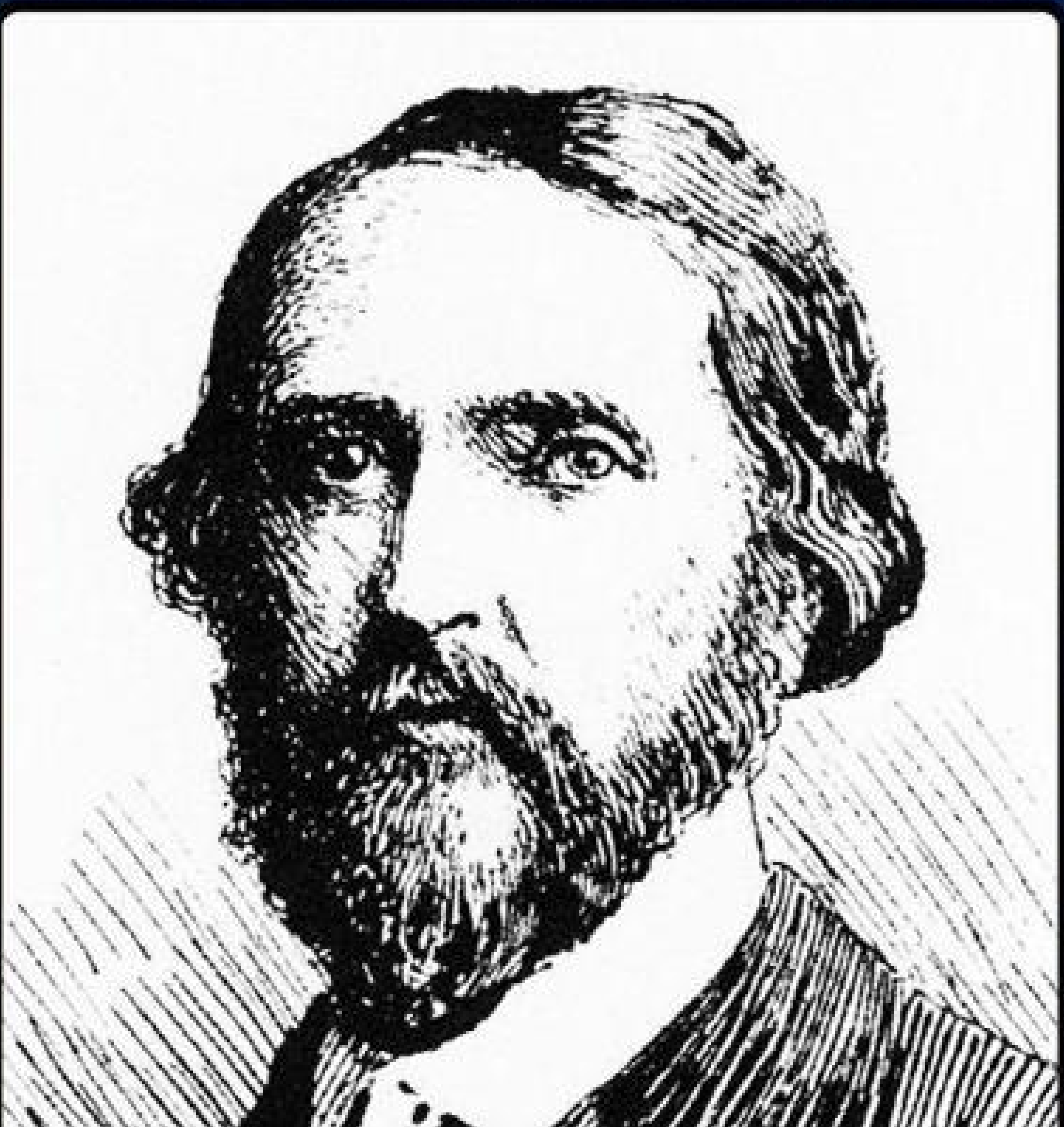
Complete Works of
SHERIDAN LE FANU



DELPHI CLASSICS

The Complete Works of

SHERIDAN LE FANU

(1814-1873)

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MEMOIR OF JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU

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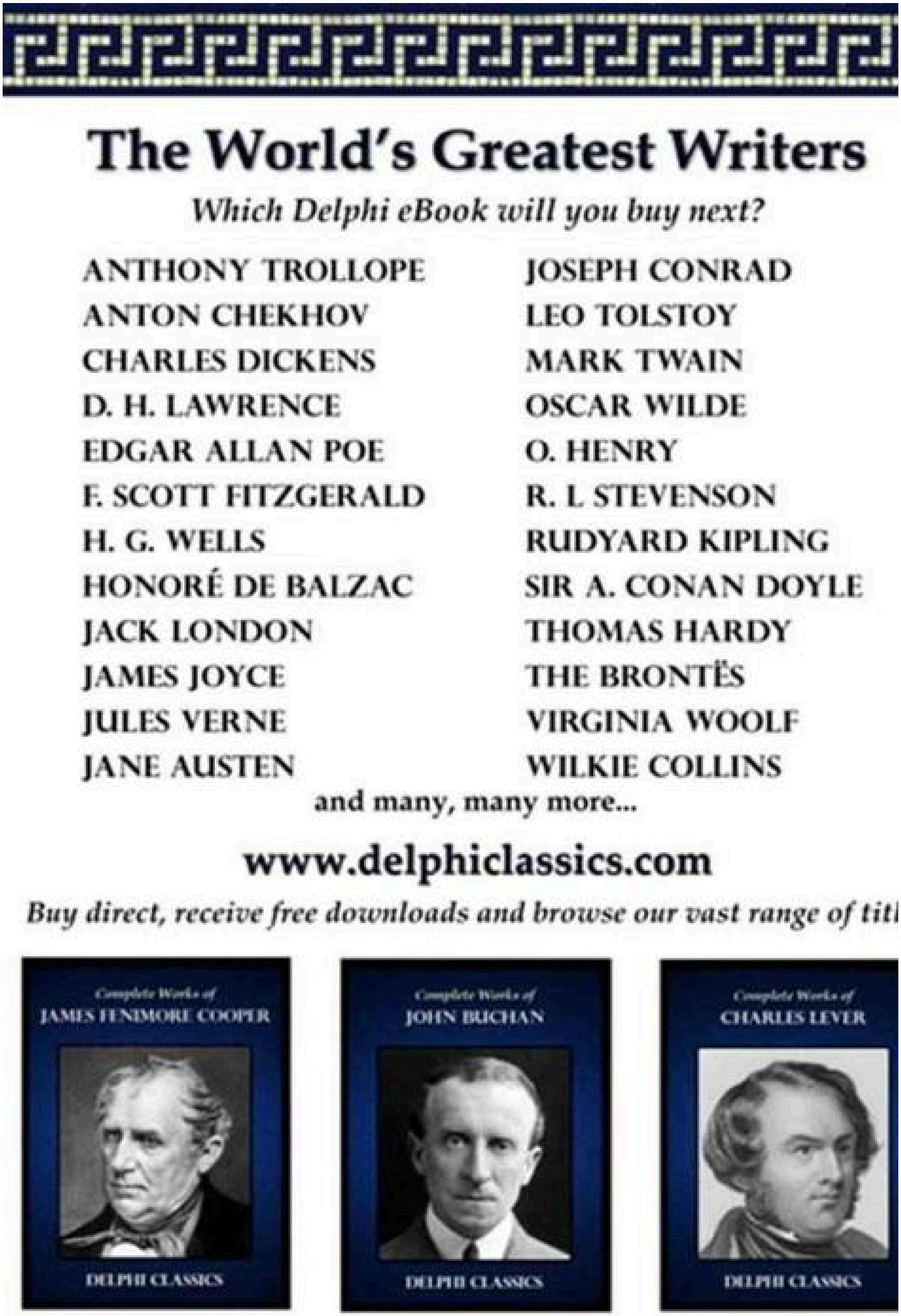

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The Novels

Lower Dominick Street, Dublin. Le Fanu was born at No. 45, which is now demolished.

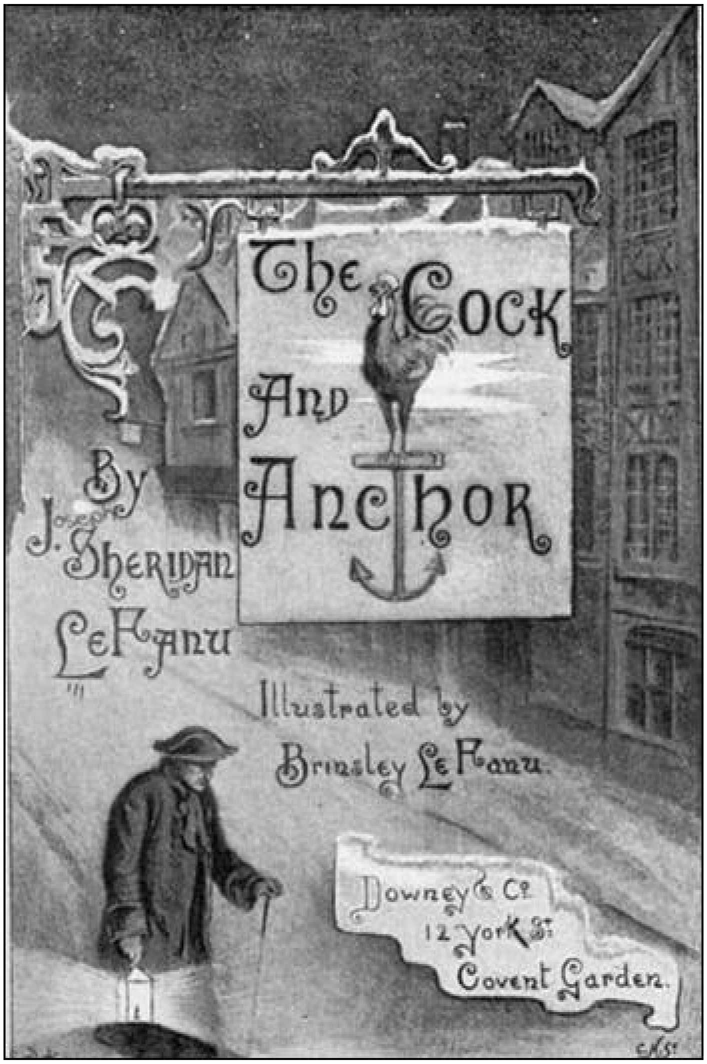
The Royal Hibernian Military School in the Phoenix Park area of Dublin, where Le Fanu's family moved shortly after his birth and where his father, Thomas Philip Le Fanu, was Chaplain.

THE COCK AND ANCHOR

BEING A CHRONICLE OF OLD DUBLIN CITY

The Cock and Anchor, being a chronicle of old Dublin, was J. Sheridan Le Fanu’s first novel, published anonymously in 1845 in three volumes by Curry and Co. in Ireland and by Longmans in England. As was common with mid-nineteenth-century fiction, the novel was first serialised in a periodical – in this case the *Dublin University Magazine*, to which Le Fanu was a frequent contributor. The title refers to an inn in eighteenth-century Dublin, the time and place in which the historical novel is set.

The narrative concerns the adventures of Edmond O’Connor as he attempts to rescue his beloved Mary Ashwoode from the clutches of her wicked father and his rival in love, the villainous Sir Henry. This early work is heavily influenced by the ‘Waverley’ novels of Sir Walter Scott and it was praised by many contemporary reviewers as an authentic historical snapshot of life amidst the turmoil and difficulties of eighteenth-century Ireland. At the same time, the dark and thrilling story and the characteristic theme of an oppressed young woman who is the victim of a devastating plot also hint at the Gothic vein of Le Fanu’s more celebrated writings. In 1873, the novel was reissued with minor revisions by Chapman and Hall, under the title *Morley Court*.



The Cock and Anchor

By Joseph J. Sheridan Le Fanu

Illustrated by Brinsley Le Fanu.

Downey & Co.
12 York St.
Covent Garden.

Title page of the 1895 edition of the novel, illustrated by Le Fanu's son, Brinsley

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Illustration by Brinsley Le Fanu, accompanying Chapter 28 in an 1895 edition of the novel

CHAPTER I.

THE "COCK AND ANCHOR" — TWO HORSEMEN — AND A SUPPER BY THE INN FIRE.

Some time within the first ten years of the last century, there stood in the fair city of Dublin, and in one of those sinuous and narrow streets which lay in the immediate vicinity of the Castle, a goodly and capacious hostelry, snug and sound, and withal carrying in its aspect something staid and aristocratic, and perhaps in nowise the less comfortable that it was rated, in point of fashion, somewhat obsolete. Its structure was quaint and antique; so much so, that had its counterpart presented itself within the precincts of "the Borough," it might fairly have passed itself off for the genuine old Tabard of Geoffry Chaucer.

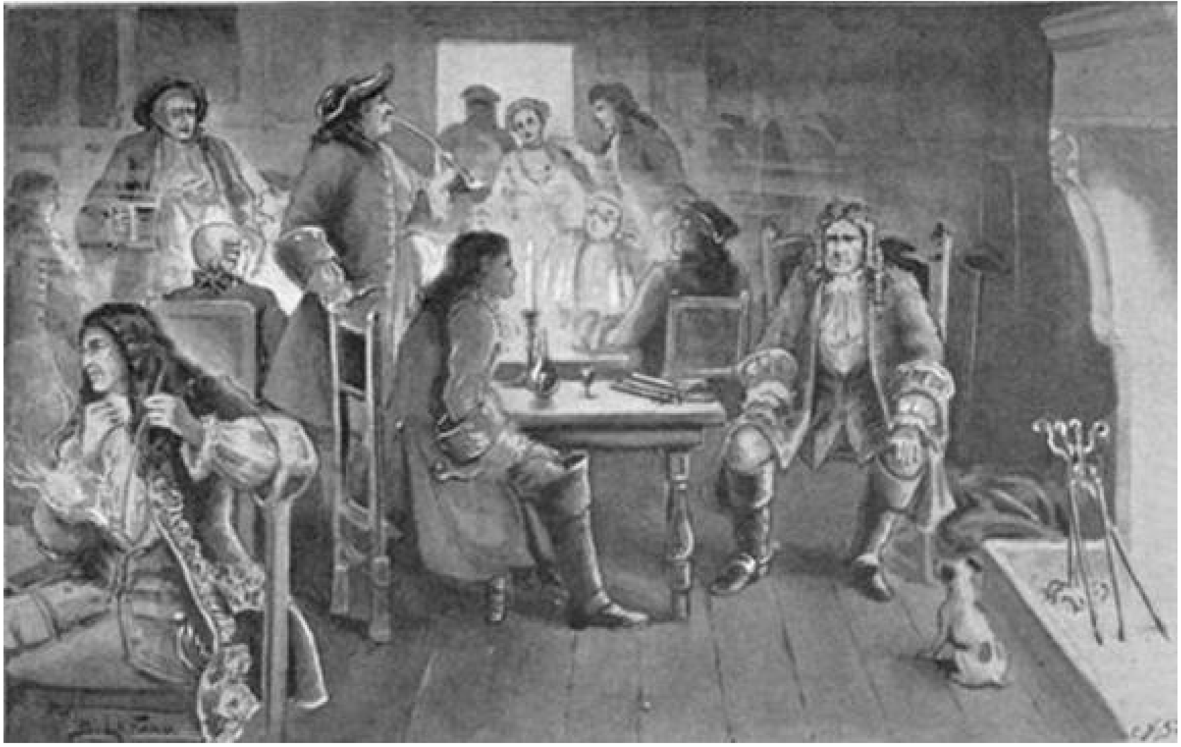
The front of the building, facing the street, rested upon a row of massive wooden blocks, set endwise, at intervals of some six or eight feet, and running parallel at about the same distance, to the wall of the lower story of the house, thus forming a kind of rude cloister or open corridor, running the whole length of the building.

The spaces between these rude pillars were, by a light framework of timber, converted into a succession of arches; and by an application of the same ornamental process, the ceiling of this extended porch was made to carry a clumsy but not unpicturesque imitation of groining. Upon this open-work of timber, as we have already said, rested the second story of the building; protruding beyond which again, and supported upon beams whose projecting ends were carved into the semblance of heads hideous as the fantastic monsters of heraldry, arose the third story, presenting a series of tall and fancifully-shaped gables, decorated, like the rest of the building, with an abundance of grotesque timber-work. A wide passage, opening under the corridor which we have described, gave admission into the inn-yard, surrounded partly by the building itself, and partly by the stables and other offices connected with it. Viewed from a little distance, the old fabric presented by no means an unsightly or ungraceful aspect: on the contrary, its very irregularities and antiquity, however in reality objectionable, gave to it an air of comfort and almost of dignity to which many of its more pretending and modern competitors might in vain have aspired. Whether it was, that from the first the substantial fabric had asserted a conscious superiority over all the minor tenements which surrounded it, or that they in modest deference had gradually conceded to it the prominence which it deserved — whether, in short, it had always stood foremost, or that the street had slightly altered its course and gradually receded, leaving it behind, an immemorial and immovable landmark by which to measure the encroachments of ages — certain it is, that at the time we speak of, the sturdy hostelry stood many feet in advance of the line of houses which flanked it on either side, narrowing the street with a most aristocratic indifference to the comforts of the pedestrian public, thus forced to shift for life and limb, as best they might, among the vehicles and horses which then thronged the city streets — no doubt, too, often by the very difficulties which it presented, entrapping the over-cautious passenger, who preferred entering the harbour which its hospitable and capacious doorway offered, to encountering all the perils involved in doubling the point.

Such as we have attempted to describe it, the old building stood more than a century since; and when the level sunbeams at eventide glinted brightly on its thousand miniature window panes, and upon the broad hanging panel, which bore, in the brightest hues and richest gilding, the portraiture of a Cock and Anchor; and when the warm, discoloured glow of sunset touched the timeworn front of the old building with a rich and cheery blush, even the most fastidious would have allowed that the object was no unpleasing one.

A dark autumnal night had closed over the old city of Dublin, and the wind was blustering in hoarse gusts through the crowded chimney-stacks — careening desolately through the dim streets, and occasionally whirling some loose tile or fragment of plaster from the house tops. The streets were silent and deserted, except when occasionally traversed by some great man’s carriage, thundering and clattering along the broken pavement, and by its passing glare and rattle making the succeeding darkness and silence but the more dreary. None stirred abroad who could avoid it; and with the exception of such rare interruptions as we have mentioned, the storm and darkness held undisputed possession of the city. Upon this ungenial night, and somewhat past the hour of ten, a well-mounted traveller rode into the narrow and sheltered yard of the "Cock and Anchor;" and having bestowed upon the groom who took the bridle of his steed such minute and anxious directions as betokened a kind and knightly tenderness for the comforts of his good beast, he forthwith entered the public room of the inn — a large and comfortable chamber, having at the far end a huge hearth overspanned by a broad and lofty mantelpiece of stone, and now sending forth a warm and ruddy glow, which penetrated in genial streams to every recess and corner of the room, tinging the dark wainscoting of the walls, glinting red and brightly upon the burnished tankards and flagons with which the cupboard was laden, and playing cheerily over the massive beams which traversed the ceiling. Groups of men, variously occupied and variously composed, embracing all the usual company of a well frequented city tavern — from the staid and sober man of business, who smokes his pipe in peace, to the loud disputatious, half-tipsy town idler, who calls for more flagons than he can well reckon, and then quarrels with mine host about the shot — were disposed, some singly, others in social clusters, in cosy and luxurious ease at the stout oak tables which occupied the expansive chamber. Among these the stranger passed leisurely to a vacant table in the neighbourhood of the good fire, and seating himself thereat, doffed his hat and cloak, thereby exhibiting a finely proportioned and graceful figure, and a face of singular nobleness and beauty. He might have seen some thirty summers — perhaps less — but his dark and expressive features bore a character of resolution and melancholy which seemed to tell of more griefs and perils overpast than men so young in the world can generally count.

The newcomer, having thrown his hat and gloves upon the table at which he had placed himself, stretched his stalwart limbs toward the fire in the full enjoyment of its genial influence, and advancing the heels of his huge jack boots nearly to the bars, he seemed for a time wholly lost in the comfortable contemplation of the red embers which flickered, glowed, and shifted before his eyes. From his quiet reverie he was soon recalled by mine host in person, who, with all courtesy, desired to know "whether his honour wished supper and a bed?" Both questions were promptly answered in the affirmative: and before many minutes the young horseman was deep in the discussion of a glorious pasty, flanked by a flagon of claret, such as he had seldom tasted before. He had scarcely concluded his meal, when another traveller, cloaked, booted, and spurred, and carrying under his arm a pair of long horse-pistols, and a heavy whip, entered the apartment, walked straight up to the fireplace, and having obtained permission of the cavalier already established there to take share of his table, he deposited thereon the formidable weapons which he carried, cast his hat, gloves, and cloak upon the floor, and threw himself luxuriously into a capacious leather-bottomed chair which confronted the cheery fire.



"A bleak night, sir, and a dark, for a ride of twenty miles," observed the stranger, addressing the younger guest.

"I can the more readily agree with you, sir," replied the latter, "seeing that I myself have ridden nigh forty, and am but just arrived."

"Whew! that beats me hollow," cried the other, with a kind of self-congratulatory shrug. "You see, sir, we never know how to thank our stars for the luck we *have* until we come to learn what luck we might have had. I rode from Wicklow — pray, sir, if it be not too bold a question, what line did you travel?"

"The Cork road."

"Ha! that's an ugly line they say to travel by night. You met with no interruption?"

"Troth, but I *did*, sir," replied the young man, "and none of the pleasantest either. I was stopped, and put in no small peril, too."

"How! stopped — stopped on the highway! By the mass, you outdo me in every point! Would you, sir, please to favour me, if 'twere not too much trouble, with the facts of the adventure — the particulars?"

"Faith, sir," rejoined the young man, "as far as my knowledge serves me, you are welcome to them all. When I was still about twelve miles from this, I was joined from a by-road by a well mounted, and (as far as I could discern) a respectable-looking traveller, who told me he rode for Dublin, and asked to join company by the way. I assented; and we jogged on pleasantly enough for some two or three miles. It was very dark — — "

"As pitch," ejaculated the stranger, parenthetically.

"And what little scope of vision I might have had," continued the younger traveller, "was well nigh altogether obstructed by the constant flapping of my cloak, blown by the storm over my face and eyes. I suddenly became conscious that we had been joined by a third horseman, who, in total silence, rode at my other side."

"How and when did *he* come up with you?"

"I can't say," replied the narrator— "nor did his presence give me the smallest uneasiness. He who had joined me first, all at once called out that his stirrup strap was broken, and halloo'd to me to rein in until he should repair the accident. This I had hardly done, when some fellow, whom I had not seen, sprang from behind upon my horse, and clasped my arms so tightly to my body, that so far from making use of them, I could hardly breathe. The scoundrel who had dismounted caught my horse by the head and held him firmly, while my hitherto silent companion clapped a pistol to my ear."

"The devil!" exclaimed the elder man, "that was checkmate with a vengeance."

"Why, in truth, so it turned out," rejoined his companion; "though I confess my first impulse was to balk the gentlemen of the road at any hazard; and with this view I plied my spurs rowel deep, but the rascal who held the bridle was too old a hand to be shaken off by a plunge or two. He swung with his whole weight to the bit, and literally brought poor Rowley's nose within an inch of the road. Finding that resistance was utterly vain, and not caring to squander what little brains I have upon so paltry an adventure, I acknowledged the jurisdiction of the gentleman's pistol, and replied to his questions."

“You proved your sound sense by so doing,” observed the other. “But what was their purpose?”

“As far as I could gather,” replied the younger man, “they were upon the look-out for some particular person, I cannot say whom; for, either satisfied by my answers, or having otherwise discovered their mistake, they released me without taking anything from me but my sword, which, however, I regret much, for it was my father’s; and having blown the priming from my pistols, they wished me the best of good luck, and so we parted, without the smallest desire on my part to renew the intimacy. And now, sir, you know just as much of the matter as I do myself.”

“And a very serious matter it is, too,” observed the stranger, with an emphatic nod. “Landlord! a pint of mulled claret — and spice it as I taught you — d’ye mind? A very grave matter — do you think you could possibly identify those men?”

“Identify them! how the devil could I? — it was dark as pitch — a cat could not have seen them.”

“But was there no mark — no peculiarity discernible, even in the dense obscurity — nothing about any of them, such as you might know again?”

“Nothing — the very outline was indistinct. I could merely pee that they were shaped like men.”

“Truly, truly, that is much to be lamented,” said the elder gentleman; “though fifty to one,” he added, devoutly, “they’ll hang one day or another — let that console us. Meantime, here comes the claret.”

So saying, the newcomer rose from his seat, coolly removed his black matted peruke from his shorn head, and replaced it by a dark velvet cap, which he drew from some mysterious nook in his breeches pocket; then, hanging the wig upon the back of his chair, he wheeled the seat round to the table, and for the first time offered to his companion an opportunity of looking him fairly in the face. If he were a believer in the influence of first impressions, he had certainly acted wisely in deferring the exhibition until the acquaintance had made some progress, for his countenance was, in sober truth, anything but attractive — a pair of grizzled brows overshadowed eyes of quick and piercing black, rather small, and unusually restless and vivid — the mouth was wide, and the jaw so much underhung as to amount almost to a deformity, giving to the lower part of the face a character of resolute ferocity which was not at all softened by the keen fiery glance of his eye; a massive projecting forehead, marked over the brow with a deep scar, and furrowed by years and thought, added not a little to the stern and commanding expression of the face. The complexion was swarthy; and altogether the countenance was one of that sinister and unpleasant kind which the imagination associates with scenes of cruelty and terror, and which might appropriately take a prominent place in the foreground of a feverish dream. The young traveller had seen too many ugly sights, in the course of a roving life of danger and adventure, to remember for a moment the impression which his new companion's visage was calculated to produce. They chatted together freely; and the elder (who, by the way, exhibited no very strong Irish peculiarities of accent or idiom, any more than did the other) when he bid his companion goodnight, left him under the impression that, however forbidding his aspect might be, his physical disadvantages were more than counterbalanced by the shrewd, quick sagacity, correct judgment, and wide range of experience of which he appeared possessed.

CHAPTER II.

A BED IN THE “COCK AND ANCHOR” — A LANTERN AND AN UGLY VISITOR BY THE BEDSIDE.

Leaving the public room to such as chose to push their revels beyond the modesty of midnight, our young friend betook himself to his chamber; where, snugly deposited in one of the snuggest beds which the “Cock and Anchor” afforded, with the ample tapestry curtains drawn from post to post, while the rude wind buffeted the casements and moaned through the antique chimney-tops, he was soon locked in the deep, dreamless slumber of fatigue.

How long this sweet oblivion may have lasted it was not easy to say; some hours, however, had no doubt intervened, when the sleeper was startled from his repose by a noise at his chamber door. The latch was raised, and someone bearing a shaded light entered the room and cautiously closed the door again. In the belief that the intruder was some guest or domestic of the inn who either mistook the room or was not aware of its occupation, the young man coughed once or twice slightly in token of his presence, and observing that his signal had not the desired effect, he inquired rather sharply, —

“Who is there?”

The only answer returned was a long “Hist!” and forthwith the steps of the unseasonable visitor were directed to the bedside. The person thus disturbed had hardly time to raise himself half upright when the curtains at one side were drawn apart, and by the imperfect light which forced its way through the horn enclosure of a lantern, he beheld the bronzed and sinister features of his fireside companion of the previous evening. The stranger was arrayed for the road, with his cloak and cocked hat on. Both parties, the visited and the visitor, for a time remained silent and in the same fixed attitude.

“Pray, sir,” at length inquired the person thus abruptly intruded upon, “to what special good fortune do I owe this most unlooked-for visit?”

The elder man made no reply; but deliberately planted the large dingy lantern which he carried upon the bed in which the young man lay.

"You have tarried somewhat too long over the wine-cup," continued he, not a little provoked at the coolness of the intruder. "This, sir, is not your chamber; seek it elsewhere. I am in no mood to bandy jests. You will consult your own ease as well as mine by quitting this room with all dispatch."

"Young gentleman," replied the elder man in a low, firm tone, "I have used short ceremony in disturbing you thus. To judge from your face you are no less frank than hardy. You will not require apologies when you have heard me. When I last night sate with you I observed about you a token long since familiar to me as the light — you wear it on your finger — it is a diamond ring. That ring belonged to a dear friend of mine — an old comrade and a tried friend in a hundred griefs and perils: the owner was Richard O'Connor. I have not heard from him for ten years or more. Can you say how he fares?"

"The brave soldier and good man you have named was my father," replied the young man, mournfully.

"*Was!*" repeated the stranger. "Is he then no more — is he dead?"

"Even so," replied the young man, sadly.

"I knew it — I felt it. When I saw that jewel last night something smote at my heart and told me, that the hand that wore it once was cold. Ah, me! it was a friendly and a brave hand. Through all the wars of King James" (and so saying he touched his hat) "we were together, companions in arms and bosom friends. He was a comely man and a strong; no hardship tired him, no difficulty dismayed him; and the merriest fellow he was that ever trod on Irish ground. Poor O'Connor! in exile; away, far away from the country he loved so well; among foreigners too. Well, well, wheresoever they have laid thee, there moulders not a truer nor a braver heart in the fields of all the world!"

He paused, sighed deeply, and then continued, —

"Sorely, sorely are thine old comrades put to it, day by day, and night by night, for comfort and for safety — sorely vexed and pillaged. Nevertheless — over-ridden, and despised, and scattered as we are, mercenaries and beggars abroad, and landless at home — still something whispers in my ear that there will come at last a retribution, and such a one as will make this perjured, corrupt, and robbing ascendency a warning and a wonder to all after times. Is it a common thing, think you, that all the gentlemen, all the chivalry of a whole country — the natural leaders and protectors of the people — should be stripped of their birthright, ay, even of the poor privilege of seeing in this their native country, strangers possessing the inheritances which are in *all* right their own; cast abroad upon the world; soldiers of fortune, selling their blood for a bare subsistence; many of them dying of want; and all because for honour and conscience sake they refused to break the oath which bound them to a ruined prince? Is it a slight thing, think you, to visit with pains and penalties such as these, men guilty of no crimes beyond those of fidelity and honour?"

The stranger said this with an intensity of passion, to which the low tone in which he spoke but gave an additional impressiveness. After a short pause he again spoke, —

"Young gentleman," said he, "you may have heard your father — whom the saints receive! — speak, when talking over old recollections, of one Captain O'Hanlon, who shared with him the most eventful scenes of a perilous time. He may, I say, have spoken of such a one."

"He has spoken of him," replied the young man; "often, and kindly too."

"I am that man," continued the stranger; "your father's old friend and comrade; and right glad am I, seeing that I can never hope to meet him more on this side the grave, to renew, after a kind, a friendship which I much prized, now in the person of his son. Give me your hand, young gentleman: I pledge you mine in the spirit of a tried and faithful friendship. I inquire not what has brought you to this unhappy country; I am sure it can be nothing which lies not within the eye of honour, so I ask not concerning it; but on the contrary, I will tell you of myself what may surprise you — what will, at least, show that I am ready to trust you freely. You were stopped tonight upon the Southern road, some ten miles from this. It was *I* who stopped you!"

O'Connor made a sudden but involuntary movement of menace; but without regarding it, O'Hanlon continued, —

"You are astonished, perhaps shocked — you look so; but mind you, there is some difference between *stopping* men on the highway, and *robbing* them when you have stopped them. I took you for one who we were informed would pass that way, and about the same hour — one who carried letters from a pretended friend — one whom I have long suspected, a half-faced, cold-hearted friend — carried letters, I say, from such a one to the Castle here; to that malignant, perjured reprobate and apostate, the so-called Lord Wharton — as meet an ornament for a gibbet as ever yet made a feast for the ravens. I was mistaken: here is your sword; and may you long wear it as well as he from whom it was inherited." Here he raised the weapon, the blade of which he held in his hand, and the young man saw it and the hilt flash and glitter in the dusky light. "And take the advice of an old soldier, young friend," continued O'Hanlon, "and when you are next, which I hope may not be for many a long day, overpowered by odds and at their mercy, do not by fruitless violence tempt them to disable you by a simpler and less pleasant process than that of merely taking your sword and unpriming your pistols. Many a good man has thrown away his life by such boyish foolery. Upon the table by your bed you will in the morning find your rapier, and God grant that it and you may long prove fortunate companions!" He was turning to go, but recollecting himself, he added, "One word before I go. I am known here as Mr. Dwyer — remember the name, Dwyer — I am generally to be heard of in this place. Should you at any time during your stay in this city require the assistance of a friend who has a cheerful willingness to serve you, and who is not perhaps altogether destitute of power, you have only to leave a billet in the hand of the keeper of this inn, and if I be above ground it will reach me — of course address it under the name I have last mentioned — and so, young gentleman, fare you well." So saying, he grasped the hand of his new friend, shook it warmly, and then, turning upon his heel, strode swiftly to the door, and so departed, leaving O'Connor with so much abruptness as not to allow him time to utter a question or remark on what had passed.

The excitement of the interview speedily passed away, the fatigues of the preceding day were persuasively seconded by the soothing sound of the now abated wind and by the utter darkness of the chamber, and the young man was soon deep in the forgetfulness of sleep once more. When the broad, red light of the morning sun broke cheerily into his room, streaming through the chinks of the old shutters, and penetrating through the voluminous folds of the vast curtains of rich, faded damask which surmounted the huge hearse-like bed in which he lay, so as to make its inmate aware that the hour of repose was past and that of action come, O’Connor remembered the circumstances of the interview which had been so strangely intruded upon him but as a dream; nor was it until he saw the sword which he had believed irrecoverably lost lying safely upon the table, that he felt assured that the visit and its purport were not the creation of his slumbering fancy. In reply to his questions when he descended, he was informed by mine host of the “Cock and Anchor,” that Mr. Dwyer had left the inn-yard upon his stout hack, a good hour before daybreak.

CHAPTER III.

THE LITTLE MAN IN BLUE AND SILVER.

Among the loungers who loitered at the door of the "Cock and Anchor," as the day wore on, there appeared a personage whom it behoves us to describe. This was a small man, with a very red face and little grey eyes — he wore a cloth coat of sky blue, with here and there a piece of silver lace laid upon it without much regard to symmetry; for the scissors had evidently displaced far the greater part of the original decorations, whose primitive distribution might be traced by the greater freshness of the otherwise faded cloth which they had covered, as well as by some stray threads, which stood like stubbles here and there to mark the ravages of the sickle. One hand was buried in the deep flap pocket of a waistcoat of the same hue and material, and bearing also, in like manner, the evidences of a very decided retrenchment in the article of silver lace. These symptoms of economy, however, in no degree abated the evident admiration with which the wearer every now and then stole a glance on what remained of its pristine splendours — a glance which descended not ungraciously upon a leg in whose fascinations its owner reposed an implicit faith. His right hand held a tobacco-pipe, which, although its contents were not ignited, he carried with a luxurious nonchalance ever and anon to the corner of his mouth, where it afforded him sundry imaginary puffs — a cheap and fanciful luxury, in which my Irish readers need not be told their humbler countrymen, for lack of better, are wont to indulge. He leaned against one of the stout wooden pillars on which the front of the building was reared, and interlarded his economical pantomime of pipe-smoking with familiar and easy conversation with certain of the outdoor servants of the inn — a familiarity which argued not any sense of superiority proportionate to the pretension of his attire.

"And so," said the little man, turning with an aristocratic ease towards a stout fellow in a jerkin, with bluff visage and folded arms, who stood beside him, and addressing him in a most melodious brogue— "and so, for sartain, you have but five single gintlemen in the house — mind, I say *single* gintlemen — for, divil carry me if ever I take up with a *family* again — it doesn't answer — it don't *shoot* me — I was never made for a family, nor a family for me — I can't stand their b —— y regularity; and— " with a sigh of profound sentiment, and lowering his voice, he added— "and, the maid-sarvants — no, devil a taste — they don't answer — they don't *shoot*. My disposition, Tom, is tindher — tindher to imbecility — I never see a petticoat but it flutters my heart — the short and the long of it is, I'm always falling in love — and sometimes the passion is not retaliated by the object, and more times it is — but, in both cases, I'm aiqually the victim — for my intintions is always honourable, and of course nothin' comes of it. My life was fairly frettin' away in a dhrame of passion among the housemaids — I felt myself witherin' away like a flower in autumn — I was losing my relish for everything, from bacon and table-dhrink upwards — dangers were thickening round me — I had but one way to execrate myself — I gave notice — I departed, and here I am."

Having wound up the sentence, the speaker leaned forward and spat passionately on the ground — a pause ensued, which was at length broken by the same speaker.

"Only two out of the five," said he, reflectively, "only two unprovided with sarvants."

"And neither of 'em," rejoined Tom, a blunt English groom, "very likely to want one. The one is a lawyer, with a hack as lean as himself, and more holes, I warrant, than halfpence in his breeches pocket. He's out a-looking for lodgings, I take it."

"He's not exactly what I want," rejoined the little man. "What's th'other like?"

"A gentleman, every inch, or *I'm* no judge," replied the groom. "He came last night, and as likely a bit of horseflesh under him as ever my two hands wisped down. He chucked me a crown-piece this morning, as if it had been no more nor a cockle shell — he did."

"By gorra, he'll do!" exclaimed the little man energetically. "It's a bargain — I'm his man."

"Ay, but you mayn't answer, brother; he mayn't take you," observed Tom.

"Wait a bit — *jist* wait a bit, till he sees me," replied he of the blue coat.

“Ay, wait a bit,” persevered the groom, coolly— “wait a bit, and when he *does* see you, it strikes me wery possible he mayn’t like your cut.”

“Not like my cut!” exclaimed the little man, as soon as he had recovered breath; for the bare supposition of such an occurrence involved in his opinion so utter and astounding a contradiction of all the laws by which human antipathies and affections are supposed to be regulated, that he felt for a moment as if his whole previous existence had been a dream and an illusion. “Not like my *cut*!”

“No,” rejoined the groom, with perfect imperturbability.

The little man deigned no other reply than that conveyed in a glance of the most inexpressible contempt, which, having wandered over the person and accoutrements of the unconscious Tom, at length settled upon his own lower extremities, where it gradually softened into a gaze of melancholy complacency, while he muttered, with a pitying smile, “Not like my cut — not like it!” and then, turning majestically towards the groom, he observed, with laconic dignity, —

“I humbly consave the gintleman has an eye in his head.”

This rebuke had hardly been administered when the subject of their conference in person passed from the inn into the street.

“There he goes,” observed Tom.

“And here *I* go after him,” added the candidate for a place; and in a moment he was following O’Connor with rapid steps through the narrow streets of the town, southward. It occurred to him, as he hurried after his intended master, that it might not be amiss to defer his interview until they were out of the streets, and in some more quiet place; nor in all probability would he have disturbed himself at all to follow the young gentleman, were it not that even in the transient glimpse which he had had of the person and features of O’Connor, the little man thought, and by no means incorrectly, that he recognized the form of one whom he had often seen before.

“That’s Mr. O’Connor, as sure as my name’s Larry Toole,” muttered the little man, half out of breath with his exertions— “an’ it’s himself’ll be proud to get me. I wondher what he’s afther now. I’ll soon see, at any rate.”

Thus communing within himself, Larry alternately walked and trotted to keep the chase in view. He might very easily have come up with the object of his pursuit, for on reaching St. Patrick’s Cathedral, O’Connor paused, and for some minutes contemplated the old building. Larry, however, did not care to commence his intended negotiation in the street; he purposed giving him rope enough, having, in truth, no peculiar object in following him at that precise moment, beyond the gratification of an idle curiosity; he therefore hung back until O'Connor was again in motion, when he once more renewed his pursuit.

O'Connor had soon passed the smoky precincts of the town, and was now walking at a slackened pace among the green fields and the trees, all clothed in the rich melancholy hues of early autumn. The evening sun was already throwing its mellow tint on all the landscape, and the lengthening shadows told how far the day was spent. In the transition from the bustle of a town to the lonely quiet of the country at eventide, and especially at that season of the year when decay begins to sadden the beauties of nature, there is something at once soothing and unutterably melancholy. Leaving behind the glare, and dust, and hubbub of the town, who has not felt in his inmost heart the still appeal of nature? The saddened beauty of sear autumn, enhanced by the rich and subdued light of gorgeous sunset — the filmy mist — the stretching shadows — the serene quiet, broken only by rural sounds, more soothing even than silence — all these, contrasted with the sounds and sights of the close, restless city, speak tenderly and solemnly to the heart of man of the beauty of creation, of the goodness of God, and, along with these, of the mournful condition of all nature — change, decay, and death. Such thoughts and feelings, stealing in succession upon the heart, touch, one by one, the springs of all our sublimest sympathies, and fill the mind with the beautiful sense of brotherhood, under God, with all nature. Under the not unpleasing influence of such suggestions, O'Connor slackened his pace to a slow irregular walk, which sorely tried the patience of honest Larry Toole.

"After all," exclaimed that worthy, "it's nothin' more nor less than an evening walk he's takin', God bless the mark! What business have I followin' him? unless — see — sure enough he's takin' the short cut to the manor. By gorra, this is worth mindin' — I must not folly him, however — I don't want to meet the family — so here I'll plant myself until sich times as he's comin' back again."

So saying, Larry Toole clambered to the top of the grassy embankment which fenced the road, and seating himself between a pair of aged hawthorn-trees, he watched young O'Connor as he followed the wanderings of a wild bridle-road until he was at length fairly hidden from view by the intervening trees and brushwood.

CHAPTER IV.

A SCARLET HOOD AMONG THE OLD TREES — THE MANOR OF MORLEY COURT — AND A PEEP INTO AN ANTIQUE CHAMBER.

The path which O'Connor followed was one of those quiet and pleasant by-roads which, in defiance of what are called improvements, are still to be discovered throughout Ireland here and there, in some unsuspected region, winding their green and sequestered ways through many a varied scene of rural beauty; and, unless when explored by some chance fisherman or tourist, unknown to all except the poor peasant to whose simple conveniences they minister.

Low and uneven embankments, overgrown by a thousand kinds of weeds and wild flowers and brushwood, marked the boundaries of this rustic pathway, but in so friendly a sort, and with so little jealousy or exclusion, that they seemed designed rather to lend a soft and sheltered resting-place to the tired traveller than to check the wayward excursions of the idle rambler into the merry fields and woodlands through which it wound. On either side the tall, hoary trees, like timeworn pillars, reared their grey, mossgrown trunks and arching branches, now but thinly clothed with the discoloured foliage of autumn, and casting their long shadows in the evening sun far over the sloping and unequal sward. The scene, the hour, and the loneliness of the place, would of themselves have been enough to induce a pensive train of thought; but, beyond the silence and seclusion, and the falling of the leaves in their eternal farewell, and all the other touching signs of nature's beautiful decay, there were deep in O'Connor's breast recollections and passions with which the scene before him was more nearly associated, than with the ordinary suggestions of fantastic melancholy.

At some distance from this road, and half hidden among the trees, there stood an old and extensive building, chiefly of deep red brick, presenting many and varied fronts and quaint gables, antique-fashioned casements, and whole groups of fantastic chimneys, sending up their thin curl of smoke into the still air, and glinting tall and red in the declining sun; while the dusky hue of the old bricks was every here and there concealed under rich mantles of dark, luxuriant ivy, which, in some parts of the structure, had not only mounted to the summits of the wall, but clambered, in rich profusion, over the steep roof, and even to the very chimney tops. This antique building — rambling, massive, and picturesque in no ordinary degree — might well have attracted the observation of the passer-by, as it presented in succession, through the irregular vistas of the rich old timber, now one front, now another, alternately hidden and revealed as the point of observation was removed. But the eyes of O'Connor sought this ancient mansion, and dwelt upon its ever-varying aspects, as he pursued his way, with an interest more deep and absorbing than that of mere curiosity or admiration; and as he slowly followed the grass-grown road, a thousand emotions and remembrances came crowding upon his mind, impetuous, passionate, and wild, but all tinged with a melancholy which even the strong and sanguine heart of early manhood could not overcome. As the path proceeded, it became more closely sheltered by the wild bushes and trees, and its windings grew more wayward and frequent, when on a sudden, from behind a screen of old thorns which lay a little in advance, a noble dog, of the true old Irish wolf breed, came bounding towards him, with every token of joy and welcome.

"Rover, Rover — down, boy, down," said the stranger, as the huge animal, in his boisterous greeting, leaped upon him again and again, flinging his massive paws upon his shoulders, and thrusting his cold nose into his bosom— "down, Rover, down."

The first transport of welcome past, the noble dog waited to receive from his old friend some marks of recognition in return, and then, swinging his long tail from side to side, away he sprang, as if to carry the joyful tidings to the companion of his evening ramble.

O'Connor knew that some of those whom he should not have chosen to meet just then or there were probably within a stone's throw of the spot where he now stood, and for a moment he was strongly tempted to turn, and, if so it might be, unobserved to retrace his steps. The close screen of wild trees which overshadowed the road would have rendered this design easy of achievement; but while he was upon the point of turning to depart, a few notes of some wild and simple Irish melody, carelessly lilted by a voice of silvery sweetness, floated to his ear. Every cadence and vibration of *that* voice was to him enchantment — he could not choose but pause. The sweet sounds were interrupted by a rustling among the withered leaves which strewed the ground. Again the fine old dog made his appearance, dashing joyously along the path towards him, and following in his wake, with slow and gentle steps, came a light and graceful female form. On her shoulders rested a short mantle of scarlet cloth; the hood was thrown partially backward, so as to leave the rich dark ringlets to float freely in the light breeze of evening; the faintest flush imaginable tinged the clear paleness of her cheek, giving to her exquisitely beautiful features a lustre, whose richness did not, however, subdue their habitual and tender melancholy. The moment the full dark eyes of the girl encountered O'Connor, the song died away upon her lips — the colour fled from her cheeks, and as instantaneously the sudden paleness was succeeded by a blush of such depth and brilliancy as threw far into shade even the brightest imagery of poetic fancy.

"Edmond!" she exclaimed, in a tone so faint and low as scarcely to reach his ear, and which yet thrilled to his very heart.

"Yes, Mary — it is, indeed, Edmond O'Connor," answered he, passionately and mournfully— "come, after long years of separation, over many a mile of sea and land — unlooked-for, and, mayhap, unwished-for — come once more to see you, and, in seeing you, to be happy, were it but for a moment — come to tell you that he loves you fondly, passionately as ever — come to ask you, dear, dear Mary, if you, too, are unchanged?"

As he thus spoke, standing by her side, O'Connor gazed on the sad, sweet face of her he loved so well, and held that little hand, which he would have given worlds to call his own. The beautiful girl was too artless to disguise her agitation. She would have spoken, but the effort was vain — the tears gathered in her dark eyes, and fell faster and faster, till at length the fruitless struggle ceased, and she wept long and bitterly.

"Oh! Edmond," said she, at length, raising her eyes sorrowfully and fondly to O'Connor's face— "what has called you hither? We two should hardly have met now or thus."

"Dear Mary," answered he, with melancholy fervour, "since last I held this loved hand, years have passed away — three long years and more — in which we two have never met — in which you scarce have even heard of me. Mary, three years bring many changes — changes irreparable. Time — which has, if it were possible, made you more beautiful even than when I saw you last — may yet have altered earlier feelings, and turned your heart from me. Were it so, Mary, I would not seek to blame you. I am not so vain — your rank — your great attractions — your surpassing beauty, must have won many admirers — drawn many suitors round you; and I — I, among all these, may well have been forgotten — I, whose best merit is but in loving you beyond my life. I will not, then — I will not, Mary, ask if you love me still: but coming thus unbidden and unlooked-for, am I forgiven — am I welcome, Mary?"

The artless girl looked up in his face with such a beautiful smile of trust and love as told more in one brief moment than language could in volumes.

"Yes, Mary," said O'Connor, reading that smile aright, with swelling heart and proud devotion; "yes, Mary. I am remembered — you are still my own — my own: true, faithful, unchanged, in spite of years of time and leagues of separation; in spite of all! — my true-hearted, my adored, my own!"

He spoke; and in the fulness of their hearts they were both for a while silent, each gazing on the other in the rapt tenderness of long-tried love — in the deep, guileless joy of this chance meeting.

"Hear me," he whispered, lower almost than the murmur of the breeze through the arching boughs above them, as if fearful that even a breath would trouble the still enchantment that held them spellbound: "hear me, for I have much to tell. The years that have passed since I spoke to you before have brought to me their store of good and ill, of sorrow and of hope. I have many things to tell you, Mary; much that gives me hope — the cheeriest hope — even that of overcoming Sir Richard's opposition! Ay, Mary, reasonable hope; and why? Because I am no longer poor: an old friend of my father's, Mr. Audley, has taken me by the hand, adopted me, made me his heir — the heir to riches and possessions which even your father will allow to be considerable — which he well may think enough to engage his prudence in favour of our union. In this hope, dearest, I am here. I daily expect the arrival of my generous friend and benefactor; and with him I will go to your father and urge my suit once more, and with God's blessing at last prevail — but hark! some one comes."

Even while he spoke, the lovers were startled by the sound of voices in gay colloquy, approaching along the quiet by-road on which they stood.

"Leave me, Edmond, leave me," said the beautiful girl, with earnest entreaty; "they must not see you with me now."

"Farewell then, dearest, since it must be so," replied O'Connor, as he pressed her hand closely in his own; "but meet me tomorrow evening — meet me by the old gate in the beech-tree walk, at the hour when you used to walk there. Nay, refuse me not, Mary. Farewell, farewell till then!" and so saying, before she had time to frame an answer, he turned from her, and was quickly lost among the trees and underwood which skirted the pathway.

In the speakers who approached, the young lady at once recognized her brother, Henry Ashwoode, and Emily Copland, her pretty cousin. The young man was handsome alike in face and figure, slightly made, and bearing in his carriage that indescribable air of aristocratic birth and pretension which sits not ungracefully upon a handsome person; his countenance, too, bore a striking resemblance to that of his sister, and, allowing for the difference of sex, resembled it as nearly as any countenance which had never expressed a passion but such as had its aim and origin alike in *self*, could do. He was dressed in the extreme of the prevailing fashion; and altogether his outward man was in all respects such as to justify his acknowledged pretensions to be considered one of the prettiest men in the then gay city of Dublin. The young lady who accompanied him was, in all points except in that of years, as unlike her cousin, Mary Ashwoode, as one pretty girl could well be to another. She was very fair; had a quick, clear eye, which carried in its glance something more than mere mirth or vivacity; an animated face, with, however, something of a bold, and at times even of a haughty expression. Laughing and chatting in light, careless gaiety, the youthful pair approached the spot where Mary Ashwoode stood.

"So, so, fair sister," cried the young man, gaily, "alone and musing, and doubtless melancholy. Shall we venture to approach her, Emily?"

Women have keener eyes in small matters than men; and Miss Copland at a glance perceived her fair cousin's flushed cheek and embarrassed manner.

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" cried she; "the girl has certainly seen a ghost or a dragoon officer."

"Neither, I assure you, cousin," replied Miss Ashwoode, with an effort; "my evening's ramble has not extended beyond this spot; and as yet I've seen no monster more alarming than my brother's new periwig."

The young man bowed.

"Nay, nay," cried Miss Copland, "but I must hear it. There certainly is some awful mystery at the bottom of all these conscious looks; but *apropos* of awful mysteries," continued she, turning to young Ashwoode, half in pity for Mary's increasing embarrassment; "where *is* Major O'Leary? What has become of your amusing old uncle?"

"That's more than *I* can tell," replied the young man; "I wash my hands of the scapegrace. I know nothing of him. I saw him for a moment in town this morning, and he promised, with a round dozen of oaths, to be out to dine with us to-day. Thus much *you* know, and thus much *I* know; for the rest, having sins enough of my own to carry, as I said before, I wash my hands of him and his."

"Well, now remember, Henry," continued she, "I make it a point with you to bring him out here tomorrow. In sober seriousness I can't get on without him. It is a melancholy and a terrible truth, but still one which I feel it my duty to speak boldly, that Major O'Leary is the only gallant and susceptible man in the family."

"Monstrous assertion?" exclaimed the young man; "why, not to mention myself, the acknowledged pink and perfection of everything that is irresistible, have you not the perfect command of my worthy cousin, Arthur Blake?"

"Now don't put me in a passion, Henry," exclaimed the girl. "How dare you mention that wretch — that irreclaimable, unredeemed foxhunter. He never talks, nor thinks, nor dreams of anything but dogs and badgers, foxes and other vermin. I verily believe he never yet was seen off a horse's back, except sometimes in a stable — he is an absolute Irish centaur! And then his odious attempts at finery — his elaborate, perverse vulgarity — the perpetual pinching and mincing of his words! An offhand, shameless brogue I can endure — a brogue that revels and riots, and defies the world like your uncle O'Leary's, I can respect and even admire — but a brogue in a strait waistcoat — — "

"Well, well," rejoined the young man, laughing, "though you may not find any sprout of the *family* tree, excepting Major O'Leary, worthy to contribute to your laudable requirements; yet surely you have a very fair catalogue of young and able-bodied gentlemen among our neighbours. What say you to young Lloyd — he lives within a stone's throw. He is a most proper, pious, and punctual young gentleman; and would make, I doubt not, a most devout and exemplary *'Cavalier servente*.'"

"Worse and worse," cried the young lady despondingly; "the most domestic, stupid, affectionate, invulnerable wretch. He never flirts out of his own family, and then, for charity I believe, with the oldest and ugliest. He is the very person for whose special case the rubric provided that no man shall marry his grandmother."

"My fair cousin," replied the young man, laughing, "I see you are hard to please. Meanwhile, sweet ladies both, let me remind you that the sun has just set; we must make our way homeward — at least *I* must. By the way, can I do anything in town for you this evening, beyond a tender message to my reverend uncle?"

"Dear me," exclaimed Miss Copland, "you have not passed an evening at home this age. What *can* you want, morning, noon, and night in that smoky, dirty town?"

"Why, the fact is," replied the young man, "business must be done; I positively must attend two routs tonight."

"Whose routs — what are they?" inquired the young lady.

"One is Mrs. Tresham's, the other Lady Stukely's."

"I *guessed* that ugly old kinswoman of mine was at the bottom of it," exclaimed the young lady with great vivacity. "Lady Stukely — that pompous, old, frightful goose! — she has laid herself out to seduce you, Harry; but don't let that dismay you, for ten to one if you fall, she'll make an honest man of you in the end and marry you. Only think, Mary, what a sister you shall have," and the young lady laughed heartily, and then added, "There are some excellent, worthy, abominable people, who seem made expressly to put one in a passion — perpetual appeals to one's virtuous indignation. Now do, Henry, for goodness sake, if a matrimonial catastrophe must come, choose at least some nymph with less rouge and wrinkles than poor dear Lady Stukely."

"Kind cousin, thyself shalt choose for me," answered the young man; "but pray, suffer me to be at large for a year or two more. I would fain live and breathe a little, before I go down into the matrimonial pit and be no more seen. But let us mend our pace, the evening turns chill."

Thus chatting carelessly, they moved towards the large brick building which we have already described, embowered among the trees; where arrived, the young man forthwith applied himself to prepare for a night of dissipation, and the young ladies to get through a dull evening as best they might.

The two fair cousins sate in a large, oldfashioned drawingroom; the walls were covered with elaborately-wrought tapestry representing, in a manner sufficiently grim and alarming, certain scenes from Ovid's Metamorphoses; a cheerful fire blazed in the capacious hearth; and the cumbrous mantelpiece was covered with those grotesque and monstrous china figures, misnamed ornaments, which were then beginning to find favour in the eyes of fashion. Abundance of richly carved furniture was disposed variously throughout the room. The young ladies sate by a small table on which lay some books and materials for work, placed near the fire. They occupied each one of those huge, high-backed, and well-stuffed chairs in which it is a mystery how our ancestors could sit and remain awake. Both were silently occupied with their own busy reflections; and it was not until the rapid clank of the horse's hoofs upon the pavement underneath the windows, as young Ashwoode started upon his night ride to the city, rose sharp and clear, that Miss Copland, waking from her reverie, exclaimed, —

"Well, sweet coz, were ever so woebegone and desolate a pair of damsels. The only available male creature in the establishment, with the exception of Sir Richard, who has actually gone to bed, has fairly turned his back upon us."

"Dear Emily," replied her cousin, "pray be serious. I wish to tell you what has passed this evening. You observed my confusion and agitation when you and Henry overtook me."

"Why, to be sure I did," replied the young lady; "and now, like an honest coz, you are going to tell me all about it." She drew her chair nearer as she spoke. "Come, my dear, tell me everything — what was your discovery? Come, now, there's a good girl, do confess." So saying she threw one arm round her cousin's neck and laid the other in her lap, looking curiously into her face the while.

"Oh! Emily, I have seen him!" exclaimed Miss Ashwoode, with an effort.

"Seen *him*! — seen whom? — old Nick, if I may judge from your looks. Whom *have* you seen, dear?" eagerly inquired Miss Copland.

"I have seen Edmond O'Connor," answered she.

"Edmond O'Connor!" repeated the girl in unfeigned surprise, "why, I thought he was in France, eating frogs and dancing cotillons. What has brought him here? — why, he'll be taken for a spy and executed on the spot. But seriously, can you conceive anything more rash and ill-judged than his coming over just now?"

"It is indeed, I greatly fear, very rash," replied the young lady; "he is resolved to speak with my father once more."

"And your father in such a precious ill-humour just at this precise moment," exclaimed Miss Copland. "I never *was* so much afraid of Sir Richard as I have been for the last two days; he has been a perfect bruin — begging your pardon, my dear girl — but even *you* must admit, let filial piety and all the cardinal virtues say what they will, that whenever Sir Richard is recovering from a fit of the gout he is nothing short of a perfect monster. I wager my diamond cross to a thimble, that he breaks the poor young man's head the moment he comes within reach of him. But jesting apart, I fear, my dear cousin, that my uncle is in no mood just now to listen to heroics."

A sharp knocking upon the floor immediately above the chamber in which the young ladies sate, interrupted the conference at this juncture.

"There is my father's signal — he wants me," exclaimed Miss Ashwoode, and rising as she spoke, without more ado she ran to render the required attendance.

"Strange girl," exclaimed Miss Copland, as her cousin's step was heard ascending the stairs, "strange girl! — she is the veriest simpleton I ever yet encountered. All this fuss to marry a fellow who is, in plain words, little better than a beggarman — a good-looking beggarman, to be sure, but still a beggar. Oh, Mary, simple Mary! I am very much tempted to despise you — there is certainly something *wrong* about you! I hate to see people without ambition enough even to wish to keep their own natural position. The girl is full of nonsense; but what's that to me? she'll *un*learn it all one day; but I'm much afraid, simple cousin, a little too late."

Having thus soliloquized, she called her maid, and retired for the night to her chamber.

CHAPTER V.

OF O'CONNOR'S MOONLIGHT WALK TO THE "COCK AND ANCHOR," AND WHAT BEFELL HIM BY THE WAY.

As soon as O'Connor had made some little way from the scene of his sudden and agitating interview with Miss Ashwoode, he slackened his pace, and with slow steps began to retrace his way toward the city. So listless and interrupted was his progress, that the sun had descended, and twilight was fast melting into darkness before he reached that point in the road at which diverged the sequestered path which he had followed. As he approached the spot, he observed a small man, with a pipe in his mouth, and his person arranged in an attitude of ease and graceful negligence, admirably calculated to exhibit the symmetry and perfection of his bodily proportions. This man had planted himself in the middle of the road, so as completely to command the pass, and, as our reader need scarcely be informed, was no other than Larry Toole — the important personage to whom we have already introduced him.

As O'Connor approached, Larry advanced, with a slow and dignified motion, to receive him: and removing his pipe from his mouth with a *nonchalant* air, he compressed the lighted contents of the bowl with his finger, and then deposited the utensil in his coat pocket, at the same time, executing, in a very becoming manner, his most courtly bow. Somewhat surprised, and by no means pleasantly, at an interruption of so unlooked-for a kind, O'Connor observed, impatiently, "I have neither time nor temper, friend, to suffer delay or listen to foolery;" and observing that Larry was preparing to follow him, he added curtly, "I desire no company, sirrah, and choose to be alone."

"An' it's exactly because you wish to be alone, and likes solitude," observed the little man, "that you and me will shoot, being formed by the bountiful hand iv nature, barrin' a few small exceptions," — here he glanced complacently at his right leg, which was a little in advance of its companion— "as similiar as two eggs."

Being in no mood to tolerate, far less to encourage this annoying intrusion, O'Connor pursued his way at a quickened pace, and in obstinate silence, and in a little time exhibited a total and very mortifying forgetfulness of Mr. Toole's bodily proximity. That gentleman, however, was not so easily to be shaken off — he perseveringly followed, keeping a pace or two behind.

"It's parfectly unconthrovertible," pursued that worthy, with considerable solemnity and emphasis, "and at laste as plain as the nose on your face, that you haven't the smallest taste of a conciption who it is you're spakin' too, Mr. O'Connor."

"And pray who may you be, friend?" inquired he, somewhat surprised at being thus addressed by name.

"Who else would I be, your honour," rejoined the persevering applicant — "who else *could* I be, if you had but a glimmer iv light to contemplate my forrum and fatures, but Laurence Toole — called by the men for the most part *Misthur* Toole, and (he added in a softened tone) by the girls most commonly designated Larry."

"Ha — Larry — Larry Toole!" exclaimed O'Connor, half reconciled to an intrusion up to that moment so ill endured. "Well, Larry, tell me briefly how are the family at the manor, yonder?"

"Why, plase your honour," rejoined Larry, promptly, "the ould masthur, that's Sir Richard, is much oftener gouty than goodhumoured, and more's the pity. I b'lieve he's breaking down very fast, and small blame to him, for he lived hard, like a rale honourable gentleman. An' then, the young masthur, that's Masthur Henry — but you didn't know him so well — he's getting on at the divil's rate — scatt'ring guineas like small shot. They say he plays away a power of money; and he and the masthur himself has often hard words enough between them about the way things is goin' on; but he ates and dhrinks well, an' the health he gets is as good as he wants for his purposes."

"Well — but your young mistress," suggested O'Connor— "you have not told me yet how Miss Ashwoode has been ever since. How have her health and spirits been — has she been well?"

"Mixed middlin', like belly bacon," replied Mr. Toole, with an air of profound sympathy— "shilly-shally, sir — off an' on, like an April day — sometimes atin' her victuals, sometimes lavin' them — no sartainty. I think the ould masthur's gout and crossness, and the young one's vagaries, is frettin' her; and it's sorry I am to see it. An' there's Miss Emily — that's Miss Copland — a rale jovial slip iv a young lady. I think you've seen her once or twice up at the manor; but now, since her father, the ould General, died, she is stayin' for good with the family. She's a fine lady, and" (drawing close to O'Connor, and speaking with very significant emphasis) "she has ten thousand pounds of her own — do you mind me, ten thousand — it's a good fortune — is not it, sir?"

He paused for a moment, and receiving no answer, which he interpreted as a sign that the announcement was operating as it ought, he added with a confidential wink —

"I thought I might as well put you up to it, you know, for no one knows where a blessin' may light."

"Larry," said O'Connor, after a considerable silence, somewhat abruptly and suddenly recollecting the presence of that little person— "if you have aught to say to me, speak it quickly. What may your business be?"

"Why, sir," replied he, "the long and short of it is, I left Sir Richard more than a week since. Not that I was turned away — no, Mr. O'Connor," continued Mr. Toole, with edifying majesty, "no sich thing at all in the wide world. My resignation, sir, was the fruit of my own solemn convictions — for the five years I was with the family, I had no comfort, or aise, or pace. I may as well spake plain to you, sir, for *you*, like myself, is young" — Mr. Toole was certainly at the wrong side of fifty— "you can aisily understand me, sir, when I say that I'm the victim iv romance, bad cess to it — romance, sir; my buzzam, sir, was always open to tindher impressions — impressions, sir, that came into it as natural as pigs into a pittaty garden. I could not shut them out — the short and the long iv it is, I was always fallin' in love, since I was the size iv a quart pot — eternally fallin' in love." Mr. Toole sighed, and then resumed. "I done my best to smother my emotions, but passion, sir, young and ardent passion, is impossible to be suppressed: you might as well be trying to keep strong beer in starred bottles durin' the pariod iv the dog days. But I never knew rightly what love was all out, in rale, terrible perfection, antil Mistress Betsy came to live in the family. I'll not attempt to describe her — it's enough to say she fixed my affections, and done for myself. She is own maid to the young mistress. I need not expectorate upon the progress iv my courtship — it's quite enough to observe, that for a considherable time my path was strewed with flowers, antil a young chap — an English bliggard, one Peter Clout — an' it's many's the clout he got, the Lord be thanked for that same! — a lump iv a chap ten times as ugly as the divil, and without more shapes about him than a pound of cruds — an impittant, ignorant, presumptious, bothered, bosthoon — antil this gentleman — this Misthur Peter Clout, made his b —— y appearance; then all at once the divil's delight began. Betsy — the lovely Betsy Carey — the lovely, the vartious, the beautiful, and the exalted — began to play thricks. I know she was in love with me — over head and ears, as bad as myself — but woman is a mystarious agent, an' bangs Banagher. Long as I've been larnin', I never could larn why it is they take delight in tormentin' the tindher-hearted."

This reflection was uttered in a tone of tender woe, and the speaker paused for some symptom of assent from his auditor. It is, however, hardly necessary to say that he paused in vain. O'Connor had enough to occupy his mind; and so far from listening to his companion's narrative, he was scarcely conscious that Mr. Toole, in bodily presence, was walking beside him. That "tindher-hearted" individual accordingly resumed the thread of his discourse.

"But, at any rate, she laid herself out to make me jealous of Peter Clout; and, with the blessin' iv the divil, she succeeded complately. Things were going on this way — she lettin' on to be mighty fond iv Peter, an' me gettin' angrier an' angrier, and Mr. Clout more an' more impittent every day, antill I seen there was no use in purtendin'; so one mornin' when we were both of us — myself and Mr. Peter Clout — clainin' up the things in the pantry, I thought I might as well have a bit iv discourse with him — when I seen, do ye mind, there was no use in mortifyin' the chap with contempt, for I did not spake to him, good, bad, or indifferent, for more than a fortnight, an' he was so ignorant and unmannerly he never noticed the differ. When I seen there was no use in keepin' him at a distance, says I to him one day in the panthry— 'Mr. Clout,' says I, 'your conduct in regard iv some persons in this house,' says I, 'is iv a description that may be shuitable to the English spalpeens,' says I, 'but is about as like the conduct of a gintleman,' says I, 'as blackin' is to plate powder.' So he turns round, an' he looks at me as if I was a Pollyphamius. 'Mind your work,' says I, 'young man, an' don't be lookin' at me as if I was a hathian godess,' says I. 'It's Mr. Toole that's speakin' to you, an' you betther mind what he says. The long an' the short iv it is, I don't like you to be hugger-muggering with a sartain delicate famale in this establishment; an' if I catch you talkin' any more to Misthress Betsy Carey, I give you fair notice, it's at your own apparel. Beware of me — for as sure as you don't behave to my likin', you might as well be in the one panthry with a hyania,' says I, an' it was thrue for me, an' it was the same way with my father before me, an' all the Tooles up to the time of Noah's ark. In pace I'm a turtle-dove all out; but once I'm riz, I'm a rale tarin' vulture."

Here Mr. Toole paused to call up a look, and after a grim shake of the head, he resumed.

"Things went on aisy enough for a day or two, antill I happened to walk into the sarvants' hall, an' who should I see but Mr. Clout sittin' on the same stool with Misthriss Betsy, an' his arm round her waist — so when I see that, before any iv them could come between us, with the fair madness I made one jump at him, an' we both had one another by the windpipe before you'd have time to bless yourself. Well, round an' round we went, rowlin' with our heads and backs agin the walls, an' divil a spot of us but was black an' blue, antill we kem to the chimney; an' sure enough when we did, down we rowled both together, glory be to God! into the fire, an' upset a kittle iv wather on top iv us; an' with that there was sich a screechin' among the women, an' maybe a small taste from ourselves, that the masthur kem in, an' if he didn't lay on us with his walkin' stick it's no matter; but, at any rate, as soon as we recovered from the scaldin' an' the bruises. *I* retired, an' the English chap was turned away; an' that's the whole story, an' I tuk my oath that I'll never go into sarvice in a *family* again. I can't make any hand of women — they're made for desthroyin' all sorts iv pace iv mind — they're etarnally triflin' with the most sarious and sacred emotions. I'll never sarve any but single gentlemen from this out, if I was to be sacrificed for it — never a bit, by the hokey!"

So saying, Mr. Toole, having, in the course of his harangue, reproduced his pipe from his pocket, with a view to flourish it in emphatic accompaniment with the cadences of his voice, smote the bowl of it upon the edge of his cocked hat, which he held in his hand, with so much passion, that the head of the pipe flew across the road, and was for ever lost among the docks and nettles. One glance he deigned to the stump which remained in his hand, and then, with an air of romantic recklessness which laughs at all sacrifices, he flung it disdainfully from him, clapped his cocked hat upon his head with a vehemence which brought it nearly to the bridge of his nose, and, planting his hands in his breeches pockets, he glanced at the stars with a scowl which, if they take any note of things terrestrial, must have filled them with alarm.

Suddenly recollecting himself, Mr. Toole perceived that his intended master, having walked on, had left him considerably behind; he therefore put himself into an easy amble, which speedily brought him up with the chase.

"Mr. O'Connor, plase your honour," he exclaimed, "sure it's not possible it's goin' to lave me behind you are, an' me so proud iv your company; an', moreover, after axin' you for a situation — that is, always supposin' you want the sarvices iv a rale dashin' young fellow, that's up to everything, an' willing to sarve you in any incapacity. An' by gorra, sir," continued he, pathetically, "it's next door to a charity to take me, for I've but one crown in the wide world left, an' I must change it tonight; an' once I change money, the shillin's makes off with themselves like a hat full of sparrows into the elements, the Lord knows where."

With a desolate recklessness, he chucked the crown-piece into the air, caught it in his palm, and walked silently on.

"Well, well," said O'Connor, "if you choose to make so uncertain an engagement as for the term of my stay in Dublin, you are welcome to be my servant for so long."

"It's a bargain," shouted Mr. Toole— "a bargain, plase your honour, done and done on both sides. I'm your man — hurra!"

They had already entered the suburbs, and before many minutes were involved in the dark and narrow streets, threading their way, as best they might, toward the genial harbourage of the "Cock and Anchor."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SOLDIER — THE NIGHT RAMBLE — AND THE WINDOW THAT LET IN MORE THAN THE MOONLIGHT.

Short as had been O’Connor’s sojourn, it nevertheless had been sufficiently long to satisfy mine host of the “Cock and Anchor,” an acute observer in such particulars, that whatever his object might have been in avoiding the more fashionably frequented inns of the city, economy at least had no share in his motive. O’Connor, therefore, had hardly entered the public room of the inn, when a servant respectfully informed him that a private chamber was prepared for his reception, if he desired to occupy it. The proposition suited well with his temper at the minute, and with all alacrity he followed the waiter, who bowed him upstairs and through a dingy passage into a room whose claims, if not to elegance, at least to comfort, could hardly have been equalled, certainly not excelled, by the more luxurious pretensions of most modern hotels.

It was a large, capacious chamber, nearly square, wainscoted with dark shining wood, and decorated with certain dingy old pictures, which might have been, for anything to the contrary, appearing in so uncertain a light, *chefs d’œuvre* of the mighty masters of the olden time: at all events, they looked as warm and comfortable as if they were. The hearth was broad, deep, and high enough to stable a Kerry pony, and was surmounted by a massive stone mantelpiece, rudely but richly carved — abundance of old furniture — tables, at which the saintly Cromwell might have smoked and boozed, and chairs old enough to have supported Sir Walter Raleigh himself, were disposed about the room with a profuseness which argued no niggard hospitality. A pair of waxlights burned cheerily upon a table beside the bright crackling fire which blazed in the huge cavity of the hearth; and O’Connor threw himself into one of those cumbrons, tall-backed, and well-stuffed chairs, which are in themselves more potent invitations to the sweet illusive visitings from the world of fancy and of dreams than all the drugs or weeds of eastern climes. Thus suffering all his material nature to rest in absolute repose, he loosed at once the reins of imagination and memory, and yielded up his mind luxuriously to their mingled realities and illusions.

He may have been, perhaps, for two or three hours employed thus listlessly in chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancy, when his meditations were interrupted by a brisk step upon the passage leading to the apartment in which he sate, instantly succeeded by as brisk a knocking at the chamber door itself.

“Is this Mr. O’Connor’s chamber?” inquired a voice of peculiar richness, intonated not unpleasingly with a certain melodious modification of the brogue, bespeaking a sort of passionate *devil-may-carishness* which they say in the good old times wrought grievous havoc among womankind. The summons was promptly answered by an invitation to enter; and forthwith the door opened, and a comely man stepped into the room. The stranger might have seen some fifty or sixty summers, or even more; for his was one of those joyous, goodhumoured, rubicund visages, upon which time vainly tries to write a wrinkle. His frame was robust and upright, his stature tall, and there was in his carriage something not exactly a swagger (for with all his oddities, the stranger was evidently a gentleman), but a certain rollicking carelessness, which irresistibly conveyed the character of a reckless, headlong goodhumour and daring, to which nothing could come amiss. In the hale and jolly features, which many would have pronounced handsome, were written, in characters which none could mistake, the prevailing qualities of the man — a gay and sparkling eye, in which lived the very soul of convivial jollity, harmonized right pleasantly with a smile, no less of archness than *bonhomie*, and in the brow there was a certain indescribable cock, which looked half pugnacious and half comic. On the whole, the stranger, to judge by his outward man, was precisely the person to take his share in a spree, be the same in joke or earnest — to tell a good story — finish a good bottle — share his last guinea with you — or blow your brains out, as the occasion might require. He was arrayed in a full suit of regimentals, and taken for all in all, one need hardly have desired a better sample of the dashing, lighthearted, daredevil Irish soldier of more than a century since.

“Ah! Major O’Leary,” cried O’Connor, starting from his seat, and grasping the soldier’s hand, “I am truly glad to see you; you are the very man of all others I most require at this moment. I was just about to have a fit of the blue devils.”

“Blue devils!” exclaimed the major; “don’t talk to a youngster like me of any such infernal beings; but tell me how you are, every inch of you, and what brings you here?”

“I never was better; and as to my business,” replied O’Connor, “it is too long and too dull a story to tell you just now; but in the meantime, let us have a glass of Burgundy; mine host of the ‘Cock and Anchor’ boasts a very peculiar cellar.” So saying, O’Connor proceeded to issue the requisite order.

“That does he, by my soul!” replied the major, with alacrity; “and for that express reason I invariably make it a point to renew my friendly intimacy with its contents whenever I visit the metropolis. But I can’t stay more than five minutes, so proceed to operations with all dispatch.”

“And why all this hurry?” inquired O’Connor. “Where need you go at this hour?”

“Faith, I don’t precisely know myself,” rejoined the soldier; “but I’ve a strong impression that my evil genius has contrived a scheme to inveigle me into a cock-pit not a hundred miles away.”

“I’m sorry for it, with all my heart, Major,” replied O’Connor, “since it robs me of your company.”

“Nay, you must positively come along with me,” resumed the major; “I sip my Burgundy on these express conditions. Don’t leave me at these years without a mentor. I rely upon your prudence and experience; if you turn me loose upon the town tonight, without a moral guide, upon my conscience, you have a great deal to answer for. I may be fleeced in a hell, or milled in a row; and if I fall in with female society, by the powers of celibacy! I can’t answer for the consequences.”

“Sooth to say, Major,” rejoined O’Connor, “I’m in no mood for mirth.”

“Come, come! never look so glum,” insisted his visitor. “Remember I have arrived at years of *in*discretion, and must be looked after. Man’s life, my dear fellow, naturally divides itself into three great stages; the first is that in which the youthful disciple is carefully instructing his mind, and preparing his moral faculties, in silence, for all sorts of villainy — this is the season of youth and innocence; the second is that in which he *practises* all kinds of rascality — and this is the flower of manhood, or the prime of life; the third and last is that in which he strives to make his soul — and this is the period of dotage. Now, you see, my dear O'Connor, I have unfortunately arrived at the prime of life, while you are still in the enjoyment of youth and innocence; I am practising what you are plotting. You are, unfortunately for yourself, a degree more sober than I; you can therefore take care that I sin with due discretion — permit me to rob or murder, without being robbed or murdered in return."

Here the major filled and quaffed another glass, and then continued, —

"In short, I am — to speak in all solemnity and sobriety — so drunk, that it's a miracle how I mounted these rascally stairs without breaking my neck. I have no distinct recollection of the passage, except that I kissed some old hunks instead of the chambermaid, and pulled his nose in revenge. I solemnly declare I can neither walk nor think without assistance; my heels and head are inclined to change places, and I can't tell the moment the body politic may be capsized. I have no respect in the world for my intellectual or physical endowments at this particular crisis; my sight is so infernally acute that I see all surrounding objects considerably augmented in number; my legs have asserted their independence, and perform 'Sir Roger de Coverley,' altogether unsolicited; and my memory and other small mental faculties have retired for the night. Under those melancholy circumstances, my dear fellow, you surely won't refuse me the consolation of your guidance."

"Had not you better, my dear Major," said O'Connor, "remain with me quietly here for the night, out of the reach of sharks and sharpers, male and female? You shall have claret or Burgundy, which you please — enough to fill a skin!"

"I can't hold more than a bottle additional," replied the major, regretfully, "if I can even do that; so you see I'm bereft of domestic resources, and must look abroad for occupation. The fact is, I expect to meet one or two fellows whom I want to see, at the place I've named; so if you can come along with me, and keep me from falling into the gutters, or any other indiscretion by the way, upon my conscience, you will confer a serious obligation on me."

O'Connor plainly perceived that although the major's statement had been somewhat overcharged, yet that his admissions were not altogether fanciful; there were in the gallant gentleman's face certain symptoms of recent conviviality which were not to be mistaken — a perceptible roll of the eye, and a slight screwing of the lips, which peculiarities, along with the faintest possible approximation to a hiccough, and a gentle see-saw vibration of his stalwart person, were indications highly corroborative of the general veracity of his confessions. Seeing that, in good earnest, the major was not precisely in a condition to be trusted with the management of anything pertaining to himself or others, O'Connor at once resolved to see him, if possible, safely through his excursion, if after the discussion of the wine which was now before them, he should persevere in his fancy for a night ramble. They therefore sate down together in harmonious fellowship, to discuss the flasks which stood upon the board.

O'Connor was about to fill his guest's glass for the tenth or twelfth time, when the major suddenly ejaculated, —

"Halt! ground arms! I can no more. Why, you hardened young reprobate, it's not to make me drunk you're trying? I must keep senses enough to behave like a Christian at the cock-fight; and, upon my soul! I've very little rationality to spare at this minute. Put on your hat, and come without delay, before I'm fairly extinguished."

O'Connor accordingly donned his hat and cloak, and yielding the major the double support of his arm on the one side, and of the banisters on the other, he conducted him safely down the stairs, and with wonderful steadiness, all things considered, they entered the street, whence, under the major's direction, they pursued their way. After a silence of a few minutes, that military functionary exclaimed, with much gravity, —

"I'm a great social philosopher, a great observer, and one who looks quite through the deeds of men. My dear boy, believe me, this country is in the process of a great moral reformation; hospitality — which I take to be the first, and the last, and the only one of all the virtues of a bishop which is fit for the practice of a gentleman — hospitality, my dear O'Connor, is rapidly approaching to a climax in this country. I remember, when I was a little boy, a gentleman might pay a visit of a week or so to another in the country, and be all the time nothing more than tipsy — *tipsy* merely. However, matters gradually improved, and that stage which philosophers technically term simple drunkenness, became the standard of hospitality. This passed away, and the sense of the country, in its silent but irresistible operation, has substituted *blind* drunkenness; and in the prophetic spirit of sublime philosophy, I foresee the arrival of that time when no man can escape the fangs of hospitality upon any conditions short of brain fever or delirium tremens."

As the major delivered this philosophic discourse, he led O'Connor through several obscure streets and narrow lanes, till at length he paused in one of the very narrowest and darkest before a dingy brick house, whose lower windows were secured with heavy bars of iron. The door, which was so incrusted with dirt and dust that the original paint was hardly anywhere discernible, stood ajar, and within burned a feeble and ominous light, so faint and murky, that it seemed fearful of disclosing the deeds and forms which itself was forced to behold. Into this dim and suspicious-looking place the major walked, closely followed by O'Connor. In the hall he was encountered by a huge savage-looking fellow, who raised his squalid form lazily from a bench which rested against the wall at the further end, and in a low, gruff voice, like the incipient growl of a roused watchdog, inquired what they wanted there.

"Why, Mr. Creigan, don't you know Major O'Leary?" inquired that gentleman. "I and a friend have business here."

The man muttered something in the way of apology, and opening the dingy lantern in which burned the wretched tallow candle which half lighted the place, he snuffed it with his finger and thumb, and while so doing, desired the major to proceed. Accordingly, with the precision of one who was familiar with every turn of the place, the gallant officer led O'Connor through several rooms, lighted in the same dim and shabby way, into a corridor leading directly to the rearward of the house, and connecting it with some other detached building. As they threaded this long passage, the major turned towards O'Connor, who followed him, and whispered, —

"Did you mark that ill-looking fellow in the hall? Poor Creigan! — a gentleman! — would you think it? — a *gentleman* by birth, and with a snug property, too — four hundred good pounds a year, and more — all gone, like last year's snow, chiefly here in backing mains of his own! poor dog! I remember him one of the best dressed men on town, and now he's fain to pick up a few shillings by the week in the place where he lost his thousands; this is the state of man!"

As he spoke thus, they had reached the end of the passage. The major opened the door which terminated the corridor, and thus displayed a scene which, though commonplace enough in its ingredients, was, nevertheless, in its *coup d'œil*, sufficiently striking. In the centre of a capacious and ill-finished chamber stood a circular platform, with a high ledge running round it. This arena, some fourteen feet in diameter, was surrounded by circular benches, which rose one outside the other, in parallel tiers, to the wall. Upon these seats were crowded some hundreds of men — a strange mixture; gentlemen of birth and honour sate side by side with notorious swindlers; noblemen with coalheavers; simpletons with sharks; the unkempt, greasy locks of squalid destitution mingled in the curls of the patrician periwig; aristocratic lace and embroidery were rubbed by the dusty shoulders of draymen and potboys; — all these gross and glaring contrarieties reconciled and bound together by one hellish sympathy. All sate locked in breathless suspense, every countenance fixed in the hard lines of intense, excited anxiety and vigilance; all leaned forward to gaze upon the combat whose crisis was on the point of being determined. Those who occupied the back seats had started up, and pressing forward, almost crushed those in front of them to death. Every aperture in this living pile was occupied by some eager, haggard, or ruffian face; and, spite of all the pushing, and crowding, and bustling, all were silent, as if the powers of voice and utterance were unknown among them.

The effect of this scene, so suddenly presented — the crowd of ill-looking and anxious faces, the startling glare of light, and the unexpected rush of hot air from the place — all so confounded him, that O’Connor did not for some moments direct his attention to the object upon which the gaze of the fascinated multitude was concentrated; when he did so he beheld a spectacle, abstractedly, very disproportioned in interest to the passionate anxiety of which it was the subject. Two game cocks, duly trimmed, and having the long and formidable steel weapons with which the humane ingenuity of “the fancy” supplies the natural spur of the poor biped, occupied the centre of the circular stage which we have described; one of the birds lay upon his back, beneath the other, which had actually sent his spurs through and through his opponent’s neck. In this posture the wounded animal lay, with his beak open, and the blood trickling copiously through it upon the board. The victorious bird crowed loud and clear, and a buzz began to spread through the spectators, as if the battle were already determined, and suspense at an end. The “law” had just expired, and the gentlemen whose business it was to *handle* the birds were preparing to withdraw them.

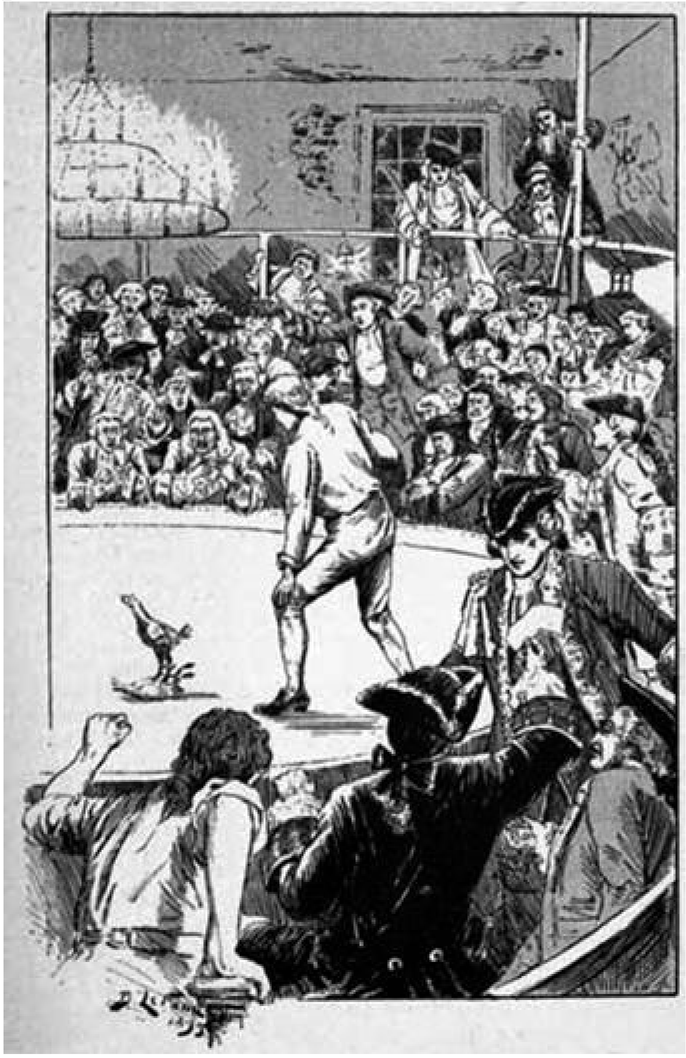
"Twenty to one on the grey cock," exclaimed a large, ill-looking fellow, who sat close to the pit, clutching his arms in his brawny hands, as if actually hugging himself with glee, while he gazed with an exulting grin upon the combat, whose issue seemed now beyond the reach of chance. The challenge was, of course, unaccepted.

"Fifty to one!" exclaimed the same person, still more ecstatically. "One hundred to one — *two* hundred to one!"

"I'll give you one guinea to two hundred," exclaimed perhaps the coolest gambler in that select assembly, young Henry Ashwoode, who sat also near the front.

"Done, Mr. Ashwoode — done with *you*; it's a bet, sir," said the same ill-looking fellow.

"Done, sir," replied Ashwoode.



Again the conqueror crowed the shrill note of victory, and all seemed over, when, on a sudden, by one of those strange vicissitudes of which the annals of the cock-pit afford so many examples, the dying bird — it may be roused by the vaunting challenge of his antagonist — with one convulsive spasm, struck both his spurs through and through the head of his opponent, who dropped dead upon the table, while the wounded bird, springing to his legs, flapped his wings, as if victory had never hovered, and then as momentarily fell lifeless on the board, by this last heroic feat winning a main on which many thousands of pounds depended. A silence for a moment ensued, and then there followed the loud exulting cheers of some, and the hoarse, bitter blasphemies of others, clamorous expostulation, hoarse laughter, curses, congratulations, and invectives — all mingled with the noise occasioned by those who came in or went out, the shuffling and pounding of feet, in one torrentuous and stunning volume of sound.

Young Ashwoode having secured and settled all his bets, shouldered his way through the crowd, and with some difficulty, reached the door at which Major O'Leary and O'Connor were standing.

"How do you do, uncle? Were you in the room when I took the two hundred to one?" inquired the young man.

"By my conscience, I was, Hal, and wish you joy with all my heart. It was a sporting bet on both sides, and as game a fight as the world ever saw."

"I must be off," continued the young man. "I promised to look in at Lady Stukely's tonight; but before I go, you must know they are all affronted with you at the manor. The girls are positively outrageous, and desired me to command your presence tomorrow on pain of excommunication."

"Give my tender regards to them both," replied the major, "and assure them that I will be proud to obey them. But don't you know my friend O'Connor," he added, in a lower tone, "you are old acquaintances, I believe?"

"Unless my memory deceives me, I have had the honour of meeting Mr. O'Connor before," said the young man, with a cold bow, which was returned by O'Connor with more than equal *hauteur*. "Recollect, uncle, no excuses," added young Ashwoode, as he retreated from the chamber— "you have promised to give tomorrow to the girls. Adieu."

“There goes as finished a specimen of a mad-cap, rakehelly young devil as ever carried the name of Ashwoode or the blood of the O’Leary’s,” observed the uncle; “but come, we must look to the sport.”

So saying, the major, exerting his formidable strength, and accompanying his turbulent progress with a large distribution of apologetic and complimentary speeches of the most high-flown kind, shoved and jostled his way to a vacant place near the front of the benches, and, seating himself there, began to give and take bets to a large amount upon the next main. Tired of the noise, and nearly stifled with the heat of the place, O’Connor, seeing that the major was resolved to act independently of him, thought that he might as well consult his own convenience as stay there to be stunned and suffocated without any prospect of expediting the major’s retreat; he therefore turned about and retraced his steps through the passage which we have mentioned. The grateful coolness of the air, and the lassitude induced by the scene in which he had taken a part, though no very prominent one, induced him to pause in the first room to which the passage, as we have said, gave access; and happening to espy a bench in one of the recesses of the windows, he threw himself upon it, thoroughly to receive the visitings of the cool, hovering air. As he lay listless and silently upon this rude couch, he was suddenly disturbed by a sound of someone treading the yard beneath. A figure sprang across toward the window; and almost instantaneously Larry Toole — for the moonlight clearly revealed the features of the intruder — was presented at the aperture, and with an energetic spring, accompanied by a no less energetic, devotional ejaculation, that worthy vaulted into the chamber, agitated, excited, and apparently at his wits’ end.

CHAPTER VII.

THREE GRIM FIGURES IN A LONELY LANE — TWO QUEER GUESTS RIDING TO TONY BLIGH'S — THE WATCHER IN DANGER — AND THE HIGHWAYMEN.

A liberal and unsolicited attention to the affairs of other people, was one among the many amiable peculiarities of Mr. Laurence Toole: he had hardly, therefore, seen the major and O'Connor fairly beyond the threshold of the "Cock and Anchor," when he donned his cocked hat and followed their steps, allowing, however, an interval sufficiently long to secure himself against detection. Larry Toole well knew the purposes to which the squalid mansion which we have described was dedicated, and having listened for a few moments at the door, to allow his master and his companion time to reach the inner sanctuary of vice and brutality, whither it was the will of Major O'Leary to lead his reluctant friend, this faithful squire entered at the halfopen door, and began to traverse the passage which we have before mentioned. He was not, however, permitted long to do so undisturbed. The grim sentinel of these unhallowed regions on a sudden upreared his towering proportions, heaving his huge shoulders with a very unpleasant appearance of preparation for an effort, and with two or three formidable strides, brought himself up with the presumptuous intruder.

"What do *you* want here — eh! you d —— d scarecrow?" exclaimed the porter, in a tone which made the very walls to vibrate.

Larry was too much astounded to reply — he therefore remained mute and motionless.

"See, my good cove," observed the gaunt porter, in the same impressive accents of admonition— "make yourself scarce, d'ye mind; and if you want to see the pit, go round — we don't let potboys and pickpockets in at this side — cut and run, or I'll have to give you a lift."

Larry was no poltroon; but another glance at the colossal frame of the porter quelled effectually whatever pugnacious movements might have agitated his soul; and the little man, having deigned one look of infinite contempt, which told his antagonist, as plainly as any look could do, that he owed his personal safety solely and exclusively to the sublime and unmerited pity of Mr. Laurence Toole, that dignified individual turned on his heel, and withdrew somewhat precipitately through the door which he had just entered.

The porter grinned, rolled his quid luxuriously till it made the grand tour of his mouth, shrugged his square shoulders, and burst into a harsh chuckle. Such triumphs as the one he had just enjoyed, were the only sweet drops which mingled in the bitter cup of his savage existence. Meanwhile, our romantic friend, traversing one or two dark lanes, made his way easily enough to the more public entrance of this temple of fortune. The door which our friend Larry now approached lay at the termination of a long and narrow lane, enclosed on each side with dead walls of brick — at the far end towered the dark outline of the building, and over the arched doorway burned a faint and dingy light, without strength enough to illuminate even the bricks against which it hung, and serving only in nights of extraordinary darkness as a dim, solitary star, by which the adventurous night rambler might shape his course. The moon, however, was now shining broad and clear into the broken lane, revealing every inequality and pile of rubbish upon its surface, and throwing one side of the enclosure into black, impenetrable shadow. Without premeditation or choice, it happened that our friend Larry was walking at the dark side of the lane, and shrouded in the deep obscurity he advanced leisurely toward the doorway. As he proceeded, his attention was arrested by a figure which presented itself at the entrance of the building, accompanied by two others, as it appeared, about to pass forth into the lane through which he himself was moving. They were engaged in animated debate as they approached — the conversation was conducted in low and earnest tones — their gestures were passionate and sudden — their progress interrupted by many halts — and the party evinced certain sinister indications of uneasy vigilance and caution, which impressed our friend with a dark suspicion of mischief, which was strengthened by his recognition of two of the persons composing the little group. His curiosity was irresistibly piqued, and he instinctively paused, lest the sound of his advancing steps should disturb the conference, and more than half in the undefined hope that he might catch the substance of their conversation before his presence should be detected. In this object he was perfectly successful.

In the form which first offered itself, he instantly detected the well-known proportions and features of young Ashwoode's groom, who had attended his master into town; and in company with this fellow stood a person whom Larry had just as little difficulty in recognizing as a ruffian who had twice escaped the gallows by the critical interposition of fortune — once by a flaw in the indictment, and again through lack of sufficient evidence in law — each time having stood his trial on a charge of murder. It was not very wonderful, then, that this startling companionship between his old fellow-servant and Will Harris (or, as he was popularly termed, "Brimstone Bill") should have piqued the curiosity of so inquisitive a person as Larry Toole.

In company with these worthies was a third, wrapped in a heavy riding-coat, and who now and then slightly took part in the conversation. They all talked in low, earnest whispers, casting many a stealthy glance backward as they advanced through the dim avenue toward our curious friend.

As the party approached, Larry ensconced himself in the recess formed by the projection of two dilapidated brick piers, between which hung a crazy door, and in whose front there stood a mound of rubbish some three feet in height. In such a position he not unreasonably thought himself perfectly secure.

"Why, what the devil ails you now, you cursed cowardly ninny," whispered Brimstone Bill, through his set teeth— "what can happen *you*, win or lose? — turn up black, or turn up red, is it not all one to you, you *mouth*, you? *Your* carcase is safe and sound — then what do you funk for now? Rouse yourself, you d —— d idiot, or I'll drive a brace of lead pellets through your brains — rouse yourself!"

Thus speaking, he shook the groom roughly by the collar.

"Stop, Bill — hands off," muttered the man, sulkily— "I'm not funking — you know I'm not; but I don't want to see him *finished* — I don't want to see him murdered when there's no occasion for it — there's no great harm in that; we want his *ribben*, not his blood; there's no profit in taking his life."

"Booby! listen to me," replied the ruffian, in the same tone of intense impatience. "What do *I* want with his life any more than you do? Nothing. Do not I wish to do the thing genteelly as much as you? He shall not lose a drop of blood, nor his skin have a scratch, if he knows how to behave and be a good boy. Bah! we need but show him the *lead towels*, and the job's done. Look you, I and Jack will sit in the private room of the 'Bleeding Horse.' Old Tony's a trump, and asks no questions; so, as you pass, give the window a skelp of the whip, and we'll be out in the snapping of a flint. Leave the rest to us. You have your instructions, you *kedger*, so act up to them, and the devil himself can't spoil our sport."

"You may look out for us, then," said the servant, "in less than two hours. He never stays late at Lady Stukely's, and he must be home before two o'clock."

"Do not forget to grease the hammers," suggested the fellow in the heavy coat.

"He doesn't carry pistols tonight," replied the attendant.

"So much the better — all *my* luck," exclaimed Brimstone— "I would not swap luck with the chancellor."

"The devil's children, they say," observed the gentleman in the large coat, "have the devil's luck."

These were the last words Larry Toole could distinguish as the party moved onward. He ventured, however, although with grievous tremors, to peep out of his berth to ascertain the movements of the party. They all stopped at a distance of some twenty or thirty yards from the spot where he crouched, and for a time appeared again absorbed in earnest debate. On a sudden, however, the fellow in the riding-coat, having frequently looked suspiciously up the lane in which they stood, stooped down, and, picking up a large stone, hurled it with his whole force in the direction of the embrasure in which Larry was lurking. The missile struck the projecting pier within a yard of that gentleman's head, with so much force that the stone burst into fragments and descended in a shower of splinters about his ears. This astounding salute was instantly followed by an occurrence still more formidable — for the ruffian, not satisfied with the test already applied, strode up in person to the doorway in which Larry had placed himself. It was well for that person that he was sheltered in front by the mass of rubbish which we have mentioned: at the foot of this he lay coiled, not daring even to breathe; every moment expecting to feel the cold point of the villain's sword poking against his ribs, and half inclined to start upon his feet and shout for help, although conscious that to do so would scarcely leave him a chance for his life. The suspicions of the wretch were, fortunately for Larry, ill-directed. He planted one foot upon the heap of loose materials which, along with the deep shadow, constituted poor Mr. Toole's only safeguard; and while the stones which his weight dislodged rolled over that prostrate person, he pushed open the door and gazed into the yard, lest any inquisitive ear or eye might have witnessed more than was consistent with the safety of the confederates of Brimstone Bill. The fellow was satisfied, and returned whistling, with affected carelessness, towards his comrades.

More dead than alive, Larry remained mute and motionless for many minutes, not daring to peep forth from his hiding-place; when at length he mustered courage to do so, he saw the two robbers still together, and again shrunk back into his retreat. Luckily for the poor wight, the fellow who had looked into the yard left the door unclosed, which, after a little time perceiving, Larry glided stealthily in on all fours, and in a twinkling sprang into the window at which his master lay, as we have already recorded.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WARNING — SHOWING HOW LARRY TOOLE FARED — WHOM HE SAW AND WHAT HE SAID — AND HOW MUCH GOOD AND HOW LITTLE HE DID — AND MOREOVER RELATING HOW SOMEBODY WAS LAID IN THE MIRE — AND HOW HENRY ASHWOODE PUT HIS FOOT IN THE STIRRUP.

Flurried and frightened as Larry was, his agitation was not strong enough to overcome in him the national, instinctive abhorrence of the character of an informer. To the close interrogatories of his master, he returned but vague and evasive answers. A few dark hints he threw out as to the cause of his alarm, but preserved an impenetrable silence respecting alike its particular nature and the persons of whose participation in the scheme he was satisfied.

In language incoherent and nearly unintelligible from excitement, he implored O'Connor to allow him to absent himself for about one hour, promising the most important results, in case his request was complied with, and vowing upon his return to tell him everything about the matter from beginning to end.

Seeing the agonized earnestness of the man, though wholly uninformed of the cause of his uneasiness, which Larry constantly refused to divulge, O'Connor granted him the permission which he desired, and both left the building together. O'Connor pursued his way to the "Cock and Anchor," where, restored to his chamber and to solitude, he abandoned himself once more to the current of his wayward thoughts.

Our friend Larry, however, was no sooner disengaged from his master, than he began, at his utmost speed, to thread the narrow and complicated lanes and streets which lay between the haunt of profligacy which we have just described, and the eastern extremity of the city. After an interrupted run of nearly half an hour through pitchy dark and narrow streets, he emerged into Stephen's Green; at the eastern side of which, among other buildings of lesser note, there then stood, and perhaps (with a new face, and some slight external changes) still stands, a large and handsome mansion. Toward this building, conspicuous in the distance by the red glare of dozens of links and torches which flared and flashed outside, and by the gay light streaming from its many windows, Larry made his way. Too eager and hurried to pass along the sides of the square by the common road, he clambered over the broken wall which surrounded it, plunged through the broad trench, and ran among the deep grass and rank weeds, now heavy with the dews of night; over the broad area he pursued his way, startling the quiet cattle from their midnight slumbers, and hastening rather than abating his speed, as he drew near to the termination of his hurried mission. As he approached, the long dark train of carriages, every here and there lighted by some flaming link still unextinguished, and surrounded by crowds of idle footmen, sufficiently indicated the scene of Lady Stukely's hospitalities. In a moment Larry had again crossed the fences which enclosed the square, and passing the broad road among the carriages, chairs, and lackeys, he sprang up the steps of the house, and thundered lustily at the hall-door. It was opened by a gruff and corpulent porter with a red face and majestic demeanour, who, having learned from Larry that he had an important message for Mr. Henry Ashwoode, desired him, in as few words as possible, to step into the hall. The official then swung the massive door to, rolled himself into his well-cushioned throne, and having scanned Larry's proportions for a minute or two with one eye, which he kept half open for such purposes, he ejaculated —

"Mr. Finley, I say, Mr. Finley, here's one with a message upwards." Having thus delivered himself, he shut down his open eye, screwed his eyebrows, and became absorbed in abstruse meditation. Meanwhile, Mr. Finley, in person arrayed in a rich livery, advanced languidly toward Larry Toole, throwing into his face a dreamy and supercilious expression, while with one hand he faintly fanned himself with a white pocket handkerchief.

"Your most obedient servant to command," drawled the footman, as he advanced. "What can I do, my good soul, to *obleege* you?"

"I only want to see the young master — that's young Mr. Ashwoode," replied Larry, "for one minute, and that's all."

The footman gazed upon him for a moment with a languid smile, and observed in the same sleepy tone, "Absolutely impossible — *amposseeble*, as they say at the Pallais Royal."

"But, blur an' agers," exclaimed Larry, "it's a matther iv life an' death, robbery an' murdher."

"Bloody murder!" echoed the man in a sweet, low voice, and with a stare of fashionable abstraction.

"Well, tear an' 'oun's," cried Larry, almost beside himself with impatience, "if you won't bring him down to me, will you even as much as carry him a message?"

"To say the truth, and upon my honour," replied the man, "I can't engage to climb up stairs just now, they are so devilish fatiguing. Don't you find them so?"

The question was thrown out in that vacant, inattentive way which seems to dispense with an answer.

"By my soul!" rejoined Larry, almost crying with vexation, "it's a hard case. Do you mane to tell me, you'll neither bring him down to me nor carry him up a message?"

"You have, my excellent fellow," replied the footman, placidly, "precisely conveyed my meaning."

"By the hokey!" cried Larry, "you're fairly breaking my heart. In the divil's name, can you as much as let me stop here till he's comin' down?"

"Absolutely impossible," replied the footman, in the same dulcet and deliberate tone. "It is indeed *amposseeble*, as the Parisians have it. You *must* be aware, my good old soul, that you're in a positive pickle. You are, pardon me, my excellent friend, very dirty and very disgusting. You must therefore go out in a few moments into the fresh air." At any other moment, such a speech would have infallibly provoked Mr. Toole's righteous and most rigorous vengeance; but he was now too completely absorbed in the mission which he had undertaken to suffer personal considerations to have a place in his bosom.

"Will you, then," he ejaculated desperately, "will you as much as give him a message yourself, when he's comin' down?"

"What message?" drawled the lackey.

"Tell him, for the love of God, to take the *old* road home, by the seven sallies," replied Larry. "Will you give him that message, if it isn't too long?"

"I have a wretched memory for messages," observed the footman, as he leisurely opened the door— "a perfect sieve: but should he catch my eye as he passes, I'll endeavour, upon my honour; good night — adieu!"

As he thus spoke, Larry had reached the threshold of the door, which observing, the polished footman, with a *nonchalant* and easy air, slammed the hall-door, thereby administering upon Larry's back, shoulders, and elbows, such a bang as to cause Mr. Toole to descend the flight of steps at a pace much more marvellous to the spectators than agreeable to himself. Muttering a bitter curse upon his exquisite acquaintance, Larry took his stand among the expectants in the street; there resolved to wait and watch for young Ashwoode, and to give him the warning which so nearly concerned his safety.

Meanwhile, Lady Stukely's drawingrooms were crowded by the gay, the fashionable, and the frivolous, of all ages. Young Ashwoode stood behind his wealthy hostess's chair, while she played quadrille, scarce knowing whether she won or lost, for Henry Ashwoode had never been so fascinating before. Lady Stukely was a delicate, die-away lady, not very far from sixty; the natural blush upon her nose outblazoned the rouge upon her cheeks; several very long teeth— "ivory and ebon alternately" — peeped roguishly from beneath her upper lip, which her ladyship had a playful trick of screwing down, to conceal them — a trick which made her ladyship's smile rather a surprising than an attractive exhibition. It is but justice, however, to admit that she had a pair of very tolerable eyes, with which she executed the most masterly evolutions. For the rest, there having existed a very considerable disparity in years between herself and her dear deceased, Sir Charles Stukely, who had expired at the mature age of ninety, more than a year before, she conceived herself still a very young, artless, and interesting girl; and under this happy hallucination she was more than half inclined to return in good earnest the disinterested affection of Henry Ashwoode.

There, too, was old Lord Aspenly, who had, but two days before, solicited and received Sir Richard Ashwoode's permission to pay his court to his beautiful daughter, Mary. There, jerking and shrugging and grimacing, he hobbled through the rooms, all wrinkles and rappee; bandying compliments and repartees, flirting and fooling, and beyond measure enchanted with himself, while every interval in frivolity and noise was filled up with images of his approaching nuptials and intended bride, while she, poor girl, happily unconscious of all their plans, was spared, for that night, the pangs and struggles which were hereafter but too severely to try her heart.

‘Twere needless to enumerate noble peers, whose very titles are now unknown — poets, who alas! were mortal — men of promise, who performed nothing — clever young men, who grew into stupid old ones — and millionaires, whose money perished with them; we shall not, therefore, weary the reader by describing Lady Stukely’s guests; let it suffice to mention that Henry Ashwoode left the rooms with young Pigwiggynne, of Bolton’s regiment of dragoons, and one of Lord Wharton’s aides-de-camp. This circumstance is here recorded because it had an effect in producing the occurrences which we have to relate by-and-by; for young Pigwiggynne having partaken somewhat freely of Lady Stukely’s wines, and being unusually exhilarated, came forth from the hall-door to assist Ashwoode in procuring a chair, which he did with a good deal more noise and blasphemy than was strictly necessary. Our friend Larry Toole, who had patiently waited the egress of his *quondam* young master, no sooner beheld him than he hastened to accost him, but Pigwiggynne being, as we have said, in high spirits and unusual good humour, cut short poor Larry’s address by jocularly knocking him on the head with a heavy walking-cane — a pleasantry which laid that person senseless upon the pavement. The humorist passed on with an exhilarating crow, after the manner of a cock; and had not a matter-of-fact chairman drawn Mr. Toole from among the coach-wheels where the joke had happened to lay him, we might have been saved the trouble of recording the subsequent history of that very active member of society. Meanwhile, young Ashwoode was conveyed in a chair to a neighbouring fashionable hotel, where, having changed his suit, and again equipped himself for the road, he mounted his horse, and followed by his treacherous groom, set out at a brisk pace upon his hazardous, and as it turned out, eventful night-ride toward the manor of Morley Court.

CHAPTER IX.

THE “BLEEDING HORSE” — HOLLANDS AND PIPES FOR TWO — EVERY BULLET HAS ITS BILLET.

At the time in which the events that we have undertaken to record took place, there stood at the southern extremity of the city, near the point at which Camden Street now terminates, a small, oldfashioned building, something between an ale-house and an inn. It occupied the roadside by no means unpicturesquely; one gable jutted into the road, with a projecting window, which stood out from the building like a glass box held together by a massive frame of wood; and commanded by this projecting gable, and a few yards in retreat, but facing the road, was the inn door, over which hung a painted panel, representing a white horse, out of whose neck there spouted a crimson cascade, and underneath, in large letters, the traveller was informed that this was the genuine old “Bleeding Horse.” Old enough, in all conscience, it appeared to be, for the tiled roof, except where the ivy clustered over it, was crowded with weeds of many kinds, and the boughs of the huge trees which embowered it had cracked and shattered one of the cumbrous chimney-stacks, and in many places it was evident that but for the timely interposition of the saw and the axe, the giant limbs of the old timber would, in the gradual increase of years, have forced their way through the roof and the masonry itself — a tendency sufficiently indicated by sundry indentures and rude repairs in those parts of the building most exposed to such casualties. Upon the night in which the events that are recorded in the immediately preceding chapters occurred, two horsemen rode up to this inn, and leisurely entering the stable yard, dismounted, and gave their horses in charge to a ragged boy who acted as hostler, directing him with a few very impressive figures of rhetoric, on no account to loosen girth or bridle, or to suffer the beasts to stir one yard from the spot where they stood. This matter settled, they entered the house. Both were muffled; the one — a large, shambling fellow — wore a capacious riding-coat; the other — a small, wiry man — was wrapped in a cloak; both wore their hats pressed down over their brows, and had drawn their mufflers up, so as to conceal the lower part of the face. The lesser of the two men, leaving his companion in the passage, opened a door, within which were a few fellows drowsily toping, and one or two asleep. In a chair by the fire sat Tony Bligh, the proprietor of the "Bleeding Horse," a middle-aged man, rather corpulent, as pale as tallow, and with a sly, ugly squint. The little man in the cloak merely introduced his head and shoulders, and beckoned with his thumb. The signal, though scarcely observed by one other of the occupants of the room, was instantly and in silence obeyed by the landlord, who, casting one uneasy glance round, glided across the floor, and was in the passage almost as soon as the gentleman in the cloak.

"Here, Tony, boy," whispered the man, as the innkeeper approached, "fetch us a pint of Hollands, a couple of pipes, and a glim; but first turn the key in this door here, and come yourself, do ye mind?"

Tony squeezed the speaker's arm in token of acquiescence, and turning a key gently in the lock, he noiselessly opened the door which Brimstone Bill had indicated, and the two cavaliers strode into the dark and vacant chamber. Brimstone walked to the window, pushed open the casement, and leaned out. The beautiful moon was shining above the old and tufted trees which lined the quiet road; he looked up and down the shaded avenue, but nothing was moving upon it, save the varying shadows as the night wind swung the branches to and fro. He listened, but no sound reached his ears, excepting the rustling and moaning of the boughs, through which the breeze was fitfully soughing.

Scarcely had he drawn back again into the room, when Tony returned with the refreshments which the gentleman had ordered, and with a dark lantern enclosing a lighted candle.

"Right, old cove," said Bill. "I see you hav'n't forgot the trick of the trade. Who are your *pals* inside?"

"Three of them sleep here tonight," replied Tony. "They're all quiet coves enough, such as doesn't hear nor see any more than they ought."

The two fellows filled a pipe each, and lighted them at the lantern.

"What mischief are you after now, Bill?" inquired the host, with a peculiar leer.

"Why should *I* be after any mischief," replied Brimstone jocularly, "any more than a sucking dove, eh? Do I look like mischief tonight, old tickle-pitcher — do I?"

He accompanied the question with a peculiar grin, which mine host answered by a prolonged wink of no less peculiar significance.

"Well, Tony boy," rejoined Bill, "maybe I *am* and maybe I *ain't* — that's the way: but mind, you did not see a stim of me, nor of *him*, tonight (glancing at his comrade), nor ever, for that matter. But you did see two ill-looking fellows not a bit like us; and I have a notion that these two chaps will manage to get into a sort of shindy before an hour's over, and then *mizzle* at once; and if all goes well, your hand shall be crossed with gold tonight."

"Bill, Bill," said the landlord, with a smile of exquisite relish, and drawing his hand coaxingly over the man's forehead, so as to smooth the curls of his periwig nearly into his eyes, "you're just the same old dodger — you are the devil's own bird — you have not cast a feather."

It is hard to say how long this tender scene might have continued, had not the other ruffian knocked his knuckles sharply on the table, and cried —

"Hist! brother — *chise* it — enough fooling — I hear a horseshoe on the road."

All held their breath, and remained motionless for a time. The fellow was, however, mistaken. Bill again advanced to the window, and gazed intently through the long vista of trees.

"There's not a bat stirring," said he, returning to the table, and filling out successively two glasses of spirits, he emptied them both. "Meanwhile, Tony," continued he, "get back to your company. Some of the fellows may be poking their noses into this place. If you don't hear *from* me, at all events you'll hear of me before an hour. Hop the twig, boy, and keep all hard in for a bit — skip."

With a roguish grin and a shake of the fist, honest Tony, not caring to dispute the commands of his friend, of whose temper he happened to know something, stealthily withdrew from the room, where we, too, shall for a time leave these worthy gentlemen of the road vigilantly awaiting the approach of their victim.

Larry Toole had no sooner recovered his senses — which was in less than a minute — than he at once betook himself to the "Cock and Anchor," resolved, as the last resource, to inform O'Connor of the fact that an attack was meditated. Accordingly, he hastened with very little ceremony into the presence of his master, told him that young Ashwoode was to be waylaid upon the road, near the "Bleeding Horse," and implored him, without the loss of a moment, to ride in that direction, with a view, if indeed it might not already be too late, to intercept his passage, and forewarn him of the danger which awaited him.

Without waiting to ask one useless question, O'Connor, before five minutes were passed, was mounted on his trusty horse, and riding at a hard pace through the dark streets towards the point of danger.

Meanwhile, young Ashwoode, followed by his mounted attendant, proceeded at a brisk trot in the direction of the manor; his brain filled with a thousand busy thoughts and schemes, among which, not the least important, were sundry floating calculations as to the probable and possible amount of Lady Stukely's jointure, as well as some conjectures respecting the *maximum* duration of her ladyship's life. Involved in these pleasing ruminations, sometimes crossed by no less agreeable recollections, in which the triumphs of vanity and the successes of the gaming-table had their share, he had now reached that shadowy and silent part of the road at which stood the little inn, embowered in the great old trees, and peeping forth with a sort of humble and friendly aspect, but ill-according with the dangerous designs it served to shelter.

Here the servant, falling somewhat further behind, brought his horse close under the projecting window of the inn as he passed, and with a sharp cut of his whip gave the concerted signal. Before sixty seconds had elapsed, two well-mounted cavaliers were riding at a hard gallop in their wake. At this headlong pace, the foremost of the two horsemen had passed Ashwoode by some dozen yards, when, checking his horse so suddenly as to throw him back upon his haunches, he wheeled him round, and plunging the spurs deep into his flanks, with two headlong springs, he dashed him madly upon the young man's steed, hurling the beast and his rider to the earth. Tremendous as was the fall, young Ashwoode, remarkable alike for personal courage and activity, was in a moment upon his feet, with his sword drawn, ready to receive the assault of the ruffian.

"Let go your skiver — drop it, you greenhorn," cried the fellow, hoarsely, as he wheeled round his plunging horse, and drew a pistol from the holster, "or, by the eternal —— , I'll blow your head into dust!"

Young Ashwoode attempted to seize the reins of the fellow's horse, and made a desperate pass at the rider.

"Take it, then," cried the fellow, thrusting the muzzle of the pistol into Ashwoode's face and drawing the trigger. Fortunately for Ashwoode, the pistol missed fire, and almost at the same moment the rapid clang of a horse's hoofs, accompanied by the loud shout of menace, broke startlingly upon his ear. Happy was this interruption for Henry Ashwoode, for, stunned and dizzy from the shock, he at that moment tottered, and in the next was prostrate upon the ground. "Blowed, by —— !" cried the villain, furiously, as the unwelcome sounds reached his ears, and dashing the spurs into his horse, he rode at a furious gallop down the road towards the country. This scene occupied scarce six seconds in the acting. Brimstone Bill, who had but a moment before come up to the succour of his comrade, also heard the rapid approach of the galloping hoofs upon the road; he knew that before he could count fifty seconds the new comer would have arrived. A few moments, however, he thought he could spare — important moments they turned out to be to one of the party. Bill kept his eye steadily fixed upon the point some three or four hundred yards distant at which he knew the horseman whose approach was announced must first appear.

In that brief moment, the cool-headed villain had rapidly calculated the danger of the groom's committing his accomplices through want of coolness and presence of mind, should he himself, as was not unlikely, become suspected. The groom's pistols were still loaded, and he had taken no part in the conflict. Brimstone Bill fixed a stern glance upon his companion while all these and other thoughts flashed like lightning across his brain.

"Darby," said he, hurriedly, to the man who sat half-stupefied in the saddle close beside him, "blaze off the lead towels — crack them off, I say."

Bill impatiently leaned forward, and himself drew the pistols from the groom's saddle-bow; he fired one of them in the air — he cocked the other. "This dolt will play the devil with us all," thought he, looking with a peculiar expression at the bewildered servant. With one hand he grasped him by the collar to steady his aim, and with the other, suddenly thrusting the pistol to his ear, and drawing the trigger, he blew the wretched man's head into fragments like a potsherd; and wheeling his horse's head about, he followed his comrade pellmell, beating the sparks in showers from the stony road at every plunge.

All this occurred in fewer moments than it has taken us lines to describe it; and before our friend Brimstone Bill had secured the odds which his safety required, O'Connor was thundering at a furious gallop within less than a hundred yards of him. Bill saw that his pursuer was better mounted than he — to escape, therefore, by a fair race was out of the question. His resolution was quickly taken. By a sudden and powerful effort he reined in his horse at a single pull, and, with one rearing wheel, brought him round upon his antagonist; at the same time, drawing one of the large pistols from the saddle-bow, he rested it deliberately upon his bridle-arm, and fired at his pursuer, now within twenty yards of him. The ball passed so close to O'Connor's head that his ear rang shrilly with the sound of it for hours after. They had now closed; the highwayman drew his second pistol from the holster, and each fired at the same instant. O'Connor's shot was well directed — it struck his opponent in the bridle-arm, a little below the shoulder, shattering the bone to splinters. With a hoarse shriek of agony, the fellow, scarce knowing what he did, forced the spurs into his horse's sides; and the animal reared, wheeled, and bore its rider at a reckless speed in the direction which his companion had followed.

It was well for him that the shot, which at the same moment he had discharged, had not been altogether misdirected. O'Connor, indeed, escaped unscathed, but the ball struck his horse between the eyes, and piercing the brain, the poor beast reared upright and fell dead upon the road. Extricating himself from the saddle, O'Connor returned to the spot where young Ashwoode and the servant still lay. Stunned and dizzy with the fall which he had had, the excitement of actual conflict was no sooner over, than Ashwoode sank back into a state of insensibility. In this condition O'Connor found him, pale as death, and apparently lifeless. Raising him against the grassy bank at the roadside, and having cast some water from a pool close by into his face, he saw him speedily recover.

"Mr. O'Connor," said Ashwoode, as soon as he was sufficiently restored, "you have saved my life — how can I thank you?"

"Spare your thanks, sir," replied O'Connor, haughtily; "for any man I would have done as much — for anyone bearing your name I would do much more. Are you hurt, sir?"

“O’Connor, I have done you much injustice,” said the young man, betrayed for the moment into something like genuine feeling. “You must forget and forgive it — I know your feelings respecting others of my family — henceforward I will be your friend — do not refuse my hand.”

“Henry Ashwoode,” replied O’Connor, “I take your hand — gladly forgetting all past causes of resentment — but I want no vows of friendship, which tomorrow you may regret. Act with regard to me henceforward as if this night had not been — for I tell you truly again, that I would have done as much for the meanest peasant breathing as I have done tonight for you; and once more I pray you tell me, are you much hurt?”

“Nothing, nothing,” replied Ashwoode— “merely a fall such as I have had a thousand times after the hounds. It has made my head swim confoundedly; but I’ll soon be steady. What, in the meantime, has become of honest Darby? If I mistake not, I see his horse browsing there by the roadside.”

A few steps showed them what seemed a bundle of clothes lying heaped upon the road; they approached it — it was the body of the servant.

“Get up, Darby — get up, man,” cried Ashwoode, at the same time pressing the prostrate figure with his boot. It had been lying with the back uppermost, and in a half-kneeling attitude; it now, however, rolled round, and disclosed, in the bright moonlight, the hideous aspect of the murdered man — the head a mere mass of ragged flesh and bone, shapeless and blackened, and hollow as a shell. Horror-struck at the sight, they turned in silence away, and having secured the two horses, they both mounted and rode together back to the little inn, where, having procured assistance, the body of the wretched servant was deposited. Young Ashwoode and O’Connor then parted, each on his respective way.

CHAPTER X.

THE MASTER OF MORLEY COURT AND THE LITTLE GENTLEMAN IN BOTTLE-GREEN — THE BARONET’S DAUGHTER — AND THE TWO CONSPIRATORS.

Encounters such as those described in the last chapter were, it is needless to say, much more common a hundred and thirty years ago than they are now. In fact, it was unsafe alike in town and country to stir abroad after dark in any district affording wealth and aristocracy sufficient to tempt the enterprise of *professional* gentlemen. If London and its environs, with all their protective advantages, were, nevertheless, so infested with desperadoes as to render its very streets and most frequented ways perilous to pass through during the hours of night, it is hardly to be wondered at that Dublin, the capital of a rebellious and semi-barbarous country — haunted by hungry adventurers, who had lost everything in the revolutionary wars — with a most notoriously ineffective police, and a rash and dissolute aristocracy, with a great deal more money and a great deal less caution than usually fall to the lot of our gentry of the present day — should have been pre-eminently the scene of midnight violence and adventure. The continued frequency of such occurrences had habituated men to think very lightly of them; and the feeble condition of the civil executive almost uniformly secured the impunity of the criminal. We shall not, therefore, weary the reader by inviting his attention to the formal investigation which was forthwith instituted; it is enough for all purposes to record that, like most other investigations of the kind at that period, it ended in — just nothing.

Instead, then, of attending inquests and reading depositions, we must here request the gentle reader to accompany us for a brief space into the dressing-room of Sir Richard Ashwoode, where, upon the morning following the events which in our last we have detailed, the aristocratic invalid lay extended upon a well-cushioned sofa, arrayed in a flowered silk dressing-gown, lined with crimson, and with a velvet cap upon his head. He was apparently considerably beyond sixty — a slightly and rather an elegantly made man, with thin, anxious features, and a sallow complexion:

his head rested upon his hand, and his eyes wandered with an air of discontented abstraction over the fair landscape which his window commanded. Before him was placed a small table, with all the appliances of an elegant breakfast; and two or three books and pamphlets were laid within reach of his hand. A little way from him sate his beautiful child, Mary Ashwoode, paler than usual, though not less lovely — for the past night had been to her one of fevered excitement, griefs, and fears. There she sate, with her work before her, and while her small hands plied their appointed task, her soft, dark eyes wandered often with sweet looks of affection toward the reclining form of that old haughty and selfish man, her father.

The silence had continued long, for the old man's temper might not, perhaps, have brooked an interruption of his ruminations, although, if the sour and spited expression of his face might be trusted, his thoughts were not the most pleasant in the world. The train of reflection, whatever it might have been, was interrupted by the entrance of a servant, bearing in his hand a note, with which he approached Sir Richard, but with that air of nervous caution with which one might be supposed to present a sandwich to a tiger.

"Why the devil, sirrah, do you pound the floor so!" cried Sir Richard, turning shortly upon the man as he advanced, and speaking in sharp and bitter accents. "What's that you've got? — a note? — take it back, you blockhead — I'll not touch it — it's some rascally scrap of dunning paper — get out of my sight, sirrah."

"An it please you, sir," replied the man, deferentially, "it comes from Lord Aspenly."

"Eh! oh! ah!" exclaimed Sir Richard, raising himself upon the sofa, and extending his hand with alacrity. "Here, give it to me; so you may go, sir — but stay, does a messenger wait? — ask particularly from me how his lordship does, do you mind? and let the man have refreshment; go, sirrah, go — begone!"

Sir Richard then took the note, broke the seal, and read the contents through, evidently with considerable satisfaction. Having completed the perusal of the note twice over, with a smile of unusual gratification, tinctured, perhaps, with the faintest possible admixture of ridicule, Sir Richard turned toward his daughter with more real cheerfulness than she had seen him exhibit for years before.

"Mary, my good child," said he, "this note announces the arrival here, on tomorrow, of my old, or rather, my most *particular* friend, Lord Aspenly; he will pass some days with us — days which we must all endeavour to make as agreeable to him as possible. You look — you *do* look extremely well and pretty to-day; come here and kiss me, child."

Overjoyed at this unwonted manifestation of affection, the girl cast her work away, and with a beating heart and light step, she ran to her father's side, threw her arms about his neck, and kissed him again and again, in happy unconsciousness of all that was passing in the mind of him she so fondly caressed.

The door again opened, and the same servant once more presented himself.

"What do you come to plague me about *now*?" inquired the master, sharply; recovering, in an instant, his usual peevish manner— "What's this you've got? — what *is* it?"

"A card, sir," replied the man, at the same time advancing the salver on which it lay within reach of the languid hand of his master.

"Mr. Audley — Mr. Audley," repeated Sir Richard, as he read the card; "I never heard of the man before, in the course of my life; I know nothing about him — nothing — and care as little. Pray what is *he* pestering about? — what does he want here?"

"He requests permission to see you, sir," replied the man.

"Tell him, with my compliments, to go to hell!" rejoined the invalid;— "Or, stay," he added, after a moment's pause— "what does he look like? — is he well or ill-dressed? — old or young?"

"A middle-aged man, sir; rather well-dressed," answered the servant.

"He did not mention his business?" asked Sir Richard.

"No, sir," replied the man; "but he said that it was very important, and that you would be glad to see him."

"Show him up, then," said Sir Richard, decisively.

The servant accordingly bowed and departed.

"A stranger! — a gentleman! — and come to me upon important and pleasant business," muttered the baronet, musingly— "important and pleasant! — Can my old, cross-grained brother-in-law have made a favourable disposition of his property, and — and — died! — that were, indeed, news worth hearing; too much luck to happen me, though — no, no, it can't be — it can't be."

Nevertheless, he thought it *might* be; and thus believing, he awaited the entrance of his visitor with extreme impatience. This suspense, however, was not of long duration; the door opened, and the servant announced Mr. Audley — a dapper little gentleman, in grave habiliments of bottle-green cloth; in person somewhat short and stout; and in countenance rather snub-featured and rubicund, but bearing an expression in which goodhumour was largely blended with self-importance. This little person strutted briskly into the room.

"Hem! — Sir Richard Ashwoode, I presume?" exclaimed the visitor, with a profound bow, which threatened to roll his little person up like an armadillo.

Sir Richard returned the salute by a slight nod and a gracious wave of the hand.

"You will excuse my not rising to receive you, Mr. Audley," said the baronet, "when I inform you that I am tied here by the gout; pray, sir, take a chair. Mary, remove your work to the room underneath, and lay the ebony wand within my reach; I will tap upon the floor when I want you."

The girl accordingly glided from the room.

"We are now alone, sir," continued Sir Richard, after a short pause. "I fear, sir — I know not why — that your business has relation to my brother; is he — is he *ill*?"

"Faith, sir," replied the little man bluntly, "I never heard of the gentleman before in my life."

"I breathe again, sir; you have relieved me extremely," said the baronet, swallowing his disappointment with a ghastly smile; "and now, sir, that you have thus considerately and expeditiously dispelled what were, thank heaven! my groundless alarms, may I ask you to what accident I am indebted for the singular good fortune of making your acquaintance — in short, sir, I would fain learn the object of your visit."

"That you shall, sir — that you shall, in a trice," replied the little gentleman in green. "I'm a plain man, my dear Sir Richard, and love to come to the point at once — ahem! The story, to be sure, is a long one, but don't be afraid, I'll abridge it — I'll abridge it." He drew his watch from his fob, and laying it upon the table before him, he continued— "It now wants, my dear sir, precisely seven minutes of eleven, by London time; I shall limit myself to half-an-hour."

"I fear, Mr. Audley, you should find me a very unsatisfactory listener to a narrative of half-an-hour's length," observed Sir Richard, drily; "in fact, I am not in a condition to make any such exertion; if you will obligingly condense what you have to say into a few minutes, you will confer a favour upon me, and lighten your own task considerably." Sir Richard then indignantly took a pinch of snuff, and muttered, almost audibly— "A vulgar, audacious, old boor."

"Well, then, we must try — we must try, my dear sir," replied the little gentleman, wiping his face with his handkerchief, by way of preparation— "I'll just sum up the leading points, and leave particulars for a more favourable opportunity; in fact, I'll hold over *all* details to our next merry meeting — our next *tête-à-tête* — when I hope we shall meet upon a pleasanter *footing* — your gouty toes, you know — d'ye take me? Ha! ha! excuse the joke — ha! ha! ha!"

Sir Richard elevated his eyebrows, and looked upon the little gentleman with a gaze of stern and petrifying severity during this burst of merriment.

"Well, my dear sir," continued Mr. Audley, again wiping his face, "to proceed to business. You have learned my name from my card, but beyond my name you know nothing about me."

"*Nothing whatever*, sir," replied Sir Richard, with profound emphasis.

"Just so; well, then, you *shall*," rejoined the little gentleman. "I have been a long time settled in France — I brought over every penny I had in the world there — in short, sir, something more than twelve thousand pounds. Well, sir, what did I do with it? There's the question. Your gay young fellows would have thrown it away at the gaming table, or squandered it on gold lace and velvets — or again, your prudent, plodding fellow would have lived quietly on the interest and left the principal to vegetate; but what did I do? Why, sir, not caring for idleness or show, I threw some of it into the wine trade, and with the rest I kept hammering at the funds, winning twice for every once I lost. In fact, sir, I prospered — the money rolled in, sir, and in due course I became rich, sir — rich — *warm*, as the phrase goes."

"Very *warm*, indeed, sir," replied Sir Richard, observing that his visitor again wiped his face— "but allow me to ask, beyond the general interest which I may be presumed to feel in the prosperity of the whole human race, how on earth does all this concern *me*?"

"Ay, ay, there's the question," replied the stranger, looking unutterably knowing— "that's the puzzle. But all in good time; you shall hear it in a twinkling. Now, being well to do in the world, you may ask me, why do not I look out for a wife? I answer you simply, that having escaped matrimony hitherto, I have no wish to be taken in the noose at these years; and now, before I go further, what do you take my age to be — how old do I look?"

The little man squared himself, cocked his head on one side, and looked inquisitively at Sir Richard from the corner of his eye. The patience of the baronet was nigh giving way outright.

"Sir," replied he, in no very gracious tones, "you may be the 'Wandering Jew,' for anything I either know or see to the contrary."

"Ha! good," rejoined the little man, with imperturbable good humour, "I see, Sir Richard, you are a wag — the Wandering Jew — ha, ha! no — not *that* quite. The fact is, sir, I am in my sixty-seventh year — you would not have thought that — eh?"

Sir Richard made no reply whatever.

"You'll acknowledge, sir, that *that* is not exactly the age at which to talk of hearts and darts, and gay gold rings," continued the communicative gentleman in the bottle-green. "I know very well that no young woman, of her own free choice, could take a liking to *me*."

"Quite impossible," with desperate emphasis, rejoined Sir Richard, upon whose ear the sentence grated unpleasantly; for Lord Aspenly's letter (in which "hearts and darts" were profusely noticed) lay before him on the table; "but once more, sir, may I implore of you to tell me the drift of all this?"

"The drift of it — to be sure I will — in due time," replied Mr. Audley. "You see, then, sir, that having no family of my own, and not having any intention of taking a wife, I have resolved to leave my money to a fine young fellow, the son of an old friend; his name is O'Connor — Edmond O'Connor — a fine, handsome, young dog, and worthy to fill any place in all the world — a high-spirited, good-hearted, dashing young rascal — you know something of him, Sir Richard?"

The baronet nodded a supercilious assent; his attention was now really enlisted.

"Well, Sir Richard," continued the visitor, "I have wormed out of him — for I have a knack of my own of getting at people's secrets, no matter how close they keep them, d'ye see — that he is over head and ears in love with your daughter — I believe the young lady who just left the room on my arrival; and indeed, if such is the case, I commend the young scoundrel's taste; the lady is truly worthy of all admiration — and — mdash;"

"Pray, sir, proceed as briefly as may be to the object of your conversation with me," interrupted Sir Richard, drily.

"Well, then, to return — I understand, sir," continued Audley, "that you, suspecting something of the kind, and believing the young fellow to be penniless, very naturally, and, indeed, I may say, very prudently, and very sensibly, opposed yourself to the thing from the commencement, and obliged the sly young dog to discontinue his visits; — well, sir, matters stood so, until *I* — cunning little *I* — step in, and change the whole posture of affairs — and how? Marry, thus, I come hither and ask your daughter's hand for *him*, upon these terms following — that I undertake to convey to him, at once, lands to the value of one thousand pounds a year, and that at my death I will leave him, with the exception of a few small legacies, sole heir to all I have; and on his wedding-day give him and his lady their choice of either of two chateaux, the worst of them a worthy residence for a nobleman."

"Are these chateaux in Spain?" inquired Sir Richard, sneeringly.

"No, no, sir," replied the little man, with perfect guilelessness; "both in Flanders."

"Well, sir," said Sir Richard Ashwoode, raising himself almost to a sitting posture, and preluding his observations with two unusually large pinches of snuff, "I have heard you very patiently throughout a statement, all of which was fatiguing, and much of which was positively disagreeable to me: and I trust that what I have now to say will render it wholly unnecessary for you and me ever again to converse upon the same topic. Of Mr. O'Connor, whom, in spite of this strange repetition of an already rejected application, I believe to be a spirited young man, I shall say nothing more than that, from the bottom of my heart I wish him every success of every kind, so long as he confines his aspirations to what is suitable to his own position in society; and, consequently, conducive to his own comfort and respectability. With respect to his very flattering vicarious proposal, I must assure you that I do not suspect Miss Ashwoode of any inclination to descend from the station to which her birth and fortune entitle her; and if I did suspect it, I should feel it to be my imperative duty to resist, by every means in my power, the indulgence of any such wayward caprice; but lest, after what I have said, any doubt should rest upon your mind as to the value of these obstacles, it may not be amiss to add that my daughter, Miss Ashwoode, is actually promised in marriage to a gentleman of exalted rank and great fortune, and who is, in all respects, an unexceptionable connection. I have the honour, sir, to wish you good-morning."

"The devil!" exclaimed the little gentleman, as soon as his utter amazement allowed him to take breath. A long pause ensued, during which he twice inflated his cheeks to their utmost tension, and puffed the air forth with a prolonged whistle of desolate wonder. Recollecting himself, however, he hastily arose, wished Sir Richard good-day, and walked down stairs, and out of the house, all the way muttering, "God bless my body and soul — a thousand pounds a year — the devil — *can* it be? — body o' me — refuse a thousand a year — what the deuce is he looking for?" — and such other ejaculations; stamping all the while emphatically upon every stair as he descended, to give vent to his indignation, as well as impressiveness to his remarks.

Something like a smile for a moment lit up the withered features of the old baronet; he leaned back luxuriously upon his sofa, and while he listened with delighted attention to the stormy descent of his visitor, he administered to its proper receptacle, with prolonged relish, two several pinches of rappee.

"So, so," murmured he, complacently, "I suspect I have seen the last of honest Mr. Audley — a little surprised and a little angry he does appear to be — dear me! — he stamps fearfully — what a very strange creature it is."

Having made this reflection, Sir Richard continued to listen pleasantly until the sounds were lost in the distance; he then rang a small hand-bell which lay upon the table, and a servant entered.

"Tell Mistress Mary," said the baronet, "that I shall not want her just now, and desire Mr. Henry to come hither instantly — begone, sirrah."

The servant disappeared, and in a few moments young Ashwoode, looking unusually pale and haggard, and dressed in a morning suit, entered the chamber. Having saluted his father with the formality which the usages of the time prescribed, and having surveyed himself for a moment at the large mirror which stood in the room, and having adjusted thereat the tie of his lace cravat, he inquired, —

"Pray, sir, who was that piece of 'too, too solid flesh' that passed me scarce a minute since upon the stairs, pounding all the way with the emphasis of a battering ram? As far as I could judge, the thing had just been discharged from your room."

"You have happened, for once in your life, to talk with relation to the subject to which I would call your attention," said Sir Richard. "The person whom you describe with your wonted facetiousness, has just been talking with me; his name is Audley; I never saw him till this morning, and he came coolly to make proposals, in young O'Connor's name, for your sister's hand, promising to settle some scurvy chateaux, heaven knows where, upon the happy pair."

"Well, sir, and what followed?" asked the young man.

"Why simply, sir," replied his father, "that I gave him the answer which sent him stamping down stairs, as you saw him. I laughed in his face, and desired him to go about his business."

"Very good, indeed, sir," observed young Ashwoode.

"There is no occasion for commentary, sir," continued Sir Richard. "Attend to what I have to say: a nobleman of large fortune has requested my permission to make his suit to your sister — *that* I have, of course, granted; he will arrive here tomorrow, to make a stay of some days. I am resolved the thing *shall* be concluded. I ought to mention that the nobleman in question is Lord Aspenly."

The young man looked for a moment or two the very impersonation of astonishment, and then, burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"Either be silent, sir, or this moment quit the room," said Sir Richard, in a tone which few would have liked to disobey— "how dare you — you — you insolent, dependent coxcomb — how dare you, sir, treat me with this audacious disrespect?"

The young man hastened to avert the storm, whose violence he had more than once bitterly felt, by a timely submission.

"I assure you, sir, nothing was further from my intention than to offend you," said he— "I am fully alive — as a man of the world, I could not be otherwise — to the immense advantages of the connection; but Lord

Aspenly I have known so long, and always looked upon as a confirmed old bachelor, that on hearing his name thus suddenly, something of incongruity, and — and — and I don't exactly know what — struck me so very forcibly, that I involuntarily and very thoughtlessly began to laugh. I assure you, sir, I regret it very much, if it has offended you."

"You are a weak fool, sir, I am afraid," replied his father, shortly: "but that conviction has not come upon me by surprise; you *can*, however, be of some use in this matter, and I am determined you *shall* be. Now, sir, mark me: I suspect that this young fellow — this O'Connor, is not so indifferent to Mary as he should be to a daughter of mine, and it is more than possible that he may endeavour to maintain his interest in her affections, imaginary or real, by writing letters, sending messages, and such manœuvring. Now, you must call upon the young man, wherever he is to be found, and either procure from him a distinct pledge to the effect that he will think no more of her (the young fellow has a sense of honour, and I would rely upon his promise), or else you must have him out — in short, make him *fight* you — you attend, sir — if *you* get hurt, we can easily make the country too hot to hold him; and if, on the other hand, *you* poke *him* through the body, there's an end of the whole difficulty. This step, sir, you *must* take — you understand me — I am very much in earnest."

This was delivered with a cold deliberateness, which young Ashwoode well understood, when his father used it to imply a fixity of purpose, such as brooked no question, and halted at no obstacle.

"Sir," replied Henry Ashwoode, after an embarrassed pause of a few minutes, "you are not aware of *one* particular connected with last night's affray — you have heard that poor Darby, who rode with me, was actually brained, and that *I* escaped a like fate by the interposition of one who, at his own personal risk, saved my life — that one was the very Edmond O'Connor of whom we speak."

"What you allude to," observed Sir Richard, with very edifying coolness, "is, no doubt, very shocking and very horrible. I regret the destruction of the man, although I neither saw nor knew much about him; and for your eminently providential escape, I trust I am fully as thankful as I ought to be; and now, granting all you have said to be perfectly accurate — which I take it to be — what conclusion do you wish me to draw from it?"

"Why, sir, without pretending to any very extraordinary proclivity to gratitude," replied the young man— "for O'Connor told me plainly that he did not expect any — I must consider what the world will say, if I return what it will be pleased to regard as an obligation, by challenging the person who conferred it."

"Good, sir — good," said the baronet, calmly: and gazing upon the ceiling with elevated eyebrows and a bitter smile, he added, reflectively, "he's afraid — afraid — afraid — ay, afraid — afraid."

"You wrong me very much, sir," rejoined young Ashwoode, "if you imagine that fear has anything to do with my reluctance to act as you would have me; and no less do you wrong me, if you think I would allow any schoolboy sentimentalism to stand in the way of my family's interests. My *real* objection to the thing is this — first, that I cannot see any satisfactory answer to the question, What will the world say of my conduct, in case I force a duel upon him the day after he has saved my life? — and again, I think it inevitably damages any young woman in the matrimonial market, to have low duels fought about her."

Sir Richard screwed his eyebrows reflectively, and remained silent.

"But at the same time, sir," continued his son, "I see as clearly as you could wish me to do, the importance, under present circumstances — or rather the absolute necessity — of putting a stop to O'Connor's suit; and, in short, to all communication between him and my sister, and I will undertake to do this effectually."

"And how, sir, pray?" inquired the baronet.

"I shall, as a matter of course, wait upon the young man," replied Henry Ashwoode— "his services of last night demand that I should do so. I will explain to him, in a friendly way, the hopelessness of his suit. I should not hesitate either to throw a little colouring of my own over the matter. If I can induce O'Connor once to regard me as his friend — and after all, it is but the part of a friend to put a stop to this foolish affair — I will stake my existence that the matter shall be broken off for ever and a day. If, however, the young fellow turn out foolish and pig-headed, I can easily pick a quarrel with him upon some other subject, and get him out of the way as you propose; but without mixing up my sister's name in the dispute, or giving occasion for gossip. However, I half suspect that it will require neither crafty stratagem nor shrewd blows to bring this absurd business to an end. I daresay the parties are beginning to tire heartily of waiting, and perhaps a little even of one another; and, for my part, I really do not know that the girl ever cared for him, or gave him the smallest encouragement."

"But *I* know that she *did*," replied Sir Richard. "Carey has shown me letters from her to him, and from him to her, not six months since. Carey is a very useful woman, and may do us important service. I did not choose to mention that I had seen these letters; but I sounded Mary somewhat sternly, and left her with a caution which I think must have produced a salutary effect — in short, I told her plainly, that if I had reason to suspect any correspondence or understanding between her and O'Connor, I should not scruple to resort to the sternest and most rigorous interposition of parental authority, to put an end to it peremptorily. I confess, however, that I have misgivings about this. I regard it as a very serious obstacle — one, however, which, so sure as I live, I will entirely annihilate."

There was a pause for a little while, and Sir Richard continued, —

"There is a good deal of sense in what you have suggested. We will talk it over and arrange operations systematically this evening. I presume you intend calling upon the fellow to-day; it might not be amiss if you had him to dine with you once or twice in town: you must get up a kind of confidential acquaintance with him, a thing which you can easily terminate, as soon as its object is answered. He is, I believe, what they call a frank, honest sort of fellow, and is, of course, very easily led; and — and, in short — made a *fool* of: as for the girl, I think I know something of the sex, and very few of them are so romantic as not to understand the value of a title and ten thousand a year! Depend upon it, in spite of all her sighs, and vapours, and romance, the girl will be dazzled so effectually before three weeks, as to be blind to every other object in the world; but if not, and should she dare to oppose my wishes, I'll make her cross-grained folly more terrible to her than she dreams of — but she knows me too well — she *dares* not."

Both parties remained silent and abstracted for a time, and then Sir Richard, turning sharply to his son, exclaimed, with his usual tart manner, —

"And now, sir, I must admit that I am a good deal tired of your very agreeable company. Go about your business, if you please, and be in this room this evening at halfpast six o’clock. You had *better* not forget to be punctual; and, for the present, get out of my sight.”

With this very affectionate leavetaking, Sir Richard put an end to the family consultation, and the young man, relieved of the presence of the only person on earth whom he really feared, gladly closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE OLD BEECH-TREE WALK AND THE IVY-GROWN GATEWAY — THE TRYSTE AND TUE CRUTCH-HANDLED CANE.

In the snug old “Cock and Anchor,” the morning after the exciting scenes in which O’Connor had taken so active a part, that gentleman was pacing the floor of his sitting-room in no small agitation. On the result of that interview, which he had resolved no longer to postpone, depended his happiness for years — it might be for life. Again and again he applied himself to the task of arranging clearly and concisely, and withal adroitly and with tact, the substance of what he had to say to Sir Richard Ashwoode. But, spite of all, his mind would wander to the pleasant hours he had passed with Mary Ashwoode in the quiet green wood and by the dark well’s side, and through the mossgrown rocks, and by the chiming current of the wayward brook, long before the cold and worldly had suspected and repulsed that love which he knew could never die but when his heart had ceased to beat for ever. Again would he, banishing with a stoical effort these unbidden visions of memory, seek to accomplish the important task which he had proposed to himself; but still all in vain. There was she once more — there was the pale, pensive, lovely face — there the long, dark, silken tresses — there the deep, beautiful eyes — and there the smile — the artless, melancholy, enchanting smile.

“It boots not trying,” exclaimed O’Connor. “I cannot collect my thoughts; and yet what use in conning over the order and the words of what, after all, will be judged merely by its meaning? Perhaps it is better that I should yield myself wholly up to the impulse of the moment, and so speak but the more directly and the more boldly. No; even in such a cause I will not accommodate myself to his cramp and crooked habits of thought and feeling. If I let him know all, it matters little how he learns it.”

As O’Connor finished this sentence, his meditations were dispelled by certain sounds, which issued from the passage leading to his room.

“A young man,” exclaimed a voice, interrupted by a good deal of puffing and blowing, probably caused by the steep ascent, “and a good-looking, eh? — (puff) — dark eyes, eh? — (puff, puff) — black hair and straight nose, eh? — (puff, puff) — long-limbed, tall, eh? — (puff).”

The answers to these interrogatories, whatever they may have been, were, where O’Connor stood, wholly inaudible; but the cross-examination was accompanied throughout by a stout, firm, stumping tread upon the old floor, which, along with the increasing clearness with which the noise made its way to O’Connor’s door, sufficiently indicated that the speaker was approaching. The accents were familiar to him. He ran to his door, opened it; and in an instant Hugh Audley, Esquire, very hot and very much out of breath, pitched himself, with a good deal of precision, shoulders foremost, against the pit of the young man’s stomach, and, embracing him a little above the hips, hugged him for some time in silence, swaying him to and fro with extraordinary energy, as if preparatory to tripping him up, and taking him off his feet altogether — then giving him a shove straight from him, and holding him at arm’s length, he looked with brimful eyes, and a countenance beaming with delight, full in O’Connor’s face.

“Confound the dog, how well he looks,” exclaimed the old gentleman, vehemently— “devilish well, curse him!” and he gave O’Connor a shove with his knuckles, and succeeded in staggering himself— “never saw you look better in my life, nor anyone else for that matter; and how is every inch of you, and what have you been doing with yourself? Come, you young dog, account for yourself.”

O’Connor had now, for the first time, an opportunity of bidding the kind old gentleman welcome, which he did to the full as cordially, if not so boisterously.

“Let me sit down and rest myself: I must take breath for a minute,” exclaimed the old gentleman. “Give me a chair, you undutiful rascal. What a devil of a staircase that is, to be sure. Well, and what do you intend doing with yourself to-day?”

“To say the truth,” said the young man, while a swarthier glow crossed his dark features. “I was just about to start for Morley Court, to see Sir Richard Ashwoode.”

“About his daughter, I take it?” inquired the old gentleman.

“Just so, sir,” replied the younger man.

“Then you may spare yourself the pains,” rejoined the old gentleman, briskly. “You are better at home. You have been forestalled.”

“What — how, sir? What do you mean?” asked O’Connor, in great perplexity and alarm.

“Just what I say, my boy. You have been forestalled.”

“By whom, sir?”

“By me.”

“By you?”

“Ay.”

The old gentleman screwed his brows and pursed up his mouth until it became a Gordian involution of knots and wrinkles, threw a fierce and determined expression into his eyes, and wagged his head slightly from side to side — looking altogether very like a “Cromwell guiltless of his country’s blood.” At length he said, —

“I’m an old fellow, and ought to know something by this time — think I *do*, for that matter; and I say deliberately — cut the whole concern and blow them all.”

Having thus delivered himself, the old gentleman resumed his sternest expression of countenance, and continued in silence to wag his head from time to time with an air of infinite defiance, leaving his young companion, if possible, more perplexed and bewildered than ever.

“And have you, then, seen Sir Richard Ashwoode?” inquired O’Connor.

“Have I seen him?” rejoined the old gentleman. “To be sure I have. The moment the boat touched the quay, and I fairly felt *terra firma*, I drove to the ‘Fox in Breeches,’ and donned a handsome suit” — (here the gentleman glanced cursorily at his bottle-green habiliments)— “I ordered a hack-coach — got safely to Morley Court — saw Sir Richard, laid up with the gout, looking just like an old, dried-up, cross-grained monkey. There was, of course, a long explanation, and all that sort of thing — a good deal of tact and diplomacy on my side, doubling about, neat fencing, and circumbendibus; but all would not do — an infernal *smash*. Sir Richard was all but downright uncivil — would not hear of it — said plump and plain he would never consent. The fact is, he’s a sour, hard, insolent old scoundrel, and a bitter pill; and I congratulate you heartily on having escaped all connection with him and his. Don’t look so down in the mouth about the matter; there’s as good fish in the sea as ever was caught; and if the young woman is half such a shrew as her father is a tartar, you have had an escape to be thankful for the longest day you live."

We shall not attempt to describe the feelings with which O'Connor received this somewhat eccentric communication. He folded his arms upon the table, and for many minutes leaned his head upon them, without motion, and without uttering one word. At length he said, —

"After all, I ought to have expected this. Sir Richard is a bigoted man in his own faith — an ambitious and a worldly man, too. It was folly, mere folly, knowing all this, to look for any other answer from him. He may indeed delay our union for a little, but he cannot bar it — he *shall* not bar it. I could more easily doubt myself than Mary's constancy; and if she be but firm and true — and she is all loyalty and all truth — the world cannot part us two. Our separation cannot outlast his life; nor shall it last so long. I will overcome her scruples, combat all her doubts, satisfy her reason. She will consent — she will be mine — my own — through life and until death. No hand shall sunder us for ever," — he turned to the old man, and grasped his hand— "My dear, kind, true friend, how can I ever thank you for all your generous acts of kindness. I cannot."

"Never mind, never mind, my dear boy," said the old gentleman, blubbering in spite of himself— "never mind — what a d —— d old fool I am, to be sure. Come, come, you, shall take a turn with me towards the country, and get an appetite for dinner. You'll be as well as ever in half an hour. When all's done, you stand no worse than you did yesterday; and if the girl's a good girl, as I make no doubt she is, why, you are sure of her constancy — and the devil himself shall not part you. Confound me if I don't run away with the girl for you myself if you make a pother about the matter. Come along, you dog — come along, I say."

"Nay, sir," replied O'Connor, "forgive me. I am keenly pained. I am agitated — confounded at the suddenness of this — this dreadful blow. I will go alone, pardon me, my kind and dear friend, I must go *alone*. I may chance to see the lady. I am sure she will not fail me — she will meet me. Oh! heart and brain, be still — be steady — I need your best counsels now. Farewell, sir — for a little time, farewell."

"Well, be it so — since so it *must* be," said Mr. Audley, who did not care to combat a resolution, announced with all the wild energy of despairing passion, "by all means, my dear boy, *alone* it shall be, though I scarce think you would be the worse of a staid old fellow's company in your ramble — but no matter, boys will be boys while the world goes round."

The conclusion of this sentence was a soliloquy, for O'Connor had already descended to the inn yard, where he procured a horse, and was soon, with troubled mind and swelling heart, making rapid way toward Morley Court. It was now the afternoon — the sun had made nearly half his downward course — the air was soft and fresh, and the birds sang sweetly in the dark nooks and bowers of the tall trees: it seemed almost as if summer had turned like a departing beauty, with one last look of loveliness to gladden the scene which she was regretfully leaving. So sweet and still the air — so full and mellow the thrilling chorus of merry birds among the rustling leaves, flitting from bough to bough in the clear and lofty shadow — so cloudless the golden flood of sunlight. Such was the day — so gladsome the sounds — so serene the aspect of all nature — as O'Connor, dismounting under the shadow of a tall, straggling hawthorn hedge, and knotting the bridle in one of its twisted branches, crossed a low stile, and thus entered the grounds of Morley Court. He threaded a winding path which led through a neglected wood of thorn and oak, and found himself after a few minutes in the spot he sought. The old beech walk had been once the main avenue to the house. Huge beech-trees flung their mighty boughs high in air across its long perspective — and bright as was the day, the long lane lay in shadow deep and solemn as that of some old Gothic aisle. Down this dim vista did O'Connor pace with hurried steps toward the spot where, about midway in its length, there stood the half-ruined piers and low walls of what had once been a gateway.

"Can it be that she shrinks from this meeting?" thought O'Connor, as his eye in vain sought the wished-for form of Mary Ashwoode, "will she disappoint me? — surely she who has walked with me so many lonely hours in guileless trust need not have feared to meet me here. It was not generous to deny me this boon — to her so easy — to me so rich — yet perchance she judges wisely. What boots it that I should see her? Why see again that matchless beauty — that touching smile — those eyes that looked so fondly on me? Why see her more — since mayhap we shall never meet again? She means it kindly. Her nature is all nobleness — all generosity; and yet — and yet to see her no more — to hear her voice no more — have we — have we then parted at last for ever? But no — by heavens— ’tis she — Mary!”

It was indeed Mary Ashwoode, blushing and beautiful as ever. In an instant O’Connor stood by her side.

“My own — my true-hearted Mary.”

“Oh! Edmond,” said she, after a brief silence, “I fear I have done wrong — have I? — in meeting you thus. I ought not — indeed I know I ought not to have come.”

“Nay, Mary, do not speak thus. Dear Mary, have we not been companions in many a pleasant ramble: in those times — the times, Mary, that will never come again? Why, then, should you deny me a few minutes’ mournful converse, where in other days we two have passed so many pleasant hours?”

There was in the tone in which he spoke something so unutterably melancholy — and in the recollections which his few simple words called crowding to her mind, something at once so touching, so dearly cherished, and so bitterly regretted — that the tears gathered in her full dark eyes, and fell one by one fast and unheeded.

“You do not grieve, then, Mary,” said he, “that you have come here — that we have met once more: do you, Mary?”

“No, no, Edmond — no, indeed,” answered she, sobbing. “God knows I do not, Edmond — no, no.”

“Well, Mary,” said he, “I am happy in the belief that you feel toward me just as you used to do — as happy as one so wretched can hope to be.”

“Edmond, your words affright me,” said she, fixing her eyes full upon him with imploring earnestness: “you look sadder — paler than you did yesterday; something has happened since then. What — what is it, Edmond? tell me — ah, tell me!”

“Yes, Mary, much has happened,” answered he, taking her hand between both of his, and meeting her gaze with a look of passionate sorrow and tenderness— “yes, Mary, without my knowledge, the friend of whom I told you had arrived, and this morning saw your father, told him *all*, and was repulsed with sternness — almost with insult. Sir Richard has resolved that it shall never be; there is no more hope of bending him — none — none — none.”

While O’Connor spoke, the colour in Mary’s cheeks came and fled in turn with quick alternations, in answer to every throb and flutter of the poor heart within.

“See him — speak to him — yourself, Edmond, yourself. Oh! do not despair — see him — speak to him,” she almost whispered, for agitation had wellnigh deprived her of voice— “see him, Edmond — yourself — for God’s sake, dear Edmond — yourself — yourself” — and she grasped his arm in her tiny hand, and gazed in his pale face with such a look of agonized entreaty as cut him to the very heart.

“Yes, Mary, if it seems good to you, I will speak to him myself,” said O’Connor, with deep melancholy. “I will, Mary, though my own heart — my reason — tells me it is all — all utterly in vain; but, Mary,” continued he, suddenly changing his tone to one of more alacrity, “if he should still reject me — if he shall forbid our ever meeting more — if he shall declare himself unalterably resolved against our union — Mary, in such a case, would you, too, tell me to see you no more — would you, too, tell me to depart without hope, and never come again? or would you, Mary — could you — dare you — dear, dear Mary, for once — once only — disobey your stern and haughty father — dare you trust yourself with me — fly with me to France, and be at last, and after all, my own — my bride?”

“No, Edmond,” said she, solemnly and sadly, while her eyes again filled with tears; and though she trembled like the leaf on the tree, yet he knew by the sound of her sad voice that her purpose could not alter— “that can never be — never, Edmond — no — no.”

“Then, Mary, can it be,” he answered, with an accent so desolate that despair itself seemed breathing in its tone— “can it be, after all — all we have passed and proved — all our love and constancy, and all our bright hopes, so long and fondly cherished — cherished in the midst of grief and difficulty — when we had no other stay but hope alone — are we, after all — at last, to part for ever? — is it, indeed, Mary, all — all over?”

As the two lovers stood thus in deep and melancholy converse by the ivy-grown and ruined gateway, beneath the airy shadow of the old beech-trees, they were recalled to other thoughts by the hurried patter of footsteps, and the rustling of the branches among the underwood which skirted the avenue. As fortune willed it, however, the intruder was no other than the honest dog, Rover, Mary’s companion in many a silent and melancholy ramble; he came sniffing and bounding with boisterous greeting to hail his young mistress and her companion. The interruption, harmless as it was, startled Mary Ashwoode.

"Were my father to find us here, Edmond," said she, "it were fatal to all our hopes. You know his temper well. Let us then part here. Follow the by-path leading to the house. Go and see him — speak with him for my sake — for my sake, Edmond — and so — and so — farewell."

"And farewell, Mary, since it must be," said O'Connor, with a bitter struggle. "Farewell, but only for a time — only for a little time, Mary; and whatever befalls, remember — remember me. Farewell, Mary."

As he thus spoke, he raised her hand to his lips, and kissed it for the first time, it might be for the last, in his life. For a moment he stood, and gazed with sad devotion upon the loved face. Then, with an effort, he turned abruptly away, and strode rapidly in the direction she had indicated; and when he turned to look again, she was gone.

O'Connor followed the narrow path, which, diverging a little from the broad grass lane, led with many a wayward turn among the tall trees toward the house. As he thus pursued his way, a few moments of reflection satisfied him of the desperate nature of the enterprise which he had undertaken. But if lovers are often upon unreal grounds desponding, it is likewise true that they are sometimes sanguine when others would despair; and, spite of all his misgivings — of all the irresistible conclusions of stern reason — hope still beckoned him on. Thus agitated, he pursued his way, until, on turning an abrupt angle, he beheld, scarcely more than a dozen paces in advance, and moving slowly toward him in the shadowy pathway, a figure, at sight of which, thus suddenly presented, he recoiled, and stood for a moment fixed as a statue. He had encountered the object of his search. The form was that of Sir Richard Ashwoode himself, who, wrapped in his scarlet roquelaure, and leaning upon the shoulder of his Italian valet, while he limped forward slowly and painfully, appeared full before him.

"So, so, so, so," repeated the baronet, at first with unaffected astonishment, which speedily, however, deepened into intense but constrained anger — his dark, prominent eyes peering fiercely upon the young man, while, stooping forward, and clutching his crutch-handled cane hard in his lean fingers, he limped first one and then another step nearer.

"Mr. O'Connor! or my eyes deceive me."

"Yes, Sir Richard," replied O'Connor, with a haughty bow, and advancing a little toward him in turn. "I am that Edmond O'Connor whom you once knew well, and whom it would seem you still know. I ought, doubtless — — "

"Nay, sir, no flowers of rhetoric, if you please," interrupted Sir Richard, bitterly— "no fustian speeches — to the point — to the point, sir. If you have ought to say to me, deliver it in six words. Your business, sir. Be brief."

"I will not indeed waste words, Sir Richard Ashwoode," replied O'Connor, firmly. "There is but one subject on which I would seek a conference with you, and that subject you well may guess."

"I *do* guess it," retorted Sir Richard. "You would renew an absurd proposal — one opened three years since, and repeated this morning by the old booby, your elected spokesman. To that proposal I have ever given one answer — no. I have not changed my mind, nor ever shall. Am I understood, sir? And least of all should I think of changing my purpose now," continued he, more pointedly, as a suspicion crossed his mind— "*now*, sir, that you have forfeited by your own act whatever regard you once seemed to me to merit. You did not seek *me* here, sir. I'm not to be fooled, sir. You did not seek me — don't assert it. I understand your purpose. You came here clandestinely to tamper like a schemer with my child. Yes, sir, a schemer!" repeated Sir Richard, with bitter emphasis, while his sharp sallow features grew sharper and more sallow still; and he struck the point of his cane at every emphatic word deep into the sod— "a mean, interested, cowardly schemer. How dare you steal into my place, you thrice-rejected, dishonourable, spiritless adventurer?"

The blood rushed to O'Connor's brow as the old man uttered this insulting invective. The fiery impulse which under other circumstances would have been uncontrollable, was, however, speedily, though with difficulty, mastered; and O'Connor replied bitterly, —

"You are an old man, Sir Richard, and *her* father — you are safe, sir. How much of chivalry or courage is shown in heaping insult upon one who *will* not retort upon you, judge for yourself. Alter what has passed, I feel that I were, indeed, the vile thing you have described, if I were again to subject myself to your unprovoked insolence: be assured, I shall never place foot of mine within your boundaries again: relieve yourself, sir, of all fears upon that score; and for your language, you know you can appreciate the respect that makes me leave you thus unanswered and unpunished."

So saying, he turned, and with long and rapid strides retraced his steps, his heart swelling with a thousand struggling emotions. Scarce knowing what he did, O'Connor rode rapidly to the "Cock and Anchor," and too much stunned and confounded by the scenes in which he had just borne a part to exchange a word with Mr. Audley, whom he found still established in his chamber, he threw himself dejectedly into a chair, and sank into gloomy and obstinate abstraction. The goodnatured old gentleman did not care to interrupt his young friend's ruminations, and hours might have passed away and found them still undisturbed, were it not that the door was suddenly thrown open, and the waiter announced Mr. Ashwoode. There was a spell in the name which instantly recalled O'Connor to the scene before him. Had a viper sprung up at his feet, he could not have recoiled with a stronger antipathy. With a mixture of feelings scarcely tolerable, he awaited his arrival, and after a moment or two of suspense, Henry Ashwoode entered the room.

Mr. Audley, having heard the name, scowled fearfully from the centre of the room upon the young gentleman as he entered, stuffed his hands halfway to the elbows in his breeches pockets, and turning briskly upon his heel, marched emphatically to the window, and gazed out into the inn yard with remarkable perseverance. The obvious coldness with which he was received did not embarrass young Ashwoode in the least. With perfect ease and a graceful frankness of demeanour, he advanced to O'Connor, and after a greeting of extraordinary warmth, inquired how he had gotten home, and whether he had suffered since any inconvenience from the fall which he had. He then went on to renew his protestations of gratitude for O'Connor's services, with so much ardour and apparent heartiness, that spite of his prejudices, the old man was moved in his favour; and when Ashwoode expressed in a low voice to O'Connor his wish to be introduced to his friend, honest Mr. Audley felt his heart quite softened, and instead of merely bowing to him, absolutely shook him by the hand. The young man then, spite of O'Connor's evident reluctance, proceeded to relate to his new acquaintance the details of the adventures of the preceding night, in doing which, he took occasion to dwell, in the most glowing terms, upon his obligations to O'Connor. After sitting with them for nearly half an hour, young Ashwoode took his leave in the most affectionate manner possible, and withdrew.

"Well, that *is* a good-looking young fellow, and a warm-hearted," exclaimed the old gentleman, as soon as the visitor had disappeared—"what a pity he should be cursed with such a confounded old father."

CHAPTER XII.

THE APPOINTED HOUR — THE SCHEMERS AND THE PLOT.

"And here comes my dear brother," exclaimed Mary Ashwoode, joyously, as she ran to welcome the young man, now entering her father's room, in which, for more than an hour previously, she had been sitting. Throwing her arm round his neck, and looking sweetly in his face, she continued— "You *will* stay with us this evening, dear Harry — do, for my sake — you won't refuse — it is so long since we have had you;" and though she spoke with a gay look and a gladsome voice, a sense of real solitariness called a tear to her dark eye.

"No, Mary — not this evening," said the young man coldly; "I must be in town again tonight, and before I go must have some conversation upon business with my father, so that I may not see you again till morning."

"But, dear Henry," said she, still clinging affectionately to his arm, "you have been in such danger, and I knew nothing of it until after you went out this morning: are you quite well, Henry? — you were not hurt — were you?"

"No, no — nothing — nothing — I never was better," said he, impatiently.

"Well, brother — *dear* brother," she continued imploringly, "come early home tonight — do not be upon the road late — won't you promise?"

"There, there, there," said he rudely, "run away — take your work, or your book, or whatever it may be, down stairs; your father wants to speak with me alone," and so saying, he turned pettishly from her.

His habitual coldness and carelessness of manner had never before seemed so ungracious. The poor girl felt her heart swell within her, as though it would burst. She had never felt so keenly that in all this world there lived but one being upon whose love she might rely, and he separated, it might be for ever, from her: she gathered up her work, and ran quickly from the room, to hide the tears which she could not restrain.

Young Ashwoode was to the full as worldly and as unprincipled a man as was his father; and whatever reluctance he may have felt as to adopting Sir

Richard's plans respecting O'Connor, the reader would grievously wrong him in attributing his unwillingness to any visitings of gratitude, or, indeed, to any other feeling than that which he had himself avowed. A few hours' reflection had satisfied the young man of the transcendent importance of securing Lord Aspenly; and by a corresponding induction he had arrived at the conclusion to which his father had already come — namely, that it was imperatively necessary by all means to put an end effectually to his sister's correspondence with O'Connor. To effect this object both were equally resolved; and with respect to the means to be employed both were equally unscrupulous. With Henry Ashwoode courage was constitutional, and art habitual. If, therefore, either duplicity or daring could ensure success, he felt that he must triumph; and, at all events, he was sufficiently impressed with the importance of the object, to resolve to leave nothing untried for its achievement.

"You *are* punctual, sir," said Sir Richard, glancing at his richly-chased watch; "sit down; I have considered your suggestions of this morning, and I am inclined to adopt them; it is most probable that Mary, like the rest of her sex, will be taken by the splendour of the proposal — fascinated — in short, as I said this morning — dazzled. Now, whether she be or not — observe me, it shall be our object to make O'Connor believe that she *is* so. You will have his ear, and through her maid, Carey, I can manage their correspondence; not a letter from either can reach the other, without first meeting my eye. I am very certain that the young fellow will lose no time in writing to her some more of those passionate epistles, of which, as I told you, I have seen a sample. I shall take care to have their letters *re*-written for the future, before they come to hand; and it shall go hard, or between us we shall manage to give each a very moderate opinion of the other's constancy; thus the affair will — or rather must — die a natural death — after all, the most effectual kind of mortality in such cases."

"I called to-day upon the fellow," said the young man. "I made him out, and without approaching the point of nearest interest, I have, nevertheless, opened operations successfully — so far as a most auspicious recommencement of our acquaintance may be so accounted."

"And, stranger still to say," rejoined the baronet, "I also encountered him to-day; but only for some dozen seconds."

"How! — saw O'Connor!" exclaimed young Ashwoode.

“Yes, sir, O’Connor — Edmond O’Connor,” repeated Sir Richard. “He was coolly walking up to the house to see me, as it would seem; and I do believe the fellow speaks truth — he *did* see me, and that is all. I fancy he will scarcely come here again uninvited; he said so pretty plainly, and I believe the fellow has spirit enough to feel an affront.”

“He did not see Mary?” inquired Henry.

“I did not ask him, and don’t choose to ask her; I don’t mean to allude to the subject in her presence,” replied Sir Richard, quickly. “I think — indeed I *know* — I can mar their plans better by appearing never once to apprehend anything from O’Connor’s pretensions. I have reasons, too, for not wishing to deal harshly with Mary *at present*; we must have no *scenes*, if possible. Were I to appear suspicious and uneasy, it would put them on their guard. And now, upon the other point, did you speak to Craven about the possibility of raising ten thousand pounds on the Glenvarlogh property?”

“He says it can be done very easily, if Mary joins you,” replied the young man; “but I have been thinking that if you ask her to sign any deed, it might as well be one assigning over her interest absolutely to you. Aspenly does not want a penny with her — in fact, from what fell from him to-day, when I met him in town, I’m inclined to think he believes that she has not a penny in the world; so she may as well make it over to you, and then we can turn it all into money when and how we please. I desired Craven to work night and day at the deeds, and have them over by ten o’clock tomorrow morning.”

“You did quite rightly,” rejoined the old gentleman. “I hardly expect any opposition from the girl — at least no more than I can easily frighten her out of. Should she prove sulky, however, I do not well know where to turn: as to asking my brother Oliver, I might as well, or *better*, ask a Jew broker; he hates me and mine with his whole heart; and to say the truth, there is not much love lost between us. No, no, there’s nothing to be looked for in that quarter. I daresay we’ll manage one way or another — lead or drive to get Mary to sign the deed, and if so, the ship rights again. Craven comes, you say, at ten tomorrow?”

“He engaged to be here at that hour with the deeds,” repeated the young man.

“Well,” said his father, yawning, “you have nothing more to say, nor I neither — oblige me by withdrawing.” So parted these congenial relations.

The past day had been an agitating one to Mary Ashwoode. Still suspense was to be her doom, and the same alternations of hope and of despair were again to rob her pillow of repose; yet even thus, happy was she in comparison with what she must have been, had she but known the schemes of which she was the unconscious subject. At this juncture we shall leave the actors in this true tale, and conclude the chapter with the close of day.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INTERVIEW — THE PARCHMENT — AND THE NOBLEMAN'S COACH.

Sir Richard Ashwoode had never in the whole course of his life denied himself the indulgence of any passion or of any whim. From his childhood upward he had never considered the feelings or comforts of any living being but himself alone. As he advanced in life, this selfishness had improved to a degree of hardness and coldness so intense, that if ever he had felt a kindly impulse at any moment in his existence, the very remembrance of it had entirely faded from his mind: so that generosity, compassion, and natural affection were to him not only unknown, but incredible. To him mankind seemed all either fools, or such as he himself was. Without one particle of principle of any kind, he had uniformly maintained in the world the character of an honourable man. The ordinary rules of honesty and morality he regarded as so many conventional sentiments, to which every gentleman subscribed, as a matter of course, in public, but which in private he had an unquestionable right to dispense with at his own convenience. He was imperious, fiery, and unforgiving to the uttermost; but when he conceived it advantageous to do so, he could practise as well as any man the convenient art of masking malignity, hatred, and inveteracy behind the pleasantest of all pleasant smiles. Capable of any secret meanness for the sake of the smallest advantage to be gained by it, he was yet full of fierce and overbearing pride; and although this world was all in all to him, yet there never breathed a man who could on the slightest provocation risk his life in mortal combat with more alacrity and absolute *sang froid* than Sir Richard Ashwoode. In his habits he was unboundedly luxurious — in his expenditure prodigal to recklessness. His own and his son's extravagance, which he had indulged from a kind of pride, was now, however, beginning to make itself sorely felt in formidable and rapidly accumulating pecuniary embarrassments. These had served to embitter and exasperate a temper which at the best had never been a very sweet one, and of whose ordinary pitch the reader may form an estimate, when he hears that in the short glimpses which he has had of Sir Richard, the baronet happened to be, owing to the circumstances with which we have acquainted him, in extraordinarily good humour.

Sir Richard had not married young; and when he did marry it was to pay his debts. The lady of his choice was beautiful, accomplished, and an heiress; and, won by his agreeability, and by his well-assumed devotedness and passion, she yielded to the pressure of his suit. They were married, and she gave birth successively to a son and a daughter. Sir Richard's temper, as we have hinted, was not very placid, nor his habits very domestic; nevertheless, the world thought the match (putting his money difficulties out of the question) a very suitable and a very desirable one, and took it for granted that the gay baronet and his lady were just as happy as a fashionable man and wife ought to be — and perhaps they were so; but, for all that, it happened that at the end of some four years the young wife died of a broken heart. Some strange scenes, it is said, followed between Sir Richard and the brother of the deceased lady, Oliver French. It is believed that this gentleman suspected the cause of Lady Ashwoode's death — at all events he had ascertained that she had not been kindly used, and after one or two interviews with the baronet, in which bitter words were exchanged, the matter ended in a fierce and bloodily contested duel, in which the baronet received three desperate wounds. His recovery was long doubtful; but life burns strongly in some breasts; and, contrary to the desponding predictions of his surgeons, the valuable life of Sir Richard Ashwoode was prolonged to his family and friends.

Since then, Sir Richard had by different agencies sought to bring about a reconciliation with his brother-in-law, but without the smallest success. Oliver French was a bachelor, and a very wealthy one. Moreover, he had it in his power to dispose of his lands and money just as he pleased. These circumstances had strongly impressed Sir Richard with a conviction that quarrels among relations are not only unseemly, but unChristian. He was never in a more forgiving and forgetting mood. He was willing even to make concessions — anything that could be reasonably asked of him, and even more, he was ready to do — but all in vain. Oliver was obdurate. He knew his man well. He saw and appreciated the baronet's motives, and hated and despised him ten thousand times more than ever.

Repulsed in his first attempt, Sir Richard resolved to give his adversary time to cool a little; and accordingly, after a lapse of twelve or fourteen years, his son Henry being then a handsome lad, he wrote to his brother-in-law a very long and touching epistle, in which he proposed to send his son down to Ardgillagh, the place where the alienated relative resided, with a portrait of his deceased lady, which, of course, with no object less sacred, and to no relative less near and respected, could he have induced himself to part. This, too, was a total failure. Oliver French, Esquire, wrote back a very succinct epistle, but one very full of unpleasant meaning. He said that the portrait would be odious to him, inasmuch as it would be necessarily associated in his mind with a marriage which had killed his sister, and with persons whom he abhorred — that therefore he would not allow it into his house. He stated, that to the motives which prompted his attention he was wide awake — that he was, however, perfectly determined that no person bearing the name or the blood of Sir Richard Ashwoode should ever have one penny of his; adding, that the baronet could leave his son, Mr. Henry Ashwoode, quite enough for a gentleman to live upon respectably; and that, at all events, in his father's virtues the young gentleman would inherit a legacy such as would insure him universal respect, and a general welcome wherever he might happen to go, excepting only one locality, called Ardgillagh.

With the failure of this last attempt, of course, disappeared every hope of success with the rich old bachelor; and the forgiving baronet was forced to content himself, in the absence of all more substantial rewards, with the consciousness of having done what was, under all the circumstances, the most Christian thing he could have done, as well as played the most knowing game, though unsuccessful, which he could have played.

Sir Richard Ashwoode limped downstairs to receive his intended son-in-law, Lord Aspenly, on the day following the events which we have detailed in our last and the preceding chapters. That nobleman had intimated his intention to be with Sir Richard about noon. It was now little more than ten, and the baronet was, nevertheless, restless and fidgety. The room he occupied was a large parlour, commanding a view of the approach to the house. Again and again he consulted his watch, and as often hobbled over, as well as he could, to the window, where he gazed in evident discontent down the long, straight avenue, with its double row of fine old giant lime-trees.

"Nearly halfpast ten," muttered Sir Richard, to himself, for at his desire he had been left absolutely alone— "ay, fully halfpast, and the fellow not come yet. No less than, two notes since eight this morning, both of them with gratuitous mendacity renewing the appointment for ten o'clock; and ten o'clock comes and goes, and half-an-hour more along with it, and still no sign of Mr. Craven. If I had fixed ten o'clock to pay his accursed, unconscionable bill of costs, he'd have been prowling about the grounds from sunrise, and pounced upon me before the last stroke of the clock had sounded."

While thus the baronet was engaged in muttering his discontent, and venting secret imprecations on the whole race of attorneys, a vehicle rolled up to the hall-door. The bell pealed, and the knocker thundered, and in a moment a servant entered, and announced Mr. Craven — a square-built man of low stature, wearing his own long, grizzled hair instead of a wig — having a florid complexion, hooked nose, beetle brows, and long-cut, Jewish, black eyes, set close under the bridge of his nose — who stepped with a velvet tread into the room. An unvarying smile sate upon his thin lips, and about his whole air and manner there was a certain indescribable sanctimoniousness, which was rather enhanced by the puritanical plainness of his attire.

"Sir Richard, I beg pardon — rather late, I fear," said he, in a dulcet, insinuating tone— "hard work, nevertheless, I do assure you — ninety-seven skins — splendidly engrossed — quite a treat — five of my young men up all night — I have got one of them outside to witness it along with me. Some reading in the thing, I promise you; but I hope — I *do* hope, I am not very late?"

"Not at all — not at all, my dear Mr. Craven," said Sir Richard, with his most engaging smile; for, as we have hinted, "dear Mr. Craven" had not made the science of conveyancing peculiarly cheap in practice to the baronet, who accordingly owed him more costs than it would have been quite convenient to pay upon a short notice— "I'll just, with your assistance, glance through these parchments, though to do so be but a matter of form. Pray take a chair beside me — there. Now then to business."

Accordingly to business they went. Practice, they say, makes perfect, and the baronet had had, unfortunately for himself, a great deal of it in such matters during the course of his life. He knew how to read a deed as well as the most experienced counsel at the Irish bar, and was able consequently to detect with wonderfully little rummaging and fumbling in the ninety-seven skins of closely written verbiage, the seven lines of sense which they enveloped. Little more than half-an-hour had therefore satisfied Sir Richard that the mass of parchment before him, after reciting with very considerable accuracy the deeds and process by which the lands of Glenvarlogh were settled upon his daughter, went on to state that for and in consideration of the sum of five shillings, good and lawful money, she, being past the age of twenty-one, in every possible phrase and by every word which tautology could accumulate, handed over the said lands, absolutely to her father, Sir Richard Ashwoode, Bart., of Morley Court, in the county of Dublin, to have, and to hold, and to make ducks and drakes of, to the end of time, constantly affirming at the end of every sentence that she was led to do all this for and in consideration of the sum of five shillings, good and lawful money. As soon as Sir Richard had seen all this, which was, as we have said, in little more than half-an-hour, he pulled the bell, and courteously informing Mr. Craven, the immortal author of the interesting document which he had just perused, that he would find chocolate and other refreshments in the library, and intimating that he would perhaps disturb him in about ten minutes, he consigned that gentleman to the guidance of the servant, whom he also directed to summon Miss Ashwoode to his presence.

“Her signing this deed,” thought he, as he awaited her arrival, “will make her absolutely dependent upon me — it will make rebellion, resistance, murmuring, impossible; she then *must* do as I would have her, or — Ah? my dear child,” exclaimed the baronet, as his daughter entered the room, addressing her in the sweetest imaginable voice, and instantaneously dismissing the sinister menace which had sat upon his countenance, and clothing it instead as suddenly with an absolute radiance of affection, “come here and kiss me and sit down by my side — are you well to-day? you look pale — you smile — well, well! it cannot be anything *very* bad. You shall run out just now with Emily. But first, I must talk with you for a little, and, strange enough, on business too.” The old gentleman paused for an instant to arrange the order of his address, and then continued. “Mary, I will tell you frankly more of my affairs than I have told to almost any person breathing. In my early days, and indeed *after* my marriage, I was far, *far* too careless in money matters. I involved myself considerably, and owing to various circumstances, tiresome now to dwell upon, I have never been able to extricate myself from these difficulties. Henry too, your brother, is fearfully prodigal — fearfully; and has within the last three or four years enormously aggravated my embarrassments, and of course multiplied my anxieties most grievously, most distractingly. I feel that my spirits are gone, my health declining, and, worse than all, my temper, yes — my *temper* soured. You do not know, you cannot know, how bitterly I feel, with what intense pain, and sorrow, and contrition, and — and *remorse*, I reflect upon those bursts of ill-temper, of acrimony, of passion, to which, spite of every resistance, I am becoming every day more and more prone.” Here the baronet paused to call up a look of compunctious anguish, an effort in which he was considerably assisted by an acute twinge in his great toe.

“Yes,” he continued, when the pain had subsided, “I am now growing old, I am breaking very fast, sinking, I feel it — I cannot be very long a trouble to anybody — embarrassments are closing around me on all sides — I have not the means of extricating myself — despondency, despair have come upon me, and with them loss of spirits, loss of health, of strength, of everything which makes life a blessing; and, all these privations rendered more horrible, more agonizing, by the reflection that my ill-humour, my peevish temper, are continually taxing the patience, wounding the feelings, perhaps alienating the affections of those who are nearest and dearest to me.”

Here the baronet became *very* much affected; but, lest his agitation should be seen, he turned his head away, while he grasped his daughter’s hand convulsively: the poor girl covered his with kisses. He had wrung her very heart.

“There is one course,” continued he, “by adopting which I might extricate myself from all my difficulties” — here he raised his eyes with a haggard expression, and glared wildly along the cornice— “but I confess I have great hesitation in leaving *you*.”

He wrung her hand very hard, and groaned slightly.

"Father, dear father," said she, "do not speak thus — do not — you frighten me."

"I was wrong, my dear child, to tell you of struggles of which none but myself ought to have known anything," said the baronet, gloomily. "One person indeed has the power to assist, I may say, to *save* me."

"And who is that person, father?" asked the girl.

"Yourself," replied Sir Richard, emphatically.

"How? — I!" said she, turning very pale, for a dreadful suspicion crossed her mind— "how can *I* help you, father?"

The old gentleman explained briefly; and the girl, relieved of her worst fears, started joyously from her seat, clapped her hands together with gladness, and, throwing her arms about her father's neck, exclaimed, —

"And is that all? — oh, father; why did you defer telling me so long? you ought to have known how delighted I would have been to do anything for you; indeed you ought; tell them to get the papers ready immediately."

"They *are* ready, my dear," said Sir Richard, recovering his self-possession wonderfully, and ringing the bell with a good deal of hurry — for he fully acknowledged the wisdom of the old proverb, which inculcates the expediency of striking while the iron's hot— "your brother had them prepared yesterday, I believe. Inform Mr. Craven," he continued, addressing the servant, "that I would be very glad to see him now, and say he may as well bring in the young gentleman who has accompanied him."

Mr. Craven accordingly appeared, and the "young gentleman," who had but one eye, and a very seedy coat, entered along with him. The latter personage bustled about a good deal, slapped the deeds very emphatically down on the table, and rumpled the parchments sonorously, looked about for pen and ink, set a chair before the document, and then held one side of the parchment, while Mr. Craven screwed his knuckles down upon the other, and the parties forthwith signed; whereupon Mr. Craven and the one-eyed young gentleman both sat down, and began to sign away with a great deal of scratching and flourishing on the places allotted for witnesses; after all which, Mr. Craven, raising himself with a smile, told Miss Ashwoode, facetiously, that the Chancellor could not have done so much for the deed as she had done; and the one-eyed young gentleman held his nose contemplatively between his finger and thumb, and reviewed the signatures with his solitary optic.

Miss Ashwoode then withdrew, and Mr. Craven and the "young gentleman" made their bows. Sir Richard beckoned to Mr. Craven, and he glided back and closed the door, having commanded the "young gentleman" to see if the coach was ready.

"You see, Mr. Craven," said Sir Richard, who, spite of all his philosophy, felt a little ashamed even that the attorney should have seen the transaction which had just been completed— "you see, sir, I may as well tell you candidly: my daughter, who has just signed this deed, is about immediately to be married to Lord Aspenly; *he* kindly offered to lend me some fifteen thousand pounds, or thereabouts, and I converted this offer (which I, of course, accepted), into the assignment, from his bride, that is to be, of this little property, giving, of course, to his lordship my personal security for the debt which I consider as owed to him: this arrangement his lordship preferred as the most convenient possible. I thought it right, in strict confidence, of course, to explain the real state of the case to you, as at first sight the thing looks selfish, and I do not wish to stand worse in my friends' books than I actually deserve to do." This was spoken with Sir Richard's most engaging smile, and Mr. Craven smiled in return, most artlessly — at the same time he mentally ejaculated, "d —— d sly!" "You'll bring this security, my dear Mr. Craven," continued the baronet, "into the market with all dispatch — do you think you can manage twenty thousand upon it?"

"I fear not more than fourteen, or perhaps, sixteen, with an effort. I do not think Glenvarlogh would carry much more — I fear not; but rely upon me, Sir Richard; I'll do everything that can be done — at all events, I'll lose no time about it, depend upon it — I may as well take this deed along with me — I have the rest; and title is very — *very* satisfactory — good-morning, Sir Richard," and the man of parchments withdrew, leaving Sir Richard in a more benevolent mood than he had experienced for many a long day.

The attorney had not been many seconds gone, when a second vehicle thundered up to the door, and a perfect storm of knocking and ringing announced the arrival of Lord Aspenly himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

ABOUT A CERTAIN GARDEN AND A DAMSEL — AND ALSO CONCERNING A LETTER AND A RED LEATHERN BOX.

Several days passed smoothly away — Lord Aspenly was a perfect paragon of politeness; but although his manner invariably assumed a peculiar tenderness whenever he approached Miss Ashwoode, yet that young lady remained in happy ignorance of his real intentions. She saw before her a grotesque old fop, who might without any extraordinary parental precocity have very easily been her grandfather, and in his airs and graces, his rappee and his rouge (for his lordship condescended to borrow a few attractions from art), and in the thousand-and-one *et ceteras* of foppery which were accumulated, with great exactitude and precision, on and about his little person, she beheld nothing more than so many indications of obstinate and inveterate celibacy, and, of course, interpreted the exquisite attentions which were meant to enchain her young heart, merely as so much of that formal target practice in love's archery, in which gallant single gentlemen of seventy, or thereabout, will sometimes indulge themselves. Emily Copland, however, at a glance, saw and understood the nature of Lord Aspenly's attentions, and she saw just as clearly the intended parts and the real position of the other actors in this somewhat ill-assorted drama, and thereupon she took counsel with herself, like a wise damsel, and arrived at the conclusion, that with some little management she might, very possibly, play her own cards to advantage among them.

We must here, however, glance for a few minutes at some of the subordinate agents in our narrative, whose interposition, nevertheless, deeply, as well as permanently, affected the destinies of more important personages.

It was the habit of the beautiful Mistress Betsy Carey, every morning, weather permitting, to enjoy a ramble in the grounds of Morley Court; and as chance (of course it was chance) would have it, this early ramble invariably led her through several quiet fields, and over a stile, into a prettily-situated, but neglected flower-garden, which was now, however, undergoing a thorough reform, according to the Dutch taste, under the presiding inspiration of Tobias Potts. Now Tobias Potts was a widower, having been in the course of his life twice disencumbered. The last Mrs. Potts had disappeared some five winters since, and Tobias was now well stricken in years; he possessed the eyes of an owl, and the complexion of a turkey-cock, and was, moreover, extremely hard of hearing, and, withal, a man of few words; he was, however, hale, upright, and burly — perfectly sound in wind and limb, and free from vice and children — had a snug domicile, consisting of two rooms and a loft, enjoyed a comfortable salary, and had, it was confidently rumoured, put by a good round sum of money somewhere or other. It therefore struck Mrs. Carey very forcibly, that to be Mrs. Potts was a position worth attaining; and accordingly, without incurring any suspicion — for the young women generally regarded Potts with awe, and the young men with contempt — she began, according to the expressive phrase in such case made and provided, to set her cap at Tobias.

In this, his usual haunt, she discovered the object of her search, busily employed in superintending the construction of a terrace walk, and issuing his orders with the brevity, decision, and clearness of a consummate gardener.

"Good-morning, Mr. Potts," said the charming Betsy. Mr. Potts did not hear. "Good-morning, Mr. Potts," repeated the damsel, raising her voice to a scream.

Tobias touched his hat with a gruff acknowledgment.

"Well, but how beautiful you are doing it," shouted the handmaid again, gazing rapturously upon the red earthen rampart, in which none but the eye of an artist could have detected the rudiments of a terrace, "it's wonderful neat, all must allow, and indeed it puzzles my head to think how you can think of it all; it *is* now, *raly* elegant, so it is."

Tobias did not reply, and the maiden continued, with a sentimental air, and still hallooing at the top of her voice —

"Well, of all the trades that is — and big and little, there's a plenty of them — there's none I'd choose, if I was a man, before the trade of a gardener."

"No, you would not, *I'm* sure," was the laconic reply.

"Oh, but I declare and purtest *I would* though," bawled the young woman; "for gardeners, old or young, is always so goodhumoured, and pleasant, and fresh-like. Oh, dear, but I would like to be a gardener."

"Not an *old* one, howsomever," growled Mr. Potts.

"Yes, but I would though, I declare and purtest to goodness gracious," persisted the nymph; "I'd rather of the two perfer to be an *old* gardener" (this was a bold stroke of oratory; but Potts did not hear it); "I'd rather be an *old* gardener," she screamed a second time; "I'd rather be an *old* gardener of the two, so I would."

"That's more than *I* would," replied Potts, very abruptly, and with an air of uncommon asperity, for he silently cherished a lingering belief in his own juvenility, and not the less obstinately that it was fast becoming desperate — a peculiarity of which, unfortunately, until that moment the damsel had never been apprised. This, therefore, was a turn which a good deal disconcerted the young woman, especially as she thought she detected a satirical leer upon the countenance of a young man in crazy inexpressibles, who was trundling a wheelbarrow in the immediate vicinity; she accordingly exclaimed not loud enough for Tobias, but quite loud enough for the young man in the infirm breeches to hear, —

"What an old fool. I purtest it's meat and drink to me to tease him — so it is;" and with a forced giggle she tripped lightly away to retrace her steps towards the house.

As she approached the stile we have mentioned, she thought she distinguished what appeared to be the inarticulate murmurings of some subterranean voice almost beneath her feet. A good deal startled at so prodigious a phenomenon, she stopped short, and immediately heard the following brief apostrophe delivered in a rich brogue: —

"Aiqually beautiful and engaging — vartuous Betsy Carey — listen to the voice of tindher emotion."

The party addressed looked with some alarm in all directions for any visible intimation of the speaker's presence, but in vain. At length, from among an unusually thick and luxuriant tuft of docks and other weeds, which grew at the edge of a ditch close by, she beheld something red emerging, which in a few moments she clearly perceived to be the classical countenance of Larry Toole.

"The Lord *purtect* us all, Mr. Toole. Why in the world do you frighten people this way?" ejaculated the nymph, rather shrilly.

"Whist! most evangelical iv women," exclaimed Larry in a low key, and looking round suspiciously— "whisht! or we are ruined."

"La! Mr. Laurence, what *are* you after?" rejoined the damsel, with a good deal of asperity. "I'll have you to know I'm not used to talk with a man that's squat in a ditch, and his head in a dock plant. That's not the way for to come up to an honest woman, sir — no more it is."

"I'd live ten years in a ditch, and die in a dock plant," replied Larry with enthusiasm, "for one sight iv you."

"And is that what brought you here?" replied she, with a toss of her head. "I purtest some people's quite overbearing, so they are, and knows no bounds."

"Stop a minute, most beautiful bayin' — for one instant minute pay attintion," exclaimed Mr. Toole, eagerly, for he perceived that she had commenced her retreat. "Tare an' owns! divine crature, it's not *goin'* you are?"

"I have no notions, good or bad, Mr. Toole," replied the young lady, with great volubility and dignity, "and no idaya in the wide world for to be standing here prating, and talking, and losing my time with such as you — if my business is neglected, it is not on your back the blame will light. I have my work, and my duty, and my business to mind, and if I do not mind them, no one else will do it for me; and I am astonished and surprised beyant telling, so I am, at the impittence of some people, thinking that the likes of me has nothing else to be doing but listening to them discoorsing in a dirty ditch, and more particular when their conduct has been sich as some people's that is old enough at any rate to know better."

The fair handmaiden had now resumed her retreat; so that Larry, having raised himself from his lowly hiding-place, was obliged to follow for some twenty yards before he again came up with her.

"Wait one half second — stop a bit, for the Lord's sake," exclaimed he, with most earnest energy.

"Well, wonst for all, Mr. Laurence," exclaimed Mistress Carey severely, "what *is* your business with me?"

"Jist this," rejoined Larry, with a mysterious wink, and lowering his voice — "a letter to the young mistress from" — here he glanced jealously round, and then bringing himself close beside her, he whispered in her ear— "from Mr. O'Connor — whisht — not a word — into her own hand, mind."

The young woman took the letter, read the superscription, and forthwith placed it in her bosom, and rearranged her kerchief.

"Never fear — never fear," said she, "Miss Mary shall have it in half an hour. And how," added she, maliciously, "*is* Mr. O'Connor? He is a lovely gentleman, is not he?"

"He's uncommonly well in health, the Lord be praised," replied Mr. Toole, with very unaccountable severity.

"Well, for my part," continued the girl, "I never seen the man yet to put beside him — unless, indeed, the young master may be. He's a very pretty young man — and so shocking agreeable."

Mr. Toole nodded a pettish assent, coughed, muttered something to himself, and then inquired when he should come for an answer.

"I'll have an answer tomorrow morning — maybe this evening," pursued she; "but do not be coming so close up to the house. Who knows who might be on our backs in an instant here? I'll walk down whenever I get it to the two mulberries at the old gate; and I'll go there either in the morning at this hour, or else a little before supper-time in the evening."

Mr. Toole, having gazed rapturously at the object of his tenderest aspirations during the delivery of this address, was at its termination so far transported by his feelings, as absolutely to make a kind of indistinct and flurried attempt to kiss her.

"Well, I purtest, this is overbearing," exclaimed the virgin; and at the same time bestowing Mr. Toole a sound box on the ear, she tripped lightly toward the house, leaving her admirer a prey to what are usually termed conflicting emotions.

When Sir Richard returned to his dressing-room at about noon, to prepare for dinner, he had hardly walked to the toilet, and rung for his Italian servant, when a knock was heard at his chamber door, and, in obedience to his summons, Mistress Carey entered.

"Well, Carey," inquired the baronet, as soon as she had appeared, "do you bring me any news?"

The lady's-maid closed the door carefully.

"News?" she repeated. "Indeed, but I do, Sir Richard — and bad news, I'm afeard, sir. Mr. O'Connor has written a great long letter to my mistress, if you please, sir."

"Have you gotten it?" inquired the baronet, quickly.

"Yes, sir," rejoined she, "safe and sound here in my breast, Sir Richard."

"Your young mistress has not opened it — or read it?" inquired he.

"Oh, dear! Sir Richard, it is after all you said to me only the other day," rejoined she, in virtuous horror. "I hope I know my place better than to be fetching and carrying notes and letters, and all soarts, unnonst to my master. Don't I know, sir, very well how that you're the best judge what's fitting and what isn't for the sight of your own precious child? and wouldn't I be very unnatural, and very hardened and ungrateful, if I was to be making secrets in the family, and if any ill-will or misfortunes was to come out of it? I purtest I never — never would forgive myself — never — no more I ought — never."

Here Mistress Carey absolutely wept.

"Give me the letter," said Sir Richard, drily.

The damsel handed it to him; and he, having glanced at the seal and the address, deposited the document safely in a small leathern box which stood upon his toilet, and having locked it safely therein, he turned to the maid, and patting her on the cheek with a smile, he remarked, —

"Be a good girl, Carey, and you shall find you have consulted your interest best."

Here Mistress Carey was about to do justice to her own disinterestedness in a very strong protestation, but the baronet checked her with an impatient wave of the hand, and continued, —

"Say not on any account one word to any person touching this letter, until you have your directions from me. Stay — this will buy you a ribbon. Goodbye — be a good girl."

So saying, the baronet placed a guinea in the girl's hand, which, with a courtesy, having transferred to her pocket, she withdrew rather hurriedly, for she heard the valet in the next room.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRAITOR.

Upon the day following, O'Connor had not yet received any answer to his letter. He was, however, not a little surprised instead to receive a second visit from young Ashwoode.

"I am very glad, my dear O'Connor," said the young man as he entered, "to have found you alone. I have been wishing very much for this opportunity, and was half afraid as I came upstairs that I should again have been disappointed. The fact is, I wish much to speak to you upon a subject of great difficulty and delicacy — one in which, however, I naturally feel so strong an interest, that I may speak to you upon it, and freely, too, without impertinence. I allude to your attachment to my sister. Do not imagine, my dear O'Connor, that I am going to lecture you on prudence and all that; and above all, my dear fellow, do not think I want to tax your confidence more deeply than you are willing I should; I know quite enough for all I would suggest; I know the plain fact that you love my sister — I have long known it, and this is enough."

"Well, sir, what follows?" said O'Connor, dejectedly.

"Do not call me *sir* — call me friend — fellow — fool — anything you please but that," replied Ashwoode, kindly; and after a brief pause, he continued: "I need not, and cannot disguise it from you, that I was much opposed to this, and vexed extremely at the girl's encouragement of what I considered a most imprudent suit. I have, however, learned to think differently — very differently. After all my littlenesses and pettishness, for which you must have, if not abhorred, at least despised me from your very heart — after all this, I say, your noble conduct in risking your own life to save my worthless blood is what I never can enough admire, and honour, and thank." Here he grasped O'Connor's hand, and shook it warmly. "After this, I tell you, O'Connor, that were there offered to me, on my sister's behoof, on the one side the most brilliant alliance in wealth and rank that ever ambition dreamed of, and upon the other side this hand of yours, I would, so heaven is my witness, forego every allurement of titles, rank, and riches, and give my sister to you. I have come here, O’Connor, frankly to offer you my aid and advice — to prove to you my sincerity, and, if possible, to realize your wishes.”

O’Connor could hardly believe his senses. Here was the man who, scarcely six days since, he felt assured, would more readily have suffered him to thrust him through the body than consent to his marriage with Mary Ashwoode, now not merely consenting to it, but offering cordially and spontaneously all the assistance in his power towards effecting that very object. Had he heard him aright? One look at his expressive face — the kindly pressure of his hand — everything assured him that he had justly comprehended all that Ashwoode had spoken, and a glow of hope, warmer than had visited him for years, cheered his heart.

“In the meantime,” continued Ashwoode, “I must tell you exactly how matters stand at Morley Court. The Earl of Aspenly, of whom you may have heard, is paying his addresses to my sister.”

“The Earl of Aspenly,” echoed O’Connor, slightly colouring. “I had not heard of this before — she did not name him.”

“Yet she has known it a good while,” returned Ashwoode, with well-affected surprise— “a month, I believe, or more. He’s now at Morley Court, and means to make some stay — are you sure she never mentioned him?”

“Titled, and, of course, rich,” said O’Connor, scarce hearing the question. “Why should I have heard of this by chance, and from another — why this reserve — this silence?”

“Nay, nay,” replied Henry, “you must not run away with the matter thus. Mary may have forgotten it, *or* — or not liked to tell you — not cared to give you needless uneasiness.”

“I wish she had — I wish she had — I am — I am, indeed, Ashwoode, very, very unhappy,” said O’Connor, with extreme dejection. “Forgive me — forgive my folly, since folly it seems — I fear I weary you.”

“Well, well, since it seems you have *not* heard of it,” rejoined Henry, carelessly throwing himself back in his chair, “you may as well learn it now — not that there is any real cause of alarm in the matter, as I shall presently show you, but simply that you may understand the position of the enemy. Lord Aspenly, then, is at present at Morley Court, where he is received as Mary’s lover — observe me, only as her lover — not yet, and I trust *never* as her *accepted* lover.”

"Go on — pray go on," said O'Connor, with suppressed but agonized anxiety.

"Now, though my father is very hot about the match," resumed his visitor, "it may appear strange enough to you that *I* never was. There are a few — a very few — advantages in the matter, of course, viewing it merely in its worldly aspect. But Lord Aspenly's property is a good deal embarrassed, and he is of violently Whig politics and connections, the very thing most hated by my old Tory uncle, Oliver French, whom my father has been anxious to cultivate; besides, the disparity in years is so very great that it is ridiculous — I might almost say *indecent* — and this even in point of family standing, and indeed of reputation, putting aside every better consideration, is objectionable. I have urged all these things upon my father, and perhaps we should not find any insurmountable obstacle *there*; but the fact is, there is another difficulty, one of which until this morning I never dreamed — the most whimsical difficulty imaginable." Here the young man raised his eyebrows, and laughed faintly, while he looked upon the floor, and O'Connor, with increasing earnestness, implored him to proceed. "It appears so very absurd and perverse an obstacle," continued Ashwoode, with a very quizzical expression, "that one does not exactly know how to encounter it — to say the truth, I think that the girl is a little — perhaps the least imaginable degree — taken — dazzled — caught by the notion of being a countess; it's very natural, you know, but then I would have expected better from her."

"By heavens, it is impossible!" exclaimed O'Connor, starting to his feet; "I cannot believe it; you must, indeed, my dear Ashwoode, you *must* have been deceived."

"Well, then," rejoined the young man, "I have lost my skill in reading young ladies' minds — that's all; but even though I should be right — and never believe me if I am *not* right — it does not follow that the giddy whim won't pass away just as suddenly as it came; her most lasting impressions — with, I should hope, one exception — were never very enduring. I have been talking to her for nearly half an hour this morning — laughing with her about Lord Aspenly's suit, and building castles in the air about what she will and what she won't do when she's a countess. But, by the way, how did you let her know that you intend returning to France at the end of this month, only, as she told me, however, for a few weeks? She mentioned it yesterday incidentally. Well, it is a comfort that I hear your secrets, though *you* won't entrust them to me. But do not, my dear fellow — *do* not look so very black — you very much overrate the firmness of women's minds, and greatly indeed exaggerate that of my sister's character if you believe that this vexatious whim which has entered her giddy pate will remain there longer than a week. The simple fact is that the excitement and bustle of all this has produced an unusual flow of high spirits, which will, of course, subside with the novelty of the occasion. Pshaw! why so cast down? — there is nothing in the matter to surprise one — the caprice of women knows do rule. I tell you I would almost stake my reputation as a prophet, that when this giddy excitement passes away, her feelings will return to their old channel." O'Connor still paced the room in silence. "Meanwhile," continued the young man, "if anything occur to you — if I can be useful to you in any way, command me absolutely, and till you see me next, take heart of grace." He grasped O'Connor's hand — it was cold as clay; and bidding him farewell, once more took his departure.

"Well," thought he, as he threw his leg across his highbred gelding at the inn door, "I have shot the first shaft home."

And so he had, for the heart at which it was directed, unfenced by suspicion, lay open to his traitorous practices. O'Connor's letter, an urgent and a touching one, was still unanswered; it never for a moment crossed his mind that it had not reached the hand for which it was intended. The maid who had faithfully delivered all the letters which had passed between them had herself received it; and young Ashwoode had but the moment before mentioned, from his sister's lips, the subject on which it was written — his meditated departure for France. This, too, it appeared, she had spoken of in the midst of gay and lighthearted trilling, and projects of approaching magnificence and dissipation with his rich and noble rival. Twice since the delivery of that letter had his servant seen Miss Ashwoode's maid; and in the communicative colloquy which had ensued she had told — no doubt according to well-planned instructions — how gay and unusually merry her mistress was, and how she passed whole hours at her toilet, and the rest of her time in the companionship of Lord Aspenly — so that between his lordship's society, and her own preparations for it, she had scarcely allowed herself time to read the letter in question, much less to answer it.

All these things served to fill O’Connor’s mind with vague but agonizing doubts — doubts which he vainly strove to combat; fears which had not their birth in an alarmed imagination, but which, alas! were but too surely approved by reason. The notion of a systematic plot, embracing so many agents, and conducted with such deep and hellish hypocrisy, with the sole purpose of destroying affections the most beautiful, and of alienating hearts the truest, was a thought so monstrous and unnatural that it never for a second flashed upon his mind; still his heart struggled strongly against despair. Spite of all that looked gloomy in what he saw — spite of the boding suggestions of his worst fears, he would not believe her false to him — that she who had so long and so well loved and trusted him — she whose gentle heart he knew unchanged and unchilled by years, and distance, and misfortunes — that she should, after all, have fallen away from him, and given up that heart, which once was his, to vanity and the hollow glitter of the world — this he could hardly bring himself to believe, yet what was he to think? alas! what?

CHAPTER XVI.

SHOWING SIGNOR PARUCCI ALONE WITH THE WIG-BLOCKS — THE BARONET'S HAND-BELL AND THE ITALIAN'S TASK.

Morley Court was a queer old building — very large and very irregular. The main part of the dwelling, and what appeared to be the original nucleus, upon which after-additions had grown like fantastic incrustations, was built of deep-red brick, with many recesses and projections and gables, and tall and grotesquely-shaped chimneys, and having broad, jutting, heavily-sashed windows, such as belonged to Henry the Eighth's time, to which period the origin of the building was, with sufficient probability, referred. The great avenue, which extended in a direct line to more than the long half of an Irish mile, led through double rows of splendid old lime-trees, some thirty paces apart, and arching in a vast and shadowy groining overhead, to the front of the building. To the rearward extended the rambling additions which necessity or caprice had from time to time suggested, as the place, in the lapse of years, passed into the hands of different masters. One of these excrescences, a quaint little prominence, with a fanciful gable and chimney of its own, jutted pleasantly out upon the green sward, courting the friendly shelter of the wild and graceful trees, and from its casement commanding through the parting boughs no views but those of quiet fields, distant woodlands, and the far-off blue hills. This portion of the building contained in the upper story one small room, to the full as oddly shaped as the outer casing of fantastic masonry in which it was inclosed — the door opened upon a back staircase which led from the lower apartments to Sir Richard's dressing-room; and partly owing to this convenient arrangement, and partly perhaps to the comfort and seclusion of the chamber itself, it had been long appropriated to the exclusive occupation of Signor Jacopo Parucci, Sir Richard's valet and confidential servant. This man was, as his name would imply, an Italian. Sir Richard had picked him up, some thirty years before the period at which we have dated our story, in Naples, where it was said the baronet had received from him very important instructions in the inner mysteries of that golden science which converts chance into certainty — a science in which Sir Richard was said to have become a masterly proficient; and indeed so loudly had fame begun to bruit his excellence therein, that he found it at last necessary, or at least highly advisable, to forego the fascinations of the gaming-table, and to bid to the worship of fortune an eternal farewell, just at the moment when the fickle goddess promised with golden profusion to reward his devotion.

Whatever his reason was, Sir Richard had been to this man a good master; he had, it was said, and not without reason, enriched him; and, moreover, it was a strange fact, that in all his capricious and savage moods, from whose consequences not only his servants but his own children had no exemption, he had never once treated this person otherwise than with the most marked civility. What the man's services had actually been, and to what secret influence he owed the close and confidential terms upon which he unquestionably stood with Sir Richard, these things were mysteries, and, of course, furnished inexhaustible matter of scandalous speculation among the baronet's dependents and most intimate friends.

The room of which we speak was Parucci's snuggery. It contained in a recess behind the door that gentleman's bed — a plain, low, uncurtained couch; and variously disposed about the apartment an abundance of furniture of much better kind; the recess of the window was filled by a kind of squat press, which was constructed in the lower part, and which contained, as certain adventurous chambermaids averred, having peeped into its dim recesses when some precious opportunity presented itself, among other shadowy shapes, the forms of certain flasks and bottles with long necks, and several tall glasses of different dimensions. Two or three tables of various sizes of dark shining wood, with legs after the fashion of the nether limbs of hippogriffs and fauns, seemed about to walk from their places, and to stamp and claw at random about the floor. A large, old press of polished oak, with spiral pillars of the same flanking it in front, contained the more precious articles of Signor Parucci's wardrobe. Close beside it, in a small recess, stood a set of shelves, on which were piled various matters, literary and otherwise, among which perhaps none were disturbed twice in the year, with the exception of six or eight packs of cards, with which, for old associations' sake, Signor Jacopo used to amuse himself now and again in his solitary hours.

On one of the tables stood two blocks supporting each a flowing black peruke, which it was almost the only duty of the tenant of this interesting sanctuary to tend, and trim, and curl. Upon the dusky tapestry were pinned several coloured prints, somewhat dimmed by time, but evidently of very equivocal morality. A birding-piece and a fragment of a fishing-rod covered with dust, neither of which Signor Parucci had ever touched for the last twenty years, were suspended over the mantelpiece; and upon the side of the recess, and fully lighted by the window, in attestation of his gentler and more refined pursuits, hung a dingy old guitar apparently still in use, for the strings, though a good deal cobbled and knotted, were perfect in number. A huge, high-backed, well-stuffed chair, in which a man might lie as snugly as a kernel in its shell, was placed at the window, and in it reclined the presiding genius of the place himself, with his legs elevated so as to rest upon the broad windowsill, formed by the roof of the mysterious press which we have already mentioned. The Italian was a little man, very slight, with long hair, a good deal grizzled, flowing upon his shoulders; he had a sallow complexion and thin hooked nose, piercing black eyes, lean cheeks, and sharp chin — and altogether a lank, attenuated, and somewhat intellectual cast of face, with, however, a certain expression of malice and cunning about the leer of his eye, as well as in the character of his thin and colourless lip, which made him by no means a very pleasant object to look upon.

“Fine weather — almost Italy,” said the little man, lazily pushing open the casement with his foot. “I am surprise, good, dear, sweet Sir Richard, his bell is stop so long quiet. Why is it not go ding, ding, dingeri, dingeri, ding-a-ding, ding, as usual. Damnation! what do I care he ring de bell and I leesten. We are not always young, and I must be allow to be a leetle deaf when he is allow to be a leetle gouty. Gode blace my body, how hot is de sun. Come down here, leer of Apollo — come to my arm, meestress of my heart — Orpheus’ leer, come queekly.” This was addressed to the ancient instrument of music which we have already mentioned, and the invitation was accompanied by an appropriate elevation of his two little legs, which he raised until he gently closed his feet upon the sides of the “leer of Apollo,” which, with a good deal of dexterity, he unhung from its peg, and conveyed within reach of his hand. He cast a look of fond admiration at its dingy and time-dried face, and forthwith, his heels still resting upon the windowsill, he was soon thrumming a tinkling symphony, none of the most harmonious, and then, with uncommon zeal, he began, to his own accompaniment, to sing some ditty of Italian love. While engaged in this refined and touching employment, he espied, with unutterable indignation, a young urchin, who, attracted by the sounds of his amorous minstrelsy, and with a view to torment the performer, who was an extremely unpopular personage, had stationed himself at a little distance before the casement, and accompanied the vocal performance of the Italian with the most hideous grimaces, and the most absurd and insulting gesticulations.

Signor Parucci would have given a good round sum to have had the engaging boy by the ears; but this he knew was out of the question; he therefore (for he was a philosopher) played and sung on without evincing the smallest consciousness of what was going forward. His plans of vengeance were, however, speedily devised and no less quickly executed. There lay upon the windowsill a fragment of biscuit, which in the course of an ecstatic flourish the little man kicked carelessly over. The bait had hardly touched the ground beneath the casement when Jacopo, continuing to play and sing the while, and apparently unconscious of anything but his own music, to his infinite delight beheld the boy first abate his exertions, and finally put an end to his affronting pantomime altogether, and begin to manœuvre in the direction of the treacherous windfall. The youth gradually approached it, and just at the moment when it was within his grasp, Signor Parucci, with another careless touch of his foot, sent over a large bow-pot well stored with clay, which stood upon the window-block. The descent of this ponderous missile was followed by a most heart-stirring acclamation from below; and good Mr. Parucci, clambering along the windowsill, and gazing downward, was regaled by the spectacle of the gesticulating youth stamping about the grass among what appeared to be the fragments of a hundred flower-pots, writhing and bellowing in transports of indignation and bodily torment.

“Povero ragazzo — Carissimo figlio,” exclaimed the valet, looking out with an expression of infinite sweetness, “my dear child and charming boy, how ‘av you broke my flower-pote, and when ‘av you come here. Ah! per Bacco, I think I ‘av see you before. Ah! yees, you are that sweetest leetel boy that was leestening at my music — so charming just now. How much clay is on your back! a cielo! amiable child, you might ‘av keel yourself.

Sacro numine, what an escape! Say your prayer, and thank heaven you are safe, my beautiful, sweetest, leetel boy. God blace you. Now rone away very fast, for fear you pool the other two flower-potes on your back, sweetest child. Gode bless you, amiable boy — they are very large and very heavy."

The youth took the hint, and having had quite enough of Mr. Parucci's music for the evening, withdrew under the combined influences of fury and lumbago. The little man threw himself back in his chair, and hugged his shins in sheer delight, grinning and chattering like a delirious monkey, and rolling himself about, and laughing with the most exquisite relish. At length, after this had gone on for some time, with the air of a man who has had enough of trifling, and must now apply himself to matters of graver importance, he arose, hung up his guitar, sent his chair, which was upon casters, rolling to the far end of the room, and proceeded to arrange the curls of one of the two magnificent perukes, on which it was his privilege to operate. After having applied himself with uncommon attention to this labour of taste for some time in silence, he retired a few paces to contemplate the effect of his performance — whereupon he fell into a musing mood, and began after his fashion to soliloquize with a good deal of energy and volubility in that dialect which had become more easy to him than his mother tongue.

"*Corpo di Bacco!* what thing is life! who would believe thirty years ago I should be here now in a barbaroose island to curl the wig of an old gouty blackguard — but what matter. I am a philosopher — damnation — it is very well as it is — per Bacco! I can go way when I like. I am reech leetle fellow, and with Sir Richard, good Sir Richard, I do always whatever I may choose. Good Sir Richard," he continued, addressing the block on which hung the object of his tasteful labours, as if it had been the baronet in person— "good Sir Richard, why are you so kind to me, when you are so cross as the old devil in hell with all the rest of the world? — why, why, why? Shall I say to you the reason, good, kind Sir Richard? Well, I weel. It is because you dare not — dare not — dare not-da-a-a-are not vaix me. I am, you know, dear Sir Richard, a poor, leetle foreigner, who is depending on your goodness. I 'ave nothing but your great pity and good charity — oh, no! I am nothing at all; but still you dare not vaix me — you moste not be angry — note at all — but very quiet — you moste not go in a passion

— oh! never — weeth me — even if I was to make game of you, and to insult you, and to pool your nose.”

Here the Italian seized, with the tongs which he had in his hand, upon that prominence in the wooden block which corresponded in position with the nose, which at other times the peruke overshadowed, and with a grin of infinite glee pinched and twisted the iron instrument until the requirements of his dramatic fancy were satisfied, when he delivered two or three sharp knocks on the smooth face of the block, and resumed his address.

“No, no — you moste not be angry, fore it would be great misfortune — oh, it would — if you and I should quarrel together; but tell me now, old *truffatore* — tell me, I say, am I not very quiet, goodnature, merciful, peetying faylow? Ah, yees — very, very — *Madre di Dio* — very moche; and dear, good Sir Richard, shall I tell you why I am so very goodnature? It is because I love you joste as moche as you love me — it is because, most charitable patron, it is my convenience to go on weeth you quietly and ‘av no fighting yet — bote you are going to get money. Oh! so coning you are, you think I know nothing — you think I am asleep — bote I know it — I know it quite well. You think I know nothing about the land you take from Miss Mary. Ah! you are very coning — oh! very; but I ‘av hear it all, and I tell you — and I swear *per sangue di D* —— , when you get that money I shall, and will, and moste — *mo-ooste* ‘av a very large, comfortable, beeg handful — do you hear me? Oh, you very coning old rascal; and if you weel not geeve it, oh, my dear Sir Richard, echellent master, I am so moche afaid we will ‘av a fight between us — a quarrel — that will spoil our love and friendship, and maybe, helas! horte your reputation — shoking — make the gentlemen spit on you, and avoid you, and call you all the ogly names — oh! shoking.”

Here he was interrupted by a loud ringing in Sir Richard’s chamber.

“There he is to pool his leetle bell — damnation, what noise. I weel go up joste now — time enough, dear, good, patient Sir Richard — time enough — oh, plainty, plainty.”

The little man then leisurely fumbled in his pocket until he brought forth a bunch of keys, from which, having selected one, he applied it to the lock of the little press which we have already mentioned, whence he deliberately produced one of the flasks which we have hinted at, along with a tall glass with a spiral stem, and filling himself a bumper of the liquor therein contained, he coolly sipped it to the bottom, accompanied throughout the performance by the incessant tinkling of Sir Richard's hand-bell.

"Ah, very good, most echellent — thank you, Sir Richard, you 'av give me so moche time and so moche music, I 'av drunk your very good health."

So saying, he locked up the flask and glass again, and taking the block which had just represented Sir Richard in the imaginary colloquy in his hand, he left his own chamber, and ran upstairs to the baronet's dressing-room. He found his master alone.

"Ah, Jacopo," exclaimed the baronet, looking somewhat flushed, but speaking, nevertheless, in a dulcet tone enough, "I have been ringing for nearly ten minutes; but I suppose you did not hear me."

"Joste so as you 'av say," replied the man. "Your *signoria* is very seldom wrong. I was so charmed with my work I could not hear nothing."

"Parucci," rejoined Sir Richard, after a slight pause, "you know I keep no secrets from you."

"Ah, you flatter me, Signor — you flatter me — indeed you do," said the valet, with ironical humility.

His master well understood the tone in which the fellow spoke, but did not care to notice it.

"The fact is, Jacopo," continued Sir Richard, "you already know so many of my secrets, that I have now no motive in excluding you from any."

"Goode, kind — oh, very kind," ejaculated the valet.

"In short," continued his master, who felt a little uneasy under the praises of his attendant— "in short, to speak plainly, I want your assistance. I know your talents well. You can imitate any handwriting you please to copy with perfect accuracy. You must copy, in the handwriting of this manuscript, the draft of a letter which I will hand you this evening. You require some little time to study the character; so take the letter with you, and be in my room at ten tonight. I will then hand you the draft of what I want written. You understand?"

"Understand! To be sure — most certilly I weel do it," replied the Italian, "so that the great devil himself will not tell the writing of the two, *l'un dall' altro*, one from the other. Never fear — geeve me the letter. I must learn the writing. I weel be here tonight before you are arrive, and I weel do it very fast, and so like — bote you know how well I can copy. Ah! yees; you know it, Signor. I need not tell."

"No more at present," said the baronet, with a gesture of caution. "Assist me to dress."

The Italian accordingly was soon deep in the mysteries of his elaborate functions, where we shall leave him and his master for the present.

CHAPTER XVII.

DUBLIN CASTLE BY NIGHT — THE DRAWINGROOM — LORD WHARTON AND HIS COURT.

Sir Richard Ashwoode had set his heart upon having Lord Aspenly for his son-in-law; and all things considered, his lordship was, perhaps, according to the standard by which the baronet measured merit, as good a son-in-law as he had any right to hope for. It was true, Lord Aspenly was neither very young nor very beautiful. Spite of all the ingenious arts by which he reinforced his declining graces, it was clear as the light that his lordship was not very far from seventy; and it was just as apparent that it was not to any extraordinary supply of bone, muscle, or flesh that his vitality was attributable. His lordship was a little, spindle-shanked gentleman, with the complexion of a consumptive frog, and features as sharp as edged tools. He condescended to borrow from the artistic talents of his valet the exquisite pencilling of his eyebrows, as well as the fine black line which gave effect to a set of imaginary eyelashes, and depth and brilliancy to a pair of eyes which, although naturally not very singularly effective, had, nevertheless, nearly as much vivacity in them as they had ever had. His smiles were perennial and unceasing, very winning and rather ghastly. He used much gesticulation, and his shrug was absolutely Parisian. To all these perfections he added a wonderful facility in rounding the periods of a compliment, and an inexhaustible affluence of something which passed for conversation. Thus endowed, and having, moreover, the additional recommendation of a handsome income, a peerage, and an unencumbered celibacy, it is hardly wonderful that his lordship was unanimously voted by all prudent and discriminating persons, without exception, the most fascinating man in all Ireland. Sir Richard Ashwoode was not one whit more in earnest in desiring the match than was Lord Aspenly himself. His lordship had for some time begun to suspect that he had nearly sown his wild oats — that it was time for him to reform — that he was ripe for the domestic virtues, and ought to renounce scamp-hood. He therefore, in the laboratory of his secret soul, compounded a virtuous passion, which he resolved to expend upon the first eligible object who might present herself. Mary Ashwoode was the fortunate damsel who first happened to come within the scope and range of his lordship's premeditated love; and he forthwith in a matrimonial paroxysm applied, according to the good old custom, not to the lady herself, but to Sir Richard Ashwoode, and was received with open arms.

The baronet indeed, as the reader is aware, anticipated many difficulties in bringing the match about; for he well knew how deeply his daughter's heart was engaged, and his misgivings were more sombre and frequent than he cared to acknowledge even to himself. He resolved, however, that the thing should be; and he was convinced, that if his lordship only were firm, spite of fate he would effect it. In order then to inspire Lord Aspenly with this desirable firmness, he not unwisely believed that his best course was to exhibit him as much as possible in public places, in the character of the avowed lover of Mary Ashwoode; a position which, when once unequivocally assumed, afforded no creditable retreat, except through the gates of matrimony. It was arranged, therefore, that the young lady, under the protection of Lady Stukely, and accompanied by Lord Aspenly and Henry Ashwoode, should attend the first drawingroom at the Castle, a ceremonial which had been fixed to take place a few days subsequently to the arrival of Lord Aspenly at Morley Court. Those who have seen the Castle of Dublin only as it now stands, have beheld but the creation of the last sixty or seventy years, with the exception only of the wardrobe tower, an old grey cylinder of masonry, very dingy and dirty, which appears to have gone into half mourning for its departed companions, and presents something of the imposing character of an overgrown, mouldy bandbox. At the beginning of the last century, however, matters were very different. The trim brick buildings, with their spacious windows and symmetrical regularity of structure, which now complete the quadrangles of the castle, had not yet appeared; but in their stead masses of building, constructed with very little attention to architectural precision, either in their individual formation or in their relative position, stood ranged together, so as to form two irregular and gloomy squares. That portion of the building which was set apart for state occasions and the viceregal residence, had undergone so many repairs and modifications, that very little if any of it could have been recognized by its original builder. Not so, however, with other portions of the pile: the ponderous old towers, which have since disappeared, with their narrow loopholes and iron-studded doors looming darkly over the less massive fabrics of the place with stern and gloomy aspect, reminded the passer every moment, that the building whose courts he trod was not merely the theatre of stately ceremonies, but a fortress and a prison.

The viceroyalty of the Earl of Wharton was within a few weeks of its abrupt termination; the approaching discomfiture of the Whigs was not, however, sufficiently clearly revealed, to thin the levees and drawingrooms of the Whig lord-lieutenant. The castle yards were, therefore, upon the occasion in question, crowded to excess with the gorgeous equipages in which the Irish aristocracy of the time delighted. The night had closed in unusual darkness, and the massive buildings, whose summits were buried in dense and black obscurity, were lighted only by the red reflected glow of crowded flambeaux and links — which, as the respective footmen, who attended the crowding chairs and coaches flourished them according to the approved fashion, scattered their wide showers of sparks into the eddying air, and illumined in a broad and ruddy glare, like that of a bonfire, the gorgeous equipages with which the square was now thronged, and the splendid figures which they successively discharged. There were coaches-and-four — outriders — running footmen and hanging footmen — crushing and rushing — jostling and swearing — and burly coachmen, with inflamed visages, lashing one another's horses and their own. Lackeys collaring and throttling one another, all "for their master's honour," in the hot and disorderly dispute for precedence, and some even threatening an appeal to the swords — which, according to the barbarous fashion of the day, they carried, to the no small peril of the public and themselves. Others dragging the reins of strangers' horses, and backing them to make way for their own — a proceeding which, of course, involved no small expenditure of blasphemy and vociferation. On the whole, it would not be easy to exaggerate the scene of riot and confusion which, under the very eye of the civil and military executive of the country, was perpetually recurring, and that, too, ostensibly in honour of the supreme head of the Irish Government.

Through all this crash, and clatter, and brawling, and vociferation, the party whom we are bound to follow made their way with some difficulty and considerable delay.

The Earl of Wharton with his countess, surrounded by a brilliant staff, and amid all the pomp and state of viceregal dignity, received the distinguished courtiers who thronged the castle chambers. At the time of which we write, Lord Wharton was in his seventieth year. Few, however, would have guessed his age at more than sixty, though many might have supposed it under that. He was rather a spare figure, with an erect and dignified bearing, and a countenance which combined vivacity, goodhumour, and boldness in an eminent degree. His manners were, to those who did not know how unreal was everything in them that bore the promise of good, singularly engaging, and that in spite of a very strong spice of coarseness, and a very determined addiction to profane swearing. He had, however, in his whole air and address a kind of rollicking, goodhumoured familiarity, which was very generally mistaken for the quintessence of candour and good-fellowship, and which consequently rendered him unboundedly popular among those who were not aware of the fact that his complimentary speeches meant just nothing, and were very often followed, the moment the object of them had withdrawn, by the coarsest ridicule, and even by the grossest abuse. For the rest, he was undoubtedly an able statesman, and had clearly discerned and adroitly steered his way through the straits and perils of troublous and eventful times. He was, moreover, a steady and uncompromising Whig, upon whom, throughout a long and active life, the stain of inconsistency had never rested; a thorough partisan, a quick and ready debater, and an unscrupulous and daring political intriguer. In private, however, entirely profligate — a sensualist and an infidel, and in both characters equally without shame.

Through the rooms there wandered a very wild, madcap boy of some ten or eleven years, venting his turbulent spirits in all kinds of mischievous pranks — sometimes planting himself behind Lord Wharton, and mimicking, with ludicrous exaggeration, which the courtly spectators had enough to do to resist, the ceremonious gestures and gracious nods of the viceroy; at other times assuming a staid and manly carriage, and chatting with his elders with the air of perfect equality, and upon subjects which one would have thought immeasurably beyond his years, and this with a sound sense, suavity, and precision which would have done honour to many grey heads in the room. This strange, bold, precocious boy of eleven was Philip, afterwards Duke of Wharton, the wonder and the disgrace of the British peerage.

"Ah! Mr. Morris," exclaimed his excellency, as a middle-aged gentleman, with a fluttered air, a round face, and vacant smile, approached, "I am delighted to see you — by —— Almighty I am — give me your hand. I have written across about the matter we wot of: but for these cursed contrary winds, I make no doubt I should have had a letter before now. Is the young gentleman himself here?"

"A — a — not quite, your excellency. That is, not at — all," stammered the gentleman, in mingled delight and alarm. "He is, my lord, a — a — laid up. He — a — it is a sore throat. Your excellency is most gracious."

"Tell him from me," rejoined Wharton, "that he must get well as quickly as may be. We don't know the moment he may be wanted. You understand me?"

"I — a — do indeed," replied Mr. Morris, retiring in graceful confusion.

"A d —— d impudent booby," whispered Wharton to Addison, who stood beside him, uttering the remark without the change of a single muscle. "He has made some cursed unconscionable request about his son. I'gad, I forget what; but we want his vote on Tuesday; and civility, you know, costs no coin."

Addison smiled faintly, and shook his head.

"May the Lord pardon us all," exclaimed a country clergyman in a rusty gown and ill-dressed wig, with a pale, attenuated, eager face, which told mournful tales of short commons and hard work; he had been for some time an intense and a grieved listener to the lord-lieutenant's conversation, and was now slowly retiring with a companion as humble as himself from the circle which surrounded his excellency, with simple horror impressed upon his pale features— "may the Lord preserve us all, how awful it is to hear one so highly trusted by *Him*, take His name thus momentarily in vain. Lord Wharton is, I fear me much, an habitual profane swearer."

"Believe me, sir, you are very simple," rejoined a young clergyman who stood close to the position which the speaker now occupied. "His excellency's object in swearing by the different persons of the Trinity is to show that he believes in revealed religion — a fact which else were doubtful; and this being his main object, it is manifestly a secondary consideration to what particular asseveration or promises his excellency happens to tack his oaths."

The lank, pale-faced prebendary looked suddenly and earnestly round upon the person who had accosted him, with an expression of curiosity and wonder, evidently in some doubt as to the spirit in which the observation had been made. He beheld a tall, stalwart man, arrayed in a clerical costume as rich as that of a churchman who has not attained to the rank of a dignitary in his profession could well be, and in all points equipped with the most perfect neatness. In the face he looked in vain for any indication of jocularity. It was a striking countenance — striking for the extreme severity of its expression, and for its stern and handsome outline. The eye which encountered the inquiring glance of the elder man was of the clearest blue, singularly penetrating and commanding — the eyebrow dark and shaggy — the lips full and finely formed, but in their habitual expression bearing a character of haughty and indomitable determination — the complexion of the face was dark; and as the country prebendary gazed upon the countenance, full, as it seemed, of a scornful, stern, merciless energy and decision, something told him, that he looked upon one born to lead and to command the people. All this he took in at a glance: and while he looked, Addison, who had detached himself from the viceregal coterie, laid his hand upon the shoulder of the stern-featured young clergyman.

“Swift,” said he, drawing him aside, “we see you too seldom here. His excellency begins to think and to hope you have reconsidered what I spoke about when last we met. Believe me, you wrong yourself in not rendering what service you can to men who are not ungrateful, and who have the power to reward. You were always a Whig, and a pamphlet were with you but the work of a few days.”

“Were I to write a pamphlet,” rejoined Swift, “it is odds his excellency would not like it.”

“Have you not always been a Whig?” urged Addison.

“Sir, I am not to be taken by nicknames,” rejoined Swift. “I know Godolphin, and I know Lord Wharton. I have long distrusted the government of each. I am no courtier, Mr. Secretary. What I suspect I will not seem to trust — what I hate I hate entirely, and renounce openly. I have heard of my Lord Wharton’s doing, too. When I refused before to understand your overtures to me to write a pamphlet for his friends, he was pleased to say I refused because he would not make me his chaplain — in saying which he knowingly and malignantly lied; and to this lie he, after his accustomed fashion, tacked a blasphemous oath. He is therefore a perjured liar. I renounce him as heartily as I renounce the devil. I am come here, Mr. Secretary, not to do reverence to Lord Wharton — God forbid! — but to offer my homage to the majesty of England, whose brightness is reflected even in that cracked and battered piece of pinchbeck yonder. Believe me, should his excellency be rash enough to engage me in talk tonight, I shall take care to let him know what opinion I have of him."

"Come, come, you must not be so dogged," rejoined Addison. "You know Lord Wharton's ways. He says a good deal more than he cares to be believed — everybody knows *that* — and all take his lordship's asseverations with a grain of allowance; besides, you ought to consider that when a man unused to contradiction is crossed by disappointment, he is apt to be choleric, and to forget his discretion. We all know his faults; but even you will not deny his merits."

Thus speaking, he led Swift toward the viceregal circle, which they had no sooner reached than Wharton, with his most goodhumoured smile, advanced to meet the young clergyman, exclaiming, —

"Swift! so it is, by —— ! I am glad to see you — by —— I am."

"I am glad, my lord," replied Swift, gravely, "that you take such frequent occasion to remind this godless company of the presence of the Almighty."

"Well, you know," rejoined Wharton, goodhumouredly, "the Scripture saith that the righteous man sweareth to his neighbour."

"And *disappointeth* him not," rejoined Swift.

"And disappointeth him not," repeated Wharton; "and by —— ," continued he, with marked earnestness, and drawing the young politician aside as he spoke, "in whatsoever I swear to thee there shall be no disappointment."

He paused, but Swift remained silent. The lord-lieutenant well knew that an English preferment was the nearest object of the young churchman's ambition. He therefore continued, —

"On my soul, we want you in England — this is no stage for you. By —— you cannot hope to serve either yourself or your friends in this place."

"Very few thrive here but scoundrels, my lord," rejoined Swift.

"Even so," replied Wharton, with perfect equanimity— "it is a nation of scoundrels — dissent on the one side and popery on the other. The upper order harpies, and the lower a mere prey — and all equally liars, rogues, rebels, slaves, and robbers. By —— some fine day the devil will carry off the island bodily. For very safety you must get out of it. By —— he'll have it."

"I am not enough in the devil's confidence to speak of his designs with so much authority as your lordship," rejoined Swift; "but I incline to think that under your excellency's administration it will answer his end as well to leave the island where it is."

"Ah! Swift, you are a wag," rejoined the viceroy; "but by —— I honour and respect your spirit. I know we shall agree yet — by —— I know it. I respect your independence and honesty all the more that they are seldom met with in a presence-chamber. By —— I respect and love you more and more every day."

"If your lordship will forego your professions of love, and graciously confine yourself to the backbiting which must follow, you will do for me to the full as much as I either expect or desire," rejoined Swift, with a grave reverence.

"Well, well," rejoined the viceroy, with the most unruffled goodhumour, "I see, Swift, you are in no mood to play the courtier just now. Nevertheless, bear in mind what Addison advised you to attempt; and though we part thus for the present, believe me, I love you all the better for your honest humour."

"Farewell, my lord," repeated Swift, abruptly, and with a formal bow he retired among the common throng.

"A hungry, ill-conditioned dog," said Wharton, turning to the person next him, "who, having never a bone to gnaw, whets his teeth on the shins of the company."

Having vented this little criticism, the viceroy resumed once more the formal routine of state hospitality.

"It is time we were going," suggested Mary Ashwoode to Emily Copland. "My lord," she continued, turning to Lord Aspenly, whose attentions had been just as conspicuous and incessant as Sir Richard Ashwoode could have wished them, "Do you know where Lady Stukely is?"

Lord Aspenly professed his ignorance.

"Have *you* seen her ladyship?" inquired Emily Copland of the gallant Major O'Leary, who stood near her.

“Upon my conscience, I have,” rejoined the major. “I’m not considered a poltroon; but I plead guilty to one weakness. I am bothered if I can stand fire when it appears in the nose of a gentlewoman; so as soon as I saw her I beat a retreat, and left my valorous young nephew to stand or fall under the blaze of her artillery. She is at the far end of the room.”

The major was easily persuaded to undertake the mission, and a word to young Ashwoode settled the matter. The party accordingly left the rooms, having, however, previously to their doing so, arranged that Major O’Leary should pass the next day at Morley Court, and afterwards accompany them in the evening to the theatre, whither Sir Richard, in pursuance of his plans, had arranged that they should all repair.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TWO COUSINS — THE NEGLECTED JEWELS AND THE BROKEN SEAL.

It was drawing toward evening when Emily Copland, in high spirits, and richly and becomingly dressed, ran lightly to the door of her cousin's chamber. She knocked, but no answer was returned. She knocked again, but still without any reply. Then opening the door, she entered the room, and beheld her cousin Mary seated at a small work-table, at which it was her wont to read. There she lay motionless — her small head leaned upon her graceful arms, over which flowed all negligently the dark luxuriant hair. An open letter was on the table before her, and two or three rich ornaments lay unheeded on the floor beside her, as if they had fallen from her hand. There was in her attitude such a passionate abandonment of grief, that she seemed the breathing image of despair. Spite of all her levity, the young lady was touched at the sight. She approached her gently, and laying her hand upon her shoulder, she stooped down and kissed her.

"Mary, dear Mary, what grieves you?" she said. "Tell me. It's I, dear — your cousin Emily. There's a good girl — what has happened to vex you?"

Mary raised her head, and looked in her cousin's face. Her eye was wild — she was pale as marble, and in her beautiful face was an expression so utterly woeful and piteous, that Emily was almost moved.

"Oh! I have lost him — for ever and ever I have lost him," said she, despairingly. "Oh! cousin, dear cousin, he is gone from me. God pity me — I am forsaken."

"Nay, cousin, do not say so — be cheerful — it cannot be — there, there," and Emily Copland kissed the poor girl's pale lips.

"Forsaken — forsaken," continued Mary, for she heard not and heeded not the voice of vain consolation. "He has thrown me off for ever — for ever — quite — quite. God pity me, where shall I look for hope?"

"Mary, dear Mary," said her cousin, "you are ill — do not give way thus. Be assured it is not as you think. You must be in error."

"In error! Oh! that I could think so. God knows how gladly I would give my poor life to think so. No, no — it is real — all real. Oh! cousin, he has forsaken me."

"I cannot believe it — I *can* not," said Emily Copland. "Such folly can hardly exist. I will not believe it. What reason have you for thinking him changed?"

"Read — oh, read it, cousin," replied the girl, motioning toward the letter, which lay open on the table— "read it once, and you will not bid me hope any more. Oh! cousin, dear cousin, there is no more joy for me in this world, turn where I will, do what I may — I am heartbroken."

Emily Copland glanced through the letter, shook her head, and dropped the note again where it had been lying.

"You know, cousin Emily, how I loved him," continued Mary, while for the first time the tears flowed fast— "you know that day after day, among all that happened to grieve me, my heart found rest in his love — in the hope and trust that he would never grow cold; and — and — oh! God pity me — *now* where is it all? You see — you know his love is gone from me — for evermore — gone from me. Oh! how I used to count the days and hours till the time would come round when I could see him and speak to him — but this has all gone. Hereafter all days are to be the same — morning or evening, summer time or winter — no change of seasons or of hours can bring to me any more hope or gladness, but ever the same — sorrow and desolate loneliness — for oh! cousin, I am very desolate, and hopeless, and heartbroken."

The poor girl threw her arms round her cousin's neck, and sobbed and wept, and wept and sobbed again, as though her heart would break. Long and bitterly she wept upon her cousin's neck in silence, unbroken, except by her sobs. After a time, however, Emily Copland exclaimed, —

"Well, Mary, to say the truth, I never much liked the matter; and as he is a fool, and an *ungrateful* fool to boot, I am not sorry that he has shown his character as he has done. Believe me, painful as such discoveries are when made thus early, they are incomparably more agonizing when made too late. A little — a very little — time will enable you quite to forget him."

"No, cousin," replied Mary— "no, I never will forget him. He is changed indeed — greatly changed from what he was — bitterly has he disappointed and betrayed me; but I cannot forget him. There shall indeed never more pass word or look between us; he shall be to me as one that is dead, whom I shall hear and see no more; but the memory of what he was — the memory of what I vainly thought him — shall remain with me while my poor heart beats."

"Well, Mary, time will show," said Emily.

"Yes, time will show — time will show," replied she, mournfully; "be the time long or short, it will show."

"You *must* forget him — you *will* forget him; a few weeks, and you will thank your stars you found him out so soon."

"Ah, cousin," replied Mary, "you do not know how all my thoughts, and hopes, and recollections — everything I liked to remember, and to look forward to; you cannot know how all that was happy in my life — but what boots it, I will keep my troth with him; I will love no other, and wed with no other; and while this sorrowful life remains I will never — never — forget him."

"I can only say, that were the case my own," rejoined Emily, "I would show the fellow how lightly I held him and his worthless heart, and marry within a month; but every one has her own way of doing things. Remember it is nearly time to start for the theatre; the coach will be at the door in half-an-hour. Surely you will come; it would seem so very strange were you to change your mind thus suddenly; and you may be very sure that, by some means or other, the impudent fellow — about whom, I cannot see why, you care so much — would hear of all your grieving, and pining, and love-sickness. Pah! I'd rather die than please the hollow, worthless creature by letting him think he had caused me a moment's uneasiness; and then, above all, Sir Richard would be so outrageously angry — why, you would never hear the end of it. Come, come, be a good girl. After all, it is only holding up your head, and looking pretty, which you can't help, for an hour or two. You must come to silence gossip abroad, as well as for the sake of peace at home — you *must* come."

"I would fain stay here at home," said the poor girl; "heart and head are sick: but if you think my father would be angry with me for staying at home, I will go. It is indeed, as you say, a small matter to me where I pass an hour or two; all times, all places — crowds or solitudes — are henceforward indifferent to me. What care I where they bring me! Cousin Emily, I will do whatever you think best."

The poor girl spoke with a voice and look of such utter wretchedness, that even her lighthearted, worldly, selfish cousin was touched with pity.

"Come, then; I will assist you," said she, kissing the pale cheek of the heart-stricken girl. "Come, Mary, cheer up, you must call up your good looks it would never do to be seen thus." And so talking on, she assisted her to dress.

Gaily and richly arrayed in the gorgeous and by no means unbecoming style of the times, and sparkling with brilliant jewels, poor Mary Ashwoode — a changed and stricken creature, scarcely conscious of what was going on around her — took her place in her father's carriage, and was borne rapidly toward the theatre.

The party consisted of the two young ladies, who were respectively under the protection of Lord Aspenly, who sate beside Mary Ashwoode, happily too much pleased with his own voluble frivolity to require anything more from her than her appearing to hear it, and young Ashwoode, who chatted gaily with his pretty cousin.

"What has become of my venerable true-love, Major O'Leary?" inquired Miss Copland.

"He will follow on horseback," replied Ashwoode. "I beheld him, as I passed downstairs, admiring himself before the looking-glass in his new regimentals. He designs tremendous havoc tonight. His coat is a perfect phenomenon — the investment of a year's pay at least — with more gold about it than I thought the country could afford, and scarlet enough to make a whole wardrobe for the lady of Babylon — a coat which, if left to itself, would storm the hearts of nine girls out of ten, and which, even with an officer in it, will enthral half the sex."

"And here comes the coat itself," exclaimed the young lady, as the major rode up to the coach-window— "I'm half in love with it myself already."

"Ladies, your devoted slave: gentlemen, your most obedient," said the major, raising his three-cornered hat. "I hope to see you before half-an-hour, under circumstances more favourable to conversation. Miss Copland, depend upon it, with your permission, I'll pay my homage to you before half-an-hour, the more especially as I have a scandalous story to tell you. Meanwhile, I wish you all a safe journey, and a pleasant one." So saying, the major rode on, at a brisk pace, to the "Cock and Anchor," there intending to put up his horse, and to exchange a few words with young O'Connor.

In the meantime the huge old coach, which contained the rest of the party, jolted and rumbled on, until at length, amid the confusion and clatter of crowded vehicles, restive horses, and vociferous coachmen, with all their accompaniments of swearing and whipping, the clank of scrambling hoofs, the bumping and hustling of carriages, and the desperate rushing of chairmen, bolting this way or that, with their living loads of foppery and fashion — the coach-door was thrown open at the box-entrance of the Theatre Royal, in Smock Alley.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE THEATRE — THE RUFFIAN — THE ASSAULT, AND THE RENCONTRE.

Major O'Leary had hardly dismounted in the quadrangle of the "Cock and Anchor," when O'Connor rode slowly into the inn-yard.

"How are you, my dear fellow?" exclaimed the man of scarlet and gold; "I was just asking where you were. Come down off that beast, I want to have a word in your ear — a bit of news — some fun. Descend, I say, descend."

O'Connor accordingly dismounted.

"Now then — a hearty shake — so. I have great news, and only a minute to tell it. Jack, run like a shot, and get me a chair. Here, Tim, take a napkin and an oyster-knife, and do not leave a bit of mud, or the sign of it, upon my back: take a general survey of the coat and breeches, and a particular review of the wig. And, Jem, do you give my boots a harum-scarum shot of a superficial scrub, and touch up the hat — gently, do you mind — and take care of the lace. So while the fellows are finishing my toilet, I may as well tell you my morsel of news. Do you know who is to be at the playhouse tonight?"

O'Connor expressed his ignorance.

"Well, then, I'll tell you, and make what use you like of it," resumed the major. "Miss Mary Ashwoode! There's for you. Take my advice, get into a decent coat and breeches, and run down to the theatre — it is not five minutes' walk from this; you'll easily find us, and I'll take care to make room for you. Why, you do not seem half pleased: what more can you wish for, unless you expect the girl to put up for the evening at the "Cock and Anchor"? Rouse yourself. If you feel modest, there is nothing like a pint or two of Madeira: don't try brandy — it's the father and mother of all sorts of indiscretions. Now, mind, you have the hint; it is an opportunity you ought to improve. By the powers, if I was in your place — but no matter. You may not have an opportunity of seeing her again these six months; and unless I'm completely mistaken, you are as much in love with the girl as I am with

— several that shall be nameless. Heigho! next after Burgundy, and the cock-pit, and the fox-hounds, and two or three more frailties of the kind, there is nothing in the world I prefer to flirtation, without much minding whether I'm the principal or the second in the affair. But here comes the vehicle."

Accordingly, without waiting to say any more, the major took his seat in the chair, and was borne by the lusty chairmen, at a swinging pace, through the narrow streets, and, without let or accident, safely deposited within the principal entrance of the theatre.

The theatre of Smock Alley (or, as it was then called, Orange Street) was not quite what theatres are nowadays. It was a large building of the kind, as theatres were then rated, and contained three galleries, one above the other, supported by heavy wooden caryatides, and richly gilded and painted. The curtain, instead of rising and falling, opened, according to the old fashion, in the middle, and was drawn sideways apart, disclosing no triumphs of illusive colouring and perspective, but a succession of plain tapestry-covered screens, which, from early habit, the audience accommodatingly accepted for town or country, dry land or sea, or, in short, for any locality whatsoever, according to the manager's good will and pleasure. This docility and good faith on the part of the audience were, perhaps, the more praiseworthy, inasmuch as a very considerable number of the aristocratic spectators actually sate in long lines down either side of the stage — a circumstance involving, by the continuous presence of the same perukes, and the same embroidered waistcoats, the same set of countenances, and the same set of legs, in every variety of clime and situation through which the wayward invention of the playwright hurried his action, a very severe additional tax upon the imaginative faculties of the audience. But perhaps the most striking peculiarities of the place were exhibited in the grim persons of two *bonâ fide* sentries, in genuine cocked hats and scarlet coats, with their enormous muskets shouldered, and the ball-cartridges dangling in ostentatious rows from their bandoleers, planted at the front, and facing the audience, one at each side of the stage — a vivid evidence of the stern vicissitudes and insecurity of the times. For the rest, the audience of those days, in the brilliant colours, and glittering lace, and profuse ornament, which the gorgeous fashion of the time allowed, presented a spectacle of rich and dazzling magnificence, such as no modern assembly of the kind can even faintly approach.

The major had hardly made his way to the box where his party were seated, when his attention was caught by an object which had for him all but irresistible attractions: this was the buxom person of Mistress Jannet Rumble, a plump, good-looking, young widow of five-and-forty, with a jolly smile, a hearty laugh, and a killing acquaintance with the language of the eyes. These perfections — for of course her jointure, which, by the way, was very considerable, could have had nothing to do with it — were too much for Major O'Leary. He met the widow accidentally, made a few careless inquiries about her finances, and fell over head and ears in love with her upon the shortest possible notice. Our friend had, therefore, hardly caught a glimpse of her, when Miss Copland, beside whom he was seated, observed that he became unusually meditative, and at length, after two or three attempts to enter again into conversation — all resulting in total and incoherent failure, the major made some blundering excuse, took his departure, and in a moment had planted himself beside the fascinating Mistress Rumble — where we shall allow him the protection of a generous concealment, and suffer him to read the lady's eyes, and insinuate his soft nonsense, without intruding for a moment upon the sanctity of lovers' mutual confidences.

Emily Copland having watched and enjoyed the manœuvres of her military friend till she was fairly tired of the amusement, and having in vain sought to engage Henry Ashwoode, who was unusually moody and absent, in conversation, at length, as a last desperate resource, turned her attention to what was passing upon the stage.

While all this was going forward, young Ashwoode was a good deal disconcerted at observing among the crowd in the pit a personage with whom, in the vicious haunts which he frequented, he had made a sort of ambiguous acquaintance. The man was a bulky, broad-shouldered, ill-looking fellow, with a large, vulgar, red face, and a coarse, sensual mouth, whose blue, swollen lips indicated habitual intemperance, and the nauseous ugliness of which was further enhanced by the loss of two front teeth, probably by some violent agency, as was testified by a deep scar across the mouth; the eyes of the man carried that uncertain expression, half of shame and half of defiance, which belongs to the coward, bully, and ruffian. The blackness of habitually-indulged and ferocious passion was upon his countenance; and the revolting character of the face was the more unequivocally marked by a sort of smile, or rather sneer, which had in it neither intellectuality nor gladness — an odious libel on the human smile, with nothing but brute insolence and scorn, and a sardonic glee in its baleful light — a smile from which every human sympathy recoiled abashed and affrighted. Let not the reader imagine that the man and the character are but the dreams of fiction; the wretch, whose outward seeming we have imperfectly sketched, lived and moved in the scenes where we have fixed our narrative — there grew rich — there rioted in the indulgence of every passion which hell can inspire or to which wealth can pander — there ministered to his insatiate avarice, by the destruction and beggary of thousands of the young and thoughtless — and there at length, in the fulness of his time, died — in the midst of splendour and infamy: with malignant and triumphant perseverance having persisted to his latest hour in the prosecution of his Satanic mission; luring the unwary into the toils of crime and inextricable madness, and thence into the pit of temporal and eternal ruin. This man, Nicholas Blarden, Esquire, was the proprietor of one of those places where fortunes are squandered, time sunk, habits, temper, character, morals, all, corrupted, blasted, destroyed — one of those places which are set apart as the especial temples of avarice, in which, year after year, are for ever recurring the same perennial scenes of mad excess, of calculating, merciless fraud, of bleak, brain-stricken despair — places to which has been assigned, in a spirit of fearful truth, the appellative of “hell.”

The man whom we have mentioned, it had never been young Ashwoode’s misfortune to meet, except in those scenes where his acquaintance was useful, without being actually discreditable; for it was the fellow’s habit, with the instinctive caution which marks such gentlemen, to court public observation as little as possible, and to skulk systematically from the eye of popular scrutiny — seldom embarrassing his aristocratic acquaintances by claiming the privilege of recognition at unseasonable times; and confining himself, for the most part, exclusively to his own coterie. Independently of his unpleasant natural peculiarities there were other circumstances which tended to make him a conspicuous object in the crowd — the fellow was extravagantly over-dressed, and had planted himself in a standing posture upon a bench, and from this elevated position was, with steady effrontery, gazing into the box in which young Ashwoode's party were seated, exchanging whispers and horse-laughs with three or four men who looked scarcely less villainous than himself, and, as soon became apparent, directing his marked and exclusive attention to Miss Ashwoode, who was too deeply absorbed in her own sorrowful reflections to heed what was passing around her. The young man felt his choler mount, as he beheld the insolent conduct of the fellow — he saw, however, that Blarden was evidently not perfectly sober, and hesitated what course he should take. Strongly as he was tempted to spring at once into the pit, and put an end to the impertinence by caning the fellow within an inch of his life, he yet felt that a disreputable conflict of the kind had better be avoided, and could not well be justified except as a last resource; he, therefore, made up his mind to bear it as long as human endurance could.

Whatever hopes he entertained of escaping a collision with this man were, however, destined to be disappointed. Nicky Blarden (as his friends endearingly called him), to the great comfort of that part of the audience in his immediate neighbourhood, at length descended from his elevated stand, but not to conceal himself among the less obtrusive spectators. With an insolent swagger the fellow shouldered his way among the crowd towards the box where the object of his gaze was seated; and, having planted himself directly beneath it, he stared impudently up at young Ashwoode, exclaiming at the same time, —

"I say, Ashwoode, how does the world wag with you? — why ain't you rattling the bones this evening? d —— n me, you may as well be off, and let me take care of the dimber mot up there?"

"Do you speak to *me*, sir?" inquired young Ashwoode, turning almost livid with passion, and speaking in that subdued tone, and with that constrained coolness, which precedes some ungovernable outburst of fury.

"Why, —— me, how great we've got all at once — I say, you don't know me — Eh! don't you?" exclaimed the fellow, with vulgar scorn, at the same time rather roughly poking Ashwoode's hand with the hilt of his sword.

"I shall show you, sir, when your drunken folly has passed away, by very sore proofs, that I *do* know you," replied the young man, clutching his cane with such a grip as threatened to force his fingers into it— "be assured, sir, I shall know you, and you me, as long as you have the power to remember."

“Whieu, d —— it, don’t frighten us,” said the fellow, looking round for the approbation of his companions. “I say, d —— n it, don’t frighten the people — come, come, no gammon. I say, Ashwoode, you must introduce me, or present me, or whatever’s the word, to your sister up there — I say you *must*.”

“Quit this part of the house this instant, sir, or nothing shall prevent me flogging you until I leave not a whole bone in your body — this warning is the last — profit by it,” rejoined Ashwoode, in a low tone of bitter rage.

“Oh, ho! it’s there you are — is it?” rejoined the fellow, with a wink at his comrades, “so you’re going to beat the people — why, d —— n it, you’re enough to make a horse laugh. I say I want to know your sister, or your miss, or whatever she is, with the black hair up there, and if you won’t introduce me, d —— n it, I must only introduce myself.”

So saying, the fellow made a spring and caught the ledge of the front of the box, with the intention of vaulting into the place. Lord Aspenly and the young ladies had arisen in some alarm.

“My lord,” said young Ashwoode, “have the goodness to conduct the ladies to the lobby — I will join you in a moment.”

This direction was promptly obeyed, and at the same moment the young man caught the fellow, already half into the box, by the neckcloth, dragged his body across the wooden parapet, and while he struggled helplessly to disengage himself — half strangled, and without the power to get either up or down — with his heavy cane, the young gentleman — every nerve, sinew, and muscle being strung to tenfold power by fury — inflicted upon his back and ribs a castigation so prolonged and tremendous, that before it had ended, the scoundrel was perfectly insensible, in which state Henry Ashwoode flung him down again into the pit, amid the obstreperous acclamations of all parts of the house — an uproar of applause in which the spectators in the pit joined with such hearty enthusiasm, that at length, touched with a kindred heroism, they turned upon the associates of the fallen champion, and fairly kicked and cuffed them out of the house.

This feat accomplished, the young gentleman went down the stairs to the street-entrance, and, after considerable delay, succeeded, with the assistance of the footman who had attended him into the house, in finding out their carriage, and having it brought to the door — not judging it expedient that the ladies should return to their places, where they would, of course, be exposed to the gazing curiosity of the multitude. He found the party in the lobby quite recovered from whatever was unpleasant in the excitement of the scene, the more violent part of which they had not witnessed. Lord Aspenly and Emily Copland were laughing over the adventure; and Mary, flashed and agitated, was looking better than she had before upon that night. Taking his cousin under his own protection, and consigning his sister to that of Lord Aspenly, young Ashwoode led the way to the carriage. As they passed slowly along the lobby, the quick eye of Mary Ashwoode discerned a form, at sight of which her heart swelled and throbbed as though it would burst — the colour fled from her cheeks, and she felt for a moment on the point of swooning; the pride of her sex, however, sustained her; the tingling blood again mounted warmly to her cheeks, her eye brightened, and she listened, with more apparent interest than perhaps she ever did before, to Lord Aspenly's remarks — the form was O'Connor's. As she passed him, she returned his salute with a slight and haughty bow, and saw, and felt the stern, cold, proud expression which marked his pale and handsome features. In another moment she was seated in the carriage; the doors were closed, crack went the whip, and clatter go the iron hoofs on the pavement — but before they had traversed a hundred yards on their homeward way, poor Mary Ashwoode sunk back in her place, and fainted away.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LODGING — YOUNG MELANCHOLY AND OLD REMEMBRANCES — AN ADVENTURE AMONG THE YEW HEDGES OF MORLEY COURT.

“There is no more doubt — no more hope” — said O’Connor, as, wrapt in his cloak, he slowly pursued his way homeward— “the worst *is* true — she is quite estranged from me — how deceived — how utterly blind I have been — yet who could have thought it? Lighthearted, vain, worthless — it is all, all true — my own eyes have seen it. Well, even this must be borne — borne as best it may, and with a manly spirit. I have been, indeed, miserably cheated” — he continued, with bitter vehemence— “and what remains for me? I’ve been infatuated — a self-flattered fool, and waken thus to find *all* lost — but grief avails not — there lie before me many paths of honourable toil, and many avenues to honourable death — the ambition of my life is over — henceforth the world has nothing to offer me. I will leave this, the country of my illfated birth — leave it for ever, and end my days honourably, and God grant soon, far away from the only one I ever loved — from her who has betrayed me.”

Such were the thoughts which darkly and vaguely hurried through O’Connor’s mind as he retraced his steps. Before he had arrived, however, at the “Cock and Anchor,” whitherward he had mechanically directed his course, he bethought himself, and turned in a different direction towards the house in which his worthy friend, Mr. Audley — having an inveterate prejudice against all inns, which, without exception, he averred to be the especial sanctuaries of damp sheets, bugs, thieves, and rheumatic fevers — had already established himself as a weekly lodger.

“Pooh, pooh! you foolish boy,” ejaculated the old bachelor, with considerable energy, in reply to O’Connor’s gloomy and passionate language; “nonsense, sir, and folly, and absurdity — you’ll give me the vapours if you go on this way — what the devil do you want of foreign service and foreign graves — do you think, booby, it was for that I came over here — tilly vally, tilly vally — I know as well as you, or any other jackanapes, what love is. I tell you, sirrah, *I* have been in love, and *I* have been jilted — *jilted*, sir! and when I *was* jilted, I thought the jilting itself quite enough, without improving the matter by getting myself buried, dead or alive.” Here the little gentleman knocked the table recklessly with his knuckles, buried his hands in his breeches pockets, and rising from his chair, paced the room with an impressive tread. “Had you ever seen Letty Bodkin you might, indeed, have known what love is” — he continued, breathing very hard— “Letty Bodkin jilted me, and I got over it. I did not ask for razors, or cannon balls, or foreign interment, sir; but I vented my indignation like a man of business, in totting up the books, and running up a heavy arrear in the office accounts — yes, sir, I did more good in the way of arithmetic and book-keeping during that three weeks of love-sick agony, than an ordinary man, without the stimulus, would do in a year” — there was another pause here, and he resumed in a softened tone— “but Letty Bodkin was no ordinary woman. Oh! you scoundrel, had you seen her, you’d have been neither to hold nor to bind — there was nothing she could not do — she embroidered a waistcoat for me — heigho! scarlet geraniums and parsley sprigs — and she danced like — like a — a spring board — she’d sail through a minuet like a duck in a pond, and hop and bounce through ‘Sir Roger de Coverley’ like a hot chestnut on a griddle; — and then she sang — oh, her singing! — I’ve heard turtle-doves and thrushes, and, in fact, most kind of fowls of all sorts and sizes; but no nightingale ever came up to her in ‘The Captain endearing and tall,’ and ‘The Shepherdess dying for love’ — there never lived a man” — continued he, with increasing vehemence— “I don’t care when or where, who could have stood, sate, or walked in her company for half-an-hour, without making an old fool of himself — she was just my age, perhaps a year or two more — I wonder whether she is much changed — heigho!”

Having thus delivered himself, Mr. Audley lapsed into meditation, and thence into a faint and rather painful attempt to vocalize his remembrance of “The Captain endearing and tall,” engaged in which desperate operation of memory, O’Connor left the old gentleman, and returned to his temporary abode to pass a sleepless night of vain remembrances, regrets, and despair.

On the morning subsequent to the somewhat disorderly scene which we have described as having occurred in the theatre, Mary Ashwoode, as usual, sate silent and melancholy, in the dressing-room of her father, Sir Richard.

The baronet was not yet sufficiently recovered to venture downstairs to breakfast, which in those days was a very early meal indeed. After an unusually prolonged silence, the old man, turning suddenly to his daughter, abruptly said, “Mary, you have now had some days to study Lord Aspenly — how do you like him?”

The girl raised her eyes, not a little surprised at the question, and doubtful whether she had heard it aright.

“I say,” resumed he, “you ought to have been able by this time to arrive at a fair judgment as to Lord Aspenly’s merits — what do you think of him — do you like him?”

“Indeed, father,” replied she, “I have observed him very little — he may be a very estimable man, but I have not seen enough of him to form any opinion; and indeed, if I had, *my* opinion must needs be a matter of the merest indifference to him and everyone else.”

“Your opinion upon this point,” replied Sir Richard, tartly, “happens *not* to be a matter of indifference.”

A considerable pause again ensued, during which Mary Ashwoode had ample time to reflect upon the very unpleasant doubts which this brief speech, and the tone in which it was uttered, were calculated to inspire.

“Lord Aspenly’s manners are very agreeable, *very*,” continued Sir Richard, meditatively— “I may say, indeed, fascinating — *very* — do you think so?” he added sharply, turning towards his daughter.

This was rather a puzzling question. The girl had never thought about him except as a frivolous old beau; yet it was plain she could not say so without vexing her father; she therefore adopted the simplest expedient under such perplexing circumstances, and preserved an embarrassed silence.

“The fact is,” said Sir Richard, raising himself a little, so as to look full in his daughter’s face, at the same time speaking slowly and sternly, “the fact is, I had better be explicit on this subject. *I* am anxious that you should think well of Lord Aspenly; it is, in short, my wish and pleasure that you should *like* him; you understand me — you had *better* understand me.” This was said with an emphasis not to be mistaken, and another pause ensued. “For the present,” continued he, “run down and amuse yourself — and — stay — offer to show his lordship the old terrace garden — do you mind? Now, once more, run away.”

So saying, the old gentleman turned coolly from her, and rang his hand-bell vehemently. Scarcely knowing what she did, such was her astonishment at all that had passed, Mary Ashwoode left the room without any very clear notion as to whither she was going, or what to do; nor was her confusion much relieved when, on entering the hall, the first object which encountered her was Lord Aspenly himself, with his triangular hat under his arm, while he adjusted his deep lace ruffles — he had never looked so ugly before. As he stood beneath her while she descended the broad staircase, smiling from ear to ear, and bowing with the most chivalric profundity, his skinny, lemon-coloured face, and cold, glittering little eyes raised toward her — she thought that it was impossible for the human shape so nearly to assume the outward semblance of a squat, emaciated toad.

"Miss Ashwoode, as I live!" exclaimed the noble peer, with his most gracious and fascinating smile. "On what mission of love and mercy does she move? Shall I hope that her first act of pity may be exercised in favour of the most devoted of her slaves? I have been looking in vain for a guide through the intricacies of Sir Richard's yew hedges and leaden statues; may I hope that my presiding angel has sent me one in you?"

Lord Aspenly paused, and grinned wider and wider, but receiving no answer, he resumed, —

"I understand, Miss Ashwoode, that the pleasure-grounds, which surround us, abound in samples of your exquisite taste; as a votary of Flora, may I ask, if the request be not too bold, that you will vouchsafe to lead a bewildered pilgrim to the object of his search? There is — is there not? — shrined in the centre of these rustic labyrinths, a small flower-garden which owes its sweet existence to your creative genius; if it be not too remote, and if you can afford so much leisure, allow me to implore your guidance."

As he thus spoke, with a graceful flourish, the little gentleman extended his hand, and courteously taking hers by the extreme points of the fingers, he led her forward in a manner, as he thought, so engaging as to put resistance out of the question. Mary Ashwoode felt far too little interest in anything but the one ever-present grief which weighed upon her heart, to deny the old fop his trifling request; shrouding her graceful limbs, therefore, in a short cloak, and drawing the hood over her head, she walked forth, with slow steps and an aching heart, among the trim hedges which fenced the oldfashioned pleasure walks.

“Beauty,” exclaimed the nobleman, as he walked with an air of romantic gallantry by her side, and glancing as he spoke at the flowers which adorned the border of the path— “beauty is nowhere seen to greater advantage than in spots like this; where nature has amassed whatever is most beautiful in the inanimate creation, only to prove how unutterably more exquisite are the charms of *living* loveliness: these walks, but this moment to me a wilderness, are now so many paths of magic pleasure — how can I enough thank the kind enchantress to whom I owe the transformation?” Here the little gentleman looked unutterable things, and a silence of some minutes ensued, during which he effected some dozen very wheezy sighs. Emboldened by Miss Ashwoode’s silence, which he interpreted as a very unequivocal proof of conscious tenderness, he resolved to put an end to the skirmishing with which he had opened his attack, and to commence the action in downright earnestness. “This place breathes an atmosphere of romance; it is a spot consecrated to the worship of love; it is — it is the shrine of passion, and I — *I* am a votary — a worshipper.”

Miss Ashwoode paused in mingled surprise and displeasure, for his vehemence had become so excessive as, in conjunction with his asthma, to threaten to choke his lordship outright. When Mary Ashwoode stopped short, Lord Aspenly took it for granted that the crisis had arrived, and that the moment for the decisive onset was now come; he therefore ejaculated with a rapturous croak, —

“And you — *you* are my divinity!” and at the same moment he descended stiffly upon his two knees, caught her hand in his, and began to mumble it with unmistakable devotion.

“My lord — Lord Aspenly! — surely your lordship cannot mean — have done, my lord,” exclaimed the astonished girl, withdrawing her hand indignantly from his grasp. “Rise, my lord; you cannot mean otherwise than to mock me by such extravagance. My lord — my lord, you surprise and shock me beyond expression.”

“Angel of beauty! most exquisite — most perfect of your sex,” gasped his lordship, “I love you — yes, to distraction. Answer me, if you would not have me expire at your feet — ugh — ugh — tell me that I may hope — ugh — that I am not indifferent to you — ugh, ugh, ugh, — that — that you can love me?” Here his lordship was seized with so violent a fit of coughing, that Miss Ashwoode began to fear that he would expire at her feet in downright earnest. During the paroxysm, in which, with one hand pressed upon his side, he supported himself by leaning with the other upon the ground, Mary had ample time to collect her thoughts, so that when at length he had recovered his breath, she addressed him with composure and decision.

"My lord," she said, "I am grateful for your preference of me; although, when I consider the shortness of my acquaintance with you, and how few have been your opportunities of knowing me, I cannot but wonder very much at its vehemence. For me, your lordship cannot feel more than an idle fancy, which will, no doubt, pass away just as lightly as it came; and as for my feelings, I have only to say, that it is wholly impossible for you ever to establish in them any interest of the kind you look for. Indeed, indeed, my lord, I hope I have not given you pain — nothing can be further from my wish than to do so; but it is my duty to tell you plainly and at once my real feelings. I should otherwise but trifle with your kindness, for which, although I cannot return it as you desire, I shall ever be grateful."

Having thus spoken, she turned from her noble suitor, and began to retrace her steps rapidly towards the house.

"Stay, Miss Ashwoode — remain here for a moment — you *must* hear me!" exclaimed Lord Aspenly, in a tone so altered, that she involuntarily paused, while his lordship, with some difficulty, raised himself again to his feet, and with a flushed and haggard face, in which still lingered the ghastly phantom of his habitual smile, he hobbled to her side. "Miss Ashwoode," he exclaimed, in a tone tremulous with emotions very different from love, "I — I — I am not used to be treated cavalierly — I — I will not brook it: I am not to be trifled with — jilted — madam, jilted, and taken in. You have accepted and encouraged my attentions — attentions which you cannot have mistaken; and now, madam, when I make you an offer — such as your ambition, your most presumptuous ambition, dared not have anticipated — the offer of my hand — and — and a coronet, you coolly tell me you never cared for me. Why, what on earth do you look for or expect? — a foreign prince or potentate, an emperor, ha — ha — he — he — ugh — ugh — ugh! I tell you plainly, Miss Ashwoode, that *my* feelings *must* be considered. I have long made my passion known to you; it has been encouraged; and I have obtained Sir Richard's — your father's — sanction and approval. You had better reconsider what you have said. I shall give you an hour; at the end of that time, unless you see the propriety of avowing feelings which, you must pardon me when I say it, your encouragement of my advances has long virtually acknowledged, I must lay the whole case, including all the painful details of my own ill-usage, before Sir Richard Ashwoode, and trust to his powers of persuasion to induce you to act reasonably, and, I *will* add, *honourably*."

Here his lordship took several extraordinarily copious pinches of snuff, after which he bowed very low, conjured up an unusually hideous smile, in which spite, fury, and triumph were eagerly mingled, and hobbled away before the astonished girl had time to muster her spirits sufficiently to answer him.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHO APPEARED TO MARY ASHWOODE AS SHE SATE UNDER THE TREES — THE CHAMPION.

With flashing eyes and a swelling heart, struck dumb with unutterable indignation, the beautiful girl stood fixed in the attitude in which his last words had reached her, while the enraged and unmanly old fop hobbled away, with the ease and grace with which a crippled ape might move over a hot griddle. He had disappeared for some minutes before she had recovered herself sufficiently to think or speak.

"If *he* were by my side," she said, "this noble lord dared not have used me thus. Edmond would have died a thousand deaths first. But oh! God look upon me, for *his* love is gone from me, and I am now a poor, grieved, desolate creature, with none to help me."

Thus saying, she sate herself down upon the grass bank, beneath the tall and antique trees, and wept with all the bitter and devoted abandonment of hopeless sorrow. From this unrestrained transport of grief she was at length aroused by the pressure of a hand, gently and kindly laid upon her shoulder.

"What vexes you, Mary, my little girl?" inquired Major O'Leary, for he it was that stood by her. "Come, darling, don't fret, but tell your old uncle the whole business, and twenty to one, he has wit enough in his old noddle yet to set matters to rights. So, so, my darling, dry your pretty eyes — wipe the tears away; why should they wet your young cheeks, my poor little doat, that you always were. It is too early yet for sorrow to come on you. Wouldn't I throw myself between my little pet and all grief and danger? Then trust to me, darling; wipe away the tears, or by —— I'll begin to cry myself. Dry your eyes, and see if I can't help you one way or another."

The mellow brogue of the old major had never fallen before with such a tender pathos upon the ear of his beautiful niece, as now that its rich current bore full upon her heart the unlooked-for words of kindness and comfort.

"Were not you always *my* pet," continued he, with the same tenderness and pity in his tone, "from the time I first took you upon my knee, my poor little Mary? And were not you fond of your old rascally uncle O'Leary?

Usedn't I always to take your part, right or wrong; and do you think I'll desert you now? Then tell it all to me — ain't I your poor old uncle, the same as ever? Come, then, dry the tears — there's a darling — wipe them away."

While thus speaking, the warm-hearted old man took her hand, with a touching mixture of gallantry, pity, and affection, and kissed it again and again, with a thousand accompanying expressions of endearment, such as in the days of her childhood he had been wont to lavish upon his little favourite. The poor girl, touched by the kindness of her early friend, whose goodnatured sympathy was not to be mistaken, gradually recovered her composure, and yielding to the urgencies of the major, who clearly perceived that something extraordinarily distressing must have occurred to account for her extreme agitation, she at length told him the immediate cause of her grief and excitement. The major listened to the narrative with growing indignation, and when it had ended, he inquired, in a tone, about whose unnatural calmness there was something infinitely more formidable than in the noisiest clamour of fury, —

"Which way, darling, did his lordship go when he left you?"

The girl looked in his face, and saw his deadly purpose there.

"Uncle, my own dear uncle," she cried distractedly, "for God's sake do not follow him — for God's sake — I conjure you, I implore— " She would have cast herself at his feet, but the major caught her in his arms.

"Well, well, my darling." he exclaimed, "I'll not *kill* him, well as he deserves it — I'll not: you have saved his life. I pledge you my honour, as a gentleman and a soldier, I'll not harm him for what he has said or done this day — are you satisfied?"

"I am, I am! Thank God, thank God!" exclaimed the poor girl, eagerly.

"But, Mary, I must see him," rejoined the major; "he has threatened to set Sir Richard upon you — I must see him; you don't object to that, under the promise I have made? I want to — to *reason* with him. He shall not get you into trouble with the baronet; for though Richard and I came of the same mother, we are not of the same marriage, nor of the same mould — I would not for a cool hundred that he told his story to your father."

"Indeed, indeed, dear uncle," replied the girl, "I fear me there is little hope of escape or ease for me. My father must know what has passed; he will learn it inevitably, and then it needs no colouring or misrepresentation to call down upon me his heaviest displeasure; his anger I must endure as best I may. God help me. But neither threats nor violence shall make me retract the answer I have given to Lord Aspenly, nor ever yield consent to marry *him* — nor any other now."

"Well, well, little Mary," rejoined the major, "I like your spirit. Stand to that, and you'll never be sorry for it. In the meantime, I'll venture to exercise his lordship's conversational powers in a brief conference of a few minutes, and if I find him as reasonable as I expect, you'll have no cause to regret my interposition. Don't look so frightened — haven't I promised, on the honour of a gentleman, that I will *not* pink him for anything said or done in his conference with you? To send a small sword through a bolster or a bailiff," he continued, meditatively, "is an *indifferent* action; but to spit such a poisonous, crawling toad as the respectable old gentleman in question, would be nothing short of *meritorious* — it is an act that 'ud tickle the fancy of every saint in heaven, and, if there's justice on earth, would canonize myself. But never mind, I'll let it alone — the little thing shall escape, since *you* wish it — Major O'Leary has said it, so let no doubt disturb you. Goodbye, my little darling, dry your eyes, and let me see you, before an hour, as merry as in the merriest days that are gone."

So saying, Major O'Leary patted her cheek, and taking her hand affectionately in both his, he added, —

"Sure I am, that there is more in all this than you care to tell me, my little pet. I am sorely afraid there is something beyond my power to remedy, to change your lighthearted nature so mournfully. What it is, I will not inquire, but remember, darling, whenever you want a friend, you'll find a sure one in me."

Thus having spoken, he turned from her, and strode rapidly down the walk, until the thick, formal hedges concealed his retreating form behind their impenetrable screens of darksome verdure.

Odd as were the manner and style of the major's professions, there was something tender, something of heartiness, in his speech, which assured her that she had indeed found a friend in him — rash, volatile, and violent it might be, but still one on whose truth and energy she might calculate. That there was one being who felt with her and for her, was a discovery which touched her heart and moved her generous spirit, and she now regarded the old major, whose spoiled favourite in childhood she had been, but whom, before, she had never known capable of a serious feeling, with emotions of affection and gratitude, stronger and more ardent than he had ever earned from any other being. Agitated, grieved, and excited, she hurriedly left the scene of this interview, and sought relief for her overcharged feelings in the quiet and seclusion of her chamber.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SPINET.

In no very pleasant frame of mind did Lord Aspenly retrace his steps toward the old house. His lordship had, all his life, been firmly persuaded that the whole female creation had been sighing and pining for the possession of his heart and equipage. He knew that among those with whom his chief experience lay, his fortune and his coronet were considerations not to be resisted; and he as firmly believed, that even without such recommendations, few women, certainly none of any taste or discrimination, could be found with hearts so steeled against the archery of Cupid, as to resist the fascinations of his manner and conversation, supported and directed, as both were, by the tact and experience drawn from a practice of more years than his lordship cared to count, even to himself. He had, however, smiled, danced, and chatted, in impregnable celibacy, through more than half a century of gaiety and frivolity — breaking, as he thought, hearts innumerable, and, at all events, disappointing very many calculations — until, at length, his lordship had arrived at that precise period of existence at which old gentlemen, not unfrequently, become all at once romantic, disinterested, and indiscreet — nobody exactly knows why — unless it be for variety, or to spite an heir presumptive, or else that, as a preliminary to second childhood, nature has ordained a second *boyhood* too. Certain, however, it is, that Lord Aspenly was seized, on a sudden, with a matrimonial frenzy; and, tired of the hackneyed schemers, in the centre of whose manœuvres he had stood and smiled so long in contemptuous security, he resolved that his choice should honour some simple, unsophisticated beauty, who had never plotted his matrimony.

Fired with this benevolent resolution, he almost instantly selected Mary Ashwoode as the happy companion of his second childhood, acquainted Sir Richard with his purpose, of course received his consent and blessing, and forthwith opened his entrenchments with the same certainty of success with which the great Duke of Marlborough might have invested a Flanders village. The inexperience of a girl who had mixed, comparatively, so little in gay society, her consequent openness to flattery, and susceptibility of being fascinated by the elegance of his address, and the splendour of his fortune — all these considerations, accompanied by a clear consciousness of his own infinite condescension in thinking of her at all, had completely excluded from all his calculations the very possibility of her doing anything else than jump into his arms the moment he should open them to receive her. The result of the interview which had just taken place, had come upon him with the overwhelming suddenness of a thunderbolt. Rejected! — Lord Aspenly rejected! — a coronet, and a fortune, and a man whom all the male world might envy — each and all rejected! — and by whom? — a chit of a girl, who had no right to look higher than a half-pay captain with a wooden leg, or a foxhunting boor, with a few inaccessible acres of bog and mountain — the daughter of a spendthrift baronet, who was, as everyone knew, on the high road to ruin. Death and fury! was it to be endured?

The little lover, absorbed in such tranquilizing reflections, arrived at the house, and entered the drawingroom. It was not unoccupied; seated by a spinet, and with a sheet of music-paper in her lap, and a pencil in her hand, was the fair Emily Copland. As he entered, she raised her eyes, started a little, became gracefully confused, and then, with her archest smile, exclaimed, —

"What shall I say, my lord? You have detected me. I have neither defence nor palliation to offer; you have fairly caught me. Here am I engaged in perhaps the most presumptuous task that ever silly maiden undertook — I am wedding your beautiful verses to most unworthy music of my own. After all, there is nothing like a simple ballad. Such exquisite lines as these inspire music of themselves. Would that Henry Purcell had had but a peep at them! To what might they not have prompted such a genius — to what, indeed?"

So sublime was the flight of fancy suggested by this interrogatory, that Miss Copland shook her head slowly in poetic rapture, and gazed fondly for some seconds upon the carpet, apparently unconscious of Lord Aspenly's presence.

"*She* is a fine creature," half murmured he, with an emphasis upon the identity which implied a contrast not very favourable to Mary— "and — and very pretty — nay, she looks almost beautiful, and so — so lively — so much vivacity. Never was poor poet so much flattered," continued his lordship, approaching, as he spoke, and raising his voice, but not above its most mellifluous pitch; "to have his verses read by *such* eyes, to have them chanted by such a minstrel, were honour too high for the noblest bards of the noblest days of poetry: for me it is a happiness almost too great; yet, if the request be not a presumptuous one, may I, in all humility, pray that you will favour me with the music to which you have coupled my most undeserving — my most favoured lines?"

The young lady looked modest, glanced coyly at the paper which lay in her lap, looked modest once more, and then arch again, and at length, with rather a fluttered air, she threw her hands over the keys of the instrument, and to a tune, of which we say enough when we state that it was in no way unworthy of the words, she sang, rather better than young ladies usually do, the following exquisite stanzas from his lordship's pen: —

"Tho' Chloe slight me when I woo,
And scorn the love of poor Philander;
The shepherd's heart she scorns is true,
His heart is true, his passion tender.
"But poor Philander sighs in vain,
In vain laments the poor Philander;
Fair Chloe scorns with high disdain,
His love so true and passion tender.
"And here Philander lays him down,
Here will expire the poor Philander;
The victim of fair Chloe's frown,
Of love so true and passion tender.
"Ah, well-a-day! the shepherd's dead;
Ay, dead and gone, the poor Philander;
And Dryads crown with flowers his head,
And Cupid mourns his love so tender."

During this performance, Lord Aspenly, who had now perfectly recovered his equanimity, marked the time with head and hand, standing the while beside the fair performer, and every note she sang found its way through the wide portals of his vanity, directly to his heart.

"Brava! brava! bravissima!" murmured his lordship, from time to time. "Beautiful, beautiful air — most appropriate — most simple; not a note that accords not with the word it carries — beautiful, indeed! A thousand thanks! I have become quite conceited of lines of which heretofore I was half ashamed. I am quite elated — at once overpowered by the characteristic vanity of the poet, and more than recompensed by the reality of his proudest aspiration — that of seeing his verses appreciated by a heart of sensibility, and of hearing them sung by the lips of beauty."

"I am but too happy if I am *forgiven*," replied Emily Copland, slightly laughing, and with a heightened colour, while the momentary overflow of merriment was followed by a sigh, and her eyes sank pensively upon the ground.

This little by-play was not lost upon Lord Aspenly.

"Poor little thing," he inwardly remarked, "she is in a very bad way — desperate — quite desperate. What a devil of a rascal I am to be sure! Egad! it's almost a pity — she's a decidedly superior person; she has an elegant turn of mind — refinement — taste — egad! she is a fine creature — and so simple. She little knows I see it all; perhaps she hardly knows herself what ails her — poor, poor little thing!"

While these thoughts floated rapidly through his mind, he felt, along with his spite and anger towards Mary Ashwoode, a feeling of contempt, almost of disgust, engendered by her audacious non-appreciation of his merits — an impertinence which appeared the more monstrous by the contrast of Emily Copland's tenderness. *She* had made it plain enough, by all the artless signs which simple maidens know not how to hide, that his fascinations had done their fatal work upon her heart. He had seen, this for several days, but not with the overwhelming distinctness with which he now beheld it.

"Poor, poor little girl!" said his lordship to himself; "I am very, very sorry, but it cannot be helped; it is no fault of mine. I am really very, very, confoundedly sorry."

In saying so to himself, however, he told himself a lie; for, instead of being grieved, he was pleased beyond measure — a fact which he might have ascertained by a single glance at the reflection of his wreathed smiles in the ponderous mirror which hung forward from the pier between the windows, as if staring down in wondering curiosity upon the progress of the flirtation. Not caring to disturb a train of thought which his vanity told him were but riveting the subtle chains which bound another victim to his conquering chariot-wheels, the Earl of Aspenly turned, with careless ease, to a table, on which lay some specimens of that worsted tapestry-work, in which the fair maidens of a century and a half ago were wont to exercise their taste and skill.

"Your work is very, very beautiful," said he, after a considerable pause, and laying down the canvas, upon whose unfinished worsted task he had been for some time gazing.

"That is my *cousin's* work," said Emily, not sorry to turn the conversation to a subject upon which, for many reasons, she wished to dwell; "she used to work a great deal with me before she grew romantic — before she fell in love."

"In love! — with whom?" inquired Lord Aspenly, with remarkable quickness.

"Don't you know, my lord?" inquired Emily Copland, in simple wonder. "May be I ought not to have told you — I am sure I ought not. Do not ask me any more. I am the giddiest girl — the most thoughtless!"

"Nay, nay," said Lord Aspenly, "you need not be afraid to trust *me* — I never tell tales; and now that I know the fact that she is in love, there can be no harm in telling me the less important particulars. On my honour," continued his lordship, with real earnestness, and affected playfulness— "upon my sacred honour! I shall not breathe one syllable of it to mortal — I shall be as secret as the tomb. Who is the happy person in question?"

"Well, my lord, you'll *promise* not to betray me," replied she. "I know very well I ought not to have said a word about it; but as I *have* made the blunder, I see no harm in telling you all I know; but you *will* be secret?"

"On my honour — on my life and soul, I swear!" exclaimed his lordship, with unaffected eagerness.

"Well, then, the happy man is a Mr. Edmond O'Connor," replied she.

"O'Connor — O'Connor — I never saw nor heard of the man before," rejoined the earl, reflectively. "Is he wealthy?"

"Oh! no; a mere beggarman," replied Emily, "and a Papist to boot!"

"Ha, ha, ha — he, he, he! a Papist beggar," exclaimed his lordship, with an hysterical giggle, which was intended for a careless laugh. "Has he any conversation — any manner — any attraction of *that* kind?"

"Oh! none in the world! — both ignorant, and I think, vulgar," replied Emily. "In short, he is very nearly a stupid boor!"

"Excellent! Ha, ha — he, he, he! — ugh! ugh! — very capital — excellent! excellent!" exclaimed his lordship, although he might have found some difficulty in explaining in what, precisely the peculiar excellence of the announcement consisted. "Is he — is he — a — a — *handsome*?"

"Decidedly *not* what I consider handsome!" replied she; "he is a large, coarse-looking fellow, with very broad shoulders — very large — and as they say of oxen, in very great condition — a sort of a prize man!"

"Ha, ha! — ugh! ugh! — he, he, he, he, he! — ugh, ugh, ugh! — de — lightful — quite delightful!" exclaimed the earl, in a tone of intense chagrin, for he was conscious that his own figure was perhaps a little too scraggy, and his legs a *leetle* too nearly approaching the genus spindle, and being so, there was no trait in the female character which he so inveterately abhorred and despised as their tendency to prefer those figures which exhibited a due proportion of thew and muscle. Under a cloud of rappee, his lordship made a desperate attempt to look perfectly delighted and amused, and effected a retreat to the window, where he again indulged in a titter of unutterable spite and vexation.

"And what says Sir Richard to the advances of this very desirable gentleman?" inquired he, after a little time.

"Sir Richard is, of course, violently against it," replied Emily Copland.

"So I should have supposed," returned the little nobleman, briskly. And turning again to the window, he relapsed into silence, looked out intently for some minutes, took more snuff, and finally, consulting his watch, with a few words of apology, and a gracious smile and a bow, quitted the room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DARK ROOM — CONTAINING PLENTY OF SCARS AND BRUISES AND PLANS OF VENGEANCE.

On the same day a very different scene was passing in another quarter, whither for a few moments we must transport the reader. In a large and aristocratic-looking brick house, situated near the then fashionable suburb of Glasnevin, surrounded by stately trees, and within furnished with the most prodigal splendour, combined with the strictest and most minute attention to comfort and luxury, and in a large and lofty chamber, carefully darkened, screened round by the rich and voluminous folds of the silken curtains, with spider-tables laden with fruits and wines and phials of medicine, crowded around him, and rather buried than supported among a luxurious pile of pillows, lay, in sore bodily torment, with fevered pulse, and heart and brain busy with a thousand projects of revenge, the identical Nicholas Blarden, whose signal misadventure in the theatre, upon the preceding evening, we have already recorded. A decent-looking matron sate in a capacious chair, near the bed, in the capacity of nursetender, while her constrained and restless manner, as well as the frightened expression with which, from time to time, she stole a glance at the bloated mass of scars and bruises, of which she had the care, pretty plainly argued the sweet and patient resignation with which her charge endured his sufferings. In the recess of the curtained window sate a little black boy, arrayed according to the prevailing fashion, in a fancy suit, and with a turban on his head, and carrying in his awestruck countenance, as well as in the immobility of his attitude, a woeful contradiction to the gaiety of his attire.

"Drink — drink — where's that d —— d hag? — give me drink, I say!" howled the prostrate gambler.

The woman started to her feet, and with a step which fell noiselessly upon the deep-piled carpets which covered the floor, she hastened to supply him.

He had hardly swallowed the draught, when a low knock at the door announced a visitor.

“Come in, can’t you?” shouted Blarden.

“How do you feel now, Nicky dear?” inquired a female voice — and a handsome face, with rather a bold expression, and crowned by a small mob-cap, overlaid with a profusion of the richest lace, peeped into the room through the halfopen door— “how do you feel?”

“In *hell* — that’s all,” shouted he.

“Doctor Mallarde is below, love,” added she, without evincing either surprise or emotion of any kind at the concise announcement which the patient had just delivered.

“Let him come up then,” was the reply.

“And a Mr. M’Quirk — a messenger from Mr. Chancey.”

“Let *him* come up too. But why the hell did not Chancey come himself? — That will do — pack — be off.”

The lady tossed her head, like one having authority, looked half inclined to say something sharp, but thought better of it, and contented herself with shutting the door with more emphasis than Dr. Mallarde would have recommended.

The physician of those days was a solemn personage: he would as readily have appeared without his head, as without his full-bottomed wig; and his ponderous goldheaded cane was a sort of fifth limb, the supposition of whose absence involved a contradiction to the laws of anatomy; his dress was rich and funereal; his step was slow and pompous; his words very long and very few; his look was mysterious; his nod awful; and the shake of his head unfathomable: in short, he was in no respect very much better than a modern charlatan. The science which he professed was then overgrown with absurdities and mystification. The temper of the times was superstitious and credulous, the physician, being wise in his generation, framed his outward man (including his air and language) accordingly, and the populace swallowed his long words and his electuaries with equal faith.

Doctor Mallarde was a doctor-like person, and, in theatrical phraseology, looked the part well. He was tall and stately, saturnine and sallow in aspect, had bushy, grizzled brows, and a severe and prominent dark eye, a thin, hooked nose, and a pair of lips just as thin as it. Along with these advantages he had a habit of pressing the gold head of his professional cane against one corner of his mouth, in a way which produced a sinister and mysterious distortion of that organ; and by exhibiting the medical baton, the outward and visible sign of doctorship, in immediate juxtaposition with the fountain of language, added enormously to the gravity and authority of the words which from time to time proceeded therefrom.

In the presence of such a spectre as this — intimately associated with all that was nauseous and deadly on earth — it is hardly to be wondered at that even Nicholas Blarden felt himself somewhat uneasy and abashed. The physician felt his pulse, gazing the while upon the ceiling, and pressing the gold head of his cane, as usual, to the corner of his mouth; made him put out his tongue, asked him innumerable questions, which we forbear to publish, and ended by forbidding his patient the use of every comfort in which he had hitherto found relief, and by writing a prescription which might have furnished a country dispensary with good things for a twelvemonth. He then took his leave and his fee, with the grisly announcement, that unless the drugs were all swallowed, and the other matters attended to in a spirit of absolute submission, he would not answer for the life of the patient.

"I am d —— d glad he's gone at last," exclaimed Blarden, with a kind of gasp, as if a weight had been removed from his breast. "Curse me, if I did not feel all the time as if my coffin was in the room. Are you there, M'Quirk?"

"Here I am, Mr. Blarden," rejoined the person addressed, whom we may as well describe, as we shall have more to say about him by-and-by.

Mr. M'Quirk was a small, wiry man, of fifty years and upwards, arrayed in that style which is usually described as "shabby genteel." He was gifted with one of those mean and commonplace countenances which seem expressly made for the effectual concealment of the thoughts and feelings of the possessor — an advantage which he further secured by habitually keeping his eyes as nearly closed as might be, so that, for any indication afforded by them of the movements of the inward man, they might as well have been shut up altogether. The peculiarity, if not the grace, of his appearance, was heightened by a contraction of the muscles at the nape of the neck, which drew his head backward, and produced a corresponding elevation of the chin, which, along with a certain habitual toss of the head, gave to his appearance a kind of caricatured affectation of superciliousness and *hauteur*, very impressive to behold. Along with the swing of the head, which we have before noticed, there was, whenever he spoke, a sort of careless libration of the whole body, which, together with a certain way of jerking or twitching the right shoulder from time to time, were the only approaches to gesticulation in which he indulged.

"Well, what does your master say?" inquired Blarden— "out with it, can't you."

"Master — master — indeed! Cock *him* up with *master*," echoed the man, with lofty disdain.

"Ay! what does he say?" reiterated Blarden, in no very musical tones. "D —— you, are you choking, or moonstruck? Out with it, can't you?"

"*Chancey* says that you had better think the matter over — and that's his opinion," replied M'Quirk.

"And a fine opinion it is," rejoined Blarden, furiously. "Why, in hell's name, what's the matter with him — the — drivelling idiot? What's law for — what's the courts for? Am I to be trounced and cudgelled in the face of hundreds, and — and half *murdered*, and nothing for it? I tell you, I'll be beggared before the scoundrel shall escape. If every penny I'm worth in the world can buy it, I'll have justice. Tell that sleepy sot Chancey that I'll *make* him work. Ho — o — o — oh!" bawled the wretch, as his anguish all returned a hundredfold in the fruitless attempt to raise himself in bed.

"Drink, here — *drink* — I'm choking! Hock and water. D —— you, don't look so stupid and frightened. I'll not be bamboozled by an old 'pothecary. Quick with it, you fumbling witch."

He finished the draught, and lay silently for a time.

"See — mind me, M'Quirk," he said, after a pause, "tell Chancey to come out himself — tell him to be here before evening, or I'll make him sorry for it, do you mind; I want to give him directions. Tell him to come at once, or I'll make him *smoke* for it, that's all."

"I understand — all right — very well; and so, as you seem settling for a snooze, I wish you good-evening, Mr. Blarden, and all sorts of pleasure and happiness," rejoined the messenger.

The patient answered by a grin and a stifled howl, and Mr. M'Quirk, having his head within the curtains, which screened him effectually from the observation of the two attendants, and observing that Mr. Blarden's eyes were closely shut in the rigid compression of pain, put out his tongue, and indulged for a few seconds in an exceedingly ugly grimace, after which, repeating his farewell in a tone of respectful sympathy, he took his departure, chuckling inwardly all the way downstairs, for the little gentleman had a playful turn for mischief.

When Gordon Chancey, Esquire, barrister-at-law, in obedience to this summons, arrived at Cherry Hill, for so the residence of the sick voluptuary was called, he found his loving friend and patron, Nicholas Blarden, babbling not of green fields, but of green curtains, theatres, dice-boxes, bright eyes, small-swords, and the shades infernal — in a word, in a high state of delirium. On calling next day, however, he beheld him much recovered; and after an extremely animated discussion, these two well-assorted confederates at length, by their united ingenuity, succeeded in roughly sketching the outlines of a plan of terrific vengeance, in all respects worthy of the diabolical council in which it originated, and of whose progress and development this history very fully treats.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CRITIC — A CONDITION — AND THE SMALL-SWORDS.

Lord Aspenly walked forth among the trim hedges and secluded walks which surrounded the house, and by alternately taking enormous pinches of rappee, and humming a favourite air or two, he wonderfully assisted his philosophy in recovering his equanimity.

"It matters but little how the affair ends," thought his lordship, "if in matrimony — the girl is, after all, a very fine girl: but if the matter is fairly off, in that case I shall — look very foolish," suggested his conscience faintly, but his lordship dismissed the thought precipitately— "in that case I shall make it a point to marry within a fortnight. I should like to know the girl who would refuse *me*"— "*the only one you ever asked*," suggested his conscience again, but with no better result— "I should like to see the girl of sense or discrimination who *could* refuse me. I shall marry the finest girl in the country, and *then* I presume very few will be inclined to call me fool."

"Not *I* for one, my lord," exclaimed a voice close by. Lord Aspenly started, for he was conscious that in his energy he had uttered the concluding words of his proud peroration with audible emphasis, and became instantly aware that the speaker was no other than Major O'Leary.

"Not *I* for one, my lord," repeated the major, with extreme gravity, "I take it for granted, my lord, that you are no fool."

"I am obliged to you, Major O'Leary, for your good opinion," replied his lordship, drily, with a surprised look and a stiff inclination of his person.

"Nothing to be grateful for in it," replied the major, returning the bow with grave politeness: "if years and discretion increase together, you and I ought to be models of wisdom by this time of day. I'm proud of my years, my lord, and I would be half as proud again if I could count as many as your lordship."

There was something singularly abrupt and uncalled for in all this, which Lord Aspenly did not very well understand; he therefore stopped short, and looked in the major's face; but reading in its staid and formal gravity nothing whatever to furnish a clue to his exact purpose, he made a kind of short bow, and continued his walk in dignified silence. There was something exceedingly disagreeable, he thought, in the manner of his companion — something very near approaching to cool impertinence — which he could not account for upon any other supposition than that the major had been prematurely indulging in the joys of Bacchus. If, however, he thought that by the assumption of the frigid and lofty dignity with which he met the advances of the major, he was likely to relieve himself of his company, he was never more lamentably mistaken. His military companion walked with a careless swagger by his side, exactly regulating his pace by that of the little nobleman, whose meditations he had so cruelly interrupted.

“What on earth is to be done with this brute beast?” muttered his lordship, taking care, however, that the query should not reach the subject of it. “I must get rid of him — I must speak with the girl privately — what the deuce is to be done?”

They walked on a little further in perfect silence. At length his lordship stopped short and exclaimed, —

“My dear major, I am a very dull companion — quite a bore; there are times when the mind — the — the — spirits require *solitude* — and these walks are the very scene for a lonely ramble. I dare venture to aver that you are courting solitude like myself — your silence betrays you — then pray do not stand on ceremony — *that* walk leads down toward the river — pray no ceremony.”

“Upon my conscience, my lord, I never was less inclined to stand on ceremony than I am at this moment,” replied the major; “so give yourself no trouble in the world about me. Nothing would annoy me so much as to have you think I was doing anything but precisely what I liked best myself.”

Lord Aspenly bowed, took a violent pinch of snuff, and walked on, the major still keeping by his side. After a long silence his lordship began to lilt his own sweet verses in a careless sort of a way, which was intended to convey to his tormentor that he had totally forgotten his presence: —

“Tho’ Chloe slight me when I woo,
And scorn the love of poor Philander;
The shepherd’s heart she scorns is true,
His heart is true, his passion tender.”

"Passion tender," observed the major— "*passion* tender — it's a *nurse*-tender the like of you and me ought to be looking for — *passion* tender — upon my conscience, a good joke."

Lord Aspenly was strongly tempted to give vent to his feelings; but even at the imminent risk of bursting, he managed to suppress his fury. The major was certainly (however unaccountable and mysterious the fact might be) in a perfectly cut-throat frame of mind, and Lord Aspenly had no desire to present *his* weasand for the entertainment of his military friend.

"Tender — *tender*," continued the inexorable major, "allow me, my lord, to suggest the word *tough* as an improvement — *tender*, my lord, is a term which does not apply to chickens beyond a certain time of life, and it strikes me as too bold a license of poetry to apply it to a gentleman of such extreme and venerable old age as your lordship; for I take it for granted that Philander is another name for yourself."

As the major uttered this critical remark, Lord Aspenly felt his brain, as it were, fizz with downright fury; the instinct of self-preservation, however, triumphed; he mastered his generous indignation, and resumed his walk in a state of mind nothing short of awful.

"My lord," inquired the major, with tragic abruptness, and with very stern emphasis— "I take the liberty of asking, *have you made your soul*?"

The precise nature of the major's next proceeding, Lord Aspenly could not exactly predict; of one thing, however, he felt assured, and that was, that the designs of his companion were decidedly of a dangerous character, and as he gazed in mute horror upon the major, confused but terrific ideas of "homicidal monomania," and coroner's inquests floated dimly through his distracted brain.

"My soul?" faltered he, in undisguised trepidation.

"Yes, my lord," repeated the major, with remarkable coolness, "have you made your soul?"

During this conference his lordship's complexion had shifted from its original lemon-colour to a lively orange, and thence faded gradually off into a pea-green; at which hue it remained fixed during the remainder of the interview.

"I protest — you cannot be serious — I am wholly in the dark. Positively, Major O'Leary, this is very unaccountable conduct — you really ought — pray explain."

“Upon my conscience, I *will* explain,” rejoined the major, “although the explanation won’t make you much more in love with your present predicament, unless I am very much out. You made my niece, Mary Ashwoode, an offer of marriage to-day; well, she was much obliged to you, but she did not *want* to marry you, and she told you so civilly. Did you then, like a man and a gentleman, take your answer from her as you ought to have done, quietly and courteously? No, you did not; you went to bully the poor girl, and to insult her; because she politely declined to marry a — a — an ugly bunch of wrinkles, like you; and you threatened to tell Sir Richard — ay, you *did* — to tell him your pitiful story, you — you — you — but wait awhile. You want to have the poor girl frightened and bullied into marrying you. Where’s your spirit or your feeling, my lord? But you don’t know what the words mean. If ever you did, you’d sooner have been racked to death, than have terrified and insulted a poor friendless girl, as you thought her. But she’s *not* friendless. I’ll teach you she’s not. As long as this arm can lift a small-sword, and while the life is in my body, I’ll never see any woman maltreated by a scoundrel — a *scoundrel*, my lord; but I’ll bring him to his knees for it, or die in the attempt. And holding these opinions, did you think I’d let you offend my niece? *No*, sir, I’d be blown to atoms first.”

“Major O’Leary,” replied his lordship, as soon as he had collected his thoughts and recovered breath to speak, “your conduct is exceedingly violent — very, and, I will add, most hasty and indiscreet. You have entirely misconceived me, you have mistaken the whole affair. You will regret this violence — I protest — I know you will, when you understand the whole matter. At present, knowing the nature of your feelings, I protest, though I might naturally resent your observations, it is not in my nature, in my *heart* to be angry.” This was spoken with a very audible quaver.

“You *would*, my lord, you *would* be angry,” rejoined the major, “you’d *dance* with fury this moment, if you *dared*. You could find it in your heart to go into a passion with a *girl*; but talking with men is a different sort of thing. Now, my lord, we are both here, with our swords; no place can be more secluded, and, I presume, no two men more willing. Pray draw, my lord, or I’ll be apt to spoil your velvet and gold lace.”

“Major O’Leary, I *will* be heard!” exclaimed Lord Aspenly, with an earnestness which the imminent peril of his person inspired— “I *must* have a word or two with you, before we put this dispute to so deadly an arbitrament."

The major had foreseen and keenly enjoyed the reluctance and the evident tremors of his antagonist. He returned his half-drawn sword to its scabbard with an impatient thrust, and, folding his arms, looked down with supreme contempt upon the little peer.

"Major O'Leary, you have been misinformed — Miss Ashwoode has mistaken me. I assure you, I meant no disrespect — none in the world, I protest. I may have spoken hastily — perhaps I did — but I never intended disrespect — never for a moment."

"Well, my lord, suppose that I admit that you did *not* mean any disrespect; and suppose that I distinctly assert that I have neither right nor inclination just now to call you to an account for anything you may have said, in your interview this morning, offensive to my niece; I give you leave to suppose it, and, what's more, in supposing it, I solemnly aver, you suppose neither more nor less than the exact truth," said the major.

"Well, then, Major O'Leary," replied Lord Aspenly, "I profess myself wholly at a loss to understand your conduct. I presume, at all events, that nothing further need pass between us about the matter."

"Not so fast, my lord, if you please," rejoined the major; "a great deal more must pass between us before I have done with your lordship; although I cannot punish you for the past, I have a perfect right to restrain you for the future. I have a proposal to make, to which I expect your lordship's assent — a proposal which, under the circumstances, I dare say, you will think, however unpleasant, by no means unreasonable."

"Pray state it," said Lord Aspenly, considerably reassured on finding that the debate was beginning to take a diplomatic turn.

"This is my proposal, then," replied the major: "you shall write a letter to Sir Richard, renouncing all pretensions to his daughter's hand, and taking upon yourself the whole responsibility of the measure, without implicating *her* directly or indirectly; do you mind: and you shall leave this place, and go wherever you please, before supper-time tonight. These are the conditions on which I will consent to spare you, my lord, and upon no other shall you escape."

"Why, what can you mean, Major O'Leary?" exclaimed the little coxcomb, distractedly. "If I did any such thing, I should be run through by

Sir Richard or his rakehelly son; besides, I came here for a wife — my friends know it; I *cannot* consent to make a fool of myself. How *dare* you presume to propose such conditions to me?"

The little gentleman as he wound up, had warmed so much, that he placed his hand on the hilt of his sword. Without one word of commentary, the major drew his, and with a nod of invitation, threw himself into an attitude of defence, and resting the point of his weapon upon the ground, awaited the attack of his adversary. Perhaps Lord Aspenly regretted the precipitate valour which had prompted him to place his hand on his sword-hilt, as much as he had ever regretted any act of his whole life; it was, however, too late to recede, and with the hurried manner of one who has made up his mind to a disagreeable thing, and wishes it soon over, he drew his also, and their blades were instantly crossed in mortal opposition.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE COMBAT AND ITS ISSUE.

Lord Aspenly made one or two eager passes at his opponent, which were parried with perfect ease and coolness; and before he had well recovered his position from the last of those lunges, a single clanging sweep of the major's sword, taking his adversary's blade from the point to the hilt with irresistible force, sent his lordship's weapon whirring through the air some eight or ten yards away.

"Take your life, my lord," said the major, contemptuously; "I give it to you freely, only wishing the present were more valuable. What do you say *now*, my lord, to the terms?"

"I say, sir — what do *I* say?" echoed his lordship, not very coherently. "Major O'Leary, you have disarmed me, sir, and you ask me what I say to your terms. What do I say? Why, sir, I say again what I said before, that I cannot and will not subscribe to them."

Lord Aspenly, having thus delivered himself, looked half astonished and half frightened at his own valour.

"Everyone to his taste — your lordship has an uncommon inclination for slaughter," observed the major coolly, walking to the spot where lay the little gentleman's sword, raising it, and carelessly presenting it to him: "take it, my lord, and use it more cautiously than you *have* done — defend yourself!"

Little expecting another encounter, yet ashamed to decline it, his lordship, with a trembling hand, grasped the weapon once more, and again their blades were crossed in deadly combat. This time his lordship prudently forbore to risk his safety by an impetuous attack upon an adversary so cool and practised as the major, and of whose skill he had just had so convincing a proof. Major O'Leary, therefore, began the attack; and pressing his opponent with some slight feints and passes, followed him closely as he retreated for some twenty yards, and then, suddenly striking up to the point of his lordship's sword with his own, he seized the little nobleman's right arm at the wrist with a grasp like a vice, and once more held his life at his disposal.

“Take your life for the second and the *last* time,” said the major, having suffered the wretched little gentleman for a brief pause to fully taste the bitterness of death; “mind, my lord, for the *last* time;” and so saying, he contemptuously flung his lordship from him by the arm which he grasped.

“Now, my lord, before we begin for the *last* time, listen to me,” said the major, with a sternness, which commanded all the attention of the affrighted peer; “I desire that you should *fully* understand what I propose. I would not like to kill you under a mistake — there is nothing like a clear, mutual understanding during a quarrel. Such an understanding being once established, bloodshed, if it unfortunately occurs, can scarcely, even in the most scrupulous bosom, excite the mildest regret. I wish, my lord, to have nothing whatever to reproach myself with in the catastrophe which you appear to have resolved shall overtake you; and, therefore, I’ll state the whole case for your dying consolation in as few words as possible. Don’t be in a hurry, my lord, I’ll not detain you more than five minutes in this miserable world. Now, my lord, you have two strong, indeed I may call them in every sense *fatal*, objections to my proposal. The first is, that if you write the letter I propose, you must fight Sir Richard and young Henry Ashwoode. Now, I pledge myself, my soul, and honour, as a Christian, a soldier, and a gentleman, that I will stand between you and them — that *I* will protect you completely from all responsibility upon that score — and that if anyone is to fight with either of them, it shall not be you. Your second objection is, that having been fool enough to tell the world that you were coming here for a wife, you are ashamed to go away without one. Now, without meaning to be offensive, I never heard anything more idiotic in the whole course of my life. But if it *must* be so, and that you cannot go away without a wife, why the d —— l don’t you ask Emily Copland — a fine girl with some thousands of pounds, I believe, and at all events dying for love of you, as I am sure you see yourself? You can’t care for one more than the other, and why the deuce need you trouble your head about their gossip, if anyone wonders at the change? And now, my lord, mark me, I have said all that is to be said in the way of commentary or observation upon my proposal, and I must add a word or two about the consequences of finally rejecting it. I have spared your life twice, my lord, within these five minutes. If you refuse the accommodation I have proposed, I will a third time give you an opportunity of disembarrassing yourself of the whole affair by running me through the body — in which, if you fail, so sure as you are this moment alive and breathing before me, you shall, at the end of the next five, be a corpse. So help me God!"

Major O'Leary paused, leaving Lord Aspenly in a state of confusion and horror, scarcely short of distraction.

There was no mistaking the major's manner, and the old *beau garçon* already felt in imagination the cold steel busy with his intestines.

"But, Major O'Leary," said he, despairingly, "will you engage — can you pledge yourself that no mischief shall follow from my withdrawing as you say? not that I would care to avoid a duel when occasion required; but no one likes to unnecessarily risk himself. Will you indeed prevent all unpleasantness?"

"Did I pledge my soul and honour that I would?" inquired the major sternly.

"Well, I am satisfied. I do agree," replied his lordship. "But is there any occasion for me to remove *tonight*?"

"Every occasion," replied the major, coolly. "You must come directly with me, and write the letter — and this evening, before supper, you must leave Morley Court. And, above all things, just remember this, let there be no trickery or treachery in this matter. So sure as I see the smallest symptom of anything of the kind, I will bring about such another piece of work as has not been for many a long day. Am I fully understood?"

"Perfectly — perfectly, my dear sir," replied the nobleman. "Clearly understood. And believe me, Major, when I say that nothing but the fact that I myself, for private reasons, am not unwilling to break the matter off, could have induced me to cooperate with you in this business. Believe me, sir, otherwise I should have fought until one or other of us had fallen to rise no more."

"To be sure you would, my lord," rejoined the major, with edifying gravity. "And in the meantime your lordship will much oblige me by walking up to the house. There's pen and paper in Sir Richard's study; and between us we can compose something worthy of the occasion. Now, my lord, if you please."

Thus, side by side, walked the two elderly gentlemen, like the very best friends, towards the old house. And shrewd indeed would have been that observer who could have gathered from the manner of either (whatever their flushed faces and somewhat ruffled exterior might have told), as with formal courtesy they threaded the trim arbours together, that but a few minutes before each had sought the other’s life.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE HELL — GORDON CHANCEY — LUCK — FRENZY AND A RESOLUTION.

The night which followed this day found young Henry Ashwoode, his purse replenished with banknotes, that day advanced by Craven, to the amount of one thousand pounds, once more engaged in the delirious prosecution of his favourite pursuit — gaming. In the neighbourhood of the theatre, in that narrow street now known as Smock Alley, there stood in those days a kind of coffee-house, rather of the better sort. From the public-room, in which actors, politicians, officers, and occasionally a member of parliament, or madcap Irish peer, chatted, lounged, and sipped their sack or coffee — the initiated, or, in short, any man with a good coat on his back and a few pounds in his pocket, on exchanging a brief whisper with a singularly sleek-looking gentleman, who sate in the prospective of the background, might find his way through a small, baize-covered door in the back of the chamber, and through a lobby or two, and thence upstairs into a suite of rooms, decently hung with gilded leather, and well lighted with a profusion of wax candles, where hazard and cards were played for stakes unlimited, except by the fortunes and the credit of those who gamed. The ceaseless clang of the dice-box and rattle of the dice upon the table, and the clamorous challenging and taking of the odds upon the throwing, accompanied by the ferocious blasphemies of desperate losers, who, with clenched hands and distracted gestures, poured, unheeded, their frantic railings and imprecations, as they, in unpitied agony, withdrew from the fatal table; and now and then the scarcely less hideous interruptions of brutal quarrels, accusations, and recriminations among the excited and half-drunken gamblers, were the sounds which greeted the ear of him who ascended toward this unhallowed scene. The rooms were crowded — the atmosphere hot and stifling, and the company in birth and pretensions, if not in outward attire, to the full as mixed and various as the degrees of fortune, which scattered riches and ruin promiscuously among them. In the midst of all this riotous uproar, several persons sate and played at cards as if (as, perhaps, was really the case), perfectly unconscious of the ceaseless hubbub going on around them. Here you might see in one place the hare-brained young squire, scarcely three months launched upon the road to ruin, snoring in drunken slumber, in his deep-cushioned chair, with his cravat untied, and waistcoat loosened, and his last cup of mulled sack upset upon the table beside him, and streaming upon his velvet breeches and silken hose — while his lightly-won bank notes, stuffed into the loose coat pocket, and peeping temptingly from the aperture, invited the fingers of the first *chevalier d'industrie* who wished to help himself. In another place you might behold two sharpers fulfilling the conditions of their partnership, by wheedling a half-tipsy simpleton into a quiet game of ombre. And again, elsewhere you might descry some bully captain, whose occupation having ended with the Irish wars, indemnified himself as best he might by such contributions as he could manage to levy from the young and reckless in such haunts as this, busily and energetically engaged in browbeating a timid greenhorn, who has the presumption to fancy that he has won something from the captain, which the captain has forgotten to pay. In another place you may see, unheeded and unheeding, the wretch who has played and lost his last stake; with white, unmeaning face and idiotic grin, glaring upon the floor, thought and feeling palsied, something worse, and more appalling than a maniac.

The whole character of the assembly bespoke the recklessness and the selfishness of its ingredients. There was, too, among them a certain coarse and revolting disregard and defiance of the etiquettes and conventional decencies of social life. More than half the men were either drunk or tipsy; some had thrown off their coats and others wore their hats; altogether the company had more the appearance of a band of reckless rioters in a public street, than of an assembly of persons professing to be gentlemen, and congregated in a drawingroom.

By the fireplace in the first and by far the largest and most crowded of the three drawingrooms, there sate a person whose appearance was somewhat remarkable. He was an ill-made fellow, with long, lank, limber legs and arms, and an habitual lazy stoop. His face was sallow; his mouth, heavy and sensual, was continually moistened with the brandy and water which stood beside him upon a small spider-table, placed there for his especial use. His eyes were long-cut, and seldom more than half open, and carrying in their sleepy glitter a singular expression of treachery and brute cunning. He wore his own lank and grizzled hair, instead of a peruke, and sate before the fire with a drowsy inattention to all that was passing in the room; and, except for the occasional twinkle of his eye as it glanced from the corner of his half-closed lids, he might have been believed to have been actually asleep. His attitude was lounging and listless, and all his movements so languid and heavy, that they seemed to be rather those of a somnambulist than of a waking man. His dress had little pretension, and less neatness; it was a suit of threadbare, mulberry-coloured cloth, with steel buttons, and evidently but little acquainted with the clothes-brush. His linen was soiled and crumpled, his shoes ill-cleaned, his beard had enjoyed at least two days' undisturbed growth; and the dingy hue of his face and hands bespoke altogether the extremest negligence and slovenliness of person.

This slovenly and ungainly being, who sate apparently unconscious of the existence of any other earthly thing than the fire on which he gazed, and the grog which from time to time he lazily sipped, was Gordon Chancey, Esquire, of Skycopper Court, Whitefriar Street, in the city of Dublin, barrister-at-law — a gentleman who had never been known to do any professional business, but who managed, nevertheless, to live, and to possess, somehow or other, the command of very considerable sums of money, which he most advantageously invested by discounting, at exorbitant interest, short bills and promissory notes in such places as that in which he now sate — one of his favourite resorts, by the way. At intervals of from five to ten minutes he slowly drew from the vast pocket of his clumsy coat a bulky pocketbook, and sleepily conned over certain memoranda with which its leaves were charged — then having looked into its well-lined receptacles, to satisfy himself that no miracle of legerdemain had abstracted the treasure on which his heart was set, he once more fastened the buckle of the leathern budget, and deposited it again in his pocket. This procedure, and his attentions to the spirits and water, which from time to time he swallowed, succeeded one another with a monotonous regularity altogether undisturbed by the uproarious scene which surrounded him.

As the night wore apace, and fortune played her wildest pranks, many an applicant — some successfully, and some in vain — sought Chancey's succour.

"Come, my fine fellow, tip me a cool hundred," exclaimed a fashionably-dressed young man, flushed with the combined excitement of wine and the dice, and tapping Chancey on the back impatiently with his knuckles— "this moment — will you, and be d — — "

"Oh, dear me, dear me, Captain Markham," drawled the barrister in a low, drowsy tone, as he turned sleepily toward the speaker, "have you lost the other hundred so soon? Oh, dear! — oh, dear!"

"Never you mind, old fox. Shell out, if you're going to do it," rejoined the applicant. "What is it to you?"

"Oh, dear me, dear me!" murmured Chancey, as he languidly drew the pocketbook from his pocket. "When shall I make it payable? Tomorrow?"

"D —— n tomorrow," replied the captain. "I'll sleep all tomorrow. Won't a fortnight do, you harpy?"

"Well, well — sign — sign it here," said the usurer, handing the paper, with a pen, to the young gentleman, and indicating with his finger the spot where the name was to be written.

The *roué* wrote his name without ever reading the paper; and Chancey carefully deposited it in his book.

"The money — the money — d —— n you, will you never give it!" exclaimed the young man, actually stamping with impatience, as if every moment's absence from the hazard-table cost him a fortune. "Give — give — *give* them."

He seized the notes, and without counting, stuffed them into his coatpocket, and plunged in an instant again among the gamblers who crowded the table.

"Mr. Chancey — Mr. Chancey," said a slight young man, whose whole appearance betokened a far progress in the wasting of a mortal decline. His face was pale as death itself, and glittering with the cold, clammy dew of weakness and excitement. The eye was bright, wild, and glassy; and the features of this attenuated face trembled and worked in the spasms of agonized anxiety and despair — with timid voice, and with the fearful earnestness of one pleading for his life — with knees half bent, and head stretched forward, while his thin fingers were clutched and knotted together in restless feverishness. He still repeated at intervals in low, supplicating accents— "Mr. Chancey — Mr. Chancey — can you spare a moment, sir — Mr. Chancey, good sir — Mr. Chancey."

For many minutes the worthy barrister gazed on apathetically into the fire, as if wholly unconscious that this piteous spectacle was by his side, and all but begging his attention.

"Mr. Chancey, good sir — Mr. Chancey, kind sir — only one moment — one word — Mr. Chancey."

This time the wretched young man advanced one of his trembling hands, and laid it hesitatingly upon Chancey's knee — the seat of mercy, as the ancients thought; but truly here it was otherwise. The hand was repulsed with insolent rudeness; and the wretched suppliant stood trembling in silence before the bill-discounter, who looked upon him with a scowl of brute ferocity, which the timid advances he had made could hardly have warranted.

"Well," growled Chancey, keeping his baleful eyes fixed not very encouragingly upon the poor young man.

"I have been unfortunate, sir — I have lost my last shilling — that is, the last I have about me at present."

"Well," repeated he.

"I might win it all back," continued the suppliant, becoming more voluble as he proceeded. "I might recover it *all* — it has often happened to me before. Oh, sir, it is possible — *certain*, if I had but a few pounds to play on."

"Ay, the old story," rejoined Chancey.

"Yes, sir, it is indeed — indeed it is, Mr. Chancey," said the young man, eagerly, catching at this improvement upon his first laconic address as an indication of some tendency to relent, and making, at the same time, a most woeful attempt to look pleasant— "it is, sir — the old story, indeed; but this time it will come out true — indeed it will. Will you do one little note for me — a *little* one — twenty pounds?"

"No, I won't," drawled Chancey, imitating with coarse buffoonery the intonation of the request— "I won't do a *little* one for you."

"Well, for ten pounds — for *ten* only."

"No, nor for ten pence," rejoined Chancey, tranquilly.

"You may keep five out of it for the discount — for friendship — only let me have five — just *five*," urged the wasted gambler, with an agony of supplication.

"No, I won't; *just five*," replied the lawyer.

“I’ll make it payable tomorrow,” urged the suppliant.

“Maybe you’ll be dead before that,” drawled Chancey, with a sneer; “the life don’t look very tough in you.”

“Ah! Mr. Chancey, dear sir — good Mr. Chancey,” said the young man, “you often told me you’d do me a friendly turn yet. Do not you remember it? — when I was able to lend you money. For God’s sake, lend me five pounds now, or anything; I’ll give you half my winnings. You’ll save me from beggary — ah, sir, for old friendship.”

Mr. Gordon Chancey seemed wondrously tickled by this appeal; he gazed sleepily at the fire while he raked the embers with the toe of his shoe, stuffed his hands deep into his breeches pockets, and indulged in a sort of lazy, comfortable laughter, which lasted for several minutes, until at length it subsided, leaving him again apparently unconscious of the presence of his petitioner. Emboldened by the condescension of his quondam friend, the young man made a piteous effort to join in the laughter — an attempt, however, which was speedily interrupted by the hollow cough of consumption. After a pause of a minute or two, during which Chancey seemed to have forgotten his existence, he once more addressed that gentleman, —

“Well, sir — well, Mr. Chancey?”

The barrister turned full upon him with an expression of face not to be mistaken, and in a tone just as unequivocal, he growled, —

“I’m d —— d if I give you as much as a leaden penny. Be off; there’s no *begging* allowed here — away with you, you blackguard.”

Having thus delivered himself, Chancey relapsed into his ordinary dreamy quiet.

Every muscle in the pale, wasted face of the ruined, dying gamester quivered with fruitless agony; he opened his mouth to speak, but could not; he gasped and sobbed, and then, clutching his lank hands over his eyes and forehead as though he would fain have crushed his head to pieces, he uttered one low cry of anguish, more despairing and appalling than the loudest shriek of horror, and passed from the room unnoticed.

“Jeffries, can you lend me fifty or a hundred pounds till tomorrow?” said young Ashwoode, addressing a middle-aged fop who had just reeled in from an adjoining room.

"*Cuss* me, Ashwoode, if the thing is a possibility," replied he, with a hiccough; "I have just been fairly cleaned out by Snarley and two or three others — not one guinea left — confound them all. I've this moment had to beg a crown to pay my chair and link-boy home; but Chancey is here; I saw him not an hour ago in his old corner."

"So he is, egad — thank you," and Ashwoode was instantly by the monied man's side. "Chancey, I want a hundred and fifty — quickly, man, are you awake?" and so saying, he shook the lawyer roughly by the shoulder.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" exclaimed he, in his usual low, sleepy voice, "it's Mr. Ashwoode, it is indeed — dear me, dear me; and can I oblige you, Mr. Ashwoode?"

"Yes; don't I tell you I want a hundred and fifty — or stay, two hundred," said Ashwoode, impatiently. "I'll pay you in a week or less — say tomorrow if you please it."

"Whatever sum you like, Mr. Ashwoode," rejoined he— "whatever sum or whatever date you please; I declare to God I'm uncommonly glad to do it. Oh, dear, but them dice *is* unruly. Two hundred, you say, and a — a *week* we'll say, not to be pressing. Well, well, this money has luck in it, maybe. That's a long lane that has no turn — fortune changes sides when it's least expected. Your name here, Mr. Ashwoode."

The name was signed, the notes taken, and Ashwoode once more at the table; but alack-a-day! fortune was for once steady, and frowned with consistent obdurateness upon Henry Ashwoode. Five minutes had hardly passed, when the two hundred pounds had made themselves wings and followed the larger sums which he had already lost. Again he had recourse to Chancey: again he found that gentleman smooth, gracious, and obliging as he could have wished. Still his luck was adverse: as fast as he drew the notes from his pocket, they were caught and whirled away in the eddy of ruin. Once more from the accommodating barrister he drew a larger sum, — still with a like result. So large and frequent were his drafts, that Chancey was obliged to go away and replenish his exhausted treasury; and still again and again, with a terrible monotony of disaster, young Ashwoode continued to lose.

At length the grey, cold light of morning streamed drearily through the chinks of the window-shutters into the hot chamber of destruction and debauchery. The sounds of daily business began to make themselves heard from the streets. The wax lights were flaring in the sockets. The floor strewn with packs of cards, broken glasses, and plates, and fragments of fowls and bread, and a thousand other disgusting indications of recent riot and debauchery which need not to be mentioned. Soiled and jaded, with bloodshot eyes and haggard faces, the gamblers slunk, one by one, in spiritless exhaustion, from the scene of their distracting orgies, to rest the brain and refresh the body as best they might.

With a stunning and indistinct sense of disaster and ruin; a vague, fevered, dreamy remembrance of overwhelming calamity: a stupefying, haunting consciousness that all the clatter, and roaring, and stifling heat, and jostling, and angry words, and smooth, civil speeches of the night past, had been, somehow or other, to him fraught with fearful and tremendous agony, and delirium, and ruin — Ashwoode stalked into the street, and mechanically proceeded to the inn where his horse was stabled.

The ostler saw, by the haggard, vacant stare with which Ashwoode returned his salutation, that something had gone wrong, and, as he held the stirrup for him, he arrived at the conclusion that the young gentleman must have gotten at least a dozen duels upon his hands, to be settled, one and all, before breakfast.

The young man dashed the spurs into the high-mettled horse, and traversing the streets at a perilous speed, without well thinking or knowing whitherward he was proceeding, he found himself at length among the wild lanes and brushwood of the Royal Park, and was recalled to himself by finding his horse rearing and floundering up to his sides in a slough. Having extricated the animal, he dismounted, threw his hat beside him, and, kneeling down, bathed his head and face again and again in the water of a little brook, which ran in many a devious winding through the tangled briars and thorns. The cold, refreshing ablution, assisted by the sharp air of the morning, soon brought him to his recollection.

“The fiend himself must have been by my elbow last night,” he muttered, as he stood bareheaded, in wild disorder, by the brook’s side. “I’ve lost before, and lost heavily too, but such a run, such an infernal string of ruinous losses. First, a thousand pounds gone — swallowed up in little more than an hour; and then the devil knows how much more — curse me, if I can remember *how* much I borrowed. I am over head and ears in

Chancey's books. How shall I face my father? and how, in the fiend's name, am I to meet my engagements? Craven will hand me no more of the money. Was I mad or drunk, to go on against such an accursed tide of bad luck? — what fury from hell possessed me? I wish I had thrust my hand between the bars, and burnt it to the elbow, before I took the dice-box last night. What's to be done?" — he paused— "Yes — I *must* do it — fate, destiny, circumstances drive me to it. I *will* marry the woman; she can't live very long — it's not likely; and even if she does, what's that to me? — the world is wide enough for us both, and once married, we need not plague one another much with our society. I must see Chancey about those d —— d bills or notes: curse me, if I even know when they are payable. My brain swims like a sea. Lady Stukely, Lady Stukely, you are a happy woman: it's an ill wind that blows nobody good — I am resolved — my course is taken. First then for Morley Court, and next for the wealthy widow's. I don't half like the thing, but, d —— n it, what other chance have I? Then away with hesitation, away with thought; fate has ordained it."

So saying, the young man donned his hat, caught the bridle of his well-trained steed, vaulted into the saddle, and was soon far on his way to Morley Court, where strange and startling tidings awaited his arrival.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DEPARTURE OF THE PEER — THE BILLET AND THE SHATTERED MIRROR.

Never yet did day pass more disagreeably to mortal man than that whose early events we have recorded did to Lord Aspenly. His vanity and importance had suffered more mortification within the last few hours than he had ever before encountered in all the eight-and-sixty winters of his previous useful existence. And spite of the major’s assurances to the contrary, he could not help feeling certain very unpleasant misgivings, as the evening approached, touching the consequences likely to follow to himself from his meditated retreat.

He resolved by the major’s advice to leave Morley Court without a formal leavetaking, or, in short, any explanatory interview whatever with Sir Richard. And for the purpose of taking his departure without obstruction or annoyance, he determined that the hour of his setting forth should be that at which the baronet was wont to retire for a time to his dressing-room, previously to appearing at supper. The note which was to announce his departure was written and sealed, and deposited in his waistcoat pocket. He felt that it supplied but a very meagre explanation of so decided a step as he was constrained to take; nevertheless it was the only explanation he had to offer. He well knew that its perusal would be followed by an explosion, and he not unwisely thought it best, under all the circumstances, to withdraw to a reasonable distance before springing the mine.

The evening closed ominously in storm and cloud; the wind was hourly rising, and distant mutterings of thunder bespoke a night of tempest. Lord Aspenly had issued his orders with secrecy, and they were punctually obeyed. At the hour indicated, his own and his servant’s horses were at the door. Lord Aspenly was crossing the hall, cloaked, booted, and spurred for the road, when he encountered Emily Copland.

“Dear me, my lord, can it be possible — surely you are not going to leave us tonight?”

“Indeed, it is but too true, fair lady,” rejoined his lordship, with a dolorous shrug. “An unlucky *contretemps* requires my attendance in town; my precipitate flight,” he continued, with an attempt at a playful smile, “is accounted for in this note, which perhaps you will kindly deliver to Sir Richard, when next you see him. I trust, Miss Copland, that fortune will often grant me the privilege of meeting you. Be assured it is one which I prize above all others. Adieu.”

His lordship gallantly kissed the hand which was extended to receive the note, and then, with his best bow, withdrew.

A few petulant questions, which bespoke his inward acerbity, he addressed to his servant — glanced with a very sour aspect at the lowering sky — clambered stiffly into the saddle, and then, desiring his attendant to follow him, rode down the avenue at a speed which seemed prompted by an instinctive dread of pursuit.

As the wind howled and the thunder rolled and rumbled nearer and nearer, Emily Copland could not but wonder more and more what urgent and peremptory cause could have induced the little peer to adopt this sudden resolution, and to carry it into effect upon such a night of storm. Surely that motive must be a strange and urgent one which would not brook the delay of a few hours, especially during the violence of such weather as the luxurious little nobleman had perhaps never voluntarily encountered in the whole course of his life. Curiosity prompted her to deliver the note which she held in her hand at once; she therefore ran lightly upstairs, and rapidly threading all the intervening lobbies and rambling passages, she knocked at her uncle’s door.

“Come in, come in,” cried the peevish voice of Sir Richard Ashwoode.

The girl entered the room. The Italian was at the toilet, arranging his master’s dressing-case, and the baronet himself in his night-gown and slippers, and with a pamphlet in his hand, reclined listlessly upon a sofa.

“Who is that? — who *is* it?” inquired he in the same tone, without turning his eyes from the volume which he read.

“Per dina!” exclaimed the Neapolitan— “Mees Emily — she is vary seldom come here. You are wailcome, Mees Emily; weel you seet down? — there is chair. Sir Richard, it is Mees Emily.”

“What does the young lady want?” inquired he, drily.

“I have gotten a note for you, uncle,” replied she.

“Well, put it down? — put it there on the table, anywhere; I presume it will keep till morning,” replied he, without removing his eyes from the pages.

“It is from Lord Aspenly,” urged the girl.

“Eh! Lord Aspenly. How — give it to me,” said the baronet, raising himself quickly and tossing the pamphlet aside. He broke the seal and read the note. Whatever its contents were, they produced upon the baronet an extraordinary effect; he started from the sofa with clenched hands and frantic gesture.

“Who — where — stop him, after him — he shall answer me — he shall!” cried, or rather shrieked, the baronet in the hoarse, choking scream of fury. “After him all — my sword, my horse. By —— , he’ll reckon with me this night.”

Never did the human form more fearfully embody the passions of hell; he stood before them absolutely transformed. The quivering face was pale as ashes; the livid veins, like blue knotted cordage, protruded upon his forehead; the eye glared and rolled with the light of madness, and as he shook and raved there before them, no dream ever conjured up a spectacle more appalling; he spit upon the letter — he tore it into fragments, and with his gouty feet stamped it into the fire.

There was no extravagance of frenzy which he did not enact. He tossed his arms into the air, and dashed his clenched hands upon the table; he stamped, he stormed, he howled; and as with thick and furious utterance he volleyed forth his incoherent threats, mandates, and curses, the foam hung upon his blackened lips.

“I’ll bring him to the dust — to the earth. My very menials shall spurn him. Almighty, that he should dare — trickster — liar — that he should dare to practise upon *me* this outrageous slight. Ay, ay — ay, ay — laugh, my lord — laugh on; but by the —— —— , this shall bring you to your knees, ay, and to your grave; and you — *you*,” thundered he, turning upon the awestruck and terrified young lady, “you no doubt had *your* share in this — ay, you have — you *have* — yes, I know you — you — you — hollow, lying —— , quit my house — out with you — turn her out — drive her out — away with her.”

As the horrible figure advanced towards her, the girl by an effort roused herself from the dreadful fascination, and turning from him, fled swiftly downstairs, and fell fainting at the parlour door.

Sir Richard still strode through his chamber with the same frantic evidences of unabated fury; and the Italian — the only remaining spectator of the hideous scene — sate calmly in a chair by the toilet, with his legs crossed, and his countenance composed into a kind of sanctimonious placidity, which, however, spite of all his efforts, betrayed at the corners of the mouth, and in the twinkle of the eye, a certain enjoyment of the spectacle, which was not altogether consistent with the perfect affection which he professed for his master.

"Ay, ay, my lord," continued the baronet, madly, "laugh on — laugh while you may; but by the —— —— , you shall gnash your teeth for this!"

"What coning, old gentleman is mi Lord Aspenly — ah! vary, vary," said the Italian, reflectively.

"You *shall*, my lord," continued Sir Richard, furiously. "Your disgrace shall be public — exemplary — the insult shall recoil upon, yourself — your punishment shall be memorable-public — tremendous."

"Mi Lord Aspenly and Sir Richard — both so coning," continued the Italian— "yees — yees — set one thief to catch the other."

The Neapolitan had, no doubt, bargained for the indulgence of his pleasant humour, as usual, free of cost; but he was mistaken. With the quickness of light, Sir Richard grasped a massive glass decanter, full of water, and hurled it at the head of his valet. Luckily for that gentleman's brains, it missed its object, and, alighting upon a huge mirror, it dashed it to fragments with a stunning crash. In the extremity of his fury, Sir Richard grasped a heavy metal inkstand, and just as the valet escaped through the private door of his room, hurled *it*, too, at his head. Two such escapes were quite enough for Signor Parucci on one evening; and not wishing to tempt his luck further, he ran nimbly down the stairs, leaped into his own room, and bolted and double-locked the door; and thence, as the night wore on, he still heard Sir Richard pacing up and down his chamber, and storming and raving in dreadful rivalry with the thunder and hurricane without.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE THUNDERSTORM — THE EBONY STICK — THE UNSEEN VISITANT — TERROR.

At length the uproar in Sir Richard's room died away. The hoarse voice in furious soliloquy, and the rapid tread as he paced the floor, were no longer audible. In their stead was heard alone the stormy wind rushing and yelling through the old trees, and at intervals the deep volleying thunder. In the midst of this hubbub the Italian rubbed his hands, tripped lightly up and down his room, placed his ear at the keyhole, and chuckled and rubbed his hands again in a paroxysm of glee — now and again venting his gratification in brief ejaculations of intense delight — the very incarnation of the spirit of mischief.

The sounds in Sir Richard's room had ceased for two hours or more; and the piping wind and the deep-mouthed thunder still roared and rattled. The Neapolitan was too much excited to slumber. He continued, therefore, to pace the floor of his chamber — sometimes gazing through his window upon the black stormy sky and the blue lightning, which leaped in blinding flashes across its darkness, revealing for a moment the ivied walls, and the tossing trees, and the fields and hills, which were as instantaneously again swallowed in the blackness of the tempestuous night; and then turning from the casement, he would plant himself by the door, and listen with eager curiosity for any sound from Sir Richard's room.

As we have said before, several hours had passed, and all had long been silent in the baronet's apartment, when on a sudden Parucci thought he heard the sharp and well-known knocking of his patron's ebony stick upon the floor. He ran and listened at his own door. The sound was repeated with unequivocal and vehement distinctness, and was instantaneously followed by a prolonged and violent peal from his master's hand-bell. The summons was so sustained and vehement, that the Italian at length cautiously withdrew the bolt, unlocked the door, and stole out upon the lobby. So far from abating, the sound grew louder and louder. On tip-toe he scaled the stairs, until he reached to about the midway; and he there paused, for he heard his master's voice exerted in a tone of terrified entreaty, —

"Not now — not now — avaunt — not now. Oh, God! — help," cried the well-known voice.

These words were followed by a crash, as of some heavy body springing from the bed — then a rush upon the floor — then another crash.

The voice was hushed; but in its stead the wild storm made a long and plaintive moan, and the listener's heart turned cold.

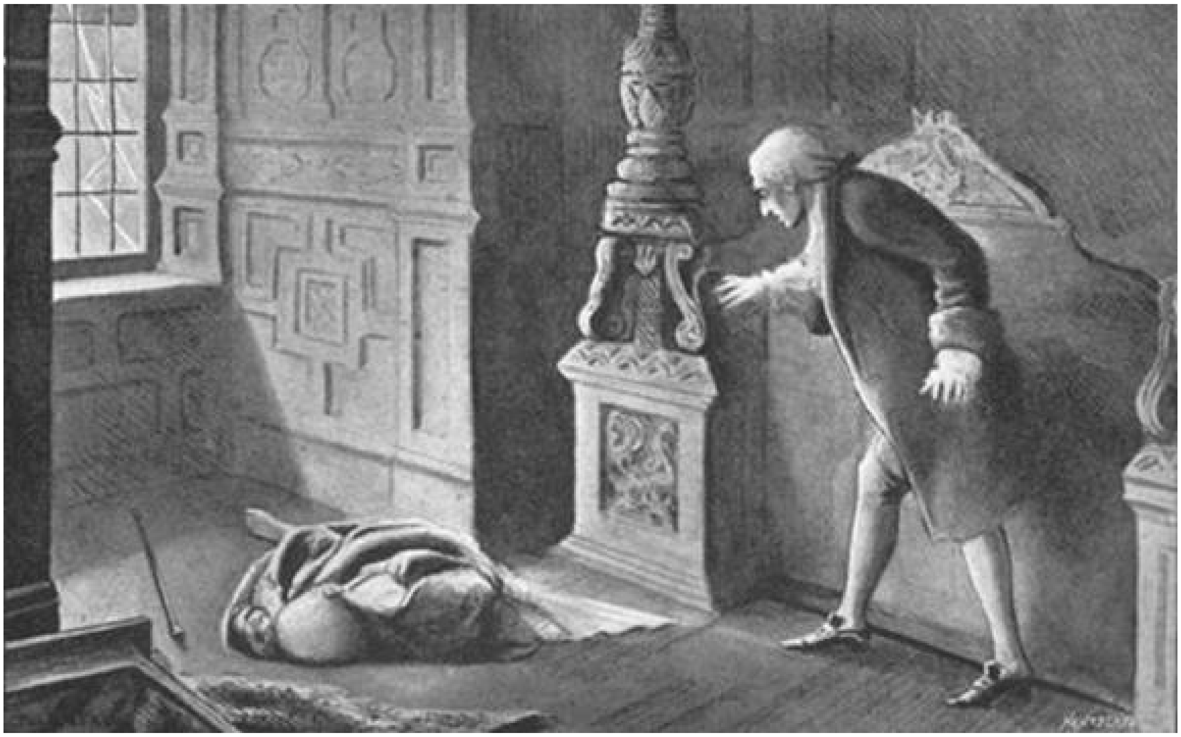
"*Malora — Corpo di Pluto!*" muttered he between his teeth. "What is it? Will he reeng again? *Santo gennaro!* — there is something wrong."

He paused in fearful curiosity; but the summons was not repeated. Five minutes passed; and yet no sound but the howling and pealing of the storm. Parucci, with a beating heart, ascended the stairs and knocked at the door of his patron's chamber. No answer was returned.

"Sir Richard, Sir Richard," cried the man, "do you want me, Sir Richard?"

Still no answer. He pushed open the door and entered. A candle, wasted to the very socket, stood upon a table beside the huge hearse-like bed, which, for the convenience of the invalid, had been removed from his bedchamber to his dressing-room. The light was dim, and waved uncertainly in the eddies which found their way through the chinks of the window, so that the lights and shadows flitted ambiguously across the objects in the room. At the end of the bed a table had been upset; and lying near it upon the floor was something — a heap of bedclothes, or — could it be? — yes, it *was* Sir Richard Ashwoode.

Parncci approached the prostrate figure: it was lying upon its back, the countenance fixed and livid, the eyes staring and glazed, and the jaw fallen — he was a corpse. The Italian stooped down and took the hand of the dead man — it was already cold; he called him by his name and shook him, but all in vain. There lay the cunning intriguer, the fierce, fiery prodigal, the impetuous, unrelenting tyrant, the unbelieving, reckless man of the world, a ghastly lump of clay.



With strange emotions the Neapolitan gazed upon the lifeless effigy from which the evil tenant had been so suddenly and fearfully called to its eternal and unseen abode.

"Gone — dead — all over — all past," muttered he, slowly, while he pressed his foot upon the dead body, as if to satisfy himself that life was indeed extinct— "quite gone. *Canchero!* it was ugly death — there was something with him; what was he speaking with?"

Parucci walked to the door leading to the great staircase, but found it bolted as usual.

"Pshaw! there was nothing," said he, looking fearfully round the room as he approached the body again, and repeating the negative as if to reassure himself— "no, no — nothing, nothing."

He gazed again on the awful spectacle in silence for several minutes.

"*Corbezzoli*, and so it *is* over," at length he ejaculated— "the game is ended. See, see, the breast is bare, and there the two marks of Aldini's stiletto. Ah! *briccone*, *briccone*, what wild faylow were you — *panzanera*, for a pretty ankle and a pair of black eyes, you would dare the devil. *Rotto di collo*, his face is moving! — pshaw! it is only the light that wavers. *Diamine!* the face is terrible. What made him speak? nothing was with him — pshaw! nothing could come to him here — no, no, nothing."

As he thus spoke, the wind swept vehemently upon the windows with a sound as if some great thing had rushed, against them, and was pressing for admission, and the gust blew out the candle; the blast died away in a lengthened wail, and then again came rushing and howling up to the windows, as if the very prince of the powers of the air himself were thundering at the casement; then again the blue dazzling lightning glared into the room and gave place to deeper darkness.

“Pah! that lightning smells like brimstone. *Sangue d’un dua*, I hear something in the room.”

Yielding to his terrors, Parucci stumbled to the door opening upon the great lobby, and with cold and trembling fingers drawing the bolt, sprang to the stairs and shouted for assistance in a tone which speedily assembled half the household in the chamber of death.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CRONES — THE CORPSE, AND THE SHARPER.

Haggard, exhausted, and in no very pleasant temper, Henry Ashwoode rode up the avenue of Morley Court.

"I shall have a blessed conference with my father," thought he, "when he learns the fate of the thousand pounds I was to have brought him — a pleasant interview, by —— . How shall I open it? He'll be no better than a Bedlamite. By —— , a pretty hot kettle of fish this — but through it I must flounder as best I may — curse it, what am I afraid of?"

Thus muttering, he leaped from the saddle, leaving the well-trained steed to make his way to the stable, and entered at the half open door. In the hall he encountered a servant, but was too much occupied by his own busy reflections to observe the earnest, awestruck countenance of the old domestic.

"Mr. Henry — Mr. Henry — stay, sir — stay — one moment," said the man, following and endeavouring to detain him.

Ashwoode, however, without heeding the interruption, hastened by him, and mounted the stairs with long and rapid strides, resolved not unnecessarily to defer the interview which he believed must come sooner or later. He opened Sir Richard's door, and entered the chamber. He looked round the room for the object of his search in vain; but to his unmeasured astonishment, beheld instead three old shrivelled hags seated by the hearth, who all rose upon his entrance, except one, who was warming something in a saucepan upon the fire, and each and all resumed respectively the visages of woe which best became the occasion.

"Eh! How is this? What brings you here, nurse?" exclaimed the young man, in a tone of startled curiosity.

The old lady whom he addressed thought it advisable to weep, and instead of returning any answer, covered her face with her apron, turned away her head, and shook her palsied hand towards him with a gesture which was meant to express the mute anguish of unutterable sorrow.

“What *is* it?” said Ashwoode. “Are you all tongue-tied? Speak, some of you.”

“Oh, musha! musha! the crathur,” observed the second witch, with a most lugubrious shake of the head, “but it is *he* that’s to be pitied. Oh, wisha — wisha — wiristhroo!”

“What the d —— l ails you? Can’t you speak out? Where’s my father?” repeated the young man, with impatient perplexity.

“With the blessed saints in glory,” replied the third hag, giving the saucepan a slight whisk to prevent the contents from burning, “and if ever there was an angel on earth, *he* was one. Well, well, he has his reward — that’s one comfort, sure. The crown of glory, with the holy apostles — it’s *he’s* to be envied — up in heaven, though he wint mighty suddint, surely.”

This was followed by a kind of semi-dolorous shake of the head, in which the three old women joined.

With a hurried step, young Ashwoode strode to the bedside, drew the curtain, and gazed upon the sharp and fixed features of the corpse, as it leered with unclosed eyes from among the bedclothes. It would not have been easy to analyze the feelings with which he looked upon this spectacle. A kind of incredulous horror sate upon his compressed features. He touched the hand, which rested stiffly upon the coverlet, as if doubtful that the old man, whom he had so long feared and obeyed, was actually *dead*. The cold, dull touch that met his was not to be mistaken, and he gazed fixedly with that awful curiosity with which in death the well-known features of a familiar face are looked on. There lay the being whose fierce passions had been to him from his earliest days a source of habitual fear — in childhood, even of terror — henceforth to be no more to him than a thing which had never been. There lay the scheming, busy head, but what availed all its calculations and its cunning now! No more thought or power has it than the cushion on which it stiffly rests. There lies the proud, worldly, unforgiving, violent man, a senseless effigy of cold clay — a grim, impassive monument of the recent presence of the unearthly visitant.

“It’s a beautiful corpse, if the eyes were only shut,” observed one of the crones, approaching; “a purty corpse as ever was stretched.”

“The hands is very handsome entirely,” observed another of them, “and so small, like a lady’s.”

"It's himself was the good master," observed the old nurse, with a slow shake of the head; "the likes of him did not thread in shoe leather. Oh! but my heart's sore for you this day, Misther Harry."

Thus speaking, with a good deal of screwing and puckering, she succeeded in squeezing a tear from one eye, like the last drop from an exhausted lemon, and suffering it to rest upon her cheek, that it might not escape observation, she looked round with a most pity-moving visage upon her companions, and an expression of face which said as plainly as words, "What a faithful, attached, old creature I am, and how well I deserve any little token of regard which Sir Richard's will may have bequeathed me."

"Ah! then, look at him," said the matron of the saucepan, gazing with the most touching commiseration upon Henry Ashwoode, "see how he looks at it. Oh, but it's he that adored him! Oh, the crathur, what will he do this day? Look at him there — he's an orphan now — God help him."

"Be off with yourselves, and leave me here," said Henry (now Sir Henry) Ashwoode, turning sharply upon them. "Send me some one that can speak a word of sense: call Parucci here, and get out of the room every one of you — away!"

With abundance of muttering and grumbling, and many an indignant toss of the head, and many a dignified sniff, the old women hobbled from the room; and Henry Ashwoode had hardly been left alone, when the small private door communicating with Parucci's apartment, opened, and the valet peeped in.

"Come in — come in, Jacopo," said the young man; "come in, and close the door. When did this happen?"

The Neapolitan recounted briefly the events which we have already recorded.

"It was a fit — some sudden seizure," said the young man, glancing at the features of the corpse.

"Yes, vary like, vary like," said Parucci; "he used to complain sometimes that his head was sweeming round, and pains and aches; but there was something more — something more."

"What do you mean? — don't speak riddles," said Ashwoode.

"I mean this, then," replied the Italian; "something came to him — something was in the room when he died."

"How do you know that?" inquired the young man.

"I heard him talking loudly with it," replied he— "talking and praying it to go away from him."

"Why did you not come into the room yourself?" asked Ashwoode.

"So I did, *Diamine*, so I did," replied he.

"Well, what saw you?"

"Nothing bote Sir Richard, dead — quite dead; and the far door was bolted inside, just so as he always used to do; and when the candle went out, the thing was here again. I heard it myself, as sure as I am leeving man — I heard it — close up with me — by the body."

"Tut, tut, man; speak sense. Do you mean to say that anyone talked with you?" said Ashwoode.

"I mean this, that something was in the chamber with me beside the dead man," replied the valet, doggedly. "I heard it with my own ears. *Zucche!* I moste 'av been deaf, if I did not hear it. It said 'hish,' and then again, close up to my face, it said it— 'hish, hish,' and laughed below its breath. Pah! the place smelt of brimstone."

"In plain terms, then, you believe that the devil was in the room; is that it?" said Ashwoode, with a ghastly smile of contempt.

"Oh! no," replied the servant, with a sneer as ghastly; "it was an angel, of course — an angel from heaven."

"No more of this folly, sirrah," said Ashwoode, sharply. "Your own d —— d cowardice fills your brain with these fancies. Here, give me the keys, and show me where the papers are laid. I shall first examine the cabinets here, and then in the library. Now open this one; and do you hear, Parucci, not one word of this cock-and-bull story of yours to the servants. Good God! my brain's unsettled. I can scarcely believe my father dead — dead," and again he stood by the bedside, and looked upon the still face of the corpse.

"We must send for Craven at once," said Ashwoode, turning from the bed; "I must confer with him; he knows better than anyone else how all my father's affairs stand. There are some d —— d bills out, I believe, but we'll soon know."

Having despatched an urgent note to Craven, the insinuating attorney, to whom we have already introduced the reader, Sir Henry Ashwoode proceeded roughly to examine the contents of boxes, escritoires, and cabinets filled with dusty papers, and accompanied and directed in his search by the Italian.

"You never heard him mention a will, did you?" inquired the young man.

The Neapolitan shook his head.

"You did not know of his making one?" he resumed.

"No, no, I cannot remember," said the Italian, reflectively; "but," he added quickly, while a peculiar meaning lit up the piercing eyes which he turned upon the interrogator— "but do you weesh to *find* one? Maybe I could help you to find one."

"Pshaw! folly; what do you take me for?" retorted Ashwoode, slightly colouring, in spite of his habitual insensibility, for Parucci was too intimate with his principles for him to assume ignorance of his meaning. "Why the devil should I wish to find a will, since I inherit everything without it?"

"Signor," said the little man, after an interval of silence, during which he seemed absorbed in deep reflection, "I have moche to say about what I shall do with myself, and some things to ask from you. I will begin and end it here and now — it is best over at once. I have served Sir Richard there for thirty-four years. I have served him well — vary well. I have taught him great secrets. I have won great abundance of good moneys for him; if he was not reech it is not my fault. I attend him through his sickness; and 'av been his companion for the half of a long life. What else I 'av done for him I need not count up, but most of it you know well. Sir Richard is there — dead and gone — the service is ended, and now I 'av resolved I will go back again to Italy — to Naples — where I was born. You shall never hear of me any more if you will do for me one little thing."

"What is it? — speak out. You want to extort money — is it so?" said Ashwoode, slowly and sternly.

"I want," continued the man, with equal distinctness and deliberateness, "I want one thousand pounds. I do not ask a penny more, and I will not take a penny less; and if you give me that, I will never trouble you more with word of mine — you will never hear or see honest Jacopo Parucci any more."

"Come, come, Jacopo, that were paying a little too dear, even for such a luxury," replied Ashwoode. "A thousand pounds! Ha! ha! A modest request, truly. I half suspect your brain is a little crazed."

"Remember what I have done — all I have done for him." rejoined the Italian, coolly. "And above all, remember what I have *not* done for him. I could have had him hanged up by the neck — hanged like a dog — but I never did. Oh! no, never — though not a day went by that I might not 'av brought the house full of officers, and have him away to jail and get him hanged. Remember all that, signor, and say is it in conscience too moche? — *rotta di collo!* It is not half — no, nor quarter so moche as I ought to ask. No, nor as you ought to give, signor, without me to ask at all."

"Parucci, you are either mad or drunk, or take me to be so," said Ashwoode, who could not feel quite comfortable in disputing the claims of the Italian, nor secure in provoking his anger. "But at all events, there is ample time to talk about these matters. We can settle it all more at our ease in a week or so."

"No, no, signor. I will have my answer now," replied the man, doggedly. "Mr. Craven has money now — the money of Miss Mary's land that Sir Richard got from her. But though the money is there *now*, in a week or leetle more we will not see moche of it, and my pocket weel remain aimpty — *corbezzoli!* am I a fool?"

"I tell you, Parucci, I will give you no promises now," exclaimed the young man, vehemently. "Why, d —— it, the blood is hardly cold in the old man's veins, and you begin to pester me for money. Can't you wait till he's buried?"

"Ay — yees — yees — wait till he's buried — and then wait till the mourning's off — and then wait for something more," said the Neapolitan, with a sneer, "and so wait on till the money's all spent. No, no, signor — *corpo di Bacco!* I will have it now. I will have my answer now, before Mr. Craven comes — *giuro di Dio*, I *will* have my answer."

"Don't talk like a madman, Parucci," replied the young man, angrily. "I have no money here. I will make no promises. And besides, your request is perfectly ridiculous and unconscionable."

"I ask for a thousand pounds," replied the valet. "I must have the promise *now*, signor, and the money to-day. If you do not promise it here and at once, I will not ask again, and maybe you weel be sorry. I will take one thousand pounds. I want no more, and I accept no less. Signor, your answer."

There was a cool, menacing insolence in the manner of the fellow which stung the pride of the young baronet to the quick.

"Scoundrel," said he, "do you think I am to be bullied by your audacious threats? Do you dream that I am weak enough to suffer a wretch like you to practise his extortions upon me? By —— , you'll find to your cost that you have no longer to deal with a master who is in your power. What care I for your utmost? Do your worst, miscreant — I defy you. I warn you only to beware of giving an undue license to your foul, lying tongue — for if I find that you have been spreading your libellous tales abroad, I'll have you pilloried and whipped."

"Well, you 'av given me an answer," replied the Italian coolly. "I weel ask no more; and now, signor, farewell — adieu. I think, perhaps, you will hear of me again. I will not return here any more after I go out; and so, for the last time," he continued, approaching the cold form which lay upon the bed, "farewell to you, Sir Richard Ashwoode. While I am alive I will never see your face again — perhaps, if holy friars tell true, we may meet again. Till then — till then — farewell."

With this strange speech the Neapolitan, having gazed for a brief space, with a strange expression, in which was a dash of something very nearly approaching to sorrow, upon the stern, moveless face before him, and then with an effort, and one long-drawn sigh, having turned away, deliberately withdrew from the room through the small door which led to his own apartment.

"The lazzarone will come to himself in a little," muttered Ashwoode; "he will think twice before he leaves this place — he'll cool — he'll cool."

Thus soliloquizing, the young man locked up the presses and desks which he had opened, bolted the door after the Italian, and hurried from the room; for, somehow or other, he felt uneasy and fearful alone in the chamber with the body.

CHAPTER XXX.

SKY-COPPER COURT.

Upon the evening of the same day, the Italian having collected together the few movables which he called his own, and left them ready for removal in the chamber which he had for so long exclusively occupied, might have been seen, emerging from the old manorhouse, and with a small parcel in his hand, wending his solitary, moonlit way across the broad wooded pasture-lands of Morley Court. Without turning to look back upon the familiar scene, which he was now for ever leaving — for all his faculties and feelings, such as they were, had busy occupation in the measures of revenge which he was keenly pursuing, he crossed the little stile which terminated the pathway he was following, and descended upon the public road — shaking from his hat and cloak the heavy drops, which in his progress the close underwood through which he brushed had shed upon him. With a quickened pace, and with a stern, almost a savage countenance, over which from time to time there flitted a still more ominous smile, and muttering between his teeth many a short and vehement apostrophe as he went, he held his way directly toward the city of Dublin; and once within the streets, he was not long in reaching the ancient, and by this time to the reader, familiar mansion, over whose portal swung the glittering sign of the "Cock and Anchor."

"Now, then," thought Parucci, "let us see whether I have not one card left, and that a trump. What, because I wear no sword myself, shall you escape unpunished? Fool — miscreant, I will this night conjure up such an avenger as will appal even you; I will send him with a thousand atrocious wrongs upon his head, frantic into your presence — you had better cope with an actual incarnate demon."

Such were the exulting thoughts which lighted the features of Parucci with a fitful smile of singular grimness as he entered the inn yard, where meeting one of the waiters, he promptly inquired for O'Connor. To his dismay, however, he learnt that that gentleman had quitted the "Cock and Anchor" on the day before, and whither he had gone, none could inform him. As he stood, pondering in bitter disappointment what step was next to be taken, somebody tapped his shoulder smartly from behind. He turned, and beheld the square form and swarthy features of O'Hanlon, whose interview with O'Connor is recorded early in these pages. After a few brief questions and answers, in which, by a reference to the portly proprietor of the "Cock and Anchor," who vouched for the accuracy of his representations, O'Hanlon satisfied the vindictive foreigner that he might safely communicate the subject of his intended communication to *him*, as to the sure friend of Mr. O'Connor. Both personages, Parucci and O'Hanlon — or, as he was there called, Dwyer — repaired to a private room, where they remained closeted for fully half an hour. That interview had its consequences — consequences of which sooner or later the reader shall fully hear, and which were perhaps somewhat unlike those calculated upon by honest Jacopo.

It is not necessary to detain the reader with a description of the ceremonial which conducted the mortal remains of Sir Henry Ashwoode to the grave. It is enough to say that if pomp and pageantry, lavished upon the fleeting tenement of clay which it has deserted, can delight the departed spirit, that of the deceased baronet was happy. The funeral was an aristocratic procession, well worthy of the rank and pretensions of the distinguished dead, and in numbers and *éclat* such as to satisfy even the exactions of Irish pride.

Carriages and four were there in abundance, and others of lesser note without number. Outriders, and footmen, and corpulent coachmen filled the court and avenue of the manor, and crowded its hall, where refreshments enough for a garrison were heaped together upon the tables. The funeral feasting and revelry finished, the enormous mob of coaches, horses, and lacqueys began to arrange itself, and assume something like order. The great velvet-covered coffin was carried out upon the shoulders of six footmen, staggering under the leaden load, and was laid in the hearse. The highborn company, dressed in the fantastic trappings of mourning, began to show themselves one by one, or in groups, at the hall-door, and took their places in their respective vehicles; and at length the enormous volume began to uncoil, and gradually passing down the great avenue, and winding along the road, to proceed toward the city, covering from the coffin to the last carriage a space of more than a mile in length.

The body was laid in the aisle of St. Audoen's Church, and a comely monument, recording in eloquent periods the virtues of the deceased, was reared by the piety of his son. The aisle, however, in which it stood, is now a rootless ruin; and this, along with many a more curious relic, has crumbled into dust from its timeworn wall: so that there now remains, except in these idle pages, no record to tell posterity that so important a personage as Sir Richard Ashwoode ever existed at all.

Of all who donned "the customary suit of solemn black" upon the death of Sir Richard Ashwoode, but one human being felt a pang of sorrow. But there *was* one whose grief was real and poignant — one who mourned for him as though he had been all that was fond and tender — who forgot and forgave all his faults and failings, and remembered only that he had been her father and she his child, and companion, and gentle, patient nursetender through many an hour of pain and sickness. Mary wept for his death bitterly for many a day and night; for all that he had ever done or said to give her pain, her noble nature found entire forgiveness, and every look, and smile, and word, and tone that had ever borne the semblance of kindness, were all treasured in her memory, and all called up again in affectionate and sorrowful review. Seldom indeed had the hard nature of Sir Richard evinced even such transient indications of tenderness, and when they did appear they were still more rarely genuine. But Mary felt that an object of her kindly care and companionship was gone — a familiar face for ever hidden — one of the only two who were near to her in the ties of blood, departed to return no more, and with all the deep, strong yearnings of kindred, she wept and mourned after her father.

Emily Copland had left Morley Court and was now residing with her gay relative, Lady Stukely, so that poor Mary was left almost entirely alone, and her brother, Sir Henry, was so immersed in business and papers that she scarcely saw him even for a moment except while he swallowed his hasty meals; and sooth to say, his thoughts were not much oftener with her than his person.

Though, as the reader is no doubt fully aware, Sir Henry's grief for the loss of his parent was by no means of that violent kind which refuses to be comforted, yet he was too chary of the world's opinion, as well as too punctilious an observer of etiquette, to make the cheerfulness of his resignation under this dispensation startlingly apparent by any overt act of levity or indifference. Sir Henry, however, must see Gordon Chancey; he must ascertain how much he owes him, and when it is all payable — facts of which he has, if any, the very dimmest and vaguest possible recollection. Therefore, upon the very day on which the funeral had taken place, as soon as the evening had closed, and darkness succeeded the twilight, the young baronet ordered his trusty servant to bring the horses to the door, and then muffling himself in his cloak, and drawing it about his face, so that even in the reflection of an accidental link he might not by possibility be recognized, he threw himself into the saddle, and telling his servant to follow him, rode rapidly through the dense obscurity towards the town.

When he had reached Whitefriar Street, he checked his pace to a walk, and calling his attendant to his side, directed him to await his return there; then dismounting, he threw him the bridle, and proceeded upon his way. Guided by the hazy starlight and by an occasional gleam from a shop-window or tavern-door, as well as by the dusky glimmer of the wretched street lamps, the young man directed his course for some way along the open street, and then turning to the right into a dark archway which opened from it, he found himself in a small, square court, surrounded by tall, dingy, half-ruinous houses which loomed darkly around, deepening the shadows of the night into impenetrable gloom. From some of these dilapidated tenements issued smothered sounds of quarrelling, indistinctly mingled with the crying of children and the shrill accents of angry females; from others the sounds of discordant singing and riotous carousal; while, as far as the eye could discern, few places could have been conceived with an aspect more dreary, forbidding, and cut-throat, and, in all respects, more depressing and suspicious.

“This is unquestionably the place,” exclaimed Ashwoode, as he stepped cautiously over the broken pavement; “there is scarcely another like it in this town or any other; but beshrew me if I remember which is the house.”

He entered one of them, the hall-door of which stood half open, and through the chinks of whose parlour-door were issuing faint streams of light and gruff sounds of talking. At one of these doors he knocked sharply with his whip-handle, and instantly the voices were hushed. After a silence of a minute or two, the parties inside resumed their conversation, and Ashwoode more impatiently repeated his summons.

"There *is* someone knocking — I tould you there was," exclaimed a harsh voice from within. "Open the doore, Corny, and take a squint."

The door opened cautiously; a great head, covered with shaggy elf-locks, was thrust through the aperture, and a singularly ill-looking face, as well as the imperfect light would allow Ashwoode to judge, was advanced towards his. The fellow just opened the door far enough to suffer the ray of the candle to fall upon the countenance of his visitant, and staring suspiciously into his face for some time, while he held the lock of the door in his hand, he asked, —

"Well, neighbour, did you rap at this doore?"

"Yes, I want to be directed to Mr. Chancey's rooms." replied Ashwoode.

"Misthur who?" repeated the man.

"Mr. Chancey — *Chancey*: he lives in this court, and, unless I am mistaken, in this house, or the next to it," rejoined Ashwoode.

"*Chancey*: I don't know him," answered the man. "Do *you* know where Mr. Chancey lives, Garvey?"

"Not I, nor don't care," rejoined the person addressed, with a hoarse growl, and without taking the trouble to turn from the fire, over which he was cowering, with his back toward the door. "Slap the *doore* to, can't you? and don't keep gostherin' there all night."

"No, he won't slap the doore," exclaimed the shrill voice of a female. "I'll see the gentleman myself. Well, sir," she cried, presenting a tall, rawboned figure, arrayed in tawdry rags, at the door, and shoving the man with the unkempt locks aside, she eyed Ashwoode with a leer and a grin that were anything but inviting— "well, sir, is there anything I can do for you. The chaps here is not used to quality, an' Pather has a mighty ignorant manner; but they are placible boys, an' manes no offence. Who is it you're lookin' for, sir?"

"Mr. Gordon Chancey: he lives in one of these houses. Can you direct me to him?"

"No, we can't," said the fellow from the fire, in a savage tone. "I tould you before. Won't you *take* your answer — won't you? Slap that *doore*, Corny, or I'll get up to him myself."

"Hould your tongue, you gaol bird, won't you?" rejoined the female, in accents of shrill displeasure. "*Chancey!* is not he the counsellor gentleman;

he has a yallow face an' a down look, and never has his hands out of his breeches' pockets?"

"The very man," replied Ashwoode.

"Well, sir, *he does* live in this court: he has the parlour next doore. The street *doore* stands open — it's a lodging-house. One doore further on; you can't miss him."

"Thank you, thank you," said Ashwoode. "Goodnight." And as the door was closed upon him, he heard the voices of those within raised in hot debate.

He stumbled and groped his way into the hall of the house which the gracious nymph, to whom he had just bidden farewell, indicated, and knocked stoutly at the parlour-door. It was opened by a sluttish girl, with bare feet, and a black eye, which had reached the green and yellow stage of recovery. She had probably been interrupted in the midst of a spirited altercation with the barrister, for ill humour and excitement were unequivocally glowing in her face.

Ashwoode walked in, and found matters as we shall describe them in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE USURER AND THE OAKEN BOX.

The room which Sir Henry Ashwoode entered was one of squalid disorder. It was a large apartment, originally handsomely wainscoted, but damp and vermin had made woeful havoc in the broad panels, and the ceiling was covered with green and black blotches of mildew. No carpet covered the bare boards, which were strewn with fragments of papers, rags, splinters of an old chest, which had been partially broken up to light the fire, and occasionally a potato-skin, a bone, or an old shoe. The furniture was scant, and no one piece matched the other. Little and bad as it was, its distribution about the room was more comfortless and wretched still. All was dreary disorder, dust, and dirt, and damp, and mildew, and rat-holes.

By a large grate, scarcely half filled with a pile of ashes and a few fragments of smouldering turf, sat Gordon Chancey, the master of this notable establishment; his arm rested upon a dirty deal table, and his fingers played listlessly with a dull and battered pewter goblet, which he had just replenished from a two-quart measure of strong beer which stood upon the table, and whose contents had dabbled that piece of furniture with sundry mimic lakes and rivers. Unrestrained by the ungenerous confinement of a fender, the cinders strayed over the cracked hearthstone, and even wandered to the boards beyond it. Mr. Gordon Chancey was himself, too, rather in deshabille. He had thrown off his shoes, and was in his stockings, which were unfortunately rather imperfect at the extremities. His waistcoat was unbuttoned, and his cravat lay upon the table, swimming in a sea of beer. As Ashwoode entered, with ill-suppressed disgust, this loathly den, the object of his visit languidly turned his head and his sleepy eyes over his shoulder, in the direction of the door, and without making the smallest effort to rise, contented himself with extending his hand along the sloppy table, palm upwards, for Ashwoode to shake, at the same time exclaiming, with a drawl of gentle placidity, —

“Oh, dear — oh, dear me! Mr. Ashwoode, I declare to God I am very glad to see you. Won’t you sit down and have some beer? Eliza, bring a cup for my friend, Mr. Ashwoode. Will you take a pipe too? I have some elegant tobacco. Bring *my* pipe to Mr. Ashwoode, and the little canister that M'Quirk left here last night."

"I am much obliged to you," said Ashwoode, with difficulty swallowing his anger, and speaking with marked *hauteur*, "my visit, though an unseasonable one, is entirely one of business. I shall not give you the trouble of providing any refreshment for me; in a word, I have neither time nor appetite for it. I want to learn exactly how you and I stand: five minutes will show me the state of the account."

"Oh, dear — oh, dear! and won't you take any beer, then? it's elegant beer, from Mr. M'Gin's there, round the corner."

Ashwoode bit his lips, and remained silent.

"Eliza, bring a chair for my friend, Sir Henry Ashwoode," continued Chancey; "he must be very tired — indeed he must, after his long walk; and here, Eliza, take the key and open the press, and do you see, bring me the little oak box on the second shelf. She's a very good little girl, Mr. Ashwoode, I assure you. Eliza is a very sensible, good little girl. Oh, dear! — oh, dear! but your father's death was very sudden; but old chaps always goes off that way, on short notice. Oh, dear me! — I declare to —— , only I had a pain in my — (here he mentioned his lower stomach somewhat abruptly) — I'd have gone to the funeral this morning. There was a great lot of coaches, wasn't there?"

"Pray, Mr. Chancey," said Ashwoode, preserving his temper with an effort, "let us proceed at once to business. I am pressed for time, and I shall be glad, with as little delay as possible, to ascertain — what I suppose there can be no difficulty in learning — the exact state of our account."

"Well, I'm very sorry, so I am, Mr. Ashwoode, that you are in such a hurry — I declare to —— I am," observed Chancey, supplying big goblet afresh from the larger measure. "Eliza, have you the box? Well, bring it here, and put it down on the table, like an elegant little girl."

The girl shoved a small oaken chest over to Chancey's elbow; and he forthwith proceeded to unlock it, and to draw forth the identical red leather pocketbook which had received in its pages the records of Ashwoode's disasters upon the evening of their last meeting.

"Here I have them. Captain Markham — no, that is not it," said Chancey, sleepily turning over the leaves; "but this is it, Mr. Ashwoode — ay, here;

first, two hundred pounds, promissory note — payable one week after date. Mr. Ashwoode, again, one hundred and fifty — promissory note — one week. Lord Kilblatters — no — ay, here again — Mr. Ashwoode, two hundred — promissory note — one week. Mr. Ashwoode, two hundred and fifty — promissory note — one week. Mr. Ashwoode, one hundred; Mr. Ashwoode, fifty. Oh, dear me! dear me! Mr. Ashwoode, three hundred." And so on, till it appeared that Sir Henry Ashwoode stood indebted to Gordon Chancey, Esq., in the sum of six thousand four hundred and fifty pounds, for which he had passed promissory notes which would all become due in two days' time.

"I suppose," said Ashwoode, "these notes have hardly been negotiated. Eh?"

"Oh, dear me! No — oh, no, Mr. Ashwoode," replied Chancey. "They have not gone out of my desk. I would not put them into the hands of a stranger for any trifling advantage to myself. Oh, dear me! not at all."

"Well, then, I suppose you can renew them for a fortnight or so, or hold them over — eh?" asked Ashwoode.

"I'm sure I can," rejoined Chancey. "The bills belong to the old cripple that lent the money; and *he* does whatever I bid him. He trusts it all to me. He gives me the trouble, and takes the profit himself. Oh! he *does* confide in me. I have only to say the word, and it's done. They shall be renewed or held over as often as you wish. Indeed, I can answer for it. Dear me, it would be very hard if I could not."

"Well, then, Mr. Chancey," replied Ashwoode, "I may require it, or I may not. Craven has the promise of a large sum of money, within two or three days — part of the loan he has already gotten. Will you favour me with a call on tomorrow afternoon at Morley Court. I will then have heard definitely from Craven, and can tell you whether I require time or not."

"Very good, sir — very fair, indeed, Mr. Ashwoode. Nothing fairer," rejoined the lawyer. "But don't give yourself any uneasiness. Oh, dear, on no account; for I declare to —— I would hold them over as long as you like. Oh, dear me — indeed but I would. Well, then, I'll call out at about four o'clock."

"Very good, Mr. Chancey," replied Ashwoode. "I shall expect you. Meanwhile, goodnight." So they separated.

The young baronet reached his ancestral dwelling without adventure of any kind, and Mr. Gordon Chancey poured out the last drops of beer from the inverted can into his pewter cup, and draining it calmly, anon buttoned his waistcoat, shook the wet from his cravat, and tied it on, thrust his feet into his shoes, and flinging his cocked hat carelessly upon his head, walked forth in deep thought into the street, whistling a concerto of his own invention.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DIABOLIC WHISPER.

Gordon Chancey sauntered in his usual lazy, lounging way, with his hands in his pockets, down the street. After a listless walk of half-an-hour he found himself at the door of a handsome house, in the immediate neighbourhood of the Castle. He knocked, and was admitted by a servant in full livery.

"Is he in the same room?" inquired Chancey.

"Yes, sir," replied the man; and without further parley, the learned counsel proceeded upstairs, and knocked at the drawingroom door, which, without waiting for any answer, he forthwith opened.

Nicholas Blarden — with two ugly black plaisters across his face, his arm in a sling, and his countenance bearing in abundance the livid marks of his late rencounter — stood with his back to the fireplace; a table, blazing with waxlights, and stored with glittering wine-flasks and other matters, was placed at a little distance before him. As the man of law entered the room, the countenance of the invalid relaxed into an ugly grin of welcome.

"Well, Gordy, boy, how goes the game? Out with your news, old rat-catcher," said Blarden, in high good humour.

"Dear me, dear me! but the night is mighty chill, Mr. Blarden," observed Chancey, filling a glass of wine to the brim, and sipping it uninvited. "News," he continued, letting himself drop into a chair— "news; well, there's not much stirring worth telling you."

"Come, what *is* it? You're not come here for nothing, old fox," rejoined Blarden, "I know by the —— twinkle in the corner of your eye."

"Well, *he* has been with me, just now," drawled Chancey.

"Ashwoode?"

"Yes."

"Well! what does he want — what does he want, eh?" asked Blarden, with intense excitement.

"He says he'll want time for the notes," replied Chancey.

"God be thanked!" ejaculated Blarden, and followed this ejaculation with a ferocious burst of laughter. "We'll have him, Chancey, boy, if only we know how to play him — by —— , we'll have him, as sure as there's heat in hell."

"Well, maybe we will," rejoined Chancey.

"Does he say he can't pay them on the day?" asked Blarden, exultingly.

"No; he says *maybe* he can't," replied the jackal.

"That's all one," cried Blarden. "What do you think? Do you think he can?"

"I think maybe he can, if we *squeeze* him," replied Chancey.

"Then *don't* squeeze him — he must not get out of our books on any terms — we'll lose him if he does," said Nicholas.

"We'll not renew the notes, but hold them over," said Chancey. "He must not feel them till he *can't* pay them. We'll make them sit light on him till then — give him plenty of line for a while — rope enough and a little patience — and the devil himself can't keep him out of the noose."

"You're right — you *are*, Gordy, boy," rejoined Blarden. "Let him get through the ready money first — eh? — and then into the stone jug with him — we'll just choose our own time for striking."

"I tell you what it is, if you are just said and led by me, you'll have a *quare* hold on him before three months are past and gone," said Chancey, lazily— "mind I tell you, you will."

"Well, Gordy, boy, fill again — fill again — here's success to you."

Chancey filled, and quaffed his bumper, with, a matter-of-fact, businesslike air.

"And do you mind me, boy," continued Blarden, "spare *nothing* in this business — bring Ashwoode entirely under my knuckle — and, by —— , I'll make it a great job for you."

"Indeed — indeed but I will, Mr. Blarden, if I can," rejoined Chancey; "and I *think* I can — I think I know a way, so I do, to get a *halter* round his neck — do you mind? — and leave the rope's end in your hand, to hang him or not, as you like."

"To *hang* him!" echoed Blarden, like one who hears something too good to be true.

"Yes, to hang him by the neck till he's dead — dead — dead," repeated Chancey, imperturbably.

“How the blazes will you do it?” demanded the wretch, anxiously. “Pish, it’s all prate and vapour.”

Gordon Chancey stole a suspicious glance round the room from the corner of his eye, and then suffering his gaze to rest sleepily upon the fire once more, he stretched out one of his lank arms, and after a little uncertain groping, succeeding in grasping the collar of his companion’s coat, and drawing his head down toward him. Blarden knew Mr. Chancey’s way, and without a word, lowered his ear to that gentleman’s mouth, who forthwith whispered something into it which produced a marked effect upon Mr. Blarden.

“If you do *that*,” replied he with ferocious exultation, “by —— , I’ll make your fortune for you at a slap.”

And so saving, he struck his hand with heavy emphasis upon the barrister’s shoulder, like a man who clenches a bargain.

“Well, Mr. Blarden,” replied Chancey, in the same drowsy tone, “as I said before, I declare it’s my opinion I can, so it is — I think I can.”

“And so do *I* think you can — by —— , I’m *sure* of it,” exclaimed Blarden triumphantly; “but take some more — more wine, won’t you? take some more, and stay a bit, can’t you?”

Chancey had made his way to the door with his usual drowsy gait; and, passing out without deigning any answer or word of farewell, stumbled lazily downstairs. There was nothing odd, however, in this leavetaking; it was Chancey’s way.

“We’ll do it, and easily too,” muttered Blarden with a grin of exultation. “I never knew him fail — that fellow is worth a mine. Ho! ho! Sir Henry, beware — beware. Egad, you had better keep a bright look-out. It’s rather late for green goslings to look to their necks, when the fox claps his nose in the poultry-yard.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SHOWING HOW SIR HENRY ASHWOODE PLAYED AND PLOTTED — AND OF THE SUDDEN SUMMONS OF GORDON CHANCEY.

Henry Ashwoode was but too anxious to avail himself of the indulgence offered by Gordon Chancey. With the immediate urgency of distress, any thoughts of prudence or retrenchment which may have crossed his mind vanished, and along with the command of new resources came new wants and still more extravagant prodigality. His passion for gaming was now indulged without restraint, and almost without the interruption of a day. For a time his fortune rallied, and sums, whose amount would startle credulity, flowed into his hands, only to be lost and squandered again in dissipation and extravagance, which grew but the wilder and more reckless, in proportion as the sources which supplied them were temporarily increased. At length, after some coquetting, the giddy goddess again deserted him. Night after night brought new and heavier disasters; and with this reverse of fortune came its invariable accompaniment — a wilder and more daring recklessness, and a more unmeasured prodigality in hazarding larger and larger sums; as if the victims of ill luck sought, by this frantic defiance, to bully and browbeat their capricious persecutor into subjection. There was scarcely an available security of any kind which he had not already turned into money, and now he began to feel, in downright earnest, the iron gripe of ruin closing upon him.

He was changed — in spirit and in aspect changed. The unwearied fire of a secret fever preyed upon his heart and brain; an untold horror robbed him of his rest, and haunted him night and day.

“Brother,” said Mary Ashwoode, throwing one hand fondly round his neck, and with the other pressing his, as he sate moodily, with compressed lips and haggard face, and eyes fixed upon the floor, in the old parlour of Morley Court— “dear brother, you are greatly changed; you are ill; some great trouble weighs upon your mind. Why will you keep all your cares and griefs from me? I would try to comfort you, whatever your sorrows may be.

Then let me know it all, dear brother; why should your griefs be hidden from me? Are there not now but the two of us in the wide world to care for each other?" and as she said this her eyes filled with tears.

"You would know what grieves me?" said Ashwoode, after a short silence, and gazing fixedly in her face, with stern, dilated eyes, and pale features. He remained again silent for a time, and then uttered the emphatic word— "*Ruin.*"

"How, dear brother, what has befallen you?" asked the poor girl, pressing her brother's hand more kindly.

"I say, we are ruined — both of us. I've lost everything. We are little better than beggars," replied he. "There's nothing I can call my own," he resumed, abruptly, after a pause, "but that old place, Incharden. It's worth next to nothing — bog, rocks, brushwood, old stables, and all — absolutely nothing. We are ruined — beggared — that's all."

"Oh! brother, I am glad we have still that dear old place. Oh, let us go down and live there together, among the quiet glens, and the old green woods; for amongst its pleasant shades I have known happier times than shall ever come again for me. I would like to ramble there again in the pleasant summer time, and hear the birds sing, and the sound of the rustling leaves, and the clear winding brook, as I used to hear them long ago. *There* I could think over many things, that it breaks my heart to think of here; and you and I, brother, would be always together, and we would soon be as happy as either of us can be in this sorrowful world."

She threw her arms around her brother's neck, and while the tears flowed fast and silently, she kissed his pale and wasted cheeks again and again.

"In the meantime," said Ashwoode, starting up abruptly, and looking at his watch, "I must go into town, and see some of these harpies — usurers — that have gotten their fangs in me. It is as well to keep out of jail as long as one can," and, with a very joyless laugh, he strode from the room.

As he rode into town, his thoughts again and again recurred to his old scheme respecting Lady Stukely.

"It is after all my only chance," said he. "I have made my mind up fifty times to it, but somehow or other, d —— n me, if I could ever bring myself to *do* it. That woman will live for five-and-twenty years to come, and she would as easily part with the control of her property as with her life. While she lives I must be her dependent — her slave: there is no use in mincing the matter, I shall not have the command of a shilling, but as she pleases; but patience — patience, Henry Ashwoode, sooner or later death *will* come, and then begins your jubilee.”

As these thoughts hurried through his brain, he checked his horse at Lady Betty Stukely’s door.

As he traversed the capacious hall, and ascended the handsome staircase — “Well,” thought he, “even *with* her ladyship, this were better than the jail.”

In the drawingroom he found Lady Stukely, Emily Copland, and Lord Aspenly. The two latter evidently deep in a very desperate flirtation, and her ladyship meanwhile very considerately employed in trying a piece of music on the spinet.

The entrance of Sir Henry produced a very manifest sensation among the little party. Lady Stukely looked charmingly conscious and fluttered. Emily Copland smiled a gracious welcome, for though she and her handsome cousin perfectly well understood each other, and both well knew that marriage was out of the question, they had each, what is called, a fancy for the other; and Emily, with the unreasonable jealousy of a woman, felt a kind of soreness, secretly and almost unacknowledged to herself, at Sir Henry’s marked devotion to Lady Stukely, though, at the same time, no feeling of her own heart, beyond the lightest and the merest vanity, had ever been engaged in favour of Henry Ashwoode. Of the whole party, Lord Aspenly alone was a good deal disconcerted, and no wonder, for he had not the smallest notion upon what kind of terms he and Henry Ashwoode were to meet; — whether that young gentleman would shake hands with him as usual, or proceed to throttle him on the spot. Ashwoode was, however, too completely a man of the world to make any unnecessary fuss about the awkward affair of Morley Court; he therefore met the little nobleman with cold and easy politeness; and, turning from him, was soon engaged in an animated and somewhat tender colloquy with the love-stricken widow, whose last words to him, as at length he arose to take his leave, were, —

“Remember tomorrow evening, Sir Henry, we shall look for you early; and you have promised not to disappoint your cousin Emily — has not he, Emily? I shall positively be affronted with you for a week at least if you are late. I am very absolute, and never forgive an act of rebellion. I’m quite a little sovereign here, and very despotic; so you had better not venture to be naughty."

Here she raised her finger, and shook it in playful menace at her admirer.

Lady Stukely had, however, little reason to doubt his punctuality. If she had but known the true state of the case she would have been aware that in literal matter-of-fact she had become as necessary to Sir Henry Ashwoode as his daily bread.

Accordingly, next evening Sir Henry Ashwoode was one of the gayest of the guests in Lady Stukely's drawingrooms. His resolution was taken; and he now looked round upon the splendid rooms and all their rich furniture as already his own. Some chatted, some played cards, some danced the courtly minuet, and some hovered about from group to group, without any determinate occupation, and sharing by turns in the frivolities of all. Ashwoode was, of course, devoted exclusively to his fair hostess. She was all smiles, and sighs, and bashful coyness; he all tenderness and fire. In short, he felt that all he wanted at that moment was the opportunity of asking, to ensure his instantaneous acceptance. While thus agreeably employed, the young baronet was interrupted by a footman, who, with a solemn bow, presented a silver salver, on which was placed an exceedingly dirty and crumpled little note. Ashwoode instantly recognized the hand in which the address was written, and snatching the filthy billet from its conspicuous position, he thrust it into his waistcoat pocket.

"A messenger, sir, waits for an answer," murmured the servant.

"Where is he?"

"He waits in the hall, sir."

"Then I shall see him in a moment — tell him so," said Ashwoode; and turning to Lady Stukely, he spoke a few sweet words of gallantry, and with a forced smile, and casting a longing, lingering look behind, he glided from the room.

"So, what can this mean?" muttered he, as he placed himself immediately under a cluster of lights in the lobby, and hastily drew forth the crumpled note. He read as follows: —

"My dear Sir Henry, — There is bad news — as bad as can be. Wherever you are, and whatever you are doing, come on receipt of these, on the moment, to me. If you don't, you'll be done for tomorrow; so come at once. Bobby M'Quirk will hand you these, and if you follow him, will bring you where I am now. I am desirous to serve you, and if the art of man can do it, to keep you out of this pickle.

“Your obedient, humble servant,

“Gordon Chancey.”

“N.B. — It is about these infernal notes, so come quickly.”

Through this production did Ashwoode glance with no very enviable feelings; and tearing the note into the very smallest possible pieces, he ran downstairs to the hall, where he found the aristocratic Mr. M’Quirk, with his chin as high as ever, marching up and down with a free and easy swagger, and one arm akimbo, and whistling the while an air of martial defiance.

“Did you bring a note to me just now?” inquired Ashwoode.

“I have had that pleasure,” replied M’Quirk, with an aristocratic air. “I presume I am addressed by Sir Henry Ashwoode, baronet. *I* am Mr. M’Quirk — Mr. Robert M’Quirk. Sir Henry, I kiss your hands — proud of the honour of your acquaintance.”

“Is Mr. Chancey at his own lodging now?” inquired Ashwoode, without appearing to hear the speeches which M’Quirk thought proper to deliver.

“Why, no,” replied the little gentleman. “Our friend Chancey is just now swigging his pot of beer, and smoking his pen’orth of pigtail in the “Old Saint Columbkil,” in Ship Street — a comfortable house, Sir Henry, as any in Dublin, and very cheap — cheap as dirt, sir. A Welsh rarebit, one penny; a black pudding, and neat cut of bread, and three leeks, for — how much do you guess?”

“Have the goodness to conduct me to Mr. Chancey, wherever he is,” said Ashwoode drily. “I will follow — go on, sir.”

“Well, Sir Henry, I’m your man — I’m your man — glad of your company, Sir Henry,” exclaimed the insinuating Bobby M’Quirk; and following his voluble conductor in obstinate silence, Sir Henry Ashwoode found himself, after a dark and sloppy walk, for the first, though not for the last time in his life, under the roof tree of the “Old Saint Columbkil.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE “OLD ST. COLUMBKIL” — A TÊTE-À-TÊTE IN THE “ROYAL RAM” — THE TEMPTER.

The “Old Saint Columbkil” was a sort of low sporting tavern frequented chiefly by horse-jockeys, cock-fighters, and dog-fanciers; it had its cock-pits, and its badger-baits, and an unpretending little “hell” of its own; and, in short, was deficient in none of the attractions most potent in alluring such company as it was intended to receive.

As Ashwoode, preceded by his agreeable companion, made his way into the low-roofed and irregular chamber, his senses were assailed by the thick fumes of tobacco, the reek of spirits, and the heavy steams of the hot dainties which ministered to the refined palates of the patrons of the “Old Saint Columbkil;” and through the hazy atmosphere, seated at a table by himself, and lighted by a solitary tallow candle with a portentous snuff, and canopied in the clouds of tobacco smoke which he himself emitted, Gordon Chancey was dimly discernible.

“Ah! dear me, dear me. I’m right glad to see you — I declare to —— , I am, Mr. Ashwoode,” said that eminent barrister, when the young gentleman had reached his side. “Indeed, I was thinking it was maybe too late to see you tonight, and that things would have to go on. Oh, dear me, but it’s a regular Providence, so it is. You’d have been up in lavender tomorrow, as sure as eggs is eggs. I’m gladder than a crown piece, upon my soul, I am.”

“Don’t talk of business here; cannot we have some place to ourselves for five minutes, out of this stifling pig-sty. I can’t bear the place; besides, we shall be overheard,” urged Ashwoode.

“Well, and that’s very true,” assented Chancey, gently, “very true, so it is; we’ll get a small room above. You’ll have to pay an extra sixpenny bit for it though, but what signifies the matter of that? M’Quirk, ask old Pottles if ‘Noah’s Ark’ is empty — either that or the ‘Royal Ram’ — run, Bobby.”

“I have something else to do, Mr. Chancey,” replied Mr. M’Quirk, with *hauteur*.

“Run, Bobby, run, man,” repeated Chancey, tranquilly.

“Run yourself,” retorted M’Quirk, rebelliously.

Chancey looked at him for a moment to ascertain by his visible aspect whether he had actually uttered the audacious suggestion, and reading in the red face of the little gentleman nothing but the most refractory dispositions, he said with a low, dogged emphasis which experience had long taught Mr. M’Quirk to respect, —

“Are you at your tricks again? D —— you, you blackguard, if you stand prating there another minute, I’ll open your head with this pot — be off, you scoundrel.”

The learned counsel enforced his eloquence by knocking the pewter pot with an emphatic clang upon the table.

All the aristocratic blood of the M’Quirks mounted to the face of the gentleman thus addressed; he suffered the noble inundation, however, to subside, and after some hesitation, and one long look of unutterable contempt, which Chancey bore with wonderful stoicism, he yielded to prudential considerations, as he had often done before, and proceeded to execute his orders.

The effect was instantaneous — Pottles himself appeared. A short, stout, asthmatic man was Pottles, bearing in his thoughtful countenance an ennobling consciousness that human society would feel it hard to go on without him, and carrying in his hand a soiled napkin, or rather clout, with which he wiped everything that came in his way, his own forehead and nose included.

With pompous step and wheezy respiration did Pottles conduct his honoured guests up the creaking stairs and into the “Royal Ram.” He raked the embers in the fireplace, threw on a piece of turf, and planting the candle which he carried upon a table covered with slop and pipe ashes, he wiped the candlestick, and then his own mouth carefully with his dingy napkin, and asked the gentlemen whether they desired anything for supper.

“No, no, we want nothing but to be left to ourselves for ten or fifteen minutes,” said Ashwoode, placing a piece of money upon the table. “Take this for the use of the room, and leave us.”

The landlord bowed and pocketed the coin, wheezed and bowed again, and then waddled magnificently out of the room. Ashwoode got up and closed the door after him, and then returning, drew his chair opposite to Chancey’s, and in a low tone asked, —

“Well, what is all this about?”

“All about them notes, nothing else,” replied Chancey, calmly.

“Go on — what of them?” urged Ashwoode.

“Can you pay them all tomorrow morning?” inquired Chancey, tranquilly.

“Tomorrow!” exclaimed Ashwoode. “Why, hell and death, man, you promised to hold them over for three months. Tomorrow! By —— , you must be joking,” and as he spoke his face turned pale as ashes.

“I told you all along, Mr. Ashwoode,” said Chancey drowsily, “that the money was not my own; I’m nothing more than an agent in the matter, and the notes are in the desk of that old bedridden cripple that lent it. D —— n him, he’s as full of fumes and fancies as old cheese is of maggots. He has taken it into his head that your paper is not safe, and the devil himself won’t beat it out of him; and the long and the short of it is, Mr. Ashwoode, he’s going to arrest you tomorrow.”

In vain Ashwoode strove to hide his agitation — he shook like a man in an ague.

“Good heavens! and is there no way of preventing this? Make him wait for a week — for a day,” said Ashwoode.

“Was not I speaking to him ten times to-day — ay, twenty times,” replied Chancey, “trying to make him wait even for one day? Why, I’m hoarse talking to him, and I might just as well be speaking to Patrick’s tower; so make your mind up to this. As sure as light, you’ll be in gaol before tomorrow’s past, unless you either settle it early some way or other, or take leg bail for it.”

“See, Chancey, I may as well tell you this,” said Ashwoode, “before a fortnight, perhaps before a week, I shall have the means of satisfying these damned notes beyond the possibility of failure. Won’t he hold them over for so long?”

“I might as well be asking him to cut out his tongue and give it to me as to allow us even a day; he has heard of different accidents that has happened to some of your paper lately — and the long and the short of it is — he won’t hear of it, nor hold them over one hour more than he can help. I declare to —— , Mr. Ashwoode, I am very sorry for your distress, so I am — but you say you’ll have the money in a week?”

“Ay, ay, ay, so I shall, *if* he don’t arrest me,” replied Ashwoode; “but if he does, my perdition’s sealed; I shall lie in gaol till I rot; but, curse it, can’t the idiot see this? — if he waits a week or so he'll get his money — every penny back again — but if he won't have patience, he loses every sixpence to all eternity."

"You might as well be arguing with an iron box as think to change that old chap by talk, when he once gets a thing into his head," rejoined Chancey. Ashwoode walked wildly up and down the dingy, squalid apartment, exhibiting in his aristocratic form and face, and in the rich and elegant suit, flashing even in the dim light of that solitary, unsnuffed candle, with gold lace and jewelled buttons, and with cravat and ruffles fluttering with rich point lace, a strange and startling contrast to the slovenly and deserted scene of low debauchery which surrounded him.

"Chancey," said he, suddenly stopping and grasping the shoulder of the sleepy barrister with a fierceness and energy which made him start— "Chancey, rouse yourself, d —— you. Do you hear? Is there *no* way of averting this awful ruin — *is* there none?"

As he spoke, Ashwoode held the shoulder of the fellow with a gripe like that of a vice, and stooping over him, glared in his face with the aspect of a maniac.

The lawyer, though by no means of a very excitable temperament, was startled at the horrible expression which encountered his gaze, and sate silently looking into his victim's face with a kind of fascination.

"Well," said Chancey, turning away his head with an effort— "there's but one way I can think of."

"What is it? Do you know anyone that *will* take my note at a short date? For God's sake, man, speak out at once, or my brain will turn. What is it?" said Ashwoode.

"Why, Mr. Ashwoode, to be plain with you," rejoined Chancey, "I do not know a soul in Dublin that would discount for you to one-fourth of the amount you require — but there is another way."

"In the fiend's name, out with it, then," said Ashwoode, shaking him fiercely by the shoulder.

"Well, then, get Mr. Craven to join you in a bond for the amount," said Chancey, "with a warrant of attorney to confess judgment."

"Craven! Why, he knows as well as you do how I am dipped. He'd just as readily thrust his hand into the fire," replied Ashwoode. "Is that your hopeful scheme?"

"Why, Mr. Craven might not do so well, after all," said Chancey, meditatively, and without appearing to hear what the young baronet said. "Oh! dear, dear, no, he would not do. Old Money-bags knows him — no, no, that would not do."

"Can your d —— d scheming brain plot no invention to help me? In the devil's name, where are your wits? Chancey, if you get me out of this accursed fix, I'll make a man of you."

"I got a whole lot of bills done for you once by the very same old gentleman," continued Chancey, "and d —— n heavy bills they were too, but they had Mr. Nicholas Blarden's name across them; would not he lend it again, if you told him how you stand? If you can come by the money in a month or so, you may be sure he'll do it."

"Better and better! Why, Blarden would ask no better fun than to see me ruined, dead, and damned," rejoined Ashwoode, bitterly. "Cudgel your brains for another bright thought."

"Oh! dear me, dear me," said the barrister mildly, "I thought you were the best of friends. Well, well, it's hard to know. But are you sure he don't like you?"

"It's odd if he does," said Ashwoode, "seeing it's scarce a month since I trounced him almost to death in the theatre. Blarden, indeed!"

"Well, Mr. Ashwoode, sit down here for a minute, and I'll say all I have to say; and if you like it, well and good; and if not, there's no harm done, and things must only take their course. Are you quite sure of having the means within a month of taking up the notes?"

"As sure as I am that I see you before me," replied he.

"Well, then, get Mr. Blarden's name along with your own to your joint and several bond — the old chap won't have anything more to do with bills — so, do you mind, your joint and several bond, with warrant of attorney to confess judgment — and I'll stake my life, he'll take it as ready as so much cash, the instant I show it to him," said the lawyer quietly.

"Are you dreaming or drunk? Have not I told you twenty times over that Blarden would cut his throat first?" retorted Ashwoode, passionately.

"Why," said Chancey, fixing his cunning eyes, with a peculiar meaning, upon the young man, and speaking with a lowered voice and marked deliberateness, "perhaps if Mr. Blarden knew that his name was wanted only to satisfy the whim of a fanciful old hunks — if he knew that judgment should never be entered — if he knew that the bond should never go outside a strong iron box, under an old bedridden cripple's bed — if he knew that no questions should be asked as to how he came to write his name at the foot of it — and if he knew that no mortal should ever see it until you paid it long before the day it was due — and if he was quite aware that the whole transaction should be considered so strictly confidential, that even to *himself* — do you mind — no allusion should be made to it; — don't you think, in such a case, you could, by some means or other, manage to get his — *name*?"

They continued to gaze fixedly at one another in silence, until, at length, Ashwoode's countenance lighted into a strange, unearthly smile.

"I see what you mean, Chancey — is it so?" said he, in a voice so low, as scarcely to be audible.

"Well, maybe you do," said the barrister, in a tone nearly as low, and returning the young man's smile with one to the full as sinister. Thus they remained without speaking for many minutes.

"There's no danger in it," said Chancey, after a long pause; "I would not take a part in it if there was. You can pay it eleven months before it's due. It's a thing I have *known* done a hundred times over, without risk; here there *can* be none. I do *all* his business myself. I tell you, that for anything that any living mortal but you and me and the old badger himself will ever hear, or see, or know of the matter, the bond might as well be burnt to dust in the back of the fire. I declare to —— it's the plain truth I'm telling you — Sir Henry — so it is."

There followed another silence of some minutes. At length Ashwoode said, "I'd rather use any name but Blarden's, if it *must* be done."

"What does it matter whose name is on it, if there is no one but ourselves to read it?" replied Chancey. "I say Blarden's is the best, because he accepted bills for you before, which were discounted by the same old codger; and again, because the old fellow knows that the money was wanted to satisfy gambling debts, and Blarden would seem a very natural party in a gaming transaction. Blarden's *is* the name for us. And, for myself, all I ask is fifty pounds for my share in the trouble."

"When must you have the bond?" asked Ashwoode.

"Set about it *now*," said Chancey; "or stay, your hand shakes too much, and for both our sakes it must be done neatly; so say tomorrow morning, early. I'll see the old gentleman tonight, and have the overdue notes to hand you in the morning. I think that's doing business."

"I would not do it — I'd rather blow my brains out — if there was a single chance of his entering judgment on the bond, or talking of it," said Ashwoode, in great agitation.

"A *chance*!" said the barrister. "I tell you there's not a *possibility*. I manage all his money matters, and I'd burn that bond, before it should see the outside of his strong box. Why, d —— n! do you think I'd let myself be ruined for fifty pounds? You don't know Gordon Chancey, indeed you don't, Mr. Ashwoode."

"Well, Chancey, I'll see you early tomorrow morning," said Ashwoode; "but are you very — *very* sure — is there no chance — no *possibility* of — of mischief?"

"I tell you, Mr. Ashwoode," replied Chancey, "unless I chose to betray *myself*, you can't come by harm. As I told you before, I'm not such a fool as to ruin myself. Rely on me, Mr. Ashwoode — rely on me. Do you believe what I say?"

Ashwoode walked slowly up to him, and fixing his eyes upon the barrister, with a glance which made Chancey's heart turn chill within him, —

"Yes, Mr. Chancey," he said, "you may be sure I believe you; for if I did *not* — so help me, God! — you should not quit this room — alive."

He eyed the caitiff for some minutes in silence, and then returning the sword, which he had partially drawn, to its scabbard, he abruptly wished him goodnight, and left the room.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OF THE COUSIN AND THE BLACK CABINET — AND OF HENRY ASHWOODE’S DECISIVE INTERVIEW WITH LADY STUKELY.

“Well, then,” said Ashwoode, a few days after the occurrences which have just been faithfully recorded, “it behoves me without loss of time to make provision for this infernal bond; until I see it burned to dust, I feel as if I stood in the dock. This sha’n’t last long — my stars be thanked, one door of escape lies open to me, and through it I will pass; the sun shall not go down upon my uncertainty. To be sure, I shall be — but curse it, it can’t be helped now; and let them laugh, and quiz, and sneer as they please, two-thirds of them would be but too glad to marry Lady Stukely with half her fortune, were she twice as old and twice as ugly — if, indeed, either were possible. Pshaw! the laugh will subside in a week, and in the style in which I shall open, curse me, if half the world won’t lie at my feet. Give me but money — money — plenty of money, and though I be a paragon of absurdity and vice, the whole town will vote me a Solomon and a saint; so let’s have no more shivering by the brink, but plunge boldly in at once and have it over.”

Fortified with these reflections, Sir Henry Ashwoode vaulted lightly into his saddle, and putting his horse into an easy canter, he found himself speedily at Lady Stukely’s house in Stephen’s Green. His servant held the rein and he dismounted, and, having obtained admission, summoned all his resolution, lightly mounted the stairs, and entered the handsome drawingroom. Lady Stukely was not there, but his cousin, Emily Copland, received him.

“Lady Betty is not visible, then?” inquired he, after a little chat upon indifferent subjects.

“I believe she is out shopping — indeed, you may be very certain she is not at home,” replied Emily, with a malicious smile; “her ladyship is always visible to you. Now confess, have you ever had much cruelty or coldness to complain of at dear Lady Stukely’s hands?”

Ashwoode laughed, and perhaps for a moment appeared a little disconcerted.

"I *do* admit, then, as you insist on placing me in the confessional, that I have always found Lady Betty as kind and polite as I could have expected or hoped," rejoined Ashwoode, assuming a grave and particularly proper air; "I were particularly ungrateful if I said otherwise."

"Oh, ho! so her ladyship has actually succeeded in inspiring my platonic cousin with gratitude," continued Emily, in the same tone, "and gratitude we all know is Cupid's best disguise. Alas, and alack-a-day, to what vile uses may we come at last — alas, my poor coz."

"Nay, nay, Emily," replied he, a little piqued, "you need not write my epitaph yet; I don't see exactly why you should pity me so enormously."

"Haven't you confessed that you glow with gratitude to Lady Stukely?" rejoined she.

"Nonsense! I said nothing about *glowing*; but what if I had?" answered he.

"Then you acknowledge that you *do* glow! Heaven help him, the man actually *glows*," ejaculated Emily.

"Pshaw! stuff, nonsense. Emily, don't be a blockhead," said he, impatiently.

"Oh! Harry, Harry, Harry, don't deny it," continued she, shaking her head with intense solemnity, and holding up her fingers in a monitory manner—"you are then actually in love. Oh, Benedick, poor Benedick! would thou hadst chosen some Beatrice not quite so well stricken in years; but what of that? — the beauties of age, if less attractive to the eye of thoughtless folly than those of youth, are unquestionably more durable; time may rob the cheek of its bloom, but I defy him to rob it of its rouge; years — I might say centuries — have no power to blanche a wig or thin its flowing locks; and though the nymph be blind with age, what matters it if the swain be blind with love? I make no doubt you'll be fully as happy together as if she had twice as long to live."

Ashwoode poked the fire and blew his nose violently, but nevertheless answered nothing.

"The brilliant blush of her cheek and the raven blackness of her wig," continued the incorrigible Emily, "in close and striking contrast, will remind you, and I trust usefully, of that *rouge et noir* which has been your ruin all your days."

Still Ashwoode spoke not.

"The exquisite roundness of her ladyship's figure will remind you that flesh, if not exactly grass, is at least very little better than bran and buckram; and her smile will invariably suggest the great truth, that whenever you do not intend to bite it is better not to show your teeth, especially when they happen to be like her ladyship's; in short, you cannot look at her without feeling that in every particular, if rightly read, she supplied a moral lesson, so that in her presence every unruly passion of man's nature must entirely subside and sink to rest. Yes, she will make you happy — eminently happy; every little attention, every caress, every fond glance she throws at you, will delightfully assure your affectionate spirit, as it wanders in memory back to the days of earliest childhood, that she will be to you all that your beloved grandmother could have been, had she been spared. Oh! Harry, Harry, this will indeed be too much happiness."

Another pause ensued, and Emily approached Sir Henry as he stood sulkily by the mantelpiece, and laying her hand upon his arm, looked archly up into his face, while shaking her head she slowly said, —

"Oh! love, love — oh! Cupid, Cupid, mischievous little boy, what hast thou done with my poor cousin's heart?

"''Twas on a widow's jointure land
The archer, Cupid, took his stand.'"

As she said this, she looked so unutterably mischievous and comical, that in spite of his vexation and all his efforts to the contrary, he burst into a long and hearty fit of laughter.

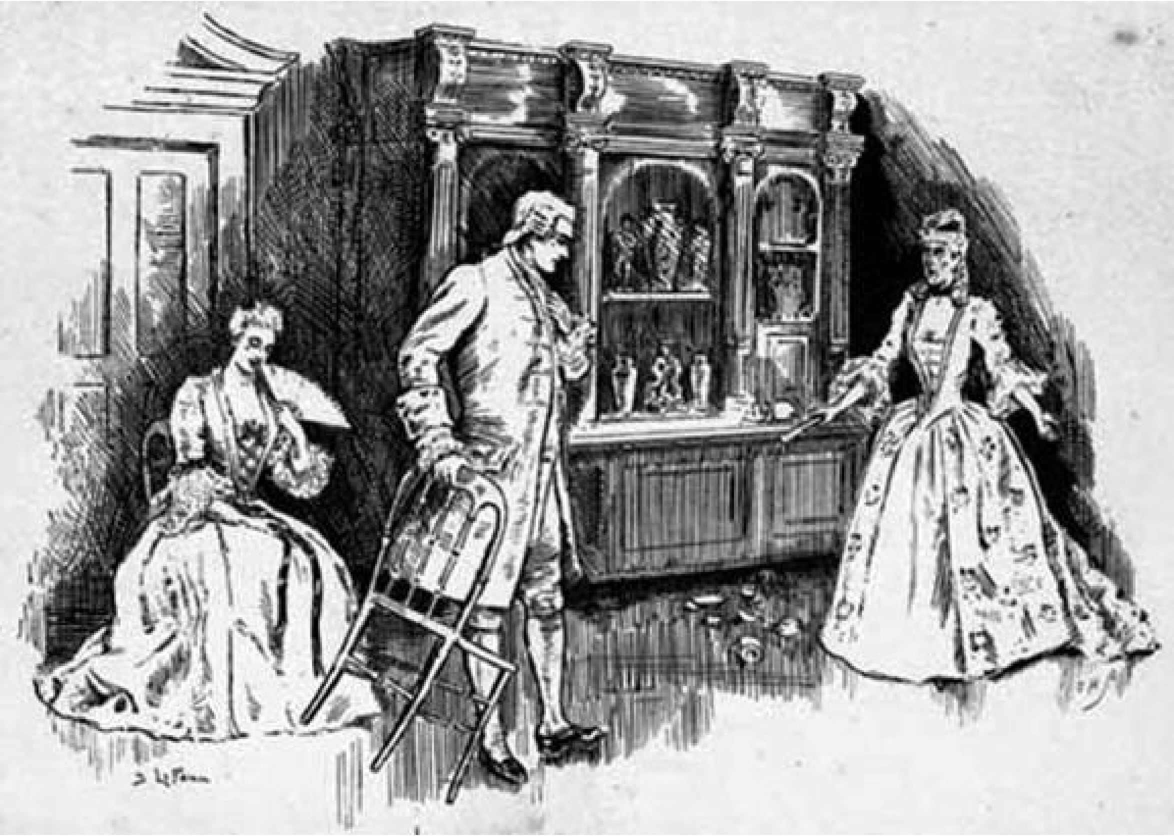
"Emily," said he, at length, "you are absolutely incorrigible — gravity in your company is entirely out of the question; but listen to me seriously for one moment, if you can. I will tell you plainly how I am circumstanced, and you must promise me in return that you will not quiz me any more about the matter. But first," he added, cautiously, "let us guard against eavesdroppers."

He accordingly walked into the next room, which opened upon that in which they were, and proceeded to close the far door. Before he had reached it, however, that in the other room opened, and Lady Stukely herself entered. The instant she appeared, Emily Copland by a gesture enjoined silence, nodded towards the door of the next room, from which Ashwoode's voice, as he carelessly hummed an air, was audible; she then frowned, nodded, and pointed with vehement repetition toward a dark recess in the wall, made darker and more secure by the flanking projection of a huge, black, varnished cabinet. Lady Stukely looked puzzled, took a step in the direction of the post of concealment indicated by the girl, then looked puzzled, and hesitated again. More impatiently Emily repeated her signal, and her ladyship, without any distinct reason, but with her curiosity all alive, glided behind the protecting cabinet, with all its army of china ornaments, into the recess, and there remained entirely concealed. She had hardly effected this movement, which the deep-piled carpet enabled her to do without noise, when Ashwoode returned, closed the door of communication between the two rooms, and then shut that through which Lady Stukely had just entered, almost brushing against her as he did so, so close was their proximity. These precautions taken, he returned.

"Now," said he, in a low and deliberate tone, "the plain facts of the case are just these. I am dipped over head and ears in debt — debts, too, of the most urgent kind — debts which threaten me with ruin. Now, these *must* be paid — one way or another they *must* be met. And to effect this I have but one course — one expedient, and you have guessed it. No man knows better than I what Lady Stukely is. I can see all that is ridiculous and repulsive about her just as clearly as anybody else. She is old enough to be my grandmother, and ugly enough to be the devil's — and, moreover, painted and varnished over like a signboard. She may be a fool — she may be a termagant — she may be what you please — but — *but* she has money. She has been throwing herself into my arms this twelvemonth or more — and — but what the deuce is that?"

This interrogatory was caused by certain choking sounds which proceeded with fearful suddenness from the place of Lady Stukely's concealment, and which were instantaneously followed by the appearance of her ladyship in bodily presence. She opened her mouth, but gave utterance to nothing but a gasp — drew herself up with such portentous and swelling magnificence, that Ashwoode almost expected to see her expand like the spectre of a magic-lantern until her head touched the ceiling. Forward she came, in her progress sweeping a score of china ornaments from the cabinet, and strewing the whole floor with the crashing fragments of monkeys, monsters, and mandarins, breathless, choking, and almost black with rage, Lady Stukely advanced to Ashwoode, who stood, for the first time in his life, bereft of every vestige of self-possession.

“Painted! varnished!” she screamed hysterically, “ridiculous! repulsive! Oh, heaven and earth! you — you preternatural monster!” With these words she uttered two piercing shrieks, and threw herself in strong hysterics into a chair, holding on her wig distractedly with one hand, for fear of accidents.



“Don’t — don’t ring the bell,” said she, with an abrupt accession of fortitude, observing Emily Copland approach the bell. “Don’t, I shall be better presently.” And then, with another shriek, she opened afresh.

As the hysterics subsided, Ashwoode began a little to recover his scattered wits, and observing that Lady Stukely had sunk back in extreme languor and exhaustion, with closed eyes, he ventured to approach the shrine of his outraged divinity.

“I feel — indeed I own, Lady Stukely,” he said, hesitatingly, “I have much to explain. I ought to explain — yes, I ought. I will, Lady Stukely — and — and I can entirely satisfy — completely dispel — — “

He was interrupted here; for Lady Stukely, starting bolt upright in the chair, exclaimed, —

“You wretch! you villain! you perjured, scheming, designing, lying, paltry, stupid, insignificant, outrageous — — “

Whether it was that her ladyship wanted words to supply a climax, or that hysterics are usually attended with such results, we cannot pretend to say, but certain it is that at this precise point the languishing, fashionable, die-away Lady Stukely actually spat in the young baronet's face.

Ashwoode changed colour, as he promptly discharged the ridiculous but very necessary task of wiping his face. With difficulty he restrained himself under this provocation, but he did command himself so far as to say nothing. He turned on his heel and walked downstairs, muttering as he went, —

"An old painted devil!"

The cool air, as he passed out, speedily dissipated the confusion and excitement of the scene that had just passed, and all the consequences of his rupture with Lady Stukely rushed upon his mind with overwhelming and maddening force.

"You were right, perfectly right — he *is* a cheat — a trickster — a villain!" exclaimed Lady Stukely. "Only to think of him! Oh, heaven and earth!" And again she was seized with violent hysterics, in which state she was conducted up to her bedroom by Emily Copland, who had enjoyed the catastrophe with an intensity of relish which none but a female, and a mischievous one to boot, can know.

Loud and repeated were Lady Stukely's thanksgivings for having escaped the snares of the designing young baronet, and warm and multiplied and grateful her acknowledgments to Emily Copland — to whom, however, from that time forth she cherished an intense dislike.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

OF JEWELS, PLATE, HORSES, DOGS, AND FAMILY PICTURES — AND CONCERNING THE APPOINTED HOUR.

In a state little, if at all, short of distraction, Sir Henry Ashwoode threw himself from his horse at Morley Court. That resource which he had calculated upon with absolute certainty had totally failed him; his last stake had been played and lost, and ruin in its most hideous aspect stared him in the face.

Spattered from heel to head with mud — for he had ridden at a reckless speed — with a face pale as that of a corpse, and his dress all disordered, he entered the great old parlour, and scarcely knowing what he did, dashed the door to with violence and bolted it. His brain swam so that the floor seemed to heave and rock like a sea; he cast his laced hat and his splendid peruke (the envy and admiration of half the *petit maîtres* in Dublin) upon the ground, and stood in the centre of the room, with his hands clutched upon the temples of his bare, shorn head, and his teeth set, the breathing image of despair. From this state he was roused by some one endeavouring to open the door.

"Who's there?" he shouted, springing backward and drawing his sword, as if he expected a troop of constables to burst in.

Whoever the party may have been, the attempt was not repeated.

"What's the matter with me — am I mad?" said Ashwoode, after a terrible pause, and hurling his sword to the far end of the room. "Lie there. I've let the moment pass — I might have done it — cut the Gordian knot, and there an end of all. What brought me here?"

He stared about the room, for the first time conscious where he stood.

"Damn these pictures," he muttered; "they're all alive — everything moves towards me." He flung himself into a chair and clasped his fingers over his eyes. "I can't breathe — the place is suffocating. Oh, God! I shall go mad!" He threw open one of the windows and stood gasping at it as if he stood at the mouth of a furnace.

"Everything is hot and strange and maddening — I can't endure this — brain and heart are bursting — it is HELL."

In a state of excitement which nearly amounted to downright insanity, he stood at the open window. It was long before this extravagant agitation subsided so as to allow room for thought or remembrance. At length he closed the window, and began to pace the room from end to end with long and heavy steps. He stopped by a pier-table, on which stood a china bowl full of flowers, and plunging his hands into it, dashed the water over his head and face.

"Let me think — let me think," said he. "I was not wont to be thus overcome by reverse. Surely I can master as much as will pay that thrice-accursed bond, if I could but collect my thoughts — there must yet be the means of meeting it. Let *that* be but paid, and then, welcome ruin in any other shape. Let me see. Ay, the furniture; then the pictures — some of them valuable — *very* valuable; then the horses and the dogs; and then — ay, the plate. Why, to be sure — what have I been dreaming of? — the plate will go halfway to satisfy it; and then — what else? Let me see. The whole thing is six thousand four hundred and fifty pounds — what more? Is there *nothing* more to meet it? The plate — the furniture — the pictures — ay, idiot that I am, why did I not think of them an hour since? — my sister's jewels — why, it's all settled — how the devil came it that I never thought of them before? It's very well, however, as it is — for if I had, they would have gone long ago. Come, come, I breathe again — I have gotten my neck out of the hemp, at all events. I'll send in for Craven this moment. He likes a bargain, and he shall have one — before tomorrow's sun goes down, that d —— d bond shall be ashes. Mary's jewels are valued at two thousand pounds. Well, let him take them at one thousand five hundred; and the pictures, plate, furniture, dogs, and horses for the rest — and he has a bargain. These jewels have saved me — bribed the hangman. What care I how or when I die, if I but avert that. Ten to one I blow my brains out before another month. A short life and a merry one was ever the motto of the Ashwoodes; and as the mirth is pretty well over with me, I begin to think it time to retire. *Satis edisti, satis bipisti, satis lusisti, tempus est tibi abire* — what am I raving about? There's business to be done now — to it, then — to it like a man — while we *are* alive let us *be* alive."

Craven liked his bargain, and engaged that the money should be duly handed at noon next day to Sir Henry Ashwoode, who forthwith bade the worthy attorney goodnight, and wrote the following brief note to Gordon Chancey, Esq.: —

“Sir,

“I shall call upon you tomorrow at one of the clock, if the hour suit you, upon particular business, and shall be much obliged by your having a *certain security* by you, which I shall then be prepared to redeem.

“I remain, sir, your very obedient servant,

“Henry Ashwoode.”

“So,” said Sir Henry, with a half shudder, as he folded and sealed this missive, “I shall, at all events, escape the halter. Tomorrow night, spite of wreck and ruin, I shall sleep soundly. God knows, I want rest. Since I wrote that name, and gave that accursed bond out of my hands, my whole existence, waking and sleeping, has been but one abhorred and ghastly nightmare. I would gladly give a limb to have that d —— d scrap of parchment in my hand this moment; but patience, patience — one night more — one night only — of fevered agony and hideous dreams — one last night — and then — once more I am my own master — my character and safety are again in my own hands — and may I die the death, if ever I risk them again as I have done — one night more — would — *would* to God it were morning!”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE RECKONING — CHANCEY'S LARGE CAT — AND THE COACH.

The morning arrived, and at the appointed hour Sir Henry Ashwoode dismounted in Whitefriar Street, and gave the bridle of his horse to the groom who accompanied him.

"Well," thought he, as he entered the dingy, dilapidated square in which Chancey's lodgings were situated, "this matter, at all events, is arranged — I sha'n't hang, though I'm half inclined to allow I deserve to do so for my infernal folly in trying the thing at all; but no matter, it has given me a lesson I sha'n't soon forget. As to the rest, what care I now? Let ruin pounce upon me in any shape but that — luckily I have still enough to keep body and soul together left."

He paused to indulge in ruminations of no very pleasant kind, and then half muttered, —

"I have been a fool — I have walked in a dream. Only to think of a man like me, who has seen something of the world, allowing that d —— d hag to play him such a trick. Well, I believe it *is* true, after all, that we cannot have wisdom without paying for it. If my acquisitions bear any proportion to my outlay, I ought to be a Solomon by this time."

The door was opened to his summons by Gordon Chancey himself. When Ashwoode entered, Chancey carefully locked the door on the inside and placed the key in his pocket.

"It's as well, Sir Henry, to be on the safe side," observed Chancey, shuffling towards the table. "Dear me, dear me, there's no such thing as being too careful — is there, Sir Henry?"

"Well, well, well, let's to business," said young Ashwoode, hurriedly, seating himself at the end of a heavy deal table, at which was a chair, and taking from his pocket a large leathern pocketbook. "You have the — the security here?"

"Of course — oh, dear, of course," replied the barrister; "the bond and warrant of attorney — that d —— d forgery — it is in the next room, very safe — oh, dear me, yes indeed.”

It struck Ashwoode that there was something, he could not exactly say what, unusual and sinister in the manner of Mr. Chancey, as well as in his emphasis and language, and he fixed his eye upon him for a moment with a searching glance. The barrister, however, busied himself with tumbling over some papers in a drawer.

“Well, why don’t you get it?” asked Ashwoode, impatiently.

“Never mind, never mind,” replied Chancey; “do *you* reckon your money over, and be very sure the bond will come time enough. I don’t wonder, though, you’re eager to have it fast in your own hands again — but it will come — it will come.”

Ashwoode proceeded to open the pocketbook and to turn over the notes.

“They’re all right,” said he, “they’re all right. But, hush!” he added, slightly changing colour— “I hear something stirring in the next room.”

“Oh, dear, dear, it’s nothing but the cat,” rejoined Chancey, with an ugly laugh.

“Your cat treads very heavily,” said Ashwoode, suspiciously.

“So it does,” rejoined Chancey, “it does tread heavy; it’s a very large cat, so it is; it has wonderful great claws; it can see in the dark; it’s a great cat; it never missed a rat yet; and I’ve seen it lure the bird off a branch with the mere power of its eye; it’s a great cat — but reckon your money, and I’ll go in for the bond.”

This strange speech was uttered in a manner at least as strange, and Chancey, without waiting for commentary or interruption, passed into the next room. The step crossed the adjoining chamber, and Ashwoode heard the rustling of papers; it then returned, the door opened, and *not* Gordon Chancey, but Nicholas Blarden entered the room and confronted Sir Henry Ashwoode. Personal fear in bodily conflict was a thing unknown to the young baronet, but now all courage, all strength forsook him, and he stood gazing in vacant horror upon that, to him, most tremendous apparition, with a face white as ashes, and covered with the starting dews of terror.

With that hideous combination, a smile and a scowl, stamped upon his coarse features, the wretch stood with folded arms, in an attitude of indescribable exultation, gazing with savage, gloating eyes full upon his appalled and terror-stricken victim. Fixed as statues they both remained for several minutes.

"Ho, ho, ho! you look frightened, young man," exclaimed Blarden, with a horse laugh; "you look as if you were going to be hanged — you look as if the hemp were round your neck — you look as if the hangman had you by the collar, you do — ho, ho, ho!"

Ashwoode's bloodless lips moved, but utterance was gone.

"It's hard to get the words out," continued Blarden, with ferocious glee. "I never knew the man yet could do a last dying speech smooth — a sort of choking comes on, eh? — the sight of the minister and the hangman makes a man feel so quare, eh? — and the coffin looks so ugly, and all the crowd; it's confusing somehow, and puts a man out, eh? — ho, ho, ho!"

Ashwoode laid his hand upon his forehead, and gazed on in blank horror.

"Why, you're not such a great man, by half, as you were in the playhouse the other evening," continued Blarden; "you don't look so grand, by any manner of means. Some way or other, you look a little sickish or so. I'm afraid you don't like my company — ho, ho, ho!"

Still Sir Henry remained locked in the same stupefied silence.

"Ho, ho! you seem to think your hemp is twisted, and your boards sawed," resumed Blarden; "you seem to think you're in a fix at last — and so do I, by —— !" he thundered, "for *I* have the rope fairly round your weasand, and, by —— I'll make you dance upon nothing, at Gallows Hill, before you're a month older. Do you hear *that* — do you — you swindler? Eh — you gaol-bird, you common forger, you robber, you crows' meat — who holds the winning cards now?"

"Where — where's the bond?" said Ashwoode, scarce audibly.

"Where's your precious bond, you forger, you gibbet-carrion?" shouted Blarden, exultingly. "Where's your forged bond — the bond that will crack your neck for you — where is it, eh? Why, here — here in my breeches pocket — *that's* where it is. I hope you think it safe enough — eh, you gallows-tassle?"

Yielding to some confused instinctive prompting to recover the fatal instrument, Ashwoode drew his sword, and would have rushed upon his brutal and triumphant persecutor; but Blarden was not unprepared even for this. With the quickness of light, he snatched a pistol from his coat pocket, recoiling, as he did so, a hurried pace or two, and while he turned, coward as he was, pale and livid as death, he levelled it at the young man's breast, and both stood for an instant motionless, in the attitudes of deadly antagonism.

"Put up your sword; I have you there, as well as everywhere else — regularly checkmated, by —— !" shouted Blarden, with the ferocity of half-desperate cowardice. "Put up your sword, I say, and don't be a bloody idiot, along with everything else. Don't you see you're done for? — there's not a chance left you. You're in the cage, and there's no need to knock yourself to pieces against the bars — you're done for, I tell you."

With a mute but expressive gesture of despair, Ashwoode grasped his sword by the slender, glittering blade, and broke it across. The fragments dropped from his hands, and he sunk almost lifeless into a chair — a spectacle so ghastly, that Blarden for a moment thought that death was about to rescue his victim.

"Chancey, come out here," exclaimed Blarden; "the fellow has taken the staggers — come out, will you?"

"Oh! dear me, dear me," said Chancey, in his own quiet way, "but he looks very bad."

"Go over and shake him," said Blarden, still holding the pistol in his hand. "What are you afraid of? He can't hurt you — he has broken his bilbo across — the symbol of gentility. By —— ! he's a good deal down in the mouth."

While they thus debated, Ashwoode rose up, looking more like a corpse endowed with motion than a living man.

"Take me away at once," said he, with a sullen wildness— "take me away to gaol, or where you will — anywhere were better than this place. Take me away; I am ruined — blasted. Make the most of it — your infernal scheme has succeeded — take me to prison."

"Oh, murder! he wants to go to gaol — do you hear him, Chancey?" cried Blarden— "such an elegant, fine gentleman to think of such a thing: only to think of a baronet in gaol — and for forgery, too — and the condemned cell such an ungentlemanly sort of a hole. Why, you'd have to use perfumes to no end, to make the place fit for the reception of your aristocratic visitors — my Lord this, and my Lady that — for, of course, you'll keep none but the best of company — ho, ho, ho! Perhaps the judge that's to try you may turn out to be an old acquaintance, for your luck is surprising — isn't it, Chancey? — and he'll pay you a fine compliment, and express his regret when he's going to pass sentence, eh? — ho, ho, ho! But, after all, I'd advise you, if the condescension is not too much to expect from such a very fine gentleman as you, to consort as much as possible with the turnkey — he's the most useful friend you can make, under your peculiarly delicate circumstances — ho, ho! — eh? It's just possible he mayn't like to associate with you, for some of them fellows are rather stiff, d'ye see, and won't keep company with certain classes of the coves in quod, such as forgers or pickpockets; but if he'll allow it, you'd better get intimate with him — ho, ho, ho! — eh?"

"Take me to the prison, sir," said Ashwoode, sternly— "I suppose you mean to do so. Let your officers remove me at once — you have, no doubt, men for the purpose in the next room. Let them call a coach, and I will go with them — but let it be at once."

"Well, you're not far out there, by —— !" replied Blarden. "I *have* a broad-shouldered acquaintance or two, and a little bit of a warrant — you understand? — in the next apartment. Grimes, Grimes, come in here — you're wanted."

A huge, ill-looking fellow, with his coat buttoned up to his chin, and a short pipe protruding from the corner of his mouth, swaggered into the chamber, with that peculiar gait which seems as if contracted by habitually shouldering and jostling through mobs and all manner of riotous assemblies.

"*That's* the bird?" said the fellow, interrogatively, and pointing with his pipe carelessly at Ashwoode. "You're my prisoner," he added, gruffly addressing the unfortunate young man, and at the same time planting his ponderous hand heavily upon his shoulder, he in the other exhibited a crumpled warrant.

"Grimes, go call a coach," said Blarden, "and don't be a brace of shakes about it, do you mind."

Grimes departed, and Blarden, after a long pause, suddenly addressing himself to Ashwoode, resumed, in a somewhat altered tone, but with intenser sternness still, —

"Now, I tell you what it is, my young cove, I have a sort of half a notion not to send you to gaol at all, do you hear?"

"Pshaw, pshaw!" said Ashwoode, turning bitterly away.

“I tell you I’m speaking what I mean,” rejoined Blarden; “I’ll not send you there *now* at any rate. I want to have a bit of chat with you this evening, and it shall rest with you whether you go there at all or not; I’ll give you the choice fairly. We’ll meet, then, at Morley Court this evening, at eight o’clock; and for fear of accidents in the meantime, you’ll have no objection to our mutual friend, Mr. Chancey, and our common acquaintance, Mr. Grimes, accompanying you home in the coach, and just keeping an eye on you till I come, for fear you might be out walking when I call — you understand me? But here’s Grimes. Mr. Grimes, my particular friend Sir Henry Ashwoode has taken an extraordinary remarkable fancy to you, and wishes to know whether you’ll do him the favour to take a jaunt with him in a carriage to see his house at Morley Court, and to spend the day with him and Mr. Chancey, for he finds that his health requires him to keep at home, and he has a particular objection to be left alone, even for a minute. Sir Henry, the coach is at the door. You’d better bundle up your banknotes, they may be useful to you. Chancey, tell Sir Henry’s groom, as you pass, that he’ll not want his horse any more to-day.”

The party went out; Sir Henry, pale as death, and scarcely able to support himself on his limbs, walking between Chancey and the herculean constable. Blarden saw them safely shut up in the vehicle, and giving the coachman his orders, gazed after them as they drove away in the direction of Morley Court, with a flushed face and a bounding heart.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

STRANGE GUESTS AT THE MANOR.

The coach jingled, jolted, and rumbled on, and Ashwoode lay back in the crazy conveyance in a kind of stupefied apathy. The scene which had just closed was, in his mind, a chaos of horrible confusion — a hideous, stunning dream, whose incidents, as they floated through his passive memory, seemed like unreal and terrific exaggerations, into whose reality he wanted energy and power to inquire. Still before him sate a breathing evidence of the truth of all these confused and horrible recollections — the stalwart, ruffianly figure of the constable — with his great red horny hands, and greasy cuffs, and the heavy coat buttoned up to his unshorn chin — and the short, discoloured pipe, protruding from the corner of his mouth — lounging back with half-closed eyes, and the air of a man who had passed the night in wearisome vigils among strife and riot, and who has acquired the compensating power of dividing his faculties at all times pretty nearly between sleep and waking — a kind of sottish, semi-existence — something between that of a swine and a sloth. Over this figure the eyes of the young man vacantly wandered, and thence to the cheerful fields and trees visible from the window, and back again to the burly constable, until every seam and button in his coat grew familiar to his mind as the oldest tenants of his memory. Beside him, too, sate Chancey — his artful, cowardly betrayer. Yet even against him he could not feel anger; all energy of thought and feeling seemed lost to him; and nothing but a dull ambiguous incredulity and a scared stupor were there in their stead. On — on they rolled and rumbled, among pleasant fields and stately hedgerows, toward the ancestral dwelling of the miserable prisoner, who sate like a lifeless effigy, yielding passively to every jolt and movement of the carriage.

“I say, Grimes, were you ever out here before?” inquired Mr. Chancey. “We’ll soon be in the manor, driving up to Morley Court. It’s a fine place, I’m given to understand. I never was here but once before, long as I know Sir Henry; but better late than never. Do you know this place, Mr. Grimes?”

A negative grunt and a short nod relieved Mr. Grimes from the painful necessity of removing his pipe for the purpose of uttering an articulate answer.

"Oh, dear me, dear me," resumed Mr. Chancey, "but I'm uncommon hungry and dry. I wish to God we were safe and sound in Sir Henry's house. Grimes, are *you* dry?"

Mr. Grimes removed his pipe, and spat upon the coach floor.

"Am I dhry?" said he. "About as dhry as a sprat in a tindher-box, that's all. Is there much more to go?"

Chancey stretched his head out of the coach window.

"I see the old piers of the avenue," said he; "and God knows but it's I that's glad we're near our journey's end. Now we're passing in — we're in the avenue."

Mr. Grimes hereupon uttered a grunt of approbation; and pressing down the ashes of his pipe with his thumb, he deposited that instrument in his waistcoat pocket — whence, at the same time, he drew a small plug of tobacco, which he inserted in his mouth, and rolled it about with his tongue from time to time during the remainder of their progress.

"Sir Henry, we're arrived," said Chancey, admonishing the baronet with his elbow— "we're at the hall-door at Morley Court. Sir Henry — dear me, dear me, he's very abstracted, so he is. I say, Sir Henry, we're at Morley Court."

Ashwoode looked vacantly in Chancey's face, and then upon the stately door of the old house, and suddenly recollecting himself, he said with strange alacrity, —

"Ay, ay — at Morley Court — so we are. Come, then, gentlemen, let us get down."

Accordingly the three companions descended from the conveyance, and entered the ancient dwelling-house together.

"Follow me, gentlemen," said Ashwoode, leading the way to a small, oak-wainscoted parlour. "You shall have refreshments immediately."

He called the servant to the door, and continued addressing himself to Chancey, and his no less refined companion.

"Order what you please, gentlemen — I can't think of these things just now; and, sirrah, do you hear me, bring a large vessel of water — my throat is literally scorched."

“Well, Mr. Chancey, what do you say?” said Grimes. “I’m for a couple of bottles of sack, and a good pitcher of ale, to begin with, in the way of liquor.”

“Well, it wouldn’t be that bad,” said Chancey. “What meat have you on the spit, my good man?”

“I don’t exactly know, sir,” replied the wondering domestic; “but I’ll inquire.”

“And see, my good man,” continued Chancey, “ask them whether there isn’t some cold roast beef in the buttery; and if so, bring it up in a jiffy, for, I declare to G — d I’m uncommon hungry; and let the cook send up a hot joint directly; — and do you mind, my honest man, light a bit of a fire here, for it’s rather chill, and put plenty of dry sticks — — “

“Give us the ale and the sack this instant minute, do you see,” said Mr. Grimes. “You may do the rest after.”

“Yes, you may as well,” resumed Chancey; “for indeed I’m lost with the drooth myself.”

“Cut your stick, saucepan,” said Mr. Grimes, authoritatively; and the servant departed in unfeigned astonishment to execute his various commissions.

Ashwoode threw himself into a seat, and in silence endeavoured to collect his thoughts. Faint, sick, and stunned, he nevertheless began gradually to comprehend every particular of his position more and more fully — until at length all the ghastly truth stood revealed to his mind’s eye in vivid and glaring distinctness. While Ashwoode was engaged in his agreeable ruminations, Mr. Chancey and Mr. Grimes were busily employed in discussing the substantial fare which his larder had supplied, and pledging one another in copious libations of generous liquor.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BARGAIN, AND THE NEW CONFEDERATES.

At length the evening came — darkness closed over the old place, and as the appointed hour approached, Ashwoode became more and more excited.

"I must," thought he, "keep every faculty intensely on the stretch, to detect, if possible, the nature of their schemes. Blarden and Chancey have unquestionably hatched some other d —— d plot, though what worse can befall me? *I* am netted as completely as their worst malice can desire. It is now seven o'clock. Another hour will determine all my doubts. Hark you, sirrah!" continued he, raising his voice, and addressing a servant who had entered the chamber, "I expect a gentleman upon particular business at eight o'clock. On his arrival conduct him directly to this room."

He then relapsed into the same train of gloomy and agitated thought.

Chancey and his burly companion both sat snugly before the fire smoking their pipes in silent enjoyment, while their miserable host paced the room from wall to wall in mental torments indescribable.

At length the weary interval expired, and within a few minutes of the appointed hour, Nicholas Blarden was admitted by the servant, and ushered into the chamber in which Ashwoode expected his arrival.

"Well, Sir Henry," exclaimed Blarden, as he swaggered into the room, "you seem a little flustered still — eh? Hope you found your company pleasant. My friends' society is considered uncommon agreeable."

The visitor here threw himself into a chair, and continued —

"By the holy Saint Paul, as I rode up your cursed old dusky avenue, I began to think the chances were ten to one you had brought your throat and a razor acquainted before this. I have known men do it under your circumstances — of course I mean *gentlemen*, with fine friends and delicate habits, and who could not stand exposure and all that kind of thing. I say, Mr. Grimes, my sweet fellow, you may leave the room, but keep within call, do ye mind. Mr. Chancey and I want to have a little confidential conversation with my friend, Sir Henry. Bundle out, and the moment you hear me call your name, bolt in again like a shot."

Mr. Grimes, without answering, rose and lounged out of the room.

"Chancey, shut that door," continued Blarden. "Shut it tight, as tight as a drum. There, to your seat again. *Now* then, Sir Henry, we may as well to business; but first of all, sit down. I have no objection to your sitting. Don't be shy."

Sir Henry Ashwoode *did* seat himself, and the three members of this secret council drew their chairs around the table, each with very different feelings.

"I take it for granted," said Blarden, planting his elbow upon the table, and supporting his chin upon his hand, while he fixed his baleful eyes upon the young man, "I take it for granted, and as a matter of course, that you have been puzzling your brains all day to come at the reason why I allow you to be sitting in this house, instead of clapping your four bones under lock and key, in another place."

He paused here, as if to allow his exordium to impress itself upon the memory of his auditory, and then resumed, —

"And I take it for granted, moreover, that you are not quite fool enough to imagine that I care one blast if you were strung up by the hangman, and carved by the doctors, tomorrow — eh?"

He paused again.

"Well, then, it's possible you think I have some end of my own to serve, by letting the matter stand over this way. And so I *have*, by —— . You think right, if you never thought right before. I *have* an object in view, and it lies with you whether it's gained or lost. Do you mind?"

"Go on — go on — go on," repeated Ashwoode, gloomily.

"What a devil of a hurry you're in," observed Blarden, with a scornful chuckle. "But don't tear yourself; you'll have it all time enough. Now I'm going to do great things for you — do you mind me? I'm going, in the first place, to give you your life and your character — such as it is; and, what's more, I'll not let you go to jail for debt neither. I'll not let you be ruined; for Nickey Blarden was never the man to do things by halves. Do you hear all I'm saying?"

"Yes, yes," said Ashwoode, faintly; "but the condition — come to that — the condition."

"Well, I *will* come to that. I will tell you the terms," rejoined Blarden. "I suppose you need not be told that I am worth a good penny, no matter how much. At any rate I'm *rich* — that much you *do* know. Well, perhaps you'll think it odd that I have not taken up a little to live more quiet and orderly; in short, that I have not sown my wild oats, and settled down, and all that, and become what they call an ornament to society — eh? You, perhaps, wonder how it comes I have not taken a rib — why I have not got married — eh? Well, I think myself it *is* a wonder, especially for such an admirer of the sex as I am, and I think it's a pity besides, and so I've made up my mind to mend the matter, do you see, and to take a wife without loss of time. She must have family, for I want that, and she must have beauty, for I would not marry the queen without it — family and beauty. I don't ask money; I have more of my own than I well know what to do with. Family and beauty is what I require. And I have settled the thing in my own mind, that the very article I want, just the thing to a nicety, is your sister — little, bright-eyed Mary — sporting Molly. I wish to marry her, and her I'll *have* — and that's the long and the short of the whole business."

"You — *you* marry my sister," exclaimed Ashwoode, returning the fellow's insolent gaze with a look of indescribable scorn and astonishment.

"Yes — I — I myself — I, Nicholas Blarden, with more gold than a man could count in three lives," shouted Blarden, returning his gaze with a scowl of defiance— "*I* condescend to marry the sister of a ruined, beggared profligate — a common *forger*, who has one foot in the dock at this minute. Down upon your marrow-bones, and thank me for my condescension — down, I say."

Overwhelmed with indignation and disgust, Ashwoode could not answer. All his self-command was required to resist his vehement internal impulse to strike the fellow to the ground and trample upon him. This strong emotion, however, had its spring in no generous source. No thought or care for Mary's feelings or fate crossed his mind; but only the sense of insulted pride, for even in the midst of all his misery and abasement, his hereditary pride of birth survived: that this low, this entirely blasted, this branded ruffian should dare to propose to ally himself with the Ashwoodes of Morley Court — a family whose blood was as pure as centuries of aristocratic transmission, and repeated commixture with that of nobility, could make it — a family who stood, in consideration and respect, one of the very highest of the country! Could flesh and blood endure it?

"Make your mind up at once — I have no time to spare; and just remember that the locality of your night's lodging depends upon your decision," said Blarden, coolly, looking at his watch. "If, unfortunately for yourself, you should resolve against the connection, then you must have the goodness to accompany us into town tonight, and the law takes its course quietly with you, and your neck-bone must only reconcile itself to an ugly bit of a twist. If otherwise, you're a made man. Run the matter fairly over in your mind, and see which of us two should desire the thing most. As for me, I tell you plainly, it's a bit of a fancy — no more — and may pass off in a day or two, for I don't pretend to be extraordinarily steady in love affairs, and always had rather a roving eye; and if I *should* happen to cool, by ——, you'll be in a nice hobble. So I think you had best take the ball at the hop — do you mind — and make no mouths at your good fortune."

Blarden paused, and looked at his huge chased-gold watch again, and laid it on the table, as if to measure Ashwoode's deliberation by the minute. Meanwhile the young baronet had ample time to recollect the desperate pressure of his circumstances, which outraged pride had for a moment half obliterated from his mind, and the process of remembrance was in no small degree assisted by the heavy tread of the constable, distinctly audible from the hall.

"Blarden," said Ashwoode, in a voice low and husky with agitation, "she'll never consent — you can't expect it: she'll never marry you."

"I'm not talking of the girl's consent just now," replied Blarden: "I'm asking only for *yours* in the first place. Am I to understand that you're agreed?"

"Yes," replied Ashwoode, sullenly; "what is there left to me, but to agree?"

"Then leave me alone to gain *her* consent," retorted Blarden, with a brutal smile. "I have a bit of a winning way with me — a knack of my own — for coming round a girl; and if she don't yield to that, why we must only try another course. When love is wanting, *obedience* is the next best thing: although we can't charm her, she's no girl if we can't frighten her — eh?"

Ashwoode was silent.

"Now mind, I require your active cooperation," continued Blarden; "there's to be no shamming. I'm no greenhorn, and know a loaded die from a fair one. It's not safe to try hocus pocus with me, and if I don't get the girl, of course you’re no brother of mine, and must not expect me to forget the old score that’s between us. Do you understand me? Unless you bring this marriage about, you must only take the consequences, and I promise you they’ll be of the very ugliest possible description.”

“Agreed, agreed; talk no more of it just now,” said Ashwoode, vehemently— “we understand one another. Tomorrow we may talk of it again; meanwhile torment me no more!”

“Well, I have said my say,” rejoined Blarden, “and have nothing more to do but to inform you, that I intend passing the night here, and, in short, to make a visit of a week or so, for it’s right the young lady should have an opportunity of knowing my geography before she marries me; and besides, I have heard a great account of old Sir Richard’s cellar. Chancey, do you tell my servant to bring my things up to the room that Sir Henry will point out. Sir Henry, you’ll see about my room — have a bit of fire in it — see to it yourself, mind; for do you mind, between ourselves, I think it’s on the whole your better course to be uncommonly civil to me. Stir yourselves, gentlemen. And, Chancey, hand Grimes his fee, and let him be off. We’ll try a jug of your claret, Sir Henry, and a spatchcock, or some little thing of the kind, and then to our virtuous beds — eh?”

After a carousal protracted to nearly three hours, during which Nickey Blarden treated his two companions to sundry ballads, and other vocal efforts somewhat more boisterous than elegant, and supplying frequent allusion, and not of the most delicate kind, to his contemplated change of condition, that interesting person proceeded somewhat unsteadily upstairs to his bedchamber. With a suspicion, which even his tipsiness could not overcome, he jealously bolted the door upon the inside, and laid his sword and pistols upon the table by his bed, remembering that it was just possible that his entertainer might conceive an expeditious project for relieving himself of all his troubles, or at least the greater part of them. These pleasant precautions taken, Mr. Blarden undressed himself with all celerity and threw himself into bed.

This gentleman’s opinion of mankind was by no means exalted, nor at all complimentary to human nature. Utter, hardened selfishness he believed to be the master-passion of the human race, and any appeal which addressed itself to that, he looked upon as irresistible. In applying this rule to Sir Henry Ashwoode he happened, indeed, to be critically correct, for the young baronet was in very nearly all points fashioned precisely according to honest Nickey's standard of humanity. That gentleman experienced, therefore, no misgivings as to his young friend's preferring at all hazards to remain at Morley Court, rather than quit the country, and enter upon a life of vagabond beggary.

"No, no," thought Blarden, "he'll not take leg bail, just because he can gain nothing earthly by it now; the only thing I can see that could serve him at all — that is, supposing him to be against the match — is to cut my throat; however, I don't think he's wild enough to run that risk, and if he does try it, by —— , he'll have the worst of the game."

Thus, after a day of unclouded triumph, did Mr. Blarden compose himself to light and happy slumbers.

CHAPTER XL.

DREAMS — FIRST IMPRESSIONS — THE MAN IN THE PLUM-COLOURED SUIT.

The sun shone cheerily through the casement of the quaint and pretty little chamber which called Mary Ashwoode its mistress. It was a fresh and sunny autumn morning; the last leaves rustled on the boughs, and the thrush and blackbird sang their merry morning lays. Mary sat by the window, looking sadly forth upon the slopes and woods which caught the slanting beams of the ruddy sun.

"I have passed, indeed, a very troubled night — I have been haunted with strange and fearful dreams. I feel very sorrowful and uneasy — indeed, indeed I do, Carey."

"It's only the vapours, my lady," replied the maid; "a glass of orange-flower water and camphor is the sovereignest thing in the world for them."

"Indeed, Carey," continued the young lady, still gazing sadly from the casement, "I know not why it is so — a foolish dream, wild and most extravagant, yet still it will not leave me. I cannot shake off this fear and depression. I will run down stairs and talk with my dear brother — that may cheer me."

She arose, ran lightly down the stairs, and entered the parlour. The first object that met her gaze, standing full before her, was a large and singularly ill-looking man, arrayed in a suit of plum-coloured cloth, richly laced. It was Nicholas Blarden. With a vulgar swagger, half abashed and half impudent, the fellow acknowledged her entrance by retreating a little and making an awkward bow, while a smile and a leer, more calculated to frighten than to attract, lighted his coarse and swollen features. The girl looked at this object with a startled air, she felt that she had seen that sinister face before, but where or when — whether waking or in a dream, she strove in vain to remember.

"I say, Ashwoode, where's your manners?" said Blarden, turning angrily towards the young baronet, who was scarcely less confounded at her sudden entrance than was the girl herself. “What do you stand gaping there for? Don’t you see the young lady wants to know who I am?”

Blarden followed this vehement exhortation with a look which at once recalled Ashwoode to his senses.

“Mary,” said he, approaching, “this is my particular friend, Mr. Nicholas Blarden. Mr. Blarden, my sister, Miss Mary Ashwoode.”

“Your most obedient humble servant, Mistress Mary,” said Blarden, with a gallant air. “Wonderful beautiful weather; d —— me, but it’s like the middle of summer. I’m just going out to take a bit of a tramp among the bushes and lead goddesses,” he added, not feeling, spite of all his effrontery, quite at his ease in the presence of the elegant and highborn girl; and, more confounded and abashed by the simple dignity of her artless nature than he ever remembered to have been before, under any circumstances whatever, he made his exit from the chamber.

“Who is that man?” said the girl, drawing close to her brother’s side, and clinging timidly to his arm. “His face is familiar to me — I have seen or dreamed of it before; it has been before me either in some troubled scene or dream. I feel frightened and oppressed when he is near me. Who is he, brother?”

“Pshaw! nonsense, girl,” said her brother, in vain attempting to appear unconstrained and at his ease; “he is a very good, honest fellow, not, as you see, the most polished in the world, but in essentials an excellent fellow; you’ll easily get over your antipathy — his oddity of manner and appearance is soon forgotten, and in all other points he is an admirable fellow. Pshaw! you have too much sense to hate a man for his face and manner.”

“I do not hate him, brother,” said Mary, “how could I? The man has never wronged me; but there is something in his eye, in his air and expression, in his whole appearance, sinister and terrible — something which oppresses and terrifies me. I can scarcely move or breathe in his presence. I only hope that I may never meet him so near again.”

“Your hope is not likely to be realized, then,” replied Ashwoode, abruptly, “he makes a stay here of a week, or perhaps more.”

A silence followed, during which he revolved the expediency of hinting at once at the designs of Blarden. As he thus paused, moodily plotting how best to open the subject, the unconscious girl stood beside him, and, looking fondly in his face, she said, —

"Dear brother, you must not be so sad. When all's done, what have we lost but some of the wealth which we can spare? We have still enough, quite enough. You shall live with your poor little sister, and I will take care of you, and read to you, and sing to you whenever you are sad; and we will walk together in the old green woods, and be far happier and merrier than ever we could have been in the midst of cold and heartless luxury and dissipation. Brother, dear brother, when shall we go to Incharden?"

"I can't say; I — I don't know that we shall go there at all," replied he, shortly.

Deep disappointment clouded the poor girl's face for a moment, but as instantly the sweet smile returned, and she laid her hand affectionately upon her brother's shoulder, and looked in his face.

"Well, dear brother, wherever you go, there is *my* home, and there I will be happy — as happy as being with the only creature that cares for me now can make me."

"Perhaps there are others who care for you — ay — even more than I do," said the young man deliberately, and fixing his eyes upon her searchingly, as he spoke.

"How, brother; what do you mean?" said the poor girl, faintly, and turning pale as death. "Have you seen — have you heard from — — " She paused, trembling violently, and Ashwoode resumed, —

"No, no, child; I have neither seen nor heard from anyone whom you know anything of. Why are you so agitated? Pshaw! nonsense."

"I know not how it is, brother; I am depressed, and easily agitated to-day," rejoined she; "perhaps it is that I cannot forget a fearful dream which troubled me last night."

"Tut, tut, child," replied he; "I thought you had other matters to think of."

"And so I have, God knows, dear brother," resumed she— "so I have; but this dream haunted me long, and haunts me still; it was about you. I dreamed that we were walking, lovingly, hand in hand, among the shady walks in this old place; when, on a sudden, a great savage dog — just like the old bloodhound you had shot last summer — came, with open jaws and all its fangs exposed, springing towards us. I threw myself, terrified, into your arms, but you grasped me, with iron strength, and held me forth toward the frightful animal. I saw your face; it was changed and horrible. I struggled — I screamed — and awakened, gasping with afright.”

“A silly, unmeaning dream,” said Ashwoode, slightly changing colour, and turning from her. “You’re not such a child, surely, as to let *that* trouble you.”

“No, indeed, brother,” replied she, “I do not suffer it to trouble my mind; but it has fastened somehow upon my imagination, and spite of all I can do, the impression remains —— There — there — see that horrible man staring in at us, from behind the evergreens,” she added, glancing at a large, tufted laurel, which partially screened the unprepossessing form of Nicholas Blarden, who was intently watching the youthful pair as they conversed. Perhaps conscious that he had been observed, he quitted his lurking-place, and plunged deeper into the thick screen of foliage.

“Dear Henry,” said she, turning imploringly toward her brother, “there is something about that man which frightens me; my heart sickens whenever I see him. I feel like some poor bird under the eye of a hawk. I do not feel safe when he is looking at me; there is some evil influence in his gaze — something bad, satanic, in his look and presence; I dread him instinctively. For God’s sake, dear, dear brother, do not keep company with him — he will harm you — it cannot lead to good.”

“This is mere folly — downright raving,” said Ashwoode, vehemently, but with an uneasiness which he could not conceal. “He is my guest, and will remain so for some weeks. I must be civil to him — *both* of us must.”

“Surely, dear brother — after all I have said — you will not ask me to associate with him during his stay, since stay he must,” urged Mary.

“We ought not to consult our whims at the expense of civility,” retorted the baronet, drily.

“But surely my presence is not required,” urged she.

“You cannot tell how that may be,” replied Ashwoode, abruptly, and then added, abstractedly, as he walked slowly towards the door: “We often speak, we know not what; we often stand, we know not where — necessity, fate, destiny — whatever is, *must* be. Let this be our philosophy, Mary.”

Wholly at a loss to comprehend this incoherent speech, his sister remained silent for some minutes.

“Well, child, how say you?” exclaimed Ashwoode, turning suddenly round.

“Dear brother,” said she, “I would fain not meet that man any more while he remains here. You will not ask me to come down.”

“A truce to this folly,” exclaimed Ashwoode, with loud and sudden emphasis. “You must — you *must*, I say, appear at breakfast, at dinner, and at supper. You must see Blarden, and talk with him — he’s *my* friend — you *must* know him.” Then checking himself, he added, in a less vehement tone — “Mary, don’t *act* like a fool — you *are* none: these silly fancies must not be indulged — remember, he’s *my* friend. There, there, be a good girl — no more folly.”

He came over, patted her cheek, and then turned abruptly from her, and left the room. His parting caress, however, was not sufficient to obliterate the painful impression which his momentary violence had left, for in that brief space of angry excitement his countenance had worn the selfsame sinister expression which had appalled her in her last night’s dream.

CHAPTER XLI.

OF O'CONNOR AND A CERTAIN TRAVELLING ECCLESIASTIC — AND HOW THE DARKNESS OVERTOOK THEM.

It has become necessary, in order to a clear and chronologically arranged exposition of events to return for a little while to our melancholy young friend, Edmond O'Connor, who, with his faithful squire, Larry Toole, following in close attendance upon his progress, was now returning from a last visit to the poor fragment of his patrimony, the wreck of his father's fortunes, and which consisted of a few hundred acres of wild woodland, surrounding a small square tower half gone to decay, and bidding fair to become in a few years a mere roofless ruin. He had seen the few retainers of his family who still remained, and bidden them a last farewell, and was now far in his second day's leisurely journey toward the city of Dublin.

The sun was fast declining among the rich and glowing clouds of an autumnal evening, and pouring its melancholy lustre upon the woods and the old towers of Leixlip, as the young man rode into that ancient town. How different were his present feelings from those with which he had last traversed the quiet little village — then his bright hopes and cheery fancies had tinged every object he looked on with their own warm and happy colouring; but now, alas! how mournful the reverse. With the sweet illusions he had so fondly cherished had vanished all the charm of all he saw; the scene was disenchanted now, and all seemed coloured in the sombre and chastened hues of his own deep melancholy; the river, with all its brawling falls and windings, filled his ear with plaintive harmonies, and all its dancing foam-bells, that chased one another down its broad eddies, glancing in the dim, discoloured light of the evening sun, seemed but so many images of the wayward courses and light illusions of human hope; even the old ivy-mantled towers, as he looked upon their timeworn front, seemed to have suffered a century's decay since last he beheld them; every scene that met his eye, and every sound that floated to his ear on the still air of evening, was alike charged with sadness.

At a slow pace, and with a heart oppressed, he passed the little town, and soon its trees, and humble roofs, and blue curling smoke were left far behind him. He had proceeded more than a mile when the sun descended, and the dusky twilight began to deepen. He spurred his horse, and at a rate more suited to the limited duration of the little light which remained, he rode at a sharp trot along the uneven way toward Dublin. He had not proceeded far at this rate when he overtook a gentleman on horseback, who was listlessly walking his steed in the same direction, and who, on seeing a cavalier thus wending his way on the same route, either with a view to secure good company upon the road, or for some other less obvious purpose, spurred on also, and took his place by the side of our young friend. O'Connor looked upon his uninvited companion with a jealous eye, for his night adventure of a few months since was forcibly recalled to his memory by the circumstances of his present situation. The person who rode by his side was, as well as he could descry, a tall, lank man, with a hooked nose, heavy brows, and sallow complexion, having something grim and ascetic in the character of his face. After turning slightly twice or thrice towards O'Connor, as if doubtful whether to address him, the stranger at length accosted the young man.

"A fair evening this, sir," said he, "and just cool enough to make a brisk ride pleasant."

O'Connor assented drily, and without waiting for a renewal of the conversation, spurred his horse into a canter, with the intention of leaving his new companion behind. That personage was not, however, so easily to be shaken off; he, in turn, put his horse to precisely the same pace, and remarked composedly, —

"I see, sir, you wish to make the most of the light we've left us; dark riding, they say, is dangerous riding hereabout. I suppose you ride for the city?"

O'Connor made no answer.

"I presume you make Dublin your halting-place?" repeated the man.

"You are at liberty, sir," replied O'Connor, somewhat sharply, "to presume what you please; I have good reasons, however, for not caring to bandy words with strangers. Where I rest for the night cannot concern anybody but myself."

“No offence, sir — no offence meant,” replied the man, in the same even tone, “and I hope none taken.”

A silence of some minutes ensued, during which O’Connor suddenly slackened his horse’s pace to a walk. The stranger made a corresponding alteration in that of his.

“Your pace, sir, is mine,” observed the stranger. “We may as well breathe our beasts a little.”

Another pause followed, which was at length broken by the stranger’s observing, —

“A lucky chance, in truth. A comrade is an important acquisition in such a ride as ours promises to be.”

“I already have one of my own choosing,” replied O’Connor drily; “I ride attended.”

“And so do I,” continued the other, “and doubtless our trusty squires are just as happy in the rencounter as are their masters.”

A considerable silence ensued, which at length was broken by the stranger.

“Your reserve, sir,” said he, “as well as the hour at which you travel, leads me to conjecture that we are both bound on the same errand. Am I understood?”

“You must speak more plainly if you would be so,” replied O’Connor.

“Well, then,” resumed he, “I half believe that we shall meet tonight — where it is no sin to speak loyalty.”

“Still, sir, you leave me in the dark as to your meaning,” replied O’Connor.

“At a certain well of sweet water,” said the man with deliberate significance— “is it not so — eh — am I right?”

“No, sir,” replied O’Connor, “your sagacity is at fault; or else, it may be, your wit is too subtle, or mine too dull; for, if your conjectures be correct, I cannot comprehend your meaning — nor indeed is it very important that I should.”

“Well, sir,” replied he, “I am seldom wrong when I hazard a guess of this kind; but no matter — if we meet we shall be better friends, I promise you.”

They had now reached the little town of Chapelizod, and darkness had closed in. At the door of a hovel, from which streamed a strong red light, the stranger drew his bridle, and called for a cup of water. A ragged urchin brought it forth.

"*Pax Domini vobiscum*," said the stranger, restoring the vessel, and looking upward steadfastly for a minute, as if in mental prayer, he raised his hat, and in doing so exhibited the monkish tonsure upon his head; and as he sate there motionless upon his horse, with his sable cloak wrapped in ample folds about him, and the strong red light from the hovel door falling upon his thin and well-marked features, bringing into strong relief the prominences of his form and attire, and shining full upon the drooping head of the tired steed which he bestrode — this equestrian figure might have furnished no unworthy study for the pencil of Schalken.

In a few minutes they were again riding side by side along the street of the straggling little town.

"I perceive, sir," said O'Connor, "that you are a clergyman. Unless this dim light deceives me, I saw the tonsure when you raised your hat just now."

"Your eyes deceived you not — I am one of a religious order," replied the man, "and perchance not on that account a more acceptable companion to you."

"Indeed you wrong me, reverend sir," said O'Connor. "I owe you an apology for receiving your advances as I have done; but experience has taught me caution; and until I know something of those whom I encounter on the highway, I hold with them as little communication as I can well avoid. So far from being the less acceptable a companion to me by reason of your sacred office, believe me, you need no better recommendation. I am myself an humble child of the true Church; and her ministers have never claimed respect from me in vain."

The priest looked searchingly at the young man; but the light afforded but an imperfect scrutiny.

"You say, sir," rejoined he after a pause, "that you acknowledge our father of Rome — that you are one of those who eschew heresy, and cling constantly to the old true faith — that you are free from the mortal taint of Protestant infidelity."

"That do I with my whole heart," rejoined O'Connor.

"Are you, moreover, one of those who still look with a holy confidence to the return of better days? When the present order of things, this usurped government and abused authority, shall pass away like a dark dream, and fly before the glory of returning truth. Do you look for the restoration of the royal heritage to its rightful owner, and of these afflicted countries to the bosom of mother Church?"

"Happy were I to see these things accomplished," rejoined O'Connor; "but I hold their achievement, except by the intervention of Almighty Providence, impossible. Methinks we have in Ireland neither the spirit nor the power to do it. The people are heartbroken; and so far from coming to the field in this quarrel, they dare not even speak of it above their breath."

"Young man, you speak as one without understanding. You know not this people of Ireland of whom you speak. Believe me, sir, the spirit to right these things is deep and strong in the bosoms of the people. What though they do not cry aloud in agony for vengeance, are they therefore content, and at their heart's ease?

"'Quamvis tacet Hermogenes, cantor tamen atque,
Optimus est modulator.'

"Their silence is not dumbness — you shall hear them speak plainly yet."

"Well, it may be so," rejoined O'Connor; "but be the people ever so willing, another difficulty arises — where are the men to lead them on? — who are they?"

The priest again looked quickly and suspiciously at the speaker; but the gloom prevented his discerning the features of his companion. He became silent — perhaps half-repenting his momentary candour, and rode slowly forward by O'Connor's side, until they had reached the extremity of the town. The priest then abruptly said, —

"I find, sir, I have been wrong in my conjecture. Our paths at this point diverge, I believe. You pursue your way by the river's side, and I take mine to the left. Do not follow me. If you be what you represent yourself, my command will be sufficient to prevent your doing so; if otherwise, I ride armed, and can enforce what I conceive necessary to my safety. Farewell."

And so saying, the priest turned his horse's head in the direction which he had intimated, rode up the steep ascent which loomed over the narrow level by the river's side; and his dark form quickly disappeared beyond the brow of the dusky hill. O'Connor's eyes instinctively followed the retreating figure of his companion, until it was lost in the profound darkness; and then looking back for any dim intimation of the presence of his trusty follower, he beheld nothing but the dark void. He listened; but no sound of horse's hoofs betokened pursuit. He shouted — he called upon his squire by name; but all in vain; and at length, after straining his voice to its utmost pitch for six or ten minutes without eliciting any other reply than the prolonged barking of half the village curs in Chapelizod, he turned away, and pursued his course alone, consoling himself with the reflection that his attendant was at least as well acquainted with the way as was he himself, and that he could not fail to reach the "Cock and Anchor" whenever he pleased to exert himself for the purpose.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE SQUIRES.

O'Connor had scarcely been joined by the priest, when Larry Toole, who jogged quietly on, pipe in mouth, behind his master, was accosted by his reverence's servant, a stout, clean-limbed fellow, arrayed in blue frieze, who rode a large, ill-made horse, and bumped listlessly along at that easy swinging jog at which our southern farmers are wont to ride. The fellow had a shrewd eye, and a pleasant countenance withal to look upon, and might be in years some five or six and thirty.

"God save you, neighbour," said he.

"God save you kindly," rejoined Mr. Toole graciously.

"A plisint evenin' for a quiet bit iv a smoke," rejoined the stranger.

"None better," rejoined Larry, scanning the stranger's proportions, to see whether, in his own phrase, "he liked his cut." The scrutiny evidently resulted favourably, for Larry removed his pipe, and handing it to his new acquaintance, observed courteously, "Maybe you'd take a draw, neighbour."

"I thank you kindly," said the stranger, as he transferred the utensil from Larry's mouth to his own. "It's turning cowld, I think. I wish to the Lord we had a dhrop iv something to warm us," observed he, speaking out of the unoccupied corner of his mouth.

"We'll be in Chapelizod, plase God," said Larry Toole, "in half an hour, an' if ould Tim Delany isn't gone undher the daisies, maybe we won't have a taste iv his best."

"Are *you* follyin' that gintleman?" inquired the stranger, with his pipe indicating O'Connor, "that gintleman that the masther is talking to?"

"I am *so*," rejoined Larry promptly, "an' a good gintleman he is; an' that's your masther there. What sort is he?"

"Oh, good enough, as masthers goes — no way surprisin' one way or th' other."

"Where are you goin' to?" pursued Larry.

"I never axed, bedad," rejoined the man, "only to folly on, wherever he goes — an' divil a hair I care where that is. What way are you two goin'?"

"To Dublin, to be sure," rejoined Larry. "I wisht we wor there now. What the divil makes him ride so unaiqual — sometimes cantherin', and other times mostly walkin' — it's mighty nansinsical, so it is."

"By gorra, I don't know, anless fancy alone," rejoined the stranger.

"Here's your pipe," continued he, after some pause, "an' I thank you kindly, misther — misther — how's this they call you?"

"Misther Larry Toole is the name I was christened by," rejoined the gentleman so interrogated.

"An' a rale illegant name it is," replied the stranger. "The Tooles is a royal family, an' may the Lord restore them to their rights."

"Amen, bedad," rejoined Larry devoutly.

"My name's Ned Mollowney," continued he, anticipating Larry's interrogatory, "from the town of Ballydun, the plisintest spot in the beautiful county iv Tipperary. There isn't it's aquil out for fine men and purty girls." Larry sighed.

The conversation then took that romantic turn which best suited the melancholy chivalry of Larry's mind, after which the current of their mutual discoursing, by the attraction of irresistible association, led them, as they approached the little village, once more into suggestive commentaries upon the bitter cold, and sundry pleasant speculations respecting the creature comforts which awaited them under Tim Delany's genial roof-tree.

"The holy saints be praised," said Ned Mollowney, "we're in the village at last. The tellin' iv stories is the dhryest work that ever a boy tuck in hand. My mouth is like a cindher all as one."

"Tim Delany's is the second house beyant that wind in the street," said Larry, pointing down the road as they advanced. "We'll jist get down for a minute or two, an' have somethin' warrum by the fire; we'll overtake the gintlemen asy enough."

"I'm agreeable, Mr. Toole," said the accommodating Ned Mollowney. "Let the gintlemen take care iv themselves. They're come to an age when they ought to know what they're about."

"This is it," said Larry, checking his horse before a low thatched house, from whose doorway the cheerful light was gleaming upon the bushes opposite.

The two worthies dismounted, and entered the humble place of entertainment. Tim Delany's company was singularly fascinating, and his liquor was, if possible, more so — besides, the evening was chill, and his hearth blazed with a fire, the very sight of which made the blood circulate freely, and the finger-tops grow warm. Larry Toole was prepossessed in favour of Ned Mollowney, and Ned Mollowney had fallen in love with Larry Toole, so that it is hardly to be wondered at that the two gentlemen yielded to the combined seduction of their situation, and seated themselves snugly by the fire, each with his due allowance of stimulating liquor, and with a very vague and uncertain kind of belief in the likelihood of their following their masters respectively until they had made themselves particularly comfortable. It was not until after nearly two hours of blissful communion with his delectable companion, that Larry Toole suddenly bethought him of the fact that he had allowed his master, at the lowest calculation, time enough to have ridden to and from the "Cock and Anchor" at least half a dozen times. He, therefore, hurriedly bade goodnight, with many a fond vow of eternal friendship for the two companions of his princely revelry, mounted his horse with some little difficulty, and becoming every moment more and more confused, and less and less perpendicular, found himself at length — with an indistinct remembrance of having had several hundred falls upon every possible part of his body, and upon every possible geological substance, from soft alluvial mud up to plain limestone, during the course of his progress — within the brick precincts of the city. The horse, with an instinctive contempt for Mr. Toole's judgment, wholly disregarded that gentleman's vehement appeals to the bridle, and quietly pursued his well-known way to the hostelry of the "Cock and Anchor."

Our honest friend had hardly dismounted, which he did with one eye closed, and a hiccough, and a happy smile which mournfully contrasted with his filthy and battered condition, when he at once became absolutely insensible, from which condition he did not recover till next morning, when he found himself partially in bed, quite undressed, with the exception of his breeches, boots, and spurs, which he had forgotten to remove, and which latter, along with his feet, he had deposited upon the pillow, allowing his head to slope gently downward towards the foot of the bed.

As soon as Mr. Toole had ascertained where he was, and begun to recollect how he came there, he removed his legs from the pillow, and softly slid upon the floor. His first solicitude was for his clothes, the spattered and villainous condition of which appalled him; his next was to endeavour to remember whether or not his master had witnessed his weakness. Absorbed in this severe effort of memory, he sat upon the bedside, gazing upon the floor, and scratching his head, when the door opened, and his friend the groom entered the chamber.

"I say, old gentleman, you've been having a little bit of a spree," observed he, gazing pleasantly upon the disconsolate figure of the little man, who sat in his shirt and jack-boots, staring at him with a woebegone and bewildered air. "Why, you had a bushel of mud about your body when you came in, and no hat at all. Well, you *had* a pleasant night of it — there's no denying that."

"No hat;" said Larry desolately. "It isn't possible I dropped my hat off my head unknownest. Bloody wars, my hat! is it gone in airnest?"

"Yes, young gentleman, you came here bareheaded. The hat *is* gone, and that's a fact," replied the groom.

"I thought my coat was bad enough; but — oh! blur-anagers, my hat!" ejaculated Larry with abandonment. "Bad luck go with the liquor — tare-an-ouns, my hat!"

"There's a shoe off the horse," observed the groom; "and the seat is gone out of your breeches as clean as if it never was in it. Well, but you *had* a pleasant evening of it — you had."

"An' my breeches desthroyed — ruined beyant cure! See, Tom Berry, take a blundherbuz, will you, and put me out of pain at wonst. My breeches! Oh, divil go with the liquor! Holy Moses, is it possible? — my breeches!"

In an agony of contrition and desperate remorse, Larry Toole clasped his hands over his eyes and remained for some minutes silent; at length he said —

"An' what did the masther say? Don't be keeping me in pain — out with it at wonst."

"What master?" inquired the groom.

"What masther?" echoed Mr. Toole— "why Mr. O'Connor, to be sure."

"I'm sure I can't say," replied the man; "I have not seen him this month."

"Wasn't he here before me last night?" inquired the little man.

"No, nor after neither," replied his visitor.

"Do you mane to tell me that he's not in the house at all?" interrogated Mr. Toole.

"Yes," replied he, "Mr. O'Connor is *not* in the house; the horse did not cross the yard this month. Will that do you?"

"Be the hoky," said Larry, "that's exthramely quare. But are you raly sure and quite sartin?"

"Yes, I tell you yes," replied he.

"Well, well," said Mr. Toole, "but that puts me to the divil's rounds to undherstand it — not come at all. What in the world's gone with him — not come — where else could he go to? Begorra, the whole iv the occurrences iv last night is a blaggard mysthery. What the divil's gone with him — where is he at all? — why couldn't he wait a bit for me an' I'd iv tuck the best care iv him? but gintlemen is always anruly. What the divil's keepin' him? I wouldn't be surprised if he made a baste iv himself in some public-house last night. A man ought never to take a dhrop more than jist what makes him plisant — bad luck to it. Lend me a breeches, an' I'll pray for you all the rest of my days. I must go out at wonst an' look for him; maybe he's at Mr. Audley's lodgings — ay, sure enough, it's there he is. Bad luck to the liquor. Why the divil did I let him go alone? Oh! sweet bad luck to it," he continued in fierce anguish, as he held up the muddy wreck of his favourite coat before his aching eyes— "my elegant coat — bad luck to it again — an' my beautiful hat — once more bad luck to it; an' my breeches — oh! it's fairly past bearin' — my elegant breeches! Bad luck to it for a threacherous drop — an' the masther lost, and no one knows what's done with him. Up with that poker, I tell you, and blow my brains out at once; there's nothing before me in this life but the divil's own delight — finish me, I tell you, and let me rest in the shade. I'll never hould up my head again, there's no use in purtendin'. Oh! bad luck to the dhrink!"

In this distracted frame of mind did Larry continue for nearly an hour, after which, with the aid of some contributions from the wardrobe of honest Tom Berry, he clothed himself, and went forth in quest of his master.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE WILD WOOD — THE OLD MANSION-HOUSE OF FINISKEA — SECRETS, AND A SURPRISE.

O'Connor pursued his way towards the city, following the broken horse-track, which then traversed the low grounds which lie upon the left bank of the Liffey. The Phœnix Park, or, as it was then called, the Royal Park, was at the time of which we write a much wilder place than it now is. There were no trim plantations nor stately clumps of tufted trees, no signs of care or culture. Broad patches of shaggy thorn spread with little interruption over the grounds, and regular roads were then unknown. The darkness became momentarily deeper and more deep as O'Connor pursued his solitary way; and the difficulty of proceeding grew every instant greater, for the heavy rains had interrupted his path with deep sloughs and pools, which became at length so frequent, and so difficult of passage, that he was fain to turn from the ordinary track, and seek an easier path along the high grounds which overhang the river. The close screen of the wild gnarled thorns which covered the upper level on which he now moved, still further deepened the darkness; and he became at length so entirely involved in the pitchy gloom, that he dismounted, and taking his horse by the head, led him forward through the tangled brake, and under the knotted branches of the old hoary thorns, stumbling among the briers and the crooked roots, and every moment encountering the sudden obstruction, either of some stooping branch, or the trunk of one of the old trees; so that altogether his progress was as tedious and unpleasant as it well could be. His annoyance became the greater as he proceeded; for he was so often compelled to turn aside, and change his course, to avoid these interruptions, that in the utter darkness he began to grow entirely uncertain whether or not he was moving in the right direction. The more he paused, and the oftener he reflected, the more entirely puzzled and bewildered did he become. Glad indeed would he have been that he had followed the track upon which he had at first entered, and run the hazard of all the sloughs and pools which crossed it; but he was now embarked in another route; and even had he desired it, so perplexed was he, that he could not have effected his retreat. Fully alive to the ridiculousness, as well as the annoyance of his situation, he slowly and painfully stumbled forward, conscious that if only he could move for half an hour or thereabout consistently in the same direction, he must disengage himself in some quarter or another from the entanglement in which he was involved. In vain he looked round him; nothing but entire darkness encountered him. In vain he listened for any sound which might intimate the neighbourhood of any living thing. Nothing but the hushed soughing of the evening breeze through the old boughs was audible; and he was forced to continue his route in the same troublesome uncertainty.

At length he saw, or thought he saw, a red light gleaming through the trees. It disappeared — it came again. He stopped, uncertain whether it was one of those fitful marsh-fires which but mock the perplexity of benighted travellers; but no — this light shone clearly, and with a steady beam, through the branches; and towards it he directed his steps, losing it now, and again recovering it, till at length, after a longer probation than he had at first expected, he gained a clear space of ground, intersected only by a few broken hedges and ditches, but free from the close wood which had so entirely darkened his advance. In this position he was enabled to discern that the light which had guided him streamed from the window of an old shattered house, partially surrounded by a dilapidated wall, having a few ruinous outhouses attached to it. In this building he beheld the old mansion-house of Finiskea, which then occupied the ground on which at present stands the powder-magazine, and which, by a slight alteration in sound, though without any analogy in meaning, has given its name to the Phœnix Park. The light streamed through the diamond panes of a narrow casement; and still leading his horse, O’Connor made his way over the broken fences towards the old house. As he approached, he perceived several figures moving to and fro in the chamber from which the light issued, and detected, or thought he did so, among them the remarkable form of the priest who had lately been his companion upon the road. As he advanced, someone inside drew a curtain across the window, though, as O’Connor conjectured, wholly unaware of his approach, and thus precluded any further reconnoitering on his part.

“At all events,” thought he, “they can spare me some one to put me upon my way. They can hardly complain if I intrude upon such an errand.”

With this reflection, he led his horse round the corner of the building to the door, which was sheltered by a small porch roofed with tiles. By the faint light, which in the open space made objects partially discernible, he perceived two men, as it appeared to him, fast asleep — half sitting and half lying on the low step of the door. He had just come near enough to accost them, when, somewhat to his surprise, he was seized from behind in a powerful grip, and his arms pinioned to his sides. A single antagonist he would easily have shaken off; but a reinforcement was at hand.

"Up, boys — be stirring — open the door," cried the hoarse voice of the person who held O'Connor.

The two figures started to their feet; their strength, combined with the efforts of his first assailant, effectually mastered O'Connor, and one of them shoved the door open.

"Pretty watch you keep," said he, as the party hurried their prisoner, wholly without the power of resistance, into the house.

Three or four powerful, large-limbed fellows, well armed, were seated in the hall, and arose on his entrance. O'Connor saw that resistance against such odds were idle, and resolved patiently to submit to the issue, whatever it might be.

"Gentlemen that's caught peeping is sometimes made to see more than they have a mind to," observed one of O'Connor's conductors.

Another removed his sword, and having satisfied himself that he had not any other weapon upon his person, observed, —

"You may let his elbows loose; but jist keep him tight by the collar."

"Let the gentlemen know there's a bird limed," observed the first speaker; and one of the others passed from the narrow hall to execute the mission.

After some little delay, O'Connor, who awaited the result with more of curiosity and impatience than of alarm, was conducted by two of the armed men who had secured him through a large passage terminating in a chamber, which they also traversed, and by a second door at its far extremity found entrance into a rude but spacious apartment, floored with tiles, and with a low ceiling of dark plank, supported by ponderous beams. A large wood fire burned in the hearth, beside which some half dozen men were congregated; several others were seated by a massive table, on which were writing materials, with which two or three of them were busily employed; a number of open letters were also strewn upon it, and here and there a brace of horse-pistols or a carbine showed that the party felt neither very secure, nor very much disposed to surrender without a struggle, should their worst anticipations be realized, in any attempt to surprise them.

Most of those who were present bore, in their disordered dress and mud-soiled boots, the evidence of recent travel. They were lighted chiefly by the broad, uncertain gleam of the blazing wood fire, in which the misty flame of two or three wretched candles which burned upon the table shone pale and dim as the last stars of night in the red dawn of an autumnal sun. In this strong and ruddy light the groups of figures, variously attired, some seated by the table, and others standing with their ample cloaks still folded around them, acquired by the contrast of broad light and shade a character of picturesqueness which had in it something wild and imposing. This singular tableau occupied the further end of the room, which was one of considerable length, and as the prisoner was led forward to the bar of the tribunal, those who composed it eyed him sternly and fixedly.

“Bind his hands fast,” said a lean and dark-featured man, with a singularly forbidding aspect and a deep, stern voice, who sat at the head of the table with a pile of papers beside him. Spite of O’Connor’s struggles, the order was speedily executed, and with such goodwill that the blood almost started from his nails.

“Now, sir,” continued the same speaker, “who are you, and what may your errand be?”

“Before I answer your questions you must satisfy me that you have authority to ask them,” replied O’Connor. “Who, I pray, are you, who dare to seize the person, and to bind the limbs of a free man? I shall know this ere one of your questions shall have a reply.”

“I have seen you, young sir, before — scarce an hour since,” observed one of those who stood by the hearth. “Look at me, and say do you remember my features?”

“I do,” replied O’Connor, who had no difficulty in recognizing those of the priest who had parted from him so abruptly on that evening— “of course I recollect your face; we rode side by side from Leixlip to-day.”

“You recollect my caution too — you cannot have forgotten that,” continued the priest, menacingly. “You know how peremptorily I warned you against following me, yet you have dogged me here; on your own head be the consequences — the fool shall perish in his folly."

"I have *not* dogged you here, sir," replied O'Connor; "I seek my way to Dublin. The river banks are so soft that a horse had better swim than seek to keep them; I therefore took the upper ground, and after losing myself among the woods, at length saw a light, reached it, and here I am."

The priest heard the statement with a sinister smile.

"A truce to these inventions, sir," said he. "It is indeed *possible* that you speak the truth, but it is in the highest degree *probable* that you lie; it is, in a word, plain — satisfactorily plain, that you followed me hither, as I suspected you might have done; you have dogged me, sir, and you have seen all that you sought to behold; you have seen my place of destination and my company. I care not with what motive you have acted — that is between yourself and your Maker. If you are a spy, which I shrewdly suspect, Providence has defeated your treason, and punished the traitor; if mere curiosity impelled you, you will remember that ill-directed curiosity was the sin which brought death upon mankind, and cease to wonder that its fruits may be bitter to yourself. What say you, young man?"

"I have told you plainly how I happened to reach this place," replied O'Connor; "I have told you once — I will repeat the statement no more; and once again I ask, on what authority you question me, and dare thus to bind my hands and keep me here against my will?"

"Authority sufficient to satisfy our own consciences," rejoined the priest. "The responsibility rests not upon you; enough it is for you to know that we have the power to detain you, and that we exercise that power, as we most probably shall *another*, still less conducive to your comfort."

"You have the power to make me captive, I admit," rejoined O'Connor— "you have the power to murder me, as you threaten, but though power to keep or kill is all the justification a robber or a bravo needs, methinks such an argument should hardly satisfy a consecrated minister of Christ."

The expression with which the priest regarded the young man grew blacker and more truculent at this rebuke, and after a silence of a few seconds he replied, —

"We are doubly authorized in what we do — ay, trebly warranted, young traitor. God Almighty has given us the instinct of self-defence, which in a righteous cause it is laudable to consult and indulge; the Church, too, tells us in these times to deal strictly with the malignant persecutors of God's truth; and lastly, we have a royal warranty — the authority of the rightful king of these realms, investing us with powers to deal summarily with rebels and traitors. Let this satisfy you."

"I honour the king," rejoined O'Connor, "as truly as any man here, seeing that *my* father lost all in the service of his illustrious sire, but I need some more satisfactory assurance of his delegated authority than the bare assertion of a violent man, of whom I know absolutely nothing, and until you show me some instrument empowering you to act thus, I will not acknowledge your competency to subject me to an examination, and still resolutely protest against your detaining me here."

"You refuse, then, to answer our questions?" said the hard-featured little person who sat at the far end of the table.

"Until you show authority to put them, I peremptorily *do* refuse to answer them," replied the young man.

The little person looked expressively at the priest, who appeared to hold a high influence among the party. He answered the look by saying, —

"His blood be upon his own head."

"Nay, not so fast, holy father; let us debate upon this matter for a few minutes, ere we execute sentence," said a singularly noble-looking man who stood beside the priest. "Remove the prisoner," he added, with a voice of command, "and keep him strictly guarded."

"Well, be it so," said he, reluctantly.

The little man who sat at the head of the table made a gesture to those who guarded O'Connor, and the order thus given and sanctioned was at once carried into execution.

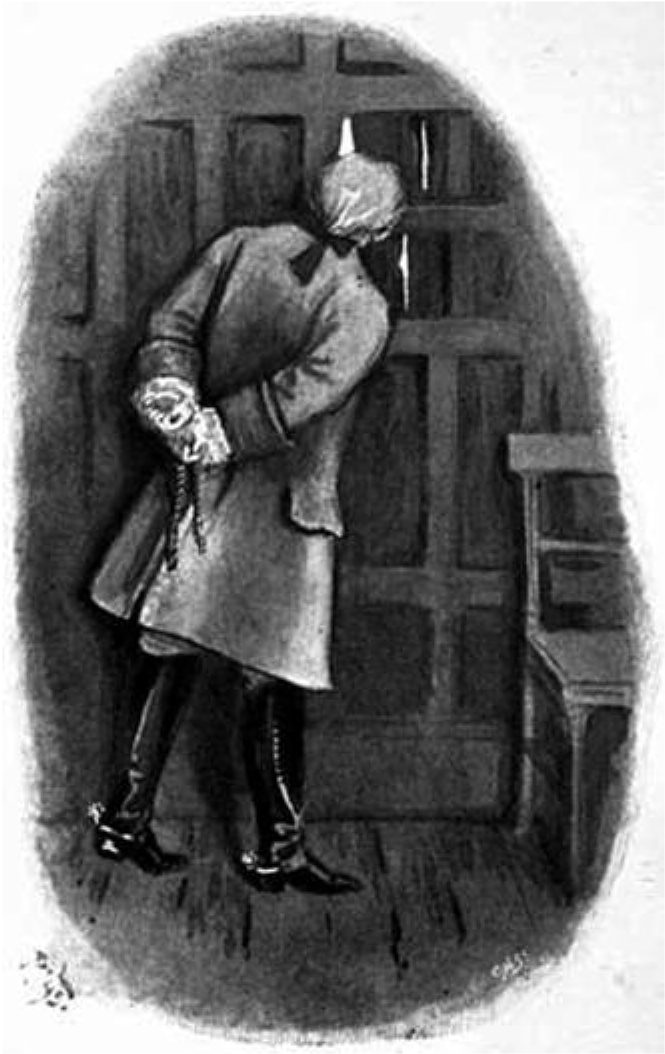
CHAPTER XLIV.

THE DOOM.

The young man was conveyed from the chamber by his two athletic conductors, the door closed upon the deliberations of the stern tribunal who were just about to debate upon the question of his life or death, and he was led round the corner of a lobby, a few steps from the chamber where his judges sat; a stout door in the wall was pushed open and he himself thrust through it into a cold, empty apartment, in perfect darkness, and the door shut and barred behind him.

Here, in solitude and darkness, the horrors of his situation rushed upon him with tremendous and overwhelming reality. His life was in the hands of fierce and relentless men, by whom, he had little doubt, he was already judged and condemned; bound and helpless, he must await, without the power of hastening or of deferring his fate by a single minute, the cold-blooded deliberations of the conclave who sat within. Unable even to hear the progress of the debate on whose result his life was suspended, a faint and dizzy sickness came upon him, and the cold dew burst from every pore; ghastly, shapeless images of horror hurried with sightless speed across his mind, and his brain throbbed with the fearful excitement of madness. With a desperate effort he roused his energies; but what could human ingenuity, even sharpened by the presence of urgent and terrific danger, suggest or devise? His hands were firmly bound behind his back; in vain he tugged with all his strength, in the fruitless hope of disengaging the cords which crushed them together. He groaned in downright agony as, strength and hope exhausted, he gave up the desperate attempt; nothing then could be done; there remained for him no hope — no chance. In this horrible condition he walked with slow steps to and fro in the dark chamber, in vain endeavouring to compose his terrible agitation.

“Were my hands but free,” thought he, “I should let the villains know that against any odds a resolute man may sell his life dearly. But it is in vain to struggle; they have bound me here but too securely.”



Thus saying, he leaned himself against the partition, to await, passively, the event which he knew could not be far distant. The surface against which he leaned was not that of the wall — it yielded slightly to his pressure — it was a door. With his knee and shoulder he easily forced it open, and entered another chamber, at the far-side of which he distinctly saw a stream of light, which, passing through a chink, fell upon the opposite wall, and, at the same time, he clearly heard the muffled sound of voices in debate. He made his way to the aperture through which the light found entrance, and as he did so, the sound of the voices fell more and more distinctly upon his ear. A small square, of about two feet each way, was cut in the wall, affording an orifice through which, probably, the closet in which he stood was imperfectly lighted in the daytime. A plank shutter was closed over this, and barred upon the outside, through the imperfect joints of which the light had found its way, and O'Connor now scanned the contents of the outer chamber. It was that in which the assembly, in whose presence he had, but a few minutes before, been standing, were congregated. A low, broad-shouldered man, whose dress was that of mourning, and who wore his own hair, which descended in meagre ringlets of black upon either side, leaving the bald summit of his head exposed, and who added to the singularity of his appearance not a little by a long, thick beard, which covered his chin and upper lip — this man, who sat nearly opposite to the opening through which O'Connor looked, was speaking and addressing himself to some person who stood, as it appeared, divided by little more than the thickness of the wall from the party whose life he was debating.

"And against all this," continued the speaker, "what weighs the life of one man — one life, at best useless to the country, and useless to the king — at *best*, I say? What came we here for? No light matter to take in hand, sirs; to be pursued with no small risk; each comes hither, *cinctus gladio*, in the cause of the king. That cause with our own lives we are bound to maintain; and why not, if need be, at the cost of the lives of others? No good can come of sparing this fellow — at the best, no advantage to the cause: and, on the other hand, should he prove a traitor, a spy, or even an idle babbler, the heaviest damage may befall us. Tush, tush, gentlemen, it is ill straining at gnats in such times. We are here a court-martial, or no court at all. If I find that such dangerous vacillation as this carries it in your councils, I shall, for one, henceforward hang my sword over the mantelpiece, and obey the new laws. What! one life against such a risk — one execution, to save the cause and secure us all. To us, who have served in the king's wars, and hanged rebels by the round dozen — even on suspicion of being so — such indecision seems incredible. There ought not to be two words about the matter. Put him to death."

Having thus acquitted himself, this somewhat unattractive personage applied himself, with much industry and absorption, to the task of chopping, shredding, rolling up, and otherwise preparing a piece of tobacco for the bowl of his pipe.

"I confess," said someone whom O'Connor could not see, "that in pleading what may be said on behalf of this young man, I have no ground to go upon beyond a mere instinctive belief in the poor fellow's honesty, and in the truth of his story."

"Pardon me, sir," replied one in whose voice O'Connor thought he recognized that of the priest, "if I say, that to act upon such fanciful impressions, as if they were grounded upon evidence, were, in nine cases out of every ten, the most transcendent and mischievous folly. I repeat my own conviction, upon something like satisfactory evidence, that he is *not* honest. I talked with the fellow this evening — perhaps a little too freely — but in that conference, if he lied not, I learned that he belonged to that most dangerous class — the worst with whom we have to contend — the lukewarm, professing, passive Catholics — the very stuff of which the worst kind of spies and informers are made. He, no doubt, guessed, from what I said — for, to be plain with you, I spoke too freely by a great deal, in the belief, I know not how assumed, that he was one of ourselves — he guessed, I say, something of the nature of my mission, and tracked me hither — at all events, by some strange coincidence, hither he came. It is for you to weigh the question of probabilities."

"It matters not, in my mind, why or how he came hither," observed the ill-favoured gentleman, who sate at the head of the table; "he *is* here, and he hath seen our meeting, and could identify many of us. This is too large a confidence to repose in a stranger, and I for one do not like it, and therefore I say let him be killed without any more parley or debate."

The old man paused, and a silence followed. With an agonized attention, O'Connor listened for one word or movement of dissent; it came not.

"All agreed?" said the bearded hero, preparing to light his tobacco pipe at the candle. "Well, so I expected."

The little man who had spoken before him knocked sharply with the butt of a pistol upon the table, and O'Connor heard the door of the room open. The same person beckoned with his hand, and one of the stalwart men who had assisted in securing him, advanced to the foot of the board.

"Let a grave be digged in the orchard," said he, "and when it is ready, bring the prisoner out and despatch him, Let it be all done and the grave closed in half an hour."

The man made a rude obeisance, and left the room in silence.

Bound as he was, O'Connor traced the four walls of the room, in the vague hope that he might discover some other outlet from the chamber than that which he had just entered. But in vain; nothing encountered him but the hard, cold wall; and even had it been otherwise, thus helplessly manacled, what would it have availed him? He passed into the room into which he had been first thrust by the two guards, and in a state little short of frenzy, he cast himself upon the floor.

"Oh God!" said he, "it is terrible to see death thus creeping toward me, and not to have the power to help myself. I am doomed — my life already devoted, and before another hour I shall lie under the clay, a corpse. Is there nothing to be done — no hope, no chance? Oh, God! nothing!"

As he lay in this strong agony, he heard, or thought he heard, the clank of the spade upon the stony soil without. The work was begun — the grave was opened. Madly he strained at the cords — he tugged with more than human might — but all in vain. Still with horrible monotony he heard the clank of the iron mattock tinkling and clanking in the gravelly soil. Oh! that he could have stopped his ears to exclude the maddening sound. The pulses smote upon his brain like floods of fire. With closed eyes, and teeth set, and hands desperately clenched, he drew himself together, in the awful spasms of uncontrollable horror. Suddenly this fearful paroxysm departed, and a kind of awful calm supervened. It was no dull insensibility to his real situation, but a certain collectedness and calm self-possession, which enabled him to behold the grim adversary of human kind, even arrayed in all the terrors of his nearest approach, with a steady eye.

"After all, when all's done, what have I to lose? Life had no more joys for me — happy I could never more have been. Why should the miserable dread death, and cling to life like cowards? What is it? A brief struggle — the agony of a few minutes — the instinctive yearnings of our nature after life; and this over, comes rest — eternal quiet."

He then endeavoured, in prayer, earnestly to commend his spirit to its Maker. While thus employed he heard steps upon the hard tiles of the passage. His heart swelled as though it would burst. He rightly guessed their mission. The bolt was slowly drawn; the dusky light of a lantern streamed into the room, and revealed upon the threshold the forms of three tall men.

"Lift him up — rise him, boys," said he who carried the lantern.

"You must come with us," said one of the two who advanced to O'Connor.

Resistance was fruitless, and he offered none. A cold, sick, overwhelming horror unstrung his joints and dimmed his sight. He suffered them to lead him passively from the room.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE MAN IN THE CLOAK — AND HIS BEDCHAMBER.

As O'Connor approached the outer door through which he was to pass to certain and speedy death, it were not easy to describe or analyze his sensations; every object he beheld in the brief glance he cast around him as he passed along the hall appeared invested with a strangely sharp and vivid intensity of distinctness, and had in its aspect something indefinably spectral and ghastly — like things beheld under the terrific spell of a waking nightmare. His tremendous situation seemed to him something unreal, incredible; he walked in an appalling dream; in vain he strove to fix his thoughts myriads and myriads of scenes and incidents, never remembered since childhood's days, now with strange distinctness and wild rapidity whirled through his brain. The hall-door stood half open, and the fellow who led the way had almost reached it, when it was on a sudden thrown wide, and a figure, muffled in a cloak, confronted the funeral procession.

The foremost man raised the ponderous weapon which he carried, and held it poised in the air, ready to shiver the head of the intruder should he venture to advance — the two guards who held O'Connor halted at the same time.

"How's this, Cormack!" said the stranger. "Do you lift your weapon against the life of a friend? — rub your eyes and waken — how is it you cannot know me? — you've been drinking, sirrah."

At the sound of the speaker's voice the man at once lowered his hatchet and withdrew, a little sulkily, like a rebuked mastiff.

"What means all this?" continued he in the cloak, looking searchingly at the party in the rear; "whom have we got here? — where made you this prisoner? So, so — this must be looked to. How were you about to deal with him, fellow?" he added, addressing himself to him whom he had first encountered.

"According to orders, captain," replied the man, doggedly.

"And how may that have been?" interrogated the gentleman in the cloak.

"*End* him," replied he, sulkily.

"Has he been before the council in the great parlour?" inquired the stranger.

"Yes, captain — long enough, too," replied the fellow.

"And *they* have ordered this execution?" added the newly arrived.

"Yes, sir — who else? Come on, boys — bring him out, will you? Time is running short," he added, addressing his comrades, and himself approaching the door.

"Re-conduct the prisoner to the council-board," said the stranger, in a tone of command.

Without a moment's hesitation they obeyed the order; and O'Connor, followed by the muffled figure of the stranger, for the second time entered the apartment where his relentless judges sate.

The newcomer strode up the room to the table at which the self-styled council were seated.

"God save you, gentlemen," said he, "and prosper the good work ye have taken in hand;" and thus speaking, he removed and cast upon the table his hat and cloak, thereby revealing the square-built form and harsh features of O'Hanlon.

O'Connor no sooner recognized the traits of his mysterious acquaintance, than he felt a hope which thrilled with a strange agony of his heart — a hope — almost a conviction — that he should escape; and unaccountable though it may appear, in this hope he felt more unmanned and agitated than he had done but a few moments before, in the apparent certainty of immediate and inevitable destruction.

The salutation of O'Hanlon was warmly, almost enthusiastically, returned, and after this interchange of friendly greeting, and a few brief questions and answers touching comparatively indifferent matters, he glanced toward O'Connor, and said, —

"I've so far presumed upon my favour with you, gentlemen, as to stay your orders in respect of that young gentleman, whom, it would appear, you have judged worthy of death. Death is a matter whose importance I've never very much insisted upon — that you know — at least, several among you, gentlemen, well know it, for you have seen me deal it somewhat unsparingly when the cause required it; but I profess I do not care in cool blood to take life upon insufficient reason. Life is lightly taken; but once gone, who can restore it? Therefore, I think it very meet that patient consideration should be had of all cases, when such deliberation is possible and convenient, before proceeding to the last irrevocable extremity. Pray you inform me upon what charges does this youth stand convicted, that his life should be forfeit?"

"It is briefly told," replied the priest. "On my way hither I encountered him; we rode and conversed together; and conjecturing that he travelled on the same errand as myself, I talked to him more freely than in all discretion I ought to have done. I discovered my mistake, and at Chapelizod I turned and left him, telling him with threats *not* to follow me; yet scarcely had I been here ten minutes, when this gentleman is found lurking near the house — and about to enter it. He is seized, bound, brought in here, and witnesses our assembly and proceedings. Under these suspicious circumstances, and with the knowledge of our meeting and its objects, were it wise to let him go? Surely not so — but the veriest madness."

"Young man," said O'Hanlon, turning to O'Connor, "what say you to this?"

"No more than what I already told these gentlemen — simply, that taking the upper level to avoid the sloughs by the river side, I became in the darkness entangled in the dense woods which cover these grounds, and at length, after groping my way through the trees as best I might, arrived by the merest chance at this place, and without the slightest knowledge, or even suspicion, either that I was following the course taken by that gentleman, or intruding myself upon any secret councils. I have no more to say — this is the simple truth."

"Well, gentlemen," said O'Hanlon, "you hear the prisoner's defence. What think you?"

"We have decided already, and he has now produced nothing new in his favour. I see no reason why we should alter our decision," replied the priest.

"You would, then, put him to death?" inquired he.

"Assuredly," replied the priest, calmly.

"But this shall not be, gentlemen; he shall *not* die. You shall slay *me* first," replied O'Hanlon. "I know this youth; and every word he has spoken I believe. He is the son of one who risked his life a hundred times, and lost all for the sake of the king and his country — one who, throughout the desperate and fruitless struggles of Irish loyalty, was in the field my constant comrade, and a braver and a better one none ever need desire. The son of such a man shall not perish by our hands; and for the risk of his talking elsewhere of this night's adventure, I will be his surety, with my life, that he mentions it to no one, and nowhere."

A silence of some seconds followed this unexpected declaration.

"Be it so, then," said the priest; "for my part, I offer no resistance."

"So say I," added the person who sat with the papers by him at the extremity of the board. "On you, however, Captain O'Hanlon, rest the whole responsibility of this act."

"On me alone. Were there the possibility of treason in that youth, I would myself perish ere I should move a hand to save him," replied O'Hanlon. "I gladly take upon myself the whole accountability, and all the consequences of the act."

"Your life and liberty are yours, sir," said the priest, addressing O'Connor; "see that you abuse neither to our prejudice. Unbind and let the prisoner go."

"Stay," said O'Hanlon. "Mr. O'Connor, I have one request to make."

"It is granted ere it is made. What can I return you in exchange for my life?" replied O'Connor.

"I wish to speak with you tonight," continued O'Hanlon, "on matters which concern you nearly. You will remain here — you can have a chamber. Farewell for the present. Conduct Mr. O'Connor to my apartment," he added, addressing the attendants, who were employed in loosening the strained cords which bound his hands; and with this direction, O'Hanlon mingled with the group at the hearth, and began to converse with them in a low voice.

O'Connor followed his guide through a narrow, damp-stained corridor, with tiled flooring, and up a broad staircase, with heavy oaken balustrades, and steps whose planks seemed worn by the tread of centuries; and then along another passage, more cheerless still than the first — several of the narrow windows, by which in the daytime it was lighted, had now lost every vestige of glass, and even of the wooden framework in which it had been fixed, and gave free admission to the fitful night-wind, as well as to the straggling boughs of ivy which mantled the old walls and clustered shelteringly about the ruined casements. Screening the candle which he carried behind the flap of his coat, to prevent its being extinguished by the gusts which somewhat rudely swept the narrow passage, the man led O'Connor to a chamber, which they both entered. It was not quite so cheerless as the desolate condition of the approach to it might have warranted one in expecting; a wood-fire, which had been recently replenished, blazed and crackled briskly upon the hearth, and shed an uncertain but cheerful glow through the recesses of the chamber. It was a spacious apartment, hung with stamped leather, in many places stained and rotted by the damp, and here and there hanging in rags from the wall, and exposing the bare, mildewed plaster beneath. The furniture was scanty, and in keeping with the place — old, dark, and crazy; and a wretched bed, with very spare covering, was, as it seemed, temporarily strewn upon the floor, near the hearth. The man placed the candle upon a small table, black with age, and patched and crutched up like a battered pensioner, and flinging some more wood upon the fire, turned and left the room in silence.

Alone, his first employment was to review again and again the strange events of that night; his next was to conjecture the nature of O'Hanlon's promised communication. Baffled in these latter speculations, he applied himself to examine the old chamber in which he sat, and to endeavour to trace the halfobliterated pattern of the tattered hangings. These occupations, along with sundry speculations just as idle, touching the original of a grim old portrait, faded and torn, which hung over the fireplace, filled up the tedious hours which preceded his expected interview with his preserver.

At length the weary interval elapsed, and the anxiously expected moment arrived. The door opened, and O'Hanlon entered. He approached the young man, who advanced to meet him, and extending his hand, grasped that of O'Connor with a warm and friendly pressure.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE DOUBLE CONFERENCE — OLD PAPERS.

“When last I saw you,” said O’Hanlon, seating himself before the hearth, and motioning O’Connor to take a chair also, “I told you that you ought to tame your rash young blood, and gave you thereupon an old soldier’s best advice. It seems, however, that you are wayward and headlong still. Young soldiers look for danger — old ones are content to meet it when it comes, knowing well that it will come often enough, uninvited and unsought; nevertheless, we will pass by this night’s adventure, and turn to other matters. First, however, it were meet and necessary that you should have somewhat to refresh you; you must needs be weary and exhausted.”

“If you can give me some wine, it will be very welcome. I care not for anything more tonight,” replied O’Connor.

“That can I,” replied he, “and will myself do you reason.” He arose, and after a few minutes’ absence entered with two flasks, whose dust and cobwebs bespoke their antiquity, and filled two large, longstemmed glasses with the generous liquor.

“Young man,” said O’Hanlon, “from the moment I saw you in the inner room yonder, I know not how or wherefore my heart clave to you; and now knowing you for the son of my true friend, I feel for you the stronger love. I will tell you now how matters stand with us. I will hide nothing from you. I am old enough to have learned the last lesson of experience — the folly of too much suspicion. I will not distrust the son of Richard O’Connor. I need hardly tell you that those men whom you saw below stairs are no friends of the ruling powers, but devoted entirely to the service and the fortunes of the rightful heir of the throne of England and of Ireland, met here together not without great peril.”

“I had conjectured as much from what I myself witnessed,” rejoined O’Connor.

“Well, then, I tell you this — the cause is not a hopeless one; the exiled king has warm, zealous, and powerful friends where their existence is least suspected,” continued O’Hanlon. “In the Parliament of England he has a strong and untiring party undetected — some of them, too, must soon wield the enormous powers of government, and have already gotten entire possession of the ear of the Queen; and so soon as events invite, and the time is ripe for action, a mighty and a sudden constitutional movement will be made in favour of the prince — a movement entirely constitutional and in the Parliament. This will, whether successful or not, raise the intolerant party here into fierce resistance — the resistance of the firelock and the sword; all the usurpers, the perjurers, and the plunderers who now possess the wealth and dignities of this spoiled and oppressed country, will arise in terror to defend their booty, and unless met and encountered, and defeated by the party of the young king in this island, will embolden the malignant rebels of the sister country to imitate their example, and so overawe the Parliament, and frustrate their beneficent intentions. To us, therefore, has fallen the humbler but important task of organizing here, in the heart of this country, and in entire secrecy, a power sufficient for the occasion. Fain would I have thee along with us in so great and good a work, but will not urge you now; think upon it, however — it is not so mad a scheme as you may have thought, but such a one as looked on calmly, with the cold eye of reason, seems practicable — ay, sure of success. Ponder the matter, then; give me no answer now — I will take none — but think well upon it, and after a week, and not sooner, when you have decided, tell me whether you will be one of us or not. Meanwhile, I have other matters to tell you of, in which perhaps your young heart will take a nearer interest."

He paused, and having replenished their glasses, and thrown a fresh supply of wood upon the fire, he continued, —

"Are you acquainted with a family named Ashwoode?"

"Yes," replied O'Connor, quickly, "I have known them long."

O'Hanlon looked searchingly at the young man, and then continued, —

"Yes," said he, "I see it is even so — your face betrays it — you loved the young lady, Mary Ashwoode — deny it not — I am your friend, and seek not idly or without purpose thus to question you. What thought you of Henry Ashwoode, now Sir Henry Ashwoode?"

"He was latterly much — *entirely* my friend," replied O'Connor.

"He so professed himself?" asked O'Hanlon.

"Ay," replied O'Connor, somewhat surprised at the tone in which the question was put, "he did so profess himself, and repeatedly."

“He is a villain — he has betrayed you,” said the elder man, sternly.

“How — what — a villain! Henry Ashwoode deceive me?” said O’Connor, turning pale as death.

“Yes — unless I’ve been strangely practised on — he has villainously deceived alike you and his own sister — pretending friendship, he has sowed distrust between you.”

“But have you evidence of what you say?” cried O’Connor. “Gracious God — what have I done!”

“I have evidence, and you shall hear and judge of it yourself,” replied O’Hanlon; “you cannot hear it tonight, however, nor I produce it — you need some rest, and so in truth do I — make use of that poor bed — a tired brain and weary body need no luxurious couch — I shall see you in the morning betimes — till then farewell.”

The young man would fain have detained O’Hanlon, and spoken with him, but in vain.

“We have talked enough for this night,” said the elder man— “I have it not in my power now to satisfy you — I shall, however, in the morning — I have taken measures for the purpose — goodnight.”

So saying, O’Hanlon left the chamber, and closed the door upon his young friend, now less than ever disposed to slumber.

He threw himself upon the pallet, the victim of a thousand harassing and exciting thoughts — sleep was effectually banished; and at length, tired of the fruitless attitude of repose which he courted in vain, he arose and resumed his seat by the hearth, in anxious and weary expectation of the morning.

At length the red light of the dawn broke over the smoky city, and with a dusky glow the foggy sun emerged from the horizon of chimney-tops, and threw his crimson mantle of ruddy light over the hoary thorn-wood and the shattered mansion, beneath whose roof had passed the scenes we have just described. Never did the sick wretch, who in sleepless anguish has tossed and fretted through the tedious watches of the night, welcome the return of day with more cordial greeting than did O’Connor upon this dusky morn. The time which was to satisfy his doubts could not now be far distant, and every sound which smote upon his ear seemed to announce the approach of him who was to dispel them all.

Weary, haggard, and nervous after the fatigues and agitation of the previous day — unrefreshed by the slumbers he so much required, his irritation and excitement were perhaps even greater than under other circumstances they would have been. The torments of suspense were at length, however, ended — he did hear steps approach the chamber — the steps evidently of more than one person — the door opened, and O'Hanlon, followed by Signor Parucci, entered the room.

"I believe, young gentleman, you have seen this person before?" said O'Hanlon, addressing O'Connor, while he glanced at the Italian.

O'Connor assented.

"Ah! yees," said the Neapolitan, with a winning smile; "he has see me vary often. Signor O'Connor — he know me vary well. I am so happy to see him again — vary — oh! vary."

"Let Mr. O'Connor know briefly and distinctly what you have already told me," said O'Hanlon.

"About the letters?" asked the Italian.

"Yes, be brief," replied O'Hanlon.

"Ah! did he not guess?" rejoined the Neapolitan; "*per crilla!* the deception succeed, then — vary coning faylow was old Sir Richard — bote not half so coning as his son, Sir Henry. He never suspect — Mr. O'Connor never doubt, bote took all the letters and read them just so as Sir Henry said he would. *Malora!* what great meesfortune."

"Parucci, speak plainly to the point; I cannot endure this. Say at once what has he done — *how* have I been deceived?" cried O'Connor.

"You remember when the old gentleman — Mr. Audley, I think he is call — saw Sir Richard — immediately after that some letters passed between you and Mees Mary Ashwoode."

"I do remember it — proceed," replied O'Connor.

"Mees Mary's letters to you were cold and unkind, and make you think she did not love you any more," added Parucci.

"Well, well — say on — say on — for God's sake, man — say on," cried O'Connor, vehemently.

"Those letters you got were not written by her," continued the Italian, coolly; "they were all wat you call *forged* — written by another person, and planned by Sir Henry and Sir Reechard; and the same way on the other side — the letters you wrote to her were all stopped, and read by the same two gentlemen, and other letters written in stead, and she is breaking her heart, because she thinks you ‘av betrayed her, and given her up — *rotta di collo!* they ‘av make nice work!”

“Prove this to me, prove it,” said O’Connor, wildly, while his eye burned with the kindling fire of fury.

“I weel prove it,” rejoined Parucci, but with an agitated voice and a troubled face; “bote, *corpo di Plato*, you weel keel me if I tell — promise — swear — by your honour — you weel not horte me — you weel not toche me — swear, Signor, and I weel tell.”

“Miserable caitiff — speak, and quickly — you are safe — I swear it,” rejoined he.

“Well, then,” resumed the Italian, with restored calmness, “I will prove it so that you cannot doubt any more — it was I that wrote the letters for them — I, myself — and beside, here is the bundle with all of them written out for me to copy — most of them by Sir Henry — you know his handwriting — you weel see the character — *corbezzoli!* he is a great rogue — and you will find all the *real* letters from you and Mees Mary that were stopped — I have them here.”

He here disengaged from the deep pocket of his coat, a red leathern case stamped with golden flowers, and opening it presented it to the young man.

With shifting colour and eyes almost blinded with agitation, O’Connor read and re-read these documents.

“Where is Ashwoode?” at length he cried; “bring me to him — gracious God, what a monster I must have appeared — will she — *can* she ever forgive me?”

Disregarding in entire contempt the mean agent of Ashwoode’s villainy, and thinking only of the highborn principal, O’Connor, pale as death, but with perfect deliberateness, arose and took the sword which the attendant who conducted him to the room had laid by the wall, and replacing it at his side, said sternly, —

“Bring me to Sir Henry Ashwoode — where is he? I must speak with him.”

“I cannot breeng you to him now,” replied Parucci, in internal ecstasies, “for I cannot say where he is; bote I know vary well where he weel be to-day after dinner time, in the evening, and I weel breeng you; bote I hope very moche you are not intending any mischiefs; if I thought so, I would be vary sorry — oh! vary."

"Well, be it so, if it may not be sooner," said O'Connor, gloomily, "this evening at all events he shall account with me."

"Meanwhile," said O'Hanlon, "you may as well remain here; and when the time arrives which this Italian fellow names, we can start. I will accompany you, for in such cases the arm of a friend can do you no harm and may secure you fair play. Hear me, you Italian scoundrel, remain here until we are ready to depart with you, and that shall be whenever you think it time to seek Sir Henry Ashwoode; you shall have enough to eat and drink meanwhile; depart, and relieve us of your company."

Signor Parucci smiled sweetly from ear to ear, shrugged, and bowed, and then glided lightly from the room, exulting in the pleasant conviction that he had commenced operations against his ungrateful patron, by involving him in a scrape which must inevitably result in somewhat unpleasant exposures, and which had beside reduced the question of Sir Henry's life or death to an even chance.

CHAPTER XLVII.

“THE JOLLY BOWLERS” — THE DOUBLE FRAY AND THE FLIGHT.

At the time of which we write, there lay at the southern extremity of the city of Dublin, a bowling-green of fashionable resort, well known as “Cullen’s Green.” For greater privacy it was enclosed by a brick wall of considerable height, which again was surrounded by stately rows of lofty and ancient elms. A few humble dwellings were clustered about it; and through one of them, a low, tiled public-house, lay the entrance into this place of pastime. Thitherward O’Connor and O’Hanlon, having left their horses at the “Cock and Anchor,” were led by the wily Italian.

“The players you say, will not stop till dusk,” said O’Connor; “we can go in, and I shall wait until the party have broken up, to speak to Ashwoode; in the interval we can mix with the spectators, and so escape remark.”

They were now approaching the little tavern embowered in tufted trees, and as they advanced, they perceived a number of hack carriages and led horses congregated upon the road about its entrance.

“Sir Henry is within; that iron-grey is his horse; *sangue dun dua*, there is no mistake,” observed the Neapolitan.

The little party entered the humble tavern, but here they were encountered by a new difficulty.

“You can’t get in tonight, gentlemen — sorry to disappint, gentlemen; but the green’s engaged,” said mine host, with an air of mysterious importance; “a private party, engaged two days since for fear of a disappint.”

“Are they so strictly private, that they would not suffer two gentlemen to be spectators of their play?” inquired O’Hanlon.

“My orders is not to let anyone in, good, bad, or indifferent, while they are playing the match; that’s *my* orders,” replied the man; “sorry to disappint, but can’t break my word with the gentlemen, you know.”

“Is there any other entrance into the bowling-green?” inquired O’Connor, “except through that door.”

"Divil a one, sir, where would it be? — divil a one, gentlemen," replied mine host, "no other way in or out."

"We will rest ourselves here for a time, then," said O'Connor.

Accordingly the party seated themselves in the low-roofed chamber through which the bowlers on quitting the ground must necessarily pass; and calling for some liquor to prevent suspicion, moodily awaited the appearance of the young baronet and his companions. Many a stern, impatient glance of expectation did O'Connor direct to the old door which alone separated him from the traitor and hypocrite who had with such monstrous fraud practised upon his unsuspecting confidence. At length he heard gay laughter and the tread of many feet approaching; the proprietor of "The Jolly Bowlers" opened the door, and several merry groups passed them by and took their departure, but O'Connor's eye in vain sought among them the form of young Ashwoode.

"I see the grey horse still at the door; I know it as well as I know my own hand," said the Italian; "as sure as I am leeving man, Sir Henry is there still."

After an interval so considerable that O'Connor almost despaired of the appearance of Ashwoode, voices were again audible, and steps approaching the doorway at a slow pace; the time between the first approach of those sounds, and the actual appearance of those who caused them, appeared to the overwrought anxiety of O'Connor all but interminable. At length, however, two figures entered from the bowling-green — the one was that of a spare but dignified-looking man, somewhat advanced in years, but carrying in his countenance a singular expression of jollity and good humour — the other was that of Sir Henry Ashwoode.

"God be thanked," said O'Hanlon, grasping the hilt of his sword, "here comes the perjured villain Wharton."

O'Connor had another object, however, and beheld no one existing thing but only the now hated form of his false friend; both he and O'Hanlon started to their feet as the two figures entered the small and darksome room. O'Connor threw himself directly in their path and said, —

"Sir Henry Ashwoode, a word with you."

The appeal was startling and unexpected, and there was in the voice and attitude of him who uttered it, something of deep, intense, constrained passion and resolution, which made the two companions involuntarily and suddenly check their advance. One moment sufficed for Sir Henry to recognize O'Connor, and another convinced him that his quondam friend had discovered his treachery, and was there to unmask, perhaps to punish him. His presence of mind, however, seldom, if ever, forsook him in such scenes as this — he instantly resolved upon the tone in which to meet his injured antagonist.

"Pray, sir," said he, with stern *hauteur*, "upon what ground do you presume to throw yourself thus menacingly in my way? Move aside and let me pass, or your rashness shall cost you dearly."

"Ashwoode — Sir Henry — you well know there is one consideration which would unstring my arm if lifted against your life — you presume upon the forbearance which this respect commands," said O'Connor. "Promise but this — that you will undeceive your sister, whom you have practised upon as cruelly as you have on me, and I will call you to no further account, and inflict no further humiliation."

"Very good, sir, very magnanimous, and exceedingly tragic," rejoined Ashwoode, scornfully. "Turn aside, sirrah, and leave my path open, or by the —— you shall rue it."

"I will not leave the spot on which I stand but with my life, except on the conditions I have named," replied O'Connor.

"Once more, before I *strike* you, leave the way," cried Ashwoode, whose constitutional pugnacity began to be thoroughly aroused. "Turn aside, sirrah! How dare you confront gentlemen — insolent beggar, how dare you!"

Yielding to the furious impulse of the moment, Sir Henry Ashwoode drew his sword, and with the naked blade struck his antagonist twice with no sparing hand. The passions which O'Connor had, with all his energy, hitherto striven to master, would now brook restraint no longer; at this last extremity of insult the blood sprang from his heart in fiery currents and tingled through every vein; every feeling but the one deadly sense of outraged pride, of repeated wrong, followed and consummated by one degrading and intolerable outrage, vanished from his mind. With the speed of light his sword was drawn and presented at Ashwoode's breast. Each threw himself into the cautious attitude of deadly vigilance, and quick as lightning the bright blades crossed and clashed in the mortal rivalry of cunning fence. Each party was possessed of consummate skill in the use of the fatal weapon which he wielded, and several times in the course of the fierce debate, so evenly were they matched, the two, as by voluntary accommodation, paused in the conflict to take breath.

With faces pale as death with rage, and a consciousness of the deadly issue in which alone the struggle could end, and with eyes that glared like those of savage beasts at bay, each eyed the other. Thus alternately they paused and renewed the combat, and for long, with doubtful fortune. In the position of the antagonists there was, however, an inequality, and, as it turned out, a decisive one — the door through which Ashwoode and his companion had entered, and to which his back was turned, lay open, and the light which it admitted fell full in O'Connor's eyes. This, as all who have handled the foil can tell, is a disadvantage quite sufficient to determine even a less nicely balanced contest than that of which we write. After several pauses in the combat, and as many desperate renewals of it, Ashwoode, in one quick lunge, passed his blade through his opponent's sword-arm. Though the blood flowed plenteously, neither party seemed inclined to abate his deadly efforts. O'Connor's arm began to grow stiff and weak, and the energy and quickness of his action impaired; the consequences of this were soon exhibited. Ashwoode lunged twice or thrice rapidly, and one of these passes, being imperfectly parried, took effect in his opponent's breast. O'Connor staggered backward, and his hand and eye faltered for a moment; but he quickly recovered, and again advanced and again with the same result. Faint, dizzy, and half blind, but with resolution and rage, enhanced by defeat, he staggered forward again, wild and powerless, and was received once more upon the point of his adversary's sword. He reeled back, stood for a moment, his sword dropped upon the ground, and he shook his empty hand in fruitless menace at his triumphant antagonist, and then rolled headlong upon the pavement, insensible, and weltering in gore — the combat was over.

Ashwoode and O'Connor had hardly crossed their weapons when O'Hanlon sprang forward and sternly accosted Lord Wharton, for it was no other, who accompanied Ashwoode.

"My lord, you need not interfere," said he, observing a movement on Lord Wharton's part as if he would have separated the combatants. "This is a question which all your diplomacy will not arrange — they will fight it to the end. If you give them not fair play while I secure the door, I will send my sword through your excellency's body."

So saying, O'Hanlon drew his weapon, and keeping occasional watch upon Wharton — who, however, did not exhibit any further disposition to interfere — he strode to the outer door, which opened upon the public road, and to prevent interruption from that quarter, drew the bar and secured it effectually.

"Now, my lord," said he, returning and resuming his position, "I have secured this fortunate meeting against intrusion. What think you, while our friends are thus engaged, were we, for warmth and exercise sake, likewise to cross our blades? Will your lordship condescend to gratify a simple gentleman so far?"

"Out upon you, fellow; know you who I am?" said Wharton, with sturdy goodhumour.

"I know thee well, Lord Wharton — a wily, selfish, double-dealing politician; a profligate in morals; an infidel in religion; and a traitor in politics. I know thee — who doth not?"

"Landlord," said Wharton, turning toward that personage, who, with amazement, irresolution, and terror in his face, inspected these violent proceedings, "landlord, I say, call in a lackey or two; I'll bring this ruffian to reason quickly. Have you gotten a pump in the neighbourhood? Landlord, I say, bestir thyself, or, by —— , I'll spur thee with my sword-point."

"Stir not, if you would keep your life," said O'Hanlon, in a tone which the half-stupefied host of "The Jolly Bowlers" dared not disobey. "If you would not suffer death upon the spot where you stand, do not attempt to move one step, nor to speak one word. My lord," he continued, "I am right glad of this rencounter. I would have freely given half what I possess in the world to have secured it. Believe me, I will not leave it unimproved. My lord, in plain terms, for ten thousand reasons I desire your death, and will not leave this place till I have striven to effect it. Draw your sword, if you be a man; draw your sword, unless cowardice has come to crown your vices."

O'Hanlon drew his sword, and allowing Wharton hardly time sufficient to throw himself into an attitude of defence, he attacked him with deadly resolution. It was well for the viceroy that he was an expert swordsman, otherwise his career would undoubtedly have been abruptly terminated upon the floor of “The Jolly Bowlers.” As it was, he received a thrust right through the shoulder, and staggering back, stumbled and fell upon the uneven pavement which studded the floor. This occurred almost at the same moment with O’Connor’s fall, and believing that he had mortally hurt his noble antagonist, O’Hanlon, without stopping to look about him hastily lifted his fallen and senseless companion from the pavement and bore him in his arms through the outer door, which the landlord had at length found resolution enough to unbar. Fortunately a hackney coach stood there waiting for a chance job from some of the aristocratic bowlers within, and in this vehicle he hurriedly deposited his inanimate burden, and desiring the coachman to drive for his life into the city, sprang into the conveyance himself. Irishmen are proverbially ready at all times to aid an escape from the fangs of justice, and without pausing to ask a question, the coachman, to whom the sight of blood and of the naked sword, which O’Hanlon still carried, was warrant sufficient, mounted the box with incredible speed, pressed his hat firmly down upon his brows, shook the reins, and lashed his horses till they smoked again; and thus, at a gallop, O’Hanlon and his bleeding companion thundered onward toward the city. Ashwoode did not interfere to stay the fugitives, for he was not sorry to be relieved of the embarrassment which he foresaw in having the body of his victim left, as it were, in his charge. He therefore gladly witnessed its removal, and addressed himself to Lord Wharton, who was rising with some difficulty from his prostrate position.

“Are you hurt, my lord?” inquired Ashwoode, kneeling by his side and assisting him to rise.

“Hush! nothing — a mere scratch. Above all things, make no row about it. By —— , I would not for worlds that anything were heard of it. Fortunately, this accident is a trivial one — the blood flows rather fast, though. Let’s get into a coach, if, indeed, the scoundrels have not run away with the last of them.”

They found one, however, at the door, and getting in with all convenient dispatch, desired the man to drive slowly toward the castle.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE STAINED RUFFLES.

We must now return for a brief space to Morley Court. The apartment which lay beneath what had been Sir Richard Ashwoode's bedchamber, and in which Mary and her gay cousin, Emily Copland, had been wont to sit and work, and read and sing together, had grown to be considered, by long-established usage, the rightful and exclusive property of the ladies of the family, and had been surrendered up to their private occupation and absolute control. Around it stood full many a quaint cabinet of dark old wood, shining like polished jet, little bookcases, and tall old screens, and music stands, and drawing tables. These, along with a spinet and a guitar, and countless other quaint and pretty sundries indicating the habitual presence of feminine refinement and taste, abundantly furnished the chamber. In the window stood some choice and fragrant flowers, and the light fell softly upon the carpet through the clustering bowers of creeping plants which mantled the outer wall, in sombre rivalry of the full damask curtains, whose draperies hung around the deep receding casements.

Here sat Mary Ashwoode, as the evening, whose tragic events we have in our last chapter described, began to close over the old manor of Morley Court. Her embroidery had been thrown aside, and lay upon the table, and a book, which she had been reading, was open before her; but her eyes now looked pensively through the window upon the fair, sad landscape, clothed in the warm and melancholy tints of evening. Her graceful arm leaned upon the table, and her small, white hand supported her head and mingled in the waving tresses of her dark hair.

"At what hour did my brother promise to return?" said she, addressing herself to her maid, who was listlessly arranging some books in the little bookcase.

"Well, I declare and purtest, I can't rightly remember," rejoined the maid, cocking her head on one side reflectively, and tapping her eyebrow to assist her recollection. "I don't think, my lady, he named any hour precisely; but at any rate, you may be sure he'll not be long away now."

"I thought he said seven o'clock," continued Mary; "would he were come! I feel very solitary to-day; and this evening we might pass happily together, for that strange man will not return tonight — he said so — my brother told me so."

"I believe Mr. Blarden changed his mind, my lady," said the maid; "for I know he gave orders before he went for a fire in his room tonight."

Even as she spoke she heard Sir Henry's step upon the stairs, and her brother entered the room.

"Harry, Harry, I am so glad to see you," said she, running lightly to him and throwing her arms around his neck. "Come, come, sit you down beside me; we shall be happy together at least for this evening. Come, Harry, come."

So saying she led him, passive and gloomy, to the fireside, and drew a chair beside that into which he had thrown himself.

"Dear brother, the time seemed so very tedious to-day while you were away," said she. "I thought it would never pass. Why are you so silent and thoughtful, brother? has anything happened to vex you?"

"Nothing," said he, glancing at her with a strange expression— "nothing to vex me — no, nothing — perhaps the contrary."

"Dear brother, have you heard good news? Come and tell me," said she; "though I fear from the sadness of your face you do but flatter me. Have you, Harry — have you heard or seen anything that gave you comfort?"

"No, not comfort; I know not what I say. Have you any wine here?" said Ashwoode, hurriedly; "I am tired and thirsty."

"No, not here," answered she, somewhat surprised at the oddity of the question, as well as by the abruptness and abstraction of his manner.

"Carey," said he, "run down — bring wine quickly; I'm exhausted — quite wearied. I have played more at bowls this afternoon than I've done for years," he added, addressing his sister as the maid departed on her errand.

"You do look very pale, brother," said she, "and your dress is all disordered; and, gracious God! — see all the ruffles of this hand are steeped in blood — brother, brother, for God's sake — are you hurt?"

"Hurt — I — ?" said he hastily, and endeavouring to smile! "no, indeed — I hurt! far be it from me — this blood is none of mine; one of our party scratched his hand, and I bound his handkerchief round the wound, and in so doing contracted these tragic spots that startle you so. No, no, believe me, when I am hurt I will make no secret of it. Carey, pour some wine into that glass — fill it — fill it, child — there," and he drank it off— "fill it again — so two or three more, and I shall be quite myself again. How snug this room of yours is, Mary."

"Yes, brother, I am very fond of it; it is a pleasant old room, and one that has often seen me happier than I shall be again," said she, with a sigh; "but do you feel better? has the wine refreshed you? You still look pale," she added, with fears not yet half quieted.

"Yes, Mary, I am refreshed," he said, with a sudden and reckless burst of strange merriment that shocked her; "I could play the match through again — I could leap, and laugh and sing;" and then he added quickly in an altered voice— "has Blarden returned?"

"No," said she; "I thought you said he would remain in town tonight."

"I said wrong if I said so at all," replied Ashwoode; "and if he *did* intend to stay in town he has changed his plans — he will be here this evening; I thought I should have found him here on my return; I expect him every moment."

"When, dear brother, is this visit of his to end?" asked the girl imploringly.

"Not for weeks — for months, I hope," replied Ashwoode drily and quickly; "why do you inquire, pray?"

"Simply because I wish it were ended, brother," answered she sadly; "but if it vexes you I will ask no more."

"It *does* vex me, then," said Ashwoode, sternly; "it *does*, and you know it" — he accompanied these words with a look even more savage than the tone in which he had uttered them, and a silence of some minutes followed.

Ashwoode desired nothing so much as to speak with his sister intelligibly upon the subject of Blarden's designs, and of his own entire approval of them; but, somehow, often as he had resolved upon it, he had never yet approached the topic, even in imagination, in his sister's presence, without feeling himself unnerved and abashed. He now strove to fret himself into a rage, in the instinctive hope that under the influence of this stimulus he might find nerve to broach the subject in plain terms; he strode quickly to and fro across the floor, casting from time to time many an angry glance at the poor girl, and seeking by every mechanical agency to work himself into a passion.

“And so it is come to this at last,” said he, vehemently, “that I may not invite my friends to my own house; or that if I dare to do so, they shall necessarily be exposed to the constant contempt and rudeness of those who ought to be their entertainers; all their advances towards acquaintance met with a hoitytoity, repulsive impertinence, and themselves treated with a marked and insulting avoidance, shunned as though they had the plague. I tell you now plainly, once for all, *I will* be master in my own house; you shall treat my guests with attention and respect; you must do so; I command you; you shall find that I am master here.”

“No doubt of it, by —— ,” ejaculated Nicholas Blarden, himself entering the room at the termination of Ashwoode’s stormy harangue; “but where the devil is the good of roaring that way? your sister is not deaf, I suppose? Mistress Mary, your most obedient — — “

Mary did not wait for further conference; but rising with a proud mien and a burning cheek, she left the room and went quickly to her own chamber, where she threw herself into a chair, covered her eyes with her hands, and burst into an agony of weeping.

“Well, but she *is* a fine wench,” cried Nicholas Blarden, as soon as she had disappeared. “The tantarums become her better than good humour;” so saying, he half filled Ashwoode’s glass with wine, and rinsed it into the fireplace; then coolly filled a bumper and quaffed it off, and then another and another.

“Sit down here and listen to me,” said he to Ashwoode, in that insolent, domineering tone which he so loved to employ in accosting him, “sit down here, I say, young man, and listen to me while I give you a bit of my mind.”

Ashwoode, who knew too well the consequences of even murmuring under the tyranny of his task-master, in silence did as he was commanded.

“I tell you what it is,” said Blarden, “I don’t like the way this affair is going on; the girl avoids me; I don’t know her, by —— , a curse better to-day than I did the first day I came into the house; this won’t do, you know; it will never do; you had better strike out some expeditious plan, or it’s very possible I may tire of the whole concern and cut it back, do you mind; you had better sharpen your wits, my fine fellow.”

“The fault is your own,” said Ashwoode gloomily; “if you desire expedition, you can command it, by yourself speaking to her; you have not as yet even hinted at your intentions, nor by any one act made her acquainted with your designs; let her see that you like her; let her understand you; you have never done so yet."

"She's infernally proud," said Blarden, "just as proud as yourself: but we know a knack, don't we, for bringing pride to its senses? Eh? Nothing, I believe, Sir Henry, like *fear* in such cases; don't you think so? I've known it succeed sometimes to a miracle — fear of one kind or another is the only way we have of working men or women. Mind I tell you she must be frightened, and well frightened too, or she'll run rusty. I have a knack with me — a kind of gift — of frightening people when I have a fancy; and if you're in earnest, as I guess you pretty well are, between us we'll tame her."

"It were not advisable to proceed at once to extremities," said Ashwoode, who, spite of his constitutional selfishness, felt some odd sensations, and not of the pleasantest kind, while they thus conversed. "You must begin by showing your wishes in your manner; be attentive to her; and, in short, let her unequivocally see the nature of your intentions; *tell* her that you want to marry her; and when she refuses, then it is time enough to commence those — those — other operations at which you hint."

"Well, d —— n me, but there is some sense in what you say," observed Blarden, filling his glass again. "Umph! perhaps I've been rather backward; I believe I *have*; she's coy, shy, and a proud little baggage withal — I like her the better for it — and requires a lot of wooing before she's won; well, I'll make myself clear on tomorrow. I'm blessed if she sha'n't understand me beyond the possibility of question or doubt; and if she won't listen to reason, *then* we'll see whether there isn't a way to break her spirit if she was as proud as the Queen." With these words Blarden arose and drained the flask of wine, then observed authoritatively, —

"Get the cards and follow me to the parlour. I want something to amuse me; be quick, d'ye hear?"

And so saying he took his departure, followed by Sir Henry Ashwoode, whose condition was now more thoroughly abject and degraded than that of a purchased slave.

CHAPTER XLIX.

OLD SONGS — THE UNWELCOME LISTENER — THE BARONET'S PLEDGE.

Next day Mary Ashwoode sat alone in the same room in which she had been so unpleasantly intruded upon on the evening before. The unkindness of her brother had caused her many a bitter tear during the past night, and although still entirely in the dark as to Blarden's designs, there was yet something in his manner during the brief moment of their yesterday evening's rencontre which alarmed her, and suggested, in a few hurried and fevered dreams which troubled her broken slumbers of the night past, his dreaded image in a hundred wild and fantastic adventures.

She sat, as we have already said, alone in the selfsame room, and as mechanically she pursued her work, her thoughts were far away, and wherever they turned still were they clouded with anxiety and sorrow. Wearied at length with the monotony of an occupation which availed not even momentarily to draw her attention from the griefs which weighed upon her, she threw her work aside, and taking the guitar which in gayer hours had often yielded its light music to her touch, and trying to forget the consciousness of her changed and lonely existence in the happier recollections which returned in these once familiar sounds, she played and sang the simple melodies which had been her favourites long ago; but while thus her hands strayed over the chords of the instrument, and the low and silvery cadences of her sweet voice recalled many a touching remembrance of the past, she was startled and recalled at once from her momentary forgetfulness of the present by a voice close behind her which exclaimed, —

"Capital — never a better — encore, encore;" and on looking hurriedly round, her glance at once encountered and recognized the form and features of Nicholas Blarden. "Go on, go on, do," said that gentleman in his most engaging way, and with an amorous grin; "do — go on, can't you — by —— , I'm half sorry I said a word."

"I — I would rather not," stammered she, rising and colouring; "I have played and sung enough — too much already."

"No, no, not at all," continued Blarden, warming as he proceeded; "hang me, no such thing, you were just going on strong when I came in — come, come, I won't *let* you stop."

Her heart swelled with indignation at the coarse, familiar insolence of his manner; but she made no other answer than that conveyed by laying down the instrument, and turning from it and him.

"Well, rot me, but this is too bad," continued he, playfully; "come, take it up again — come, you *must* tip us another stave, young lady — do — curse me if I heard half your songs, you're a perfect nightingale."

So saying he took up the guitar, and followed her with it towards the fireplace.

"Come, you won't refuse, eh? — I'm in earnest," he continued; "upon my soul and oath I want to hear more of it."

"I have already told you, sir," said Mary Ashwoode, "that I do not wish to play or sing any more at present. I am sure you are not aware, Mr. Blarden, that this is my private apartment; no one visits me here uninvited, and at present I wish to be alone."

Thus speaking, she resumed her seat and her work, and sat in perfect silence, her heaving breast and glowing cheeks alone betraying the strength of her emotions.

"Ho, ho! rot me, but she's sulky," cried Blarden, with a horse-laugh, while he flung the guitar carelessly upon the table; "sure you wouldn't turn me out — that would be very hard usage, and no mistake. Eh! Miss Mary?"

Mary continued to ply her silks in silence, and Blarden threw himself into a chair opposite to her.

"I like to rise you — hang me, if I don't," said Blarden, exultingly— "you are always a snug-looking bit of goods, but when your blood's up, you're a downright beauty — rot me, but you are — why the devil don't you talk to me — eh?" he added, more roughly than he had yet spoken.

Mary Ashwoode began now to feel seriously alarmed at the man's manner, and as her eyes encountered his gloating gaze, her colour came and went in quick succession.

"Confoundedly pretty, sure enough, and well you know it, too," continued he— "curse me, but you *are* a fine wench — and I'll tell you what's more — I'm more than half in love with you at this minute, may the devil have me but I am."

Thus speaking, he drew his chair nearer hers.

"Mr. Blarden — sir — I insist on your leaving me," said Mary, now thoroughly frightened.

"And *I* insist on *not* leaving you," replied Blarden, with an insolent chuckle— "so it's a fair trial of strength between us, eh? — ho, ho, what are you afraid of? — stick up to your fight — do then — I like you all the better for your spirit — confound me but I do."

He advanced his chair still nearer to that on which she was seated.

"Well, but you *do* look pretty, by Jove," he exclaimed. "I like *you*, and I am determined to make you like *me* — I am — you *shall* like me."

He arose, and approached her with a half amorous, half menacing air.

Pale as death, Mary Ashwoode arose also, and moved with hurried, trembling steps towards the door. He made a movement as if to intercept her exit, but checked the impulse, and contented himself with observing with a scowl of spite and disappointment, as she passed from the room, —

"Pride will have a fall, my fine lady — you'll be tame enough yet for all your tantarums, by Jove."

Breathless with haste and agitation, Mary reached the study, where she knew her brother was now generally to be found. He was there engaged in the miserable labour of looking through accounts and letters, in arranging the complicated records of his own ruin.

"Brother," said she, running to his side with the earnestness of deep agitation, "brother, listen to me."

He raised his eyes, and at a glance easily divined the cause of her excitement.

"Well," said he, "speak on — I hear."

"Brother," she resumed, "that man — that Mr. Blarden, came uninvited into my study; he was at first very coarse and free in his manner — very disagreeable and impudent — he refused to leave me when I requested him to do so, and every moment became more and more insolent — his manner and language terrified me. Brother, dear brother, you must not expose me to another such scene as that which has just passed."

Ashwoode paused for a good while, with the pen still in his fingers, and his eyes fixed abstractedly upon his sister's pale face. At length he said, —

"Do you wish me to make this a quarrel with Blarden? Was there enough to warrant a — a duel?"

He well knew, however, that he was safe in putting the question, and in anticipating her answer, he calculated rightly the strength of his sister's affection for him.

"Oh! no, no, brother — no!" she cried, with imploring terror; "dear brother, you are everything to me now. No, no; promise that you will not!"

"Well, well, I do," said Ashwoode; "but how would you have me act?"

"Do not ask this man to prolong his visit," replied she; "or if he must, at least let me go elsewhere while he remains here."

"You have but one female relative in Ireland with a house to receive you," rejoined Ashwoode, "and that is Lady Stukely; and I have reason to think she would not like to have you as a guest just now."

"Dear Harry — dear brother, think of some place," said she, with earnest entreaty. "I now feel secure nowhere; that rude man, the very sight of whom affrights me, will not forbear to intrude upon my privacy; alone — in my own little room — anywhere in this house — I am equally liable to his intrusions and his rudeness. Dear brother, take pity on me — think of some place."

"Curse that beast Blarden!" muttered Sir Henry Ashwoode, between his teeth. "Will nothing ever teach the ruffian one particle of tact or common sense? What good end could he possibly propose to himself by terrifying the girl?"

Ashwoode bit his lips and frowned, while he thought the matter over. At length he said, —

"I shall speak to Blarden immediately. I begin to think that the man is not fit company for civilized people. I think we must get rid of him at whatever temporary inconvenience, without actual rudeness. Without anything approaching to a quarrel, I can shorten his visit. He shall leave this either tonight or before seven o'clock tomorrow morning."

"And you promise there shall be no quarrel — no violence?" urged she.

"Yes, Mary, I do promise," rejoined Ashwoode.

"Dear, dear brother, you have set my heart at rest," cried she. "Yes, you *are* my own dear brother — my protector!" And with all the warmth and enthusiasm of unsuspecting love, she threw her arms around his neck and kissed her betrayer.

Mary had scarcely left the room in which Sir Henry Ashwoode was seated, when he perceived Blarden sauntering among the trees by the window, with his usual swagger; the young man put on his hat and walked quickly forth to join him; as soon as he had come up with him, Blarden turned, and anticipating him, said, —

"Well, I *have* spoken out, and I think she understands me too; at any rate, if she don't, it's no fault of mine."

"I wish you had managed it better," said Ashwoode; "there is a way of doing these things. You have frightened the foolish girl half out of her wits."

"Have I, though?" exclaimed Blarden, with a triumphant grin. "She's just the girl we want — easily cowed. I'm glad to hear it. We'll manage her — we'll bring her into training before a week — hang me, but we will."

"You began a little too soon, though," urged Ashwoode; "you ought to have tried gentle means first."

"Devil the morsel of good in them," rejoined Blarden. "I see well enough how the wind sits — she don't like me; and I haven't time to waste in wooing. Once we're buckled, she'll be fond enough of me; matrimony 'll turn out smooth enough — I'll take devilish good care of that; but the courtship will be the devil's tough business. We must begin the taming system offhand; there's no use in shilly shally."

"I tell you," rejoined Ashwoode, "you have been too precipitate — I speak, of course, merely in relation to the policy and expediency of the thing. I don't mean to pretend that constraint may not become necessary hereafter; but just now, and before our plans are well considered, and our arrangements made, I think it was injudicious to frighten her so. She was talking of leaving the house and going to Lady Stukely's, or, in short, anywhere rather than remain here."

"Threaten to run away, did she?" cried Blarden, with a whistle of surprise which passed off into a chuckle.

"Yes, in plain terms, she said so," rejoined Ashwoode.

"Then just turn the key upon her at once," replied Blarden— "lock her up — let her measure her rambles by the four walls of her room! Hang me, if I can see the difficulty."

Ashwoode remained silent, and they walked side by side for a time without exchanging a word.

“Well, I believe I’m right,” cried Blarden, at length; “I think our game is plain enough, eh? Don’t let her budge an inch. Do you act turnkey, and I’ll pay her a visit once a day for fear she’d forget me — I’ll be her father confessor, eh? — ho, ho! — and between us I think we’ll manage to bring her to before long.”

“We must take care before we proceed to this extremity that all our agents are trustworthy,” said Ashwoode. “There is no immediate danger of her attempting an escape, for I told her that you were leaving this either tonight or tomorrow morning, and she’s now just as sure as if we had her under lock and key.”

“Well, what do you advise? Can’t you speak out? What’s all the delay to lead to?” said Blarden.

“Merely that we shall have time to adjust our schemes,” replied Ashwoode; “there is more to be done than perhaps you think of. We must cut off all possibility of correspondence with friends out of doors, and we must guard against suspicion among the servants; they are all fond of her, and there is no knowing what mischief might be done even by the most contemptible agents. Some little preparation before we employ coercion is absolutely indispensable.”

“Well, then, you’d have me keep out of the way,” said Blarden. “But mind you, I won’t leave this; I like to have my own eye upon my own business.”

“There is no reason why you should leave it,” rejoined Ashwoode. “The weather is now cold and broken, so that Mary will seldom leave the house; and when she remains in it, she is almost always in the little drawingroom with her work, and books, and music; with the slightest precaution you can effectually avoid her for a few days.”

“Well, then, agreed — done and done — a fair go on both sides,” replied Blarden, “but it must not be too long; knock out some scheme that will wind matters up within a fortnight at furthest; be lively, or she shall lead apes, and you swing as sure as there’s six sides to a die.”

CHAPTER L.

THE PRESS IN THE WALL.

Larry Toole, having visited in vain all his master's usual haunts, returned in the evening of that day on which we last beheld him, to the "Cock and Anchor," in a state of extreme depression and desolateness.

"By the holy man," said Larry, in reply to the inquiries of the groom, who encountered him at the yard gate, "he's gone as clane as a whistle. It's dacent thratement, so it is — gone, and laves me behind to rummage the town for him, and divil a sign of him, good or bad. I'm fairly burstin' with emotions. Why did he make off with himself? Why the devil did he desart me? There's no apology for sich minewvers, nor no excuse in the wide world, anless, indeed, he happened to be dhrounded or dhrunk. I'm fairly dry with the frettin'. Come in with me, and we'll have a sorrowful pot iv strong ale together by the kitchen fire; for, bedad, I want something badly."

Accordingly the two worthies entered the great old kitchen, and by the genial blaze of its cheering hearth, they discussed at length the probabilities of recovering Larry's lost master.

"Usedn't he to take a run out now and again to Morley Court?" inquired the groom; "you told me so."

"By the hokey," exclaimed Larry, with sudden alacrity, "there is some sinse in what you say — bedad, there is. I don't know how in the world I didn't think iv going out there to-day. But no matter, I'll do it tomorrow."

And in accordance with this resolution, upon the next day, early in the forenoon, Mr. Toole pursued his route toward the old manorhouse. As he approached the domain, however, he slackened his pace, and, with extreme hesitation and caution, began to loiter toward the mansion, screening his approach as much as possible among the thick brushwood which skirted the rich old timber that clothed the slopes and hollows of the manor in irregular and stately masses. Sheltered in his post of observation, Larry lounged about until he beheld Sir Henry emerge from the hall door and join Nicholas Blarden in the *tête-à-tête* which we have in our last chapter described. Our romantic friend no sooner beheld this occurrence, than he felt all his uneasiness at once dispelled. He marched rapidly to the hall door, which remained open, and forthwith entered the house. He had hardly reached the interior of the hall, when he was encountered by no less a person than the fair object of his soul's idolatry, the beauteous Mistress Betsy Carey.

"La, Mr. Laurence," cried she, with an affected start, "you're always turning up like a ghost, when you're least expected."

"By the powers of Moll Kelly!" rejoined Larry, with fervour, "it's more and more beautiful, the Lord be merciful to us, you're growin' every day you live. What the divil will you come to at last?"

"Well, Mr. Toole," rejoined she, relaxing into a gracious smile, "but you do talk more nonsense than any ten beside. I wonder at you, so I do, Mr. Toole. Why don't you have a discreeterer way of conversation and discourse?"

"Och! murdher! — heigho! beautiful Betsy," sighed Larry, rapturously.

"Did you walk, Mr. Toole?" inquired the maiden.

"I did so," rejoined Larry.

"Young master's just gone out," continued the maid.

"So I seen, jewel," replied Mr. Toole.

"An' you may as well come into the parlour, an' have some drink and victuals," added she, with an encouraging smile.

"Is there no fear of his coming in on me?" inquired Larry, cautiously.

"Tilly vally, man, who are you afraid of?" exclaimed the handmaiden, cheerily. "Come, Mr. Toole, you used not to be so easily frightened."

"I'll never be afraid to folly your lead, most beautiful and bewildhering iv famales," ejaculated Mr. Toole, gallantly. "So here goes; folly on, and I'll attind you behind."

Accordingly, they both entered the great parlour, where the table bore abundant relics of a plenteous meal, and Mistress Betsy Carey, with her own fair hands, placed a chair for him at the table, and heaping a plate with cold beef and bread, laid it before her grateful swain, along with a foaming tankard of humming ale. The maid was gracious, and the beef delicious; his ears drank in her accents, and his throat her ale, and his heart and mouth were equally full. Thus, in a condition as nearly as human happiness can approach to unalloyed felicity, realizing the substantial bliss of Mahomet's paradise, Mr. Toole ogled and ate, and glanced and guzzled in soft rapture, until the force of nature could no further go on, and laying down his knife and fork, he took one long last draught of ale, measuring, it is supposed, about three half-pints, and then, with an easy negligence, wiping the froth from his mouth with the cuff of his coat, he addressed himself to the fair dame once more, —

"They may say what they like, by the hokey! all the world over; but divil bellows me, if ever I seen sich another beautiful, fascinating, flusthrating famale, since I was the size iv that musthard pot — may the divil bile me if I did," ejaculated Mr. Toole, rapturously throwing himself into the chair with something between a sigh and a grunt, and ready to burst with love and repletion.

The fair maiden endeavoured to look contemptuous; but she smiled in spite of herself.

"Well, well, Mr. Toole," she exclaimed, "I see there is no use in talking; a fool's a fool to the end of his days, and some people's past cure. But tell me, how's Mr. O'Connor?"

"Bedad, it's time for me to think iv it," exclaimed Larry, briskly. "Do you know what brought me here?"

"How should *I* know?" responded she, with a careless toss of her head, and a very conscious look.

"Well," replied Mr. Toole, "I'll tell you at once. I lost the masther as clane as a new shilling, an' I'm fairly braking my heart lookin' for him; an' here I come, trying would I get the chance iv hearing some soart iv a sketch iv him."

"Is that all?" inquired the damsel, drily.

"All!" ejaculated Larry; "begorra. I think it's enough, an' something to spare. *All!* why, I tell you the masther's lost, an' anless I get some news of him here, it's twenty to one the two of us 'ill never meet in this disappinting world again. *All!* I think that something."

"An' pray, what should *I* know about Mr. O'Connor?" inquired the girl, tartly.

"Did you see him, or hear of him, or was he out here at all?" asked he.

"No, he wasn't. What would bring him?" replied she.

"Then he *is* gone in airnest," exclaimed Larry, passionately; "he's gone entirely! I half guessed it from the first minute. By jabers, my bitther curse attind that bloody little public. He’s lost, an’ tin to one he’s *in glory*, for he was always unfortunate. Och! divil fly away with the liquor.”

“Well, to be sure,” ejaculated the lady’s maid, with contemptuous severity, “but it is surprising what fools some people is. Don’t you think your master can go anywhere for a day or two, but he must bring *you* along with him, or ask *your* leave and licence to go where he pleases forsooth? Marry, come up, it’s enough to make a pig laugh only to listen to you.”

Just at this moment, and when Larry was meditating his reply, steps were heard in the hall, and voices in debate. They were those of Nicholas Blarden and of Sir Henry Ashwoode. Larry instantly recognized the latter, and his companion both of them.

“They’re coming this way,” gasped Larry, with agonized alarm. “Tare an’ ouns, evangelical girl, we’re done for. Put me somewhere quick, or begorra it’s all over with us.”

“What’s to be done, merciful Moses? Where can you go?” ejaculated the terrified girl, surveying the room with frantic haste. “The press. Oh! thank God, the press. Come along, quick, quick, Mr. Toole, for gracious goodness sake.”

So saying, she rushed headlong at a kind of cupboard or press, whose doors opened in the panelling of the wall, and fumbling with frightful agitation among her keys, she succeeded at length in unlocking it, and throwing open its door, exhibited a small orifice of about four feet and a half by three in the wall.

“Now, Mr. Toole, into it, as you vally your precious life — quick, quick, for the love of heaven,” ejaculated the maiden.

Larry was firmly persuaded that the feat was a downright physical impossibility; yet with a devotion and desperation which love and terror combined alone could inspire, he mounted a chair, and, supported by all the muscular strength of his soul’s idol, scrambled into the aperture. A projecting shelf about half way up threw his figure so much out of equilibrium, that the task of keeping him in his place was no light one. By main strength, however, the girl succeeded in closing the door and locking her visitor fairly in, and before her master entered the chamber, Mr. Toole became a close prisoner, and the key which confined him was safely deposited in the charming Betsy’s pocket.

Blarden roared lustily to the servants, and with sundry impressive imprecations, commanded them to remove every vestige of the breakfast of which the prisoner had just clandestinely partaken. Meanwhile he continued to walk up and down the room, whistling a lively ditty, and here and there, at particularly sprightly parts, drumming with his foot in time upon the floor.

"Well, that job's done at last," said he. "The room's clean and quiet, and we can't do better than take a twist at the cards. So let's have a pack, and play your best, d'ye mind."

This was addressed to Ashwoode, who, of course, acquiesced.

"Oh, bloody wars, I'm in for it," murmured Larry, "they'll be playin' here to no end, and I smothering fast, as it is; I'll never come out iv this pisition with my life."

Few situations could indeed be conceived physically more uncomfortable. A shelf projecting about midway pressed him forward, exerting anything but a soothing influence upon the backbone, so that his whole weight rested against the door of his narrow prison, and was chiefly sustained by his breast-bone and chin. In this very constrained attitude, and afraid to relieve his fatigue by moving even in the very slightest degree, lest some accidental noise should excite suspicion and betray his presence, the ill-starred squire remained; his discomforts still further enhanced by the pouring of some pickles, which had been overturned upon an upper shelf, in cool streams of vinegar down his back.

"I could not have betther luck," murmured he. "I never discoorsed a famale yet, but I paid through the nose for it. Didn't I get enough iv romance, bad luck to it, an' isn't it a plisint pisition I'm in at last — locked up in an ould cupboard in the wall, an' fairly swimming in vinegar. Oh, the women, the women. I'd rather than every stitch of cloth on my back, I walked out clever an' clane to meet the young masther, and not let myself be boxed up this way, almost dying with the cramps and the snuffication. Oh, them women, them women!"

Thus mourned our helpless friend in inarticulate murmurings. Meanwhile young Ashwoode opened two or three drawers in search of a pack of cards.

"There are several, I know, in that locker," said Ashwoode. "I laid some of them there myself."

"This one?" inquired Blarden, making the interrogatory by a sharp application of the head of his cane to the very panel against which Larry's chin was resting. The shock, the pain, and the exaggerated loudness of the application caused the inmate of the press, in spite of himself, to ejaculate, —

"Oh, holy Pether!"

"Did you hear anything queer?" inquired Blarden, with some consternation. "Anyone calling out?"

"No," said Ashwoode.

"Well, see what the nerves is," cried Blarden, "by —— , I'd have bet ten to one I heard a voice in the wall the minute I hit that locker door — this —— weather don't agree with me."

This sentence he wound up by administering a second knock where he had given the first; and Larry, with set teeth and a grin, which in a horse-collar would have won whole pyramids of gingerbread, nevertheless bore it this time with the silent stoicism of a tortured Indian.

"The nerves is a —— quare piece of business," observed Mr. Blarden — a philosophical remark in which Larry heartily concurred— "but get the cards, will you — what the —— is all the delay about?"

In obedience to Ashwoode's summons, Mistress Betsy Carey entered the room.

"Carey," said he, "open that press and take out two or three packs of cards."

"I can't open the locker," replied she, readily, "for the young mistress put the key astray, sir — I'll run and look for it, if you please, sir."

"God bless you," murmured Larry, with fervent gratitude.

"Hand me that bunch of keys from under your apron," said Blarden, "ten to one we'll find some one among them that'll open it."

"There's no use in trying, sir," replied the girl, very much alarmed, "it's a pitiklar soart of a lock, and has a pitiklar key — you'll ruinate it, sir, if you go for to think to open it with a key that don't fit it, so you will — I'll run and look for it if you please, sir."

"Give me that bunch of keys, young woman; give them, I tell you," exclaimed Blarden.

Thus constrained, she reluctantly gave the keys, and among them the identical one to whose kind offices Mr. O'Toole owed his present dignified privacy.

"Come in here, Chancey," said Mr. Blarden, addressing that gentleman, who happened at that moment to be crossing the hall— "take these keys here and try if any of them will pick that lock."

Chancey accordingly took the keys, and mounting languidly upon a chair, began his operations.

It were not easy to describe Mr. Toole's emotions as these proceedings were going forward — some of the keys would not go in at all — others went in with great difficulty, and came out with as much — some entered easily, but refused to turn, and during the whole of these various attempts upon his "dungeon keep," his mental agonies grew momentarily more and more intense, so much so that he was repeatedly prompted to precipitate the *dénouement*, by shouting his confession from within. His heart failed him, however, and his resolution grew momentarily feebler and more feeble — he would have given worlds at that moment that he could have shrunk into the pickle-pot, whose contents were then streaming down his back — gladly would he have compounded for escape at the price of being metamorphosed for ever into a gherkin. His prayers were, however, unanswered, and he felt his inevitable fate momentarily approaching.

"This one will do it — I declare to God I have it at last," drawled Chancey, looking lazily at a key which he held in his hand; and then applying it, it found its way freely into the keyhole.

"Bravo, Gordy, by —— ," cried Blarden, "I never knew you fail yet — you're as cute as a pet fox, you are."

Mr. Blarden had hardly finished this flattering eulogium, when Chancey turned the key in the lock: with astonishing violence the doors burst open, and Larry Toole, Mr. Chancey, and the chair on which he was mounted, descended with the force of a thunderbolt on the floor. In sheer terror, Chancey clutched the interesting stranger by the throat, and Larry, in self-defence, bit the lawyer's thumb, which had by a trifling inaccuracy entered his mouth, and at the same time, with both his hands, dragged his nose in a lateral direction until it had attained an extraordinary length and breadth. In equal terror and torment the two combatants rolled breathless along the floor; the charming Betsy Carey screamed murder, robbery, and fire — while Ashwoode and Blarden both started to their feet in the extremest amazement.

"How the devil did you get into that press?" exclaimed Ashwoode, as soon as the rival athletes had been separated and placed upon their feet, addressing Larry Toole.

"Oh! the robbing villain," ejaculated Mistress Betsy Carey— "don't suffer nor allow him to speak — bring him to the pump, gentlemen — oh! the lying villain — kick him out, Mr. Chancey — thump him, Sir Henry — don't spare him, Mr. Blarden — turn him out, gentlemen all — he's quite aperiently a robber — oh! blessed hour, but it's I that ought to be thankful — what in the world wide would I do if he came powdering down on me, the overbearing savage!"

"Och! murder — the cruelty iv women!" ejaculated Larry, reproachfully — "oh! murdher, beautiful Betsy."

"Don't be talking to me, you sneaking, skulking villain," cried Mistress Carey, vehemently, "you must have stole the key, so you must, and locked yourself up, you frightful baste. For goodness gracious sake, gentlemen, don't keep him talking here — he's dangerous — the Turk."

"Oh! the villainy iv women!" repeated Larry, with deep pathos.

A brief cross-examination of Mistress Carey and of Larry Toole sufficed to convict the fair maiden of her share in concealing the prisoner.

"Now, Mr. Toole," said Ashwoode, addressing that personage, "you have been once before turned out of this house for misconduct — I tell you, that if you do not make good use of your time, and run as fast as your best exertions will enable you, you shall have abundant reason to repent it, for in five minutes more I will set the dogs after you; and if ever I find you here again, I will have you ducked in the horse-pond for a full hour — depart, sirrah — away — run."

Larry did not require any more urgent remonstrances to induce him to expedite his retreat — he made a contrite bow to Sir Henry — cast a look of melancholy reproach at the beautiful Betsy, who, with a heightened colour, was withdrawing from the scene, and then with sudden nimbleness, effected his retreat.

"The fellow," said Ashwoode, "is a servant of that O'Connor, whom I mentioned to you. I do not think we shall ever have the pleasure of his company again. I am glad the thing has happened, for it proves that we cannot trust Carey."

"That it does," echoed Blarden, with an oath.

“Well, then, she shall take her departure hence before a week,” rejoined Ashwoode. “We shall see about her successor without loss of time. So much for Mistress Carey.”

CHAPTER LI.

FLORA GUY.

“Why, I thought you had done for that fellow, that O’Connor,” exclaimed Blarden, after he had carefully closed the door. “I thought you had pinked him through and through like a riddle — isn’t he dead — didn’t you settle him?”

“So I thought myself, but some troublesome people have the art of living through what might have killed a hundred,” rejoined Ashwoode; “and I do not at all like this servant of his privately coming here, to hold conference with my sister’s maid — it looks suspicious; if it be, however, as I suspect, I have effectually countermined them.”

“Well, then,” replied Blarden, with an oath, “at all events we must set to work now in earnest.”

“The first thing to be done is to find a substitute for the girl whom I am about to dismiss,” said Ashwoode, “we must select carefully, one whom we can rely upon — do *you* choose her?”

“Why, I’m no great judge of such cattle,” rejoined Blarden. “But here’s Chancey that understands them. I stake this ring to a sixpence he has one in his eye this very minute that’ll fit our purpose to a hair — what do you say, Gordy, boy — can you hit on the kind of wench we want — eh, you old sly boots?”

Chancey sat sleepily before the fire, and a languid, lazy smile expanded his sallow sensual face as he gazed at the bars of the grate.

“Are you tongue-tied, or what?” exclaimed Blarden; “speak out — can you find us such a one as we want? she must be a regular knowing devil, and no mistake — as sly as yourself — a dead hand at a scheming game like this — a deep one.”

“Well, maybe I do,” drawled Chancey, “I think I know a girl that would do, but maybe you’d think her too bad.”

“She can’t be too bad for the work we want her for — what the devil do you mean by BAD?” exclaimed Blarden.

"Well," continued Chancey, disregarding the last interrogatory, "she's Flora Guy, she attends in the 'Old Saint Columbkil,' a very arch little girl — I think she'll do to a nicety."

"Use your own judgment, I leave it all to you," said Blarden, "only get one at once, do you mind, you know the sort we want."

"I suppose she can't come any sooner than tomorrow, she must have notice," said Chancey, "but I'll go in there to-day if you like, and talk to her about it; I'll have her out with you here tomorrow to a certainty, an' I declare to G —— she's a very smart little girl."

"Do so," said Ashwoode, "and the sooner the better."

Chancey arose, stuffed his hands into his breeches pockets according to his wont, and with a long yawn lounged out of the room.

"Do you keep out of the way after this evening," continued Sir Henry, addressing himself to Blarden; "I will tell her that you are to leave us this night, and that your visit ends; this will keep her quiet until all is ready, and then she must be tractable."

"Do you run and find her, then," said Blarden, "and tell her that I'm off for town this evening — tell her at once — and mind, bring me word what she says — off with you, doctor — ho, ho, ho! — mind, bring me word what she says — do you hear?"

With this pleasant charge ringing in his ears, Sir Henry Ashwoode departed upon his honourable mission.

Chancey strolled listlessly into town, and after an easy ramble, at length found himself safe and sound once more beneath the roof of the 'Old Saint Columbkil.' He walked through the dingy deserted benches and tables of the old tavern, and seating himself near the hearth, called a greasy waiter who was dozing in a corner.

"Tim, I'm raything dry to-day, Timothy," said Mr. Chancey, addressing the functionary, who shambled up to him more than half asleep; "what will you recommend, Timothy — what do you think of a pot of light ale?"

"Pint or quart?" inquired Tim shortly.

"Well, we'll say a pint to begin with, Timothy," said Chancey, meekly; "and do you see, Timothy, if Miss Flora Guy is on the tap; I wish she would bring it to me herself — do you mind, Timothy?"

Tim nodded and departed, and in a few minutes a brisk step was heard, and a neat, goodhumoured looking wench approached Mr. Chancey, and planted a pint pot of ale before him.

"Well, my little girl," said Chancey, with the quiet dignity of a patron, "would you like to get a fine situation in a baronet's family, my dear; to be own maid to a baronet's sister, where they eat off of silver every day in the week, and have more money than you or I could count in a twelvemonth?"

"Where's the good of liking it, Mr. Chancey?" replied the girl, laughing; "it's time enough to be thinking of it when I get the offer."

"Well, you *have* the offer this minute, my little girl," rejoined Chancey; "I have an elegant place for you — upon my conscience I have — up at Morley Court, with Sir Henry Ashwoode; he's a baronet, dear, and you're to be own maid to Miss Mary Ashwoode."

"It can't be the truth you're telling me," said the girl, in unfeigned amazement.

"I declare to G — d, and upon my soul, it is the plain truth," drawled Chancey; "Sir Henry Ashwoode, the baronet, asked me to recommend a tidy, sprightly little girl, to be own maid to his elegant, fine sister, and I recommended you — I declare to G — d but I did, and I come in to-day from the baronet's house to hire you, so I did."

"Well, an' is it in airnest you are?" said the girl.

"What I'm telling you is the rale truth," rejoined Chancey: "I declare to G — d upon my soul and conscience, and I wouldn't swear that in a lie, if you like to take the place you can get it."

"Well, well, after *that* — why, my fortune's made," cried the girl, in ecstasies.

"It is *so*, indeed, my little girl," rejoined Chancey; "your fortune's made, sure enough."

"An' my dream's out, too; for I was dreaming of nothing but washing, and that's a sure sign of a change, all the live-long night," cried she, "washing linen, and such lots of it, all heaped up; well, I'm a sharp dreamer — ain't I, though?"

"You will take it, then?" inquired Chancey.

"*Will* I — maybe I won't," rejoined she.

"Well, come out tomorrow," said Chancey.

"I can't tomorrow," replied she; "for all the tablecloth is to be done, an' I would not like to disappoint the master after being with him so long."

"Well, can you next day?"

"I can," replied she; "tell me where it is."

"Do you know Tony Bligh's public — the old 'Bleeding Horse?'" inquired he.

"I do — right well," she rejoined with alacrity.

"They'll direct you there," said Chancey; "ask for the manor of Morley Court; it's a great old brick house, you can see it a mile away, and whole acres of wood round it — it's a wonderful fine place, so it is; remember it's Sir Henry himself you're to see when you go there; an' do you mind what I'm saying to you, if I hear that you were talking and prating about the place here to the chaps that's idling about, or to old Pottles, or the sluts of maids, or, in short, to anyone at all, good or bad, you'll be sure to lose the situation; so mind my advice, like a good little girl, and don't be talking to any of them about where you're going; for it wouldn't look respectable for a baronet to be hiring his servants out of a tavern — do you mind me, dear."

"Oh, never fear me, Mr. Chancey," she rejoined; "I'll not say a word to a living soul; but I hope there's no fear the place will be taken before me, by not going tomorrow."

"Oh! dear me! no fear at all, I'll keep it open for you; now be a good girl, and remember, don't disappoint."

So saying he drained his pot of ale to the last drop, and took his departure in the pleasing conviction that he had secured the services of a fitting instrument to carry out the infernal schemes of his employers.

CHAPTER LII.

OF MARY ASHWOODE'S WALK TO THE LONESOME WELL — AND OF WHAT SHE SAW THERE — AND SHOWING HOW SCHEMES OF PERIL BEGAN TO CLOSE AROUND HER.

On the following evening, Mary Ashwoode, in the happy conviction that Nicholas Blarden was far away, and for ever removed from her neighbourhood, walked forth at the fall of the evening unattended, to ramble among the sequestered, but now almost leafless woods, which richly ornamented the old place. Through sloping woodlands, among the stately trees and wild straggling brushwood, now densely crowded together, and again opening in broad vistas and showing the level sward, and then again enclosing her amid the gnarled and hoary trunks and fantastic boughs, all touched with the mellow golden hue of the rich lingering light of evening, she wandered on, now treading the smooth sod among the branching roots, now stepping from mossy stone to stone across the wayward brook — now pausing on a gentle eminence to admire the glowing sky and the thin haze of evening, mellowing all the distant shadowy outlines of the landscape; and by all she saw at every step beguiled into forgetfulness of the distance to which she had wandered.

She now approached what had been once a favourite spot with her. In a gentle slope, and almost enclosed by wooded banks, was a small clear well, an ancient lichen-covered arch enclosed it; and all around in untended wildness grew the rugged thorn and dwarf oak, crowding around it with a friendly pressure, and embowering its dark clear waters with their ivy-clothed limbs; close by it stood a tall and graceful ash, and among its roots was placed a little rustic bench where, in happier times, Mary had often sat and read through the pleasant summer hours; and now, alas! there was the little seat and there the gnarled roots and the hoary stems of the wild trees, and the graceful ivy clusters, and the timeworn mossy arch that vaulted the clear waters bubbling so joyously beneath; how could she look on these old familiar friends, and not feel what all who with changed hearts and altered fortunes revisit the scenes of happier times are doomed to feel?

For a moment she paused and stood lost in vain and bitter regrets by the old well-side. Her reverie was, however, soon and suddenly interrupted by the sound of something moving among the brittle brushwood close by; she looked quickly in the direction of the noise, and though the light had now almost entirely failed, she yet discovered, too clearly to be mistaken, the head and shoulders of Nicholas Blarden, as he pushed his way among the bushes toward the very spot where she stood. With an involuntary cry of terror she turned, and running at her utmost speed, retraced her steps toward the old mansion; not daring even to look behind her, she pursued her way among the deepening shadows of the old trees with the swiftness of terror; and, as she ran, her fears were momentarily enhanced by the sound of heavy footfalls in pursuit, accompanied by the loud short breathing of one exerting his utmost speed. On — on she flew with dizzy haste; the distance seemed interminable, and her exhaustion was such that she felt momentarily tempted to forego the hopeless effort, and surrender herself to the mercy of her pursuer. At length she approached the old house — the sounds behind her abated; she thought she heard hoarse volleys of muttered imprecations, but not hazarding even a look behind, she still held on her way, and at length, almost wild with fear, entered the hall and threw herself sobbing into her brother's arms.

"Oh God! brother; he's here; am I safe?" and she burst into hysterical sobs.

As soon as she was a little calmed, he asked her, —

"What has alarmed you, Mary; what have you seen to agitate you so?"

"Oh! brother; have you deceived me; *is* that fearful man still an inmate of the house?" she said.

"No; I tell you no," replied Ashwoode, "he's gone; his visit ended with yesterday evening; he's fifty miles away by this time; tut — tut — folly, child; you must not be so fanciful."

"Well, brother, *he* has deceived *you*," she rejoined, with the earnestness of terror; "he is *not* gone; he is about this place; so surely as you stand there, I saw him; and, O God! he pursued me, and had my strength faltered for a moment, or my foot slipped, I should have been in his power;" she leaned down her head and clasped her hands across her eyes, as if to exclude some image of horror.

"This is mere raving, child," said Ashwoode, "the veriest folly; I tell you the man is gone; you heard, if anything at all, a dog or a hare springing through the leaves, and your imagination supplied the rest. I tell you, once for all, that Blarden is threescore good miles away."

"Brother, as surely as I see you, I saw him this night," she replied. "I could not be mistaken; I saw him, and for several seconds before I could move, such was the palsy of terror that struck me. I saw him, and watched him advancing towards me — gracious heaven! for while I could reckon ten; and then, as I fled, he still pursued; he was so near that I actually heard his panting, as well as the tread of his feet; — brother — brother — there was no mistake; there *could* be none in this."

"Well, be it so, since you will have it," replied Ashwoode, trying to laugh it off; "you have seen his *fetch* — I think they call it so. I'll not dispute the matter with you; but this I will aver, that his corporeal presence is removed some fifty miles from hence at this moment; take some tea and get you to bed, child; you have got a fit of the vapours; you'll laugh at your own foolish fancies tomorrow morning."

That night Sir Henry Ashwoode, Nicholas Blarden, and their worthy confederate, Gordon Chancey, were closeted together in earnest and secret consultation in the parlour.

"Why did you act so rashly — what could have possessed you to follow the girl?" asked Ashwoode, "you have managed one way or another so thoroughly to frighten the girl, to make her so fear and avoid you, that I entirely despair, by fair means, of ever inducing her to listen to your proposals."

"Well, that does not take me altogether by surprise," said Blarden, "for I have been suspecting so much this many a day; we must then go to work in right earnest at once."

"What measures shall we take?" said Ashwoode.

"What measures!" echoed Blarden; "well, confound me if I know what to begin with, there's such a lot of them, and all good — what do you say, Gordy?"

"You ought to ask her to marry you offhand," said Chancey, demurely, but promptly; "and if she refuses, let her be locked up, and treat her as if she was *mad* — do you mind; and I'll go to Patrick's-close, and bring out old Shycock, the clergyman; and the minute she strikes, you can be coupled; she'll give in very soon, you'll find; little Ebenezer will do whatever we bid him, and swear whatever we like; we'll all swear that you and she are man and wife already; and when she denies it, threaten her with the madhouse; and then we'll see if she won't come round; and you must first send away the old servants — every mother's skin of them — and get *new* ones instead; and that's my advice."

"It's not bad, either," said Blarden, knitting his brows twice or thrice, and setting his teeth. "I like that notion of threatening her with Bedlam; it's a devilish good idea; and I'll give long odds it will work wonders; what do you say, Ashwoode?"

"Choose your own measures," replied the baronet. "I'm incapable of advising you."

"Well, then, Gordy, that's the go," said Blarden; "bring out his reverence whenever I tip you the signal; and he shall have board and lodging until the job's done; he'll make a tip-top domestic chaplain; I suppose we'll have family prayers while he stays — eh? — ho, ho! — devilish good idea, that; and Chancey'll act clerk — eh? won't you, Gordy?" and, tickled beyond measure at the facetious suggestion, Mr. Blarden laughed long and lustily.

"I suppose I may as well keep close until our private chaplain arrives, and the new waiting-maid," said Blarden; "and as soon as all is ready, I'll blaze out in style, and I'll tell you what, Ashwoode, a precious good thought strikes me; turn about you know is fair play; and as I'm fifty miles away today, it occurs to me it would be a deuced good plan to have *you* fifty miles away tomorrow — eh? — we could manage matters better if you were supposed out of the way, and that she knew I had the whole command of the house, and everything in it; she'd be a cursed deal more frightened; what do you think?"

"Yes, I entirely agree with you," said Ashwoode, eagerly catching at a scheme which would relieve him of all prominent participation in the infamous proceedings — an exemption which, spite of his utter selfishness, he gladly snatched at. "I will do so. I will leave the house in reality."

"No — no; my tight chap, not so fast," rejoined Blarden, with a savage chuckle. "I'd rather have my eye on you, if you please; just write her a letter, dated from Dublin, and say you're obliged to go anywhere you please for a month or so; she'll not find you out, for we'll not let her out of her room; and now I think everything is settled to a turn, and we may as well get under the blankets at once, and be stirring betimes in the morning."

CHAPTER LIII.

THE DOUBLE FAREWELL.

Next day Mistress Betsy Carey bustled into her young mistress's chamber looking very red and excited.

"Well, ma'am," said she, dropping a short indignant courtesy, "I'm come to bid you goodbye, ma'am."

"How — what can you mean, Carey?" said Mary Ashwoode.

"I hope them as comes after me," continued the handmaiden, vehemently, "will strive to please you in all pints and manners as well as them that's going."

"Going!" echoed Mary; "why, this can't be — there must be some great mistake here."

"No mistake at all, ma'am, of any sort or description; the master has just paid up my wages, and gave me my discharge," rejoined the maid. "Oh, the ingratitude of some people to their servants is past bearing, so it is."

And so saying, Mistress Carey burst into a passion of tears.

"There *is* some mistake in all this, my poor Carey," said the young lady; "I will speak to my brother about it immediately; don't cry so."

"Oh! my lady, it ain't for myself I'm crying; the blessed saints in heaven knows it ain't," cried the beautiful Betsy, glancing devotionally upward through her tears; "not at all and by no means, ma'am, it's all for other people, so it is, my lady; oh! ma'am, you don't know the badness and the villainy of people, my lady."

"Don't cry so, Carey," replied Mary Ashwoode, "but tell me frankly what fault you have committed — let me know why my brother has discharged you."

"Just because he thinks I'm too fond of you, my lady, and too honest for what's going on," cried she, drying her eyes in her apron with angry vehemence, and speaking with extraordinary sharpness and volubility; "because I saw Mr. O'Connor's man yesterday — and found out that the young gentleman's letters used to be stopped by the old master, God rest him, and Sir Henry, and all kinds of false letters written to him and to you by themselves, to breed mischief between you. I never knew the reason before, why in the world it was the master used to make me leave every letter that went between you, for a day or more in his keeping. Heaven be his bed; I was too innocent for them, my lady; we were both of us too simple; oh dear! oh dear! it's a quare world, my lady. And that wasn't all — but who do you think I meets to-day skulking about the house in company with the young master, but Mr. Blarden, that we all thought, glory be to God, was I don't know how far off out of the place; and so, my lady, because them things has come to my knowledge, and because they knowed in their hearts, so they did, that I'd rayther be crucified than hide as much as the black of my nail from you, my lady, they put me away, thinking to keep you in the dark. Oh! but it's a dangerous, bad world, so it is — to put me out of the way of tellin' you whatever I knowed; and all I'm hoping for is, that them that's coming in my room won't help the mischief, and try to blind you to what's going on;" hereupon she again burst into a flood of tears.

"Good God," said Mary Ashwoode, in the low tones of horror, and with a face as pale as marble, "*is* that dreadful man here — have you seen him?"

"Yes, my lady, seen and talked with him, my lady, not ten minutes since," replied the maid, "and he gave me a guinea, and told me not to let on that I seen him — he did — but he little knew who he was speaking to — oh! ma'am, but it's a terrible shocking bad world, so it is."

Mary Ashwoode leaned her head upon her hand in fearful agitation. This ruffian, who had menaced and insulted and pursued her, a single glance at whose guilty and frightful aspect was enough to warn and terrify, was in league and close alliance with her own brother to entrap and deceive her — Heaven only could know with what horrible intent.

"Carey, Carey," said the pale and affrighted lady, "for God's sake send my brother — bring him here — I must see Sir Henry, your master — quickly, Carey — for God's sake quickly."

The young lady again leaned her head upon her hand and became silent; so the lady's maid dried her eyes, and left the room to execute her mission.

The apartment in which Mary Ashwoode was now seated, was a small dressing-room or boudoir, which communicated with her bedchamber, and itself opened upon a large wainscotted lobby, surrounded with doors, and hung with portraits, too dingy and faded to have a place in the lower rooms.

She had thus an opportunity of hearing any step which ascended the stairs, and waited, in breathless expectation, for the sounds of her brother's approach. As the interval was prolonged her impatience increased, and again and again she was tempted to go down stairs and seek him herself; but the dread of encountering Blarden, and the terror in which she held him, kept her trembling in her room. At length she heard two persons approach, and her heart swelled almost to bursting, as, with excited anticipation, she listened to their advance.

"Here's the room for you at last," said the voice of an old female servant, who forthwith turned and departed.

"I thank you kindly, ma'am," said the second voice, also that of a female, and the sentence was immediately followed by a low, timid knock at the chamber door.

"Come in," said Mary Ashwoode, relieved by the consciousness that her first fears had been delusive — and a good-looking wench, with rosy cheeks, and a clear, goodhumoured eye, timidly and hesitatingly entered the room, and dropped a bashful courtesy.

"Who are you, my good girl, and what do you want with me?" inquired Mary, gently.

"I'm the new maid, please your ladyship, that Sir Henry Ashwoode hired, if it pleases you, ma'am, instead of the young woman that's just gone away," replied she, her eyes staring wider and wider, and her cheeks flushing redder and redder every moment, while she made another courtesy more energetic than the first.

"And what is your name, my good girl?" inquired Mary.

"Flora Guy, may it please your ladyship," replied the newcomer, with another courtesy.

"Well, Flora," said her new mistress, "have you ever been in service before?"

"No, ma'am, if you please," replied she, "unless in the old Saint Columbkil."

"The old Saint Columbkil," rejoined Mary. "What is that, my good girl?"

The ignorance implied in this question was so incredibly absurd, that spite of all her fears and all her modesty, the girl smiled, and looked down upon the floor, and then coloured to the eyes at her own presumption.

“It’s the great wine-tavern and eating-house, ma’am, in Ship Street, if you please,” rejoined she.

“And who hired you?” inquired Mary, in undisguised surprise.

“It was Mr. Chancey, ma’am — the lawyer gentleman, please your ladyship,” answered she.

“Mr. Chancey! — I never heard of him before,” said the young lady, more and more astonished. “Have you seen Sir Henry — my brother?”

“Oh! yes, my lady, if you please — I saw him and the other gentleman just before I came upstairs, ma’am,” replied the maid.

“What other gentleman?” inquired Mary, faintly.

“I think Sir Henry was the young gentleman in the frock suit of sky-blue and silver, ma’am — a nice young gentleman, ma’am — and there was another gentleman, my lady, with him; he had a plum-coloured suit with gold lace; he spoke very loud, and cursed a great deal; a large gentleman, my lady, with a very red face, and one of his teeth out. I seen him once in the tap-room. I remembered him the minute I set eyes on him, but I can’t think of his name. He came in, my lady, with that young lord — I forget *his* name, too — that was ruined with play and dicing, my lady; and they had a quart of mulled sack — it was I that brought it to them — and I remembered the redfaced gentleman very well, for he was turning round over his shoulder, and putting out his tongue, making fun of the young lord — because he was tipsy — and winking to his own friends.”

“What did my brother — Sir Henry — your master — what did he say to you just now?” inquired Mary, faintly, and scarcely conscious what she said.

“He gave me a bit of a note to your ladyship,” said the girl, fumbling in the profundity of her pocket for it, “just as soon as he put the other girl — her that’s gone, my lady — into the chaise — here it is, ma’am, if you please.”

Mary took the letter, opened it hurriedly, and with eyes unsteady with agitation, read as follows: —

“My dear Mary, — I am compelled to fly as fast as horseflesh can carry me, to escape arrest and the entire loss of whatever little chance remains of averting ruin. I don’t see you before leaving this — my doing so were alike painful to us both — perhaps I shall be here again by the end of a month — at all events, you shall hear of me some time before I arrive. I have had to discharge Carey for very ill-conduct I have not time to write fully now. I have hired in her stead the bearer, Flora Guy, a very respectable, good girl. I shall have made at least two miles away in my flight before you read this. Perhaps you had better keep within your own room, for Mr. Blarden will shortly be here to look after matters in my absence. I have hardly a moment to scratch this line.

"Always your attached brother,

"Henry Ashwoode."

Her eye had hardly glanced through this production when she ran wildly toward the door; but, checking herself before she reached it, she turned to the girl, and with an earnestness of agony which thrilled to her very heart, she cried, —

"Is he gone? tell me, as you hope for mercy, is he — *is* he gone?"

"Who, who is it, my lady?" inquired the girl, a good deal startled.

"My brother — my brother: is he gone?" cried she more wildly still.

"I seen him riding away very fast on a grey horse, my lady," said the maid, "not five minutes before I came up stairs."

"Then it's too late. God be merciful to me! I am lost, I have none to guard me; I have none to help me — don't — don't leave me; for God's sake don't leave the room for one instant — — "

There was an imploring earnestness of entreaty in the young lady's accents and manner, and a degree of excited terror in her dilated eyes and pale face, which absolutely affrighted the attendant.

"No, my lady," said she, "I won't leave you, I won't indeed, my lady."

"Oh! my poor girl," said Mary, "you little know the griefs and fears of her you've come to serve. I fear me you have changed your lot, however hard before, much for the worst in coming here; never yet did creature need a friend so much as I; and never was one so friendless before," and thus speaking, poor Mary Ashwoode leaned forward and wept so bitterly that the girl was almost constrained to weep too for very pity.

"Don't take it to heart so much, my lady; don't cry. I'll do my best, my lady, to serve you well; indeed I will, my lady, and true and faithful," said the poor damsel, approaching timidly but kindly to her young mistress's side. "I'll not leave you, my lady; no one shall harm you nor hurt a hair of your head; I'll stay with you night and day as long as you're pleased to keep me, my lady, and don't cry; sure you won't, my lady?"

So the poor girl in her own simple way strove to comfort and encourage her desolate mistress.

It is a wonderful and a beautiful thing how surely, spite of every difference of rank and kind and forms of language, the words of kindness and of sympathy — be they the rudest ever spoken, if only they flow warm from the heart of a fellow-mortal — will gladden, comfort, and cheer the sorrow-stricken spirit. Mary felt comforted and assured.

"Do you be but true to me; stay by my side in this season of my sorest trouble; and may God reward you as richly as I would my poor means could," said Mary, with the same intense earnestness of entreaty. "There is kindness and truth in your face. I am sure you will not deceive me."

"Deceive you, my lady! God forbid," said the poor maid, earnestly; "I'd die before I'd deceive you; only tell me how to serve you, my lady, and it will be a hard thing that I won't do for you."

"There is no need to conceal from you what, if you do not already know, you soon must," said Mary, speaking in a low tone, as if fearful of being overheard; "that redfaced man you spoke of, that talked so loud and swore so much, that man I fear — fear him more than ever yet I dreaded any living thing — more than I thought I *could* fear anything earthly — him, this Mr. Blarden, we must avoid."

"Blarden — Mr. Blarden," said the maid, while a new light dawned upon her mind. "I could not think of his name — Nicholas Blarden — Tommy, that is one of the waiters in the 'Columbkil,' my lady, used to call him 'red ruin.' I know it all now, my lady; it's he that owns the great gaming house near High Street, my lady; and another in Smock Alley; I heard Mr. Pottles say he could buy and sell half Dublin, he's mighty rich, but everyone says he's a very bad man: I couldn't think of his name, and I remember everything about him now; it's all found out. Oh! dear — dear; then it's all a lie; just what I thought, every bit from beginning to end — nothing else but a lie. Oh, the villain!"

"What lie do you speak of?" asked Mary; "tell me."

"Oh, the villain!" repeated the girl. "I wish to God, my lady, you were safe out of this house — — "

"What is it?" urged Mary, with fearful eagerness; "what lie did you speak of? what makes you now think my danger greater?"

"Oh! my lady, the lies, the horrible lies he told me to-day, when Sir Henry and himself were hiring me," replied she. "Oh! my lady, I'm sure you are not safe here — — "

"For God's sake tell me plainly, what did they say?" repeated Mary.

"Oh, ma'am, what do you think he told me? As sure as you're sitting there, he told me he was a mad-doctor," replied she; "and he said, my lady, how that you were not in your right mind, and that he had the care of you; and, oh, my God, my lady, he told me never to be frightened if I heard you crying out and screaming when he was alone with you, for that all mad people was the same way — — "

"And was Sir Henry present when he told you this?" said Mary, scarce articulately.

"He was, my lady," replied she, "and I thought he turned pale when the redfaced man said that; but he did not speak, only kept biting his lips and saying nothing."

"Then, indeed, my case is hopeless," said Mary, faintly, while all expression, save that of vacant terror, faded from her face; "give me some counsel — advise me, for God's sake, in this terrible hour. What shall I do?"

"Ah, my lady, I wish to the blessed saints I could," rejoined the girl; "haven't you some friends in Dublin; couldn't I go for them?"

"No — no," said she, hastily, "you must not leave me; but, thank God, you have advised me well. I have one friend, and indeed only one, in Dublin, whom I may rely upon, my uncle, Major O'Leary; I will write to him."

She sat down, and with cold trembling hands traced the hurried lines which implored his succour; she then rang the bell. After some delay it was answered by a strange servant; and, after a few brief inquiries, to her unutterable horror she learned that all who remained of the old faithful servants of the family had been dismissed, and persons whose faces she had never seen before, hired in their stead.

These were prompt and decisive measures, and ominously portended some sinister catastrophe; the whole establishment reduced to a few strangers, and — as she had too much reason to fear — tools and creatures of the wretch Blarden. Having ascertained these facts, Mary Ashwoode, without giving the letter to the man, dismissed him with some trivial direction, and turning to her maid, said, —

"You see how it is; I am beset by enemies; may God protect and save me; what shall I do? my mind — my senses, will forsake me. Merciful heaven! what will become of me?"

"Shall I take it myself, my lady?" inquired the maid.

Mary raised herself eagerly, but with sudden dejection, said, —

"No — no; it cannot be; you must not leave me. I could not bear to be alone here; besides, they must not think you are my friend; no, no, it cannot be."

"Well, my lady," said the maid decisively, "we'll leave the house tonight; they'll not be on their guard against that, and once beyond the walls, you're safe."

"It is, I believe, the only chance of safety left me," replied Mary, distractedly; "and, as such, it shall be tried."

CHAPTER LIV.

THE TWO CHANCES — THE BRIBED COURIER.

"I don't half like the girl you've picked up," said Nicholas Blarden, addressing his favourite parasite, Chancey; "she don't look half sharp enough for our work; she hasn't the cut of a town lass about her; she's too like a milkmaid, too simple, too soft. I've confounded misgivings she's no schemer."

"Well, well — dear me, but you're very suspicious," said Chancey. "I'd like to know did ever anything honest come out of the 'Old Saint Columbkil!' there wasn't a sharper little wench in the place than herself, and I'll tell you that's a big word — no, no; there's not an inch of the fool about her."

"Well, she can't do us much mischief anyway," said Blarden; "the three others are as true as steel — the devil's own chickens; and mind you don't let the door-keys out of your pocket. Honour's all very fine, and ought not to be doubted; but there's nothing to my mind like a stiff bit of a rusty lock."

Chancey smiled sleepily, and slapped the broad skirt of his coat twice or thrice, producing therefrom the ringing clank which betoken the presence of the keys in question.

"So then we're all caged, by Jove," continued Blarden, rapturously; "and very different sorts of game we are too: did you ever see the show-box where the cats and the rats and the little birds are all boxed up together, higgledy-piggledy, in the same wire cage. I can't but think of it; it's so devilish like."

"Well, well — dear me; I declare to God but you're a terrible funny chap," said Chancey, enjoying a quiet chuckle; "but some way or another," he continued, significantly, "I'm thinking the cat will have a claw at the little bird yet."

"Well, maybe it will;" rejoined Blarden, "you never knew one yet that was not fond of a tit-bit when he could have it. Eh?"

Thus playfully they conversed, seasoning their pleasantries with sack and claret, and whatever else the cellars of Morley Court afforded, until evening closed, and the darkness of night succeeded.

Mary Ashwoode and her maid sat prepared for the execution of their adventurous project; they had early left the outer room in which we saw them last, and retired into her bedchamber to avoid suspicion; as the night advanced they extinguished the lights, lest their gleaming through the windows should betray the lateness of their vigil, and alarm the fears of their persecutors. Thus, in silence and darkness, not daring to speak, and almost afraid to breathe, they waited hour after hour until long past midnight. The well-known sounds of riotous swearing and horse-laughter, and the heavy trampling of feet, as the half-drunken revellers staggered to their beds, now reached their ears in noises faint and muffled by the distance. At length all was again quiet, and nearly a whole hour of silence passed away ere they ventured to move, almost to breathe.

"Now, Flora, open the outer door softly," whispered Mary, "and listen for any, the faintest sound; take off your shoes, and for your life move noiselessly."

"Never fear, my lady," responded the girl in a tone as low; and slipping off her shoes from her feet, she pressed her hand upon the young lady's wrist, to intimate silence, and glided into the little boudoir. With sickening anxiety the young lady heard her cross the small chamber, now and then stumbling against some pieces of furniture and cautiously groping her way; at length the door-handle turned, and then followed a silence. After an interval of a few seconds the girl returned.

"Well, Flora," whispered Mary, eagerly, as she approached, "is all still?"

"Oh! blessed hour! my lady, the door's locked on the outside," replied the maid.

"It can't be," said Mary Ashwoode, while her very heart sank within her. "Oh! Flora, Flora — girl, don't say that."

"It is indeed, my lady — as sure as I'm a living soul, it is so," replied she fearfully; "and it was wide open when I came up. Oh! blessed hour! my lady, what are we to do?"

"I will try; I will see; perhaps you are mistaken. God grant you may be," said the young lady, making her way to the door which opened on to the lobby. She reached it — turned the handle — pressed it with all her feeble strength, but in vain; it was indeed securely locked upon the outside; her project of escape was baffled at the very outset, and with a heart-sickening sense of terror and dismay — such as she had never felt before — she returned with her attendant to her chamber.

A night, sleepless, except for a few brief and fevered slumbers, crowded with terrors, passed heavily away, and the morning found Mary Ashwoode, pale, nervous, and feverish. She resolved, at whatever hazard, to endeavour to induce one of the new servants to convey her letter to Major O'Leary. The detection of this attempt could at worst result in nothing worse than to precipitate whatever mischief Blarden and his confederates had plotted, and which would if not so speedily, at all events as surely overtake her, were no such attempt made.

"Flora," said she, "I am resolved to try this chance, I fear me it is but a poor one; you, however, my poor girl, must not be compromised should it fail; you must not be exposed by your faithfulness to the vengeance of these villains; do you go into the next room, and I will try what may be done."

So saying, she rang the bell, and in a few minutes it was answered by the same man who had obeyed her summons on the day before. The man, although arrayed in livery, had by no means the dapper air of a professed footman, and possessed rather a villainous countenance than otherwise; he stood at the door with one hand fumbling at the handle, while he asked with an air half gruff and half awkward what she wanted. She sat in silence for a minute like the enchanter whose spells have been for the first time answered by the appearance of the familiar; too much agitated and affrighted to utter her mandate; with a violent effort she mastered her trepidation, and with an appearance of self-possession and carelessness which she was far from feeling, she said, —

"Can you, my good man, find a trusty messenger to carry a letter for me to a friend in Dublin?"

The man remained silent for some seconds, twisted his mouth into several strange contortions, and looked very hard indeed at her. At length he said, closing the door at the same time, and speaking in a low key, —

"Well, I don't say but I *might* find one, but there's a great many things would make it very costly; maybe you could not afford to pay him?"

"I could — I would — see here," and she took a diamond ring from her finger; "this is a diamond; it is of value — convey but this letter safely and it is yours."

The man took the ring from the table where she laid it, and examined it curiously.

"It's a pretty ring — it is," said he, removing it a little from his eye, and turning it in different directions so as to make it flash and sparkle in the light, "it *is* a pretty ring, rayther small for my fingers, though — it's a real diamond?"

"It is indeed, valuable — worth forty pounds at least," she replied.

"Well, then, here goes, it's worth a bit of a risk," and so saying he deposited it carefully in a corner of his waistcoat pocket, "give me the letter now, ma'am."

She handed him the letter, and he thrust it into the deepest abyss of his breeches pocket.

"Deliver that letter but safely," said she, "and what I have given you shall be but the earnest of what's to come, it is important — urgent — execute but the mission truly, and I will not spare rewards."

The man gave two short nods of huge significance, accompanied with a slight grunt.

"I say again, let me but have assurance that the message has been done," repeated she, "and you shall have abundant reason to rejoice, above all things dispatch — and — and — *secrecy*."

The man winked very hard with one eye, and at the same time with his crooked finger drew his nose so much on one side, that he seemed intent on removing that feature into exile somewhere about the region of his ear; and having performed this elegant and expressive pantomime for several seconds, he stooped forward, and in an emphatic whisper said, —

"*Ne-ver fear.*"

He then opened the door and abruptly made his exit, leaving poor Mary Ashwoode full of agitating hopes.

CHAPTER LV.

THE FEARFUL VISITANT.

Two or three days had passed, during which Mary had ascertained the fact that every door affording egress from the house was kept constantly locked, and that the new servants, as well as Blarden and his companions, were perpetually on the alert, and traversing the lower apartments, so that even had the door of the mansion laid open it would have been impossible to attempt an escape without encountering some one of those whose chief object was to keep her in close confinement, perhaps the very man from whose presence her inmost soul shrank in terror — she felt, therefore, that she was as effectually and as helplessly a prisoner as if she lay in the dungeons of a gaol.

Often again had she endeavoured to see the man to whom she had confided her letter to Major O'Leary, but in vain; her summons was invariably answered by the others, and fearing to excite suspicion, she, of course, did not inquire for him, and so, after a time, desisted from her endeavours.

Her window commanded a partial view of the old shaded avenue, and hour after hour would she sit at her casement, watching in vain for the longed-for appearance of her uncle, and listening, as fruitlessly, for the clang of his horse's hoofs upon the stony court.

"Oh! Flora, will he ever come?" she would exclaim, with a voice of anguish, "will he ever — ever come to deliver me from this horrible thraldom? I watch in vain, from the light of early dawn till darkness comes — I watch in vain, for the welcome sight of my friend — in vain — in vain I listen for the sound of his approach — heaven pity me, where shall I turn for hope — all — all have forsaken me — all that ever I loved have fallen from me, and left me desolate in this extremity — has he, too, my last friend, forsaken me — will they leave me here to misery — oh, that I might lay me down where head and heart are troubled no more, and be at rest in the cold grave. He'll never come — no — no — no — never."

Then she would wring her hands, still gazing from the casement, and hopelessly sob and weep.

She knew not why it was that Nicholas Blarden had suffered her, for a day or two, to be exempt from the dreaded intrusions of his hated presence. But this afforded her little comfort; she knew not how soon — at what moment — the monster might choose to present himself before her under circumstances of horror so dreadful as those of her present friendless and forsaken abandonment to his mercy — and when these imminent fears were for an instant hushed, a thousand agonizing thoughts, arising from the partial revelations of her late servant, Carey, occupied her mind. That the correspondence between her and O'Connor had been falsified — she dreaded, yet she hoped it might be true — she feared, yet prayed it might be so — and while the thought that others had wrought their estrangement, and that the coolness of indifference had not touched the heart of him she so fondly loved visited her mind, a thousand bright, but momentary hopes, fluttered her poor heart, and, for an instant, her dangers and her fears were all forgotten.

The day had passed, and its broad, clear light had given place to the red, dusky glow of sunset, when Mary Ashwoode heard the measured tread of several persons approaching her room. With an instinctive consciousness of her peril, she started to her feet, while every tinge of colour fled entirely from her cheeks.

"Flora — stay by me — oh, God, they are coming!" she said, and the words had hardly escaped her lips, when the door of the boudoir, in which she stood, was pushed open, and Nicholas Blarden, followed by Gordon Chancey, entered the room. There was in the countenance of Blarden none of his usual affectation of good humour; on the contrary, it wore a scowl of undisguised and formidable menace, the effect of which was enhanced by the baleful significance of the malignant glance which he fixed upon her, and as he stood there biting his lips in ominous silence, and gazing with savage, gloating eyes, upon the affrighted girl, it were not easy to imagine an apparition more intimidating and hideous. Even Chancey seemed a little uneasy in the anticipation of what was coming, and the sallow face of the barrister looked more than usually sallow, and his glittering eyes more glossy than ever.

"Go out of the room, *you* — do you mind," said Blarden, grimly, addressing Flora Guy, who had placed herself a little in advance of her young mistress, and who stood mute and thunderstruck, looking upon the two intruders— "are you palsied, or what — quit the room when I command you, you brimstone fool;" and he clutched her by the shoulder, and thrust her headlong out of the chamber, flinging the door to, with a crash that made the walls ring again.

"Listen to me and mind me, and weigh my words, or you'll rue it," said he, with a tremendous oath, addressing himself to the speechless and terrified lady. "I have a bit of information to give you, and then a bit of advice after it; you must know it's my intention we shall be married; mind me, *married* tomorrow evening; I know you don't like it; but *I* do, and that's enough for my purpose; and whenever I make my mind up to a thing, there is not that power in earth, or heaven, or hell, to turn me from it. I was always considered a tough sort of a chap when I was in earnest about anything; and I can tell you I'm mighty well in earnest here; and now you may as well know how completely I have you under my thumb; there is not a servant in the house that does not belong to me; there is not a door in the house but the key of it is in my keeping; there is not a word spoken in the house but I hear it, nor a thing done that I don't know of it, and *here's your letter for you*," he shouted, and flung her letter to Major O'Leary open before her on the table. "How dare you tamper with my servant's honesty? how *dare* you?" thundered he, with a stamp upon the floor which made the ornaments on the cabinet dance and jingle; "but mind how you try it again — beware; mind how you offer to bribe them again; I give you fair warning; you're my property now — to do what I like with, just as much as my horse or my dog; and if you *won't* obey me, why I'll find a way to *make* you; tomorrow evening I'll have a parson here, and we'll be buckled; make no rout about it, and it will be better for you, for whatever you do or say, if I had to get you into a strait-waistcoat and clap a plaister over your mouth to keep you quiet, married we shall be; husband and wife, and plenty of witnesses to vouch for it; do you understand me, and no mistake; and if you're foolish enough to make a row about it, I'll tell you what I'll do in such a case," and he fixed his eyes with a still more horrible expression upon her. “I have a particular friend, do you mind — a very obliging, particular old friend that’s a mad-doctor; do you hear me; not a very lucky one to be sure, for he has made devilish few cures; a mad-doctor, do you mind? — and I’ll have him to reside here and superintend your treatment; do you hear me? don’t stand gaping there like an idiot; do you hear me?”

Blarden during this address had advanced into the room and stood by the little table, leaning his knuckles upon it, and stooping forward and advancing his menacing and hideous face, so as to diminish still further the intervening distance, when, all on a sudden, like a startled bird, she darted across the room, and ere they had time to interpose, had opened the door, and was halfway across the lobby; she passed Flora Guy, who was sobbing at the door with her apron to her eyes, and at the head of the stairs beheld Sir Henry Ashwoode, no less confounded at the rencounter than was she herself.

“My brother! my brother!” she shrieked, and threw herself fainting into his arms.

Spite of all that was base in his character, the young man was so shocked and confounded that he turned pale as death, and speech and recollection for a moment forsook him.

Almost at the same instant Chancey and Blarden were at his side.

“What the devil ails you?” said Blarden, furiously, addressing Ashwoode, “what do you stand there hugging her for, you white-faced idiot?”

Ashwoode’s lips moved; but he could not speak, and the senseless burden still lay in his arms.

“Let her go, will you, you d —— d oaf? take hold of the girl, Chancey, and you, you idiot, come here and lend a hand; carry her into her room, and mind, sweet lips, keep the key in your pocket; and if you want help tatter the bells; get down, will you, you moonstruck fool?” he continued, addressing Ashwoode; “what do you stand there for, with your whitewashed face?”

Ashwoode, scarcely knowing what he did, staggered down the stairs and made his way to the parlour, where he sat gasping, with his face buried in his hands. Meanwhile, with many a meek expression of pity, the lawyer assisted Flora Guy in bearing the inanimate body of her mistress into the chamber, where, in happy unconsciousness, she lay under the tender care of her humble friend and servant. Blarden and Chancey having accomplished the object of their mission, departed to the lower regions to enjoy whatever good cheer Morley Court afforded.

CHAPTER LVI.

EBENEZER SHYCOCK.

In pursuance of the arrangements which Mr. Blarden had, on the evening before, announced to his intended victim, Gordon Chancey was despatched early the next morning to engage the services of a clergyman for the occasion. He knew pretty well how to choose his man, and for the most part, when a plot was to be executed, in theatrical phrase, *cast* the parts well. He proceeded leisurely to the city, and sauntering through the streets, found himself at length in Saint Patrick's Close; beneath the shadow of the old Cathedral he turned down a narrow and deserted lane and stopped before a dingy, miserable little shop, over whose doorway hung a panel with the dusky and faded similitude of two great keys crossed, now scarcely discernible through the ancient dust and soot. The shop itself was a chaotic depository of old locks, holdfasts, chisels, crowbars, and in short, of rusty iron in almost every conceivable shape. Chancey entered this dusky shop, and accosting a very grimed and rusty-looking little boy who was, with a file, industriously employed in converting a kitchen candlestick into a cannon, inquired, —

"I say, my good boy, does the Reverend Doctor Ebenezer Shycock stop here yet?"

"Aye, does he," said the youth, inspecting the visitor with a broad and leisurely stare, while he wiped his forehead with his shirt sleeve.

"Up the stairs, is it?" demanded Chancey.

"Aye, the garrets," replied the boy. "And mind the hole in the top lobby," he shouted after him, as he passed through the little door in the back of the shop and began to ascend the narrow stairs.

He did "mind the hole in the top lobby" (a very necessary caution, by the way, as he might otherwise have been easily engulfed therein and broken either his neck or his leg, after descending through the lath and plaster, upon the floor of the landing-place underneath); and having thus safely reached the garret door, he knocked thereupon with his knuckles.

"Come in," answered a female voice, not of the most musical quality, and Chancey accordingly entered. A dirty, sluttish woman was sitting by the window, knitting, and as it seemed, she was the only inmate of the room.

"Is the Reverend Ebenezer at home, my dear?" inquired the barrister.

"He is, and he isn't," rejoined the female, oracularly.

"How's that, my good girl?" inquired Chancey.

"He's in the house, but he's not good for much," answered she.

"Has he been throwing up the little finger, my dear?" said Chancey, "he used to be rayther partial to brandy."

"Brandy — brandy — who says brandy?" exclaimed a voice briskly from behind a sheet which hung upon a string so as to screen off one corner of the chamber.

"Ay, ay, that's the word that'll waken you," said the woman. "Here's a gentleman wants to speak with you."

"The devil there is!" exclaimed the clerical worthy, abruptly, while with a sudden chuck he dislodged the sheet which had veiled his presence, and disclosed, by so doing, the form of a stout, short, bull-necked man, with a mulberry-coloured face and twinkling grey eyes — one of them in deep mourning. He wore a greasy red nightcap and a very tattered and sad-coloured shirt, and was sitting upright in a miserable bed, the covering of which appeared to be a piece of ancient carpet. With one hand he scratched his head, while in the other he held the sheet which he had just pulled down.

"How are you, Parson Shycock?" said Chancey; "how do you find yourself this morning, doctor?"

"Tolerably well. But what is it you want with me? out with it, spooney. Any job in my line, eh?" inquired the clergyman.

"Yes, indeed, doctor," replied Chancey, "and a very good job; you're wanted to marry a gentleman and a lady privately, not a mile and a half out of town, this evening; you'll get five guineas for the job, and I think that's no trifle."

The parson mused, and scratched his head again.

"Well," said he, "you must do a little job for me first. You can't be ignorant that we members of the Church militant are often hard up; and whenever I'm in a fix I pop wig, breeches, and gown, and take to my bed; you'll find the three articles in this lane, corner house — sign, three golden balls; present this docket — where the devil is it? ay, here; all right —

present this along with two guineas, paid in advance on account of job: bring me the articles, and I'll get up and go along with you in a brace of shakes. And stay; didn't I hear some one talking of brandy? or — or was I dreaming? You may as well get in a half-pint, for I'm never the thing till I have some little moderate refreshment; so, dearly beloved, mizzle at once."

"Dear me, dear me, doctor," said Chancey, "how can you think I'd go for to bring two guineas along with me?"

"If you haven't the *rhino*, this is no place for you, my fellow-sinner," rejoined the couple-beggar; "and if you *have*, off with you and deliver the togs out of pop. You wouldn't have a clergyman walk the streets without breeches, eh, dearly beloved cove?"

"Well, well, but you're a wonderful man," rejoined Chancey, with a faint smile. "I suppose, then, I must do it; so give me the docket, and I'll be here again as soon as I can."

"And do you mind me, you stray sheep, you, don't forget the lush," added the pastor. "I'm very desirous to wet my whistle; my mums, by the hokey, is as dry as a Dutch brick. Goodbye to you, and do you mind, be back here in the twinkling of a brace of bedposts."

With this injunction, and bearing the crumpled document, which the reverend divine had given him, as his credentials with the pawnbroker, Mr. Chancey cautiously lounged down the crazy stairs.

"I say, my nutty Nancy," observed the parson, after a long yawn and a stretch, addressing the female who sat at the window, "that chap's made of money. I had a pint with him once in Clarke's public — round the corner there. His name's Chancey, and he does half the bills in town — a regular Jew chap."

So saying, the Reverend Ebenezer Shycock, LL.D., unceremoniously rolled himself out of bed and hobbled to a crazy deal box, in which were deposited such articles of attire as had not been transmitted to the obliging proprietor of the neighbouring three golden balls.

While the reverend divine was kneeling before this box, and, with a tenderness suited to their frail condition, removing the few scanty articles of his wardrobe and laying them reverently upon a crazy stool beside him, Mr. Chancey returned, bearing the liberated decorations of the doctor's person, as also a small black bottle.

"Oh, dear me, doctor," said Chancey, "but I'm glad to see you're stirring. Here's the things."

"And the — the lush, eh?" inquired the clergyman, peering inquisitively round Chancey's side to have a peep at the bottle.

"Yes, and the lush too," said the barrister.

"Well, give me the breeches," said the doctor, with alacrity, clutching those essential articles and proceeding to invest his limbs therein. "And, Nancy, a sup of water and a brace of cups."

A cracked mug and a battered pewter goblet made their appearance, and, along with the ruin of a teapot which contained the pure element, were deposited on a chair — for tables were singularly scarce in the reverend doctor's establishment.

"Now, my beloved fellow-sinner, mix like a Trojan!" exclaimed the divine; "and take care, take care, pogey aqua, don't drown it with water; chise it, *chise* it, man, that'll do."

With these words he grasped the vessel, nodded to Chancey, and directing his two grey eyes with a greedy squint upon the liquor as it approached his lips, he quaffed it at a single draught.

Without waiting for an invitation, which Chancey thought his clerical acquaintance might possibly forget, the barrister mingled some of the same beverage for his own private use, and quietly gulped it down; seeing which, and dreading Mr. Chancey's powers, which he remembered to have already seen tested at "Clarke's public," the learned divine abstractedly inverted the brandy bottle into his pewter goblet, and shedding upon it an almost imperceptible dew from the dilapidated teapot, he terminated the *symposium* and proceeded to finish his toilet.

This was quickly done, and Mr. Gordon Chancey and the Reverend Ebenezer Shycock — two illustrious and singularly well-matched ornaments of their respective professions — proceeded arm in arm, both redolent of grog, to the nearest coach stand, where they forthwith supplied themselves with a vehicle; and while Mr. Chancey pretty fully instructed his reverend companion in the precise nature of the service required of him, and, as far as was necessary, communicated the circumstances of the whole case, they traversed the interval which separated Dublin city from the manor of Morley Court.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE CHAPLAIN'S ARRIVAL AT MORLEY COURT — THE KEY — AND THE BOOZE IN THE BOUDOIR.

The hall door was opened to the summons of the two gentlemen by no less a personage than Nicholas Blarden himself, who, having carefully locked it again, handed the key to his accomplice, Gordon Chancey.

"Here, take it, Gordy, boy," exclaimed he, "I make you porter for the term of the honeymoon. Keep the gates well, old boy, and never let the keys out of your pocket unless I tell you. And so," continued he, treating the Reverend Ebenezer Shycock to a stare which took in his whole person, "you have caught the doctor and landed him fairly. Doctor — what's your name? no matter — it's a delightful turn-up for a sinner like me to have the heavenly consolation of your pious company. Follow me in here; I dare say your reverence would not object to a short interview with the brandy flask, or something of the kind — even saints must wet their whistles now and again."

So saying, Blarden led the way into the parlour.

"Here, guzzle away, old gentleman, there's plenty of the stuff here," said Blarden, "only beware how you make a beast of yourself. You mustn't tie up your red rag, do you mind? We'll want you to stand and read; and if you just keep senses enough for that, you may do whatever you like with the rest."

The clergyman nodded, and with a single sweep of his grey eyes, took in the contents of the whole table. His shaking hand quickly grasped the neck of the brandy flask, and he filled out and quaffed a comforting bumper.

"Now, take it easy, do, or, by Jove, you'll not *keep* till evening," said Blarden. "Chancey, have an eye on the parson, for his mind's so intent on heaven that he may possibly forget where he is and what he's doing. After dinner, Ashwoode and I have to go into town — some matters that must be wound up before the evening's entertainment begins — we'll be out, however, at eight o'clock or so. And mind this," he continued, gripping the barrister's shoulder in his hand with an energizing pressure, and speaking into his ear to secure attention, “you know that little room upstairs wherein we had the bit of chat with my lady love — the — the boudoir, I think they call it — now, mind me well — when the dusk comes on, do you and his reverence there take your pipes and your brandy, or whatever else you’re amusing yourselves with at the time, and sit in that same room together, so that not a mouse can cross the floor unknown to you. Don’t forget this, for we can’t be too sharp. Do you hear me, old Lucifer?”

“Never fear, never fear,” rejoined Mr. Chancey. “The Reverend Ebenezer and I will spend the evening there — and, indeed, I declare to God, it’s a very neat little room, so it is, for a quiet pipe and a pot of sack.”

“Well, that’s a point settled,” rejoined Blarden. “And do you mind me, don’t let that beastly old sot knock himself up before we come home. Do you hear me, old scarecrow,” he continued, poking the reverend doctor somewhere about the region of the abdomen with the hilt of his sword, which he was adjusting at his side, and addressing himself to that gentleman, “if I find you drunk when I return this evening, I’ll make it your last bout — I’ll tap the brandy, old tickle pitcher, and stave the cask, and send you to seek your fortune in the other world. Mind my words — I’m not given to joking when I have real business on hand; and faith, you’ll find me as ready to *do* as to promise.”

So saying, he left the room.

“A rum cove, that, upon my little word,” said the Reverend Ebenezer Shycock, filling out another bumper of his beloved cordial. “Take the bottle away at once; lock it up, my fellow-worm, lock it up, or I’ll be at it again. Lock it up while I have this glass in my hand, or I must have another, and that might be — *might*, I say — *possibly* might — but d —— n it, no, it can’t — I will have one more.” And so saying, with desperate resolution, he quaffed what he had already in his hand and filled out another.

Chancey did not wait till he had repeated his mandate, but quietly removed the seductive flask and placed it beyond the reach and the sight of his clerical friend, who, feeling himself a little pleasant, sat down before the hearth, and in a voice whose tone nearly resembled that of a raven labouring under an affection of the chest, he chaunted through his nose, with many significant winks and grimaces, a ditty at that time in high acceptance among the votaries of vice and license, and whose words were such as even the ‘Old St. Columbkill’ would hardly have tolerated. This performance over — which, by the way, Chancey relished in his own quiet way with intense enjoyment — the reverend gentleman, composed himself for a doze for several hours, from which he aroused himself to eat and to drink a little more.

Thus pleasantly the day wore on, until at length the sun descended in glory behind the far-off blue hills, and the pale twilight began to herald the approach of night.

That day Mary Ashwoode appeared to have lost all energy of thought and feeling; she lay pale and silent upon her bed, seeming scarcely conscious even of the presence of her faithful attendant. From the moment of her yesterday's interview with Blarden, and the meeting with her brother, she had been thus despairing and stupefied. Flora Guy sat in the window, sometimes watching the pale face of the wretched lady, and at others looking out upon the old woodlands and the great avenue, darkened among its double rows of huge old limes. As the day wore on she suddenly exclaimed, —

"Oh, my lady, here's a gentleman coming with Mr. Chancey up the avenue, I see them between the trees, and the coach driving away."

"Can it — *can* it be?" exclaimed Mary, starting wildly up in the bed— "is it he?"

"It's a little stout gentleman, with a red pimply face — they're talking under the window now, my lady; he has a band on, and a black gown across his arm — as sure as daylight, my lady — he is — blessed hour; he *is* a parson."

Mary Ashwoode did not speak, but the momentary flash of hope faded from her face, and was succeeded by a paleness so deadly that lips and cheeks looked bloodless as the marble lineaments of a statue; in dull and silent despair she sank again where she had lain before.

"Don't fear them, my lady," said the poor girl, placing herself by the bedside where, more like a corpse than a living being, her hapless mistress lay; "I will not leave you, and though they may threaten, they dare not hurt you — don't fear them, my lady."

The blanched cheeks and evident excitement of the honest maiden, however, too clearly belied her words of encouragement.

Twice or thrice the girl, in the course of the day, locking the door of her mistress's chamber, according to the orders of Nicholas Blarden and his confederates, but less in obedience to them than for the sake of *her* security, ran downstairs to learn whatever could be gathered from the servants of the intended movements of the conspirators; each time, as she descended the stairs, the parlour bell was rung, and a servant encountered her before she had well reached the hall; and Mr. Chancey, too, with his hands in his pockets, and his cunning eyes glittering suspiciously through their half-closed lids, would meet and question her before she passed: were ever sentinels more vigilant — was ever *surveillance* more jealous and complete?

During these excursions she picked up whatever was to be learned of the intentions of those in whose power her young mistress now helplessly and despairingly lay.

"Sir Henry Ashwoode and Mr. Blarden is gone to town together, my lady," said the maid, in a whisper, for she felt the vigilance of Chancey and his creatures might pursue her even to the chamber where she stood; "they'll not be out till about eight o'clock, my lady, at the soonest, maybe not till near nine or ten; at any rate it will be dark long before they come, and God knows what may turn up before then — don't lose heart, my lady — don't give up."

In vain, entirely in vain, however, were the words of hope and courage spoken; they fell cold and dead upon the palsied senses and stricken heart of despairing terror. Mary Ashwoode scarcely understood, and seemed not even to have heard them.

As the evening approached the poor girl made another exploring ramble, in the almost desperate speculation that she might possibly hit upon something which might suggest even a hint of some mode of escape. Having encountered Chancey and one of the serving men, as usual, and passed her examination, she crossed the large old hall, and without any definite predetermination, entered Sir Henry's study, where he and Blarden had been sitting, and carelessly thrown upon the table a large key. For a moment she could scarcely believe her eyes, and her heart bounded high with hope as she grasped it quickly and rolled it in her apron— "Could it be the key of one of the doors through which alone liberty was to be regained?" With a deliberate step, which strangely belied her restless anxiety, she passed the door within which Chancey was sitting, and ascended to the young lady's chamber.

“My lady, is this it?” exclaimed she, almost breathless with excitement, and holding the key before the lady’s face.

Mary Ashwoode with a momentary eagerness glanced at it.

“No, no,” said she, faintly, “I know all the keys of the outer doors; it was I who brought them to my father every night; but this is none of them — no, no, no, no.” There was a dulness and apathy upon the young lady, and a seeming insensibility to everything — to hope, to danger — to all, in short, which had intensely interested every faculty of mind and feeling but the day before — which frightened and dismayed her humble friend.

“Don’t, my lady — don’t give up — oh, sure you won’t lose heart entirely; see if I won’t think of something — never mind, if I don’t think of some way or another yet.”

The red discoloured tints of evening were now fading from the landscape, and rapidly giving place to the dim twilight — the harbinger of a night of dangers, terrors, and adventures; and as the poor maiden sat by the young lady’s side, with a heart full of dark and ominous foreboding, she heard the door of the outer chamber — the little boudoir which we have often had occasion to mention — opened, and two persons entered it.

“They are here — they are come. Oh, God! they are here,” exclaimed Mary Ashwoode, clasping her small hand in terror round the girl’s wrist.

“The door’s locked, my lady,” said the girl, scarcely less terrified than her mistress; “they can’t come in without letting us know first.’ So saying, she ran to the door and peeped through the keyhole, to reconnoitre the party, and then stepping on tip-toe to the young lady, who, more dead than alive, was sitting by the bedside, she said in a whisper, —

“Who do you think it is, ma’am? blessed hour! my lady, who should it be but that lawyer gentleman — that Mr. Chancey, and the old parson — they are settling themselves at the table.”

Mr. Gordon Chancey and the Reverend Ebenezer Shycock were determined to make themselves comfortable in their new quarters. Accordingly they heaped wood and turf upon the expiring fire, and compelled the servant to ply the kitchen bellows, until the hearth crackled and roared again; then drawing the table to the fireside — a pretty little work-table of poor Mary’s — now covered with brandy-flasks, pieces of tobacco, pipes, and the other apparatus of their coarse debauch — the two worthies, illuminated by a pair of ponderous wax-candles, and by the blaze of a fire, and having drawn the curtains, sat themselves down and commenced their jolly vigils.

Chancey possessed the rare faculty of preserving his characteristic cunning throughout every phase and stage of intoxication short of absolute insensibility; on the present occasion, however, he was resolved not to put this convenient accomplishment to the test. The goodwill of Nicholas Blarden was too lucrative a possession to be lightly parted with, and he could not afford to hazard it by too free an indulgence upon the present important occasion; he therefore conducted his assaults upon the bottle with a very laudable abstemiousness. Not so, however, his clerical companion; he, too, had, in connection with his convivial frailties, a compensating gift of his own; he possessed, in an eminent degree, the power of recovering his intellects upon short notice from the influence of brandy, and of descending almost at a single bound from the loftiest altitude of drunken inspiration to the dull insipid level of ordinary sobriety; all he asked was fifteen minutes to bring himself to. He used to say with becoming pride— "If I could have done it in *ten*, I'd have been a bishop by this time; but *dis aliter visum*; I had not time one forenoon; being wapper-eyed, I was five minutes short of my allowance to get right, consequently officiated oddly — fell on my back on the way out, and couldn't get up; but what signifies it? I'm better off, as matters stand, ten to one; so here goes, my fellow-sinner, to it again; one brimmer more."

The reverend doctor, therefore, was much less cautious than his companion, and soon began to exhibit very unequivocal symptoms of a declension in his intellectual and physical energies, and a more than corresponding elevation in his hilarious spirits.

"I say," said Chancey, "my good man, you'd better stop; you have too much in as it is; they'll be here before half-an-hour, and if Mr. Blarden finds you this way, I declare to God I think he'll crack your neck down the staircase."

"Well, dearly beloved," said the clerical gentleman, "I believe you *are* right; I'll bring myself to. I *am* a little heavy-eyed or so; all I ask for is a towel and cold water." So saying, with many a screw of the lips, and many a hiccough, he made an effort to rise, but tumbled back — with an expression of the most heavenly benevolence — into his chair, knocking his head with an audible sound upon the back of it, and at the same time overturning one of the candles.

"Pull the bell, dearly beloved," said he, with a smile and a hiccough— "a basin of water and a towel."

"Devil broil you, for a drunken beast," said Chancey, seriously alarmed at the condition of the couple-beggar; "he'll never be fit for his work tonight."

"Fifteen minutes, neither more nor less," hiccoughed the divine, with the same celestial smile— "towel, basin of cold water, and fifteen minutes."

Chancey did procure the cold water and a napkin, which, being laid before the clergyman, he proceeded with much deliberation, while various expressions of stupendous solemnity and beaming benevolence flitted in beautiful alternations across his expressive countenance, to prepare them for use. He doffed his wig, and first bathing his head, face, and temples completely in the cool liquid, saturated the towel likewise therein, and wound it round his shorn head in the fashion of a Turkish turban; having accomplished which feat, he leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and became, to all intents and purposes, for the time being, stone dead.

Leaving his reverend companion undisturbed to the operation of his own hydropathic treatment, Gordon Chancey drew his seat near to the fire, and filling his pipe anew with tobacco, leaned back in the chair, crossed his legs, and more than half closing his eyes, prepared himself luxuriously for what he called "a raal elegant draw of particular pigtail."

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE SIGNAL.

Flora Guy peeped eagerly through the keyhole of her lady's chamber into the little apartment in which the two boon companions were seated. After reconnoitring for a very long time, she moved lightly to her mistress's side, and said, in a low but distinct tone, —

"Now, my lady, you must get up and rouse yourself — for God's sake, mistress dear, shake off the heaviness that's over you, and we have a chance left still."

"Are they not in the next room to us?" inquired Mary.

"Yes, my lady," replied the maid, "but the parson gentleman is drunk or asleep, and Mr. Chancey is there alone — and — and has the four keys beside him on the table; don't be frightened, my lady, do you stay quite quiet, and I'll go into the room."

Mary Ashwoode made no answer, but pressed the poor girl's hand in her cold fingers, and without moving, almost without breathing, awaited the result. Flora Guy, meanwhile, opened the door, and passed into the outer apartment, assuming, as she did so, an air of easy and careless indifference. Chancey turned as she entered the room, fanning the smoke of his tobacco pipe aside with his hand, and eying her with a jealous glance.

"Well, my little girl," said he, "and what makes you leave your young lady, my dear?"

"An' is a body never to get an instant minute to themselves?" rejoined she, with an indignant toss of her head; "why then, I tell you what it is, Mr. Chancey, I'm tired to death, so I am, sitting in that little room the whole blessed day, and not a word, good or bad, will the young lady say — she's gone stupid like."

"Is the door locked?" said Chancey, suspiciously, and at the same time rising and approaching the young lady's chamber.

As he did so, Flora Guy, availing herself instantly of this averted position, snatched up, without waiting to choose, one of the four great keys which lay upon the table, and replaced it dexterously with that which she had but a short time before shown to her mistress; in doing so, however, spite of all her caution, a slight clank was audible.

"Well, *is* it locked?" inquired the damsel, hoping by the loud tone in which she uttered the question to drown the suspicious sounds which threatened her schemes with instant detection.

"Yes, it is locked," rejoined Chancey, glancing quickly at the keys; "but what do you want there? move off from my place, will you?" and shambling to the table he hastily gathered the four keys in his grasp, and thrust them into his deep coat pocket.

"You're in a mighty quare humour, so you are, Mr. Chancey," said the girl, affecting a saucy tone, through which, had his ear been listening for the sound, he might have detected the quaver of extreme agitation, "you usedn't to be so cross by no means at the Columbkil, but mighty pleasant, so you used."

"Well, my little girl," said Chancey, whose suspicions were now effectually quieted, "I declare to God you're the first that ever said I was bad tempered, so you are — will you have something to drink?"

"What have you there, Mr. Chancey?" inquired she.

"This is brandy, my little girl, and this is sack, dear," rejoined Chancey, "both of them elegant; you must have whichever you like — which will you choose, dear?"

"Well, then, I'll have a little drop of the sack, mulled, I thank you, Mr. Chancey," replied she.

"There's nothing to mull it in here, my little girl," objected the barrister.

"Oh, but I'll get it in a minute though," replied she, "I'll run down for a saucepan."

"Well, dear, run away," replied he, "but don't be long, for Miss Ashwoode might want you, my little girl, and it wouldn't do if you were out of the way, you know."

Without waiting to hear the end of this charge, Flora Guy ran down the staircase, and speedily returned with the utensil required.

"Maybe I'd better go in for a minute first, and see if she wants me," suggested the girl.

"Very well, my dear," replied Chancey.

And accordingly, she turned the key in the chamber door, closed it again, and stood by the young lady's side; such was her agitation that for three or four seconds she could not speak.

"My lady," at length she said, "I have one of the keys — when I go in next I'll leave your room door unlocked, only closed just, and no more — the lobby door is ajar — I left it that way this very minute; and when you hear me saying 'the sack's upset!' — do you open your door, and cross the room as quick as light, and out on the lobby, and stop by the stairs, my lady, and I'll follow you as fast as I can. Here, my lady," continued the poor girl, bringing a small box from her mistress's toilet; "your rings, my lady — they'll be wanted — mind, your rings, my lady — there is the little case, keep it in your pocket; if we escape, my lady, they'll be wanted — mind, Mr. Chancey has ears like needle points. Keep up your heart, my lady, and in the name of God we'll try this chance."

"Into His hands I commit myself," said the young lady, with a tone and air of more firmness and energy than she had shown for days; "my heart is strengthened, my courage comes again — oh, thank God, I am equal to this dreadful hour."

Flora Guy made a gesture of silence, and then, opening the door briskly, and shutting it again with an ostentatious noise, and drawing the key from the lock, she crossed the room to where Chancey, who had watched her entrance, was sitting.

"Well, my dear," said he, "how is that delicate young lady in there?"

"Why, she's raythur bad, I'm afraid," rejoined the girl; "she's the whole day long in a sort of a heavy dulness like — she don't seem to mind anything."

"So much the better, my dear," said Chancey, "she'll be the less inclined to gad, or to be troublesome — come, mix the spices and the sugar, dear, and settle the liquor in the saucepan — you want some refreshment, so you do, for I declare to God, I never saw anyone so pale in all my life as you are this minute."

"I'll not be long so," said the girl, affecting a tone of briskness, and proceeding to mingle the ingredients in the little saucepan, "for I think if I was dead itself, let alone a little bit tired, a cup of mulled sack would cheer me up again."

So saying, she placed the little saucepan on the bar.

"Is the parson asleep?" inquired she.

"Indeed, my dear, I'm very much afraid it's tipsy he is," drawled Chancey, demurely, "take care of that clergyman, my dear, for indeed I'm afraid he has very loose conduct."

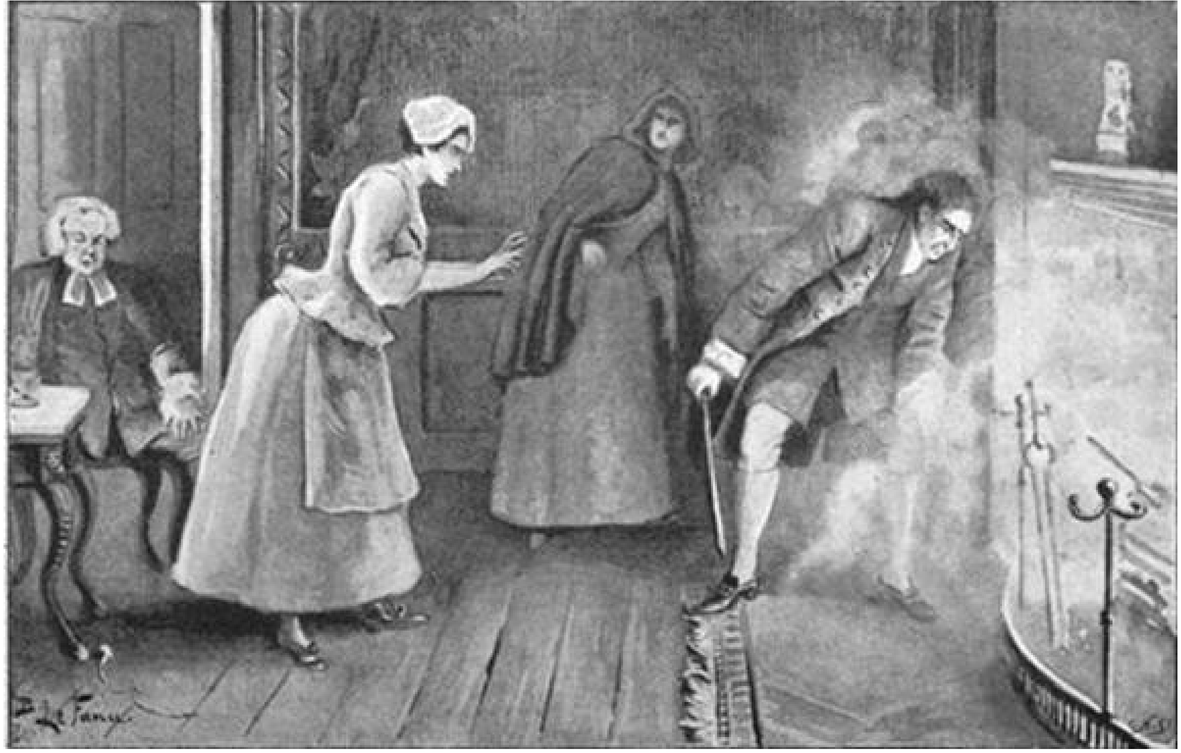
"Will I blacken his nose with a burned cork?" inquired she.

"Oh! no, my little girl," replied Chancey, with a tranquil chuckle, and turning his sleepy grey eyes upon the apoplectic visage of the stupefied drunkard who sat bolt upright before him; "no, no, we don't know the minute he may be wanted; he'll have to perform the ceremony very soon, my dear; and Mr. Blarden, if he took the fancy, would think nothing of braining half a dozen of us. I declare to God he wouldn't."

"Well, Mr. Chancey, will you mind the little saucepan for one minute," said she, "while I'm putting a bit of turf or a few sticks under it."

"Indeed I will," said he, turning his eyes lazily upon the utensil, but doing nothing more to secure it. Flora Guy accordingly took some wood, and, pretending to arrange the fire, overturned the wine; the loud hiss of the boiling liquid, and the sudden cloud of whirling steam and ashes, ascending toward the ceiling, and puffing into his face, half confounded the barrister, and at the same instant, Flora Guy, clapping her hands, and exclaimed with a shrill cry, —

"*The sack's upset! the sack's upset!* lend a hand, Mr. Chancey — Mr. Chancey, do you hear?" and, while thus conjured, the barrister, in obedience to her vociferous appeal, made some indistinct passes at the saucepan with the poker, which he had grasped at the first alarm; the damsel, without daring to look directly where every feeling would have riveted her eyes, beheld a dark form glide noiselessly behind Chancey, and pass from the room. For the moment, so intense was her agony of anxiety, she felt upon the very point of fainting; in an instant more, however, she had recovered all her energies, and was bold and quick-witted as ever; one glance in the direction of the lady's chamber showed her the door slowly swinging open; fortunately the barrister was at the moment too much occupied with the extraction of the remainder of the saucepan from the fire, to have yet perceived the treacherous accident, one glance at which would have sealed their ruin, and Flora Guy, running noiselessly to the door, remedied the perilous disclosure by shutting it softly and quickly; and then, with much clattering of the key, and a good deal of pushing beside, forcing it open again, she passed into the room and spoke a little in a low tone, as if to her mistress; and then, returning, she locked the door of the then untenanted chamber in real earnest, and, crossing to Chancey, said:— “I wonder at you, so I do, Mr. Chancey; you frightened the young mistress half out of her wits; and I’m all over dust and ashes; I must run down and wash every inch of my face and hands, so I must; and here, Mr. Chancey, will you keep the key of the bedroom till I come back? afraid I might drop it; and don’t let it out of your hands.”



“I will indeed, dear; but don’t be long away,” rejoined the barrister, extending his hand to receive the key of the now vacant chamber.

So Flora Guy boldly walked forth upon the lobby, and closing the chamber door behind her, found herself in the vast old gallery, hung round with grim and antique portraits, and lighted only by the fitful beams of a clouded moon shining doubtfully through the stained glass of a solitary window.

Mary Ashwoode awaited her approach, concealed in a small recess or niche in the wall, shrined like an image in the narrow enclosure of carved oak, not daring to stir, and with a heart throbbing as though it would burst.

“My lady, are you there?” whispered the maid, scarce audibly; great nervous excitement renders the sense morbidly acute, and Mary Ashwoode heard the sound distinctly, faint though it was, and at some distance from her; she stepped falteringly from her place of concealment, and took the hand of her conductress in a grasp cold as that of death itself, and side by side they proceeded down the broad staircase. They had descended about halfway when a loud and violent ringing from the bell of the chamber where Chancey was seated made their very hearts bound with terror; they stood fixed and breathless on the stair where the fearful peal had first reached their ears. Again the summons came louder still, and at the same moment the sounds of steps approached from below, and the gleam of a candle quickly followed; Mary Ashwoode felt her ears tingle and her head swim with terror; she was on the point of sinking upon the floor. In this dreadful extremity her presence of mind did not forsake Flora Guy: disengaging her hand from that of her terrified mistress, she tripped lightly down the stairs to meet the person who was approaching — a turn in the staircase confronted them, and she saw before her the serving man whose treachery had already defeated Mary Ashwoode's hopes of deliverance.

"What keeps you such a time answering the bell?" inquired she, saucily, "you needn't go up now, for I've got your message; bring up clean cups and a clean saucepan, for everything's destroyed with the dust and dirt Mr. Chancey's after kicking up; what did he do, do you think, but upsets the sack into the fire. Now be quick with the things, will you? the bell won't be easy one minute till they're done."

"Give me a kiss, sweet lips," exclaimed the man, setting down his candle, "and I'll not be a brace of shakes about the message; come, you *must*," he continued, playfully struggling with the affrighted girl.

"Well, do the message first, at any rate," said she, forcing herself, with some difficulty, from his grasp, as the bell rang a third time; "it will be a nice piece of business, so it will, if Mr. Chancey comes down and catches you here, pulling me about, so it will, you'll look well, won't you, when he's telling it to Mr. Blarden? — don't be a fool."

The reiterated application to the bell had more effect upon the serving man than all her oratory, and muttering a curse or two, he ran down, determined, vindictively, to bring up soiled cups, and a dirty saucepan. The man had hardly departed, when the maid exclaimed, in a hurried whisper, "Come — come — quick — quick, for your life!" and with scarcely the interval of three seconds, they found themselves in the hall.

“Here’s the key, my lady; see which of the doors does it open,” whispered she, exhibiting the key in the dusky and imperfect light.

“Here — here — this way,” said Mary Ashwoode, moving with weak and stumbling steps through a tiled lobby which opened upon the great hall, and thence along a narrow passage upon which several doors opened. “Here, here,” she exclaimed, “this door — this — I cannot open it — my strength is gone — this is it — for God’s sake, quickly.”

After two or three trials, Flora Guy succeeded in getting the key into the lock, and then exerting the whole strength of her two hands, with a hoarse jarring clang the bolt revolved, the door opened, and they stood upon the fresh and dewy sward, beneath the shadow of the old ivy-mantled walls. The girl locked the door upon the outside, fearful that its lying open should excite suspicion, and flung the key away into the thick weeds and brushwood.

“Now, my lady, the shortest way to the high road?” inquired Flora in a hurried whisper, and supporting, as well as she could, the tottering steps of her mistress, “how do you feel, my lady? Don’t lose heart now, a few minutes more and you will be safe — courage — courage, my lady.”

“I am better now, Flora,” said Mary faintly, “much better — the cool air refreshes me.” As she thus spoke, her strength returned, her step grew fleeter and firmer, and she led the way round the irregular ivy-clothed masses of the dark old building and through the stately trees that stood gathered round it. Over the unequal sward they ran with the light steps of fear, and under the darksome canopy of the vast and ancient linden-trees, gliding upon the smooth grass like two ghosts among the chequered shade and dusky light. On, on they sped, scarcely feeling the ground beneath their feet as they pursued their terrified flight; they had now gained the midway distance in the ancient avenue between the mansion and great gate, and still ran noiselessly and fleetly along, when the quick ear of Mary Ashwoode caught the distant sounds of pursuit.

“Flora — Flora — oh, God! we are followed,” gasped the young lady.

“Stop an instant, my lady,” rejoined the maid, “let us listen for a second.”

They did pause, and distinctly, between them and the old mansion, they heard, among the dry leaves with which in places the ground was strewn, the tread of steps pursuing at headlong speed.

“It is — it is, I hear them,” said Mary distractedly.

“Now, my lady, we must run — run for our lives; if we but reach the road before them, we may yet be saved; now, my lady, for God’s sake don’t falter — don’t give up.”

And while the sounds of pursuit grew momentarily louder and more loud, they still held their onward way with throbbing hearts, and eyes almost sightless with fatigue and terror.

CHAPTER LIX.

HASTE AND PERIL.

The rush of feet among the leaves grew every moment closer and closer upon them, and now they heard the breathing of their pursuer — the sounds came near — nearer — they approached — they reached them.

"Oh, God! they are up with us — they are upon us," said Mary, stumbling blindly onward, and at the same moment she felt something laid heavily upon her shoulder — she tottered — her strength forsook her, and she fell helplessly among the branching roots of the old trees.

"My lady — oh, my lady — thank God, it's only the dog," cried Flora Guy, clapping her hands in grateful ecstasies; and at the same time, Mary felt a cold nose thrust under her neck and her chin and cheeks licked by her old favourite, poor Rover. More dead than alive, she raised herself again to her feet, and before her sat the great old dog, his tail sweeping the rustling leaves in wide circles, and his goodhumoured tongue lolling from among his ivory fangs. With many a frisk and bound the fine dog greeted his long-lost mistress, and seemed resolved to make himself one of the party.

"No, no, poor Rover," said Mary, hurriedly— "we have rambled our last together — home, Rover, home."

The old dog looked wonderingly in the face of his mistress.

"Home, Rover — home," repeated she, and the noble dog did credit to his good training by turning dejectedly, and proceeding at a slow, broken trot homeward, after stopping, however, and peeping round his shoulder, as though in the hope of some signal relentingly inviting his return.

Thus relieved of their immediate fears, the two fugitives, weak, exhausted, and breathless, reached the great gate, and found themselves at length upon the high road. Here they ventured to check their speed, and pursue their way at a pace which enabled them to recover breath and strength, but still fearfully listening for any sound indicative of pursuit.

The moon was high in the heavens, but the dark, drifting scud was sailing across her misty disc, and giving to her light the character of ceaseless and ever varying uncertainty. The road on which they walked was that which led to Dublin city, and from each side was embowered by tall old trees, and rudely fenced by unequal grassy banks. They had proceeded nearly half-a-mile without encountering any living being, when they heard, suddenly, a little way before them, the sharp clang of horses' hoofs upon the road, and shortly after, the moon shining forth for a moment, revealed distinctly the forms of two horsemen approaching at a slow trot.

"As sure as light, my lady, it's they," said Flora Guy, "I know Sir Henry's grey horse — don't stop, my lady — don't try to hide — just draw the hood over your head, and walk on steady with me, and they'll never mind us, but pass on."

With a throbbing heart, Mary obeyed her companion, and they walked side by side by the edge of the grassy bank and under the tall trees — the distance between them and the two mounted figures momentarily diminishing.

"I say he's as lame as a hop-jack," cried the well-known voice of Nicholas Blarden, as they approached— "hav'n't you an eye in your head, you mouth, you — look there — another false step, by Jove."

Just at this moment the girls, looking neither to the right nor left, and almost sinking with fear, were passing them by.

"Stop you, one of you, will you?" said Blarden, addressing them, and at the same time reining in his horse.

Flora Guy stopped, and making a slight curtsey, awaited his further pleasure, while Mary Ashwoode, with faltering steps and almost dead with terror, walked slowly on.

"Have you light enough to see a stone in a horse's hoof, my dimber hen? — have you, I say?"

"Yes, sir," faltered the girl, with another curtsey, and not venturing to raise her voice, for fear of detection.

"Well, look into them all in turn, will you?" continued Blarden, "while I walk the beast a bit. Do you see anything? is there a stone there? — is there?"

"No, sir," said she again, with a curtsey.

"No, sir," echoed he— "but I say 'yes, sir,' and I'll take my oath of it. D —— n it, it can't be a strain. Get down, Ashwoode, I say, and look to it yourself; these blasted women are fit for nothing but darning old stockings — get down, I say, Ashwoode."

Without awaiting for any more formal dismissal, Flora Guy walked quickly on, and speedily overtook her companion, and side by side they continued to go at the same moderate pace, until a sudden turn in the road interposing trees and bushes between them and the two horsemen, they renewed their flight at the swiftest pace which their exhausted strength could sustain; and need had they to exert their utmost speed, for greater dangers than they had yet escaped were still to follow.

Meanwhile Nicholas Blarden and Sir Henry Ashwoode mended their pace, and proceeded at a brisk trot toward the manor of Morley Court. Both rode on more than commonly silent, and whenever Blarden spoke, it was with something more than his usual savage moroseness. No doubt their rapid approach to the scene where their hellish cruelty and oppression were to be completed, did not serve either to exhilarate their spirits or to soothe the asperities of Blarden's ruffian temper. Now and then, indeed, he did indulge in a few flashes of savage exulting glee at his anticipated triumph over the hereditary pride of Sir Henry, against whom, with all a coward's rancour, he still cherished a "lodged hate," and in mortifying and insulting whom his kestrel heart delighted and rioted with joy. As they approached the ancient avenue, as if by mutual consent, they both drew bridle and reduced their pace to a walk.

"You shall be present and give her away — do you mind?" said Blarden, abruptly breaking silence.

"There's no need for that — surely there is none?" said Ashwoode.

"Need or no need, it's my humour," replied Blarden.

"I've suffered enough already in this matter," replied Sir Henry, bitterly; "there's no use in heaping gratuitous annoyances and degradation upon me."

"Ho, ho, running rusty," exclaimed Blarden, with the harsh laugh of coarse insult— "running rusty, eh? I thought you were broken in by this time — paces learned and mouth made, eh? — take care, take care."

"I say," repeated Ashwoode, impetuously, "you can have no object in compelling my presence, except to torment me."

"Well, suppose I allow that — what then, eh? — ho, ho!" retorted Blarden.

Sir Henry did not reply, but a strange fancy crossed his mind.

"I say," resumed Blarden, "I'll have no argument about it; I choose it, and what I choose must be done — that's enough."

The road was silent and deserted; no sound, save the ringing of their own horses' hoofs upon the stones, disturbed the stillness of the air; dark, ragged clouds obscured the waning moon, and the shadows were deepened further by the stooping branches of the tall trees which guarded the road on either side. Ashwoode's hand rested upon the pommel of his holster pistol, and by his side moved the wretch whose cunning and ferocity had dogged and destroyed him — with startling vividness the suggestion came. His eyes rested upon the dusky form of his companion, all calculations of consequences faded away from his remembrance, and yielding to the dark, dreadful influence which was upon him, he clutched the weapon with a deadly gripe.

"What are you staring at me for? — am I a stone wall, eh?" exclaimed Blarden, who instinctively perceived something odd in Ashwoode's air and attitude, spite of the obscurity in which they rode.

The spell was broken. Ashwoode felt as if awaking from a dream, and looked fearfully round, almost expecting to behold the visible presence of the principle of mischief by his side, so powerful and vivid had been the satanic impulse of the moment before.

They turned into the great avenue through which so lately the fugitives had fearfully sped.

"We're at home now," cried Blarden; "come, be brisk, will you?" And so saying, he struck Ashwoode's horse a heavy blow with his whip. The spirited animal reared and bolted, and finally started at a gallop down the broad avenue towards the mansion, and at the same pace Nicholas Blarden also thundered to the hall door.

CHAPTER LX.

THE UNTREASURED CHAMBER.

Their obstreperous summons at the door was speedily answered, and the two cavaliers stood in the hall.

“Well, all’s right, I suppose?” inquired Blarden, tossing his gloves and hat upon the table.

“Yes, sir,” replied the servant, “all but the lady’s maid; Mr. Chancey’s been calling for her these five minutes and more, and we can’t find her.”

“How’s this — all the doors locked?” inquired Blarden vehemently.

“Ay, sir, every one of them,” replied the man.

“Who has the keys?” asked Blarden.

“Mr. Chancey, sir,” replied the servant.

“Did he allow them out of his keeping — did he?” urged Blarden.

“No, sir — not a moment — for he was saying this very minute,” answered the domestic, “he had them in his pocket, and the key of Miss Mary’s room along with them; he took it from Flora Guy, the maid, scarce a quarter of an hour ago.”

“Then all *is* right,” said Blarden, while the momentary blackness of suspicion passed from his face, “the girl’s in some hole or corner of this lumbering old barrack, but here comes Chancey himself, what’s all the fuss about — who’s in the upper room — the — the boudoir, eh?” he continued, addressing the barrister, who was sneaking downstairs with a candle in his hand, and looking unusually sallow.

“The Reverend Ebenezer and one of the lads — they’re sitting there,” answered Chancey, “but we can’t find that little girl, Flora Guy, anywhere.”

“Have you the keys?” asked Blarden.

“Ay, dear me, to be sure I have, except the one that I gave to little Bat there, to let you in this minute. I have the three other keys; dear me — dear me — what could ail me?” And so saying, Chancey slapped the skirt of his coat slightly so as to make them jingle in his pocket.

“The windows are all fast and safe as the wall itself — screwed down,” observed Blarden, “let’s see the keys — show them here.”

Chancey accordingly drew them from his pocket, and laid them on the table.

"There's the three of them," observed he, calmly.

"Have you no more?" inquired Blarden, looking rather aghast.

"No, indeed, the devil a one," replied Chancey, thrusting his arm to the elbow in his coat pocket.

"D — n me, but I think this is the key of the cellar," ejaculated Blarden, in a tone which energized even the apathetic lawyer, "come here, Ashwoode, what key's this?"

"It *is* the cellar key," said Ashwoode, in a faltering voice and turning very pale.

"Try your pockets for another, and find it, or —— ." The aposiopesis was alarming, and Blarden's direction was obeyed instantaneously.

"I declare to God," said Chancey, much alarmed, "I have but the three, and that in the door makes four."

"You d —— d oaf," said Blarden, between his set teeth, "if you have botched this business, I'll let you know for what. Ashwoode, which of the keys is missing?"

After a moment's hesitation, Ashwoode led the way through the passage which Mary and her companion had so lately traversed.

"That's the door," said he, pointing to that through which the escape had been effected.

"And what's this?" cried Blarden, shouldering past Sir Henry, and raising something from the ground, just by the doorpost, "a handkerchief, and marked, too — it's the young lady's own — give me the key of the lady's chamber," continued he, in a low changed voice, which had, in the ears of the barrister, something more unpleasant still than his loudest and harshest tones— "give me the key, and follow me."

He clutched it, and followed by the terror-stricken barrister, and by Sir Henry Ashwoode, he retraced his steps, and scaled the stairs with hurried and lengthy strides. Without stopping to glance at the form of the still slumbering drunkard, or to question the servant who sat opposite, on the chair recently occupied by Chancey, he strode directly to the door of Mary Ashwoode's sleeping apartment, opened it, and stood in an untenanted chamber.

For a moment he paused, aghast and motionless; he ran to the bed — still warm with the recent pressure of his intended victim — the room was, indeed, deserted. He turned round, absolutely black and speechless with rage. As he advanced, the wretched barrister — the tool of his worst schemes — cowered back in terror. Without speaking one word, Blarden clutched him by the throat, and hurled him with his whole power backward. With tremendous force he descended with his head upon the bar of the grate, and thence to the hearthstone; there, breathless, powerless, and to all outward seeming a livid corpse, lay the devil's cast-off servant, the red blood trickling fast from ears, nose, and mouth. Not waiting to see whether Chancey was alive or dead, Mr. Blarden seized the brandy flask and dashed it in the face of the stupid drunkard — who, disturbed by the fearful hubbub, was just beginning to open his eyes — and leaving that reverend personage drenched in blood and brandy, to take care of his boon companion as best he might, Blarden strode down the stairs, followed by Ashwoode and the servants.

"Get horses — horses all," shouted he, "to the stables — by Jove, it was they we met on the road — the two girls — quick to the stables — whoever catches them shall have his hat full of crowns."

Led by Blarden, they all hurried to the stables, where they found the horses unsaddled.

"On with the saddles — for your life be quick," cried Blarden, "four horses — fresh ones."

While uttering his furious mandates, with many a blasphemous imprecation, he aided the preparations himself, and with hands that trembled with eagerness and rage, he drew the girths, and buckled the bridles, and in almost less than a minute, the four horses were led out upon the broken pavement of the stableyard.

"Mind, boys," cried Blarden, "they are two mad-women — escaped mad-women — ride for your lives. Ashwoode, do you take the right, and I'll take the left when we come on the road — do you follow me, Tony — and Dick, do you go with Sir Henry — and, now, devil take the hindmost." With these words he plunged the spurs into his horse's flanks, and with the speed of a thunder blast, they all rode helter-skelter, in pursuit of their human prey.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE CART AND THE STRAW.

While this was passing, the two girls continued their flight toward Dublin city. They had not long passed Ashwoode and Nicholas Blarden, when Mary's strength entirely failed, and she was forced first to moderate her pace to a walk, and finally to stop altogether and seat herself upon the bank which sloped abruptly down to the road.

"Flora," said she, faintly, "I am quite exhausted — my strength is entirely gone; I must perforce rest myself and take breath here for a few minutes, and then, with God's help, I shall again have power to proceed."

"Do so, my lady," said Flora, taking her stand beside her mistress, "and I'll watch and listen here by you. Hish! don't I hear the sound of a car on the road before us?"

So, indeed, it seemed, and at no great distance too. The road, however, just where they had placed themselves, made a sweep which concealed the vehicle, whatever it might be, effectually from their sight. The girl clambered to the top of the bank, and thence commanding a view of that part of the highway which beneath was hidden from sight, she beheld, two or three hundred yards in advance of them, a horse and cart, the driver of which was seated upon the shaft, slowly wending along in the direction of the city.

"My lady," said she, descending from her post of observation, "if you have strength to run on for only a few perches more of the road, we'll be up with a car, and get a lift into town without any more trouble; try it, my lady."

Accordingly they again set forth, and after a few minutes' further exertion, they came up with the vehicle and accosted the driver, a countryman, with a short pipe in his mouth, who, with folded arms, sat listlessly upon the shaft.

"Honest man, God bless you, and give us a bit of a lift," said Flora Guy; "we've come a long way and very fast, and we are fairly tired to death."

The countryman drew the halter which he held, and uttering an unspellable sound, addressed to his horse, succeeded in bringing him and the vehicle to a standstill.

"Never say it twiste," said he; "get up, and welcome. Wait a bit, till I give the straw a turn for yees; not for it; step on the wheel; don't be in dread, he won't move."

So saying, he assisted Mary Ashwoode into the rude vehicle, and not without wondering curiosity, for the hand which she extended to him was white and slender, and glittered in the moonlight with jewelled rings. Flora Guy followed; but before the cart was again in motion, they distinctly heard the far-off clatter of galloping hoofs upon the road. Their fears too truly accounted for these sounds.

"Merciful God! we are pursued," said Mary Ashwoode; and then turning to the driver, she continued, with an agony of imploring terror— "as you look for pity at the dreadful hour when all shall need it, do not betray us. If it be as I suspect, we are pursued — pursued with an evil — a dreadful purpose. I had rather die a thousand deaths than fall into the hands of those who are approaching."

"Never fear," interrupted the man; "lie down flat both of you in the cart and I'll hide you — never fear."

They obeyed his directions, and he spread over their prostrate bodies a covering of straw; not quite so thick, however, as their fears would have desired; and thus screened, they awaited the approach of those whom they rightly conjectured to be in hot pursuit of them. The man resumed his seat upon the shaft, and once more the cart was in motion.

Meanwhile, the sharp and rapid clang of the hoofs approached, and before the horsemen had reached them, the voice of Nicholas Blarden was shouting —

"Holloa — holloa, honest fellow — saw you two young women on the road?"

There was scarcely time allowed for an answer, when the thundering clang of the iron hoofs resounded beside the conveyance in which the fugitives were lying, and the horsemen both, with a sudden and violent exertion, brought their beasts to a halt, and so abruptly, that although thrown back upon their haunches, the horses slid on for several yards upon the hard road, by the mere impetus of their former speed, knocking showers of fire flakes from the stones.

"I say," repeated Blarden, "did two girls pass you on the road — did you see them?"

"Divil a sign of a girl I see," replied the man, carelessly; and to their infinite relief, the two fugitives heard their pursuer, with a muttered curse, plunge forward upon his way. This relief, however, was but momentary, for checking his horse again, Blarden returned.

"I say, my good chap, I passed you before tonight, not ten minutes since, on my way out of town, not half-a-mile from this spot — the girls were running this way, and if they're between this and the gate — they must have passed you."

"Devil a girl I seen this —— Oh, begorra! you're right, sure enough," said the driver, "what the devil was I thinkin' about — two girls — one of them tall and slim, with rings on her fingers — and the other a short, active bit of a colleen?"

"Ay — ay — ay," cried Blarden.

"Sure enough they did overtake me," said the man, "shortly after I passed two gentlemen — I suppose you are one of them — and the little one axed me the direction of Harold's-cross — and when I showed it to them, bedad they both made no more bones about it, but across the ditch with them, an' away over the fields — they're halfway there by this time — it was jist down there by the broken bridge — they were quare-looking girls."

"It would be d —— d odd if they were not — they're both mad," replied Blarden; "thank you for your hint."

And so saying, as he turned his horse's head in the direction indicated, he chucked a crown piece into the cart. As the conveyance proceeded, they heard the driver soliloquizing with evident satisfaction —

"Bedad, they'll have a plisint serenade through the fields, the two of them," observed he, standing upon the shafts, and watching the progress of the two horsemen— "there they go, begorra — over the ditch with them. Oh, by the hokey, the sarvint boy's down — the heart's blood iv a toss — an' oh, bloody wars! see the skelp iv the whip the big chap gives him — there they go again down the slope — now for it — over the gripe with them — well done, bedad, and into the green lane — devil take the bushes, I can't see another sight iv them. Young women," he continued, again assuming his sitting position, and replacing his pipe in the corner of his mouth— “all’s safe now — they’re clean out of sight — you may get up, miss.”

Accordingly, Mary Ashwoode and Flora Guy raised themselves.

“Here,” said the latter, extending her hand toward the driver, “here’s the silver he threw to you.”

“I wisht I could airn as much every day as aisily,” said the man, securing his prize; “that chap has raal villiany in his face; he looks so like ould Nick, I’m half afeard to take his money; the crass of Christ about us, I never seen such a face.”

“You’re an honest boy at any rate,” said Flora Guy, “you brought us safe through the danger.”

“An’ why wouldn’t I — what else ‘id I do?” rejoined the countryman; “it wasn’t for to sell you I was goin’.”

“You have earned my gratitude for ever,” said Mary Ashwoode; “my thanks, my prayers; you have saved me; your generosity, and humanity, and pity, have delivered me from the deadliest peril that ever yet overtook living creature. God bless you for it.”

She removed a ring from her finger, and added— “Take this; nay, do not refuse so poor an acknowledgment for services inestimable.”

“No, miss, no,” rejoined the countryman, warmly, “I’ll not take it; I’ll not have it; do you think I could do anything else but what I did, and you putting yourself into my hands the way you did, and trusting to me, and laving yourselves in my power intirely? I’m not a Turk, nor an unnatural Jew; may the devil have me, body and soul, the hour I take money, or money’s worth, for doin’ the like.”

Seeing the man thus resolved, she forbore to irritate him by further pressing the jewel on his acceptance, and he, probably to put an end to the controversy, began to shake and chuck the rope halter with extraordinary vehemence, and at the same time with the heel of his brogue, to stimulate the lagging jade, accompanying the application with a sustained hissing; the combined effect of all which was to cause the animal to break into a kind of hobbling canter; and so they rumbled and clattered over the stony road, until at length their charioteer checked the progress of his vehicle before the hospitable doorway of “The Bleeding Horse” — the little inn to which, in the commencement of these records, we have already introduced the reader.

"Hould that, if you plase," said he, placing the end of the halter in Flora Guy's hand, "an' don't let him loose, or he'll be makin' for the grass and have you upset in the ditch. I'll not be a minute in here; and maybe the young lady and yourself 'id take a drop of something; the evenin's mighty chill entirely."

They both, of course, declined the hospitable proposal, and their conductor, leaving them on the cart, entered the little hostelry; outside the door were two or three cars and horses, whose owners were boozing within; and feeling some return of confidence in the consciousness that they were in the neighbourhood of persons who could, and probably would, protect them, should occasion arise, Mary Ashwoode, with her light mantle drawn around her, and the hood over her head, sat along with her faithful companion, awaiting his return, under the embowering shadow of the old trees.

"Flora, I am sorely perplexed; I know not whither to go when we have reached the city," said Mary, addressing her companion in a low tone. "I have but one female relative residing in Dublin, and she would believe, and think, and do, just as my brother might wish to make her. Oh, woeful hour! that it should ever come to this — that I should fear to trust another because she is my own brother's friend."

She had hardly ceased to speak when a small man, with his cocked hat set somewhat rakishly on one side, stepped forth from the little inn door; he had just lighted his pipe, and was inhaling its smoke with anxious attention lest the spark which he cherished should expire before the ignition of the weed became sufficiently general; his walk was therefore slow and interrupted; the top of his finger tenderly moved the kindling tobacco, and his two eyes squinted with intense absorption at the bowl of the pipe; by the time he had reached the back of the cart in which Mary Ashwoode and her attendant were seated, his labours were crowned by complete success, as was attested by the dense volumes of smoke which at regular intervals he puffed forth. He carried a cutting-whip under his arm, and was directing his steps toward a horse which, with its bridle thrown over a gate-post, was patiently awaiting his return. As he passed the rude vehicle in which the two fugitives were couched, he happened to pause for a moment, and Mary thought she recognized the figure before her as that of an old acquaintance.

"Is that Larry — Larry Toole?" inquired she.

"It's myself, sure enough," rejoined that identical personage; "an' who are you — a woman, to be sure, who else 'id be axin' for me?"

"Larry, don't you know me?" said she.

"Divil a taste," replied he. "I only see you're a female av coorse, why wouldn't you, for, by the piper that played before Moses, I'm never out of one romance till I'm into another."

"Larry," said she, lowering her voice, "it is Miss Ashwoode who speaks to you."

"Don't be funnin' me, can't you?" rejoined Larry, rather pettishly. "I've got enough iv the thricks iv women latterly; an' too much. I'm a raal marthyr to famale mineuvers; there's a bump on my head as big as a goose's egg, glory be to God! an' my bones is fairly aching with what I've gone through by raison iv confidin' myself to the mercy of women. Oh thunder — — "

"I tell you, Larry," repeated Mary, "I am, indeed, Miss Ashwoode."

"No, but who are you, in earnest?" urged Larry Toole; "can't you put me out iv pain at wonst; upon my sowl I don't know you from Moses this blessed minute."

"Well, Larry, although you cannot recognize my voice," said she, turning back her hood so as to reveal her pale features in the moonlight, "you have not forgotten my face."

"Oh, blessed hour! Miss Mary," exclaimed Larry, in unfeigned amazement, while he hurriedly thrust his pipe into his pocket, and respectfully doffed his hat.

"Hush, hush," said Mary, with a gesture of caution. "Put on your hat, too; I wish to escape observation; put it on, Larry; it is my wish."

Larry reluctantly complied.

"Can you tell me where in town my uncle O'Leary is to be found?" inquired she, eagerly.

"Bedad, Miss Mary, he isn't in town at all," replied the man; "they say he married a widdy lady about ten days ago; at any rate he's gone out of town more than a week; I didn't hear where."

"I know not whither to turn for help or counsel, Flora," said she, despairingly, "my best friend is gone."

"Well," said Larry — who, though entirely ignorant of the exact nature of the young lady's fears, had yet quite sufficient shrewdness to perceive that she was, indeed, involved in some emergency of extraordinary difficulty and peril— “well, miss, maybe if you’d take a fool’s advice for once, it might turn out best,” said Larry. “There’s an ould gentleman that knows all about your family; he was out at the manor, and had a long discourse, himself and Sir Richard — God rest him — a short time before the ould masther died; the gentleman’s name is Audley; and, though he never seen you but once, he wishes you well, and ‘id go a long way to sarve you; an’ above all, he’s a raal rock iv sinse. I’m not bad myself, but, begorra, I’m nothin’ but a fool beside him; now do you, Miss Mary, and the young girl that’s along with you, jist come in here; you can have a snug little room to yourselves, and I’ll go into town and have the ould gentleman out with you before you know what you’re about, or where you are; he’ll ax no more than the wind iv the word to bring him here in a brace iv shakes; and my name’s not Larry if he don’t give you suparior advice.”

A slight thing determines a mind perplexed and desponding; and Mary Ashwoode, feeling that whatever objection might well be started against the plan proposed by Larry Toole, yet felt that, were it rejected, she had none better to follow in its stead; anything rather than run the risk of being placed again in her brother’s keeping; there was no time for deliberation, and therefore she at once adopted the suggestion. Larry, accordingly, conducted them into the little inn, and consigned them to the care of a haggard, slovenly girl, who, upon a hint from that gentleman, conducted them to a little chamber, up a flight of stairs, looking out upon the back yard, where, with a candle and a scanty fire, she left the two anxious fugitives; and, as she descended, they heard the clank of the iron shoes, as Larry spurred his horse into a hard gallop, speeding like the wind upon his mission.

The receding sounds of his rapid progress had, however, hardly ceased to be heard, when the fears and anxieties which had been for a moment forgotten, returned with heavier pressure upon the poor girl’s heart, and she every moment expected to hear the dreaded voices of her pursuers in the passage beneath, or to see their faces entering at the door. Thus restlessly and fearfully she awaited the return of her courier.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE COUNCIL — SHOWING WHAT ADVICE MR. AUDLEY GAVE, AND HOW IT WAS TAKEN.

Larry Toole was true to his word. Without turning from the direct course, or pausing on his way for one moment, he accomplished the service which he had volunteered, and in an incredibly short time returned to the little inn, bringing Mr. Audley with him in a coach.

With an air of importance and mystery, suitable to the occasion, the little gentleman, followed by his attendant, proceeded to the chamber where Miss Ashwoode and her maid were awaiting his arrival. Mary arose as he entered the room, and Larry, from behind, ejaculated, in a tone of pompous exultation, “Here he is, Miss Mary — Mr. Audley himself, an’ no mistake.”

“Tut, tut, Larry,” exclaimed the little gentleman, turning impatiently toward that personage, whose obstreperous announcement had disarranged his plans of approach; “hold your tongue, Larry, I say — ahem!”

“Mr. Audley,” said Mary, “I hope you will pardon — — “

“Not one word of the kind — excuse the interruption — not a word,” exclaimed the little gentleman, gallantly waving his hand— “only too much honour — too proud, Miss Ashwoode, I have long known something of your family, and, strange as it may appear, have felt a peculiar interest in you — although I had not the honour of your acquaintance — for the sake of — of other parties. I have ever entertained a warm regard for your welfare, and although circumstances are much, very much changed, I cannot forget relations that once subsisted — ahem!” This was said diplomatically, and he blew his nose with a short decisive twang. “I understand, my poor young lady,” he continued, relapsing into the cordial manner that was natural to him, “that you are at this moment in circumstances of difficulty, perhaps of danger, and that you have been disappointed in this emergency by the absence of your relative, Major O’Leary, with whose acquaintance, by-the-bye, I am honoured, and a more worthy, warm-hearted — but no matter — in his absence, then, I venture to tender my poor services — pray, if it be not too bold a request, tell me fully and fairly, the nature of your embarrassment; and if zeal, activity, and the friendliest dispositions can avail to extricate you, you may command them all — pray, then, let me know what I *can* do to serve you.” So saying, the old gentleman took the pale and lovely lady’s hand, with a mixture of tenderness and respect which encouraged and assured her.

Larry having withdrawn, she told the little gentleman all that she could communicate, without disclosing her brother’s implication in the conspiracy. Even this reserve, the old gentleman’s warm and kindly manner, and the goodnatured simplicity, apparent in all he said and did, effectually removed, and the whole case, in all its bearings, and with all its circumstances, was plainly put before him. During the narrative, the little gentleman was repeatedly so transported with ire as to slap his thigh, sniff violently, and mutter incoherent ejaculations between his teeth; and when it was ended, was so far overcome by his feelings, that he did not trust himself to address the young lady, until he had a little vented his indignation by marching and countermarching, at quick time, up and down the room, blowing his nose with desperate abandonment, and muttering sundry startling interjections. At length he grew composed, and addressing Mary Ashwoode, observed, —

“You are quite right, my dear young lady — quite right, indeed, in resolving against putting yourself into the hands of anybody under Sir Henry’s influence — perfectly right and wise. Have you *no* relatives in this country, none capable of protecting you, and willing to do so?”

“I have, indeed, one relative,” rejoined she, but — — “

“Who is it?” interrupted Audley.

“An uncle,” replied Mary.

“His name, my dear — his name?” inquired the old gentleman, impatiently.

“His name is French — Oliver French,” replied she, “but — — “

“Never mind,” interrupted Audley again, “where does he live?”

“He lives in an old place called Ardgillagh,” rejoined she, “on the borders of the county of Limerick.”

“Is it easily found out? — near the high road from Dublin? — near any town? — easily got at?” inquired he, with extraordinary volubility.

“I’ve heard my brother say,” rejoined she, “that it is not far from the high road from Dublin; he was there himself. I believe the place is well known by the peasantry for many miles round; but — — “

“Very good, very good, my dear,” interposed Mr. Audley again. “Has he a family — a wife?”

“No,” rejoined Mary; “he is unmarried, and an old man.”

“Pooh, pooh! why the devil hasn’t he a wife? but no matter, you’ll be all the welcomer. That’s our ground — all the safer that it’s a little out of the way,” exclaimed the old man. “We’ll steal a march — they’ll never suspect us; we’ll start at once.”

“But I fear,” said Mary, dejectedly, “that he will not receive me. There has long been an estrangement between our family and him; with my father he had a deadly quarrel while I was yet an infant. He vowed that neither my father nor any child of his should ever cross his threshold. I’ve been told he bitterly resented what he believed to have been my father’s harsh treatment of my mother. I was too young, however, to know on which side the right of the quarrel was; but I fear there is little hope of his doing as you expect, for some six or seven years since my brother was sent down, in the hope of a reconciliation, and in vain. He returned, reporting that my uncle Oliver had met all his advances with scorn. No, no, I fear — I greatly fear he will not receive me.”

“Never believe it — never think so,” rejoined old Audley, warmly; “if he were man enough to resent your mother’s wrongs, think you his heart will have no room for yours? Think you his nature’s changed, that he cannot pity the distressed, and hate tyranny any longer? Never believe me, if he won’t hug you to his heart the minute he sees you. I like the old chap; he was right to be angry — it was his duty to be in a confounded passion; he ought to have been kicked if he hadn’t done just as he did — I’d swear he was right. Never trust me, if he’ll not take your part with his whole heart, and make you his pet for as long as you please to stay with him. Deuce take him, I like the old fellow.”

“You would advise me, then, to apply to him for protection?” asked Mary Ashwoode, “and I suppose to go down there immediately.”

“Most unquestionably so,” replied Mr. Audley, with a short nod of decision— “most unquestionably — start tonight; we shall go as far as the town of Naas; I will accompany you. I consider you my ward until your natural protectors take you under their affectionate charge, and guard you from grief and danger as they ought. My good girl,” he continued, addressing Flora Guy, "you must come along with your mistress; I've a coach at the door. We shall go directly into town, and my landlady shall take you both under her care until I have procured two chaises, the one for myself, and the other for your mistress and you. You will find Mrs. Pickley, my landlady, a very kind, excellent person, and ready to assist you in making your preparations for the journey."

The old gentleman then led his young and beautiful charge, with a mixture of gallantry and pity, by the hand down the little inn stairs, and in a very brief time Mary Ashwoode and her faithful attendant found themselves under the hospitable protection of Mrs. Pickley's roof-tree.

CHAPTER LXIII.

PARTING — THE SHELTERED VILLAGE, AND THE JOURNEY'S END.

Never was little gentleman in such a fuss as Mr. Audley — never were so many orders issued and countermanded and given again — never were Larry Toole's energies so severely tried and his intellects so distracted — impossible tasks and contradictory orders so "huddled on his back," that he well nigh went mad under the burthen; at length, however, matters were arranged, two coaches with posthorses were brought to the door, Mary Ashwoode and her attendant were deposited in one, along with such extempore appliances for wardrobe and toilet as Mrs. Pickley, in a hurried excursion, was enabled to collect from the neighbouring shops and pack up for the journey, and Mr. Audley stood ready to take his place in the other.

"Larry," said he, before ascending, "here are ten guineas, which will keep you in bread and cheese until you hear from me again; don't on any account leave the 'Cock and Anchor,' your master's horse and luggage are there, and, no doubt, whenever he returns to Dublin, which I am very certain must soon occur, he will go directly thither; so be you sure to meet him there, should he happen during my absence to arrive; and mark me, be very careful of this letter, give it him the moment you see him, which, please God, will be very soon indeed; keep it in some safe place — don't carry it in your breeches pocket, you blockhead, you'll grind it to powder, booby! indeed, now that I think on't, you had better give it at once in charge to the innkeeper of the 'Cock and Anchor;' don't forget, on your life I charge you, and now goodnight."

"Goodnight, and good luck, your honour, and may God speed you!" ejaculated Larry, as the vehicles rumbled away. The charioteers had received their directions, and Mary Ashwoode and her trusty companion, confused and bewildered by the rapidity with which events had succeeded one another during the day, and stunned by the magnitude of the dangers which they had so narrowly escaped, found themselves, scarcely crediting the evidence of their senses, rapidly traversing the interval which separated Dublin city from the little town of Naas.

It is not our intention to weary our readers with a detailed account of the occurrences of the journey, nor to present them with a catalogue of all the mishaps and delays to which Irish posting in those days, and indeed much later, was liable; it is enough to state that upon the evening of the fourth day the two carriages clattered into the wretched little village which occupied the road on which opened the avenue leading up to the great house of Ardgillagh. The village, though obviously the abode of little comfort or cheerfulness, was not on that account the less picturesque; the road wound irregularly where it stood, and was carried by an old narrow bridge across a wayward mountain stream which wheeled and foamed in many a sportive eddy within its devious banks. Close by, the little mill was couched among the sheltering trees, which, extending in irregular and scattered groups through the village, and mingling with the stunted bushes and briars of the hedges, were nearly met from the other side of the narrow street by the broad branching limbs of the giant trees which skirted the wild wooded domain of Ardgillagh. Thus occupying a sweeping curve of the road, and embowered among the shadowy arches of the noble timber, the little village had at first sight an air of tranquillity, seclusion, and comfort, which made the traveller pause to contemplate its simple attractions and to admire how it could be that a few wretched hovels with crazy walls and thatch overgrown with weeds, thus irregularly huddled together beneath the rude shelter of the wood, could make a picture so pleasing to the eye and so soothing to the heart. The vehicles were drawn up by their drivers before the door of a small thatched building which, however, stood a whole head and shoulders higher than the surrounding hovels, exhibiting a second storey with three narrow windows in front, and over its doorway, from which a large pig, under the stimulus of a broomstick, was majestically issuing, a signboard, the admiration of connoisseurs for miles round, presenting a half-length portrait of the illustrious Brian Borhome, and admitted to be a startling likeness. Before this mansion — the only one in the place which pretended to the character of a house of public entertainment — the postboys drew bridle, and brought the vehicles to a halt. Mr. Audley was upon the road in an instant, and with fussy gallantry assisting Mary Ashwoode to descend. Their sudden arrival had astounded the whole household — consternation and curiosity filled the little establishment. The proprietor, who sat beneath the capacious chimney, started to his feet, swallowing, in his surprise, a whole potato, which he was just deliberately commencing, and by a miracle escaped choking. The landlady dropped a pot, which she was scrubbing, upon the back of a venerable personage who was in a stooping posture, lighting his pipe, and inadvertently wiped her face in the pot clout; everybody did something wrong, and nobody anything right; the dog was kicked and the cat scalded, and in short, never was known in the little village of Ardgillagh, within the memory of man, except when Ginckle marched his troops through the town, such a universal hubbub as that which welcomed the two chaises and their contents to the door of Pat Moroney's hospitable mansion.

Mrs. Moroney, with more lampblack upon her comely features than she was at that moment precisely aware of, hastened to the door, which she occupied as completely and exclusively as the corpulent specimen of Irish royalty over her head did his proper signboard; all the time gazing with an admiring grin upon Mr. Audley and the lady whom he assisted to descend; and at exceedingly short and irregular intervals, executing sundry slight ducks, intended to testify her exuberant satisfaction and respect, while all around and about her were thrust the wondering visages of the less important inmates of the establishment; many were the murmured criticisms, and many the ejaculations of admiration and surprise, which accompanied every movement of the party under observation.

"Oh! but she's a fine young lady, God bless her!" said one.

"But isn't she mighty pale, though, entirely?" observed another.

"That's her father — the little stout gentleman; see how he houlds her hand for fear she'd thrip comin' out. Oh! but he's a nate man!" remarked a third.

"An' her hand as white as milk; an' look at her fine rings," said a fourth.

"She's a rale lady; see the grand look of her, and the stately step, God bless her!" said a fifth.

"See, see; here's another comin' out; that's her sisther," remarked another.

"Hould your tongues, will yees?" ejaculated the landlady, jogging her elbow at random into somebody's mouth.

"An' see the little one taking the box in her hand," observed one.

“Look at the tall lady, how she smiles at her, God bless her! she’s a rale good lady,” remarked another.

“An’ now she’s linkin’ with him, and here they come, by gorra,” exclaimed a third.

“Back with yees, an’ lave the way,” exclaimed Mrs. Moroney; “don’t you see the quality comin’?”

Accordingly, with a palpitating heart, the worthy mistress of King Brian Borhome prepared to receive her aristocratic guests. With due state and ceremony she conducted them into the narrow chamber which, except the kitchen, was the only public apartment in the establishment. After due attention to his fair charge, Mr. Audley inquired of the hostess, —

“Pray, my good worthy woman, are we not now within a mile or less of the entrance into the domain of Ardgillagh?”

“The gate’s not two perches down the road, your honour,” replied she; “is it to the great house you want to go, sir?”

“Yes, my good woman; certainly,” replied he.

“Come here, Shawneen, come, asthore!” cried she, through the halfopen door. “I’ll send the little gossoon with you, your honour; he’ll show you the way, and keep the dogs off, for they all knows him up at the great house. Here, Shawneen; this gintleman wants to be showed the way up to the great house; and don’t let the dogs near him; do you mind? He hasn’t much English,” said she, turning to her guest, by way of apology, and then conveying her directions anew in the mother tongue.

Under the guidance of this ragged little urchin, Mr. Audley accordingly set forth upon his adventurous excursion.

Mrs. Moroney brought in bread, milk, eggs, and in short, the best cheer which her limited resources could supply; and, although Mary Ashwoode was far too anxious about the result of Mr. Audley’s visit to do more than taste the tempting bowl of new milk which was courteously placed before her, Flora Guy, with right good will and hearty appetite, did ample justice to the viands which the hostess provided.

After some idle talk between herself and Flora Guy, Mrs. Moroney observed in reply to an interrogatory from the girl, —

“Twenty or thirty years ago there wasn’t such a foxhunter in the country as Mr. French; but he’s this many a year ailing, and winter after winter, it’s worse and worse always he’s getting, until at last he never stirs out at all; and for the most part he keeps his bed.”

“Is anyone living with him?” inquired Flora.

“No, none of his family,” answered she; “no one at all, you may say; there’s no one does anything in his place, an’ very seldom anyone sees him except Mistress Martha and Black M’Guinness; them two has him all to themselves; and, indeed, there’s quare stories goin’ about them.”

CHAPTER LXIV.

MISTRESS MARTHA AND BLACK M’GUINNESS.

Mr. Audley, preceded by his little ragged guide, walked thoughtfully on his way to visit the old gentleman, of whose oddities and strange and wayward temper the keeper of the place where they had last obtained a relay of horses had given a marvellous and perhaps somewhat exaggerated account. Now that he had reached the spot, and that the moment approached which was to be the crisis of the adventure, he began to feel far less confident of success than he had been while the issue of his project was comparatively remote.

They passed down the irregular street of the village, and beneath the trees which arched overhead like the vast and airy aisles of some huge Gothic pile, and after a short walk of some two or three hundred yards, during which they furnished matter of interesting speculation to half the village idlers, they reached a rude gate of great dimensions, but which had obviously seen better days. There was no lodge or gatehouse, and Mr. Audley followed the little conductor over a stile, which occupied the side of one of the great ivy-mantled stone piers; crossing this, he found himself in the demesne. A broken and irregular avenue or bridle track — for in most places it was little more — led onward over hill and through hollow, along the undulations of the soft green sward, and under the fantastic boughs of gnarled thorns and oaks and sylvan birches, which in thick groups, wild and graceful as nature had placed them, clothed the varied slopes. The rude approach which they followed led them a wayward course over every variety of ground — now flat and boggy, again up hill, and over the grey surface of lichen-covered rocks — again down into deep fern-clothed hollows, and then across the shallow, brawling stream, without bridge or appliance of any kind, but simply through its waters, forced, as best they might, to pick their steps upon the mossgrown stones that peeped above the clear devious current. Thus they passed along through this wild and extensive demesne, varied by a thousand inequalities of ground and by the irregular grouping of the woods, which owed their picturesque arrangement to the untutored fancies of nature herself, whose dominion had there never known the intrusions of the axe, or the spade, or the pruning-hook, but exulted in the unshackled indulgence of all her wildest revelry. After a walk of more than half-an-hour's duration, through a long vista among the trees, the grey gable of the old mansion of Ardgillagh, with its small windows and high and massive chimney stacks, presented itself.

There was a depressing air of neglect and desertion about the old place, which even the unimaginative temperament of Mr. Audley was obliged to acknowledge. Rank weeds and grass had forced their way through the pavement of the courtyard, and crowded in patches of vegetation even to the very door of the house. The same was observable, in no less a degree, in the great stableyard, the gate of which, unhinged, lay wide open, exhibiting a range of outhouses and stables, which would have afforded lodging for horse and man to a whole regiment of dragoons. Two men, one of them in livery, were loitering through the courtyard, apparently not very well knowing what to do with themselves; and as the visitors approached, a whole squadron of dogs, the little ones bouncing in front with shrill alarm, and the more formidable, at a majestic canter and with deep-mouthed note of menace, bringing up the rear, came snarling, barking, and growling, towards the intruders at startling speed.

"Piper, Piper, Toby, Fan, Motheradauna, Boxer, Boxer, Toby!" screamed the little guide, advancing a few yards before Mr. Audley, who, in considerable uneasiness, grasped his walking cane with no small energy. The interposition of the urchin was successful, the dogs recognized their young friend, the angry clangour was hushed and their pace abated, and when they reached Mr. Audley and his guide, in compliment to the latter they suffered the little gentleman to pass on, with no further question than a few suspicious sniffs, as they applied their noses to the calves of that gentleman's legs. As they continued to approach, the men in the court, now alarmed by the vociferous challenge of the dogs, eyed the little gentleman inquisitively, for a visitor at Ardgillagh was a thing that had not been heard of for years. As Mr. Audley's intention became more determinate, and his design appeared more unequivocally to apply for admission, the servant, who watched his progress, ran by some hidden passage in the stableyard into the mansion and was ready to gratify his curiosity legitimately, by taking his post in the hall in readiness to answer Mr. Audley's summons, and to hold parley with him at the door.

"Is Mr. French at home?" inquired Mr. Audley.

"Ay, sir, he is at home," rejoined the man, deliberately, to allow himself time fully to scrutinize the visitor's outward man.

"Can I see him, pray?" asked the little gentleman.

"Why, raly, sir, I can't exactly say," observed the man, scratching his head. "He's upstairs in his own chamber — indeed, for that matter, he's seldom out of it. If you'll walk into the room there, sir, I'll inquire."

Accordingly, Mr. Audley entered the apartment indicated and sat himself down in the deep recess of the window to take breath. He well knew the kind of person with whom he had to deal, previously to encountering Oliver French in person. He had heard quite enough of Mistress Martha and of Black M'Guinness already, to put him upon his guard, and fill him with just suspicions as to their character and designs; he therefore availed himself of the little interval to arrange his plans of operation in his own mind. He had not waited long, when the door opened, and a tall, elderly woman, with a bunch of keys at her side, and arrayed in a rich satin dress, walked demurely into the room. There was something unpleasant and deceitful in the expression of the half-closed eyes and thin lips of this lady which inspired Mr. Audley with instinctive dislike of her — an impression which was rather heightened than otherwise by the obvious profusion with which her sunken and sallow cheeks were tinged with rouge. This demure and painted lady made a courtesy on seeing Mr. Audley, and in a low and subdued tone which well accorded with her meek exterior, inquired, —

"You were asking for Mr. Oliver French, sir?"

"Yes, madam," replied Mr. Audley, returning the salute with a bow as formal; "I wish much to see him, if he could afford me half an hour's chat."

"Mr. French is very ill — very — very poorly, indeed," said Mistress Martha, closing her eyes, and shaking her head. "He dislikes talking to strangers. Are you a relative, pray, sir?"

"Not I, madam — not at all, madam," rejoined Mr. Audley.

A silence ensued, during which he looked out for a minute at the view commanded by the window; and as he did so, he observed with the corner of his eyes that the lady was studying him with a severe and searching scrutiny. She was the first to break the silence.

"I suppose it's about business you want to see him?" inquired she, still looking at him with the same sharp glance.

"Just so," rejoined Mr. Audley; "it is indeed upon business."

"He dislikes transacting business or speaking of it himself," said she. "He always employs his own man, Mr. M'Guinness. I'll call Mr. M'Guinness, that you may communicate the matter to him."

"You must excuse me," said Mr. Audley. "My instructions are to give my message to Mr. Oliver French in person — though indeed there's no secret in the matter. The fact is, Madam, my mission is of a kind which ought to make me welcome. You understand me? I come here to announce a — a — an acquisition, in short a sudden and, I believe, a most unexpected acquisition. But perhaps I've said too much; the facts are for his own ear solely. Such are my instructions; and you know I have no choice. I've posted all the way from Dublin to execute the message; and between ourselves, should he suffer this occasion to escape him, he may never again have an opportunity of making such an addition to — but I must hold my tongue — I'm prating against orders. In a word, madam, I'm greatly mistaken, or it will prove the best news that has been told in this house since its master was christened."

He accompanied his announcement with a prodigious number of nods and winks of huge significance, and all designed to beget the belief that he carried in his pocket the copy of a will, or other instrument, conveying to the said Oliver French of Ardgillagh the gold mines of Peru, or some such trifle.

Mistress Martha paused, looked hard at him, then reflected again. At length she said, with the air of a woman who has made up her mind, —

"I dare to say, sir, it *is* possible for you to see Mr. French. He is a little better to-day. You'll promise not to fatigue him — but you must first see Mr. M'Guinness. He can tell better than I whether his master is sufficiently well to-day for an interview of the kind."

So saying, Mrs. Martha sailed, with saint-like dignity, from the room.

"*She* rules the roost, I believe," said Mr. Audley within himself. "If so, all's smooth from this forth. Here comes the gentleman, however — and, by the laws, a very suitable co-mate for that painted Jezebel."

As Mr. Audley concluded this criticism, a small man, with a greasy and dingy complexion, and in a rusty suit of black, made his appearance.

This individual was, if possible, more subdued, meek, and Christian-like than the lady who had just evacuated the room in his favour. His eyes were, if possible, habitually more nearly closed; his step was as soft and cat-like to the full; and, in a word, he was in air, manner, gait, and expression as like his accomplice as a man can well be to one of the other sex.

A short explanation having passed between this person and Mr. Audley, he retired for a few minutes to prepare his master for the visit, and then returning, conducted the little bachelor upstairs.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE CONFERENCE — SHOWING HOW OLIVER FRENCH BURST INTO A RAGE AND FLUNG HIS CAP ON THE FLOOR.

Mr. Audley followed Black M'Guinness as we have said up the stairs, and was, after an introductory knock at the door, ushered by him into Oliver French's bedroom. Its arrangements were somewhat singular — a dressing-table with all the appliances of the most elaborate cultivation of the graces, and a huge mirror upon it, stood directly opposite to the door; against the other wall, between the door and this table, was placed a massive sideboard covered with plate and wine flasks, cork-screws and cold meat, in the most admired disorder — two large presses were also visible, one of which lay open, exhibiting clothes, and papers, and other articles piled together in a highly original manner — two or three very beautiful pictures hung upon the walls. At the far end of the room stood the bed, and at one side of it a table covered with wines and viands, and at the other, a large iron-bound chest, with a heavy bunch of keys dangling from its lock — a little shelf, too, occupied the wall beside the invalid, abundantly stored with tall phials with parchment labels, and pill-boxes and gallipots innumerable. In the bed, surrounded by the drapery of the drawn curtains, lay, or rather sat, Oliver French himself, propped up by the pillows: he was a corpulent man, with a generous double chin; a goodnatured grey eye twinkled under a bushy, grizzled eyebrow, and a countenance which bore unequivocally the lines of masculine beauty, although considerably disfigured by the traces of age, as well as of something very like intemperance and full living: he wore a silk night-gown and a shirt of snowy whiteness, with lace ruffles, and on his head was a crimson velvet cap.

Grotesque as were the arrangements of the room, there was, nevertheless, about its occupant an air of aristocratic superiority and ease which at once dispelled any tendency to ridicule.

"Mr. Audley, I presume," said the invalid.

Mr. Audley bowed.

“Pray, sir, take a chair. M’Guinness, place a chair for Mr. Audley, beside the table here. I am, as you see, sir,” continued he, “a confirmed valetudinarian; I suffer abominably from gout, and have not been able to remove to my easy chair by the fire for more than a week. I understand that you have some matters of importance to communicate to me; but before doing so, let me request of you to take a little wine, you can have whatever you like best — there’s some Madeira at your elbow there, which I can safely recommend, as I have just tasted it myself — o-oh! d —— the gout — you’ll excuse me, sir — a cursed twinge.”

“Very sorry to see you suffering,” responded Mr. Audley— “very, indeed, sir.”

“It sha’n’t, however, prevent my doing you reason, sir,” replied he, with alacrity. “M’Guinness, two glasses. I drink, sir, to our better acquaintance. Now, M’Guinness, you may leave the room.”

Accordingly Mr. M’Guinness withdrew, and the gentlemen were left *tête-à-tête*.

“And now, sir,” continued Oliver French, “be so good as to open the subject of your visit.”

Mr. Audley cleared his voice twice or thrice, in the hope of clearing his head at the same time, and then, with some force and embarrassment, observed, —

“I am necessarily obliged, Mr. French, to allude to matters which may possibly revive unpleasant recollections. I trust, indeed, my dear sir, — I’m sure that you will not suffer yourself to be distressed or unduly excited, when I tell you that I must recall to your memory a name which I believe does not sound gratefully to your ear — the name of Ashwoode.”

“Curse them,” was the energetic commentary of the invalid.

“Well, sir, I dare venture to say that you and I are not very much at variance in our estimate of the character of the Ashwoodes generally,” said Mr. Audley. “You are aware, I presume, that Sir Richard has been some time dead.”

“Ha! actually *gone* to hell? — no, sir, I was not aware of this. Pray, proceed, sir,” responded Oliver French.

“I am aware, sir, that he treated his lady harshly,” resumed Audley.

“Harshly, *harshly*, sir,” cried the old man, with an energy that well nigh made his companion bounce from his seat— “why, sir, beginning with neglect and ending with blows — through every stage of savage insult and injury, his wretched wife, my sister — the most gentle, trusting, lovely creature that ever yet was born to misery, was dragged by that inhuman monster, her husband, Sir Richard Ashwoode; he broke her heart — he killed her, sir — *killed* her. She was my sister — my only sister; I was justly proud of her — loved her most dearly, and the inhuman villain broke her heart."

Through his clenched teeth he uttered a malediction, and with a vehemence of hatred which plainly showed that his feelings toward the family had undergone no favourable change.

"Well, sir," resumed Mr. Audley, after a considerable interval, "I cannot wonder at the strength of your feelings in this matter, more especially at this moment. I myself burn with indignation scarce one degree less intense than yours against the worthy son of that most execrable man, and upon grounds, too, very nearly similar."

He then proceeded to recount to his auditor, waxing warm as he went on, all the circumstances of Mary Ashwoode's sufferings, and every particular of the grievous persecution which she had endured at the hands of her brother, Sir Henry. Oliver French ground his teeth and clutched the bedclothes as he listened, and when the narrative was ended, he whisked the velvet cap from his head, and flung it with all his force upon the floor.

"Oh, God Almighty! that I had but the use of my limbs," exclaimed he, with desperation— "I would give the whole world a lesson in the person of that despicable scoundrel. I would — but," he added bitterly, "I am powerless — I am a cripple."

"You are not powerless, sir, for purposes nobler than revenge," exclaimed Audley, with eagerness; "you may shelter and protect the helpless, friendless child of calamity, the story of whose wrongs has so justly fired you with indignation."

"Where is she — where?" cried Oliver French, eagerly— "I ought to have asked you long ago."

"She is not far away — she even now awaits your decision in the little village hard by," responded Mr. Audley.

"Poor child — poor child!" ejaculated Oliver, much agitated. "And did she — could she doubt my willingness to befriend her — good God — could she doubt it? — bring her — bring her here at once — I long to see her — poor bird — poor bird — the world's winter has closed over thee too soon. Alas! poor child — tell her — tell her, Mr. Audley, that I long to see her — that she is most welcome — that all which I command is heartily and entirely at her service. Plead my apology for not going myself to meet her — as God knows I would fain do; you see I am a poor cripple — a very worthless, helpless, good-for-nothing old man. Tell her all better than I can do it now. God bless you, sir — God bless you, for believing that such an ill-conditioned old fellow as I am had yet heart enough to feel rightly sometimes. I had rather die a thousand deaths than that you had not brought the poor outcast child to my roof. Tell her how glad — how very, very happy — how proud it makes me that she should come to her old uncle Oliver — tell her this. God bless you, sir!"

With a cordial pressure, he gripped Audley's hand, and the old gentleman, with a heart overflowing with exultation and delight, retraced his steps to the little village, absolutely bursting with impatience to communicate the triumphant result of his visit.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE BEDCHAMBER.

Black M'Guinness and Mistress Martha had listened in vain to catch the purport of Mr. Audley's communication. Unfortunately for them, their master's chamber was guarded by a double door, and his companion had taken especial pains to close both of them before detailing the subject of his visit. They were, however a good deal astonished by Mr. French's insisting upon rising forthwith, and having himself clothed and shaved. This huge, goodnatured lump of gout was, accordingly, arrayed in full suit — one of the handsomest which his wardrobe commanded — his velvet cap replaced by a flowing peruke — his gouty feet smothered in endless flannels, and himself deposited in his great easy chair by the fire, and his lower extremities propped up upon stools and pillows. These preparations, along with a complete rearrangement of the furniture, and other contents of the room, effectually perplexed and somewhat alarmed his disinterested dependents.

Mr. Audley returned ere the preparations were well completed, and handed Mary Ashwoode and her attendant from the chaise. It needs not to say how the old bachelor of Ardgillagh received her — with, perhaps, the more warmth and tenderness that, as he protested, with tears in his eyes, she was so like her poor mother, that he felt as if old times had come again, and that she stood once more before him, clothed in the melancholy beauty of her early and illfated youth. It were idle to describe the overflowing kindness of the old man's greeting, and the depth of gratitude with which his affectionate and hearty welcome was accepted by the poor grieved girl. He would scarcely, for the whole evening, allow her to leave him for one moment; and every now and again renewed his pressing invitation to her and to Mr. Audley to take some more wine or some new delicacy; he himself enforcing his solicitations by eating and drinking in almost unbroken continuity during the whole time. All his habits were those of the most unlimited self-indulgence; and his chief, if not his sole recreation for years, had consisted in compounding, during the whole day long, those astounding gastronomic combinations, which embraced every possible variety of wine and liqueur, of vegetable, meat, and confection; so that the fact of his existing at all, under the extraordinary regimen which he had adopted, was a triumph of the genius of digestion over the demon of dyspepsia, such as this miserable world has seldom witnessed. Nevertheless, that he did exist, and that too, apparently, in robust though unwieldy health, with the exception of his one malady, his constitutional gout, was a fact which nobody could look upon and dispute. With an imperiousness which brooked no contradiction, he compelled Mr. Audley to eat and drink very greatly more than he could conveniently contain — browbeating the poor little gentleman into submission, and swearing, in the most impressive manner, that he had not eaten one ounce weight of food of any kind since his entrance into the house; although the unhappy little gentleman felt at that moment like a boa constrictor who has just bolted a buffalo, and pleaded in stifled accents for quarter; but it would not do. Oliver French, Esq., had not had his humour crossed, nor one of his fancies contradicted, for the last forty years, and he was not now to be thwarted or put down by a little "hop-o'-my-thumb," who, though ravenously hungry, pretended, through mere perverseness, to be bursting with repletion. Mr. Audley's labours were every now and again pleasingly relieved by such applications as these from his merciless entertainer.

"Now, my good friend — my worthy friend — will you think it too great a liberty, sir, if I ask you to move the pillow a *leetle* under this foot?"

"None in the world, sir — quite the contrary — I shall have the very greatest possible pleasure," would poor Mr. Audley reply, preparing for the task.

"You are very good, sir, very kind, sir. Just draw it quietly to the right — a little, a very little — you are very good, indeed, sir. Oh — oh, O — oh, you — you booby — you'll excuse me, sir — gently — there, there — gently, gently. O — oh, you d —— d handless idiot — pray pardon me, sir; that will do."

Such passages as these were of frequent occurrence; but though Mr. Audley was as choleric as most men at his time of life, yet the incongruous terms of abuse were so obviously the result of inveterate and almost unconscious habit, stimulated by the momentary twinges of acute pain, that he did not suffer this for an instant to disturb the serenity and goodwill with which he regarded his host, spite of all his oddities and self-indulgence.

In the course of the evening Oliver French ordered Mistress Martha to have beds prepared for the party, and that lady, with rather a vicious look, withdrew. She soon returned, and asked in her usual low, dulcet tone, whether the young lady could spare her maid to assist in arranging the room, and forthwith Flora Guy consigned herself to the guidance of the sinister-looking Abigail.

"This is a fine country, isn't it?" inquired Mistress Martha, softly, when they were quite alone.

"A very fine country, indeed, ma'am," rejoined Flora, who had heard enough to inspire her with a certain awe of her conductress, which inclined her as much as possible to assent to whatever proposition she might be inclined to advance, without herself hazarding much original matter.

"It's a pity you can't see it in the summer time; this is a very fine place indeed when all the leaves are on the trees," repeated Mistress Martha.

"Indeed, so I'd take it to be, ma'am," rejoined the maid.

"Just passing through this way — hurried like, you can't notice much about it though," remarked the elderly lady, carelessly.

"No, ma'am," replied Flora, becoming more reserved, as she detected in her companion a wish to draw from her all she knew of her mistress's plans.

"There are some views that are greatly admired in the neighbourhood — the glen and the falls of Glashangower. If she could stay a week she might see everything."

"Oh! indeed, it's a lovely place," observed Flora, evasively.

"That old gentleman, that Mr. Audley, your young mistress's father, or — or uncle, or whatever he is" — Mistress Martha here made a considerable pause, but Flora did not enlighten her, and she continued— "whatever he is to her, it's no matter, he seems a very goodhumoured nice old gentleman — he's in a great hurry back to Dublin, where he came from, I suppose."

"Well, I really don't know," replied the girl.

"He looks very comfortable, and everything handsome and nice about him," observed Mistress Martha again. "I suppose he's well off — plenty of money — not in want at all."

"Indeed he seems all that," rejoined the maid.

"He's cousin, or something or another, to the master, Mr. French; didn't you tell me so?" asked the painted Abigail.

"No, ma'am; I didn't tell you; I don't know," replied she.

"This is a very damp old house, and full of rats; I wish I had known a week ago that beds would be wanting; but I suppose it was a sudden thing," said the housekeeper.

"Indeed, I suppose it just was, ma'am," responded the attendant.

"Are you going to stay here long?" asked the old lady, more briskly than she had yet spoken.

"Raly, ma'am, I don't know," replied Flora.

The old painted termagant shot a glance at her of no pleasant meaning; but for the present checked the impulse in which it had its birth, and repeated softly— "You don't know; why, you are a very innocent, simple little girl."

"Pray, ma'am, if it's not making too bold, which is the room, ma'am?" asked Flora.

"What's your young lady's name?" asked the matron, directly, and disregarding the question of the girl.

Flora Guy hesitated.

"Do you hear me — what's your young lady's name?" repeated the woman, softly, but deliberately.

"Her name, to be sure; her name is Miss Mary," replied she.

"Mary *what*?" asked Martha.

"Miss Mary Ashwoode," replied Flora, half afraid as she uttered it.

Spite of all her efforts, the woman's face exhibited disagreeable symptoms of emotion at this announcement; she bit her lips and dropped her eyelids lower than usual, to conceal the expression which gleamed to her eyes, while her colour shifted even through her rouge. At length, with a smile infinitely more unpleasant than any expression which her face had yet worn, she observed, —

"Ashwoode, Ashwoode. Oh! dear, to be sure; some of Sir Richard's family; well, I did not expect to see them darken these doors again. Dear me! who'd have thought of the Ashwoodes looking after him again? well, well, but they're a very forgiving family," and she uttered an ill-omened tittering.

"Which is the room, ma'am, if you please?" repeated Flora.

"That's the room," cried the stalwart dame, with astounding vehemence, and at the same time opening a door and exhibiting a large neglected bedchamber, with its bedclothes and other furniture lying about in entire disorder, and no vestige of a fire in the grate; "that's the room, miss, and make the best of it yourself, for you've nothing else to do."

In this very uncomfortable predicament Flora Guy applied herself energetically to reduce the room to something like order, and although it was very cold and not a little damp, she succeeded, nevertheless, in giving it an air of tolerable comfort by the time her young mistress was prepared to retire to it.

As soon as Mary Ashwoode had entered this chamber her maid proceeded to narrate the occurrences which had just taken place.

"Well, Flora," said she, smiling, "I hope the old lady will resume her good temper by tomorrow, for one night I can easily contrive to rest with such appliances as we have. I am more sorry, for your sake, my poor girl, than for mine, however, and wherever I lay me down, my rest will be, I fear me, very nearly alike."

"She's the darkest, ill-lookingest old woman, God bless us, that ever I set my two good-looking eyes upon, my lady," said Flora. "I'll put a table to the door; for, to tell God's truth, I'm half afeard of her. She has a nasty look in her, my lady — a bad look entirely."

Flora had hardly spoken when the door opened, and the subject of their conversation entered.

"Good evening to you, Miss Ashwoode," said she, advancing close to the young lady, and speaking in her usual low soft tone. "I hope you find everything to your liking. I suppose your own maid has settled everything according to your fancy. Of course, she knows best how to please you. I'm very delighted to see you here in Ardgillagh, as I was telling your innocent maid there — very glad, indeed; because, as I said, it shows how forgiving you are, after all the master has said and done, and the way he has always spit on every one of your family that ever came here looking after his money — though, indeed, I'm sure you're a great deal too good and too religious to care about money; and I'm sure and certain it's only for the sake of Christian charity, and out of a forgiving disposition, and to show that there isn't a bit of pride of any sort, or kind, or description in your carcase — that you're come here to make yourself at home in this house, that never belonged to you, and that never will, and to beg favours of the gentleman that hates, and despises, and insults everyone that carries your name — so that the very dogs in the streets would not lick their blood. I like that, Miss Ashwoode — I *do* like it," she continued, advancing a little nearer; "for it shows you don't care what bad people may say or think, provided you do your Christian duty. They may say you're come here to try and get the old gentleman's money; they may say that you're eaten up to the very backbone with meanness, and that you'd bear to be kicked and spit upon from one year's end to the other for the sake of a few pounds — they'll call you a sycophant and a schemer — but you don't mind that — and I admire you for it — they'll say, miss — for they don't scruple at anything — they'll say you lost your character and fortune in Dublin, and came down here in the hope of finding them again; but I tell you what it is," she continued, giving full vent to her fury, and raising her accents to a tone more resembling the scream of a screech-owl than the voice of a human being, "I know what you're at, and I'll blow your schemes, Miss Innocence. I'll make the house too hot to hold you. Do you think I mind the old bedridden cripple, or anyone else within its four walls? Hoo! I'd make no more of them or of you than that old glass there;" and so saying, she hurled the candlestick, with all her force, against the large mirror which depended from the wall, and dashed it to atoms.

"Hoo! hoo!" she screamed, "you think I am afraid to do what I threatened; but wait — wait, I say; and now goodnight to you, Miss Ashwoode, for the first time, and pleasant dreams to you."

So saying, the fiendish hag, actually quivering with fury, quitted the room, drawing the door after her with a stunning crash, and leaving Mary Ashwoode and her servant breathless with astonishment and consternation.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE EXPULSION.

While this scene was going on in Mary Ashwoode's chamber, our friend Oliver French, having wished Mr. Audley goodnight, had summoned to his presence his confidential servant, Mr. M'Guinness. The corpulent invalid sat in his capacious chair by the fireside, with his muffled legs extended upon a pile of pillows, a table loaded with the materials of his protracted and omnigenous repast at his side. Black M'Guinness made his appearance, evidently a little intoxicated, and not a little excited. He proceeded in a serpentine course through the chamber, overturning, of malice prepense, everything in which he came in contact.

"What the devil ails you, sir?" ejaculated Mr. French— "what the plague do you mean? D — n you, M'Guinness, you're drunk, sir, or mad."

"Ay, to be sure," ejaculated M'Guinness, grimly. "Why not — oh, do — I've no objection; d —— n away, sir, pray, do."

"What do you mean by talking that way, you scoundrel?" exclaimed old French.

"Scoundrel!" repeated M'Guinness, overturning a small table, and all thereupon, with a crash upon the floor, and approaching the old gentleman, while his ugly face grew to a sickly, tallowy white with rage, "you go for to bring a whole lot of beggarly squatters into the house to make away with your substance, and to turn you against your faithful, tried, trusty, and dutiful servants," he continued, shaking his fist in his master's face. "You do, and to leave them, ten to one, in their old days unprovided for. Damn ingratitude! — to the devil with thankless, unnatural vermin! You call me scoundrel. Scoundrel was the word — by this cross it was."

While Oliver French, speechless with astonishment and rage, gazed upon the audacious menial, Mistress Martha herself entered the chamber.

"Yes, they are, you old dark-hearted hypocrite — they're settled here — fixed in the house — they are," screamed she; "but they *sha'n't* stay long; or, if they do, I'll not leave a whole bone in their skins. What did *they* ever do for you, you thankless wretch?"

"Ay, what did they ever do for you?" shouted M'Guinness.

"Do you think we're fools — do you? and idiots — do you? not to know what you're at, you ungrateful miscreant! Turn them out, bag and baggage — every mother's skin of them, or I'll show them the reason why, turn them out, I say."

"You infernal hag, I'd see you in hell or Bedlam first," shouted Oliver, transported with fury. "You have had your way too long, you accursed witch — you have."

"Never mind — oh! — you wretch," shrieked she— "never mind — wait a bit — and never fear, you old crippled sinner, I'll be revenged on you, you old devil's limb. Here's your watch for you," screamed she, snatching a massive, chased gold watch from her side, and hurling it at his head. It passed close by his ear, and struck the floor behind him, attesting the force with which it had been thrown, as well as the solidity of its workmanship, by a deep mark ploughed in the floor.

Oliver French grasped his crutch and raised it threateningly.

"You old wretch, I'll not let you strike the woman," cried M'Guinness, snatching the poker, and preparing to dash it at the old man's head. What might have been the issue of the strife it were hard to say, had not Mr. Audley at that moment entered the room.

"Heyday!" cried that gentleman, "I thought it had been robbers — what's all this?"

M'Guinness turned upon him, but observing that he carried a pistol in each hand, he contented himself with muttering a curse and lowering the poker which he held in his hand.

"Why, what the devil — your own servants — your own man and woman!" exclaimed Mr. Audley. "I beg your pardon, sir — pray excuse me, Mr. French; perhaps I ought not to have intruded upon you."

"Pray don't go, Mr. Audley — don't think of going," said Oliver, eagerly, observing that his visitor was drawing to the door. "These beasts will murder me if you leave me; I can't help myself — do stay."

"Pray, madam, you are the amiable and remarkably quiet gentlewoman with whom I was to-day honoured by an interview? God bless my body and soul, can it possibly be?" said Mr. Audley, addressing himself to the lady.

"You vile old swindling schemer," shrieked she, returning— "you skulking, mean dog — you brandy-faced old reprobate, you — hoo! wait,

wait — wait awhile; I'll master you yet — just wait — never mind — hoo!" and with something like an Indian war-whoop she dashed out of the room.

"Get out of this apartment, you ruffian, you — M'Guinness, get out of the room," cried old French, addressing the fellow, who still stood grinning and growling there.

"No, I'll not till I do my business," retorted the man, doggedly; "I'll put you to bed first. I've a right to do my own business; I'll undress you and put you to bed first — bellows me, but I will."

"Mr. Audley, I beg pardon for troubling you," said Oliver, "but will you pull the bell if you please, like the very devil."

"Pull away till you are black in the face; *I'll* not stir," retorted M'Guinness.

Mr. Audley pulled the bell with a sustained vehemence which it put Mr. French into a perspiration even to witness.

"Pull away, old gentleman — you may pull till you burst — to the devil with you all. I'll not stir a peg till I choose it myself; I'll do my business what I was hired for; there's no treason in that. D —— me, if I stir a peg for you," repeated M'Guinness, doggedly.

Meanwhile, two half-dressed, scared-looking servants, alarmed by Mr. Audley's persevering appeals, showed themselves at the door.

"Thomas — Martin — come in here, you pair of boobies," exclaimed French, authoritatively; "Martin, do you keep an eye on that scoundrel, and Thomas, run you down and waken the postboy and tell him to put his horses to, and do you assist him, sir, away!"

With unqualified amazement in their faces, the men proceeded to obey their orders.

"So, so," said Oliver, still out of breath with anger, "matters are come to a pleasant pass, I'm to be brained with my own poker — by my own servant — in my own house — very pleasant, because forsooth, I dare to do what I please with my own — highly agreeable, truly! Mr. Audley, may I trouble you to give me a glass of noyeau — let me recommend that to you, Mr. Audley, it has the true flavour — nay, nay — I'll hear of no excuse — I'm absolute in my own room at least — come, my dear sir — I implore — I insist — nay, I command; come — come — a bumper; very good health, sir; a pleasant pair of furies! — just give me the legs of that woodcock while we are waiting."

Accordingly Mr. Oliver French filled up the brief interval after his usual fashion, by adding slightly to the contents of his stomach, and in a little time the servant whom he had dispatched downward, returned with the postboy in person.

"Are your horses under the coach, my good lad?" inquired old French.

"No, but they're to it, and that's better," responded the charioteer.

"You'll not have far to go — only to the little village at the end of the avenue," said Mr. French. "Mr. Audley, may I trouble you to fill a large glass of Creme de Portugal; thank you; now, my good lad, take that," continued he, delighted at an opportunity of indulging his passion for ministering to the stomach of a fellow mortal, "take it — take it — every drop — good — now Martin, do you and Thomas find that termagant — fury — Martha Montgomery, and conduct her to the coach — carry her down if necessary — put her into it, and one of you remain with her, to prevent her getting out again, and let the other return, and with my friend the postboy, do a like good office by my honest comrade Mr. M'Guinness — mind you go along with them to the village, and let them be set down at Moroney's public-house; everything belonging to them shall be sent down tomorrow morning, and if you ever catch either of them about the place — duck them — whip them — set the dogs on them — that's all."

Shrieking as though body and soul were parting, Mrs. Martha was half-carried, half-dragged from the scene of her long-abused authority; screaming her threats, curses, and abuse in volleys, she was deposited safely in the vehicle, and guarded by the footman — who in secret rejoiced in common with all the rest of the household at the disgrace of the two insolent favourites — and was forced to sit therein until her companion in misfortune being placed at her side, they were both, under a like escort, safely deposited at the door of the little public-house, scarcely crediting the evidence of their senses for the reality of their situation.

Henceforward Ardgillagh was a tranquil place, and day after day old Oliver French grew to love the gentle creature, whom a chance wind had thus carried to his door, more and more fondly. There was an artlessness and a warmth of affection, and a kindliness about her, which all, from the master down to the humblest servant, felt and loved; a grace, and dignity, and a simple beauty in every look and action, which none could see and not admire. The strange old man, whose humour had never brooked contradiction, felt for her, he knew not why, a tenderness and respect such as he never before believed a mortal creature could inspire; her gentle wish was law to him; to see her sweet face was his greatest joy — to please her his first ambition; she grew to be, as it were, his idol.

It was her chief delight to ramble unattended through the fine old place. Often, with her faithful follower, Flora Guy, she would visit the humble dwellings of the poor, wherever grief or sickness was, and with gentle words of comfort and bounteous pity, cheer and relieve. But still, from week to week it became too mournfully plain that the sweet, sad face was growing paler and ever paler, and the graceful form more delicately slight. In the silent watches of the night often would Flora Guy hear her loved young mistress weep on for hours, as though her heart were breaking; yet from her lips there never fell at any time one word of murmuring, nor any save those of gentle kindness; and often would she sit by the casement and reverently read the pages of one old volume, and think and read again, while ever and anon the silent tears, gathering on the long, dark lashes, would fall one by one upon the leaf, and then would she rise with such a smile of heavenly comfort breaking through her tears, that peace, and hope, and glory seemed beaming in her pale angelic face.

Thus from day to day, in the old mansion of Ardgillagh, did she, whose beauty none, even the most stoical, had ever seen unmoved — whose artless graces and perfections all who had ever beheld her had thought unmatched, fade slowly and uncomplainingly, but with beauty if possible enhanced, before the eyes of those who loved her; yet they hoped on, and strongly hoped — why should they not? She was young — yes, very young, and why should the young die in the glad season of their early bloom?

Mr. Audley became a wondrous favourite with his eccentric entertainer, who would not hear of his fixing a time for his departure, but partly by entreaties, partly by bullying, managed to induce him to prolong his stay from week to week. These concessions were not, however, made without corresponding conditions imposed by the consenting party, among the foremost of which was the express stipulation that he should not be expected, nor by cajolery nor menaces induced or compelled, to eat or drink at all more than he himself felt prompted by the cravings of his natural appetite to do. The old gentlemen had much in common upon which to exercise their sympathies; they were both staunch Tories, both admirable judges of claret, and no less both extraordinary proficients in the delectable pastimes of backgammon and draughts, whereat, when other resources failed, they played with uncommon industry and perseverance, and sometimes indulged in slight ebullitions of acrimonious feeling, scarcely exhibited, however, before they were atoned for by fervent apologies and vehement vows of good behaviour for the future.

Leaving this little party to the quiet seclusion of Ardgillagh, it becomes now our duty to return for a time to very different scenes and other personages.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE FRAY.

It now becomes our duty to return for a short time to Sir Henry Ashwoode and Nicholas Blarden, whom we left in hot pursuit of the trembling fugitives. The night was consumed in vain but restless search, and yet no satisfactory clue to the direction of their flight had been discovered; no evidence, not even a hint, by which to guide their pursuit. Jaded by his fruitless exertions, frantic with rage and disappointment, Nicholas Blarden at peep of light rode up to the hall door of Morley Court.

"No news since?" cried he, fixing his bloodshot eyes upon the man who took his horse's bridle, "no news since?"

"No, sir," cried the fellow, shaking his head, "not a word."

"Is Sir Henry within?" inquired Blarden, throwing himself from the saddle.

"No, sir," replied the man.

"Not returned yet, eh?" asked Nicholas.

"Yes, sir, he did return, and he left again about ten minutes ago," responded the groom.

"And left no message for me, eh?" rejoined Blarden.

"There's a note, sir, on a scrap of paper, on the table in the hall, I forgot to mention," replied the man— "he wrote it in a hurry, with a pencil, sir."

Blarden strode into the hall, and easily discovered the document — a hurried scrawl, scarcely legible; it ran as follows: —

"Nothing yet — no trace — I half suspect they're lurking in the neighbourhood of the house. I must return to town — there are two places which I forgot to try. Meet me, if you can — say in the old Saint Columbkil; it's a deserted place, in the morning about ten or eleven o'clock.

"Henry Ashwoode."

Blarden glanced quickly through this effusion.

"A precious piece of paper, that!" muttered he, tearing it across, "worthy of its author — a cursed greenhorn; consume him for a *mouth*, but no matter — no matter yet. Here, you rakehelly squad, some of you," shouted he, addressing himself at random to the servants, one of whom he heard approaching, “here, I say, get me some food and drink, and don’t be long about it either, I can scarce stand.” So saying, and satisfied that his directions would be promptly attended to, he shambled into one of the sitting-rooms, and flung himself at his full length upon a sofa; his disordered and bespattered dress and mud-stained boots contrasted agreeably with the rich crimson damask and gilded backs and arms of the couch on which he lay. As he applied himself voraciously to the solid fare and the wines with which he was speedily supplied, a thousand incoherent schemes, and none of them of the most amiable kind, busily engaged his thoughts. After many wandering speculations, he returned again to a subject which had more than once already presented itself. “And then for the brother, the fellow that laid his blows on me before a whole playhouse full of people, the vile spawn of insolent beggary, that struck me till his arm was fairly tired with striking — I’m no fool to forget such things — the rascally forging ruffian — the mean, swaggering, lying bully — no matter — he must be served out in style, and so he shall. I’ll not hang him though, I may turn him to account yet, some way or other — no, I’ll not hang him, keep the halter in my hand — the best trump for the last card — hold the gallows over him, and make him lead a pleasant sort of life of it, one way or other. I’ll not leave a spark of pride in his body I’ll not thrash out of him. I’ll make him meeker and sleeker and humbler than a spaniel; he shall, before the face of all the world, just bear what I give him, and do what I bid him, like a trained dog — sink me, but he shall.”

Somewhat comforted by these ruminations, Nicholas Blarden arose from a substantial meal, and a reverie, which had occupied some hours; and without caring to remove from his person the traces of his toilsome exertions of the night past, nor otherwise to render himself one whit a less slovenly and neglected-looking figure than when he had that morning dismounted at the hall door, he called for a fresh horse, threw himself into the saddle, and spurred away for Dublin city.

He reached the doorway of the old Saint Columbkil, and, under the shadow of its ancient signboard, dismounted. He entered the tavern, but Ashwoode was not there; and, in answer to his inquiries, Mr. Blarden was informed that Sir Henry Ashwoode had gone over to the “Cock and

Anchor," to have his horse cared for, and that he was momentarily expected back.

Blarden consulted his huge gold watch. "It's eleven o'clock now, every minute of it, and he's not come — hoity toity rather, I should say, all things considered. I thought he was better up to his game by this time — but no matter — I'll give him a lesson just now."

As if for the express purpose of further irritating Mr. Blarden's already by no means angelic temper, several parties, composed of second-rate sporting characters, all laughing, swearing, joking, betting, whistling, and by every device, contriving together to produce as much clatter and uproar as it was possible to do, successively entered the place.

"Well, Nicky, boy, how does the world wag with you?" inquired a dapper little fellow, approaching Blarden with a kind of brisk, hopping gait, and coaxingly digging that gentleman's ribs with the butt of his silver-mounted whip.

"What the devil brings all these chaps here at this hour?" inquired Blarden.

"Soft is your horn, old boy," rejoined his acquaintance, in the same arch strain of pleasantry; "two regular good mains to be fought to-day — tough ones, I promise you — Fermanagh Dick against Long White — fifty birds each — splendid fowls, I'm told — great betting — it will come off in little more than an hour."

"I don't care if it never comes off," rejoined Blarden; "I'm waiting for a chap that ought to have been here half an hour ago. Rot him, I'm sick waiting."

"Well, come, I'll tell you how we'll pass the time. I'll toss you for guineas, as many tosses as you like," rejoined the small gentleman, accommodatingly. "What do you say — is it a go?"

"Sit down, then," replied Blarden; "sit down, can't you? and begin."

Accordingly the two friends proceeded to recreate themselves thus pleasantly. Mr. Blarden's luck was decidedly bad, and he had been already "physicked," as his companion playfully remarked, to the amount of some five-and-twenty guineas, and his temper had become in a corresponding degree affected, when he observed Sir Henry Ashwoode, jaded, haggard, and with dress disordered, approaching the place where he sat.

“Blarden, we had better leave this place,” said Ashwoode, glancing round at the crowded benches; “there’s too much noise here. What say you?”

“What do I say?” rejoined Blarden, in his very loudest and most insolent tone— “I say you have made an appointment and broke it, so stand there till it’s my convenience to talk to you — that’s all.”

Ashwoode felt his blood tingling in his veins with fury as he observed the sneering significant faces of those who, attracted by the loud tones of Nicholas Blarden, watched the effect of his insolence upon its object. He heard conversations subside into whispers and titters among the low scoundrels who enjoyed his humiliation; yet he dared not answer Blarden as he would have given worlds at that moment to have done, and with the extremest difficulty restrained himself from rushing among the vile rabble who exulted in his degradation, and compelling *them* at least to respect and fear him. While he stood thus with compressed lips and a face pale as ashes with rage, irresolute what course to take, one of the coins for which Blarden played rolled along the table, and thence along the floor for some distance.

“Go, fetch that guinea — jump, will you?” cried Blarden, in the same boisterous and intentionally insolent tone. “What are you standing there for, like a stick? Pick it up, sir.”

Ashwoode did not move, and an universal titter ran round the spectators, whose attention was now effectually enlisted.

“Do what I order you — do it this moment. D —— your audacity, you had better do it,” said Blarden, dashing his clenched fist on the table so as to make the coin thereon jump and jingle.

Still Ashwoode remained resolutely fixed, trembling in every joint with very passion; prudence told him that he ought to leave the place instantly, but pride and obstinacy, or his evil angel, held him there.

The sneering whispers of the crowd, who now pressed more nearly round them in the hope of some amusement, became more and more loud and distinct, and the words, “white feather,” “white liver,” “muff,” “cur,” and other terms of a like import reached Ashwoode’s ear. Furious at the contumacy of his wretched slave, and determined to overbear and humble him, Blarden exclaimed in a tone of ferocious menace, —

“Do as I bid you, you cursed, insolent upstart — pick up that coin, and give it to me — or by the laws, you’ll shake for it.”

Still Ashwoode moved not.

"Do as I bid you, you robbing swindler," shouted he, with an oath too appalling for our pages, and again rising, and stamping on the floor, "or I'll give you to the crows."

The titter which followed this menace was unexpectedly interrupted. The young man's aspect changed; the blood rushed in livid streams to his face; his dark eyes blazed with deadly fire; and, like the bursting of a storm, all the gathering rage and vengeance of weeks in one tremendous moment found vent. With a spring like that of a tiger, he rushed upon his persecutor, and before the astonished spectators could interfere, he had planted his clenched fists dozens of times, with furious strength, in Blarden's face. Utterly destitute of personal courage, the wretch, though incomparably a more powerful man than his light-limbed antagonist, shrank back, stunned and affrighted, under the shower of blows, and stumbled and fell over a wooden stool. With murderous resolution, Ashwoode instantly drew his sword, and another moment would have witnessed the last of Blarden's life, had not several persons thrown themselves between that person and his frantic assailant.

"Hold back," cried one. "The man's down — don't murder him."

"Down with him — he's mad!" cried another; "brain him with the stool."

"Hold his arm, some of you, or he'll murder the man!" shouted a third, "hold him, will you?"

Overpowered by numbers, with his face lacerated and his clothes torn, and his naked sword still in his hand, Ashwoode struggled and foamed, and actually howled, to reach his abhorred enemy — glaring like a baffled beast upon his prey.

"Send for constables, quick — *quick*, I say," shouted Blarden, with a frantic imprecation, his face all bleeding under his recent discipline.

"Let me go — let me go, I tell you, or by the father that made me, I'll send my sword through half-a-dozen of you," almost shrieked Ashwoode.

"Hold him — hold him fast — consume you, hold him back!" shouted Blarden; "he's a forger! — run for constables!"

Several did run in various directions for peace officers.

"Wring the sword from his hand, why don't you?" cried one; "cut it out of his hand with a knife!"

"Knock him down! — down with him! Hold on!"

Amid such exclamations, Ashwoode at length succeeded, by several desperate efforts, in extricating himself from those who held him; and without hat, and with clothes rent to fragments in the scuffle, and his face and hands all torn and bleeding, still carrying his naked sword in his hand, he rushed from the room, and, followed at a respectable distance by several of those who had witnessed the scuffle, and by his distracted appearance attracting the wondering gaze of those who traversed the streets, he ran recklessly onward to the “Cock and Anchor.”

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE BOLTED WINDOW.

Followed at some distance by a wondering crowd, he entered the inn-yard, where, for the first time, he checked his flight, and returned his sword to the scabbard.

"Here, ostler, groom — quickly, here!" cried Ashwoode. "In the devil's name, where are you?"

The ostler presented himself, gazing in unfeigned astonishment at the distracted, pale, and bleeding figure before him.

"Where have you put my horse?" said Ashwoode.

"The boy's whisping him down in the back stable, your honour," replied he.

"Have him saddled and bridled in three seconds," said Ashwoode, striding before the man towards the place indicated. "I'll make it worth your while. My life — my *life* depends on it!"

"Never fear," said the fellow, quickening his pace, "may I never buckle a strap if I don't."

With these words, they entered the stable together, but the horse was not there.

"Confound them, they brought him to the dark stable, I suppose," said the groom, impatiently. "Come along, sir."

"'Sdeath! it will be too late! Quick! — quick, man! — in the fiend's name, be quick!" said Ashwoode, glaring fearfully towards the entrance to the inn-yard.

Their visit to the second stable was not more satisfactory.

"Where the devil's Sir Henry Ashwoode's horse?" inquired the groom, addressing a fellow who was seated on an oat-bin, drumming listlessly with his heels upon its sides, and smoking a pipe the while— "where's the horse?" repeated he.

The man first satisfied his curiosity by a leisurely view of Ashwoode's disordered dress and person, and then removed his pipe deliberately from his mouth, and spat upon the ground.

"Where's Sir Henry's horse?" he repeated. "Why, Jim took him out a quarter of an hour ago, walking down towards the Poddle there. I'm thinking he'll be back soon now."

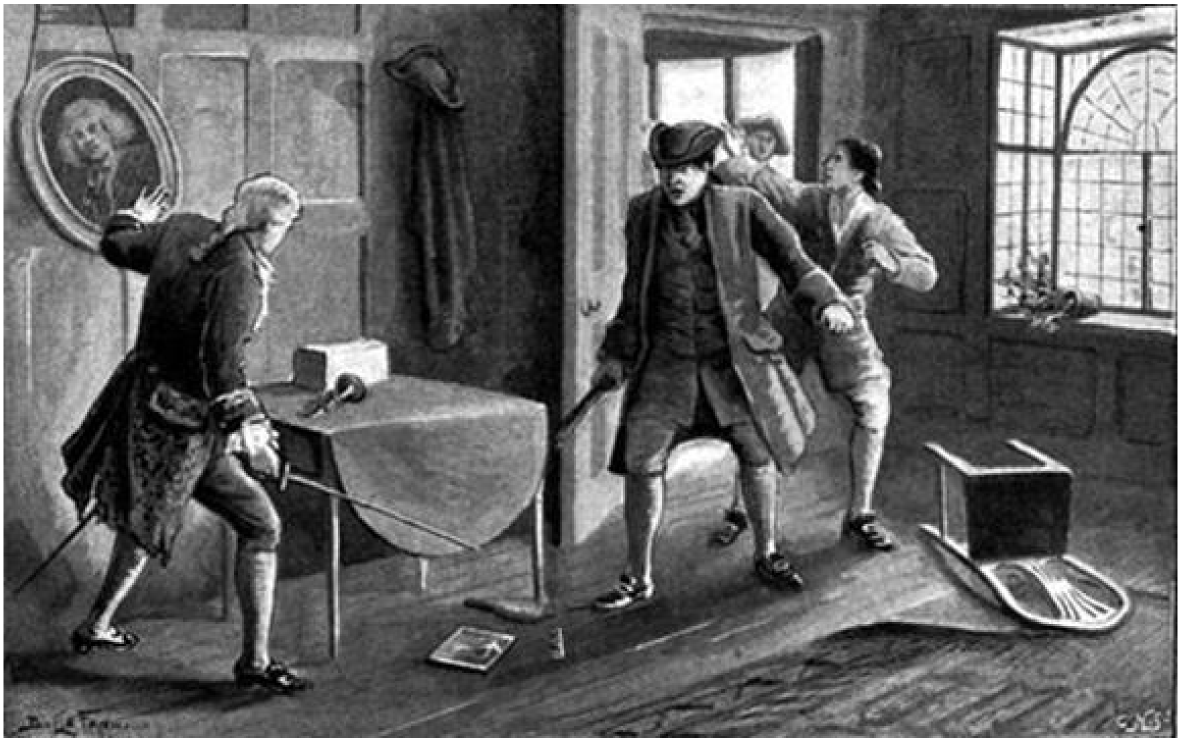
"Saddle a horse — any horse — only let him be sure and fleet," cried Ashwoode, "and I'll pay you his price thrice over!"

"Well, it's a bargain," replied the groom, promptly; "I don't like to see a gentleman caught in a hobble, if I can help him out of it. Take my advice, though, and duck your head under the water in the trough there; your face is full of blood and dust, and couldn't but be noticed wherever you went."

While the groom was with marvellous celerity preparing the horse which he selected for the young man's service, Ashwoode, seeing the reasonableness of his advice, ran to the large trough full of water which stood before the pump in the inn-yard; but as he reached it, he perceived the entrance of some four or five persons into the little quadrangle whom, at a glance, he discovered to be constables.

"That's him — he's our bird! After him! — there he goes!" cried several voices.

Ashwoode sprang up the stairs of the gallery which, as in most old inns, overhung the yard. He ran along it, and rushed into the first passage which opened from it. This he traversed with his utmost speed, and reached a chamber door. It was fastened; but hurling himself against it with his whole weight, he burst it open, the hoarse voices of his pursuers, and their heavy tread, ringing in his ears. He ran directly to the casement; it looked out upon a narrow by-lane. He strove to open it, that he might leap down upon the pavement, but it resisted his efforts; and, driven to bay, and hearing the steps at the very door of the chamber, he turned about and drew his sword.



“Come, no sparring,” cried the foremost, a huge fellow in a great coat, and with a bludgeon in his hand; “give in quietly; you’re regularly caged.”

As the fellow advanced, Ashwoode met him with a thrust of his sword. The constable partly threw it up with his hand, but it entered the fleshy part of his arm, and came out near his shoulder blade.

“Murder! murder! — help! help!” shouted the man, staggering back, while two or three more of his companions thrust themselves in at the door.

Ashwoode had hardly disengaged his sword, when a tremendous blow upon the knuckles with a bludgeon dashed it from his grasp, and almost at the same instant, he received a second blow upon the head, which felled him to the ground, insensible, and weltering in blood, the execrations and uproar of his assailants still ringing in his ears.

“Lift him on the bed. Pull off his cravat. By the hoky, he’s done for. Devil a kick in him. Open his vest. Are you hurted, Crotty? Get some water and spirits, some of yees, an’ a towel. Begorra, we just nicked him. He’s an active chap. See, he’s opening his mouth and his eyes. Hould him, Teague, for he’s the devil’s bird. Never mind it, Crotty. Devil a fear of you. Tear open the shirt. Bedad, it was close shaving. Give him a drop iv the brandy. Never a fear of you, old bulldog.”

These and such broken sentences from fifty voices filled the little chamber where Ashwoode lay in dull and ghastly insensibility after his recent deadly struggle, while some stuped the wounds of the combatants with spirits and water, and others applied the same medicaments to their own interiors, and all talked loud and fast together, as men are apt to do after scenes of excitement.

We need not follow Ashwoode through the dreadful preliminaries which terminated in his trial. In vain did he implore an interview with Nicholas Blarden, his relentless prosecutor. It were needless to enter into the evidence for the prosecution, and that for the defence, together with the points made arguments, and advanced by the opposing counsel; it is enough to know that the case was conducted with much ability on both sides, and that the jury, having deliberated for more than an hour, at length found the verdict which we shall just now state. A baronet in the dock was too novel an exhibition to fail in drawing a full attendance, and the consequence was, that never was known such a crowd of human beings in a compass so small as that which packed the court-house upon this memorable occasion.

Throughout the whole proceedings, Sir Henry Ashwoode, though deadly pale, conducted himself with singular coolness and self-possession, frequently suggesting questions to his counsel, and watching the proceedings apparently with a mind as disengaged from every agitating consciousness of personal danger as that of any of the indifferent but curious bystanders who looked on. He was handsomely dressed, and in his degraded and awful situation preserved, nevertheless, in his outward mien and attire, the dignity of his rank and former pretensions. As is invariably the case in Ireland, popular sympathy moved strongly in favour of the prisoner, a feeling of interest which the grace, beauty, and evident youth of the accused, as well as his high rank — for the Irish have ever been an aristocratic race — served much to enhance; and when the case closed, and the jury retired after an adverse charge from the learned judge, to consider their verdict, perhaps Ashwoode himself would have seemed, to the careless observer, the least interested in the result of all who were assembled in that densely crowded place, to hear the final adjudication of the law. Those, however, who watched him more narrowly could observe, in this dreadful interval, that he raised his handkerchief often to his face, keeping it almost constantly at his mouth to conceal the nervous twitching of the muscles which he could not control. The eyes of the eager multitude wandered from the prisoner to the jury-box, and thence to the impassive parchment countenance of the old ermined effigy who presided at the harrowing scene, and not one ventured to speak above his breath. At length, a sound was heard at the door of the jury-box — the jury was returning. A buzz ran through the court, and then the prolonged "hish," enjoining silence, while one by one the jurors entered and resumed their places in the box. The verdict was — Guilty.

In reply to the usual interrogatory from the officer of the court, Sir Henry Ashwoode spoke, and though many there were moved, even to sobs and tears, yet his manner had recovered its grace and collectedness, and his voice was unbroken and musical as when it was wont to charm all hearers in the gay saloons of fashion, and splendour, and heedless folly, in other times — when he, blasted and ruined as he stood there, was the admired and courted favourite of the great and gay.

"My lord," said he, "I have nothing to urge which, in the strict requirements of the law, avails to abate the solemn sentence which you are about to pronounce — for my life I care not — something is, however, due to my character and the name I bear — a name, my lord, never, never except on this day, never clouded by the shadow of dishonour — a name which will yet, after I am dead and gone, be surely and entirely vindicated; vindicated, my lord, in the entire dispersion of the foul imputations and fatal contrivances under which my fame is darkened and my life is taken. Far am I from impeaching the verdict that I have just heard. I will not arraign the jurymen, nor lay to *their* charge that I am this day wrongfully condemned, but to the charge of those who, on that witness table, have sworn my life away — perjurers procured for money, whose exposure I leave to time, and whose punishment to God. Knowing that although my body shall ignominiously perish, and though my fame be tarnished for an hour, yet shall truth and years, with irresistible power, bring my innocence to light — rescue my character and restore the name I bear. He who stands in the shadow of death, as I do, has little to fear in human censure, and little to gather from the applause of men. My life is forfeited, and I must soon go into the presence of my Creator, to receive my everlasting doom; and in presence of that almighty and terrible God before whom I must soon stand, and as I look for mercy when He shall judge me, I declare, that of this crime, of which I am pronounced guilty, I am altogether innocent. I am a victim of a conspiracy, the motives of which my defence hath truly showed you. I never committed the crime for which I am to suffer. I repeat that I am innocent, and in witness of the truth of what I say, I appeal to my Maker and my Judge, the Eternal and Almighty God."

Having thus spoken, Ashwoode received his sentence, and was forthwith removed to the condemned cell.

Ashwoode had many and influential friends, and it required but a small exercise of their good offices to procure a reprieve. He would not suffer himself to despond — no, nor for one moment to doubt his final escape from the fangs of justice. He was first reprieved for a fortnight, and before that term expired again for six weeks. In the course of the latter term, however, an event occurred which fearfully altered his chances of escape, and filled his mind with the justest and most dreadful apprehensions. This was the recall of Wharton from the viceroyalty of Ireland.

The new lord-lieutenant could not see, in the case of the young Whig baronet, the same extenuating circumstances which had wrought so effectually upon his predecessor, Wharton. The judge who had tried the case refused to recommend the prisoner to the mercy of the Crown; and the viceroy accordingly, in his turn, refused to entertain any application for the commutation or further suspension of his sentence; and now, for the first time, Sir Henry Ashwoode felt the tremendous reality of his situation. The term for which he was reprieved had nearly expired, and he felt that the hours which separated him from the deadly offices of the hangman were numbered. Still, in this dreadful consciousness, there mingled some faint and flickering ray of hope — by its uncertain mockery rendering the terrors of his situation but the more intolerable, and by the sleepless agonies of suspense, unnerving the resolution which he might have otherwise summoned to his aid.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE BARONET’S ROOM.

Desperately wounded, O’Connor lay between life and death for many weeks in the dim and secluded apartment whither O’Hanlon had borne him after his combat with Sir Henry Ashwoode. There, fearing lest his own encounter with Wharton, and its startling result, should mark them for pursuit and search, he placed O’Connor under the charge of trusty creatures of his own — for some time not daring to visit him except under cover of the night. This alarm, however, soon subsided; and consequently less precaution was adopted. O’Connor’s wounds were, as we have said, most dangerous, and for fully two months he lay upon the fiery couch of fever, alternately raving in delirium, and locked in the dull stupor of entire apathy and exhaustion. Through this season of pain and peril he was sustained, however, by the energies of a young and vigorous constitution. The fever, at length, abated, and the unclouded light of reason returned; still, however, in body he was weak, so weak that, sorely against his will, he was perforce obliged to continue the occupant of his narrow bed, in the dingy and secluded lodgings in which he lay. Impatient to learn something of her who entirely filled his thoughts, and of the truth of whose love for him he now felt the revival of more than hope, he chafed and fretted in the narrow limits of his dark and gloomy chamber. Spite of all the remonstrances of the old crone who attended him, backed by the more awful fulminations of his apothecary, O’Connor would not submit any longer to the confinement of his bed; and, but for the firm and effectual resistance of O’Hanlon, would have succeeded, weak as he was, in making his escape from the house, and resuming his ordinary occupations and pursuits, as though his health had not suffered, nor his strength become impaired, so as to leave him scarcely the power of walking a hundred steps, without the extremest exhaustion and lassitude. To O’Hanlon’s expostulations he was forced to yield, and even pledged his word to him not to attempt a removal from his hated lodgings, without his consent and approbation. In reply to a message to his friend Audley, he learned, much to his mortification, that that gentleman had left town, and as thus full of disquiet and anxiety, one day O'Connor was seated, pale and languid, in his usual place by the window, the door of his apartment opened, and O'Hanlon entered. He took the hand of the invalid and said, —

"I commend your patience, young man, you have been my *parole* prisoner for many days. When is this durance to end?"

"I'faith, I believe with my life," rejoined O'Connor, "I never knew before what weariness and vexation in perfection are — this dusky room is hateful to me, it grows narrower and narrower every day — and those old houses opposite — every pane of glass in their windows, and every brick in their walls I have learned by rote — I am tired to death. But, seriously, I have other and very different reasons for wishing to be at liberty again — reasons so urgent as to leave me no rest by night or day. I chafe and fret here like a caged bird. I have been too long shut up — my strength will never come again unless I am allowed to breathe the fresh air — you are all literally killing me with kindness."

"And yet," rejoined O'Hanlon, "I have never been thought an over-careful leech, and truth to say, had I suffered you to have your own way, you would not now have been a living man. I know, as well as any of them, how to tend a wound, and this I will say, that in all my practice it never yet has been my lot to meet with so ill-conditioned and cross-grained a patient as yourself. Why, nothing short of downright force has kept you in your room — your life is saved in spite of yourself."

"If you keep me here much longer," replied O'Connor, "it will prove but indifferent economy as regards my bodily health, for I shall undoubtedly cut my throat before another week."

"There shall be no need, my friend, to find such an escape," replied O'Hanlon, "for I now absolve you of your promise, hitherto so well observed; nay, more, *I* advise you to leave the house to-day. I think your strength sufficient, and the occasion, moreover, demands that you should visit an acquaintance immediately."

"Who is it?" inquired O'Connor, starting to his feet with alacrity, "thank God I am at length again my own master."

"When I this day entered the yard of the 'Cock and Anchor'," answered O'Hanlon, "the inn where you and I first encountered, I found a fellow inquiring after you most earnestly; he had a letter with which he was charged. It is from Sir Henry Ashwoode, who lies now in prison, and under sentence of death. You start, and no wonder — his old associates have convicted him of forgery."

"Gracious Heaven, is it possible?" exclaimed O'Connor.

"Nay, *certain*," continued O'Hanlon, "nor has he any longer a chance of escape. He has been twice reprieved — but his friend Wharton is recalled — his reprieve expires in three days' time, and then he will be inevitably executed."

"Good God, is this — can it be reality?" exclaimed O'Connor, trembling with the violence of his agitation, "give me the letter." He broke the seal, and read as follows: —

"Edmond O'Connor, — I know I have wronged you sorely. I have destroyed your peace and endangered your life. You are more than avenged. I write this in the condemned cell of the gaol. If you can bring yourself to confer with me for a few minutes, come here. I stand on no ceremony, and time presses. Do not fail. If you be living I shall expect you.

"Henry Ashwoode."

O'Connor's preparations were speedily made, and leaning upon the arm of his elder friend, he, with slow and feeble steps, and a head giddy with his long confinement, and the agitating anticipation of the scene in which he was just about to be engaged, traversed the streets which separated his lodging from the old city gaol — a sombre, stern, and melancholy-looking building, surrounded by crowded and dilapidated houses, with decayed plaster and patched windows, and a certain desolate and sickly aspect, as though scared and blasted by the contagious proximity of that dark receptacle of crime and desperation which loomed above them. At the gate O'Hanlon parted from him, appointing to meet him again in the "Cock and Anchor," whither he repaired. After some questions, O'Connor was admitted. The clanging of bolts, and bars, and door-chains, smote heavily on his heart — he heard no other sounds but these and the echoing tread of their own feet, as they traversed the long, dark, stone-paved passages which led to the dungeon in which he whom he had last seen in the pride of fashion, and youth, and strength, was now a condemned felon, and within a few hours of a public and ignominious death. The turnkey paused at one of the narrow doors opening from the dusky corridor, and unclosing it, said, —

"A gentleman, sir, to see you."

“Request him to come in,” replied a voice, which, though feebler than it used to be, O’Connor had no difficulty in recognizing. In compliance with this invitation, he with a throbbing heart entered the prison-room. It was dimly lighted by a single small window set high in the wall, and darkened by iron bars. A small deal table, with a few books carelessly laid upon it, occupied the centre of the cell, and two heavy stools were placed beside it, on one of which was seated a figure, with his back to the light, to conceal, with a desperate tenacity of pride, the ravages which the terrific mental fever of weeks had wrought in his once bold and handsome face. By the wall was stretched a wretched pallet; and upon the plaster were written and scratched, according to the various moods of the miserable and guilty tenants of the place, a hundred records, some of slang philosophy, some of desperate drunken defiance, and some again of terror, but all bearing reference to the dreadful scene to which this was but the antechamber and the passage. Many hieroglyphical emblems of unmistakable significance had also been traced upon the walls by the successive occupants of the place, such as coffins, gallows-trees, skulls and cross-bones; the most striking among which symbols was a large figure of death upon a horse, sketched with much spirit, by some moralizing convict, with a piece of burned stick, and to which some waggish successor had appropriately added, in red chalk, a gigantic pair of spurs. As soon as O’Connor entered, the turnkey closed the door, and he and Sir Henry Ashwoode were left alone. A silence of some minutes, which neither party dared to break, ensued.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE FAREWELL.

O’Connor was the first to speak. In a low voice, which trembled with agitation, he said, —

“Sir Henry Ashwoode, I have come here in answer to a note which reached me but a few minutes since. You desired a conference with me; is there any commission with which you would wish to charge me? — if so, let me know it, and it shall be done.”

“None, none, Mr. O’Connor, thank you,” rejoined Ashwoode, recovering his characteristic self-possession, and continuing proudly, “if you add to your visit a patient audience of a few minutes, you will have conferred upon me the only favour I desire. Pray, sit down; it is rather a hard and a homely seat,” he added, with a haggard, joyless smile— “but the only one this place supplies.”

Another silence followed, during which Sir Henry Ashwoode restlessly shifted his attitude every moment, in evident and uncontrollable nervous excitement. At length he arose, and walked twice or thrice up and down the narrow chamber, exhibiting without any longer care for concealment his pale, wasted face in the full light which streamed in through the grated window, his sunken eyes and unshorn chin, and worn and attenuated figure.

“You hear that sound,” said he, abruptly stopping short, and looking with the same strange smile upon O’Connor; “the clank upon the flags as I walk up and down — the jingle of the fetters — isn’t it strange — isn’t it odd — like a dream — eh?”

Another silence followed, which Ashwoode again abruptly interrupted.

“You know all this story? — of course you do — everybody does — how the wretches have trapped me — isn’t it terrible — isn’t it dreadful? Oh! you cannot know what it is to mope about this place alone, when it is growing dark, as I do every evening, and in the night time. If I had been another man, I’d have been raving mad by this time. I said *alone* — did I?” he continued, with increasing excitement; “oh! that it were! — oh! that it were! He comes there — *there*,” he screamed, pointing to the foot of the bed, “with all those infernal cloths and fringes about his face, morning and evening. Ah, God! such a thing — half idiot, half fiend; and still the same, though I curse him till I’m hoarse, he won’t leave it. Can’t they wait — can’t they wait? forever is a long day. As I’m a living man, he’s with me every night — there — there is the body, gaping and nodding — *there* — *there* — *there*!”

As he shouted this with frantic and despairing horror, shaking his clenched hands toward the place of his dreaded nightly visitant, O’Connor felt a thrill of horror such as he had never known before, and hardly recovered from this painful feeling, when Sir Henry Ashwoode turned to the little table on which, among many things, a vessel of water was placed, and filling some out into a cracked cup, he added to it drops from a phial, and hastily swallowed the mixture.

“Laudanum is all the philosophy or religion I can boast; it’s well to have even so much,” said he, returning the bottle to his pocket. “It’s a dead secret, though, that I have got any; this is a present from the doctor they allow me to see, and I’m on honour not — to poison myself — isn’t it comical? — for fear he should get into a scrape; but I’ve another game to play — no fear of that — no, no.”

Another silence followed, and Sir Henry Ashwoode said quickly, —

“What do the people say about it? Do they think I forged that accursed bond? Do they think me guilty?”

O’Connor declared his entire ignorance of public rumour, alleging his own illness, and consequent close confinement, as the cause of it.

“They sha’n’t believe me guilty, no, they sha’n’t. Look ye, sir, I have one good feeling left,” he resumed, vehemently; “I will not let my name suffer. If the most resolute firmness to the very last, and the most solemn renunciation of the charges preferred against me, reiterated at the foot of the gallows, with the halter about my neck — if these can beget a belief of my innocence, my name shall be clear — my name shall not suffer; this last outrage I will avert; but oh, my God! is there no chance yet — must I — *must* I perish? Will no one save me — will no one help me? Oh, God! oh, God! is there no pity — no succour; must it come?”

Thus crying, he threw himself forward upon the table, while every joint and muscle quivered and heaved with fierce hysterical sobs which, more like a succession of short convulsive shrieks than actual weeping, betrayed his agony, while O’Connor looked on with a mixture of horror and pity, which all that was past could not suppress.

At length the paroxysm subsided. The wretched man filled out some more water, and mingling some drops of laudanum in it, he drank it off, and became comparatively composed.

“Not a word of this to any living being, I charge you,” said he, clutching O’Connor’s arm in his attenuated hand, and fixing his sunken fiery eyes upon his; “I would not have my folly known; I’m not always so weak as you have seen me. It *must* be, that’s all — no help for it. It’s rather a novel thing, though, to hang a baronet — ha! ha! You look scared — you think my wits are unsettled; but you’re wrong. I don’t sleep; I hav’n’t for some time; and want of rest, you know, makes a man’s manner odd; makes him excitable — nervous. I’m more myself now.”

After a short pause, Sir Henry Ashwoode resumed, —

“When we had that affray together, in which would to God you had run me through the heart, you put a question to me about my sister — poor Mary; I will answer that now, and more than answer it. That girl loves you with her whole heart; loves you alone; never loved another. It matters not to tell how I and my father — the great and accursed first cause of all our misfortunes and miseries — effected your estrangement. The Italian miscreant told you truth. The girl is gone I know not whither, to seek an asylum from me — ay, from *me*. To save my life and honour. I would have constrained her to marry the wretch who has destroyed me. It was he — *he* who urged it, who cajoled me. I joined him, to save my life and honour! and now — oh! God, where are they?”

O’Connor rose, and said somewhat sternly, —

“May God pardon you, Sir Henry Ashwoode, for all you have done against the peace of that most noble and generous being, your sister. What I have suffered at your hands I heartily forgive.”

“I ask forgiveness nowhere,” rejoined Ashwoode, stoically; “what’s done is done. It has been a wild and fitful life, and is now over. What forgiveness can you give me or she that’s worth a thought? — folly, folly!”

“One word of earnest hope before I leave you; one word of solemn warning,” said O’Connor; “the vanities of this world are fading fast and for ever from your view; you are going where the applause of men can reach you no more! I conjure you, then, for the sake of your eternal peace, if your sentence be a just one, do not insult your Creator by denying your guilt, and pass into His awful presence with a lie upon your lips."

Ashwoode paused for a moment, and then walked suddenly up to O'Connor, and almost in a whisper said, —

"Not a word of that, my course is chosen; not one word more. Observe, what has passed between us is private; now leave me." So saying, Ashwoode turned from him, and walked toward the narrow window of his cell.

"Farewell, Sir Henry Ashwoode, farewell for ever; and may God have mercy upon you," said O'Connor, passing out upon the dark and narrow corridor.

The turnkey closed the door with a heavy crash upon his prisoner, and locked it once more, and thus the two young men, who had so often and so variously encountered in the unequal path of life, were parted never again to meet in the wayward scenes of this chequered and changeful existence. Tired and agitated, O'Connor threw himself into the first coach he met, and was deposited safely in the "Cock and Anchor." It were vain to attempt to describe the ecstasies and transports of honest Larry Toole at the unexpected recovery of his long-lost master; we shall not attempt to do so. It is enough for our purpose to state that at the "Cock and Anchor" O'Connor received two letters from his old friend, Mr. Audley, and one conveying a pressing invitation from Oliver French of Ardgillagh, in compliance with which, early on the next morning, he mounted his horse, and set forth, followed by his trusty squire, upon the high road to Naas, resolved to task his strength to the uttermost, although he knew that even thus he must necessarily divide his journey into many more stages than his impatience would have allowed, had more rapid travelling in his weak condition been possible.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE ROPE AND THE RIOT IN GALLOWS GREEN — AND THE WOODS OF ARDGILLAGH BY MOONLIGHT.

At length came that day, that dreadful day, whose evening Sir Henry Ashwoode was never to see. Noon was the time fixed for the fatal ceremonial; and long before that hour, the mob, in one dense mass of thousands, had thronged and choked the streets leading to the old gaol. Upon this awful day the wretched man acquired, by a strange revulsion, a kind of stoical composure, which sustained him throughout the dreadful preparations. With hands cold as clay, and a face white as ashes, and from which every vestige of animation had vanished, he proceeded, nevertheless, with a calm and collected demeanour to make all his predetermined arrangements for the fearful scene. With a minute elaborateness he finished his toilet, and dressed himself in a grave, but particularly handsome suit. Could this shrunken, torpid, ghastly spectre, in reality be the same creature who, a few months since, was the admiration and envy of half the beaux of Dublin?

There was little or none of the fitful excitability about him which had heretofore marked his demeanour during his confinement; on the contrary, a kind of stupor and apathy had supervened, partly occasioned by the laudanum which he had taken in unusually large quantities, and partly by the overwhelming horror of his situation. He seemed to observe and hear nothing. When the gaoler entered to remove his irons, shortly before the time of his removal had arrived, he seemed a little startled, and observing the physician who had attended him among those who stood at the door of his cell, he beckoned him toward him.

“Doctor, doctor,” said he in a dusky voice, “how much laudanum may I safely take? I want my head clear to say a few words, to speak to the people. Don’t give me too much; but let me, with that condition, have whatever I can safely swallow. You know — you understand me; don’t oblige me to speak any more just now.”

The physician felt his pulse, and looked in his face, and then mingled a little laudanum and water, which he applied to the young man's pale, dry lips. This dose was hardly swallowed, when one of the gaol officials entered, and stated that the ordinary was anxious to know whether the prisoner wished to pray or confer with him in private before his departure. The question had to be twice repeated ere it reached Sir Henry. He replied, however, quickly, and in a low tone, —

"No, no, not for the world. I can't bear it; don't disturb me — don't, don't."

It was now intimated to the prisoner that he must proceed. His arms were pinioned, and he was conducted along the passages leading to the entrance of the gaol, where he was received by the sheriff. For a moment, as he passed out into the broad light and the keen fresh air, he beheld the vast and eager mob pressing and heaving like a great dark sea around him, and the mounted escort of dragoons with drawn swords and gay uniforms; and without attaching any clear or definite meaning to the spectacle, he beheld the plumes of a hearse, and two or three fellows engaged in sliding the long black coffin into its place. These sights, and the strange, gaping faces of the crowd, and the sheriff's carriage, and the gay liveries, and the crowded fronts and roofs of the crazy old houses opposite, for one moment danced like the fragment of a dream across his vision, and in the next he sat in the oldfashioned coach which was to convey him to the place of execution.

"Only twenty-seven years, only twenty-seven years, only twenty-seven years," he muttered, vacantly and mechanically repeating the words which had reached his ear from those who were curiously reading the plate upon the coffin as he entered the coach— "only twenty-seven, twenty-seven."

The awful procession moved on to the place of its final destination; the enormous mob rushing along with it — crowding, jostling, swearing, laughing, whistling, quarrelling, and hustling, as they forced their way onward, and staring with coarse and eager curiosity whenever they could into the vehicle in which Ashwoode sat. All the sights — the haggard, smirched, and eager faces, the prancing horses of the troopers, the well-known shops and streets, and the crowded windows — all sailed by his eyes like some unintelligible and heart-sickening dream. The place of public execution for criminals was then, and continued to be for long after, a spot significantly denominated "Gallows Hill," situated in the neighbourhood of

St. Stephen's Green, and not far from the line at present traversed by Baggot Street. There a permanent gallows was erected, and thither, at length, amid thousands of crowding spectators, the melancholy procession came, and proceeded to the centre of area, where the gallows stood, with the long new rope swinging in the wind, and the cart and the hangman, with the guard of soldiers, prepared for their reception. The vehicles drew up, and those who had to play a part in the dreadful scene descended. The guard took their place, preserving a narrow circle around the fatal spot, free from the pressure of the crowd. The carriages were driven a little away, and the coffin was placed close under the gallows, while Ashwoode, leaning upon the chaplain and upon one of the sheriffs, proceeded toward the cart, which made the rude platform on which he was to stand.

"Sir Henry Ashwoode," observes a contemporary authority, the *Dublin Journal*, "showed a great deal of calmness and dignity, insomuch that a great many of the mob, especially among the women, were weeping. His figure and features were handsome, and he was finely dressed. He prayed a short time with the ordinary, and then, with little assistance, mounted the hurdle, whence he spoke to the people, declaring his innocence with great solemnity. Then the hangman loosened his cravat, and opened his shirt at the neck, and Sir Henry turning to him, bid him, as it was understood, to take a ring from his finger, for a token of forgiveness, which he did, and then the man drew the cap over his eyes; but he made a sign, and the hangman lifted it up again, and Sir Henry, looking round at all the multitude, said again, three times, 'In the presence of God Almighty, I stand here innocent;' and then, a minute after, 'I forgive all my enemies, and I die innocent;' then he spoke a word to the hangman, and the cap being pulled down, and the rope quickly adjusted, the hurdle was moved away, and he swung off, the people with one consent crying out the while. He struggled for a long time, and very hard; and not for more than an hour was the body cut down, and laid in the coffin. He was buried in the night-time. His last dying words have begot among most people a great opinion of his innocence, though the lawyers still hold to it that he was guilty. It was said that Mr. Blarden, the prosecutor, was in a house in Stephen's Green, to see the hanging, and as soon as the mob heard it, they went and broke the windows, and, but for the soldiers, would have forced their way in, and done more violence."

Thus speaks the *Dublin Journal*, and the extract needs no addition from us.

Gladly do we leave this hateful scene, and turn from the dreadful fate of him whose follies and vices had wrought so much misery to others, and ended in such fearful ignominy and destruction to himself. We leave the smoky town, with all its fashion, vice, and villainy; its princely equipages; its prodigals; its paupers; its great men and its sycophants; its mountebanks and mendicants; its riches and its wretchedness. We leave that old city of strange compounds, where the sublime and the ridiculous, deep tragedies and most whimsical farces are ever mingling — where magnificence and squalor rub shoulders day by day, and beggars sit upon the steps of palaces. How much of what is wonderful, wild, and awful, has not thy secret history known! How much of the romance of human act and passion, vicissitude, joy and sorrow, grandeur and despair, has there not lived, and moved, and perished, age after age, under thy perennial curtain of solemn smoke!

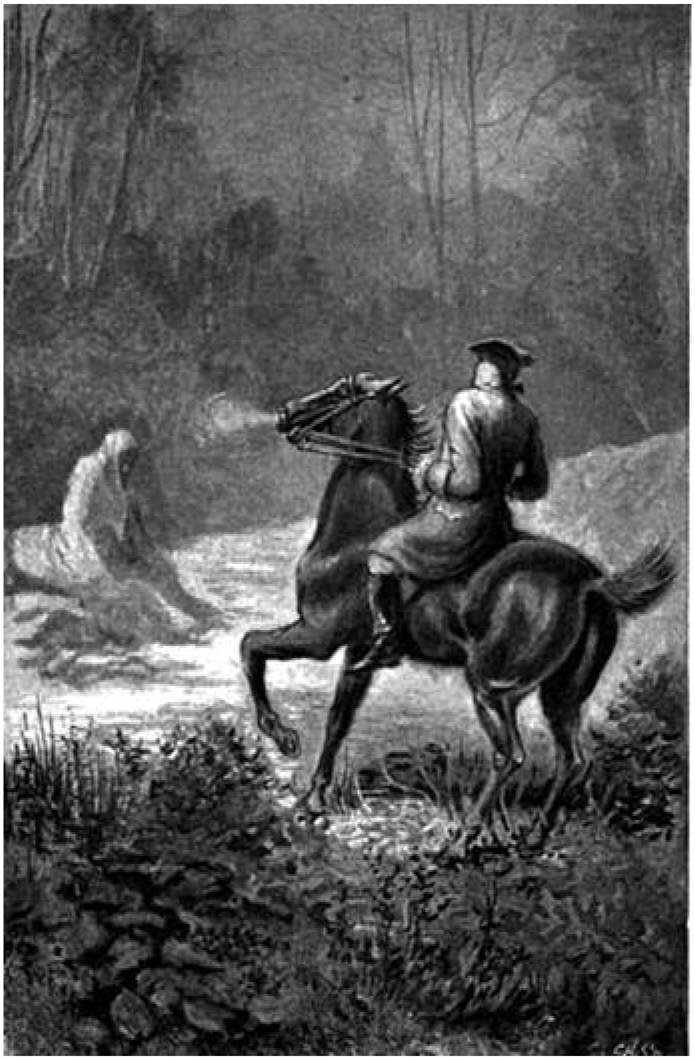
Far, far behind, we leave the sickly smoky town — and over the far blue hills and wooded country — through rocky glens, and by sonorous streams, and over broad undulating plains, and through the quiet villages, with their humble thatched roofs from which curls up the light blue smoke among the sheltering bushes and tall hedgerows — through ever-changing scenes of softest rural beauty, in day time and at eventide, and by the wan, misty moonlight, we follow the two travellers who ride toward the old domain of Ardgillagh.

The fourth day’s journey brought them to the little village which formed one of the boundaries of that old place. But, long ere they reached it, the sun had gone down behind the distant hills, under his dusky canopy of crimson clouds, and the pale moon had thrown its broad light and shadows over the misty landscape. Under the soft splendour of the moon, chequered by the moving shadows of the tall and ancient trees, they rode into the humble village — no sound arose to greet them but the desultory baying of the village dogs, and the soft sighing of the light breeze through the spreading boughs — and no signal of waking life was seen, except, few and far between, the red level beam of some still glowing turf fire, shining through the rude and narrow aperture that served the simple rustic instead of casement.

At one of these humble dwellings Larry Toole applied for information, and with ready courtesy the "man of the house," in person, walked with them to the entrance of the place, and shoved open one of the valves of the crazy old gate, and O'Connor rode slowly in, following, with his best caution, the directions of his guide. His honest squire, Larry, meanwhile, loitered a little behind, in conference with the courteous peasant, and with the laudable intention of procuring some trifling refection, which, however, he determined to swallow without dismounting, and with all convenient dispatch, bearing in mind a wholesome remembrance of the disasters which followed his convivial indulgence in the little town of Chapelizod. While Larry thus loitered, O'Connor followed the wild winding avenue which formed the only approach to the old mansion. This rude track led him a devious way over slopes, and through hollows, and by the broad grey rocks, white as sheeted phantoms in the moonlight, and the thick weeds and brushwood glittering with the heavy dew of night, and through the beautiful misty vistas of the ancient wild wood, now still and solemn as old cathedral aisles. Thus, under the serene and cloudless light of the sailing moon, he had reached the bank of the broad and shallow brook whose shadowy nooks and gleaming eddies were canopied under the gnarled and arching boughs of the hoary thorn and oak — and here tradition tells a marvellous tale.

It is narrated that when O'Connor reached this point, his jaded horse stopped short, refusing to cross the stream, and when urged by voice and spur, reared, snorted, and by every indication exhibited the extremest terror and an obstinate reluctance to pass the brook. The rider dismounted — took his steed by the head, patted and caressed him, and by every art endeavoured to induce him to traverse the little stream, but in vain; while thus fruitlessly employed, his attention was arrested by the sounds of a female voice, in low and singularly sweet and plaintive lamentation, and looking across the water, for the first time he beheld the object which so affrighted his steed. It was a female figure arrayed in a mantle of dusky red, the hood of which hung forward so as to hide the face and head: she was seated upon a broad grey rock by the brook's side, and her head leaned forward so as to rest upon her knees; her bare arm hung by her side, and the white fingers played listlessly in the clear waters of the brook, while with a wild and piteous chaunt, which grew louder and clearer as he gazed, she still sang on her strange mournful song. Spellbound and entranced, he knew not why, O'Connor gazed on in speechless and breathless awe, until at length the tall form arose and disappeared among the old trees, and the sounds melted away and were lost among the soft chiming of the brook, and heard no more. He dared not say whether it was reality or illusion, he felt like one suddenly recalled from a dream, and a certain awe, and horror, and dismay still hung upon him, for which he scarcely could account.

Without further resistance, the horse now crossed the brook; O'Connor remounted, and followed the shadowy track; but again he was destined to meet with interruption; the pathway which he followed, embowered among the branching trees and bushes, at one point wound beneath a low, ivy-mantled rock; he was turning this point, when his horse, snorting loudly, checked his pace with a recoil so sudden that he threw himself back upon his haunches, and remained, except for his violent trembling, fixed and motionless. O'Connor raised his eyes, and standing upon the rock which overhung the avenue, he beheld, for a moment, a tall female form clothed in an ample cloak of dusky red. The arms with the hands clasped, as if in the extremity of woe, firmly together, were extended above her head, the face white as the foam of the river, and the eyes preternaturally large and wild, were raised fixedly toward the broad bright moon; this phantom, for such it was, for a moment occupied his gaze, and in the next, with a scream so piercing and appalling that his very marrow seemed to freeze at the sound, she threw herself forward as though she would cast herself upon the horse and rider — and, was gone.



The horse started wildly off and galloped at headlong speed up the broken ascent, and for some time O'Connor had not collectedness to check his frantic course, or even to think; at length, however, he succeeded in calming the terrified animal — and, uttering a fervent prayer, he proceeded, without further adventure, till the tall gable of the old mansion in the spectral light of the moon among its thick embowering trees and rich ivy-mantles, with all its tall white chimney stacks and narrow windows with their thousand glittering panes, arose before his anxious gaze.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE LAST LOOK.

Time had flowed on smoothly in the quiet old place, with an even current unbroken and unmarred, except by one event. Sir Henry Ashwoode's danger was known to old French and Mr. Audley; but with anxious and effectual care they kept all knowledge of his peril and disgrace from poor Mary: this pang was spared her. The months that passed had wrought in her a change so great and so melancholy, that none could look upon her without sorrowful forebodings, without misgivings against which they vainly strove. Sore grief had done its worst: the light and graceful step grew languid and feeble — the young face wan and wasted — the beautiful eyes grew dim; and now in her sad and early decline, as in other times, when her smile was sunshine, and her very step light music, was still with her the same warm and gentle spirit; and even amid the waste and desolation of decay, still prevailed the ineffaceable lines of that matchless and touching beauty, which in other times had wrought such magic.

It was upon that day, the night of which saw O'Connor's long-deferred arrival at Ardgillagh, that Flora Guy, vainly striving to restrain her tears, knocked at Mr. Audley's chamber door. The old gentleman quickly answered the summons.

"Ah, sir," said the girl, "she's very bad, sir, if you wish to see her, come at once."

"I *do*, indeed, wish to see her, the dear child," said he, while the tears started to his eyes; "bring me to the room."

He followed the kind girl to the door, and she first went in, and in a low voice told her that Mr. Audley wished much to see her, and she, with her own sweet, sad smile, bade her bring him to her bedside.

Twice the old man essayed to enter, and twice he stayed to weep bitterly as a child. At length he commanded composure enough to enter, and stood by the bedside, and silently and reverently held the hand of her that was dying.

“My dear child! my darling!” said he, vainly striving to suppress his sobs, while the tears fell fast upon the thin small hand he held in his— “I have sought this interview, to tell you what I would fain have told you often before now but knew not how to speak of it, I want to speak to you of one who loved you, and loves you still, as mortal has seldom loved; of — of my good young friend O’Connor.”

As he said this, he saw, or was it fancy, the faintest flush imaginable for one moment tinge her pale cheek. He had touched a chord to which the pulses of her heart, until they had ceased to beat, must tremble; and silently and slow the tears gathered upon her long dark lashes, and followed one another down her wan face, unheeded. Thus she listened while he related how truly O’Connor had loved her, and when the tale was ended she wept on long and silently.

“Flora,” she said at length, “cut off a lock of my hair.”

The girl did as she was desired, and in her thin and feeble hand her young mistress took it.

“Whenever you see him, sir,” said she, “will you give him this, and say that I sent it for a token that to the last I loved him, and to help him to remember me when I am gone: this is my last message — and poor Flora, won’t you take care of her?”

“Won’t I, won’t I!” sobbed the old man, vehemently. “While I have a shilling in the world she shall never know want — faithful creature” — and he grasped the honest girl’s hand, and shook it, and sobbed and wept like a child.

He took the long dark ringlet, which he had promised to give to O’Connor; and seeing that his presence agitated her, he took a long last look at the young face he was never more to see in life, and kissing the small hand again and again, he turned and went out, crying bitterly.

Soon after this she grew much fainter, and twice or thrice she spoke as though her mind was busy with other scenes.

“Let us go down to the well side,” she said, “the primroses and cowslips are always there the earliest;” and then she said again, “He’s coming, Flora; he’ll be here very soon, so come and dress my hair; he likes to see my hair dressed with flowers — wild flowers.”

Shortly after this she sank into a soft and gentle sleep, and while she lay thus calmly, there came over her pale face a smile of such a pure and heavenly light, that angelic hope, and peace, and glory, shone in its beauty. The smile changed not; but she was dead! The sorrowful struggle was over — the weary bosom was at rest — the true and gentle heart was cold for ever — the brief but sorrowful trial was over — the desolate mourner was gone to the land where the pangs of grief, the tumults of passion, regrets, and cold neglect are felt no more.

Her favourite bird, with gay wings, flutters to the casement; the flowers she planted are sweet upon the evening air; and by their hearths the poor still talk of her and bless her; but the silvery voice that spoke, and the gentle hand that tended, and the beautiful smile that gave an angelic grace to the offices of charity, where are they?

The tapers are lighted in the silent chamber, and Flora Guy has laid early spring flowers on the still cold form that sleeps there in its serene sad beauty tranquilly and for ever; when in the courtyard are heard the tramp and clatter of a horse's hoofs — it is he — O'Connor, — he comes for her — the long lost — the dearly loved — the true-hearted — the found again.

'Twere vain to tell of frantic grief — words cannot tell, nor imagination conceive, the depth — the wildness — the desolation of that woe.

CONCLUSION.

Some fifteen years ago there was still to be seen in the little ruined church which occupies a corner in what yet remains of the once magnificent domain of Ardgillagh, side by side among the tangled weeds, two gravestones; one recording the death of Mary Ashwoode, at the early age of twenty-two, in the year of grace 1710; the other, that of Edmond O'Connor, who fell at Denain, in the year of our Lord 1712. Thus they were, who in life were separated, laid side by side in death. It is a still and sequestered spot, and the little ruin clothed in rich ivy, and sheltered by the great old trees with its solemn and holy quiet, in such a resting-place as most mortals would fain repose in when their race is done.

For the rest our task is quickly done. Mr. Audley and Oliver French had so much gotten into one another's way of going on, that the former gentleman from week to week, and from month to month, continued to prolong his visit, until after a residence of eight years, he died at length in the mansion of Ardgillagh, at a very advanced age, and without more than two days' illness, having never experienced before, in all his life, one hour's sickness of any kind. Honest Oliver French outlived his boon companion by the space of two years, having just eaten an omelette and actually called for some woodcock-pie; he departed suddenly while the servant was raising the crust. Old Audley left Flora Guy well provided for at his death, but somehow or other considerably before that event Larry Toole succeeded in prevailing on the honest handmaiden to marry him, and although, questionless, there was some disparity in point of years, yet tradition says, and we believe it, that there never lived a fonder or a happier couple, and it is a genealogical fact, that half the Tooles who are now to be found in that quarter of the country, derive their descent from the very alliance in question.

Of Major O'Leary we have only to say that the rumour which hinted at his having united his fortunes with those of the house of Rumble, were but too well founded. He retired with his buxom bride to a small property, remote from the dissipation of the capital, and except in the matter of an occasional cock-fight, whenever it happened to be within reach, or a tough encounter with the squire, when a new pipe of claret was to be tasted, one or two occasional indiscretions, he became, as he himself declared, in all respects an ornament to society.

Lady Stukely, within a few months after the explosion with young Ashwoode, vented her indignation by actually marrying young Pigwiggynne. It was said, indeed, that they were not happy; of this, however, we cannot be sure; but it is undoubtedly certain that they used to beat, scratch, and pinch each other in private — whether in play merely, or with the serious intention of correcting one another's infirmities of temper, we know not. Several weeks before Lady Stukely's marriage, Emily Copland succeeded in her long-cherished schemes against the celibacy of poor Lord Aspenly. His lordship, however, lived on with a perseverance perfectly spiteful, and his lady, alas and alack-a-day, tired out, at length committed a *faux pas* — the trial is on record, and eventuated, it is sufficient to say, in a verdict for the plaintiff.

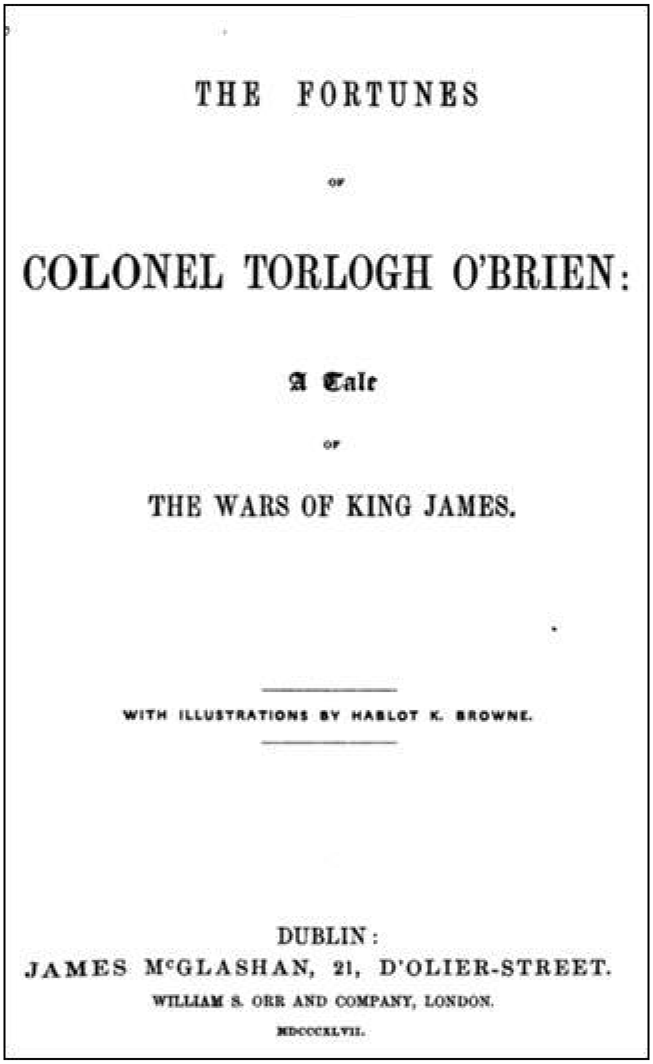
Of Chancey, we have only to say that his fate was as miserable as his life had been abject and guilty. When he arose after the tremendous fall which he had received at the hands of his employer, Nicholas Blarden, upon the memorable night which defeated all their schemes, for he *did* arise with life — intellect and remembrance were alike quenched — he was thenceforward a drivelling idiot. Though none cared to inquire into the cause and circumstances of his miserable privation, long was he well known and pointed out in the streets of Dublin, where he subsisted upon the scanty alms of superstitious charity, until at length, during the great frost in the year 1739, he was found dead one morning, in a corner under St. Audoen's Arch, stark and cold, cowering in his accustomed attitude.

Nicholas Blarden died upon his feather bed, and if every luxury which imagination can devise, or prodigal wealth procure, can avail to soothe the racking torments of the body, and the terrors of the appalled spirit, he died happy.

Of the other actors in this drama — with the exception of M'Quirk, who was publicly whipped for stealing four pounds of sausages from an eating house in Bride Street, and the Italian, who, we believe, was seen as groom-porter in Mr. Blarden's hell, for many years after — tradition is silent.

THE FORTUNES OF COLONEL TORLOGH O’BRIEN

The Fortunes of Colonel Torlogh O’Brien: A Tale of the Wars of King James, published anonymously in 1847, was Le Fanu’s second novel. A historical romance, it is set during the Irish Williamite War (1689-91), in which Catholic supporters of the deposed James II fought against Protestants loyal to the new British king, William III, who ruled jointly with his wife Mary from 1689. Against this backdrop, the novel tells the story of the Jacobite Colonel Torlogh O’Brien and his attempts to gain the hand of his beloved Grace Willoughby, daughter of the Williamite Sir Hugh.



THE FORTUNES

OF

COLONEL TORLOGH O'BRIEN:

A Tale

OF

THE WARS OF KING JAMES.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HABLOT K. BROWNE.

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The frontispiece of the first edition, which was illustrated by Hablot Knight Browne ('Phiz'), who also famously illustrated Dickens' novels

CHAPTER I.

THE MAGIC MIRROR.

IN the summer of the year 1686, at about ten o'clock at night, two scenes were passing, very different in all the accidents of place, plot, and personage; and which although enacted, the one in London, and the other near it, yet exercised an influence upon the events and persons of our Irish story, so important and so permanent, that we must needs lift the curtain from before the magic mirror, which every author, in virtue of his craft, is privileged to consult, and disclose for a minute the scenery and forms which flit across its mystic surface.

Look, then, reader, into the wondrous speculum, and behold a handsome saloon, richly furnished in the fashion of those days. The walls are hung with gorgeous tapestry, and against them stand curiously carved cabinets, stored with their loads of precious china and other treasures of art; luxurious sofas, and massive chairs and tables, covered with splendid cloths, occupy the floor, which shows in the intervals between this rich profusion of furniture, the deep pile of a Turkey carpet, spreading its soft and gaudy texture over the boards, and evidencing a degree of luxury not always then to be found, even in the mansions of the wealthiest nobles of a profuse and voluptuous court.

Large pictures, in magnificent carved and gilded frames, hang upon the walls; and at the far end of the chamber, from the lofty ceiling to the floor descend the rich folds of damask draperies, through which, and through the open windows from whose architraves they hang, is seen the River Thames, shimmering in the uncertain moonlight — gliding onward in his eternal course, and reflecting in his ever-moving mirror, the glow of forges, and the warm firelight of snug citizens at jovial supper, or, perchance, the solitary red glimmer that twinkles from the poor student's attic — all which, and hundreds more, countless as the stars on high, his waters catch as they flow under the dark banks opposite in broad and silent flood.

In the chamber into which we are looking, there burns a large lamp, which sheds through its stained-glass sphere a soft, rose-coloured light on all the objects which surround it; and eight wax lights, flaring and flickering in the wanton evening breeze which floats lightly in at the open windows, lend an additional distinctness to the forms that occupy the room.

These are four in number: two lean over a table, which stands near the window, and seem to be closely examining a map, which nearly covers the board over which they stoop — the one sharp-featured, sallow, somewhat slovenly in his attire, his short cloak hanging from his shoulder, and his high-crowned hat (then an obsolete fashion) dangling in his hand, leans over the outspread plan, and with eager gestures and rapid enunciation, and yet with a strange mixture of deference, appears to harangue his listening companion. *He* is a strong, square-built man, somewhat, perhaps, beyond the middle age, gravely and handsomely dressed — his huge perriwig swings forward as he bends over and rests his chin upon his jewelled hand, and fixes upon the chart before him a countenance bold and massive, in which the lines of strong sense and sensuality are strikingly combined.

Pacing to and fro, and sometimes pausing half abstractedly at this table, looking for a moment at the outspread paper, and betraying the absence, and, perhaps, the agitation of his mind by his wandering gaze and the restless drumming of his knuckles on the table; then turning again to resume his rapid walk across the floor, and stealing occasionally a hurried and uneasy look towards a figure who sits alone upon a sofa in the obscurest part of the chamber, is seen a man of commanding stature and lofty mien, though somewhat tending to corpulence, richly dressed in a suit of dark velvet, sparkling with jewels, his neckcloth and ruffles fluttering with splendid point, having in his countenance a certain character of haughty command, according well with the high pretensions of his garb.

Another figure remains to be described, it is that toward which the regards of him we have just examined are so often turned: the form is that of a female, seated, as we have said, upon a sofa, and wrapped in a close travelling cloak, the hood of which falls over her face, so that, excepting that she is tall, and possesses hands and feet of singular beauty and slimness, we can pronounce nothing whatever of her *personnel* — she is evidently weeping, her dress shows the vibration of every sob, and the convulsive clasping of her small hands, and the measured beating of her tiny foot upon the floor, betoken her inward anguish.

While thus they are engaged, upon the broad bosom of the river, under the silver moonlight, with gay torches glowing, and, no doubt, plentiful store of laughing masks, and sweet swell of floating music (for those nearest the window turn and seem to listen), glides by the royal pageant — the court of St. James's on the water — the royal barges passing on their way; and now all is gone, sailed onward, and vanished like a dream.

Lo! there must have been some sudden sound at the door! They all start and look toward it — the lean gentleman, in the shabby suit, clutches his map; his brawny companion advances a pace; the tall aristocrat arrests his walk, and stands fixed and breathless; while the lady shrinks further back, and draws her hood more closely over her face.

Their objects, then, must be secret.

It is, however, a false alarm, they resume their respective postures and occupations — and so leaving them, we wave the wand which conjured up the scene, and in a moment all is shivered, clouded, and gone.

But, lo! another rises gradually to view: it represents the dim vistas of a vaulted chamber, spanned with low, broad arches of stone, springing from the stone floor. Two blazing links, circled with a lurid halo from the heavy damps which hang there, in thin perpetual fog, shed a dusky, flickering glare upon the stained and dripping roof, and through the dim and manifold perspective of arches, until it spends itself in vapoury darkness. A group of some seven or eight figures stands in the fitful glow of this ruddy illumination — gentlemen of wealth and worship it would seem, by the richness of their garb: some are wrapt in their cloaks, some are booted, and all wear their broadleafed, low-crowned hats. Strong lights and deep shadows mark many a furrowed and earnest face. This is no funereal meeting, as the place would seem to indicate — no trappings of mourning are visible, and the subject of their conversation, though deep and weighty, is too earnest and energizing for a theme of sorrow; neither is there, in the faces or gestures of the assembly, a single indication of excitement or enthusiasm. The countenances, the attitudes, the movements of the group all betoken caution, deliberation, and intense anxiety. From time to time are seen, singly, or in couples, or in groups of three, other forms in the shadowy distance, as richly dressed, gliding like ghosts through the cloistered avenues, and holding with themselves, or one another anxious debate.

And now, a tall and singularly handsome young man, in gorgeous military uniform, turning from an elder personage in a velvet cloak, to whom he has been deferentially listening, moves a pace or two toward the detached parties, who walk slowly up and down, as we have described, and raising his plumed hat, he beckons them forward; and so they come, and muster with the rest; whereupon, the elder gentleman, in the velvet cloak, draws forth a letter, and with a brief word or two of preface, as it would seem, reads it for the rest, pausing from time to time to offer and receive remarks. This over, he says something further, whereupon he and all the rest raise their hats for a moment, and then he shows the letter to one of the company nearest to himself, who takes it, looks to the end, and then to the beginning, and then upon the back of it, and so passes it on to another, and so from hand to hand it goes, until again it reaches him who first produced it; and then, with the same solemn and earnest looks and air, they, one by one, take leave, shake hands, and glide away, until the old gentleman in the cloak, and one other remain. Then he in the cloak holds the corner of the momentous letter to the flaring link, and now it floats to the ground in flame, and now all that remains of the mysterious paper, is a light black film, coursed all over by a thousand nimble sparkles. Cautious old gentleman!

Enough — the spell is over, the lines and colours shift and change, shadows and lights are lost and mingled, and all is once more whirling and blended in vague, impenetrable cloud and darkness But the pageant which has, for a fleeting moment, moved before us, has reflected a dread reality, whose consequences are not only entwined with the incidents of the history we are going to relate, but mingle in the currents of a thousand tales of glory; ay, and in the meanness and buffoonery of comedies, enough to feast all cynics, that ever were, or ever shall be, to satiety; and more nobly and sorrowfully, alas! in the dire events of tragedies, of most heroic and mournful splendour. It revealed the meeting of a council, upon whose wisdom, craft, and energy, hung the doom of millions — the fate of kingdoms, princedoms, powers.

CHAPTER II.

THE LADY AND THE PRIEST.

IN the month of March, in the year of our Lord 1689, the red and dusky light of a frosty sunset had flung its crimson mantle over the broad sides of the Slievephelim hills, tinting the white rocks and the wintry woods which irregularly covered their wide expanse with a genial blush, which again melted softly away into the deep blue shadows that gathered mistily in the long sweeping hollows and rugged defiles into which that wild range winds and breaks. Among other objects, this rich colouring illuminated the irregular, gray front of a building of considerable antiquity, and some strength, although wholly incapable of resisting, with any sustained effect, the artillery of an age still less advanced in military science than the eventful one of which we write. Even then a timeworn pile, carrying in its aspect something venerable and saddened, and not the less picturesque, perhaps, that its character was somewhat undefined, and its parts adapted with small attention to regularity of structure — here presenting the character of a fortress, and there that of an antique dwelling-house; in some parts bound in the giant clasp of the dark embowering ivy, and at others exposing to the dusky light of the setting sun its hoary front, and steep, gray-flagged roof, with all its furniture of glittering windows, and darksome portals, and the low-arched gateway which, under its deep shadow and heavy masonry, seemed to warn away the intruder with a jealous scowl. Around this building, and much nearer than military precaution would have allowed them, and but partially and irregularly cleared from about the mansion, stood grouped the fantastic birch and oak which then and there, even within the memory of man, skirted with wild and beautiful forest, whole miles, we might say leagues, of the mountain sides. Thus circumstanced, and occupying the slope of the mountain's foot, the castle of Lisnamoe stood, on the evening we have mentioned, steeped in the glowing, airy tide which flooded all the broad and hazy landscape, as far as the eye might reach, with dusky crimson.

This evening-light, solemn and melancholy as the chastened beam which streams through the stained oriel of some ancient church, poured through three narrow windows, deep set in the thickness of the wall, into a low, broad chamber within the building which we have just described. Heavy beams traversed its ceiling from end to end; its floors and wainscoating were of shining wood, as black as the bog oak; and the furniture, of which there was no lack, seemed fashioned in the same dark wood. Cupboards and presses there were; chairs and tables, and chests of rude and antique workmanship; a row of clumsy bookshelves, partly stocked with volumes, occupied the wall above the yawning hearth; and near its side, in a high-backed, ponderous chair of oak, sat the only living inmate of the chamber.

It is a lady of stately, yet most sorrowful mein, clothed from head to foot in a suit of the deepest mourning — so thin and pale, and so unearthly still, as she leaned back in her chair, that, looking upon her, one might hold his breath and doubt if she were really alive. She must have been beautiful; in that wasted form and face the lines of beauty still linger; the fair proportion of the deer-like limbs, the noble formation of the small and classic head, and, above all, the exquisite line of grace and symmetry still traceable in the now sharpened and emaciated features, tell eloquently and mournfully of what she was. Of her age it were not easy to speak with certainty; if you look upon her hand, the fineness, the delicacy, and snowy whiteness of its texture, contrasted like polished ivory with the dark, shining table on which it rests, would bespeak her little more than a girl — a young girl, wasted by decay, and soon to forsake for ever this beautiful world, with all its bright enchantments still undissolved around her, and even in life's happy spring-tide called away for ever. Look again at the pale face, and there you read not the traces of early decay; it is not the countenance of youth — deep lines of sorrow, anguish, despair, have left their ineffaceable character upon its sharp and colourless contour; acutest suffering, chastened by profound humility, are there mournfully predominant; and again, behold from beneath the black velvet cap there strays in silver lines a long grey lock. The usual test of woman's age are here inapplicable and at fault; and whatever be her years, it is but too plain that wild and terrible affliction has anticipated the hand of time, and that the pity-moving spectacle who sits alone in the dim chamber, is the fearful work of strange troubles — the wreck of grievous agony, perhaps of fierce and wayward passion — that she is one whose pride, and fire, end beauty, the storm has quenched, and reft, and shattered — one whose inward desolation is complete.

But ere this description might be written, she so moveless, so literally deathlike before, had on a sudden raised her quenched and sunken eyes passionately toward heaven, clasped her thin hands, and wringing them bitterly in what seemed the agony of prayer, broke forth in low and earnest accents.

“Oh! that it might be so, that it might be so — oh! that my worthless life might yield this one good and worthy service — that I might, unseen and lost as I am, guard them from this mysterious danger. Inscrutable are the ways of heaven, wonderful its dispensations, that I, *I* should have been carried hither, on the currents of that dreadful destiny of which I am now the unresisting sport — borne to this place, cast among these people, just as my presence here — weak, worthless, mayhap forgotten — oh! bitter word, forgotten! — as I am — may prove a blessing; may open an escape; may save life, and rescue innocence. Weak and imperfect are my means; but there is One who can even with the folly of the weak confound all the wisdom of the wicked, and bring the designs of the crafty utterly to nought. Id His hands their safety is, and He with his mighty arm protects the good and pure.”

As she thus spoke the tears rose to her eyes, and she wept for some minutes in bitter humiliation, softly repeating from time to time the last, words she had spoken— “the good and pure, the good and pure!” — On the table before her lay pen and ink, and a piece of paper, on which, in characters as plain as printing, were written certain words, with whose import the reader may hereafter be made more fully acquainted.

This paper lay upon the table before the sable-clad lady, who was still weeping bitterly, when a knock was heard at the chamber door; she hastily took the paper, folded it, and having placed it within the bosom of her gown, desired the visitor to come in. The door opened, and there entered a very young man, dressed in a suit of the plainest black, with his own dark brown hair falling in curls upon his shoulders; his face was thin and pale, his forehead high and intellectual; and, though his form was fragile, and somewhat stooped, and his face worn and sallow with the midnight studies, and, perchance, the austerities of his religious calling; and though in his countenance, mingling with its prevailing expression of gravity, was a sadness and even a sweetness which might have seemed scarcely consistent with the energy of his sex, yet in his dark eye there burned a certain light — the fire of an enthusiasm — which, in a character less gentle, might easily have degenerated into the wildness and ferocity of fanaticism.

With that air of melancholy respect, which great misfortunes in noble minds never fail to inspire, the young priest, for so he was, approached the lady.

"I trust," said he, gently, "that my visit has not come unseasonably; it shall be but a brief one, and I grieve to say, it must be my last. I have come to bid you farewell!"

"Your last visit! and to bid farewell!" repeated she, mournfully. This is a sudden, and to me a sad parting. You leave the castle then tonight?"

"Yes, and for many reasons," he replied, firmly. "What I yesterday suspected, I more suspect to-day. Those whose hearth I hare shared, and whose bread I have eaten for so long, I will not betray; nor shall I stay here to have my mind filled with apprehensions, which I dare not, divulge, and which to keep secret is to connive at hidden wickedness, and to participate in sin. I must away — I will hear and see no more of that which it troubles my conscience to hide, and which yet I may not tell. I am resolved — my part is taken, and so a long farewell to the place where I have passed so many quiet years — a long farewell to those who have been my early friends. Other scenes await me, where, with less of happiness, and, perchance, of safety, I may command more opportunities of good. And, gentle and most afflicted lady, in leaving you, ignorant of the purpose which has brought you here — unacquainted with the sad story of your life — unacquainted even with your very name, and seeking not to penetrate the deep mystery of your existence — I feel yet that in leaving you I shall part from a friend."

"I thank you for believing so — I thank you heartily," rejoined she, sadly and earnestly; "and pray you to do me so much justice as to continue to regard me thus while you live, and by this worthless token to remember me."

The young man took the ring which she presented, and having thanked her, she resumed —

"I shall, indeed, miss your gentle counsel — your kindness, your pity — *sorely* miss them," said the lady, with patient sorrow.

“God grant you comfort,” said the ecclesiastic, earnestly laying his hand upon the thin wasted fingers of the lady.

“Comfort — comfort!” said she, quickly and almost wildly; “no, no — no, no. You know not what you say — comfort for me! — oh! never more.”

“Yes, lady, there *is* comfort for you, whatever be your fears and sorrows — a consolation reserved even for the sin-stained conscience — even for the broken heart,” he said, solemnly and affectionately; “reject it not — the Church, with the voice of heavenly love and mercy, calls you to her bosom — implores of you to come; and, with a smile of pity, and forgiveness, and encouragement, will fold you in her arms.”

The lady slowly shook her head in mute despair.

“Turn not away from comfort — hope — forgiveness” — he said, while his eye kindled, and his form seemed to dilate with the glory and grandeur of his theme. “The Church — the eternal Church — of whose glorious company I am but the meanest and basest servant — the Church, even with my voice, calls thee to herself. Come, and she will tell thee how thou mayest have hope — how thou mayest, indeed, obliterate the dreadful stains of remorseful memory — how thou mayest be lifted up from the dark and fathomless abyss of sin and despair, and, mounting toward the throne of grace, ascend, until at last, when expiation shall have done its work, your soul shall rise, pure and glorious as a sinless angel, into the light of the eternal presence of God. Oh! turn not away; refuse not to be saved; reject not the heavenly message!”

“I have,” she answered, humbly but firmly, and still with downcast eyes — “I have, as I have told you ere now, but one trust, but one hope, one faith — and these rest not in any Church.”

A slight flush of impatience for a moment tinged the pale cheek of the priest; but it quickly subsided, and his countenance wore even more than its wonted expression of sadness, as, with arms folded and eyes cast down, he slowly paced the chamber-floor in silence.

“And whither do you purpose to go?” asked the lady, after a considerable pause, “Any where — I care not whither. *First* to Limerick, as I am at present minded,” he answered. “I hear there is a chaplaincy to one of the new regiments yet unfilled; but night draws on apace, time presses, and I must away.”

“I need not remind you,” she said —

“Of my promise of yesterday?” interrupted he. “Assuredly not; the paper shall be conveyed, though, for the reasons then assigned, under circumstances of perfect mystery. These are dark and perilous times — the saints guide and guard us!”

The lady then placed the document, of which we have already spoken, in his hands, and the ecclesiastic resumed —

“I well know how much depends upon the safe conveyance of this paper. Trust me, I shall not fail: before midnight it shall be in his hands.”

“And if he hearken not to that,” she said, “neither will he hear though one rose from the dead. God speed thee, and farewell!”

CHAPTER III.

THE ROAD TO GLINDARRAGH — THE THREE HORSEMEN WHO TRAVELLED IT.

THE young priest drew his cloak closely about his face, — mayhap to hide some evidences of bitter emotion which he could not altogether repress, — and hastily catching up the little bundle which formed his only luggage, he descended the narrow staircase, and passing forth upon the short green sward, he was soon traversing the winding pathway under the boughs of the wild wood. Leaving him for the present among the lengthening shadows, to pursue alone his hurried way toward the distant towers of Glindarragh Castle, we must glance for a moment at another party, who, from an opposite direction, and upon very different thoughts intent, were also tending toward that antique and hospitable mansion.

It was upon the same evening, then, that a cavalcade, consisting of three horsemen, might have been seen slowly approaching the steep old bridge of Glindarragh. Foremost and alone rode a young gentleman, apparently somewhere about six-and-twenty years of age, dressed in a riding suit of rich material, which was cut, moreover, in the extreme of the then prevailing fashion; a low-crowned hat, whose broad leaf was slightly cocked in front, overshadowed his handsome but somewhat sallow features, which were not unbecomingly relieved by the sable curls of his flowing peruke. The richness of the lace, which fluttered in the loose ends of his short neckcloth, as well as in his ruffles, together with the expensive elegance of his whole attire, bespoke him a gallant, profuse in his habits and courtly in his tastes; while the delicacy and hauteur of his features, and a certain negligent and graceful ease with which he sate his horse, betokened one of gentle birth and high breeding; there was, moreover, in the bearing of this gentleman a kind of bold, goodhumoured frankness, which indicated one who has seen the world, and knows how to make the most of it, go where he may, upon the shortest possible notice.

Behind him rode, at a little distance, his valet, a small, withered, bilious Englishman, bestriding a singularly tall and rawboned steed, and looking with a soured expression and a "careless desolation" from object to object, as he mentally and not unfrequently audibly contrasted the uninviting prospect before him with the substantial comforts which every where greeted the eye of the traveller in his own happier land.

Beside him, and carrying behind his saddle a huge leathern trunk, containing so much of his master's wardrobe as he brought with him for present use, rode Tim Dwyer, an appendage picked up at a Dublin inn, rather for his supposed useful than for his decorative attributes, and whose office it was to have a general eye after every thing, and see that nothing went wrong — an office which, though apparently one of considerable anxiety and trouble, yet seemed to cost that individual marvellously little of either. His tastes ran strongly in the direction of blarney, quiet quizzing, and ardent spirits. His secret philosophy pointed to "number one" as decidedly the most important object in nature, and his leading principle was embodied in an injunction to take the world *aisy.* Tim Dwyer's outward man was almost as lean and little as that of his companion; but, unlike him, his face wore a genial flush, which improved into a purple as it mounted to the sharp extremity of his nose; his eyes were small grey ones, and seldom more than half open; and his mouth, which was remarkably wide, was singularly flexible at the corners, which were generally slightly drawn downward when the rest of his face appeared to be laughing — a peculiarity which gave habitually to his whole countenance a sort of humbugging expression, strongly indicative of his propensities. When we add that this person presented, in his threadbare and slovenly attire, a marked contrast to the equipments of his natty companion, and that his years appeared to number some four or five-and-forty, we have said all that we have been able to collect respecting his external peculiarities.

As the young gentleman who headed this cavalcade rode slowly forward — for one of his horse's shoes was loose — his ruminations at length embodied themselves in a soliloquy like this: —

"And so, like a dutiful son, here I am, beset with bogs and mountains, wild geese and savages, and about to play the amorous Romeo at the feet of a rustic hoyden, whom I never yet beheld, in this old mildewed castle of Glin — Glindarragh, I think they call it — and if the lady but please to pity my amorous distress, forthwith I must be married! Percy Neville, Percy Neville, was ever filial piety like thine! Yet needs must, they say, when the devil drives. A younger son, without provision, can't defend himself lies at the mercy of his parents, and is the natural prey and sport of paternal atrocity. Here have I been for hill twelve months marooned upon this desolate island; and when I expected a letter of recall, and looked day by day for my deliverance,! there comes a new paternal dispatch — I'm ordered to the wilds of Munster, to be murdered or married, as the case may be! Oh! Percy Neville, great is thy filial obedience, and odds my life, thou hast had thy reward, too; for thy days have been wonderous long in this land."

The young man concluded with a discontented shrug; and speedily recovering his constitutional gaiety, he hummed a madrigal, as his eye swept over the broad and wooded expanse which spread before him to the very feet of the Slievephelim hills.

"Well," said he, as if the expansive view and the freshening breeze had given a new impulse to his spirits, "who knows but the girl may turn out after all to be just what I've pictured to myself a thousand times, as the very creature most formed to delight and dazzle mankind; a Chloe or a Phillis — an Arcadian beauty, with the charms of Venus, and the simplicity of Flora. I'm tired of your fine ladies, with their essences, and paint, and buckram, their easy airs and their easy virtue; and, egad, if I could meet with such a damsel as I might describe, methinks I could, with a good grace and heart's content, take her to wife, and help to tend her cabbages and turkeys, without a wandering wish or a roving thought to tempt me back into the artificial world again.'"

Meanwhile, the two squires, to borrow the language of knight errantry, interchanged pleasant and profitable discourse, as they followed their master side by side.

"The more I see of it, the worse I likes it," observed Dick Goslin, glancing superciliously around him— "it's all bogs and starvation!"

"Be dad, it's thrue for you," responded Tim— "bogs an' starvation, sure enough."

"Starvation and stink, sir," continued the foreigner, with increasing asperity."

"Faugh! I wonder the very pigs don't cut and run; now, jest you look round at that 'ere prospect, will you."

Tim looked round accordingly, with the goodhumoured compliance of a nurse "humouring" a spoilt child; and not knowing exactly what was expected from him in the way of remark, remained silent.

"You call that the country, I believe?" resumed the valet with bitter disdain; "the country — eh? The country is the word — you'll correct me if I'm wrong."

"The counthry we call it, be the hokey, true for you," responded Tim with a contrite air: "but how in the world id the likes iv us know the differ, Misther Goslin, sir — oh murdher, but ignorance is a poor thing."

"The country! Yes: ha, ha, the country!" continued Mr. Goslin, scornfully; "why not? But do you know what I call it, my honest feller, for if you don't I'll tell you."

"Why then, I'm ashamed to say I do *not,"* replied Tim.

"I call it," he continued with extreme severity, "alow, dirty, vulgar, 'owling desert, and that's what I call it, my fine feller, do you mind me?"

"An' that's just what it is to the life, all over," chimed in the Hibernian; "a low, dirty — phiew, it fairly goes beyant me, Mr. Goslin, there's no tellin' what it is — it bangs all the powers iv discourse, an' laves me that I'm fairly flusthrated for the want iv words."

"And then the people, the Irishers," resumed Mr. Goslin, turning up his eyes and his hands, as well as his hold of the bridle would allow him— "did any inhuman being ever look at such a nest of land savages? for I'm consumed if ever *I* did."

"Thrue for you — what else are are we but savages, every mother's skin iv us?" rejoined his companion.

"And then, in the matter of gentlemanlike amusements — why rat me, if the benighted pagans at the inn last night understood me, when I asked if they ever had a bear-fight in the town," he continued, with a sneer of the sublimest scorn; "and then their cooking — faugh! its enough to make a gentleman swear against wittles."

"Whisht!" said Tim Dwyer, prolonging the ejaculation, while he nudged his companion once or twice, and stole a furtive glance all round.

"Why, what's the matter now?" inquired the valet, rather uneasily, and following the cautious glance of his comrade. "Nothing wrong —

"Whisht — nothin' at all, but myself that was going to tell you something," replied Tim Dwyer, speaking still in a whisper, and looking cautiously from side to side, "only I was afeared some iv the boys might hear me, do you mind, an' if they did, it might lead to MURDHER."

He stooped as he uttered the last emphatic word in a grim whisper in the ear of his companion, and followed it by a portentous wink.

With a good deal of excitement, Mr. Goslin exclaimed, "I say, Tim Dwyer, my good fellow, what the devil are you at — speak out, man — can't you?"

"You were mentionin' their cookery," observed Tim.

"Ay — what then?" replied the other.

"What then? Why, ain't you a Protestant?" said Tim; "don't you see it now?"

"Well, split my windpipe, if I do," replied Mr. Goslin.

"Well, then, here it is," rejoined Mr. Dwyer, in a hard mysterious whisper, "they have a way iv cooking, an' a soort of vittles, do ye mind, whenever they get the ways and the mains iv comin' at it, that id frighten you to hear iv, let alone to see it. Oh murdher! but we're the divil's savages, and flogs the blackimoors — divil a doubt iv it!"

"Come, come, my good man, speak out, can't you?" urged Dick Goslin, pettishly.

"Spake out! Bedad I won't, for how 'id I know who'd be listenin'?" retorted Tim. "But the long an' the short iv it's just this, we're rale tearin', devourin' savages — *devourin',* do ye mind, bastes iv *prey,* Misther Goslin; savages by nature, and papists by religion, an' as hungry as vultures, do ye mind."

"Why, you don't mean for to say as how you'd eat inhuman flesh?" ejaculated the Englishman, with a slight change of colour, and eyeing his companion with horrible curiosity.

"Not in *Dublin,* iv coorse," replied Tim Dwyer.

"Nor anywhere else neither, *I* should say — eh?" continued the valet, with increasing consternation.

"Whis — sht!" ejaculated Tim, putting his finger to his nose mysteriously; "the Munsthermen has their oddities, an' no wondher; it's a mighty poor place entirely, an' provisions is murdherin' scairce; it's hard to deny the craythurs when they're cryin' for a bit; an' necessity's the mother iv invention."

“Why strike me flat, do you mean for to go for to say?” — exclaimed the Londoner, much excited.

“I main for to say this much,” interrupted Tim Dwyer, “that if I was so befrinded by heaven as to be an Englishman, do you mind me? an’ so illuminated as to be a Protestant, do you see? an’ if I found myself in a strange part iv Munster, do you consave, where I wouldn’t be missed if any thing was to happen me, why I’d take special good care to keep myself ankimminly quiet, an’ not to be lookin’ in before male times especially, into the cabins iv the poor starvin’ craythurs, that’s fond, to a failin’, iv fresh mate and black puddins — do you undherstand me?”

The cockney turned very pale, and breathed hard, as, with lips compressed, and sidelong glance of horrible significance, he exchanged a ghastly wink with his companion.

“Don’t tell, for the life iv you, it was *I* toult you. Mind, honour bright, isn’t it?” urged Tim Dwyer, in a low and earnest whisper.

“Word and honour, hand and glove,” replied the valet, with chivalric emphasis, and then sank into profound and moody silence, which he doggedly maintained until the three horsemen rode leisurely under the echoing archway of Glindarragh Castle.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PROPHETIC SONG — AND HOW THE KILLIOCH READ THE OMEN OF TORLOGH O'BRIEN.

THE castle of Glindarragh occupied the bank of a broad and devious mountain river, and presented a striking and somewhat sombre *coup d'œil.* The buildings of which it was composed formed a quadrangle of considerable dimensions, and though varying in height, were all alike structures of an ancient date, and of exceeding solidity and strength; its eastern side overhung the stream, from whose waters its walls arose in gray and sombre masses; and in that which looked toward the north, under a lofty arch, lay the chief entrance to the castle; in the olden time guarded by a portcullis and drawbridge, but now protected solely by an old and ponderous gate of oak, studded with huge iron nails, with heads as large as penny pieces — the fosse was dry, and choked with bushes, and at the entrance had been raised to the level of the road by which the building was approached, so that as a fortress, or post of military defence, the structure had manifestly been long disused; from the western side, sloped gently downward, as if in further evidence of the peaceful character and pursuits of its present owners, a closely hedged flower garden, varied with long grass terraces, and many trim living walls and arbours of close dark yew, exhibiting the exactest care in its culture, and in the richness and complication of its quaintly cut knots and beds, resembling the pattern of a fantastic carpet. To this rich and formal flower-garden, a smaller gate or sally port in the castle wall gave admission; the remaining side, which faced toward the south, contained those buildings which supplied, though upon an unwieldy scale, and in a sufficiently quaint and clumsy fashion, the purposes of a modern dwelling-house. At the moment when the three mounted travellers entered the great gate, which stood hospitably open to receive them, and gazed curiously round upon the antique buildings in whose shadows they stood, two very different figures were seated within the wall of the old castle.

The chamber which they occupied was a low room of moderate dimensions; the floor was covered with matting, and the ceiling was of clumsily joined, time-blackened oak; gilded leather hung the walls, and a lofty mantelpiece, supported by two spiral stone pillars, masked with its projection the broad arch of the hearth, in which a pile of turf and wood was burning. An old picture of a gentleman in the costume of Charles the First, much in need of cleaning, and which had suffered, whether accidentally or of malice prepense, a very ugly scar across the lower part of the visage, hung at the far end of the room in a dingy frame, and very imperfectly lighted.

The furniture of the chamber presented nothing remarkable, except that it was a little behind the fashion of the day, and of an unpretending and somewhat threadbare aspect, but still comfortable, and with a sort of snug air of old housekeeping about it, which more than made amends for its want of elegance. A narrow bed occupied a recess in the wall, and a single window, commanding a view of the winding river, and a vast and ancient orchard, and beyond them, of a broad plain, bounded by undulating hills, with the mighty Galties in the dim distance, admitted the light.

In a massive arm chair, singularly disproportioned to the dimensions of its occupant, was seated a little old woman, dressed in a sort of loose red wrapper, with short sleeves, showing her shrivelled yellow arms above the elbows, and with a coloured handkerchief brought over her head and knotted under her chin; a comical mixture of goodnature, gratification, and self-importance, was impressed upon her withered features, round which, escaping from beneath the folds of the kerchief which bound her head, there wantoned a few locks of grizzled red hair.

Seated near her feet, upon a low stool, with the guitar on which she had, but the moment before, been accompanying her sweet and silvery voice, lying tirelessly in her lap beneath her snow white arm, her other hand being Laid upon the old woman’s knee, while with a beautiful smile, half of fun and half of fondness, she looked up into her nurse’s face, was the fairest girl that ever yet combined the matchless graces of perfect form and feature, with the lovelier charms of expression ever varying, ever beautiful — the subtle, heart-stirring magic of true loveliness — the witchery, that sweetly, sadly, passionately beguiles the senses, and steals away the heart of the rapt gazer even while he looks.

“God bless you, mavourneen,” said the old woman, “God keep you, my darlin’, with your purty face and your purty songs; but of all the tunes you have, the one you sung the last, though its the best may-be, I like it the least.”

“And why, nurse,” asked the girl, with a smile. “Is it because the tune is a mournful one?”

“It is not that alone, alanna,” replied the old woman, with a shake of the head, “though it’s lonesome enough, God knows, it laves me.”

“What is it, then?” insisted the young lady, merrily. “Why does old nurse scorn my poor music? I know no sweeter tune than that; it needs must be you think I spoil it in the singing.”

“Spoil it! my darlin’ — spoil it! acushla,” ejaculated the old nurse. “No, no, it’s only too sweet an’ beautiful you sing it, my darlin’; if you knew but the mainin’ iv the tune — an’ its little I ever thought I’d hear one iv your name singing it, my purty child — aiah! but its a quare way things comes round, and it’s many’s the day since that song was heard inside these ould walls before; not since bloody Cromwell’s wars: I was but a slip of a colleen then myself — aiah wislia! but time runs on, flowin’ for ever, as constant as the river there, and no one noticin’ it all along; an’ it’s many’s the acorn is grown into an oak, and many’s the sthrong man is undher the grass, and many’s the purty girl is turned into a wrinkled ould *killioch* like myself, since thim days, avourneen!”

“Well, nurse, but the tune,” urged the young lady; “what harm is in the tune?”

“Harm, darlin’ — why, then, it’s little harm, or maybe less good there’s in it,” continued the old woman, oracularly; “but who in the wide world larned it to you, my own purty colleen?”

“*That*, nurse, is more than I myself can tell,” rejoined the girl, whose curiosity was a little piqued at the air of mingled mystery and anxiety with which the old crone dwelt upon the song; “I heard a girl sing it, as she went through the woods on the other side of the river, and so sweetly, that I listened until her wild notes were quite lost in the distance; and thus it was I learned the song, first one cadence, then another, and so on until the whole was learned; and for the words I sing with it, they, are Master Shakspeare’s. The girl from whom I caught the air was singing in Irish.”

"I'd give a gold piece I had my thumb on her windpipe," replied the old beldame, fiercely, with a sudden and savage ferocity almost appalling. "I'd have tightened her whistle for her, the robber; for it's an ould sayin' I often heard, 'a crowing hen was never lucky.'"

"Tell me, nurse — do, dear nurse, tell me, what is there in the song to move you thus?" asked the lady, at the same time drawing her stool closer to the old woman's feet, and coaxingly looking up into her face.

"It's a song, darlin'," answered the nurse, "that was made in the ould times, by the O'Briens, before they lost this castle an' all the lands, the last time in Cromwill's wars, as I often tould you; it was mednear a hundred years ago, when the Willoughbys first got the court — the time the monks was turned out of Glindarragh abbey, as I often heard my grandmother tellin' — God rest her — an' it's all full iv promises how the O'Briens is to come back, and to hold the castle and the lands again, in spite of the world; and it's well I can think iv the time before your grandfather's father — the saints receive him — it's well I remember him, though I was no more nor a slip iv a girl, an he an ould man — was killed in the troubles on the bridge there below, ripped up and hacked to pieces with their skeins, like an ould horse they'd be tearing up in pieces for the dogs, and tumbled over the battlements, that you would not know him from a big sack of blood, if it wasn't for the nice long gray hair he wore — God rest him — into the river, that was rollin' and foamin' bank high, and roarin' like a mill sluice under every arch, that blessed day. It's well I can remember how we used to hear them in the long nights before that, singin' the same song in the wood opposite the castle; and, thrue enough, the O'Briens *did* get in, an' had it to themselves, as I tould you, for eight long years, until Cromwill's war come, and your grandfather — God rest him — got it back; an' Cromwell druv them all out of the counthry, an' left them not a sod, nor a stick, nor a stone belonging to them; an' they were great men of courage in Spain — generals and the likes, as was reported here — an' was always promisin' how they'd come home some day, and win back the ould castle, and the twelve townlands, and the three estates, and the wood of Glindarragh, an' all the rest; an' latterly there was talks of Torlogh Dhuv — a young boy of the O'Briens — as it was reported here, the greatest and the wickedest of them all, a terrible man of war and blood; and it's said, moreover — the Lord guard and save us all — that he swore himself, on the altar, before the blessed and holy Pope, as I'm tould, in furrin parts, never to rest antil he had revenge on them that took the lands and the blood of his family."

"That is Torlogh Dhuv, whose name used to frighten me when I was a child!" said the young girl. "Do you remember, nurse, how you used to say? 'Dont go there, or Torlogh Dhuv will have you,' and so on. But, in truth, I do believe from all I have learned, that he is a bad and violent man — nay, if report speak truth, a very monster of cruelty. My father heard but a week since that he is coming over to this country, and moreover, to have a command in the king's army."

"May God forbid, my darling child! God in his mercy, an all the saints, forbid!" cried the old woman, while her withered cheeks turned pale with horror, and in the energy of her terror she started up from her seat, and stood shaking and wan as the guilty resurrection of the old woman of Berkeley.

"'Why, nurse! dear nurse — why are you thus appalled?" said the young lady, herself well nigh affrighted at the undisguised terror of the old woman.

"my child, I'm afeard the lands and castle are lost — lost to you and yours for ever, darling — an' what worse, I know not, mavourneen. The old prophecy is comin' out — he has the mark on his forehead, they all say that, and now he's coming to this counthry. Oh, wirristhru! wirristhru!"

"Dear nurse," said the young lady, half afraid that agitation had unsettled the old woman's wits, "what does all this mean?"

"Mean, darling, mean!" echoed the agitated woman; "it's too soon, I'm afeard, you'll know the meaning of it all, acushla. Hasn't he the mark; an' isn't he comin' to the counthry — may be in it this blessed minute — the Lord be marciful to us all; and then it's a little thing id bring him to Glindarragh-bridge. Oh, voh, voh! but it's myself that has the sore heart this day!"

"Dear nurse, tell me what so much afflicts you in all this," said the beautiful girl earnestly.

"Listen to me, mavourneen — listen, to me, asthora," replied the nurse, while she shook her head, and raised her trembling hand; "it's an ould prophecy that was made long ago, an' they all knew when Cormack got the castle, in the throubles, that he'd lose it again, for he had not the marks in the prophecy. It was made in Irish, when first they lost the lands, in the ould queen's time, a hundred years ago, an' this is the way it runs."

The crone paused as she conned over the fatal words; her white lips moving, and her shrivelled hand and arm uplifted, while she cowered over the lovely girl in the earnest effort to recall the syllables of the mystic rhyme, looking the very impersonation of one of those benevolent but hideous fairies, who, in nursery tales, delight to attend at royal christenings, and mutter over the highborn heroine of the story those spells of auspicious potency which guard and save her through all the enchanted dangers through which she is to pass.

At last the old woman, having satisfied herself of the accuracy of her recollection, repeated in a low and sullen tone some rude verses in Irish.

"And what is the meaning of the Irish, dear nurse?" inquired the lady; "for as yet I am no wiser than at first."

I'll tell you that, my child," replied the old domestic. "I'll tell you that; I'll give you, word for word, the English of it all. This is the way it goes, then —

When the real O'Brien shall stand again On the bridge of Glindarragh, With a shamrogue in the bone of his forehead, And a jewel round his arm.

His horse shall keep holyday, stabled Under the long hall as of old, And his own shall never lose O'Brien any more.'

There it is, my child, there it is; acushla — an' sure it's thrublin' me, darlin', this minute while I'm sittin' here."

"It is a strange prophecy, nurse," said the fair girl, musingly. "And a strange mark it describes — a shamrogue in the bone of his forehead! Is it not so it runs?"

"So it is, darling, and the mark is *there,* in the bone of his forehead, sure enough," replied the old woman, mournfully. "A wound with a bullet that bruk the skull, left the print of the shamrogue in his forehead for ever — the three leaves, I'm toult, as plain as you'd pick it in the field; and now he's comin' to the counthry, and what's to keep him from the castle bridge. Oh! my darlin' acushla ma chree, it's comin' it is, asthora, an' nothin' can keep it back."

At this moment a knocking was heard at the chamber door, and two handmaidens, breathless with haste and eagerness, burst into the room, both talking together so loud and so fast, that it was some time ere the young lady had ascertained that the purpose of their visit was to announce the arrival of her kinsman, Percy Neville, with the nature of whose visit the reader is already acquainted. The duties of hospitality would brook no delay; and Sir Hugh, as ill fortune would have it, was some miles from his home. So pretty Grace had no choice, awkward as was the task, but to run down to the chamber where her expectant kinsman awaited her, and herself to bid him welcome to Glindarragh. Wondering what kind of man he should prove to be, a good deal flushed, and a good deal fluttered, sustained, however, against the tremors of agitation by a certain amount of pride and natural dignity which never forsook her, with a light step, and a frank and gracious bearing, she entered the room to bid the stranger welcome.

Strange to say, it required but a single glance at the pale and somewhat effeminate features of the young stranger, and at the indolent negligence of his attitude, to quiet in an instant every fluttered feeling, and restore the embarrassed girl very nearly, if not entirely, to her usual self-possession. With perfect *sang froid,* though with no lack of courtesy, the young man arose, and with the formal gallantry of the day, carried the lady’s hand to his lips; and then, in his own light and careless way, he ran on from one trifle to another, and with, as she thought, a very perceptible indifference about the kind of impression he was making, and a total want of that kind of interest or even curiosity about the object of his destined choice, which is supposed to animate even the coldest lover. It were hard to say which of the two was most disappointed; for, though the young lady was eminently beautiful — there could be no question of that — yet her beauty was not of that saddened and gentler kind; there was not the homeliness, and humility, and piquante *mauvaise honte* — in short, there was not presented to him that entire contract to the style of female beauty, and mien, and dress, to which he had been in England accustomed; nor, if the truth must out, that decided inferiority to himself, in ease of deportment and self-possession, which a strange combination of caprice and vanity had led him to wish for, and wishing for, more than half to expect. In a word, never did two persons, brought together under such circumstances, stand before one another more completely disenchanted, than did Grace Willoughby and Percy Neville, as they thus encountered, in the dark and formal old parlour, hung round with grim and faded portraits, which seemed to look down with a kind of starch and severe approval upon this singularly platonic interview.

So strongly did the absurdity of their mutual position strike the young lady, that, after several ineffectual efforts, she at last gave way to a burst of merriment, so hearty and prolonged, that Percy Neville felt himself irresistibly drawn into it; and the youthful pair laughed peal after peal of as merry and honest laughter as ever the old rafters rang with.

“Well, cousin Percy,” said the girl at last, while the merry tears still glittered in her lashes, “we shall at least prove good friends and cheerful companions while you stay; and if our parting, which I do really hope may be a long way off, be but half so goodhumoured as our meeting, why we shall separate without one particle of malice or ill-nature, and I believe without the heartache either.”

There was something so frank and hearty in the way in which the girl stretched out her little hand as she ended the sentence, that Percy felt, as, with a half comic half cordial salutation, he took her proffered hand, that it was then and there mutually covenanted and agreed between them that marriage and lovemaking were quite out of the question. We shall leave Percy Neville for the present, and follow Grace Willoughby, who, much relieved by finding that the visit of her kinsman would, after all, prove by no means the formidable and momentous matter she had so much feared, put on her hood, and ran lightly to her flower-garden to visit, ere the ruddy sunlight had quite disappeared, the early flowers that, with girlish delight, she greeted every time she looked on them,’ as the sweet harbingers of summer. While thus employed, the notes of the prophetic song, which had so strangely fascinated her imagination, again reached the lady’s ear; and little dreaming of danger or adventure, she vowed within herself that she would, with her own eyes, behold the minstrel who thus daringly chanted under the very walls of her father’s castle the downfall of his family and the ruin of his fortunes.

CHAPTER V.

NARRATING ALL THAT BEFEL GRACE WILLOUGHBY IN THE WOOD OF GLINDARRAGH.

THE young lady traversed the castleyard without observation, and with a light step, and a heart charged with no graver feeling than girlish curiosity and love of frolic, she passed under the castle gate, and down the narrow road leading from the castle to the old bridge, which, with five high and narrow arches, crossed the river within some hundred yards of the gate of the old building. The sun had still some twenty minutes of his course to run, and was beginning to sink among the piles of crimson clouds, which, like a gorgeous couch, seemed softly wooing the god of day to his repose. The young lady, in her rich red mantle, paused for a moment, and leaning over the grey battlement, looked up the chafing wayward stream. On one side rose the hoary walls and massive towers of the castle, with its narrow windows glittering in the red sunbeams, and its ivy nodding and waving in the light breeze of evening. On the other hung the wild wood of oak and thorn, whose branches, gnarled as the twisted horns of the wild deer which had once strayed proudly among their glades, overhung the wimpling flood, and caught the gilding and mellow light of the departing day. Between these objects, thus closing in the view, the dim hills and the far-off peaks of the mighty Galties faintly caught the level light in the filmy distance; and all seemed wrought with such a wondrous harmony of colouring, and such a melting softness of outline and shadowing, that, with the fresh sounds of the sighing breeze and rippling water, and the distant baying of village dogs, the lowing of the far-off kine, and the softened beating of the mill-wheels, mingling in the varied hum, and gently filling her ear with murmur not unmusical, she felt her heart moved within her with the tenderest joy, and sadness, and rapture, blended in strange absorbing ecstacy; so that, as she looked at the loved scene of all her brief existence — the old towers among which she was born; the river, whose hoarse voice, and changeful moods, and fitful eddies, and dark nooks, had been her familiar and, as it seemed, her kindly companions, from the time that memory had traced its earliest childish records; and the dear old wood where, with her fond nurse, she had wandered in the long autumn days, and gathered her infant treasures of bramble-berries and *frahauns*. As she looked at all these familiar, friendly scenes of her untroubled and gentle life — the home of all her store of happiness, remembered or to come — tears, pure tears of tenderest joy rose in her dark eyes, quivered like glittering diamonds on her long lashes, and one by one fell on the bosom of her own loved stream, and mingling in the rejoicing current, seemed to blend her fond remembrances and gentle affections still more dearly than ever with its chiming waters. Alas! in all the fond security of a home, never yet clouded by one fleeting trouble — in all the trusting repose of a pure young heart, that never yet was grieved by disappointment, or wrung with the pangs of fear and sorrow — guileless as an angel stooping from Paradise over this vexed world, the fair girl looks upon the chafing river, and never dreams that such a thing as danger haunts the dear scenes of her childish sports.

This reverie or rapture is broken; she has on a sudden heard the song again; and with a half laugh, and a sudden start, resolved no more to forget the purpose of her ramble, she lightly descends the steep side of the bridge, and wanders by the river's bank through the hoary trees, among whose trunks and boughs the level light is streaming; and now she approaches the very spot where the songstress pours her melody; but, ere she reaches it, the object of her search is, as ill-fortune wills it, in motion — is gone — a screen of brushwood hides her effectually; and still the lady follows.

The sun had almost touched the verge of the distant hills, and the loneliness of the place — together, mayhap, with the ominous associations connected with the wild, sweet minstrelsy which lured her on — had already inspired, to allay the curiosity which had led her thus far, some little admixture of doubt and fear. She looked back; there was light, she thought, sufficient to see her home again, ere the sun had sunk, and to allow her time to pursue the invisible minstrel as far as the nearest screen of brambles, from under which it seemed the sounds were rising. She now approached it closely; the sounds were almost at her ear; and peeping through the bushes, she discerned a portion of the figure from which they proceeded, huddled up in a sort of bower, or rather lair. All she could distinctly see was the hand of the singer, which held a twig, with which the emphasis of the fierce and plaintive song was marked. On a sudden, as she watched this form, a sharp whistle reached her ear from some distance behind her. The figure started up, fully confronting her, and not a female, as she had expected to behold, but a wild, haggard, shockheaded boy stood gazing with a grin of something between wonder and ferocity full in her face. He was a mass of rags and filth, with the exception of a torn embroidered waistcoat, which might have fitted a full-grown man, and which descended, in very incongruous finery, to his very ankles, supplying his only substitute for the combined appliances of coat and vest. There was something savage and repulsive beyond expression in the face and bearing of this brawny urchin — an impression which the young lady felt considerably enhanced by observing the long straight blade of a skean shining under the folds of his vest. The beautiful girl, her lips parted with affright, her light form thrown back, and her head raised, stood like a startled deer, irresolute, and gazed at the squalid ruffian figure before her with a fascination which seemed reciprocal, for he also stood motionless, and stared in return upon her with a look of mingled curiosity and menace.

As they stood thus, the whistle was repeated; and the boy, without more delay, dived into the thickest of the underwood, and was lost to her sight. The apparition had appeared and vanished again with such astounding suddenness and rapidity, that, were it not that the sprays of the branches were still quivering where he had plunged through the thicket, she might have doubted whether the spectacle had not been indeed but the ideal creation of her own fancy.

Too late repenting the rashness which had led her to so sequestered a spot at such an hour, and unattended, at a season when, though danger had never approached herself, she well knew it to be abroad and busy, she began, flushed and agitated, to retrace her steps through the wood toward the old bridge, which once regained, she would feel herself again secure. But that bridge was not to be regained, poor girl, without the deadliest peril that ever yet were innocence and weakness exposed to. The danger moves between you and your home. Alas! urge your speed, fair girl, as you may, you do but approach it the faster; the danger is before you — moves towards you — see, it comes — it is here.

As she pursued her homeward path with rapid tread and beating heart, she came on a sudden — passing the corner of a dense mass of furze and brambles, full in front of a figure, in dimensions much more formidable than that she had last encountered, and in aspect scarcely less repulsive — a huge, square-shouldered fellow, arrayed in a blue laced coat, three-cocked hat and plume, and jack boots, affecting a sort of demi-military attire, with a sabre by his side, and a pair of pistols stuck in his belt, occupied the pathway directly before her.

At her sudden appearance he had instinctively laid his coarse red hand upon the butt of one of his pistols; but one second sufficed to withdraw it again, and with a "ho-ho-hum!" he set his feet apart and his arms akimbo, as if prepared to dispute her passage, and eyed her with a look half jocular, half brutal. If the manner and bearing of his personage were calculated to alarm the young lady, there was certainly in his visage very little to reassure her. His face was large and broad, and suitably planted upon a powerful bull neck; a pair of glittering piggish eyes were set far apart in his head; his nose was drooping and somewhat awry; and a quantity of coarse reddish hair occupied his upper lip and chin, between which were glittering the double row of his tobacco-stained teeth, as he grinned facetiously in the face of the affrighted lady.

"And where are you going, my colleen dhas, in such a murdherin' hurry?" inquired he in a strong brogue, while at the same time he extended his arms to prevent the possibility of her passing him; "where is it you're going, my *colleen beg,* in all this foosther, an' at this time o' day?" and then breaking into song, and approaching her still more nearly, he continued —

"Oh! Colleen, it's not goin' to leave me,
An' breakin' your promise you'd be,
An' forgettin' the kisses you gave me
In undher the crooked oak tree?"

The young lady's colour came and went with mingled alarm and indignation, and her heart beat so fast that she felt almost choaking, as this coarse and ruffianly figure drew nearer and nearer to her: with a violent effort, however, she mastered her agitation sufficiently to reply in a firm tone.

"I am going home, sir, to the castle — I am Sir Hugh Willoughby's daughter. Pray, sir, allow me to pass on."

The fellow uttered a prolonged whistle of surprise, and then repeated with a grin —

"Sir Hugh Willoughby's daughter? — oh, ho! so much the better, my colleen oge. Come, lift up the hood, an' give us a peep, for they say you've a purty face of your own, acushla."

"Sir, I pray you, suffer me to go on my way," urged she, now thoroughly alarmed at the insolent familiarity of the fellow. "Sir, it is growing late, and the twilight is falling; do, sir, I entreat, allow me to go homeward,"

"Late — to be sure it is, darlin'," responded he, with a chuckle; "too late to let you pass without paying your way, my girl. There you stand — the purtiest girl in the seven parishes, as I'm tould; an' here stand I a dashin' officer of the king's militia, an' as fine a fellow, my darlin', as ever a purty wench need desire to look at. Here we are, all alone, my beauty; an', sure enough, the twilight fast falling, an' the bushes all round."

"Sir, let me go — I must go home," said she, trembling violently, for she perceived that his jocular manner had given place to one of savage and sullen, determination, which rendered the familiarity and the endearment of his language but the more menacing and repulsive. "Sir, you will let me go — I know you will, you are an officer and a gentleman!"

"Too old an officer not to know when I'm well served," replied he, advancing; "and too much of a gentleman not to thank fortune for her favours. Come, come, sweetheart, no nonsense."

"Let me pass — let me pass," said she, almost breathless with terror; "let me go, for these are my father's woods, sir. How dare you bar my passage?"

"Come, come, come, none of your nonsense — this sort of balderdash will never go down with me," replied he, sternly, *"Monnum an dhioul,* what's your ould father to me; I wish I had him for five minutes here, foot to foot, and hand to hand, the bloody ould heretic dog, and you'd see what crows' meat I'd make of him. Look in my face, darlin', an' *thonnum an dhioul,* you'll see I'm in earnest; an' I tell what it is, mavourneen, it's often I shot a better woman than yourself."

Heedless of every menace, while in an instant a thousand, thousand thoughts and remembrances, and a thousand agonized appeals whirled in frightful chaos through her mind, the young girl, in wildest terror uttered shriek after shriek, while at the instant her wrist was grasped in the massive gripe of her assailant.

Oh! for some pitying angel to rescue kindred innocence and beauty. Oh! for some stalworth champion, with righteous heart and iron arm, to hew and crush the cowardly monster into dust. Oh! good Sir Hugh, come, come — in heaven's name, spur on thy good steed rowel-deep, spur on — spur, till thy way is tracked with blood and foam — ride for your life — for your life, Sir Hugh — thy daughter — the praised of every tongue, the pure and bright and beautiful, the idol of thy pride and love and life — thy child, for whose sake thou dost hold thy life-blood cheap — thy child, thy child, is struggling in a ruffian's grasp. Oh! for a messenger of mercy to peal this summons in his ears, and ring the alarm through all the chambers of his heart. Oh! beautiful Grace Willoughby, art thou then, indeed, defenceless? Not so; for at the very moment when the hand of the brawny villain had grasped the tiny wrist of the beautiful lady, a deliverer appeared.

Through the wood of Glindarragh there wound an old bridle-track — it scarcely deserved to be called a road — which, entering the wooded grounds about a mile away, followed its wild and sequestered course among the thick trees and brushwood, until it debouched upon the more frequented road, just by the Castle-bridge. From this lonely road, which passed scarcely two hundred yards behind the spot where Grace Willoughby held parley with her insolent and ruffianly assailant, an unexpected deliverer appeared.

"Holla, fellow! forbear thy rudeness, or, by the mass, I'll teach you a different behaviour! Do you hear, scoundrel?" cried a deep, stem voice, in a tone, less of anger, than of haughty and contemptuous command.

There was something in the suddenness, as well as in the tone of this interruption, which instantaneously diverted the attention of the ruffian from his intended victim, who, half dead with fear and agitation, staggered backwards, and supported herself, almost breathless, against a tree. At the same moment that he relaxed his grasp, he had turned in the direction of the speaker, and beheld, some thirty yards away, at the far end of the little glade in which he stood, mounted upon a powerful black charger, blazing in the splendour of a gorgeous military uniform, the figure of a tall man, of dark complexion and singularly handsome features, the character of which was at once melancholy and stern. His own black hair, instead of the monstrous peruke then fashionable, escaped from beneath his broadleafed, white-plumed hat, and fell in clusters upon his shoulders; his burnished cuirass reflected the last red rays of the half-hidden sun, and the scarlet skirts, which, falling from beneath it, reached to the tops of his huge jack-boots, glowed and glittered with gold lace; his buff leather gauntlets reached half way to his elbows, and his good sword danced and clanged by his side.

Before time for further parley had elapsed, this cavalier was within ten steps of the burly militia-man; and in an instant springing from his military saddle, confronted him upon the sward.

“Stand there, good Roland,” said he, throwing the bridle on the horse’s neck, and instantly strode up to the ill-favoured fellow in the blue suit, who, nothing dismayed, awaited his approach with no other indication of emotion than a glance to the right and left, as if to see that, in case of a scuffle, his movements might be unembarrassed by branch or bramble; and, this precaution taken, he drew his beaver with an air of grim determination firmly down upon his brows, and resting his right hand upon the butt of one of the pistols which stuck in his belt, he set his left arm akimbo, and squaring himself while he planted his feet asunder firmly in the soil, he eyed the young soldier with a look of ferocious menace and defiance.

“Who and what are you, sirrah, who shame not to offer rudeness to an unprotected girl?” demanded the stalworth cavalier, in the same deep tones of contemptuous command. “Forbear, scoundrel, and begone! or by Saint Jago! your punishment shall be sharp and lasting!”

“Pish! man; do you think to bully me?” rejoined the ruffian, with a darker scowl. “I don’t want to be at mischief; but if you put me to it, I’ll blow a brace of holes through your purty face, *‘ma bouchal*,’ and give you to the otters.”

The dark eyes of the soldier flashed actual fire, as with the speed of light, his sabre gleaming in his hand, he sprang upon his brawny adversary.

“You *will* have it, then!” roared his opponent, while at the same instant he levelled one of his long horse-pistols in the face of the advancing dragoon; but as instantaneously a whirring sweep of his adversary’s sabre, missing his fingers by scarcely a hair’s-breadth, struck the weapon so tremendous a blow, that it leaped from his hand, and, spinning through the air as if hurled by the arm of a giant, it plunged far away into the stream, flinging the foam from about it a yard high into the air, and before the weapon had yet touched the water, the swordsman, dashing his sabre-hilt into his antagonist’s face, struck him so astounding a blow, that he rolled over and over headlong upon the sward; and in the next instant, ere he had recovered his senses, the triumphant soldier had planted his knee upon his breast, and secured the remaining pistol of his fallen opponent. All this happened with the rapidity of lightning.

"And now, what have you to plead why I should not rid the earth of you this moment? Speak, miscreant! — what mercy have you a right to look for?"

The swarthy dragoon cocked the weapon while he thus spoke, and eyed his truculent foe with a look of the deadliest significance.

The prostrate object of this menacing address, in return, stared with a vacant look, which gradually kindled into astonishment, and almost joy, in the face of the stranger; and after a brief interval of a second or two, in a tone which bespoke the extremity of wonderment and surprise, he replied by a few hurried sentences, and, as it seemed, of vehement interrogatory, in the Irish tongue.

"Hey day!" cried the officer, rising hastily, so as to relieve the defeated combatant, and drawing himself up to his full height, and folding his arms, he coolly looked down upon the swollen and bloody face of the *soi-disant* militia-man, with a smile, or a sneer — it might be either — while he calmly added —

"I little expected to have met *you* here, Mr. Hogan. Get up, and shake thyself, man; this is but child's play, compared with what we have both encountered in other countries. You were not wont to be so easily upset, though, sooth to say, you seem to have had a tolerably heavy buffet."

"I've met my master, that's all," said the fellow, as he pressed his broad hand upon the wound he had just received, and then looked gloomily upon the blood which covered his fingers; "but no matter; I take it in good humour; and, as you say, it's not the first time I've seen the colour of my own blood."

"Not the first, but marvellously nigh being the last!" rejoined the tall soldier, contemptuously. "Get up, sirrah, and begone! I spare you for the sake of former acquaintance; though, as you well know, your pranks in Flanders would have been better requited by a rope's-end, the wheel, or the gibbet, than thus. Up, sirrah, and depart!"

So saying, he discharged the pistol among the trees, and handed the smoking weapon to the wounded man, who had now arisen, crestfallen and bloody, from the ground.

"There — take it! and let me see you walk down yon pathway as far as the eye can follow," continued he, sternly; "and for old acquaintance sake, I tell you, that if I see you attempt to load again, or even so much as stop to look back upon me, I will send a leaden messenger after you, straight enough to find you even through a keyhole. What I say, I say — and so good night."

"Short courtesy — short courtesy, sir," rejoined the fellow; "but it's all one to me. It was your way when you were little more than a boy; and soft talk doesn't come with years and hard knocks. But, never mind, I owe you no grudge for this night's work, and mean you no wrong. So good night, and no harm done."

Having thus spoken, the ill-favoured personage in the blue laced coat turned upon his heel, and strode rapidly down the little path, without once turning or pausing upon his way, until he was lost among the deepening shadows and thickening brushwood in the distance.

"And what has become of the girl?" exclaimed the dragoon.

"I had well nigh forgotten her. Ha! by the mass, swooned or dead! I trust the villain has not hurt her!"

In truth the poor girl, terrified by the peril from which she had but just escaped, and scared and shocked by the scene of violence — the first she had ever witnessed — which had been enacted in her presence, but the moment after, had indeed lost all consciousness, and sunk in utter insensibility at the foot of the oak tree, against which she had leaned for support.

From the shallow river brink he took water in his hand, and throwing back the crimson hood, he dashed it in her face; and as consciousness slowly returned, he had ample leisure to admire that miracle of beauty. Pale as monumental marble were the matchless features, round whose beautiful stillness wantoned her rich golden ringlets in the fitful breeze of evening — her small and classic head rested on the high knotted roots of the old oak tree, all unconscious, and nothing dreaming of dangers, bygone or to come; and in the perfect features, and the softly oval face, moveless though they were, there reigned a look so sweet, so heavenly, and withal so noble, that she seemed an existence too guileless, pure, and lofty for this earth, a native of another sphere, a messenger of preternatural grace and goodness, arrested in her beautiful and bounteous wanderings, even in the wild wood where she lay, by some too potent magic locked in enchanted slumbers. And he, the handsome stalworth warrior, who bends over her with haughty brow and eyes of fire, might seem the predestinated champion, chosen and appointed from his birth to break the spell of the enchanter's power, and set the heavenly captive free again. He watches her with a fixed stern look, in which is seen something of wonder and admiration, as well there may; for in all his wanderings in foreign lands and splendid courts, it never yet has been his fortune to behold a face that could compare with that on which he gazes now. Yes! the spell is broken — the glow of life returns, in the faintest, finest tint; like the first blush of the coming morning, it steals over her deathlike cheek, and gently flows into her parted lips in ruddier streams; and now the long dark lashes tremble, and now she sighs from the very depths of her innocent true heart; and now her eyes are opened — beautiful eyes! dark, lustrous, soft — she looks around in wild alarm; and now she remembers all — she essays to rise — she draws her mantle closely round her, and glances round in fearful haste, but the dreaded form is no longer there, her defender stands beside her, and she knows that she is safe.

"The darkness of night is fast descending — you may have far to go," said he gravely and respectfully, after a pause of a few minutes had allowed her time fully to recover her scattered recollections. "Pardon me, when I say it were meet for you to pursue your way as speedily as may be; you shall have my protection until you have passed this dangerous cover. You are still faint — prithee lean upon my arm. So your path lies this way— 'tis well, then, our way lies together."

Thus speaking, he led the beautiful and trembling girl through the pathway she had that evening so joyously traced; and side by side in silence they reached the road, and stood upon the antique bridge — his good steed following in his master's steps with the submissive docility and affection of a well-trained dog, now snuffing the crisp grass by the path-side, and now with cocked ears and glowing eyes lifting his head to catch some distant sound.

Never, since the five tall arches of Glindarragh bridge first rose from the dark flashing waters of the chafing stream, did its gray battlements enclose two nobler and more handsome forms. Never yet did glittering court or gay saloon behold a pair so meetly matched for grace and stately beauty, as did that wildly-wooded steep old bridge in Munster: and never yet was beauty of two different orders more gracefully contrasted, than in the youthful soldier and the fair girl, on whom, as side by side they traversed the broken road, the last flush of the glorious sunset fell in soft splendour. He so tall, so dark, so stern — his glossy black hair flowing to his shoulders — his face colourless, except for the clear olive tint, which might have almost become a Moorish prince, so clear and dark was its hue — his eyes so full of speaking fire — his mouth so finely chisseled and so stem, darkly surmounted with that grim moustache — can human face wear a haughtier, sterner beauty than reigns in his? While she, poor fluttered Grace — her noble brow shaded by the rich curls of her hair — her face so soft, so exquisitely turned — as full of varying dimples as the wimpling sunny tide that flows so gently by them — flushed with the mantling glow of agitation — hangs on his arm, tremblingly, modestly, yet with the ineffable loftiness of true nobility, and all the pride of artless purity. Thus they move side by side, the very types of sternness and of softness, of protection and dependence, of strength and weakness: nay, the contrast was not less striking even in their dress — he elaborately attired in all the gorgeous and splendid habilaments of martial equipment, according to the punctilious but magnificent style of those days, and she with but a simple hood and cloak of red cloth thrown hastily over her dress.

They had now reached the centre of the ancient bridge, and the soldier paused, as the dusky towers and battlements of Glindarragh Castle rose in their grim and massive proportions before him.

“Can these be — are they,” he said, after a breathless pause, “the towers of Glindarragh?”

The lady assented.

“These — *these,* then, are the towers of Glindarragh,” repeated the tall soldier, with an expression of deep and melancholy interest, as he gazed fixedly upon the ancient fabric. “Glindarragh Castle, the ancient home and rightful property of the banished O’Briens.”

He paused for a few moments in silent contemplation of the building, and then, with a sigh, he suddenly turned to resume his way.

“Where does your home lie?” he inquired, in a saddened tone. “I would fain see you in safety beneath its shelter; the times are perilous, and the night draws on.”

“Glindarragh castle is my home, sir,” said the girl, with simple dignity.

“And *you?”* said he quickly.

“I am Sir Hugh Willoughby’s only daughter,” she rejoined proudly, while she raised her head, and the hood falling backward left her golden ringlets to the rising night-wind.

The dark cavalier instinctively withdrew his arm and recoiled a pace or two, while a swarthier glow for a moment crossed his haughty countenance; and as the fair girl marked his ungracious action, and looked in his stern and now almost forbidding countenance, she felt, she knew not why, a pang of wounded pride, a feeling something akin to humiliation, disappointment, and even to sorrow. Turning haughtily from her, he drew near the battlement of the bridge, and raising his powerful voice, he halloed for some one to approach. The summons being answered, and the sound of the advancing steps being audible in the distance, he turned again toward the half-offended girl, and said, with the extremest coldness, and even severity —

“I have now done a soldier’s duty — you are safe, and here I leave you in the care of your own people. Spare your thanks for those who can accept them, as for me I will not. What I have done, I would do again for you or for another as freely as just now. I ask for it no acknowledgment but this, that you tell Sir Hugh Willoughby, from me, that I neither intended a favour nor accepted thanks — that a long account of a very different kind remains between us still unclosed, and that in these unsettled times, when truth and treason are brought sternly to the test, he may perchance hear again of Torlogh Dhuv O’Brien.”

As he thus spoke, the light breeze blew the curls from his forehead, and the grim omen, the triple scar, deeply sunk in his bold and lofty brow, for the first time met her eyes. With a slight and haughty salutation he raised his plumed hat, and as the messenger from the castle reached the spot, he sprang into his war-saddle, struck the spurs into his horse’s flanks, and in a moment the hereditary enemy of her father’s house was out of sight,

CHAPTER VI.

THE FEUD OF THE COUSINS, SHOWING THAT GRAY LOCKS DO NOT ALWAYS MAKE COOL HEADS — AND THAT A BLACK HEART MAY BEAT UNDER A RED MANTLE.

WHILE Grace Willoughby was lightly crossing the old bridge of Glindarragh, upon the eventful ramble whose adventures we have just recounted, and at a distance of some half dozen miles from the scene of our last chapter, there occurred an accidental meeting between persons strikingly contrasted in many respects. Two old roads, one descending the precipitous front of a furze-clothed rocky hill, the other sweeping round its base, among stunted sloes and hawthorn trees, which skirt the banks of a wayward trout stream, converge at a point where the brawling rivulet is overspanned by a steep old bridge, whose grey battlements rustle with a luxuriant mantle of ivy, darkened under the shadow of clustering bushes. Over this stream the united roads are carried by the bridge, and thence along the lower country, under a double row of ash and elm trees. Descending the steepest of these roads, toward the bridge, rode a cavalier, followed by a mounted servant: the gentleman was advanced in years — perhaps a winter or two past sixty, as nearly as one might guess; his countenance was bold, frank, and imperious — his features somewhat high and marked — his eye keen grey, shadowed by a thick, grizzled eyebrow — his figure was portly, but firm and robust; he wore a dark-green coat, cut in the cumbrous fashion of the time, with huge cuffs rolled back to the elbow, showing abundance of shirt sleeve and ruffles, and all richly overlaid with gold lace — a pair of huge jack-boots encased his legs, the folds of a laced cravat fluttered upon his breast, and from under his broadleafed hat the curls of a handsome peruke escaped in masses upon his shoulders. He bestrode a tall, well-trained hunter of iron grey; and his saddle was covered with red plush, trimmed with gold. In a word, his equipment was that of a country gentleman of wealth and worship in his day; and his aspect and bearing those of a man accustomed to be heard with deference; and, perhaps, too little habituated to restrain the impulses of a somewhat fiery and impatient temper.

Moving toward the same point, at the same time, by the lower road, and, unlike the gentleman in the green suit, unattended by a servant, rode a lean, athletic man, with a hooked nose, dark prominent eyes of piercing black, a sallow complexion, and a certain unpleasant expresssion of mingled energy and meanness, it might be treachery, in his face, which gave it a character, at once repulsive and intimidating. He wore a mantle of dusky red, which seemed to have seen much service; and in all respects, except in the quality of his steed, had he been studying how best to mark his contempt for those proprieties of fashion, which the elder cavalier seemed so carefully to cultivate, without descending into absolute slovenliness, he could not have succeeded more admirably. This is the identical sallow, sharp-featured man, who, three years before, upon a certain moonlight night, was leaning over a map, in that rich London saloon into which we have already looked.

As the elderly gentleman cautiously walked his horse down the steep descent, he suffered his eye to wander moodily over the broad landscape: an undulating plain of many miles' extent, bounded by a range of blue hills, softened and dimmed in the haze of evening, and clothed with misty wood in many a sweeping line, and irregular mass, while the winding river, between its bosky banks, shone like burnished gold in the sunset glow, in which all the broad scenery was steeped; and while thus listlessly employed, his attention was arrested by the ringing tramp which announced the approach of the other horseman. He looked first carelessly toward the advancing figure — then again more jealously — and at length, with a darkened brow, and a scornful smile, he averted his gaze, and muttered —

"My pious, mass-going kinsman — so stead my fortune, I had as lief meet his brimstone master, the honester devil of the two; if he have any shame or grace left, he'll try to avoid me."

Had the speaker been able to dive into the bosom of that ill-favoured cavalier, he would have found within the polluted and fiery depths of that moral Gehenna, somewhat to kindle into fiercer flame, the smouldering fires of bygone feuds — and mayhap to darken his bold heart with the shadows of dismay — he would there have read the fearful records of subtle, deep-laid, deadly schemes, even now ripe for execution, and already moving toward their purpose — of which he, the unconscious, proud old man — he and his fortunes were the foredoomed sport.:

The recognition, as it seemed, was mutual; for the object of this not very complimentary soliloquy checked his steed, as if in momentary indecision; but in that brief interval, a thought which had often before occurred to him, but never until now with practical effect — a strange and sudden thought, smote with the vividness and power of lightning upon his mind. As if he had resolved that the meeting, from which the other so scornfully and bitterly recoiled, should actually occur, he spurred forward, so as to reach the bridge before the arrival of the elder horseman; who, observing this manœuvre with profound contempt, haughtily determined, upon his part, neither to seek nor to avoid the interview, which his hated kinsman seemed resolved to thrust upon him. It was thus that, as he descended the farther side of the steep bridge, at a leisurely walk, he found himself riding beside the cavalier in the red cloak.

“Sir Hugh Willoughby?” said the latter, raising his hat, with a doubtful smile, and stooping with an almost servile salutation.

“Yes, Miles Garrett,” said Sir Hugh, turning full upon him with stern abruptness; and fixing himself more firmly in his seat, while he eyed his companion with a look of fiery scorn and defiance, which seemed to threaten the possibility of a collision much sterner than one of mere words; “here I am, sir, what do you, or what can you desire with me?”

Sir Hugh had not raised his voice unduly, and his companion was too cool a diplomatist to notice his looks or his emphasis; he, therefore, continued calmly, but cautiously —

“It is a long time, Sir Hugh, since we have met— “

“Would it were longer — what then?” rejoined the knight, curtly.

“Maybe nothing — and maybe a great deal, Sir Hugh replied his kinsman, tranquilly. “Sir Hugh, will you hear me patiently? nay, pardon me when I say it, you *must* hear me. Condemn no man unheard; least of all one who, however remotely, claims kindred with yourself; one, besides, who respects you, who honours you, who wishes you well, and means fairly by you. Sir Hugh, I will be heard in my own defence; you have wronged me deeply, wronged me for years — if you but knew how much, your generous spirit would grieve for the injury, and atone for the injustice. But I seek not to inspire remorse — I ask for no concessions, though, as you will one day learn, *I,* alone, have everything, in this to me most deplorable quarrel, to forgive. But enough — let us look to the future. I am willing to serve you, willing to be your friend — your humble friend, if you will but try me; you shall not need to repent it; on the faith of a Christian man, you shall not— "

"Which faith do you swear by — your old one, or your new?" responded the old man, with a grim sneer.

"If I have changed from what I have been, Sir Hugh, and in more respects than one," rejoined he, "I may not be the worse man now— "

"Truth for once, at least," replied his companion, sullenly.

"I am altered thus far at least for the better, you will allow," replied Miles Garrett, with unruffled but earnest calmness, while he stealthily scanned, in the lines of his companion's countenance, the effect of his words; "I am, at all events, improved in this, that I can now command the self-denial to seek an interview like this — the humbleness to bear with whatever reception you may please to accord me — and the patience to submit to suspicion and affront, from *you,* without resentment. This, Sir Hugh, you will acknowledge is a change — and an alteration for the *better,* too."

"Well sir, and what then?" rejoined the knight, in a tone which, though far from courteous, was still somewhat less austere.

"Merely that I am prepared, come what, come may, to try this one cast more for peace," rejoined Miles Garrett; "that I am willing to encounter the mortification and disgrace of repulse and rejection, rather than leave one chance of reconciliation untried. Did I court your favour or friendship, Sir Hugh, when your friends were in power, your prosperity unclouded, your prospects secure? No — but now that matters are in some sort reversed — now that your star has set, and mine burns high and unclouded — now that I have, I care not to conceal it, powerful friends, and prospects which, were I an ambitious man, might well have dazzled me, in this my hour of fortune — when malice cannot conceive, nor ingenuity invent a motive for the act, but the single purpose of having all the past forgotten and forgiven — variance reconciled, and discord reduced to harmony, — I come to proffer you the free use of whatever interest I command — to tender you my services, whenever and however they may stand you in stead — and to offer you— " he was on the point of saying, 'my hand,' and of suiting the action to the word; but fearing to hazard so bold an experiment so soon, he checked himself, and concluded— “and to offer you, in a word, my poor friendship, and all that such an offer can imply.”

“Miles Garrett, you are my kinsman, as you say,” replied Sir Hugh, speaking hesitatingly, and for the first time in a tone which did not indicate actual bitterness of feeling; “there is no denying that — my cousin in the second degree; and I will go with you so far as to say, that it were better that peace were between us, if so it may be, than strife; nay more, it seems to me your offers look fair, and if you *mean* not fair as well as speak so, I profess I cannot comprehend thee; but — but” — and the old man paused.

How much amiss is silence read at times even by the craftiest men. The thickening twilight obscured the subtle lines in whose varying expression the younger man, as he from time to time eyed his companion askance, had read the feelings which worked within him; this silence, therefore, he read favourably, and forbore to interrupt it.

“The honest knight,” thought he, “is pondering deeply of my offer — even now, perchance, considering how he shall first and best employ my proffered interest; but soft, good, easy man, there’s a condition tacked to the covenant I offer; we do not, at our years, make such splendid presents as those I have named wholly without a purpose.”

But meanwhile, through the mind of the old man were flitting, recollections, obscured but for a moment — scenes charged with black suspicions, inspiring terrible revenge — doubts, whose force shook his very heart within him — and lastly rose before him the chamber, where, in the direst hour of his dark despair and agony, he and the very man who now rode by his side, grappled and tugged in mortal conflict, until both rolled weltering on the floor — the faces of the scared friends who forced asunder the murderous combatants — all the circumstances of the hideous fray rose up before him, like an exhalation from the pit, and with them swelled within him a storm of fiery passions, long dormant, not forgotten — stung as by an adder, he struck his spurs rowel deep into his horse’s flanks, and curbing him as furiously, the strong steed bolted and reared.

The scene which memory had evoked, dissolved and vanished in an instant; but the impressions it had revived remained fixed, stern, and terrible. Suffering the chafed beast to regain his composure as best he might, the old knight sate fixed and silent as a statue of bronze, while his companion, resuming his place by his side, rode silently forward for some time, awaiting the further conversation of the elder gentleman. Finding that they were traversing the time and space which measured their distinct companionship, without any attempt on the part of Sir Hugh to renew the conversation, begun, as he conceived, so auspiciously, Miles Garrett resolved himself to break the silence, and in the full conviction that the weighty considerations which he had suggested, were not lost upon the mind of his bluff companion, he thus pursued his imaginary advantage —

"How strange and wayward is the course of thought — how unlooked for the suggestions of the memory — how unbidden and mysterious the rising, as from the grave of years, of slumbering recollections, to upbraid and soften the wayward heart of man."

He spoke, as if in contemplative soliloquy — his words, however, and the sentiment which they conveyed, jarred with painful and sudden coincidence upon the old man's ear — they came like a sneering commentary of the fiend, mocking with an odious parody of truth, the remembrances which had just risen within his own mind, blasting and fiery, as if ascending from the nethermost abyss of hell. Almost with a start, he turned full upon the speaker, and held his breath, well nigh expecting to see the infernal reader of souls himself beside him; and inwardly convinced, that if he were come incarnate in the human shape, to work him mischief, he could not have chosen a more appropriate form for such a mission, than that of his long detested and all but dreaded kinsman.

"I remember once," continued Miles Garrett, "and I scarce know how the remembrance has been now recalled; it is in my memory, that you once said, before the fatal quarrel which has for so long estranged us, had begun, and while we yet lived in interchange of confidence, and the free flow of natural affection — I remember you said, you earnestly prayed heaven there might subsist between our descendants, the same close and friendly intercourse which then held us together. The recollection of this passing phrase, which may, perchance, long since have faded from your memory, has often times returned to mine, yea, even when the feud was hottest and fiercest between us, and ever with this recollection came the thought — this prayer may be even yet fulfilled." He paused for a moment, and then resumed with greater animation. "Ay, and lately with growing frequency and strength; with power, even to controul my plans and actions — to balk self-interest, and disarm what others might have thought a just revenge — I speak of my claim at law, to the wood and manor of Glindarragh — let it not move you — nay, I mean not to pursue it; despite the advice of learned counsel — it is foregone. I boast not of this remission of my claim; you may think my title bad — others thought differently; but, be it good or bad, it is all one to me, I never mean to press it; it is, indeed, to all intents and purposes a nullity, so let that pass, and come we now to other matters, nearer to my heart than ever that was."

They were now approaching that point of the road where their respective ways again diverged, and the same certainty of immediate separation, which, sustained by something of curiosity, enabled Sir Hugh Willoughby to tolerate in silence the companionship of his artful cousin, urged the latter with the greater precipitancy to open himself fully, and without reserve; he, therefore, collecting himself for what he well knew would prove the crisis of the conference, summoning at once all his caution and his firmness, for he was, by no means, deficient in personal or moral courage — thus pursued his diplomatic discourse: —

"In a word, Sir Hugh Willoughby, I am your kinsman, therefore you will admit of no unworthy blood. I am, moreover, hereditarily your friend. I am so at this moment, by earnest disposition, by the desire to serve, or rather, Sir Hugh, to *save* you, if you will but give me leave; I am, besides, what the world calls rich. I vaunt not my wealth, but even *you* will allow it considerable. I possess, besides, claims which if pushed, must necessarily become troublesome. Observe me, however, I do not mean to push them — troublesome, certainly, perhaps perilous, I am, also, your neighbour; and in addition to all this, Sir Hugh, what touches the present matter nearly, your junior, by full twelve years. Here, then, you have a man, rich, friendly, well born, not without credit in high places, and, moreover, not an old man, as you well know, offering to make, in these perilous times, a close alliance with your house — an alliance, Sir Hugh, it had best be spoken plainly, and at once, by marriage. I, Miles Garrett, offer myself as suitor for your daughter's hand."

Sir Hugh Willoughby wheeled his horse almost across the narrow road, and while his heart swelled within him, almost to bursting, and his massive frame trembled with ungovernable fury at this most unexpected masterpiece of audacity, he stared at the unabashed delinquent with a scowl of the fiercest wrath.

“My daughter! — my daughter! — to you!” at last he muttered, in accents almost choked with fury— “to you, a scoundrel whose very presence I could scarce bring myself for one forgetful moment to tolerate — whose very name I execrate: traitor to your friends, apostate from your God, consummate miscreant, monster and destroyer, dare to pollute my daughter’s name once more, and I pistol you that instant where you sit.”

CHAPTER VII.

MILES GARRETT'S MESSAGE.

MILES GARRETT, though no very impetuous man, was not proof against the torrent of insult and opprobrium, thus suddenly and unexpectedly discharged upon him. The colour fled from his cheeks, and then the tide of rage returning, darkened his face in livid streams, and with a motion as quick as light, he half drew his rapier from its sheath; with a passionate effort of self-restraint however, he dashed it back again, and waiting for an instant to recover his self-possession, rejoined with a hideous sneer: —

"Very well, sir, we'll see who is the loser, you or I — a little time will show; as for me, I take the matter coolly enough, as you see, more calmly even than you do: nor shall you move me, by all your oratory, to raise my voice above its accustomed level, or to draw my sword as others might, in a like case, do against your life. Happily, I have learned to control the foolish impulses of passion, otherwise, fore God! one or other of us should have left his life blood on these stones; we are reserved, therefore, for our respective destinies. These are changeful and perilous times, Sir Hugh; none knows to-day what tomorrow may bring; and so sir, I leave you to your reflections and to your *doom."*

Having uttered this last word with a menacing emphasis and significance, he turned his horse up the road which led toward Lisnamoe, and without looking back again, he rode away at a sharp trot through the overhanging trees, and under the radiance of the moon, which now began to shine in the cloudless sky.

The abruptness of a steep ascent, on a sudden, compelled him to slacken the pace at which he travelled, and instinctively pausing, as the far off clang of the horseshoe, whose tread was measuring Sir Hugh's retreat, rang faintly upon his ear, he looked down upon the broad plain from the summit of the hillock, and following with his eye, the winding of the river, now shimmering like silver in the moonlight, his gaze at last rested upon a dark mass of building which crested the river's bank, and the summits of whose towers and chimneys were touched in silvery relief by the sailing moon. As he looked upon this distant pile, he drew up his gaunt figure to its full height, and while a bitter smile of infernal spite and triumph lit up his sinister features, made more appalling by the stillness and solitude of the surrounding scenery, he sternly muttered through his clenched teeth, from time to time, such sentences as these: —

"Towers and battlements, high walls and strong gates, grand things all to look upon; but will they keep out wreck and ruin? — will they quash a bill of indictment? — will they free your neck from the halter, or save your lands from forfeiture? Hearth and home, reeking kitchen and glowing hall — pleasant things, Sir Hugh — right pleasant things, with honest faces and safe company — but scarce so pleasant, methinks, with such unbidden guests as may look in on you tomorrow night, to share their jollity. Mill and weirs; barns and dovecotes; turf and corn, and all the rest of your rich substance, well builded, and long in gathering too, may yet be quickly spent and spoilt, Sir Hugh, as you shall find — you shall; and so you'll learn at last — too late, old dotard — the full and dire effect of your infatuated rashness; frantic possession were its better name. The fool who dashes from his lips the one specific which has power to drive the poison from his veins, and save him — is a sage, compared with thee. The wretch who, weary of the world, cuts his own throat, is not more obviously his own destroyer than you, in your malignant blindness. Driveller! you have flung from you your last offer of salvation. The chance that by a thousand lucky accidents your good genius this day proffered you — in your immeasurable presumption, and your transcendant folly, you have spurned; and now shall ruin — ruin, in every terrible shape, from every side converging, pour down on you and yours, till there remains not, of all your wealth, and pride, and insolence, a wreck or vestige. My sword, Sir Hugh, spared you tonight, that I might launch at your house and life a vengeance so stupendous, that it will hurl you and your fancied greatness, like a thunder-blasted tower, into dust."

He lifted his arm for a moment in an attitude of menace, and in the next he was once more, and at a rapid pace, pursuing his solitary night ride.

As Miles Garrett followed his homeward way through the misty shadows flung by wild hedges and straggling timber across the narrow road, he passed the tall, lean figure of a female, wrapt in a cloak of red cloth; her lank form was curved with age or bodily deformity; she carried a staff of blackthorn in her bony hand, but less, as it seemed, for support than for effect, for she often smote the stones of the road, and often the stooping boughs of the overhanging wood in malignant wantonness, as it seemed, while she advanced with long and leisurely strides over the unequal road; her hood flapped in the light breeze, and occasionally disclosed a sharp hooked nose and the bowl of a short tobacco pipe, from which she drew thin clouds of the narcotic vapour which perfumed the chill night air.

As the grim horseman rode by, almost grazing her shoulder with his jack boot, so closely did she keep the centre of the narrow road, she whined a mendicant petition, which degenerated into a fierce and bitter curse, as he, sullen and unheeding, pursued his way.

"Wisha! one little penny, Miles Garrett, agra, an' the ould woman 'il! be prayin' for you night and morning, an' may — it's never mindin' he's keepin', the thatching pincil! Ride away, an' the widdy's curse behind you — you black, ill-lookin', lean, unlucky scoundrel; may the garron come down an' crack your long neck in the piper's quarry, you yellow nigger! an' if you ever get back may you carry the Phooca home on your shoulders — you shkamin', double-tongued, poison-faced dog, you. Oh! blur an' agers! it's stoppin' you are, is it? — an' it's plenty iv stoppin' an' standin' I wish you this blessed night. Turnin' round, is it? — may you never find the way home, you down-lookin' villian; doesn't the world know you, what sort you are? — as bad as your murdherin' ould cousin, Willoughby, the hangman: bad luck to every mother's skin iv you, seed, breed, an' generation — the bloody pack iv yez — may ye be cuttin' one another's throats, it's all yez are fit for. Aia! byjabers, what's that? It's beck'nin'he is — its changin' your tune you are, afther all, is it?"

As she thus spoke, she quickened her pace, and advanced to meet Miles Garrett, who was now slowly retracing the intervening space which he had lately passed at so sharp a pace.

"Peg Maher!" he said, gruffly, as he approached, "is that Peg Maher?"

"Ah, then, who else id be in it, agra?" she responded, with a whine, "it's the poor widdy, sure enough, wid no one to help her but the fatherless innocent, that's more in her way wid his thricks an' his nansense, God help him, than anything he's good for the crathur."

"There — there's a shilling," he interrupted, in the same gruff tone, as he dropped the coin into her hand.

“Wisha! nay blessin’ an you night an’ mornin’, Miles Garrett, acushla,” said she, as she glanced from the coin, which glittered on her smoke-dried palm, into the face of the donor, with an undisguised expression of wonder and curiosity; “The widdy’s blessin’ be about you an’ yours this night.”

She looked inquiringly in his face, for he had reined in his horse, and now sate motionless in his saddle, gazing upon her with a scowl of profound and, as it seemed, malignant thought.

“Peg Maher,” he continued, abruptly, after a pause of some seconds, “I’ll make that shilling a crown, if you do a message for me safely.”

“Begorra, it’s a far message, an’ a heavy one, the poor widdy would not carry for a crown piece, Misther Garrett, agra,” she rejoined, with alacrity; “an’ for safity, just lave that to myself — that’s all.”

Without heeding her, he muttered, thoughtfully, “it mustn’t be to Willoughby himself — the hotheaded old bully might frighten the hag into confessing whom she had it from — no, his right-hand man will answer better and turning to the old woman again, he said, in a changed tone, “you must tell old Tisdal, of Drumgunniol — observe my words, old woman — that his own house and Glindarragh castle will be rifled and burnt on tomorrow night, unless he and Willoughby gather their friends — you understand me — and defend themselves; just say so much, and no more. If you mention one word of your having seen or met with *me,* you had better make up your mind to quit the country, for I’ll undoubtedly make it too hot to hold you — do you understand me, witch?”

“An’ how could I but ondherstand you, darlin’ gentleman? — to be sure I do,” rejoined she; “never spake to Peg Maher, if I don’t carry the message right. That’s enough — honour bright, and no deludin’.”

Without further interchange of words, Miles Garrett flung the broad silver piece upon the road before her, and rode rapidly away. She picked up and examined the coin in the moonlight, and ringing her earnings together in her joined hands, she wagged her head exultingly, and, with a chuckle, muttered, as she watched the receding form of the horseman —

“A crown an’ a shilling, aisy aimed, by gannies, an’ for nothin else but mischief, as sure as my name’s Peg Maher; for wherever it lies, an’ whatever it mains, I know by his face, an’ I know by his nature, there’s mischief *galore* in Dark Garrett’s message. Let them fall out, the blacker the better; let them be plundherin’ an’ murdherin’ aich-other, an’ *caed mille* *faltha;* they robbed an' slaughtered *us* long enough, an' now, like the wild dogs, when there's no more left for them to tear an' devour, they only turn an one another." She sat down on the bank by the road side, and continued, in a changed tone, "Oh! Shamus, mavourneen, did I ever forget you? — don't think it, my darlin', I'm your own Peggy still — your own Peggy bawn, that you married an' loved — that was your young wife for two years, my darlin'. Did I ever lave you, Shamus, all the time you wor on your keepin'? — wasn't Peggy beside you in the woods of Aherloe, *ma bouchai dhas,* an' did'nt you sleep with your head in her lap on the side of Galty More — oh! cushla machree, an' didn't we dar' the storms together, my darlin'? an' the hunger and could, for Peggy was your first love an' your last; an' when they killed you — killed you, my beautiful, undaunted boy, didn't Peggy — your own Peggy bawn — hould your head on her could knees for a day and a night, the way she used when you were sleepin' in the wild glins an' the mountains, Shamus *laudher ma bohul bra,* with no one but herself to guard you — antil the sinses left me, and the neighbours carried me, God knows where, away from my darlin — for, livin' or dead, I'd cling to you, Shamus; and afther your head was laid in the clay — then, when our first child was born, the poor innocent — oil! wasn't my heart hoping I might die in the pains? that I might be with my darlin' again. Oh! Shamus, my husband! — my darlin' thrue-hearted boy! sure I'm thinkin' of you every minute that goes, an' promisin' an' prayin', *my bouchai bragh,* that the time will come round yet, when I'll see your murdherers hunted an' harried from the hills to the woods, an' from the woods to the glins, an' back again — with no shelter from the winter's wind but the mountain carrigs an' the brakes by the bog side; it's comin' yet — it's comin' — I see it comin'!"

She rose hastily, and climbed to the top of the bushy bank which overlooked the road, and as suddenly resuming her wonted accents of harsh and querulous discord, she shrilly called —

"Shaun — Shaun, you big omadhaun, will I never make you folly me. Shaun dhas, will you come, I tell you, or, by gannies, I'll lay this switch across your back."

CHAPTER VIII.

OF PHEBE TISDAL AND HER PURITAN UNCLE — OF THE RUINED ABBEY OF GLINDARRAGH, AND OF THOSE WHO WALKED AMONG ITS GRAVES BY MOONLIGHT.

MEANWHILE, Percy Neville, being left to his own devices, donned his hat and gloves once more, and prompted by the curiosity of idleness, loitered forth into the castle yard, and thence through the high-arched, frowning gateway, into the steep road descending toward the old bridge which his fair cousin had so lately traversed. He turned, however, in the opposite direction, and mounting the high grounds which overhung this abrupt declivity, he soon commanded the broad, bold prospect which spread away for many a mile of wood and pasture and heathy bog, in one vast undulating plain, even to the feet of the far-off dim blue hills.

He looked round on this wide landscape with all its softened shadows and sunset glories expanding beneath and around him, and felt the freshening breeze which swept its broad extent, and heard the wild and varied harmony of nature and all the pleasant sounds of rural life. The lowing of kine and the distant singing of maidens floated upward, mingling with the many voices of the river and the hushed melody of the wind, to his rejoicing ear. Shrill, but softly, harped the gray branches of the aged ash, and freshly rustled the thick ivy on the tower walls, in the exulting breeze. The innocent whistlings of the small birds, and the kindly cawings of the soaring crow winging to his far-off retreats in the shadowy wild wood — all filled his senses with unknown delight as he rambled onward, until at last, crossing a low and broken fence, he found himself in the great old orchard, whose overgrown and hoary apple-trees rivalled the monarchs of the forest in size — some half decayed, some by storm or leven blast reft of their lordliest boughs, but all gigantic and picturesque. The sloping ground over which they spread was drawn into furrowed undulations by the rugged gripe of the spreading mossgrown roots, and darkened by the tangled boughs of the ancient fruit-trees, through whose gray and furrowed trunks the ruddy light was solemnly streaming.

The transition from the feelings which we have just attempted to describe, to melancholy, is easy and frequent; and Percy Neville, albeit unused to the melting mood, did feel his heart touched with somewhat of the softness and the sadness of more sensitive and passionate natures, as he rambled onward through the natural cloisters of these huge old trees — a temperament which predisposed him, perchance, to impressions of a sweet and earnest kind, as passing a low mound, which had once divided the extensive orchard into two distinct and independent inclosures, but was now no more than a gentle grassy bank, furrowed, unequal, and clothed in many places with straggling branches, he beheld the scene which we shall now describe.

As he ascended this bank, he heard at the other side, the prattle of voices, and, on looking over, he beheld two or three country girls milking a group of cows, and, farther among the trees, several tattered urchins driving more kine upward, toward the party already gathered there. A group more peaceful, rural, and harmonizing better with his present tone of feeling, could hardly have been presented, yet his eye rested upon it but for a moment. A form, simple and homely in all the accidents of dress and ornament, but, as it seemed to him, surpassing in grace and loveliness all that he had ever yet beheld, stood close before him, and a little aloof from the rest — it was the figure of a maiden — very young she seemed — perhaps seventeen years had passed over her, but no more; her small classic head was quite uncovered; her hair was dark, dark brown, and soft and glossy as the finest silk — its rich folds gathered at the back by a small golden bodkin, and parting in front over her artless and beautiful forehead. Hers was a countenance, once seen to be long remembered — not so much, perchance, for the exquisite symmetry of its features, peerless as they were — nor for the dark, melancholy eyes, which, full of beautiful expression, looked from beneath the shadow of her long lashes in such deep, soft eloquence — as for the matchless and ineffable grace and sadness that pervaded every look of that pale and lovely face; a saddened radiance from the innocent, deep, warm heart dwelt in its pale beauty; in its loveliness, trembled the loveliness of her own guileless affections, and, smiling or pensive, in every change of her sensitive face — and they were ever varying, as the gently sparkling dimples of some shadowy, wild well — there spoke the same deep, tender loveliness — the same touching harmony of beauty and expression, which moved the heart with pity, joy, and melancholy — softly, as might the thrilling strain of some sweet, old song. The grace and elegance of her form accorded meetly with the beauty of her face: tall, slight, and exquisitely symmetrical — a gracious gentleness and modesty, a simple dignity and ease moved in her every action, and made every gesture and attitude beautiful. She wore a red cloak of finer cloth than that employed by the peasant girls in theirs; and one of her small and slender feet, enclosed in a high shoe, buckled across the instep, was shewn a little in advance of the drapery of her mantle, as she stood listening to the melody which one of the girls was singing while she plied her task.

"Beautiful — beautiful creature!" said Percy Neville, as he gazed upon this unexpected apparition.

He was not, however, long an undetected spectator of this simple group. His presence was quickly perceived, and the song and the laughing gossip were hushed, while all eyes were turned wonderingly upon him. Merrily be descended the grassy bank, and with gay good humour dissipated the momentary constraint which his approach had obviously produced; and so, ere a minute had well elapsed, the merry voices and merrier laughter were mingling pleasantly as before. Goodhumouredly he complied with the laughing solicitation of a buxom, barefoot girl, and from the "noggin" she presented, tasted the warm new milk, and then with provoking special pleading, affected to resist the unanimous decision, that he must pay his footing; which at last he did, however, and with a liberality which raised him at once to the pinnacle of popularity.

But while all this was passing, the object which alone had interested him, the beautiful girl, ere he had yet exchanged one word with her, while for a moment his eyes were turned another way, had withdrawn — was gone. He looked round in the pettishness of disappointment, and mentally wishing the whole party — we need not say where — he climbed the green bushy bank again, and saw a little before him, greatly to his comfort, the retreating form of the graceful girl in the cloak, as she pursued the path toward the castle, among the knotted branching roots and lichen-covered trunks of the old trees, through whose devious arcades the dusky golden light was streaming. In a moment he was at her side.

"Pretty maiden," said he, with something at once of gaiety and respect, "are you going to Glindarragh Castle?"

“I am, sir,” she answered gently.

“And so am I,” he continued gaily, “and with your permission I shall walk beside you — that is, if you have no objection,” he hesitatingly added.

She looked surprised, then slightly blushed, and with a gentle smile which showed a little even row of pearly teeth, she said, with a beautiful embarrassment and simplicity —

“Oh no, sir, I’m sure I couldn’t; you’re very welcome, sir, to go with me.”

“Many thanks and true ones, my fair maiden, for saying so,” he replied. “And what may your business be in that dismal old place, and so near the nightfall too? — are you not afraid to walk alone at dusk among these lonely places?”

“No, sir,” she answered, with a melancholy smile— “no harm ever happened me, and I’m not afraid; I am going up to the castle, to the young lady; she is very good, sir — oh, very good; she was always kind to me, and likes me to be with her.”

“And where does your father live?” inquired he, with increasing interest.

“My father is dead, sir,” she answered, with melancholy gentleness.

“And your mother,” he added, in a softer tone.

‘She is dead, sir; I have no mother, and no father,” she answered, mournfully.

“An orphan, so young, so very beautiful!” he thought, as he looked with a deep emotion of pity upon the girl.

“And have you no brothers or sisters?” he inquired.

“No, sir; I never had brother or sister; my mother died when I was a little child, and my father soon after. I scarce remember them,” answered she, encouraged by the obvious interest with which her replies were listened to. “This is the way, sir,” she continued, as she turned the key in a little wicket which opened from the orchard into the garden of which we have already spoken.

Entering its shadowy hedges with a sigh, Percy Neville continued —

“And you, pretty maiden, what may be your name?”

“Phebe, sir, Phebe Tisdal,” she answered modestly.

“And have you no kindred, my pretty Phebe — no relations to take care of you, and to love you?”

"I have an uncle, sir. I live with him at Drumgunniol, where I was born," she answered.

"Well, my pretty Phebe," said he, as they reached the little sally port, which gave admission from the garden to the castle yard, "I hope I shall often see you while I remain here, and if ever the time shall come when you need a friend, remember Percy Neville."

The young man spoke, perhaps, with a deeper earnestness than he intended, and the girl looked up in his face, with an expression of wonder in her deep, soft, dark gray eyes, and encountering his bold gaze of admiration, she lowered them again with a heightened colour, and an expression at once of pain and sadness. Their *tete-a-tete* was now ended, and we shall leave them for a time to turn to that quaint dwelling-house of Drumgunniol, of which the beautiful Phebe Tisdal has just spoken in her own sad silvery accents.

On the same day, at the same sunset hour, a short, bow-legged, square-built man, appearing some years in advance of three score, with a large, deeply furrowed, and somewhat pimply face, a massive nose of glowing purple, two small, gray, squinting eyes, and a countenance expressive, in no ordinary degree, of gloom, determination, and ferocity, passed forth into the open country, having carefully latched the gate which gave admission to his narrow farmyard, compassed by a high wall and strong stone-built offices on three sides, and closed upon the fourth by a tall, narrow, and massively constructed stone dwelling-house of three stories high, with chimney-stacks as ponderous as watchtowers, rising at each gable, and flanking, with clumsy but comfortable shelter, the steep, gray, flagged roof of his snug and well-built tenement.

He was dressed in grave-coloured habiliments, somewhat coarse and very rusty, and wore a short black cloak and high-crowned hat, with a very plain and narrow rim of shirt collar, lying flat upon the neck of his doublet. In his broad and muscular hand, which might more meetly have grasped a halberd or a musquetoon, he carried a crutch-handled cane; and as he pursued his way, his pace was firm and deliberate — nay, even pompous — though the masculine and sinister character of his somewhat bloated visage, which carried upon it the legible traces of early intemperance, as well as of constitutional daring and sternness, in a very striking and unpleasant degree, effectually qualified any tendency to ridicule, which his consequential gait, and square and ungainly form, as well as his peculiar garb, might else have inspired.

Closing the wicket carefully behind him, as we have said, this figure pursued the winding footpath which led through the then wooded fields toward the bridge and castle of Glindarragh, which lay somewhere about the long half of an Irish mile away. Ungladdened even for a moment by the rich expanse of sunset scenery which spread before him, the eye of this morose and gloomy man rested, for the most part, upon the ground, as if in sullen contempt of the beauties with which smiling nature greeted his advance — or occasionally darted a quick and jealous glance at either side, as the capricious track which he pursued led him suddenly among closer brushwood, or into the lap of some gentle hollow; until at last the lonely and shattered ruins of Glindarragh Abbey rose close before him; its roofless gables and tall stone-shafted windows, and gray ivied walls, ascending from among the fern and nettles, and spreading their long shadows over the sward, showed additionally mournful and solemn in the dim glow of evening, whose level radiance gilded the grass-grown summit of many an humble mound, and turned its gray headstone to dusky red, and shone and glittered, flashing and glowing like warm fire upon the burnished leaves of the rustling ivy.

As the old man approached these timeworn walls, through which his path wound its devious way, there arose in his imagination sundry conjectures, in which, from congenial association long grown into inveterate habit; he pleasantly indulged as often as he found himself beneath its melancholy shadow. How much of hoarded gold, of ancient plate, of jewelled reliques, might lie deep and dark under the foundations of that deserted pile, hidden in the season of danger, and deposited by its long-exiled and scattered owners, secure in leaden chests, and deep in the yellow mould, there to rest untroubled by bar or mattock, until time shall be no more.

Such speculations, though woven of the flimsiest dreams of fancy, had yet an interest, keen and absorbing, for the sombre being who trod the old ruin, and often would he ponder and pause, as he pursued his lonely way, to calculate in what spot the crafty caution of the old monks would most securely, and with least suspicion, have secreted the buried treasure. Such pleasant, though somewhat tantalizing visions, had now again filled his mind, as Jeremiah Tisdal, the puritan proprietor of the grange of

Drumgunniol, found himself once more among the silent arches of this ancient building. Slackening his pace to indulge still further these intoxicating ruminations, which stole over his senses like the enchantment of opium, Tisdal looked wistfully, now through some gap in the ruined walls, now into the low arched doorway of some narrow chamber, the use of which, unless for some such purpose as the mysterious one with which his thoughts were busy, he could not divine; now peering through some tall ivy-wreathed window, and again under some dark and low-browed vault; and while he thus amused himself, still though lciteringly advancing upon his course toward Glindarragh bridge his attention was arrested, in a sudden, and by him a most unwished-for manner, by the apparition of a human form.

On looking through a narrow slit into a small chamber, whose roof, less walls fully admitted the light, he beheld, seated near the door-and busily discussing some crusts of bread and an onion, and with a leathern-cased flask beside him, a man whom he instantly recognized, and at sight of whom he felt for a moment so overcome with horror and dismay, that, had the fiend himself risen up before him in that awful place, he could not have been more overwhelmed and paralysed with terror. The man whose sudden appearance had wrought this terrible revulsion in the feelings of the proprietor of Drumgunniol, though not very prepossessing in his outward aspect, was by no means hideous enough to dismay a man of Tisdal's firm nerves. He sat upon a low stone by the chamber-door, his provisions in a blue handkerchief between his knees, and his flask by his side; his clothes were not of the coarse cloth used by the Irish peasantry, but like the cast-off finery of gentility in make and texture, and reduced, by overwear and exposure, to a mass of rags and squalor. This tattered figure was that of a man of middle stature, pale and spare, and rendered peculiarly remarkable by a broad deep scar, which, traversing his visage from the right eye to the corner of the mouth, crossed the nose in its passage, and had reduced the bridge of that prominence to a distorted and unsightly level.

Such a countenance, with its deep and ineffaceable furrow, and partially flattened wry nose, was too remarkable to be easily mistaken or forgotten, and Jeremiah Tisdal, in full recognition, gazed upon it with an aspect almost of despair; while, from his red face — nay even from his purple nose — the blood receded, leaving nothing but a straggling network of livid threads, streaking the sallow cadaverous flesh, from whose every pore the cold sweat was starting, to indicate the region where the fiery purple of his visage had most fiercely predominated. With unutterable horror Tisdal continued for a full minute or more to gaze upon the sitting figure, who, wholly unconscious of the absorbing contemplation of which he was the object, continued with undiminished attention and unabated good will to address himself to the homely viands before him. It was with an effort such as that with which the victim of nightmare at length dispels the frightful illusion which has held him in its fascination, that Tisdal withdrew himself from the narrow aperture through which he had beheld this, to his eyes, most terrific spectre, and instinctively pressing his hat down upon his brow, so that the broad leaf shaded his livid features, and muffling the lower part of his face in the folds of his cloak, he strode with rapid and noiseless steps along the pathway.

“O God, merciful and terrible!” he muttered in an agony of desperation, when some three or four hundred yards had interposed between aim and the scene of his appalling discovery— “is there then no escape — no pardon for me? What fearful curse pursues me, that even here, buried in the wild inhospitable recesses of a savage and perilous country, I cannot escape the dreadful doom that pursues me. Gracious God, is not the anguish of remorse, are not the pangs of fear, and the terrible images of memory, torment sufficient, that thou must send thine incarnate avenger, after ten long years, to dog me — to destroy me. Yes; I am accursed of God — forsaken — struggle as I may — given over for ever and ever to the evil one.”

He gnashed his teeth in unutterable anguish, and then stamping: furiously upon the ground, he abruptly stopped short, and turned fiercely toward the mouldering ruin, which lay in all its solemn and melancholy repose some hundred yards behind him.

“Yes, the die is cast,” said he, while the fearful agitation of the moment before gradually subsided, and his face assumed its wonted character of firmness, gloom, and severity; “he has at last driven me to the wall, and one or other of us two must go down. I cannot escape him; the question is merely who strikes first. But — but, after all, it may be but accident. Be it so; I shall bring it to the test — any thing but doubt. Let the crisis come *now.”*

He paused again, opened his cloak, and from a buff leathern belt which encircled his doublet, he successively drew two pistols, tried the loading of both with the ramrod, touched the flints, and added a little fresh priming; then replacing them in his girdle, he slowly said —

“He may not know me, changed as I am; he may not seek me, well for him if he do not. I will enter the chamber, and confront him, and if it prove otherwise— “

He said no more, but retraced his steps toward the ruined pile, not quite so rapidly as he had left it, and with a countenance, though less agitated, fully as pale as before, and charged with the black and condensed ferocity of a dark and deadly purpose. Thus resolved, Tisdal walked heavily into the silent ruin, and diverging a little from the beaten path, he entered that part of the building upon which the door of the small chamber, into which he had so lately looked, directly opened. For an instant he paused as he approached the narrow portal, and drew one long breath, like a daring swimmer who stakes his life upon one bold plunge into the prevailing sea, and then firmly and collectedly he entered the roofless apartment. But the decisive interview he courted was not then and there to be. The man whose presence had wrought so fearful a revulsion in all his feelings, was gone; and with a strange sensation, at once of disappointment and relief, he looked around upon the deserted walls, and up and down through the long passages and mouldering chambers of the old building. The search, however, was vain; and though he climbed the winding stair of the tower, and looked down from the ivy. bowered windows, like some ill-omened bird shrouded from light, and peering forth with malignant eye in search of its proper prey, his scrutiny from hence was alike unrewarded.

Buried in his own stormy and remorseful reflections, this grim and brawny personage seated himself upon the worn steps of the spiral stair, his elbows resting upon his knees, and his heavy chin propped upon his clenched hands, while his eyes, gazing vacantly through the arched window of the central tower which he thus occupied, wandered slowly and gloomily over the narrow cloisters and the spreading yew tree beneath, until gradually the mellow blush of sunset melted into the cold gray of twilight, and that in turn gave place to the misty light of the spectral moon. The solemn ruin, with its buried dead, slumbering in the silence of the night, and under the broad cold moonlight, might well have awakened in the heart of the solitary occupant of the abbey tower some feelings of superstitious awe.

The subsidence of fierce and angry passions is accompanied with a depression and gloom more painful far than the more agitating emotions which have preceded them. In Tisdal’s case the stormy feelings of wrath and terror had acquired a sterner and deadlier character from a thousand thrilling and appalling remembrances associated with the apparition which had evoked them, as well as with the black and revengeful suggestions of his own desperation. As these terrible emotions which had so fiercely shaken him, slowly sank to rest, leaving an awful stillness and blank dismay behind them, he felt in his solitude a horror and a fear he had scarcely ever known before — it was as though he had been for an hour and more unconsciously holding close communion with the tempter himself — yielding up his soul to the powers of the evil influence, and had on a sudden emerged from the awful presence and was alone. With a chill sense of undefined fear, which he in vain attempted to dispel — the Puritan arose — glanced quickly and fearfully around him, and descending the narrow stair of the tall grey tower, entered the shadowy cloister, and accidentally encountered as he did so, the old woman, whom Miles Garret had so lately commissioned with the sinister message which she at once proceeded to deliver.

Tisdal, however, with his constitutional suspicion and shrewdness, pressed her sternly but unavailingly with close and searching interrogatories, but seeing that the woman obstinately persisted in an entire disregard of his further questioning, he moodily turned from her, and pursuing the solitary pathway toward Glindarragh Castle, he left the ivied chambers of the ruin to the more congenial occupation of the bats and owls, as well as of the scarcely less ominous sample of humanity with whom he had just held such strange and inauspicious intercourse.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BOAT ON THE RIVER —— THE MYSTERIOUS WARNING.

WE left Jeremiah Tisdal, with moody mien and steady pace, pursuing his way, under the silvery moonlight, toward the old bridge and castle of Glindarragh. If the puritan had possessed an eye for the picturesque, he might have found in the scene before him matter enough for pleasurable contemplation. His path had now reached the river's bank. Before him wheeled the chafing stream, its foam and eddies glittering like showers and ripples of molten silver in the full radiance of the moon, and overspanned by the high arches of the steep and antique bridge, showing dark and black against the broad and lustrous current of the stream. On the right, hung the massive and sombre outline of the castle — its towers, roofs, and chimneys piled in one dark frowning mass above the murmuring waters; and on the left, rising from the very verge of the river, and stretching far away over the undulating plain, spread the thickets and branching timber of the wild wood in one broad shadowy mass, among whose hollows and nooks the light vapours of night were, slumbering; and far away, melting in the thin shrouds of mist, and well nigh lost to sight, the dim and distant mountains.

But Tisdal had no sense of the merely beautiful; his eyes were busy in the jealous scrutiny of the straggling copse, which, at either side, skirted his path, or in watching and avoiding the difficulties of his broken way. Safe and sound, he stood at last under the shadowy arch of the great gate of the castle, and with a heavy stone battered the iron-studded oak, until tower and forest echoed to the din; while, from the inner yard, his summons was answered by the clamorous challenge of a dozen dogs, baying and barking in furious rivalry.

"What's your business, neighbour?" inquired a gruff voice, through the narrow bow-slit that flanked the gate.

"That voice is Phil Gorman's. Look, man — look at me," rejoined the puritan. "Know you not Jeremiah Tisdal, of Drumgunniol?"

"Aiah, wisha! sure enough — sure enough," replied the porter, in a tone of lazy recognition. "Wait a bit, an' I'll draw the boults this minute, wid a heart an' a half, Mr. Tisdal, I will. Them's quare times," he resumed, after a minute's interval, as, unbarring the small door which was cut in the great gate, he gave admission to the sombre visitant— "quare times, when the ould gate is barred as regular as the night falls — quare times, Mr. Tisdal, when there's need for the likes — and need enough there is, too," he continued, while he barred the door again, as Tisdal walked into the castleyard— "need enough, an' too much, for it's only tonight our young lady, God bless her, was freckened a'most out iv her senses wid a thievin' rogue — one iv them plundherin' viliians that's robbin' an' hangin', an'has no other thrade to live by — divil take the bloody breed iv them — over there in the wood, jist, as I may say, in undher the very walls."

The old man continued to ramble on in the same style, while Tisdal crossed to the door of the great hall, which stood half open at the other side of the yard. He entered this rude apartment, within the canopy of whose mighty chimney sate two or three fellows smoking and chatting listlessly in the flickering light of the wood and turf fire; and hardly pausing for a word of inquiry, he proceeded through several chambers and passages, guided by so much moonlight as could make its way through the narrow windows, until having reached the first landing of a winding stone stair, he knocked at a chamber door, and in the next moment found himself in the apartment of Sir Hugh Willoughby.

The old knight sate in gloomy excitement, still booted and spurred as he had dismounted two hours before, by the expiring fire which smouldered in the ashes of his broad hearth, his high and handsome features fixed in the stern lines of condensed anger, and still glowing with the swarthy fires of outraged pride.

"Ha, Tisdal, gad's my life, you're welcome. Tisdal, what do you think of all this? A strange pass we've come to — eh? when highwaymen and ruffians infest our fields and farms, and hem us into our strongholds — scarce leave us safety in our very dwellings; what think you — but you have heard of it — my daughter was this very evening menaced by an armed scoundrel in the wood yonder, and within sight of these very windows. As I stand here," he continued, starting to his feet, and stamping furiously upon the floor, "had I but met the ruffian this evening, when I sought him yonder with my men, I would, so help me heaven, have set up a gallows on the castle hill, and at my own risk hung him high enough before an hour, to warn his friends for six miles round, that old Hugh Willoughby knows how to deal with villains."

"It's well you do know how, Sir Hugh," rejoined the puritan, coolly, "because it is a knowledge you'll need ere two days more have passed. We're all in danger," he continued, "all — great as well as small; you, Sir Hugh, within your fenced towers, as well as I within my poor farmhouse — all in sore peril. Would God we were safely through tomorrow night!"

"Sit down, Tisdal, sit down, man, and speak your tidings plainly," said Sir Hugh. "What hast thou heard, and from whom, to fill thy mind with such fearful auguries? Speak, man."

Tisdal briefly stated the substance of his interview with the crone ill the ruined abbey, while the old knight listened with deep and stern attention.

"The channel through which the news hath reached you, Tisdal, alone inclines me much to believe it false," said Sir Hugh, slowly and hesitatingly; "but — but as you say, the burthen of the tale is but too likely to prove true; and that miscreant whose insolence affrighted my child to-day, in his person and attire accords well with what I have heard of certain ruffian adventurers whom these perilous times have tempted into lawless enterprise; there was waiting upon him, too, a wild, savage, Irish boy with a skean. Ay, ay, it may prove even too true. Spies, *spies,* Tisdal, rapparees!"

"Counting the plunder and marking your bulwarks of defence," chimed in the master of Drumgunniol.

"True, true, and — but they shall be defeated; I will show the savage marauders I can maintain my house against them — I will, if it be God's will, against all odds defend my property, my home, and my people."

"'Tis safest ever to act as if a threatened danger were an actual one, and sure to come," replied Tisdal.

"And so will I act, my friend," rejoined the old knight, promptly; "I will prepare for the threatened mischief, leave no precaution untaken, call in my friends and my people, gather my best cattle within the castle walls, bar the gates, man the towers, and then with a firm heart leave the issue to Almighty God."

"Well and wisely said, Sir Hugh," rejoined Jeremiah Tisdal; "and such small portion of my worldly substance as I can conveniently remove, with your permission, I will lodge within these walls, and I and my trusty man Bligh will come hither with such store of arms and ammunition as we can muster betimes in the day; for unless matters turn out smoother than I apprehend, we'll need good store of powder and lead, and that, right well delivered, to hold this place against the odds with which't will be encompassed."

"Do so, do so, honest Tisdal; and — and let me see, what friends I may I reckon on in this strait," continued Willoughby. "There is Wilson, of Drumboy, too old himself, but his nephew will come, an active, bold young fellow — egad, worth two in himself — he will bring at least one man with him; and then the two Browns, of Lisnagarriff good shots and staunch friends both; and there is Bill Stepney, of Clonsallagh, and his three stout sons — four muskets from Clonsallagh — God grant they may not yet have given them up; and then Garret Lloyd — odd's life, I must send to him tonight, he starts tomorrow for Clonmel — we can't spare the best duck-shot in the country."

And thus the old knight went on summing up, as nearly as he might, the volunteer contingent, upon whom he might reckon from among his friends and neighbours. But while employed in these hurried and exciting calculations, he was on a sudden interrupted by a noise which startled him and his companion, brought both of them in an instant to their feet, and fixed their astounded gaze upon the window of the apartment in which they stood.

With a stunning crash the casement of the chamber was burst asunder, and a heavy body, which might have been a paving-stone or a hand-grenade, smote with an astounding din, and amid a shower of shattered glass upon the floor and bounded and rumbled to the far end of the room. The old knight stood in amazement, glancing from the shattered window to the missile which now lay quietly settled upon the floor, as if it were a piece of the proper furniture of the apartment. Jeremiah Tisdal meanwhile, with instantaneous promptitude, had planted himself at the aperture, through which the night-wind was now freely and fitfully playing, and stretching forward through the depth of the recess, advanced his bullet head through the casement, and beheld drifting slowly down the moonlit current toward the shadowy bridge, a small boat, usually moored at the opposite side of the stream, and which, as it seemed to him, now contained two dark forms. While Tisdal was employed, as we have described, in scrambling on all fours along the narrow stone windowsill, and keenly searching through the uncertain light for the cause of the strange and startling interruption which had so unseasonably broken in upon their conference, Sir Hugh Willoughby cautiously approached the mysterious projectile which lay upon the floor, half expecting every moment to see it explode, and blow himself and the other occupant of the room to fragments; he turned it over suspiciously with his toe, and alike to his relief and his surprise discovered it to be, after all, but a large smooth stone, with a piece of paper tied firmly against its surface. The paper was addressed— "To Sir Hugh Willoughby, Knight, at his house of Glindarragh Castle and in an instant he had disengaged and opened the letter. His eye had no sooner rested upon the character in which it was traced, than every faculty and feeling of his nature became at once absorbed in its perusal. It was briefly expressed in the following terms: —

"SIR HUGH WILLOUGHBY — On tomorrow night, Glindarragh Castle will be wrecked, and your cattle and property plundered and wasted. For God's sake, seek not to defend them; save what you can, but fly. If you resist, evils a thousandfold greater will follow upon you. Your enemies expect you to defend the place; disappoint them — save yourself and your child. Fly! For the sake of your daughter, escape. You are among the toils; if you stay but forty-eight hours more, you are lost. One chance — and but one remains — take it and fly.

"This comes from a friend, long unseen, but too well known."

When the tall, slender character in which these lines were written met the gaze of the old man, he staggered backward, like one who has received a sudden blow — the blood mounted dizzily to his head, and the feeble letters swam in mist before his eyes; then, as suddenly, the fevered tide retired, and pale and heart-sick (though not by reason of the tidings which the letter conveyed, dismaying as they were), he slowly read and re-read the paper.

Meanwhile, Jeremiah Tisdal, having hailed the boat which was gradually floating toward the bridge, but without affecting the motion of those who sat within it, any more than he could have arrested, by his challenge, the foam flakes which drifted by upon the eddies of the stream, drew back from his post of observation, and stood once more upon the floor of the chamber.

"Ha! but a stone and a letter!" said Tisdal, as his eye glanced from the missile and the loosened cord to the paper, upon which the agitated gaze of the knight was fixed. The sound of the puritan's voice aroused Sir Hugh.

"Where are they? — for God's sake, where? Tisdal, call to them — stop them," cried he, distractedly, as he moved, first towards the door, and then towards the window.

"They're under the bridge by this time," said Tisdal; "they are in the small boat, and heeded not my calling."

"Let's after them, in heaven's name, quickly — for your life, quickly," cried the old knight, frantically, as with head uncovered, he rushed from the chamber, followed closely by Tisdal, and down the steep and narrow winding-stair, across the castleyard, unlocked and unbarred the portal in the great gate with breathless haste, and without exchanging a word with the astounded porter, who, with starting eyes and mouth agape, beheld the breathless and disorderly race in which his master and the puritan seemed to strive which should out run the other. With a hasty order from Tisdal to watch at the gates they both passed in a moment from the sight of the old dependant, and, panting and breathless, reached the bridge together.

"There they are, as the Lord liveth, there!" cried Tisdal, whose phlegmatic nature was now thoroughly excited by the unwonted and violent exercise in which he had engaged.

"Holloa boat! holloa there! — bring to — stop, I say — turn her in there — stop, or by — I fire upon you," shouted the knight, furiously, as he beheld the two figures, instead of obeying his call, poling with all their strength down the rapids.

Swift as an arrow the skiff flew down the rushing stream, until about three hundred yards below the bridge, when they saw the two forms who manned her fling down their poles, and jumping into the shallows, reach the bank, where, in an instant, they were lost among the brushwood; further pursuit was now, of course, out of the question.

"Tisdal," said the master of Glindarragh Castle, in a changed and subdued voice, as he turned from the vain pursuit, "I have had another warning, and such a one as leaves in my mind no doubt of the meditated outrage, of which your message was the first and imperfect intimation. We must now prepare as best we may; be you with me by sunrise in the morning, and get such of your goods as you can easily remove within the keep of these strong walls. They shall not carry it here as they have done elsewhere, for, although I stood alone, I would defend the old house while I had power to draw a trigger."

He shook the puritan strongly by the hand, and with a stern but friendly good night, they parted.

Sir Hugh hurried across the castleyard, his heart swelling with a thousand feelings, which none suspected but himself, and hastening into the chamber where he had just held his exciting conference with Tisdal, he locked the door, seized the mysterious note, which lay open upon the table, and kissing it again and again, and pressing it passionately to his heart, he threw himself into his chair, and wept and sobbed like a child.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTAIN BOWSHANKS AND DICK SLASH.

As Tisdal approached the strong and formal farmhouse of Drumgunniol, his quick eye was attracted by the glow of an unusually fierce and ruddy fire, streaming from the narrow windows of the kitchen, and flooding the stones and bushes of the opposing hillock with a blush of dusky red, which contrasted cosily with the cold spectral lights and shadows of the misty moonshine —

"By my troth," muttered the master of the mansion, as he drew nigh, "this is but ill husbandry of turf and firewood. Master Bligh, methinks your supper must needs be something of the largest to need so fierce a blaze — this must be seen to — this must be seen to — but, ha! what have we here?"

This sudden ejaculation was caused by the unwonted sounds of profane singing which somewhat boisterously arose from the interior of the mansion; and Tisdal's heart faltered with a dreadful misgiving as this unusual ministrelsy reached his ear. He no longer approached his dwelling with the bold, firm, and consequential step which usually characterised the proprietor of Drumgunniol — he drew nigh rather with the stealthy caution of a thief, prowling fearfully about some rich man's house, cowering from view, and dreading even the sound of his own cautious footfalls. Thus did Jeremiah Tisdal draw near to his kitchen-window, avoiding the light which poured from the casement, and scarcely daring to breathe lest his presence should be detected. When he looked in, his worst fears were at once realised. Seated in the chimney-corner, with a mug of stout home-brewed ale beside him, while he carelessly chopped and shredded a pipe full of tobacco on the table, sate the identical tattered and ill-favoured traveller, whose appearance had so fearfully disconcerted him in the ruin but a few hours before. The stranger was singing with a loud voice and a rollicking air, one of the low licentious ballads of the day, to which, with shame and confusion of face be it written, the saintly Master Praise-God Bligh appeared to listen from the opposite corner with a great deal of sly and quiet relish. Tisdal drew back from the window in extreme trepidation; he smote his clenched hands upon his breast and ground his teeth in bootless rage and despair; again he peered like a skulking spy into his own comfortable kitchen, and again withdrew in anguish and desperation into the darkest recesses of the high-walled yard.

Meanwhile the ballad ended, and Praise-God Bligh walked forth to bolt the strong oak shutters upon the outside of the window. He had hardly entered the open yard when he was confronted by his master —

"Come hither, sir," said Tisdal, in a stern harsh whisper, while he dragged the astonished domestic under the shadow of the stable wall. "How dare you, idiot — how dare you suffer that man within my house?" he whispered, with such vehemence and fury that the froth found its way through his clenched teeth and gathered upon his lips. "Dog, do you hear me? Your life — your life hangs on your answer," he continued, while he shook the terrified servant by the throat. "How came you to admit that — that — *man* within my house — are you drunk or moonstruck — answer, *how?"*

"Deal patiently I pray thee with thy servant," muttered the domestic, terrified no less at the unwonted violence of his master than at the expression of preterhuman rage and agony which blackened his terrific countenance; "hear me — for God's sake, hear me, and loosen your hold of my throat — pray — pray good master, patience and do but hear me."

"How came you to admit that person within my house?" reiterated the master of Drumgunniol.

"I will tell you all about it if you will but loosen your hold," replied the servant entreatingly.

"Speak, then, and plainly, or by Him that made me you'll have cause to rue it," retorted Tisdal, with stern deliberateness.

"Hear me, then, and may I die the death if I speak not as plainly as you desire," continued the domestic with imploring earnestness; "he told me that he was a sort of cousin of yours, that he came all the way from Lincoln to find you out, and that he brings good news with him, and this is all I know of the matter as I hope for salvation."

"You lie, you infernal traitor, you lie like your master the devil; he told you no such cock-and-a-bull story," retorted his master, in a furious whisper, forgetting in an instant all the sanctimonious conventionalities of his sect, while he advanced his clenched fist within an inch of the affrighted servant's face; "it's a lie — all a lie — a villanous lie from beginning to end. He gave you money — money — or promised it — promised money for your treason — bribed, perfidious spy! did he, miscreant, did he, or not? Answer I say."

With an imprecation too awful here to be expressed, and an earnestness so palpably sincere as to leave no possible doubt of his veracity, the servant denied the charge.

"Then you are a greater idiot than I took you for, that's all," replied Tisdal through his set teeth, and with a savage scowl of the blackest rage. "A blessed driveller to leave in charge of one's house and substance!"

The whole of this conference was rendered the more singular, and perhaps not the less horrible, that it was conducted in whispers.

He turned abruptly, and walked a few steps toward the house; and then, with a gesture of despair, he strode back again to the amazed and awe-stricken domestic.

"Idiot — idiot — accursed, execrable idiot — you have ruined — destroyed your master!" ejaculated he, frantically; and at the same moment he struck the unsuspecting man with all the force of fury, with his doubled fist, in the face. The servant staggered backward, stunned and bloody, and fell heavily upon the rough pavement under the wall. Unheeding his fall, Tisdal again turned toward the house, and again unable to summon resolution for the dreaded meeting, paused. He approached the window, looked in once more; then drew back, adjusted his disordered dress, called all his firmness to his aid, and, with a steady pace and resolute mien, entered the door of his house, and walking straight into the kitchen, confronted the sinister-looking personage, who sate, very much at his ease, beneath the comfortable canopy of the great kitchen chimney.

Cosey, warm, and cheery was the kitchen of the grange of Drumgunniol; the crisp turf and unctuous bogwood glowed, blazed, and sparkled in the mighty hearth, flooding the chamber even to its remotest nooks and most forgotten recesses with a genial warmth, and pouring abroad a ruddy light, that danced pleasantly along the smoke-dried rafters, and blazed and flashed in the rows of burnished pewter, which furnished the cumbrous old cupboard at the further end. Good cheer enough, for a year and more depended in inviting festoonery from the ceiling alone — golden bunches of onions, whole bushes of dried pot-herbs, smoked beef, hams, and flitches, and dried salmon, threw their flickering shadows far along the broad ceiling; the irregular dark walls glittered redly with crowded utensils, and loomed with high-piled shelves; a comfortable old clock ticked vigilantly in a recess near the window, and a matchlock and a short musket, together with several fishing-rods of sundry lengths, added to the homely decorations of the mantelpiece; and several cloaks and other pieces of drapery, together with sundry old hats and a saddle, depended from certain pegs in the side boarding of a cumbrous stair, which communicated with the loft above; the cat sat purring in the inmost corner of the hearth, and the dog dozed lazily, stretched at his full length before its glow. Such was the hospitable chamber which smiled a ruddy welcome upon the master of Drumgunniol, as he passed the threshold of his home, and shut his door with a lusty swing in the face of the chill night air.

Deadly and stern, however, was the contrast between this snug scene of homely abundance and the sinister and evil looks of the two personages who formed its only occupants. Tisdal fixed upon the stranger a look of gloomy menace, which his visitant returned with a tranquil grin, half of sarcasm, half of defiance; and thus, for nearly a minute, the two old acquaintances regarded each other without interchanging a single syllable.

The kitchen clock in the grange of Drumgunniol might have ticked some two or three dozen times ere Tisdal spoke.

The disreputable looking stranger sate quietly by the fire, leering slyly from the corner of his eye upon his agitated host, while a slight smile added a still more unpleasant meaning to his pale and sinister face.

At length Tisdal broke the silence.

“How came you, sir,” said, he, sternly, *“to* establish yourself as a guest in my house, uninvited and undesired by me?”

“Pooh, pooh, brother Snap, never mind mouthing with me; look like yourself, bold Captain Gordon, *alias* Burnt-brandy-for-two, or if you like the new name better, Saint Jeremiah Tisdal,” retorted the stranger glibly. “Come, I say — come, man, never stand striving to look like one of the postles in a church window there, for it won’t go down with me. Little Dick Slash is the same offhand fellow that he ever was, though not quite such a *beau;* and I’m shot, if you’ll come the saint over him. Ha, ha! — egad your high crown and black toggery is enough to tickle one into absolute convulsions.”

"I am indeed a changed man," replied Tisdal, slowly and sternly, as soon as the harsh cachinnation with which his old acquaintance wound up, had quite subsided; "and it were well for you, Richard Deverel, if you were so, too."

"Why, that depends very much on the sort of change a man might make," answered Deverel, briskly. "For instance, a new hat, a suit of green and silver, a well-lined purse, and an active nag, were a change of affairs, I grant you, highly desirable just now. But, odds boddikins! such a change as yours! Why, if you had turned monk, or astrologer, or doctor, or any thing else, with a relish of the old dead knowledge, good living and burnt-brandy-for-two sort of style about it — odds! if you had done this, and taken a town lodging, where, as thou knowest, brother Jeremiah, there is no lack of monied fl*ats,* comely wenches, bully boys, sack, brandy, and so following, why, man, I could have understood and admired thee; but a puritan at the back of a bog, in the heart of a wilderness — gibbet me! if I can comprehend *that."*

"The place has been mine for nigh eleven years," replied Tisdal, doggedly. "I have lived here for that term an altered man, eschewing evil, and seeking the Lord. I affect no company save my own, and have desired no habitation save this house, ever since it has come to me."

"Come to you!" echoed the visitor, with a smile worthy of Mephistophiles himself. "I was by, Captain Gordon, I believe, when it *came* to you, as you say."

Tisdal drew his brows together in a deep, black scowl, like a man stung with a sudden pang of bodily anguish, and uttered from the depths of his wrung heart, agroan of the fiercest torture; while Deveril carelessly filled the bowl of his pipe, and lighted the tobacco at the candle.

"Come, old Bowshanks — brave brother Snap — valiant captain," exclaimed the visitor, as soon as he had got his tobacco-pipe in full play, "this is, after all, but a scurvy welcome. Let's have some supper, and a glass of your old favourite. You forget, my boy, how long it is since we two have met."

"Look ye, Richard Deveril," said Tisdal, with startling abruptness, and eyeing his visitor with a deadly scowl, while he disclosed a long-barrelled pistol gleaming in his hand, "what's to prevent my dealing with you on the spot, as — as — a *robber?"*

“And what’s to prevent my dealing with *you,* in like manner, as a *murderer?”* retorted Deveril, coolly; while, without even disarranging his negligent attitude, he as instantaneously levelled a pistol at the body of his host. “One, two, three — move but a finger, and I whip you through — heart, liver, lights, pluck, and all.”

Tisdal stood unmoved before the muzzle of the villain’s pistol, as if his own personal risk were a matter wholly unrecognised in the stern debate which at that moment occupied his mind.

“Put up your barking-iron, and no more noise,” said Deveril, with sarcastic coolness. “We know one another; and two can play at that game. Odd rat it, man, and did you fancy that little Dick Slash would pay his old friend, Captain Bowshanks, a visit at this time of night, and in his country-house, too, without the lead towels about him. Tut, man, I’m not a fool.”

“You’re the same cool villain you ever were,” said Tisdal.

“I’ faith, Master Snap, and so are you,” rejoined Deveril. “Bulldog every inch both of us; so better not to quarrel — eh?”

“What seek you here, and with me?” urged Tisdal, gloomily.

“Look at my clothes. Pooh, pooh, you know well enough what I want,” retorted Deveril. “*Help,* that’s all.”

“Just so; you come here to extort money,” continued Tisdal.

“And find you prepared to give it,” said the stranger. “Why, see you, Master Tisdal, I have not a shilling — scarce a rag. I swallowed my last crust to-day, and have nothing left on the face of the earth but these my old pair of barkers. Now, turn from me to *you.* What’s your case? The devil, or what you will, has prospered you, fed your belly, clothed your back. Your steeple hat throws off the weather; that black blanket about your shoulders keeps you warm; your shoes are sound, your doublet whole; you are blessed with a house, a kitchen, coin, and what not; — in short, you are a comfortable, greasy, well-fed, rich old dog; while I — not one bit a worse man than yourself — I am all but begging my way up to Dublin. Come, come, look at the matter fairly, and say ought you to grudge a lift to an old comrade. I don’t want much; you’ll find me reasonable. Put up your pistols; and if you don’t like my offer, it’s time enough to talk big, and tap claret afterwards.”

Tisdal paused for a moment moodily, and then thrust the weapon back again into his belt.

Deveril's pale face, for the first time, exhibited some slight evidences of inward agitation. He drew a long breath, and rising from his seat, stood with his back to the fire, watching with a piercing eye, in whose contracted pupil there gleamed something at once of craft, ferocity, and extreme suspicion, the movements of his host, who in dogged silence, and with a sombre scowl, took a turn or two up and down the well-stored kitchen, in the ruddy and uncertain firelight, and among the manifold creature comforts which seemed but to mock the horrors of his misery, with the glad salutation, "ent, drink, and be merry."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MONEY BAGS.

THE two tenants of the kitchen of the grange of Drumgunniol remained silent for a time: Tisdal was the first to speak —

"Deveril," said he, in an altered tone, "you know not what a hazard you have run. Had I shot you dead, you would have had no more than your deserts; but, thanks be to the Lord, I have spared you, and taken no more blood upon these hands of mine. I rebuked the spirit that prompted to the act; and I swear to thee, by the living God, I will not seek to harm thee, except it be in self-defence."

"And I," said the guest, with a courteous flourish, as he replaced his pistol, in turn, within his vest— "and I swear by the honour of a gentleman, that I will not seek to hurt thee, except for a like purpose; so the treaty is concluded and agreed on both sides. Let us then proceed to supper; for, as I have told you, my dinner has been something of the lightest; and ale and tobacco, though good enough in their way, are scarce equal, in the matter of nourishment, to a grilled pullet and a rasher of bacon; and that you'll admit, noble captain."

"Prithee, forbear to call me by nicknames," said Tisdal, vehemently. "You want food, raiment, and perchance a little money. Well, these you shall have; but while you stay under my roof, all I demand is this, that before others you make no allusion to what is past, to — in short, to my former courses. You comprehend me; and so— "

At this moment, the bony, lank, hard visage of Praise-God Bligh, bruised and frightened, appeared at the door; and Tisdal conveyed the conclusion of his caution by pressing his finger to his lip — a gesture which Deveril answered by a quiet wink. The master of Drumgunniol then proceeded to issue his orders for supper; and old Alley, the wrinkled and rheumatic maid-of-all-work, being roused from her slumbers in the loft, descended the creaking stair in loose attire, and with many a muttered curse, united her labours with those of the lean and lankhaired servitor; and thus, ere long, a smoking meal of savoury food reeked invitingly upon the board. The meal proceeded in sullen silence, until the two domestics had withdrawn for the night to their respective cribs.

"Come, come, old Snap," said the stranger, in reply to an interrogatory from Tisdal— "pleasure tonight, business to morrow. Rat me, if I hurry myself to please you — tomorrow morning, I say, I shall tell you my terms; tonight I shall consider them with the aid of your flask, and a whiff of tobacco."

"If you desire a bed, you will find a clean and warm one in yonder closet," said Tisdal.

"Why, captain," replied he, "to tell the truth, it's quite a novelty to me to meet with such brandy as I've got here, so I have made up my mind to pass the night in my chair — just in our own old style — with the stone jar before me, and a good pipe of tobacco between my finger and thumb; and all the more particularly as I see no harm in keeping wide awake — do you take me — under my very peculiar circumstances; so, with many thanks for your polite attention, I'll just stay as I am."

"Do as you list," replied Tisdal, wholly disregarding the sneer with which this intimation was conveyed; "there is turf and wood enough in the creel behind you to keep the fire blazing till morning."

Having thus spoken, the master of Drumgunniol withdrew, and with a heavy tread, and a still heavier heart, mounted the steep and narrow stair which led to his bedchamber, and bolting and locking the door upon the inside, threw himself upon his knees, and poured forth in the agony of his soul a torrent of passionate prayer, interrupted with groans and sighs which seemed to burst from the very depths of his heart. Deveril appeared meanwhile resolved to make his solitary vigil as comfortable as the means and appliances within his reach would allow. With his thick-soled shoe he thrust the embers on the hearth together, and heaped over them fragments of dried bogwood enough to make a bonfire; and while the genial blaze flickered and mounted with many a bursting crackle and shower of ruddy sparks, he drew his chair still nearer, and leaning his elbow on the table, and his head upon his hand, he fixed his eyes upon the shifting embers in profound and exciting meditation, while with vigorous exhalation he puffed forth dense and cloudy volumes of the aromatic vapour of his favourite weed. Half an hour passed, and he laid the exhausted pipe upon the table, slowly drained a longstemmed glass of brandy, relapsed into deep and engrossing meditation, and arose from it at length with a laugh low and stifled, but withal so villainous in its tone and expression, that it might well have chilled the heart of any mortal listener.

"Expede Herculem" muttered he, as he stepped lightly to the cupboard, on which, in ruddy shining rows, glittered the burnished utensils of the comfortable household— "*Ex pede Herculem,* as we used to say at school, let us judge the saloon by the contents of the kitchen, and by the result see what the old boy *can* do; for after all that is the point. Pish! — pooh! — tut!" he ejaculated, as he impatiently but noiselessly turned over, one after another, the plates, dishes, cups, and flagons which stood before him in comely rows— "all pewter, pewter and brass. No clue here: nothing to show whether the old gallows-tassel has silver and gold in his plate-chest — if, indeed, he has one at all. So, igad, the only way is to take that for granted, and bleed him freely. I'm safe enough in saying he has both money and plate. Pshaw! — to be sure he has. What else does he lock up his bedroom for, and carry the key with him wherever he goes? What else does he keep that lank, canting rascal for, that the devil himself could not pump one word of information out of — either the veriest simpleton, or the deepest knave in this land of saints."

Deveril filled his pipe anew, and again seated himself in front of the blazing fire.

From his abstraction, however, he was soon aroused. His quick ear caught a sound from without, and as it seemed to him, proceeding from some cause in operation close under the very walls of the old house. The guilty and the vile are ever suspicious, and the stranger started from his seat, and gliding noiselessly across the chamber, he stepped lightly into the closet which Tisdal had indicated, and from its dark window, himself unseen, observed, to his no small astonishment, the form of Praise-God Bligh, whom he believed to be at that moment in his garret and fast asleep, gliding stealthily by, and wide awake. For a single second he beheld him, and in another he was gone.

"Treachery!" muttered Deveril; "treason in the wind" — and he went softly to the outer door; it was, however, bolted and locked upon the inside.

Tisdal meanwhile, as we have said, had locked himself into his chamber under the high roof of the mansion, and there, in the anguish of his heart, was pouring forth his bitter and impetuous supplications — fierce, fervent, and incoherent — praying for his own deliverance and pardon: and, in the same breath, invoking curses and destruction upon the head of his persecutor — upbraiding heaven with having deserted him in his need — and finally praying with sobs, and groans, and wringing of hands, that the poor, miserable, and insufficient store of household stuff, and silver and gold with which his weak endeavours had been blessed, might escape the hands of the spoiler, and the wiles of the crafty. Then rising he unlocked an old oak press, and from its darkest and deepest corner drew out a leathern bag full of gold pieces, the counting of which was one of his daily exercises, fulfilled as regularly as his devotions. He felt this bag with the fond pressure of both his hands — he cowered over it with looks of love and anguish which would have been a perfect feast to a cynic — he untied the firmly twisted thongs which secured the opening, took out one by one the broad gold pieces — looked at them with the yearning gaze of love and despair — replaced them, and again bound the neck of the huge leathern purse, with as much jealousy as if the admission of even a particle of air might have dissolved the enchanting vision which from time to time its interior disclosed.

“And must I — must I share it with him. The little store I have with so much self-denial hoarded — must its better half be squandered by this wretch, in pot-house revellings, and still viler profligacy. If I were what once I was, I would have blown fifty souls into eternity first. But no, no! — no more blood! — no more blood!”

After a little pause, he added, in a tone of fierce agitation —

“Thank God, the girl — little Phebe — is out of the way tonight — thank God, at least, for that — thank God for that.”

He took a few hasty turns up and down the room — stopped short, while gradually a grim smile, first of doubtful significance, but which rapidly brightened into one of sinister but unequivocal triumph, lighted up his dark and ill-favoured countenance; with exulting vehemence he smote his hand upon his forehead, stamped fiercely upon the floor, and cried —

“I have it, God be thanked, I have it.”

He counted out ten of the broad gold pieces which furnished the leathern bag, folded them, and placed them in the same press; then from another bag of the same kind, he took some score crowns and as many shillings, and did likewise with them. He next secured the two leathern purses with tenfold precaution, and dropping them, one at each side, into the low pockets of his black threadbare coat, he softly turned the key in his door, opened it noiselessly, and with the velvet tread of an old tiger, stole forth upon the lobby. He paused at the stairhead, stooped over the bannister, and with his open hand, throwing back the straggling grizzled locks which impeded his hearing, and with mouth agape, and scarcely daring to breathe, he listened for any stir which might prove his visitant in motion; for well he knew the accomplishments of him with whom he had to deal — a mongrel monster, combining the ferocity of the wolf and the craft of the fox — vigilant, suspicious, murderous, and prompt.

He was satisfied with the result of his observation, and without however abating the extreme caution with which his movements were conducted, he glided across the lobby to the little chamber where Praise-God Bligh was slumbering in happy unconsciousness, after the fatigues and agitations of the day. Softly and cautiously did Tisdal raise the latch, and stealthily did he move into the apartment until he stood by the pallet of his unconscious dependant, when stooping over his recumbent form, with one hand he grasped and shook the shoulder of the slumberer, while with the other he no less rudely compressed his mouth; and, as his eyes opened upon the dark form which, like some black unsightly vision of the night, stooped over him, Tisdal said, in harsh emphatic whispers —

“It is I — I, Jeremiah Tisdal, your master; be not afraid; speak not one word, for your life; fear nothing — but up, and do thy clothes on.”

The man, thus aroused, with as little noise as even Tisdal could have wished, got down from his bed, and in silent haste began to huddle on his clothes, so that in a few minutes he stood before the puritan sufficiently attired for the service upon which he was thus abruptly summoned.

“Bligh,” said his master, returning from the door, at which, with jealous caution he had again been listening, and closing it carefully behind him; “your thriftless folly has placed me and my household in sore jeopardy; that fellow who now sits and keeps watch in the kitchen, is a *murderer* and a *robber:* speak not, sirrah, but listen: what’s past cannot be mended. You shall descend from this window with the speed of light — bear these bags to Glindarragh, and — but woe’s me! no — that will not do — they are all at rest ere this — and to return with the money were ruin — utter ruin. Yet they must not remain in the house even for an hour,” he continued, distractedly; "the villain may have begun his search already; anything but that — anything but that; so get you forth, and dig quickly and quietly a small hole, some three feet deep, under the crab tree in the paddock; lay in the bottom of it these two bags, which I will drop down when you are safe on the ground; throw the soil carefully back again, so that so much as a single ounce weight of it shall not remain about — tread it home, and lay the sod neatly on top, so that none can suspect it has been disturbed; dost thou comprehend? So now forth, and down with thee."

In stern contempt of the young man's expostulations and alarms, Tisdal compelled him to essay the perilous descent — the feat was performed in safety — and, with fluttering anxiety and eager eyes, Jeremiah watched the lad, as he hurried round the corner of the house to the well-secured spot to which he had directed him.

He paused, scarcely daring to breathe, until he thought sufficient time had elapsed for the execution of the momentous commission, and then Tisdal again entered his chamber, made some alterations in his dress, as though he had but just risen, and hastily attired him self, and taking his candle in his hand, he, with an ostentatious clatter-proceeded to stamp and stumble down the stairs — calling, as he approached the kitchen, "Ho! Deveril! — art thou awake; rouse thee, man, I would fain have a word with thee."

He entered the kitchen, and found Deveril apparently precisely as Le had left him."

"I tell thee, Deveril, I cannot rest. Thou has spoken well — I cannot slumber," said Tisdal, gloomily, setting the candle upon the table, and seating himself. "Though I have courted sleep with all my soul, it has fled from me. It will not return even for a moment; nor can I know repose until this matter is settled between us; so let it now be determined, and once for all concluded, and thus an end of it. We each understand the other; say then, at once, what wilt thou take and begone, so that I may never see thee more."

"Will you swear to play me no knave's trick," replied Deveril, fixing his piercing gaze upon his host, "and say what plate and money thou hast in thy possession?"

With an imprecation too fearful to be repeated, Tisdal named the sum which he had just deposited in his press, as all the wealth his dwelling contained, and proffered the keys of all his presses, chests, and closets, in vindication of his truth.

“Some fifty pounds. Hum! You have scarce been prudent, noble captain — too much addicted methinks to creature-comforts to be so thrifty as would become one of thy years,” replied Deveril, “Fifty pounds is a pretty sum, I must admit; but then my habits, as you know, are expensive — and my secret worth something. Nevertheless I mean to be reasonable; and to put you out of pain at once, I name a hundred — an hundred pounds — not a penny less. You can easily get the other fifty among your friends and neighbours, or, in short, where you list; but have them I must — that’s all.”

“You’re a merciless, griping villain to deal with,” answered Tisdal, bitterly; “but I suppose I must e’en submit. All I can do is to try to find the money, though few will be disposed to lend it. Tomorrow I will seek it; and, come what come may, on the day following, by hook or by crook, I shall make it up.”

He sighed profoundly as he concluded the sentence, called up as nearly as he could the despairing look of a ruined man, and then, with a hollow groan; he turned and remounted the worn and creaking stairs, exultingly muttering between his teeth, as the distance between him and his former comrade increased —

“And if you live until that day, or escape such a singeing on tomorrow-night, as will give thee quite enough of this country and its customs, may I pay thee every shilling of the hundred pounds; if my house is to be burned, ’tis well, at least, to have such a scoundrel broiled to powder in the flames.”

His mind pleasantly occupied with plans of further extortion, Deveril, upon the other hand, chuckled with unrestrained glee, and rubbed his hands together, as the departing footsteps of his gloomy host smote heavily upon his ear; and so the two companions parted for the night, each in the happy conviction that he had overreached the other.

CHAPTER XII.

SHOWING THE HALL OF LISNAMOE AND THE HILLS OF SLIEVE-PHELIM BY NIGHT — AND NARRATING HOW NED O' THE HILLS SMOKED A PIPE OF TOBACCO AND STRUCK A BARGAIN.

On the same night, Miles Garrett was sitting in the same shabby habiliments in which we have last beheld him, buried in profound and by no means gentle thought, in the hall of his castle at Lisnamoe. At a table — equally taciturn, though by no means as thoughtful — sate, at a little distance, the very person who had, but a few hours before, so terrified the fair Grace Willoughby, and afterwards so roughly atoned for his discourtesy; he was absorbed in the engrossing demolition of a mighty mountain of beef, which he washed down with copious draughts of ale, and abundant potations of more generous liquor. It was not until this unattractive personage had concluded his repast, and twice filled and twice emptied his goblet, that the silence of the apartment was disturbed. Pushing back the oak stool on which he sate, the brawny gentleman (for he claimed a gentle lineage) arose, heaved his huge shoulders, hitched up his breeches, and drawing the cuff of his coat across his greasy mouth, he approached his entertainer with an easy swagger.

"Well, sir, that's done; and now, I may say, I'm all as one as ready for the road," ejaculated he, planting his broad fists on the table; "so, if it's pleasing to your honour, you might as well give me the bit of paper, for I'd like to be tramping at once."

"Sit down, then," said Garrett, taking pen and paper,— "sit down, and attend to me. You have deposed to having lost sundry head of cattle, and you now require a warrant from me, empowering you, in the king's name, to search for the same — is it not so?"

"To a nicety," ejaculated the fellow, with a sly grin.

"You know your powers under this warrant — eh?" inquired the magistrate.

“Och, bloody wars! — what id ail me?” answered he, impatiently. “Then I shall place it in your hands, leaving all to your *discretion,”* continued Garrett, with marked significance, while he applied himself to draft the necessary document, which — having dried it carefully at the fire, and read it through — he handed to the applicant, observing, as he did so, with emphatic deliberation —

“I have no choice in this matter, Mr. Hogan. As a justice of the peace I have no choice — but to grant your application, and, as a justice of the king’s peace, I wish you success. You say you have an appointment for tonight elsewhere, touching this untoward business, so it were poor courtesy to press your farther stay; should you desire it, however, you can have the same bed in which you last night slept.”

“Well, Miles Garrett, a *bochal,”* cried the ruffian, exultingly, as h*e* pinned the paper in his waistcoat pocket, “never believe me if you don’t hear of quare news before a week is past and gone — and if I don’t do all you want, and may be a bit to the back of it— “

“What do you mean, sir?” said Garrett, with stern abruptness, and staring full in the fellow’s face, until the familiar gaze of the ruffian sank for a moment abashed and subdued under the steadier and more commanding eye of the superior villain. “Execute that warrant as seems most consistent with the king’s service and your own interest; and again, sir, I wish you may succeed in recovering your cattle.”

“Well, well,” said the other, “take your own way — it’s all one — we both of us know what we want, and that is every thing; and so, your worship, I wish you a good night and the best of good luck, and peace and plenty; and here’s towards your good health.”

He had approached the wine-flask, as he spoke, and filling a bumper, with a grin of savage meaning he nodded to Miles Garrett, quaffed it down to the last drop, and then, looking in vain into the unmoved countenance of his host for a single ray of corresponding significance, he muttered —

“Well, well, well, but you’re a quare boy and so, turning upon his heel he left the room, and was, in five minutes after, riding slowly along a broken and narrow way, which led through the heathy steeps and wilds of the savage and desolate mountains of Slievephelim.

Miles Garrett, meanwhile, arose, and paced the stone floor of the hall with an exulting stride.

“All goes smoothly and steadily onward,” said he with an ill-favoured smile: “by this time tomorrow night, the better part of all his cattle and his other substance will be driven or waste, and thus the first act of the tragic drama will have been completed; and if he resist their entrance, demanded in virtue of the king’s warrant — then, in that case, comes the second act — the second and the best — for all the rest flows smoothly on from thenceforth to the crowning scene — the tragic catastrophe — stupid, headstrong, helpless hound!”

With a pale face, dilated nostril, and a grim smile, Miles Garrett paced the floor from wall to wall. His ruminations seemed to afford him no small delight, for he slapped his forehead, exultingly, and muttered —

“It’s all the brain — the brain — the brain!” He relapsed into sience for some minutes, and his countenance grew darker and darker every moment. At last he spoke again— “And as for thy daughter” — he continued, with an ugly scowl, and biting his thin lips at every pause— “as for thy daughter, if I but choose to have her, I *shall* have her, in spite of all thy frantic bluster. Bah! Hugh Willoughby, you ought to know me by this time and he smiled in the malignant consciousness of his own dogged and resolute sagacity and daring. “Yes, Hugh Willoughby, you shall know within a month all you have lost in madly repelling my proffered hand. Old scores of vengeance and bright hopes of profit and advancement I was willing to forego; but like an idiot you repulsed your fortune. You have had your miserable triumph. Make the most of it; for now — *now* something tells me MY triumph is at hand. Yes, Hugh Willoughby, you have made your bed, and you shall lie in it!”

While Miles Garrett thus chewed the cud of sweet and bitter fancy — as with downward, ominous glance, and heavy stride, he stalked backward and forward through his gloomy hall — his recent guest and companion was under the hazy moonlight, pursuing his lonely and uneven road. This track, little better than a broken pathway, wound along the elevated surface of the broad range of hills, deep among whose vast and heathy undulations the horseman was soon tracing his solitary and melancholy progress. The sense of loneliness is nowhere so awful as among the gigantic and monotonous solitudes of mountain scenery, especially when the exaggerating and uncertain radiance of the moon shrouds the vast undulations of the bleak and mighty hillsides, and invests their dusky outlines with undefined immensity of distance and magnitude. There the solitary traveller — lifted high above the sounds and sights of human habitation, with savage and gigantic scenery looming in deserted sublimity above and around him — feels, amid the vastness and the utter solitude of nature, awestruck with a fearful sense of his own nothingness. An intruder, as it were, among elements and influences, stupendous, desolate, and unsocial, he loses all sense of companionship with the things around him, and a feeling of isolation and of undefined danger steals solemnly and fearfully upon him.

The horseman whom we are bound to follow, now found himself in the lap of a broad misty hollow, around which, as he proceeded, seemed to gather and thicken the dark and swelling summits of the hills like monstrous forms closing him in to intercept his escape, and sailing slowly onward to overwhelm him in their awful confluence. Here and there the inequalities of the heathy flat, over which his course lay, were marked by huge strata of naked rock, lifted above the dark brown surface in vast riven masses, and strewn along the soil in gray shimmering lines, like the fragments and foundations of some Titanic fortification; and the grandeur and desolation of the scene were heightened by the rush and moan of the upper currents of the air, as they swept among the hill tops, and through the rocky glens, and solitary ravines.

The cavalier had heard of "*phookas*" and other malignant sprites, who, in desert places, encounter, scare, and even smite with decrepitude or madness the benighted traveller. He was familiar, too, with a thousand wild stories of the freaks, the delusions, and the malice of "the good people." He had heard how farmers, returning alone from distant fairs or travelling pedlars pursuing their benighted way, had been met and accosted on these lonely hills by ugly dwarfs, or intercepted by calves or dogs of unearthly kind, and other strange beings, who had terrified or abused them, so that, by the morning light, they had lost either their wits or their lives. All these tales of preternatural terror floated in gloomy succession through his mind, as he rode slowly onward through the vast and misty solitudes of the mountain-tracts. Often, as he pursued his way, he drew bridle and paused, fancying that he had heard a woman's shriek, and uncertain whether the shrill and distant sound might not have been the cry of some wild bird, scared by the night-owl from its rest; and listening on with a horrible misgiving, lest the sound should prove some phantom-wail, and be succeeded by some wilder spectral freak of unequivocal and insupportable terror; again he would turn and gaze behind him, as the hushed breeze hovered like close whispers in his ear, and scowling breathless, with blanched cheeks and parted lips, into the bleak void, subduing the half-muttered curse which instinctively rose to his lips, and mumbling a word or two of a forgotten prayer; and then, with an effort to reassure himself, giving his hat a new set, squaring his shoulders, planting his arm a-kimbo, and whistling a snatch of some favourite tune, he would once more resume his way, again to interrupt it as before.

It was, therefore, with a sense of relief which he would scarcely have confessed even to himself, that at last, after more than an hour’s lonely progress, he found himself within a mile of the spot at which he knew he should find human companionship. Inwardly congratulating himself upon his proximity to his journey’s present termination, he pressed onward at a brisker pace — still, however, very far from being altogether freed from those visitings of awe and doubt which he had, during his long and lonely night-ride, in vain endeavoured entirely to suppress vVhile he thus spurred onward, now traversing the soft elastic peat, with noiseless tread, and now clanging over the naked rock, a strange and dwarfish figure, which fancy might well have assigned to one of the malignant fairly brood, on a sudden started — he knew not how — as it seemed from the very soil beneath his horse’s hoofs. A thrill of superstitious terror for a moment unnerved him, and it was not until he had gazed for some seconds upon the wild and startling apparition, that he recognised the elf-looks and smoke-dried visage of the ill-favoured boy, whose unexpected appearance had that day so affrighted Sir Hugh’s fair daughter at Glindarragh bridge.

“God bless us!” said the horseman, recovering from an indistinct attempt to cross himself; “and so it’s only you, you devil’s whelp.”

And indulging the irritation which often follows causeless alarm, the burly horseman dealt the urchin a sharp blow of his switch across the head, which made him howl and caper in so unearthly and uncouth a fashion, that one unacquainted with his eccentricities of mien might well have felt his supernatural doubts confirmed, rather than allayed by the wild and grotesque exhibition.

“Never mind it, Shaeen dhas, never mind it, purty boy,” said the man, as the urchin gradually abated his strange demonstrations. “I did not know you, asthora — never mind it; but tell me, like an honest gossoon, is he down in the glin?"

"He is — what id ail him," said the boy— "himself an' two or three more, *Leam a rinka* and Shaun Laudher, an' a boy iv the Kellys, an' a quare little gossoon like myself, and the old Shan-a-van, an' that's all that's in it."

The horseman spurred his steed into a clattering canter, the boy running lightly and easily by his side; and thus they continued in silence to advance, until the track which they pursued swept into the course of a narrow glen, at first presenting a declivity so slight as to be scarcely distinguishable from the heathy level of the higher region, but gradually becoming more and more defined, until at last it deepened into a dark and craggy pass, precipitous and rocky, clothed with furze and heath, and traversed at the bottom by a stream, now dwindled to an attenuated thread, and whose gravelly bed supplied the broken and precarious roadway over which they dashed and scrambled. An abrupt turn of this defile brought them on a sudden to the object of their search.

From the door of a wretched hovel perched halfway up the steep and narrow pass, there streamed a strong red light, which flooded the rocky fragments and tufted furze, crowded closely about it, with warm and cheery crimson; and as it lay at the shadowy side of the deep ravine, the dusky light relieved the few objects on which it fell in fiery distinctness, and rendered the surrounding darkness but the denser and blacker by the contrast. Placing his horse's bridle in the hand of the uncouth and savage urchin who attended him, Hogan ascended the steep path which led to the cabin-door, and in a few moments he stood beneath the roof-tree of the hovel.

In the strong red light of the fire sat, or rather reclined, three men in coarse frieze, listlessly chatting in the strong gutturals of their native tongue; and thus disposed around the hearth in such attitudes as suited each, they occupied the hard earthen floor beneath the chimney, and warmed themselves the while. An old, smoke-dried, puckered hag cowered at the back of the hearth, showing through the filmy turf smoke scarcely more substantial than the pale blue and yellow flames which flickered above the red embers. Pacing the uneven earthen floor at the front of this rude and comfortless chamber, and from time to time glancing sharply through the open door as he arrested his measured pace, was a personage, of whose appearance we must say a word or two. He was rather above than below the middle size, his structure compact, well-knit, and wiry; and as he measured the floor with a firm and elastic tread, and turned his quick and fiery glance from object to object, there was a restless excitability and energy in his whole air and mien, as well as a piercing shrewdness, a promptitude and decision in his marked and swarthy countenance, which stamped him at once as a man of action and of daring. His dress, though considerably worn and weather-beaten, was alike in fabric and fashion that of a man who pretended to the rank of a gentleman. His own coal-black hair escaped from under the broad leaf of his hat, and added to the effect of his dark and sharply-marked features, which alike from the intense brightness and activity of his dark eye, and from the peculiar conformation of the strongly developed under jaw, bore a character of sternness and even of cruelty which impressed those who looked upon him with feelings bordering upon fear, aversion, and distrust. As he strode backward and forward, he seemed wrapped in exciting meditation; one hand was buried in his bosom, the other held the slender stem of a tobacco-pipe, from which he drew the smoke, which, in dense and rapid volumes, he puffed into the eddying air. With downward aspect and knitted brow, and flashing glance, he thus traversed the breadth of the dreary hovel to and again, as Hogan reached the door.

A curt but cordial greeting passed betw een these two personages thus brought together, and a close and earnest conference followed, partly carried on in English, and partly in the “mother tongue.” Through this it is not necessary to follow them; it is enough for our purpose to state its concluding words —

“You’ll be able to gother the boys in time?” asked Hogan, doubtfully.

“With one whistle I’d bring them round me from Keeper to Monasterowena, and from Doon to Killaloe,” rejoined he, scornfully.

“And you’ll not fail me?” continued Hogan.

“When did O Moel Ryan fail of his promise?” returned “Ned o’ the Hills” — for he was the speaker — with tranquil disdain.

‘Hand and word,” cried the brawny visitor, as with emphatic energy he smote his broad hand upon the extended palm of his companion —

“hand and word, and the bargain’s clenched.”

At a word from Ryan, one of the followers at the hearth sprung to his feet, and filling out two drams of brandy, carried them to the door where the two principal persons stood.

"I drink to you, Mr. Hogan," said Ryan.

"And here's towards your good health," replied Hogan, in a voice of thunder, "an' success to us both, an' smashing to smithers be the luck of our inemies."

With these words he dashed off the liquor, and, with a wild hurra, he flung the glass high into the dewy night-air, whence descending, it burst into jingling shivers in the craggy depths of the bleak glen — a type of the savage malediction to which he had just pledged its contents.

"Tomorrow night, and half an hour before the moon goes down," said our new acquaintance, shaking back his long dark locks, as a lion might his mane, when he scents the prey afar off, "in the wood of Glindarragh, and under the *Carrig-na-Phoka* — and so, God send you safe home."

Thus they parted, Hogan to pursue, in his long and solitary night-ride, the purpose which occupied his mind; and his confederate to complete, in the hurried interval, the vast and deadly arrangements of their desperate enterprise.

Meanwhile, in her chamber in the old castle of Glindarragh — books, music, and oldfashioned tapestry work all neglected — sits, in her ponderous high-backed chair, her soft eyes resting in deep reverie upon the changing embers of the hearth, the sweet Grace Willoughby, pensive, pale and mournful — she who before that night scarce ever knew what one grave thought or one transient cloud of sorrow might be. What thoughts are now chasing one another through the clear stillness of her mind? The agitating dangers of the evening have ceased to quicken her pulse and flush her cheek; the flutterings of her proud and timid heart are quiet now, and yet she sits absorbed in the deep enchantment of her reverie. Her beautiful face, late so radiant and dimpling with the pleasant smiles of arch and girlish merriment, is now touched for the first time with the loftier character of pride and melancholy — yet both combined so softly, and in so lovely a look, that nothing but the nobleness of pride and the gentle sweetness of sorrow reign in its pure and mournful tranquillity. As she leans her graceful head upon her small white hand, on which falls thickly the golden shower of her rich hair, her memory is busy with the words, the looks, the gestures, aye, with the very plumes and spurs and gold lace of the handsome champion who had rescued her that day. She hears him as he spoke — every accent of his rich manly voice is sounding in her ear; he stands before her, in all his proud and martial beauty, as she that day beheld him — she sees again his looks of chivalric, respectful tenderness, as he led her toward her home; and then, again, oh! sudden, painful change, she beholds the stern and proud aspect, the averted look, with which her transformed deliverer took his abrupt departure. Innocent girl! as thus she muses, she persuades her willing heart that she but yields to the promptings of her simple curiosity; yet if she will but look into that heart, she will find a deeper interest there. What makes it happiness to thee to recall his lightest word, or look, or gesture; and when his sudden parting rises in thy memory, why that pang of wounded pride, and whence that rising sigh? Oh! girl, bethink thee ere it be too late; he is thy father's foe — the devoted enemy of all thy house; beware, sweet Grace, beware; love not where thou canst not be loved again; guard well the portals of thy warm and gentle heart; oh, dwell not on his words and looks so fondly; but banish that image from thy mind with fear and horror, as a snare of Hell.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUNSET AND MOONLIGHT ON THE TOWERS OF GLINDARRAGH.

THOUGH the meditated attempt on the castle of Glindarragh was vaguely known among the surrounding peasantry, and though it supplied the material of gossiping discussion at every forge and hedge shebeen-shop for miles around, yet, neither to Sir Hugh nor to one individual of his household, was one hint of danger spoken — absolute mystery sealed the lips of every peasant; and had it not been for the warning of which we have already spoken, the castle of Glindarragh might easily have been surprised, and all within it lain at the mercy of a wild banditti.

The sun was now hastening downward among the western hills, and, as it seemed, with a fiery and vengeful light glared murkily upon the old towers of Glindarragh. A low wind moaned and whispered through the chimneys and battlements of the doomed building and the neighbouring wood, with a wild ominous sound, in fitful gusts, which muttered and swelled like the laughter of fiendish revelry, and died away in long wailing moans. On the castle walls, from time to time, might be seen anxious groups scanning the distance with stern and gloomy suspense. The gates were fast closed and barred, and the stout old building, in its bold and sombre isolation, might well have suggested the image of some gallant storm-beaten ship, with rigging taut and all hands alert, awaiting an approaching hurricane.

Occasional snatches of songs floated, as if in defiance, from the gray summits of the old towers, and mingled strangely with the lowing of cattle which arose from within the walls — and again all was lost in the bleak howl of the rising gust. Every thing gave note of preparation — the loopholes in the river tower flanking the great gate, which had been walled up for years, were now again opened for the play of musketry; and from the summit of the Banshee's tower, which, at the other extremity, in like manner flanked the entrance, peered downward the muzzle of an ancient and honey-combed demi-culverin, loaded with musket bullets half way to the mouth. The castleyard, too, presented an unwonted spectacle; for all the best of Sir Hugh's cattle had been driven from the neighbouring pastures, and cows and fat oxen and sheep, stood in patient groups, penned closely within the precincts of a rough paling, which left but one free avenue down the centre of the yard, and a clear though narrow passage down the sides. Thus the crowded cattle stood in hundreds closely pent within the dark inclosure of the castle walls, and all the air of stir and bustle within the fortress was enhanced by the arrival, from various quarters, in prompt response to Sir Hugh's summons, of motley reinforcements, numbering in all full seventy men; some of gentle birth, accompanied by their servants; others, sturdy yeomen, with their sons or brethren; and all with due supply of muskets, matchlocks, birding pieces, or other serviceable firearms, and proportionate and proper ammunition therewith; for Tyrconnell's proclamation for the disarming of the yeomanry and gentry had been but partial and imperfect in its effect, and, unless where there existed a pressing necessity, or what was so considered by King James's government, for enforcing its requisitions, had remained practically inoperative; except, indeed, that the new construction of the law exposed the man who ventured to dispute it to the risk of a state prosecution, if by any overt act he evinced his disobedience to the Castle manifesto, and thus was added not a little to the embarrassments and the perils of men, whose properties and lives the government had not at ail times the power, even if it had the desire, to protect, and who were, therefore, in most cases reduced to rely for safety, under Providence, solely upon their own energies and resources.

It was now late enough, in all conscience, for Jeremiah Tisdal, th cool and cautious Puritan to have sought the security of Glindarragh Castle, and along with his ungainly servitor — Praise-God Bligh — to have contributed to the numbers of the little garrison its due contingent from the town land of Drumgunniol; yet Jeremiah Tisdal had not arrived, and Sir Hugh was perplexed to divine the reason of his absence, and often missed his sagacious counsel, as with the aid of the more experienced of his friends he apportioned the defence of the old fortress among its garrison, and assigned to each his post and office when the emergency of actual conflict should have arisen.

The level beams of this stormy sunset, and the lengthening shadows had, however, warned Tisdal that the time had indeed arrived when he could no longer with safety protract his stay within the comparatively unprotected mansion of Drumgunniol. With Praise-God Bligh, therefore, by his side, and a matchlock of marvellous length gleaming upon his shoulder, and a huge horn of gunpowder and a leathern bag of bullets dangling by his belt beneath the cloak, the Puritan might have been seen issuing from the wicket-door of the yard, and tracing with his wonted gait, and with a countenance unusually black and troubled, the pathway which conducted from his house to Glindarragh bridge — the lank and sad-coloured form of the lad who accompanied him, with a short musket slung at his lean back, followed closely and fearfully at his heels; and never did sunset-ray light upon a gloomier or more forbidding pair. In total silence they thus traversed the lonely path together, and without encountering a human form, excepting one or two peasant loungers, whom they passed without one word or gesture of greeting, in sullen silence and with a dark interchange of looks of mutual menace and hatred, they both at length found themselves upon the little bushy eminence which commanded a view of the bridge and castle of Glindarragh. Here the long pent-up feelings of the master of Drumgunniol at last found vent. He stopped short and looked back with an aspect of the extremest distress towards the spot where the gray chimneys of Drumgunniol peered above the bushes which clothed the brow of the intervening slopes.

"It is a sore extremity and hard to bear," he muttered, clutching the stock of his matchlock with the energy of rage.

The servant responded by one of those peculiar groans, which rise mournfully from the depths of the stomach, and finding no vent at the compressed and drawn-down lips, escape, at last, with a dismal twang from the nose. With this meek and mournful response, he folded his lean hands, and turned up his eyes.

"Bligh," said his master, clutching him decisively by the arm, "thou art a fleet runner, even as Ashael, who followed after the chariot of Abner; unsling thy firelock, and back to the house — it will be dark ere thou hast reached it, and the serpent eyes of that incarnate devil cannot penetrate the dark; try once more what has baffled us — (woe is me!) all the day long — without his seeing thee, get me the money bags and thou shalt have — I will give thee — I will not tell thee what, at present — but speed thee, and I will wait for thee where I stand; at all events, be sure that you return with speed — our lives may rest on it — away!"

Bligh knew too well the absolute and cruel temper of him with whom he had to deal — much as his bowels yearned to plead for a remission of the dreaded order — even for a moment to dispute his master's command, and with trembling knees, and a sinking heart, he started upon his very doubtful mission. But, ere he did so, the sun went down, and the murky twilight began to strive more and more faintly with the wan moonlight, whose cold radiance was soon to illume the wide expanded landscape.

Every thing conspired to enhance the uneasiness of the proprietor of Drumgunniol. Half-an-hour had now elapsed, and his servant had not returned — though, as his impatient master calculated, so fleet a runner as he might have easily traversed the intervening distance four times over in the time. He cursed his hard fate a thousand times — bitterly he anathematized the lagging courier, whom he would have cheerfully seen roasted to a cinder at a slow fire, in exchange for the blessed assurance that his precious gold was safe. Another half hour had nearly passed, and Tisdal eyed the dark battlements of the tower, and inwardly prayed that he might, ere ten minutes more had passed, find himself safely within their compass — resolved that, should that time elapse without bringing the return of his absent messenger, the lad, and, alas! the gold must be left to their doom.

With the nervousness of a man who knows that every moment of his stay may prove that of his own destruction, and who yet feels, that to desert the post of suspended danger which he occupies, is, in effect, to abandon that which is dearer to him almost than his very life, Tisdal paced the narrow platform which he had chosen for his watch, from bush to bush; the chill blast froze his heart, and its deep threatening and wild sounds dismayed him. With looks of jealous and ferocious scrutiny, he trod the narrow space and searched the distance, as the daring and storm-beaten captain of some surrounded smuggler, in the desperation of his circumstances, might pace his quarter-deck, and strain his eyes for the distant chance of relief or escape. The moon, however, was now the only source of light, and her silvery disk was fast approaching the verge of the horizon — to stay any longer, indeed he felt, would be but madness — one despairing curse he launched at his lagging messenger, and then was about, in sheer distraction, to cross the bridge, and claim admittance to the castle, when he saw a dark figure gliding along the pathway from Drumgunniol toward him.

"It is Bligh," thought he, while his heart bounded with exultation — but, alas! never was hope more delusive. Bligh had had his adventures, and was then far enough away.

Tisdal moved a pace or two to meet the approaching form, and, as he did so, his ear was startled with the report of a musket, sharply echoed from the direction of his own house, and, with a momentary glance, he beheld a strange blood-red light tinging the horizon with a wild and lurid glare, exactly where his mansion stood.

"As I live, it burns," said Tisdal, while his colour shifted to a livid hue, and his breath came thick; "they have fired the house. Now — now, it is all up with thee, crafty, subtle, illfated miscreant."

There was, however, no triumph in his face as he thus spoke — nothing but a deadly, livid horror. His eye travelled again to the path way, where he had beheld the solitary figure but a moment before, and now it seemed as though, in dense and sombre masses, the dark bushes themselves were creeping and stealing onward to meet him.

"May the Almighty guard me, it is the wild Irish!" he muttered, with a terrible revulsion, and instantaneously turned and ran, with what speed his stiff joints could command, down the rugged pathway toward the bridge.

A dense mass of human forms, however, noiselessly deployed before him upon the open road at the near bridge end — he knew not how or from whence — like a black sea, overflowing its banks, and noiselessly pouring its waters into the neighbouring flats and hollow's.

"Surrounded! — oh, merciful Father, deliver me," he ejaculated, in the extremity of his despair.

And now, all around him, were seen the same dark masses, stealing, and crowding, and creeping along; and now another, and another shot was heard in the dull distance from Drumgunniol, and the fierce glare which lighted up the horizon glowed deeper and wilder. It was no longer possible to avoid detection, so, with the desperate resolution of selling his life as dearly as he could, Jeremiah Tisdal grasped his long matchlock firmly in both hands, and ran towards the bridge, upon the desperate chance of forcing his way unexpectedly between the party who occupied the river brink and the castle gate, and, this done, of keeping them at bay until he had reached the shelter of the walls. His plan, however, was hardly conceived ere it was frustrated; for, in, his quick descent, he stumbled upon the rugged pathway, and striding with accelerated speed down the broken slope, he at length fell headlong, and, in doing so, discharged innocuously, with loud explosion, the whistling bullet from his matchlock, through the night air; and ere he could recover his feet, was overpowered and secured.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ASSAULT.

WHILE this is passing without, the reader must pardon us if we transport him for one moment within the castle walls, on which from place to place are posted some score of sentinels, armed, vigilant, and anxious — their weapons glancing, and their forms showing darkly in the uncertain moonlight. He must follow us into the great hall of the castle. It is a long and broad stone-floored chamber, with a low oaken ceiling sustained by heavy beams, blackened by age and smoke; at each end yawns a capacious hearth, in which roars an eddying cloud of smoke, and sparkles, and flickering flame, as the piles of turf and crackling bogwood glow and blaze, like rival bonfires, beneath their opposing chimneys. A mighty oaken table stretches down the centre of this great chamber, so vast that in the flaming smoky torchlight one can scarcely see clearly from end to end. Huge dishes, high-piled with savoury fare, poultry and mighty joints, and pyramids of potatoes, and dishes of the now obsolete "cobladdy," send up their savoury canopy of steam, which overhangs in genial festoonery of cloud the busy guests, fully a hundred in number, who with their weapons beside them, and in strange and grotesque variety of demi-military equipment, sit upon stout oak stools upon either side, and with knives and forks raise such a din and clatter on the pewter plates, as well nigh drown the obstreperous clangour of voices raised in jest, or disputation, or excited narrative, and the uproar of laughter and good wishes, an the ringing of goblets when the guests pledge one another in cordial revelry, and altogether there swells and thunders such a volume of festive uproar, as might have stunned a miller in his tuck-mill.

At the upper end of the board, as beseems the host, sits the stou Sir Hugh, and at his right and left those of the highest consideration among his visiters. Casks of good wine, as well as of mighty ale propped along the walls, yielded to the simple appliance of the faucet and spiggot their delicious burthens, which foamed in many a silver and many a pewter tankard, cup, and flagon: and all this scene of hilarity and festive cheer was heightened and exaggerated by the exciting consciousness of approaching conflict and companionship in danger; and in its picturesque effect mellowed and enriched by the warm and lurid glare of torches, flaming redly from their sockets in the walls over the warlike and variously attired banqueters.

"Nevertheless," continued Stepney of Annagh — a white-headed old gentleman, with full, red, stolid cheeks, small grey, goodhumoured eyes, shaggy eyebrows, and almost no forehead at all, looking gravely upon Sir Hugh— "nevertheless I think it were well to sally forth, and lay about us. Trust me, there's nothing like a vigorous sally."

"We have no right to assault them till they have first attacked us," replied Sir Hugh; "and all I seek is to defend my house against them. God forbid that I should shed one drop of blood more than our protection requires. Besides — besides," he continued with a mournful shake of the head, "I would not set my child's safety upon the precarious chances of such an enterprise."

"What if they try to burn us out of the place?" urged the old man. "If it be possible to burn the house," said Percy Neville, glancing upward at the torches which flared within a few feet of the ceiling, "which seems to me a problem, methinks we're like to save the gentlemen that trouble."

"I fear them not," said old Sir Hugh; "my trust is in the Almighty. My family in time past have suffered sore distresses and dreadful extremities within this very house of Glindarragh, yet the old towers stand firm as ever, and a Willoughby is here tonight to guard them with his own right arm."

"And a Neville, too, by my faith," said the young man briskly, and with a flashing eye. Then as instantaneously relapsing into his usual careless vein, he added— "A Neville, too, as the devil would have it — wherever kicks and cuffs are plentiest, there my benignant star is sure to carry me. But meanwhile does it not strike you, cousin Willoughby, that while we are swilling and cramming here, the castle might be stormed, and the sentries all impaled, and we know nothing of the matter, until our own turn came to die upon these piles of beef and poultry; for my part I could not hear so much as the crack of that old cannon on the — what d'ye call it tower?"

"Smuggling Dick has the culverin in charge," said Stepney, pompously.

"Then Smuggling Dick is not long for this world," rejoined Neville; "they have loaded it to the very mouth, and, never believe me, or it will burst like an egg-shell. Reserve the culverin, good cousin Hugh, I beseech you, to the last act of the tragedy, and when things are altogether desperate, and you have made up your mind to put the garrison out of pain, and blow the old castle into infinite space, then, and not till then, give Smuggling Dick the signal, spring the culverin, and so discharge us, castle and all, with eclat into the clouds."

"You're a brave lad, though somewhat hairbrained," replied Sir Hugh, gravely; "but there is reason in much that you have said, and so methinks it were well that we were stirring, and this supper ended." As he thus spoke, a messenger from without, his long hair wisped and straggling wildly from the wind, and his face scared and pale, stood at the door, and shouted in accents that rose above the din and clatter of the feast, as with uplifted arms he gazed eagerly toward Sir Hugh— "The Irish are coming! — the Irish — the Irish!"

A hundred voices in wild confusion caught up, and echoed the startling summons. At the instant every face darkened with the stern reality and presence of danger; wild and savage was the hubbub — the clang of weapons, as in breathless haste each guest resumed his own — the scrambling of men across the table, amid crashing dishes and rolling tankards — the tumbling of stools and barrels, and the hoarse cries of "the Irish! — the Irish! — the Rapparees — Ned o' the Hills. Let them come on, they're welcome; we're ready for them. We'll give them a bellyful — Protestant powder and ball. Hurrah! — hola! — huzza!"

Thus shouting in terrible and deadly excitement, hurtling and hustling along, and jostling one another, they poured forth into the castle yard, and each mounted to his post of vantage, with the deep, stern curiosity of brave men, who in the tempest hear on a sudden the dreadful words, "the ship is on a rock," and climb breathless to the deck to see for themselves the dangers which surround them. With feelings such as these, but toned by resolute daring and indomitable self-reliance, did the little garrison mount to the various posts assigned them on the walls and towers, and in the narrow embrasures from which their musquetry could tell.

Let us glance for a moment at another group. While this boisterous and desultory meal, so abruptly concluded, was yet proceeding, old Con Donovan, the butler, was enjoying, in the privacy of his own chamber, a pleasant booze with Dick Goslin and Tim Dwyer, the two squires who, as we have already mentioned, in their several capacities, followed the fortunes of Percy Neville. The butler’s chamber was a small stone-vaulted apartment in one of the flanking towers, with a single narrow casement peering, like a miniature tunnel, through the thickness of the wall, and commanding a circumscribed but pleasant view of the quaint white statues and trim yew hedges of the formal flower-garden we have already mentioned. All was, however, now dark without; and in the butler’s snuggery no blinking candle, with lengthening wick and feeble ray, gleamed dismally upon the jolly party; but their carousal was meetly lighted by the joyous blaze of wood and turf, flaming in the hearth, strong, fierce, and roaring as the spirit of revelry itself. By a clumsy, strong-jointed table, stored with flasks and cups, and seated upon stout old ponderous stools, the three companions glowed in genial confidence and growing jollity before the warm blaze of the fire, that murmured and sputtered in comfortable rivalry with the fitful moaning of the chill night wind.

Tim Dwyer had never looked so red, so quizzical, and so goodhumoured in all his life before. Even the bilious, sharp-faced Londoner seemed touched and kindled with the expanding influences of good fellowship. And as for Con Donovan, he was the very picture of an ancient butler. Sack, sherry, Canaries, and claret, not to mention brandy and usquebaugh, burned and beamed in his ruby visage, and twinkled and sparkled from under his bushy grey brow. Mingling in the jolly character of his visage, was an expression, half judicious, half severe, which spoke of fifty years of exquisite and unimpeachable tasting, and as many of absolute domination over the keys of office. There was not a pimple on his nose that did not represent whole dozens of emptied wine-flasks; nor a wrinkle in his thoughtful face that did not indicate the subtle critic and the judge supreme; while his long fine hair of snowy white bespoke his own venerable and racy antiquity of date. Such seemed Con Donovan upon ordinary occasions. But when he stood before the dark and ancient cupboard, with all its store of burnished plate and blazing tankards, arrayed in lordly display, tier above tier, and the ponderous key of office in his right hand — at such times the porter of paradise never looked half so sublimely conscious of the good things committed to his charge, and of the unparalleled importance of his function, as did the venerable butler of Glindarragh Castle.

Here then in this calm retreat, which might have made a cell for old Friar Tuck, the three companions plunged without restraint headlong into the joys of giddy wassail. Vain were it, in sooth, to follow Con through all his rambling lore about the O'Briens and the castle; every chamber in the old place had its appropriate tradition — the story of the banshee's tower, and "the room of the candle," Crohore's cellar, the *far na phisogue,* and the "sperrit of the slasher" that haunted certain chambers of the castle; these and a hundred other tales of wonder and mystery the old domestic recounted to his listening guests.

But as their potations waxed deeper, their conversation waxed louder and more brilliant. Con told his very best stories in his very best style, though his utterance grew somewhat indistinct towards the close, but that did not prevent his enjoying their point prodigiously himself and laughing in proportion. From this mood he gradually slid into another, grew amorous, and sung a piteous love ditty, which, however, was so interpolated with hiccoughs as to be scarce connected and intelligible. Tim Dwyer, in a pathetic vein, with touching confidence, ran through his past career, and shed copious floods of tears, while he fervently wrung the hands of his companions, much to their inconvenience. Even Dick Goslin grew loquacious and took a valiant turn, challenging in his own proper person the whole four provinces of Ireland to mortal combat, and defying them to come on. In this defiance, however, he was interrupted by losing his equilibrium, and falling along with his stool upon the floor, where he continued, nevertheless, with unabated courage to challenge and defy the whole Irish population, together with at the barbarous nations of ancient and modern times, with every species of provocative and contumely most calculated to goad them to the conflict. His two companions, who were themselves hardly in a better plight, had scarcely succeeded in helping him to his feet, when the door opened, and a pair of honest yeomen, hot and out of breath, entered with the alarming intelligence that Drumgunniol was in a blaze and the rapparees already in sight.

This astounding announcement was wonderfully sobering in its effects. Dick Goslin, though in a somewhat serpentine course, made his way out of the room, and neither designing to share in the glories of the triumph, if such it should prove, nor yet to be in the way and visible in case the "land savages," as he called them, should get in, he directed his course to a small and deserted kitchen which he had that day reconnoitred, and shoving aside the cover of a large metal boiler, upon which he had pitched as his destined asylum in the hour of need, he tumbled himself into it, and with a little trouble slid the cover back again into its place, and here, comfortless and cramped as was his posture, the heaviness of his free libations gradually prevailed, and he sank into a profound and deathlike slumber.

Meanwhile the excitement of preparation everywhere continued within the castle walls, and amid all the hurry scurry, the brave old Sir Hugh, his iron gray locks escaping from beneath his broadleafed hat, and his short cloak drawn tightly round his shoulders, armed with carbine and pistols, and accompanied by the stout old Stepney at one side, and at the other by his cousin, Percy Neville, crossed the courtyard with a cool and steady pace, and mounting the steep stairs, entered the narrow stone-floored and stone vaulted chamber which overhung the great gate, and placing himself at the central loop hole, looked forth upon the steep avenue which led upward from the foot of the bridge to the castle, and commanded a wide prospect of the surrounding country.

“As I hope for grace,” said Sir Hugh vehemently, striking the butt of the weapon which he carried upon the floor, “the villains have fired honest Tisdal’s house — that blaze is from Drumgunniol; pray heaven the trusty fellow may not have fallen into their hands.”

They all looked wistfully in the direction which the old knight had indicated, and plainly saw the volumes of smoke rolling and heaving in lurid masses, while showers of sparks and broad sheets of flame from time to time illumined the dusky glow with a more dazzling brightness.

“Neville,” said the old knight with sudden alacrity, after a lengthened pause— “Neville, your young eyes are fitter for this misty light than mine; see you any thing yonder on the bridge near the farther side of the river; methinks I see a horseman.”

“Two horsemen, Sir Hugh, unless I see double,” rejoined the young man; “and as well as I can perceive, a sort of mob about them, moving slowly this way.”

Had they at that moment been enabled to scan the area around the castle walls, upon the other side of the building, they would have beheld much more formidable demonstrations of the enemy; for stealing onward among the orchard trees, and through the garden and at the opposite side of the river, were seen gathering and thickening, moment after moment, dark, dense masses of human figures, until the very copse and underwood seemed instinct with life; and the number of assailants thus silently accumulating, vast as they undoubtedly were, were rendered terrifically undefined by the deep, impenetrable shadows and cover of the surrounding trees and brushwood, which for any thing to the contrary appearing, might all be occupied by the same threatening masses whose van at every side in sinister silence began to close round the devoted building. Still, too, as death, the little garrison within, in breathless suspense, awaited the expected assault of what, with the dreadful sinkings of dismay, they inwardly felt to be an overpowering force; and many a man who had not prayed for a full year before, now muttered fervent appeals to the God of battles, as glancing along the dark line of copse which straggled from the dense wood around the ancient fortress, he marked the gradual swelling of the noiseless and stupendous multitude, and the slow, onward stealing of their dark and ominous front. As this awful and noiseless inundation of human hatred and vengeance rolled onward, and rose, as it were, gradually but steadily around the doomed building, the hearts of even the bravest within it beat fast and thick; and every man of the comparatively little garrison felt, as with set teeth and riveted gaze he breathlessly watched, as under some horrible fascination, the slow advance of the living tide which was sweeping onward, that he would have gladly exchanged the hideous tranquillity of that lulled and quiet approach for all the roar and clangour of the fiercest danger and the maddest strife of actual conflict. Meanwhile Sir Hugh, and those who along with him tenanted the small stone chamber which we have described, watched with cool but anxious scrutiny the movements of the group who had appeared upon the bridge. Two horsemen, as well as the now fast descending moonlight would allow them to discover, well mounted and equipped like gentlemen, and surrounded by a rabble rout of some hundred men, turned slowly up the approach to the castle gate, and dismounting at the far end, left their horses there, and so with a jaunty swagger they both strode up the broken ascent, followed by their wild myrmidons. The one was a stout, ill-looking, broad-shouldered fellow; the other a dark, swarthy-featured man, of light and wiry build. The reader needs not to be told that he beheld in them “Captain” Hogan and the redoubted Eamon a Knuck, or Ned Ryan of the Hills — O’Moel-Ryan of the race of Cahir-More. Side by side they approached the great gate, and had already come within some ten paces of the arch, when a stern voice from the embrasure over the gateway challenged the leaders of this sinister party.

"Hold," cried Sir Hugh, for it was he who spoke— "what seek you here, sirs, at this unseemly hour?"

"We demand admission under a search-warrant," replied Ned Ryan, as promptly and as sternly.

"A search-warrant! — search — and for what?" demanded the old knight from the narrow embrasure.

"What for? — why, for my gray *coppul!"* retorted the burly ruffian, Hogan, swaggering in front of his slighter companion— "for my *coppul beg greagh* and my elegant cow, *Dhrimandhu.* My darlin girl, will I never see your blue coat and the white twist iv your horns again. Och voh! agus ochone, Dhrimandhu!"

The end of this apostrophe went off into the Irish chorus of the well-known humorous song, which he chanted with stentorian lungs, and a burlesque exaggeration of the extremest woe. There was a cool insolence in this buffoonery which stirred the blood in the old knight's veins.

"Have a care, fellow," said he, with difficulty mastering his rage— "have a care, sirrah, and keep your ribaldry within your teeth. It is no light matter, as you shall find, in troublous times like these, and at such an hour, to beset a gentleman's dwelling. Show me the authority on which you presume to disturb the quiet of my household, or by Saint George I'll make my people clear the road, and set you singing to another tune."

"Then you are old Willoughby in person?" said Ryan.

"I am Sir Hugh Willoughby, fellow?" replied the knight.

"Well, old Hugh," continued the rapparee, "you shall be gratified. You want to see the warrant?"

"I demand it," replied he.

"Then look at it," retorted the rapparee, folding the paper closely, and fixing it firmly upon a pike's point, he raised it to the aperture within which Sir Hugh was standing.

The old knight, in the now declining beams of the moon, was with difficulty enabled to decypher a few words of the warrant, but at the foot of it he read in large and marked characters the hated name of "Miles Garrett."

Without uttering one syllable, he tore the paper across and across, and stretching his arm from the casement, with indignant vehemence he flung the fragments to the night wind, which whisked them up, and whirled them in an instant over the battlements in a mimic snow shower.

"Is it so you treat the warrant of the king's justice, old rebel," fiercely exclaimed the redoubted Edmond Ryan, who had now fallen back a little, and resumed his station close in front of the crowd who had accompanied him.

"Ay, and even so will I give your soul to the night blast, robber and murderer, if you loiter here another minute" retorted Sir Hugh, bitterly.

The rapparee turned to the crowd who followed them, waved his hand, and in a moment the dense mob had dissolved and glided under cover of the bushes, and the turf and corn stacks, which stood ranged along the steep road. At the same instant he blew a piercing whistle, which rung through the old walls, and awoke the shrill echo of the wood, until it was lost in the wail of the rising wind.

"Och vo-agus, och hone, Drimandhu," struck up the burly companion of Ned o' the Hills, as with a dramatic assumption of the most extravagant transports of grief and desolation, he walked down the broken road to a more prudent distance, where he suddenly threw himself flat in the grass behind a furze.

"You refuse, then, peremptorily to admit this poor gentleman, and to open your door to the king's warrant?" said Ned o' the Hills, slightly hitching his shoulders, and squaring himself like a man preparing for action.

"I refuse to admit notorious ruffians and their hordes of savage banditti within my house, now and at all times," replied the old knight, firmly.

"Then you are a traitor to King James, detected, avowed, and punished."

As he spoke the last word, with the quickness of light, he levelled and discharged his carbine full at the shot-hole at which the master of Glindarragh had conducted this strange parley.

The bullet rang shrilly through the low crown of the old man's hat, grazing the very hair of his head, and without further effect smote upon the opposing wall, and fell flat as a crown piece upon the floor. The sharp report of the rapparee's shot had hardly ceased to vibrate in the echoes, when half a dozen muskets flashing with rapid explosion from the walls, sent their leaden missives chirping by his pars, as cowering low, he ran for a little space down the roadway, and throwing himself under cover, whistled again and again the same shrilly signal; and now were seen dense formidable masses pouring over the bridge, and at a running pace beginning to traverse the upward road toward the castle gate, while from the walls the musketry rattled sharply, and the returning fire from the road side covered the wild advance of the desperate column who rushed upward toward the gate; and now from every side growing, swelling, as the darkness deepened, arose the wild and fearful yell of the assailants, gathering, and strengthening, and rolling in stunning confluence over the old building like conflicting thundery and piercing the ear of night with the savage hootings of hate and defiance. Spreading, and pealing, and soaring rose the sound, in an uproar so terrific and gigantic, that the very storm seemed to sink in hushed dismay; and it grew almost a marvel that the ancient walls did not rock and topple to the ground like those of Jericho of old, under the stupendous vibrations of the mighty chorus of wild menace and vengeance that rushed, and trembled, and towered in the troubled night air. Within the intervals of this fearful hurricane, but comparatively faint as the "wild farewell" of the crew over whom are closing for ever the black waves of the ocean, might be heard the answering shout of the garrison from the walls, and towers, and shot holes, as with resolute defiance they anxiously awaited the decisive tug of actual conflict.

And now with terrific hubbub and thundering war-whoop the dark and savage multitude, bearing in their van a ponderous beam, dislodged from the mill close by, came rushing madly like a dark wave rolling and pealing up the shingles on the shore, toward the castle gate; bang, bang goes the musketry from the castle — rattle go the shots in return from the cover: hiss and whistle — the bullets sing through the darksome air; and now the dense multitudes are up — are thronging and hustling one another beneath the very walls, and cover in undulating masses of heaving black the steep surface of the road from the bridge, a sea of wild haggard heads swaying and rolling this way and that, and flowing like conflicting tides, so that those who from the castle walls beheld the giddy spectacle, felt their very brains to swim and sicken as they looked. The assailants drive madly onward, they rush and thunder at the oak gate of the castle, driving the huge beam they bear with crashing and stunning reverberation and infernal uproar, against the ancient and iron-studded planks. Well was it for those within that they had so effectually propped and strengthened it in time, with solid stone and rubbish, and carts and logs heaped up and packed together in dense and deep support, else the good planks, hard and massive as they were, must have yielded to the gigantic concussions under which the very walls seem to ring and tremble.

And now, with a stunning report, the cannon on the flanking tower explodes, and wraps the gate and its assailants alike, for a moment, in sulphurous smoke and eddying sparks; but the howling blast soon sweeps and whirls the mephitic cloud away, and reveals the rapparees, unflinching and ferocious as ever, still driving on their desperate assault; groans and wild shrieks of agony are lost amid other sounds. A rabid yell of maddened defiance rising from all sides of the beleaguered building, answers the thunder of the cannon, and with fury whetted and courage confirmed, the wild Irish sustain their as yet fruitless attack, redoubling the echoing shocks which batter at the gate, and momentarily expecting to burst the old oak planking, and to rush pellmell with all their skeans, and pikes, and matchlocks, into the devoted fortress, and make short work with the garrison.

While the dreadful din stunning the ear of night, shook the old building to its very foundations, the fair Grace Willoughby, with parted lips, and face pale as marble, but lofty mien and kindling eye, looked from the narrow windows of the stone vaulted chamber, in which, as the safest in the building, she and the other females of the household had been placed. It commanded no view but of the castle yard; and as she watched the opposing side, in which the great gate lay, at every thundering shout almost expecting to see the human torrent of destruction burst into the enclosure, she walked from window to window in all the wild but nobly curbed intensity of excitement and suspense. Behind her moved poor Phebe Tisdal, in silent agony of terror, now wringing her hands, and anon clasping them together, and vainly seeking words to form a prayer; while at the further end of the chamber, in unrestrained extravagance of clamorous panic, a group of females wailed and wept with all the wild cadences and frantic gestures of Irish women keening for the dead.

Again, a little apart from them, and still as a waxen mask, might be seen, under the shadow of her red hood, the yellow shrivelled features of the old nurse, who, seated upon a rude armchair by the expiring embers of the fire, with closed eyes and trembling fingers, fast and fervently told the beads of her rosary; and thus did even this chamber send forth its contingent of noise, its weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, to mingle in the infernal chorus that scared the sober night.

The rapparees had lost not a few of their men, killed by the fire from the castle, whose bodies lay crushed and mangled under the feet of the enraged survivors, and about thirty or forty, besides, more or less wounded, when, disappointed by the obstinacy with which the gate had resisted the formidable force brought to bear upon it, Ryan, whose carbine had been employed as fast as he could load it, in marking every embrasure and loophole in the walls — now with a savage imprecation, resolved on abandoning this plan of attack, and trying another, which as he believed could hardly fail of success; sharp and shrilly he whistled again and again, and as the summons reached his followers, the wild hurly burly subsided, and they retreated, like the stormy scud hurrying before the blast, from the castle front.

Ignorant of the cause of this movement, those who occupied the point of attack, cheered fiercely as they discharged their pieces upon the rear of the retiring groups, and then shook hands, and almost wept for joy, in the delusive hope that the attack was now finally abandoned in despair — and the danger which had but a moment or two before so appalingly and overpoweringly menaced them, indeed safely and triumphantly overpast.

Not a shot had been fired from any side of the castle but the one, the immense masses which beset the building on the other aspects lying inactive, excepting in so far as they joined in the fearful war cry, which sounded as though twelve legions of yelling demons hovered in the overhanging air, making every echo vocal with their hellish revelry of hate and frenzy. It would seem as though these Multitudinous reserves were designed, not for actual attack, but only to prevent the possibility of the escape of a single human being from the desperately defended fortress; and now, in strange and almost awful contrast with the recent stirring tumult, all alike, without and within, sank into hushed and still repose, leaving no sounds save the rush of the waters and the melancholy soughing of the wind to fill the listening ear.

The gallant gentlemen and hardy yeomen, reeking from their recent exertions, their haggard faces smirched with powder, and some among them bleeding, half choked with smoke, and holding their hot muskets in their grimed hands, looked forth into the void space so recently occupied by their terrific assailants, lost in wonder as to the cause of their sudden disappearance, and scarcely crediting the evidence of their senses, which assured them that the Irish had really withdrawn. Some laughed in their excitement, others almost shed tears, some lifted up their voices in solemn and fervent thanksgivings; and there were also some who, smarting from their recent hurts, bitterly cursed "the murderous savages," as they wiped away the trickling blood, muttering many a sanguinary and ferocious imprecation, and swearing many a vow of vengeance.

"By my faith," said Percy Neville, answering a vehement tirade of Stepney's, "call them cowards and savages if you will, but as far as I may pronounce from my own poor personal experiences, their flesh wounds smart as much as those of the politest and most valorous people upon earth; and thus much too I will aver, that in this skirmish they have borne themselves as prettily as any men need do."

"I fear that we have seen but the beginning of this night's work," said old Sir Hugh, as leaning upon the muzzle of his piece, he looked anxiously into the increasing darkness, in the vain search for some decisive manifestation to determine the doubtful problem of the enemy's designs. "I would rather than a thousand pounds," he continued, gloomily, "that I had thrown all the corn and hay into the river this morning — but that cannot now be cured; and praised be Heaven, these walls are strong, and have been proved by fire before; nevertheless, I would fain that this wind went down."

"It blows a fresh breeze," said old Stepney.

"I wish the gentlemen outside would make up their minds at once," said Neville, with a shiver; it's odds, if they don't, but we shall all take cold. Here stand we all cooling, like new candles in a row, while the bar barians are supping comfortably on old Tisdal. I' faith, if they deliberate much longer, I shall, for one, go peaceably to bed — but ha! they *are* at it again."

"And now — God guard and save us; for what I feared is indeed come at last," echoed Sir Hugh, with despairing vehemence. "Were it not for this accursed storm, I would still fearlessly defy them — but — but — we must not despair."

As the old man thus spoke, several lights, like red meteoric fires, came dancing and running in serpentine and wavy lines up the road, and shedding long streams of sparkles in the blast.

"What, in wonder's name are these?" whispered the young man, as he watched the strange phenomenon— "squibs — fireworks!"

"No such thing," replied Sir Hugh, sternly, as he rammed home the wadding of his piece— "lighted turfs to fire the corn and hay stacks — and all the store of turf, and to burn us out if possible."

So saying, the old knight resting his carbine on the sill of the loophole, fired — and, with a yell, they saw the dark form of the foremost runner, roll to the earth, while the lighted coal bounded onward in the blast, till it spent itself along the road in showers of sparks — the moon being now set, the darkness had so increased, that it was impossible any longer to discern the forms of objects, except when very near, so that the will-o'-the-wisp vagaries of these gliding stars alone guided the aim of the marksmen within the castle, and now once more began to swell and peal the same wild war-cry from every side, and the musketry from the walls to flash and clang with sharper echo from without.

"I fear we can scarce stand here much longer," said Percy Neville, for the first time exhibiting something like dismay— "the smoke begins to thicken so, that the place is all but stifling."

Still, however, the shots fell fast, and as he stood by the window and levelled his piece, through the rolling masses of dense white smoke, he suddenly staggered backward, exclaiming with an oath, "I'm hit at the same moment his right arm dropped powerlessly by his side, and his weapon falling on the floor, exploded.

"Don't mind me," said the young man, "it's nothing — nothing — it has unstrung my arm for the present, that's all." And so saying, dizzy and faint with pain, he staggered down the steps.

And now the cloud of smoke, white, dense, rolling and eddying in the rushing breeze, and huge enough to hide a mountain in its mighty folds, came streaked with streams of glittering sparks, flying high and low in its rolling tide. And now again, this awful cloud of smoke that tumbles and whirls till every corner, nook, and crevice of the great yard is lost in thickening vapour, begins to glow with a broad hue of deep fierce crimson, now reflected and now fading, anon coming and again lost, and then returning with increasing, widening, deepening glare; while the air grows hot, and the wild yell of the assailants swells and soars from every side, until it seems as it were to overarch the devoted structure in one huge dome of ringing and roaring iron. And now it is done, the flame bursts clear, magnificent appalling — in one vast, surging, living sheet of red, with a sound like the rattle and roar of thunder through the dense shroud of rolling smoke, and over the front wall of the castle, towering high and wide, and spreading and pealing, while hill and wood and sky, glare like a furnace in its terrific illumination. Well was it for all within the castle walls, that the buildings most exposed, were roofed with vaulted stone, and for the most part floored with the same — else all within must have been speedily destroyed — the iron stanchions of the windows, heated to whiteness in the torrent of flame, bent and warped like bars of wax, and the lead trickled down the old walls in streams like tears along the furrowed cheeks of age. The whole front of the building was of course abandoned, and those who had manned its towers and embrasures, were forced by the scorching glare, to fly for safety to the further side of the yard, and shelter within the buildings, where resolutely they took their stand, resolved, whenever the flames should abate, to dispute the entrance of the marauders, to the death. Meanwhile, between the hostile parties there roared a surging gulf of fire; within was wild panic, or sullen despair — the black and deadly determination of men who feel that their hour is come, and have resolved to sell their lives as dearly as they can. Had there lain a passage through the door which opened upon the garden at the side, no threats, arguments, or entreaty, could have prevented the little garrison, though the attempt were the veriest madness and certain destruction — from sallying forth and plunging furiously into the thick of their elated enemies — but that door had been secured both on the outside and within by solid masonry, and now there remained for them nothing but the horrors of suspense, the resolution of despair.

Without — what a spectacle — what a wide sea of upturned grinning faces — long elf-locks, bearded chins, wild gleaming eyes — what rushing and pressing and swaying hither and thither of the dense living mass — what flashing of skeans and pike heads, in the broad red effulgence of the towering conflagration.

Pressing among the burning turf, and heedless of the scorching fire, the foremost of the throng caught up the glowing sods, and hurled them through the arching flame over the castle walls, in a thickening hail-storm of fire.

Tumbling, bounding, rolling, hopping, these missiles, speeding like rockets through the pitchy air, burst into fragments upon the pavement, scorching and burning the maddened cattle — who, bellowing, butting, rearing, and bolting in blind fury, broke loose from their pens, and gored each other — rushing hither and thither, and adding new horror and confusion to the frantic scene.

CHAPTER XV.

THE STRUGGLE IS OVER.

THE great oak gate had now given way; and through the arched passage the flame was roaring like a torrent through a mill-sluice; and still downward, through the eddying smoke and sparks, poured faster and thicker the storm of fiery missiles from above: and all, amid the fiercest and wildest tempest of thundering execration, triumph, and fury — in which the occasional discharge of musketry, and the whizzing of the bullets, were wholly lost and swallowed up. And now the air grew too hot almost for respiration or sight — stifling, blinding, and intolerable. Forced into shelter within the buildings at the further end of the yard, the desperate defenders of the place stood by the closed windows, with their loaded weapons in their hands; and with contracted brows and pallid faces, watched the fluctuations of the dazzling and gigantic surf of mounting fire which roared and tumbled before them.

Meanwhile, without, the motley thousands thronged and pressed with fiercer and sterner exultation around the outer ring of the gradually receding fire; and foremost, reeling in the gripe of some dozen of the crowded assailants, with his arms bound and face bleeding, and apparently insensible or lifeless, was thrust and tumbled onwards, amid a storm of jeers and execrations, the helpless form of Jeremiah Tisdal. Anathemas, sarcasms, and terrific menaces, chiefly delivered in the strong emphatic gutturals of the native tongue, rang around him, amid yells and threatening laughter to the full as frightful.

“Ring the tongue out of the dog,” cried one voice; “rip him up,” yelled another; “drive a coal down his throat,” shrieked a third; “sink the pikes in him “roast the black Sassenach “plough him up with the knives “lift him into the bonfire such, and such like were the conflicting suggestions of the multitude.

“Hands off there,” cried Hogan, authoritatively, so as to deter those who seemed most practically disposed; “hands off, ye bliguards, an’ take it aisy. Can’t yez have common patience, an’ not be spoilin’ your own sport.

Where’s the good in skiverin’ the prisoner — devil’s cure to him, for a black old heretic scoundrel — in such an unrasonable hurry. See, Mara,” he continued, addressing the most athletic of the party who held Tisdal; “I’m thinkin’ after all, there’s no use waitin’ with him all night; so just take him up to the top of the gallows hillock, and swing him up in sight of the scoundrels in the castle, to comfort them while they’re roastin’.”

The mandate was hardly uttered, when the luckless puritan, torn, breathless, stunned, and helpless, was dragged through the crowd, by the wild lictors, who were to preside at his execution; and borne onward rather than walking, was forced up the steep and abrupt eminence, on which, in former times, used to stand the gallow’s, upon which the lords of Glindarragh were wont to exercise the sternest prerogative of a savage feudalism. A long ladder was speedily upreared, sunk in the ground to the depth of a few feet, inclining forwards towards the castle walls, and propped in front by three or four stout spars. And while this extempore substitute for a gibbet was in process of erection, others of the party were hotly engaged in twisting a strong hay-rope, or sougaun — and now, the preparations all being completed, a wild, half naked boy, with one end of the halter between his teeth, climbed nimbly up the ladder and passed the cord over the topmost round; and as soon as both extremities of it rested upon the ground, the grinning urchin descended with a whoop of savage delight.

Meanwhile, those who were employed below had torn open Tisdal’s shirt at the throat; and the old man’s bull neck, with all its swollen cordage of veins and sinews lay exposed to the gripe of the rope.

“What are you going to murder me for?” growled Tisdal almost inarticulately, as his eye wandered over the tremendous spectacle which lay beneath and about him. “Don’t kill me in cold blood, boys — don’t kill an unarmed man.”

“Unarmed, you murdherin’ wolf, you,” retorted the fellow next him, dealing him a buffet in the mouth, which, had he not been so closely wedged among the crowd of his eager executioners, as to render prostration impossible, must have felled him to the ground; and which, as it was, bathed his chin and throat in streams of blood; “unarmed, sure enough; for we took it from you, you black-hearted villain, before you could get in to your friends. But look down there — look at them all, where they’re roastin’ in hell before you — look at bloody Willoughby, an’ the rest o’ them.”

“For God’s sake, boys,” Tisdal essayed to plead; *“*for God’s sake— “

The adjuration was, however, drowned in a yell of curses and derision. *“*Hell’s gapin’ for you “the devil ‘ill be burnin’ wisps on your sowl before mornin’ “up with the heretic dog “give him a good view of ould Willoughby “hang him like a mad dog.”

Such exclamations, and a perfect hurricane of Irish anathemas, jeers, and denunciations stunned and overwhelmed the wretched man. And now, amid this uproarious jargon, the noose of the rude rope is forced over his head, and drawn tight upon his throat. He tries to struggle, to cry, to pray — the dreadful scene reels and dances before him — and now the cord is strained — tug after tug raises him from the earth — and with every fresh swing, a yell bursts from the surrounding crowd, of fierce exultation and defiance; but to his ear they sink into a stifled hum — before his eyes a pitchy darkness, flashing with balls of fire, is spread — a ringing, as of mighty bells, is in his brain — an intolerable sense of suffocation and bursting, along with the dull throes of maddening terror, supervene — and now, he feels no more.

The clamorous crowd, straining with weight and muscle, had hardly succeeded in raising their convulsed and blackening victim eight feet from the earth, when the hay rope which sustained his body gave way, and breaking, suffered the now unconscious, though still living, burthen to tumble heavily to the ground.

“Knot it *“*bad luck to it for a sougaun *“*splice it and a hundred such exclamations followed; while, dragging Tisdal back, they set him, half upright against the foot of the ladder, a hideous effigy of glaring, livid strangulation — and hastily repaired the rude appliances of this savage execution.

While this scene was passing upon the little hillock overlooking the castle, the main body of the aggressive party, more keenly interested in the progress of the fire, and the prospect of speedily forcing an entrance through the passage which it had opened, scarce turned their thoughts or their eyes upon the dreadful spectacle. The fire had now evidently exhausted its fiercest strength, and was beginning perceptibly to wane; and Ned of the Hills and Hogan were already marshalling the best armed and the most reckless and powerful of their men in the van, to enter the castle, in a compact mass, sustained by the momentum of all the others; who, in a wild rabble-rout would drive onward from behind, the moment the subsidence of the now nearly expended conflagration should have rendered advance practicable.

Matters were in this position, when a cry arose among the more distant stragglers of the rapparees, which speedily spread itself onward, till it penetrated the denser body around the castle walls, and gradually hushed the threatening clamours with which, but a moment before, the surrounding echoes were pealing: "the sogers! — the dragoons!" Such were the words which wrought this magic effect.

"This is the devil's luck," said *Eaman a Knuck,* who, with Hogan by his side, was at this moment, with earnest gesture and fiercely rapid orders, reiterating his commands to the shockheaded, bearded, ferocious guerrillas; who, firmly planted, shoulder to shoulder, with their pikes grasped short, or skeans gleaming in their sinewy hands, bare-armed and bareheaded, awaited the moment when the signal for the last tug of conflict should end for ever the protracted struggle. Suddenly pausing, and with his blackened hands throwing back his damp sable tresses, he turned scowlingly in the direction from which were now faintly heard the distant signals of the trumpet, floating onward upon the night wind, with the fiery and fretted eye with which the hawk, wheeling to stoop upon his prey, might first descry, in the dim distance, the sable presence of the soaring eagle who hovers onward to wrest it from his talons. With such a glance did the swarthy rapparee for a minute scowl into the darksome void from whence this martial music came sweeping toward Glindarragh.

"There are several trumpets there, he said at last, in his native Irish, in which tongue the colloquy was continued; "what in the fiend's name brings them here at this hour?"

"What if we make a night of it, and try a brush with them too?" urged Hogan, recklessly.

Ned of the Hills looked for a moment contemptuously in his face, and then said —

"Pshaw! Mr. Hogan, you're not serious. Donovan," he continued, addressing one of those who stood near him; "get the boys under cover; here, you, Ryan, give them warning at the other side — they must be over the river in no time. It is a cursed chance," he muttered, as the messenger sped upon his mission; "but with my consent, no man shall lift his finger against King James's troops."

The castle and its blazing front no longer rivet the eyes of the surrounding multitude. Doubtfully and irresolutely the gaze of all turns toward the deep obscurity in which the advance of the approaching soldiery is shrouded; one look, of the blackest frustrated rage, the rapparee flung at the old timeworn building, whose chimneys, towers, and battlements, piled one behind the other, rose in the blood-red flame and smoke, more like an airy fabric of fire — an unsubstantial pandemonium — than a solid fortress of ancient masonry; and with a muttered curse, in which were concentrated the very bitterness and rage of his inmost soul, he turned, and in a changed tone, issued furiously his new commands: —

"As for you, Mr. Hogan," he continued, addressing that person, and observing the deep ferocious discontent which impressed his features; "you can act as you think fit; do what you list with your own men."

"Ned Ryan," he retorted, bitterly; "you're little better than— "

"Than what, sir?" demanded the rapparee, with an emphasis so stern, that Hogan paused, and then added in a subdued tone —

"Than a captain in the king's dragoons, Ned; there's no great harm in that."

"Get your men home," replied Ryan, sternly, "or you'll find yourself in the end little better than a fool, Mr. Hogan!"

And so saying, the dark-featured speaker rapidly descended the steep road, threw himself upon his good horse, and sate by the bridge head until all had passed over. Then, just as the front ranks of the buff-coated dragoons began to show themselves in the red light of the still glowing fire, as their vanguard appeared above the brow of the eminence, which, at a distance of a few furlongs, and upon the same side of the river, overlooked the old fortress of Glindarragh, he wheeled his steed, and riding slowly over the bridge, was soon hidden among the close stems and branches of the old oak wood.

Amid the wild confusion that reigned within the castle walls, the frantic lowing of the cattle, and the busy clang and clatter of renewed preparation, it was long ere the sounds which had already reached the attacking party, were heard by those within. From the flanking towers, farthest removed from the still burning masses of corn and turf, the hurried movements of the rapparees had, indeed, been discovered, though the cause of this general and sudden withdrawal of the wild Irish, as the defenders of the castle called them, was as yet a mystery; and the jaded and heart-sick garrison scarcely dared to entertain the hope that this cessation of hostilities would not like the last, prove but the prelude to some new assault, if possible more terrible than that they had already experienced.

As the fire rapidly subsided, those upon the summit of the towers, however, at last discerned the martial front of the cavalry, and heard the shrilly braying of the trumpets, as, in obedience to the signal, a squadron of dragoons clattered down the broken road, and crossing the steep bridge, halted, and formed at the opposite end — their buff-coats and low-crowned cocked hats showing clear and sharp in the light of the fire, as they might have done in the blaze of noon. These were quickly followed by two other squadrons, who, dismounting at the bridge, unslung their musketoons, and spread themselves partly among the wood at the far side of the stream, and partly upon the hillock and rising grounds which overlooked the castle and the adjacent road; and meanwhile, the whole body of horse, with the clang of hoofs, and ringing of accoutrements, and the occasional hoarse voice of command, and the heart-stirring blast of the trumpet, preluding every new movement, began to advance at a walk, in all the imposing silence and regularity of military order, full in the lurid glow of the subsiding conflagration, down the steep and winding road to Glindarragh Castle.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DRAGOONS IN THE GREAT HALL — THE EXECUTION.

THE dragoons halted, and dismounted upon the road leading up to the castle gate, until the fire already subsiding had sunk into red masses of glowing embers; and the lighter fragments of the corn and hay, which had blazed so fiercely but an hour before, now swept in trains of sparks along the howling wind, and, strewn high in the troubled air, floated away into the darksome void.

Meanwhile, the party within the walls, relieved from the more urgent terrors of their situation, had already begun to speculate, with anxious suspense and alarm, upon the purpose with which the troops — the neighing of whose horses, and the loud voices and laughter of whose soldiery already filled their ears — had arrived before the castle walls.

Those who are acquainted with the melancholy history of the times of which we write, need not to be reminded of the terror in which, but too justly, the new levies of Tyrconnell were held by the perplexed, outnumbered, and (as it must be confessed) the disaffected Protestant population of the country. The excesses of these troops did not, perhaps, transcend those committed in numberless similar cases by other soldiery; but, in addition to the licentiousness and rapacity from which no army in a relaxed state of discipline is free, there were here old heart-burnings to be slaked, and old scores to be settled — feuds and animosities the most bitter and implacable; and when we reflect upon the defencelessness of the Protestant population of Ireland every where but in the north — when we recollect the opportunities and excuses for oppression which their notorious and not unnatural sympathy with the already successful revolutionists of the sister kingdom afforded in abundance — and when we consider the temper of the times, and the savage and ferocious antagonism in which Irish parties had conflicted even within the memory of the then existing generation, it is only wonderful that the Protestants of the south and west were suffered to escape as well as they did. Ireland was, at the time we speak of, actually the theatre of war. The gallant Enniskilleners, unsupported as yet by a single company of regular troops, maintained an adventurous and brilliant struggle against the royalist forces in the north; and these military collisions with the brave volunteers of Ulster, while they chafed and provoked the fiercer and more fiery antipathies of the two antagonist parties, served also to involve in a too just suspicion of actual disloyalty to James, the Protestant population of the other provinces. Under the menacing and almost desperate circumstances of the royalist cause, it is, therefore, scarcely to be wondered at that measures of extreme severity should have been directed by the Jacobite government against a party justly feared, and more *dreaded*, perhaps, than actually disliked. The sympathies of the Protestants, and, whenever they could give it, their cooperation also, went zealously with the invading army, and threatened with multiplied and formidable dangers the interests of an already wellnigh ruined and almost desperately embarrassed dynasty. If obsolete statutes were, therefore, revived and enforced, and quibbling law points raised to disarm them in masses, or to disable and crush them in detail, the zealous loyalist who availed himself of such tortuous instruments, found ample justification for the equivocal nature of the means employed, in the paramount importance of the ends which he pursued. An army of upwards of forty thousand men, almost entirely newly raised, and, for the greater part, ill-officered, and scarcely half disciplined, held undisputed possession of the greater part of the country; and while the executive, in times so excited and "out of joint," wanted the power, even had it possessed the will, to control their licentiousness, they in turn were inadequate to restrain the excesses of the native marauders, who, under the well-known name of rapparees, pillaged and laid waste the property of the country, and carried on a trade of outrage and rapine upon their own account. It is, therefore, injustice to judge the severities and the losses sustained by the Protestant population of Ireland during that terrible struggle, by the rules which would apply to well-affected subjects, and in peaceful times.

The passage into the castle being now safe and free, and the fires everywhere nearly spent, the officer in command of the detachment, accompanied by several others, and followed by a guard of dragoons, rode slowly through the open archway and into the castle yard. Amid the wreck and confusion which here presented itself — the cowering cattle, broken pailings, and smouldering turf — old Sir Hugh Willoughby and a party of his friends, some of them bleeding, and all grimed and smutted with gunpowder, heated with exertion and bleared with smoke, stood together to receive their military visitants, and presented a group, haggard and wild enough in all conscience.

"Sir Hugh Willoughby," exclaimed the officer, as he walked his horse in front, and fixed his eye upon the little party with a stony and imperious gaze; "my business is with him. If Sir Hugh Willoughby be among you, let him come forward."

"I am here, Sir Captain," replied the old gentleman, with more than equal hauteur, advancing a pace or two in front of his friends, "and desire to know your message."

*"*You *shall,"* interrupted the officer, impassively. "Cornet Burke,' he continued, addressing an officer by his side, "let half the squadron keep the gate, and the other half dismount and follow me."

"Where is your authority, sir, and what your purpose?" demanded the knight, whose fiery spirit was stirred within him.

"The king's colours, sir, in times like these, are authority sufficient with all loyal men; and for my purpose, I shall unfold that presently, retorted the officer, coldly, as he dismounted, and gave the bridle of his horse into the hand of one of the attendant guards.

"Be pleased, Sir Hugh Willoughby," continued the officer, "to lead the way into the great hall — I attend you, sir."

This was added in a tone of emphatic command, which seemed to say, "hesitate or demur at your peril and Sir Hugh, with an effort which nothing but an overwhelming sense of the madness of attempting resistance, and the ridiculousness of exhibiting an unavailing irritation and reluctance enabled him to exert, proceeded to lead the way to his own castle hall, accompanied by the little party of his friends, and closely followed by the commander of the detachment and his subordinate officers, the file of dismounted dragoons bringing up the rear.

In this order the irregular procession entered the long and now deserted chamber, to the upper end of which the officers proceeded, while the guard halted and formed in front of the doorway, and Sir Hugh and his assembled brethren stood aloof in a body at the foot of the long table, whose further extremity was occupied by the swarthy colonel and his party. With a stern and moody curiosity he scanned the extensive chamber, illuminated as it was by the red glare of some dozen torches, and then his dark eye fell sternly and coldly upon the motley party at the further end. Meanwhile they had ample leisure to admire, were they indeed disposed for any such emotion, the symmetry of his graceful and athletic form, and the striking beauty and nobleness of his stern and handsome features.

Had Sir Hugh recognised in the imposing form on which he looked, the champion to whose strong arm he owed his daughter's safety, gratitude might for the moment, if for no longer, have overcome the harsher feelings which struggled in his breast. But whatever he was hereafter to learn of the handsome swordsman before him, at present he knew him not.

"Gentlemen," said the officer, addressing them in a deep and peremptory tone, which well accorded with the haughty and decisive character of his pale face, "some of you, I see, are armed; in the first place, then, in the king's name, I charge you, deliver your weapons into the keeping of the guard at the door. Corporal Flaherty, advance two paces, and receive the gentlemen's arms."

The order was obeyed in silence by the grinning corporal, whose face, as he eyed the little group, wore an expression of coarse exultation and derision, which was anything but conciliatory.

Some shook their heads resolutely, others hung down theirs with a sense of bitter humiliation, others again exchanged significant looks of menace, and some even clutched their muskets with a firmer gripe, and laid their right hands on the locks. This hesitation and confusion, however, was little favoured by the stern soldier who presided, and the orders "unsling your carbines,"— "ground arms,"— "prime and load," delivered in a rapid succession, and followed by the jingle of some dozen of iron ramrods, precipitated the crisis ere time was given for deliberation, or even for action.

"Surrender your weapons, my friends, obediently; let us give the adversary no needless advantage over us," said Sir Hugh, mournfully. "God knows!" he added, passionately, and smiting his sinewy hand upon the table, "were it not that the king's name enforces the demand, I would yield my weapons only with my life."

The obvious agony of the brave old man seemed, in some sort, to touch the stern nature of the colonel, for he said —

"Your courage, Sir Hugh Willoughby, is not disputed, and if you like it better, for the sake of honour, loyalty, and obedience to the laws, I will *entreat* you and your friends to yield up your arms peaceably, and without delay; and further, gentlemen," he continued, "you will not object to giving your names and places of abode, as my duty obliges me to make a list of all whom I have found in arms in this place. Captain Lutterel, you will please, yourself, to see to the drawing up of such a list."

While the measures necessary to carry out these directions were going forward, the stern young officer in command again addressed himself to Sir Hugh.

"It is right, sir, I should at once inform you," said he, abruptly, "that two companies of my dragoons are billeted upon you, for how long, will depend upon orders from Dublin Castle; for the rest you must find quarters for tonight."

"Two hundred men and horses billeted upon one gentleman's house!" cried Sir Hugh, with wrathful astonishment. "So, heaven guard me, but this is the very extremity and extravagance of oppression!"

"It is no affair of mine, sir," replied the officer, coldly. "If you deem yourself oppressed, you had best memorial the Lord Lieutenant."

"Memorial him! — memorial the arch-fiend rather!" cried Sir Hugh, stamping furiously upon the floor.

"You must not lose your temper, Sir Hugh," interrupted the soldier coldly, "or you may chance to lose something not so easily recovered."

"What's *that?"* demanded the old man, vehemently.

"Your *life,* sir," replied the colonel.

"My *life!"* responded the old knight, passionately— "my life! God knows 'tis little worth — God knows how cheap I hold it!"

The knight spoke these words with such a sudden and mournful change of voice and aspect, that his friends gathered about him, and bidding him be of good heart, and fear not for the issue, shook him by the hands, and pledged their souls and honours to stand by him to the last, with protestations so passionate and fervent as only in scenes of transcendant excitement are evoked.

While this was passing, an officer entered the room, and, raising his hat, observed —

"We have secured two prisoners, colonel."

"Where are they?" asked he.

"In the yard, sir," replied the subaltern, "with a corporal's guard."

"March them in then," replied Torlogh O'Brien.

And forthwith, under a guard of five dismounted dragoons, two men were led into the castle-hall, and exposed to the full blaze of the torchlight.

One of these was no other than Jeremiah Tisdal, who, stupified and bloody, torn, soiled, and bareheaded, was yet instantly recognised by his friends, and, after a few words of explanation from Sir Hugh, was released without further question; the other was a red-headed, ragged peasant, with a low forehead, covered with the coarse, bushy red hair which almost touched his shaggy eyebrows, and overhung a pair of small deep-set eyes, in which gleamed a wild and fitful light, something between ferocity and cunning, as he took a rapid, and, as it seemed, a curious survey of the chamber and its occupants; a coarse foxy beard covered his upper lip and chin, and upon his face, which was deadly pale, and marked with blood, the moisture of anguish and exhaustion was shining.

"Is the dog wounded?" asked Torlogh, observing the blood-marks upon his face.

"Upon my showl he is, an' twiste over, your honour," replied the corporal; "a bit iv a scratch in the pole, and a shot in the thigh."

"So, scoundrel!" continued the superior, addressing the prisoner in a tone of calm but very ominous severity, "you are one of the savage banditti who have burned corn and hay enough tonight to have maintained a regiment of the king's horse for half a year to come! "What have you to say for yourself?"

The fellow jabbered something in Irish.

"What does he say, Corporal Flaherty?" demanded the officer.

"He says as how the leg's unaisy wid him, your honour, colonel," answered the man, rendering, as well as he could, the native tongue into English.

"He is but one of the rabble rout, not worth questioning," muttered the officer. "Take that knife from him."

"It doesn't matther, your honour," responded the corporal, obeying, however, the order, and drawing the rudely-fashioned skean, with its rough wooden handle, from among the wretched man's rags, and laving it upon the table; "it doesn't matther, for his arms is fast enough with a halther."

And, as if to make assurance doubly sure, the burly corporal drew the rope which bound his arms behind with an additional wrench, which amounted nearly to dislocation, and sent a flush of pain into the wretch's pallid face.

"Ask him for what use he designed that knife," continued the officer.

"He says, your honour, it's to help you to rip up the Sassenachs' bodies," responded the interpreter, with a chuckle, while the red-haired savage grinned with a ferocious scowl, as he glanced quickly from man to man.

"How are we to deal with these brigands, these savages?" said the colonel, throwing himself into a chair and addressing himself to the officer beside him, as he pointed carelessly toward the prisoner. "How restrain and bridle their enormities and violence, except with a strong arm and a high hand; their burnings, and their plunderings, and their butcheries, these wretches lay to the account of the king's service, and those who suffer by *their* outrages and rapine, charge, and naturally so, their wrongs and losses upon the royal cause. This must be mended — the king's army must not he involved in the guilt and disgrace of such proceedings; we must deal strictly with their perpetrators, and by conspicuous examples of present severity, rescue the character of the army and the government from every imputation of favouring or tolerating these enormities; this duty I at least will steadily perform. Remove the prisoner to the yard," continued he, with stern tranquillity. "Are your men loaded?" he added, turning to the officer at the head of the guard, the subaltern replied in the affirmative.

"Send out a corporal with six men, and let them fire upon that dog," continued the colonel; "and stay — we must give these murderous freebooters a lesson — let the body be kept, and choose a high spot of ground to hang it upon tomorrow morning."

Though the unfortunate man, whose sentence was thus pronounced, knew not one word of the language in which it was spoken, he gathered something of its purport from the looks of those who surrounded him, and from the movement of the guard at the door. Faint with loss of blood, and stiff from his wounds, the wretched prisoner appeared to acquire new strength with the frenzy of despair; bound as he was he flung himself on the ground, and though overpowered in an instant, and lifted up, and dragged, and hustled forward toward the door, he still struggled frantically, and clung to every object on which he could clutch his fingers, shrieking, in his native tongue, alternate defiances, curses, and entreaties, alike fruitless as the idle wind, gnashing his teeth and tugging and hissing till the white flakes hung upon his red bristly beard. Thus was he heaved, thrust, and jostled forward; and as he passed the door, one last look of such inexpressible imploring, despairing terror, he cast behind him, as might have smitten many a heart less stoically inflexible with its mute appeal; and then with something between a scream and a burst of sobs and wailing, the struggling and wounded prisoner was hurried into the outer space, and at the same time the words— "Shoulder your carbines — right face — quick march," brought half a dozen dragoons, with faces in whose sombre and lowering expression was legible their inward revulsion from the dreadful duty they were called upon to perform, in a double file after them into the yard.

A few moments more and a sharp, ringing volley from without announced that the wild and reckless existence of the rapparee was over; and now began the clatter and bustle, the uproar and swearing, to-ing and fro-ing of the soldiery, as with such order as could be maintained amid a scene of hurry and confusion, they proceeded to distribute their horses in the stabling of the castle; the ungirthing and wisping down of steeds, snorting and neighing; the ringing of spurs, and the clang of sabres on the pavement, and the occasional blast ot the shrilly trumpet, and the harsh voice of command, all commingling, rose in a strange Babel chorus of martial tumult to the sky, and made meet music for the hurry-scurry movements of the soldiers, some stripped to their shirtsleeves, crossing this way and that with buckets of water, or hats-full of corn; others in their buff coats and cocked hats, taking the matter easily, and smoking their pipes as they stood in little knots with their horses' bridles hanging on their arms; while they laughed, and swore, and puffed together in high good humour; and all this motley and exciting scene, lighted up, now here and now there, by the red torches which passed hither and thither among the crowd.

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Now all is quiet — the sentinels have mounted guard, and with shouldered carbines, pace and re-pace the echoing archway where the great gate stood, singing as they march, from time to time, snatches of old Irish minstrelsy, that borne on the sighing wind fall soothingly upon the ears of those whom anxious thoughts keep sadly waking, and mingle sweetly in the far off dreams of many a slumberer.

Torlogh O'Brien walks, alone, with slow and mournful steps, through the great hall of his ancestral home. What associations, what memories, what traditions, gather around him; like the wild harping of a thousand minstrels, resounding in heart-stirring swell — the deeds, the glories, the ruin of his house, ring in proud wails and martial dirges, through the silent chamber, and giant forms of other times rise in majestic pageant, and people its darkness. To him the still void is teeming with all the grandeur and thunders of the fiercest life; but amid the sable throng — dark spectres of murder, pealing dire menace in his ear, and beckoning the last of the ancient race to vengeance — glides one bright form, radiant with heavenly beauty, before whose soft effulgence the murky phantoms glide back and vanish — while her low voice of silvery music, with magic power, swells through the conflicting uproar of infernal clamour, and prevails in plaintive and celestial harmony. Angelic form — spirit of heart-subduing music! — clothed in such victorious gentleness and lovely might, he sees in thee the form of her whom his brave arm has rescued — thy music is her voice. Grace Willoughby! thy beautiful phantom stills and rebukes the tumult of his fierce hereditary hate.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SLASHER — THE BLACK GUEST OF DRUMGUNNIOL — THE ALARM.

WE need not stop to tell how, early in the morning, ere the cold grey of the coming dawn had warmed into a blush before the rising god of day — amid the shrilly clangour of trumpets, and the ringing and jingling of accoutrements, and the neighing and thundering tramp of war-steeds — several successive detachments left the castle, until the body of the king's cavalry who occupied that fortress had dwindled down to two companies, about two hundred men, together with their colonel and other officers, now occupying Glindarragh, and destined, perhaps, for some time to do so, as the headquarters of the regiment.

The noise and bustle of departure, and all those stirring sounds of military preparation and movements, fell heavily and painfully upon the fevered ear of Percy Neville, who lay, with throbbing temples and parched lips, weak and in sore anguish, upon his hot and sleepless bed. The roll of the kettledrums and the swell of the trumpet seemed, in his distempered fancy, somehow identified with the fiery heat and pain which tormented him — a part of his own fevered and agonized sensations; and these sensations in turn seemed again something no longer within himself, but rather, as it were, so many external influences, perplexing and tormenting — moving with the moving soldiers, and waxing more oppressive and thrilling with the wearisome clatter, and laughter, and shrilly trumpet sounds, which vexed his sick head: the dulness and stupor of dreaming were upon him, with all the reality of pain — an anxious, restless helplessness — which seemed always prompting the monotonous idea that some slight adjustment of the tossed and crumpled bedclothes, or some new arrangement of his weary and burning limbs, if he could but achieve it, would assuage all his torment, and refresh and relieve effectually his aching head and harassing fancies.

Let us glance for a moment at another chamber, blessed with a very different tenant. We left Mr. Richard Goslin, a gentleman who had an invincible repugnance to doing any thing but precisely what he was hired to do, coiled, for double assurance alike against the troublesome importunities of his friends and the more troublesome molestations of his enemies, securely in the bottom of a huge iron caldron, in a sequestered apartment, the orifice in the boiler being covered over with much dexterity, as we have described, by the cautious contrivance of its interesting tenant.

Now, it so happened that, early in the morning, hot water being in great request, two of the handmaidens of Glindarragh bethought themselves of the identical caldron in which our friend had enshrined himself with such admirable providence and profound mystery; and — one with a lighted candle and a bundle of bog-fir, the other with a mighty hamper of good dry turf — they both entered the little chamber together, neither caring to visit it alone, for sundry fearful considerations — to wit, the generally accredited reports which stated that a certain quondam servitor in the castle, whose pugnacious and daredevil dispositions had earned for him, while in life, the expressive appellative of "The Slasher," was wont, for lack of better employment in his disembodied state, to frequent that uninviting apartment, and there, under divers strange disguises, varying in an ascending scale, from tom-cats and black rabbits up to full-sized men in armour, to play all manner of unmeaning and unmanly pranks upon defenceless females, and occasionally, as they expressed it, even going so far as to take a rise out of the men. Not caring, therefore, to loiter unnecessarily in these haunted premises, the two wenches hurried through their task with all possible dispatch; and just as they had completed the arrangements of the turf, and applied the light, so that the thin blaze began to writhe and curl through the crisp sods and crackling wood, they heard, or thought they heard, a strange, unearthly sound, whether proceeding from above, or below, or behind them, or before, they neither could devise. This was no trick of fancy; their senses had not played them false; they had heard, in truth, a long-drawn grunt, which proceeded in an uneasy movement from the slumbering tenant of the caldron, and boomed in cavernous reverberation and half-stifled echoes from the metallic inclosure. The girls clung to one another as they gazed around them; but nothing met their search; and as the sound was not repeated, they took courage, blessed themselves, and hurried to complete their labours, by drawing water at the well in the castleyard. While they were thus employed, the fire beneath the caldron began to act, the air within became gradually rarified and heated, like that of an oven; and its temperature at last reached such a pitch, that Dick Goslin awakened slowly from a dream, in which the great fire of London, and other images of a like glowing kind, were awfully combined, and found himself in a perspiration so profuse, and in a state of impotence so absolutely helpless, that he almost fancied himself neither more nor less than a given number of quarts of some simmering liquid, a sort of conscious soup, steaming away at the mercy of the cook, and only to be extricated by the assistance of a ladle. With no distinct recollection of where he was, or how he had come there, and enveloped in total darkness, he yet wanted energy to rouse his faculties, or to move a single muscle. The heat became momentarily more oppressive; a faint, half painful, half luxurious languor overpowered him, from which he would not, if he could, have released himself; and thus gradually dissolving into brine and vapour, the grosser elements of what had once been Dick Goslin lay passively in his enervating retreat.

Meanwhile, the two strapping wenches returned with a mighty tub of pure cold water between them. With marvellous strength, and almost apoplectic struggles, it was lifted, by their united efforts, to the brink; and while one of them slipped aside the cover of the boiler, the other, in a twinkling, soused the sparkling, ponderous torrent full into the caldron. What language can describe the shock, the astounding revulsion which seemed at that instant to reverse all the functions of Dick Goslin's corporeal system, and, as it were, to turn him inside out and upside down, and drive him ten thousand ages backward into a preexistent state! With something between a sob and a shriek, he started up madly from his lair. The maidens responded with a piercing squall; and she who held the tub, in her terror, dashed it down on him as he rose, with such Amazonian force, that one plank started from the bottom, his head came through, and the tub spun round on his shoulders, and hung there like a gigantic suit of armour — back-piece, breast-plate, and gorget, all in one. Without trying to extricate himself, he rushed in a state of frenzy after the terrified girls, who careered along the passages, shrieking— "The Slasher! the Slasher!" — an ejaculation which Mr. Goslin believed to be elicited by some object of terror behind himself, and which, therefore, lent but new wings to his pursuit. In their terrified flight, several other maids, who, peeping from other chambers, beheld the mysterious figure rushing onward in the background, were quickly involved, and with new energy swelled the chorus of alarm, until every passage rang with the terrific soubriquet of "the Slasher." To stem this torrent, however, the valorous butler and adventurous Tim Dwyer started forth in various athletic attitudes; but being neither of them quite so steady as they might have been, had they confined their morning's potations to the pure fluid of which their Saxon comrade had had so much, they were instantly overborne, and, along with the foremost of the female fugitives, rolled upon the floor; and so, one over the other, higgledy-piggledy, the whole troop shrieking and yelling, tumbled and bowled, and Dick Goslin, last of all, with a crash which staved in the tub; and when they arose, full half a dozen persons, all of unquestionable veracity, among whom was Dick Goslin himself, were prepared to swear, if required so to do, that they had themselves, with "their own good-looking eyes," beheld a gigantic form in black armour, in full pursuit of the party, and that having flung the tub among them, he had vanished with a terrific roar. It is, of course, needless to observe, that henceforth even the most sceptical among the servants looked grave, and forebore to sneer when the subject of "the Slasher" was upon the *tapis.*

Meanwhile, in this cold dreary twilight of coming morning, Jeremiah Tisdal, with aching eyes and swollen face, scarce half recovered from his last night's strangulation, and with his sombre and sad coloured vesture, but yesterday so quaint, precise, and saintly, now all torn and soiled — stole from the castle gate, and, like a troubled spirit speeding toward the scene of its earthly sins and habitation, glided darkly along the shadowy pathway, through the wild trees and brushwood, among which the damps and darkness of night were still lingering. With trembling knees and quickened respiration he approached his ruined dwelling; there stood the tall gables, gray and wan as gigantic spectres, and through the roofless summit and the sashless apertures of the windows, the cold faint light was staring; the reek of fire still filled the air, and the floating wreaths of smoke rolled lazily about its base, and clung to the damp grass and weeds around. With a gaze of dull despair, he stared for several minutes upon the ruined dwelling-place. He walked toward the yard door mechanically. The sight of a spade, lying in its usual place, however, recalled him for a moment to himself; he snatched it up, and hurried with faltering steps to the spot where his gold had been concealed. Some one had anticipated him, the earth was thrown up around it, the treasure was gone.

"Oh! God of my hope, it is gone," cried the puritan, finding voice in the extremity of his agony— "gone, gone — spoiled — plundered," he continued, frantically, as he threw himself upon his knees, and with his bare fingers delved and rummaged among the loosened earth. "Bligh has robbed me — robbed me of all — the villain robbed his master! — not a chance coin left — the wretch — the robber — the treacherous dog — the villain — may the curse of Gehazi overtake and cling to him!"

While Jeremiah Tisdal thus railed and cursed in hoarse accents, as he burrowed with his crooked fingers among the upturned earth, he might not inappositely have presented to the fancy of the spectator the image of a famished ghoul cowering over some open grave, and searching for the fragments of his unclean feast.

"Gone, gone, gone," he cried, in a voice of almost childish rage and grief, as he sat down in despair upon the cold earth beside the spot, and smote his clenched hands sometimes upon his breast, and sometimes upon the dull soil, until gradually this frantic energy of woe subsided into a sullen, black moroseness, from which, however, after the lapse of some ten minutes, he on a sudden started up —

"Aye, aye," he exclaimed, with a new and fiercer interest, "let's see how Deveril has fared."

With this exclamation, he hurried toward the ruined walls; the lower windows had all been secured with iron bars, which had of course survived the flames, and now showed in sharp black lines against the grey light of morning which streamed through the building. Passing the corner of the still reeking ruin, Tisdal stopped short, with a shuddering ejaculation which had a strange mixture of joy and horror in its intonation —

"Then it *is* done! — ha, ha! — the hunter caught in his own toils, the robber bereft of his spoil, the murderer of his precious life."

The spectacle which elicited these words was one of sufficient horror. Through the bars of a window, within a few yards of which the speaker stood, were thrust the knee and the head of a figure, whose escape had been rendered impracticable by two transverse bars which, deeply sunk in the side walls, secured the rest. The head, and one arm and shoulder, as well as one knee, were thrust through the iron stanchions, and all was black and shrunk, the clothes burned entirely away, and the body roasted and shrivelled to a horrible tenuity; the lips dried up and drawn, so that the white teeth grinned and glittered in hideous mockery, and thus the whole form, arrested in the very attitude of frenzied and desperate exertion, showed more like the hideous, blackened effigy of some grinning ape, than anything human.

With a horrible and icy fascination, old Tisdal gazed upon this appalling spectacle, till it almost seemed, to his distempered fancy, that the fiendish grinning thing was greeting him "with mop and mow," as the coal-black, shrunken mask, with its shining white rows of teeth, set off by the hideous grotesqueness of its attitude, met, and appeared to return his fixed and thrilling gaze.

"Deveril! Deveril! muttered the puritan, scarce daring to speak above his breath, as he drew back a little; for though he knew it was but fancy, the light curling smoke rising between him and that fearful object, gave to it an appearance of motion, which enhanced the horrible effect of the spectacle upon his imagination. "Deveril! Deveril! — this is horrible! Who could have thought he'd have struggled so hard? Why did they not pike him? How could they let him roast there? It was frightful!"

With a violent effort Tisdal turned, and two steps placed the corner of the building between him and that terrible object. A strange feeling, something almost bordering upon a gush of tenderness, came upon him, as he continued —

"Deveril! Deveril! poor Deveril! — it was dreadful! — it was frightful! — he was ray staunch companion in my evil days. Oh, Deveril! Deveril! — he saved my life once — why did I forget Blackheath? Oh, Deveril, was it for this you saved it? Oh, my God! that I could call him back! — or — or at least that he had died elsewhere, and an easier death! He was my comrade — *my* comrade — when no one else would consort with me! Is he dead? — is he quite dead? I wonder is he quite — quite dead? If he had but life enough left to forgive me! — oh, that he had but life enough to forgive me!"

Thus speaking, with a strange hysterical revulsion of feeling, Tisdal distractedly returned to the spot where first the dreadful apparition had met his eye. There, fixed as the bars themselves, still stood the awful, monkey-like figure, black and grinning as ever.

"Deveril! Deveril! — old boy, Deveril!" cried his former associate, almost frantically; but the sounds echoed unheeded through the empty walls, and the thin vapour curled, undisturbed by breath or movement, like the smoke of his torment for ever ascending about and above the sooty, grinning effigy. "Deveril! Deveril! is there any life in you? Old fellow, it's I — it's Tisdal — burnt brandy! Oh, God! Deveril! Deveril! won't you answer Captain Gordon? It's I — I — it's brother Snap! Oh, Deveril, my boy, you saved me — you saved me — I know it — I remember that night. Speak, old boy, one word. I think you moved! — you *did* move!"

Tisdal distractedly snatched up a long charred joist, which lay among the smouldering rubbish, and, stretching across the smoking embers and ashes, he, with the end of it, pushed the ghastly figure. The effect was horrible; for though the pressure was but slight, the grinning head separated from the body, and rolled, amid a cloud of dust, towards Tisdal's feet, while the body dropped back into the ashes and rubbish within the walls, leaving but the blackened arm still clinging and sticking to the bars. If the frightful apparition had spontaneously sprung from its position, and leaped at the throat of its betrayer, Tisdal could hardly have felt a pang of terror wilder than the paroxysm which froze him, as he saw the head of his victim thus rolling and plunging through the ashes, toward his feet. At length, relieved by something between a sigh and a shudder, and trembling so violently that his legs could scarcely bear him, he managed to withdraw as far as the low fence which enclosed the little paddock within which had stood the mansion of Drumgunniol, now but a scorched and smoking ruin, and seating himself upon the low grassy bank, he strove to collect his scattered wits, and to quiet his terrible agitation.

Let us return, however, to the castle of Glindarragh, where, by the strange and wayward chances of fortune, the stern and fiery soldier, whose manly beauty and gallant bearing, and, more perhaps than all, the wild and melancholy interest with which his name was there associated, had so impressed the imagination, and perhaps the heart, of fair Grace Willoughby, was now become an inmate. Seldom, indeed, she saw him; for whatever his motive might have been, he seemed studiously to avoid alike all intercourse, and even occasional encounter, with the ordinary inmates of the place. There was, however, to her, — she knew not and asked not wherefore — an indescribable interest, and even a happiness in the bare consciousness of his being near — in the feeling that the same roof harboured them both, and that every moment might, by some slight and unforeseen accident, bring them again together.

More abstracted, and more pensive, and more timid, she grew day by day. She would sit for whole hours, leaning on her hand, and reading her far-off fortunes in the clear fire, that shifted and sank on the great hearth before her, or at the feet of her old nurse would seem to listen to her interminable tales of other times, while her thoughts were far away in the dim cloudy regions of wildest romance and sweetest fancy. In love! The pride of Grace Willoughby would have repudiated the charge with high and maidenly disdain. In love! She never even suspected it; or if she did, perchance, for a moment, she haughtily repressed the rising doubt. What could he be to her, or she to him? In love! Impossible! And then to prove to herself how easily she could dismiss his image from her mind, would she take her work, or her mu sic, and for a time pursue them; but what madrigals or tapestry, gentle Grace, could now interest and delight thee as before? None! They are all grown irksome, and thrown aside ere well begun. Alas! are all her lighthearted merriment and pleasant pastimes — the thoughtless glee of girlish innocence — gone, never, never to return? Silent and saddened, with many a sigh and many a blush, in deep absorbing reveries, she whiles the day away; and many an unknown vigil of many an hour she keeps by night; and when at last soft slumber seals her saddened eyes, in how many of the wild and airy pageants of her dreams does that graceful, manly form appear!

Some ten days had now elapsed since the arrival of the King’s soldiers at the Castle of Glindarragh, when, in the forenoon of a gloomy and somewhat tempestuous day, Sir Hugh Willoughby stood, booted and spurred, and with his hat on, before the fire of the old and spacious parlour to which we have already introduced the reader. His horse, for full ten minutes, had stood saddled and bridled, in the yard; and still the old knight loitered, in moody abstraction, by the hearth. Thus anxiously ruminating, his eye wandered from object to object, until it lighted upon the fair face of his daughter, turned towards him with a look so tender and loving that its influence soothed his troubled spirit; and a smile — not, indeed, the joyous, unclouded sunshine of happiez times — but a smile of fond affection and paternal pride, chastened and saddened, as the evening glow reflected upon some timeworn tower, lighted up his rugged features.

"Grace, my girl, we must not be cast down," he said, with a feeble and melancholy effort at encouragement; "the troubles which threaten us, even should they come, and in their worst form, have yet their allotted limits, beyond which they cannot pass, and their allotted seasons, beyond which they cannot endure. Our family have weathered many a storm before; let us remember this, trusting in God's mercy, and prepare ourselves to breast the coming adversity, with brave assurance of his powerful aid in time of need."

There was something so subdued and mournful in the tone in which the old man spoke, that spite of the smile he wore, and the encouragement conveyed in his words, his daughter felt grieved almost to tears as he uttered them; for though she lacked no fortitude and courage to look the coming danger fully in the face, and to meet it firmly when it came, she could not, unmoved, remark the obvious and mournful change which care and anxiety had already wrought upon the old man's once buoyant and fearless spirit.

"The troubles of this afflicted country are, I fear, but now beginning," continued Sir Hugh, seating himself gloomily by the fire; "our country is the destined theatre of war; the King — King James, has landed — is now in Ireland."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the girl, with a mixture of interest and of awe. "Aye, Grace; indeed and in truth. Advices reached this morning, acquainting the colonel with the fact," continued Sir Hugh. "He has disembarked at Kinsale; they make no secret of it; why should they?"

"Then, father, let us hope that he has so much of the generous nature of true royalty about him, that he may not leave his honest subjects unprotected and exposed to the assaults of violence and rapine," said the girl, proudly. "If, coming as a king, he but carries in his heart one spark of kingly virtue, his oppressed and disregarded Protestant people of Ireland will he gainers, and not losers, by his coming."

"Poor Grace!" said Sir Hugh, sadly.

"Then you see increase of danger in the King's arrival?" inquired she, doubtfully, and after a pause, "Yes, my poor girl," he replied, dejectedly;

“when the King set his foot upon our shores, all hope of a peaceful issue from out our present difficulties vanished. There can now be no accommodation with England; the sword must decide the quarrel; and in the struggle, what ravage, what destruction, what suffering must ensue!”

Grace sighed and changed colour, for her sad heart told her, and with a pang that wrung it, even to the very core, that all the airy fabric of her fond fancy was shivered and dissolving; the loved creation of her deep and passionate imagination, in which alone was now stored all her treasure of happiness and hope, in which, although she knew it not, lay wrapt her very life, was fleeting fast, and disappearing from her sight — for well she knew, that war with all its heightened animosities, if, indeed, its chances should spare his life, must so widen and deepen the gulph between herself and the secret object of her thoughts, that they might never again, in all human probability, meet more.

“Then the — the soldiers will soon go hence?” inquired the girl, hurriedly, after a short silence; and while she spoke, a blush of glowing crimson mantled in her cheeks.

‘‘I know not, child,” he answered, bitterly, unheeding the agitation which had called the conscious blood into her face; “they are quartered here, as elsewhere, but to vex and harass an obnoxious man — to waste the substance of a Protestant — to humble and impoverish — to crush and plunder one whom they suspect and hate; when they have done their work, they will go elsewhere. But hark!” he continued, turning abruptly and approaching the window; “there’s some one asking loudly for me in the yard.”

As he spoke, they saw the plumed hats (for they could see but these) of several men pass the high-silled casement — the chamber door flew open, and old Donovan, his purple face, nay, his very nose almost white with agitation, and his silvery locks streaming backward in the air, rushed into the room. With one arm raised in frantic warning, trembling with eagerness, while panic and ghastly woe, and something akin to rage, were struggling in-his furrowed face, and glaring in his eyes —

“Master — for God’s sake, quick — quick, for the love of heaven,” he almost shrieked; “they’re here — for your life — your life, master dear, hide, hide. Oh, my God, they’re here, they’re in — for your life, quick — for your life— “

The old man yelled the last words, stamping like a maniac upon the floor, and hurling the door shut with all his force, he flung himself against it, cowering toward the floor, and straining with his shoulder to the sturdy planks, in a frenzy of vain but almost sublime resistance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WARRANT.

ALMOST at the same moment when the old servant thus planted himself against the chamber door, were heard upon the outside, voices and the noise of feet; the latch was raised, and there followed a loud and peremptory knocking.

"Leave the door, Donovan — stand aside, I command you," cried Sir Hugh, vehemently.

With a mute gesture of despair the old domestic obeyed, and at the same moment the knocking was still more loudly repeated.

"Come in, whoever you be — come in," cried Sir Hugh, sternly.

The summons was hardly uttered ere it was complied with, and Miles Garrett, accompanied by an officer, and strange to say, by the identical redfaced, sinister looking personage who had a few evenings before placed Grace Willoughby in such fear and actual peril, in the wood of Glindarragh — the ruffian Hogan, accoutred precisely as he had been on that eventful day, and all three followed by a party of soldiers, entered the chamber.

"Ha, Miles Garrett!" exclaimed Sir Hugh, in unmeasured amazement.

His gaunt kinsman answered not, but turned upon him a look before whose ominous significance, in spite of his constitutional hardihood, the old knight felt a certain sinking of dismay. The hard features of the unexpected intruder were unnaturally pale, and through the habitual cunning of his eye glared something wolfish, as with a rapid sweep it took in the contents of the chamber. He waved his hand to the soldiers, who halted at the door, and advancing some paces into the apartment without removing his high crowned hat, he paused by a little table, and resting his gloved hand upon it, drew himself up to his full height, and eyed the old knight still in silence with a look in which agitation and hatred were strangely blended.

"Miles Garrett," said the old man, slowly, and with subdued sternness, as he returned his gaze, "there's ruin in your face; speak out, man — what is your message?"

“One that you need scarce be in such haste to hear,” retorted Garrett, slowly, and with something bordering upon a smile, but so hideous and unearthly that it bore no more resemblance to what a human smile should be, than the fire damp of a graveyard does to the blessed sunshine of a summer’s day.

“Do you know that gentleman, sir?” he added, sternly, pointing toward Hogan, who was standing with his legs apart and his arms folded, leering impudently at Grace Willoughby, who, terrified at his presence, stood trembling, while her colour came and went in quick succession, behind the old knight, and clinging instinctively to his hand.

“Do you know that gentleman, sir?” repeated Miles Garrett, with louder and more insolent emphasis.

“Spare your breath, sirrah,” retorted Sir Hugh, reddening with indignation; “I’m not to be frightened by loud talking, and you know it— “

“So much for the respect you pay the king’s commission,” said Garrett, glancing at the officer, to call his attention to the fact. “You have, however, yet to learn, sir, that his majesty has servants who will firmly do their duty, and who will enforce submission and obedience, though they may fail in procuring that respect which every *loyal* subject cherishes for the authority they hold.”

“Miles Garrett, once for all, speak plainly,” cried Sir Hugh, stamping passionately as he spoke. “What is your business here?”

“To arrest you,” replied Garrett, gruffly, and fixing his malignant eye steadily upon the old knight, for he had now perfectly recovered his self-possession.

There ensued a pause of some moments.

“How? — me!” at last exclaimed Sir Hugh.

“Ay, *you,* sir — *you,”* retorted Garrett, with fierce and insulting emphasis.

“Me! and for what — upon what charge?” urged Sir Hugh, glancing indignantly from man to man. “Tell me, sir — in God’s name tell me, what am I accused of?”

“Treason — high treason — levying war against the king,” replied Miles Garrett, coolly.

“Treason!” echoed Sir Hugh, vehemently— “treason; the charge is false, *all* false; you know it, none better — false, false as your own black heart —

villainously false! Oh, Miles Garrett, Miles Garrett, you double dyed villain, this is all your doing. Yes, you d — d traitorous —

Oh! that you but dared to leave this feud to the arbitrament of the sword; old as I am, that I could but meet you foot to foot, and hand to hand, in a fair field, and strike but one good blow for my life; but I forget myself — I am half a child, and do but heighten your cowardly triumph by chafing thus in the meshes. I will be more a man."

He turned to his terrified daughter, and while he spoke some words of affection and comfort in her ear, Miles Garrett, addressing the officer, placed a letter in his hands.

"This, sir," said the latter, "is for my superior in command. Corporal O'Higgins, take this letter to the colonel."

The man departed, and Garrett continued, turning to Sir Hugh, and a second time pointing toward the ill-favoured personage who accompanied him —

"You know this gentleman, I presume?"

"I know him *not,"* retorted Sir Hugh, more calmly; "but if he were a gentleman, methinks he would know better than to stand covered as you do here, and in a lady's presence."

"This *gentleman* is a chief witness against you," continued Garrett, with a stern emphasis upon the word, "and, as I venture to predict, will prove a conclusive one. Upon his informations you are about to be arrested and removed; and upon his testimony you are likely ultimately to lose your life. Am I sufficiently intelligible?"

"And who or what are you, sir, who are so very ready to swear away the life of an innocent man?" asked Sir Hugh, bitterly.

"Who am I — phiew! What the divil does it matther who I am, or what I am either?" replied Hogan, with a grin and a swagger —

"My thrade's a horse docthor, achusla, says he,
An' I'll cure you for nothin,' allana ma chree."

These verses he sang with coarse buffoonery, and then continued— "What is it to you what I am, any more than that I'll tell the thruth, an' if *that* puts a nail in your coffin, it's no fault of mine, surely."

“Hold your tongue, sir,” interposed Garrett, bluntly. “It seems, then,” he continued after a brief pause, and turning again toward Sir Hugh— “it would seem that you are not acquainted with the person of this— “ gentleman, he was about to say, but the recent exhibition restrained him, and he modified the phrase— “of this deponent. Well, observe me, sir, I desire to acquaint you with the nature and substance of his charge; I shall deal with you directly, and above board.”

“‘Directly and above board!’” repeated Sir Hugh, slowly and sarcastically, and then with a bitter smile he shook his head.

“Ay, sir,” continued Garrett, doggedly, “you shall be dealt with indulgently beyond what I fear you will eventually appear to have deserved.”

“Miles Garrett,” cried the old knight, vehemently, and with an expression which struggled between rage and strong disgust, “forbear to mock me with this loathsome cant. Enjoy your villainous triumph, like the bloody and crafty man you are; but insult me not by naming indulgence, directness, honesty — in connexion with your atrocious mission of perjury and blood.”

“This it is to hold the king’s commission of the peace in times like these,” ejaculated Garrett, with a smile of contemptuous resignation “What rebel ever liked his punishment yet? Strike high or strike low, ’tis all one — no pleasing them!”

At this moment a firm and rapid step was heard, accompanied by the clang of the long cavalry-sword ringing upon the pavement, and Colonel Torlogh O’Brien entered the room.

The blood, which but a moment before retreating to her heart, had left her cheek pale as monumental marble, now sprang tingling through every channel to the beautiful face of Grace Willoughby, in a tide so full and warm, that her very neck, and even to her temples, glowed with bright vermilion; and her eyes, hitherto fixed in wild alarm upon the strange and dreaded actors in the scene, now sank to the ground.

As O’Brien entered he removed his plumed hat, and bowed with grave, it might almost have been sorrowful respect, to Sir Hugh and to the beautiful lady who clung by his arm.

“Have I your permission,” he said, in a constrained and somewhat haughty tone, addressing Sir Hugh, “to confer for a few moments with this gentleman, Miles Garrett, of Lisnamoe, whom,” he added, with: slight bow to that gentleman, which was as slightly returned— “I presume I see here now.”

“Colonel O’Brien,” replied Sir Hugh, proudly and sadly, “you have the power, and, for aught I see to the contrary, the king may soon give you also the right, which I believe you claim, to use this Castle of Glindarragh, and all belonging to it, even as you list.”

“This comes,” observed Miles Garrett, with a savage sneer — for the blush which, at the entrance of the handsome soldier, had mantled the face of the beautiful girl, and still more, perhaps, Sir Hugh’s allusion to O’Brien’s ancestral claim, had somehow roused the worst passions of his evil nature into keener activity— “this comes of men usurping what they cannot keep. Cuckoos ought not to build in falcon’s nests!” Torlogh O’Brien’s dark eye flashed for one moment upon the last speaker, with a look whose proud and savage fire might well have warranted the image which its glance rebuked; and Garrett, ugly, ungainly, and repulsive — requited the noble glance of the soldier with a look to the full as firm, but one in which caution and craft alone tempered the undisguised and sanguinary ferocity which now lighted up its awakened significance.

Averting his glance from Miles Garrett almost as quickly as he had first bent it upon him, Colonel O’Brien turned again to Sir Hugh, and with an air and tone of proud respect which touched the old knight, he said —

“I have your permission, then, Sir Hugh Willoughby, to remain here for a few moments?”

“You have, Colonel O’Brien — you have,” returned the old man, in a tone more gentle than he had yet employed; “and though the question be but a form, I thank you, sir — with all my heart I thank you — for the courtesy which prompts it.”

Strange to say, the very friendliness of spirit in which this slight respect was greeted by Sir Hugh, had the effect of repelling the stern and haughty nature of the younger man; in an instant the habitual remembrances of inveterate feud were awakened, and the deep chasm of hereditary hostility yawned again between them. He bowed coldly to Sir Hugh, and, turning to Miles Garrett, observed —

“I shall glance again at this letter, the contents of which, as yet, I am but imperfectly acquainted with.”

All this while Mr. Hogan, with his hands buried in his waistcoat pockets, stood whistling, in profound contemplation of one of the old portraits which hung upon the walls, and with his back turned full upon the speakers; and in the deep recess of the window, Torlogh O'Brien was soon absorbed in the perusal of the letter.

"Sir Hugh Willoughby," resumed Garrett, with singular calmness and gravity, "it is fair you should know what has been sworn against you. This — Mr. Hogan — lost some cows and horses about the beginning of this month; he procured a warrant of search, and having reason to suspect that your herds had stolen them, — he proceeded hither with his friends — and mark what follows; just ten days since, at fall of evening, he asked leave, under this warrant, peaceably to look for his cattle."

"Peaceably!" echoed Sir Hugh. "Good! sir, proceed."

"Peaceably," repeated Garrett, "to search for his cattle concealed, as he believed, within this castle; he was accosted from the shot-hole overlooking the gate by *you,* sir, and denied admittance, insolently and peremptorily denied admittance; he then fixed the warrant itself upon a staff— "

"Would he swear it was not upon a pike staff?" said Sir Hugh, with indignant and sarcastic emphasis.

"Upon a pikestaff, was it?" repeated Garrett, quickly, and paused in anxious silence for an answer; while his eye, intent with cat-like vigilance, watched every movement of his prey.

"Go on, sir, go on — if you mean to speak more, go on," said Sir Hugh, with intense and bitter scorn.

"Yes, sir, if you will; he conveyed it to you, as you say, upon a pike's end," resumed Garrett, again pausing for a second or two at the last word; but receiving no answer from Sir Hugh, he quickly continued, raising his voice as he proceeded— "You, sir, received it, tore it to pieces, threw it to the winds with your own hands, and defied the poor gentleman who claimed admission in virtue of its authority to enter; and now, like a vapouring coward — ay, sir, start, and scowl, and glare as you may — a vapouring, pot-valiant coward, you dare not, *dare* not avow your own braggart action."

Miles Garrett had well calculated the effect his words were likely to produce upon one of his hearers at least, for, boiling with rage and scorn, the old knight was upon the very point of giving rash and vehement utterance to all that Garrett most desired to hear him speak. There was, however, another listener, upon whom his language wrought to very different purpose, so suddenly that it seemed as though an apparition had started from the floor — Torlogh O'Brien stood between Miles Garrett and the enraged old gentleman.

"Forbear!" he cried, in a tone of stern and deliberate command, as, with outstretched hand, he warned Sir Hugh; "forbear — speak not for your life — speak not a word — for your *child's* sake, speak not."

The suddenness and energy of the apparition which thus interposed, in all the impressiveness of command and warning, effectually checked the impetuosity of the knight, and a dead silence of some seconds followed.

"Sir Hugh Willoughby," continued the soldier, almost sarcastically, "there is a homely adage which says that least said is soonest mended. Beware of ungoverned passion — and rush not into admissions which may touch your life. Come, Sir Hugh, be a man, and a calm one, or so surely as you stand there, and living at this moment, your enemies will take you in the snares of death."

"Oh! he is right, he is right, dear father — he speaks truly," said Grace, passionately, throwing her arms about the old man's neck, and clinging to him in an agony of love and terror; "answer them not, dear father — for my sake, answer them not. Oh! good sir," she said, with a most piteous smile, as she turned to Miles Garrett, and pleaded sweetly with him, all unconscious of the hideous passions with which she thus essayed to parley, "he is hasty, easily moved, but kind, and gentle, and forgiving; for pity's sake, sir, do not chafe his spirit now."

"Grace — Grace, my girl," said Sir Hugh, turning to her sadly and sternly, "speak not to that bad man; you know not, perhaps you never may, wherefore I say it; but, my child, speak not to him, look not upon him, avoid him as the incarnate curse of our family — one who has been the great destroyer of all that, with us, time can never, never in all its crowding changes and chances — never restore again. My innocent child, my darling — my only, only child — I will not tell you more; but, once for all, hold with him no communion."

He kissed her forehead with melancholy fondness as he concluded.

"Colonel O'Brien," said Miles Garrett, eyeing the officer askance. while his face grew white and livid with concentrated rage, "you attend here under the direction of that letter, and to obey my orders: beware, sir, how you exceed your duty."

"Pshaw, sir, reserve your lectures for your bailiffs and constables," retorted Torlogh, with cold contempt; "we both act under orders, you as well as I, and yours are not, and cannot be, to trepan your prisoner into dangerous admissions."

"I know my duty and its limits," replied Garrett, while his face grew paler and paler, and the scowl upon his brow grew blacker and deadlier, "and one of its behests is to unmask *all* treason and to expose *all* traitors, no matter, Sir Colonel, whose livery they may wear."

"Sir Hugh Willoughby," said the soldier, coldly, and without appearing to have so much as heard the last observation of Miles Garrett, "you are my prisoner — I arrest you under this warrant, which has been handed to me for execution. This second paper is a summons directed to you, and which I now deliver, to attend the Privy Council in Dublin Castle. It is my duty to provide an escort for your safe conveyance, which shall be done; and now, Mr. Justice," he continued, turning to Miles Garrett, "I am responsible for Sir Hugh Willoughby's appearance, and shall deliver his person into custody in Dublin, as required. You have no further business here, I presume?"

"None, sir," replied Miles Garrett, with an affectation of carelessness, "none. *You* are now accountable, and let me tell you, sir, an error on the side of strictness is more easily mended than one the other way. You scarcely *can* be too rigorous for caution in this case; 'tis enough to meet rebellion in the North, we must not let it spread into the South; examples must be made, and shall be before long; above all, be strict, and do not scruple in all respects to treat him as a military prisoner, for such he virtually is; in a word, sir, alike for others' warning and his own security, exercise *severity.* You understand me — severity?"

"Severity! *good,* sir," repeated O'Brien, coldly. "Have you anything further to suggest before you depart?"

"One word more — one word," continued Garrett, as he directed a look in which malignity and meanness struggled for the ascendancy, toward the old knight and the beautiful girl who clung to him with all the moving agony of love and terror, "I would have you prevent communication between the prisoner and any other persons, even those nearest to him in kindred: on that very account, perhaps, the most dangerous with whom he could hold intercourse. You will see the necessity of this measure."

"From the young lady, his daughter, you mean?" inquired Torlogh O'Brien, in the same cold tone.

"Certainly, most certainly," replied Garrett, eagerly catching at the suggestion which relieved him from what even he felt to be the embarrassing necessity of being more explicit.

The father, with a mute gesture of despair, drew his daughter still more closely to him, and, with a bursting heart and pale face, gazed on her loved countenance, while she, clinging to him with the very wildness of fear and love, turned her imploring eyes in mute appeal from Miles Garrett to the soldier, who, with stern and thoughtful brow, was moodily pacing the floor to and fro. One quick glance he stole toward his prisoner, and addressing Garrett, said —

"No doubt, the course you name were safest — wisest."

"Clearly," interrupted the magistrate.

"Would this duty had fallen to another's lot!" ejaculated Torlogh.

"A soldier's duties, and in times like these, are often painful," observed Garrett, with a shrug.

"But then," resumed O'Brien, coldly, "the lady is very young — almost too young to share in treasonable enterprises. What think you?" Miles Garrett shook his head.

"You really apprehend danger to the king's government in this young lady's being admitted to converse with her aged father?" said Torlogh, sarcastically. "Do I understand you rightly, Mr. Garrett — are you serious?"

"Take your own course, sir," replied Miles Garrett, hastily; "and if there be any miscarriage in the matter, on your head be the consequences."

"Nay, but would you have me separate them from this moment?" persevered the soldier; "were not that undue severity?"

"Sir, I have said my mind already on the matter," replied Garrett, doggedly. "Your duty is plain; what your conduct may be I pretend not to divine."

Torlogh bit his lip, as he for a moment fixed his eye steadily upon the magistrate. He turned, however, sharply on his heel, without speaking, and walked to the window.

Meanwhile Garrett prepared, though lingeringly, to depart.

“You will need to make all possible despatch,” he said, once more addressing O’Brien, as he drew on his gloves; “you have a weighty responsibility cast upon you, sir, and I venture to caution you, as a young man, against yielding to any influences, save those of duty only.”

As he spoke, he glanced at Grace Willoughby with a significance so obvious that, spite of her fears and agitation, a feeling of a very different kind for a moment overcame her, and she blushed so deeply that even from her neck to her very temples glowed with the crimson tide. Thus she stood overwhelmed with confusion and maidenly resentment, still holding by her father’s arm, and with her eyes turned to the floor, while her quickened respiration was visible through the heaving of her silken bodice.

“Enough, sir!” replied the soldier, sharply and emphatically; “and let me caution you in return against intruding gratuitous advice where impertinence may be resented, and where its repetition may be punished. I have no more to learn from you; your presence is useless to me, and obviously painful to others; so, in mere decency, methinks it were better to withdraw.”

Miles Garrett was on the point of retorting; but the prudence of villainy prevailed, and he restrained the angry emotions which experience had taught him to control. He tapped Hogan upon the shoulder, pointed the way to the door, and having glanced hesitatingly for a moment or two successively at the other occupants of the chamber, he turned abruptly, muttering something between his teeth, and without addressing one word to those whom he was leaving, strode gloomily from the room.

Overcome with the agitation of the scene through which she had but just passed — her heart wrung with feelings the most agonizing and exciting — poor Grace Willoughby no sooner saw herself relieved of the hateful and dreaded presence of those who had just departed, than, yielding herself up to the torrent of passionate grief and affection, terror and tenderness, which had long struggled in her bosom, she threw her arms around her father’s neck, and covering him with kisses, wept and sobbed as if her heart would break.

Torlogh O’Brien, meanwhile, stood stern, dark, and silent, in the deep recess of the window, looking forth with compressed lips and a clouded brow upon the retreating forms of those from whom he had just received his dread commission. He suffered this incontrollable burst of feeling to expend itself without interruption, and it was not until many minutes had passed that he again addressed the fallen master of Glindarragh.

“Sir Hugh Willoughby,” said he, “I am now, as you are aware, accountable for your appearance in Dublin: your person is in my keeping. I shall place you, however, under no unnecessary restraint. You are a gentleman, and your word is all I require to assure me that you will not attempt escape, while under my charge. We must reach Dublin within five days, and the sooner, therefore, we leave this the better. We have a hundred miles of bad road before us, and twenty miles a-day is as much as my men are accustomed to travel.”

“I am your prisoner, sir,” replied the old knight, with melancholy dignity; “you have a right to command my movements. In trusting to my honour, as you propose, you shall not find yourself mistaken, One request I have to make, and that is, that my poor child may be allowed, as you have heard her so earnestly entreat, to accompany her old father upon this unexpected journey. We shall be prepared to set forth, if need be, this afternoon. My daughter may come with me?”

“Surely, surely, Sir Hugh,” replied the soldier, hastily; and then he added, more coldly, “I shall leave you to employ the interval in needful preparations — this evening must see us on the road.”

With these words, having bowed haughtily, Colonel Torlogh O’Brien withdrew; and thus ended a conference pregnant with the destinies of all who had taken a part in it.

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Leavetaking is at best a bitter task, and doubly so when kind faces and old familiar scenes are but too probably looked upon indeed for a last time, never to be greeted or revisited more in all the changes and chances of this troublous life. Bitter and stern was the pang which wrung the heart of old Sir Hugh, as, with forced buoyancy of voice and look, he grasped the honest hands of many an humble friend; and sore was the grief that swelled in the bosom of his fair daughter as, side by side, they rode down the steep old road to the bridge of Glindarragh, which they were now passing, never, it might be, to cross it more. How did they listen to the sweet sounds which, evening after evening, as far as memory could number, had filled the haunted air of that loved home? — how many a sidelong glance of lingering tenderness was stolen at the old gray towers and wimpling river, so sadly smiling in the glorious evening light! As thus silently they looked and listened their last in mute farewell, many a blessing and many a prayer followed the little cavalcade, while gradually it wound its way through the devious woodlands.

The group was, indeed, picturesque enough, and might have claimed a passing glance of interest, even from those unacquainted with its melancholy destination. Foremost rode old Sir Hugh, his face nearly hidden in the folds of his mantle; and almost by his side his beautiful daughter, cloaked and hooded for the journey, and pale with the piteous struggles of harrowing fears and bitter sorrow; then followed the grim, old, trusty Jeremiah Tisdal, and a group of servants in attendance on the lady and her father; and next, at a considerable interval, rode the dark Colonel Torlogh O'Brien, followed by a guard of dragoons. Such was the cavalcade which, upon that evening, wound slowly down the road from the Castle of Glindarragh in ominous procession, taking the highway for that scene of wild and momentous enterprises and events — that rallying point of strange and striking characters — the far-off city of Dublin.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CARBRIE.

IT was upon the evening of Saturday, the 23rd of March, in the eventful year 1689, that the cavalcade which we are bound to follow, slowly entered the suburbs of Dublin city. Spite of the anxious thoughts which occupied his mind, Sir Hugh felt his attention irresistibly interested by the strange and exciting contrast which the appearance of the metropolis then presented, compared with the character it had worn but two years before, when he had last visited it. Stir and bustle enough were, indeed, still there; but it was not the steady energy of vigorous health, so much as the distempered excitement of fever and intoxication. Thick groups of men were earnestly conferring in the streets, with energetic gestures and in animated tones, and with occasional bursts of excited laughter; and from every cluster some lounging listener was ever and anon dropping off and attaching himself to some new group, and sharing in turn in their discussions; — whilst mingling with the civilians, singly or in straggling parties, might be seen the stalworth blue-coated militia-men, or the regular soldiery in their scarlet uniforms and cocked hats. Idlers of all sorts, females as well as men, were congregated about the tavern doors in convivial knots, while from within, the merry scraping of fiddles, or the nasal squeak of the bagpipe, or sometimes the sonorous cadences of an Irish song, or the uproarious voices of hilarious or disputatious revellers, came in busy discord upon the ear; and aloft in the upper windows might be seen the lounging, listless forms of half-dressed soldiers, smoking their pipes, as they leaned lazily from the casements over the crowded street. Occasionally, too, a file of pikemen or musketeers, marching grimly upon duty, traversed the crowded way, and sometimes a friar, in the habit of his order, a license which the times allowed, would show himself, giving quaint and picturesque variety to the character and colouring of the endless combinations which shifted and resolved, and reunited, in inextricably-commingling currents, under the wearied eye of the spectator. Troops of jaded cattle, too, with a guard of soldiers accompanying them, might be seen from time to time, lowing and shambling their way to the slaughter-house, about to die and be pickled in the cause of King James. Here and there the scene was enlivened by some tipsy fellow brandishing his hat or flourishing his halberd; while he shouted "God save King James!" and "To hell with the Prince!" — the broad, quaint street along which they moved presented more the appearance of a fair, or a disorderly barrack-yard, than that of a metropolitan highway; and the air of excitement which pervaded it was, if possible, enhanced by the hammering and sawing of carpenters, busy in erecting scaffolding at points of vantage on either side, and the rapid shovelling of dozens of fellows every where employed in spreading heaps of fine gravel over the massive and unequal pavement — a provident consideration for which King James was indebted to the dutiful attention of his loyal corporation. The town itself exhibited abundant indications of the unsettled and turbulent character of the times. Some of the shops were closed: the battered windows and splintered doors of others testified the violence to which they had been recently exposed. Inns, taverns, and dram-shops alone seemed in full and thriving business. Sentinels paced in front of the church-doors, within which arms and other warlike munitions were stored. Few and far between, might be seen the straight-backed coaches of the few aristocratic inhabitants who still lingered in the city — stiff and ponderous vehicles, blazing with gorgeous colours, carved and gilded, and rumbling and toppling along the crowded streets. As the mounted party whom we are following became gradually involved in this crowd and uproar, Torlogh O'Brien drew his men close together, and himself took his place at the unprotected side of Grace Willoughby.

"The King enters the city on tomorrow," said Torlogh, in reply to a question from Sir Hugh. "These artisans and labourers whom you see, are making preparations for his reception."

"It is, indeed, a strange spectacle," said Sir Hugh, as his eye wandered down the oldfashioned street, with its long perspective of projecting gables, now illuminated by the level beams of the sun, while all its motley masses of human life moved and shifted in ceaseless and ever-varying mazes before and about him;— "a strange, and, I trust it is no treason to add, a melancholy sight. Every where I see but the boding indications of protracted civil strife, as well as of the coming military struggle which must for years, it may be, make our country the theatre of war, and stain her fields with the blood of the best and bravest of her sons."

“It is, indeed, but too true,” replied the soldier; “every thing portends a coming storm — nor can we know peace or calm until the tempest shall have spent its fury first. How much blood and misery have they to answer for who have, by the reckless extremity of rebellion, involved this fair and loyal kingdom in so dire and desperate a struggle.”

“Can you read the motto on that flag, that floats so high above yonder housetops?” asked Sir Hugh. “Methinks it waves from the Castle-towers.”

“Aye, sir,” responded Torlogh, with a stern tone and a kindling eye, as he scanned the distant banner, with its well-defined blazonry of letters; “the words are apposite to the times, and speak home to the hearts of Irishmen: they are ‘Now or never — now and for ever!’”

These stern and energetic words, so different in the impression they produced upon the two companions, had the effect of reminding them instantaneously of the entire and irreconcileable antagonism of their views and interests. A silence, gloomy, and for some minutes unbroken, succeeded. It was at length, however, interrupted by Sir Hugh.

“I had for the moment well nigh forgotten, in the excitement of this strange scene, that I am myself a prisoner,” said he, dejectedly. “Whither — to what place of confinement — do you purpose conducting me?”

“I shall take upon myself the responsibility of giving you so much of your liberty, sir,” replied Torlogh O’Brien, “as my duty will permit. The hurry of these times necessitates many irregularities; and if these are sometimes inevitably attended with hardship, it is at least some compensation that they permit occasional indulgences, such as, in times less lax, we dare not hope for. There are peculiar circumstances attending your case, sir,” he continued, glancing slightly at the light form of the girl beside him, “which make it but humanity to afford you so much of liberty and leisure as may safely be accorded to one in your situation. I shall arrange so that the safe custody of your person shall, for a time at least, remain my charge. You can lodge in the Carbrie; you shall continue to be my prisoner upon your parole, and give me your word of honour that you will not absent yourself for more than two hours at any given time from your lodgings. I and my men shall quarter in the next house, and you shall have no further molestation, meanwhile, than an occasional visit from an orderly.”

The soldier checked Sir Hugh’s acknowledgments by informing him abruptly that they had now reached their destination; and, accordingly, the cavalcade drew up at the entrance of the Carbrie.

We must say a few words touching this ancient building, before which the travellers have just halted. The Carbrie, so called, nobody knew why or wherefore, was a huge old mansion; even at the time we speak of, the suns and smoke of more than two centuries had seasoned its quaint timbers, and dimmed the paint and gilding of its gorgeous ornaments — it had been, a hundred years before, the dwelling of the princely and turbulent Earls of Kildare, whose wayward fortunes themselves supply more of the romance of history, than the wildest fiction which calls itself historic can recount. The mansion was built in what was called the cagework fashion, the style employed in all the ancient structures of the Irish capital, its walls being intersected by a compact and firmly jointed framework of oak timber, which formed the skeleton of the structure, afterwards completed by building up the interstices with solid masonry. Upon these timbers were cut in the prevailing fashion, and in well marked projecting letters, sundry Latin texts, along with ancient family mottos, while upon every projecting beam-head, and wherever else sufficient verge was presented, stood forth, in proud relief, the crest, or the armorial bearings of the powerful family who had reared it; it showed a wide and varied front of great extent, whose multitudinous projections and recesses were, however, symmetrically arranged, forming a massive centre, and two wings, whose flanking extremities were completed by tall and narrow square towers. As the eye wandered upwards, it lost itself among a goodly row of tall, quaint gables, surmounted with grotesque, and now half rotten decorations in timber. Rusty vanes and fanciful chimney stacks peeped in comfortable clusters, above the dusky tiles and still more dusky ornaments whose paint and gilding had long given place to the soot and dust of time. This vast dwelling-house stood in Skinner’s-row, and having long passed from the possession of its original proprietors, was now divided into three distinct houses, each of vast and unwieldy proportions. The centre one had been converted into an inn or tavern, and was, at the time of which we write, one of great resort; one of the wings seemed scarce half tenanted, and was much gone to decay; it pretended, however, to be also a tavern, as its signboard indicated, where, under the royal shadow of King James’s wig and sceptre, French and Rhenish wines of the first flavour were loyally dispensed by the proprietor. The other was employed as a lodging-house, and it was before the entrance of this last, that the cavalcade dismounted.

Having intimated to Sir Hugh, that should occasion render his presence desirable for any purpose, he would be always to be found in the inn next door, and having, with head uncovered, respectfully, and even mournfully bade farewell to the young lady whose changed fortunes made her doubly an object of interest to his generous sympathies, Torlogh O'Brien withdrew; and old Sir Hugh and his beautiful daughter took possession of the dim and spacious apartments which their host assigned them, and on whose painted pannels and dusky carving were still traceable many a half effaced memorial, and many a scarcely legible record of their former ownership and bygone splendour.

The old man saw his daughter to her chamber door, and sighed heavily as he pressed her hand in his; with an effort, however, he smiled as he looked with a melancholy anxiety, which that smile vainly essayed to conceal, upon her young and once happy face. She entered her apartment, and as she heard his receding steps, she threw herself upon a chair, and yielding to the agony which had long struggled at her heart, she burst into a paroxysm of weeping, so bitter and protracted, that even if the worst event which her terrified imagination at times presented had actually befallen, she could scarcely have mourned her lost guide and friend with a wilder abandonment of woe. While the journey continued, the adventures and changes of each successive day had occupied her mind, and more than all, the unacknowledged happiness which Torlogh's presence every moment inspired, had beguiled the sadness of her heart; but now all this was gone, and all her sorrows and her fears returned upon her with accumulated power. Tediously, and mournfully, and fearfully the watches of the night wore on. Many a mournful pageant of happier memory, and many a train of anxious doubts, of harassing and maddening fears coursed one another through her sleepless brain — interrupted only when her startled ear was aroused to present consciousness by the loud songs, or louder brawling of the turbulent and noisy spirits who had pushed their debauches beyond the modesty of midnight, and were now straggling homewards through the streets. At length she slept, locked for a time in deep and happy forgetfulness of all her fears and griefs, and never waked until her chamber glowed with the bright sunlight of that memorable day, which was to witness the stately entrance of the last king of the Stuart line, into his loyal and ancient city of Dublin.

Never yet was an event more calculated to produce a deep and thrilling sensation among the population of a great city, than that whose immediate approach impressed every citizen of Dublin, upon the morning of the 24th of March, 1689, with the exciting consciousness that a momentous and irrevocable scene was about to be enacted within the ancient capital of Ireland. Many a heart that morning fluttered and faltered, as hour after hour told the nearer and nearer approach of a crisis, not only in their own individual fortunes, but, grander far — in the destinies of the empire, perhaps of Europe; many a man that morning rose with a clouded brow and an aching heart, filled with stem and gloomy anticipations of personal disaster, and coming ruin; and many a one, upon the other hand, with head and heart throbbing with the high aspirations of fiery ambition, and the fevered intoxication of rapacity and avarice; and many too, more nobly animated by the pure and generous enthusiasm of a patriotism as fondly, nay, desperately cherished as it was afterwards bitterly and frightfully disappointed. Over how many dark anxieties, and selfish schemes, and noble aspirations of purest patriotism, the red light of that morning dawned, none can tell; but few there were within those ancient walls, of the tens of thousands who were expecting that coming event, who awaited it with no deeper and livelier emotion than that of mere curiosity — with no sterner and more thrilling sensation than the mere excitement of a holiday amusement.

From nine o’clock and earlier, the long line of street from St. James’s Gate, including James’s-street, Thomas-street, and thence through the newgate into High-street, and up to the castle-gate, were crowded with eager and excited multitudes; a double line of foot soldiers at each side extending the whole length (a full mile) of this continuous street, kept the centre clear for the passage of the expected procession; the long line of cocked hats and grounded muskets, the scarlet coats and bandoliers of the new-raised Irish troops, sternly reminded the spectator of the fearful military struggle which that day’s pageant was too surely to precipitate. The loyal care of the Jacobite corporation had provided an evenly spread coating of fine gravel over the heavy and unequal pavement, in honour of the royal passenger who was about to traverse the streets. Looking upward, the quaint, unequal houses, from their tall gables and steep roofs, down to the very basement, showed at every window no less eager groups of human faces; and from the crowded balconies as well as from the windows, descended rich draperies of cloth and arras, while in the clear space in the centre of the street patrolled, from time to time, detachments of that splendid cavalry, which afterwards, in many a field, proved themselves worthy of a braver king, and a more fortunate cause. Nine o'clock came, and ten, and eleven, and the crowd had as yet had nothing to entertain them except the procession of the aldermen and common councillors in their robes, seated in coaches, and headed by their hotheaded and pompous lord mayor, Terence Dermott, in the state coach and four horses, with the mace-bearer and sword-bearer, and all the other civic officers in attendance — as they proceeded to the boundaries of the city walls, there to greet his majesty when he should arrive, with a loyal welcome, ana in due form to surrender up the keys of Dublin into his royal hands.

Suspended expectation partakes of the nature of hope deferred — and if it maketh not the heart sick, is yet irksome enough, and hard to bear.

Thus monotonously and tediously did the hours pass unrelieved except by an occasional scuffle among the mob, or by the appearance of some terrified cur-dog scampering and yelping down the long open space, amid the laughter, hootings, and missiles of the listless rabble — or by an occasional display, from the housetops, of some new banner, with a motto of loyal vaunting emblazoned on its folds, and which found a ready response in the fierce plaudits and thundering acclamations of the multitude.

Every face that showed itself wore an aspect of eagerness and good humour. The Protestants, of course, who, for the most part apprehended little but mischief from the events of that day, and whose memories were stored with the judicial atrocities of Jeffries, and the then recent horrors of the French *dragonades,* kept close within doors, or contented themselves with peeping, with anxious and sombre curiosity, from upper windows, and the back recesses of their shops — shrinking from remark, and sullenly resolved against mingling in the loyal crowd, or offering honour to one whom England had pronounced no longer King. Exceptions, of course, there were: some in the sincere belief that James meant well, and would mend matters by his influence; others, in the time-serving alacrity of mere subserviency and self-seeking; all, however, with the few exceptions above described, wore an air of excitement and joyful expectation.

Broad as was the street, it was densely crowded — from the castle drawbridge and Cork tower to St. James's gate, and the distant liberties of the city — at which point, in passing, we may remark, a broad and lofty stage, carpeted and canopied with tapestry, was erected; and upon this platform two harpers, arrayed in the true old national costume — rang out inspiring music from their wire-strung harps — filling the free air with the shrill clangour of those Celtic *maurshauils,* to which, perchance, in days gone by, the ancient septs had marched to battle. Beneath this high platform stood some forty friars, in their solemn and picturesque vesture, and marshalled around a high cross, which rose like a standard from the midst of their ranks; and these, whenever the warlike harping paused, raised in full and mighty chorus some solemn anthem of welcome and benediction, appropriate to the occasion; and thus alternated the warlike measure and the holy chaunt, swelling the full tide of national enthusiasm, like the grand and melancholy echoes of the deeds and the worship of the old days of Irish glory; and as if one master chord of the Irish heart would yet have remained untouched, without some such provision, grouped at either side, were troops of pretty, graceful girls, dressed fancifully in white, and carrying baskets of flowers, to strew in the way before the king. That ill-natured fellow, the puritan author of "Ireland's Lamentation," indeed, insinuates some scandal touching these loyal nymphs of Flora; but we renounce him and his stories, and so pass on.

Meanwhile, in the back lanes and by-streets, the savoury steam of "cussamuck" and broth, the tempting pyramids of gingerbread and oaten cakes, and no less tempting pennyworths of tobacco, in countless profusion, along with casks of ale, and plentiful store of spirits and uskeabagh, allured the senses of hundreds of weary loungers, and pleasantly engaged the energies of many a crowded group.

The chamber which old Sir Hugh occupied commanded a full view up and down the broad street, glittering with its double files of musketeers, and all the blazonry of decoration. Its long perspective of crowded balconies, and windows, and gables, hung with cloths and tapestries of a thousand various hues, shone in the clear March sun; and these, with all the gay flags, small and great, fluttering and floating in the air, and the dark continuous masses of closely wedged men, women, and boys, extending as far as the eye could reach, showed more like some vast theatric pageant, some fantastic and gorgeous scenic structure, than a solid and substantial town, built and peopled for the sober purposes of thrift and business, and capable of standing the wind and rain of centuries. With many a "pish!" and "pshaw!" and many a muttered ejaculation of bitter contempt, and many a darker expression of indignant and gloomy despondency, did Sir Hugh that morning pace the floor of his apartment, betraying, spite of all his professions of contempt and derision, by many a long pause of deep and intense observation, as he passed and repassed the casement, the deep and momentous interest with which the scene going on without was fraught to him. It was not until the hour of noon had come and gone, that the distant shouting of the multitude, sustained, and swelling, and gathering in wild and exciting volume, every moment, rose sternly to the ear of old Sir Hugh, and down the long crowded line of street, the cry came speeding like the roll of a hedge fire— "the King — the King!" Grace Willoughby looked in her father's face, and thought she saw his colour come and go in sudden alternation, as breathless and stern he arrested his pace at the window, and looked gloomily up the street as far as its winding line would allow. And now swelling and sinking, burst after burst, but still in one continuous roar of acclamation, rolled on the gathering chorus of thousands and tens of thousands of human voices. The squadrons of cavalry clattered in quick succession along the open way, to and fro, with drawn sabres, keeping the passage clear.

CHAPTER XX.

THE KING ENJOYS HIS OWN AGAIN.

MINUTE after minute elapsed, and as yet no harbinger of the approaching procession had reached them, but the swelling acclamation which rose and pealed louder and nearer every moment; and it was not until fully a quarter of an hour had elapsed, that the front of the *cortege* appeared: at length it came; a gorgeous coach, with six horses and outriders and grooms in the royal livery, rolled slowly along at a stately walk; then came another, and another after that, and so on until six of equal splendour had passed. Then followed a close wagon guarded by a party of French dragoons in green uniform and with drawn swords. These, again, were succeeded by a brilliant cavalcade of about two hundred gentlemen of the city, all gaily dressed, and handsomely mounted. Then, after a short interval came Barker, the major of the royal regiment, in his splendid uniform of scarlet and gold, surmounted by a burnished cuirass, bareheaded, and with his left hand controlling his fiery black charger, while his right arm extended enforced the orders which, from time to time, he reiterated as he advanced, with all the flurry of excited importance, and which the officers in command of the double line of musketeers took up and vociferously repeated— “dress up — shoulder your arms — keep the middle of the street clear — keep back the crowd” — which latter mandate had become the more necessary as the mob were now, in proportion as the interest of the exhibition increased, pressing more and more urgently and curiously torward. Then followed twenty-nine gentlemen, nobly mounted and richly dressed, also bareheaded, and cheering and waving their cocked hats before a coach and six horses (one of Tyrconnell’s), in which was seated Fitz James, the younger brother of the Duke of Berwick — it is scarcely necessary to add, the illegitimate offspring of the king.

This equipage was closely succeeded by three officers of the guard, in their gorgeous uniforms, curbing their mettled steeds to a prancing walk, also bareheaded, and carrying their white-plumed cocked hats in their right hands. These were attended each by a led horse; next followed a body of mounted military officers of rank, among whom the crowd seemed particularly to distinguish two — the one a tall, athletic, dashing dragoon, with a bold, frank face, but withal commanding, prompt, and sagacious — and an easy and manly carriage — whose smile, as he returned the greeting of the multitude, with many a wave of his military hat, hovered between amusement and a prouder emotion — something of excited gratification and kindling triumph. The cries of "Sarsfield! Sarsfield! — more power to you! — Sarsfield for ever! — long life to you!" and soforth, the greater part thundered forth in the genuine fervour of the native Irish tongue, sufficiently indicated the individuality of the stalworth soldier. The other object of popular recognition presented a striking, and a very unfavourable contrast to the bold and handsome figure we have just described. This was a diminutive old hunchback, enveloped in a huge scarlet military cloak, which had obviously seen hard service. He bestrode a gigantic black horse, rawboned and vicious; his features were sharp and shrewd, and red as a brick from hard weather and brandy, but the twinkle of his eye, spite of the sarcastic stamp of his other features, had in it a character of dry humour and jollity which qualified the grotesque acerbity of their expression — a fixed and cynical smile, half goodhumoured, half derisive, exhibiting his only acknowledgment of the enthusiastic recognition with which the multitude greeted his appearance. The oddity of this deformed and singular figure was still further enhanced by a huge wig, in a state of the wildest dishevelment and neglect, straggling in tangled wisps about his sharp and elevated shoulders, and surmounted by a broadleafed white hat and an enormous plume. This grotesque and neglected figure was no other than the celebrated veteran, Teigue O'Regan, then full seventy years of age, and who was destined, in the coming struggle, to outdo in skill, fortitude, and daring, all that he had heretofore achieved. Ere this could be written, however, the group in which they moved had passed on, and was succeeded closely by the five trumpets and kettledrums of state in their liveries — after whom there moved some twenty of the gentlemen at large on horseback; next succeeded the messengers and pursuivants — then came the Ulster king-at-arms and the herald in all his gorgeous blazonry; — and now approached the object on whom the thoughts and hopes of so many thousands were centred — that being whose name had for so long acted like a talisman upon all Ireland — the exiled king — the champion and martyr of the ancient faith — the friend of the native people and their old aristocracy, covered with calamities, come among them to head his brave Irish army, and in the field of battle, to hazard one bold cast for his faith and fortunes, and their own. The cries of “The King! the King!” came faster and shriller, until, preceded by the full and stately form of the haughty Talbot, Earl of Tyrconnell, bareheaded, and bearing the sword of state, as he rode singly in front, and flanked at either side, but a little in advance of them, by the Duke of Berwick and Lords Granard, Powis, and Melfort, there appeared, in a slouching hat and sooty-black peruke, in a plain suit of cinnamon-coloured cloth, with a george hung over his shoulder by a blue ribbon, the form of a man of strong and rather massive build, somewhat stricken in years, with a large face and heavy features, whose rigid and strongly-marked lines were impressed with a character of dignity, qualified, however, by something like the melancholy of discontent, which an occasional smile of gracious suavity relieved only for a moment. Dark-complexioned and haughty, the countenance was striking at once from its coarseness and inflexibility, and its stately and formal character was improved and confirmed by the sombre accompaniment of his huge coal-black peruke. Such, in aspect and equipment, did James advance, sitting his steed with more of formal adjustment and precision than elegance or grace; and as this figure, so strikingly contrasted in its extreme plainness of attire with the splendid forms which preceded and attended him, came slowly onward, returning with stately and gracious courtesy, from time to time, the enthusiastic greetings of his people, a burst of wild and tumultuous acclamation ran and rose around and before him, so stupendous, that air and earth rang with its vibrations. Fierce and wild was the rushing and crushing of the serried multitude; blessings, gratulations, welcomes, in English and in Irish, swelled in wild Babel-chorus; a tossing, tumbling sea of waving hats, and plumes, and handkerchiefs, and, answered at every window, and balcony, and housetop, with kindred enthusiasm, dazzled the eye with its giddy multitudinous whirl. Some wept, some laughed, in the thrilling excitement of that memorable scene; and, never since the island rose from the waves of the Atlantic, did its echoes ring with such a wild, passionate, and heartfelt burst of sympathy, devotion, and welcome, as thundered in that sustained and reiterated acclamation. Personal claims, individual intrigues, private schemes of advancement — all lesser feelings — were for the moment lost in the grand and paramount consciousness, that in the unpretending figure before them were centred interests so great, so stupendous, and so dear to them all their ancient grandeur, their old religion, their long hoped-for ascendancy, the movements and the power of mighty armies, the fortunes of kingdoms and people; the heart-stirring and awful consciousness of all these things filled that rapturous welcome with such an inspiring sublimity of enthusiasm, as Dublin will, in all probability, never see more.

Thus, burst after burst of welcome pealed after and before him, as he moved onward toward the Castle-gate, and a troop of the French guard, riding four abreast and close behind, soon screened the King from view. We need not wait for the long train which followed, including cavalcades of gentlemen and troops of buff-coated dragoons, with their broadleafed hats and tossing plumes, and the line of noblemen's coaches, with six horses each, and the coach and four which bears Judge Keating in his scarlet and ermine, and all the other coaches and six, and cavalcades of gentlemen, and troops of soldiery, until at last there remained behind but the confused rabble-rout, who bring up the rear on foot, with wands, and streamers, and banners displayed, and cockades in their hats, shouting and huzzaing in rivalry with their motley brethren, who stand in dense array, and cheering from ten thousand throats at either side. Nor need we follow King James through all his progress to the castle-gate. There, as from Castle-street, the royal cavalcade wheeled upon the ancicnt drawbridge, under the shadow of the two grim flanking towers, a striking and a solemn pageant awaited his arrival. The Titular Primate crowned with a triple tiara, to represent the pope, and followed by the other prelates of his Church — *plenis pontificalibus* — in all the gorgeous and solemn array of the splendid ecclesiastical wardrobe of the ancient Church, stood marshalled to receive him. Before this impressive and magnificent spectacle, King James reined in his horse, dismounted,- and reverently doffing his plain black hat, advanced across the drawbridge, threw himself upon his knees before the lordly impersonation of the see of Rome, and amid an absolute frenzy of acclamation from the now more than ever enraptured multitude, received the benediction of mother Church. Under such auspices, amid music, and acclamations, and blessings, and all the pageantry of splendid ecclesiastical and military and civil pomp, "suitable," as he himself says, "to the most solemn ceremony of the kind, and performed with the greatest order and decency imaginable,” did James enter, for the first time, the precincts of the Irish capital.

While all this pageant was passing through the street with wild hubbub, Sir Hugh stood at the casement which commanded the scene, and from time to time pointed out to his daughter by his side, those whom he thought most worthy of remark, coupling the indication of each individual, with such suitable commentary as this: —

“See you that fellow in the crimson velvet and gold, a fellow with long light-coloured moustaches and eyebrows, a nose like a vulture’s beak, and a small, sleepy, grey eye — that is one of the bloodiest miscreants among them. Look at him — mark him well — that is my Lord Galmoy. And there rides another wretch, as execrable in his own way; an intriguing, heartless, sensual ruffian — that bull-fronted, bloated gentleman in black — that is Thomas Talbot — the lay priest, as they call him; my Lord Tyrconnell’s precious brother.”

Thus the old knight pursued his commentaries, as the various personages, presented in succession, challenged his criticism. But poor Grace no longer heeded or heard him; her thoughts were wandering far away — fondly and unconsciously pursuing the cherished image of one whom her quick eye had instantly discerned, as for a moment he passed amid a crowd of others in the long procession. Need we say it was the form of Torlogh O’Brien which had lured her thoughts away, far into the fairy regions of romantic hope and fancy; and it was *not* until Sir Hugh, stamping vehemently upon the floor, exclaimed in the startling accents of surprise, anger, and alarm, “the scoundrel — what then has brought *Aim* hither?” that she was suddenly recalled to the present scene, and following the direction of her father’s fiery gaze, she beheld the lank, athletic form of Miles Garrett, looking, it seemed to her, if possible, more ugly, sinister, and repulsive than ever, in the rich magnificence of his courtly attire, and riding slowly forward among a group of others.

“The villain has dogged me hither,” he cried, in extreme agitation, “lest chance, or mercy should deliver me — dogged me, to insure my destruction — the malignant villain — I feel it — I know it — may God defend me. It needed no further craft, intrigue, or perjury, to aggravate my danger in this dire extremity. Villain — persevering malignant villain!”

The old man turned almost frantically from the window, walked to the far end of the room, and threw himself into a chair.

Startled at the extreme agitation and almost horror with which this apparition had filled the mind of the old man, his daughter fearfully and tenderly approached him, her own heart oppressed with dire misgivings, and throwing her arms around his neck, she covered his cheeks with her kisses.

*

Night now covered the ancient city of Dublin. Bonfires blazed at every corner; squibs bounced and rattled in mad horse-play among the shins of the multitude, and rockets soared gloriously aloft into the pitchy void; pipers played “the King enjoys his own again,” and other loyal airs; the crowd lounged this way and that, in laughing noisy groups; from the windows, gleaming with lights, and chequered with flitting shadows, were heard the merry scraping of fiddlers, and pounding of dancing feet, along with all manner of jolly and uproarious sounds; the streets resounded with shouting, and buzz, and clatter: here the cheering, groans, and hooting of a mock procession, consigning, in effigy, the usurping Prince of Orange to the flames of a bonfire; there the drunken oratory of some tipsy royalist, mounted upon a cart, or haranging from a tavern window, and sometimes too the angrier sounds of fierce disputation and quarrelling — these sounds, mingled with the occasional reverberating report of fireworks and the constant hum of music, filled all the town with such a buzz of excitement, as few but those whom weighty anxieties depressed, could listen to without a feeling of corresponding restlessness and hilarity.

It was upon this evening that old Jeremiah Tisdal sate morosely by the hearth of the public room of the great old inn which occupied the centre of “the Carbrie this chamber had once been the hall of the noble mansion which fortune, in her wayward caprices, had degraded to the vile and vulgar uses of a common hostelry; two mighty hearths at either end confronted one another gloriously, and sent their hospitable warmth through every nook of the vast old reeking chamber. The place was filled with noise and clatter enough of its ow’n, and presented as motley a gathering of guests as ever yet a tavern chamber contained: some stood by the fire discussing the exciting events of the day, and the angry politics which agitated men's minds; others drank together, or played at backgammon, while listless loungers overlooked the game; some came in, while others went out, keeping up a constant double current of hospitable traffic. Here might be seen samples of many a strangely contrasted class; burly, comfortable citizens eagerly listening to the latest news of Londonderry and the Enniskilleners, retailed by some raw militia officer in all the conscious importance of his new blue uniform and brigadier wig, and seasoned with many a threat and thundering oath. In another place might be seen the boor who scarce could muster so much English as to call for his liquor and tobacco, swaggering along in the brand-new gaudy suit, to purchase which he had sold off his pigs and his cows, and come up to Dublin to seek his fortune in the character of a gentleman; and near him, perchance, with martial strut, and staring about with a bold gaze of curiosity, appeared one of the newly-arrived French troopers, affecting a sublime unconsciousness of the interest with which he was obviously observed; while in a dusky corner, two or three friars, in the peculiar habits of their orders, conversed in subdued but eager whispers over their homely supper.

Tisdal sate gloomily by the fire, smoking his pipe, and inly ruminating upon the events of the day — a contemplation by no means calculated to sweeten the natural moroseness of his temper, while he listened from time to time with growing impatience to the conversation which proceeded immediately beside him. While thus employed, he observed a pale young man, with a sweet, but melancholy countenance, and a pair of fiery dark eyes, gazing upon him with a degree of attention, under which he felt himself, spite of his phlegmatic temperament, singularly restless and uncomfortable. The form of the stranger was slight and graceful, and he was attired in a plain suit of black; he stood quite alone, and at a distance of some ten or twelve feet from the spot occupied by the puritan, so that his gaze was frequently interrupted by interposing groups. Once or twice Tisdal, returning his glance with angry impatience, succeeded in catching his eye, which, however, was instantaneously averted. Again, and again, this was repeated — and again, and again the puritan felt that he was still the object of the same vigilant and disconcerting observation. Once or twice he was on the point of going up to the pale gentleman in black and accosting him, but prudence told him that in such a place, and on such a night, a person of his faith and politics would best consult his safety by avoiding remark, and resisting every temptation to enter into discussion with strangers. Impressed with the obvious expediency of this latter course, the puritan availed himself of the first opportunity to withdraw himself unobserved to another part of the chamber. Gliding behind the crowded knots of guests who filled the room, he seated himself at a remote and unoccupied table at the furthest extremity of the large apartment; from this position, he looked in vain among the crowd, for the form which had caused him, in spite of himself, the uneasy and unpleasant feelings, inseparable from the idea of being watched. No longer under the eye of this unknown personage, he felt himself once more at ease, and smoked his pipe in calm and contemplative serenity, or something as nearly akin to it as his gloomy and unquiet temperament was capable of enjoying.

As his eye wandered listlessly among the crowd, his gaze was arrested by a face and form with which he was familiar; it was that of Mile3 Garrett, who had just entered the room in company with a square-built man in black, with a mantle of the same hue, folded in the Spanish fashion, the skirt being thrown over his shoulder, and muffling his face nearly to the eyes; he wore a black slouching hat, and making a signal to the host, he walked with him a little apart, and without removing the muffling from his face, spoke a few words in his ear: these appeared to be deferentially received, for the stout figure in black beckoned to Garrett, who instantly joined them, and preceded by the respectful innkeeper, they passed in silence through a room communicating with the private apartments of the hostlery. With the reader’s permission, we shall follow them up a broad oak stair, along a gallery, through a sombre passage opening upon a large, bleak, old chamber, and through it into another; here the party stopped — the host placed the solitary candle which he carried, upon a table; its insufficient light illuminated the faded figures in the tapestry with an uncertain flicker, and left the recesses and corners of the chamber but half defined; the large hearth was fire, less, and for aught appearing to the contrary, might have been so for half a century before — and the whole room partook of a character cheerless and spectral enough to -have made a fanciful man feel rather queer: the two guests, however, who had just entered, did not appear to belong to this class; and in answer to their entertainer’s deferential inquiry whether he should bring them a pair of candles, and have a fire lighted the stranger in black peremptorily answered “*neither!”* and then, as he drew his gauntlet-shaped gloves from his hands, and tossed them upon the table, he added in a tone as summary —

“We must be private for a quarter of an hour; on no pretence disturb us; this pays you, and so begone!”

As he concluded, he laid a guinea upon the table with an emphatic pressure; the host pocketed the coin, bowed, and withdrew.

“Garrett!” he continued, as soon as the door had been closed for some seconds, “look out on the passage, and see that all is clear.” Miles Garrett obeyed the mandate in obsequious silence, and as he did so, the stranger threw his cloak upon a chair, and displayed the form of a powerfully built man, with square shoulders, short neck, and a face, upon whose swarthy breadth was impressed the stamp of masculine intellect and passion, with a certain character of sensuality besides, presenting on the whole such a countenance as irresistibly arrests the attention and impresses the memory; this was the very individual whom Sir Hugh had that day pointed out to his daughter as the “lay priest,” and brother to the Earl of Tyrconnell, while the procession was passing beneath the windows of the Carbrie; let us add too, that this is the identical person whom we described in the earliest chapter of this book as leaning over a certain map, in company with Miles Garrett, upon a soft summer’s night in the year 1686, in a rich saloon in London. On a very different night, thus three years later, have these two persons met — in a grim, old, dusty inn-chamber, in Dublin city. He sat down, and resting his elbows upon the table, leaned his chin upon his folded hands, while for a few moments he maintained a thoughtful silence.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CONFERENCE — THE BACK-LANE — THE RING.

“WELL,” said he at last, throwing himself back in his chair, and tapping his knuckles sharply upon the table, “begin, despatch.”

Miles Garrett removed his hat as he took his seat opposite his companion, and with instinctive jealousy, glanced round the room, ere he commenced —

“You remember the property?” he inquired.

“Yes, proceed,” answered Talbot.

“And — and the man?” hesitated Garrett.

“Yes, we have reason — go on,” he replied.

“Well, then,” resumed his companion, “he has run his neck fairly into the noose at last.”

“How so?” asked Talbot.

“He is arrested under a warrant for high treason,” replied the magistrate.

“Ay, indeed!” exclaimed Talbot, “come, this looks like business. Well, then, and what’s your case, for I assume its of your making; can you prove it?”

“Ye-es, yes; I think we can,” said Garrett, “a great deal of course will depend on the judge — and they have some troublesome witnesses.”

“Who are they?” asked Talbot, quickly.

“One is a fellow named Tisdal — a dogged, ill-conditioned fellow, with honesty enough to spoil any body’s schemes but his own,” replied Garrett.

“A servant, or dependant?” inquired Talbot.

“No; unfortunately under no direct obligation to Sir Hugh — a sort of independent, humble, friend,” answered he.

“Well, what can he prove?” persisted the other.

“You must understand, in the first place,” replied Garrett, “that this is a case like Brown’s, which, no doubt, you have heard of.”

Talbot nodded, and his companion pursued.

“Sir Hugh fancies his house is to be attacked, and forms his friends into a sort of volunteer militia. A Mr. Hogan, with his servants, demands admission under a search-warrant, to look for some cattle he has lost. He is refused; the result is bloodshed — in short, a regular battle, and some dozens are slain; now this whig rascal, Tisdal, will give evidence, that Sir Hugh acted purely in self-defence; that the mob burned the witness's house, and nearly hanged himself, although he took no part in the defence of Sir Hugh's dwelling."

"And the other witness, who is he?" urged Talbot, impatiently.

"Colonel Torlogh O'Brien, who came up during the fray, dispersed the assailants, and afterwards shot one of the rapparees — (for, between ourselves, they were little better) that was taken close by," answered the magistrate.

"What kind of man is he?"

"A proud, impracticable, unmanageable fellow," replied Garrett "Then its a bungled business — botched, that's all," said Talbot contemptuously, as he threw himself back in his chair, folded his arms, and looked with a coarse sneer in the face of his companion.

"Its a better crown case than Brown's indictment, as it stands," said Garrett, sturdily.

"Ay — that's the way you d —— d Irish fellows, that live at the back of your bogs and mountains, prate of such matters," retorted Talbot, with coarse contempt. "Brown's case, indeed! why that has made noise enough, and too much, already. The king has a party in England as well as here, and he can't afford to lose them, that *you* may gain an estate."

A long silence followed, broken only by the impatient tapping of Talbot's foot upon the floor.

"What's his title? A grant from Cromwell — eh?" he inquired abruptly, after a pause of more than a minute.

"No, a grant from the old queen," replied Garrett, shaking his head gloomily.

"Then the act of settlement does not touch it — curs'd unlucky!" muttered Talbot, with the vehemence of disappointment. "He is summoned before the privy council," he resumed, after another brief pause.

"Yes; I delivered the summons myself," replied Garrett.

"And the warrant too?" continued Talbot.

"Yes, both at the same time," continued his companion.

"More bungling! — more botching!" said Talbot, bitterly.

“What good in having him before the council, with an indictment over his head — why he’ll not cut his own throat. What in the devil’s name can you hope to make of him? Bah! one of your cow-boys would have made a better job of it.”

“Well, sir,” said Garrett, drawing himself up indignantly, “am I to understand that you give the matter up? If so, speak out, and there’s an end of it.”

The “lay priest” remained silent and thoughtful; at length he arose and walked to the window, where he paused for a time, looking forth into the utter darkness with an aspect almost as black. Miles Garrett, doubtful of the effects of his sudden show of independence, watched his movements from the corner of his eye, with a covert glance of intense and absorbing interest, which became more uneasy in proportion as the silence was protracted, at length he said: —

“I don’t know what your secret reasons for despairing of success may be, but looking at the case itself, and no further, I think there is, on the contrary, every cause for confidence. Sir Hugh Willoughby, like the rest of Ms religion, is, in heart, a rebel and nothing better, every body knows it, though few may have it in their power to prove it. A jury of loyal men will, therefore, be little disposed to let him ride off upon a legal crotchet, a loyal judge will be little disposed to— “

“Tut, tut, man, I know all that,” interrupted Talbot, turning abruptly, and walking again to the table, at which Miles Garrett continued to sit; “a conviction, I dare say, may be had: the question is, will the king’s advisers, for reasons of state policy, recommend the Crown to abandon this prosecution — that is the question.”

“What are those papers beside you?” he resumed, abruptly, after a pause.

“Some notes, hastily thrown together,” said Garrett, “which may help to guide those who shall examine him at council, as well as to determine whether this is not a case *demanding* a prosecution.”

As he spoke, he handed the papers to his companion, who glanced through their contents, and, having occupied some minutes in this employment, he observed: —

“You have drawn this statement well enough; I’ll take it with me.”

“And — and you remember,” said Garrett, hesitatingly.

He stopped, however, ere he concluded the sentence; and taking the candle, he looked jealously out upon the anti-chamber once more, then cautiously closing the door, he came back, seated himself, and leaning forward, so as to make himself distinctly heard without raising his voice above a whisper, he continued, with a shrewd and anxious look: —

"You remember, I presume, the *terms* on which we act together in this business?"

"Remember! yes, of course, distinctly. Why you don't suppose I have lost your undertaking, and the parchment? Of course I remember," replied Talbot, sternly.

"You also recollect," continued Garrett, averting his eyes, and speaking in the same cautious whisper, "the precise relation in which I happen to stand with regard to his Excellency, your brother, you remember the — *the peculiar* circumstances— "

"Yes, well," said Talbot, with contemptuous emphasis; and then he added, in a careless tone, "leave all that to me, Mr. Garrett, I know and remember all the circumstances well, and shall turn my knowledge to account, leave that to me."

"Where may I see you tomorrow?" asked Garrett.

"I shall make no appointment now, in the morning you shall hear from me, we have been but too long together in this place already. Rest content, I shall urge the matter this night; take the candle, if you please, and lead the way."

With this unceremonious direction, he pressed his broadleafed hat again over his brows, readjusted his cloak as before, and followed his gaunt companion through the dreary succession of chambers and passages, which we have already traced in their company, and so in grim silence down the broad darksome staircase, with its ponderous balustrades of worm-eaten timber.

Jeremiah Tisdal meanwhile continued to smoke his pipe of tobacco in sour and solemn taciturnity, and a full hour elapsed ere he called for his reckoning, and prepared to depart. As the innkeeper received the shot and assisted Tisdal to adjust his cloak, he addressed him in a cautious tone: —

"Sir," he said, "from your dress, I take it, you are from the north country, and if you be a Whig I counsel you to avoid the crowd before the door; if my guess be a right one, and that you know best, follow me and I will let you forth by a private way."

Tisdal gruffly nodded his assent to the proposal, and his host led the way through several chambers and corridors, and at last undid a rusty bar, opened a narrow door and pointing into the dark, drew back, and suffered Tisdal to pass forth. He did so, and in the dark stumbled down two steep steps, and found himself in a narrow lane, totally unlighted save by the dusky gleam from an occasional window high in the dark old walls. As Tisdal stumbled on, the innkeeper, stooping forward through the door, whistled shrilly, and then precipitately closed it again. This signal awakened the suspicions of the Puritan, but the grating sound of the rusty bolt returning to its socket, reminded him that he had now no course but to proceed.

"A pretty place to cut a Protestant throat in," muttered he, as he looked with a scowl into the impenetrable gloom, and then up into the dim glare of the distant casements, while at the same time he pressed down his hat and braced himself, in the instinctive anticipation of a coming struggle.

He was about to proceed when a chance light, gleaming through a lower window, illuminated a patch of the opposite wall, within a few yards of the spot where he then stood. In the full light of this sudden gleam he was a little startled to see a human form — it was that of the young, pale faced man in black, whose persevering scrutiny in the inn-room had some time since so much disconcerted him. He was standing near the wall, leaning upon a cane, and slightly inclined forward in the attitude of one who attentively listens.

"I would stake my life on it," muttered Tisdal, "that same lean fellow in black is watching for me. I don't know what to make of him — he does not look like a thief, nor altogether like a madman. I'll accost him, whatever he be and in pursuance of this resolution he exclaimed— "You're observed, sir, whatever be your purpose, if it be *honest* you will scarce refuse to lead the way out of this dark alley, and oblige a stranger who knows it not; but if otherwise," he added more sternly, and after a pause, observing that the figure seemed no otherwise affected by this address than in so far as he altered his attitude to one of perfect perpendicularity, and advanced a step or two toward the speaker— "if otherwise I warn you to think twice ere you run yourself into danger, I am prepared and resolved."

“I carry no weapon, sir, and mean you no hurt,” replied the stranger, in a gentle tone. “I have expected you here for the better part of an hour.”

“It was preconcerted then between you and the landlord that I should leave his house this way?” said Tisdal, with surprise, still qualified with suspicion.

“Yes,” replied the other, calmly; “I wish to speak a few words with you, and cared not to be remarked; your name is Tisdal — Jeremiah Tisdal?”

“Well — and what then?” urged the master of Druingunniol, with renewed surprise.

“I know the purpose of your visit to this city,” pursued the young man, in the same gentle tone. “You have accompanied Sir Hugh Willoughby and his daughter.”

“And if you know all about me, what need to question me?” said Tisdal, gruffly.

“I desire to know where Sir Hugh lodges — I ask no more than that you should convey me to his presence. It nearly concerns his safety that I should see him,” replied the gentleman in black, with tranquil earnestness. As they thus spoke they were, side by side, slowly pursuing their way — the stranger a little in advance — through the dark and winding lane.

“You know Sir Hugh Willoughby?” asked Tisdal, sharply.

“No,” answered the young man, quietly.

“Your request is then, to say the least of it, a strange one,” observed the puritan. “What can I tell of you or your designs; you may mean well, or you may mean mischief; ’tis easier to work harm than good; and he that would escape the serpent’s bite, now-a-days, must exercise the serpent’s wisdom.”

“You are suspicious — unreasonably suspicious, Mr. Tisdal,” answered the young man, in a melancholy tone; yet I can scarcely blame you, nor have I any right to resent your injurious doubts. Bethink you, however, and say, were I an enemy of Sir Hugh’s, and sought his ruin, could I not ascertain with ease, from other enemies, where he is now lodged. I need not seek this knowledge from his friends, least of all need I seek thus secretly a *private* interview. You wrong me, Mr. Tisdal.”

“Well then, what *do* you purpose — what have you to disclose?” pursued the elder man.

“For my purpose,” said his companion, “it is to place Sir Hugh upon his guard; for the disclosures I may make, you must pardon me when I say, they are for Sir Hugh Willoughby's ear, and for no other."

They had now nearly reached the end of the narrow lane, and the lights and the noise of the open street were close at hand, the young man stopped short, and said with gravity, —

"I have told you frankly my reason for wishing an interview with Sir Hugh Willoughby; you can conduct me if you will to his lodging; if you refuse to do so, the consequences be upon your own head. Tonight my information may be important, tomorrow it may be too late. If you please to lead me to his presence now, I follow you — if not, we part here, and this minute."

Tisdal looked in the young man's face, for the light from the frequented and still busy street fell full upon him, as he stood, with one hand buried in his vest, and the other resting upon his silver-mounted cane, and in the expression of his features, as well as in his attitude, there was something at once tranquil and melancholy, which almost assured the Puritan that his original apprehensions were unfounded.

"Priest, madman, or astrologer," thought Tisdal, "he looks harmless, and even were he disposed for mischief, I see not what evil he can do."

"Follow me," he added, gruffly, as he turned abruptly in the direction of the Carbrie, and gliding cautiously along, so as to avoid observation or interruption, they soon found themselves within the door of that section of the old building, in which Sir Hugh and his fair daughter were now lodged.

The young man, in silence followed Tisdal up the stairs, and he having knocked at the door, led the way into the chamber. The old knight was sitting at the table, with a Bible open before him, and close beside him sate his beautiful child, with her hand locked in his.

"Ha, my trusty Tisdal," said he, while, for a moment, his countenance lightened with a smile, "and — and, gad's my life — a priest too," he added, with a changed look, and in a tone of surprise; for the young man in black had now uncovered his head, and as he bowed, the tonsure was plainly discernible.

"Sir Hugh Willoughby," said the priest, turning his full dark eyes upon the old knight, "I have sought an interview with you, owing to some information touching your personal safety, which I this day acci — dentally learned; this interview must be private — quite private; and if you desire to know how it comes to pass, that I, a stranger, should feel, as I do, an interest in your fortunes, look at this ring see in it a token of sincerity, and a plea for my excuse: for the sake of the person who gave me this, I have come here, and though a stranger, have presumed to intrude upon your privacy."

Sir Hugh turned deadly pale as he looked upon this token; his fingers trembled so violently, that he was fain to place it on the table again; he raised his hand slowly to his head, and twice essayed to speak, but in vain; so he but motioned to the young man to be seated, and rising hastily, left the room.

His daughter sate for a few moments glancing fearfully from Tisdal to the stranger, and from him to the old Puritan again; but at last, overcome with uneasiness for her father, she hurried after him, and reached his chamber door. She heard his voice in broken sentences from within, and his heavy and hurried tread, as with agitated step he crossed and recrossed the room. She knocked, but her summons was unheard; she tried to open the door, but it was secured within; so she went down the stairs and waited upon the lobby for some minutes. On returning to knock once more at his door, she heard, she thought, the old man sobbing bitterly; but the sound speedily ceased, and he came forth, and kissing her fondly, he took her by the hand and descending the stairs in silence, he entered the chamber where Tisdal and the young priest stood.

"You will pardon me, sir," he said, addressing the young man in a subdued tone, "and it may be, you know enough to do so readily, when I tell you that some remembrances connected with that token, for a time unmanned me. I am now composed and prepared to hear you. You desire to be private; we can be so in the next room. Will you accompany me?"

The priest bowed gravely, and followed Sir Hugh, who, when they had entered the chamber, closed the door, and placing the candle upon the table, after an agitated pause, and in a voice so broken as to be scarcely audible, he asked— "Is she well, sir; is she happy; does she need help?"

"The lady whose this token was, stands not in need of any aid; she is, I trust, well," answered the young man; "and for happiness, I believe her chief hopes are fixed in futurity."

"I will not ask where she is," said Sir Hugh, hurriedly; "I suppose the question were vain."

"Vain, indeed, sir — I may not answer it — my promise has been given," answered the young man.

“Well, sir, proceed we to the purpose of your visit,” said the old knight, with a heavy sigh, and after a long pause.

“I have come, sir, it is right to say, with no message or intimation from *her,* the lady of whom we have spoken,” said the stranger; “but simply, to carry to you a caution, grounded upon information, of which mere accident this day put me in possession. You are prosecuted for high treason. Know you the *motives* of that prosecution?”

“The motives — why, faction, I should say; with, perhaps, some leaven of personal malice,” replied Sir Hugh.

“There may be, for aught I know, something of those mixed up in it,” answered his visiter; “but the true and sustaining motive, the purpose and object of the whole proceeding is the possession of your property; it matters not for whom, your *property* is the real aim of this indictment — this knowledge may help to guide you hereafter. The other matter is of more immediate concernment. You are to be examined before the privy council, within a few days at furthest.”

“True, sir, what then?” replied he.

“No pains will be spared to entrap you into perilous admissions; and, mark me well, your words will be written down by a clerk in the adjoining room, and if they can serve against you, will be brought in evidence upon your trial — so, once for all, be upon your guard. You now comprehend the motives which originated this prosecution. If you be innocent, fear not — avarice may be bribed.”

“But not by me. I will hold no terms with it,” said the old man, vehemently. “I stand on my innocency and on my rights; and whoever they be, who would reach at any possessions through my life — I care not how great or how many — I defy them all. I have done no wrong — I have done my duty — I have guarded my house, and my family, and my child’s life, as the laws of man, and God, and nature allow me; and if for this the king will take my life, let him have it — the innocent blood needs no ransom. They may make a traitor and a corpse of me, but I will hold no compromise with villainy.”

The young man’s kindling eye told plainly how his own nature sympathised with the words of the old knight; but he shook his head sadly, and taking his hat, he added —

"Do nothing hastily, sir; consider every act, weigh every word; for, be your cause what it may, you will need the coolest caution, the calmest judgment, as well as the promptest energy, and the keenest sagacity to boot, if you would baffle or escape the schemes of that cabal."

These were the concluding words of the young man; and, as he spoke them, he passed slowly forth. He paused, however, in the outer room, and added —

"I am attached, as assistant almoner, to a regiment of horse, whose head quarters are at present in your house of Glindarragh. My duty will take me there in a few days. Should you desire any message thither, you may trust its safety to my charge. I shall see you ere I depart."

Thus speaking, he bowed lowly and gravely to the young lady, and then to the knight, and so withdrew.

"Alas! alas!" said the young man, bitterly and sadly within himself, as he once more found himself alone, and in the chill night air— "alas! for the country in whose name such deeds are done, such passions cherished. Woe's me for the truth, when the children of darkness are foremost in her cause! — woe's me for the Church, when her banners are unfurled by secular ambition and rapacity, and her rights and her interests but a cover and pretence for selfish schemes and private spoliation. Was ever country so loyal to her faith and king, so full of virtues, so schooled in afflictions, so willing to suffer and to bleed! — were ever poor people filled with holier devotion and loftier enthusiasm, if their leaders would but guide them on with singleness of purpose, and show them honestly what they ought to do! But, alas, instead of wisdom and virtue, I see but craft and avarice, violence and chicane — with scandal and weakness, and, alas! I fear me, with disaster and ruin behind."

The priest now turned up a narrow and deserted street, and, walking at a brisker pace, after two or three turns, he came into a kind of dreary opening, which extended from the termination of the street which he had now reached, into the scattered suburbs. The only object discernible against the deep blue starlit sky was the outline of a large house with a steep gable, and surrounded by several tall, desolate-looking trees. A garden of some extent, filled with straggling bushes, drearily occupied the side of this mansion. Into this enclosure, the young man admitted himself by a latchkey; and as he approached the narrow portal which opened from the house into the garden, his ear was attracted by the snorting and champing of a horse close by. On looking through the paling, he perceived, with tolerable distinctness, a carriage and horses drawn under the front of the old house, and opposite to the hall-door. For many reasons this disposition struck him as a strange and somewhat unaccountable one.

"God grant that the poor lady may not have been disturbed," he exclaimed, uneasily, as he raised his eyes upward to a window upon the first floor, through whose red curtains a light was duskily visible.

At this moment the light was suddenly moved, and a shadow passed between him and the curtain. At the same time he heard two voices raised in strong excitement. The one was that of a man who seemed to be reiterating some command with growing sternness — the other were the accents of a female, pleading, as it seemed, with him, and that under the urgency of fear and anguish, and something of indignation, too. In the midst of this, the casement was on a sudden pushed open, but it was as instantly shut again with violence, and the vehement debate continued as before.

At the same moment a window in the front of the house was thrown open, and a female voice, in loud accents of alarm, called shrilly for the watch.

Not knowing what to think or fear, the young man stumbled and scrambled through bushes and over earth mounds, in the dark — speeding through the old garden with all the haste his limbs could command.

To turn the key, spring into the dark house, along the passage, and up the staircase — every moment hearing the angry debate of human voices rise louder and more distinct upon his excited ear — was but the work of a moment. Without hesitating for a second, either for preparation or ceremony, the young priest pushed open the door, and entered the chamber.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FAMILIAR — THE CASTLE — AN OLD FRIEND IN A NEW COAT.

Two figures occupied the room — one was the pale, wasted, and melancholy form of the lady whom we have already seen in the antique chamber in the castle of Lisnamoe — the same, too, we may as well observe in passing, whose presence supplied the only female figure who, muffled and weeping, appeared in the saloon in London, to which, in our first chapter, we introduced the reader.

She stood with her hands raised and clasped together in anguish — one foot advanced, as if she had but just stamped it upon the floor in passion; her face, however, spite of her excitement, showed no hue of life through its transparent whiteness, but her dark eyes streamed fire upon the tall, athletic, malignant form before her — it was that of Miles Garrett.

As the door opened, each glanced to see what its revolution might disclose.

"Ha, O'Gara!" exclaimed Garrett, with bitter emphasis the moment he beheld him; "then *you* are the mover of all this precious mischief."

' I understand you not, sir," replied the young man, with dignity; "I've taken no part in any mischief — I have done no wrong — and if I can prevent it, shall permit none," he added, glancing at the melancholy wreck of pride and beauty, who now sank (the momentary strength of terror and anger fled), pale, helpless, and deathlike, into a chair.

"I will not go — I will not go," she muttered, fearfully glancing from the young priest to Garrett; "do not let him force me away — I will not go."

"Look you," said Garrett, striking the table with his clenched fist; "no more debate — walk by my side down stairs, or I'll lift you to the coach in my arms."

"Sir, Mr. Garrett— " said the ecclesiastic, earnestly.

"Silence! meddling, fanatic idiot," cried Garrett, forgetting his habitual self-command, and stamping furiously on the floor.

"Oh, save me, good sir," said the lady, rising again, and tottering backward.

"You shall *not* touch this unhappy lady, sir; by — you shall not said the priest, his generous indignation overcoming every other feeling.

"Out of my way — ungrateful dog!" cried Garrett, with concentrated ire — "out of my way, or your black weeds and Spanish diploma shall not protect you."

"*I* will not leave this spot," answered the young man, firmly; "I interpose myself — my life — between this unprotected lady and your violence; unarmed as I am, you shall find me resolute — I will not give way; I entreat, I implore of you, think well what it is you do."

"I tell thee, blockhead, thou knowest nothing of this matter," said Garrett, through his set teeth; "this lady is my charge — for her safety *I* am responsible; thy audacious intrusion I will not tolerate; be advised — be warned."

"Miles Garrett," cried the lady, in extreme agitation; "you have, and *can* have, no authority over me."

"We'll see that," retorted Garrett, with an epithet too coarsely insulting for these pages.

"Stand back, sir," said the priest, in a tone of stern and fearless reproach; "how can you break a bruised reed? in the name of manhood I charge you again — stand back."

"I tell you what, young sir," said Garrett, with a sudden accession of calmness, more deadly and ominous far than his preceding excitement had been; "I desire no violence — but if you persist in your knight errantry, you may chance to rue it. Leave me and this lady to settle our own affairs, and depart from the house as you came into it."

"I will leave the room at this lady's bidding, and at no other," said the young man, firmly, still interposing calmly between Garrett and the feeble object of his peremptory visit.

As the slight form of the priest confronted the gaunt and powerful figure of the intruder, it were hard to conceive a contrast more striking and affecting. Garrett stood blazing in the finery of his rich gala suit — his full wig resting on his shoulder in a black cloud of horse hair, itself as well as his lace, and all his rich attire, disordered by the hurry and violence of his gestures — while his marked and swarthy features scowled with the blackest storm of gathering fury, upon the pale, bright-eyed young man, who, with a calm look, half of defiance, half of reproach, serenely fearless, stood in the composed attitude of peace, one hand thrown a little back, as if to check the advance of the lady whom he sought to defend, the other resting upon his silver-headed cane — and the paleness of his noble features, and the tranquil dignity of his attitude, alike relieved and enhanced by the sable dye and simple fashion of his not ungraceful dress.

The young priest had hardly uttered the sentence we have last written, when Garrett, with a muttered curse or a threat, doubling his huge fist, strode towards him. At the same moment, however, the chamber door, which was nearly closed, was pushed partly open, and a mean looking, prying countenance, grinning and puckered, and apparently belonging to a person who had passed the meridian of his days, peered sharply and inquisitively, with a pair of small, glittering eyes, into the apartment.

“Hey-day, Mr. Garrett, stay your hand, sir — pray, do, Mr. Garrett,” cried the apparition in a squeaking voice, and with a good deal of energy.

“Well, what now? come in — come in, rascal,” replied Garrett, half impatiently and half irresolutely, as he turned quickly toward the speaker. Edgeways, and with a look of cringing complacency which contrasted odiously with the fierce and diabolic passions which he well knew had but just startled the echoes of the old house, the stranger entered; he Was meanly dressed, and in his sycophantic smile there was a lurking villainy which combined to render his appearance indefinably formidable as well as repulsive, he bowed round with a low and servile inclination, “What do you want — in the devil’s name, what is it?” pursued Garrett.

“I crave your pardon, Mr. Garrett, and *your’s,* madam,” he replied, again bowing humbly; “but having come hither upon this business, and in the same carriage, I thought I might be excused if I came up stairs, and just hinted that this discussion has beer carried on in so high a tone, that what with the noise of the dispute, and the old woman in the attic calling for the watch, if I had not known that this was a mere visit, as I may say, of friendly persuasion, I should myself have almost believed I overheard a riot.”

The old man placed his emphasis so pointedly, that were *it* not for his cringing smile and attitude, and his humble tone, this speech must have been construed as a piece of mere impertinence; as it was, Garrett did not seem clearly to know in what way to take it; he felt, perhaps, that the rebuke which it conveyed, had come seasonably: he therefore paused, a good deal disconcerted.

"Since the lady prefers the society of her new *protector*," continued the stranger, with a covert sneer as he glanced at the young ecclesiastic, "surely, Mr. Garrett, you need not fret yourself if that preference leads her into new difficulties, and perhaps disgraces — all of her own making. You have acquitted yourself, Mr. Garrett — *you* wash your hands of the whole business — once and for ever; you have done your duty, and need trouble yourself no further."

Garrett glanced darkly and irresolutely once or twice in the face of the speaker, and the little ill-favoured man returned his glance with one silent look of such diabolic rebuke as Mephistophiles himself might have shot at his rash familiar.

"My friend and patron, Mr. Garrett," he continued in the same humble tone, and with the same sweet smile, "is a little hasty — a little rough. I regret your determination; but as you decline returning to the security of his roof, he can of course do no more than wish you as much tranquillity and safety, and respectability elsewhere; good night, madam, we take our leave."

So saying, the little gentleman put his arm through Garrett's, and infinitely to the amazement of the other two occupants of the chamber, led him unresisting and in silence from the chamber, and so down the stairs.

"Thank God, thank God!" said the poor lady, clasping her thin hands fervently together as she raised her eyes to heaven in an agony of gratitude, "Oh God, be thanked," and she burst into an hysterical paroxysm of weeping.

"Come what may," she said at last, when the violence of her passionate agitation had subsided, "I shall never know the bitterness and humiliation of crossing his threshold and sheltering under his roof-tree more. Oh, merciful God! that I should ever have owed protection to the persecutor, the murderous persecutor of poor — poor, wronged — — " She buried her face in her hands and sobbed and trembled so violently, that the young man became almost alarmed for her.

"Had you not come in when you did," she resumed with a shudder, "I do believe he would have murdered me; he looked as if he could — well, well, my life they may take; would — would it were ended, and so all over; but I will not yield in this — I will not eat the bread of his betrayer — no threats, no cajolery shall prevail. I will not go back — another home they may find me, but *there* I will not go."

Meanwhile Garrett and his companion, inclosed in the oldfashioned coach, were driven rapidly along the streets; for some minutes the silence was unbroken except by the rumble of the wheels. The shabby-looking personage, however, at last remarked, "What a virago, that is — mere skin and bone, but animated with the soul of a tigress; you took a wrong course with her, believe me; the only way with such subjects, is to wheedle and coax; as to resorting to brute force — doing mischief and ultimately failing, as you might — why, it were worse than frenzy; besides the object is not really worth the risk. You apprehend, believe me, too much from her newly-asserted independence."

"I do not agree with you; it's a bad business — cursed bad," said Garrett sulkily; "but you're right in saying that force would not do, after that officious dog of a priest came in. I do not know what to say of it."

"Nobody knows but yourself that she's here?" inquired his companion.

"No; and do you keep your counsel — not a word of it to any one breathing; do you mark me?" said Garrett, impressing the caution with two or three lazy but emphatic kicks.

"Trust *me,* Mr. Garrett, confidence is confidence, sir, with *me,'"*said the sinister-looking personage from the corner of the coach, where he lay coiled up like a reptile in the darkness.

"I tell you," said Garrett, suddenly, after another sulky pause, "I don't like it — it's a bad business; if she makes herself troublesome to certain persons just now, she will *ruin* my schemes for me; curse her, she's here of course, about the old blustering knight's affair, though what can she do to help him! I don't like it, however, that't all — the very people whom she ought not to meet, are now in town, and here she comes, as if the devil inspired her with the precise and only freak she could contrive, to pester and baulk me. I can't afford to lose one particle of my interest at court at this moment; if I do, all my pains go for nothing; curse the woman! curse her; look ye, Garvey, you must find some way to keep her quiet — dispose of her somehow; *any* how, so you prevent her meddling — prevent her shewing herself — that's all I want."

A silence ensued, which was broken by Mr. Garvey's bursting into a short laugh.

"A deuced comical plan crossed my mind, and not a bad one either; one that will bring the old lady to reason, Mr. Garrett," said he; "and keep her as close as if the grand inquisitor had her four bones under lock and key."

"I don't want to know any thing about it," said Garrett, hastily; and then added, gruffly; "but remember the occasion may arise *suddenly,* and — and you need not be over-scrupulous when it does come; but here we are again."

The coach stopped, and they proceeded to descend.

A few days after the events recorded in our last chapter, somewhere about the hour of noon, a coach, surrounded by a guard of dragoons, rumbled over the drawbridge, and under the ancient archway, which then, between two grim and dusky towers — massive, sombre, and prisonlike, and under cover of two heavy cannon, upon a platform within — gave admission to the castle of Dublin. The castle of those days bore small resemblance to the present structure. A suspicious-looking, dingy, ominous building — sternly impressed in every aspect with the double character of a fortress and a gaol — swarming with lounging soldiery — and with every pass, and almost every doorway guarded by a musketeer; old brass cannons, of marvellous length, peered grimly from the timeworn embrasures of the outer walls; and the buildings, whose narrow and unequal gables crowded up the intervals between the towers, formed a spacious quadrangle, whose irregularity and gloom, coupled with the sounds of military occupation — the echoing tread of the sentinels, and the challenging of those who passed — and the marching and countermarching of the files of soldiery, at stated times, relieving guard; all impressed the mind of the man who, leaving the busy streets, plunged on a sudden within its solemn precincts, with something at once of gloom and excitement — how much more the mind of him who passed beneath its formidable shadows, as a prisoner of state.

While this vehicle made its way onward, several carriages and four, having deposited their living burdens of rank, arrogance, guile, or Wisdom, as the case might be, at the entrance to the council chamber, were moving slowly away — and two or three mounted lackeys were walking their masters' horses slowly up and down, before the listless groups who lounged and gossipped there. The coach drew up at a little distance from this door, and Sir Hugh Willoughby, followed by old Jeremiah Tisdal, descended to the pavement; and Torlogh O'Brien dismounting, whispered a word or two in his ear, and then led the way briskly toward the narrow arched doorway, which admitted to the interior of the building, in which lay the chamber where King James's privy council were then assembled.

As Sir Hugh was about to pass through the crowd of applicants and expectants who haunted the outer door, Thomas Talbot stood within the shadow of the archway. He caught Sir Hugh's eye as he passed, and a slight and stem interchange of recognition partially revealed the feelings with which each regarded the other. But the old knight engaged his eye but for a moment; — a little incident, which might easily have escaped another, attracted and riveted his attention. Tisdal was following Sir Hugh at a brief interval, and as the burly puritan made his way through the crowd which beset the entrance, some one tapped him sharply on the shoulder; he looked round, and encountered the steady and sneering gaze of the musketeer, who kept guard at the door. Could he believe his eyes! — there, in the bright scarlet uniform and bandoleer, with shouldered musket, and broadleafed low-crowned military hat, stood with a suppressed grin of triumph stamped upon his unsightly visage, the identical Richard Deverill, whose body he at that moment believed to be mingling in the ashes of the ruined Grange of Drumgunniol. Without deranging his stiff military attitude, Deverill kept his eye with a steady significance, which he enhanced by one or two arch winks, and a low titter of suppressed delight, full upon his confounded and horror-stricken acquaintance. Tisdal returned his pleasant glance of recognition with a stare of such obvious agitation and dismay, that it was impossible to witness the intensity of fear and amazement which it pourtrayed — an expression so powerfully contrasted with the dogged and masculine character of his features — without a sensation at once of curiosity and suspicion. Tisdal stepped, or rather staggered back a pace or two, with mouth agape, and a scowl of horror — but mastering his emotion, with a strong effort, he recovered his self-possession; he glanced quickly round him, to see if he had been observed, and darting another hurried look at the object of his fear, he hastened into the building, and followed Sir Hugh up the stairs. This recognition, and its agitating effect upon Tisdal, occupied little more time than would have sufficed to receive a blow and to stagger a step or two under its impulse; but though no other eye observed it, the keen glance of Talbot, who as we have said, had paused for a moment in the shadow of the entrance, instantly noted the occurrence. It might mean nothing — but it might be important — so without a moment's delay, this crafty and energetic man, inwardly resolving to turn the incident, if possible, to account, took his own decisive measures, thereupon.

Meanwhile, Sir Hugh mounted the broad staircase, and passing a crowded lobby, entered the apartment, where he was to await the pleasure of his majesty, King James, then sitting in council in the adjoining chamber. The feelings of suspense and excited expectation — the consciousness that he was about to encounter, in a few moments, those public men, whom, upon earth, he most dreaded and hated — the feeling that he was about to stand, for the first time, under the eye of royal suspicion and displeasure, that he was momentarily approaching a scene which must prove one of the most memorable and momentous of his existence — all these reflections and emotions combined to depress, excite, and agitate him to a degree that was absolutely painful. Thus he awaited with breathless anxiety and suspense the summons which should call him through the crowded antechamber into the royal presence-

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PRIVY COUNCIL.

SIR HUGH had not very long to wait in the antechamber; many groups were there assembled, some with memorials, and other matters officially to be submitted; others, and the greater number, lounging there, in the hope of having a few minutes' conference with one or other of the privy council, as they withdrew; intent on urging some private suit, for place or pension, and most of them engaged in animated conversation — some of it conducted in genuine Irish, then almost universally understood and spoken by the country gentlemen — and all, it is scarcely necessary to add, of a very decidedly one-sided character, as respected the momentous politics of the day. Sir Hugh, silently, and ill at ease, awaited in suspense the summons which was to call him into the presence of King James. At last, a door in the far end of the chamber, opened, and a clerk looked in and drew back again — then the same door was reopened, and the same official entered, and twice called Sir Hugh Willoughby by name. Through the now silent and staring crowd, the old knight passed; the guard who accompanied him and Tisdal were stopped at the door, and he passed alone into the council chamber.

It was a spacious wainscoted chamber, lighted not very cheerfully, by three narrow windows, cased in deep recesses in the side wall, and overlooking the interior quadrangle of the castle. At a long table sate some dozen of the right honourable the privy council of those days, in rich suits, velvets, and laced cloths; and presenting (even were its effect unaided by the consciousness that the whole power, dignity, and enterprise of the loyalist cause were there assembled), a *coup doeil,* whose very richness, splendour, and solemnity would have made it impressive.

At the head of the table he had no difficulty in recognizing, at a single glance, King James himself, dressed, as on the day of his entrance into Dublin, with a plainness which contrasted strikingly enough with the almost gorgeous attire of those around him. Pens, ink, and some papers lay before him; and at the moment when the old knight entered, the king was addressing a dark-featured, intelligent gentleman, with animated eyes, gravely but richly dressed in a suit of velvet, who sate close by him. This personage was the Count D'Avaux, the ambassador, and not now for the first time, of the *grand monarque.* The remark had been a gracious one, and obviously intended, at least, for a pleasantry; for a formal smile was upon the face of majesty, as he concluded; and the Count D'Avaux shrugged and laughed, in which latter loyal tribute, the rest of the council dutifully joined.

As the king's eye rested upon Sir Hugh, the passing smile vanished, and his rigid and heavy features recovered in an instant their usual haughty and saturnine expression — with a formal and lofty carriage, and a bold, and, it must be added, a somewhat ungracious stare, the king, for some seconds, looked full upon the old knight.

"Whom have we here, Tyrconnel?" inquired James, gravely, turning to the Irish favourite, without a change in a single feature of his rigid face.

"Sir Hugh Willoughby, my liege," answered Tyrconnel, bowing toward the king, and speaking in a low tone— "your majesty will remember— "

"Willoughby! — I remember," said James — whose accurate memory and painstaking habits made him at all events a good man of business— "I remember — Willoughby — let me see — I have a note of this matter by me — so — we have it" — ana as he thus spoke, the king turned over the leaves of a gilt red leather notebook— "a prisoner under a warrant of high treason — a gentleman of Limerick, in Munster."

"The same, my liege," answered Tyrconnel.

"You are Sir Hugh Willoughby?" continued the king, turning again toward the prisoner, with the same fixed and somewhat forbidding aspect.

"I am, may it please your majesty, but no traitor;" replied Sir Hugh, firmly but respectfully.

"Your house of Glindarragh," continued the king, coldly, again referring to his notes and pursuing his interrogatories, for he delighted in conducting an examination in person, and sometimes indulged this taste to an extent scarcely reconcileable with the dignity of his royal station— "your house of Glindarragh is situated in the southern district of this our kingdom of Ireland, in the county, I think, of Limerick?"

"Even so, my liege," replied the knight.

"We desire, then, to know," continued the king, "from your own experience, which must needs be considerable, *how* you believe our

Protestant subjects of that district to be affected toward our rights and person? — Speak out, sir" — he continued, sternly— "you will find more safety in plain dealing than equivocation, when you come thus face to face with the King — how do they stand affected, sir — it's a plain question?"

"May it please your majesty, they are one and all peaceably dis posed," replied Sir Hugh, after a moment's hesitation, for the peremptory tone of the king had a little disconcerted him.

"Scarce *peaceably,* methiuks," rejoined the king, austerely, "if what is in evidence against yourself, and some three score others of your friends, be no perjury."

Tyrconnel smiled contemptuously on old Sir Hugh, as James uttered this ominous sarcasm.

"If there be any matter sworn against me, my liege," answered Sir Hugh spiritedly— "save that where your majesty's government had not the power to protect my life and interests, I feared not to defend them for myself — that evidence of which your majesty has spoken — *is* perjury, and nothing better."

James could ill brook, except when it came from a favourite, even the semblance of contradiction, though he not unfrequently provoked it; and the fearless speech of the old knight savoured much too strongly of whiggish independence, not to offend an intolerance of opposition so sensitive and exacting as that of the last king of the Stuarts. A glow of irritation flushed his massive features. He sate more erect as he eyed the unceremonious prisoner with a look of extreme displeasure, and with a slight and haughty gesture adjusted the folds of his laced cravat, and the sable curls of his peruke; it manifestly required an effort of the royal dignity to swallow down the angry and peremptory rebuke which had risen to his lips; he did, however, suppress the unseemly ebullition, and after a brief pause, he observed: —

"You are somewhat blunt, Sir Knight — somewhat blunt, methinks, but we except not against your plain speaking, provided you but deal as plainly in your answers, as you have done in your commentary. I desire to know how far we may calculate upon the loyalty and duty of our Protestant subjects in Munster. Take the question thus — were our service to need their active assistance, do you think the Protestant gentlemen of your acquaintance would accept commissions in our army or militia?"

“For myself, my liege,” replied Sir Hugh, “I have not been bred a soldier; and my years, moreover, unfit me for a soldier’s life; had I a choice, therefore, I frankly allow I should decline a commission in either service; and as regards the gentlemen of my acquaintance, I have never spoken to them of such a matter, and cannot, therefore, presume to say how they might act in such a case.”

“Bravo, old gentleman — well said, and guardedly!” muttered one of those who sate by, as with one hand buried to the wrist in the folds of his rich laced vest, and the other grasping as firmly as he might have done his holster pistol, the elbow of the great chair in which he sate — he looked with a keen, bold countenance, on which flitted the faintest smile of admiration, toward the stout old prisoner; this was one among the last made, and will prove, perhaps, one the last forgotten of King James’s privy councillors — Colonel Sarsfield — not yet Lord Lucan.

“You see how it is,” said James, addressing the French ambassador in the language of that court, which was, at least, as easy to him as his own, “heresy and disaffection go hand in hand; by my royal faith,” he added, with vivacity, “I have not a Protestant subject on whom I dare rely.”

The king paused, and the Frenchman observed with a calm smile— “my royal master of France makes light of such difficulties, he converts one half with a dragonade, and mans his galleys with the rest.”

“My good friend,” said James, peevishly, “your master is a king; as for me, *par ma foi!* my subjects have taken to ruling me so effectually, that I am but too much obliged to them if they let me say my prayers my own way.”

“I would suggest,” began the count in reply.

“Count D’Avaux,” interposed Tyrconnel, with a jealousy which he could not repress, but at the same time with a haughty affectation of deference, “as one of his majesty’s privy council, and with his royal permission, I must remind you that you are here on sufferance, and not as an adviser.”

“By your leave, my Lord Tyrconnel,” rejoined the ambassador, with provoking coolness; “I represent, here, the majesty of France — the power which has supplied your empty magazines, filled your garrisons, replenished your treasury, and, under the safeguard of the *fleur-de-lis,* from the deckage of a French navy, and amidst the battalions of a French army, landed your royal *master* (and he laid a galling emphasis on the word), upon the shores of Ireland; I have the exalted honour to represent King Louis — the monarchy of France, in this assembly; and I have yet to learn that France appears in your Irish councils on sufferance."

"Your excellency seems to have forgotten," exclaimed Sarsfield, sarcastically, for he shared in the national and personal jealousy with which the obvious prevalence of French councils in the *cabinet interieur* had inspired the Irish adherents of the royal cause, "that the flower of our Irish army is serving your master in France; and for the supplies he is pleased to send — what are they but a loan, and a prudent one to boot? Pshaw! Count d'Avaux," he continued, more gruffly, "we all know as well as you do that France serves but her own ends in throwing some men and money into this country. It is childish all this rhetoric vapour, fustian."

"Colonel Sarsfield, you have said enough," exclaimed d'Avaux, calmly, but with a heightened colour, and at the same time preparing to rise; "such language, scarce seemly from one gentleman to another, when offered to the Majesty of France — ."

"Count D'Avaux, my good friend, for my sake," cried James, excitedly, laying his hand upon the ambassador's arm— "Colonel Sarsfield, we have had enough, and over much, of these vain altercations; let them be ended. My Lord Tyrconnel, I look to you to keep our hot Irish bloods from boiling over. This is, beside," he added, more severely, and glancing at Sir Hugh, whose presence had been forgotten for the moment, "scarce prudent or politic, or seemly. My lords and gentlemen of the privy council, our time is scarce enough for business; it shall not be wasted in distractions. Nay, D'Avaux, I entreat — Colonel Sarsfield, I command," he continued, raising his voice as the two personages indicated, successively attempted to speak. "Messieurs, there must be an end of this; while I preside here I will be obeyed. *Ma foi!* gentlemen, am! King here, or not? Tyrconnel, Riverston, second our endeavours, I pray you in this matter."

"Your Majesty's command is enough for me," said Sarsfield, with an angry glance at D'Avaux, followed, however, by a profound and graceful inclination to the King, whose extreme distress had, perhaps, wrought upon him more effectually even than his manifest displeasure.

"We are so persuaded, Colonel Sarsfield," said James quickly; and then he added, with a sigh, which seemed to rise from the very depths of his heart, and with a slight knitting of the brows, as if in pain, "God knows —

God knows we are troubled and perplexed over much already by the outrages and the wiles of open and of secret enemies; let us be at peace with one another. We are friends; I beseech you, as friends, be at peace one with another."

The king spoke in such a tone of extreme distress and earnest entreaty, that an embarrassed silence of some seconds followed — a pause of which it were hard to say whether it partook most of the solemn or the ridiculous. Tyrconnel, however, interrupted this awkward silence.

"May it please your Majesty to permit me to put a few questions to Sir Hugh Willoughby," he asked, "before his attendance is dispensed with?"

"Surely, surely; but be brief — be brief; we have wasted time enough, and over much, already," rejoined the king, a little peevishly; and taking a pen, he began to jot down some notes with a careful hand in ft small blank book, in which were entered the materials of those journals which he kept with such persevering amplitude and punctuality.

"It may be, my Lord Chief Justice Riverston," said Tyrconnel, as if suddenly recollecting a circumstance which had escaped him, and with a gracious smile— "it may be that you had best, with his majesty's permission, withdraw for a few moments from the council; as *you* shall try this case hereafter, it were but fair play in us to guard the prisoner against prejudicing himself by too much freedom in your presence."

"Do not withdraw on my account, my lord," said Sir Hugh, sternly and quickly; I will take sufficient care *not* to prejudice myself. I thank you for your merciful anxiety, my Lord Tyrconnel; but it is altogether causeless."

Tyrconnel was evidently not prepared for this, for a faint cloud of displeasure and disappointment darkened the haughty face of the practised dissembler.

"Be it as you will, then," he said; "only be cautious — say no more than is simply necessary."

Sir Hugh turned impatiently away, and Tyrconnel continued: "We have heard something against the character and credibility of this Mr. Hogan, your chief accuser. You represent his visit to your house to have been a mere pretence, to gain an entrance for lawless violence. I have heard matter which would give a colouring to this. It has been suggested to me that he presented you with a forged warrant of search, on the night of the affray. Did you read the name signed at the foot of it?"

"I care not to answer that question, my lord," said Sir Hugh, calmly, but decisively.

"You are asked," said the king, laying down his pen, and looking upon the contumacious prisoner with an expression of imperious surprise— "you are asked whether you read the signature at the foot of the warrant. The Earl of Tyrconnel awaits your answer."

"May it please your majesty," said Sir Hugh, respectfully but perfectly firmly, "I have already declined to answer my Lord Tyrconnel's question."

"You will answer the King, then," said James, peremptorily; "*we* now ask you that question, and expect an answer."

"My liege," said Sir Hugh, "the question touches matters affecting my life. For this reason it was, my liege, I refused to answer it."

"*Ma foi!* dost thou refuse to answer me?" said the King, colouring, and with more impatience than dignity, at the same time striking his notebook upon the table.

"If your Majesty *commands* me to answer" — said Sir Hugh.

"I ask you the question, and I expect an answer." reiterated the King.

"I will obey your royal command, should your majesty impose it on me," replied the old knight; "but while your royal permission leaves me free to claim the constitutional privilege of every man under a capital accusation, I will do so; and, with all submission to your majesty, I must continue to decline to answer that question."

"My liege," urged Tyrcounel, in an under tone, "will you not command him to answer?"

The King hesitated; spoke a little in a low tone to D'Avaux; and only the last words he said were audible as he leaned back —

"He is right — ay, quite right— 'tis not worth pressing. Sir Hugh Willoughby," he added, aloud, addressing the old knight in atone of high displeasure, "as our wish hath not prevailed with you in this matter, we shall not add our command. By my troth, sir knight, there have been kings of England who would have dealt sharply with such contumacy; but let that pass — I had rather err on the side of clemency than exercise severity, however just. We have come into this our kingdom of Ireland," he continued, with dignity, as he glanced round the members of the council, "not to pursue and to punish, but rather to reconcile, to restore, and to forgive. He who reads the hearts of kings, and under whom kings reign, and to whom alone must even kings render an account — the great God knows how gladly we would make all our subjects, even those who have wronged us deepest, happy and secure — how gladly we would assure them that we are ever more ready to grant forgiveness than they to ask it; and that, save for the necessity of warning and example, the halter and the axe might be unused for us till doomsday.”

“My liege,” said Tyrconnel, with a sullen displeasure which he was at no pains to conceal, “the prisoner does not choose to answer the questions which I put to him; and as your majesty tolerates his recusancy, I shall press him with no further examination — I’ve done with him.”

“Then, i’ God’s name, let him begone, and let us to other matters,” said James, hastily; and then he added more austerely, “you may depart, Sir Hugh Willoughby; the council have no further need of your attendance.”

Much relieved at the unexpected ease of his escape from a scene which he had anticipated with so much anxiety and alarm, Sir Hugh bowed low to his majesty, and, withdrawing under charge of the same official who had conducted him into the chamber, was once more *com*mitted to the keeping of the guard who waited in the outer room.

“That old gentleman,” said Galmoy, slowly, as his sleepy eye followed Sir Hugh from the chamber, and continuing to lean indolently back in his chair; “that old gentleman presumes strangely upon your royal clemency; there is treason in every circumstance of his case, and rebel in every word he uttered; and yet he looks your majesty in the face, as confidently as though he had raised a regiment in your service. I could scarcely forbear laughing at his impudence.”

“Yet, ’tis no laughing matter, Earl of Galmoy,” said James, somewhat curtly; “this old knight is but a sample — and we fear too just a one — of the general temper of our Protestant subjects. They are schooled in rebellion — one and all, with but a few most honourable exceptions; I never trusted them.”

“The history of these kingdoms, and of your royal house,” said Tyrconnel, sternly, “affords memorable and bloody proofs of the wisdom of your majesty’s distrust.”

“True,” said James, calmly; for though he always spoke of his unhappy father with decent respect, he felt no delicacy, and exacted none from others, in alluding to his fate; “but though the bulk of them always repudiated the extremity of that sacrilegious murder; yet, in general and in all other matters, they concurred with the murderer. I remember well, when the late king, my beloved brother, and I, were in France, we had often occasion to go into companies, without letting ourselves be known; and there we used to hear the Protestants — invariably and without exception — speak in praise of Cromwell; a circumstance which easily impressed us both with the conviction that they were, in the mass, *not* to be trusted; that they were rebels in their hearts."

"And truly can I aver," said Tyrconnel; "as far as my poor ex perience goes in the affairs of this kingdom, that whenever and wherever the difficulties of your majesty's service were the greatest, that I have found them rebels in *fact,* no less than in disposition."

"The whole island ought to be governed under martial law; it needs purging and bleeding, to a purpose," said Lord Galmoy, with a faint sneer; "by — , if your majesty were to give them drumhead law, with an occasional taste of the thumbscrews and the strappado, where the truth was hard to come at, it would make men stare to see the order things would fall into before a month."

, "Nay, nay— 'tis better as it is," replied the king; "as soon as we have quelled this untoward revolt in the north, we shall take order so to dispose our troops, that insurrection for the future shall be all but physically impossible; and, meanwhile, we have loyal juries and able judges (and the king glanced graciously at the chief-justice, who bowed low in return); and thus furnished, we fear not lest the guilty shall escape. But enough of this; let us look to the proclamation touching the new coinage: methinks, Duke of Tyrconnel, you have got a rough draft of it, by you."

So, with the reader's leave we shall turn to other matters.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE COUNTESS'S BOWER.

HOT and excited, Sir Hugh, accompanied by Jeremiah Tisdal, and attended by the guard, made their exit from the council chamber, and retracing their way through chambers and passages still occupied by loitering groups — they descended the ill-lighted staircase, and found themselves once more in the open yard. Tisdal glanced fearfully, as he passed, at the sentinel who kept watch by the door; and to his inexpressible relief, perceived that the guard had since been changed.

We mentioned before, that the old building which bore the name of the Carbrie, had been subdivided into three houses — the centre one being a well frequented inn — that upon one side a lodging house, in which, as we have seen, Sir Hugh's apartments were situated, and that upon the other, a sort of dingy, ambiguous-looking tavern, which seemed to be sinking rapidly into utter decay, and carried in its dreary and dilapidated aspect, a certain air of gloom and indescribable suspicion Its desolation was not that of honest poverty, but the wreck and squalor of vice and secret villainy; its darkness and solitude were like the shrinking, sinister seclusion of conscious guilt. There was in the sluggish undulations of its close atmosphere — in the echo of its deserted passages — in the very creak of its half-rotten stairs and rat-eaten flooring, something which seemed to mutter and moan of warning and of peril — there was a certain influence which whispered DANGER in the ear of him who ventured alone to trust himself among its desolate chambers, and equivocal company; the street door gave admission to an ill-lighted and uninviting shop, rather than tavern-room; for a counter traversed it, on which were huddled some measures for liquor, and several glasses, amid the slop of stale libations, the ashes of tobacco, and several dirty stumps of candle; a few barrels, and some dozens of wine flasks in the back ground, supported the convivial pretensions of this inauspicious looking place; the wainscoating was broken, and full of rat-holes, and the furniture both meagre and crazy; — the whole air of the place com billing the character of darkness, discomfort, and debauchery, might best be conveyed in the one emphatic term— "cut-throat."

A tall female of some five-and-fifty years — skinny and large boned — arrayed in tawdry finery, was standing behind the counter; her shoulders leaning against the wall, and her arms folded; her hard, bony face was flushed, and the grin of pugnacity and defiance which distended her wide mouth, exhibited many a woeful gap in her discoloured teeth; she was redolent of brandy, and seemed in a state of considerable excitement, as she glanced from time to time, with her spiteful grey eyes, upon her companion — while all the time an almost imperceptible wagging of the head betrayed the malignant resolution with which she maintained her part in the domestic debate with which the dusky chamber was now resounding.

On the counter, with his back toward the entrance, sate the other occupant of the room — a short, square-shouldered, bloated fellow, perhaps some fifteen or twenty years the lady's junior — with a tallowy, sensual face, and a villainous eye. He was entertaining himself, as the discussion proceeded, by deepening a nick, with his penknife, in the counter.

"It isn't now — nor once — but always you're at it," said the gentleman — knocking the haft of the knife on the table by way of emphasis— "I tell you, you've made away with five pound of it — I know it — and I'll know *how* — I will."

He added an epithet and an oath which we need not perpetuate. "Ha! ha!" laughed the lady, malignantly, "you're taking after the doctor — are you?"

"The doctor's in his grave," said the man, cutting a very deep slice, "the old boy has him, and I believe he's made a good exchange of it out of *your* hands, anyway."

"Maybe you'd like to follow him?" retorted she with a ghastly smile.

The man looked up from his task with an expression in which uneasiness struggled strangely with suppressed rage —

"It's threatening me you are — is it?" he said, while his tallowy face darkened. "Come — come — come, I know a trick worth two of the doctor's — put me to it — and see if I don't take care of myself and of *you too;* pish! do you think to bully *me* — do you?"

"I could do for you, my boy, as easy as that," and she snapped her fingers, with a laugh of scorn— "it's only a whisper — a word with the constable, and Margery Coyle is a widow again; tut — tut — you lump of a fool — no shaking of your knife at me — I don't value it a rusty nail — don't think to frighten me."

"You're as bad yourself, and you know it, you devil's carrion," said the man furiously, but scarce above his breath. "Talk of the constable, indeed — you're a pretty gaol bird to face the constable — aint you?"

"Look behind you," said she, contemptuously.

A soldier was pushing at the shopdoor, and the ill-looking host, thus checked in a dialogue which might have led to results more practical than we have been called on to record, threw his legs over the counter, let himself down lazily on the floor, and proceeded to give admission to their guest.

The visitor entered with the familiar swagger of a man who knows he has the power to make himself welcome, and glancing round the chamber, observed —

"Quite private, I see — no company — eh?"

"Not one, corporal — not a soul," replied the host —

"So much the better," replied Deveril, taking a gold piece from his waistcoat pocket, and raising it impressively between his finger and thumb. "I've spent a good round lump of money with you — Mr. What-d'-ye-call'em, and I mean to spend a trifle more."

"The keen sense of favours to come," inclined the short and bloated body of mine host with a profound and grateful acknowledgment.

"The fact is, I want a couple of rooms up stairs," continued Deveril, "they must open one upon the other, but I'll see to that myself — I expect some company — very particular company to supper this evening. Come up along with me — I'll see your apartments, and choose for myself."

They both accordingly ascended the stairs, and entered the chambers opening from the first landing. The building extended far in a backward direction, and had been very irregularly divided from its neighbour, so that Deveril and his guide found themselves involved in a rambling complexity of passages and dismal chambers, of which it would have been no easy matter to draft the plan. The proprietor had suggested several apartments, as presenting the required relation — that of communicating one with the other; but his recommendations had been either wholly disregarded, or else dismissed with an impatient "pish the soldier, however, at last resolved to cut the matter short by a full explanation.

"What I want," he said, in a low distinct tone, "is a chamber in which some company — I and a friend for instance, might sit and sup together, without guessing — do you mark me — that a *second* door communicated with it; such a door must, therefore, lie like that of a closet in the panelling — dead flat in the wainscoat — you understand me — or if you have it behind the hangings. But dang it! your tapestries are all in tatters and stripes, like rotten palls in a church vault," he added, glancing round him in disgust: "you have not a single corner such as I want; why, I thought all sorts of rat-traps and hiding holes must be plenty in such a tumble-down old barrack of a place."

"The countess's bower is the very thing for him," said the man, decisively. "There's a room they call the countess's bower," he continued— "that is the very thing you want."

And thus speaking, he led the way into a square panelled chamber, which opened upon the passage; and crossing the floor, he applied himself to examine the wainscoat in the recess beside the hearth, whose deathlike damps had not been dispelled for many a long year by the blaze of a fire. After a little delay, he succeeded in forcing in a small door, cut without casing, or any other indication of its presence, except its keyhole in the wood; and this opened, gave admission to a very small chamber, with a tiled floor, and bare brick walls. At one end stood a little stone altar, with a stone crucifix upon it. Here, in this little oratory, doubtless, had the pious and highborn dame, to whom tradition assigned the occupation of the adjoining chamber, been wont, in times long past, to breathe her confessions and her prayers; and it may be too, to perform her vigils, her fasts, and her penitential meditations. How different the uses to which old father Time, in his cynical wantonness, was now about to consign this once holy haunt of the pure and the beautiful.

"'Gadso, this is the very thing, as I'm a gentleman," quoth the corporal, exultingly; "and that little hole, yonder, does it lead anywhere?"

And as he said this, he walked toward the aperture of which he spoke — a dark and narrow opening; and on looking down, he beheld a flight of steps.

"It leads to the lumber-closet, down stairs," replied the host.

"Good, sir, all right — quite right," said Deveril; "so much the better; this is precisely what I wanted. Well, then, come back again, and close the door.

So, now then, listen to me; I and a friend will sup this evening in this square chamber here — the countess's bower, as you call it; have a good fire, for it's cursedly chill; and get a little furniture into it, that it mayn't look so deserted and queer. When I call for supper, lay it *here,* by the fire, and close by that door into the closet; do you understand?"

His entertainer bowed.

"Now," continued Deveril, "mind the rest, and make no blunders, but attend to me. This night, as soon as it is dark, two gentlemen, with cloaks on, will come into your shop — one of them shorter than the other — and inquire whether a private room has been engaged for them. Ask no questions; but as soon as the tall one hands you a shilling, bring them quietly up into the closet here, by the backstair — stay! can one see through that keyhole? Ay,'ay, all right; and now, do you understand me thoroughly?"

"Never fear, sir — never fear," said the man.

"Take this for earnest," said Deveril, placing the gold piece in the fellow's hand; "and if you behave properly, and do your business well, you shall have no need to grumble at your payment."

The man bowed, stole a sly glance of examination at the coin; but it was all right, and he pocketed it with another and a lower acknowledgment.

"There is one thing more that must be attended to," resumed Deveril, after taking a brisk turn or two up and down the chamber; "you know Sergeant Burke, of my regiment — the gentleman that drank here for a night and a day, at my expense?"

"I remember him well, sir," replied the proprietor of the King's Head.

"He will be here about the same time, with a few military friends," pursued Deveril; "let them have — mark me! — the chamber *under* this; am I understood?"

"It shall be done, corporal," replied he.

"And, do you mind me," continued the soldier; "as soon as they come — but not till then — do you run up here, and put a new flask of brandy on the table, and say, 'there's more below, whenever it's wanted.'"

"I'll do it, sir — I understand; I'll not forget it, sir," rejoined he. Deveril cast an anxious look round the room, bit his nails, and seemed to grow uneasy and gloomy. After a pause, he said —

"You had better not have any other company near us; none within hearing, but those I've mentioned."

The man bowed, and promised implicit attention to the direction; and so both descended the staircase side by side.

"Look ye," said Deveril, stopping abruptly upon the landing, and speaking in a low tone, and with a sternness of voice and countenance which he had not exhibited heretofore; "this is no light matter, sir — men's *fives* hang upon it. Beware how you whisper one word of what has passed between us; and doubly beware how you fail in executing any one of the directions I've given you: you'd better have lost a hand or an eye, than fail in one tittle."

As he spoke the concluding words, he griped the fellow's arm with a pressure so violent, that it almost forced the tears into his ill-favoured eyes; and then thrusting him from him, the musketeer silently walked down the stairs, and forth into the public street.

"That's a queer fellow," muttered the host, as he followed Deveril's movements, with a sinister glance of mingled wonder and dislike— "a queer fellow, and knows the world, whatever his business be. Well, who cares, he pays well, and that's the main point to look to."

CHAPTER XXV.

BURNT BRANDY FOR TWO.

WHILE this was passing, Sir Hugh, in his lodging, sate in anxious and gloomy conference, with a shrewd and seasoned veteran of the law, Caleb Crooke, and his sour and gloomy companion, Jeremiah Tisdal. A danger at a distance, proverbially a very different matter from a danger at hand, is often, and happily for ourselves, unduly despised; but as the interval in which the thousand and one fortunate accidents, on which we have unconsciously reckoned, may possibly arise, wears fruitlessly away — the dreaded event presents itself at last, in the stern, hard lineaments of actual reality, and often with an aspect as appalling as though it had arrived wholly unlooked for, and with all the heightened terrors of surprise. It was thus that Sir Hugh, now that he beganto investigate thedetails of his own case, and to examine the chances of ruin or escape, with the severity which the near approach of the decisive issue demanded, felt his stout heart shaken, and his once cheerful mind filled with the worst forebodings. His own misgivings were, perhaps, the gloomier, that it was obvious to his now nervously-sensitive observation, that the honest and intelligent professional adviser, who sate in consultation with him, spite of every effort to appear cheerful and assured, was in reality full of doubts, if not despondency. Sir Hugh sate watching, with absorbed and breathless interest, the varied expression of the crabbed attorney's sharp and intelligent face, as though his fortune and his life depended upon its slightest change; while Jeremiah Tisdal recounted coolly and clearly the evidence he was prepared to give.

"Shall I be allowed the aid of counsel?" inquired Sir Hugh.

"Certainly, to sit by and advise you," replied the man of writs and notices; "but his voice must not be heard in court. It is a hard rule: but you cannot be heard by counsel against an indictment for high treason."

"What think you of the jury?" urged the knight.

"In the heats and perils of these times, men's minds and hearts are alike unsettled and distempered," replied the attorney, "and I rely not on the impartiality of any jury. My sole trust is in the judges, and in the obvious weakness of the prosecution. At the same time I do confess, I would give a great deal that, at any sacrifice of money or property, you could make interest with some great man for a *nolle prosequi* — but come what may, our trust is in God and a good cause.”

The attorney was collecting and arranging the notes which he had taken.

“Mr. Tisdal,” he said, as he proceeded, “unless I mistake, your evidence will go far to extricate our honoured friend from his present difficulties.”

He paused abruptly, for a servant entered at that moment, and brought a small crumpled slip of paper, which he placed in Jeremiah Tisdal’s hand.

It was now almost dark, and the Puritan approached the solitary candle which burned in the chamber, and by its light read the following words: —

“LITTLE DICK SLASH to his old friend the Captain, greeting.

“I desire to speak with you — so leave your company, and come down to me. If you keep me waiting, I shall go up to you. Choose between these courses; for see you, and speak with you, I will.

“Yours as you shall treat me, “DEVERIL.”

Tisdal read this document over and over again, with such obvious and uncontrollable evidences of agitation, that even Sir Hugh observed the darkened expression which crossed his countenance, as he studied it.

“No ill news, Tisdal, I trust?” inquired the old knight.

“No — nothing — no, Sir Hugh,” stammered he, as he crumpled the paper in his fingers, and thrust it deep into his pocket. He walked first a step or two towards the door, then paused irresolutely, and strode to the window, whence he looked sternly and eagerly downward, and along the street, in both directions; then returning, he said abruptly —

“I’m called away, Sir Hugh; I am no needed here further at present. I shall return speedily.”

His excited and flurried manner was so remarkable as he uttered these words, and moved from the chamber, that Sir Hugh and his attorney looked on one another in silent wonder for some seconds after the door had closed.

“A strange fellow that,” said the latter. “He looked as though he were on his way to the gallows.”

“He is a strange, gloomy, and excitable man,” said the knight; but brave and trustworthy. I’ve known him long, and seen him often tried.”

As they thus conferred, the subject of their discourse descended the staircase, and needed no guide to indicate the place where his visitor was to be found, inasmuch as he heard the well-known voice of Deveril, in jocular converse with the servant, at the street door.

"Ha, Mr. Tisdal," he exclaimed, assuming, much to the Puritan's relief, a tone of respect, "I am glad to see you, sir."

Jeremiah nodded, and silently walked forth and pursued his way for some time in profound and obstinate taciturnity. At last he turned suddenly upon Deveril, who was smoking lazily at his side, and abruptly asked —

"Well, what is it you want?"

Deveril removed his pipe, and spat upon the ground; and, shrugging his shoulders as he looked, with a half laugh, upon the Puritan, he said —

"Why, what an ill-conditioned churl he has turned out. This comes of your Munster farming, your turf and buttermilk! Why, man, you're scarce fit for civil company. What do I want! Nothing — nothing from you — nothing in the world but your company. You treated me in the country, and I'll treat you in town."

"I don't want your company — I don't want your supper," said Tisdal, gruffly.

"Come, come — you're too savage; rot me but it won't do," rejoined Deveril. "It's better to be friends than foes, especially where it costs you nothing. Come — I believe I'm the best off of the two, at present; and since I joined the army, and entered his Majesty's service, I've set up as a sort of a sly saint, in the same line as yourself, barring that I go to mass, and you to another sort of mummery; so take courage, and remember I have a character now to look after, as well as you. Come, come — we must keep terms; it's better to have a cup of sack than to draw daggers on one another, without a cause. Come along man; be advised."

Induced by such speeches, and, more than all, by the obvious prudence of avoiding an unnecessary rupture with this man, so long as he was disposed upon reasonable terms to observe a truce, Tisdal moodily suffered his communicative companion to lead him into the "King's Head," the inauspicious tavern, among whose dusky chambers we have already followed Deveril.

Behold them, therefore, seated by a blazing fire, in the old panelled chamber which tradition called the countess's bower. A piece of rush matting covered a patch of the floor, beside the hearth, and upon it stood the table with their snug refection disposed in inviting confusion over its white cloth. The candles upon the table, indeed, but feebly lighted up the wide expanse of the deserted chamber; but the flickering blaze of the hearth had dispelled the damps, and sent its ruddy pulsations of fitful light into the most distant corners and recesses of the apartment.

"Sit down in your chair, old bully; choose a pipe, and help yourself out of this," cried Deveril, doing the honours, and chucking his tobacco-box across the table to his comrade; while he threw himself into a seat, and glanced at the bright fire with a cozy shrug: "a snug fire," he continued, significantly, "a snug fire, captain, though not quite so warm as Drumgunniol, eh?"

"The place is burned," said Tisdal, doggedly; not choosing to understand his comrade's sneer.

"Burned! well, that's no great news to me," rejoined Deveril, crossing his legs, and planting one elbow carelessly upon the table, while he proceeded to chop and shred his tobacco; upon which he smiled the while, as sarcastically as if his conversation was addressed exclusively to it; "no great news, seeing I beheld the bonfire with these eyes, and should, had you but seen out your pleasant frolic, myself have lent a few pounds of grease to the blaze; come, old Snap, be frank and friendly, and say, in confidence, did not you mean that I should broil in your old tinder-box of a house."

"How could I help you, blockhead; I had well nigh perished myself," said Tisdal, roughly.

"Aye, indeed? that would have been a blow to the religious world," said Deveril, with a look of concern.

"But how do you satisfy me for my money, comrade; the gold and silver you stole from beneath the crab-tree in the paddock; account with me for that," growled Tisdal.

"Dreams and fancies, friend; the fire has fried your brains, old boy — and these are the fumes and vapours — gold and silver, crab-trees and paddocks;" cried Deveril, throwing himself back, and shaking his head, slowly; "take care, saint Jeremiah — thy pious rigours, thv austerities and mortifications are fast unsettling thy wits; 'tis all pure fancy, or, if it be anything more, I at least comprehend it not; and what's more," he continued, altering his manner to one of very distinct and decisive significance; "I never shall comprehend it either, to the end of the chapter; so let us turn to something more intelligible," "And how," continued Tisdal, "how do you defend your cruelty to poor Bligh, my trusty servant, whom you shut into the house, and committed to the flames."

"Nay," cried Deveril, with real sincerity; I know nothing of that; he must have fled into it from the Irish. I was far away ere then; but was he burned, really and actually burned alive?"

"Burnt to a cinder, poor dog," said Tisdal.

"Well he was the stupidest booby, that Bligh — just the sort of fellow to run into a house on fire, and burn himself to tinder," said Deveril; and as he reflected on the adventure, it gradually struck him in so ludicrous a light, that he first chuckled, and then laughed outright, until the tears overflowed his eyes.

"And so," resumed Deveril, as soon as this hilarious explosion had quite expended itself; "the old farmhouse and the saintly youth, are actually burned to smoke and ashes — dust and charcoal; it was a comfortable old place — devilish comfortable; and you got it, you know, a dead bargain."

Deveril said this in a careless sort of way, and without even glancing at his companion, who rose as if stung with a sudden pain — sate down again, and scowled once or twice quickly upon him, as if upon the point of speaking, but he held his peace.

"Come," said Deveril, "I'm your entertainer tonight; and gibbet me but I'll treat you like a gentleman; rot it, I'll have no moping. Odd's life, man, we know one another; where's the good of striving to humbug? it's no bite — file against file — so as well to let it alone. There's the backgammon-board — there's the burned brandy, and all the rest — and here am I, your old bully comrade, ready to play you a hit, or tip you a stave; or, — come — to begin — ladle a glassful], and listen to me, while I tell you the ups and the downs of little Dick Slash, since we parted company in merry Lincolnshire."

Tisdal complied in silence, and thus together sate these two ancient companions in iniquity, changed in aspect, and one, at least, not less so in mind, since their old days of sin and riot, and now after their long separation, once more so strangely brought together by the whims of fortune — there they sate, quaffing "pottle-deep potations," from the bowl of burnt brandy — Tisdal's favourite beverage, of old — and talking over, with growing interest and recklessness, their old remembrances. Under the influence of the potent bowl, all the superinduced formalities of Tisdal's puritanism gradually melted away and vanished, piece by piece, revealing the natural character of the man, until, in all the indestructible vividness and strength of its old passion and daring, the dark and fiery spirit stood confessed.

The backgammon board at which they had been playing — for Tisdal had, as we have said, for the nonce forgotten his puritanism — was now shoved aside, and deeper and fiercer grew these ominous revelries. Strange and wild was Deveril's excitement, as, with flashing eye and a face flushed, but not with the glow of intoxication, he ran through his adventures, comic, tragic, and perilous, with a rapidity and a rude fascination of descriptive force which absorbed his old comrade in its interest, and fired him, in turn, with a corresponding excitement and reckless unreserve (fatal excitement — fatal unreserve); and thus hour after hour flew by, and found them still in deep carousal.

These mad orgies were at their highest and loudest when the innkeeper entered with a flask of brandy in his hand.

"A new flask of brandy, corporal," answered the man, fixing his eye on the soldier, as he placed the bottle on the table, and then added slowly— "and there's more below, whenever you please to want it."

He paused for a minute, looking with steady significance in Deveril's face, and then turning, left the room, without saying another word.

Deveril's hilarity subsided — the blood left his face; a dark and sinister expression gradually gathered upon its unsightly features, deeper and blacker every moment; he drew two or three long breaths, with something between a shiver and a sigh, and rose abruptly from his seat.

"What's the matter? — what's gone wrong with you now, you gallows dog?" inquired Tisdal, in a tone whose surprise, if not suspicion, was ill-qualified by a semblance of rough jollity.

"Nothing at all — a sort of a chill; the room is cold, isn't it?" replied Deveril, with an unsuccessful effort to appear at his ease. "Take some liquor, and never mind me."

Tisdal looked at him doubtfully and steadily for some time; and Deveril's uneasiness seemed rather to increase than diminish as he stooped down, and taking the poker in his hand, began to batter it heavily upon the hearth.

“What the devil ails you?” said Tisdal, more uneasily, while a vague suspicion of some unknown mischief connected with the incomprehensible movements and conduct of his comrade, began to fill his mind; and after a pause, he added sternly and uneasily —

“I’ll not stay here to see you play the fool; so good night.”

“What are you afraid of — eh?” said Deveril, with a ghastly laugh; and striking again and still harder upon the hearth with the massive poker, “Curse your nonsense; what are you dreaming about? —— what are you afraid of?”

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TUSSLE AND THE EVES DROPPERS.

CONFIRMED in his suspicions, undefined as they were, Tisdal rose hastily from his seat.

"Don't go — you must not go; you shan't go," cried Deveril, planting himself between Tisdal and the door, and affecting to laugh, while the hilarious cachinnation was horribly belied by the expression of his face. "Why, we've not well begun yet, rot it; you shan't turn tail at this time of night; you're *my* guest, you know — and I'm master here."

As he spoke, he continued to affect a playful jocularity, which, however, did not prevent his companion's observing the deadly expression which lurked beneath it, and remarking also that he clutched the poker with the genuine earnestness of a man prepared to employ it as a weapon of offence.

"Let me pass," cried Tisdal, with the ferocity of thoroughly aroused suspicion.

"Nonsense, nonsense," continued Deveril, in a tone half jocular, half soothing, but which filled the mind of Tisdal with the deadliest fears.

"Let me pass, or by —— ," cried the puritan, with something bordering upon desperation, for he was unarmed.

Hola! Burke — are you asleep? — here — murder — here," shouted Deveril, at the top of his voice, and no longer attempting to disguise the nature of his intentions.

Pressing his hat firmly down upon his brows, Tisdal grasped the ponderous brass candlestick, and hurled it at the head of his treacherous entertainer. Deveril, by quickly stooping, escaped the missile, which smote the old wainscoting at the further end of the room, with a crash which might have frightened the rats for ever and a day from the countess's bower; and in the next moment the two companions were locked together in desperate and deadly conflict. Tugging and striving, they wheeled and shuffled along the floor; down went the table — cups, glasses, bowl, flaggons, and all, rattling and rumbling over the dusty old boards; and down rolled the combatants over the prostrate table, over and over; and as Tisdal tugged and tumbled in this deadly grapple, in the flickering firelight, he saw two strange figures, spectre-like, peering at him from the hearth.

“Deveril, Deveril,” he muttered, half breathless, “you won’t murder me — don’t take my life.”

“Burke, Burke,” still shouted the redoubted Dick Slash, “come — will you come, d — you, or I must brain him. Burke — hola, Burke, he’s choking me!”

Tisdal heard no more; for, whether accidentally or otherwise, the heavy poker which they struggled for, descended stunningly upon his head, and in an instant all was dark, dreamless lethargy.

Disengaging himself as the soldiers entered, Deveril arose, torn and agitated, and smeared with the blood which flowed plenteously from Tisdal’s wound.

“Get candles, will you — some of you,” cried Garvey, his shrill voice strained to an absolute screech, in his intense agitation; for if he was alarmed at the violent struggle which he had but just witnessed, he was now doubly terrified at its result, fearing, and as it seemed, not without cause, that the unfortunate puritan was actually murdered. “Lights, will you? — lights! candles here!”

“Hold your fool’s tongue,” said Miles Garrett, gruffly, for he it was who had accompanied Garvey, and with him entered the room from the little closet which we have already described. “Hold your tongue, wiil you, or you’ll have the whole street up here and grasping Tisdal by the collar, he dragged him up into a sitting posture. “He’s not dead, and very little damaged either.”

“He has mauled me to some purpose,” said Deveril, now speaking for the first time since the conflict, and adjusting his torn shirt mechanically with one hand, the other still holding the ponderous poker, while he gazed in the heavy face of his betrayed comrade.

“Every man for himself, and God for us all. Egad, you did not give yourselves much trouble to get my weazand out of his gripe; and I have luck to thank, and not you, gentlemen, that I have a puff of breath in my body.”

Candles were now brought in, and Tisdal was placed in an arm chair, and some water dashed in his face. An odd tableau enough the room presented: a great, old, damp-stained, dreary chamber, with a little group standing around one sitting form; Garvey, with a glass of water in his hand, frightened and fidgetty, pale as clay; in sinister suspense, splashing the cold showers in the face of their torpid victim, whose grizzled locks and livid features were drenched in blood and water.

Garrett, silent, stern, and gloomy, with his strong hand still upon the old man's collar; and Deveril coolly readjusting his disarranged attire, and stealing, from time to time, a curious look, half shrinking, half ferocious, at the puritan; and lastly, near the door, imperfectly lighted, with grounded muskets, stood the broad-hatted soldiers, silent and listless, while their corporal, in grim luxury, chewed a quid of tobacco. At last, Tisdal opened his eyes, stared wildly round, and attempted to rise, but fell again giddily into his chair, muttering incoherently all the while.

"Thank God — thank God," whispered Garvey, and the pious ebullition of gratitude we are bound to admit, was spoken in the genuine sincerity of selfishness; "by the law, sir, there's nothing the matter with him — no murder, after all."

"It's dark, sir — dark, sir — to be sure it is; dark — dark — curse the road, and the trees; dark — dark as pitch," muttered Tisdal, staring wildly before him.

"We'll get some more water," suggested Garvey, relapsing into alarm.

"Ay, ay — in the water, was it? A year ago, found there — so it was — dangerous bit, sir," continued Tisdal, and then, on a sudden perceiving Deveril, he said in a tone of alacrity— "ha, Dick — Dick — Dick — little Dick for ever; Dick, Dick at it again."

"The men may stand on the lobby, I suppose, sir," said Deveril, hastening to drown the voice of the bewildered puritan, and addressing Miles Garrett, at whose disposal the soldiers were placed.

"Ay, take them to the lobby," said he; and as the order was obeyed, Tisdal continued —

"Dick — Dick — he didn't hurt you, eh; no, no, no — it's nothing, is it?" and as he spoke, he raised his hand to his head. The sober black of his sleeve seemed to fix his gaze, and with a puzzled look of dismay and horror, he said —

"Dick, Dick, they've found you out; I often told you, my God, a thousand times, I told you, you'd come to the gallows; is it — tell me, *are* we blown?" he cried, with a bewildered look, gazing from face to face; "Dick

— Dick, stand by me, and we'll have one blaze for it; blood and lightning! man, don't knock under."

He made a frantic effort to rise, but was easily overpowered, and kept in his chair, where he continued to sit in dogged silence, while, minute after minute, one by one, his scattered recollections returned, and slowly resumed their successive connexion, until at last the scene, in which he had just borne so principal a part, and all the occurrences of the evening, in their true bearings, stood fully reinstated and restored before his mind's eye. At length, after a silence of many minutes, he said, in a tone of stern reproach —

"Deveril, you have done for me! You're a blacker scoundrel than I took you for. You once had a notion of honour about you: you're nothing now but a stag — you're not game, what you once were you're not game."

"Game as *you* are" — retorted Deveril, with an ineffectual effort to appear perfectly at his ease, for spite of his effrontery, there was something so indefensibly *unprofessional* in his conduct to his old associate, that he felt an emotion almost akin to genuine shame, as he attempted to return his steady gaze of gloomy reproach.

"I might have served you out. I might have blown your fox's head off your shoulders — I might have taken your life as easily as drawn a trigger, when you came to Drumgunniol a few weeks ago, but like a chicken-hearted fool, I spared you," continued Tisdal, bitterly.

"Thank you for nothing," replied Deveril, scornfully. "You thought the wild Irish might do it as well. My fox's head, as you call it, saved me there, and no love of yours, comrade."

"Gentlemen," said Tisdal, suddenly rising, after a considerable pause, "you have no right to keep me here. I'm no prisoner — I shall leave you now — I'm a free man."

At a word from Garrett the door opened, and the guard showed themselves. Tisdal threw one look of rage and despair at Deveril, and then cast himself again into the chair.

"Well," said he, at length, in a tone of sullen, bitter despondency, "what do you want of me? Speak out, and have done with it, can't you?"

"You see, Mr. Tisdal, you had better behave peaceably," said Garrett. "There is nothing to be gained by violence. We are protected, and you in every way in our power — you have been overheard — your admissions and confessions; and so, methinks, a submissive behaviour will best become you, as the reverse will inevitably make your position only the more perilous. You see those soldiers — *we,* too, are armed: and I tell you fairly, that, except with my permission, you shall not leave this room alive. So, Mr. Tisdal, let me recommend you calmly to submit to what cannot be avoided."

"I'm betrayed and lost," muttered Tisdal.

"No, no — not lost," interrupted Garvey, with one of his sweetest smiles of villainy— "that is, unless you choose it. No, no — not lost at all."

"Mr. Garvey says truly," resumed Miles Garrett. "You shall have the choosing of your own fate. We shall confer with you for a time, and submit your fortunes to your own decision."

Garvey, meanwhile, was arranging some paper, which, along with a small ink-horn and pens, he took from his coatpocket, and, mounting a pair of spring spectacles upon his nose, he completed his elaborate preparations for writing.

The soldiers withdrew — the doors were closed — and Tisdal was left alone with his three oddly-matched companions.

Half an hour passed, and an hour; and the sentinels who kept watch on the lobby were yet undischarged. They had heard nothing but the broken hum of voices from within, sometimes raised in vehement expostulations, sometimes in ferocious threats and imprecations, and once or twice was heard a voice as of one whose heart was wrung with agony unspeakable — a bitter, hoarse moan of anguish and horror unendurable. Then, again, these abrupt discordant outbreaks would subside into the same level hum, and at times even into utter silence. Thus time wore away, until at last the guard of musketeers on the lobby saw the chamber-door open, and Deveril come forth.

"Well," said he, with a yawn, "it's settled after all, and without troubling you, gentlemen. He turns out to be a safer man than we took him for, and no crop-eared Covenant rascal after all, though he has a deuced Whiggish sort of a slang and toggery about him; but he's a true man, corporal — a true man."

The corporal, who was somewhat tired of his occupation, spit through his teeth upon the floor, and, giving his quid a new turn, remarked morosely that— “He did not care the butt-end of a burned match if the devil had him.”

In the countess’s chamber, meanwhile, Garrett was standing by the table reading, with an air of evident satisfaction, the last sheet of several, on which the ink was scarcely yet dry. They were the sworn depositions of Jeremiah Tisdal. The Puritan himself sate just as we left him, except that his elbows were leaning on the table, and his face buried in his coarse sinewy hands; so that only his burning forehead and its swollen veins are visible.

“So far so well,” said Garrett, as he slowly folded the document, and carefully placed it in his deep pocket; “we have done with you for the present.”

Tisdal lifted his arm with an expression of rage and menace, but shame or compunction overcame him, and he once more buried his face in his hands, and remained silent.

“Pooh! pooh! Mr. Tisdal — what can ail you?” said Garvey, in his most soothing accents. “There — there — why, you have done no wrong, and need not be ashamed of any one.”

With this remark, Garvey bundled up all his appliances, and hurried after Miles Garrett, who had already left the room.

“Garvey, you must see the landlord,” whispered Garrett in his ear, and, clutching him impressively by the arm, as he spoke; “you must see him, and arrange that other business; and, remember, *I* have no part in it; it is your own affair, mind you, and no business of mine.”

“I understand, sir, of course. Mr. Garrett, it was my own suggestion,” answered the familiar in a whisper as earnest. “You can pass out, and I will confer with him; but, somehow, I wish a few of these would stay in the way.” He paused, glancing uneasily at the soldiers, who were moving before them down the broad, dim, old staircase: “For, to be plain with you, I should not just choose to meet that old Puritan rascal in his present mood *alone,* and in such a cut-throat hole of a place as this.”

“You’re as arrant a coward as ever,” said Garrett, contemptuously. “Do as you list, but see to it without delay.”

Thus speaking, Garrett drew his cloak about him, and strode forth into the street, leaving his dependant to manage his *tete-a-tete* with the innkeeper as best he might.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DEEDS OF DARKNESS.

GARVEY looked wistfully at the departing soldiers, and then casting a hurried glance up the stairs, and seeing nothing in that direction to warrant a precipitate retreat, he timidly glided into the dram-shop at the side, enjoining silence by a significant gesture to Peter Coyle, the proprietor, as he glanced at his grim helpmate, who, with a flushed face, lying back in a high chair, was snoring in a tipsy doze. Stealthily passing her by, he entered a little closet, attended by his ill-looking host; and then, having cleared his voice once or twice, though he did not meditate raising it above a whisper, thus began: —

"Mr. Coyle," said he, "you know I'm a professional man — and it might often lie in my way to give you a lift. Your place has its advantages and disadvantages — but it happens to suit me; and to show you that I'm serious, I mean to try you with a job of some importance, and that immediately."

"By cock and pie, sir, you'll find me up to anything; for fair pay and short accounts is all I ask," replied the bloated innkeeper, with a sinister look, as if he expected some villainous proposal.

"I know it well, Mr. Coyle," replied Garvey, "and fair pay and cash on the nail shall he your meed. Now, observe me: the relative of a certain old lady, about Whom you shall know nothing but exactly what I tell you, desires to place her for a little time in your charge. This is a rambling old house, and you must have abundance of out-o'-the-way apartments up stairs; let her have one of the most private, and as near the tiles as may be: for it's just possible that she may endeavour to do something queer; in short, to give you the slip, and cut and run: so the cock-loft is the place, under lock and key, do you mind. Look sharp is the word; for if she gets away, I promise you you'll get into trouble. Don't tell that drunken old devil, there," he continued, confidentially, with a slight nod toward his interesting helpmate, who was snoring, as we have said, in the bar-room; "if she knows it, every body knows it; the secret must be your own, and no one else's — and your visitor must be as safe and as close as if she were in the Berminghara tower. You shall be well rewarded if you do your business; and, on the other hand, should you fail, I tell you fairly and once more, you were never in such peril before in all your days. So, bethink you before you undertake this job — count the gains, and count the cost, and then for your answer."

"If that's all, I'm agreed," rejoined the fellow, promptly; "that is, if so be, the terms are suitable."

"Good; then you shall hear from me again; and, meanwhile, hold yourself prepared — and take this for earnest."

Thus saying, Garvey placed some gold in the fellow's hand, and stealing out lightly, for fear of awaking the slumbering landlady, he gladly found himself once more in the protection of the public street.

Meanwhile, in the countess's bower, Jeremiah Tisdal was left wholly alone. There was that in the subject of his recent conversation, and above all in its result, so horrific, that spite of all his stoicism, he trembled in every joint, while he remembered it. With the scowl of fear-stricken villainy, he sate looking down movelessly upon the floor: when he did move, at last, his first impulse, strangely, was to stride to the outer door, close it, and draw the bolt. He next shut that which communicated with the closet, of which we have so often spoken, and secured it with one of the massive chairs, sloped prop-wise against it, making these arrangements with a breathless flurry and a jealousy, which would have argued the immediate apprehension of assault or arrest.

No longer restraining his agony, he smote his clenched hand upon his breast and his head, and groaned as if his very heart were bursting, while he walked distractedly from wall to wall of the ruinous old chamber. Jeremiah Tisdal was not a hypocrite: we have failed to represent him justly, if the reader has so esteemed him. He was one who would have given any thing he possessed on earth, save his life, to be assured that heaven was reconciled with him — anything but his *life,* for he had learned to fear to die. Through years of profligacy and crime, the principles instilled in his childhood had followed him, ever returning to his memory, and whispering terrors unspeakable to his conscience.

Remorse had for years been the passion of his life the old nature of the man was indeed still there, but all subdued by the ghastly presence of a secret terror — moroseness and avarice, perhaps, because so entirely unlike the sins of his guilty youth, he had suffered unconsciously to creep into his heart; but living in constant remembrance of his evil deeds, and in ceaseless terror of the judgment to come, he did, with all the zeal of abject fear, seek in his own dark and fanatical way to propitiate heaven, and to earn safety from the doom, whose dread never ceased to haunt him night and day; the fear of death, except when overwhelmed in the instinctive excitement of actual conflict, had become with him a positive disease. He dared not die — and hence the dreadful power of the threat which that night had tom him from his hopes — the hopes to which he clung frantically, as the murderer of old might to the horns of the altar, and dragged him from the very sanctuary back again into all the terrors of retributive destruction: it was *sin* inexorably demanding back his bondman.

The remorseless claim he felt as though it had been thundered in his ears. To defer the evil day, he paid the price of his respite — betrayed his benefactor — bore false witness against the life of his friend. Oh, madness! that the work of years should be in one brief hour undone, and he once more the murderous slave of Satan. In his frenzy, he cast himself on his knees — threw himself wallowing on the floor, and called in his agony upon the Almighty, for pardon, at one time, and at another for destruction, in frantic incoherence.

At last, by a violent effort, he resolved to review, as closely as his memory would serve him, the whole substance and material of the statement to which he had that night subscribed his oath, with a desire of ascertaining the amount of mischief to Sir Hugh, involved in the perjury into which he had been coerced. This review, however, more than ever persuaded him that he had nothing to hope for — that he had ruined his friend.

Cold as stone, and shivering violently, as a man in an ague fit, Tis dal stood for nigh half an hour, by the fireplace — his damp hand clutched upon the mantelpiece. The agony of his mind was now increased by nearer terrors — the fear that he was ill, and, perhaps, about to die. Upon the projecting ledge of the mantelpiece, there stood a flask of brandy, scarcely half emptied, the only surviving relic of-his ill-omened carousal. He swallowed nearly the whole of it at a draught, and threw himself into a chair by the fire. The overwhelming dram he had just taken speedily produced its effect; the floor rocked and heaved beneath him, like a labouring sea; the candles flickered and danced, and crossed and multiplied themselves; all was confusion and giddiness, until gradually darkness swallowed the chaos, and he lay snoring in heavy and helpless stupor.

Strange to say, it was not dreamless: he had slept, he knew not how long, when he was visited by a wild and awful vision. He dreamed that it was night — just such a night as that on which Deveril had so unexpectedly greeted him in the Grange of Drumgunniol. He was, he thought, returning to his house; and as he passed, he looked through the Window into the glowing kitchen. His little niece, Phebe, was standing by the fire, and before her a man — gracious God! — with his throat cut from ear to ear; the girl's murdered father, with rapid and awful gestures, telling his tale of mortal wrongs. In his fearful dream, Tisdal thought he strove to move from the window, but without the power to stir, until the dead man, seeming to have ended his horrible story, pointed slowly at him where he stood; and thereupon, in his dream, the girl turned round, and with a measured step, walked toward him, while her features, once so pretty and innocent, grew ghastly and demoniac, and she cried aloud, as she came on— "JUDGMENT!"

With a start he wakened. He must have slept long; for the fire was now expiring, and one of the candles had burned out, and the other was flaring in the socket, and so faintly that its unequal flashes scarce reached the distant walls of the old chamber. Every thing was still, except for the soft fall of rain upon the windows. Such were the circumstances under which, on raising his eyes, he saw, as clearly as the uncertain and fluctuating light would allow, a mysterious and ill-defined form arrayed in some thin, fantastic festoonery of rags, which waved and fluttered strangely, moving backward and forward, toward the expiring candle and from it, in a sort of crazed and hovering dance — sometimes scarcely distinguishable from a flickering shadow upon the wall, and sometimes again, for the least imaginable point of time, just catching the light, and — merciful Heaven! showing, as it seemed, the terrific features of the dead — the face which had haunted him in his dream — wearing, at once, a look of terror, and malignity, and vengeance, in hideous incongruity with its fantastic movements. This fearful apparition, sometimes a shadow, and sometimes, for a second, a thing so distinctly terrific — and then, again, but a flaunting, flickering mist, seemed to flutter and hover in a strange sympathy with the expiring and uncertain light; and not the least horrible part of the infernal dance was, that it was all absolutely soundless. A sudden breath moved the dying flame — it trembled, flashed up, and expired, leaving Tisdal in utter darkness. For hours he sate, afraid to move — unable to pray, almost to breathe. The cold sweat burst from every pore — thrill after thrill of horror froze him — rigid and cold as stone he sate, unable to count the terrible hours, which, in their hideous monotony, seemed drawn out into whole years of unearthly agony. Gradually, however, the grey light of morning streamed into the dreary chamber, and Tisdal skulked, terror-stricken, from his seat. With a deep conviction that the dreadful apparition which had visited him in the night-time foreboded his own coming ruin, he hurriedly snatched his hat, and, not waiting to draw his mantle about him, unbolted the chamber door, and quitted an apartment, every object in which had now grown insupportably horrible. Dizzy and feverish from the unwonted excesses and frightful agitation of the previous night, he walked forth without interruption into the grey light and still breath of morning.

Where is the stoic who can, unmoved, await the slow but steady approach of an inevitable danger — a danger stupendous, inexorable — which no exertion of his can frustrate, and no ingenuity escape? As the tired sailor, clinging to the torn shrouds of a wreck, watches the onward roll of the mountainous wave, that towers and blackens but the wilder, and vaster, the nearer it comes, so did old Sir Hugh, in the dreadful calmness of suspense, await the arrival of the day which was finally to determine his doom — to dispose of his fortune and his life. Days passed, and weeks; and at last the long-dreaded crisis was at hand. It was now the eve of that morn on which Sir Hugh Willoughby was to be arraigned for high treason.

The sun was just going down as Grace sate in mournful companionship with her father, in the dusky chamber of “the carbrie,” and in the fitful pauses of their melancholy conversation, full many a wandering thought carried her back again to the pleasant woods and winding river, and the grey towers of Glindarragh; and sometimes, with a transient interest, she wondered how her old companions, her fond nurse, and gentle little Phebe fared; and whether they knew of the fearful danger in which the knightly master of Glindarragh at that moment stood. But no tidings had reached them. In those suspicious and terrible times, when letters were liable to be intercepted, read, and severely construed by the government, it had been judged most prudent for Sir Hugh, in his perilous position, to attempt no correspondence with his absent friends. While thus her fond fancy carried her back in many a flitting thought, to her loved home, the same sunset was gilding its grey walls. Within the deep shadow of a low-arched casement, pushed open to receive the fragrant breath of evening, sits a pale invalid, a young man, negligently but elegantly dressed — it is Percy Neville; and see, outside, arrested in her return with her troop of merry milkmaids, close by the grey windowsill, stands the graceful, artless, beautiful girl we have seen before, Phebe Tisdal, half reluctant, half gratified, blushing in reproachful confusion, and smiling with all her soft innocent dimples; so true, and withal so touching a smile, that one knew not whether to smile again or to sigh as he looked on it. But here we must not linger; back again to "the Carbrie" our story calls us.

Till midnight the old knight sate with his daughter, who read to him from time to time such passages as he desired from the Bible; and in the intervals they communed with what cheerfulness they might assume. Willing, however, that his child, whose pale looks filled him with new anxieties, should have some repose, of which she seemed to stand sorely in need, he bade her goodnight, with a mournful serenity, and commending her to God's keeping, shut himself into his chamber.

Heart-sick, fearful, and well nigh despairing, poor Grace, seated by the window of her apartment, counted the weary hours. The hum of conviviality and the noises of riot had now sunk into profound silence, and every sound of human bustle, business, and pleasure, was hushed. It was a dark, moonless night of heavy plashing rain. There were no street-lamps in those days, and the dense obscurity of all without deepened, with a sort of depressing sympathy, the gloom which reigned within her mind. As she sate thus sorrowfully, she heard the rumble of carriage wheels, and the clang of horses' hoofs on the pavement, almost beneath the window where she sate. It stopped some little way up the street, at the same side; and almost at the same moment a lantern issued from one of the entrances, and moved irregularly, sometimes faster and sometimes slower, over the little interval which interposed between the line of the houses and the coach, in accordance with what might be the movements of some one engaged in engrossing conference with a companion. At last it stopped, and twice or thrice was darkened, as by the passing of persons between her and the light. Trifling as was all this, she became insensibly interested in what was passing — the more so, perhaps, on account of the utter loneliness of the hour, and the extreme darkness, as well as the tempestuous character of the night, which conspired to throw an air of mystery over these proceedings. It might be a hearse for a secret funeral, or a coach full of state conspirators; it might, in short, be anything dark, sinister, or guilty.

Oh! night, sweet, sad herald of repose, of dewy shadows and soft serenades, and mystic glorious dreams, how many minstrels have sung from earliest ages, when the world was young, thy wondrous gentleness and celestial beauties! — how many lovers have sighed, and wished thy shadows endless! and yet, oh, night! in all the chastened glories of thy starry court, for how many dost thou rise a queen of terrors!

She pushed the casement gently open; the buzz of men's voices in suppressed tones reached her ear through the night air, followed by the sound of the opening of the coach door; then came a stifled scream, as if through the folds of many mufflings; then it rose loud and piercing, and once more stifled as before. This was accompanied by the sound of feet, as of men staggering and stumbling over the pavement under a struggling load. The sounds seemed to follow the lantern into the entrance whence it had at first issued. The door was shut, and in the darkness the vehicle rumbled off as it had come, leaving all once mere in profound obscurity and silence.

Chilled with a feeling akin to horror, the young lady hastily closed the window, and drew further into the security of the chamber. Had she but known fully the story in which that scream was a single incident, wild work it would have wrought with her heart and brain that night. Even as it was, in the intervals of her own immediate anxieties and fears, as she lay awake through the tedious hours of darkness, the shriek which had startled her still rang in her ears, and made her heart beat fast.

It was, as we have said, a dark and stormy night, and heavy drifts of rain, from time to time, rode upon the blast; muddy streams scoured the gutters, and the wet lay so deep in every rut and hollow of the pavement, that the foot passenger, as he plodded through the dusky streets, gave up in sulky despair the idle attempt to pick his steps, and recklessly plunged on through the pools and mire.

Few pedestrians trod the streets; all who could avoid exposure to the ungenial weather, were snugly housed; every place of entertainment in the city was crowded, and the guests seemed resolved to make amends by the boisterous riot of their mirth for the restraints to which the storm and rain subjected them.

Upon this dismal night, lights gleamed from the castle windows; one of those brilliant drawingrooms which assembled all that was gay, and brave, and beautiful in the Jacobite cause, within the stately chambers of the royal residence, was then proceeding; and through the long rows of gleaming windows, in the intervals of the howling gusts, were faintly heard, the softened harmonies of merry music.

At the side of the quadrangle, most remote from those sights and crowds, wrapped closely in his mantle, and filled with ruminations by no means congenial with the spirit of revelry and mirth which reigned so near him, stood a tall, dark figure. He had twice walked to the dim lamp which overhung a doorway close by, to consult his watch, and twice returned with hasty strides to the shelter of the arched entrance, within whose shadow he had ensconced himself. At last, having satisfied himself that the appointed hour had arrived, this personage groped his way to the further end of the dark lobby, in which he stood, and knocked sharply at a door. It was opened by a servant who, on hearing Miles Garrett's name, ushered that gentleman — for he was the expectant in the cloak — up stairs, and into an apartment, where he left him in utter solitude. A fire was nearly expiring in the hearth, and four w'ax candles, in massive silver candlesticks, illuminated the chamber. It was furnished in the richest fashion, and hung with gorgeous tapestry. A portrait of the then Duchess of Tyrconnel — taken in all the splendour of her early beauty, before her first marriage — graced the wall, in a massive frame. A table, on which stood a large writing-desk, jealously locked, and a silver tray, with coffee cup and ewer, in the confusion in which a hurried enjoyment of that refection had left them, gave further token of the recent occupation of the chamber. A *couteau de chase,* moreover, dangled by its belt from the back of the tall chair that stood close by it.

Garrett removed his hat and cloak, and even went so far as to wipe his soiled boots in the skirt of the latter; he adjusted his wardrobe with the utmost care, and altogether exhibited a good deal of fidgetty uneasiness about the approaching interview, whatever its object might be. He listened for the sound of approaching steps — and hearing none, consulted his watch; and then again listened, with every manifestation of anxious and excited impatience, tempered, however, and in some sort subdued, by a certain awe and uneasiness, resulting from a consciousness alike of the uncertainty of his reception, and of the momentous importance of his success

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TYRCONNEL.

A CONSIDERABLE time elapsed, and found Garrett still alone, in the stately apartment in which our last chapter left him.

"It's two-and-forty minutes past the appointed hour," he muttered, as he glanced at his watch; "I fear he has forgotten it, or, perhaps, the insolence which they say has grown upon him, prompts him to treat poor gentlemen, as I am, like link-boys, or lackeys — as fit only to wait his pleasure, and dance attendance upon his caprice. S'life but it's growing bitter cold," he added with a shudder, and, acquiring courage with the irritation of disappointment and discomfort, he ventured to rake the embers of the fire together, and to throw on a fragment or two of wood; how far this new accession of hardihood might have carried him, it were not easy to say; his next proceeding would have probably essayed the daring sacrilege, of seating himself at his ease, in one of the rich, luxurious chairs, which seemed made to receive a ducal, or a royal pressure only; he was, however, effectually startled, and recalled alike from this meditated enormity, and from his mutinous temper, by the opening of a door in the further end of the chamber, and the entrance of the Duke of Tyrconnel.

Few forms could be more imposing; his stature was commanding, exceeding six feet in height, and, at the time of which we write, though not actually un wieldly through corpulence, as he afterwards became, he was full and large in a proportion which gave majestic effect to his towering figure; his complexion was a ruddy brown — his eyes of the darkest grey, and his features, though not prominent, eminently masculine and handsome, and over-clouded by a prodigious flowing periwig, of sombre brown. The expression of the countenance was grave, haughty, and even insolent — and there was a sternness in the compressed and down-drawn mouth, and a certain inflexibility and domineering pride in the whole character of the face, which, accompanied with the grand and massive proportions of his figure, and the gorgeous accessories of his splendid attire, rendered the *coup d'œil* absolutely overawing.

As Garrett, standing with his hat in his hand, watched the stately and measured approach of the new made duke, he marked with wonder the change which a very few years had wrought in his face and form, and thought he could read at a glance in the impressive countenance before him, alike the man of action, of passion, and of policy; he saw the arrogance, the ambition, the arch-dissimulation, and the cruelty of that intemperate and wily spirit, as he bowed and cringed before him, with all the servile idolatry due to so portentous an incarnation of successful scheming and daring.

The Duke of Tyrconnel advanced gravely, and slowly, some way into the room, before he addressed his visitor, who stood before him in an attitude of awkward subserviency, and with an expression, half uneasy, and half sycophantic, his whole bearing contrasting strikingly enough with the lofty carriage and perfect breeding of the haughty favourite.

"Mr. Garrett, of Lisnamoe?" said Tyrconnel, inquiringly.

"The same, my Lord Duke," replied Garrett, again bowing profoundly.

The duke seated himself, but, without inviting Garrett to do so; and affecting to be dazzled by the light which fell full upon his face, he carelessly drew the table on which the candles stood, backward, until his features were in shadow — and then crossing one leg over the other, he leaned back in his seat, and once more fixed his eyes upon his visitor.

"Mr. Garrett," he at last said, in a cold and haughty tone, "you have a request to make, if I've rightly understood your purpose, from my brother; you solicit a grant of land, is it not so?"

"The same estate, your grace," said Garrett, "about which I applied to you, my lord duke, when the court of claims was sitting."

"Willoughby's property — I know it," said Tyrconnel.

"A great estate — a considerable property — your grace," said Garrett.

"A very great estate, sir — I know it," repeated Tyrconnel, with deliberate emphasis, and a pause of some two or three minutes ensued, during which Garrett in vain strove to read the dark, bold, inscrutable countenance of the dangerous man before him.

"You have got some securities of mine in your hands," said Tyrconnel abruptly.

"Two bonds, your grace, for three thousand pounds, and a heavy accumulation of interest," said Garrett, while a faint hope of a settlement began to glimmer upon his fancy.

"Good — yes — so it was," said Tyrconnel, slowly, and another silence followed.

"Methinks those bonds were paid," he resumed, gravely fixing his eyes once more upon the applicant.

Garrett was astounded — a faint, incredulous smile, hovered in his look of amazement — he hardly knew in what spirit his patron spoke, and he hesitated in some confusion.

"I say sir," repeated Tyrconnel, with a stern voice, and a menacing look— "I think — I am sure, those bonds are paid; bethink you, sir — for I must know how this matter stands, before I enter upon that other business in which you are so nearly concerned; my belief, sir, is, that the bonds are paid."

Garrett looked in the leaker's face, for some peculiar significance to guide him in this strait, but he saw nothing there but the insolent sternness of one who suspects the honesty of the man he looks on, and cares not to disguise, or qualify that suspicion. Tyrconnel looked as if he actually believed what he said.

"Your grace must pardon me," said Garrett, with an air at once cringing and deprecatory, "if I cannot immediately — just at this moment, call to mind— "

"Speak out, man — and at once," said the duke, in a peremptory tone, "if you wont admit this settlement, why, then, in God's name, dispute it, and so we part as litigants — for I promise you I'll not pay money twice over; your memory may serve you better than mine does me, sir — you have a perfect right to trust it, but I'll not be bamboozled into paying my debts twice over, as I've said."

Thoroughly alarmed for the fate of his application, Garrett now lost not an instant in recalling his false step.

"I crave your pardon, my lord duke," he said, with eager submission; "your grace has misunderstood me — I have misconveyed myself."

"I thought your memory might have served you so far," said Tyrconnel, with the haughty displeasure of an injured man.

"My lord, I am far from disputing the settlement of which your grace has spoken," urged Garrett.

"So you do remember it?" persisted he.

“Yes, I remember it — quite recollect it all, most clearly, your Grace,” replied Garrett, who would have sworn he remembered the conquest or the flood at that moment, if only he could, by doing so, have restored the all-powerful favourite to good humour.

“Then bring the bonds and receipts for the consideration, sir, tomorrow morning, hither, and deal like an honest man.” said Tyrconnel, still with extreme sternness. “You have done strangely, methinks, in retaining them in your possession for so long; let this be mended, sir, and promptly — tomorrow morning, before ten o’clock; you hear me sir?”

Garrett protested that he would be punctual, and inwardly thought that the duke must possess either the most treacherous memory, or the most matchless impudence in all Ireland.

“You have made sacrifices for the king, Mr. Garrett,” resumed Tyrconne., with haughty condescension, after a brief pause; “you have zealously attached yourself to his cause; and have, moreover, relinquished your heresy, and become, I understand, a Catholic. I am acquainted with your claims — and you may reckon upon my interest with the king, in your behalf, should this Willoughby be convicted; his estate cannot better be bestowed — nay, sir, there is no need of formal speeches — I’m pressed for time; remember, ten o’clock tomorrow morning.”

With a low and grateful reverence, and a countenance glowing with the irrepressible exultation of gratified avarice, Garrett, who, through this somewhat singular interview, had continued standing, withdrew — but ere he disappeared, Tyrconnel, on a sudden recalled him.

“Another word, Mr, Garrett,” he said, in a low tone, glancing almost unconsciously in turn at the two doors of the chamber. Garrett returned, and stood once more, hat in hand, before this unprincipled great man. Tyrconnel looked at him thoughtfully, and, as it seemed, almost with embarrassment. He then averted his gaze to the hearth — then, again, glanced rapidly toward the doors of the apartment — and pushing the small table on which the candles stood, still further back, he said —

“It is some years since I last saw you, Mr. Garrett, in London; I need not remind you of the nature of the commission you then undertook; you have, I presume, sir, fulfilled it faithfully?”

“Faithfully, your grace, most faithfully,” replied Garrett, with more assurance; for he felt that upon this topic, at least, he had the duke at some advantage; "in strict accordance, in every tittle, with your grace's wishes."

"And — and — the person — the lady — Lady Willoughby, herself," said Tyrconnel, with an effort; "does she still live?"

"I'faith she does," rejoined Garrett — with an ungainly shrug, and a shake of the head; "and I was well nigh adding — if it be no harm — I *grieve* to say it."

"How does she?" pursued Tyrconnel, curtly — for he obviously resented the growing familiarity of Garrett's manner.

"Why, about as well, I suppose, as a cast-off ladylove generally does," rejoined Garrett, carelessly; "a good deal down in the mouth, lean, sallow, and hippish — always dying, but still alive."

Tyrconnel looked down, suddenly, upon the floor, and then as suddenly shot a black and frowning glance upon the speaker. He paused, however; and raising his jewelled hand for a few seconds to his forehead, recovered his calmness, to all appearance, except that his face was still a little flushed.

"And gossip, scandal — has it grown silent? he asked, in a low tone; and, fixing his eyes once more upon Garrett— "or is it, at all events, still at fault — still on the wrong scent?"

"That it is, by my troth," said Garrett, with a chuckle, which had in it a mixture of familiarity and glee, indescribably villainous and offensive; "half the world, the old gentleman included, make me a present of the sin, as your grace did of the mistress."

"Keep your own place, sir — be advised, keep your own place," interrupted Tyrconnel, in a tone so peremptory that Garrett almost started; and still more hotly and arrogantly, he continued— "you are disposed, methinks, to forget yourself, and your position, and whom you are speaking to. S'death, sir, you shall know where you stand, and how you stand. You presume, sir — presume, because I have employed you," he continued, with increasing intemperance — for when his passion once broke bounds, its course was headlong and torrentuous beyond all parallel — and the suspicion, however faint, that Garrett imagined that he stood within his power, incensed his pride almost to madness; "you presume, because I have used you — used you like the scoundrel pander you were willing to make yourself. By — , if I thought you dared presume upon your fancied usefulness, I'd teach you to know and remember me, while life is left you."

It was hard to determine whether, in this sudden explosion of invective, there was more of passion or of policy; his face, indeed, was charged with the blackest tempest of ire — but at the same time, the faintest imaginable approximation to a smile curled his lip, as his eye rested upon Garrett, with a glance, half intimidating, half observing. If the display were premeditated, however, it was well judged; for though Garrett manifested, at first, alike by his attitude and his countenance, the impulse of that physical courage in which he was by no means deficient — yet a moment sufficed to extinguish its angry fires, and to leave him cowed and submissive before the domineering duke; and with an air so meanly cringing and humble, that he seemed ready to fall down and worship before the great man's shoe-tie, in all the profoundest abasement, and idolatry of sycophantic awe.

He stammered — he pleaded — he retracted — he explained; in short, he apologised, and that so humbly, that Tyrconnel at length condescended to nod his satisfaction, and to tell him haughtily that he might withdraw, under the assurance of his renewed favour.

With many a profound and ceremonious bow, Garrett retired through the door by which he had entered.

Tyrconnel rose with a gloomy look, and leaning upon the mantelpiece, rested his forehead upon his hand for a time, in anxious abstraction.

"Illfated, unhappy — most unhappy woman!" he muttered slowly and sullenly. "The thought of her has troubled me — troubled me sorely — more than once; but what need to vex one's self about the past? Such follies — affairs of the heart, and all that — are pretty well over with me; and by my faith, were I to turn monk for my sins, I have weightier matters than a foolish intrigue to think of."

He sank again into silence, and his thoughts shifted gradually to other and more practical matters. He walked moodily to the window, drew the rich damask curtains, and looked forth upon the stormy skies, across which the black scud was drifting.

"Threatening — changing; now the stars peep out; and now they're wrapt in storm and vapour," he muttered in gloomy abstraction, and slow and broken sentences. "Now, the happy lights of heaven appear; and now all's lost in murky tempest. Just so — just so; a chequered, almost cheerless struggle; a day's despair for every hour of hope. How will this end — how will it all end? Oh, God! that I could see two years onward into the unrolled book of fate! Where will be all this state and ceremony then? — this goodly pomp and order, where will be the aspirants and the favourite? — where these portly priests, and gilded soldiers, and all the scheming and the splendour of this court? — and the King himself! Aye, aye, well-a-day; and I — what are these orders, and these baubles, and this dukedom? While I walk among these peers, and bishops, and judges, and generals, and all the rest, and see the poor King smiling, I behold ruin through all this frippery and state. 'Tis all horrible masquerade. Fools — fools! a week may turn this pomp to beggary — this music and jollity into howling and gnashing of teeth; away with this hollow mummery; off with your disguises: fly to your prayer books and confessions. We tread a stage, God knows, crazed and rotten in every plank; and, Heavens! what an abyss beneath! Yet see *how* they tread it! — as if it were rock — living rock — adamant: down to the earth's centre and foundation, adamant. Even that scheming rascal, Garrett; I dare swear he would think himself sorely wronged were we to limit his grant to one for life or a term of years."

He turned from the window. "And yet," he added bitterly, after a pause, "these are the men who call me rash, headlong, violent, impolitic. Idiots! had it not been for my rashness, where would all this and they have been now? Where would the army, the militia have been, all Protestant as they were? in open mutiny. For these creatures of court favour — of *my* favour — indeed, there is but one chance; but I — *I* have another and a deeper game to play; I bide my time. Would to God, the King were back again in France, and I once more the pilot of affairs! Well, well; all in good time — all in good time." The duke stood for a moment before the full length mirror, to rearrange the equipments of his stately dress. The anxious disquietude was smoothed away from his swarthy features, and all their bold haughty gravity returned, as he quitted the room to take his place once more among the splendid and stately groups which filled the great saloon of the castle with all the gorgeous gaiety of courtly pageantry and mirth.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE VERDICT.

THE courts of law, at the time of which we write, were held in an old and gloomy building adjoining Christ Church; so crazy and decayed, indeed, that it was found necessary, a very few years later, to take down and rebuild the whole structure.

A strong guard of musketeers occupied the entrance; barristers, in their gowns and falling collars, and solemn black perukes, flitted back and forward through the dark passages, like ill-omened apparitions — the sable familiars of the place. The body of the Court of King's Bench was crowded. The entrance and mustering of the jurymen, the fussy arrangements of the sheriff, the continual pressure of the crowd, and the occasional interference of the guard or the tipstaff, filled the old chamber up to its very roof with din and uproar.

Miles Garrett, his eye unusually bright and restless, and his face pale and clammy with anxiety, stood in one of the less-frequented passages of the building, his elbows leaning upon a high windowsill, and one hand shading his brows. He turned quickly about as a step approached: it was that of Thomas Talbot.

"So," said the latter, coolly, with a sort of sneer, "early upon the ground, Garrett! You're a keen sportsman, by my faith! Is the quarry yet in sight?"

"It's hardly yet time," said Garrett, consulting his ponderous gold watch. "You can see for yourself, a few steps further on, through the arch into the court."

"What of the witnesses?" asked Talbot, with a cautious glance down the passage; "what of the dragoon, O'Brien?"

"Safe, waiting in Londonderry for despatches," answered Garrett.

"Keep your eye on the Roundhead rascal — where have you got him?" pursued Talbot.

"There," replied Garrett, pointing to a small door opening off the lobby.

"Don't let him falter. If need be, give him brandy; he must be kept up," said Talbot.

A step approaching warned him to be gone.

“We must not be seen together — I’ll into the court,” he said, hastily, and strode down the passage, humming a song as he went.

Meanwhile, in the court itself, the bar had mustered. The attorney-general, Sir Richard Neagle, and the solicitor-general, had unfolded their ponderous briefs, and fussily began to look through them, whispering from time to time in question or consultation together, and sometimes referring, in short decisive whispers, to “the juniors” behind them, who instantly dived into text-books or reports of state trials, and in eager, half-frightened whispers, communicated the results to their leaders.

The crowd every moment grew denser — many a richly-dressed gentleman, in plumed hat and gold-laced suit, standing among the ignoble throng; and here and there some Protestant merchant, anxious and frightened, but too curious to leave the scene unsatisfied; and in the background, over the grim expanse of heads, gleamed the halbards and muskets of the militia, who kept guard. All was expectation, fuss, and bustle, squeezing and jostling. Men gaped, and gossiped, and yawned, and fidgeted, and consulted their watches in restless impatience; and there was such to-ing and fro-ing, such chatting, and laughing, and uproar, that the very cobwebs depending from the oaken roof, shivered and trembled in the clack and buzz.

In the midst of all this weary waiting, and noise, and clatter, was heard, at length, the entrance of the court official, settling the cushions, and arranging the pens and paper for the Bench; and at last the loud cry of “Silence in the court!” announced the approach of the judges; and, in all the pomp of scarlet and ermine, with collar and ruffles of lace, and a portentous flowing black wig, Chief Justice Nugent, now Lord Riverston, with his sharp hooked nose, severe eye, and thin ascetic lip, sailed awfully in, and, bowing to the bar, sate silently upon the bench.

Mr. Justice O’Neile followed. As this was what is called a trial at bar, all the judges sate, and as three judges then formed the full bench, in each of the law courts in Ireland, and as it happened that one of these three seats had been suffered to remain vacant, the full court included but the two judges we have named. Sir Hugh Willoughby was now called in due form, and a hushed silence of breathless expectation awaited his appearance.

There came the venerable old man, slowly pressing through the crowd, accompanied by a friend, and a guard of two men. A low hiss followed him as he advanced, but this insult was but a partial demonstration, for those immediately about him pressed back and made way for him, as he moved onward to his trial.

When he took his place at the bar, and looked calmly round him, it were hard to say whether the lines of nobleness or affliction most prevailed in his faded features.

"Where is Tisdal?" whispered old Sir Hugh, somewhat anxiously, in the ear of Caleb-Crooke, his solicitor.

"I know not," answered he, glancing inquiringly around. "Would he were here and he whispered to a messenger, who bustled away to find him.

Aye, where was Tisdal? Soon enough is old Sir Hugh to see and to hear that trusted villain, though now he may not; yet, reader, if you glance with us into that dark, mildewed closet, not twenty yards away, what see you there? Tisdal! aye, Tisdal — though you scarce know him in his desperate solitude. See his arm extended on the table — the fingers clutched together, as in a death spasm; see the elbow of the other arm upon his knee — his head thus propped, and his hand locked in the shaggy hair, as though he would wring and wrench the very scalp off; see the terrors of his deathlike face — mark how he shakes, how the strained sinews vibrate — hear those sobs and shudders; and then turn back your gaze from that lost demoniac being, to the high, serene aspect of the forsaken old man, and say which is the happier of the two.

The jury are sworn — Mr. Attorney-General Neagle rises grimly to his stern duty, with a rustling of silk, and a crumpling of papers — the crowded court becomes hushed, the clear voice of the advocate alone is heard, and the work of LAW begins.

The speech of an attorney-general, in those days, if he did his duty, was expected to be a very different thing from the address of the same functionary in modern times. It was, from beginning to end, a piece of coarse invective and impetuous railing; in which the guilt of the accused was not only taken for granted, but heightened and exaggerated by the fiercest and darkest colouring. Sir Hugh was often on the very point of yielding to the impulses of the wrath and scorn inspired by this unmeasured oratorical discipline, and interrupting the prosecutor in his harangue, by indignant recriminations, which would have but opened a new field for the rhetoric of the advocate; and in all probability seriously diminished whatever chance Sir Hugh might still have had of escape.

The urgencies of his friends, however, were seconded by the feelings of astonishment and perplexity with which other portions of the speech filled the mind of the old knight; and he was forced to listen, with breathless wonder, which hovered between horror and incredulity, as the florid barrister informed the jury that he would prove the prisoner to have been in the constant and daily habit of holding treasonable language with his friends and followers — and that, too, of the most atrocious kind; and that, moreover, he had declared to one much in his confidence, but who, prompted by the compunction of his wounded conscience, had since confessed the conversation — that had the castle of Glindarragh been tenable when the king's troops arrived, on the night of the affray, he would have held it against them, "in the name of that unnatural prodigy — that viper — that, in a measure, parricidal usurper, William of Orange — who, gentlemen of the jury, were he, through the perfidy of the disaffected English colonists, in this ancient kingdom, to force an entrance, and establish his wicked authority here, would, so help me heaven as I believe it, pour out his wrath and vengeance upon the head of every loyal man in the kingdom; nay, punish you, gentlemen, and myself, for calling to account this hoary rebel."

In the old chamber in the Carbrie, meanwhile, sate poor Grace Willoughby — a glass of water on the table, from which she swallowed a little from time to time, with pale and trembling lips, and a sobbing effort to relieve the choking at her throat — a bright feverish flush was on her cheeks, giving to her eyes an unnatural brilliancy, starting up at every sound, straining her sight along the street, to catch the first glimpse of the messenger who came and went to and from the court, bearing to her short notes, which told the progress of the terrible ordeal proceeding there. The last of these lay upon the table, and was couched in these terms: —

"The jury have retired — the judge has charged unfavourably — it is all Tisdal's evidence — a villain. We have hopes, notwithstanding; don't despond, darling. God bless you.

“H. W.”

It was now nearly dusk, and still the poor girl gazed from the window; then starting, ran to the door, and held it open, listening in ain for a repetition of the sound which fancy alone had heard; then returning, wringing her hands the while, to the table, and reading again and again, the little note, already a thousand times conned over, in the desperate endeavour to extract from its laconic intimations, some dearer light into the horrible obscurity of her suspense.

At last a step was heard upon the stair. She ran to the door; a servant, pale and haggard, hurried across the lobby; she strove to speak, but could not. The note was in her hand — she read it — one word — gracious God! but one— “GUILTY.” For a few dizzy seconds her eye remained fixed upon the terrible word; and then, clapping her hands together, with one wild scream, she fell senseless to the ground.

*

It was now night, and two gentlemen, in unbounded exultation, were seated at supper in a handsome room in the Carbrie; they were Miles Garrett and Thomas Talbot; they had drunk deeply, and were both somewhat flushed and excited.

“My brother knows how to play his cards, that’s all,” said Talbot, filling his glass with claret, “and fortune has dealt him a pretty strong hand of trumps, it must be allowed; knowledge, sir, is necessary — granted, but knowledge without opportunity avails nought. Here, for instance, am I,” he continued, recklessly— “I dare swear there is not a poor gentleman in Christendom better understands the hard and soft points of human character — from the court to the cabaret; but what avails it, my friends — or the devil made me a priest, *civiliter mortuus,* and for any good my skill can bring me, I might as well be as great a fool as old Willoughby, or as great a brute as yourself.”

Garrett knew his companion’s rough way, and in a moment of success like this, he could not resent it.

“What say you to a cardinal’s hat,” suggested Garrett.

"Look me in the face, man, and say how a cardinal's hat would sit upon me," said Talbot, scornfully. "Some attributes for Church preferment I do possess — I allow it. I could drink you, for instance, under the table. I know what's good, and how to help myself, but as there's no promotion to be had without talents of the sort, so there's none to be had either without the talent of hiding these gifts from all but the Church itself; now I've no fancy for putting my candle under a bushel, and to speak plainly, such is my temper, I would not be Pope, and practice so much restraint. I'm out of my element in this accursed calling; had they made me, instead, a captain of dragoons, I'd have stood as high as my brother by this time, and on far firmer ground to boot; but somehow, when a man gets a title — he wants an heir, and the mischief on it is, an heir must be legitimate, and so, to beget him, you must take a wife — and thus there's an end of your fun; for trust me, I've seen many a gay fellow married, and though they may grin, they seldom smile again! Thus am I better content to live as I do, than if I took a dukedom with all the appurtenances. Fill your glass, Garrett; I've a toast to give you."

They each filled, and Talbot resumed —

"Come, Garrett, let us drink to the fair lady to whom you owe more than to all the sex beside; let's drink, I say, to Lady 'Willoughby."

Garrett laughed and shrugged, and said —

"She has been, after all, worth something to me, and to you, too, for that matter; but there's a knocking at the door — eh?"

"No — is there?" said Talbot, "well, what are you afraid of?"

"Come in — who's there — come in, I say," said Garrett.

The door opened, and Garvey, with his usual cringing, villainous smile, sneaked in inch by inch.

"Who is that?" asked Talbot drily, after treating Garvey to a full stare of some seconds.

"He's an attorney fellow, and a scrivener," answered Garrett, in a stage whisper.

"Cheap and nasty, I dare affirm," said Talbot, carelessly filling his glass once more, "and well worthy of his client."

"Well, Garvey," said Garrett, somewhat ungraciously, "don't you see, sir, I'm engaged."

"Well! I was not aware, Mr. Garrett; I beg pardon, sir — I crave your pardon gentlemen both."

As Garvey spoke thus, he stood a little behind Talbot, and unobserved by him, he looked in Garrett's eye with a look of impatient significance, and beckoned over his shoulder, toward the door, with his thumb.

I thought you were alone, Mr. Garrett," he continued, in the same humble tone, "and it was my own little account I wanted to say a word about — and if it wouldn't be too bold, I'll ask you, Mr. Garrett, just for a minute to come out to me on the lobby."

"Never mind me, you fool; go with him to the lobby, or to the devil, or where you list, only shut the door," said Talbot, "and don't bring that respectable, grinning, cut-throat, looking gentleman, back again with you — that's all."

Without more ado, Garrett followed Garvey from the apartment, and closing the door, he continued to follow him into another chamber.

"Well!" exclaimed Garrett, looking with inquiring anxiety into the little man's face which, he knew not exactly how, boded something disastrous.

"Not well, I'm afraid," he rejoined, "at least, not *so* well as we thought, by half — by no means so smooth a business as we took it for; but who knows — who knows — and all's well that ends well."

"Will you speak out, and leave your riddles; what's wrong?" said Garrett, with an oath and an impatient stamp upon the floor.

"The whole of it is just this then," said Garvey— "the old knight, Sir Hugh Willoughby, has but a life interest in his property."

"A life interest! impossible," cried Garrett aghast, and thoroughly sobered in an instant by the announcement; "do you mean to say that he has no more than a life estate in Glindarragh. Zounds! do you mean to say *that"*

"By my troth I do," rejoined Garvey, *"*and so it is; if the old knight were hanged tomorrow, his daughter has the fee-simple of Glindarragh, and all the rest by marriage settlement, charged with a jointure to the old lady, so unless you can attaint the women too, you're as far as ever from the old gentleman's acres."

"Why — curse me, its incredible!" ejaculated Garrett, more appalled and bewildered than ever. "I never heard of this settlement, though his wife, to be sure, had a fortune, and true enough, there must have been some settlement in *her* favour; but, hell and death, man' how do you know this — how have you heard it — how do you know it's true; *is* it true?"

"Crooke's confidential clerk has a sneaking regard for me, for one reason or another, no matter," replied Garvey, "and he told me all about it; there is not a doubt of it; the fact is so. I thought it best, Mr. Garrett, not to mention it before your guest."

"You were right — quite right," said Garrett, hastily, and then he paused for two or three minutes. "It wont do — I'm afraid it won't do," he added, anxiously, "but it shall be tried. Garvey, I'll see you in the morning, at my lodgings — I must back again to my friend."

And so saying, with a changed mien, and a fallen countenance, he retraced his steps; he paused on the lobby for a minute to recover his looks, which he felt were troubled and disconcerted.

"I've one shot left in the locker, at all events," he muttered, "and if *it* tells, why then, what care I. I have all I want without their help — and as for Talbot — why, in that case, I can whistle him off to the devil, who owns him, and dare his worst. Come, come, all's not lost yet."

He placed his hand upon the latch, and in another moment he and Talbot were once more seated together as we found them.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CELL AND THE RIVALS — THE BROKEN CANE AND A LAST CHANCE FOR LIFE.

THE evening of the following day had consigned Sir Hugh to a chamber in the Birmingham tower, then the usual state prison, and one of the gloomiest in the old Castle of Dublin. A small apartment, of irregular shape, overspanned by a dusky low arch of stone; a single narrow grated window, scarcely large enough to admit a man's head, and close to the vaulted ceiling, grudgingly lighted the dismal apartment; two or three rude pieces of the commonest furniture, thinly occupied the bare stone floor; a truckle bed, little better than a mat, lay in the corner; a dark festoonery of cobwebs waved in the sluggish air, and the low and narrow aperture which gave admission to the room, was occupied by a ponderous door of oak, so studded with nails and screws, and crossed and embedded with rusty bars, that scarce an inch of the timber was any where apparent. Two figures occupied the room; they were those of the old knight and his fair daughter; he so broken, so furrowed with the lines of age and care, but withal, so majestic in his feebleness and humiliation — she so beautiful, yet so sad, that they might have meetly represented Time and Sorrow, in their sad companionship.

"This extremity," continued the old man, pursuing the current of his melancholy discourse, "would cost me, broken and humbled as I am, scarce a sigh, were it not — were it not," he repeated with an cent as though his heart were breaking, " my pretty Grace, for thee; who will guard thee and guide thee through these terrible times, my gentle, loving child?"

A rude noise at the entrance interrupted him — the bars gave way successively — the door swung open, and Miles Garrett entered. He had obviously not expected to see the girl there, for he looked surprized and disconcerted, and for a moment hesitated as if he would have retired; the dogged and forbidding aspect which he had at first worn, however speedily returned, with, perhaps, the more sinister darkness by reason of the effort it cost him to master his strange agitation.

Sir Hugh turned haughtily from him, without rising or speaking a word, and drew his daughter still closer to his side. Miles Garrett took off his hat, then dashed it on again, and glanced with an uncertain look from one to the other; at last he spoke, but not until he had twice or thrice essayed in vain; and when, clearing his husky voice, he did succeed at length, it was with an appearance of something between shame and anger at his own weakness.

"Cousin Willoughby," he said, gruffly, "you see how it has gone. I told you so — you would not believe me — but who was right?"

"What do you seek here — what can you want with me?" asked Sir Hugh, without looking toward him, and speaking in a tone of subdued sternness.

"Look ye, Cousin Hugh — I don't mean to make professions of friendship; you refused my offers, and I was vexed, spited — what you will," said he, growing more fluent as he proceeded. "I have let matters take their course hitherto — I have not interposed my interest to protect you — I have stood neutral. Now, mark me, Cousin Hugh — I speak advisedly, perhaps — *perhaps,* I say, it is not *yet* too late."

"Words — words — words," muttered the old knight, softly, as he looked down upon his irons with a bitter smile.

"Yes, words, and deeds to match them," said Garrett, with sudden sternness, "that was *my* way from a boy, and that being so, my words are well worth weighing. You think it is too late for help; I say it is *not,* and the result will prove it."

He paused, but the old man deigned not the slightest answer to his words.

"This is an extremity of sore and urgent peril — while there's life there s hope, the proverb says; but life once gone, it is gone indeed" he pursued, addressing himself for the first time to the girl; "he lies under sentence — the sword is suspended over him; it may fail tomorrow — it may fall *now;* the step of the dreadful messenger, even while I speak, may be upon the stair."

With a mute gesture of agony and despair, the poor girl wildly clasped her hands upon her temples.

"Yet he may be saved — I am sure he may. *I* can save him!" said Garrett, deliberately.

There was a breathless pause of a few seconds.

"I *will* save him," pursued Garrett, vehemently, and then added, dashing his hand upon the table; "but if I do, you — *you* must marry me."

Sir Hugh rose slowly from his seat, and drew his daughter back, with something like a shudder, as he gazed silently upon Garrett, with a look in which horror and astonishment were blended.

"God forbid — God, in his mercy, forbid," he muttered, still drawing his child further back, as if he dreaded even the contagion of his looks.

"Enough!" cried Garrett, ferociously looking from the frightened girl, to the indignant countenance of the old knight, and reading, at a glance, the hopelessness of his proposal; "you have had your last offer — your last chance; fortune shall run her own course with you now — you to the gibbet, and you to the streets..You'll not be the first of your blood that has come to shame."

And with a brutal laugh of spite, he shook his hand at the affrighted girl, then turned on his heel, and strode out of the room, white and trembling with rage, which his affected carelessness in vain essayed to conceal.

The last words of the wretch smote like a deathblow upon the brain and the heart of the old man. He stood speechless and stunned for a moment, and then a convulsive burst of sobs relieved him, and burying his face in his hands, he sank into his seat.

Meanwhile, along the footway leading from the Cork Tower toward the Birmingham Tower, upon the broad platform of the Castle wall, a dark-visaged, handsome dragoon, his face pale, and his eyes bright with rage, was pacing swiftly.

"Traced home to him — the wretch!" muttered Torlogh O'Brien — for he was the soldier who thus strode along the Castle wall — with bitter distinctness, muttering his suppressed invectives through his set teeth; "that I should be made the sport of his murderous craft, practised upon by fraud, and made, unconsciously, to lend myself to such an accursed conspiracy. I could have saved that fine old man; my testimony would have made it *impossible* to find him guilty; and now, I fear, he is, indeed, lost — irrecoverably lost! But ha! who's that? — by heaven, the murderer!"

With a flushed and stormy countenance, Miles Garrett was just

"Your wig and your hat's comin' afther you, with the sarvints, I suppose?" suggested a third.

"Oh, but's himself that's butthered all over," ejaculated a fourth.

"He's the sign of the 'Black Swan' all over, bedad."

These, and a thousand other pleasantries, enlivened his efforts to mount the bank, which, at last, he did, half blind with his bath, and giddy with rage.

Meanwhile, having just glanced after his discomfited antagonist, and flung his broken cane after him, without waiting to see the issue of the adventure, Torlogh O'Brien descended the steps which Garrett had so lately mounted; and readjusting the disorder of his dress as he proceeded, he made his way directly to the Birmingham tower, where, as we have said, Sir Hugh Willoughby was confined.

With little difficulty or delay, he gained admission to the tower. With feelings strangely agitated and conflicting, he silently ascended the steep dark stairs. The hoarse lock screamed — the bars groaned and clanged — the door rolled open, and Torlogh O'Brien stood before Sir Hugh Willoughby. When the brave young soldier looked upon the old man, whom, spite of the untoward circumstances which made their fortunes, as it seemed, irreconcileably opposed, he could not help liking and admiring — when he beheld him thus rigorously a prisoner — when he saw the irons on his limbs, pity and indignation thrilled him; and a rush, almost of tenderness, on a sudden overpowered his softened heart.

For the first time in his life, he grasped the old man's hands, and wrung them again and again in the warm pressure of unrestrained and generous feeling.

"Sir Hugh — Sir Hugh," he cried; "I did not look to find you thus; you are wronged — you are greatly wronged.'Fore heaven this must be righted; you shall not lose your life — you shall not perish; there shall be no cruelty, no sacrifice, no judicial murder. Great God! this is a crying sin — a shame, a burning shame; my heart swells at the sight of these irons."

"My good friend," said Sir Hugh, returning his grasp as warmly— "for friend I may, and will call you — grieve not for this — it cannot be mended now; and when all's done, 'tis but a few years, at most, taken from the end of an old — a very old life; although— "

He was going to have added somewhat, but he sighed bitterly, and became silent.

"No, no, no — it shall not be," cried Torlogh, passionately; "there has been foul play here; the king shall hear of it — you shall have justice —

you shall not be wronged — you shall not be *murdered;* I will lose my life first. Let us think of all means — let us try everything; something must be done, one way or another. You shall be saved, cost what it may — you shall not die."

He" turned and looked upon the young lady with a gaze of undisguised pity and admiration; and was there not — or was it fancy in its quenched and melancholy fires, something of a deeper, and still tenderer passion? It seemed as though he was upon the very point of speaking, but some secret influence sealed his lips.

"My poor child has prayed me to suffer her to speak with the king for me," said Sir Hugh, looking upon her with a faint smile of fondness and melancholy.

"It is wisely thought, Sir Hugh; she may succeed; at least, it is worth a trial," said Torlogh, earnestly.

"You hear what he says, dear father," said she, with joyful confidence; "let me go and speak with the king; and God may give me words and wisdom to prevail."

So speaking, she rose up with a bright eye, and a pale and solemn face.

"Nay," said Sir Hugh, dejectedly; "it were but a vain endeavour. The spirit in which I have been pursued has been that of uncompromising severity; I have no friends near the king — but, as I have too much reason to believe, many malignant, though, God knows, most unprovoked enemies. What chance, therefore, has this poor child of moving the king's purpose, and softening resolutions so stern and inflexible?"

"Let it be tried, however," urged Torlogh.

"It were but to show a cowardly love of life, ill befitting an old man and a brave one," responded Sir Hugh; "it were but adding needless humiliation and shame, to misfortunes 'which have brought me low enough already."

"Yet, suffer the young lady to make the attempt," pursued Tarlogh; "I implore of you — I conjure you to permit her."

The old man heaved a heavy sigh, and answered not.

"Suffer her to go, Sir Hugh; it may be that the wisdom and the mercy of heaven have inspired this thought; oppose it not," continued Torlogh; "and I, if the prayer be not too bold a one — I will entreat, in all humbleness, of the lady, to allow me to attend her steps, and render whatever service my poor ability can offer. Command me to the uttermost — I shall be but too happy, too proud to obey.”

The lady lowered her lustrous eyes, and a faint tinge warmed her pale cheek. With a beautiful struggle of embarrassment and gratification, she murmured her low sweet thanks for his fervent proffers “This is about the hour,” continued Torlogh, “when the king usually walks in the Castle garden; if it seem well to you, let the attempt be made *now.* I will endeavour to procure admission for you, and you will then see his majesty face to face, without fear of interruption, and free to listen to your supplication. Let us then, if it be your pleasure, go at once; and, in God’s name, try whether you can now prevail with him.”

“You will meet but a cold hearing and a stern judge, my poor Grace,” said her father, slowly shaking his head; “nevertheless, as you desire it still, in God’s name, as you say, so be it, go and try. Here,” he added, as he selected a paper from among several which lay upon the rude table beside him; “here, my poor child, is the paper — place it in the king’s hand, as you desire; but I warn you, be not sanguine — for, calmly viewed, the project is indeed but a hopeless one.”

With a countenance, in which hope contended with awe, the pale girl calmly arose, and did on her simple cloak and hood in silence; then kissing her father fondly and sadly, with a lofty, and serene, and mournful mien, she passed from the chamber, followed closely by Torlogh O’Brien. The official outside the door closed it with a heavy swing, and Grace was now fairly committed to her agitating enterprize.

CHAPTER XXXI.

KING JAMES IN THE CASTLE GARDEN.

CLOSE under the further curtain of the Castle, lay the formal garden, in which it was King James' wont, during his anxious sojourn in his Irish capital, to take the air, for at least an hour every day.

Across the quadrangle of the old Castle, did Torlogh O'Brien, with his plumed hat in his hand, respectfully conduct the beautiful and silent lady. He led the way into the doorway of a small round tower, one of two which occupied the wall between the Birmingham and the Wardrobe towers. A sour-looking hag of some seventy winters, seated upon a stool in a far recess, was at first scarcely visible in the imperfect light of the stone-vaulted chamber, as she busily plied her distaff, and chanted with an ill-omened croak, from time to time, a snatch of some old Milesian ballad. As the two youthful visitants entered this grim and darksome abode, the crone raised her shrivelled yellow arm, and with her smoke-dried fingers, swept back the straggling long white locks, peering at them with an expression which was anything but inviting.

"Is Nial in the tower, good dame?" asked Torlogh.

"Is Nial in the tower?" she repeated aecoerately, to allow herself full time to reconnoitre; "no he isn't — sure he's never where he ought to be — the *sturk,* and why ud he be here? Nial, indeed! — aye — aye! if its Nial you want, you better go down the back lanes, an hunt through the shebeen shops, for its little his ould mother sees iv him."

The latter part of this harangue was delivered in the way of a discontented soliloquy, and sunk into an inarticulate grumble at the close — and so she pursued her task, as though she had wholly forgotten their presence.

"Well, honest dame," said Torlogh, endeavouring, by a gentle address, to conciliate the wayward hag— "though Nial is not at home, I dare say the keys are, and if so, you will do us a great kindness by allowing us to pass into the garden."

“Into the garden, is it? Why then, an’ id nothing else sarve you but into the garden itself,” she ejaculated, with all the arrogance of office, as she surveyed them both with a half contemptuous leer. “Why then, yez id look well, an’ the king himself, God bless him, there this minute; maybe its to walk with himself yez want — well, but that’s impitence, in airnest.”

“Nay, madam — we may desire to see the king, and even to speak with him, and yet be guilty of no audacity,” said Torlogh, half amused, in spite of his anxiety, at the old woman’s official insolence; “and even such is the truth — this young lady has a message of life and death to deliver to his majesty. Ipray you do us so much kindness as to turn the key in the lock, and suffer us to enter. I will bear you harmless against all consequences — and,” he added, stooping over her, and placing a gold piece in her hand as he spoke, “and reward you for your pains.”

“Well, well acuslila, stop a bit,” said she, in a softened tone, as she deposited the coin in her withered breast; “ax me whatever you plase, an’ I’ll not refuse you anything in raison, barrin’ letting you into the garden, for that’s a thing I wouldn’t do for the holy Saint Ghost, let alone a sinful young dhragoon like yourself; take a pinch iv the snishin, an’ ax anything but that alone.”

She extended a horn snuff-box, as she spoke, and fearful of offending her, Torlogh thanked her, and affected to partake of its contents.

“Well, then,” said he, “if you will not allow us both to enter, at least admit this lady.”

“Nansense!” cried she, “is not it all one — I said I wouldn’t, an’ I’m not goin’ back iv my word. No — no — I know what it is to crass a proud gintleman like the king. My husband, God rest him — an’ glory be his bed — went again General Cromwell once. They called him bloody Cromwell, an’ he had the look iv it — glory be to God — in his face — for I never seen him but my heart riz into my mouth. There was some powdher in the store-honse tower, over the way, and the general ordhered how that no one should smoke a pipe iv tobaccy within the two cannons that was outside iv it — an’ my husband, the saints resave him, poor Connor — he was an aisy goin’, good natured boy — he was so — and mainin’ no harm himself, never throubled his head with dhramin’ any one else meant mischief neither; an’ the dear man, sure enough, he was smokin’ his pipe, quiet an’ aisy, serenadin’ along, right between the two cannons, an’ he feels a walkin’ cane just laid on his shouldher; so when he looked round, who id be in it but the general himself, an' he was so bothered, that he stood lookin' at him just like a fool, all as one; an' Gineral Cromwell just puts out his hand this a way, an' he takes the pipe out iv his mouth, an', says he, 'Clap your thumb in the bowl iv it, friend, an' walk before me to the gatehouse.' Them was his very words, an' poor Connor dar'n't say boo, for there never was the thing yet, barrin' the divil maybe, dar' crass him — so he stuck his thumb in the pipe, an' he was so freckened, he hardly felt it, though it burnt him a'most to the bone, an' he walks before him to the guardroom at the drawbridge, an' he gave him in charge iv the officer, an' says he, 'Bring out a file an' shoot him at eight o'clock tomorrow mornin', for there must be an end of smokin' so near my powdher an' as sure as you're standin' there, he'd have shot him dead the next mornin', only for ould Sir Charles Coote that knew him, an' begged his life; but he lost his place, an' for twelve years we wor out iv the Castle, and a sore time we had iv it — an' it's that that makes me guarded ever since iv goin' against great men, even in thrifles, do ye mind."

As she thus spoke, a key was turned in the door communicating with the garden; it opened, and a tall, striking-looking officer entered from the garden; it was Colonel Sarsfield.

"Ha, O'Brien!" said he, gaily glancing from him to the cloaked form of the girl— "why, what a romantic tableau! — a youthful warrior — a distressed damsel — and something very like a fell enchantress in the background of this sombre tower; prithee, what part is reserved for me — giant or — ?"

"Nay, deliverer," said Torlogh, "for unless you enact that part, I fear me the adventure must stand still for lack of it."

And so saying, he drew him aside, and spoke earnestly with him for a few minutes, during which time Sarsfield's countenance grew grave, and he several times glanced with apparent interest at the form of the young lady.

"Certainly," said he; "but take my advice and let the lady go alone his majesty's respect for the sex will insure her a more courteous hear ing, if not a more favourable one, than, perhaps, you or I could hope for."

Grace thanked him hurriedly, but earnestly, said she would follow his advice, and go alone; and passing through the narrow portal which he held open with one hand, while with the other he gracefully raised his military hat — she found herself within the tall close hedges, and darksome alleys of the formal garden. She walked on slowly to recover completely her self-possession, and to prepare herself as well as she might, for the agitating interview which was now at hand. She thus passed through the length of the garden, without encountering any living thing, and in like manner through another alley, with its stately statues, showing in classic relief against the deep shadows of the straight yew hedge; as she drew near the corner of this, she felt convinced she should, on turning it, behold the object of her search — and the suspense of that moment so overwhelmed her, that she could scarce summon resolution to pass the angle of the closely shaded walk. She speedily mastered her agitation, however, and drawing a long, deep sigh, like one about to plunge into an unfathomed and perilous sea, she passed onward and entered the long walk; a single glance down its long perspective sufficed to assure her that her anticipations had not misled her. From the further extremity two figures were slowly advancing toward her. Ont was that of the king, plainly dressed, and leaning upon a cane; the other was that of a younger man, attired in a suit of black cloth; they seemed to be communing earnestly, for they often stopped and faced one another, and thus pursuing their desultory ramble, they slowly approached the spot where she stood.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ANSWER.

IT was not until they had nearly reached the statue by which she had taken her stand, that the king became aware of her presence.

"Whom have we here?" he said, with good humoured surprize, as he paused within a few paces of the girl, and gazed with some curiosity, and obviously not a little admiration upon her; *"par ma foi c'est une jolie fille,"* he continued, looking toward his grave companion, who had lowered his eyes demurely to the ground. The king turned his gaze again full upon the shrinking girl, with that bold look of undisguised admiration which had earned for him, in his earlier days, the reputation of being the most conspicuous ogler at court; "by my word, good father, I incline to think the true divinity hath descended in person to shame these counterfeit graces of lead and stone, and tempt me from your colder orthodoxy, into the charming follies of the antique worship."

"What say you, father — are you, too, a proselyte," he added, gaily, laying his cane upon his companion's shoulder— "are you, too, in danger?"

Father Petre answered not, but lowered his head, it might be about an inch more, with an almost imperceptible shake of grave disapprobation.

"My liege," said the girl, while the colour which his bold criticism had called to her cheek again retired, leaving her features almost as pale as marble, and at the same time approaching and extending a folded paper in her hands, "if your majesty will graciously be pleased to read this petition, you will learn briefly the subject of my humble supplication."

James removed his glove gallantly, and taking the paper in his finger and thumb, held it up, and waved it warningly at her with a smile as he said —

"I see how it is, I would stake my life on't — a place for a clever young fellow who needs but experience to turn out a capital financier; or, let us say, rather a commission for a brave gentleman, who asks but opportunity to prove a hero and a general? What say you, father, have we read aright our fair petitioner's memorial in her eyes?"

"My liege, it is no such matter," she began.

"By my faith, then, we are at fault," said the king, raising his eyebrows, and good humouredly shaking his head; "you have baulked our penetration, and for a penance, we will have thee open the matter to us by word of mouth." —

"I will do so, may it please your majesty," said the girl, spiritedly. "I am the daughter — the only child of Sir Hugh Willoughby, a true subject of your majesty, accused of treason by false witnesses, and now condemned to die."

The king's face darkened ominously as she spoke, and he interrupted her by saying coldly —

"We will read the paper — we will read it."

James walked slowly away, as he deliberately unfolded the petition, and paused, while he read it; then walked on a pace or two further, and read a little more.

In all the sickening uncertainty of suspense, meanwhile, did poor Grace Willoughby watch his movements, striving to read in every look and gesture some ground of hope. James had walked some twenty yards away, in this desultory and broken fashion, when, at length, he turned to the Jesuit who accompanied him, and placing his arm within his companion's, continued to walk down the trim alley, evidently conversing upon the topic which was, at that moment, making the heart of the poor girl flutter and throb, as though its pulsations would choke her. She saw them again pause, while the king read the petition through, and while he was thus employed, to her extreme dismay, the Duke of Tyrconnel entered the walk, and with the suavity of a courtier, and the confidence of a favourite, approached his royal benefactor.

They stopped and conversed together, in a little knot, at the far extremity of the terrace. The king handed the paper to Tyrconnel, who returned it, with a brief remark or two, and James having said a few words more, folded it, and coolly placed it in his pocket.

"It is decided now, one way or other," exclaimed the poor girl, as she watched, with an intensity of suspense little short of agony, the proceedings of the little group. "God grant it may be favourably. Oh, yes! yes — it must be so — for see, they are laughing; thank God — thank God — they could not, I think they could not laugh so pleasantly, were it otherwise."

Her agitation was so extreme, that she was on the point of hurrying to the spot where the king was standing, to hear, at once, his answer to her prayer. She feared, however, that the least precipitation might be construed into a want of due respect, and so perhaps fatally prejudice her suit; and rather than encounter, even in imagination, a risk so tremendous, she waited patiently where she stood, until the king, in his own good time, might please to release her from the anguish of her doubts. Unhappily for her, James appeared now to have fallen upon a subject, which peculiarly interested him, for his gestures became more animated, and he drew, in illustration of the matter of his discourse, a sort of diagram with his walking cane, upon the gravel walk, and lectured thereupon, with a good deal of emphasis — pointing from time to time to different parts of his tracing, while his two companions listened with real or affected interest, and occasionally dropped a question, or remark, which furnished the king with new matter of discussion. Nearly ten minutes had elapsed ere the poor girl saw them approach so near that she was now able to overhear what passed.

"It was not exactly so," said the king, again stopping short, "though pretty nearly so: 'tis easily explained. Opdam lay to our leeward, within half musket shot, as it might be, there. I was standing at the moment, by the bulwark, on the quarter-deck, as thus — and had just raised my glass; Muskerry stood, as it might be so, where you, Talbot, now stand; Falmouth scarce a step behind — as it might be, *there*, where you are, father; and Mr. Boyle, some pretty distance backward, not three steps from the binnacle; all happening, thus, in the same line — at which moment came the enemy's shot, and killed those three brave gentlemen; the ball, as I calculated, must have passed some four, perhaps five inches less than two feet from my shoulder."

"I've heard it reckoned, by those who had the honour to serve on hoard with your majesty," said Tyrconnel, "at something less than a single foot."

"I will not be positive," said the king, evidently not displeased at the suggestive correction; "I will venture to aver, however, the distance was not *more* than I have said."

"'Tis such narratives," said Father Petre, with a shake of the head, and a well acted shudder, "which realize to us, timid sons of peace, the true dangers and terrors of battle; one such escape, methinks, might find a man gravity and caution for the remainder of his days."

“Tut, tut, father,” said James, gaily, but withal proudly, “’tis but the fortune of war, and a sailor who has been in a few hot fights, if he be fit for his calling, will witness such casualties as coolly as he would the shooting away of a spar, or the cutting of a shroud; not indeed,” he added, in a graver tone, and crossing himself with an expression of devotion, in which, it must be confessed, a very obvious irradiation of vanity still lingered— “not but that a good Catholic, wherever he be, will, in all deliverances, look up with gratitude and love to Almighty God, and to his blessed saints. But, by my faith, we had clean forgotten the matter of this petition of Sir Hugh Willoughby’s,” he said, abruptly breaking off, as his eye chanced to encounter the form of Grace Willoughby, who now stood close by him.

He took the paper from his coat pocket, along with a pocketbook, in which, with a pencil, he seemed to take a note of its contents, and, after folding it up again, with a few brief remarks, he advanced slowly toward the poor girl, with a look of dark and haughty severity in his face, which ominously contrasted with the gaiety and affability with which he had accosted her before, “We have read the petition, young lady,” he said, with cold gravity, “which you have given into our hand, praying that we would extend our royal clemency to your unhappy father, Sir Hugh Willoughby; it is a bold prayer, considering, alike, the straits and troubles of these times, and the nature of the crime of which he stands convicted; and yet, so far from wishing him, or any other of our subjects ill — there lives not that soul, even among the greatest and most unnatural of our enemies, against whom we harbour, so God be our stead, the least malice or revenge; and were we merely to consult the promptings of our own heart, we would, indeed, rather say to all our rebellious subjects (and God wot they are many), live and repent, than die in your iniquity; but alas! it is not with governors and rulers, as with other men; the safety of the body politic, and the discipline of the national manners, good government, law, subordination, peace, and prosperity, all hang upon the acts and words of kings; and what might be gentleness and mercy in common men, would be but weakness, nay, criminality in them; and, as the king is the anointed of God Almighty, and, by him, consecrated to his high office, it beseems him, as God’s chief magistrate on earth, in distributing his judgments, to have a strict regard to that spirit in which the Almighty administers his own, namely, for a warning and prevention; by the terrors of occasional punishment, to coerce the ill-disposed into the ways of peace and honesty; this is as much the duty of the king, as to forgive. Wherefore, ànd considering all the attending circumstances, we are obliged to refuse this prayer, and, in your father's case, to suffer the law to take its usual course."

James spoke this formal, and, to the poor girl, most terrible address, with much gravity, and discreet emphasis — but withal, as phlegmatically, as though it were no more than a mere lecture upon the abstract question of divine right and royal prerogative; and, having concluded, he was turning coldly away, when she cried in a tone of sudden and thrilling agony —

"Stay — my liege — in the name of God — I conjure you — stay and hear me."

The king turned upon her, once more., the same forbidding look of cold displeasure.

"Young woman," interposed Tyrconnel imperiously— "'tis neither seemly nor respectful thus to importune his majesty; do you not see — can you not perceive this urgency is unbefitting — not to say indecent?"

"Nay," said the king, waving his hand backward in gentle reproof; "if the young lady has any matter to urge, as yet undisclosed to us — and pertinent to this petition — God forbid we should turn from her, and refuse a hearing. Proceed, then," he continued, turning again toward her— "if there be any matter of fact or argument omitted *here"* and he tapped the paper which he had just perused; "let us have it, i' God's name, and speedily."

"My liege," she said, "I am unskilled in argument — take pity on me — I can but pray for mercy. Oh, my liege, hear me, pleading for *my* father; and in your own troubles, may God incline your children to plead for you— "

"His majesty has already restricted you, young lady, to arguments and facts," interrupted Tyrconnel, who dreaded the effect of an allusion to his children — the only topic by which, through selfish channels enough, it must be confessed, the heart of the king was easily assailable; "you are but wasting his majesty's time and patience, in thus recurring to mere importunity."

"He speaks the truth," said the king; "we desire to know, simply, whether you have any new matter to add to that stated in this paper. We have conceded much in suffering this irregular intrusion thus far; we cannot consent to be detained by mere solicitation."

“My liege,” she continued, with imploring earnestness; “the great God, the King of kings, the Judge of all the earth — before whom, at the last day, you and he shall stand to receive your everlasting doom — He knows that he is entirely innocent of this crime. My liege, my liege, have mercy — and may your judge be merciful to you— “

The king turned petulantly from her as she spoke; and in the wildness of her agony she threw herself upon her knees before him.

“For pity’s sake — for God’s sake,” she cried, almost frantically; “consider — think; it is innocent blood they seek to shed — the innocent blood that cries up before the throne of God for vengeance. My Lord Tyrconnel — good priest — oh, sirs, speak for me, he will hear you— “

“Tyrconnel raised his eyes, and Father Petre lowered his meekly; and at the same moment the king interrupted the girl’s melancholy appeal by saying, curtly —

“It can not be — once for all, young lady, we tell you, it can not be; and desire you plainly, to take your answer.”

“Oh! no, no, no, my liege — for pity’s sake,” cried the poor girl distractedly.

“Nay, damsel, this is scarce seemly,” said the king, peremptorily, and, at the same time, disengaging the skirt of his coat, which in her agony she had grasped, “and only to be excused on the score of your unripe experience. We decide *no* matter with undue haste, and, having decided once, and upon sufficient reasons, we do not lightly change; it is determined in this case, the law shall take its course — and, if we urge not the execution of the sentence on an early day, we expect not to be troubled for our forbearance.”

The king turned austerely away, and terrified by the dreadful threat faintly implied in his closing sentence, she made no further effort to detain him.

Heart-sick and trembling, she followed him and his companions, with her eyes, as they slowly passed onward upon the broad walk which formed the royal promenade, and marked their careless gestures and easy laughter, as they renewed their light conversation; and then, scarce knowing whither she went, she turned in the opposite direction, and finding herself, after a few minutes, alone, in a sequestered alley, she sate herself down upon a block of stone, under the shadow of the dark evergreens, and found relief in a burst of bitter tears.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SWEET WORDS AND TEARS AND WILD FLOWERS.

"WE left Grace Willoughby seated mournfully in the Castle garden, in a lonely alley, among the trim dark yews. She had dried her tears, and was sitting dejectedly, with drooping head, and clasped hands, upon the rude mossgrown fragment of rock, which she had chosen for her seat, when she was recalled from her reverie, by a deep, manly voice, close beside her.

"I have been seeking you," said Torlogh O'Brien, for he was the speaker — "I have been seeking you, Mistress Grace Willoughby, and grieve to find you thus sorrowful; it is, then, as we feared, the king has rejected your suit."

"He has rejected it," said poor Grace, in a tone so piteous, that it touched the young soldier's heart. "Ah, what shall I do now? I fear — I greatly fear it is all over."

"Nay," said Torlogh, in a tone that was almost tender— "do not despair — it is but a first defeat — and many resources remain yet untried. I have friends — powerful friends — all their interest and my own — every influence that I command — shall be to the uttermost exerted."

She looked up to thank him, and, as her eyes encountered his ardent gaze, they dropped again, and, instead of speaking, she blushed, and every moment more and more deeply.

"You have too long misunderstood me, Mistress Grace," he continued, in the same ardent and melancholy tone, and, at the same time, seating himself upon the high bank beside her, that his softened voice might distinctly reach her— "a descendant, the last, it may be, of an ancient and unfortunate house — referring their outcast and ruined fortunes, in some sort, to the deeds and daring of your ancestors. Nay, I will say it — educated, as I have been, in abhorrence of your race — I came hither with a heart charged with wrath and vengeance against your family — full of the darkest passions of that ancient feud; but — all — all that is changed now."

As the sweet and melancholy tones of the young man's voice fell upon her ear, her head was turned a little away; but he saw that she blushed and trembled more and more every moment — while her white fingers, straying among the moss and grass, unconsciously plucked the wild flowers that grew beside her.

"It is, indeed, all changed," he continued, passionately— "changed, almost from the moment when I saw you first. You must not be angry with me — you are not angry. I cannot — cannot refrain from speaking; having spoken so far, I must speak all. From the time I saw you first, you have haunted me in my waking thoughts, spite of all my struggles, and in my dreams — you have been alone all the joy, and all the sorrow of my existence. Yes, dear, *dear* Grace, I do, passionately, with my whole heart, fondly love you."

He had taken her hand, and held it fervently, while her colour shifted momentarily from deadly pale to glowing crimson. She attempted to withdraw it, and arose, while a thousand thousand thrilling thoughts and emotions were crowded into that brief interval of silence; and still holding her hand, while his cheek — that cheek which had never blanched for all the terrors of battle, was pale as death — he passionately pursued his impetuous discourse: —

"Yes, I love you, dear, dear Grace — I love you, as you will never meet another capable of loving you again; as *I* have loved but once, and never, never can love more — nay, do not, do not turn away — nay, suffer me to hold your dear hand for this brief minute; the first time — it may be for the last time — in my life. Hear me thus, then, tell you how I love you — even though the tale be told in vain; and say dearest, ah, say if you can ever — dare I hope it — ever, ever love me in return."

As he concluded, she -withdrew her hand. Such were the confusion and the tumult of her feelings, that she dared not, and could not frame an answer; but one look in her pale face told him truly he was beloved again. He took her cold, trembling, little hand once more; he held it fondly — for she now did not draw it away — but she tried once more to speak; and, instead of speaking — poor, pretty Grace — she fainted away.

Unmoving, unconscious, the loved burthen lay in his arms; and as he looked in her pale face, and saw the colour returning, Torlogh O'Brien had never known what it was to be really proud and happy before.

"Is it — is it all a dream?" at length she softly said.

"No, dearest, no," he said as softly, but with most passionate tenderness; "no dream — no illusion — but truth — reality — to me the proudest and the brightest that has ever been. Look, dearest, look up into my face — it is I, Torlogh, your lover — I who stand beside you —

Torlogh O'Brien, your own true lover, who would rather lose a thousand lives, than this dear hand — ay, who would rather perish where he stands, than forget even one sweet look of yours."

As he thus spoke, her full heart at last found relief, and the bright tears gathered in her downcast eyes, and fell softly and silently among the wild flowers in her lap.

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How absorbing was the proud, unutterable rapture of that minute — how unlooked for, through the desolate darkness of that hour, shone out this sudden, tender gleam of deepest happiness. Like an unexpected, momentary glow of evening sun, breaking through a sky of storm, and pouring its radiance through wet leaves and drooping boughs; where, as the eye wanders, lost in the clear perspective of the opening glades, the birds sing sweetly, and flowers shimmer bright, as though they had never been evercast by the terrors and the gloom of tempest. Thus, for a moment, in the thrilling joy of that happy, happy interview, were forgotten the troubles, the fears, the agonies of the hour before.

But, perchance, we have already tarried too long over these gentle passages of love; it is after all but a cold task, recording scenes like these. Words will not do it, because no words spoken in such moments, ever yet equalled the heart's emotions, from which they sprung — feelings which are, indeed, unutterable — which eyes and tones may tell, but common language never. What more was told by words and looks in that sweet, passionate conference, it were idle to record: suffice it to say, that when they arose to depart, they had exchanged the mutual troth of lovers.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MESSENGER.

Meanwhile, in his gloomy chamber, Sir Hugh was not alone. It's faithful agent, Caleb Crooke, sate with him: deep and anxious was their consultation.

"It is important — most important," said the attorney, toward the close of their conference; "that the deed of settlement should be placed safely in my hands. It is the only security — the only provision your poor child possesses. Should these villains, whom I suspect to be at the bottom of your prosecution, urge their victory to its murderous issue, this document secures your daughter against spoliation" — and as he spoke, he wrung his old patron's hand— "God grant God, in his mercy, grant it may not be so — but it is ever safest to look at the worst aspect of affairs, and guard not only against what is probable, but what is possible, too. The deed is now in Glindarragh; can you say exactly where?"

"Yes, the very spot," said Sir Hugh; "but how to get a bold and trusty messenger— "

"Ay, there's the difficulty," said Crooke, thoughtfully; "and bold and trusty must he be, in times like these, to whom I would commit so anxious and so grave an errand."

"Hush — whom have we here?" interrupted the old knight. "Ha, my poor girl," he continued, fondly, but at the same time, bitterly, as his daughter, followed by Torlogh O'Brien, entered the sombre chamber; "I see full well how you have sped — even as I predicted. Put not your trust in princes, my child; there is One, and but One, to whom we may look with confidence, even in the worst of troubles. He can deliver me, if it be his good will, though all the powers of this world were leagued against me; and without the shield of his protection, with kings and armies on our side, we are not safe. Therefore, upon the God of all might and all mercy, in this sore extremity, I only and entirely rely."

Too much agitated and embarrassed to speak, Grace remained silent; but Torlogh O'Brien, in a few brief sentences, put Sir Hugh and his companion in full possession of the result of the young lady's mission; and, this done, once more their deliberations turned upon the important document, and the choice of a trusty messenger.

"Would I could offer my services," said Torlogh; "but I must, even tonight, set forth for Londonderry; such are the king's commands."

The now familiar sound of the grating of the bars and bolts which secured the prison door, interrupted him. All eyes were turned anxiously toward the narrow portal; and to their mingled surprise and relief, Father O'Gara, the young priest whom we have had so often occasion to mention, entered the gloomy apartment.

The opportune appearance of this young man, in whom the old knight felt a degree of confidence, for which, even in the momentous conference which he had had with him before, he could scarcely find a warrant, seemed to his excited fancy like a providential solution of his present difficulties; and this impression was, perhaps, heightened and confirmed by the further coincidence, that Glindarragh Castle turned out to be the inmediate destination of their visiter. In accordance with the promise he had made Sir Hugh, when last they met in the Carbrie, the young priest had now sought an interview with him, previous to his departure from Dublin, to join the regiment (Torlogh O'Brien's) of which he had been appointed assistant-chaplain; and which, as the reader is aware, was now quartered in the hereditary mansion of the illfated knight of Glindarragh.

Here, then, was a messenger, in all particulars adapted to the mission. Secured against the violence of the peasant marauders, by that sacred character, which even the most reckless of the rapparees never failed to respect; and protected from the insolent interruptions of the soldiery, by his own demi-military office. Such advantages, backed by his frank offers of service, and by his already approved good will, in such an emergency easily overbalanced whatever scruples, under circumstances less urgent, might have suggested themselves to the mind of the old knight, and determined him finally to entrust to his execution this, to him, most momentous commission.

The task is imposed and undertaken, with full and accurate directions — with oft-repeated charges and instructions; and commissioned, moreover, with two letters for Percy Neville — one from Sir Hugh himself, the other from a correspondent in England — and which had reached the Carbrie by private hand, the young priest has taken his melancholy leave, and now rides slowly through the quaint streets of Dublin, toward the western suburbs. And now the rustling of green leaves, and the merry songs of small birds are around him; village smoke and lowly thatch rise softly into view, among dark tufted bushes; and rivers rush and glitter under thick shadows of stooping copsewood. He throws his eyes around him over the varied landscape, with a gush of silent joy and gratitude — and then, breaking from his happy reverie, with a half sigh, and remembering, perchance, the melancholy isolation which has outlawed him, as it were, from the free and happy sympathies of nature, he drops the bridle on his sober palfrey's neck — and with a saddened look, draws down the broad leaf of his slouching hat, and opening his silver-clasped breviary, reads his appointed pages, while his steed treads leisurely along.

Good priest, it would befit thee better to spur on — life and death are in the issue of thy mission — craft and villainy are plotting behind thee. Onward, onward, ere yet the pursuit begins.

The ways of virtue are the ways of wisdom, no less than the ways of pleasantness; and fraud, however craftily conducted, leads oftener than men will easily believe, to mere self-confusion, complication, and defeat. Many a time the wicked find themselves reduced to strive, in the *vain* attempt to obviate those very consequences, to produce which their best exertions were originally given. Many a man has seen, in his actual experience of life, hundreds of examples of this mysterious law of retribution which makes the very craft of the ungodly in which he glories, the instrument of his own abasement, turns all his wisdom into foolishness, and proves his fancied successes in reality, but so many reverses and disasters.

At about the same time, in a small, dark room, in Thomas Talbot's lodgings, that gentleman was closeted with Miles Garrett and his humble friend, Garvey.

"Then the matter, briefly told, is simply this," said Talbot, with gloomy bitterness; "our pains are all gone for nought — the land's not his; and, hang or drown, it's all one to us."

"Just so, your worship," rejoined Garvey, plaintively; "a life estate, with a limitation in tail to the issue of his body."

“I know — just so,” continued Talbot; “so that when the old gentleman is hanged, his estates go to the girl, instead of to the crown. S’death, what management! Well, Garrett,” he resumed, with dogged contempt, after a brief pause— “what have you to offer upon this dilemma — attaint the girl, eh? or something as profound and practicable.”

“How the devil could *I* tell there was a deed of settlement in the way?” retorted Garrett, with asperity; “there’s no good in blaming *me* for it.”— “ —

“Of course — but answer my question,” pursued Talbot; “come, come, can you darn the cobweb — or *is* all lost? One thing is clear — as the old fellow *is* attainted, his life estate at least is in the crown, and *that* is worth something. So, egad, we must not snuff him out — till we are sure of some advantage by his death, at least — as the matter stands, hanging him would but deprive us of the little we have got.”

“That’s plain enough,” said Garrett; “he is the sole life in our lease; so far from hanging the old dog we must needs make much of him — at least until this business is cleared up.”

“Suppose,” said Garvey, speaking very slowly, and with a leer of guilty cunning— “we could get at this unlucky deed; — and if *we* had it fast, what evidence could *they* adduce in support of such a settlement, so as to defeat the king’s claim: if that deed were in the fire, I’d snap my fingers at them, the sooner the old man was strung up the better, in such a case.”

The three confederates exchanged looks of excited significence. Talbot broke the silence —

“Can you maKe a guess in wnose keeping that instrument at present lies?” he inquired, earnestly.

‘‘No, not now — that is — not yet,” replied Garvey; “it is *not* in Crooke’s hands — and I can’t say at present where it is; but,” he added, with a smile of infernal triumph, which disclosed his gapped and discoloured teeth, from ear to ear; “b*ut* I am promised information, upon which we can rely implicitly — and tomorrow morning we shall know the very spot — the very *inch* which it occupies.”

“By — , then, the thing’s done,” cried Talbot, striking his hand upon the table.

“’Tis but to get a warrant to seize the papers on suspicion,” said Garrett, throwing himself back in his chair, while his contracted brow expanded with the delectable sense of relief — and in the luxury of..his sensations, he rubbed his hands together, as though he had been washing them.

"You could not learn tonight?" urged Talbot.

"Impossible — utterly impossible," replied Garvey, with an important shake of the head; "no, not for love or money; the least suspicion would blow all. I must watch my man, and take the time when eyes are off. Tomorrow morning, by eight o'clock, I shall know all about it — if Crooke himself knows it."

"Well, then, tomorrow morning be it," said Talbot, rising, thoughtfully; "the thing, however, must be done with some tact and caution. I don't care a fig, myself, for scandal; but here it might be dangerous; nothing venture, nothing win, however — so, in the devil's name, let it be tried. Mr. Garvey," continued Talbot, motioning him somewhat unceremoniously toward the door; "we shall expect to see you here, by eight of the clock, tomorrow morning — nay, no formalities, I pray you — good night — good night, sir — fare you well. If ever the devil had a dutiful drudge ou earth," he continued, addressing Garrett, as the descending tread of their humble accomplice was heard upon the stairs; "that sneaking rascal is one."

"He's a useful fellow in his way," said Garrett.

"Very," replied Talbot; but don't leave the handling of that deed to him; let him help you to select it, if you need his aid — but do the important part yourself — *yourself,* mind you — for that rascal might pocket the settlement, and keep it over our heads, afterwards, to extort money — so burn it yourself."

"Meanwhile," said Garrett, "you undertake to have the old man reprieved, lest this should fail."

"Certainly— 'tis but a word in my brother's ear," said Talbot; "but if you and Garvey do your business properly, he may hang as high as they please, by this day week."

CHAPTER XXXV.

TIM DWYER'S STORY.

ONCE more our story, in its wayward progress, carries us into the wild scenery of Munster, and among the personages we left there.

Under the grey walls of Glindarragh Castle, in the dewy twilight, sate three companions, in easy listlessness, smoking and chatting together luxuriously: old Con Donovan, Tim Dwyer, and the bilious Dick Goslin, now grown into inseperable comrades, upon the strength of the one grand sympathy — their common love of good liquor — conposed the party. Pleasant enough looked the little group, on that calm summer evening, seated under the grey shelter of the timeworn towers, with the river flowing cheerily beneath their feet, and the ivy clusters rustling around them.

The conversation had turned upon the marvellous, perhaps acquiring its solemn complexion from the closing shadows of night.

"I never seen a banshee myself," said Tim Dwyer, stealing an upward glance at the old tower which sheltered them, and at the same time interrupting a thrilling silence which had followed the tale just concluded by the venerable butler; "an' with the help iv God I hope I never will, though my grandmother's aunt — rest her soul — at the time whin ould Peg O'Neil died — that was the publican's motherin-law — heerd it the whole night long, keenin' and crying on the top iv the house, jist for all the world like a pair iv cats id be tarin' the puddins out iv one another — the crass iv Christ about us."

"Ay, ay," said the butler, solemnly, shaking his head, "that's the way with them, one time singing, an' another time crying — sometimes like one thing, and sometimes like another."

"No being up to them — no being up to them," threw in Goslin, gloomily; "but we've no sich things in England," he added, briskly.

"Nor no witches nor sperits neither — I suppose, no more nor toads an' sarpints, as I said before," said Tim Dwyer, with careless sarcasm, and a nudge to the butler.

“There’s witches in more places nor England, and there’s no location but what has ghostesses, more or less,” retorted Goslin.

“There’s more sperits heerd tell of, than seen,” said Dwyer, over whom a sense of uneasiness and awe was gradually stealing; “I’ll tell you a story iv a whole parish that was freckened beyant all tellin’ — an’ bad luck to the sperit was in it, good or bad, afther all.”

Accordingly Tim having readjusted the disposition of his limbs for greater ease, and wound himself up for an effort of recollection, proceeded in these terms: —

“It was in the little village iv Ballymaquinlan it happened, about twinty years ago, last Candlemass; in thim times there was a farmer livin’ there, an’ his name was Paddy Morgan, an’ by the same token, black Paddy was the name they christened an him, for he was a rale nigger, an’ a bad mimber all out — an’ there was not a respickable man in the parish, barrin’ three white rabbits he kep’ in a wire cage, along with the rest iv the poultry, in the backyard, id be seen spakin’ to him, an’ no wondher; but *thim* was aneommon fond iv him surely, an’ to that degree it was comminly consaved among the neighbours, that it wasn’t rabbits at all, God bless us, but the sperits iv his three brothers that was in it; but at any rate, in the middle iv all his divilment, he tuck the fever at last, on Monday mornin’, an’ before Thursday he was in glory, an’ the divil a one could deny he desarved it — the villian iv the world. Well, he was buried, in coorse, in the churchyard iv Ballymaquinlan, an’ though he had but few relations, an’ no friends, the wake and the berrin’ was as plisant as if he had them to no end. Well, there was two boys in them days livin’ in the town, an’ divil sich a pair iv rogues was in the seven parishes; there was no soart or description iv schamin’, an’ plundherin’, an’ humbuggin’, but they wor up to it. Nothin’ was beyant them; begorra there wasn’t the likes iv them in Ireland’s ground — an’ they were sworn frinds into the bargain — an’ comrades together, in all soarts of villiany. Whatever the one was for, the other never said agin’ it. Larry, the miller, that ownded the flour mills, was one it them, and sportin’ Terence, the dancin’-master, was th’ other; a rala pair iv schamers. Well, it happened on the night afther black Paddy Morgan was buried, the two iv them had a plan laid out together. Yor sportin’ Terence having a cousin by the mother’s side, that was goin’ to give a christenin’, an’ she bein’ a favorite iv his own, he thought he could not do less than to give her a present — so, havin’ nothin' else iv his own convanient at the time, he thought the best thing he could do, was jist to give her one iv the neighbour's sheep; an' when he tould Larry, the miller, 'begorra,' says Larry, for he was a ginerous chap too, 'begorra,' says he, 'I don't mind if I give her black Paddy's three white rabbits into the bargain,' says he, an' so, without more to do, they planned to meet at the church door, where there was a little soart IV a shed goin' in, as soon as the sheep and the rabbits id be stole that night. Well, sure enough, Larry the miller, not having so far to go, nor such a troublesome job as sportin' Terence, was the first iv the two at the place iv meetin', an' down he sits an the bench, an' claps the cage with the rabbits in it, on the ground close *opposite* to where he was sittin, while he'd be takin' a shough iv the pipe.

"Well, he was not there long, when vrho should be cornin' up to the church, to get out the cushions as usual, to give them an air iv the fire, but the sexton, Tim Bryan, himself, thinkin' all the way iv nothin' in the world but black Paddy Morgan, that he buried the same mornin', an' thrimblin' in his very skin every step — an' as he was cornin' up to the porch, sure enough, what did he see, but black Paddy's three white rabbits in the cage, right at the step iv it, skippin' an' jumpin about like mad; so wid that he stops short, an' he blesses himself as well as he could — an' before he half finished it, Larry, never thinkin' but all was quiet outside, lets a yawn inside, in the porch — and the sound he made, and the white look iv him — for he was dusted all over with flour — finished poor Tim all out intirely — to that degree, that begorra he tuk to his heels, as if the divil himself was after him; an' never tuk time to say as much as God bless us, till he run fairly into little Phil Martin's kitchen. Well, Phil was the clerk in their, days, an' an illegant fine one he was — a rale great man iv book larnin': he'd talk algibray or Habrew-Greek for a week, without wonst drawin' breath — an' he had Latin enough to bother a priest — an' as many charrums as id rise the roof aff a chapel. The only thing agin him, at all, at all, was a soart iv a stutther he had, an' his legs bein' crippled in undher him — although that same got Him a power iv help an' presents, one way or another, among the neighbours; but at any rate he was a great man iv book larnin' entirely; an' as soon as Tim the sexton kem to himself, 'oh, Phil,' says he, 'it's all over wid me — I seen himself,' says he, 'as sure as you're sittin' there — black Paddy Morgan, God rest his unforthunate sowl,' says he, 'roarin' like mad wid the fair pains' iv purgathory. Oh, by the hokey,' says he, 'the sound iv it's in my head this minute, sittin' in his windin' sheet, in the church porch,' says he; 'nothin' less id sarve him, an' the three white rabbits an' all,' says he. 'Oh, Phil darlin', I never gev in to sperits before,' says he, 'but I seen one at last, in airnest,' says he— 'an' I'll never do a day's good again — an' that's the long and the short iv it," says he.

"'Timothy Bryan,' says the clerk, says he, 'you betther take care what you're sayin,' says he, 'for it's a sarious thing to accuse any man,' says he, 'at laste behind his back, do ye mind, iv walkin' after he's dacently buried,' says he; 'so considher in yourself, again', says he, 'an think twiste before you make such a hanious charge agin any man livin,'' says he.

"Well, wid that, Tim Bryan cursed his sowl and his conscience, antil he was fairly black in the face — and Phil Martin hadn't a word to say agin it any longer.

"'So,' says Phil, says he, 'it astanishes me,' says he, 'you didn't thry him wid the Lord's Prayer backwards,' says he, 'standin' on the left leg,' says he — 'for there never was a sperit yet,' says he, 'could stand *that,* as simple as it is,' says he.

"' Arra God bless you,' says Tim, for he was gettin' vexed on the head iv it; 'an' what id the sperit be doin' while I'd be sayin' the Lord's Prayer, like a duck on one leg, backwards,' says he; 'why, man he'd have me swallied, body and bones, before I'd be half way through with it,' says he.

"'Why, you misherable infiddle,' says Phil, makin' answer; 'what is it you'd be afeard iv; swally ye, ye bosthoon, ye — begorra, I'd like to see him attimpt the like. Who ever heard iv a sperit that id dar for to go for to ate a Christian, barrin Joe Garvey, the tinker, God bless us,' says he, 'that tuk a collip out iv the priest's boy,' says he.

"'An' the ghost iv Moll Doyle's black sow,' says Tim, says he, 'the Lord be marciful to us all.'

"'There was that, surely,' says Phil, settlin' his wig — but there's no one will ever pursuade me,' says he, 'that ever a sperit id dar to put a tooth in a sexton, or any other anointed ministher iv divine sarvice,' says he, 'an' in holy ground, more be token,' says he; 'an' be the hokey, it surprises me,' says he, 'you'd be sich a coward and a pagan,' says he, as to be afeared iv the likes in your own church, Tim Bryan,' says he.

"'An' what'll I do at all?' says Tim.

"'Lay it, to be sure,' says Phil; 'lay it on the spot — lay it, what else?' says he. 'Be the powers of Moll — I mane be the contints iv that book,' says he, 'aff I had but the use iv my limbs, I'd walk down myself, this instant minute,' says he, 'an' lay it in airnest, before he'd have time to spit on the flure,' says he.

"'Never say it twiste,' says Tim Bryan, takin' him up an the word; 'for I'll carry you down on my back, myself,' says he; 'for iv you're not afeard, neither am I,' says he; 'I've nothin' an' my conscience, its aisy, thank God,' says he; 'so up wid you on my shoulders,' says he, 'an' we'll soon see who is the coward,' says he.

"Well, begorra, as soon as he heerd that, Phil Martin turned the colour iv a bad pittayty — savin' your presence — with the rale fright; but he would not lave it to the sexton to say he was afeard to go along wid him, afther all he said an the head iv it; so, be the powers, havin' nothin' for it but to see the job through, wid a heavy heart up he gets an Tim's back, an off wid the pair of them to the church. There was nothin' but starlight, an' the ould church looked twiste as big an' as black as ever *opposite* them, and divil a one word they said antil they kem within seven or eight steps of the porch, an', begorra, *there* was the three white rabbits, sure enough; an' they could just see them, an hear the wires jinglin' when they'd hop here and there in the cage.

"'Stop — be aisy, can't you,' says Phil, sittin' up an his back, an' diggin' his heels into Tim's breast bone like dhrumsticks, with the rale fright, all the while— 'stop where you are, man, we're near enough I tell ye.'

"So wid that Tim stops where he was, an' they both wor freckened to that degree, they neither iv them spoke one word for as good as a minute, but starin' the three rabits for the bare life. At last says Phil Martin, says he, dhrippin' down all the time wid the fair fright— 'Tim,' says he, 'thry an' stand an the left leg,' says he, 'as well as you can,' says he; 'for it won't take an operation,' says he, 'anless you do it; for I'm goin' to begin at wanst, God bless us an'save us, savs he; 'an' keep steady, you villain,' says he, 'or I'll murther you; for if you fall, as sure as you do, be the powers, we're both done for,' says he.

"So wid that Tim Bryan claps his elbow to the churchyard wall beside him, studdying himself as well as he was able, an' he ups wid his left leg, like a gandher asleep; an' seein' every thing was ready, Phil Martin —

givin' himself up for lost — opens, as well as the fright id let him, wid the Lord's prayer backwards. Well, begorra, he made sich a noise, that he was not half way through wid it when Larry the miller, that was half asleep inside iv the porch, rises himself up, thinkin' it was his comrade callin' him; so up he gets, an' out he walks, an' seein' the man wid the bundle an his back, av coorse who should he think it was but his friend the dancin' masther, wid the sheep an his shouldhers. Well, when the sexton, wid the clerk an his back, seen the white thing cornin' out iv the porch, an' makin' for them, the pair iv them a'most lost their sinses an the spot. The sexton stood gapin an his two legs, an' the divil a word the clerk could spake, but wid the fright he gripped the hair iv Tim Bryan's head wid both his hands, an' held an for the bare life. 'Is he fat,' says the miller, whisperin', an' cornin' towards them, still consaivin' it was the sheep that was in it.

"'Fat or lain,' says the sexton, gettin' back his speech an the instant, with the fair desperation, for he was freckened beyant all bearin'; 'fat or lain,' says he, screechin' it out with the rale fright— 'take him as he is,' says he, pitchin' the cripple right before him into the path, an' away wid himself through the town like the wind, as hard as he could peg, net darin' as much as to look behind him; but the quarest thing about it was the cripple himself; for, bedad, he was hardly an the ground when up he jumps an his legs as nimble as if he never lost the use iv them for a day, an' away wid him afther the sexton, roarin' as if the life was lavin' him. But, Tim, the sexton had a long start av him; an', bein' in good wind, he he never tuck time as much as to say 'God bless us!' until he was into his own house, an' the door shut behind him; an' devil a word he could say, good, had, or indifferent — walkin' up an' down the kitchin', wid the hat off his head, and scarce a taste iv the hair left in it, afther the wisp Phil Martin pulled out iv him; but, oh, Phil Martin! Phil Martin! the Lord have marcy on your sinful sowl — not ate a sexton! — wouldn't he? Oh, bloody wars! it is not a sexton, sure enough, but the best clerk in Ireland's ground he has in his belly by this time,' says he.

"'An' what's wrong wid Phil Martin?' says his wife, Kit Bryan, sharp enough— 'what's wrong with him, I am axin'?' says she, fairly bothered with the way he was goin' an, prayin' an' blessin' up an' down the place, all as one as a fool or a ministher: 'what is it ails him,' save she, 'at all, at all, you bosthoon, you?'

“‘The divil has him at last,’ says he— ‘that’s alL

“‘The divil?’ says she.

“‘Ay, the divil himself! *in propria quæ maribus.* Are you deaf?’ says he. ‘Oh, murdher! murdher! will I never be quit iv misfortunes? says he. ‘Why in the world couldn’t I let the boy alone?’ says he.

What kem over me at all, at all, to ax him to get up an my back?’ says he. ‘What put it into my head ever to think iv the likes *V* says he. ‘I have the loss iv his sinful sowl on me now/ says he; ‘an’ Ins sperit’ill be afther me every hour iv the night,’ says he, ‘as long as I’m alive; an’ I won’t say agin it, but I desarve the likes,’ says he; ‘for I’ll never deny but I was guilty iv a dirty turn — bad luck to myself!’ says he; ‘for I never was done before. His sperit ‘ill be afther me, I tell ye, night an’ mornin’, wherever I go,’ says he.

“An’ just with them words, Phil Martin himself pushes in the door, as white as a sheet, an’ in wid him into the middle iv them.

“‘The sperit!’ says Tim, lettin’ a roar you’d hear half a mile away, an’ leapin’ up an the table, wid his face to the wall: ‘the sperit!’ says he. ‘Didn’t I tell you? We’re done for!’ says he, ‘every mother’s son iv us.’

“An’ begorra, when Phil the cripple hears that, thinkin’ the sperit was behind himself, he runs right through the kitchen like a mad bull, and never stops to look round, but into the bedroom he boults, an’ into the bed wid him, head foremost, an’ before you’d have time to wink an eye, he had himself rowled up, in a ball, in the bedclothes; an’ out runs the family, screechin’ like mad; an’, the more they screeched, the tighter Phil rowled himself round in the clothes, until he rowled fairly off the bed, right into the washing tub, and stuck in it fast, in a ball, antil he was tuck up an hour afther, wid scarce any breath or sinses left in his body.

“Well, all the time the clerk an’ the sexton was runnin’ away, Larry the miller was just as much freckened as themselves; for nothin’ id persuade him but what it was the divil himself he seen carryin’ away black Paddy Morgan, body an’ bones, an his back; and what put it beya it all doubts wid him, was the way the clerk kept screechin’ every step he run.

“The divil has me,’ he’d roar out iv him, an’

‘oh, murdher, the devil has hould iv me fast,’ an’ such other violent injections an’ expressions all the way. ‘Tare an owns,’ says the miller, turnin’ could all over him, ‘I’ll never be the betther iv that the longest day I have to live,’ says he, ‘it’s a rale lesson to sinners iv all soarts. God bless us,' says he, 'it's amosttuck the sinses out iv me,' says he, crassin' himself, 'an' I hope I'll have grace to mend my ways an' take warnin' by what I seen an' heerd this blessed night,' says he. 'Bad luck to them rabbits,' says he, rising the cage wid one kick, 'they're throublin' my canscience,' says he, 'and I'd give the hat off my head I never stole one iv them,' says he; 'but begorra, there's no use in frettin about it now,' says he, 'for there's no way iv preventin' the past barrin' confession alone,' says he, 'an' I'll go to Father Murphy this blessed minute,' says he, 'an I'll tell him what I seen an' heerd; though, begorra, it's a bad case, I'm afeard,' says he, 'an' a bad way things is in wid you, Paddy Morgan, you unfortunate sinner,' says he, 'an''ill take the divil's sthrong allowance iv masses all out; but don't give in,' says he, 'for if any one's up to the thricks of the divil it's the clargy, God reward them,' says he.

"So wid that he med the best iv his way to Father Murphy's' blessin' himself every second step he took, an' afther his raverence heard it all, "'Are you sure,' says he, 'they went clane out iv the cliurch-yard?' says he, "I am, your raverence,' says he.

"'Take care what you say, you bliggard,' says his raverence,'

'for you'll never have a day's luck iv you desave your clargy,' says he, 'an I ax you again, you villian, are you sure an' sartin they went out iv the churchyard, both iv them, quite an' clane?' says he.

"'Sure an' sartin as I am standin' here, your raverence,' says the miller, 'didn't I see them as plain as I see you *V* says he, 'an' didn't I hear him screechin' murdher the whole way through the town?'

"'Well, then,' says his raverence, turnin' to the mass boy he had wid him, 'get the things ready,' says he, 'for it's only my duty to do what I can for his poor wandherin' soul,' says he, 'and if the family chooses to consider my throuble,' says he, 'it'ill be all the betther for themselves hereafter when they are in a siœiliar situation; as we must all iv us come to it, airly or late,' says he.

"Well, whin all was ready, sure enough himself an' his sarvint, an' the mass-boy, wid holy wather an' all soarts, an' two blessed candles, an' the priest's robes, an' everything complate, an' Larry the miller along wid them to show them the place where it happened, an' a tindher-box to light the candles — God bless us — an' the mass-boy's dhress on him, an' the prayer-books, an' all; so Larry bein' afeard to go into the churchyard agin, stopped outside, an’ his raverence an’ all the rest iv them lights the candles and rises the prayers, though begorra there was not one iv them but was wishin’ it was fairly over; so into the porch with them, sliakin’ an’ trimblin,’ with the candles, an’ all; an’ they wor blessin’ in Latin, an’ sprinklin’ their (vather, av coorse, an everything before them, when who should come quietly round but sportin’ Terence, the dancin’ masther, with a murdherin’ fat sheep on his back, thinkin’ to find his comrade an’ the rabbits in the porch, where they were all to meet; but when he seen the light, and heerd the quare sounds goin’ an’ inside, in spite is all he could do, the thoughts iv black Paddy Morgan kem into his head; but he would not let an; an’ says he to himself, ‘It’s only that schamin’ Larry,’ says he, ‘that’s thinkin’ to frighten me — the bliggard,’ says he.

“Well, while he was cornin’ an quite an easy— ‘baah,’ says the sheep on his back:

“‘Did yez hear nothin’ outside,’ says his raverence, turnin’ the colour iv a scalded pig, an’ stoppin’ in the middle iv the prayer; ‘did yez or no, ye villians — did yez hear it — yes or no,’ says he.

“‘Ba-a-ah,’ says the sheep, again, twiste as loud as before.

“‘Oh, bloody wars! I mane holy Saint Christipher!’ says the priest, says he, ‘what is it at all, at all; did not that thevin’ bliggard, Larry the miller tell us, God bless us, it was gone complately out iv the churchyards, sweet bad luck to him — the villian, an’ here it is as sthrong as a bull — all as one — and we jammed up in this little bit iv a corner, wid no where to run to — bad luck — I mane God bless us all,’ says he.

“‘Ba-a-ah,’ says the sheep again.

“‘Holy Virgin, Saint Anthony, an’ Nebechadnaser,’ says the priest, tumblin’ his robe over his head wid the foosther he was in, ‘is there no way out iv this, right or left, up or down, iv any soart, body or sowl,’ says he, dhrivin’ himself agin’ the church door, thinking to have a run through the aisle, an’ a jump through the windy for his life; down goes the sarvint boy on his hunkers, an’ the little mass boy a top iv him. Ba-a-ah goes the sheep again; an’

‘holy Saint Jupether — Saint Bridget assist us,’ says the priest, an’ wid that up walks Terence, not knowin’ what in the world was the matter, an’ right into the front iv the porch wid him. Well, when his raverence seen him wid the white thing bundled up on his shoulders, he lets one roar like a dying pig, an' he flings the candle right into Terence's eye; an' begorra Terence himself wasn't one taste betther, for the minute he seen the priest, before ever his raverence had time to fling the candle — with all his robes, and the little boy dhressed out — an' all the rest iv the coothriments — he lets one bawl out iv him, you'd hear over Kilworth mountain, wid the rale madness iv fright. 'It's black Paddy Morgan himself says he, flingin' the sheep head foremost among them, an' cuttin' acrass the yard, an' over the wall like a greyhound. 'Take him wid you,' says the priest, jumpin' back, an' knockin' down the little mass boy, an' puttin' out the light wid the boult he made— 'take him wid you in God's name,' says he, 'to hell, or anywhere else out iv this an' makin a charge in rale desperation, his raverance jumped right over the sheep, as clane as a slitther, an' never stopped runnin' until he got home — no one ever knew how — more dead than alive; an' begorra, he tuck to his bed, an' wasn't the better iv it for a full year; an' the end iv the whole iv it was, there was no less than seven indiveedials that was ready to sware, next mornin', they seen the divil — God bless us — or the ghost iv black Paddy — or the two iv them together; an' there was so many ins an' outs in the story, that it bothered the whole kit iv them to make head *or* tail iv it, for a good five months afther the fair iv Ballymaquinlan an' in the mane time, the miller changed his coorses, and tuk te mass an' good company, an' all other soarts iv mortification; an next mornin' his raverince sint the coadjuthor with a half pint of holt-wather to complate the job, as he said himself; an' so, Misther Gosliis, you see to a monstheration, be the mains iv this story, that it's oftentimes there's a power iv good fright goes for nothin' — and a dale more holy wather scatthered, than there's quite occasion for; an' take warnin' by Larry the miller, an' don't be frightened out iv your fun, nor runnin' blindfold into dacency an' religion, before you know the rason why.'" As Tim Dwyer concluded his story, which has, perhaps, too long interrupted ours, the shadows of night were stealing fast over the landscape; and yielding with prompt goodwill to Con Donovan's suggestion, "to be thinkin' about supper," the little party had soon effected a comfortable retreat within the castle walls.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE FORGET-ME-NOT.

THE moon shone gloriously from the soft summer clouds, and silvered the woods and towers of Glindarragh, as Percy Neville, overtaken by the nightfall in his ramble, found himself once more under the shadow of the oaks and thorns. The presence of the king's soldiers in the castle, however in other respects undesirable, was attended at least with this good result — that no predatory invasion was any longer to be apprehended from the wild peasantry; and thus the ancient mansion and its surrounding woods were now as secure and peaceful as in the happiest times of civil quiet.

As the young invalid slowly approached the bridge of Glindarragh, he heard upon the sequestered bye-road which debouched at its extremity, the rapid tread of a horse's hoof; and pausing by the battlement, he saw beneath the stooping boughs, the advancing form of a horseman.

"God save you, sir," said the cavalier, gravely drawing up upon the bridge, beside the young gentleman, and raising his hat with a formal salutation— "I bear with me some letters for the castle — and some, if I mistake not, intended for your own hand; may I ask your name? Even as I suspected," continued O'Gara, his question answered— "I have two letters addressed to you."

Percy Neville, with a courteous acknowledgment, took the letters which the young priest extended toward him, and, leaning against the battlement of the bridge, as the horseman rode up the steep ascent to the castle gate, he read their contents in the bright moonlight. Sir Hugh's letter was a hurried one, and intentionally made light of his own present difficulties. In the belief, therefore, that the old knight was undergoing no more than the inconvenient formalities of a temporary confinement, the young gentleman, without much anxiety, passed on to the next. This was from his father, Sir Thomas Neville; one passage from it we shall quote; it was couched in the following terms: —

“On receipt of these, it is my pleasure you shall set forth from Glindarragh, and crossing the Shannon into Clare, by which course you will be less like to meet interruption, than were you to take the long road through Dublin; so to pass on for Antrim in the north, where I shall expect your arrival, as doth my honoured friend, Sir John Campbel. You can get a protection from any general officer; but, as Sir John is known to be a Whig, you had best not mention your exact destination. It is now high time you were settled in life. I have let my cousin Hugh know my opinion of his weakness in suffering a wilful young hussey to disappoint both him and me. Mayhap, however, it is better so. I have at present in view such an alliance as will be, in point of rank, more honourable, and no less desirable in the matter of wealth; but I will more fully unfold my purpose when he had accosted her before. “We have read the petition, young lady.” a fortnight.”

There was nothing in this letter, one might have thought, to make the young man particularly sorrowful; and yet he was very pensive and melancholy, as he folded it again. He leaned over the mossgrown parapet, and looked sadly down upon the chafing stream, and then up again upon the broad sailing disc of the summer moon.

“And so, and so, all is ended,” he said, in regretful meditation; “all her innocent, pretty ways — her simple kindness — the chance meetings that gave such a charm to every day — all gone and over for me. Am I never to see her again — tier light step, her beautiful smile — shall I hear her voice no more, the sweetest, the softest?”

He paused abruptly, and a pang of grief and loneliness more bitter than he had felt for many a year, wrung his heart; and if the truth must e’en be told, it needed the whole force of all his stoicism to restrain the tears from starting. With a bitter effort, however, he mastered the weakness which threatened to unman him.

“I little dreamed,” he said, “the thought of leaving her would cost me grief like this. She little thinks it either — she, who never cast away a thought on me, save in simple kindness — she will forget me, as lightly as she would the chance traveller, whom her bounty had relieved; and I — I must forget her too — I will forget her — if I may — And yet,” he resumed bitterly, after a pause— “it is, perchance, better thus — better to part thus early, and while it is yet possible, than to wait on, and break my heart. Only to think on it — sure never did dream steal away the senses like this — never did dream work such sweet and sorrowful magic. From the moment when I saw her first, in that old orchard, which Hove, and always will for her sake — when I saw her standing there, in her simple, sad, exquisite beauty, a spell was on me, which I had — which I *have* — no power to break — a spell which will enchain me, heart and soul, for ever. And then to think — oh, God! is it not bitter — that *I,* loving her thus — ay, *loving,* loving her to madness — that I can never tell her this — that she can never know it. Pride, pride, pride — accursed pride," he said, with the vehemence of anguish, as with a slight but expressive gesture, he struck the folded letter, which he still held in his hand, upon the battlement of the bridge— "pride, parental pride, commands me to be silent — forbids me to woo to an honourable alliance, this most noble and beautiful creature — this being whom I love so fondly, so unutterably, because, alas! she is humble in fortune and in birth. And therefore must I, with all my store of love and adoration untold, part from her silently — never, most like, in all the wayward paths of life to meet her more.

But then," he resumed, "she cares not for me — that is, beyond mere simple kindness — she knows nought of the love I bear her. I, myself scarce knew it until now. To her this parting will be but so many last words, and one last look — to *me,* a struggle that wrings the very heart. But that avails not: were I to plead and pray, with all the fond love of my heart, 'tis more than likely she would refuse to hear me. I cannot now bethink me I ever marked *that,* in her words or looks, which could show me that she liked me; wherefore, then, say more? Better to part thus, and at once, than strive to involve her in the fate of one whom misfortune would thenceforward mark for its own — dependant upon the pleasure of an ambitious and imperious father. Ay, ay, 'tis better as it is: pride, you have triumphed," and as he spoke, he crushed the letter in his clenched hand. "Yes," he pursued; "it will need much stoicism — a sore effort; but I shall not be wanting to myself — I shall leave this place tomorrow — I shall leave it early, and without seeing her — I shall avoid the possibility of seeing her — I am resolved there shall be no leavetaking."

He had hardly uttered this doughty resolution, when he heard a light footfall approaching the bridge. The little sound smote heavy on his heart

— a thousand thousand remembrances and feelings rose at its tiny summons — and in an instant all his resolves were obliterated and gone. There she came, indeed, alone — descending the steep road at the far bridge foot, her light cloak drawn about her, and her little shoebuckles glittering at every step in the moonlight. So, after all, they were to meet before he left the old castle — and under the screen of the wild thorn, whose roots were knotted in the buttress of the bridge, and beneath the soft and melancholy radiance of the moon, Percy Neville and the simple country beauty stood together, in another minute, upon the lonely road.

"Whither are you going, my pretty Phebe?" asked Percy Neville, with a melancholy smile.

"I am going down to Nurse Eileen's, sir," she answered, gently.

"Nurse Eileen — the good old woman who nursed *you,* my pretty Phebe," he continued in the same tone; "I feel fond of the old nurse, myself — though, in truth, I could scarce tell why, unless it be, mayhap, because she loves you so well."

The girl looked with sweet embarrassment in his face — and then turned her glance downward upon the chafing river.

"And where does nurse Eileen live?" asked he, willing to prolong this chance interview.

"In the old Abbey Mill, sir," answered she, again raising her soft, dark, melancholy eyes, "on the border of the wood, by the river bank; it was the knight — Sir Hugh — that made it up for her — God bless him — and put her there."

"I know it — a pretty, small, thatched house, by the river side, among the oaks. She is very happy there, I dare say," he pursued,' with a sigh. "You and she are very happy together."

She looked up into his face with one of her own sad, beautiful smiles, but marking the singularly melancholy expression which reigned there,' the smile with all the eloquence of its modest dimples, gave place to a look of sorrow, and almost of pain — and turning her eyes pensively away, she plucked from among the moss which covered the old battlement, one of the little blue weeds that nodded there; it chanced to be that wild flower to which poets and lovers have given the name of "forget-me-not."

"Give me that little flower," he said, very sorrowfully and tenderly, after he had watched her small fingers playing with its slender stem, for some minutes. “They call it a ‘forget-me-not,’ and if *you* give it, ‘twill, indeed, prove one to me; give it to me — pretty Phebe — and it will remind me of this spot, and this hour — when I am far away — and, perchance, when years are past and gone.”

With a mournful smile of perfect innocence and modesty, she held the little flower toward him. He took it, and he took her hand.

“We have been very good friends — have we not? — since I came here, my pretty Phebe,” he continued in the same mournful tone— “we have been good friends all that time, and so you must not take away your hand from me, for a few short minutes now; for this is, perchance, the last time in my life I shall ever see and speak with you, my kind little friend — my pretty Phebe.”

In the moonlight, he thought, he saw her colour change as he said this. She did not speak, however, but lowered her head a little, as if to adjust her cloak, and he plainly felt the little hand he held tremble in his own.

“Does she love me — does she really love me?” thought he, as he gazed passionately upon the beautiful girl.

“Phebe,” he continued, after more than a minute had passed in silence, “my pretty Phebe, when I am gone away, as I shall be tomorrow — will you sometimes think of me — will you remember poor Percy Neville.”

She strove to smile, she tried to speak, but she could not; it was all in vain; the fountains of her full heart were unlocked — the unavailing struggle was over — and she wept in all the abandonment of desolate and bitter grief.

In an instant every colder thought and remembrance vanished from his mind. Warm, generous, fervent, as ever flowed from a lover’s -full heart, the words of passion, devotion, adoration, pledged him for ever to the weeping girl. What recked he of consequences; what cared he for the difficulties of the distant future. She loved him — loved him truly; he would not — he *could* not give her up.

What boots it to follow this scene of passionate romance through all its length. They parted, then, beneath that wild-thorn tree, pledged and promised one to the other, through every chance and change of life.

CHAPTER XXXVII,

THE PARCHMENT.

WEARY after a day of tedious travel, O'Gara entered the old castleyard, as we have described, and fully impressed with the importance of his mission, hastened, spite of his fatigue, to acquit himself of his momentous undertaking. In compliance with Sir Hugh's minute directions, he selected, as his bed chamber, the old knight's apartment, which, as we have mentioned in an early chapter of this book, was situated in one of the projecting towers, overhanging the river; he at his leisure rummaged the dusty papers and parchments which filled the old press in the antechamber — and, at length, to his infinite satisfaction, discovered the identical deed of settlement — the precious document of which he was in search.

It is necessary to be somewhat particular in detailing his proceedings, inasmuch as he was that night destined to experience an adventure, whose consequences exerted an important influence upon the subsequent events of our history.

Having ascertained by an accurate scrutiny, the identity of the deed he had selected, as the actual document of which he was in search — he sate down before a roaring fire of turf and bogwood, in what we have called the antechamber or dressing room, through which his bedchamber was reached, and then enjoyed at his leisure, such substantial refection as his jaded condition demanded. His supper ended, fatigue began to weigh his eyelids down, and leaving the door of communication open, lie placed his loaded pistols upon the table where he had supped, and for greater security, brought the parchment itself with him into his bedchamber, and laid it safely under his pillow, upon which his own weary head was soon pressed in dreamless slumber.

He might have slept for some hours, when he became conscious, though without thoroughly awaking, that some one was cautiously moving about his bedroom, with a candle, and stealthily moving the furniture and searching among his clothes; but the sense of fatigue was so overpowering, that, although he actually opened his eyes, and saw the light shifting, and the distended shadow of a human form gliding upon the wall, he had no distinct consciousness of anything sufficiently extraordinary in the circumstance, to warrant his interfering — and wanted energy to arouse himself so far as to call out and speak to the intruder. Thus it was that once or twice he was thus partially awakened, and again relapsed into the overpowering forgetfulness of sleep; before, upon one of those occasions of temporary consciousness, he distinctly saw the face of an ugly, sinister-looking man, glide close by the curtains of his bed; the face seemed travelsoiled, anxious, and villainous, and was stooped down, under the light of the candle, as if peering in cautious search after something; there was that in the features, momentary as was the glimpse which he had obtained of them, which suggested to his mind some association of remembered outrage and danger, with such sudden and painful power, that in an instant he felt himself thoroughly aroused.

“Who’s there?” cried the young priest, in a tone of sudden alarm.

There was no reply whatever, but instantaneously the candle was extinguished. O’Gara, however, thought he could distinctly hear the sound of a cautious retreat in the outer room; and without an instant’s hesitation, except so much as was necessary to feel the parchment under the pillow, he sprang from his bed, and followed the sounds. As he entered at the door communicating with his bed room, he saw, indeed, clearly enough a retreating form skulking in a stooping posture from the outer room.

He stretched his hand instantly to the table for his pistols, but the fire light showed him that they were gone; his visiter had taken the precaution to remove them — a sufficiently unequivocal evidence of a sinister purpose. Glad that the intruder had, at all events, relieved the apartment of his presence, O’Gara followed to the outer door, looked forth upon the passage, and hearing nothing, contented himself with shutting the door, and turning the key in the lock upon the inside.

For some time after his return to bed, he was kept awake by uneasy conjectures and speculations as to the purpose of the visit which had thus disturbed him; and no less so by the fruitless endeavour to recall the time or the season or any of the attendant circumstances in which the countenance, somewhere and somehow unquestionably seen before, had first been presented to him. But gradually the soothing rush of the waters, seconded by the fatigues of his journey, prevailed over every more exciting influence, and he once again sank into profound repose.

Perhaps it was that the agitating occurrence which we have just described made O'Gara's after-slumbers lighter and more easily disturbed; but certain it is that he was wakened on a sudden by a slight rustling at the side of the bed, and distinctly heard a soft step crossing the floor of his chamber, toward the outer room, and at the same moment a very low knocking, like a tapping with the nails, at the outside door. His first instinct, as before, was to thrust his hand beneath his pillow. Good God! the parchment was gone! In an instant he was upon the floor; and just as he entered the antechamber, he saw, in the imperfect fire light, the squat, sinister figure which had appeared by his bedside, and so unpleasantly occupied his drowsy fancy, reach the chamber door, and turning the key hurriedly in the lock, exclaim, in a harsh screech —

"Found, by — . I have it — I have it."

Straight at this hideous thief the young priest darted, heedless of all consequences. The villain did not wait to open the door, and make his escape upon the passage; but leaving it vacant for the entrance of his accomplice, he ran round the room, screaming "help!" and pursued by O'Gara in his shirt. A tall, powerful form, however, now bolted into the room, and joining in the scramble, clutched the unarmed priest around the waist in his iron gripe, so tight that he scarce had room to breathe; and exclaimed in a piercing whisper —

"Now, now, Garvey — now, you idiot; now, into the fire with it. Well done; grind your heel on it; roll the red fire over it. Well done, boy. Never fear, I have him fast."

As he thus reiterated his directions, the half suffocated and helpless priest, to his unutterable agony, beheld the ugly familiar execute his orders to the letter. The parchment shriveled, smoked, and smouldered; and at last he saw Garvey's foot grind its very ashes into powder.

"There now," growled Garrett, relieving the struggling priest with a rude shove, "our business here is done; so if you'll take a fool's counsel, you'll just get back again into your bed, which, by the way you'd have done wisely not to have left at all."

"You have done a foul wrong, Mr. Garrett," said the priest, indignantly. "That caitiff there has stolen the paper from under my head, as I slept, and by your direction destroyed it. The mischief is, I fear, irreparable; but it must be answered for."

"Get to your bed, I tell you," retorted Garrett, menacingly: "you are too fond, by half, of meddling in other men's intrigues; beware, or you'll burn your fingers at last. You have come in my way once or twice already — be prudent, and seek not to thwart me again."

"I seek to thwart no man in the pursuit of his lawful business or pleasure," replied O'Gara; "but I will not submit to be robbed, and to see the property entrusted to my care, destroyed, without remonstrance and complaint, where both will be attended to."

"What I have done, I have warrant for," retorted Garrett, doggedly; "I am armed with authority to search here for papers — to seize such as I please, and deal with them at my discretion; and thus much I will tell you, my worthy sir, there is enough in my possession to mark you for suspicion; do you hear, to involve you in correspondence with convicted traitors — so if you be wise, you will stir as little as need be at present. Above all, forbear offending those, who, if provoked, may prove themselves possessed alike, of the will and the power to punish you."

Having thus spoken, with a threatening shake of the head, Garrett strode from the room, without waiting for an answer, and pushing Garvey before bim, swung the door fast, and left O'Gara confounded and dismayed at the disastrous issue of his mission.

"I have nothing for it," said he, after some minute's reflection, "but to return to Dublin, if I can obtain permission to do so; and, at least, to secure my own honour against the imputation of a share in this most infamous proceeding — as well as to clear my conscience by the fullest information I can give, of the reproach of having screened the villains by my silence. I greatly fear the loss is an irreparable — a ruinous one."

Without attempting to return to his bed, he hurried through the offices of his simple toilet, with all convenient dispatch — and seating himself by the fire, awaited in solitary and anxious ruminations, the arrival of the morning.

How different were the feelings with which Miles Garrett paced the floor of his chamber. It was nigh twenty years since he had last passed a night in Glindarragh Castle. Sir Hugh was then a prosperous gentleman, and greeted him with all the hospitality of kindred and affection. A beautiful young bride was by his side, in all the pride of her early loveliness — glad and happy as the song of the merry lark in a summer’s morning — proud and generous as she was beautiful — but alas! too light, too vain, too fond of admiration — too open to flattery, for safety against the arts of villains; and now, how was all this wrecked and blasted — how hideous and desolate the contrast!

As Miles Garrett, in the irrepressible excitement of his recent triumph, strode slowly through the long wainscoated apartment, of which he was the solitary tenant, spite of all the exultation of his success, he Mt occasionally a sudden misgiving — a pang of something like fear, if not remorse — as the remembrance of all he had inflicted — the portentous desolation which he alone had wrought, came darkly to his mind. He started, with an effort, from this haunting thought, as a feverish sleeper would from a recurring nightmare — and busied his mind with projects of further aggrandisement, and schemes of future vengeance.

“The thing is done,” muttered he, as half jaded with his own excitement, he threw himself into an armed chair, before the expiring fire; “done and ended; there is no need any longer to avert his fate — so, in the devil’s name, let him hang now, as soon as they list. Why should I budge to save him? pshaw! this dark old room, with its accursed remembrances rising like vapours round me, makes a mere child of me; why, in hell’s name, should *I,* of all men, stir to save him? why should I turn chicken-hearted, and lose courage now? Curse my folly; how Talbot, and even that sneaking dastard, Garvey, would laugh at me if they knew it!’Sdeath, let the old dog hang, the sooner the better — it’s not my doing — and, if it were, by — he has earned it well of my hands; aye, fifty times over — the insolent, dogged fool! No, no,” he continued, after a long pause; “I’m not so weak — I’m not so mean, as to help the snarling, ungrateful, old libeller out of his troubles; he has turned on me twice, when I offered to succour him — and, ‘fore God, he shall never do so a third time. And then there’s that hopeful Spaniard; well, well, no matter — all in good time. Brag is a good dog, but Holdfast is a better — and we’ll see whether I’ll not get the whip-hand of Colonel O’Brien yet; all in good time— ‘fair and easy goes far in a day.’” He shook his head slowly, and smiled a pale sinister smile, upon the smouldering fire as he spoke; and then bit his lip, and contracted his brows, in deep and silent thought — buried in which we shall for the present leave him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE THUNDER STORM.

ABOUT four or five days had now elapsed since the events recorded in our last chapter. A sultry day, and a sky overcast with masses of lurid cloud, had heralded in a night of unusual darkness. The distant mutterings of the coming storm had now deepened into the nearer thunder; the big, sullen rain-drops beat the pavement with rapid splash, as peal after peal rattled and bellowed close over the housetops, like the opening of gigantic artillery, upon the devoted city. Long, winding streets and alleys, gables, chimneys, bulkheads, and signboards started into sharp light and shadow, in the intense white glare of the lightning; for one instant the flooded gutters, the quaint houses, the cowering passengers, each point of prominence, every diamond window pane, every street post, every stone, reflected the dazzling burst of livid fire — and in the next the crashing thunder swept the ghastly pageant back into the darkness of chaos.

It was upon this awful night of tempest and gloom, that a horseman, but just dismounted, stood dripping in his broadleafed hat, and drenched mantle of coarse black cloth, within the chief entrance of the Carbrie. He was parleying with one of the servants of the hostelry, and the result of his conference was speedily to conduct him by a private way up a backstairs, and into a small, sombre-looking bed-chamber, where, toil-worn, wet, and fasting as he was, he applied himself, with no other measure, towards his own comfort, than that of throwing aside. his cloak and hat, to the task of writing a letter, with much apparent care and anxiety, while the servant hurried through the arrangements of his dingy chamber, and having lighted a fire, departed. The stranger, who was thus left to his cheerless meditations, was no other than O’Gara, whose ill success our last chapter has sufficiently detailed.

Several times, as he proceeded in his tedious task, he had been interrupted by the sound of voices in the room next to that in which he was sitting. On a sudden, the tone of one of the speakers appeared to strike his ear with peculiar and absorbing interest. His pen was arrested in the midst of a word — his pale face was raised, and his lips parted, with an expression ot eager and almost horrified attention — while his eyes were fixed upon the partition through which the sounds had reached him. Drawing his breath with a gentle sigh, after the long suspense, O’Gara laid down the pen beside him, as softly as though the sound of a falling feather might have determined his fate — and stepping, with outstretched arms and noiseless tread across the room, he reached the chink in the wooden division, through which he had marked the flickering of the light in the adjoining apartment. He held his breath as he looked through: and, aided by the gestures and the countenances of those who spoke, as well as by their nearer proximity, he was enabled, with tolerable distinctness, to catch the substance of their colloquy. He was just in time to see a half-concealed figure, in black, pass from the chamber, and the door shut roughly after it. Miles Garrett wa(s standing with his back to the fire; and his eyes, which had followed the departing figure, with no very friendly glance, were still fixed upon the door, with an expression of rage and spite, which lighted his unsightly visage with a character little short of murderous. Garvey sate close by a table scarce a yard away from his employer, stealthily watching his countenance with an eye of keen and villainous scrutiny; which, however, as Garrett’s glance was suddenly directed upon him) was quickly exchanged for the usual look of crouching sycophancy. It failed, however, to conciliate the proprietor of Lisnamoe, whose recent interview appeared to have left a sting of the deadliest kind behind it.

“And so, Mr. Garvey, you are looking out for a new patron,” said Garrett, with ominous pleasantry, while a smile that chilled the little scrivener with affright, gleamed in his eye; “you are looking for a new patron — and priest Talbot, you think, would serve your purpose — you do — but pray, my very sly little gentleman, did you never hear that it is ill husbandry to throw out the foul water till you are sure of the fresh?”

“I’m not looking — indeed I’m not. Mr. Garrett, for a new patron,” stammered Garvey.

“And what then did you mean, may I inquire?” continued Garrett, with the same ominous smile, and constrained calmness, while a slight hitching of the shoulders, and a measured shake of the head, betrayed the intensity of his passion— “what did you mean by saying — you thought his extortionate proposal a reasonable one — answer me that, sir? What did you mean by that — will you have the goodness to say?"

"Why, sir, Mr. Garrett, you know he had the cards in his own hands; if he chose to balk the business, he could leave you in the lurch, as easy as turn on his heel," said Garvey, with a deprecatory tone, and a look of genuine alarm— "and I thought— "

"You *thovght* — did you? — you thought," continued Garrett, in the same vein; and unable any longer to curb his fury, he thundered, "and who the devil gave you leave to think?" and at the same moment, with the back of his open hand, he dealt the affrighted wretch, a box across the face so furious that he fell back, stunned for the moment, in his chair, and the blood spirted from his nose and mouth, and died his ashy face in crimson; "that will teach you to meddle, when you are not wanted, you confounded oaf, you" — he added, but whether it was that upon reflection, his own convictions acquitted Garvey, or that the severity of the infliction had a little exceeded what he had contemplated — and, perhaps, had even a little shocked him, certain it is, that he added no more in the way of reproach, but turning sullenly toward the fire, left Garvey to recover at his leisure, while he whistled a quick march, and thrusting one hand into his pocket, leaned his elbow upon the chimneypiece, and wagged his head in time, until hearing his companion blowing his nose, coughing, and evincing other signs of returning vigour, he vouchsafed him a surly glance over his shoulder, and asked him with considerable asperity, "what for he kept blowing like a grampus, and whether lie meant to make a night of it?"

An ugly portrait enough, did Garvey's visage present, pale and bloody, and wearing in every feature the hideous expression of malignant rage, contending with craven terror — while his eyes, in which were usually discernable no traces of passion or significance, but the half-quenched glitter of stealthy cunning, now gleamed with the mingled hate and cowardice of the poisoner, as they followed Garrett with undisguised but unconscious meaning.

Meanwhile the thunder bellowed, and the rain pattered without, in sustained, and still increasing fury.

— "Never mind it, man," said Garrett, at last, in a tone of gruff conciliation; "what a cursed fuss you make about half nothing. Come, come, what will you have — wine or— "

“No, no, Mr. Garrett, I thank you, said Garvey, with a distracted smile, while he continued wiping his face in his hand, and at every removal looking at the blood with which it was still covered— “I’ll remember it — I’ll remember it when the time comes.”

“You’ll *remember* it?” repeated Garrett after him, in a tone of menacing inquiry.

“That is,” added Garvey, hastily; for whatever his real meaning might have been, the gathering cloud of suspicion upon his patron’s brow plainly indicated the prudence of qualifying the phrase; “that is, I’ll charge it in the bill of costs.”

“Umph — run rusty, eh?” muttered Garrett; “he’ll remember it — will he. Look ye, Mr. Garvey— “

“You mistake me, Mr. Garrett; you mistake me,” interposed Garvey, with a sudden accession of humility.

“Well, suppose I do, Mr. Garvey, it’s as well to tell you at once, you’re no dog for my money, if you can’t bear the lash,” said Garrett, doggedly; “with me you’ll get just what you deserve — whether you’ve made a hit or made a mistake; and if you don’t like my terms — why, there’s the door.”

Garvey sate still; and his master, turning upon his heel, lounged carelessly to the window.

A long pause ensued, during which Garrett drew the curtain at the window, so that every blinding glare of lightning shone into the chamber, eclipsing the murky glimmer of the candle in its awful brightness.

“It’s a queer night,” said he, after one of these flashes so dazzling and so near, that he had involuntarily shrunk in its light, and held his breath during the stunning explosion which followed— “a queer night; one would almost think the devil had business on his hands. How is Lady Willoughby — she has been dying for the last week; I would not wonder if her ladyship made her flitting tonight; the old boy is at his tricks — egad, the whole air smells like brimstone.”

“She’s near her end — near enough,” said Garvey, once more restored, at least to outward calmness; and, as he spoke, he and his companion were both dazzled again in the intense glare, followed, or rather accompanied by a clanging report, under which the old mansion rocked and trembled in every stone and timber. “God bless us,” he ejaculated with a shudder, after an interval of some seconds, and making an imperfect attempt to cross himself, “it would be an awful night to die in, and Coyle says she has not much life left in her; its a frightful niglit — I thought the old place was blown about our ears that time; God Almighty guard us.”

“What are you mouthing about,” muttered Garrett, who began to catch the contagion of Garvey’s terrors; “stop your praying and bless sing, or I’ll give you something to talk about — it makes my skin creep to hear you — a nice fellow you are to put up prayers for people in a night like this; curse me, but it’s enough to bring a thunderbolt on the place, so it is.”

Garrett turned again to the table, and taking out his purse, counted out several pieces of gold upon the board.

“That Coyle is as hungry a thief as this villainous town contains,” he muttered through his teeth, as he reckoned the coins; “the rogue charges his own price — well, well, it’s not much matter, after all; this extortion can’t last long — one week more, perhaps, and then a plain, deal coffin, and the sexton’s fee; here Garvey,” he continued, “take it to the scoundrel at once — it’s a cursed imposition, but we can’t help it; take it — pshaw! what are you afraid of — it’s but a step, and you’ll find me here when you return.”

Garvey knew the temper of his employer too well to hazard an expostulation or demur; and throwing now and then a stealthy glance of uneasiness and discontent through the window, upon the external storm and darkness, he proceeded to wrap his shabby cloak about his shoulders, and gathering up the money, and counting it again, he consigned it to his pocket, and hat in hand, proceeded silently from the room.

“Without one moment’s hesitation, O’Gara, in like manner, wrapt in his mantle, drew his hat over his brows, and noiselessly hurried from the chamber; scarce daring to breathe until he had reached the open street; and, unobserved, took his station at the opposite side, with his keen eye fixed upon the door of the Carbrie — into whose well lighted passage he could clearly see. In this position his vigilance was not long unrewarded — for he beheld Garvey slowly enter the open lobby, communicating with the street — and peep, stealthily, with many a shrug and shiver, forth upon the wild and angry sky, while he drew his muffling still closer about him. At last, however, he plunged into the unsheltered street; and O’Gara kept pace with him at the other side, until he saw him fairly into Mr. Coyle’s sombre and sinister-looking *auberge.* Having crossed the street, through the small, lozenge-shaped window panes, he beheld, after a short delay, the swollen and sallow innkeeper, withdraw in company with Garvey; and having thus ascertained to his entire satisfaction what he had already suspected, the young priest hurried away through the storm and darkness — intent upon a project, in whose execution he was resolved that neither storm nor darkness, nor another agency should defeat or dismay him.

Meanwhile it behoves us for one moment to glance at the gloomy cell, in the Birmingham Tower, which was occupied by Sir Hugh Willoughby, who now sate wholly alone in his dimly-lighted and desolate cell.

His ruminations, painful and gloomy as they were, were nevertheless disagreeably interrupted by the jarring prelude of bolt and bar, which announced yet another visiter. It was the official of the prison who entered — and with a hesitating and embarrassed manner, and a countenance somewhat pale, stood in uneasy silence at the door. There was something sinister in his aspect and demeanour which impressed Sir Hugh with a feeling akin to dismay: the old knight looked inquiringly in his face for some time before the ominous messenger spoke.

“Sir Hugh Willoughby?” said the man, glancing at the open page in a soiled and heavy volume in his hands.

“The same,” said Sir Hugh, affirmatively.

“Under sentence of death for high treason,” continued the officer, still reading.

“The same — pray, proceed,” urged the knight.

“And reprieved during the king’s pleasure?”

“Ay, ay — the same,” pursued the old man.

“You know, sir,” he said, sulkily, after a brief pause, and turning his eyes another way; “you know, sir, *I* have nothing to do with it; my duty is only what you see,” he added, apologetically; “I try to make gentlemen as comfortable as I’m able, while they’re here; and they’re all welcome to stay here as long as they like, for my part — but, sir, but— “

“Speak plainly, man, for God’s sake — have you any ill news to tell me?” urged Sir Hugh, in a tone which betrayed his terrible misgivings.

The man evidently was a novice at his business — at least in its sterner department — for he appeared much disconcerted at this direct appeal; and not knowing exactly how to begin, paused and shuffled for some time, in evident embarrassment, at the door.

"You see, sir," he resumed, after some seconds had elapsed in silence; "I'm only under orders, and has no choice in the business — and after all, why, we must all of us go sooner or later, you know — and then all's even — — "

"For God's sake," said Sir Hugh, "speak the worst, and at once — is it — is it *tomorrow?"*

"Tomorrow, sir, at twelve o'clock — you just hit it," answered he, much relieved; "twelve o'clock, sir — an' you're not to be quartered — that's one comfort, at any rate. The warrant is gone to the sheriff, sir — and it's my business, you see, to let you know."

"God's will be done," said Sir Hugh, in a voice scarce audible, while his head sunk, and he clasped his hands together, with a convulsive pressure— "God's will be done."

"I'll be in in the mornin' again, sir, at six o'clock; and maybe you'd want a word with the clargy, or a scratch of the pen, by the way of a vrill," pursued the man; "and if you'd wish every thing properly attended to, and moderate charges, I have a cousin, an undertaker, that does funerals for the first quality in the land, sir; and I hope your honour found everything to your liking here, sir, while you were in it. My wife is makin' up the little account — and it will be time enough to settle it in the mornin'."

The man stood for a moment or two in the doorway; but seeing that his presence was unheeded, he forbore to say anything further; and casting an official glance round the room, to ascertain that all was right, he closed the book, and tucking it under his arm, disappeared amid the ringing of keys and the clang and creak of the iron fastenings.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE MURDER.

Now turn we once more to Garvey, whom we followed upon his short excursion into "the King's Head."

"Nobody in the house — no strangers, I suppose?" asked Garvey, stealthily, as soon as he found himself safe within the dingy precincts which acknowledged the dominion of Peter Coyle.

"No one but *that,"* said the host, testily pointing with his thumb toward his helpmate, who sate, as usual, dozing in her chair — and at the same time shooting at her a glance of the blackest malignity; "no one but that — and she's one too many; for, of all the brimstone spawn that I ever came across, that same she-devil flogs them. Curse her," he continued, waxing energetic as he proceeded; "I have no rest night or day with her; I dare not sleep in the house alone with her, without lock and bar between us — the murdering hag; it's but last night I had a tussle with her for the razor, or she'd have had me in kingdom come, like the doctor, I take it — as it is, she's scarce left a finger on my hand, the she-butcher!"

As he thus spoke, with truculent emphasis, he shook the member in question, swathed about in bloody rags, in deadly menace at the slumberer.

"She's set her scheming headpiece to work now, to find out who it is I have got above — but you may as well let that alone, murdering Mag, for as bould as you are; you may — for if you're determined, so am I; and have a care — for long threatening comes at last — and if you put me to it, I'll go through with it; and then, who will you have to thank but yourself, my darling?"

As he thus apostrophized the tipsy sleeper, he busied himself in trimming the candle, and making himself ready to accompany Mr. Garvey, by throwing on his loose coat; and this done, the two worthies began to ascend the crazy and darksome stairs — sometimes startled by the scampering of the rats down the shadowy corridors, and sometimes more awfully by the roar of the thunder. Altogether, the expedition had in it something so strange and even so ghastly, that Mr. Garvey, as he followed his villainous-looking conductor through deserted, damp-stained lobbies, and up half-rotten stairs, to the chamber where the helpless victim of violence and villainy was lying, felt himself growing indescribably nervous and uncomfortable.

"Didn't you hear a step on the stair," asked Coyle, pausing with a look of something between wrath and horror, at the door, when their dreary ramble terminated; histh — listen."

"No, no, God bless us all; no, nothing of the sort," said Garvey, hurriedly; "come here quick — don't keep us standing in this cursed place all night; turn the key, will you, and let us in; see, let me in first," he added, glancing nervously back into the darkness; "though, egad, no — go on yourself, the lady may be — God bless us she may be *dead;* I hear no sounds within, eh!"

"Well, what if she is," said Coyle, with an ugly forced smile, and a real shudder, "sure moping Molly's there, at all events, and she's not dead, I take it."

He turned the key in the door, and they entered a wretched damp-stained apartment, in the further end of which a door stood partially open, and a faint light gleamed through the aperture. Treading cautiously, he scarce knew why, Coyle led the way to the chamber of sickness, perhaps of death.

Cowering over a wretched fire, sate the half-witted girl, the sole attendant of the unhappy lady — a pale, withered, smoke-dried creature, with smirched face, and filthy hands and arms, muttering and jabbering to herself, and stealing looks of idiotic malevolence and jealousy toward the intruders.

"She's asleep — asleep only," whispered Coyle, pointing to the bed; "the coverlet moves with the breathing — see it; but histh!" he added, grasping Garvey by the arm, "I *do* hear a step coming — if it's flesh or blood, it's that rip of hell; she's at her tricks, histh! here — sure enough, here she comes — she's resolved she or I must go under the daisies, the red burning villain."

Thus speaking, Coyle waddled swiftly to the outer door, and just as he passed it, and took his stand upon the lobby, the tall form of his repulsive helpmate glided into the passage from the stairhead, and advanced, with a slight degree of unsteadiness, and with many a sinister grin and toss of the head, carrying a candle in one hand, and, as her husband descried, much to his uneasiness, a case knife in the other.

"Well," said Coyle, in a tone whose gruffness but imperfectly disguised its trepidation, "what in the fiend's name are you after now? did not I tell you to keep below, eh? did not I warn you against this floor? — yes or no?"

"An' who cares if you did," said she, with an ominous grin, while her face glowed absolutely scarlet, with the combined excitement of whiskey and wrath, "why you lump of gallows carrion, is it for you I'd turn drudge in my own house? — do you think I'm afeard of your knuckles, you coward? Aye, shake your fist as long as you like, but dar to touch me, as much as with a finger, and that minute I'll let the light into your puddens."

As she thus spoke she continued to advance, and when she came to the concluding threat she flourished the knife and uttered a kind of hiss through her gapped and carious teeth, which might have rivalled the sibilations of an awakened viper.

"Keep back, I tell you, or I'll make you," he ejaculated, with all the vehemence of fear.

"Keep back yourself," she cried, with another flourish of the weapon she carried, "keep out of my way — back with you, for into that room I'll go this night or I'll know the reason why."

As she spoke the virago advanced with an infernal glare upon the unwieldy sentinel, who watched her motions, in return, with a gaze of mingled fear and rage. As she came up to him he propped his broad shoulders resolutely against the doorpost, and drawing up his sinewy leg, received her upon his clouted heel with a kick, so well aimed and vigorous that she reeled back to the end of the passage, and stood, with lacklustre eyes and livid face, gaping and gasping against the wall.

"Ha, ha! take that, young woman," cried he, with brutal exultation, "your tongue doesn't wag quite so glib now, I'm thinking."

He was interrupted, however, before he could complete his triumphant apostrophe, for, recovering her breath, the enraged and murderous hag hurled herself rather than rushed upon him, and dashed the knife at his throat; it ripped the skin from his chin to his ear, but nothing more, and, scarce knowing what he did, he swung her from him against the side wall, and then sprung backward to secure himself from a repetition of the assault, behind the door. Ere he could close it, however, the drunken beldame had thrust her head, shoulder, and one arm through the aperture, and with eyes whose deadly gleam lent new vigour to his terrified resistance, while the veins of her forehead actually stood out with the prominence of knotted cordage, she tugged and strained at the door with the frenzied exertion of a strength which tasked that of her bleeding spouse to the uttermost. As thus they strove her foot slipped, and she would have fallen across the threshold had not the door closed, with the full pressure of Coyle's whole strength and weight, across her neck, and held her thus suspended and helpless. Setting his knee and his shoulder still more firmly against the planks, he strained the door with strangling pressure upon the throat of the wretched woman, watching the gradual blackening and quivering of her frightful face, with an expression half vindictive and half horrified.

"Let it go man, let it go Coyle," cried Garvey, who saw enough to fill him with horror, "let it go, I tell you, for God's sake," and in the impatience of his terror and irresolution, he actually wrung his hands, and danced upon the floor. "Coyle, Coyle, are you mad? don't you see? she's black — she's dead; let go — its murder; I tell you let go."

Coyle, meanwhile, kept staring with the same expression, at once malignant and appalled, upon the gaping, livid face of his victim, while he still continued to exert the whole pressure of his deadly weight.

And this scene of hate and murder, enacted at the very threshold of death, and under the awful voice of heaven's thunder!

"I hear voices, and steps too; voices and steps — they are coming," cried Garvey, "come here Molly — moping Molly — for God's sake, Molly, bear witness; I had nothing to do with it. Coyle, remember it was all your own doing; my good little precious girl, you saw it all. Oh! my God, is there no way out — is there no way out?" and, as he spoke,. he ran and rummaged round the room, in the vain hope of finding some mode of exit.

Coyle, meanwhile, heard the approaching sounds; in breathless alarm he retreated from the fatal door — down fell the hideous burthen which it had sustained — the knees drawn up to the chest in the last mortal spasm — and all still and grim in the frightful blackness of death.

"They're coming," he muttered, with an oath, "Margery get up — get up girl," he continued, thrusting the body with his foot. "Hell and death she's gone — she's done for; lend a hand Garvey, you helpless muff you, lend a hand and haul her under the bed!"

It was too late, however, for any such precautionary measures. O'Gara, accompanied by half-a-dozen musketeers of the militia, were now upon the passage; retreat or concealment was alike out of the question. The arrest of the murderer, and the deliverance of the imprisoned lady, were already virtually effected.

CHAPTER XL.

THE HOUR OF DEATH.

NEXT morning Caleb Crooke, his wrinkled forehead surmounted by a velvet cap, from under which a few scant white locks escaped, and his keen grey eyes peering through the spring spectacles which compressed his nostrils, at a letter which he had but just opened, sate in his usual chair of state, before a desk piled with papers and parchments. Directly opposite to him, and almost as grimy as the dingy wainscoting of the dark apartment, sate his confidential clerk — a lank, starch, sanctimonious looking gentleman, somewhere about fifty, and with a slight squint, which made his face anything but a "letter of recommendation." This sallow and somewhat sinister looking official, pursued his scrivenery in industrious taciturnity, and without ever raising his eyes for a moment, except to dip his pen in the ink, on which occasion, as often as it occurred, he shot a single stealthy glance at his employer's countenance, and forthwith again applied himself to his monotonous task.

Crooke had no sooner concluded the letter, than he shook his head, sighed, and muttered some half-dozen bitter ejaculations within himself, then rose in great trouble, and having taken a turn or two up and down the chamber, exclaimed —

"This is the sorest blow of all — the deed destroyed! — and just at such a time — the villains — the robbers!"

And with these broken exclamations, he stood sometimes scratching his head, sometimes wringing his hands, the very image of perplexity and dismay.

"Well," said he, at last, "I all along had my suspicions of that sneaking dog of a priest — what possessed me to disregard them? Good heaven, why did I trust him — why was I mad enough to trust him? trust a priest, and with such a commission! I ought to be kicked, and cursed, and burnt for it."

The door opened at this moment, and the priest himself, Father O'Gara, entered the room.

The constrained, suspicious, and disconcerting reception which awaited him, was so far from repelling the young ecclesiastic, that without awaiting even the ceremony of an invitation, he seated himself, and at once opened the subject of his visit. The conversation that ensued was long, animated, and earnest. Its results we need not here detail; suffice it for the present to remark, that before it had proceeded for more than five minutes, the grimy clerk on a sudden remembered a notice which he had forgotten to serve, and with his principal's permission, hurried out of the room.

Meanwhile a scene of agony, almost of terror, the last farewell of two beings, who had been for many a year to each other dearer than all the world beside, filled Sir Hugh's dark and desolate cell with sobs, and prayers, and blessings. We shall not attempt to describe it.

And now the hour of noon drew near — the awful hour which was to consign Sir Hugh Willoughby to the hands of the executioner. Every stir in the castleyard, every sound upon the stairs, was listened to in the breathless agony of suspense, by his distracted child; every coming moment was dreaded as the herald of the officers of death. Pale, but calm and resigned, the old man sat in his grim prison, whose damps and gloom might meetly have foreshadowed the chill shadows of the tomb to which he was hurrying. In prayer he had sought and found that heroism which more nobly, and far more securely than human pride and resolution, can sustain the heart of man through the terrors of such a scene.

In misery uncontrollable, and wildest despair, poor Grace wept, and trembled, and clung to him, and sobbed, like a creature bereft of reason; and through these dreadful moments, the brave old man strove, though in vain, by words of fortitude and comfort, to calm the wild transports of her breaking heart.

At length the dreaded sounds were actually heard. The ill-omened scream of the rusty lock, the clang and rattle of chains and bars, along with gruff voices upon the passage, the door itself rolled back, and the gaoler entered; but oh! praised be heaven, is it possible — with a REPRIEVE!

Yes, Sir Hugh Willoughby, though still under sentence, and a prisoner as before, is again reprieved until the king's further pleasure shall be known.

Oh! who can describe the overwhelming delirium of joy which welcomed this unlooked for respite, and in the intoxication of deliverance from present ruin, hailed the precarious boon with all the rapturous ecstacy which might have greeted an entire deliverance in the king’s full pardon.

*

The first rapture of his sudden rescue had for some time subsided, and in calmer happiness now, Sir Hugh and his darling child mingled their smiles and tears, as hand locked in hand, the kind words and fond looks of dearest affection were exchanged between them; when once more the prison door flew open, and breathless with eagerness and haste, old Caleb Crooke, supported by O’Gara and Torlogh O’Brien, stood in the scanty light which struggled through the bars of the dungeon.

‘‘My dear old patron — my admirable friend — worthy knight,” cried Crooke, scarce intelligibly, through want of breath and extreme vehemence, while the tears, spite of all his efforts, coursed one another down his rugged cheeks, “I’ll never forgive you; how could you think of being hanged, without letting your agent, and honest, trusty, humble old friend Caleb Crooke, whose fortune you made, and whose fortune and whose self you have as good a right to command as if they were, in fact, as they are in right, and in gratitude, your own — without letting him know a word about it; confound me, confound me, I say, if I ever forgive it.”

As he thus spoke, he wrung his old benefactor’s two hands in his own, with a vehemence which was all but dislocating.

“But it’s all settled, now,” he continued, with unabated impetuosity “all settled, all right — the deed — the settlement that was burnt, you know — but, no, you don’t know — egad, I forgot, but no matter — it’s found again — that is — not it — but an attested copy, which is all one you know; and — and— “

Here honest Caleb was taken with so obstinate a fit of coughing, that he became utterly unintelligible; and O’Gara, consulting the anxiety of his hearers, and undeterred by Crooke’s deprecatory gestures, took upon him the office of spokesman forthwith, and thus proceeded: —

“And to the preservation and discovery of this deed, under God, you are indebted for your reprieve — and for more, for your perfect security against ever suffering the execution of the’ sentence under which you lie. The wretches who conspired your death aimed in reality at your estate, and finding that *that* is limited to another on your death, are resolved to enjoy it at least during your life; and to extend the term of this enjoyment, they, of course, desire to protract that life, with which it ends. But, sir, there is more — "

"Let *me* — let *me* — young gentleman — let *me"* insisted Crooke, who had now recovered breath — and, with gentle violence, pushing back the young priest with his open hand, he continued— "yes, indeed, there *is* more, as he said — a great deal more. This young man — this Colonel Torlogh O'Brien, has behaved — I will say it, though he nods and frowns at me all the while — *nobly,* ay, sir, nobly. The French court had, it seems, long since promised him their interest, in seeking the restitution of his Irish ancestral patrimony — of which you know Glindarragh is a chief portion. The ambassador was prepared to press this upon the King — but he has waived his claim to your forfeited life interest, on condition that you shall be liberated, immediately, upon bail. The terms are agreed to — and at this moment, the necessary bonds are being drawn up. I ought to add — because the thing tells handsomely for him — that Colonel Sarsfield requested to be your second bail — so, please God, by tomorrow morning, you shall be once more a free man."

What followed, we need not detail — nor yet all that passed between the beautiful Grace Willoughby, and the brave and handsome soldier, whose proud but generous heart she had irrevocably won.

Torlogh O'Brien remained with Sir Hugh until the hour arrived, when the prison rules of Dublin Castle obliged Grace Willoughby to leave her father for the night; and, accompanied by her woman, she took her leave, and returned in a coach to her apartments in the Carbrie. There we shall leave her, in the deep solitude and silence of the night, to commune with her own heart — and to calm, if possible, the tumult of its sweet and bitter emotions and remembrances.

The young soldier, being thus alone with Sir Hugh, opened fully to him the purport of his interview with Grace in the castle garden. Deeply, however, to his mortification and disappointment, the young man found his proposal coldly, though not unkindly, listened to. Sir Hugh Willoughby had his pride and reserve as well as Torlogh O'Brien; and in his fallen fortunes he could not bear the thought that his family should be beholden, either for rank or wealth, to the generous forgiveness of an hereditary foe. The strong and unfavourable prejudices with which he had at first regarded Colonel O'Brien, had, it is needless to say, long since entirely disappeared; but his present humbled position was not the attitude in which to entertain an offer, which, in his eyes, wore too much the appearance of an obligation.

Pained and chagrined, though not actually offended at what, under all the circumstances, seemed to him the unreasonable conduct of the knight, Torlogh O'Brien was constrained to take his departure with a heart still troubled with perplexing doubts, and dark anxieties for the future.

"Well, Sir Hugh Willoughby," he said, with a proud but melancholy air; "to speak frankly, I did not anticipate so cold an answer to my suit; it pains me the more that I may not see you for many months again. Tonight I proceed to take, in person, the command of my regiment; and so it is even possible, in times so troublous and uncertain as the present, I may never see you more. Farewell, Sir Hugh — farewell — we part, at least, as friends."

As Torlogh O'Brien rode slowly through the moonlit streets, chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancy, he found himself under the walls *of* the now quiet Carbrie; and, as his eye wandered on among the gables, and vanes, and projecting beam-heads, which varied the front of the antique structure, something more than the romantic influence of the misty moonshine, under which the old fabric was shimmering, induced him to draw bridle, and break the rapid pace of his steed into a walk. He checked even this moderate motion, as he reached that part of the mansion in which Sir Hugh's lodgings were situated, and looked up, with passionate regret, to the quaint casements, within which he knew his beautiful Grace was, even at that moment, mayhap, thinking of her own true lover.

At such an hour, and under such circumstances, of course he dared not ask to see her; and once more he was about to put his horse in motion, and pursue his melancholy night ride, when a light gleamed from an open lattice, and a small hand was extended to close it. When did a lover's eye deceive him? At the first glimpse of the form thus casually revealed, his heart swelled in his bosom — and with graceful gallantry, he raised his plumed hat. The gesture caught her eye, for she looked down upon him — then hastily withdrew, and then as hastily returned. Pressing his hand to his heart, as he looked upward at the loved form but dimly visible, he said, in the low, thrilling tones of deepest passion, only the words— "till death —

till death.” She waved her hand — lingered for one moment, and in the next was gone.

For a minute and more he continued to gaze, locked in fond fascination, upon the now darkened casement, where lie had seen, but for a moment, the loved form and face which haunted his imagination every hour, in day-thoughts and in dreams; then sighing, he drew his hat upon his brows with something of a scornful mien.

“Till death,” he said, “ay, till death; and unless this hand hath lost its cunning,” and he raised his gauntlet-gloved right hand, “and unless thou, my brave Roland, hast lost thy fire and mettle, death may still be many a year removed; and if it be — in spite of fate, she shall at last be mine — on — on — let us on — danger hath been our comrade through many a rough year — and if, through those that are to come, thou bearest thy master well and safely as before, then what power on earth can keep her from me — away, away, my brave Roland.”

As though he understood his master’s words, the noble steed pricked his ears, and snorting, broke into a plunging canter; nor was the reverie n which the young soldier was lost for one moment interrupted until it was dispelled by the challenge of the sentinel at St. James’s gate.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE FAREWELL.

A FEW nights later Sir Hugh Willoughby, now once more a free man, was pacing with agitated steps the floor of his apartment, adjoining the Carbrie. His cloak and hat lay ready, upon a chair, to be donned at a moment's notice. His face was pale, and wore a character of mingled anxiety and grief, as in manifest impatience he glanced from time to time at his watch, and listened for the sound of footfalls or of voices at the door. He had communicated the nature of his engagement, whatever it might be, to no one; simply stating that business would call him forth upon that evening, and directing that so soon as a gentleman at the street door should inquire for him, he should be at once apprised of his arrival.

The night was unusually dark; and as it wore on, Sir Hugh's uneasiness visibly increased. Dark as it was, he frequently looked from the windows, in the vain endeavour to penetrate its gloom, and would then in silence resume his restless walk, with, if possible, increased agitation and dejection. In all this there was a mystery, which, however much it might pique her curiosity, or however nearly it might interest even higher feelings, his fair daughter attempted not to penetrate. She saw that the old knight was resolved that the purpose of his melancholy and agitating expedition should remain unknown; and she sought not to trouble him with inquiries which might possibly offend.

At length a smart knocking at the chamber door announced that a gentleman awaited Sir High at the entrance. In silent haste the old knight did on his cloak and hat; took his daughter tenderly by the hand, and kissed her; then, having gazed in her face for some moments with a look of melancholy irresolution, as though he were uncertain whether or not to speak some matter that weighed heavily upon his mind, he turned abruptly from her with a sigh, and hurried from the chamber, leaving her, if possible, more than ever anxious and perplexed. We must follow the knight down the staircase of the old house, which he traversed with the heavy tread of age, and forth into the dark and now comparatively deserted streets. A single form, wrapped like his own in a mantle, awaited his approach, close to the entrance of the house.

"Sir Hugh Willoughby?" said the stranger, inquiringly.

"Ay, sir; the same," answered the knight dejectedly. "I thank you for keeping tryste with me. Shall we now proceed?"

"If you desire it. We can easily have a coach," said the stranger. "I fear you will find the way somewhat longer than you reckon upon."

"No, no," answered the old man, hastily. "I would be entirely private; none but thou and I shall know of this visit. God grant me courage for the mournful — the terrible interview. Let us on — let us on, my good friend; I pray, thee, let us on."

"Then lean, at least, upon my arm," responded his companion.

The old knight accepted the proffered courtesy, and thus in silence they began to thread the dark and sinuous ways, which, diverging from the high street, in a southerly direction, soon lost themselves in a confused labyrinth of narrow and complicated lanes, among which Sir Hugh followed the guidance of his companion.

Pursuing their way thus steadily and in silence, the two pedestrians at length arrived at a deserted and desolate-looking place, where the street which they followed became gradually thinly-built and broken, and at last terminated in a lonely area, in whose foreground were visible only some partially constructed or half-ruinous fragments of houses, while behind them loomed, in a heavy mass, against the gloomy, starless sky, the peaked gables and ponderous chimneys of a massive old mansion, with a few scattered and tufted trees dimly grouped around it.

We have already introduced the reader to this desolate-looking tenement — the same in which, we have seen, in an earlier chapter of this tale, Miles Garrett and O'Gara confronted, in resolute and fiery debate, about the poor heartbroken lady, who had found, in her misery, but one human friend.

"We must be near it now," said Sir Hugh, in an agitated whisper; for the clang of arms, and the challenging of the guard at some little distance, borne to his ears upon the night breeze, assured him that they had well nigh reached the extreme verge of the city.

"Yonder is the house," answered O'Gara, for he was the knight's conductor; "yonder is the house; and I should have called earlier to guide you hither, had it not been that she — the poor lady — was asleep, and the honest woman who attends her prayed me to await her waking, which I did. Here, then, ends our walk."

They now stood beneath the dark walls of the sombre mansion; and the priest, applying a latchkey, effected their entrance, without any other sound than that of gently opening and closing again the massive portal; and thus they found themselves cautiously mounting the broad staircase, in unbroken silence. A dim light, burning upon the lobby, showed them the door of a chamber, into which the priest, with a sorrowful countenance, slowly entered; and the old man, with head inclined and broken steps, followed like one in a dream.

From an inner door, at the farther end of the apartment, a decent looking female looked in upon them, and, beckoning her to him, O'Gara asked —

"Does she wake or sleep now?"

"She's awake ever since you left," answered the attendant, in a whisper; and, with a shake of the head, she added— "and her next sleep, I'm afeard, will be a long one. Poor thing! — it's nearly over with her now!"

"Go down stairs, my good woman, and wait there until I call you," said the priest, gently, "for she must now consult the peace of her troubled mind, and we need to be undisturbed."

Without speaking, the woman promptly and reverently obeyed. The chamber door was closed, and O'Gara, returning from the sick-room, whither he had gone alone for a moment, said: —

"Come, Sir Hugh, she expects you."

The old knight followed him almost mechanically into the chamber of death.

There lay, upon the bed which he approached, the wreck of that beauty of which he bad once been to proud — all that now remained of the young and happy bride he had loved so fondly. At sight of him — remembered, oh, how well, through all the blighting changes of griefs and years! — the wasted form started up in the bed, and, with one piercing scream, clasped her poor thin hands across her eyes.

"Oh, let me kneel — let me kneel — help me to kneel!" she cried, struggling ineffectually to rise from the bed, and, stretching her wasted arms imploringly towards him— "Oh, Hugh! Hugh!" she cried again, clasping her hands over her face, and sinking forward in the bed, with the weakness of coming death — she presented such a type of heartbroken agony and humility as must have touched a Stoic.

The old man wept bitterly; and for a long time, through his sobs, could only repeat —

“Poor Marian! poor Marian After a long silence, the poor creature struggled again to speak —

“Oh, Hugh, I dare not ask you to forgive me *now;* but after I am gone, Hugh, will you forgive me then? Will you wipe away the remembrance of all the misery and sorrows, and think of the times — the old times — when you saw me first, Hugh — the happy times, that *you* can remember without remorse?”

The old man wept so bitterly that he could not answer “All I dare to ask, Hugh, is that, when I am dead and gone, you will sometimes try and think of those days, and remember me as if I died then — died in those happy times!”

Crying as if his heart would break, the old man could not answer, but took the cold, emaciated hand of her whom he had once loved so well, and pressed it, and wrung it in his own, while he sobbed and wept on still in silence.

Oh! who could describe, what words can tell, the wild scream of fearful joy and wonder that broke from her at that touch?

“My hand! my hand! Oh, God Almighty! — he holds my hand again! I am forgiven! I am forgiven!”

And as she spoke, the fountain of her tears was opened, and with a long, deep shiver, she lay weeping and sobbing, as though her poor heart would burst.

“Poor, poor Marian,” said the old man, still crying and wringing her hand as he spoke, “you *are* forgiven — you are indeed forgiven. Oh, Marian, Marian, I never thought to have seen you thus.” And they both wept on for a time in silence.

“And the child, Hugh?” she said at last, in a tone which, though almost a whisper, yet cut him to the heart.

“Is well and very beautiful; like, very like what you were Marian,” he answered, while his tears flowed on; but perceiving that the grasp with which she had tremblingly clung to his was fast growing cold and feeble, he added, pressing her hand as he had once pressed that selfsame hand in scenes and times how different —

"Marian, Marian, my poor Marian, would it comfort you to see her?"

"Oh no," she answered, desolately, but very gently, "no, no, I am unworthy; I could not — no, no. But," she continued, after a while, with a most mournful humility, "I have one last request — my jewels — they are under the pillow — take them, Hugh, and give them to her, and when you see them on her you will may be — *may be,* sometimes think of me — and of my penitence, and the mercy you showed me; and then, too, may be you will look back, in memory, to the better times, when poor, lost Marian wore them herself — won't you come again tomorrow, Hugh; for I am too weak to tell you all tonight — you'll come again and see me in the morning, won't you, and though my heart is broken — broken, Hugh, I'll cry with very joy to see you when you come. You're not going yet. Press my hand again — hold me, Hugh; oh, let me feel your hand. Forgiven, thank God — all forgiven, all forgiven."

Murmuring these words, she sank gently, gently into sleep — it was the last long sleep; his hand still locked in hers, and the tears still wet upon her long, dark lashes. Yes, poor Marian! — the troubled spirit and weary head at last sleep sound and sweetly. There is no more sorrow and contempt for thee. Poor fallen lady! the pangs of grief, the dreams of old times, will flutter thy poor heart no more. No sting of contumely will ever tinge that pale cheek — no old remembrance, stealing like soft music o'er thee, will ever wet thy lids with tears again. The last thou wilt ever shed lie glittering there serenely. Yes, hold that thin hand still, Sir Hugh, and look in that pale face; though it knows thee not — though it will never smile even on *thee* again — what sight and touch will ever stir thy heart like these! Could tongues of angels plead with thy proud heart with half the eloquence of that cold, fixed face? — could a giant's grasp shake thee like the chill touch of that little hand?

Hour after hour, in the silent chamber of death, by the side of that last sad relic of her whom he had once loved so proudly and so fondly, sat old Sir Hugh, heedless of all, save the yearnings and the grief that swelled at this roubled heart, and the remembrances that gathered round him like a dream, as he gazed on the still and mournful features of the dead.

The same morning sun that shone upon Sir Hugh, and marked with its rosy greeting the pale couch of death, streamed upon a very different scene by the old bridge of Glindarragh.

It was the first parting of a young and beautiful girl from her husband; and that husband — whom, gentle reader, will you guess him to have been? Who but Percy Neville. Yes, Percy Neville — at last constrained to bid, let us hope but a *brief,* farewell to his lovely young bride, sweet Phebe. How often has he stood, with his foot in the stirrup, and how often has he disappointed his impatient steed, to return, and snatch one last word, one last kiss more — to breathe another assurance, fervent and tender, of speedy return and unchanging love — while, one hand round her waist, the other locked in hers, he looks passionately into the dark, tearful eyes, and pale lovely face, of the simple rustic beauty he has wooed and won. How many a fond prayer and loving word her soft voice murmurs, as her little head lies so trustingly buried in his breast. At length, however, the *last* of all — his last words are spoken indeed. Away he clatters, still turning as he goes, and waving his hand, in token of adieu, to the weeping girl, whose fond looks follow, until at last the distance hides him; and he is gone — quite gone.

CHAPTER XLII.

LOVE AND GLORY.

FAST as old Time sweeps in his swarth, fresh weeds and flowers spring up beneath his scythe. — Old actors pass away and are forgotten, and new ones take their places. Thus, as the current of our tale flows on, we lose sight, and mayhap for ever, of many a familiar personage and place, while strange faces and new objects rise around us, as we drift onward toward the close. A year has passed — the sunshine, and the rains, and winds of a long year have fallen upon the grave of Lady Willoughby. Sir Hugh — landless now and homeless — still, with his fair child, dwells in the same lodging where we saw him last. To attempt to leave the city were, under existing circumstances, a dangerous, if not an impracticable enterprise. Stern proclamations, dictated by the dread urgency of the impending crisis, and enforced by the prompt and atrocious sanctions of military law, restricted all suspected persons to the immediate neighbourhood of their dwellings, and in the majority of cases had even placed them under the rigours of actual imprisonment.

It were difficult indeed, to convey an adequate idea of the intense and agitating excitement which pervaded those of every class, who, either from necessity or choice, were still resident in Ireland, during this season of doubt and danger, when the crisis of that awful martial struggle whose issue was to determine the hopes and fears of all, was obviously at hand. The imminent proximity of a catastrophe so momentous and uncertain stimulated and darkened every alternating passion — the hatred, the ambition, the suspicions, the hopes, and the alarms of all. As the struggle became more distinctly a military one, the savage spirit of martial despotism more and more unequivocally characterised and governed the whole policy of the Jacobite executive. The extremest severities were practised, as we have said, against the defenceless Protestants, whose creed was assumed to be a sufficient evidence of their Whig predilections; and these severities were aggravated a thousandfold by the licentious violence of the half-disciplined troops to whom their administration was committed.

It was the eve of the first of July, 1690, that memorable day on which was fought the battle of the Boyne. The old city of Dublin was now comparatively deserted. Scarce a red coat was to be seen in its gloomy and shattered streets; a handful of militia kept guard at the Castle, which had sent forth its king, with all his goodly company of generals and courtiers, either to take an active part in the long-deferred struggle, or to witness its issue as spectators. The stillness and languor of the town, contrasted with the recent hubbub and bustle attending the transit of thousands of stern and reckless soldiery, upon their march to the scene of danger, had in it something at once depressing and indefinably exciting. Upon the fortunes of the coming battle each party felt that their destinies were suspended. The hushed and agitating prevalence of a suspense, which came home not only to the soldier and the politician, but to every private man, in the shape of alarm for his property and his safety, pervaded every street and dwelling, and clouded every countenance in the city with awe. Business was entirely neglected; men kept restlessly to-ing and fro-ing, and grouping together in little knots, gossiping at the street comers, in low tones, and laughing strangely, in the almost hysterical excitement of the crisis — the long-looked-for crisis, that was now at last, in fearful earnest, indeed, present and upon them.

A tall and singularly handsome officer of dragoons, fully equipped in the splendid uniform of those days, and wearing in his face an expression at once lofty and melancholy, was, upon the night in question, ascending a dark and oldfashioned stair in the city cf Dublin. He paused at a door, which opened from the first landing-place. A feeling which he could not for a moment overcome, held him doubtfully at the threshold. He entered, however, and, raising his plumed hat, and shaking back from his noble features his long black hair, Torlogh O’Brien stood in the presence of Grace Willoughby and her father.

How did her shifting colour show the beating of her little heart, as, between smiles and blushes, she greeted her true lover! How did the soldier’s eyes, with the passionate fire of his own fierce and melancholy nature, requite her softer looks!

“Sir Hugh,” he said, having with a melancholy smile returned the old man’s greeting, in language not less generous, “it is long — to me how long! — since I have seen you, and it *may* be long, very long, ere I see you again.” And he glanced towards the fair girl with a fondness all the more touching for the stern and haughty beauty of his face. ‘I have but a few hurried moments to stay here. I cannot, and will not, waste words. What is so near my heart must be spoken — spoken perchance, with a soldier’s bluntness, but yet with the feeling that all my hopes, my happiness, are wound up in your answer. You remember — you cannot have forgotten — our conversation on the evening when I saw you last. Sir Hugh, it is no light fancy, no trivial feeling, that could lead Torlogh O’Brien thus to sue on in spite of a repulse. I love your daughter — Mistress Grace — I lore her dearly — desperately — with all the love and all the loyalty — with every feeling, and passion, and thought, and hope of my heart; — say, if I outlive tomorrow’s battle, will you at last consent, and give her to the fondest and truest lover that ever yet in honour and devotion sued for the hand of maiden?”

Sir Hugh was shaken. He looked at his daughter, and then at the noble face of the handsome soldier, and then once more at his own loved child.

“Torlogh, Torlogh O’Brien, she has been my only child — my darling,” he said at last, in a broken voice; and the tears, which the dangers of adverse fortune had never yet wrung from his eyes, began to gather thick, and coursed one another down his furrowed cheeks as he spoke— “She has been the comfort, the stay, the pride of my old age; she has been, indeed — indeed — a good child to me; and if, she loves you, why should *I* mar her happiness or yours. Let her, then, choose now and for ever for herself.”

“Grace, dearest Grace, you hear him,” said Torlogh, passionately turning to her: “Say but one word; deign but one smile; consent but by a look, and flood with joy the heart that loves you well — the heart that by tomorrow night *may* beat no more.”

The last words of his appeal smote home to her true heart — the bashful struggles of timidity were over in a moment.

“Oh, Torlogh, Torlogh!” she wildly cried; and, pale and sobbing, the light form of the noble girl, in a moment, lay folded fondly and trustingly to the heart of the soldier.

We need not follow to its close that hurried but eventful interview’, nor say how the old man kissed his beautiful and blushing child; how fondly he blessed them both, and how he pressed their hands together. After many and many a fond farewell, at last he was gone, indeed; and even the receding clang of his charger's hoofs sank into silence.

Thus Torlogh O'Brien, in wild and happy ecstacy of triumph, rode rapidly towards the camp of King James, and never thought the while that fortune may interpose "full many a slip between the cup and the lip."

While Torlogh O'Brien, thus absorbed in glorious reveries spurs onward towards "the tented field," we shall avail ourselves of the interval, unwilling as we are to interrupt his entranced and happy silence, to say a few words touching the progress of events, which, we trust, may suffice to give the reader some general notion of the actual state of things at the period at which we have now taken up our tale. If, however, as is by no means impossible, the gentle reader care marvellously little for such dissertations, he can easily escape the present by what is technically termed "skipping" the next dozen or so lines.

The presence of William's powerful and splendidly-organized army in the North, and the arrival of the Prince himself to take their head, had stimulated the fierce excitement of the country, and intensified by the darkest forebodings the inveterate malignity of old feuds and jealousies. The exhausting fiscal exertions which the state was forced to make, the prostration, or rather the ruin of all trade, the general neglect of tillage, and the frightful waste committed by the rapparees, had so devastated the country, that famine, and its attendant pestilence, threatened, with the invading sword, to consummate the desolation of the land.

In addition to all this, the cause of the unfortunate James had sustained sore loss more directly still, by multitudinous desertions, which transferred in detail much of the energy and influence of the Jacobite party, to the camp of the invader. With few exceptions, indeed, such apostacies were confined to men of second-rate importance and ability; but still the traitors, however individually despicable, disheartened the faithful by their numbers, and almost invariably carried with them intelligence of the weakness, the apprehensions, and the plans of their former associates, which proved valuable to their opponents.

Among many better men, Miles Garrett had played his royal master false; incapable of enthusiasm, cold, selfish, and phlegmatic, his calculations were untinged by passion, and need we add, unwarmed by patriotism. He understood the difficulties of the Jacobite cause, and weighing the chances with the nicest scrutiny, it seemed well to him to desert at once, and while yet he might make a merit of so doing, to the party in whose favour the odds seemed multiplying every day.

King William's camp occupied the rising grounds upon the northern side of the river. The hoarse murmur of the broad-breasted Boyne filled the stirless air between the two great armies, whose prowess was next day to determine the fate of the kingdom, and mingled sadly with that confluence of petty sounds, which, like the solemn murmurings of a mighty tide, overarches the myriad gatherings of living men.

A sultry summer's night wrapt the wide landscape in darkness. The tents of William's splendidly appointed army spread like a canvass city over the undulating ground, and the dusky fires, at intervals, glared strong and red upon military forms, and munition waggons; while from across the river, far away, came the softened sounds of shouting, and the sullen roll of drums, with the rumble of provision cars, and the faint clear call of the trumpet, incessantly filling the air with the exciting evidences of the presence and preparation of the hostile army.

It was now about the hour of twelve, when, as honest Story tells us, William of Nassau, his sword arm in a sling (for he had but that morning, while reconnoitering, received a wound which had well nigh proved his last), mounted upon his war steed, and accompanied by his staff, among whom we recognize, amid the dashing horsemen, our old friend Percy Neville, rode forth in person, through the camp. The guard, bearing torches, rode with them, and thus under the lurid illumination, glowing duskily on tossing plumes, and flashing upon burnished cuirasses, did the martial cavalcade tramp onward — its progress marked by the ruddy glare that crimsoned the air above them, and by the stem huzzas of excited welcome that greeted the soldier king, wherever he appeared.

There was an officer, a captain in one of King "William's regiments of dragoons, with plumed hat and buff coat, standing by, as William of Nassau, accompanied by his staff, thus moved onward through the camp upon the memorable night to which our tale has brought us. This cavalry officer stood listlessly leaning against a provision waggon, and smoked on in contemptuous indifference, while a tattered, scared, and travelsoiled man, of mean aspect and small and unsightly figure, stood near him, with hat in hand, and earnestly urged his disregarded suit. In the lank, ungainly form, and sinister face of the officer, and in the crouching mien, and cadaverous, villainous aspect of his humble suitor, no person who had seen them once, could have failed to recognize Miles Garrett, and his now cast off dependant, Garvey.

CHAPTER XLIII.

GARVEY’S QUARTERS.

“As soon as they missed your honour,” said Garvey, “they took me up to General Lauzun’s tent — me that knew as much about it, God knows, and you know, as the babe unborn, and it was just the toss of a shilling I wasn’t shot; they said I was your secretary, and must produce the correspondence, and as you very well know, sir, I had none to shew, not that I would have shown it, even if I had — God forbid — no such thing, of course.”

“Of course,” echoed Garrett, sneeringly.

“Of course,” reiterated Garvey, in a tone of deprecatory humility; “but in this case, you know, noble captain, it was out of my power. What had I to declare? — what *could* I tell? — I knew none of your secrets, and you’ll bear me witness, Mr. Garrett, I never tried to learn them.”

“Yes, you *did* try,” said Garrett, who had removed his pipe for a moment, and now for the first time deigned a look, though no very auspicious one, upon his petitioner— “Yes, you did try, and you told all you could; but I found you out, and saw through you, when you thought I trusted you, you shallow miscreant; but no matter.”

“I never wronged you, Mr. Garrett; by this cross, I never did you one hap’orth of harm, sir,” urged Garvey, advancing nearer, and cowering still lower in his urgency— “never, sir — never, your honour, by every saint in heaven; may I never live till mornin’, Mr. Garrett, if I did.”

Garrett knew as well as Garvey did himself, that the wretched, shortsighted tool of Satan, that cowered, and cringed, and cursed before him, lied in every word he said; but he made no other answer, than with a faint and ugly smile, to puff a thin stream of tobacco into the air, and watch it as it curled up into the dark.

“Well,” said he, after a second or two, “they did *not* shoot you; and what did they, pray?”

“They tossed me in a blanket, noble captain, for a full hour,” whimpered the wretched man; “I’m bruises from head to heel, an’ so sore, I scarce can stand, or walk, or lie.”

Garrett took his pipe from his mouth, and laughed outright, and the miserable, servile creature before him essayed to join in the cachination.

"It was very funny — very funny," he said, "but they kept it up too long — if it was not for that I'd have laughed myself, indeed I would; but they kept it up cruelly long, and let me strike the ground every time; I'm aching from head to foot. It was at seven o'clock they turned me out of the camp, without a protection, so I dared not go towards Dublin, for you know all the passes are guarded, and I could not get through Drogheda to come here, for the king's — that is, King James's — soldiers have it, too, and there is not a creature in the country, and I had not a penny in my pocket, nor a morsel of food, and only for a drink of milk I got last night, I think I'd have died before morning — and a little girl ferried me over two miles below Drogheda; and I had such a round to come, keeping out of the way of the soldiers, for I was as much afraid of one side as the other, until I knew I was near, where I could see you, sir, God bless you; so I was hiding in bushes and ditches the whole day long — and running this way and that — and as God is my judge, this day, I eat nothing but a handful of cold potatoes I got out of a pig trough, early this morning; I'm half dead, Mr. Garrett — I'm starving, sir."

"I suppose you'd like to quarter here with me?" said Garrett, with a pleasant twinkle in his eye.

"If you don't let me, sir, I'm afraid I'll starve — I'll never live through the night without food," returned Garvey, imploringly; "since seven o'clock yesterday morning, I declare to God I never eat a bit, but half-a-dozen cold potatoes, not the size of wallnuts. Oh! Mr. Garrett, Mr. Garrett," and the wretched man stooped down, and crawled almost to his feet, in the desperate endeavour to catch the imperturbable captain's eye, now fixed upon the ground, "sure you won't refuse me, sir — you would not turn me off — you would not have me starve."

Garrett again took his pipe from his mouth, and spitting upon the ground, asked with a tranquil leer —

"And why should not I?"

"Because I served you, sir, in all your plans Mr. Garrett; oh, sir, you mustn't forget, you won't forget," replied the familiar, with agonized entreaty in every look, and tone, and gesture.

"Oh! Mr. Garrett, think of it — think of it all; remember Sir Hugh's business — remember Lady Willoughby; did not I help you every way — did I stop at any thing — and am not I ready for whatever you please again; sure if I was only your dog that served you through thick and thin, Mr. Garrett, you would not refuse me a morsel of food, when I'm famishing with hunger."

"And yet I have shot more than one dog in my time, for turning on his master; what do you say to that?" retorted Garrett, calmly.

"Why, Mr. Garrett, you don't mean — you can't mean — what is it — what is it at all?" cried the terrified villain.

"I'm not going to shoot you, you blockhead — but you had better let go my coat, or I'll hack your fingers off with my rapier; there, that's better," said Garrett, roughly; "you want, it seems, something to eat, and a place to lie in — that's reasonable enough, after all — you shall have them. Here Corporal Ford, turn out four of your men," he continued, addressing that officer; "and now Mr. Garvey, it is right to tell you," he resumed, after a considerable pause, and interrupting his address at every half-dozen words, to pursue his smoking, "its right you should understand that provisions are unusually dear — (here came a long whiff); and hungry mouths, on the contrary, unusually plenty — (here another puff); so that you see, his majesty's officers must all, in their several capacities, exercise the strictest economy — (another whiff); and as it happens that you will probably eat as much as another man — (here came a long, thin stream of smoke, which seemed, as it were, attenuated and extended by the length and subtlety of the calculation); and as unfortunately there is no conceivable useful purpose to which we can turn you here — (another stream, if possible thinner and longer); why it seems to me advisable, for the better service of his majesty, to quarter yon, for this night, upon the enemy — do you comprehend?

So — ! here, Corporal Ford, take this little tory gentleman down to the river's bank, and — the water is not yet too high to ford it — put him into the stream, and make him cross. If he demurs, send a ball or two after him, and I'll be bound — wherever he goes — he'll not return."

In vain the affrighted wretch pleaded in an agony of terror — imploring, in the name of all the saints of heaven, and for the sake of God himself, to be turned out in any direction but the one which the inexorable captain had selected. He was hurried down to the river's brink, pouring forth prayers, imprecations, and entreaties at every step — shoved at last, actually weeping, into the stream — and then, under the muzzles of the soldiers' carbines, forced, willy nilly, to wade onward toward the hostile bank — often turning, often hesitating, now emerging nearly half way — and now nearly chin deep in the waters of the Boyne. At last, he hid himself, cowering, among the sedges at the opposite shore — while every moment the rising tide forced him to shift his position, and gradually rendered his retreat impossible — while at the same time his teeth began to chatter, and his limbs grew numb, as he squatted in the chill waters.

Feeling at last that his strength was failing him, the wretched, terror-stricken creature, through very fear of the imminent death which threatened him, should he longer endeavour to maintain his precarious and miserable position, summoned resolution, and plashing softly through the long grass and reeds, emerged at last upon the dry and solid sward. Creeping from bush to bush, and shivering so that his very joints ached, the exhausted wretch endeavoured by stamping his feet, chafing his limbs, and blowing upon his numbed fingers, to recover some of the vital warmth which seemed fast expiring within his chilled and travel-worn frame. Spite of all the caution, however, with which these comfortless proceedings were conducted, his movements were not long unobserved. An unlucky sentinel, after dodging about in vigilant suspicion, with his piece cocked, at last descried the object which had alarmed him.

"Hola, who goes there?" was the stern challenge which arrested unfortunate Garvey, in his dreary *pas de seul.*

He essayed to answer, but terror deprived him of utterance.

"Stand," cried the soldier, making his way leisurely up to him— "stand, friend, or I'll blow your head off — stand, I say."

As Garvey made no attempt to move, the hand of the musqueteer was soon clutched firmly in the little man's cravat; and shaking him perhaps a little more roughly than was strictly necessary, the soldier hauled him along with him; at every dozen steps propounding some new question, backed by an oath or two, and followed by a few additional chucks by the throat.

"Never an answer for me, is not there?" said he; "well, I'm bringing you to a place where they'll find a tongue for you, by — , if you were as dumb as a red herrin'."

With this cheering assurance, Garvey was passively conducted by his captor, to a roofless hovel, which answered for a guardroom, where two or three soldiers were sleeping, stretched on the ground, and some were smoking and chatting together; and having been catechized there again, with no better success, he was placed under a further escort, and conducted, as a suspected spy, to the tent of the officer in command of the division, who, unhappily for the wretched Garvey, turned out to be the notorious Lord Galmoy.

Passing the sentinel who kept guard outside the tent ropes, the little party found themselves in the presence of that cold-blooded and cruel nobleman. He had but just dismounted, and his military hat and gloves had not yet been removed. He sate beside a rude table, on which a pair of candles were burning, some reports and writing materials, along with his pistols lay beside him; and a piece of tarpaulin stretched along a pole, fenced off a portion of the area for his lordship's bedchamber. Beside him stood a stiff military attendant, who was receiving orders touching his lordship's personal equipment for the morrow; and his cuirass, together with his military saddle, and emblazoned saddle-cloth, lay upon a form close by.

As the party entered, his lordship looked up, and the light fell full upon his cadaverous face and hooked nose, and his bristling masses of light moustache; while his small, indolent eye coldly scanned them; and he said, in a drawling, careless tone, so slow and quiet, that but for its impassive coldness, it might have bespoken the very gentlest purposes: —

"A prisoner, so — what of him, corporal?"

"Crossed the river — so, so; and then crept up among the bushes — so!" resumed Lord Galmoy, as soon as he heard the statement through; "and, as you say, the very man, Miles Garrett's secretary, who was, yesterday morning, turned out of the camp, a suspected traitor, *then;* and *now*, your prisoner — so, so. Have you any information of importance to give us?" he continued, lazily turning his eyes upon Garvey; "If you have, say so, and it may possibly save you."

"Ah, my lord general — noble, generous sir," cried Garvey, whom the frenzy of actual despair had now at length restored to speech; "I'm no spy, as God is my witness — I'm no traitor; don't, for God's sake, don't have me blanketed again, noble general. I'm as honest as the king himself; ask any one that knows me. If they toss me again, it will be the death of me — I'm just dead as it is."

"I'm not thinking of any such thing, my good fellow," said his lordship, tranquilly.

"Lord bless you, sir, my Lord Galmoy, your noble honour, the Lord and all the saints of heaven reward and prosper you."

"Hold your tongue, fellow, if you can," said his lordship, in the same even tone, and staring upon him with the same unmoved but singularly repulsive countenance— "hold your tongue, and listes to me."

"That I will, my lord — noble general— "

"See, my good gentleman," interrupted Lord Galmoy, in the same quiet way, "if you won't hold your tongue, I'll make you do so — how long is it since you left the prince's camp?"

"Well, I should say some twenty minutes or half an hour — perhaps more," said Garvey, whose thoughts, just then, were none of the clearest.

"Is the prince still living?" pursued his lordship.

I do suppose he is," replied Garvey, more and more perplexed; 'but I knew not that his life was in question."

"Come, come," said the officer, while for the first time an imperious and measured emphasis slightly marked his calm address, and something indescribably intimidating overcast his features, though their tranquillity remained undisturbed, "your simplicity is a little overacted — you really must manage to know something; take my advice, and endeavour to remember; I ask you simply, what opinion is pronounced on the prince's wound — is it mortal, dangerous, or trifling? It's a plain question — *do* manage to answer it."

"As I'm a living man, my lord general, I did not so much as hear he was wounded, before now," replied Garvey.

"Hum — ha! — I see — very well, Mr what's-your-name — I understand — you're a very clever person — very profound — or else really very stupid — stupid or contumacious."

"Mullins," said his lordship, suddenly addressing the military servant, who was standing by, "as I live, I had well nigh forgot to tell you to punch another hole in the left shoulder-strap of the inlaid cuirass; see, bring it hither." And his lordship went minutely into details; and having concluded, he turned once more toward the party who awaited his further orders; "so, he offers nothing," continued his lordship, in the same calm tone; "very well, you know what to do with him; and, sergeant, observe me, before you hang him, it will not be amiss to try him with the strappado — you may get something from him yet."

"Great God — oh, Christ!" cried the frantic prisoner; "noble, good, kind, worthy general, it is not — it is not — oh, holy Mother of God; why, blessed saints of heaven, it can't be possible."

During this burst of agony, Lord Galmoy nodded impassively to the guard, who had hurried the wretched man from the tent, long before he had concluded this incoherent appeal, the last he was ever to utter to the mercy of a human tribunal.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE STRAPPADO.

THE reader must accompany us to a gentle bush-clad slope, immediately outside the Irish camp. Here stood the simple apparatus, by means of which was inflicted the terrible torture, known by the name of the strappado — an importation for which the Irish were indebted to the French troops who served among them. The machine was, as we have said, a simple one — consisting of a single beam of some twenty feet in height, planted perpendicularly in the ground, with a strong horizontal arm, little more than a yard in length, extended, gibbet-like, from the top of it; and in a pulley, attached to the extremity of this ran a rope, one end of which swung loosely to the ground, while the other was firmly knotted on a projecting plug fixed in the upright post which we have described, and also within little more than a foot of the ground. Beneath this mysterious instrument stood the military lictors, to whom is committed the execution of the sentence we have but just heard, and some dozen or so of spectators — all in high, good humour; and in the centre, the miserable prisoner himself, now stripped to his shirt and breeches — and with his lank arms tied at the wrists firmly behind his back.

“For God’s sake, have mercy, sir — worthy, honest gentleman.”

“To be sure I will, alanna; I would not hurt a hair of your head for Ireland’s grounds; we’ll only just go through the forums, that’s all,” said the burly soldier, who was now knotting the loose extremity of the long rope we have mentioned, with many a doubled wrench, securely in the wretched man’s wrists, bound fast as they were behind his back.

“Mercy, mercy — for God’s sake, mercy, noble sir,” repeated their helpless victim, in the mere stupefaction of vacant terror.

“To be sure I will, aint I tellin’ you?” pursued the executioner, in a tone of the most soothing endearment, and at the same time making a hideous grimace, followed by a grin, and a wink at the bystanders; “I’d sooner hurt myself than such a purty gossoon, any day; we’ll make it as pleasant as we can — and I hope you don't find *that* too tight," he added, as he wrenched the last knot close with his whole force.

"Mercy, sir — mercy — mercy," the wretched man continued to sob, as though he had lost the power of uttering any word but the one.

"Nonsense, man, it's nothin' at all, I'm telliu' you; we'll only give you a bit iv a lift, just to show you London — nothin' more; I tell you it's nothin' at all worth spakin' about. What the devil are you afeard of, *a bouchai?"* reiterated the soldier, in the same pleasant vein.

"Now, he's all right, boys," he resumed, trying the firmness of the knot with a few careless chucks; "he's quite safe, and no fear of slipping; for I would not have you get a fall for all I'm worth — do ye mind; pull away, boys — lift him — up with him — there he goes."

As he thus spoke, two of the other soldiers hauling the opposite extremity of the rope, raised the manacled wretch slowly from the ground, until he swung by his wrists, at a height of about six feet, his face depending toward the earth, and his knees nearly touching his chin — while the utmost exertion of every fibre was required to keep his arms close enough to his back, to prevent the strain upon them from becoming actually intolerable.

Having raised him to this height, the fixed extremity of the rope was so secured as to prevent the possibility of his descending nearer to the earth.

"Ah, gentlemen — for God's sake," persisted the terrified Garvey, "for God's sake, gentlemen, let me down now — do, good gentlemen — I can't bear it longer, my arms are breaking — mercy, mercy; good gentlemen, mercy."

"Who's hurtin' you, avich," resumed the same facetious personage, "tell me, my darlin', an' I'll taich him behaviour; can't yez let the gintleman alone, an' he not offendin' any one," continued he, with genuine humour, addressing hie grinning comrades, "an' only wants to get up a bit, and see what's goin' an."

"Thrue for you, Bryan," responded the sergeant, who stood by, with grave jocularity, "he came here just to see whatever he could, just as I may say, to look round him *that* a way," and, as he concluded, the sergeant, with easy familiarity, span him gently round by the lock of hair which depended from his forehead, to the intense amusement of the spectators.

"Mercy, gentlemen, mercy — I can't bear it — my arms — oh, my God — my arms — mercy, mercy," cried Garvey, with increasing agony; while the twitching of every flushed feature betrayed the intensity of the exertion which tasked his exhausted strength; “oh, mercy, gentlemen — mercy — mercy.”

“Up with him now, pull away, pull away, boys, don’t be keepin’ his honour waiting,” pursued the sergeant. “There he goes, pull away, pull away — up with him — there he goes.”

As he spoke two of the soldiers under his command, hauled the rope with their united strength, until they had raised the miserable man to within about a yard of the pulley, at the end of the projecting arm. The rope by which he swung was, as the reader will remember, secured firmly at the extremity, in a plug projecting from the upright shaft of the gibbet-like apparatus, and in such a way that the living load which depended at the other end could not fall nearer than some six feet or so, to the earth, “Mercy, mercy. Oh, my God, let me rest for half a minute,” cried Garvey. “Mercy, gentlemen, mercy, mercy.”

“Never fear, we’ll let you down soon enough, don’t be unaisy,” said the sergeant, measuring, as nearly as he could with his halbert, the height at which the prisoner was now suspended. “That will do; now mind the word, when I say *three,* steady boys — one — mind the word — two, steady boys — three, and away he goes.”

At the word, the men let the rope go, and the living burthen which they had so lately raised, shot downwards from his elevated position to the point at which, as we have said, the rope was fixed; then; his descent was arrested with a dislocating shock which wrenched his arms almost from the shoulder sockets. With a yell so appalling that it dashed with a momentary horror, even the faces of the executioners themselves, the miserable man testified the unendurable anguish of the dreadful torture; rolling his head and his eyes around, in the delirium of his fierce agony, he shrieked forth blasphemies and prayers in wild and terrible incoherence.

“Pike him, an’ put him out of pain, for God’s sake, will yez?” cried one of the spectators, with the energy of horror, and wincing under the frightful spectacle.

“Lave him alone,” said the sergeant, authoritatively; “stand uack, a bouchai, and mind your own business, or I’ll taich you a lesson; stand back, I say.”

“Have you any thing to say now, mister prisoner?” he demanded, sternly, of the mangled wretch, who slowly revolved — a spectacle half ludicrous, half terrific; maddened and stunned with agony, however, he only jabbered, and yelled; and writhed.

“Oh, blessed Father, stop his mouth, any way,” cried another of the lookers-on, in irrepressible terror and loathing.

“I’m sorry I kem near it at all, God bless us,” said a third, lingering on in the irresistible fascination of horror.

“Will ye spake, darlin’! — yes or no,” demanded the sergeant again, “an’ stop your bawling?”

“Do you hear the sargeant spaking to you?” demanded one of the executioners, indignantly;.and at the same time administering a slight chuck to the rope, which, however, had no other effect than that of extorting a still more piercing yell from the miserable caitiff.

“Come, boys, lie’s a rale detarmined Turk of a chap,” said the sergeant, irefully; “he won’t be said by you or me — so are yez ready?”

“Come along,” responded one.

“Now for it,” replied the other.

And once more, with their united strength, Garvey soared aloft, to the topmost range of the rope’s play — some score feet high in the air. Again was the concerted signal given— “one, two,..three!” — and again, with a whirr, and a rush, and a shock that almost snapped the rope, down came the racked prisoner, and the hideous torture was repeated; and now the agony of the wretch — his shrieks and writhings seemed to kindle a ferocious excitement among his executioners. The two soldiers who strained the rope, tugged faster and more furiously, and the very exertion demanded by the feat, seemed but to stimulate their growing fury. The sergeant stormed and swore his encouragement and applause; and even some of the spectators caught the irresistible contagion, and stamped and whooped in irrepressible excitement.

Again was the agonized wretch raised aloft, as before, and again subjected to the same terrific shock; and, again, and yet again, was the torture repeated, amid shrieks, that rang still wilder and more piercing every moment; while at each new descent the frightful process of dislocation perceptibly advanced; at last, after nine such unutterable pangs, nature relieved the sufferer, and he received the tenth and last in the passive silence of insensibility. Cruelty had now done its worst; the tortured limbs were wrenched completely round in their sockets, and, from the torn ligaments, the bruised blood was welling through his tattered shirt, in purple streams. He was now lowered to the ground and before the halter, whose gripe was to end the sentence with the life of the senseless and mutilated mass of humanity which lay before them, had been adjusted about his throat, one of the soldiers clubbed his musket, and with two blows mercifully shattered the unconscious head to pieces, and thus secured the mangled wretch against the possibility of further torment.

Thus, with all his unscrupulous pliancy and wakeful cunning, did our old acquaintance, Garvey, come eventually to swing upon a gibbet; and, by a strange coincidence enough, he attained that elevation upon a charge of one of the very few crimes of which he was in reality innocent. Then leave we Garvey there, with strained neck and head awry, slowly swaying in the soft night breeze, never more to scheme or flatter, with heart now steeled for ever against the allurements of human ambition, and the terrors of human power, more serenely tranquil than the bravest of them all, amid the thunder, and shouting, and slaughter of the morrow’s battle.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE FORTUNE OF THE FIELD — THE LAST RETURN TO DUBLIN — TIDINGS OF TORLOGH O'BRIEN.

THE author of "The Boyne Water" has, with a masterly hand, sketched the events of the momentous battle which gives its name to his work; we are not presumptuous enough to traverse the ground already explored by him; we shall have, besides, ere we close these chapters, to witness another and a far more desperately contested fight than this.

Return we, therefore, now to the friends whom we have left in the good city of Dublin. Early on the morning following the events recorded in our last chapter, it was universally known among the citizens that expresses had arrived, announcing that the battle would be fought that day. The guards at all the city gates were doubled, and the Protestant inhabitants prudently kept within their homes. As is usual in cases of such excited and terrible suspense, every hour brought with it some new rumour — some fresh alarm. Now it was announced that the French fleet was riding in Dublin bay; and again that an express had arrived from Waterford, and that the French troops had effected a landing in England. Then again came a report that the battle was going in favour of King James, and the English right wing already entirely routed. Then it was rumoured that King William was killed, and next, that he was only made prisoner. Varied by such agitating and conflicting rumours, the tedious hours of the long summer's day wore on. But at length, at about five o'clock in the evening, on jaded horses, dejected and travelsoiled, the first straggling couriers from the field of battle came riding into the town. These men, interrupted at every corner, clustered round by little mobs of listeners at every tavern door where they halted, and pursued by the more pertinacious even into the sanctuary of the tap-room, speedily spread the inauspicious tidings through the town. Others, scared and weary, came clattering in, at six o'clock, with news still more disastrous, of utter defeat. And hence, as the night wore on, faster and faster every moment came crowding in wounded and dusty soldiers, on tired steeds, and among them many of King James's body guards, without either swords or pistols, exhausted, savage, and dejected. The appearance of these latter gave rise to abundant speculation respecting the fate of the King himself, while the confusion and disorder of the streets were every moment enhanced by the continual and desultory arrival of ammunition carts, waggons, cannon and military baggage, passing incessantly through all the avenues of the town. Such was the disordered condition of the city at about ten o'clock at night, when King James himself came in, accompanied by about two hundred horse, straggling, broken, and dispirited. As this soiled and sombre effigy of royalty rode onward toward the Castle, stared at in silent dismay and wonder by the gaping crowd, and all but jostled by the dust-covered troopers who rode in such disorder about him, how striking — almost touching was the contrast which memory suggested, when, in all the splendid order of a stately pageant, amid the blessings and acclamations of enthusiastic thousands, he had, but one short year before, made his entrance into the selfsame city of Dublin. Thus dejected, and virtually dethroned, the poor King rode into the royal fortress, which was, after that night, never more to own him as its master.

Until twelve o'clock that night, these broken groups of horse came straggling, in continual succession, into the town; and the Protestants began to think that in good truth the whole Jacobite army had been utterly disorganized and broken, and were almost expecting the arrival of William's forces, to complete their destruction, when, with the wild harmony of hautboys and trumpets, and the roll of kettledrums, the van of the Irish horse appeared, and, much to the surprise of all who had witnessed the previous scattered arrivals, the whole of this splendid force entered the town, in perfect order. These were succeeded, early in the morning, by the French, and a great portion of the Irish foot; and after an interval of a few hours, the whole of this force marched out again, to receive and check the advance of William's army, and secure the city from attack.

All this, it is needless to say, kept the inhabitants of the town in a constant flutter of excitement and alarm. But who can describe the agony of suspense in which poor Grace awaited some tidings of her lover. Trusting in the confusion and darkness of the hour to escape remark, the old knight himself resolved, if possible, to procure some accurate information, which might relieve his child and himself from an uncertainty which was becoming all but insupportable. Without communicating his design to her, he was speedily in the midst of the scene of uproar and confusion which he had for so long witnessed from the window of his lodging. He had not to go far for the information which he coveted; for at the door of the Carbrie he saw an officer dismount, wearing the uniform of Torlogh O'Brien's regiment. Pushing his way through a crowd of gloomy faces, and heedless of the loud and eager conversation that arose on every side of him, Sir Hugh Willoughby followed the object of his pursuit through the mob of frightened and inquisitive civilians and dusty soldiers, who filled the public room of the old inn; and with the courtesy which the usages of the time allowed, took his seat at the table where the officer had already established himself; and after a brief introductory greeting, invited him to drink a pint of sack, at his expense. Spite of the sullenness of fatigue and defeat, some considerations — among which, perchance, a lamentable scarcity of coin was not the least — induced a prompt, if not very gracious acquiescence on the part of the stranger.

"It has fared amiss with you, to-day," said Sir Hugh, after a few preliminary remarks, "unless report speak false."

The soldier replied with a glance, half sullen, half defiant; then throwing his hat, with a reckless air, upon the table, he said, with a careless bitterness —

"It has fared with us, precisely as it ever must, sir, with men commanded by one who has neither conduct nor courage. We have had to retreat before superior numbers, but our retreat was as orderly' and as steady as a movement on parade. Had my Lord Tyrconnell, and our colonel, and Sarsfield been duly seconded, by —— we would have won the country this day; as it was, *they* have left more men upon the field than we: I pistoled two with my own hand, myself. The battle was as well fought as ever was field — I care not where. That French fellow, Lauzun, is enough to ruin fifty campaigns himself — the king, too, marred and mismanaged everything; almost all our artillery was last night sent off the ground, for Dublin, here — as if expressly to dishearten our men; and then, when the fight began, the old — ; but no matter, he'll pay dearly for it all, himself — it was a cursed day for Ireland when he first set his foot on her shores."

Having thus delivered himself, he quaffed off his wine, and filled another glass.

“And your colonel,” said Sir Hugh, his heart sinking with anxiety as he approached the question, which he almost dreaded to put— “your colonel — Torlogh O’Brien — a friend, I may say a very near and dear friend of mine; how has it fared with him?”

“As with a brave soldier,” answered the officer, sternly, but sadly withal, as he glanced through the window by the table-side, upward at the silvery summer clouds; “he lies on the field where he fought so well; and no braver soldier sleeps in the light of that moon tonight.”

“Good God, sir, dead!” ejaculated Sir Hugh, in extreme agitation; “is he — is he really and certainly dead?”

“‘Ifaith, sir — I fear me it is but too sure. I saw it, myself, in the last gallant charge — a d — d Dutch fellow did it — shot him in the sword-arm; and he was sabred down the next moment, and tumbled among the horses. If there is any life left in him still, he must have had as many as a cat. The Dutch rascal was one of the birds I bagged — that’s one comfort. Before the smoke was out of his pistol, I shot him as dead as that board and he slapped his hand on the table.

“Yet it is possible — ay, clearly possible, after all, that he may still be living,” cried Sir Hugh, while a faint hope gleamed on his mind, though he scarcely dared himself to trust it; “there was my own uncle, in Cromwell’s time — and — ay, ay, it well may be — many a man has outlived a worse mauling than that. Sir, sir, we must not despond — we will not despair — we’ll drink to his health, sir, and his speedy recovery; fill, sir, fill — I pledge you to the health of Colonel Torlogh O’Brien.”.

The soldier filled carelessly, as one who goes through some lifeless form, and gloomily dashed the liquor off; and Sir Hugh himself, resolved to tell the best tale he could to his poor child — hastily took leave of his new acquaintance, having placed upon the board a gold piece to defray the expense of their entertainment — a politeness which, even at a later period, one gentleman might tender to another, without offending the rules of etiquette.

Thus did old Sir Hugh, with a forced confidence and cheerfulness in his look and accents, but with a heart laden with the direst misgivings, return to his lodgings, and to his daughter’s presence.

It was at five o’clock in the morning, after the memorable battle of the Boyne, that the Roman Catholic Lord mayor, two or three of the judges, and some few of the principal citizens, who had espoused the cause of King James, stood in a motley group, awaiting the appearance of their royal master, in the presence-chamber. The king’s summons had called them from uneasy slumbers thus early to the castle; and in the cold grey of the morning’s light, it were hard to imagine a drearier or less inviting spectacle, than this group of loyalists presented. While they were waiting thus, James, a man of punctuality to the last, was employed in paying and discharging his menial servants, previously to taking his final leave of the Irish capital. At last, however, the dispirited expectants in the presence-chamber were relieved — the door opened, and James, followed by two or three gentlemen and officers, including Colonel Lutterel, who kept garrison as governor of the city, entered the apartment.

The king was plainly dressed in a travelling suit, and a certain expression of bitterness overcast, with additional gloom, his usually sombre countenance — as with grave moroseness he returned the salute of the group who awaited him. There was that, in the fallen condition of the king — in the very magnitude of his misfortunes, which lent a kind of mournful dignity to his presence, and which, spite of the petulance that occasionally broke from him, impressed the few disappointed and well nigh ruined followers of his cause, who stood before him, with feelings of melancholy respect.

“Gentlemen,” said the king, after a brief pause, “it hath pleased the almighty Disposer of events to give the victory to our enemies; you have, doubtless, heard already, all that it concerns you most nearly to know. Our army hath been defeated, and the enemy will be in possession of this city, at latest, before many days have passed. It hath been our fate — we speak it in no bitterness, for your case is one with ours — to be everywhere ill-served. In England, we had an army who could have fought for us, if they would — here it is contrariwise: we have an army who are loyal enough, but who will not stand by us; the issue is, in either case, for us, one and the same. Matters, therefore, being so, we must needs shift for ourselves as best we may; above all, we do command you — we do *implore* of you, gentlemen, in your several stations — and principally you, Colonel Lutterel, as governor of this our city — to prevent all undue severities, all angry reprisals, all violences, which some may be disposed — while the city remains still in the hands of our friends — to inflict upon the suspected within its walls. We do earnestly entreat of you all to remember that this is *our* city, and they our subjects; protect it and;hem so long as it shall seem wise to occupy this town for us. This is our last command — our parting request."

Here the king paused for a second or two, while he glanced round again upon his dejected auditory, and a general murmur of acquiescence indicated the respectful attention with which he was listened to.

"Our personal safety," pursued James, in a changed voice, "renders it needful that we stay no longer within our kingdom of Ireland — *your* services and fidelity, gentlemen, we shall ever bear in affectionate remembrance. Make for yourselves such terms as prudence dictates: as for us, the sad fortune which hath turned even our own children— "

The king's voice faltered and broke; and spite of all his efforts, two or three heavy tears rolled slowly, one by one, down his face, and fell sullenly upon his rich lace collar. Mastering the weakness of his wounded heart, with a strong effort, James, after a few moments, resumed.

"The sad fortune which hath pursued us through all our troubles — dissolving those natural ties dearest to the human heart — and ranking among our enemies even those most cherished and beloved, hath left us but little to hope from the humanity of strangers. What clemency may we expect from them, seeing that our own kindred — our own children, have drawn the sword against us? We shall, therefore, quit this kingdom, trusting to the loyalty of those we leave behind, to guard our interests as to them seems best: we take our departure — it may be to meet soon under happier fortunes again; it may be to meet no more — but, at all events, bearing with us a sweet and consolatory remembrance of your most loyal faith and constancy: and so, gentlemen, we bid you farewell — all lovingly farewell — farewell."

There was, in the conclusion of the king's brief address, something pathetic, and even generous, which touched the hearts of his auditory with a momentary feeling akin to pity and even admiration. Such as were foremost in the little crowd, grouped around him as he departed, with loyal wishes and blessings — and several even kneeled and kissed the feeble hand from which the sceptre had been so lately wrung.

A minute or two more, and King James, accompanied by but two or three attendants, rode at a sharp trot over the castle drawbridge, and thence along the high road to Waterford, where he embarked for France, never more to revisit his hereditary dominions.

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The day that followed was an anxious one for the Protestants who remained in the city of Dublin; the blackest rage and exasperation pervaded the defeated soldiery, who indemnified themselves for their disappointment (disgrace it could not fairly be called) by terrifying the disaffected and Whiggish residents, still in their power, with continual threats of fire and sack. The militia, who kept guard at the Castle, talked freely and exultingly of the pillage and burning which was to lay the city waste, ere William with his forces could effect an entrance. Thus were the suspected inhabitants kept perpetually upon the rack of frightful anticipation and suspense during the whole of the anxious interval between the departure of James, and the entrance of the victorious William.

Peeping stealthily from their windows, these obnoxious inmates beheld, with anxious and fearful curiosity, the tumultuous confusion which filled the streets; mobs of listless and depressed idlers of all ranks, dusty stragglers from every corps, and in all the varied uniforms of King James's army; carts and waggons laden with stores and ammunition, mounted lackeys, and the stately carriages of the Jacobite aristocracy, lumbering westward from the town, with their affrighted loads of beauty and refinement; dust and clatter, jostling and gossipping, gloomy citizens, furious and half drunken soldiers, liveried servants, carters, coaches, and horsemen, mingled, and doubled, and crushed and hustled in the mazes of a distempered and distracting dream.

All this hurry-scurry had, however, pretty well subsided by two or three o'clock, and the affrighted Protestants began now, in good earnest, to hope that their terrors had been, after all, but causeless. The arrival of King William's vanguard was momentarily expected; and the poor Roman Catholic citizens, in this untoward reverse of fortune, began, in turn, to think of securing themselves from the wrath of the invaders, whose whole power was now thought to be approaching within a few hours' march of the town; and many of them sought shelter, and found it too, by scores, in the shops and houses of the Protestants. Again, however, the tables were destined to be turned, for, at four o'clock, the entire Jacobite army, which was supposed to have been, by this time, far on its march westward, reentered the town — the cavalry foremost, and these followed by the French and Irish foot, with bands playing, and banners displayed, and thundering huzzas. And now, indeed, the panic of the defenceless Protestants was piteous; women screamed — children cried — men barred their doors and windows, and stood in distracted silence, awaiting the overwhelming assault and destruction which all expected — unarmed, unaided, and as they believed, devoted to immediate and frightful ruin and death. Once more, however, their fears were relieved, for the whole army marched through the town without once halting, until they had reached the open country at the other side, where they were formed for the march, and so proceeded westward, astounding many a gaping villager and rustic maiden with the splendour of their long drawn pageant of martial pomp and ringing music.

Still, Lutterell, with some three hundred of the militia, continued to keep garrison for King James, in the city of Dublin, and still the gaols and the provisional prisons, converted to that use for the occasion, remained full — in some cases nearly to suffocation — of the suspected Whigs and Protestants who had been summarily consigned to the rigours of confinement; and still the sentinels kept guard at the doors — sometimes threatening them with immediate execution — sometimes promising to blow them up with gunpowder, said to be stored in the vaults underneath; and, in short, keeping alive their sensibilities by a constant round of such practical pleasantries.

Lutterell, however, a few hours afterwards, followed the army, and withdrew his guards; the prisoners were now at liberty — the militia all gone, and thus the last vestige of James's supremacy had vanished from the city of Dublin as completely as though the sights and terrors of the last strange year had been but the creations of a dream.

It was not, however, until eight o'clock on the following night that the fearful interregnum which held the city in all the anxiety and agitation of suspense, was finally terminated by the entrance of a single troop of William's dragoons, who came, with their officer, to take charge of the stores. A contemporary writer, an eye-witness of the scene, describes their reception: “It was impossible,” says the author of the Irish Journal, “the king himself coming after this, could be welcomed with equal joy as this one troop; the Protestants hung about the horses, and were ready to pull the men off them, as they marched up to the Castle.”

Having thus seen the old King fairly out of the island, and the new one established in possession of the Irish capital, leaving William’s army encamped close to Dublin, by the quiet village of Finglas, and that of his illfated rival in active preparation for the defence of Limerick, we shall close this Chapter, designing, in our next, to take up the personal adventures of those whose fortunes we have hitherto followed, under circumstances thus suddenly, and to some of them disastrously, reversed.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE CATHEDRAL.

THE moon was now high in the heavens, and her blue light fell through the tall arches of a roofless aisle. The hum and buzz of the stirring streets but faintly floated into this solemn and secluded ruin; the bat flitted in his noiseless zig-zag career; the drooping ivy nodded and beckoned from the timeworn buttresses, and thin white mists crept over the grass-grown graves. Through the grey shafts of the Gothic aisle, a little group moves slowly and mysteriously; two men in slouching hats — are carrying in a cloak some heavy, helpless burthen, and stagger and stumble through the undulating graves as they proceed. See, yonder are two others; their coats are thrown aside, and a heavy slab of stone displaced has disclosed a dark, yawning orifice in the wall. See, yet again, another pair of silent figures; side by side they stand beneath the high-arched doorway, under the central tower, guarding, as it seems, the entrance into this melancholy and solemn place. Never did moonlight fall upon two more haggard and resolute faces; swords peep out from the skirts of their short mantles, and pistols gleam in their hands. The faces are fixed as death and all as silent — not even whispers passing. A stranger, looking in through that stone-shafted aisle, might have fancied he beheld the spectres of the guilty dead, re-enacting some of the dark and fearful scenes of the life they had left, in that ghostly and desolate spot.

About the same time — scarce a stone's throw away — an earnest colloquy engaged two men in close debate, whose gist and purpose nearly enough affected those silent figures, whom we have just seen in the ruins. There then stood, at this the northern side of the city, among the scattered dwellings of a broad, winding street, a lowly stunted inn, with a thatched roof, and projecting upper story, half barn, half house. Within was a broad, earthen-floored chamber, where dozens of guests, of one kind or another, were talking, singing, eating, and drinking, with small regard either to the criticisms or the convenience of any but their own especial knot of companions. In the rear of this were several deserted stables, the lofts of which had been converted into a sort of common sleeping ward, for the poorer frequenters of this little inn. A few bundles of musty straw supplied the bedding, and a wallet, or saddle, furnished the luxuriously-disposed with bolster and pillow at once. Strewn over the floor of this dreary dormitory, lay some half-dozen tired mortals; some snoring in profound unconsciousness, others kept awake by many an anxious thought for the coming morrow. Among those who slept, was a stout and gloomy-looking old man, rolled in his threadbare cloak, his head supported upon a scanty bundle, tied in a handkerchief, and his deep, stertorous breathing testifying how soundly he slumbered. On a sudden he started up with a look of terror, and gazing into the darkness of the chamber, with a moaning shudder —

"Oh, God! oh, God! what dreams!" he muttered at last; and rising slowly and dejectedly, for he feared to disturb his companions in wretchedness, who were likely to resent such an invasion of their repose with a violence proportionate to the value they set upon this, their solitary luxury, he crept towards the ladder, which led downwards from the loft. Close to this point, however, unfortunately for his peaceable intentions, a recent comer, unseen by our newly-awakened friend, had established himself; and upon this recumbent figure the portly walker set his foot, with a pressure which was any thing but soothing. Up bounced the sleeper from his lair, with a ready oath, and a fist already clenched, to second the imprecation with a blow. A chance ray of moonlight, however, streaming through the broken roof, illuminated the forbidding face of the burly offender, and the assailant stayed his hand; and, after a breathless pause of a few seconds, ejaculated —

"Tisdal!"

"Ay, Tisdal," retorted he— "Tisdal, I, and thou, Deveril, or the devil has borrowed his voice."

"Well met, Jeremiah — well met, bow-shanks," said the ruffian, but without his usual hilarity of tone. "Curse this place; hadn't we better come down and have something — eh?

"Yes, if *you* pay for it," said Tisdal, with bitter vehemence; "I have but three shillings in the world, but three — and I'm not going to squander them on *you,* miscreant!"

“Yery good — as you please, honest master Tisdal,” replied Deveril, coolly; “as for me I have a pocketful of crowns, but, egad, they’re brass ones; and now that the king is gone, the prince has played your humble servant a scurvy trick and cried them all down to pennies; but never mind, come down, I say — I want to have a word with you; I have some work on my fingers, and want a partner; what say you to i share in a venture? — comedown, I say, come along.”

And Deveril, without adding another word, descended the crazy ladder, every second rung of which was either gone or cracked. Tisdal, whose necessities overcame his abhorrence of the man, followed, and they both stood upon the rutted and broken pavement of the little courtyard — each glanced around with the quickness of suspicion, but the place was absolutely deserted and silent, except from the muffled sounds of song and laughter that arose from the kitchen of the humble inn — the two companions stood close together, and spoke in the lowest tones of caution.

“I’ve had bad dreams,” quoth Tisdal, whose destitution made him a ready listener to any proposal for bettering his forlorn condition, “and your venture will come to nought; besides if it be any thing of the old kind,” he whispered hurriedly, “I’ll have nothing to do with it — I’ll have no part in it — I’d rather die — I’d rather die!”

“Tut, man, spare your breath,” said Deveril, coolly, “why there’s not a man in the city worth sixpence after all the taxation, and searches, and all that; whom in the devil’s name could we rob with profit; content yourself, it’s nothing of the kind.”

“Deveril — Deveril,” said Tisdal, with a troubled and sinister air, “my dream is coming out — it is coming out. I do believe you are the fiend himself, in shape of man, come again to tempt and undo me.”

“Pshaw, man! — what ails you?” retorted Deveril, impatiently. “I tell you it’s no such thing — quite the reverse — a laudable, legal, righteous, saint-like action.”

“What is it? — out with it, then,” urged Tisdal.

“There are two outlawed rascals,” responded Deveril, “Ryan (Ned of the Hills, they call him) and Hogan, nicknamed Galloping Hogan. The prince has set a price upon their heads. I have smoked a pipe with them in the camp, and know them; and I think I recognized them both, not two hours since, in this town. If they are hiding here, we may, with your knowledge of the cut-throat lanes and alleys of the city, and my acquaintance with their persons, point them both out, and so touch the gold. There's a simple, honest, straightforward plan for you, that has none of the old stand-and-deliver smack about it, that you should roll your eyes, and turn up vour nose at mention of it. Eh? — what say you?"

Tisdal, after some brief parley, agreed.

"Here I am in King Jemmie's uniform, and about to touch King William's cash," said Deveril, with a rollicking grin, and a snap of the fingers. "Little Dick Slash for ever! Ah! Captain, no one like Dick for getting out of a scrape — that you'll allow. I'm a deserter, do you mind, at present; and then, if this scheme fails, why I'm off again, away for Limerick, after the drum and the colours once more; for I've a kick or two left in me still; and, egad, I'll see the fun out, unless better offers."

*

King William had encamped his army, not far from forty thousand strong, close by the little village of Finglass. The city of Dublin, though filled with laggers and deserters from James's army, skulking in all its obscure hiding-places, was yet secure enough. The Blue Guards garrisoned the Castle, and kept guard at all the public offices. The Protestant citizens forgot all their losses and troubles, and, to their credit be it added, even their old scores of vengeance, in the happy consciousness of their entire deliverance.

On the Sunday following the memorable passage of the Boyne, King William, a punctilious observer of the public duties as well as of the domestic proprieties of religion, attended Divine service in St. Patrick's Cathedral. The gate of the great aisle stood open to receive the royal conqueror; curiosity, enthusiasm, and loyalty, had combined with higher motives, to draw together an immense concourse, within this solemn and ancient building. Among the crowd who tended thither, walked Sir Hugh, accompanied by his old friend and kinsman, Sir Thomas Neville, who had regaled him already with a hundred vehement complaints, of his "hairbrained son," his "mad-cap boy," his "good-for-nothing, scapegrace, Percy;" of whose eventual fortunes, it seemed, he so absolutely despaired, that he was well nigh resolved to transport him to Jamaica, or anywhere, out of his sight or hearing.

“I tell you what,” said he, confidentially, at last: “I have reason to believe the boy was about to make a fool of himself for life — for life, sir *r* Egad! I ascertained by a lucky accident the damsel’s name — it was Tisdal.”

“How! — Tisdal!” ejaculated Sir Hugh. “Can it be little Phebe — Phebe Tisdal? You amaze me!”

“By my troth, ’twas even so — Phebe Tisdal, at your service,” responded his companion: “but I have knocked that scheme on the head. I did not let him know I was in the secret, however, for the boy has a spice of his father in him — egad, sir, a spirit, a devil of a spirit, sir — so I made interest, and had the hopeful jackanapes sent off upon public business — a good joke i’ faith! — public business, sir, to London. Ha, ha!”

“So we sha’nt see poor Percy,” said Sir Hugh.

“No, no — egad! — not this bout,” said Sir Thomas, wiping his eyes after his explosion of merriment: “not this bout, sir; he’s safer where he is; for it would not quite do to have my son marry a milkmaid. I wrote a short letter — *t* pretty complete extinguisher upon the whole affair — to the girl, and I mean to be after him myself to London. He can’t be too closely looked after — no, no.”

When these old kinsfolk had reached the Gothic pile, and found themselves at last among its rude and solemn arches — a part of the expectant multitude who thronged its aisle, whose echoes were now pealing with the rich and plaintive harmonies of the organ — they took their places in silence in the front of the crowd, who had already formed themselves so as to leave a clear passage along the centre to the choir, down which the king was to walk. Sir Hugh, who had never yet beheld the renowned personage, who had played so great a part in the world’s history, was naturally intensely anxious to behold him; and at last this eager wish was gratified.

A prolonged shouting from without, amid which the tramp of chargers could scarcely be heard, announced the arrival of the king, accompanied by several of his chief officers and a guard; and in a few minutes, having dismounted, the royal party entered at the western gate, and so proceeded up the centre of the great aisle. The slow pace at which they moved, afforded abundant time to Sir Hugh to scan the figure of him whose fame had for so long filled all Europe, and the sounds and sights of whose last victory were still, as it were, before and around them. A kind of hum — a low, stirring sound — which reverence for the place alone restrained from swelling into a wild huzza of rapture — rose on every side, from the dense and enthusiastic crowd, as William advanced, with slow and somewhat feeble step, along the aisle — a frail, slight figure, arrayed in a riding suit of crimson velvet, heavily laced, with the ponderous adjuncts of the high jack-boots and clumsy spurs, worn in those days; his apparent feebleness contrasting with exciting effect, with all that was known of the daring and resolution which animated that fragile frame in the field of battle. He wore, of course, the full peruke of the day, in hue, dark brown, overshadowing a countenance (alas! that if should be so!) very perceptibly scarred with the smallpox; the face was lank, its general character austere and immoveable, with an expression about the mouth that resembled the peevishness of habitual pain; the nose was very high, the eyebrows marked, and the eyes dark, prominent, and bright as an eagle's. The piercing fire of this latter feature redeemed the whole face, and contrasted vividly and splendidly with its rigid stillness; no one on whom it looked ever forgot its power — it was an eye worthy of the hero. He carried a cane in his hand, and leaned upon it with a pressure, which showed that his apparent weakness was also real; and as he moved onward, that deep, hollow cough, which never forsook him, was more than once audible.

Not far from the entrance opening from the aisle into the choir, in the transept, was placed a coffin, covered with a crimson velvet pall. It was that of Schonberg, whose remains it was then intended should finally rest in Westminster Abbey, but which were afterwards buried instead within the walls where they then lay, and within which they will continue to lie, in all probability, till the day of doom. As the king reached this spot, one of his officers whispered a word in his ear, and William stopped somewhat abruptly, paced a step or so towards the coffin, and looked upon it steadfastly, and, as it seemed, sadly; then shook his head slowly, and said aloud —

"Few like him left — few like him left." And then, after a brief pause, he added— "Good Schonberg! we trust he rests in God!"

This incident, the entire unaffectedness of the king's brief but mournful apostrophe, and the deeper solemnity which darkened his grave features as he moved onward, impressed his subjects with a respectful interest, which, if possible, enhanced the enthusiasm with which they regarded their deliverer, who, as they well knew, had in the same fight which had laid the tenant of that coffin low, hazarded his own life, again and again, with an unreserve the most daring and devoted.

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The service was now concluded, and Sir Hugh having taken leave of his companion, and waiting until the crowd had in some measure dispersed, paced the great aisle of the rude old building from end to end; and as will often happen in such cases, while thus occupying the interval, he fell unconsciously into meditation. The king, officers, guards, and all were now departed, the eager crowds gradually broke into detachments and dispersed, and Sir Hugh remained, except for one other solitary pedestrian, wholly alone in the deserted building. His companion was a man apparently of some three score years, with a stooping carriage, and a slight limp as he walked; he had long grizzled hair, which had once been red, a smoky brown complexion, projecting underjaw, and a keen fiery dark eye; he was plainly dressed in a sober and somewhat threadbare garb of snuff-coloured cloth, and one of his hands carried a walking-stick, on which he leaned with considerable emphasis. As Sir Hugh, for about the twentieth time, passed this singular and somewhat repulive-looking person, the stranger on a sudden accosted him with the salutation— “Good day, sir the knight returned the greeting, and the stranger, thus encouraged, proceeded: —

“A glorious sermon, sir — a moving discourse,” he observed with much fervency. “Doctor King, is indeed, sir, a precious instrument — precious, truly, as that other most honourable vessel, which hath been cracked and broken, alas! like a vile potsherd, only a few days since, by the rebels’ shot — I mean that man of God — that minister of peace — that holy preacher of fire and sword — that most Christian dragoon and doctor of divinity — Governor Walker, who saved Derry by his holy zeal, undergoing in his own proper person the double duties of parson and bombardier — from the pulpit to the bastion, sir, and back again — preaching and battering by turns, exhorting saints to earn paradise by blowing sinners to perdition, and in a word, going about everywhere doing good; alas, sir, that was an unlucky shot that rid the world of him; what a bishop he would have made!”

Sir Hugh looked once or twice at the speaker, but though his tone, as well as his rhapsodical language, was as it seemed that of irony and sarcasm, yet his countenance and gestures betrayed no indication of the kind, nevertheless there was something in the whole apostrophe sufficiently sinister to arm the reserve of the old knight, who contented himself with simply bowing in reply.

“Well, sir,” continued the old man, raising one hand slightly, and turning up the whites of his eyes, “lie’s gone to heaven, in a buff jerkin and jack-boots, for he died as he lived, in harness; he’s disposed of — so much the worse, sir, for us, Protestant boys — so much the worse, though after all we must not despair — there’s as good fish in the sea as ever was caught. I doubt if even he, that holy man of Bible and bullet, Walker himself, could have delivered a more seasonable discourse — a more edifying and sustaining harangue than that we have heard to-day. Doctor King, sir, has earned a bishopric; nay, he has earned even a higher promotion, may he get it! though methought indeed he sometimes soared a flight above the king himself, when for instance he likened his late majesty, James, to Lucifer, as you may remember, for as it seemed to me the king frowned, and looked dissatisfied; between ourselves, I fear me William of Nassau is not so good a Protestant by half as you and I were disposed to esteem him.”

“It would seem to me sir,” replied the knight, a little tartly, “that you are making yourself pleasant at the expense of— “

“Nay, nay, say not so,” interrupted he of the snuff-coloured suit, “what! *I* make myself pleasant, and at my years! pleasant about the solemn Walker! pleasant about a two hours’ sermon! pleasant — pleasant — odds my life, sir, time has been when I should have pinked a man through the ribs for so much as hinting I could be pleasant on such subjects.”

“You’ll excuse me then, sir, if I confess myself at a loss to comprehend you,” said Sir Hugh. “If you *he* serious, your discourse is, to say the least of it, somewhat extravagant, and by no means to my liking; I shall, therefore, with your leave— “

“Wish me good morning,” suggested his companion, in an altered tone; and for the first time standing erect and firmly before him. “You’re right, Sir Hugh Willoughby, though we part not company quite so soon as you would have us, you are right in holding my words to be the language of derision and contempt; but see you I am not here to bandy arguments and instances — hold we each our own opinions — you yours to your comfort, I mine at my peril; I have watched an opportunity to speak one word with you unobserved."

"Speak it then," said the old man, not a little surprised.

"Colonel Torlogh O'Brien," continued the stranger, lowering his voice, "lies badly wounded in this town; the lethargy of fever is upon him now; but two days since I promised him that if he reached the city in safety, I would inform *you,* Sir Hugh Willoughby, of his condition; and, if you desired it, lead you to his lodging, that with your own eyes you might see that he lives. You need not be told that secrecy is needful in a case like this; if, then, you desire to assure yourself of his safety, you may accompany me."

"I do indeed desire it — earnestly desire it," answered Sir Hugh, eagerly, "I would, however, fain know, if it may be so, to whom I speak?"

"An Irish gentleman, sir," answered the stranger, coolly and withal sternly; "my name is and can be no concern of yours; I have undertaken a message, which I have delivered; I make an offer which you may accept or refuse, as suits you best; in either case you preserve *of course* an honourable secrecy."

"Of course," echoed Sir Hugh, haughtily; and then added— "I am ready to go with you."

CHAPTER XLVII.

MARY'S ABBEY.

THE momentary change of gait and tone, to which we have just alluded, in the odd-looking stranger, was enough to assure Sir Hugh that his companion was supporting an assumed character, and maintaining a disguise. He was, however, constitutionally fearless; and, indeed, it needed, perhaps, more courage on the part of his companion, obnoxious as, perhaps, he was, to the powers now in the ascendancy, to trust his safety thus in the hands of a Whig gentleman, who had small reason to regard the friends of King James's cause with favour or affection.

At an easy pace they pursued their way, which led them to Essex-Bridge (then but a few years open, and long since rebuilt from the foundations), and having crossed the river, they plunged into a series of narrow lanes and streets, many of them resembling those of a crowded village rather than of a metropolis — some of the houses that composed them little better than hovels, some thatched, and others tiled, and all thrown together with a marvellous contempt of symmetry, and, as it seemed, of convenience too. The whole population, brute and human, appeared to have turned out, and to be lounging and loitering in the streets: men and women, pigs and children, dogs and poultry. A crowded listlessness pervaded the highways and alleys, such as may still be seen in many of the older quarters of our provincial towns, even to this day. Sir Hugh and his companion made their way through all this, and reached at last a mass of low, roofless buildings, which looked like ruinous stables. At the end of this row — the dreary effect of which was enhanced by the utter silence and desertion of the place — there stood a dingy, shattered wall, which showed here and there the traces of having once been battlemented. In a low broad, archway in this, was swinging a rotten door of oak, studded with rusty pins of iron. Quickening his pace, and throwing a hurried glance behind him, the unknown hastily pushed this open, and led Sir Hugh into a neglected graveyard, overgrown with rank grass and nettles, from among which were peeping hundreds of old headstones, of all heights and hues. The tall windows of an old and ruined church looked mournfully forth upon this deserted burial-ground, from the further extremity of the enclosure; a pile of confused rubbish and ruins at the right; and upon the other side, a mass of quaint old buildings, which seemed to have suffered almost as much from time as the rest had from violence. With the exception of a portion of one of these melancholy looking tenements, the whole range appeared to have been given up to decay and utter desertion. Stone-shafted windows and dark doorways, through which the breeze sighed and moaned desolately enough, looked sadly out upon the waving grass and grey headstones of the little churchyard. From one tall chimney only, among the group, a thin curl of smoke was rising.

"You know this place?" inquired his conductor.

"Mary's Abbey; is it not?" rejoined Sir Hugh.

"It is so," answered he; "and once more I have to remind you, sir, that you have engaged to observe a strict and honourable secrecy. am now introducing you to the haunts or men, some of whom are, like *myself* — proscribed and desperate; and all of whom have, at least, strong reasons for concealing, in impenetrable mystery, their present abode, which, destitute of every other recommendation, presents, at least, the one advantage of security."

Sir Hugh repeated his assurances of secrecy, and they both ascended a flight of some dozen stone steps, which slanted along the front of the building in question, and terminated before a small door, which was at once opened to the stranger's summons, by a huge, ill-looking fellow, whom Sir Hugh had some indistinct remembrance of having seen before. The door being closed again, Sir Hugh found himself with his new companion in a low, long room, grudgingly lighted by a single narrow shot-hole rather than a window, and even that half stopped with old clothes and other mufflers. There was scarcely a fragment of furniture in the chamber; a fire glowed under the yawning chimney, and afforded the chief illumination of which the room could boast; a loft overhead, whose boarding had once formed the ceiling, was now rotted and shattered; and through its gaping apertures, and the fissures of the broken roof, the obstructed light of day was drearily peeping. The tall, ungainly, moving figure who had acted as janitor was now smoking by the fire — it was Hogan.

"Welcome home, Mr. Ryan," said he at length, sulkily enough.

"An' who is it's with you? — aiah! be the laws— " and with this broken ejaculation Mr. Hogan burst into a sudden and unpleasant fit of laughter.

"I've seen *you* somewhere," said Sir Hugh, doubtfully. "No matther — no matther — nevermind," said Hogan, stirring the ashes of his pipe, and grinning into the bowl of it all the while, "we'll be good friends yet, please God; bar the door, Ned," he continued, "it's not a spy you are, is it?"

"This gentleman has come here at my request; he has pledged his honour to keep the secrecy of our hiding-place," answered Ryan, "there's nothing to fear from him."

"I'm forced to wear this disguise," said Ryan, with a shrug and a smile of bitterness; "we lead pretty much the life of the fox — hiding now, preying again, and seldom safe but when we are earthed. When Colonel O'Brien wakes, I shall hear, and then conduct you to his chamber; until then we must not disturb him — I have so promised."

They sunk now into a gloomy silence, which was at last broken by Hogan, who took the pipe he had now finished from his mouth, and looking with a surly melancholy at the hearth, said on a sudden —

"I thought I heard the banshee last night, Eaman; I thought I heard her, sure enough, cryin' through the graves an' the ould buildings, as sweet an' as beautiful as a colleen that 'id be cryin' after her lover, down in our own sweet Munster, where I wisht in my heart we wor both iv us now."

There was something almost pathetic in the rough tones of Hogan as he said this, and in his face an ominous look of gloom and doubt, which, perhaps, impressed his companion unpleasantly.

"Come, come, Hogan," he said, briskly, "what dismays you now; I never saw you cast down before?" and, after a pause, he broke into the Irish language.

Sir Hugh, who understood it, however, thoroughly, intimated as much; and with an angry growl, and an angrier glance, Hogan again sank for a time into sullen silence. At last he said again, relapsing into the same vein of gloomy association, which seemed to have fastened upon his fancy —

"I thought I heard her more than half the night-; I never heard sweeter. I remember the time, Eaman, that same cryin' — through the graves there, in the night, so soft and dark — would have made me drop tears in plenty; but it is not that way it takes me now. Aiah, wisha! wisha! I'm misdoubtin' there's something wrong; there's death in that cryin,' Eaman — mind my words, there's something in it — *death* in it, Eaman, for me or for you."

At this moment, a careless step was heard upon the stone stair outside, and a knocking ensued at the door. Hogan and Ryan exchanged a quick, ominous glance, as they suddenly arose, and impressed silence upon their visiter by a peremptory gesture.

We must here glance for a moment at the cause of this interruption. As Sir Hugh, accompanied by his guide, entered the chamber, where they were now immured, and closed the door behind them — a rustling might have been observed in the rubbish of one of the roofless buildings, which stood in this melancholy quadrangle; and, after a moment, the wiry form and sinister face of our old acquaintance, Deveril, arose cautiously from among the loose piles of stones and tiles, and advancing with as little noise as possible to the window, he looked into the inclosure, and in all directions, before he even ventured to speak out —

"Well," he exclaimed at last, with a chuckle, which had in it an indescribable mixture of exultation, villainy, and something very like fear— "well, who was right? we have found the form, and, egad, the hare's sitting. Come, be lively; the plan's your own as much as mine, so don't turn tail now like a cur. Come, I say, what the devil ails you?"

This concluding interrogatory was delivered with much suppressed vehemence; for the countenance on which he looked bore an expression so very unlike what he had expected to find there, that the contrast almost startled him —

"What? are you afraid of brother Snap! what; will nothing but burnt brandy screw you up to the point?"

This encouragement was addressed, as the reader has no doubt perceived, to no less a person than our old acquaintance, Jeremiah Tisdal, who, somewhat more blotched, as well as somewhat less brawny than of yore, now rose slowly from the same well devised-post of observation, from which Deveril had only just emerged.

"I saw him," answered Tisdal, with a look of terror and dislike; "I saw him, I tell you."

"Who, man? — speak out," retorted Deveril, in an impatient whisper. "One whom I fear to see more than the father of ill himself," replied Tisdal, with a shudder.

"Puh man — you mean the old knight, Sir Hugh. Eh?" replied Deveril, sharply. "Why, roast me, but you're turned out a regular old woman; curse you, this is no time to trifle. *I* wont be trifled with; stir yourself."

"I'll not go into the same room, or under the same roof with that old man," said Tisdal, doggedly; "I have so much grace left."

"Grace, indeed; why, you devil's meat — but no matter; you had ever, while I can remember, the same dogged temper," said Deveril, with something like disgust. "You had always a good thick pig's-head of your own, so have your own way. Do you go for the men, then; bring them round quietly and quickly; and mind, as *you* hang fire, you must only pay for it. I take one-half; the rest goes among you and your pals."

Deveril examined the flints and priming of his pistols, as also the charge, and then dropped one of them into each of his two heavy coatpockets, where they lay perfectly concealed; so that for any thing to the contrary appearing, he might have really been, as he desired to appear, a perfectly unarmed man.

"All right," he said, with a pale and distorted smile. "Now go you, and do your part, such as it is; and I stake my life on't, Ned Ryan's head shall stick over the castle gate by tomorrow, and we fob the gold."

"Enough — enough," said Tisdal, with renewed alacrity. Get thee on, so soon as I have been gone for so long as may bring me to the place where they await us — I will not fail thee."

With these words, Tisdal scrambled over the loose stones and rubbish, and pushed his unwieldly bulk through one of the narrow loopholes in the back wall, and so made his way through the rear, to the spot where a corporal and four men, at scarce a quarter of a mile distance, were awaiting his arrival.

Meanwhile, Deveril having suffered as long a time to elapse as he conceived to be prudent without taking any further step, at length rubbed off so much of the dust and cobwebs he had contracted as were removable, and coming forth, shook the folds of his dress free of the creases impressed by his constrained attitude, then, with the usual cock in his hat, and whistling as he went in affected *nonchalance,* he mounted the stone steps, and knocked, as we have seen, at the door which had so recently closed upon Sir Hugh and the rapparee.

In obedience to the gestures of his two companions, Sir Hugh, whose situation was beginning to be anything but a pleasant one, observed a strict silence, while Hogan mounted a table, and looked cautiously forth from the little window. He beheld Deveril standing alone at the door, with his ear to the planks, and his mouth a-gape, obviously intent on hearing whatever might pass previously to his own admission. He also saw below his own shockheaded attendant, the boy whom we have mentioned elsewhere. This wild, elf-like creature shook his head with an expression of urgent menace, pointed to Deveril, unseen by that gentleman, then drew his finger significantly across his own throat, and in the next moment he had vanished. This intimation was not lost upon his patron. Hogan descended, leaving Deveril still in the same fixed attitude of attention, and from time to time renewing his summons at the door, while he whispered emphatically in Ryan's ear the word— "Danger."

"How many of them are there?" asked he, "But *one,"* answered he— "but one *now."*

"Then let him in," said Ryan, decisively. And forthwith the bars were removed, and Deveril entered.

"Friends — friends," ejaculated Deveril, with an appearance of relieved anxiety— "friends, egad, and in common troubles. Here at least I am safe, if, that is, you will consent to harbour me, until I can either creep out of the town unobserved, or else change these tell-tale clothes."

"Sit down by the fire — you call us friends — treat us like friends. Sit down, I say — sit by the fire," said Ryan.

Deveril had not expected to find Hogan there; for he was, spite of all his efforts to appear at his ease, a little disconcerted and undecided for a few moments. It wore off, however, and he sat down in the place indicated, Hogan meanwhile watching, with an intense, though scarcely perceptible, vigilance, every movement of his, as a huge, hungry cat might those of a domesticated magpie. One look of significance, the faintest and quickest imaginable, the two raparees exchanged.

"Sir Hugh," said Ryan, "come hither." At the same time he beckoned him into an inner room."

The knight complied. It was smaller and darker, and in every respect more comfortless than the other. The floor was covered with heavy flagging, and seizing a crowbar which lay ready among some straw, Ryan, raised one of the heaviest of these flags, and disclosed a flight of steps, such as in old churches lead down into the crypts.

‘‘These lead to the vaults. When you reach the last step of hirty, turn to your right, and walk straight on, guided by the wall at your right hand, until you see light. You will there find better entertainment than here, and you will also discover him whom you desire to see. You are expected, and, therefore, need not fear for your safety. You must now waste no time, for we are about to have had work here. That soldier is a spy and a traitor.”

“’Twas ill managed to suffer that prying scoundrel to discover this place of concealment,” said Sir Hugh, who instinctively disliked the-ill-looking musketeer.

“Not so,” said Ryan, gloomily and hurriedly; “he’ll never tell that secret to living man — *that’s* settled; and now, Sir Hugh, get you down — trust me — you *have* trusted me already — your life has been in my hands since I met you in Saint Patrick’s — trust me now — and remember that whatever be my misfortunes, I cherish at least the honour of a gentleman.”

Nothing daunted, Sir Hugh began to descend the steep steps, and with a reverberation which echoed through unseen vaults, the massive stone at the orifice fell again into its place, leaving him to grope his way as best he might in utter darkness.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE PATIENT — THE TRAITOR'S FATE — THE MILLS OF GLINDARRAGH.

As Sir Hugh descended, the cold earth damps that lurked in those dismal regions gathered oppressively around him — the darkness was complete, and he heard, as he advanced, the rats scampering through unseen passages, and living things, he knew not what, flopping and floundering upon the wet pavement under his feet. Thus he pursued with extreme caution, and scarcely less anxiety than disgust, his dubious course — now actually treading upon one of the huge rats that swarmed there, with a tameness shocking enough in all conscience — now encountering with his outstretched hand a pile of rotten coffins, which came down at the touch, with a rattle and reverberation that startled the involuntary intruder. At last, however, his perplexities were ended by a gleam of fire light, shining through the crevices of a distant door, and with renewed confidence, and a quickened pace, he stepped onward to the place, and knocked hastily for admission.

"Who's there?" asked a voice from within, suspending a low wild song in which it had been exercised.

"Sir Hugh Willoughby," replied the knight, instinctively giving his name, although with small likelihood, as it seemed, of being recognized there; such, however, was not the case — on the contrary, the door was instantly unbarred, and Sir Hugh found himself in a stone chamber, furnished with a huge hearth, and indented with dozens of odd niches and nooks, quaint and unsymmetrieal, and which even widowed of the clocks and presses, and wine-bins, which doubtless had in old times lodged cosily within their embrace, had yet a certain comfortable irregularity of aspect, which prevented the chamber appearing quite so desolate as it might have done.

It was such a chamber, as alike from its revolting vicinity to death and decay, its incongruous air of ruined jollity and bygone comfort, and the circuitous and horrible nature of its approaches, might well have been the scene of some of those unclean and mysterious orgies which modern scandal hits referred to the age of monkish hypocrisy and crime.

Shutting the door, and barring it as before, the inmate of the chamber, who wore a tattered, military coat, motioned Sir Hugh to remain by the fire; and himself proceeded into another chamber, opening off that in which they stood. He returned almost instantly, and desiring Sir Hugh to follow, he led him into the room.

It was also vaulted like the former. A wretched, extempore bed, covered with a military cloak, supported the wounded form of Torlogh O'Brien — a solitary candle shed a dim, comfortless light over the dreary scene — and a dapper little gentleman, whose pursy face plainly enough expressed that he did not very well know which to be most affronted or frightened at his situation, sate upon a rough wooden stool by the bedside, holding the patient's hand, and regarding his watch the while with a pugnacious leer from the corner of his eyes. There was in the punctilious adjustment, brand-new gloss, and accurate finish in every particular, of the little gentleman's dress, a contrast to the dreary and sombre desolation and surrounding recklessness, which, under other circumstances, would have provoked Sir Hugh to smile.

As he entered, the patient turned his head, and showed the pale face and sunken eye of fever; he smiled, however, faintly, and would have striven to rise, but the little gentleman peremptorily prevented it — enjoined Sir Hugh to stand where he was, and observe silence; and then proceeded to demonstrate the danger which must attend the utterance of so much as a dozen words by the patient.

Spite, however, of all ne could do, the words were spoken, answered, and spoken again; and what was more, the patient, instead of dying, appeared much the better of the experiment. After a short time, however, it became apparent that he was really beginning to be exhausted; and Sir Hugh having withdrawn, Torlogh O'Brien sank, greatly to the physician's edification, into a profound sleep.

The little man joined Sir Hugh in the large room, and sat down, in like manner, by the fire — the uncouth attendant shambling, in grim taciturnity, into the sick man's chamber, there to keep watch while he slept.

*

Return we now to the two rapparees, whom we left in the upper chamber of this dilapidated building, in familiar communion with the cool-headed musketeer, our old friend, Deveril, whose mission involves so much alike of danger and of hope, to himself.

Sullenly and silently the three companions sate in the ruinous and darksome chamber we have described. Again and again did Deveril, as the time wore on, and brought him every moment nearer to the critical point, which was to determine his own fate and that of the two men with whom he sat, wish himself, whether for good or ill, fairly out of suspense. The door was barred, as we have said, and Deveril began to eye its ponderous bolt with no small uneasiness.

"What," he bethought him, "were the two desperadoes, whom he de signed to betray, to suspect his mission, ere his accomplices could force these barriers, and come to his succour!"

The thought, however, did not dismay him, for at every movement he felt the pressure of the heavy horse-pistols which swung in his pockets. *These*, at least, were a pair of friends, good at need, and whose honesty even he suspected not.

At length the long-expected moment arrived — steps were heard outside.

"Deveril," said Hogan, carelessly addressing the soldier, who had risen, "mount that barrel, will you, and look through the window: there's some one stirring outside."

Deveril ascended the post of observation accordingly, and Hogan exchanged a significant look with Ryan.

"Well," he continued, "what do you see there?"

"It's one of ourselves," said Deveril, clearing his voice, which was a little broken and husky; "it's one of ourselves, an unfortunate fellow called Tisdal, that was witness against old Willoughby — do you remember? I suppose he's hard up for a hiding hole, like the rest of us."

As he thus spoke, Deveril had descended, and stood for a moment between the barrel and the door, undecided, with his hands in his coat pockets.

"He is a safe man — isn't he?" asked Hogan carelessly; "let him in; it id be a hard thing, surely, when the dogs is loose, to stop the earth against a poor devil of an old fox like that; open the door, I say." Deveril turned carelessly on his heel, and approached the door; his heart swelled almost to bursting, and the hand which he raised to the bar was damp and cold as clay with agitation. His hand was raised, but it did not reach the bar; for a light sound struck his ear, and quick as light he turned. He turned and saw a sight of terror — close to his shoulder, a human countenance, livid and distorted with the fearful energy of hate. There was this face, and an upraised arm. For one breathless instant it was revealed, and in the next, Deveril lay quivering and tumbling like an epileptic, upon the floor; and Hogan, stooping over him, with a second blow despatched him.

"Now, Ned — now," said Hogan. "Shoulder to shoulder — we'll do them yet."

"Drag back the body," said Ryan, "while I stand by the door. There," he continued; "now, one look from the window, without showing yourself. Quick, man — quick."

Meanwhile, although this occupied scarcely half a minute, those without began to grow impatient. First came a low whistle, then a louder one; and, at last, a peremptory knocking at the door. Hogan had mounted the inverted barrel so lately occupied by the wretched Deveril, and reconnoitred stealthily the position of the enemy. Two sturdy soldiers were standing on the little stair platform before the elevated doorway; another, backed by Tisdal, occupied the stair; and the sergeant himself stood underneath, upon the ground, no doubt conceding to liis subordinates the post of danger, in the generous belief that it was also that of honour. Hogan jumped lightly to the floor; hitched up his breeches, pressed down his hat upon his brows, and drew the buckle of his belt a hole or so tighter.

"Are you ready?" he asked of his companion.

Ryan assented.

"Now for it, then. Stand fast. I'll take the stairs — you the other scoundrel and the sergeant."

He then applied himself leisurely to undo the iron bars which secured the door. Responding to the impatient and repeated summons of the soldiers in a tone of terrified and deprecating entreaty, which seemed but to stimulate the insolence of their assault.

At last the task was ended; and Hogan, drawing a long breath in preparation of the stupendous effort he meditated, on a sudden swung back the door; with one blow of his Herculean fist smote the foremost of them headlong to the ground, a distance of nearly a dozen feet; hurled the next backward down the precipitous steps, with irresistible violence, carrying Tisdal and his companion along with him. And at the same moment Ryan sprang lightly to the ground, and ere he had recovered from his astonishment, thrust his rapier twice through the serjeant, who fell senseless to the earth.

Amid shouts and curses, with the bleeding rapier still in his hand, he vaulted nimbly through the window of the ruined church; while Hogan, with a wild halloo, sprang through the archway beneath the central tower. A shot from the musket of the only one of the soldiers who had escaped untouched, struck up the tiles and rubbish between them as they ran; and in the next moment they had crossed the outer wall, and so pursuing devious ways, were gone — who could say whither?

*

Sir Thomas Neville, as we have seen, had set his heart upon entirely and hopelessly dissolving whatever ties subsisted between his son, Percy, and the rustic maiden, whose aspiring audacity had filled him with so much horror and indignation. Of the actual nature of that connexion, he had, indeed, no suspicion. His measures, as we have seen, were promptly taken: the letters which his son had intended for poor Phebe, Sir Thomas, in the exercise of what he considered to be his paternal rights, intercepted and destroyed. Percy he managed to have removed to England, and he himself wrote a stern and peremptory letter to Phebe, which, if anything of which Percy himself was not the author, could have done so, would unquestionably have broken the poor girl's heart. So much importance did Sir Thomas attach to this affair, that he despatched a special messenger — a trusted domestic of his own — from Dublin, to bear this decisive document to its proper destination.

The messenger accordingly set forth, and at the first Irish outpost upon which he stumbled, procured a "protection," which carried him without adventure to his journey's close. It was evening as he turned into the little by-road, which, breaking off at the old bridge of Glindarragh, winds under oak and thorn trees along the river's brink, opposite the grey walls of the castle. A ride of little more than five minutes brought him to the now silent mills; and beyond this picturesque little group of buildings, and embowered in silvan seclusion, by the brook's side, stood the quaint farm house, with its steep thatcli, and two stories of diamond casements, softly and sadly lighted in the mellow evening sun. In a moment more, the messenger stood in the homely chamber, occupied by our, now alas! mournfully altered — little friend, Phebe. Pale was her cheek and dim her eyes with untold watchings and patient sorrow. She rose, as he entered, with the untaught and artless grace with which nature had so beautifully endowed her. He intimated that he was a messenger from Dublin.

"Sir," said she, while her cheeks flushed with a blight and sudden glow, and then grew paler even than before, "Oh, sir, do you bring any news of — of *him?"*

"Mr. Percy Neville is in England," said the messenger, with involuntary respect. "He is in England; and I believe not likely to return for a long time — "

"Oh! did you see him? — is he well?" she said, hurriedly.

"Yes, well; very well — very well," answered the man.

"And is there — is there — have you" — she trembled so violently that she could not, for a moment, go on; "Is there any letter, any token — any message?"

"None from him," answered the messenger. "I have one from Sir Thomas, Mr. Percy's father — Sir Thomas Neville."

She took the letter with a trembling hand, and broke the seal. What it contained he knew not; but he saw in her face, first a momentary wildness, and then such a look of unutterable desolation and anguish as no limner could ever paint. In silence, she pressed her thin, clasped hands upon her side, as if in anguish insupportable, but no word betrayed her agony. She stood without motion, in the same woful attitude minute after minute. At length, nature relieved her bursting heart, and the tears flowed fast and silently down her cheeks.

"I feared it, I long feared it, sir; oh, how I dreaded it night and day; and now, it's come at last — after all, after all, the worst, the worst is come." She wept on in silence, wringing her little hands in untold agony. "Sir, I have no friend that is able to advise me in this great sorrow," she resumed at length; but I often thought, and I told him — I told him then, and I thought it many a time since — I was not worthy to be his wife — for I thought his people in England, sir, and all his great friends, could not like me the way *he* did; and when the time passed on, a year — oh, a long year — now, sir, and no tale or tidings of him, I began to think — for I, could not help it — he was maybe wishing himself that it was all over — that he had never seen me, and I could not blame him even if he did; and it often came into my mind to write him word to get the marriage broken, and that I would not say against it — and but for one thing I think I would have written: the little child — *his* little child and mine. It was the lovingest, sweetest — all its little ways, and, oh, sir, it was so like himself — I think it often kept my heart from breaking. But it's there now, lying in that bed — it's dead and gone; oh, my darling — my darling — my darling."

She drew the curtain of the bed where lay the lifeless infant, and clasping its cold form to her heart, she kissed it, and wept, and wept, and kissed it again.

The messenger was leaving the room, but his heart was full — he turned again, and drying his eyes hastily, he took the poor mourner gently by the arm and said hastily —

"Never mind that letter — Master Percy knows nothing of it — he loves you better than his life — I *know* it well — and he'll be back soon, I tell you — *soon* — God knows I speak the truth."

And God bless thee, honest fellow, for thy frank compassion: in this parting sentence — a few words of rough pity and truth thus briefly spoken — thou hast bequeathed her a hope — one hope — without which the poor heart that shall cling to it, through many a day and month of disappointment, with desperate trust, would soon have lain as still and cold as the little form she folds so passionately in her lonely bosom.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A DOUBLE RECOGNITION.

THE political and military struggle in whose events the current of our tale is inwoven, was, as the reader is no doubt well aware, a singularly protracted one. It was not until the third year after the date of the English revolution that the Jacobite army was withdrawn from the shores of Ireland. To this, the closing year of the grand and tragic drama of Irish resistance, our story brings us. Nearly a full year has passed since the events recorded in our last chapter — a year which had witnessed William's ineffectual siege of Limerick, and Sarsfield's brilliant exploit, achieved in the interception and destruction of the heavy battering train and ammunition destined for the destruction of the beleaguered city. William's forces were, with the approach of 'winter, withdrawn, and the hopes of the Jacobite leaders again revived; meanwhile intrigue, ambition, and jealousy were at work in spreading dissension and its attendant weakness among the party of the exiled king. Tyrconnel, the haughty favourite, had become hateful to many, and suspected nearly by all. Sarsfield, a strange compound of vanity, devotion, sagacity, and daring, stimulated by the exaggerated admiration and praises of his satellites, now openly aspired to the chief command of James's army in Ireland; a post, which had he obtained it, he might have filled with signal effect. His boundless popularity — his daring promptitude, and strong common sense, were qualities which, in conjunction with his high rank and immense sacrifices, might reasonably have secured for him the object of his ambition. But French interests and intrigues prevailed, and the Marquis de St. Ruth was commissioned with a command, which Sarsfield had certainly earned by his services, and which he would probably have wielded, if not with ultimate success, at all events with better fortune than attended the foreigner.

The waste which had been so recklessly committed upon the country, now reacted with fearful disaster upon the very army whose licentiousness had wrought it. A dreadful scarcity, little short of famine, prevailed throughout the west and south, except in such parts as were accessible to supplies from abroad — and the Irish army was reduced to extremities which, perhaps, no other army in the world would have endured with a like patience, and indeed without disorganization or mutiny.

General St. Ruth had, as we have said already, arrived — a bold, energetic, and skilful officer — somewhat vain andobstinate, however, and having earned for himself already a bad notoriety by the severity with which he had executed several of the atrocious dragonades against the defenceless Huguenots of France. This latter ingredient in his military experience, was perhaps one of the qualifications which recommended him for a command, where, as in France, the faith of Rome was assumed to be contending with fire and sword against the powers of heresy.

*

It was a lovely summer's night, then, in the year of grace, 1691, when a coach — one of those clumsy, straight-backed vehicles, which we see in old prints, came jogging and rumbling along a narrow road, somewhere in the rich county of Kildare, and between a double row of fine old trees. This vehicle contained two personages — a venerable old gentleman, richly dressed, and a beautiful girl, somewhat pensive, and dressed also as became a person of wealth and worship. Irish roads were by no means then what they have since become. A steep and broken acclivity made it necessary for the travellers to descend and walk, a task, however, which the softness and beauty of the night rendered pleasant rather than otherwise, and which no sense of danger or insecurity disturbed; for, as the reader is aware, the perils and uncertainties of war were now removed so far as the beleaguered town of Athlone, between which and the capital Ginkle's army interposed. The district through which wound the quiet road in question was safe as in the most tranquil time of peace. It was therefore with a feeling of perfect security that the young lady placed her arm through that of her venerable protector, and paused with him to enjoy, from the eminence they were ascending, the beautiful moonlit landscape that expanded before them.

At this moment a tall and stalworth figure stood near them. He had just descended from a footpath upon the road. He carried a rough walking staff in his hand, and was dressed as might beseem a thrifty yeoman, with a grey cloth mantle hanging upon his well-formed shoulders. He stopped — gazed on them intently, and exclaimed —

"Gracious heaven! can it — *can* it be they?

"What!" said he, fervently, advancing toward them; "Grace, dear Grace — will you not know me?"

"How — who — Torlogh!" she gasped.

"Yes, dearest," he said, and in an instant Torlogh O'Brien stood by her side, paler and thinner, indeed, than when she had last seen him — but still her own betrothed and adored lover— "yes, your own true lover — your betrothed, and, if heaven spare me, your proud and happy partner through all the years of life instore for us. Dearest, dearest how I bless God for this chance meeting. Oh! that we were met here and now to part no more — dear, dearest Grace. And you, my kind, my dear, my honoured friend," he continued, addressing Sir Hugh, "what happiness — what fortune to meet you here. My letters reached you, did they not?" he proceeded, addressing Grace again.

"Oh, yes — but — but I have been very anxious, very wretched and the poor girl burst into tears; "are you — are yon, indeed, *quite* recovered?"

"Quite, dearest, though my recovery has been slow, and long doubtful," he answered; "had they but given me my way, I should have been out and serving months ago; but when did a leech suffer his patient to slip through his fingers. As for me, I have been literally a prisoner among a set of goodnatured savages, who, in the excess of their kindness, would, I believe, have knocked me on the head, rather than permitted my escape, until my strength and health were duly certified by a doctor of physic. I incline to think I've suffered more from this compulsory confinement than I could have done merely from my wounds."

"And, now," resumed she, looking earnestly in his face; "what means this strange dress — this disguise? Oh, Torlogh, I fear me you are again about to hazard your life and mine — for mine is now bound up in yours. If you die, Torlogh, I care no more for life: oh, tell me, tell me — say you will not hazard your life so soon again. Oh, Torlogh, dear Torlogh, I fear — I fear, we shall never meet more."

"And better even so, dearest," he answered, "than that you should wed a disgraced and dishonoured man. No, dear Grace, while my regiment serves in these wars — while I hold King James's commission, and have health and strength to carry my cuirass, and draw my sword, it never shall be said that Torlogh O'Brien was unseen upon the day of battle."

"The lad is right — aye, right in every syllable," said the old knight, with emotion. "Give me your hand again. I honour you, my friend, for your brave resolution, although, in truth, I would fain those honest barbarians had held you still in durance for a month or so longer." Torlogh smiled, and then replied more gravely —

"This war is near it's close — everything proves the crisis is indeed upon us — a month, a week may see it ended. Ginkle is a rapid campaigner, and St. Ruth, his opponent, is an enterprizing general also. "With such antagonists, war is a quick game, and the evil of suspense, at least, is not added to its other woes."

Thus the conversation was pursued, which, having so far followed, we need pursue no farther. Suffice it to say, that they parted with a thousand renewed and passionate pledges of undying love.

A hurried farewell, and the two fond hearts were once more severed. Away rolled the oldfashioned coach, by a quiet bye-road, in a southerly direction, where some five miles further, the knight and his fair daughter were to remain, for a time, the guests of an old friend, in a fine old rambling mansion, with terrace gardens, and long lonely fish ponds closed in with dark yew hedges, and boasting every scenic accessory, in a word, which a love-sick damsel need desire. Here we leave them until the military events, which as yet impend over the country, shall have determined finally the prudence or the danger of venturing a homeward journey to Glindarragh Castle.

Our resolute friend, meanwhile, with a firm and vigorous tread, pursued his way upon the morning following, loitering occasionally in the villages through which he passed, to learn, without suspicion, whatever he could glean of the movements of the contending armies.

The day was now spent, and the summer moon was sailing high in the heavens, and shone upon a dreary sweep of heathy hills, so low and gradual as scarcely to deserve that name; bleak and monotonous, the white mist lurking in the hollows began now to creep chilly over the dark slopes and undulations of the uplands, and not a living form, save that of our wayworn friend, was visible over the expanse. Still, with firm tread and constant purpose, he pursued his way, conscious, meanwhile, that as he approached the neighbourhood of the hostile armies, his own personal risk increased an hundredfold. The perpetual danger — in his present uncertainty of the exact position of the contending parties — of falling in unexpectedly with some detachment of the enemy, was of itself enough to inspire anxiety, and whet his vigilance.

He knew the ground which he now trod, and remembered that a little village lay in the lap of the hill, just beyond the brow which he was now about to pass. Hunger and fatigue conspired to hasten his efforts to reach this humble resting-place, at which he proposed halting for the night. Accordingly, it was with a feeling of the extremest satisfaction that he found himself at last descending the ill-defined bridle-track which tended directly into the humble village; and now through the mist the outlines of the clustering gables and tufted bushes became apparent; but no note or sign of life, no baying of dogs, no sound of human voices, no twinkling light, met eye or ear, as he approached: all was dark and still. He now stood in the street (if so it might be called) of the desolated village; blackened walls, and gables, and charred roof-trees, and mounds of ashes spread drearily around him; and both the silence and desertion of the hour inspired a feeling almost akin to fear.

"What!" said he, as he halted in indecision, amid this bleak, unsightly wreck: "could they not spare this poor cluster of wretched hovels!" He looked around him, and involuntarily ejaculated, "Woe to that poor land within whose fields and towns the strife of war maintains itself! — *all* smitten, the poor and the rich alike — the high and the lowly! How many an humble home is roofless here! — how many a hearth is quenched and black! and heaven only knows, beside, how many a poor peasant heart lies mouldering beneath these ashes! Alas! for this stricken country! — woe! woe!"

As he said this, standing among the trees that had once sheltered the little groups of villagers, now scattered heaven knew whither, he was startled by a shrill and prolonged whistle, as it seemed scarce a hundred yards away, and which rang through the blackened ruins like the shriek of some ill-omened bird responding to his desolate apostrophe. Glad, however, of anything that intimated the vicinity of human life, Torlogh O'Brien shouted lustily in reply; and thus, sustaining a continued interchange of signals, he and the unknown were soon confronted. The latter, however, was not unaccompanied; two other men followed him closely; and all three halted within little more than a yard of our hero, a strange looking group enough. The foremost had on a tattered militia coat, overlaid with dirty white lace. He wore a rough cap of black sheepskin, and a pair of trooper's jack-boots; and as he came up he unslung a musket, and handled it as if for instant use. His companions were bearded, shock-haired, bare-legged, and bareheaded creatures — one of them wrapped in the ancient crescent-shaped mantle, which Spenser has celebrated, and the other with nothing but his rags about him, and a stout half pike in his hand. All this was clearly visible enough under the bright moonlight.

"Who is she?" said the fellow in the shaggy cap, which presented the appearance of a preternaturally enormous head of shaggy hair: "Who is she?" he repeated, with a threatening oath, in Irish, and at the same time cocking his piece.

"I am a traveller, and have walked not far from forty miles to-day, he answered calmly, and finding my expected resting-place in ashes, am now constrained to pursue my way still further, and expect you to direct me on my course."

"*Thomnom an dhioul* — she's a shentlemans, ejaculated the same speaker, "I know by hur talk — a shentleman.

"And what then — suppose I *were* a gentleman? said Torlogh.

"Why then — d — n you for a figgish son of a bish," he retorted promptly, and at the same time he brought the musket to his shoulder.

"Stop — listen — mark what you do; if you slay me, friend, you kill one of king James's officers," said Torlogh, sternly. "I hold the king's-commission, and am now on my way to join the army, and resume my command."

"Shew hur protection," said the same man, after a pause of indecision, and lowering the butt of his piece.

"I travel under no protection but my own," retorted Torlogh; "I have, however, better proof of the truth of my words than any protection, were it from the Duke of Tyrconnel himself, could furnish; I carry my commission with me; and by its production I will prove myself at least as true a friend to Ireland as you are."

After a brief altercation, accordingly, Torlogh was conducted by his rude companions out of the town, and diverging from the ill-defined road which he had hitherto followed, they descended into an abrupt hollow, in the centre of which was burning a prodigious fire, round which were congregated a number of figures variously and picturesquely illuminated, partly by the cold moonlight, and partly by the glare of the turf and "brusna." A little apart was a slaughtered cow, which had probably supplied the greater part of the cheer on which they were feasting.

"Ha — Ryan!" said Torlogh, the moment his eye lighted upon the group, and in a moment Eaman a knuck was before him.

CHAPTER L.

THE OUTPOST.

TORLOGH O'BRIEN was now a welcome guest at the savage feast, of which, however, he was fain enough to avail himself; and sooth to say, to a hungry and exhausted man worse might possibly have been welcome. As they discussed this cheer, seasoned with many a draft of usquebagh and brandy, Torlogh learned that the party was a kind of rear-guard to another, who being now in safety had proceeded, leading with them fourteen dragoon horses, the fruit of a cleverly-contrived surprise, executed by the rapparees on the night preceding.

From Ryan he learned further that William's forces were now in possession of Athlone, and that St. Ruth had withdrawn his army to Aghrim, where it was rumoured he had resolved to give the enemy battle. He also learned that the little town of Aghrim, where they were now in position, was distant some five and twenty miles; and that considerable supplies, arms, ammunition, clothing, and money, but no men, except a handful of troopers who accompanied the general, as a bodyguard, had reached the country along with St. Ruth. Of him the rapparees could say but little; he had arrived but a few weeks since, and Sarsfield and he had already had several angry and bitter altercations.

Having thus gleaned all the information he could, Torlogh O'Brien stretched himself upon the hearth, near the fire, and was soon fast asleep. With the first gleam of the opening dawn, the bivouac was all astir again; another meal of savage plenty ushered in the day — after which Ryan undertook to conduct his guest a mile or so upon his journey.

As side by side they walked onward, each felt the cheering influences of the early day. The slanting sunbeams shot ruddily athwart the brown sweeping undulations of the hills they were descending — the dew-drops sparkled in the heath, from among whose purple tufts ever and anon the merry lark soared upward and upward into the sky, until all but his thrilling matin melted into air; the fresh bracing breath of morning, and the lowing of distant kine from the fields beneath them, and the thousand pleasant scents, and sounds, and influences that hail the opening day, inspired with feelings akin to joy and confidence, the breasts of both, as they trod the downward path, and looked abroad ever the ruddy and expansive prospect.

Having bid his companion farewell, Torlogh O'Brien soon struck into a narrow road, designing to cross the Shannon by the fords, a little below the point now known as Shannon Bridge. Torlogh O'Brien was well aware of the risk he incurred of falling in, accidentally, with some straggling party of William's army, from whom (were his real character discovered), he might very possibly receive the roughest usage. He was not sorry, therefore, to meet at a sudden turning of the road, a pedlar marching leisurely along toward him, with his pack strapped upon his shoulders, and his measuring staff, studded with brass nails, glittering like a sceptre in his grasp. He, therefore, accosted this "travelling merchant," and learned from him that the road, as far as he had travelled it, was free from all obstruction.

"Which army have you seen?" asked Torlogh.

"Faix, then, I seen both iv them," he replied; "the likes iv me have no business takin' part with this side or that side, but just to mind my business, an' take the world aisy."

"Have you been delayed or annoyed by either?" said O'Brien; "have you been allowed to drive your trade without hindrance or molestation?"

"An' why would not I?" he rejoined; "it's only too glad they'd be to see the likes iv me coming near them; hindherance, indeed, is that all ye know about it?"

Torlogh O'Brien mused for a moment, and then said —

"If you be willing to sell your pack and measure, as they are, for a lump sum, you shall have it on the spot. What say you — will you sel them?"

The offer was promptly acceded to, and after a brief négociation, the purchase was completed — the disembarrassed pedlar pursued his way with the gold pieces, which might have fairly bought his possessions thrice over, stored safely within his waistband; and Torlogh O'Brien, with the staff in his hand, and the burthen slung across his stalworth shoulders, strode onward toward his destination, with renewed confidence — and, indeed, comparatively careless as to whom he might encounter, under his assumed character.

Evening was drawing on apace, when from a gradual eminence he beheld some three miles before him the broad Shannon, glowing like burnished gold under the fiery summer sun.

A few miles more, he thought — a few miles beyond that glorious barrier, and I am again at the head of my brave Irish soldiers. He listened for the distant sound of cannon, in the instinctive anxiety of the brave man who fears lest his part in a grand impending struggle should be denied him. “The breeze favours,” he resumed; “the guns would be audible from hence; thank God, all is still — I am in time.”

With renewed energy, and something of the deep and stirring excitement of coming battle already upon him, Torlogh O’Brien strode onward upon the narrow and unfrequented road, toward the ford which lay before him.

The train of busy thought which had followed the reflections we have just mentioned, was interrupted on a sudden by the jingle of a horse’s hoof, and in less than a minute, a tall, rawboned, military chaplain, in a somewhat rusty cassock, a plain, broadleafed hat, and military boots, and a good deal to Torlogh’s uneasiness, attended by two mounted dragoons, rode at a leisurely walk, from a converging road, right into that which he himself was pursuing.

To have attempted to avoid this unexpected cavalcade, in which his practised eye instantly detected the adherents of the Prince of Orange, could have no other effect than that of exciting suspicion.

“Hola! halt there, sirrah!” cried the chaplain, for he was a little in the rear; “halt, I say, and right about.”

As Torlogh saw nothing for it but to sustain his assumed character as best he might, he unhesitatingly obeyed this unceremonious order, and the same grave functionary, fixing a small eye, which owed its overpowering effect, entirely to the fiery purple of the massive face in which it was set, full upon the pedestrian, said, signing to him at the same time to march by his side —

“What may be your calling, friend — and that upon your back — what’s *that,* eh? Speak up, man — speak out, I charge you.”

“As for my calling, sir, I’m a pedlar,” answered Torlogh, with difficulty assuming the outward deference of respect, “and that I carry is my pack.”

Torlogh paused abruptly, for in his momentary confusion he had failed to perceive what he now observed for the first time, the horse which his interrogator bestrode, was no other than Roland — his own brave charger, lost at the action of the Boyne, and now encountered again under circumstances so altered. Well was it for Torlogh that the grave cavalier mistook the nature of the good steed's demonstrations — the cocking of his ears — his snortings, and champings.

"Tush, Captain — go to — go to, I say," ejaculated his rider, checking him once or twice; "quiet, Isay, we must not bite the poor for being poor — God forbid; nay, nay, honest man, fear him not," he continued, addressing Torlogh, "he is used to dragoons, and loves not any else; but fear him not, he knows his rider. A pedlar and a pack — so — so — and I dare aver, not sorry to find a market for some of his wares; now, what may you have to sell — eh?"

The question was somewhat disconcerting, as Torlogh knew just as little as the questioner what might be the contents of the pack; he answered, therefore, promptly and deferentially —

"If your honour be likely to buy — I can't do less than unpack and show my wares."

"Time enough — time enough," rejoined the chaplain; "be not too hot after mammon, friend. There's a time to buy, and a time to sell; and I'll do neither the one nor the other, I promise you until I get out of the saddle. But come along — come along, and we'll soon see what may be done.

Accordingly, very little obliged to his ungainly patron, Torlogh O'Brien continued to walk by his stirrup, answering as briefly as he might the questions which he showered upon him, until, on a sudden, they came upon a large dilapidated farm house, with a stone enclosure, and a cluster of offices about it, peeping out among the tufted timbers of an old overgrown orchard. It was quite evident that this place was occupied by a troop of dragoons; for two dismounted troopers, with their pieces shouldered, kept guard before the gateway upon the road; and some dozen of horses, still saddled, but with the girths loose, were visible in the open shed in the yard.

"Now, then," ejaculated the cavalier in the cassock, as he dismounted— "now, then, we can see what you have got to sell. No want of customers here, I warrant you; so come along. In with you, pack and all — in — in, I say."

Thus encouraged, Torlogh O'Brien had no choice in prudence but to comply; and accordingly, preceded by the chaplain, and followed by the soldiers, leading their horses, he entered the enclosure, where the dragoons were loitering in groups, and thence into the house, whose door stood open, and the little party proceeded directly into a large chamber, dilapidated and damp-stained, and which had once been a cosey kitchen, and was now little better than a wreck. They found here a group of officers, who stood listlessly chatting and looking out of the shattered windows, dusty, and with their hats on, just as they had dismounted. Scarce a moment had elapsed ere the supposed pedlar was established at the head of the only table the room possessed, and his goods displayed before the little group, who clustered about him. While thus engaged, he observed a countenance pass the outside of the window, the sight of which filled him, reasonably enough, with dismay. It was that of Miles Garrett.

He fortunately had not removed his hat, and he pressed it deeper upon his brows as that personage entered the chamber. Miles Garrett, who was, as it seemed, in command of the detachment, took his place among; the rest at the table, and joined in their careless comments upon the wares displayed before them. The trying scene was now, as Torlogh hoped, drawing rapidly to a close; when, greatly to his uneasiness, he observed Garrett look sharply once or twice at his features, as if desiring to see more than the broad flap of his hat rendered easily visible.

"Friend pedlar," he said, at last, abruptly interrupting a bargain, "methinks it were scarce more than courtesy to doff your hat in presence of *gentlemen,* who are honoured, moreover, with the King's commission — take it off, sir; take it off, I say."

These words — their peremptory tone — the suspicious glance that accompanied them — all showed Torlogh that concealment or evasion was no longer possible. He drew himself up to his full height, returning Garrett's glance of exulting malignity and recognition with one of proud and reckless defiance, and for a moment they both stood face to face, in breathless silence, amid the wondering soldiers.

"Ha! he's netted at last," said Garrett, under his breath, and as it seemed unconsciously; while he continued to regard him with the same fixed and triumphant smile of malignity.

"'Well, Mr. Pedlar," he exclaimed with chuckling triumph, "so it seems you *won't* uncover, eh?"

"Not to you," retorted Torlogh, with the intense sternness of hatred and despair. "Cold-blooded, murderous intriguer — betrayer of your friends, of your faith, of your King — wretch and renegade, uncover to *you!* — steeled as you are in effrontery and crime, and with all your soldiers round you —

how dare you, abominable wretch — how dare you ask an honest man to do you reverence?”

As Torlogh, with flashing eyes, and a voice hoarse with passion, concluded this furious address, his hand mechanically sought the place where his sword-hilt might have been.

“Ho, corporal; hola, guards,” shouted Garrett, stamping on the floor, and raising a pistol to the level of Torlogh’s breast, “Move — attempt to escape — *move,* and I fire. Guards there, hola.”

A single spring brought Torlogh up to his opponent, but ere he could grapple with him, he was effectually overpowered by numbers, and dragged to the floor.

“A spy! a rapparee! a deserter; pistol him — brain him — pink him,” such were the ejaculations, accompanied by many an oath and imprecation, which rose and rang in ferocious confusion around the overmatched Jacobite, in this desperate but short-lived struggle. Torlogh O’Brien now lay gasping and overpowered upon the floor, a literal pile of men above him, hauling, throttling, tearing, and tugging at their now over-mastered and breathless victim.

“Hughes — Berry,” said Garrett, hastily, “order patroles down the road, both ways, this moment. Let the trumpet sound — call in the men — tighten girths — and have all ready. There’s something in this, by — , more than we wot of. Secure the prisoner — bind him,” he continued, addressing himself again to those who were engaged about Torlogh— “bind him, and never spare — bind him as you would a mad beast.”

With such directions, Garrett stimulated his men, sooth to say, nothing loath themselves to extreme severity, in pinioning the prisoner s arms, and drawing the cords to their utmost tension; and thus, in a few seconds more, Torlogh O’Brien, bareheaded, his long hair matted and tangled in the struggle, his hands and his face smeared with blood — pale and faint from exhaustion — stood once more, pinioned and securely guarded by two soldiers, before his now entirely triumphant enemy.

CHAPTER LI.

THE RIDE BY MOONLIGHT.

"WELL, sir, methinks you have at last got yourself fairly into pound; and egad you will scarce get out Scot free," exclaimed Garrett, as he seated himself opposite to his prisoner, and eyed him with a smile and a scowl, grim enough to behold. "You don't care, I presume, to give any information — dogged, of course; corporal, search him."

To attempt resistance under the circumstances would have been as undignified as futile. Torlogh, therefore, submitted in sullen silence.

"Ha! his commission," said Garrett, glancing at the parchment document, as he placed it in his pocket. "And what's this? — a letter," he continued, roughly opening the next paper handed to him.

"Do not read that — I charge you as you would be held a gentleman — read it not," interrupted Torlogh, indignantly.

With provoking coolness, Garrett proceeded to read it, nevertheless; and, as he did so, bit his lip, and turned deadly pale — then, tearing it slowly into strips and across and across, he flung it back into the grate, with a sneer, observing —

"You're not like to read such amorous memorials long, I promise you, master pedlar, though, sooth to say, it were a pity to spoil so promising a romance — but spies are spies, though never so deep in love, and must to the gallows as often as they are caught. Corporal," he continued, "look out a stout piece of rope in the stables there. We'll swing the traitor from one of the old orchard boughs — would every branch bore fruit as good. Meanwhile march him into one of the buildings, where he may say his prayers, and commend himself to his mistress, before all's over. Away with him — march."

The concluding order was spoken in a loud and peremptory tone, for he obviously did not care to hear his victim speak — and saw, or thought he saw, a disposition on his part to do so. Avoiding his very glance, Garrett turned abruptly on his heel, and strode to the window, through which he continued to look, whistling in affected carelessness, until the prisoner and his guard had passed forth.

He then became silent, glanced quickly through the room in dark abstraction, and again looked forth in gloomy silence.

“Cangley,” said he, addressing an officer, “I and Mr. Strong (here he glanced at the chaplain), will return this evening to headquarters; you take the command of the detachment in my absence — have your in at Ballinasloe by noon tomorrow — there you will at least hear of our position, and join the regiment forthwith; keep a sharp look out all night — do you mind — and hang and shoot any of the rapparees you may chance to light upon; don’t let the dogs escape. Parson, come hither,” he added, addressing the chaplain, and leading that perplexed official forth. They walked, arm in arm, in the little enclosure, to and fro, in earnest conference.

“Promise him, then,” said Garrett, in conclusion, “that you will contrive his escape, or procure his pardon; say anything, in short, so that you lead him to tell you all about that old woman’s papers and jewels; first, *is* Lady Willoughby actually dead — and then, what has become of her valuable jewels, and all the rest. I have a claim for some six or eight years’ maintenance upon them — I can’t afford to be swindled out of this.”

“I’ll see what may be *honestly* done,” he replied; “I’ll do all I fairly may.”

“Here you, sir,” said Garrett, striking one of the soldiers with the cane he carried, as he might an ill-favoured dog; “here you, sir — you, Hartley — go in yonder to the prisoner — tell him from me to collect his wits, and prepare for an interview, and see that the cord is well secured about his arms — be quick, sirrah,” he added, menacing him with a repetition of the blow; “and make no blunders — or by the mass, you shall walk the gauntlet, as you did before.”

In surly silence the fellow obeyed; and it was not till he had reached the door of the stable where the prisoner was confined, that he muttered bitterly —

“Walk the gauntlet again — I believe you would flay me alive, if you dare. Well, I’ll put a spoke in your wheel for all that — I will — and now’s the time.”

The dusk had now closed, and the rude chamber which he entered was so dark, that for a moment he could not discern its inmate. In gloomy despair, exhausted by vehement but fruitless efforts to free his hands, he was now sitting sullenly by the wall. The soldier came close up to him without speaking. He then said in a low but distinct tone —

"See, comrade — whoever you be — Captain Garrett means to pay you a visit — he'll be in this minute, to wheedle something out of you; but never mind: will you fight him and finish him, if you can, provided I loose your arms, and give you this knife?"

"I'll fight for my life — I'll fight while I've a drop of blood; give nr this chance," said Torlogh, fiercely.

"You must wait here for him; and never say, if it fails, how you came by the knife," he pursued; "do you swear this?"

"I swear — as a soldier and a gentleman, I pledge my honour," said Torlogh, earnestly.

"Then, here goes," said the fellow, sullenly, as he ripped open the strained cordage; "now use your hands, when he comes — and use this to a purpose," he added, in a whisper, and placed the sharp knife, whose blade was full six inches long, in his grasp.

This done and said, he vanished — the door was secured outside — and all passed so rapidly, that but for the evidences in which he could not be deceived, he would have almost thought it a dream.

Nearly a quarter of an hour elapsed, which, to the prisoner, seemed to embrace whole hours of suspense, without the appearance of the expected visitant. At length, however, the chaplain entered. Torlogh O'Brien had placed himself in the shadow of the door, and recognized the intruder at a glance. Cautiously the lank gentleman in the mantle and cassock advanced, and our hero's first impulse was to avail himself of the open door, and relying upon his own strength and activity, to venture all upon one: bold effort; the hazard of attempting to brave his way, single-handed, through an enclosure filled with troopers, was well nigh desperate; and in the momentary hesitation, another, and as it seemed a more hopeful scheme, flashed upon his mind. Upon this latter he resolved to stake all — and with caution and rapidity, he proceeded thus to its execution: —

With tread as noiseless as that of a cat, he lightly followed the stooped and groping figure, which was moving before him toward the dark extremity of the chamber. Had his own urgent and awful danger admitted an emotion of mirth, he might well have smiled at the ludicrous attitudes of the long-legged pastor — who, sweeping his lank arms slowly before him, groped and stumbled cautiously onward, in a stooping posture, ejaculating, as he proceeded —

“Prisoner — I say, prisoner, bestir thyself; prisoner, where’s thy tongue, man? — I’ll not harm thee.”

If his ungainly attitudes and strange intonations were calculated to make our hero smile, what followed, had not his own life hung upon the issue, might well have made him laugh outright.

Collecting his whole strength, and watching his opportunity well — for the formidable proportions of his antagonist were not to be despised — Torlogh O’Brien waited until the cowering figure turned, in its bewildered search, towards himself; and then, with a single spring, clutching him by the throat, he hurled him backward, and with his whole weight, pinned him to the pavement. The violence of his fall — the utter unexpectedness of the assault — and a thousand confused apprehensions, prevented his attempting, for some seconds, to move, or even to speak: of these moments, Torlogh promptly availed himself: —

“I am armed — speak not — make no sound — and I swear you shall have no hurt; but if you attempt to stir, or give the alarm, by — you shall die; I’m armed — once more, beware. Listen to my proposal,” he continued, his hand still griped upon the throat of the prostrate man, with a pressure which just allowed him space to breathe; “listen — and submit with prudence.”

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Meanwhile a sentinel with loaded musket, paced and repaced the space before the stable-door — dragoons smoked and loitered in the yard — two guards kept the outer gate, and Miles Garrett sate mounted upon his steed, while the brave Roland, never more, as it seemed, to bear his true master to the field, stood saddled beside him; an escort of four dragoons, moreover, stood by their horses, awaiting the order to mount, and close by the cavalcade a rope was swinging from a strong bough, and underneath a cart was placed. Upon these ominous preparations, Garrett looked from time to time with a kind of fascination — it was not pleasure, nor yet fear — a strange and horrible attraction, from which he seemed himself impatient to escape, for he looked often at his watch, and then through the gateway into the yard; at length muttering something which might have been either a curse, or a congratulation, between his teeth, he beheld the chaplain stalk slowly and gloomily forth; the impatient steed neighed shrilly, as his rider approached. The stalworth chaplain gloomily mounted; he seemed, in truth, sorely crestfallen and depressed. The escort also mounted, and this little military cavalcade began to move at a brisk pace along the narrow and shaded road. They had ridden some way ere Garrett spoke.

"Well," he said, abruptly, "what did the scoundrel tell you?"

The dragoons were riding at a sharp trot, the pace which they had all kept hitherto, in advance of them, and the chaplain drew bridle as if about to make a disclosure more at his ease; he pointed, however, silently down a narrow lane, at the foot of which under a long perspective of stooping bushes, the waters of the glorious Shannon were glittering in the moonbeams.

"Well — what of it?" demanded Garrett, surlily, "you don't want fa ford the water — do you?"

"Aye, but I do though," answered he of the cassock, sternly; "look at me, and know me."

Miles Garrett looked, and aghast beheld Torlogh O'Brien himself; he had dropped the heavy cloak from his shoulders, to disembarrass his movements, and the stern, statue-like features, and fiery eyes, looked full upon the almost cowering villain.

"Miscreant," he said, in a tone of intense and deadly calmness, "well may you despair — conscience tells you you deserve to die — here — this moment — by my hand— 'twere but to touch this trigger, and all your villainies are ended; but, *murderer* as you are, *I* will not at advantage take your life, unless you force me to it; nay, advance not your hand to the holster; turn not, move not, except as I direct, or by heaven you die upon the spot, even were you innocent, as you are in reality blasted with every crime. Now, sir, we understand each other; I charge you on your life, restore me my commission; nay, no dallying — so there now, sir, follow your troopers at what pace you please."

Garrett hesitated for a moment, eyed his companion with a look of hideous rage, and perhaps was for a moment upon the point of risking all upon one desperate struggle; he wheeled about, however, and furiously dashing the spurs into his steed, was scarcely a pistol-shot away, when he shouted the alarm at the top of his voice.

"Now for it — now, my good Roland, thy master's life is in thy keeping — true mettled — fleet of limb — away — away!"

As he spoke, he gave him rein, and spring after spring away they went.' Soaring like the wind down the steep road — behind them thunders the clatter of pursuit, and the hoarse shouting of the chace lends wings to their headlong speed, and now he plunges into the ford, high sheets the water round him in glittering spray, and down the steep road he has but just descended, his enemies come spurring and shouting like a demon chace, down to the water's brink they rattle.

Some plunge in, and follow; others spring from their horses and unsling their pieces — see how he plunges through the water close to the opposing bank — two shots, in quick succession — ha! is he down? no it was but a stumble; see, he shouts and waives his hat in defiance — now up the steep bank he plunges and scrambles — another shot — by the mass it has spun his hat off — he turns in the saddle as he clears the brow, and waives his hand with an exulting cheer, and in a moment more the rising bank has interposed, he gains upon them every second.

For a mile or more at reckless speed the chase was maintained. The interval, however, was obviously increasing between the pursued and the pursuers, and Garrett, in rage and despair, reins in his horse at last Hoarse with curses and threats, he railed and stormed at his men, and at the fugitive in turn.

CHAPTER LII.

THE CAMP AND THE FIELD OF AGHRIM.

AFTER little more than an hour’s brisk riding, Torlogh O’Brien found himself traversing the straight and narrow paved road, which in those days formed the immediate approach of the ancient town of Aghrim. The misty moonlight covered the whole landscape; to the left rose the softened outline of the hill of Kilcomedan — a gentle eminence of a mile or so in length, with the little town of Aghrim snugly nestled at its foot, and the white canvas of the Irish camp studding its crest from end to end. Hundreds of ruddy fires were glowing, and around them were visible the gliding forms of soldiery and peasants; a hum and murmur like that of a crowded city, filled the night air. The lowing of cattle, penned for slaughter in the ruined castle which flanked the road, close to its entrance into the town, the distant neighing of horses, and the sullen roll of drums, enhanced, by a thousand martial and thrilling associations, the excitement which made his heart beat thick and fast, as he drew near the destined field of battle.

He soon fell in with the Irish pickets, and having stated his rank, and proved it by producing his commission, was, at his own request, conducted directly to Lord Lucan’s tent. Passing, therefore, through the then excited little town, with its stout, heavy-chimnied, thatched houses, ringing with laughter, and singing, and all kinds of merriment, he pursued, with his escort, the steep road which mounts the crest of the sweeping hill, and entering the entrenched camp, found himself in a few minutes in Sarsfield’s tent. His welcome was frank and cordial.

“You have a keen relish, colonel, for danger,” said he, briskly; “you have just arrived in time — tomorrow we expect hot work enough, and to spare; but it is needful you should see the precious commander-in-chief they have sent us from Paris, before you assume the command of your regiment; so let us to his tent at once, as much is to be done, and little time to do it in.”

“Had I not better first see O’Mara, and get at my trunk mails,” said Torlogh, glancing at his unmilitary attire, “these French generals, they say, are punctilious in matters of the toilet.’

“Pshaw! what care you or I for the coxcomb’s fancies,” said Sarsfield gruffly, at the same time planting his cocked hat carelessly on, and taking Torlogh by the arm; “we don’t want *petit maitres,* but men of head and action, and the oftener we let him see it, the better he’s like to behave himself; besides, *I* command the cavalry, and I stand between you and the fellow’s annoyance; if he don t like your dress, we can’t help it — there’s matter more important for tonight, than triming of ruffles and unpapering of gold lace.”

As he thus spoke, he led O’Brien through a portion of the camp, until they reached, near the very summit of the hill, one of these ancient raths which abound in Ireland; this was an unusually large one, with a high embankment hedged with wild bushes and brambles surrounding it; and in the centre of the enclosed area stood the tent of the Marquis de St. Ruth. Passing the sentinels who guarded the levelled way into the fort, and who saluted Lord Lucan, that officer led his companion to the general’s tent.

“Lord Lucan,” said Sarsfield, curtly announcing himself to the starch old military servant who came to the tent door.

“Pray come in, my lord,” answered the grizzled veteran, with a low inclination, and employing the French language, in which the subsequent conversation was also conducted.

General St. Ruth was sitting writing at a table under a strong light. He was a well-built, handsome man, of some fifty years; sharp and masculine of feature; dark complexioned; and with a countenance decidedly bold and energetic; though marred a little in expression by a certain superciliousness, not to say disdain, which had, perhaps, helped to provoke the positive dislike with which Lord Lucan regarded him.

Without raising his head, the French general continued to write in apparent unconsciousness of the presence of his visiters. If this unconsciousness was assumed, it was certainly well acted. Sarsfield, however, abruptly terminated it by intimating his presence in a sharp and peremptory tone.

General St. Ruth rose and recieved Lord Lucan with a formal and distant salutation, and remained standing, it is to be presumed, to void the necessity of asking his visiter to be seated.

“Some business, I presume, my lord?” he said, drily enough.

Sarsfield replied by presenting Torlogh O'Brien, and to him St. Ruth spoke for several minutes with easy courtesy, never addressing one word to his companion, who, much nettled at the foreigner's studied coolness, constrained his resentment so far as to affect indifference.

"Adieu, colonel," said St. Ruth at last, still confining his attention to O'Brien, "we much needed cavalry officers, such as I already judge you to be — gentlemen who understand and do their own business, without interfering in that of others."

"By my faith," interposed Sarsfield, unceremoniously, and almost savagely — for he knew that the last remark had been pointed at himself; there is, indeed, a sore lack of men who understand their business here a derth by no means mendedby any late arrivals we can toast. It was conspicuously proved at Athlone, and I trust may not be so again tomorrow."

"If you have no further business with me, my lord," said the general, tartly, "may I pray you — as ceremony seems to be dispensed with here — to direct your care, for an hour or so, to your men and horses — and leave me to arrange the business of tomorrow. Your orders shall be with you by two o'clock tonight. Adieu."

"Marquis of St. Ruth," retorted Sarsfield, bluntly, while the blood mounted to his face; "I seek not to be consulted by you — though, perchance, wiser men have asked and followed my advice. Of thus much, however, be assured — but that the king's service demands forbearance, spite of your command and your commission, I would, on the spot, teach you to respect an Irish gentleman."

St. Ruth changed colour, and made a menacing movement of his hand toward his sword-hilt; he mastered the impulse, however — and with a shrug, and an ominous smile, he said, briefly —

"You can explain this language hereafter and elsewhere, my lord." He then bowed very low, pointing at the same time toward the door. Thus ended O'Brien's introduction — and thus concluded a conference, which had well nigh ended in bloodshed.

"Ah, my good friend, honest Cailliard," exclaimed St. Ruth, with a profound and anxious sigh, as he threw himself into his chair; "woe worth the day that ever I accepted this command." For some seconds he remained silent and abstracted. “What say you, Cailliard — a bad affair?” he abruptly added, glancing at the trim old soldier.

“My good lord,” answered he, kindly and respectfully, “I have often heard you say as much, when we were serving in Savoy. It is, after all, but fatigue; half an hour’s sleep, or a cup of coffee, and all is bright again.”

St. Ruth smiled, but shook his head, and then almost sadly added —

“No, no, Cailliard — this is a very different business; this appointment has made me enemies at home — powerful enemies; and *here,* you see how it is. Louvois is my enemy — this Irish command has made him so,” he continued, in gloomy abstraction: “Louvois — Louvois, a dangerous, dangerous gentleman — specially dangerous in absence; and this Lord Lucan, and his Lutterels, factious, insubordinate truly — among them all, I hold my honours on a fragile tenure; by my faith, a miscarriage here were a grave matter for me — ruin, ruin, nothing short of ruin.”

He relapsed into silence, and resumed his writing, which occupied him for nearly half an hour longer.

“Eh bien! my friend — so far it is well done,” said he, briskly, rising throwing the pen upon the table; “orders and despatches — all done, and the plan complete; tomorrow’s battle here — all here,” and he touched his forehead. “So, by my faith, I’ve earned my biscuit and my glass of wine, for this night at least, methinks: what say you, my trusty Cailliard? Come, bring the flask — and bring a glass, too, for yourself,” he added, gaily and kindly; “drink, drink to your master’s success — drink to his Irish laurels; for, by Saint Denis, I’m resolved to gather them, though it be but to plant them on my grave.”

The memorable 12th of July, 1691, rose over the destined field of battle, in one of those heavy fogs which portend unusual heat. Before seven o’clock, scouts came spurring in with the exciting intelligence, that the whole English force was rapidly crossing the River Suck, at Ballinasloe, and the fords adjacent, just three miles distant from the field of Aghrim. At eight o’clock, the columns of Irish infantry were formed all along the front of the camp; and with colours displayed, and drums beating, began to march down the slope of the hill, and get into position. The cavalry destined for the outposts moved forward — and the artillery, with all its lumbering appliances, advanced to occupy the several batteries whence its fire was to play upon the assailing army.

A few words must here be said in explanation of the Irish position. The hill of Kilcomedan is in no part very steep — it forms a gradual llope, extending almost due north and south, from end to end, a distance of about a mile and a half; and at the time of which we speak, it was perfectly open and covered with heath. Along the crest of this hill was pitched the Irish camp; and the position in which St. Ruth was resolved to await the enemy, extended along its base.

The foremost line of the Irish, composed entirely of musketeers, occupied a series of small enclosures, and was covered in front throughout its entire extent by a morass, throughout which flows a little stream; and this swamp, with difficulty passable by infantry, was wholly so for cavalry. Through two passes only was the Irish position, thus covered, assailable upon firm ground, the one at the extreme right, much the more open of the two," and called the pass of Urrachree, from an old house and demesne which lay close to it; and the other, at the extreme left, by the long, straight road leading into the town of Aghrim. This road was broken, and so narrow that some annalists state that two horses could not pass it abreast; in addition to which it was commanded by the Castle of Aghrim, then as now, it is true, but a ruin, but whose walls and enclosures nevertheless afforded effectual cover, and a position such as ought to have rendered the pass impregnable. Beyond these passes, at either side, were extensive bogs; and dividing them, the interposing morass. The enclosures in which the advanced musketeers were posted afforded excellent cover, and from one to the other communications had been cut, and at certain intervals their whole length was also traversed by broad passages intended to admit the flanking charge of the Irish cavalry, in case the enemy's infantry should succeed in forcing their way thus far. The main line extended in a double row of columns, parallel to the advanced position of the musketeers, and the reserve of the cavalry was drawn up upon a small plain, a little behind the Castle of Aghrim, which was occupied by a force of about two thousand men. The Irish army numbered in all perhaps about twenty thousand men, and the position which they held extended more than an English mile, and was indeed as powerful a one as could-possibly have been selected.

Many of our readers are no doubt aware, that the field of Aghrim was fought upon a Sunday, a circumstance which added one to the many thrilling incidents of the martial scene. The army had hardly moved into the position which was that day to be so sternly and devotedly maintained, when the solemn service of high mass was commenced at the head of every regiment by its respective chaplain; and during this solemn ceremonial, at every moment were arriving fresh messengers from the outposts, their horses covered with dust and foam, with the stern intelligence that the enemy were steadily approaching; and amid all this excitement and suspense, in silence and bareheaded, kneeled the devoted thousands, in the ranks inwhich they were to receive the foe, and on the very ground for which they were, in a few hours, so desperately to contend. This solemn and striking ceremonial, under circumstances which even the bravest admit to be full of awe, and amid the tramp and neighing of horses, and the jingling of accoutrements, and the distant trumpet signals from the outposts, invested the scene with a wildness and sublimity of grandeur which blanched many a cheek, and fluttered many a heart with feelings very different from those of fear.

And now from the extreme left, resting upon the Castle of Aghrim, high mass being ended, arose a wild shouting — the deep, stern acclamation of thousands of human voices swelling over the heathy sweep of Kilcomedan, and wildly pealing onward, and gathering as it came; while foremost among a brilliant staff, with his chief officers about him, dressed in a uniform which actually blazed with gold, and with a snow white plume (which tradition still records tossing in the three-cocked hat, which he raised as he greeted each regiment in succession), rode the man who carried in his head alone the plan of that day's battle — the Marquis de St. Ruth. A word or two he spoke at the head of every regiment, and though his language, which was French, was not of course understood, except by the officers, his stern and animated voice, the splendour of his appearance, and the emphatic gesture with which he pointed with hiss plumed hat in the direction in which the enemy, shrouded in the intervening mist, were known to be advancing, these were appeals sufficient for hearts charged with the wild and stern excitement of impending battle. At every brief, stern sentence, from the Irish ranks, in the irrepressible enthusiasm of that grand and terrible hour, broke rapturous gratulations and responses, in the wild and passionate Celtic dialect, which swelled and gathered as he passed on, in one long cheer of high and pealing menace, far more thrilling and glorious than all the clangour of the martial music that rose along the line.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE BATTLE.

DEEPER and more exciting every moment grew the suspense — all the outposts from the opposite hills, only a mile distant, had been driven in, and upon their misty outlines every eye was turned to discern, if possible, the columns of the enemy, whose presence was already indicated by the sharp roll of drums, and the other signals which accompany military movements. At length, however, at twelve o'clock, under the blaze of the noonday sun, the interposing mist rolled slowly away like a solemn curtain, and disclosed to each army the stern military spectacle which confronted it.

"Jesu guard us!" said O'Gara, addressing Torlogh O'Brien, who, at the head of his regiment, occupied the right of the line at the pass of Urrachree, "it is a powerful army. I fear me we are much outnumbered and his dilated eye wandered over the low undulating hills which confronted him, upon which were slowly moving the compacted masses of the enemy.

"These are Cunningham's dragoons, methinks," said Torlogh O'Brien, lowering the glass through which he had been scrutinizing the foremost regiment of the immensely preponderating force which threatened the pass of Urrachree. "We shall have a brush with then: presently. See there to the left: they are getting their great guns into battery. Yonder are the Danes, and look there the Huguenot foot; there again are the white Dutch, and there the blue."

As Torlogh O'Brien thus pointed out, in detail, as far as he distinctly could, the various regiments which formed the opposing army, the sight over which the eye of the young priest wandered was, in truth, a stern and splendid one. There were masses of cavalry, some in buff jerkins, others in steel breast-plates — wide seas of tossing plumes and manes — huge columns of pikemen, reflecting from their burnished headpieces, cuirasses, and grives the blaze of the meridian sun; there were the musketeers too, in their bright cloth uniforms, varying according to the national equipment of every country in that wondrous confluence of nations assembled there; and every regiment, headed by its colonel, trailing in his own right hand a veritable pike, according to the then military usage, as, stiff with gold lace, with flowing periwig, and lawn neckcloth, he marched in the van of his men.

“See,” added Torlogh, abruptly, “an aid-de-camp from Ginkle’s staff is now speaking with the commander of Cunningham’s regiment; take my advice, Mr. O’Gara, and ride back towards the camp; for, unless I’m mistaken, the action will begin presently.”

He had hardly said thus much, when a single troop of dragoons filed off from the regiment, to which their attention was directed, and began to trot down the opposite slope, into the plain which interposed between the two armies, followed by the main body at a walk; and now, indeed, many a heart beat thick, and all was hushed and silent as the grave! — for the threatened attack upon the pass of Urrachree was actually about to open, and with it the momentous battle on which the destinies of the kingdom were suspended. At the same moment the Irish battery commanding the pass of Urrachree opened its fire upon the advancing troops; and the opposing hills pealed back the successive explosions; while the British detachment from a trot broke into a charge, and with cuirasses and swords flashing through the clouds of dust that rose around them from the parched soil, came thundering down upon the outposts which guarded the entrance to the pass.

“I pray you, ride a little back,” said Torlogh, addressing the priest a second time, as the smoke of the cannon, driving slowly over the light breeze, darkened their faces in its shadow. “The battle has commenced. My men may be engaged ere many minutes more.”

Reluctantly, the priest obeyed; and just as he did so, St. Ruth and his staff galloped up to the spot. Every glass was now raised to watch the issue.

“Right, right! — well done!” exclaimed St. Ruth, in his native tongue, as he watched intently the movements of the opposing parties: “our men give ground, as I directed. Good! — the English cross the rivulet! — and now the whole regiment are about to follow! Colonel O’Brien,” he continued, addressing that officer, who was instantly at his side, “as soon as they are all across, charge them in flank.”

Torlogh bowed, and rode back to the head of his regiment; and in a few seconds more, the splendid cavalry he commanded were following him at a gallop down the slope. The intervening distance was cleared in A*ss* than a minute, and with a wild cheer the splendid corps dashed into the English cavalry, ere they had well time to form, and bore them back in utter confusion, pursuing them beyond the stream they had already crossed, hurling men and horses over in the tremendous rush, and sabring the riders in spite of their cuirasses and steel-cased hats. When the dust cleared off, it disclosed O'Brien's regiment halted in line, beyond the stream, and the English cavalry retiring in confusion; on the ground lay strewn many a steed and rider, and many a horse, with empty saddle, scampered wildly over the plain.

"By my faith, a beautiful charge!" said St. Ruth, in irrepressible exultation. "These Irish will immortalize themselves to day. We must take some care of the brave fellows, however. Desire my Lord Galway to move his horse a little forward," he added, addressing one of his aides-de-camp; and then to another he said— "Tell O'Brien to draw his men again behind the brook."

The officers spurred off upon their respective missions, and the orders were duly attended to. These movements were followed by repeated skirmishes between the Irish and English cavalry at the same flank, but with a like result; and after two hours' conflict, the latter had not made an inch of ground. Meanwhile, the remainder of the British force was halted much in the position they had occupied when the attack upon the pass of Urrachree was commenced; and the cavalry which had been engaged was now withdrawn. An anxious interval followed; and up to five o'clock, it was undecided whether the attack should be renewed or not: at that hour, however, the enemy were once more put in motion — and now, indeed, it became evident that a general action was about to commence. The Danish cavalry moved forward upon the same point, and under cover of their advance — the Danish and Huguenot infantry marched up to the enclosures occupied by the Irish musketeers, and commenced the attack in earnest, upon the extreme right. Now rose the roar of musketry, sharp and sustained — and hedges, fields, and plain, were speedily shrouded in one white mass of smoke, through which were seen the dense columns of the assailants, and the rapid and ceaseless blazing of the guns.

Other columns of English infantry, marching along the edge of the morass, in front of the line, soon began to move upon various points of the Irish centre, across the intervening swamp; and thus, in little more than an hour, the whole line, with the exception of the extreme left, at the pass of

Aghrim, was hotly engaged. The English artillery, planted at the verge of the morass, played upon the Irish centre, and was answered from the Irish batteries; while, throughout the whole length of the line, in one continuous roar, the musketry poured on, enveloping all beyond it in impenetrable cloud. The Irish, in accordance with the order of their general, retired in perfect order, from one inclosure to another, wherever they were pressed, and thus drew the impetuous assailants onward. The Huguenots, upon the right, were thus surrounded, and at last forced to give ground under tremendous slaughter. Precisely a similar manœuvre was practised with a like success upon the centre — three times were the enemy driven headlong through the morass, which they had crossed, and forced, with dreadful loss, back to the very muzzles of their cannon. The Irish line, throughout its entire extent, was unshaken — its centre was victorious, and its left untouched. The evening was already far spent, and the issue of the struggle, whatever it might be, could not now be remote. St. Ruth, seeing the British centre thus repeatedly beaten back, could not restrain his exultation and rapture at the heroism of the Irish infantry, of whom before he had thought so meanly, when he beheld them, for the third time, drive their assailants pellmell through the bog, and pursue them to their very batteries. Tradition says he threw his hat up into the air, and cried, "Now, then, I will beat them back to the gates of Dublin."

Meanwhile the right wing of the English, consisting of several regiments of their best cavalry and infantry, together with a party of artillery, began to advance along the narrow road to Aghrim; this approach, as we have already said, was greatly the most difficult, and was, moreover, entirely commanded by the castle and its enclosures, in which were posted nearly two thousand men; it was, moreover, swept by one of the Irish batteries, and was so very narrow, that two men could with difficulty, if at all, ride abreast along it; no wonder then if St. Ruth considered this pass altogether impracticable.

This force marched down the long and narrow causeway, which we have described as forming the only pass by which the left of the Irish line was approachable upon solid ground; and having reached a point some three or four hundred yards in advance of the castle of Aghrim (whose ruined walls and ditches closely overlooked the road), they began rapidly to form into column, upon a small esplanade of firm soil, which there expanded to an extent of some few acres. The artillery unyoked their guns, and the infantry, quitting the road, began to march, or rather to wade and scramble through the swamp, keeping their ranks, as best they might, under a continued fire from the Irish batteries; at the same time the English cavalry began to file along the road toward the castle, and their cannon, over the heads of the advancing columns, returned the pealing fire of the Irish guns.

St. Ruth rode a little up the hill of Kilcomedan, whence he might command a view of the entire field. From end to end, like one continued roar of thunder, pealed the musketry; and the unbroken cloud of white smoke spread entirely across the plain, and swept round the bases of the opposing hills. The glorious evening sun streamed redly over the scene of havoc — blazing on the extended splendour of martial pomp — and all along the line rose, deep and stern, the wild shouting of tens of thousands of human voices — while, from the opposing batteries rang out the sustained discharge of artillery, and the roar of round shot — speeding through dust and smoke, upon their deadly mission.

Nobly, upon every point, were the Irish infantry sustaining the assault; the English centre was absolutely beaten, and thrown into confusion; the pass of Urrachree was maintained with invincible resolution; the infantry who had crossed near Aghrim were driven, under the tremendous fire of their opponents, back again, with fearful loss, to the verge of the bog; and the cavalry were moving slowly along the broken road, in files, and approaching the castle — occupied, as we have said, by nearly two thousand infantry — under whose shot it seemed impossible that a single horseman of the whole force thus fearfully exposed, could escape destruction.

Almost at a glance, the practised eye of the general took in all that we have described.

“What do they mean, there?” said he to Lord Galmoy, who stood next him, and pointing with his glass to the English cavalry.

“They mean to force the pass,” replied he.

“Then *we* have won the field,” said St. Ruth; “but they are brave fellows; it is a pity they should be so exposed. Order two foot regiments,” he added, promptly, “from the left rear, to move toward Urrachree, at quick time the aide-de-camp dashed away down the slope with the orders; “and the reserved cavalry to mount, and two regiments to move hither,” he continued, addressing a second messenger, who sped away upon the errand; while springing from his jaded and foam-streaked horse, St. Ruth himself mounted the grey charger which the groom held for him close by the battery; the third steed, and the last, as tradition says, which he bestrode that day — and then, in a few brief words, he issued his final orders to the gunner for the direction of his fire.

Now, indeed, the fate of the day seemed wellnigh settled, and many an Irish soldier grasped the hand of his comrade in the enthusiasm of anticipated victory, as they watched the heroic exploits of their resolute brethren in the van.

Fortune, however, on a sudden declared for the English. A fatal blunder was too late discovered. The regiment who occupied the castle and its enclosures, whose fire must have exterminated the cavalry, in their difficult, nay desperate advance, found cannon ball, instead of bullets, in the casks with which they were supplied. Messenger after messenger was despatched in furious haste, to repair this ruinous error — but in vain. The enemy's cavalry was now advancing almost under the walls of the Castle. Pebbles, buttons — every thing that the moment could supply — was in requisition; but shotted with such missiles, their fire was ineffectual. Under this shower of gravel, and ramrods, and buttons, the cavalry, but partially disturbed, pressed onward, passed the castle, and formed upon the left flank of the Irish infantry. At the same ‘ moment, by a misapprehension of St. Ruth's orders, two columns from the front, instead of the rear, of the Irish line of infantry, began to march — from the flank now most severely pressed — towards Urrachree. The English infantry, seeing their support thus withdrawn from the musketeers who had hitherto effectually held them in check, now boldly recrossed the bog; and a cry of treachery began to spread along the Irish line. The cavalry whom St. Ruth had ordered in advance were, however, now formed upon the hillside. The general, confident of their resolution, and having seen their prowess proved already, in full assurance of sweeping the English horse, with ease, from their present lodgment, rode to the head of the magnificent column who awaited his orders. "They are beaten," said he, with stern exultation, "let us beat them to the purpose." Everything depended on the promptitude of the movement; and at this critical moment, when the fortunes of kings and kingdoms hung trembling in the scale, a round shot from one of the English batteries shattered the head of St. Ruth to atoms. The white plumed hat rolled down the hill before the breeze. Wildly plunged the maddened charger. The lifeless body swayed for a minute in the deep saddle, with all its resplendent trappings, and tumbled to the ground. The cavalry halted; some of the French guard dismounted, and threw a cloak over the headless trunk, which was thus carried to the rear. The guard themselves followed; and now a general panic began to spread throughout the Irish army. The cavalry, thus left without orders or general, fell back in uncertainty. The infantry, first at the left flank, then at the centre, and finally at the right began to give ground, at first slowly, and soon in confusion, running pellmell toward the camp. The Irish cavalry, abandoned by the foot, retreated by the road to Loughrea; and in one huge mob, the now routed infantry ran toward the bog which extended in the rear. Among this broken and wide-spread mass the infuriated English cavalry plunged and hewed, and trampled with merciless slaughter — a giddy, frightful scene of rage and terror, confusion, and butchery, on every side. Instead of the stern huzzas which had filled the air not half an hour before, now rose, wild and appalling, one fearful chorus of wailing, terror, and despair.

“We killed,” says Story, “seven thousand of the Irish upon the spot, as was generally believed, and there could not be many tewer, lor looking among the dead three days after, when all our own, and some of theirs were buried, I reckoned in some small enclosures one hundred-and-fifty, in others one hundred-and-twenty, &c., lying, most of them by the ditches where they were shot; and the rest, from the top of;he hill where their camp had been, looked like a great flock of sheep scattered up and down the country, for almost four miles round.”

Thus ended the last battle, in which the Irish nation rallied the fragments of its ancient aristocracy and native people, in military array against the power of England.

In the choir of St. Patrick’s cathedral are suspended what are alleged to be the gloves and spurs of St. Ruth; nay, even the shot that slew him in its flight. His ashes lie, as tradition asserts with clear and circumstantial detail, in the roofless church of Athenry, beside those of Lord Galway, who fell upon the selfsame field of battle.

To this hour, by many a peasant hearth, tradition tells her tales of (hat memorable day — the rustic labourer from time to time turns up the whitened bones of those who fought and fell so bravely upon the tranquil and deserted fields, where once the fate of Ireland was determined; and many a rusted spur and pike-head still is found just where the chances of the battle had flung it so many years ago.

CHAPTER LIV.

OF GLINDARRAGH CASTLE AND ALL WHO MET THERE

THE events which follow are matter of history. — The siege and treaty of Limerick — the death of the Duke of Tyrconnel — and the "flight of the Wild Geese," as tradition still calls the departure of the Irish regiments for the shores of France, to fill, as they afterwards did, all Europe with the renown of the Irish Brigade — on these events we need not dwell. But one intervening occurrence of a private kind, and of small interest, indeed, to the reader, though of some importance to our tale, it is here necessary to record; this is the death of old Sir Thomas Neville — now past a full month or more — and to which, as an explanatory fact, and as such only (without disrespect to his memory), allusion has now been made.

It was in the month of October, 1691, that the French ship in which Sarsfield was about to embark, floated, with her white canvas spread, on the bosom of the noble Shannon. Standing with one foot on the gunwale of the boat, which was about to row him to the vessel's side, Lord Lucan (for the last time, wrung the hand of Torlogh O'Brien.

"Had you done otherwise," he said, in conclusion; "I should never have forgiven you; and what is more, neither would the King. You have redeemed your engagements to his majesty, well and nobly; honour imposes on you now another, and, I trust, a happier allegiance. May she to whom it is due, prove all that rumour says of her: — I can wish you no greater happiness. Remember all I've said to you of friends and country; and so, farewell — farewell."

The boat skimmed the blue waves of the glorious river — a few minutes more, and the tall vessel floated down with wind and tide; the noble exile, as he stood upon the quarter-deck, waving his hat to the friends who watched his departure, under the shadow of that now deserted fortress the ancient town of Limerick — which his energy and daring had so well defended.

Torlogh O'Brien having watched the departing vessel until the figures upon her deck grew dim and indistinct, mounted his charger, Roland, and was soon far upon his way to Glindarragh castle.

Upon the same day it was, that Sir Hugh's carriage, in which travelled himself and his daughter, Grace Willoughby, also approached, though by a different route, the castle of Glindarragh.

The last miles of a journey, especially when it is to end with home, are invariably the most irksome. The roads were broken, and the progress of the vehicle in which he sat so intolerably tedious, that the old knight's impatience could brook it at length no longer. He descended on foot, to cross the fields by a pathway which, traversing the now desolate farm of Drumgunniol, led pretty directly to the bridge of Glindarragh. As the old man strode firmly through the straggling bushes, and marked the blackened ruins of the farmhouse — these striking memorials of the troublous times so lately past suggested irresistibly their corresponding associations of persons and of adventure — associations which haunted Sir Hugh until, as he walked through the shadowy ruins of the old abbey of Glindarragh, he involuntarily exclaimed —

"Unhappy wretch — illfated Tisdal! what chance, I wonder, has befallen him."

He was startlingly answered by a groan; and looking a little to the left, he saw, at a distance of but a few yards before him, seated upon a fragment of some dislodged and ruined tomb, the identical Tisdal, with whom his imagination even then was busy; his hair grown thin and gray, his lank hands supporting his stooping head, and his dress soiled and tattered — a spectacle, indeed, of wretchedness. Sir Hugh looked fixedly upon him, and perhaps something of pity softened the sternness of his regard. The man — who had, indeed, seen him as he approached — arose, and turning sullenly away, walked some paces slowly into the ruin. He stopped, however — hesitated — returned, and threw himself at his old patron's feet. Strange and various were the impulses which crossed the mind of old Sir Hugh, as he beheld this spectacle. His generous nature triumphed, however; and in a tone of deep sorrow he called on him to rise. It was long ere that call was answered. A strange conversation ensued: it concluded thus —

"It seems, indeed, the wisest, if not the only course left for you," said Sir Hugh. "In the new world, with the ocean between you and the' scenes of all your troubles and remorse, you will have security at least, if not happiness. Of your property here I will become the purchaser. Agree with my attorney in Dublin — you know him well — and for your present necessities take this.”

Sir Hugh placed some gold in his hand as he spoke. The wretched man was unable to answer. At last he said —

“A wretch like me has no blessing to give; but — but your own heart will bless you for this.”

He turned abruptly, as it seemed, unwilling to trust himself with another word, and walking hurriedly through the mouldering walls, was soon out of sight; but the old knight thought he heard him sobbing as he went.

Oh, how immeasurably happier was Sir Hugh, as he pursued his homeward path, than if he had turned sternly away from the prostrate though guilty suppliant!

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The happiness of that day, no words of ours can paint. What blessings, what “welcomes back again,” what tears of joy! Old Sir Hugh — simple and eager as a boy in his delight — attended by his favourite dogs — bounding and yelping round him in affectionate ecstacies, and by many a beaming face of humble friendship — revisits his horses and his hawks, handles once more his trusty birding piece, again tries the spring and balance of his pet trout-rod, and, in short, like an emancipated schoolboy, let loose upon the yet untried delights of holiday time, hovers in rapturous uncertainty among the conflicting attractions of a hundred joyous and familiar sports. As thus he whiles whole hours away, which fly almost like minutes, Grace, once more with her old nurse, sits in her quaint, darksome chamber. Those who had not seen her since she went forth, full two years since, might mark some change, though not unpleasing, in the buoyant, impetuous girl who then departed — something subdued, more tender, though not sadder, in the rich nobleness of her beauty: her high and graceful carriage had more of settled dignity; her affections, too, not warmer, but more disciplined; yet was she still simple, true, generous as ever, only she had grown less a girl and more a woman.

‘Well, well, a cushla,” said the old woman, archly, as she held up her tremulous finger, and looked with a puckered smile into the blushing face and laughing eyes of her darling; “did not I say the old song was coming out; if it did not come true one way, it will another. There he stood on Glindarragh bridge, sure enough, an' the leaf of the shamarogue in the bone of his forehead — as who can deny that same, and the jewel on his arm; it's well I mind that night, for the jewel was yourself, mavourneen, that hung so beautiful round his arm, that frightful evening. The Lord be thanked that it's over, and gone for ever and ever; an' a bright, precious, glorious jewel you were an' are my colleen beg moe. An' under the old hall, sure enough, where the cider, an' the beer, an' the butter, an' all the rest, is stored away — for though they call it the store-loft now, the old hall it is — an' the hall you might hear the old people callin' it to this day — undher the hall, sure enough, he stabled his horse, an' into the castle he's comin' now for good; an' so the old song's come true, an' all's out but the endin' of it. Well, well, ye can finish that between ye; an' if the castle ever goes away from the O'Briens agin — for the want of an heir, at least — it's your own fault, you rogue, you, an' no one else's — mind my words; for there is not a handsomer or a cleverer gentleman in Ireland's grounds, than that same Colonel — that same Torlogh Duv O'Brien."

Ere the blushing and half-laughing girl could chide her old nurse, the clang of horses' hoofs were heard in the courtyard —

"He's coming, he's here," she cried; and starting up, she threw her arms about the old woman's neck, and kissed her again and again, and then ran, with a bounding heart and a glowing cheek, down to the stately parlour, with its dark wainscoting and its solemn files of ancestral portraits.

There, among these old family memorials, stood the breathing representative of that new alliance, which was to bury, in love's oblivion, all the feuds and discords of the past. Yes, Torlogh O'Brien — happy, thrice happy, in the true love of this devoted and beautiful girl, with tumultuous greeting folds her to his heart, and, with the privilege of the betrothed, kisses her burning cheek — nay, kisses her very lips. Oh! joyous meeting; oh! ecstacy unutterable; too wildly happy for tears — too deep for laughter; yet trembling and gushing with the mysterious confluence of both; what raptures of affection in every look; what boundless tenderness in the hushed tones of every word!

Leave we them to talk together, to look on one another — to talk and look, and look and talk again, in fullness of happiness, while hours untold fly by with giddy speed.

Alas! there is one for whom this welcome hour hath brought no joy; who sits lonely and sorrow-stricken in the midst of the general happiness. Near the deserted mill, upon the woody slope, in that quaint cottage, sheltered by tufted thorns and knotted oaks, and wooed and sung to by the wayward stream — sits in the lone casement a pale, faded, but still beautiful creature. Her wan cheek leans upon her little hand. Her deep, dark eye wanders from the waving bramble to the foaming stream, but vacantly, for images unseen by others fill its sad vision, and wet its lashes with glittering tears.

Alas! Poor little Phebe — lonely, lonely watcher — desolate and gentle creature — hoping ever on, in spite of sorrow, and cold neglect, and long delays. Alas! shall joy ever more light up thy pale face with smiles; shall the day ever come, indeed, when *he* shall fold thee to his heart again — when *his* voice shall murmur the charmed music of his boundless love into thy longing ear — when *his* lips shall kiss away thy tears, and bid thee grieve no more — or is the hope, the one hope on which thy very life has hung, after all but an illusion?

Hark! the unwonted clang of a horse's hoof disturbs the day-dream of the solitary mourner; and now a step upon the stair — a voice — oh *I* blessed sound! — oh, heaven — and can it be? Like a startled bird, toward that voice she flies, and, with one wild cry of joy, drops senseless into Percy Neville's arms.

"My wife — my darling — my adored — my own! — and do I see you? — and do I hold you fast, indeed — indeed, once more? Phebe, darling Phebe, speak to me! — look up! — it is I — Percy — your own Percy — who will never, never, while he lives, part from you more!"

Weeping — oh, how bitterly! — with very ecstasy of joy, her thin arms strained about his neck, sobbing and nestling in his bosom she lay.

"And could you, *could* you think your own Percy would ever, of his own choice, even for an hour leave you? Oh, could you think that all the world would tempt me to forsake you — dearest — my own — my idolized? Yes, darling, smile — smile through your tears; for we *are* met, indeed — never again — oh, never — while we live, to part!"

Oh, what rapture of affection! what greetings! what tears and blessings! what hopes for long and happy years to come! — hopes, unlike too many of their human kindred, destined to be realized. What confidences! what mingled tears and smiles! — what shall we say? Better to hold our peace, and leave these to the kindly reader's fancy.

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Never in the Hall of Glindarragh was wedding feast half so joyous before. The old knight sat again at the head of his board, the very impersonation of gracious hospitality, and cordial welcome. Grace and Torlogh O'Brien, as beseems the brideand bridegoom, at his right, and at his left Percy Neville and his own sweet Phebe; and beyond them good friends and neighbours true, and tenants and dependants. What hilarity — what happiness — what blushing, and quizzing, and laughter, and toasting — what clattering of knives and forks — what a buzzing medley of many voices — what booming and squeaking of a full dozen of bagpipes, at least, straining in preparation for the coming dance, outside in the lobbies — what a jostling, and crossing, and confusion of servants! and not one sour or gloomy, face to be seen among them all. Even Dick Goslin's sallow countenance glowed faintly in the reflected radiation of the general jollity and good humour, while Tim Dwyer, in good fellowship and agreeability, absolutely outdid himself; and, as he was after heard to remark, despaired of ever coming up to it again, or anything like it, to his dying day. But all this was nothing to Con Donovan — he was a sublimation of himself; his grandeur was never so grand before — his smiles never so luminous — his jokes were irresistible — the very twinkle of his eye bewitching; his portliness seemed to have expanded and rounded; the very whiteness of his hair was whiter, and the redness of his face more rubicund. He was Con Donovan intensified and exaggerated a hundredfold, as he stood, absolutely radiating with a kind of glory around him, behind the chair of his indulgent and beloved old master. This is indeed delightful, when every face you look upon beams with the glow of cordial, kindly merriment — when the tides of sympathy, like springs unlocked in sudden thaws, gush genially and unrestrained; and all the clatter and rude uproar of jolly sound is harmonized by some soft undercurrent of pervading melody, as it were the sweet singing of so many hearts from very joy. Here, then, ere yet one coming cloud has thrown its shadow over the scene, drop we the curtain upon those actors, with whom we have grown familiar, and from whom the writer, at least, now parts for ever, with something like regret.

O’Gara continued to hold his place as almoner, after his regiment had been taken into the pay of France. He accompanied them through several of the continental campaigns, and finally retired into an humble monastery in the north of Italy — in whose library are, we believe, still to be seen, several volumes inscribed with his name. Thomas Talbot retired to the court of St. Germains, where he subsisted, nominally, upon his wretched pension, but in reality upon play, at which he was an adept — and which maintained him in those debauched and expensive courses to which he was addicted — until at last his vicious career was suddenly cut short, and he was found, early one morning, in a narrow lane, in an obscure part of Paris, lying stark and stiff, in a pool of blood — his body pierced with a hundred wounds, and his broken sword still griped in his cold hand, attesting the characteristic resolution with which he had contended for his life.

The fate of Miles Garrett was somewhat remarkable. When Ryan, familiarly known as Ned of the Hills, retired to the Slievephelim mountains, the centre of the ancient patrimony of the O’Moel Ryans (the sept whose representative he claimed to be), none of the bordering proprietary suffered at all so severely and so often from his predatory excursions, as did the renegade proprietor of Lisnamoe. Bitterly did Miles Garrett resent the pillage which thinned his broad pastures of their choicest kine and horses; but unable, with such a retinue as he, unaided, could command, to contend against the numerous band which the rapparee kept constantly about him, he secretly arranged a plan by which he and two neighbouring gentlemen, Waller of Castle Waller, and Bourke, of Glinbally, were to meet upon the heights overlooking Muroe, and thus to concentrate their forces for pursuit on the next alarm. This was not long deferred. One fine autumn morning, the “herds” came running into the castle of Lisnamoe, with news that the outlaw and his men were driving off the cattle. Messengers were despatched in hot haste to those who had promised their assistance; and Miles Garrett and his men, making a long sweep to intercept the outlaw’s retreat, halted at the head of Cappercullen Glen, overhanging the little village of Muroe. Here having dismounted, Garrett pursued the tangled and narrow path which wound along the edge of the precipitous glen, descending toward the village from which quarter the expected assistance was to arrive. Tradition says, that on turning a corner of this precarious and giddy path, he was encountered, face to face, by the rapparee himself. A brief and deadly struggle instantly ensued, in which, Garrett's footing failing him, the outlaw ran him through the body with his rapier. Whether the wound were a mortal one or not, the result was the same; for, standing upon the salient angle of the pathway — suspended a hundred feet and more above the craggy base, among whose rocks a swollen mountain stream was flashing and foaming — he reeled backward, and fell over the unguarded edge of the precipice. Headlong through the air he tumbled, and touching a branch in his fall, turned over, and so, head downward, reached the rocky bed of the torrent, where his skull was shattered like a gourd; and he lay huddled together among the stones and foam, until hours after, the ghastly corpse was found by children gathering "frahans" in the depths of that lonely dingle.

THE END

THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD

Published in three volumes in 1863, this was the last of Le Fanu's novels to be set in the past (and in Ireland) and the first to be published under his own name. It was initially serialised in the *Dublin University Magazine* from October 1861 to February 1863, under the pseudonym Charles de Cresseron. Indeed, most of Le Fanu's subsequent novels were first published in that periodical, which he owned and edited from 1861. The book version of the novel was self-published by Le Fanu, but he was able to sell a number of copies to the London publisher Tinsley, who soon reissued it under their own imprint. It was Le Fanu's most successful novel up to that point and is still one of his better known works.

The story opens with a prologue describing the discovery of a violently beaten skull in the churchyard at Chapelizod, near Dublin, and the narrator then takes us back in time to 1767, as he imagines the events that might explain the skull's condition. As might be imagined from this description, the ensuing plot is an intriguing mix of the supernatural and the sensational with a realistic depiction of life in a mid-nineteenth-century Irish village.

Le Fanu spent his youth in Chapelizod, near the Phoenix Park area of Dublin, and drew on his impressions of that village for the setting of this novel and some of his ghost stories, one of which ('Narrative of a Ghost of a Hand') is incorporated in the narrative of this novel. The book was later an important reference point for James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, which contains cryptic allusions to the novel.

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A modern view of Chapelizod, where this novel is set

The Tyled House, Balyfermot, the setting for 'Narrative of the Ghost of a Hand'

A PROLOGUE — BEING A DISH OF VILLAGE CHAT.

We are going to talk, if you please, in the ensuing chapters, of what was going on in Chapelizod about a hundred years ago. A hundred years, to be sure, is a good while; but though fashions have changed, some old phrases dropped out, and new ones come in; and snuff and hair-powder, and sacques and solitaires quite passed away — yet men and women were men and women all the same — as elderly fellows, like your humble servant, who have seen and talked with rearward stragglers of that generation — now all and long marched off — can testify, if they will.

In those days Chapelizod was about the gayest and prettiest of the outpost villages in which old Dublin took a complacent pride. The poplars which stood, in military rows, here and there, just showed a glimpse of formality among the orchards and old timber that lined the banks of the river and the valley of the Liffey, with a lively sort of richness. The broad old street looked hospitable and merry, with steep roofs and many coloured hall-doors. The jolly old inn, just beyond the turnpike at the sweep of the road, leading over the buttressed bridge by the mill, was first to welcome the excursionist from Dublin, under the sign of the Phœnix. There, in the grand wainscoted back-parlour, with 'the great and good King William,' in his robe, garter, periwig, and sceptre presiding in the panel over the chimneypiece, and confronting the large projecting window, through which the river, and the daffodils, and the summer foliage looked so bright and quiet, the Aldermen of Skinner's Alley — a club of the 'true blue' dye, as old as the Jacobite wars of the previous century — the corporation of shoemakers, or of tailors, or the freemasons, or the musical clubs, loved to dine at the stately hour of five, and deliver their jokes, sentiments, songs, and wisdom, on a pleasant summer's evening. Alas! the inn is as clean gone as the guests — a dream of the shadow of smoke.

Lately, too, came down the old 'Salmon House' — so called from the blazonry of that noble fish upon its painted signboard — at the other end of the town, that, with a couple more, wheeled out at right angles from the line of the broad street, and directly confronting the passenger from Dublin, gave to it something of the character of a square, and just left room for the high road and Martin’s Row to slip between its flank and the orchard that overtopped the river wall. Well! it is gone. I blame nobody. I suppose it was quite rotten, and that the rats would soon have thrown up their lease of it; and that it was taken down, in short, chiefly, as one of the players said of ‘Old Drury,’ to prevent the inconvenience of its coming down of itself. Still a peevish but harmless old fellow — who hates change, and would wish things to stay as they were just a little, till his own great change comes; who haunts the places where his childhood was passed, and reverences the homeliest relics of by-gone generations — may be allowed to grumble a little at the impertinences of improving proprietors with a taste for accurate parallelograms and pale new brick.

Then there was the village church, with its tower dark and rustling from base to summit, with thick piled, bowering ivy. The royal arms cut in bold relief in the broad stone over the porch — where, pray, is that stone now, the memento of its old viceregal dignity? Where is the elevated pew, where many a lord lieutenant, in point, and gold lace, and thundercloud periwig, sate in awful isolation, and listened to orthodox and loyal sermons, and took French rappee; whence too, he stepped forth between the files of the guard of honour of the Royal Irish Artillery from the barrack over the way, in their courtly uniform, white, scarlet, and blue, cocked hats, and cues, and ruffles, presenting arms — into his emblazoned coach and six, with hanging footmen, as wonderful as Cinderella’s, and outriders outblazing the liveries of the troops, and rolling grandly away in sunshine and dust.

The ‘Ecclesiastical Commissioners’ have done their office here. The tower, indeed, remains, with half its antique growth of ivy gone; but the body of the church is new, and I, and perhaps an elderly fellow or two more, miss the oldfashioned square pews, distributed by a traditional tenure among the families and dignitaries of the town and vicinage (who are they now?), and sigh for the queer, old, clumsy reading-desk and pulpit, grown dearer from the long and hopeless separation; and wonder where the tables of the Ten Commandments, in long gold letters of Queen Anne’s date, upon a vivid blue ground, arched above, and flanking the communion-table, with its tall thin rails, and fifty other things that appeared to me in my nonage, as stable as the earth, and as sacred as the heavens, are gone to.

As for the barrack of the Royal Irish Artillery, the great gate leading into the parade ground, by the river side, and all that, I believe the earth, or rather that grim giant factory, which is now the grand feature and centre of Chapelizod, throbbing all over with steam, and whizzing with wheels, and vomiting pitchy smoke, has swallowed them up.

A line of houses fronting this — old familiar faces — still look blank and regretfully forth, through their glassy eyes, upon the changed scene. How different the company they kept some ninety or a hundred years ago!

Where is the mill, too, standing fast by the bridge, the manorial appendage of the town, which I loved in my boyhood for its gaunt and crazy aspect and dim interior, whence the clapper kept time mysteriously to the drone of the mill-sluice? I think it is gone. Surely *that* confounded thing can't be my venerable old friend in masquerade!

But I can't expect you, my reader — polite and patient as you manifestly are — to potter about with me, all the summer day, through this melancholy and mangled old town, with a canopy of factory soot between your head and the pleasant sky. One glance, however, before you go, you will vouchsafe at the village tree — that stalworth elm. It has not grown an inch these hundred years. It does not look a day older than it did fifty years ago, *I* can tell you. There he stands the same; and yet a stranger in the place of his birth, in a new order of things, joyless, busy, transformed Chapelizod, listening, as it seems to me, always to the unchanged song and prattle of the river, with his reveries and affections far away among by-gone times and a buried race. Thou hast a story, too, to tell, thou slighted and solitary sage, if only the winds would steal it musically forth, like the secret of Mildas from the moaning reeds.

The palmy days of Chapelizod were just about a hundred years ago, and those days — though I am jealous of their pleasant and kindly fame, and specially for the preservation of the few memorials they have left behind, were yet, I may say, in your ear, with all their colour and adventure — perhaps, on the whole, more pleasant to read about, and dream of, than they were to live in. Still their violence, follies, and hospitalities, softened by distance, and illuminated with a sort of barbaric splendour, have long presented to my fancy the glowing and ever-shifting combinations upon which, as on the red embers, in a winter's gloaming, I love to gaze, propping my white head upon my hand, in a lazy luxury of reverie, from my own armchair, while they drop, ever and anon, into new shapes, and silently tell their 'winter's tales.'

When your humble servant, Charles de Cresseron, the compiler of this narrative, was a boy some fourteen years old — how long ago precisely that was, is nothing to the purpose, ’tis enough to say he remembers what he then saw and heard a good deal better than what happened a week ago — it came to pass that he was spending a pleasant week of his holidays with his benign uncle and godfather, the curate of Chapelizod. On the second day of his, or rather *my* sojourn (I take leave to return to the first person), there was a notable funeral of an old lady. Her name was Darby, and her journey to her last home was very considerable, being made in a hearse, by easy stages, from her house of Lisnabane, in the county of Sligo, to the churchyard of Chapelizod. There was a great flat stone over that small parcel of the rector’s freehold, which the family held by a tenure, not of lives, but of deaths, renewable for ever. So that my uncle, who was a man of an anxious temperament, had little trouble in satisfying himself of the meerings and identity of this narrow tenement, to which Lemuel Mattocks, the sexton, led him as straight and confidently as he could have done to the communion-table.

My uncle, therefore, fiated the sexton’s presentment, and the work commenced forthwith. I don’t know whether all boys have the same liking for horrors which I am conscious of having possessed — I only know that I liked the churchyard, and deciphering tombstones, and watching the labours of the sexton, and hearing the old world village talk that often got up over the relics.

When this particular grave was pretty nearly finished — it lay from east to west — a lot of earth fell out at the northern side, where an old coffin had lain, and good store of brown dust and grimy bones, and the yellow skull itself came tumbling about the sexton’s feet. These fossils, after his wont, he lifted decently with the point of his shovel, and pitched into a little nook beside the great mound of mould at top.

‘Be the powers o’ war! here’s a battered headpiece for yez,’ said young Tim Moran, who had picked up the cranium, and was eyeing it curiously, turning it round the while.

‘Show it here, Tim;’ ‘let *me* look,’ cried two or three neighbours, getting round as quickly as they could.

‘Oh! murdher;’ said one.

‘Oh! be the powers o’ Moll Kelly!’ cried another.

‘Oh! bloody wars!’ exclaimed a third.

‘That poor fellow got no chance for his life at all, at all!’ said Tim.

‘That was a bullet,’ said one of them, putting his finger into a clean circular aperture as large as a halfpenny.

‘An’ look at them two cracks. Och, murther!’

‘There’s only one. Oh, I see you’re right, *two*, begorra!’

‘Aich o’ them a wipe iv a poker.’

Mattocks had climbed nimbly to the upper level, and taking the skull in his fist, turned it about this way and that, curiously. But though he was no chicken, his memory did not go far enough back to throw any light upon the matter.

‘Could it be the Mattross that was shot in the year ‘90, as I often heerd, for sthrikin’ his captain?’ suggested a bystander.

‘Oh! that poor fellow’s buried round by the north side of the church,’ said Mattocks, still eyeing the skull. ‘It could not be Counsellor Gallagher, that was kilt in the jewel with Colonel Ruck — he was hot in the head — bud it could not be — augh! not at all.’

‘Why not, Misther Mattocks?’

‘No, nor the Mattross neither. This, ye see, is a dhry bit o’ the yard here; there’s ould Darby’s coffin, at the bottom, down there, sound enough to stand on, as you see, wid a plank; an’ he was buried in the year ‘93. Why, look at the coffin this skull belongs to, ‘tid go into powdher between your fingers; ’tis nothin’ but tindher.’

‘I believe you’re right, Mr. Mattocks.’

‘Phiat! to be sure. ’Tis longer undher ground by thirty years, good, or more maybe.’

Just then the slim figure of my tall mild uncle, the curate, appeared, and his long thin legs, in black worsted stockings and knee-breeches, stepped reverently and lightly among the graves. The men raised their hats, and Mattocks jumped lightly into the grave again, while my uncle returned their salute with the sad sort of smile, a regretful kindness, which he never exceeded, in these solemn precincts.

It was his custom to care very tenderly for the bones turned up by the sexton, and to wait with an awful solicitude until, after the reading of the funeral service, he saw them gently replaced, as nearly as might be, in their old bed; and discouraging all idle curiosity or levity respecting them, with a solemn rebuke, which all respected. Therefore it was, that so soon as he appeared the skull was, in Hibernian phrase, ‘dropt like a hot potato,’ and the grave-digger betook himself to his spade so nimbly.

‘Oh! Uncle Charles,’ I said, taking his hand, and leading him towards the foot of the grave; ‘such a wonderful skull has come up! It is shot through with a bullet, and cracked with a poker besides.’

‘’Tis thrue for him, your raverence; he was murthered twiste over, whoever he was — rest his sowl;’ and the sexton, who had nearly completed his work, got out of the grave again, with a demure activity, and raising the brown relic with great reverence, out of regard for my good uncle, he turned it about slowly before the eyes of the curate, who scrutinised it, from a little distance, with a sort of melancholy horror.

‘Yes, Lemuel,’ said my uncle, still holding my hand, ‘’twas undoubtedly a murder; ay, indeed! He sustained two heavy blows, beside that gunshot through the head.’

‘’Twasn’t gunshot, Sir; why the hole ‘id take in a grape-shot,’ said an old fellow, just from behind my uncle, in a pensioner’s cocked hat, leggings, and long old-world red frock-coat, speaking with a harsh reedy voice, and a grim sort of reserved smile.

I moved a little aside, with a sort of thrill, to give him freer access to my uncle, in the hope that he might, perhaps, throw a light upon the history of this remarkable memorial. The old fellow had a rat-like gray eye — the other was hid under a black patch — and there was a deep red scar across his forehead, slanting from the patch that covered the extinguished orb. His face was purplish, the tinge deepening towards the lumpish top of his nose, on the side of which stood a big wart, and he carried a great walking-cane over his shoulder, and bore, as it seemed to me, an intimidating, but caricatured resemblance to an old portrait of Oliver Cromwell in my Whig grandfather’s parlour.

‘You don’t think it a bullet wound, Sir?’ said my uncle, mildly, and touching his hat — for coming of a military stock himself, he always treated an old soldier with uncommon respect.

‘Why, please your raverence,’ replied the man, reciprocating his courtesy; ‘I *know* it’s not.’

‘And what *is* it, then, my good man?’ interrogated the sexton, as one in authority, and standing on his own dunghill.

'The trepan,' said the fogey, in the tone in which he'd have cried 'attention' to a raw recruit, without turning his head, and with a scornful momentary skew-glance from his gray eye.

'And do you know whose skull that was, Sir?' asked the curate.

'Ay do I, Sir, *well*,' with the same queer smile, he answered. 'Come, now, you're a grave-digger, my fine fellow,' he continued, accosting the sexton cynically; 'how long do you suppose that skull's been under ground?'

'Long enough; but not so long, *my* fine fellow, as yours has been above ground.'

'Well, you're right there, for *I* seen him buried,' and he took the skull from the sexton's hands; 'and I'll tell you more, there was some dry eyes, too, at his funeral — ha, ha, ha!'

'You were a resident in the town, then?' said my uncle, who did not like the turn his recollections were taking.

'Ay, Sir, that I was,' he replied; 'see that broken tooth, there — I forgot 'twas there — and the minute I seen it, I remembered it like this morning — I could swear to it — when he laughed; ay, and that sharp corner to it — hang him,' and he twirled the loose tooth, the last but two of all its fellows, from' its socket, and chucked it into the grave.

'And were you — you weren't in the army, *then*?' enquired the curate, who could not understand the sort of scoffing dislike he seemed to bear it.

'Be my faith I was *so*, Sir — the Royal Irish Artillery,' replied he, promptly.

'And in what capacity?' pursued his reverence.

'Drummer,' answered the mulberry-faced veteran.

'Ho! — Drummer? That's a good time ago, I dare say,' said my uncle, looking on him reflectively.

'Well, so it is, not far off fifty years,' answered he. 'He was a hard-headed codger, he was; but you see the sprig of shillelagh was too hard for him — ha, ha, ha!' and he gave the skull a smart knock with his walking-cane, as he grinned at it and wagged his head.

'Gently, gently, my good man,' said the curate, placing his hand hastily upon his arm, for the knock was harder than was needed for the purpose of demonstration.

'You see, Sir, at that time, our Colonel-in-Chief was my Lord Blackwater,' continued the old soldier, 'not that we often seen him, for he lived in France mostly; the Colonel-en-Second was General Chattesworth, and Colonel Stafford was Lieutenant-Colonel, and under him Major O'Neill; Captains, four — Cluffe, Devereux, Barton, and Burgh: First Lieutenants — Puddock, Delany, Sackville, and Armstrong; Second Lieutenants — Salt; Barber, Lillyman, and Pringle; Lieutenant Fireworkers — O'Flaherty— '

'I beg your pardon,' interposed my uncle, '*Fireworkers*, did you say?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'And what, pray, does a Lieutenant *Fireworker* mean?'

'Why, law bless you, Sir! a Fireworker! 'twas his business to see that the men loaded, sarved, laid, and fired the gun all right. But that doesn't signify; you see this old skull, Sir: well, 'twas a nine days' wonder, and the queerest business you ever heerd tell of. Why, Sir, the women was frightened out of their senses, an' the men puzzled out o' their wits — they wor — ha, ha, ha! an' I can tell you all about it — a mighty black and bloody business it was— '

'I — I beg your pardon, Sir: but I think — yes — the funeral has arrived; and for the present, I must bid you good-morning.'

And so my uncle hurried to the church, where he assumed his gown, and the solemn rite proceeded.

When all was over, my uncle, after his wont, waited until he had seen the disturbed remains re-deposited decently in their place; and then, having disrobed, I saw him look with some interest about the churchyard, and I knew 'twas in quest of the old soldier.

'I saw him go away during the funeral,' I said.

'Ay, the old pensioner,' said my uncle, peering about in quest of him.

And we walked through the town, and over the bridge, and we saw nothing of his cocked hat and red single-breasted frock, and returned rather disappointed to tea.

I ran into the back room which commanded the churchyard in the hope of seeing the old fellow once more, with his cane shouldered, grinning among the tombstones in the evening sun. But there was no sign of him, or indeed of anyone else there. So I returned, just as my uncle, having made the tea, shut down the lid of his silver tea-pot with a little smack; and with a kind but absent smile upon me, he took his book, sat down and crossed one of his thin legs over the other, and waited pleasantly until the delightful infusion should be ready for our lips, reading his old volume, and with his disengaged hand gently stroking his long shin-bone.

In the meantime, I, who thirsted more for that tale of terror which the old soldier had all but begun, of which in that strangely battered skull I had only an hour ago seen face to face so grizzly a memento, and of which in all human probability I never was to hear more, looked out dejectedly from the window, when, whom should I behold marching up the street, at slow time, towards the Salmon House, but the identical old soldier, cocked-hat, copper nose, great red single-breasted coat with its prodigious wide buttonholes, leggings, cane, and all, just under the village tree.

‘Here he is, oh! Uncle Charles, here he comes,’ I cried.

‘Eh, the soldier, is he?’ said my uncle, tripping in the carpet in his eagerness, and all but breaking the window.

‘So it is, indeed; run down, my boy, and beg him to come up.’

But by the time I had reached the street, which you may be sure was not very long, I found my uncle had got the window up and was himself inviting the old boy, who having brought his left shoulder forward, thanked the curate, saluting soldier-fashion, with his hand to his hat, palm foremost. I’ve observed, indeed, than those grim old campaigners who have seen the world, make it a principle to accept anything in the shape of a treat. If it’s bad, why, it costs them nothing; and if good, so much the better.

So up he marched, and into the room with soldierly self-possession, and being offered tea, preferred punch, and the ingredients were soon on the little round table by the fire, which, the evening being sharp, was pleasant; and the old fellow being seated, he brewed his nectar, to his heart’s content; and as we sipped our tea in pleased attention, he, after his own fashion, commenced the story, to which I listened with an interest which I confess has never subsided.

Many years after, as will sometimes happen, a flood of light was unexpectedly poured over the details of his narrative; on my coming into possession of the diary, curiously minute, and the voluminous correspondence of Rebecca, sister to General Chattesworth, with whose family I had the honour to be connected. And this journal, to me, with my queer cat-like affection for this old village, a perfect treasure — and the interminable *bundles* of letters, sorted and arranged so neatly, with little abstracts of their contents in red ink, in her own firm thin hand upon the covers, from all and to all manner of persons — for the industrious lady made fair copies of all the letters she wrote — formed for many years my occasional, and always pleasant winter night's reading.

I wish I could infuse their spirit into what I am going to tell, and above all that I could inspire my readers with ever so little of the peculiar interest with which the old town has always been tinted and saddened to my eye. My boyish imagination, perhaps, kindled all the more at the story, by reason of it being a good deal connected with the identical old house in which we three — my dear uncle, my idle self, and the queer old soldier — were then sitting. But wishes are as vain as regrets; so I'll just do my best, bespeaking your attention, and submissively abiding your judgment.

CHAPTER I.

THE RECTOR'S NIGHT-WALK TO HIS CHURCH.

AD. 1767 — in the beginning of the month of May — I mention it because, as I said, I write from memoranda, an awfully dark night came down on Chapelizod and all the country round.

I believe there was no moon, and the stars had been quite put out under the wet 'blanket of the night,' which impenetrable muffler overspread the sky with a funereal darkness.

There was a little of that sheet-lightning early in the evening, which betokens sultry weather. The clouds, column after column, came up sullenly over the Dublin mountains, rolling themselves from one horizon to the other into one black dome of vapour, their slow but steady motion contrasting with the awful stillness of the air. There was a weight in the atmosphere, and a sort of undefined menace brooding over the little town, as if unseen crime or danger — some mystery of iniquity — was stealing into the heart of it, and the disapproving heavens scowled a melancholy warning.

That morning old Sally, the rector's housekeeper, was disquieted. She had dreamed of making the great four-post, state bed, with the dark green damask curtains — a dream that betokened some coming trouble — it might, to be sure, be ever so small — (it had once come with no worse result than Dr. Walsingham's dropping his purse, containing something under a guinea in silver, over the side of the ferry boat) — but again it might be tremendous. The omen hung over them doubtful.

A large square letter, with a great round seal, as big as a crown piece, addressed to the Rev. Hugh Walsingham, Doctor of Divinity, at his house, by the bridge, in Chapelizod, had reached him in the morning, and plainly troubled him. He kept the messenger a good hour awaiting his answer; and, just at two o'clock, the same messenger returned with a second letter — but this time a note sufficed for reply. "Twill seem ungracious,' said the doctor, knitting his brows over his closed folio in the study; 'but I cannot choose but walk clear in my calling before the Lord. How can I honestly pronounce hope, when in my mind there is nothing but *fear* — let another do it if he see his way — I do enough in being present, as ’tis right I should.’

It was, indeed, a remarkably dark night — a rush and downpour of rain! The doctor stood just under the porch of the stout brick house — of King William’s date, which was then the residence of the worthy rector of Chapelizod — with his great surtout and cape on — his leggings buttoned up — and his capacious leather ‘overalls’ pulled up and strapped over these — and his broadleafed hat tied down over his wig and ears with a mighty silk kerchief. I dare say he looked absurd enough — but it was the women’s doing — who always, upon emergencies, took the doctor’s wardrobe in hand. Old Sally, with her kind, mild, grave face, and gray locks, stood modestly behind in the hall; and pretty Lilias, his only child, gave him her parting kiss, and her last grand charge about his shoes and other exterior toggery, in the porch; and he patted her cheek with a little fond laugh, taking old John Tracy’s, the butler’s, arm. John carried a handsome horn-lantern, which flashed now on a roadside bush — now on the discoloured battlements of the bridge — and now on a streaming window. They stepped out — there were no umbrellas in those days — splashing among the wide and widening pools; while Sally and Lilias stood in the porch, holding candles for full five minutes after the doctor and his ‘Jack-o’-the-lantern,’ as he called honest John, whose arm and candle always befriended him in his night excursions, had got round the corner.

Through the back bow-window of the Phœnix, there pealed forth — faint in the distance and rain — a solemn royal ditty, piped by the tuneful Aldermen of Skinner’s Alley, and neither unmusical nor somehow uncongenial with the darkness, and the melancholy object of the doctor’s walk, the chant being rather monastic, wild, and dirge-like. It was a quarter past ten, and no other sound of life or human neighbourhood was stirring. If secrecy were an object, it was well secured by the sable sky, and the steady torrent which rolled down with electric weight and perpendicularity, making all nature resound with one long hush — sh — sh — sh — sh — deluging the broad street, and turning the channels and gutters into mimic mill-streams which snorted and hurtled headlong through their uneven beds, and round the corners towards the turbid Liffey, which, battered all over with rain, muddy, and sullen, reeled its way towards the sea, rolling up to the heavens an aspect black as their own.

As they passed by the Phœnix (a little rivulet, by-the-bye, was spouting down from the corner of the sign; and indeed the night was such as might well have caused that suicidal fowl to abandon all thoughts of self-incremation, and submit to an unprecedented death by drowning), there was no idle officer, or lounging waiter upon the threshold. Military and civilians were all snug in their quarters that night; and the inn, except for the ‘Aldermen’ in the back parlour, was doing no business. The door was nearly closed, and only let out a tall, narrow slice of candlelight upon the lake of mud, over every inch of which the rain was drumming.

The doctor’s lantern glided by — and then across the street — and so leisurely along the footway, by the range of lightless hall doors towards the Salmon House, also dark; and so, sharp round the corner, and up to the churchyard gate, which stood a little open, as also the church door beyond, as was evidenced by the feeble glow of a lantern from within.

I dare say old Bob Martin, the sexton, and grave Mr. Irons, the clerk, were reassured when they heard the cheery voice of the rector hailing them by name. There were now three candles in church; but the edifice looked unpleasantly dim, and went off at the far end into total darkness. Zekiel Irons was a lean, reserved fellow, with a black wig and blue chin, and something shy and sinister in his phiz. I don’t think he had entertained honest Bob with much conversation from those thin lips of his during their grizzly *tête-à-tête* among the black windows and the mural tablets that overhung the aisle.

But the rector had lots to say — though deliberately and gravely, still the voice was genial and inspiring — and exorcised the shadows that had been gathering stealthily around the lesser Church functionaries. Mrs. Irons’s tooth, he learned, was still bad; but she was no longer troubled with ‘that sour humour in her stomach.’ There were sour humours, alas! still remaining — enough, and to spare, as the clerk knew to his cost. Bob Martin thanked his reverence; the cold rheumatism in his hip was better.’ Irons, the clerk, replied, ‘he had brought two prayer-books.’ Bob averred ‘he could not be mistaken; the old lady was buried in the near-vault; though it was forty years before, he remembered it like last night. They changed her into her lead coffin in the vault — he and the undertaker together — her own servants would not put a hand to her. She was buried in white satin, and with her rings on her fingers. It was her fancy, and so ordered in her will. They said she was mad. He'd know her face again if he saw her. She had a long hooked nose; and her eyes were open. For, as he was told, she died in her sleep, and was quite cold and stiff when they found her in the morning. He went down and saw the coffin to-day, half an hour after meeting his reverence.'

The rector consulted his great warming-pan of a watch. It was drawing near eleven. He fell into a reverie, and rambled slowly up and down the aisle, with his hands behind his back, and his dripping hat in them, swinging nearly to the flags, — now lost in the darkness — now emerging again, dim, nebulous, in the foggy light of the lanterns. When this clerical portrait came near, he was looking down, with gathered brows, upon the flags, moving his lips and nodding, as if counting them, as was his way. The doctor was thinking all the time upon the one text: — Why should this livid memorial of two great crimes be now disturbed, after an obscurity of twenty-one years, as if to jog the memory of scandal, and set the great throat of the monster baying once more at the old midnight horror?

And as for that old house at Ballyfermot, why any one could have looked after it as well as he. 'Still he must live somewhere, and certainly this little town is quieter than the city, and the people, on the whole, very kindly, and by no means curious.' This latter was a mistake of the doctor's, who, like other simple persons, was fond of regarding others as harmless repetitions of himself. 'And his sojourn will be,' he says, 'but a matter of weeks; and the doctors mind wandered back again to the dead, and forward to the remoter consequences of his guilt, so he heaved a heavy, honest sigh, and lifted up his head and slackened his pace for a little prayer, and with that there came the rumble of wheels to the church door.

CHAPTER II.

THE NAMELESS COFFIN.

Three vehicles with flambleaux, and the clang and snorting of horses came close to the church porch, and there appeared suddenly, standing within the disc of candlelight at the church door, before one would have thought there was time, a tall, very pale, and peculiar looking young man, with very large, melancholy eyes, and a certain cast of evil pride in his handsome face.

John Tracy lighted the wax candles which he had brought, and Bob Martin stuck them in the sockets at either side of the cushion, on the ledge of the pew, beside the aisle, where the prayer-book lay open at 'the burial of the dead,' and the rest of the party drew about the door, while the doctor was shaking hands very ceremoniously with that tall young man, who had now stepped into the circle of light, with a short, black mantle on, and his black curls uncovered, and a certain air of high breeding in his movements. 'He reminded me painfully of him who is gone, whom we name not,' said the doctor to pretty Lilias, when he got home; he has his pale, delicately-formed features, with a shadow of his evil passions too, and his mother's large, sad eyes.'

And an elderly clergyman, in surplice, band, and white wig, with a hard, yellow, furrowed face, hovered in, like a white bird of night, from the darkness behind, and was introduced to Dr. Walsingham, and whispered for a while to Mr. Irons, and then to Bob Martin, who had two short forms placed transversely in the aisle to receive what was coming, and a shovel full of earth — all ready. So, while the angular clergyman ruffled into the front of the pew, with Irons on one side, a little in the rear, both books open; the plump little undertaker, diffusing a steam from his moist garments, making a prismatic halo round the candles and lanterns, as he moved successively by them, whispered a word or two to the young gentleman [Mr. Mervyn, the doctor called him], and Mr. Mervyn disappeared. Dr. Walsingham and John Tracy got into contiguous seats, and Bob Martin went out to lend a hand. Then came the shuffling of feet, and the sound of hard-tugging respiration, and the suppressed energetic mutual directions of the undertaker's men, who supported the ponderous coffin. How much heavier, it always seems to me, that sort of load than any other of the same size!

A great oak shell: the lid was outside in the porch, Mr. Tressels was unwilling to screw it down, having heard that the entrance to the vault was so narrow, and apprehending it might be necessary to take the coffin out. So it lay its length with a dull weight on the two forms. The lead coffin inside, with its dusty black velvet, was plainly much older. There was a plate on it with two bold capitals, and a full stop after each, thus; —

R. D. obiit May 11th, A.D. 1746. ætat 38.

And above this plain, oval plate was a little bit of an ornament no bigger than a sixpence. John Tracy took it for a star, Bob Martin said he knew it to be a Freemason's order, and Mr. Tressels, who almost overlooked it, thought it was nothing better than a fourpenny cherub. But Mr. Irons, the clerk, knew that it was a coronet; and when he heard the other theories thrown out, being a man of few words he let them have it their own way, and with his thin lips closed, with their changeless and unpleasant character of an imperfect smile, he coldly kept this little bit of knowledge to himself.

Earth to earth (rumble), dust to dust (tumble), ashes to ashes (rattle).

And now the coffin must go out again, and down to its final abode.

The flag that closed the entrance of the vault had been removed. But the descent of Avernus was not facile, the steps being steep and broken, and the roof so low. Young Mervyn had gone down the steps to see it duly placed; a murky, fiery light; came up, against which the descending figures looked black and cyclopean.

Dr. Walsingham offered his brother-clergyman his hospitalities; but somehow that cleric preferred returning to town for his supper and his bed. Mervyn also excused himself. It was late, and he meant to stay that night at the Phœnix, and tomorrow designed to make his compliments in person to Dr. Walsingham. So the bilious clergyman from town climbed into the vehicle in which he had come, and the undertaker and his troop got into the hearse and the mourning coach and drove off demurely through the town; but once a hundred yards or so beyond the turnpike, at such a pace that they overtook the rollicking *cortège* of the Alderman of Skinner's Alley upon the Dublin road, all singing and hallooing, and crowing and shouting scraps of banter at one another, in which recreations these professional mourners forthwith joined them; and they cracked screaming jokes, and drove wild chariot races the whole way into town, to the terror of the divine, whose presence they forgot, and whom, though he shrieked from the window, they never heard, until getting out, when the coach came to a standstill, he gave Mr. Tressels a piece of his mind, and that in so alarming a sort, that the jolly undertaker, expressing a funereal concern at the accident, was obliged to explain that all the noise came from the scandalous party they had so unfortunately overtaken, and that ‘the drunken blackguards had lashed and frightened his horses to a runaway pace, singing and hallooing in the filthy way he heard, it being a standing joke among such roisterers to put quiet tradesmen of his melancholy profession into a false and ridiculous position.’ He did not convince, but only half puzzled the ecclesiastic, who muttering, ‘credat Judæus,’ turned his back upon Mr. Tressels, with an angry whisk, without bidding him goodnight.

Dr. Walsingham, with the aid of his guide, in the meantime, had reached the little garden in front of the old house, and the gay tinkle of a harpsichord and the notes of a sweet contralto suddenly ceased as he did so; and he said — smiling in the dark, in a pleasant soliloquy, for he did not mind John Tracy, — old John was not in the way— ‘She always hears my step — always — little Lily, no matter how she’s employed,’ and the hall-door opened, and a voice that was gentle, and yet somehow very spirited and sweet, cried a loving and playful welcome to the old man.

CHAPTER III.

MR. MERVYN IN HIS INN.

The morning was fine — the sun shone out with a yellow splendour — all nature was refreshed — a pleasant smell rose up from tree, and flower, and earth. The now dry pavement and all the row of village windows were glittering merrily — the sparrows twittered their lively morning gossip among the thick ivy of the old church tower — here and there the village cock challenged his neighbour with high and vaunting crow, and the bugle notes soared sweetly into the air from the artillery ground beside the river.

Moore, the barber, was already busy making his morning circuit, servant men and maids were dropping in and out at the baker's, and old Poll Delany, in her weather-stained red hood, and neat little Kitty Lane, with her bright young careful face and white basket, were calling at the doors of their customers with new laid eggs. Through halfopened hall doors you might see the powdered servant, or the sprightly maid in her mob-cap in hot haste steaming away with the red japanned 'tea kitchen' into the parlour. The town of Chapelizod, in short, was just sitting down to its breakfast.

Mervyn, in the meantime, had had his solitary meal in the famous back parlour of the Phœnix, where the newspapers lay, and all comers were welcome. He was by no means a bad hero to look at, if such a thing were needed. His face was pale, melancholy, statuesque — and his large enthusiastic eyes, suggested a story and a secret — perhaps a horror. Most men, had they known all, would have wondered with good Doctor Walsingham, why, of all places in the world, he should have chosen the little town where he now stood for even a temporary residence. It was not a perversity, but rather a fascination. His whole life had been a flight and a pursuit — a vain endeavour to escape from the evil spirit that pursued him — and a chase of a chimera.

He was standing at the window, not indeed enjoying, as another man might, the quiet verdure of the scene, and the fragrant air, and all the mellowed sounds of village life, but lost in a sad and dreadful reverie, when in bounced little redfaced bustling Dr. Toole — the joke and the chuckle with which he had just requited the fat old barmaid still ringing in the passage— ‘Stay there, sweetheart,’ addressed to a dog squeezing by him, and which screeched out as he kicked it neatly round the doorpost.

‘Hey, your most obedient, Sir,’ cried the doctor, with a short but grand bow, affecting surprise, though his chief object in visiting the back parlour at that moment was precisely to make a personal inspection of the stranger. ‘Pray, don’t mind me, Sir, — your — ho! Breakfast ended, eh? Coffee not so bad, Sir; rather good coffee, I hold it, at the Phœnix. Cream very choice, Sir? — I don’t tell ‘em so though (a wink); it might not improve it, you know. I hope they gave you — eh? — eh? (he peeped into the cream-ewer, which he turned towards the light, with a whisk). And no disputing the eggs — forty-eight hens in the poultry yard, and ninety ducks in Tresham’s little garden, next door to Sturk’s. They make a precious noise, I can tell you, when it showers. Sturk threatens to shoot ‘em. He’s the artillery surgeon here; and Tom Larkin said, last night, it’s because they only dabble and quack — and two of a trade, you know — ha! ha! ha! And what a night we had — dark as Erebus — pouring like pumps, by Jove. I’ll remember it, I warrant you. Out on business — a medical man, you know, can’t always choose — and near meeting a bad accident too. Anything in the paper, eh? ho! I see, Sir, haven’t read it. Well, and what do you think — a queer night for the purpose, eh? you’ll say — we had a funeral in the town last night, Sir — some one from Dublin. It was Tressel’s men came out. The turnpike rogue — just round the corner there — one of the talkingest gossips in the town — and a confounded prying, tattling place it is, I can tell you — knows the driver; and Bob Martin, the sexton, you know — tells me there were two parsons, no less — hey! Cauliflowers in season, by Jove. Old Dr. Walsingham, our rector, a pious man, Sir, and does a world of good — that is to say, relieves half the blackguards in the parish — ha! ha! when we’re on the point of getting rid of them — but means well, only he’s a little bit lazy, and queer, you know; and that rancid, rawboned parson, Gillespie — how the plague did they pick him up? — one of the mutes told Bob ’twas he. He’s from Donegal; I know all about him; the sourest dog I ever broke bread with — and mason, if you please, by Jove — a prince pelican! He supped at the Grand Lodge after labour, one night — *you’re* not a mason, I see; tipt you the sign — and his face was so pinched, and so yellow, by

Jupiter, I was near squeezing it into the punch-bowl for a lemon — ha! ha! hey?'

Mervyn's large eyes expressed a well-bred surprise. Dr. Toole paused for nearly a minute, as if expecting something in return; but it did not come.

So the doctor started afresh, never caring for Mervyn's somewhat dangerous looks.

'Mighty pretty prospects about here, Sir. The painters come out by dozens in the summer, with their books and pencils, and scratch away like so many Scotchmen. Ha! ha! ha! If you draw, Sir, there's one prospect up the river, by the mills — upon my conscience — but you don't draw?'

No answer.

'A little, Sir, maybe? Just for a maggot, I'll wager — like *my* good lady, Mrs. Toole.' A nearer glance at his dress had satisfied Toole that he was too much of a maccaroni for an artist, and he was thinking of placing him upon the lord lieutenant's staff. 'We've capital horses here, if you want to go on to Leixlip,' (where — this between ourselves and the reader — during the summer months His Excellency and Lady Townshend resided, and where, the old newspapers tell us, they 'kept a public day every Monday,' and he 'had a levée, as usual, every Thursday.') But this had no better success.

'If you design to stay over the day, and care for shooting, we'll have some ball practice on Palmerstown fair-green to-day. Seven baronies to shoot for ten and five guineas. One o'clock, hey?'

At this moment entered Major O'Neill, of the Royal Irish Artillery, a small man, very neatly got up, and with a decidedly Milesian cast of countenance, who said little, but smiled agreeably —

'Gentlemen, your most obedient. Ha, doctor; how goes it? — anything new — anything *on* the *Freeman*?'

Toole had scanned that paper, and hummed out, as he rumpled it over,— 'nothing — very — particular. Here's Lady Moira's ball: fancy dresses — all Irish; no masks; a numerous appearance of the nobility and gentry — upwards of five hundred persons. A good many of your corps there, major?'

'Ay, Lord Blackwater, of course, and the general, and Devereux, and little Puddock, and — — '

'*Sturk* wasn't,' with a grin, interrupted Toole, who bore that practitioner no goodwill. 'A gentleman robbed, by two footpads, on Chapelizod-road, on Wednesday night, of his watch and money, together with his hat, wig and cane, and lies now in a dangerous state, having been much abused; one of them dressed in an old light-coloured coat, wore a wig. By Jupiter, major, if I was in General Chattesworth's place, with two hundred strapping fellows at my orders, I'd get a commission from Government to clear that road. It's too bad, Sir, we can't go in and out of town, unless in a body, after nightfall, but at the risk of our lives. [The convivial doctor felt this public scandal acutely.] The bloody-minded miscreants, I'd catch every living soul of them, and burn them alive in tar-barrels. By Jove! here's old Joe Napper, of Dirty-lane's dead. Plenty of dry eyes after *him*. And stay, here's another row.' And so he read on.

In the meantime, stout, tightly-braced Captain Cluffe of the same corps, and little dark, hard-faced, and solemn Mr. Nutter, of the Mills, Lord Castlemallard's agents, came in, and half a dozen more, chiefly members of the club, which met by night in the front parlour on the left, opposite the bar, where they entertained themselves with agreeable conversation, cards, backgammon, draughts, and an occasional song by Dr. Toole, who was a florid tenor, and used to give them, 'While gentlefolks strut in silver and satins,' or 'A maiden of late had a merry design,' or some other such ditty, with a recitation by plump little stage-stricken Ensign Puddock, who, in 'thpite of hith lithp,' gave rather spirited imitations of some of the players — Mossop, Sheridan, Macklin, Barry, and the rest. So Mervyn, the stranger, by no means affecting this agreeable society, took his cane and cocked-hat, and went out — the dark and handsome apparition — followed by curious glances from two or three pairs of eyes, and a whispered commentary and criticism from Toole.

So, taking a meditative ramble in 'His Majesty's Park, the Phœnix;' and passing out at Castleknock gate, he walked up the river, between the wooded slopes, which make the valley of the Liffey so pleasant and picturesque, until he reached the ferry, which crossing, he at the other side found himself not very far from Palmerstown, through which village his return route to Chapelizod lay.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAIR-GREEN OF PALMERSTOWN.

There were half-a-dozen carriages, and a score of led horses outside the fair-green, a precious lot of ragamuffins, and a good resort to the public-house opposite; and the gate being open, the artillery band, rousing all the echoes round with harmonious and exhilarating thunder, within — an occasional crack of a ‘Brown Bess,’ with a puff of white smoke over the hedge, being heard, and the cheers of the spectators, and sometimes a jolly chorus of many-toned laughter, all mixed together, and carried on with a pleasant running hum of voices — Mervyn, the stranger, reckoning on being unobserved in the crowd, and weary of the very solitude he courted, turned to his right, and so found himself upon the renowned fair-green of Palmerstown.

It was really a gay rural sight. The circular target stood, with its bright concentric rings, in conspicuous isolation, about a hundred yards away, against the green slope of the hill. The competitors in their best Sunday suits, some armed with muskets and some with fowling pieces — for they were not particular — and with bunches of ribbons fluttering in their three-cornered hats, and sprigs of gay flowers in their breasts, stood in the foreground, in an irregular cluster, while the spectators, in pleasant disorder, formed two broad, and many-coloured parterres, broken into little groups, and separated by a wide, clear sweep of green sward, running up from the marksmen to the target.

In the luminous atmosphere the men of those days showed bright and gay. Such fine scarlet and gold waistcoats — such sky-blue and silver — such pea-green lutestrings — and pink silk linings — and flashing buckles — and courtly wigs — or becoming powder — went pleasantly with the brilliant costume of the stately dames and smiling lasses. There was a pretty sprinkling of uniforms, too — the whole picture in gentle motion, and the bugles and drums of the Royal Irish Artillery filling the air with inspiring music.

All the neighbours were there — merry little Dr. Toole in his grandest wig and goldheaded cane, with three dogs at his heels, — he seldom appeared without this sort of train — sometimes three — sometimes five — sometimes as many as seven — and his hearty voice was heard bawling at them by name, as he sauntered through the town of a morning, and theirs occasionally in short screeches, responsive to the touch of his cane. Now it was, ‘Fairy, you savage, let that pig alone!’ a yell and a scuffle— ‘Juno, drop it, you slut’ — or ‘Cæsar, you blackguard, where are you going?’

‘Look at Sturk there, with his lordship,’ said Toole, to the fair Magnolia, with a wink and a nod, and a sneering grin. ‘Good natured dog that — ha! ha! You’ll find he’ll oust Nutter at last, and get the agency; that’s what he’s driving at — always undermining somebody.’ Doctor Sturk and Lord Castlemallard were talking apart on the high ground, and the artillery surgeon was pointing with his cane at distant objects. ‘I’ll lay you fifty he’s picking holes in Nutter’s management this moment.’

I’m afraid there was some truth in the theory, and Toole — though he did not remember to mention it — had an instinctive notion that Sturk had an eye upon the civil practice of the neighbourhood, and was meditating a retirement from the army, and a serious invasion of his domain.

Sturk and Toole, behind backs, did not spare one another. Toole called Sturk a ‘horse doctor,’ and ‘the smuggler’ — in reference to some affair about French brandy, never made quite clear to me, but in which, I believe, Sturk was really not to blame; and Sturk called him ‘that drunken little apothecary’ — for Toole had a boy who compounded, under the rose, his draughts, pills, and powders in the back parlour — and sometimes, ‘that smutty little ballad singer,’ or ‘that whiskeyfied dog-fancier, Toole.’ There was no actual quarrel, however; they met freely — told one another the news — their mutual disagreeabilities were administered guardedly — and, on the whole, they hated one another in a neighbourly way.

Fat, short, radiant, General Chattesworth — in full, artillery uniform — was there, smiling, and making little speeches to the ladies, and bowing stiffly from his hips upward — his great cue playing all the time up and down his back, and sometimes so near the ground when he stood erect and threw back his head, that Toole, seeing Juno eyeing the appendage rather viciously, thought it prudent to cut her speculations short with a smart kick.

His sister Rebecca — tall, erect, with grand lace, in a splendid stiff brocade, and with a fine fan — was certainly five-and-fifty, but still wonderfully fresh, and sometimes had quite a pretty little pink colour — perfectly genuine — in her cheeks; command sat in her eye and energy on her lip — but though it was imperious and restless, there was something provokingly likeable and even pleasant in her face. Her niece, Gertrude, the general's daughter, was also tall, graceful — and, I am told, perfectly handsome.

'Be the powers, she's mighty handsome!' observed 'Lieutenant Fireworker' O'Flaherty, who, being a little stupid, did not remember that such a remark was not likely to pleasure the charming Magnolia Macnamara, to whom he had transferred the adoration of a passionate, but somewhat battered heart.

'They must not see with my eyes that think so,' said Mag, with a disdainful toss of her head.

'They say she's not twenty, but I'll wager a pipe of claret she's something to the back of it,' said O'Flaherty, mending his hand.

'Why, bless your innocence, she'll never see five-and-twenty, and a bit to spare,' sneered Miss Mag, who might more truly have told that tale of herself. 'Who's that pretty young man my Lord Castlemallard is introducing to her and old Chattesworth?' The commendation was a shot at poor O'Flaherty.

'Hey — so, my Lord knows him!' says Toole, very much interested. 'Why that's Mr. Mervyn, that's stopping at the Phœnix. A. Mervyn, — I saw it on his dressing case. See how she smiles.'

'Ay, she simpers like a firmity kettle,' said scornful Miss Mag.

'They're very grand to-day, the Chattesworths, with them two livery footmen behind them,' threw in O'Flaherty, accommodating his remarks to the spirit of his ladylove.

'That young buck's a man of consequence,' Toole rattled on; 'Miss does not smile on everybody.'

'Ay, she looks as if butter would not melt in her mouth, but I warrant cheese won't choke her,' Magnolia laughed out with angry eyes.

Magnolia's fat and highly painted parent — poor bragging, goodnatured, cunning, foolish Mrs. Macnamara, the widow — joined, with a venemous wheeze in the laugh.

Those who suppose that all this rancour was produced by mere feminine emulations and jealousy do these ladies of the ancient sept Macnamara foul wrong. Mrs. Mack, on the contrary, had a fat and genial soul of her own, and Magnolia was by no means a particularly ungenerous rival in the lists of love. But Aunt Rebecca was hoitytoity upon the Macnamaras, whom she would never consent to more than half-know, seeing them with difficulty, often failing to see them altogether — though Magnolia's stature and activity did not always render that easy. To-day, for instance, when the firing was brisk, and some of the ladies uttered pretty little timid squalls, Miss Magnolia not only stood fire like brick, but with her own fair hands cracked off a firelock, and was more complimented and applauded than all the marksmen beside, although she shot most dangerously wide, and was much nearer hitting old Arthur Slowe than that respectable gentleman, who waved his hat and smirked gallantly, was at all aware. Aunt Rebecca, notwithstanding all this, and although she looked straight at her from a distance of only ten steps, yet she could not see that large and highly-coloured heroine; and Magnolia was so incensed at her serene impertinence that when Gertrude afterwards smiled and courtesied twice, she only held her head the higher and flung a flashing defiance from her fine eyes right at that unoffending virgin.

Everybody knew that Miss Rebecca Chattesworth ruled supreme at Belmont. With a docile old general and a niece so young, she had less resistance to encounter than, perhaps, her ardent soul would have relished. Fortunately for the general it was only now and then that Aunt Becky took a whim to command the Royal Irish Artillery. She had other hobbies just as odd, though not quite so scandalous. It had struck her active mind that such of the ancient women of Chapelizod as were destitute of letters — mendicants and the like — should learn to read. Twice a week her 'old women's school,' under that energetic lady's presidency, brought together its muster-roll of rheumatism, paralysis, dim eyes, bothered ears, and invincible stupidity. Over the fireplace in large black letters, was the legend, 'BETTER LATE THAN NEVER!' and out came the horn-books and spectacles, and to it they went with their A-B ab, etc., and plenty of wheezing and coughing. Aunt Becky kept good fires, and served out a mess of bread and broth, along with some pungent ethics, to each of her hopeful old girls. In winter she further encouraged them with a flannel petticoat apiece, and there was besides a monthly dole. So that although after a year there was, perhaps, on the whole, no progress in learning, the affair wore a tolerably encouraging aspect; for the academy had increased in numbers, and two old fellows, liking the notion of the broth and the 6d. a month — one a barber, Will Potts, ruined by a shake in his right hand, the other a drunken pensioner, Phil Doolan, with a wooden leg — petitioned to be enrolled, and were, accordingly, admitted. Then Aunt Becky visited the gaols, and had a knack of picking up the worst characters there, and had generally two or three discharged felons on her hands. Some people said she was a bit of a Voltarian, but unjustly; for though she now and then came out with a bouncing social paradox, she was a good bitter Churchwoman. So she was liberal and troublesome — offhanded and dictatorial — not without good nature, but administering her benevolences somewhat tyrannically, and, for the most part, doing more or less of positive mischief in the process.

And now the general (‘old Chattesworth,’ as the scornful Magnolia called him) drew near, with his benevolent smirk, and his stiff bows, and all his goodnatured formalities — for the general had no notion of ignoring his good friend and officer, Major O’Neill, or his sister or niece — and so he made up to Mrs. Macnamara, who arrested a narrative in which she was demonstrating to O’Flaherty the general’s lineal descent from old Chattesworth — an army tailor in Queen Anne’s time — and his cousinship to a live butter dealer in Cork — and spicing her little history with not a very nice epigram on his uncle, ‘the counsellor,’ by Dr. Swift, which she delivered with a vicious chuckle in the ‘Fireworker’s’ ear, who also laughed, though he did not quite see the joke, and said, ‘Oh-ho-ho, murdher!’

The good Mrs. Mack received the general haughtily and slightly, and Miss Magnolia with a short courtesy and a little toss of her head, and up went her fan, and she giggled something in Toole’s ear, who grinned, and glanced uneasily out of the corner of his shrewd little eye at the unsuspicious general and on to Aunt Rebecca; for it was very important to Dr. Toole to stand well at Belmont. So, seeing that Miss Mag was disposed to be vicious, and not caring to be compromised by her tricks, he whistled and bawled to his dogs, and with a jolly smirk and flourish of his cocked-hat, off he went to seek other adventures.

Thus, was there feud and malice between two houses, and Aunt Rebecca's wrong-headed freak of cutting the Macnamaras (for it was not 'snobbery,' and she would talk for hours on band-days publicly and familiarly with scrubby little Mrs. Toole), involved her innocent relations in scorn and ill-will; for this sort of offence, like Chinese treason, is not visited on the arch offender only, but according to a scale of consanguinity, upon his kith and kin. The criminal is minced — his sons lashed — his nephews reduced to cutlets — his cousins to joints — and so on — none of the family quite escapes; and seeing the bitter reprisals provoked by this kind of uncharity, fiercer and more enduring by much than any begotten of more tangible wrongs, Christian people who pray, 'lead us not into temptation,' and repeat 'blessed are the peacemakers,' will, on the whole, do wisely to forbear practising it.

As handsome, slender Captain Devereux, with his dark face, and great, strange, earnest eyes, and that look of intelligence so racy and peculiar, that gave him a sort of enigmatical interest, stepped into the fair-green, the dark blue glance of poor Nan Glynn, of Palmerstown, from under her red Sunday riding-hood, followed the tall, dashing, graceful apparition with a stolen glance of wild loyalty and admiration. Poor Nan! with thy fun and thy rascalities, thy strong affections and thy fatal gift of beauty, where does thy head rest now?

Handsome Captain Devereux! — Gipsy Devereux, as they called him for his clear dark complexion — was talking a few minutes later to Lilias Walsingham. Oh, pretty Lilias — oh, true lady — I never saw the pleasant crayon sketch that my mother used to speak of, but the tradition of thee has come to me — so bright and tender, with its rose and violet tints, and merry, melancholy dimples, that I see thee now, as then, with the dew of thy youth still on thee, and sigh as I look, as if on a lost, early love of mine.

'I'm out of conceit with myself,' he said; 'I'm so idle and useless; I wish that were all — I wish myself better, but I'm such a weak coxcomb — a father-confessor might keep me nearer to my duty — some one to scold and exhort me. Perhaps if some charitable lady would take me in hand, something might be made of me still.'

There was a vein of seriousness in this reverie which amused the young lady; for she had never heard anything worse of him — very young ladies seldom do hear the worst — than that he had played once or twice rather high.

‘Shall I ask Gertrude Chattesworth to speak to her Aunt Rebecca?’ said Lilias slyly. ‘Suppose you attend her school in Martin’s Row, with “better late than never” over her chimneypiece: there are two pupils of your own sex, you know, and you might sit on the bench with poor Potts and good old Doolan.’

‘Thank you. Miss Lilias,’ he answered, with a bow and a little laugh, as it seemed just the least bit in the world piqued; ‘I know she would do it zealously; but neither so well nor so wisely as others might; I wish I dare ask *you* to lecture me.’

‘I!’ said that young lady. ‘Oh, yes, I forgot,’ she went on merrily,’ five years ago, when I was a little girl, you once called me Dr. Walsingham’s curate, I was so grave — do you remember?’

She did not know how much obliged Devereux was to her for remembering that poor little joke, and how much the handsome lieutenant would have given, at that instant, to kiss the hand of the grave little girl of five years ago.

‘I was a more impudent fellow then,’ he said, ‘than I am now; won’t you forget my old impertinences, and allow me to make atonement, and be your — your *very* humble servant now?’

She laughed. ‘Not my servant — but you know I can’t help you being my parishioner.’

‘And as such surely I may plead an humble right to your counsels and reproof. Yes, you *shall* lecture me — I’ll bear it from none but *you*, and the more you do it, the happier, at least, you make me,’ he said.

‘Alas, if my censure is pleasant to you, ’tis a certain sign it can do you no good.’

‘It *shall* do me good, and be it never so bitter and so true, it will be pleasant to me too,’ he answered, with an honest and very peculiar light in his dark, strange eyes; and after a little pause, ‘I’ll tell you why, just because I had rather you remembered my faults, than that you did not remember me at all.’

‘But, ’tis not my business to make people angry.’

‘More likely you should make me sad, or perhaps happy, that is to say, better. I think you’d like to see your parish improve.’

‘So I would — but by means of my example, not my preaching. No; I leave that to wiser heads — to the rector, for instance’ — and she drew closer to the dear old man, with a quick fond glance of such proud affection, for she thought the sun never shone upon his like, as made Devereux sigh a little unconscious sigh. The old man did not hear her — he was too absorbed in his talk — he only felt the pressure of his darling’s little hand, and returned it, after his wont, with a gentle squeeze of his cassocked arm, while he continued the learned essay he was addressing to young, queer, erudite, simple Dan Loftus, on the descent of the Decie branch of the Desmonds. There was, by-the-bye, a rumour — I know not how true — that these two sages were concocting between them, beside their folios on the Castle of Chapelizod, an interminable history of Ireland.

Devereux was secretly chafed at the sort of invisible, but insuperable resistance which pretty Lilias Walsingham, as it seemed, unconsciously opposed to his approaches to a nearer and tenderer sort of trifling. ‘The little Siren! there are air-drawn circles round her which I cannot pass — and why should I? How is it that she interests me, and yet repels me so easily? And — and when I came here first,’ he continued aloud, ‘you were, oh dear! how mere a child, hardly eleven years old. How long I’ve known you, Miss Lilias, and yet how formal you are with me.’ There was reproach almost fierce in his eye, though his tones were low and gentle. ‘Well!’ he said, with an odd changed little laugh, ‘you *did* commit yourself at first — you spoke against card-playing, and I tell you frankly I mean to play a great deal more, and a great deal higher than I’ve ever done before, and so adieu.’

He did not choose to see the little motion which indicated that she was going to shake hands with him, and only bowed the lower, and answered her grave smile, which seemed to say, ‘Now, you are vexed,’ with another little laugh, and turned gaily away, and so was gone.

‘She thinks she has wounded me, and she thinks, I suppose, that I can’t be happy away from her. I’ll let her see I can; I shan’t speak to her, no, nor look at her, for a month!’

The Chattesworths by this time, as well as others, were moving away — and that young Mr. Mervyn, more remarked upon than he suspected, walked with them to the gate of the fair-green. As he passed he bowed low to good Parson Walsingham, who returned his salute, not unkindly — that never was — but very gravely, and with his gentle and thoughtful blue eyes followed the party sadly on their way.

‘Ay — there he goes — Mervyn! Well! — so — so — pray Heaven, sorrow and a blight follow him not into this place.’ The rector murmured to himself, and sighed, still following him with his glance.

Little Lilias, with her hand within his arm, wondered, as she glanced upward into that beloved face, what could have darkened it with a look so sad and anxious; and then her eyes also followed the retreating figure of that pale young man, with a sort of interest not quite unmixed with uneasiness.

CHAPTER V.

HOW THE ROYAL IRISH ARTILLERY ENTERTAINED SOME OF THE NEIGHBOURS AT DINNER.

If I stuck at a fib as little as some historians, I might easily tell you who won the prizes at this shooting on Palmerstown Green. But the truth is, I don’t know; my granduncle could have told me, for he had a marvellous memory, but he died, a pleasant old gentleman of fourscore and upwards, when I was a small urchin. I remember his lively old face, his powdered bald head and pigtail, his slight erect figure, and how merrily he used to play the fiddle for his juvenile posterity to dance to. But I was not of an age to comprehend the value of this thin, living volume of old lore, or to question the oracle. Well, it can’t be helped now, and the papers I’ve got are silent upon the point. But there were jollifications to no end both in Palmerstown and Chapelizod that night, and declamatory conversations rising up in the street at very late hours, and singing, and ‘*hurooing*’ along the moonlit roads.

There was a large and pleasant dinner-party, too, in the mess-room of the Royal Irish Artillery. Lord Castlemallard was there in the place of honour, next to jolly old General Chattesworth, and the worthy rector, Doctor Walsingham, and Father Roach, the dapper, florid little priest of the parish, with his silk waistcoat and well-placed paunch, and his keen relish for funny stories, side-dishes, and convivial glass; and Dan Loftus, that simple, meek, semi-barbarous young scholar, his head in a state of chronic dishevelment, his harmless little round light-blue eyes, pinkish from late night reading, generally betraying the absence of his vagrant thoughts, and I know not what of goodness, as well as queerness, in his homely features.

Good Dr. Walsingham, indeed, in his simple benevolence, had helped the strange, kindly creature through college, and had a high opinion of him, and a great delight in his company. They were both much given to books, and according to their lights zealous archæologists. They had got hold of Chapelizod Castle, a good tough enigma. It was a theme they never tired of. Loftus had already two folios of extracts copied from all the records to which Dr. Walsingham could procure him access. They could not have worked harder, indeed, if they were getting up evidence to prove their joint title to Lord Castlemallard's estates. This pursuit was a bond of close sympathy between the rector and the student, and they spent more time than appeared to his parishioners quite consistent with sanity in the paddock by the river, pacing up and down, and across, poking sticks into the earth and grubbing for old walls underground.

Loftus, moreover, was a good Irish scholar, and from Celtic MSS. had elicited some cross-lights upon his subject — not very bright or steady, I allow — but enough to delight the rector, and inspire him with a tender reverence for the indefatigable and versatile youth, who was devoting to the successful equitation of their hobby so many of his hours, and so much of his languages, labour, and brains.

Lord Castlemallard was accustomed to be listened to, and was not aware how confoundedly dull his talk sometimes was. It was measured, and dreamy, and every way slow. He was entertaining the courteous old general at the head of the table, with an oration in praise of Paul Dangerfield — a wonderful man — immensely wealthy — the cleverest man of his age — he might have been anything he pleased. His lordship really believed his English property would drop to pieces if Dangerfield retired from its management, and he was vastly obliged to him inwardly, for retaining the agency even for a little time longer. He was coming over to visit the Irish estates — perhaps to give Nutter a wrinkle or two. He was a bachelor, and his lordship averred would be a prodigious great match for some of our Irish ladies. Chapelizod would be his headquarters while in Ireland. No, he was not sure — he rather thought he was *not* of the Thorley family; and so on for a mighty long time. But though he tired them prodigiously, he contrived to evoke before their minds' eyes a very gigantic, though somewhat hazy figure, and a good deal stimulated the interest with which a new arrival was commonly looked for in that pleasant suburban village. There is no knowing how long Lord Castlemallard might have prosed upon this theme, had he not been accidentally cut short, and himself laid fast asleep in his chair, without his or anybody else's intending it. For overhearing, during a short pause, in which he sipped some claret, Surgeon Sturk applying some very strong, and indeed, frightful language to a little pamphlet upon magnetism, a subject then making a stir — as from a much earlier date it has periodically done down to the present day — he languidly asked Dr. Walsingham his opinion upon the subject.

Now, Dr. Walsingham was a great reader of out-of-the-way lore, and retained it with a sometimes painful accuracy; and he forthwith began —

‘There is, my Lord Castlemallard, a curious old tract of the learned Van Helmont, in which he says, as near as I can remember his words, that magnetism is a magical faculty, which lieth dormant in us by the opiate of primitive sin, and, therefore, stands in need of an excitator, which excitator may be either good or evil; but is more frequently Satan himself, by reason of some previous oppignoration or compact with witches. The power, indeed, is in the witch, and not conferred by him; but this versipellous or Protean impostor — these are his words — will not suffer her to know that it is of her own natural endowment, though for the present charmed into somnolent inactivity by the narcotic of primitive sin.’

I verily believe that a fair description — none of your poetical balderdash, but an honest plodding description of a perfectly comfortable bed, and of the process of going to sleep, would, judiciously administered soon after dinner, overpower the vivacity of any tranquil gentleman who loves a nap after that meal — gently draw the curtains of his senses, and extinguish the bedroom candle of his consciousness. In the doctor’s address and quotation there was so much about somnolency and narcotics, and lying dormant, and opiates, that my Lord Castlemallard’s senses forsook him, and he lost, as you, my kind reader, must, all the latter portion of the doctor’s lullaby.

‘I’d give half I’m pothethed of, Thir, and all my prothpecth in life,’ lisped vehemently plump little Lieutenant Puddock, in one of those stage frenzies to which he was prone, ‘to be the firtht Alecthander on the boardth.’

Between ourselves, Puddock was short and fat, very sentimental, and a little bit of a *gourmet*; his desk stuffed with amorous sonnets and receipts for side-dishes; he, always in love, and often in the kitchen, where, under the rose, he loved to direct the cooking of critical little *plats*, very goodnatured, rather literal, very courteous, *a chevallier*, indeed, *sans reproche*. He had a profound faith in his genius for tragedy, but those who liked him best could not help thinking that his plump cheeks, round, little light eyes, his lisp, and a certain lack-a-daisical, though solemn expression of surprise, which Nature, in one of her jocular moods, seemed to have fixed upon his countenance, were against his shining in that walk of the drama. He was blessed, too, with a pleasant belief in his acceptance with the fair sex, but had a real one with his comrades, who knew his absurdities and his virtues, and laughed at and loved him.

‘But hang it, there ‘th no uthe in doing things by halves. Melpomene’s the most jealous of the Muses. I tell you if you stand well in her gratheth, by Jove, Thir, you mutht give yourthelf up to her body and thoul. How the deuthe can a fellow that’s out at drill at hicth in the morning, and all day with his head filled with tacticth and gunnery, and — and— ‘

‘And ‘farced pigeons’ and lovely women,’ said Devereux.

‘And such dry professional matterth,’ continued he, without noticing, perhaps hearing the interpolation, ‘How can he pothibly have a chance againth geniuses, no doubt — vathly thuperior by nature’ — (Puddock, the rogue, believed no such thing)— ‘but who devote themthelveth to the thtudy of the art incethantly, exclusively, and — and — — ‘

‘Impossible,’ said O’Flaherty. ‘There now, was Tommy Shycock, of Ballybaisly, that larned himself to balance a fiddlestick on his chin; and the young leedies, and especially Miss Kitty Mahony, used to be all around him in the ball-room at Thralee, lookin’, wondhrin’, and laughin’; and I that had twiste his brains, could not come round it, though I got up every morning for a month at four o’clock, and was obleeged to give over be rason of a soart iv a squint I was gettin’ be looking continually at the fiddlestick. I began with a double bass, the way he did — it’s it that was the powerful fateaguin’ exercise, I can tell you. Two blessed hours a-day, regular practice, besides an odd half-hour, now and agin, for three mortial years, it took him to larn it, and dhrilled a dimple in his chin you could put a marrow-fat pay in.’

‘Practice,’ resumed Puddock, I need not spell his lisp, ‘study — time to devote — industry in great things as in small — there’s the secret. *Nature*, to be sure— ‘

‘Ay, Nature, to be sure — we must sustain Nature, dear Puddock, so pass the bottle,’ said Devereux, who liked his glass.

‘Be the powers, Mr. Puddock, if I had half your janius for play-acting,’ persisted O’Flaherty, ‘nothing i’d keep me from the boards iv Smock-alley playhouse — incog., I mean, of course. There’s that wonderful little Mr. Garrick — why he’s the talk of the three kingdoms as long as I can remember — an' making his thousand pounds a week — coining, be gannies — an' he can't be much taller than you, for he's contimptably small.'

'I'm the taller man of the two,' said little Puddock, haughtily, who had made enquiries, and claimed half an inch over Rocius, honestly, let us hope. 'But this is building castles in the air; joking apart, however, I do confess I should dearly love — just for a maggot — to play two parts — Richard the Third and Tamerlane.'

'Was not that the part you spoke that sympathetic speech out of for me before dinner?'

'No, that was Justice Greedy,' said Devereux.

'Ay, so it was — was it? — that smothered his wife.'

'With a pudding clout,' persisted Devereux.

'No. With a — pooh! — a — you know — and stabbed himself,' continued O'Flaherty.

'With a larding-pin— 'tis written in good Italian.'

'Augh, not at all — it isn't Italian, but English, I'm thinking of — a pilla, Puddock, you know — the *black* rascal.'

'Well, English or Italian — tragedy or comedy,' said Devereux, who liked Puddock, and would not annoy him, and saw he was hurt by Othello's borrowing his properties from the kitchen; 'I venture to say you were well entertained: and for my part, Sir, there are some characters' — (in farce Puddock was really highly diverting)— 'in which I prefer Puddock to any player I every saw.'

'Oh — ho — ho!' laughed poor little Puddock, with a most gratified derisiveness, for he cherished in secret a great admiration for Devereux.

And so they talked stage-talk. Puddock lithping away, grand and garrulous; O'Flaherty, the illiterate, blundering in with sincere applause; and Devereux sipping his claret and dropping a quiet saucy word now and again.

'I shall never forget Mrs. Cibber's countenance in that last scene — you know — in the "Orphan" — Monimia *you* know, Devereux.' And the table being by this time in high chat, and the chairs a little irregular, Puddock slipped off his, and addressing himself to Devereux and O'Flaherty — just to give them a notion of Mrs. Cibber — began, with a countenance the most wobegone, and in a piping falsetto —

‘When I am laid low, i’ the grave, and quite forgotten.’

Monimia dies at the end of the speech — as the reader may not be aware; but when Puddock came to the line —

‘When I am dead, as presently I shall be,’

all Mrs. Cibber’s best points being still to come, the little lieutenant’s heel caught in the edge of the carpet, as he sailed with an imaginary hoop on grandly backward, and in spite of a surprising flick-flack cut in the attempt to recover his equipoise, down came the ‘orphan,’ together with a table-load of spoons and plates, with a crash that stopt all conversation.

Lord Castlemallard waked up, with a snort and a ‘hollo, gentlemen!’

‘It’s only poor dear Monimia, general,’ said Devereux with a melancholy bow, in reply to a fiery and startled stare darted to the point by that gallant officer.

‘Hey — eh?’ said his lordship, brightening up, and gazing glassily round with a wan smile; and I fancy he thought a lady had somehow introduced herself during his nap, and was pleased, for he admired the sex.

‘If there’s any recitation going on, I think it had better be for the benefit of the company,’ said the general, a little surly, and looking full upon the plump Monimia, who was arranging his frill and hair, and getting a little awkwardly into his place.

‘And I think ‘twould be no harm, Lieutenant Puddock, my dear,’ says Father Roach, testily, for he had been himself frightened by the crash, ‘if you’d die a little aisier the next time.’

Puddock began to apologise.

‘Never mind,’ said the general, recovering, ‘let’s fill our glasses — my Lord Castlemallard, they tell me this claret is a pretty wine.’

‘A very pretty wine,’ said my lord.

‘And suppose, my lord, we ask these gentlemen to give us a song? I say, gentlemen, there are fine voices among you. Will some gentleman oblige the company with a song?’

‘Mr. Loftus sings a very fine song, I’m told,’ said Captain Cluffe, with a wink at Father Roach.

‘Ay,’ cried Roach, backing up the joke (a good old one, and not yet quite off the hooks), ‘Mr. Loftus sings, I’ll take my davy — I’ve heard him!’

Loftus was shy, simple, and grotesque, and looked like a man who could not sing a note. So when he opened his eyes, looked round, and blushed, there was a general knocking of glasses, and a very flattering clamour for Mr. Loftus's song.

But when silence came, to the surprise of the company he submitted, though with manifest trepidation, and told them that he would sing as the company desired. It was a song from a good old writer upon fasting in Lent, and was, in fact, a reproof to all hypocrisy. Hereupon there was a great ringing of glasses and a jolly round of laughter rose up in the cheer that welcomed the announcement. Father Roach looked queer and disconcerted, and shot a look of suspicion at Devereux, for poor Dan Loftus had, in truth, hit that divine strait in a very tender spot.

The fact is, Father Roach was, as Irish priests were sometimes then, a bit of a sportsman. He and Toole used occasionally to make mysterious excursions to the Dublin mountains. He had a couple of mighty good dogs, which he lent freely, being a goodnatured fellow. He liked good living and jolly young fellows, and was popular among the officers, who used to pop in freely enough at his reverence's green hall-door whenever they wanted a loan of his dogs, or to take counsel of the ghostly father (whose opinion was valued more highly even than Toole's) upon the case of a sick dog or a lame nag.

Well, one morning — only a few weeks before — Devereux and Toole together had looked in on some such business upon his reverence — a little suddenly — and found him eating a hare! — by all the gods, it *was* — hare-pie in the middle of Lent!

It was at breakfast. His dinner was the meal of an anchorite, and who would have guessed that these confounded sparks would have bounced into his little refectory at that hour of the morning? There was no room for equivocation; he had been caught in the very act of criminal conversation with the hare-pie. He rose with a spring, like a Jack-in-a-box, as they entered, and knife and fork in hand, and with shining chops, stared at them with an angry, bothered, and alarmed countenance, which increased their laughter. It was a good while before he obtained a hearing, such was the hilarity, so sustained the fire of ironical compliments, enquiries, and pleasantries, and the general uproar.

When he did, with hand uplifted, after the manner of a prisoner arraigned for murder, he pleaded 'a dispensation.' I suppose it was true, for he backed the allegation with several most religious oaths and imprecations, and explained how men were not always quite so strong as they looked; that he might, if he liked it, by permission of his bishop, eat meat at every meal in the day, and every day in the week; that his not doing so was a voluntary abstinence — not conscientious, only expedient — to prevent the 'unreasonable remarks' of his parishioners (a roar of laughter); that he was, perhaps, rightly served for not having publicly availed himself of his bishop's dispensation (renewed peals of merriment). By this foolish delicacy (more of that detestable horse-laughter), he had got himself into a false position; and so on, till the *ad misericordiam* peroration addressed to 'Captain Devereux, dear,' and 'Toole, my honey.' Well, they quizzed him unmercifully; they sat down and eat all that was left of the hare-pie, under his wistful ogle. They made him narrate minutely every circumstance connected with the smuggling of the game, and the illicit distillation for the mess. They never passed so pleasant a morning. Of course he bound them over to eternal secrecy, and of course, as in all similar cases, the vow was religiously observed; nothing was ever heard of it at mess — oh, no — and Toole never gave a dramatic representation of the occurrence, heightened and embellished with all the little doctor's genius for farce.

There certainly was a monologue to which he frequently afterwards treated the Aldermen of Skinner's Alley, and other convivial bodies, at supper, the doctor's gestures were made with knife and fork in hand, and it was spoken in a rich brogue and tones sometimes of thrilling pathos, anon of sharp and vehement indignation, and again of childlike endearment, amidst pounding and jingling of glasses, and screams of laughter from the company. Indeed the lord mayor, a fat slob of a fellow, though not much given to undue merriment, laughed his ribs into such a state of breathless torture, that he implored of Toole, with a wave of his hand — he could not speak — to give him breathing time, which that voluble performer disregarding, his lordship had to rise twice, and get to the window, or, as he afterwards said, he should have lost his life; and when the performance was ended, his fat cheeks were covered with tears, his mouth hung down, his head wagged slowly from side to side, and with short gasping 'oohs,' and 'oohs,' his hands pressed to his pudgy ribs, he looked so pale and breathless, that although they said nothing, several of his comrades stared hard at him, and thought him in rather a queer state.

Shortly after this little surprise, I suppose by way of ratifying the secret treaty of silence, Father Roach gave the officers and Toole a grand Lent dinner of fish, with no less than nineteen different *plats*, baked, boiled, stewed, in fact, a very splendid feast; and Puddock talked of some of those dishes more than twenty years afterwards.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THE MINSTRELSY PROCEEDS.

No wonder, then, if Father Roach, when Loftus, in the innocence of his heart, announced his song and its theme, was thoroughly uneasy, and would have given a good deal that he had not helped that simple youth into his difficulty. But things must now take their course. So amid a decorous silence, Dan Loftus lifted up his voice, and sang. That voice was a high small pipe, with a very nervous quaver in it. He leaned back in his chair, and little more than the whites of his upturned eyes were visible; and beating time upon the table with one hand, claw-wise, and with two or three queer, little thrills and roulades, which reappeared with great precision in each verse, he delivered himself thus, in what I suspect was an old psalm tune: —

‘Now Lent is come, let us refrain
From carnal creatures, quick or slain;
Let’s fast and macerate the flesh,
Impound and keep it in distress.’

Here there came a wonderful, unspellable choking sound, partly through the mouth, partly through the nose, from several of the officers; and old General Chattesworth, who was frowning hard upon his dessert-plate, cried, ‘Order, gentlemen,’ in a stern, but very tremulous undertone. Lord Castlemallard, leaning upon his elbow, was staring with a grave and dreamy curiosity at the songster, and neither he nor his lordship heard the interruption, and on went the pleasant ditty; and as the musician regularly repeated the last two lines like a clerk in a piece of psalmody, the young wags, to save themselves from bursting outright, joined in the chorus, while verse after verse waxed more uproarious and hilarious, and gave a singular relief to Loftus’s thin, high, quavering solo: —

(*Loftus, solo.*)

‘But to forbear from flesh, fowl, fish,
And eat potatoes in a dish,
Done o’er with amber, or a mess
Of ringos in a Spanish dress

(*Chorus of Officers.*)

‘Done o’er with amber, or a mess
Of ringos in a Spanish dress.’

‘’Tis a good song,’ murmured Doctor Walsingham in Lord Castlemallard’s ear— ‘I know the verses well — the ingenious and pious Howel penned them in the reign of King James the First.’

‘Ha! thank you, Sir,’ said his lordship.

(*Loftus, solo.*)

‘Or to refrain from all high dishes,
But feed our thoughts with wanton wishes,
Making the soul, like a light wench,
Wear patches of concupiscence.

(*Chorus of Officers.*)

‘Making the soul, like a light wench,
Wear patches of concupiscence

(*Loftus, solo.*)

‘This is not to keep Lent aright,
But play the juggling hypocrite;
For we must starve the inward man,
And feed the outward too on bran.

(*Chorus of Officers.*)

'For we must starve the inward man,
And feed the outward too on bran.'

I believe no song was ever received with heartier bursts of laughter and applause. Puddock indeed was grave, being a good deal interested in the dishes sung by the poet. So, for the sake of its moral point, was Dr. Walsingham, who, with brows gathered together judicially, kept time with head and hand, murmuring 'true, true — *good*, Sir, good,' from time to time, as the sentiment liked him.

But honest Father Roach was confoundedly put out by the performance. He sat with his blue double chin buried in his breast, his mouth pursed up tightly, a red scowl all over his face, his quick, little, angry, suspicious eyes peeping cornerwise, now this way, now that, not knowing how to take what seemed to him like a deliberate conspiracy to roast him for the entertainment of the company, who followed the concluding verse with a universal roaring chorus, which went off into a storm of laughter, in which Father Roach made an absurd attempt to join. But it was only a gunpowder glare, swallowed in an instant in darkness, and down came the black portcullis of his scowl with a chop, while clearing his voice, and directing his red face and vicious little eyes straight on simple Dan Loftus he said, rising very erect and square from an unusually ceremonious bow —

'I don't know, Mr. Loftus, exactly what you mean by a "ring-goat in a Spanish dress"' (the priest had just smuggled over a wonderful bit of ecclesiastical toggery from Salamanca): 'and — a — person wearing patches, you said of — of — patches of concupiscence, I think.' (Father Roach's housekeeper unfortunately wore patches, though, it is right to add, she was altogether virtuous, and by no means young); 'but I'm bound to suppose, by the amusement our friends seem to derive from it, Sir, that a ring-goat, whatever it means, is a good joke, as well as a goodnatured one.'

'But, by your leave, Sir,' emphatically interposed Puddock, on whose ear the ecclesiastic's blunder grated like a discord, 'Mr. Loftus sang nothing about a goat, though kid is not a bad thing: he said, "ringos," meaning, I conclude, eringoeous, a delicious preserve or confection. Have you never eaten them, either preserved or candied — a — why I — a — I happen to have a receipt — a — and if you permit me, Sir — a capital receipt. When I was a boy, I made some once at home, Sir; and, by Jupiter, my brother, Sam, eat of them till he was quite sick — I remember, *so* sick, by Jupiter, my poor mother and old Dorcas had to sit up all night with him — a — and — I was going to say, if you will allow me, Sir, I shall be very happy to send the receipt to your housekeeper.'

'You'll not like it, Sir,' said Devereux, mischievously: 'but there really is a capital one — quite of another kind — a lenten dish — fish, you know, Puddock — the one you described yesterday; but Mr. Loftus has, I think, a still better way.'

'Have you, Sir?' asked Puddock, who had a keen appetite for knowledge.

'I don't know, Captain Puddock,' murmured Loftus, bewildered.

'What is it?' remarked his reverence, shortly.

'A roast roach,' answered Puddock, looking quite innocently in that theologian's fiery face.

'*Thank* you,' said Father Roach, with an expression of countenance which polite little Puddock did not in the least understand.

'And how *do you* roast him — we know Loftus's receipt,' persisted Devereux, with remarkable cruelty.

'Just like a lump,' said Puddock, briskly.

'And how is that?' enquired Devereux.

'Flay the lump — splat him — divide him,' answered Puddock, with great volubility; 'and cut each side into two pieces; season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg, and baste with clarified butter; dish him with slices of oranges, barberries, grapes, gooseberries, and butter; and you will find that he eats deliriously either with farced pain or gammon pain.'

This rhapsody, delivered with the rapidity and emphasis of Puddock's earnest lisp, was accompanied with very general tokens of merriment from the company, and the priest, who half suspected him of having invented it, was on the point of falling foul of him, when Lord Castlemallard rose to take leave, and the general forthwith vacated the chair, and so the party broke up, fell into groups, and the greater part sauntered off to the Phœnix, where, in the club-room, they, with less restraint, and some new recruits, carried on the pleasures of the evening, which pleasures, as will sometimes happen, ended in something rather serious.

CHAPTER VII.

SHOWING HOW TWO GENTLEMEN MAY MISUNDERSTAND ONE ANOTHER, WITHOUT ENABLING THE COMPANY TO UNDERSTAND THEIR QUARREL.

Loftus had by this time climbed to the savage lair of his garret, overstrewn with tattered papers and books; and Father Roach, in the sanctuary of his little parlour, was growling over the bones of a devilled-turkey, and about to soothe his fretted soul in a generous libation of hot whiskey punch. Indeed, he was of an appeasable nature, and on the whole a very good fellow.

Dr. Toole, whom the young fellows found along with Nutter over the draught-board in the club-room, forsook his game to devour the story of Loftus's Lenten Hymn, and poor Father Roach's penance, rubbed his hands, and slapped his thigh, and crowed and shouted with ecstasy. O'Flaherty, who called for punch, and was unfortunately prone to grow melancholy and pugnacious over his liquor, was now in a saturnine vein of sentiment, discoursing of the charms of his peerless mistress, the Lady Magnolia Macnamara — for he was not one of those maudlin shepherds, who pipe their loves in lonely glens and other sequestered places, but rather loved to exhibit his bare scars, and roar his tender torments for the edification of the market-place.

While he was descanting on the attributes of that bewitching 'crature,' Puddock, not two yards off, was describing, with scarcely less unction, the perfections of 'pig roast with the hair on:' and the two made a medley like 'The Roast Beef of Old England,' and 'The Last Rose of Summer,' arranged in alternate stanzas. O'Flaherty suddenly stopped short, and said a little sternly to Lieutenant Puddock —

'Does it very much signify, Sir (or as O'Flaherty pronounced it "Sorr,") whether the animal has hair upon it or not?'

'*Every* thing, Thir, in thith particular retheipt,' answered Puddock, a little loftily.

'But,' said Nutter, who, though no great talker, would make an effort to prevent a quarrel, and at the same time winking to Puddock in token that

O’Flaherty was just a little ‘hearty,’ and so to let him alone; ‘what signifies pigs’ hair, compared with human tresses?’

‘Compared with *human* tresses?’ interrupted O’Flaherty, with stern deliberation, and fixing his eyes steadily and rather unpleasantly upon Nutter (I think he saw that wink and perhaps did not understand its import.)

‘Ay, Sir, and Mrs. Magnolia Macnamara has as rich a head of hair as you could wish to see,’ says Nutter, thinking he was drawing him off very cleverly.

‘As *I* could wish to see?’ repeated O’Flaherty grimly.

‘As *you* could desire to see, Sir,’ reiterated Nutter, firmly, for he was not easily put down; and they looked for several seconds in silence a little menacingly, though puzzled, at one another.

But O’Flaherty, after a short pause, seemed to forget Nutter, and returned to his celestial theme.

‘Be the powers, Sir, that young leedy has the most beautiful dimple in her chin I ever set eyes on!’

‘Have you ever put a marrow fat pea in it, Sir?’ enquired Devereux, simply, with all the beautiful rashness of youth.

‘No, Sorr,’ replied O’Flaherty, in a deep tone, and with a very dangerous glare; ‘and I’d like to see the man who, in my presence, id preshum to teeke that libertee.’

‘What a glorious name Magnolia is!’ interposed little Toole in great haste; for it was a practice among these worthies to avert quarrels — very serious affairs in these jolly days — by making timely little diversions, and it is wonderful, at a critical moment, what may be done by suddenly presenting a trifle; a pin’s point, sometimes — at least, a marvellously small one — will draw off innocuously, the accumulating electricity of a pair of bloated scowling thunderclouds.

‘It was her noble godmother, when the family resided at Castlemara, in the county of Roscommon, the Lady Carrick-o’-Gunniol, who conferred it,’ said O’Flaherty, grandly, ‘upon her god-daughter, as who had a better right — I say, *who* had a better right?’ and he smote his hand upon the table, and looked round inviting contradiction. ‘My godmothers, in my baptism — that’s catechism — and all the town of Chapelizod won’t put that down — the Holy Church Catechism — while Hyacinth O’Flaherty, of Coolnaquirk, Lieutenant Fireworker, wears a sword.’

‘Nobly said, lieutenant!’ exclaimed Toole, with a sly wink over his shoulder.

‘And what about that leedy’s neeme, Sir?’ demanded the enamoured fireworker.

‘By Jove, Sir, it is quite true, Lady Carrick-o’-Gunniol *was* her godmother:’ and Toole ran off into the story of how that relationship was brought about; narrating it, however, with great caution and mildness, extracting all the satire, and giving it quite a dignified and creditable character, for the Lieutenant Fireworker smelt so confoundedly of powder that the little doctor, though he never flinched when occasion demanded, did not care to give him an open. Those who had heard the same story from the mischievous merry little doctor before, were I dare say, amused at the grand and complimentary turn he gave it now.

The fact was, that poor Magnolia’s name came to her in no very gracious way. Young Lady Carrick-o’-Gunniol was a bit of a wag, and was planting a magnolia — one of the first of those botanical rarities seen in Ireland — when goodnatured, vapouring, vulgar Mrs. Macnamara’s note, who wished to secure a peeress for her daughter’s spiritual guardian, arrived. Her ladyship pencilled on the back of the note, ‘Pray call the dear babe Magnolia,’ and forthwith forgot all about it. But Madam Macnamara was charmed, and the autograph remained afterwards for two generations among the archives of the family; and, with great smiles and much complacency, she told Lord Carrick-o’-Gunniol all about it, just outside the grand jury-room, where she met him during the assize week; and, being a man of a weak and considerate nature, rather kind, and very courteous — although his smile was very near exploding into a laugh, as he gave the good lady snuff out of his own box — he was yet very much concerned and vexed, and asked his lady, when he went home, how she could have induced old Mrs. Macnamara to give that absurd name to her poor infant; whereat her ladyship, who had not thought of it since, was highly diverted; and being assured that the babe was actually christened, and past recovery Magnolia Macnamara, laughed very merrily, kissed her lord, who was shaking his head gravely, and then popped her hood on, kissed him again, and, laughing still, ran out to look at her magnolia, which, by way of reprisal, he henceforth, notwithstanding her entreaties, always called her ‘Macnamara;’ until, to her infinite delight, he came out with it, as it sometimes happens, at a wrong time, and asked old Mac — a large, mild man — then extant, Madame herself, nurse, infant Magnolia, and all, who had arrived at the castle, to walk out and see Lady Carrick-o'-Gunniol's 'Macnamara,' and perceived not the slip, such is the force of habit, though the family stared, and Lady C. laughed in an uncalled-for-way, at a sudden recollection of a tumble she once had, when a child, over a flowerbed; and broke out repeatedly, to my lord's chagrin and bewilderment, as they walked towards the exotic.

When Toole ended his little family anecdote, which, you may be sure, he took care to render as palatable to Magnolia's knight as possible, by not very scrupulous excisions and interpolations he wound all up, without allowing an instant for criticism or question, by saying briskly, though incoherently.

'And so, what do you say, lieutenant, to a Welsh rabbit for supper?'

The lieutenant nodded a stolid assent.

'Will *you* have one, Nutter?' cried Toole.

'No,' said Nutter.

'And why not?' says Toole.

'Why, I believe Tom Rooke's song in praise of oysters,' answered Nutter, 'especially the verse —

'"The youth will ne'er live to scratch a gray head,
On a supper who goes of Welsh rabbit to bed."'

How came it to pass that Nutter hardly opened his lips this evening — on which, as the men who knew him longest all remarked, he was unprecedentedly talkative — without instantaneously becoming the mark at which O'Flaherty directed his fiercest and most suspicious scowls? And now that I know the allusion which the pugnacious lieutenant apprehended, I cannot but admire the fatality with which, without the smallest design, a very serious misunderstanding was brought about.

'As to *youths* living to scratch gray heads or not, Sir,' said the young officer, in most menacing tones; 'I don't see what concern persons of your age can have in that. But I'll take leave to tell you, Sir, that a gentleman, whether he be a "youth" as you *say*, or aged, as you *are*, who endayvours to make himself diverting at the expense of others, runs a murdhering good risk, Sir, of getting himself scratched where he'll like it least.'

Little Nutter, though grave and generally taciturn, had a spirit of his own, and no notion whatever of knocking under to a bully. It is true, he had not the faintest notion why he was singled out for the young gentleman's impertinence; but neither did he mean to enquire. His mahogany features darkened for a moment to logwood, and his eyes showed their whites fiercely.

'We are not accustomed, Sir, in this part of the world, to your Connaught notions of politeness; we meet here for social — a — a — sociality, Sir; and the long and the short of it is, young gentleman, if you don't change your key, you'll find two can play at that game — and — and, I tell you, Sir, there will be wigs on the green, Sir.'

Here several voices interposed.

'Silence, gentlemen, and let me speak, or I'll assault him,' bellowed O'Flaherty, who, to do him justice, at this moment looked capable of anything. 'I believe, Sir,' he continued, addressing Nutter, who confronted him like a little game-cock, 'it is not usual for one gentleman who renders himself offensive to another to oblige him to proceed to the length of manually malthrating his person.'

'Hey! eh?' said Nutter, drawing his mouth tight on one side with an ugly expression, and clenching his hands in his breeches pockets.

'Manually malthrating his person, Sir,' repeated O'Flaherty, 'by striking, kicking, or whipping any part or mimber of his body; or offering a milder assault, such as a pull by the chin, or a finger-tap upon the nose. It is usual, Sir, for the purpose of avoiding ungentlemanlike noise, inconvenience, and confusion, that one gentleman should request of another to suppose himself affronted in the manner, whatever it may be, most intolerable to his feelings, which request I now, Sir, teeke the libertee of preferring to you; and when you have engaged the services of a friend, I trust that Lieutenant Puddock, who lodges in the same house with me, will, in consideration of my being an officer of the same honourable corps, a sthranger in this part of the counthry, and, above all, a gentleman who can show paydagree like himself [here a low bow to Puddock, who returned it]; that Lieutenant Puddock will be so feelin' and so kind as to receive him on my behalf, and acting as *my* friend to manage all the particulars for settling, as easily as may be, this most unprovoked affair.'

With which words he made another bow, and a pause of enquiry directed to Puddock, who lisped with dignity —

'Sir, the duty is, for many reasons, painful; but I — I can't refuse, Sir, and I accept the trust.'

So O'Flaherty shook his hand, with another bow; bowed silently and loftily round the room, and disappeared, and a general buzz and a clack of tongues arose.

'Mr. Nutter — a — I hope things may be settled pleasantly,' said Puddock, looking as tall and weighty as he could; 'at present I — a — that is, at the moment, I — a — don't quite see — [the fact is, he had not a notion what the deuce it was all about] — but your friend will find me — your friend — a — at my lodgings up to one o'clock tonight, if necessary.'

And so Puddock's bow. For the moment an affair of this sort presented itself, all concerned therein became reserved and official, and the representatives merely of a ceremonious etiquette and a minutely-regulated ordeal of battle. So, as I said, Puddock bowed grandly and sublimely to Nutter, and then magnificently to the company, and made his exit.

There was a sort of a stun and a lull for several seconds. Something very decisive and serious had occurred. One or two countenances wore that stern and mysterious smile, which implies no hilarity, but a kind of reaction in presence of the astounding and the slightly horrible. There was a silence; the gentlemen kept their attitudes too, for some moments, and all eyes were directed toward the door. Then some turned to Charles Nutter, and then the momentary spell dissolved itself.

CHAPTER VIII.

RELATING HOW DOCTOR TOOLE AND CAPTAIN DEVEREUX WENT ON A MOONLIGHT ERRAND.

Nearly a dozen gentlemen broke out at once into voluble speech. Nutter was in a confounded passion; but being a man of few words, showed his wrath chiefly in his countenance, and stood with his legs apart and his arms stuffed straight into his coat pockets, his back to the fireplace, with his chest thrown daringly out, sniffing the air in a state of high tension, and as like as a respectable little fellow of five feet six could be to that giant who smelt the blood of the Irishman, and swore, with a ‘Fee! Faw!! Fum!!!’ he’d ‘eat him for his supper that night.’

‘None of the corps can represent you, Nutter, you know,’ said Captain Cluffe. ‘It may go hard enough with Puddock and O’Flaherty, as the matter stands; but, by Jove! if any of us appear on the other side, the general would make it a very serious affair, indeed.’

‘Toole, can’t you?’ asked Devereux.

‘Out of the question,’ answered he, shutting his eyes, with a frown, and shaking his head. ‘There’s no man I’d do it sooner for, Nutter knows; but I can’t — I’ve refused too often; besides, you’ll want me professionally, you know; for Sturk must attend that Royal Hospital enquiry tomorrow all day — but hang it, where’s the difficulty? Isn’t there? — pooh! — why there must be lots of fellows at hand. Just — a — just think for a minute.’

‘I don’t care who,’ said Nutter, with dry ferocity, ‘so he can load a pistol.’

‘Tom Forsythe would have done capitally, if he was at home,’ said one.

‘But he’s *not*,’ remarked Cluffe.

‘Well,’ said Toole, getting close up to Devereux, in a coaxing undertone, ‘suppose we try Loftus.’

‘Dan Loftus!’ ejaculated Devereux.

‘Dan Loftus,’ repeated the little doctor, testily; ‘remember, it’s just eleven o’clock. He’s no great things, to be sure; but what better can we get.’

‘Allons, donc!’ said Devereux, donning his cocked-hat, with a shrug, and the least little bit of a satirical smile, and out bustled the doctor beside him.

‘Where the deuce did that broganeer, O’Flaherty, come from?’ said Cluffe, confidentially, to old Major O’Neill.

‘A Connaughtman,’ answered the major, with a grim smile, for he was himself of that province and was, perhaps, a little bit proud of his countryman.

‘Toole says he’s well connected,’ pursued Cluffe; ‘but, by Jupiter! I never saw so-mere a Teague; and the most cross-grained devil of a cat-a-mountain.’

‘I could not quite understand why he fastened on Mr. Nutter,’ observed the major, with a mild smile.

‘I’ll rid the town of him,’ rapped out Nutter, with an oath, leering at his own shoebuckle, and tapping the sole with asperity on the floor.

‘If you are thinking of any unpleasant measures, gentlemen, I’d rather, if you please, know nothing of them,’ said the sly, quiet major; ‘for the general, you are aware, has expressed a strong opinion about such affairs; and as ’tis past my bed-hour, I’ll wish you, gentlemen, a goodnight,’ and off went the major.

‘Upon my life, if this Connaught rapparee is permitted to carry on his business of indiscriminate cut-throat here, he’ll make the service very pleasant,’ resumed Cluffe, who, though a brisk young fellow of eight-and-forty, had no special fancy for being shot. ‘I say the general ought to take the matter into his own hands.’

‘Not till I’m done with it,’ growled Nutter.

‘And send the young gentleman home to Connaught,’ pursued Cluffe.

‘I’ll send him first to the other place,’ said Nutter, in allusion to the Lord Protector’s well-known alternative.

In the open street, under the sly old moon, red little Dr. Toole, in his great wig, and Gipsy Devereux, in quest of a squire for the good knight who stood panting for battle in the front parlour of the ‘Phœnix,’ saw a red glimmer in Loftus’s dormant window.

‘He’s alive and stirring still,’ said Devereux, approaching the hall door with a military nonchalance.

‘Whisht!’ said Toole, plucking him back by the sash: ‘we must not make a noise — the house is asleep. I’ll manage it — leave it to me.’

And he took up a handful of gravel, but not having got the range, he shied it all against old Tom Drought’s bedroom window.

‘Deuce take that old sneak,’ whispered Toole vehemently, ‘he’s always in the way; the last man in the town I’d have — but no matter:’ and up went a pebble, better directed, for this time it went right through Loftus’s window, and a pleasant little shower of broken glass jingled down into the street.

‘Confound you, Toole,’ said Devereux, ‘you’ll rouse the town.

‘Plague take the fellow’s glass — it’s as thin as paper,’ sputtered Toole.

‘Loftus, we want you,’ said Toole, in a hard whispered shout, and making a speaking trumpet of his hands, as the wild head of the student, like nothing in life but a hen’s nest, appeared above.

‘Cock-Loftus, come down, d’ye hear?’ urged Devereux.

‘Dr. Toole and Lieutenant Devereux — I — I — dear me! yes. Gentlemen, your most obedient,’ murmured Loftus vacantly, and knocking his head smartly on the top of the window frame, in recovering from a little bow. ‘I’ll be wi’ ye, gentlemen, in a moment.’ And the hen’s nest vanished.

Toole and Devereux drew back a little into the shadow of the opposite buildings, for while they were waiting, a dusky apparition, supposed to be old Drought in his nightshirt, appeared at that gentleman’s windows, saluting the ambassadors with mop and moe, in a very threatening and energetic way. Just as this demonstration subsided, the hall door opened wide — and indeed was left so — while our friend Loftus, in a wonderful tattered old silk coat, that looked quite indescribable by moonlight, the torn linings hanging down in loops inside the skirts, pale and discoloured, like the shreds of banners in a cathedral; his shirt loose at the neck, his breeches unbuttoned at the knees, and a gigantic, misshapen, and mouldy pair of slippers clinging and clattering about his feet, came down the steps, his light, round little eyes and queer, quiet face peering at them into the shade, and a smokified volume of divinity tucked under his arm, with his finger between the leaves to keep the place.

When Devereux saw him approaching, the whole thing — mission, service, man, and all — struck him in so absurd a point of view, that he burst out into an explosion of laughter, which only grew more vehement and uproarious the more earnestly and imploringly Toole tried to quiet him, pointing up with both hands, and all his fingers extended, to the windows of the sleeping townsfolk, and making horrible grimaces, shrugs, and ogles. But the young gentleman was not in the habit of denying himself innocent indulgences, and shaking himself loose of Toole, he walked down the dark side of the street in peals of laughter, making, ever and anon, little breathless remarks to himself, which his colleague could not hear, but which seemed to have the effect of setting him off again into new hemi-demi-semiquavers and roars of laughter, and left the doctor to himself, to conduct the negociation with Loftus.

‘Well?’ said Devereux, by this time recovering breath, as the little doctor, looking very red and glum, strutted up to him along the shady pavement.

‘Well? *well?* — oh, ay, *very* well, to be sure. I’d like to know what the plague we’re to do now,’ grumbled Toole.

‘Your precious armour-bearer refuses to act then?’ asked Devereux.

‘To be sure he does. He sees *you* walking down the street, ready to die o’ laughing — at *nothing*, by Jove!’ swore Toole, in deep disgust; ‘and — and — och! hang it! it’s all a confounded pack o’ nonsense. Sir, if you could not keep grave for five minutes, you ought not to have come at all. But what need *I* care? It’s Nutter’s affair, not mine.’

‘And well for him we failed. Did you ever see such a fish? He’d have shot himself or Nutter, to a certainty. But there’s a chance yet: we forgot the Nightingale Club; they’re still in the Phœnix.’

‘Pooh, Sir! they’re all tailors and greengrocers,’ said Toole, in high dudgeon.

‘There are two or three good names among them, however,’ answered Devereux; and by this time they were on the threshold of the Phœnix.

‘Larry,’ he cried to the waiter, ‘the Nightingale Club is *there*, is it not?’ glancing at the great back parlour door.

‘Be the powers! Captain, you may say that,’ said Larry, with a wink, and a grin of exquisite glee.

‘See, Larry,’ said Toole, with importance, ‘we’re a little serious now; so just say if there’s any of the gentlemen there; you — you understand, now; quite steady? D’ye see me?’

Larry winked — this time a grave wink — looked down at the floor, and up to the cornice, and —

‘Well,’ said he, ‘to be candid with you, jest at this minute — half-an-hour ago, you see, it was different — the only gentleman I’d take on myself to recommend to you as perfectly sober is Mr. Macan, of Petticoat-lane.’

‘Is he in business?’ asked Toole.

‘Does he keep a shop?’ said Devereux.

‘A shop! *two* shops; — a great man in the chandlery line,’ responded Larry.

‘H’m! not precisely the thing we want, though,’ says Toole.

‘There are some of them, surely, that *don’t* keep shops,’ said Devereux, a little impatiently.

‘Millions!’ said Larry.

‘Come, say their names.’

‘Only one of them came this evening, Mr. Doolan, of Stonnybatther — he’s a retired merchant.’

‘That will do,’ said Toole, under his breath, to Devereux. Devereux nodded.

‘Just, I say, tap him on the shoulder, and tell him that Dr. Toole, you know, of this town, with many compliments and excuses, begs one word with him,’ said the doctor.

‘Hoo! Docthur dear, he was the first of them down, and was carried out to his coach insensible jist when Mr. Crozier of Christ Church began, “Come Roger and listen;” he’s in his bed in Stonnybatther a good hour and a half ago.’

‘A retired merchant,’ says Devereux; ‘well, Toole, what do you advise now?’

‘By Jove, I think one of us must go into town. ‘Twill never do to leave poor Nutter in the lurch; and between ourselves, that O’Flaherty’s a — a bloodthirsty idiot, by Jove — and ought to be put down.’

‘Let’s see Nutter — you or I must go — we’ll take one of these songster’s “noddies.”’

A ‘noddy’ give me leave to remark, was the one-horse hack vehicle of Dublin and the country round, which has since given place to the jaunting car, which is, in its turn, half superseded by the cab.

And Devereux, followed by Toole, entered the front parlour again. But without their help, the matter was arranging itself, and a second, of whom they knew nothing, was about to emerge.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW A SQUIRE WAS FOUND FOR THE KNIGHT OF THE RUEFUL COUNTENANCE.

When Dr. Toole grumbled at his disappointment, he was not at all aware how nearly his interview with Loftus had knocked the entire affair on the head. He had no idea how much that worthy person was horrified by his proposition; and Toole walked off in a huff, without bidding him goodnight, and making a remark in which the words ‘old woman’ occurred pretty audibly. But Loftus remained under the glimpses of the moon in perturbation and sore perplexity. It was so late he scarcely dared disturb Dr. Walsingham or General Chattesworth. But there came the half-stifled cadence of a song — not bacchanalian, but sentimental — something about Daphne and a swain — struggling through the window-shutters next the green hall-door close by, and Dan instantly bethought himself of Father Roach. So knocking stoutly at the window, he caused the melody to subside and the shutter to open. When the priest, looking out, saw Dan Loftus in his deshabille, I believe he thought for a moment it was something from the neighbouring churchyard.

However, his reverence came out and stood on the steps, enveloped in a hospital aroma of broiled bones, lemons, and alcohol, and shaking his visitor affectionately by the hand — for he bore no malice, and the Lenten ditty he quite forgave as being no worse in modern parlance than an unhappy ‘fluke’ — was about to pull him into the parlour, where there was ensconced, he told him, ‘a noble friend of his.’ This was ‘Pat Mahony, from beyond Killarney, just arrived — a man of parts and conversation, and a lovely singer.’

But Dan resisted, and told his tale in an earnest whisper in the hall. The priest made his mouth into a round queer little O, through which he sucked a long breath, elevating his brows, and rolling his eyes slowly about.

‘A jewel! And Nutter, of all the men on the face of the airth — though I often heerd he was a fine shot, and a sweet little fencer in his youth, an’ game, too — oh, be the powers! you can see that still — game to the backbone — and — whisht a bit now — who's the other?'

'Lieutenant O'Flaherty.'

(A low whistle from his reverence). 'That's a boy that comes from a fighting county — Galway. I wish you saw them at an election time. Why, there's no end of divarsion — the divarsion of *stopping* them, of course, I mean (observing a sudden alteration in Loftus's countenance). An' *you*, av coorse, want to stop it? And so, av coorse, do I, my dear. Well, then, wait a bit, now — we must have our eyes open. Don't be in a hurry — let us be harrumless as sarpints, but *wise* as doves. Now, 'tis a fine thing, no doubt, to put an end to a jewel by active intherfarence, though I have known cases, my dear child, where suppressing a simple jewel has been the cause of half a dozen breaking out afterwards in the same neighbourhood, and on the very same quarrel, d'ye mind — though, of coorse, that's no reason here or there, my dear boy! But take it that a jewel is breaking down and coming to the ground of itself (here a hugely cunning wink), in an aisy, natural, accommodating way, the only effect of intherfarence is to bolster it up, d'ye see, so just considher how things are, my dear. Lave it all to me, and mind my words, it *can't* take place without a second. The officers have refused, so has Toole, *you* won't undertake it, and it's too late to go into town. I defy it to come to anything. Jest be said be me, Dan Loftus, and let sleeping dogs lie. Here I am, an old experienced observer, that's up to their tricks, with my eye upon them. Go you to bed — lave them to me — and they're checkmated without so much as seeing how we bring it to pass.'

Dan hesitated.

'Arrah! go to your bed, Dan Loftus, dear. It's past eleven o'clock — they're nonplussed already; and lave *me* — me that understands it — to manage the rest.'

'Well, Sir, I do confide it altogether to you. I know I might, through ignorance, do a mischief.'

And so they bid a mutual goodnight, and Loftus scaled his garret stair and snuffed his candle, and plunged again into the business of two thousand years ago.

'Here's a purty business,' says the priest, extending both his palms, with a face of warlike importance, and shutting the door behind him with what he called ‘a cow’s kick;’ ‘a jewel, my dear Pat, no less; bloody work I’m afeared.’

Mr. Mahony, who had lighted a pipe during his entertainer’s absence, withdrew the fragrant tube from his lips, and opened his capacious mouth with a look of pleasant expectation, for he, like other gentlemen of his day — and, must we confess, not a few jolly clerics of my creed, as well as of honest Father Roach’s — regarded the ordeal of battle, and all its belongings, simply as the highest branch of sporting. Not that the worthy father avowed any such sentiment; on the contrary, his voice and his eyes, if not his hands, were always raised against the sanguinary practice; and scarce a duel occurred within a reasonable distance unattended by his reverence, in the capacity, as he said, of ‘an unauthorised, but airnest, though, he feared, unavailing peacemaker.’ There he used to spout little maxims of reconciliation, and Christian brotherhood and forbearance; exhorting to forget and forgive; wringing his hands at each successive discharge; and it must be said, too, in fairness, playing the part of a good Samaritan towards the wounded, to whom his green hall-door was ever open, and for whom the oil of his consolation and the wine of his best bin never refused to flow.

‘Pat, my child,’ said his reverence, ‘that Nutter’s a divil of a fellow — at least he *was*, by all accounts; he’ll be bad enough, I’m afeared, and hard enough to manage, if everything goes smooth; but if he’s kept waiting there, fuming and boiling over, do ye mind, without a natural vent for his feelings, or a *friend*, do ye see, at his side to — to *resthrain* him, and bring about, if possible, a friendly mutual understanding — why, my dear child, he’ll get into that state of exasperation an’ violence, he’ll have half a dozen jewels on his hands before morning.’

‘Augh! ‘tid be a murther to baulk them for want of a friend,’ answered Mr. Mahony, standing up like a warrior, and laying the pipe of peace upon the chimney. ‘Will I go down, Father Denis, and offer my sarvices?’

‘With a view to a *reconciliation*, mind,’ said his reverence, raising his finger, closing his eyes, and shaking his florid face impressively.

‘Och, bother! don’t I know — of coorse, reconciliation;’ and he was buttoning his garments where, being a little ‘in flesh,’ as well as tall, he had loosed them. ‘*Where* are the gentlemen now, and who will I ask for?’

‘I’ll show you the light from the steps. Ask for Dr. Toole; and he’s *certainly* there; and if he’s not, for Mr. Nutter; and just say you came from my house, where you — a — pooh! accidentally heard, through Mr. Loftus, do ye mind, there was a difficulty in finding a friend to — a — strive to make up matters between thim.’

By this time they stood upon the doorsteps; and Mr. Mahony had clapt on his hat with a pugnacious cock o’ one side; and following, with a sporting and mischievous leer, the direction of the priest’s hand, that indicated the open door of the Phœnix, through which a hospitable light was issuing.

‘There’s where you’ll find the gentlemen, in the front parlour,’ says the priest. ‘You remember Dr. Toole, and *he’ll* remember *you*. An’ *mind*, dear, it’s to make it up you’re goin’.’ Mr. Mahony was already under weigh, at a brisk stride, and with a keen relish for the business. ‘And the blessing of the peacemaker go with you, my child!’ added his reverence, lifting his hands and his eyes towards the heavens, ‘An’ upon my fainy!’ looking shrewdly at the stars, and talking to himself, ‘they’ll have a fine morning for the business, *if*, unfortunately’ — and here he reascended his doorsteps with a melancholy shrug— ‘if *unfortunately*, Pat Mahony should fail.’

When Mr. Pat Mahony saw occasion for playing the gentleman, he certainly did come out remarkably strong in the part. It was done in a noble, florid, glowing style, according to his private ideal of the complete fine gentleman. Such bows, such pointing of the toes, such graceful flourishes of the three-cocked hat — such immensely engaging smiles and wonderful by-play, such an apparition, in short, of perfect elegance-valour, and courtesy, were never seen before in the front parlour of the Phœnix.

‘Mr. Mahony, by jingo!’ ejaculated Toole, in an accent of thankfulness amounting nearly to rapture. Nutter seemed relieved, too, and advanced to be presented to the man who, instinct told him, was to be his friend. Cluffe, a man of fashion of the military school, eyed the elegant stranger with undisguised disgust and wonder, and Devereux with that sub-acid smile with which men will sometimes quietly relish absurdity.

Mr. Mahony, ‘discoursin’ a country neighbour outside the halfway-house at Muckafubble, or enjoying an easy *tête-à-tête* with Father Roach, was a very inferior person, indeed, to Patrick Mahony, Esq., the full-blown diplomatist and pink of gentility astonishing the front parlour of the Phœnix.

There, Mr. Mahony’s periods were fluent and florid, and the words chosen occasionally rather for their grandeur and melody than for their exact connexion with the context or bearing upon his meaning. The consequence was a certain gorgeous haziness and bewilderment, which made the task of translating his harangues rather troublesome and conjectural.

Having effected the introduction, and made known the object of his visit, Nutter and he withdrew to a small chamber behind the bar, where Nutter, returning some of his bows, and having listened without deriving any very clear ideas to two consecutive addresses from his companion, took the matter in hand himself, and said he —

‘I beg, Sir, to relieve you at once from the trouble of trying to arrange this affair amicably. I have been grossly insulted, he’s not going to apologise, and nothing but a meeting will satisfy me. He’s a mere murderer. I have not the faintest notion why he wants to kill me; but being reduced to this situation, I hold myself obliged, if I can, to rid the town of him finally.’

‘Shake hands, Sir,’ cried Mahony, forgetting his rhetoric in his enthusiasm; ‘be the hole in the wall, Sir, I honour you.’

CHAPTER X.

THE DEAD SECRET, SHOWING HOW THE FIREWORKER PROVED TO PUDDOCK THAT NUTTER HAD SPIED OUT THE NAKEDNESS OF THE LAND.

When Puddock, having taken a short turn or two in the air, by way of tranquillising his mind, mounted his lodging stairs, he found Lieutenant O'Flaherty, not at all more sober than he had last seen him, in the front drawingroom, which apartment was richly perfumed with powerful exhalations of rum punch.

'Dhrink this, Puddock — dhrink it,' said O'Flaherty, filling a large glass in equal quantities with rum and water; 'dhrink it, my sinsare friend; it will studdy you, it will, upon my honour, Puddock!'

'But — a — thank you, Sir, I am anxious to understand exactly' — said Puddock. Here he was interrupted by a frightful grin and a '*ha!*' from O'Flaherty, who darted to the door, and seizing his little withered French servant, who was entering, swung him about the room by his coat collar.

'So, Sorr, you've been prating again, have you, you desateful, idle old dhrunken miscreant; you did it on purpose, you blundherin' old hyena; it's the third jewel you got your masther into; and if I lose my life, divil a penny iv your wages ye'll ever get — that's one comfort. Yes, Sorr! this is the third time you have caused me to brew my hands in human blood; I dono' if it's malice, or only blundherin'. Oh!' he cried, with a still fiercer shake, 'it's I that wishes I could be sure 'twas malice, I'd skiver you, heels and elbows, on my sword, and roast you alive on that fire. Is not it a hard thing, my darlin' Puddock, I can't find out.' He was still holding the little valet by the collar, and stretching out his right hand to Puddock. 'But I am always the sport of misfortunes — small and great. If there was an ould woman to be handed in to supper — or a man to be murthered by mistake — or an ugly girl to be danced with, whose turn was it, ever and always to do the business, but poor Hyacinth O'Flaherty's — (tears). I could tell you, Puddock,' he continued, forgetting his wrath, and letting his prisoner go, in his eager pathos — the Frenchman made his escape in a twinkling— 'I was the only man in our regiment that tuck the mazles in Cork, when it was goin' among the children, bad luck to them — I that was near dyin' of it when I was an infant; and I was the only officer in the regiment, when we were at Athlone, that was prevented going to the race ball — and I would not for a hundred pounds. I was to dance the first minuet, and the first country dance, with that beautiful creature, Miss Rose Cox. I was makin' a glass of brandy punch — not feelin' quite myself — and I dhressed and all, in our room, when Ensign Higgins, a most thoughtless young man, said something disrespectful about a beautiful mole she had on her chin; bedad, Sir, he called it a wart, if you plase! and feelin' it sthrongly, I let the jug of scaldin' wather drop on my knees; I wish you felt it, my darlin' Puddock. I was scalded in half a crack from a fut above my knees down to the last joint of my two big toes; and I raly thought my sinses were leving me. I lost the ball by it. Oh, ho, wirresthrue! poor Hyacinth O'Flaherty!' and thereupon he wept.

'You thee, Lieutenant O'Flaherty,' lisped Puddock, growing impatient, 'we can't say how soon Mr. Nutter's friend may apply for an interview, and — a — I must confeth I don't yet quite understand the point of difference between you and him, and therefore— '

'A where the devil's that blackguard little French wazel gone to?' exclaimed O'Flaherty, for the first time perceiving that his captive had escaped. 'Kokang Modate! Do you hear me, Kokang Modate!' he shouted.

'But really, Sir, you must be so good as to place before me, before me, Sir, clearly, the — the cause of this unhappy dispute, the exact offenth, Thir, for otherwithe— '

'Cause, to be sure! and plenty iv cause. I never fought a jewel yet, Puddock, my friend — and this will be the ninth — without cause. They said, I'm tould, in Cork, I was quarrelsome; they lied; I'm not quarrelsome; I only want pace, and quiet, and justice; I hate a quarrelsome man. I tell you, Puddock, if I only knew where to find a quarrelsome man, be the powers I'd go fifty miles out of my way to pull him be the nose. They lied, Puddock, my dear boy, an' I'd give twenty pounds this minute I had them on this flure, to tell them how *damnably* they lied!'

'No doubt, Thir,' said Puddock, 'but if you pleathe I really mutht have a dithtinct answer to my— '

‘Get out o’ that, Sorr,’ thundered O’Flaherty, with an awful stamp on the floor, as the ‘coquin maudit,’ O’Flaherty’s only bit of French, such as it was, in obedience to that form of invocation, appeared nervously at the threshold, ‘or I’ll fling the contints of the r-r-oo-oo-oom at your head, (exit Monsieur, again). Be gannies! if I thought it was he that done it, I’d jirk his old bones through the top of the window. Will I call him back and give him his desarts, will I, Puddock! Oh, ho, hone! my darlin’ Puddock, everything turns agin me; what’ll I do, Puddock, jewel, or what’s to become o’ me?’ and he shed some more tears, and drank off the greater part of the beverage which he had prepared for Puddock.

‘I believe, Sir, that this is the sixth time I’ve ventured to ask a distinct statement from your lips, of the cauthe of your dithagreement with Mr. Nutter, which I plainly tell you, Thir, I don’t at prethent underthtand, said Puddock, loftily and firmly enough.

‘To be sure, my darlin’ Puddock,’ replied O’Flaherty, ‘it was that cursed little French whipper-snapper, with his monkeyfied intherruptions; be the powers, Puddock, if you knew half the mischief that same little baste has got me into, you would not wondher if I murthered him. It was he was the cause of my jewel with my cousin, Art Considine, and I wanting to be the very pink of politeness to him. I wrote him a note when he came to Athlone, afther two years in France, and jist out o’ compliment to him, I unluckily put in a word of French: come an’ dine, says I, and we’ll have a dish of chat. I knew u-n p-l-a-t (spelling it), was a dish, an’ says I to Jerome, that pigimy (so he pronounced it) you seen here at the door, that’s his damnable name, what’s *chat* in French — c-h-a-t — spelling it to him; “sha,” says he; “sha?” says I, “spell it, if you plase,” says I; “c-h-a-t,” says he, the stupid old viper. Well, I took the trouble to write it out, “un plat de chat;” “is that right?” says I, showing it to him. “It is, my lord,” says he, looking at me as if I had two heads. I never knew the manin’ of it for more than a month afther I shot poor Art through the two calves. An’ he that fought two jewels before, all about cats, one of them with a Scotch gentleman that he gave the lie to, for saying that French cooks had a way of stewing cats you could not tell them from hares; and the other immadiately afther, with Lieutenant Rugge, of the Royal Navy, that got one stewed for fun, and afther my Cousin Art dined off it, like a man, showed him the tail and the claws. It’s well he did not die of it, and no wondher he resented my invitation, though upon my honour, as a soldier and a gentleman, may I be stewed alive myself in a pot, Puddock my dear, if I had the laste notion of offering him the smallest affront!'

'I begin to despair, Sir,' exclaimed Puddock, 'of receiving the information without which 'tis vain for me to try to be useful to you; once more, may I entreat to know what *is* the affront of which you complain?'

'You don't know; raly and truly now, you don't know?' said O'Flaherty, fixing a solemn tipsy leer on him.

'I tell you *no*, Thir,' rejoined Puddock.

'And do you mean to tell me you did not hear that vulgar dog Nutter's unmanly jokes?'

'Jokes!' repeated Puddock, in large perplexity, 'why I've been here in this town for more than five years, and I never heard in all that time that Nutter once made a joke — and upon my life, I don't think he could make a joke, Sir, if he tried — I don't, indeed, Lieutenant O'Flaherty, upon my honour!'

And rat it, Sir, how can I help it?' cried O'Flaherty, relapsing into pathos.

'Help what?' demanded Puddock.

O'Flaherty took him by the hand, and gazing on his face with a maudlin, lacklustre tenderness, said: —

'Absalom was caught by the hair of his head — he was, Puddock — long hair or short hair, or (a hiccough) no hair at all, isn't it nature's doing, I ask you my darlin' Puddock, *isn't* it?' He was shedding tears again very fast. 'There was Cicero and Julius Cæsar, wor both as bald as that,' and he thrust a shining sugar basin, bottom upward, into Puddock's face. '*I'm* not bald; I tell you I'm *not* — no, my darlin' Puddock, I'm not — poor Hyacinth O'Flaherty is *not bald*,' shaking Puddock by both hands.

'That's very plain, Sir, but I don't see your drift,' he replied.

'I want to tell you, Puddock, dear, if you'll only have a minute's patience. The door can't fasten, divil bother it; come into the next room;' and toppling a little in his walk, he led him solemnly into his bedroom — the door of which he locked — somewhat to Puddock's disquietude, who began to think him insane. Here having informed Puddock that Nutter was driving at the one point the whole evening, as any one that knew the secret would have seen; and having solemnly imposed the seal of secrecy upon his second, and essayed a wild and broken discourse upon the difference between total baldness and partial loss of hair, he disclosed to him the grand mystery of his existence, by lifting from the summit of his head a circular piece of wig, which in those days they called I believe, a ‘topping,’ leaving a bare shining disc exposed, about the size of a large pat of butter.

‘Upon my life, Thir, it’th a very fine piethe of work,’ says Puddock, who viewed the wiglet with the eye of a stage-property man, and held it by a top lock near the candle. ‘The very finetht piethe of work of the kind I ever thaw. ‘Tith thertainly French. Oh, yeth — we can’t do such thingth here. By Jove, Thir, what a wig that man would make for Cato!’

‘An’ he must be a mane crature — I say, a mane crature,’ pursued O’Flaherty, ‘for there was not a soul in the town but Jerome, the — the treacherous ape, that knew it. It’s he that dhresses my head every morning behind the bed-curtain there, with the door locked. And Nutter could never have found it out — *who* was to tell him, unless that ojus French damon, that’s never done talkin’ about it;’ and O’Flaherty strode heavily up and down the room with his hands in his breeches’ pockets, muttering savage invectives, pitching his head from side to side, and whisking round at the turns in a way to show how strongly he was wrought upon.

‘Come in, Sorr!’ thundered O’Flaherty, unlocking the door, in reply to a knock, and expecting to see his ‘ojus French damon.’ But it was a tall fattish stranger, rather flashily dressed, but a little soiled, with a black wig, and a rollicking red face, showing a good deal of chin and jaw.

O’Flaherty made his grandest bow, quite forgetting the exposure at the top of his head; and Puddock stood rather shocked, with the candle in one hand and O’Flaherty’s scalp in the other.

‘You come, Sir, I presume, from Mr. Nutter,’ said O’Flaherty, with lofty courtesy. This, Sir, is my friend, Lieutenant Puddock of the Royal Irish Artillery, who does me the honour to support me with his advice and— ‘

As he moved his hand towards Puddock, he saw his scalp dangling between that gentleman’s finger and thumb, and became suddenly mute. He clapped his hand upon his bare skull, and made an agitated pluck at that article, but missed, and disappeared, with an imprecation in Irish, behind the bed curtains.

‘If you will be so obliging, Sir, as to precede me into that room,’ lisped Puddock, with grave dignity, and waving O’Flaherty’s scalp slightly towards the door — for Puddock never stooped to hide anything, and being a gentleman, pure and simple, was not ashamed or afraid to avow his deeds, words, and situations; ‘I shall do myself the honour to follow.’

‘Gi’ me *that*,’ was heard in a vehement whisper from behind the curtains. Puddock understood it, and restored the treasure.

The secret conference in the drawingroom was not tedious, nor indeed very secret, for anyone acquainted with the diplomatic slang in which such affairs were conducted might have learned in the lobby, or indeed in the hall, so mighty was the voice of the stranger, that there was no chance of any settlement without a meeting which was fixed to take place at twelve o’clock next day on the Fifteen Acres.

CHAPTER XI.

SOME TALK ABOUT THE HAUNTED HOUSE — BEING, AS I SUPPOSE, ONLY OLD WOMAN'S TALES.

Old Sally always attended her young mistress while she prepared for bed — not that Lilias required help, for she had the spirit of neatness and a joyous, gentle alacrity, and only troubled the good old creature enough to prevent her thinking herself grown old and useless.

Sally, in her quiet way, was garrulous, and she had all sorts of old-world tales of wonder and adventure, to which Lilias often went pleasantly to sleep; for there was no danger while old Sally sat knitting there by the fire, and the sound of the rector's mounting upon his chairs, as was his wont, and taking down and putting up his books in the study beneath, though muffled and faint, gave evidence that that good and loving influence was awake and busy.

Old Sally was telling her young mistress, who sometimes listened with a smile, and sometimes lost a good five minutes together of her gentle prattle, how the young gentleman, Mr. Mervyn, had taken that awful old haunted habitation, the Tiled House 'beyant at Ballyfermot,' and was going to stay there, and wondered no one had told him of the mysterious dangers of that desolate mansion.

It stood by a lonely bend of the narrow road. Lilias had often looked upon the short, straight, grass-grown avenue with an awful curiosity at the old house which she had learned in childhood to fear as the abode of shadowy tenants and unearthly dangers.

'There are people, Sally, nowadays, who call themselves free-thinkers, and don't believe in anything — even in ghosts,' said Lilias.

'A then the place he's stopping in now, Miss Lily, 'ill soon cure him of free-thinking, if the half they say about it's true,' answered Sally.

'But I don't say, mind, he's a free-thinker, for I don't know anything of Mr. Mervyn; but if he be not, he must be very brave, or very good, indeed. I know, Sally, I should be horribly afraid, indeed, to sleep in it myself,' answered Lilias, with a cosy little shudder, as the aërial image of the old house for a moment stood before her, with its peculiar malign, sacred, and skulking aspect, as if it had drawn back in shame and guilt under the melancholy old elms among the tall hemlock and nettles.

‘And now, Sally, I’m safe in bed. Stir the fire, my old darling.’ For although it was the first week in May, the night was frosty. ‘And tell me all about the Tiled House again, and frighten me out of my wits.’

So good old Sally, whose faith in such matters was a religion, went off over the well-known ground in a gentle little amble — sometimes subsiding into a walk as she approached some special horror, and pulling up altogether — that is to say, suspending her knitting, and looking with a mysterious nod at her young mistress in the four-poster, or lowering her voice to a sort of whisper when the crisis came.

So she told her how when the neighbours hired the orchard that ran up to the windows at the back of the house, the dogs they kept there used to howl so wildly and wolfishly all night among the trees, and prowl under the walls of the house so dejectedly, that they were fain to open the door and let them in at last; and, indeed, small need was there for dogs; for no one, young or old, dared go near the orchard after nightfall. No, the burnished golden pippins that peeped through the leaves in the western rays of evening, and made the mouths of the Ballyfermot schoolboys water, glowed undisturbed in the morning sunbeams, and secure in the mysterious tutelage of the night smiled coyly on their predatory longings. And this was no fanciful reserve and avoidance. Mick Daly, when he had the orchard, used to sleep in the loft over the kitchen; and he swore that within five or six weeks, while he lodged there, he twice saw the same thing, and that was a lady in a hood and a loose dress, her head drooping, and her finger on her lip, walking in silence among the crooked stems, with a little child by the hand, who ran smiling and skipping beside her. And the Widow Cresswell once met them at nightfall, on the path through the orchard to the back-door, and she did not know what it was until she saw the men looking at one another as she told it.

‘It’s often she told it to me,’ said old Sally; ‘and how she came on them all of a sudden at the turn of the path, just by the thick clump of alder trees; and how she stopped, thinking it was some lady that had a right to be there; and how they went by as swift as the shadow of a cloud, though she only seemed to be walking slow enough, and the little child pulling by her arm, this way and that way, and took no notice of her, nor even raised her head, though she stopped and courtesied. And old Dalton, don't you remember old Dalton, Miss Lily?'

'I think I do, the old man who limped, and wore the old black wig?'

'Yes, indeed, acushla, so he did. See how well she remembers! That was by a kick of one of the earl's horses — he was groom there,' resumed Sally. 'He used to be troubled with hearing the very sounds his master used to make to bring him and old Oliver to the door, when he came back late. It was only on very dark nights when there was no moon. They used to hear all on a sudden, the whimpering and scraping of dogs at the hall door, and the sound of the whistle, and the light stroke across the window with the lash of the whip, just like as if the earl himself — may his poor soul find rest — was there. First the wind 'id stop, like you'd be holding your breath, then came these sounds they knew so well, and when they made no sign of stirring or opening the door, the wind 'id begin again with such a hoo-hoo-o-o-high, you'd think it was laughing, and crying, and hooting all at once.'

Here old Sally's tale and her knitting ceased for a moment, as if she were listening to the wind outside the haunted precincts of the Tiled house; and she took up her parable again.

'The very night he met his death in England, old Oliver, the butler, was listening to Dalton — for Dalton was a scholar — reading the letter that came to him through the post that day, telling him to get things ready, for his troubles wor nearly over and he expected to be with them again in a few days, and maybe almost as soon as the letter; and sure enough, while he was reading, there comes a frightful rattle at the window, like some one all in a tremble, trying to shake it open, and the earl's voice, as they both conceited, cries from outside, "Let me in, let me in, let me in!" "It's him," says the butler. "'Tis so, bedad," says Dalton, and they both looked at the windy, and at one another — and then back again — overjoyed, in a soart of a way, and frightened all at onst. Old Oliver was bad with the rheumatiz. So away goes Dalton to the hall-door, and he calls "who's there?" and no answer. "Maybe," says Dalton, to himself, "'tis what he's rid round to the back-door;" so to the back-door with him, and there he shouts again — and no answer, and not a sound outside — and he began to feel quare, and to the hall door with him back again. "Who's there? do you hear? who's there?" he shouts, and receives no answer still. "I'll open the door at any rate," says he, “maybe it’s what he’s made his escape,” for they knew all about his troubles, and wants to get in without noise, so praying all the time — for his mind misgave him it might not be all right — he shifts the bars and unlocks the door; but neither man, woman, nor child, nor horse, nor any living shape was standing there, only something or another slipt into the house close by his leg; it might be a dog, or something that way, he could not tell, for he only seen it for a moment with the corner of his eye, and it went in just like as if it belonged to the place. He could not see which way it went, up or down, but the house was never a happy one, or a quiet house after; and Dalton bangs the hall-door, and he took a sort of a turn and a trembling, and back with him to Oliver, the butler, looking as white as the blank leaf of his master’s letter, that was between his finger and thumb. “What is it? *what* is it?” says the butler, catching his crutch like a waypon, fastening his eyes on Dalton’s white face, and growing almost as pale himself. “The master’s dead,” says Dalton — and so he was, signs on it.

‘After the turn she got by what she seen in the orchard, when she came to know the truth of what it was, Jinny Cresswell, you may be sure, did not stay there an hour longer than she could help: and she began to take notice of things she did not mind before — such as when she went into the big bedroom over the hall, that the lord used to sleep in, whenever she went in at one door the other door used to be pulled to very quick, as if some one avoiding her was getting out in haste; but the thing that frightened her most was just this — that sometimes she used to find a long straight mark from the head to the foot of her bed, as if ’twas made by something heavy lying there, and the place where it was used to feel warm — as if — whoever it was — they only left it as she came into the room.

‘But the worst of all was poor Kitty Haplin, the young woman that died of what she seen. Her mother said it was how she was kept awake all the night with the walking about of some one in the next room, tumbling about boxes, and pulling over drawers, and talking and sighing to himself, and she, poor thing, wishing to go asleep, and wondering who it could be, when in he comes, a fine man, in a sort of loose silk morning-dress, an’ no wig, but a velvet cap on, and to the windy with him quiet and aisy, and she makes a turn in the bed to let him know there was some one there, thinking he’d go away, but instead of that, over he comes to the side of the bed, looking very bad, and says something to her — but his speech was thick and choakin' like a dummy's that id be trying to spake — and she grew very frightened, and says she, 'I ask your honour's pardon, Sir, but I can't hear you right,' and with that he stretches up his neck nigh out of his cravat, turning his face up towards the ceiling, and — grace between us and harm! — his throat was cut across, and wide open; she seen no more, but dropped in a dead faint in the bed, and back to her mother with her in the morning, and she never swallied bit or sup more, only she just sat by the fire holding her mother's hand, crying and trembling, and peepin' over her shoulder, and starting with every sound, till she took the fever and died, poor thing, not five weeks after.'

And so on, and on, and on flowed the stream of old Sally's narrative, while Lilias dropped into dreamless sleep, and then the story-teller stole away to her own tidy bedroom and innocent slumbers.

CHAPTER XII.

SOME ODD FACTS ABOUT THE TILED HOUSE — BEING AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE OF THE GHOST OF A HAND.

I'm sure she believed every word she related, for old Sally was veracious. But all this was worth just so much as such talk commonly is — marvels, fabulæ, what our ancestors called winter's tales — which gathered details from every narrator, and dilated in the act of narration. Still it was not quite for nothing that the house was held to be haunted. Under all this smoke there smouldered just a little spark of truth — an authenticated mystery, for the solution of which some of my readers may possibly suggest a theory, though I confess I can't.

Miss Rebecca Chattesworth, in a letter dated late in the autumn of 1753, gives a minute and curious relation of occurrences in the Tiled House, which, it is plain, although at starting she protests against all such fooleries, she has heard with a peculiar sort of interest, and relates it certainly with an awful sort of particularity.

I was for printing the entire letter, which is really very singular as well as characteristic. But my publisher meets me with his *veto*; and I believe he is right. The worthy old lady's letter *is*, perhaps, too long; and I must rest content with a few hungry notes of its tenor.

That year, and somewhere about the 24th October, there broke out a strange dispute between Mr. Alderman Harper, of High Street, Dublin, and my Lord Castlemallard, who, in virtue of his cousinship to the young heir's mother, had undertaken for him the management of the tiny estate on which the Tiled or Tyled House — for I find it spelt both ways — stood.

This Alderman Harper had agreed for a lease of the house for his daughter, who was married to a gentleman named Prosser. He furnished it, and put up hangings, and otherwise went to considerable expense. Mr. and Mrs. Prosser came there sometime in June, and after having parted with a good many servants in the interval, she made up her mind that she could not live in the house, and her father waited on Lord Castlemallard, and told him plainly that he would not take out the lease because the house was subjected to annoyances which he could not explain. In plain terms, he said it was haunted, and that no servants would live there more than a few weeks, and that after what his son-in-law's family had suffered there, not only should he be excused from taking a lease of it, but that the house itself ought to be pulled down as a nuisance and the habitual haunt of something worse than human malefactors.

Lord Castlemallard filed a bill in the Equity side of the Exchequer to compel Mr. Alderman Harper to perform his contract, by taking out the lease. But the Alderman drew an answer, supported by no less than seven long affidavits, copies of all which were furnished to his lordship, and with the desired effect; for rather than compel him to place them upon the file of the court, his lordship struck, and consented to release him.

I am sorry the cause did not proceed at least far enough to place upon the files of the court the very authentic and unaccountable story which Miss Rebecca relates.

The annoyances described did not begin till the end of August, when, one evening, Mrs. Prosser, quite alone, was sitting in the twilight at the back parlour window, which was open, looking out into the orchard, and plainly saw a hand stealthily placed upon the stone windowsill outside, as if by some one beneath the window, at her right side, intending to climb up. There was nothing but the hand, which was rather short but handsomely formed, and white and plump, laid on the edge of the windowsill; and it was not a very young hand, but one aged, somewhere about forty, as she conjectured. It was only a few weeks before that the horrible robbery at Clondalkin had taken place, and the lady fancied that the hand was that of one of the miscreants who was now about to scale the windows of the Tiled House. She uttered a loud scream and an ejaculation of terror, and at the same moment the hand was quietly withdrawn.

Search was made in the orchard, but no indications of any person's having been under the window, beneath which, ranged along the wall, stood a great column of flower-pots, which it seemed must have prevented any one's coming within reach of it.

The same night there came a hasty tapping, every now and then, at the window of the kitchen. The women grew frightened, and the servant-man, taking firearms with him, opened the back-door, but discovered nothing. As he shut it, however, he said, 'a thump came on it,' and a pressure as of somebody striving to force his way in, which frightened *him*; and though the tapping went on upon the kitchen window panes, he made no further explorations.

About six o'clock on the Saturday evening following, the cook, 'an honest, sober woman, now aged nigh sixty years,' being alone in the kitchen, saw, on looking up, it is supposed, the same fat but aristocratic-looking hand, laid with its palm against the glass, near the side of the window, and this time moving slowly up and down, pressed all the while against the glass, as if feeling carefully for some inequality in its surface. She cried out, and said something like a prayer on seeing it. But it was not withdrawn for several seconds after.

After this, for a great many nights, there came at first a low, and afterwards an angry rapping, as it seemed with a set of clenched knuckles at the back-door. And the servant-man would not open it, but called to know who was there; and there came no answer, only a sound as if the palm of the hand was placed against it, and drawn slowly from side to side with a sort of soft, groping motion.

All this time, sitting in the back parlour, which, for the time, they used as a drawingroom, Mr. and Mrs. Prosser were disturbed by rappings at the window, sometimes very low and furtive, like a clandestine signal, and at others sudden, and so loud as to threaten the breaking of the pane.

This was all at the back of the house, which looked upon the orchard as you know. But on a Tuesday night, at about halfpast nine, there came precisely the same rapping at the hall-door, and went on, to the great annoyance of the master and terror of his wife, at intervals, for nearly two hours.

After this, for several days and nights, they had no annoyance whatsoever, and began to think that nuisance had expended itself. But on the night of the 13th September, Jane Easterbrook, an English maid, having gone into the pantry for the small silver bowl in which her mistress's posset was served, happening to look up at the little window of only four panes, observed through an auger-hole which was drilled through the window frame, for the admission of a bolt to secure the shutter, a white pudgy finger — first the tip, and then the two first joints introduced, and turned about this way and that, crooked against the inside, as if in search of a fastening which its owner designed to push aside. When the maid got back into the kitchen we are told ‘she fell into “a swounde,” and was all the next day very weak.’

Mr. Prosser being, I’ve heard, a hard-headed and conceited sort of fellow, scouted the ghost, and sneered at the fears of his family. He was privately of opinion that the whole affair was a practical joke or a fraud, and waited an opportunity of catching the rogue *flagrante delicto*. He did not long keep this theory to himself, but let it out by degrees with no stint of oaths and threats, believing that some domestic traitor held the thread of the conspiracy.

Indeed it was time something were done; for not only his servants, but good Mrs. Prosser herself, had grown to look unhappy and anxious. They kept at home from the hour of sunset, and would not venture about the house after nightfall, except in couples.

The knocking had ceased for about a week; when one night, Mrs. Prosser being in the nursery, her husband, who was in the parlour, heard it begin very softly at the hall-door. The air was quite still, which favoured his hearing distinctly. This was the first time there had been any disturbance at that side of the house, and the character of the summons was changed.

Mr. Prosser, leaving the parlour-door open, it seems, went quietly into the hall. The sound was that of beating on the outside of the stout door, softly and regularly, ‘with the flat of the hand.’ He was going to open it suddenly, but changed his mind; and went back very quietly, and on to the head of the kitchen stair, where was a ‘strong closet’ over the pantry, in which he kept his firearms, swords, and canes.

Here he called his man-servant, whom he believed to be honest, and, with a pair of loaded pistols in his own coatpockets, and giving another pair to him, he went as lightly as he could, followed by the man, and with a stout walking-cane in his hand, forward to the door.

Everything went as Mr. Prosser wished. The besieger of his house, so far from taking fright at their approach, grew more impatient; and the sort of patting which had aroused his attention at first assumed the rhythm and emphasis of a series of doubleknocks.

Mr. Prosser, angry, opened the door with his right arm across, cane in hand. Looking, he saw nothing; but his arm was jerked up oddly, as it might be with the hollow of a hand, and something passed under it, with a kind of gentle squeeze. The servant neither saw nor felt anything, and did not know why his master looked back so hastily, cutting with his cane, and shutting the door with so sudden a slam.

From that time Mr. Prosser discontinued his angry talk and swearing about it, and seemed nearly as averse from the subject as the rest of his family. He grew, in fact, very uncomfortable, feeling an inward persuasion that when, in answer to the summons, he had opened the hall-door, he had actually given admission to the besieger.

He said nothing to Mrs. Prosser, but went up earlier to his bedroom, 'where he read a while in his Bible, and said his prayers.' I hope the particular relation of this circumstance does not indicate its singularity. He lay awake a good while, it appears; and, as he supposed, about a quarter past twelve he heard the soft palm of a hand patting on the outside of the bedroom door, and then brushed slowly along it.

Up bounced Mr. Prosser, very much frightened, and locked the door, crying, 'Who's there?' but receiving no answer but the same brushing sound of a soft hand drawn over the panels, which he knew only too well.

In the morning the housemaid was terrified by the impression of a hand in the dust of the 'little parlour' table, where they had been unpacking delft and other things the day before. The print of the naked foot in the sea-sand did not frighten Robinson Crusoe half so much. They were by this time all nervous, and some of them half-crazed, about the hand.

Mr. Prosser went to examine the mark, and made light of it but as he swore afterwards, rather to quiet his servants than from any comfortable feeling about it in his own mind; however, he had them all, one by one, into the room, and made each place his or her hand, palm downward, on the same table, thus taking a similar impression from every person in the house, including himself and his wife; and his 'affidavit' deposed that the formation of the hand so impressed differed altogether from those of the living inhabitants of the house, and corresponded with that of the hand seen by Mrs. Prosser and by the cook.

Whoever or whatever the owner of that hand might be, they all felt this subtle demonstration to mean that it was declared he was no longer out of doors, but had established himself in the house.

And now Mrs. Prosser began to be troubled with strange and horrible dreams, some of which as set out in detail, in Aunt Rebecca's long letter, are really very appalling nightmares. But one night, as Mr. Prosser closed his bedchamber-door, he was struck somewhat by the utter silence of the room, there being no sound of breathing, which seemed unaccountable to him, as he knew his wife was in bed, and his ears were particularly sharp.

There was a candle burning on a small table at the foot of the bed, beside the one he held in one hand, a heavy ledger, connected with his father-in-law's business being under his arm. He drew the curtain at the side of the bed, and saw Mrs. Prosser lying, as for a few seconds he mortally feared, dead, her face being motionless, white, and covered with a cold dew; and on the pillow, close beside her head, and just within the curtains, was, as he first thought, a toad — but really the same fattish hand, the wrist resting on the pillow, and the fingers extended towards her temple.

Mr. Prosser, with a horrified jerk, pitched the ledger right at the curtains, behind which the owner of the hand might be supposed to stand. The hand was instantaneously and smoothly snatched away, the curtains made a great wave, and Mr. Prosser got round the bed in time to see the closet-door, which was at the other side, pulled to by the same white, puffy hand, as he believed.

He drew the door open with a fling, and stared in: but the closet was empty, except for the clothes hanging from the pegs on the wall, and the dressing-table and looking-glass facing the windows. He shut it sharply, and locked it, and felt for a minute, he says, 'as if he were like to lose his wits;' then, ringing at the bell, he brought the servants, and with much ado they recovered Mrs. Prosser from a sort of 'trance,' in which, he says, from her looks, she seemed to have suffered 'the pains of death:' and Aunt Rebecca adds, 'from what she told me of her visions, with her own lips, he might have added, "and of hell also."'

But the occurrence which seems to have determined the crisis was the strange sickness of their eldest child, a little boy aged between two and three years. He lay awake, seemingly in paroxysms of terror, and the doctors who were called in, set down the symptoms to incipient water on the brain. Mrs. Prosser used to sit up with the nurse by the nursery fire, much troubled in mind about the condition of her child.

His bed was placed sideways along the wall, with its head against the door of a press or cupboard, which, however, did not shut quite close. There was a little valance, about a foot deep, round the top of the child's bed, and this descended within some ten or twelve inches of the pillow on which it lay.

They observed that the little creature was quieter whenever they took it up and held it on their laps. They had just replaced him, as he seemed to have grown quite sleepy and tranquil, but he was not five minutes in his bed when he began to scream in one of his frenzies of terror; at the same moment the nurse, for the first time, detected, and Mrs. Prosser equally plainly saw, following the direction of *her* eyes, the real cause of the child's sufferings.

Protruding through the aperture of the press, and shrouded in the shade of the valance, they plainly saw the white fat hand, palm downwards, presented towards the head of the child. The mother uttered a scream, and snatched the child from its little bed, and she and the nurse ran down to the lady's sleeping-room, where Mr. Prosser was in bed, shutting the door as they entered; and they had hardly done so, when a gentle tap came to it from the outside.

There is a great deal more, but this will suffice. The singularity of the narrative seems to me to be this, that it describes the ghost of a hand, and no more. The person to whom that hand belonged never once appeared: nor was it a hand separated from a body, but only a hand so manifested and introduced that its owner was always, by some crafty accident, hidden from view.

In the year 1819, at a college breakfast, I met a Mr. Prosser — a thin, grave, but rather chatty old gentleman, with very white hair drawn back into a pigtail — and he told us all, with a concise particularity, a story of his cousin, James Prosser, who, when an infant, had slept for some time in what his mother said was a haunted nursery in an old house near Chapelizod, and who, whenever he was ill, over-fatigued, or in anywise feverish, suffered all through his life as he had done from a time he could scarce remember, from a vision of a certain gentleman, fat and pale, every curl of whose wig, every button and fold of whose laced clothes, and every feature and line of whose sensual, benignant, and unwholesome face, was as minutely engraven upon his memory as the dress and lineaments of his own grandfather's portrait, which hung before him every day at breakfast, dinner, and supper.

Mr. Prosser mentioned this as an instance of a curiously monotonous, individualised, and persistent nightmare, and hinted the extreme horror and anxiety with which his cousin, of whom he spoke in the past tense as ‘poor Jemmie,’ was at any time induced to mention it.

I hope the reader will pardon me for loitering so long in the Tiled House, but this sort of lore has always had a charm for me; and people, you know, especially old people, will talk of what most interests themselves, too often forgetting that others may have had more than enough of it.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH THE RECTOR VISITS THE TILED HOUSE, AND DOCTOR TOOLE LOOKS AFTER THE BRASS CASTLE.

Next morning Toole, sauntering along the low road towards the mills, as usual bawling at his dogs, who scampered and nuzzled hither and thither, round and about him, saw two hackney coaches and a 'noddy' arrive at 'the Brass Castle,' a tall old house by the river, with a little bit of a flower-garden, half-a-dozen poplars, and a few old privet hedges about it; and being aware that it had been taken the day before for Mr. Dangerfield, for three months, he slackened his pace, in the hope of seeing that personage, of whom he had heard great things, take seisin of his tabernacle. He was disappointed, however; the great man had not arrived, only a sour-faced, fussy old lady, Mrs. Jukes, his housekeeper and a servant-wench and a great lot of boxes and trunks; and so leaving the coachman grumbling and swearing at the lady, who, bitter, shrill, and voluble, was manifestly well able to fight her own battles, he strolled back to the Phœnix, where a new evidence of the impending arrival met his view in an English groom with three horses, which the hostler and he were leading into the inn-yard.

There were others, too, agreeably fidgeted about this arrival. The fair Miss Magnolia, for instance, and her enterprising parent, the agreeable Mrs. Macnamara: who both as they gaped and peeped from the windows, bouncing up from the breakfast-table every minute, to the silent distress of quiet little Major O'Neill, painted all sorts of handsome portraits, and agreeable landscapes, and cloud-clapped castles, each for her private contemplation, on the spreading canvas of her hopes.

Dr. Walsingham rode down to the 'Tiled House,' where workmen were already preparing to make things a little more comfortable. The towering hall-door stood half open; and down the broad stairs — his tall, slim figure, showing black against the light of the discoloured lobby-window — his raven hair reaching to his shoulders — Mervyn, the pale, large-eyed genius of that haunted place, came to meet him. He led him into the cedar parlour, the stained and dusty windows of which opened upon that mossgrown orchard, among whose great trunks and arches those strange shapes were said sometimes to have walked at night, like penitents and mourners through cathedral pillars.

It was a reception as stately, but as sombre and as beggarly withal as that of the Master of Ravenswood, for there were but two chairs in the cedar-parlour, — one with but three legs, the other without a bottom; so they were fain to stand. But Mervyn could smile without bitterness and his desolation had not the sting of actual poverty, as he begged the rector to excuse his dreary welcome, and hoped that he would find things better the next time.

Their little colloquy got on very easily, for Mervyn liked the rector, and felt a confidence in him which was comfortable and almost exhilarating. The doctor had a cheery, kindly, robust voice, and a good, honest emphasis in his talk; a guileless blue eye; a face furrowed, thoughtful, and benevolent; well formed too. He must have been a handsome curate in his day. Not uncourtly, but honest; the politeness of a gentle and tender heart; *very* courteous and popular among ladies, although he sometimes forgot that they knew no Latin.

So Mervyn drew nigh to him in spirit, and liked him and talked to him rather more freely [though even that was enigmatically enough] than he had done to anybody else for a long time. It would seem that the young man had formed no very distinct plan of life. He appeared to have some thought of volunteering to serve in America, and some of entering into a foreign service; but his plans were, I suppose, *in nubibus*. All that was plain was that he was restless and eager for some change — any.

It was not a very long visit, you may suppose; and just as Dr. Walsingham rode out of the avenue, Lord Castlemallard was riding leisurely by towards Chapelizod, followed by his groom.

His lordship, though he had a drowsy way with him, was esteemed rather an active man of business, being really, I'm afraid, only what is termed a fidget: and the fact is, his business would have been better done if he had looked after it himself a good deal less.

He was just going down to the town to see whether Dangerfield had arrived, and slackened his pace to allow the doctor to join him, for he could ride with him more comfortably than with parsons generally, the doctor being well descended, and having married, besides, into a good family. He stared, as he passed, at the old house listlessly and peevishly. He had heard of Mervyn's doings there, and did not like them.

'Yes, Sir, he's a very pretty young, man, and very well dressed,' said his lordship, with manifest dissatisfaction: 'but I don't like meeting him, you know. 'Tis not his fault; but one can't help thinking of — of things! and I'd be glad his friends would advise him not to dress in velvets, you know — particularly black velvets you can understand. I could not help thinking, at the time, of a pall, somehow. I'm not — no — not pleasant near him. No — I — I can't — his face is so pale — you don't often, see so pale a face — no — it looks like a reflection from one that's still paler — you understand — and in short, even in his perfumes there's a taint of — of — you know — a taint of blood, Sir. Then there was a pause, during which he kept slapping his boot peevishly with his little riding-whip. 'One can't, of course, but be kind,' he recommenced. 'I can't do much — I can't make him acceptable, you know — but I pity him, Dr. Walsingham, and I've tried to be kind to him, *you* know that; for ten years I had all the trouble, Sir, of a guardian without the authority of one. Yes, of course we're kind; but body o' me! Sir, he'd be better any where else than here, and without occupation, you know, quite idle, and so conspicuous. I promise you there are more than I who think it. And he has commenced fitting up that vile old house — that vile house, Sir. It is ready to tumble down — upon my life they say so; Nutter says so, and Sturk — Dr. Sturk, of the Artillery here — an uncommon sensible man, you know, says so too. 'Tis a vile house, and ready to tumble down, and you know the trouble I was put to by that corporation fellow — a — what's his name — about it; and he can't let it — people's servants won't stay in it, you know, the people tell such stories about it, I'm told; and what business has he here, you know? It is all very fine for a week or so, but they'll find him out, they will, Sir. He may call himself Mervyn, or Fitzgerald, or Thompson, Sir, or any other name, but it won't do, Sir. No, Dr. Walsingham, it won't do. The people down in this little village here, Sir, are plaguy sharp — they're cunning; upon my life, I believe they are too hard for Nutter.'

In fact, Sturk had been urging on his lordship the purchase of this little property, which, for many reasons ought to be had a bargain, and adjoined Lord Castlemallard's, and had talked him into viewing it quite as an object.

No wonder, then, he should look on Mervyn’s restorations and residence, in the light of an impertinence and an intrusion.

CHAPTER XIV.

RELATING HOW PUDDOCK PURGED O'FLAHERTY'S HEAD — A CHAPTER WHICH, IT IS HOPED, NO GENTEEL PERSON WILL READ.

Rum disagreed with O'Flaherty confoundedly, but, being sanguine, and also of an obstinate courage not easily to be put down, and liking that fluid, and being young withal, he drank it defiantly and liberally whenever it came in his way. So this morning he announced to his friend Puddock that he was suffering under a headache 'that 'id burst a pot.' The gallant fellow's stomach, too, was qualmish and disturbed. He heard of breakfast with loathing. Puddock rather imperiously insisted on his drinking some tea, which he abhorred, and of which, in very imperfect clothing and with deep groans and occasional imprecations on 'that bastely clar't' — to which he chose to ascribe his indisposition — he drearily partook.

'I tell you what, Thir,' said Puddock, finding his patient nothing better, and not relishing the notion of presenting his man in that seedy condition upon the field: 'I've got a remedy, a very thimple one; it used to do wondereth for my poor Uncle Neagle, who loved rum shrub, though it gave him the headache *always*, and sometimes the gout.'

And Puddock had up Mrs. Hogg, his landlady, and ordered a pair of little muslin bags about the size of a pistol-cartridge each, which she promised to prepare in five minutes, and he himself tumbled over the leaves of his private manuscript quarto, a desultory and miscellaneous album, stuffed with sonnets on Celia's eye — a lock of hair, or a pansy here or there pressed between the pages — birthday verses addressed to Sacharissa, receipts for 'puptons,' 'farces,' &c.; and several for toilet luxuries, 'Angelica water,' 'The Queen of Hungary's' ditto, 'surfeit waters,' and finally, that he was in search of, to wit, 'My great Aunt Bell's recipe for purging the head' (good against melancholy or the headache). You are not to suppose that the volume was slovenly or in anywise unworthy of a gentleman and officer of those days. It was bound in red and gold, had two handsome silver-gilt clasps and red edges, the writing being exquisitely straight and legible, and without a single blot.

‘I have them all except — two — *three*,’ murmured the thoughtful Puddock when he had read over the list of ingredients. These, however, he got from Toole, close at hand, and with a little silver grater and a pretty little agate pocket pestle and mortar — an heirloom derived from poor Aunt Bell — he made a wonderful powder; ‘nutmeg and ginger, cinnamon and cloves,’ as the song says, and every other stinging product of nature and chemistry which the author of this famous family ‘purge for the head’ could bring to remembrance; and certainly it *was* potent. With this the cartridges were loaded, the ends tied up, and O’Flaherty, placed behind a table on which stood a basin, commenced the serious operation, under Puddock’s directions, by introducing a bag at each side of his mouth, which as a man of honour, he was bound to retain there until Puddock had had his morning’s tête-à-tête with the barber.

Those who please to consult old domestic receipt-books of the last century, will find the whole process very exactly described therein.

‘Be the powers, Sorr, that was the stuff!’ said O’Flaherty, discussing the composition afterwards, with an awful shake of his head; ‘my chops wor blazing before you could count twenty.’

It was martyrdom; but anything was better than the incapacity which threatened, and certainly, by the end of five minutes, his head was something better. In this satisfactory condition — Jerome being in the back garden brushing his regimentals, and preparing his other properties — he suddenly heard voices close to the door, and gracious powers! one was certainly Magnolia’s.

‘That born devil, Juddy Carrol,’ blazed forth. O’Flaherty, afterwards, ‘pushed open the door; it served me right for not being in my bedroom, and the door locked — though who’d a thought there was such a cruel eediot on airth — bad luck to her — as to show a leedy into a gentleman, with scarcely the half of his clothes on, and undhergoin’ a soart iv an operation, I may say.’

Happily the table behind which he stood was one of those oldfashioned toilet affairs, with the back part, which was turned toward the door, sheeted over with wood, so that his ungartered stockings and rascally old slippers, were invisible. Even so, it was bad enough: he was arrayed in a shabby old silk roquelaire, and there was a towel upon his breast, pinned behind his neck. He had just a second to pop the basin under the table, and to whisk the towel violently from under his chin, drying that feature with merciless violence; when the officious Judy Carrol, Grand Chamberlain in Jerome's absence, with the facetious grin of a goodnatured lady about to make two people happy, introduced the bewitching Magnolia, and her meek little uncle, Major O'Neill.

In they came, rejoicing, to ask the gallant fireworker (it was a different element just now), to make one of a party of pleasure to Leixlip. O'Flaherty could not so much as hand the young lady a chair; to emerge from behind the table, or even to attempt a retreat, was of course not to be thought of in the existing state of affairs. The action of Puddock's recipe was such as to make his share in the little complimentary conversation that ensued very indistinct, and to oblige him, to his disgrace and despair, when the poor fellow tried a smile, actually to apply his towel hastily to his mouth.

He saw that his visitors observed those symptoms with some perplexity: the major was looking steadfastly at O'Flaherty's lips, and unconsciously making corresponding movements with his own, and the fair Magnolia was evidently full of pleasant surprise and curiosity. I really think, if O'Flaherty had had a pistol within reach, he would have been tempted to deliver himself summarily from that agonising situation.

'I'm afraid, lieutenant, you've got the toothache,' said Miss Mag, with her usual agreeable simplicity.

In his alacrity to assure her there was no such thing, he actually swallowed one of the bags. 'Twas no easy matter, and he grew very red, and stared frightfully, and swallowed a draught of water precipitately. His misery was indeed so great that at the conclusion of a polite little farewell speech of the major's, he uttered an involuntary groan, and lively Miss Mag, with an odious titter, exclaimed —

'The little creature's teething, uncle, as sure as you're not; either that, or he's got a hot potato in his poor little mouzey-wouzey;' and poor O'Flaherty smiled a great silent moist smile at the well-bred pleasantry. The major, who did not choose to hear Mag's banter, made a formal, but rather smiling salute. The lieutenant returned it, and down came the unlucky mortar and a china plate, on which Puddock had mingled the ingredients, with a shocking crash and jingle on the bare boards; a plate and mortar never made such a noise before, O'Flaherty thought, with a mental imprecation.

'Nothing — hash— 'appened — Shur,' said O'Flaherty, whose articulation was affected a good deal, in terror lest the major should arrest his departure.

So the major and tall Miss Magnolia, with all her roses and lilies, and bold broad talk, and her wicked eyes, went down the stairs; and O'Flaherty, looking with lively emotion in the glass, at the unbecoming coup-d'œil, heard that agreeable young lady laughing most riotously under the windows as she and the major marched away.

It was well for Judy, that, being of the gentler sex, the wrath of the fireworker could not wreak itself upon her. The oftener he viewed himself in the pier-glass, trying in vain to think he did not look so very badly after all, the more bitter were his feelings. Oh, that villainous old silk morning gown! and his eyes so confoundedly red, and his hair all dishevelled — bad luck to that clar't! the wig was all right, that was his only comfort;, and his mouth, 'och, look at it; twiste its natural size,' though that was no trifle.

'Another week I'll not stop in her lodgings,' cried poor O'Flaherty, grinning at himself in the glass, 'if she keeps that savage, Judy Carrol, here a day longer.'

Then he stumbled to the stairhead to call her up for judgment; but changed his mind, and returned to the looking-glass, blowing the cooling air in short whistles through his peppered lips — and I'm sorry to say, blowing out also many an ejaculation and invective, as that sorry sight met his gaze in the oval mirror, which would have been much better not uttered.

CHAPTER XV.

ÆSCULAPIUS TO THE RESCUE.

It was not until Puddock had returned, that the gallant fireworker recollected all on a sudden that he had swallowed one of the bags.

‘Thwallowed? — thwallowed it!’ said Puddock, looking very blank and uncomfortable; ‘why, Thir, I told you you were to be *very* careful.’

‘Why, why curse it, it’s *not*, ’tisn’t — — ‘

‘There was a long pause, and O’Flaherty stared a very frightened and hideous stare at the proprietor of the red quarto.

‘Not *what*, Thir?’ demanded Puddock, briskly, but plainly disconcerted.

‘Not anything — anything *bad* — or, or — there’s no use in purtendin’, Puddock,’ he resumed, turning quite yellow. ‘I see, Sir, I see by your looks, it’s what you think, I’m poisoned!’

‘I — I — do *not*, Thir, think you’re poisoned,’ he replied indignantly, but with some flurry; ‘that is, there’s a great deal in it that could not pothibly do you harm — there’s only one ingredient, yes — or, or, yes, perhapth three, but thertainly no more, that I don’t quite know about, depend upon it, ’tis nothing — a — nothing — a — seriouthly — a — But why, my dear Thir, why on earth did you violate the thimple directions — why did you thwallow a particle of it?’

‘Och, why did I let it into my mouth at all — the divil go with it!’ retorted poor O’Flaherty; ‘an’ wasn’t I the born eediot to put them devil’s dumplins inside my mouth? but I did not know what I was doin’ — no more I didn’t.’

‘I hope your head’th better,’ said Puddock, vindicating by that dignified enquiry the character of his recipe.

‘Auch! my head be smathered, what the puck do I care about it?’ O’Flaherty broke out. ‘Ah, why the devil, Puddock, do you keep them ould women’s charrums and devilments about you? — you’ll be the death of some one yet, so you will.’

‘It’s a recipe, Sir,’ replied Puddock, with the same dignity ‘from which my great uncle, General Neagle, derived frequent benefit.’

‘And here I am,’ says O’Flaherty, vehemently; ‘and you don’t know whether I’m poisoned or no!’

At this moment he saw Dr. Sturk passing by, and drummed violently at the window. The doctor was impressed by the summons; for however queer the apparition, it was plain he was desperately in earnest.

‘Let’s see the recipe,’ said Sturk, drily; ‘you think you’re poisoned — I know you do;’ poor O’Flaherty had shrunk from disclosing the extent of his apprehensions, and only beat about the bush; ‘and if you be, I lay you fifty, I can’t save you, nor all the doctors in Dublin — show me the recipe.’

Puddock put it before him, and Sturk looked at the back of the volume with a leisurely disdain, but finding no title there, returned to the recipe. They both stared on his face, without breathing, while he conned it over. When he came about halfway, he whistled; and when he arrived at the end, he frowned hard; and squeezed his lips together till the red disappeared altogether, and he looked again at the back of the book, and then turned it round, once more reading the last line over with a severe expression.

‘And so you actually swallowed this — this devil’s dose, Sir, did you?’ demanded Sturk.

‘I — I believe he did, some of it; but I warned him, I did, upon my honour! Now, tell him, did I not warn you, my dear lieutenant, not to thwallow,’ interposed little Puddock, who began to grow confoundedly agitated; but Sturk, who rather liked shocking and frightening people, and had a knack of making bad worse, and an alacrity in waxing savage without adequate cause, silenced him with —

‘I p-pity you, Sir,’ and ‘pity’ shot like a pellet from his lips. ‘Why the deuce will you dabble in medicine, Sir? Do you think it’s a thing to be learnt in an afternoon out of the bottom of an old cookery-book?’

‘Cookery-book! excuse me, Dr. Sturk,’ replied Puddock offended. ‘I’m given to underthtand, Sir, it’s to be found in Culpepper.’

‘Culpepper!’ said Sturk, viciously. ‘Cull-*poison* — you have peppered him to a purpose, I promise you! How much of it, pray, Sir (to O’Flaherty,) have you got in your stomach?’

‘Tell him, Puddock,’ said O’Flaherty, helplessly.

‘Only a trifle I assure you,’ extenuated Puddock (I need not spell his lisp), ‘in a little muslin bag, about the size of the top joint of a lady’s little finger.’

‘Top joint o’ the devil!’ roared O’Flaherty, bitterly, rousing himself; ‘I tell you, Dr. Sturk, it was as big as my thumb, and a miracle it did not choke me.’

‘It may do that job for you yet, Sir,’ sneered the doctor with a stern disgust. ‘I dare say you feel pretty hot here?’ jerking his finger into his stomach.

‘And — and — and — *what* is it? — is it — do you think it’s anything — anyways — *dangerous*?’ faltered poor O’Flaherty.

‘Dangerous!’ responded Sturk, with an angry chuckle — indeed, he was specially vindictive against lay intruders upon the mystery of his craft; ‘why, yes — ha, — ha! — just maybe a little. It’s only *poison*, Sir, deadly, barefaced poison!’ he began sardonically, with a grin, and ended with a black glare and a knock on the table, like an auctioneer’s ‘gone!’

‘There are no less than two — three — *five* mortal poisons in it,’ said the doctor with emphatic acerbity. ‘You and Mr. Puddock will allow *that’s* rather strong.’

O’Flaherty sat down and looked at Sturk, and wiping his damp face and forehead, he got up without appearing to know where he was going. Puddock stood with his hands in his breeches pockets, staring with his little round eyes on the doctor, I must confess, with a very foolish and rather guilty vacuity all over his plump face, rigid and speechless, for three or four seconds; then he put his hand, which did actually tremble, upon the doctor’s arm, and he said, very thickly —

‘I feel, Sir, you’re right; it is my fault, Sir, I’ve poisoned him — merthiful goodneth! — I — I— ‘

Puddock’s address acted for a moment on O’Flaherty. He came up to him pale and queer, like a somnambulist, and shook his fingers very cordially with a very cold grasp.

‘If it was the last word I ever spoke, Puddock, you’re a goodnatured — he’s a gentleman, Sir — and it was *all* my own fault; he warned me, he did, again’ swallyin’ a dhrop of it — remember what I’m saying, doctor— ’twas *I* that done it; I was *always* a botch, Puddock, an’ a fool; and — and — gentlemen — goodbye.’

And the flowered dressing-gown and ungartered stockings disappeared through the door into the bedroom, from whence they heard a great souse on the bed, and the bedstead gave a dismal groan.

‘Is there; — *is* there nothing, doctor — for mercy’s sake, think — doctor, do — I conjure you — pray think — there must be something’ — urged Puddock, imploringly.

‘Ay, that’s the way, Sir, fellows quacking themselves and one another; when they get frightened, and with good reason, come to us and expect miracles; but as in this case, the quantity was not very much, ’tis not, you see, overpowering, and he *may* do if he takes what I’ll send him.’

Puddock was already at his bedside, shaking his hand hysterically, and tumbling his words out one over the other —

‘You’re thafe, my dear Thir — *dum thpiro thpero* — he thayth — Dr. Thturk — he can thave you, my dear Thir — my dear lieutenant — my dear O’Flaherty — he can thave you, Thir — thafe and thound, Thir.’

O’Flaherty, who had turned his face to the wall in the bitterness of his situation — for like some other men, he had the intensest horror of death when he came peaceably to his bedside, though ready enough to meet him with a ‘hurrah!’ and a wave of his rapier, if he arrived at a moment’s notice, with due dash and eclat — sat up like a shot, and gaping upon Puddock for a few seconds, relieved himself with a long sigh, a devotional upward roll of the eyes, and some muttered words, of which the little ensign heard only ‘blessing,’ very fervently, and ‘catch me again,’ and ‘divil bellows it;’ and forthwith out came one of the fireworker’s long shanks, and O’Flaherty insisted on dressing, shaving, and otherwise preparing as a gentleman and an officer, with great gaiety of heart, to meet his fate on the Fifteen Acres.

In due time arrived the antidote. It was enclosed in a gallipot, and was what I believe they called an electuary. I don’t know whether it is an obsolete abomination now, but it looked like brick-dust and treacle, and what it was made of even Puddock could not divine. O’Flaherty, that great Hibernian athlete, unconsciously winced and shuddered like a child at sight of it. Puddock stirred it with the tip of a tea-spoon, and looked into it with inquisitive disgust, and seemed to smell it from a distance, lost for a minute in inward conjecture, and then with a slight bow, pushed it ceremoniously toward his brother in arms.

‘There is not much the matter with me now — I feel well enough,’ said O’Flaherty, mildly, and eyeing the mixture askance; and after a little while he looked at Puddock. That disciplinarian understood the look, and said, peremptorily, shaking up his little powdered head, and lisping vehemently —

‘Lieutenant O’Flaherty, Sir! I insist on your instantly taking that physic. How you may feel, Sir, has nothing to do with it. If you hesitate, I withdraw my sanction to your going to the field, Sir. There’s no — there *can* be — no earthly excuse but a — a miserable objection to a — swallowing a — recipe, Sir — that isn’t — that is may be — not intended to please the palate, but to save your *life*, Sir, — remember. Sir, you’ve swallowed a — you — you *require*, Sir — you don’t think I fear to say it, Sir! — you have swallowed that you ought not to have swallowed, and don’t, Sir — don’t — for *both* our sakes — for Heaven’s sake — I implore — and insist — don’t trifle, Sir.’

O’Flaherty felt himself passing under the chill and dismal shadow of death once more, such was the eloquence of Puddock, and so impressible his own nature, as he followed the appeal of his second. ‘Life is sweet;’ and, though the compound was nauseous, and a necessity upon him of swallowing it in horrid instalments, spoonful after spoonful, yet, though not without many interruptions, and many a shocking apostrophe, and even some sudden paroxysms of horror, which alarmed Puddock, he did contrive to get through it pretty well, except a little residuum in the bottom, which Puddock wisely connived at.

The clink of a horseshoe drew Puddock to the window. Sturk riding into town, reined in his generous beast, and called up to the little lieutenant.

‘Well, he’s taken it, eh?’

Puddock smiled a pleasant smile and nodded.

‘Walk him about, then, for an hour or so, and he’ll do.’

‘Thank you, Sir,’ said little Puddock, gaily.

‘Don’t thank *me*, Sir, *either* of you, but remember the lesson you’ve got,’ said the doctor, tartly, and away he plunged into a sharp trot, with a cling-clang and a cloud of dust. And Puddock followed that ungracious leech, with a stare of gratitude and admiration, almost with a benediction. And his anxiety relieved, he and his principal prepared forthwith to provide real work for the surgeons.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ORDEAL BY BATTLE.

The chronicles of the small-sword and pistol are pregnant with horrid and absurd illustrations of certain great moral facts. Let them pass. A duel, we all know, is conceived in the spirit of ‘Punch and Judy’ — a farce of murder. Sterne’s gallant father expired, or near it, with the point of a small-sword sticking out two feet between his shoulders, all about a goose-pie. I often wondered what the precise quarrel was. But these tragedies smell all over of goose-pie. Why — oh, why — brave Captain Sterne, as with saucy, flashing knife and fork you sported with the outworks of that fated structure, was there no augur at thine elbow, with a shake of his wintry beard, to warn thee that the birds of fate — *thy* fate — sat vigilant under that festive mask of crust? Beware, it is Pandora’s pie! Madman! hold thy hand! The knife’s point that seems to thee about to glide through that pasty is palpably levelled at thine own windpipe! But this time Mephistopheles leaves the revellers to use their own cutlery; and now the pie is opened; and now the birds begin to sing! Come along, then to the Fifteen Acres, and let us see what will come of it all.

That flanking demi-bastion of the Magazine, crenelled for musketry, commands, with the aid of a couple of good field-glasses, an excellent and secret view of the arena on which the redoubted O’Flaherty and the grim Nutter were about to put their metal to the proof. General Chattesworth, who happened to have an appointment, as he told his sister at breakfast, in town about that hour, forgot it just as he reached the Magazine, gave his bridle to the groom, and stumped into the fortress, where he had a biscuit and a glass of sherry in the commandant’s little parlour, and forth the two cronies sallied mysteriously side by side; the commandant, Colonel Bligh, being remarkably tall, slim, and straight, with an austere, mulberry-coloured face; the general stout and stumpy, and smiling plentifully, short of breath, and double chinned, they got into the sanctum I have just mentioned.

I don’t apologise to my readers, English-born and bred, for assuming them to be acquainted with the chief features of the ‘Phœnix Park, near

Dublin. Irish scenery is now as accessible as Welsh. Let them study the old problem, not in blue books, but in the green and brown ones of our fields and heaths, and mountains. If Ireland be no more than a great capability and a beautiful landscape, faintly visible in the blue haze, even from your own headlands, and separated by hardly four hours of water, and a ten-shilling fare, from your jetties, it is your own shame, not ours, if a nation of bold speculators and indefatigable tourists leave it unexplored.

So I say, from this coigne of vantage, looking westward over the broad green level toward the thin smoke that rose from Chapelizod chimneys, lying so snugly in the lap of the hollow by the river, the famous Fifteen Acres, where so many heroes have measured swords, and so many bullies have bit the dust, was distinctly displayed in the near foreground. You all know the artillery butt. Well, that was the centre of a circular enclosure containing just fifteen acres, with broad entrances eastward and westward.

The old fellows knew very well where to look.

Father Roach was quite accidentally there, reading his breviary when the hostile parties came upon the ground — for except when an accident of this sort occurred, or the troops were being drilled, it was a sequestered spot enough — and he forthwith joined them, as usual, to reconcile the dread debate.

Somehow, I think his arguments were not altogether judicious.

'I don't ask particulars, my dear — I abominate all that concerns a quarrel; but Lieutenant O'Flaherty, jewel, supposin' the very worst — supposin', just for argument, that he has horse-whipped you —— .'

'An' who dar' suppose it?' glared O'Flaherty.

'Or, we'll take it that he spit in your face, honey. Well,' continued his reverence, not choosing to hear the shocking ejaculations which this hypothesis wrung from the lieutenant; 'what of that, my darlin'? Think of the indignities, insults, and disgraces that the blessed Saint Martellus suffered, without allowing, anything worse to cross his lips than an Ave Mary or a smile in resignation.'

'Ordher the priest off the ground, Sorr,' said O'Flaherty, lividly, to little Puddock, who was too busy with Mr. Mahony to hear him; and Roach had already transferred his pious offices to Nutter, who speedily flushed up and became, to all appearances, in his own way just as angry as O'Flaherty.

‘Lieutenant O’Flaherty, a word in your ear,’ once more droned the mellow voice of Father Roach; ‘you’re a young man, my dear, and here’s Lieutenant Puddock by your side, a young man too; I’m as ould, my honeys, as the two of you put together, an’ I advise you, for your good — don’t shed human blood — don’t even draw your swords — don’t, my darlins; don’t be led or said by them army-gentlemen, that’s always standin’ up for fightin’ because the leedies admire fightin’ men. They’ll call you cowards, polthroons, curs, sneaks, turn-tails — let them!’

‘There’s no standin’ this any longer, Puddock,’ said O’Flaherty, incensed indescribably by the odious names which his reverence was hypothetically accumulating; ‘if you want to see the fightin’, Father Roach —— .’

‘Apage, Sathanas!’ murmured his reverence, pettishly, raising his plump, blue chin, and dropping his eyelids with a shake of the head, and waving the back of his fat, red hand gently towards the speaker.

‘In that case, stay here, an’ look your full, an’ welcome, only don’t make a noise; behave like a Christian, an’ hould your tongue; but if you really hate fightin’, as you say — — ‘

Having reached this point in his address, but intending a good deal more, O’Flaherty suddenly stopped short, drew himself into a stooping posture, with a flush and a strange distortion, and his eyes fastened upon Father Roach with an unearthly glare for nearly two minutes, and seized Puddock upon the upper part of his arm with so awful a grip, in his great bony hand, that the gallant little gentleman piped out in a flurry of anguish —

‘O — O — O’Flaherty, Thir — *let* go my arm, Thir.’

O’Flaherty drew a long breath, uttered a short, deep groan, and wiping the moisture from his red forehead, and resuming a perpendicular position, was evidently trying to recover the lost thread of his discourse.

‘There’th dethidedly thomething the matter with you, Thir,’ said Puddock, anxiously, *sotto voce*, while he worked his injured arm’s a little at the shoulder.

‘You may say that,’ said O’Flaherty, very dismally, and, perhaps, a little bitterly.

‘And — and — and — you don’t mean to thay — why — eh?’ asked Puddock, uneasily.

‘I tell you what, Puddock — there’s no use in purtendin’ — the poison’s working — *that’s* what’s the matter,’ returned poor O’Flaherty, in what romance writers call ‘a hissing whisper.’

‘Good — merthiful — graciouth — Thir!’ ejaculated poor little Puddock, in a panic, and gazing up into the brawny fireworker’s face with a pallid fascination; indeed they both looked unpleasantly unlike the popular conception of heroes on the eve of battle.

‘But — but it can’t be — you forget Dr. Sturk and — oh, dear! — the antidote. It — I thay — it can’t *be*, Thir,’ said Puddock, rapidly.

‘It’s no use, now; but I shirked two or three spoonfuls, and I left some more in the bottom,’ said the gigantic O’Flaherty, with a gloomy sheepishness.

Puddock made an ejaculation — the only violent one recorded of him — and turning his back briskly upon his principal, actually walked several steps away, as if he intended to cut the whole concern. But such a measure was really not to be thought of.

‘O’Flaherty — Lieutenant — I won’t reproach you,’ began Puddock.

‘*Reproach* me! an’ who *poisoned* me, my tight little fellow?’ retorted the fireworker, savagely.

Puddock could only look at him, and then said, quite meekly —

‘Well, and my dear Thir, what on earth had we better do?’

‘Do,’ said O’Flaherty, ‘why isn’t it completely Hobson’s choice with us? What can we do but go through with it?’

The fact is, I may as well mention, lest the sensitive reader should be concerned for the gallant O’Flaherty, that the poison had very little to do with it, and the antidote a great deal. In fact, it was a reckless compound conceived in a cynical and angry spirit by Sturk, and as the fireworker afterwards declared, while expressing in excited language his wonder how Puddock (for he never suspected Sturk’s elixir) had contrived to compound such a poison— ‘The torture was such, my dear Madam, as fairly thranslated me into the purlieus of the other world.’

Nutter had already put off his coat and waistcoat, and appeared in a neat little black lutestring vest, with sleeves to it, which the elder officers of the R.I.A. remembered well in by-gone fencing matches.

’Tis a most *miserable* situation,’ said Puddock, in extreme distress.

‘Never mind,’ groaned O’Flaherty, grimly taking off his coat; ‘you’ll have *two* corpses to carry home with you; don’t you show the laste taste iv unaisiness, an’ I’ll not disgrace you, *if* I’m spared to see it out.’

And now preliminaries were quite adjusted; and Nutter, light and wiry, a good swordsman, though not young, stepped out with his vicious weapon in hand, and his eyes looking white and stony out of his dark face. A word or two to his armour-bearer, and a rapid gesture, right and left, and that magnificent squire spoke low to two or three of the surrounding officers, who forthwith bestirred themselves to keep back the crowd, and as it were to keep the ring unbroken. O'Flaherty took his sword, got his hand well into the hilt, poised the blade, shook himself up as it were, and made a feint or two and a parry in the air, and so began to advance, like Goliath, towards little Nutter.

'Now, Puddock, back him up — encourage your man,' said Devereux, who took a perverse pleasure in joking; 'tell him to flay the lump, splat him, divide him, and cut him in two pieces —— .

It was a custom of the corps to quiz Puddock about his cookery; but Puddock, I suppose, did not hear his last night's 'receipt' quoted, and he kept his eye upon his man, who had now got nearly within fencing distance of his adversary. But at this critical moment, O'Flaherty, much to Puddock's disgust, suddenly stopped, and got into the old stooping posture, making an appalling grimace in what looked like an endeavour to swallow, not only his under lip, but his chin also. Uttering a quivering, groan, he continued to stoop nearer to the earth, on which he finally actually sat down and hugged his knees close to his chest, holding his breath all the time till he was perfectly purple, and rocking himself this way and that.

The whole procedure was a mystery to everybody except the guilty Puddock, who changed colour, and in manifest perturbation, skipped to his side.

'Bleth me — bleth me — my dear O'Flaherty, he'th very ill — where ith the pain?'

'Is it "farced pain," Puddock, or "gammon pain?"' asked Devereux, with much concern.

Puddock's plump panic-stricken little face, and staring eyeballs, were approached close to the writhing features of his redoubted principal — as I think I have seen honest Sancho Panza's, in one of Tony Johannot's sketches, to that of the prostrate Knight of the Rueful Countenance.

'I wish to Heaven I had thwallowed it myself — it'th dreadful — what ith to be — are you eathier — I *think* you're eathier.'

I don't think O'Flaherty heard him. He only hugged his knees tighter, and slowly turned up his face, wrung into ten thousand horrid puckers, to the sky, till his chin stood as high as his forehead, with his teeth and eyes shut, and he uttered a sound like a half-stifled screech; and, indeed, looked very black and horrible.

Some of the spectators, rear-rank men, having but an imperfect view of the transaction, thought that O'Flaherty had been hideously run through the body by his solemn opponent, and swelled the general chorus of counsel and ejaculation, by all together advising cobwebs, brown-paper plugs, clergymen, brandy, and the like; but as none of these comforts were at hand, and nobody stirred, O'Flaherty was left to the resources of Nature.

Puddock threw his cocked hat upon the ground and stamped in a momentary frenzy.

'He'th *dying* — Devereux — Cluffe — he'th — I *tell* you, he'th dying;' and he was on the point of declaring himself O'Flaherty's murderer, and surrendering himself as such into the hands of anybody who would accept the custody of his person, when the recollection of his official position as poor O'Flaherty's second flashed upon him, and collecting with a grand effort, his wits and his graces —

'It'th totally impothible, gentlemen,' he said, with his most ceremonious bow; 'conthidering the awful condition of my printhipal — I — I have reathon to fear — in fact I know — Dr. Thturk has theen him — that he'th under the action of *poithon* — and it'th quite impractithable, gentlemen, that thith affair of honour can protheed at prethent;' and Puddock drew himself up peremptorily, and replaced his hat, which somebody had slipped into his hand, upon his round powdered head.

Mr. Mahony, though a magnificent gentleman, was, perhaps, a little stupid, and he mistook Puddock's agitation, and thought he was in a passion, and disposed to be offensive. He, therefore, with a marked and stern sort of elegance, replied —

'*Pison*, Sir, is a remarkably strong alpathet; it's language, Sir, which, if a gentleman uses at all, he's bound in justice, in shivalry, and in dacency to a generous adversary, to define with precision. Mr. Nutter is too well known to the best o'society, moving in a circle as he does, to require the panegyric of humble me. They drank together last night, they differed in opinion, that’s true, but fourteen clear hours has expired, and pison being mentioned — — ‘

‘Why, body o’ me! Sir,’ lisped Puddock, in fierce horror; ‘can you imagine for one moment, Sir, that I or any man living could suppose for an instant, that my respected friend, Mr. Nutter, to whom (a low bow to Nutter, returned by that gentleman) I have now the misfortune to be opposed, is capable — capable, Sir, of poisoning any living being — man, woman, or child; and to put an end, Sir, at once to all misapprehension upon this point, it was I — *I*, Sir — myself — who poisoned him, altogether accidentally, of course, by a valuable, but mismanaged receipt, this morning, Sir — you — you *see*, Mr. Nutter!’

Nutter, balked of his gentlemanlike satisfaction, stared with a horrified but somewhat foolish countenance from Puddock to O’Flaherty.

‘And now, Thir,’ pursued Puddock, addressing himself to Mr. Mahony, ‘if Mr. Nutter desires to postpone the combat, I consent; if not, I offer mythelf to maintain it inthead of my printhipal.’

And so he made another low bow, and stood bareheaded, hat in hand, with his right hand on his sword hilt.

‘Upon my honour, Captain Puddock, it’s precisely what I was going to propose myself, Sir,’ said Mahony, with great alacrity; ‘as the only way left us of getting honourably out of the great embarrassment in which we are placed by the premature *death*-struggles of your friend; for nothing, Mr. Puddock, but being *bonâ fide in articulo mortis*, can palliate his conduct.’

‘My dear Puddock,’ whispered Devereux, in his ear, ‘surely you would not kill Nutter to oblige two such brutes as these?’ indicating by a glance Nutter’s splendid second and the magnanimous O’Flaherty, who was still sitting speechless upon the ground.

‘Captain Puddock,’ pursued that mirror of courtesy, Mr. Patrick Mahony, of Muckafubble, who, by-the-bye, persisted in giving him his captaincy, may I enquire who’s *your* friend upon this unexpected turn of affairs?’

‘There’s no need, Sir,’ said Nutter, dryly and stoutly, ‘I would not hurt a hair of your head, Lieutenant Puddock.’

‘Do you hear him?’ panted O’Flaherty, for the first time articulate, and stung by the unfortunate phrase — it seemed fated that Nutter should not open his lips without making some allusion to human hair: ‘do you *hear* him, Puddock? Mr. Nutter — (he spoke with great difficulty, and in jerks)

— Sir — Mr. Nutter — you shall — ugh — you shall render a strict accow-ow-oh-im-m-m!'

The sound was smothered under his compressed lips, his face wrung itself again crimson with a hideous squeeze, and Puddock thought the moment of his dissolution was come, and almost wished it over.

'Don't try to speak — pray, Sir, don't — there — there, now,' urged Puddock, distractedly; but the injunction was unnecessary.

'Mr. Nutter,' said his second sulkily, 'I don't see anything to satisfy your outraged honour in the curious spectacle of that gentleman sitting on the ground making faces; we came here not to trifle, but, as I conceive, to dispatch business, Sir.'

'To dispatch that unfortunate gentleman, you mean, and that seems pretty well done to your hand,' said little Dr. Toole, bustling up from the coach where his instruments, lint, and plasters were deposited. 'What's it all, eh? — oh, Dr. *Sturk's* been with him, eh? Oh, ho, ho, ho!' and he laughed sarcastically, in an undertone, and shrugged, as he stooped down and took O'Flaherty's pulse in his fingers and thumb.

'I tell you what, Mr. a — a — a — Sir,' said Nutter, with a very dangerous look; 'I have had the honour of knowing Lieutenant Puddock since August, 1756; I won't hurt him, for I like and respect him; but, if fight I must, I'll fight *you*, Sir!'

'Since August, 1756?' repeated Mr. Mahony, with prompt surprise. 'Pooh! why didn't you mention that before? Why, Sir, he's an old friend, and you *could* not pleasantly ask him to volunteer to bare his waypon against the boosom of his friend. No, Sir, shivalry is the handmaid of Christian charity, and honour walks hand in hand with the human heart!'

With this noble sentiment he bowed and shook Nutter's cold, hard hand, and then Puddock's plump little white paw.

You are not to suppose that Pat Mahoney, of Muckafubble, was a poltroon; on the contrary, he had fought several shocking duels, and displayed a remarkable amount of savagery and coolness; but having made a character, he was satisfied therewith. They may talk of fighting for the fun of it, liking it, delighting in it; don't believe a word of it. We all hate it, and the hero is only he who hates it least.'

'Ugh, I can't stand it any longer; take me out of this, some of you,' said O'Flaherty, wiping the damp from his red face. 'I don't think there's ten minutes' life in me.'

'*De profundis conclamavi*,' murmured fat father Roach; 'lean upon me, Sir.'

'And me,' said little Toole.

'For the benefit of your poor soul, my honey, just say you forgive Mr. Nutter before you leave the field,' said the priest quite sincerely.

'Anything at all, Father Roach,' replied the sufferer; 'only don't bother me.'

'You forgive him then, aroon?' said the priest.

'Och, bother! forgive him, to be sure I do. *That's* supposin', mind, I don't recover; but if I *do* —— .'

'Och, pacible, pacible, my son,' said Father Roach, patting his arm, and soothing him with his voice. It was the phrase he used to address to his nag, Brian O'Lynn, when Brian had too much oats, and was disagreeably playful. 'Nansinse, now, can't you be pacible — pacible my son — there now, pacible, pacible.'

Upon his two supporters, and followed by his little second, this towering sufferer was helped, and tumbled into the coach, into which Puddock, Toole, and the priest, who was curious to see O'Flaherty's last moments, all followed; and they drove at a wild canter — for the coachman was 'hearty' — over the green grass, and toward Chapelizod, though Toole broke the check-string without producing any effect, down the hill, quite frightfully, and were all within an ace of being capsized. But ultimately they reached, in various states of mind, but safely enough, O'Flaherty's lodgings.

Here the gigantic invalid, who had suffered another paroxysm on the way, was slowly assisted to the ground by his awestruck and curious friends, and entered the house with a groan, and roared for Judy Carroll with a curse, and invoked Jerome, the *cokang modate*, with horrible vociferation. And as among the hushed exhortations of the good priest, Toole and Puddock, he mounted the stairs, he took occasion over the banister, in stentorian tones, to proclaim to the household his own awful situation, and the imminent approach of the moment of his dissolution.

CHAPTER XVII.

LIEUTENANT PUDDOCK RECEIVES AN INVITATION AND A RAP OVER THE KNUCKLES.

The old gentlemen, from their peepholes in the Magazine, watched the progress of this remarkable affair of honour, as well as they could, with the aid of their field-glasses, and through an interposing crowd.

‘By Jupiter, Sir, he’s through him!’ said Colonel Bligh, when he saw O’Flaherty go down.

‘So he is, by George!’ replied General Chattesworth; ‘but, eh, which is he?’

‘The *long* fellow,’ said Bligh.

‘O’Flaherty? — hey! — no, by George! — though so it is — there’s work in Frank Nutter yet, by Jove,’ said the general, poking his glass and his fat face an inch or two nearer.

‘Quick work, general!’ said Bligh.

‘Devilish,’ replied the general.

The two worthies never moved their glasses; as each, on his inquisitive face, wore the grim, wickedish, half-smile, with which an old stager recalls, in the prowess of his juniors, the pleasant devilment of his own youth.

‘The cool, old hand, Sir, too much for your new fireworker,’ remarked Bligh, cynically.

‘Tut, Sir, this O’Flaherty has not been three weeks among us,’ spluttered out the general, who was woundily jealous of the honour of his corps. ‘There are lads among our fireworkers who would whip Nutter through the liver while you’d count ten!’

‘They’re removing the — the — (a long pause) the *body*, eh?’ said Bligh. ‘Hey! no, see, by George, he’s walking but he’s *hurt*.’

‘I’m mighty well pleased it’s no worse, Sir,’ said the general, honestly glad.

‘They’re helping him into the coach — long legs the fellow’s got,’ remarked Bligh.

‘These — things — Sir — are — are — very — un — pleasant,’ said the general, adjusting the focus of the glass, and speaking slowly — though no Spanish dandy ever relished a bull-fight more than he an affair of the kind. He and old Bligh had witnessed no less than five — not counting this — in which officers of the R.I.A. were principal performers, from the same sung post of observation. The general, indeed, was conventionally supposed to know nothing of them, and to reprobate the practice itself with his whole soul. But somehow, when an affair of the sort came off on the Fifteen Acres, he always happened to drop in, at the proper moment, upon his old crony, the colonel, and they sauntered into the demi-bastion together, and quietly saw what was to be seen. It was Miss Becky Chattesworth who involved the poor general in this hypocrisy. It was not exactly her money; it was her force of will and unflinching audacity that established her control over an easy, harmless, plastic old gentleman.

‘They are unpleasant — devilish unpleasant — somewhere in the body, I think, hey? they’re stooping again, stooping again — eh? — *plaguy* unpleasant, Sir (the general was thinking how Miss Becky’s tongue would wag, and what she might not even *do*, if O’Flaherty died). Ha! on they go again, and a — Puddock — getting in — and that’s Toole. He’s not so much hurt — eh? He helped himself a good deal, you saw; but (taking heart of grace) when a quarrel does occur, Sir, I believe, after all, ’tis better off the stomach at once — a few passes — you know — or the crack of a pistol — who’s that got in — the priest — hey? by George!’

‘Awkward if he dies a Papist,’ said cynical old Bligh — the R.I.A. were Protestant by constitution.

‘That never happens in our corps, Sir,’ said the general, haughtily; ‘but, as I say, when a quarrel — does — occur — Sir — there, they’re off at last; when it does occur — I say — heyday! what a thundering pace! a gallop, by George! that don’t look well (a pause) — and — and — a — about what you were saying — you know he *couldn’t* die a Papist in our corps — no one does — no one ever *did* — it would be, you know — it would be a *trick*, Sir, and O’Flaherty’s a gentleman; it *could* not be — (he was thinking of Miss Becky again — she was so fierce on the Gunpowder Plot, the rising of 1642, and Jesuits in general, and he went on a little flustered); but then, Sir, as I was saying, though the thing has its uses —— .’

‘I’d like to know where society’d be without it,’ interposed Bligh, with a sneer.

‘Though it may have its uses, Sir; it’s not a thing one can sit down and say is *right* — we *can’t*!’

‘I’ve heard your sister, Miss Becky, speak strongly on that point, too,’said Bligh.

‘Ah! I dare say,’ said the general, quite innocently, an coughing a little. This was a sore point with the henpecked warrior, and the grim scarcecrow by his side knew it, and grinned through his telescope; ‘and you see — I say — eh! I think they’re breaking up, a — and — I say — I — it seems all over — eh — and so, dear colonel, I must take my leave, and —— .’

And after a lingering look, he shut up his glass, and walking thoughtfully back with his friend, said suddenly —

‘And, now I think of it — it could not be *that* — Puddock, you know, would not suffer the priest to sit in the same coach with such a design — Puddock’s a good officer, eh! and knows his duty.’

A few hours afterwards, General Chattesworth, having just dismounted outside the Artillery barracks, to his surprise, met Puddock and O’Flaherty walking leisurely in the street of Chapelizod. O’Flaherty looked pale and shaky, and rather wild; and the general returned his salute, looking deuced hard at him, and wondering all the time in what part of his body (in his phrase) ‘he had got it;’ and how the plague the doctors had put him so soon on his legs again.

‘Ha, Lieutenant Puddock,’ with a smile, which Puddock thought significant— ‘give you good-evening, Sir. Dr. Toole anywhere about, or have you seen Sturk?’

‘No, he had not.’

The general wanted to hear by accident, or in confidence, all about it; and having engaged Puddock in talk, that officer followed by his side.

‘I should be glad of the honour of your company, Lieutenant Puddock, to dinner this evening — Sturk comes, and Captain Cluffe, and this wonderful Mr. Dangerfield too, of whom we all heard so much at mess, at five o’clock, if the invitation’s not too late.’

The lieutenant acknowledged and accepted, with a blush and a very low bow, his commanding officer’s hospitality; in fact, there was a *tendre* in the direction of Belmont, and little Puddock had inscribed in his private book many charming stanzas of various lengths and structures, in which the name of ‘Gertrude’ was of frequent recurrence.

‘And — a — I say, Puddock — Lieutenant O’Flaherty, I thought — I — I thought, d’ye see, just now, eh? (he looked inquisitively, but there was no answer); I thought, I say, he looked devilish out of sorts, is he — a — *ill*?’

‘He *was very* ill, indeed, this afternoon, general; a sudden attack — — ‘

The general looked quickly at Puddock’s plump, consequential face; but there was no further light in it. ‘He *was* hurt then, I knew it’ — he thought — ‘who’s attending him — and why is he out — and was it a flesh-wound — or where was it?’ all these questions silently, but vehemently, solicited an answer — and he repeated the last aloud, in a careless sort of way.

‘And — a — Lieutenant Puddock, you were saying — a — tell me — now — *where* was it?’

‘In the park, general,’ said Puddock, in perfect good faith.

‘Eh? ah! in the park, was it? but I want to know, you know, what part of the body — d’ye see — the shoulder — or? — — ‘

‘The duodenum, Dr. Toole called it — just here, general,’ and he pressed his fingers to what is vulgarly known as the ‘pit’ of his stomach.

‘What, Sir, do you mean to say the pit of his stomach?’ said the general, with more horror and indignation than he often showed.

‘Yes, just about that point, general, and the pain was very violent indeed,’ answered Puddock, looking with a puzzled stare at the general’s stern and horrified countenance — an officer might have a pain in his stomach, he thought, without exciting all that emotion. Had he heard of the poison, and did he know more of the working of such things than, perhaps, the doctors did?

‘And what in the name of Bedlam, Sir, does he mean by walking about the town with a hole through his — his what’s his name? I’m hanged but I’ll place him under arrest this moment,’ the general thundered, and his little eyes swept the perspective this way and that, as if they would leap from their sockets, in search of the reckless O’Flaherty. ‘Where’s the adjutant, Sir?’ he bellowed with a crimson scowl and a stamp, to the unoffending sentry.

‘That’s the way to make him lie quiet, and keep his bed till he heals, Sir.’

Puddock explained, and the storm subsided, rumbling off in half a dozen testy assertions on the general’s part that he, Puddock, had distinctly used the word ‘*wounded*,’ and now and then renewing faintly, in a muttered explosion, on the troubles and worries of his command, and a great many ‘pshaws!’ and several fits of coughing, for the general continued out of breath for some time. He had showed his cards, however, and so, in a dignified disconcerted sort of way, he told Puddock that he had heard something about O’Flaherty’s having got most improperly into a foolish quarrel, and having met Nutter that afternoon, and for a moment feared he might have been hurt; and then came enquiries about Nutter, and there appeared to have been no one hurt, and yet the parties on the ground — and no fighting — and yet no reconciliation — and, in fact, the general was so puzzled with this conundrum, and so curious, that he was very near calling after Puddock, when they parted at the bridge, and making him entertain him, at some cost of consistency, with the whole story.

So Puddock — his head full of delicious visions — marched homeward — to powder and perfume, and otherwise equip for that banquet of the gods, of which he was to partake at five o’clock, and just as he turned the corner at ‘The Phœnix,’ who should he behold, sailing down the Dublin road from the King’s House, with a grand powdered footman, bearing his cane of office, and a great bouquet behind her, and Gertrude Chattesworth by her side, but the splendid and formidable Aunt Becky, who had just been paying her compliments to old Mrs. Colonel Stafford, from whom she had heard all about the duel. So as Puddock’s fat cheeks grew pink at sight of Miss Gertrude, all Aunt Becky’s colour flushed into her face, as her keen eye pierced the unconscious lieutenant from afar off, and chin and nose high in air, her mouth just a little tucked in, as it were, at one corner — a certain sign of coming storm — an angry hectic in each cheek, a fierce flirt of her fan, and two or three short sniffs that betokened mischief — she quickened her pace, leaving her niece a good way in the rear, in her haste to engage the enemy. Before she came up she commenced the action at a long range, and very abruptly — for an effective rhetorician of Aunt Becky’s sort, jumps at once, like a good epic poet, *in medias res*; and as Nutter, who, like all her friends in turn, experienced once or twice ‘a taste of her quality,’ observed to his wife, ‘by Jove, that woman says things for which she ought to be put in the watch-house.’ So now and here she maintained her reputation —

‘You ought to be flogged, Sir; yes,’ she insisted, answering Puddock’s bewildered stare, ‘tied up to the halberts and flogged.’

Aunt Rebecca was accompanied by at least half a dozen lapdogs, and those intelligent brutes, aware of his disgrace, beset poor Puddock’s legs with a furious vociferation.

‘Madam,’ said he, his ears tingling, and making a prodigious low bow; ‘commissioned officers are never flogged.’

‘So much the worse for the service, Sir; and the sooner they abolish that anomalous distinction the better. I’d have them begin, Sir, with you, and your accomplice in murder, Lieutenant O’Flaherty.’

‘Madam! your most obedient humble servant,’ said Puddock, with another bow, still more ceremonious, flushing up intensely to the very roots of his powdered hair, and feeling in his swelling heart that all the generals of all the armies of Europe dare not have held such language to him.

‘Good-evening, Sir,’ said Aunt Becky, with an energetic toss of her head, having discharged her shot; and with an averted countenance, and in high disdain, she swept grandly on, quite forgetting her niece, who said a pleasant word or two to Puddock as she passed, and smiled so kindly, and seemed so entirely unconscious of his mortification, that he was quite consoled, and on the whole was made happy and elated by the rencontre, and went home to his washballs and perfumes in a hopeful and radiant, though somewhat excited state.

Indeed, the little lieutenant knew that kind-hearted termagant, Aunt Becky, too well, to be long cast down or even flurried by her onset. When the same little Puddock, about a year ago, had that ugly attack of pleurisy, and was so low and so long about recovering, and so puny and fastidious in appetite, she treated him as kindly as if he were her own son, in the matter of jellies, strong soups, and curious light wines, and had afterwards lent him some good books which the little lieutenant had read through, like a man of honour as he was. And, indeed, what specially piqued Aunt Becky’s resentment just now was, that having had, about that time, a good deal of talk with Puddock upon the particular subject of duelling, he had, as she thought, taken very kindly to her way of thinking; and she had a dozen times in the last month, cited Puddock to the general; and so his public defection was highly mortifying and intolerable.

So Puddock, in a not unpleasant fuss and excitement, sat down in his dressing-gown before the glass; and while Moore the barber, with tongs, powder, and pomade, repaired the dilapidations of the day, he contemplated his own plump face, not altogether unapprovingly, and thought with a charming anticipation of the adventures of the approaching evening.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RELATING HOW THE GENTLEMEN SAT OVER THEIR CLARET, AND HOW DR. STURK SAW A FACE.

Puddock drove up the avenue of gentlemanlike old poplars, and over the little bridge, and under the high-arched bowers of elms, walled up at either side with evergreens, and so into the courtyard of Belmont. Three sides of a parellelogram, the white old house being the largest, and offices white and in keeping, but overgrown with ivy, and opening to yards of their own on the other sides, facing one another at the flanks, and in front a straight Dutch-like moat, with a stone balustrade running all along from the garden to the bridge, with great stone flower pots set at intervals, the shrubs and flowers of which associated themselves in his thoughts with beautiful Gertrude Chattesworth, and so were wonderfully bright and fragrant. And there were two swans upon the water, and several peacocks marching dandily in the courtyard; and a grand old Irish dog, with a great collar, and a Celtic inscription, dreaming on the steps in the evening sun.

It was always pleasant to dine at Belmont. Old General Chattesworth was so genuinely hospitable and so really glad to see you, and so hilarious himself, and so enjoying. A sage or a scholar, perhaps, might not have found a great deal in him. Most of his stories had been heard before. Some of them, I am led to believe, had even been printed. But they were not very long, and he had a good natured word and a cordial smile for everybody; and he had a good cook, and explained his dishes to those beside him, and used sometimes to toddle out himself to the cellar in search of a curious bon-bouche; and of nearly every bin in it he had a little anecdote or a pedigree to relate. And his laugh was frequent and hearty, and somehow the room and all in it felt the influence of his presence like the glow, and cheer, and crackle of a bright Christmas fire.

Miss Becky Chattesworth, very stately in a fine brocade, and a great deal of point lace, received Puddock very loftily, and only touched his hand with the tips of her fingers. It was plain he was not yet taken into favour. When he entered the drawingroom, that handsome stranger, with the large eyes, so wonderfully elegant and easy in the puce-coloured cut velvet — Mr. Mervyn — was leaning upon the high back of a chair, and talking agreeably, as it seemed, to Miss Gertrude. He had a shake of the hand and a fashionable greeting from stout, dandified Captain Cluffe, who was by no means so young as he would be supposed, and made up industriously and braced what he called his waist, with great fortitude, and indeed sometimes looked half-stifled, in spite of his smile and his swagger. Sturk, leaning at the window with his shoulders to the wall, beckoned Puddock gruffly, and cross-examined him in an undertone as to the issue of O'Flaherty's case. Of course he knew all about the duel, but the corps also knew that Sturk would not attend on the ground in any affair where the Royal Irish Artillery were concerned, and therefore they could bring what doctor they pleased to the field without an affront.

'And see, my buck,' said Sturk, winding up rather savagely with a sneer; 'you've got out of that scrape, you and your *patient*, by a piece of good luck that's not like to happen twice over; so take my advice, and cut that leaf out of your — your — grandmother's cookery book, and light your pipe with it.'

This slight way of treating both his book and his ancestors nettled little Puddock — who never himself took a liberty, and expected similar treatment — but he knew Sturk, the nature of the beast, and he only bowed grandly, and went to pay his respects to cowed, kindly, querulous little Mrs. Sturk, at the other end of the room. An elderly gentleman, with a rather white face, a high forehead and grim look, was chatting briskly with her; and Puddock, the moment his eye lighted on the stranger, felt that there was something remarkable about him. Taken in detail, indeed, he was insignificant. He was dressed as quietly as the style of that day would allow, yet in his toilet, there was entire ease and even a latent air of fashion. He wore his own hair; and though there was a little powder upon it and upon his coat collar, it was perfectly white, frizzed out a little at the sides, and gathered into a bag behind. The stranger rose and bowed as Puddock approached the lady, and the lieutenant had a nearer view of his great white forehead — his only good feature — and the pair of silver spectacles that glimmered under it, and his small hooked nose and stern mouth.

''Tis a mean countenance,' said the general, talking him over when the company had dispersed.

‘No countenance,’ said Miss Becky decisively, ‘*could* be mean with such a forehead.’

The fact is — if they had cared to analyse — the features, taken separately, with that one exception, were insignificant; but the face was singular, with its strange pallor, its intellectual mastery, and sarcastic decision.

The general, who had accidentally omitted the ceremony — in those days essential — now strutted up to introduce them.

‘Mr. Dangerfield, will you permit me to present my good friend and officer Lieutenant Puddock. Lieutenant Puddock, Mr Dangerfield — Mr. Dangerfield, Lieutenant Puddock.’

And there was a great deal of pretty bowing, and each was the other’s ‘most obedient,’ and declared himself honoured; and the conventional parenthesis ended, things returned to their former course.

Puddock only perceived that Mrs. Sturk was giving Dangerfield a rambling sort of account of the people of Chapelizod. Dangerfield, to do him justice, listened attentively. In fact, he had led her upon that particular theme, and as easily and cleverly kept her close to the subject. For he was not a general to manœuvre without knowing first how the ground lay, and had an active, enquiring mind, in which he made all sorts of little notes.

So Mrs. Sturk prattled on, to her own and Mr. Dangerfield’s content, for she was garrulous when not under the eye of her lord, and always gentle, though given to lamentation, having commonly many small hardships to mention. So, quite without malice or retention, she poured out the gossip of the town, but not its scandal. Indeed, she was a very harmless, and rather sweet, though dolorous little body, and was very fond of children, especially her own, who would have been ruined were it not that they quailed as much as she did before Sturk, on whom she looked as by far the cleverest and most awful mortal then extant, and never doubted that the world thought so too. For the rest, she preserved her dresses, which were not amiss, for an interminable time, her sheets were always well aired, her maids often saucy, and she often in tears, but Sturk’s lace and fine-linen were always forthcoming in exemplary order; she rehearsed the catechism with the children, and loved Dr. Walsingham heartily, and made more raspberry jam than any other woman of her means in Chapelizod, except, perhaps, Mrs. Nutter, between whom and herself there were points of resemblance, but something as nearly a feud as could subsist between their harmless natures. Each believed the other matched with a bold bad man, who was always scheming something — they never quite understood what — against her own peerless lord; each on seeing the other, hoping that Heaven would defend the right and change the hearts of her enemies, or, at all events confound their politics; and each, with a sort of awful second-sight, when they viewed one another across the street, beholding her neighbour draped in a dark film of thundercloud, and with a sheaf of pale lightning, instead of a fan flickering in her hand.

When they came down to dinner, the gallant Captain Cluffe contrived to seat himself beside Aunt Becky, to whom the rogue commended himself by making a corner on his chair, next hers, for that odious greedy little brute 'Fancy,' and by a hundred other adroit and amiable attentions. And having a perfect acquaintance with all her weak points — as everybody had who lived long in Chapelizod — he had no difficulty in finding topics to interest her, and in conversing acceptably thereupon. And, indeed, whenever he was mentioned for some time after, she used to remark, that Captain Cluffe was a very conversable and worthy young (!) man.

In truth, that dinner went swiftly and pleasantly over for many of the guests. Gertrude Chattesworth was placed between the enamoured Puddock and the large-eyed, handsome, mysterious Mervyn. Of course, the hour flew with light and roseate wings for him. Little Puddock was in great force, and chatted with energy, and his theatrical lore, and his oddities, made him not unamusing. So she smiled on him more than usual, to make amends for the frowns of the higher powers, and he was as happy as a prince and as proud as a peacock, and quite tipsy with his success.

It is not always easy to know what young ladies like best or least, or quite what they are driving at; and Cluffe, from the other side of the table, thought, though Puddock *was* an agreeable fellow, and exerting himself uncommonly (for Cluffe, like other men not deep in the *literæ humaniores*, had a sort of veneration for 'book learning,' under which category he placed Puddock's endless odds and ends of play lore, and viewed the little lieutenant himself accordingly with some awe as a man of parts and a scholar, and prodigiously admired his verses, which he only half understood); he fancied, I say, although Puddock was unusually entertaining, that Miss Gertrude would have been well content to exchange him for the wooden lay-figure on which she hung her draperies when she sketched, which might have worn his uniform and filled his chair, and spared her his agreeable conversation, and which had eyes and saw not, and ears and heard not.

In short, the cunning fellow fancied he saw, by many small signs, a very decided preference on her part for the handsome and melancholy, but evidently eloquent stranger. Like other cunning fellows, however, Cluffe was not always right; and right or wrong, in his own illusions, if such they were, little Puddock was, for the time, substantially blessed.

The plump and happy lieutenant, when the ladies had flown away to the drawingroom and their small teacups, waxed silent and sentimental, but being a generous rival, and feeling that he could afford it, made a little effort, and engaged Mervyn in talk, and found him pleasantly versed in many things of which he knew little, and especially in the Continental stage and drama, upon which Puddock heard him greedily; and the general's bustling talk helped to keep the company merry, and he treated them to a bottle of the identical sack of which his own father's wedding posset had been compounded! Dangerfield, in a rather harsh voice, but agreeably and intelligently withal, told some rather pleasant stories about old wines and curious wine fanciers; and Cluffe and Puddock, who often sang together, being called on by the general, chanted a duet rather prettily, though neither, separately, had much of a voice. And the incorrigible Puddock, apropos of a piece of a whale once eaten by Dangerfield, after his wont, related a wonderful receipt— 'a weaver surprised.' The weaver turned out to be a fish, and the 'surprising' was the popping him out of ice into boiling water, with after details, which made the old general shake and laugh till tears bedewed his honest cheeks. And Mervyn and Dangerfield, as much surprised as the weaver, both looked, each in his own way, a little curiously at the young warrior who possessed this remarkable knowledge.

And the claret, like the general's other wines, was very good, and Dangerfield said a stern word or two in its praise, and guessed its vintage, to his host's great elation, who, with Lord Castlemallard, began to think Dangerfield a very wonderful man.

Dr. Sturk alone sipped his claret silently; looking thoughtfully a good deal at Dangerfield over the way, and when spoken to, seemed to waken up, but dropped out of the conversation again; though this was odd, for he had intended giving Dangerfield a bit of his mind as to what might be made of the Castlemallard estates, and by implication letting in some light upon Nutter's mismanagement.

When Dr. Sturk had come into the drawingroom before dinner, Dangerfield was turning over a portfolio in the shade beyond the window, and the evening sun was shining strongly in his own face; so that during the ceremony of introduction he had seen next to nothing of him, and then sauntered away to the bow window at the other end, where the ladies were assembled, to make his obeisance.

But at the dinner-table, he was placed directly opposite, with the advantage of a very distinct view; and the face, relieved against the dark stamped leather hangings on the wall, stood out like a sharply-painted portrait, and produced an odd and unpleasant effect upon Sturk, who could not help puzzling himself then, and for a long time after, with unavailing speculations about him.

The grim white man opposite did not appear to trouble his head about Sturk. He eat his dinner energetically, chatted laconically, but rather pleasantly. Sturk thought he might be eight-and-forty, or perhaps six or seven-and-fifty — it was a face without a date. He went over all his points, insignificant features, high forehead, stern countenance, abruptly silent, abruptly speaking, spectacles, harsh voice, harsher laugh, something sinister perhaps, and used for the most part when the joking or the story had a flavour of the sarcastic and the devilish. The image, as a whole, seemed to Sturk to fill in the outlines of a recollection, which yet was *not* a recollection. He could not seize it; it was a decidedly unpleasant impression of having seen him before, but where he could not bring to mind. 'He got me into some confounded trouble some time or other,' thought Sturk, in his uneasy dream; 'the sight of him is like a thump in my stomach. Was he the sheriff's deputy at Chester, when that rascally Jew-tailor followed me? Dangerfield — Dangerfield — Dangerfield — no; or could it be that row at Taunton? or the custom-house officer — let me see — 1751; no, he was a taller man — yes, I remember him; it is *not* he. Or was he at Dick Luscome's duel?' and he lay awake half the night thinking of him; for he was not only a puzzle, but there was a sort of suspicion of danger and he knew not what, throbbing in his soul whenever his reverie conjured up that impenetrable, white scoffing face.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN WHICH THE GENTLEMEN FOLLOW THE LADIES.

Having had as much claret as they cared for, the gentlemen fluttered gaily into the drawingroom, and Puddock, who made up to Miss Gertrude, and had just started afresh, and in a rather more sentimental vein, was a good deal scandalised, and put out by the general's reciting with jolly emphasis, and calling thereto his daughter's special attention, his receipt for 'surprising a weaver,' which he embellished with two or three burlesque improvements of his own, which Puddock, amidst his blushes and confusion, allowed to pass without a protest. Aunt Rebecca was the only person present who pointedly refused to laugh; and with a slight shudder and momentary elevation of her eyes, said, 'wicked and unnatural cruelty!' at which sentiment Puddock used his pockethandkerchief in rather an agitated manner.

''Tis a thing I've never done myself — that is, I've never seen it done,' said Little Puddock, suffused with blushes, as he pleaded his cause at the bar of humanity — for those were the days of Howard, and the fair sex had taken up the philanthropist. 'The — the — receipt— 'tis, you see, a thing I happened to meet — and — and just read it in the — in a book — and the — I — a — — '

Aunt Becky, with her shoulders raised in a shudder, and an agonised and peremptory 'there, there, *there*,' moved out of hearing in dignified disgust, to the general's high entertainment, who enjoyed her assaults upon innocent Puddock, and indeed took her attacks upon himself, when executed with moderation, hilariously enough — a misplaced goodhumour which never failed to fire Aunt Becky's just resentment.

Indeed, the general was so tickled with this joke that he kept it going for the rest of the evening, by sly allusions and mischievous puns. As for instance, at supper, when Aunt Rebecca was deploring the miserable depression of the silk manufacture, and the distress of the poor Protestant artisans of the Liberty, the general, with a solemn wink at Puddock, and to that officer's terror, came out with —

‘Yet, who knows, Lieutenant Puddock, but the weavers, poor fellows, may be surprised, you know, by a sudden order from the Court, as happened last year.’

But Aunt Rebecca only raised her eyebrows, and, with a slight toss of her head, looked sternly at a cold fowl on the other side. But, from some cause or other — perhaps it was Miss Gertrude’s rebellion in treating the outlawed Puddock with special civility that evening, Miss Becky’s asperity seemed to acquire edge and venom as time proceeded. But Puddock rallied quickly. He was on the whole very happy, and did not grudge Mervyn his share of the talk, though he heard him ask leave to send Miss Gertrude Chattesworth a portfolio of his drawings made in Venice, to look over, which she with a smile accepted — and at supper, Puddock, at the general’s instigation, gave them a solo, which went off pretty well, and, as they stood about the fire after it, on a similar pressure, an imitation of Barry in Othello; and upon this, Miss Becky, who was a furious partisan of Smock-alley Theatre and Mossop against Barry, Woodward, and the Crow-street playhouse, went off again. Indeed, this was a feud which just then divided the ladies of all Dublin, and the greater part of the country, with uncommon acrimony.

‘Crow-street was set up,’ she harangued, ‘to ruin the old house in the spirit of covetousness, *you* say’ (Puddock had not said a word on the subject;) ‘well, covetousness, we have good authority for saying, is idolatry — nothing less — *idolatry*, Sir, — you need not stare.’ (Puddock certainly did stare.) ‘I suppose you *once* read your Bible, Sir, but every sensible man, woman, child, and infant, Sir, in the kingdom, knows it was malice; and malice, Holy Writ says, is *murder* — but I forgot, that’s perhaps no very great objection with Lieutenant Puddock.’

And little Puddock flushed up, and his round eyes grew rounder and rounder, as she proceeded, every moment; and he did not know what to say — for it had not struck him before that Messrs. Barry’s and Woodward’s theatrical venture might be viewed in the light of idolatry or murder. So dumfounded as he was, he took half of Lord Chesterfield’s advice in such cases, that is, he forgot the smile, but he made a very low bow, and, with this submission, the combat (*si rixa est*) subsided.

Dangerfield had gone away some time — so had Mervyn — Sturk and his wife went next, and Cluffe and Puddock, who lingered as long as was decent, at last took leave. The plump lieutenant went away very happy, notwithstanding the two or three little rubs he had met with, and a good deal more in love than ever. And he and his companion were both thoughtful, and the walk home was quite silent, though very pleasant.

Cluffe was giving shape mentally to his designs upon Miss Rebecca's £20,000 and savings. He knew she had had high offers in her young days and refused; but those were past and gone — and gray hairs bring wisdom — and women grow more practicable as the time for action dwindles — and she was just the woman to take a fancy — and 'once the maggot bit,' to go any honest length to make it fact. And Cluffe knew that he had the field to himself, and that he was a well-made, handsome, agreeable officer — not so young as to make the thing absurd, yet young enough to inspire the right sort of feeling. To be sure, there were a few things to be weighed. She was, perhaps — well, she *was* eccentric. She had troublesome pets and pastimes — he knew them all — was well stricken in years, and had a will of her own — that was all. But, then, on the other side was the money — a great and agreeable arithmetical fact not to be shaken — and she could be well-bred when she liked, and a self-possessed, dignified lady, who could sail about a room, and courtesy, and manage her fan, and lead the conversation, and do the honours, as Mrs. Cluffe, with a certain air of *haut ton*, and in an imposing way, to Cluffe's entire content, who liked the idea of overawing his peers.

And the two warriors, side by side, marched over the bridge, in the starlight, and both by common consent, halted silently, and wheeled up to the battlement; and Puddock puffed a complacent little sigh up the river toward Belmont; and Cluffe was a good deal interested in the subject of his contemplation, and in fact, the more he thought of it, the better he liked it.

And they stood, each in his reverie, looking over the battlement toward Belmont, and hearing the hushed roll of the river, and seeing nothing but the deep blue, and the stars, and the black outline of the trees that overhung the bridge, until the enamoured Cluffe, who liked his comforts, and knew what gout was, felt the chill air, and remembered suddenly that they had stopped, and ought to be in motion toward their beds, and so he shook up Puddock, and they started anew, and parted just at the Phœnix, shaking hands heartily, like two men who had just done a good stroke of business together.

CHAPTER XX.

IN WHICH MR. DANGERFIELD VISITS THE CHURCH OF CHAPELIZOD, AND ZEKIEL IRONS GOES A FISHING.

Early next morning Lord Castlemallard, Dangerfield, and Nutter, rode into Chapelizod, plaguy dusty, having already made the circuit of that portion of his property which lay west of the town. They had poked into the new mills and the old mills, and contemplated the quarries, and lime-kilns, and talked with Doyle about his holding, and walked over the two vacant farms, and I know not all besides. And away trotted his lordship to his breakfast in town. And Dangerfield seeing the church door open, dismounted and walked in, and Nutter did likewise.

Bob Martin was up in the gallery, I suppose, doing some good, and making a considerable knocking here and there in the pews, and walking slowly with creaking shoes. Zekiel Irons, the clerk, was down below about his business, at the communion table at the far end, lean, blue-chinned, thin-lipped, stooping over his quarto prayer books, and gliding about without noise, reverent and sinister. When they came in, Nutter led the way to Lord Castlemallard's pew, which brought them up pretty near to the spot where grave Mr. Irons was prowling serenely. The pew would soon want new flooring, Mr. Dangerfield thought, and the Castlemallard arms and supporters, a rather dingy piece of vainglory, overhanging the main seat on the wall, would be nothing the worse of a little fresh gilding and paint.

'There was a claim — eh — to one foot nine inches off the eastern end of the pew, on the part of — of the family — at Inchicore, I think they call it,' said Dangerfield, laying his riding-whip like a rule along the top to help his imagination— 'Hey — that would spoil the pew.'

'The claim's settled, and Mr. Langley goes to the other side of the aisle,' said Nutter, nodding to Irons, who came up, and laid his long clay-coloured fingers on the top of the pew door, and one long, thin foot on the first step, and with half-closed eyes, and a half bow, he awaited their pleasure.

'The Langley family had *this* pew,' said Dangerfield, with a side nod to that next his lordship's.

‘Yes, Sir,’ said Irons, with the same immutable semblance of a smile, and raising neither his head nor his eyes.

‘And who’s got it now?’

‘His reverence, Dr. Walsingham.’

And so it came out, that having purchased Salmonfalls, the rector had compromised the territorial war that was on the point of breaking out among his parishioners, by exchanging with that old coxcomb Langley, the great square pew over the way, that belonged to that house, for the queer little crib in which the tenant of Inchicore had hitherto sat in state; and so there was peace, if not good will, in the church.

‘Hey — let’s see it,’ said Dangerfield, crossing the aisle, with Irons at his heels, for he was a man that saw everything for himself, that ever so remotely concerned him or his business.

‘We buried Lord — — ‘ (and the title he spoke very low) ‘in the vault here, just under where you stand, on Monday last, by night,’ said Irons, very gently and grimly, as he stood behind Dangerfield.

A faint galvanic thrill shot up through the flagging and his firmly planted foot to his brain, as though something said, ‘Ay, here I am!’

‘Oh! indeed?’ said Dangerfield, dryly, making a little nod, and raising his eyebrows, and just moving a little a one side— ‘’Twas a nasty affair.’

He looked up, with his hands in his breeches’ pockets, and read a mural tablet, whistling scarce audibly the while. It was not reverent, but he was a gentleman; and the clerk standing behind him, retained his quiet posture, and that smile, that yet was not a smile, but a sort of reflected light — was it patience, or was it secret ridicule? — you could not tell: and it never changed, and somehow it was provoking.

‘And some persons, I believe, had an unpleasant duty to do there,’ said Dangerfield, abruptly, in the middle of his tune, and turning his spectacles fully and sternly on Mr. Irons.

The clerk’s head bent lower, and he shook it; and his eyes, but for a little glitter through the eyelashes, seemed to close.

‘’Tis a pretty church, this — a pretty town, and some good families in the neighbourhood,’ said Dangerfield, briskly; ‘and I dare say some trout in the river — hey? — the stream looks lively.’

‘Middling, only — poor gray troutlings, Sir — not a soul cares to fish it but myself,’ he answered.

'You're the clerk — eh?'

'At your service, Sir.'

'*Dublin* man? — or— '

'Born and bred in Dublin, your honour.'

'Ay — well! Irons — you've heard of Mr. Dangerfield — Lord Castlemallard's agent — I am he. Good-morning, Irons;' and he gave him half-a-crown, and he took another look round; and then he and Nutter went out of the church, and took a hasty leave of one another, and away went Nutter on his nag, to the mills. And Dangerfield, just before mounting, popped into Cleary's shop, and in his grim, laconic way, asked the proprietor, among his meal-bags and bacon, about fifty questions in less than five minutes. 'That was one of Lord Castlemallard's houses — eh — with the bad roof, and manure-heap round the corner?' — and, 'Where's the pot-house they call the Salmon House? — doing a good business — eh?' and at last— 'I'm told there's some trout in the stream. Is there anyone in the town who knows the river, and could show me the fishing? — Oh, the clerk! and what sort of fish is *he* — hey? — Oh! an honest, worthy man, is he? Very good, Sir. Then, perhaps, Mr. a — perhaps, Sir, you'll do me the favour to let one of your people run down to his house, and say Mr. Dangerfield, Lord Castlemallard's agent, who is staying, you know, at the Brass Castle, would be much obliged if he would bring his rod and tackle, and take a walk with him up the river, for a little angling, at ten o'clock!'

Jolly Phil Cleary was deferential, and almost nervous in his presence. The silver-haired, grim man, with his mysterious reputation for money, and that short decisive way of his, and sudden cynical chuckle, inspired a sort of awe, which made his wishes, where expressed with that intent, very generally obeyed; and, sure enough, Irons appeared, with his rod, at the appointed hour, and the interesting anglers — Piscator and his 'honest scholar,' as Isaac Walton hath it — set out side by side on their ramble, in the true fraternity of the gentle craft.

The clerk had, I'm afraid, a shrew of a wife — shrill, vehement, and fluent. 'Rogue,' 'old miser,' 'old sneak,' and a great many worse names, she called him. Good Mrs. Irons was old, fat, and ugly, and she knew it; and that knowledge made her natural jealousy the fiercer. He had learned, by long experience, the best tactique under fire: he became actually taciturn; or, if he spoke, his speech was laconic and enigmatical; sometimes throwing out a proverb, and sometimes a text; and sometimes when provoked past endurance, spouting mildly a little bit of meek and venomous irony.

He loved his trout-rod and the devious banks of the Liffey, where, saturnine and alone, he filled his basket. It was his helpmate's rule, whenever she did not know to a certainty precisely what Irons was doing, to take it for granted that he was about some mischief. Her lodger, Captain Devereux, was her great resource on these occasions, and few things pleased him better than a stormy visit from his hostess in this temper. The young scapegrace would close his novel, and set down his glass of sherry and water (it sometimes smelt very like brandy, I'm afraid). To hear her rant, one would have supposed, who had not seen him, that her lankhaired, grimly partner, was the prettiest youth in the county of Dublin, and that all the comely lasses in Chapelizod and the country round were sighing and setting caps at him; and Devereux, who had a vein of satire, and loved even farce, enjoyed the heroics of the fat old slut.

'Oh! what am I to do, captain, jewel?' she bounced into the room, with flaming face and eyes swelled, and the end of her apron, with which she had been swobbing them, in her hand, while she gesticulated, with her right; 'there, he's off again to Island Bridge, — the owdacious sneak! It's all that dirty hussy's doing. I'm not such a fool, but I know how to put this and that together, though he thinks I don't know of his doings; but I'll be even with you, Meg Partlet, yet — you trollop;' and all this was delivered in renewed floods of tears, and stentorian hysterics, while she shook her fat red fist in the air, at the presumed level of Meg's beautiful features.

'Nay, Madam,' said the gay captain; 'I prithee, weep not; the like discoveries, as you have read, have been made in Rome, Salamanca, Ballyporeen, Babylon, Venice, and fifty other famous cities.' He always felt in these interviews, as if she and he were extemporising a burlesque — she the Queen of Crim Tartary, and he an Archbishop in her court — and would have spoken blank verse, only he feared she might perceive it, and break up the conference.

'And what's that to the purpose? — don't I know they're the same all over the world — nothing but brutes and barbarians.'

'But suppose, Madam, he has only gone up the river, and just taken his rod — — '

'Oh! rod, indeed. I know where he wants a rod, the rascal!'

‘I tell you, Madam,’ urged the chaplain, ‘you’re quite in the wrong. You’ve discovered after twenty years’ wedlock that your husband’s — a man! and you’re vexed: would you have him anything else?’

‘You’re all in a story,’ she blubbered maniacally; ‘there’s no justice, nor feeling, nor succour for a poor abused woman; but I’ll do it — I will. I’ll go to his reverence — don’t try to persuade me — the Rev. Hugh Walsingham, Doctor of Divinity, and Rector of Chapelizod (she used to give him at full length whenever she threatened Zekiel with a visitation from that quarter, by way of adding ponderosity to the menace) — I’ll go to him straight — don’t think to stop me — and we’ll see what he’ll say;’ and so she addressed herself to go.

‘And when you see him, Madam, ask the learned doctor — don’t ask me — believe the rector of the parish — he’ll tell you, that it hath prevailed from the period at which Madam Sarah quarrelled with saucy Miss Hagar; that it hath prevailed among all the principal nations of antiquity, according to Pliny, Strabo, and the chief writers of antiquity; that Juno, Dido, Eleanor Queen of England, and Mrs. Partridge, whom I read of here (and he pointed to the open volume of Tom Jones), each made, or thought she made, a like discovery.’ And the captain delivered this slowly, with knitted brow and thoughtful face, after the manner of the erudite and simple doctor.

‘Pretty Partridges, indeed! and nice game for a parish clerk!’ cried the lady, returning. ‘I wonder, so I do, when I look at him, and think of his goings on, how he can have the assurance to sit under the minister, and look the congregation in the face, and tune his throat, and sing the blessed psalms.’

‘You are not to wonder, Madam; believe the sage, who says, *omnibus hoc vitium est cantoribus*.’

Devereux knew of old that the effect of Latin on Mrs. Irons was to heighten the inflammation, and so the matron burst into whole chapters of crimination, enlivened with a sprinkling of strong words, as the sages of the law love to pepper their indictments and informations with hot adverbs and well-spiced parentheses, ‘falsely,’ ‘scandalously,’ ‘maliciously,’ and *suadente diabolo*, to make them sit warm on the stomachs of a loyal judge and jury, and digest easily.

The neighbours were so accustomed to Mrs. Irons’ griefs, that when her voice was audible, as upon such occasions it was, upon the high road and in the back gardens, it produced next to no sensation; everybody had heard from that loud oracle every sort of story touching Irons which could well be imagined, and it was all so thoroughly published by the good lady, that curiosity on the subject was pretty well dead and gone, and her distant declamation rattled over their heads and boomed in their ears, like the distant guns and trumpets on a review day, signifying nothing.

And all this only shows what every man who has ruralised a little in his lifetime knows, more than in theory, that the golden age lingers in no corner of the earth, but is really quite gone and over everywhere, and that peace and *prisca fides* have not fled to the nooks and shadows of deep valleys and bowery brooks, but flown once, and away to heaven again, and left the round world to its general curse. So it is even in pretty old villages, embowered in orchards, with hollyhocks and jessamine in front of the houses, and primeval cocks and hens pecking and scraping in the street, and the modest river dimpling and simpering among osiers and apple trees, and old ivied walls close by — you sometimes hear other things than lowing herds, and small birds singing, and purling streams; and shrill accents and voluble rhetoric will now and then trouble the fragrant air, and wake up the dim old river-god from his nap.

As to Irons, if he was all that his wife gave out, he must have been a mighty sly dog indeed; for on the whole, he presented a tolerably decent exterior to society. It is said, indeed, that he liked a grave tumbler of punch, and was sardonic and silent in his liquor; that his gait was occasionally a little queer and uncertain, as his lank figure glided home by moonlight, from the ‘Salmon House;’ and that his fingers fumbled longer than need be with the latch, and his tongue, though it tried but a short and grim ‘bar’th door, Marjry,’ or ‘gi’ me can’le, wench,’ sometimes lacked its cunning, and slipped and kept not time. There were, too, other scandals, such as the prying and profane love to shoot privily at church celebrities. Perhaps it was his reserve and sanctity that provoked them. Perhaps he was, in truth, though cautious, sometimes indiscreet. Perhaps it was fanciful Mrs. Irons’ jealous hullabaloos and hysterics that did it — I don’t know — but people have been observed, *apropos* of him, to wink at one another, and grin, and shake their heads, and say: ‘the nearer the church, you know’ — and ‘he so ancient, too! but ’tis an old rat that won’t eat cheese,’ and so forth.

Just as Mrs. Irons whisked round for the seventh time to start upon her long threatened march to Dr. Walsingham's study to lay her pitiful case before him, Captain Devereux, who was looking toward the 'Phœnix,' saw the truant clerk and Mr. Dangerfield turn the corner together on their return.

'Stay, Madam, here comes the traitor,' said he; 'and, on my honour, 'tis worse than we thought; for he has led my Lord Castlemallard's old agent into mischief too — and Meg Partlet has had two swains at her feet this morning; and, see, the hypocrites have got some trout in their basket, and their rods on their shoulders — and look, for all the world, as if they had only been fishing — sly rogues!'

'Well, it's all one,' said Mrs. Irons, gaping from the other window, and sobering rapidly; 'if 'tisn't to-day, 'twill be tomorrow, I suppose; and at any rate 'tis a sin and shame to leave any poor crature in this miserable taking, not knowing but he might be drownded — or worse — dear knows it would not be much trouble to tell his wife when the gentleman wanted him — and sure for any honest matter I'd never say against it.'

Her thoughts were running upon Dangerfield, and what 'compliment' he had probably made her husband at parting; and a minute or two after this, Devereux saw her, with her riding-hood on, trudging up to the "Salmon House" to make inquisition after the same.

CHAPTER XXI.

RELATING AMONG OTHER THINGS HOW DOCTOR TOOLE WALKED UP TO THE TILED HOUSE; AND OF HIS PLEASANT DISCOURSE WITH MR. MERVYN.

Dr. Sturk's spirits and temper had not become more pleasant lately. In fact he brooded more, and was more savage at home than was at all agreeable. He used to go into town oftener, and to stay there later; and his language about Toole and Nutter, when there was none but submissive little Mrs. Sturk by, was more fierce and coarse than ever. To hear him, then, one would have supposed that they were actually plotting to make away with him, and that in self-defence he must smite them hip and thigh. Then, beside their moral offensiveness, they were such 'idiots,' and: 'noodles,' and botching and blundering right and left, so palpably to the danger and ruin of their employers, that no man of conscience could sit easy and see it going on; and all this simply because he had fixed his affections upon the practice of the one, and the agency of the other. For Sturk had, in his own belief, a genius for business of every sort. Everybody on whom his insolent glance fell, who had any sort of business to do, did it wrong, and was a 'precious disciple,' or a 'goose,' or a 'born jackass,' and excited his scoffing chuckle. And little Mrs. Sturk, frightened and admiring, used to say, while he grinned and muttered, and tittered into the fire, with his great shoulders buried in his balloon-backed chair, his heels over the fender and his hands in his breeches' pockets— 'But, Barney, you know, you're so clever — there's no one like you!' And he was fond of just nibbling at speculations in a small safe way, and used to pull out a roll of banknotes, when he was lucky, and show his winnings to his wife, and chuckle and swear over them, and boast and rail, and tell her, if it was not for the cursed way his time was cut up with hospital, and field days, and such trumpery regimental duties, he could make a fortune while other men were thinking of it; and he very nearly believed it. And he was, doubtless, clear-headed, though wrong-headed, too, at times, and very energetic; but his genius was for pushing men out of their places to make way for himself.

But with all that he had the good brute instincts too, and catered diligently for his brood, and their 'dam' — and took a gruff unacknowledged pride in seeing his wife well dressed — and had a strong liking for her — and thanked her in his soul for looking after things so well; and thought often about his boys, and looked sharply after their education; and was an efficient and decisive head of a household; and had no vices nor expensive indulgences; and was a hard but tolerably just man to deal with.

All this time his uneasiness and puzzle about Dangerfield continued, and, along with other things, kept him awake often to unseasonable hours at night. He did not tell Mrs. Sturk. In fact, he was a man, who, though on most occasions he gave the wife of his bosom what he called 'his mind' freely enough, yet did not see fit to give her a great deal of his confidence.

Dangerfield had his plans too. Who has not? Nothing could be more compact and modest than his household. He had just a housekeeper and two maids, who looked nearly as old, and a valet, and a groom, who slept at the 'Phœnix,' and two very pretty horses at livery in the same place. All his appointments were natty and complete, and his servants, every one, stood in awe of him; for no lip or eye-service would go down with that severe, prompt, and lynx-eyed gentleman. And his groom, among the coachmen and other experts of the 'Salmon House,' used to brag of his hunters in England; and his man, of his riches, and his influence with Lord Castlemallard.

In England, Dangerfield, indeed, spent little more money than he did in Chapelizod, except in his stable; and Lord Castlemallard, who admired his stinginess, as he did everything else about him, used to say: 'He's a wonder of the world! How he retains his influence over all the people he knows without ever giving one among them so much as a mutton-chop or a glass of sherry in his house, I can't conceive. *I* couldn't do it, I know.' But he had ultimate plans, if not of splendour, at least of luxury. His tastes, and perhaps some deeper feelings, pointed to the continent, and he had purchased a little paradise on the Lake of Geneva, where was an Eden of fruits and flowers, and wealth of marbles and coloured canvas, and wonderful wines maturing in his cellars, and aquaria for his fish, and ice-houses and baths, and I know not what refinements of old Roman Villa-luxury beside — among which he meant to pass the honoured evening of his days; with just a few more thousands, and, as he sometimes thought, perhaps a wife. He had not quite made up his mind; but he had come to the time when a man must forthwith accept matrimony frankly, or, if he be wise, shake hands with bleak celibacy, and content himself for his earthly future with monastic jollity and solitude.

It is a maxim with charitable persons — and no more than a recognition of a great constitutional axiom — to assume, in the absence of proof to the contrary, that every British subject is an honest man. Now, if we had gone to Lord Castlemallard for his character — and who more competent to give him one — we know very well what we should have heard about Dangerfield; and, on the other hand, we have never found him out — have we, kind reader? — in a shabby action or unworthy thought; and, therefore, it leaves upon our mind an unpleasant impression about that Mr. Mervyn, who arrived in the dark, attending upon a coffin as mysterious as himself, and now lives solitarily in the haunted house near Ballyfermot, that the omniscient Dangerfield should follow him, when they pass upon the road, with that peculiar stern glance of surprise which seemed to say,— ‘Was ever such audacity conceived? Is the man mad?’

But Dangerfield did not choose to talk about him — if indeed he had anything to disclose — though the gentlemen at the club pressed him often with questions, which however, he quietly parried, to the signal vexation of active little Dr. Toole, who took up and dropped, in turn, all sorts of curious theories about the young stranger. Lord Castlemallard knew all about him, too, but his lordship was high and huffy, and hardly ever in Chapelizod, except on horseback, and two or three times in the year at a grand dinner at the Artillery mess. And when Mervyn was mentioned he always talked of something else, rather imperiously, as though he said, ‘You’ll please to observe that upon that subject I don’t choose to speak.’ And as for Dr. Walsingham, when he thought it right to hold his tongue upon a given matter, thumbscrews could not squeeze it from him.

In short, our friend Toole grew so feverish under his disappointment that he made an excuse of old Tim Molloy’s toothache to go up in person to the ‘Tiled House,’ in the hope of meeting the young gentleman, and hearing something from him (the servants, he already knew, were as much in the dark as he) to alleviate his distress. And, sure enough, his luck stood him in stead; for, as he was going away, having pulled out old Molloy’s grinder to give a colour to his visit, who should he find upon the steps of the hall-door but the pale, handsome young gentleman himself.

Dr. Toole bowed low, and grinned with real satisfaction, reminded him of their interview at the 'Phœnix,' and made by way of apology for his appearance at the 'Tiled House,' a light and kind allusion to poor old Tim, of whose toothache he spoke affectionately, and with water in his eyes — for he half believed for the moment what he was saying — declared how he remembered him when he did not come up to Tim's knee-buckle, and would walk that far any day, and a bit further too, he hoped, to relieve the poor old boy in a less matter. And finding that Mr. Mervyn was going toward Chapelizod, he begged him not to delay on his account, and accompanied him down the Ballyfermot road, entertaining him by the way with an inexhaustible affluence of Chapelizod anecdote and scandal, at which the young man stared a good deal, and sometimes even appeared impatient: but the doctor did not perceive it, and rattled on; and told him moreover, everything about himself and his belongings with a minute and voluble frankness, intended to shame the suspicious reserve of the stranger. But nothing came; and being by this time grown bolder, he began a more direct assault, and told him, with a proper scorn of the village curiosity, all the theories which the Chapelizod gossips had spun about him.

'And they say, among other things, that you're not — a — in fact — there's a mystery — a something — about your birth, you know,' said Toole, in a tone implying pity and contempt for his idle townsfolk.

'They lie, then!' cried the young man, stopping short, more fiercely than was pleasant, and fixing his great lurid eyes upon the cunning face of the doctor; and, after a pause, 'Why can't they let me and my concerns alone, Sir?'

'But there's no use in saying so, *I* can tell you,' exclaimed little Toole, recovering his feet in an instant. 'Why, I suppose there isn't so tattling, prying, lying, scandalous a little colony of Christians on earth; eyes, ears, and mouths all open, Sir; heads busy, tongues wagging; lots of old maids, by Jove; ladies' women, and gentlemen's gentlemen, and drawers and footmen; club talk, Sir, and mess-table talk, and talk on band days, talk over cards, talk at home, Sir — talk in the streets — talk — talk; by Jupiter Tonans! 'tis enough to bother one's ears, and make a man envy Robinson Crusoe!'

‘So I do, Sir, if we were rid of his parrot,’ answered Mervyn: and with a dry ‘I wish you a good-morning, doctor — doctor — a — *Sir*’ — turned sharply from him up the Palmerstown-road.

‘Going to Belmont,’ murmured little Toole, with his face a little redder than usual, and stopping in an undignified way for a moment at the corner to look after him. ‘He’s close — plaguy close; and Miss Rebecca Chattesworth knows nothing about him neither — I wander does she though — and doesn’t seem to care even. He’s not there for nothing though. *Some* one makes him welcome, depend on’t,’ and he winked to himself. ‘A plaguy high stomach, too, by Jove. I bet you fifty, if he stays here three months, he’ll be at swords or pistols with some of our hot bloods. And whatever his secret is — and I dare say ’tisn’t worth knowing — the people here will ferret it out at last, I warrant you. There’s small good in making all the fuss he does about it; if he knew but all, there’s no such thing as a secret here — hang the one have *I*, I know, just because there’s no use in trying. The whole town knows when I’ve tripe for dinner, and where I have a patch or a darn. And when I got the fourteen pigeons at Darkey’s-bridge, the birds were not ten minutes on my kitchen table when old Widow Foote sends her maid and her compliments, as she knew my pie-dish only held a dozen, to beg the two odd birds. Secret, indeed!’ and he whistled a bar or two contemptuously, which subsided into dejected silence, and he muttered, ‘I wish I knew it,’ and walked over the bridge gloomily; and he roared more fiercely on smaller occasions than usual at his dogs on the way home, and they squalled oftener and louder.

Now, for some reason or other, Dangerfield had watched the growing intimacy between Mervyn and Miss Gertrude Chattesworth with an evil eye. He certainly did know something about this Mr. Mervyn, with his beautiful sketches, and his talk about Italy, and his fine music. And his own spectacles had carefully surveyed Miss Chattesworth, and she had passed the ordeal satisfactorily. And Dangerfield thought, ‘These people can’t possibly suspect the actual state of the case, and who and what this gentleman is *to my certain knowledge*; and ’tis a pity so fine a young lady should be sacrificed for want of a word spoken in season.’ And when he had decided upon a point, it was not easy to make him stop or swerve.

CHAPTER XXII.

TELLING HOW MR. MERVYN FARED AT BELMONT, AND OF A PLEASANT LITTLE DEJEUNER BY THE MARGIN OF THE LIFFEY.

Now it happened that on the very same day, the fashion of Dr. Walsingham's and of Aunt Rebecca's countenances were one and both changed towards Mr. Mervyn, much to his chagrin and puzzle. The doctor, who met him near his own house on the bridge, was something distant in manner, and looked him in the face with very grave eyes, and seemed sad, and as if he had something on his mind, and laid his hand upon the young man's arm, and addressed himself to speak; but glancing round his shoulder, and seeing people astir, and that they were under observation, he reserved himself.

That both the ladies of Belmont looked as if they had heard some strange story, each in her own way. Aunt Rebecca received the young man without a smile, and was unaccountably upon her high horse, and said some dry and sharp things, and looked as if she could say more, and coloured menacingly, and, in short, was odd, and very nearly impertinent. And Gertrude, though very gentle and kind, seemed also much graver, and looked pale, and her eyes larger and more excited, and altogether like a brave young lady who had fought a battle without crying. And Mervyn saw all this and pondered on it, and went away soon; the iron entered into his soul.

Aunt Rebecca was so occupied with her dogs, squirrels, parrots, old women, and convicts, that her eyes being off the cards, she saw little of the game; and when a friendly whisper turned her thoughts that way, and it flashed upon her that tricks and honours were pretty far gone, she never remembered that she had herself to blame for the matter, but turned upon her poor niece with 'Sly creature!' and so forth. And while owing to this inattention, Gertrude had lost the benefit of her sage Aunt Rebecca's counsels altogether, her venerable but frisky old grandmother — Madam Nature — it was to be feared, might have profited by the occasion to giggle and whistle her own advice in her ear, and been indifferently well obeyed. I really don't pretend to say — maybe there was nothing, or next to nothing in it; or if there was, Miss Gertrude herself might not quite know. And if she did suspect she liked him, ever so little, she had no one but Lilias Walsingham to tell; and I don't know that young ladies are always quite candid upon these points. Some, at least, I believe, don't make confidences until their secrets become insupportable. However, Aunt Rebecca was now wide awake, and had trumpeted a pretty shrill reveiller. And Gertrude had started up, her elbow on the pillow, and her large eyes open; and the dream, I suppose, was shivered and flown, and something rather ghastly at her side.

Coming out of church, Dr. Walsingham asked Mervyn to take a turn with him in the park — and so they did — and the doctor talked with him seriously and kindly on that broad plateau. The young man walked darkly beside him, and they often stopped outright. When, on their return, they came near the Chapelizod gate, and Parson's lodge, and the duck-pond, the doctor was telling him that marriage is an affair of the heart — also a spiritual union — and, moreover, a mercantile partnership — and he insisted much upon this latter view — and told him what and how strict was the practice of the ancient Jews, the people of God, upon this particular point. Dr. Walsingham had made a love-match, was the most imprudent and open-handed of men, and always preaching to others against his own besetting sin. To hear him talk, indeed, you would have supposed he was a usurer. Then Mr. Mervyn, who looked a little pale and excited, turned the doctor about, and they made another little circuit, while he entered somewhat into his affairs and prospects, and told him something about an appointment in connexion with the Embassy at Paris, and said he would ask him to read some letters about it; and the doctor seemed a little shaken; and so they parted in a very friendly but grave way.

When Mervyn had turned his back upon Belmont, on the occasion of the unpleasant little visit I mentioned just now, the ladies had some words in the drawingroom.

'I have *not* coquetted, Madam,' said Miss Gertrude, haughtily.

'Then I'm to presume you've been serious; and I take the liberty to ask how far this affair has proceeded?' said Aunt Rebecca, firmly, and laying her gloved hand and folded fan calmly on the table.

'I really forget,' said the young lady, coldly.

‘Has he made a declaration of love?’ demanded the aunt, the two red spots on her cheeks coming out steadily, and helping the flash of her eyes.

‘Certainly not,’ answered the young lady, with a stare of haughty surprise that was quite unaffected.

At the pleasant luncheon and dance on the grass that the officers gave, in that pretty field by the river, half-a-dozen of the young people had got beside the little brook that runs simpering and romping into the river just there. Women are often goodnatured in love matters where rivalry does not mix, and Miss Gertrude, all on a sudden, found herself alone with Mervyn. Aunt Becky, from under the ash trees at the other end of the field, with great distinctness, for she was not a bit near-sighted, and considerable uneasiness, saw their *tête-à-tête*. It was out of the question getting up in time to prevent the young people speaking their minds if so disposed, and she thought she perceived that in the young man’s bearing, which looked like a pleading and eagerness, and ‘Gertrude’s put out a good deal — I see by her plucking at those flowers — but my head to a China orange — the girl won’t think of him. She’s not a young woman to rush into a horrible folly, hand-over-head,’ thought Aunt Becky; and then she began to think they were talking very much at length indeed, and to regret that she had not started at once from her post for the place of meeting; and one, and two, and three minutes passed, and perhaps some more, and Aunt Becky began to grow wroth, and was on the point of marching upon them, when they began slowly to walk towards the group who were plucking bunches of woodbine from the hedge across the little stream, at the risk of tumbling in, and distributing the flowers among the ladies, amidst a great deal of laughing and gabble. Then Miss Gertrude made Mr. Mervyn rather a haughty and slight salutation, her aunt thought, and so dismissed him; he, too, made a bow, but a very low one, and walked straight off to the first lady he saw.

This happened to be mild little Mrs. Sturk, and he talked a good deal to her, but restlessly, and, as it seemed, with a wandering mind; and afterwards he conversed, with an affectation of interest — it was only that — Aunt Becky, who observed him with some curiosity, thought — for a few minutes with Lilias Walsingham; and afterwards he talked with an effort, and so much animation and such good acceptance [though it was plain, Aunt Becky said, that he did not listen to one word she said,] to the fair Magnolia, that O’Flaherty had serious thoughts of horse-whipping him when the festivities were over — for, as he purposed informing him, his 'ungentlemanlike intherfarence.'

'He has got his quietus,' thought Aunt Becky, with triumph; 'this brisk, laughing carriage, and heightened colour, a woman of experience can see through at a glance.'

Yes, all this frisking and skipping is but the hypocrisy of bleeding vanity — *hæret lateri* — they are just the flush, wriggle, and hysterics of suppressed torture.

Then came her niece, cold and stately, with steady eye and a slight flush, and altogether the air of the conscientious young matron who has returned from the nursery, having there administered the discipline; and so she sat down beside her aunt, serene and silent, and, the little glow passed away, pale and still.

'Well, he *has* spoken?' said her aunt to her, in a sharp aside.

'Yes,' answered the young lady, icily.

'And has had his answer?'

'Yes — and I beg, Aunt Rebecca, the subject may be allowed to drop.' The young lady's eyes encountered her aunt's so directly and were so fully charged with the genuine Chattesworth lightning, that Miss Rebecca, unused to such demonstrations, averted hers, and with a slight sarcastic inclination, and, 'Oh! your servant, young lady,' beckoning with her fan grandly to little Puddock, who was hovering with other designs in the vicinity, and taking his arm, though he was not forgiven, but only employed — a distinction often made by good Queen Elizabeth — marched to the marquee, where, it was soon evident, the plump lieutenant was busy in commending, according to their merits, the best bits of the best *plats* on the table.

'So dear Aunt Becky has forgiven Puddock,' said Devereux, who was sauntering up to the tent between O'Flaherty and Cluffe, and little suspecting that he was descanting upon the intended Mrs. Cluffe— 'and they are celebrating the reconciliation over a jelly and a pupton. I love Aunt Rebecca, I tell you — I don't know what we should do without her. She's impertinent, and often nearly insupportable; but isn't she the most placable creature on earth? I venture to say I might kill you, Lieutenant O'Flaherty — of course, with your permission, Sir — and she'd forgive me tomorrow morning! And she really does princely things — doesn't she? She set up that ugly widow — what's her name? — twice in a shop in Dame Street, and gave two hundred pounds to poor Scamper's orphan, and actually pensions that old miscreant, Wagget, who ought to be hanged — and never looks for thanks or compliments, or upbraids her ingrates with past kindnesses. She's noble — Aunt Becky's every inch a gentleman!'

By this time they had reached the tent, and the hearty voice of the general challenged them from the shade, as he filliped a little chime merrily on his empty glass.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHICH CONCERNS THE GRAND DINNER AT THE KING'S HOUSE, AND WHO WERE THERE, AND SOMETHING OF THEIR TALK, REVERIES, DISPUTES, AND GENERAL JOLLITY.

It was about this time that the dinner-party at the King's House came off. Old Colonel and Mrs. Stafford were hospitable, if not very entertaining, and liked to bring their neighbours together, without ceremony, round a saddle of mutton and a gooseberry pie, and other such solid comforts; and then, hey for a round game! — for the young people, Pope Joan, or what you please, in the drawingroom, with lots of flirting and favouritism, and a jolly little supper of broiled bones and whipt cream, and toasts and sentiments, with plenty of sly allusions and honest laughter all round the table. But twice or thrice in the year the worthy couple made a more imposing gathering at the King's House, and killed the fatted calf, and made a solemn feast to the big wigs and the notables of Chapelizod, with just such a sprinkling of youngsters as sufficed to keep alive the young people whom they brought in their train. There was eating of venison and farced turkeys, and other stately fare; and they praised the colonel's claret, and gave the servants their 'veils' in the hall, and drove away in their carriages, with flambeaux and footmen, followed by the hearty goodnight of the host from the hall-door steps, and amazing the quiet little town with their rattle and glare.

Dinner was a five o'clock affair in those days, and the state parlour was well filled. There was old Bligh from the Magazine — I take the guests in order of arrival — and the Chattesworths, and the Walsinghams; and old Dowager Lady Glenvarlogh — Colonel Stratford's cousin — who flashed out in the evening sun from Dublin in thunder and dust and her carriage-and-four, bringing her mild little country niece, who watched her fat painted aunt all the time of dinner, with the corners of her frightened little eyes, across the table; and spoke sparingly, and ate with diffidence; and Captain Devereux was there; and the next beau who appeared was — of all men in the world — Mr. Mervyn! and Aunt Becky watched, and saw with satisfaction, that he and Gertrude met as formally and coldly as she could have desired. And then there was an elaborate macaroni, one of the Lord Lieutenant's household, — Mr. Beauchamp; and last, Lord Castlemallard, who liked very well to be the chief man in the room, and dozed after dinner serenely in that consciousness, and loved to lean back upon his sofa in the drawing-room, and gaze in a dozing, smiling, Turkish reverie, after Gertrude Chattesworth and pretty Lilias, whom he admired; and when either came near enough, he would take her hand and say,— 'Well, child, how do you do? — and why don't you speak to your old friend? You charming rogue, you know I remember you no bigger than your fan. And what mischief have you been about — eh? What mischief have you been about, I say, young gentlewoman? Turning all the pretty fellows' heads, I warrant you — eh! — turning their heads?' And he used to talk this sort of talk very slowly, and to hold their hands all the while, and even after this talk was exhausted, and grin sleepily, and wag his head, looking with a glittering, unpleasant gaze in their faces all the time. But at present we are all at dinner, in the midst of the row which even the best bred people, assembled in sufficient numbers, will make over that meal.

Devereux could not help seeing pretty Lilias over the way, who was listening to handsome Mervyn, as it seemed, with interest, and talking also her pleasant little share. He was no dunce, that Mervyn, nor much of a coxcomb, and certainly no clown, Devereux thought; but as fine a gentleman, to speak honestly, and as handsome, as well dressed, and as pleasant to listen to, with that sweet low voice and piquant smile, as any. Besides he could draw, and had more yards of French and English verses by rote than Aunt Becky owned of Venetian lace and satin ribbons, and was more of a scholar than he. He? *He*! — why— 'he?' what the deuce had Devereux to do with it — was he vexed? — A fiddlestick! He began to flag with Miss Ward, the dowager's niece, and was glad when the refined Beauchamp, at her other side, took her up, and entertained her with Lady Carrickmore's ball and the masquerade, and the last levee, and the withdrawing-room. There are said to have been persons who could attend to half a dozen different conversations going on together, and take a rational part in them all, and indulge, all the time, in a distinct consecutive train of thought beside. I dare say, Mr. Morphy, the chess-player, would find no difficulty in it. But Devereux was not by any means competent to the feat, though there was one conversation, perhaps, the thread of which he would gladly have caught up and disentangled. So the talk at top and bottom and both sides of the table, with its cross-readings, and muddle, and uproar, changed hands, and whisked and rioted, like a dance of Walpurgis, in his lonely brain.

What he heard, on the whole, was very like this— ‘hubble-bubble-rubble-dubble — the great match of shuttlecock played between the gentlemen of the north and those of hubble-bubble — the Methodist persuasion; but — ha-ha-ha! — a squeeze of a lemon — rubble-dubble — ha-ha-ha! — wicked man — hubble-bubble — force-meat balls and yolks of eggs — rubble-dubble — musket balls from a steel crossbow — upon my — hubble-bubble — throwing a sheep’s eye — ha-ha-ha — rubble-dubble — at the two remaining heads on Temple Bar — hubble-bubble — and the duke left by his will — rubble-dubble — a quid of tobacco in a brass snuff-box — hubble-bubble — and my Lady Rostrevor’s very sweet upon — rubble-dubble — old Alderman Wallop of John’s-lane — hubble-bubble — ha-ha-ha — from Jericho to Bethany, where David, Joab, and — rubble-dubble — the whole party upset in the mud in a chaise marine — and — hubble-bubble — shake a little white pepper over them — and — rubble-dubble — his name is Solomon — hubble-bubble — ha-ha-ha — the poor old thing dying of cold, and not a stitch of clothes to cover her nakedness — rubble-dubble — play or pay, on Finchley Common — hubble-bubble — most melancholy truly — ha-ha-ha! — rubble-dubble — and old Lady Ruth is ready to swear she never — hubble-bubble — served High Sheriff for the county of Down in the reign of Queen Anne — rubble-dubble — and Dr. and Mrs. Sturk — hubble-bubble — Secretaries of State in the room of the Duke of Grafton and General Conway — rubble-dubble — venerable prelate — ha-ha-ha! hubble-bubble — filthy creature — hubble-bubble-rubble-dubble.’

And this did not make him much wiser or merrier. Love has its fevers, its recoveries, and its relapses. The patient — nay even his nurse and his doctor, if he has taken to himself such officers in his distress — may believe the malady quite cured — the passion burnt out — the flame extinct — even the smoke quite over, when a little chance puff of rivalry blows the white ashes off, and, lo! the old liking is still smouldering. But this was not Devereux’s case. He remembered when his fever — not a love one — and his leave of absence at Scarborough, and that long continental tour of hers with Aunt Rebecca and Gertrude Chattesworth, had carried the grave, large-eyed little girl away, and hid her from his sight for more than a year, very nearly *two* years, the strange sort of thrill and surprise with which he saw her again — tall and slight, and very beautiful — no, not *beautiful*, perhaps, if you go to rule and compass, and Greek trigonometrical theories; but there was an indescribable prettiness in all her features, and movements, and looks, higher, and finer, and sweeter than all the canons of statuary will give you.

How prettily she stands! how prettily she walks! what a sensitive, spirited, clear-tinted face it is! This was pretty much the interpretation of his reverie, as Colonel Stafford's large and respectable party obligingly vanished for a while into air. Is it sad? I think it *is* sad — I don't know — and how sweetly and how drolly it lighted up; at that moment he saw her smile — the pleasant mischief in it — the dark violet glance — the wonderful soft dimple in chin and cheek — the little crimson mouth, and its laughing coronet of pearls — and then all earnest again, and still so animated! What feminine intelligence and character there is in that face!— 'tis pleasanter to me than conversation— 'tis a fairy tale, or — or a dream, it's so interesting — I never know, you see, what's coming — Is not it wonderful? What is she talking about now? — what does it signify? — she's so strangely beautiful — she's like those Irish melodies, I can't reach all their meaning; I only know their changes keep me silent, and are playing with my heart-strings.

Devereux's contemplation of the animated *tête-à-tête*, for such, in effect, it seemed to him at the other side of the table, was, however, by no means altogether pleasurable. He began to think Mervyn conceited; there was a 'provoking probability of succeeding' about him, and altogether something that was beginning to grow offensive and odious.

'She knows well enough I like her,' so his liking said in confidence to his vanity, and even *he* hardly overheard them talk; 'better a great deal than I knew it myself, till old Strafford got together this confounded stupid dinner-party (he caught Miss Chattesworth glancing at him with a peculiar look of enquiry). Why the plague did he ask *me* here? it was Puddock's turn, and he likes venison and compots, and — and — but 'tis like them — the women fall in love with the man who's in love with himself, like Narcissus yonder

— and they can’t help it — not they — and what care I? — hang it! I say, what is’t to me? — and yet — if she were to leave it — what a queer unmeaning place Chapelizod would be!’

‘And what do you say to that, Captain Devereux?’ cried the hearty voice of old General Chattesworth, and, with a little shock, the captain dropped from the clouds into his chair, and a clear view of the larded fowl before him, and his own responsibilities and situation —

‘Some turkey!’ he said, awaking, and touching the carving-knife and fork, with a smile and a bow; and he mingled once more in the business and bustle of life.

And soon there came in the general talk and business one of those sudden lulls which catch speakers unawares, and Mr. Beauchamp was found saying —

‘I saw her play on Thursday, and, upon my honour, the Bellamy is a mockery, a skeleton and a spectacle.’

‘That’s no reason,’ said Aunt Becky, who, as usual, had got up a skirmish, and was firing away in the cause of Mossop and Smock-alley playhouse; ‘why, she would be fraudulently arrested in her own chair, on her way to the playhouse, by the contrivance of the rogue Barry, and that wicked mountebank, Woodward.’

‘You’re rather hard upon them, Madam,’ said Mrs. Colonel Stafford, who stood up for Crow-street, with a slight elevation of her chin.

‘Very true, indeed, Mistress Chattesworth,’ cried the dowager, overlooking Madam Stafford’s parenthesis, and tapping an applause with her fan, and, at the same time, rewarding the champion of Smock-alley, for she was one of the faction, with one of her large, painted smiles, followed by a grave and somewhat supercilious glance at the gentleman of the household; ‘and I don’t believe *they*, at least, can think her a spectacle, and — a — the like, or they’d hardly have conspired to lock her in a sponging-house, while she should have been in the playhouse. What say you, Mistress Chattesworth?’

‘Ha, ha! no, truly, my lady; but you know she’s unfortunate, and a stranger, and the good people in this part of the world improve so safe an opportunity of libelling a friendless gentlewoman.’

This little jet of vitriol was intended for the eye of the Castle beau; but he, quite innocent of the injection, went on serenely —

‘So they do, upon my honour, Madam, tell prodigious naughty tales about her: yet upon my life I do pity her from my soul: how that fellow Calcraft, by Jove — she says, you know, she’s married to him, but we know better — he has half broken her heart, and treated her with most refined meanness, as I live; in the green-room, where she looks an infinity worse than on the stage, she told me — — ‘

‘I dare say,’ said Aunt Becky, rather stiffly, pulling him up; for though she had fought a round for poor George Anne Bellamy for Mossop’s sake, she nevertheless had formed a pretty just estimate of that faded, goodnatured, and insolvent demirep, and rather recoiled from any anecdotes of her telling.

‘And Calcraft gave her his likeness in miniature,’ related the macaroni, never minding; ‘set round with diamonds, and, will you believe it? when she came to examine it, they were not brilliants, but rose-diamonds — despicable fellow!’

Here the talk began to spring up again in different places, and the conversation speedily turned into what we have heard it before, and the roar and confusion became universal, and swallowed up what remained of poor George Anne’s persecutions.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN WHICH TWO YOUNG PERSONS UNDERSTAND ONE ANOTHER BETTER, PERHAPS, THAN EVER THEY DID BEFORE, WITHOUT SAYING SO.

And now the ladies, with their gay plumage, have flown away like foreign birds of passage, and the jolly old priests of Bacchus, in the parlour, make their libations of claret; and the young fellows, after a while, seeing a gathering of painted fans, and rustling hoops, and fluttering laces, upon the lawn, and a large immigration of hilarious neighbours besides, and two serious fiddlers, and a black fellow with a tambourine preparing for action, and the warm glitter of the western sun among the green foliage about the window, could stand it no longer, but stole away, notwithstanding a hospitable remonstrance and a protest from old Strafford, to join the merry muster.

‘The young bucks will leave their claret,’ said Lord Castlemallard; ‘and truly ’tis a rare fine wine, colonel, a mighty choice claret truly (and the colonel bowed low, and smiled a rugged purple smile in spite of himself, for his claret *was* choice), all won’t do when Venus beckons — when she beckons — ha, ha — all won’t do, Sir — at the first flutter of a petticoat, and the invitation of a pair of fine eyes — fine eyes, colonel — by Jupiter, they’re off — you can’t keep ‘em — I say your wine won’t keep ‘em — they’ll be off, Sir — peeping under the hoods, the dogs will — and whispering their wicked nonsense, Dr. Walsingham — ha, ha — and your wine, I say — your claret, colonel, won’t hold ‘em— ’twas once so with us — eh, general? — ha! ha! and we must forgive ‘em now.’

And he shoved round his chair lazily, with a left-backward wheel, so as to command the window, for he liked to see the girls dance, the little rogues! — with his claret and his French rappee at his elbow; and he did not hear General Chattesworth, who was talking of the new comedy called the ‘Clandestine Marriage,’ and how ‘the prologue touches genteelly on the loss of three late geniuses — Hogarth, Quin, and Cibber — and the epilogue is the picture of a polite company;' for the tambourine and the fiddles were going merrily, and the lasses and lads in motion.

Aunt Becky and Lilias were chatting just under those pollard osiers by the river. She was always gentle with Lily, and somehow unlike the pugnacious Aunt Becky, whose attack was so spirited and whose thrust so fierce; and when Lily told a diverting little story — and she was often very diverting — Aunt Becky used to watch her pleasant face, with such a droll, goodnatured smile; and she used to pat her on the cheek, and look so glad to see her when they met, and often as if she would say— ' I admire you a great deal more, and I am a great deal fonder of you than you think; but you know brave stoical Aunt Becky can't say all that — it would not be in character, you know.' And the old lady knew how good she was to the poor, and she liked her spirit, and candour, and honour — it was so uncommon, and somehow angelic, she thought. 'Little Lily's so true!' she used to say; and perhaps there was there a noble chord of sympathy between the young girl, who had no taste for battle, and the daring Aunt Becky.

I think Devereux liked her for liking Lily — he thought it was for her own sake. Of course, he was often unexpectedly set upon and tomahawked by the impetuous lady; but the gay captain put on his scalp again, and gathered his limbs together, and got up in high good humour, and shook himself and smiled, after his dismemberment, like one of the old soldiers of the Walhalla — and they were never the worse friends.

So, turning his back upon the fiddles and tambourine, Gipsy Devereux sauntered down to the river-bank, and to the osiers, where the ladies are looking down the river, and a blue bell, not half so blue as her own deep eyes, in Lilias's fingers; and the sound of their gay talk came mixed with the twitter and clear evening songs of the small birds. By those same osiers, that see so many things, and tell no tales, there will yet be a parting. But its own sorrow suffices to the day. And now it is a summer sunset, and all around dappled gold and azure, and sweet, dreamy sounds; and Lilias turns her pretty head, and sees him; — and oh! was it fancy, or did he see just a little flushing of the colour on her cheek — and her lashes seemed to drop a little, and out came her frank little hand. And Devereux leaned on the paling there, and chatted his best sense and nonsense, I dare say; and they laughed and talked about all sorts of things; and he sang for them a queer little snatch of a ballad, of an enamoured captain, the course of whose true love ran not smooth; —

The river ran between them,
And she looked upon the stream,
And the soldier looked upon her
As a dreamer on a dream.
‘Believe me — oh! believe,’
He sighed, ‘you peerless maid;
My honour is pure,
And my true love sure,
Like the white plume in my hat,
And my shining blade.’

The river ran between them,
And she smiled upon the stream,
Like one that smiles at folly —
A dreamer on a dream.
‘I do not trust your promise,
I will not be betrayed;
For your faith is light,
And your cold wit bright,
Like the white plume in your hat,
And your shining blade.’

The river ran between them,
And he rode beside the stream,
And he turned away and parted,
As a dreamer from his dream.
And his comrade brought his message,
From the field where he was laid —
Just his name to repeat,
And to lay at her feet
The white plume from his hat
And his shining blade.

And he sang it in a tuneful and plaintive tenor, that had power to make rude and ridiculous things pathetic; and Aunt Rebecca thought he was altogether very agreeable. But it was time she should see what Miss Gertrude was about; and Devereux and Lily were such very old friends that she left them to their devices.

‘I like the river,’ says he; ‘it has a soul, Miss Lily, and a character. There are no river *gods*, but nymphs. Look at that river, Miss Lilias; what a girlish spirit. I wish she would reveal herself; I could lose my heart to her, I believe — if, indeed, I could be in love with anything, you know. Look at the river — is not it feminine? it’s sad and it’s merry, musical and sparkling — and oh, so deep! Always changing, yet still the same. ‘Twill show you the trees, or the clouds, or yourself, or the stars; and it’s so clear and so dark, and so sunny, and — so cold. It tells everything, and yet nothing. It’s so pure, and so playful, and so tuneful, and so coy, yet so mysterious and *fatal*. I sometimes think, Miss Lilias, I’ve seen this river spirit; and she’s like — very like you!’

And so he went on; and she was more silent and more a listener than usual. I don’t know all that was passing in pretty Lilias’s fancy — in her heart — near the hum of the waters and the spell of that musical voice. Love speaks in allegories and a language of signs; looks and tones tell his tale most truly. So Devereux’s talk held her for a while in a sort of trance, melancholy and delightful. There must be, of course, the affinity — the rapport — the what you please to call it — to begin with — it matters not how faint and slender; and then the spell steals on and grows. See how the poor little woodbine, or the jessamine, or the vine, will lean towards the rugged elm, appointed by Virgil, in his epic of husbandry (I mean no pun) for their natural support — the elm, you know it hath been said, is the gentleman of the forest: — see all the little tendrils turn his way silently, and cling, and long years after, maybe, clothe the broken and blighted tree with a fragrance and beauty not its own. Those feeble feminine plants, are, it sometimes seems to me, the strength and perfection of creation — strength perfected in weakness; the ivy, green among the snows of winter, and clasping together in its true embrace the loveless ruin; and the vine that maketh glad the heart of man amidst the miseries of life. I must not be mistaken, though, for Devereux’s talk was only a tender sort of trifling, and Lilias had said nothing to encourage him to risk more; but she now felt sure that Devereux liked her — that, indeed, he took a deep interest in her — and somehow she was happy.

And little Lily drew towards the dancers, and Devereux by her side — not to join in the frolic; it was much pleasanter talking. But the merry thrum and jingle of the tambourine, and vivacious squeak of the fiddles, and the incessant laughter and prattle of the gay company were a sort of protection. And perhaps she fancied that within that pleasant and bustling circle, the discourse, which was to her so charming, might be longer maintained. It was music heard in a dream — strange and sweet — and might never come again.

FOOTNOTE:

These little verses have been several times set to music, and last and very sweetly, by Miss Elizabeth Philp.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN WHICH THE SUN SETS, AND THE MERRYMAKING IS KEPT UP BY CANDLELIGHT IN THE KING'S HOUSE, AND LILY RECEIVES A WARNING WHICH SHE DOES NOT COMPREHEND.

Dr. Toole, without whom no jollification of any sort could occur satisfactorily in Chapelizod or the country round, was this evening at the 'King's House,' of course, as usual, with his eyes about him and his tongue busy; and at this moment he was setting Cluffe right about Devereux's relation to the title and estates of Athenry. His uncle Roland Lord Athenry was, as everybody knew, a lunatic — Toole used to call him Orlando Furioso: and Lewis, his first cousin by his father's elder brother — the heir presumptive — was very little better, and reported every winter to be dying. He spends all his time — his spine being made, it is popularly believed, of gristle — stretched on his back upon a deal board, cutting out paper figures with a pair of scissors. Toole used to tell them at the club, when alarming letters arrived about the health of the noble uncle and his hopeful nephew — the heir apparent— 'That's the gentleman who's backbone's made of jelly — eh, Puddock? Two letters come, by Jove, announcing that Dick Devereux's benefit is actually fixed for the Christmas holidays, when his cousin undertakes to die for positively the last time, and his uncle will play in the most natural manner conceivable, the last act of "King Lear."' In fact, this family calamity was rather a cheerful subject among Devereux's friends; and certainly Devereux had no reason to love that vicious, selfish old lunatic, Lord Athenry, who in his prodigal and heartless reign, before straw and darkness swallowed him, never gave the boy a kind word or gentle look, and owed him a mortal grudge because he stood near the kingdom, and wrote most damaging reports of him at the end of the holidays, and despatched those letters of Bellerophon by the boy's own hand to the schoolmaster, with the natural results.

When Aunt Rebecca rustled into the ring that was gathered round about the fiddles and tambourine, she passed Miss Magnolia very near, with a high countenance, and looking straight before her, and with no more recognition than the tragedy queen bestows upon the painted statue on the wing by which she enters. And Miss Mag followed her with a titter and an angry flash of her eyes. So Aunt Rebecca made up to the little hillock — little bigger than a good teacake — on which the dowager was perched in a high-backed chair, smiling over the dancers with a splendid benignity, and beating time with her fat short foot. And Aunt Becky told Mrs. Colonel Stafford, standing by, she had extemporised a living Watteau, and indeed it *was* a very pretty picture, or Aunt Becky would not have said so; and 'craning' from this eminence she saw her niece coming leisurely round, not in company of Mervyn.

That interesting stranger, on the contrary, had by this time joined Lilias and Devereux, who had returned toward the dancers, and was talking again with Miss Walsingham. Gertrude's beau was little Puddock, who was all radiant and supremely blest. But encountering rather a black look from Aunt Becky as they drew near, he deferentially surrendered the young lady to the care of her natural guardian, who forthwith presented her to the dowager; and Puddock, warned off by another glance, backed away, and fell, unawares, helplessly into the possession of Miss Magnolia, a lady whom he never quite understood, and whom he regarded with a very kind and polite sort of horror.

So the athletic Magnolia instantly impounded the little lieutenant, and began to rally him, in the sort of slang she delighted in, with plenty of merriment and malice upon his *tendre* for Miss Chattesworth, and made the gallant young gentleman blush and occasionally smile, and bow a great deal, and take some snuff.

'And here comes the Duchess of Belmont again,' said the saucy Miss Magnolia, seeing the stately approach of Aunt Becky, as it seemed to Puddock, through the back of her head. I think the exertion and frolic of the dance had got her high blood up into a sparkling state, and her scorn and hate of Aunt Rebecca was more demonstrative than usual. 'Now you'll see how she'll run against poor little simple me, just because I'm small. And *this* is the way they dance it,' cried she, in a louder tone; and capering backward with a bounce, and an air, and a grace, she came with a sort of a courtesy, and a smart bump, and a shock against the stately Miss Rebecca; and whisking round with a little scream and a look of terrified innocence, and with her fingers to her heart, to suppress an imaginary palpitation, dropped a low courtesy, crying —

‘I’m blest but I thought ’twas tall Burke, the gunner.’

‘You might look behind before you spring backward, young gentlewoman,’ said Aunt Becky, with a very bright colour.

‘And you might look before you before you spring forward, old gentlewoman,’ replied Miss Mag, just as angry.

‘Young ladies used to have a respect to decorum,’ Aunt Becky went on.

‘So they prayed me to tell you, Madam,’ replied the young lady, with a very meek courtesy, and a very crimson face.

‘Yes, Miss Mac — Mag — Madam — it used to be so,’ rejoined Aunt Rebecca, ‘’twas part of my education, at least, to conduct myself in a polite company like a civilised person.’

‘“I wish I could see it,” says blind Hugh,’ Magnolia retorted; ‘but ’twas a good while ago, Madam, and you’ve had time to forget.’

‘I shall acquaint your mother, Mrs. — Mug — Mac — Macnamara, with your pretty behaviour tomorrow,’ said Miss Rebecca.

‘Tomorrow’s a new day, and mother may be well enough then to hear your genteel lamentation; but I suppose you mean tomorrow come never,’ answered Magnolia, with another of her provoking meek courtesies.

‘Oh, this is Lieutenant Puddock,’ said Aunt Becky, drawing off in high disdain, ‘the bully of the town. Your present company, Sir, will find very pretty work, I warrant, for your sword and pistols; Sir Launcelot and his belle!’

‘Do you like a belle or beldame best, Sir Launcelot?’ enquired Miss Mag, with a mild little duck to Puddock.

‘You’ll have your hands pretty full, Sir, ha, ha, ha!’ and with scarlet cheeks, and a choking laugh, away sailed Aunt Rebecca.

‘Choke, chicken, there’s more a-hatching,’ said Miss Mag, in a sort of aside, and cutting a flicflac with a merry devilish laugh, and a wink to Puddock. That officer, being a gentleman, was a good deal disconcerted, and scandalised — too literal to see, and too honest to enjoy, the absurd side of the combat.

’Twas an affair of a few seconds, like two frigates crossing in a gale, with only opportunity for a broadside or two; and when the Rebecca Chattesworth sheered off, it can’t be denied, her tackling was a good deal more cut up, and her hull considerably more pierced, than those of the saucy Magnolia, who sent that whistling shot and provoking cheer in her majestic wake.

'I see you want to go, Lieutenant Puddock — Lieutenant O'Flaherty, I promised to dance this country dance with you; don't let me keep *you*, Ensign Puddock,' said Miss Mag in a huff, observing little Puddock's wandering eye and thoughts.

'I — a — you see, Miss Macnamara, truly you were so hard upon poor Miss Rebecca Chattesworth, that I fear I shall get into trouble, unless I go and make my peace with her,' lisped the little lieutenant, speaking the truth, as was his wont, with a bow and a polite smile, and a gentle indication of beginning to move away.

'Oh, is that all? I was afraid you were sick of the mulligrubs, with eating chopt hay; you had better go back to her at once if she wants you, for if you don't with a good grace, she'll very likely come and take you back by the collar,' and Miss Mag and O'Flaherty joined in a derisive hee-haw, to Puddock's considerable confusion, who bowed and smiled again, and tried to laugh, till the charming couple relieved him by taking their places in the dance.

When I read this speech about the 'mulligrubs,' in the old yellow letter which contains a lively account of the skirmish, my breath was fairly taken away, and I could see nothing else for more than a minute; and so soon as I was quite myself again, I struck my revising pen across the monstrous sentence, with uncompromising decision, referring it to a clerical blunder, or some unlucky transposition, and I wondered how any polite person could have made so gross a slip. But see how authentication waits upon truth! Three years afterwards, I picked up in the parlour of the 'Cat and Fiddle,' on the Macclesfield Road, in Derbyshire, a scrubby old duodecimo, which turned out to be an old volume of Dean Swift's works: well, I opened in the middle of 'Polite Conversation,' and there, upon my honour, the second sentence I read was '*Lady Smart*,' (mark *that*— 'Lady!') 'What, you are sick of the mulligrubs, with eating chopt hay?' So my good old yellow letter-writer ('I.' or 'T.' Tresham, I can't decide what he signs himself) — *you* were, no doubt, exact here as in other matters, and *I* was determining the probable and the impossible, unphilosophically, by the *rule* of my own time. And my poor Magnolia, though you spoke some years — thirty or so

— later than my Lady Smart, a countess for aught I know, you are not so much to blame. Thirty years! what of that? Don't we, to this hour, more especially in rural districts, encounter among the old folk, every now and then, one of honest Simon Wagstaff's pleasantries, which had served merry ladies and gentlemen so long before that charming compiler, with his 'Large Table Book,' took the matter in hands. And I feel, I confess, a queer sort of a thrill, not at all contemptuous — neither altogether sad, nor altogether joyous — but something pleasantly regretful, whenever one of those quaint and faded old servants of the mirth of so many dead and buried generations, turns up in my company.

And now the sun went down behind the tufted trees, and the blue shades of evening began to deepen, and the merry company flocked into the King's House, to dance again and drink tea, and make more love, and play round games, and joke, and sing songs, and eat supper under old Colonel Stafford's snug and kindly roof-tree.

Dangerfield, who arrived rather late, was now in high chat with Aunt Becky. She rather liked him and had very graciously accepted a gray parrot and a monkey, which he had deferentially presented, a step which called forth, to General Chattesworth's consternation, a cockatoo from Cluffe, who felt the necessity of maintaining his ground against the stranger, and wrote off by the next packet to London, in a confounded passion, for he hated wasting money, about a pelican he had got wind of. Dangerfield also entered with much apparent interest into a favourite scheme of Aunt Becky's, for establishing, between Chapelizod and Knockmaroon, a sort of retreat for discharged gaol-birds of her selection, a colony, happily for the character and the silver spoons of the neighbourhood, never eventually established.

It was plain he was playing the frank, good fellow, and aiming at popularity. He had become one of the club. He played at whist, and only smiled, after his sort, when his partner revoked, and he lost like a gentleman. His talk was brisk, and hard, and caustic — that of a Philistine who had seen the world and knew it. He had the Peerage by rote, and knew something out-of-the-way, amusing or damnable about every person of note you could name; and his shrewd gossip had a bouquet its own, and a fine cynical flavour, which secretly awed and delighted the young fellows. He smiled a good deal. He was not aware that a smile did not quite become him. The fact is, he had lost a good many side teeth, and it was a hollow and sinister disclosure. He would laugh, too, occasionally; but his laugh was not rich and joyous, like General Chattesworth's, or even Tom Toole's cozy chuckle, or old Doctor Walsingham's hilarious ha-ha-ha! He did not know it; but there was a cold hard ring in it, like the crash and jingle of broken glass. Then his spectacles, shining like ice in the light, never removed for a moment — never even pushed up to his forehead — he eat in them, drank in them, fished in them, joked in them — he prayed in them, and, no doubt, slept in them, and would, it was believed, be buried in them — heightened that sense of mystery and mask which seemed to challenge curiosity and defy scrutiny with a scornful chuckle.

In the meantime, the mirth, and frolic, and flirtation were drawing to a close. The dowager, in high good humour, was conveyed down stairs to her carriage, by Colonel Stafford and Lord Castlemallard, and rolled away, with blazing flambeaux, like a meteor, into town. There was a breaking-up and leavetaking, and parting jokes on the doorsteps; and as the ladies, old and young, were popping on their mantles in the little room off the hall, and Aunt Becky and Mrs. Colonel Strafford were exchanging a little bit of eager farewell gossip beside the cabinet, Gertrude Chattesworth — by some chance she and Lilias had not had an opportunity of speaking that evening — drew close to her, and she took her hand and said 'Goodnight, dear Lily,' and glanced over her shoulder, still holding Lily's hand; and she looked very pale and earnest, and said quickly, in a whisper:

'Lily, darling, if you knew what I could tell you, if I dare, about Mr. Mervyn, you would cut your hand off rather than allow him to talk to you, as, I confess, he *has* talked to me, as an admirer, and knowing what I know, and with my eye upon him — Lily — *Lily* — I've been amazed by him tonight. I can only *warn* you now, darling, to beware of a great danger.'

''Tis no danger, however, to me, Gertrude, dear,' said Lily, with a pleasant little smile. 'And though he's handsome, there's something, is there not, *funeste* in his deep eyes and black hair; and the dear old man knows something strange about him, too; I suppose 'tis all the same story.'

'And he has not told you,' said Gertrude, looking down with a gloomy face at her fan.

'No; but I'm so curious, I know he will, though he does not like to speak of it; but you know, Gerty, I love a horror, and I know the story's fearful, and I feel uncertain whether he’s a man or a ghost; but see, Aunt Rebecca and Mistress Strafford are kissing.’

‘Goodnight, dear Lily, and remember!’ said pale Gertrude without a smile, looking at her, for a moment, with a steadfast gaze, and then kissing her with a hasty and earnest pressure. And Lily kissed her again, and so they parted.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RELATING HOW THE BAND OF THE ROYAL IRISH ARTILLERY PLAYED, AND, WHILE THE MUSIC WAS GOING ON, HOW VARIOUSLY DIFFERENT PEOPLE WERE MOVED.

Twice a week the band of the Royal Irish Artillery regaled all comers with their music on the parade-ground by the river; and, as it was reputed the best in Ireland, and Chapelizod was a fashionable resort, and a very pretty village, embowered in orchards, people liked to drive out of town on a fine autumn day like this, by way of listening, and all the neighbours showed there, and there was quite a little fair for an hour or two.

Mervyn, among the rest, was there, but for scarce ten minutes, and, as usual, received little more than a distant salutation, coldly and gravely returned, from Gertrude Chattesworth, to whom Mr. Beauchamp, whom she remembered at the Stafford's dinner, addicted himself a good deal. That demigod appeared in a white surtout, with a crimson cape, a French waistcoat, his hair *en papillote*, a feather in his hat, a *couteau de chasse* by his side, with a small cane hanging to his button, and a pair of Italian greyhounds at his heels; and he must have impressed Tresham prodigiously; for I observe no other instance in which he has noted down costume so carefully. Little Puddock, too, was hovering near, and his wooing made uncomfortable by Aunt Becky's renewed severity, as well as by the splendour of 'Mr. Redheels,' who was expending his small talk and *fleuerets* upon Gertrude. Cluffe, moreover, who was pretty well in favour with Aunt Rebecca, and had been happy and prosperous, had his little jealousies too to plague him, for Dangerfield, with his fishing-rod and basket, no sooner looked in, with his stern front and his remarkable smile, than Aunt Becky, seeming instantaneously to forget Captain Cluffe, and all his winning ways, and the pleasant story, to the point of which he was just arriving, in his best manner, left him abruptly, and walked up to the grim pescator del onda, with an outstretched hand, and a smile of encouragement, and immediately fell into confidential talk with him.

‘The minds of anglers,’ says the gentle Colonel Robert Venables, ‘be usually more calm and composed than many others; when he hath the worst success he loseth but a hook or line, or perhaps what he never possessed, a fish; and suppose he should take nothing, yet he enjoyeth a delightful walk by pleasant rivers, in sweet pastures, amongst odoriferous flowers, which gratify his senses and delight his mind; and if example, which is the best proof, may sway anything, I know no sort of men less subject to melancholy than anglers.’ It was only natural, then, that Dangerfield should be serene and sunny.

Aunt Becky led him a little walk twice or thrice up and down. She seemed grave, earnest, and lofty, and he grinned and chatted after his wont energetically, to stout Captain Cluffe’s considerable uneasiness and mortification. He had seen Dangerfield the day before, through his field-glass, from the high wooded grounds in the park, across the river, walk slowly for a good while under the poplars in the meadow at Belmont, beside Aunt Becky, in high chat; and there was something particular and earnest in their manner, which made him uncomfortable then. And fat Captain Cluffe’s gall rose and nearly choked him, and; he cursed Dangerfield in the bottom of his corpulent, greedy soul, and wondered what fiend had sent that scheming old land-agent three hundred miles out of his way, on purpose to interfere with his little interests, as if there were not plenty of — of — well! — rich old women — in London. And he bethought him of the price of the cockatoo and the probable cost of the pelican, rejoinders to Dangerfield’s contributions to Aunt Rebecca’s menagerie, for those birds were not to be had for nothing; and Cluffe, who loved money as well, at least, as any man in his Majesty’s service, would have seen the two tribes as extinct as the dodo, before he would have expended sixpence upon such tom-foolery, had it not been for Dangerfield’s investments in animated nature. ‘The hound! as if two could not play at that game.’ But he had an uneasy and bitter presentiment that they were birds of paradise, and fifty other cursed birds beside, and that in this costly competition Dangerfield could take a flight beyond and above him; and he thought of the flagitious waste of money, and cursed him for a fool again. Aunt Becky had said, he thought, something in which ‘tomorrow’ occurred, on taking leave of Dangerfield. ‘Tomorrow!’ ‘What tomorrow? She spoke low and confidentially, and seemed excited and a little flushed, and very distrait when she came back. Altogether, he felt as if Aunt Rebecca was slipping through his fingers, and would have liked to take that selfish old puppy, Dangerfield, by the neck and drown him out of hand in the river. But, notwithstanding the state of his temper, he knew it might be his only chance to shine pre-eminently at that moment in amiability, wit, grace, and gallantry, and, though it was up-hill work, he did labour uncommonly.

When Mr. Dangerfield's spectacles gleamed through the crowd upon Dr. Sturk, who was thinking of other things beside the music, the angler walked round forthwith, and accosted that universal genius. Mrs. Sturk felt the doctor's arm, on which she leaned, vibrate for a second with a slight thrill — an evidence in that hard, fibrous limb of what she used to call 'a start' — and she heard Dangerfield's voice over his shoulder. And the surgeon and the grand vizier were soon deep in talk, and Sturk brightened up, and looked eager and sagacious, and important, and became very voluble and impressive, and, leaving his lady to her own devices, with her maid and children, he got to the other side of the street, where Nutter, with taciturn and black observation, saw them busy pointing with cane and finger, and talking briskly as they surveyed together Dick Fisher's and Tom Tresham's tenements, and the Salmon House; and then beheld them ascend the steps of Tresham's door, and overlook the wall on the other side toward the river, and point this way and that along the near bank, as it seemed to Nutter discussing detailed schemes of alteration and improvement. Sturk actually pulled out his pocketbook and pencil, and then Dangerfield took the pencil, and made notes of what he read to him, on the back of a letter; and Sturk looked eager and elated, and Dangerfield frowned and looked impressed, and nodded again and again. *Diruit ædificat, mutat quadrata rotundis*, under his very nose — he unconsulted! It was such an impertinence as Nutter could ill-digest. It was a studied slight, something like a public deposition, and Nutter's jealous soul seethed secretly in a hellbroth of rage and suspicion.

I mentioned that Mistress Sturk felt in that physician's arm the telegraphic thrill with which the brain will occasionally send an invisible message of alarm from the seat of government to the extremities; and as this smallest of all small bits of domestic gossip did innocently escape me, the idle and goodnatured reader will, I hope, let me say out my little say upon the matter, in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCERNING THE TROUBLES AND THE SHAPES THAT BEGAN TO GATHER ABOUT DOCTOR STURK.

It was just about that time that our friend, Dr. Sturk, had two or three odd dreams that secretly acted disagreeably upon his spirits. His liver he thought was a little wrong, and there was certainly a little light gout sporting about him. His favourite 'pupton,' at mess, disagreed with him; so did his claret, and hot suppers as often as he tried them, and that was, more or less, nearly every night in the week. So he was, perhaps, right, in ascribing these his visions to the humours, the spleen, the liver, and the juices. Still they sat uncomfortably upon his memory, and helped his spirits down, and made him silent and testy, and more than usually formidable to poor, little, quiet, hard-worked Mrs. Sturk.

Dreams! What talk can be idler? And yet haven't we seen grave people and gay listening very contentedly at times to that wild and awful sort of frivolity; and I think there is in most men's minds, sages or zanies, a secret misgiving that dreams may have an office and a meaning, and are perhaps more than a fortuitous concourse of symbols, in fact, the language which good or evil spirits whisper over the sleeping brain.

There was an ugly and ominous consistency in these dreams which might have made a less dyspeptic man a little nervous. Tom Dunstan, a sergeant whom Sturk had prosecuted and degraded before a court-martial, who owed the doctor no goodwill, and was dead and buried in the churchyard close by, six years ago, and whom Sturk had never thought about in the interval — made a kind of resurrection now, and was with him every night, figuring in these dreary visions and somehow in league with a sort of conspirator-in-chief, who never showed distinctly, but talked in scoffing menaces from outside the door, or clutched him by the throat from behind his chair, and yelled some hideous secret into his ear, which his scared and scattered wits, when he started into consciousness, could never collect again. And this fellow, with whose sneering cavernous talk — with whose very knock at the door or thump at the partition-wall he was as familiar as with his own wife's voice, and the touch of whose cold convulsive hand he had felt so often on his cheek or throat, and the very suspicion of whose approach made him faint with horror, his dreams would not present to his sight. There was always something interposed, or he stole behind him, or just as he was entering and the door swinging open, Sturk would awake — and he never saw him, at least in a human shape.

But one night he thought he saw, as it were, his sign or symbol. As Sturk lay his length under the bedclothes, with his back turned upon his slumbering helpmate, he was, in the spirit, sitting perpendicularly in his great balloon-backed chair at his writing-table, in the window of the back one-pair-of-stairs chamber which he called his library, where he sometimes wrote prescriptions, and pondering over his pennyweights, his Roman numerals, his guttæ and pillulæ, his 3s, his 5s, his 9s, and the other arabesque and astrological symbols of his mystery, he looked over his pen into the churchyard, which inspiring prospect he thence commanded.

Thus, as out of the body sat our recumbent doctor in the room underneath the bed in which his snoring idolon lay, Tom Dunstan stood beside the table, with the short white threads sticking out on his blue sleeve, where the stitching of the stripes had been cut through on that twilight parade morning when the doctor triumphed, and Tom's rank, fortune, and castles in the air, all tumbled together in the dust of the barrack pavement; and so, with his thin features and evil eye turned sideways to Sturk, says he, with a stiff salute— 'A gentleman, Sir, that means to dine with you,' and there was the muffled knock at the door which he knew so well, and a rustling behind him. So the doctor turned him about quickly with a sort of chill between his shoulders, and perched on the back of his chair sat a portentous old quizzical carrion-crow, the antediluvian progenitor of the whole race of carrion-crows, monstrous, with great shining eyes, and head white as snow, and a queer human look, and the crooked beak of an owl, that opened with a loud grating 'caw' close in his ears; and with a 'bo-o-oh!' and a bounce that shook the bed and made poor Mrs. Sturk jump out of it, and spin round in the curtain, Sturk's spirit popped back again into his body, which sat up wide awake that moment.

It is not pretended that at this particular time the doctor was a specially good sleeper. The contrary stands admitted; and I don't ask you, sagacious reader, to lay any sort of stress upon his dreams; only as there came a time when people talked of them a good deal over the fireside in Chapelizod, and made winter's tales about them, I thought myself obliged to tell you that such things were.

He did not choose to narrate them to his brother-officers, and to be quizzed about them at mess. But he opened his budget to old Dr. Walsingham, of course, only as a matter to be smiled at by a pair of philosophers like them. But Dr. Walsingham, who was an absent man, and floated upon the ocean of his learning serenely and lazily, drawn finely and whimsically, now hither, now thither, by the finest hair of association, glided complacently off into the dim region of visionary prognostics and warnings, and reminded him how Joseph dreamed, and Pharaoh, and Benvenuto, Cellini's father, and St. Dominick's mother, and Edward II. of England, and dodged back and forward among patriarchs and pagans, and modern Christians, men and women not at all suspecting that he was making poor Sturk, who had looked for a cheerful, sceptical sort of essay, confoundedly dismal and uncomfortable.

And, indeed, confoundedly distressed he must have been, for he took his brother-chip, Tom Toole, whom he loved not, to counsel upon his case — of course, strictly as a question of dandelion, or gentian, or camomile flowers; and Tom, who, as we all know, loved him reciprocally, frightened him as well as he could, offered to take charge of his case, and said, looking hard at him out of the corner of his cunning, resolute little eye, as they sauntered in the park —

'But I need not tell *you*, my good Sir, that physic is of small avail, if there is any sort of — a — a — vexation, or — or — in short — a — a — *vexation,* you know, on your mind.'

'A — ha, ha, ha! — what? Murdered my father, and married my grandmother?' snarled Sturk, sneeringly, amused or affecting to be so, and striving to laugh at the daisies before his toes, as he trudged along, with his hands in his breeches' pockets. 'I have not a secret on earth, Sir. 'Tis not a button to me, Sir, who talks about me; and I don't owe a guinea, Sir, that is, that I could not pay tomorrow, if I liked it; and there's nothing to trouble me — nothing, Sir, except this dirty, little, gouty dyspepsy, scarce worth talking about.

Then came a considerable silence; and Toole's active little mind, having just made a note of this, tripped off smartly to half-a-dozen totally different topics, and he was mentally tippling his honest share of a dozen of claret, with a pleasant little masonic party at the Salmon-leap, on Sunday next, and was just going to charm them with his best song, and a new verse of his own compounding, when Sturk, in a moment, dispersed the masons, and brought him back by the ear at a jump from the Salmon-leap, with a savage ——

‘And I’d like to know, Sir, who the deuce, or, rather, what the —— (*plague* we’ll say) could put into your head, Sir, to suppose any such matter?’

But this was only one of Sturk’s explosions, and he and little Toole parted no better and no worse friends than usual, in ten minutes more at the latter’s doorstep.

So Toole said to Mrs. T. that evening ——

‘Sturk owes money, mark my words, sweetheart. Remember *I* say it — he’ll cool his heels in a prison, if he’s no wiser than of late, before a twel’month. Since the beginning of February he has lost — just wait a minute, and let me see — ay, that, £150 by the levanting of old Tom Farthingale; and, I had it to-day from little O’Leary, who had it from Jim Kelly, old Craddock’s conducting clerk, he’s bit to the tune of three hundred more by the failure of Larkin, Brothers, and Hoolaghan. You see a little bit of usury under the rose is all very well for a vulgar dog like Sturk, if he knows the town, and how to go about it; but hang, it, he knows nothing. Why, the turnpike-man, over the way, would not have taken old Jos. Farthingale’s bill for fippence — no, nor his bond neither; and he’s stupid beside — but he can’t help that, the hound! — and he’ll owe a whole year’s rent only six weeks hence, and he has not a shilling to bless himself with. Unfortunate devil — I’ve no reason to like him — but, truly, I do pity him.’

Saying which Tom Toole, with his back to the fire, and a look of concern thrown into his comic little mug, and his eyebrows raised, experienced a very pleasurable glow of commiseration.

Sturk, on the contrary, was more than commonly silent and savage that evening, and sat in his drawingroom, with his fists in his breeches’ pockets, and his heels stretched out, lurid and threatening, in a gloomy and highly electric state. Mrs. S. did not venture her usual ‘would my Barney like a dish of tea?’ but plied her worsted and knitting-needles with mild concentration, sometimes peeping under her lashes at Sturk, and sometimes telegraphing faintly to the children if they whispered too loud — all cautious pantomime — *nutu signisque loquuntur*.

Sturk was incensed by the suspicion that Tom Toole knew something of his losses, ‘the dirty, little, unscrupulous spy and tattler.’ He was confident, however, that he could not know their extent. It was certainly a hard thing, and enough to exasperate a better man than Sturk, that the savings of a shrewd, and, in many ways, a self-denying life should have been swept away, and something along with them, by a few unlucky casts in little more than twelve months. And he such a clever dog, too! the best player, all to nothing, driven to the wall, by a cursed obstinate run of infernal luck. And he used to scowl, and grind his teeth, and nearly break the keys and shillings in his gripe in his breeches’ pocket, as imprecations, hot and unspoken, coursed one another through his brain. Then up he would get, and walk sulkily to the brandy-flask and have a dram, and feel better, and begin to count up his chances, and what he might yet save out of the fire; and resolve to press vigorously for the agency, which he thought Dangerfield, if he wanted a useful man, could not fail to give him; and he had hinted the matter to Lord Castlemallard, who, he thought, understood and favoured his wishes. Yes; that agency would give him credit and opportunity, and be the foundation of his new fortunes, and the saving of him. A precious, pleasant companion, you may suppose, he was to poor little Mrs. Sturk, who knew nothing of his affairs, and could not tell what to make of her Barney’s eccentricities.

And so it was, somehow, when Dangerfield spoke his greeting at Sturk’s ear, and the doctor turned short round, and saw his white frizzed hair, great glass eyes, and crooked, short beak, quizzical and sinister, close by, it seemed for a second as if the ‘caw’ and the carrion-crow of his dream was at his shoulder; and, I suppose, he showed his discomfiture a little, for he smiled a good deal more than Sturk usually did at a recognition.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN WHICH MR. IRONS RECOUNTS SOME OLD RECOLLECTIONS ABOUT THE PIED HORSE AND THE FLOWER DE LUCE.

It was so well known in Chapelizod that Sturk was poking after Lord Castlemallard's agency that Nutter felt the scene going on before his eyes between him and Dangerfield like a public affront. His ire was that of a phlegmatic man, dangerous when stirred, and there was no mistaking, in his rigid, swarthy countenance, the state of his temper.

Dangerfield took an opportunity, and touched Nutter on the shoulder, and told him frankly, in effect, though *he* wished things to go on as heretofore, Sturk had wormed himself into a sort of confidence with Lord Castlemallard.

'Not confidence, Sir — *talk*, if you please,' said Nutter grimly.

'Well, into talk,' acquiesced Dangerfield; 'and by Jove, I've a hard card to play, you see. His lordship will have me listen to Doctor Sturk's talk, such as it is.'

'He has no talk in him, Sir, you mayn't get from any other impudent dunderhead in the town,' answered Nutter.

'My dear Sir, understand me. I'm your friend,' and he placed his hand amicably upon Nutter's arm; 'but Lord Castlemallard has, now and then, a will of his own, I need not tell you; and somebody's been doing you an ill turn with his lordship; and you're a gentleman, Mr. Nutter, and I like you, and I'll be frank with you, knowing 'twill go no further. Sturk wants the agency. You have *my* goodwill. *I* don't see why he should take it from you; but — but — you see his lordship takes odd likings, and he won't always listen to reason.'

Nutter was so shocked and exasperated, that for a moment he felt stunned, and put his hand toward his head.

'I think, Sir,' said Nutter, with a stern, deliberate oath, I'll write to Lord Castlemallard this evening, and throw up his agency; and challenge Sturk, and fight him in the morning.'

‘You must not resign the agency, Sir; his lordship is whimsical; but you have a friend at court. I’ve spoken in full confidence in your secrecy; and should any words pass between you and Dr. Sturk, you’ll not mention my name; I rely, Sir, on your honour, as you may on my goodwill;’ and Dangerfield shook hands with Nutter significantly, and called to Irons, who was waiting to accompany him, and the two anglers walked away together up the river.

Nutter was still possessed with his furious resolution to fling down his office at Lord Castlemallard’s feet, and to call Sturk into the lists of mortal combat. One turn by himself as far as the turnpike, however, and he gave up the first, and retained only the second resolve. Half-an-hour more, and he had settled in his mind that there was no need to punish the meddler that way: and so he resolved to bide his time — a short one.

In the meanwhile Dangerfield had reached one of those sweet pastures by the river’s bank which, as we have read, delight the simple mind of the angler, and his float was already out, and bobbing up and down on the ripples of the stream; and the verdant valley, in which he and his taciturn companion stood side by side, resounded, from time to time, with Dangerfield’s strange harsh laughter; the cause of which Irons did not, of course, presume to ask.

There is a churchyard cough — I don’t see why there may not be a churchyard laugh. In Dangerfield’s certainly there was an omen — a glee that had nothing to do with mirth; and more dismaying, perhaps, than his sternest rebuke. If a man is not a laugher by nature, he had better let it alone. The bipeds that love mousing and carrion have a chant of their own, and nobody quarrels with it. We respect an owl or a raven, though we mayn’t love him, while he sticks to his croak or to-whoo. ’Tisn’t pleasant, but quite natural and unaffected, and we acquiesce. All we ask of these gentlemanlike birds is, that they mistake not their talent — affect not music; or if they do, that they treat not us to their queer warblings.

Irons, with that never-failing phantom of a smile on his thin lips, stood a little apart, with a gaff and landing-net, and a second rod, and a little bag of worms, and his other gear, silent, except when spoken to, or sometimes to suggest a change of bait, or fly, or a cast over a particular spot; for Dangerfield was of good Colonel Venables’ mind, that ’tis well in the lover of the gentle craft to associate himself with some honest, expert angler, who will freely and candidly communicate his skill unto him.'

Dangerfield was looking straight at his float; but thinking of something else. Whenever Sturk met him at dinner, or the club, the doctor's arrogance and loud lungs failed him, and he fell for a while into a sort of gloom and dreaming; and when he came slowly to himself, he could not talk to anyone but the man with the spectacles; and in the midst of his talk he would grow wandering and thoughtful, as if over some half-remembered dream; and when he took his leave of Dangerfield it was with a lingering look and a stern withdrawal, as if he had still a last word to say, and he went away in a dismal reverie. It was natural, that with his views about the agency, Sturk should regard him with particular interest. But there was something more here, and it did not escape Dangerfield, as, indeed, very little that in anywise concerned him ever did.

'Clever fellow, Doctor Sturk,' said the silver spectacles, looking grimly at the float. 'I like him. You remember him, you say, Irons?'

'Ay, Sir,' said Bluechin: 'I never forget a face.' 'Par nobile,' sneered the angler quietly.' In the year '45, eh — go on.'

'Ay, Sir; he slept in the "Pied Horse," at Newmarket, and was in all the fun. Next day he broke his arm badly, and slept there in the closet off Mr. Beauclerc's room that night under laudanum, and remained ten days longer in the house. Mr. Beauclerc's chamber was the "flower de luce." Barnabus Sturk, Esq. When I saw him here, half the length of the street away, I knew him and his name on the instant. I never forget things.'

'But he don't remember you?'

'No,' smiled Bluechin, looking at the float also.

'Two-and-twenty-years. How came it he was not summoned?'

'He was under laudanum, and could tell nothing.'

'Ay,' said the spectacles, 'ay,' and he let out some more line. 'That's deep.'

'Yes, Sir, a soldier was drownded in that hole.'

'And Dr. Toole and Mr. Nutter don't love him — both brisk fellows, and have fought.'

Bluechin smiled on.

'Very clever dog — needs be sharp though, or he'll come to — ha!' and a gray trout came splashing and flickering along the top of the water upon the hook, and Irons placed the net in Dangerfield’s outstretched hand, and the troutling was landed, to the distant music of ‘God save the King,’ borne faintly on the air, by which the reader perceives that the band were now about to put up their instruments, and the gay folk to disperse. And at the same moment, Lord Castlemallard was doing old General Chattesworth the honour to lean upon his arm, as they walked to and fro upon the parade-ground by the river’s bank, and the general looked particularly grand and thoughtful, and my lord was more than usually gracious and impressive, and was saying: —

‘’Tis a good match every way: he has good blood in his veins, Sir, the Dangerfields of Redminster; and you may suppose he’s rich, when he was ready to advance Sir Sedley Hicks thirty-five thousand pounds on mortgage, and to my certain knowledge has nearly as much more out on good securities; and he’s the most principled man I think I ever met with, and the cleverest dog, I believe, in these kingdoms; and I wish you joy, General Chattesworth.’

And he gave the general snuff out of his box, and shook hands, and said something very good, as he got into his carriage, for he laughed a good deal, and touched the general’s ribs with the point of his gloved finger; and the general laughed too, moderately, and was instantaneously grave again, when the carriage whirled away.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SHOWING HOW POOR MRS. MACNAMARA WAS TROUBLED AND HAUNTED TOO, AND OPENING A BUDGET OF GOSSIP.

Some score pages back, when we were all assembled at the King's House, my reader, perhaps, may not have missed our fat and consequential, but on the whole, goodnatured acquaintance, Mrs. Macnamara; though, now I remember, he *did* overhear the gentle Magnolia, in that little colloquy in which she and Aunt Becky exchanged compliments, say, in substance, that she hoped that amiable parent might be better next day. She was not there, she was not well. Of late Mrs. Macnamara had lost all her pluck, and half her colour, and some even of her fat. She was like one of those portly dowagers in Numbernip's select society of metamorphosed turnips, who suddenly exhibited sympathetic symptoms of failure, grew yellow, flabby, and wrinkled, as the parent bulb withered and went out of season. You would not have known her for the same woman.

A tall, pale female, dressed in black satin and a black velvet riding hood, had made her two visits in a hackney-coach; but whether these had any connexion with the melancholy change referred to, I don't, at this moment, say. I know that they had a very serious bearing upon after events affecting persons who figure in this true history. Whatever her grief was she could not bring herself to tell it. And so her damask cheek, and portly form, and rollicking animal spirits continued to suffer.

The major found that her mind wandered at piquet. Toole also caught her thinking of something else in the midst of his best bits of local scandal; and Magnolia several times popped in upon her large mother in tears. Once or twice Toole thought, and he was right, that she was on the point of making a disclosure. But her heart failed her, and it came to nothing. The little fellow's curiosity was on fire. In his philosophy there was more in everything than met the eye, and he would not believe Magnolia, who laughed at him, that she did not know all about it.

On this present morning poor Mrs. Macnamara had received a note, at which she grew pale as the large pat of butter before her, and she felt quite sick as she thrust the paper into her pocket, and tried to smile across the breakfast table at Magnolia, who was rattling away as usual, and the old major who was chuckling at her impudent mischief over his buttered toast and tea.

‘Why, mother dear,’ cried Mag suddenly, ‘what the plague ails your pretty face? Did you ever see the like? It’s for all the world like a bad batter pudding! I lay a crown, now, that was a bill. Was it a bill? Come now, Mullikins (a term of endearment for mother). Show us the note. It is too bad, you poor dear, old, handsome, bothered angel, you should be fretted and tormented out of your looks and your health, by them dirty shopkeepers’ bills, when a five-pound note, I’m certain sure, ‘id pay every mothers skin o’ them, and change to spare!’ And the elegant Magnolia, whose soiclainet and Norwich crape petticoat were unpaid for, darted a glance of reproach full upon the major’s powdered head, the top of which was cleverly presented to receive it, as he swallowed in haste his cup of tea, and rising suddenly, for his purse had lately suffered in the service of the ladies, and wanted rest —

’Tis nothing at all but that confounded egg,’ he said, raising that untasted delicacy a little towards his nose. ‘Why the divil will you go on buying our eggs from that dirty old sinner, Poll Delany?’ And he dropped it from its cup plump into the slop-basin.

‘A then maybe it was,’ said poor Mrs. Mac, smiling as well as she could; ‘but I’m better.’

‘No you’re not, Mullikins,’ interposed Magnolia impatiently. ‘There’s Toole crossing the street, will I call him up?’

‘Not for the world, Maggy darling. I’d have to pay him, and where’s the money to come from?’

The major did not hear, and was coughing besides; and recollecting that he had a word for the adjutant’s ear, took his sword off the peg where it hung, and his cocked hat, and vanished in a twinkling.

‘Pay Toole, indeed! nonsense, mother,’ and up went the window.

‘Good-morrow to your nightcap, doctor!’

‘And the top of the morning to you, my pretty Miss chattering Mag, up on your perch there,’ responded the physician.

‘And what in the world brings you out this way at breakfast time, and where are you going? — Oh! goosey, goosey gander, where do you wander?'

'Up stairs, if you let me,' said Toole, with a flourish of his hand, and a gallant grin, 'and to my lady's chamber.'

'And did you hear the news?' demanded Miss Mag.

The doctor glanced over his shoulder, and seeing the coast clear, he was by this time close under the little scarlet geranium pots that stood on the windowsill.

'Miss Chattesworth, eh?' he asked, in a sly, low tone.

'Oh, bother her, no. Do you remember Miss Anne Marjoribanks, that lodged in Doyle's house, down there, near the mills, last summer, with her mother, the fat woman with the poodle, and the — don't you know?'

'Ay, ay; she wore a flowered silk tabby sacque, on band days,' said Toole, who had an eye and a corner in his memory for female costume, 'a fine showy — I remember.' 'Well, middling: that's she.'

'And what of her?' asked Toole, screwing himself up as close as he could to the flower-pots.

'Come up and I'll tell you,' and she shut down the window and beckoned him slily, and up came Toole all alive.

Miss Magnolia told her story in her usual animated way, sometimes dropping her voice to a whisper, and taking Toole by the collar, sometimes rising to a rollicking roar of laughter, while the little doctor stood by, his hands in his breeches' pockets, making a pleasant jingle with his loose change there, with open mouth and staring eyes, and a sort of breathless grin all over his ruddy face. Then came another story, and more chuckling.

'And what about that lanky long may-pole, Gerty Chattesworth, the witch? — not that anyone cares tuppence if she rode on a broom to sweep the cobwebs off the moon, only a body may as well know, you know,' said Miss Mag, preparing to listen.

'Why, by Jupiter! they say — but d'ye mind, I don't know, and faith I don't believe it — but they do say she's going to be married to — who do you think now?' answered Toole.

'Old Colonel Bligh, of the Magazine, or Dr. Walsingham, may be,' cried Mag, with a burst of laughter; 'no young fellow would be plagued with her, I'm certain.'

'Well, ha, ha! you *are* a conjuror, Miss Mag, to be sure. He's *not* young — you're right there — but then, he's rich, he is, by Jove! there's no end of his — well, what do you say now to Mr. Dangerfield?’

‘Dangerfield! Well’ (after a little pause), ‘he’s ugly enough and old enough too, for the matter of that; but he’s as rich as a pork-pie; and if he’s worth half what they say, you may take my word for it, when he goes to church it won’t be to marry the steeple.’

And she laughed again scornfully and added —

‘’Twas plain enough from the first, the whole family laid themselves out to catch the old quiz and his money. Let the Chattesworths alone for scheming, with all their grand airs. Much I mind them! Why, the old sinner was not an hour in the town when he was asked over the way to Belmont, and Miss dressed out there like a puppet, to simper and flatter the rich old land agent, and butter him up — my Lord Castlemallard’s bailiff — if you please, ha, ha, ha! and the Duchess of Belmont, that ballyrags every one round her, like a tipsy old soldier, as civil as six, my dear Sir, with her “Oh, Mr. Dangerfield, this,” and her “Dear Mr. Dangerfield, that,” and all to marry that long, sly hussy to a creature old enough to be her grandfather, though she’s no chicken neither. Faugh! filthy!’ and Miss Magnolia went through an elegant pantomime of spitting over her shoulder into the grate.

Toole thought there was but one old fellow of his acquaintance who might be creditably married by a girl young enough to be his granddaughter, and that was honest Arthur Slowe; and he was going to insinuate a joke of the sort; but perceiving that his sly preparatory glance was not pleasantly responded to, and that the stalworth nymph was quite in earnest, he went off to another topic.

The fact is that Toole knew something of Miss Mag’s plans, as he did of most of the neighbours’ beside. Old Slowe was, in certain preponderating respects, much to be preferred to the stalworth fireworker, Mr. Lieutenant O’Flaherty. And the two gentlemen were upon her list. Two strings to a bow is a time-honoured provision. Cupid often goes so furnished. If the first snap at the critical moment, should we bowstring our precious throttles with the pieces? Far be it from us! Let us waste no time in looking foolish; but pick up the gray-goose shaft that lies so innocently at our feet among the daisies; and it’s odds but the second plants it i’ the clout.’ The lover, the hero of the piece, upon whose requited passion and splendid settlements the curtain goes down, is a *role* not always safely to be confided to the genius and discretion of a single performer. Take it that the captivating Frederick

Belville, who is announced for the part, is, along with his other qualifications, his gallantry, his grace, his ringlets, his pathetic smile, his lustrous eyes, his plaintive tenor, and five-and-twenty years — a little bit of a rip — rather frail in the particular of brandy and water, and so, not quite reliable. Will not the prudent manager provide a substitute respectably to fill the part, in the sad event of one of those sudden indispositions to which Belville is but too liable! It may be somewhat ‘fat and scant of breath,’ ay, and scant of hair and of teeth too. But though he has played Romeo thirty years ago, the perruquier, and the dentist, and the rouge-pot, and the friendly glare of the footlights will do wonders; and Podgers — steady fellow! — will be always at the right wing, at the right moment, know every line of his author, and contrive to give a very reasonable amount of satisfaction to all parties concerned. Following this precedent, then, that wise virgin, Miss Magnolia, and her sagacious mamma, had allotted the role in question to Arthur Slowe, who was the better furnished for the part, and, on the whole, the stronger ‘cast.’ But failing him, Lieutenant O’Flaherty was quietly, but unconsciously, as the phrase is,’under-studying’ that somewhat uncertain gentleman.

‘And the general’s off to Scarborough,’ said Toole.

‘Old Chattesworth! I thought it was to Bath.

‘Oh, no, Scarborough; a touch of the old rheum, and stomach I sent him there; and he’s away in the Hillsborough packet for Holyhead this morning, and Colonel Stafford’s left in command.’

‘And my Lady Becky Belmont’s superseded,’ laughed Miss Magnolia, derisively.

‘And who do you think’s going to make the grand tour? from Paris to Naples, if you please, and from Naples to Rome, and up to Venice, and home through Germany, and deuce knows where beside; you’ll not guess in a twel’month,’ said Toole, watching her with a chuckle.

‘Devereux, maybe,’ guessed the young lady.

‘No ’tisn’t,’ said Toole, delighted; ‘try again!’

‘Well, ’tis, let me see. Some wild young rogue, with a plenty of money, I warrant, if I could only think of him — come, don’t keep me all day — who the plague is he, Toole?’ urged the young lady, testily.

‘Dan Loftus,’ answered Toole, ‘ha, ha, ha, ha!’

‘Dan Loftus! — the grand tour — why, where’s the world running to? Oh, ho, ho, ho, hoo! what a macaroni!’ and they laughed heartily over it, and called him ‘travelled monkey,’ and I know not what else.

‘Why, I thought Dr. Walsingham designed him for his curate; but what in the wide world brings Dan Loftus to foreign parts— “To dance and sing for the Spanish King, and to sing and dance for the Queen of France?”’

‘Hey! Dan’s got a good place, I can tell you — travelling tutor to the hopeful young lord that is to be — Devereux’s cousin. By all the Graces, Ma’am, ’tis the blind leading the blind. I don’t know which of the two is craziest. Hey, diddle-diddle — by Jupiter, such a pair — the dish ran away with the spoon; but Dan’s a good creature, and we’ll — we’ll miss him. I like Dan, and he loves the rector — I like him for that; where there’s gratitude and fidelity, Miss Mag, there’s no lack of other virtues, I warrant you — and the good doctor has been a wonderful loving friend to poor Dan, and God bless him for it, say I, and amen.’

‘And amen with all my heart,’ said Miss Mag, gaily; ‘’tis an innocent creature — poor Dan; though he’d be none the worse of a little more lace to his hat, and a little less Latin in his head. But see here, doctor, here’s my poor old goose of a mother (and she kissed her cheek) as sick as a cat in a tub.’

And she whispered something in Toole’s wig, and they both laughed uproariously.

‘I would not take five guineas and tell you what she says,’ cried Toole.

‘Don’t mind the old blackguard, mother dear!’ screamed Magnolia, dealing Æsculapius a lusty slap on the back; and the cook at that moment knocking at the door, called off the young lady to the larder, who cried over her shoulder as she lingered a moment at the door— ‘Now, send her something, Toole, for my sake, to do her poor heart good. Do you mind — for faith and troth the dear old soul is sick and sad; and I won’t let that brute, Sturk, though he does wear our uniform, next or near her.’

‘Well, ’tisn’t for me to say, eh? — and now she’s gone, — just let me try.’ And he took her pulse.

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCERNING A CERTAIN WOMAN IN BLACK.

And Toole, holding her stout wrist, felt her pulse and said— ‘Hem — I see — and— ‘

And so he ran on with half-a-dozen questions, and at the end of his catechism said, bluntly enough —

‘I tell you what it is, Mrs. Mack, you have something on your mind, my dear Madam, and till it’s off, you’ll never be better.’

Poor Mrs. Mack opened her eyes, and made a gesture of amazed disclaimer, with her hands palm upwards. It was all affectation.

‘Pish!’ said Toole, who saw the secret almost in his grasp; ‘don’t tell me, my dear Madam — don’t you think I know my business by this time o’ day? I tell you again you’d better ease your mind — or take my word for it you’ll be sorry too late. How would you like to go off like poor old Peggy Slowe — eh? There’s more paralysis, apoplexy, heart-diseases, and lunacy, caused in one year by that sort of silly secrecy and moping, than by — hang it! My dear Madam,’ urged Toole, breaking into a bold exhortation on seeing signs of confusion and yielding in his fat patient— ‘you’d tell me all that concerns your health, and know that Tom Toole would put his hand in the fire before he’d let a living soul hear a symptom of your case; and here’s some paltry little folly or trouble that I would not — as I’m a gentleman — give a halfpenny to hear, and you’re afraid to tell me — though until you do, neither I, nor all the doctors in Europe, can do you a ha’porth o’ good.’

‘Sure I’ve nothing to tell, doctor dear,’ whimpered poor Mrs. Mack, dissolving into her handkerchief.

‘Look ye — there’s no use in trying to deceive a doctor that knows what he’s about.’ Toole was by this time half mad with curiosity. ‘Don’t tell me what’s on your mind, though I’d be sorry you thought I wasn’t ready and anxious, to help you with my best and most secret services; but I confess, my dear Ma’am, I’d rather not hear — reserve it for some friend who has your confidence — but ’tis plain from the condition you’re in’ — and Toole closed his lips hard, and nodded twice or thrice— ‘you have not told either the major or your daughter; and tell it you must to *some* one, or take the consequences.'

'Oh! Dr. Toole, I *am* in trouble — and I'd like to tell you; but won't you — won't you promise me now, on your solemn honour, if I do, you won't tell a human being?' blubbered the poor matron.

'Conscience, honour, veracity, Ma'am — but why should I say any more — don't you know me, my dear Mrs. Mack?' said Toole in a hot fidget, and with all the persuasion of which he was master.

'Indeed, I do — and I'm in great trouble — and sometimes think no one can take me out of it,' pursued she.

'Come, come, my dear Madam, is it money?' demanded Toole.

'Oh! no — it's— 'tis a dreadful — that is, there *is* money in it — but oh! dear Doctor Toole, there's a frightful woman, and I don't know what to do: and I sometimes thought you might be able to help me — you're so clever — and I was going to tell you, but I was ashamed — there now, it's out,' and she blubbered aloud.

'*What's* out?' said Toole, irritated. 'I can't stop here all day, you know; and if you'd rather I'd go, say so.'

'Oh no, but the major, nor Maggy does not know a word about it; and so, for your life, don't tell them; and — and — here it is.'

And from her pocket she produced a number of the *Freeman's Journal*, five or six weeks old and a great deal soiled.

'Read it, read it, doctor dear, and you'll see.'

'Read all this! thank you, Ma'am; I read it a month ago,' said the doctor gruffly.

'Oh! no — this — only there — you see — *here*,' and she indicated a particular advertisement, which we here reprint for the reader's instruction; and thus it ran —

"Mary Matchwell's most humble Respects attend the Nobility and Gentry. She has the Honour to acquaint them that she transacts all Business relative to Courtship and Marriage, with the utmost Dispatch and Punctuality. She has, at a considerable Expense, procured a complete List of all the unmarried Persons of both Sexes in this Kingdom, with an exact Account of their Characters, Fortunes, Ages, and Persons. Any Lady or Gentleman, by sending a Description of the Husband or Wife they would chuse, shall be informed where such a One is to be had, and put in a

Method for obtaining him, or her, in the speediest Manner, and at the smallest Expense. Mrs. Matchwell's Charges being always proportioned to the Fortunes of the Parties, and not to be paid till the Marriage takes place. She hopes the Honour and Secrecy she will observe in her Dealings, will encourage an unfortunate Woman, who hath experienced the greatest Vicissitudes of Life, as will be seen in her Memoirs, which are shortly to be published under the Title of 'Fortune's Football.' All Letters directed to M. M., and sent Post paid to the Office where this Paper is published, shall be answered with Care."'

'Yes, yes, I remember that — a cheating gipsy — why, it's going on still — I saw it again yesterday, I think — a lying jade! — and this is the rogue that troubles you?' said Toole with his finger on the paragraph, as the paper lay on the table.

'Give it to me, doctor, dear. I would not have them see it for the world — and — and — oh! doctor — sure you wouldn't tell.'

'Augh, bother! — didn't I swear my soul, Ma'am; and do you think I'm going to commit a perjury about "Mary Matchwell" — phiat!'

Well, with much ado, and a great circumbendibus, and floods of tears, and all sorts of deprecations and confusions, out came the murder at last.

Poor Mrs. Mack had a duty to perform by her daughter. Her brother was the best man in the world; but what with 'them shockin' forfitures' in her father's time (a Jacobite granduncle had forfeited a couple of town-lands, value £37 per annum, in King William's time, and to that event, in general terms, she loved to refer the ruin of her family), and some youthful extravagances, his income, joined to hers, could not keep the dear child in that fashion and appearance her mother had enjoyed before her, and people without pedigree or solid pretension of any sort, looked down upon her, just because they had money (she meant the Chattesworths), and denied her the position which was hers of right, and so seeing no other way of doing the poor child justice, she applied to 'M. M.'

'To find a husband for Mag, eh?' said Toole.

'No, no. Oh, Dr. Toole, 'twas— 'twas for *me*,' sobbed poor Mrs. Mack. Toole stared for a moment, and had to turn quickly about, and admire some shell-work in a glass box over the chimneypiece very closely, and I think his stout short back was shaking tremulously as he did so; and, when he turned round again, though his face was extraordinarily grave, it was a good deal redder than usual.

‘Well, my dear Madam, and where’s the great harm in that, when all’s done?’ said Toole.

‘Oh, doctor, I had the unpardonable *wake*ness, whatever come over me, to write her two letters on the subject, and she’ll print them, and expose me, unless,’ — here she rolled herself about in an agony of tears, and buried her fat face in the back of the chair.

‘Unless you give her money, I suppose,’ said Toole. ‘There’s what invariably comes of confidential communications with female enchanters and gipsies! And what do you propose to do?’

‘I don’t know — what can I do? She got the £5 I borrowed from my brother, and he can’t lend me more; and I can’t tell him what I done with that; and she has £3 10s. I — I raised on my best fan, and the elegant soiclainet, you know — I bought it of Knox & Acheson, at the Indian Queen, in Dame-street;’ and his poor patient turned up her small tearful blue eyes imploringly to his face, and her goodnatured old features were quivering all over with tribulation.

‘And Mag knows nothing of all this?’ said Toole.

‘Oh, not for the wide world,’ whispered the matron, in great alarm. ‘Whisht! is that her coming?’

‘No; there she is across the street talking to Mrs. Nutter. Listen to me: I’ll manage that lady, Mrs. Mary — what’s her name? — Matchwell. I’ll take her in hands, and — whisper now.’

So Toole entered into details, and completed an officious little conspiracy; and the upshot of it was that Mrs. Mack, whenever M. M. fixed a day for her next extortionate visit, was to apprise the doctor, who was to keep in the way; and, when she arrived, the good lady was just to send across to him for some ‘peppermint drops,’ upon which hint Toole himself would come slily over, and place himself behind the arras in the bedroom, whither, for greater seclusion and secrecy, she was to conduct the redoubted Mary Matchwell, who was thus to be overheard, and taken by the clever doctor in the act; and then and there frightened not only into a surrender of the documents, but of the money she had already extracted, and compelled to sign such a confession of her guilt as would effectually turn the tables, and place her at the mercy of the once more happy Macnamara.

The doctor was so confident, and the scheme, to the sanguine Celtic imagination of the worthy matron, appeared so facile of execution and infallible of success, that I believe she would at that moment have embraced, and even kissed, little Toole, in the exuberance of her gratitude, had that learned physician cared for such fooleries.

The fact is, however, that neither the doctor nor his patient quite understood Mrs. Matchwell or her powers, nor had the least inkling of the marvellous designs that were ripening in her brain, and involving the fate of more than one of the good easy people of Chapelizod, against whom nobody dreamed a thunderbolt was forging.

So the doctor, being a discreet man, only shook her cordially by the hand, at his departure, patting her encouragingly at the same time, on her fat shoulder, and with a sly grin and a wink, and a wag of his head — offering to ‘lay fifty,’ that between them ‘they’d be too hard for the witch.’

CHAPTER XXXI.

BEING A SHORT HISTORY OF THE GREAT BATTLE OF BELMONT THAT LASTED FOR SO MANY DAYS, WHEREIN THE BELLIGERENTS SHOWED SO MUCH CONSTANCY AND VALOUR, AND SOMETIMES ONE SIDE AND SOMETIMES T'OTHER WAS VICTORIOUS.

So jolly old General Chattesworth was away to Scarborough, and matters went by no means pleasantly at Belmont; for there was strife between the ladies. Dangerfield — cunning fellow — went first to Aunt Becky with his proposal; and Aunt Becky liked it — determined it should prosper, and took up and conducted the case with all her intimidating energy and ferocity. But Gertrude's character had begun to show itself of late in new and marvellous lights, and she fought her aunt with cool, but invincible courage; and why should she marry, and above all, why marry that horrid, grim old gentleman, Mr. Dangerfield. No, she had money enough of her own to walk through life in maiden meditation, fancy free, without being beholden to anybody for a sixpence. Why, Aunt Rebecca herself had never married, and was she not all the happier of her freedom? Aunt Rebecca tried before the general went away, to inflame and stir him up upon the subject. But he had no capacity for coercion. She almost regretted she had made him so very docile. He would leave the matter altogether to his daughter. So Aunt Rebecca, as usual, took, as we have said, the carriage of the proceedings.

Since the grand eclaircissement had taken place between Mervyn and Gertrude Chattesworth, they met with as slight and formal a recognition as was possible, consistently with courtesy. Puddock had now little to trouble him upon a topic which had once cost him some uneasiness, and Mervyn acquiesced serenely in the existing state of things, and seemed disposed to be 'sweet upon' pretty Lilias Walsingham, if that young lady had allowed it; but her father had dropped hints about his history and belongings which surrounded him in her eyes with a sort of chill and dismal halo. There was something funeste and mysterious even in his beauty; and her spirits faltered and sank in his presence. Something of the same unpleasant influence, too, or was it fancy, she thought his approach seemed now to exercise upon Gertrude also, and that she, too, was unaccountably chilled and darkened by his handsome, but ill-omened presence.

Aunt Becky was not a woman to be soon tired, or even daunted. The young lady's resistance put her upon her mettle, and she was all the more determined, that she suspected her niece had some secret motive for rejecting a partner in some respects so desirable.

Sometimes, it is true, Gertrude's resistance flagged; but this was only the temporary acquiescence of fatigue, and the battle was renewed with the old spirit on the next occasion, and was all to be fought over again. At breakfast there was generally, as I may say, an affair of picquets, and through the day a dropping fire, sometimes rising to a skirmish; but the social meal of supper was generally the period when, for the most part, these desultory hostilities blazed up into a general action. The fortune of war as usual shifted. Sometimes Gertrude left the parlour and effected a retreat to her bedroom. Sometimes it was Aunt Rebecca's turn to slam the door, and leave the field to her adversary. Sometimes, indeed, Aunt Becky thought she had actually finished the exhausting campaign, when her artillery had flamed and thundered over the prostrate enemy for a full half hour unanswered; but when, at the close of the cannonade she marched up, with drums beating and colours flying, to occupy the position and fortify her victory, she found, much to her mortification, that the foe had only, as it were, lain down to let her shrapnels and canister fly over, and the advance was arrested with the old volley and hurrah. And there they were — not an inch gained — peppering away at one another as briskly as ever, with the work to begin all over again.

'You think I have neither eyes nor understanding; but I can see, young lady, as well as another; ay, Madam, I've eyes, and some experience too, and 'tis my simple duty to my brother, and to the name I bear, not to mention *you*, niece, to prevent, if my influence or authority can do it, the commission of a folly which, I can't but suspect, may possibly be meditated, and which, even you, niece, would live very quickly to repent.'

Gertrude did not answer; she only looked a little doubtfully at her aunt, with a gaze of deep, uneasy enquiry. That sort of insinuation seemed to disconcert her. But she did not challenge her aunt to define her meaning, and the attack was soon renewed at another point.

When Gertrude walked down to the town, to the King’s House, or even to see Lily, at this side of the bridge, Dominick, the footman, was ordered to trudge after her — a sort of state she had never used in her little neighbourly rambles — and Gertrude knew that her aunt catechised that confidential retainer daily. Under this sort of management, the haughty girl winced and fretted, and finally sulked, grew taciturn and sarcastic, and shut herself up altogether within the precincts of Belmont.

CHAPTER XXXII.

NARRATING HOW LIEUTENANT PUDDOCK AND CAPTAIN DEVEREUX BREWED A BOWL OF PUNCH, AND HOW THEY SANG AND DISCOURSED TOGETHER.

If people would only be content with that which is, let well alone, and allow to-day to resemble yesterday and tomorrow to day, the human race would be much fatter at no greater cost, and sleep remarkably well. But so it is that the soul of man can no more rest here than the sea or the wind. We are always plotting against our own repose, and as no man can stir in a crowd without disturbing others, it happens that even the quietest fellows are forced to fight for their *status quo*, and sometimes, though they would not move a finger or sacrifice a button for the chance of ‘getting on,’ are sulkily compelled to cut capers like the rest. Nature will have it so, and has no end of resources, and will not suffer even the sluggish to sit still, but if nothing else will do, pins a cracker to their skirts, in the shape of a tender passion, or some other whim, and so sets them bouncing in their own obese and clumsy way, to the trouble of others as well as their own discomfort. It is a hard thing, but so it is; the comfort of absolute stagnation is nowhere permitted us. And such, so multifarious and intricate our own mutual dependencies, that it is next to impossible to marry a wife, or to take a house for the summer at Brighton, or to accomplish any other entirely simple, goodhumoured, and selfish act without affecting, not only the comforts, but the reciprocal relations of dozens of other respectable persons who appear to have nothing on earth to say to us or our concerns. In this respect, indeed, society resembles a pyramid of potatoes, in which you cannot stir one without setting others, in unexpected places, also in motion. Thus it was, upon very slight motives, the relations of people in the little world of Chapelizod began to shift and change considerably, and very few persons made a decided move of any sort without affecting or upsetting one or more of his neighbours.

Among other persons unexpectedly disturbed just now was our friend Captain Devereux. The letter reached him at night. Little Puddock walked to his lodgings with him from the club, where he had just given a thplendid rethitation from Shakespeare, and was, as usual after such efforts, in a high state of excitement, and lectured his companion, for whom, by-the-bye, he cherished a boyish admiration, heightened very considerably by his not quite understanding him, upon the extraordinary dramatic capabilities and versatilities of Shakespeare's plays, which, he said, were not half comprehended.

'It was only on Tuesday — the night, you know, I fired the pistol at the robbers, near the dog-house, through the coach window, returning all alone from Smock-alley Theatre. I was thinking, upon my honour, if I had your parts, my dear Devereux, and could write, as I know you can, I'd make a variation upon every play of Shakespeare, that should be strictly moulded upon it, and yet in no respect recognisable.'

'Ay, like those Irish airs that will produce tears or laughter, as they are played slow or quick; or minced veal, my dear Puddock, which the cook can dress either savoury or sweet at pleasure; or Aunt Rebecca, that produces such different emotions in her different moods, and according to our different ways of handling her, is scarce recognisable in some of them, though still the same Aunt Becky,' answered Devereux, knocking at Irons' door.

'No, but seriously, by sometimes changing an old person to a young, sometimes a comical to a melancholy, or the reverse, sometimes a male for a female, or a female for a male — I assure you, you can so entirely disguise the piece, and yet produce situations so new and surprising —— .'

'I see, by all the gods at once, 'tis an immortal idea! Let's take Othello — I'll set about it tomorrow — tonight, by Jove! A gay young Venetian nobleman, of singular beauty, charmed by her tales of "anthropophagites and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders," is seduced from his father's house, and married by a middle-aged, somewhat hard-featured black woman, Juno, or Dido, who takes him away — not to Cyprus — we must be original, but we'll suppose to the island of Stromboli — and you can have an eruption firing away during the last act. There Dido grows jealous of our hero, though he's as innocent as Joseph; and while his valet is putting him to bed he'll talk to him and prattle some plaintive little tale how his father had a man called Barbarus. And then, all being prepared, and his bedroom candle put out, Dido enters, looking unusually grim, and smothers him with a pillow in spite of his cries and affecting entreaties, and —— By Jupiter! here's a letter from Bath, too.'

He had lighted the candles, and the letter with its great red eye of a seal, lying upon the table, transfixed his wandering glance, and smote somehow to his heart with an indefinite suspense and misgiving.

'With your permission, my dear Puddock?' said Devereux, before breaking the seal; for in those days they grew ceremonious the moment a point of etiquette turned up. Puddock gave him leave, and he read the letter.

'From my aunt,' he said, throwing it down with a discontented air; and then he read it once more, thought for a while, and put it into his pocket. 'The countess says I must go, Puddock. She has got my leave from the general; and hang it — there's no help for it — I can't vex her, you know. Indeed, Puddock, I *would* not vex her. Poor old aunt — she has been mighty kind to me — no one knows how kind. So I leave tomorrow.'

'Not to stay away!' exclaimed Puddock, much concerned.

'I don't know, dear Puddock. I know no more than the man in the moon what her plans are. Lewis, you know, is ordered by the doctors to Malaga; and Loftus — honest dog — I managed that trifle for him — goes with him; and the poor old lady, I suppose, is in the vapours, and wants me — and that's all. And Puddock, we must drink a bowl of punch together — you and I — or something — anything — what you please.'

And so they sat some time longer, and grew very merry and friendly, and a little bit pathetic in their several ways. And Puddock divulged his secret but noble flame for Gertrude Chattesworth, and Devereux sang a song or two, defying fortune, in his sweet, sad tenor; and the nymph who skipt up and down stairs with the kettle grew sleepy at last; and Mrs. Irons rebelled in her bed, and refused peremptorily to get up again, to furnish the musical topers with rum and lemons, and Puddock, having studied his watch — I'm bound to say with a slight hiccough and supernatural solemnity — for about five minutes, satisfied himself it was nearly one o'clock, and took an affecting, though soldier-like leave of his comrade, who, however, lent him his arm down the stairs, which were rather steep; and having with difficulty dissuaded him from walking into the clock, the door of which was ajar, thought it his duty to see the gallant little lieutenant home to his lodgings; and so in the morning good little Puddock's head ached. He had gone to bed with his waistcoat and leggings on — and his watch was missing and despaired of, till discovered, together with a lemon, in the pocket of his surtout, hanging against the wall; and a variety of other strange arrangements came to light, with not one of which could Puddock connect himself.

Indeed, he was ‘dithguthted’ at his condition; and if upon the occasion just described he had allowed himself to be somewhat ‘intoxicated with liquor,’ I must aver that I do not recollect another instance in which this worthy little gentleman suffered himself to be similarly overtaken. Now and then a little ‘flashy’ he might be, but nothing more serious — and rely upon it, this was no common virtue in those days.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN WHICH CAPTAIN DEVEREUX'S FIDDLE PLAYS A PRELUDE TO 'OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY.'

There was some little undefinable coolness between old General Chattesworth and Devereux. He admired the young fellow, and he liked good blood in his corps, but somehow he was glad when he thought he was likely to go. When old Bligh, of the Magazine, commended the handsome young dog's good looks, the general would grow grave all at once, and sniff once or twice, and say, 'Yes, a good-looking fellow certainly, and might make a good officer, a mighty good officer, but he's wild, a troublesome dog.' And, lowering his voice, 'I tell you what, colonel, as long as a young buck sticks to his claret, it is all fair; but hang it, you see, I'm afraid he likes other things, and he won't wait till after dinner — this between ourselves, you know. 'Tis not a button to me, by Jupiter, what he does or drinks, off duty; but hang it, I'm afraid some day he'll break out; and once or twice in a friendly way, you know, I've had to speak with him, and, to say truth, I'd rather he served under anyone else. He's a fine fellow, 'tis a pity there should be anything wrong, and it would half break my heart to have to take a public course with him; not, you know, that it has ever come to anything like that — but — but I've heard things — and — and he must pull up, or he'll not do for the service.' So, though the thing did not amount to a scandal, there was a formality between Devereux and his commanding officer, who thought he saw bad habits growing apace, and apprehended that ere long disagreeable relations might arise between them.

Lord Athenry had been no friend to Devereux in his nonage, and the goodnatured countess, to make amends, had always done her utmost to spoil him, and given him a great deal more of his own way, as well as of plumcake, and Jamaica preserves, and afterwards a great deal more money, than was altogether good for him. Like many a worse person, she was a little bit capricious, and a good deal selfish; but the young fellow was handsome. She was proud of his singularly good looks, and his wickedness interested her, and she gave him more money than to all the best public charities to which she contributed put together. Devereux, indeed, being a fast man, with such acres as he inherited, which certainly did not reach a thousand, mortgaged pretty smartly, and with as much personal debt beside, of the fashionable and refined sort, as became a young buck of bright though doubtful expectations — and if the truth must be owned, sometimes pretty nearly pushed into a corner — was beholden, not only for his fun, but, occasionally for his daily bread and even his liberty, to those benevolent doles.

He did not like her peremptory summons; but he could not afford to quarrel with his bread and butter, nor to kill by undutiful behaviour the fair, plump bird whose golden eggs were so very convenient. I don't know whether there may not have been some slight sign in the handwriting — in a phrase, perhaps, or in the structure of the composition, which a clever analysis might have detected, and which only reached him vaguely, with a foreboding that he was not to see Chapelizod again so soon as usual when this trip was made. And, in truth, his aunt had plans. She designed his retirement from the Royal Irish Artillery, and had negociated an immediate berth for him on the Staff of the Commander of the Forces, and a prospective one in the household of Lord Townshend; she had another arrangement 'on the anvil' for a seat in Parliament, which she would accomplish, if that were possible; and finally a wife. In fact her ladyship had encountered old General Chattesworth at Scarborough only the autumn before, and they had had, in that gay resort, a good deal of serious talk (though serious talk with the good countess never lasted very long), between their cards and other recreations, the result of which was, that she began to think, with the good general, that Devereux would be better where one unlucky misadventure would not sully his reputation for life. Besides, she thought Chapelizod was not safe ground for a young fellow so eccentric, perverse, and impetuous, where pretty faces were plentier than good fortunes, and at every tinkling harpsichord there smiled a possible *mesalliance*. In the town of Chapelizod itself, indeed, the young gentleman did not stand quite so high in estimation as with his aunt, who thought nothing was good or high enough for her handsome nephew, with his good blood and his fine possibilities. The village folk, however, knew that he was confoundedly dipped; that he was sometimes alarmingly pestered by duns, and had got so accustomed to hear that his uncle, the earl, was in his last sickness, and his cousin, the next heir, dead, when another week disclosed that neither one nor the other was a bit worse than usual, that they began to think that Devereux's turn might very possibly never come at all. Besides, the townspeople had high notions of some of their belles, and not without reason. There was Miss Gertrude Chattesworth, for instance, with more than fourteen thousand pounds to her fortune, and Lilias Walsingham, who would inherit her mother's money, and the good rector's estate of twelve hundred a year beside, and both with good blood in their veins, and beautiful princesses too. However, in those days there was more parental despotism than now. The old people kept their worldly wisdom to themselves, and did not take the young into a scheming partnership; and youth and beauty, I think, were more romantic, and a great deal less venal.

Such being the old countess's programme — a plan, according to her lights, grand and generous, she might have dawdled over it, for a good while, for she did not love trouble. It was not new; the airy castle had been some years built, and now, in an unwonted hurry, she wished to introduce the tenant to the well-aired edifice, and put him in actual possession. For a queer little attack in her head, which she called a fainting fit, and to which nobody dared afterwards to make allusion, and which she had bullied herself and everybody about her into forgetting, had, nevertheless, frightened her confoundedly. And when her helpless panic and hysterics were over, she silently resolved, if the thing were done, then 'twere well 'twere done quickly.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN WHICH LILIAS HEARS A STAVE OF AN OLD SONG AND THERE IS A LEAVETAKING BESIDE THE RIVER.

Devereux’s move was very sudden, and the news did not reach the Elms till his groom had gone on to Island-bridge with the horses, and he himself, booted and spurred, knocked at the door. The doctor was not at home; he had ridden into Dublin. Of course it was chiefly to see him he had gone there.

‘And Miss Walsingham?’

She was also out; no, not in the garden. John thought maybe at old Miss Chattesworth’s school; or, Sally said, maybe at Belmont; they did not know.

Devereux looked into the large room at the right hand of the hall, with the fair sad portrait of Lilias’s young mother smiling, from the wall. Like *her*, too — and the tall glasses of flowers — and the harpsichord open, with the music she would play, just as usual, that evening, he supposed; and he stood at the door, looking round the room, booted and spurred, as I have said, with his cocked hat held to his breast, in a reverie. It was not easy for old Sally to guess what was passing in his mind, for whenever he was sad he smiled, but with the somewhat of bitter in his smile, and when he suffered he used to joke.

Just at that moment Lilias Walsingham was walking along the high street of the village to the King’s House, and stopping to say a goodnatured little word to old Jenny Creswell, was overtaken by mild Mrs. Sturk, who was walking her little menagerie into the park.

‘And oh! dear Miss Walsingham, did you hear the news? she said; ‘Captain Devereux is gone to England, and I believe we sha’n’t see him here again.’

Lilias felt that she grew pale, but she patted one of the children on the head, and smiled, and asked him some foolish little question.

‘But why don’t you listen, dear Miss Lilias? You don’t hear, I think,’ said Mrs. Sturk.

‘I do hear, indeed; when did he go?’ she asked, coldly enough.

‘About half an hour ago,’ Mrs. Sturk thought: and so, with a word or two more, and a kissing of hands, the good lady turned, with her brood, up the park lane, and Lily walked on to pay her visit to Mrs. Colonel Stafford, feeling all the way a strange pang of anger and disappointment.

‘To think of his going away without taking leave of my father!’

And when she reached the hall-door of the King’s House for a moment she forgot what she had come for, and was relieved to find that good Mrs. Strafford was in town.

There was then, I don’t know whether there is not now, a little path leading by the river bank from Chapelizod to Island-bridge, just an angler’s footpath, devious and broken, but withal very sweet and pretty. Leaving the King’s House, she took this way home, and as she walked down to the river bank, the mortified girl looked down upon the grass close by her feet, and whispered to the daisies as she went along— ‘No, there’s no more kindness nor friendliness left in the world; the people are all cold creatures now, and hypocrites; and I’m glad he’s gone.’

She paused at the stile which went over the hedge just beside an old fluted pier, with a grass-grown urn at top, and overgrown with a climbing rose-tree, just such a study as a young lady might put in her album; and then she recollected the long letter from old Miss Wardle that Aunt Becky had sent her to read, with a request, which from that quarter was a command, that she should return it by six o’clock, for Aunt Becky, even in matters indifferent, liked to name hours, and nail people sharp and hard to futile appointments and barren punctualities.

She paused at the stile; she liked the old pier; its partner next the river was in fragments, and the ruin and the survivor had both been clothed by good Mrs. Strafford — who drew a little, and cultivated the picturesque — with the roses I have mentioned, besides woodbine and ivy. She had old Miss Wardle’s letter in her hand, full, of course, of shocking anecdotes about lunatics, and the sufferings of Fleet prisoners, and all the statistics, and enquiries, and dry little commissions, with which that worthy lady’s correspondence abounded. It was open in her hand, and rustled sharp and stiffly in the air, but it was not inviting just then. From that point it was always a pretty look down or up the river; and her eyes followed with the flow of its waters towards Inchicore. She loved the river; and in her thoughts she wondered why she loved it — so cold, so unimpressible —

that went shining and rejoicing away into the sea. And just at that moment she heard a sweet tenor, with a gaiety somehow pathetic, sing not far away the words she remembered —

‘And she smiled upon the stream,
Like one that smiles at folly,
A dreamer on a dream.’

Devereux was coming — it was his playful salutation. Her large eyes dropped to the ground with the matchless blush of youth. She was strangely glad, but vexed at having changed colour; but when he came up with her, in the deep shadow thrown by the old pier, with its thick festooneries, he could not tell, he only knew she looked beautiful.

‘My dreams take wing, but my follies will not leave me. And you have been ill, Miss Lilias?’

‘Oh, nothing; only a little cold.’

‘And I am going — I only knew last night — really going away.’ He paused; but the young lady did not feel called upon to say anything, and only allowed him to go on. In fact, she was piqued, and did not choose to show the least concern about his movements. ‘And I’ve a great mind now that I’m departing this little world,’ and he glanced, it seemed to her, regretfully towards the village, ‘to put you down, Miss Lily, if you will allow it, in my codicil for a legacy — — ‘

She laughed a pleasant little careless laugh. How ill-natured! but, oh! wasn’t it musical.

‘Then I suppose, if you were not to see me for some time, or maybe for ever, the village folks won’t break their hearts after Dick Devereux?’

And the gipsy captain smiled, and his eyes threw a soft violet shadow down upon her; and there was that in his tone which for a moment touched her with a strange reproach, like a bar of sweet music.

But little Lily was spirited; and if *he*, so early a friend, could go away without bidding goodbye, why he should not suppose *she* cared.

‘Break our hearts? Not at all, perhaps; but of course I — the parson’s daughter — I should, and old Moore, the barber, and Pat Moran, the hackney coachman, and Mrs. Irons your fat landlady, you’ve been so very good to all of us, you know.’

‘Well,’ he interrupted, ‘I’ve left my white surtout to Moran: a hat, let me see, and a pair of buckles to Moore; and my glass and china to dear Mrs. Irons.’

‘Hat — buckles — surtout — glass — china — gone! Then it seems to me your earthly possessions are pretty nearly disposed of, and your worldly cares at an end.’

‘Yes; very nearly, but not quite,’ he laughed. ‘I have one treasure left — my poor monkey; he’s a wonderful fellow — he has travelled half over the world, and is a perfect fine gentleman — and my true comrade until now. Do you think Dr. Walsingham, of his charity, would give the poor fellow free quarters at the Elms?’

She was going to make answer with a jest, satirically; but her mood changed quickly. It was, she thought, saucy of Captain Devereux to fancy that she should care to have his pet; and she answered a little gravely —

‘I can’t say indeed; had you cared to see him, you might have asked him; but, indeed, Captain Devereux, I believe you’re jesting.’

‘Faith! Madam, I believe I am; or, it does not much matter — dreaming perhaps. There’s our bugle!’ And the sweet sounds quivered and soared through the pleasant air. ‘How far away it sounds already; ours are sweet bugles — the sweetest bugles to my ear in the wide world. Yes, dreaming. I said I had but one treasure left,’ he continued, with a fierce sort of tenderness that was peculiar to him: ‘and I did not mean to tell you, but I will. Look at that, Miss Lily, ’tis the little rose you left on your harpsichord this morning. I stole it: ’tis mine; and Richard Devereux would die rather than lose it to another.’

So then, after all, he had been at the Elms; and she had wronged him.

‘Yes, dreaming,’ he continued, in his old manner; ‘and ’tis time I were awake, awake and on the march.’

‘You are then really going?’ she said, so that no one would have guessed how strangely she felt at that moment.

‘Yes, really going,’ he said, quite in his own way; ‘Over the hills and far away; and so, I know, you’ll first wish your old friend God speed.’

‘I do, indeed.’

‘And then you’ll shake hands, Miss Lily, as in old times.’

And out came the frank little hand, and he looked on it, with a darkling smile, as it lay in his own sinewy but slender grasp; and she said with a smile— 'Goodbye.'

She was frightened lest he should possibly say more than she knew how to answer.

'And somehow it seems to me, I have a great deal to say.'

'And I've a great deal to read, you see;' and she just stirred old Miss Wardle's letter, that lay open in her hand, with a smile just the least in the world of comic distress.

'A great deal,' he said.

'And farewell, again,' said Lilias.

'Farewell! dear Miss Lily.'

And then, he just looked his old strange look upon her; and he went: and she dropped her eyes upon the letter. He had got into the far meadow, where the path makes a little turn round the clump of poplars, and hides itself. Just there he looked over his shoulder, a last look it might be, the handsome strange creature that had made so many of her hours pass so pleasantly; he that was so saucy with everyone else, and so gentle with her; of whom, she believed, she might make anything, a hero or a demigod! She knew a look would call him back — back, maybe, to her feet; but she could not give that little sign. There she stood, affecting to read that letter, one word of which she did not see. 'She does not care; but — but there's no one like her. No — she does not care,' he thought; and she let him think it: but her heart swelled to her throat, and she felt as if she could have screamed, 'Come back — my only love — my darling — without you I must die!' But she did not raise her head. She only read on, steadily, old Miss Wardle's letter — over and over — the same half-dozen lines. And when, after five minutes more, she lifted up her eyes, the hoary poplars were ruffling their thick leaves in the breeze — and he gone; and the plaintive music came mellowed from the village, and the village and the world seemed all on a sudden empty for her.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN WHICH AUNT BECKY AND DOCTOR TOOLE, IN FULL BLOW, WITH DOMINICK, THE FOOTMAN, BEHIND THEM, VISIT MISS LILY AT THE ELMS.

After such leavetakings, especially where something like a revelation takes place, there sometimes supervenes, I'm told, a sort of excitement before the chill and ache of separation sets in. So, Lily, when she went home, found that her music failed her, all but the one strange little air, 'The river ran between them;' and then she left the harpsichord and went into the garden through the glass door, but the flowers had only half their interest, and the garden was solitary, and she felt restless, as if she were going to make a journey, or looking for strange news; and then she bethought her again of Mrs. Colonel Stafford, that she might have by this time returned from Dublin, and there was some little interest about the good old lady, even in this, that she had just returned by the same road that he had gone away by, that she might have chanced to see him as he passed; that at least she might happen to speak of him, and to know something of the likelihood of his return, or even to speculate about him; for now any talk in which his name occurred was interesting, though she did not know it quite herself. So she went down to the King's House, and did find old Mrs. Stafford at home: and after an entertaining gossip about some 'rich Nassau damask,' at Haughton's in the Coombe, that had taken her fancy mightily, and how she had chosen a set of new Nankeen plates and fine oblong dishes at the Music Hall, and how Peter Raby, the watchman, was executed yesterday morning, in web worsted breeches, for the murder of Mr. Thomas Fleming, of Thomas-street, she did come at last to mention Devereux: and she said that the colonel had received a letter from General Chattesworth, 'who by-the-bye,' and then came a long parenthesis, very pleasant, you may be sure, for Lily to listen to; and the general, it appeared, thought it most likely that Devereux would not return to Chapelizod, and the Royal Irish Artillery; and then she went on to other subjects, and Lily staid a long time, thinking she might return to Devereux, but she did not mention him again. So home went little Lily more pensive than she came.

It was near eight o'clock, when who should arrive at the door, and flutter the crows in the old elms with an energetic double knock, but Aunt Rebecca, accompanied by no less a personage than Dr. Toole in full costume, and attended by old Dominick, the footman.

The doctor was a little bit ruffled and testy, for having received a summons from Belmont, he had attended in full blow, expecting to prescribe for Aunt Rebecca or Miss Gertrude, and found, instead, that he was in for a barren and benevolent walk of half a mile on the Inchicore road, with the energetic Miss Rebecca, to visit one of her felonious pensioners who lay sick in his rascally crib. It was not the first time that the jolly little doctor had been entrapped by the good lady into a purely philanthropic excursion of this kind. But he could not afford to mutiny, and vented his disgust in blisters and otherwise drastic treatment of the malingering scoundrels whom he served out after his kind for the trouble and indignity they cost him.

'And here we are, Lily dear, on our way to see poor dear Pat Doolan, who, I fear, is not very long for this world. Dominick! — he's got a brain fever, my dear.'

The doctor said 'pish!' inaudibly, and Aunt Becky went on.

'You know the unhappy creature is only just out of prison, and if ever mortal suffered unjustly, he's the man. Poor Doolan's as innocent as you or I, my dear, or sweet little Spot, there;' pointing her fan like a pistol at that interesting quadruped's head. 'The disgrace has broken his heart, and that's at the bottom of his sickness. I wish you could hear him speak, poor dear wretch — Dominick!' and she had a word for that domestic in the hall.

'Hear him speak, indeed!' said Toole, taking advantage of her momentary absence. 'I wish you could, the drunken blackguard. King Solomon could not make sense of it. She gave that burglar, would you believe it, Ma'am? two guineas, by Jupiter: the first of this month — and whiskey only sixpence a pint — and he was drunk without intermission of course, day and night for a week after. Brain fever, indeed, 'tis just as sweet a little fit of delirium tremens, my dear Madam, as ever sent an innocent burglar slap into bliss;' and the word popped out with a venomous hiss and an angry chuckle.

‘And so, my dear,’ resumed Aunt Becky, marching in again; ‘good Doctor Toole — our good Samaritan, here — has taken him up, just for love, and the poor man’s fee — his blessing.’

The doctor muttered something about ‘taking him up,’ but inarticulately, for it was only for the relief of his own feelings.

‘And now, dear Lilias, we want your good father to come with us, just to pray by the poor fellow’s bedside: he’s in the study, is he?’

‘No, he was not to be home until tomorrow morning.’

‘Bless me!’ cried Aunt Becky, with as much asperity as if she had said something different; ‘and not a soul to be had to comfort a dying wretch in your father’s parish — yes, he’s dying; we want a minister to pray with him, and here we’ve a Flemish account of the rector. This tells prettily for Dr. Walsingham!’

‘Dr. Walsingham’s the best rector in the whole world, and the holiest man and the noblest,’ cried brave little Lily, standing like a deer at bay, with her wild shy eyes looking full in Aunt Becky’s, and a flush in her cheeks, and the beautiful light of truth beaming like a star from her forehead. And for a moment it looked like battle; but the old lady smiled a kind of droll little smile, and gave her a little pat on the cheek, saying with a shake of her head, ‘saucy girl!’

‘And you,’ said Lily, throwing her arms about her neck, ‘are my own Aunt Becky, the greatest darling in the world!’ And so, as John Bunyan says, ‘the water stood in their eyes,’ and they both laughed, and then they kissed, and loved one another the better. That was the way their little quarrels used always to end.

‘Well, doctor, we must only do what we can,’ said Aunt Becky, looking gravely on the physician: ‘and I don’t see why *you* should not read — you can lend us a prayer-book, darling — just a collect or two, and the Lord’s Prayer — eh?’

‘Why, my dear Ma’am, the fellow’s howling about King Lewis and the American Indians, Dominick says, and ghosts and constables, and devils, and worse things, Madam, and — pooh — punch and laudanum’s his only chance; don’t mind the prayer-book, Miss Lily — there’s no use in it, Mistress Chattesworth! I give you my honour, Ma’am, he could not make head or tale of it.’

In fact, the doctor was terrified lest Aunt Rebecca should compel him to officiate, and he was thinking how the fellows at the club, and the Aldermen of Skinner's-alley, would get hold of the story, and treat the subject less gravely than was desirable.

So Aunt Becky, with Lily's leave, called in Dominick, to examine him touching the soundness of Pat Doolan's mind, and the honest footman had no hesitation in pronouncing him wholly *non compos*.

'Pleasant praying with a chap like that, by Jove, as drunk as an owl, and as mad as a March hare! my dear Ma'am,' whispered Toole to Lilias.

'And, Lily dear', there's poor Gertrude all alone— 'twould be good natured in you to go up and drink a dish of tea with her; but, then, you're cold — you're afraid?'

She was not afraid — she had been out to-day — and it had done her all the good in the world, and it was very good of Aunt Becky to think of it, for she was lonely too: and so off went the elder Miss Chattesworth, with her doctor and Dominick, in their various moods, on their mission of mercy; and Lily sent into the town for the two chairmen, Peter Brian and Larry Foy, the two-legged ponies, as Toole called them.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NARRATING HOW MISS LILIAS VISITED BELMONT, AND SAW A STRANGE COCKED-HAT IN THE SHADOW BY THE WINDOW.

At that time, in every hall of gentility, there stood a sedan-chair, the property of the lady of the house; and by the time the chairmen had arrived and got the poles into their places, and trusty John Tracy had got himself into his brown surtout, trimmed with white lace, and his cane in his hand — (there was no need of a lantern, for the moon shone softly and pleasantly down) — Miss Lilias Walsingham drew her red riding hood about her pretty face, and stepped into the chair; and so the door shut, the roof closed in, and the young lady was fairly under weigh. She had so much to think of, so much to tell about her day's adventure, that before she thought she had come half the way, they were flitting under the shadows of the poplars that grew beside the avenue; and, through the window, she saw the hospitable house spreading out its white front as they drew near, and opening its wings to embrace her.

The hall-door stood half open, though it had been dark some time; and the dogs came down with a low growl, and plenty of sniffing, which forthwith turned into a solemn wagging of tails, for they were intimate with the chairmen, and with John Tracy, and loved Lilias too. So she got out in the hall, and went into the little room at the right, and opening the door of the inner and larger one — there was no candle there, and 'twas nearly dark — saw Gertrude standing by the window which looked out on the lawn toward the river. That side of the house was in shade, but she saw that the window was thrown up, and Gertrude, she thought, was looking toward her, though she did not move, until she drew nearer, wondering why she did not approach, and then, pausing in a kind of unpleasant doubt, she heard a murmured talking, and plainly saw the figure of a man, with a cloak, it seemed, wrapped about him, and leaning from outside, against the windowsill, and, as she believed, holding Gertrude's hand.

The thing that impressed her most was the sharp outline of the cocked-hat, with the corners so peculiarly pinched in, and the feeling that she had never seen that particular hat before in the parish of Chapelizod.

Lily made a step backward, and Gertrude instantly turned round, and seeing her, uttered a little scream.

‘’Tis I, Gertrude, darling — Lily — Lily Walsingham,’ she said, perhaps as much dismayed as Gertrude herself; ‘I’ll return in a moment.’

She saw the figure, outside, glide hurriedly away by the side of the wall.

‘Lily — Lily, darling; no, don’t go — I did not expect you;’ and Gertrude stopped suddenly, and then as suddenly said —

‘You are very welcome, Lily;’ and she drew the window down, and there was another pause before she said— ‘Had not we better go up to the drawingroom, and — and — Lily darling, you’re very welcome. Are you better?’

And she took little Lily’s hand, and kissed her.

Little Lilias all this time had said nothing, so entirely was she disconcerted. And her heart beat fast with a kind of fear: and she felt Gertrude’s cold hand tremble she fancied in hers.

‘Yes, darling, the drawingroom, certainly,’ answered Lily. And the two young ladies went up stairs holding hands, and without exchanging another word.

‘Aunt Becky has gone some distance to see a sick pensioner; I don’t expect her return before an hour.’

‘Yes — I know — and she came, dear Gertrude, to see me; and I should not have come, but that she asked me, and — and — — ‘

She stopped, for she was speaking apologetically, like an intruder, and she was shocked to feel what a chasm on a sudden separated them, and oppressed with the consciousness that their old mutual girlish confidence was dead and gone; and the incident of the evening, and Gertrude’s changed aspect, and their changed relations, seemed a dreadful dream.

Gertrude looked so pale and wretchedly, and Lily saw her eyes, wild and clouded, once or twice steal toward her with a glance of such dark alarm and enquiry, that she was totally unable to keep up the semblance of their old merry gossiping talk, and felt that Gertrude read in her face the amazement and fear which possessed her.

‘Lily, darling, let us sit near the window, far away from the candles, and look out; I hate the light.’

‘With all my heart,’ said Lily. And two paler faces than theirs, that night, did not look out on the moonlight prospect.

‘I hate the light, Lily,’ repeated Gertrude, not looking at her companion, but directly out through the bow-window upon the dark outline of the lawn and river bank, and the high grounds on the other side. ‘I hate the light — yes, I hate the light, because my thoughts are darkness — yes, my thoughts are darkness. No human being knows me; and I feel like a person who is *haunted*. Tell me what you saw when you came into the parlour just now.’

‘Gertrude, dear, I ought not to have come in so suddenly.’

‘Yes, ’twas but right— ’twas but kind in you, Lily — right and kind — to treat me like the openhearted and intimate friend that, Heaven knows, I was to you, Lily, all my life. I think — at least, I think — till lately — but you were always franker than I — and truer. You’ve walked in the light, Lily, and that’s the way to peace. I turned aside, and walked in mystery; and it seems to me I am treading now the valley of the shadow of death. Waking and talking, I am, nevertheless, in the solitude and darkness of the grave. And what did you see, Lily — I know you’ll tell me truly — when you came into the parlour, as I stood by the window?’

‘I saw, I think, the form of a man in a cloak and hat, as I believe, talking with you in whispers, Gertrude, from without.’

‘The form of a man, Lily — you’re right — not a man, but the form of a man,’ she continued, bitterly; ‘for it seems to me sometimes it can be no human fascination that has brought me under the tyranny in which I can scarce be said to breathe.’

After an interval she said —

‘It will seem incredible. You’ve heard of Mr. Dangerfield’s proposal, and you’ve heard how I’ve received it. Well, listen.’

‘Gertrude, dear!’ said Lily, who was growing frightened.

‘I’m going,’ interrupted Miss Chattesworth, ‘to tell you my strange, if you will, but not guilty — no, *not* guilty — secret. I’m no agent now, but simply passive in the matter. But you must first pledge me your sacred word that neither to my father nor to yours, nor to my aunt, nor to any living being, will you ever reveal what I am about to tell you, till I have released you from your promise.’

Did ever woman refuse a secret? Well, Lily wavered for a moment. But then suddenly stooping down, and kissing her, she said:

‘No, Gertrude, darling — you’ll not be vexed with me — but you must not tell me your secret. You have excuses such as I should not have — you’ve been drawn into this concealment, step by step, unwillingly; but, Gertrude, darling, I must not hear it. I could not look Aunt Becky in the face, nor the kind general, knowing that I was — — ‘

She tried to find a word.

‘*Deceiving* them, Lily,’ said Gertrude, with a moan.

‘Yes, Gertrude, darling.’ And she kissed her again. ‘And it might be to your great hurt. But I thank you all the same from my heart for your confidence and love; and I’m gladder than you’ll ever know, Gerty, that they are still the same.’ And thus the two girls kissed silently and fervently, and poor Gertrude Chattesworth wept uncomplainingly, looking out upon the dark prospect.

‘And you’ll tell me, darling, when you’re happier, as you soon will be?’ said Lily.

‘I will — I will indeed. I’m sometimes happier — sometimes quite happy — but I’m very low tonight, Lily,’ answered she.

Then Lily comforted and caressed her friend. And I must confess she was very curious, too, and nothing but a terror of possessing a secret under such terms, withheld her from hearing Gertrude’s confession. But on her way home she thanked Heaven for her resolution, and was quite sure that she was happier and better for it.

They were roused by Aunt Becky’s knock at the hall-door, and her voice and Dominick’s under the window.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SHOWING HOW SOME OF THE FEUDS IN CHAPELIZOD WAXED FIERCER, AND OTHERS WERE SOLEMNLY CONDONED.

By this time little Dr. Toole had stepped into the club, after his wont, as he passed the Phœnix. Sturk was playing draughts with old Arthur Slowe, and Dangerfield, erect and grim, was looking on the game, over his shoulder. Toole and Sturk were more distant and cold in their intercourse of late, though this formality partook of their respective characters. Toole used to throw up his nose, and raise his eyebrows, and make his brother mediciner a particularly stiff, and withal scornful reverence when they met. Sturk, on the other hand, made a short, surly nod— ’twas little more — and, without a word, turned on his heel, with a gruff pitch of his shoulder towards Toole.

The fact was, these two gentlemen had been very near exchanging pistol shots, or sword thrusts, only a week or two before; and all about the unconscious gentleman who was smiling in his usual pleasant fashion over the back of Sturk’s chair. So Dangerfield’s little dyspepsy had like to have cured one or other of the village leeches, for ever and a day, of the heartache and all other aches that flesh is heir to. For Dangerfield commenced with Toole: and that physician, on the third day of his instalment, found that Sturk had stept in and taken his patient bodily out of his hands.

‘I’ve seen one monkey force open the jaws of his brother, resolutely introduce his fingers, pluck from the sanctuary of his cheek the filbert he had just stowed there for his private nutrition and delight, and crunch and eat it with a stern ecstasy of selfishness, himself; and I fancy that the feelings of the quadrumanous victim, his jaws aching, his pouch outraged, and his bon-bouche in the miscreant’s mouth, a little resembles those of the physician who has suffered so hideous a mortification as that of Toole.

Toole quite forgave Dangerfield. That gentleman gave him to understand that *his* ministrations were much more to his mind than those of his rival. But — and this was conveyed in strict confidence — this change was put upon him by a — a — in fact a nobleman — Lord Castlemallard — with whom, just now, Dr. Sturk can do a great deal; 'and you know I can't quarrel with my lord. It has pained me, I assure you, very much; and to say truth, whoever applied to him to interfere in the matter, was, in my mind, guilty of an impertinence, though, as you see, I can't resent it.'

'*Whoever* applied? 'tis pretty plain,' repeated Toole, with a vicious sneer. 'The whispering, undermining — and as stupid as the Hill of Howth. I wish you safe out of his hands, Sir.'

And positively, only for Aunt Becky, who was always spoiling this sort of sport, and who restrained the gallant Toole by a peremptory injunction, there would have been, in Nutter's unfortunate phrase, 'wigs on the green,' next day.

So these gentlemen met on the terms I've described: and Nutter's antipathy also, had waxed stronger and fiercer. And indeed, since Dangerfield's arrival, and Sturk's undisguised endeavours to ingratiate himself with Lord Castlemallard, and push him from his stool, they had by consent ceased to speak to one another. When Sturk met Nutter, he, being of superior stature, looked over his head at distant objects: and when Nutter encountered Sturk, the little gentleman's dark face grew instantaneously darker — first a shade — then another shadow — then the blackness of thunder overspread it; and not only did he speak not a word to Sturk, but seldom opened his lips, while that gentleman remained in the room.

On the other hand, if some feuds grew blacker and fiercer by time, there were others which were Christianly condoned; foremost among which was the mortal quarrel between Nutter and O'Flaherty. On the evening of their memorable meeting on the Fifteen Acres, Puddock dined out, and O'Flaherty was too much exhausted to take any steps toward a better understanding. But on the night following, when the club had their grand supper in King William's parlour, it was arranged with Nutter that a gentlemanlike reconciliation was to take place; and accordingly, about nine o'clock, at which time Nutter's arrival was expected, Puddock, with the pomp and gravity becoming such an occasion, accompanied by O'Flaherty, big with his speech, entered the spacious parlour.

When they came in there was a chorus of laughter ringing round, with a clapping of hands, and a Babel of hilarious applause; and Tom Toole was seen in the centre, sitting upon the floor, hugging his knees, with his drawn sword under his arm, his eyes turned up to the ceiling, and a contortion so unspeakably ludicrous upon his queer little face, as was very near causing little Puddock to explode in an unseemly burst of laughter.

Devereux, sitting near the door, luckily saw them as they entered, and announced them in a loud tone— 'Lieutenant Puddock, gentlemen, and Lieutenant Fireworker O'Flaherty.' For though Gipsy Devereux loved a bit of mischief, he did not relish it when quite so serious, as the Galwegian Fireworker was likely to make any sort of trifling on a point so tender as his recent hostilities on the Fifteen Acres.

Toole bounded to his feet in an instant, adjusting his wig and eyeing the new comers with intense but uneasy solemnity, which produced some suppressed merriment among the company.

It was well for the serenity of the village that O'Flaherty was about to make a little speech — a situation which usually deprived him of half his wits. Still with the suspicion of conscious weakness, he read something affecting himself in the general buzz and countenance of the assembly; and said to Devereux, on purpose loud enough for Toole to hear— 'Ensign Puddock and myself would be proud to know what was the divarting tom-foolery going on about the floor, and for which we arrived unfortunately a little too leet?'

'Tom-foolery, Sir, is an unpleasant word!' cried the little doctor, firing up, for he was a game-cock.

'Tom Toolery he means,' interposed Devereux, 'the pleasantest word, on the contrary, in Chapelizod. Pray, allow me to say a word a degree more serious. I'm commissioned, Lieutenant Puddock and Lieutenant O'Flaherty' (a bow to each), 'by Mr. Mahony, who acted the part of second to Mr. Nutter, on the recent occasion, to pray that you'll be so obliging as to accept his apology for not being present at this, as we all hope most agreeable meeting. Our reverend friend, Father Roach whose guest he had the honour to be, can tell you more precisely the urgent nature of the business on which he departed.'

Father Roach tried to stop the captain with a reproachful glance, but that unfeeling officer fairly concluded his sentence notwithstanding, with a wave of his hand and a bow to the cleric; and sitting down at the same moment, left him in possession of the chair.

The fact was, that at an unseemly hour that morning three bailiffs — for the excursion was considered hazardous — introduced themselves by a stratagem into the reverend father's domicile, and nabbed the high-souled Patrick Mahony, as he slumbered peacefully in his bed, to the terror of the simple maid who let them in. Honest Father Roach was for showing fight on behalf of his guest. On hearing the row and suspecting its cause — for Pat had fled from the kingdom of Kerry from perils of the same sort — his reverence jumped out of bed with a great pound on the floor, and not knowing where to look for his clothes in the dark, he seized his surplice, which always lay in the press at the head of his bed, and got into it with miraculous speed, whisking along the floor two pounds and a half of Mr. Fogarty's best bacon, which the holy man had concealed in the folds of that sacred vestment, to elude the predatory instincts of the women, and from which he and Mr. Mahony were wont to cut their jovial rashers.

The shutter of poor Mahony's window was by this time open, and the gray light disclosed the grimly form of Father Roach, in his surplice, floating threateningly into the chamber. But the bailiffs were picked men, broad-shouldered and athletic, and furnished with active-looking shillelaghs. Veni, vidi, victus sum! a glance showed him all was lost.

'My blessin' an you, Peg Finigan! and was it you let them in?' murmured his reverence, with intense feeling.

'At whose suit?' enquired the generous outlaw, sitting up among the blankets.

'Mrs. Elizabeth Woolly, relict and administhrathrix of the late Mr. Timotheus Woolly, of High-street, in the city of Dublin, tailor,' responded the choragus of the officers.

'Woolly — I was thinkin' so,' said the captive. 'I wisht I *had* her by the wool, bad luck to her!'

So away he went, to the goodnatured ecclesiastic's grief, promising, nevertheless, with a disconsolate affectation of cheerfulness, that all should be settled, and he under the Priest's roof-tree again before night.

'I don't — exactly — know the nature of the business, gentlemen,' said Father Roach, with considerable hesitation.

'*Urgent*, however, it *was* — wasn't it?' said Devereux.

'Urgent — well; *certainly* — a — and — — '

‘And a summons there was no resisting — from a lady — eh? You said so, Father Roach,’ persisted Devereux.

‘A — from a leedy — a — yes — certainly,’ replied he.

‘A *widow* — is not she?’ enquired Devereux.

‘A widda, undoubtedly,’ said the priest.

‘Thay no more Thir,’ said little Puddock, to the infinite relief of the reverend father, who flung another look of reproach at Devereux, and muttered his indignation to himself. ‘I’m perfectly satisfied; and so, I venture to thay, is Lieutenant O’Flaherty — — ‘

‘Is not he going to say something to Nutter?’ enquired Devereux.

‘Yes,’ whispered Puddock, ‘I hope he’ll get through it. I — I wrote a few sentences myself; but he’s by no means perfect — in fact, between ourselves, he’s a somewhat slow study.’

‘Suppose you purge his head again, Puddock?’ Puddock did not choose to hear the suggestion: but Nutter, in reply to a complimentary speech from Puddock, declared, in two or three words, his readiness to meet Lieutenant O’Flaherty halfway; ‘and curse me, Sir, if I know, at this moment, what I did or said to offend him.’

Then came a magnanimous, but nearly unintelligible speech from O’Flaherty, prompted by little Puddock, who, being responsible for the composition, was more nervous during the delivery of that remarkable oration, than the speaker himself; and ‘thuffered indethcribably’ at hearing his periods mangled; and had actually to hold O’Flaherty by the arm, and whisper in an agony— ‘not yet — *curthe* it — not yet’ — to prevent the incorrigible fireworker from stretching forth his bony red hand before he had arrived at that most effective passage which Puddock afterwards gave so well in private for Dick Devereux, beginning, ‘and thus I greet — — ‘

Thus was there a perfect reconciliation, and the gentlemen of the club, Toole included, were more than ever puzzled to understand the origin of the quarrel, for Puddock kept O’Flaherty’s secret magnificently, and peace prevailed in O’Flaherty’s breast until nearly ten months afterwards, when Cluffe, who was talking of the American war, asked O’Flaherty, who was full of volunteering, how he would like a ‘clean shave with an Indian scalping knife,’ whereupon O’Flaherty stood erect, and having glowered about him for a moment, strode in silence from the room, and consulted immediately with Puddock on the subject, who, after a moment's reflection found it no more than chance medley.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DREAMS AND TROUBLES, AND A DARK LOOK-OUT.

So there was no feud in the club worth speaking of but those of which Dr. Sturk was the centre; and Toole remarked this night that Sturk looked very ill — and so, in truth, he did; and it was plain, too, that his mind was not in the game, for old Slowe, who used not to have a chance with him, beat him three times running, which incensed Sturk, as small things will a man who is in the slow fever of a secret trouble. He threw down the three shillings he had lost with more force than was necessary, and muttering a curse, clapped on his hat and took up a newspaper at another table, with a rather flushed face. He happened to light upon a dolorous appeal to those 'whom Providence had blessed with riches,' on behalf of a gentleman 'who had once held a commission under his Majesty, and was now on a sudden by some unexpected turns of fortune, reduced, with his unhappy wife and five small children, to want of bread, and implored of his prosperous fellow-citizens that charitable relief which, till a few months since, it was his custom and pleasure to dispense to others.' And this stung him with a secret pang of insecurity and horror. Trifles affected him a good deal now. So he pitched down the newspaper and walked across to his own house, with his hands in his pockets, and thought again of Dangerfield, and who the deuce he could be, or whether he had really ever, anywhere — in the body or in the spirit — encountered him, as he used to feel with a boding vagueness he had done. And then those accursed dreams: he was not relieved as he expected by disclosing them. The sense of an ominous meaning pointing at him in all their grotesque images and scenery, still haunted him.

'Parson Walsingham, with all his reading,' his mind muttered, as it were, to itself, 'is no better than an old woman; and that knave and buffoon, Mr. Apothecary Toole, looked queer, the spiteful dog, just to disquiet me. I wonder at Dr. Walsingham though. A sensible man would have laughed me into spirits. On my soul, I think he believes in dreams.' And Sturk laughed within himself scornfully. It was all affectation, and addressed strictly to himself, who saw through it all; but still he practised it. 'If these infernal losses had not come to spoil my stomach. I should not have remembered them, much less let them haunt me this way, like a cursed file of ghosts. I'll try gentian tomorrow.'

Everything and everyone was poking at the one point of his secret fears. Dr. Walsingham preached a sermon upon the text, 'remember the days of darkness for they are many.' It went over the tremendous themes of death and judgment in the rector's own queer, solemn, measured way, and all the day after rang in Sturk's ear as the drums and fifes in the muffled peal of the Dead March used to do long ago, before his ear grew familiar with its thrilling roll. Sermons usually affected Sturk no more than they did other military gentlemen. But he was in a morbid state; and in this one or two terms or phrases, nothing in themselves, happened to touch upon a sensitive and secret centre of pain in the doctor's soul.

For instance, when he called death 'the great bankruptcy which would make the worldly man, in a moment, the only person in his house not worth a shilling,' the preacher glanced unconsciously at a secret fear in the caverns of Sturk's mind, that echoed back the sonorous tones and grisly theme of the rector with a hollow thunder.

There was a time when Sturk, like other shrewd, bustling fellows, had no objection to hear who had an execution in his house, who was bankrupt, and who laid by the heels; but now he shrunk from such phrases. He hated to think that a clever fellow was ever absolutely beggared in the world's great game. He turned his eye quickly from the *Gazette*, as it lay with other papers on the club table; for its grim pages seemed to look in his face with a sort of significance, as if they might some day or other have a small official duty to perform by him; and when an unexpected bankruptcy was announced by Cluffe or Toole in the club-room, it made his ear ring like a slap, and he felt sickish for half an hour after.

One of that ugly brood of dreams which haunted his nights, borrowed, perhaps, a hint from Dr. Walsingham's sermon. Sturk thought he heard Toole's well-known, brisk voice, under his windows, exclaim, 'What is the dirty beggar doing there? faugh! — he smells all over like carrion — ha, ha ha!' and looking out, in his dream, from his drawingroom window, he saw a squalid mendicant begging alms at his hall-door. 'Hollo, you, Sir; what do want there?' cried the surgeon, with a sort of unaccountable antipathy and fear. 'He lost his last shilling in the great bankruptcy, in October,' answered

Dunstan's voice behind his ear; and in the earth-coloured face which the beggar turned up towards him, Sturk recognised his own features— ''Tis I' — he gasped out with an oath, and awoke in a horror, not knowing where he was. 'I — I'm dying.'

'October,' thought Sturk— 'bankruptcy. 'Tis just because I'm always thinking of that infernal bill, and old Dyle's renewal, and the rent.'

Indeed, the surgeon had a stormy look forward, and the navigation of October was so threatening, awful, and almost desperate, as he stood alone through the dreadful watches at the helm, with hot cheek and unsteady hand, trusting stoically to luck and hoping against hope, that rocks would melt, and the sea cease from drowning, that it was almost a wonder he did not leap overboard, only for the certainty of a cold head and a quiet heart, and one deep sleep.

And, then, he used to tot up his liabilities for that accursed month, near whose yawning verge he already stood; and then, think of every penny coming to him, and what might be rescued and wrung from runaways and bankrupts whose bills he held, and whom he used to curse in his bed, with his fists and his teeth clenched, when poor little Mrs. Sturk, knowing naught of this danger, and having said her prayers, lay sound asleep by his side. Then he used to think, if he could only get the agency in time it would set him up — he could borrow £200 the day after his appointment; and he must make a push and extend his practice. It was ridiculous, that blackguard little Toole carrying off the best families in the neighbourhood, and standing in the way of a man like him; and Nutter, too — why, Lord Castlemallard knew as well as he did, that Nutter was not fit to manage the property, and that *he was* — and Nutter without a child or anyone, and *he* with seven! and he counted them over mentally with a groan. 'What was to become of them?' Then Nutter would be down upon him, without mercy, for the rent; and Dangerfield, if, indeed, he cared to do it [curse it, he trusted nobody], could not control him; and Lord Castlemallard, the selfish profligate, was away in Paris, leaving his business in the hands of that bitter old botch, who'd go any length to be the ruin of him.

Then he turned over the chances of borrowing a hundred pounds from the general — as he did fifty times every day and night, but always with the same result— 'No; curse him, he's as weak as water — petticoat government — he'll do nothing without his sister's leave, and she hates me like poison;' and then he thought— 'it would not be much to ask Lord Castlemallard — there's still time — to give me a month or two for the rent, but if the old sneak thought I owed twopence, I might whistle for the agency, and besides, faith! — I don't think he'd interfere.'

Then the clock down stairs would strike 'three,' and he felt thankful, with a great sigh, that so much of the night was over, and yet dreaded the morning.

And then he would con over his chances again, and think which was most likely to give him a month or two. Old Dyle— 'Bah! he's a stone, he would not give me an hour. Or Carny, curse him, unless Lucas would move him. And, no, Lucas is a rogue, selfish beast: he owes me his place; and I don't think he'd stir his finger to snatch me from perdition. Or Nutter — Nutter, indeed! — why that fiend has been waiting half the year round to put in his distress the first hour he can.'

And then Sturk writhed round on his back, as we may suppose might St. Anthony on his gridiron, and rolled his eyeballs up toward the dark bed; and uttered a dismal groan, and thought of the three inexorable fates, Carny, Nutter, and Dyle, who at that moment held among them the measure, and the thread, and the shears of his destiny: and standing desperately in the dark at the verge of the abyss, he mentally hurled the three ugly spirits together into his bag, and flung them whirling through the mirk into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TELLING HOW LILIAS WALSINGHAM FOUND TWO LADIES AWAITING HER ARRIVAL AT THE ELMS.

When Lilias Walsingham, being set down in the hall at the Elms, got out and threw back her hood, she saw two females sitting there, who rose, as she emerged, and bobbed a courtesy each. The elder was a slight thin woman of fifty or upwards, dark of feature, but with large eyes, the relics of early beauty. The other a youthful figure, an inch or two taller, slim and round, and showing only a pair of eyes, large and dark as the others, looking from under her red hood, earnestly and sadly as it seemed, upon Miss Walsingham.

‘Good-evening, good neighbours,’ said Miss Lily in her friendly way; ‘the master is in town, and won’t return till tomorrow; but may be you wish to speak to me?’

‘’Tis no place for the like of yous,’ said old John Tracy, gruffly, for he knew them, with the privilege of an old servant. ‘If you want to see his raverence, you must come in the morning.’

‘But it may be something, John, that can’t wait, and that I can do,’ said Lily.

‘And, true for you, so it is, my lady,’ said the elder woman, with another bob; ‘an’ I won’t delay you, Ma’am, five minutes, if you plaze, an’ it’s the likes of you,’ she said, in a shrewish aside, with a flash of her large eyes upon John Tracy, ‘that stands betune them that’s willin’ to be good and the poor — so yez do, saucepans and bone-polishers, bad luck to yez.’

The younger woman plucked the elder by the skirt; but Lily did not hear. She was already in the parlour.

‘Ay, there it is,’ grinned old John, with a wag of his head.

And so old Sally came forth and asked the women to step in, and set chairs for them, while Lily was taking off her gloves and hood by the table.

‘You’ll tell me first who you are,’ said Lily, ‘my good woman — for I don’t think we’ve met before — and then you will say what I can do for you.’

‘I’m the Widdy Glynn, Ma’am, at your sarvice, that lives beyant Palmerstown, down by the ferry, af its playsin’ to you; and this is my little girl, Ma’am, av you plaze. Nan, look up at the lady, you slut.’

She did not need the exhortation, for she was, indeed, looking at the lady, with a curious and most melancholy gaze.

‘An’ what I’m goin’ to say, my lady, if you plase, id best be said alone;’ and the matron glanced at old Sally, and bobbed another courtesy.

‘Very well,’ said Miss Walsingham. ‘Sally, dear, the good woman wants to speak with me alone: so you may as well go and wait for me in my room.’

And so the young lady stood alone in presence of her two visitors, whereupon, with a good many courtesies, and with great volubility, the elder dame commenced —

‘’Tis what we heerd, Ma’am, that Captain Devereux, of the Artillery here, in Chapelizod, Ma’am, that’s gone to England, was coortin’ you my lady; and I came here with this little girl, Ma’am, if you plaze, to tell you, if so be it’s thrue, Ma’am, that there isn’t this minute a bigger villian out iv gaol — who brought my poor little girl there to disgrace and ruin, Ma’am?’

Here Nan Glynn began to sob into her apron.

‘’Twas you, Richard Devereux, that promised her marriage — with his hand on the Bible, on his bended knee. ’Twas you, Richard Devereux, you hardened villian — yes, Ma’am, that parjured scoundrel — (don’t be cryin’, you fool) — put that ring there, you see, on her finger, Miss, an’ a priest in the room, an’ if ever man was woman’s husband in the sight of God, Richard Devereux is married to Nan Glynn, poor an’ simple as she stands there.’

‘Stop, mother,’ sobbed Nan, drawing her back by the arm; ‘don’t you see the lady’s sick.’

‘No — no — not anything; only — only shocked,’ said poor Lilias, as white as marble, and speaking almost in a whisper; ‘but I can’t say Captain Devereux ever spoke to me in the way you suppose, that’s all. I’ve no more to say.’

Nan Glynn, sobbing and with her apron still to her eyes, was gliding to the door, but her mother looked, with a coarse sort of cunning in her eye, steadily at the poor young lady, in some sort her victim, and added more sternly —

‘Well, my lady, ’tis proud I am to hear it, an’ there’s no harm done, at any rate; an’ I thought ’twas only right I should tell you the thruth, and give you this warnin’, my lady; an’ here’s the atturney’s writin’, Ma’am — if you’ll plaze to read it — Mr. Bagshot, iv Thomas Street — sayin’, if you’ll be plazed to look at it — that ’tis a good marriage, an’ that if he marries any other woman, gentle or simple, he’ll take the law iv him in my daughter’s cause, the black, parjured villian, an’ transport him, with a burnt hand, for bigamany; an’ ’twas only right, my lady, as the townspeople was talking, as if it was as how he was thryin’ to invagle you, Miss, the desaver, for he’d charrum the birds off the trees, the parjurer; and I’ll tell his raverence all about it when I see him, in the morning — for ’tis only right he should know. Wish the lady goodnight, Nan, you slut — an the same from myself, Ma’am.’

And, with another courtesy, the Glynns of Palmerstown withdrew.

CHAPTER XL.

OF A MESSENGER FROM CHAPELIZOD VAULT WHO WAITED IN THE TYLED HOUSE FOR MR. MERVYN.

Mervyn was just about this time walking up the steep Ballyfermot Road. It was then a lonely track, with great bushes and hedgerows overhanging it; and as other emotions subsided, something of the chill and excitement of solitude stole over him. The moon was wading through flecked masses of cloud. The breath of night rustled lightly through the bushes, and seemed to follow her steps with a strange sort of sigh and a titter. He stopped and looked back under the branches of an old thorn, and traced against the dark horizon the still darker outline of the ivied church tower of Chapelizod, and thought of the dead that lay there, and of all that those sealed lips might tell, and old tales of strange meetings on moors and desolate places with departed spirits, flitted across his brain; and the melancholy rush of the night air swept close about his ears, and he turned and walked more briskly toward his own gloomy quarters, passing the churchyard of Ballyfermot on his right. There were plenty of headstones among the docks and nettles: some short and some tall, some straight and some slanting back, and some with a shoulder up, and a lonely old ash-tree still and dewy in the midst, glimmering cold among the moveless shadows; and then at last he sighted the heavy masses of old elm, and the pale, peeping front of the 'Tyled House,' through the close and dismal avenue of elm, he reached the front of the mansion. There was no glimmer of light from the lower windows, not even the noiseless flitting of a bat over the dark little courtyard. His key let him in. He knew that his servants were in bed. There was something cynical in his ree-raw independence. It was unlike what he had been used to, and its savagery suited with his bitter and unsociable mood of late.

But his step sounding through the hall, and the stories about the place of which he was conscious. He battled with his disturbed foolish sensations, however, and though he knew there was a candle burning in his bedroom, he turned aside at the foot of the great stair, and stumbled and groped his way into the old wainscoted back-parlour, that looked out, through its great bow window, upon the haunted orchard, and sat down in its dismal solitude.

He ruminated upon his own hard fate — the meanness of mankind — the burning wrongs, as he felt confident, of other times, Fortune's inexorable persecution of his family, and the stygian gulf that deepened between him and the object of his love; and his soul darkened with a fierce despair, and with unshaped but evil thoughts that invited the tempter.

The darkness and associations of the place were unwholesome, and he was about to leave it for the companionship of his candle, but that, on a sudden, he thought he heard a sound nearer than the breeze among the old orchard trees.

This was the measured breathing of some one in the room. He held his own breath while he listened— 'One of the dogs,' he thought, and he called them quietly; but no dog came. 'The wind, then, in the chimney;' and he got up resolutely, designing to open the half-closed shutter. He fancied as he did so that he heard the respiration near him, and passed close to some one in the dark.

With an unpleasant expectation he threw back the shutters, and unquestionably he did see, very unmistakably, a dark figure in a chair; so dark, indeed, that he could not discern more of it than the rude but undoubted outline of a human shape; and he stood for some seconds, holding the open shutter in his hand, and looking at it with more of the reality of fear than he had, perhaps, ever experienced before. Pale Hecate now, in the conspiracy, as it seemed, withdrew on a sudden the pall from before her face, and threw her beams full upon the figure. A slim, tall shape, in dark clothing, and, as it seemed, a countenance he had never beheld before — black hair, pale features, with a sinister-smiling character, and a very blue chin, and closed eyes.

Fixed with a strange horror, and almost expecting to see it undergo some frightful metamorphosis, Mervyn stood gazing on the cadaverous intruder.

'Hollo! who's that?' cried Mervyn sternly.

The figure opened his eyes, with a wild stare, as if he had not opened them for a hundred years before, and rose up with an uncertain motion, returning Mervyn's gaze, as if he did not know where he was.

'Who are you?' repeated Mervyn.

The phantom seemed to recover himself slowly, and only said: ‘Mr. Mervyn?’

‘Who are you, Sir?’ cried Mervyn, again.

‘Zekiel Irons,’ he answered.

‘Irons? what *are* you, and what business have you here, Sir?’ demanded Mervyn.

‘The Clerk of Chapelizod,’ he continued, quietly and remarkably sternly, but a little thickly, like a man who had been drinking.

Mervyn now grew angry.

‘The Clerk of Chapelizod — here — sleeping in my parlour! What the devil, Sir, do you mean?’

‘Sleep — Sir — sleep! There’s them that sleeps with their eyes open. Sir — you know who they may be; there’s some sleeps sound enough, like me and you; and some that’s sleepwalkers,’ answered Irons; and his enigmatical talk somehow subdued Mervyn, for he said more quietly —

‘Well, what of all this, Sirrah?’

‘A message,’ answered Irons. The man’s manner, though quiet, was dogged, and somewhat savage.

‘Give it me, then,’ said Mervyn, expecting a note, and extending his hand.

‘I’ve nothing for your hand, Sir, ’tis for your ear,’ said he.

‘From whom, then, and what?’ said Mervyn, growing impatient again.

‘I ask your pardon, Mr. Mervyn; I have a good deal to do, back and forward, sometimes early, sometimes late, in the church — Chapelizod Church — all alone, Sir; and I often think of you, when I walk over the south-side vault.’

‘What’s your message, I say, Sir, and who sends it,’ insisted Mervyn.

‘Your father,’ answered Irons.

Mervyn looked with a black and wild sort of enquiry on the clerk — was he insane or what? — and seemed to swallow down a sort of horror, before his anger rose again.

‘You’re mistaken — my father’s dead,’ he said, in a fierce but agitated undertone.

‘He’s dead, Sir — yes,’ said his saturnine visitor, with the same faint smile and cynical quietude.

‘Speak out, Sirrah; whom do you come from?’

'The late Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Dunoran.' He spoke, as I have said, a little thickly, like a man who had drunk his modicum of liquor.

'You've been drinking, and you dare to mix my — my father's name with your drunken dreams and babble — you wretched sot!'

A cloud passed over the moon just then, and Irons darkened, as if about to vanish, like an offended apparition. But it was only for a minute, and he emerged in the returning light, and spoke —

'A naggin of whiskey, at the Salmon House, to raise my heart before I came here. I'm not drunk — that's sure.' He answered, quite unmoved, like one speaking to himself.

'And — why — what can you mean by speaking of him?' repeated Mervyn, unaccountably agitated.

'I speak *for* him, Sir, by your leave. Suppose he greets you with a message — and you don't care to hear it?'

'You're mad,' said Mervyn, with an icy stare, to whom the whole colloquy began to shape itself into a dream.

'Belike *you're* mad, Sir,' answered Irons, in a grim, ugly tone, but with face unmoved. ''Twas not a light matter brought me here — a message — there — well! — your right honourable father, that lies in lead and oak, without a name on his coffin-lid, would have you to know that what he said was — as it should be — and I can prove it— '

'What? — he said *what?* — what is it? — what can you prove? Speak out, Sirrah!' and his eyes shone white in the moonlight, and his hand was advanced towards Irons's throat, and he looked half beside himself, and trembling all over.

'Put down your hand or you hear no more from me,' said Irons, also a little transformed.

Mervyn silently lowered his hand clenched by his side, and, with compressed lips, nodded an impatient sign to him.

'Yes, Sir, he'd have you to understand he never did it, and I can prove it — *but I won't!*'

That moment, something glittered in Mervyn's hand, and he strode towards Irons, overturning a chair with a crash.

'I have you — come on and you're a dead man,' said the clerk, in a hoarse voice, drawing into the deep darkness toward the door, with the dull gleam of a pistol-barrel just discernible in his extended hand.

‘Stay — don’t go,’ cried Mervyn, in a piercing voice; ‘I conjure — I implore — whatever you are, come back — see, I’m unarmed,’ (and he flung his sword back toward the window).

‘You young gentlemen are always for drawing upon poor bodies — how would it have gone if I had not looked to myself, Sir, and come furnished?’ said Irons, in his own level tone.

‘I don’t know — I don’t *care* — I don’t care if I were dead. Yes, yes, ’tis true, I almost wish he had shot me.’

‘Mind, Sir, you’re on honour,’ said the clerk, in his old tone, as he glided slowly back, his right hand in his coat pocket, and his eye with a quiet suspicion fixed upon Mervyn, and watching his movements.

‘I don’t know what or who you are, but if ever you knew what human feeling is — I say, if you are anything at all capable of compassion, you will kill me at a blow rather than trifle any longer with the terrible hope that has been my torture — I believe my insanity, all my life.’

‘Well, Sir,’ said Irons, mildly, and with that serene suspicion of a smile on his face, ‘if you wish to talk to me you must take me different; for, to say truth, I was nearer killing you that time than you were aware, and all the time I mean you no harm! and yet, if I thought you were going to say to anybody living, Zekiel Irons, the clerk, was here on Tuesday night, I believe I’d shoot you now.’

‘You wish your visit secret? well, you have my honour, no one living shall hear of it,’ said Mervyn. ‘Go on.’

‘I’ve little to say, your honour; but, first, do you think your servants heard the noise just now?’

‘The old woman’s deaf, and her daughter dare not stir after nightfall. You need fear no interruption.’

‘Ay, I know; the house is haunted, they say, but dead men tell no tales. ’Tis the living I fear, I thought it would be darker — the clouds broke up strangely; ’tis as much as my life’s worth to me to be seen near this Tyled House; and never you speak to me nor seem to know me when you chance to meet me, do you mind, Sir? I’m bad enough myself, but there’s some that’s worse.’

’Tis agreed, there shall be no recognition,’ answered Mervyn.

‘There’s them watching me that can see in the clouds, or the running waters, what you’re thinking of a mile away, that can move as soft as ghosts, and can gripe as hard as hell, when need is. So be patient for a bit — I gave you the message — I tell you ’tis true; and as to my proving it at present, I can, you see, and I can’t; but the hour is coming, only be patient, and swear, Sir, upon your soul and honour, that you won’t let me come to perdition by reason of speaking the truth.’

‘On my soul and honour, I mean it,’ answered Mervyn. ‘Go on.’

‘Nor ever tell, high or low, rich or poor, man, woman, or child, that I came here; because — no matter.’

‘That I promise, too; for Heaven’s sake go on.’

‘If you please, Sir, no, not a word more till the time comes,’ answered Irons; ‘I’ll go as I came.’ And he shoved up the window-sash and got out lightly upon the grass, and glided away among the gigantic old fruit-trees, and was lost before a minute.

Perhaps he came intending more. He had seemed for a while to have made up his mind, Mervyn thought, to a full disclosure, and then he hesitated, and, on second thoughts, drew back. Barren and tantalising, however, as was this strange conference, it was yet worth worlds, as indicating the quarter from which information might ultimately be hoped for.

CHAPTER XLI.

IN WHICH THE RECTOR COMES HOME, AND LILY SPEAKS HER MIND, AND TIME GLIDES ON, AND AUNT REBECCA CALLS AT THE ELMS.

Next morning, punctual at the early breakfast-hour of those days, the cheery voice of the old rector was heard at the garden rails that fronted the house, and out ran Tom Clinton, from the stableyard, and bid his 'raverence,' with homely phrase, and with a pleasant grin, 'welcome home,' and held his bridle and stirrup, while the parson, with a kind smile, and half a dozen enquiries, and the air of a man who, having made a long journey and a distant sojourn, expands on beholding old faces and the sights of home again; he had been away, to be sure, only one night and a part of a day, but his heart clave to his home and his darling; and Lilias ran to the garden gate to meet him, with her old smile and greeting, it seemed fonder and more tender than ever, and then they kissed and hugged and kissed again, and he patted her cheek and thought she looked a little pale, but would not say anything just then that was not altogether cheerful; and so they stepped up the two or three yards of gravel walk — she at his right side, with her right hand in his and her left clinging by his arm, and nestling close by his side, and leading him up to the house like a beloved captive.

And so at breakfast he narrated all his adventures, and told who were at the dinner party, and described two fine ladies' dresses — for the doctor had skill in millinery, though it was as little known as Don Quixote's talent for making bird-cages and tooth-picks, confided, as we remember, in one of his conversations with honest Sancho, under the cork trees. He told her his whole innocent little budget of gossip, in his own simple, pleasant way; and his little Lily sat looking on her beloved old man, and smiling, but saying little, and her eyes often filling with tears; and he looked, when he chanced to see it — wistfully and sadly for an instant, but he made no remark.

And sometime after, as she happened to pass the study-door, he called her — 'Little Lily, come here.' And in she came; and there was the doctor, all alone and erect before his bookshelves, plucking down a volume here, and putting up one there, and —

'Shut the door, little Lily,' said he gently and cheerily, going on with his work. 'I had a letter yesterday evening, my darling, from Captain Devereux, and he tells me that he's very much attached to you; and I don't wonder at his being in love with little Lily — he could not help it.' And he laughed fondly, and was taking down a volume that rather stuck in its place, so he could not turn to look at her; for, the truth was, he supposed she was blushing, and could not bear to add to her confusion; and he, though he continued his homely work, and clapped the sides of his books together, and blew on their tops, and went so simply and plainly to the point, was flushed and very nervous himself; for, though he thought of her marriage at some time or another as a thing that was to be, still it had seemed a long way off. And now, now it was come, and little Lily was actually going to be married — going away — and her place would know her no more; and her greeting and her music would be missed in the evening, and the garden lonely, and the Elms dark, without Lily.

'And he wants to marry my little Lily, if she'll have him. And what does my darling wish me to say to him?' and he spoke very cheerily.

'My darling, *you're* my darling; and your little Lily will never, never leave you. She'll stay.' And here the little speech stopped, for she was crying, with her arms about his neck; and the old man cried, too, and smiled over her, and patted her gracious head, with a little trembling laugh, and said, 'God bless you, my treasure.'

'Well, little Lily, will you have him?' he said, after a little pause.

'No, my darling, no!' she answered, still crying.

'You *won't* have him?'

'No — no — never!'

'Well, little Lily, I won't answer his letter to-day; there's no hurry, you know. And, if you are of the same mind tomorrow, you can just say you wish me to write.'

'Change, I can't; my answer will always be the same — always the same.'

And she kissed him again, and went toward the door; but she turned back, drying her eyes, with a smile, and said —

‘No, your little Lily will stay with her darling old man, and be a pleasant old maid, like Aunt Becky: and I’ll play and sing your favourite airs, and Sally and I will keep the house; and we’ll be happier in the Elms, I’m determined, than ever we were — and won’t you call me, darling, when you’re going out?’

So little Lily ran away, and up stairs; and as she left the study and its beloved tenant, at every step the air seemed to darken round her, and her heart to sink. And she turned the key in her door, and threw herself on the bed; and, with her face to the pillow, cried as if her heart would break.

So the summer had mellowed into autumn, and the fall of the leaf, and Devereux did not return; and, it was alleged in the club, on good authority, that he was appointed on the staff of the Commander of the Forces; and Puddock had a letter from him, dated in England, with little or no news in it; and Dr. Walsingham had a long epistle from Malaga, from honest Dan Loftus, full of Spanish matter for Irish history, and stating, with many regrets, that his honourable pupil had taken ill of a fever. And this bit of news speedily took wind, and was discussed with a good deal of interest, and some fun, at the club; and the odds were freely given and taken upon the event.

The politics of Belmont were still pretty much in the old position. The general had not yet returned, and Aunt Rebecca and Gertrude fought pitched battles, as heretofore, on the subject of Dangerfield. That gentleman had carried so many points in his life by simply waiting, that he was nothing daunted by the obstacles which the caprice of the young lady presented to the immediate accomplishment of his plans. And those which he once deliberately formed, were never abandoned for trifles.

So when Aunt Becky and Miss Gertrude at length agreed on an armistice — the conditions being that the question of Mr. Dangerfield’s bliss or misery was to stand over for judgment until the general’s return, which could not now be deferred more than two or three weeks — the amorous swain, on being apprised of the terms by Aunt Rebecca, acquiesced with alacrity, in a handsome, neat, and gallant little speech, and kissed Aunt Rebecca’s slender and jewelled hand, with a low bow and a grim smile, all which she received very graciously.

Of course, Dangerfield knew pretty well how matters stood; he was not a man to live in a dream; facts were his daily bread. He knew to a month how old he was, and pretty exactly how time had dealt with his personal charms. He had a very exact and cynical appreciation of the terms on which Miss Chattesworth would — if at all — become and continue to be his wife. But he wanted her — she suited him exactly, and all he needed to make his kingdom sure, when he had obtained her, was his legal rights. He was no Petruchio; neither was it his theory to rule by love. He had a different way. Without bluster, and without wheedling, he had the art of making those who were under his rule perfectly submissive; sooner or later they all came to fear him as a child does a spectre. He had no misgivings about the peace of his household.

In the meantime Gertrude grew happier and more like herself, and Aunt Rebecca had her own theories about the real state of that young lady's affections, and her generally unsuspected relations with others.

Aunt Rebecca called at the Elms to see Lilias Walsingham, and sat down beside her on the sofa.

'Lily, child, you're not looking yourself. I'll send you some drops. You must positively nurse yourself. I'm almost sorry I did not bring Dr. Toole.'

'Indeed I'm glad you did not, Aunt Becky; I take excellent care of myself. I have not been out for three whole days.'

'And you must not budge, darling, while this east wind continues. D'ye mind? And what do you think, my dear, I do believe I've discovered the secret reason of Gertrude's repugnance to Mr. Dangerfield's most advantageous offer.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Lily, becoming interested.

'Well, I suppose you suspected she *had* a secret?' said Aunt Rebecca.

'I can only say, dear Aunt Becky, she has not told it to *me*.'

'Now, listen to me, my dear,' said Aunt Becky, laying her fan upon Lily's arm. 'So sure as you sit there, Gertrude likes somebody, and I think I shall soon know who he is. Can you conjecture, my dear?' And Aunt Rebecca paused, looking, Lilias thought, rather pale, and with a kind of smile too.

'No,' said Lilias; 'no, I really can't.'

'Well, maybe when I tell you I've reason to think he's one of our officers here. Eh? Can you guess?' said Aunt Becky, holding her fan to her mouth, and looking straight before her.

It was now Lily's turn to look pale for a moment, and then to blush so much that her ears tingled, and her eyes dropped to the carpet. She had time to recover, though, for Aunt Becky, as I've said, was looking straight before her, a little pale, awaiting the result of Lily's presumed ruminations. A moment satisfied her it could not be Devereux, and she was soon quite herself again.

'An officer! no, Aunt Becky — there certainly is Captain Cluffe, who always joins your party when you and Gertrude go down to hear the band, and Lieutenant Puddock, too, who does the same — but you know— '

'Well, my dear, all in good time. Gertrude's very secret, and proud too; but I shall know very soon. I've ascertained, my dear, that an officer came under the window the other evening, and sang a verse of a French chanson, from the meadow, in a cloak, if you please, with a guitar. I could name his name, my dear— '

'Do pray tell me,' said Lily, whose curiosity was all alive.

'Why — a — not yet, my dear,' answered Aunt Becky, looking down; 'there are — there's a reason — but the affair, I may tell you, began, in earnest, on the very day on which she refused Mr. Mervyn. But I forgot you did not know *that* either — however, you'll never mention it.' And she kissed her cheek, calling her 'my wise little Lily.'

'And my dear, it has been going on so regularly ever since, with, till very lately, so little disguise, that I only wonder everybody doesn't see it as plain as I do myself; and Lily, my dear,' continued Aunt Rebecca, energetically, rising from the sofa, as some object caught her eye through the glass-door in the garden, 'your beautiful roses are all trailing in the mud. What on earth is Hogan about? and there, see, just at the door, a boxful of nails! — I'd nail his ear to the wall if he were mine,' and Aunt Rebecca glanced sharply through the glass, this way and that, for the offending gardener, who, happily, did not appear. Then off went Aunt Becky to something else; and in a little time remembered the famous academy in Martin's-row, and looking at her watch, took her leave in a prodigious hurry, and followed by Dominick, in full livery, and two dogs, left Lilias again to the society of her own sad thoughts.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN WHICH DR. STURK TRIES THIS WAY AND THAT FOR A REPRIEVE ON THE EVE OF EXECUTION.

So time crept on, and the day arrived when Sturk must pay his rent, or take the ugly consequences. The day before he spent in Dublin financiering. It was galling and barren work. He had to ask favours of fellows whom he hated, and to stand their refusals, and pretend to believe their lying excuses, and appear to make quite light of it, though every failure stunned him like a blow of a bludgeon, and as he strutted jauntily off with a bilious smirk, he was well nigh at his wits' end. It was dark as he rode out by the low road to Chapelizod — crestfallen, beaten — scowling in the darkness through his horse's ears along the straight black line of road, and wishing, as he passed the famous Dog-house, that he might be stopped and plundered, and thus furnished with a decent excuse for his penniless condition, and a plea in which all the world would sympathise for a short indulgence — and, faith! he did not much care if they sent a bullet through his harassed brain. But the highwaymen, like the bankers, seemed to know, by instinct, that he had not a guinea, and declined to give him even the miserable help he coveted.

When he got home he sent down for Cluffe to the Phœnix, and got him to take Nutter, who was there also, aside, and ask him for a little time, or to take part of the rent. Though the latter would not have helped him much; for he could not make out ten pounds just then, were it to save his life. But Nutter only said —

'The rent's not mine; I can't give it or lose it; and Sturk's not safe. Will *you* lend it? *I* can't.'

This brought Cluffe to reason. He had opened the business, like a jolly companion, in a generous, full-blooded way.

'Well, by Jove, Nutter, I can't blame you; for you see, between ourselves, I'm afraid 'tis as you say. We of the Royal Irish have done, under the rose, you know, all we can; and I'm sorry the poor devil has run himself into a scrape; but hang it, we must have a conscience; and if you think there's a risk of losing it, why I don't see that I can press you.

The reader must not suppose when Cluffe said, ‘we of the Royal Irish,’ in connection with some pecuniary kindness shown to Sturk, that that sensible captain had given away any of his money to the surgeon; but Sturk, in their confidential conference, had hinted something about a ‘helping hand,’ which Cluffe coughed off, and mentioned that Puddock had lent him fifteen pounds the week before.

And so he had, though little Puddock was one of the poorest officers in the corps. But he had no vices, and husbanded his little means carefully, and was very kindly and offhand in assisting to the extent of his little purse a brother in distress, and never added advice when so doing — for he had high notions of politeness — or, in all his life, divulged any of these little money transactions.

Sturk stood at his drawingroom window, with his hat on, looking towards the Phœnix, and waiting for Cluffe’s return. When he could stand the suspense no longer, he went down and waited at his doorsteps. And the longer Cluffe stayed the more did Sturk establish himself in the conviction that the interview had prospered, and that his ambassador was coming to terms with Nutter. He did not know that the entire question had been settled in a minute-and-a-half, and that Cluffe was at that moment rattling away at backgammon with his arch-enemy, Toole, in a corner of the club parlour.

It was not till Cluffe, as he emerged from the Phœnix, saw Sturk’s figure stalking in the glimpses of the moon, under the village elm, that he suddenly recollected and marched up to him. Sturk stood, with his face and figure mottled over with the shadows of the moving leaves and the withered ones dropping about him, his hands in his pockets, and a crown-piece — I believe it was his last available coin just then — shut up fast and tight in his cold fingers, with his heart in his mouth, and whistling a little to show his unconcern.

‘Well,’ said Sturk, ‘he won’t, of course?’

Cluffe shook his head.

‘Very good — I’ll manage it another way,’ said Sturk, confidently. ‘Goodnight;’ and Sturk walked off briskly towards the turnpike.

‘He might have said “thank you,” I think,’ Cluffe said, looking after him with a haughty leer— ‘mixing myself up in his plaguy affairs, and asking favours of fellows like Nutter.’ But just then, having reached the corner next the Phœnix, Sturk hesitated, and Cluffe, thinking he might possibly turn back and ask him for money, turned on his heel, and, like a prudent fellow, trudged rapidly off to his lodgings.

Toole and O'Flaherty were standing in the doorway of the Phœnix, observing the brief and secret meeting under the elm.

'That's Sturk,' said Toole.

O'Flaherty grunted acquiescence.

Toole watched attentively till the gentlemen separated, and then glancing on O'Flaherty from the corner of his eye, with a knowing smile, 'tipped him the wink,' as the phrase went in those days.

'An affair of honour?' said O'Flaherty, squaring himself. He smelt powder in everything.

'More like an affair of *dishonour*,' said Toole, buttoning his coat. 'He's been "kiting" all over the town. Nutter can distrain for his rent tomorrow, and Cluffe called him outside the bar to speak with him; put that and that together, Sir.' And home went Toole.

Sturk, indeed, had no plan, and was just then incapable of forming any. He changed his route, not knowing why, and posted over the bridge, and a good way along the Inchicore road, and then turned about and strode back again and over the bridge, without stopping, and on towards Dublin; and suddenly the moon shone out, and he recollected how late it was growing, and so turned about and walked homeward.

As he passed by the row of houses looking across the road towards the river, from Mr. Irons's hall-door step a well-known voice accosted him —

'A thweet night, doctor — the moon tho thilver bright — the air tho thoft!'

It was little Puddock, whose hand and face were raised toward the sweet regent of the sky.

'Mighty fine night,' said Sturk, and he paused for a second. It was Puddock's way to be more than commonly friendly and polite with any man who owed him money; and Sturk, who thought, perhaps rightly, that the world of late had been looking cold and black upon him, felt, in a sort of way, thankful for the greeting and its cordial tone.

'A night like this,' pursued the little lieutenant, 'my dear Sir, brings us under the marble balconies of the palace of the Capulets, and sets us repeating "On such a night sat Dido on the wild seabanks" — you remember— "and with a willow wand, waved her love back to Carthage,"

— or places us upon the haunted platform, where buried Denmark revisits the glimpses of the moon. My dear doctor, ’tis wonderful — isn’t it — how much of our enjoyment of Nature we owe to Shakespeare— ‘twould be a changed world with us, doctor, if Shakespeare had not written— ‘ Then there was a little pause, Sturk standing still.

‘God be wi’ ye, lieutenant,’ said he, suddenly taking his hand. ‘If there were more men like you there would be fewer broken hearts in the world.’ And away went Sturk.

CHAPTER XLIII.

SHOWING HOW CHARLES NUTTER'S BLOW DESCENDED, AND WHAT PART THE SILVER SPECTACLES BORE IN THE CRISIS.

In the morning the distress and keepers were in Sturk's house.

We must not be too hard upon Nutter. 'Tis a fearful affair, and no child's play, this battle of life. Sturk had assailed him like a beast of prey; not Nutter, to be sure, only Lord Castlemallard's agent. Of that functionary his wolfish instinct craved the flesh, bones, and blood. Sturk had no other way to live and grow fat. Nutter or he must go down. The little fellow saw his great red maw and rabid fangs at his throat. If he let him off, he would devour him, and lie in his bed, with his cap on, and his caudles and cordials all round, as the wolf did by Little Red Riding Hood's grandmamma; and with the weapon which had come to hand — a heavy one too, — he was going, with Heaven's help, to deal him a brainblow.

When Sturk heard in the morning that the blow was actually struck, he jumped out of bed, and was taken with a great shivering fit, sitting on the side of it. Little Mrs. Sturk, as white as her nightcap with terror, was yet decisive in emergency, and bethought her of the brandy bottle, two glasses from which the doctor swallowed before his teeth gave over chattering, and a more natural tint returned to his blue face.

'Oh! Barney, dear, are we ruined?' faltered poor little Mrs. Sturk.

'Ruined, indeed!' cried Sturk, with an oath, 'Come in here.' He thought his study was on the same floor with his bedroom, as it had been in old times in their house in Limerick, ten or twelve years before.

'That's the nursery, Barney, dear,' she said, thinking, in the midst of the horror, like a true mother, of the children's sleep.

Then he remembered and ran down to the study, and pulled out a sheaf of bills and promissory notes, and renewals thereof, making a very respectable show.

'Ruined, indeed!' he cried, hoarsely, talking to his poor little wife in the tones and with the ferocity which the image of Nutter; with which his brain was filled, called up. ‘Look, I say, here’s one fellow owes me that — and that — and that — and there — there’s a dozen in that by another — there’s two more sets there pinned together — and here’s an account of them all — two thousand two hundred — and you may say three hundred — two thousand three hundred — owed me here; and that miscreant won’t give me a day.’

‘Is it the rent, Barney?’

‘The rent? To be sure; what else should it be?’ shouted the doctor, with a stamp.

And so pale little Mrs. Sturk stole out of the room, as her lord with bitter mutterings pitched his treasure of bad bills back again into the escritoire: and she heard him slam the study door and run down stairs to browbeat and curse the men in the hall, for he had lost his head somewhat, between panic and fury. He was in his stockings and slippers, with an old flowered silk dressing-gown, and nothing more but his shirt, and looked, they said, like a madman. One of the fellows was smoking, and Sturk snatched the pipe from his mouth, and stamped it to atoms on the floor, roaring at them to know what the —— brought them there; and without a pause for an answer, thundered, ‘And I suppose you’ll not let me take my box of instruments out of the house — mind, it’s worth fifty pounds; and curse me, if one of our men dies for want of them in hospital, I’ll indict you both, and your employer along with you, *for murder!*’ And so he railed on, till his voice failed him with a sort of choking, and there was a humming in his ears, and a sort of numbness in his head, and he thought he was going to have a fit; and then up the stairs he went again, and into his study, and resolved to have Nutter out — and it flashed upon him that he’d say, ‘Pay the rent first;’ and then — what next? why he’d post him all over Dublin, and Chapelizod, and Leixlip, where the Lord Lieutenant and Court were.

And down he sat to a sheet of paper, with his left hand clenched on the table, and his teeth grinding together, as he ransacked his vocabulary for befitting terms; but alas, his right hand shook so that his penmanship would not do, in fact, it half frightened him. ‘By my soul! I believe something bad has happened me,’ he muttered, and popped up his window, and looked out, half dreaming over the churchyard on the park beyond, and the dewy overhanging hill, all pleasantly lighted up in the morning sun.

While this was going on, little Mrs. Sturk, who on critical occasions took strong resolutions promptly, made a wonderfully rapid toilet, and let herself quietly out of the street door. She had thought of Dr. Walsingham; but Sturk had lately, in one of his imperious freaks of temper, withdrawn his children from the good doctor's catechetical class, and sent him besides, one of his sturdy, impertinent notes — and the poor little woman concluded there was no chance there. She knew little of the rector — of the profound humility and entire placability of that noble soul.

Well, she took the opposite direction, and turning her back on the town, walked at her quickest pace toward the Brass Castle. It was not eight o'clock yet, but the devil had been up betimes and got through a good deal of his day's work, as we have seen. The poor little woman had made up her mind to apply to Dangerfield. She had liked his talk at Belmont, where she had met him; and he enquired about the poor, and listened to some of her woful tales with a great deal of sympathy; and she knew he was very rich, and that he appreciated her Barney, and so she trudged on, full of hope, though I don't think many people who knew the world better would have given a great deal for her chance.

Dangerfield received the lady very affably, in his little parlour, where having already despatched his early meal, he was writing letters. He looked hard at her when she came in, and again when she sat down; and when she had made an end of her long and dismal tale, he opened a sort of strong box, and took out a thin quarto and read, turning the leaves rapidly over.

'Ay, here we have him — Chapelizod — Sturk, Barnabas — Surgeon, R.I.A., assignee of John Lowe — hey! one gale day, as you call it, only! — September. How came that? Rent, £40. Why, then, he owes a whole year's rent, £40, Ma'am. September, and his days of grace have expired. He ought to have paid it.'

Here there came a dreadful pause, during which nothing was heard but the sharp ticking of his watch on the table.

'Well, Ma'am,' he said, 'when a thing comes before me, I say yes or no promptly. I like your husband, and I'll lend him the amount of his rent.'

Poor little Mrs. Sturk jumped up in an ecstasy, and then felt quite sick, and sat down almost fainting, with a deathlike smile.

'There's but one condition I attach, that you tell me truly, my dear Ma'am, whether you came to me directly or indirectly at his suggestion.'

No, indeed, she had not; it was all her own thought; she had not dared to mention it to him, lest he should forbid her, and now she should be almost afraid to tell him where she had been.

'He'll not be very angry, depend on't, my good Madam; you did wisely in coming to me. I respect your sense and energy; and should you hereafter stand in need of a friendly office, I beg you'll remember once who is disposed to help you.'

Then he sat down and wrote with a flying pen —

'My dear Sir, — I have just learned from Mrs. Sturk that you have an immediate concern for forty pounds, to which, I venture to surmise, will be added some fees, *etc.* I take leave, therefore, to send herewith fifty guineas, which I trust will suffice for this troublesome affair. We can talk hereafter about repayment. Mrs. Sturk has handed me a memorandum of the advance.

'Your very obedient, humble servant,
Giles Dangerfield.
The Brass Castle, Chapelizod,
'2nd October, 1767.'

Then poor little Mrs. Sturk was breaking out into a delirium of gratitude. But he put his hand upon her arm kindly, and with a little bow and an emphasis, he said —

'Pray, not a *word*, my dear Madam. Just write a line;' and he slid his desk before her with a sheet of paper on it; 'and say Mr. Dangerfield has this day handed me a loan of fifty guineas for my husband, Doctor Barnabas Sturk. Now sign, if you please, and add the date. Very good!'

'I'm afraid you can hardly read it — my fingers tremble a little,' said Mrs. Sturk, with a wild little deprecatory titter, and for the first time very near crying.

''Tis mighty well,' said Dangerfield, politely; and he accompanied the lady with the note and fifty guineas, made up in a little rouleau, fast in her hand, across his little garden, and with— 'A fine morning truly,' and 'God bless you, Madam,' and one of his peculiar smiles, he let her out through his little wicket on the high road. And so away went Mrs. Sturk, scarce feeling the ground under her feet; and Giles Dangerfield, carrying his white head very erect, with an approving conscience, and his silver spectacles flashing through the leaves of his lilacs and laburnums, returned to his parlour.

Mrs. Sturk, who could hardly keep from running, glided along at a wonderful rate, wondering now and then how quickly the whole affair — so awful as it seemed to her in magnitude — was managed. Dangerfield had neither hurried her nor himself, and yet he despatched the matter and got her away in less than five minutes.

In little more than a quarter of an hour after, Dr. Sturk descended his doorsteps in full costume, and marched down the street and passed the artillery barrack, from his violated fortress, as it were, with colours flying, drums beating, and ball in mouth. He paid the money down at Nutter's table, in the small room at the Phœnix, where he sat in the morning to receive his rents, eyeing the agent with a fixed smirk of hate and triumph, and telling down each piece on the table with a fierce clink that had the ring of a curse in it. Little Nutter met his stare of suppressed fury with an eye just as steady and malign and a countenance blackened by disappointment. Not a word was heard but Sturk's insolent tone counting the gold at every clang on the table.

Nutter shoved him a receipt across the table, and swept the gold into his drawer.

'Go over, Tom,' he said to the bailiff, in a stern low tone, 'and see the men don't leave the house till the fees are paid.'

And Sturk laughed a very pleasant laugh, you may be sure, over his shoulder at Nutter, as he went out at the door.

When he was gone Nutter stood up, and turned his face toward the empty grate. I have seen some plain faces once or twice look so purely spiritual, and others at times so infernal, as to acquire in their homeliness a sort of awful grandeur; and from every feature of Nutter's dark wooden face was projected at that moment a supernatural glare of baffled hatred that dilated to something almost sublime.

CHAPTER XLIV.

RELATING HOW, IN THE WATCHES OF THE NIGHT, A VISION CAME TO STURK, AND HIS EYES WERE OPENED.

Sturk's triumph was only momentary. He was in ferocious spirits, indeed, over the breakfast-table, and bolted quantities of buttered toast and eggs, swallowed cups of tea, one after the other, almost at a single gulp, all the time gabbling with a truculent volubility, and every now and then a thump, which made his spoon jingle in his saucer, and poor, little Mrs. Sturk start, and whisper, 'Oh, my dear!' But after he had done defying and paying off the whole world, and showing his wife, and half convincing himself, that he was the cleverest and finest fellow alive, a letter was handed to him, which reminded him, in a dry, short way, of those most formidable and imminent dangers that rose up, apparently insurmountable before him; and he retired to his study to ruminate again, and chew the cud of bitter fancy, and to write letters and tear them to pieces, and, finally, as was his wont, after hospital hours, to ride into Dublin, to bore his attorney with barren inventions and hopeless schemes of extrication.

Sturk came home that night with a hang-dog and jaded look, and taciturn and half desperate. But he called for whiskey, and drank a glass of that cordial, and brewed a jug of punch in silence, and swallowed glass after glass, and got up a little, and grew courageous and flushed, and prated away, rather loud and thickly with a hiccough now and then, and got to sleep earlier than usual.

Somewhere among the 'small hours' of the night he awoke suddenly, recollecting something.

'I have it,' cried Sturk, with an oath, and an involuntary kick at the foot-board, that made his slumbering helpmate bounce.

'What is it, Barney, dear?' squalled she, diving under the bedclothes, with her heart in her mouth.

'It's like a revelation,' cried Sturk, with another oath; and that was all Mrs. Sturk heard of it for some time. But the surgeon was wide awake, and all alive about it, whatever it was. He sat straight up in the bed, with his lips energetically compressed, and his eyebrows screwed together, and his shrewd, hard eyes rolling thoughtfully over the curtains, in the dark, and now and then an ejaculation of wonder, or a short oath, would slowly rise up, and burst from his lips, like a great bubble from the fermentation.

Sturk's brain was in a hubbub. He had fifty plans, all jostling and clamouring together, like a nursery of unruly imps— 'Take *me*'— 'No, take *me*'— 'No, *me*!' He had been dreaming like mad, and his sensorium was still all alive with the images of fifty phantasmagoria, filled up by imagination and conjecture, and a strange, painfully-sharp remembrance of things past — all whirling in a carnival of roystering but dismal riot — masks and dice, laughter, maledictions, and drumming, fair ladies, tipsy youths, mountebanks, and assassins: tinkling serenades, the fatal clang and rattle of the dice-box, and long drawn, distant screams.

There was no more use in Sturk's endeavours to reduce all this to order, than in reading the Riot Act to a Walpurgis gathering. So he sat muttering unconscious ejaculations, and looking down, as it were, from his balcony, waiting for the uproar to abate; and when the air did clear and cool a little, there was just one face that remained impassive, and serenely winked before his eyes.

When things arrived at this stage, and he had gathered his recollections about him, and found himself capable of thinking, being a man of action, up he bounced and struck a light, vaulted into his breeches, hauled on his stockings, hustled himself into his roquelaure, and, candle in hand, in slippered feet, glided, like a ghost, down stairs to the back drawingroom, which, as we know, was his study.

The night was serene and breathless. The sky had cleared, and the moonlight slept mistily on the soft slopes of the park. The landscape was a febrifuge, and cooled and quieted his brain as he stood before it at his open window, in solitary meditation. It was not till his slowly wandering eye lighted on the churchyard, with a sort of slight shock, that he again bestirred himself.

There it lay, with its white tombstones and its shadows spread under him, seeming to say— 'Ay, here I am; the narrow goal of all your plans. Not one of the glimmering memorials you see that does not cover what once was a living world of long-headed schemes, chequered remembrances, and well-kept secrets. Here lie your brother plotters, all in bond, only some certain inches below; with their legs straight and their arms by their sides, as when grim Captain Death called the stern word “attention!” with their sightless faces and unthinking foreheads turned up to the moon. Dr. Sturk, there are lots of places for you to choose among — suit yourself — here — or here — or maybe here.’

And so Sturk closed the window and remembered his dream, and looked out stealthily but sternly from the door, which was ajar, and shut it sharply, and with his hands in his breeches’ pockets, took a quick turn to the window; his soul had got into harness again, and he was busy thinking. Then he snuffed the candle, and then quickened his invention by another brisk turn; and then he opened his desk, and sat down to write a note.

‘Yes,’ said he to himself, pausing for a minute, with his pen in his fingers, ‘’tis as certain as that I sit here.’

Well, he wrote the note. There was a kind of smile on his face, which was paler than usual all the while; and he read it over, and threw himself back in his chair, and then read it over again, and did not like it, and tore it up.

Then he thought hard for a while, leaning upon his elbow; and took a couple of great pinches of snuff, and snuffed his candle again, and, as it were, snuffed his wits, and took up his pen with a little flourish, and dashed off another, and read it, and liked it, and gave it a little sidelong nod, as though he said, ‘You’ll do;’ and, indeed, considering all the time and thought he spent upon it, the composition was no great wonder, being, after all, no more than this: —

‘Dear Sir, — Will you give me the honour of a meeting at
my house this morning, as you pass through the town? I shall
remain within till noon; and hope for some minutes’ private discourse
with you.
‘Your most obedient, very humble servant,
‘Barnabas Sturk.’

Then he sealed it with a great red seal, large enough for a patent almost, impressed with the Sturk arms — a boar’s head for crest, and a flaunting scroll, with ‘Dentem fulmineum cave’ upon it. Then he peeped again from the window to see if the gray of the morning had come, for he had left his watch under his bolster, and longed for the time of action.

Then up stairs went Sturk; and so, with the note, like a loaded pistol, over the chimney, he popped into bed, where he lay awake in agitating rumination, determined to believe that he had seen the last of those awful phantoms — those greasy bailiffs — that smooth, smirking, formidable attorney; and — curse him — that bilious marshal’s deputy, with the purplish, pimply tinge about the end of his nose and the tops of his cheeks, that beset his bed in a moving ring — this one pushing out a writ, and that rumpling open a parchment deed, and the other fumbling with his keys, and extending his open palm for the garnish. Avaunt. He had found out a charm to rout them all, and they sha’n’t now lay a finger on him — a short and sharp way to clear himself; and so I believe he had.

CHAPTER XLV.

CONCERNING A LITTLE REHEARSAL IN CAPTAIN CLUFFE'S, LODGING, AND A CERTAIN CONFIDENCE BETWEEN DR. STURK AND MR. DANGERFIELD.

Mrs. Sturk, though very quiet, was an active little body, with a gentle, anxious face. She was up and about very early, and ran down to the King's House, to ask Mrs. Colonel Stafford, who was very kind to her, and a patroness of Sturk's, to execute a little commission for her in Dublin, as she understood she was going into town that day, and the doctor's horse had gone lame, and was in the hands of the farrier. So the good lady undertook it, and offered a seat in her carriage to Dr. Sturk, should his business call him to town. The carriage would be at the door at halfpast eleven.

And as she trotted home — for her Barney's breakfast-hour was drawing nigh — whom should she encounter upon the road, just outside the town, but their grim spectacled benefactor, Dangerfield, accompanied by, and talking in his usual short way to Nutter, the arch enemy, who, to say truth, looked confoundedly black and she heard the silver spectacles say, ''Tis, you understand, my own thoughts *only* I speak, Mr. Nutter.'

The fright and the shock of seeing Nutter so near her, made her salutation a little awkward; and she had, besides, an instinctive consciousness that they were talking about the terrible affair of yesterday. Dangerfield, on meeting her, bid Nutter good-morning suddenly, and turned about with Mrs. Sturk, who had to slacken her pace a little, for the potent agent chose to walk rather slowly.

'A fine morning after all the rain, Madam. How well the hills look,' and he pointed across the Liffey with his cane; 'and the view down the river,' and he turned about, pointing towards Inchicore.

I believe he wanted to see how far Nutter was behind them. He was walking in the opposite direction, looking down on the kerbstones of the footpath, and touching them with his cane, as if counting them as he proceeded. Dangerfield nodded, and his spectacles in the morning sun seemed to flash two sudden gleams of lightning after him.

‘I’ve been giving Nutter a bit of my mind, Madam, about that procedure of his. He’s very angry with me, but a great deal more so with your husband, who has my sympathies with him; and I think I’m safe in saying he’s likely soon to have an offer of employment under my Lord Castlemallard, if it suits him.

And he walked on, and talked of other things in short sentences, and parted with Mrs. Sturk with a grim brief kindness at the door, and so walked with his wiry step away towards the Brass Castle, where his breakfast awaited him, and he disappeared round the corner of Martin’s Row.

‘And which way was he going when you met him and that — that *Nutter*?’ demanded Sturk, who was talking in high excitement, and not being able to find an epithet worthy of Nutter, made it up by his emphasis and his scowl. She told him.

‘H’m! then, he can’t have got my note yet!’

She looked at him in a way that plainly said, ‘what note?’ but Sturk said no more, and he had trained her to govern her curiosity.

As Dangerfield passed Captain Cluffe’s lodgings, he heard the gay tinkle of a guitar, and an amorous duet, not altogether untunefully sung to that accompaniment; and he beheld little Lieutenant Puddock’s back, with a broad scarlet and gold ribbon across it, supporting the instrument on which he was industriously thrumming, at the window, while Cluffe, who was emitting a high note, with all the tenderness he could throw into his robust countenance, and one of those involuntary distortions which in amateurs will sometimes accompany a vocal effort, caught the eye of the cynical wayfarer, and stopped short with a disconcerted little cough and a shake of his chops, and a grim, rather red nod, and ‘Good-morning, Mr. Dangerfield.’ Puddock also saluted, still thrumming a low chord or two as he did so, for he was not ashamed, like his stout playmate, and saw nothing incongruous in their early minstrelsy.

The fact is, these gallant officers were rehearsing a pretty little entertainment they designed for the ladies at Belmont. It was a serenade, in short, and they had been compelled to postpone it in consequence of the broken weather; and though both gentlemen were, of course, romantically devoted to their respective objects, yet there were no two officers in his Majesty’s service more bent upon making love with a due regard to health and comfort than our friends Cluffe and Puddock. Puddock, indeed, was disposed to conduct it in the true masquerading spirit, leaving the ladies to guess at the authors of that concord of sweet sounds with which the amorous air of night was to quiver round the walls and groves of Belmont; and Cluffe, externally acquiescing, had yet made up his mind, if a decent opportunity presented, to be detected and made prisoner, and that the honest troubadours should sup on a hot broil, and sip some of the absent general's curious Madeira at the feet of their respective mistresses, with all the advantage which a situation so romantic and so private would offer.

So 'tinkle, tinkle, twang, twang, THRUM!' went the industrious and accomplished Puddock's guitar; and the voices of the enamoured swains kept tolerable tune and time; and Puddock would say, 'Don't you think, Captain Cluffe, 'twould perhapth go better if we weren't to try that shake upon A. Do let's try the last two barth without it;' and 'I'm thorry to trouble you, but jutht wonth more, if you pleathe —

'"But hard ith the chathe my thad heart mutht purthue,
While Daphne, thweet Daphne, thtill flieth from my view."'

Puddock, indeed, had strict notions about rehearsing, and, on occasions like this, assumed managerial airs, and in a very courteous way took the absolute command of Captain Cluffe, who sang till he was purple, and his belts and braces cracked again, not venturing to mutiny, though he grumbled a little aside.

So when Dangerfield passed Cluffe's lodging again, returning on his way into Chapelizod, the songsters were at it still. And he smiled his pleasant smile once more, and nodded at poor old Cluffe, who this time was very seriously put out, and flushed up quite fiercely, and said, almost in a mutiny —

'Hang it, Puddock, I believe you'd keep a fellow singing ballads over the street all day. Didn't you see that cursed fellow, Dangerfield, sneering at us — curse him — I suppose he never heard a gentleman sing before; and, by Jove, Puddock, you know you do make a fellow go over the same thing so often it's enough to make a dog laugh.'

A minute after Dangerfield had mounted Sturk's doorsteps, and asked to see the doctor. He was ushered up stairs and into that back drawingroom which we know so well. Sturk rose as he entered.

‘Your most obedient, Mr. Dangerfield,’ said the doctor, with an anxious bow.

‘Good-morning, Sir,’ said Dangerfield. ‘I’ve got your note, and am here in consequence; what can I do?’

Sturk glanced at the door, to see it was shut, and then said —

‘Mr. Dangerfield, I’ve recollected a — *something*.’

‘You *have*? ho! Well, my good Sir?’

‘You, I know, were acquainted with — with *Charles Archer*?’

Sturk looked for a moment on the spectacles, and then dropped his eyes.

‘Charles Archer,’ answered Dangerfield promptly, ‘yes, to be sure. But, Charles, you know, got into trouble, and ’tis not an acquaintance you or I can boast of; and, in fact, we must not mention him; and I have long ceased to know anything of him.’

‘But, I’ve just remembered his address; and there’s something about his private history which I very well know, and which gives me a claim upon his kind feeling, and he’s now in a position to do me a material service; and there’s no man living, Mr. Dangerfield, has so powerful an influence with him as yourself. Will you use it in my behalf, and attach me to you by lasting gratitude?’

Sturk looked straight at Dangerfield; and Dangerfield looked at him, quizzically, perhaps a little ashamed, in return; after a short pause —

‘I *will*,’ said Dangerfield, with a sprightly decision. ‘*But*, you know, Charles is not a fellow to be trifled with — hey? and we must not mention his name — you understand — or hint where he lives, or anything about him, in short.’

‘That’s plain,’ answered Sturk.

‘You’re going into town, Mrs. Sturk tells me, in Mrs. Strafford’s carriage. Well, when you return this evening, put down in writing what you think Charles can do for you, and I’ll take care he considers it.’

‘I thank you, Sir,’ said Sturk, solemnly.

‘And hark ye, you’d better go about your business in town — do you see — just as usual; ‘twill excite enquiry if you don’t; so you must in this and other things proceed exactly as I direct you,’ said Dangerfield.

‘Exactly, Sir, depend on’t,’ answered Sturk.

‘Good-day,’ said Dangerfield.

‘Adieu,’ said the doctor; and they shook hands, gravely.

On the lobby Dangerfield encountered Mrs. Sturk, and had a few pleasant words with her, patting the bull-heads of the children, and went down stairs smiling and nodding; and Mrs. Sturk popped quietly into the study, and found her husband leaning on the chimney piece, and swabbing his face with his handkerchief — strangely pale — and looking, as the good lady afterwards said, for all the world as if he had seen a ghost.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE CLOSET SCENE, WITH THE PART OF POLONIUS OMITTED.

When Magnolia and the major had gone out, each on their several devices, poor Mrs. Macnamara called Biddy, their maid, and told her, in a vehement, wheezy, confidential whisper in her ear, though there was nobody by but themselves, and the door was shut.

‘Biddy, now mind — d’ye see — the lady that came to me in the end of July — do you remember? — in the black satin — you know? — she’ll be here to-day, and we’re going down together in her coach to Mrs. Nutter’s; but that does not signify. As soon as she comes, bring her in here, into this room — d’ye mind? — and go across that instant minute — d’ye see now? — straight to Dr. Toole, and ask him to send me the peppermint drops he promised me.’

Then she cross-questioned Biddy, to ascertain that she perfectly understood and clearly remembered; and, finally, she promised her half-a-crown if she peformed this very simple commission to her mistress’s satisfaction and held her tongue religiously on the subject. She had apprised Toole the evening before, and now poor ‘Mrs. Mack’s sufferings, she hoped, were about to be brought to a happy termination by the doctor’s ingenuity. She was, however, very nervous indeed, as the crisis approached; for such a beast as Mary Matchwell at bay was a spectacle to excite a little tremor even in a person of more nerve than fat Mrs. Macnamara.

And what could Mary Matchwell want of a conjuring conference, of all persons in the world, with poor little Mrs. Nutter? Mrs. Mack had done in this respect simply as she was bid. She had indeed no difficulty to persuade Mrs. Nutter to grant the interview. That harmless little giggling creature could not resist the mere mention of a fortuneteller. Only for Nutter, who set his face against this sort of sham witchcraft, she would certainly have asked him to treat her with a glimpse into futurity at that famous-sibyl’s house; and now that she had an opportunity of having the enchantress *tête-à-tête* in her own snug parlour at the Mills, she was in a delightful fuss of mystery and delight.

Mrs. Mack, indeed, from her own sad experience, felt a misgiving and a pang in introducing the formidable prophetess. But what could she do? She dared not refuse; all she could risk was an anxious hint to poor little Mrs. Nutter, 'not to be telling her *anything*, good, bad, or indifferent, but just to ask her what questions she liked, and no more.' Indeed, poor Mrs. Mack was low and feverish about this assignation, and would have been more so but for the hope that her Polonius, behind the arras, would bring the woman of Endor to her knees.

All on a sudden she heard the rumble and jingle of a hackney coach, and the clang of the horses' hoofs pulled up close under her window; her heart bounded and fluttered up to her mouth, and then dropped down like a lump of lead, and she heard a well-known voice talk a few sentences to the coachman, and then in the hall, as she supposed, to Biddy; and so she came into the room, dressed as usual in black, tall, thin, and erect, with a black hood shading her pale face and the mist and chill of night seemed to enter along with her.

It was a great relief to poor Mrs. Mack, that she actually saw Biddy at that moment run across the street toward Toole's hall-door, and she quickly averted her conscious glance from the light-heeled handmaid.

'Pray take a chair, Ma'am,' said Mrs. Mack, with a pallid face and a low courtesy.

Mistress Matchwell made a faint courtesy in return, and, without saying anything, sat down, and peered sharply round the room.

'I'm glad, Ma'am, you had no dust to-day; the rain, Ma'am, laid it beautiful.'

The grim woman in black threw back her hood a little, and showed her pale face and thin lips, and prominent black eyes, altogether a grisly and intimidating countenance, with something wild and suspicious in it, suiting by no means ill with her supernatural and malign pretensions.

Mrs. Mack's ear was strained to catch the sound of Toole's approach, and a pause ensued, during which she got up and poured out a glass of port for the lady, and she presented it to her deferentially. She took it with a nod, and sipped it, thinking, as it seemed, uneasily. There was plainly something more than usual upon her mind. Mrs. Mack thought — indeed, she was quite sure — she heard a little fussing about the bedroom door, and concluded that the doctor was getting under cover.

When Mrs. Matchwell had set her empty glass upon the table, she glided to the window, and Mrs. Mack's guilty conscience smote her, as she saw her look towards Toole's house. It was only, however, for the coach; and having satisfied herself it was at hand, she said —

'We'll have some minutes quite private, if you please— 'tisn't my affair, you know, but yours,' said the weird woman.

There had been ample time for the arrangement of Toole's ambuscade. Now was the moment. The crisis was upon her. But poor Mrs. Mack, just as she was about to say her little say about the front windows and opposite neighbours, and the privacy of the back bedroom, and to propose their retiring thither, felt a sinking of the heart — a deadly faintness, and an instinctive conviction that she was altogether overmatched, and that she could not hope to play successfully any sort of devil's game with that all-seeing sorceress. She had always thought she was a plucky woman till she met Mistress Mary. Before *her* her spirit died within her — her blood flowed hurriedly back to her heart, leaving her body cold, pale, and damp, and her soul quailing under her gaze.

She cleared her voice twice, and faltered an enquiry, but broke down in panic; and at that moment Biddy popped in her head —

'The doctor, Ma'am, was sent for to Lucan, an' he won't be back till six o'clock, an' he left no peppermint drops for you, Ma'am, an' do you want me, if you plase, Ma'am?'

'Go down, Biddy, that'll do,' said Mrs. Mack, growing first pale, and then very red.

Mary Matchwell scented death afar off; for her the air was always tainted with ominous perfumes. Every unusual look or dubious word thrilled her with a sense of danger. Suspicion is the baleful instinct of self-preservation with which the devil gifts his children; and hers never slept.

'*What* doctor?' said Mrs. Matchwell, turning her large, dismal, wicked gaze full on Mrs. Mack.

'Doctor Toole, Ma'am.' She dared not tell a literal lie to that piercing, prominent pair of black eyes.

'And why did you send for Doctor O'Toole, Ma'am?'

‘I did not send for the doctor,’ answered the fat lady, looking down, for she could not stand that glance that seemed to light up all the caverns of her poor soul, and make her lies stand forth self-confessed. ‘I did not send for him, Ma’am, only for some drops he promised me. I’ve been very sick — I — I — I’m so miserable.’

And poor Mrs. Mack’s nether lip quivered, and she burst into tears.

‘You’re enough to provoke a saint, Mrs. Macnamara,’ said the woman in black, rather savagely, though coldly enough. ‘Why you’re on the point of fortune, as it seems to me.’ Here poor Mrs. Mack’s inarticulate lamentations waxed more vehement. ‘You don’t believe it — very well — but where’s the use of crying over your little difficulties, Ma’am, like a great baby, instead of exerting yourself and thanking your best friend?’

And the two ladies sat down to a murmuring *tête-à-tête* at the far end of the room; you could have heard little more than an inarticulate cooing, and poor Mrs. Mack’s sobs, and the stern —

‘And is that all? I’ve had more trouble with you than with fifty reasonable clients — you can hardly be serious — I tell you plainly, you must manage matters better, my good Madam; for, frankly, Ma’am, *this* won’t do.’

With which that part of the conference closed, and Mary Matchwell looked out of the window. The coach stood at the door, the horses dozing patiently, with their heads together, and the coachman, with a black eye, mellowing into the yellow stage, and a cut across his nose — both doing well — was marching across from the public-house over the way, wiping his mouth in the cuff of his coat.

‘Put on your riding-hood, if you please, Madam, and come down with me in the coach to introduce me to Mrs. Nutter,’ said Mrs. Matchwell, at the same time tapping with her long bony fingers to the driver.

‘There’s no need of that, Madam. I said what you desired, and I sent a note to her last night, and she expects you just now; and, indeed, I’d rather not go, Madam, if you please.’

‘’Tis past that now — just do as I tell you, for come you must,’ answered Mrs. Matchwell.

As the old woman of Berkley obeyed, and got up and went quietly away with her visitor, though her dead flesh quivered with fear, so poor Mrs. Mack, though loath enough, submitted in silence.

‘Now, you look like a body going to be hanged — you do; what’s the matter with you, Madam? I tell you, you mustn’t look that way. Here, take a sup o’ this;’ and she presented the muzzle of a small bottle like a pistol at her mouth as she spoke —

‘There’s a glass on the table, if you let me, Ma’am,’ said Mrs. Mack.

‘Glass be —— ; here, take a mouthful.’

And she popped it between her lips; and Mrs. Mack was refreshed and her spirit revived within her.

CHAPTER XLVII.

IN WHICH PALE HECATE VISITS THE MILLS, AND CHARLES NUTTER, ESQ., ORDERS TEA.

Poor Mrs. Nutter, I have an honest regard for her memory. If she was scant of brains, she was also devoid of guile — giggle and raspberry-jam were the leading traits of her character. And though she was slow to believe ill-natured stories, and made, in general, a horrid jumble when she essayed to relate news, except of the most elementary sort; and used to forget genealogies, and to confuse lawsuits and other family feuds, and would have made a most unsatisfactory witness upon any topic on earth, yet she was a ready sympathiser, and a restless but purblind matchmaker — always suggesting or suspecting little romances, and always amazed when the eclaircissement came off. Excellent for condoling — better still for rejoicing — she would, on hearing of a surprising good match, or an unexpected son and heir, or a pleasantly-timed legacy, go off like a mild little peal of joy-bells, and keep ringing up and down and zig-zag, and to and again, in all sorts of irregular roulades, without stopping, the whole day long, with 'Well, to be sure.' 'Upon my conscience, now, I scarce can believe it.' 'An' isn't it pleasant, though.' 'Oh! the creatures — but it was badly wanted!' 'Dear knows — but I'm glad — ha, ha, ha,' and so on. A train of reflection and rejoicing not easily exhausted, and readily, by simple transposition, maintainable for an indefinite period. And people, when good news came, used to say, 'Sally Nutter will be glad to hear that;' and though she had not a great deal of sense, and her conversation was made up principally of interjections, assisted by little gestures, and wonderful expressions of face; and though, when analysed it was not much, yet she made a cheerful noise, and her company was liked; and her friendly little gesticulation, and her turning up of the eyes, and her smiles and sighs, and her 'whisht a bit,' and her 'faith and troth now,' and 'whisper,' and all the rest of her little budget of idiomatic expletives, made the people somehow, along with her sterling qualities, fonder of her than perhaps, having her always at hand, they were quite aware.

So they both entered the vehicle, which jingled and rattled so incessantly and so loud that connected talk was quite out of the question, and Mrs. Macnamara was glad ’twas so; and she could not help observing there was something more than the ordinary pale cast of devilment in Mary Matchwell’s face — something, she thought, almost frightful, and which tempted her to believe in her necromantic faculty.

So they reached Nutter’s house, at the mills, a sober, gray-fronted mansion, darkened with tall trees, and in went Mrs. Mack. Little Mrs. Nutter received her in a sort of transport of eagerness, giggle, and curiosity.

‘And is she really in the coach now? and, my dear, does she really tell the wonders they say? Mrs. Molly told me — well, now, the most surprising things; and do you actually believe she’s a conjuror? But mind you, Nutter must not know I had her here. He can’t abide a fortuneteller. And what shall I ask her? I think about the pearl cross — don’t you? For I *would* like to know, and then whether Nutter or his enemies — you know who I mean — will carry the day — don’t you know? Doctor Sturk, my dear, and — and — but that’s the chief question.’

Poor Mrs. Mack glanced over her shoulder to see she wasn’t watched, and whispered her in haste —

‘For mercy’s sake, my dear, take my advice, and that is, listen to all she tells you, but tell her nothing.’

‘To be sure, my dear, that’s only common sense,’ said Mrs. Nutter.

And Mary Matchwell, who thought they had been quite long enough together, descended from the carriage, and was in the hall before Mrs. Nutter was aware; and the silent apparition overawed the poor little lady, who faltered a ‘Good-evening, Madam — you’re very welcome — pray step in.’ So in they all trooped to Nutter’s parlour.

So soon as little Mrs. Nutter got fairly under the chill and shadow of this inauspicious presence, her giggle subsided, and she began to think of the dreadful story she had heard of her having showed Mrs. Flemming through a glass of fair water, the apparition of her husband with his face half masked with blood, the day before his murder by the watchmen in John’s-lane. When, therefore, this woman of Endor called for water and glasses, and told Mrs. Mack that she must leave them alone together, poor little empty Mrs. Nutter lost heart, and began to feel very queer, and to wish herself well out of the affair; and, indeed, was almost ready to take to her heels and leave the two ladies in possession of the house, but she had not decision for this.

‘And mayn’t Mrs. Mack stay in the room with us?’ she asked, following that good lady’s retreating figure with an imploring look.

‘By no means.’

This was addressed sternly to Mrs. Mack herself, who, followed by poor Mrs. Nutter’s eyes, moved fatly and meekly out of the room.

She was not without her fair share of curiosity, but on the whole, was relieved, and very willing to go. She had only seen Mary Matchwell take from her pocket and uncase a small, oval-shaped steel mirror, which seemed to have the property of magnifying objects; for she saw her cadaverous fingers reflected in it to fully double their natural size, and she had half filled a glass with water, and peered through it askew, holding it toward the light.

Well, the door was shut, and an interval of five minutes elapsed; and all of a sudden two horrible screams in quick succession rang through the house.

Betty, the maid, and Mrs. Mack were in the small room on the other side of the hall, and stared in terror on one another. The old lady, holding Betty by the wrist, whispered a benediction; and Betty crying— ‘Oh! my dear, what’s happened the poor misthress?’ crossed the hall in a second, followed by Mrs. Mack, and they heard the door unlocked on the inside as they reached it.

In they came, scarce knowing how, and found poor little Mrs. Nutter flat upon the floor, in a swoon, her white face and the front of her dress drenched with water.

‘You’ve a scent bottle, Mrs. Macnamara — let her smell to it,’ said the grim woman in black, coldly, but with a scarcely perceptible gleam of triumph, as she glanced on the horrified faces of the women.

Well, it was a long fainting-fit; but she did come out of it. And when her bewildered gaze at last settled upon Mrs. Matchwell, who was standing darkly and motionless between the windows, she uttered another loud and horrible cry, and clung with her arms round Mrs. Mack’s neck, and screamed —

‘Oh! Mrs. Mack, *there* she is — *there* she is — *there* she is.’

And she screamed so fearfully and seemed in such an extremity of terror, that Mary Matchwell, in her sables, glided, with a strange sneer on her pale face, out of the room across the hall, and into the little parlour on the other side, like an evil spirit whose mission was half accomplished, and who departed from her for a season.

‘She’s here — she’s here!’ screamed poor little Mrs. Nutter.

‘No, dear, no — she’s not — she’s gone, my dear, indeed she’s gone,’ replied Mrs. Mack, herself very much appalled.

‘Oh! is she gone — is she — *is* she gone?’ cried Mrs. Nutter, staring all round the room, like a child after a frightful dream.

‘She’s gone, Ma’am, dear — she isn’t here — by this crass, she’s gone!’ said Betty, assisting Mrs. Mack, and equally frightened and incensed.

‘Oh! oh! Betty, where is he gone? Oh! Mrs. Mack — oh! no — no — never! It can’t be — it couldn’t. It *is* not he — he never did it.’

‘I declare to you, Ma’am, she’s not right in her head!’ cried poor Betty, at her wits’ ends.

‘There — *there* now, Sally, darling — *there*,’ said frightened Mrs. Mack, patting her on the back.

‘There — there — there — I see him,’ she cried again. ‘Oh! Charley, — Charley, sure — sure I didn’t see it aright — it was not real.’

‘There now, don’t be frettin’ yourself, Ma’am dear,’ said Betty.

But Mrs. Mack glanced over her shoulder in the direction in which Mrs. Nutter was looking, and with a sort of shock, not knowing whether it was a bodily presence or a simulacrum raised by the incantations of Mary Matchwell, she beheld the dark features and white eyeballs of Nutter himself looking full on them from the open door.

‘Sally — what ails you, sweetheart?’ said he, coming close up to her with two swift steps.

‘Oh! Charley— ’twas a dream — nothing else — a bad dream, Charley. Oh! say it’s a dream,’ cried the poor terrified little woman. ‘Oh! she’s coming — she’s coming!’ she cried again, with an appalling scream.

‘*Who* — what’s the matter?’ cried Nutter, looking in the direction of his poor wife’s gaze in black wrath and bewilderment, and beholding the weird woman who had followed him into the room. As he gazed on that pale, wicked face and sable shape, the same sort of spell which she exercised upon Mrs. Mack, and poor Mrs. Nutter, seemed in a few seconds to steal over Nutter himself, and fix him in the place where he stood. His mahogany face bleached to sickly boxwood, and his eyes looked like pale balls of stone about to leap from their sockets.

After a few seconds, however, with a sort of gasp, like a man awaking from a frightful sleep, he said —

‘Betty, take the mistress to her room;’ and to his wife, ‘go, sweetheart. Mrs. Macnamara, this must be explained,’ he added; and taking her by the hand, he led her in silence to the hall-door, and signed to the driver.

‘Oh! thank you, Mr. Nutter,’ she stammered; ‘but the coach is not mine; it came with that lady who’s with Mrs. Nutter.’

He had up to this moved with her like a somnambulist.

‘Ay, that lady; and who the devil is she?’ and he seized her arm with a sudden grasp that made her wince.

‘Oh! that lady!’ faltered Mrs. Mack— ‘she’s, I believe — she’s Mrs. Matchwell — the — the lady that advertises her abilities.’

‘Hey! I know — the fortuneteller, and go-between, — her!’

She was glad he asked her no more questions, but let her go, and stood in a livid meditation, forgetting to bid her good evening. She did not wait, however, for his courteous dismissal, but hurried away towards Chapelizod. The only thing connected with the last half-hour’s events that seemed quite clear and real to the scared lady was the danger of being overtaken by that terrible woman, and a dreadful sense of her own share as an accessory in the untold mischief that had befallen poor Mrs. Nutter.

In the midst of her horrors and agitation Mrs. Mack’s curiosity was not altogether stunned. She wondered vaguely, as she pattered along, with what dreadful exhibition of her infernal skill Mary Matchwell had disordered the senses of poor little Mrs. Nutter — had she called up a red-eyed, sooty-raven to her shoulder — as old Miss Alice Lee (when she last had a dish of tea with her) told her she had once done before — and made the ominous bird speak the doom of poor Mrs. Nutter from that perch? or had she raised the foul fiend in bodily shape, or showed her Nutter’s dead face through the water?

With these images flitting before her brain, she hurried on at her best pace, fancying every moment that she heard the rumble of the accursed coach behind her, and longing to see the friendly uniform of the Royal Irish

Artillery, and the familiar house fronts of the cheery little street, and above all, to hide herself securely among her own household gods.

When Nutter returned to the parlour his wife had not yet left it.

'I'll attend here, go you up stairs,' said Nutter. He spoke strangely, and looked odd, and altogether seemed strung up to a high pitch.

Out went Betty, seeing it was no good dawdling; for her master was resolute and formidable. The room, like others in oldfashioned houses with thick walls, had a double door. He shut the one with a stern slam, and then the other; and though the honest maid loitered in the hall, and, indeed, placed her ear very near the door, she was not much the wiser.

There was some imperfectly heard talk in the parlour, and cries, and sobs, and more talking. Then before Betty was aware, the door suddenly opened, and out came Mary Matchwell, with gleaming eyes, and a pale laugh of spite and victory and threw a look, as she passed, upon the maid that frightened her, and so vanished into her coach.

Nutter disengaged himself from poor Mrs. Nutter's arms, in which he was nearly throttled, while she sobbed and shrieked —

'Oh! Charley, dear — dearest Charley — Charley, darling — isn't it frightful?' and so on.

'Betty, take care of her,' was all he said, and that sternly, like a man quietly desperate, but with a dismal fury in his face.

He went into the little room on the other side of the now darkening hall, and shut the door, and locked it inside. It was partly because he did not choose to talk just now any more with his blubbering and shrieking wife. He was a very kind husband, in his way, but a most incapable nurse, especially in a case of hysterics.

He came out with a desk in his hands.

'Moggy,' he said, in a low tone, seeing his other servant-woman in the dusk crossing at the foot of the stairs, 'here, take this desk, leave it in our bedroom— 'tis for the mistress; tell her so by-and-by.'

The wench carried it up; but poor Mrs. Nutter was in no condition to comprehend anything, and was talking quite wildly, and seemed to be growing worse rather than better.

Nutter stood alone in the hall, with his back to the door from which he had just emerged, his hands in his pockets, and the same dreary and wicked shadow over his face.

‘So that —— Sturk will carry his point after all,’ he muttered.

On the hall wainscot just opposite hung his horse-pistols; and when he saw them, and that wasn’t for a while — for though he was looking straight at them, he was staring, really, quite through the dingy wooden panel at quite other objects three hundred miles away — when he *did* see them, I say, he growled in the same tone —

‘I wish one of those bullets was through my head, so t’other was through his.’

And he cursed him with laconic intensity. Then Nutter slapped his pockets, like a man feeling if his keys and other portable chattels are all right before he leaves his home. But his countenance was that of one whose mind is absent and wandering. And he looked down on the ground, as it seemed in profound and troubled abstraction; and, after a while, he looked up again, and again glared on the cold pistols that hung before him — ready for anything. And he took down one with a snatch and weighed it in his hand, and fell to thinking again; and, as he did, kept opening and shutting the pan with a snap, and so for a long time, and thinking deeply to the tune of that castanet, and at last he roused himself, who knows from what dreams, and hung up the weapon again by its fellow, and looked about him.

The hall-door lay open, as Mary Matchwell had left it. Nutter stood on the doorstep, where he could hear faintly, from above stairs, the cries and wails of poor, hysterical Mrs. Nutter. He remained there a good while, during which, unperceived by him, Dr. Toole’s pestle-and-mortar-boy, who had entered by the backway, had taken a seat in the hall. He was waiting for an empty draught-bottle, in exchange for a replenished flask of the same agreeable beverage, which he had just delivered; for physic was one of poor Mrs. Nutter’s weaknesses, though, happily, she did not swallow half what came home for her.

When Nutter turned round, the boy — a sharp, tattling vagabond, he knew him well — was reading a printed card he had picked up from the floor, with the impress of Nutter’s hob-nailed tread upon it. It was endorsed upon the back, ‘For Mrs. Macnamara, with the humble duty of her obedient servant, M. M.’

‘What’s that, Sirrah?’ shouted Nutter.

‘For Mrs. Nutter, I think, Sir,’ said the urchin, jumping up with a start.

‘Mrs. Nutter,’ repeated he— ‘No — Mrs. Mac — Macnamara,’ and he thrust it into his surtout pocket. ‘And what brings you here, Sirrah?’ he added savagely; for he thought everybody was spying after him now, and, as I said, he knew him for a tattling young dog — he had taken the infection from his master, who had trained him.

‘Here, woman,’ he cried to Moggy, who was passing again, ‘give that pimping rascal his —— answer; and see, Sirrah, if I find you sneaking about the place again, I’ll lay that whip across your back.’

Nutter went into the small room again.

‘An’ how are ye, Jemmie — how’s every inch iv you?’ enquired Moggy of the boy, when his agitation was a little blown over.

‘I’m elegant, thank ye,’ he answered; ‘an’ what’s the matther wid ye all? I cum through the kitchen, and seen no one.’

‘Och! didn’t you hear? The poor mistress — she’s as bad as bad can be.’ And then began a whispered confidence, broken short by Nutter’s again emerging, with the leather belt he wore at night on, and a short back-sword, called a *coutteau de chasse*, therein, and a heavy walking-cane in his hand.

‘Get tea for me, wench, in half an hour,’ said he, this time quite quietly, though still sternly, and without seeming to observe the quaking boy, who, at first sight, referred these martial preparations to a resolution to do execution upon him forthwith; ‘you’ll find me in the garden when it’s ready.’

And he strode out, and pushing open the wicket door in the thick garden hedge, and, with his cane shouldered, walked with a quick, resolute step down towards the pretty walk by the river, with the thick privet hedge and the row of old pear trees by it. And that was the last that was heard or seen of Mr. Nutter for some time.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

SWANS ON THE WATER.

At about halfpast six that evening, Puddock arrived at Captain Cluffe's lodgings, and for the last time the minstrels rehearsed their lovelorn and passionate ditties. They were drest 'all in their best,' under that outer covering, which partly for mystery and partly for bodily comfort — the wind, after the heavy rains of the last week, having come round to the east — these prudent troubadours wore.

Though they hardly glanced at the topic to one another, each had his delightful anticipations of the chances of the meeting. Puddock did not value Dangerfield a rush, and Cluffe's mind was pretty easy upon that point from the moment his proposal for Gertrude Chattesworth had taken wind.

Only for that cursed shower the other night, that made it incumbent on Cluffe, who had had two or three sharp little visits of his patrimonial gout, and no notion of dying for love, to get to his quarters as quickly as might be — he had no doubt that the last stave of their first duet rising from the meadow of Belmont, with that charming roulade — devised by Puddock, and the pathetic twang-twang of his romantic instrument, would have been answered by the opening of the drawingroom window, and Aunt Becky's imperious summons to the serenaders to declare themselves, and come in and partake of supper!

The only thing that at all puzzled him, unpleasantly connected with that unsuccessful little freak of musical lovemaking, was the fellow they saw getting away from under the open window — the very same at which Lilias Walsingham had unintentionally surprised her friend Gertrude. He had a surtout on, with the cape cut exactly after the fashion of Dangerfield, and a three-cocked hat with very pinched corners, in the French style, which identical hat Cluffe was ready to swear he saw upon Dangerfield's head very early one morning, as he accidentally espied him viewing his peas and tulips in the little garden of the Brass Castle by the river side.

'Twas fixed, in fact, in Cluffe's mind that Dangerfield was the man; and what the plague need had a declared lover of any such clandestine manœuvres. Was it possible that the old scoundrel was, after all, directing his night visits differently, and keeping the aunt in play, as a reserve, in the event of the failure of his suit to the niece? Plans as gross, he knew, had succeeded; old women were so devilish easily won, and loved money too, so well sometimes.

These sly fellows agreed that they must not go to Belmont by Chapelizod-bridge, which would lead them through the town, in front of the barrack, and under the very signboard of the Phœnix. No, they would go by the Knockmaroon-road, cross the river by the ferry, and unperceived, and unsuspected, enter the grounds of Belmont on the further side.

So away went the amorous musicians, favoured by the darkness, and talking in an undertone, and thinking more than they talked, while little Puddock, from under his cloak, scratched a faint little arpeggio and a chord, ever and anon, upon ‘the inthrument.’

When they reached the ferry, the boat was tied at the near side, but deuce a ferryman could they see. So they began to shout and hallo, singly, and together, until Cluffe, in much ire and disgust, exclaimed —

‘Curse the sot — drunk in some whiskey-shop — the blackguard! That is the way such scoundrels throw away their chances, and help to fill the high roads with beggars and thieves; curse him, I sha’n’t have a note left if we go on bawling this way. I suppose we must go home again.’

‘Fiddle-thtick!’ exclaimed the magnanimous Puddock. ‘I pulled myself across little more than a year ago, and ’twas as easy as — as — anything. Get in, an’ loose her when I tell you.’

This boat was managed by means of a rope stretched across the stream from bank to bank; seizing which, in both hands, the boatman, as he stood in his skiff, hauled it, as it seemed, with very moderate exertion across the river.

Cluffe chuckled as he thought how sold the rascally boatman would be, on returning, to find his bark gone over to the other side.

‘Don’t be uneathy about the poor fellow,’ said Puddock; ‘we’ll come down in the morning and make him a present, and explain how it occurred.’

‘Explain *yourself* — poor fellow, be hanged!’ muttered Cluffe, as he took his seat, for he did not part with his silver lightly. ‘I say, Puddock, tell me when I’m to slip the rope.’

The signal given, Cluffe let go, entertaining himself with a little jingle of Puddock's guitar, of which he had charge, and a verse or two of their last song; while the plump little lieutenant, standing upright, midships in the boat, hauled away, though not quite so deftly as was desirable. Some two or three minutes had passed before they reached the middle of the stream, which was, as Puddock afterwards remarked, 'gigantically thwollen;' and at this point they came to something very like a standstill.

'I say, Puddock, keep her head a little more up the stream, will you?' said Cluffe, thinking no evil, and only to show his nautical knowledge.

'It's easy to say keep her head up the stream,' gasped Puddock who was now labouring fearfully, and quite crimson in the face, tugging his words up with a desperate lisp, and too much out of breath to say more.

The shades of the night and the roar of the waters prevented Cluffe observing these omens aright.

'What the plague are you doing *now*? cried Cluffe, arresting a decorative passage in the middle, and for the first time seriously uncomfortable, as the boat slowly spun round, bringing what Cluffe called her head — though head and tail were pretty much alike — toward the bank they had quitted.

'Curse you, Puddock, why — what are you going back for? you can't do it.'

'Lend a hand,' bawled Puddock, in extremity. 'I say, help, seize the rope; I say, Cluffe, quick, Sir, my arms are breaking.'

There was no exaggeration in this — there seldom was in any thing Puddock said; and the turn of the boat had twisted his arms like the strands of a rope.

'Hold on, Puddock, curse you, I'm comin',' roared Cluffe, quite alive to the situation. 'If you let go, I'm *diddled* but I'll shoot you.'

'Catch the rope, I thay, Thir, or 'tith all over!'

Cluffe, who had only known that he was slowly spinning round, and that Puddock was going to commit him to the waves, made a vehement exertion to catch the rope, but it was out of reach, and the boat rocked so suddenly from his rising, that he sat down by mistake again, with a violent plump that made his teeth gnash, in his own place; and the shock and his alarm stimulated his anger.

'Hold on, Sir; hold on, you little devil, I say, one minute, here — hold — hollo!'

While Cluffe was shouting these words, and scrambling forward, Puddock was crying —

'Curth it, Cluffe, quick — oh! hang it, I can't thtand it — bleth my *thoul*!

And Puddock let go, and the boat and its precious freightage, with a horrid whisk and a sweep, commenced its seaward career in the dark.

'Take the oars, Sir, hang you!' cried Cluffe.

'There are no oarth,' replied Puddock, solemnly.

'Or the helm.'

'There'th no helm.'

'And what the devil, Sir?' and a splash of cold water soused the silken calves of Cluffe at this moment.

'Heugh! heugh! — and what the devil *will* you do, Sir? you don't want to drown me, I suppose?' roared Cluffe, holding hard by the gunwale.

'*You* can thwim, Cluffe; jump in, and don't mind me,' said little Puddock, sublimely.

Cluffe, who was a bit of a boaster, had bragged, one evening at mess, of his swimming, which he said was famous in his school days; 'twas a lie, but Puddock believed it implicitly.

'Thank you!' roared Cluffe. 'Swim, indeed! — buttoned up this way — and — and the gout too.'

'I say, Cluffe, save the guitar, if you can,' said Puddock.

In reply, Cluffe cursed that instrument through his teeth, with positive fury, and its owner; and, indeed, he was so incensed at this unfeeling request, that if he had known where it was, I think he would have gone nigh to smash it on Puddock's head, or at least, like the 'Minstrel Boy,' to tear its chords asunder; for Cluffe was hot, especially when he was frightened. But he forgot — though it was hanging at that moment by a pretty scarlet and gold ribbon about his neck.

'Guitar be *diddled*!' cried he; ''tis gone — where *we're* going — to the bottom. What devil possessed you, Sir, to drown us this way?'

Puddock sighed. They were passing at this moment the quiet banks of the pleasant meadow of Belmont, and the lights twinkled from the bow-window in the drawingroom. I don't know whether Puddock saw them — Cluffe certainly did not.

'Hallo! hallo! — a rope!' cried Cluffe, who had hit upon this desperate expedient for raising the neighbourhood. 'A rope — a rope! hallo! hallo! —

a ro-o-o-ope!’

And Aunt Becky, who heard the wild whooping, mistook it for drunken fellows at their diversions, and delivered her sentiments in the drawingroom accordingly.

CHAPTER XLIX.

SWANS IN THE WATER.

We're coming to something — what's that?' said Puddock, as a long row of black stakes presented themselves at some distance ahead, in the dusky moonlight, slanting across the stream.

‘'Tis the salmon-weir!' roared Cluffe with an oath that subsided into something like a sickening prayer.

It was only a fortnight before that a tipsy fellow had been found drowned in the net. Cluffe had lost his head much more than Puddock, though Cluffe had fought duels. But then, he really could not swim a bit, and he was so confoundedly buckled up.

‘Sit to the right. Trim the boat, Sir!' said little Puddock.

‘Trim the devil!' bawled Cluffe, to whom this order of Puddock's, it must be owned a useless piece of marinetism in their situation, was especially disgusting; and he added, looking furiously ahead— ‘'Tisn't the boat I'd trim, I promise you: you — you ridiculous murderer!'

Just then Puddock's end of the boat touched a stone, or a post, or something in the current, and that in which Cluffe sat came wheeling swiftly round across the stream, and brought the gallant captain so near the bank that, with a sudden jerk, he caught the end of a branch that stretched far over the water, and, spite of the confounded tightness of his toilet, with the energy of sheer terror, climbed a good way; but, reaching a point where the branch forked, he could get no further, though he tugged like a brick. But what was a fat fellow of fifty, laced, and buckled, and buttoned up, like poor Cluffe — with his legs higher up among the foliage than his head and body — to do, and with his right calf caught in the fork of a branch, so as to arrest all progress, and especially as the captain was plainly too much for the branch, which was drooping toward the water, and emitting sounds premonitory of a smash.

With a long, screaking crash the branch stooped down to the water, and, so soon as the old element made itself acquainted with those parts that reached it first, the gallant captain, with a sort of sob, redoubled his efforts, and down came the faithless bough, more and more perpendicularly, until his nicely got-up cue and bag, then his powdered head, and finally Captain Cluffe's handsome features, went under the surface. When this occurred, he instantaneously disengaged his legs with a vague feeling that his last struggle above water was over.

His feet immediately touched the bottom; he stood erect, little above his middle, and quite out of the main current, within half-a-dozen steps of the bank, and he found himself — he scarcely knew how — on terra firma, impounded in a little flower-garden, with lilacs and laburnums, and sweetbriars, and, through a window close at hand, whom should he see but Dangerfield, who was drying his hands in a towel; and, as Cluffe stood for a moment, letting the water pour down through his sleeves, he further saw him make some queer little arrangements, and eventually pour out and swallow a glass of brandy, and was tempted to invoke his aid on the spot; but some small incivilities which he had bestowed upon Dangerfield, when he thought he cherished designs upon Aunt Rebecca, forbade; and at that moment he spied the little wicket that opened upon the road, and Dangerfield stept close up to the window, and cried sternly, 'Who's there?' with his grim spectacles close to the window.

The boyish instinct of 'hide and seek' took possession of Cluffe, and he glided forth from the precincts of the Brass Castle upon the high road, just as the little hall-door was pushed open, and he heard the harsh tones of Dangerfield challenging the gooseberry bushes and hollyhocks, and thrashing the evergreens with his cane.

Cluffe hied straight to his lodgings, and ordered a sack posset. Worthy Mrs. Mason eyed him in silent consternation, drenched and dishevelled, wild, and discharging water from every part of his clothing and decorations, as he presented himself without a hat, before her dim dipt candle in the hall.

'I'll take that — that vessel, if you please, Sir, that's hanging about your neck,' said the mild and affrighted lady, meaning Puddock's guitar, through the circular orifice of which, under the chords, the water with which it was filled occasionally splashed.

'Oh — eh? — the instrument? — confound it!' and rather sheepishly he got the gray red and gold ribbon over his dripping head, and placing it in her hand without explanation, he said— 'A warming-pan as quickly as may be, I beg, Mrs. Mason — and the posset, I do earnestly request. You see — I

— I've been nearly drowned — and — and I can't answer for consequences if there be one minute's delay.

And up he went streaming, with Mrs. Mason's candle, to his bedroom, and dragged off his clinging garments, and dried his fat body, like a man coming out of a bath, and roared for hot water for his feet, and bellowed for the posset and warming-pan, and rolled into his bed, and kept the whole house in motion.

And so soon as he had swallowed his cordial, and toasted his sheets, and with the aid of his man rolled himself in a great blanket, and clapped his feet in a tub of hot water, and tumbled back again into his bed, he bethought him of Puddock, and ordered his man to take his compliments to Captain Burgh and Lieutenant Lillyman, the tenants of the nearest lodging-house, and to request either to come to him forthwith on a matter of life or death.

Lillyman was at home, and came.

'Puddock's drowned, my dear Lillyman, and I'm little better. The ferry boat broke away with us. Do go down to the adjutant — they ought to raise the salmon nets — I'm very ill myself — very ill, indeed — else I'd have assisted; but you know *me*, Lillyman. Poor Puddock— 'tis a sad business — but lose no time.'

'And can't he swim?' asked Lillyman, aghast.

'Swim? — ay, like a stone, poor fellow! If he had only thrown himself out, and held by me, hang it, I'd have brought him to shore; but poor Puddock, he lost his head. And I — you see me here — don't forget to tell them the condition you found me in, and — and — now don't lose a moment.'

So off went Lillyman to give the alarm at the barrack.

CHAPTER L.

TREATING OF SOME CONFUSION, IN CONSEQUENCE, IN THE CLUB-ROOM OF THE PHŒNIX AND ELSEWHERE, AND OF A HAT THAT WAS PICKED UP.

When Cluffe sprang out of the boat, he was very near capsizing it and finishing Puddock offhand, but she righted and shot away swiftly towards the very centre of the weir, over which, in a sheet of white foam, she swept, and continued her route toward Dublin — bottom upward, leaving little Puddock, however, safe and sound, clinging to a post, at top, and standing upon a rough sort of plank, which afforded a very unpleasant footing, by which the nets were visited from time to time.

‘Hallo! are you safe, Cluffe?’ cried the little lieutenant, quite firm, though a little dizzy, on his narrow stand, with the sheets of foam whizzing under his feet; what had become of his musical companion he had not the faintest notion, and when he saw the boat hurled over near the sluice, and drive along the stream upside down, he nearly despaired.

But when the captain’s military cloak, which he took for Cluffe himself, followed in the track of the boat, whisking, sprawling, and tumbling, in what Puddock supposed to be the agonies of drowning, and went over the weir and disappeared from view, returning no answer to his screams of ‘Strike out, Cluffe! to your right, Cluffe. Hollo! to your right,’ he quite gave the captain over.

‘Surrendhur, you thievin’ villain, or I’ll put the contints iv this gun into yir carcass,’ shouted an awful voice from the right bank, and Puddock saw the outline of a gigantic marksman, preparing to fire into his corresponding flank.

‘What do you mean, Sir?’ shouted Puddock, in extreme wrath and discomfort.

‘Robbin’ the nets, you spalpeen; if you throw them salmon you’re hidin’ undher your coat into the wather, be the tare-o-war— ‘

‘What salmon, Sir?’ interrupted the lieutenant. ‘Why, salmon’s not in season, Sir.’

'None iv yer flummery, you schamin' scoundrel; but jest come here and give yourself up, for so sure as you don't, or dar to stir an inch from that spot, I'll blow you to smithereens!'

'Captain Cluffe is drowned, Sir; and I'm Lieutenant Puddock,' rejoined the officer.

'Tare-an-ouns, an' is it yerself, Captain Puddock, that's in it?' cried the man. 'I ax yer pardon; but I tuk you for one of thim vagabonds that's always plundherin' the fish. And who in the wide world, captain jewel, id expeck to see you there, meditatin' in the middle of the river, this time o' night; an' I dunna how in the world you got there, at all, at all, for the planking is carried away behind you since yistherday.'

'Give an alarm, if you please, Sir, this moment,' urged Puddock. 'Captain Cluffe has gone over this horrid weir, not a minute since, and is I fear drowned.'

'Dhrownded! och! bloody wars.'

'Yes, Sir, send some one this moment down the stream with a rope— '

'Hollo, Jemmy?' cried the man, and whistled through his crooked finger.

'Jemmy,' said he to the boy who presented himself, 'run down to Tom Garret, at the Millbridge, and tell him Captain Cluffe's dhrownded over the weir, and to take the boat-hook and rope — he's past the bridge by this time — ay is he at the King's House — an' if he brings home the corpse alive or dead, before an hour, Captain Puddock here will give him twenty guineas reward.' So away went the boy.

''Tis an unaisy way you're situated yourself, I'm afeard,' observed the man.

'Have the goodness to say, Sir, by what meanth, if any, I can reach either bank of the river,' lisped Puddock, with dignity.

''Tis thrue for you, captain, *that's* the chat — how the divil to get you alive out o' the position you're in. Can you swim?'

'No, Thir.'

'An' how the dickens did you get there?'

'I'd rather hear, Sir, how I'm to get away, if you please,' replied Puddock, loftily.

'Are you bare-legged?' shouted the man.

'No, Sir,' answered the little officer, rather shocked.

'An' you're there wid shoes on your feet.

‘Of course, Sir,’ answered Puddock.

‘Chuck them into the water this instant minute,’ roared the man.

‘Why, there are valuable buckles, Sir,’ remonstrated Puddock.

‘Do you mane to say you’d rather be dhrownded in yer buckles than alive in yer stockin’ feet?’ he replied.

There were some cross expostulations, but eventually the fellow came out to Puddock. Perhaps the feat was not quite so perilous as he represented; but it certainly was not a pleasant one. Puddock had a rude and crazy sort of banister to cling to, and a rugged and slippery footing; but slowly and painfully, from one post to another, he made his way, and at last jumped on the solid, though not dry land, his life and his buckles safe.

‘I’ll give you a guinea in the morning, if you come to my quarterth, Mr. —— Thir,’ and, without waiting a second, away he ran by the footpath, and across the bridge, right into the Phœnix, and burst into the club-room. There were assembled old Arthur Slowe, Tom Trimmer, from Lucan, old Trumble, Jack Collop, Colonel Stafford, and half-a-dozen more members, including some of the officers — O’Flaherty among the number, a little ‘flashy with liquor’ as the phrase then was.

Puddock stood in the wide opened door, with the handle in his hand. He was dishevelled, soused with water, bespattered with mud, his round face very pale, and he fixed a wild stare on the company. The clatter of old Trimmer’s backgammon, Slowe’s disputations over the draftboard with Colonel Stafford, Collop’s dissertation on the points of that screw of a horse he wanted to sell, and the general buzz of talk, were all almost instantaneously suspended on the appearance of this phantom, and Puddock exclaimed —

‘Gentlemen, I’m thorry to tell you, Captain Cluffe ith, I fear, drowned!’

‘Cluffe?’ ‘Drowned?’ ‘By Jupiter!’ ‘You don’t say so? and a round of such ejaculations followed this announcement.

Allow me here to mention that I permit my people to swear by all the persons of the Roman mythology. There was a horrible profanity in the matter of oaths in those days, and I found that without changing the form of sentences, and sacrificing idioms, at times, I could not manage the matter satisfactorily otherwise.

‘He went over the salmon weir — I saw him — Coyle’s — weir — headlong, poor fellow! I shouted after him, but he could not anthwer, so pray let's be off, and— '

Here he recognised the colonel with a low bow and paused. The commanding officer instantaneously despatched Lieutenant Brady, who was there, to order out Sergeant Blakeney and his guard, and any six good swimmers in the regiment who might volunteer, with a reward of twenty guineas for whoever should bring in Cluffe alive, or ten guineas for his body; and the fat fellow all the time in his bed sipping sack posset!

So away ran Brady and a couple more of the young fellows at their best pace — no one spared himself on this errand — and little Puddock and another down to the bridge. It was preposterous.

By this time Lillyman was running like mad from Cluffe's lodgings along Martin's Row to the rescue of Puddock, who, at that moment with his friends and the aid of a long pole, was poking into a little floating tanglement of withered leaves, turf, and rubbish, under the near arch of the bridge, in the belief that he was dealing with the mortal remains of Cluffe.

Lillyman overtook Toole at the corner of the street just in time to hear the scamper of the men, at double-quick, running down the sweep of the road to the bridge, and to hear the shouting that arose from the parade-ground by the river bank, from the men within the barrack precincts.

Toole joined Lillyman running.

'What the plague's this hubbub and hullo?' he cried.

'Puddock's drowned,' panted Lillyman.

'Puddock! bless us! where?' puffed Toole.

'Hollo! you, Sir — have they heard it — is he *drowned?*' cried Lillyman to the sentry outside the gate.

'Dhrownded? yes, Sir,' replied the man saluting.

'Is help gone?'

'Yes, Sir, Lieutenant Brady, and Sergeant Blakeney, and nine men.'

'Come along,' cried Lillyman to Toole, and they started afresh. They heard the shouting by the river bank, and followed it by the path round the King's House, passing the Phœnix; and old Colonel Stafford, who was gouty, and no runner, standing with a stern and anxious visage at the door, along with old Trumble, Slowe, and Trimmer, and some of the maids and drawers in the rear, all in consternation.

'Bring me the news,' screamed the colonel, as they passed.

Lillyman was the better runner. Toole a good deal blown, but full of pluck, was labouring in the rear; Lillyman jumped over the stile, at the river path; and Toole saw an officer who resembled 'poor Puddock,' he thought, a good deal, cross the road, and follow in Lillyman's wake. The doctor crossed the stile next, and made his best gallop in rear of the plump officer, excited by the distant shouting, and full of horrible curiosity and goodnature.

Nearly opposite Inchicore they fished up an immense dead pig; and Toole said, to his amazement, he found Puddock crying over it, and calling it 'my brother!' And this little scene added another very popular novelty to the doctor's stock of convivial monologues.

Toole, who loved Puddock, hugged him heartily, and when he could get breath, shouted triumphantly after the more advanced party, 'He's found, he's found!'

'Oh, thank Heaven!' cried little Puddock, with upturned eyes; 'but is he really found?'

The doctor almost thought that his perils had affected his intellect.

'Is he found — are *you* found?' cried the doctor, resuming that great shake by both hands, which in his momentary puzzle he had suspended.

'I — a — oh, dear! — I don't quite understand — is he lost? for mercy's sake is Cluffe lost?' implored Puddock.

'Lost in his bed clothes, maybe,' cried Lillyman, who had joined them.

'But he's not — he's *not* drowned?'

'Pish! drowned, indeed! unless he's drowned in the crock of hot water he's clapt his legs into.'

'Where is he — where's Cluffe?'

'Hang it! — he's in bed, in his lodging, drinking hot punch this half-hour.'

'But are you certain?'

'Why, I saw him there myself,' answered Lillyman, with an oath.

Poor little Puddock actually clasped his hands, looked up, and poured forth a hearty, almost hysterical, thanksgiving; for he had charged Cluffe's death altogether upon his own soul, and his relief was beyond expression.

In the meantime, the old gentlemen of the club were in a thrilling suspense, and that not altogether disagreeable state of horror in which men chew the cud of bitter fancy over other men's catastrophes. After about ten minutes in came young Spaight.

'Well,' said the colonel, 'is Cluffe safe or — eh?'

'Cluffe's safe — only half drowned; but poor Puddock's lost.'

'What!'

'Drowned, I'm afraid.'

'Drowned! who says so?' repeated the colonel.

'Cluffe — everybody.'

'Why, there it is!' replied the colonel, with a great oath, breaking through all his customary reserve and stiffness, and flinging his cocked-hat on the middle of the table, piteously, 'A fellow that can't swim a yard *will* go by way of saving a great — a large gentleman, like Captain Cluffe, from drowning, and he's pulled in himself; and so — bless my soul! what's to be done?'

So the colonel broke into a lamentation, and a fury, and a wonder. 'Cluffe and Puddock, the two steadiest officers in the corps! He had a devilish good mind to put Cluffe under arrest — the idiots — Puddock — he was devilish sorry. There wasn't a more honourable' — *et cetera*. In fact, a very angry and pathetic funeral oration, during which, accompanied by Doctor Toole, Lieutenant Puddock, in person, entered; and the colonel stopped short with his eyes and mouth very wide open, and said the colonel very sternly.

'I — I'm glad to see, Sir, you're safe: and — and — I suppose, I shall hear now that *Cluffe's* drowned?' and he stamped the emphasis on the floor.

While all this was going on, some of the soldiers had actually got into Dublin. The tide was in, and the water very high at 'Bloody Bridge.' A hat, near the corner, was whisking round and round, always trying to get under the arch, and always, when on the point, twirled round again into the corner — an image of the 'Flying Dutchman' and hope deferred. A watchman's crozier hooked the giddy thing. It was not a military hat; but they brought it back, and the captive was laid in the guardroom — mentioned by me because we've seen that identical hat before.

CHAPTER LI.

HOW CHARLES NUTTER'S TEA, PIPE, AND TOBACCO-BOX WERE ALL SET OUT FOR HIM IN THE SMALL PARLOUR AT THE MILLS; AND HOW THAT NIGHT WAS PASSED IN THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD.

Mrs. Nutter and Mrs. Sturk, the wives of the two men who most hated one another within the vicinage of Chapelizod — natural enemies, holding aloof one from another, and each regarding the other in a puzzled way, with a sort of apprehension and horror, as the familiar of that worst and most formidable of men — her husband — were this night stricken with a common fear and sorrow.

Darkness descended on the Mills and the river — a darkness deepened by the umbrageous trees that grouped about the old gray house in which poor Mrs. Nutter lay so ill at ease. Moggy carried the jingling tray of teathings into Nutter's little study, and lighted his candles, and set the silver snuffers in the dish, and thought she heard him coming, and ran back again, and returned with the singing 'tea-kitchen,' and then away again, for the thin buttered toast under its china cover, which our ancestors loved.

Then she listened — but 'twas a mistake — it was the Widow Macan's step, who carried the ten pailfuls of water up from the river to fill the butt in the backyard every Tuesday and Friday, for a shilling a week, and 'a cup o' tay with the girls in the kitchen.'

Then Moggy lighted the fire with the stump of a candle, for the night was a little chill, and she set the small round table beside it, and laid her master's pipe and tobacco-box on it, and listened, and began to wonder what detained him.

So she went out into the sharp still air, and stood on the hall-door step, and listened again. Presently she heard the Widow Macan walking up from the garden with the last pail on her head, who stopped when she saw her, and set down the vessel upon the corner of the clumsy little balustrade by the doorstep. So Moggy declared her uneasiness, which waxed greater when Mrs. Macan told her that ‘the masther, God bless him, wasn’t in the garden.’

She had seen him standing at the river’s edge, while she passed and repassed. He did not move a finger, or seem to notice her, and was looking down into the water. When she came back the third or fourth time, he was gone.

At Moggy’s command she went back into the garden, though she assured her, solemnly— ‘’twas nansince lookin’ there’ — and called Mr. Nutter, at first in a deferential and hesitating way; but, emboldened and excited by the silence, for she began to feel unaccountably queer, in a louder and louder a key, till she was certain that he was neither in the garden nor in the orchard, nor anywhere near the house. And when she stopped, the silence seemed awful, and the darkness under the trees closed round her with a supernatural darkness, and the river at the foot of the walk seemed snorting some inarticulate story of horror. So she locked the garden door quickly, looking over her shoulder for she knew not what, and ran faster than she often did along the sombre walk up to the hall door, and told her tale to Moggy, and begged to carry the pail in by the hall-door.

In they came, and Moggy shut the hall-door, and turned the key in it. Perhaps ’twas the state in which the poor lady lay up stairs that helped to make them excited and frightened. Betty was sitting by her bedside, and Toole had been there, and given her some opiate, I suppose, for she had dropped into a flushed snoring sleep, a horrid counterfeit of repose. But she had first had two or three frightful fits, and all sorts of wild, screaming talk between. Perhaps it was the apparition of Mary Matchwell, whose evil influence was so horribly attested by the dismal spectacle she had left behind her, that predisposed them to panic; but assuredly each anticipated no good from the master’s absence, and had a foreboding of something bad, of which they did not speak; but only disclosed it by looks, and listening, and long silences. The lights burning in Nutter’s study invited them, and there the ladies seated themselves, and made their tea in the kitchen tea-pot, and clapped it on the hob, and listened for sounds from Mrs. Nutter’s chamber, and for the step of her husband crossing the little courtyard; and they grew only more nervous from listening, and there came every now and then a little tapping on the window-pane. It was only, I think, a little sprig of the climbing-rose that was nailed by the wall, nodding at every breath, and rapping like unseen finger-tops, on the glass. But, as small things will, with such folk, under such circumstances, it frightened them confoundedly.

Then, on a sudden, there came a great yell from poor Mrs. Nutter's chamber, and they both stood up very pale. The Widow Macan, with the cup in her hand that she was 'tossing' at the moment, and Moggy, all aghast, invoked a blessing under her breath, and they heard loud cries and sudden volleys of talk, and Biddy's voice, soothing the patient.

Poor Mrs. Nutter had started up, all on a sudden, from her narcotic doze, with a hideous scream that had frightened the women down stairs. Then she cried —

'Where am I?' and 'Oh, the witch — the witch!'

'Oh! no, Ma'am, dear,' replied Betty; 'now, aisy, Ma'am, darling.'

'I'm going mad.'

'No, Ma'am, dear? — there now — sure 'tis poor Betty that's in it — don't be afear'd, Ma'am.'

'Oh, Betty, hold me — don't go — I'm mad — am I mad?'

Then in the midst of Betty's consolations, she broke into a flood of tears, and seemed in some sort relieved; and Betty gave her her drops again, and she began to mumble to herself, and so to doze.

At the end of another ten minutes, with a scream, she started up again.

'That's her step — where are you, Betty?' she shrieked, and when Betty ran to the bedside, she held her so hard that the maid was ready to cry out, leering all the time over her shoulder— 'Where's Charles Nutter? — I saw him speaking to you.'

Then the poor little woman grew quieter, and by her looks and moans, and the clasping of her hands, and her upturned eyes, seemed to be praying; and when Betty stealthily opened the press to take out another candle, her poor mistress uttered another terrible scream, crying —

'You wretch! her head won't fit — you can't hide her;' and the poor woman jumped out of her bed, shrieking 'Charles, Charles, Charles!'

Betty grew so nervous and frightened, that she fairly bawled to her colleague, Moggy, and told her she would not stay in the room unless she sat up all night with her. So, together they kept watch and ward, and as the night wore on, Mrs. Nutter's slumbers grew more natural and less brief, and her paroxysms of waking terror less maniacal. Still she would waken, with a cry that thrilled them, from some frightful vision, and seem to hear or see nothing aright for a good while after, and muttering to the frightened maids —

‘Listen to the knocking — oh! — breathing outside the door — bolt it, Betty — girls, say your prayers— ’tis he,’ or sometimes, ‘’tis she.’

And thus this heavy night wore over; and the wind, which began to rise as the hours passed, made sounds full of sad untranslatable meaning in the ears of the watchers.

Poor Mrs. Sturk meanwhile, in the House by the Churchyard, sat listening and wondering, and plying her knitting-needles in the drawingroom. When the hour of her Barney’s expected return had passed some time, she sent down to the barrack, and then to the club, and then on to the King’s House, with her service to Mrs. Stafford, to enquire, after her spouse. But her first and her second round of enquiries, despatched at the latest minute at which she was likely to find any body out of bed to answer them, were altogether fruitless. And the lights went out in one house after another, and the Phœnix shut its doors, and her own servants were for hours gone to bed; and the little town of Chapelizod was buried in the silence of universal slumber. And poor Mrs. Sturk still sat in her drawingroom, more and more agitated and frightened.

But her missing soldier did not turn up, and Leonora sat and listened hour after hour. No sound of return, not even the solemn clank and fiery snort of the fiend-horse under her window, or the ‘ho-lo, ho-la — my life, my love!’ of the phantom rider, cheated her with a momentary hope.

Poor Mrs. Sturk! She raised the window a few inches, that she might the better hear the first distant ring of his coming on the road. She forgot he had not his horse that night, and was but a pedestrian. But somehow the night-breeze through the aperture made a wolfish howling and sobbing, that sounded faint and far away, and had a hateful character of mingled despair and banter in it.

She said every now and then aloud, to reassure herself— ‘What a noise the wind makes to be sure!’ and after a while she opened the window wider. But her candle flared, and the flame tossed wildly about, and the perplexed lady feared it might go out absolutely. So she shut down the window altogether; for she could not bear the ill-omened baying any longer.

So it grew to be past two o’clock, and she was afraid that Barney would be very angry with her for sitting up, should he return.

She went to bed, therefore, where she lay only more feverish — conjecturing, and painting frightful pictures, till she heard the crow of the early village cock, and the caw of the jackdaw wheeling close to the eaves as he took wing in the gray of the morning to show her that the business of a new day had commenced; and yet Barney had not returned.

Not long after seven o'clock, Dr. Toole, with Juno, Cæsar, Dido, and Sneak at his heels, paid his half-friendly, half-professional visit at the Mills.

Poor little Mrs. Nutter was much better — quiet for her was everything, packed up, of course, with a little physic; and having comforted her, as well as he was able, he had a talk with Moggy in the hall, and all about Nutter's disappearance, and how Mrs. Macan saw him standing by the river's brink, and that was the last anyone near the house had seen of him; and a thought flashed upon Toole, and he was very near coming out with it, but checked himself, and only said —

'What hat had he on?'

So she told him.

'And was his name writ in it, or how was it marked?'

'Two big letters — a C and an N.'

'I see; and do you remember any other mark you'd know it by?'

'Well, yes; I stitched the lining only last month, with red silk, and that's how I remember the letters.'

'I know; and are you sure it was that hat he had on?'

'Certain sure — why, there's all the rest;' and she conned them over, as they hung on their pegs on the rack before them.

'Now, don't let the mistress be downhearted — keep her up, Moggy, do you mind. I told her the master was with Lord Castlemallard since yesterday evening, on business, and don't you say anything else; keep her quiet, do ye mind, and humour her.'

And away went Toole, at a swift pace, to the town again, and entered the barrack, and asked to see the adjutant, and then to look at the hat the corporal had fished up by 'Bloody Bridge;' and, by Jupiter! his heart gave a couple of great bounces, and he felt himself grow pale — they were the identical capitals, C N, and the clumsy red silk stitching in the lining.

Toole was off forthwith, and had a fellow dragging the river before three-quarters of an hour.

Dr. Walsingham, returning from an early ride to Island Bridge, saw this artist at work, with his ropes and great hooks, at the other side of the river; and being a man of enquiring mind, and never having witnessed the process before, he cried out to him, after some moments lost in conjecture —

‘My good man, what are you fishing for?’

‘A land-agent,’ answered Isaac Walton.

‘A land-agent?’ repeated the rector, misdoubting his ears.

The saturnine angler made no answer.

‘And has a gentleman been drowned here?’ he persisted.

The man only looked at him across the stream, and nodded.

‘Eh! and his name, pray?’

‘Old Nutter, of the Mills,’ he replied.

The rector made a woeful ejaculation, and stared at the careless operator, who had a pipe in his mouth the while, which made him averse from conversation. He would have liked to ask him more questions, but he was near the village, and refrained himself; and he met Toole at the corner of the bridge who, leaning on the shoulder of the rector’s horse, gave him the sad story in full.

CHAPTER LII.

CONCERNING A ROULEAU OF GUINEAS AND THE CRACK OF A PISTOL.

Dangerfield went up the river that morning with his rod and net, and his piscatory fidus Achates, Irons, at his elbow. It was a nice gray sky, but the clerk was unusually silent even for him; and the sardonic piscator appeared inscrutably amused as he looked steadily upon the running waters. Once or twice the spectacles turned full upon the clerk, over Dangerfield's shoulder, with a cynical light, as if he were on the point of making one of his ironical jokes; but he turned back again with a little whisk, the jest untold, whatever it was, to the ripple and the fly, and the coy gray troutlings.

At last, Dangerfield said over his shoulder, with the same amused look, 'Do you remember Charles Archer?'

Irons turned pale, and looked down embarrassed as it seemed, and began plucking at a tangled piece of tackle, without making any answer.

'Hey? Irons,' persisted Dangerfield, who was not going to let him off.

'Yes, I do,' answered the man surlily; 'I remember him right well; but I'd rather not, *and* I won't speak of him, that's all.'

'Well, Charles Archer's *here*, we've seen him, haven't we? and just the devil he always was,' said Dangerfield with a deliberate chuckle of infinite relish, and evidently enjoying the clerk's embarrassment as he eyed him through his spectacles obliquely.

'He has seen *you*, too, he says; and thinks *you* have seen *him*, hey?' and Dangerfield chuckled more and more knowingly, and watched his shiftings and sulkings with a pleasant grin, as he teased and quizzed him in his own enigmatical way.

'Well, supposing I *did* see him,' said Irons, looking up, returning Dangerfield's comic glance with a bold and lowering stare; 'and supposing *he* saw *me*, so long as we've no business one of another, and never talks like, nor seems to remember — I think 'tisnt, no ways, no one's business — that's what I say.'

‘True, Irons, very true; you, I, and Sturk — the doctor I mean — are cool fellows, and don’t want for nerve; but I think, don’t you? we’re afraid of Charles Archer, for all that.’

‘Fear or no fear, I don’t want to talk *to* him nor *of* him, no ways,’ replied the clerk, grimly, and looking as black as a thundercloud.

‘Nor I neither, but you know he’s here, and what a devil he is; and we can’t help it,’ replied Dangerfield, very much tickled.

The clerk only looked through his nearly closed eyes, and with the same pale and surly aspect toward the point to which Dangerfield’s casting line had floated, and observed —

‘You’ll lose them flies, Sir.’

‘Hey?’ said Dangerfield, and made another cast further into the stream.

‘Whatever he may seem, and I think I know him pretty well,’ he continued in the same sprightly way, ‘Charles Archer would dispose of each of us — you understand — without a scruple, precisely when and how best suited his convenience. Now doctor Sturk has sent him a message which I know will provoke him, for it sounds like a threat. If he reads it so, rely on’t, he’ll lay Sturk on his back, one way or another, and I’m sorry for him, for I wished him well; but if he will play at brag with the *devil I* can’t help him.’

‘I’m a man that holds his tongue; I never talks none, even in my liquor. I’m a peaceable man, and no bully, and only wants to live quiet,’ said Irons in a hurry.

‘A disciple of *my* school, you’re right, Irons, that’s my way; *I* never *name* Charles except to the two or three who meet him, and then only when I can’t help it, just as you do; fellows of that kidney I always take quietly, and I’ve prospered. Sturk would do well to reconsider his message. Were *I* in his shoes, I would not eat an egg or a gooseberry, or drink a glass of fair water from that stream, while he was in the country, for fear of *poison*! curse him! and to think of Sturk expecting to meet him, and walk with him, after such a message, together, as you and I do here. Do you see that tree?’

It was a stout poplar, just a yard away from Irons’s shoulder; and as Dangerfield pronounced the word ‘tree,’ his hand rose, and the sharp report of a pocket-pistol half-deafened Irons’s ear.

‘I say,’ said Dangerfield, with a startling laugh, observing Irons wince, and speaking as the puff of smoke crossed his face, ‘he’d lodge a bullet in the cur’s heart, as suddenly as I’ve shot that tree;’ the bullet had hit the stem right in the centre, ‘and swear he was going to rob him.’

Irons eyed him with a livid squint, but answered nothing. I think he acquiesced in Dangerfield’s dreadful estimate of Charles Archer’s character.

‘But we must give the devil his due; Charles can do a handsome thing sometimes. You shall judge. It seems he saw you, and you him — here, in this town, some months ago, and each knew the other, and you’ve seen him since, and done likewise; but you said nothing, and he liked your philosophy, and hopes you’ll accept of this, which from its weight I take to be a little rouleau of guineas.’

During this speech Irons seemed both angry and frightened, and looked darkly enough before him on the water; and his lips were moving, as if in a running commentary upon it all the while.

When Dangerfield put the little roll in his hand, Irons looked suspicious and frightened, and balanced it in his palm, as if he had thoughts of chucking it from him, as though it were literally a satanic douceur. But it is hard to part with money, and Irons, though he still looked cowed and unhappy, put the money into his breeches’ pocket, and he made a queer bow, and he said —

‘You know, Sir, I never asked a farthing.’

‘Ay, so he says,’ answered Dangerfield.

‘And,’ with an imprecation, Irons added, ‘I never expected to be a shilling the better of him.’

‘He knows it; and now you have the reason why I mentioned Charles Archer; and having placed that gold in your hand, I’ve done with him, and we sha’n’t have occasion, I hope, to name his name for a good while to come,’ said Dangerfield.

Then came a long refreshing silence, while Dangerfield whipt the stream with his flies. He was not successful; but he did not change his flies. It did not seem to trouble him; indeed, mayhap he did not perceive it. And after fully twenty minutes thus unprofitably employed, he suddenly said, as if in continuation of his last sentence —

‘And, respecting that money you’ll use caution; a hundred guineas is not always so honestly come by. Your wife drinks — suppose a relative in England had left you that gold, by will, ‘twould be best not to let *her* know; but give it to Dr. Walsingham, secretly, to keep for you, telling him the reason. He’ll undertake the trust and tell no one — *that’s* your plan — mind ye.’

Then came another long silence, and Dangerfield applied himself in earnest to catch some trout, and when he had accomplished half-a-dozen, he tired altogether of the sport, and followed by Irons, he sauntered homewards, where astounding news awaited him.

CHAPTER LIII.

RELATING AFTER WHAT FASHION DR. STURK CAME HOME.

As Dangerfield, having parted company with Irons at the corner of the bridge, was walking through the town, with his rod over his shoulder and his basket of troutlings by his side, his attention was arrested by a little knot of persons in close and earnest talk at the barrack-gate, nearly opposite Sturk's house.

He distinguished at a glance the tall grim figure of Oliver Lowe, of Lucan, the sternest and shrewdest magistrate who held the commission for the county of Dublin in those days, mounted on his iron-gray hunter, and holding the crupper with his right hand, as he leaned toward a ragged, shaggy little urchin, with naked shins, whom he was questioning, as it seemed closely. Half-a-dozen gaping villagers stood round.

There was an indescribable something about the group which indicated horror and excitement. Dangerfield quickened his pace, and arrived just as the adjutant rode out.

Saluting both as he advanced, Dangerfield asked —

'Nothing amiss, I hope, gentlemen?'

'The surgeon here's been found murdered in the park!' answered Lowe.

'Hey — *Sturk*?' said Dangerfield.

'Yes,' said the adjutant: 'this boy here says he's found him in the Butcher's Wood.'

'The Butcher's Wood! — why, what the plague brought him *there*?' exclaimed Dangerfield.

''Tis his straight road from Dublin across the park,' observed the magistrate.

'Oh! — I thought 'twas the wood by Lord Mountjoy's,' said Dangerfield; 'and when did it happen?'

'Pooh! — some time between yesterday afternoon and half an hour ago,' answered Mr. Lowe.

'Nothing known?' said Dangerfield. ''Twill be a sad hearing over the way;' and he glared grimly with a little side-nod at the doctor's house.

Then he fell, like the others, to questioning the boy. He could tell them but little — only the same story over and over. Coming out of town, with tea and tobacco, a pair of shoes, and a bottle of whisky, for old Mrs. Tresham — in the thick of the wood, among brambles, all at once he lighted on the body. He could not mistake Dr. Sturk; he wore his regimentals; there was blood about him; he did not touch him, nor go nearer than a musket's length to him, and being frightened at the sight in that lonely place he ran away and right down to the barrack, where he made his report.

Just then out came Sergeant Bligh, with his men — two of them carrying a bier with a mattress and cloaks thereupon. They formed, and accompanied by the adjutant, at quick step marched through the town for the park. Mr. Lowe accompanied them, and in the park-lane they picked up the ubiquitous Doctor Toole, who joined the party.

Dangerfield walked a while beside the adjutant's horse; and, said he —

'I've had as much walking as I can well manage this morning, and you don't want for hands, so I'll turn back when I've said just a word in your ear. You know, Sir, funerals are expensive, and I happen to know that poor Sturk was rather pressed for money — in fact, 'twas only the day before yesterday I myself lent him a trifle. So will you, through whatever channel you think best, let poor Mrs. Sturk know that she may draw upon me for a hundred pounds, if she requires it?'

'Thank you, Mr. Dangerfield; I certainly shall.'

And so Dangerfield lifted his hat to the party and fell behind, and came to a stand still, watching them till they disappeared over the brow of the hill.

When he reached his little parlour in the Brass Castle, luncheon was upon the table. But he had not much of an appetite, and stood at the window, looking upon the river with his hands in his pockets, and a strange pallid smile over his face, mingling with the light of the silver spectacles.

'When Irons hears of this,' he said, 'he'll come to my estimate of Charles Archer, and conclude he has had a finger in that pretty pie; 'twill frighten him.'

And somehow Dangerfield looked a little bit queer himself, and he drank off two small glasses, such as folks then used in Ireland — of Nantz; and setting down the glass, he mused —

'A queer battle life is; ha, ha! Sturk laid low — the wretched fool! Widow — yes; children — ay. Charles! Charles! if there be a reckoning after death, your score's an ugly one. I'm tired of playing my part in this weary game of defence. Irons and I remain with the secret between us. Glasscock had his fourth of it, and tasted death. Then we three had it; and Sturk goes next; and now I and Irons — Irons and I — which goes first?' And he fell to whistling slowly and dismally, with his hands in his breeches' pockets, looking vacantly through his spectacles on the ever-running water, an emblem of the eternal change and monotony of life.

In the meantime the party, with Tim Brian, the bare-shanked urchin, still in a pale perspiration, for guide, marched on, all looking ahead, in suspense, and talking little.

On they marched, till they got into the bosky shadow of the close old whitethorn and brambles, and there, in a lonely nook, the small birds hopping on the twigs above, sure enough, on his back, in his regimentals, lay the clay-coloured image of Sturk, some blood, nearly black now, at the corners of his mouth, and under his stern brows a streak of white eyeball turned up to the sky.

There was a pool of blood under his pomatumed, powdered, and curled head, more under his right arm, which was slightly extended, with the open hand thrown palm upwards, as if appealing to heaven.

Toole examined him.

'No pulse, by Jove! Quiet there! don't stir!' Then he clapped his ear on Sturk's white Marseilles vest.

'Hush!' and a long pause. Then Toole rose erect, but still on his knees, '*Will* you be quiet there? I think there's some little action still; only don't talk, or shift your feet; and just — just, do be quiet!'

Then Toole rose to his knees again, with a side glance fixed on the face of Sturk, with a puzzled and alarmed look. He evidently did not well know what to make of it. Then he slipped his hand within his vest, and between his shirt and his skin.

'If he's dead, he's not long so. There's warmth here. And see, get me a pinch or two of that thistle-down, d'ye see?'

And with the help of this improvised test he proceeded to try whether he was still breathing. But there was a little air stirring, and they could not manage it.

'Well!' said Toole, standing this time quite erect, 'I — I think there's life there still. And now, boys, d'ye see? lift him very carefully, d'ye mind?

Gently, very gently, for I tell you, if this hæmorrhage begins again, he'll not last twenty seconds.'

So on a cloak they lifted him softly and deftly to the bier, and laid covering over him; and having received Toole's last injunctions, and especially a direction to Mrs. Sturk to place him in a well-warmed bed, and introduce a few spoonfuls of warm port wine negus into his mouth, and if he swallowed, to continue to administer it from time to time, Sergeant Bligh and his men commenced their funereal march toward Sturk's house.

'And now, Mr. Adjutant,' said Lowe, 'had not we best examine the ground, and make a search for anything that may lead to a conviction?'

Well, a ticket was found trod into the bloody mud, scarcely legible, and Sturk's cocked hat, the leaf and crown cut through with a blow of some blunt instrument. His sword they had found by his side not drawn.

'See! here's a footprint, too,' said Lowe; 'don't move!'

It was remarkable. They pinned together the backs of two letters, and Toole, with his surgical scissors, cut the pattern to fit exactly into the impression; and he and Lowe, with great care, pencilled in the well-defined marks of the great hob-nails, and a sort of seam or scar across the heel.

'Twas pretty much after this fashion. It was in a slight dip in the ground where the soil continued soft. They found it in two other places coming up to the fatal spot, from the direction of the Magazine. And it was traceable on for some twenty yards more faintly; then, again, very distinctly, where — a sort of ditch interposing — a jump had been made, and here it turned down towards the park wall and the Chapelizod road, still, however, slanting in the Dublin direction.

In the hollow by the park wall it appeared again, distinctly; and here it was plain the transit of the wall had been made, for the traces of the mud were evident enough upon its surface, and the mortar at top was displaced, and a little tuft of grass in the mud, left by the clodded shoesole. Here the fellow had got over.

They followed, and, despairing of finding it upon the road, they diverged into the narrow slip of ground by the river bank, and just within the park-gate, in a slight hollow, the clay of which was still impressible, they found the track again. It led close up to the river bank, and there the villain seemed to have come to a stand still; for the sod just for so much as a good sized sheet of letter-paper might cover, was trod and broken, as if at the water’s edge he had stood for a while, and turned about and shifted his feet, like a fellow that is uneasy while he is stationary.

From this stand-point they failed to discover any receding footprint; but close by it came a little horse track, covered with shingle, by which, in those days, the troops used to ride their horses to water. He might have stepped upon this, and following it, taken to the streets; or he might — and this was Lowe’s theory — have swam the river at this point, and got into some of those ruffian haunts in the rear of Watling and St. James’s streets. So Lowe, who, with a thief or a murderer in the wind, had the soul of a Nimrod, rode round to the opposite bank, first telling Toole, who did not care to press his services at Sturk’s house, uninvited, that he would send out the great Doctor Pell to examine the patient, or the body, as the case might turn out.

By this time they were carrying Doctor Sturk — that gaudy and dismal image — up his own staircase — his pale wife sobbing and shivering on the landing, among whispered ejaculations from the maids, and the speechless wonder of the awe-stricken children, staring through the banisters — to lay him in the bed where at last he is to lie without dreaming.

CHAPTER LIV.

IN WHICH MISS MAGNOLIA MACNAMARA AND DR. TOOLE, IN DIFFERENT SCENES, PROVE THEMSELVES GOOD SAMARITANS; AND THE GREAT DOCTOR PELL MOUNTS THE STAIRS OF THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD.

So pulse or no pulse, dead or alive, they got Sturk into his bed.

Poor, cowed, quiet little Mrs. Sturk, went quite wild at the bedside.

‘Oh! my Barney — my Barney — my noble Barney,’ she kept crying. ‘He’s gone — he’ll never speak again. Do you think he hears? Oh, Barney, my darling — Barney, it’s your own poor little Letty — oh — Barney, darling, don’t you hear. It’s your own poor, foolish Letty.’

But it was the same stern face, and ears of stone. There was no answer and no sign.

And she sent a pitiful entreaty to Doctor Toole, who came very goodnaturedly — and indeed he was prowling about the doorway of his domicile in expectation of the summons. And he shook her very cordially by the hand, and quite ‘filled-up,’ at her woebegone appeal, and told her she must not despair yet.

And this time he pronounced most positively that Sturk was still living.

‘Yes, my dear Madam, so sure as you and I are. There’s no mistaking.’

And as the warmth of the bed began to tell, the signs of life showed themselves more and more unequivocally. But Toole knew that his patient was in a state of coma, from which he had no hope of his emerging.

So poor little Mrs. Sturk — as white as the plaster on the wall — who kept her imploring eyes fixed on the doctor’s ruddy countenance, during his moments of deliberation, burst out into a flood of tears, and thanksgivings, and benedictions.

‘He’ll recover — something tells me he’ll recover. Oh! my Barney — darling — you will — you will.’

‘While there’s life — you know — my dear Ma’am,’, said Toole, doing his best. ‘But then — you see — he’s been very badly abused about the head; and the brain you know — is the great centre — the — the — but, as I said, while there's life, there's hope.'

'And he's so strong — he shakes off an illness so easily; he has such courage.'

'So much the better, Ma'am.'

'And I can't but think, as he did not die outright, and has shown such wonderful endurance. Oh! my darling, he'll get on.'

'Well, well, Ma'am, there certainly have been wonderful recoveries.'

'And he's so much better already, you see, and I know so well how he gets through an illness, 'tis wonderful, and he certainly is mightily improved since we got him to bed. Why, I can *see* him breathe now, and you know it *must* be a good sign; and then there's a merciful God over us — and all the poor little children — what would become of us?' And then she wiped her eyes quickly. 'The promise, you know, of length of days — it often comforted me before — to those that honour father and mother; and I believe there never was so good a son. Oh! my noble Barney, never; 'tis my want of reliance and trust in the Almighty's goodness.'

And so, holding Toole by the cuff of his coat, and looking piteously into his face as they stood together in the doorway, the poor little woman argued thus with inexorable death.

Fools, and blind; when amidst our agonies of supplication the blow descends, our faith in prayer is staggered, as if it reached not the ear of the Allwise, and moved not His sublime compassion. Are we quite sure that we comprehend the awful and far-sighted game that is being played for us and others so well that we can sit by and safely dictate its moves?

How will Messrs. Morphy or Staunton, on whose calculations, I will suppose, you have staked £100, brook your insane solicitations to spare this pawn or withdraw that knight from prise, on the board which is but the toy type of that dread field where all the powers of eternal intellect, the wisdom from above and the wisdom from beneath — the stupendous intelligence that made, and the stupendous sagacity that would undo us, are pitted one against the other in a death-combat, which admits of no reconciliation and no compromise?

About poor Mrs. Nutter's illness, and the causes of it, various stories were current in Chapelizod. Some had heard it was a Blackamoor witch who had evoked the foul fiend in bodily shape from the parlour cupboard, and that he had with his cloven foot kicked her and Sally Nutter round the apartment until then screams brought in Charles Nutter, who was smoking in the garden; and that on entering, he would have fared as badly as the rest, had he not had presence of mind to pounce at once upon the great family Bible that lay on the windowsill, with which he belaboured the infernal intruder to a purpose. Others reported ’twas the ghost of old Philip Nutter, who rose through the floor, and talked I know not what awful rhodomontade. These were the confabulations of the tap-room and the kitchen; but the speculations and rumours current over the card-table and claret glasses were hardly more congruous or intelligible. In fact, nobody knew well what to make of it. Nutter certainly had disappeared, and there was an uneasy feeling about him. The sinister terms on which he and Sturk had stood were quite well known, and though nobody spoke out, every one knew pretty well what his neighbour was thinking of.

Our blooming friend, the handsome and stalworth Magnolia, having got a confidential hint from agitated Mrs. Mack, trudged up to the mills, in a fine frenzy, vowing vengeance on Mary Matchwell, for she liked poor Sally Nutter well. And when, with all her roses in her cheeks, and her saucy black eyes flashing vain lightnings across the room in pursuit of the vanished woman in sable, the Amazon with black hair and slender waist comforted and pitied poor Sally, and anathematised her cowardly foe, it must be confessed she looked plaguy handsome, wicked, and goodnatured.

‘Mary Matchwell, indeed! *I’ll* match her well, wait a while, you’ll see if I don’t. I’ll pay her off yet, never mind, Sally, darling. Arrah! Don’t be crying, child, do you hear me. *What’s* that? *Charles?* Why, then, is it about Charles you’re crying? Charles Nutter? Phiat! woman dear! don’t you think he’s come to an age to take care of himself? I’ll hold you a crown he’s in Dublin with the sheriff, going to cart that jade to Bridewell. And why in the world didn’t you send for *me*, when you wanted to discourse with Mary Matchwell? Where was the good of my poor dear mother? Why, she’s as soft as butter. ’Twas a devil like me you wanted, you poor little darling. Do you think I’d a let her frighten you this way — the vixen — I’d a knocked her through the window as soon as look at her. She saw with half an eye she could frighten you both, you poor things. Oh! ho! how I wish I was here. I’d a put her across my knee and — *no* — do you say? Pooh! you don’t know me, you poor innocent little creature; and, do ye mind now, you must not be moping here. Sally Nutter, all alone, you'll just come down to us, and drink a cup of tea and play a round game and hear the news; and look up now and give me a kiss, for I like you, Sally, you kind old girl.'

And she gave her a hug, and a shake, and half-a-dozen kisses on each cheek, and laughed merrily, and scolded and kissed her again.

Little more than an hour after, up comes a little *billet* from the goodnatured Magnolia, just to help poor little Sally Nutter out of the vapours, and vowing that no excuse should stand good, and that come she must to tea and cards. 'And, oh! what do you think?' it went on. 'Such a bit a newse, I'm going to tell you, so prepare for a chock;' at this part poor Sally felt quite sick, but went on. 'Doctor Sturk, that droav into town Yesterday, as grand as you Please, in Mrs. Strafford's coach, all smiles and Polightness — whood a bleeved! Well He's just come back, with two great Fractions of his skull, riding on a Bear, insensible into The town — there's for you. Only Think of poor Mrs. Sturk, and the Chock she's got on sight of Him: and how thankful and Pleasant you should be that Charles Nutter is not a Corpes in the Buchar's wood, and jiggin Home to you like Sturk did. But well in health, what I'm certain shure he is, taken the law of Mary Matchwell — bless the Mark — to get her emprisind and Publickly wiped by the commin hangman.' All which rhapsody conjured up a confused and dyspeptic dream, full of absurd and terrific images, which she could not well comprehend, except in so far as it seemed clear that some signal disaster had befallen Sturk.

That night, at nine o'clock, the great Doctor Pell arrived in his coach, with steaming horses, at Sturk's hall-door, where the footman thundered a tattoo that might have roused the dead; for it was the family's business, if they did not want a noise, to muffle the knocker. And the doctor strode up, directed by the whispering awestruck maid, to Sturk's bedchamber, with his hands in his muff, after the manner of doctors in his day, without asking questions, or hesitating on lobbies, for the sands of his minutes ran out in gold-dust. So, with a sort of awe and suppressed bustle preceding and following him, he glided up stairs and straight to the patient's bedside, serene, saturnine, and rapid.

In a twinkling the maid was running down the street for Toole, who had kept at home, in state costume, expecting the consultation with the great man, which he liked. And up came Toole, with his brows knit, and his chin high, marching over the pavement in a mighty fuss, for he knew that the oracle's time and temper were not to be trifled with.

In the club, Larry the drawer, as he set a pint of mulled claret by old Arthur Slowe's elbow, whispered something in his ear, with a solemn wink.

'Ho! — by Jove, gentlemen, the doctor's come — Doctor Pell. His coach stands at Sturk's door, Larry says, and we'll soon hear how he fares.' And up got Major O'Neill with a 'hey! ho — ho!' and out he went, followed by old Slowe, with his little tankard in his fist, to the inn-door, where the major looked on the carriage, lighted up by the footman's flambeau, beneath the old village elm — up the street — smoking his pipe still to keep it burning, and communicating with Slowe, two words at a time. And Slowe stood gazing at the same object with his little faded blue eyes, his disengaged hand in his breeches' pocket, and ever and anon wetting his lips with his hot cordial, and assenting agreeably to the major's conclusions.

'Seize ace! curse it!' cried Cluffe, who, I'm happy to say, had taken no harm by his last night's wetting; 'another gammon, I'll lay you fifty.'

'Toole, I dare thay, will look in and tell us how poor Sturk goes on,' said Puddock, playing his throw.

'Hang it, Puddock, mind your game — to be sure, he will. Cinque ace! well, *curse* it! the same throw over again! 'Tis too bad. I missed taking you last time, with that stupid blot you've covered — and now, by Jove, it ruins me. There's no playing when fellows are getting up every minute to gape after doctors' coaches, and leaving the door open — hang it, I've lost the game by it — gammoned twice already. 'Tis very pleasant. I only wish when gentlemen interrupt play, they'd be good enough to pay the bets.'

It was not much, about five shillings altogether, and little Puddock had not often a run of luck.

'If you'd like to win it back, Captain Cluffe, I'll give you a chance,' said O'Flaherty, who was tolerably sober. 'I'll lay you an even guinea Sturk's dead before nine tomorrow morning; and two to one he's dead before this time tomorrow night.'

'I thank you — no, Sir — two doctors over him, and his head in two pieces — you're very obliging, lieutenant, but I'll choose a likelier wager,' said Cluffe.

Dangerfield, who was overlooking the party, with his back to the fire, appeared displeased at their levity — shook his head, and was on the point of speaking one of those polite but cynical reproofs, whose irony, cold and intangible, intimidated the less potent spirits of the club-room. But he dismissed it with a little shrug. And a minute after, Major O'Neill and Arthur Slowe became aware that Dangerfield had glided behind them, and was looking serenely, like themselves, at the Dublin doctor's carriage and smoking team. The light from Sturk's bedroom window, and the red glare of the footman's torch, made two little trembling reflections in the silver spectacles as he stood in the shade, peering movelessly over their shoulders.

‘'Tis a sorry business, gentlemen,’ he said in a stern, subdued tone. ‘Seven children and a widow. He's not dead yet, though: whatever Toole might do, the Dublin doctor would not stay with a dead man; time's precious. I can't describe how I pity that poor soul, his wife — what's to become of her and her helpless brood I know not.’

Slowe grunted a dismal assent, and the major, with a dolorous gaze, blew a thin stream of tobacco-smoke into the night air, which floated off like the ghost of a sigh towards the glimmering window of Sturk's bedroom. So they all grew silent. It seemed they had no more to say, and that, in their minds, the dark curtain had come down upon the drama of which the ‘noble Barney,’ as poor Mrs. Sturk called him, was hero.

CHAPTER LV.

IN WHICH DR. TOOLE, IN FULL COSTUME, STANDS UPON THE HEARTHSTONE OF THE CLUB, AND ILLUMINATES THE COMPANY WITH HIS BACK TO THE FIRE.

Two or three minutes later, the hall-door of Sturk's mansion opened wide, and the figure of the renowned doctor from Dublin, lighted up with a candle from behind, and with the link from before, glided swiftly down the steps, and disappeared into the coach with a sharp clang of the door. Up jumps the footman, and gives his link a great whirl about his head. The maid stands on the step with her hand before the flaring candle. 'The Turk's Head, in Werburgh Street,' shouts the footman, and smack goes the coachman's whip, and the clang and rattle begin.

'That's Alderman Blunkett — he's dying,' said the major, by way of gloss on the footman's text; and away went the carriage with thundering wheels, and trailing sparks behind it, as if the wild huntsman had furnished its fleet and shadowy team.

'He has ten guineas in his pocket for that — a guinea a minute, by Jove, coining, no less,' said the major, whose pipe was out, and he thinking of going in to replenish it. 'We'll have Toole here presently, depend upon it.'

He had hardly spoken when Toole, in a halo of candlelight, emerged from Sturk's hall-door. With one foot on the steps, the doctor paused to give a parting direction about chicken-broth and white-wine whey.

These last injunctions on the doorsteps had begun, perhaps in a willingness to let folk see and even hear that the visit was professional; and along with the lowering and awfully serious countenance with which they were delivered, had grown into a habit, so that, as now, he practised them even in solitude and darkness.

Then Toole was seen to approach the Phœnix, in full blow, his cane under his arm. With his full-dressed wig on, he was always grand and Æsculapian, and reserved withal, and walked with a measured tread, and a sad and important countenance, which somehow made him look more chubby; and he was a good deal more formal with his friends at the inn-door, and took snuff before he answered them. But this only lasted some eight or ten minutes after a consultation or momentous visit, and would melt away insensibly in the glow of the club-parlour, sometimes reviving for a minute, when the little mirror that sloped forward from the wall, showed him a passing portrait of his grand wig and toggery. And it was pleasant to observe how the old fellows unconsciously deferred to this temporary self-assertion, and would call him, not Tom, nor Toole, but ‘doctor,’ or ‘Doctor Toole,’ when the fit was upon him.

And Devereux, in his day, won two or three wagers by naming the doctor with whom Toole had been closeted, reading the secret in the countenance and by-play of their crony. When it had been with tall, cold, stately Dr. Pell, Toole was ceremonious and deliberate, and oppressively polite. On the other hand, when he had been shut up with brusque, half-savage, energetic Doctor Rogerson, Tom was laconic, decisive, and insupportably illbred, till, as we have said, the mirage melted away, and he gradually acquiesced in his identity. Then, little by little, the irrepressible gossip, jocularity, and ballad minstrelsy were heard again, his little eyes danced, and his waggish smiles glowed once more, ruddy as a setting sun, through the nectarian vapours of the punch-bowl. The ghosts of Pell and Rogerson fled to their cold dismal shades, and little Tom Toole was his old self again for a month to come.

‘Your most obedient, gentlemen — your most obedient,’ said Toole, bowing and taking their hands graciously in the hall— ‘a darkish evening, gentlemen.’

‘And how does your patient, doctor?’ enquired Major O’Neil.

The doctor closed his eyes, and shook his head slowly, with a gentle shrug.

‘He’s in a bad case, major. There’s little to be said, and that little, Sir, not told in a moment,’ answered Toole, and took snuff.

‘How’s Sturk, Sir?’ repeated the silver spectacles, a little sternly.

‘Well, Sir, he’s not *dead*; but, by your leave, had we not better go into the parlour, eh?— ’tis a little chill, and, as I said, ’tis not all told in a moment — he’s not dead, though, that’s the sum of it — *you* first, pray proceed, gentlemen.’

Dangerfield grimly took him at his word; but the polite major got up a little ceremonious tussle with Toole in the hall. However, it was no more than a matter of half-a-dozen bows and waves of the hand, and ‘after you, Sir;' and Toole entered, and after a general salutation in the style of Doctor Pell, he established himself upon the hearthstone, with his back to the fire, as a legitimate oracle.

Toole was learned, as he loved to be among the laity on such occasions, and was in no undue haste to bring his narrative to a close. But the gist of the matter was this — Sturk was labouring under concussion of the brain, and two terrific fractures of the skull — so long, and lying so near together, that he and Doctor Pell instantly saw 'twould be impracticable to apply the trepan, in fact that 'twould be certain and instantaneous death. He was absolutely insensible, but his throat was not yet palsied, and he could swallow a spoonful of broth or sack whey from time to time. But he was a dead man to all intents and purposes. Inflammation might set in at any moment; at best he would soon begin to sink, and neither he nor Doctor Pell thought he had the smallest chance of awaking from his lethargy for one moment. He might last two or three days, or even a week — what did it signify? — what was he better than a corpse already? He could never hear, see, speak, or think again; and for any difference it could possibly make to poor Sturk, they might clap him in his grave and cover him up tonight.

Then the talk turned upon Nutter. Every man had his theory or his conjecture but Dangerfield, who maintained a discreet reserve, much to the chagrin of the others, who thought, not without reason, that he knew more about the state of his affairs, and especially of his relations with Lord Castlemallard, than perhaps all the world beside.

'Possibly, poor fellow, he was not in a condition to have his accounts overhauled, and on changing an agency things sometimes come out that otherwise might have kept quiet. He was the sort of fellow who would go through with a thing; and if he thought the best way on going out of the agency was to go out of the world also, out he'd go. They were always a resolute family — Nutter's great uncle, you know, drowned himself in that little lake — what do you call it? — in the county of Cavan, and 'twas mighty coolly and resolutely done too.'

But there was a haunting undivulged suspicion in the minds of each. Every man knew what his neighbour was thinking of, though he did not care to ask about his ugly dreams, or to relate his own. They all knew what sort of terms Sturk and Nutter had been on. They tried to put the thought away, for though Nutter was not a joker, nor a songster, nor a story-teller, yet they liked him. Besides, Nutter might possibly turn up in a day or two, and in that case ‘twould go best with those who had not risked an atrocious conjecture about him in public. So every man waited, and held his tongue upon that point till his neighbour should begin.

CHAPTER LVI.

DOCTOR WALSINGHAM AND THE CHAPELIZOD CHRISTIANS MEET TO THE SOUND OF THE HOLY BELL, AND A VAMPIRE SITS IN THE CHURCH.

The next day the Sabbath bell from the ivied tower of Chapelizod Church called all good church-folk round to their pews and seats. Sturk's place was empty — already it knew him no more — and Mrs. Sturk was absent; but the little file of children, on whom the neighbours looked with an awful and a tender curiosity, was there. Lord Townshend, too, was in the viceregal seat, with gentlemen of his household behind, splendid in star and peruke, and eyed over their prayer-books by many inquisitive Christians. Nutter's little pew, under the gallery, was void like Sturk's. These sudden blanks were eloquent, and many, as from time to time the dismal gap opened silent before their eyes, felt their thoughts wander and lead them away in a strange and dismal dance, among the nodding hawthorns in the Butcher's Wood, amidst the damps of night, where Sturk lay in his leggings, and powder and blood, and the beetle droned by unheeding, and no one saw him save the guilty eyes that gleamed back as the shadowy shape stole swiftly away among the trees.

Dr. Walsingham's sermon had reference to the two-fold tragedy of the week, Nutter's supposed death by drowning, and the murder of Sturk. In his discourses he sometimes came out with a queer bit of erudition. Such as, while it edified one portion of his congregation, filled the other with unfeigned amazement.

'We may pray for rain,' said he on one occasion, when the collect had been read; 'and for other elemental influence with humble confidence. For if it be true, as the Roman annalists relate, that their augurs could, by certain rites and imprecations, produce thunderstorms — if it be certain that thunder and lightning were successfully invoked by King Porsenna, and as Lucius Piso, whom Pliny calls a very respectable author, avers that the same thing had frequently been done before his time by King Numa Pompilius, surely it is not presumption in a Christian congregation,' and so forth.

On this occasion he warned his parishioners against assuming that sudden death is a judgment. 'On the contrary, the ancients held it a blessing; and Pliny declares it to be the greatest happiness of life — how much more should we? Many of the Roman worthies, as you are aware, perished thus suddenly, Quintius Æmilius Lepidus, going out of his house, struck his great toe against the threshold and expired; Cneius Babius Pamphilus, a man of prætorian rank, died while asking a boy what o'clock it was; Aulus Manlius Torquatus, a gentleman of consular rank, died in the act of taking a cheese-cake at dinner; Lucius Tuscius Valla, the physician, deceased while taking a draught of mulsum; Appius Saufeius, while swallowing an egg: and Cornelius Gallus, the prætor, and Titus Haterius, a knight, each died while kissing the hand of his wife. And I might add many more names with which, no doubt, you are equally familiar.'

The gentlemen of the household opened their eyes; the officers of the Royal Irish Artillery, who understood their man, winked pleasantly behind their cocked hats at one another; and his excellency coughed, with his perfumed pockethandkerchief to his nose, a good deal; and Master Dicky Sturk, a grave boy, who had a side view of his excellency, told his nurse that the lord lieutenant laughed in church! and was rebuked for that scandalum magnatum with proper horror.

Then the good doctor told them that the blood of the murdered man cried to heaven. That they might comfort themselves with the assurance that the man of blood would come to judgment. He reminded them of St. Augustan's awful words, 'God hath woollen feet, but iron hands;' and he told them an edifying story of Mempricius, the son of Madan, the fourth king of England, then called Britaine, after Brute, who murdered his brother Manlius, and mark ye this, after twenty years he was devoured by wild beasts; and another of one Bessus— 'tis related by Plutarch — who having killed his father, was brought to punishment by means of swallows, which birds, his guilty conscience persuaded him, in their chattering language did say to one another, that Bessus had killed his father, whereupon he bewrayed his horrible crime, and was worthily put to death. 'The great Martin Luther,' he continued, 'reports such another story of a certain Almaigne, who, when thieves were in the act of murdering him, espying a flight of crows, cried aloud, "Oh crows, I take you for witnesses and revengers of my death." And so it fell out, some days afterwards, as these same thieves were drinking in an inn, a flight of crows came and lighted on the top of the house; whereupon the thieves, jesting, said to one another, “See, yonder are those who are to avenge the death of him we despatched t’other day,” which the tapster overhearing, told forthwith to the magistrate, who arrested them presently, and thereupon they confessed, and were put to death.’ And so he went on, sustaining his position with strange narratives culled here and there from the wilderness of his reading.

Among the congregation that heard this sermon, at the eccentricities of which I have hinted, but which had, beside, much that was striking, simply pathetic, and even awful in it, there glided — shall I say — a phantom, with the light of death, and the shadows of hell, and the taint of the grave upon him, and sat among these respectable persons of flesh and blood — impenetrable — secure — for he knew there were but two in the church for whom clever disguises were idle and transparent as the air. The blue-chinned sly clerk, who read the responses, and quavered the Psalms so demurely, and the white-headed, silver-spectacled, upright man, in my Lord Castlemallard’s pew, who turned over the leaves of his prayer-book so diligently, saw him as he was, and knew him to be Charles Archer, and one of these at least, as this dreadful spirit walked, with his light burning in the noonday, dogged by inexorable shadows through a desolate world, in search of peace, he knew to be the slave of his lamp.

CHAPTER LVII.

IN WHICH DR. TOOLE AND MR. LOWE MAKE A VISIT AT THE MILLS, AND RECOGNISE SOMETHING REMARKABLE WHILE THERE.

After church, Dr. Toole walking up to the Mills, to pay an afternoon visit to poor little Mrs. Nutter, was overtaken by Mr. Lowe, the magistrate who brought his tall, iron-gray hunter to a walk as he reached him.

‘Any tidings of Nutter?’ asked he, after they had, in the old world phrase, given one another the time of day.

‘Not a word,’ said the doctor; ‘I don’t know what to make of it; but you know what’s thought. The last place he was seen in was his own garden. The river was plaguy swollen Friday night, and just where he stood it’s deep enough, I can tell you; often I bathed there when I was a boy. He was consumedly in the dumps, poor fellow; and between ourselves, he was a resolute dog, and atrabilious, and just the fellow to make the jump into kingdom-come if the maggot bit: and you know his hat was fished out of the river a long way down. They dragged next morning, but — pish!— ’twas all nonsense and moonshine; why, there was water enough to carry him to Ringsend in an hour. He was a good deal out of sorts, as I said, latterly — a shabby design, Sir, to thrust him out of my Lord Castlemallard’s agency; but that’s past and gone; and, besides, I have reason to know there was some kind of an excitement — a quarrel it could not be — poor Sally Nutter’s too mild and quiet for that; but a — a — *something* — a — an — agitation — or a bad news — or something — just before he went out; and so, poor Nutter, you see, it looks very like as if he had done something rash.’

Talking thus, they reached the Mills by the river side, not far from Knockmaroon.

On learning that Toole was about making a call there, Lowe gave his bridle to a little Chapelizod ragamuffin, and, dismounting, accompanied the doctor. Mrs. Nutter was in her bed.

‘Make my service to your mistress,’ said Toole, ‘and say I’ll look in on her in five minutes, if she’ll admit me.’ And Lowe and the doctor walked on to the garden, and so side by side down to the river’s bank.

‘Hey! — look at that,’ said Toole, with a start, in a hard whisper; and he squeezed Lowe’s arm very hard, and looked as if he saw a snake.

It was the impression in the mud of the same peculiar footprint they had tracked so far in the park. There was a considerable pause, during which Lowe stooped down to examine the details of the footmark.

‘Hang it — you know — poor Mrs. Nutter — eh?’ said Toole, and hesitated.

‘We must make a note of that — the thing’s important,’ said Mr. Lowe, sternly fixing his gray eye upon Toole.

‘Certainly, Sir,’ said the doctor, bridling; ‘I should not like to be the man to hit him — you know; but it *is* remarkable — and, curse it, Sir, if called on, I’ll speak the truth as straight as *you*, Sir — every bit, Sir.’

And he added an oath, and looked very red and heated.

The magistrate opened his pocketbook, took forth the pattern sole, carefully superimposed it, called Toole’s attention, and said —

‘*You see*.’

Toole nodded hurriedly; and just then the maid came out to ask him to see her mistress.

‘I say, my good woman,’ said Lowe; ‘just look here. Whose footprint is that — do you know it?’

‘Oh, why, to be sure I do. Isn’t it the master’s brogues?’ she replied, frightened, she knew not why, after the custom of her kind.

‘You observe that?’ and he pointed specially to the transverse line across the heel. ‘Do you know that?’

The woman assented.

‘Who made or mended these shoes?’

‘Bill Heaney, the shoemaker, down in Martin’s-row, there— ’twas he made them, and mended them, too, Sir.’

So he came to a perfect identification, and then an authentication of his paper pattern; then she could say they were certainly the shoes he wore on Friday night — in fact, every other pair he had were then on the shoe-stand on the lobby. So Lowe entered the house, and got pen and ink, and continued to question the maid and make little notes; and the other maid knocked at the parlour door with a message to Toole.

Lowe urged his going; and somehow Toole thought the magistrate suspected him of making signs to his witness, and he departed ill at ease; and at the foot of the stairs he said to the woman —

‘You had better go in there — that stupid Lynn is doing her best to hang your master, by Jove!’

And the woman cried —

‘Oh, dear, bless us!’

Toole was stunned and agitated, and so with his hand on the clumsy banister he strode up the dark staircase, and round the little corner in the lobby, to Mrs. Nutter’s door.

‘Oh, Madam, ‘twill all come right, be sure,’ said Toole, uncomfortably, responding to a vehement and rambling appeal of poor Mrs. Nutter’s.

‘And do you *really* think it will? Oh, doctor, doctor, *do* you think it will? The last two or three nights and days — how many is it? — oh, my poor head — it seems like a month since he went away.’

‘And where do you think he is? Do you think it’s business?’

‘Of course ’tis business, Ma’am.’

‘And — and — oh, doctor! — you really think he’s safe?’

‘Of *course*, Madam, he’s safe — what’s to ail him?’

And Toole rummaged amongst the old medicine phials on the chimneypiece, turning their labels round and round, but neither seeing them nor thinking about them, and only muttering to himself with, I’m sorry to say, a curse here and there.

‘You see, my dear Ma’am, you must keep yourself as quiet as you can, or physic’s thrown away upon you; you really must,’ said Toole.

‘But doctor,’ pleaded the poor lady, ‘you don’t know — I — I’m terrified — I — I — I’ll never be the same again,’ and she burst into hysterical crying.

‘Now, really, Madam — confound it — my dear, good lady — you see — this will never do’ — he was uncorking and smelling at the bottles in search of ‘the drops’— ‘and — and — here they are — and isn’t it better, Ma’am, you should be well and hearty — here drink this — when — when he comes back — don’t you see — than — a — a— ‘

‘But — oh, I wish I could tell you. She said — she said — the — the — oh, you don’t know— ‘

‘*She* — who? *Who* said *what*?’ cried Toole, lending his ear, for he never refused a story.

‘Oh! Doctor, he’s gone — I’ll never — never — I know I’ll never see him again. Tell me he’s not gone — tell me I’ll see him again.’

‘Hang it, can’t she stick to one thing at a time — the poor woman’s half out of her wits,’ said Toole, provoked; ‘I’ll wager a dozen of claret there’s more on her mind than she’s told to anyone.’

Before he could bring her round to the subject again, the doctor was called down to Lowe; so he took his leave for the present; and after his talk with the magistrate, he did not care to go up again to poor little Mrs. Nutter; and Moggy was as white as ashes standing by, for Mr. Lowe had just made her swear to her little story about the shoes; and Toole walked home to the village with a heavy heart, and a good deal out of humour.

Toole knew that a warrant would be issued next day against Nutter. The case against him was black enough. Still, even supposing he had struck those trenchant blows over Sturk’s head, it did not follow that it was without provocation or in cold blood. It looked, however, altogether so unpromising, that he would have been almost relieved to hear that Nutter’s body had been found drowned in the river.

Still there was a chance that he made good his retreat. If he had not paid his fare in Charon’s packet-boat, he might, at least, have crossed the channel in the *Trevor* or *Hillsborough* to Holyhead. Then, deuce was in it, if he did not make a fair run for it, and earth himself snugly somewhere. ’Twas lighter work then than now. ‘The old saying at London, among servants,’ writes that goodnatured theatrical wag, Tate Wilkinson, ‘was, “I wish you were at York!” which the wronged cook has now changed for, “I wish you were at Jamaica.” Scotland was then imagined by the cockney as a dreary place, distant almost as the West Indies; *now*’(reader, pray note the marvel) ‘an agreeable party may, with the utmost ease, dine early in the week in Grosvenor Square, and without discomposure set down at table on Saturday or Sunday in the new town of Edinburgh!’ From which we learn that miracles of celerity were already accomplishing themselves, and that the existing generation contemplated their triumphs complacently. But even upon these we have improved, and nowadays, our whole social organisation is subservient to detection. Cut your telegraph wires, substitute sail boats for steam, and your old fair and easy forty-miles-a-day stagecoaches for the train and the rail, disband your City police and detective organisation, and make the transit of a letter between London and Dublin a matter of from five days to nearly as many weeks, and compute how much easier it was then than now for an adventurous highwayman, an absconding debtor, or a pair of fugitive lovers, to make good their retreat. Slow, undoubtedly, was the flight — they did not run, they walked away; but so was pursuit, and altogether, without authentic lights and official helps — a matter of postchaises and perplexity, cross-roads and rumour, foundering in a wild waste of conjecture, or swallowed in the quag of some country inn-yard, where nothing was to be heard, and out of which there would be no relay of posters to pull you until nine o’clock next morning.

As Toole debouched from Martin’s-row, on his return, into the comparative amplitude of the main street of Chapelizod, he glanced curiously up to Sturk’s bedroom windows. There were none of the white signals of death there. So he ascended the door step, and paid a visit — of curiosity, I must say — and looked on the snorting image of his old foe, and the bandaged head, spellbound and dreamless, that had machinated so much busy mischief against his own medical sovereignty and the rural administration of Nutter.

As Toole touched his pulse, and saw him swallow a spoonful of chicken broth, and parried poor Mrs. Sturk’s eager quivering pleadings for his life with kind though cautious evasions, he rightly judged that the figure that lay there was more than half in the land of ghosts already — that the enchanter who met him in the Butcher’s Wood, and whose wand had traced those parallel indentures in his skull, had not only exorcised for ever the unquiet spirit of intrigue, but wound up the tale of his days. It was true that he was never more to step from that bed, and that his little children would, ere many days, be brought there by kindly, horror-loving maids, to look their last on ‘the poor master,’ and kiss awfully his cold stern mouth before the coffin lid was screwed down, and the white-robed image of their father hidden away for ever from their sight.

CHAPTER LVIII.

IN WHICH ONE OF LITTLE BOPEEP'S SHEEP COMES HOME AGAIN, AND VARIOUS THEORIES ARE ENTERTAINED RESPECTING CHARLES NUTTER AND LIEUTENANT PUDDOCK.

And just on Monday morning, in the midst of this hurlyburly of conjecture, who should arrive, of all the people in the world, and reestablish himself in his old quarters, but Dick Devereux. The gallant captain was more splendid and handsome than ever. But both his spirits and his habits had suffered. He had quarrelled with his aunt, and she was his bread and butter — ay, buttered on both sides. How lightly these young fellows quarrel with the foolish old worshippers who lay their gold, frankincense, and myrrh, at the feet of the handsome thankless idols. They think it all independence and high spirit, whereas we know it is nothing but a little egotistical tyranny, that unconsciously calculates even in the heyday of its indulgence upon the punctual return of the penitent old worshipper, with his or her votive offerings.

Perhaps the gipsy had thought better of it, and was already sorry he had not kept the peace. At all events, though his toilet and wardrobe were splendid — for fine fellows in his plight deny themselves nothing — yet morally he was seedy, and in temper soured. His duns had found him out, and pursued him in wrath and alarm to England, and pestered him very seriously indeed. He owed money beside to several of his brother officers, and it was not pleasant to face them without a guinea. An evil propensity, at which, as you remember, General Chattesworth hinted, had grown amid his distresses, and the sting of self-reproach exasperated him. Then there was his old love for Lilias Walsingham, and the pang of rejection, and the hope of a strong passion sometimes leaping high and bright, and sometimes nickering into ghastly shadows and darkness.

Indeed, he was by no means so companionable just now as in happier times, and was sometimes confoundedly morose and snappish — for, as you perceive, things had not gone well with him latterly. Still he was now and then tolerably like his old self.

Toole, passing by, saw him in the window. Devereux smiled and nodded, and the doctor stopped short at the railings, and grinned up in return, and threw out his arms to express surprise, and then snapped his fingers, and cut a little caper, as though he would say— 'Now, you're come back — we'll have fun and fiddling again.' And forthwith he began to bawl his enquiries and salutations. But Devereux called him up peremptorily, for he wanted to hear the news — especially all about the Walsinghams. And up came Toole, and they had a great shaking of hands, and the doctor opened his budget and rattled away.

Of Sturk's tragedy and Nutter's disappearance he had already heard. And he now heard some of the club gossip, and all about Dangerfield's proposal for Gertrude Chattesworth, and how the old people were favourable, and the young lady averse — and how Dangerfield was content to leave the question in abeyance, and did not seem to care a jackstraw what the townspeople said or thought — and then he came to the Walsinghams, and Devereux for the first time really listened. The doctor was very well — just as usual; and wondering what had become of his old crony, Dan Loftus, from whom he had not heard for several months; and Miss Lily was not very well — a delicacy here (and he tapped his capacious chest), like her poor mother. 'Pell and I consulted about her, and agreed she was to keep within doors.' And then he went on, for he had a suspicion of the real state of relations between him and Lily, and narrated the occurrence rather with a view to collect evidence from his looks and manner, than from any simpler motive; and, said he, 'Only think, that confounded wench, Nan — you know — Nan Glynn,' And he related her and her mother's visit to Miss Lily, and a subsequent call made upon the rector himself — all, it must be confessed, very much as it really happened. And Devereux first grew so pale as almost to frighten Toole, and then broke into a savage fury — and did not spare hard words, oaths, or maledictions. Then off went Toole, when things grew quieter, upon some other theme, giggling and punning, spouting scandal and all sorts of news — and Devereux was looking full at him with large stern eyes, not hearing a word more. His soul was cursing old Mrs. Glynn, of Palmerstown — that mother of lies and what not — and remonstrating with old Dr. Walsingham — and protesting wildly against everything.

General Chattesworth, who returned two or three weeks after, was not half pleased to see Devereux. He had heard a good deal about him and his doings over the water, and did not like them. He had always had a misgiving that if Devereux remained in the corps, sooner or later he would be obliged to come to a hard reckoning with him. And the handsome captain had not been three weeks in Chapelizod, when more than the general suspected that he was in nowise improved. So General Chattesworth did not often see or talk with him; and when he did, was rather reserved and lofty with him. His appointment on the staff was in abeyance — in fact, the vacancy on which it was expectant had not definitely occurred — and all things were at sixes and sevens with poor Dick Devereux.

That evening, strange to say, Sturk was still living; and Toole reported him exactly in the same condition. But what did that signify? ’Twas all one. The man was dead — as dead to all intents and purposes that moment as he would be that day twelvemonths, or that day hundred years.

Dr. Walsingham, who had just been to see poor Mrs. Sturk — now grown into the habit of hoping, and sustained by the intense quiet fuss of the sick room — stopped for a moment at the door of the Phœnix, to answer the cronies there assembled, who had seen him emerge from the murdered man’s house.

‘He is in a profound lethargy,’ said the worthy divine. ‘’Tis a subsidence — his life, Sir, stealing away like the fluid from the clepsydra — less and less left every hour — a little time will measure all out.’

‘What the plague’s a clepsydra?’ asked Cluffe of Toole, as they walked side by side into the club-room.

‘Ho! pooh! one of those fabulous tumours of the epidermis mentioned by Pliny, you know, exploded ten centuries ago — ha, ha, ha!’ and he winked and laughed derisively, and said, ‘Sure you know Doctor Walsingham.’

And the gentlemen began spouting their theories about the murder and Nutter, in a desultory way; for they all knew the warrant was out against him.

‘My opinion,’ said Toole, knocking out the ashes of his pipe upon the hob; for he held his tongue while smoking, and very little at any other time;

‘and I’ll lay a guinea ‘twill turn out as I say — the poor fellow’s drowned himself. Few knew Nutter — I doubt if *any* one knew him as I did. Why he did not seem to feel anything, and you’d ha’ swore nothing affected him, more than that hob, Sir; and all the time, there wasn’t a more thin-skinned, atrabilious poor dog in all Ireland — but honest, Sir — thorough steel, Sir. All I say is, if he had a finger in that ugly pie, you know, as some will insist, I’ll stake my head to a china orange, ’twas a fair front to front fight. By Jupiter, Sir, there wasn’t one drop of cur’s blood in poor Nutter. No, poor fellow; neither sneak nor assassin *there*— ‘

‘They thought he drowned himself from his own garden — poor Nutter,’ said Major O’Neill.

‘Well, that he did *not*,’ said Toole. ‘That unlucky shoe, you know, tells a tale; but for all that, I’m clear of the opinion that drowned he is. We tracked the step, Lowe and I, to the bank, near the horse-track, in Barrack Street, just where the water deepens — there’s usually five feet of water there, and that night there was little short of ten. Now, take it, that Nutter and Sturk had a tussle — and the thing happened, you know — and Sturk got the worst of it, and was, in fact, despatched, why, you know the kind of panic — and — and — the panic — you know — a poor dog, finding himself so situated, would be in — with the bitter, old quarrel between them — d’ye see? And this at the back of his vapours and blue-devils, for he was dumpish enough before, and would send a man like Nutter into a resolution of making away with himself; and that’s how it happened, you may safely swear.’

‘And what do *you* think, Mr. Dangerfield?’ asked the major.

‘Upon my life,’ said Dangerfield, briskly, lowering his newspaper to his knee, with a sharp rustle, ‘these are questions I don’t like to meddle in. Certainly, he had considerable provocation, as I happen to know; and there was no love lost — that I know too. But I quite agree with Doctor Toole — if he was the man, I venture to say ’twas a fair fight. Suppose, first, an altercation, then a hasty blow — Sturk had his cane, and a deuced heavy one — he wasn’t a fellow to go down without knowing the reason why; and if they find Nutter, dead or alive, I venture to say he’ll show some marks of it about him.’

Cluffe wished the whole company, except himself, at the bottom of the Red Sea; for he was taking his revenge of Puddock, and had already lost a gammon and two hits. Little Puddock won by the force of the dice. He was not much of a player; and the sight of Dangerfield — that repulsive, impenetrable, moneyed man, who had 'overcome him like a summer cloud,' when the sky of his fortunes looked clearest and sunniest, always led him to Belmont, and the side of his ladylove.

If Cluffe's mind wandered in that direction, his reveries were rather comfortable. He had his own opinion about his progress with Aunt Rebecca, who had come to like his conversation, and talked with him a great deal about Puddock, and always with acerbity; Cluffe, who was a sort of patron of Puddock's, always, to do him justice, defended him respectfully. And Aunt Rebecca would listen very attentively, and then shake her head, and say, 'You're a great deal too goodnatured, captain; and he'll never thank you for your pains, *never* — *I* can tell you.'

Well, Cluffe knew that the higher powers favoured Dangerfield; and that, beside his absurd sentiment, not to say passion, which could not but be provoking, Puddock's complicity in the abortive hostilities of poor Nutter and the gallant O'Flaherty rankled in Aunt Becky's heart. She was, indeed, usually appeasable and forgiving enough; but in this case her dislike seemed inveterate and vindictive; and she would say —

'Well, let's talk no more of him; 'tis easy finding a more agreeable subject: but you can't deny, captain, that 'twas an unworthy hypocrisy his pretending to sentiments against duelling to me, and then engaging as second in one on the very first opportunity that presented.'

Then Cluffe would argue his case, and plead his excuses, and fumbled over it a good while; not that he'd have cried a great deal if Puddock had been hanged; but, I'm afraid, chiefly because, being a fellow of more gaiety and accomplishment than quickness of invention, it was rather convenient, than otherwise, to have a topic, no matter what, supplied to him, and one that put him in an amiable point of view, and in a kind of graceful, intercessorial relation to the object of his highly prudent passion. And Cluffe thought how patiently she heard him, though he was conscious 'twas rather tedious, and one time very like another. But then, 'twasn't the talk, but the talker; and he was glad, at all risks, to help poor Puddock out of his disgrace, like a generous soul, as he was.

CHAPTER LIX.

TELLING HOW A COACH DREW UP AT THE ELMS, AND TWO FINE LADIES, DRESSED FOR THE BALL, STEPPED IN.

It was now more than a fortnight since Sturk's mishap in the Butcher's Wood, and he was still alive, but still under the spell of coma. He was sinking, but very slowly; yet it was enough to indicate the finality of that 'life in death.'

Dangerfield once or twice attacked Toole rather tartly about Sturk's case.

'Can nothing be done to make him speak? Five minutes' consciousness would unravel the mystery.'

Then Toole would shrug, and say, 'Pooh — pooh! my dear Sir, you know nothing.'

'Why, there's *life*!'

'Ay, the mechanical functions of life, but the brain's overpowered,' replied Toole, with a wise frown.

'Well, relieve it.'

'By Jupiter, Sir, you make me laugh,' cried Toole with a grin, throwing up his eyebrows. 'I take it, you think we doctors can work miracles.'

'Quite the reverse, Sir,' retorted Dangerfield, with a cold scoff. 'But you say he may possibly live six weeks more; and all that time the wick is smouldering, though the candle's short — can't you blow it in, and give us even one minute's light?'

'Ay, a smouldering wick and a candle if you please; but enclosed in a glass bottle, how the deuce *are* you to blow it?'

'Pish!' said the silver spectacles, with an icy flash from his glasses.

'Why, Sir, you'll excuse me — but you don't understand,' said Toole, a little loftily. 'There are two contused wounds along the scalp as long as that pencil — the whole line of each partially depressed, the depression all along being deep enough to lay your finger in. You can ask Irons, who dresses them when I'm out of the way.'

'I'd rather ask you, Sir,' replied Dangerfield, in turn a little high.

‘Well, you can’t apply the trepan, the surface is too extended, and all unsound, and won’t bear it— ‘twould be simply killing him on the spot — don’t you see? and there’s no way else to relieve him.’

General Chattesworth had not yet returned. On his way home he had wandered aside, and visited the fashionable wells of Buxton, intending a three days’ sojourn, to complete his bracing up for the winter. But the Pool of Siloam did not work pleasantly in the case of the robust general, who was attacked after his second dip with a smart fit of the gout in his left great-toe, where it went on charmingly, without any flickering upward, quite stationary and natural for three weeks.

About the end of which time the period of the annual ball given by the officers of the Royal Irish Artillery arrived. It was a great event in the town. To poor Mrs. Sturk, watching by her noble Barney, it seemed, of course, a marvellous insensibility and an outrage. But the world must follow its instinct and vocation, and attend to its business and amuse itself too, though noble Barneys lie a-dying here and there.

Aunt Becky and Gertrude drew up at the Elms, the rector’s house, with everything very handsome about them, and two laced footmen, with flambeaux, and went in to see little Lily, on their way to the ball, and to show their dresses, which were very fine, indeed, and to promise to come next day and tell her all the news; for Lily, as I mentioned, was an invalid, and balls and flicflacs were not for her.

Little Lily smiled her bright girlish smile, and threw both her arms round grand Aunt Becky’s neck.

‘You good dear Aunt Becky, ’twas so kind and like you to come — you and Gertie. And oh, Geminie! what a grand pair of ladies!’ and she made a little rustic courtesy, like Nell in the farce. ‘And I never saw this before (a near peep at Gertrude’s necklace), and Aunt Becky, what beautiful lace. And does not she look handsome, Gertie? I *never* saw her look *so* handsome. She’ll be the finest figure there. There’s no such delicate waist anywhere.’ And she set her two slender little forefingers and thumbs together, as if spanning it. ‘You’ve no chance beside her, Gertie; she’ll set all the young fellows a-sighing and simpering.’

‘You wicked little rogue! I’ll beat you black and blue, for making fun of old Aunt Becky,’ cried Miss Rebecca, and ran a little race at her, about two inches to a step; her fan raised in her finger and thumb, and a jolly smile twinkling in her face, for she knew it was true about her waist, and she liked to be quizzed by the daring little girl. Her diamonds were on too, and her last look in her mirror had given her a satisfactory assurance, and she always played with little Lily, when they met; everyone grew gay and girlish with her.

So they stayed a full quarter of an hour, and the footman coughing laboriously outside the window reminded Aunt Rebecca at last how time flew; and Lily was for sitting down and playing a minuet and a country dance, and making them rehearse their steps, and calling in old Sally to witness the spectacle before they went; and so she and Aunt Becky had another little sportive battle — they never met, and seldom parted, without one. How was it that when gay little Lily provoked these little mimic skirmishes Aunt Becky would look for a second or two an inexpressibly soft and loving look upon her, and become quite girlish and tender? I think there is a way to every heart, and some few have the gift to reach it unconsciously and always.

So away rustled the great ladies, leaving Lily excited, and she stood at the window, with flushed cheek, and her fingers on the sash, looking after them, and she came back with a little smile and tears in her eyes. She sat down, with a bright colour in her cheeks, and did play a country dance, and then a merry old Irish air, full of frolic and spirit, on the harpsichord; and gentle old Sally's face peeped in with a wistful smile, at the unwonted sounds.

'Come, sober old Sally, my sweetheart! I've taken a whim in my head, and you shall dress me, for to the ball I'll go.'

'Tut, tut, Miss Lily, darling,' said old Sally, with a smile and a shake of the head. 'What would the doctors say?'

'What they please, my darling.'

And up stood little Lily, with her bright colour and lustrous eyes.

'Angel bright!' said the old woman, looking in that beloved and lovely young face, and quite 'filling up,' as the saying is, 'there is not your peer on earth — no — not one among them all to compare with our Miss Lilias,' and she paused, smiling, and then she said— 'But, my darling, sure you know you weren't outside the door this five weeks.'

'And is not that long enough, and too long, to shut me up, you cruel old woman? Come, come, Sally, girl, I'm resolved, and to the ball I'll go; don't be frightened. I'll cover my head, and send in for Aunt Becky, and only just peep in, muffled up, for ten minutes; and I'll go and come in the chair, and what harm can I take by it?'

Was it spirit? Did she want to show the folk that she did not shrink from meeting somebody; or that, though really ill, she ventured to peep in, through sheer liking for the scrape of the fiddle, and the fun, to show them that at least she was not heart-sick? Or was it the mysterious attraction, the wish to see him once more, just through her hood, far away, with an unseen side glance, and to build endless speculations, and weave the filmy web of hope, for who knows how long, out of these airy tints, a strange, sad smile, or deep, wild glance, just seen and fixed for ever in memory? She had given him up in words, but her heart had not given him up. Poor little Lily! She hoped all that was so bad in him would one day mend. He was a hero still — and, oh! she hoped, would be true to her. So Lily's love, she scarce knew how, lived on this hope — the wildest of all wild hopes — waiting on the reformation of a rake.

'But, darling Miss Lily, don't you know the poor master would break his heart if he thought you could do such a wild thing as to go out again 'the doctors' orders, at this time o' night, and into that hot place, and out again among the cold draughts.'

Little Lily paused.

''Tis only a step, Sally; do you honestly think it would vex him?'

'Vex him, darling? no, but break his heart. Why, he's never done asking about you, and — oh! its only joking you are, my darling, that's all.'

'No, Sally, dear love, I meant it,' said little Lily, sadly; 'but I suppose it was a wild thought, and I'm better at home.'

And she played a march that had somehow a dash of the pathetic in it, in a sort of reverie, and she said:

'Sally, do you know that?'

And Sally's gentle face grew reflective, and she said:

'Sure, Miss Lily, that's the tune — isn't it — the Artillery plays when they march out to the park?'

Lily nodded and smiled, and the tune moved on, conjuring up its pictured reverie. Those review days were grand things when little Lily was a child — magnanimous expenditure of hair and gunpowder was there. There sat General Chattesworth, behind his guns, which were now blazing away like fun, wearing his full uniform, point cravat and ruffles, and that dignified and somewhat stern aspect which he put on with the rest of his review-day costume, bestriding his cream-coloured charger, Bombardier, and his plume and powdered *ails de pigeon*, hardly distinguishable from the smoke which enveloped him, as a cloud does a demigod in an allegorical picture.

Chord after chord brought up all this moving pageant, unseen by Sally's dim old eyes, before the saddened gaze of little Lily, whose life was growing to a retrospect. She stood in the sunny street, again a little child, holding old Sally by the hand, on a soft summer day. The sentries presented arms, and the corps marched out resplendent. Old General Chattesworth, as proud as Lucifer, on Bombardier, who nods and champs, prancing and curvetting, to the admiration of the women; but at heart the mildest of quadrupeds, though passing, like an impostor as he was, for a devil incarnate; the band thundering melodiously that dashing plaintive march, and exhilarating and firing the souls of all Chapelizod. Up went the windows all along the street, the rabble-rout of boys yelled and huzzaed like mad. The maids popped their mob-caps out of the attics, and giggled, and hung out at the risk of their necks. The serving men ran out on the hall-door steps. The village roués emerged in haste from their public houses. The whole scene round and along from top to bottom, was grinning and agape. Nature seemed to brighten up at sight of them; and the sun himself came out all in his best, with an unparalleled effulgence.

Yes, the town was proud of its corps, and well it might. As gun after gun, with its complement of men and its lieutenant fireworkers, with a 'right wheel,' rolled out of the gate upon the broad street, not a soul could look upon the lengthening pageant of blue and scarlet, with its symmetrical diagonals of snowy belt and long-flapped white cartouche boxes, moving together with measured swing; its laced cocked-hats, leggings, and courtly white shorts and vests, and ruffles, and all its buttons and brasses flashing up to the sun, without allowing it was a fine spirited sight.

And Lily, beholding the phantom regiment, with mournful eyes, played their grand sad march proudly as they passed.

They looked so dashing and so grand; they were the tallest, shapeliest fellows. Faith, I can tell you, it was no such trifle, pulling along all those six and four pounders; and they needed to be athletic lads; and the officers were, with hardly an exception, martial, highbred gentlemen, with aristocratic bearing, and some of them, without question, confoundedly handsome.

And always there was one light, tall shape; one dark handsome face, with darker, stranger eyes, and a nameless grace and interest, moving with the march of the gay pageant, before her mind's eye, to this harmonious and regretful music, which, as she played on, and her reverie deepened, grew slower and more sad, till old Sally's voice awoke the dreamer. The chords ceased, the vision melted, and poor little Lily smiled sadly and kindly on old Sally, and took her candle, and went up with her to her bed.

CHAPTER LX.

BEING A CHAPTER OF HOOPS, FEATHERS, AND BRILLIANTS, AND BUCKS AND FIDDLERS.

It was a mighty grand affair, this ball of the Royal Irish Artillery. General Chattesworth had arrived that morning, just in time to preside over the hospitalities — he could not contribute much to the dancing — and his advent, still a little lame, but looking, as his friends told him, ten years younger for his snug little fit of the gout at Buxton, reinstated Aunt Becky in her place of power, to the secret disappointment of Madame Strafford, who had set her heart on doing the honours, and rehearsed for weeks, over her toilet, and even in bed, her little speeches, airs, and graces.

Lord Castlemallard was there, of course — and the gay and splendid Lady Moira — whom I mention because General Chattesworth opened the ball in a minuet with her ladyship — hobbling with wonderful grace, and beaming with great ceremonious smiles through his honourable martyrdom. But there were more than a score of peers there beside, with their peeresses in tall feathers, diamonds, and monstrous hoops. And the lord lieutenant was very near coming — and a lord lieutenant in those days, with a parliament to open, and all the regalia of his office about him, was a far greater personage than, in our democratic age, the sovereign in person.

Captain Cluffe had gone down in a chair to Puddock's lodgings, to borrow a pair of magnificent knee-buckles. Puddock had a second pair, and Cluffe's own had not, he thought, quite recovered their good looks since that confounded ducking on the night of the serenade. The gallant captain, learning that Puddock and Devereux intended walking — it was only a step across to the barrack-yard — and finding that Puddock could not at the moment lay his hand upon the buckles, and not wishing to keep the chair longer — for he knew delay would inflame the fare, and did not like dispensing his shillings —

'Hey! walk? I like the fancy,' cried the gay captain, sending half-a-crown down stairs to his 'two-legged ponies,' as people pleasantly called them.

‘I’d rather walk with you than jog along in a chair by myself, my gay fellows, any day.’

Most young fellows of spirit, at the eve of a ball, have their heads pretty full. There is always some one bright particular star to whom, even as they look on their own handsome features in the mirror, their adoration is paid.

Puddock’s shoebuckles flashed for Gertrude Chattesworth, as he turned out his toes. For her his cravat received its last careless touch — his ruffles shook themselves, and fell in rich elegance about his plump little hands. For her his diamond ring gleamed like a burning star from his white little finger; and for her the last fragrance was thrown over his pockethandkerchief, and the last ogle thrown upon his looking-glass. All the interest of his elaborate toilet — the whole solemn process and detail — was but a worship of his divinity, at which he officiated. Much in the same way was Cluffe affected over his bedizenment in relation to his own ladylove; but in a calmer and more long-headed fashion. Devereux’s toilet most of the young fellows held to be perfection; yet it seemed to trouble him less than all the rest. I believe it was the elegant and slender shape that would have set off anything, and that gave to his handsome costume and ‘properties’ an undefinable grace not their own. Indeed, as he leaned his elbow upon the window sash, looking carelessly across the river, he did not seem much to care what became of the labours of his toilet.

‘I have not seen her since I came; and now I’m going to this stupid ball on the chance of meeting her there. And she’ll not come — she avoids me — the chance of meeting her — and she’ll not come. Well! if she be not kind to me, what care I for whom she be? And what great matter, after all, if she were there. She’d be, I suppose, on her high horse — and — and ’tis not a feather to me. Let her take her own way. What care I? If she’s happy, why shouldn’t I — why shouldn’t I?’

Five minutes after: —

‘Who the plague are these fellows in the Phœnix? How the brutes howl over their liquor!’ said Devereux, as he and Puddock, at the doorsteps, awaited Cluffe, who was fixing his buckles in the drawingroom.

‘The Corporation of Tailors,’ answered Puddock, a little loftily, for he was not inwardly pleased that the precincts of the ‘Phœnix’ should be profaned by their mechanical orgies.

Through the open bow window of the great oak parlour of the inn was heard the mighty voice of the president, who was now in the thick of his political toasts.

‘Odds bud!’ lisped little Puddock, ‘what a stentorian voice!’

‘Considering it issues from a tailor!’ acquiesced Devereux, who thought he recognised the accents, and hated tailors, who plagued him with long bills and dangerous menaces.

‘May the friends of the Marquis of Kildare be ever blessed with the tailor’s thimble,’ declaimed the portentous toast master. ‘May the needle of distress be ever pointed at all mock patriots; and a hot needle and a burning thread to all sewers of sedition!’ and then came an applauding roar.

‘And may you ride into town on your own goose, with a hot needle behind you, you roaring pigmy!’ added Devereux.

‘The Irish cooks that can’t relish French sauce!’ enunciated the same grand voice, that floated, mellowed, over the field.

‘Sauce, indeed!’ said Puddock, with an indignant lisp, as Cluffe, having joined them, they set forward together; ‘I saw some of them going in, Sir, and to look at their vulgar, unthinking countenances, you’d say they had not capacity to distinguish between the taste of a quail and a goose; but, by Jove! Sir, they have a dinner. *You’re* a politician, Cluffe, and read the papers. You remember the bill of fare — don’t you? — at the Lord Mayor’s entertainment in London.’

Cluffe, whose mind was full of other matters, nodded his head with a grunt.

‘Well, I’ll take my oath,’ pursued Puddock, ‘you couldn’t have made a better dinner at the Prince of Travendahl’s table. Spanish olea, if you please — ragou royal, cardoons, tendrons, shellfish in marinade, ruffs and rees, wheat-ears, green morels, fat livers, combs and notts. ’Tis rather odd, Sir, to us who employ them, to learn that our tailors, while we’re eating the dinners we do — our *tailors*, Sir, are absolutely gorging themselves with such things — with *our* money, by Jove!’

‘*Yours*, Puddock, not mine,’ said Devereux. ‘I haven’t paid a tailor these six years. But, hang it, let’s get on.’

So, in they walked by the barrack-yard, lighted up now with a splendid red blaze of torches, and with different emotions, entered the already crowded ball-room.

Devereux looked round the room, among nodding plumes and flashing brilliants, and smirking old bucks, and simpering young ones, amidst the buzz of two or three hundred voices, and the thunder and braying of the band. There were scores of pretty faces there — blondes and brunettes — blue eyes and brown — and more spirit and animation, and, I think, more grace too, in dance and talk, than the phlegmatic affectation of modern days allows; and there were some bright eyes that, not seeming to look, yet recognised, with a little thrill at the heart, and a brighter flush, the brilliant, proud Devereux — so handsome, so impulsive, so unfathomable — with his gipsy tint, and great enthusiastic eyes, and strange melancholy, sub-acid smile. But to him the room was lifeless, and the hour was dull, and the music but a noise and a jingle.

‘I knew quite well she wasn’t here, and she never cared for me, and I — why should I trouble my head about her? She makes her cold an excuse. Well, maybe yet she’ll wish to see Dick Devereux, and I far away. No matter. They’ve heard slanders of me, and believe them. Amen, say I. If they’re so light of faith, and false in friendship to cast me off for a foul word or an idle story — curse it — I’m well rid of that false and foolish friendship, and can repay their coldness and aversion with a light heart, a bow, and a smile. One slander I’ll refute — yes — and that done, I’ll close this idle episode in *my* cursed epic, and never, *never* think of her again.’

But fancy will not be controlled by resolutions, though ne’er so wise and strong, and precisely as the captain vowed ‘never’ — away glided that wild, sad sprite across the moonlit river, and among the old black elms, and stood unbidden beside Lilias. Little Lily, as they used to call her five years ago; and Devereux, who seemed to look so intently and so strangely on the flash and whirl of the dancers, saw but an old fashioned drawingroom, with roses clustering by the windows, and heard the sweet rich voice, to him the music of Ariel, like a far-off dirge — a farewell — sometimes a forgiveness — and sometimes the old pleasant talk and merry little laugh, all old remembrances or vain dreams now.

But Devereux had business on his hands that night, and about eleven o’clock he had disappeared. ’Twas easy to go and come in such a crowd, and no one perceive it.

But Puddock was very happy and excited. Mervyn, whom he had once feared, was there, a mere spectator, however, to witness that night’s signal triumph. He had never danced so much with Miss Gertrude before, that is to say, at a great ball like this at which there was a plenty of bucks with good blood and lots of money; and indeed, it seemed to favour the idea of his success that Aunt Rebecca acknowledged him only with a silent and by no means gracious courtesy.

She was talking to Toole about Lilias, and saying how much better she had looked that evening.

‘She’s not better, Ma’am; I’d rather she hadn’t the bright flush you speak of, there’s something, you see, not quite right in that left lung, and that bright tint, Madam, is hectic — she’s not better, Madam, not that we don’t hope to see her so — Heaven forbid — but ’tis an anxious case;’ and Toole shook his head gravely.

When Aunt Becky was getting on her hood and mantle, she invariably fell into talk with some crony who had a story to tell, or a point to discuss. So as she stood listening to old Colonel Bligh’s hard, reedy gabble, and popping in her decisive word now and then, Gertrude, equipped for the night air, and with little Puddock for her escort, glided out and took her place in the great state coach of the Chattesworths, and the door being shut, she made a little nod and a faint smile to her true knight, and said with the slightest possible shrug —

‘How cold it is tonight; my aunt, I think, will be obliged for your assistance, Lieutenant Puddock; as for me, I must shut up my window and wish you goodnight.’

And with another smile she accordingly shut up the window, and when his best bow was accomplished, she leaned back with a pale and stricken countenance, and a great sigh — such a one as caused Lady Macbeth’s physician, long ago, to whisper, ‘What a sigh is there! the heart is sorely charged.’ The footmen were standing by the open door, through which Aunt Becky was to come, and there were half a dozen carriages crowded side by side, the lackeys being congregated, with links lighted, about the same place of exit; and things being so, there came a small sharp tapping at the far window of the carriage, and with a start Gertrude saw the identical mantle, and the three-cocked-hat with the peculiar corners, which had caused certain observers so much speculation on another night, and drawing close to the window, whereat this apparition presented itself, she let it down.

‘I know, beloved Gertrude, what you would say,’ he softly said; ‘but be it frenzy or no, I cannot forbear; I am unalterable — be you the same.’

A white, slender hand glided in and seized hers, not resisting.

‘Yes, Mordaunt, the same; but, oh! how miserable!’ said Gertrude, and with just the slightest movement in the fingers of her small hand, hardly perceptible, and yet how fond a caress!

‘I’m like a man who has lost his way among the catacombs — among the dead,’ whispered this muffled figure, close to the window, still fervently holding her hand, ‘and sees at last the distant gleam that shows him that his wanderings are to end. Yes, Gertrude, my beloved — yes, Gertrude, idol of my solitary love — the mystery is about to end — I’ll end it. Be I what I may you know the worst, and have given me your love and troth — you are my affianced bride; rather than lose you, I would die; and I think, or I am walking in a dream, I’ve but to point my finger against two men, and all will be peace and light — light and peace — to me long strangers!’

At this moment Aunt Becky’s voice was heard at the door, and the flash of the flambeaux glared on the window. He kissed the hand of the pale girl hurriedly, and the French cocked-hat and mantle vanished.

In came Aunt Rebecca in a fuss, and it must be said in no very gracious mood, and rather taciturn and sarcastic; and so away they rumbled over the old bridge towards Belmont.

CHAPTER LXI.

IN WHICH THE GHOSTS OF A BY-GONE SIN KEEP TRYST.

Devereux, wrapped in his cloak, strode into the park, through Parson's-gate, up the steep hill, and turned towards Castleknock and the furze and hawthorn wood that interposes. The wide plain spread before him in solitude, with the thin vapours of night, lying over it like a film in the moonlight.

Two or three thorn trees stood out from the rest, a pale and solitary group, stooping eastward with the prevailing sweep of a hundred years or more of westerly winds. To this the gipsy captain glided, in a straight military line, his eye searching the distance; and, after a while, from the skirts of the wood, there moved to meet him a lonely female figure, with her light clothing fluttering in the cold air. At first she came hurriedly, but as they drew near, she came more slowly.

Devereux was angry, and, like an angry man, he broke out first with —

'So, your servant, Mistress Nan! Pretty lies you've been telling of me — you and your shrew of a mother. You thought you might go to the rector and say what you pleased, and I hear nothing.'

Nan Glynn was undefinably aware that he was very angry, and had hesitated and stood still before he began, and now she said imploringly —

'Sure, Masther Richard, it wasn't me.'

'Come, my lady, don't tell me. You and your mother — curse her! — went to the Elms in my absence — *you* and she — and said I had promised to *marry* you! There — yes or no. Didn't you? And could you or could she have uttered a more utterly damnable lie?'

''Twas *she*, Master Richard — troth an' faith. I never knew she was going to say the like — no more I didn't.'

'A likely story, truly, Miss Nan!' said the young rake, bitterly.

'Oh! Masther Richard! by this cross! — you won't believe me— 'tis as true as you're standin' there — until she said it to Miss Lily— '

'Hold your tongue!' cried Devereux, so fiercely, that she thought him half wild; 'do you think 'tis a pin's point to me which of you first coined or uttered the lie? Listen to me; I'm a desperate man, and I'll take a course with you both you'll not like, unless you go tomorrow and see Dr. Walsingham yourself, and tell him the whole truth — yes, the truth — what the devil do I care? — speak that, and make the most of it. But tell him plainly that your story about my having promised to marry you — do you hear — was a lie, from first to last — a lie — a lie — without so much as a grain of truth mixed up in it. All a cursed — devil's — woman's invention. Now, mind ye, Miss Nan, if you don't, I'll bring you and your mother into court, or I'll have the truth out of you.'

'But there's no need to threaten, sure, you know, Masther Richard, I'd do anything for you — I would. I'd beg, or I'd rob, or I'd die for you, Masther Richard; and whatever you bid me, your poor wild Nan 'ill do.'

Devereux was touched, the tears were streaming down her pale cheeks, and she was shivering.

'You're cold, Nan; where's your cloak and riding hood?' he said, gently.

'I had to part them, Masther Richard.'

'You want money, Nan,' he said, and his heart smote him.

'I'm not cold when I'm near you, Masther Richard. I'd wait the whole night long for a chance of seeing you; but oh! ho — (she was crying as if her heart would break, looking in his face, and with her hands just a little stretched towards him), oh, Masther Richard, I'm nothing to you now — your poor wild Nan!'

Poor thing! Her mother had not given her the best education. I believe she was a bit of a thief, and she could tell fibs with fluency and precision. The woman was a sinner; but her wild, strong affections were true, and her heart was not in pelf.

'Now, don't cry — where's the good of crying — listen to me,' said Devereux.

'Sure I heerd you were sick, last week, Masther Richard,' she went on, not heeding, and with her cold fingers just touching his arm timidly — and the moon glittered on the tears that streamed down her poor imploring cheeks— 'an' I'd like to be caring you; an' I think you look bad, Masther Richard.'

'No, Nan — I tell you, no — I'm very well, only poor, just now, Nan, or *you* should not want.'

‘Sure I know, Masther Richard: it is not that. I know you’d be good to me if you had it: and it does not trouble me.’

‘But see, Nan, you must speak to your friends, and say— ‘

‘Sorra a friend I have — sorra a friend, Masther Richard; and I did not spake to the priest this year or more, and I darn’t go near him,’ said the poor Palmerstown lass that was once so merry.

‘Why won’t you listen to me, child? I won’t have you this way. You must have your cloak and hood. ’Tis very cold; and, by Heavens, Nan, you shall never want while I have a guinea. But you see I’m poor now, curse it — I’m poor — I’m sorry, Nan, and I have only this one about me.’

‘Oh, no, Masther Richard, keep it — maybe you’d want it yourself.’

‘No, child, don’t vex me — there — I’ll have money in a week or two, and I’ll send you some more, Nan — I’ll not forget you.’ He said this in a sadder tone; ‘and, Nan, I’m a changed man. All’s over, you know, and we’ll see one another no more. You’ll be happier, Nan, for the parting, so here, and now, Nan, we’ll say goodbye.’

‘Oh! no — no — no — not goodbye; you couldn’t — couldn’t — couldn’t — your poor wild Nan.’

And she clung to his cloak, sobbing in wild supplication.

‘Yes, Nan, goodbye, it must be — no other word.’

‘An’ oh, Masther Richard, is it in airnest? You wouldn’t, oh! sure you wouldn’t.’

‘Now, Nan, there’s a good girl; I must go. Remember your promise, and I’ll not forget you, Nan — on my soul, I won’t.’

‘Well, well, mayn’t I chance to see you, maybe? mayn’t I look at you marching, Masther Richard, at a distance only? I wouldn’t care so much, I think, if I could see you sometimes.’

‘Now, there, Nan, you must not cry; you know ’tis all past and gone more than a year ago. ’Twas all d —— d folly — all my fault; I’m sorry, Nan — I’m sorry; and I’m a changed man, and I’ll lead a better life, and so do you, my poor girl.’

‘But mayn’t I see you? Not to spake to you, Masther Richard. Only sometimes to see you, far off, maybe.’ Poor Nan was crying all the time she spoke.— ‘Well, well, I’ll go, I will, indeed, Masther Richard; only let me kiss your hand — an’ oh! no, no, don’t say goodbye, an’ I’ll go — I’m gone now, an’ maybe — just maybe, you might some time chance to wish to see your poor, wild Nan again — only to see her, an’ I’ll be thinking o’ that.’

The old feeling — if anything so coarse deserved the name — was gone; but he pitied her with all his heart; and that heart, such as it was — though she did not know it — was bleeding for her.

He saw her, poor creature, hurrying away in her light clothing, through the sharp, moonlight chill, which, even in the wrapping of his thick cloak, he felt keenly enough. She looked over her shoulder — then stopped; perhaps, poor thing, she thought he was relenting, and then she began to hurry back again. They cling so desperately to the last chance. But that, you know, would never do. Another pleading — another parting — So he turned sharply and strode into the thickets of the close brushwood, among which the white mists of night were hanging. He thought, as he stepped resolutely and quickly on, with a stern face, and heavy heart, that he heard a wild sobbing cry in the distance, and that was poor Nan’s farewell.

So Devereux glided on like a ghost, through the noiseless thicket, and scarcely knowing or caring where he went, emerged upon the broad open plateau, and skirting the Fifteen Acres, came, at last, to a halt upon the high ground overlooking the river — which ran, partly in long trains of silver sparkles, and partly in deep shadow beneath him. Here he stopped; and looked towards the village where he had passed many a pleasant hour — with a profound and remorseful foreboding that there were no more such pleasant hours for him; and his eye wandered among the scattered lights that still twinkled from the distant windows; and he fancied he knew, among them all, that which gleamed pale and dim through the distant elms — the star of his destiny; and he looked at it across the water — a greater gulf severed them — so near, and yet a star in distance — with a strange mixture of sadness and defiance, tenderness and fury.

CHAPTER LXII.

OF A SOLEMN RESOLUTION WHICH CAPTAIN DEVEREUX REGISTERED AMONG HIS HOUSEHOLD GODS, WITH A LIBATION.

When Devereux entered his drawingroom, and lighted his candles, he was in a black and bitter mood. He stood at the window for a while, and drummed on the pane, looking in the direction of the barrack, where all the fun was going on, but thinking, in a chaotic way, of things very different, and all toned with that strange sense of self-reproach and foreboding which, of late, had grown habitual with him — and not without just cause.

‘This shall be the last. ’Twas dreadful, seeing that poor Nan; and I want it — I can swear, I really and honestly want it — only one glass to stay my heart. Everyone may drink in moderation — especially if he’s heart-sick, and has no other comfort — one glass and no more — curse it.’

So one glass of brandy — I’m sorry to say, unmixed with water — the handsome misanthropist sipped and sipped, to the last drop; and then sat down before his fire, and struck, and poked, and stabbed at it in a bitter, personal sort of way, until here and there some blazes leaped up, and gave his eyes a dreamy sort of occupation; and he sat back, with his hands in his pockets, and his feet on the fender, gazing among the Plutonic peaks and caverns between the bars.

‘I’ve had my allowance for tonight; tomorrow night, none at all. ’Tis an accursed habit: and I’ll not allow it to creep upon me. No, I’ve never fought it fairly, as I mean to do now— ’tis quite easy, if one has but the will to do it.’

So he sat before his fire, chewing the cud of bitter fancy only; and he recollected he had not quite filled his glass, and up he got with a swagger, and says he —

‘We’ll drink fair, if you please — one glass — one only — but that, hang it — a bumper.’

So he made a rough calculation.

'We'll say so much — here or there, 'tis no great matter. A thimble full won't drown me. Pshaw! that's too much. What am I to do with it? — hang it. Well, we can't help it— 'tis the last.'

So whatever the quantity may have been, he drank it too, and grew more moody; and was suddenly called up from the black abyss by the entrance of little Puddock, rosy and triumphant, from the ball.

'Ha! Puddock! Then, the fun's over. I'm glad to see you. I've been *tête-à-tête* with my shadow — cursed bad company, Puddock. Where's Cluffe?'

'Gone home, I believe.'

'So much the better. You know Cluffe better than I, and there's a secret about him I never could find out. *You* have, maybe?'

'What's that?' lisped Puddock.

'What the deuce Cluffe's good for.'

'Oh! tut! We all know Cluffe's a very good fellow.'

Devereux looked from under his finely pencilled brows with a sad sort of smile at good little Puddock.

'Puddock,' says he, 'I'd like to have you write my epitaph.

Puddock looked at him with his round eyes a little puzzled, and then he said —

'You think, maybe, I've a turn for making verses; and you think also I like you, and there you're quite right.'

Devereux laughed, but kindly, and shook the fat little hand he proffered.

'I wish I were like you, Puddock. We've the knowledge of good and evil between us. The knowledge of good is all yours: you see nothing but the good that men have; you see it — and, I dare say, truly — where I can't. The darker knowledge is mine.'

Puddock, who thought he thoroughly understood *King John, Shylock*, and *Richard III.*, was a good deal taken aback by Devereux's estimate of his penetration.

'Well, I don't think you know me, Devereux,' resumed he with a thoughtful lisp. 'I'm much mistaken, or I could sound the depths of a villain's soul as well as most men.'

'And if you did you'd find it full of noble qualities,' said Dick Devereux. 'What book is that?'

'The tragical history of Doctor Faustus,' answered Puddock. 'I left it here more than a week ago. Have you read it?'

‘Faith, Puddock, I forgot it! Let’s see what ’tis like,’ said Devereux. ‘Hey day!’ And he read —

‘Now, Faustus, let thine eyes with horror stare
Into that vast perpetual torture-house;
There are the furies tossing damned souls
On burning forks; their bodies boil in lead;
There are live quarters broiling on the coals
That ne’er can die; this ever-burning chair
Is for o’er-tortured souls to rest them in;
These that are fed with sops of flaming fire
Were gluttons, and loved only delicates,
And laughed to see the poor starve at their gates.

‘Tailors! by Jupiter! Serve’em right, the rogues. Tailors lining upon ragou royal, Spanish olea, Puddock — fat livers, and green morels in the Phœnix, the scoundrels, and laughing to see poor gentlemen of the Royal Irish Artillery starving at their gates — hang ‘em.’

‘Well! well! Listen to the *Good Angel*,’ said Puddock, taking up the book and declaiming his best —

‘O thou hast lost celestial happiness,
Pleasures unspeakable, bliss without end.
Hadst thou affected sweet divinity,
Hell or the devil had no power on thee —
Hadst thou kept on that way. Faustus, behold
In what resplendent glory thou hadst sat,
On yonder throne, like those bright shining spirits,
And triumphed over hell! That hast thou lost;
And now, poor soul, must thy good angel leave thee;
The jaws of hell are open to receive thee.’

‘Stop that; ’tis all cursed rant,’ said Devereux. ‘That is, the thing itself; you make the most it.’

‘Why, truly,’ said Puddock, ‘there are better speeches in it. But ’tis very late; and parade, you know — I shall go to bed. And you— ‘

‘No. I shall stay where I am.’

‘Well, I wish you goodnight, dear Devereux.’

‘Goodnight, Puddock’

And the plump little fellow was heard skipping down stairs, and the hall-door shut behind him. Devereux took the play that Puddock had just laid down, and read for a while with a dreary kind of interest. Then he got up, and, I’m sorry to say, drank another glass of the same strong waters.

‘Tomorrow I turn over a new leaf;’ and he caught himself repeating Puddock’s snatch of Macbeth, ‘Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow.’

Devereux looked out, leaning on the window-sash. All was quiet now, as if the rattle of a carriage had never disturbed the serene cold night. The town had gone to bed, and you could hear the sigh of the river across the field. A sadder face the moon did not shine upon.

‘That’s a fine play, Faustus — Marlowe,’ he said. Some of the lines he had read were booming funereally in his ear like a far-off bell. ‘I wonder whether Marlowe had run a wild course, like some of us here — myself — and could not retrieve. That honest little mountebank, Puddock, does not understand a word of it. I wish I were like Puddock. Poor little fellow!’

So, after awhile, Devereux returned to his chair before the fire, and on his way again drank of the waters of Lethe, and sat down, not forgetting, but remorseful, over the fire.

‘I’ll drink no more tonight — there — curse me if I do.’

The fire was waxing low in the grate. ‘Tomorrow’s a new day. Why, I never made a resolution about it before. I can keep it. ’Tis easily kept. Tomorrow I begin.’

And with fists clenched in his pockets, he vowed his vow, with an oath into the fire; and ten minutes were not past and over when his eye wandered thirstily again to the flask on the middle of the table, and with a sardonic, flushed smile, he quoted the ‘Good Angel’s’ words: —

‘O, Faustus, lay that damned book aside,
And gaze not on it lest it tempt thy soul.’

And then pouring out a dram, he looked on it, and said, with the ‘Evil Angel’ —

‘Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art,
Wherein all Nature’s treasure is contained:

Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,
Lord and commander of the elements.'

And then, with a solitary sneer, he sipped it. And after awhile he drank one glass more — they were the small glasses then in vogue — and shoved it back, with —

'There; that's the last.'

And then, perhaps, there was one other 'last;' and after that 'the *very* last.' Hang it! it *must* be the last, and so on, I suppose. And Devereux was pale, and looked wild and sulky on parade next morning.

CHAPTER LXIII.

IN WHICH A LIBERTY IS TAKEN WITH MR. NUTTER'S NAME, AND MR. DANGERFIELD STANDS AT THE ALTAR.

Poor Mrs. Nutter continued in a state of distracted and flighty tribulation, not knowing what to make of it, nor, indeed, knowing the worst; for the neighbours did not tell her half they might, nor drop a hint of the dreadful suspicion that dogged her absent helpmate.

She was sometimes up rummaging among the drawers, and fidgeting about the house, without any clear purpose, but oftener lying on her bed, with her clothes on, crying. When she got hold of a friend, she disburthened her soul, and called on him or her for endless consolations and assurances, which, for the most part, she herself prescribed. There were, of course, fits of despair as well as starts of hope; and bright ideas, accounting for everything, and then clouds of blackness, and tornadoes of lamentation.

Father Roach, a goodnatured apostle, whose digestion suffered when anyone he liked was in trouble, paid her a visit; and being somehow confounded with Dr. Toole, was shown up to her bedroom, where the poor little woman lay crying under the coverlet. On discovering where he was, the good father was disposed to flinch, and get down stairs, in tenderness to his 'character,' and thinking what a story 'them villians o' the world'id make iv it down at the club there.' But on second thoughts, poor little Sally being neither young nor comely, he ventured, and sat down by the bed, veiled behind a strip of curtain, and poured his mellifluous consolations into her open ears.

And poor Sally became eloquent in return. And Father Roach dried his eyes, although she could not see him behind the curtain, and called her 'my daughter,' and 'dear lady,' and tendered such comforts as his housekeeping afforded. 'Had she bacon in the house?' or 'maybe she'd like a fat fowl?' 'She could not eat?' 'Why then she could make elegant broth of it, and dhrink it, an' he'd keep another fattenin' until Nutter himself come back.'

'And then, my honey, you an' himself'll come down and dine wid ould Father Austin; an' we'll have a grand evenin' of it entirely, laughin' over the remimbrance iv these blackguard troubles, acuishla! Or maybe you'd accept iv a couple o' bottles of claret or canaries? I see — you don't want for wine.'

So there was just one more offer the honest fellow had to make, and he opened with assurances 'twas only between himself an' her — an' not a sowl on airth 'id ever hear a word about it — and he asked her pardon, but he thought she might chance to want a guinea or two, just till Nutter came back, and he brought a couple in his waistcoat pocket.

Poor Father Roach was hard-up just then. Indeed, the being hard-up was a chronic affection with him. Two horses were not to be kept for nothing. Nor for the same moderate figure was it possible to maintain an asylum for unfortunates and outlaws — pleasant fellows enough, but endowed with great appetites and an unquenchable taste for consolation in fluid forms.

A clerical provision in Father Roach's day, and church, was not by any means what we have seen it since. At all events he was not often troubled with the possession of money, and when half-a-dozen good weddings brought him in fifty or a hundred pounds, the holy man was constrained forthwith to make distribution of his assets among a score of sour, and sometimes dangerous tradespeople. I mention this in no disparagement of Father Roach, quite the contrary. In making the tender of his two guineas — which, however, Sally declined — the worthy cleric was offering the widow's mite; not like some lucky dogs who might throw away a thousand or two and be nothing the worse; and you may be sure the poor fellow was very glad to find she did not want it.

'Rather hard measure, it strikes me,' said Dangerfield, in the club, 'to put him in the *Hue-and-Cry*.'

But there he was, sure enough, 'Charles Nutter, Esq., formerly of the Mills, near Knockmaroon, in the county of Dublin;' and a full description of the dress he wore, as well as of his height, complexion, features — and all this his poor little wife, still inhabiting the Mills, and quite unconscious that any man, woman, or child, who could prosecute him to conviction, for a murderous assault on Dr. Sturk, should have £50 reward.

'News in to-day, by Jove,' said Toole, bustling solemnly into the club; 'by the packet that arrived at one o'clock, a man taken, answering Nutter's description exactly, just going aboard of a Jamaica brig at Gravesend, and giving no account of himself. He's to be sent over to Dublin for identification.'

And when that was thoroughly discussed two or three times over, they fell to talking of other subjects, and among the rest of Devereux, and wondered what his plans were; and, there being no brother officers by, whether he meant to keep his commission, and various speculations as to the exact cause of the coldness shown him by General Chattesworth. Dick Spaight thought it might be that he had not asked Miss Gertrude in marriage.

But this was pooh-poohed. 'Besides, they knew at Belmont,' said Toole, who was an authority upon the domestic politics of that family, and rather proud of being so, 'just as well as I did that Gipsy Dick was in love with Miss Lilias; and I lay you fifty he'd marry her tomorrow if she'd have him.'

Toole was always a little bit more intimate with people behind their backs, so he called Devereux 'Gipsy Dick.'

'She's ailing, I hear,' said old Slowe.

'She is, indeed, Sir,' answered the doctor, with a grave shake of the head.

'Nothing of moment, I hope?' he asked.

'Why, you see it may be; she had a bad cough last winter, and this year she took it earlier, and it has fallen very much on her lungs; and you see, we can't say, Sir, what turn it may take, and I'm very sorry she should be so sick and ailing — she's the prettiest creature, and the best little soul; and I don't know, on my conscience, what the poor old parson would do if anything happened her, you know. But I trust, Sir, with care, you know, 'twill turn out well.'

The season for trout-fishing was long past and gone, and there were no more pleasant rambles for Dangerfield and Irons along the flowery banks of the devious Liffey. Their rods and nets hung up, awaiting the return of genial spring; and the churlish stream, abandoned to its wintry mood, darkled and roared savagely under the windows of the Brass Castle.

One dismal morning, as Dangerfield's energetic step carried him briskly through the town, the iron gate of the churchyard, and the door of the church itself standing open, he turned in, glancing upward as he passed at Sturk's bedroom windows, as all the neighbours did, to see whether General Death's white banners were floating there, and his tedious siege ended — as end it must — and the garrison borne silently away in his custody to the prison house.

Up the aisle marched Dangerfield, not abating his pace, but with a swift and bracing clatter, like a man taking a frosty constitutional walk.

Irons was moping softly about in the neighbourhood of the reading-desk, and about to mark the places of psalms and chapters in the great church Bible and Prayer-book, and sidelong he beheld his crony of the angle marching, with a grim confidence and swiftness, up the aisle.

'I say, where's Martin?' said Dangerfield, cheerfully.

'He's gone away, Sir.'

'Hey! then you've no one with you?'

'No, Sir.'

Dangerfield walked straight on, up the step of the communion-table, and shoving open the little balustraded door, he made a gay stride or two across the holy precinct, and with a quick right-about face, came to a halt, the white, scoffing face, for exercise never flushed it, and the cold, broad sheen of the spectacles, looked odd in the clerk's eyes, facing the church-door, from beside the table of the sacrament, displayed, as it were, in the very frame — foreground, background, and all — in which he was wont to behold the thoughtful, simple, holy face of the rector.

'Alone among the dead; and not afraid?' croaked the white face pleasantly.

The clerk seemed always to writhe and sweat silently under the banter of his comrade of the landing-net, and he answered, without lifting his head, in a constrained and dogged sort of way, like a man who expects something unpleasant —

'Alone? yes, Sir, there's none here but ourselves.'

And his face flushed, and the veins on his forehead stood out, as will happen with a man who tugs at a weight that is too much for him.

'I saw you steal a glance at Charles when he came into the church here, and it strikes me I was at the moment thinking of the same thing as you, to wit, will he require any special service at our hands? Well, he does! and you or I must do it. He'll give a thousand pounds, mind ye; and that's something in the way of fellows like you and me; and whatever else he may have done, Charles has never broke his word in a money matter. And, hark'ee, can’t you thumb over that Bible and Prayer-book on the table here as well as *there? Do* so. Well— ‘

And he went on in a lower key, still looking full front at the church-door, and a quick glance now and then upon Irons, across the communion-table.

‘’Tis nothing at all — don’t you see — what are you afraid of? It can’t change events— ’tis only a question of to-day or tomorrow — a whim — a maggot — hey? You can manage it this way, mark ye.’

He had his pockethandkerchief by the two corners before him, like an apron, and he folded it neatly and quickly into four.

‘Don’t you see — and a little water. You’re a neat hand, you know; and if you’re interrupted, ’tis only to blow your nose in’t — ha, ha, ha! — and clap it in your pocket; and *you* may as well have the money — hey? Good-morning.’

And when he had got halfway down the aisle, he called back to Irons, in a loud, frank voice —

‘And Martin’s not here — could you say where he is?’

But he did not await the answer, and glided with quick steps from the porch, with a side leer over the wavy green mounds and tombstones. He had not been three minutes in the church, and across the street he went, to the shop over the way, and asked briskly where Martin, the sexton, was. Well, they did not know.

‘Ho! Martin,’ he cried across the street, seeing that functionary just about to turn the corner by Sturk’s hall-door steps; ‘a word with you. I’ve been looking for you. See, you must take a foot-rule, and make all the measurements of that pew, you know; don’t mistake a hair’s breadth, d’ye mind, for you must be ready to swear to it; and bring a note of it to me, at home, to-day, at one o’clock, and you shall have a crown-piece.’

From which the reader will perceive — as all the world might, if they had happened to see him enter the church just now — that his object in the visit was to see and speak with Martin; and that the little bit of banter with Irons, the clerk, was all by-play, and parenthesis, and beside the main business, and, of course, of no sort of consequence.

Mr. Irons, like most men of his rank in life, was not much in the habit of exact thinking. His ruminations, therefore, were rather confused, but, perhaps, they might be translated in substance, into something like this —

‘Why the —— can’t he let them alone that’s willing to let him alone? I wish he was in his own fiery home, and better people at rest. I *can’t* mark them places — I don’t know whether I’m on my head or heels.’

And he smacked the quarto Prayer-book down upon the folio Bible with a sonorous bang, and glided out, furious, frightened, and taciturn, to the Salmon House.

He came upon Dangerfield again only half-a-dozen steps from the turn into the street. He had just dismissed Martin, and was looking into a note in his pocketbook, and either did not see, or pretended not to see, the clerk. But some one else saw and recognised Mr. Irons; and, as he passed, directed upon him a quick, searching glance. It was Mr. Mervyn, who happened to pass that way. Irons and Dangerfield, and the churchyard — there was a flash of association in the group and the background which accorded with an old suspicion. Dangerfield, indeed, was innocently reading a leaf in his red and gilt leather pocketbook, as I have said. But Irons’s eyes met the glance of Mervyn, and contracted oddly, and altogether there gleamed out something indefinable in his look. It was only for a second — a glance and an intuition; and from that moment it was one of Mervyn’s immovable convictions, that Mr. Dangerfield knew something of Irons’s secret. It was a sort of intermittent suspicion before — now it was a monstrous, but fixed belief.

So Mr. Irons glided swiftly on to the Salmon House, where, in a dark corner, he drank something comfortable; and stalked back again to the holy pile, with his head aching, and the world round him like a wild and evil dream.

CHAPTER LXIV.

BEING A NIGHT SCENE, IN WHICH MISS GERTRUDE CHATTESWORTH, BEING ADJURED BY AUNT BECKY, MAKES ANSWER.

In Aunt Becky's mind, the time could not be far off when the odd sort of relations existing between the Belmont family and Mr. Dangerfield must be defined. The Croesus himself, indeed, was very indulgent. He was assiduous and respectful; but he wisely abstained from pressing for an immediate decision, and trusted to reflection and to Aunt Becky's good offices; and knew that his gold would operate by its own slow, but sure, gravitation.

At one time he had made up his mind to be peremptory — and politely to demand an unequivocal 'yes,' or 'no.' But a letter reached him from London; it was from a great physician there. Whatever was in it, the effect was to relieve his mind of an anxiety. He never, indeed, looked anxious, or moped like an ordinary man in blue-devils. But his servants knew when anything weighed upon his spirits, by his fierce, short, maniacal temper. But with the seal of that letter the spell broke, the evil spirit departed for a while, and the old jocose, laconic irony came back, and glittered whitely in the tall chair by the fire, and sipped its claret after dinner, and sometimes smoked its long pipe and grinned into the embers of the grate. At Belmont, there had been a skirmish over the broiled drumsticks at supper, and the ladies had withdrawn in towering passions to their nightly devotions and repose.

Gertrude had of late grown more like herself, but was quite resolute against the Dangerfield alliance, which Aunt Becky fought for, the more desperately that in their private confidences under the poplar trees she had given the rich cynic of the silver spectacles good assurance of success.

Puddock drank tea at Belmont — nectar in Olympus — that evening. Was ever lieutenant so devoutly romantic? He had grown more fanatical and abject in his worship. He spoke less, and lisped in very low tones. He sighed often, and sometimes mightily; and ogled unhappily, and smiled lackadaisically. The beautiful damsel was, in her high, cold way, kind to the guest, and employed him about the room on little commissions, and listened to his speeches without hearing them, and rewarded them now and then with the gleam of a smile, which made his gallant little heart flutter up to his solitaire, and his honest powdered head giddy.

'I marvel, brother,' ejaculated Aunt Becky, suddenly, appearing in the parlour, where the general had made himself comfortable over his novel, and opening her address with a smart stamp on the floor. The veteran's heart made a little jump, and he looked up over his gold spectacles.

'I marvel, brother, what you can mean, desire, or intend, by all this ogling, sighing, and lovemaking; 'tis surely a strange way of forwarding Mr. Dangerfield's affair.'

He might have blustered a little, as he sometimes did, for she had startled him, and her manner was irritating; but she had caught him in a sentimental passage between Lovelace and Miss Harlowe, which always moved him — and he showed no fight at all; but his innocent little light blue eyes looked up wonderingly and quite gently at her.

'Who — I? *What* ogling, Sister Becky?'

'You! tut! That foolish, ungrateful person, Lieutenant Puddock; what can you propose to yourself, brother, in bringing Lieutenant Puddock here? I hate him.'

'Why, what about Puddock — what has he done?' asked the general, with round eyes still, and closing his book on his finger.

'What has he done! Why, he's at your daughter's feet,' cried Aunt Becky, with scarlet cheeks, and flashing eyes; 'and she — artful gipsy, has brought him there by positively making love to him.'

'Sweet upon Toodie (the general's old pet name for Gertrude); why, half the young fellows are — you know — pooh, pooh,' and the general stood up with his back to the fire — looking uneasy; for, like many other men, he thought a woman's eyes saw further in such a case than his.

'Do you wish the young hussy — do you — to marry Lieutenant Puddock? I should not wonder! Why, of course, her fortune you and she may give away to whom you like; but remember, she's young, and has been much admired, brother; and may make a great match; and in our day, young ladies were under direction, and did not marry without apprising their parents or natural guardians. Here's Mr. Dangerfield, who proposes great settlements. Why won't she have him? For my part, I think we're little better than cheats; and I mean to write tomorrow morning and tell the poor gentleman that you and I have been bamboozling him to a purpose, and meant all along to marry the vixen to a poor lieutenant in your corps. Speak truth, and shame the devil, brother; for my part, I'm sick of the affair; I'm sick of deception, ingratitude, and odious fools.

Aunt Becky had vanished in a little whirlwind, leaving the general with his back to the fire, looking blank and uncomfortable. And from his little silver tankard he poured out a glassful of his mulled claret, not thinking, and smelled to it deliberately, as he used to do when he was tasting a new wine, and looked through it, and set the glass down, forgetting he was to drink it, for his thoughts were elsewhere.

On reaching her bedroom, which she did with impetuous haste, Aunt Becky shut the door with a passionate slam, and said, with a sort of choke and a sob, 'There's nought but ingratitude on earth — the odious, odious, *odious* person!'

And when, ten minutes after, her maid came in, she found Aunt Rebecca but little advanced in her preparations for bed; and her summons at the door was answered by a fierce and shrilly nose-trumpeting, and a stern 'Come in, hussy — are you deaf, child?' And when she came in, Aunt Becky was grim, and fussy, and her eyes red.

Miss Gertrude was that night arrived just on that dim and delicious plateau — that debatable land upon which the last waking reverie and the first dream of slumber mingle together in airy dance and shifting colours — when, on a sudden, she was recalled to a consciousness of her grave bedposts, and damask curtains, by the voice of her aunt.

Sitting up, she gazed on the redoubted Aunt Becky through the lace of her *bonnet de nuit*, for some seconds, in a mystified and incredulous way.

Mistress Rebecca Chattesworth, on the other hand, had drawn the curtains, and stood, candle in hand, arrayed in her nightdress, like a ghost, only she had on a pink and green quilted dressing-gown loosely over it.

She was tall and erect, of course; but she looked softened and strange; and when she spoke, it was in quite a gentle, humble sort of way, which was perfectly strange to her niece.

'Don't be frightened, sweetheart,' said she, and she leaned over and with her arm round her neck, kissed her. 'I came to say a word, and just to ask you a question. I wish, indeed I do — Heaven knows, to do my duty; and, my dear child, will you tell me the whole truth — will you tell me truly? — You will, when I ask it as a kindness.'

There was a little pause, and Gertrude looked with a pale gaze upon her aunt.

'Are you,' said Aunt Becky— 'do you, Gertrude — do you like Lieutenant Puddock?'

'Lieutenant Puddock!' repeated the girl, with the look and gesture of a person in whose ear something strange has buzzed.

'Because, if you really are in love with him, Gertie; and that he likes you; and that, in short— ' Aunt Becky was speaking very rapidly, but stopped suddenly.

'In love with Lieutenant Puddock!' was all that Miss Gertrude said.

'Now, do tell me, Gertrude, if it be so — tell *me*, dear love. I know 'tis a hard thing to say,' and Aunt Becky considerately began to fiddle with the ribbon at the back of her niece's nightcap, so that she need not look in her face; 'but, Gertie, tell me truly, do you like him; and — and — why, if it be so, I will mention Mr. Dangerfield's suit no more. There now — there's all I want to say.'

'Lieutenant Puddock!' repeated young Madam in the nightcap; and by this time the film of slumber was gone; and the suspicion struck her somehow in altogether so comical a way that she could not help laughing in her aunt's sad, earnest face.

'Fat, funny little Lieutenant Puddock! — was ever so diverting a disgrace? Oh! dear aunt, what have I done to deserve so prodigious a suspicion?'

It was plain, from her heightened colour, that her aunt did not choose to be laughed at.

'What have you done?' said she, quite briskly; 'why — what have you done?' and Aunt Becky had to consider just for a second or two, staring straight at the young lady through the crimson damask curtains. 'You have — you — you — why, what have you *done*? and she covered her confusion by stooping down to adjust the heel of her slipper.

'Oh! it's delightful — plump little Lieutenant Puddock!' and the graver her aunt looked the more irrepressibly she laughed; till that lady, evidently much offended, took the young gentlewoman pretty roundly to task.

‘Well! I’ll tell you what you have done,’ said she, almost fiercely. ‘As absurd as he is, you have been twice as sweet upon him as he upon you; and you have done your endeavour to fill his brain with the notion that you are in love with him, young lady; and if you’re not, you have acted, I promise you, a most unscrupulous and unpardonable part by a most honourable and well-bred gentleman — for that character I believe he bears. Yes — you may laugh, Madam, how you please; but he’s allowed, I say, to be as honest, as true, as fine a gentleman as — as— ‘

‘As ever surprised a weaver,’ said the young lady, laughing till she almost cried. In fact, she was showing in a new light, and becoming quite a funny character upon this theme. And, indeed, this sort of convulsion of laughing seemed so unaccountable on natural grounds to Aunt Rebecca, that her irritation subsided into perplexity, and she began to suspect that her extravagant merriment might mean possibly something which she did not quite understand.

‘Well, niece, when you have quite done laughing at nothing, you will, perhaps, be so good as to hear me. I put it to you now, young lady, as your relation and your friend, once for all, upon your sacred honour — remember you’re a Chattesworth — upon the honour of a Chattesworth’ (a favourite family form of adjuration on serious occasions with Aunt Rebecca), ‘do you like Lieutenant Puddock?’

It was now Miss Gertrude’s turn to be nettled, and to remind her visitor, by a sudden flush in her cheek and a flash from her eyes, that she was, indeed, a Chattesworth; and with more disdain than, perhaps, was quite called for, she repelled the soft suspicion.

‘I protest, Madam,’ said Miss Gertrude, ‘’tis *too* bad. Truly, Madam, it *is vastly* vexatious to have to answer so strange and affronting a question. If you ever took the trouble, aunt, to listen to, or look at, Lieutenant Puddock, you might— ‘

‘Well, niece,’ quoth Aunt Becky, interrupting, with a little toss of her head, ‘young ladies weren’t quite so hard to please in my time, and I can’t see or hear that he’s so much worse than others.’

‘I’d sooner die than have him,’ said Miss Gertie, peremptorily.

‘Then, I suppose, if ever, and whenever he asks you the question himself, you’ll have no hesitation in telling him so?’ said Aunt Becky, with becoming solemnity.

‘Laughable, ridiculous, comical, and absurd, as I always thought and believed Lieutenant Puddock to be, I yet believe the asking such a question of me to be a stretch of absurdity, from which his breeding, for he is a gentleman, will restrain him. Besides, Madam, you can’t possibly be aware of the subjects on which he has invariably discoursed whenever he happened to sit by me — plays and players, and candied fruit. Really, Madam, it is too absurd to have to enter upon one’s defence against so incredible an imagination.’

Aunt Rebecca looked steadily for a few seconds in her niece’s face, then drew a long breath, and leaning over, kissed her again on the forehead, and with a grave little nod, and looking on her again for a short space, without saying a word more, she turned suddenly and left the room.

Miss Gertrude’s vexation again gave way to merriment; and her aunt, as she walked sad and stately up stairs, heard one peal of merry laughter after another ring through her niece’s bedroom. She had not laughed so much for three years before; and this short visit cost her, I am sure, two hours’ good sleep at least.

CHAPTER LXV.

RELATING SOME AWFUL NEWS THAT REACHED THE VILLAGE, AND HOW DR. WALSINGHAM VISITED CAPTAIN RICHARD DEVEREUX AT HIS LODGINGS.

And now there was news all over the town, to keep all the tongues there in motion.

News — news — great news! — terrible news! Peter Fogarty, Mr. Tresham's boy, had it that morning from his cousin, Jim Redmond, whose aunt lived at Ringsend, and kept the little shop over against the 'Plume of Feathers,' where you might have your pick and choice of all sorts of nice and useful things — bacon, brass snuff-boxes, penny ballads, eggs, candles, cheese, tobacco-pipes, pinchbeck buckles for knee and instep, soap, sausages, and who knows what beside.

No one quite believed it — it was a tradition at third hand, and Peter Fogarty's cousin, Jim Redmond's aunt, was easy of faith; — Jim, it was presumed, not very accurate in narration, and Peter, not much better. Though, however, it was not actually 'intelligence,' it was a startling thesis. And though some raised their brows and smiled darkly, and shook their heads, the whole town certainly pricked their ears at it. And not a man met another without 'Well! anything more? You've heard the report, Sir — eh?'

It was not till Doctor Toole came out of town, early that day, that the sensation began in earnest.

'There could be no doubt about it— 'twas a wonderful strange thing certainly. After so long a time — and so well preserved too.'

'*What* was it — what *is* it?'

'Why, Charles Nutter's corpse is found, Sir!'

'Corpse — hey!'

'So Toole says. Hollo! Toole — Doctor Toole — I say. Here's Mr. Slowe hasn't heard about poor Nutter.'

'Ho! neighbour Slowe — give you good-day, Sir — not heard it? By Jove, Sir — poor Nutter!— 'tis true — his body's found — picked up this morning, just at sunrise, by two Dunleary fishermen, off Bullock. Justice

Lowe has seen it — and Spaight saw it too. I've just been speaking with him, not an hour ago, in Thomas Street. It lies at Ringsend — and an inquest in the morning.'

And so on in Doctor Toole's manner, until he saw Dr. Walsingham, the good rector, pausing in his leisurely walk just outside the row of houses that fronted the turnpike, in one of which were the lodgings of Dick Devereux.

The good Doctor Toole wondered what brought his reverence there, for he had an inkling of something going on. So he bustled off to him, and told his story with the stern solemnity befitting such a theme, and that pallid, half-suppressed smile with which an exciting horror is sometimes related. And the good rector had many ejaculations of consternation and sympathy, and not a few enquiries to utter. And at last, when the theme was quite exhausted, he told Toole, who still lingered on, that he was going to pay his respects to Captain Devereux.

'Oh!' said cunning little Toole, 'you need not, for I told him the whole matter.'

'Very like, Sir,' answered the doctor; 'but 'tis on another matter I wish to see him.'

'Oh! — ho! — certainly — very good, Sir. I beg pardon — and — and — he's just done his breakfast — a late dog, Sir — ha! ha! Your servant, Doctor Walsingham.'

Devereux puzzled his comrade Puddock more than ever. Sometimes he would descend with his blue devils into the abyss, and sit there all the evening in a dismal sulk. Sometimes he was gayer even than his old gay self; and sometimes in a bitter vein, talking enigmatical ironies, with his strange smile; and sometimes he was dangerous and furious, just as the weather changes, without rhyme or reason. Maybe he was angry with himself, and thought it was with others; and was proud, sorry, and defiant, and let his moods, one after another, possess him as they came.

They were his young days — beautiful and wicked — days of clear, rich tints, and sanguine throbbings, and *gloria mundi* — when we fancy the spirit perfect, and the body needs no redemption — when, fresh from the fountains of life, death is but a dream, and we walk the earth like heathen gods and goddesses, in celestial egotism and beauty. Oh, fair youth! — gone for ever. The parting from thee was a sadness and a violence — sadder, I think, than death itself. We look behind us, and sigh after thee, as on the pensive glories of a sunset, and our march is toward the darkness. It is twilight with us now, and will soon be starlight, and the hour and place of slumber, till the reveille sounds, and the day of wonder opens. Oh, grant us a good hour, and take us to Thy mercy! But to the last those young days will be remembered and worth remembering; for be we what else we may, young mortals we shall never be again.

Of course Dick Devereux was now no visitor at the Elms. All *that* for the present was over. Neither did he see Lilias; for little Lily was now a close prisoner with doctors, in full uniform, with shouldered canes, mounting guard at the doors. ’Twas a hard winter, and she needed care and nursing. And Devereux chafed and fretted; and, in truth, ’twas hard to bear this spite of fortune — to be so near, and yet so far — quite out of sight and hearing.

A word or two from General Chattesworth in Doctor Walsingham’s ear, as they walked to and fro before the white front of Belmont, had decided the rector on making this little call; for he had now mounted the stair of Devereux’s lodging, and standing on the carpet outside, knocked, with a grave, sad face on his door panel, glancing absently through the lobby window, and whistling inaudibly the while.

The doctor was gentle and modest, and entirely kindly. He held good Master Feltham’s doctrine about reproofs. ‘A man,’ says he, ‘had better be convinced in private than be made guilty by a proclamation. Open rebukes are for Magistrates, and Courts of Justice! for Stelled Chambers and for Scarlets, in the thronged Hall Private are for friends; where all the witnesses of the offender’s blushes are blinde and deaf and dumb. We should do by them as Joseph thought to have done by Mary, seeke to cover blemishes with secrecy. Public reproofe is like striking of a Deere in the Herd; it not only wounds him to the loss of enabling blood, but betrays him to the Hound, his Enemy, and makes him by his fellows be pusht out of company.’

So on due invitation from within, the good parson entered, and the handsome captain in all his splendours — when you saw him after a little absence ’twas always with a sort of admiring surprise — you had forgot how *very* handsome he was — this handsome slender fellow, with his dark face and large, unfathomable violet eyes, so wild and wicked, and yet so soft, stood up surprised, with a look of welcome quickly clouded and crossed by a gleam of defiance.

They bowed, and shook hands, however, and bowed again, and each was the other’s ‘servant;’ and being seated, they talked *de generalibus*; for the good parson would not come like an executioner and take his prisoner by the throat, but altogether in the spirit of the shepherd, content to walk a long way about, and wait till he came up with the truant, and entreating him kindly, not dragging or beating him back to the flock, but leading and carrying by turns, and so awaiting his opportunity. But Devereux was in one of his moods. He thought the doctor no friend to his suit, and was bitter, and formal, and violent.

CHAPTER LXVI.

OF A CERTAIN TEMPEST THAT AROSE AND SHOOK THE CAPTAIN'S SPOONS AND TEACUPS; AND HOW THE WIND SUDDENLY WENT DOWN.

I'm very glad, Sir, to have a few quiet minutes with you,' said the doctor, making then a little pause; and Devereux thought he was going to re-open the matter of his suit. 'For I've had no answer to my last letter, and I want to know all you can tell me of that most promising young man, Daniel Loftus, and his most curious works.'

'Dan Loftus is dead and— ' (I'm sorry to say he added something else); 'and his works have followed him, Sir,' said the strange captain, savagely; for he could not conceive what business the doctor had to think about *him*, when Captain Devereux's concerns were properly to be discussed. So though he had reason to believe he was quite well, and in Malaga with his 'honourable' and sickly cousin, he killed him offhand, and disposed summarily of his works.

There was an absolute silence of some seconds after this scandalous explosion; and Devereux said— 'In truth, Sir, I don't know. They hold him capable of taking charge of my wise cousin — hang him! — so I dare say he can take care of himself; and I don't see what the plague ill's to happen him.'

The doctor's honest eyes opened, and his face flushed a little. But reading makes a full man, not a quick one; and so while he was fashioning his answer, the iron cooled. Indeed he never spoke in anger. When on sudden provocation he carried his head higher and flushed a little, they supposed he was angry; but if he was, this was all he showed of the old Adam, and he held his peace.

So now the doctor looked down upon the tablecloth, for Devereux's breakfast china and silver were still upon the table, and he marshalled some crumbs he found there, sadly, with his finger, in a row first, and then in a circle, and then, goodness knows how; and he sighed profoundly over his work.

Devereux was in his mood. He was proud — he had no notion of apologising. But looking another way, and with his head rather high, he hoped Miss Lilias was better.

Well, well, the spring was coming; and Parson Walsingham knew the spring restored little Lily. ‘She’s like a bird — she’s like a flower, and the winter is nearly past,’ (and the beautiful words of the ‘Song of Songs,’ which little Lily so loved to read, mingled like a reverie in his discourse, and he said), ‘the flowers will soon appear in the earth, the time of the singing birds will come, and the voice of the turtle be heard in our land.’

‘Sir,’ said Dick Devereux, in a voice that sounded strangely, ‘I have a request; may I make it? — a favour to beg. ’Tisn’t, all things remembered, very much. If I write a letter, and place it open in your hand — a letter, Sir — to Miss Lily — will you read it to her, or else let her read it? Or even a message — a spoken message — will you give it?’

‘Captain Devereux,’ said the doctor, in a reserved but very sad sort of way, ‘I must tell you that my dear child is by no means well. She has had a cold, and it has not gone away so soon as usual — something I think of her dear mother’s delicacy — and so she requires care, my little Lily, a great deal of care. But, thank God, the spring is before us. Yes, yes; the soft air and sunshine, and then she’ll be out again. You know the garden, and her visits, and her little walks. So I don’t fret or despair. Oh, no.’ He spoke very gently, in a reverie, after his wont, and he sighed heavily. ‘You know ’tis growing late in life with me, Captain Devereux,’ he resumed, ‘and I would fain see her united to a kind and tender partner, for I think she’s a fragile little flower. Poor little Lily! Something, I often think, of her dear mother’s delicacy, and I have always nursed her, you know. She has been a great pet;’ and he stopped suddenly, and walked to the window. ‘A great pet. Indeed, if she could have been spoiled, I should have spoiled her long ago, but she could not. Ah, no! Sweet little Lily!’

Then quite firmly but gently Parson Walsingham went on: —

‘Now, the doctors say she mustn’t be agitated, and I can’t allow it, Captain Devereux. I gave her your message — let me see — why ’tis four, ay, five months ago. I gave it with a good will, for I thought well of you.’

‘And you don’t any longer — there, ’tis all out,’ broke in Devereux, fiercely.

‘Well, you know her answer; it was not lightly given, nor in haste, and first and last ’twas quite decided, and I sent it to you under my own hand.’

‘I thought you were a friend to me, Dr. Walsingham, and now I’m sure you’re none,’ said the young fellow, in the same bitter tone.

‘Ah, Captain Devereux, he can be no friend to you who is a friend to your faults; and you no friend to yourself if you be an enemy to him that would tell you of them. Will you like him the worse that would have you better?’

‘We’ve *all* faults, Sir; mine are not the worst, and I’ll have neither shrift nor absolution. There’s some reason here you won’t disclose.’

He was proud, fierce, pale, and looked damnably handsome and wicked.

‘She gave *no* reason, Sir;’ answered Dr. Walsingham. No, she gave none; but, as I understood, she did not love you, and she prayed me to mention it no more.’

‘She gave no reason; but you *know* the reason,’ glared out Devereux.

‘Indeed, Sir, I do *not* know the reason,’ answered the rector.

‘But you know — you *must* — you *meant* — *you*, at least had heard some ill of me, and you no longer wish my suit to prosper.’

‘I have, indeed, of late, heard *much* ill of you, Captain Devereux,’ answered Dr. Walsingham, in a very deliberate but melancholy way, ‘enough to make me hold you no meet husband for any wife who cared for a faithful partner, or an honourable and a quiet home.’

‘You mean — I know you do — that Palmerstown girl, who has belied me?’ cried Devereux.

‘That unhappy young woman, Captain Devereux, her name is Glynn, whom you have betrayed under a promise of marriage.’

That moment Devereux was on his feet. It was the apparition of Devereux; a blue fire gleaming in his eyes, not a word from his white lips, while three seconds might have ticked from Mrs. Irons’s prosy old clock on the stairhead; his slender hand was outstretched in appeal and defiance, and something half-celestial, half-infernal — the fallen angelic — in his whole face and bearing.

‘May my merciful Creator strike me dead, here at your feet, Doctor Walsingham, but ’tis a lie,’ cried he. ‘I never promised — she’ll tell you. I thought she told you long ago. ’Twas that devil incarnate, her mother, who forged the lie, why or wherefore, except for her fiendish love of mischief, I know not.’

‘I cannot tell, Sir, about your promise,’ said the doctor gravely; ‘with or without it, the crime is heinous, the cruelty immeasurable.’

‘Dr. Walsingham,’ cried Dick Devereux, a strange scorn ringing in his accents, ‘with all your learning you don’t know the world; you don’t know human nature; you don’t see what’s passing in this very village before your eyes every day you live. I’m not worse than others; I’m not half so bad as fifty older fellows who ought to know better; but I’m *sorry*, and ’tisn’t easy to say that, for I’m as proud, proud as the devil, proud as you; and if it were to my Maker, what more can I say? I’m sorry, and if Heaven forgives us when we repent, I think our wretched fellow-mortals may.’

‘Captain Devereux, I’ve nothing to forgive,’ said the parson, kindly.

‘But I tell you, Sir, this cruel, unmeaning separation will be my eternal ruin,’ cried Devereux. ‘Listen to me — by Heaven, you shall. I’ve fought a hard battle, Sir! I’ve tried to forget her — to *hate* her — it won’t do. I tell you, Dr. Walsingham, ’tis not in your nature to comprehend the intensity of my love — you can’t. I don’t blame you. But I think, Sir — I think I *might* make her like me, Sir. They come at last, sometimes, to like those that love them so — so *desperately: that* may not be for me, ’tis true. I only ask to plead my own sad cause. I only want to see her — gracious Heaven — but to see her — to show her how I was wronged — to tell her she can make me what she will — an honourable, pure, self-denying, devoted man, or leave me in the dark, alone, with nothing for it but to wrap my cloak about my head, and leap over the precipice.’

‘Captain Devereux, why will you doubt me? I’ve spoken the truth. I have already said I must not give your message; and you are not to suppose I dislike you, because I would fain have your faults mended.’

‘Faults! have I? To be sure I have. So have *you, more,* Sir, and *worse* than I, maybe,’ cried Devereux, wild again; ‘and you come here in your spiritual pride to admonish and to lecture, and to *insult* a miserable man, who’s better, perhaps, than yourself. You’ve heard ill of me? you hear I sometimes drink maybe a glass too much — who does not? you can drink a glass yourself, Sir; drink more, and show it less than I maybe; and you listen to every damned slander that any villain, to whose vices and idleness you pander with what you call your alms, may be pleased to invent, and you deem yourself charitable; save us from such charity! *Charitable*, and you refuse to deliver my miserable message: hardhearted Pharisee!’

It is plain poor Captain Devereux was not quite himself — bitter, fierce, half-mad, and by no means so polite as he ought to have been. Alas! as Job says, ‘ye imagine to reprove words; and the speeches of one that is desperate, which are as wind.’

‘Yes, hardhearted, unrelenting Pharisee.’ The torrent roared on, and the wind was up; it was night and storm with poor Devereux. ‘You who pray every day — oh — damnable hypocrisy — lead us not into temptation — you neither care nor ask to what courses your pride and obstinacy are driving me — your fellow-creature.’

‘Ah, Captain Devereux, you are angry with me, and yet it’s not my doing; the man that is at variance with himself will hardly be at one with others. You have said much to me that is unjust, and, perhaps, unseemly; but I won’t reproach you; your anger and trouble make wild work with your words. When one of my people falls into sin, I ever find it is so through lack of prayer. Ah! Captain Devereux, have you not of late been remiss in the duty of private prayer?’

The captain laughed, not pleasantly, into the ashes in the grate. But the doctor did not mind, and only said, looking upward — .

‘Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.’

There was kindness, and even tenderness, in the tone in which simple Dr. Walsingham spoke the appellative, brother; and it smote Devereux now, as sometimes happens with wayward fellows, and his better nature was suddenly moved.

‘I’m *sorry*, Sir — I am. You’re too patient — I’m *very* sorry; ’tis like an angel — you’re noble, Sir, and I such an outcast. I — I wish you’d strike me, Sir — you’re too kind and patient, Sir, and so pure — and how have I spoken to you? A *trial*, Sir, if you *can* forgive me — one trial — my vice — you shall see me changed, a new man. Oh, Sir, let me swear it. I *am*, Sir — I’m reformed; don’t believe me till you see it. Oh! good Samaritan, — don’t forsake me — I’m all one wound.’

Well! they talked some time longer, and parted kindly.

CHAPTER LXVII.

IN WHICH A CERTAIN TROUBLED SPIRIT WALKS.

Mr. Dangerfield was at the club that night, and was rather in spirits than otherwise, except, indeed, when poor Charles Nutter was talked of. Then he looked grave, and shrugged, and shook his head, and said —

‘A bad business, Sir; and where’s his poor wife?’

‘Spending the night with us, poor soul,’ said Major O’Neill, mildly, ‘and hasn’t an idaya, poor thing; and indeed, I hope, she mayn’t hear it.’

‘Pooh! Sir, she must hear it; but you know she might have heard worse, Sir, eh?’ rejoined Dangerfield.

‘True for you, Sir,’ said the major, suspending the filling of his pipe to direct a quiet glance of significance at Dangerfield, and then closing his eyes with a nod.

And just at this point in came Spaight.

‘Well, Spaight!’

‘Well, Sir.’

‘You saw the body, eh?’ and a dozen other interrogatories followed, as, cold and wet with melting snow, dishevelled, and storm-beaten — for it was a plaguy rough night — the young fellow, with a general greeting to the company, made his way to the fire.

‘’Tis a tremendous night, gentlemen, so by your leave I’ll stir the fire — and, yes, I seen him, poor Nutter — and, paugh, an ugly sight he is, I can tell you; here Larry, bring me a rummer-glass of punch — his right ear’s gone, and a’most all his right hand — and screeching hot, do you mind — an’, phiew — altogether ’tis sickening — them fishes, you know — I’m a’most sorry I went in — you remember Dogherty’s whiskey shop in Ringsend — he lies in the back parlour, and wondherful little changed in appearance.’

And so Mr. Spaight, with a little round table at his elbow, and his heels over the fender, sipped his steaming punch, and thawed inwardly and outwardly, as he answered their questions and mixed in their speculations.

Up at the Mills, which had heard the awful news, first from the Widow Macan, and afterwards from Pat Moran, the maids sat over their tea in the kitchen in high excitement and thrilling chat— 'The poor master!' 'Oh, the poor man!' 'Oh, la, what's that?' with a start and a peep over the shoulders. 'And oh, dear, and how in the world will the poor little misthress ever live over the news?' And so forth, made a principal part of their talk. There was a good accompaniment of wind outside, and a soft pelting of snow on the window panes, 'and oh, my dear life, but wasn't it dark!'

Up went Moggy, with her thick-wicked kitchen candle, to seek repose; and Betty, resolving not to be long behind, waited only 'to wash up her plates' and slack down the fire, having made up her mind, for she grew more nervous in solitude, to share Moggy's bed for that night.

Moggy had not been twenty minutes gone, and her task was nearly ended, when— 'Oh, blessed saints!' murmured Betty, with staring eyes, and dropping the sweeping-brush on the flags, she heard, or thought she heard, her master's step, which was peculiar, crossing the floor overhead.

She listened, herself as pale as a corpse, and nearly as breathless; but there was nothing now but the muffled gusts of the storm, and the close soft beat of the snow, so she listened and listened, but nothing came of it.

''Tis only the vapours,' said Betty, drawing a long breath, and doing her best to be cheerful; and so she finished her labours, stopping every now and then to listen, and humming tunes very loud, in fits and starts. Then it came to her turn to take her candle and go up stairs; she was a good half-hour later than Moggy — all was quiet within the house — only the sound of the storm — the creak and rattle of its strain, and the hurlyburly of the gusts over the roof and chimneys.

Over her shoulder she peered jealously this way and that, as with flaring candle she climbed the stairs. How black the window looked on the lobby, with its white patterns of snow flakes in perpetual succession sliding down the panes. Who could tell what horrid face might be looking in close to her as she passed, secure in the darkness and that drifting white lace veil of snow? So nimbly and lightly up the stairs climbed Betty, the cook.

If listeners seldom hear good of themselves, it is also true that peepers sometimes see more than they like; and Betty, the cook, as she reached the landing, glancing askance with ominous curiosity, beheld a spectacle, the sight of which nearly bereft her of her senses.

Crouching in the deep doorway on the right of the lobby, the cook, I say, saw something — a figure — or a deep shadow — only a deep shadow — or maybe a dog. She lifted the candle — she peeped under the candlestick: ’twas no shadow, as I live, ’twas a well-defined figure!

He was draped in black, cowering low, with the face turned up. It was Charles Nutter’s face, fixed and stealthy. It was only while the fascination lasted — while you might count one, two, three, deliberately — that the horrid gaze met mutually. But there was no mistake there. She saw the stern dark picture as plainly as ever she did. The light glimmered on his white eyeballs.

Starting up, he struck at the candle with his hat. She uttered a loud scream, and flinging stick and all at the figure, with a great clang against the door behind, all was swallowed in instantaneous darkness; she whirled into the opposite bedroom she knew not how, and locked the door within, and plunged head-foremost under the bedclothes, half mad with terror.

The squall was heard of course. Moggy heard it, but she heeded not; for Betty was known to scream at mice, and even moths. And as her door was heard to slam, as was usual in panics of the sort, and as she returned no answer, Moggy was quite sure there was nothing in it.

But Moggy’s turn was to come. When spirits ‘walk,’ I’ve heard they make the most of their time, and sometimes pay a little round of visits on the same evening.

This is certain; Moggy was by no means so great a fool as Betty in respect of hobgoblins, witches, banshees, pookas, and the world of spirits in general. She eat heartily, and slept soundly, and as yet had never seen the devil. Therefore such terrors as she that night experienced were new to her, and I can’t reasonably doubt the truth of her narrative. Awaking suddenly in the night, she saw a light in the room, and heard a quiet rustling going on in the corner, where the old white-painted press showed its front from the wall. So Moggy popped her head through her thin curtains at the side, and — blessed hour! — there she saw the shape of a man looking into the press, the doors being wide open, and the appearance of a key in the lock.

The shape was very like her master. The saints between us and harm! The glow was reflected back from the interior of the press, and showed the front part of the figure in profile with a sharp line of light. She said he had some sort of thick slippers over his boots, a dark coat, with the cape buttoned, and a hat flapping over his face; coat and hat and all, sprinkled over with snow.

As if he heard the rustle of the curtain, he turned toward the bed, and with an awful ejaculation she cried, ‘’Tis you, Sir!’

‘Don’t stir, and you’ll meet no harm,’ he said, and over he posts to the bedside, and he laid his cold hand on her wrist, and told her again to be quiet, and for her life to tell no one what she had seen, and with that she supposed she swooned away; for the next thing she remembered was listening in mortal fear, the room being all dark, and she heard a sound at the press again, and then steps crossing the floor, and she gave herself up for lost; but he did not come to the bedside any more, and the tread passed out at the door, and so, as she thought, went down stairs.

In the morning the press was locked and the door shut, and the hall-door and back-door locked, and the keys on the hall-table, where they had left them the night before.

You may be sure these two ladies were thankful to behold the gray light, and hear the cheerful sounds of returning day; and it would be no easy matter to describe which of the two looked most pallid, scared, and jaded that morning, as they drank a hysterical dish of tea together in the kitchen, close up to the window, and with the door shut, discoursing, and crying, and praying over their tea-pot in miserable companionship.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

HOW AN EVENING PASSES AT THE ELMS, AND DR. TOOLE MAKES A LITTLE EXCURSION; AND TWO CHOICE SPIRITS DISCOURSE, AND HEBE TRIPS IN WITH THE NECTAR.

Up at the Elms, little Lily that night was sitting in the snug, oldfashioned room, with the good old rector. She was no better; still in doctors' hands and weak, but always happy with him, and he more than ever gentle and tender with her; for though he never would give place to despondency, and was naturally of a trusting, cheery spirit, he could not but remember his young wife, lost so early; and once or twice there was a look — an outline — a light — something, in little Lily's fair, girlish face, that, with a strange momentary agony, brought back the remembrance of her mother's stricken beauty, and plaintive smile. But then his darling's gay talk and pleasant ways would reassure him, and she smiled away the momentary shadow.

And he would tell her all sorts of wonders, old-world gaieties, long before she was born; and how finely the great Mr. Handel played upon the harpsichord in the Music Hall, and how his talk was in German, Latin, French, English, Italian, and half-a-dozen languages besides, sentence about; and how he remembered his own dear mother's dress when she went to Lord Wharton's great ball at the castle — dear, oh! dear, how long ago that was! And then he would relate stories of banshees, and robberies, and ghosts, and hairbreadth escapes, and 'rapparees,' and adventures in the wars of King James, which he heard told in his nonage by the old folk, long vanished, who remembered those troubles.

'And now, darling,' said little Lily, nestling close to him, with a smile, 'you *must* tell me all about that strange, handsome Mr. Mervyn; who he is, and what his story.'

'Tut, tut! little rogue — — '

'Yes, indeed, you must, and you will; you've kept your little Lily waiting long enough for it, and she'll promise to tell nobody.'

'Handsome he is, and strange, no doubt — it was a strange fancy that funeral. Strange, indeed,' said the rector.

‘What funeral, darling?’

‘Why, yes, a funeral — the bringing his father’s body to be laid here in the vault, in my church; it is their family vault. ’Twas a folly; but what folly will not young men do?’

And the good parson poked the fire a little impatiently.

‘Mr. Mervyn — *not* Mervyn — that was his mother’s name; but — see, you must not mention it, Lily, if I tell you — *not* Mr. Mervyn, I say, but my Lord Dunoran, the only son of that disgraced and bloodstained nobleman, who, lying in gaol, under sentence of death for a foul and cowardly murder, swallowed poison, and so closed his guilty life with a tremendous crime, in its nature inexpiable. There, that’s all, and too much, darling.’

‘And was it very long ago?’

‘Why, ’twas before little Lily was born; and long before *that* I knew him — only just a little. He used the Tiled House for a hunting-lodge, and kept his dogs and horses there — a fine gentleman, but vicious, always, I fear, and a gamester; an overbearing man, with a dangerous cast of pride in his eye. You don’t remember Lady Dunoran? — pooh, pooh, what am I thinking of? No, to be sure! you could not. ’Tis from her, chiefly, poor lady, he has his good looks. Her eyes were large, and very peculiar, like *his* — his, you know, are very fine. She, poor lady, did not live long after the public ruin of the family.’

‘And has he been recognised here? The townspeople are so curious.’

‘Why, dear child, not one of them ever saw him before. He’s been lost sight of by all but a few, a very few friends. My Lord Castlemallard, who was his guardian, of course, knows; and to me he disclosed himself by letter; and we keep his secret; though it matters little who knows it, for it seems to me he’s as unhappy as aught could ever make him. The townspeople take him for his cousin, who squandered his fortune in Paris; and how is he the better of their mistake, and how were he the worse if they knew him for whom he is? ’Tis an unhappy family — a curse haunts it. Young in years, old in vice, the wretched nobleman who lies in the vault, by the coffin of that old aunt, scarcely better than himself, whose guineas supplied his early profligacy — alas! he ruined his illfated, beautiful cousin, and she died heartbroken, and her little child, both there — in that melancholy and contaminated house.’

So he rambled on, and from one tale to another, till little Lily's early bed-hour came.

I don't know whether it was Doctor Walsingham's visit in the morning, and the chance of hearing something about it, that prompted the unquiet Tom Toole to roll his cloak about him, and buffet his way through storm and snow, to Devereux's lodgings. It was only a stone's-throw; but even that, on such a night, was no trifle.

However, up he went to Devereux's drawingroom, and found its handsome proprietor altogether in the dumps. The little doctor threw off his sleety cloak and hat in the lobby, and stood before the officer fresh and puffing, and a little flustered and dazzled after his romp with the wind.

Devereux got up and received him with a slight bow and no smile, and a 'Pray take a chair, Doctor Toole.'

'Well, this *is* a bright fit of the dismals,' said little Toole, nothing overawed. 'May I sit near the fire?'

'Upon it,' said Devereux, sadly.

'Thank'ee,' said Toole, clapping his feet on the fender, with a grin, and making himself comfortable. 'May I poke it?'

'Eat it — do as you please — anything — everything; play that fiddle (pointing to the ruin of Puddock's guitar, which the lieutenant had left on the table), or undress and go to bed, or get up and dance a minuet, or take that pistol, with all my heart, and shoot me through the head.'

'Thank'ee, again. A fine choice of amusements, I vow,' cried the jolly doctor.

'There, don't mind me, nor all I say, Toole. I'm, I suppose, in the vapours; but, truly, I'm glad to see you, and I thank you, indeed I do, heartily, for your obliging visit; 'tis very neighbourly. But, hang it, I'm weary of the time — the world is a dull place. I'm tired of this planet, and should not mind cutting my throat and trying a new star. Suppose we make the journey together, Toole; there is a brace of pistols over the chimney, and a fair wind for some of them.'

'Rather too much of a gale for my taste, thanking you again,' answered Toole with a cosy chuckle; 'but, if *you're* bent on the trip, and can't wait, why, at least, let's have a glass together before parting.'

'With all my heart, what you will. Shall it be punch?'

‘Punch be it. Come, hang saving; get us up a ha’porth of whiskey,’ said little Toole, gaily.

‘Hallo, Mrs. Irons, Madam, will you do us the favour to make a bowl of punch as soon as may be?’ cried Devereux, over the banister.

‘Come, Toole,’ said Devereux, ‘I’m very dismal. Losses and crosses, and deuce knows what. Whistle or talk, what you please, I’ll listen; tell me anything; stories of horses, dogs, dice, snuff, women, cocks, parsons, wine — what you will. Come, how’s Sturk? He’s beaten poor Nutter, and won the race; though the stakes, after all, were scarce worth taking — and what’s life without a guinea? — he’s grown, I’m told, so confoundedly poor, “quis pauper? avarus.” A worthy man was Sturk, and, in some respects, resembled the prophet, *Shylock*; but you know nothing of him — why the plague don’t you read your Bible, Toole?’

‘Well,’ said Toole, candidly, ‘I don’t know the Old Testament as well as the New; but certainly, whoever he’s like, he’s held out wonderfully. ’Tis nine weeks since he met that accident, and there he’s still, above ground; but that’s all — just above ground, you see.’

‘And how’s Cluffe?’

‘Pooh, Cluffe indeed! Nothing ever wrong with him but occasional over-eating. Sir, you’d a laughed to-day had you seen him. I gave him a bolus, twice the size of a gooseberry. “What’s this?” said he. “A bolus,” says I. “The devil,” says he; “dia-bolus, then,” says I— “hey?” said I, “well?” ha! ha! and by Jove, Sir, it actually half stuck in his œsophagus, and I shoved it down like a bullet, with a probang; you’d a died a laughing, yet ’twasn’t a bit too big. Why, I tell you, upon my honour, Mrs. Rebecca Chattesworth’s black boy, only t’other day, swallowed a musket bullet twice the size, ha! ha! — he did — and I set him to rights in no time with a little powder.’

‘Gunpowder?’ said Devereux. ‘And what of O’Flaherty? I’m told he was going to shoot poor Miles O’More.’

‘Ha, ha! hey? Well, I don’t think either remembered in the morning what they quarrelled about,’ replied Toole; ‘so it went off in smoke, Sir.’

‘Well, and how is Miles?’

‘Why, ha, ha! he’s back again, with a bill, as usual, and a horse to sell — a good one — the black one, don’t you remember? He wants five and thirty guineas; ’tisn’t worth two pounds ten. “Do you know anyone who wants him? I would not mind taking a bill, with a couple of good names upon it,” says he. Upon my credit I believe he thought I'd buy him myself. "Well," says I, "I think I do know a fellow that would give you his value, and pay you cash besides," says I. 'Twas as good as a play to see his face. "Who is he?" says he, taking me close by the arm. "The knacker," says I. 'Twas a bite for Miles; hey? ha, ha, ha!'

'And is it true old Tresham's going to join our club at last?'

'He! hang him! he's like a brute beast, and never drinks but when he's dry, and then small beer. But, I forgot to tell you, by all that's lovely, they do say the charming Magnolia — a fine bouncing girl that — is all but betrothed to Lieutenant O'Flaherty.'

Devereux laughed, and thus encouraged, Toole went on, with a wink and a whisper.

'Why, the night of the ball, you know, he saw her home, and they say he kissed her — by Bacchus, on both sides of the face, — at the door there, under the porch; and you know, if he had not a right, she'd a-knocked him down.'

'Psha! the girl's a Christian, and when she's smacked on one cheek she turns the other. And what says the major to it?'

'Why, as it happened, he opened the door precisely as the thing occurred; and he wished Lieutenant O'Flaherty goodnight, and paid him a visit in the morning. And they say 'tis all satisfactory; and — by Jove! 'tis good punch.' And Mrs. Irons entered with a china bowl on a tray.

CHAPTER LXIX.

CONCERNING A SECOND HURRICANE THAT RAGED IN CAPTAIN DEVEREUX’S DRAWINGROOM, AND RELATING HOW MRS. IRONS WAS ATTACKED WITH A SORT OF CHOKING IN HER BED.

And the china bowl, with its silver ladle, and fine fragrance of lemon and old malt whiskey, and a social pair of glasses, were placed on the table by fair Mistress Irons; and Devereux filled his glass, and Toole did likewise; and the little doctor rattled on; and Devereux threw in his word, and finally sang a song. ’Twas a ballad, with little in the words; but the air was sweet and plaintive, and so was the singer’s voice: —

‘A star so High,
In my sad sky,
I’ve early loved and late:
A clear lone star,
Serene and far,
Doth rule my wayward fate.

‘Tho’ dark and chill
The night be still,
A light comes up for me:
In eastern skies
My star doth rise,
And fortune dawns for me.

‘And proud and bold,
My way I hold;
For o’er me high I see,
In night’s deep blue,

My star shine true,
And fortune beams on me.

‘Now onward still,
Thro’ dark and chill,
My lonely way must be;
In vain regret,
My star will set,
And fortune’s dark for me.

‘And whether glad,
Or proud, or sad,
Or howsoe’er I be;
In dawn or noon,
Or setting soon,
My star, I’ll follow thee.’

And so there was a pause and a silence. In the silvery notes of the singer there was the ring of a prophecy; and Toole half read its meaning. And himself loving a song, and being soft over his music, he remained fixed for a few seconds, and then sighed, smiling, and dried his light blue eyes covertly; and he praised the song and singer briskly; and sighed again, with his fingers on the stem of his glass. And by this time Devereux had drawn the window-curtain, and was looking across the river, through the darkness, towards the Elms, perhaps for that solitary distant light — his star — now blurred and lost in the storm. Whatever his contemplations, it was plain, when he turned about, that the dark spirit was upon him again.

‘Curse that punch,’ said he, in language still more emphatic. ‘You’re like Mephistopheles in the play — you come in upon my quiet to draw me to my ruin. ’Twas the devil sent you here, to kill my soul, I believe; but you sha’n’t. *Drink*, will you? — ay — I’ll give you a draught — a draught of *air* will cool you. Drink to your heart’s content.’

And to Toole’s consternation up went the window, and a hideous rush of eddying storm and snow whirled into the room. Out went the candles — the curtains flapped high in air, and lashed the ceiling — the door banged with a hideous crash — papers, and who knows what beside, went spinning, hurry-scurry round the room; and Toole's wig was very near taking wing from his head.

'Hey — hey — hey! holloo!' cried the doctor, out of breath, and with his artificial ringlets frisking about his chops and eyes.

'Out, sorcerer — temptation, begone — avaunt, Mephistopheles — cauldron, away!' thundered the captain; and sure enough, from the open window, through the icy sleet, whirled the jovial bowl; and the jingle of the china was heard faint through the tempest.

Toole was swearing, in the whirlwind and darkness, like a trooper.

'Thank Heaven! 'tis gone,' continued Devereux; 'I'm safe — no thanks to you, though; and, hark ye, doctor, I'm best alone; leave me — leave me, pray — and pray forgive me.'

The doctor groped and stumbled out of the room, growling all the while, and the door slammed behind him with a crash like a cannon.

'The fellow's brain's disordered — *delirium tremens*, and jump out of that cursed window, I wouldn't wonder,' muttered the doctor, adjusting his wig on the lobby, and then calling rather mildly over the banisters, he brought up Mrs. Irons with a candle, and found his cloak, hat, and cane; and with a mysterious look beckoned that matron to follow him, and in the hall, winking up towards the ceiling at the spot where Devereux might at the moment be presumed to be standing —

'I say, has he been feverish or queer, or — eh? — any way humorsome or out of the way?' And then— 'See now, you may as well have an eye after him, and if you remark anything strange, don't fail to let me know — d'ye see? and for the present you had better get him to shut his window and light his candles.'

And so the doctor, wrapped in his mantle, plunged into the hurricane and darkness; and was sensible, with a throb of angry regret, of a whiff of punch rising from the footpath, as he turned the corner of the steps.

An hour later, Devereux being alone, called to Mrs. Irons, and receiving her with a courteous gravity, he said —

'Madam, will you be so good as to lend me your Bible?'

Devereux was prosecuting his reformation, which, as the reader sees, had set in rather tempestuously, but was now settling in serenity and calm.

Mrs. Irons only said —

'My —— ?' and then paused, doubting her ears.

'Your *Bible*, if you please, Madam.'

'Oh? — oh! my Bible? I — to be sure, captain, jewel,' and she peeped at his face, and loitered for a while at the door, for she had unpleasant misgivings about him, and did not know what to make of his request, so utterly without parallel. She'd have fiddled at the door some time longer, speculating about his sanity, but that Devereux turned full upon her with a proud stare, and rising, he made her a slight bow, and said: 'I *thank* you, Madam,' with a sharp courtesy, that said: 'avaunt, and quit my sight!' so sternly, though politely, that she vanished on the instant; and down stairs she marvelled with Juggy Byrne, 'what the puck the captain could want of a Bible! Upon my conscience it sounds well. It's what he's not right in his head, I'm afeared. A Bible!' — and an aërial voice seemed to say, 'a pistol,' and another, 'a coffin,'— 'An' I'm sure I wish that quare little Lieutenant Puddock id come up and keep him company. I dunno' what's come over him.'

And they tumbled about the rattletraps under the cupboard, and rummaged the drawers in search of the sacred volume. For though Juggy said there was no such thing, and never had been in her time, Mrs. Irons put her down with asperity. It was not to be found, however, and the matron thought she remembered that old Mrs. Legge's cook had borrowed it some time ago for a charm. So she explained the accident to Captain Devereux, who said —

'I thank you, Madam; 'tis no matter. I wish you a goodnight, Madam;' and the door closed.

'No Bible!' said Devereux, 'the old witch!'

Mrs. Irons, as you remember, never spared her rhetoric, which was fierce, shrill, and fluent, when the exercise of that gift was called for. The parish clerk bore it with a cynical and taciturn patience, not, perhaps, so common as it should be in his sex; and this night, when she awoke, and her eyes rested on the form of her husband at her bedside, with a candle lighted, and buckling on his shoes, with his foot on the chair, she sat up straight in her bed, wide awake in an instant, for it was wonderful how the sight of that meek man roused the wife in her bosom, especially after an absence, and she had not seen him since four o'clock that evening; so you may suppose his reception was warm, and her expressions every way worthy of her feelings.

Meek Irons finished buckling that shoe, and then lifted the other to the edge of the chair, and proceeded to do the like for it, serenely, after his wont, and seeming to hear nothing. So Mrs. Irons proceeded, as was her custom when that patient person refused to be roused — she grasped his collar near his cheek, meaning to shake him into attention.

But instantly, as the operation commenced, the clerk griped her with his long, horny fingers by the throat, with a snap so sure and energetic that not a cry, not a gasp even, or a wheeze, could escape through ‘the trachea,’ as medical men have it; and her face and forehead purpled up, and her eyes goggled and glared in her head; and her husband looked so insanely wicked, that, as the pale picture darkened before her, and she heard curse after curse, and one foul name after another hiss off his tongue, like water off a hot iron, in her singing ears, she gave herself up for lost. He closed this exercise by chucking her head viciously against the board of the bed half-a-dozen times, and leaving her thereafter a good deal more confused even than on the eventful evening when he had first declared his love.

So soon as she came a little to herself, and saw him coolly buttoning his leggings at the bedside, his buckles being adjusted by this time, her fear subsided, or rather her just indignation rose above it, and drowned it; and she was on the point of breaking out afresh, only in a way commensurate with her wrongs, and proportionately more formidable; when, on the first symptom of attack, he clutched her, if possible, tighter, the gaping, goggling, purpling, the darkening of vision and humming in ears, all recommenced; likewise the knocking of her head with improved goodwill, and, spite of her struggles and scratching, the bewildered lady, unused to even a show of insurrection, underwent the same horrid series of sensations at the hands of her rebellious lord.

When they had both had enough of it, Mr. Irons went on with his buttoning, and his lady gradually came to. This time, however, she was effectually frightened — too much so even to resort to hysterics, for she was not quite sure that when he had buttoned the last button of his left legging he might not resume operations, and terminate their conjugal relations.

Therefore, being all of a tremble, with her hands clasped, and too much terrified to cry, she besought Irons, whose bodily strength surprised her, for her life, and his pale, malign glance, askew over his shoulder, held her with a sort of a spell that was quite new to her — in fact, she had never respected Irons so before.

When he had adjusted his leggings, he stood lithe and erect at the bedside, and with his fist at her face, delivered a short charge, the point of which was, that unless she lay like a mouse till morning he'd have her life, though he hanged for it. And with that he drew the curtain, and was hidden from her sight for some time.

CHAPTER LXX.

IN WHICH AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR IS SEEN. IN THE CEDAR-PARLOUR OF THE TILED HOUSE, AND THE STORY OF MR. BEAUCLERC AND THE 'FLOWER DE LUCE' BEGINS TO BE UNFOLDED.

It was an awful night, indeed, on which all this occurred, and that apparition had shown itself up at the Mills. And truly it would seem the devil had business on his hands, for in the cedar-parlour of the Tiled House another unexpected manifestation occurred just about the same hour.

What gentleman is there of broken fortunes, undefined rights, and in search of evidence, without a legal adviser of some sort? Mr. Mervyn, of course, had his, and paid for the luxury according to custom. And every now and then off went a despatch from the Tiled House to the oracular London attorney; sometimes it was a budget of evidence, and sometimes only a string of queries. Tonight, to the awful diapason of the storm — he was penning one of these — the fruit of a tedious study of many papers and letters, tied up in bundles by his desk, all of them redolent of ominous or fearful associations.

I don't know why it is the hours fly with such a strange celerity in the monotony and solitude of such nightwork. But Mervyn was surprised, as many a one similarly occupied has been, on looking at his watch, to find that it was now long past midnight; so he threw himself back in his chair with a sigh, and thought how vainly his life was speeding away, and heard, with a sort of wonder, how mad was the roar of the storm without, while he had quietly penned his long rescript undisturbed.

The wild bursts of supernatural fury and agony which swell and mingle in a hurricane, I dare say, led his imagination a strange aërial journey through the dark. Now it was the baying of hell hounds, and the long shriek of the spirit that flies before them. Anon it was the bellowing thunder of an ocean, and the myriad voices of shipwreck. And the old house quivering from base to cornice under the strain; and then there would come a pause, like a gasp, and the tempest once more rolled up, and the same mad hubbub shook and clamoured at the windows.

So he let his Pegasus spread his pinions on the blast, and mingled with the wild rout that peopled the darkness; or, in plainer words, he abandoned his fancy to the haunted associations of the hour, the storm, and the house, with a not unpleasant horror. In one of these momentary lulls of the wind, there came a sharp, distinct knocking on the window-pane. He remembered with a thrill the old story of the supernatural hand which had troubled that house, and began its pranks at this very window.

Ay, ay, ’twas the impatient rapping of a knuckle on the glass quite indisputably.

It is all very well weaving the sort of dream or poem with which Mervyn was half amusing and half awing himself, but the sensation is quite different when a questionable sound or sight comes uninvited to take the matter out of the province of our fancy and the control of our will. Mervyn found himself on his legs, and listening in a less comfortable sort of horror, with his gaze fixed in the direction of that small sharp knocking. But the storm was up again, and drowning every other sound in its fury.

If Mr. Mervyn had been sufficiently frightened, he would have forthwith made good his retreat to his bedroom, or, if he had not been frightened at all, he would have kept his seat, and allowed his fancies to return to their old channel. But, in fact, he took a light in his hand, and opened a bit of the window-shutter. The snow, however, was spread over the panes in a white, sliding curtain, that returned the light of his candle, and hid all without. ’Twas idle trying to peer through it, but as he did, the palm of a hand was suddenly applied to the glass on the outside, and began briskly to rub off the snow, as if to open a peephole for distinct inspection.

It was to be more this time than the apparition of a hand — a human face was immediately presented close to the glass — not that of Nutter either — no — it was the face of Irons — pale, with glittering eyes and blue chin, and wet hair quivering against the glass in the storm.

He nodded wildly to Mervyn, brushing away the snow, beckoning towards the back-door, as he supported himself on one knee on the window-stone, and, with his lips close to the glass, cried, ‘let me in;’ but, in the uproar of the storm, it was by his gestures, imperfectly as they were seen, rather than by his words, that Mervyn comprehended his meaning.

Down went Mr. Mervyn, without a moment's hesitation, leaving the candle standing on the passage table, drew the bolts, opened the door, and in rushed Irons, in a furious gust, his cloak whirling about his head amidst a bitter eddying of snow, and a distant clapping of doors throughout the house.

The door secured again, Mr. Irons stood in his beflaked and dripping mantle, storm-tossed, dishevelled, and alone once again in the shelter of the Tiled House, to explain the motive of his visit.

'Irons! I could hardly believe it,' and Mervyn made a pause, and then, filled with the one idea, he vehemently demanded, 'In Heaven's name, have you come to tell me all you know?'

'Well, maybe — no,' answered the clerk: 'I don't know; I'll tell you something. I'm going, you see, and I came here on my way; and I'll tell you more than last time, but not all — not all yet.'

'Going? and where? — what are your plans?'

'Plans? — I've *no* plans. Where am I going! — nowhere — anywhere. I'm going away, that's all.'

'You're leaving this place — eh, to return no more?'

'I'm leaving it tonight; I've the doctor's leave, Parson Walsingham. What d'ye look at, Sir? d'ye think it's what I murdered any one? not but if I stayed here I might though,' and Mr. Irons laughed a frightened, half maniacal sort of laugh. 'I'm going for a bit, a fortnight, or so, maybe, till things get quiet — (lead us not into temptation!) — to Mullingar, or anywhere; only I won't stay longer at hell's door, within stretch of that devil's long arm.'

'Come to the parlour,' said Mervyn, perceiving that Irons was chilled and shivering.

There, with the door and window-shutters closed, a pair of candles on the table, and a couple of faggots of that pleasant bogwood, which blazes so readily and fragrantly on the hearth, Irons shook off his cloak, and stood, lank and grim, and, as it seemed to Mervyn, horribly scared, but well in view, and trying, sullenly, to collect his thoughts.

'I'm going away, I tell you, for a little while; but I'm come to see you, Sir, to think what I may tell you now, and above all, to warn you again' saying to any living soul one word of what passed between us when I last was here; you've kept your word honourable as yet; if you break it I'll not return,' and he clenched it with an oath, 'I *daren't* return.'

'I'll tell you the way it happened,' he resumed. ''Tis a good while now, ay twenty-two years; your noble father's dead these twenty-two years and upwards. 'Twas a bad murdher, Sir: they wor both bad murdhers. I look on it, *he's* a murdhered man.'

'He — who?' demanded the young man.

'Your father, Sir.'

'My father murdered?' said Mervyn.

'Well, I see no great differ; I see none at all. I'll tell you how it was.'

And he looked over his shoulder again, and into the corners of the room, and then Mr. Irons began —

'I believe, Sir, there's no devil like a vicious young man, with a hard heart and cool courage, in want of money. Of all the men I ever met with, or heard tell of, Charles Archer was the most dreadful. I used sometimes to think he *was* the devil. It wasn't long-headed or cunning he was, but he knew your thoughts before you half knew them yourself. He knew what *every* one was thinking of. He made up his mind at a glance, and struck like a thunderbolt. As for pity or fear, he did not know what they were, and his cunning was so deep and sure there was no catching him.

'He came down to the Pied Horse Inn, where I was a drawer, at Newmarket, twice.'

Mervyn looked in his face, quickly, with a ghastly kind of a start.

'Ay, Sir, av coorse you know it; you read the trial; av coorse you did. Well, he came down there twice. 'Twas a good old house, Sir, lots of room, and a well-accustomed inn. An' I think there was but two bad men among all the servants of the house — myself and Glascock. He was an under hostler, and a bad boy. He chose us two out of the whole lot, with a look. He never made a mistake. He knew us some way like a crow knows carrion, and he used us cleverly.'

And Irons cursed him.

'He's a hard master, like his own,' said Irons; 'his wages come to nothing, and his services is hell itself. He could sing, and talk, and drink, and keep things stirring, and the gentlemen liked him; and he was, 'twas said, a wonderful fine player at whist, and piquet, and ombre, and all sorts of card-playing. So you see he could afford to play fair. The first time he came down, he fought three duels about a tipsy quarrel over a pool of Pope Joan. There was no slur on his credit, though; 'twas just a bit of temper. He wounded all three; two but trifling; but one of them — Chapley, or Capley, I think, was his name — through the lungs, and he died, I heard, abroad. I saw him killed— 'twasn't the last; it was done while you'd count ten. Mr. Archer came up with a sort of a sneer, pale and angry, and 'twas a clash of the small swords — one, two, three, and a spring like a tiger — and all over. He was frightful strong; ten times as strong as he looked — all a deception.'

'Well, Sir, there was a Jew came down, offering wagers, not, you see, to gentlemen, Sir, but to poor fellows. And Mr. Archer put me and Glascock up to bite him, as he said; and he told us to back Strawberry, and we did. We had that opinion of his judgment and his knowledge — you see, we thought he had ways of finding out these things — that we had no doubt of winning, so we made a wager of twelve pounds. But we had no money — not a crown between us — and we must stake gold with the host of the "Plume of Feathers;" and the long and the short of it was, I never could tell how he put it into our heads, to pledge some of the silver spoons and a gold chain of the master's, intending to take them out when we won the money. Well, Strawberry lost, and we were left in the lurch. So we told Mr. Archer how it was; for he was an offhanded man when he had anything in view, and he told us, as we thought, he'd help us if we lost. "Help you," says he, with a sort of laugh he had, "I want help myself; I haven't a guinea, and I'm afraid you'll be hanged: and then," says he, "stay a bit, and I'll find a way."

'I think he *was* in a bad plight just then himself; he was awful expensive with horses and — and — other things; and I think there was a writ, or maybe more, out against him, from other places, and he wanted a lump of money in his hand to levant with, and go abroad. Well, listen, and don't be starting, or making a row, Sir,' and a sulky, lowering, hang-dog shadow, came over Irons. 'Your father, Lord Dunoran, played cards; his partner was Mr. Charles Archer. Whist it was — with a gentleman of the name of Beauclerc, and I forget the other — he wore a chocolate suit, and a black wig. 'Twas I carried them their wine. Well, Mr. Beauclerc won, and Mr. Archer stopped playing, for he had lost enough; and the gentleman in the chocolate — what was his name? — Edwards, I think — ay, 'twas — *yes*, Edwards, it was — was tired, and turned himself about to the fire, and took a pipe of tobacco; and my lord, your father, played piquet with Mr.

Beauclerc; and he lost a power of money to him, Sir; and, by bad luck, he paid a great part of it, as they played, in rouleaus of gold, for he had won at the dice down stairs. Well, Mr. Beauclerc was a little hearty, and he grew tired, and was for going to bed. But my lord was angry, and being disguised with liquor too, he would not let him go till they played more; and play they did, and the luck still went the same way; and my lord grew fierce over it, and cursed and drank, and that did not mend his luck you may be sure; and at last Mr. Beauclerc swears he'd play no more; and both kept talking together, and neither heard well what t'other said; but there was some talk about settling the dispute in the morning.

'Well, Sir, in goes Mr. Beauclerc, staggering — his room was the Flower de luce — and down he throws himself, clothes an' all, on his bed; and then my lord turned on Mr. *Edwards*, I'm sure that was his name, and persuades him to play at piquet; and to it they went.

'As I was coming in with more wine, I meets Mr. Archer coming out, "Give them their wine," says he, in a whisper, "and follow me." An' so I did. "You know something of Glascock, and have a fast hold of him," says he, "and tell him quietly to bring up Mr. Beauclerc's boots, and come back along with him; and bring me a small glass of rum." And back he goes into the room where the two were stuck in their cards, and talking and thinking of nothing else.'

CHAPTER LXXI.

IN WHICH MR. IRONS’S NARRATIVE REACHES MERTON MOOR.

Well, I did as he bid me, and set the glass of rum before him, and in place of drinking it, he follows me out. “I told you,” says he, “I’d find a way, and I’m going to give you fifty guineas apiece. Stand you at the stairhead,” says he to Glascock, “and listen; and if you hear anyone coming, step into Mr. Beauclerc’s room with his boots, do you see, for I’m going to rob him.” I thought I’d a fainted, and Glascock, that was a tougher lad than me, was staggered; but Mr. Archer had a way of taking you by surprise, and getting you into a business before you knew where you were going. “I see, Sir,” says Glascock. “And come you in, and I’ll do it,” says Mr. Archer, and in we went, and Mr. Beauclerc was fast asleep.

‘I don’t like talking about it,’ said Irons, suddenly and savagely, and he got up and walked, with a sort of a shrug of the shoulders, to and fro half-a-dozen times, like a man who has a chill, and tries to make his blood circulate.

Mervyn commanded himself, for he knew the man would return to his tale, and probably all the sooner for being left to work off his transient horror how he might.

‘Well, he did rob him, and I often thought how cunningly, for he took no more than about half his gold, well knowing, I’m now sure, neither he nor my lord, your father, kept any count; and there was a bundle of notes in his pocketbook, which Mr. Archer was thinning swiftly, when all of a sudden, like a ghost rising, up sits Mr. Beauclerc, an unlucky rising it was for him, and taking him by the collar — he was a powerful strong man— “You’ve robbed me, Archer,” says he. I was behind Mr. Archer, and I could not see what happened, but Mr. Beauclerc made a sort of a start and a kick out with his foot, and seemed taken with a tremble all over, for while you count three, and he fell back in the bed with his eyes open, and Mr. Archer drew a thin long dagger out of the dead man’s breast, for dead he was.

“What are you afraid of, you —— fool?” says he, shaking me up; “I know what I’m about; I’ll carry you through; your life’s in my hands, mine in yours, only be cool.” He was that himself, if ever man was, and quick as light he closed the dead man’s eyes, saying, “in for a penny in for a pound,” and he threw a bit of the coverlet over his breast, and his mouth and chin, just as a man might draw it rolling round in the bed, for I suppose he thought it best to hide the mouth that was open, and told its tale too plainly, and out he was on the lobby the next instant. “Don’t tell Glascock what’s happened, ‘twill make him look queer; let him put in the boots, and if he’s asked, say Mr. Beauclerc made a turn in the bed, and a grumbling, like a man turning over in his sleep, while he was doing so, d’ye see, and divide this, ‘twill settle your little trouble, you know.” ’Twas a little paper roll of a hundred guineas. An’ that’s the way Mr. Beauclerc came by his death.’

This to Mervyn was the sort of shock that might have killed an older man. The dreadful calamity that had stigmatised and beggared his family — the horror and shame of which he well remembered, when first revealed to him, had held him trembling and tongue-tied for more than an hour before tears came to his relief, and which had ever since blackened his sky, with a monotony of storm and thunder, was in a moment shown to be a chimera. No wonder that he was for a while silent, stunned, and bewildered. At last he was able — pale and cold — to lift up his clasped hands, his eyes, and his heart, in awful gratitude, to the Author of Mercy, the Revealer of Secrets, the Lord of Life and Truth.

‘And where is this Charles Archer — is he dead or living?’ urged Mervyn with an awful adjuration.

‘Ay, where to catch him, and how — Dead? Well, he’s dead to some, you see, and living to others; and living or dead, I’ll put you on his track some fine day, if you’re true to me; but not yet awhile, and if you turn a stag, or name my name to living soul (and here Mr. Irons swore an oath such as I hope parish clerks don’t often swear, and which would have opened good Dr. Walsingham’s eyes with wonder and horror), you’ll never hear word more from me, and I think, Sir, you’ll lose your life beside.’

‘Your threats of violence are lost on me, I can take care of myself,’ said Mervyn, haughtily.

The clerk smiled a strange sort of smile.

‘But I’ve already pledged my sacred honour not to mention your name or betray your secret.’

‘Well, just have patience, and maybe I’ll not keep you long; but ’tis no trifle for a man to make up his mind to what’s before *me*, maybe.’

After a pause, Irons resumed —

‘Well, Sir, you see, Mr. Archer sat down by the fire and smoked a pipe, and was as easy and pleased, you’d say, to look on him, as a man need be; and he called for cards when my lord wanted them, and whatever else he needed, making himself busy and bustling — as I afterwards thought to make them both remember well that he was in the room with them.

‘In and out of the chamber I went with one thing or another, and every time I passed Mr. Beauclerc’s room I grew more and more frightened; and, truth to say, I was a scared man, and I don’t know how I got through my business; every minute expecting to hear the outcry from the dead man’s room.

‘Mr. Edwards had an appointment, he said — nothing good, you may be sure — they were a rakehelly set — saving your presence. Neither he nor my lord had lost, I believe, anything to signify to one another; and my lord, your father, made no difficulty about his going away, but began to call again for Mr. Beauclerc, and to curse him — as a half-drunk man will, making a power of noise; and, “Where’s he gone to?” and, “Where’s his room?” and, “ —— him, he shall play, or fight me.” You see, Sir, he had lost right and left that time, and was an angry man, and the liquor made him half mad; and I don’t think he knew rightly what he was doing. And out on the lobby with him swearing he should give him his revenge, or he’d know the reason why.

“Where’s Mr. Beauclerc’s room?” he shouts to me, as if he’d strike me; I did not care a rush about that, but I was afraid to say — it stuck in my throat like — and I stared at Mr. Archer; and he calls to the chambermaid, that was going up stairs, “Where does Mr. Beauclerc lie?” and she, knowing him, says at once, “The Flower de luce,” and pointed to the room; and with that, my lord staggered up to the door, with his drawn sword in hand, bawling on him to come out, and fumbling with the pin; he could not open it; so he knocked it open with a kick, and in with him, and Mr. Archer at his elbow, soothing him like; and I, I don’t know how — behind him.

‘By this time he had worked himself into a mad passion, and says he, “Curse your foxing — if you won’t play like a man, you may die like a dog.” I think ’twas them words ruined him; the chambermaid heard them outside; and he struck Mr. Beauclerc half-a-dozen blows with the side of the small-sword across the body, here and there, quite unsteady; and “Hold, my lord, you’ve hurt him,” cries Mr. Archer, as loud as he could cry. “Put up your sword for Heaven’s sake,” and he makes a sort of scuffle with my lord, in a friendly way, to disarm him, and push him away, and “Throw down the coverlet and see where he’s wounded,” says he to me; and so I did, and there was a great pool of blood — *we* knew all about that — and my lord looked shocked when he seen it. “I did not mean that,” says my lord; “but,” says he, with a sulky curse, “he’s well served.”

‘I don’t know whether Glascock was in the room or not all this while, maybe he was; at any rate, he swore to it afterwards; but you’ve read the trial, I warrant. The room was soon full of people. The dead man was still warm— ’twas well for us. So they raised him up; and one was for trying one thing, and another; and my lord was sitting stupid-like all this time by the wall; and up he gets, and says he, “I hope he’s not dead, but if he be, upon my honour, ’tis an accident — no more. I call Heaven to witness, and the persons who are now present; and pledge my sacred honour, as a peer, I meant no more than a blow or two.”

“You hear, gentlemen, what my lord says, he meant only a blow or two, and not to take his life,” cries Mr. Archer.

‘So my lord repeats it again, cursing and swearing, like St. Peter in the judgment hall.

‘So, as nobody was meddling with my lord, out he goes, intending, I suppose, to get away altogether, if he could. But Mr. Underwood missed him, and he says, “Gentlemen, where’s my Lord Dunoran? we must not suffer him to depart;” and he followed him — two or three others going along with him, and they met him with his hat and cloak on, in the lobby, and he says, stepping between him and the stairs, —

‘“My lord, you must not go, until we see how this matter ends.”

‘“Twill end well enough,” says he, and without more ado he walks back again.

‘So you know the rest — *how* that business ended, at least for him.’

‘And you are that very Zekiel Irons who was a witness on the trial?’ said Mervyn, with a peculiar look of fear and loathing fixed on him.

‘The same,’ said Irons, doggedly; and after a pause, ‘but I swore to very little; and all I said was true — though it wasn’t the whole truth. Look to the trial, Sir, and you’ll see ’twas Mr. Archer and Glascock that swore home against my lord — not I. And I don’t think myself, Glascock was in the room at all when it happened — so I don’t.’

‘And where *is* that wretch, Glascock, and that double murderer Archer; where is *he?*’

‘Well, Glascock’s making clay.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Under ground, this many a day. Listen: Mr. Archer went up to London, and he was staying at the Hummums, and Glascock agreed with me to leave the “Pied Horse.” We were both uneasy, and planned to go up to London together; and what does he do — nothing less would serve him — but he writes a sort of letter, asking money of Mr. Archer under a threat. This, you know, was after the trial. Well, there came no answer; but after a while — all on a sudden — Mr. Archer arrives himself at the “Pied Horse;” I did not know then that Glascock had writ to him — for he meant to keep whatever he might get to himself. “So,” says Mr. Archer to me, meeting me by the pump in the stableyard, “that was a clever letter you and Glascock wrote to me in town.”

‘So I told him ’twas the first I heard of it.

‘“Why,” says he, “do you mean to tell me you don’t want money?”

‘I don’t know why it was, but a sort of a turn came over me and I said, “*No*.”

‘“Well,” says he, “I’m going to sell a horse, and I expect to be paid tomorrow; you and Glascock must wait for me outside” — I think the name of the village was Merton — I’m not sure, for I never seen it before or since — “and I’ll give you some money then.”

‘“I’ll have none,” says I.

‘“What, no money?” says he. “Come, come.”

‘“I tell you, Sir, I’ll have none,” says I. Something, you see, came over me, and I was more determined than ever. I was always afeard of him, but I feared him like Beelzebub now. “I’ve had enough of your money, Sir; and I tell you what, Mr. Archer, I think ’tis best to end our dealings, and I’d rather, if you please, Sir, never trouble you more.”

‘“You’re a queer dog,” says he, with his eye fast on me, and musing for a while — as if he could see into my brain, and was diverted by what he found there;— “you’re a queer dog, Irons. Glascock knows the world better, you see; and as you and he are going up to London together, and I must give the poor devil a lift, I’ll meet you at the other side of Merton, beyond the quarry — you know the moor — on Friday evening, after dark — say seven o’clock — we must be quiet, you know, or people will be talking.”

‘Well, Sir, we met him, sure enough, at the time and place.’

CHAPTER LXXII.

IN WHICH THE APPARITION OF MR. IRONS IS SWALLOWED IN DARKNESS.

’Twas a darkish night — very little moon — and he made us turn off the road, into the moor — black and ugly it looked, stretching away four or five miles, all heath and black peat, stretches of little broken hillocks, and a pool or tarn every now and again. An’ he kept looking back towards the road, and not a word out of him. Well, I did not like meeting him at all if I could help it, but I was in dread of him; and I thought he might suppose I was plotting mischief if I refused. So I made up my mind to do as he bid me for the nonce, and then have done with him.

‘By this time we were in or about a mile from the road, and we got over a low rising ground, and back nor forward, nor no way could we see anything but the moor; and I stopped all of a sudden, and says I, “We’re far enough, I’ll go no further.”

‘“Good,” says Mr. Archer; “but let’s go yonder, where the stones are — we can sit as we talk — for I’m tired.”

‘There was half-a-dozen white stones there by the side of one of these black tarns. We none of us talked much on that walk over the moor. We had enough to think of, each of us, I dare say.

‘“This will do,” says Mr. Archer, stopping beside the pool; but he did not sit, though the stones were there. “Now, Glascock, here I am, with the price of my horse in my pocket; what do you want?”

‘Well, when it came to the point so sudden, Glascock looked a bit shy, and hung his head, and rowled his shoulders, and shuffled his feet a bit, thinking what he’d say.

‘“Hang it, man; what are you afraid of? we’re friends,” says Mr. Archer, cheerfully.

‘“Surely, Sir,” says Glascock, “I did not mean aught else.”

‘And with that Mr. Archer laughed, and says he —

‘“Come — you beat about the bush — let’s hear your mind.”

‘“Well, Sir, ’tis in my letter,” says he.

'"Ah, Glascock," says he, "that's a threatening letter. I did not think you'd serve me so. Well, needs must when the devil drives." And he laughed again, and shrugs up his shoulders, and says he, putting his hand in his pocket, "there's sixty pounds left; 'tis all I have; come, be modest — what do you say?"

'"You got a lot of gold off Mr. Beauclerc," says Glascock.

'"Not a doit more than I wanted," says he, laughing again. "And who, pray, had a better right — did not I murder him?"

'His talk and his laughing frightened me more and more.

'"Well, I stood to you then, Sir; didn't I?" says Glascock.

'"Heart of oak, Sir — true as steel; and now, how much do you want? Remember, 'tis all I have — and I out at elbows; and here's my friend Irons, too — eh?"

'"I want nothing, and I'll take nothing," says I; "not a shilling — not a halfpenny." You see there was something told me no good would come of it, and I was frightened besides.

'"What! you won't go in for a share, Irons?" says he.

'"No; 'tis your money, Sir — I've no right to a sixpence — and I won't have it," says I; "and there's an end."

'"Well, Glascock, what say you? — you hear Irons."

'"Let Irons speak for himself — he's nothing to me. You should have considered me when all that money was took from Mr. Beauclerc — one done as much as another — and if 'twas no more than holding my tongue, still 'tis worth a deal to you."

'"I don't deny — a deal — everything. Come — there's sixty pounds here — but, mark, 'tis all I have — how much?"

'"I'll have thirty, and I'll take no less," says Glascock, surly enough.

'"Thirty! 'tis a good deal — but all considered — perhaps not too much," says Mr. Archer.

'And with that he took his right hand from his breeches' pocket, and shot him through the heart with a pistol.

'Neither word, nor stir, nor groan, did Glascock make; but with a sort of a jerk, flat on his back he fell, with his head on the verge of the tarn.

'I believe I said something — I don't know — I was almost as dead as himself — for I did not think anything *that* bad was near at all.

'"Come, Irons — what ails you — steady, Sir — lend me a hand, and you'll take no harm."

'He had the pistol he discharged in his left hand by this time, and a loaded one in his right.

'"'Tis his own act, Irons. *I* did not want it; but I'll protect myself, and won't hold my life on ransom, at the hands of a Jew or a Judas," said he, smiling through his black hair, as white as a tombstone.

'"I am neither," says I.

'"I know it," says he; "and so you're *here*, and he *there*."

'"Well, 'tis over now, I suppose," says I. I was thinking of making off.

'"Don't go yet," says he, like a man asking a favour; but he lifted the pistol an inch or two, with a jerk of his wrist, "you must help me to hide away this dead fool."

'Well, Sir, we had three or four hours cold work of it — we tied stones in his clothes, and sunk him close under the bank, and walled him over with more. 'Twas no light job, I can tell you the water was near four feet deep, though 'twas a dry season; and then we slipped out a handsome slice of the bank over him; and, making him all smooth, we left him to take his chance; and I never heard any talk of a body being found there; and I suppose he's now where we left him.'

And Irons groaned.

'So we returned silent and tired enough, and I in mortal fear of him. But he designed me no hurt. There's luckily some risk in making away with a fellow, and 'tisn't done by any but a fool without good cause; and when we got on the road again, I took the London road, and he turned his back on me, and I don't know where he went; but no doubt his plans were well shaped.

''Twas an ugly walk for me, all alone, over that heath, I can tell you. 'Twas mortal dark; and there was places on the road where my footsteps echoed back, and I could not tell but 'twas Mr. Archer following me, having changed his mind, maybe, or something as bad, if that could be; and many's the time I turned short round, expecting to see him, or may be that other lad, behind, for you see I got a start like when he shot Glascock; and there was a trembling over me for a long time after.

'Now, you see, Glascock's dead, and can't tell tales no more nor Mr. Beauclerc, and Dr. Sturk's a dead man too, you may say; and I think he knew — that is — brought to mind somewhat. He lay, you see, on the night Mr. Beauclerc lost his life, in a sort of a dressing-room, off his chamber, and the door was open; but he was bad with a fall he had, and his arm in splints, and he under laudanum — in a trance like — and on the inquest he could tell nothing; but I think he remembered something more or less concerning it after.' And Mr. Irons took a turn, and came back very close to Mervyn, and said very gently, 'and I think Charles Archer murdered him.'

'Then Charles Archer *has* been in Dublin, perhaps in Chapelizod, within the last few months,' exclaimed Mervyn, in a sort of agony.

'I didn't say so,' answered Irons. 'I've told you the truth— 'tis the truth — but there's no catching a ghost — and who'd believe my story? and them things is so long ago. And suppose I make a clean breast of it, and that I could bring you face to face with him, the world would not believe my tale, and I'd then be a lost man, one way or another — no one, mayhap, could tell how — I'd lose my life before a year, and all the world could not save me.'

'Perhaps — perhaps Charles Nutter's the man; and Mr. Dangerfield knows something of him,' cried Mervyn.

Irons made no answer, but sat quite silent for some seconds, by the fire, the living image of apathy.

'If you name me, or blab one word I told you, I hold my peace for ever,' said he, slowly, with a quiet oath, but very pale, and how blue his chin looked — how grim his smile, with his face so shiny, and his eyelids closed. You're to suppose, Sir, 'tis possible Mr. Dangerfield has a guess at him. Well, he's a clever man, and knows how to put this and that together; and has been kind to Dr. Sturk and his family. He's a good man, you know; and he's a long-headed gentleman, they say; and if he takes a thing in hand, he'll be as like as another to bring it about. But sink or swim my mind's made up. Charles Archer, wherever he is, will not like my going — he'll sniff danger in the wind, Sir. I could not stay — he'd have had me — you see, body and soul. 'Twas time for me to go — and go or stay, I see nothing but bad before me. 'Twas an evil day I ever saw his face; and 'twould be better for me to have a cast for my life at any rate, and that I'm nigh-hand resolved on; only you see my heart misgives me — and that's how it is. I can't quite make up my mind.'

For a little while Mervyn stood in an agony of irresolution. I'm sure I cannot understand all he felt, having never been, thank Heaven! in a like situation. I only know how much depended on it, and I don't wonder that for some seconds he thought of arresting that lank, pale, sinister figure by the fire, and denouncing him as, by his own confession, an accessory to the murder of Beauclerc. The thought that he would slip through his fingers, and the clue to vindication, fortune, and happiness, be for ever lost, was altogether so dreadful that we must excuse his forgetting for a moment his promise, and dismissing patience, and even policy, from his thoughts.

But 'twas a transitory temptation only, and common sense seconded honour. For he was persuaded that whatever likelihood there was of leading Irons to the critical point, there was none of driving him thither; and that Irons, once restive and impracticable, all his hopes would fall to the ground.

'I am going,' said Irons, with quiet abruptness; 'and right glad the storm's up still,' he added, in a haggard rumination, and with a strange smile of suffering. 'In dark an' storm — curse him! — I see his face everywhere. I don't know how he's got this hold over me,' and he cursed him again and groaned dismally. 'A night like this is my chance — and so here goes.'

'Remember, for Heaven's sake, remember,' said Mervyn, with agonised urgency, as he followed him with a light along the passage to the back-door.

Irons made no answer; and walking straight on, without turning his head, only lifted his hand with a movement backward, like a man who silently warns another from danger.

So Irons went forth into the night and the roaring storm, dark and alone, like an evil spirit into desert places; and Mervyn barred the door after him, and returned to the cedar parlour, and remained there alone and long in profound and not unnatural agitation.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

CONCERNING A CERTAIN GENTLEMAN, WITH A BLACK PATCH OVER HIS EYE, WHO MADE SOME VISITS WITH A LADY, IN CHAPELIZOD AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD.

In the morning, though the wind had somewhat gone down, ’twas still dismal and wild enough; and to the consternation of poor Mrs. Macnamara, as she sat alone in her window after breakfast, Miss Mag and the major being both abroad, a hackney coach drew up at the door, which stood open. The maid was on the step, cheapening fish with a virulent lady who had a sieve-full to dispose of.

A gentleman, with a large, unwholesome face, and a patch over one eye, popped his unpleasant countenance, black wig, and three-cocked hat, out of the window, and called to the coachman to let him out.

Forth he came, somewhat slovenly, his coat not over-well brushed, having in his hand a small trunk, covered with gilt crimson leather, very dingy, and somewhat ceremoniously assisted a lady to alight. This dame, as she stepped with a long leg, in a black silk stocking, to the ground, swept the front windows of the house from under her velvet hood with a sharp and evil glance; and in fact she was Mistress Mary Matchwell.

As she beheld her, poor Mrs. Mack’s heart fluttered up to her mouth, and then dropped with a dreadful plump, into the pit of her stomach. The dingy, dismal gentleman, swinging the red trunk in his hand, swaggered lazily back and forward, to stretch his legs over the pavement, and air his large cadaverous countenance, and sniff the village breezes.

Mistress Matchwell in the meantime, exchanging a passing word with the servant, who darkened and drew back as if a ghost had crossed her, gathered her rustling silks about her, and with a few long steps noiselessly mounted the narrow stairs, and stood, sallow and terrible in her sables, before the poor gentlewoman.

With two efforts Mrs. Mack got up and made a little, and then a great courtesy, and then a little one again, and tried to speak, and felt very near fainting.

‘See,’ says Mary Matchwell, ‘I must have twenty pounds — but don’t take on. You must make an effort, my dear— ’tis the last. Come, don’t be cast down. I’ll pay you when I come to my property, in three weeks’ time; but law expenses must be paid, and the money I must have.’

Hereupon Mrs. Mack clasped her hands together in an agony, and ‘set up the pipes.’

M. M. was like to lose patience, and when she did she looked most feloniously, and in a way that made poor soft Mrs. Mack quiver.

‘’Tis but twenty pounds, woman,’ she said, sternly. ‘Hub-bub-bub-boo-hoo-hoo,’ blubbered the fat and miserable Mrs. Macnamara. ‘It will be all about — I may as well tell it myself. I’m ruined! My Venetian lace — my watch — the brocade not made up. It won’t do. I must tell my brother; I’d rather go out for a charwoman and starve myself to a skeleton, than try to borrow more money.’

Mrs. Matchwell advanced her face towards the widow’s tearful countenance, and held her in the spell of her dreadful gaze as a cat does a bird.

‘Why, curse you, woman, do you think ’tis to rob you I mean?— ’tisn’t a present even — only a loan. Stop that blubbering, you great old mouth! or I’ll have you posted all over the town in five minutes. A *loan*, Madam; and you need not pay it for three months — three whole months — *there*!’

Well, this time it ended as heretofore — poor Mrs. Mack gave way. She had not a crown-piece, indeed, that she could call her own; but M. M. was obliging, and let her off for a bill of exchange, the nature of which, to her dying day, the unhappy widow could never comprehend, although it caused her considerable affliction some short time subsequently.

Away went Mary Matchwell with her prize, leaving an odour of brandy behind her. Her dingy and sinister squire performed his clumsy courtesies, and without looking to the right or left, climbed into the coach after her, with his red trunk in his hand; and the vehicle was again in motion, and jingling on at a fair pace in the direction of Nutter’s house, The Mills, where her last visit had ended so tragically.

Now, it so happened that just as this coach, with its sombre occupants, drew up at The Mills, Doctor Toole was standing on the steps, giving Moggy a parting injunction, after his wont; for poor little Mrs. Nutter had been thrown into a new paroxysm by the dreadful tidings of her Charlie's death, and was now lying on her bed, and bathing the pillow in her tears.

'Is this the tenement called the Mills, formerly in the occupation of the late Charles Nutter — eh?' demanded the gentleman, thrusting his face from the window, before the coachman had got to the door.

'It is, Sir,' replied Toole, putting Moggy aside, and suspecting, he could not tell what amiss, and determined to show front, and not averse from hearing what the visit was about. 'But Mrs. Nutter is very far from well, Sir; in fact, in her bedchamber, Sir, and laid upon her bed.'

'Mrs. Nutter's *here*, Sir,' said the man phlegmatically. He had just got out on the ground before the door, and extended his hand toward Mary Matchwell, whom he assisted to alight.

'*This* is Mrs. Nutter, relict of the late Charles Nutter, of The Mills, Knockmaroon, in the parish of Chapelizod.'

'At your service, Sir,' said Mary Matchwell, dropping a demure courtesy, and preparing to sail by him.

'Not so fast, Ma'am, if you please,' said Toole, astonished, but still sternly and promptly enough. 'In with you, Moggy, and bar the kitchen door.'

And shoving the maid back, he swung the door to, with a slam. He was barely in time, and Mary Matchwell, baffled and pale, confronted the doctor, with the devil gleaming from her face.

'Who are you, man, that dare shut my own door in my face?' said the beldame.

'Toole's my name, Madam,' said the little doctor, with a lofty look and a bow. 'I have the honour to attend here in a professional capacity.'

'Ho! a village attorney,' cried the fortuneteller, plainly without having consulted the cards or the planets. 'Well, Sir, you'd better stand aside, for I am the Widow Nutter, and this is my house; and burn me, but one way or another, in I'll get.'

'You'd do well to avoid a trespass, Ma'am, and better to abstain from house breaking; and you may hammer at the knocker till you're tired, but they'll not let you in,' rejoined Toole. 'And as to you being the Widow Nutter, Ma'am, that is widow of poor Charles Nutter, lately found drowned, I'll be glad to know, Ma'am, how you make *that* out.'

‘Stay, Madam, by your leave,’ said the cadaverous, large-faced man, interposing. ‘We are here, Sir, to claim possession of this tenement and the appurtenances, as also of all the money, furniture, and other chattels whatsoever of the late Charles Nutter; and being denied admission, we shall then serve certain cautionary and other notices, in such a manner as the court will, under the circumstances, and in your presence, being, by your admission, the attorney of Sarah Hearty, calling herself Nutter— ‘

‘I did not say I was,’ said Toole, with a little toss of his chin.

The gentleman’s large face here assumed a cunning leer.

‘Well, we have our thoughts about that, Sir,’ he said. ‘But by your leave, we’ll knock at the hall-door.’

‘I tell you what, Sir,’ said Toole, who had no reliance upon the wisdom of the female garrison, and had serious misgivings lest at the first stout summons the maids should open the door, and the ill-favoured pair establish themselves in occupation of poor Mrs. Nutter’s domicile, ‘I’ll not object to the notices being received. There’s the servant up at the window there — but you must not make a noise; Mrs. Nutter, poor woman, is sick and hypochondriac, and can’t bear a noise; but I’ll permit the service of the notices, because, you see, we can afford to snap our fingers at you. I say, Moggy, open a bit of that window, and take in the papers that this gentleman will hand you. *There*, Sir, on the end of your cane, if you please — very good.’

‘’Twill do, she has them. Thank you, Miss,’ said the legal practitioner, with a grin. ‘Now, Ma’am, we’d best go to the Prerogative Court.’

Mary Matchwell laughed one of her pale malevolent laughs up at the maid in the window, who stood there, with the papers in her hand, in a sort of horror.

‘Never mind,’ said Mary Matchwell, to herself, and, getting swiftly into the coach, she gleamed another ugly smile up at the window of The Mills, as she adjusted her black attire.

‘To the Prerogative Court,’ said the attorney to the coachman.

‘In that house I’ll lie tonight,’ said Mary Matchwell, with a terrible mildness, as they drove away, still glancing back upon it, with her peculiar smile; and then she leaned back, with a sneer of superiority on her pallid features, and the dismal fatigue of the spirit that rests not, looked savagely out from the deep, haggard windows of her eyes.

When Toole saw the vehicle fairly off, you may be sure he did not lose time in getting into the house, and there conning over the papers, which puzzled him unspeakably.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

IN WHICH DOCTOR TOOLE, IN HIS BOOTS, VISITS MR. GAMBLE, AND SEES AN UGLY CLIENT OF THAT GENTLEMAN'S; AND SOMETHING CROSSES AN EMPTY ROOM.

Here's a conspiracy with a vengeance!' muttered Toole, 'if a body could only make head or tail of it. Widow! — Eh! — We'll see: why, she's like no woman ever *I* saw. Mrs. Nutter, forsooth!' and he could not forbear laughing at the conceit. 'Poor Charles! 'tis ridiculous — though upon my life, I don't like it. It's just possible it may be all as true as gospel — they're the most devilish looking pair I've seen out of the dock — curse them — for many a day. I would not wonder if they were robbers. The *widow* looks consumedly like a man in petticoats — hey! — devilish like. I think I'll send Moran and Brien up to sleep tonight in the house. But, hang it! if they were, they would not come out in the daytime to give an alarm. Hollo! Moggy, throw me out one of them papers till I see what it's about.'

So he conned over the notice which provoked him, for he could not half understand it, and he was very curious.

'Well, keep it safe, Moggy,' said he. 'H'm — it *does* look like law business, after all, and I believe it *is*. No — they're not housebreakers, but robbers of another stamp — and a worse, I'll take my davy.'

'See,' said he, as a thought struck him, 'throw me down both of them papers again — there's a good girl. They ought to be looked after, I dare say, and I'll see the poor master's attorney to-day, d'ye mind? and we'll put our heads together — and, that's right — *relict* indeed!'

And, with a solemn injunction to keep doors locked and windows fast, and a nod and a wave of his hand to Mistress Moggy, and muttering half a sentence or an oath to himself, and wearying his imagination in search of a clue to this new perplexity, he buttoned his pocket over the legal documents, and strutted down to the village, where his nag awaited him saddled, and Jimmey walking him up and down before the doctor's hall-door.

Toole was bound upon a melancholy mission that morning. But though properly a minister of life, a doctor is also conversant with death, and inured to the sight of familiar faces in that remarkable disguise. So he spurred away with more coolness, though not less regret than another man, to throw what light he could upon the subject of the inquest which was to sit upon the body of poor Charles Nutter.

The little doctor, on his way to Ringsend, without the necessity of diverging to the right or left, drew bridle at the door of Mr. Luke Gamble, on the Blind Quay, attorney to the late Charles Nutter, and jumping to the ground, delivered a rattling summons thereupon.

It was a dusty, dreary, wainscoted old house — indeed, two old houses intermarried — with doors broken through the partition walls — the floors not all of a level — joined by steps up and down — and having three great staircases, that made it confusing. Through the windows it was not easy to see, such a fantastic mapping of thick dust and dirt coated the glass.

Luke Gamble, like the house, had seen better days. It was not his fault; but an absconding partner had well nigh been his ruin: and, though he paid their liabilities, it was with a strain, and left him a poor man, shattered his connexion, and made the house too large by a great deal for his business.

Doctor Toole came into the clerk’s room, and was ushered by one of these gentlemen through an empty chamber into the attorney’s sanctum. Up two steps stumbled the physician, cursing the house for a place where a gentleman was so much more likely to break his neck than his fast, and found old Gamble in his velvet cap and dressing-gown, in conference with a hard-faced, pale, and pock-marked elderly man, squinting unpleasantly under a black wig, who was narrating something slowly, and with effort, like a man whose memory is labouring to give up its dead, while the attorney, with his spectacles on his nose, was making notes. The speaker ceased abruptly, and turned his pallid visage and jealous, oblique eyes on the intruder.

Luke Gamble looked embarrassed, and shot one devilish angry glance at his clerk, and then made Doctor Toole very welcome.

When Toole had ended his narrative, and the attorney read the notices through, Mr. Gamble’s countenance brightened, and darkened and brightened again, and with a very significant look, he said to the pale, unpleasant face, pitted with smallpox —

'M. M.,' and nodded.

His companion extended his hand toward the papers.

'Never mind,' said the attorney; 'there's that here will fix M. M. in a mighty tight vice.'

'And who's M. M., pray?' enquired Toole.

'When were these notices served, doctor?' asked Mr. Gamble.

'Not an hour ago; but, I say, who the plague's M. M.?' answered Toole.

'M. M.,' repeated the attorney, smiling grimly on the backs of the notices which lay on the table; 'why there's many queer things to be heard of M. M.; and the town, and the country, too, for that matter, is like to know a good deal more of her before long; and who served them — a process-server, or who?'

'Why, a fat, broad, bull-necked rascal, with a double chin, and a great round face, the colour of a bad suet-dumplin', and a black patch over his eye,' answered Toole.

'Very like — was he alone?' said Gamble.

'No — a long, sly she-devil in black, that looked as if she'd cut your windpipe, like a cat in the dark, as pale as paper, and mighty large, black, hollow eyes.'

'Ay — that's it,' said Gamble, who, during this dialogue, had thrown his morning-gown over the back of the chair, and got on his coat, and opened a little press in the wall, from which he took his wig, and so completed his toilet.

'That's it?' repeated Toole: 'what's it? — what's *what?*'

'Why, 'tis David O'Regan — Dirty Davy, as we call him. I never knew him yet in an honest case; and the woman's M. M.'

'Hey! to be sure — a woman — I know — I remember; and he was on the point of breaking out with poor Mrs. Macnamara's secret, but recovered in time. 'That's the she fortuneteller, the witch, M. M., Mary Matchwell; 'twas one of her printed cards, you know, was found lying in Sturk's blood. Dr. Sturk, you remember, that they issued a warrant for, against our poor friend, you know.'

'Ay, ay — poor Charles — poor Nutter. Are you going to the inquest?' said Gamble; and, on a sudden, stopped short, with a look of great fear, and a little beckon of his hand forward, as if he had seen something.

There was that in Gamble's change of countenance which startled Toole, who, seeing that his glance was directed through an open door at the other end of the room, skipped from his chair and peeped through it. There was nothing, however, visible but a tenebrose and empty passage.

'What did you see — eh? What frightens you?' said Toole. 'One would think you saw Nutter — like — like.'

Gamble looked horribly perturbed at these words.

'Shut it,' said he, nearing the door, on which Toole's hand rested. Toole took another peep, and did so.

'Why, there's nothing there — like — like the women down at the Mills there,' continued the doctor.

'What about the women?' enquired Gamble, not seeming to know very well what he was saying, agitated still — perhaps, intending to keep Toole talking.

'Why, the women — the maids, you know — poor Nutter's servants, down at the Mills. They swear he walks the house, and they'll have it they saw him last night.'

'Pish! Sir— 'tis all conceit and vapours — women's fancies — a plague o' them all. And where's poor Mrs. Nutter?' said Gamble, clapping on his cocked-hat, and taking his cane, and stuffing two or three bundles of law papers into his coat pockets.

'At home — at the Mills. She slept at the village and so missed the ghost. The Macnamaras have been mighty kind. But when the news was told her this morning, poor thing, she would not stay, and went home; and there she is, poor little soul, breaking her heart.'

Mr. Gamble was not ceremonious; so he just threw a cursory and anxious glance round the room, clapped his hands on his coat pockets, making a bunch of keys ring somewhere deep in their caverns. And all being right —

'Come along, gentlemen,' says he, 'I'm going to lock the door;' and without looking behind him, he bolted forth abstractedly into his dusty anteroom.

'Get your cloak about you, Sir — remember your *cough*, you know — the air of the streets is sharp,' said he with a sly wink, to his ugly client, who hastily took the hint.

'Is that *coach* at the door?' bawled Gamble to his clerks in the next room, while he locked the door of his own snuggery behind him; and being satisfied it was so, he conducted the party out by a side door, avoiding the clerks' room, and so down stairs.

'Drive to the courts,' said the attorney to the coachman; and that was all Toole learned about it that day. So he mounted his nag, and resumed his journey to Ringsend at a brisk trot.

I suppose, when he turned the key in his door, and dropped it into his breeches' pocket, the gentleman attorney assumed that he had made everything perfectly safe in his private chamber, though Toole thought he had not looked quite the same again after that sudden change of countenance he had remarked.

Now, it was a darksome day, and the windows of Mr. Gamble's room were so obscured with cobwebs, dust, and dirt, that even on a sunny day they boasted no more than a dim religious light. But on this day a cheerful man would have asked for a pair of candles, to dissipate the twilight and sustain his spirits.

He had not been gone, and the room empty ten minutes, when the door through which he had seemed to look on that unknown something that dismayed him, opened softly — at first a little — then a little more — then came a knock at it — then it opened more, and the dark shape of Charles Nutter, with rigid features and white eyeballs, glided stealthily and crouching into the chamber, and halted at the table, and seemed to read the endorsements of the notices that lay there.

CHAPTER LXXV.

HOW A GENTLEMAN PAID A VISIT AT THE BRASS CASTLE, AND THERE READ A PARAGRAPH IN AN OLD NEWSPAPER.

Dangerfield was, after his wont, seated at his desk, writing letters, after his early breakfast, with his neatly-labelled accounts at his elbow. There was a pleasant frosty sun glittering through the twigs of the leafless shrubs, and flashing on the ripples and undulations of the Liffey, and the redbreasts and sparrows were picking up the crumbs which the housekeeper had thrown for them outside. He had just sealed the last of half-a-dozen letters, when the maid opened his parlour-door, and told him that a gentleman was at the hall-step, who wished to see him.

Dangerfield looked up with a quick glance —

'Eh? — to be sure. Show him in.'

And in a few seconds more, Mr. Mervyn, his countenance more than usually pale and sad, entered the room. He bowed low and gravely, as the servant announced him.

Dangerfield rose with a prompt smile, bowing also, and advanced with his hand extended, which, as a matter of form rather than of cordiality, his visitor took, coldly enough, in his.

'Happy to see you here, Mr. Mervyn — pray, take a chair — a charming morning for a turn by the river, Sir.'

'I have taken the liberty of visiting you, Mr. Dangerfield— '

'Your visit, Sir, I esteem an honour,' interposed the lord of the Brass Castle.

A slight and ceremonious bow from Mervyn, who continued— 'For the purpose of asking you directly and plainly for some light upon a matter in which it is in the highest degree important I should be informed.'

'You may command me, Mr. Mervyn,' said Dangerfield, crossing his legs, throwing himself back, and adjusting himself to attention.

Mervyn fixed his dark eyes full and sternly upon that white and enigmatical face, with its round glass eyes and silver setting, and those delicate lines of scorn he had never observed before, traced about the mouth and nostril.

‘Then, Sir, I venture to ask you for all you can disclose or relate about one Charles Archer.’

Dangerfield cocked his head on one side, quizzically, and smiled the faintest imaginable cynical smile.

‘I can’t *disclose* anything, for the gentleman never told me his secrets; but all I can relate is heartily at your service.’

‘Can you point him out, Sir?’ asked Mervyn, a little less sternly, for he saw no traces of a guilty knowledge in the severe countenance and prompt, unembarrassed manner of the gentleman who leaned back in his chair, with the clear bright light full on him, and his leg crossed so carelessly.

Dangerfield smiled, shook his head gently, and shrugged his shoulders the least thing in the world.

‘Don’t you know him, Sir?’ demanded Mervyn.

‘Why,’ said Dangerfield, with his chin a little elevated, and the tips of his fingers all brought together, and his elbows resting easily upon the arms of his chair, and altogether an involuntary air of hauteur, ‘Charles Archer, perhaps you’re not aware, was not exactly the most reputable acquaintance in the world; and my knowledge of him was very slight indeed — wholly accidental — and of very short duration.’

‘May I ask you, if, without leaving this town, you can lay your finger on him, Sir?’

‘Why, not conveniently,’ answered Dangerfield, with the same air of cynical amusement. ‘‘Twould reach in that case all the way to Florence, and even then we should gain little by the discovery.’

‘But you do know him?’ pursued Mervyn.

‘*I did*, Sir, though very slightly,’ answered Dangerfield.

‘And I’m given to understand, Sir, he’s to be found occasionally in this town?’ continued his visitor.

‘There’s just one man who sees him, and that’s the parish clerk — what’s his name? — Zekiel Irons — he sees him. Suppose we send down to his house, and fetch him here, and learn all about it?’ said Dangerfield, who seemed mightily tickled by the whole thing.

‘He left the town, Sir, last night; and I’ve reason to suspect, with a resolution of returning no more. And I must speak plainly, Mr. Dangerfield,

’tis no subject for trifling — the fame and fortune of a noble family depend on searching out the truth; and I’ll lose my life, Sir, or I’ll discover it.’

Still the old cynical, quizzical smile on Dangerfield’s white face, who said encouragingly —

‘Nobly resolved, Sir, upon my honour!’

‘And Mr. Dangerfield, if you’ll only lay yourself out to help me, with your great knowledge and subtlety — disclosing everything you know or conjecture, and putting me in train to discover the rest — so that I may fully clear this dreadful mystery up — there is no sacrifice of fortune I will not cheerfully make to recompense such immense services, and you may name with confidence your own terms, and think nothing exorbitant.’

For the first time Dangerfield’s countenance actually darkened and grew stern, but Mervyn could not discern whether it was with anger or deep thought, and the round spectacles returned his intense gaze with a white reflected sheen, sightless as death.

But the stern mouth opened, and Dangerfield, in his harsh, brief tones, said —

‘You speak without reflection, Sir, and had nigh made me lose my temper; but I pardon you; you’re young, Sir, and besides, know probably little or nothing of me. Who are you, Sir, who thus think fit to address me, who am by blood and education as good a gentleman as any alive? The inducements you are pleased to offer — you may address elsewhere — they are not for me. I shall forget your imprudence, and answer frankly any questions, within my knowledge, you please to ask.’

Mervyn bowed apologetically, and a silence ensued; after which he thus availed himself of his host’s permission to question him —

‘You mentioned Irons, the clerk, Mr. Dangerfield, and said that he sees Charles Archer. Do you mean it?’

‘Why, thus I mean it. He *thinks* he sees him; but, if he does, upon my honour, he sees a ghost,’ and Dangerfield chuckled merrily.

‘Pray, Mr. Dangerfield, consider me, and be serious, and in Heaven’s name explain,’ said Mervyn, speaking evidently in suppressed anguish.

‘Why, you know — don’t you? the poor fellow’s not quite right here,’ and he tapped the centre of his own towering forehead with the delicate tip of his white middle finger. ‘I’ve seen a little of him; he’s an angler, so am I; and he showed me the fishing of the river, here, last summer, and often amused me prodigiously. He's got some such very odd maggots! I don't say, mind ye, he's *mad*, there are many degrees, and he's quite a competent parish clerk. He's only wrong on a point or two, and one of them is Charles Archer. I believe for a while he thought *you* were he; and Dangerfield laughed his dry, hard chuckle.

'Where, Sir, do you suppose Charles Archer is now to be found?' urged Mervyn.

'Why, what remains of him, in Florence,' answered Dangerfield.

'You speak, Sir, as if you thought him dead.'

'Think? I know he's dead. I knew him but three weeks, and visited him in his sickness — was in his room half an hour before he died, and attended his funeral,' said Dangerfield.

'I implore of you, Sir, as you hope for mercy, don't trifle in this matter,' cried Mervyn, whose face was white, like that of a man about to swoon under an operation.

'Trifle! What d'ye mean, Sir?' barked out Dangerfield, rabidly.

'I mean, Sir, *this* — I've information he's positively living, and can relieve my father's memory from the horrible imputation that rests upon it. You know who I am!'

'Ay, Sir, Lord Castlemallard told me.'

'And my life I cheerfully devote to the task of seizing and tracing out the bloody clue of the labyrinth in which I'm lost.'

'Good— 'tis a pious as well as a prudent resolve,' said Dangerfield, with a quiet sneer. 'And now, Sir, give me leave to say a word. Your information that Charles Archer is living, is not worth the breath of the madman that spoke it, as I'll presently show you. By an odd chance, Sir, I required this file of newspapers, last week, to help me in ascertaining the date of Sir Harry Wyatt's marriage. Well, only last night, what should I hit on but this. Will you please to read?'

He had turned over the pages rapidly, and then he stopped at this little piece of news packed up in a small paragraph at the bottom of a column, and, pointing his finger to it, he slid the volume of newspapers over to Mervyn, who read —

'Died on the 4th of August, of a lingering disease, at his lodgings in Florence, whither he had gone for the improvement of his health, Charles Archer, Esq., a gentleman who some three years since gave an exceeding clear evidence against Lord Dunoran, for the murder of Mr. Beauclerc, and was well known at Newmarket. His funeral, which was private, was attended by several English gentlemen, who were then at Florence.'

Mervyn, deadly pale, with gleaming eyes, and hand laid along his forehead, as if to screen off an insupportable light and concentrate his gaze upon the words, read and re-read these sentences with an agony of scrutiny such as no critic ever yet directed upon a disputed passage in his favourite classic. But there was no possibility of fastening any consolatory interpretation upon the paragraph. It was all too plain and outspoken.

''Tis possible this may be true — *thus* much. *A* Charles Archer is dead, and yet another Charles Archer, the object of my search, still living,' said Mervyn.

'Hey! that didn't strike me,' said Dangerfield, as much amused as was consistent with moderately good breeding. 'But I can quite account, Mr. Mervyn,' he continued, with a sudden change of tone and manner, to something almost of kindness, 'for your readiness to entertain any theory not quite destructive of hopes, which, notwithstanding, I fear, rest simply on the visions of that poor hypochondriac, Irons. But, for all that, 'tis just possible that something may strike either you or me in the matter not quite so romantic — hey? But still something. — You've not told me how the plague Charles Archer could possibly have served you. But on that point, perhaps, we can talk another time. I simply desire to say, that any experience or ability I may possess are heartily at your service whenever you please to task them, as my good wishes are already.'

So, stunned, and like a man walking in a dream — all his hopes shivered about his feet — Mervyn walked through the door of the little parlour in the Brass Castle, and Dangerfield, accompanying him to the little gate which gave admission from the highroad to that tenement, dismissed him there, with a bow and a pleasant smile; and, standing, for a while, wiry and erect, with his hands in his pockets, he followed him, as he paced dejectedly away, with the same peculiar smile.

When he was out of sight, Dangerfield returned to his parlour, smiling all the way, and stood on the hearthrug, with his back to the fire. When he was alone, a shadow came over his face, and he looked down on the fringe with a thoughtful scowl — his hands behind his back — and began adjusting and smoothing it with the toe of his shoe.

‘Sot, fool, and poltroon — triple qualification for mischief — I don’t know why he still lives. Irons — a new vista opens, and this d —— d young man!’ All this was not, as we sometimes read, ‘mentally ejaculated,’ but quite literally muttered, as I believe every one at times mutters to himself. ‘Charles Archer living — Charles Archer dead — or, as I sometimes think, neither one nor t’other quite — half man, half corpse — a vampire — there is no rest for thee: no sabbath in the days of thy week. Blood, blood — blood— ’tis tiresome. Why should I be a slave to these d —— d secrets. I don’t think ’tis my judgment, so much as the devil, holds me here. Irons has more brains than I — instinct — calculation — which is oftener right? Miss Gertrude Chattesworth, a mere whim, I think understood her game too. I’ll deal with that tomorrow. I’ll send Daxon the account, vouchers, and cheque for Lord Castlemallard — tell Smith to sell my horses, and, by the next packet — hey?’ and he kissed his hand, with an odd smirk, like a gentleman making his adieux, ‘and so leave those who court the acquaintance of Charles Archer, to find him out, and catch their Tartar how they may.’

CHAPTER LXXVI.

RELATING HOW THE CASTLE WAS TAKEN, AND HOW MISTRESS MOGGY TOOK HEART OF GRACE.

That evening there came to the door of the Mills, a damsel, with a wide basket on her arm, the covering of which being removed, a goodly show of laces, caps, fans, washballs, buckles, and other attractions, came out like a parterre of flowers, with such a glow as dazzled the eyes of Moggy, at the study window.

‘Would you plaze to want any, my lady?’ enquired the pedlar.

Moggy thought they were, perhaps, a little bit too fine for her purse, but she could not forbear longing and looking, and asking the prices of this bit of finery and that, at the window; and she called Betty, and the two maids conned over the whole contents of the basket.

At last she made an offer for an irresistible stay-hook of pinchbeck, set with half-a-dozen resplendent jewels of cut glass, and after considerable chaffering, and a keen encounter of their wits, they came at last to terms, and Moggy ran out to the kitchen for her money, which lay in a brass snuff-box, in a pewter goblet, on the dresser.

As she was counting her coin, and putting back what she did not want, the latch of the kitchen door was lifted from without, and the door itself pushed and shaken. Though the last red gleam of a stormy sunset was glittering among the ivy leaves round the kitchen window, the terrors of last night’s apparition were revived in a moment, and, with a blanched face, she gazed on the door, expecting, breathlessly, what would come.

The door was bolted and locked on the inside, in accordance with Doctor Toole’s solemn injunction; and there was no attempt to use violence. But a brisk knocking began thereat and Moggy, encouraged by hearing the voices of Betty and the vender of splendours at the little parlour window, and also by the amber sunlight on the rustling ivy leaves, and the loud evening gossip of the sparrows, took heart of grace, and demanded shrilly —

‘Who’s there?’

A whining beggar’s voice asked admission.

‘But you can’t come in, for the house is shut up for the night, replied the cook.

‘’Tis a quare hour you lock your doors at,’ said the besieger.

‘Mighty quare, but so it is,’ she answered.

‘But ’tis a message for the misthress I have,’ answered the applicant.

‘Who from?’ demanded the porteress.

‘’Tis a present o’ some wine, acushla.’

‘Who from?’ repeated she, growing more uneasy.

‘Auch! woman, are you going to take it in, or no?’

‘Come in the morning, my good man,’ said she, ‘for sorrow a foot you’ll put inside the house tonight.’

‘An’ that’s what I’m to tell them that sent me.’

‘Neither more nor less,’ replied she.

And so she heard a heavy foot clank along the pavement, and she tried to catch a glimpse of the returning figure, but she could not, though she laid her cheek against the window-pane. However, she heard him whistling as he went, which gave her a better opinion of him, and she thought she heard the road gate shut after him.

So feeling relieved, and with a great sigh, she counted her money over; and answering Betty’s shrill summons to the study, as the woman was in haste, with a ‘Coming, coming this minute,’ she replaced her treasure, and got swiftly into poor Charles Nutter’s little chamber. There was his pipe over the chimney, and his green, and gold-laced Sunday waistcoat folded on the little walnut table by the fire, and his small folio, ‘Maison Rustique, the Country Farme,’ with his old green worsted purse set for a marker in it where he had left off reading the night before all their troubles began; and his silk dressing-gown was hanging by the window-frame, and his velvet morning-cap on the same peg — the dust had settled on them now. And after her fright in the kitchen, all these mementoes smote her with a grim sort of reproach and menace, and she wished the window barred, and the door of the ominous little chamber locked for the night.

‘’Tis growing late,’ said the dealer from without, ‘and I daren’t be on the road after dark. Gi’ me my money, good girl; and here, take your stay-hook.’

And so saying, she looked a little puzzled up and down, as not well knowing how they were to make their exchange.

‘Here,’ says Moggy, ‘give it in here.’ And removing the fastening, she shoved the window up a little bit. ‘Hould it, Betty; hould it up,’ said she. And in came the woman’s hard, brown hand, palm open, for her money, and the other containing the jewel, after which the vain soul of Moggy lusted.

‘That’ll do,’ said she; and crying shrilly, ‘Give us a lift, sweetheart,’ in a twinkling she shoved the window up, at the same time kneeling, with a spring, upon the sill, and getting her long leg into the room, with her shoulder under the window-sash, her foot firmly planted on the floor, and her face and head in the apartment. Almost at the same instant she was followed by an ill-looking fellow, buttoned up in a surtout, whose stature seemed enormous, and at sight of whom the two women shrieked as if soul and body were parting.

The lady was now quite in the room, and standing upright showed the tall shape and stern lineaments of Mary Matchwell. And as she stood she laughed a sort of shuddering laugh, like a person who had just had a plunge in cold water.

‘Stop that noise,’ said she, recognising Betty, who saw her with unspeakable terror. ‘I’m the lady that came here, you know, some months ago, with Mrs. Macnamara; and I’m Mrs. Nutter, which the woman up stairs *is not*. I’m Mrs. Nutter, and *you’re my* servants, do ye mind? and I’ll act a fair mistress by you, if you do me honest service. Open the hall-door,’ she said to the man, who was by this time also in the room. And forth he went to do her bidding, and a gentleman, who turned out to be that respectable pillar of the law whom Mr. Gamble in the morning had referred to as ‘Dirty Davy,’ entered. He was followed by Mrs. Mary Matchwell’s maid, a giggling, cat-like gipsy, with a lot of gaudy finery about her, and a withered, devilment leering in her face; and a hackney-coach drove up to the door, which had conveyed the party from town; and the driver railing in loud tones, after the manner of his kind in old times, at all things, reeking of whiskey and stale tobacco, and cursing freely, pitched in several trunks, one after the other; and, in fact, it became perfectly clear that M. M. was taking possession. And Betty and Moggy, at their wits’ end between terror and bewilderment, were altogether powerless to resist, and could only whimper a protest against the monstrous invasion, while poor little Sally Nutter up stairs, roused by the wild chorus of strange voices from the lethargy of her grief, and even spurred into active alarm, locked her door, and then hammered with a chair upon the floor, under a maniacal hallucination that she was calling I know not what or whom to the rescue.

Then Dirty Davy read aloud, with due emphasis, to the maids, copies, as he stated, of the affidavits sworn to that day by Mistress Mary Matchwell, or as he called her, Mrs. Nutter, relict of the late Charles Nutter, gentleman, of the Mills, in the parish of Chapelizod, barony of Castleknock, and county of Dublin, deposing to her marriage with the said Charles Nutter having been celebrated in the Church of St. Clement Danes, in London, on the 7th of April, 1750. And then came a copy of the marriage certificate, and then a statement how, believing that deceased had left no 'will' making any disposition of his property, or naming an executor, she applied to the Court of Prerogative for letters of administration to the deceased, which letters would be granted in a few days; and in the meantime the bereaved lady would remain in possession of the house and chattels of her late husband.

All this, of course, was so much 'Hebrew-Greek,' as honest Father Roach was wont to phrase it, to the scared women. But M. M. — ½ÅºÄ¹ µ¿¹ºÉÂ — fixing them both with her cold and terrible gaze, said quite intelligibly —

'What's your name?'

'Moggy Sullivan, if you please, Ma'am.'

'And what's yours?'

'Lizabet — Betty they call me — Madam; Lizabet Burke, if you please, Madam.'

'Well, then, Moggy Sullivan and Elizabeth Burke, harkee both, while I tell you a thing. I'm mistress here by law, as you've just heard, and you're my servants; and if you so much as wind the jack or move a tea-cup, except as I tell you, I'll find a way to punish you; and if I miss to the value of a pin's head, I'll indict you for a felony, and have you whipped and burnt in the hand — you know what that means. And now, where's Mistress Sarah Harty? for she must pack and away.'

'Oh! Ma'am, jewel, the poor misthress.'

'*I'm* the mistress, slut.'

'Ma'am, dear, she's very bad.'

'*Where* is she?'

'In her room, Ma'am,' answered Betty, with blubbered cheeks.

‘Where are you going, minx?’ cried M. M., with a terrible voice and look, and striding toward the door, from which Moggy was about to escape.

Now, Moggy was a sort of heroine, not in the vain matter of beauty, for she had high cheek bones, a snub nose, and her figure had no more waist, or other feminine undulations, than the clock in the hall; but like that useful piece of furniture, presented an oblong parallelogram, unassisted by art; for, except on gala days, these homely maidens never sported hoops. But she was, nevertheless, a heroine of the Amazonian species. She tripped up Pat Morgan, and laid that athlete suddenly on his back, upon the grass plot before the hall door, to his eternal disgrace, when he ‘offered’ to kiss her, while the fiddler and tambourine-man were playing. She used to wring big boys by the ears; overawe fishwives with her voluble invective; put dangerous dogs to rout with sticks and stones, and evince, in all emergencies, an adventurous spirit and an alacrity for battle.

For her, indeed, as for others, the spell of ‘M. M.’s’ evil eye and witchlike presence was at first too much; but Moggy rallied, and, thus challenged, she turned about at the door and stoutly confronted the intruder.

‘Minx, yourself, you black baste; I’m goin’ just wherever it plases me best, and I’d like to know who’ll stop me; and first, Ma’am, be your lave, I’ll tell the mistress to lock her door, and keep you and your rakehelly squad at the wrong side of it, and then, Ma’am, wherever the fancy takes me next — and that’s how it is, and my sarvice to your ladyship.’

Off went Moggy, with a leer of defiance and a snap of her fingers, cutting a clumsy caper, and rushed like a mad cow up the stairs, shouting all the way, ‘Lock your door, Ma’am — lock your door.’

Growing two or three degrees whiter, M. M., so soon as she recovered herself, glided in pursuit, like the embodiment of an evil spirit, as perhaps she was, and with a gleam of insanity, or murder, in her eye, which always supervened when her wrath was moved.

The sullen face of the bailiff half lighted up with a cynical grin of expectation, for he saw that both ladies were game, and looked for a spirited encounter. But Dirty Davy spoiled all by interposing his person, and arresting the pursuit of his client, and delivering a wheezy expostulation close in her ear.

‘’Tis a strange thing if I can’t do what I will with my own — fine laws, i’faith!’

‘I only tell you, Madam, and if you do, it may embarrass us mightily by-and-by.’

‘I’d wring her neck across the banister,’ murmured M. M.

‘An’ now, plase your ladyship, will I bring your sarvice to the ladies and gentlemen down in the town, for ’tis there I’m going next,’ said Moggy, popping in at the door, with a mock courtesy, and a pugnacious cock in her eye, and a look altogether so provoking and warlike as almost tempted the bailiff at the door to clap her on the back, and cry, had he spoken Latin, *macte virtute puer*!

‘Catch the slut. You sha’n’t budge — not a foot — hold her,’ cried M. M. to the bailiff.

‘Baugh!’ was his answer.

‘See, now,’ said Davy, ‘Madam Nutter’s not serious — you’re *not*, Ma’am? We don’t detain you, mind. The door’s open. There’s no false imprisonment or duress, mind ye, thanking you all the same, Miss, for your offer. We won’t detain you, ah, ah. No, I thank you. Chalk the road for the young lady, Mr. Redmond.’

And Davy fell to whisper energetically again in M. M.’s ear.

And Moggy disappeared. Straight down to the town she went, and to the friendly Dr. Toole’s house, but he was not expected home from Dublin till morning. Then she had thoughts of going to the barrack, and applying for a company of soldiers, with a cannon, if necessary, to retake the Mills. Then she bethought her o’ good Dr. Walsingham, but he was too simple to cope with such seasoned rogues. General Chattesworth was too far away, and not quite the man either, no more than Colonel Stafford; and the young beaux, ‘them captains, and the like, ‘id only be funnin’ me, and knows nothing of law business.’ So she pitched upon Father Roach.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

IN WHICH IRISH MELODY PREVAILS.

Now, Father Roach's domicile was the first house in the Chapel-lane, which consisted altogether of two, not being very long. It showed a hall-door, painted green — the national hue — which enclosed, I'm happy to say, not a few of the national virtues, chief among which reigned hospitality. As Moggy turned the corner, and got out of the cold wind under its friendly shelter, she heard a stentorian voice, accompanied by the mellifluous drone of a bagpipe, concluding in a highly decorative style the last verse of the 'Colleen Rue.'

Respect for this celestial melody, and a desire to hear a little more of what might follow, held Moggy on the steps, with the knocker between her finger and thumb, unwilling to disturb by an unseasonable summons the harmonies from which she was, in fact, separated only by the thickness of the window and its shutter. And when the vocal and instrumental music came to an end together with a prolonged and indescribable groan and a grunt from the songster and the instrument, there broke forth a shrilly chorus of female cackle, some in admiration and some in laughter; and the voice of Father Roach was heard lustily and melodiously ejaculating 'More power to you, Pat Mahony!'

As this pleasant party all talked together, and Moggy could not clearly unravel a single sentence, she made up her mind to wait no longer, and knocked with good emphasis, under cover of the uproar.

The maid, who had evidently been in the hall, almost instantaneously opened the door; and with a hasty welcome full of giggle and excitement, pulled in Moggy by the arm, shutting the door after her; and each damsel asked the other, 'An' how are you, and are you elegant?' and shaking her neighbour by both hands. The clerical handmaid, in a galloping whisper in Moggy's ear, told her,' 'Twas a weddin' party, and such tarin' fun she never see — sich dancin' and singin', and laughin' and funnin'; and she must wait a bit, and see the quality,' a portion of whom, indeed, were visible as well as overpoweringly audible, through the halfopen door of the front parlour;

‘and there was to be a thunderin’ fine supper — a round of beef and two geese, and a tubful of oysters,’ &c., &c.

Now I must mention that this feast was, in fact, in its own way, more romantically wonderful than that of the celebrated wedding of Camacho the Rich, and one of the many hundred proofs I’ve met with in the course of my long pilgrimage that the honest prose of everyday life is often ten times more surprising than the unsubstantial fictions of even the best epic poets.

The valiant Sir Jaufry, it is true, was ordered to a dungeon by the fair Brunissende, who so soon as she beheld him, nevertheless became enamoured of the knight, and gave him finally her hand in wedlock. But if the fair Brunissende had been five and forty, or by’r lady, fifty, the widow of a tailor, herself wondrous keen after money, and stung very nigh to madness by the preposterous balance due (as per ledger), and the inexhaustible and ingenious dodges executed by the insolvent Sir Jaufry, the composer of that chivalric romance might have shrunk from the happy winding-up as bordering too nearly upon the incredible.

Yet good Father Roach understood human nature better. Man and woman have a tendency to fuse. And given a good-looking fellow and a woman, no matter of what age, who but deserves the name, and bring them together, and let the hero but have proper opportunities, and deuce is in it if nothing comes of the matter. Animosity is no impediment. On the contrary ’tis a more advantageous opening than indifference. The Cid began his courtship by shooting his ladylove’s pigeons, and putting her into a pet and a frenzy. The Cid knew what he was about. Stir no matter *what* passions, provided they *be* passions, and get your image well into your lady’s head, and you may repeat, with like success, the wooing (which superficial people pronounce so unnatural) of crook-backed Richard and the Lady Anne. Of course, there are limits. I would not advise, for instance, a fat elderly gentleman, bald, carbuncled, dull of wit, and slow of speech, to hazard that particular method, lest he should find himself the worse of his experiment. My counsel is for the young, the tolerably good-looking, for murmuring orators of the silver-tongue family, and romantic athletes with coaxing ways.

Worthy Father Roach constituted himself internuncio between Mahony, whom we remember first in his pride of place doing the honours of that feast of Mars in which his ‘friend’ Nutter was to have carved up the great

O’Flaherty on the Fifteen Acres, and next, *quantum, mutatus ab illo*! a helpless but manly captive in the hands of the Dublin bailiffs, and that very Mrs. Elizabeth Woolly, relict and sole executrix of the late Timotheus Woolly, of High-street, tailor, &c., &c., who was the cruel cause of his incarceration.

Good Father Roach, though a paragon of celibacy, was of a gallant temperament, and a wheedling tongue, and unfolded before the offended eye of the insulted and vindictive executrix so interesting a picture of ‘his noble young friend, the victim of circumstance, breaking his manly heart over his follies and misfortunes;’ and looking upon her, Mrs. Woolly, afar off, with an eye full of melancholy and awe, tempered with, mayhap, somewhat of romantic gallantry, like Sir Walter Raleigh from the Tower window on Queen Elizabeth, that he at length persuaded the tremendous ‘relict’ to visit her captive in his dungeon. This she did, in a severe mood, with her attorney, and good Father Roach; and though Mahony’s statement was declamatory rather than precise, and dealt more with his feelings than his resources, and was carried on more in the way of an appeal to the ‘leedy’ than as an exposition to the man of law, leaving matters at the end in certainly no clearer state than before he began, yet the executrix consented to see the imprisoned youth once more, this time dispensing with her attorney’s attendance, and content with the protection of the priest, and even upon that, on some subsequent visits, she did not insist.

And so the affair, like one of those medleys of our Irish melodies arranged by poor M. Jullien, starting with a martial air, breathing turf and thunder, fire and sword, went off imperceptibly into a pathetic and amorous strain. Father Roach, still officiating as internuncio, found the dowager less and less impracticable, and at length a treaty was happily concluded. The captive came forth to wear thenceforward those lighter chains only, which are forged by Hymen and wreathed with roses; and the lady applied to his old promissory notes the torch of love, which in a moment reduced them to ashes. And here, at the hermitage of our jolly Chapelizod priest — for bride and bridegroom were alike of the ‘ancient faith’ — the treaty was ratified, and the bagpipe and the bridegroom, in tremendous unison, splitting the rafters with ‘Hymen, Hymen, O Hymenœe!’

In the midst of this festive celebration, his reverence was summoned to the hall, already perfumed with the incense of the geese, the onions, the bacon browned at the kitchen-fire, and various other delicacies, toned and enriched by the vapours that exhaled from the little bottle of punch which, in consideration of his fatigues, stood by the elbow of the piper.

When the holy man had heard Moggy's tale, he scratched his tonsure and looked, I must say, confoundedly bored.

'Now, Moggy, my child, don't you see, acushla, 'tisn't to me you should ha' come; I'm here, my dear, engaged,' and he dried his moist and rubicund countenance, 'in one of the sacred offices iv the Church, the sacrament, my dear, iv' — here Mahony and the piper struck up again in so loud a key in the parlour, that as Moggy afterwards observed, 'they could not hear their own ears,' and the conclusion of the sentence was overwhelmed in, 'Many's the bottle I cracked in my time.' So his reverence impatiently beckoned to the hall-door, which he opened, and on the steps, where he was able to make himself audible, he explained the nature of his present engagement, and referred her to Doctor Toole. Assured, however, that he was in Dublin, he scratched his tonsure once more.

'The divil burn the lot o' them, my dear, an' purty evenin' they chose for their vagaries — an' law papers too, you say, an' an attorney into the bargain — there's no influence you can bring to bear on them fellows. If 'twas another man, an' a couple more at his back, myself an' Pat Moran 'id wallop them out of the house, an' into the river, be gannies; as aisy as say an *ave*.'

The illustration, it occurred to him, might possibly strike Moggy as irreverent, and the worthy father paused, and, with upturned eyes, murmured a Latin ejaculation, crossing himself; and having thus reasserted his clerical character, he proceeded to demonstrate the uselessness of his going.

But Father Roach, though sometimes a little bit testy, and, on the whole, not without faults, was as goodnatured an anchorite as ever said mass or brewed a contemplative bowl of punch. If he refused to go down to the Mills, he would not have been comfortable again that night, nor indeed for a week to come. So, with a sigh, he made up his mind, got quietly into his surtout and mufflers which hung on the peg behind the hall-door, clapped on his hat, grasped his stout oak stick, and telling his housekeeper to let them know, in case his guests should miss him, that he was obliged to go out for ten minutes or so on parish business, forth sallied the stout priest, with no great appetite for knight-errantry, but still anxious to rescue, if so it might be, the distressed princess, begirt with giants and enchanters, at the Mills.

At the Salmon House he enlisted the stalworth Paddy Moran, with the information conveyed to that surprised reveller, that he was to sleep at ‘Mrs. Nutter’s house’ that night; and so, at a brisk pace, the clerical knight, his squire, and demoiselle-errant, proceeded to the Mills.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

IN WHICH, WHILE THE HARMONY CONTINUES IN FATHER ROACH'S FRONT PARLOUR, A FEW DISCORDS ARE INTRODUCED ELSEWHERE; AND DOCTOR TOOLE ARRIVES IN THE MORNING WITH A MARVELLOUS BUDGET OF NEWS.

The good people who had established themselves in poor Nutter's domicile did not appear at all disconcerted by the priest's summons. His knock at the hall-door was attended to with the most consummate assurance by M. M.'s maid, just as if the premises had belonged to her mistress all her days.

Between this hussy and his reverence, who was in no mood to be trifled with, there occurred in the hall some very pretty sparring, which ended by his being ushered into the parlour, where sat Mistress Matchwell and Dirty Davy, the 'teathings' on the table, and an odour more potent than that of the Chinese aroma circulating agreeably through the chamber.

I need not report the dialogue of the parties, showing how the honest priest maintained, under sore trial, his character for politeness while addressing a lady, and how he indemnified himself in the style in which he 'discoorsed' the attorney; how his language fluctuated between the persuasively religious and the horribly profane; and how, at one crisis in the conversation, although he had self-command enough to bow to the matron, he was on the point of cracking the lawyer's crown with the fine specimen of Irish oak which he carried in his hand, and, in fact, nothing but his prudent respect for that gentleman's cloth prevented his doing so.

'But supposin', Ma'am,' said his reverence, referring to the astounding allegation of her marriage with Nutter; 'for the sake of argumint, it should turn out to be so, in coorse you would not like to turn the poor woman out iv doors, without a penny in her pocket, to beg her bread?'

'Your friend up stairs, Sir, intended playing the lady for the rest of her days,' answered M. M., with a cat-like demureness, sly and cruel, 'at my cost and to my sorrow. For twenty long years, or nigh hand it, she has lived with my husband, consuming my substance, and keeping me in penury. What did she allow me all that time? — not so much as that crust — ha! ha!

— no, not even allowed my husband to write me a line, or send me a shilling. I suppose she owes me for her maintenance here — in my house, out of my property — fully two thousand pounds. Make money of that, Sir; — and my lawyer advises me to make her pay it.'

'Or rather to make her account, Ma'am; or you will, if she's disposed to act fairly, take anything you may be advised, to be reasonable and equitable, Ma'am,' interposed Dirty Davy.

'That's it,' resumed Madam Mary. 'I don't want her four bones. Let her make up one thousand pounds — that's reason, Sir — and I'll forgive her the remainder. But if she won't, then to gaol I'll send her, and there she may rot for me.'

'You persave, Sir,' continued the attorney; 'your client — I mane your friend — has fixed herself in the character of an agent — all the late gintleman's money, you see, went through her hands — an agent or a steward to Charles Nutther, desased — an' a coort iv equity'll hould her liable to account, ye see; an' we know well enough what money's past through her hands annually — an' whatever she can prove to have been honestly applied, we'll be quite willin' to allow; but, you see, we must have the balance!'

'Balance!' said the priest, incensed beyond endurance; 'if you stay balancin' here, my joker, much longer, you'll run a raysonable risk of balancin' by the neck out iv one of them trees before the doore.'

'So you're threatenin' my life, Sir!' said the attorney, with a sly defiance.

'You lie like the divil, Sir — savin' your presence, Ma'am. Don't you know the differ, Sir, between a threat an' a warnin', you bosthoon?' thundered his reverence.

'You're sthrivin' to provoke me to a brache iv the pace, as the company can testify,' said Dirty Davy.

'Ye lie again, you — you fat crature— 'tis thryin' to provoke you to *keep* the pace I am. Listen to me, the both o' yez — the leedy up stairs, the misthress iv this house, and widow of poor Charles Nutter — Mrs. Sally Nutther, I say — is well liked in the parish; an' if they get the wind o' the word, all I say 's this — so sure as you're found here houldin' wrongful possession of her house an' goods, the boys iv Palmerstown, Castleknock, and Chapelizod will pay yez a visit you won't like, and duck yez in the river, or hang yez together, like a pair of common robbers, as you unquestionably *are — not*,' he added, with a sudden sense of legal liability.

'Who's that?' demanded the lynx-eyed lady, who saw Pat Moran cross the door in the shadow of the lobby.

'That's Mr. Moran, a most respectable and muscular man, come here to keep possession, Madam, for Mrs. Sally Nutther, our good friend and neighbour, Ma'am,' replied the priest.

'As you plase, Sir,' replied the attorney; 'you're tumblin' yourself and your friend into a nice predicament — as good a consthructive ousther, vi et armis, as my client could possibly desire. Av coorse, Sir, we'll seek compensation in the regular way for this violent threspass; and we have you criminally, you'll obsarve, no less than civilly.'

'Now, look — onderstand me — don't affect to misteek, av you plase,' said the priest, not very clear or comfortable, for he had before had one or two brushes with the law, and the recollection was disagreeable: 'I — Mr. Moran — we're here, Sir — the both iv us, as you see — pacibly — and — and — all to that — and at the request of Mrs. Sally Nutther — mind that, too — at her special desire — an' I tell you what's more — if you make any row here — do you mind — I'll come down with the magisthrate an' the soldiers, an' lave it to them to dale with you accordin' — mind ye — to law an' equity, civil, human, criminal, an' divine — an' make money o' that, ye — ye — mountain in labour — savin' your presence, Ma'am.'

'I thank you — that'll do, Sir,' said the lawyer, with a lazy chuckle.

'I'll now do myself the honour to make my compliments to Mrs. Sally Nutther,' said Father Roach, making a solemn bow to Mrs. Matchwell, who, with a shrill sneer, pursued him as he disappeared with —

'The lady in the bedroom, your reverence?'

Whereat Dirty Davy renewed his wheezy chuckle.

Nothing daunted, the indignant divine stumped resolutely up stairs, and found poor Sally Nutter, to whose room he was joyfully admitted by honest Betty, who knew his soft honest brogue in a panic, the violence of which had almost superseded her grief. So he consoled and fortified the poor lady as well as he could, and when she urged him to remain in the house all night.

'My dear Ma'am,' says he, lifting his hand and shaking his head, with closed eyes, 'you forget my ca*rac*ter. Why, the house is full iv faymales. My darlin' Mrs. Nutther, I — I couldn't enthertain sich an idaya; and, besides,' said he, with sudden energy, recollecting that the goose might be overdone, 'there's a religious duty, my dear Ma'am — the holy sacrament waitin' — a pair to be married; but Pat Moran will keep them quiet till mornin,' and I'll be down myself to see you then. So my sarvice to you, Mrs. Nutther, and God bless you, my dear Ma'am.'

And with this valediction the priest departed, and from the road he looked back at the familiar outline of the Mills, and its thick clumps of chimneys, and two twinkling lights, and thought of the horrible and sudden change that had passed over the place and the inmates, and how a dreadful curse had scathed them: making it, till lately the scene of comfort and tranquillity, to become the hold of every foul spirit, and the cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

Doctor Toole arrived at ten o'clock next morning, with news that shook the village. The inquest was postponed to the evening, to secure the attendance of some witnesses, who could throw a light, it was thought, on the enquiry. Then Doctor Toole was examined, and identified the body at first, confidently.

'But,' said he, in the great parlour of the Phœnix, where he held forth, 'though the features were as like as two eggs, it struck me the forehead was a thought broader. So, said I, I can set the matter at rest in five minutes. Charles Nutter's left upper arm was broken midway, and I set it; there would be the usual deposit where the bone knit, and he had a sword thrust through his right shoulder, cicatrised, and very well defined; and he had lost two under-teeth. Well, the teeth *were* gone, but three instead of two, and on laying the arm-bone bare, 'twas plain it had never been broken, and, in like manner, nothing wrong with the right shoulder, and there was nothing like so much deltoid and biceps as Nutter had. So says I, at once, be that body whose it may, 'tis none of Charles Nutter's, and to that I swear, gentlemen; and I had hardly made an end when 'twas identified for the corpse of the French hair-dresser, newly arrived from Paris, who was crossing the Liffey, on Tuesday night, you remember, at the old ferry-boat slip, and fell in and was drowned. So that part of the story's ended.

'But, gentlemen,' continued Toole, with the important and resolute bearing of a man who has a startling announcement to make, 'I am sorry to have to tell you that poor Charles Nutter's in gaol.'

In gaol! was echoed in all sorts of tones from his auditory, with an abundance of profane ejaculations of wonderment, concern, and horror.

‘Ay, gentlemen, in the body of the gaol.’

Then it came out that Nutter had been arrested that very morning, in a sedan-chair, at the end of Cook Street, and was now in the county prison awaiting his trial; and that, no doubt, bail would be refused, which, indeed, turned out truly.

So, when all these amazing events had been thoroughly discussed, the little gathering dispersed to blaze them abroad, and Toole wrote to Mr. Gamble, to tell him that the person, Mary Matchwell, claiming to be the wife of Charles Nutter, has established herself at the Mills, and is disposed to be troublesome, and terrifies poor Mrs. Sally Nutter, who is ill; it would be a charity to come out, and direct measures. I know not what ought to be done, though confident her claim is a bag of moonshine and lies, and, if not stopped, she’ll make away with the goods and furniture, which is mighty hard upon this unfortunate lady,’ etc., *etc.*

‘That Mary Matchwell, as I think, ought to be in gaol for the assault on Sturk; her card, you know, was found in the mud beside him, and she’s fit for any devil’s work.’

This was addressed by Toole to his good wife.

‘That *card?* said Jimmey, who happened to be triturating a powder in the corner for little Master Barney Sturk, and who suspended operations, and spoke with the pestle in his fingers, and a very cunning leer on his sharp features: ‘I know all about that card.’

‘You do — do you? and why didn’t you spake out long ago, you vagabond?’ said Toole. ‘Well, then! come now! — what’s in your knowledge-box? — out with it.’

‘Why, I had that card in my hand the night Mr. Nutter went off.’

‘Well? — go on.’

‘’Twas in the hall at the Mills, Sir; I knew it again at the Barracks the minute I seen it.’

‘Why, ’tis a printed card — there’s hundreds of them — how d’ye know one from t’other, wisehead?’

‘Why, Sir, ’twas how this one was walked on, and the letter M. in Mary was tore across, an’ on the back was writ, in red ink, for Mrs. Macnamara, and they could not read it down at the Barracks, because the wet had got at it, and the end was mostly washed away, and they thought it was MacNally, or MacIntire; but I knew it the minute I seen it.'

'Well, my tight little fellow, and what the dickens has all that to do with the matter?' asked Toole, growing uneasy.

'The dickens a much, I believe, Sir; only as Mr. Nutter was goin' out he snatched it out o' my hand — in the hall there — and stuffed it into his pocket.'

'You did not tell that lying story, did you, about the town, you mischievous young spalpeen?' demanded the doctor, shaking his disciple rather roughly by the arm.

'No — I — I didn't — I did not tell, Sir — what is it to me?' answered the boy, frightened.

'You didn't tell — not you, truly. I lay you a tenpenny-bit there isn't a tattler in the town but has the story by rote — a pretty kettle o' fish you'll make of it, with your meddling and lying. If 'twas true, 'twould be another matter, but — hold your tongue; — how the plague are you to know one card from another when they're all alike, and Mrs. Macnamara, Mrs. Macfiddle. I suppose *you* can read better than the *adjutant*, ha, ha! Well, mind my words, you've got yourself into a pretty predicament; I'd walk twice from this to the county court-house and back again, only to look at it; a pleasant cross-hackling the counsellors will give you, and if you prevaricate — you know what that is, my boy — the judge will make short work with you, and you may cool your heels in gaol as long as he pleases, for me.'

'And, look'ee,' said Toole, returning, for he was going out, as he generally did, whenever he was profoundly ruffled; 'you remember the affidavit-man that was whipped and pilloried this time two years for perjury, eh? Look to it, my fine fellow. There's more than me knows how Mr. Nutter threatened to cane you that night — and a good turn 'twould have been — and 'twouldn't take much to persuade an honest jury that you wanted to pay him off for that by putting a nail in his coffin, you young miscreant! Go on — do — and I promise you'll get an airing yet you'll not like — you will.'

And so Toole, with a wag of his head, and a grin over his shoulder, strutted out into the village street, where he was seen, with a pursed mouth, and a flushed visage, to make a vicious cut or two with his cane in the air as he walked along. And it must be allowed that Master Jimmey's reflections were a little confused and uncomfortable, as he pondered over the past and the future with the pestle in his fingers and the doctor's awful words ringing in his ears.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

SHOWING HOW LITTLE LILY'S LIFE BEGAN TO CHANGE INTO A RETROSPECT; AND HOW ON A SUDDEN SHE BEGAN TO FEEL BETTER.

As time wore on, little Lilias was not better. When she had read her Bible, and closed it, she would sit long silent, with a sad look, thinking; and often she would ask old Sally questions about her mother, and listen to her, looking all the time with a strange and earnest gaze through the glass door upon the evergreens and the early snowdrops. And old Sally was troubled somehow, and saddened at her dwelling so much upon this theme.

And one evening, as they sat together in the drawingroom — she and the good old rector — she asked him, too, gently, about her; for he never shrank from talking of the beloved dead, but used to speak of her often, with a simple tenderness, as if she were still living.

In this he was right. Why should we be afraid to *speak* of those of whom we think so continually? She is not dead, but sleepeth! I have met a few, and they very good men, who spoke of their beloved dead with this cheery affection, and mingled their pleasant and loving remembrances of them in their common talk; and often I wished that, when I am laid up in the bosom of our common mother earth, those who loved me would keep my memory thus socially alive, and allow my name, when I shall answer to it no more, to mingle still in their affectionate and merry intercourse.

'Some conflicts my darling had the day before her departure,' he said; 'but such as through God's goodness lasted not long, and ended in the comfort that continued to her end, which was so quiet and so peaceable, we who were nearest about her, knew not the moment of her departure. And little Lily was then but an infant — a tiny little thing. Ah! if my darling had been spared to see her grown-up, such a beauty, and so like her!'

And so he rambled on; and when he looked at her, little Lily was weeping; and as he looked she said, trying to smile —

'Indeed, I don't know why I'm crying, darling. There's nothing the matter with your little Lily — only I can't help crying: and I'm your foolish little

Lily, you know.’

And this often happened, that he found she was weeping when he looked on her suddenly, and she used to try to smile, and both, then, to cry together, and neither say what they feared, only each unspeakably more tender and loving. Ah, yes! in their love was mingling now something of the yearning of a farewell, which neither would acknowledge.

‘Now, while they lay here,’ says sweet John Bunyan, in his ‘Pilgrim’s Progress,’ ‘and waited for the good hour, there was a noise in the town that there was a post come from the celestial city, with matter of great importance to one Christiana. So enquiry was made for her, and the house was found out where she was; so the post presented her with a letter, the contents whereof were, “Hail, thou good one! I bring thee tidings that the Master calleth for thee, and expecteth that thou shouldst stand in his presence, in clothes of immortality, within these ten days.”’

‘When he had read this letter to her, he gave her therewith a sure token that he was a true messenger, and was come to bid her make haste to be gone. The token was an arrow with a point sharpened with love, let easily into her heart, which by degrees wrought so effectually with her, that at the time appointed she must be gone.

‘When Christiana saw that her time was come, and that she was the first of this company that was to go over, she called for Mr. Greatheart, her guide, and told him how matters were.’

And so little Lily talked with Mr. Greatheart in her own way; and hearing of her mother, gave ear to the story as to a sweet and solemn parable, that lighted her dark steps. And the old man went on: —

‘It is St. John who says, “And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. So when they had rowed about five-and-twenty, or thirty furlongs, they see the Lord walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. But he saith unto them, It is I, be not afraid.” So is it with the frail bark of mortality and the trembling spirit it carries. When “it is now dark,” and the sea arises, and the “great wind” blows, the vessel is tost, and the poor heart fails within it; and when they see the dim form which they take to be the angel of death walking the roaming waters, they cry out in terror, but the voice of the sweet Redeemer, the Lord of Life is heard, “It is I; be not afraid,” and so the faithful ones “willingly receive him into the ship,” and immediately it is at the land whither they go: yes, at the land whither they go. But, oh! the lonely ones, left behind on the other shore.’

One morning, old Sally, who, in her quiet way, used to tell all the little village news she heard, thinking to make her young mistress smile, or at least listen, said —

‘And that wild young gentleman, Captain Devereux, is growing godly, they say; Mrs. Irons tells me how he calls for his Bible o’ nights, and how he does not play cards, nor eat suppers at the Phœnix, nor keep bad company, nor go into Dublin, but goes to church; and she says she does not know what to make of him.’

Little Lily did not speak or raise her head; she went on stirring the little locket, that lay on the table, with the tip of her finger, looking on it silently. She did not seem to mind old Sally’s talk, almost to hear it, but when it ended, she waited, still silent, as a child, when the music is over, listens for more.

When she came down she placed her chair near the window, that she might see the snowdrops and the crocuses.

‘The spring, at last, Sally, my darling, and I feel so much better;’ and Lily smiled on the flowers through the windows, and I fancy the flowers opened in that beautiful light.

And she said, every now and then, that she felt ‘so much better — so much stronger,’ and made old Sally sit by her, and talk to her, and smiled so happily, and there again were all her droll engaging little ways. And when the good rector came in, that evening, she welcomed him in the old pleasant way: though she could not run out, as in other times, when she heard his foot on the steps, to meet him at the door, and there was such a beautiful colour in her clear, thin cheeks, and she sang his favourite little song for him, just one verse, with the clear, rich voice he loved so well, and then tired. The voice remained in his ears long after, and often came again, and that little song, in lonely reveries, while he sat listening, in long silence, and twilight, a swan’s song.

‘You see, your little Lily is growing quite well again. I feel so much better.’

There was such a childish sunshine in her smile, his trembling heart believed it.

‘Oh! little Lily, my darling!’ he stopped — he was crying, and yet delighted. Smiling all the time, and crying, and through it a little laugh, as if he had waked from a dream of having lost her, and found her there — his treasure — safe. ‘If anything happened to little Lily, I think the poor old man’ — and the sentence was not finished; and, after a little pause, he said, quite cheerily— ‘But I knew the spring would bring her back. I knew it, and here she is; the light of the house; little Lily, my treasure.’

And so he blessed and kissed her, and blessed her again, with all his fervent soul, laying his old hand lightly on her fair young head; and when she went up for the night, with gentle old Sally, and he heard her room door shut, he closed his own, and kneeling down, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, in a rapture of gratitude, he poured forth his thanksgivings before the Throne of all Mercies.

These outpourings of gratitude, all premature, for blessings not real but imagined, are not vain. They are not thrown away upon that glorious and marvellous God who draws near to all who will draw near to Him, reciprocates every emotion of our love with a tenderness literally parental, and is delighted with his creatures’ appreciation of his affection and his trustworthiness; who knows whereof we are made, and remembers that we are but dust, and is our faithful Creator. Therefore, friend, though thou fearest a shadow, thy prayer is not wasted; though thou rejoicest in an illusion, thy thanksgiving is not in vain. They are the expressions of thy faith recorded in Heaven, and counted — oh! marvellous love and compassion! — to thee for righteousness.

CHAPTER LXXX.

IN WHICH TWO ACQUAINTANCES BECOME, ON A SUDDEN, MARVELLOUSLY FRIENDLY IN THE CHURCHYARD; AND MR. DANGERFIELD SMOKES A PIPE IN THE BRASS CASTLE, AND RESOLVES THAT THE DUMB SHALL SPEAK.

On Sunday, Mervyn, after the good doctor's sermon and benediction, wishing to make enquiry of the rector touching the movements of his clerk, whose place was provisionally supplied by a corpulent and unctuous mercenary from Dublin, whose fat presence and panting delivery were in signal contrast with the lank figure and deep cavernous tones of the absent official, loitered in the churchyard to allow time for the congregation to disperse, and the parson to disrobe and emerge.

He was reading an epitaph on an expansive black flagstone, in the far corner of the churchyard — it is still there — upon several ancestral members of the family of Lowe, who slept beneath 'in hope,' as the stonecutter informed the upper world; and musing, as sad men will, upon the dates and vanities of the record, when a thin white hand was lightly laid upon his sleeve from behind; and looking round, in expectation of seeing the rector's grave, simple, kindly countenance, he beheld, instead, with a sort of odd thrill, the white glittering face of Mr. Paul Dangerfield.

'Hamlet in the churchyard!' said the white gentleman, with an ambiguous playfulness, very like a sneer. 'I'm too old to play Horatio; but standing at his elbow, if the Prince permits, I have a friendly word or two to say, in my own dry way.'

There was in Mervyn's nature something that revolted instinctively from the singular person who stood at his shoulder. Their organisations and appetites were different, I suppose, and repellent. Cold and glittering was the 'gelidus anguis in herbâ' — the churchyard grass — who had lifted his baleful crest close to his ear.

There was a slight flush on 'Hamlet's' forehead, and a glimmer of something dangerous in his eye, as he glanced on his stark acquaintance.

But the feeling was transitory and unreasonable, and he greeted him with a cold and sad civility.

‘I was thinking, Mr. Mervyn,’ said Mr. Dangerfield, politely, ‘of walking up to the Tiled House, after church, to pay my respects, and ask the favour of five minutes’ discourse with you; and seeing you here, I ventured to present myself.’

‘If I can do anything to serve Mr. Dangerfield,’ began Mervyn.

Dangerfield smiled and bowed. He was very courteous; but in his smile there was a character of superiority which Mervyn felt almost like an insult.

‘You mistake me, Sir. I’m all gratitude; but I don’t mean to trouble you further than to ask your attention for two or three minutes. I’ve a thing to tell you, Sir. *I*’m really anxious to serve *you*. I wish I could. And ’tis only that I’ve recollected since I saw you, a circumstance of which possibly you may make some use.’

‘I’m deeply obliged, Sir — deeply,’ said Mervyn, eagerly.

‘I’m only, Sir, too happy. It relates to Charles Archer. I’ve recollected, since I saw you, a document concerning his death. It had a legal bearing of some sort, and was signed by at least three gentlemen. One was Sir Philip Drayton, of Drayton Hall, who was with him at Florence in his last illness. I may have signed it myself, but I don’t recollect. It was by his express desire, to quiet, as I remember, some proceedings which might have made a noise, and compromised his family.’

‘Can you bring to mind the nature of the document?’

‘Why, thus much. I’m quite sure it began with a certificate of his death; and then, I think, was added a statement, at his last request, which surprised, or perhaps, shocked us. I only say I *think* — for though I remember that such a statement was solemnly made, I can’t bring to mind whether it was set out in the writing of which I speak. Only I am confident it referred to some crime — a confession of something; but for the life o’ me I can’t recollect what. If you could let me know the subject of your suspicion it might help me. I should never have remembered this occurrence, for instance, had it not been for our meeting t’other day. I can’t exactly — in fact, *at all* — bring to mind what the crime was: forgery, or perjury — eh?’

‘Why, Sir, ’twas this,’ said Mervyn, and stopped short, not knowing how far even this innocent confidence might compromise Irons. Dangerfield, his head slightly inclined, was disconcertingly silent and attentive.

‘I — I suspect,’ resumed Mervyn, ‘I suspect, Sir, ’twas *perjury*,’ said Mervyn.

‘Oh! perjury? I see — in the matter of his testimony in that distressing prosecution. My Lord Dunoran — hey?’

Mervyn bowed, and Dangerfield remained silent and thoughtful for a minute or two, and then said: —

‘I see, Sir — I *think* I see; but, who then was the guilty man, who killed Mr. —— pooh, What’s-his-name — the deceased man, — you know?’

‘Why, upon that point, Sir, I should have some hesitation in speaking. I can only now say thus much, that I’m satisfied, he, Charles Archer, in swearing as he did, committed wilful perjury.’

‘You are? — oho! — oh! This is satisfactory. You don’t, of course, mean mere conjecture — eh?’

‘I know not, Sir, how you would call it, but ’tis certainly a feeling fixed in my mind.’

‘Well, Sir, I trust it may prove well founded. I wish I had myself a copy of that paper; but, though I have it not, I think I can put you in a way to get it. It was addressed, I perfectly recollect, to the Messrs. Elrington, gentlemen attorneys, in Chancery-lane, London. I remember it, because my Lord Castlemallard employed them eight or nine years afterwards in some law business, which recalled the whole matter to my mind before it had quite faded. No doubt they have it there. ’Twas about a week after his death. The date of that you can have from newspapers. You’ll not mention my name when writing, because they mayn’t like the trouble of searching, and my Lord Castlemallard would not approve my meddling in other persons’ affairs — even in yours.’

‘I sha’n’t forget. But what if they refuse to seek the paper out?’

‘Make it worth their while in money, Sir; and, though they may grumble over it, I warrant they’ll find it.’

‘Sir,’ said Mervyn, suddenly, ‘I cannot thank you half enough. This statement, should it appear attached, as you suppose, to the certificate, may possibly place me on the track of that lost witness, who yet may restore my ruined name and fortunes. I thank you, Sir. From my heart I *do* thank you.’

And he grasped Dangerfield’s white thin hand in his, with a fervour how unlike his cold greeting of only a few minutes before, and shook it with an eager cordiality.

Thus across the grave of these old Lowes did the two shake hands, as they had never done before; and Dangerfield, white and glittering, and like a frolicsome man, entering into a joke, wrung his with an exaggerated demonstration, and then flung it downward with a sudden jerk, as if throwing down a glove. The gesture, the smile, and the suspicion of a scowl, had a strange mixture of cordiality, banter and defiance, and he was laughing a quiet 'ha, ha, ha;' and, wagging his head, he said —

'Well, I thought 'twould please you to hear this; and anything more I can do or think of is equally at your service.'

So, side by side they returned, picking their steps among the graves and headstones, to the old church porch.

For a day or two after the storm, the temper of our cynical friend of the silver spectacles had suffered. Perhaps he did not like the news which had reached him since, and would have preferred that Charles Nutter had made good his escape from the gripe of justice.

The management of Lord Castlemallard's Irish estates had devolved provisionally upon Mr. Dangerfield during the absence of Nutter and the coma of his rival; and the erect white gentleman, before his desk in his elbow-chair, when, after his breakfast, about to open the letters and the books relating to this part of his charge, used sometimes to grin over his work, and jabber to himself his hard scoffs and gibes over the sins and follies of man, and the chops and changes of this mortal life.

But from and after the night of the snow-storm he had contracted a disgust for this part of his labours, and he used to curse Nutter with remarkable intensity, and with an iteration which, to a listener who thought that even the best thing may be said too often, would have been tiresome.

Perhaps a little occurrence, which Mr. Dangerfield himself utterly despised, may have had something to do with his bitter temper, and gave an unsatisfactory turn to his thoughts. It took place on the eventful night of the tempest.

If some people saw visions that night, others dreamed dreams. In a midnight storm like this, time was when the solemn peal and defiant clang of the holy bells would have rung out confusion through the winged hosts of 'the prince of the powers of the air,' from the heights of the abbey tower. Everybody has a right to his own opinion on the matter. Perhaps the prince and his army are no more upon the air on such a night than on any other; or that being so, they no more hastened their departure by reason of the bells than the eclipse does by reason of the beating of the Emperor of China's gongs. But this I aver, whatever the cause, upon such nights of storm, the sensoria of some men are crossed by such wild variety and succession of images, as amounts very nearly to the Walpurgis of a fever. It is not the mere noise — other noises won't do it. The air, to be sure, is thin, and blood-vessels expand, and perhaps the brain is pressed upon unduly. Well, I don't know. Material laws may possibly account for it. I can only speak with certainty of the phenomenon. I've experienced it; and some among those of my friends who have reached that serene period of life in which we con over our ailments, register our sensations, and place ourselves upon regimens, tell me the same story of themselves. And this, too, I know, that upon the night in question, Mr. Paul Dangerfield, who was not troubled either with vapours or superstitions, as he lay in his green-curtained bed in the Brass Castle, had as many dreams flitting over his brain and voices humming and buzzing in his ears, as if he had been a poet or a pythoness.

He had not become, like poor Sturk before his catastrophe, a dreamer of dreams habitually. I suppose he did dream. The beasts do. But his visions never troubled him; and I don't think there was one morning in a year on which he could have remembered his last night's dream at the breakfast-table.

On this particular night, however, he did dream. *Vidit somnium*. He thought that Sturk was dead, and laid out in a sort of state in an open coffin, with a great bouquet on his breast, something in the continental fashion, as he remembered it in the case of a great, stern, burly ecclesiastic in Florence. The coffin stood on tressels in the aisle of Chapelizod church; and, of all persons in the world, he and Charles Nutter stood side by side as chief mourners, each with a great waxen taper burning in one hand, and a white pockethandkerchief in the other.

Now in dreams it sometimes happens that men undergo sensations of awe, and even horror, such as waking they never know, and which the scenery and situation of the dream itself appear wholly inadequate to produce. Mr. Paul Dangerfield, had he been called on to do it, would have kept solitary watch in a dead man's chamber, and smoked his pipe as serenely as he would in the club-room of the Phœnix. But here it was different. The company were all hooded and silent, sitting in rows: and there was a dismal sound of distant waters, and an indefinable darkness and horror in the air; and, on a sudden, up sat the corpse of Sturk, and thundered, with a shriek, a dreadful denunciation, and Dangerfield started up in his bed aghast, and cried— 'Charles Archer!'

The storm was bellowing and shrieking outside, and for some time that grim, white gentleman, bolt upright in his shirt, did not know distinctly in what part of the world, or, indeed, in what world he was.

'So,' said Mr. Dangerfield, soliloquising, 'Charles Nutter's alive, and in prison, and what comes next? 'Tis enough to make one believe in a devil almost! Why wasn't he drowned, d — n him? How did he get himself taken, d — n him again? From the time I came into this unlucky village I've smelt danger. That accursed beast, a corpse, and a ghost, and a prisoner at last — well, he has been my evil genius. *If* he were drowned or hanged; born to be hanged, I hope: all I want is quiet — just *quiet*; but I've a feeling the play's not played out yet. He'll give the hangman the slip, will he: not if I can help it, though; but caution, Sir, caution; life's at stake — my life's on the cast. The clerk's a wise dog to get out of the way. Death's walking. What a cursed fool I was when I came here and saw those beasts, and knew them, not to turn back again, and leave them to possess their paradise! I think I've lost my caution and common sense under some cursed infatuation. That handsome, insolent wench, Miss Gertrude, 'twould be something to have her, and to humble her, too; but — but 'tis not worth a week in such a neighbourhood.'

Now this soliloquy, which broke into an actual mutter every here and there, occurred at about eleven o'clock a.m., in the little low parlour of the Brass Castle, that looked out on the wintry river.

Mr. Dangerfield knew the virtues of tobacco, so he charged his pipe, and sat grim, white, and erect by the fire. It is not everyone that is 'happy thinking,' and the knight of the silver spectacles followed out his solitary discourse, with his pipe between his lips, and saw all sorts of things through the white narcotic smoke.

'It would not do to go off and leave affairs thus; a message might follow me, eh? No; I'll stay and see it out, quite out. Sturk — Barnabas Sturk. If he came to his speech for five minutes — hum — we'll see. I'll speak with Mrs. Sturk about it — we must help him to his speech — a prating fellow;

’tis hard he should hold his tongue; yes, we’ll help him to his speech; ’tis in the interest of justice — eternal justice — ha, ha, the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Let Dr. Sturk be sworn — ha, ha — magna est veritas — there is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed; ha, ha. Let Dr. Sturk be called.’

So the white, thin phantom of the spectacles and tobacco pipe, sitting upright by the fire, amused himself with a solitary banter. Then he knocked the white ashes out upon the hob, stood up with his back to the fire, in grim rumination, for about a minute, at the end of which he unlocked his desk, and took forth a letter, with a large red seal. If was more than two months old by this time, and was, in fact, that letter from the London doctor which he had expected with some impatience.

It was not very long, and standing he read it through, and his white face contracted, and darkened, and grew strangely intense and stern as he did so.

‘’Tis devilish strong — ha, ha, ha — conclusive, indeed.’ He was amused again. ‘I’ve kept it long enough — *igni reservata*.’

And holding it in the tongs, he lighted a corner, and as the last black fragment of it, covered with creeping sparks, flew up the chimney, he heard the voice of a gentleman hallooing in the courtyard.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

IN WHICH MR. DANGERFIELD RECEIVES A VISITOR, AND MAKES A CALL.

Dangerfield walked out and blandly greeted the visitor, who turned out to be Mr. Justice Lowe.

‘I give you good-morning, Sir; pray, alight and step in. Hallo, Doolan, take Mr. Justice Lowe’s horse.’

So Mr. Lowe thanked him, in his cold way, and bowing, strode into the Brass Castle; and after the customary civilities, sat himself down, and says he —

‘I’ve been at the Crown Office, Sir, about this *murder*, we may call it, upon Sturk, and I told them you could throw a light, as I thought, on the matter.’

‘As how, Sir?’

‘Why, regarding the kind of feeling that subsisted between the prisoner, Nutter, and Doctor Sturk.’

‘’Tis unpleasant, Sir, but I can’t object.’

‘There was an angry feeling about the agency, I believe? Lord Castlemallard’s agency, eh?’ continued Lowe.

‘Well, I suppose it *was* that; there certainly was an unpleasant feeling — *very* unpleasant.’

‘You’ve heard him express it?’

‘Yes; I think most gentlemen who know him have. Why, he made no disguise of it; he was no great talker, but we’ve heard him on that subject.’

‘But you specially know how it stood between them in respect of the agency?’

‘Yes.’

‘Very good, Sir,’ said Lowe.

‘And I’ve a notion that something decisive should be done toward effecting a full discovery, and I’ll consider of a method,’ replied Dangerfield.

‘How do you mean?’ said Lowe, looking up with a glance like a hawk.

'How! why I'll talk it over with Mrs. Sturk this evening.'

'Why, what has she got to tell?'

'Nothing, as I suppose; I'll see her to-day; there's nothing to tell; but something, I think, to be done; it hasn't been set about rightly; 'tis a botched business hitherto — that's in *my* judgment.'

'Yet 'tis rather a strong case,' answered Mr. Lowe, superciliously.

'Rather a strong case, so it is, but I'll clench it, Sir; it ought to be certain.'

'Well, Sir?' said Lowe, who expected to hear more.

'Yes,' said Dangerfield, briskly, "twill depend on *her; I'll* suggest, *she'll* decide.'

'And why *she*, Sir?' said Lowe sharply.

'Because 'tis her business and her right, and no one else can,' answered Dangerfield just as tartly, with his hands in his breeches' pockets, and his head the least thing o' one side, and then with a bow, 'won't you drink a glass of wine, Sir?' which was as much as to say, you'll get no more from me.

'I thank you, Sir, no; 'tis a little too early for me.' And so with the usual ceremonies, Mr. Lowe departed, the governor of the Brass Castle walking beside his horse, as far as the iron gate, to do him honour; and as he rode away towards Lucan, Mr. Dangerfield followed him with a snowy smirk.

Then briskly, after his wont, the knight of the shining spectacles made his natty toilet; and in a few minutes his cocked hat was seen gliding along the hedge toward Chapelizod.

He glanced up at Sturk's window — it was a habit now — so soon as he came in sight, but all looked as usual. So he mounted the steps, and asked to see Mrs. Sturk.

'My dear Madam,' said he, after due courtesies interchanged, 'I've but a few minutes; my horse waits yonder at the Phœnix, and I'm away to town. How does your patient to-day?'

'Oh, mighty well — wonderful — that is considering how cold the weather is. The doctor says he's lower, indeed, but I don't mind that, for he must be lower while the cold continues; I always say that; and I judge very much by the eye; don't you, Mr. Dangerfield? by his looks, you know; they can't deceive me, and I assure you— '

'Your house is quiet; are the children out, Ma'am?'

'Oh, yes, with Mag in the park.'

‘Perhaps, Ma’am, you’d let me see him?’

‘See him?’

‘Yes, look on him, Ma’am, only for a moment you know.’

She looked very much surprised, and perhaps a little curious and frightened.

‘I hope you haven’t heard he’s worse, Mr. Dangerfield. Oh, Sir, sure you haven’t?’

‘No, Madam, on my honour, except from yourself, I’ve heard nothing of him to-day; but I’d like to see him, and speak a word to you, with your permission.’

So Mrs. Sturk led the way up stairs, whispering as she ascended; for she had always the fancy in her head that her Barney was in a sweet light sleep, from which he was on no account to be awakened, forgetting, or not clearly knowing, that all the ordnance in the barrack-yard over the way had not voice enough to call him up from that dread slumber.

‘You may go down, my dear,’ said Mr. Dangerfield to the little girl, who rose silently from the chair as they entered; ‘with your permission, Mistress Sturk — I say, child, you may run down,’ and he smiled a playful, sinister smile, with a little wave of his finger toward the door. So she courtesied and vanished obediently.

Then he drew the curtain, and looked on Doctor Sturk. There lay the hero of the tragedy, his smashed head strapped together with sticking-plaster, and a great white fold of fine linen, like a fantastic turban, surmounting his grim yellow features.

Then he slipped his fingers under the coverlet, and took his hand; a strange greeting that! But it was his pulse he wanted, and when he had felt it for a while —

‘Psha!’ said he in a whisper — for the semblance of sleep affected everyone alike— ‘his pulse is just gone. Now, Madam, listen to me. There’s not a soul in Chapelizod but yourself who does not know his wounds are mortal — he’s *dying*, Ma’am.’

‘Oh — oh — o — o — oh, Mr. Dangerfield, you don’t — you don’t think so,’ wildly cried the poor little lady, growing quite white with terror and agony.

‘Now, pray, my dear Mistress Sturk, compose yourself, and hear me out: ’Tis my belief he has a chance; but none, absolutely *no* chance, Madam, unless my advice be taken. There’s not an evening, Ma’am, I meet Doctor Toole at the club, but I hear the same report — a little lower — always the same — lower — sinking — and *no hope*.’

Here Mrs. Sturk broke out again.

‘Now, Madam,’ I protest you’ll make me regret my visit, unless you please to command yourself. While the doctors who are about him have got him in hands, there’s neither hope for his life, nor for his recovering, for one moment, the use of his speech. Pray, Madam, hear me. They state as much themselves. Now, Madam, I say, we must have a chance for his life, and if that fails, a chance for his speech. The latter, Madam, is of more consequence than, perhaps, you are aware.’

Poor little Mrs. Sturk was looking very pale, and breathing very hard, with her hand pressed to her heart.

‘I’ve done what I could, you know, to see my way through his affairs, and I’ve succeeded in keeping his creditors quiet.’

At this point poor Mrs. Sturk broke out —

‘Oh! may the Father of the fatherless, if such they are to be bless and reward — oh — oh — ho — ho, Mr. Dangerfield — oh — oh-oh — Sir.’

‘Now, pray, Madam, oblige me and be tranquil. I say, Madam, his affairs, I suspect, are by no means in so bad a case as we at first supposed, and he has got, or I’m mistaken, large sums out, but where, neither I nor you can tell. Give him five minutes’ speech, and it may be worth a thousand pounds to you — well, not to you, if you will, but to his children. And again, Madam, ’tis of the utmost importance that he should be able to state who was the villain who struck him — Charles — a — Charles — Mr. Nutter — you know, Madam.’

‘Oh! that dreadful — dreadful man — may Heaven forgive him. Oh, my Barney! look at him there — he’d forgive him if he could speak. You would, my blessed Barney — you would.’

‘To be sure he would. But see, Ma’am, the importance of having his evidence to settle the fact. Well, I know that he would not like to hang anybody. But suppose, Ma’am, Charles Nutter is innocent, don’t you think he’d like to acquit him? ay, you do. Well, Ma’am, ’tis due to the public, you see, and to his children that he should have a chance of recovering his speech, and to common humanity that he should have a chance for his *life* — eh? and *neither* will the doctors who have him in hands allow him. Now, Madam, there's a simple operation, called trepanning, you have heard of it, which would afford him such a chance, but fearing its failure they won't try it, although they allege that without it *he must die*, d'ye see? — ay, *die he must*, without a cast for his life if you won't try it.'

And so, by harping on the alternatives, and demonstrating the prudence, humanity, and duty of action, and the inevitably fatal consequences of the other course, he wrought upon her at last to write a note to Surgeon Dillon to come out on the evening following, and to perform the operation. The dreadful word 'to-day,' the poor little woman could not abide. She pleaded for a respite, and so, half-distracted, fixed tomorrow.

'I hope, my dear Madam, you've some little confidence in me. I think I have shown an interest, and I've striven to be of use.'

'Oh, Sir, Mr. Dangerfield, you've been too good, our guardian angel; but for you, Sir, we should not have had a roof over our heads, or a bed to lie on; oh! may— '

'Well, Ma'am, you please to speak too highly of my small services; but I would plead them, humble as they are, as a claim on your confidence, and having decided upon this wise and necessary course, pray do not say a word about it to anybody but myself. I will go to town, and arrange for the doctor's visit, and you'll soon, I hope, have real grounds for gratitude, not to me, Ma'am, but to Heaven.'

CHAPTER LXXXII.

IN WHICH MR. PAUL DANGERFIELD PAYS HIS RESPECTS AND COMPLIMENTS AT BELMONT; WHERE OTHER VISITORS ALSO PRESENT THEMSELVES.

Before going to town, Mr. Dangerfield, riding over the bridge and up the Palmerstown-road, dismounted at Belmont doorsteps, and asked for the general. He was out. Then for Miss Rebecca Chattesworth. Yes, she was in the withdrawing-room. And so, light, white, and wiry, he ascended the stairs swiftly.

‘Mr. Dangerfield,’ cried Dominick, throwing open the door; and that elderly and ill-starred wooer glided in thereat.

‘Madam, your most humble servant.’

‘Oh! Mr. Dangerfield? You’re very welcome, Sir,’ said Aunt Becky, with a grand courtesy, and extending her thin jewelled hand, which he took gallantly, with another bow, and a smile, and a flash from his spectacles.

Aunt Becky laid down her volume of Richardson. She was quite alone, except for her little monkey — Goblin — with a silver hoop about his waist, and a chain thereto attached; two King Charles’s dogs, whose barking subsided after a while; and one gray parrot on a perch in the bow-window, who happily was not in a very chatty mood just then. So the human animals were able to edge in a sentence easily enough. And Mr. Dangerfield said —

‘I’m happy in having found you, Madam; for whatever be my disappointments else, to Miss Rebecca Chattesworth at least I owe a debt of gratitude, which, despairing to repay it, I can only acknowledge; and leaving unacknowledged, I should have departed from Ireland most unhappily.’

‘What a fop! what a fop,’ said the parrot.

‘You rate my poor wishes too highly, Mr. Dangerfield. I over-estimated, myself, my influence with the young lady; but why speak of your departure, Sir, so soon? A little time may yet work a change.’

‘You lie, you dog! you lie, you lie, you lie,’ said the parrot.

‘Madam,’ said he with a shake of his head, ‘’tis hoping against hope. Time will add to *my* wrinkles without softening *her* aversion. I utterly despair. While there remained one spark of hope I should never have dreamed of leaving Chapelizod.’

Here there was a considerable pause, during which the parrot occasionally repeated, ‘You lie, you lie — you dog — you lie.’

‘Of course, Sir, if the chance be not worth waiting for, you do well to be gone wherever your business or your pleasures, Sir, invite you,’ said Aunt Becky, a little loftily.

‘What a fop!’ said the parrot. ‘You lie, you dog!’

‘Neither business, Madam, nor pleasures invite me. My situation here has been most distressing. So long as hope cheered me, I little regarded what might be said or thought; but I tell you honestly that hope is extinguished; and it has grown to me intolerable longer to remain in sight of that treasure for which I cannot cease to wish, and which I never can possess. I’ve grown, Madam, to detest the place.’

Aunt Becky, with her head very high, adjusted in silence, the two China mandarins on the mantelpiece — first, one very carefully, then the other. And there was a pause, during which one of the lapdogs screamed; and the monkey, who had boxed his ears, jumped, with a ringing of his chain, chattering, on the back of the armchair in which the grim suitor sat. Mr. Dangerfield would have given the brute a slap in the face, but that he knew how that would affect Miss Rebecca Chattesworth.

‘So, Madam,’ said he, standing up abruptly, ‘I am here to thank you most gratefully for the countenance given to my poor suit, which, here and now, at last and for ever, I forego. I shall leave for England so soon as my business will allow; and as I made no secret of my suit, so I shall make none of the reasons of my departure. I’m an outspoken man, Madam; and as the world knew my hopes, I shall offer them no false excuses for my departure; but lift my hat, and bow to fortune — a defeated man.’

‘*Avez-vous diné mon petit coquin?*’ said the parrot.

‘Well, Sir, I will not altogether deny you have reason for what you design; and it may be, ’tis as well to bring the matter to a close, though your resolution has taken me by surprise. She hath shown herself so perverse in this respect, that I allow I see no present likelihood of a change; and indeed

I do not quite understand my niece; and, very like, she does not comprehend herself.'

Mr. Dangerfield almost smiled one of his grim disconcerting smiles, and a cynical light played over his face; and the black monkey behind him grinned and hugged himself like his familiar. The disappointed gentleman thought he understood Miss Gertrude pretty well.

'I thought,' said Aunt Becky; 'I suspected — did you — a certain young gentleman in this neighbourhood— '

'As having found his way to the young lady's good graces?' asked Dangerfield.

'Yes; and I conjecture you know whom I mean,' said Aunt Rebecca.

'Who — pray, Madam?' he demanded.

'Why, Lieutenant Puddock,' said Aunt Becky, again adjusting the china on the chimneypiece.

'Eh? — truly? — that did not strike me,' replied Dangerfield.

He had a disconcerting way of saying the most ordinary things, and there was a sort of latent meaning, like a half-heard echo, underrunning the surface of his talk, which sometimes made people undefinably uncomfortable; and Aunt Becky looked a little stately and flushed; but in a minute more the conversation proceeded.

'I have many regrets, Miss Chattesworth, in leaving this place. The loss of your society — don't mistake me, I never flatter — is a chief one. Some of your views and plans interested me much. I shall see my Lord Castlemallard sooner than I should had my wishes prospered; and I will do all in my power to engage him to give the site for the building, and stones from the quarry free; and I hope, though no longer a resident here, you will permit me to contribute fifty pounds towards the undertaking.'

'Sir, I wish there were more gentlemen of your public spirit and Christian benevolence,' cried Aunt Becky, very cordially; 'and I have heard of all your goodness to that unhappy family of Doctor Sturk's — poor wretched man!'

'A bagatelle, Madam,' said Dangerfield, shaking his head and waving his hand slightly; 'but I hope to do them, or at least the public, a service of some importance, by bringing conviction home to the assassin who struck him down, and that in terms so clear and authentic, as will leave no room for doubt in the minds of any; and to this end I'm resolved to stick at no trifling sacrifice, and, rather than fail, I'll drain my purse.'

'Mon petit coquin!' prattled the parrot in the bow-window.

'And, Madam,' said he, after he had risen to take his leave, 'as I before said, I'm a plain man. I mean, so soon as I can wind my business up, to leave this place and country — I would *tonight*, if I could; but less, I fear, than some days — perhaps a week will not suffice. When I'm gone, Madam, I beg you'll exercise no reserve respecting the cause of my somewhat abrupt departure; I could easily make a pretext of something else; but the truth, Madam, is easiest as well as best to be told; I protracted my stay so long as hope continued. Now my suit is ended. I can no longer endure the place. The remembrance of your kindness only, sweetens the bitterness of my regret, and that I shall bear with me so long, Madam, as life remains.'

And saying this, as Mr. Richardson writes, 'he bowed upon her passive hand,' and Miss Rebecca made him a grand and gracious courtesy.

As he retreated, whom should Dominick announce but Captain Cluffe and Lieutenant Puddock. And there was an odd smile on Mr. Dangerfield's visage, as he slightly acknowledged them in passing, which Aunt Rebecca somehow did not like.

So Aunt Becky's levee went on; and as Homer, in our schoolboy ear, sang the mournful truth, that 'as are the generations of the forest leaves so are the succession of men,' the Dangerfield efflorescence had no sooner disappeared, and that dry leaf whisked away down the stairs, than Cluffe and Puddock budded forth and bloomed in his place, in the sunshine of Aunt Rebecca's splendid presence.

Cluffe, in virtue of his rank and pretensions, marched in the van, and, as Aunt Becky received him, little Puddock's round eyes swept the room in search, perhaps, of some absent object.

'The general's not here,' said Aunt Becky loftily and severely, interpreting Puddock's wandering glance in that way. 'Your visit, perhaps, is for him — you'll find him in his study, with the orderly.'

'My visit, Madam,' said Puddock, with a slight blush, 'was intended for you, Madam — not for the general, whom I had the honour of seeing this morning on parade.'

‘Oh! for me? I thank you,’ said Aunt Rebecca, with a rather dry acknowledgment. And so she turned and chatted with Cluffe, who, not being at liberty to talk upon his usual theme — his poor, unhappy friend, Puddock, and his disgraces — was eloquent upon the monkey, and sweet upon the lapdogs, and laughed till he grew purple at the humours of the parrot, and swore, as gentlemen then swore, ’twas a conjuror, a wonder, and as good as a play. While this entertaining conversation was going on, there came a horrid screech and a long succession of yelps from the courtyard.

‘Good gracious mercy,’ cried Aunt Rebecca, sailing rapidly to the window, ‘’tis Flora’s voice. Sweet creature, have they killed you — my angel; what is it? — where *are* you, sweetheart? — where *can* she be? Oh, dear — oh, dear!’ — and she looked this way and that in her distraction.

But the squeak subsided, and Flora was not to be seen; and Aunt Becky’s presence of mind returned, and she said —

‘Captain Cluffe, ’tis a great liberty; but you’re humane — and, besides, I know that *you* would readily do me a kindness.’ That emphasis was shot at poor Puddock. ‘And may I pray you to try on the steps if you can see the dear animal, anywhere — you know Flora?’

‘Know her? — oh dear, yes,’ cried Cluffe with alacrity, who, however, did *not*, but relied on her answering to her name, which he bawled lustily from the doorsteps and about the courtyard, with many terms of endearment, intended for Aunt Becky’s ear, in the drawingroom.

Little Puddock, who was hurt at that lady’s continued severity, was desirous of speaking; for he liked Aunt Becky, and his heart swelled within him at her injustice; but though he hemmed once or twice, somehow the exordium was not ready, and his feelings could not find a tongue.

Aunt Becky looked steadfastly from the window for a while, and then sailed majestically toward the door, which the little ensign, with an humble and somewhat frightened countenance, hastened to open.

‘Pray, Sir, don’t let me trouble you,’ said Aunt Becky, in her high, cold way.

‘Madam, ’tis no trouble — it would be a happiness to me, Madam, to serve you in any way you would permit; but *’tis* a trouble to me, Madam, indeed, that you leave the room, and a greater trouble,’ said little Puddock, waxing fluent as he proceeded, ‘that I have incurred your displeasure —

indeed, Madam, I know not how — your goodness to me, Madam, in my sickness, I never can forget.'

'You *can* forget, Sir — you *have* forgot. Though, indeed, Sir, there was little to remember, I — I'm glad you thought me kind, Sir. I — I wish you well, Sir,' said Aunt Becky. She was looking down and a little pale, and in her accents something hurried and almost sad. 'And as for my displeasure, Sir, who said I was displeased? And if I were, what could my displeasure be to you? No, Sir,' she went on almost fiercely, and with a little stamp on the floor, 'you don't care; and why should you? — you've proved it — you don't, Lieutenant Puddock, and you *never* did.'

And, without waiting for an answer, Aunt Becky flashed out of the room, and up stairs to her chamber, the door of which she slammed fiercely; and Gertrude, who was writing a letter in her own chamber, heard her turn the key hastily in the lock.

When Cluffe, who for some time continued to exercise his lungs in persuasive invitations to Flora, at last gave over the pursuit, and returned to the drawingroom, to suggest that the goddess in question had probably retreated to the kitchen, he was a good deal chagrined to find the drawingroom 'untreasured of its mistress.'

Puddock looked a good deal put out, and his explanation was none of the clearest; and he could not at all say that the lady was coming back.

'I think, Lieutenant Puddock,' said Cluffe, who was much displeased, and had come to regard Aunt Rebecca very much as under his especial protection, 'it might have been better we hadn't called here. I — you see — you're not — you see it yourself — you've offended Miss Rebecca Chattesworth somehow, and I'm afraid you've not mended matters while I was down stairs bawling after that cursed — that — the — little dog, you know. And — and for my part, I'm devilish sorry I came, Sir.'

This was said after a wait of nearly ten minutes, which appeared at least twice as long.

'I'm sorry, Sir, I embarrassed you with the disadvantage of my company,' answered little Puddock, with dignity.

'Why, 'tisn't that, you know,' rejoined Cluffe, in a patronising 'my good-fellow' sort of way; 'you know I always liked your company devilish well. But where's the good of putting one's self in the way of being thought *de trop* — don't you see — by other people — and annoyed in this way — and

— you — you don’t know the *world*, Puddock — you’d much better leave yourself in any hands, d’ye see; and so, I suppose, we may as well be off now— ’tis no use waiting longer.’

And discontentedly and lingeringly the gallant captain, followed by Puddock, withdrew himself — pausing to caress the wolf-dog at the corner of the courtyard, and loitering as long as it was decent in the avenue.

All this time Miss Gertrude Chattesworth, like her more mature relative, was in the quiet precincts of her chamber. She, too, had locked her door, and, with throbbing temples and pale face, was writing a letter, from which I take the liberty of printing a few scarcely coherent passages.

‘I saw you on Sunday — for near two hours — may Heaven forgive me, thinking of little else than you. And, oh! what would I not have given to speak, were it but ten words to you? When is my miserable probation to end? Why is this perverse mystery persisted in? I sometimes lose all hope in my destiny, and wellnigh all trust in you. I feel that I am a deceiver, and cannot bear it. I assure you, on my sacred honour, I believe there is nothing gained by all this — oh! forgive the word — deception. How or when is it to terminate? — what do you purpose? — why does the clerk’s absence from the town cause you so much uneasiness — is there any danger you have not disclosed? A friend told me that you were making preparations to leave Chapelizod and return to England. I think I was on the point of fainting when I heard it. I almost regret I did not, as the secret would thus have been discovered, and my emancipation accomplished. How have you acquired this strange influence over me, to make me so deceive those in whom I should most naturally confide? I am persuaded they believe I really recoil from you. And what is this new business of Doctor Sturk? I am distracted with uncertainties and fears. I hear so little, and imperfectly from you, I cannot tell from your dark hints whether some new danger lurks in those unlooked-for quarters. I know not what magic binds me so to you, to endure the misery of this strange deceitful mystery — but you are all mystery; and yet be not — you cannot be — my evil genius. You will not condemn me longer to a wretchedness that must destroy me. I conjure you, declare yourself. What have we to fear? I will brave all — anything rather than darkness, suspense, and the consciousness of a continual dissimulation.

Declare yourself, I implore of you, and be my angel of light and deliverance.'

There is a vast deal more, but this sample is quite enough; and when the letter was finished, she signed it —

'Your most unhappy and too-faithful,

'Gertrude'.

And having sealed it, she leaned her anxious head upon her hand, and sighed heavily.

She knew very well by what means to send it; and the letter awaited at his house him for whom it was intended on his return that evening.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

IN WHICH THE KNIGHT OF THE SILVER SPECTACLES MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF THE SAGE ‘BLACK DILLON,’ AND CONFERS WITH HIM IN HIS RETREAT.

At that time there had appeared in Dublin an erratic genius in the medical craft, a young surgeon, ‘Black Dillon,’ they called him, the glory and disgrace of his calling; such as are from time to time raised up to abase the pride of intellect, and terrify the dabblers in vice. A prodigious mind, illuminating darkness, and shivering obstacles at a blow, with an electric force — possessing the power of a demigod, and the lusts of a swine. Without order, without industry; defying all usages and morality; lost for weeks together in the catacombs of vice; and emerging to reassert in an hour the supremacy of his intellect; without principles or shame; laden with debt; and shattered and poisoned with his vices; a branded and admired man.

In the presence of this outcast genius and prodigy of vice, stood Mr. Dangerfield. There were two other gentlemen in the same small room, one of whom was doggedly smoking, with his hat on, over the fire; the other snoring in a crazy armchair, on the back of which hung his wig. The window was small and dirty; the air muddy with tobacco-smoke, and inflamed with whiskey. Singing and the clang of glasses was resounding from the next room, together with peals of coarse laughter, and from that on the other side, the high tones and hard swearing, and the emphatic slapping of a heavy hand upon the table, indicating a rising quarrel, were heard. From one door through another, across the narrow floor on which Mr. Dangerfield stood, every now and then lounged some neglected, dirty, dissipated looking inmate of these unwholesome precincts. In fact, Surgeon Dillon’s present residence was in that diversorium pecatorum, the Four Courts Marshalsea in Molesworth-court. As these gentlemen shuffled or swaggered through, they generally nodded, winked, grunted, or otherwise saluted the medical gentleman, and stared at his visitor. For as the writer of the Harleian tract — I forget its name — pleasantly observes:— ‘In gaol they are no proud men, but will be quickly acquainted without ceremony.’

Mr. Dangerfield stood erect; all his appointments were natty, and his dress, though quiet, rich in material, and there was that air of reserve, and decision, and command about him, which suggests money, an article held much in esteem in that retreat. He had a way of seeing every thing in a moment without either staring or stealing glances, and nobody suspected him of making a scrutiny. In the young surgeon he saw an object in strong contrast with himself. He was lean and ungainly, shy and savage, dressed in a long greasy silk morning gown, blotched with wine and punch over the breast. He wore his own black hair gathered into a knot behind, and in a neglected dusty state, as if it had not been disturbed since he rolled out of his bed. This being placed his large, red, unclean hands, with fingers spread, like a gentleman playing the harpsichord, upon the table, as he stood at the side opposite to Mr. Dangerfield, and he looked with a haggard, surly stare on his visitor, through his great dark, deep-set prominent eyes, streaming fire, the one feature that transfixed the attention of all who saw him. He had a great brutal mouth, and his nose was pimply and inflamed, for Bacchus has his fires as well as Cupid, only he applies them differently. How polished showed Mr. Dangerfield’s chin opposed to the three days’ beard of Black Dillon! how delicate his features compared with the lurid proboscis, and huge, sensual, sarcastic mouth of the gentleman in the dirty morning-gown and shapeless slippers, who confronted him with his glare, an image of degradation and power!

‘Tuppince, Docthor Dillon,’ said a short, fat, dirty nymph, without stays or hoop, setting down a ‘naggin o’ whiskey’ between the medical man and his visitor.

The doctor, to do him justice, for a second or two looked confoundedly put out, and his eyes blazed fiercer as his face flushed.

‘Three halfpence outside, and twopence here, Sir,’ said he with an awkward grin, throwing the money on the table; ‘that’s the way our shepherd *deglubat oves*, Sir; she’s brought it too soon, but no matter.’

It was not one o’clock, in fact.

‘They *will* make mistakes, Sir; but you will not suffer their blunders long, I warrant,’ said Dangerfield, lightly. ‘Pray, Sir, can we have a room for a moment to ourselves?’

‘We can, Sir, ’tis a liberal house; we can have any thing; liberty itself, Sir — for an adequate sum,’ replied Mr. Dillon.

Whatever the sum was, the room was had, and the surgeon, who had palpably left his ‘naggin’ uneasily in company with the gentleman in the hat, and him without a wig, eyed Dangerfield curiously, thinking that possibly his grand-aunt Molly had left him the fifty guineas she was rumoured to have sewed up in her stays.

‘There’s a great deal of diversion, Sir, in five hundred guineas, said Mr. Dangerfield, and the spectacles dashed pleasantly upon the doctor.

‘Ye may say that,’ answered the grinning surgeon, with a quiet oath of expectation.

‘’Tis a handsome fee, Sir, and you may have it.’

‘Five hundred guineas!’

‘Ah, you’ve heard, Sir, perhaps, of the attempted murder in the park, on Doctor Sturk, of the Artillery; for which Mr. Nutter now lies in prison?’ said Mr. Dangerfield.

‘That I have, Sir.’

‘Well, you shall have the money, Sir, if you perform a simple operation.’

‘’Tis not to hang him you want me?’ said the doctor, with a gloomy sneer.

‘Hang him! — ha, ha — no, Sir, Doctor Sturk still lives, but insensible. He must be brought to consciousness, and speech. Now, the trepan is the only way to effect it; and I’ll be frank with you: Doctor Pell has been with him half a dozen times, and he says the operation would be instantaneously fatal. I don’t believe him. So also says Sir Hugh Skelton, to whom I wrote in London — I don’t believe him, either. At all events, the man is dying, and can’t last very many days longer, so there’s nothing risked. His wife wishes the operation; here’s her note; and I’ll give you five hundred guineas and — what are you here for?’

‘Only eighteen, unless some more has come in this morning,’ answered the doctor.

‘And your liberty, Sir, *that* on the spot, if you undertake the operation, and the fee so soon as you have done it.’

The doctor’s face blazed with a grin of exultation; he squared his shoulders and shook himself a little; and after a little silence, he demanded —

‘Can you describe the case, Sir, as you stated it to Sir Hugh Skelton?’

‘Surely, Sir, but I rely for it and the terms, upon the description of a village doctor, named Toole; an ignoramus, I fear.’

And with this preface he concisely repeated the technical description which he had compiled from various club conversations of Dr. Toole’s, to which no person imagined he had been listening so closely.

‘If that’s the case, Sir, ‘twill kill him.’

‘Kill or cure, Sir, ’tis the only chance,’ rejoined Dangerfield.

‘What sort is the wife, Sir?’ asked Black Dillon, with a very odd look, while his eye still rested on the short note that poor Mrs. Sturk had penned.

‘A nervous little woman of some two or three and forty,’ answered the spectacles.

The queer look subsided. He put the note in his pocket, and looked puzzled, and then he asked— ‘

‘Is he any way related to you, Sir?’

‘None in life, Sir. But that does not affect, I take it, the medical question.’

‘No, it does *not* affect the medical question — nothing *can*,’ observed the surgeon, in a sulky, sardonic way.

‘Of course not,’ answered the oracle of the silver spectacles, and both remained silent for a while.

‘You want to have him speak? Well, suppose there’s a hundred chances to one the trepan kills him on the spot — what then?’ demanded the surgeon, uncomfortably.

Dangerfield pondered, also uncomfortably for a minute, but answered nothing; on the contrary, he demanded —

‘And what then, Sir?’

‘But here, in this case,’ said Black Dillon, ‘there’s no chance at all, do you see, there’s *no* chance, good, bad, or indifferent; none at all.’

‘But *I* believe there *is*,’ replied Dangerfield, decisively.

‘You believe, but *I* know.’

‘See, Sir,’ said Dangerfield, darkening, and speaking with a strange snarl; ‘I know what I’m about. I’ve a desire, Sir, that he should speak, if ‘twere only two minutes of conscious articulate life, and then death— ’tis not a pin’s point to me how soon. Left to himself he must die; therefore, to shrink from the operation on which depends the discovery both of his actual murderer and of his money, Sir, otherwise lost to his family, is — is a damned affectation! *I* think it — so do *you*, Sir; and I offer five hundred guineas as your fee, and Mrs. Sturk's letter to bear you harmless.'

Then there was a pause. Dangerfield knew the man's character as well as his skill. There were things said about him darker than we have hinted at.

The surgeon looked very queer and gloomy down upon the table, and scratched his head, and he mumbled gruffly —

'You see — you know— 'tis a large fee, to be sure; but then— '

'Come, Sir,' said Dangerfield, looking as though he'd pull him by the ear; 'it *is* a large fee, and you'll get no more — you should not stick at trifles, when there's — a — a — justice and humanity — and, to be brief, Sir — yes or no?'

'*Yes*,' answered the doctor; 'but how's the fee secured?'

'Hey! I'd forgot. Right, Sir — you shall be satisfied.'

And he took a pen, and wrote on the back of a letter —

'SIR — Considering the hopeless condition in which Dr. Sturk now lies, and the vast importance of restoring him, Dr. Sturk, of the R.I.A., to the power of speech, even for a few minutes, I beg to second Mrs. Sturk's request to you; and when you shall have performed the critical operation she desires, I hereby promise, whether it succeed or fail, to give you a fee of five hundred guineas.

Paul Dangerfield.

'The Brass Castle, Chapelizod.'

And he dated it, and handed it to the surgeon, who read it through, and then looked with a gruff hesitation at the writer.

'Oh, you've only to enquire — anyone who knows Chapelizod will tell you who I am; and you'll want something — eh? — to take you out of this — how much?'

'Only seven guineas. There's a little score here, and some fees. Eighteen will cover everything, unless something has come in this morning.'

So they went to 'the Hatch,' and made enquiries, and all being well, Mr. Dangerfield dealt liberally with the surgeon, who promised to be in attendance at Dr. Sturk's house in Chapelizod, at seven o'clock next evening.

‘And pray, Dr. Dillon, come in a coach,’ said Dangerfield, ‘and in costume — you understand. They’ve been accustomed, you know, to see Pell and other doctors who make a parade.’

And with these injunctions they parted; and the surgeon, whose luggage was trifling, jumped into a coach with it, and jingled home to his den and his liberty.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

IN WHICH CHRISTIANA GOES OVER; AND DAN LOFTUS COMES HOME.

This evening Lily Walsingham was early tired and very weak, Sally thought, and more glad than usual to lie down in her bed; and there her old and loving nurse fancied that she looked a little strange, and that her thoughts sometimes wandered.

She lay very quietly for a good while, and suddenly, with a beautiful look, and in a clear, glad voice, she said —

‘Mother!’

And old Sally said —

‘There’s no one, dear Miss Lily, but me.’

But she was looking earnestly, and, with a wrapt smile, only said —

‘Oh!’

She thought she saw her, I believe.

Are these always illusions? Or is it only that, as the twilight deepens, and the shapes of earth melt into night, the stars of heaven, changeless and serene, reveal themselves, and shine out to the darkened eyes of mortals?

As Aunt Becky sat that night in the drawingroom with her niece, a maid, with a whisper, placed a little note in Miss Gertrude’s hand. There was a little pause.

‘Oh! aunt — oh!’ and she looked so terrified. ‘Oh! aunt,’ and she threw her arms round her aunt’s neck, and began crying wildly. ‘Poor Lily’s gone — there’s the note.’

Then arose the wild wailing of unavailing grief, and sobs, mixed with early recollections of childhood, and all poor Lily’s sweet traits poured out.

Old Aunt Rebecca took the note. Her stoicism was the point on which she piqued herself most. She looked very pale, and she told her niece to be composed; for Aunt Becky had a theory that feelings ought to be commanded, and that it only needed effort and resolution. So she read the note, holding her head very high, but the muscles of her face were quivering.

‘Oh! Gertrude, if ever there was an angel — and the poor desolate old man — — ‘

The theory broke down, and old Aunt Rebecca cried and sat down, and cried heartily, and went and put her thin arms round her niece, and kissed her, and cried, and cried, and kissed her again.

‘She was such — such a darling — oh! Gertrude dear, we must never quarrel any more.’

Death had come so near, and all things less than itself were rebuked in that sublime presence; and Lily Walsingham was gone; and she who was so lately their gay companion, all at once so awfully angelic in the unearthly light of death.

‘Who’d ha’ thought it was so near, Ma’am,’ said the maid; ‘the poor little thing! Though to be sure, Ma’am, a winding sheet came three times in the candle last night, and I turns it round and picks it off, that way, with my nail, unknownst to Mrs. Heany, for fear she’d be frettin’ about the little boy that’s lyin’ at home in the smallpox; and indeed I thought ’twas for him it was; but man proposes, and God disposes — and death forgets none, the Lord be praised — and everyone has their hour, old and young, Ma’am; and as I was sayin’, they had no notion or expectation up at the Elms, Ma’am, she was so bad, the heavens be her bed this night. ’Twas all in an instant like, Miss, she made as if she’d sit up, bein’ leanin’ on pillows — and so she put out them purty little hands of hers, with a smile, and that was all — the purty crature — everyone’s sorry afther her. The man was cryin’ in the hall that brought the note.’

The poor came to the door, and made their rude and kindly lamentations — they were all quite sincere— ‘His reverence was very good, but he couldn’t have the thought, you know.’ It was quite true— ‘everyone was sorry.’ The brave Magnolia’s eyes were red, when she looked out of the window next morning, and jolly little Doctor Toole said at the club —

‘Ah, Sir, she was a bright little thing — a born lady — such a beauty — and the best little creature. The town might well be proud of her, in every way, Sir.’ And he fell a blubbering; and old Major O’Neill, who was a quiet and silent officer, cried in a reserved way, looking into the fire, with his elbow on the mantelpiece. And Toole said, ‘I don’t know how I’ll pass that house.’

And many felt the same. Little Lily was there no more — and the Elms were changed — the light and the grace were gone — and they were only dark old trees now.

And everyone felt a great desire to find some way — any way — to show their respect and affection for their good old rector. And I'm sure he understood it — for liking and reverence, one way or another, will tell their story. The hushed enquiries at the door, and little offers of useless services made by stealth through the servants, and such like foolish kindnesses at such a time — the evidence of a great but helpless sympathy — are sweet as angelic music.

And who should arrive at night, with all his trunks, or at least a considerable number of them, and his books and rattletraps, but honest, simple Dan Loftus. The news was true about his young charge. He had died of fever at Malaga, and Dick Devereux was at last a step, and a long one — nearer to the title. So Dan was back again in his old garret. Travel had not educated him in the world's ways. In them he was the same queer, helpless tyro. And his costume, though he had a few handsome articles — for, travelling with a sprig of nobility, he thought it but right and seemed to dress accordingly — was on that account, perhaps, only more grotesque than ever. But he had acquired mountains of that lore in which he and good Doctor Walsingham delighted. He had transcribed old epitaphs and translated interminable extracts from archives, and bought five Irish manuscripts, all highly illustrative of that history on which he and the doctor were so pleasantly engaged. It was too late that night to go up to the Elms; but he longed to unpack his trunkful of manuscripts, and to expound to his beloved doctor the treasures he had amassed.

And over his solitary tea-cup and his book the sorrowful news from the Elms reached him, and all his historical castles in the air were shivered. In the morning, before the town was stirring, he crossed the bridge, and knocked softly at the familiar hall-door. Honest old John Tracy opened it, and Dan shook hands with him, and both cried for a while quietly.

'How is the honoured master?' at last said Loftus.

'He's there in the study, Sir. Thank God, you're come, Sir. I'm sure he'd like to see you — I'll ask him.'

Dan went into the drawingroom. He looked out at the flowers, and then at the harpsichord, and on her little walnut table, where her work-basket lay, and her thimble, and the little coral necklace — a childish treasure that she used to wear when she was quite a little thing. It was like a dream; and everything seemed to say— ‘Poor little Lily!’

So old John came in, and ‘Sir,’ said he, ‘the master will be glad to see you.’ And Dan Loftus found himself in the study; and the good doctor and he wrung one another’s hands for a long time.

‘Oh, Dan — Dan — she’s gone — little Lily.’

‘You’ll see her again, Sir — oh, you’ll see her again.’

‘Oh, Dan! Dan! Till the heavens be no more they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. Oh, Dan, a day’s so long — how am I to get over the time?’

‘The loving Lord, Sir, will find a way.’

‘But, oh! was there no pitying angel to stay the blow — to plead for a few years more of life? I deserved it — oh, Dan, yes! — I know it — I deserved it. But, oh! could not the avenger have pierced me, without smiting my innocent darling?’

‘Oh! she was taken in love, not in judgment, Sir — my pastor — but in love. It was the voice of the Redeemer that called her.’

And honest Dan repeated, through his sobs, a verse of that ‘Song of Songs,’ which little Lily had loved so well —

‘My well-beloved spake, and said unto me: Arise, my love, my fair one, and come thy way.’

The old man bowed his sorrowful head listening.

‘You never saw anything so beautiful,’ said he after a while. ‘I think, Dan, I could look at her for ever. I don’t think it was partiality, but it seems to me there never was — I never saw a creature like her.’

‘Oh, noble! noble!’ sobbed poor Dan.

The doctor took him by the arm, and so into the solemn room.

‘I think you’d like to see her, Dan?’

‘I would — I would indeed, Sir.’

And there was little Lily, never so like the lily before. Poor old Sally had laid early spring flowers on the white coverlet. A snowdrop lay by her pale little finger and thumb, just like a flower that has fallen from a child’s hand it its sleep. He looked, at her — the white angelic apparition — a smile, or a light upon the face.

‘Oh, my darling, my young darling, gone— “He is not a man as I am, that I should answer him.”’

But poor Dan, loudly crying, repeated the noble words of Paul, that have spoken down to us through the sorrows of nigh two thousand years —

‘For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.’

And so there was a little pause, and the old man said —

‘It was very good of you to come to me, my good young friend, in my helplessness and shipwreck, for the Lord hath hid himself from me; but he speaks to his desolate creature, my good Dan, through your gracious lips. My faith! — I thought I had faith till it was brought to the test, and then it failed! But my good friend, Loftus, was sent to help me — to strengthen the feeble knees.’

And Dan answered, crying bitterly, and clasping the rector’s hand in both of his —

‘Oh, my master, all that ever I knew of good, I learned from you, my pastor, my benefactor.’

So, with a long, last look, Dan followed the old man to the study, and they talked long there together, and then went out into the lonely garden, and paced its walks side by side, up and down.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

IN WHICH CAPTAIN DEVEREUX HEARS THE NEWS; AND MR. DANGERFIELD MEETS AN OLD FRIEND AFTER DINNER.

On the night when this great sorrow visited the Elms, Captain Richard Devereux, who had heard nothing of it, was strangely saddened and disturbed in mind. They say that a distant death is sometimes felt like the shadow and chill of a passing iceberg; and if this ominous feeling crosses a mind already saddened and embittered, it overcasts it with a feeling akin to despair.

Mrs. Irons knocked at his door, and with the eagerness of a messenger of news, opened it without awaiting his answer.

‘Oh, captain, jewel, do you know what? There’s poor Miss Lily Walsingham; and what do you think but she’s dead — the poor little thing; gone tonight, Sir — not half an hour ago.’

He staggered a little, and put his hand toward his sword, like a man struck by a robber, and looked at her with a blank stare. She thought he was out of his mind, and was frightened.

‘’Tis only me, Sir, Mrs. Irons.’

‘A — thank you;’ and he walked towards the chimney, and then towards the door, like a man looking for something; and on a sudden clasping his forehead in his hands, he cried a wild and terrible appeal to the Maker and Judge of all things.

‘’Tis impossible — oh, no — oh, no — it’s *not* true.’

He was in the open air, he could not tell how, and across the bridge, and before the Elms — a dream — the dark Elms — dark everything.

‘Oh, no — it can’t be — oh, no — oh, no;’ and he went on saying as he stared on the old house, dark against the sky, ‘Oh, no — oh, no.’

Two or three times he would have gone over to the hall-door to make enquiry, but he sickened at the thought. He clung to that hope, which was yet not a hope, and he turned and walked quickly down the river’s side by the Inchicore-road. But the anguish of suspense soon drew him back again; and now his speech was changed, and he said —

‘Yes, she’s gone — she’s gone — oh, she’s gone — she’s certainly gone.’

He found himself at the drawingroom window that looked into the little garden at the front of the house, and tapping at the window-pane. He remembered, all on a sudden — it was like waking — how strange was such a summons. A little after he saw a light crossing the hall, and he rang the door-bell. John Tracy opened the door. Yes, it was all true.

The captain was looking very pale, John thought, but otherwise much as usual. He stared at the old servant for some seconds after he told him all, but said nothing, not even goodnight, and turned away. Old John was crying; but he called after the captain to take care of the step at the gate: and as he shut the hall-door his eye caught, by the light of his candle, a scribbling in red chalk, on the white doorpost, and he stooped to read it, and muttered, ‘Them mischievous young blackguards!’ and began rubbing it with the cuff of his coat, his cheek still wet with tears. For even our grief is volatile; or, rather, it is two tunes that are in our ears together, the requiem of the organ, and, with it, the faint hurdy-gurdy jig of our vulgar daily life; and now and then this latter uppermost.

It was not till he had got nearly across the bridge that Captain Devereux, as it were, waked up. It was no good waking. He broke forth into sheer fury. It is not my business to note down the horrors of this impious frenzy. It was near five o’clock when he came back to his lodgings; and then, not to rest. To sit down, to rise again, to walk round the room and round, and stop on a sudden at the window, leaning his elbows on the sash, with hands clenched together, and teeth set; and so those demoniac hours of night and solitude wore slowly away, and the cold gray stole over the east, and Devereux drank a deep draught of his fiery Lethe, and cast himself down on his bed, and fell at once into a deep, exhausted lethargy.

When his servant came to his bedside at seven o’clock, he was lying motionless, with flushed cheeks, and he could not rouse him. Perhaps it was well, and saved him from brain-fever or madness.

But after such paroxysms comes often a reaction, a still, stony, awful despondency. It is only the oscillation between active and passive despair. Poor Leonora, after she had worked out her fit, tearing ‘her raven hair,’ and reviling heaven, was visited in sadder and tenderer guise by the vision of the past; but with that phantom went down in fear and isolation to the grave.

This morning several of the neighbours went into Dublin, for the bills were to be presented against Charles Nutter for a murderous assault, with intent to kill, made upon the person of Barnabas Sturk, Esq., Doctor of Medicine, and Surgeon to the Royal Irish Artillery. As the day wore on, the honest gossips of Chapelizod looked out anxiously for news. And everybody who met any one else asked him— ‘Any news about Nutter, eh?’ — and then they would stop to speculate — and then one would wonder that Dr. Walsingham’s man, Clinton, had not yet returned — and the other would look at his watch, and say ’twas one o’clock — and then both agreed that Spaight, at all events, must soon come — for he has appointed two o’clock for looking at that brood mare of Fagan’s.

At last, sure enough, Spaight appeared. Toole, who had been detained by business in another quarter, had ridden into the town from Leixlip, and was now dismounted and talking with Major O’Neill upon the absorbing topic. These cronies saw Spaight at the turnpike, and as he showed his ticket, he talked with the man. Of course, the news was come. The turnpike-man knew it by this time; and off scampered Toole, and the major followed close at his heels, at double-quick. He made a dismal shake or two of his head, and lifted his hand as they drew near. Toole’s heart misgave him.

‘Well, how is it? — what’s the news?’ he panted.

‘A true bill,’ answered Spaight, with a solemn stare; ‘a true bill, Sir.’

Toole uttered an oath of consternation, and taking the words out of Spaight’s mouth, told the news to the major.

‘Do you tell me so?’ exclaimed the major. ‘Bedad, Sir, I’m uncommon sorry.’

‘A bad business, Sir,’ observed Spaight.

‘No worse,’ said Toole. ‘If they convict him on this, you know — in case Sturk dies, and die he will — they’ll indict and convict him on the more *serious* charge,’ and he winked gloomily, ‘the evidence is all one.’

‘That poor little Sally Nutter!’ ejaculated the major. ‘She’s to be pitied, the crature!’

‘’Tis mighty slender evidence to take a man’s life on,’ said Toole, with some disgust. ‘Be the law, Sir, the whole thing gives me a complete turn. Are you to dine with Colonel Strafford to-day?’

‘I am, Sir,’ said the major; ‘an’ it goes again’ the colonel’s grain to have a party at all just now, with the respect he has for the family up there,’ and he nodded his head, pensively, toward the Elms. ‘But he asked Lowe ten days ago, and Mr. Dangerfield, and two or three more; and you know he could not put them off on that ground — there being no relationship, you see — and, ‘pon my oath, Sir, I’d rather not go myself, just now.’

That evening, at five o’clock, Colonel Stafford’s dinner party assembled at the King’s House. The colonel was a serene man, and hospitality — even had he been in the dumps — demands her sacrifices. He, therefore, did the honours as beseemed a genial and courteous old officer of the Royal Irish Artillery, who, if his conversation was not very remarkable in quality, and certainly not exorbitant in quantity, made up by listening a great deal, and supplying no end of civility, and an affluence of very pretty claret. Mr. Justice Lowe was there, and Mr. Dangerfield, and old Colonel Bligh, of the Magazine, and honest Major O’Neill, notwithstanding his low spirits. Perhaps they required keeping up; and claret like Colonel Stafford’s is consoling.

The talk turned, of course, a good deal on Charles Nutter; and Mr. Dangerfield, who was in great force, and, indeed, in particularly pleasant spirits, except when unfortunate Nutter was actually under discussion — when he grew grave and properly saddened — told, in his clear, biting way, a curious rosary of Newgate stories — of highwaymen’s disguises — of clever constables — of circumstantial evidence, marvellously elicited, and exquisitely put together — of monsters, long concealed, drawn from the deep by the finest tackle, into upper light, and dropped deftly into the landing-net of Justice. These curious anecdotes of Bow-street dexterity and Bagshot dodges — thrust and parry — mine and countermine — ending, for the most part, in the triumph of Bow-street, Justice crowned, and a Tyburn speech — tickled Lowe mightily, who quite enjoyed himself, and laughed more than his friend Colonel Stafford ever remembered to have heard him before, over some of the ingenious stratagems described so neatly by Dangerfield, and the gay irony with which he pointed his catastrophes. And Lowe actually, having obtained Colonel Stafford’s leave, proposed that gallant officer’s health in a bumper, and took occasion to mention their obligations to him for having afforded them the opportunity of enjoying Mr. Dangerfield’s sprightly and instructive sallies; and hoped, with all his heart, that the neighbourhood was long to enjoy the advantage and pleasure of his residence among them. And Mr. Dangerfield replied gaily, that all that was needed to make such sweet scenery and charming company as the place commanded absolutely irresistible, was the sense of safety conferred by the presence of such a magistrate as Mr. Lowe, and the convivial inspiration of such wine as their gallant host provided; and that, for his part, being somewhat of an old boy, and having had enough of rambling, nothing would better please him than to spend the residue of his days amidst the lively quietude of their virtuous and hilarious neighbourhood; and some more to the like purpose, which pleased the good company highly, who all agreed that the white gentleman — fluent, easy, and pointed in his delivery — was a mighty fine speaker, indeed. Though there was a lurking consciousness in each, which none cared to publish, that there was, at times, an indefinable flavour of burlesque and irony in Mr. Dangerfield's compliments, which excited momentary suspicions and qualms, which the speaker waived off, however, easily with his jewelled fingers, and smiled mockingly away.

Lowe was mightily taken with him. There was little warmth or veneration in that hard justice's nature. But Mr. Dangerfield had a way with him that few men with any sort of taste for the knowledge of evil could resist; and the cold-eyed justice of the peace hung on his words with an attentive rapture, and felt that he was drinking deep and pleasant draughts from the sparkling fountains of knowledge; and was really sorry, and shook him admiringly by the hand, when Dangerfield, who had special business at home, rose up in his brisk way, and flashed a farewell over the company from his spectacles.

'If Mr. Dangerfield really means to stay here, he must apply for the commission of the peace,' said Mr. Lowe, so soon as the door shut. 'We must put it upon him. I protest I never met a man so fitted by nature and acquirements to make a perfectly useful magistrate. He and I, Sir, between us, we'd give a good account of this part of the county; and there's plenty of work, Sir, if 'twere only between this and Dublin; and, by George, Sir, he's a wonderful diverting fellow, full of anecdote. Wonderful place London, to be sure.'

'And a good man, too, in a quiet way,' said Colonel Strafford, who could state a fact. ''Tisn't every rich man has the heart to part with his money as he does; he has done many charities here, and especially he has been most bountiful to poor Sturk's family.'

‘I know that,’ said Lowe.

‘And he sent a fifty pound note by the major there to poor Sally Nutter o’ Monday last; he’ll tell you.’

And thus it is, as the foul fiend, when he vanishes, leaves a smell of brimstone after him, a good man leaves a fragrance; and the company in the parlour enjoyed the aroma of Mr. Dangerfield’s virtues, as he buttoned his white surtout over his breast, and dropped his vails into the palms of the carbuncled butler and fuddled footman in the hall.

It was a clear, frosty, starlit night. White and stern was the face which he turned upward for a moment to the sky. He paused for a second in the ray of candlelight that gleamed through Puddock’s window-shutter, and glanced on the pale dial of his large gold watch. It was only halfpast eight o’clock. He walked on, glancing back over his shoulder, along the Dublin road.

‘The drunken beast. My mind misgives me he’ll disappoint,’ muttered the silver spectacles, gliding briskly onward.

When he reached the main street he peered curiously before him under the village tree, in quest of carriage lights.

‘A lawless brute like that may be before his time as well as after.’ So he walked briskly forward, and up Sturk’s doorsteps, and knocked.

‘The Dublin doctor hasn’t come, eh?’ — he asked.

‘No, Sir, he isn’t come yet— ’twas nine o’clock, the mistress told me.’

‘Very good. Tell Mrs. Sturk, pray, that I, Mr. Dangerfield, you know, will call, as I promised, at nine o’clock precisely.’

And he turned again and walked briskly over the bridge, and away along the Inchicore road overhanging the river. All was silent there. Not a step but his own was stirring, and the road in places so overhung with old trees that it was difficult to see a yard before one.

He slackened his pace, and listened, like a man who keeps an assignation, and listened again, and laughed under his breath; and sure enough, before long, the clink of a footstep was heard approaching swiftly from the Dublin direction.

Mr. Dangerfield drew aside under the deep shadow of a high hawthorn hedge, overhung by trees; and watching intently, he saw a tall, lank figure, with a peculiar gait and stoop of its own, glide stealthily by. He smiled after it in the dark.

The tall figure was that of our old friend, Zekiel Irons, the clerk. A sable form, as beseemed his ecclesiastical calling — and now a white figure was gliding without noise swiftly after him.

Suddenly, as he reached an open part of the road, a thin hand was laid on his shoulder, and, with a start, and a 'hollo,' he sprung round.

'Hey! why, you're as frightened as if you had seen Charles — Charles *Nutter*. Hey? — don't be uneasy. I heard from the parson yesterday morning you were to be with him tonight before nine o'clock, about that money you left in his hands, and I've chanced to meet you; and this I want you to understand, Charles Nutter is in gaol, and we must not let him get out — do you see? That business settled, we're at rest. So, Mr. Irons, you must not show the white feather. Be bold — speak out what you know — now's the time to strike. I'll put your evidence, as you reported it to me, into shape, and you come to me tomorrow morning at eight o'clock; and mind you, I'll reward you this time, and better than ever you've fared before. Go on. Or stay — I'll go before.'

And Mr. Dangerfield laughed one of his chilly laughs — and, with a nod to Irons, repeated— 'eight o'clock' — and so walked on a little bit.

The clerk had not said a word. A perspiration broke forth on his forehead, and, wiping the drops away, he said —

'Lord have mercy upon us — Lord deliver us — Lord have mercy upon us,' like a man dying.

Mr. Dangerfield's bold proposition seemed quite to overpower and unman him.

The white figure turned short, facing the clerk, and said he —

'See you, Mr. Irons, I'm serious — there must be no shirking. If you undertake, you must go through; and, hark! in your ear — you shall have five hundred pounds. I put no constraint — say yes or no — if you don't like you needn't. Justice, I think, will be done even without your help. But till he's quiet — you understand — *nothing* sure. He has been dead and alive again — curse him; and till he's at rest, and on the surgeon's table — ha! ha! — we sha'n't feel quite comfortable.'

'Lord have mercy upon us!' muttered Irons, with a groan.

'Amen,' said Dangerfield, with a sneering imitation.

'*There*, 'tis enough — if you have nerve to speak truth and do justice, you may have the money. We're men of business — you and I. If not, I sha'n't trouble you any more. If you like it, come to me at eight o'clock in the morning; if not, why, stay away, and no harm's done.'

And with these words, Mr. Dangerfield turned on his heel once more, and started at a lively pace for Chapelizod.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

IN WHICH MR. PAUL DANGERFIELD MOUNTS THE STAIRS OF THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD, AND MAKES SOME ARRANGEMENTS.

The white figure glided duskily over the bridge. The river rushed beneath in Egyptian darkness. The air was still, and a thousand celestial eyes twinkled down brightly through the clear deep sky upon the actors in this true story. He kept the left side, so that the road lay between him and the Phœnix door, which gaped wide with a great hospitable grin, and crimsoned the night air with a glow of candlelight.

The white figure turned the corner, and glided onward in a straight, swift line — straight and swift as fate — to the door of Doctor Sturk.

He knocked softly at the hall-door, and swiftly stepped in and shut it.

'How's your master?'

'Jist the same way, plaze yer honour; jist sleepin' — still sleepin' — sleepin' always,' answered the maid.

'Has the Dublin doctor come?'

'No.'

'The mistress — where's she?'

'In the room, Sir, with the masther.'

'Present my service to her — Mr. Dangerfield's compliments, you know — and say I await her permission to come up stairs.'

Presently the maid returned, with poor Mrs. Sturk's invitation to Mr. Dangerfield to walk up.

Up he went, leaving his white surtout and cocked hat in the hall, and entered the chamber where pale little Mrs. Sturk, who had been crying a great deal, sat in a dingy old tabby saque, by the light of a solitary mould-candle at the bedside of the noble Barney.

The mutton-fat wanted snuffing; but its light danced and splintered brilliantly over Mr. Dangerfield's resplendent shoebuckles, and up and down his cut-steel buttons, and also glimmered in a more phosphoric way upon his silver spectacles, as he bowed at the door, arrayed in a puce cut velvet coat, lined with pink, long embroidered satin waistcoat, fine lace ruffles and cravat, his well-shaped leg gleaming glossily in silk, and altogether, in his glimmering jewellery, and purple and fine linen, resembling Dives making a complimentary visit to the garret of Lazarus.

Poor little Mrs. Sturk felt her obligations mysteriously enlarged by so much magnificence, and wondered at the goodness of this white-headed angel in point, diamonds, and cut velvet, who had dropped from the upper regions upon the sad and homely floor of her Barney's sick chamber.

'Dr. Dillon not yet arrived, Madam? Well, 'tis precisely his hour; we shall have him soon. How does the patient? Ha! just as usual. How? — why there's a change, isn't there?'

'As how, Sir?' enquired Mrs. Sturk, with a scared look.

'Why, don't you see? But you mustn't be frightened; there's one coming in whom I have every confidence.'

'I don't see, Sir. What is it, Mr. Dangerfield? Oh, *pray*, Sir?'

'Why — a — nothing very particular, only he looks more languid than when I saw him last, and discoloured somewhat, and his face more sunk, I think — eh?'

'Oh, no, Sir— 'tis this bad light — nothing more, indeed, Sir. This evening, I assure you, Mr. Dangerfield, at three o'clock, when the sun was shining, we were all remarking how well he looked. I never saw — you'd have said so — such a wonderful improvement.'

And she snuffed the candle, and held it up over Barney's grim features.

'Well, Madam, I hope we soon may find it. 'Twill be a blessed sight — eh? — when he sits up in that bed, Madam, as I trust he may this very night, and speak — eh?'

'Oh! my precious Barney!' and the poor little woman began to cry, and fell into a rhapsody of hopes, thanksgiving, anecdote and prayer.

In the meanwhile Dangerfield was feeling his pulse, with his watch in the hollow of his hand.

'And aren't they better — his pulse, Sir — they were stronger this morning by a great deal than last night — it was just at ten o'clock — don't you perceive, Sir?'

'H'm — well, I hope, Ma'am, we'll soon find *all* better. Now, have you got all things ready — you have, of course, a sheet well aired?'

'A sheet — I did not know 'twas wanted.'

‘Hey, this will never do, my dear Madam — he’ll be here and nothing ready; and you’ll do well to send over to the mess-room for a lump of ice. ’Tis five minutes past nine. If you’ll see to these things, I’ll sit here, Madam, and take the best care of the patient — and, d’ye see, Mistress Sturk, ‘twill be necessary that you take care that Toole hears nothing of Dr. Dillon’s coming.’

It struck me, when originally reading the correspondence which is digested in these pages, as hardly credible that Doctor Sturk should have continued to live for so long a space in a state of coma. Upon this point, therefore, I took occasion to ask the most eminent surgeon of my acquaintance, who at once quieted my doubts by detailing a very remarkable case cited by Sir A. Cooper in his lectures, Vol. I., p. 172. It is that of a seaman, who was pressed on board one of his Majesty’s ships, early in the revolutionary war; and while on board this vessel, fell from the yardarm, and was taken up insensible, in which state he continued living for thirteen months and some days!

So with a little more talk, Mrs. Sturk, calling one of her maids, and leaving the little girl in charge of the nursery, ran down with noiseless steps and careworn face to the kitchen, and Mr. Dangerfield was left alone in the chamber with the spellbound sleeper on the bed.

In about ten seconds he rose sharply from his chair and listened: then very noiselessly he stepped to the door and listened again, and gently shut it.

Then Mr. Dangerfield moved to the window. There was a round hole in the shutter, and through it he glanced into the street, and was satisfied.

By this time he had his white-pocket-handkerchief in his hands. He folded it deftly across and across into a small square, and then the spectacles flashed coldly on the image of Dr. Sturk, and then on the door; and there was a pause.

‘What’s that?’ he muttered sharply, and listened for a second or two.

It was only one of the children crying in the nursery. The sound subsided.

So with another long silent step, he stood by the capriole-legged old mahogany table, with the scallop shell containing a piece of soap and a washball, and the basin with its jug of water standing therein. Again he listened while you might count two, and dipped the handkerchief, so folded, into the water, and quietly squeezed it; and stood white and glittering by Sturk's bedside.

People moved very noiselessly about that house, and scarcely a minute had passed when the door opened softly, and the fair Magnolia Macnamara popped in her glowing face and brilliant glance, and whispered.

'Are you there, Mrs. Sturk, dear?'

At the far side of the bed, Dangerfield, with his flashing spectacles and snowy aspect, and a sort of pant, rose up straight, and looked into her eyes, like a white bird of prey disturbed over its carrion.

She uttered a little scream — quite pale on a sudden — for she did not recognise the sinister phantom who glimmered at her over the prostrate Sturk.

But Dangerfield laughed his quiet hollow 'ha! ha! ha!' and said promptly,

'A strange old nurse I make, Miss Macnamara. But what can I do? Mrs. Sturk has left me in charge, and faith I believe our patient's looking mighty badly.'

He had observed Miss Mag glancing from him to the dumb figure in the bed with a puzzled kind of horror.

The fact is, Sturk's face had a leaden tint; he looked, evidently enough, even in that dim candlelight, a great deal worse than the curious Miss Mag was accustomed to see him.

'He's very low, tonight, and seems oppressed, and his pulse is failing; in fact, my dear young lady, he's plainly worse tonight than I like to tell poor Mrs. Sturk, you understand.'

'And his face looks so shiny and damp-like,' said Miss Mag, with a horrible sort of scrutiny.

'Exactly so, Miss, 'tis *weakness*,' observed Dangerfield.

'And you were wiping it with your pockethandkerchief when I looked in,' continued Miss Mag.

'Was I — ha, ha— 'tis wonderful how quick we learn a new business. I vow I begin to think I should make a very respectable nursetender.'

'And what the dickens brings *him* up here?' asked Miss Mag of herself; so soon as the first shock was over, the oddity of the situation struck her as she looked with perplexed and unpleasant sort of enquiry at Mr. Dangerfield.

Just then up came the meek little Mrs. Sturk, and the gentleman greeted her with a 'Well, Madam, I have not left his bedside since you went down; and I think he looks a little better — just a little — eh?'

'I trust and pray, Sir, that when the doctor— ' began Mrs. Sturk, and stopped short, for Mr. Dangerfield frowned quickly, and pointed towards Miss Mag, who was now, after her wont, looking round the room for matter of interest.

'And is Pell comin' out tonight?' asked Miss Mag quickly.

'No, truly. Madam,' answered the gentleman: 'Dr. Pell's not comin' — is he, Mrs. Sturk?'

'Dr. Pell! — oh, la — no, Sir. No, my dear.' And, after a pause, 'Oh, ho. I wish it was over,' she groaned, with her hand pressed to her side, looking with a kind of agony on Sturk.

'*What over*?' asked Miss Mag.

Just then a doubleknock came to the hall-door, and Mr. Dangerfield signed sternly to Mrs. Sturk, who first stood up, with her eyes and mouth wide open, and then sat down, like a woman going to faint.

But the maid came up and told Miss Mag that her mother and Lieutenant O'Flaherty were waiting on the steps for her; and so, though loath to go unsatisfied, away she went, with a courtesy to Mr. Dangerfield and a kiss to Mrs. Sturk, who revived on hearing it was only her fat kindly neighbour from over the way, instead of Black Doctor Dillon, with his murderous case of instruments.

The gentleman in the silver spectacles accompanied her to the lobby, and offered his hand; but she dispensed with his attendance, and jumped down the stairs with one hand to the wall and the other on the banisters, nearly a flight at a time; and the cackle of voices rose from the hall door, which quickly shut, and the fair vision had vanished.

Dangerfield's silver spectacles gleamed phosphorically after her from under his lurid forehead. It was not a pleasant look, and his mouth was very grim. In another instant he was in the room again, and glanced at his watch.

''Tis halfpast nine,' he said, in a quiet tone, but with a gleam of intense fury over his face, 'and that — that — doctor named *nine*.'

Dangerfield waited, and talked a little to Mrs. Sturk and the maid, who were now making preparations, in short sentences, by fits and starts of half-a-dozen words at a time. He had commenced his visit ceremoniously, but now he grew brusque, and took the command: and his tones were prompt and stern, and the women grew afraid of him.

Ten o'clock came. Dangerfield went down stairs, and looked from the drawingroom windows. He waxed more and more impatient. Down he went to the street. He did not care to walk towards the King's House, which lay on the road to Dublin; he did not choose to meet his boon companions again, but he stood for full ten minutes, with one of Dr. Sturk's military cloaks about him, under the village tree, directing the double-fire of his spectacles down the street, with an incensed steadiness, unrewarded, unrelieved. Not a glimmer of a link; not a distant rumble of a coach-wheel. It was a clear, frosty night, and one might hear a long way.

If any of the honest townsfolk had accidentally lighted upon that muffled, glaring image under the dark old elm, I think he would have mistaken it for a ghost, or something worse. The countenance at that moment was not prepossessing.

Mr. Dangerfield was not given to bluster, and never made a noise; but from his hollow jaws he sighed an icy curse towards Dublin, which had a keener edge than all the roaring blasphemies of Donnybrook together; and, with another shadow upon his white face, he reentered the house.

'He'll not come tonight, Ma'am,' he said with a cold abruptness.

'Oh, thank Heaven! — that is — I'm so afraid — I mean about the operation.'

Dangerfield, with his hands in his pockets, said nothing. There was a sneer on his face, white and dark, somehow. That was all. Was he baffled, and was Dr. Sturk, after all, never to regain his speech?

At halfpast ten o'clock, Mr. Dangerfield abandoned hope. Had it been Dr. Pell, indeed, it would have been otherwise. But Black Dillon had not a patient; his fame was in the hospitals. There was nothing to detain him but his vices, and five hundred pounds to draw him to Chapelizod. He had not come. He must be either brained in a row, or drunk under a table. So Mr. Dangerfield took leave of good Mrs. Sturk, having told her in case the doctor should come, to make him wait for his arrival before taking any measures, and directing that he should be sent for immediately.

So Mr. Dangerfield got into his white surtout silently in the hall, and shut the door quickly after him, and waited, a grim sentry, under the tree, with his face towards Dublin. Father Time had not blunted the white gentleman's perceptions, touched his ear with his numb fingers, or blown the smoke of his tobacco-pipe into his eyes. He was keen of eye, sharp of hearing; but neither sight nor sound rewarded him, and so he turned, after a few minutes, and glided away, like a white ghost, toward the Brass Castle.

In less than five minutes after, the thunder of a coach shook Dr. Sturk's windows, followed by a rousing peal on the hall-door, and Dr. Dillon, in dingy splendours, and a great draggled wig, with a goldheaded cane in his bony hand, stepped in; and, diffusing a reek of whiskey-punch, and with a case of instruments under his arm, pierced the maid, who opened the door, through, with his prominent black eyes, and frightened her with his fiery face, while he demanded to see Mrs. Sturk, and lounged, without ceremony, into the parlour; where he threw himself on the sofa, with one of his bony legs extended on it, and his great ugly hand under his wig scratching his head.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

IN WHICH TWO COMRADES ARE TETE-A-TETE IN THEIR OLD QUARTERS, AND DOCTOR STURK’S CUE IS CUT OFF, AND A CONSULTATION COMMENCES.

The buzz of a village, like the hum of a city, represents a very wonderful variety of human accent and feeling. It is marvellous how few families thrown together will suffice to furnish forth this *dubia cœna* of sweets and bitters.

The roar of many waters — the ululatus of many-voiced humanity — marvellously monotonous, considering the infinite variety of its ingredients, booms on through the dark. The story-teller alone can take up the score of the mighty medley, and read at a glance what every fife and fiddlestick is doing. That pompous thrum-thrum is the talk of the great white Marseilles paunch, pietate gravis; the whine comes from Lazarus, at the area rails; and the bass is old Dives, roaring at his butler; the piccolo is contributed by the studious schoolboy, whistling over his Latin Grammar; that wild, long note is poor Mrs. Fondle’s farewell of her dead boy; the ugly barytone, rising from the tap-room, is what Wandering Willie calls a sculduddery song — shut your ears, and pass on; and that clear soprano, in nursery, rings out a shower of innocent idiotisms over the half-stripped baby, and suspends the bawl upon its lips.

So, on this night, as usual, there rose up toward the stars a throbbing murmur from our village — a wild chaos of sound, which we must strive to analyse, extracting from the hurlyburly each separate tune it may concern us to hear.

Captain Devereux was in his lodging. He was comparatively tranquil now; but a savage and impious despair possessed him. Serene outwardly — he would not let the vulgar see his scars and sores; and was one of those proud spirits who build to themselves desolate places.

Little Puddock was the man with whom he had least reserve. Puddock was so kindly, and so true and secret, and cherished beside, so great an admiration for him, that he greeted him rather kindly at a moment when another visitor would have fared scurvily enough. Puddock was painfully struck with his pallor, his wild and haggard eye, and something stern and brooding in his handsome face, which was altogether new and shocking to him.

‘I’ve been *thinking*, Puddock,’ he said; ‘and thought with me has grown strangely like despair — and that’s all. Why, man, *think* — what is there for me? — all my best stakes I’ve lost already; and I’m fast losing myself. How different, Sir, is my fate from others? Worse men than I — every way incomparably worse — and d —— them, *they* prosper, while I go down the tide. ’Tisn’t just!’ And he swore a great oath. ‘’Tis enough to make a man blaspheme. I’ve done with life — I hate it. I’ll volunteer. ’Tis my first thought in the morning, and my last at night, how well I’d like a bullet through my brain or heart. D —— the world, d —— feeling, d —— memory. I’m not a man that can always be putting prudential restraints upon myself. I’ve none of those plodding ways. The cursed fools that spoiled me in my childhood, and forsake me now, have all to answer for — I charge them with my ruin.’ And he launched a curse at them (meaning his aunt) which startled the plump soul of honest little Puddock.

‘You must not talk that way, Devereux,’ he said, still a good deal more dismayed by his looks than his words. ‘Why are you so troubled with vapours and blue devils?’

‘Nowhy!’ said Devereux, with a grim smile.

‘My dear Devereux, I say, you mustn’t talk in that wild way. You — you talk like a ruined man!’

‘And I so comfortable!’

‘Why, to be sure, Dick, you have had some little rubs, and, maybe, your follies and your vexations; but, hang it, you are young; you can’t get experience — at least, so I’ve found it — without paying for it. You mayn’t like it just now; but it’s well worth the cost. Your worries and miscarriages, dear Richard, will make you steady.’

‘Steady!’ echoed Devereux, like a man thinking of something far away.

‘Ay, Dick — you’ve sown your wild oats.’

On a sudden, says the captain, ‘My dear little Puddock,’ and he took him by the hand, with a sort of sarcastic flicker of a smile, and looked in his face almost contemptuously; but his eyes and his voice softened before the unconscious bonhomie of the true little gentleman. ‘Puddock, Puddock, did it never strike you, my boy, that Hamlet never strives to speak a word of comfort to the forlorn old Dane? He felt it would not do. Every man that's worth a button knows his own case best; and I know the secrets of my own prison-house. Sown my wild oats! To be sure I have, Puddock, my boy; and the new leaf I've turned over is just this; I've begun to reap them; and they'll grow, my boy, and grow as long as grass grows; and — Macbeth has his dagger, you know, and I've my sickle — the handle towards my hand, that you can't see; and in the sweat of my brow, I must cut down and garner my sheaves; and as I sowed, so must I reap, and grind, and bake, the black and bitter grist of my curse. Don't talk nonsense, little Puddock. Wasn't it Gay that wrote the "Beggar's Opera?" Ay! Why don't you play Macheath? Gay! — Ay — a pleasant fellow, and his poems too. He writes — don't you remember — he writes,

'So comes a reckoning when the banquet's o'er —
The dreadful reckoning, and men smile no more.'

'Puddock, throw up that window, the room's too hot — or stay never mind; read a book, Puddock, you like it, and I'll stroll a little along the path, and find you when I come back.'

'Why it's dark,' remonstrated his visitor.

'Dark? I dare say — yes, of course — very dark — but cool; the air is cool.'

He talked like a man who was thinking of something else; and Puddock thought how strangely handsome he looked, with that pale dash of horror, like King Saul when the evil spirit was upon him; and there was a terrible misgiving in his mind. The lines of the old ballad that Devereux used to sing with a sort of pathetic comicality were humming in his ear, —

'He walked by the river, the river so clear —
The river that runs through Kilkenny;
His name was Captain Wade,
And he died for that fair maid.'

and so following. What could he mean by walking, at that hour, alone, by the river's brink? Puddock, with a sinking and flutter at his heart, unperceived, followed him down stairs, and was beside him in the street.

‘The path by the river?’ said Puddock.

‘The river — the path? Yes, Sir, the path by the river. I thought I left you up stairs,’ said Devereux, with an odd sort of sulky shrinking.

‘Why, Devereux, I may as well walk with you, if you don’t object,’ lisped Puddock.

‘But I do object, Sir,’ cried Devereux, suddenly, in a fierce high key, turning upon his little comrade. ‘What d’ye mean, Sir? You think I mean to — to *drown* myself — ha, ha, ha! or what the devil’s running in your head? I’m not a madman, Sir, nor you a mad-doctor. Go home, Sir — or go to — to where you will, Sir; only go your own way, and leave me mine.’

‘Ah, Devereux, you’re very quick with me,’ said Puddock, placing his plump little hand on Devereux’s arm, and looking very gently and gravely in his face.

Devereux laid his hand upon Puddock’s collar with an agitated sort of sneer. But he recollected himself, and that diabolical gloom faded from his face, and he looked more like himself, and slid his cold hand silently into little Puddock’s; and so they stood for a while, by the doorstep, to the admiration of Mrs. Irons — whom Devereux’s high tones had called to her window.

‘Puddock, I don’t think I’m well, and I don’t know quite what I’ve been saying. I ask your pardon. You’ve always been very good to me, Puddock. I believe — I believe you’re the only friend I have, and — Puddock, you won’t leave me.’

So up stairs they went together; and Mrs. Irons, from what she had overheard, considered herself justified in saying, that ‘Captain Devereux was for drowning himself in the Liffey, and would have done so only for Lieutenant Puddock.’ And so the report was set a-going round the garrulous town of Chapelizod.

As Mr. Dangerfield glided rapidly along the silent road towards the Brass Castle, the little gate of his now leafless flower-garden being already in sight, he saw a dark figure awaiting him under the bushes which overhung it. It was Mr. Irons, who came forward, without speaking, and lifted his hat respectfully, perhaps abjectly, and paused for recognition.

‘Hey! Irons?’ said Mr. Dangerfield.

‘At your service, Sir.’

‘Well, and what says his worship?’ asked the gentleman, playfully.

‘I wanted to tell your honour that it won’t make no odds, and I’ll do it.’

‘Of course. You’re right. It does make no odds. He’ll hang whatever you do; and I tell you ’tis well he should, and only right *you* should speak the truth, too— ‘twill make assurance doubly sure.’

‘At eight o’clock in the morning, Sir, I’ll attend you,’ said Irons, with a sort of shiver.

‘Good! and I’ll jot down your evidence, and we’ll drive over to Mr. Lowe’s, to Lucan, and you shall swear before him. And, you understand — I don’t forget what I promised — you’ll be a happier man every way for having done your duty; and here’s half-a-crown to spend in the Salmon House.’

Irons only moaned, and then said —

‘That’s all, Sir. But I couldn’t feel easy till it was off my mind.’

‘At eight o’clock I shall expect you. Goodnight, Irons.’

And with his hands in his pockets he watched Irons off the ground. His visage darkened as for a while his steady gaze was turned toward Dublin. He was not quite so comfortable as he might have been.

Meanwhile Black Dillon, at Mrs. Sturk’s request, had stalked up stairs to the patient’s bedside.

‘Had not I best send at once for Mr. Dangerfield?’ she enquired.

‘No occasion, Ma’am,’ replied the eminent but slightly fuddled ‘Saw-bones,’ spitting beside him on the floor ‘until I see whether I’ll operate tonight. What’s in that jug, Ma’am? Chicken-broth? That’ll do. Give him a spoonful. See — he swallows free enough;’ and then Black Dillon plucked up his eyelids with a roughness that terrified the reverential and loving Mrs. Sturk, and examined the distorted pupils.

‘You see the cast in that eye, Ma’am; there’s the pressure on the brain.’

Dillon was lecturing her upon the case as he proceeded, from habit, just as he did the students in the hospital.

‘No convulsions, Ma’am?’

‘Oh, no, Sir, thank Heaven; nothing in the least — only quiet sleep, Sir; just like that.’

‘Sleep, indeed — that’s no sleep, Ma’am. Boo-hooh! I couldn’t bawl that way in his face, Ma’am, without disturbing him, Ma’am, if it was. Now we’ll get him up a bit — there, that’s right — aisy. He was lying, Ma’am, I understand, on his back, when they found him in the park, Ma’am — so Mr.

Dangerfield says — ay. Well, slip the cap off — backward — backward, you fool; that'll do. Who plastered his head, Ma'am?'

'Doctor Toole, Sir.'

'Toole — Toole — h'm — I see — hey — hi — tut! 'tis the devil's pair of fractures, Ma'am. See — nearer — d'ye see, there's two converging lines — d'ye see, Ma'am?' and he indicated their directions with the silver handle of an instrument he held in his hand, 'and serrated at the edges, I'll be bound.'

And he plucked off two or three strips of plaster with a quick whisk, which made poor little Mrs. Sturk wince and cry, 'Oh, dear, Sir!'

'Threpan, indeed!' murmured Black Dillon, with a coarse sneer, 'did they run the scalpel anywhere over the occiput, Ma'am?'

'I — I — truly, Sir — I'm not sure,' answered Mrs. Sturk, who did not perfectly understand a word he said.

The doctor's hair had not been cut behind. Poor Mrs. Sturk, expecting his recovery every day, would not have permitted the sacrilege, and his dishevelled cue lay upon his shoulders. With his straight surgical scissors Black Dillon snipped off this sacred appendage before the good lady knew what he was about, and cropped the back of his head down to the closest stubble.

'Will you send, if you please, Ma'am, for Doctor — Doctor — Thingumee?'

'Doctor Toole?' enquired Mrs. Sturk.

'Doctor Toole, Ma'am; yes,' answered the surgeon.

He himself went down to the coach at the hall-door, and in a few minutes returned with a case, and something in a cloth. From the cloth he took an apparatus, like the cushioned back of a chair, with straps and buckles attached to it, and a sort of socket, the back of which was open, being intended to receive the head in.

'Now, Ma'am, we'll prop him up comfortable with this, if you please.'

And having got it into place, and lowered by a screw, the cushions intended to receive his head, and got the lethargic trunk and skull of the Artillery doctor well-placed for his purpose, he took out a roll of sticking-plaster and a great piece of lint, and laid them on the table, and unlocked his box, which was a large one, and took out several instruments, silver-mounted, straight and crooked, with awful adaptations to unknown butcheries and tortures, and then out came another — the veritable trepan — resembling the homely bit-and-brace, but slender, sinister, and quaint, with a murderous sort of elegance.

‘You may as well order in half-a-dozen clean towels, if you please, Ma’am.’

‘Oh! Doctor, you’re not going to have an operation tonight, gasped Mrs. Sturk, her face quite white and damp, and her clasped hands trembling.

‘Twenty to one, Ma’am,’ he replied with a slight hiccup, ‘we’ll have nothing of the kind; but have them here, Ma’am, and some warm water for fear of accidents — though maybe ’tis only for a dhrop of punch we’ll be wanting it,’ and his huge, thirsty mouth grinned facetiously; and just then Dr. Toole entered the room. He was confoundedly surprised when he found Black Dillon there. Though bent on meeting him with hauteur and proper reserve, on account of his damnable character, he was yet cowed by his superior knowledge, so that Tom Toole’s address was strangely chequered with pomposity and alarm.

Dillon’s credentials there was, indeed, no disputing, so they sent for Moore, the barber; and, while he was coming, they put the women out of the room, and sat in consultation.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

IN WHICH MR. MOORE THE BARBER ARRIVES, AND THE MEDICAL GENTLEMEN LOCK THE DOOR.

The ladies were not much the wiser, though, I confess, they were not far removed from the door. The great men inside talked indistinctly and technically, and once Doctor Dillon was so unfeeling as to crack a joke — they could not distinctly hear what — and hee-haw brutally over it. And poor little Mrs. Sturk was taken with a great palpitation, and looked as white as a ghost, and was, indeed, so obviously at the point of swooning that her women would have removed her to the nursery, and placed her on the bed, but that such a procedure would have obliged them to leave the door of their sick master's room, just then a point of too lively interest to be deserted. So they consoled their mistress, and supported her with such strong moral cordials as compassionate persons in their rank and circumstances are prompt to administer.

'Oh! Ma'am, jewel, don't be takin' it to heart that way — though, dear knows, 'tis no way surprisin' you would; for may I never sin if ever I seen such a murtherin' steel gimblet as the redfaced docthor — I mane the Dublin man — has out on the table beside the poor masther— 'tid frighten the hangman to look at it — an' six towels, too! Why, Ma'am dear, if 'twas what they wor goin' to slaughter a bullock they wouldn't ax more nor that.'

'Oh! don't. Oh! Katty, Katty — don't, oh don't'

'An' why wouldn't I, my darlin' misthress, tell you what's doin', the way you would not be dhruv out o' your senses intirely if you had no notion, Ma'am dear, iv what they're goin' to do to him?'

At this moment the door opened, and Doctor Dillon's carbuncled visage and glowing eyes appeared.

'Is there a steady woman there — not a child, you know, Ma'am? A — *you'll* do (to Katty). Come in here, if you please, and we'll tell you what you're to do.'

So, being nothing loath, she made her courtesy and glided in.

‘Oh! doctor,’ gasped poor Mrs. Sturk, holding by the hem of his garment, ‘do you think it will kill him?’

‘No, Ma’am — not tonight, at any rate,’ he answered, drawing back; but still she held him.

‘Oh! doctor, you think it *will* kill him?’

‘No, Ma’am — there’s always some danger.’

‘Danger of what, Sir?’

‘Fungus, Ma’am — if he gets over the chance of inflammation. But, on the other hand, Ma’am, we may do him a power of good; and see, Ma’am, ‘twill be best for you to go down or into the nursery, and we’ll call you, Ma’am, if need be — that is, if he’s better, Ma’am, as we hope.’

‘Oh! Mr. Moore, it’s you,’ sobbed the poor woman, holding fast by the sleeve of the barber, who that moment, with many reverences and ‘your servant, Ma’am,’ had mounted to the lobby with the look of awestruck curiosity, in his long, honest face, which the solemn circumstance of his visit warranted.

‘You’re the man we sent for?’ demanded Dillon, gruffly.

‘’Tis good Mr. Moore,’ cried trembling little Mrs. Sturk, deprecating and wheedling him instinctively to make him of her side, and lead him to take part with her and resist all violence to her husband — flesh of her flesh, and bone of her bone.

‘Why don’t you spake, Sor-r-r? Are you the barber we sent for or no? What ails you, man?’ demanded the savage Doctor Dillon, in a suppressed roar.

‘At your sarvice, Ma’am — Sir,’ replied Moore, with submissive alacrity.

‘Come in here, then. Come in, will you?’ cried the doctor, hauling him in with his great red hand.

‘There now — there now — there — there,’ he said gruffly, extending his palm to keep off poor Mrs. Sturk.

So he shut the door, and poor Mrs. Sturk heard him draw the bolt, and felt that her Barney had passed out of her hands, and that she could do nothing for him now but clasp her hands and gasp up her prayers for his deliverance; and so great indeed was her anguish and panic, that she had not room for the feminine reflection how great a brute Doctor Dillon was.

So she heard them walking this way and that, but could not distinguish what they said, only she heard them talking; and once or twice a word reached her, but not very intelligible, such as —

‘’Twas Surgeon Beauchamp’s — see that’

‘Mighty curious.’

Then a lot of mumbling, and

‘Cruciform, of course.’

This was said by Doctor Dillon, near the door, where he had come to take an additional candle from the table that stood there; as he receded it lost itself in mumble again, and then she heard quite plainly —

‘Keep your hand there.’

And a few seconds after,

‘Hold it there and don’t let it drip.’

And then a little more mumbled dialogue, and she thought she heard —

‘Begin now.’

And there was a dead silence of many seconds; and Mrs. Sturk felt as if she must scream, and her heart beat at a gallop, and her dry, white lips silently called upon her Maker for help, and she felt quite wild, and very faint; and heard them speak brief, and low together, and then another long silence; and then a loud voice, in a sort of shriek, cry out that name — holy and awful — which we do not mix in tales like this. It was Sturk’s voice; and he cried in the same horrid shriek, ‘Murder — mercy — Mr. Archer!’

And poor Mrs. Sturk, with a loud hysterical cry, that quivered with her agony, answered from without, and wildly rattled at the door-handle, and pushed with all her feeble force to get in, in a kind of crescendo screaming — ‘Oh, Barney — Barney — *Barney* — *sweetheart* — what are they *doing*?’

‘Oh! blessed hour! — Ma’am— ’tis the master himself that is talking;’ and with a very pale face the maid, who stood in the doorway beside her, uttered her amazed thanksgiving.

And the doctors’ voices were now heard plainly enough soothing the patient, and he seemed to have grown more collected; and she heard him — she thought — repeat a snatch of a prayer, as a man might just rescued from a shipwreck; and he said in a tone more natural in one so sick and weak, ‘I’m a dead man — he’s done it — where is he? — he’s murdered me.’

‘Who?’ demanded Toole’s well-known voice.

‘Archer — the villain — Charles Archer.’

‘Give me the cup with the claret and water, and the spoon — there it is,’ said Dillon’s rough bass tones.

And she heard the maid’s step crossing the floor, and then there was a groan from Sturk.

‘Here, take another spoonful, and don’t mind talking for a while. It’s doing mighty well. There, don’t let him slip over — that’s enough.’

Just then Toole opened the door enough to put his head through, and gently restraining poor Mrs. Sturk with his hand, he said with a vigorous whisper —

‘’Twill all go well, Ma’am, we hope, if he’s not agitated; you must not go in, Ma’am, nor talk to him — by-and-by you may see him, but he must be quiet now; his pulse is very regular at present — but you see, Ma’am, we can’t be too cautious.’

While Toole was thus discoursing her at the door, she heard Dr. Dillon washing his hands, and Sturk’s familiar voice, sounding so strange after the long silence, say very languidly and slowly —

‘Take a pen, Sir — some one — take and write — write down what I say.’

‘Now, Ma’am, you see he’s bent on talking,’ said Toole, whose quick ear caught the promise of a revelation. ‘I must be at my post, Ma’am — the bed post — hey! We may joke now, Ma’am, that the patient’s recovered his speech; and, you know, you mustn’t come in — not till we tell you it’s safe — there now — rely on me — I give you my word of honour he’s doing as well as we could have hoped for.’

And Toole shook her trembling little hand very cordially, and there was a very goodnatured twinkle in his eye.

And Toole closed the door again, and they heard Sturk murmur something more; and then the maid, who was within, was let out by Toole, and the door closed and bolted again, and a sort of cooing and murmuring recommenced.

After a while, Toole, absolutely pale, and looking very stern, opened the door, and, said he, in a quiet way —

‘Ma’am, may I send Katty down to the King’s House, with a note to Mr. — a note to the King’s House, Ma’am — I thank you — and see, Katty, good girl, ask to see the gentleman himself, and take his answer from his own lips.’

And he tore off the back of a letter, and pencilled on it these words —

‘My dear Sir, — Dr. Sturk has been successfully operated upon by me and another gentleman; and being restored to speech and recollection, but very weak, desires earnestly to see you, and make an important disclosure to you as a justice of the peace.

‘I am, Sir, your very obedient, humble servant,

‘Thomas Toole.

Upon this note he clapt a large seal with the Toole arms, and when it was complete, placed it in the hands of Katty, who, with her riding-hood on and her head within it teeming with all sorts of wild conjectures and horrible images, and her whole soul in a whirl of curiosity, hurried along the dark street, now and then glinted on by a gleam through a shutter, or enlivened by the jingle of a harpsichord, or a snatch of talk and laughter heard faintly through the windows, and along the Dublin-road to the gate of the King’s House. The hall-door of this hospitable mansion stood open, and a flood of red candlelight fell upon one side of the gray horse, saddle, and holster pipes, which waited the descent of Mr. Lowe, who was shaking hands with the hospitable colonel at the threshold.

Katty was just in time, and the booted gentleman, in his surtout and cape, strode back again into the light of the hall-door, and breaking the seal, there read, with his clear cold eye, the lines which Toole had pencilled, and thrusting it into his coat pocket, and receiving again the fuddled butler’s benedictions — he had given him half-a-crown — he mounted his gray steed, and at a brisk trot, followed by his servant, was, in little more than two minutes’ time, at Dr. Sturk’s door.

Moore, the barber, *functus officio*, was now sitting in the hall, with his razors in his pocket, expecting his fee, and smelling pleasantly of the glass of whiskey which he had just drunk to the health and long life of the master — God bless him — and all the family.

Doctor Toole met Mr. Lowe on the lobby; he was doing the honours of the ghastly eclaircissement, and bowed him up to the room, with many an intervening whisper, and a sort of apology for Dillon, whom he treated as quite unpresentable, and resolved to keep as much as practicable in the background.

But that gentleman, who exulted in a good stroke of surgery, and had no sort of professional delicacy, calling his absent fathers and brethren of the scalpel and forceps by confounded hard names when he detected a blunder or hit a blot of theirs, met Mr. Lowe on the upper lobby.

‘Your servant, Sir,’ said he, rubbing his great red hands with a moist grin; ‘you see what I’ve done. Pell’s no surgeon, no more than that — (Toole, he was going to say, but modified the comparison in time) — that candlestick! to think of him never looking at the occiput; and *he* found lying on his back — ’twas well Mr. Dangerfield pitched on me — though I say it — why *shouldn’t* I say it — a depression, the size of a shilling in the back of the head — a bit of depressed bone, you see, over the cerebellum — the trepan has relieved him.’

‘And was it Mr. Dangerfield?’ enquired Lowe, who was growing to admire that prompt, cynical hero more and more every hour.

‘By gannies, it just was. He promised me five hundred guineas to make him speak. What all them solemn asses could not compass, that’s sweeping in their thousands every quarter, thanks to a discerning public. Baugh! He had heard of a rakehelly dog, with some stuff in his brain-pan, and he came to me — and I done it — Black Dillon done it — ha, ha! that’s for the pack of them. Baugh!’

Doctor Dillon knew that the profession slighted him; and every man’s hand against him, his was against every man.

Sturk was propped up and knew Lowe, and was, in a ghastly sort of way, glad to see him. He looked strangely pale and haggard, and spoke faintly.

‘Take pen and ink,’ said he.

There were both and paper ready.

‘He would not speak till you came,’ whispered Toole, who looked hotter than usual, and felt rather small, and was glad to edge in a word.

‘An’ don’t let him talk too long; five minutes or so, and no more,’ said Doctor Dillon; ‘and give him another spoonful now — and where’s Mr. Dangerfield?’

‘And do you really mean to say, Sir, he promised you a fee of *five* — eh?’ said Toole, who could not restrain his somewhat angry curiosity.

‘Five hundred guineas — ha, ha, ha! be gannies, Sir, there’s a power of divarsion in that.’

‘’Tis a munificent fee, and prompted by a fine public spirit. We are all his debtors for it! and to you, Sir, too. He’s an early man, Sir, I’m told. You’ll not see him tonight. But, whatever he has promised is already performed; you may rely on his honour.'

'If you come out at nine in the morning, Dr. Dillon, you'll find him over his letters and desk, in his breakfast parlour,' said Toole, who, apprehending that this night's work might possibly prove a hit for the disreputable and savage luminary, was treating him, though a good deal stung and confounded by the prodigious amount of the fee, with more ceremony than he did at first. 'Short accounts, you know,' said Dillon, locking the lid of his case down upon his instruments. 'But maybe, as you say, 'tis best to see him in the morning — them rich fellows is often testy — ha! ha! An' a word with you, Dr. Toole,' and he beckoned his brother aside to the corner near the door — and whispered something in his ear, and laughed a little awkwardly, and Toole, very red and grave, lent him — with many misgivings, two guineas.

'An' see — don't let them give him too much of that — the chicken broth's too sthrong — put some wather to that, Miss, i' you plaze — and give him no more tonight — d'ye mind — than another half a wine-glass full of clar't unless the docthor here tells you.'

So Dr. Dillon took leave, and his fiery steeds, whirling him onward, devoured, with their resounding hoofs, the road to Dublin, where he had mentally devoted Toole's two guineas to the pagan divinities whose worship was nightly celebrated at the old St. Columbkill.

'We had best have it in the shape of a deposition, Sir, at once,' said Lowe, adjusting himself at the writing-table by the bedside, and taking the pen in his fingers, he looked on the stern and sunken features of the resuscitated doctor, recalled, as it were, from 'the caverns of the dead and the gates of darkness,' to reveal an awful secret, and point his cold finger at the head of the undiscovered murderer.

'Tell it as shortly as you can, Sir, but without haste,' said Toole, with his finger on his pulse. Sturk looked dismal and frightened, like a man with the hangman at his elbow.

'It was that d — d villain — Charles Archer — write that down— 'twas a foul blow — Sir, I'm murdered — I suppose.'

And then came a pause.

'Give me a spoonful of wine — I was coming out of town at dusk — this evening— '

‘No, Sir; you’re here some time, stunned and unconscious.’

‘Eh! how long?’

‘No matter, Sir, now. Just say the date of the night it happened.’

Sturk uttered a deep groan.

‘Am I dying?’ said he.

‘No, Sir, please goodness — far from it,’ said Toole.

‘Fracture?’ asked Sturk, faintly.

‘Why — yes — something of the sort — indeed — altogether a fracture; but going on mighty well, Sir.’

‘Stabbed anywhere — or gunshot wound?’ demanded Sturk.

‘Nothing of the kind, Sir, upon my honour.’

‘You think — I have a chance?’ and Sturk’s cadaverous face was moist with the dews of an awful suspense.

‘Chance,’ said Toole, in an encouraging tone, ‘well, I suppose you have, Sir — ha, ha! But, you know, you must not tire yourself, and we hope to have you on your legs again, Sir, in a reasonable time.’

‘I’m very bad — the sight’s affected,’ groaned Sturk.

‘See, Sir, you tire yourself to no purpose. You’re in good hands, Sir — and all will go well — as we expect — Pell has been with you twice— ‘

‘H’m! Pell — that’s good.’

‘And you’re going on mighty well, Sir, especially tonight.’

‘Doctor, upon your honour, have I a chance?’

‘You have, Sir, — certainly — yes — upon my honour.’

‘Thank God!’ groaned Sturk, turning up the whites of his eyes, and lifting up two very shaky hands.

‘But you must not spoil it — and fatigue will do that for you,’ remarked Toole.

‘But, Sir, Sir — I beg pardon, Doctor Toole — but this case is not quite a common one. What Doctor Sturk is about to say may acquire an additional legal value by his understanding precisely the degree of danger in which he lies. Now, Doctor Sturk, you must not be over much disturbed,’ said Lowe.

‘No, Sir — don’t fear me — I’m not much disturbed,’ said Sturk.

‘Well, Doctor Toole,’ continued Lowe, ‘we must depart a little here from regular medical routine — tell Doctor Sturk plainly all you think.’

‘Why — a’ — and Doctor Toole cleared his voice, and hesitated.

‘Tell him what you and Doctor Dillon think, Sir. Why, Doctor Dillon spoke very plainly to me.’

‘I don’t like his pulse, Sir. I think you had better not have agitated him,’ muttered Toole with an impatient oath.

‘’Tis worse to keep his mind doubtful, and on the stretch,’ said Lowe. ‘Doctor Toole, Sir, has told you the bright side of the case. It is necessary, making the deposition you propose, that you should know t’other.’

‘Yes, of course — quite right — go on,’ said Sturk faintly.

‘Why, you know,’ said Toole, sniffing, and a little sulkily, ‘you know, Doctor Sturk, we, doctors, like to put the best foot foremost; but you can’t but be aware, that with the fractures — *two* fractures — along the summit of the skull, and the operation by the trepan, behind your head, just accomplished, there must be, of course, some danger.’

‘I see. Sir,’ said Sturk, very quietly, but looking awfully cadaverous; ‘all I want to know is, how long you think I may live?’

‘You may recover altogether, Sir — you may — but, of course — you may — there’s a chance; and things might not go right,’ said Toole, taking snuff.

‘I see — Sir— ’tis enough’ — and there was a pause. ‘I’d like to have the sacrament, and pray with the clergyman a little — Lord help me! — and my will — only a few words — I don’t suppose there’s much left me; but there’s a power of appointment — a reversion of £600, stock — I’m tired.’

‘Here, take this,’ said Toole, and put half-a-dozen spoonsful of claret and water into his lips, and he seemed to revive a little. ‘There’s no immediate hurry — upon my honour, Doctor Sturk, there isn’t,’ said Toole. ‘Just rest aisy a bit; you’re disturbed a good deal, Sir; your pulse shows it; and you need not, I assure you, upon my conscience and honour— ’tis quite on the cards you may recover.’

And as he spoke, Toole was dropping something from a phial into a wine-glass — sal volatile — ether — I can’t say; but when Dr. Sturk swallowed it there was a ‘potter-carrier’s’ aroma about the room.

Then there was a pause for a while, and Toole kept his fingers on his pulse; and Sturk looked, for some time, as if he were on the point of fainting, which, in his case, might have proved very like dying.

‘Have you the claret bottle in the room?’ demanded Toole, a little flurried; for Sturk’s pulses were playing odd pranks, and bounding and sinking in a dance of death.

‘The what, Sir?’ asked the maid.

‘The *wine*, woman — this instant,’ said the doctor, with a little stamp.

So, the moment he had the bottle, he poured out half a large glass, and began spooning it into Sturk’s white parted lips.

Lowe looked on very uneasily; for he expected, as Toole did also, prodigious revelations; though each had a suspicion that he divined their nature tolerably clearly.

‘Give him some more,’ said Toole, with his fingers on the sick man’s wrist, and watching his countenance. ‘D —— it, don’t be afraid — more, some more — more!’

And so the Artillery doctor’s spirit revived within him; though with flickerings and tremblings; and he heaved some great sighs, and moved his lips. Then he lay still for a while; and after that he spoke.

‘The pen, Sir, — write,’ he said. ‘He met me in the Butcher’s Wood; he said he was going to sleep in town,’ and Sturk groaned dismally; ‘and he began talking on business — and turned and walked a bit with me. I did not expect to see him there — he was frank — and spoke me fair. We were walking slowly. He looked up in the sky with his hands in his coat pockets and was a step, or so, in advance of me; and he turned short — I didn’t know — I had no more fear than you — and struck me a blow with something he had in his hand. He rose to the blow on his toes— ’twas so swift, I had no time — I could not see what he struck with, ’twas like a short bit of rope.’

‘Charles Archer? Do you know him, Dr. Toole?’ asked Lowe. Toole shook his head.

‘Charles Archer!’ he repeated, looking at Sturk; ‘where does he live?’ and he winked to Toole, who was about speaking, to hold his peace.

‘Here — in this town — Chapelizod, up the river, a bit, with — with a — changed name,’ answered Sturk. And at the name he mentioned, Lowe and Toole, in silence and steadfastly, exchanged a pale, grim glance that was awful to see.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

IN WHICH A CERTAIN SONGSTER TREATS THE COMPANY TO A DOLOROUS BALLAD WHEREBY MR. IRONS IS SOMEWHAT MOVED.

It seemed that Mr. Dangerfield had taken Zekiel Irons's measure pretty exactly. The clerk had quite made up his mind to take the bold step urged upon him by that gentleman. He was a slow man. When one idea had fairly got into his head there was no room there for another. Cowardly and plotting; but when his cowardice was wrought upon to a certain pitch, he would wax daring and fierce from desperation.

He walked down to the village from the little gate of the Brass Castle, where he had talked with Mr. Dangerfield, appointing eight o'clock next morning for making the deposition; late now for all purposes; but to nail him to a line of *vivá voce* evidence when he should come to be examined on Charles Nutter's approaching trial. The whole way along he walked with the piece of silver, which Mr. Paul Dangerfield had given him, griped tight in his crooked fingers, in his breeches' pocket — no change in his grim and sinister face — no turn of the head — no side glance of the eye — all dark, rigid, and tense.

The mechanism of long habit brought him round the corner to the door of the Salmon House, the 'public' facing, but with the length of the street interposing, the Phœnix, whose lights were visible through and under the branches of the village tree. His mind wandered back to the Mills with a shock, and glided stealthily past the Brass Castle without dwelling there, and he looked down the street. Over the bridge at the Elms, lay death in its awful purity. At his left, in the Gray Stone House, was Doctor Sturk — the witness with sealed lips — the victim of Charles Archer's mysterious prowess; and behind lay the churchyard, and the quiet little church with that vault and nameless coffin. Altogether, the suggestions and associations about him were not cheerful or comfortable. He squeezed the silver — Dangerfield's little remembrance — with a furious strain, and ground his teeth.

‘I’m like a man surrounded. I wish I was out of it all!’ he muttered, with a careworn glance.

So he entered the public-house.

There was not much business doing. Three friends, Smithfield dealers, or some such folk, talking loudly over their liquor of prices and prospects; and one fat fellow, by the fire, smoking a pipe, with a large glass of punch at his elbow.

‘Ah, then, Mr. Irons, an’ is it yourself that’s in it? and where in the world wor ye all this time?’ said the landlady.

‘Business, Ma’am, business, Mrs. Molloy.’

‘An’ there’s your chair waitin’ for you beside the fire, Mr. Irons, this month an’ more — a cowld evening — and we all wondherin’ what in the wide world was gone widg ye — this I do’no how long.’

‘Thank ye, Ma’am — a pipe and a glass o’ punch.’

Irons was always a man of few words, and his laconics did not strike Mistress Molloy as anything very strange. So she wiped the little table at his side, and with one foot on the fender, and his elbow on his knee, he smoked leisurely into the fireplace.

To look at his face you would have supposed he was thinking; but it was only that sort of foggy vacuity which goes by the name of ‘a brown study.’ He never thought very clearly or connectedly; and his apathetic reveries, when his mood was gloomy, were furnished forth in a barren and monotonous way, with only two or three frightful figures, and a dismal scenery that seldom shifted.

The three gentlemen at the table called for more liquor, and the stout personage, sitting opposite to Irons, dropped into their talk, having smoked out his pipe, and their conversation became more general and hilarious; but Irons scarce heard it. Curiosity is an idle minx, and a soul laden like the clerk’s has no entertainment for her. But when one of the three gentlemen who sat together — an honest but sad-looking person with a flaxen wig, and a fat, florid face — placing his hand in the breast of his red plush waistcoat, and throwing himself back in his chair, struck up a dismal tune, with a certain character of psalmody in it, the clerk’s ear was charmed for a moment, and he glanced on the singer and sipped some punch; and the ballad, rude and almost rhymeless, which he chanted had an undefined and unpleasant fascination for Irons. It was thus: —

‘A man there was near Ballymooney,
Was guilty of a deed o’ blood,
For thravellin’ alongside iv ould Tim Rooney.
He kilt him in a lonesome wood.

‘He took his purse, and his hat and cravat.
And stole his buckles and his prayer-book, too;
And neck-and-heels, like a cruel savage,
His corpus through the wood he drew.

‘He pult him over to a big bog-hole,
And sunk him undher four-foot o’ wather,
And built him down wid many a thumpin’ stone.
And slipt the bank out on the corpus afther.’

Here the singer made a little pause, and took a great pull at the beer-can, and Irons looked over his shoulder at the minstrel; but his uneasy and malignant glance encountered only the bottom of the vessel; and so he listened for more, which soon came thus: —

‘An’ says he, “Tim Rooney, you’re there, my boy,
Kep’ down in the bog-hole wid the force iv suction,
An’ tisn’t myself you’ll throuble or annoy,
To the best o’ my opinion, to the resurrection.”

‘With that, on he walks to the town o’ Drumgoole,
And sot by the fire in an inn was there;
And sittin’ beside him, says the ghost— “You fool!
’Tis myself’s beside ye, Shamus, everywhere.”’

At this point the clerk stood up, and looked once more at the songster, who was taking a short pull again, with a suspicious, and somewhat angry glance. But the unconscious musician resumed —

'"Up through the wather your secret rises;
The stones won't keep it, and it lifts the mould,
An' it tracks your footsteps, and yoar fun surprises
An' it sits at the fire beside you black and cowld.

'"At prayers, at dances, or at wake or hurling;
At fair, or funeral, or where you may;
At your going out, and at your returning,
'Tis I'll be with you to your dying day."'

'Is there much more o' that?' demanded Irons, rather savagely.

The thirsty gentleman in the red plush waistcoat was once more, as he termed it, 'wetting his whistle;' but one of his comrades responded tartly enough —

'I'd like there was — an' if you mislike it, neighbour, there's the door.'

If he expected a quarrel, however, it did not come; and he saw by Irons's wandering eye, fierce as it looked, that his thoughts for the moment were elsewhere. And just then the songster, having wiped his mouth in his coat-sleeve, started afresh in these terms —

'"You'll walk the world with a dreadful knowledge,
And a heavy heart and a frowning brow;
And thinking deeper than a man in college,
Your eye will deaden, and your back will bow.

'"And when the pariod iv your life is over,
The frightful hour of judgment then will be;
And, Shamus Hanlon, heavy on your shoulder,
I'll lay my cowld hand, and you'll go wid me."'

This awful ditty died away in the prolonged drone which still finds favour in the ears of our Irish rustic musicians, and the company now began to talk of congenial themes, murders, ghosts, and retributions, and the horrid tune went dismally booming on in Mr. Irons's ear.

Trifling, and apparently wholly accidental, as was this occurrence, the musical and moral treat had a very permanent effect upon the fortunes of

Irons, and those of other persons who figure in our story. Mr. Irons had another and another glass of punch. They made him only more malign and saturnine. He sat in his corner by the fire, silent and dismal; and no one cared what was passing in the brain behind that black and scowling mask. He paid sternly and furiously, like a villain who has lost at play; and without a 'goodnight,' or any other leave taking, glided ominously from the room; and the gentlemen who carried on the discourse and convivialities of the Salmon House, followed him with a gibe or two, and felt the pleasanter for the removal of that ungracious presence.

A few minutes later, Mr. Lowe stood on the hall-door step, and calling to his man, gave him a little note and some silver, and a message — very impressively repeated — and the groom touched his hat, and buttoned up his coat about his neck, the wind being from the east, and he started, at something very near a gallop, for Dublin.

There was a man at the door of the Salmon House, who, with a taciturn and saturnine excitement, watched the unusual bustle going on at the doorsteps of Doctor Sturk's dwelling. This individual had been drinking there for a while; and having paid his shot, stood with his back to the wall, and his hands in his pockets, profoundly agitated, and with a chaos of violent and unshaped thoughts rising and rolling in his darkened brain.

After Lowe went into the house again, seeing the maid still upon the steps, talking with Mr. Moore, the barber, who was making his lingering adieux there, this person drew near, and just as the tonsor made his final farewell, and strode down the street towards his own dwelling, he presented himself in time to arrest the retreat of the damsel.

'By your leave, Mistress Katty,' said he, laying his hand on the iron rail of the doorsteps.

'Oh, good jewel! an' is that yourself, Mr. Irons? And where in the world wor you this month an' more?'

'Business — nothin' — in Mullingar — an' how's the docthor tonight?'

The clerk spoke a little thickly, as he commonly did on leaving the Salmon House.

'He's elegant, my dear — beyant the beyants — why, he's sittin' up, dhrinking chicken-broth, and talking law-business with Mr. Lowe.'

'He's talkin'!'

‘Ay is he, and Mr. Lowe just this minute writ down all about the way he come by the breakin’ of his skull in the park, and we’ll have great doings on the head of it; for the master swore to it, and Doctor Toole — — ‘

‘An’who done it?’ demanded Irons, ascending a step, and grasping the iron rail.

‘I couldn’t hear — nor no one, only themselves.’

‘An’ who’s that rode down the Dublin road this minute?’

‘That’s Mr. Lowe’s man; ’tis what he’s sent him to Dublin wid a note.’

‘I see,’ said Irons, with a great oath, which seemed to the maid wholly uncalled for; and he came up another step, and held the iron rail and shook it, like a man grasping a battle-axe, and stared straight at her, with a look so strange, and a visage so black, that she was half-frightened.

‘A what’s the matther wid you, Misther Irons?’ she demanded.

But he stared on in silence, scowling through her face at vacancy, and swaying slightly as he griped the metal banister.

‘I *will*,’ he muttered, with another most unclerklike oath, and he took Katty by the hand, and shook it slowly in his own cold, damp grasp as he asked, with the same intense and forbidding look,

‘Is Mr. Lowe in the house still?’

‘He is, himself and Doctor Toole, in the back parlour.’

‘Whisper him, Katty, this minute, there’s a man has a thing to tell him.’

‘What about?’ enquired Katty.

‘About a great malefactor.’

Katty paused, with her mouth open, expecting more.

‘Tell him now; at once, woman; you don’t know what delay may cost.’

He spoke impetuously, and with a bitter sort of emphasis, like a man in a hurry to commit himself to a course, distrusting his own resolution.

She was frightened at his sudden fierceness, and drew back into the hall and he with her, and he shut the door with a clang behind him, and then looked before him, stunned and wild, like a man called up from his bed into danger.

‘Thank God. I’m in for it,’ muttered he, with a shudder and a sardonic grin, and he looked for a moment something like that fine image of the Wandering Jew, given us by Gustave Doreé, the talisman of his curse dissolved, and he smiling cynically in the terrible light of the judgment day.

The woman knocked at the parlour door, and Lowe opened it.

‘Who’s here?’ he asked, looking at Irons, whose face he remembered, though he forgot to whom it belonged.

‘I’m Zekiel Irons, the parish-clerk, please your worship, and all I want is ten minutes alone with your honour.’

‘For what purpose?’ demanded the magistrate, eyeing him sharply.

‘To tell you all about a damned murder.’

‘Hey — why — who did it?’

‘Charles Archer,’ he answered; and screwed up his mouth with a convulsive grimace, glaring bloodlessly at the justice.

‘Ha! Charles Archer! I think we know something already about that.’

‘I don’t think you do, though; and by your leave, you’ll promise, if I bring it home to him, you’ll see me safe through it. ’Tis what I’m the only witness living that knows all about it.’

‘Well, what is it about?’

‘The murder of Mr. Beauclerc, that my Lord Dunoran was tried and found guilty for.’

‘Why, all very good; but that did not happen in Ireland.’

‘No. At Newmarket, the “Pied Horse.”’

‘Ay, in England. I know, and that’s out of our jurisdiction.’

‘I don’t care. I’ll go to London if you like — to Bow-street — anywhere — so as I make sure to hang him; for my life is worse than death while he’s at this side of the grave — and I’d rather be in my coffin — I would — than live within five miles of him. Anyway, you’ll hear what I have to say, and to *swear*, and send me safe across the water to Bow-street, or wherever else you think best; for, if he has his liberty, and gets sight o’ me again, I’m a dead man.’

‘Come in here, Mr. Irons, and take a chair,’ said the justice.

Doctor Toole was in the room, in a balloon-backed chair, regaling himself with a long pipe, and Mr. Lowe shut the door.

‘We have another deposition, doctor, to take; Mr. Irons, here, is prepared to swear informations of very singular importance.’

‘Irons, hollo! from what planet did you drop tonight?’

‘Mullingar, Sir.’

‘Nothing about the burning of the old woman at Tyrrell’s Pass, eh?’

‘No— ’tis an old story. I don’t care what comes of it, I’m innocent, only you’ll say I kept it too long to myself. But you can’t touch my life. I’m more afeard of him than you, and with good cause; but I think he's in a corner now, and I'll speak out and take my chance, and you mustn't allow me to be murdered.'

By this time Lowe had procured writing materials, and all being ready, he and the curious and astonished doctor heard a story very like what we have already heard from the same lips.

CHAPTER XC.

MR. PAUL DANGERFIELD HAS SOMETHING ON HIS MIND, AND CAPTAIN DEVEREUX RECEIVES A MESSAGE.

Mr. Dangerfield having parted with Irons, entered the little garden or shrubbery, which skirted on either side the short gravel walk, which expanded to a miniature courtyard before the door of the Brass Castle. He flung the little iron gate to with a bitter clang; so violent that the latch sprang from its hold, and the screaking iron swung quivering open again behind him.

Like other men who have little religion, Mr. Paul Dangerfield had a sort of vague superstition. He was impressible by omens, though he scorned his own weakness, and sneered at, and quizzed it sometimes in the monologues of his ugly solitude. The swinging open of the outer gate of his castle sounded uncomfortably behind him, like an invitation to shapeless danger to step in after him. The further he left it behind him, the more in his spirit was the gaping void between his two little piers associated with the idea of exposure, defencelessness, and rashness. This feeling grew so strong, that he turned about before he reached his hall-door, and, with a sensation akin to fury, retraced the fifteen or twenty steps that intervened, and grasped the cold iron with the fiercest tension of his sinews, as if it had resented his first violence by a dogged defiance of his wishes, and spluttering a curse between his teeth, he dashed it to again — and again, as once more it sprang open from the shock.

‘Who’s master *now*?’ snarled Mr. Paul Dangerfield, through his clenched teeth, and smiting the senseless iron with a vindictive swoop of his cane. I fancy his face at this moment had some of the peculiar lines and corrugations which we observe in that of Retzsch’s Mephistopheles, when he gripes the arm of Faust to drag him from Margaret’s cell. So he stood behind his iron grating, glaring and grinning defiance into the darkness, with his fingers clenched hard upon his cane.

Black Dillon’s failure was a blow to the progress of his plans. It incensed him. ‘That d —— d outcast! That *he* should presume so to treat a man who could master him so easily at any game, and buy and sell him body and soul, and had actually bargained to give him five hundred guineas — the needy, swinish miscreant! and paid him earnest beside — the stupid cheat! Drink — dice — women! Why, five hundred guineas made him free of his filthy paradise for a twelvemonth, and the leprous oaf could not quit his impurities for an hour, and keep the appointment that was to have made him master of his heart's desires.'

At his hall-door he paused, listening intently, with his spectacles glimmering toward Chapelizod, for the sound of a distant step; but there was no messenger afoot. He heard only the chill sigh of the air through the leafless branches.

Mr. Dangerfield had not his key with him; and he beat an unnecessarily loud and long tattoo upon his door, and before it could possibly have been answered, he thundered a second through the passages.

Mrs. Jukes knew the meaning of that harsh and rabid summons. 'There was something on the master's mind.' His anxieties never depressed him as they did other men, but strung up his energies to a point of mental tension and exasperation which made him terrible to his domestics. It was not his acts — his conduct was always under control, but chiefly his looks, and accents, and an influence that seemed to take possession of him at such times that rendered him undefinably formidable to his servants.

'Ha! — mighty obleeging (he so pronounced the word) — let in at last — cold outside, Ma'am. You've let out the fire I suppose?'

His tones were like the bark of a wolf, and there was a devilish smirk in his white face, as he made her a mock salutation, and glided into his parlour. The fire was bright enough, however, as Mrs. Jukes was much relieved to see; and dropping a courtesy she enquired whether he would like a dish of tea, or anything?

'No, Ma'am!' he snarled.

'Would he like his dressing-gown and slippers?'

'No, Ma'am,' again. So she dropped another courtesy, and sneaked away to the kitchen, with short, noiseless steps, and heard Mr. Dangerfield shut the door sharply.

His servants were afraid of him. They could not quite comprehend him. They knew it was vain trying to deceive him, and had quite given up lying and prevaricating. Neither would he stand much talking. When they prattled he brought them to the point sternly; and whenever a real anxiety rested on his mind he became pretty nearly diabolical. On the whole, however, they had a strange sort of liking for him. They were proud of his wealth, and of his influence with great people. And though he would not allow them to rob, disobey, or deceive him, yet he used them handsomely, paid like a prince, was a considerate master, and made them comfortable.

Now Mr. Dangerfield poked up his fire and lighted his candles. Somehow, the room looked smaller he thought than it had ever seemed before. He was not nervous — nothing could bring him to that; but his little altercation with the iron gate, and some uncomfortable thoughts had excited him. It was an illusion merely — but the walls seemed to have closed in a foot or two, and the ceiling to have dropped down proportionably, and he felt himself confined and oppressed.

‘My head’s a little bit heated — *ira furo brevis*,’ and he sneered a solitary laugh, more like himself, and went out into his tiny hall, and opened the door, and stood on the step for air, enjoying the cold wind that played about his temples. Presently he heard the hollow clink of two pair of feet walking toward the village. The pedestrians were talking eagerly; and he thought, as they passed the little iron gate of his domain, he heard his own name mentioned, and then that of Mervyn. I dare say it was mere fancy; but, somehow, he did not like it, and he walked swiftly down to the little gate by the road side — it was only some twenty yards — keeping upon the grass that bounded it, to muffle the sound of his steps. This white phantom noiselessly stood in the shadow of the road side. The interlocutors had got a good way on, and were talking loud and volubly. But he heard nothing that concerned him from either again, though he waited until their steps and voices were lost in the distance.

The cool air was pleasant about his bare temples, and Mr. Paul Dangerfield waited a while longer, and listened, for any sound of footsteps approaching from the village, but none such was audible; and beginning to feel a little chilly, he entered his domicile again, shut the hall-door, and once more found himself in the little parlour of the Brass Castle.

His housekeeper heard his harsh voice barking down the passage at her, and rising with a start from her seat, cried,

‘At your service, Sir.’

‘At a quarter to twelve o’clock fetch me a sandwich, and a glass of absynthe, and meanwhile, don’t disturb me.’

And she heard him enter his little parlour, and shut the door.

‘There’s something to vex, but nothing to threaten — nothing. It’s all that comical dream — curse it! What tricks the brain plays us! ’Tis fair it should though. We work it while we please, and it plays when it may. The slave has his saturnalia, and flouts his tyrant. Ha, ha! ’tis time these follies were ended. I’ve something to do tonight.’

So Mr. Dangerfield became himself again, and applied himself keenly to his business.

When I first thought of framing the materials which had accumulated in my hands into a narrative, dear little Lily Walsingham’s death was a sore trouble to me. ‘Little’ Lily I call her, but though slight, she was not little — rather tall, indeed.

It was, however, the term I always heard connected with her pretty name in my boyhood, when the old people, who had remembered her very long ago, mentioned her, as they used, very kindly, a term of endearment that had belonged to her, and in virtue of the childlike charm that was about her, had grown up with her from childhood. I had plans for mending this part of the record, and marrying her to handsome Captain Devereux, and making him worthy of her; but somehow I could not. From very early times I had known the sad story. I had heard her beauty talked about in my childhood; the rich, clear tints, the delicate outlines, those tender and pleasant dimples, like the wimpling of a well; an image so pure, and merry, and melancholy withal, had grown before me, and in twilight shadows visited the now lonely haunts of her brief hours; even the old church, in my evening rambles along the uplands of the park, had in my eyes so saddened a grace in the knowledge that those slender bones lay beneath its shadows, and all about her was so linked in my mind with truth, and melancholy, and altogether so sacred, that I could not trifle with the story, and felt, even when I imagined it, a pang, and a reproach, as if I had mocked the sadness of little Lily’s fate; so, after some ponderings and trouble of mind I gave it up, and quite renounced the thought.

And, after all, what difference should it make? Is not the generation among whom her girlish lot was cast long passed away? A few years more or less of life. What of them now? When honest Dan Loftus cited those lines from the ‘Song of Songs,’ did he not make her sweet epitaph? Had she married Captain Devereux, what would her lot have been? She was not one of those potent and stoical spirits, who can survive the wreck of their best affections, and retort injury with scorn. In forming that simple spirit, Nature had forgotten arrogance and wrath. She would never have fought against the cruelty of changed affections if that or the treasons of an unprincipled husband had come. His love would have been her light and life, and when that was turned away, like a northern flower that has lost its sun, she would have only hung her pretty head, and died, in her long winter. So viewing now the ways of wisdom from a distance, I think I can see they were the best, and how that fair, young mortal, who seemed a sacrifice, was really a conqueror.

Puddock and Devereux on this eventful night, as we remember, having shaken hands at the doorsteps, turned and went up stairs together, very amicably again, to the captain’s drawingroom.

So Devereux, when they returned to his lodgings, had lost much of his reserve, and once on the theme of his grief, stormed on in gusts, and lulls, and thunder, and wild upbraidings, and sudden calms; and the goodnatured soul of little Puddock was touched, and though he did not speak, he often dried his eyes quietly, for grief is conversant not with self, but with the dead, and whatever is generous moves us.

‘There’s no one stirring now, Puddock — I’ll put my cloak about me and walk over to the Elms, to ask how the rector is tonight,’ said Devereux, muffling himself in his military mantle.

It was only the restlessness of grief. Like all other pain, grief is haunted with the illusion that change means relief; motion is the instinct of escape. Puddock walked beside him, and they went swiftly and silently together.

When they reached the other side of the bridge, and stood under the thorn-hedge fronting the leafless elms, Devereux was irresolute.

‘Would you wish *me* to enquire?’ asked Puddock. Devereux held him doubtfully by the arm for a moment or two, and then said gently —

‘No, I thank you, Puddock — I’ll go — yes — I’ll go myself;’ and so Captain Devereux went up to the door.

John Tracy, at the steps, told him that he thought his master wished to speak with him; but he was not quite sure. The tall muffled figure therefore waited at the door while John went in to tell his master, and soon returned to say that Doctor Walsingham would be much obliged to him to step into the study.

When the doctor saw Devereux, he stood up to meet him.

'I hope, Sir,' said Devereux, very humbly, 'you have forgiven me.'

The doctor took his hand and shook it very hard, and said, 'There's nothing — we're both in sorrow. Everyone — everyone is sorry, Sir, but you more.'

Devereux did not say anything, being moved, as I suppose. But he had drawn his cloak about his face, and was looking down.

'There was a little message — only a word or two,' said the doctor; 'but everything of hers is sacred.'

He turned over some papers in his desk, and chose one. It was in Lily's pretty handwriting.

'I am charged with this little message. Oh, my darling!' and the old man cried bitterly.

'Pray, read it — you will understand it— 'tis easily read. What a pretty hand it was!'

So Devereux took the little paper, and read just the words which follow: —

'My beloved father will, I hope, if he thinks it right, tell Captain Richard Devereux that I was not so unkind and thankless as I may have seemed, but very grateful for his preference, of which I know, in many ways, how unworthy I was. But I do not think we could have been happy; and being all over, it is a great comfort to friends who are separated here, that there is a place where all may meet again, if God will; and as I did not see or speak with him since my dear father brought his message, I wished that so much should be said, and also to say a kind goodbye, and give him all good wishes.

'LILIAS.'

'Friday evening.'

Captain Richard Devereux read this simple little record through, and then he said: —

'Oh, Sir, may I have it — isn't it mine?'

We who have heard those wondrous aërial echoes of Killarney, when the breath has left the bugle and its cadences are silent, take up the broken links of the lost melody with an answer far away, sad and celestial, real, yet unreal, the fleeting yet lingering spirit of music, that is past and over, have something in memory by which we can illustrate the effect of these true voices of the thoughts and affections that have perished, returning for a few charmed moments regretfully and sweetly from the sea of eternal silence.

And so that sad and clear farewell, never repeated, was long after, in many a lonely night, answered by the voice of Devereux.

‘Did she — did she know how I loved her? Oh, never, never! I’ll never love any but you. Darling, darling — you can’t die. Oh, no, no, no! Your place knows you still; your place is here — here — here.’

And he smote his breast over that heart which, such as it was, cherished a pure affection for her.

CHAPTER XCI.

CONCERNING CERTAIN DOCUMENTS WHICH REACHED MR. MERVYN, AND THE WITCHES' REVELS AT THE MILLS.

I would be ashamed to say how, soon after Dangerfield had spoken to Mr. Mervyn in the churchyard on the Sunday afternoon, when he surprised him among the tombstones, the large-eyed young gentleman, with the long black hair, was at his desk, and acting upon his suggestion. But the *Hillsborough* was to sail next day; and Mr. Mervyn's letter, containing certain queries, and an order for twenty guineas on a London house, glided in that packet with a favouring breeze from the Bay of Dublin, on its way to the London firm of Elrington Brothers.

On the morning of the day whose events I have been describing in the last half-dozen chapters, Mr. Mervyn received his answer, which was to the following effect: —

'Sir, — Having made search for the Paper which you enquire after, we have Found one answering your description in a General way; and pursuant to your request and Direction, beg leave to forward you a Copy thereof, together with a copy of a letter concerning it, received by the same post from Sir Philip Drayton, of Drayton Hall, Sometime our Client, and designed in Part to explain his share in the matter. Your order for twenty guineas, on Messrs. Trett and Penrose, hath come to hand, and been duly honoured, and we thankfully Accept the same, in payment for all trouble had in this matter.

'&c., &c., &c.'

The formal document which it enclosed said: —

'This is to certify that Charles Archer, Esq., aged, as shortly before his death he reported himself, thirty-five years, formerly of London, departed this life, on the 4th August, 1748, in his lodgings, in the city of Florence, next door to the "Red Lion," and over against the great entrance of the Church of the Holy Cross, in the which, having conformed to the holy Roman faith, he is buried. — Signed this 12th day of August, 1748.

‘Philip Drayton, Baronet.
‘Gaetano Meloni, M.D.
‘Robert Smith, Musician.

‘We three having seen the said Charles Archer during his sickness, and after his decease.’

Then followed the copy of the baronet’s letter to his attorneys, which was neither very long nor very businesslike.

‘Why the plague don’t you make the scoundrel, Jekyl, pay? His mother’s dead only t’other day, and he must be full of money. I’ve scarce a marvedy in hand, now; so let him have a writ in his, drat him. About that certificate, I’m almost sorry I signed it. I’ve bin thinking ’tis like enough I may be troubled about it. So you may tell ‘em I know no more only what is there avouched. No more I do. He played at a faro-table here, and made a very pretty figure. But I hear now from Lord Orland that there are many bad reports of him. He was the chief witness against that rogue, Lord Dunoran, who swallowed poison in Newgate, and, they say, leaned hard against him, although he won much money of him, and swore with a bloodthirsty intention. But that is neither here nor there; I mean ill reports of his rogueries at play, and other doings, which, had I sooner known, my name had not bin to the paper. So do not make a noise about it, and maybe none will ask for’t. As for Jack Jekyl, why not take the shortest way with him. You’re very pitiful fellows; but I wish o’ my conscience you’d take some pity o’ me, and not suffer me to be bubbled,’ &c., &c.

There was only a sentence or two more, referring in the same strain to other matters of business, of which, in the way of litigation, he seemed to have no lack, and the letter ended.

‘I’ll go direct to London and see these people, and thence to Florence. Gaetano Meloni — he may be living — who knows? He will remember the priest who confessed him. A present to a religious house may procure — in a matter of justice, and where none can be prejudiced, for the case is very special — a dispensation, if he be the very Charles Archer — and he may — why not? — have disclosed all on his deathbed. First, I shall see Mr. Dangerfield — then those attorneys; and next make search in Florence; and, with the aid of whatever I can glean there, and from Irons, commence in England the intensest scrutiny to which a case was ever yet subjected.’

Had it not been so late when he found this letter on his return, he would have gone direct with it to the Brass Castle; but that being quite out of the question, he read it again and again. It is wonderful how often a man will spell over and over the same commonplace syllables, if they happen to touch a subject vitally concerning himself, and what theories and speculations he will build upon the accidental turn of a phrase, or the careless dash of a pen.

As we see those wild animals walk their cages in a menagerie, with the fierce instincts of suppressed action rolling in the vexed eye and vibrating in every sinew, even so we behold this hero of the flashing glance and sable locks treading, in high excitement, the floor of the cedar parlour. Every five minutes a new hope — a new conjecture, and another scrutiny of the baronet's letter, or of the certificate of Archer's death, and hour after hour speeding by in the wild chase of successive chimeras.

While Mr. Justice Lowe's servant was spurring into town at a pace which made the hollow road resound, and struck red flashes from the stones, up the river, at the Mills, Mistress Mary Matchwell was celebrating a sort of orgie. Dirty Davy and she were good friends again. Such friendships are subject to violent vicissitudes, and theirs had been interrupted by a difference of opinion, of which the lady had made a note with a brass candlestick over his eye. Dirty Davy's expressive feature still showed the green and yellow tints of convalescence. But there are few philosophers who forgive so frankly as a thorough scoundrel, when it is his interest to kiss and be friends. The candlestick was not more innocent of all unpleasant feeling upon the subject than at that moment was Dirty Davy.

Dirty Davy had brought with him his chief clerk, who was a facetious personage, and boozy, and on the confidential footing of a common rascality with his master, who, after the fashion of Harry V. in his nonage, condescended in his frolics and his cups to men of low estate; and Mary Matchwell, though fierce and deep enough, was not averse on occasion, to partake of a bowl of punch in sardonic riot, with such agreeable company.

Charles Nutter's unexpected coming to life no more affected Mary Matchwell's claim than his supposed death did her spirits. Widow or wife, she was resolved to make good her position, and the only thing she seriously dreaded was that an intelligent jury, an eminent judge, and an adroit hangman, might remove him prematurely from the sphere of his conjugal duties, and forfeit his worldly goods to the crown.

Next morning, however, a writ or a process of some sort, from which great things were expected, was to issue from the court in which her rights were being vindicated. Upon the granting of this, Mistress Matchwell and Dirty Davy — estranged for some time, as we have said, — embraced. She forgot the attorney's disrespectful language, and he the lady's brass candlestick, and, over the punch-bowl of oblivion and vain glory, they celebrated their common victory.

Under advice, M. M. had acquiesced, pending her vigorous legal proceedings, in poor little Sally Nutter's occupying her bedroom in the house for a little while longer. The beleagured lady was comforted in her strait by the worthy priest, by honest Dr. Toole, and not least, by that handsome and stalworth nymph, the daring Magnolia. That blooming Amazon was twice on the point of provoking the dismal sorceress, who kept her court in the parlour of the Mills, to single combat. But fortune willed it otherwise, and each time the duel had been interrupted in its formal inception, and had gone no further than that spirited prologue in which the female sex so faithfully preserve the tradition of those thundering dialogues which invariably precede the manual business of the Homeric fray.

This was the eve of a great triumph and a memorable gala. Next morning, Sally Nutter was to be scalped, roasted, and eaten up, and the night was spent in savage whoopings, songs and dances. They had got a reprobate blind fiddler into the parlour, where their punch-bowl steamed — a most agreeable and roistering sinner, who sang indescribable songs to the quaver of his violin, and entertained the company with Saturnalian vivacity, jokes, gibes, and wicked stories. Larry Cleary, thou man of sin and music! methinks I see thee now. Thy ugly, cunning, pitted face, twitching and grinning; thy small, sightless orbs rolling in thy devil's merriment, and thy shining forehead red with punch.

In the kitchen things were not more orderly; M. M.'s lean maid was making merry with the bailiff, and a fat and dreadful trollop with one eye — tipsy, noisy, and pugnacious.

Poor little Sally Nutter and her maids kept dismal vigil in her bedroom. But that her neighbours and her lawyer would in no sort permit it, the truth is, the frightened little soul would long ago have made herself wings, and flown anywhere for peace and safety.

It is remarkable how long one good topic, though all that may be said upon it has been said many scores of times, will serve the colloquial purposes of the good folk of the kitchen or the nursery. There was scarcely half-an-hour in the day during which the honest maids and their worthy little mistress did not discuss the dreadful Mary Matchwell. They were one and all, though in different degrees, indescribably afraid of her. Her necromantic pretensions gave an indistinctness and poignancy to their horror. She seemed to know, by a diabolical intuition, what everybody was about — she was so noiseless and stealthy, and always at your elbow when you least expected. Those large dismal eyes of hers, they said, glared green in the dark like a cat's; her voice was sometimes so coarse and deep, and her strength so unnatural, that they were often on the point of believing her to be a man in disguise. She was such a blasphemer, too; and could drink what would lay a trooper under the table, and yet show it in nothing but the superintensity of her Satanic propensities. She was so malignant, and seemed to bear to all God's creatures so general a malevolence, that her consistent and superlative wickedness cowed and paralysed them. The enigma grew more horrible every day and night, and they felt, or fancied, a sort of influence stealing over them which benumbed their faculty of resistance, and altogether unstrung their nerves.

The grand compotation going on in the parlour waxed louder and wilder as the night wore on. There were unseen guests there, elate and inspiring, who sat with the revellers — phantoms who attend such wassail, and keep the ladle of the punch-bowl clinking, the tongue of the songster glib and tuneful, and the general mirth alive and furious. A few honest folk, with the gift of a second sight in such matters, discover their uncanny presence — leprous impurity, insane blasphemy, and the stony grin of unearthly malice — and keep aloof.

To heighten their fun, this jovial company bellowed their abominable ballads in the hall, one of them about 'Sally M'Keogh,' whose sweetheart was hanged, and who cut her throat with his silver-mounted razor, and they hooted their gibes up the stairs. And at last Mary Matchwell, provoked by the passive quietude of her victim, summoned the three revellers from the kitchen, and invaded the upper regions at their head — to the unspeakable terror of poor Sally Nutter — and set her demon fiddler a scraping, and made them and Dirty Davy's clerk dance a frantic reel on the lobby outside her bedroom door, locked and bolted inside, you may be sure.

In the midst of this monstrous festivity and uproar, there came, all on a sudden, a reverberating doubleknock at the hall-door, so loud and long that every hollow, nook, and passage of the old house rang again. Loud and untimely as was the summons, it had a character, not of riot, but of alarm and authority. The uproar was swallowed instantly in silence. For a second only the light of the solitary candle shone upon the pale, scowling features of Mary Matchwell, and she quenched its wick against the wall. So the Walpurgis ended in darkness, and the company instinctively held their breaths.

There was a subdued hum of voices outside, and a tramping on the crisp gravel, and the champing and snorting of horses, too, were audible.

'Does none o' yez see who's in it?' said the blind fiddler.

'Hold your tongue,' hissed Mary Matchwell with a curse, and visiting the cunning pate of the musician with a smart knock of the candlestick.

'I wisht I had your thumb undher my grinder,' said the fiddler, through his teeth, 'whoever you are.'

But the rest was lost in another and a louder summons at the hall-door, and a voice of authority cried sternly,

'Why don't you open the door? — hollo! there — I can't stay here all night.'

'Open to him, Madam, I recommend you,' said Dirty Davy, in a hard whisper; 'will I go?'

'Not a step; not a word;' and Mary Matchwell griped his wrist.

But a window in Mrs. Nutter's room was opened, and Moggy's voice cried out —

'Don't go, Sir; for the love o' goodness, don't go. Is it Father Roach that's in it?'

''Tis I, woman — Mr. Lowe — open the door, I've a word or two to say.'

CHAPTER XCII.

THE WHER-WOLF.

About a quarter of an hour before this, Mr. Paul Dangerfield was packing two trunks in his little parlour, and burning letters industriously in the fire, when his keen ear caught a sound at which a prophetic instinct within him vibrated alarm. A minute or two before he had heard a stealthy footstep outside. Then he heard the cook walk along the passage, muttering to herself, to the hall-door, where there arose a whispering. He glanced round his shoulder at the window. It was barred. Then lifting the table and its load lightly from before him, he stood erect, fronting the door, and listening intently. Two steps on tip-toe brought him to it, and he placed his fingers on the key. But he recollected a better way. There was one of those bolts that rise and fall perpendicularly in a series of rings, and bar or open the door by a touch to a rope connected with it by a wire and a crank or two.

He let the bolt softly drop into its place; the rope was within easy reach, and with his spectacles gleaming white on the door, he kept humming a desultory tune, like a man over some listless occupation.

Mr. Paul Dangerfield was listening intently, and stepped as softly as a cat. Then, with a motion almost elegant, he dropt his right hand lightly into his coatpocket, where it lay still in ambuscade.

There came a puffing night air along the passage, and rattled the door; then a quiet shutting of the hall-door, and a shuffling and breathing near the parlour.

Dangerfield, humming his idle tune with a white and sharpening face, and a gaze that never swerved, extended his delicately-shaped fingers to the rope, and held it in his left hand. At this moment the door-handle was suddenly turned outside, and the door sustained a violent jerk.

‘Who’s there?’ demanded the harsh, prompt accents of Dangerfield, suspending his minstrelsy. ‘I’m busy.’

‘Open the door — we’ve a piece of intelligence to gi’e ye.’

‘Certainly — but don’t be tedious.’ (He drew the string, and the bolt shot up). ‘Come in, Sir.’

The door flew open; several strange faces presented themselves on the threshold, and at the same instant, a stern voice exclaimed —

‘Charles Archer, I arrest you in the king’s name.’

The last word was lost in the stunning report of a pistol, and the foremost man fell with a groan. A second pistol already gleamed in Dangerfield’s hand, and missed. With a spring like a tiger he struck the hesitating constable in the throat, laying his scalp open against the door-frame, and stamping on his face as he fell; and clutching the third by the cravat, he struck at his breast with a knife, already in his hand. But a pistol-shot from Lowe struck his right arm, scorching the cloth; the dagger and the limb dropped, and he staggered back, but recovered his equilibrium, and confronted them with a white skull-like grin, and a low ‘ha, ha, ha!’

It was all over, and the silver spectacles lay shattered on the floor, like a broken talisman, and a pair of gray, strangely-set, wild eyes glared upon them.

The suddenness of his assault, his disproportioned physical strength and terrific pluck, for a second or two, confounded his adversaries; but he was giddy — his right arm dead by his side. He sat down in a chair confronting them, his empty right hand depending near to the floor, and a thin stream of blood already trickling down his knuckles, his face smiling, and shining whitely with the damp of anguish, and the cold low ‘ha, ha, ha!’ mocking the reality of the scene.

‘Heinous old villain!’ said Lowe, advancing on him.

‘Well, gentlemen, I’ve shown fight, eh? — and now I suppose you want my watch, and money, and keys — eh?’

‘Read the warrant, Sir,’ said Lowe, sternly.

‘Warrant! hey — warrant? — why, this is something new — will you be so good as to give me a glass of water — thank you — hold the paper a moment longer — I can’t get this arm up.’ With his left hand he set down the tumbler-glass, and then held up the warrant.

‘Thank ye. Well, this warrant’s for Charles Archer.’

‘*Alias* Paul Dangerfield — if you read, Sir.’

‘Thank you — yes — I see — that’s news to me. Oh! Mr. Lowe — I did not see *you* — I haven’t hurt you, I hope? Why the plague do you come at these robbing hours? We’d have all fared better had you come by daylight.’

Lowe did not take the trouble to answer him.

‘I believe you’ve *killed* that constable in the exercise of his duty, Sir; the man’s dead,’ said Lowe, sternly.

‘Another gloss on my text; why invade me like housebreakers?’ said Dangerfield with a grim scoff.

‘No violence, Sirrah, on your peril — the prisoner’s wounded,’ said Lowe, catching the other fellow by the collar and thrusting him back: he had gathered himself up giddily, and swore he’d have the scoundrel’s life.

‘Well, gentlemen, you have made a *false* arrest, and shot me while defending my person — *you* — four to one! — and caused the death of your accomplice; what more do you want?’

‘You must accompany us to the county gaol, Sir; where I’ll hand in your committal.’

‘Dr. Toole, I presume, may dress my arm?’

‘Certainly, Sir.’

‘Good! what more?’

‘There’s a coach at the door, you’ll please to step in, Sir.’

‘Good, Sir, again; and now permit me to make a remark. I submit, Sir, to all this violence, and will go with you, under protest, and with a distinct warning to you, Mr. Lowe, and to your respectable bodyguard of prizefighters and ruffians — how many? — two, four, five, six, upon my honour, counting the gentleman upon the floor, and yourself, Sir — seven, pitted against one old fellow, ha, ha, ha! — a distinct warning, Sir, that I hold you accountable for this outrage, and all its consequences.’

‘See to that man; I’m afraid he has killed him,’, said Lowe.

He was not dead, however, but, as it seemed, suffering intense pain, and unable to speak except in a whisper. They got him up with his back to the wall.

‘You issue a warrant against another man whom I believe to be dead, and execute it upon *me* — rather an Irish proceeding, Sir; but, perhaps, if not considered impertinent, you will permit me to enquire what is the particular offence which that other person has committed, and for which you have been pleased to shoot me?’

‘You may read it on the warrant, Sir; ’tis for a murderous assault on Doctor Sturk.’

‘Hey? better and better! why, I’m ready to pay five hundred guineas to make him speak; and you’ll soon find how expensive a blunder you’ve committed, Sir,' observed Dangerfield, with a glare of menace through his hollow smile.

'I'll stand that hazard, Sir,' rejoined Lowe, with a confident sneer.

The dreadful sounds of the brief scuffle had called up the scared and curious servants. The smell of the pistol-smoke, the sight of blood, the pale faces of the angry and agitated men, and the spectacle of their master, mangled, ghastly, and smiling, affrighted Mrs. Jukes; and the shock and horror expressed themselves in tears and distracted lamentations.

'I must have your keys, Sir, if you please,' said Mr. Lowe.

'A word first — here, Jukes,' he addressed his housekeeper; 'stop that, you fool!' (she was blubbering loudly) ''tis a mistake, I tell you; I shall be back in an hour. Meanwhile, here are my keys; let Mr. Lowe, there, have them whenever he likes — all my papers, Sir (turning to Lowe). I've nothing, thank Heaven! to conceal. Pour some port wine into that large glass.'

And he drank it off, and looked better; he appeared before on the point of fainting.

'I beg pardon, gentlemen — will you drink some wine?'

'I thank you, no, Sir. You'll be good enough to give me those keys' (to the housekeeper).

'Give them — certainly,' said Dangerfield.

'Which of them opens the chest of drawers in your master's bedchamber facing the window?' He glanced at Dangerfield, and thought that he was smiling wider, and his jaws looked hollower, as he repeated —

'If she does not know it, I'll be happy to show it you.'

With a surly nod, Mr. Lowe requited the prisoner's urbanity, and followed Mrs. Jukes into her master's bedchamber; there was an oldfashioned oak chest of drawers facing the window.

'Where's Captain Cluffe?' enquired Lowe.

'He stopped at his lodgings, on the way,' answered the man; 'and said he'd be after us in five minutes.'

'Well, be good enough, Madam, to show me the key of these drawers.'

So he opened the drawers in succession, beginning at the top, and searching each carefully, running his fingers along the inner edges, and holding the candle very close, and grunting his disappointment as he closed and locked each in its order.

In the mean time, Doctor Toole was ushered into the little parlour, where sat the disabled master of the Brass Castle. The fussy little mediciner showed in his pale, stern countenance, a sense of the shocking reverse and transformation which the great man of the village had sustained.

'A rather odd situation you find me in, Doctor Toole,' said white Mr. Dangerfield, in his usual harsh tones, but with a cold moisture shining on his face; 'under *duresse*, Sir, in my own parlour, charged with murdering a gentleman whom I have spent five hundred guineas to bring to speech and life, and myself half murdered by a justice of the peace and his discriminating followers, ha, ha, ha! I'm suffering a little pain, Sir; will you be so good as to lend me your assistance?'

Toole proceeded to his task much more silently than was his wont, and stealing, from time to time, a glance at his noticeable patient with the wild gray eyes, as people peep curiously at what is terrible and repulsive.

''Tis broken, of course,' said Dangerfield.

'Why, yes, Sir,' answered Toole; 'the upper arm — a bullet, Sir. H'm, ha — yes; it lies only under the skin, Sir.'

And with a touch of the sharp steel it dropped into the doctor's fingers, and lay on a bloody bit of lint on the table by the wine-glasses. Toole applied his sticking-plaster, and extemporised a set of splints, and had the terrified cook at his elbow tearing up one of her master's shirts into strips for bandages; and so went on neatly and rapidly with his shifty task.

In the mean time, Cluffe had arrived. He was a little bit huffed and grand at being nailed as an evidence, upon a few words carelessly, or, if you will, confidentially dropped at his own mess-table, where Lowe chanced to be a guest; and certainly with no suspicion that his little story could in any way be made to elucidate the mystery of Sturk's murder. He would not have minded, perhaps, so much, had it not been that it brought to light and memory again the confounded ducking sustained by him and Puddock, and which, as an officer and a very fine fellow, he could not but be conscious was altogether an undignified reminiscence.

'Yes, the drawers were there, he supposed; those were the very ones; he stooped but little; it must have been the top one, or the next to it. The thing was about as long as a drumstick, like a piece of whip handle, with a spring in it; it bent this way and that, as he dried it in the towel, and at the butt it was ribbed round and round with metal rings — devilish heavy.'

So they examined the drawers again, took everything out of them, and Captain Cluffe, not thinking it a soldier-like occupation, tacitly declined being present at it, and, turning on his heel, stalked out of the room.

‘What’s become of it, Ma’am?’ said Lowe, suddenly and sternly, turning upon Mrs. Jukes, and fixing his eyes on hers. There was no guilty knowledge there.

‘He never had any such thing that I know of,’ she answered stoutly; ‘and nothing could be hid from me in these drawers, Sir; for I had the key, except when it lay in the lock, and it must ha’ been his horsewhip; it has some rings like of leather round it, and he used to lay it on these drawers.’

Cluffe was, perhaps, a little bit stupid, and Lowe knew it; but it was the weakness of that good magistrate to discover in a witness for the crown many mental and moral attributes which he would have failed to recognise in him had he appeared for the prisoner.

‘And where’s that whip, now?’ demanded Lowe.

‘By the hall-door, with his riding-coat, Sir,’ answered the bewildered housekeeper.

‘Go on, if you please, Ma’am, and let me see it.’

So to the hall they went, and there, lying across the pegs from which Mr. Dangerfield’s surtout and riding-coat depended, there certainly was a whip with the butt fashioned very much in the shape described by Captain Cluffe; but alas, no weapon — a mere toy — leather and cat-gut.

Lowe took it in his hand, and weighing it with a look of disgust and disappointment, asked rather impatiently —

‘Where’s Captain Cluffe?’

The captain had gone away.

‘Very well, I see,’ said Lowe, replacing the whip; ‘that will do. The hound!’

Mr. Lowe now reentered the little parlour, where the incongruous crowd, lighted up with Mr. Dangerfield’s wax lights, and several kitchen candles flaring in greasy brass sticks, were assisting at the treatment of the master of the castle and the wounded constables.

‘Well, Sir,’ said Mr. Dangerfield, standing erect, with his coat sleeve slit, and his arm braced up in splints, stiff and helpless in a sling, and a blot of blood in his shirt sleeve, contrasting with the white intense smirk of menace upon his face; ‘if you have quite done with my linen and my housekeeper, Sir, I'm ready to accompany you under protest, as I've already said, wherever you design to convey my mangled person. I charge you, Sir, with the safety of my papers and my other property which you constrain me to abandon in this house; and I think you'll rue this night's work to the latest hour of your existence.'

'I've done, and will do my duty, Sir,' replied Lowe, with dry decision.

'You've committed a d —— d outrage; duty? ha, ha, ha!'

'The coach is at the door, hey?' asked Lowe

'I say, Sir,' continued Dangerfield, with a wolfish glare, and speaking in something like a suppressed shriek, 'you *shall* hear my warning and my protest, although it should occupy the unreasonable period of two whole minutes of your precious time. You half murder, and then arrest me for the offence of another man, and under the name of a man who has been dead and buried full twenty years. I can prove it; the eminent London house of Elrington Brothers can prove it; the handwriting of the late Sir Philip Drayton, Baronet, of Drayton Hall, and of two other respectable witnesses to a formal document, can prove it; dead and rotten — *dust*, Sir. And in your stupid arrogance, you blundering Irishman, you dare to libel me — your superior in everything — with his villainous name, and the imputation of his crimes — to violate my house at the dead of night — to pistol me upon my own floor — and to carry me off by force, as you purpose, to a common gaol. Kill Dr. Sturk, indeed! Are you mad, Sir? *I* who offered a fee of five hundred guineas even to bring him to speech! *I* who took the best medical advice in *London* on his behalf; *I* who have been his friend only too much with my Lord Castlemallard, and who, to stay his creditors, and enable his family to procure for him the best medical attendance, and to afford him, in short, the best chance of recovery and life, have, where *you* neither lent or bestowed a shilling — poured out my money as profusely as you, Sir, have poured out my blood, every drop of which, Sir, shall cost you a slice of your estate. But even without Sturk's speaking one word, I've evidence which escaped *you*, conceited blockhead, and which, though the witness is as mad almost as yourself, will yet be enough to direct the hand of justice to the right man. There *is* a Charles, Sir, whom all suspect, who awaits trial, judgment, and death in this case, the wretched Charles Nutter of the Mills, Sir, whose motive is patent, and on whose proceedings a light will, I believe, be thrown by the evidence of Zekiel Irons, whatever that evidence may be worth.’

‘I don’t care to tell you, Sir, that ’tis partly on the evidence of that same Zekiel Irons that I’ve arrested *you*,’ said Mr. Justice Lowe.

‘Zekiel Irons, *me*! What Zekiel Irons charge me with the crime which he was here, not two hours since, fastening on oath upon Charles Nutter! Why, Sir, he asked me to bring him to your residence in the morning, that he might swear to the information which he repeated in my presence, and of which there’s a note in that desk. ‘Pon my life, Sir, ’tis an agreeable society, this; bedlam broke loose — the mad directing the mad, and both falling foul of the sane. One word from Doctor Sturk, Sir, will blast you, so soon as, please Heaven, he shall speak.’

‘He *has* spoken, Sir,’ replied Lowe, whose angry passions were roused by the insults of Dangerfield, and who had, for the moment, lost his customary caution.

‘Ha!’ cried Dangerfield, with a sort of gasp, and a violent smirk, the joyousness of which was, however, counteracted by a lurid scowl and a wonderful livid glare in his wild eyes; ‘ha! he has? Bravo, Sir, bravissimo!’ and he smirked wider and wider, and beat his uninjured hand upon the table, like a man applauding the *denouement* of a play. ‘Well, Sir; and notwithstanding his declaration, you arrest me upon the monstrous assertion of a crazy clerk, you consummate blockhead!’

‘’Twon’t do, Sir, you sha’n’t sting me by insult into passion; nor frighten me by big words and big looks into hesitation. My duty’s clear, and be the consequences what they may, I’ll carry the matter through.’

‘Frighten you! ha, ha, ha!’ and Dangerfield glared at his bloody shirtsleeve, and laughed a chilly sneer; ‘no, Sir, but I’ll punish you, with Doctor Sturk’s declaration against the babble of poor Zekiel Irons. I’ll quickly close your mouth.’

‘Sir, I never made it a practice yet to hide evidence from a prisoner. Why should I desire to put you out of the world, if you’re innocent? Doctor Sturk, Sir, has denounced you distinctly upon oath. Charles Archer, going by the name of Paul Dangerfield, and residing in this house, called the “Brass Castle,” as the person who attempted to murder him in the Butcher’s Wood.’

‘*What*, Sir? Doctor Sturk denounce *me*! Fore heaven, Sir — it seems to me you’ve all lost your wits. Doctor Sturk! — ? Doctor Sturk charge *me* with having assaulted him! why — curse it, Sir — it can’t possibly be — you can’t believe it; and, if he said it, the man’s raving still.’

‘He has said it, Sir.’

‘Then, Sir, in the devil’s name, didn’t it strike you as going rather fast to shoot me on my own hearthstone — *me*, knowing all you do about me — with no better warrant than the talk of a man with a shattered brain, awakening from a lethargy of months? Sir, though the laws afford no punishment exemplary enough for such atrocious precipitation, I promise you I’ll exact the last penalty they provide; and now, Sir, take me where you will; I can’t resist. Having shot me, do what you may to interrupt my business; to lose my papers and accounts; to prevent my recovery, and to blast my reputation — Sir, I shall have compensation for all.’

So saying, Dangerfield, with his left hand, clapt his cocked hat on, and with a ghastly smile nodded a farewell to Mrs. Jukes, who, sobbing plentifully, had placed his white surtout, cloakwise over his shoulders, buttoning it about his throat. The hall-door stood open; the candles flared in the night air, and with the jaunty, resolute step of a man marching to victory and revenge, he walked out, and lightly mounted to his place. She saw the constables get in, and one glimpse more of the white grim face she knew so well, the defiant smirk, the bloodstained shirtsleeve, and the coach-door shut. At the crack of the whip and the driver’s voice, the horses scrambled into motion, the wheels revolved, and the master of the Brass Castle and the equipage glided away like a magic lantern group, from before the eyes and the candle of the weeping Mrs. Jukes.

CHAPTER XCIII.

IN WHICH DOCTOR TOOLE AND DIRTY DAVY CONFER IN THE BLUE-ROOM.

The coach rumbled along toward Dublin at a leisurely jog. Notwithstanding the firm front Mr. Lowe had presented, Dangerfield’s harangue had affected him unpleasantly. Cluffe’s little bit of information respecting the instrument he had seen the prisoner lay up in his drawer on the night of the murder, and which corresponded in description with the wounds traced upon Sturk’s skull, seemed to have failed. The handle of Dangerfield’s harmless horsewhip, his mind misgave him, was all that would come of *that* piece of evidence; and it was impossible to say there might not be something in all that Dangerfield had uttered. Is it a magnetic force, or a high histrionic vein in some men, that makes them so persuasive and overpowering, and their passion so formidable? But, with Dangerfield’s presence, the effect of his plausibilities and his defiance passed away. The pointed and consistent evidence of Sturk, perfectly clear as he was upon every topic he mentioned, and the corroborative testimony of Irons, equally distinct and damning — the whole case blurred and disjointed, and for a moment grown unpleasantly hazy and uncertain in the presence of that white sorcerer, readjusted itself now that he was gone, and came out in iron and compact relief — impregnable.

‘Run boys, one of you, and open the gate of the Mills,’ said Lowe, whose benevolence, such as it was, expanded in his intense feeling of relief. ‘‘Twill be good news for poor Mistress Nutter. She’ll see her husband in the morning.’

So he rode up to the Mills, and knocked his alarm, as we have seen and heard, and there told his tidings to poor Sally Nutter, vastly to the relief of Mistress Matchwell, the Blind Fiddler, and even of the sage, Dirt Davy; for there are persons upon the earth to whom a sudden summons of any sort always sounds like a call to judgment, and who, in any such ambiguous case, fill up the moments of suspense with wild conjecture, and a ghastly summing-up against themselves; can it be this — or that — or the other old, buried, distant villainy, that comes back to take me by the throat?

Having told his good news in a few dry words to Mrs. Sally, Mr. Lowe superadded a caution to the dark lady down stairs, in the face of which she, being quite reassured by this time, grinned and snapped her fingers, and in terms defied, and even cursed the tall magistrate without rising from the chair in which she had reestablished herself in the parlour. He mounted his hunter again, and followed the coach at a pace which promised soon to bring him up with that lumbering conveyance; for Mr. Lowe was one of those public officers who love their work, and the tenant of the Brass Castle was no common prisoner, and well worth seeing, though at some inconvenience, safely into his new lodging.

Next morning, you may be sure, the news was all over the town of Chapelizod. All sorts of cross rumours and wild canards, of course, were on the wind, and every new fact or fib borne to the doorstep with the fresh eggs, or the morning's milk and butter, was carried by the eager servant into the parlour, and swallowed down with their toast and tea by the staring company.

Upon one point all were agreed: Mr. Paul Dangerfield lay in the county gaol, on a charge of having assaulted Dr. Sturk with intent to kill him. The women blessed themselves, and turned pale. The men looked queer when they met one another. It was altogether so astounding — Mr. Dangerfield was so rich — so eminent — so moral — so charitable — so above temptation. It had come out that he had committed, some said three, others as many as fifteen secret murders. All the time that the neighbours had looked on his white head in church as the very standard of probity, and all the prudential virtues rewarded, they were admiring and honouring a masked assassin. They had been bringing into their homes and families an undivulged and terrible monster. The wher-wolf had walked the homely streets of their village. The ghoul, unrecognised, had prowled among the graves of their churchyard. One of their fairest princesses, the lady of Belmont, had been on the point of being sacrificed to a vampire. Horror, curiosity, and amazement, were everywhere.

Charles Nutter, it was rumoured, was to be discharged on bail early, and it was mooted in the club that a deputation of the neighbours should ride out to meet him at the boundaries of Chapelizod, welcome him there with an address, and accompany him to the Mills as a guard of honour; but cooler heads remembered the threatening and unsettled state of things at that domicile, and thought that Nutter would, all things considered, like a quiet return best; which view of the affair was, ultimately, acquiesced in.

For Mary Matchwell, at the Mills, the tidings which had thrown the town into commotion had but a solitary and a selfish interest. She was glad that Nutter was exculpated. She had no desire that the king should take his worldly goods to which she intended helping herself: otherwise he might hang or drown for ought she cared. Dirty Davy, too, who had quaked about his costs, was greatly relieved by the turn which things had taken; and the plain truth was that, notwithstanding his escape from the halter, things looked very black and awful for Charles Nutter and his poor little wife, Sally.

Doctor Toole, at halfpast nine, was entertaining two or three of the neighbours, chiefly in oracular whispers, by the fire in the great parlour of the Phœnix, when he was interrupted by Larry, the waiter, with —

‘Your horse is at the door, docther’ (Toole was going into town, but was first to keep an appointment at Doctor Sturk’s with Mr. Lowe), ‘and,’ continued Larry, ‘there’s a fat gentleman in the blue room wants to see you, if you plase.’

‘Hey? — ho! let’s see then,’ said little Toole, bustling forth with an important air. ‘The blue room, hey?’

When he opened the door of that small apartment there stood a stout, corpulent, rather seedy and dusty personage, at the window, looking out and whistling with his hat on. He turned lazily about as Toole entered, and displayed the fat and forbidding face of Dirty Davy.

‘Oh! I thought it might be professionally, Sir,’ said Toole, a little grandly; for he had seen the gentleman before, and had, by this time, found out all about him, and perceived he had no chance of a fee.

‘It *is* professionally, Sir,’ quoth Dirty Davy, ‘if you’ll be so obleeging as to give me five minutes.’

With that amiable egotism which pervades human nature, it will be observed, each gentleman interpreted ‘professionally’ as referring to his own particular calling.

So Toole declared himself ready and prepared to do his office, and Dirty Davy commenced.

‘You know me, I believe, Sir?’

‘Mr. David O’Reegan, as I believe,’ answered Toole.

‘The same, Sir,’ replied Davy. ‘I’m on my way, Sir, to the Mills, where my client, Mrs. Nutter (here Toole uttered a disdainful grunt), resides; and I called at your house, doctor, and they sent me here; and I am desirous to prove to you, Sir, as a friend of Miss Sarah Harty, styling herself Mrs. Nutter, that my client’s rights are clear and irresistible, in order that you may use any interest you may have with that ill-advised faymale — and I’m told she respects your advice and opinion highly — to induce her to submit without further annoyance; and I tell you, in confidence, she has run herself already into a very sarious predicament.’

‘Well, Sir, I’ll be happy to hear you,’ answered Toole.

‘’Tis no more, Sir, than I expected from your well-known candour,’ replied Dirty Davy, with the unctuous politeness with which he treated such gentlemen as he expected to make use of. ‘Now, Sir, I’ll open our case without any reserve or exaggeration to you, Sir, and that, Doctor Toole, is what I wouldn’t do to many beside yourself. The facts is in a nutshell. We claim our conjugal rights. Why, Sir? Because, Sir, we married the oppugnant, Charles Nutter, gentleman, of the Mills, and so forth, on the 7th of April, Anno Domini, 1750, in the Church of St. Clement Danes, in London, of which marriage this, Sir, is a verbatim copy of the certificate. Now, Sir, your client — I mane your friend — Misthress Mary Harty, who at present affects the state and usurps the rights of marriage against my client — the rightful Mrs. Nutter, performed and celebrated a certain pretended marriage with the same Charles Nutter, in Chapelizod Church, on the 4th of June, 1758, seven years and ten months, wanting three days, subsequent to the marriage of my client. Well, Sir, I see exactly, Sir, what you’d ask: “Is the certificate genuine?”’

Toole grunted an assent.

‘Well, Sir, upon that point I have to show you this,’ and he handed him a copy of Mr. Luke Gamble’s notice served only two days before, to the effect that, having satisfied himself by enquiring on the spot of the authenticity of the certificate of the marriage of Charles Nutter of the Mills, and so forth, to Mary Duncan, his client did not mean to dispute it. ‘And, Sir, further, as we were preparing evidence in support of my client’s and her maid’s affidavit, to prove her identity with the Mary Duncan in question, having served your client — I mane, Sir, asking your pardon again — your friend, with a notice that such corroboratory evidence being unnecessary, we would move the court, in case it were pressed for, to give us the costs of procuring it, Mr. Luke Gamble fortwith struck, on behalf of his client, and admitted the sufficiency of the evidence. Now, Sir, I mention these things, not as expecting you to believe them upon my statement, you see, but simply to enquire of Mr. Gamble whether they be true or no; and if true, Sir, upon his admission, then, Sir, I submit we're entitled to your good offices, and the judicious inthurfarence of the Rev. Mr. Roach, your respectable priest, Sir.'

'My friend, Sir, not my priest. I'm a Churchman, Sir, as everybody knows.'

'Of course, Sir — I ask your pardon again, Doctor Toole — Sir, your friend to induce your client — *friend* I mane again, Sir — Mistress Sarah Harty, formerly housekeeper of Mr. Charless (so he pronounced it) Nutther, gentleman, of the Mills, and so forth, to surrendher quiet and peaceable possession of the premises and chattels, and withdraw from her tortuous occupation dacently, and without provoking the consequences, which must otherwise follow in the sevarest o' forms;' or, as he pronounced it, 'fawrums.'

'The sevarest o' grandmothers. Humbug and flummery! Sir,' cried Toole, most unexpectedly incensed, and quite scarlet.

'D'ye mane I'm a liar, Sir? Is that what you mane?' demanded Dirty Davy, suddenly, like the doctor, getting rid of his ceremonious politeness.

'I mane what I mane, and that's what I mane,' thundered Toole, diplomatically.

'Then, tell your *friend* to prepare for consequences,' retorted Dirty Davy, with a grin.

'And make my compliments to your client, or conjuror, or wife, or whatever she is, and tell her that whenever she wants her dirty work done, there's plenty of other Dublin blackguards to be got to do it, without coming to Docther Thomas Toole, or the Rev. Father Roach.'

Which sarcasm he delivered with killing significance, but Dirty Davy had survived worse thrusts than that.

'She's a conjuror, is she? I thank you, Sir.'

'You're easily obliged, Sir,' says Toole.

‘We all know what that manes. And these documents *sworn* to by my client and myself, is a pack o’ lies! Betther and betther! I thank ye again, Sir.’

‘You’re welcome, my honey,’ rejoined Toole, affectionately.

‘An’ you live round the corner. I know your hall-door, Sir — a light brown, wid a brass knocker.’

‘Which is a fine likeness iv your own handsome face, Sir,’ retorted Toole.

‘An’ them two documents, Sir, is a fabrication and a forgery, backed up wid false affidavits?’ continued Mr. O’Reegan.

‘Mind that, Larry,’ says the doctor, with a sudden inspiration addressing the waiter, who had peeped in; ‘he admits that them two documents you see there, is forgeries, backed up with false affidavits; you heard him say so, and I’ll call you to prove it.’

‘*You lie!*’ said Dirty Davy, precipitately, for he was quite disconcerted at finding his own sophistical weapons so unexpectedly turned against him.

‘You scum o’ the airth!’ cried Toole, hitting him, with his clenched fist, right upon the nose, so vigorous a thump, that his erudite head with a sonorous crash hopped off the wainscot behind it; ‘you lying scullion!’ roared the doctor, instantaneously repeating the blow, and down went Davy, and down went the table with dreadful din, and the incensed doctor bestrode his prostrate foe with clenched fists and flaming face, and his grand wig all awry, and he panting and scowling.

‘Murdher, murdher, *murdher!*’ screamed Dirty Davy, who was not much of a Spartan, and relished nothing of an assault and battery but the costs and damages.

‘You — you — you’

‘Murdher — help — help — murdher — murdher!’

‘Say it again, you cowardly, sneaking, spying viper; say it *again*, can’t you?’

It was a fine tableau, and a noble study of countenance and attitude.

‘Sich a bloody nose I never seen before,’ grinned Larry rubbing his hands over the exquisite remembrance. ‘If you only seed him, flat on his back, the great ould shnake, wid his knees and his hands up bawling murdher; an’ his big white face and his bloody nose in the middle, like nothin’ in nature, bedad, but the ace iv hearts in a dirty pack.’

How they were separated, and who the particular persons that interposed, what restoratives were resorted to, how the feature looked half an hour afterwards, and what was the subsequent demeanour of Doctor Toole, upon the field of battle, I am not instructed; my letters stop short at the catastrophe, and run off to other matters.

Doctor Toole's agitations upon such encounters did not last long. They blew off in a few thundering claps of bravado and defiance in the second parlour of the Phœnix, where he washed his hands and readjusted his wig and ruffles, and strutted forth, squaring his elbows, and nodding and winking at the sympathising waiters in the inn hall; and with a half grin at Larry —

'Well, Larry, I think I showed him Chapelizod, hey?' said the doctor, buoyantly, to that functionary, and marched diagonally across the broad street toward Sturk's house, with a gait and a countenance that might have overawed an army.

CHAPTER XCIV.

WHAT DOCTOR STURK BROUGHT TO MIND, AND ALL THAT DOCTOR TOOLE HEARD AT MR. LUKE GAMBLE'S.

Just as he reached Sturk's door, wagging his head and strutting grimly — and, palpably, still in debate with Dirty Davy — his thoughts received a sudden wrench in a different direction by the arrival of Mr. Justice Lowe, who pulled up his famous gray hunter at the steps of the house by the churchyard.

'You see, Doctor Toole, it won't do, waiting. The thing's too momentous.'

And so they walked up stairs and into the drawingroom, and sent their compliments to Mrs. Sturk, who came down in *deshabille*, with her things pinned about her, and all over smiles. Poor little woman! Toole had not observed until now how very thin she had grown.

'He's going on delightfully, gentlemen; he drank a whole cup of tea, weak of course, Doctor Toole, as you bid me; and he eat a slice of toast, and liked it, and two Naples biscuits, Mr. Lowe, and I know he'll be delighted to see you.'

'Very good, Madam, *very* good,' said Toole.

'And he's looking better already. He waked out of that sweet sleep not ten minutes after you left this morning.'

'Ay, he was sleeping very quietly,' said Toole to Lowe. 'May we go up, Ma'am?'

'Oh! he'll be overjoyed, gentlemen, to see you, and 'twill do him an infinity of good. I can scarce believe my eyes. We've been tidying the study, the maid and I, and airing the cushions of his chair;' and she laughed a delighted little giggle. 'And even the weather has taken up such beautiful sunshine; everything favourable.'

'Well, Doctor Sturk,' said Toole, cheerily, 'we have a good account of you — a vastly good account, doctor; and, by St. George, Sir, we've been tidying— '

He was going to say the study, but little Mrs. Sturk put her finger to her lip in a wonderful hurry, raising her eyebrows and drawing a breath through her rounded lips, in such sort as arrested the sentence; for she knew how Barney's wrath always broke out when he thought the women had been in his study, and how he charged every missing paper for a month after upon their cursed meddling. But Sturk was a good deal gentler now, and had a dull and awful sort of apathy upon him; and I think it was all one to him whether the women had been in the study or not. So Toole said instead —

'We've been thinking of getting you down in a little while, doctor, if all goes pleasantly; 'tis a lovely day, and a good omen — see how the sun shines in at the curtain.'

But there was no responsive sunshine upon Sturk's stern; haggard face, as he said very low — still looking on the foot-board— 'I thank you, doctor.'

So after a few more questions, and a little bit of talk with Mrs. Sturk, they got that good lady out of the room, and said Lowe to the patient —

'I'm sorry to trouble you, Dr. Sturk, but there's a weighty matter at which you last night hinted; and Dr. Toole thought you then too weak; and in your present state, I would not now ask you to speak at any length, were the matter of less serious moment.'

'Yes, Sir,' said Sturk, but did not seem about to speak any more; and after a few seconds, Lowe continued.

'I mean, Dr. Sturk, touching the murder of Mr. Beauclerc, which you then said was committed by the same Charles Archer, who assaulted you in the park.'

'Ay, Sir,' said Sturk.

'The same murder of which Lord Dunoran was adjudged guilty.'

Sturk moved his lips with a sort of nod.

'And, Doctor Sturk, you remember you then said you had yourself *seen* Charles Archer do that murder.'

Sturk lifted his hand feebly enough to his forehead, and his lips moved, and his eyes closed. They thought he was praying — possibly he was; so they did not interrupt him; and he said, all on a sudden, but in a low dejected way, and with many pauses —

'Charles Archer. I never saw another such face; 'tis always before me. He was a man that everybody knew was dangerous — a damnable profligate besides — and, as all believed, capable of anything, though nobody could actually bring anything clearly home to him but his bloody duels, which, however, were fairly fought. I saw him only thrice in my life before I saw him here. In a place, at Newmarket, where they played hazard, was once; and I saw him fight Beau Langton; and I saw him murder Mr. Beauclerc. I saw it all!' And the doctor swore a shuddering oath.

'I lay in the small room or closet, off the chamber in which he slept. I was suffering under a bad fracture, and dosed with opium. 'Tis all very strange, Sir. I saw everything that happened. I saw him stab Beauclerc. Don't question me; it tires me. I think 'twas a dagger. It looked like a small bayonet I'll tell you how — all, by-and-by.'

He sipped a little wine and water, and wiped his lips with a very tremulous handkerchief.

'I never spoke of it, for I could not. The whole of that five minutes' work slipped from my mind, and was gone quite and clean when I awoke. What I saw I could not interrupt. I was in a cataleptic state, I suppose. I could not speak; but I saw like a lynx, and heard every whisper. When I awakened in the morning I remembered nothing. I did not know I had a secret. The knowledge was sealed up until the time came. A sight of Charles Archer's face at any time would have had, as I suppose, the same effect. When I saw him here, the first time, it was at the general's at Belmont; though he was changed by time, and carefully disguised, all would not do. I felt the sight of him was fatal. I was quite helpless; but my mind never stopped working upon it till — till— '

Sturk groaned.

'See now,' said Toole, 'there's time enough, and don't fatigue yourself. There, now, rest quiet a minute.'

And he made him swallow some more wine; and felt his pulse and shook his head despondingly at Lowe, behind his back.

'How is it?' said Sturk, faintly.

'A little irritable — that's all,' said Toole.

''Till one night, I say,' — Sturk resumed, after a minute or two, 'it came to me all at once, awake — I don't know — or in a dream; in a moment I had it all. 'Twas like a page cut out of a book — lost for so many years.' And Sturk moaned a despairing wish to Heaven that the secret had never returned to him again.

‘Yes, Sir — like a page cut out of a book, and never missed till ’twas found again; and then sharp and clear, every letter from first to last. Then, Sir — then — thinking ’twas no use at that distance of time taking steps to punish him, I — I foolishly let him understand I knew him. My mind misgave me from the first. I think it was my good angel that warned me. But ’tis no use now. I’m not a man to be easily frightened. But it seemed to me he was something altogether worse than a man, and like — like Satan; and too much for me every way. If I was wise I’d have left him alone. But ’tis no good fretting now. It was to be. I was too outspoken— ’twas always my way — and I let him know; and — and you see, he meant to make away with me. He tried to take my life, Sir; and I think he has done it. I’ll never rise from this bed, gentlemen. I’m done for.’

‘Come, Doctor Sturk, you mustn’t talk that way, Pell will be out this evening, and Dillon may be — though faith! I don’t quite know that Pell will meet him — but we’ll put our heads together, and deuce is in it or we’ll set you on your legs again.’

Sturk was screwing his lips sternly together, and the lines of his gruff haggard face were quivering, and a sullen tear or two started down from his closed eye.

‘I’m — I’m a little nervous, gentlemen — I’ll be right just now I’d like to see the — the children, if they’re in the way, that’s all — by-and-by, you know.’

‘I’ve got Pell out, you see — not that there’s any special need — you know; but he was here before, and it wouldn’t do to offend him; and he’ll see you this afternoon.’

‘I thank you, Sir,’ said Sturk, in the same dejected way.

‘And, Sir,’ said Lowe, ‘if you please, I’ll get this statement into the shape of a deposition or information, for you see ’tis of the vastest imaginable importance, and exactly tallies with evidence we’ve got elsewhere, and ‘twouldn’t do, Sir, to let it slip.’

And Toole thought he saw a little flush mount into Sturk’s sunken face, and he hastened to say —

‘What we desire, Dr. Sturk, is to be able to act promptly in this case of my Lord Dunoran. Measures must be taken instantly, you see, for ’tis of old standing, and not a day to be lost, and there’s why Mr. Lowe is so urgent to get your statement in white and black.’

‘And sworn to,’ added Mr. Lowe.

‘I’ll swear it,’ said Sturk, in the same sad tones.

And Mrs. Sturk came in, and Toole gave leave for chicken broth at twelve o’clock, about two table-spoonsful, and the same at halfpast one, when he hoped to be back again. And on the lobby he gave her, with a cheery countenance, all the ambiguous comfort he could. And Lowe asked Mrs. Sturk for more pens and paper, and himself went down to give his man a direction at the door, and on the way, in the hall, Toole looking this way and that, to see they weren’t observed, beckoned him into the front parlour, and, said he, in a low key —

‘The pulse is up a bit, not very much, but still I don’t like it — and very hard, you see — and what we’ve to dread, you know’s inflammation; and he’s so shocking low, my dear Sir, we must let him have wine and other things, or we’ll lose him that way; and you see it’s a mighty unpleasant case.’

And coming into the hall, in a loud confident voice he cried— ‘And I’ll be here again by halfpast one o’clock.’

And so he beckoned to the boy with his horse to come up, and chatted in the interim with Mr. Lowe upon the steps, and told him how to manage him if he grew exhausted over his narrative; and then mounting his nag, and kissing his hand and waving his hat to Mrs. Sturk, who was looking out upon him from Barney’s window, he rode away for Dublin.

Toole, on reaching town, spurred on to the dingy residence of Mr. Luke Gamble. It must be allowed that he had no clear intention of taking any step whatsoever in consequence of what he might hear. But the little fellow was deuced curious; and Dirty Davy’s confidence gave him a sort of right to be satisfied.

So with his whip under his arm, and a good deal out of breath, for the stairs were steep, he bounced into the attorney’s sanctum.

‘Who’s *that? Is* that? — Why, bless my soul and body! ’tis yourself,’ cried Toole, after an astonished pause of a few seconds at the door, springing forward and grasping Nutter by both hands, and shaking them vehemently, and grinning very joyously and kindly the while.

Nutter received him cordially, but a little sheepishly. Indeed, his experiences of life, and the situations in which he had found himself since they had last met, were rather eccentric and instructive than quite pleasant to remember. And Nutter, in his way, was a proud fellow, and neither liked to be gaped at nor pitied.

But Toole was a thorough partisan of his, and had been urgent for permission to see him in gaol, and they knew how true he had been to poor Sally Nutter, and altogether felt very much at home with him.

So sitting in that twilight room, flanked with piles of expended briefs, and surrounded with neatly docketed packets of attested copies, notices, affidavits, and other engines of legal war — little Toole having expended his congratulations, and his private knowledge of Sturk's revelations, fell upon the immediate subject of his visit.

'That rogue, Davy O'Reegan, looked in on me not an hour ago, at the Phœnix' (and he gave them a very spirited, but I'm afraid a somewhat fanciful description of the combat.) 'And I'm afraid he'll give us a deal of trouble yet. He told me that the certificate— '

'Ay — here's a copy;' and Luke Gamble threw a paper on the table before him.

'That's it — Mary Duncan — 1750 — the very thing — the rascal! Well, he said, you know, but I knew better, that you had admitted the certificate formally.'

'So I have. Sir,' said. Mr. Gamble, drily, stuffing his hands into his breeches' pockets, and staring straight at Toole with elevated eyebrows, and as the little doctor thought, with a very odd expression in his eyes.

'You *have*, Sir?'

'I have!' and then followed a little pause, and Mr. Gamble said —

'I did so, Sir, because there's no disputing it — and — and I think, Doctor Toole, I know something of my business.'

There was another pause, during which Toole, flushed and shocked, turned his gaze from Gamble to Nutter.

''Tis a true bill, then?' said Toole, scarcely above his breath, and very dismally.

A swarthy flush covered Nutter's dark face. The man was ashamed.

''Tis nigh eighteen years ago, Sir,' said Nutter embarrassed, as he well might be. 'I was a younger man, then, and was bit, Sir, as many another has been, and that's all.'

Toole got up, stood before the fireplace, and hung his head, with compressed lips, and there was a silence, interrupted by the hard man of the law, who was now tumbling over his papers in search of a document, and humming a tune as he did so.

‘It may be a good move for Charles Nutter, Sir, but it looks very like a checkmate for poor Sally,’ muttered Toole angrily.

Mr. Luke Gamble either did not hear him, or did not care a farthing what he said; and he hummed his tune very contentedly.

‘And I had, moreover,’ said he, ‘to make another admission for the same reason, videlicet, that Mary Matchwell, who now occupies a portion of the Mills, the promovent in this suit, and Mary Duncan mentioned in that certificate, are one and the same person. Here’s our answer to their notice, admitting the fact.’

‘I thank you,’ said Toole again, rather savagely, for a glance over his shoulder had shown him the attorney’s face grinning with malicious amusement, as it seemed to him, while he readjusted the packet of papers from which he had just taken the notice; ‘I saw it, Sir, your brother lawyer, Mr. O’Reegan, Sir, showed it me this morning.’

And Toole thought of poor little Sally Nutter, and all the wreck and ruin coming upon her and the Mills, and began to con over his own liabilities, and to reflect seriously whether, in some of his brisk altercations on her behalf with Dirty Davy and his client, he might not have committed himself rather dangerously; and especially the consequences of his morning’s collision with Davy grew in darkness and magnitude very seriously, as he reflected that his entire statement had turned out to be true, and that he and his client were on the winning side.

‘It seems to me, Sir, you might have given some of poor Mrs. Nutter’s friends at Chapelizod a hint of the state of things. I, Sir, and Father Roach — we’ve meddled, Sir, more in the business — than — than — but no matter now — and all under a delusion, Sir. And poor Mistress Sally Nutter — *she* doesn’t seem to trouble you much, Sir.’

He observed that the attorney was chuckling to himself still more and more undisguisedly, as he slipped the notice back again into its place.

‘You gentlemen of the law think of nothing, Sir, but your clients. I suppose ’tis a good rule, but it may be pushed somewhat far. And what do you propose to do for poor Mistress Sally Nutter?’ demanded Toole, very sternly, for his blood was up.

‘She has heard from us this morning,’ said Mr. Gamble, grining on his watch, ‘and she knows all by this time, and ’tisn’t a button to her.’

And the attorney laughed in his face; and Nutter who had looked sulky and uncomfortable, could resist no longer, and broke into a queer responsive grin. It seemed to Toole like a horrid dream.

There was a tap at the door just at this moment.

‘Come in,’ cried Mr. Gamble, still exploding in comfortable little bursts of half-suppressed laughter.

‘Oh! ’tis you? Very good, Sir,’ said Mr. Gamble, sobering a little. He was the same lanky, vulgar, and slightly-squinting gentleman, pitted with the smallpox, whom Toole had seen on a former occasion. And the little doctor thought he looked even more cunning and meaner than before. Everything had grown to look repulsive, and every face was sinister now; and the world began to look like a horrible masquerade, full of half-detected murderers, traitors, and miscreants.

‘There isn’t a soul you can trust— ’tis enough to turn a man’s head; ’tis sickening, by George!’ grumbled the little doctor, fiercely.

‘Here’s a gentleman, Sir,’ said Gamble, waving his pen towards Toole, with a chuckle, ‘who believes that ladies like to recover their husbands.’

The fellow grew red, and grinned a sly uneasy grin, looking stealthily at Toole, who was rapidly growing angry.

‘Yes, Sir, and one who believes, too, that gentlemen ought to protect their wives,’ added the little doctor hotly.

‘As soon as they know who they are,’ muttered the attorney to his papers.

‘I think, gentlemen, I’m rather in your way,’ said Toole with a gloomy briskness; ‘I think ’tis better I should go. I — I’m somewhat amazed, gentlemen, and I — I wish you a good-morning.’

And Toole made them a very stern bow, and walked out at the wrong door.

‘This way, by your leave, doctor,’ said Mr. Gamble, opening the right one; and at the head of the stairs he took Toole by the cuff, and said he —

‘After all, ’tis but just the wrong Mrs. Nutter should give place to the right; and if you go down to the Mills tomorrow, you’ll find she’s by no means so bad as you think her.’

But Toole broke away from him sulkily, with —

‘I wish you a good-morning, Sir.’

It was quite true that Sally Nutter was to hear from Charles and Mr. Gamble that morning; for about the time at which Toole was in conference with those two gentlemen in Dublin, two coaches drew up at the Mills.

Mr. Gamble's conducting gentleman was in one, and two mysterious personages sat in the other.

'I want to see Mrs. Nutter,' said Mr. Gamble's emissary.

'Mrs. Nutter's in the parlour, at your service,' answered the lean maid who had opened the door, and who recognising in that gentleman an adherent of the enemy, had assumed her most impertinent leer and tone on the instant.

The ambassador looked in and drew back.

'Oh, then, 'tisn't the mistress you want, but the master's old housekeeper; ask *her*.'

And she pointed with her thumb towards Molly, whose head was over the banister.

So, as he followed that honest handmaiden up stairs, he drew from his coatpocket a bundle of papers, and glanced at their endorsements, for he had a long exposition to make, and then some important measures to execute.

Toole had to make up for lost time; and as he rode at a smart canter into the village, he fancied he observed the signs of an unusual excitement there. There were some faces at the windows, some people on the doorsteps; and a few groups in the street; they were all looking in the Dublin direction. He had a nod or two as he passed. Toole thought forthwith of Mr. David O'Reegan — people generally refer phenomena to what most concerns themselves — and a dim horror of some unknown summary process dismayed him; but his hall-door shone peaceably in the sun, and his boy stood whistling on the steps, with his hands in his pockets. Nobody had been there since, and Pell had not yet called at Sturk's.

'And what's happened — what's the neighbours lookin' after?' said Toole, as his own glance followed the general direction, so soon as he had dismounted.

''Twas a coach that had driven through the town, at a thundering pace, with some men inside, from the Knockmaroon direction, and a lady that was screeching. She broke one of the coach windows in Martin's-row, and the other — *there*, just opposite the Phœnix.' The glass was glittering on the road. ‘She had rings on her hand, and her knuckles were bleeding, and it was said ’twas poor Mrs. Nutter going away with the keepers to a madhouse.’

Toole turned pale and ground his teeth, looking towards Dublin.

‘I passed it myself near Island-bridge; I did hear screeching, but I thought ’twas from t’other side of the wall. There was a fellow in an old blue and silver coat with the driver — eh?’

‘The same,’ said the boy; and Toole, with difficulty swallowing down his rage, hurried into the house, resolved to take Lowe’s advice on the matter, and ready to swear to poor Sally’s perfect sanity— ‘the crature! — the villains!’

But now he had only a moment to pull off his boots, to get into his grand costume, and seize his cane and his muff, too — for he sported one; and so transformed and splendid, he marched down the paved *trottoir* — Doctor Pell happily not yet arrived — to Sturk’s house. There was a hackney coach near the steps.

CHAPTER XCV.

IN WHICH DOCTOR PELL DECLINES A FEE, AND DOCTOR STURK A PRESCRIPTION.

In entering the front parlour from whence, in no small excitement, there issued the notes of a course diapason, which he fancied was known to him, he found Mr. Justice Lowe in somewhat tempestuous conference with the visitor.

He was, in fact, no other than Black Dillon; black enough he looked just now. He had only a moment before returned from a barren visit to the Brass Castle, and was in no mood to be trifled with.

‘’Twasn’t *I*, Sir, but Mr. Dangerfield, who promised you five hundred guineas,’ said Mr. Lowe, with a dry nonchalance.

‘Five hundred fiddles,’ retorted Doctor Dillon — his phrase was coarser, and Toole at that moment entering the door, and divining the situation from the doctor’s famished glare and wild gestures, exploded, I’m sorry to say in a momentary burst of laughter, into his cocked hat. ’Twas instantly stifled, however; and when Dillon turned his flaming eyes upon him, the little doctor made him a bow of superlative gravity, which the furious hero of the trepan was too full of his wrongs to notice in any way.

‘I was down at his house, bedad, the “Brass Castle,” if you plase, and not a brass farthin’ for my pains, nothing there but an ould woman, as ould and as ugly as himself, or the divil — be gannies! An’ he’s levanted, or else tuck for debt. Brass Castle! brass *forehead*, bedad. Brass, like Goliath, from head to heels; an’ by the heels he’s laid, I’ll take my davy, considherin’ at his laysure which is strongest — a brass castle or a stone jug. An’ where, Sir, am I to get my five hundred guineas — where, Sir?’ he thundered, staring first in Lowe’s face, then in Toole’s, and dealing the table a lusty blow at each interrogatory.

‘I think, Sir,’ said Lowe, anticipating Toole, ‘you’d do well to consider the sick man, Sir.’ The noise was certainly considerable.

‘I don’t know, Sir, that the sick man’s considherin’ me much,’ retorted Doctor Dillon. ‘Sick man — sick grandmother’s aunt! If you can’t speak like a man o' sense, *don't* spake, at any rate, like a justice o' the pace. Sick man, indeed! why there's not a crature livin' barrin' a natural eediot, or an apothecary, that doesn't know the man's dead; he's *dead*, Sir; but 'tisn't so with me, an' I can't get on without vittles, and vittles isn't to be had without money; that's logic, Mr. Justice; that's a medical fact Mr. Docthor. An' how am I to get my five hundred guineas? I say, *you* and *you* — the both o' ye — that prevented me of going last night to his brass castle — brass snuff-box — there isn't room to stand in it, bedad — an' gettin' my money. I hold you both liable to me — one an' t'other — the both o' ye.'

'Why, Sir,' said Lowe, ''tis a honorarium.'

''Tis no such thing, Sir; 'tis a contract,' thundered Dillon, pulling Dangerfield's note of promise from his pocket, and dealing it a mighty slap with the back of his hand.

'Contract or no, Sir, there's nobody liable for it but himself.'

'We'll try that, Sir; and in the meantime, what the divil am I to do, I'd be glad to know; for strike me crooked if I have a crown piece to pay the coachman. Trepan, indeed; I'm nately trepanned myself.'

'If you'll only listen, Sir, I'll show you your case is well enough. Mr. Dangerfield, as you call him, has not left the country; and though he's arrested, 'tisn't for debt. If he owes you the money, 'tis your own fault if you don't make him pay it, for I'm credibly informed he's worth more than a hundred thousand pounds.'

'And where is he, Sir?' demanded Black Dillon, much more cheerfully and amicably. 'I hope I see you well, Doctor Toole.'

That learned person acknowledged the somewhat tardy courtesy, and Lowe made answer:

'He lies in the county gaol, Sir, on a serious criminal charge; but a line from me, Sir, will, I think, gain you admission to him forthwith.'

'I'll be much obliged for it, Sir,' answered Dillon. 'What o'clock is it?' he asked of Toole; for though it is believed he owned a watch, it was sometimes not about him; and while Lowe scribbled a note, Toole asked in a dignified way —

'Have you seen our patient, Sir?'

'Not I. Didn't I see him last night? The man's dead. He's in the last stage of exhaustion with an inflammatory pulse. If you feed him up he'll die of inflammation; and if you don't he'll die of wakeness. So he lies on the fatal horns of a dilemma, you see; an' not all the men in Derry'll take him off them alive. He's gone, Sir. Pell's coming, I hear. I'd wait if I could; but I must look afther business; and there's no good to be done here. I thank you, Mr. Lowe — Sir — your most obedient servant, Doctor Toole.' And with Lowe's note in his breeches' pocket, he strode out to the steps, and whistled for his coachman, who drove his respectable employer tipsily to his destination.

I dare say the interview was characteristic; but I can find no account of it. I am pretty sure, however, that he did not get a shilling. So at least he stated in his declaration, in the action against Lowe, in which he, or rather his attorney, was nonsuited, with grievous loss of costs. And judging by the sort of esteem in which Mr. Dangerfield held Black Dillon, I fancy that few things would have pleased him better in his unfortunate situation than hitting that able practitioner as hard as might be.

Just as he drove away, poor little Mrs. Sturk looked in.

'Is there anything, Ma'am?' asked Toole, a little uneasily.

'Only — only, I think he's just a little frightened — he's so nervous you know — by that Dublin doctor's loud talking — and he's got a kind of trembling — a shivering.'

'Eh — a shivering, Ma'am?' said Toole. 'Like a man that's taken a cold, eh?'

'Oh, he hasn't got cold — I'm sure — there's no danger of that. It's only nervous; so I covered him up with another pair of blankets, and gave him a hot drink.'

'Very good, Ma'am; I'll follow you up in a minute.'

'And even if it was, you know he shakes off cold in no time, he has such a fine constitution.'

'Yes, Ma'am — that's true — very good, Ma'am. I'll be after you.'

So up stairs went Mrs. Sturk in a fuss.

'That's it,' said Toole so soon as they were alone, nodding two or three times dejectedly, and looking very glum. 'It's set in — the inflammation — it's set in, Sir. He's gone. That's the rigor.'

'Poor gentleman,' said Lowe, after a short pause, 'I'm much concerned for him, and for his family.'

''Tis a bad business,' said Toole, gloomily, like a man that's frightened. And he followed Mrs. Sturk, leaving Lowe adjusting his papers in the parlour.

Toole found his patient laden with blankets, and shivering like a man in an ague, with blue sunken face. And he slipped his hand under the clothes, and took his pulse, and said nothing but— 'Ay — ay — ay' — quietly to himself, from time to time, as he did so; and Sturk — signing, as well as he could, that he wanted a word in his ear — whispered, as well as his chattering teeth would let him,

'You know what *this* is.'

'Well — well — there now, there; drink some of this,' said Toole, a little flurried, and trying to seem cool.

'I think he's a little bit better, doctor,' whispered poor little Mrs. Sturk, in Toole's ear.

'Twill pass away. Ma'am.'

Toole was standing by the bedside, looking rather woefully and frightened on Sturk's face, and patting and smoothing the coverlet with the palm of his stumpy, red hand; and whispering to himself from time to time, 'Yes, yes,' although with rather a troubled and helpless air.

Just then came the roll of a coach to the door, and a long peal at the knocker; and little Toole ran down to meet the great Doctor Pell in the hall. He was in, in a moment, and turned aside with Toole into the drawingroom. And Toole's voice was heard pretty volubly. It was only a conference of about two minutes. And Dr. Pell said in his usual *tall* way, as they came out —

'How long ago, Sir?'

'About ten — no, hardly so much — *eight* minutes ago,' answered Toole, as he followed that swift phantom up the stairs.

'Your most obedient, Ma'am,' said the slim and lofty doctor, parenthetically saluting the good lady; and he stood by the bedside, having laid his muff on the chair.

'Well, Sir, and how do you feel? There now, that will do, Sir; don't mind speaking; *I* see. And he put his hand under the clothes, and laid it on Sturk's arm, and slid it down to his hand, and felt his pulse.

'And he's been near ten minutes this way?' said the doctor.

'Oh, he was a great deal worse; 'tis a vast deal better now; isn't it, Doctor Toole?'

'The rigor is subsiding, then. Has he had a sweat, Ma'am?' said Pell.

‘Oh, no — nothing like — quite nice and cool, doctor — and no fever; nice quiet sleep; and his appetite wonderful; tell him, Doctor Toole.’

‘Oh, yes, Ma’am — Doctor Pell knows; I told him all, Ma’am,’ said Toole, who was looking with a blank and dismal sort of contemplation upon Sturk’s fallen countenance.

‘Well, Ma’am,’ said Pell, as he looked on his watch, ‘this rigor, you see, will soon pass away, and you’re doing everything we could wish, and (for he found he had time to scribble a prescription), we’ll just order him a trifle. Good-day, Sir. Your most obedient, Ma’am.’

‘Pen and ink in the drawingroom, Doctor Pell,’ said Toole, reverentially.

‘Oh! no, *no*, Madam, excuse me,’ murmured Doctor Pell, gently pressing back Mrs. Sturk’s fee, the residuum of Dangerfield’s bounty, with his open palm.

‘Oh, but Doctor Pell,’ urged she, in a persuasive aside, half behind him, in the shadow of the doorway.

‘Pray, Madam, no more — pardon me,’ and Doctor Pell, with a peremptory bow, repelled his fee.

Why do physicians take their honest earnings in this clandestine way — transacted like favours, secret, sweet, and precious; and pocketed in dark corners, and whispers, like the wages of sin? Cold Doctor Pell here refused a very considerable fee. He could on occasion behave handsomely; but I can’t learn that blustering, hilarious Doctor Rogerson ever refused his.

And the doctor descended, not hastily, but very swiftly, and was in the drawingroom, and the door shut.

‘Gone, poor gentleman!’ said Toole, in an under tone — his phraseology became refined in Pell’s presence; he’d have said ‘poor devil,’ or ‘poor dog,’ if he had been with Doctor Rogerson.

Pell held the pen in his thin lips, while he tore off half-a-sheet of paper, and only shook his head funereally.

So, taking the pen in his fingers, he said, ‘We’ll give him so and so, if you approve.’

‘Very good, Sir,’ said Toole, deferentially; and Pell, not seeming to hear, dashed off a few spattered lines, with necromantic circles and zigzags at the end of each.

When Sturk afterwards saw that paper in the fingers of the maid, being very weak, he did not care to speak; but he signed with a little motion of his head, and she leaned down to listen.

‘Recipe?’ whispered the doctor; ‘put it — in — the fire;’ and he shut his eyes — tired.

Pell, looking again at his watch, was Doctor Toole’s very obedient servant, and was waylaid by poor little Mrs. Sturk on the lobby.

‘Well, Madam, we’ve put our heads together, and ordered a little matter, and that rigor — that shivering fit — will subside; and we trust he’ll be easier then; and you’ve a very competent adviser in Doctor a — a — — ‘

‘Toole,’ suggested the eager little woman.

‘Doctor Toole, Madam, and he’ll direct whatever may be necessary; and should he wish to consult again, you can send for me; but he’s quite competent, Madam, and he’ll tell you all we think.’

He had got to the end of the stairs while talking, and made his adieux, and glided down and out; and before poor little Mrs. Sturk bethought her how little she had got from him, she heard the roll of his coach wheels whirling him back again to Dublin. I believe few doctors grow so accustomed to the ghastly *eclaircissement* as not very willingly to shirk it when they may.

Toole shrank from it, too, and dodged, and equivocated, and evaded all he could; but he did admit there was an unfavourable change; and when he had gone — promising to be back at four o’clock — poor little Mrs. Sturk broke down — all alone in the drawingroom — and cried a passionate flood of tears; and thinking she was too long away, dried her eyes quickly, and ran up, and into Barney’s room with a smile on; and she battled with the evil fear; and hope, that faithful angel that clings to the last, hovered near her with blessed illusions, until an hour came, next day, in the evening, about four o’clock, when from Barney’s room there came a long, wild cry. It was ‘his poor foolish little Letty’ — the long farewell — and the ‘noble Barney’ was gone. The courtship and the married days — all a faded old story now; and a few days later, reversed arms, and muffled drums, and three volleys in the churchyard, and a little file of wondering children, dressed in black, whom the old general afterwards took up in his arms, one by one, very kindly, and kissed, and told them they were to come and play in Belmont whenever they liked, and to eat fruit in the garden, and a great deal more; for all which a poor little lady, in a widow’s cap, and a lonely room, hard-by, was very grateful.

CHAPTER XCVI.

ABOUT THE RIGHTFUL MRS. NUTTER OF THE MILLS, AND HOW MR. MERVYN RECEIVED THE NEWS.

Little Doctor Toole came out feeling rather queer and stunned from Sturk’s house. It was past three o’clock by this time, and it had already, in his eyes, a changed and empty look, as his upturned eye for a moment rested upon its gray front, and the window-panes glittering in the reddening sun. He looked down the street towards the turnpike, and then up it, towards Martin’s-row and the Mills. And he bethought him suddenly of poor Sally Nutter, and upbraided himself, smiting the point of his cane with a vehement stab upon the pavement, for having forgotten to speak to Lowe upon her case. Perhaps, however, it was as well he had not, inasmuch as there were a few not unimportant facts connected with that case about which he was himself in the dark.

Mr. Gamble’s conducting clerk had gone up stairs to Mrs. Nutter’s door, and being admitted, had very respectfully asked leave to open, for that lady’s instruction, a little statement which he was charged to make.

This was in substance, that Archibald Duncan, Mary Matchwell’s husband, was in Dublin, and had sworn informations against her for bigamy; and that a warrant having been issued for her arrest upon that charge, the constables had arrived at the Mills for the purpose of executing it, and removing the body of the delinquent, M. M., to the custody of the turnkey; that measures would be taken on the spot to expel the persons who had followed in her train; and that Mr. Charles Nutter himself would arrive in little more than an hour, to congratulate his good wife, Sally, on the termination of their troubles, and to take quiet possession of his house.

You can imagine how Sally Nutter received all this, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, looking in the face of the man of notices and attested copies, unable to speak — unable quite to believe. But before he came to the end of his dry and delightful narrative, a loud yell and a scuffle in the parlour were heard; a shrilly clamour of warring voices; a dreadful crash of glass: a few curses and oaths in basses and barytones; and some laughter from the coachmen, who viewed the fray from outside through the window; and a brief, wild, and garrulous uproar, which made little Sally Nutter — though by this time used to commotion — draw back with her hands to her heart, and hold her breath. It was the critical convulsion; the evil spirit was being eliminated, and the tenement, stunned, bruised, and tattered, about to be at peace.

Of Charles Nutter's doings and adventures during the terrible interval between his departure on the night of Mary Matchwell's first visit to the Mills, and his return on this evening to the same abode, there is a brief outline, in the first person, partly in answer to questions, and obviously intended to constitute a memorandum for his attorney's use. I shall reprint it with your leave — as it is not very long — verbatim.

'When that woman, Sir, came out to the Mills,' says this document, 'I could scarce believe my eyes; I knew her temper; she was always damnably wicked; but I had found out all about her long ago; and I was amazed at her audacity. What she said was true — we *were* married; or rather, we went through the ceremony, at St. Clement Danes, in London, in the year '50. I could not gainsay that; but I well knew what she thought was known but to herself and another. She had a husband living then. We lived together little more than three months. We were not a year parted when I found out all about him; and I never expected more trouble from her.

'I knew all about him then. But seventeen years bring many changes; and I feared he might be dead. He was a saddler in Edinburgh, and his name was Duncan. I made up my mind to go thither straight. Next morning the *Lovely Betty*, packet, was to sail for Holyhead. I took money, and set out without a word to anybody. The wretch had told my poor wife, and showed her the certificate, and so left her half mad.

'I swore to her 'twas false. I told her to wait a bit and she would see. That was everything passed between us. I don't think she half understood what I said, for she was at her wits' ends. I was scarce better myself first. 'Twas a good while before I resolved on this course, and saw my way, and worse thoughts were in my head; but so soon as I made up my mind to this I grew cool. I don't know how it happened that my footprints by the river puzzled them; 'twas all accident; I was thinking of no such matter; I did not go through the village, but through the Knockmaroon gate; 'twas dark by that time; I only met two men with a cart — they did not know me — Dublin men, I think. I crossed the park in a straight line for Dublin; I did not meet a living soul; ’twas dark, but not very dark. When I reached the Butcher’s Wood, all on a sudden, I heard a horrid screech, and two blows quick, one after the other, to my right, not three score steps away — heavy blows — they sounded like the strokes of a man beating a carpet.

‘With the first alarm, I hollo’d, and ran in the direction shouting as I went; ’twas as I ran I heard the second blow; I saw no one, and heard no other sound; the noise I made myself in running might prevent it. I can’t say how many seconds it took to run the distance — not many; I ran fast; I was not long in finding the body; his white vest and small clothes showed under the shadow; he seemed quite dead. I thought when first I took his hand, there was a kind of a quiver in his fingers; but that was over immediately. His eyes and mouth were a bit open; the blood was coming very fast, and the wounds on his head looked very deep — frightful — as I conjectured they were done with a falchion (a name given to a heavy wooden sword resembling a New Zealand weapon); there was blood coming from one ear, and his mouth; there was no sign of life about him, and I thought him quite dead. I would have lifted him against a tree, but his head looked all in a smash, and I daren’t move him. I knew him for Dr. Sturk, of the Artillery; he wore his regimentals; I did not see his hat; his head was bare when I saw him.

‘When I saw ’twas Doctor Sturk, I was frightened; he had treated me mighty ill, and I resented it, which I did not conceal; and I thought ‘twould look very much against me if I were any way mixed up in this dreadful occurrence — especially not knowing who did it — and being alone with the body so soon after ’twas done. I crossed the park wall therefore; but by the time I came near Barrack-street, I grew uneasy in my mind, lest Doctor Sturk should still have life in him, and perish for want of help. I went down to the river-side, and washed my hands, for there was blood upon ‘em, and while so employed, by mischance I lost my hat in the water and could not recover it. I stood for a while by the river-bank; it was a lonely place; I was thinking of crossing there first, I was so frightened; I changed my mind, however, and went round by Bloody-bridge.

‘The further I went the more fearful I grew, lest Sturk should die for want of help that I might send him; and although I thought him dead, I got such a dread of this over me as I can’t describe. I saw two soldiers opposite the

"Royal Oak" inn, and I told them I overheard a fellow speak of an officer that lay wounded in the Butcher's Wood, not far from the park-wall, and gave them half-a-crown to have search made, which they promised, and took the money.

'I crossed Bloody-bridge, and got into a coach, and so to Luke Gamble's. I told him nothing of Sturk; I had talked foolishly to him, and did not know what even he might think. I told him all about M. M.'s, that is Mary Duncan's turning up; she went by that name in London, and kept a lodging-house. I took his advice on the matter, and sailed next morning. The man Archie Duncan had left Edinburgh, but I traced him to Carlisle and thence to York, where I found him. He was in a very poor way, and glad to hear that Demirep was in Dublin, and making money. When I came back I was in the *Hue-and-Cry* for the assault on Sturk.

'I took no precaution, not knowing what had happened; but 'twas night when we arrived, Duncan and I, and we went straight to Gamble's and he concealed me. I kept close within his house, except on one night, when I took coach. I was under necessity, as you shall hear, to visit Chapelizod. I got out in the hollow of the road by the Knockmaroon pond, in the park; an awful night it was — the night of the snow-storm, when the brig was wrecked off the Black Rock, you remember. I wanted to get some papers necessary to my case against Mary Duncan. I had the key of the glass door; the inside fastening was broke, and there was no trouble in getting in. But the women had sat up beyond their hour, and saw me. I got the papers, however, and returned, having warned them not to speak. I ventured out of doors but once more, and was took on a warrant for assaulting Sturk. 'Twas the women talking as they did excited the officer's suspicions.

'I have lain in prison since. The date of my committal and discharge are, I suppose, there.'

And so ends this rough draft, with the initials, I think, in his own hands, C. N., at the foot.

At about halfpast four o'clock Nutter came out to the Mills in a coach. He did not drive through Chapelizod; he was shy, and wished to feel his way a little. So he came home privily by the Knockmaroon Park-gate. Poor little Sally rose into a sort of heroine. With a wild cry, and 'Oh, Charlie!' she threw her arms about his neck; and the 'good little crayture,' as Magnolia was wont to call her, had fainted. Nutter said nothing, but carried her in his arms to the sofa, and himself sobbed very violently for about a minute, supporting her tenderly. She came to herself very quickly, and hugged her Charlie with such a torrent of incoherent endearments, welcomes, and benedictions as I cannot at all undertake to describe. Nutter didn't speak. His arms were about her, and with wet eyes, and biting his nether-lip, and smiling, he looked into her poor little wild, delighted face with an unspeakable world of emotion and affection beaming from the homely lines and knots of that old mahogany countenance; and the maids smiling, blessing, courtesying, and welcoming him home again, added to the pleasant uproar which amazed even the tipsy coachman from the hall.

'Oh! Charlie, I have you fast, my darling. Oh! but it's wonderful; you, yourself — my Charlie, your own self — never, never, oh! *never* to part again!' and so on.

And so for a rapturous hour, it seemed as if they had passed the dark valley, and were immortal; and no more pain, sorrow, or separation for them. And, perhaps, these blessed illusions are permitted now and again to mortals, like momentary gleams of paradise, and distant views of the delectable mountains, to cheer poor pilgrims with a foretaste of those meetings beyond the river, where the separated and beloved shall embrace.

It is not always that the person most interested in a rumour is first to hear it. It was reported in Chapelizod, early that day, that Irons, the clerk, had made some marvellous discovery respecting Lord Dunoran, and the murder of which an English jury had found that nobleman guilty. Had people known that Mervyn was the son of that dishonoured peer — as in that curious little town they would, no doubt, long since have, at least, suspected, had he called himself by his proper patronymic Mordaunt — he would not have wanted a visitor to enlighten him half-an-hour after the rumour had began to proclaim itself in the streets and public haunts of the village. No one, however, thought of the haughty and secluded young gentleman who lived so ascetic a life at the Tiled House, and hardly ever showed in the town, except in church on Sundays; and who when he rode on his black hunter into Dublin, avoided the village, and took the highroad by Inchicore.

When the report did reach him, and he heard that Lowe, who knew all about it, was at the Phœnix, where he was holding a conference with a gentleman from the Crown Office, half wild with excitement, he hurried thither. There, having declared himself to the magistrate and his companion, in that little chamber where Nutter was wont to transact his agency business, and where poor Sturk had told down his rent, guinea by guinea, with such a furious elation, on the morning but one before he received his deathblow, he heard, with such feelings as may be imagined, the magistrate read aloud, not only the full and clear information of Irons, but the equally distinct deposition of Doctor Sturk, and was made aware of the complete identification of the respectable and vivacious Paul Dangerfield with the dead and damned Charles Archer!

On hearing all this, the young man rode straight to Belmont, where he was closeted with the general for fully twenty minutes. They parted in a very friendly way, but he did not see the ladies. The general, however, no sooner bid him farewell at the doorsteps than he made his way to the drawingroom, and, big with his amazing secret, first, in a very grave and almost agitated way, told little 'Toodie,' as he called his daughter, to run away and leave him together with Aunt Rebecca, which being done, he anticipated that lady's imperious summons to explain himself by telling her, in his blunt, soldierly fashion, the wondrous story.

Aunt Becky was utterly confounded. She had seldom before in her life been so thoroughly taken in. What a marvellous turn of fortune! What a providential deliverance and vindication for that poor young Lord Dunoran! What an astounding exposure of that miscreant Mr. Dangerfield!

'What a blessed escape the child has had!' interposed the general with a rather testy burst of gratitude.

'And how artfully she and my lord contrived to conceal their engagement!' pursued Aunt Rebecca, covering her somewhat confused retreat.

But, somehow, Aunt Rebecca was by no means angry. On the contrary, anyone who knew her well would have perceived that a great weight was taken off her mind.

The consequences of Dangerfield's incarceration upon these awful charges, were not confined altogether to the Tiled House and the inhabitants of Belmont.

No sooner was our friend Cluffe well assured that Dangerfield was in custody of the gaoler, and that his old theory of a certain double plot carried on by that intriguing personage, with the object of possessing the hand and thousands of Aunt Rebecca, was now and for ever untenable, than he wrote to London forthwith to countermand the pelican. The answer, which in those days was rather long about coming, was not pleasant, being simply a refusal to rescind the contract.

Cluffe, in a frenzy, carried this piece of mercantile insolence off to his lawyer. The stout captain was, however, undoubtedly liable, and, with a heavy heart, he wrote to beg they would, with all despatch, sell the bird in London on his account, and charge him with the difference. 'The scoundrels! — they'll buy him themselves at half-price, and charge me a per centage besides; but what the plague better can I do?

In due course, however, came an answer, informing Captain Cluffe that his letter had arrived too late, as the bird, pursuant to the tenor of his order, had been shipped for him to Dublin by the *Fair Venus*, with a proper person in charge, on the Thursday morning previous. Good Mrs. Mason, his landlady, had no idea what was causing the awful commotion in the captain's room; the fitful and violent soliloquies; the stamping of the captain up and down the floor; and the contusions, palpably, suffered by her furniture. The captain's temper was not very pleasant that evening, and he was fidgety and feverish besides, expecting every moment a note from town to apprise him of its arrival.

However, he walked up to Belmont a week or two after, and had a very consolatory reception from Aunt Becky. He talked upon his old themes, and upon the subject of Puddock, was, as usual, very friendly and intercessorial; in fact, she showed at last signs of yielding.

'Well, Captain Cluffe, tell him if he cares to come, he *may* come, and be on the old friendly footing; but be sure you tell him he owes it all to *you*.'

And positively, as she said so, Aunt Rebecca looked down upon her fan; and Cluffe thought looked a little flushed, and confused too; whereat the gallant fellow was so elated that he told her all about the pelican, discarding as unworthy of consideration, under circumstances so imminently promising, a little plan he had formed of keeping the bird privately in Dublin, and looking out for a buyer.

Poor little Puddock, on the other hand, had heard, more than a week before this message of peace arrived, the whole story of Gertrude's engagement to Lord Dunoran, as we may now call Mr. Mervyn, with such sensations as may be conjectured. His heart, of course, was torn; but having sustained some score of similar injuries in that region upon other equally harrowing occasions, he recovered upon this with all favourable symptoms, and his wounds healed with the first intention. He wore his chains very lightly, indeed. The iron did not enter into his soul; and although, of course, ‘he could never cease but with his life to dwell upon the image of his fleeting dream — the beautiful nymph of Belmont,’ I have never heard that his waist grew at all slimmer, or that his sleep or his appetite suffered during the period of his despair.

The good little fellow was very glad to hear from Cluffe, who patronised him most handsomely, that Aunt Rebecca had consented to receive him once more into her good graces.

‘And the fact is, Puddock, I think I may undertake to promise you’ll never again be misunderstood in that quarter,’ said Cluffe, with a mysterious sort of smile.

‘I’m sure, dear Cluffe, I’m grateful as I ought, for your generous pleading on my poor behalf, and I do prize the good will of that most excellent lady as highly as any, and owe her, beside, a debt of gratitude for care and kindness such as many a mother would have failed to bestow.’

‘Mother, indeed! Why, Puddock, my boy, you forget you’re no chicken,’ said Cluffe, a little high.

‘And tomorrow I will certainly pay her my respects,’ said the lieutenant, not answering Cluffe’s remark.

So Gertrude Chattesworth, after her long agitation — often despair — was tranquil at last, and blessed in the full assurance of the love which was henceforth to be her chief earthly happiness.

‘Madam was very sly,’ said Aunt Becky, with a little shake of her head, and a quizzical smile; and holding up her folded fan between her finger and thumb, in mimic menace as she glanced at Gertrude. ‘Why, Mr. Mordaunt, on the very day — the day we had the pleasant luncheon on the grass — when, as I thought, she had given you your quietus— ’twas quite the reverse, and you had made a little betrothal, and duped the old people so cleverly ever after.’

‘You have forgiven me, dear aunt,’ said the young lady, kissing her very affectionately, ‘but I will never quite forgive myself. In a moment of great agitation I made a hasty promise of secrecy, which, from the moment ’twas made, was to me a never-resting disquietude, misery, and reproach. If you, my dearest aunt, knew, as *he* knows, all the anxieties, or rather the terrors, I suffered during that agitating period of concealment— '

'Indeed, dear Madam,' said Mordaunt — or as we may now call him, Lord Dunoran — coming to the rescue, ''twas all my doing; on me alone rests all the blame. Selfish it hardly was. I could not risk the loss of my beloved; and until my fortunes had improved, to declare our situation would have been too surely to lose her. Henceforward I have done with mystery. *I* will never have a secret from her, nor she from you.'

He took Aunt Becky's hand. 'Am I, too, forgiven?'

He held it for a second, and then kissed it.

Aunt Becky smiled, with one of her pleasant little blushes, and looked down on the carpet, and was silent for a moment; and then, as they afterwards thought a little oddly, she said,

'That censor must be more severe than I, who would say that concealment in matters of the heart is never justifiable; and, indeed, my dear,' she added, quite in a humble way, 'I almost think you were right.'

Aunt Becky's looks and spirits had both improved from the moment of this *eclaircissement*. A load was plainly removed from her mind. Let us hope that her comfort and elation were perfectly unselfish. At all events, her heart sang with a quiet joy, and her good humour was unbounded. So she stood up, holding Lord Dunoran's hand in hers, and putting her white arm round her niece's neck, she kissed her again and again, very tenderly, and she said —

'How very happy, Gertrude, you must be!' and then she went quickly from the room, drying her eyes.

Happy indeed she was, and not least in the termination of that secrecy which was so full of self-reproach and sometimes of distrust. From the evening of that dinner at the King's House, when in an agony of jealousy she had almost disclosed to poor little Lily the secret of their engagement, down to the latest moment of its concealment, her hours had been darkened by care, and troubled with ceaseless agitations.

Everything was now going prosperously for Mervyn — or let us call him henceforward Lord Dunoran. Against the united evidence of Sturk and Irons, two independent witnesses, the crown were of opinion that no defence was maintainable by the wretch, Archer. The two murders were unambiguously sworn to by both witnesses. A correspondence, afterwards read in the Irish House of Lords, was carried on between the Irish and the English law officers of the crown — for the case, for many reasons, was admitted to be momentous — as to which crime he should be first tried for — the murder of Sturk, or that of Beauclerc. The latter was, in this respect, the most momentous — that the cancelling of the forfeiture which had ruined the Dunoran family depended upon it.

‘But are you not forgetting, Sir,’ said Mr. Attorney in consultation, ‘that there’s the finding of *felo de se* against him by the coroner’s jury?’

‘No, Sir,’ answered the crown solicitor, well pleased to set Mr. Attorney right. ‘The jury being sworn, found only that he came by his death, but whether by gout in his stomach, or by other disease, or by poison, they had no certain knowledge; there was therefore no such coroner’s verdict, and no forfeiture therefore.’

‘And I’m glad to hear it, with all my heart. I’ve seen the young gentleman, and a very pretty young nobleman he is,’ said Mr. Attorney. Perhaps he would not have cared if this expression of his good will had got round to my lord.

The result was, however, that their prisoner was to be first tried in Ireland for the murder of Doctor Barnabas Sturk.

A few pieces of evidence, slight, but sinister, also turned up. Captain Cluffe was quite clear he had seen an instrument in the prisoner’s hand on the night of the murder, as he looked into the little bedchamber of the Brass Castle, so unexpectedly. When he put down the towel, he raised it from the toilet, where it lay. It resembled the butt of a whip — was an inch or so longer than a drumstick, and six or seven inches of the thick end stood out in a series of circular bands or rings. He washed the thick end of it in the basin; it seemed to have a spring in it, and Cluffe thought it was a sort of loaded baton. In those days robbery and assault were as common as they are like to become again, and there was nothing remarkable in the possession of such defensive weapons. Dangerfield had only run it once or twice hastily through the water, rolled it in a red handkerchief, and threw it into his drawer, which he locked. When Cluffe was shown the whip, which bore a rude resemblance to this instrument, and which Lowe had assumed to be all that Cluffe had really seen, the gallant captain peremptorily pooh-poohed it. ’Twas no such thing. The whip-handle was light in comparison, and it was too long to fit in the drawer.

Now, the awful fractures which had almost severed Sturk's skull corresponded exactly with the wounds which such an instrument would inflict, and a tubular piece of broken iron, about two inches long, exactly corresponding with the shape of the loading described by Cluffe, was actually discovered in the sewer of the Brass Castle. It had been in the fire, and the wood or whalebone was burnt completely away. It was conjectured that Dangerfield had believed it to be lead, and having burnt the handle, had broken the metal which he could not melt, and made away with it in the best way he could. So preparations were pushed forward, and Sturk's dying declaration, sworn to, late in the evening before his dissolution, in a full consciousness of his approaching death, was, of course, relied on, and a very symmetrical and logical bill lay, neatly penned, in the Crown Office, awaiting the next commission for the county.

CHAPTER XCVII.

IN WHICH OBEDIAH ARRIVES.

In the meantime our worthy little Lieutenant Puddock — by this time quite reconciled to the new state of things, walked up to Belmont, with his head a great deal fuller — such and so great are human vagaries — of the interview pending between him and Aunt Becky than of the little romance which had exploded so unexpectedly about a fortnight ago.

He actually saw Miss Gertrude and my Lord Dunoran walking side by side, on the mulberry walk by the river; and though he looked and felt a little queer, perhaps, a little absurd, he did not sigh, or murmur a stanza, or suffer a palpitation; but walked up to the hall-door, and asked for Miss Rebecca Chattesworth.

Aunt Becky received him in the drawingroom. She was looking very pale, and spoke very little, and very gently for her. In a reconciliation between two persons of the opposite sexes — though the ages be wide apart — there is almost always some little ingredient of sentiment.

The door was shut, and Puddock's voice was heard in an indistinct murmur, upon the lobby. Then there was a silence, or possibly, some speaking in a still lower key. Then Aunt Becky was crying, and the lieutenant's voice cooing through it. Then Aunt Becky, still crying, said —

'A longer time than *you* think for, lieutenant; two years, and more — *always*! And the lieutenant's voice rose again; and she said— 'What a fool I've been!' which was again lost in Puddock's accents; and the drawingroom door opened, and Aunt Rebecca ran up stairs, with her handkerchief to her red nose and eyes, and slammed her bedroom door after her like a boarding-school miss.

And the general's voice was heard shouting 'luncheon' in the hall; and Dominick repeated the announcement to Puddock, who stood, unusually pale and very much stunned, with the handle of the open drawingroom door in his hand, looking up toward the bedroom in an undecided sort of way, as if he was not clear whether it was not his duty to follow Aunt Becky. On being told a second time, however, that the general awaited him at luncheon, he apprehended the meaning of the message, and went down to the parlour forthwith.

The general, and my lord Dunoran, and Miss Gertrude, and honest Father Roach, were there; and Aunt Becky being otherwise engaged, could not come.

Puddock, at luncheon, was abstracted — frightened — silent, for the most part; talking only two or three sentences during that sociable meal, by fits and starts; and he laughed once abruptly at a joke he did not hear. He also drank three glasses of port.

Aunt Rebecca met him with her hood on in the hall. She asked him, with a faltering sort of carelessness, looking very hard at the clock, and nearly with her back to him —

‘Lieutenant, will you take a turn in the garden with me?’

To which Puddock, with almost a start — for he had not seen her till she spoke — and, upon my word, ’tis a fact, with a blush, too — made a sudden smile, and a bow, and a suitable reply in low tones; and forth they sallied together, and into the garden, and up and down the same walk, for a good while — a long while — people sometimes don’t count the minutes — with none but Peter Brian, the gardener, whom they did not see, to observe them.

When they came to the white wicket-door of the garden, Aunt Rebecca hastily dropped his arm, on which she had leaned; and together they returned to the house very affably; and there Aunt Becky bid him goodbye in a whisper, a little hastily; and Puddock, so soon as he found Dominick, asked for the general.

He had gone down to the river; and Puddock followed. As he walked along the court, he looked up; there was a kind of face at the window. He smiled a great deal and raised his hat, and placed it to his heart, and felt quite bewildered, like a man in a dream; and in this state he marched down to the river’s bank.

They had not been together for a full minute when the stout general threw back his head, looking straight in his face; and then he stepped first one, then another, fat little pace backward, and poked his cane right at the ribs of the plump little lieutenant, then closing with him, he shook both Puddock’s hands in both his, with a hearty peal of laughter.

Then he took Puddock under his arm. Puddock had to stoop to pick up his hat which the general had dislodged. And so the general walks him slowly towards the house; sometimes jogging his elbow a little under his ribs; sometimes calling a halt and taking his collar in his finger and thumb, thrusting him out a little, and eyeing him over with a sort of swagger, and laughing and coughing, and whooping, and laughing again, almost to strangulation; and altogether extraordinarily boisterous, and hilarious, and familiar, as Cluffe thought, who viewed this spectacle from the avenue.

Mr. Sterling would not have been quite so amused at a similar freak of Mrs. Hidleberg's — but our honest general was no especial worshipper of money — he was rich, too, and his daughter, well dowered, was about to marry a peer, and beside all this, though he loved 'Sister Becky,' her yoke galled him; and I think he was not altogether sorry at the notion of a little more liberty.

At the same moment honest Peter Brien, having set his basket of winter greens down upon the kitchen-table, electrified his auditory by telling them, with a broad grin and an oath, that he had seen Lieutenant Puddock and Aunt Rebecca kiss in the garden, with a good smart smack, 'by the powers, within three yards of his elbow, when he was stooping down cutting them greens!' At which profanity, old Mistress Dorothy, Aunt Rebecca's maid, was so incensed that she rose and left the kitchen without a word. The sensation there, however, was immense; and Mistress Dorothy heard the gabble and laughter fast and furious behind her until she reached the hall.

Captain Cluffe was asking for Aunt Rebecca when Puddock and the general reached the hall-door, and was surprised to learn that she was not to be seen. 'If she knew 'twas I,' he thought, 'but no matter.'

'Oh, *we* could have told you that; eh, Puddock?' cried the general; ''tisn't everybody can see my sister to-day, captain; a very peculiar engagement, eh, Puddock?' and a sly wink and a chuckle.

Cluffe smiled a little, and looked rather conscious and queer, but pleased with himself; and his eyes wandered over the front windows hastily, to see if Aunt Becky was looking out, for he fancied there was something in the general's quizzing, and that the lady might have said more than she quite intended to poor little Puddock on the subject of the gallant mediator; and that, in fact, he was somehow the theme of some little sentimental disclosure of the lady's. What the plague else could they both mean by quizzing Cluffe about her?

Puddock and he had not gone halfway down the short avenue, when Cluffe said, with a sheepish smile:

‘Miss Rebecca Chattesworth dropped something in her talk with you, Puddock, I see that plain enough, my dear fellow, which the general has no objection I should hear, and, hang it, I don’t see any myself. I say, I may as well hear it, eh? I venture to say there’s no great harm in it.’

At first Puddock was reserved, but recollecting that he had been left quite free to tell whom he pleased, he made up his mind to unbosom; and suggested, for the sake of quiet and a longer conversation, that they should go round by the ferry.

‘No, I thank you, I’ve had enough of that; we can walk along as quietly as you like, and turn a little back again if need be.’

So slowly, side by side, the brother-officers paced toward the bridge; and little Puddock, with a serious countenance and blushing cheeks, and looking straight before him, made his astounding disclosure.

Puddock told things in a very simple and intelligible way, and Cluffe heard him in total silence; and just as he related the crowning fact, that he, the lieutenant, was about to marry Miss Rebecca Chattesworth, having reached the milestone by the footpath, Captain Cluffe raised his foot thereupon, without a word to Puddock, and began tugging at the strap of his legging, with a dismal red grin, and a few spluttering curses at the artificer of the article.

‘And the lady has had the condescension to say that she has liked me for at least *two years*.’

‘And she hating you like poison, to my certain knowledge,’ laughed Captain Cluffe, very angrily, and swallowing down his feelings. So they walked on a little way in silence, and Cluffe, who, with his face very red, and his mouth a good deal expanded, and down in the corners, was looking steadfastly forward, exclaimed suddenly, —

‘*Well*?’

‘I see, Cluffe,’ said Puddock; ‘you don’t think it prudent — you think we mayn’t be happy?’

‘*Prudent*,’ laughed Cluffe, with a variety of unpleasant meanings; and after a while— ‘And the general knows of it?’

‘And approves it most kindly,’ said Puddock.

‘What else can he do?’ sneered Cluffe; ‘’tis a precious fancy — they *are* such cheats! Why you might be almost her *grand*-son, my dear Puddock, ha, ha, ha. ’Tis preposterous; you’re sixteen years younger than I.’

‘If you can’t congratulate me, ‘twould be kinder not to say anything, Captain Cluffe; and nobody must speak in my presence of that lady but with proper respect; and I — I thought, Cluffe, you’d have wished me well, and shaken hands and said something — something— ‘

‘Oh, as for that,’ said Cluffe, swallowing down his emotions again, and shaking hands with Puddock rather clumsily, and trying to smile, ‘I wish you well, Heaven knows — everything good; why shouldn’t I, by George? You know, Puddock, ’twas I who brought you together. And — and — am I at liberty to mention it?’

Puddock thought it better the news should be proclaimed from Belmont.

‘Well, so I think myself,’ said Cluffe, and relapsed into silence till they parted, at the corner of the broad street of Chapelizod and Cluffe walked at an astounding pace on to his lodgings.

‘Here’s Captain Cluffe,’ said Mrs. Mason, to a plump youth, who had just made the journey from London, and was standing with the driver of a low-backed car, and saluted the captain, who was stalking in without taking any notice.

‘Little bill, if you please, captain.’

‘What is it?’ demanded the captain, grimly.

‘Obediar’s come, Sir.’

‘Obediar!’ said the captain. ‘What the plague do you mean, Sir?’

‘Obediar, Sir, is the name we give him. The pelican, Sir, from Messrs. Hamburgh and Slighe.’

And the young man threw back a piece of green baize, and disclosed Obediar, who blinked with a tranquil countenance upon the captain through the wires of a strong wooden cage. I doubt if the captain ever looked so angry before or since. He glared at the pelican, and ground his teeth, and actually shook his cane in his fist; and if he had been one bit less prudent than he was, I think Obediar would then and there have slept with his fathers.

Cluffe whisked himself about, and plucked open the paper.

‘And what the devil is all this for, Sir? ten — twelve pounds ten shillings freightage and care on the way — and twenty-five, by George, Sir — not far from forty pounds, Sir,' roared Cluffe.

'Where'll I bring him to, Sir?' asked the driver.

The captain bellowed an address we sha'n't print here.

'Curse him — curse the brute! forty pounds!' and the captain swore hugely, 'you scoundrel! Drive the whole concern out of that, Sir. Drive him away, Sir, or by Jove, I'll break every bone in your body, Sir.'

And the captain scaled the stairs, and sat down panting, and outside the window he heard the driver advising something about putting the captain's bird to livery, 'till sich time as he'd come to his sinses;' and himself undertaking to wait opposite the door of his lodgings until his fare from Dublin was paid.

Though Cluffe was occasionally swayed by the angry passions, he was, on the whole, in his own small way, a long-headed fellow. He hated law, especially when he had a bad case; and accordingly he went down again, rumpling the confounded bill in his hand, and told the man that he did not blame *him* for it — though the whole thing was an imposition; but that rather than have any words about it, he'd pay the account, and have done with it; and he stared again in the face of the pelican with an expression of rooted abhorrence and disgust, and the mild bird clapped its bill, perhaps expecting some refreshment, and looking upon the captain with a serene complacency very provoking under the circumstances.

'How the devil people can like such misshapen, idiotic-looking, selfish, useless brutes; and, by George, it smells like a polecat — curse it! but some people have deuced queer fancies in more matters than one. The brute! on my soul, I'd like to shoot it.'

However, with plenty of disputation over the items, and many oaths and vows, the gallant captain, with a heavy and wrathful heart, paid the bill; and although he had sworn in his drawingroom that he'd eat the pelican before Aunt Rebecca should have it, he thought better also upon this point too, and it arrived that evening at Belmont, with his respectful compliments.

Cluffe was soon of opinion that he was in absolute possession of his own secret, and resolved to keep it effectually. He hinted that very evening at mess, and afterwards at the club, that he had been managing a very nice and delicate bit of diplomacy which not a soul of them suspected, at Belmont; and that by George, he thought they'd stare when they heard it. He had worked like a lord chancellor to bring it about; and he thought all was pretty well settled, now. And the Chapelizod folk, in general, and Puddock, as implicitly as any, and Aunt Rebecca, for that matter, also believed to their dying day that Cluffe had managed that match, and been a true friend to little Puddock.

Cluffe never married, but grew confoundedly corpulent by degrees, and suffered plaguily from gout; but was always well dressed, and courageously buckled in, and, I dare say, two inches less in girth, thanks to the application of mechanics, than nature would have presented him.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

IN WHICH CHARLES ARCHER PUTS HIMSELF UPON THE COUNTRY.

The excitement was high in Chapelizod when the news reached that a true bill was found against Charles Archer for the murder of Barnabas Sturk. Everywhere, indeed, the case was watched with uncommon interest; and when the decisive day arrived, and the old judge, furrowed, yellow, and cross, mounted the bench, and the jury were called over, and the challenges began, and the grim, gentlemanlike person with the white hair, and his right arm in a black silk sling, whispering to his attorney and now and again pencilling, with his left hand, a line to his counsel with that indescribable air of confidence and almost defiance, pleaded to the indictment 'not guilty,' and the dreadful business of the day began, the court was crowded as it seldom had been before.

A short, clear, horrible statement unfolded the case for the crown. Then the dying deposition of Sturk was put in evidence; then Irons the clerk was put up, and told his tale doggedly and distinctly, and was not to be shaken. 'No, it was not true that he had ever been confined in a mad house.' 'He had never had delirium tremens.' 'He had never heard that his wife thought him mad.' 'Yes, it was true he had pledged silver of his master's at the Pied Horse at Newmarket' 'He knew it was a felony, but it was the prisoner who put it into his head and encouraged him to do it.' 'Yes, he would swear to that.' 'He had several times spoken to Lord Dunoran, when passing under the name of Mervyn, on the subject of his father being wronged.' 'He never had any promise from my lord, in case he should fix the guilt of that murder on some other than his father.' Our friend, Captain Cluffe, was called, and delivered his evidence in a somewhat bluff and peremptory, but on the whole effective way.

Charles Nutter, after some whispered consultation, was also called, and related what we have heard. 'Yes, he had been arrested for the murder of Dr. Sturk, and now stood out on bail to answer that charge.' Then followed some circumstances, one of which, the discovery of a piece of what was presumed to be the weapon with which the murder was perpetrated, I have already mentioned. Then came some evidence, curious but quite clear, to show that the Charles Archer who had died at Florence was *not* the Charles Archer who had murdered Beauclerc, but a gentleman who had served in the army, and had afterwards been for two years in Italy, in the employment of a London firm who dealt in works of art, and was actually resident in *Italy* at the time when the Newmarket murder occurred, and that the attempt to represent him as the person who had given evidence against the late Lord Dunoran was an elaborate and cunning contrivance of the prisoner at the bar. Then came the medical evidence.

Pell was examined, and delivered only half a dozen learned sentences; Toole, more at length, made a damaging comparison of the fragment of iron already mentioned, and the outline of the fractures in the deceased man's head; and Dillon was questioned generally, and was not cross-examined. Then came the defence.

The points were, that Sturk was restored to speech by the determined interposition of the prisoner at the bar, an unlikely thing if he was ruining himself thereby! That Sturk's brain had been shattered, and not cleared from hallucinations before he died; that having uttered the monstrous dream, in all its parts incredible, which was the sole foundation of the indictment against that every way respectable and eminent gentleman who stood there, the clerk, Irons, having heard something of it, had conceived the plan of swearing to the same story, for the manifest purpose of securing thereby the favour of the young Lord Dunoran, with whom he had been in conference upon this very subject without ever once having hinted a syllable against Mr. Paul Dangerfield until after Doctor Sturk's dream had been divulged; and the idea of fixing the guilt of Beauclerc's murder upon that gentleman of wealth, family, and station, occurred to his intriguing and unscrupulous mind.

Mr. Dangerfield, in the dock nodded sometimes, or sneered or smirked with hollow cheeks, or shook his head in unison with the passing sentiment of the speaker, directing, through that hot atmosphere, now darkening into twilight, a quick glance from time to time upon the aspect of the jury, the weather-gauge of his fate, but altogether with a manly, sarcastic, and at times a somewhat offended air, as though he should say, ''Tis somewhat too good a jest that I, Paul Dangerfield, Esq., a man of fashion, with my known character, and worth nigh two hundred thousand pounds sterling, should stand here, charged with murdering a miserable Chapelizod doctor!' The minutes had stolen away; the judge read his notes by candlelight, and charged, with dry and cranky emphasis, dead against that man of integrity, fashion, and guineas; and did not appear a bit disturbed at the idea of hanging him.

When the jury went in he had some soup upon the bench, and sipped it with great noise. Mr. Dangerfield shook hands with his counsel, and smirked and whispered. Many people there felt queer, and grew pale in the suspense, and the general gaze was fixed upon the prisoner with a coarse curiosity, of which he seemed resolutely unconscious; and five minutes passed by and a minute or two more — it seemed a very long time — the minute-hands of the watches hardly got on at all — and then the door of the jury-room opened, and the gentlemen came stumbling in, taking off their hats, and silence was called. There was no need; and the foreman, with a very pale and frightened face, handed down the paper.

And the simple message sounded through the court —

'Guilty!'

And Mr. Dangerfield bowed, and lifted up a white, smiling countenance, all over shining now with a slight moisture.

Then there was some whispering among the conductors of the prosecution; and the leader stood up to say, that, in consequence of a communication from the law officers in England, where the prisoner was to be arraigned on a capital indictment, involving serious consequences to others — for the murder, he meant, of Mr. Beauclerc — the crown wished that he should stand over for judgment until certain steps in that case had been taken at the other side. Then the court enquired whether they had considered so and so; and the leader explained and satisfied his lordship, who made an order accordingly. And Mr. Dangerfield made a low bow, with a smirk, to his lordship, and a nod, with the same, to his counsel; and he turned, and the turnkey and darkness received him.

Mr. Dangerfield, or shall we say the villain, Charles Archer, with characteristic promptitude and coolness, availed himself of the interval to try every influence he could once have set in motion, and as it were to gather his strength for a mighty tussle with the king of terrors, when his pale fingers should tap at his cell door. I have seen two of his letters, written with consummate plausibility and adroitness, and which have given me altogether a very high idea of his powers. But they were all received with a terrifying coldness or with absolute silence. There was no reasoning against an intuition. Every human being felt that the verdict was true, and that the judgment, when it came would be right: and recoiled from the smiling gentleman, over whose white head the hempen circle hung like a diabolical glory Dangerfield, who had something of the Napoleonic faculty of never 'making pictures' to himself, saw this fact in its literality, and acquiesced in it.

He was a great favourite with the gaoler, whom, so long as he had the command of his money, he had treated with a frank and convivial magnificence, and who often sat up to one o'clock with him, and enjoyed his stories prodigiously, for the sarcastic man of the world lost none of his amusing qualities: and — the fatigues of his barren correspondence ended — slept, and eat, and drank, pretty much as usual.

This Giant Despair, who carried the keys at his girdle, did not often get so swell a pilgrim into his castle, and was secretly flattered by his familiarity, and cheered by his devilish gaiety, and was quite willing to make rules bend a little, and the place as pleasant as possible to his distinguished guest, and give him in fact, all his heart could desire, except a chance of escape.

'I've one move left — nothing very excellent — but sometimes, you know, a scurvy card enough will win the trick. Between you and me, my good friend, I have a thing to tell that 'twill oblige my Lord Dunoran very much to hear. My Lord Townshend will want his vote. He means to prove his peerage immediately and he may give a poor devil a lift, you see — hey?

So next day there came my Lord Dunoran and a magistrate, not Mr. Lowe — Mr. Dangerfield professed a contempt for him, and preferred any other. So it was Mr. Armstrong this time, and that is all I know of him.

Lord Dunoran was more pale than usual; indeed he felt like to faint on coming into the presence of the man who had made his life so indescribably miserable, and throughout the interview he scarcely spoke six sentences, and not one word of reproach. The villain was down. It was enough.

Mr. Dangerfield was, perhaps, a little excited. He talked more volubly than usual, and once or twice there came a little flush over his pallid forehead and temples. But, on the whole, he was very much the same brisk, sardonic talker and polite gentleman whom Mr. Mervyn had so often discoursed with in Chapelizod. On this occasion, his narrative ran on uninterruptedly and easily, but full of horrors, like a satanic reverie.

‘Upon my honour, Sir,’ said Paul Dangerfield, with his head erect, ‘I bear Mr. Lowe no ill-will. He is, you’ll excuse me, a thief-catcher by nature. He can’t help it. He thinks he works from duty, public spirit, and other fine influences; I know it is simply from an irrepressible instinct. I do assure you, I never yet bore any man the least ill-will. I’ve had to remove two or three, not because I hated them — I did not care a button for any — but because their existence was incompatible with my safety, which, Sir, is the first thing to me, as yours is to you. Human laws we respect — ha, ha! — you and I, because they subserve our convenience, and just so long. When they tend to our destruction, ’tis, of course, another thing.’

This, it must be allowed, was frank enough; there was no bargain here; and what ever Mr. Dangerfield’s plan might have been, it certainly did not involve making terms with Lord Dunoran beforehand, or palliating or disguising what he had done. So on he went.

‘I believe in luck, Sir, and there’s the sum of my creed. I was wrong in taking that money from Beauclerc *when* I did, ’twas in the midst of a dismal run of ill-fortune. There was nothing unfair in taking it, though. The man was a cheat. It was not really his, and no one could tell to whom it belonged; ’twas no more his because I had found it in his pocket than if I had found it in a barrel on the high seas. I killed him to prevent his killing me. Precisely the same motive, though in your case neither so reasonable nor so justifiable, as that on which, in the name of justice, which means only the collective selfishness of my fellow-creatures, you design in cool blood to put me publicly to death. ’Tis only that you, gentlemen, think it contributes to your safety. That’s the spirit of human laws. I applaud and I adopt it in my own case. Pray, Sir’ (to Mr. Armstrong), ‘do me the honour to try this snuff, ’tis real French rappee.

‘But, Sir, though I have had to do these things, which you or any other man of nerve would do with a sufficient motive, I never hurt any man without a necessity for it. My money I’ve made fairly, though in great measure by play, and no man can say I ever promised that which I did not perform. ’Tis quite true I killed Beauclerc in the manner described by Irons. That was put upon me, and I could not help it. I did right. ’Tis also true, I killed that scoundrel Glascock, as Irons related. Shortly after, being in trouble about money and in danger of arrest, I went abroad, and changed my name and disguised my person.

‘At Florence I was surprised to find a letter directed to Charles Archer. You may suppose it was not agreeable. But, of course, I would not claim it; and it went after all to him for whom it was intended. There was actually there a Mr. Charles Archer, dying of a decline. Three respectable English residents had made his acquaintance, knowing nothing of him but that he was a sick countryman. When I learned all about it, I, too, got an introduction to him; and when he died, I prevailed with one of them to send a note signed by himself and two more to the London lawyer who was pursuing me, simply stating that Charles Archer had died in Florence, to their knowledge, they having seen him during his last illness, and attended his funeral.

‘I told them that he had begged me to see this done, as family affairs made it necessary; ’twas as well to use the event — and they did it without difficulty. I do not know how the obituary announcement got into the newspapers — it was not my doing — and naming him as the evidence in the prosecution of my Lord Dunoran was a great risk, and challenged contradiction, but none came. Sir Philip Drayton was one of the signatures, and it satisfied the attorney.

‘When I came to Chapelizod, though, I soon found that the devil had not done with me, and that I was like to have some more unpleasant work on my hands. I did not know that Irons was above ground, nor he either that I was living. We had wandered far enough asunder in the interval to make the chances very many we should never meet again. Yet here we met, and I knew him, and he me. But he’s a nervous man, and whimsical.

‘He was afraid of me, and never used his secret to force money from me. Still it was not pleasant. I did not know but that if I went away he might tell it. I weighed the matter; ’tis true I thought there might have come a necessity to deal with him; but I would not engage in anything of the sort, without an absolute necessity. But Doctor Sturk was different — a bull-headed, conceited fool. I thought I remembered his face at Newmarket, and changed as it was, I was right, and learned all about him from Irons. I saw his mind was at work on me, though he could not find me out, and I could not well know what course a man like that might take, or how much he might have seen or remembered. That was not pleasant either.

‘I had taken a whim to marry; there’s no need to mention names; but I supposed I should have met no difficulty with the lady — relying on my wealth. Had I married, I should have left the country.

‘However, it was not to be. It might have been well for all had I never thought of it. For I’m a man who, when he once places an object before him, will not give it up without trying. I can wait as well as strike, and know what’s to be got by one and t’other. Well, what I’ve once proposed to myself I don’t forego, and that helped to hold me where I was.

‘The nature of the beast, Sturk, and his circumstances were dangerous. ’Twas necessary for my safety to make away with him. I tried it by several ways. I made a quarrel between him and Toole, but somehow it never came to a duel; and a worse one between him and Nutter, but that too failed to come to a fight. It was to be, Sir, and my time had come. What I long suspected arrived, and he told me in his own study he knew me, and wanted money. The money didn’t matter; of that I could spare abundance, though ’tis the nature of such a tax to swell to confiscation. But the man who gets a sixpence from you on such terms is a tyrant and your master, and I can’t brook slavery.

‘I owed the fellow no ill-will; upon my honour, as a gentleman; I forgive him, as I hope he has forgiven me. It was all fair he should try. We can’t help our instincts. There’s something wolfish in us all. I was vexed at his d —— d folly, though, and sorry to have to put him out of the way. However, I saw I must be rid of him.

‘There was no immediate hurry. I could afford to wait a little. I thought he would walk home on the night I met him. He had gone into town in Colonel Strafford’s carriage. It returned early in the afternoon without him. I knew his habits; he dined at Keating’s ordinary at four o’clock; and Mercer, whom he had to speak with, would not see him, on his bill of exchange business, in his counting-house. Sturk told me so; and he must wait till halfpast five at his lodgings. What he had to say was satisfactory, and I allowed five minutes for that.

‘Then he might come home in a coach. But he was a close-fisted fellow and loved a shilling; so it was probable he would walk. His usual path was by the Star Fort, and through the thorn woods between that and the

Magazine. So I met him. I said I was for town, and asked him how he had fared in his business; and turned with him, walking slowly as though to hear. I had that loaded whalebone in my pocket, and my sword, but no pistol. It was not the place for firearms; the noise would have made an alarm. So I turned sharp upon him and felled him. He knew by an intuition what was about to happen, for as the blow fell he yelled “murder.” That d —— d fellow, Nutter, in the wood at our right, scarce a hundred yards away, halloed in answer. I had but time to strike him two blows on the top of his head that might have killed an ox. I felt the metal sink at the second in his skull, and would have pinked him through with my sword, but the fellow was close on me, and I thought I knew the voice for Nutter’s. I stole through the bushes swiftly, and got along into the hollow under the Magazine, and thence on.

‘There was a slight fog upon the park, and I met no one. I got across the park-wall, over the quarry, and so down by the stream at Coyles, and on to the road near my house. No one was in sight, so I walked down to Chapelizod to show myself. Near the village tree I met Dr. Toole. I asked him if Nutter was in the club, and he said no — nor at home, he believed, for his boy had seen him more than half-an-hour ago leave his hall door, dressed for the road.

‘So I made as if disappointed, and turned back again, assured that Nutter was the man. I was not easy, for I could not be sure that Sturk was dead. Had I been allowed a second or two more, I’d have made sure work of it. Still I was *nearly* sure. I could not go back now and finish the business. I could not say whether he lay there any longer, and if he did, how many men Nutter might have about him by this time. So, Sir, the cast was made, I could not mend it, and must abide my fortune be it good or ill.

‘Not a servant saw me go out or return. I came in quietly, and went into my bedroom and lighted a candle. ’Twas a blunder, a blot, but a thousand to one it was not hit. I washed my hands. There was some blood on the whalebone, and on my fingers. I rolled the loaded whalebone up in a red handkerchief, and locked it into my chest of drawers, designing to destroy it, which I did, so soon as the servants were in bed; and then I felt a chill and a slight shiver;— ’twas only that I was an older man. I was cool enough, but a strain on the mind was more to me then than twenty years before. So I drank a dram, and I heard a noise outside my window. ’Twas then that stupid dog, Cluffe, saw me, as he swears.

‘Well, next day Sturk was brought home; Nutter was gone, and the suspicion attached to him. That was well. But, though Pell pronounced that he must die without recovering consciousness, and that the trepan would kill him instantaneously, I had a profound misgiving that he might recover speech and recollection. I wrote as exact a statement of the case to my London physician — a very great man — as I could collect, and had his answer, which agreed exactly with Doctor Pell’s. ’Twas agreed on all hands the trepan would be certain death. Days, weeks, or months — it mattered not what the interval — no returning glimmer of memory could light his deathbed. Still, Sir, I presaged evil. He was so long about dying.

‘I’m telling you everything, you see. I offered Irons what would have been a fortune to him — he was attending occasionally in Sturk’s sick-room, and assisting in dressing his wounds — to watch his opportunity and smother him with a wet handkerchief. I would have done it myself afterwards, on the sole opportunity that offered, had I not been interrupted.

‘I engaged, with Mrs. Sturk’s approval, Doctor Dillon. I promised him five hundred guineas to trepan him. That young villain, I could prove, bled Alderman Sherlock to death to please the alderman’s young wife. Who’d have thought the needy profligate would have hesitated to plunge his trepan into the brain of a dying man — a corpse, you may say, already — for five hundred guineas? I was growing feverish under the protracted suspense. I was haunted by the apprehension of Sturk’s recovering his consciousness and speech, in which case I should have been reduced to my present rueful situation; and I was resolved to end that cursed uncertainty.

‘When I thought Dillon had forgot his appointment in his swinish vices, I turned my mind another way. I resolved to leave Sturk to *nature*, and clench the case against Nutter, by evidence I would have compelled Irons to swear. As it turned out, *that* would have been the better way. Had Sturk died without speaking, and Nutter hanged for his death, the question could have opened no more, and Irons would have been nailed to my interest.

‘I viewed the problem every way. I saw the danger from the first, and provided many expedients, which, one after the other, fortune frustrated. I can’t confidently say even now that it would have been wiser to leave Sturk to die, as the doctors said he must. I had a foreboding, in spite of all they could say, he would wake up before he died and denounce me. If ’twas a mistake, ’twas a fated one, and I could not help it.

‘So, Sir, you see I’ve nothing to blame myself for — though all has broken down.

‘I guessed when I heard the sound at the hall-door of my house that Sturk or Irons had spoken, and that they were come to take me. Had I broken through them, I might have made my escape. It was long odds against me, but still I had a chance — that’s all. And the matter affecting my Lord Dunoran’s innocence, I’m ready to swear, if it can serve his son — having been the undesigned cause of some misfortunes to you, my lord, in my lifetime.’

Lord Dunoran said nothing, he only bowed his head.

So Dangerfield, when his statement respecting the murder of Beauclerc had been placed clearly in writing, made oath of its truth, and immediately when this was over (he had, while they were preparing the statement, been walking up and down his flagged chamber), he grew all on a sudden weak, and then very flushed, and they thought he was about to take a fit; but speedily he recovered himself, and in five minutes’ time was much as he had been at the commencement.

After my lord and Mr. Armstrong went away, he had the gaoler with him, and seemed very sanguine about getting his pardon, and was very brisk and chatty, and said he’d prepare his petition in the morning, and got in large paper for drafting it on, and said, ‘I suppose at the close of this commission they will bring me up for judgment; that will be the day after tomorrow, and I must have my petition ready.’ And he talked away like a man who had got a care off his mind, and is in high spirits; and when grinning, beetle-browed Giant Despair shook his hand, and wished him luck at parting, he stopped him, laying his white hand upon his herculean arm, and, said he, ‘I’ve a point to urge they don’t suspect. I’m sure of my liberty; what do you think of that — hey?’ and he laughed. ‘And when I get away what do you say to leaving this place and coming after me? Upon my life, you must, Sir. I like you, and if you don’t, rot me, but I’ll come and take you away myself.’

So they parted in a sprightly, genial way; and in the morning the turnkey called the gaoler up at an unseasonable hour, and told him that Mr. Dangerfield was dead.

The gaoler lay in the passage outside the prisoner's cell, with his bed across the door, which was locked, and visited him at certain intervals. The first time he went in there was nothing remarkable. It was but half-an-hour after the gaoler had left. Mr. Dangerfield, for so he chose to be called, was dozing very quietly in his bed, and just opened his eyes, and nodded on awaking, as though he would say, 'Here I am,' but did not speak.

When, three hours later, the officer entered, having lighted his candle at the lamp, he instantly recoiled. 'The room felt so queer,' said he, 'I thought I'd a fainted, and I drew back. I tried it again a bit further in, and 'twas worse, and the candle almost went out— 'twas as if the devil was there. I drew back quick, and I called the prisoner, but no word was there. Then I locks the door, and called Michael; and when he came we called the prisoner again, but to no purpose. Then we opened the door, and I made a rush, and smashed the glass of the window to let in air. We had to wait outside a good while before we could venture in; and when we did, there he was lying like a man asleep in his bed, with his nightcap on, and his hand under his cheek, and he smiling down on the flags, very sly, like a man who has won something cleverly. He was dead, and his limbs cold by this time.'

There was an inquest. Mr. Dangerfield 'looked very composed in death,' says an old letter, and he lay 'very like sleep,' in his bed, 'his fingers under his cheek and temple,' with the countenance turned 'a little downward, as if looking upon something on the floor,' with an 'ironical smile;' so that the ineffaceable lines of sarcasm, I suppose, were traceable upon that jaundiced mask.

Some said it was a heart disease, and others an exhalation from the prison floor. He was dead, that was all the jury could say for certain, and they found 'twas 'by a visitation of God.' The gaoler, being a superstitious fellow, was plaguily nervous about Mr. Dangerfield's valediction, and took clerical advice upon it, and for several months after became a very serious and ascetic character; and I do believe that the words were spoken in reality with that sinister jocularity in which his wit sported like churchyard meteors, when crimes and horrors were most in his mind.

The niece of this gaoler said she well remembered her uncle, when a very old man, three years before the rebellion, relating that Mr. Dangerfield came by his death in consequence of some charcoal in a warming pan he had prevailed on him to allow him for his bed, he having complained of cold. He got it with a design to make away with himself, and it was forgotten in the room. He placed it under the bed, and waited until the first call of the turnkey was over, and then he stuffed his surtout into the flue of the small fireplace, which afforded the only ventilation of his cell, and so was smothered. It was not till the winter following that the gaoler discovered, on lighting a fire there, that the chimney was stopped. He had a misgiving about the charcoal before, and now he was certain. Of course, he said nothing about his suspicions at first, nor of his discovery afterwards.

So, sometimes in my musings, when I hear of clever young fellows taking to wild courses, and audaciously rushing — where good Christians pray they may not be led — into temptation, there rises before me, with towering forehead and scoffing face, a white image smoking his pipe grimly by a plutonic fire; and I remember the words of the son of Sirach— 'The knowledge of wickedness is not wisdom, neither at any time the counsel of sinners prudence.'

Mr. Irons, of course, left Chapelizod. He took with him the hundred guineas which Mr. Dangerfield had given him, as also, it was said, a handsome addition made to that fund by open-handed Dr. Walsingham; but somehow, being much pressed for time, he forgot good Mistress Irons, who remained behind and let lodgings pretty much as usual, and never heard from that time forth anything very distinct about him; and latterly it was thought was, on the whole, afraid rather than desirous of his turning up again.

Doctor Toole, indeed, related in his own fashion, at the Phœnix, some years later, a rumour which, however, may have turned out to be no better than smoke.

'News of Zekiel, by Jove! The prophet was found, Sir, with a friend in the neighbourhood of Hounslow, with a brace of pistols, a mask, a handful of slugs, and a powder-horn in his pocket, which he first gave to a constable, and then made his compliments to a justice o' the peace, who gave him and his friend a note of commendation to my Lord Chief Justice, and his lordship took such a fancy to both that, by George, he sent them in a procession in his best one-horse coach, with a guard of honour and a chaplain, the high-sheriff dutifully attending, through the City, where, by the king's commands, they were invested with the grand collar of the order of the hempen cravat, Sir, and with such an attention to their comfort they were not required to descend from their carriage, by George, and when it drove away they remained in an easy, genteel posture, with their hands behind their backs, in a sort of an ecstasy, and showed their good humour by dancing a reel together with singular lightness and agility, and keeping it up till they were both out of breath, when they remained quiet for about half an hour to cool, and then went off to pay their respects to the President of the College of Surgeons,' and so forth; but I don't think Irons had pluck for a highwayman, and I can't, therefore, altogether, believe the story.

We all know Aunt Rebecca pretty well by this time. And looking back upon her rigorous treatment of Puddock, recorded in past chapters of this tale, I think I can now refer it all to its true source.

She was queer, quarrelsome, and sometimes nearly intolerable; but she was generous and offhanded, and made a settlement, reserving only a life interest, and nearly all afterwards to Puddock.

'But in a marriage settlement,' said the attorney (so they called themselves in those days), 'it is usual; and here his tone became so gentle that I can't say positively what he uttered.'

'Oh — a — *that*,' she said, 'a — well, you can speak to Lieutenant Puddock, if you wish. I only say for myself a life estate; Lieutenant Puddock can deal with the remainder as he pleases.' And Aunt Rebecca actually blushed a pretty little pink blush. I believe she did not think there was much practical utility in the attorney's suggestion, and if an angel in her hearing had said of her what he once said of Sarah, she would not have laughed indeed, but I think she would have shaken her head.

She was twenty years and upwards his senior; but I don't know which survived the other, for in this life the battle is not always to the strong.

Their wedding was a very quiet affair, and the talk of the village was soon directed from it to the approaching splendours of the union of Miss Gertrude and my Lord Dunoran.

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE STORY ENDS.

The old minutes of the Irish House of Lords can better explain than I the parliamentary process by which all the consequences of the judgment against the late Lord Dunoran were abrogated, as respected his son. An ancient name rescued from the shadow of dishonour, and still greater estates, made my lord and lady as happy as things can. So for the recluse Mervyn, and the fair Gertrude Chattesworth, our story ends like a fairy tale.

A wedding in those days was a celebration and a feast; and it was deemed fitting that the union of Gertrude Chattesworth and the youthful Lord Dunoran should await the public vindication of his family, and the authentic restoration of all their rights and possessions. On the eve of this happy day, leaning on the youthful arm of kindly Dan Loftus, there came a figure not seen there for many months before, very much changed, grown, oh, how old! It was the good rector, who asked to see Miss Gertrude.

And so when he entered the room, she ran to meet him with a little cry; and she threw her arms about his neck and sobbed a good deal on that old, cassocked shoulder, and longed to ask him to let her be as a daughter to him. But he understood her and, after a while, he wished her joy, very kindly. And my Lord Dunoran came in, and was very glad to see him, and very tender and reverent too; and the good doctor, as he could not be at the wedding, wished to say a word ‘on the eve of the great change which my dear young friend — little Gertie, we used to call her — is about to make.’ And so he talked to them both. It was an affectionate little homily, and went on something in this sort —

‘But I need not say how honourable an estate it is, only, my lord, you will always remember your wooing is not over with your wedding. As you did first choose your love, you must hereafter love your choice. In Solomon’s Song, the Redeemer the bridegroom, and the Church His spouse, one calls the other “love,” to show that though both did not honour alike, yet both should love alike.

‘And always be kind, and the kinder the more her weakness needs it. Elkanah says to his wife, “Am not I better unto thee than ten sons?” As though he favoured her more for that which she thought herself despised. So a good husband will not love his wife less, but comfort her more for her infirmities, as this man did, that she may bear with his infirmities too. And if she be jealous — ay, they will be jealous— ‘

He spoke in a reverie, with a sad fond look, not a smile, but something like a smile, and a little pensive shake of the head; he was thinking, perhaps, of very old times. And ‘my lord’ glanced with a sly smile at Gertrude, who was looking on the carpet with, I think, a blush, and I’m sure saw my lord’s glance seeking hers, but made as though she did not.

‘If she be jealous, her jealousy, you know, is still the measure of her love. Bless God that he hath made thee to her so dear a treasure that she cannot hide her fears and trouble lest she should lose even a portion of thy love; and let thy heart thank *her* too.

‘And if the husband would reprove her, it must be in such a mood as if he did chide with himself, and his words like Jonathan’s arrows, which were not shot to hurt but to give warning. She must have no words but loving words from thee. She is come to thee as to a sanctuary to defend her from hurt, and canst thou hurt her thyself? Does the king trample his crown? Solomon calls the wife the crown of her husband; therefore, he who despiseth her woundeth his own honour. I am resolved to honour virtue in what sex soever I find it.’

The doctor was speaking this like a soliloquy, slowly, and looking on the floor.

‘And I think in general I shall find it more in women than in men.’

Here the young people exchanged another smile, and the doctor looked up and went on. ‘Ay — though weaker and more infirmly guarded, I believe they are better; for everyone is so much the better, by how much he comes nearer to God; and man in nothing is more like him than in being merciful. Yet woman is far more merciful than man. God is said to be love; and I am sure in that quality woman everywhere transcends.’

The doctor’s serious discourses were a mosaic of old divines and essayists, and Greek and Latin authors, as the writings of the Apostolic Fathers are, in a great measure, a tesselation of holy writ. He assumed that everybody knew where to find them. His business was only to repeat the truth wherever gleaned. So I can't tell how much was the doctor's and how much theirs.

And when he had done upon this theme, and had risen to take leave, he said in his gentle and simple way —

'And I brought you a little present — a necklace and earrings — oldfashioned, I'm afraid — they were my dear mother's diamonds, and were to have been— '

Here there was a little pause — they knew what was in his mind — and he dried his eyes quickly.

'And won't you take them, Gertie, for poor little Lily's keepsake? And so — well, well — little Gerty — I taught you your catechism — dear, dear! Little Gerty going to be married! And may God Almighty bless her to you, and you to her, with length of days, and all goodness; and with children, the inheritors of your fair forms, and all your graces, to gladden your home with love and duty, and to close your eyes at last with tender reverence; and to walk after you, when your time is over, in the same happy and honourable paths.'

Miss Gertrude was crying, and with two quick little steps she took his knotted old hand, and kissed it fervently and said —

'I thank you, Sir, you've always been so good to me; I wish I could tell you — and won't you come to us, Sir, and see us very often — when we are settled — and bring good Mr. Loftus, and dear old Sally; and thank you, Sir, with all my heart, for your beautiful presents, and for your noble advice, Sir, which I will never forget, and for your blessing, and I wish I could show you how very much I love and reverence you.'

And my Lord Dunoran, though he was smiling, looked as if he had been crying too. But men, you know, don't like to be detected in that weakness, though everybody knows there are moments when *bonus Homerus dormitat*.

Good Doctor Walsingham made Dan Loftus his curate. But when in the course of time a day came when the old rector was to meet his parishioners no more, and the parish was vacant, I do not hear that honest Dan succeeded to it. Indeed I'm afraid that it needs sometimes a spice of the devil, or at least of the world, to get on in the Church. But Lord Dunoran took him with him on the embassage to Lisbon, and afterwards he remained in his household as his domestic chaplain, much beloved and respected.

And there he had entire command of his lordship’s fine library, and compiled and composed, and did everything but publish and marry.

In due time the fair Magnolia made the amorous and formidable O’Flaherty happy. Single blessedness was not for her, and it is due to her to say, she turned out one of the best house-wives in Chapelizod, and made the fireworker account for every shilling of his pay and other revenues, and managed the commissariat and all other departments to admiration. She cured her lord very nearly of boozing, and altogether of duelling. One combat only he fought after his marriage, and it was rumoured that the blooming Magnolia actually chastised the gigantic delinquent with her own fair hand. That, however, I don’t believe. But unquestionably she did, in other ways, lead the contumacious warrior so miserable a life for some months after that, as he averred to the major, with tears in his eyes, it would have been ‘more to his teeste to have been shot on the occasion.’ At first, of course, the fireworker showed fight, and sometimes broke loose altogether; but in the end ‘his mouth was made,’ his paces formed, and he became a very serviceable and willing animal. But if she was strong she was also generous, and very popular for her good nature and fearlessness. And they made a very happy, as well as a comely couple. And many handsome children were nursed at her fair breast, and drew many a Celtic virtue from that kindly fountain and one of the finest grenadiers who lay in his red coat and sash within the French lines on the field of Waterloo, in that great bivouac which knows no *reveille* save the last trumpet, was a scion of that fine military stock.

At length came the day of the nuptials — a grand day for Belmont — a grand day for the town. Half-a-dozen flags were up and floating in the autumnal sun. The band of the Royal Irish Artillery played noble and cheering strains upon the lawns of Belmont. There were pipers and fiddlers beside for rustic merry-makers under the poplars. Barrels of strong ale and sparkling cider were broached on the grass; and plenty of substantial fare kept the knives and forks clattering under the marquees by the hedgerow. The rude and hospitable feudalism of old times had not died out yet; marriage being an honourable estate, the bride and bridegroom did not steal away in a travelling carriage, trying to pass for something else, to unknown regions, but remained courageously upon the premises, the central figures of a genial gala.

Need I describe the wedding? It always seems to me that I saw it, and see it still, I've heard the old folk talk it over so often. The reader's fancy will take that business off my hands. 'What's a play without a marriage? and what is a marriage if one sees nothing of it?' says Sir Roger in Gay's tragi-comic pastoral. 'Let him have his humour, but set the doors wide open, that we may see how all goes on.'

(*Sir Roger at the door, pointing*.)

'So natural! d'ye see now, neighbours? The ring, i'faith. To have and to hold! Right again; well play'd, doctor; well play'd, son *Thomas*. Come, come, I'm satisfied. Now for the fiddles and dances.'

And so are we — now, then, for the fiddles and dances! And let those who love to foot it keep it up — after sack-posset and stocking thrown — till two o'clock i' the morning; and the elder folk, and such as are 'happy thinking,' get home betimes; and smiling still, get to their beds; and with hearty laughter — as it were mellowed by distance — still in their ears, and the cheery scrape of the fiddle, all pervading, still humming on; and the pleasant scuffle of light feet, and with kindly ancient faces, and blushing young ones all round in airy portraiture; grinning, roguish, faithful, fuddled old servants, beflowered and liveried, pronouncing benedictions at the foot of the stairs, and pocketing their vails; and buxom maids in their best Sunday finery, giggling and staring, with eyes starting out of their heads, at the capering 'quality,', through the halfopen doors; let us try to remember the 'sentiment' delivered by that ridiculous dog, Tom Toole, after supper, at which we all laughed so heartily. And, ah! there were some pretty faces that ought to have been there — faces that were pleasant to see, but that won't smile or blush any more; and I missed them, though I said nothing. And so, altogether, it went down among my pleasant recollections, and I think will always remain so, for it was all kindly, and had its root in the heart; and the affections were up and stirring, and mixed in the dance with the graces, and shook hands kindly with old father Bacchus; and so I pull my nightcap about my ears, drop the extinguisher on the candle, and wish you all pleasant dreams.

THE END

WYLDER'S HAND

Published in three volumes in 1864 and the first of Le Fanu's sensation novels, *Wylder's Hand* contains many of the hallmarks of that genre such as a mysterious disappearance, a loveless marriage and blackmail. A psychological thriller, it relates the mystery of Mark Wylder, who vanishes without trace shortly before he can marry Dorcas Brandon and safeguard the ownership of Brandon Hall. Before its publication in book form, it had been serialised in the *Dublin University Magazine* from June 1863 to February 1864.

The novel is the first of Le Fanu's books to be set in England. The success of *The House by the Churchyard* allowed him to negotiate a lucrative contract with the London publisher Richard Bentley. *Wylder's Hand* (and subsequent mystery thrillers) were written in response to Bentley's demand for a 'story of an English subject and in modern times'.

Richard Bentley (1794–1871) was one of the leading 19th century publishers, establishing the profitable and well-regarded Bentley's Miscellany. Bentley was successful in convincing Le Fanu to tailor his tales for an English audience to increase sales. Unlike his fellow Irish writer Charles Lever, who insisted on adhering to Irish subject matter, Le Fanu took this advice, using more English themes and therefore profiting by it.

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An undated portrait of Le Fanu

CHAPTER I.

RELATING HOW I DROVE THROUGH THE VILLAGE OF GYLINGDEN WITH MARK WYLDER'S LETTER IN MY VALISE.

It was late in the autumn, and I was skimming along, through a rich English county, in a postchaise, among tall hedgerows gilded, like all the landscape, with the slanting beams of sunset. The road makes a long and easy descent into the little town of Gylingden, and down this we were going at an exhilarating pace, and the jingle of the vehicle sounded like sledge-bells in my ears, and its swaying and jerking were pleasant and lifelike. I fancy I was in one of those moods which, under similar circumstances, I sometimes experience still — a semi-narcotic excitement, silent but delightful.

An undulating landscape, with a homely farmstead here and there, and plenty of old English timber scattered grandly over it, extended mistily to my right; on the left the road is overtopped by masses of noble forest. The old park of Brandon lies there, more than four miles from end to end. These masses of solemn and discoloured verdure, the faint but splendid lights, and long filmy shadows, the slopes and hollows — my eyes wandered over them all with that strange sense of unreality, and that mingling of sweet and bitter fancy, with which we revisit a scene familiar in very remote and early childhood, and which has haunted a long interval of maturity and absence, like a romantic reverie.

As I looked through the chaise-windows, every moment presented some group, or outline, or homely object, for years forgotten; and now, with a strange surprise how vividly remembered and how affectionately greeted! We drove by the small old house at the left, with its double gable and pretty grass garden, and trim yews and modern lilacs and laburnums, backed by the grand timber of the park. It was the parsonage, and old bachelor Doctor Crewe, the rector, in my nonage, still stood, in memory, at the door, in his black shorts and gaiters, with his hands in his pockets, and a puckered smile on his hard ruddy countenance, as I approached. He smiled little on others I believe, but always kindly upon me. This general liking for children and instinct of smiling on them is one source of the delightful illusions which make the remembrance of early days so like a dream of Paradise, and give us, at starting, such false notions of our value.

There was a little fair-haired child playing on the ground before the steps as I whirled by. The old rector had long passed away; the shorts, gaiters, and smile — a phantom; and nature, who had gathered in the past, was providing for the future.

The pretty mill-road, running up through Redman's Dell, dank and dark with tall romantic trees, was left behind in another moment; and we were now traversing the homely and antique street of the little town, with its queer shops and solid steep-roofed residences. Up Church-street I contrived a peep at the old gray tower where the chimes hung; and as we turned the corner a glance at the 'Brandon Arms.' How very small and low that palatial hostelry of my earlier recollections had grown! There were new faces at the door. It was only two-and-twenty years ago, and I was then but eleven years old. A retrospect of a score of years or so, at three-and-thirty, is a much vaster affair than a much longer one at fifty.

The whole thing seemed like yesterday; and as I write, I open my eyes and start and cry, 'can it be twenty, five-and-twenty, aye, by Jove! five-and-thirty, years since then?' How my days have flown! And I think when another such yesterday shall have arrived, where shall I be?

The first ten years of my life were longer than all the rest put together, and I think would continue to be so were my future extended to an ante-Noachian span. It is the first ten that emerge from nothing, and commencing in a point, it is during them that consciousness, memory — all the faculties grow, and the experience of sense is so novel, crowded, and astounding. It is this beginning at a point, and expanding to the immense disk of our present range of sensuous experience, that gives to them so prodigious an illusory perspective, and makes us in childhood, measuring futurity by them, form so wild and exaggerated an estimate of the duration of human life. But, I beg your pardon.

My journey was from London. When I had reached my lodgings, after my little excursion up the Rhine, upon my table there lay, among the rest, one letter — there generally *is* in an overdue bundle — which I viewed with suspicion. I could not in the least tell why. It was a broad-faced letter, of bluish complexion, and had made inquisition after me in the country — had asked for me at Queen's Folkstone; and, *vised* by my cousin, had presented itself at the Friars, in Shropshire, and thence proceeded by Sir Harry's direction (there was the autograph) to Nolton Hall; thence again to Ilchester, whence my fiery and decisive old aunt sent it straight back to my cousin, with a whisk of her pen which seemed to say, 'How the plague can I tell where the puppy is?— 'tis your business, Sir, not mine, to find him out!' And so my cousin despatched it to my headquarters in town, where from the table it looked up in my face, with a broad red seal, and a countenance scarred and marred all over with various postmarks, erasures, and transverse directions, the scars and furrows of disappointment and adventure.

It had not a good countenance, somehow. The original lines were not prepossessing. The handwriting I knew as one sometimes knows a face, without being able to remember who the plague it belongs to; but, still, with an unpleasant association about it. I examined it carefully, and laid it down unopened. I went through half-a-dozen others, and recurred to it, and puzzled over its exterior again, and again postponed what I fancied would prove a disagreeable discovery; and this happened every now and again, until I had quite exhausted my budget, and then I did open it, and looked straight to the signature.

'Pooh! Mark Wylder,' I exclaimed, a good deal relieved.

Mark Wylder! Yes, Master Mark could not hurt *me*. There was nothing about him to excite the least uneasiness; on the contrary, I believe he liked me as well as he was capable of liking anybody, and it was now seven years since we had met.

I have often since thought upon the odd sensation with which I hesitated over his unopened letter; and now, remembering how the breaking of that seal resembled, in my life, the breaking open of a portal through which I entered a labyrinth, or rather a catacomb, where for many days I groped and stumbled, looking for light, and was, in a manner, lost, hearing strange sounds, witnessing imperfectly strange sights, and, at last, arriving at a dreadful chamber — a sad sort of superstition steals over me.

I had then been his working junior in the cause of Wylder *v.* Trustees of Brandon, minor — Dorcas Brandon, his own cousin. There was a complicated cousinship among these Brandons, Wylders, and Lakes — inextricable intermarriages, which, five years ago, before I renounced the bar, I had at my fingers' ends, but which had now relapsed into haze. There must have been some damnable taint in the blood of the common ancestor — a spice of the insane and the diabolical. They were an ill-conditioned race — that is to say, every now and then there emerged a miscreant, with a pretty evident vein of madness. There was Sir Jonathan Brandon, for instance, who ran his own nephew through the lungs in a duel fought in a paroxysm of Cencian jealousy; and afterwards shot his coachman dead upon the box through his coach-window, and finally died in Vienna, whither he had absconded, of a pike-thrust received from a sentry in a brawl.

The Wylders had not much to boast of, even in contrast with that wicked line. They had produced their madmen and villains, too; and there had been frequent intermarriages — not very often happy. There had been many lawsuits, frequent disinheritings, and even worse doings. The Wylders of Brandon appear very early in history; and the Wylder arms, with their legend, ‘resurgam,’ stands in bold relief over the great door of Brandon Hall. So there were Wylders of Brandon, and Brandons of Brandon. In one generation, a Wylder illusing his wife and hating his children, would cut them all off, and send the estate bounding back again to the Brandons. The next generation or two would amuse themselves with a lawsuit, until the old Brandon type reappeared in some bachelor brother or uncle, with a Jezebel on his left hand, and an attorney on his right, and, presto! the estates were back again with the Wylders.

A ‘statement of title’ is usually a dry affair. But that of the dynasty of Brandon Hall was a truculent romance. Their very ‘wills’ were spiced with the devilment of the ‘testators,’ and abounded in insinuations and even language which were scandalous.

Here is Mark Wylder’s letter: —

‘DEAR CHARLES — Of course you have heard of my good luck, and how kind poor Dickie — from whom I never expected anything — proved at last. It was a great windfall for a poor devil like me; but, after all, it was only right, for it ought never to have been his at all. I went down and took possession on the 4th, the tenants very glad, and so they might well be; for, between ourselves, Dickie, poor fellow, was not always pleasant to deal with. He let the roof all out of repair, and committed waste beside in timber he had no right to in life, as I am told; but that don’t signify much, only the house will cost me a pretty penny to get it into order and furnish. The rental is five thousand a-year and some hundreds, and the rents can be got up a bit

— so Larkin tells me. Do you know anything of him? He says he did business for your uncle once. He seems a clever fellow — a bit too clever, perhaps — and was too much master here, I suspect, in poor Dickie's reign. Tell me all you can make out about him. It is a long time since I saw you, Charles; I'm grown brown, and great whiskers. I met poor Dominick — what an ass that chap is — but he did not know me till I introduced myself, so I must be a good deal changed. Our ship was at Malta when I got the letter. I was sick of the service, and no wonder: a lieutenant — and there likely to stick all my days. Six months, last year, on the African coast, watching slavers — think of that! I had a long yarn from the viscount — advice, and that sort of thing. I do not think he is a year older than I, but takes airs because he's a trustee. But I only laugh at trifles that would have riled me once. So I wrote him a yarn in return, and drew it uncommon mild. And he has been useful to me; and I think matters are pretty well arranged to disappoint the kind intention of good Uncle Wylder — the brute; he hated my father, but that was no reason to persecute me, and I but an infant, almost, when he died, d — him. Well, you know he left Brandon with some charges to my Cousin Dorcas. She is a superbly fine girl. Our ship was at Naples when she was there two years ago; and I saw a good deal of her. Of course it was not to be thought of then; but matters are quite different, you know, now, and the viscount, who is a very sensible fellow in the main, saw it at once. You see, the old brute meant to leave her a life estate; but it does not amount to that, though it won't benefit me, for he settled that when I die it shall go to his right heirs — that will be to my son, if I ever have one. So Miss Dorcas must pack, and turn out whenever I die, that is, if I slip my cable first. Larkin told me this — and I took an opinion — and found it is so; and the viscount seeing it, agreed the best thing for her as well as me would be, we should marry. She is a wideawake young lady, and nothing the worse for that: I'm a bit that way myself. And so very little courtship has sufficed. She is a splendid beauty, and when you see her you'll say any fellow might be proud of such a bride; and so I am. And now, dear Charlie, you have it all. It will take place somewhere about the twenty-fourth of next month; and you must come down by the first, if you can. Don't disappoint. I want you for best man, maybe; and besides, I would like to talk to you about some things they want me to do in the settlements, and you were always a long-headed fellow: so pray don't refuse.

‘Dear Charlie, ever most sincerely,
‘Your old Friend,

‘MARK WYLDER.

‘P.S. — I stay at the Brandon Arms in the town, until after the marriage; and then you can have a room at the Hall, and capital shooting when we return, which will be in a fortnight after.’

I can’t say that Wylder was an old *friend*. But he was certainly one of the oldest and most intimate acquaintances I had. We had been for nearly three years at school together; and when his ship came to England, met frequently; and twice, when he was on leave, we had been for months together under the same roof; and had for some years kept up a regular correspondence, which first grew desultory, and finally, as manhood supervened, died out. The plain truth is, I did not *very* much like him.

Then there was that beautiful apathetic Dorcas Brandon. Where is the laggard so dull as to experience no pleasing flutter at his heart in anticipation of meeting a perfect beauty in a country house. I was romantic, like every other youngish fellow who is not a premature curmudgeon; and there was something indefinitely pleasant in the consciousness that, although a betrothed bride, the young lady still was fancy free: not a bit in love. It was but a marriage of convenience, with mitigations. And so there hovered in my curiosity some little flicker of egotistic romance, which helped to rouse my spirits, and spur me on to action.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH I ENTER THE DRAWINGROOM.

I was now approaching Brandon Hall; less than ten minutes more would set me down at its doorsteps. The stiff figure of Mrs. Marston, the old housekeeper, pale and austere, in rustling black silk (she was accounted a miser, and estimated to have saved I dare not say how much money in the Wylder family — kind to me with the bread-and-jam and Naples-biscuit-kindness of her species, in old times) — stood in fancy at the doorway. She, too, was a dream, and, I dare say, her money spent by this time. And that other dream, to which she often led me, with the large hazel eyes, and clear delicate tints — so sweet, so *riante*, yet so sad; poor Lady Mary Brandon, dying there — so unhappily mated — a young mother, and her baby sleeping in long 'Broderie Anglaise' attire upon the pillow on the sofa, and whom she used to show me with a peeping mystery, and her finger to her smiling lip, and a gaiety and fondness in her pretty face. That little helpless, groping, wailing creature was now the Dorcas Brandon, the mistress of the grand old mansion and all its surroundings, who was the heroine of the splendid matrimonial compromise which was about to reconcile a feud, and avert a possible lawsuit, and, for one generation, at least, to tranquillise the troubled annals of the Brandons and Wylders.

And now the ancient gray chapel, with its stained window, and store of old Brandon and Wylder monuments among its solemn clump of elm-trees, flitted by on my right; and in a moment more we drew up at the great gate on the left; not a hundred yards removed from it, and with an eager recognition, I gazed on the noble front of the old manorial house.

Up the broad straight avenue with its solemn files of gigantic timber towering at the right and the left hand, the chaise rolled smoothly, and through the fantastic iron gate of the courtyard, and with a fine swinging sweep and a jerk, we drew up handsomely before the doorsteps, with the Wylder arms in bold and florid projection carved above it.

The sun had just gone down. The blue shadows of twilight overcast the landscape, and the mists of night were already stealing like thin smoke among the trunks and roots of the trees. Through the stone mullions of the projecting window at the right, a flush of firelight looked pleasant and hospitable, and on the threshold were standing Lord Chelford and my old friend Mark Wylder; a faint perfume of the mildest cheroot declared how they had been employed.

So I jumped to the ground and was greeted very kindly by the smokers.

'I'm here, you know, *in loco parentis*; — my mother and I keep watch and ward. We allow Wylder, you see, to come every day to his devotions. But you are not to go to the Brandon Arms — you got my note, didn't you?'

I had, and had come direct to the Hall in consequence.

I looked over the door. Yes, my memory had served me right. There were the Brandon arms, and the Brandon quartered with the Wylder; but the Wylder coat in the centre, with the grinning griffins for supporters, and flaunting scrolls all round, and the ominous word 'resurgam' underneath, proclaimed itself sadly and vauntingly over the great entrance. I often wonder how the Wylder coat came in the centre; who built the old house — a Brandon or a Wylder; and if a Wylder, why was it Brandon Hall?

Dusty and seedy somewhat, as men are after a journey, I chatted with Mark and the noble peer for a few minutes at the door, while my valise and *et ceteras* were lifted in and hurried up the stairs to my room, whither I followed them.

While I was at my toilet, in came Mark Wylder laughing, as was his wont, and very unceremoniously he took possession of my easy-chair, and threw his leg over the arm of it.

'I'm glad you're come, Charlie; you were always a good fellow, and I really want a hand here confoundedly. I think it will all do very nicely; but, of course, there's a lot of things to be arranged — settlements, you know — and I can't make head or tail of their lingo, and a fellow don't like to sign and seal hand over head — *you* would not advise that, you know; and Chelford is a very good fellow, of course, and all that — but he's taking care of Dorcas, you see; and I might be left in the lurch.'

'It is a better way, at all events, Mark, than Wylder *versus* Trustees of Brandon, minor,' said I.

'Well, things do turn out very oddly; don't they?' said Mark with a sly glance of complacency, and his hands in his pockets. 'But I know you'll hold the tiller till I get through; hang me if I know the soundings, or where I'm going; and you have the chart by heart, Charlie.'

'I'm afraid you'll find me by no means so well up now as six years ago in "Wylder and Brandon;" but surely you have your lawyer, Mr. Larkin, haven't you?'

'To be sure — that's exactly it — he's Dorcas's agent. I don't know anything about him, and I do know you — don't you see? A fellow doesn't want to put himself into the hands of a stranger altogether, especially a lawyer, ha, ha! it wouldn't pay.'

I did not half like the equivocal office which my friend Mark had prepared for me. If family squabbles were to arise, I had no fancy to mix in them; and I did not want a collision with Mr. Larkin either; and, on the whole, notwithstanding his modesty, I thought Wylder very well able to take care of himself. There was time enough, however, to settle the point. So by this time, being splendid in French boots and white vest, and altogether perfect and refreshed, I emerged from my dressing-room, Wylder by my side.

We had to get along a dim oak-panelled passage, and into a sort of *oeil-de-boeuf*, with a lantern light above, from which diverged two other solemn corridors, and a short puzzling turn or two brought us to the head of the upper stairs. For I being a bachelor, and treated accordingly, was airily perched on the third storey.

To my mind, there is something indescribably satisfactory in the intense solidity of those old stairs and floors — no spring in the planks, not a creak; you walk as over strata of stone. What clumsy grandeur! What Cyclopean carpenters! What a prodigality of oak!

It was dark by this time, and the drawingroom, a vast and grand chamber, with no light but the fire and a pair of dim soft lamps near the sofas and ottomans, lofty, and glowing with rich tapestry curtains and pictures, and mirrors, and carved oak, and marble — was already tenanted by the ladies.

Old Lady Chelford, stiff and rich, a Vandyke dowager, with a general effect of deep lace, funereal velvet, and pearls; and pale, with dreary eyes, and thin high nose, sat in a high-backed carved oak throne, with red cushions. To her I was first presented, and cursorily scrutinised with a stately oldfashioned insolence, as if I were a candidate footman, and so dismissed. On a low seat, chatting to her as I came up, was a very handsome and rather singular-looking girl, fair, with a light golden-tinted hair; and a countenance, though then grave enough, instinct with a certain promise of animation and spirit not to be mistaken. Could this be the heroine of the pending alliance? No; I was mistaken. A third lady, at what would have been an ordinary room's length away, half reclining on an ottoman, was now approached by Wylder, who presented me to Miss Brandon.

'Dorcas, this is my old friend, Charles de Cresseron. You have often heard me speak of him; and I want you to shake hands and make his acquaintance, and draw him out — do you see; for he's a shy youth, and must be encouraged.'

He gave me a cheerful slap on the shoulder as he uttered this agreeable bit of banter, and altogether disconcerted me confoundedly. Wylder's dress-coats always smelt of tobacco, and his talk of tar. I was quietly incensed and disgusted; for in those days I *was* a little shy.

The lady rose, in a soft floating way; tall, blackhaired — but a blackness with a dull rich shadow through it. I had only a general impression of large dusky eyes and very exquisite features — more delicate than the Grecian models, and with a wonderful transparency, like tinted marble; and a superb haughtiness, quite unaffected. She held forth her hand, which I did little more than touch. There was a peculiarity in her greeting, which I felt a little overawing, without exactly discovering in what it consisted; and it was I think that she did not smile. She never took that trouble for form's sake, like other women.

So, as Wylder had set a chair for me I could not avoid sitting upon it, though I should much have preferred standing, after the manner of men, and retaining my liberty.

CHAPTER III.

OUR DINNER PARTY AT BRANDON.

I was curious. I had heard a great deal of her beauty; and it had exceeded all I heard; so I talked my sublimest and brightest chit-chat, in my most musical tones, and was rather engaging and amusing, I ventured to hope. But the best man cannot manage a dialogue alone. Miss Brandon was plainly not a person to make any sort of exertion towards what is termed keeping up a conversation; at all events she did not, and after a while the present one got into a decidedly sinking condition. An acquiescence, a faint expression of surprise, a fainter smile — she contributed little more, after the first few questions of courtesy had been asked, in her low silvery tones, and answered by me. To me the natural demise of a *tête-à-tête* discourse has always seemed a disgrace. But this apathetic beauty had either more moral courage or more stupidity than I, and was plainly terribly indifferent about the catastrophe. I've sometimes thought my struggles and sinkings amused her cruel serenity.

Bella ma stupida! — I experienced, at last, the sort of pique with which George Sand's hero apostrophises *la derniere Aldini*. Yet I could not think her stupid. The universal instinct honours beauty. It is so difficult to believe it either dull or base. In virtue of some mysterious harmonies it is 'the image of God,' and must, we feel, enclose the God-like; so I suppose I felt, for though I wished to think her stupid, I could not. She was not exactly languid, but a grave and listless beauty, and a splendid beauty for all that.

I told her my early recollections of Brandon and Gylingden, and how I remembered her a baby, and said some graceful trifles on that theme, which I fancied were likely to please. But they were only received, and led to nothing. In a little while in comes Lord Chelford, always natural and pleasant, and quite unconscious of his peerage — he was above it, I think — and chatted away merrily with that handsome animated blonde — who on earth, could she be? — and did not seem the least chilled in the stiff and frosted presence of his mother, but was genial and playful even with that Spirit of the Frozen Ocean, who received his affectionate trifling with a sort of smiling, though wintry pride and complacency, reflecting back from her icy aspects something of the rosy tints of that kindly sunshine.

I thought I heard him call the young lady Miss Lake, and there rose before me an image of an old General Lake, and a dim recollection of some reverse of fortune. He was — I was sure of that — connected with the Brandon family; and was, with the usual fatality, a bit of a *mauvais sujet*. He had made away with his children's money, or squandered his own; or somehow or another impoverished his family not creditably. So I glanced at her, and Miss Brandon divined, it seemed, what was passing in my mind, for she said: —

'That is my cousin, Miss Lake, and I think her very beautiful — don't you?'

'Yes, she certainly is very handsome,' and I was going to say something about her animation and spirit, but remembered just in time, that that line of eulogy would hardly have involved a compliment to Miss Brandon. 'I know her brother, a little — that is, Captain Lake — Stanley Lake; he's her brother, I fancy?'

'*Oh?*' said the young lady, in that tone which is pointed with an unknown accent, between a note of enquiry and of surprise. 'Yes; he's her brother.'

And she paused; as if something more were expected. But at that moment the bland tones of Larcom, the solemn butler, announced the Rev. William Wylder and Mrs. Wylder, and I said —

'William is an old college friend of mine;' and I observed him, as he entered with an affectionate and sad sort of interest. Eight years had passed since we met last, and that is something at any time. It had thinned my simple friend's hair a little, and his face, too, was more careworn than I liked, but his earnest, sweet smile was there still. Slight, gentle, with something of a pale and studious refinement in his face. The same gentle voice, with that slight, occasional hesitation, which somehow I liked. There is always a little shock after an absence of some years before identities adjust themselves, and then we find the change is not, after all, so very great. I suspect it is, rather, that something of the old picture is obliterated, in that little interval, to return no more. And so William Wylder was vicar now instead of that straight wiry cleric of the mulberry face and black leggings.

And who was this little Mrs. William Wylder who came in, so homely of feature, so radiant of goodhumour, so eager and simple, in a very plain dress — a Brandon housemaid would not have been seen in it, leaning so pleasantly on his lean, long, clerical arm — made for reaching books down from high shelves, a lank, scholarlike limb, with a somewhat threadbare cuff — and who looked round with that anticipation of pleasure, and that simple confidence in a real welcome, which are so likely to insure it? Was she an helpmeet for a black-letter man, who talked with the Fathers in his daily walks, could extemporise Latin hexameters, and dream in Greek. Was she very wise, or at all learned? I think her knowledge lay chiefly in the matters of poultry, and puddings, and latterly, of the nursery, where one treasure lay — that golden-haired little boy, four years old, whom I had seen playing among the roses before the parsonage door, asleep by this time — halfpast seven, 'precise,' as old Lady Chelford loved to write on her summons to dinner.

When the vicar, I dare say, in a very odd, quaint way, made his proposal of marriage, moved thereto assuredly, neither by fortune, nor by beauty, to good, merry, little Miss Dorothy Chubley, whom nobody was supposed to be looking after, and the town had, somehow, set down from the first as a natural-born old maid — there was a very general amazement; some disappointment here and there, with customary sneers and compassion, and a good deal of genuine amusement not ill-natured.

Miss Chubley, all the shopkeepers in the town knew and liked, and, in a way, respected her, as 'Miss Dolly.' Old Reverend John Chubley, D.D., who had been in love with his wife from the period of his boyhood; and yet so grudging was Fate, had to undergo an engagement of nigh thirty years before Hymen rewarded their constancy; being at length made Vicar of Huddelston, and master of church revenues to the amount of three hundred pounds a year — had, at forty-five, married his early love, now forty-two.

They had never grown old in one another's fond eyes. Their fidelity was of the days of chivalry, and their simplicity comical and beautiful. Twenty years of happy and loving life were allotted them and one pledge — poor Miss Dorothy — was left alone, when little more than nineteen years old. This good old couple, having loved early and waited long, and lived together with wonderful tenderness and gaiety of heart their allotted span, bid farewell for a little while — the gentle little lady going first, and, in about two years more, the good rector following.

I remembered him, but more dimly than his merry little wife, though she went first. She made raisin-wine, and those curious biscuits that tasted of Windsor soap.

And this Mrs. William Wylder just announced by soft-toned Larcom, is the daughter (there is no mistaking the jolly smile and lumpy odd little features, and radiance of amiability) of the good doctor and Mrs. Chubley, so curiously blended in her loving face. And last comes in old Major Jackson, smiling largely, squaring himself, and doing his courtesies in a firm but florid military style, and plainly pleased to find himself in good company and on the eve of a good dinner. And so our dinner-list is full.

The party were just nine — and it is wonderful what a row nine well-behaved people will contrive to make at a dinner-table. The inferior animals — as we see them caged and cared for, and fed at one o'clock, 'precise,' in those public institutions provided for their maintenance — confine their uproar to the period immediately antecedent to their meal, and perform the actual process of deglutition with silent attention, and only such suckings, lappings, and crunchings, as illustrate their industry and content. It is the distinctive privilege of man to exert his voice during his repast, and to indulge also in those specially human cachinnations which no lower creature, except that disreputable Australian biped known as the 'laughing jackass,' presumes to imitate; and to these vocal exercises of the feasters respond the endless ring and tinkle of knife and fork on china plate, and the ministering angels in white chokers behind the chairs, those murmured solicitations which hum round and round the ears of the revellers.

Of course, when great guns are present, and people talk *pro bono publico*, one at a time, with parliamentary regularity, things are different; but at an ordinary symposium, when the garrulous and diffident make merry together, and people break into twos or threes and talk across the table, or into their neighbours' ears, and all together, the noise is not only exhilarating and peculiar, but sometimes perfectly unaccountable.

The talk, of course, has its paroxysms and its subsidences. I have once or twice found myself on a sudden in total silence in the middle of a somewhat prolix, though humorous story, commenced in an uproar for the sole recreation of my pretty neighbour, and ended — patched up, *renounced* — a faltering failure, under the converging gaze of a sternly attentive audience.

On the other hand, there are moments when the uproar whirls up in a crescendo to a pitch and volume perfectly amazing; and at such times, I believe that anyone might say anything to the reveller at his elbow, without the smallest risk of being overheard by mortal. You may plan with young Caesar Borgia, on your left, the poisoning of your host; or ask pretty Mrs. Fusible, on your right, to elope with you from her grinning and gabbling lord, whose bald head flashes red with champagne only at the other side of the table. There is no privacy like it; you may plot your wickedness, or make your confession, or pop the question, and not a soul but your confidant be a bit the wiser — provided only you command your countenance.

I don't know how it happened, but Wylder sat beside Miss Lake. I fancied he ought to have been differently placed, but Miss Brandon did not seem conscious of his absence, and it seemed to me that the handsome blonde would have been as well pleased if he had been anywhere but where he was. There was no look of liking, though some faint glimmerings both of annoyance and embarrassment in her face. But in Wylder's I saw a sort of conceited consciousness, and a certain eagerness, too, while he talked; though a shrewd fellow in many ways, he had a secret conviction that no woman could resist him.

'I suppose the world thinks me a very happy fellow, Miss Lake?' he said, with a rather pensive glance of enquiry into that young lady's eyes, as he set down his hock-glass.

'I'm afraid it's a selfish world, Mr. Wylder, and thinks very little of what does not concern it.'

'Now, *you*, I dare say,' continued Wylder, not caring to perceive the *soupçon* of sarcasm that modulated her answer so musically, 'look upon me as a very fortunate fellow?'

'You are a very fortunate person, Mr. Wylder; a gentleman of very moderate abilities, with no prospects, and without fortune, who finds himself, without any deservings of his own, on a sudden, possessed of an estate, and about to be united to the most beautiful heiress in England, *is*, I think, rather a fortunate person.'

‘You did not always think me so stupid, Miss Lake,’ said Mr. Wylder, showing something of the hectic of vexation.

‘Stupid! did I say? Well, you know, we learn by experience, Mr. Wylder. One’s judgment matures, and we are harder to please — don’t you think so? — as we grow older.’

‘Aye, so we are, I dare say; at any rate, some things don’t please us as we calculated. I remember when this bit of luck would have made me a devilish happy fellow — *twice* as happy; but, you see, if a fellow hasn’t his liberty, where’s the good of money? I don’t know how I got into it, but I can’t get away now; and the lawyer fellows, and trustees, and all that sort of prudent people, get about one, and persuade, and exhort, and they bully you, by Jove! into what they call a marriage of convenience — I forget the French word — you know; and then, you see, your feelings may be very different, and all that; and where’s the good of money, I say, if you can’t enjoy it?’

And Mr. Wylder looked poetically unhappy, and trundled over a little bit of fricandeau on his plate with his fork, desolately, as though earthly things had lost their relish.

‘Yes; I think I know the feeling,’ said Miss Lake, quietly. ‘That ballad, you know, expresses it very prettily:— “Oh, thou hast been the cause of this anguish, my mother?”’

It was not then as old a song as it is now.

Wylder looked sharply at her, but she did not smile, and seemed to speak in good faith; and being somewhat thick in some matters, though a cunning fellow, he said —

‘Yes; that is the sort of thing, you know — of course, with a difference — a girl is supposed to speak there; but men suffer that way, too — though, of course, very likely it’s more their own fault.’

‘It is very sad,’ said Miss Lake, who was busy with a *pâté*.

‘She has no life in her; she’s a mere figurehead; she’s awfully slow; I don’t like black hair; I’m taken by conversation — and all that. There are some men that can only really love once in their lives, and never forget their first love, I assure you.’

Wylder murmured all this, and looked as plaintive as he could without exciting the attention of the people over-the-way.

Mark Wylder had, as you perceive, rather vague notions of decency, and not much experience of ladies; and thought he was making just the interesting impression he meditated. He was a good deal surprised, then, when Miss Lake said, and with quite a cheerful countenance, and very quickly, but so that her words stung his ear like the prick of a bodkin.

‘Your way of speaking of my cousin, Sir, is in the highest degree discreditable to you and offensive to me, and should you venture to repeat it, I will certainly mention it to Lady Chelford.’

And so she turned to old Major Jackson at her right, who had been expounding a point of the battle of Vittoria to Lord Chelford; and she led him again into action, and acquired during the next ten minutes a great deal of curious lore about Spanish muleteers and French prisoners, together with some particulars about the nature of picket duty, and ‘that scoundrel, Castanos.’

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH WE GO TO THE DRAWINGROOM AND THE PARTY BREAKS UP.

Wylder was surprised, puzzled, and a good deal incensed — that saucy craft had fired her shot so unexpectedly across his bows. He looked a little flushed, and darted a stealthy glance across the table, but no one he thought had observed the manoeuvre. He would have talked to ugly Mrs. W. Wylder, his sister-in-law, at his left, but she was entertaining Lord Chelford now. He had nothing for it but to perform *cavalier seul* with his slice of mutton — a sensual sort of isolation, while all the world was chatting so agreeably and noisily around him. He would have liked, at that moment, a walk upon the quarter-deck, with a good head-wind blowing, and liberty to curse and swear a bit over the bulwark. Women are so full of caprice and hypocrisy, and 'humbugging impudence!'

Wylder was rather surly after the ladies had floated away from the scene, and he drank his liquor doggedly. It was his fancy, I suppose, to revive certain sentimental relations which had, it may be, once existed between him and Miss Lake; and he was a person of that combative temperament that magnifies an object in proportion as its pursuit is thwarted.

In the drawingroom he watched Miss Lake over his cup of coffee, and after a few words to his *fiancée* he lounged toward the table at which she was turning over some prints.

'Do come here, Dorothy,' she exclaimed, not raising her eyes, 'I have found the very thing.'

'What thing? my dear Miss Lake,' said that good little woman, skipping to her side.

'The story of "Fridolin," and Retzch's pretty outlines. Sit down beside me, and I'll tell you the story.'

'Oh!' said the vicar's wife, taking her seat, and the inspection and exposition began; and Mark Wylder, who had intended renewing his talk with Miss Lake, saw that she had foiled him, and stood with a heightened colour and his hands in his pockets, looking confoundedly cross and very like an outcast, in the shadow behind.

After a while, in a pet, he walked away. Lord Chelford had joined the two ladies, and had something to say about German art, and some pleasant lights to throw from foreign travel, and devious reading, and was as usual intelligent and agreeable; and Mark was still more sore and angry, and strutted away to another table, a long way off, and tossed over the leaves of a folio of Wouverman's works, and did not see one of the plates he stared at so savagely.

I don't think Mark was very clear as to what he wanted, or, even if he had had a cool half-hour to define his wishes, that he would seriously have modified existing arrangements. But he had a passionate sort of obstinacy, and his whims took a violent character when they were crossed, and he was angry and jealous and unintelligible, reminding one of Carlyle's description of Philip Egalité — a chaos.

Then he joined a conversation going on between Dorcas Brandon and the vicar, his brother. He assisted at it, but took no part, and in fact was listening to that other conversation which sounded, with its pleasant gabble and laughter, like a little musical tinkle of bells in the distance. His gall rose, and that distant talk rang in his ears like a cool but intangible insult.

It was dull work. He looked at his watch — the brougham would be at the door to take Miss Lake home in a quarter of an hour; so he glided by old Lady Chelford, who was dozing stiffly through her spectacles on a French novel, and through a second drawingroom, and into the hall, where he saw Larcom's expansive white waistcoat, and disregarded his advance and respectful inclination, and strode into the outer hall or vestibule, where were hat-stands, walking-sticks, great coats, umbrellas, and the exuviae of gentlemen.

Mark clapped on his hat, and rifled the pocket of his paletot of his cigar-case and matches, and spluttered a curse or two, according to old Nollekins' receipt for easing the mind, and on the doorsteps lighted his cheroot, and became gradually more philosophical.

In due time the brougham came round with its lamps lighted, and Mark, who was by this time placid, greeted Price on the box familiarly, after his wont, and asked him whom he was going to drive, as if he did not know, cunning fellow; and actually went so far as to give Price one of those cheap and nasty weeds, of which he kept a supply apart in his case for such occasions of good fellowship.

So Mark waited to put the lady into the carriage, and he meditated walking a little way by the window and making his peace, and there was perhaps some vague vision of jumping in afterwards; I know not. Mark's ideas of ladies and of propriety were low, and he was little better than a sailor ashore, and not a good specimen of that class of monster.

He walked about the courtyard smoking, looking sometimes on the solemn front of the old palatial mansion, and sometimes breathing a white film up to the stars, impatient, like the enamoured Aladdin, watching in ambuscade for the emergence of the Princess Badroulbadour. But honest Mark forgot that young ladies do not always come out quite alone, and jump unassisted into their vehicles. And in fact not only did Lord Chelford assist the fair lady, cloaked and hooded, into the carriage, but the vicar's goodhumoured little wife was handed in also, the good vicar looking on, and as the gay goodnight and leavetaking took place by the doorsteps, Mark drew back, like a guilty thing, in silence, and showed no sign but the red top of his cigar, glowing like the eye of a Cyclops in the dark; and away rolled the brougham, with the two ladies, and Chelford and the vicar went in, and Mark hurled the stump of his cheroot at Fortune, and delivered a fragmentary soliloquy through his teeth; and so, in a sulk, without making his adieux, he marched off to his crib at the Brandon Arms.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH MY SLUMBER IS DISTURBED.

The ladies had accomplished their ascension to the upper regions. The good vicar had marched off with the major, who was by this time unbuckling in his lodgings; and Chelford and I, *tête-à-tête*, had a glass of sherry and water together in the drawingroom before parting. And over this temperate beverage I told him frankly the nature of the service which Mark Wylder wished me to render him; and he as frankly approved, and said he would ask Larkin, the family lawyer, to come up in the morning to assist.

The more I saw of this modest, refined, and manly peer, the more I liked him. There was a certain courteous frankness, and a fine old English sense of duty perceptible in all his serious talk. So I felt no longer like a conspirator, and was to offer such advice as might seem expedient, with the clear approbation of Miss Brandon’s trustee. And this point clearly settled, I avowed myself a little tired; and lighting our candles at the foot of the stairs, we scaled that long ascent together, and he conducted me through the intricacies of the devious lobbies up stairs to my chamber-door, where he bid me goodnight, shook hands, and descended to his own quarters.

My room was large and oldfashioned, but snug; and I, beginning to grow very drowsy, was not long in getting to bed, where I fell asleep indescribably quickly.

In all old houses one is, of course, liable to adventures. Where is the marvellous to find refuge, if not among the chambers, the intricacies, which have seen the vicissitudes, the crimes, and the deaths of generations of such men as had occupied these?

There was a picture in the outer hall — one of those full-length gentlemen of George II.’s time, with a dark peruke flowing on his shoulders, a cut velvet coat, and lace cravat and ruffles. This picture was pale, and had a long chin, and somehow had impressed my boyhood with a singular sense of fear. The foot of my bed lay towards the window, distant at least five-and-twenty-feet; and before the window stood my dressing-table, and on it a large looking-glass.

I dreamed that I was arranging my toilet before this glass — just as I had done that evening — when on a sudden the face of the portrait I have mentioned was presented on its surface, confronting me like a real countenance, and advancing towards me with a look of fury; and at the instant I felt myself seized by the throat and unable to stir or to breathe. After a struggle with this infernal garotter, I succeeded in awaking myself; and as I did so, I felt a rather cold hand really resting on my throat, and quietly passed up over my chin and face. I jumped out of bed with a roar, and challenged the owner of the hand, but received no answer, and heard no sound. I poked up my fire and lighted my candle. Everything was as I had left it except the door, which was the least bit open.

In my shirt, candle in hand, I looked out into the passage. There was nothing there in human shape, but in the direction of the stairs the green eyes of a large cat were shining. I was so confoundedly nervous that even ‘a harmless, necessary cat’ appalled me, and I clapped my door, as if against an evil spirit.

In about half an hour’s time, however, I had quite worked off the effect of this nightmare, and reasoned myself into the natural solution that the creature had got on my bed, and lay, as I have been told they will, upon my throat, and so, all the rest had followed.

Not being given to the fear of *larvae* and *lemures*, and also knowing that a mistake is easily committed in a great house like that, and that my visitor might have made one, I grew drowsy in a little while, and soon fell asleep again. But knowing all I now do, I hold a different conclusion — and so, I think, will you.

In the morning Mark Wylder was early upon the ground. He had quite slept off what he would have called the nonsense of last night, and was very keen upon settlements, consols, mortgages, jointures, and all that dry but momentous lore.

I find a note in my diary of that day:— ‘From halfpast ten o’clock until two with Mark Wylder and Mr. Larkin, the lawyer, in the study — dull work — over papers and title — Lord Chelford with us now and then to lend a helping hand.’

Lawyer Larkin, though he made our work lighter — for he was clear, quick, and orderly, and could lay his hand on any paper in those tin walls of legal manuscripts that built up two sides of his office — did not make our business, to me at least, any pleasanter. Wylder thought him a clever man (and so perhaps, in a certain sense, he was); Lord Chelford, a most honourable one; yet there came to me by instinct an unpleasant feeling about him. It was not in any defined way — I did not fancy that he was machinating, for instance, any sort of mischief in the business before us — but I had a notion that he was not quite what he pretended.

Perhaps his *personnel* prejudiced me — though I could not quite say why. He was a tall, lank man — rather long of limb, long of head, and gaunt of face. He wanted teeth at both sides, and there was rather a skull-like cavity when he smiled — which was pretty often. His eyes were small and reddish, as if accustomed to cry; and when everything went smoothly were dull and dovelike, but when things crossed or excited him, which occurred when his own pocket or plans were concerned, they grew singularly unpleasant, and greatly resembled those of some not amiable animal — was it a rat, or a serpent? It was a peculiar concentrated vigilance and rapine that I have seen there. But that was long afterwards. Now, indeed, they were meek, and sad, and pink.

He had an ambition, too, to pass for a highbred gentleman, and thought it might be done by a somewhat lofty and drawling way of talking, and distributing his length of limb in what he fancied were easy attitudes. If the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel, so are the elegances of a vulgar man; and his made me wince.

I might be all in the wrong — and was, no doubt, unreasonable — for he bore a high character, and passed for a very gentlemanlike man among the villagers. He was also something of a religious light, and had for a time conformed to Methodism, but returned to the Church. He had a liking for long sermons, and a sad abhorrence of amusements, and sat out the morning and the evening services regularly — and kept up his dissenting connection too, and gave them money — and appeared in print, in all charitable lists — and mourned over other men's backslidings and calamities in a lofty and Christian way, shaking his tall bald head, and turning up his pink eyes mildly.

Notwithstanding all which he was somehow unlovely in my eyes, and in an indistinct way, formidable. It was not a pleasant misgiving about a gentleman of Larkin's species, the family lawyer, who become *viscera magnorum domuum*.

My duties were lighter, as adviser, than I at first apprehended. Wylder's crotchets were chiefly 'mare's nests.' We had read the draft of the settlement, preparatory to its being sent to senior counsel to be approved. Wylder's attorney had done his devoir, and Mr. Larkin avowed a sort of parental interest in both parties to the indentures, and made, at closing, a little speech, very high in morality, and flavoured in a manly way with religion, and congratulated Mark on his honour and plain dealing, which he gave us to understand were the secrets of all success in life, as they had been, in an humble way of his own.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH DORCAS BRANDON SPEAKS.

In answer to ‘the roaring shiver of the gong’ we all trooped away together to luncheon. Lady Chelford and Dorcas and Chelford had nearly ended that irregular repast when we entered. My chair was beside Miss Brandon; she had breakfasted with old Lady Chelford that morning, and this was my first meeting that day. It was not very encouraging.

People complained that acquaintance made little way with her. That you were, perhaps, well satisfied with your first day’s progress, but the next made no head-way; you found yourself this morning exactly at the point from which you commenced yesterday, and tomorrow would recommence where you started the day before. This is very disappointing, but may sometimes be accounted for by there being nothing really to discover. It seemed to me, however, that the distance had positively increased since yesterday, and that the oftener she met me the more strange she became. As we went out, Wylder enquired, with his usual good taste: ‘Well, what do you think of her?’ Then he looked slily at me, laughing, with his hands in his pockets. ‘A little bit slow, eh?’ he whispered, and laughed again, and lounged into the hall. If Dorcas Brandon had been a plain woman, I think she would have been voted an impertinent bore; but she was so beautiful that she became an enigma. I looked at her as she stood gravely gazing from the window. Is it Lady Macbeth? No; she never would have had energy to plan her husband’s career and manage that affair of Duncan. A sultana rather — sublimely egotistical, without reverence — a voluptuous and haughty embodiment of indifference. I paused, looking at a picture, but thinking of her, and was surprised by her voice very near me.

‘Will you give me just a minute, Mr. De Cresseron, in the drawingroom, while I show you a miniature? I want your opinion.’

So she floated on and I accompanied her.

‘I think,’ she said, ‘you mentioned yesterday, that you remembered me when an infant. You remember my poor mamma, don’t you, very well?’

This was the first time she had yet shown any tendency, so far as I had seen, to be interested in anything, or to talk to me. I seized the occasion, and gave her, as well as I could, the sad and pretty picture that remained, and always will, in the vacant air, when I think of her, on the mysterious retina of memory.

How filmy they are! the moonlight shines through them, as through the phantom Dane in Retzch's outlines — colour without substance. How they come, wearing for ever the sweetest and pleasantest look of their earthly days. Their sweetest and merriest tones hover musically in the distance; how far away, how near to silence, yet how clear! And so it is with our remembrance of the immortal part. It is the loveliest traits that remain with us perennially; all that was noblest and most beautiful is there, in a changeless and celestial shadow; and this is the resurrection of the memory, the foretaste and image which the 'Faithful Creator' accords us of the resurrection and glory to come — the body redeemed, the spirit made perfect.

On a cabinet near to where she stood was a casket of ormolu, which she unlocked, and took out a miniature, opened, and looked at it for a long time. I knew very well whose it was, and watched her countenance; for, as I have said, she interested me strangely. I suppose she knew I was looking at her; but she showed always a queenlike indifference about what people might think or observe. There was no sentimental softening; but her gaze was such as I once saw the same proud and handsome face turn upon the dead — pale, exquisite, perhaps a little stern. What she read there — what procession of thoughts and images passed by — threw neither light nor shadow on her face. Its apathy interested me inscrutably.

At last she placed the picture in my hand, and asked —

'Is this really very like her?'

'It is, and it is *not*,' I said, after a little pause. 'The features are true: it is what I call an accurate portrait, but that is all. I dare say, exact as it is, it would give to one who had not seen her a false, as it must an inadequate, idea, of the original. There was something *naïve* and *spirituel*, and very tender in her face, which he has not caught — perhaps it could hardly be fixed in colours.'

‘Yes, I always heard her expression and intelligence were very beautiful. It was the beauty of mobility — true beauty.’

‘There is a beauty of another stamp, equally exquisite, Miss Brandon, and perhaps more overpowering.’ I said this in nearly a whisper, and in a very marked way, almost tender, and the next moment was amazed at my own audacity. She looked on me for a second or two, with her dark drowsy glance, and then it returned to the picture, which was again in her hand. There was a total want of interest in the careless sort of surprise she vouchsafed my little sally; neither was there the slightest resentment. If a wafer had been stuck upon my forehead, and she had observed it, there might have been just that look and no more. I was ridiculously annoyed with myself. I was betrayed, I don’t know how, into this little venture, and it was a flat failure. The position of a shy man, who has just made an unintelligible joke at a dinner-table, was not more pregnant with self-reproach and embarrassment.

Upon my honour, I don’t think there was anything of the *roué* in me. I own I did feel towards this lady, who either was, or seemed to me, so singular, a mysterious interest just beginning — of that peculiar kind which becomes at last terribly absorbing.

I was more elated by her trifling notice of me than I can quite account for. It was a distinction. She was so indescribably handsome — so passively disdainful. I think if she had listened to me with even the faintest intimation of caring whether I spoke in this tone or not, with even a flash of momentary resentment, I might have rushed into a most reprehensible and ridiculous rigmarole.

In this, the subtlest and most perilous of all intoxications, it needs immense presence of mind to conduct ourselves always with decorum. But she was looking, just as before, at the miniature, as it seemed to me, in fancy infusing some of the spirit I had described into the artist’s record, and she said, only in soliloquy, as it were, ‘Yes, I see — I *think* I see.’

So there was a pause; and then she said, without, however, removing her eyes from the miniature, ‘You are, I believe, Mr. De Cresseron, a very old friend of Mr. Wylder’s. Is it not so?’

So soon after my little escapade, I did not like the question; but it was answered. There was not the faintest trace of a satirical meaning, however, in her face; and after another very considerable interval, at the end of which she shut the miniature in its case, she said, ‘It was a peculiar face, and very beautiful. It is odd how many of our family married for love — wild love-matches. My poor mother was the last. I could point you out many pictures, and tell you stories — my cousin, Rachel, knows them all. You know Rachel Lake?’

‘I’ve not the honour of knowing Miss Lake. I had not an opportunity of making her acquaintance yesterday; but I know her brother — so does Wylder.’

‘What’s that?’ said Mark, who had just come in, and was tumbling over a volume of ‘Punch’ at the window.

‘I was telling Miss Brandon that we both know Stanley Lake.’ On hearing which, Wylder seemed to discover something uncommonly interesting or clever in the illustration before him; for he approached his face very near to it, in a scrutinising way, and only said, ‘Oh?’

‘That marrying for love was a fatality in our family,’ she continued in the same low tone — too faint I think to reach Mark. ‘They were all the most beautiful who sacrificed themselves so — they were all unhappy marriages. So the beauty of our family never availed it, any more than its talents and its courage; for there were clever and witty men, as well as very brave ones, in it. Meaner houses have grown up into dukedoms; ours never prospers. I wonder what it is.’

‘Many families have disappeared altogether, Miss Brandon. It is no small thing, through so many centuries, to have retained your ancestral estates, and your pre-eminent position, and even this splendid residence of so many generations of your lineage.’

I thought that Miss Brandon, having broken the ice, was henceforth to be a conversable young lady. But this sudden expansion was not to last. Ovid tells us, in his ‘Fasti,’ how statues sometimes surprised people by speaking more frankly and to the purpose even than Miss Brandon, and straight were cold chiselled marble again; and so it was with that proud, cold *chef d’oeuvre* of tinted statuary.

Yet I thought I could, even in that dim glimpse, discern how the silent subterranean current of her thoughts was flowing; like other representatives of a dynasty, she had studied the history of her race to profit by its errors and misfortunes. There was to be no weakness or passion in her reign.

The princess by this time was seated on the ottoman, and chose to read a letter, thus intimating, I suppose, that my audience was at an end; so I took up a book, put it down, and then went and looked over Wylder's shoulder, and made my criticisms — not very novel, I fear — upon the pages he turned over; and I am sorry to say I don't think he heard much of what I was saying, for he suddenly came out with —

'And where is Stanley Lake now, do you know?'

'I saw him in town — only for a moment though — about a fortnight ago; he was arranging, he said, about selling out.'

'Oh! retiring; and what does he propose doing then?' asked Wylder, without raising his eyes from his book. He spoke in a sort of undertone, like a man who does not want to be overheard, and the room was quite large enough to make that sort of secrecy easy without the appearance of seeking it.

'I have not an idea. I don't think he's fit for many things. He knows something of horses, I believe, and something of play.'

'But he'll hardly make out a living that way,' said Wylder, with a sort of sneer or laugh. I thought he seemed put out, and a little flushed.

'I fancy he has enough to live upon, without adding to it, however,' I said.

Wylder leaned back in his low chair, with his hands stuffed in his pockets, and the air of a man trying to look unconcerned, but both annoyed and disconcerted nevertheless.

I tell you what, Charlie, between you and me, that fellow, Stanley, is a d —— d bad lot. I may be mistaken, of course; he's always been very civil to me, but we don't like one another; and I don't think I ever heard him say a good word of any one, I dare say he abuses you and me, as he does everyone else.'

'Does he?' I said. 'I was not aware he had that failing.'

'Oh, yes. He does not stick at trifles, Master Stanley. He's about the greatest liar, I think, I ever met with,' and he laughed angrily.

I happened at that moment to raise my eyes, and I saw Dorcas's face reflected in the mirror; her back was towards us, and she held the letter in her hand as if reading it, but her large eyes were looking over it, and on us, in the glass, with a gaze of strange curiosity. Our glances met in the mirror; but hers remained serenely undisturbed, and mine dropped and turned away hastily. I wonder whether she heard us. I do not know. Some people are miraculously sharp of hearing.

‘I dare say,’ said Wylder, with a sneer, ‘he was asking affectionately for me, eh?’

‘No; not that I recollect — in fact there was not time; but I suppose he does not like you less for what has happened; you’re worth cultivating now, you know.’

Wylder was leaning on his elbow, with just the tip of his thumb to his teeth, with a vicious character of biting it, which was peculiar to him when anything vexed him considerably, and glancing sharply this way and that —

‘You know,’ he said, suddenly, ‘we are a sort of cousins; his mother was a Brandon — a second cousin of Dorcas’s — no, of her father’s — I don’t know exactly how. He’s a pushing fellow, one of the coolest hands I know; but I don’t see that I can be of any use to him, or why the devil I should. I say, old fellow, come out and have a weed, will you?’

I raised my eyes. Miss Brandon had left the room. I don’t know that her presence would have prevented his invitation, for Wylder’s wooing was certainly of the coolest. So forth we sallied, and under the autumnal foliage, in the cool amber light of the declining evening, we enjoyed our cheroots; and with them, Wylder his thoughts; and I, the landscape, and the whistling of the birds; for we waxed Turkish and taciturn over our tobacco.

CHAPTER VII.

RELATING HOW A LONDON GENTLEMAN APPEARED IN REDMAN'S DELL.

I believe the best rule in telling a story is to follow events chronologically. So let me mention that just about the time when Wylder and I were filming the trunks of the old trees with wreaths of lingering perfume, Miss Rachel Lake had an unexpected visitor.

There is, near the Hall, a very pretty glen, called Redman's Dell, very steep, with a stream running at the bottom of it, but so thickly wooded that in summer time you can only now and then catch a glimpse of the water gliding beneath you. Deep in this picturesque ravine, buried among the thick shadows of tall old trees, runs the narrow mill-road, which lower down debouches on the end of the village street. There, in the transparent green shadow, stand the two mills — the old one with A.D. 1679, and the Wylder arms, and the eternal 'resurgam' projecting over its door; and higher up, on a sort of platform, the steep bank rising high behind it, with its towering old wood overhanging and surrounding, upon a site where one of king Arthur's knights, of an autumn evening, as he rode solitary in quest of adventures, might have seen the peeping, gray gable of an anchorite's chapel dimly through the gilded stems, and heard the drowsy tinkle of his vesper-bell, stands an old and small two-storied brick and timber house; and though the sun does not very often glimmer on its windows, it yet possesses an air of sad, old-world comfort — a little flower-garden lies in front with a paling round it. But not every kind of flowers will grow there, under the lordly shadow of the elms and chestnuts.

This sequestered tenement bears the name of Redman's Farm; and its occupant was that Miss Lake whom I had met last night at Brandon Hall, and whose pleasure it was to live here in independent isolation.

There she is now, busy in her tiny garden, with the birds twittering about her, and the yellow leaves falling; and her thick gauntlets on her slender hands. How fresh and pretty she looks in that sad, sylvan solitude, with the background of the dull crimson brick and the climbing roses. Bars of sunshine fall through the branches above, across the thick tapestry of blue, yellow, and crimson, that glow so richly upon their deep green ground.

There is not much to be done just now, I fancy, in the gardening way; but work is found or invented — for sometimes the hour is dull, and that bright, spirited, and at heart, it may be, bitter exile, will make out life somehow. There is music, and drawing. There are flowers, as we see, and two or three correspondents, and walks into the village; and her dark cousin, Dorcas, drives down sometimes in the pony-carriage, and is not always silent; and indeed, they are a good deal together.

This young lady's little Eden, though overshadowed and encompassed with the solemn sylvan cloister of nature's building, and vocal with sounds of innocence — the songs of birds, and sometimes those of its young mistress — was no more proof than the Mesopotamian haunt of our first parents against the intrusion of darker spirits. So, as she worked, she lifted up her eyes, and beheld a rather handsome young man standing at the little wicket of her garden, with his gloved hand on the latch. A man of fashion — a town man — his dress bespoke him: smooth cheeks, light brown curling moustache, and eyes very peculiar both in shape and colour, and something of elegance of finish in his other features, and of general grace in the *coup d'oeil*, struck one at a glance. He was smiling silently and slily on Rachel, who, with a little cry of surprise, said —

'Oh, Stanley! is it you?'

And before he could answer, she had thrown her arms about his neck and kissed him two or three times. Laughingly, half-resisting, the young man waited till her enthusiastic salutation was over, and with one gloved hand caressingly on her shoulder, and with the other smoothing his ruffled moustache, he laughed a little more, a quiet low laugh. He was not addicted to stormy greetings, and patted his sister's shoulder gently, his arm a little extended, like a man who tranquillises a frolicsome pony.

'Yes, Radie, you see I've found you out;' and his eye wandered, still smiling oddly, over the front of her quaint habitation.

'And how have you been, Radie?'

'Oh, very well. No life like a gardener's — early hours, work, air, and plenty of quiet.' And the young lady laughed.

'You are a wonderful lass, Radie.'

'Thank you, dear.'

‘And what do you call this place?’

‘“The Happy Valley,” *I* call it. Don’t you remember “Rasselas?”’

‘No,’ he said, looking round him; ‘I don’t think I was ever there.’

‘You horrid dunce! — it’s a book, but a stupid one — so no matter,’ laughed Miss Rachel, giving him a little slap on the shoulder with her slender fingers.

His reading, you see, lay more in circulating library lore, and he was not deep in Johnson — as few of us would be, I’m afraid, if it were not for Boswell.

‘It’s a confounded deal more like the “Valley of the Shadow of Death,” in “Pilgrim’s Progress” — you remember — that old Tamar used to read to us in the nursery,’ replied Master Stanley, who had never enjoyed being quizzed by his sister, not being blessed with a remarkably sweet temper.

‘If you don’t like my scenery, come in, Stanley, and admire my decorations. You must tell me all the news, and I’ll show you my house, and amaze you with my housekeeping. Dear me, how long it is since I’ve seen you.’

So she led him in by the arm to her tiny drawingroom; and he laid his hat and stick, and gray paletot, on her little marquetrie-table, and sat down, and looked languidly about him, with a sly smile, like a man amused.

‘It is an odd fancy, living alone here.’

‘An odd necessity, Stanley.’

‘Aren’t you afraid of being robbed and murdered, Radie?’ he said, leaning forward to smell at the pretty bouquet in the little glass, and turning it listlessly round. ‘There are lots of those burglar fellows going about, you know.’

‘Thank you, dear, for reminding me. But, somehow, I’m not the least afraid. There hasn’t been a robbery in this neighbourhood, I believe, for eight hundred years. The people never think of shutting their doors here in summer time till they are going to bed, and then only for form’s sake; and, beside, there’s nothing to rob, and I really don’t much mind being murdered.’

He looked round, and smiled on, as before, like a man contemptuously amused, but sleepily withal.

‘You are very oddly housed, Radie.’

‘I like it,’ she said quietly, also with a glance round her homely drawingroom.

‘What do you call this, your boudoir or parlour?’

‘I call it my drawingroom, but it’s anything you please.’

‘What very odd people our ancestors were,’ he mused on. ‘They lived, I suppose, out of doors like the cows, and only came into their sheds at night, when they could not see the absurd ugliness of the places they inhabited. I could not stand upright in this room with my hat on. Lots of rats, I fancy, Radie, behind that wainscoting? What’s that horrid work of art against the wall?’

‘A shell-work cabinet, dear. It is not beautiful, I allow. If I were strong enough, or poor old Tamar, I should have put it away; and now that you’re here, Stanley, I think I’ll make you carry it out to the lobby for me.’

‘I should not like to touch it, dear Radie. And pray how do you amuse yourself here? How on earth do you get over the day, and, worse still, the evenings?’

‘Very well — well enough. I make a very good sort of a nun, and a capital housemaid. I work in the garden, I mend my dresses, I drink tea, and when I choose to be dissipated, I play and sing for old Tamar — why did not you ask how she is? I do believe, Stanley, you care for no one, but’ (she was going to say yourself, she said instead, however, but) ‘perhaps, the least in the world for me, and that not very wisely,’ she continued, a little fiercely, ‘for from the moment you saw me, you’ve done little else than try to disgust me more than I am with my penury and solitude. What do you mean? You always have a purpose — will you ever learn to be frank and straightforward, and speak plainly to those whom you ought to trust, if not to love? What are you driving at, Stanley?’

He looked up with a gentle start, like one recovering from a reverie, and said, with his yellow eyes fixed for a moment on his sister, before they dropped again to the carpet.

‘You’re miserably poor, Rachel: upon my word, I believe you haven’t clear two hundred a year. I’ll drink some tea, please, if you have got any, and it isn’t too much trouble; and it strikes me as very curious you like living in this really very humiliating state.’

‘I don’t intend to go out for a governess, if that’s what you mean; nor is there any privation in living as I do. Perhaps you think I ought to go and housekeep for you.’

‘Why — ha, ha! — I really don’t know, Radie, where I shall be. I’m not of any regiment now.’

‘Why, you have not sold out?’ She flushed and suddenly grew pale, for she was afraid something worse might have happened, having no great confidence in her brother.

But she was relieved.

‘I *have* sold my commission.’

She looked straight at him with large eyes and compressed lips, and nodded her head two or three times, just murmuring, ‘Well! well! well!’

‘Women never understand these things. The army is awfully expensive — I mean, of course, a regiment like ours; and the interest of the money is better to me than my pay; and see, Rachel, there’s no use in lecturing *me* — so don’t let us quarrel. We’re not very rich, you and I; and we each know our own affairs, you yours, and I mine, best.’

There was something by no means pleasant in his countenance when his temper was stirred, and a little thing sometimes sufficed to do so.

Rachel treated him with a sort of deference, a little contemptuous perhaps, such as spoiled children receive from indulgent elders; and she looked at him steadily, with a faint smile and arched brows, for a little while, and an undefinable expression of puzzle and curiosity.

‘You are a very amusing brother — if not a very cheery or a very useful one, Stanley.’

She opened the door, and called across the little hall into the homely kitchen of the mansion.

‘Tamar, dear, Master Stanley’s here, and wishes to see you.’

‘Oh! yes, poor dear old Tamar; ha, ha!’ says the gentleman, with a gentle little laugh, ‘I suppose she’s as frightful as ever, that worthy woman. Certainly she *is* awfully like a ghost. I wonder, Radie, you’re not afraid of her at night in this cheerful habitation. *I* should, I know.’

‘A ghost *indeed*, the ghost of old times, an ugly ghost enough for many of us. Poor Tamar! she was always very kind to *you*, Stanley.’

And just then old Tamar opened the door. I must allow there was something very unpleasant about that worthy old woman; and not being under any personal obligations to her, I confess my acquiescence in the spirit of Captain Lake’s remarks.

She was certainly perfectly neat and clean, but white predominated unpleasantly in her costume. Her cotton gown had once had a pale pattern over it, but wear and washing had destroyed its tints, till it was no better than white, with a mottling of gray. She had a large white kerchief pinned with a grisly precision across her breast, and a white linen cap tied under her chin, fitting close to her head, like a child's nightcap, such as they wore in my young days, and destitute of border or frilling about the face. It was a dress very odd and unpleasant to behold, and suggested the idea of an hospital, or a madhouse, or death, in an undefined way.

She was past sixty, with a mournful puckered and puffy face, tinted all over with a thin gamboge and burnt sienna glazing; and very blue under the eyes, which showed a great deal of their watery whites. This old woman had in her face and air, along with an expression of suspicion and anxiety, a certain character of decency and respectability, which made her altogether a puzzling and unpleasant apparition.

Being taciturn and undemonstrative, she stood at the door, looking with as pleased a countenance as so sad a portrait could wear upon the young gentleman.

He got up at his leisure and greeted 'old Tamar,' with his sleepy, amused sort of smile, and a few trite words of kindness. So Tamar withdrew to prepare tea; and he said, all at once, with a sudden accession of energy, and an unpleasant momentary glare in his eyes —

'You know, Rachel, this sort of thing is all nonsense. You cannot go on living like this; you must marry — you shall marry. Mark Wylder is down here, and he has got an estate and a house, and it is time he should marry you.'

'Mark Wylder is here to marry my cousin, Dorcas; and if he had no such intention, and were as free as you are, and again to urge his foolish suit upon his knees, Stanley, I would die rather than accept him.'

'It was not always so foolish a suit, Radie,' answered her brother, his eyes once more upon the carpet. 'Why should not *he* do as well as another? You liked him well enough once.'

The young lady coloured rather fiercely.

'I am not a girl of seventeen now, Stanley; and — and, besides, I *hate* him.'

‘What d — d nonsense! I really beg your pardon, Radie, but it *is* precious stuff. You are quite unreasonable; you’ve no cause to hate him; he dropped you because you dropped him. It was only prudent; he had not a guinea. But now it is different, and he *must* marry you.’

The young lady stared with a haughty amazement upon her brother.

‘I’ve made up my mind to speak to him; and if he won’t I promise you he shall leave the country,’ said the young man gently, just lifting his yellow eyes for a second with another unpleasant glare.

‘I almost think you’re mad, Stanley; and if you do anything so insane, sure I am you’ll rue it while you live; and wherever he is I’ll find him out, and acquit myself, with the scorn I owe him, of any share in a plot so unspeakably mean and absurd.’

‘Brava, brava! you’re a heroine, Radie; and why the devil,’ he continued, in a changed tone, ‘do you apply those insolent terms to what I purpose doing?’

‘I wish I could find words strong enough to express my horror of your plot — a plot every way disgusting. You plainly know something to Mark Wylder’s discredit; and you mean, Stanley, to coerce him by fear into a marriage with your penniless sister, who *hates* him. Sir, do you pretend to be a gentleman?’

‘I rather think so,’ he said, with a quiet sneer.

‘Give up every idea of it this moment. Has it not struck you that Mark Wylder may possibly know something of you, you would not have published?’

‘I don’t think he does. What do you mean?’

‘On my life, Stanley, I’ll acquaint Mr. Wylder this evening with what you meditate, and the atrocious liberty you presume — yes, Sir, though you are my brother, the *atrocious liberty* you dare to take with my name — unless you promise, upon your honour, now and here, to dismiss for ever the odious and utterly resultless scheme.’

Captain Lake looked very angry after his fashion, but said nothing. He could not at any time have very well defined his feelings toward his sister, but mingling in them, certainly, was a vein of unacknowledged dread, and, shall I say, respect. He knew she was resolute, fierce of will, and prompt in action, and not to be bullied.

‘There’s more in this, Stanley, than you care to tell me. You have not troubled yourself a great deal about me, you know: and I’m no worse off now than any time for the last three years. You’ve *not* come down here on *my* account — that is, altogether; and be your plans what they may, you sha’n’t mix my name in them. What you please — wise or foolish — you’ll do in what concerns yourself; — you always *have* — without consulting me; but I tell you again, Stanley, unless you promise, upon your honour, to forbear all mention of my name, I will write this evening to Lady Chelford, apprising her of your plans, and of my own disgust and indignation; and requesting her son’s interference. *Do* you promise?’

‘There’s no such *haste*, Radie. I only mentioned it. If you don’t like it, of course it can lead to nothing, and there’s no use in my speaking to Wylder, and so there’s an end of it.’

‘There *may* be some use, a purpose in which neither my feelings nor interests have any part. I venture to say, Stanley, your plans are all for *yourself*. You want to extort some advantage from Wylder; and you think, in his present situation, about to marry Dorcas, you can use me for the purpose. Thank Heaven! Sir, you committed for once the rare indiscretion of telling the truth; and unless you make me the promise I require, I will take, before evening, such measures as will completely exculpate me. Once again, do you promise?’

‘Yes, Radie; ha, ha! of course I promise.’

‘Upon your honour?’

‘Upon my honour — *there*.’

‘I believe, you gentlemen dragoons observe that oath — I hope so. If you choose to break it you may give me some trouble, but you sha’n’t compromise me. And now, Stanley, one word more. I fancy Mr. Wylder is a resolute man — none of the Wylders wanted courage.’

Captain Lake was by this time smiling his sly, sleepy smile upon his French boots.

‘If you have formed any plan which depends upon frightening him, it is a desperate one. All I can tell you, Stanley, is this, that if I were a man, and an attempt made to extort from me any sort of concession by terror, I would shoot the miscreant who made it through the head, like a highwayman.'

'What the devil are you talking about?' said he.

'About *your danger*,' she answered. 'For once in your life listen to reason. Mark Wylder is as prompt as you, and has ten times your nerve and sense; you are more likely to have committed yourself than he. Take care; he may retaliate your *threat* by a counter move more dreadful. I know nothing of your doings, Stanley — Heaven forbid! but be warned, or you'll rue it.'

'Why, Radie, you know nothing of the world. Do you suppose I'm quite demented? Ask a gentleman for his estate, or watch, because I know something to his disadvantage! Why, ha, ha! dear Radie, every man who has ever been on terms of intimacy with another must know things to his disadvantage, but no one thinks of telling them. The world would not tolerate it. It would prejudice the betrayer at least as much as the betrayed. I don't affect to be angry, or talk romance and heroics, because you fancy such stuff; but I assure you — when will that old woman give me a cup of tea? — I assure you, Radie, there's nothing in it.'

Rachel made no reply, but she looked steadfastly and uneasily upon the enigmatical face and downcast eyes of the young man.

'Well, I hope so,' she said at last, with a sigh, and a slight sense of relief.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH CAPTAIN LAKE TAKES HIS HAT AND STICK.

So the young people sitting in the little drawingroom of Redman's farm pursued their dialogue; Rachel Lake had spoken last, and it was the captain's turn to speak next.

'Do you remember Miss Beauchamp, Radie?' he asked rather suddenly, after a very long pause.

'Miss Beauchamp? Oh! to be sure; you mean little Caroline; yes, she must be quite grown up by this time — five years — she promised to be pretty. What of her?'

Rachel, very flushed and agitated still, was now trying to speak as usual.

'She *is* good-looking — a little coarse some people think,' resumed the young man; 'but handsome; black eyes — black hair — rather on a large scale, but certainly handsome. A style I admire rather, though it is not very refined, nor at all classic. But I like her, and I wish you'd advise me.' He was talking, after his wont, to the carpet.

'Oh?' she exclaimed, with a gentle sort of derision.

'You mean,' he said, looking up for a moment, with a sudden stare, 'she has got money. Of course she has; I could not afford to admire her if she had not; but I see you are not just now in a mood to trouble yourself about my nonsense — we can talk about it tomorrow; and tell me now, how do you get on with the Brandon people?'

Rachel was curious, and would, if she could, have recalled that sarcastic 'oh' which had postponed the story; but she was also a little angry, and with anger there was pride, which would not stoop to ask for the revelation which he chose to defer; so she said, 'Dorcas and I are very good friends; but I don't know very well what to make of her. Only I don't think she's quite so dull and apathetic as I at first supposed; but still I'm puzzled. She is either absolutely uninteresting, or very interesting indeed, and I can't say which.'

'Does she like you?' he asked.

‘I really don’t know. She tolerates me, like everything else; and I don’t flatter her; and we see a good deal of one another upon those terms, and I have no complaint to make of her. She has some aversions, but no quarrels; and has a sort of laziness — mental, bodily, and moral — that is sublime, but provoking; and sometimes I admire her, and sometimes I despise her; and I do not yet know which feeling is the juster.’

‘Surely she is woman enough to be fussed a little about her marriage?’

‘Oh, dear, no! she takes the whole affair with a queenlike and supernatural indifference. She is either a fool or a very great philosopher, and there is something grand in the serene obscurity that envelopes her,’ and Rachel laughed a very little.

‘I must, I suppose, pay my respects; but tomorrow will be time enough. What pretty little teacups, Radie — quite charming — old cock china, isn’t it? These were Aunt Jemima’s, I think.’

‘Yes; they used to stand on the little marble table between the windows.’

Old Tamar had glided in while they here talking, and placed the little tea equipage on the table unnoticed, and the captain was sipping his cup of tea, and inspecting the pattern, while his sister amused him.

‘This place, I suppose, is confoundedly slow, is not it? Do they entertain the neighbours ever at Brandon?’

‘Sometimes, when old Lady Chelford and her son are staying there.’

‘But the neighbours can’t entertain them, I fancy, or you. What a dreary thing a dinner party made up of such people must be — like “Aesop’s Fables,” where the cows and sheep converse.’

‘And sometimes a wolf or a fox,’ she said.

‘Well, Radie, I know you mean me; but as you wish it, I’ll carry my fangs elsewhere; — and what has become of Will Wylder?’

‘Oh! he’s in the Church!’

‘Quite right — the only thing he was fit for;’ and Captain Lake laughed like a man who enjoys a joke slily. ‘And where is poor Billy quartered?’

‘Not quite half a mile away; he has got the vicarage of Naunton Friars.’

‘Oh, then, Will is not quite such a fool as we took him for.’

‘It is worth just £180 a year! but he’s very far from a fool.’

‘Yes, of course, he knows Greek poets and Latin fathers, and all the rest of it. I don’t mean he ever was plucked. I dare say he’s the kind of fellow *you'd* like very well, Radie.' And his sly eyes had a twinkle in them which seemed to say, 'Perhaps I've divined your secret.'

'And so I do, and I like his wife, too, *very* much.'

'His wife! So William has married on £180 a year;' and the captain laughed quietly but very pleasantly again.

'On a very little more, at all events; and I think they are about the happiest, and I'm sure they are the best people in this part of the world.'

'Well, Radie, I'll see you tomorrow again. You preserve your good looks wonderfully. I wonder you haven't become an old woman here.'

And he kissed her, and went his way, with a slight wave of his hand, and his odd smile, as he closed the little garden gate after him.

He turned to his left, walking down towards the town, and the innocent green trees hid him quickly, and the gush and tinkle of the clear brook rose faint and pleasantly through the leaves, from the depths of the glen, and refreshed her ear after his unpleasant talk.

She was flushed, and felt oddly; a little stunned and strange, although she had talked lightly and easily enough.

'I forgot to ask him where he is staying: the Brandon Arms, I suppose. I don't at all like his coming down here after Mark Wylder; what *can* he mean? He certainly never would have taken the trouble for *me*. What *can* he want of Mark Wylder? I think *he* knew old Mr. Beauchamp. He may be a trustee, but that's not likely; Mark Wylder was not the person for any such office. I hope Stanley does not intend trying to extract money from him; anything rather than that degradation — than that *villainy*. Stanley was always impracticable, perverse, deceitful, and so foolish with all his cunning and suspicion — so *very* foolish. Poor Stanley. He's so unscrupulous; I don't know what to think. He said he could force Mark Wylder to leave the country. It must be some bad secret. If he tries and fails, I suppose he will be ruined. I don't know what to think; I never was so uneasy. He will blast himself, and disgrace all connected with him; and it is quite useless speaking to him.'

Perhaps if Rachel Lake had been in Belgravia, leading a town life, the matter would have taken no such dark colouring and portentous proportions. But living in a small old house, in a dark glen, with no companion, and little to occupy her, it was different.

She looked down the silent way he had so lately taken, and repeated, rather bitterly, ‘My only brother! my only brother! my only brother!’

That young lady was not quite a pauper, though she may have thought so. Comparatively, indeed, she was; but not, I venture to think, absolutely. She had just that symmetrical three hundred pounds a year, which the famous Dean of St. Patrick’s tells us he so ‘often wished that he had clear.’ She had had some money in the Funds besides, still more insignificant but this her Brother Stanley had borrowed and begged piecemeal, and the Consols were no more. But though something of a nun in her way of life, there was no germ of the old maid in her, and money was not often in her thoughts. It was not a bad *dot*; and her Brother Stanley had about twice as much, and therefore was much better off than many a younger son of a duke. But these young people, after the manner of men were spited with fortune; and indeed they had some cause. Old General Lake had once had more than ten thousand pounds a year, and lived, until the crash came, in the style of a vicious old prince. It was a great break up, and a worse fall for Rachel than for her brother, when the plate, coaches, pictures, and all the valuable effects’ of old Tiberius went to the hammer, and he himself vanished from his clubs and other haunts, and lived only — a thin intermittent rumour — surmised to be in gaol, or in Guernsey, and quite forgotten soon, and a little later actually dead and buried.

CHAPTER IX.

I SEE THE RING OF THE PERSIAN MAGICIAN.

‘That’s a devilish fine girl,’ said Mark Wylder.

He was sitting at this moment on the billiard table, with his coat off and his cue in his hand, and had lighted a cigar. He and I had just had a game, and were tired of it.

‘Who?’ I asked. He was looking on me from the corners of his eyes, and smiling in a sly, rakish way, that no man likes in another.

‘Radie Lake — she’s a splendid girl, by Jove! Don’t you think so? and she liked me once devilish well, I can tell you. She was thin then, but she has plumped out a bit, and improved every way.’

Whatever else he was, Mark was certainly no beauty; — a little short he was, and rather square — one shoulder a thought higher than the other — and a slight, energetic hitch in it when he walked. His features in profile had something of a Grecian character, but his face was too broad — very brown, rather a bloodless brown — and he had a pair of great, dense, vulgar, black whiskers. He was very vain of his teeth — his only really good point — for his eyes were a small cunning, gray pair; and this, perhaps, was the reason why he had contracted his habit of laughing and grinning a good deal more than the fun of the dialogue always warranted.

This sea-monster smoked here as unceremoniously as he would have done in ‘Rees’s Divan,’ and I only wonder he did not call for brandy-and-water. He had either grown coarser a great deal, or I more decent, during our separation. He talked of his *fiancée* as he might of an opera-girl almost, and was now discussing Miss Lake in the same style.

‘Yes, she is — she’s very well; but hang it, Wylder, you’re a married man now, and must give up talking that way. People won’t like it, you know; they’ll take it to mean more than it does, and you oughtn’t. Let us have another game.’

‘By-and-by; what do you think of Larkin?’ asked Wylder, with a sly glance from the corners of his eyes. ‘I think he prays rather more than is good for his clients; mind I spell it with an ‘a,’ not with an ‘e;’ but hang it, for an attorney, you know, and such a sharp chap, it does seem to me rather a — a joke, eh?'

'He bears a good character among the townspeople, doesn't he? And I don't see that it can do him any harm, remembering that he has a soul to be saved.'

'Or the other thing, eh?' laughed Wylder. 'But I think he comes it a little too strong — two sermons last Sunday, and a prayer-meeting at nine o'clock?'

'Well, it won't do him any harm,' I repeated.

'Harm! O, let Jos. Larkin alone for that. It gets him all the religious business of the county; and there are nice pickings among the charities, and endowments, and purchases of building sites, and trust deeds; I dare say it brings him in two or three hundred a year, eh?' And Wylder laughed again. 'It has broken up his hard, proud heart,' he says; 'but it left him a devilish hard head, I told him, and I think it sharpens his wits.'

'I rather think you'll find him a useful man; and to be so in his line of business he must have his wits about him, I can tell you.'

'He amused me devilishly,' said Wylder, 'with a sort of exhortation he treated me to; he's a delightfully impudent chap, and gave me to understand I was a limb of the Devil, and he a saint. I told him I was better than he, in my humble opinion, and so I am, by chalks. I know very well I'm a miserable sinner, but there's mercy above, and I don't hide my faults. I don't set up for a light or a saint; I'm just what the Prayer-book says — neither more nor less — a miserable sinner. There's only one good thing I can safely say for myself — I am no Pharisee; that's all; I air no religious prig, puffing myself, and trusting to forms, making long prayers in the market-place' (Mark's quotations were paraphrastic), 'and thinking of nothing but the uppermost seats in the synagogue, and broad borders, and the praise of men — hang them, I hate those fellows.'

So Mark, like other men we meet with, was proud of being a Publican; and his prayer was— 'I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, spiritually proud, formalists, hypocrites, or even as this Pharisee.'

'Do you wish another game?' I asked.

'Just now,' said Wylder, emitting first a thin stream of smoke, and watching its ascent. 'Dorcas is the belle of the county; and she likes me, though she's odd, and don't show it the way other girls would. But a fellow knows pretty well when a girl likes him, and you know the marriage is a sensible sort of thing, and I'm determined, of course, to carry it through; but, hang it, a fellow can't help thinking sometimes there are other things besides money, and Dorcas is not my style. Rachel's more that way; she's a *tremendious* fine girl, by Jove! and a spirited minx, too; and I think,' he added, with an oath, having first taken two puffs at his cigar, 'if I had seen her first, I'd have thought twice before I'd have got myself into this business.'

I only smiled and shook my head. I did not believe a word of it. Yet, perhaps, I was wrong. He knew very well how to take care of his money; in fact, compared with other young fellows, he was a bit of a screw. But he could do a handsome and generous thing for himself. His selfishness would expand nobly, and rise above his prudential considerations, and drown them sometimes; and he was the sort of person, who, if the fancy were strong enough, might marry in haste, and repent — and make his wife, too, repent — at leisure.

'What do you laugh at, Charlie?' said Wylder, grinning himself.

'At your confounded grumbling, Mark. The luckiest dog in England! Will nothing content you?'

'Why, I grumble very little, I think, considering how well off I am,' rejoined he, with a laugh.

'Grumble! If you had a particle of gratitude, you'd build a temple to Fortune — you're pagan enough for it, Mark.'

'Fortune has nothing to do with it,' says Mark, laughing again.

'Well, certainly, neither had you.'

'It was all the Devil. I'm not joking, Charlie, upon my word, though I'm laughing.' (Mark swore now and then, but I take leave to soften his oaths). 'It was the Persian Magician.'

'Come, Mark, say what you mean.'

'I mean what I say. When we were in the Persian Gulf, near six years ago, I was in command of the ship. The captain, you see, was below, with a hurt in his leg. We had very rough weather — a gale for two days and a night almost — and a heavy swell after. In the night time we picked up three poor devils in an open boat — . One was a Persian merchant, with a grand beard. We called him the magician, he was so like the pictures of Aladdin's uncle.'

'Why *he* was an African,' I interposed, my sense of accuracy offended.

'I don't care a curse what he was,' rejoined Mark; 'he was exactly like the picture in the storybooks. And as we were lying off — I forget the cursed name of it — he begged me to put him ashore. He could not speak a word of English, but one of the fellows with him interpreted, and they were all anxious to get ashore. Poor devils, they had a notion, I believe, we were going to sell them for slaves, and he made me a present of a ring, and told me a long yarn about it. It was a talisman, it seems, and no one who wore it could ever be lost. So I took it for a keepsake; here it is,' and he extended his stumpy, brown little finger, and showed a thick, coarsely-made ring of gold, with an uncut red stone, of the size of a large cherry stone, set in it.

'The stone is a humbug,' said Wylder. 'It's not real. I showed it to Platten and Foyle. It's some sort of glass. But I would not part with it. I got a fancy into my head that luck would come with it, and maybe that glass stuff was the thing that had the virtue in it. Now look at these Persian letters on the inside, for that's the oddest thing about it. Hang it, I can't pull it off — I'm growing as fat as a pig — but they are like a queer little string of flowers; and I showed it to a clever fellow at Malta — a missionary chap — and he read it off slick, and what do you think it means: "I will come up again;"' and he swore a great oath. 'It's as true as you stand there — *our* motto. Is not it odd? So I got the "resurgam" you see there engraved round it, and by Jove! it did bring me up. I was near lost, and did rise again. Eh?'

Well, it certainly was a curious accident. Mark had plenty of odd and not unamusing lore. Men who beat about the world in ships usually have; and these 'yarns,' furnished, after the pattern of Othello's tales of Anthropophagites and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders, one of the many varieties of fascination which he practised on the fair sex. Only in justice to Mark, I must say that he was by no means so shameless a drawer of the long-bow as the Venetian gentleman and officer.

'When I got this ring, Charlie, three hundred a year and a London life would have been Peru and Paradise to poor Pill Garlick, and see what it has done for me.'

'Aye, and better than Aladdin's, for you need not rub it and bring up that confounded ugly genii; the slave of your ring works unseen.'

‘So he does,’ laughed Wylder, in a state of elation, ‘and he’s not done working yet, I can tell you. When the estates are joined in one, they’ll be good eleven thousand a year; and Larkin says, with smart management, I shall have a rental of thirteen thousand before three years! And that’s only the beginning, by George! Sir Henry Twisden can’t hold his seat — he’s all but broke — as poor as Job, and the gentry hate him, and he lives abroad. He has had a hint or two already, and he’ll never fight the next election. D’ye see — hey?’

And Wylder winked and grinned, with a wag of his head.

‘M.P. — eh? You did not see that before. I look a-head a bit, eh? and can take my turn at the wheel — eh?’

And he laughed with cunning exultation.

‘Miss Rachel will find I’m not quite such a lubber as she fancies. But even then it is only begun. Come, Charlie, you used to like a bet. What do you say? I’ll buy you that twenty-five guinea book of pictures — what’s its name? — if you give me three hundred guineas one month after I’m a peer of Parliament. Hey? There’s a sporting offer for you. Well! what do you say — eh?’

‘You mean to come out as an orator, then?’

‘Orator be diddled! Do you take me for a fool? No, Charlie; but I’ll come out strong as a *voter* — that’s the stuff they like — at the right side, of course, and that is the way to manage it. Thirteen thousand a year — the oldest family in the county — and a steady thick and thin supporter of the minister. Strong points, eh, Charlie? Well, do you take my offer?’

I laughed and declined, to his great elation, and just then the gong sounded and we were away to our toilets.

While making my toilet for dinner, I amused myself by conjecturing whether there could be any foundation in fact for Mark’s boast, that Miss Brandon liked him. Women are so enigmatical — some in everything — all in matters of the heart. Don’t they sometimes actually admire what is repulsive? Does not brutality in our sex, and even rascality, interest them sometimes? Don’t they often affect indifference, and occasionally even aversion, where there is a different sort of feeling?

As I went down I heard Miss Lake chatting with her queenlike cousin near an open door on the lobby. Rachel Lake was, indeed, a very constant guest at the Hall, and the servants paid her much respect, which I look upon as a sign that the young heiress liked her and treated her with consideration; and indeed there was an insubordinate and fiery spirit in that young lady which would have brooked nothing less and dreamed of nothing but equality.

CHAPTER X.

THE ACE OF HEARTS.

Who should I find in the drawingroom, talking fluently and smiling, after his wont, to old Lady Chelford, who seemed to receive him very graciously, for her at least, but Captain Stanley Lake!

I can’t quite describe to you the odd and unpleasant sort of surprise which that very gentlemanlike figure, standing among the Brandon household gods at this moment, communicated to me. I thought of the few odd words and looks that had dropped from Wylder about him with an ominous pang as I looked, and I felt somehow as if there were some occult relation between that confused prelude of Wylder’s and the Mephistophelean image that had risen up almost upon the spot where it was spoken. I glanced round for Wylder, but he was not there.

‘You know Captain Lake?’ said Lord Chelford, addressing me.

And Lake turned round upon me, a little abruptly, his odd yellowish eyes, a little like those of the sea-eagle, and the ghost of his smile that flickered on his singularly pale face, with a stern and insidious look, confronted me. There was something evil and shrinking in his aspect, which I felt with a sort of chill, like the commencing fascination of a serpent. I often thought since that he had expected to see Wylder before him.

The churchyard meteor expired, there was nothing in a moment but his ordinary smile of recognition.

‘You’re surprised to see me here,’ he said in his very pleasing low tones.

‘I lighted on him in the village; and I knew Miss Brandon would not forgive me if I allowed him to go away without coming here. (He had his hand upon Lake’s shoulder.) They are cousins, you know; we are all cousins. I’m bad at genealogies. My mother could tell us all about it — we, Brandons, Lakes; Wylders, and Chelfords.’

At this moment Miss Brandon entered, with her brilliant Cousin Rachel.
The blonde and the dark, it was a dazzling contrast.

So Chelford led Stanley Lake before the lady of the castle. I thought of the 'Fair Brunnisende,' with the captive knight in the hands of her seneschal before her, and I fancied he said something of having found him trespassing in her town, and brought him up for judgment. Whatever Lord Chelford said, Miss Brandon received it very graciously, and even with a momentary smile. I wonder she did not smile oftener, it became her so. But her greeting to Captain Lake was more than usually haughty and frozen, and her features, I fancied, particularly proud and pale. It seemed to me to indicate a great deal more than mere indifference — something of aversion, and nearer to a positive emotion than anything I had yet seen in that exquisitely apathetic face.

How was it that this man with the yellow eyes seemed to gleam from them an influence of pain or disturbance, wherever almost he looked.

'Shake hands with your cousin, my dear,' said old Lady Chelford, peremptorily. The little scene took place close to her chair; and upon this stage direction the little piece of by-play took place, and the young lady coldly touched the captain's hand, and passed on.

Young as he was, Stanley Lake was an old man of the world, not to be disconcerted, and never saw more than exactly suited him. Waiting in the drawingroom, I had some entertaining talk with Miss Lake. Her conversation was lively, and rather bold, not at all in the coarse sense, but she struck me as having formed a system of ethics and views of life, both goodhumoured and sarcastic, and had carried into her rustic sequestration the melancholy and precocious lore of her early London experience.

When Lord Chelford joined us, I perceived that Wylder was in the room, and saw a very cordial greeting between him and Lake. The captain appeared quite easy and cheerful; but Mark, I thought, notwithstanding his laughter and general jollity, was uncomfortable; and I saw him once or twice, when Stanley's eye was not upon him, glance sharply on the young man with an uneasy and not very friendly curiosity.

At dinner Lake was easy and amusing. That meal passed off rather pleasantly; and when we joined the ladies in the drawingroom, the good vicar's enthusiastic little wife came to meet us, in one of her honest little raptures.

'Now, here's a thing worth your looking at! Did you ever see anything so bee-utiful in your life? It is such a darling little thing; and — look now — is not it magnificent?'

She arrested the file of gentlemen just by a large lamp, before whose effulgence she presented the subject of her eulogy — one of those costly trifles which announce the approach of Hymen, as flowers spring up before the rosy steps of May.

Well, it was pretty — French, I dare say — a little set of tablets — a toy — the cover of enamel, studded in small jewels, with a slender border of symbolic flowers, and with a heart in the centre, a mosaic of little carbuncles, rubies, and other red and crimson stones, placed with a view to light and shade.

'Exquisite, indeed!' said Lord Chelford. 'Is this yours, Mrs. Wylder?'

'Mine, indeed!' laughed poor little Mrs. Dorothy. 'Well, dear me, no, indeed;' — and in an earnest whisper close in his ear— 'a present to Miss Brandon, and the donor is not a hundred miles away from your elbow, my lord!' and she winked slyly, and laughed, with a little nod at Wylder.

'Oh! I see — to be sure — really, Wylder, it does your taste infinite credit.'

'I'm glad you like it,' says Wylder, chuckling benignantly on it, over his shoulder. 'I believe I *have* a little taste that way; those are all real, you know, those jewels.'

'Oh, yes! of course. Have you seen it, Captain Lake?' And he placed it in that gentleman's fingers, who now took his turn at the lamp, and contemplated the little parallelogram with a gleam of sly amusement.

'What are you laughing at?' asked Wylder, a little snappishly.

'I was thinking it's very like the ace of hearts,' answered the captain softly, smiling on.

'Fie, Lake, there's no poetry in you,' said Lord Chelford, laughing.

'Well, now, though, really it is funny; it did not strike me before, but do you know, now, it *is*,' laughs out jolly Mrs. Dolly, 'isn't it. Look at it, do, Mr. Wylder — isn't it like the ace of hearts?'

Wylder was laughing rather redly, with the upper part of his face very surly, I thought.

'Never mind, Wylder, it's the winning card,' said Lord Chelford, laying his hand on his shoulder.

Whereupon Lake laughed quietly, still looking on the ace of hearts with his sly eyes.

And Wylder laughed too, more suddenly and noisily than the humour of the joke seemed quite to call for, and glanced a grim look from the corners of his eyes on Lake, but the gallant captain did not seem to perceive it; and after a few seconds more he handed it very innocently back to Mrs. Dorothy, only remarking —

‘Seriously, it *is* very pretty, and *appropriate*.’

And Wylder, making no remark, helped himself to a cup of coffee, and then to a glass of Curaçoa, and then looked industriously at a Spanish quarto of Don Quixote, and lastly walked over to me on the hearthrug.

‘What the d — has he come down here for? It can’t be for money, or balls, or play, and he has no honest business anywhere. Do you know?’

‘Lake? Oh! I really can’t tell; but he’ll soon tire of country life. I don’t think he’s much of a sportsman.’

‘Ha, isn’t he? I don’t know anything about him almost; but I hate him.’

‘Why should you, though? He’s a very gentlemanlike fellow and your cousin.’

‘My cousin — the Devil’s cousin — everyone’s cousin. I don’t know who’s my cousin, or who isn’t; nor you don’t, who’ve been for ten years over those d — d papers; but I think he’s the nastiest dog I ever met. I took a dislike to him at first sight long ago, and that never happened me but I was right.’

Wylder looked confoundedly angry and flustered, standing with his heels on the edge of the rug, his hands in his pockets, jingling some silver there, and glancing from under his red forehead sternly and unsteadily across the room.

‘He’s not a man for country quarters! he’ll soon be back in town, or to Brighton,’ I said.

‘If *he* doesn’t, *I* will. That’s all.’

Just to get him off this unpleasant groove with a little jolt, I said —

‘By-the-bye, Wylder, you know the pictures here; who is the tall man, with the long pale face, and wild phosphoric eyes? I was always afraid of him; in a long peruke, and dark red velvet coat, facing the hall-door. I had a horrid dream about him last night.’

‘That? Oh, I know — that’s Lorne Brandon. He was one of our family devils, he was. A devil in a family now and then is not such a bad thing, when there’s work for him.’ (All the time he was talking to me his angry little eyes were following Lake.) ‘They say he killed his son, a blackguard, who was found shot, with his face in the tarn in the park. He was going to marry the gamekeeper’s daughter, it was thought, and he and the old boy, who was for high blood, and all that, were at loggerheads about it. It was not proved, only thought likely, which showed what a nice character he was; but he might have done worse. I suppose Miss Partridge would have had a precious lot of babbies; and who knows where the estate would have been by this time.’

‘I believe, Charlie,’ he recommenced suddenly, ‘there is not such an unnatural family on record as ours; is there? Ha, ha, ha! It’s well to be distinguished in any line. I forget all the other good things he did; but he ended by shooting himself through the head in his bedroom, and that was not the worst thing ever he did.’

And Wylder laughed again, and began to whistle very low — not, I fancy, for want of thought, but as a sort of accompaniment thereto, for he suddenly said —

‘And where is he staying?’

‘Who? — Lake?’

‘Yes.’

‘I don’t know; but I think he mentioned Larkins’s house, didn’t he? I’m not quite sure.’

‘I suppose he this I’m made of money. By Jove! if he wants to borrow any I’ll surprise him, the cur; I’ll talk to him; ha, ha, ha!’

And Wylder chuckled angrily, and the small change in his pocket tinkled fiercely, as his eye glanced on the graceful captain, who was entertaining the ladies, no doubt, very agreeably in the distance.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH LAKE UNDER THE TREES OF BRANDON, AND I IN MY CHAMBER, SMOKE OUR NOCTURNAL CIGARS.

Miss Lake declined the carriage tonight. Her brother was to see her home, and there was a leavetaking, and the young ladies whispered a word or two, and kissed, after the manner of their kind. To Captain Lake, Miss Brandon's adieux were as cold and haughty as her greeting.

'Did you see that?' said Wylder in my ear, with a chuckle; and, wagging his head, he added, rather loftily for him, 'Miss Brandon, I reckon, has taken your measure, Master Stanley, as well as I. I wonder what the deuce the old dowager sees in him. Old women always like rascals.'

And he added something still less complimentary.

I suppose the balance of attraction and repulsion was overcome by Miss Lake, much as he disliked Stanley, for Wylder followed them out with Lord Chelford, to help the young lady into her cloak and goloshes, and I found myself near Miss Brandon for the first time that evening, and much to my surprise she was first to speak, and that rather strangely.

'You seem to be very sensible, Mr. De Cresseron; pray tell me, frankly, what do you think of all this?'

'I am not quite sure, Miss Brandon, that I understand your question,' I replied, enquiringly.

'I mean of the — the family arrangements, in which, as Mr. Wylder's friend, you seem to take an interest?' she said.

'There can hardly be a second opinion, Miss Brandon; I think it a very wise measure,' I replied, much surprised.

'Very wise — exactly. But don't these very wise things sometimes turn out very foolishly? Do you really think your friend, Mr. Wylder, cares about me?'

'I take that for granted: in the nature of things it can hardly be otherwise,' I replied, a good deal startled and perplexed by the curious audacity of her interrogatory.

‘It was very foolish of me to expect from Mr. Wylder’s friend any other answer; you are very loyal, Mr. De Cresseron.’

And without awaiting my reply she made some remark which I forget to Lady Chelford, who sat at a little distance; and, appearing quite absorbed in her new subject, she placed herself close beside the dowager, and continued to chat in a low tone.

I was vexed with myself for having managed with so little skill a conversation which, opened so oddly and frankly, might have placed me on relations so nearly confidential, with that singular and beautiful girl. I ought to have rejoiced — but we don’t always see what most concerns our peace. In the meantime I had formed a new idea of her. She was so unreserved, it seemed, and yet in this directness there was something almost contemptuous.

By this time Lord Chelford and Wylder returned; and, disgusted rather with myself, I ruminated on my want of generalship.

In the meantime, Miss Lake, with her hand on her brother’s arm, was walking swiftly under the trees of the back avenue towards that footpath which, through wild copse and broken clumps near the park, emerges upon the still darker road which passes along the wooded glen by the mills, and skirts the little paling of the recluse lady’s garden.

They had not walked far, when Lake suddenly said —

‘What do you think of all this, Radie — this particular version, I mean, of marriage, *à-la-mode*, they are preparing up there?’ and he made a little dip of his cane towards Brandon Hall, over his shoulder. ‘I really don’t think Wylder cares twopence about her, or she about him,’ and Stanley Lake laughed gently and sleepily.

‘I don’t think they pretend to like one another. It is quite understood. It was all, you know, old Lady Chelford’s arrangement: and Dorcas is so supine, I believe she would allow herself to be given away by anyone, and to anyone, rather than be at the least trouble. She provokes me.’

‘But I thought she liked Sir Harry Bracton: he’s a good-looking fellow; and Queen’s Bracton is a very nice thing, you know.’

‘Yes, so they said; but that would, I think, have been worse. Something may be made of Mark Wylder. He has some sense and caution, has not he? — but Sir Harry is wickedness itself!’

‘Why — what has Sir Harry done? That is the way you women run away with things! If a fellow’s been a little bit wild, he’s Beelzebub at once. Bracton’s a very good fellow, I can assure you.’

The fact is, Captain Lake, an accomplished player, made a pretty little revenue of Sir Harry’s billiards, which were wild and noisy; and liking his money, thought he liked himself — a confusion not uncommon.

‘I don’t know, and can’t say, how you fine gentlemen define wickedness: only, as an obscure female, I speak according to my lights: and he is generally thought the wickedest man in this county.’

‘Well, you know, Radie, women like wicked fellows: it is contrast, I suppose, but they do; and I’m sure, from what Bracton has said to me — I know him intimately — that Dorcas likes him, and I can’t conceive why they are not married.’

‘It is very happy, for her at least, they are not,’ said Rachel, and a long silence ensued.

Their walk continued silent for the greater part, neither was quite satisfied with the other. But Rachel at last said —

‘Stanley, you meditate some injury to Mark Wylder.’

‘I, Radie?’ he answered quietly, ‘why on earth should you think so?’

‘I saw you twice watch him when you thought no one observed you — and I know your face too well, Stanley, to mistake.’

‘Now that’s impossible, Radie; for I really don’t think I once thought of him all this evening — except just while we were talking.’

‘You keep your secret as usual, Stanley,’ said the young lady.

‘Really, Radie, you’re quite mistaken. I assure you, upon my honour, I’ve no secret. You’re a very odd girl — why won’t you believe me?’

Miss Rachel only glanced across her mufflers on his face. There was a bright moonlight, broken by the shadows of overhanging boughs and withered leaves; and the mottled lights and shadows glided oddly across his pale features. But she saw that he was smiling his sly, sleepy smile, and she said quietly —

‘Well, Stanley, I ask no more — but you don’t deceive me.’

‘I don’t try to. If your feelings indeed had been different, and that you had not made such a point — you know— ‘

‘Don’t insult me, Stanley, by talking again as you did this morning. What I say is altogether on your own account. Mark my words, you’ll find him too strong for you; aye, and too deep. I see very plainly that *he* suspects you as I do. You saw it, too, for nothing of that kind escapes you. Whatever you meditate, he probably anticipates it — you know best — and you will find him prepared. You have given him time enough. You were always the same, close, dark, and crooked, and wise in your own conceit. I am very uneasy about it, whatever it is. *I* can't help it. It will happen — and most ominously I feel that you are courting a dreadful retaliation, and that you will bring on yourself a great misfortune; but it is quite vain, I know, speaking to you.'

'Really, Radie, you're enough to frighten a poor fellow; you won't mind a word I say, and go on predicting all manner of mischief between me and Wylder, the very nature of which I can't surmise. Would you dislike my smoking a cigar, Radie?'

'Oh, no,' answered the young lady, with a little laugh and a heavy sigh, for she knew it meant silence, and her dark auguries grew darker.

To my mind there has always been something inexpressibly awful in family feuds. Mortal hatred seems to deepen and dilate into something diabolical in these perverted animosities. The mystery of their origin — their capacity for evolving latent faculties of crime — and the steady vitality with which they survive the hearse, and speak their deep-mouthed malignities in every new-born generation, have associated them somehow in my mind with a spell of life exceeding and distinct from human and a special Satanic action.

My chamber, as I have mentioned, was upon the third storey. It was one of many, opening upon the long gallery, which had been the scene, four generations back, of that unnatural and bloody midnight duel which had laid one scion of this ancient house in his shroud, and driven another a fugitive to the moral solitudes of a continental banishment.

Much of the day, as I told you, had been passed among the grisly records of these old family crimes and hatreds. They had been an ill-conditioned and not a happy race. When I heard the servant's step traversing that long gallery, as it seemed to the in haste to be gone, and when all grew quite silent, I began to feel a dismal sort of sensation, and lighted the pair of wax candles which I found upon the small writing table. How wonderful and mysterious is the influence of light! What sort of beings must those be who hate it?

The floor, more than anything else, showed the great age of the room. It was warped and arched all along by the wall between the door and the window. The portion of it which the carpet did not cover showed it to be oak, dark and rugged. My bed was unexceptionably comfortable, but, in my then mood, I could have wished it a great deal more modern. Its four posts were, like the rest of it, oak, wellnigh black, fantastically turned and carved, with a great urn-like capital and base, and shaped midway, like a gigantic lance-handle. Its curtains were of thick and faded tapestry. I was always a lover of such antiquities, but I confess at that moment I would have vastly preferred a sprightly modern chintz and a trumpery little French bed in a corner of the Brandon Arms. There was a great lowering press of oak, and some shelves, with withered green and gold leather borders. All the furniture belonged to other times.

I would have been glad to hear a step stirring, or a cough even, or the gabble of servants at a distance. But there was a silence and desertion in this part of the mansion which, somehow, made me feel that I was myself a solitary intruder on this level of the vast old house.

I shan't trouble you about my train of thoughts or fancies; but I began to feel very like a gentleman in a ghost story, watching experimentally in a haunted chamber. My cigar case was a resource. I was not a bit afraid of being found out. I did not even take the precaution of smoking up the chimney. I boldly lighted my cheroot. I peeped through the dense window curtain there were no shutters. A cold, bright moon was shining with clear sharp lights and shadows. Everything looked strangely cold and motionless outside. The sombre old trees, like gigantic hearse plumes, black and awful. The chapel lay full in view, where so many of the, strange and equivocal race, under whose ancient roof-tree I then stood, were lying under their tombstones.

Somehow, I had grown nervous. A little bit of plaster tumbled down the chimney, and startled me confoundedly. Then some time after, I fancied I heard a creaking step on the lobby outside, and, candle in hand, opened the door, and looked out with an odd sort of expectation, and a rather agreeable disappointment, upon vacancy.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH UNCLE LORNE TROUBLES ME.

I was growing most uncomfortably like one of Mrs. Anne Radcliffe's heroes — a nervous race of demigods.

I walked like a sentinel up and down my chamber, puffing leisurely the solemn incense, and trying to think of the Opera and my essay on 'Paradise Lost,' and other pleasant subjects. But it would not do. Every now and then, as I turned towards the door, I fancied I saw it softly close. I can't the least say whether it was altogether fancy. It was with the corner, or as the Italians have it, the 'tail' of my eye that I saw, or imagined that I saw, this trifling but unpleasant movement.

I called out once or twice sharply— 'Come in!' 'Who's there?' 'Who's that?' and so forth, without any sort of effect, except that unpleasant reaction upon the nerves which follows the sound of one's own voice in a solitude of this kind.

The fact is I did not myself believe in that stealthy motion of my door, and set it down to one of those illusions which I have sometimes succeeded in analysing — a half-seen combination of objects which, rightly placed in the due relations of perspective, have no mutual connection whatever.

So I ceased to challenge the unearthly inquisitor, and allowed him, after a while, serenely enough, to peep as I turned my back, or to withdraw again as I made my regular right-about face.

I had now got halfway in my second cheroot, and the clock clanged 'one.' It was a very still night, and the prolonged boom vibrated strangely in my excited ears and brain. I had never been quite such an ass before; but I do assure you I was now in an extremely unpleasant state. One o'clock was better, however, than twelve. Although, by Jove! the bell was 'beating one,' as I remember, precisely as that king of ghosts, old Hamlet, revisited the glimpses of the moon, upon the famous platform of Elsinore.

I had pondered too long over the lore of this Satanic family, and drunk very strong tea, I suppose. I could not get my nerves into a comfortable state, and cheerful thoughts refused to inhabit the darkened chamber of my brain. As I stood in a sort of reverie, looking straight upon the door, I saw — and this time there could be no mistake whatsoever — the handle — the only modern thing about it — slowly turned, and the door itself as slowly pushed about a quarter open.

I do not know what exclamation I made. The door was shut instantly, and I found myself standing at it, and looking out upon the lobby, with a candle in my hand, and actually freezing with foolish horror.

I was looking towards the stairhead. The passage was empty and ended in utter darkness. I glanced the other way, and thought I saw — though not distinctly — in the distance a white figure, not gliding in the conventional way, but limping off, with a sort of jerky motion, and, in a second or two, quite lost in darkness.

I got into my room again, and shut the door with a clap that sounded loudly and unnaturally through the dismal quiet that surrounded me, and stood with my hand on the handle, with the instinct of resistance.

I felt uncomfortable; and I would have secured the door, but there was no sort of fastening within. So I paused. I did not mind looking out again. To tell you the plain truth, I was just a little bit afraid. Then I grew angry at having been put into such remote, and, possibly, suspected quarters, and then my comfortable scepticism supervened. I was yet to learn a great deal about this visitation.

So, in due course having smoked my cheroot, I jerked the stump into the fire. Of course I could not think of depriving myself of candlelight; and being already of a thoughtful, old-bachelor temperament, and averse from burning houses, I placed one of my tall waxlights in a basin on the table by my bed — in which I soon effected a lodgment, and lay with a comparative sense of security.

Then I heard two o’clock strike; but shortly after, as I suppose, sleep overtook me, and I have no distinct idea for how long my slumber lasted. The fire was very low when I awoke, and saw a figure — and a very odd one — seated by the embers, and stooping over the grate, with a pair of long hands expanded, as it seemed, to catch the warmth of the sinking fire.

It was that of a very tall old man, entirely dressed in white flannel — a very long spencer, and some sort of white swathing about his head. His back was toward me; and he stooped without the slightest motion over the fireplace, in the attitude I have described.

As I looked, he suddenly turned toward me, and fixed upon me a cold, and as it seemed, a wrathful gaze, over his shoulder. It was a bleached and a long-chinned face — the countenance of Lorne's portrait — only more faded, sinister, and apathetic. And having, as it were, secured its awful command over me by a protracted gaze, he rose, supernaturally lean and tall, and drew near the side of my bed.

I continued to stare upon this apparition with the most dreadful fascination I ever experienced in my life. For two or three seconds I literally could not move. When I did, I am not ashamed to confess, it was to plunge my head under the bedclothes, with the childish instinct of terror; and there I lay breathless, for what seemed to me not far from ten minutes, during which there was no sound, nor other symptom of its presence.

On a sudden the bedclothes were gently lifted at my feet, and I sprang backwards, sitting upright against the back of the bed, and once more under the gaze of that long-chinned old man.

A voice, as peculiar as the appearance of the figure, said: —

'You are in my bed — I died in it a great many years ago. I am Uncle Lorne; and when I am not here, a devil goes up and down in the room. See! he had his face to your ear when I came in. I came from Dorcas Brandon's bedchamber door, where her evil angel told me a thing; — and Mark Wylder must not seek to marry her, for he will be buried alive if he does, and he will, maybe, never get up again. Say your prayers when I go out, and come here no more.'

He paused, as if these incredible words were to sink into my memory; and then, in the same tone, and with the same countenance, he asked —

'Is the blood on my forehead?'

I don't know whether I answered.

'So soon as a calamity is within twelve hours, the blood comes upon my forehead, as they found me in the morning — it is a sign.'

The old man then drew back slowly, and disappeared behind the curtains at the foot of the bed, and I saw no more of him during the rest of that odious night.

So long as this apparition remained before me, I never doubted its being supernatural. I don't think mortal ever suffered horror more intense. My very hair was dripping with a cold moisture. For some seconds I hardly knew where I was. But soon a reaction came, and I felt convinced that the apparition was a living man. It was no process of reason or philosophy, but simply I became persuaded of it, and something like rage overcame my terrors.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PONY CARRIAGE

So soon as daylight came, I made a swift cold water toilet, and got out into the open air, with a solemn resolution to see the hated interior of that bedroom no more. When I met Lord Chelford in his early walk that morning, I'm sure I looked myself like a ghost — at all events, very wild and seedy — for he asked me, more seriously than usual, how I was; and I think I would have told him the story of my adventure, despite the secret ridicule with which, I fancied, he would receive it, had it not been for a certain insurmountable disgust and horror which held me tongue-tied upon the affair.

I told him, however, that I had dreamed dreams, and was restless and uncomfortable in my present berth, and begged his interest with the housekeeper to have my quarters changed to the lower storey — quite resolved to remove to the 'Brandon Arms,' rather than encounter another such night as I had passed.

Stanley Lake did not appear that day; Wylder was glowering and abstracted — worse company than usual; and Rachel seemed to have quite passed from his recollection.

While Rachel Lake was, as usual, busy in her little garden that day, Lord Chelford, on his way to the town, by the pretty mill-road, took off his hat to her with a smiling salutation, and leaning on the paling, he said —

'I often wonder how you make your flowers grow here — you have so little sun among the trees — and yet, it is so pretty and flowery; it remains in my memory as if the sun were always shining specially on this little garden.'

Miss Lake laughed.

'I am very proud of it. They try not to blow, but I never let them alone till they do. See all my watering-pots, and pruning-scissors, my sticks, and bass-mat, and glass covers. Skill and industry conquer churlish nature — and this is my Versailles.'

‘I don’t believe in those sticks, and scissors, and watering-pots. You won’t tell your secret; but I’m sure it’s an influence — you smile and whisper to them.’

She smiled — without raising her eyes — on the flower she was tying up; and, indeed, it was such a smile as must have made it happy — and she said, gaily —

‘You forget that Lord Chelford passes this way sometimes, and shines upon them, too.’

‘No, he’s a dull, earthly dog; and if he shines here, it is only in reflected light’

‘Margery, child, fetch me the scissors.’

And a hobble-de-hoy of a girl, with round eyes, and a long white-apron, and bare arms, came down the little walk, and — eyeing the peer with an awful curiosity — presented the shears to the charming Atropos, who clipped off the withered blossoms that had bloomed their hour, and were to cumber the stalk no more.

‘Now, you see what art may do; how *passée* this creature was till I made her toilet, and how wonderfully the poor old beauty looks now,’ and she glanced complacently at the plant she had just trimmed.

‘Well, it is young again and beautiful; but no — I have no faith in the scissors; I still believe in the influence — from the tips of your fingers, your looks, and tones. Flowers, like fairies, have their favourites, whom they smile on and obey; and I think this is a haunted glen — trees, flowers, all have an intelligence and a feeling — and I am sure you see wonderful things, by moonlight, from your window.’

With a strange meaning echo, those words returned to her afterwards— ‘I’m sure you see wonderful things, by moonlight, from your window.’

But no matter; the winged words — making pleasant music — flew pleasantly away, now among transparent leaves and glimmering sun; by-and-by, in moonlight, they will return to the casement piping the same tune, in ghostly tones.

And as they chatted in this strain, Rachel paused on a sudden, with upraised hand, listening pleasantly.

‘I hear the pony-carriage; Dorcas is coming,’ she said.

And the tinkle of tiny wheels, coming down the road, was audible.

‘There’s a pleasant sense of adventure, too, in the midst of your seclusion. Sudden arrivals and passing pilgrims, like me, leaning over the paling, and refreshed by the glimpse the rogue steals of this charming oratory. Yes; here comes the fair Brunnisende.’

And he made his salutation. Miss Brandon smiled from under her gipsy-hat very pleasantly for her.

‘Will you come with me for a drive, Radie?’ she asked.

‘Yes, dear — delighted. Margery, bring my gloves and cloak.’ And she unpinned the faded silk shawl that did duty in the garden, and drew off her gauntlets, and showed her pretty hands; and Margery popped her cloak on her shoulders, and the young lady pulled on her gloves. All ready in a moment, like a young lady of energy; and chatting merrily she sat down beside her cousin, who held the reins. As there were no more gates to open, Miss Brandon dismissed the servant, who stood at the ponies’ heads, and who, touching his hat with his white glove, received his *congé*, and strode with willing steps up the road.

‘Will you take me for your footman as far as the town?’ asked Lord Chelford; so, with permission, up he jumped behind, and away they whirled, close over the ground, on toy wheels ringing merrily on the shingle, he leaning over the back and chatting pleasantly with the young ladies as they drove on.

They drew up at the Brandon Arms, and little girls courtesied at doors, and householders peeped from their windows, not standing close to the panes, but respectfully back, at the great lady and the nobleman, who was now taking his leave.

And next they pulled up at that official rendezvous, with whitewashed front — and ‘postoffice,’ in white letters on a brown board over its door, and its black, hinged window-pane, through which Mr. Driver — or, in his absence, Miss Anne Driver — answered questions, and transacted affairs officially.

In the rear of this establishment were kept some dogs of Lawyer Larkin’s; and just as the ladies arrived, that person emerged, looking overpoweringly gentlemanlike, in a white hat, gray paletot, lavender trowsers, and white riding gloves. He was in a righteous and dignified way pleased to present himself in so becoming a costume, and moreover in good company, for Stanley Lake was going with him to Dutton for a day’s sport, which neither of them cared for. But Stanley hoped to pump the attorney, and the attorney, I'm afraid, liked being associated with the fashionable captain; and so they were each pleased in the way that suited them.

The attorney, being long as well as lank, had to stoop under the doorway, but drew himself up handsomely on coming out, and assumed his easy, highbred style, which, although he was not aware of it, was very nearly insupportable, and smiled very engagingly, and meant to talk a little about the weather; but Miss Brandon made him one of her gravest and slightest bows, and suddenly saw Mrs. Brown at her shop door on the other side, and had a word to say to her.

And now Stanley Lake drew up in the taxcart, and greeted the ladies, and told them how he meant to pass the day; and the dogs being put in, and the attorney, I'm afraid a little spited at his reception, in possession of the reins, they drove down the little street at a great pace, and disappeared round the corner; and in a minute more the young ladies, in the opposite direction, resumed their drive. The ponies, being grave and trustworthy, and having the road quite to themselves, needed little looking after, and Miss Brandon was free to converse with her companion.

'I think, Rachel, you have a lover,' she said.

'Only a bachelor, I'm afraid, as my poor Margery calls the young gentleman who takes her out for a walk on a Sunday, and I fear means nothing more.'

'This is the second time I've found Chelford talking to you, Rachel, at the door of your pretty little garden.'

Rachel laughed.

'Suppose, some fine day, he should put his hand over the paling, and take yours, and make you a speech.'

'You romantic darling,' she said, 'don't you know that peers and princes have quite given over marrying simple maidens of low estate for love and liking, and understand matchmaking better than you or I; though I could give a tolerable account of myself, after the manner of the white cat in the story, which I think is a pattern of frankness and modest dignity. I'd say with a courtesy— "Think not, prince, that I have always been a cat, and that my birth is obscure; my father was king of six kingdoms, and loved my mother tenderly," and so forth.'

‘Rachel, I like you,’ interrupted the dark beauty, fixing her large eyes, from which not light, but, as it were, a rich shadow fell softly on her companion. It was the first time she had made any such confession. Rachel returned her look as frankly, with an amused smile, and then said, with a comic little toss of her head —

‘Well, Dorcas, I don’t see why you should not, though I don’t know why you say so.’

‘You’re not like other people; you don’t complain, and you’re not bitter, although you have had great misfortunes, my poor Rachel.’

There be ladies, young and old, who, the moment they are pitied, though never so cheerful before, will forthwith dissolve in tears. But that was not Rachel’s way; she only looked at her with a goodhumoured but grave curiosity for a few seconds, and then said, with rather a kindly smile —

‘And now, Dorcas, I like you.’

Dorcas made no answer, but put her arm round Rachel’s neck, and kissed her; Dorcas made two kisses of it, and Rachel one, but it was cousinly and kindly; and Rachel laughed a soft little laugh after it, looking amused and very lovingly on her cousin; but she was a bold lass, and not given in anywise to the melting mood, and said gaily, with her open hand still caressingly on Dorcas’s waist —

‘I make a very good nun, Dorcas, as I told Stanley the other day. I sometimes, indeed, receive a male visitor, at the other side of the paling, which is my grille; but to change my way of life is a dream that does not trouble me. Happy the girl — and I am one — who cannot like until she is first beloved. Don’t you remember poor, pale Winnie, the maid who used to take us on our walks all the summer at Dawling; how she used to pluck the leaves from the flowers, like Faust’s Marguerite, saying, “He loves me a little — passionately, not at all.” Now if I were loved passionately, I might love a little; and if loved a little — it should be not at all.’

They had the road all to themselves, and were going at a walk up an ascent, so the reins lay loosely on the ponies’ necks and Dorcas looked with an untold meaning in her proud face, on her cousin, and seemed on the point of speaking, but she changed her mind.

‘And so Dorcas, as swains are seldom passionately in love with so small a pittance as mine, I think I shall mature into a queer old maid, and take all the little Wylders, masters and misses, with your leave, for their walks, and help to make their pinafores.' Whereupon Miss Dorcas put her ponies into a very quick trot, and became absorbed in her driving.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH VARIOUS PERSONS GIVE THEIR OPINIONS OF CAPTAIN STANLEY LAKE.

‘Stanley is an odd creature,’ said Rachel, so soon as another slight incline brought them to a walk; ‘I can’t conceive why he has come down here, or what he can possibly want of that disagreeable lawyer. They have got dogs and guns, and are going, of course, to shoot; but he does not care for shooting, and I don’t think Mr. Larkin’s society can amuse him. Stanley is clever and cunning, I think, but he is neither wise nor frank. He never tells me his plans, though he must know — he *does* know — I love him; yes, he’s a strange mixture of suspicion and imprudence. He’s wonderfully reserved. I am certain he trusts no one on earth, and at the same time, except in his confidences, he’s the rashest man living. If he were like Lord Chelford, or even like our good vicar — not in piety, for poor Stanley’s training, like my own, was sadly neglected there — I mean in a few manly points of character, I should be quite happy, I think, in my solitary nook.’

‘Is he so very odd?’ said Miss Brandon, coldly.

‘I only know he makes me often very uncomfortable,’ answered Rachel. ‘I never mind what he tells me, for I think he likes to mislead everybody; and I have been two often duped by him to trust what he says. I only know that his visit to Gylingden must have been made with some serious purpose, and his ideas are all so rash and violent.’

‘He was at Donnyston for ten days, I think, when I was there, and seemed clever. They had charades and *proverbes dramatiques*. I’m no judge, but the people who understood it, said he was very good.’

‘Oh! yes he is clever; I knew he was at Donnyston, but he did not mention he had seen you there; he only told me he had met you pretty often when you were at Lady Alton’s last season.’

‘Yes, in town,’ she answered, a little drily.

While these young ladies are discussing Stanley Lake, I may be permitted to mention my own estimate of that agreeable young person.

Captain Lake was a gentleman and an officer, and of course an honourable man; but somehow I should not have liked to buy a horse from him. He was very gentlemanlike in appearance, and even elegant; but I never liked him, although he undoubtedly had a superficial fascination. I always thought, when in his company, of old Lord Holland's silk stocking with something unpleasant in it. I think, in fact, he was destitute of those fine moral instincts which are born with men, but never acquired; and in his way of estimating his fellow men, and the canons of honour, there was occasionally perceptible a faint flavour of the villainous, and an undefined savour, at times, of brimstone. I know also that when his temper, which was nothing very remarkable, was excited, he could be savage and brutal enough; and I believe he had often been violent and cowardly in his altercations with his sister — so, at least, two or three people, who were versed in the scandals of the family, affirmed. But it is a censorious world, and I can only speak positively of my own sensations in his company. His morality, however, I suppose, was quite good enough for the world, and he had never committed himself in any of those ways of which that respectable tribunal takes cognizance.

'So that d — d fellow Lake is down here still; and that stupid, scheming lubber, Larkin, driving him about in his taxcart, instead of minding his business. I could not see him to-day. That sort of thing won't answer me; and he *is* staying at Larkin's house, I find.' Wylder was talking to me on the door steps after dinner, having in a rather sulky way swallowed more than his usual modicum of Madeira, and his remarks were delivered interruptedly — two or three puffs of his cigar interposed between each sentence.

'I suppose he expects to be asked to the wedding. He *may* expect — ha, ha, ha! You don't know that lad as I do.'

Then there came a second cigar, and some little time in lighting, and full twenty enjoyable puffs before he resumed.

'Now, you're a moral man, Charlie, tell me really what you think of a fellow marrying a girl he does not care that for,' and he snapt his fingers. 'Just for the sake of her estate — it's the way of the world, of course, and all that — but, is not it a little bit shabby, don't you think? Eh? Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'll not debate with you, Wylder, on that stupid old question. It's the way of the world, as you say, and there's an end of it.'

‘They say she’s such a beauty! Well, so I believe she is, but I can’t fancy her. Now you must not be angry. I’m not a poet like you — book-learned, you know; and she’s too solemn by half, and grand. I wish she was different. That other girl, Rachel — she’s a devilish handsome craft. I wish almost she was not here at all, or I wish she was in Dorcas’s shoes.’

‘Nonsense, Wylder! stop this stuff; and it is growing cold throw away that cigar, and come in.’

‘In a minute. No, I assure you, I’m not joking. Hang it! I must talk to some one. I’m devilish uncomfortable about this grand match. I wish I had not been led into it I don’t think I’d make a good husband to any woman I did not fancy, and where’s the good of making a girl unhappy, eh?’

‘Tut, Wylder, you ought to have thought of all that before. I don’t like your talking in this strain when you know it is too late to recede; besides, you are the luckiest fellow in creation. Upon my word, I don’t know why the girl marries you; you can’t suppose that she could not marry much better, and if you have not made up your mind to break off, of which the world would form but one opinion, you had better not speak in that way any more.’

‘Why, it was only to you, Charlie, and to tell you the truth, I do believe it is the best thing for me; but I suppose every fellow feels a little queer when he is going to be spliced, a little bit nervous, eh? But you are right — and I’m right, and we are all right — it *is* the best thing for us both. It will make a deuced fine estate; but hang it! you know a fellow’s never satisfied. And I suppose I’m a bit put out by that disreputable dog’s being here — I mean Lake; not that I need care more than Dorcas, or anyone else; but he’s no credit to the family, you see, and I never could abide him. I’ve half a mind, Charlie, to tell you a thing; but hang it! you’re such a demure old maid of a chap. Will you have a cigar?’

‘No.’

‘Well, I believe two’s enough for me,’ and he looked up at the stars.

‘I’ve a notion of running up to town, only for a day or two, before this business comes off, just on the sly; you’ll not mention it, and I’ll have a word with Lake, quite friendly, of course; but I’ll shut him up, and that’s all. I wonder he did not dine here to-day. Did you ever see so pushing a brute?’

So Wylder chucked away his cigar, and stood for a minute with his hands in his pockets looking up at the stars, as if reading fortunes there.

I had an unpleasant feeling that Mark Wylder was about some mischief — a suspicion that some game of mine and countermine was going on between him and Lake, to which I had no clue whatsoever.

Mark had the frankness of callosity, and could recount his evil deeds and confess his vices with hilarity and detail, and was prompt to take his part in a lark, and was a remarkably hard hitter, and never shrank from the brunt of the row; and with these fine qualities, and a much superior knowledge of the ways of the flash world, had commanded my boyish reverence and a general popularity among strangers. But, with all this, he could be as secret as the sea with which he was conversant, and as hard as a stonewall, when it answered his purpose. He had no lack of cunning, and a convenient fund of cool cruelty when that stoical attribute was called for. Years, I dare say, and a hard life and profligacy, and command, had not made him less selfish or more humane, or abated his craft and resolution.

If one could only see it, the manoeuvring and the ultimate collision of two such generals as he and Lake would be worth observing.

I dare say my last night's adventure tended to make me more nervous and prone to evil anticipation. And although my quarters had been changed to the lower storey, I grew uncomfortable as it waxed late, and half regretted that I had not migrated to the 'Brandon Arms.'

Uncle Lorne, however, made me no visit that night. Once or twice I fancied something, and started up in my bed. It was fancy, merely. What state had I really been in, when I saw that long-chinned apparition of the pale portrait? Many a wiser man than I had been mystified by dyspepsia and melancholic vapours.

CHAPTER XV.

DORCAS SHOWS HER JEWELS TO MISS LAKE.

Stanley Lake and his sister dined next day at Brandon. Under the cold shadow of Lady Chelford, the proprieties flourished, and generally very little else. Awful she was, and prompt to lecture young people before their peers, and spoke her mind with fearful directness and precision. But sometimes she would talk, and treat her hearers to her recollections, and recount anecdotes with a sort of grim cleverness, not wholly unamusing.

She did not like Wylder, I thought, although she had been the inventor and constructor of the family alliance of which he was the hero. I did not venture to cultivate her; and Miss Brandon had been, from the first, specially cold and repellent to Captain Lake. There was nothing very genial or promising, therefore, in the relations of our little party, and I did not expect a very agreeable evening.

Notwithstanding all this, however, our dinner was, on the whole, much pleasanter than I anticipated. Stanley Lake could be very amusing; but I doubt if our talk would quite stand the test of print. I often thought if one of those artists who photograph language and thought — the quiet, clever 'reporters,' to whom England is obliged for so much of her daily entertainment, of her social knowledge, and her political safety, were, pencil in hand, to ensconce himself behind the arras, and present us, at the close of the agreeable banquet, with a literal transcript of the feast of reason, which we give and take with so much complacency — whether it would quite satisfy us upon reconsideration.

When I entered the drawingroom after dinner, Lord Chelford was plainly arguing a point with the young ladies, and by the time I drew near, it was Miss Lake's turn to speak.

'Flattering of mankind, I am sure, I have no talent for; and without flattering and wheedling you'll never have conjugal obedience. Don't you remember Robin Hood? how —

'The mother of Robin said to her husband,
My honey, my love, and my dear.'

And all this for leave to ride with her son to see her own brother at Gamwell.'

'I remember,' said Dorcas, with a smile. 'I wonder what has become of that old book, with its odd little woodcuts.

'And he said, I grant thee thy boon, gentle Joan!
Take one of my horses straightway.'

'Well, though the book is lost, we retain the moral, you see,' said Rachel with a little laugh; 'and it has always seemed to me that if it had not been necessary to say, "my honey, my love, and my dear," that good soul would not have said it, and you may be pretty sure that if she had not, and with the suitable by-play too, she might not have ridden to Gamwell that day.'

'And you don't think *you* could have persuaded yourself to repeat that little charm, which obtained her boon and one of his horses straightway?' said Lord Chelford.

'Well, I don't know what a great temptation and a contumacious husband might bring one to; but I'm afraid I'm a stubborn creature, and have not the feminine gift of flattery. If, indeed, he felt his inferiority and owned his dependence, I think I might, perhaps, have called him "my honey, my love, and my dear," and encouraged and comforted him; but to buy my personal liberty, and the right to visit my brother at Gamwell — never!'

And yet she looked, Lord Chelford thought, very goodhumoured and pleasant, and he fancied a smile from her might do more with some men than all gentle Joan's honeyed vocabulary.

'I own,' said Lord Chelford, laughing, 'that, from prejudice, I suppose, I am in favour of the apostolic method, and stand up for the divine right of my sex; but then, don't you see, it is your own fault, if you make it a question of right, when you may make it altogether one of fascination?'

'Who, pray, is disputing the husband's right to rule?' demanded old Lady Chelford unexpectedly.

'I am very timidly defending it against very serious odds,' answered her son.

'Tut, tut! my dears, what's all this; you *must* obey your husbands,' cried the dowager, who put down nonsense with a high hand, and had ruled her lord with a rod of iron.

'That's no tradition of the Brandons,' said Miss Dorcas, quietly.

'The Brandons — pooh! my dear — it is time the Brandons should grow like other people. Hitherto, the Brandon men have all, without exception, been the wickedest in all England, and the women the handsomest and the most self-willed. Of course the men could not be obeyed in all things, nor the women disobeyed. I'm a Brandon myself, Dorcas, so I've a right to speak. But the words are precise — honour and obey — and obey you *must*; though, of course you may argue a point, if need be, and let your husband hear reason.'

And, having ruled the point, old Lady Chelford leaned back and resumed her doze.

There was no longer anything playful in Dorcas's look. On the contrary, something fierce and lurid, which I thought wonderfully becoming; and after a little she said —

'I promised, Rachel, to show you my jewels. Come now — will you? — and see them.'

And she placed Rachel's hand on her arm, and the two young ladies departed.

'Are you well, dear?' asked Rachel when they reached her room.

Dorcas was very pale, and her gaze was stern, and something undefinably wild in her quietude.

'What day of the month is this?' said Dorcas.

'The eighth — is not it? — yes, the eighth,' answered Rachel.

'And our marriage is fixed for the twenty-second — just a fortnight hence. I am going to tell you, Rachel, what I have resolved on.'

'How really beautiful these diamonds are! — quite superb.'

'Yes,' said Dorcas, opening the jewel-cases, which she had taken from her cabinet, one after the other.

‘And these pearls! how very magnificent! I had no idea Mark Wylder’s taste was so exquisite.’

‘Yes, very magnificent, I suppose.’

‘How charming — quite regal — you will look, Dorcas!’

Dorcas smiled strangely, and her bosom heaved a little, Rachel thought. Was it elation, or was there not something wildly bitter gleaming in that smile?

‘I *must* look a little longer at these diamonds.’

‘As long, dear, as you please. You are not likely, Rachel, to see them again.’

From the blue flash of the brilliants Rachel in honest amazement raised her eyes to her cousin’s face. The same pale smile was there; the look was oracular and painful. Had she overheard a part of that unworthy talk of Wylder’s at the dinner-table, the day before, and mistaken Rachel’s share in the dialogue?

And Dorcas said —

‘You have heard of the music on the waters that lures mariners to destruction. The pilot leaves the rudder, and leans over the prow, and listens. They steer no more, but drive before the wind; and what care they for wreck or drowning?’

I suppose it was the same smile; but in Rachel s eyes, as pictures will, it changed its character with her own change of thought, and now it seemed the pale rapt smile of one who hears music far off, or sees a vision.

‘Rachel, dear, I sometimes think there is an evil genius attendant on our family,’ continued Dorcas in the same subdued tone, which, in its very sweetness, had so sinister a sound in Rachel’s ear. ‘From mother to child, from child to grandchild, the same influence continues; and, one after another, wrecks the daughters of our family — a wayward family, and full of misery. Here I stand, forewarned, with my eyes open, determinedly following in the funereal footsteps of those who have gone their way before me. These jewels all go back to Mr. Wylder. He never can be anything to me. I was, I thought, to build up our house. I am going, I think, to lay it in the dust. With the spirit of the insane, I feel the spirit of a prophetess, too, and I see the sorrow that awaits me. You will see.’

‘Dorcas, darling, you are certainly ill. What is the matter?’

‘No, dear Rachel, not ill, only maybe agitated a little. You must not touch the bell — listen to me; but first promise, so help you Heaven, you will keep my secret.’

‘I do promise, indeed Dorcas, I swear I’ll not repeat one word you tell me.’

‘It has been a vain struggle. I know he’s a bad man, a worthless man — selfish, cruel, maybe. Love is not blind with me, but quite insane. He does not know, nor you, nor anyone; and now, Rachel, I tell you what was unknown to all but myself and Heaven — looking neither for counsel, nor for pity, nor for sympathy, but because I must, and you have sworn to keep my secret. I love your brother. Rachel, you must try to like me.’

She threw her arms round her cousin’s neck, and Rachel felt in her embrace the vibration of an agony.

She was herself so astonished that for a good while she could hardly collect her thoughts or believe her senses. Was it credible? Stanley! whom she had received with a coldness, if not aversion, so marked, that, if he had a spark of Rachel’s spirit, he would never have approached her more! Then came the thought — perhaps they understood one another, and that was the meaning of Stanley’s unexpected visit?

‘Well, Dorcas, dear, I *am* utterly amazed. But does Stanley — he can hardly hope?’

Dorcas removed her arms from her cousin’s neck; her face was pale, and her cheeks wet with tears, which she did not wipe away.

‘Sit down by me, Rachel. No, *he* does *not* like *me* — that is — I don’t know; but, I am sure, he can’t suspect that I like him. It was my determination it should not be. I resolved, Rachel, quite to extinguish the madness; but I could not. It was not his doing, nor mine, but something else. There are some families, I think, too wicked for Heaven to protect, and they are given over to the arts of those who hated them in life and pursue them after death; and this is the meaning of the curse that has always followed us. No good will ever happen us, and I must go like the rest.’

There was a short silence, and Rachel gazed on the carpet in troubled reflection, and then, with an anxious look, she took her cousin’s hand, and said —

‘Dorcas, you must think of this no more. I am speaking against my brother’s interest. But you must not sacrifice yourself, your fortune, and your *happiness*, to a shadow; whatever his means are, they hardly suffice for his personal expenses — indeed, they don't suffice, for I have had to help him. But that is all trifling compared with other considerations. I am his sister, and, though he has shown little love for me, I am not without affection — and strong affection — for him; but I must and will speak frankly. You could not, I don't think anyone could be happy with Stanley for her husband. You don't know him: he's profligate; he's ill-tempered; he's cold; he's selfish; he's secret. He was a spoiled boy, totally without moral education; he might, perhaps, have been very different, but he *is what* he is, and I don't think he'll ever change.'

'He may be what he will. It is vain reasoning with that which is not reason; the battle is over; possibly he may never know, and that might be best for both — but be it how it may, I will never marry anyone else.'

'Dorcas, dear, you must not speak to Lady Chelford, or to Mark Wylder, tonight. It is too serious a step to be taken in haste.'

'There has been no haste, Rachel, and there can be no change.'

'And what reason can you give?'

'None; no reason,' said Dorcas, slowly.

'Wylder would have been suitable in point of wealth. Not so well, I am sure, as you *might* have married; but neither would *he* be a good husband, though not so bad as Stanley; and I do not think that Mark Wylder will quietly submit to his disappointment.'

'It was to have been simply a marriage of two estates. It was old Lady Chelford's plan. I have now formed mine, and all that's over. Let him do what he will — I believe a lawsuit is his worst revenge — I'm indifferent.'

Just then a knock came to the chamber door.

'Come in,' said Miss Brandon: and her maid entered to say that the carriage, please Ma'am, was at the door to take Miss Lake home.

'I had no idea it was so late,' said Rachel.

'Stay, dear, don't go for a moment. Jones, bring Miss Lake's cloak and bonnet here. And now, dear,' she said, after a little pause, 'you'll remember your solemn promise?'

'I never broke my word, dear Dorcas; your secret is safe.'

'And, Rachel, try to like me.'

'I love you better, Dorcas, than I thought I ever could. Goodnight, dear.'

'Goodnight.'

And the young ladies parted with a kiss, and then another.

CHAPTER XVI.

‘JENNY, PUT THE KETTLE ON.’

Old Lady Chelford, having despatched a sharp and unceremonious message to her young kinswoman, absent without leave, warning her, in effect, that if she returned to the drawingroom it would be to preside, alone, over gentlemen, departed, somewhat to our secret relief.

Upon this, on Lord Chelford’s motion, in our forlorn condition, we went to the billiard-room, and there, under the bright lights, and the gay influence of that wonderful game, we forgot our cares, and became excellent friends apparently— ‘cuts,’ ‘canons,’ ‘screws,’ ‘misses,’ ‘flukes’ — Lord Chelford joked, Wylder ‘chaffed,’ even Lake seemed to enjoy himself; and the game proceeded with animation and no lack of laughter, beguiling the watches of the night; and we were all amazed, at length, to find how very late it was. So we laid down our cues, with the customary ejaculations of surprise.

We declined wine and water, and all other creature comforts. Wylder and Lake had a walk before them, and we bid Lord Chelford ‘goodnight’ in the passage, and I walked with them through the deserted and nearly darkened rooms.

Our talk grew slow, and our spirits subsided in this changed and tenebrose scenery. The void and the darkness brought back, I suppose, my recollection of the dubious terms on which these young men stood, and a feeling of the hollowness and delusion of the genial hours just passed under the brilliant lights, together with an unpleasant sense of apprehension.

On coming out upon the doorsteps we all grew silent.

The moon was low, and its yellow disk seemed, as it sometimes does, dilated to a wondrous breadth, as its edge touched the black outline of the distant woods. I half believe in presentiments, and I felt one now, in the chill air, the sudden silence, and the watchful gaze of the moon. I suspect that Wylder and Lake, too, felt something of the same ominous qualm, for I thought their faces looked gloomy in the light, as they stood together buttoning their loose wrappers and lighting their cigars.

With a ‘goodnight, goodnight,’ we parted, and I heard their retreating steps crunching along the walk that led to Redman’s Hollow, and by Miss Rachel’s quiet habitation. I heard no talking, such as comes between whiffs with friendly smokers, side by side; and, silent as mutes at a funeral, they walked on, and soon the fall of their footsteps was heard no more, and I reentered the hall and shut the door. The level moonlight was shining through the stained heraldic window, and fell bright on the portrait of Uncle Lorne, at the other end, throwing a patch of red, like a stain, on one side of its pale forehead.

I had forgot, at the moment, that the ill-omened portrait hung there, and a sudden horror smote me. I thought of what my vision said of the ‘blood upon my forehead,’ and, by Jove! there it was!

At this moment the large white Marseilles waistcoat of grave Mr. Larcom appeared, followed by a tall powdered footman, and their candles and businesslike proceedings frightened away the phantoms. So I withdrew to my chamber, where, I am glad to say, I saw nothing of Uncle Lorne.

Miss Lake, as she drove that night toward Gylingden, said little to the vicar’s wife, whose good husband had been away to Friars, making a sick-call, and she prattled on very merrily about his frugal little tea awaiting his late return, and asked her twice on the way home whether it was halfpast nine, for she did not boast a watch; and in the midst of her prattle was peeping at the landmarks of their progress.

‘Oh, I’m so glad — here’s the finger post, at last!’ and then— ‘Well, here we are at the “Cat and Fiddle;” I thought we’d never pass it.’

And, at last, the brougham stopped at the little garden-gate, at the far end of the village; and the good little mamma called to her maid-of-all-work from the window —

‘Has the master come yet, Becky?’

‘No, Ma’am, please.’

And I think she offered up a little thanksgiving, she so longed to give him his tea herself; and then she asked —

‘Is our precious mannikin asleep?’ Which also being answered happily, as it should be, she bid her fussy adieux, with a merry smile, and hurried, gabbling amicably with her handmaid, across the little flower-garden; and Miss Lake was shut in and drove on alone, under the thick canopy of old trees, and up the mill-road, lighted by the flashing lamps, to her own little precincts, and was, in turn, at home — solitary, triste, but still her home.

‘Get to your bed, Margery, child, you are sleepy,’ said the young lady kindly to her queer little maid-of-honour. Rachel was one of those persons who, no matter what may be upon their minds, are quickly impressible by the scenes in which they find themselves. She stepped into her little kitchen — always a fairy kitchen, so tiny, so white, so raddled, and shining all over with that pleasantest of all effulgence — burnished tins, pewters, and the homely decorations of the dresser — and she looked all round and smiled pleasantly, and kissed old Tamar, and said —

‘So, my dear old fairy, here’s your Cinderella home again from the ball, and I’ve seen nothing so pretty as this since I left Redman’s Farm. How white your table is, how nice your chairs; I wish you’d change with me and let me be cook week about; and, really the fire is quite pleasant tonight. Come, make a cup of tea, and tell us a story, and frighten me and Margery before we go to our beds. Sit down, Margery, I’m only here by permission. What do you mean by standing?’ And the young lady, with a laugh, sat down, looking so pleased, and goodnatured, and merry, that even old Tamar was fain to smile a glimmering smile; and little Margery actively brought the tea-caddy; and the kettle, being in a skittish singing state, quickly went off in a boil, and Tamar actually made tea in her brown tea-pot.

‘Oh, no; the delf cups and saucers; — it will be twice as good in them;’ and as the handsome mistress of the mansion, sitting in the deal chair, loosened her cloak and untied her bonnet, she chatted away, to the edification of Margery and the amusement of both.

This little extemporised bivouac, as it were, with her domestics, delighted the young belle. Vanity of vanities, as Mr. Thackeray and King Solomon cry out in turn. Silver trays and powdered footmen, and Utrecht, velvet upholstery — miserable comforters! What saloon was ever so cheery as this, or flashed all over in so small a light so splendidly, or yielded such immortal nectar from chased teapot and urn, as this brewed in brown crockery from the roaring kettle?

So Margery, sitting upon her stool in the background — for the Queen had said it, and sit she must — and grinning from ear to ear, in a great halo of glory, partook of tea.

‘Well, Tamar, where’s your story?’ said the young lady.

‘Story! La! bless you, dear Miss Radie, where should I find a story? My old head’s a poor one to remember,’ whimpered white Tamar.

‘Anything, no matter what — a ghost or a murder.’

Old Tamar shook her head.

‘Or an elopement?’

Another shake of the head.

‘Or a mystery — or even a dream?’

‘Well — a dream! Sometimes I do dream. I dreamed how Master Stanley was coming, the night before.’

‘You did, did you? Selfish old thing! and you meant to keep it all to yourself. What was it?’

Tamar looked anxiously and suspiciously in the kitchen fire, and placed her puckered hand to the side of her white linen cap.

‘I dreamed, Ma’am, the night before he came, a great fellow was at the hall-door.’

‘What! here?’

‘Yes, Ma’am, this hall-door. So muffled up I could not see his face; and he pulls out a letter all over red.’

‘Red?’

‘Aye, Miss; a red letter.’

‘Red ink?’

‘No, Miss, red *paper*, written with black, and directed for you.’

‘Oh!’

‘And so, Miss, in my dream, I gave it you in the drawingroom; and you opened it, and leaned your hand upon your head, sick-like, reading it. I never saw you read a letter so serious-like before. And says you to me, Miss, “It’s all about Master Stanley; he is coming.” And sure enough, here he was quite unexpected, next morning.’

‘And was there no more?’ asked Miss Lake.

‘No more, Miss. I awoke just then.’

‘It *is* odd,’ said Miss Lake, with a little laugh. ‘Had you been thinking of him lately?’

‘Not a bit, Ma’am. I don’t know when.’

‘Well, it certainly is *very* odd.’

At all events, it had glanced upon a sensitive recollection unexpectedly. The kitchen was only a kitchen now; and the young lady, on a sudden, looked thoughtful — perhaps a little sad. She rose; and old Tamar got up before her, with her scared, secret look, clothed in white — the witch, whose word had changed all, and summoned round her those shapes, which threw their indistinct shadows on the walls and faces around.

‘Light the candles in the drawingroom, Margery, and then, child, go to your bed,’ said the young lady, awakening from an abstraction. ‘I don’t mind dreams, Tamar, nor fortunetellers — I’ve dreamed so many good dreams, and no good ever came of them. But talking of Stanley reminds me of trouble and follies that I can’t help, or prevent. He has left the army, Tamar, and I don’t know what his plans are.’

‘Ah! poor child; he was always foolish and changeable, and a deal too innocent for them wicked officer-gentlemen; and I’m glad he’s not among them any longer to learn bad ways — I am.’

So, the drawingroom being prepared, Rachel bid Tamar and little Margery goodnight, and the sleepy little handmaid stumped off to her bed; and white old Tamar, who had not spoken so much for a month before, put on her solemn round spectacles, and by her dipt candle read her chapter in the ponderous Bible she had thumbed so well, and her white lips told over the words as she read them in silence.

Old Tamar, I always thought, had seen many untold things in her day, and some of her recollections troubled her, I dare say; and she held her tongue, and knitted her white worsteds when she could sit quiet — which was most hours of the day; and now and then when evil remembrances, maybe, gathered round her solitude, she warned them off with that book of power — so that my recollection of her is always the same white-clad, cadaverous old woman, with a pair of barnacles on her nose, and her look of secrecy and suffering turned on the large print of that worn volume, or else on the fumbling-points of her knitting-needles.

It was a small house, this Redman’s Farm, but very silent, for all that, when the day’s work was over; and very solemn, too, the look-out from the window among the colonnades of tall old trees, on the overshadowed earth, and through them into deepest darkness; the complaining of the lonely stream far down is the only sound in the air.

There was but one imperfect vista, looking down the glen, and this afforded no distant view — only a downward slant in the near woodland,

and a denser background of forest rising at the other side, and tonight mistily gilded by the yellow moonbeams, the moon herself unseen.

Rachel had opened her window-shutters, as was her wont when the moon was up, and with her small white hands on the window-sash, looked into the wooded solitudes, lost in haunted darkness in every direction but one, and there massed in vaporous and discoloured foliage, hardly more distinct, or less solemn.

‘Poor old Tamar says her prayers, and reads her Bible; I wish *I* could. How often I wish it. That good, simple vicar — how unlike his brother — is wiser, perhaps, than all the shrewd people that smile at him. He used to talk to me; but I’ve lost that — yes — I let him understand I did not care for it, and so that good influence is gone from me — graceless creature. No one seemed to care, except poor old Tamar, whether I ever said a prayer, or heard any good thing; and when I was no more than ten years old, I refused to say my prayers for her. My poor father. Well, Heaven help us all.’

So she stood in the same sad attitude, looking out upon the shadowy scene, in a forlorn reverie.

Her interview with Dorcas remained on her memory like an odd, clear, half-horrible dream. What a dazzling prospect it opened for Stanley; what a dreadful one might it not prepare for Dorcas. What might not arise from such a situation between Stanley and Mark Wylder, each in his way a worthy representative of the ill-conditioned and terrible race whose blood he inherited? Was this doomed house of Brandon never to know repose or fraternity?

Was it credible? Had it actually occurred, that strange confession of Dorcas Brandon’s? Could anything be imagined so mad — so unaccountable? She reviewed Stanley in her mind’s eye. She was better acquainted, perhaps, with his defects than his fascinations, and too familiar with both to appreciate at all their effect upon a stranger.

‘What can she see in him? There’s nothing remarkable in Stanley, poor fellow, except his faults. There are much handsomer men than he, and many as amusing — and he with no estate.’

She had heard of charms and philtres. How could she account for this desperate hallucination?

Rachel was troubled by a sort of fear tonight, and the low fever of an undefined expectation was upon her. She turned from the window, intending to write two letters, which she had owed too long — young ladies' letters — for Miss Lake, like many of her sex, as I am told, had several little correspondences on her hands; and as she turned, with a start, she saw old Tamar standing in the doorway, looking at her.

'Tamar!'

'Yes, Miss Rachel.'

'Why do you come so softly, Tamar? Do you know, you frightened me?'

'I thought I'd look in, Miss, before I went to bed, just to see if you wanted anything.'

'No — nothing, thank you, dear Tamar.'

'And I don't think, Miss Rachel, you are quite well tonight, though you are so gay — you're pale, dear; and there's something on your mind. Don't be thinking about Master Stanley; he's out of the army now, and I'm thankful for it; and make your mind easy about him; and would not it be better, dear, you went to your bed, you rise so early.'

'Very true, good old Tamar, but tonight I must write a letter — not a long one, though — and I assure you, I'm quite well. Goodnight, Tamar.'

Tamar stood for a moment with her odd weird look upon her, and then bidding her goodnight, glided stiffly away, shutting the door.

So Rachel sat down to her desk and began to write; but she could not get into the spirit of her letter; on the contrary, her mind wandered away, and she found herself listening, every now and then, and at last she fancied that old Tamar, about whom that dream, and her unexpected appearance at the door, had given her a sort of spectral feeling that night, was up and watching her; and the idea of this white sentinel outside her door excited her so unpleasantly, that she opened it, but found no Tamar there; and then she revisited the kitchen, but that was empty too, and the fire taken down. And, finally, she passed into the old woman's bedchamber, whom she saw, her white head upon her pillow, dreaming again, perhaps. And so, softly closing her door, she left her to her queer visions and deathlike slumber.

CHAPTER XVII.

RACHEL LAKE SEES WONDERFUL THINGS BY MOONLIGHT FROM HER WINDOW.

Though Rachel was unfit for letter-writing, she was still more unfit for slumber. She leaned her temple on her hand, and her rich light hair half covered her fingers, and her amazing interview with Dorcas was again present with her, and the same feeling of bewilderment. The suddenness and the nature of the disclosures were dreamlike and unreal, and the image of Dorcas remained impressed upon her sight; not like Dorcas, though the same, but something ghastly, wan, glittering, and terrible, like a priestess at a solitary sacrifice.

It was late now, not far from one o’clock, and around her the terrible silence of a still night. All those small sounds lost in the hum of midday life now came into relief — a ticking in the wainscot, a crack now and then in the joining of the furniture, and occasionally the tap of a moth against the window pane from outside, sounds sharp and odd, which made her wish the stillness of the night were not so intense.

As from her little table she looked listlessly through the window, she saw against the faint glow of the moonlight, the figure of a man who seized the paling and vaulted into the flower garden, and with a few swift, stumbling strides over the flowerbeds, reached the window, and placing his pale face close to the glass, she saw his eyes glittering through it; he tapped — or rather beat on the pane with his fingers — and at the same time he said, repeatedly: ‘Let me in; let me in.’

Her first impression, when she saw this person cross the little fence at the roadside was, that Mark Wylder was the man. But she was mistaken; the face and figure were Stanley Lake’s.

She would have screamed in the extremity of her terror, but that her voice for some seconds totally failed her; and recognising her brother, though like Rhoda, in Holy Writ, she doubted whether it was not his angel, she rose up, and with an awful ejaculation, she approached the window.

‘Let me in, Radie; d — you, let me in,’ he repeated, drumming incessantly on the glass. There was no trace now of his sleepy jeering way. Rachel saw that something was very wrong, and beckoned him toward the porch in silence, and having removed the slender fastenings of the door, it opened, and he entered in a rush of damp night air. She took him by the hand, and he shook hers mechanically, like a man rescued from shipwreck, and plainly not recollecting himself well.

‘Stanley, dear, what’s the matter, in Heaven’s name?’ she whispered, so soon as she had got him into her little drawingroom.

‘He has done it; d — him, he has done it,’ gasped Stanley Lake.

He looked in her face with a glazed and ashy stare. His hat remained on his head, overshadowing his face; and his boots were soiled with clay, and his wrapping coat marked, here and there, with the green of the stems and branches of trees, through which he had made his way.

‘I see, Stanley, you’ve had a scene with Mark Wylder; I warned you of your danger — you have had the worst of it.’

‘I spoke to him. He took a course I did not expect. I’m not well.’

‘You’ve broken your promise. I see you have used *me*. How base; how stupid!’

‘How could I tell he was such a *fiend*?’

‘I told you how it would be. He has frightened you,’ said Rachel, herself frightened.

‘D — him; I wish I had done as you said. I wish I had never come here. Give me a glass of wine. He has ruined me.’

‘You cruel, wretched creature!’ said Rachel, now convinced that he had compromised her as he threatened.

‘Yes, I was wrong; I’m sorry; things have turned out different. Who’s that?’ said Lake, grasping her wrist.

‘Who — where — Mark Wylder?’

‘No; it’s nothing, I believe.’

‘Where is he? Where have you left him?’

‘Up there, at the pathway, near the stone steps.’

‘Waiting there?’

‘Well, yes; and I don’t think I’ll go back, Radie.’

‘You *shall* go back, Sir, and carry my message; or, no, I could not trust you. I’ll go with you and see him, and disabuse him. How could you — how *could* you, Stanley?’

‘It was a mistake, altogether; I’m sorry, but I could not tell there was such a devil on the earth.’

‘Yes, I told you so. *He* has frightened *you*’ said Rachel.

‘He *has*, *maybe*. At any rate, I was a fool, and I think I’m ruined; and I’m afraid, Rachel, you’ll be inconvenienced too.’

‘Yes, you have made him savage and brutal; and between you, I shall be called in question, you wretched fool!’

Stanley was taking these hard terms very meekly for a savage young coxcomb like him. Perhaps they bore no very distinct meaning just then to his mind. Perhaps it was preoccupied with more exciting ideas; or, it may be, his agitation and fear cried ‘amen’ to the reproach; at all events, he only said, in a pettish but deprecatory sort of way —

‘Well, where’s the good of scolding? how can I help it now?’

‘What’s your quarrel? why does he wait for you there? why has he sent you here? It must concern *me*, Sir, and I insist on hearing it all.’

‘So you shall, Radie; only have patience just a minute — and give me a little wine or water — anything.’

‘There is the key. There’s some wine in the press, I think.’

He tried to open it, but his hand shook. He saw his sister look at him, and he flung the keys on the table rather savagely, with, I dare say, a curse between his teeth.

There was running all this time in Rachel’s mind, and had been almost since the first menacing mention of Wylder’s name by her brother, an indistinct remembrance of something unpleasant or horrible. It may have been mere fancy, or it may have referred to something long ago imperfectly heard. It was a spectre of mist, that evaporated before she could fix her eyes on it, but was always near her elbow.

Rachel took the key with a faint gleam of scorn on her face and brought out the wine in silence.

He took a tall-stemmed Venetian glass that stood upon the cabinet, an antique decoration, and filled it with sherry — a strange revival of old service! How long was it since lips had touched its brim before, and whose? Lovers’, maybe, and how. How long since that cold crystal had glowed with the ripples of wine? This, at all events, was its last service. It is an old legend of the Venetian glass — its shivering at touch of poison; and there are those of whom it is said, ‘the poison of asps is under their lips.’

‘What’s that?’ ejaculated Rachel, with a sudden shriek — that whispered shriek, so expressive and ghastly, that you, perhaps, have once heard in your life — and her very lips grew white.

‘Hollo!’ cried Lake. He was standing with his back to the window, and sprang forward, as pale as she, and grasped her, with a white leer that she never forgot, over his shoulder, and the Venice glass was shivered on the ground.

‘Who’s there?’ he whispered.

And Rachel, in a whisper, ejaculated the awful name that must not be taken in vain.

She sat down. She was looking at him with a wild, stern stare, straight in the face, and he still holding her arm, and close to her.

‘I see it all now,’ she whispered.

‘Who — what — what is it?’ said he.

‘I could not have fancied *that*,’ she whispered with a gasp.

Stanley looked round him with pale and sharpened features.

‘What the devil is it! If that scoundrel had come to kill us you could not cry out louder,’ he whispered, with an oath. ‘Do you want to wake your people up?’

‘Oh! Stanley,’ she repeated, in a changed and horror-stricken way. ‘What a fool I’ve been. I see it at last; I see it all now,’ and she waved her white hands together very slowly towards him, as mesmerisers move theirs.

There was a silence of some seconds, and his yellow ferine gaze met hers strangely.

‘You were always a sharp girl, Radie, and I think you do see it,’ he said at last, very quietly.

‘The witness — the witness — the dreadful witness!’ she repeated.

‘I’ll show you, though, it’s not so bad as you fancy. I’m sorry I did not take your advice; but how, I say, could I know he was such a devil? I must go back to him. I only came down to tell you, because Radie, you know you proposed it yourself; *you* must come, too — you *must*, Radie.’

‘Oh, Stanley, Stanley, Stanley!’

‘Why, d — it, it can’t be helped now; can it?’ said he, with a peevish malignity. But she was right; there was something of the poltroon in him, and he was trembling.

‘Why could you not leave me in peace, Stanley?’

‘I can’t go without you, Rachel. I won’t; and if we don’t we’re both ruined,’ he said, with a bleak oath.

‘Yes, Stanley, I knew you were a coward,’ she replied, fiercely and wildly.

‘You’re always calling names, d — you; do as you like. I care less than you think how it goes.’

‘No, Stanley; you know me too well. Ah! No, you sha’n’t be lost if I can help it.’ Rachel shook her head as she spoke, with a bitter smile and a dreadful sigh.

Then they whispered together for three or four minutes, and Rachel clasped her jewelled fingers tight across her forehead, quite wildly, for a minute.

‘You’ll come then?’ said Stanley.

She made no answer, and he repeated the question.

By this time she was standing; and without answering, she began mechanically to get on her cloak and hat.

‘You must drink some wine first; he may frighten you, perhaps. You *must* take it, Rachel, or I’ll not go.’

Stanley Lake was swearing, in his low tones, like a swell-mobsman tonight.

Rachel seemed to have made up her mind to submit passively to whatever he required. Perhaps, indeed, she thought there was wisdom in his advice. At all events she drank some wine.

Rachel Lake was one of those women who never lose their presence of mind, even under violent agitation, for long, and who generally, even when highly excited, see, and do instinctively, and with decision, what is best to be done; and now, with dilated eyes and white face, she walked noiselessly into the kitchen, listened there for a moment, then stole lightly to the servants’ sleeping-room, and listened there at the door, and lastly looked in, and satisfied herself that both were still sleeping. Then as cautiously and swiftly she returned to her drawingroom, and closed the window-shutters and drew the curtain, and signalling to her brother they went stealthily forth into the night air, closing the hall-door, and through the little garden, at the outer gate of which they paused.

‘I don’t know, Rachel — I don’t like it — I’m not fit for it. Go back again — go in and lock your door — we’ll not go to him — *you* need not, you know. He may stay where he is — let him — I’ll not return. I say, I’ll see him no more. I’ll get away. I’ll consult Larkin — shall I? Though that won’t do — he’s in Wylder’s interest — curse him. What had I best do? I’m not equal to it.’

‘We *must* go, Stanley. You said right just now; be resolute — we are both ruined unless we go. You have brought it to that — you *must* come.’

‘I’m not fit for it, I tell you — I’m not. You were right, Radie — I think I’m not equal to a business of this sort, and I won’t expose you to such a scene. *You’re* not equal to it either, I think,’ and Lake leaned on the paling.

‘Don’t mind me — you haven’t much hitherto. Go or stay, I’m equally ruined now, but not equally disgraced; and go we must, for it is *your only* chance of escape. Come, Stanley — for shame!’

In a few minutes more they were walking in deep darkness and silence, side by side, along the path, which diverging from the mill-road, penetrates the coppice of that sequestered gorge, along the bottom of which flows a tributary brook that finds its way a little lower down into the mill-stream. This deep gully in character a good deal resembles Redman’s Glen, into which it passes, being fully as deep, and wooded to the summit at both sides, but much steeper and narrower, and therefore many shades darker.

They had now reached those rude stone steps, some ten or fifteen in number, which conduct the narrow footpath up a particularly steep acclivity, and here Lake lost courage again, for they distinctly heard the footsteps that paced the platform above.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARK WYLDER’S SLAVE.

Nearly two hours had passed before they returned. As they did so, Rachel Lake went swiftly and silently before her brother. The moon had gone down, and the glen was darker than ever. Noiselessly they reentered the little hall of Redman’s Farm. The candles were still burning in the sitting-room, and the light was dazzling after the profound darkness in which they had been for so long.

Captain Lake did not look at all like a London dandy now. His dress was confoundedly draggled; the conventional countenance, too, was wanting. There was a very natural savagery and dejection there, and a wild leer in his yellow eyes.

Rachel sat down. No living woman ever showed a paler face, and she stared with a look that was sharp and stern upon the wainscot before her.

For some minutes they were silent; and suddenly, with an exceeding bitter cry, she stood up, close to him, seizing him in her tiny hands by the collar, and with wild eyes gazing into his, she said —

‘See what you’ve brought me to — wretch, wretch, wretch!’

And she shook him with violence as she spoke. It was wonderful how that fair young face could look so terrible.

‘There, Radie, there,’ said Lake, disengaging her fingers. ‘You’re a little hysterical, that’s all. It will be over in a minute; but don’t make a row. You’re a good girl, Radie. For Heaven’s sake, don’t spoil all by folly now.’

He was overawed and deprecatory.

‘A slave! only think — a slave! Oh frightful, frightful! Is it a dream? Oh frightful, frightful! Stanley, Stanley, it would be *mercy* to kill me,’ she broke out again.

‘Now, Radie, listen to reason, and don’t make a noise; you know we agreed, *you* must go, and *I can’t* go with you.’

Lake was cooler by this time, and his sister more excited than before they went out.

‘I used to be brave; my courage I think is gone; but who’d have imagined what’s before me?’

Stanley walked to the window and opened the shutter a little. He forgot how dark it was. The moon had gone down. He looked at his watch and then at Rachel. She was sitting, and in no calmer state; serene enough in attitude, but the terribly wild look was unchanged. He looked at his watch again, and held it to his ear, and consulted it once more before he placed the tiny gold disk again in his pocket.

‘This won’t do,’ he muttered.

With one of the candles in his hand he went out and made a hurried, peeping exploration, and soon, for the rooms were quickly counted in Redman’s Farm, he found her chamber small, neat, *simplex munditiis*. Bright and natty were the chintz curtains, and the little toilet set out, not inelegantly, and her pet piping-goldfinch asleep on his perch, with his bit of sugar between the wires of his cage; her pillow so white and unpressed, with its little edging of lace. Were slumbers sweet as of old ever to know it more? What dreams were henceforward to haunt it? Shadows were standing about that lonely bed already. I don’t know whether Stanley Lake felt anything of this, being very decidedly of the earth earthy. But there are times when men are translated from their natures, and forced to be romantic and superstitious.

When he came back to the drawingroom, a toilet bottle of *eau de cologne* in his hand, with her lace handkerchief he bathed her temples and forehead. There was nothing very brotherly in his look as he peered into her pale, sharp features, during the process. It was the dark and pallid scrutiny of a familiar of the Holy Office, bringing a victim back to consciousness.

She was quickly better.

‘There, don’t mind me,’ she said sharply; and getting up she looked down at her dress and thin shoes, and seeming to recollect herself, she took the candle he had just set down, and went swiftly to her room.

Gliding without noise from place to place, she packed a small black leather bag with a few necessary articles. Then changed her dress quickly, put on her walking boots, a close bonnet and thick veil, and taking her purse, she counted over its contents, and then standing in the midst of the room looked round it with a great sigh, and a strange look, as if it was all new to her. And she threw back her veil, and going hurriedly to the toilet, mechanically surveyed herself in the glass. And she looked fixedly on the pale features presented to her, and said —

‘Rachel Lake, Rachel Lake! what are you now?’

And so, with knitted brows and stern lips, a cadaveric gaze was returned on her from the mirror.

A few minutes later her brother, who had been busy down stairs, put his head in and asked —

‘Will you come with me now, Radie, or do you prefer to wait here?’

‘I’ll stay here — that is, in the drawingroom,’ she answered, and the face was withdrawn.

In the little hall Stanley looked again at his watch, and getting quietly out, went swiftly through the tiny garden, and once upon the mill-road, ran at a rapid pace down towards the town.

The long street of Gylingden stretched dim and silent before him. Slumber brooded over the little town, and his steps sounded sharp and hollow among the houses. He slackened his pace, and tapped sharply at the little window of that modest postoffice, at which the young ladies in the pony carriage had pulled up the day before, and within which Luke Waggot was wont to sleep in a sort of wooden box that folded up and appeared to be a chest of drawers all day. Luke took care of Mr. Larkin’s dogs, and groomed Mr. Wylder’s horse, and ‘cleaned up’ his dog-cart, for Mark being close about money, and finding that the thing was to be done more cheaply that way, put up his horse and dog-cart in the postoffice premises, and so evaded the livery charges of the ‘Brandon Arms.’

But Luke was not there; and Captain Lake recollecting his habits and his haunt, hurried on to the ‘Silver Lion,’ which has its gable towards the common, only about a hundred steps away, for distances are not great in Gylingden. Here were the flow of soul and of stout, long pipes, long yarns, and tolerably long credits; and the humble scapegraces of the town resorted thither for the pleasures of a club-life, and often revelled deep into the small hours of the morning.

So Luke came forth.

D — it, where’s the note?’ said the captain, rummaging uneasily in his pockets.

‘You know me — eh!’

‘Captain Lake. Yes, Sir.’

‘Well — oh! here it is.’

It was a scrap pencilled on the back of a letter —

‘LUKE WAGGOT,

‘Put the horse to and drive the dog-cart to the “White House.” Look out for me there. We must catch the up mail train at Dollington. Be lively. If Captain Lake chooses to drive you need not come.

‘M. WYLDER.’

‘I’ll drive,’ said Captain Lake. ‘Lose no time and I’ll give you half-a-crown.’

Luke stuck on his greasy wideawake, and in a few minutes more the dog-cart was trundled out into the lane, and the horse harnessed, went between the shafts with that wonderful cheerfulness with which they bear to be called up under startling circumstances at unseasonable hours.

‘Easily earned, Luke,’ said Captain Lake, in his soft tones.

The captain had buttoned the collar of his loose coat across his face, and it was dark beside. But Luke knew his peculiar smile, and presumed it; so he grinned facetiously as he put the coin in his breeches pocket and thanked him; and in another minute the captain, with a lighted cigar between his lips, mounted to the seat, took the reins, the horse bounded off, and away rattled the light conveyance, sparks flying from the road, at a devil of a pace, down the deserted street of Gylingden, and quickly melted in darkness.

That night a spectre stood by old Tamar’s bedside, in shape of her young mistress, and shook her by the shoulder, and stooping, said sternly, close in her face —

‘Tamar, I’m going away — only for a few days; and mind this — I’d rather be *dead* than any creature living should know it. Little Margery must not suspect — you’ll manage that. Here’s the key of my bedroom — say I’m sick — and you must go in and out, and bring tea and drinks, and talk and whisper a little, you understand, as you might with a sick person, and keep the shutters closed; and if Miss Brandon sends to ask me to the Hall, say I’ve a headache, and fear I can’t go. You understand me clearly, Tamar?’

‘Yes, Miss Radie,’ answered old Tamar, wonder-stricken, with a strange expression of fear in her face.

‘And listen,’ she continued, ‘you must go into my room, and bring the message back, as if from me, with *my love* to Miss Brandon; and if she or Mrs. William Wylder, the vicar’s wife, should call to see me, always say I’m asleep and a little better. You see exactly what I mean?’

‘Yes, Miss,’ answered Tamar, whose eyes were fixed in a sort of fascination, full on those of her mistress.

‘If Master Stanley should call, he is to do just as he pleases. You used to be accurate, Tamar; may I depend upon you?’

‘Yes, Ma’am, certainly.’

‘If I thought you’d fail me now, Tamar, I should *never* come back.
Goodnight, Tamar. There — don’t bless me. Goodnight.’

When the light wheels of the dog-cart gritted on the mill-road before the little garden gate of Redman’s Farm, the tall slender figure of Rachel Lake was dimly visible, standing cloaked and waiting by it. Silently she handed her little black leather bag to her brother, and then there was a pause. He stretched his hand to help her up.

In a tone that was icy and bitter, she said —

‘To save myself I would not do it. You deserve no love from me — you’ve showed me none — *never*, Stanley; and yet I’m going to give the most desperate proof of love that ever sister gave — all for your sake; and it’s guilt, guilt, but my *fate*, and I’ll go, and you’ll never thank me; that’s all.’

In a moment more she sat beside him; and silent as the dead in Charon’s boat, away they glided toward the ‘White House which lay upon the high road to Dollington.

The sleepy clerk that night in the Dollington station stamped two first-class tickets for London, one of which was for a gentleman, and the other for a cloaked lady, with a very thick veil, who stood outside on the platform; and almost immediately after the scream of the engine was heard piercing the deep tatting, the Cyclopean red lamps glared nearer and nearer, and the palpitating monster, so stupendous and so docile, came smoothly to a standstill before the trelliswork and hollyhocks of that pretty station.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TARN IN THE PARK.

Next morning Stanley Lake, at breakfast with the lawyer, said —

‘A pretty room this is. That bow window is worth all the pictures in Brandon. To my eye there is no scenery so sweet as this, at least to breakfast by. I don’t love your crags and peaks and sombre grandeur, nor yet the fat, flat luxuriance of our other counties. These undulations, and all that splendid timber, and the glorious ruins on that hillock over there! How many beautiful ruins that picturesque old fellow Cromwell has left us.’

‘You don’t eat your breakfast, though,’ said the attorney, with a charming smile of reproach.

‘Ah, thank you; I’m a bad breakfaster; that is,’ said Stanley, recollecting that he had made some very creditable meals at the same table, ‘when I smoke so late as I did last night.’

‘You drove Mr. Wylder to Dollington?’

‘Yes; he’s gone to town, he says — yes, the mail train — to get some diamonds for Miss Brandon — a present — that ought to have come the day before yesterday. He says they’ll never have them in time unless he goes and blows them up. Are you in his secrets at all?’

‘Something in his confidence, I should hope,’ said Mr. Larkin, in rather a lofty and reserved way.

‘Oh, yes, of course, in serious matters; but I meant other things. You know he has been a little bit wild; and ladies, you know, ladies will be troublesome sometimes; and to say truth, I don’t think the diamonds have much to say to it.’

‘Oh? — hem! — well, you know, *I*’m not exactly the confidant Mr. Wylder would choose, I suspect, in a case of that very painful, and, I will say, distressing character — I rather think — indeed, I *hope* not.’

‘No, of course — I dare say — but I just fancied he might want a hint about the law of the matter.’

The gracious attorney glanced at his guest with a thoroughly businesslike and searching eye.

‘You don’t think there’s any really serious annoyance — you don’t know the party?’ said he.

‘*I?* — Oh, dear, no. Wylder has always been very reserved with me. He told me nothing. If he had, of course I should not have mentioned it. I only conjecture, for he really did seem to have a great deal more on his mind; and he kept me walking back and forward, near the mill-road, a precious long time. And I really think once or twice he was going to tell me.’

‘Oh! you think then, Mr. Lake, there *may* be some serious — a — a — well, I should hope not — I do most earnestly *trust* not.’ This was said with upturned eyes and much unction. ‘But do you happen, Captain Lake, to know of any of those unfortunate, those miserable connections which young gentlemen of fashion — eh? It’s very sad. Still it often needs, as you say, professional advice to solve such difficulties — it is very sad — oh! is not it sad?’

‘Pray, don’t let it affect your spirits,’ said Lake, who was leaning back in his chair, and looking on the carpet, about a yard before his lacquered boots, in his usual sly way. ‘I may be quite mistaken, you know, but I wished you to understand — having some little experience of the world, I’d be only too happy to be of any use, if you thought my diplomacy could help poor Wylder out of his trouble — that is, if there really is any. But *you* don’t know?’

‘*No*,’ said Mr. Larkin, thoughtfully; and thoughtful he continued for a minute or two, screwing his lips gently, as was his wont, while ruminating, his long head motionless, the nails of his long and somewhat large hand tapping on the arm of his chair, with a sharp glance now and then at the unreadable visage of the cavalry officer. It was evident his mind was working, and nothing was heard in the room for a minute but the tapping of his nails on the chair, like a death-watch.

‘No,’ said Mr. Larkin again, ‘I’m not suspicious — naturally too much the reverse, I fear; but it certainly does look odd. Did he tell the family at Brandon?’

‘Certainly not, that I heard. He may have mentioned it. But I started with him, and we walked together, under the impression that he was going, as usual, to the inn, the — what d’ye call it?— “Brandon Arms;” and it was a sudden thought — now I think of it — for he took no luggage, though to be sure I dare say he has got clothes and things in town.’

‘And when does he return?’

‘In a day or two, at furthest,’ he said.

‘I wonder what they’ll think of it at Brandon?’ said the attorney, with a cavernous grin of sly enquiry at his companion, which, recollecting his character, he softened into a sad sort of smile, and added, ‘No harm, I dare say; and, after all, you know, why should there — any man may have business; and, indeed, it is very likely, after all, that he really went about the jewels. Men are too hasty to judge one another, my dear Sir; charity, let us remember, thinketh no evil.’

‘By-the-bye,’ said Lake, rather briskly for him, rummaging his pockets, ‘I’m glad I remembered he gave me a little note to Chelford. Are any of your people going to Brandon this morning?’

‘I’ll send it,’ said the lawyer, eyeing the little pencilled note wistfully, which Lake presented between two fingers.

‘Yes, it is to Lord Chelford,’ said the attorney, with a grand sort of suavity — he liked lords — placing it, after a scrutiny, in his waistcoat pocket.

‘Don’t you think it had best go at once? — there may be something requiring an answer, and your post leaves, doesn’t it, at twelve?’

‘Oh! an answer, is there?’ said Mr. Larkin, drawing it from his pocket, and looking at it again with a perceptible curiosity.

‘I really can’t say, not having read it, but there *may*,’ said Captain Lake, who was now and then a little impertinent, just to keep Mr. Larkin in his place, and perhaps to hint that he understood him.

‘*Read* it! Oh, my *dear* Sir, my *dear* Captain Lake, how *could* you — but, oh! no — you *could* not suppose I meant such an idea — oh, dear — no, no. You and I have our notions about what’s gentlemanlike and professional — a — and gentlemanlike, as I say — Heaven forbid.’

‘Quite so!’ said Captain Lake, gently.

‘Though all the world does not think with us, *I* can tell you, things come before us in *our* profession. Oh, ho! ho!’ and Mr. Larkin lifted up his pink eyes and long hands, and shook his long head, with a melancholy smile and a sigh like a shudder.

When at the later breakfast, up at Brandon, that irregular pencilled scroll reached Lord Chelford’s hand, he said, as he glanced on the direction —

‘This is Mark Wylder’s; what does he say?’

‘So Mark’s gone to town,’ he said; ‘but he’ll be back again on Saturday, and in the meantime desires me to lay his heart at your feet, Dorcas. Will you read the note?’

‘No,’ said Dorcas, quietly.

Lady Chelford extended her long, shrivelled fingers, on which glimmered sundry jewels, and made a little nod to her son, who gave it to her, with a smile. Holding her glasses to her eyes, the note at a distance, and her head rather back, she said —

‘It is not a pretty billet,’ and she read in a slow and grim way: —

‘DEAR CHELFORD, — I’m called up to London just for a day. No lark, but honest business. I’ll return on Saturday; and tell Dorcas, with dozens of loves, I would write to her, but have not a minute for the train.

‘Yours, &c.

‘M. WYLDER.’

‘No; it is not pretty,’ repeated the old lady; and, indeed, in no sense was it. Before luncheon Captain Lake arrived.

‘So Wylder has run up to town,’ I said, so soon as we had shaken hands in the hall.

‘Yes; *I* drove him to Dollington last night; we just caught the up train.’

‘He says he’ll be back again on Saturday,’ I said.

‘Saturday, is it? He seemed to think — yes — it *would* be only a day or so. Some jewels, I think, for Dorcas. He did not say distinctly; I only conjecture. Lady Chelford and Miss Brandon, I suppose, in the drawingroom?’

So to the drawingroom he passed.

‘How is Rachel? how is your sister, Captain Lake, have you seen her to-day?’ asked old Lady Chelford, rather benignantly. She chose to be gracious to the Lakes. ‘Only, for a moment, thank you. She has one of her miserable headaches, poor thing; but she’ll be better, she says, in the afternoon, and hopes to come up here to see you, and Miss Brandon, this evening.’

Lord Chelford and I had a pleasant walk that day to the ruins of Willerton Castle. I find in my diary a note— ‘Chelford tells me it is written in old surveys, Wylderton, and was one of the houses of the Wylders. What considerable people those Wylders were, and what an antique stock.’

After this he wished to make a visit to the vicar, and so we parted company. I got into Brandon Park by the pretty gate near Latham.

It was a walk of nearly three miles across the park from this point to the Hall, and the slopes and hollows of this noble, undulating plain, came out grandly in the long shadows and slanting beams of evening. That yellow, level light has, in my mind, something undefinably glorious and melancholy, such as to make almost any scenery interesting, and my solitary walk was delightful.

People must love and sympathise very thoroughly, I think, to enjoy natural scenery together. Generally it is one of the few spectacles best seen alone. The silence that supervenes is indicative of the solitary character of the enjoyment. It is a poem and a reverie. I was quite happy striding in the amber light and soft, long shadows, among the ferns, the copsewood, and the grand old clumps of timber, exploring the undulations, and the wild nooks and hollows which have each their circumscribed and sylvan charm; a wonderful interest those little parklike broken dells have always had for me; dotted with straggling birch and oak, and here and there a hoary ash tree, with a grand and melancholy grace, dreaming among the songs of wild birds, in their native solitudes, and the brown leaves tipped with golden light, all breathing something of old-world romance — the poetry of bygone love and adventure — and stirring undefinable and delightful emotions that mingle unreality with sense, a music of the eye and spirit.

After many devious wanderings, I found, under shelter of a wonderful little hollow, in which lay, dim and still, a tarn, reflecting the stems of the trees that rose from its edge, in a way so clear and beautiful, that, with a smile and a sigh, I sat myself down upon a rock among the ferns, and fell into a reverie.

The image of Dorcas rose before me. There is a strange mystery and power in the apathetic, and in that unaffected carelessness, even defiance of opinion and criticism, which I had seen here for the first time, so beautifully embodied. I was quite sure she both thought and felt, and could talk, too, if she chose it. What tremendous self-reliance and disdain must form the basis of a female character, which accepted misapprehension and depreciation with an indifference so genuine as to scorn even the trifling exertion of disclosing its powers.

She could not possibly care for Wylder, any more than he cared for her. That odd look I detected in the mirror — what did it mean? and Wylder's confusion about Captain Lake — what was that? I could not comprehend the situation that was forming. I went over Wylder's history in my mind, and Captain Lake's — all I could recollect of it — but could find no clue, and that horrible visitation or vision! what was *it*?

This latter image had just glided in and taken its place in my waking dream, when I thought I saw reflected in the pool at my feet, the shape and face which I never could forget, of the white, long-chinned old man.

For a second I was unable, I think, to lift my eyes from the water which presented this cadaverous image.

But the figure began to move, and I raised my eyes, and saw it retreat, with a limping gait, into the thick copse before me, in the shadow of which it stopped and turned stiffly round, and directed on me a look of horror, and then withdrew.

It is all very fine laughing at me and my fancies. I do not think there are many men who in my situation would have felt very differently. I recovered myself; I shouted lustily after him to stay, and then in a sort of half-frightened rage, I pursued him; but I had to get round the pool, a considerable circuit. I could not tell which way he had turned on getting into the thicket; and it was now dusk, the sun having gone down during my reverie. So I stopped a little way in the copsewood, which was growing quite dark, and I shouted there again, peeping under the branches, and felt queer and much relieved that nothing answered or appeared.

Looking round me, in a sort of dream, I remembered suddenly what Wylder had told me of old Lorne Brandon, to whose portrait this inexplicable phantom bore so powerful a resemblance. He was suspected of having murdered his own son, at the edge of a tarn in the park. *This* tarn maybe — and with the thought the water looked blacker — and a deeper and colder shadow gathered over the ominous hollow in which I stood, and the rustling in the withered leaves sounded angrily.

I got up as quickly as might be to the higher grounds, and waited there for awhile, and watched for the emergence of the old man. But it did not appear; and shade after shade was spreading solemnly over the landscape, and having a good way to walk, I began to stride briskly along the slopes and hollows, in the twilight, now and then looking into vacancy, over my shoulder.

The little adventure, and the deepening shades, helped to sadden my homeward walk; and when at last the dusky outline of the Hall rose before me, it wore a sort of weird and haunted aspect.

CHAPTER XX.

CAPTAIN LAKE TAKES AN EVENING STROLL ABOUT GYLINGDEN.

Again I had serious thoughts of removing my person and effects to the Brandon Arms. I could not quite believe I had seen a ghost; but neither was I quite satisfied that the thing was altogether canny. The apparition, whatever it was, seemed to persecute me with a mysterious obstinacy; at all events, I was falling into a habit of seeing it; and I felt a natural desire to escape from the house which was plagued with its presence.

At the same time I had an odd sort of reluctance to mention the subject to my entertainers. The thing itself was a ghostly slur upon the house, and, to run away, a reproach to my manhood; and besides, writing now at a distance, and in the spirit of history, I suspect the interest which beauty always excites had a great deal to do with my resolve to hold my ground; and, I dare say, notwithstanding my other reasons, had the ladies at the Hall been all either old or ugly, I would have made good my retreat to the village hotel.

As it was, however, I was resolved to maintain my position. But that evening was streaked with a tinge of horror, and I more silent and *distrait* than usual.

The absence of an accustomed face, even though the owner be nothing very remarkable, is always felt; and Wylder was missed, though, sooth to say, not very much regretted. For the first time we were really a small party. Miss Lake was not there. The gallant captain, her brother, was also absent. The vicar, and his good little wife, were at Naunton that evening to hear a missionary recount his adventures and experiences in Japan, and none of the neighbours had been called in to fill the empty chairs.

Dorcas Brandon did not contribute much to the talk; neither, in truth, did I. Old Lady Chelford occasionally dozed and nodded sternly after tea, waking up and eyeing people grimly, as though enquiring whether anyone presumed to suspect her ladyship of having had a nap.

Chelford, I recollect, took a book, and read to us now and then, a snatch of poetry — I forget what. *My* book — except when I was thinking of the tarn and that old man I so hated — was Miss Brandon's exquisite and mysterious face.

That young lady was leaning back in her great oak chair, in which she looked like the heroine of some sad and gorgeous romance of the old civil wars of England, and directing a gaze of contemplative and haughty curiosity upon the old lady, who was unconscious of the daring profanation.

All on a sudden Dorcas Brandon said —

'And pray what do you think of marriage, Lady Chelford?'

'What do I think of marriage?' repeated the dowager, throwing back her head and eyeing the beautiful heiress through her gold spectacles, with a stony surprise, for she was not accustomed to be catechised by young people. 'Marriage? — why 'tis a divine institution. What can the child mean?'

'Do you think, Lady Chelford, it may be safely contracted, solely to join two estates?' pursued the young lady.

'Do I think it may safely be contracted, solely to join two estates?' repeated the old lady, with a look and carriage that plainly showed how entirely she appreciated the amazing presumption of her interrogatrix.

There was a little pause.

'*Certainly*,' replied Lady Chelford; 'that is, of course, under proper conditions, and with a due sense of its sacred character and a — a — obligations.'

'The first of which is *love*,' continued Miss Brandon; 'the second *honour* — both involuntary; and the third *obedience*, which springs from them.'

Old Lady Chelford coughed, and then rallying, said —

'Very good, Miss!'

'And pray, Lady Chelford, what do you think of Mr. Mark Wylder?' pursued
Miss Dorcas.

'I don't see, Miss Brandon, that my thoughts upon that subject can concern anyone but myself,' retorted the old lady, severely, and from an awful altitude. 'And I may say, considering who I am — and my years —

and the manner in which I am usually treated, I am a little surprised at the tone in which you are pleased to question me.'

These last terrible remarks totally failed to overawe the serene temerity of the grave beauty.

'I assumed, Lady Chelford, as you had interested yourself in me so far as to originate the idea of my engagement to Mr. Wylder, that you had considered these to me very important questions a little, and could give me satisfactory answers upon points on which my mind has been employed for some days; and, indeed, I think I've a right to ask that assistance of you.'

'You seem to forget, young lady, that there are times and places for such discussions; and that to Mr. — a — a — your visitor (a glance at me), it can't be very interesting to listen to this kind of — of — conversation, which is neither very entertaining, nor very *wise*.'

'I am answerable only for *my* part of it; and I think my questions very much to the purpose,' said the young lady, in her low, silvery tones.

'I don't question your good opinion, Miss Brandon, of your own discretion; but *I* can't see any profit in now discussing an engagement of more than two months' standing, or a marriage, which is fixed to take place only ten days hence. And I think, Sir (glancing again at me), it must strike *you* a little oddly, that I should be invited, in your presence, to discuss family matters with Miss Dorcas Brandon?'

Now, was it fair to call a peaceable inhabitant like me into the thick of a fray like this? I paused long enough to allow Miss Brandon to speak, but she did not choose to do so, thinking, I suppose, it was my business.

'I believe I ought to have withdrawn a little,' I said, very humbly; and old Lady Chelford at the word shot a gleam of contemptuous triumph at Miss Dorcas; but I would not acquiesce in the dowager's abusing my concession to the prejudice of that beautiful and daring young lady— 'I mean, Lady Chelford, in deference to you, who are not aware, as Miss Brandon is, that I am one of Mr. Wylder's oldest and most intimate friends; and at his request, and with Lord Chelford's approval, have been advised with, in detail, upon all the arrangements connected with the approaching marriage.'

'I am not going, at present, to say any more upon these subjects, because Lady Chelford prefers deferring our conversation,' said this very odd young lady; 'but there is nothing which either she or I may say, which I wish to conceal from any friend of Mr. Wylder's.'

The idea of Miss Brandon's seriously thinking of withdrawing from her engagement with Mark Wylder, I confess never entered my mind. Lady Chelford, perhaps, knew more of the capricious and daring character of the ladies of the Brandon line than I, and may have discovered some signs of a coming storm in the oracular questions which had fallen so harmoniously from those beautiful lips. As for me, I was puzzled. The old viscountess was flushed (she did not rouge), and very angry, and, I think, uncomfortable, though she affected her usual supremacy. But the young lady showed no sign of excitement, and lay back in her chair in her usual deep, cold calm.

Lake's late smoking with Wylder must have disagreed with him very much indeed, for he seemed more out of sorts as night approached. He stole away from Mr. Larkin's trellised porch, in the dusk. He marched into the town rather quickly, like a man who has business on his hands; but he had none — for he walked by the 'Brandon Arms,' and halted, and stared at the postoffice, as if he fancied he had something to say there. But no — there was no need to tap at the wooden window-pane. Some idle boys were observing the dandy captain, and he turned down the short lane that opened on the common, and sauntered upon the short grass.

Two or three groups, and an invalid visitor or two — for Gylingden boasts a 'spa' — were lounging away the twilight half-hours there. He seated himself on one of the rustic seats, and his yellow eyes wandered restlessly and vaguely along the outline of the beautiful hills. Then for nearly ten minutes he smoked — an odd recreation for a man suffering from the cigars of last night — and after that, for nearly as long again, he seemed lost in deep thought, his eyes upon the misty grass before him, and his small French boot beating time to the music of his thoughts.

Several groups passed close by him, in their pleasant circuit. Some wondered what might be the disease of that pale, peevish-looking gentleman, who sat there so still, languid, and dejected. Others set him down as a gentleman in difficulties of some sort, who was using Gylingden for a temporary refuge.

Others, again, supposed he might be that Major Craddock who had lost thirty thousand pounds on Vanderdecken the other day. Others knew he was staying with Mr. Larkin, and supposed he was trying to raise money at disadvantage, and remarked that some of Mr. Larkin's clients looked always unhappy, though they had so godly an attorney to deal with.

When Lake, with a little shudder, for it was growing chill, lifted up his yellow eyes suddenly, and recollected where he was, the common had grown dark, and was quite deserted. There were lights in the windows of the reading-room, and in the billiard-room beneath it; and shadowy figures, with cues in their hands, gliding hither and thither, across its uncurtained windows.

With a shrug, and a stealthy glance round him, Captain Lake started up. The instinct of the lonely and gloomy man unconsciously drew him towards the light, and he approached. A bat, attracted thither like himself, was flitting and flickering, this way and that, across the casement.

Captain Lake, waiting, with his hand on the door-handle, for the stroke, heard the smack of the balls, and the score called by the marker, and entered the hot, glaring room. Old Major Jackson, with his glass in his eye, was contending in his shirtsleeves heroically with a Manchester bag-man, who was palpably too much for him. The double-chinned and florid proprietor of the 'Brandon Arms,' with a brandy-and-water familiarity, offered Captain Lake two to one on the game in anything he liked, which the captain declined, and took his seat on the bench.

He was not interested by the struggle of the gallant major, who smiled like a prizefighter under his punishment. In fact, he could not have told the score at any point of the game; and, to judge by his face, was translated from the glare of that arena into a dark and splenetic world of his own.

When he wakened up, in the buzz and clack of tongues that followed the close of the game, Captain Lake glared round for a moment, like a man called up from sleep; the noise rattled and roared in his ears, the talk sounded madly, and the faces of the people excited and menaced him undefinably, and he felt as if he was on the point of starting to his feet and stamping and shouting. The fact is, I suppose, he was confoundedly nervous, dyspeptic, or whatever else it might be, and the heat and glare were too much for him.

So, out he went into the chill, fresh night-air, and round the corner into the quaint main-street of Gylingden, and walked down it in the dark, nearly to the last house by the corner of the Redman's Dell road, and then back again, and so on, trying to tire himself, I think; and every time he walked down the street, with his face toward London, his yellow eyes gleamed through the dark air, with the fixed gaze of a man looking out for the appearance of a vehicle. It, perhaps, indicated an anxiety and a mental look-out in that direction, for he really expected no such thing.

Then he dropped into the 'Brandon Arms,' and had a glass of brandy and water, and a newspaper, in the coffee-room; and then he ordered a 'fly,' and drove in it to Lawyer Larkin's house— 'The Lodge,' it was called — and entered Mr. Larkin's drawingroom very cheerfully.

'How quiet you are here,' said the captain. 'I have been awfully dissipated since I saw you.'

'In an innocent way, my dear Captain Lake, you mean, of course — in an innocent way.'

'Oh! no; billiards, I assure you. Do you play?'

'Oh! dear no — not that I see any essential harm in the game *as* a game, for those, I mean, who don't object to that sort of thing; but for a resident here, putting aside other feelings — a resident holding a position — it would not do, I assure you. There are people there whom one could not associate with comfortably. I don't care, I hope, how poor a man may be, but do let him be a gentleman. I own to that prejudice. A man, my dear Captain Lake, whose father before him has been a gentleman (old Larkin, while in the flesh, was an organist, and kept a small day school at Dwiddleston, and his grandfather he did not care to enquire after), and who has had the education of one, does not feel himself at home, you know — I'm sure you have felt the same sort of thing yourself.'

'Oh! of course; and I had such a nice walk on the common first, and then a turn up and down before the 'Brandon Arms,' where at last I read a paper, and could not resist a glass of brandy and water, and, growing lazy, came home in a 'fly,' so I think I have had a very gay evening.

Larkin smiled benignantly, and would have said something no doubt worth hearing, but at that moment the door opened, and his old cook and elderly parlour-maid — no breath of scandal ever troubled the serene fair fame of his household, and everyone allowed that, in the prudential virtues, at least, he was nearly perfect — and Sleddon the groom, walked in, with those sad faces which, I suppose, were first learned in the belief that they were acceptable to their master.

'Oh!' said Mr. Larkin, in a low, reverential tone, and the smile vanished; 'prayers!'

'Well, then, if you permit me, being a little tired, I'll go to my bedroom.'

With a grave and affectionate interest, Mr. Larkin looked in his face, and sighed a little and said: —

‘Might I, perhaps, venture to beg, just this one night — — ‘

That chastened and entreating look it was hard to resist. But somehow the whole thing seemed to Lake to say, ‘Do allow me this once to prescribe; do give your poor soul this one chance,’ and Lake answered him superciliously and irreverently.

‘No, thank you, no — any prayers I require I can manage for myself, thank you. Goodnight.’

And he lighted a bedroom candle and left the room.

‘What a beast that fellow is. I don’t know why the d — I stay in his house.’

One reason was, perhaps, that it saved him nearly a guinea a day, and he may have had some other little reasons just then.

‘Family prayers indeed! and such a pair of women — witches, by Jove! — and that rascally groom, and a hypocritical attorney! And the vulgar brute will be as rich as Croesus, I dare say.’

Here soliloquised Stanley Lake in that gentleman’s ordinary vein. His momentary disgust had restored him for a few seconds to his normal self. But certain anxieties of a rather ghastly kind, and speculations as to what might be going on in London just then, were round him again, like armed giants, in another moment, and the riches or hypocrisy of his host were no more to him than those of Overreach or Tartuffe.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN WHICH CAPTAIN LAKE VISITS HIS SISTER'S SICK BED.

I suspect there are very few mere hypocrites on earth. Of course, I do not reckon those who are under compulsion to affect purity of manners and a holy integrity of heart — and there are such — but those who volunteer an extraordinary profession of holiness, being all the while conscious villains. The Pharisees, even while devouring widows' houses, believed honestly in their own supreme righteousness.

I am afraid our friend Jos. Larkin wore a mask. I am sure he often wore it when he was quite alone. I don't know indeed, that he ever took it off. He was, perhaps, content to see it, even when he looked in the glass, and had not a very distinct idea what the underlying features might be. It answers with the world; it almost answers with himself. Pity it won't do everywhere! 'When Moses went to speak with God,' says the admirable Hall, 'he pulled off his veil. It was good reason he should present to God that face which he had made. There had been more need of his veil to hide the glorious face of God from him than to hide his from God. Hypocrites are contrary to Moses. He showed his worst to men, his best to God; they show their best to men, their worst to God; but God sees both their veil and their face, and I know not whether He more hates their veil of dissimulation or their face of wickedness.'

Captain Lake wanted rest — sleep — quiet thoughts at all events. When he was alone he was at once in a state of fever and gloom, and seemed always watching for something. His strange eyes glanced now this way, now that, with a fierce restlessness — now to the window — now to the door — and you would have said he was listening intently to some indistinct and too distant conversation affecting him vitally, there was such a look of fear and conjecture always in his face.

He bolted his door and unlocked his dressing case, and from a little silver box in that glittering repository he took, one after the other, two or three little wafers of a dark hue, and placed them successively on his tongue, and suffered them to melt, and so swallowed them. They were not liquorice. I am afraid Captain Lake dabbled a little in opium. He was not a great adept — yet, at least — like those gentlemen who can swallow five hundred drops of laudanum at a sitting. But he knew the virtues of the drug, and cultivated its acquaintance, and was oftener under its influence than perhaps any mortal, except himself, suspected.

The greater part of mankind are, upon the whole, happier and more cheerful than they are always willing to allow. Nature subserves the majority. She smiled very brightly next morning. There was a twittering of small birds among the brown leaves and ivy, and a thousand other pleasant sounds and sights stirring in the sharp, sunny air. This sort of inflexible merrymaking in nature seems marvellously selfish in the eyes of anxious Captain Lake. Fear hath torment — and fear is the worst ingredient in mental pain. This is the reason why suspense is so intolerable, and the retrospect even of the worst less terrible.

Stanley Lake would have given more than he could well afford that it were that day week, and he no worse off. Why did time limp so tediously away with him, prolonging his anguish gratuitously? He felt truculently, and would have murdered that week, if he could, in the midst of its loitering sunshine and gaiety.

There was a strange pain at his heart, and the pain of intense and fruitless calculation in his brain; and, as the Mahometan prays towards Mecca, and the Jew towards Jerusalem, so Captain Lake's morning orisons, whatsoever they were, were offered at the window of his bedroom toward London, from whence he looked for his salvation, or it might be the other thing — with a dreadful yearning.

He hated the fresh glitter of that morning scene. Why should the world be cheerful? It was a repast spread of which he could not partake, and it spited him. Yes; it was selfish — and hating selfishness — he would have struck the sun out of the sky that morning with his walking-cane, if he could, and draped the world in black.

He saw from his window the good vicar walk smiling by, in white choker and seedy black, his little boy holding by his fingers, and capering and wheeling in front, and smiling up in his face. They were very busy talking.

Little 'Fairy' used to walk, when parochial visits were not very distant, with his 'Wapsie;' how that name came about no one remembered, but the vicar answered to it more cheerily than to any other. The little man was solitary, and these rambles were a delight. A beautiful smiling little fellow, very exacting of attention — troublesome, perhaps; he was so sociable, and needed sympathy and companionship, and repaid it with a boundless, sensitive *love*. The vicar told him the stories of David and Goliath, and Joseph and his brethren, and of the wondrous birth in Bethlehem of Judea, the star that led the Wise Men, and the celestial song heard by the shepherds keeping their flocks by night, and snatches of ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’; and sometimes, when they made a feast and eat their pennyworth of cherries, sitting on the style, he treated him, I am afraid, to the profane histories of Jack the Giant-killer and the Yellow Dwarf; the vicar had theories about imagination, and fancied it was an important faculty, and that the Creator had not given children their unextinguishable love of stories to no purpose.

I don’t envy the man who is superior to the society of children. What can he gain from children’s talk? Is it witty, or wise, or learned? Be frank. Is it not, honestly, a mere noise and interruption — a musical cackling of geese, and silvery braying of tiny asses? Well, say I, out of my large acquaintance, there are not many men to whom I would go for wisdom; learning is better found in books, and, as for wit, is it always pleasant? The most companionable men are not always the greatest intellects. They laugh, and though they don’t converse, they make a cheerful noise, and show a cheerful countenance.

There was not a great deal in Will Honeycomb, for instance; but our dear Mr. Spectator tells us somewhere that ‘he laughed easily,’ which I think quite accounts for his acceptance with the club. He was kindly and enjoying. What is it that makes your dog so charming a companion in your walks? Simply that he thoroughly likes you and enjoys himself. He appeals imperceptibly to your affections, which cannot be stirred — such is God’s will — ever so lightly, without some little thrillings of happiness; and through the subtle absorbents of your sympathy he infuses into you something of his own hilarious and exulting spirit.

When Stanley Lake saw the vicar, the lines of his pale face contracted strangely, and his wild gaze followed him, and I don’t think he breathed once until the thin smiling man in black, with the little gambolling bright boy holding by his hand, had passed by. He was thinking, you may be sure, of his Brother Mark.

When Lake had ended his toilet and stared in the glass, he still looked so haggard, that on greeting Mr. Larkin in the parlour, he thought it necessary to mention that he had taken cold in that confounded billiard-room last night, which spoiled his sleep, and made him awfully seedy that morning. Of course, his host was properly afflicted and sympathetic.

‘By-the-bye, I had a letter this morning from that party — our common friend, Mr. W., you know,’ said Larkin, gracefully.

‘Well, what is he doing, and when does he come back? You mean Wylder, of course?’

‘Yes; my good client, Mr. Mark Wylder. Permit me to assist you to some honey, you’ll find it remarkably good, I venture to say; it comes from the gardens of Queen’s Audley. The late marquis, you know, prided himself on his honey — and my friend, Thornbury, cousin to Sir Frederick Thornbury — I suppose you know him — an East Indian judge, you know — very kindly left it at Dollington for me, on his way to the Earl of Epsom’s.’

‘Thank you — delicious, I’m sure, it has been in such good company. May I see Wylder’s note — that is, if there’s no private business?’

‘Oh, certainly.’

And, with Wylder’s great red seal on the back of the envelope, the letter ran thus: —

‘DEAR LARKIN, — I write in haste to save post, to say I shall be detained in town a few days longer than I thought. Don’t wait for me about the parchments; I am satisfied. If anything crosses your mind, a word with Mr. De C. at the Hall, will clear all up. Have all ready to sign and seal when I come back — certainly, within a week.

‘Yours sincerely,

‘M. WYLDER,

‘London.’

It was evidently written in great haste, with the broadnibbed pen he liked; but notwithstanding the sort of swagger with which the writing marched across the page, Lake might have seen here and there a little quaver — indicative of something different from haste — the vibrations of another sort of flurry.

'"Certainly within a week," he writes. Does he mean he'll be here in a week or only to have the papers ready in a week?' asked Lake.

'The question, certainly, does arise. It struck me on the first perusal,' answered the attorney. 'His address is rather a wide one, too — London! Do you know his club, Captain Lake?'

'The *Wanderers*. He has left the *United Service*. Nothing for me, by-the-way?'

'No letter. No.'

'*Tant mieux*, I hate them,' said the captain. 'I wonder how my sister is this morning.'

'Would you like a messenger? I'll send down with pleasure to enquire.'

'Thank you, no; I'll walk down and see her.'

And Lake yawned at the window, and then took his hat and stick and sauntered toward Gylingden. At the postoffice window he tapped with the silver tip of his cane, and told Miss Driver with a sleepy smile —

'I'm going down to Redman's Farm, and any letters for my sister, Miss Lake, I may as well take with me.'

Everybody 'in business' in the town of Gylingden, by this time, knew Captain Lake and his belongings — a most respectable party — a high man; and, of course, there was no difficulty. There was only one letter — the address was written— 'Miss Lake, Redman's Farm, near Brandon Park, Gylingden,' in a stiff hand, rather slanting backwards.

Captain Lake put it in his paletot pocket, looked in her face gently, and smiled, and thanked her in his graceful way — and, in fact, left an enduring impression upon that impressible nature.

Turning up the dark road at Redman's Dell, the gallant captain passed the old mill, and, all being quiet up and down the road, he halted under the lordly shadow of a clump of chestnuts, and opened and read the letter he had just taken charge of. It contained only these words: —

'Wednesday.

'On Friday night, next, at halfpast twelve.'

This he read twice or thrice, pausing between whiles. The envelope bore the London postmark. Then he took out his cigar case, selected a promising weed, and wrapping the laconic note prettily round one of his scented matches, lighted it, and the note flamed pale in the daylight, and dropped still blazing, at the root of the old tree he stood by, and sent up a little curl of blue smoke — an incense to the demon of the wood — and turned in a minute more into a black film, overrun by a hundred creeping sparkles; and having completed his mysterious incremation, he, with his yellow eyes, made a stolen glance around, and lighting his cigar, glided gracefully up the steep road, under the solemn canopy of old timber, to the sound of the moaning stream below, and the rustle of withered leaves about him, toward Redman's Farm.

As he entered the flower-garden, the jaundiced face of old Tamar, with its thousand small wrinkles and its ominous gleam of suspicion, was looking out from the darkened porch. The white cap, kerchief, and drapery, courtesied to him as he drew near, and the dismal face changed not.

'Well, Tamar, how do you do? — how are all? Where is that girl Margery?'

'In the kitchen, Master Stanley,' said she, courtesying again.

'Are you sure?' said Captain Lake, peeping toward that apartment over the old woman's shoulder.

'Certain sure, Master Stanley.'

'Well, come up stairs to your mistress's room,' said Lake, mounting the stairs, with his hat in his hand, and on tip-toe, like a man approaching a sick chamber.

There was something I think grim and spectral in this ceremonious ascent to the empty chamber. Children had once occupied that silent floor for there was a little balustraded gate across the top of the staircase.

'I keep this closed,' said old Tamar, 'and forbid her to cross it, lest she should disturb the mistress. Heaven forgive me!'

'Very good,' he whispered, and he peeped over the banister, and then entered Rachel's silent room, darkened with closed shutters, the white curtains and white coverlet so like 'the dark chamber of white death.'

He had intended speaking to Tamar there, but changed his mind, or rather could not make up his mind; and he loitered silently, and stood with the curtain in his gloved hand, looking upon the cold coverlet, as if Rachel lay dead there.

'That will do,' he said, awaking from his wandering thought. 'We'll go down now, Tamar.'

And in the same stealthy way, walking lightly and slowly, down the stairs they went, and Stanley entered the kitchen.

'How do you do, Margery? You'll be glad to hear your mistress is better. You must run down to the town, though, and buy some jelly, and you are to bring her back change of this.'

And he placed half-a-crown in her hand.

'Put on your bonnet and my old shawl, child; and take the basket, and come back by the side door,' croaked old Tamar.

So the girl dried her hands — she was washing the teacups — and in a twinkling was equipped and on her way to Gylingden.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH CAPTAIN LAKE MEETS A FRIEND NEAR THE WHITE HOUSE.

Lake had no very high opinion of men or women, gentle or simple.

‘She listens, I dare say, the little spy,’ said he.

‘No, Master Stanley! She’s a good little girl.’

‘She quite believes her mistress is up stairs, eh?’

‘Yes; the Lord forgive me — I’m deceiving her.’

He did not like the tone and look which accompanied this.

‘Now, my good old Tamar, you really can’t be such an idiot as to fancy there can be any imaginable wrong in keeping that prying little slut in ignorance of that which in no wise concerns her. This is a critical matter, do you see, and if it were known in this place that your young mistress had gone away as she has done — though quite innocently — upon my honour — I think it would blast her. You would not like, for a stupid crotchet, to ruin poor Radie, I fancy.’

‘I’m doing just what you both bid me,’ said the old woman.

‘You sit up stairs chiefly?’

She nodded sadly.

‘And keep the hall door shut and bolted?’

Again she nodded.

‘I’m going up to the Hall, and I’ll tell them she’s much better, and that I’ve been in her room, and that, perhaps, she may go up to see them in the morning.’

Old Tamar shook her head and groaned.

‘How long is all this to go on for, Master Stanley?’

‘Why, d — you, Tamar, can’t you listen?’ he said, clutching her wrist in his lavender kid grasp rather roughly. ‘How long — a very short time, I tell you. She’ll be home immediately. I’ll come tomorrow and tell you exactly — maybe tomorrow evening — will that do? And should they call, you must say the same; and if Miss Dorcas, Miss Brandon, you know — should wish to go up to see her, tell her she’s asleep. Stop that hypocritical grimacing, will you. It is no part of your duty to tell the world what can't possibly concern them, and may bring your young mistress to — *perdition*. That does not strike me as any part of your religion.'

Tamar groaned again, and she said: 'I opened my Bible, Lord help me, three times to-day, Master Stanley, and could not go on. It's no use — I can't read it.'

'Time enough — I think you've read more than is good for you. I think you are half mad, Tamar; but think what you may, it must be done. Have not you read of straining at gnats and swallowing camels? You used not, I've heard, to be always so scrupulous, old Tamar.'

There was a vile sarcasm in his tone and look.

'It is not for the child I nursed to say that,' said Tamar.

There were scandalous stories of wicked old Tiberius — bankrupt, dead, and buried — compromising the fame of Tamar — not always a spectacled and cadaverous student of Holy Writ. These, indeed, were even in Stanley's childhood old-world, hazy, traditions of the servants' hall. But boys hear often more than is good, and more than gospel, who live in such houses as old General Lake, the old millionaire widower, kept.

'I did not mean anything, upon my honour, Tamar, that could annoy you. I only meant you used not to be a fool, and pray don't begin now; for I assure you Radie and I would not ask it if it could be avoided. You have Miss Radie's secret in your hands, I don't think you'd like to injure her, and you used to be trustworthy. I don't think your Bible teaches you anywhere to hurt your neighbour and to break faith.'

'Don't speak of the Bible now; but you needn't fear me, Master Stanley,' answered the old woman, a little sternly. 'I don't know why she's gone, nor why it's a secret — I don't, and I'd rather not. Poor Miss Radie, she never heard anything but what was good from old Tamar, whatever I might ha' bin myself, miserable sinners are we all; and I'll do as you bid me, and I *have* done, Master Stanley, howsoever it troubles my mind;' and now old Tamar's words spoke — that's all.

'Old Tamar is a sensible creature, as she always was. I hope I did not vex you, Tamar. I did not mean, I assure you; but we get rough ways in the army, I'm afraid, and you won't mind me. You never *did* mind little Stannie when he was naughty, you know.'

There was here a little subsidence in his speech. He was thinking of giving her a crown, but there were several reasons against it, so that handsome coin remained in his purse.

'And I forgot to tell you, Tamar, I've a ring for you in town — a little souvenir; you'll think it pretty — a gold ring, with a stone in it — it belonged to poor dear Aunt Jemima, you remember. I left it behind; so stupid!'

So he shook hands with old Tamar, and patted her affectionately on the shoulder, and he said: —

'Keep the hall-door bolted. Make any excuse you like: only it would not do for anyone to open it, and run up to the room as they might, so don't forget to secure the door when I go. I think that is all. Ta-ta, dear Tamar. I'll see you in the morning.'

As he walked down the mill-road toward the town, he met Lord Chelford on his way to make enquiry about Rachel at Redman's Farm; and Lake, who, as we know, had just seen his sister, gave him all particulars.

Chelford, like the lawyer, had heard from Mark Wylder that morning — a few lines, postponing his return. He merely mentioned it, and made no comment; but Lake perceived that he was annoyed at his unexplained absence.

Lake dined at Brandon that evening, and though looking ill, was very good company, and promised to bring an early report of Rachel's convalescence in the morning.

I have little to record of next day, except that Larkin received another London letter. Wylder plainly wrote in great haste, and merely said: —

'I shall have to wait a day or two longer than I yesterday thought, to meet a fellow from whom I am to receive something of importance, rather, as I think, to me. Get the deeds ready, as I said in my last. If I am not in Gylingden by Monday, we must put off the wedding for a week later — there is no help for it. You need not talk of this. I write to Chelford to say the same.'

This note was as unceremonious, and still shorter. Lord Chelford would have written at once to remonstrate with Mark on the unseemliness of putting off his marriage so capriciously, or, at all events, so mysteriously —

Miss Brandon not being considered, nor her friends consulted. But Mark had a decided objection to many letters: he had no fancy to be worried, when he had made up his mind, by prosy remonstrances; and he shut out the whole tribe of letter-writers by simply omitting to give them his address.

His cool impertinence, and especially this cunning precaution, incensed old Lady Chelford. She would have liked to write him one of those terse, courteous, biting notes, for which she was famous; and her fingers, morally, tingled to box his ears. But what was to be done with mere 'London?' Wylder was hidden from mortal sight, like a heaven-protected hero in the 'Iliad,' and a cloud of invisibility girdled him.

Like most rustic communities, Gylingden and its neighbourhood were early in bed. Few lights burned after halfpast ten, and the whole vicinity was deep in its slumbers before twelve o'clock.

At that dread hour, Captain Lake, about a mile on the Dollington, which was the old London road from Gylingden, was pacing backward and forward under the towering files of beech that overarch it at that point.

The 'White House' public, with a wide panel over its door, presenting, in tints subdued by time, a stagecoach and four horses in mid career, lay a few hundred yards nearer to Gylingden. Not a soul was stirring — not a sound but those, sad and soothing, of nature was to be heard.

Stanley Lake did not like waiting any more than did Louis XIV. He was really a little tired of acting sentry, and was very peevish by the time the ring of wheels and horse-hoofs approaching from the London direction became audible. Even so, he had a longer wait than he expected, sounds are heard so far by night. At last, however, it drew nearer — nearer — quite close — and a sort of nondescript vehicle — one horsed — loomed in the dark, and he calls —

'Hallo! there — I say — a passenger for the "White House?"'

At the same moment, a window of the cab — shall we call it — was let down, and a female voice — Rachel Lake's — called to the driver to stop.

Lake addressed the driver —

'You come from Johnson's Hotel — don't you — at Dollington?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Well, I'll pay you half-fare to bring me there.'

'All right, Sir. But the 'oss, Sir, must 'av 'is oats fust.'

‘Feed him here, then. They are all asleep in the “White House.” I’ll be with you in five minutes, and you shall have something for yourself when we get into Dollington.’

Stanley opened the door. She placed her hand on his, and stepped to the ground. It was very dark under those great trees. He held her hand a little harder than was his wont.

‘All quite well, ever since. You are not very tired, are you? I’m afraid it will be necessary for you to walk to “Redman’s Farm,” dear Radie — but it is hardly a mile, I think — for, you see, the fellow must not know who you are; and I must go back with him, for I have not been very well — indeed I’ve been, I may say, very ill — and I told that fellow, Larkin, who has his eyes about him, and would wonder what kept me out so late, that I would run down to some of the places near for a change, and sleep a night there; and that’s the reason, dear Radie, I can walk only a short way with you; but you are not afraid to walk a part of the way home without me? You are so sensible, and you have been, really, so very kind, I assure you I appreciate it, Radie — I do, indeed; and I’m very grateful — I am, upon my word.’

Rachel answered with a heavy sigh.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW RACHEL SLEPT THAT NIGHT IN REDMAN'S FARM.

'Allow me — pray do,' and he took her little bag from her hand. 'I hope you are not very tired, darling; you've been so very good; and you're not afraid — you know the place is so quiet — of the little walk by yourself. Take my arm; I'll go as far as I can, but it is very late you know — and you are sure you are not afraid?'

'I ought to be afraid of nothing now, Stanley, but I think I am afraid of everything.'

'Merely a little nervous — it's nothing — I've been wretchedly since, myself; but, I'm so glad you are home again; you shall have no more trouble, I assure you; and not a creature suspects you have been from home. Old Tamar has behaved admirably.'

Rachel sighed again and said —

'Yes — poor Tamar.'

'And now, dear, I'm afraid I must leave you — I'm very sorry; but you see how it is; keep to the shady side, close by the hedge, where the trees stop; but I'm certain you will meet no one. Tamar will tell you who has called — hardly anyone — I saw them myself every day at Brandon, and told them you were ill. You've been very kind, Radie; I assure you I'll never forget it. You'll find Tamar up and watching for you — I arranged all that; and I need not say you'll be very careful not to let that girl of yours hear anything. You'll be very quiet — she suspects nothing; and I assure you, so far as personal annoyance of any kind is concerned, you may be perfectly at ease. Goodnight, Radie; God bless you, dear. I wish very much I could see you all the way, but there's a risk in it, you know. Goodnight, dear Radie. By-the-bye, here's your bag; I'll take the rug, it's too heavy for you, and I may as well have it to Dollington.'

He kissed her cheek in his slight way, and left her, and was soon on his way to Dollington, where he slept that night — rather more comfortably than he had done since Rachel's departure.

Rachel walked on swiftly. Very tired, but not at all sleepy — on the contrary, excited and nervous, and rather relieved, notwithstanding that Stanley had left her to walk home alone.

It seemed to her that more than a month had passed since she saw the mill-road last. How much had happened! how awful was the change! Familiar objects glided past her, the same, yet the fashion of the countenance was altered; there was something estranged and threatening.

The pretty parsonage was now close by: in the dews of night the spirit of peace and slumbers smiled over it; but the sight of its steep roof and homely chimney-stacks smote with a shock at her brain and heart — a troubled moan escaped her. She looked up with the instinct of prayer, and clasped her hands on the handle of that little bag which had made the mysterious journey with her; a load which no man could lift lay upon her heart.

Then she commenced her dark walk up the mill-road — her hands still clasped, her lips moving in broken appeals to Heaven. She looked neither to the right nor to the left, but passed on with inflexible gaze and hasty steps, like one who crosses a plank over some awful chasm.

In such darkness Redman's dell was a solemn, not to say an awful, spot; and at any time, I think, Rachel, in a like solitude and darkness, would have been glad to see the red glimmer of old Tamar's candle proclaiming under the branches the neighbourhood of human life and sympathy.

The old woman, with her shawl over her head, sat listening for her young mistress's approach, on the little side bench in the trellised porch, and tottered hastily forth to meet her at the garden wicket, whispering forlorn welcomes, and thanksgivings, which Rachel answered only with a kiss.

Safe, safe at home! Thank Heaven at least for that. Secluded once more — hidden in Redman's Dell; but never again to be the same — the careless mind no more. The summer sunshine through the trees, the leafy songs of birds, obscured in the smoke and drowned in the discord of an untold and everlasting trouble.

The hall-door was now shut and bolted. Wise old Tamar had turned the key upon the sleeping girl. There was nothing to be feared from prying eyes and listening ears.

'You are cold, Miss Radie, and tired — poor thing! I lit a bit of fire in your room, Miss; would you like me to go up stairs with you, Miss?'

'Come.'

And so up stairs they went; and the young lady looked round with a strange anxiety, like a person seeking for something, and forgetting what; and, sitting down, she leaned her head on her hand with a moan, the living picture of despair.

'You've a headache, Miss Radie?' said the old woman, standing by her with that painful enquiry which sat naturally on her face.

'A heartache, Tamar.'

'Let me help you off with these things, Miss Radie, dear.'

The young lady did not seem to hear, but she allowed Tamar to remove her cloak and hat and handkerchief.

The old servant had placed the teathings on the table, and what remained of that wine of which Stanley had partaken on the night from which the eclipse of Rachel's life dated. So, without troubling her with questions, she made tea, and then some negus, with careful and trembling hands.

'No,' said Rachel, a little pettishly, and put it aside.

'See now, Miss Radie, dear. You look awful sick and tired. You are tired to death and pale, and sorry, my dear child; and to please old Tamar, you'll just drink this.'

'Thank you, Tamar, I believe you are right.'

The truth was she needed it; and in the same dejected way she sipped it slowly; and then there was a long silence — the silence of a fatigue, like that of fever, near which sleep refuses to come. But she sat in that waking lethargy in which are sluggish dreams of horror, and neither eyes nor ears for that which is before us.

When at last with another great sigh she lifted her head, her eyes rested on old Tamar's face, at the other side of the fireplace, with a dark, dull surprise and puzzle for a moment, as if she could not tell why she was there, or where the place was; and then rising up, with piteous look in her old nurse's face, she said, 'Oh! Tamar, Tamar. It is a dreadful world.'

'So it is, Miss Radie,' answered the old woman, her glittering eyes returning her sad gaze wofully. 'Aye, so it is, sure! — and such it was and will be. For so the Scripture says— "Cursed is the ground for thy sake" — hard to the body — a vale of tears — dark to the spirit. But it is the hand of God that is upon you, and, like me, you will say at last, "It is good for me that I have been in trouble." Lie down, dear Miss Radie, and I'll read to you the blessed words of comfort that have been sealed for me ever since I saw you last. They have — but that's over.'

And she turned up her pallid, puckered face, and, with a trembling and knotted pair of hands uplifted, she muttered an awful thanksgiving.

Rachel said nothing, but her eyes rested on the floor, and, with the quiet obedience of her early childhood, she did as Tamar said. And the old woman assisted her to undress, and so she lay down with a sigh in her bed. And Tamar, her round spectacles by this time on her nose, sitting at the little table by her pillow, read, in a solemn and somewhat quavering voice, such comfortable passages as came first to memory.

Rachel cried quietly as she listened, and at last, worn out by many feverish nights, and the fatigues of her journey, she fell into a disturbed slumber, with many startings and sudden wakings, with cries and strange excitement.

Old Tamar would not leave her, but kept her seat in the high-backed armchair throughout the night, like a nurse — as indeed she was — in a sick chamber. And so that weary night limped tediously away, and morning dawned, and tipped the discoloured foliage of the glen with its glow, awaking the songs of all the birds, and dispersing the white mists of darkness. And Rachel with a start awoke, and sat up with a wild look and a cry —

'What is it?'

'Nothing, dear Miss Radie — only poor old Tamar.' And a new day had begun.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DORCAS BRANDON PAYS RACHEL A VISIT.

It was not very much past eleven that morning when the pony carriage from Brandon drew up before the little garden wicket of Redman's Farm.

The servant held the ponies' heads, and Miss Dorcas passed through the little garden, and met old Tamar in the porch.

'Better to-day, Tamar?' enquired this grand and beautiful young lady.

The sun glimmered through the boughs behind her; her face was in shade, and its delicate chiselling was brought out in soft reflected lights; and old Tamar looked on her in a sort of wonder, her beauty seemed so celestial and splendid.

Well, she *was* better, though she had had a bad night. She was up and dressed, and this moment coming down, and would be very happy to see Miss Brandon, if she would step into the drawingroom.

Miss Brandon took old Tamar's hand gently and pressed it. I suppose she was glad and took this way of showing it; and tall, beautiful, graceful, in rustling silks, she glided into the tiny drawingroom silently, and sate down softly by the window, looking out upon the flowers and the falling leaves, mottled in light and shadow.

We have been accustomed to see another girl — bright and fair-haired Rachel Lake — in the small rooms of Redman's Farm; but Dorcas only in rich and stately Brandon Hall — the beautiful 'genius loci' under lofty ceilings, curiously moulded in the first James's style — amid carved oak and richest draperies, tall china vases, paintings, and cold white statues; and somehow in this low-roofed room, so small and homely, she looks like a displaced divinity — an exile under Juno's jealousy from the cloudy splendours of Olympus — dazzlingly melancholy, and 'humano major' among the meannesses and trumperies of earth.

So there came a step and a little rustling of feminine draperies, the small door opened, and Rachel entered, with her hand extended, and a pale smile of welcome.

Women can hide their pain better than we men, and bear it better, too, except when *shame* drops fire into the dreadful chalice. But poor Rachel Lake had more than that stoical hypocrisy which enables the tortured spirits of her sex to lift a pale face through the flames and smile.

She was sanguine, she was genial and companionable, and her spirits rose at the sight of a friendly face. This transient spring and lighting up are beautiful — a glamour beguiling our senses. It wakens up the frozen spirit of enjoyment, and leads the sad faculties forth on a wild forgetful frolic.

'Rachel, dear, I'm so glad to see you,' said Dorcas, placing her arms gently about her neck, and kissing her twice or thrice. There was something of sweetness and fondness in her tones and manner, which was new to Rachel, and comforting, and she returned the greeting as kindly, and felt more like her former self. 'You have been more ill than I thought, darling, and you are still far from quite recovered.'

Rachel's pale and sharpened features and dilated eye struck her with a painful surprise.

'I shall soon be as well as I am ever likely to be — that is, quite well,' answered Rachel. 'You have been very kind. I've heard of your coming here, and sending, so often.'

They sat down side by side, and Dorcas held her hand.

'Maybe, Rachel dear, you would like to drive a little?'

'No, darling, not yet; it is very good of you.'

'You have been so ill, my poor Rachel.'

'Ill and troubled, dear — troubled in mind, and miserably nervous.'

Poor Rachel! her nature recoiled from deceit, and she told, at all events, as much of the truth as she dared.

Dorcas's large eyes rested upon her with a grave enquiry, and then Miss Brandon looked down in silence for a while on the carpet, and was thinking a little sternly, maybe, and with a look of pain, still holding Rachel's hand, she said, with a sad sort of reproach in her tone,

'Rachel, dear, you have not told my secret?'

'No, indeed, Dorcas — never, and never will; and I think, though I have learned to fear death, I would rather die than let Stanley even suspect it.'

She spoke with a sudden energy, which partook of fear and passion, and flushed her thin cheek, and made her languid eyes flash.

‘Thank you, Rachel, my Cousin Rachel, my only friend. I ought not to have doubted you,’ and she kissed her again. ‘Chelford had a note from Mr. Wylder this morning — another note — his coming delayed, and something of his having to see some person who is abroad,’ continued Dorcas, after a little pause. ‘You have heard, of course, of Mr. Wylder’s absence?’

‘Yes, something — *everything*,’ said Rachel, hurriedly, looking frowningly at a flower which she was twirling in her fingers.

‘He chose an unlucky moment for his departure. I meant to speak to him and end all between us; and I would now write, but there is no address to his letters. I think Lady Chelford and her son begin to think there is more in this oddly-timed journey of Mr. Wylder’s than first appeared. When I came into the parlour this morning I knew they were speaking of it. If he does not return in a day or two, Chelford, I am sure, will speak to me, and then I shall tell him my resolution.’

‘Yes,’ said Rachel.

‘I don’t understand his absence. I think *they* are puzzled, too. Can you conjecture why he is gone?’

Rachel made no answer, but rose with a dreamy look, as if gazing at some distant object among the dark masses of forest trees, and stood before the window so looking across the tiny garden.

‘I don’t think, Rachel dear, you heard me?’ said Dorcas.

‘Can I conjecture why he is gone?’ murmured Rachel, still gazing with a wild kind of apathy into distance. ‘Can I? What can it now be to you or me — why? Yes, we sometimes conjecture right, and sometimes wrong; there are many things best not conjectured about at all — some interesting, some abominable, some that pass all comprehension: I never mean to conjecture, if I can help it, again.’

And the wan oracle having spoken, she sate down in the same sort of abstraction again beside Dorcas, and she looked full in her cousin’s eyes.

‘I made you a voluntary promise, Dorcas, and now you will make me one. Of Mark Wylder I say this: his name has been for years hateful to me, and recently it has become frightful; and you will promise me simply this, that you will never ask me to speak again about him. Be he near, or be he far, I regard his very name with horror.’

Dorcas returned her gaze with one of haughty amazement; and Rachel said,

‘Well, Dorcas, you promise?’

‘You speak truly, Rachel, you *have* a right to my promise: I give it.’

‘Dorcas, you are changed; have I lost your love for asking so poor a kindness?’

‘I’m only disappointed, Rachel; I thought you would have trusted me, as I did you.’

‘It is an antipathy — an antipathy I cannot get over, dear Dorcas; you may think it a madness, but don’t blame me. Remember I am neither well nor happy, and forgive what you cannot like in me. I have very few to love me now, and I thought you might love me, as I have begun to love you. Oh! Dorcas, darling, don’t forsake me; I am very lonely here and my spirits are gone and I never needed kindness so much before.’

And she threw her arms round her cousin’s neck, and brave Rachel at last burst into tears.

Dorcas, in her strange way, was moved.

‘I like you still, Rachel; I’m sure I’ll always like you. You resemble me, Rachel: you are fearless and inflexible and generous. That spirit belongs to the blood of our strange race; all our women were so. Yes, Rachel, I do love you. I was wounded to find you had thoughts you would not trust to me; but I have made the promise, and I’ll keep it; and I love you all the same.’

‘Thank you, Dorcas, dear. I like to call you cousin — kindred is so pleasant. Thank you, from my heart, for your love; you will never know, perhaps, how much it is to me.’

The young queen looked on her kindly, but sadly, through her large, strange eyes, clouded with a presage of futurity, and she kissed her again, and said —

‘Rachel, dear, I have a plan for you and me: we shall be old maids, you and I, and live together like the ladies of Llangollen, careless and happy recluses. I’ll let Brandon and abdicate. We will make a little tour together, when all this shall have blown over, in a few weeks, and choose our retreat; and with the winter’s snow we’ll vanish from Brandon, and appear with the early flowers at our cottage among the beautiful woods and hills of Wales. Will you come, Rachel?’

At sight of this castle or cottage in the air, Rachel lighted up. The little whim had something tranquillising and balmy. It was escape — flight from Gylingden — flight from Brandon — flight from Redman's Farm: they and all their hated associations would be far behind, and that awful page in her story, not torn out, indeed, but gummed down as it were, and no longer glaring and glowering in her eyes every moment of her waking life.

So she smiled upon the picture painted on the clouds; it was the first thing that had interested her for days. It was a hope. She seized it; she clung to it. She knew, perhaps, it was the merest chimera; but it rested and consoled her imagination, and opened, in the blackness of her sky, one small vista, through whose silvery edge the blue and stars of heaven were visible.

CHAPTER XXV.

CAPTAIN LAKE LOOKS IN AT NIGHTFALL.

In the queer little drawingroom of Redman's Farm it was twilight, so dense were the shadows from the great old chestnuts that surrounded it, before the sun was well beneath the horizon; and you could, from its darkened window, see its red beams still tinting the high grounds of Willerston, visible through the stems of the old trees that were massed in the near foreground.

A figure which had lost its energy — a face stamped with the lines and pallor of a dejection almost guilty — with something of the fallen grace and beauty of poor Margaret, as we see her with her forehead leaning on her slender hand, by the stirless spinning-wheel — the image of a strange and ineffaceable sorrow, sat Rachel Lake.

Tamar might glide in and out; her mistress did not speak; the shadows deepened round her, but she did look up, nor call, in the old cheerful accents, for lights. No more roulades and ringing chords from the piano — no more clear spirited tones of the lady's voice sounded through the low ceilings of Redman's Farm, and thrilled with a haunting melody the deserted glen, wherein the birds had ended their vesper songs and gone to rest.

A step was heard at the threshold — it entered the hall; the door of the little chamber opened, and Stanley Lake entered, saying in a doubtful, almost timid way —

'It is I, Radie, come to thank you, and just to ask you how you do, and to say I'll never forget your kindness; upon my honour, I never can.'

Rachel shuddered as the door opened, and there was a ghastly sort of expectation in her look. Imperfectly as it was seen, he could understand it. She did not bid him welcome or even speak. There was a silence.

'Now, you're not angry with me, Radie dear; I venture to say I suffer more than you: and how could I have anticipated the strange turn things have taken? You know how it all came about, and you must see I'm not really to blame, at least in intention, for all this miserable trouble; and even if I were, where's the good in angry feeling or reproaches now, don't you see, when I can't mend it? Come, Radie, let bygones be bygones. There's a good girl; won't you?'

'Aye, bygones are bygones; the past is, indeed, immutable, and the future is equally fixed, and more dreadful.'

'Come, Radie; a clever girl like you can make your own future.'

'And what do you want of me now?' she asked, with a fierce cold stare.

'But I did not say I wanted anything.'

'Of course you do, or I should not have seen you. Mark me though, I'll go no further in the long route of wickedness you seem to have marked out for me. I'm sacrificed, it is true, but I won't renew my hourly horrors, and live under the rule of your diabolical selfishness.'

'Say what you will, but keep your temper — will you?' he answered, more like his angry self. But he checked the rising devil within him, and changed his tone; he did not want to quarrel — quite the reverse.

'I don't know really, Radie, why you should talk as you do. I don't want you to do anything — upon my honour I don't — only just to exercise your common sense — and you have lots of sense, Radie. Don't you think people have eyes to see, and ears and tongues in this part of the world? Don't you know very well, in a small place like this, they are all alive with curiosity? and if you choose to make such a tragedy figure, and keep moping and crying, and all that sort of thing, and look so *funeste* and miserable, you'll be sure to fix attention and set the whole d — d place speculating and gossiping? and really, Radie, you're making mountains of molehills. It is because you live so solitary here, and it *is* such a gloomy out-o'-the-way spot — so awfully dark and damp, nobody *could* be well here, and you really must change. It is the very temple of blue-devilry, and I assure you if I lived as you do I'd cut my throat before a month — you *mustn't*. And old Tamar, you know, such a figure! The very priestess of despair. She gives me the horrors, I assure you, whenever I look at her; you must not keep her, she's of no earthly use, poor old thing; and, you know, Radie, we're not rich enough — you and I — to support other people. You must really place yourself more cheerfully, and I'll speak to Chelford about Tamar. There's a very nice place — an asylum, or something, for old women — near — (Dollington he was going to say, but the associations were not pleasant) — near some of those little towns close to this, and he's a visitor, or governor, or whatever they call it. It is really not fair to expect you or me to keep people like that.'

'She has not cost you much hitherto, Stanley, and she will give you very little trouble hereafter. I won't part with Tamar.'

'She has not cost me much?' said Lake, whose temper was not of a kind to pass by anything. 'No; of course, she has not. *I* can't afford a guinea. You're poor enough; but in proportion to my expenses — a woman, of course, can live on less than half what a man can — I'm a great deal poorer than you; and I never said I gave her sixpence — did I? I have not got it to give, and I don't think she's fool enough to expect it; and, to say the truth, I don't care. I only advise you. There are some cheerful little cottages near the green, in Gylingden, and I venture to think, this is one of the very gloomiest and most uncomfortable places you could have selected to live in.'

Rachel looked drearily toward the window and sighed — it was almost a groan.

'It was cheerful always till this frightful week changed everything. Oh! why, why, why did you ever come?' She threw back her pale face, biting her lip, and even in that deepening gloom her small pearly teeth glimmered white; and then she burst into sobs and an agony of tears.

Captain Lake knew something of feminine paroxysms. Rachel was not given to hysterics. He knew this burst of anguish was unaffected. He was rather glad of it. When it was over he expected clearer weather and a calm. So he waited, saying now and then a soothing word or two.

'There — there — there, Radie — there's a good girl. Never mind — there — there.' And between whiles his mind, which, in truth, had a good deal upon it, would wander and pursue its dismal and perplexed explorations, to the unheard accompaniment of her sobs.

He went to the door, but it was not to call for water, or for old Tamar. On the contrary, it was to observe whether she or the girl was listening. But the house, though small, was built with thick partition walls, and sounds were well enclosed in the rooms to which they belonged.

With Rachel this weakness did not last long. It was a gust — violent — soon over; and the 'o'ercharged' heart and brain were relieved. And she pushed open the window, and stood for a moment in the chill air, and sighed, and whispered a word or two over the closing flowers of her little garden toward the darkening glen, and with another great sigh closed the window, and returned.

'Can I do anything, Radie? You're better now. I knew you would be. Shall I get some water from your room?'

'No, Stanley; no, thank you. I'm very well now,' she said, gently.

'Yes, I think so. I knew you'd be better.' And he patted her shoulder with his soft hand; and then followed a short silence.

'I wish you were more pleasantly lodged, Radie; but we can speak of that another time.'

'Yes — you're right. This place is dreadful, and its darkness dreadful; but light is still more dreadful now, and I think I'll change; but, as you say, there is time enough to think of all that.'

'Quite so — time enough. By-the-bye, Radie, you mentioned our old servant, whom my father thought so highly of — Jim Dutton — the other evening. I've been thinking of him, do you know, and I should like to find him out. He was a very honest fellow, and attached, and a clever fellow, too, my father thought; and *he* was a good judge. Hadn't you a letter from his mother lately? You told me so, I think; and if it is not too much trouble, dear Radie, would you allow me to see it?'

Rachel opened her desk, and silently selected one of those clumsy and original missives, directed in a staggering, round hand, on paper oddly shaped and thick, such as mixes not naturally with the aristocratic fabric, on which crests and ciphers are impressed, and placed it in her brother's hand.

'But you can't read it without light,' said Rachel.

'No; but there's no hurry. Does she say where she is staying, or her son?'

'Both, I think,' answered Rachel, languidly; 'but he'll never make a servant for you — he's a rough creature, she says, and was a groom. You can't remember him, nor I either.'

'Perhaps — very likely;' and he put the letter in his pocket.

‘I was thinking, Rachel, you could advise me, if you would, you are so clever, you know.’

‘Advise!’ said Rachel, softly; but with a wild and bitter rage ringing under it. ‘I did advise when it was yet time to profit by advice. I bound you even by a promise to take it, but you know how it ended. You don’t want my advice.’

‘But really I do, Radie. I quite allow I was wrong — worse than wrong — but where is the use of attacking me now, when I’m in this dreadful fix? I took a wrong step; and what I now have to do is to guard myself, if possible, from what I’m threatened with.’

She fancied she saw his pale face grow more bloodless, even in the shadow where he sat.

‘I know you too well, Stanley. You want *no* advice. You never took advice — you never will. Your desperate and ingrained perversity has ruined us both.’

‘I wish you’d let me know my own mind. I say I do — (and he uttered an unpleasant exclamation). Do you think I’ll leave matters to take their course, and sit down here to be destroyed? I’m no such idiot. I tell you I’ll leave no stone unturned to save myself; and, in some measure, *you* too, Radie. You don’t seem to comprehend the tremendous misfortune that menaces me — *us* — *you* and me.’

And he cursed Mark Wylder with a gasp of hatred not easily expressed.

She winced at the name, and brushed her hand to her ear.

‘Don’t — don’t — *don’t*,’ she said, vehemently.

‘Well, what the devil do you mean by refusing to help me, even with a hint? I say — I *know* — all the odds are against us. It is sometimes a long game; but unless I’m sharp, I can’t escape what’s coming. I *can’t* — you can’t — sooner or later. It is in motion already — d — him — it’s coming, and you expect me to do everything alone.’

‘I repeat it, Stanley,’ said Rachel, with a fierce cynicism in her low tones, ‘you don’t want advice; you have formed your plan, whatever it is, and that plan you will follow, and no other, though men and angels were united to dissuade you.’

There was a pause here, and a silence for a good many seconds.

‘Well, perhaps, I *have* formed an outline of a plan, and it strikes me as very well I have — for I don’t think you are likely to take that trouble. I only want to explain it, and get your advice, and any little assistance you can give me; and surely that is not unreasonable?'

'I have learned one secret, and am exposed to one danger. I have taken — to save you — it may be only a *respite* — one step, the remembrance of which is insupportable. But I was passive. I am fallen from light into darkness. There ends my share in your confidence and your fortunes. I will know no more secrets — no more disgrace; do what you will, you shall never use me again.'

'Suppose these heroics of yours, Miss Radie, should contribute to bring about — to bring about the worst,' said Stanley, with a sneer, through which his voice trembled.

'Let it come — my resolution is taken.'

Stanley walked to the window, and in his easy way, as he would across a drawingroom to stand by a piano, and he looked out upon the trees, whose tops stood motionless against the darkened sky, like masses of ruins. Then he came back as gently as he had gone, and stood beside his sister; she could not see his yellow eyes now as he stood with his back to the window.

'Well, Radie, dear — you have put your hand to the plough, and you sha'n't turn back now.'

'What?'

'No — you sha'n't turn back now.'

'You seem, Sir, to fancy that I have no right to choose for myself,' said Miss Rachel, spiritedly.

'Now, Radie, you must be reasonable — who have I to advise with?'

'Not me, Stanley — keep your plots and your secrets to yourself. In the guilty path you have opened for me one step more I will never tread.'

'Excuse me, Radie, but you're talking like a fool.'

'I am not sorry you think so — you can't understand motives higher than your own.'

'You'll see that you must, though. You'll see it in a little while. Self-preservation, dear Radie, is the first law of nature.'

'For yourself, Stanley; and for *me*, self-sacrifice,' she retorted, bitterly.

'Well, Radie, I may as well tell you one thing that I'm resolved to carry out,' said Lake, with a dreamy serenity, looking on the dark carpet.

'I'll hear no secret, Stanley.'

'It can't be long a secret, at least from you — you can't help knowing it,' he drawled gently. 'Do you recollect, Radie, what I said that morning when I first called here, and saw you?'

'Perhaps I do, but I don't know what you mean,' answered she.

'I said, Mark Wylder — — '

'Don't name him,' she said, rising and approaching him swiftly.

'I said *he* should go abroad, and so he shall,' said Lake, in a very low tone, with a grim oath.

'Why do you talk that way? You terrify me,' said Rachel, with one hand raised toward his face with a gesture of horror and entreaty, and the other closed upon his wrist.

'I say he *shall*, Radie.'

'Has he lost his wits? I can't comprehend you — you frighten me, Stanley. You're talking wildly on purpose, I believe, to terrify me. You know the state I'm in — sleepless — half wild — all alone here. You're talking like a maniac. It's cruel — it's cowardly.'

'I mean to *do* it — you'll see.'

Suddenly she hurried by him, and in a moment was in the little kitchen, with its fire and candle burning cheerily. Stanley Lake was at her shoulder as she entered, and both were white with agitation.

Old Tamar rose up affrighted, her stiff arms raised, and uttered a blessing. She did not know what to make of it. Rachel sat down upon one of the kitchen chairs, scarce knowing what she did, and Stanley Lake halted near the threshold — gazing for a moment as wildly as she, with the ghost of his sly smile on his smooth, cadaverous face.

'What ails her — is she ill, Master Stanley?' asked the old woman, returning with her white eyes the young man's strange yellow glare.

'I — I don't know — maybe — give her some water,' said Lake.

'Glass of water — quick, child,' cried old Tamar to Margery.

'Put it on the table,' said Rachel, collected now, but pale and somewhat stern.

'And now, Stanley, dear,' said she, for just then she was past caring for the presence of the servants, 'I hope we understand one another — at least, that you do me. If not, it is not for want of distinctness on my part; and I think you had better leave me for the present, for, to say truth, I do not feel very well.'

'Goodnight, Radie — goodnight, old Tamar. I hope, Radie, you'll be better — every way — when next I see you. Goodnight.'

He spoke in his usual clear low tones, and his queer ambiguous smile was there still; and, hat in hand, with his cane in his fingers, he made another glance and a nod over his shoulder, at the threshold, and then glided forth into the little garden, and so to the mill-road, down which, at a swift pace, he walked towards the village.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CAPTAIN LAKE FOLLOWS TO LONDON.

Wylder’s levanting in this way was singularly disconcerting. The time was growing short. He wrote with a stupid goodhumour, and an insolent brevity which took no account of Miss Brandon’s position, or that (though secondary in awkwardness) of her noble relatives. Lord Chelford plainly thought more than he cared to say; and his mother, who never minced matters, said perhaps more than she quite thought.

Chelford was to give the beautiful heiress away. But the receiver of this rich and peerless gift — like some mysterious knight who, having carried all before him in the tourney, vanishes no one knows whither, when the prize is about to be bestowed, and whom the summons of the herald and the call of the trumpet follow in vain — had escaped them.

‘Lake has gone up to town this morning — some business with his banker about his commission — and he says he will make Wylder out on his arrival, and write to me,’ said Lord Chelford.

Old Lady Chelford glanced across her shoulder at Dorcas, who leaned back in a great chair by the window, listlessly turning over a book.

‘She’s a strange girl, she does not seem to feel her situation — a most painful and critical one. That low, coarse creature must be looked up somehow.’

‘Lake knows where he is likely to be found, and will see him, I dare say, this evening — perhaps in time to write by tonight’s post.’

So, in a quiet key, Miss Dorcas being at a distance, though in the same room, the dowager and her son discussed this unpleasant and very nervous topic.

That evening Captain Lake was in London, comfortably quartered in a private hotel, in one of the streets off Piccadilly. He went to his club and dined better than he had done for many days. He really enjoyed his three little courses — his pint of claret, his cup of *cafè noir*, and his *chasse;* the great Babylon was his Jerusalem, and his spirit found rest there.

He was renovated and refreshed, his soul was strengthened, and his countenance waxed cheerful, and he began to feel like himself again, under the brown canopy of metropolitan smoke, and among the cabs and gaslights.

After dinner he got into a cab, and drove to Mark Wylder's club. Was he there? — No. Had he been there to-day? — No. Or within the last week? — No; not for two months. He had left his address, and was in the country. The address to which his letters were forwarded was 'The Brandon Arms, Gylingden.'

So Captain Lake informed that functionary that his friend had come up to town, and asked him again whether he was quite certain that he had not called there, or sent for his letters. — No; nothing of the sort. Then Captain Lake asked to see the billiard-marker, who was likely to know something about him. But he knew nothing. He certainly had not been at the 'Lark's Nest,' which was kept by the marker's venerable parent, and was a favourite haunt of the gay lieutenant.

Then our friend Stanley, having ruminated for a minute, pencilled a little note to Mark, telling him that he was staying at Muggeridge's Hotel, 7, Hanover Street, Piccadilly, and wished *most* particularly to see him for a few minutes; and this he left with the hall-porter to give him should he call.

Then Lake got into his cab again, having learned that he had lodgings in St. James's Street when he did not stay at the club, and to these he drove. There he saw Mrs. M'Intyre, a Caledonian lady, at this hour somewhat mellow and talkative; but she could say nothing to the purpose either. Mr. Wylder had not been there for nine weeks and three days; and would owe her, on Saturday next, twenty-five guineas. So here, too, he left a little note to the same purpose; and reentering his cab, he drove a long way, and past St. Paul's, and came at last to a court, outside which he had to dismount from his vehicle, entering the grimy quadrangle through a narrow passage. He had been there that evening before, shortly after his arrival, with old Mother Dutton, as he called her, about her son, Jim.

Jim was in London, looking for a situation, all which pleased Captain Lake; and he desired that she should send him to his hotel to see him in the morning.

But being in some matters of a nervous and impatient temperament, he had come again, as we see, hoping to find Jim there, and to anticipate his interview of the morning.

The windows, however, were dark, and a little research satisfied Captain Lake that the colony was in bed. In fact, it was by this time halfpast eleven o'clock, and working-people don't usually sit up to that hour. But our friend, Stanley Lake, was one of those persons who think that the course of the world's affairs should bend a good deal to their personal convenience, and he was not pleased with these unreasonable working-people who had gone to their beds, and brought him to this remote and grimy amphitheatre of black windows for nothing. So, wishing them the goodnight they merited, he reentered his cab, and drove rapidly back again towards the West-end.

This time he went to a somewhat mysterious and barricadoed place, where in a blaze of light, in various rooms, gentlemen in hats, and some in great coats, were playing roulette or hazard; and I am sorry to say, that our friend, Captain Lake, played first at one and then at the other, with what success exactly I don't know. But I don't think it was very far from four o'clock in the morning when he let himself into his family hotel with that latchkey, the cock's tail of Micyllus, with which goodnatured old Mrs. Muggeridge obliged the good-looking captain.

Captain Lake having given orders the evening before, that anyone who might call in the morning, and ask to see him, should be shown up to his bedroom *sans ceremonie*, was roused from deep slumber at a quarter past ten, by a knock at his door, and a waiter's voice.

'Who's that?' drawled Captain Lake, rising, pale and half awake, on his elbow, and not very clear where he was.

'The man, Sir, as you left a note for yesterday, which he desires to see you?'

'Tell him to step in.'

So out went the waiter in pumps, and the sound of thick shoes was audible on the lobby, and a sturdier knock sounded on the door.

'Come in,' said the captain.

And Jim Dutton entered the room, and, closing the door, made, at the side of the bed, his reverence, consisting of a nod and a faint pluck at the lock of hair over his forehead.

Now Stanley Lake had, perhaps, expected to see some one else; for though this was a very respectable-looking fellow for his walk in life, the gay young officer stared full at him, with a frightened and rather dreadful countenance, and actually sprung from his bed at the other side, with an ejaculation at once tragic and blasphemous.

The man plainly had not expected to produce any such result, and looked very queer. Perhaps he thought something had occurred to affect his personal appearance; perhaps some doubt about the captain's state of health, and misgiving as to delirium tremens may have flickered over his brain.

They were staring at one another across the bed, the captain in his shirt.

At last the gallant officer seemed to discover things as they were, for he said —

'Jim Dutton, by Jove!'

The oath was not so innocent; but it was delivered quietly; and then the captain drew a long breath, and then, still staring at him, he laughed a ghastly little laugh, also quietly.

'And so it is you, Jim,' said the captain. 'And how do you do — quite well, Jim — and out of place? You've been hurt in the foot, eh? so old your — Mrs. Dutton tells me, but that won't signify. I was dreaming when you came in; not quite awake yet, hardly; just wait a bit till I get my slippers on; and this— ' So into his red slippers he slid, and got his great shawl dressing-gown, such as fine gentlemen then wore, about his slender person, and knotted the silken cords with depending tassels, and greeted Jim Dutton again in very friendly fashion, enquiring very particularly how he had been ever since, and what his mother was doing; and I'm afraid not listening to Jim's answers as attentively as one might have expected.

Whatever may have been his intrinsic worth, Jim was not polished, and spoke, moreover, an uncouth dialect, which broke out now and then. But he was in a sort of way attached to the Lake family, the son of an hereditary tenant on that estate which had made itself wings, and flown away like the island of Laputa. It could not be said to be love; it was a sort of traditionary loyalty; a sentiment, however, not altogether unserviceable.

When they had talked together for a while, the captain said —

'The fact is, it is not quite on me you would have to attend; the situation, perhaps, is better. You have no objection to travel. You *have* been abroad, you know; and of course wages and all that will be in proportion.'

Well, Jim had not any objection to speak of.

‘What’s wanted is a trustworthy man, perfectly steady, you see, and a fellow who knows how to hold his tongue.’

The last condition, perhaps, struck the man as a little odd; he looked a little confusedly, and he conveyed that he would not like to be in anything that was not quite straight.

‘Quite straight, Sir!’ repeated Stanley Lake, looking round on him sternly; ‘neither should I, I fancy. You are to suppose the case of a gentleman who is nursing his estate — you know what that means — and wants to travel, and keep quite quiet, and who requires a steady, trustworthy man to look after him, in such a way as I shall direct, with very little trouble and capital pay. I have a regard for you, Dutton; and seeing so good a situation was to be had, and thinking you the fittest man I know, I wished to serve you and my friend at the same time.’

Dutton became grateful and docile upon this.

‘There are reasons, quite honourable I need not tell you, which make it necessary, James Dutton, that the whole of this affair should be kept perfectly to ourselves; you are not to repeat one syllable I say to you to your mother, do you mind, or to any other person living. The gentleman is liberal, and if you can just hold your tongue, you will have little trouble in satisfying him upon all other points. But if you can’t be quite silent, you had better, I frankly tell you, decline the situation, excellent in all respects as it is.’

‘I’m a man, Sir, as can be close enough.’

‘So much the better. You don’t drink?’

Dutton coloured a little and coughed and said —

‘No, Sir.’

‘You have your papers?’

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘We must be satisfied as to your sobriety, Dutton. Come back at halfpast eleven and I’ll see you, and bring your papers; and, do you see, you are not to talk, you understand; only you may say, if anyone presses, that I am thinking of hiring you to attend on a gentleman, whose name you don’t yet know, who’s going to travel. That’s all.’

So Jim Dutton made his bow, and departed; and Captain Lake continued to watch the door for some seconds after his departure, as if he could see his retreating figure through it. And, said he, with an oath, and his hand to his forehead, over his eyebrow —

‘It *is* the most unaccountable thing in nature!’

Then, after a reverie of some seconds, the young gentleman applied himself energetically to his toilet; and coming down to his sitting-room, he looked into his morning paper, and then into the street, and told the servant as he sate down to breakfast, that he expected a gentleman named Wylder to call that morning, and to be sure to show him up directly.

Captain Lake’s few hours’ sleep, contrary to popular ideas about gamesters’ slumbers, had been the soundest and the most natural which he had enjoyed for a good many nights. He was refreshed. At Gylingden and Brandon he had been simulating Captain Stanley Lake — being, in truth, something quite different — with a vigilant histrionic effort which was awfully exhausting, and sometimes nearly intolerable. Here the captain was perceptibly stealing into his old ways and feelings. His spirit revived; something like confidence in the future, and a possibility even of enjoying the present, was struggling visibly through the cold fog that environed him. Reason has, after all, so little to do with our moods. The weather, the scene, the stomach, how pleasantly they deal with facts — how they supersede philosophy, and even arithmetic, and teach us how much of life is intoxication and illusion.

Still there was the sword of Damocles over his pineal gland. D —— that sheer, cold blade! D —— him that forged it! Still there was a great deal of holding in a horsehair. Had not salmon, of I know not how many pounds’ weight, been played and brought to land by that slender towage. There is the sword, a burnished piece of cutlery, weighing just so many pounds; and the horsehair has sufficed for an hour, and why not for another — and soon? Hang moping and nonsense! Waiter, another pint of Chian; and let the fun go forward.

So the literal waiter knocked at the door. ‘A person wanted to see Captain Lake. No, it was not Mr. Wylder. It was the man who had been here in the morning — Dutton is his name.’

‘And so it is really halfpast eleven?’ said Lake, in a sleepy surprise.
‘Let him come in.’

And so in comes Jim Dutton again, to hear particulars, and have, as he hopes, his engagement ratified.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LAWYER LARKIN'S MIND BEGINS TO WORK.

That morning Lake's first report upon his inquisition into the whereabouts of Mark Wylder — altogether disappointing and barren — reached Lord Chelford in a short letter; and a similar one, only shorter, found Lawyer Larkin in his pleasant breakfast parlour.

Now this proceeding of Mr. Wylder's, at this particular time, struck the righteous attorney, and reasonably, as a very serious and unjustifiable step. There was, in fact, no way of accounting for it, that was altogether complimentary to his respected and nutritious client. Yes; there was something every way *very* serious in the affair. It actually threatened the engagement which was so near its accomplishment. Some most powerful and mysterious cause must undoubtedly be in operation to induce so sharp a 'party,' so keen after this world's wealth, to risk so huge a prize. Whatever eminent qualities Mark Wylder might be deficient in, the attorney very well knew that cunning was not among the number.

'It is nothing of the nature of debt — plenty of money. It is nothing that money can buy off easily either, though he does not like parting with it. Ten — *twenty* to one — it is the old story — some unfortunate female connection — some ambiguous relation, involving a doubtful marriage.'

And Josiah Larkin turned up his small pink eyes, and shook his tall, bald head gently, and murmured, as he nodded it —

'The sins of his youth find him out; the sins of his youth.'

And he sighed; and his long palms were raised, and waved, or rather paddled slowly to the rhythm of the sentiment.

If the butchers' boy then passing saw that gaunt and good attorney, standing thus in his bow-window, I am sure he thought he was at his devotions and abated his whistling as he went by.

After this Mr. Larkin's ruminations darkened, and grew, perhaps, less distinct. He had no particular objection to a mystery. In fact, he rather liked it, provided he was admitted to confidence. A mystery implied a difficulty of a delicate and formidable sort; and such difficulties were not disadvantageous to a clever and firm person, who might render himself very necessary to an embarrassed principal with plenty of money.

Mr. Larkin had a way of gently compressing his underlip between his finger and thumb — a mild pinch, a reflective caress — when contemplations of this nature occupied his brain. The silver light of heaven faded from his long face, a deep shadow of earth came thereon, and his small, dovelike eyes grew intense, hungry, and rat-like.

Oh! Lawyer Larkin, your eyes, though very small, are very sharp. They can read through the outer skin of ordinary men, as through a parchment against the light, the inner writing, and spell out its meanings. How is it that they fail to see quite through one Jos. Larkin, a lawyer of Gylingden? The layover of Gylingden is somehow two opaque for them, I almost think. Is he really too deep for you? Or is it that you don't care to search him too narrowly, or have not time? or as men in money perplexities love not the scrutiny of their accounts or papers, you don't care to tire your eyes over the documents in that neatly japanned box, the respectable lawyer's conscience?

If you have puzzled yourself, you have also puzzled me. I don't quite know what to make of you. I've sometimes thought you were simply an impostor, and sometimes simply the dupe of your own sorceries. The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Some men, with a piercing insight into the evil of man's nature, have a blurred vision for their own moralities. For them it is not easy to see where wisdom ends and guile begins — what wiles are justified to honour, and what partake of the genius of the robber, and where lie the delicate boundaries between legitimate diplomacy and damnable lying. I am not sure that Lawyer Larkin did not often think himself very nearly what he wished the world to think him — an 'eminent Christian.' What an awful abyss is self delusion.

Lawyer Larkin was, on the whole, I dare say, tolerably well pleased with the position, as he would have said, of his spiritual interest, and belonged to that complacent congregation who said, 'I am rich and have need of nothing;' and who, no doubt, opened their eyes wide enough, and misdoubted the astounding report of their ears, when the judge thundered, ‘Thou art wretched and miserable, and poor and blind and naked.’

When Jos. Larkins had speculated thus, and built rich, but sombre, castles in the air, for some time longer, he said quietly to himself —

‘Yes.’

And then he ordered his dog-cart, and drove off to Dollington, and put up at Johnson’s Hotel, where Stanley Lake had slept on the night of his sister’s return from London. The people there knew the lawyer very well; of course, they quite understood his position. Mr. Johnson, the proprietor, you may be sure, does not confound him with the great squires, the baronets, and feudal names of the county; but though he was by comparison easy in his company, with even a dash of familiarity, he still respected Mr. Larkin as a man with money, and a sort of influence, and in whose way, at election and other times, it might lie to do his house a good or an ill turn.

Mr. Larkin got into a little brown room, looking into the inn garden, and called for some luncheon, and pen and ink, and had out a sheaf of law papers he had brought with him, tied up in professional red tape; and asked the waiter, with a grand smile and recognition, how he did; and asked him next for his good friend, Mr. Johnson; and trusted that business was improving; and would be very happy to see him for two or three minutes, if he could spare time.

So, in due time, in came the corpulent proprietor, and Lawyer Larkin shook hands with him, and begged him to sit down, like a man who confers a distinction; and assured him that Lord Edward Buxleigh, whom he had recommended to stay at the house for the shooting, had been very well pleased with the accommodation — very highly so indeed — and his lordship had so expressed himself when they had last met at Sir Hugh Huxterley’s, of Hatch Court.

The good lawyer liked illuminating his little narratives, compliments, and reminiscences with plenty of armorial bearings and heraldic figures, and played out his court-cards in easy and somewhat overpowering profusion.

Then he enquired after the two heifers that Mr. Johnson was so good as to feed for him on his little farm; and then he mentioned that his friend, Captain Lake, who was staying with him at his house at Gylingden, was also very well satisfied with his accommodation, when he, too, at Lawyer Larkin’s recommendation, had put up for a night at Johnson’s Hotel; and it was not every house which could satisfy London swells of Captain Lake's fashion and habits, he could tell him.

Then followed some conversation which, I dare say, interested the lawyer more than be quite showed in Mr. Johnson's company. For when that pleased and communicative host had withdrawn, Jos. Larkin made half-a-dozen little entries in his pocketbook, with 'Statement of Mr. William Johnson,' and the date of their conversation, at the head of the memorandum.

So the lawyer, having to run on as far as Charteris by the goods-train, upon business, walked down to the station, where, having half-an-hour to wait, he fell into talk with the station-master, whom he also knew, and afterwards with Tom Christmas, the porter; and in the waiting-room he made some equally businesslike memoranda, being certain chips and splinters struck off the clumsy talk of these officials, and laid up in the lawyer's little private museum, for future illustration and analysis.

By the time his little book was again in the bottom of his pocket, the train had arrived, and doors swung open and clapt and people got in and out to the porter's accompaniment of 'Dollington — Dollington — Dollington!' and Lawyer Larkin took his place, and glided away to Charteris, where he had a wait of two hours for the return train, and a good deal of barren talk with persons at the station, rewarded by one or two sentences worth noting, and accordingly duly entered in the same little pocketbook.

Thus was the good man's day consumed; and when he mounted his dog-cart, at Dollington, wrapped his rug about his legs, whip and reins in hand, and the ostler buckled the apron across, the sun was setting redly behind the hills; and the air was frosty, and the night dark, as he drew up before his own doorsteps, near Gylingden. A dozen lines of one of these pages would suffice to contain the fruits of his day's work; and yet the lawyer was satisfied, and even pleased with it, and eat his late dinner very happily; and though dignified, of course, was more than usually mild and gracious with all his servants that evening, and 'expounded at family prayers' in a sense that was liberal and comforting; and went to bed after a calm and pleased review of his memoranda, and slept the sleep of the righteous.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARK WYLDER'S SUBMISSION.

Every day the position grew more critical and embarrassing. The day appointed for the nuptials was now very near, and the bridegroom not only out of sight but wholly untraceable. What was to be done?

A long letter from Stanley Lake told Lord Chelford, in detail, all the measures adopted by that energetic young gentleman for the discovery of the truant knight: —

'I have been at his club repeatedly, as also at his lodgings — still *his*, though he has not appeared there since his arrival in town. The billiard-marker at his club knows his haunts; and I have taken the liberty to employ, through him, several persons who are acquainted with his appearance, and, at my desire, frequent those places with a view to discovering him, and bringing about an interview with me.

'He was seen, I have reason to believe, a day or two before my arrival here, at a low place called the "Miller's Hall," in the City, where members of the "Fancy" resort, at one of their orgies, but not since. I have left notes for him wherever he is likely to call, entreating an interview.

'On my arrival I was sanguine about finding him; but I regret to say my hopes have very much declined, and I begin to think he must have changed his quarters. If you have heard from him within the last few days, perhaps you will be so kind as to send me the envelope of his letter, which, by its postmark, may possibly throw some light or hint some theory as to his possible movements. He is very clever; and having taken this plan of concealing his residence, will conduct it skilfully. If the case were mine I should be much tempted to speak with the detective authorities, and try whether they might not give their assistance, of course without *éclat*. But this is, I am aware, open to objection, and, in fact, would not be justifiable, except under the very peculiar urgency of the case.

'Will you be so good as to say what you think upon this point; also, to instruct me what you authorise me to say should I be fortunate enough to meet him. At present I am hardly in a position to say more than an acquaintance — never, I fear, very cordial on his part — would allow; which, of course, could hardly exceed a simple mention of your anxiety to be placed in communication with him.

'If I might venture to suggest, I really think a peremptory alternative should be presented to him. Writing, however, in ignorance of what may since have passed at Brandon, I may be assuming a state of things which, possibly, no longer exists. Pray understand that in any way you please to employ me, I am entirely at your command. It is also possible, though I hardly hope it, that I may be able to communicate something definite by this evening's post.

'I do not offer any conjectures as to the cause of this very embarrassing procedure on his part; and indeed I find a great difficulty in rendering myself useful, with any likelihood of really succeeding, without at the same exposing myself to an imputation of impertinence. You will easily see how difficult is my position.

'Whatever may be the cause of Mark Wylder's present line of conduct, it
appears to me that if he really did attend that meeting at the "Miller's
Hall," there cannot be anything *very* serious weighing upon his spirits.
My business will detain me here, I rather think, three days longer.'

By return of post Lord Chelford wrote to Stanley Lake: —

'I am so very much obliged to you for all the trouble you have taken. The measures which you have adopted are, I think, most judicious; and I should not wish, on consideration, to speak to any official person. I think it better to trust entirely to the means you have already employed. Like you, I do not desire to speculate as to the causes of Wylder's extraordinary conduct; but, all the circumstances considered, I cannot avoid concluding, as you do, that there must be some *very* serious reason for it. I enclose a note, which, perhaps, you will be so good as to give him, should you meet before you leave town.'

The note to Mark Wylder was in these terms: —

'DEAR WYLDER, — I had hoped to see you before now at Brandon. Your unexplained absence longer continued, you must see, will impose on me the necessity of offering an explanation to Miss Brandon's friends, of the relations, under these strange circumstances, in which you and she are to be assumed to stand. You have accounted in no way for your absence. You have not even suggested a postponement of the day fixed for the completion of your engagement to that young lady; and, as her guardian, I cannot avoid telling her, should I fail to hear explicitly from you within three days from this date, that she is at liberty to hold herself acquitted of her engagement to you. I do not represent to you how much reason everyone interested by relationship in that young lady has to feel offended at the disrespect with which you have treated her. Still hoping, however, that all may yet be explained,

'I remain, my dear Wylder, yours very truly,

'CHELFORD.'

Lord Chelford had not opened the subject to Dorcas. Neither had old Lady Chelford, although she harangued her son upon it as volubly and fiercely as if he had been Mark Wylder in person, whenever he and she were *tête-à-tête*. She was extremely provoked, too, at Dorcas's evident repose under this astounding treatment, and was enigmatically sarcastic upon her when they sat together in the drawingroom.

She and her son were, it seemed, not only to think and act, but to feel also, for this utterly immovable young lady! The Brandons, in her young days, were not wanting in spirit. No; they had many faults, but they were not sticks or stones. They were not to be taken up and laid down like wax dolls; they could act and speak. It would not have been safe to trample upon them; and they were not less beautiful for being something more than pictures and statues.

This evening, in the drawingroom, there were two very pretty ormolu caskets upon the little marble table.

'A new present from Mark Wylder,' thought Lady Chelford, as these objects met her keen glance. 'The unceremonious bridegroom has, I suppose, found his way back with a peace-offering in his hand.' And she actually peered through her spectacles into the now darkened corners of the chamber, half expecting to discover the truant Wylder awaiting there the lecture she was well prepared to give him; but the square form and black whiskers of the prodigal son were not discernible there.

‘So, so, something new, and very elegant and pretty,’ said the old lady aloud, holding her head high, and looking as if she were disposed to be propitiated. ‘I think I can risk a conjecture. Mr. Wylder is about to reappear, and has despatched these heralds of his approach, no doubt suitably freighted, to plead for his reacceptance into favour. You have heard, then, from Mr. Wylder, my dear Dorcas?’

‘No, Lady Chelford,’ said the young lady with a grave serenity, turning her head leisurely towards her.

‘No? Oh, then where is my son? He, perhaps, can explain; and pray, my dear, what are these?’

‘These caskets contain the jewels which Mr. Wylder gave me about six weeks since. I had intended restoring them to him; but as his return is delayed, I mean to place them in Chelford’s hands; because I have made up my mind, a week ago, to put an end to this odious engagement. It is all over.’

Lady Chelford stared at the audacious young lady with a look of incensed amazement for some seconds, unable to speak.

‘Upon my word, young lady! vastly fine and independent! You *chasser* Mr. Wylder without one moment’s notice, and without deigning to consult me, or any other person capable of advising you. You are about to commit as gross and indelicate a breach of faith as I recollect anywhere to have heard of. What will be thought? — what will the world say? — what will your friends say? Will you be good enough to explain yourself? *I*’ll not undertake your excuses, I promise you.’

‘Excuses! I don’t think of excuses, Lady Chelford; no person living has a right to demand one.’

‘Very tragic, young lady, and quite charming!’ sneered the dowager angrily.

‘Neither one nor the other, I venture to think; but quite true, Lady Chelford,’ answered Miss Brandon, haughtily.

‘I don’t believe you are serious, Dorcas,’ said Lady Chelford, more anxiously, and also more gently. ‘I can’t suppose it. I’m an old woman, my dear, and I sha’n’t trouble you very long. I can have no object in misleading you, and you have never experienced from me anything but kindness and affection. I think you might trust me a little, Dorcas — but that, of course, is for you, you are your own mistress now — but, at least, you may reconsider the question you propose deciding in so extraordinary a way. I allow you might do much better than Mark Wylder, but also worse. He has not a title, and his estate is not enough to carry the point *à force d'argent*; I grant all that. But *together* the estates are more than most titled men possess; and the real point is the fatal slip in your poor uncle's will, which makes it so highly important that you and Mark should be united; bear that in mind, dear Dorcas. I look for his return every day — every hour, indeed — and no doubt his absence will turn out to have been unavoidable. You must not act precipitately, and under the influence of mere pique. His absence, I will lay my life, will be satisfactorily accounted for; he has set his heart upon this marriage, and I really think you will almost drive him mad if you act as you threaten.'

'You have, indeed, dear Lady Chelford, been always very kind to me, and I do trust you,' replied this beautiful heiress, turning her large shadowy eyes upon the dowager, and speaking in slow and silvery accents, somehow very melancholy. 'I dare say it is very imprudent, and I don't deny that Mr. Wylder may have reason to complain of me, and the world will not spare me either; but I have quite made up my mind, and nothing can ever change me; all is over between me and Mr. Wylder — quite over — for ever.'

'Upon my life, young lady, this is being very sharp, indeed. Mr. Wylder's business detains him a day or two longer than he expected, and he is punished by a final dismissal!'

The old lady's thin cheeks were flushed, and her eyes shot a reddish light, and altogether she made an angry sight. It was hardly reasonable. She had been inveighing against Miss Brandon's apathy under Wylder's disrespect, and now that the young lady spoke and acted too, she was incensed. She had railed upon Wylder, in no measured terms, herself, and even threatened, as the proper measure, that very step which Dorcas had announced; and now she became all at once the apologist of this insolent truant, and was ready to denounce her unreasonable irritation.

'So far, dear Lady Chelford, from provoking me to this decision, his absence is, I assure you, the sole reason of my having delayed to inform him of it.'

‘And I assure you, Miss Brandon, *I* sha’n’t undertake to deliver your monstrous message. He will probably be here tomorrow. You have prepared an agreeable surprise for him. You shall have the pleasure of administering it yourself, Miss Brandon. For my part, I have done my duty, and here and now renounce all responsibility in the future management of your affairs.’

Saying which, she rose, in a stately and incensed way, and looking with flashing eyes over Dorcas’s head to a far corner of the apartment, without another word she rustled slowly and majestically from the drawingroom.

She was a good deal shocked, and her feelings quite changed, however, when next morning the post brought a letter to Chelford from Mark Wylder, bearing the Boulogne postmark. It said —

‘DEAR CHELFORD,

‘Don’t get riled; but the fact is I don’t see my way out of my present business’ — (this last word was substituted for another, crossed out, which looked like ‘scrape’)— ‘for a couple of months, maybe. Therefore, you see, my liberty and wishes being at present interfered with, it would be very hard lines if poor Dorcas should be held to her bargain. Therefore, I will say this — *she is quite free* for me. Only, of course, I don’t decline to fulfil my part whenever at liberty. In the meantime I return the miniature, with her hair in it, which I constantly wore about me since I got it. But I have no right to it any longer, till I know her decision. Don’t be too hard on me, dear Chelford. It is a very old lark has got me into this present vexation. In the meantime, I wish to make it quite clear what I mean. Not being able by any endeavour’ — (here a nautical phrase scratched out, and ‘endeavour’ substituted)— ‘of mine to be up to time, and as these are P.P. affairs, I must only forfeit. I mean, I am at the lady’s disposal, either to fulfil my engagement the earliest day I can, or to be turned adrift. That is all I can say.

‘In more trouble than you suppose, I remain, dear Chelford, yours, whatever you may think, faithfully,

‘MARK WYLDER’

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW MARK WYLDER'S DISAPPEARANCE AFFECTED HIS FRIENDS.

Lady Chelford's wrath was now turned anew upon Wylder — and the inconvenience of having no visible object on which to expend it was once more painfully felt. Railing at Mark Wylder was, alas! but beating the air. The most crushing invective was — thanks to his adroit mystification — simply a soliloquy. Poor Lady Chelford, who loved to give the ingenious youngsters of both sexes, when occasion invited, a piece of her mind, was here — in the case of this vulgar and most provoking delinquent — absolutely tongue-tied! If it had been possible to tell Wylder what she thought of him it would, perhaps, have made her more tolerable than she was for some days after the arrival of that letter, to other members of the family.

The idea of holding Miss Brandon to this engagement, and proroguing her nuptials from day to day, to convenience the bridegroom — absent without explanation — was of course quite untenable. Fortunately, the marriage, considering the antiquity and the territorial position of the two families who were involved, was to have been a very quiet affair indeed — no festivities — no fireworks — nothing of the nature of a county gala — no glare or thunder — no concussion of society — a dignified but secluded marriage.

This divested the inevitable dissolution of these high relations of a great deal of its *éclat* and ridicule.

Of course there was abundance of talk. Scarce a man or woman in the shire but had a theory or a story — sometimes bearing hard on the lady, sometimes on the gentleman; still it was an abstract breach of promise, and would have much improved by some outward and visible sign of disruption and disappointment. Some concrete pageantries to be abolished and removed; flagstaffs, for instance, and banners, marquees, pyrotechnic machinery, and long tiers of rockets, festoons of evergreens, triumphal arches with appropriate mottoes, to come down and hide themselves away, would have been pleasant to the many who like a joke, and to the few, let us hope, who love a sneer.

But there were no such fopperies to hurry off the stage disconcerted. In the autumnal sun, among the embrowned and thinning foliage of the noble trees, Brandon Hall looked solemn, sad and magnificent, as usual, with a sort of retrospective serenity, buried in old-world glories and sorrows, and heeding little the follies and scandals of the hour.

In the same way Miss Brandon, with Lord and Lady Chelford, was seen next Sunday, serene and unchanged, in the great carved oak Brandon pew, raised like a dais two feet at least above the level of mere Christians, who frequented the family chapel. There, among old Wylder and Brandon tombs — some painted stone effigies of the period of Elizabeth and the first James, and some much older — stone and marble knights praying on their backs with their spurs on, and said to have been removed nearly three hundred years ago from the Abbey of Naunton Friars, when that famous monastery began to lose its roof and turn into a picturesque ruin, and by-gone generations of Wylders and Brandons had offered up their conspicuous devotions, with — judging from their heathen lives — I fear no very remarkable efficacy.

Here then, next Sunday afternoon, when the good vicar, the Rev. William Wylder, at three o’clock, performed his holy office in reading-desk and pulpit, the good folk from Gylingden assembled in force, saw nothing noticeable in the demeanour or appearance of the great Brandon heiress. A goddess in her aerial place, haughty, beautiful, unconscious of human gaze, and seen as it were telescopically by mortals from below. No shadow of trouble on that calm marble beauty, no light of joy, but a serene superb indifference.

Of course there was some satire in Gylingden; but, in the main, it was a loyal town, and true to its princess. Mr. Wylder’s settlements were not satisfactory, it was presumed, or the young lady could not bring herself to like him, or however it came to pass, one way or another, that sprig of willow inevitably to be mounted by hero or heroine upon such equivocal occasions was placed by the honest town by no means in her breast, but altogether in his buttonhole.

Gradually, in a more authentic shape, information traceable to old Lady Chelford, through some of the old county families who visited at Brandon, made it known that Mr. Wylder's affairs were not at present by any means in so settled a state as was supposed; and that a long betrothal not being desirable on the whole, Miss Brandon's relatives thought it advisable that the engagement should terminate, and had so decided, Mr. Wylder having, very properly, placed himself absolutely in their hands.

As for Mark, it was presumed he had gone into voluntary banishment, and was making the grand tour in the spirit of that lackadaisical gentleman in the then fashionable song, who says: —

From sport to sport they hurry me,
To banish my regret,
And if they win a smile from me,
They think that I forget.

It was known to be quite final, and as the lady evinced no chagrin and affected no unusual spirits, but held, swanlike and majestic, the even tenor of her way, there was, on the whole, little doubt anywhere that the gentleman had received his *congé*, and was hiding his mortification and healing his wounds in Paris or Vienna, or some other suitable retreat.

But though the good folk of Gylingden, in general, cared very little how Mark Wylder might have disposed of himself, there was one inhabitant to whom his absence was fraught with very serious anxiety and inconvenience.

This was his brother, William, the vicar.

Poor William, sound in morals, free from vice, no dandy, a quiet, bookish, self-denying mortal, was yet, when he took holy orders and quitted his chambers at Cambridge, as much in debt as many a scamp of his college. He had been, perhaps, a little foolish and fanciful in the article of books, and had committed a serious indiscretion in the matter of a carved oak bookcase; and, worse still, he had published a slender volume of poems, and a bulkier tome of essays, scholastic and theologic, both which ventures, notwithstanding their merits, had turned out unhappily; and worse still, he had lent that costly loan, his sign manual, on two or three occasions, to friends in need, and one way or another found that, on winding up and closing his Cambridge life, his assets fell short of his liabilities very seriously.

The entire amount it is true was not very great. A pupil or two, and a success with his work ‘On the Character and Inaccuracies of Eusebius,’ would make matters square in a little time. But his advertisements for a resident pupil had not been answered; they had cost him something, and he had not any more spare bread just then to throw upon the waters. So the advertisements for the present were suspended; and the publishers, somehow, did not take kindly to Eusebius, who was making the tour of that fastidious and hardhearted fraternity.

He had staved off some of his troubles by a little loan from an insurance company, but the premium and the instalments were disproportioned to his revenue, and indeed very nearly frightful to contemplate. The Cambridge tradesmen were growing minatory; and there was a stern person who held a renewal of one of his old paper subsidies to the necessities of his scampish friend Clarkson, who was plainly a difficult and awful character to deal with.

Dreadful as were the tradesmen’s peremptory and wrathful letters, the promptitude and energy of this latter personage were such as to produce a sense of immediate danger so acute that the scared vicar opened his dismal case to his Brother Mark.

Mark, sorely against the grain, and with no good grace, at last consented to advance £300 in this dread emergency, and the vicar blessed his benefactor, and in his closet on his knees, shed tears of thankfulness over his deliverance, and the sky opened and the flowers locked bright, and life grew pleasant once more.

But the £300 were not yet in his pocket, and Mark had gone away; and although of course the loan was sure to come, the delay — any delay in his situation — was critical and formidable. Here was another would-be correspondent of Mark’s foiled for want of his address. Still he would not believe it possible that he could forget his promise, or shut up his bowels of mercy, or long delay the remittance which he knew to be so urgently needed.

In the meantime, however, a writ reached the hand of the poor Vicar of Naunton Friars, who wrote in eager and confused terror to a friend in the Middle Temple on the dread summons, and learned that he was now ‘in court,’ and must ‘appear,’ or suffer judgment by default.

The end was that he purchased a respite of three months, by adding thirty pounds to his debt, and so was thankful for another deliverance, and was confident of the promised subsidy within a week, or at all events a fortnight, or, at worst, three months was a long reprieve — and the subsidy must arrive before the emergency.

In this there can be no dismay;
My ships come home a month before the day.

When the ‘service’ was over, the neighbourly little congregation, with a sprinkling of visitors to Gylingden, for sake of its healing waters, broke up, and loitered in the vicinity of the porch, to remark on the sermon or the weather, and ask one another how they did, and to see the Brandon family enter their carriage and the tall, powdered footman shut the door upon them, and mount behind, and move off at a brilliant pace, and with a glorious clangour and whirl of dust; and, this incident over, they broke up gradually into little groups, in Sunday guise, and many colours, some for a ramble on the common, and some to tea, according to the primitive hours that ruled old Gylingden.

The vicar, and John Hughes, clerk and sexton, were last out; and the reverend gentleman, thin and tall, in white necktie, and black, a little threadbare, stood on the steps of the porch, in a sad abstraction. The red autumnal sun nearing the edge of the distant hills,

Looked through the horizontal misty air
Shorn of its beams —

and lighted the thin and gentle features of the vicar with a melancholy radiance. The sound of the oak door closing heavily behind him and John Hughes, and the key revolving in the lock recalled him, and with a sigh and a smile, and a kindly nod to John, he looked up and round on the familiar and pretty scenery undecided. It was not quite time to go home; his troubles were heavy upon him, too, just then; they have their paroxysms like ague; and the quiet of the road, and the sweet air and sunshine, tempted him to walk off the chill and fever of the fit.

As he passed the little cottage where old Widow Maddock lay sick, Rachael Lake emerged. He was not glad. He would rather have had his sad walk in his own shy company. But there she was — he could not pass her by; so he stopped, and lifted his hat, and greeted her; and then they shook hands. She was going his way. He looked wistfully on the little hatch of old Widow Maddock's cottage; for he felt a pang of reproach at passing her door; but there was no comfort then in his thoughts, only a sense of fear and hopeless fatigue.

'How is poor old Mrs. Maddock?' he asked; 'you have been visiting the sick and afflicted, and I was passing by; but, indeed, if I were capable at this moment I should not fail to see her, poor creature.'

There was something apologetic and almost miserable in his look as he said this.

'She is not better; but you have been very good to her, and she is very grateful; and I am glad,' said Rachel, 'that I happened to light on you.'

And she paused. They were by this time walking side by side; and she glanced at him enquiringly; and he thought that the handsome girl looked rather thin and pale.

'You once said,' Miss Lake resumed, 'that sooner or later I should be taught the value of religion, and would learn to prize my great privileges; and that for some spirits the only approach to the throne of mercy was through great tribulation. I have often thought since of those words, and they have begun, for me, to take the spirit of a prophecy — sometimes that is — but at others they sound differently — like a dreadful menace — as if my afflictions were only to bring me to the gate of life to find it shut.'

'Knock, and it shall be opened,' said the vicar; but the comfort was sadly spoken, and he sighed.

'But is not there a time, Mr. Wylder, when He shall have shut to the door, and are there not some who, crying to him to open, shall yet remain for ever in outer darkness?'

'I see, dear Miss Lake, that your mind is at work — it is a good influence — at work upon the great, theme which every mortal spirit ought to be employed upon.'

'My fears are at work; my mind is altogether dark and turbid; I am sometimes at the brink of despair.'

'Take comfort from those fears. There is hope in that despair;' and he looked at her with great interest in his gentle eyes.

She looked at him, and then away toward the declining sun, and she said despairingly —

'I cannot comprehend you.'

'Come!' said he, 'Miss Lake, bethink you; was there not a time — and no very distant one — when futurity caused you no anxiety, and when the subject which has grown so interesting, was altogether distasteful to you. The seed of the Word is received at length into good ground; but a grain of wheat will bring forth no fruit unless it die first. The seed dies to outward sense, and despair follows; but the principle of life is working in it, and it will surely grow, and bring forth fruit — thirty, sixty, an hundredfold — be not dismayed. The body dies, and the Lord of life compares it to the death of the seed in the earth; and then comes the palingenesis — the rising in glory. In like manner He compares the reception of the principle of eternal life into the soul to the dropping of a seed into the earth; it follows the general law of mortality. It too dies — such a death as the children of heaven die here — only to germinate afresh with celestial power and beauty.'

Miss Lake's way lay by a footpath across a corner of the park to Redman's Dell. So they crossed the stile, and still conversing, followed the footpath under the hedgerow of the pretty field, and crossing another stile, entered the park.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN BRANDON PARK.

To me, from association, no doubt, that park has always had a melancholy character. The ground undulates beautifully, and noble timber studs it in all varieties of grouping; and now, as when I had seen the ill-omened form of Uncle Lorne among its solitudes, the descending sun shone across it with a saddened glory, tipping with gold the blades of grass and the brown antlers of the distant deer.

Still pursuing her solemn and melancholy discourse, the young lady followed the path, accompanied by the vicar.

‘True,’ said the vicar, ‘your mind is disturbed, but not by doubt. No; it is by *truth.*’ He glanced aside at the tarn where I had seen the phantom, and by which their path now led them— ‘You remember Parnell’s pretty image?

‘So when a smooth expanse receives imprest
Calm nature’s image on its watery breast,
Down bend the banks, the trees depending grow,
And skies beneath with answering colours glow;
But if a stone the gentle scene divide,
Swift ruffling circles curl on every side,
And glimmering fragments of a broken sun,
Banks, trees, and skies, in thick disorder run.’

‘But, as I said, it is not a doubt that agitates your mind — that is well represented by the “stone,” that subsides and leaves the pool clear, it maybe, but stagnant as before. Oh, no; it is an angel who comes down and troubles the water.’

‘What a heavenly evening!’ said a low, sweet voice, but with something insidious in it, close at his shoulder.

With a start, Rachel glanced back, and saw the pale, peculiar face of her brother. His yellow eyes for a moment gleamed into hers, and then on the vicar, and, with his accustomed smile, he extended his hand.

‘How do you do? — better, I hope, Radie? How are you, William?’

Rachel grew deadly pale, and then flushed, and then was pale again.

'I thought, Stanley, you were in London.'

'So I was; but I arrived here this morning; I'm staying for a few days at the Lodge — Larkin's house; you're going home, I suppose, Radie?'

'Yes — oh, yes — but I don't know that I'll go this way. You say you must return to Gylingden now, Mr. Wylder; I think I'll turn also, and go home that way.'

'Nothing would give me greater pleasure,' said the vicar, truly as well as kindly, for he had grown interested in their conversation; 'but I fear you are tired' — he looked very kindly on her pale face— 'and you know it will cost you a walk of more than two miles.'

'I forgot — yes — I believe I *am* a *little* tired; I'm afraid I have led *you*, too, farther than you intended.' She fancied that her sudden change of plan on meeting her brother would appear odd.

'I'll see you a little bit on your way home, Radie,' said Stanley.

It was just what she wished to escape. She was more nervous, though not less courageous than formerly. But the old, fierce, defiant spirit awoke. Why should she fear Stanley, or what could it be to her whether he was beside her in her homeward walk?

So the vicar made his adieux there, and began, at a brisker pace, to retrace his steps toward Gylingden; and she and Stanley, side by side, walked on toward Redman's Dell.

'What a charming park! and what delightful air, Radie; and the weather so very delicious. They talk of Italian evenings; but there is a pleasant sharpness in English evenings quite peculiar. Is not there just a little suspicion of frost — don't you think so — not actually cold, but crisp and sharp — unspeakably exhilarating; now really, this evening is quite celestial.'

'I've just been listening to a good man's conversation, and I wish to reflect upon it,' said Rachel, very coldly.

'Quite so; that is, of course, when you are alone,' answered Stanley, serenely. 'William was always a very clever fellow to talk — very well read in theology — is not he? — yes, he does talk very sweetly and nobly on religion; it is a pity he is not quite straight, or at least more punctual, in his money affairs.'

‘He is distressed for money? William Wylder is distressed for money! Do you mean *that*?’ said Rachel, turning a tone of sudden surprise and energy, almost horror, turning full upon him, and stopping short.

‘Oh, dear! no — not the least distressed that I ever heard of,’ laughed Stanley coldly— ‘only just a little bit roguish, maybe.’

‘That’s so like you, Stanley,’ said the young lady, with a quiet scorn, resuming her onward walk.

‘How very beautiful that clump of birch trees is, near the edge of the slope there; you really can’t imagine, who are always here, how very intensely a person who has just escaped from London enjoys all this.’

‘I don’t think, Stanley,’ said the young lady coldly, and looking straight before her as she walked, ‘you ever cared for natural scenery — or liked the country — and yet you are here. I don’t think you ever loved me, or cared whether I was alone or in company; and yet seeing — for you *did* see it — that I would now rather be alone, you persist in walking with me, and talking of trees and air and celestial evenings, and thinking of something quite different. Had not you better turn back to Gylingden, or the Lodge, or wherever you mean to pass the evening, and leave me to my quiet walk and my solitude?’

‘In a few minutes, dear Radie — you are so odd. I really believe you think no one can enjoy a ramble like this but yourself.’

‘Come, Stanley, what do you want?’ said his sister, stopping short, and speaking with the flush of irritation on her cheek— ‘do you mean to walk to Redman’s Dell, or have you anything unpleasant to say?’

‘Neither, I hope,’ said the captain, with his sleepy smile, his yellow eyes resting on the innocent grass blades before him.

‘I don’t understand you, Stanley. I am always uncomfortable when you are near me. You stand there like an evil spirit, with some purpose which I cannot divine; but you shall not ensnare me. Go your own way, why can’t you? Pursue your own plots — your wicked plots; but let me rest. I *will* be released, Sir, from your presence.’

‘Really this is very fine, Radie, considering how we are related; I’m Mephistopheles, I suppose, and you Margaret, or some other simple heroine — rebuking the fiend in the majesty of your purity.’

And indeed in the reddish light, and in that lonely and solemn spot, the slim form of the captain, pale, sneering, with his wild eyes, confronting the beautiful light-haired girl, looked not quite unlike a type of the jaunty fiend he was pleased to suppose himself.

‘I tell you, Stanley, I feel that you design employing me in some of your crooked plans. I have horrible reasons, as you know, for avoiding you, and so I will. I hope I may never desire to see you alone again, but if I do, it shall not be to receive, but to impose commands. You had better return to Gylingden, and leave me.’

‘So I will, dear Radie, by-and-by,’ said he, with his amused smile.

‘That is, you *won’t* until you have said what you meditate. Well, then, as it seems I must hear it, pray speak at once, standing where we are, and quickly, for the sun will soon go down, and one step more I will not walk with you.’

‘Well, Radie, you are pleased to be whimsical; and, to say truth, I *was* thinking of saying a word or two, just about as idea that has been in my mind some time, and which you half divined — you are so clever — the first day I saw you at Redman’s Farm. You know you fancied I was thinking of marrying.’

‘I don’t remember that I said so, but I thought it. You mentioned Caroline Beauchamp, but I don’t see how your visit *here* could have been connected with that plan.’

‘But don’t you think, Radie, I should do well to marry, that is, assuming everything to be suitable?’

‘Well, perhaps, for *yourself*, Stanley; but — — ‘

‘Yes, of course,’ said Lake; ‘but the unfortunate girl, you were going to say — thank you. She’s, of course, very much to be pitied, and you have my leave to pity her as much as you please.’

‘I do pity her,’ said Rachel.

‘Thank you, again,’ said Stanley; ‘but seriously, Radie, you can be, I think, very essentially of use to me in this affair, and you must not refuse.’

‘Now, Stanley, I will cut this matter short. I can’t serve you. I won’t.
I don’t know the young lady, and I don’t mean to make her acquaintance.’

‘But I tell you that you *can* serve me,’ retorted Stanley, with a savage glare, and features whitened with passion, ‘and you *shall* serve me; and you *do* know the young lady intimately.’

‘I say, Sir, I do *not*,’ replied Rachel, haughtily and fiercely.

‘She is Dorcas Brandon; you know *her*, I believe. I came down here to marry her. I had made up my mind when I saw you first and I’ll carry my point; I always do. She does not like me, maybe; but she *shall*. I never yet resolved to make a woman like me, and failed. You need not look so pale; and put on that damned affected look of horror. I may be wild, and — and what you please, but I’m no worse than that brute, Mark Wylder, and you never turned up your eyes when he was her choice; and I knew things about him that ought to have damned him, and she’s well rid of a branded rascal. And now, Rachel, you know her, and you must say a good word for me. I expect your influence, and if you don’t use it, and effectually, it will be worse for you. You women understand one another, and how to get a fellow favourably into one another’s thoughts. So, listen to me, this is a vital matter; indeed, it is, Radie. I have lost a lot of money, like a — fool, I suppose; well, it is gone, and this marriage is indispensable. I must go in for it, it is life or death; and if I fail through your unkindness (here he swore an impious oath) I’ll end all with a pistol, and leave a letter to Chelford, disclosing everything concerning you, and me, and Mark Wylder.’

I think Rachel Lake was as near fainting as ever lady was, without actually swooning. It was well they had stopped just by the stem of a great ash tree, against which Rachel leaned for some seconds, with darkness before her eyes, and the roar of a whirlpool in her ears.

After a while, with two or three gasps, she came to herself. Lake had been railing on all this time, and his voice, which, in ill-temper, was singularly bleak and terrible, was again in her ears the moment she recovered her hearing.

‘I do not care to quarrel; there are many reasons why we should not,’ Lake said in his peculiar tones. ‘You have some of my secrets, and you must have more; it can’t be helped, and, I say, you *must*. I’ve been very foolish. I’ll give up play. It has brought me to this. I’ve had to sell out. I’ve paid away all I could, and given bills for the rest; but I can’t possibly pay them, don’t you see; and if things go to the worst, I tell you I’ll not stay. I don’t want to make my bow just yet, and I’ve no wish to injure you; but I’ll do as I have said (he swore again), and Chelford shall have a distinct statement under my hand of everything that has happened. I don't suppose you wish to be accessory to all this, and therefore it behoves you, Rachel, to do what you can to prevent it. One woman can always influence another, and you are constantly with Dorcas. You'll do all you can; I'm sure you will; and you can do a great deal. I know it; I'll do as much for you, Radie! Anything you like.'

For the first time her brother stood before her in a really terrible shape; she felt his villainy turning with a cowardly and merciless treason upon her forlorn self. Sacrificed for him, and that sacrifice used by him to torture, to extort, perhaps to ruin. She quailed for a minute in the presence of this gigantic depravity and cruelty. But Rachel was a brave lass, and rallied quickly.

'After all I have done and suffered!' said she, with a faint smile of unimaginable bitterness; 'I did not think that human wickedness could produce such a brother as you are.'

'Well, it is no news what you think of me, and not much matter, either. I don't see that I am a worse brother than you are a sister.' Stanley Lake was speaking with a livid intensity. 'You see how I'm placed; a ruined man, with a pistol to my head; what you can do to save me may amount to nothing, but it may be everything, and you say you won't try! Now I say you *shall*, and with every energy and faculty you possess, or else abide the consequences.'

'And I tell you, Sir,' replied Rachel, 'I know you; you are capable of anything but of hurting yourself. I'll never be your slave; though, if I pleased, I might make you mine. I scorn your threats — I defy you.'

Stanley Lake looked transported, and the yellow fires of his deep-set eyes glared on her, while his lips moved to speak, but not a word came, and it became a contortion; he grasped the switch in his hand as if to strike her.

'Take care, Sir, Lord Chelford's coming,' said the young lady, haughtily, with a contracted glance of horror fixed on Lake.

Lake collected himself. He was a man who could do it pretty quickly; but he had been violently agitated, and the traces of his fury could not disappear in a moment.

Lord Chelford was, indeed, approaching, only a few hundred yards away.

'Take my arm,' said Lake.

And Rachel mechanically, as story-tellers say, placed her slender gloved hand upon his arm — the miscreant arm that had been so nearly raised to strike her; and they walked along, brother and sister, in the Sabbath sunset light, to meet him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN REDMAN'S DELL.

Lord Chelford raised his hat, smiling: 'I am so very glad I met you, I was beginning to feel so solitary!' he placed himself beside Miss Lake. 'I've had such a long walk across the park. How do you do, Lake? when did you come?'

And so on — Lake answering and looking wonderfully as usual.

I think Lord Chelford perceived there was something amiss between the young people, for his eye rested on Rachel with a momentary look of enquiry, unconscious, no doubt, and quickly averted, and he went on chatting pleasantly; but he looked, once or twice, a little hard at Stanley Lake. I don't think he had an extraordinarily good opinion of that young gentleman. He seldom expressed an ill one of anybody, and then it was in very measured language. But though he never hinted at an unfavourable estimate of the captain, his intimacies with him were a little reserved; and I think I have seen him, even when he smiled, look the least little bit in the world uncomfortable, as if he did not quite enter into the captain's pleasantries.

They had not walked together very far, when Stanley recollected that he must take his leave, and walk back to Gylingden; and so the young lady and Lord Chelford were left to pursue their way towards Redman's Farm together.

It would have been a more unaccountable proceeding on the part of Stanley Lake, and a more romantic situation, if Rachel and his lordship had not had before two or three little accidental rambles together in the grounds and gardens of Brandon. There was nothing quite new in the situation, therefore; and Rachel was for a moment indescribably relieved by Stanley's departure.

The shock of her brief interview with her brother over, reflection assured her, knowing all she did, that Stanley's wooing would prosper, and so this cause of quarrel had really nothing in it; no, nothing but a display of his temper and morals — not very astonishing, after all — and, like an ugly picture or a dreadful dream, in no way to affect her afterlife, except as an odious remembrance.

Therefore, little by little, like a flower that has been bruised, in the tranquillising influences about her, the young lady got up, expanded, and grew like herself again — not like enough, indeed, to say much, but to listen and follow his manly, refined, and pleasant talk, every moment with a pang, that had yet something pleasurable in it, contrasting the quiet and chivalric tone of her present companion, with the ferocious duplicity of the sly, smooth terrorist who had just left her side.

It was rather a marked thing — as lean Mrs. Loyd, of Gylingden, who had two thin spinsters with pink noses under her wing, remarked — this long walk of Lord Chelford and Miss Lake in the park; and she enjoined upon her girls the propriety of being specially reserved in their intercourse with persons of Lord Chelford's rank; not that they were much troubled with dangers from any such quarter. Miss Lake had, she supposed, her own notions, and would act as she pleased; but she owned for her part she preferred the old fashion, and thought the men did also; and was sure, too, that young ladies lost nothing by a little reserve and modesty.

Now something of this, no doubt, passed in the minds of Lord Chelford and his pretty companion. But what was to be done? That perverse and utterly selfish brother, Stanley Lake, had chosen to take his leave. Lord Chelford could not desert the young lady, and would it have been a very nice delicacy in Miss Lake to make her courtesy in the middle of the park, and protest against pursuing their walk together any further?

Lord Chelford was a lively and agreeable companion; but there was something unusually gentle, almost resembling tenderness, in his manner. She was so different from her gay, fiery self in this walk — so gentle; so subdued — and he was more interested by her, perhaps, than he had ever been before.

The sun just touched the verge of the wooded uplands, as the young people began to descend the slope of Redman's Dell.

'How very short!' Lord Chelford paused, with a smile, at these words. 'I was just going to say how short the days have grown, as if it had all happened without notice, and contrary to the almanac; but really the sun sets cruelly early this evening, and I am so *very* sorry our little walk is so soon to end.'

There was not much in this little speech, but it was spoken in a low, sweet voice; and Rachel looked down on the ferns before her feet, as they walked on side by side, not with a smile, but with a blush, and that beautiful look of gratification so becoming and indescribable. Happy that moment — that enchanted moment of oblivion and illusion! But the fitful evening breeze came up through Redman's Dell, with a gentle sweep over the autumnal foliage. Sudden as a sigh, and cold; in her ear it sounded like a whisper or a shudder, and she lifted up her eyes and saw the darkening dell before her; and with a pang, the dreadful sense of reality returned. She stopped, with something almost wild in her look. But with an effort she smiled, and said, with a little shiver, 'The air has grown quite chill, and the sun nearly set; we loitered, Stanley and I, a great deal too long in the park, but I am now at home, and I fear I have brought you much too far out of your way already; goodbye.' And she extended her hand.

'You must not dismiss your escort here. I must see you through the enchanted dell — it is only a step — and then I shall return with a good conscience, like a worthy knight, having done my devoir honestly.'

She looked down the dell, with a dark and painful glance, and then she said a few words of hesitating apology and acquiescence, and in a few minutes more they parted at the little wicket of Redman's Farm. They shook hands. He had a few pleasant, lingering words to say. She paused as he spoke at the other side of that little garden door. She seemed to like those lingering sentences — and hung upon them — and even smiled but in her eyes there was a vague and melancholy pleading — a wandering and unfathomable look that pained him.

They shook hands again — it was the third time — and then she walked up the little gravel walk, hardly a dozen steps, and disappeared within the door of Redman's Farm, without turning another parting look on Lord Chelford, who remained at the little paling — expecting one, I think — to lift his hat and say one more parting word.

She turned into the little drawingroom at the left, and, herself unseen, did take that last look, and saw him go up the road again towards Brandon. The shadows and mists of Redman's Dell anticipated night, and it was already deep twilight there.

On the table there lay a letter which Margery had brought from the postoffice. So Rachel lighted her candles and read it with very little interest, for it concerned a world towards which she had few yearnings. There was just one sentence which startled her attention: it said, ‘We shall soon be at Knowlton — for Christmas, I suppose. It is growing too wintry for mamma near the sea, though I like it better in a high wind than in a calm; and a gale is such fun — such a romp. The Dulhamptons have arrived: the old Marchioness never appears till three o’clock, and only out in the carriage twice since they came. I can’t say I very much admire Lady Constance, though she is to be Chelford’s wife. She has fine eyes — and I think no other good point — much too dark for my taste — but they say clever;’ and not another word was there on this subject.

‘Lady Constance! arranged, I suppose, by Lady Chelford — no great dot — and an unamiable family — an odious family — nothing to recommend her but her rank.’

So ruminated Rachel Lake as she looked out on her shadowy garden, and tapped a little feverish tattoo with her finger on the window pane; and she meditated a great while, trying to bring back distinctly her recollection of Lady Constance, and also vaguely conjecturing who had arranged the marriage, and how it had come about.

‘Chelford cannot like her. It is all Lady Chelford’s doing. Can I have mistaken the name?’

But no. Nothing could be more perfectly distinct than ‘Chelford,’ traced in her fair correspondent’s very legible hand.

‘He treats the young lady very coolly,’ thought Rachel, forgetting, perhaps, that his special relations to Dorcas Brandon had compelled his stay in that part of the world.

Mingled with this criticism, was a feeling quite unavowed even to herself — a sore feeling that Lord Chelford had been — and this she never admitted to herself before — more particular — no, not exactly that — but more something or other — not exactly expressible in words, in his approaches to her, than was consistent with his situation. But then she had been very guarded; not stiff or prudish, indeed, but frank and cold enough with him, and that was comforting.

Still there was a sense of wonder — a great blank, and something of pain in the discovery — yes, pain — though she smiled a faint blushing smile — alone as she was; and then came a deep sigh; and then a sort of start.

‘Rachel, Rachel, is it possible?’ murmured the young lady, with the same dubious smile, looking down upon the ground, and shaking her head. ‘Yes, I do really think you had begun to like Lord Chelford — only *begun*, the least little insidious bit; but thank you, wild Bessie Frankleyn, you have quite opened my eyes. Rachel, Rachel, girl! what a fool you were near becoming!’

She looked like her old pleasant self during this little speech — arch and fresh, and still smiling — she looked up and sighed, and then her dark look returned, and she said dismally,

‘What utter madness!’

And leaned for a while with her fingers upon the window sash; and when she turned to old Tamar, who brought in her tiny tea equipage, it seemed as if the shadow of the dell, into which she had been vacantly gazing, still rested on her face.

‘Not here, Tamar; I’ll drink tea in my room; and you must bring your tea-cup, too, and we’ll take it together. I am — I think I am — a little nervous, darling, and you won’t leave me?’

So they sat down together in her chamber. It was a cheery little bedroom, when the shutters were closed, and the fire burning brightly in the grate.

‘My good Tamar will read her chapters aloud. I wish I could enjoy them like you. I can only wish. You must pray for me, Tamar. There is a dreadful image — and I sometimes think a dreadful being always near me. Though the words you read are sad and awful, they are also sweet, like funeral music a long way off, and they tranquillise me without making me better, as the harping of David did the troubled and forsaken King Saul.’

So the old nurse mounted her spectacles, glad of the invitation, and began to read. Her reading was very, slow, and had other faults too, being in that sing-song style to which some people inexplicably like to read Holy Writ; but it was reverent and distinct, and I have heard worse even in the reading desk.

‘Stop,’ said Rachel suddenly, as she reached about the middle of the chapter.

The old woman looked up, with her watery eyes wide open, and there was a short pause.

‘I beg your pardon, dear Tamar, but you must first tell me that story you used to tell me long ago of Lady Ringdove, that lived in Epping Forest, to whom the ghost came and told something she was never to reveal, and who slowly died of the secret, growing all the time more and more like the spectre; and besought the priest when she was dying, that he would have her laid in the abbey vault, with her mouth open, and her eyes and ears sealed, in token that her term of slavery was over, that her lips might now be open, and that her eyes were to see no more the dreadful sight, nor her ears to hear the frightful words that used to scare them in her lifetime; and then, you remember, whenever afterwards they opened the door of the vault, the wind entering in, made such moanings in her hollow mouth, and declared things so horrible that they built up the door of the vault, and entered it no more. Let me have the entire story, just as you used to tell it.'

So old Tamar, who knew it was no use disputing a fancy of her young mistress, although on Sunday night she would have preferred other talk, recounted her old tale of wonder.

'Yes, it is true — a true allegory, I mean, Tamar. Death will close the eyes and ears against the sights and sounds of earth; but even the tomb secures no secrecy. The dead themselves declare their dreadful secrets, open-mouthed, to the winds. Oh, Tamar! turn over the pages, and try to find some part which says where safety and peace may be found at any price; for sometimes I think I am almost bereft of — reason.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

MR. LARKIN AND THE VICAR.

The good vicar was not only dismayed but endangered by his brother's protracted absence. It was now the first week in November. Bleak and wintry that ungenial month set in at Gylingden; and in accord with the tempestuous and dismal weather the fortunes of the Rev. William Wylder were darkened and agitated.

This morning a letter came at breakfast, by post, and when he had read it, the poor vicar grew a little white, and he folded it very quietly and put it in his waistcoat pocket, and patted little Fairy on the head. Little Fairy was asking him a question all this time, very vehemently, 'How long was Jack's sword that he killed the giants with?' and several times to this distinct question he received only the unsatisfactory reply, 'Yes, my darling;' and at last, when little Fairy mounted his knee, and hugging the abstracted vicar round the neck, urged his question with kisses and lamentations, the parson answered with a look of great perplexity, and only half recalled, said, 'Indeed, little man, I don't know. How long, you say, was Jack's sword? Well, I dare say it was as long as the umbrella.' He got up, with the same perplexed and absent look, as he said this, and threw an anxious glance about the room, as if looking for something he had mislaid.

'You are not going to write now, Willie, dear?' expostulated his good little wife, 'you have not tasted your tea yet.'

'I have, indeed, dear; haven't I? Well, I will.'

And, standing, he drank nearly half the cup she had poured out for him, and set it down, and felt in his pocket, she thought, for his keys.

'Are you looking for anything, Willie, darling? Your keys are in my basket.'

'No, darling; no, darling — nothing. I have everything I want. I think I must go to the Lodge and see Mr. Larkin, for a moment.'

'But you have eaten nothing,' remonstrated his partner; 'you must not go until you have eaten something.'

‘Time enough, darling; I can’t wait — I sha’n’t be away twenty minutes — time enough when I come back.’

‘Have you heard anything of Mark, darling?’ she enquired eagerly.

‘Of Mark? Oh, no! — nothing of Mark.’ And he added with a deep sigh, ‘Oh, dear! I wonder he does not write — no, nothing of Mark.’

She followed him into the hall.

‘Now, Willie darling, you must not go till you have had your breakfast — you will make yourself ill — indeed you will — do come back, just to please me, and eat a little first.’

‘No, darling; no, my love — I can’t, indeed. I’ll be back immediately; but I must catch Mr. Larkin before he goes out. It is only a little matter — I want to ask his opinion — and — oh! here is my stick — and I’ll return immediately.’

‘And I’ll go with you,’ cried little Fairy.

‘No, no, little man; I can’t take you — no, it is business — stay with mamma, and I’ll be back again in a few minutes.’

So, spite of Fairy’s clamours and the remonstrances of his fond, clinging little wife, with a hurried kiss or two, away he went alone, at a very quick pace, through the high street of Gylingden, and was soon in the audience chamber of the serious, gentleman attorney.

The attorney rose with a gaunt and sad smile of welcome — begged Mr. Wylder, with a wave of his long hand, to be seated — and then seating himself and crossing one long thigh over the other, he threw his arm over the back of his chair, and leaning back with what he conceived to be a graceful and gentlemanly negligence — with his visitor full in the light of the window and his own countenance in shadow, the light coming from behind — a diplomatic arrangement which he affected — he fixed his small, pink eyes observantly upon him, and asked if he could do anything for Mr. William Wylder.

‘Have you heard anything since, Mr. Larkin? Can you conjecture where his address may now be?’ asked the vicar, a little abruptly.

‘Oh! Mr. Mark Wylder, perhaps, you refer to?’

‘Yes; my brother, Mark.’

Mr. Larkin smiled a sad and simple smile, and shook his head.

‘No, indeed — not a word — it is very sad, and involves quite a world of trouble — and utterly inexplicable; for I need not tell you, in my position, it can’t be pleasant to be denied all access to the client who has appointed me to act for him, nor conducive to the apprehension of his wishes upon many points, which I should much prefer not being left to my discretion. It is really, as I say, inexplicable, for Mr. Mark Wylder must thoroughly see all this: he is endowed with eminent talents for business, and must perfectly appreciate the embarrassment in which the mystery with which he surrounds the place of his abode must involve those whom he has appointed to conduct his business.’

‘I have heard from him this morning,’ resumed the lawyer; ‘he was pleased to direct a power of attorney to me to receive his rents and sign receipts; and he proposes making Lord Viscount Chelford and Captain Lake trustees, to fund his money or otherwise invest it for his use, and’ —

‘Has he — I beg pardon — but did he mention a little matter in which I am deeply — indeed, vitally interested?’ The vicar paused.

‘I don’t quite apprehend; perhaps if you were to frame your question a little differently, I might possibly — a — you were saying’ —

‘I mean a matter of very deep interest to me,’ said the poor vicar, colouring a little, ‘though no very considerable sum, viewed absolutely; but, under my unfortunate circumstances, of the most urgent importance — a loan of three hundred pounds — did he mention it?’

Again Mr. Larkin shook his head, with the same sad smile.

‘But, though we do not know how to find him, he knows very well where to find us — and, as you are aware, we hear from him constantly — and no doubt he recollects his promise, and will transmit the necessary directions all in good time.’

‘I earnestly hope he may,’ and the poor cleric lifted up his eyes unconsciously and threw his hope into the form of a prayer. ‘For, to speak frankly, Mr. Larkin, my circumstances are very pressing. I have just heard from Cambridge, and find that my good friend, Mr. Mountain, the bookseller, has been dead two months, and his wife — he was a widower when I knew him, but it would seem has married since — is his sole executrix, and has sold the business, and directed two gentlemen — attorneys — to call in all the debts due to him — peremptorily — and they say I must pay before the 15th; and I have, absolutely, but five pounds in the world, until March, when my half-year will be paid. And indeed, only that the tradespeople here are so very kind, we should often find it very difficult to manage.'

'Perhaps,' said Mr. Larkin, blandly, 'you would permit me to look at the letter you mention having received from the solicitors at Cambridge?'

'Oh, thank you, certainly; here it is,' said William Wylder, eagerly, and he gazed with his kind, truthful eyes upon the attorney's countenance as he glanced over it, trying to read something of futurity therein.

'Foukes and Mauley,' said Mr. Larkin. 'I have never had but one transaction with them; they are not always pleasant people to deal with. Mind, I don't say anything affecting their integrity — Heaven forbid; but they certainly did take rather what I would call a short turn with us on the occasion to which I refer. You must be cautious; indeed, my dear Sir, *very* cautious. The fifteenth — just ten clear days. Well, you know you have till then to look about you; and you know we may any day hear from your brother, directing the loan to be paid over to you. And now, my dear and reverend friend, you know me, I hope,' continued Mr. Larkin, very kindly, as he handed back the letter; 'and you won't attribute what I say to impertinent curiosity; but your brother's intended advance of three hundred pounds can hardly have had relation only to this trifling claim upon you. There are, no doubt — pardon me — several little matters to be arranged; and considerable circumspection will be needed, pending your brother's absence, in dealing with the persons who are in a position to press their claims unpleasantly. You must not trifle with these things. And let me recommend you seeing your legal adviser, whoever he is, immediately.'

'You mean,' said the vicar, who was by this time very much flushed, 'a gentleman of your profession, Mr. Larkin. Do you really think — well, it has frequently crossed my mind — but the expense, you know; and although my affairs are in a most unpleasant and complicated state, I am sure that everything would be perfectly smooth if only I had received the loan my kind brother intends, and which, to be sure, as you say, any day I may receive.'

'But, my dear Sir, do you really mean to say that you would pay claims from various quarters — how old is this, for instance? — without examination!'

The vicar looked very blank.

‘I — this — well, this I certainly do owe; it has increased a little with interest, though good Mr. Mountain never charged more than six per cent. It was, I think, about fifteen pounds — books — I am ashamed to say how long ago; about a work which I began then, and laid aside — on Eusebius; but which is now complete, and will, I hope, eventually repay me.’

‘Were you of age, my dear Sir, when he gave you these books on credit? Were you twenty-one years of age?’

‘Oh! no; not twenty; but then I owe it, and I could not, as s a Christian man, you know, evade my debts.’

‘Of course; but you can’t pay it at present, and it may be highly important to enable you to treat this as a debt of honour, you perceive. Suppose, my dear Sir, they should proceed to arrest you, or to sequestrate the revenue of your vicarage. Now, see, my dear Sir, I am, I humbly hope, a Christian man; but you will meet with men in every profession — and mine is no exception — disposed to extract the last farthing which the law by its extremest process will give them. And I really must tell you, frankly, that if you dream of escaping the most serious consequences, you must at once place yourself and your affairs in the hands of a competent man of business. It will probably be found that you do not in reality owe sixty pounds of every hundred claimed against you.’

‘Oh, Mr. Larkin, if I could induce *you*.’

Mr. Larkin smiled a melancholy smile, and shook his head.

‘My dear Sir, I only wish I could; but my hands are so awfully full,’ and he lifted them up and shook them, and shook his tall, bald head at the same time, and smiled a weary smile. ‘Just look there,’ and he waved his fingers in the direction of the Cyclopean wall of tin boxes, tier above tier, each bearing, in yellow italics, the name of some country gentleman, and two baronets among the number; ‘everyone of them laden with deeds and papers. You can’t have a notion — no one has — what it is.’

‘I see, indeed,’ murmured the honest vicar, in a compassionating tone, and quite entering into the spirit of Mr. Larkin’s mournful appeal, as if the being in large business was the most distressing situation in which an attorney could well find himself.

'It was very unreasonable of me to think of troubling you with my wretched affairs; but really I do not know very well where to turn, or whom to speak to. Maybe, my dear Sir, you can think of some conscientious and Christian practitioner who is not so laden with other people's cares and troubles as you are. I am a very poor client, and indeed more trouble than I could possibly be gain to anyone. But there may be some one; pray think; ten days is so short a time, and I can do nothing.'

Mr. Larkin stood at the window ruminating, with his left hand in his breeches pocket, and his right, with finger and thumb pinching his under lip, after his wont, and the despairing accents of the poor vicar's last sentence still in his ear.

'Well,' he said hesitatingly, 'it is not easy, at a moment's notice, to point out a suitable solicitor; there are many, of course, very desirable gentlemen, but I feel it, my dear Sir, a very serious responsibility naming one for so peculiar a matter. But you shall not, in the meantime, go to the wall for want of advice. Rely upon it, we'll do the best we can for you,' he continued, in a patronising way, with his chin raised, and extending his hand kindly to shake that of the parson. 'Yes, I certainly will — you must have advice. Can you give me two hours tomorrow evening — say to tea — if you will do me the honour. My friend, Captain Lake, dines at Brandon tomorrow. He's staying here with me, you are aware, on a visit; but we shall be quite by ourselves, say at seven o'clock. Bring all your papers, and I'll get at the root of the business, and see, if possible, in each particular case, what line is best to be adopted.'

'How can I thank you, my dear Sir,' cried gentle William Wylder, his countenance actually beaming with delight and gratitude — a brighter look than it had worn for many weeks.

'Oh, don't — *pray* don't mention it. I assure you, it is a happiness to me to be of any little use; and, really, I don't see how you could possibly hold your own among the parties who are pressing you without professional advice.'

'I feel,' said the poor vicar, and his eyes filled as he smiled, and his lip quivered a little— 'I feel as if my prayer for direction and deliverance were answered at last. Oh! my dear Sir, I have suffered a great deal; but something assures me I am rescued, and shall have a quiet mind once more

— I am now in safe and able hands.' And he shook the safe and able, and rather large, hands of the amiable attorney in both his.

'You make too much of it, my dear Sir. I should at any time be most happy to advise you,' said Mr. Larkin, with a lofty and pleased benevolence, 'and with great pleasure, *provisionally*, until we can hit upon a satisfactory solicitor with a little more time at his disposal, I undertake the management of your case.'

'Thank Heaven!' again said the vicar, who had not let go his hands. 'And it is so delightful to have for my guide a Christian man, who, even were I so disposed, would not lend himself to an unworthy or questionable defence; and although at this moment it is not in my power to reward your invaluable assistance — — '

'Now really, my dear Sir, I must insist — no more of this, I beseech you. I do most earnestly insist that you promise me you will never mention the matter of professional remuneration more, until, at least, I press it, which, rely upon it, will not be for a good while.'

The attorney's smile plainly said, that his 'good while' meant in fact 'never.'

'This is, indeed, unimaginable kindness. How *have* I deserved so wonderful a blessing!'

'And I have no doubt,' said the attorney, fondling the vicar's arm in his large hand, 'that these claims will ultimately be reduced fully thirty per cent. I had once a good deal of professional experience in this sort of business; and, oh! my dear Sir, it is really *melancholy*!' and up went his small pink eyes in a pure horror, and his hands were lifted at the same time; 'but we will bring them to particulars; and you may rely upon it, you will have a much longer time, at all events, than they are disposed to allow you.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LADIES ON GYLINGDEN HEATH.

Just at this moment they became aware of a timid little tapping which had been going on at the window during the latter part of this conference, and looking up, the attorney and the vicar saw ‘little Fairy’s’ violet eyes peering under his light hair, with its mild, golden shadow, and the odd, sensitive smile, at once shy and arch; his cheeks were wet with tears, and his pretty little nose red, though he was smiling; and he drew his face aside among the jessamine, when he saw the gaunt attorney directing his patronising smile upon him.

‘I beg pardon,’ said the vicar, rising with a sudden smile, and going to the window. ‘It is my little man. Fairy! Fairy! What has brought you here; my little man?’

Fairy glanced, still smiling, but very shamefacedly at the grand attorney, and in his little fist he held a pair of rather seedy gloves to the window pane.

‘So I did. I protest I forgot my gloves. Thank you, little man. Who is with you? Oh! I see. That is right.’

The maid ducked a short courtesy.

‘Indeed, Sir, please, Master Fairy was raising the roof (a nursery phrase, which implied indescribable bellowing), and as naughty as could be, until missis allowed him to come after you.’

‘Oh! my little man, you must not do that. Ask nicely, you know; always quietly, like a little gentleman.’

‘But, oh! Wapsie, your hands would be cold;’ and he held the gloves to him against the glass.

‘Well, darling, thank you; you are a kind little man, and I’ll be with you in a moment,’ said the vicar, smiling very lovingly on his naughty little man.

‘Mr. Larkin,’ said he, turning very gratefully to the attorney ‘you can lay this Christian comfort to your kind heart, that you have made mine a hundredfold lighter since I entered this blessed room; indeed, you have lifted a mountain from it by the timely proffer of your invaluable assistance.'

Again the attorney waved off, with a benignant and humble smile, rather oppressive to see, all idea of obligation, and accompanied his grateful client to the glass door of his little porch, where Fairy was already awaiting him with the gloves in his hand.

'I do believe,' said the good vicar, as he walked down what Mr. Larkin called 'the approach,' and looking up with irrepressible gratitude to the blue sky and the white clouds sailing over his head, 'if it be not presumption, I must believe that I have been directed hither — yes, darling, yes, my hands are warm' (this was addressed to little Fairy, who was clamouring for information on the point, and clinging to his arm as he capered by his side). 'What immense relief;' and he murmured another thanksgiving, and then quite hilariously —

'If little man would like to come with his Wapsie, we'll take such a nice little walk together, and we'll go and see poor Widow Maddock; and we'll buy three muffins on our way home, for a feast this evening; and we'll look at the pictures in the old French "Josephus;" and Mamma and I will tell stories; and I have a halfpenny to buy apples for little Fairy.'

The attorney stood at his window with a shadow on his face, and his small eyes a little contracted and snakelike, following the slim figure of the threadbare vicar and his golden-haired, dancing little comrade; and then he mounted a chair, and took down successively four of his japanned boxes; two of them, in yellow letters, bore respectively the label '*Brandon, No. 1,'* and '*No. 2*;' the other '*Wylder, No. 1,'* and '*No. 2.'*

He opened the 'Wylder' box first, and glanced through a neat little 'statement of title,' prepared for counsel when draughting the deed of settlement for the marriage which was never to take place.

'The limitations, let me see, is not there something that one might be safe in advancing a trifle upon — eh? — h'm — yes.'

And, with his lip in his finger and thumb, he conned over those remainders and reversions with a skilled and rapid eye.

Rachel Lake was glad to see the slender and slightly-stooped figure of the vicar standing that morning — his bright little boy by the hand — in the wicket of the tiny flower-garden of Redman's Farm. She went out quickly to greet him. The sick man likes the sound of his kind doctor's step on the stairs; and, be his skill much or little, trusts in him, and will even joke a little asthmatic joke, and smile a feeble hectic smile about his ailments, when he is present.

So they fell into discourse among the autumnal flowers and withered leaves; and, as the day was still and genial, they remained standing in the garden; and away went busy little 'Fairy,' smiling and chatting with Margery, to see the hens and chickens in the yard.

The physician, after a while, finds the leading features of most cases pretty much alike. He knows when inflammation may be expected and fever will supervene; he is not surprised if the patient's mind wanders a little at times; expects the period of prostration and the return of appetite; and has his measures and his palliatives ready for each successive phase of sickness and recovery. In like manner, too, the good and skilful parson comes by experience to know the signs and stages of the moral ailments and recoveries which some of them know how so tenderly and so wisely to care for. They, too, have ready — having often proved their consolatory efficacy — their febrifuges and their tonics, culled from that tree of life whose 'leaves are for the healing of the nations.'

Poor Rachel's hours were dark, and life had grown in some sort terrible, and death seemed now so real and near — aye, quite a fact — and, somehow, not unfriendly. But, oh! the immense futurity beyond, that could not be shirked, to which she was certainly going.

Death, and sleep so welcome! But, oh! that stupendous LIFE EVERLASTING, now first unveiled. She could only close her eyes and wring her hands. Oh! for some friendly voice and hand to stay her through the Valley of the Shadow of Death!

They talked a long while — Rachel chiefly a listener, and often quietly weeping; and, at last, a very kindly parting, and a promise from the simple and gentle vicar that he would often look in at Redman's Farm.

She watched his retreating figure as he and little Fairy walked down the tenebrose road to Gylingden, following them with a dismal gaze, as a benighted and wounded wayfarer in that 'Valley' would the pale lamp's disappearing that had for a few minutes, in a friendly hand, shone over his dreadful darkness.

And when, in fitful reveries, fancy turned for a moment to an earthly past and future, all there was a blank — the past saddened, the future bleak. She did not know, or even suspect, that she had been living in an aerial castle, and worshipping an unreal image, until, on a sudden, all was revealed in that chance gleam of cruel lightning, the line in that letter, which she read so often, spelled over, and puzzled over so industriously, though it was clear enough. How noble, how good, how bright and true, was that hero of her unconscious romance.

Well, no one else suspected that incipient madness — that was something; and brave Rachel would quite master it. Happy she had discovered it so soon. Besides, it was, even if Chelford were at her feet, a wild impossibility now; and it was well, though despair were in the pang, that she had, at last, quite explained this to herself.

As Rachel stood in her little garden, on the spot where she had bidden farewell to the vicar, she was roused from her vague and dismal reverie by the sound of a carriage close at hand. She had just time to see that it was a brougham, and to recognise the Brandon liveries, when it drew up at the garden wicket, and Dorcas called to her from the open window.

‘I’m come, Rachel, expressly to take you with me; and I won’t be denied.’

‘You are very good, Dorcas; thank you, dear, very much; but I am not very well, and a very dull companion to-day.’

‘You think I am going to bore you with visits. No such thing, I assure you. I have taken a fancy to walk on the common, that is all — a kind of longing; and you must come with me; quite to ourselves, you and I. You won’t refuse me, darling; I know you’ll come.’

Well, Rachel did go. And away they drove through the quiet town of Gylingden together, and through the short street on the right, and so upon the still quieter common.

This plain of green turf broke gradually into a heath; and an irregular screen of timber and underwood divided the common of Gylingden in sylvan fashion from the moor. The wood passed, Dorcas stopped the carriage, and the two young ladies descended. It was a sunny day, and the air still; and the open heath contrasted pleasantly with the sombre and confined scenery of Redman’s Dell; and altogether Rachel was glad now that she had made the effort, and come with her cousin.

‘It was good of you to come, Rachel,’ said Miss Brandon; ‘and you look tired; but you sha’n’t speak more than you like; and I’ll tell you all the news. Chelford is just returned from Brighton; he arrived this morning; and he and Lady Chelford will stay for the Hunt Ball. I made it a point. And he called at Hockley, on his way back, to see Sir Julius. Do you know him?’

‘Sir Julius Hockley? No — I’ve heard of him only.’

‘Well, they say he is wasting his property very fast; and I think him every way very nearly a fool; but Chelford wanted to see him about Mr. Wylder. Mark Wylder, you know, of course, has turned up again in England. His letter to Chelford, six weeks ago, was from Boulogne; but his last was from Brighton; and Sir Julius Hockley witnessed — I think they call it — that letter of attorney which Mark sent about a week since to Mr. Larkin; and Chelford, who is most anxious to trace Mark Wylder, having to surrender — I think they call it — a “trust” is not it — or something — I really don’t understand these things — to him, and not being able to find out his address, Mr. Larkin wrote to Sir Julius, whom Chelford did not find at home, to ask him for a description of Mark, to ascertain whether he had disguised himself; and Sir Julius wrote to Chelford such an absurd description of poor Mark, in doggrel rhyme — so like — his odd walk, his great whiskers, and everything. Chelford does not like personalities, but he could not help laughing. Are you ill, darling?’

Though she was walking on beside her companion, Rachel looked on the point of fainting.

‘My darling, you must sit down; you do look very ill. I forgot my promise about Mark Wylder. How stupid I have been! and perhaps I have distressed you.’

‘No, Dorcas, I am pretty well; but I have been ill, and I am a little tired; and, Dorcas, I don’t deny it, I *am* amazed, you tell me such things. That letter of attorney, or whatever it is, must not be acted upon. It is incredible. It is all horrible wickedness. Mark Wylder’s fate is dreadful, and Stanley is the mover of all this. Oh! Dorcas, darling, I wish I could tell you everything. Some day I may be — I am sick and terrified.’

They had sat down, by this time, side by side, on the crisp bank. Each lady looked down, the one in suffering, the other in thought.

‘You are better, darling; are not you better?’ said Dorcas, laying her hand on Rachel’s, and looking on her with a melancholy gaze.

‘Yes, dear, better — very well’ — answered Rachel, looking up but without an answering glance at her cousin.

‘You blame your brother, Rachel, in this affair.’

‘Did I? Well — maybe — yes, he *is* to blame — the miserable man — whom I hate to think of, and yet am always thinking of — Stanley well knows is not in a state to do it.’

‘Don’t you think, Rachel, remembering what I have confided to you, that you might be franker with me in this?’

‘Oh, Dorcas! don’t misunderstand me. If the secret were all my own — Heaven knows, hateful as it is, how boldly I would risk all, and throw myself on your fidelity or your mercy — I know not how you might view it; but it is different, Dorcas, at least for the present. You know me — you know how I hate secrets; but this *is* not mine — only in part — that is, I dare not tell it — but may be soon free — and to us all, dear Dorcas, a woful, *woful*, day will it be.’

‘I made you a promise, Rachel,’ said her beautiful cousin, gravely, and a little coldly and sadly, too; ‘I will never break it again — it was thoughtless. Let us each try to forget that there is anything hidden between us.’

‘If ever the time comes, dear Dorcas, when I may tell it to you, I don’t know whether you will bless or hate me for having kept it so well; at all events, I think you’ll pity me, and at last understand your miserable cousin.’

‘I said before, Rachel, that I liked you. You are one of us, Rachel. You are beautiful, wayward, and daring, and one way or another, misfortune always waylays us; and I have, I know it, calamity before me. Death comes to other women in its accustomed way; but we have a double death. There is not a beautiful portrait in Brandon that has not a sad and true story. Early death of the frail and fair tenement of clay — but a still earlier death of happiness. Come, Rachel, shall we escape from the spell and the destiny into solitude? What do you think of my old plan of the valleys and lakes of Wales? a pretty foreign tongue spoken round us, and no one but ourselves to commune with, and books, and music. It is not, Radie, altogether jest. I sometimes yearn for it, as they say foreign girls do for convent life.’

‘Poor Dorcas,’ said Rachel, very softly, fixing her eyes upon her with a look of inexpressible sadness and pity.

‘Rachel,’ said Dorcas, ‘I am a changeable being — violent, self-willed. My fate may be quite a different one from that which *I* suppose or *you* imagine. I may yet have to retract *my* secret.'

'Oh! would it were so — would to Heaven it were so.'

'Suppose, Rachel, that I had been deceiving you — perhaps deceiving myself — time will show.'

There was a wild smile on beautiful Dorcas's face as she said this, which faded soon into the proud serenity that was its usual character.

'Oh! Dorcas, if your good angel is near, listen to his warnings.'

'We have no good angels, my poor Rachel: what modern necromancers, conversing with tables, call "mocking spirits," have always usurped their place with us: singing in our drowsy ears, like Ariel — visiting our reveries like angels of light — being really our evil genii — ah, yes!'

'Dorcas, dear,' said Rachel, after both had been silent for a time, speaking suddenly, and with a look of pale and keen entreaty— 'Beware of Stanley — oh! beware, beware. I think I am beginning to grow afraid of him myself.'

Dorcas was not given to sighing — but she sighed — gazing sadly across the wide, bleak moor, with her proud, apathetic look, which seemed passively to defy futurity — and then, for awhile, they were silent.

She turned, and caressingly smoothed the golden tresses over Rachel's frank, white forehead, and kissed them as she did so.

'You are better, darling; you are rested?' she said.

'Yes, dear Dorcas,' and she kissed the slender hand that smoothed her hair.

Each understood that the conversation on that theme was ended, and somehow each was relieved.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SIR JULIUS HOCKLEY’S LETTER.

Jos. Larkin mentioned in his conversation with the vicar, just related, that he had received a power of attorney from Mark Wylder. Connected with this document there came to light a circumstance so very odd, that the reader must at once be apprised of it.

This legal instrument was attested by two witnesses, and bore date about a week before the interview, just related, between the vicar and Mr. Larkin. Here, then, was a fact established. Mark Wylder had returned from Boulogne, for the power of attorney had been executed at Brighton. Who were the witnesses? One was Thomas Tupton, of the Travellers’ Hotel, Brighton.

This Thomas Tupton was something of a sporting celebrity, and a likely man enough to be of Mark’s acquaintance.

The other witness was Sir Julius Hockley, of Hockley, an unexceptionable evidence, though a good deal on the turf.

Now our friend Jos. Larkin had something of the Red Indian’s faculty for tracking his game, by hardly perceptible signs and tokens, through the wilderness; and this mystery of Mark Wylder’s flight and seclusion was the present object of his keen and patient pursuit.

On receipt of the ‘instrument,’ therefore, he wrote by return of post, ‘presenting his respectful compliments to Sir Julius Hockley, and deeply regretting that, as solicitor of the Wylder family, and the *gentleman* (*sic*) empowered to act under the letter of attorney, it was imperative upon him to trouble him (Sir Julius H.) with a few interrogatories, which he trusted he would have no difficulty in answering.’

The first was, whether he had been acquainted with Mr. Mark Wylder’s personal appearance before seeing him sign, so as to be able to identify him. The second was, whether he (Mr. M.W.) was accompanied, at the time of executing the instrument, by any friend; and if so, what were the name and address of such friend. And the third was, whether he could communicate any information whatsoever respecting Mr. M.W.’s present place of abode?

The same queries were put in a somewhat haughty and peremptory way to the sporting hotel-keeper, who answered that Mr. Mark Wylder had been staying for a week at his house, about five months ago; and that he had seen him twice — once 'backing' Jonathan, when he beat the great American billiard-player; and another time, when he lent him his copy of 'Bell's Life,' in the coffee-room; and thus he was enabled to identify him. For the rest he could say nothing.

Sir Julius's reply was of the hoitytoity and rollicking sort, bordering in parts very nearly on nonsense, and generally impertinent. It reached Mr. Larkin as he sat at breakfast with his friend, Stanley Lake.

'Pray read your letters, and don't mind me, I entreat. Perhaps you will allow me to look at the "Times;" and I'll trouble you for the sardines.'

The postmark 'Hockley,' stared the lawyer in the face; and, longing to break the seal, he availed himself of the captain's permission. So Lake opened the 'Times;' and, as he studied its columns, I think he stole a glance or two over its margin at the attorney, now deep in the letter of Sir Julius Hockley.

He (Sir J.H.) 'presented his respects to Mr. Lark*ens*, or Lark*ins*, or Lark*me*, or Lark*us* — Sir J.H. is not able to read *which* or *what*; but he is happy to observe, at all events, that, end how he may, the gentleman begins with a "lark!" which Sir J.H. always does, when he can. Not being able to discover his terminal syllable, he will take the liberty of styling him by his sprightly beginning, and calling him shortly "Lark." As Sir J. never objected to a lark, the gentleman so designated introduces himself with a strong prejudice, in Sir J.'s mind, in his favour — so much so, that by way of a lark, Sir J. will answer Lark's questions, which are not, he thinks, very impertinent. The wildest of all Lark's questions refers to Wylder's place of abode, which Sir J. was never wild enough to think of asking after, and does not know; and so little was he acquainted with the gentleman, that he forgot he was an evangelist doing good under the style and title of Mark. Lark may, therefore, tell Mark, if he sees him, or his friends — Matthew, Luke, and John — that Sir Julius saw Mark only on two successive days, at the cricket-match, played between Paul's Eleven — the coincidence is remarkable — and the Ishmaelites (these, I am bound to observe, were literally the designations of the opposing sides); and that he had the honour of being presented to Mark — saint or sinner, as he may be — on the ground, by his, Sir J.H.'s, friend, Captain Stanley Lake, of the Guards.'

Here was an astounding fact. Stanley Lake had been in Mark Wylder's company only ten days ago, when that great match was played at Brighton! What a deep gentleman was that Stanley Lake, who sat at the other end of the table with the 'Times' before him. What a varnished rascal — what a matchless liar!

He had returned to Gylingden, direct, in all likelihood, from his conferences with Mark Wylder, to tell all concerned that it was vain endeavouring to trace him, and still offering his disinterested services in the pursuit.

No matter! We must take things coolly and cautiously. All this chicanery will yet break down, and the conspiracy, be it what it may, will be thoroughly exposed. Mystery is the shadow of guilt; and, most assuredly, thought Mr. Larkin, there is some *infernal* secret, *well worth knowing*, at the bottom of all this. You little think I have you here! and he slid Sir Julius Hockley's piece of rubbishy banter into his waistcoat pocket, and then opened and glanced at half-a-dozen other letters, in a cool, quick official way, endorsing a little note on the back of each with his gold, patent pencil. All Mr. Jos. Larkin's 'properties' were handsome and imposing, and he never played with children without producing his gold repeater, and making it strike, and exhibiting its wonders for their amusement, and the edification of the adults, whose presence, of course, he forgot.

'Paul's Eleven have challenged the Gipsies,' said Lake, languidly lifting his eyes from the paper. 'By-the-bye, are you anything of a cricketer? And they are to play at Hockley, Sir Julius Hockley's ground. You know Sir Julius, don't you?'

'Very slightly. I may say I *have* that honour, but we have never been thrown together; a mere — a — the slightest thing in the world.'

'Not schoolfellows —— you are not an Eton man, eh?' said Lake.

'Oh no! My dear father' (the organist) 'would not send a boy of his to what he called an idle school. But my acquaintance with Sir Julius was a trifling matter. Hockley is a very pretty place, is not it?'

‘A sweet place. A great match was played between those fellows at Brighton: Paul’s Eleven beat fifteen of the Ishmaelites, about a fortnight since; but they have no chance with the Gipsies. It will be quite a hollow thing — a one-innings affair.’

‘Have you ever seen Paul’s Eleven play?’ asked the lawyer, carelessly taking up the newspaper which Lake had laid down.

‘I saw them play that match at Brighton, I mentioned just now, a few days ago.’

‘Ah! did you?’

‘Did not you *know* I was there?’ said Lake, in rather a changed tone. Larkin looked up, and Lake laughed in his face quietly the most impertinent laugh he had ever seen or heard, with his yellow eyes fixed on the lawyer’s pink little optics. ‘I was there, and Hockley was there, and Mark Wylder was there — was not he?’ and Lake stared and laughed, and the attorney stared; and Lake added, ‘What a d — d cunning fellow you are; ha, ha, ha!’

Larkin was not easily put out, but he *was* disconcerted now; and his cheeks and forehead grew suddenly pink, and he coughed a little, and tried to throw a look of mild surprise into his face.

‘Why, you have this moment had a letter from Hockley. Don’t you think I knew his hand and the postmark, and your look said quite plainly, “Here’s news of my friend Stanley Lake and Mark Wylder.” I had an uncle in the Foreign Office, and they said he would have been quite a distinguished diplomatist if he had lived; and I was said to have a good deal of his talent; and I really think I have brought my little evidences very prettily together, and jumped to a right conclusion — eh?’

A flicker of that sinister shadow I have sometimes mentioned crossed Larkin’s face, and contracted his eyes, as he said, a little sternly —

‘I have nothing on earth to conceal, Sir; I never had. All *my* conduct has been as open as the light; there’s not a letter, Sir, I ever write or receive, that might not, so far as *I* am concerned, with my good will, lie open on that table for every visitor that comes in to read; — open as the day, Sir:’ and the attorney waved his hand grandly.

‘Hear, hear, hear,’ said Lake, languidly, and tapping a little applause on the table, while he watched the solicitor’s rhetoric with his sly, disconcerting smile.

'It was but conscientious, Captain Lake, that I should make particular enquiry respecting the genuineness of a legal instrument conferring such very considerable powers. How, on earth, Sir, could I have the slightest suspicion that *you* had seen my client, Mr. Wylder, considering the tenor of your letters and conversation? And I venture to say, Captain Lake, that Lord Chelford will be just as much surprised as I, when he hears it.'

Jos. Larkin, Esq., delivered this peroration from a moral elevation, all the loftier that he had a peer of the realm on his side. But peers did not in the least overawe Stanley Lake, who had been all his days familiar with those idols; and the moral altitudes of the attorney amused him vastly.

'But he'll *not* hear it; *I* won't tell him, and you sha'n't; because I don't think it would be prudent of us — do you? — to quarrel with Mark Wylder, and he does not wish our meeting known. It is nothing on earth to me; on the contrary, it rather places me in an awkward position keeping other people's secrets.'

The attorney made one of his slight, gentlemanlike bows, and threw back his head with a lofty and reserved look.

'I don't know, Captain Lake, that I would be quite justified in withholding the substance of Sir Julius Hockley's letter from Lord Chelford, consulted, as I have had the honour to be, by that nobleman. I shall, however, turn it over in my mind.'

'Don't the least mind me. In fact, I would rather tell it than not. And I can explain to Chelford why *I* could not mention the circumstance. Wylder, in fact, tied me down by a promise, and he'll be devilish angry with you; but, it seems, you don't very much mind that.'

He knew that Mr. Larkin *did* very much mind it; and the quick glance of the attorney could read nothing whatever in the captain's pallid face and downcast eyes, smiling on the points of his varnished boots.

'Of course, you know, Captain Lake, in alluding to the possibility of my making any communication to Lord Chelford, I limit myself strictly to the letter of Sir Julius Hockley, and do not, by any means, my dear Captain Lake, include the conversation which has just occurred, and the communication which you have volunteered to make me.'

'Oh! quite so,' said the captain, looking up suddenly, as was his way, with a momentary glare, like a man newly-waked from a narcotic doze.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE HUNT BALL.

By this time your humble servant, the chronicler of these Gylingden annals, had taken his leave of magnificent old Brandon, and of its strangely interesting young mistress and was carrying away with him, as he flew along the London rails, the broken imagery of that grand and shivered dream. He was destined, however, before very long, to revisit these scenes; and in the meantime heard, in rude outline, the tenor of what was happening — the minute incidents and colouring of which were afterwards faithfully communicated.

I can, therefore, without break or blur, continue my description; and to say truth, at this distance of time, I have some difficulty — so well acquainted was I with the actors and the scenery — in determining, without consulting my diary, what portions of the narrative I relate from hearsay, and what as a spectator. But that I am so far from understanding myself, I should often be amazed at the sayings and doings of other people. As it is, I behold in myself an abyss, I gaze down and listen, and discover neither light nor harmony, but thunderings and lightnings, and voices and laughter, and a medley that dismays me. There rage the elements which God only can control. Forgive us our trespasses; lead us not into temptation; deliver us from the Evil One! How helpless and appalled we shut our eyes over that awful chasm.

I have long ceased, then, to wonder why any living soul does anything that is incongruous and unanticipated. And therefore I cannot say how Miss Brandon persuaded her handsome Cousin Rachel to go with her party, under the wing of Old Lady Chelford, to the Hunt Ball of Gylingden. And knowing now all that then hung heavy at the heart of the fair tenant of Redman’s Farm, I should, indeed, wonder inexpressibly, were it not, as I have just said, that I have long ceased to wonder at any vagaries of myself or my fellow creatures.

The Hunt Ball is the great annual event of Gylingden. The critical process of ‘coming out’ is here consummated by the young ladies of that town and vicinage. It is looked back upon for one-half of the year, and forward to for the other. People date by it. The battle of Inkerman was fought immediately before the Hunt Ball. It was so many weeks after the Hunt Ball that the Czar Nicholas died. The Carnival of Venice was nothing like so grand an event. Its solemn and universal importance in Gylingden and the country round, gave me, I fancied, some notion of what the feast of unleavened bread must have been to the Hebrews and Jerusalem.

The connubial capabilities of Gylingden are positively wretched. When I knew it, there were but three single men, according even to the modest measure of Gylingden housekeeping, capable of supporting wives, and these were difficult to please, set a high price on themselves — looked the country round at long ranges, and were only wistfully and meekly glanced after by the frugal vestals of Gylingden, as they strutted round the corners, or smoked the pipe of apathy at the reading-room windows.

Old Major Jackson kept the young ladies in practice between whiles, with his barren gallantries and graces, and was, just so far, better than nothing. But, as it had been for years well ascertained that he either could not or would not afford to marry, and that his love passages, like the passages in Gothic piles that 'lead to nothing,' were not designed to terminate advantageously, he had long ceased to excite, even in that desolate region, the smallest interest.

Think, then, what it was, when Mr. Pummice, of Copal and Pummice, the splendid house-painters at Dollington, arrived with his artists and charwomen to give the Assembly Room its annual touching-up and bedizenment, preparatory to the Hunt Ball. The Gylingden young ladies used to peep in, and from the lobby observe the wenches dry-rubbing and waxing the floor, and the great Mr. Pummice, with his myrmidons, in aprons and paper caps, retouching the gilding.

It was a tremendous crisis for honest Mrs. Page, the confectioner, over the way, who, in legal phrase, had 'the carriage' of the supper and refreshments, though largely assisted by Mr. Battersby, of Dollington. During the few days' agony of preparation that immediately preceded this notable orgie, the good lady's countenance bespoke the magnitude of her cares. Though the weather was usually cold, I don't think she ever was cool during that period — I am sure she never slept — I don't think she ate — and I am afraid her religious exercises were neglected.

Equally distracting, emaciating, and godless, was the condition to which the mere advent of this festival reduced worthy Miss Williams, the dressmaker, who had more white muslin and young ladies on her hands than she and her choir of needle-women knew what to do with. During this tremendous period Miss Williams hardly resembled herself — her eyes dilated, her lips were pale, and her brow corrugated with deep and inflexible lines of fear and perplexity. She lived on bad tea — sat up all night — and every now and then burst into helpless floods of tears. But somehow, generally things came pretty right in the end. One way or another, the gay belles and elderly spinsters, and fat village chaperones, were invested in suitable costume by the appointed hour, and in a few weeks Miss Williams' mind recovered its wonted tone, and her countenance its natural expression.

The great night had now arrived. Gylingden was quite in an uproar. Rural families of eminence came in. Some in oldfashioned coaches; others, the wealthier, more in London style. The stables of the 'Brandon Arms,' of the 'George Inn,' of the 'Silver Lion,' even of the 'White House,' though a good way off, and generally every vacant standing for horses in or about the town were crowded; and the places of entertainment we have named, and minor houses of refection, were vocal with the talk of flunkeys, patrician with powdered heads, and splendent in variegated liveries.

The front of the Town Hall resounded with the ring of horse-hoofs, the crack of whips, the bawling of coachmen, the clank of carriage steps and clang of coach doors. A promiscuous mob of the plebs and profanum vulgus of Gylingden beset the door, to see the ladies — the slim and the young in white muslins and artificial flowers, and their stout guardian angels, of maturer years, in satins and velvets, and jewels — some real, and some, just as good, of paste. In the cloak-room such a fuss, unfurling of fans, and last looks and hurried adjustments.

When the Crutchleighs, of Clay Manor, a good, old, formal family, were mounting the stairs in solemn procession — they were always among the early arrivals — they heard a piano and a tenor performing in the supper-room.

Now, old Lady Chelford chose to patronise Mr. Page, the Dollington professor, and partly, I fancy, to show that she could turn things topsy-turvy in this town of Gylingden, had made a point, with the rulers of the feast, that her client should sing half-a-dozen songs in the supper-room before dancing commenced.

Mrs. Crutchleigh stayed her step upon the stairs abruptly, and turned, with a look of fierce surprise upon her lean, white-headed lord, arresting thereby the upward march of Corfe Crutchleigh, Esq., the hope of his house, who was pulling on his gloves, with his eldest spinster sister on his lank arm.

‘There appears to be a concert going on; we came here to a ball. Had you not better enquire, Mr. Crutchleigh; it would seem we have made a mistake?’

Mrs. Crutchleigh was sensitive about the dignity of the family of Clay Manor; and her cheeks flushed above the rouge, and her eyes flashed severely.

‘That’s singing — particularly *loud singing*. Either we have mistaken the night, or somebody has taken upon him to upset all the arrangements. You’ll be good enough to enquire whether there will be dancing tonight; I and Anastasia will remain in the cloak-room; and we’ll all leave if you please, Mr. Crutchleigh, if this goes on.’

The fact is, Mrs. Crutchleigh had got an inkling of this performance, and had affected to believe it impossible; and, detesting old Lady Chelford for sundry slights and small impertinences, and envying Brandon and its belongings, was resolved not to be put down by presumption in that quarter.

Old Lady Chelford sat in an armchair in the supper-room, where a considerable audience was collected. She had a splendid shawl or two about her, and a certain air of demi-toilette, which gave the Gylingden people to understand that her ladyship did not look on this gala in the light of a real ball, but only as a sort of rustic imitation — curious, possibly amusing, and, like other rural sports, deserving of encouragement, for the sake of the people who made innocent holiday there.

Mr. Page, the performer, was a plump young man, with black whiskers, and his hair in oily ringlets, such as may be seen in the model wigs presented on smiling, waxen dandies, in Mr. Rose’s front window at Dollington. He bowed and smiled in the most unexceptionable of white chokers and the dapperest of dress coats, and drew off the whitest imaginable pair of kid gloves, when he sat down to the piano, subsiding in a sort of bow upon the music-stool, and striking those few, brisk and noisy chords with which such artists proclaim silence and reassure themselves.

Stanley Lake, that eminent London swell, had attached himself as gentleman-in-waiting to Lady Chelford's household, and was perpetually gliding with little messages between her ladyship and the dapper vocalist of Dollington, who varied his programme and submitted to an occasional *encore* on the private order thus communicated.

'I told you Chelford would be here,' said Miss Brandon to Rachel, in a low tone, glancing at the young peer.

'I thought he had returned to Brighton. I fancied he might be — you know the Dulhamptons are at Brighton; and Lady Constance, of course, has a claim on his time and thoughts.'

Rachel smiled as she spoke, and was adjusting her bouquet, as Dorcas made answer —

'Lady Constance, my dear Radie! That, you know, was never more than a mere whisper; it was only Lady Chelford and the marchioness who talked it over — they would have liked it very well. But Chelford won't be managed or scolded into anything of the kind; and will choose, I think, for himself, and I fancy not altogether according to their ideas, when the time comes. And I assure you, dear Radie, there is not the least truth in that story about Lady Constance.'

Why should Dorcas be so earnest to convince her handsome cousin that there was nothing in this rumour? Rachel made no remark, and there was a little silence.

'I'm so glad I succeeded in bringing you here,' said Dorcas; 'Chelford made such a point of it; and he thinks you are losing your spirits among the great trees and shadows of Redman's Dell; and he made it quite a little cousinly duty that I should succeed.'

At this moment Mr. Page interposed with the energetic prelude of his concluding ditty. It was one of Tom Moore's melodies.

Rachel leaned back, and seemed to enjoy it very much. But when it was over, I think she would have found it difficult to say what the song was about.

Mr. Page had now completed his programme, and warned by the disrespectful violins from the gallery of the ball-room, whence a considerable caterwauling was already announcing the approach of the dance, he made his farewell flourish, and bow and, smiling, withdrew.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BALL ROOM.

Rachel Lake, standing by the piano, turned over the leaves of the volume of 'Moore's Melodies' from which the artist in black whiskers and white waistcoat had just entertained his noble patroness and his audience.

Everyone has experienced, I suppose for a few wonderful moments, now and then, a glow of seemingly causeless happiness, in which the earth and its people are glorified — peace and sunlight rest on everything — the spirit of music and love is in the air, and the heart itself sings for joy. In the light of this celestial illusion she stood now by the piano, turning over the pages of poor Tom Moore, as I have said, when a low pleasant voice near her said —

'I was so glad to see that Dorcas had prevailed, and that you were here.
We both agreed that you are too much a recluse in that Der Frieschutz
Glen — at least, for your friends' pleasure; and owe it to us all to
appear now and then in this upper world.'

'Excelsior, Miss Lake,' interposed dapper little Mr. Buttle, with a smirk; 'I think this little bit of music — it was got up, you know, by that old quiz, Dowager Lady Chelford — was really not so bad — a rather good idea, after all, Miss Lake. Don't you?'

Poor Mr. Buttle did not know Lord Chelford, and thus shooting his 'arrow o'er the house,' he 'hurt his brother.' Chelford turned away, and bowed and smiled to one or two friends at the other side of the room.

'Yes, the music was very pretty, and some of the songs were quite charmingly sung. I agree with you — we are very much obliged to Lady Chelford — that is her son, Lord Chelford.'

'Oh!' said Buttle, whose smirk vanished on the instant in a very red and dismal vacancy, 'I — I'm afraid he'll think me shockingly rude.' And in a minute more Buttle was gone.

Miss Lake again looked down upon the page, and as she did so, Lord Chelford turned and said —

‘You are a worshipper of Tom Moore, Miss Lake?’

‘An admirer, perhaps — certainly no worshipper. Yet, I can’t say. Perhaps I do worship; but if so, it is a worship strangely mixed with contempt.’ And she laughed a little. ‘A kind of adoring which I fancy belongs properly to the lords of creation, and which we of the weaker sex have no right to practise.’

‘Miss Lake is pleased to be ironical tonight,’ he said, with a smile.

‘Am I? I dare say. All women are. Irony is the weapon of cowardice, and cowardice the vice of weakness. Yet I think I was naturally bold and true. I hate cowardice and deception even in myself — I hate perfidy — I hate *fraud*.’

She tapped a little emphasis upon the floor with her white satin shoe, and her eyes flashed with a dark and angry meaning among the crowd at the other end of the room, as if for a second or two following an object to whom in some way the statement applied.

The strange bitterness of her tone, though it was low enough, and something wild, suffering, and revengeful in her look, though but momentary, and hardly definable, did not escape Lord Chelford, and he followed unconsciously the direction of her glance; but there was nothing there to guide him to a conclusion, and the good people who formed that polite and animated mob were in his eyes, one and all, quite below the level of tragedy, or even of melodrama.

‘And yet, Miss Lake, we are all more or less cowards or deceivers — at least, to the extent of suppression. Who would speak the whole truth, or like to hear it? — not I, I know.’

‘Nor I,’ she said, quietly.

‘And I do think, if people had no reserves, they would be very uninteresting,’ he added.

She was looking, with a strange light upon her face — a smile, perhaps — upon the open pages of ‘Moore’s Melodies’ as he spoke.

‘I like a little puzzle and mystery — they surround our future and our past; and the present would be insipid, I think, without them. Now, I can’t tell, Miss Lake, as you look on Tom Moore there, and I try to read your smile, whether you happen at this particular moment to adore or despise him.'

'Moore's is a daring morality — what do you think, for instance, of these lines?' she said, touching the verse with her bouquet.

Lord Chelford read —

I ask not, I know not, if guilt's in thy heart
I but know that I love thee, whatever thou art.'

He laughed.

'Very passionate, but hardly respectable. I once knew,' he continued a little more gravely, 'a marriage made upon that principle, and not very audaciously either, which turned out very unhappily.'

'So I should conjecture,' she said, rising from her chair, rather drearily and abstractedly, 'and there is good old Lady Sarah. I must go and ask her how she does.' She paused for a moment, holding her bouquet drooping towards the floor, and looking with her clouded eyes down — down — through it; and then she looked up suddenly, with an odd, fierce smile, and she said bitterly enough— 'and yet, if I were a man, and capable of loving, I could love no other way; because I suppose love to be a madness, and the sublimest and the most despicable of states. And I admire Moore for that flash of the fallen angelic — it is the sentiment of a hero and a madman — too base and too *noble* for this cool, wise world.'

She was already moving away, nebulous in hovering folds of snowy muslin. And she floated down like a cloud upon the ottoman, beside old Lady Sarah, and smiled and leaned towards her, and talked in her sweet, low, distinct accents. And Lord Chelford followed her, with a sad sort of smile, admiring her greatly.

Of course, *non cuivis contigit*, it was not every man's privilege to dance with the splendid Lady of Brandon. It was only the demigods who ventured within the circle. Her kinsman, Lord Chelford, did so; and now handsome Sir Harry Bracton, six feet high, so broad-shouldered and slim-waisted, his fine but not very wise face irradiated with indefatigable smiles, stood and conversed with her, with that jaunty swagger of his — his weight now on this side, now on that, squaring his elbows like a crack whip with four-in-hand, and wagging his perfumed tresses — boisterous, rollicking, beaming with immeasurable self-complacency.

Stanley Lake left old Lady Chelford's side, and glided to that of Dorcas Brandon.

'Will you dance this set — are you engaged, Miss Brandon?' he said, in low eager tones.

'Yes, to both questions,' answered she, with the faintest gleam of the conventional smile, and looking now gravely again at her bouquet.

'Well, the next possibly, I hope?'

'I never do that,' said the apathetic beauty, serenely.

Stanley looked as if he did not quite understand, and there was a little silence.

'I mean, I never engage myself beyond one dance. I hope you do not think it rude — but I never do.'

'Miss Brandon can make what laws she pleases for all here, and for some of us everywhere,' he replied, with a mortified smile and a bow.

At that moment Sir Harry Bracton arrived to claim her, and Miss Kybes — elderly and sentimental, and in no great request — timidly said, in a gobbling, confidential whisper —

'What a handsome couple they do make! Does not it quite realise your conception, Captain Lake, of young Lochinvar, you know, and his fair Helen —

So stately his form and so lovely her face —

You remember —

'That never a hall such a galliard did grace.

Is not it?'

'So it is, really; it did not strike me. And that "one cup of wine" — you recollect — which the hero drank; and, I dare say it made young Lochinvar a little noisy and swaggering, when he proposed "treading the measure" — is not that the phrase? Yes, really; it is a very pretty poetical parallel.'

And Miss Kybes was pleased to think that Captain Lake would be sure to report her elegant little compliment in the proper quarters, and that her incense had not missed fire.

When Miss Brandon returned, Lake was unfortunately on duty beside old Lady Chelford, whom it was important to propitiate, and who was in the middle of a story — an extraordinary favour from her ladyship; and he had the vexation to see Lord Chelford palpably engaging Miss Brandon for the next dance.

When she returned, she was a little tired, and doubtful whether she would dance any more — certainly not the next dance. So he resolved to lie in wait, and anticipate any new suitor who might appear.

His eyes, however, happened to wander, in an unlucky moment, to old Lady Chelford, who instantaneously signalled to him with her fan.

‘ — the woman,’ mentally exclaimed Lake, telegraphing, at the same time, with a bow and a smile of deferential alacrity, and making his way through the crowd as deftly as he could; what a —— fool I was to go near her.’

So the captain had to assist at the dowager lady’s supper; and not only so, but in some sort at her digestion also, which she chose should take place for some ten minutes in the chair that she occupied at the supper table.

When he escaped, Miss Brandon *was* engaged once more — and to Sir Harry Bracton, for a second time.

And moreover, when he again essayed his suit, the young lady had peremptorily made up her mind to dance no more that night.

‘How *can* Dorcas endure that man,’ thought Rachel, as she saw Sir Harry lead her to her seat, after a second dance. ‘Handsome, but so noisy and foolish, and wicked; and is not he vulgar, too?’

But Dorcas was not demonstrative. Her likings and dislikings were always more or less enigmatical. Still Rachel Lake fancied that she detected signs, not only of tolerance, but of positive liking, in her haughty cousin’s demeanour, and wondered, after all, whether Dorcas was beginning to like Sir Harry Bracton. Dorcas had always puzzled her — not, indeed, so much latterly — but this night the mystery began to darken once more.

Twice, for a moment, their eyes met; but only for a moment. Rachel knew that a tragedy might be — at that instant, and under the influence of that very spectacle — gathering its thunders silently in another part of the room, where she saw Stanley's pale, peculiar face; and although he appeared in nowise occupied by what was passing between Dorcas Brandon and Sir Harry, she perfectly well knew that nothing of it escaped him.

The sight of that pale face was a cold pang at her heart — a face prophetic of evil, at sight of which the dark curtain which hid futurity seemed to sway and tremble, as if a hand from behind was on the point of drawing it. Rachel sighed profoundly, and her eyes looked sadly through her bouquet on the floor.

'I'm very glad you came, Radie,' said a sweet voice, which somehow made her shiver, close to her ear. 'This kind of thing will do you good; and you really wanted a little fillip. Shall I take you to the supper-room?'

'No, Stanley, thank you; I prefer remaining.'

'Have you observed how Dorcas has treated me this evening?'

'No, Stanley; nothing unusual, is there?' answered Rachel, glancing uneasily round, lest they should be overheard.

'Well, I think she has been more than usually repulsive — quite marked; I almost fancy these Gylingden people, dull as they are, must observe it. I have a notion I sha'n't trouble Gylingden or her after tomorrow.'

Rachel glanced quickly at him. He was deadly pale, with his faint unpleasant smile; and he returned her glance for a second wildly, and then dropped his eyes to the ground.

'I told you,' he resumed again, after a short pause, and commencing with a gentle laugh, 'that she liked that fellow, Bracton.'

'You did say something, I think, of that, some time since,' said Rachel; 'but really — — '

'But really, Radie, dear, you can't need any confirmation more than this evening affords. We both know Dorcas very well; she is not like other girls. She does not encourage fellows as they do; but if she did not like Bracton very well indeed, she would send him about his business. She has danced with him twice, on the contrary, and has suffered his agreeable conversation all the evening; and that from Dorcas Brandon means, you know, everything.'

‘I don’t know that it means anything. I don’t see why it should; but I am very certain,’ said Rachel, who, in the midst of this crowded, gossiping ballroom, was talking much more freely to Stanley, and also, strange to say, in more sisterly fashion, than she would have done in the little parlour of Redman’s Farm; ‘I am very certain, Stanley, that if this supposed preference leads you to abandon your wild pursuit of Dorcas, it will prevent more ruin than, perhaps, either of us anticipates; and, Stanley,’ she added in a whisper, looking full in his eyes, which were raised for a moment to hers, ‘it is hardly credible that you dare still to persist in so desperate and cruel a project.’

‘Thank you,’ said Stanley quietly, but the yellow lights glared fiercely from their sockets, and were then lowered instantly to the floor.

‘She has been very rude to me tonight; and you have not been, or tried to be, of any earthly use to me; and I will take a decided course. I perfectly know what I’m about. You don’t seem to be dancing. *I* have not either; we have both got something more serious, I fancy, to think of.’

And Stanley Lake glided slowly away, and was lost in the crowd. He went into the supper-room, and had a glass of seltzer water and sherry. He loitered at the table. His ruminations were dreary, I fancy, and his temper by no means pleasant; and it needed a good deal of that artificial command of countenance which he cultivated, to prevent his betraying something of the latter, when Sir Harry Bracton, talking loud and volubly as usual, swaggered into the supper-room, with Dorcas Brandon on his arm.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SUPPER-ROOM.

It was rather trying, in this state of things, to receive from the triumphant baronet, with only a parenthetical ‘Dear Lake, I beg your pardon,’ a rough knock on the elbow of the hand that held his glass, and to be then summarily hustled out of his place. It was no mitigation of the rudeness, in Lake’s estimate, that Sir Harry was so engrossed and elated as to seem hardly conscious of any existence but Miss Brandon’s and his own.

Lake was subject to transient paroxysms of exasperation; but even in these be knew how to command himself pretty well before witnesses. His smile grew a little stranger, and his face a degree whiter, as he set down his glass, quietly glided a little away, and brushed off with his handkerchief the aspersion which his coat had suffered.

In a few minutes more Miss Brandon had left the supper-room leaning upon Lord Chelford’s arm; and Sir Harry remained, with a glass of pink champagne, such as young fellows drink with a faith and comfort so wonderful, at balls and *fêtes champêtres*.

Sir Harry Bracton was already ‘chaffing a bit,’ as he expressed it, with the young lady who assisted in dispensing the good things across the supper-table, and was just calling up her blushes by a pretty parallel between her eyes and the sparkling quality of his glass, and telling her her mamma must have been sweetly pretty.

Now, Sir Harry’s rudeness to Lake had not been, I am afraid, altogether accidental. The baronet was sudden and vehement in his affairs of the heart; but curable on short absences, and easily transferable. He had been vehemently enamoured of the heiress of Brandon a year ago and more; but during an absence Mark Wylder’s suit grew up and prospered, and Sir Harry Bracton acquiesced; and, to say truth, the matter troubled his manly breast but little.

He had hardly expected to see her here in this rollicking, rustic gathering. She was, he thought, even more lovely than he remembered her. Beauty sometimes seen again does excel our recollections of it. Wylder had gone off the scene, as Mr. Carlyle says, into infinite space. Who could tell exactly the cause of his dismissal, and why the young lady had asserted her capricious resolve to be free?

There were pleasant theories adaptable to the circumstances; and Sir Harry cherished an agreeable opinion of himself; and so, all things favouring; the old flame blazed up wildly, and the young gentleman was more in love then, and for some weeks after the ball, than perhaps he had ever been before.

Now some men — and Sir Harry was of them — are churlish and ferocious over their loves, as certain brutes are over their victuals. In one of these tender paroxysms, when in the presence of his Dulcinea, the young baronet was always hot, short, and saucy with his own sex; and when his jealousy was ever so little touched, positively impertinent.

He perceived what other people did not, that Miss Brandon's eye once on that evening rested for a moment on Captain Lake with a peculiar expression of interest. This look was but once and momentary; but the young gentleman resented it, and brooded over it, every now and then, when the pale face of the captain crossed his eye; and two or three times, when the beautiful young lady's attention seemed unaccountably to wander from his agreeable conversation, he thought he detected her haughty eye moving in the same direction. So he looked that way too; and although he could see nothing noticeable in Stanley's demeanour, he could have felt it in his heart to box his ears.

Therefore, I don't think he was quite so careful as he might have been to spare Lake that jolt upon the elbow, which coming from a rival in a moment of public triumph was not altogether easy to bear like a Christian.

'Some grapes, please,' said Lake, to the young lady behind the table.

'Oh, *uncle*! Is that you, Lake? — beg pardon; but you *are* so like my poor dear uncle, Langton. I wish you'd let me adopt you for an uncle. He was such a pretty fellow, with his fat white cheeks and long nose, and he looked half asleep. Do, pray, Uncle Lake; I should like it so,' and the baronet, who was, I am afraid, what some people would term, perhaps, vulgar, winked over his glass at the blooming confectioner, who turned away and tittered over her shoulder at the handsome baronet's charming banter.

The girl having turned away to titter, forgot Lake's grapes; so he helped himself, and leaning against the table, looked superciliously upon Sir Harry, who was not to be deterred by the drowsy gaze of contempt with which the captain retorted his angry ‘chaff.’

‘Poor uncle died of love, or chicken pox, or something, at forty. You’re not ailing, Nunkie, are you? You do look wofully sick though; too bad to lose a second uncle at the same early age. You’re near forty, eh, Nunkie? and such a pretty fellow! You’ll take care of me in your will, Nunkie, won’t you? Come, what will you leave me; not much tin, I’m afraid.’

‘No, not much tin,’ answered Lake; ‘but I’ll leave you what you want more, my sense and decency, with a request that you will use them for my sake.’

‘You’re a devilish witty fellow, Lake; take care your wit don’t get you into trouble,’ said the baronet, chuckling and growing angrier, for he saw the Hebe laughing; and not being a ready man, though given to banter, he sometimes descended to menace in his jocularity.

‘I was just thinking your dulness might do the same for you,’ drawled Lake.

‘When do you mean to pay Dawlings that bet on the Derby?’ demanded Sir Harry, his face very red, and only the ghost of his smile grinning there. ‘I think you’d better; of course it is quite easy.’

The baronet was smiling his best, with a very red face, and that unpleasant uncertainty in his contracted eyes which accompanies suppressed rage.

‘As easy as that,’ said Lake, chucking a little bunch of grapes full into Sir Harry Bracton’s handsome face.

Lake recoiled a step; his face blanched as white as the cloth; his left arm lifted, and his right hand grasping the haft of a table-knife.

There was just a second in which the athletic baronet stood, as it were breathless and incredulous, and then his Herculean fist whirled in the air with a most unseemly oath: the girl screamed, and a crash of glass and crockery, whisked away by their coats, resounded on the ground.

A chair between Lake and Sir Harry impeded the baronet's stride, and his uplifted arm was caught by a gentleman in moustache, who held so fast that there was no chance of shaking it loose.

'D — it, Bracton; d — you, what the devil — don't be a — fool' and other soothing expressions escaped this peacemaker, as he clung fast to the young baronet's arm.

'The people — hang it! — you'll have all the people about you.
Quiet — quiet — can't you, I say. Settle it quietly. Here I am.'

'Well, let me go; that will do,' said he, glowering furiously at Lake, who confronted him, in the same attitude, a couple of yards away. 'You'll hear,' and he turned away.

'I am at the "Brandon Arms" till tomorrow,' said Lake, with white lips, very quietly, to the gentleman in moustaches, who bowed slightly, and walked out of the room with Sir Harry.

Lake poured out some sherry in a tumbler, and drank it off. He was a little bit stunned, I think, in his new situation.

Except for the waiters, and the actors in it, it so happened that the supper-room was empty during this sudden fracas. Lake stared at the frightened girl, in his fierce abstraction. Then, with his wild gaze, he followed the line of his adversary's retreat, and shook his ears slightly, like a man at whose hair a wasp has buzzed.

'Thank you,' said he to the maid, suddenly recollecting himself, with a sort of smile; 'that will do. What confounded nonsense! He'll be quite cool again in five minutes. Never mind.'

And Lake pulled on his white glove, glancing down the file of silent waiters-some looking frightened, and some reserved — in white ties and waistcoats, and he glided out of the room — his mind somewhere else — like a somnambulist.

It was not perfectly clear to the gentlemen and ladies in charge of the ices, chickens, and champagne, between which of the three swells who had just left the room the quarrel was — it had come so suddenly, and was over so quickly, like a clap of thunder. Some had not seen any, and others only a bit of it, being busy with plates and ice-tubs; and the few who had seen it all did not clearly comprehend it — only it was certain that the row had originated in jealousy about Miss Jones, the pretty apprentice, who was judiciously withdrawn forthwith by Mrs. Page, the properest of confectioners.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AFTER THE BALL.

Lake glided from the feast with a sense of a tremendous liability upon him. There was no retreat. The morning — yes, the morning — what then? Should he live to see the evening? Sir Harry Bracton was the crack shot of Swivel's gallery. He could hit a walking-cane at fifteen yards, at the word. There he was, talking to old Lady Chelford. Very well; and there was that fellow with the twisted moustache — plainly an officer and a gentleman — twisting the end of one of them, and thinking profoundly, with his back to the wall, evidently considering his coming diplomacy with Lake's 'friend.' Aye, by-the-bye, and Lake's eye wandered in bewilderment among village dons and elderly country gentlemen, in search of that inestimable treasure.

These thoughts went whisking and whirling round in Captain Lake's brain, to the roar and clatter of the Joinville Polka, to which fifty pair of dancing feet were hopping and skimming over the floor.

'Monstrous hot, Sir — hey? ha, ha, by Jove!' said Major Jackson, who had just returned from the supper-room, where he had heard several narratives of the occurrence. 'Don't think I was so hot since the ball at Government House, by Jove, Sir, in 1828 — awful summer that!'

The major was jerking his handkerchief under his florid nose and chin, by way of ventilation; and eyeing the young man shrewdly the while, to read what he might of the story in his face.

'Been in Calcutta, Lake?'

'No; very hot, indeed. Could I say just a word with you — this way a little. So glad I met you.' And they edged into a little nook of the lobby, where they had a few minutes' confidential talk, during which the major looked grave and consequential, and carried his head high, nodding now and then with military decision.

Major Jackson whispered an abrupt word or two in his ear, and threw back his head, eyeing Lake with grave and sly defiance. Then came another whisper and a wink; and the major shook his hand, briefly but hard, and the gentlemen parted.

Lake strolled into the ball-room, and on to the upper end, where the ‘best’ people are, and suddenly he was in Miss Brandon’s presence.

‘I’ve been very presumptuous, I fear, tonight, Miss Brandon, he said, in his peculiar low tones. ‘I’ve been very importunate — I prized the honour I sought so very much, I forgot how little I deserved it. And I do not think it likely you’ll see me for a good while — possibly for a very long time. I’ve therefore ventured to come, merely to say goodbye — only that, just — goodbye. And — and to beg that flower’ — and he plucked it resolutely from her bouquet— ‘which I will keep while I live. Goodbye, Miss Brandon.’

And Captain Stanley Lake, that pale apparition, was gone.

I do not know at all how Miss Brandon felt at this instant; for I never could quite understand that strange lady. But I believe she looked a little pale as she gravely adjusted the flowers so audaciously violated by the touch of the cool young gentleman.

I can’t say whether Miss Brandon deigned to follow him with her dark, dreamy gaze. I rather think not. And three minutes afterwards he had left the Town Hall.

The Brandon party did not stay very late. And they dropped Rachel at her little dwelling. How very silent Dorcas was, thought Rachel, as they drove from Gylingden. Perhaps others were thinking the same of Rachel.

Next morning, at halfpast seven o’clock, a dozen or so of rustics, under command of Major Jackson, arrived at the back entrance of Brandon Hall, bearing Stanley Lake upon a shutter, with glassy eyes, that did not seem to see, sunken face, and a very blue tinge about his mouth.

The major fussed into the house, and saw and talked with Larcom, who was solemn and bland upon the subject, and went out, first, to make personal inspection of the captain, who seemed to him to be dying. He was shot somewhere in the shoulder or breast — they could not see exactly where, nor disturb him as he lay. A good deal of blood had flowed from him, upon the arm and side of one of the men who supported his head.

Lake said nothing — he only whispered rather indistinctly one word, ‘water’ — and was not able to lift his head when it came; and when they poured it into and over his lips, he sighed and closed his eyes.

‘It is not a bad sign, bleeding so freely, but he looks devilish shaky, you see. I’ve seen lots of our fellows hit, you know, and I don’t like his looks —

poor fellow. You’d better see Lord Chelford this minute. He could not stand being brought all the way to the town. I’ll run down and send up the doctor, and he’ll take him on if he can bear it.’

Major Jackson did not run. Though I have seen with an astonishment that has never subsided, fellows just as old and as fat, and braced up, besides, in the inflexibilities of regimentals, keeping up at double quick, at the heads of their companies, for a good quarter of a mile, before the colonel on horseback mercifully called a halt.

He walked at his best pace, however, and indeed was confoundedly uneasy about his own personal liabilities.

The major surprised Doctor Buddle shaving. He popped in unceremoniously. The fat little doctor received him in drawers and a very tight web worsted shirt, standing by the window, at which dangled a small looking-glass.

‘By George, Sir, they’ve been at mischief,’ burst forth the major; and the doctor, razor in hand, listened with wide open eyes and half his face lathered, to the story. Before it was over the doctor shaved the unshorn side, and (the major still in the room) completed his toilet in hot haste.

Honest Major Jackson was very uncomfortable. Of course, Buddle could not give any sort of opinion upon a case which he had not seen; but it described uglily, and the major consulted in broken hints, with an uneasy wink or two, about a flight to Boulogne.

‘Well, it will be no harm to be ready; but take no step till I come back,’ said the doctor, who had stuffed a great roll of lint and plaister, and some other medicinals, into one pocket, and his leather case of instruments, forceps, probe, scissors, and all the other steel and silver horrors, into the other; so he strutted forth in his great coat, unnaturally broad about the hips; and the major, ‘devilish uncomfortable,’ accompanied him at a smart pace to the great gate of Brandon. He did not care to enter, feeling a little guilty, although he explained on the way all about the matter. How devilish stiff Bracton’s man was about it. And, by Jove, Sir! you know, what was to be said? for Lake, like a fool, chucked a lot of grapes in his face — for nothing, by George!’

The doctor, short and broad, was now stumping up the straight avenue, under the noble trees that roofed it over, and Major Jackson sauntered about in the vicinity of the gate, more interested in Lake's safety than he would have believed possible a day or two before.

Lord Chelford being an early man, was, notwithstanding the ball of the preceding night, dressing, when St. Ange, his Swiss servant, knocked at his door with a dozen pockethandkerchiefs, a bottle of eau-de-cologne, and some other properties of his métier.

St. Ange could not wait until he had laid them down, but broke out with —

'Oh, mi Lor! — qu'est-il arrivé? — le pauvre capitaine! il est tué — il se meurt — he dies — d'un coup de pistolet. He comes de se battre from beating himself in duel — il a été atteint dans la poitrine — le pauvre gentilhomme! of a blow of the pistol.'

And so on, the young nobleman gathering the facts as best he might.

'Is Larcom there?'

'In the gallery, mi lor.'

'Ask him to come in.'

So Monsieur Larcom entered, and bowed ominously.

'You've seen him, Larcom. Is he very much hurt?'

'He appears, my lord, to me, I regret to say, almost a-dying like.'

'Very weak? Does he speak to you?'

'Not a word, my lord. Since he got a little water he's quite quiet.'

'Poor fellow. Where have you put him?'

'In the housekeeper's lobby, my lord. I rather think he's a-dying. He looks uncommon bad, and I and Mrs. Esterbroke, the housekeeper, my lord, thought you would not like he should die out of doors.'

'Has she got your mistress's directions?'

'Miss Brandon is not called up, my lord, and Mrs. Esterbroke is unwillin' to halarm her; so she thought it better I should come for orders to your lordship; which she thinks also the poor young gentleman is certainly a-dying.'

'Is there any vacant bedroom near where you have placed him? What does Mrs. —— the housekeeper, say?'

'She thinks, my lord, the room hopposit, where Mr. Sledd, the architeck, slep, when 'ere, would answer very nice. It is roomy and hairy, and no steps. Major Jackson, who is gone to the town to fetch the doctor, my lord, says Mr. Lake won't a-bear carriage; and so the room on the level, my lord, would, perhaps, be more convenient.'

'Certainly; tell her so. I will speak to Miss Brandon when she comes down. How soon will the doctor be here?'

'From a quarter to half an hour, my lord.'

'Then tell the housekeeper to arrange as she proposes, and don't remove his clothes until the doctor comes. Everyone must assist. I know, St. Ange, you'll like to assist.'

So Larcom withdrew ceremoniously, and Lord Chelford hastened his toilet, and was down stairs, and in the room assigned by the housekeeper to the ill-starred Captain Lake, before Doctor Buddle had arrived.

It had already the dismal character of a sick chamber. Its light was darkened; its talk was in whispers; and its to-ings and froings on tip-toe. An obsolete chambermaid had been already installed as nurse. Little Mrs. Esterbroke, the housekeeper, was fussing hither and thither about the room noiselessly.

So this gay, astute man of fashion had fallen into the dungeon of sudden darkness, and the custody of old women; and lay helpless in the stocks, awaiting the judgment of Buddle. Ridiculous little pudgy Buddle — how awful on a sudden are you grown — the interpreter of death in this very case. '*My* case,' thought that seemingly listless figure on the bed; '*my* case — I suppose it *is* fatal — I am to go out of this room in a long cloth-covered box. I am going to try, alone and for ever, the value of those theories of futurity and the unseen which I have quietly scouted all my days. Oh, that the prophet Buddle were here, to end my tremendous suspense, and to announce a reprieve from Heaven.'

While the wounded captain lay on the bed, with his clothes on, and the coverlet over him, and that clay-coloured apathetic face, with closed eyes, upon the pillow, without sigh or motion, not a whispered word escaped him; but his brain was appalled, and his heart died within him in the unspeakable horror of death.

Lord Chelford, too, having looked on Lake with silent, but awful misgivings, longed for the arrival of the doctor; and was listening and silent when Buddle's short step and short respiration were heard in the passage. So Larcom came to the door to announce the doctor in a whisper, and

Buddle fussed into the room, and made his bow to Lord Chelford, and his brief compliments and condolences.

'Not asleep?' he enquired, standing by the bed.

The captain's lips moved a disclaimer, I suppose, but no sound came.

So the doctor threw open the window-shutters, and clipped Stanley Lake's exquisite coat ruthlessly through with his scissors, and having cleared the room of all useless hands, he made his examination.

It was a long visit. Buddle in the hall afterwards declined breakfast — he had a board to attend. He told Lord Chelford that the case was 'a very nasty one.'

In fact, the chances were against the captain, and he, Buddle, would wish a consultation with a London surgeon — whoever Lord Chelford lead most confidence in — Sir Francis Seddley, he thought, would be very desirable — but, of course, it was for the family to decide. If the messenger caught the quarter to eleven up train at Dollington, he would be in London at six, and could return with the doctor by the down mail train, and so reach Dollington at ten minutes past four next morning, which would answer, as he would not operate sooner.

As the doctor toddled towards Gylingden, with sympathetic Major Tackson by his side, before they entered the town they were passed by one of the Brandon men riding at a hard canter for Dollington.

'London?' shouted the doctor, as the man touched his hat in passing.

'Yes, Sir.'

'Glad o' that,' said the major, looking after him.

'So am I,' said the learned Buddle. 'I don't see how we're to get the bullet out of him, without mischief. Poor devil, I'm afraid he'll do no good.'

The ladies that morning had tea in their rooms. It was near twelve o'clock when Lord Chelford saw Miss Brandon. She was in the conservatory amongst her flowers, and on seeing him stepped into the drawingroom.

'I hope, Dorcas, you are not angry with me. I've been, I'm afraid, very impertinent; but I was called on to decide for you, in your absence, and they all thought poor Lake could not be moved on to Gylingden without danger.'

'You did quite rightly, Chelford, and I thank you,' said Miss Brandon, coldly; and she seated herself, and continued —

'Pray, what does the doctor really say?'

'He speaks very seriously.'

‘Does he think there is danger?’

‘Very great danger.’

Miss Brandon looked down, and then, with a pale gaze suddenly in Chelford’s face —

‘He thinks he may die?’ said she.

‘Yes,’ said Lord Chelford, in a very low tone, returning her gaze solemnly.

‘And nobody to advise but that village doctor, Buddle — that’s hardly credible, I think.’

‘Pardon me. At his suggestion I have sent for Sir Francis Seddley, from town, and I hope he may arrive early tomorrow morning.’

‘Why, Stanley Lake may die to-day.’

‘He does not apprehend that. But it is necessary to remove the bullet, and the operation will be critical, and it is for that specially that Sir Francis is coming down.’

‘It is to take place tomorrow, and he’ll die in that operation. You know he’ll die,’ said Dorcas, pale and fierce.

‘I assure you, Dorcas, I have been perfectly frank. He looks upon poor Lake as in very great danger — but that is all.’

‘What brutes you men are!’ said Dorcas, with a wild scorn in her look and accent, and her cheeks flushed with passion. ‘You knew quite well last night there was to be this wicked duel in the morning — and you — a magistrate — a lord-lieutenant — what are you? — you connived at this bloody conspiracy — and *he* — your own cousin, Chelford — your cousin!’

Chelford looked at her, very much amazed.

‘Yes; you are worse than Sir Harry Bracton — for you’re no fool; and worse than that wicked old man. Major Jackson — who shall never enter these doors again — for he was employed — trusted in their brutal plans; but you had no excuse and every opportunity — and you have allowed your Cousin Stanley to be murdered.’

‘You do me great injustice, Dorcas. I did not know, or even suspect that a hostile meeting between poor Lake and Bracton was thought of. I merely heard that there had been some trifling altercation in the supper-room; and when, intending to make peace between them, I alluded to it, just before we left, and Bracton said it was really nothing — quite blown over — and that he could not recollect what either had said. I was entirely deceived — you know I speak truth — quite deceived. They think it fair, you know, to dupe other people in such affairs; and I will also say,' he continued, a little haughtily, 'that you might have spared your censure until at least you had heard what I had to say.'

'I do believe you, Chelford; you are not vexed with me. Won't you shake hands?'

He took her hand with a smile.

'And now,' said she, 'Chelford, ought not we to send for poor Rachel: her only brother? Is not it sad?'

'Certainly; shall I ask my mother, or will you write?'

'I will write,' she said.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN WHICH MISS RACHEL LAKE COMES TO BRANDON, AND DOCTOR BUDDLE CALLS AGAIN.

In about an hour afterwards, Rachel Lake arrived in the carriage which had been despatched for her with Dorcas's note.

She was a good deal muffled up, and looked very pale, and asked whether Miss Brandon was in her room, whither she glided rapidly up stairs. It was a sort of boudoir or dressing-room, with a few pretty old portraits and miniatures, and a number of Louis Quatorze looking-glasses hung round, and such pretty quaint cabriole gilt and pale green furniture.

Dorcas met her at the door, and they kissed silently.

'How is he, Dorcas?'

'Very ill, dear, I'm afraid — sit down, darling.'

Rachel was relieved, for in her panic she almost feared to ask if he were living.

'Is there immediate danger?'

'The doctor says not, but he is very much alarmed for tomorrow.'

'Oh! Dorcas, darling, he'll die; I know it. Oh! merciful Heaven! how tremendous.'

'You will not be so frightened in a little time. You have only just heard it, Rachel dearest, and you are startled. I was so myself.'

'I'd like to see him, Dorcas.'

'Sit here a little and rest, dear. The doctor will make his visit immediately, and then we can ask him. He's a goodnatured little creature — poor old Buddle — and I am certain if it can safely be, he won't prevent it.'

'Where is he, darling — where is Stanley?'

So Dorcas described as well as she could.

'Oh, poor Stanley. Oh, Stanley — poor Stanley,' gasped Rachel, with white lips. 'You have no idea, Dorcas — no one can — how terrific it is. Oh, poor Stanley — poor Stanley.'

'Drink this water, darling; you must not be so excited.'

'Dorcas, say what the doctor may, see him I must.'

‘There is time to think of that, darling.’

‘Has he spoken to anyone?’

‘Very little, I believe. He whispers a few words now and then — that is all.’

‘Nothing to Chelford — nothing particular, I mean?’

‘No — nothing — at least that I have heard of.’

‘Did he wish to see no one?’

‘No one, dear.’

‘Not poor William Wylder?’

‘No, dear. I don’t suppose he cares more for a clergyman than for any other man; none of his family ever did, when they came to lie on a bed of sickness, or of death either.’

‘No, no,’ said Rachel, wildly; ‘I did not mean to pray. I was not thinking of that; but William Wylder was different; and he did not mention *me* either?’

Dorcas shook her head.

‘I knew it,’ continued Rachel, with a kind of shudder. ‘And tell me, Dorcas, does he know that he is in danger — such imminent danger?’

‘That I cannot say, Rachel, dear. I don’t believe doctors like to tell their patients so.’

There was a silence of some minutes, and Rachel, clasping her hands in an agony, said —

‘Oh, yes — he’s gone — he’s certainly gone; and I remain alone under that dreadful burden.’

‘Please, Miss Brandon, the doctor’s down stairs with Captain Lake,’ said the maid, opening the door.

‘Is Lord Chelford with him?’

‘Yes, Miss, please.’

‘Then tell him I will be so obliged if he will come here for a moment, when the doctor is gone; and ask the doctor now, from me, how he thinks Captain Lake.’

In a little while the maid returned. Captain Lake was not so low, and rather better than this morning, the doctor said; and Rachel raised her eyes, and whispered an agitated thanksgiving. ‘Was Lord Chelford coming?’

‘His lordship had left the room when she returned, and Mr. Larcom said he was with Lawyer Larkin in the library.’

‘Mr. Larkin can wait. Tell Lord Chelford I wish very much to see him here.’

So away went the maid again. A message in that great house was a journey; and there was a little space before they heard a knock at the door of Dorcas’s pretty room, and Lord Chelford, duly invited, came in.

Lord Chelford was surprised to see Rachel, and held her hand, while he congratulated her on the more favourable opinion of the physician this afternoon; and then he gave them, as fully and exactly as he could, all the lights emitted by Dr. Buddle, and endeavoured to give his narrative as cheerful and confident an air as he could. Then, at length, he recollected that Mr. Larkin was waiting in the study.

‘I quite forgot Mr. Larkin,’ said he; ‘I left him in the library, and I am so very glad we have had a pleasanter report upon poor Lake this evening; and I am sure we shall all feel more comfortable on seeing Sir Francis Seddley. He *is* such an admirable surgeon; and I feel sure he’ll strike out something for our poor patient. I’ve known him hit upon such original expedients, and make such wonderful successes.’

So with a kind smile he left the room.

Then there was a long pause.

‘Does he really think that Stanley will recover?’ said Rachel.

‘I don’t know; I suppose he hopes it. I don’t know, Rachel, what to think of anyone or anything. What wild beasts they are. How “swift to shed blood,” as poor William Wylder said last Sunday. Have you any idea what they quarrelled about?’

‘None in the world. It was that odious Sir Harry Bracton — was not it?’

‘Why so odious, Rachel? How can you tell which was in the wrong? I only know he seems to be a better marksman than your poor brother.’

Rachel looked at her with something of haughty and surprised displeasure, but said nothing.

‘You look at me, Radie, as if I were a monster — or *monstress*, I should say — whereas I am only a Brandon. Don’t you remember how our great ancestor, who fought for the House of York, changed suddenly to Lancaster, and how Sir Richard left the King and took part with Cromwell, not for any particular advantage, I believe, or for any particular reason even, but for wickedness and wounded pride, perhaps.'

'I don't quite see your meaning, Dorcas. I can't understand how *your* pride has been hurt; but if Stanley had any, I can well imagine what torture it must have endured; wretched, wicked, punished fool!'

'You suspect what they fought about, Radie!'

Rachel made no answer.

'You do, Radie, and why do you dissemble with me?'

'I don't dissemble; I don't care to speak; but if you will have me say so, I *do* suspect — I think it must have originated in jealousy of you.'

'You look, Radie, as if you thought I had managed it — whereas I really did not care.'

'I do not understand you, Dorcas; but you appear to me very cruel, and you smile, as I say so.'

'I smile, because I sometimes think so myself.'

With a fixed and wrathful stare Rachel returned the enigmatical gaze of her beautiful cousin.

'If Stanley dies, Dorcas, Sir Harry Bracton shall hear of it. I'll lose my life, but he shall pay the forfeit of his crime.'

So saying, Rachel left the room, and gliding through passages, and down stairs, she knocked at Stanley's door. The old woman opened it.

'Ah, Dorothy! I'm so glad to see *you* here!' and she put a present in her hard, crumpled hand.

So, noiselessly, Rachel Lake, without more parley, stepped into the room, and closed the door. She was alone with Stanley With a beating heart, and a kind of chill stealing over her, by her brother's bed.

The room was not so dark that she could not see distinctly enough.

There lay her brother, such as he was — still her brother, on the bleak, neutral ground between life and death. His features, peaked and earthy, and that look, so new and peculiar, which does not savour of life upon them. He did not move, but his strange eyes gazed cold and earnest from their deep sockets upon her face in awful silence. Perhaps he thought he saw a phantom.

'Are you better, dear?' whispered Rachel.

His lips stirred and his throat, but he did not speak until a second effort brought utterance, and he murmured, ‘Is that you, Radie?’

‘Yes, dear. Are you better?’

‘*No*. I’m shot. I shall die tonight. Is it night yet?’

‘Don’t despair, Stanley, dear. The great London doctor, Sir Francis Seddley, will be with you early in the morning, and Chelford has great confidence in him. I’m sure he will relieve you.’

‘This is Brandon?’ murmured Lake.

‘Yes, dear.’

She thought he was going to say more, but he remained silent, and she recollected that he ought not to speak, and also that she had that to say which must be said.

Sharp, dark, and strange lay that familiar face upon the white pillow. The faintest indication of something like a peevish sneer; it might be only the lines of pain and fatigue; still it had that unpleasant character remaining fixed on its features.

‘Oh, Stanley! you say you think you are dying. Won’t you send for William Wylder and Chelford, and tell all you know of Mark?’

She saw he was about to say something, and she leaned her head near his lips, and she heard him whisper, —

‘It won’t serve Mark.’

‘I’m thinking of *you*, Stanley — I’m thinking of you.’

To which he said either ‘Yes’ or ‘So.’ She could not distinguish.

‘I view it now quite differently. You said, you know, in the park, you would tell Chelford; and I resisted, I believe, but I don’t now. I had *rather* you did. Yes, Stanley, I conjure you to tell it all.’

The cold lips, with a livid halo round them, murmured, ‘Thank you.’

It was a sneer, very shocking just then, perhaps; but unquestionably a sneer.

‘Poor Stanley!’ she murmured, with a kind of agony, looking down upon that changed face. ‘One word more, Stanley. Remember, it’s I, the only one on earth who stands near you in kindred, your sister, Stanley, who implores of you to take this step before it is too late; at least, to consider.’

He said something. She thought it was ‘I’ll think;’ and then he closed his eyes. It was the only motion she had observed, his face lay just as it had done on the pillow. He had not stirred all the time she was there; and now that his eyelids closed, it seemed to say, our interview is over — the curtain has dropped; and so understanding it, with that one awful look that may be the last, she glided from the bedside, told old Dorothy that he seemed disposed to sleep, and left the room.

There is something awful always in the spectacle of such a sick-bed as that beside which Rachel had just stood. But not quite so dreadful is the sight as are the imaginings and the despair of absence. So reassuring is the familiar spectacle of life, even in its subsidence, so long as bodily torture and mental aberration are absent.

In the meanwhile, on his return to the library, Lord Chelford found his dowager mother in high chat with the attorney, whom she afterwards pronounced 'a very gentlemanlike man for his line of life.'

The conversation, indeed, was chiefly that of Lady Chelford, the exemplary attorney contributing, for the most part, a polite acquiescence, and those reflections which most appositely pointed the moral of her ladyship's tale, which concerned altogether the vagaries of Mark Wylder — a subject which piqued her curiosity and irritated her passions.

It was a great day for Jos. Larkin; for by the time Lord Chelford returned the old lady had asked him to stay for dinner, which he did, notwithstanding his morning dress, to his great inward satisfaction, because he could henceforward mention, 'the other day, when I dined at Brandon,' or 'old Lady Chelford assured me, when last I dined at Brandon;' and he could more intimately speak of 'our friends at Brandon,' and 'the Brandon people,' and, in short, this dinner was very serviceable to the excellent attorney.

It was not very amusing this interchange of thought and feeling between Larkin and the dowager, upon a theme already so well ventilated as Mark Wylder's absconding, and therefore I let it pass.

After dinner, when the dowager's place knew her no more, Lord Chelford resumed his talk with Larkin.

'I am quite confirmed in the view I took at first,' he said. 'Wylder has no claim upon me. There are others on whom much more naturally the care of his money would devolve, and I think that my undertaking the office he proposes, under his present strange circumstances, might appear like an acquiescence in the extraordinary course he has taken, and a sanction generally of his conduct, which I certainly can't approve. So, Mr. Larkin, I have quite made up my mind. I have no business to undertake this trust, simple as it is.'

'I have only, my lord, to bow to your lordship's decision; at the same time I cannot but feel, my lord, how peculiar and painful is the position in which it places me. There are rents to be received by me, and sums handed over, to a considerable — I may say, indeed, a very large amount: and my friend Lake — Captain Lake — now, unhappily, in so very precarious a state, appears to dislike the office, also, and to anticipate annoyance, in the event of his consenting to act. Altogether, your lordship will perceive that the situation is one of considerable, indeed very great embarrassment, as respects me. There is, however, one satisfactory circumstance disclosed in his last letter. His return, he says, cannot be delayed beyond a very few months, perhaps *weeks;* and he states, in his own rough way, that he will then explain the motives of his conduct to the entire satisfaction of all those who are cognizant of the measures which he has adopted — no more claret, thanks — no more — a delicious wine — and he adds, it will then be quite understood that he has acted neither from caprice, nor from any motive other than self-preservation. I assure you, my lord, that is the identical phrase he employs — self-preservation. I all along suspected, or, rather, I mean, supposed, that Mr. Wylder had been placed in this matter under coercion — a — a threat.'

'A little more wine?' asked Lord Chelford, after another interval.

'No — no more, I thank you. Your lordship's very good, and the wine, I may say, excellent — delicious claret; indeed, quite so — ninety shillings a dozen, I should venture to say, and hardly to be had at that figure; but it grows late, I rather think, and the trustees of our little Wesleyan chapel — we've got a little into debt in that quarter, I am sorry to say — and I promised to advise with them this evening at nine o'clock. They have called me to counsel more than once, poor fellows; and so, with your lordship's permission, I'll withdraw.'

Lord Chelford walked with him to the steps. It was a beautiful night — very little moon, but that and the stars wonderfully clear and bright, and all things looking so soft and airy.

‘Try one of these,’ said the peer, presenting his cigar case.

Larkin, with a glow of satisfaction, took one of these noble cigars, and rolled it in his fingers, and smelt it.

‘Fragrant — wonderfully fragrant!’ he observed, meekly, with a connoisseur’s shake of the head.

The night was altogether so charming that Lord Chelford was tempted. So he took his cap, and lighted his cigar, too, and strolled a little way with the attorney.

He walked under the solemn trees — the same under whose airy groyning Wylder and Lake had walked away together on that noteworthy night on which Mark had last turned his back upon the grand old gables and twisted chimneys of Brandon Hall.

This way was rather a round, it must be confessed, to the Lodge — Jos, Larkin’s peaceful retreat. But a stroll with a lord was worth more than that sacrifice, and every incident which helped to make a colourable case of confidential relations at Brandon — a point in which the good attorney had been rather weak hitherto — was justly prized by that virtuous man.

If the trustees, Smith the pork-butcher, old Captain Snoggles, the Town Clerk, and the rest, had to wait some twenty minutes in the drawingroom at the Lodge, so much the better. An apology was, perhaps, the best and most modest shape into which he could throw the advertisement of his dinner at Brandon — his confidential talk with the proud old dowager, and his after-dinner ramble with that rising young peer, Lord Chelford. It would lead him gracefully into detail, and altogether the idea, the situation, the scene and prospect, were so soothing and charming, that the good attorney felt a silent exaltation as he listened to Lord Chelford’s two or three delighted sentences upon the illimitable wonders and mysteries glimmering in the heavens above them.

The cigar was delicious, the air balmy and pleasant, his digestion happy, the society unexceptionably aristocratic — a step had just been gained, and his consideration in the town and the country round improved, by the occurrences of the evening, and his whole system, in consequence, in a state so serene, sweet and satisfactory, that I really believe there was genuine moisture in his pink, dovelike eyes, as he lifted them to the heavens, and murmured, ‘Beautiful, beautiful!’ And he mistook his sensations for a holy rapture and silent worship.

Cigars, like other pleasures, are transitory. Lord Chelford threw away his stump, tendered his case again to Mr. Larkin, and then took his leave, walking slowly homewards.

CHAPTER XL.

THE ATTORNEY'S ADVENTURES ON THE WAY HOME.

Mr. Jos. Larkin was now moving alone, under the limbs of the Brandon trees. He knew the path, as he had boasted to Lord Chelford, from his boyhood; and, as he pursued his way, his mind got upon the accustomed groove, and amused itself with speculations respecting the vagaries of Mark Wylder.

'I wonder what his lordship thinks. He was very close — very' ruminated Larkin; 'no distinct ideas about it possibly; and did not seem to wish to lead me to the subject. Can he *know* anything? Eh, can he possibly? Those high fellows are very knowing often — so much on the turf, and all that — very sharp and very deep.'

He was thinking of a certain noble lord in difficulties, who had hit a client of his rather hard, and whose affairs did not reflect much credit upon their noble conductor.

'Aye, I dare say, deep enough, and intimate with the Lakes. He expects to be home in two months' time. *He's* a deep fellow too; he does not like to let people know what he's about. I should not be surprised if he came tomorrow. Lake and Lord Chelford may both know more than they say. Why should they both object merely to receive and fund his money? They think he wants to get them into a fix — hey? If I'm to conduct his business, I ought to know it; if he keeps a secret from me, affecting all his business relations, like this, and driving him about the world like an absconding bankrupt, how can I advise him?'

All this drifted slowly through his mind, and each suggestion had its collateral speculations; and so it carried him pleasantly a good way on his walk, and he was now in the shadow of the dense copsewood that mantles the deep ravine which debouches into Redman's Dell.

The road was hardly two yards wide, and the wood walled it in, and overhung it occasionally in thick, irregular masses. As the attorney marched leisurely onward, he saw, or fancied that he saw, now and then, in uncertain glimpses, something white in motion among the trees beside him.

At first he did not mind; but it continued, and grew gradually unpleasant. It might be a goat, a white goat; but no, it was too tall for that. Had he seen it at all? Aye! there it was, no mistake now. A poacher, maybe? But their poachers were not of the dangerous sort, and there had not been a robber about Gylingden within the memory of man. Besides, why on earth should either show himself in that absurd way?

He stopped — he listened — he stared suspiciously into the profound darkness. Then he thought he heard a rustling of the leaves near him, and he hallooed, ‘Who’s there?’ But no answer came.

So, taking heart of grace, he marched on, still zealously peering among the trees, until, coming to an opening in the pathway, he more distinctly saw a tall, white figure, standing in an ape-like attitude, with its arms extended, grasping two boughs, and stooping, as if peeping cautiously, as he approached.

The good attorney drew up and stared at this gray phantasm, saying to himself, ‘Yes,’ in a sort of quiet hiss.

He stopped in a horror, and as he gazed, the figure suddenly drew back and disappeared.

‘Very pleasant this!’ said the attorney, after a pause, recovering a little. ‘What on earth can it be?’

Jos. Larkin could not tell which way it had gone. He had already passed the midway point, where this dark path begins to descend through the ravine into Redman’s Dell. He did not like going forward — but to turn back might bring him again beside the mysterious figure. And though he was not, of course, afraid of ghosts, nor in this part of the world, of robbers, yet somehow he did not know what to make of this gigantic gray monkey.

So, not caring to stay longer, and seeing nothing to be gained by turning back, the attorney buttoned the top button of his coat, and holding his head very erect, and placing as much as he could of the path between himself and the side where the figure had disappeared, marched on steadily. It was too dark, and the way not quite regular enough, to render any greater speed practicable.

From the thicket, as he proceeded, he heard a voice — he had often shot woodcocks in that cover — calling in a tone that sounded in his ears like banter, ‘Mark — Mark — Mark — Mark.’

He stopped, holding his breath, and the sound ceased.

‘Well, this certainly is not usual,’ murmured Mr. Larkin, who was a little more perturbed than perhaps he quite cared to acknowledge even to himself. ‘Some fellow perhaps watching for a friend — or tricks, maybe.’

Then the attorney, trying his supercilious smile in the dark, listened again for a good while, but nothing was heard except those whisperings of the wind which poets speak of. He looked before him with his eyebrows screwed, in a vain effort to pierce the darkness, and the same behind him; and then after another pause, he began uncomfortably to move down the path once more.

In a short time the same voice, with the same uncertain echo among the trees, cried faintly, ‘Mark — Mark,’ and then a pause; then again, ‘Mark — Mark — Mark,’ and then it grew more distant, and sounded among the trees and reverberations of the glen like laughter.

‘Mark — ha — ha — hark — ha — ha — ha — hark — Mark — Mark — ha — ha — hark!’

‘Who’s there?’ cried the attorney, in a tone rather ferocious from fright, and stamping on the path. But his summons and the provocation died away together in the profoundest silence.

Mr. Jos. Larkin did not repeat his challenge. This cry of ‘Mark!’ was beginning to connect itself uncomfortably in his mind with his speculations about his wealthy client, which in that solitude and darkness began to seem not so entirely pure and disinterested as he was in the habit of regarding them, and a sort of wood-demon, such as a queer little schoolfellow used long ago to read a tale about in an old German storybook, was now dogging his darksome steps, and hanging upon his flank with a vindictive design.

Jos. Larkin was not given to fancy, nor troubled with superstition. His religion was of a comfortable, punctual, businesslike cast, which according with his genius — denied him, indeed, some things for which, in truth, he had no taste — but in no respect interfered with his main mission upon earth, which was getting money. He had found no difficulty hitherto in serving God and Mammon. The joint business prospered. Let us suppose it was one of those falterings of faith, which try the best men, that just now made him feel a little queer, and gave his thoughts about Mark Wylder, now grown habitual, that new and ghastly complexion which made the situation so unpleasant.

He wished himself more than once well out of this confounded pass, and listened nervously for a good while, and stared once more, half-frightened, in various directions, into the darkness.

'If I thought there could be anything the least wrong or reprehensible — we are all fallible — in my allowing my mind to turn so much upon my client, I can certainly say I should be very far from allowing it — I shall certainly consider it — and I may promise myself to decide in a Christian spirit, and if there be a doubt, to give it against myself.'

This resolution, which was, he trusted, that of a righteous man, was, I am afraid, the effect rather of fright than reflection, and employed in that sense somewhat in the manner of an exorcism — whispered rather to the ghost than to his conscience.

I am sure Larkin did not himself suppose this. On the contrary, he really believed, I am convinced, that he scouted the ghost, and had merely volunteered this salutary self-examination as an exercise of conscience. He could not, however, have doubted that he was very nervous — and that he would have been glad of the companionship even of one of the Gylingden shopkeepers, through this infested bit of wood.

Having again addressed himself to his journey, he was now approaching that part of the path where the trees recede a little, leaving a considerable space unoccupied at either side of his line of march. Here there was faint moonlight and starlight, very welcome; but a little in advance of him, where the copsewood closed in again, just above those stone steps which Lake and his sister Rachel had mounted together upon the night of the memorable rendezvous, he fancied that he again saw the gray figure cowering among the foremost stems of the wood.

It was a great shock. He stopped short — and as he stared upon the object, he felt that electric chill and rising of the hair which accompany supernatural panic.

As he gazed, however, it was gone. Yes. At all events, he could see it no more. Had he seen it there at all? He was in such an odd state he could not quite trust himself. He looked back hesitatingly. But he remembered how very long and dark the path that way was, and how unpleasant his adventures there had been. And although there was a chance that the gray monkey was lurking somewhere near the path, still there was now but a short space between him and the broad carriage track down Redman's Dell, and once upon that he considered himself almost in the street of Gylingden.

So he made up his mind, and marched resolutely onward, and had nearly reached that point at which the converging screen of thicket again overshadows the pathway, when close at his side he saw the tall, white figure push itself forward among the branches, and in a startling undertone of enquiry, like a conspirator challenging his brother, a voice — the same which he had so often heard during this walk — cried over his shoulder,

'Mark *Wylder*!'

Larkin sprung back a pace or two, turning his face full upon the challenger, who in his turn was perhaps affrighted, for the same voice uttered a sort of strangled shriek, and he heard the branches crack and rustle as he pushed his sudden retreat through them — leaving the attorney more horrified than ever.

No other sound but the melancholy soughing of the night-breeze, and the hoarse murmur of the stream rising from the stony channel of Redman's Dell, were now, or during the remainder of his walk through these haunted grounds, again audible.

So, with rapid strides passing the dim gables of Redman's Farm, he at length found himself, with a sense of indescribable relief, upon the Gylingden road, and could see the twinkling lights in the windows of the main street.

CHAPTER XLI.

IN WHICH SIR FRANCIS SEDDLEY MANIPULATES.

At about two o’clock Buddle was called up, and spirited away to Brandon in a dog-cart. A haemorrhage, perhaps, a sudden shivering, and inflammation — a sinking, maybe, or delirium — some awful change, probably — for Buddle did not return.

Old Major Jackson heard of it, in his early walk, at Buddle’s door. He had begun to grow more hopeful. But hearing this he walked home, and replaced the dress-coat and silk stockings he had ventured to remove, promptly in his valise, which he buckled down and locked — swallowed with agitated voracity some fragments of breakfast — got on his easy boots and gaiters — brushed his best hat, and locked it into its leather case — placed his rug, greatcoat, and umbrella, and a rough walking-stick for service, and a gold-tipped, exquisite cane, for duty on promenades of fashion, neatly on top of his valise, and with his old white hat and shooting-coat on, looking and whistling as much as possible as usual, he popped carelessly into John Hobbs’s stable, where he was glad to see three horses standing, and he mentally chose the black cob for his flight to Dollington.

‘A bloodthirsty rascal that Bracton,’ muttered the major. The expenses were likely to be awful, and some allowance was to be made for his state of mind.

He was under Doctor Buddle’s porch, and made a flimsy rattle with his thin brass knocker. ‘Maybe he has returned?’ He did not believe it, though.

Major Jackson was very nervous, indeed. The up trains from Dollington were ‘few and far between,’ and that *diddled* Crutchleigh would be down on him the moment the breath was out of poor Lake. ‘It was plain yesterday at the sessions that infernal woman (his wife) had been at him. She hates Bracton like poison, because he likes the Brandon people; and, by Jove, he’ll have up every soul concerned. The Devil and his wife I call them. If poor Lake goes off anywhere between eleven and four o’clock, I’m nabbed, by George!’

The door was opened. The doctor peeped out of his parlour.

‘Well?’ enquired the major, confoundedly frightened.

‘Pretty well, thank ye, but awfully fagged — up all night, and no use.’

‘But how *is* he?’ asked the major, with a dreadful qualm of dismay.

‘Same as yesterday — no change — only a little bleeding last night — not arterial; venous you know — only venous.’

The major thought he spoke of the goddess, and though he did not well comprehend, said he was ‘glad of it.’

‘Think he’ll do then?’

‘He may — very unlikely though. A nasty case, as you can imagine.’

‘He’ll certainly not go, poor fellow, before four o’clock P.M. I dare say — eh?’

The major’s soul was at the Dollington station, and was regulating poor Lake’s departure by ‘Bradshaw’s Guide.’

‘Who knows? We expect Sir Francis this morning. Glad to have a share of the responsibility off my shoulders, I can tell you. Come in and have a chop, will you?’

‘No, thank you, I’ve had my breakfast.’

‘You have, have you? Well, I haven’t,’ cried the doctor, with an agreeable chuckle, shaking the major’s hand, and disappearing again into his parlour.

I found in my lodgings in London, on my return from Doncaster, some two months later, a copy of the county paper of this date, with a cross scrawled beside the piece of intelligence which follows. I knew that tremulous cross. It was traced by the hand of poor old Miss Kybes — with her many faults always kind to me. It bore the Brandon postmark, and altogether had the impress of authenticity. It said: —

‘We have much pleasure in stating that the severe injury sustained four days since by Captain Stanley Lake, at the time a visitor at the Lodge, the picturesque residence of Josiah Larkin, Esq., in the vicinity of Gylingden, is not likely to prove so difficult of treatment or so imminently dangerous as was at first apprehended. The gallant gentleman was removed from the scene of his misadventure to Brandon Hall, close to which the accident occurred, and at which mansion his noble relatives, Lord Chelford and the Dowager Lady Chelford, are at present staying on a visit. Sir Francis Seddley came down express from London, and assisted by our skilful county practitioner, Humphrey Buddle, Esq., M.D. of Gylingden, operated most successfully on Saturday last, and we are happy to say the gallant patient has since been going on as favourably as could possibly have been anticipated. Sir Francis Seddley returned to London on Sunday afternoon.'

Within a week after the operation, Buddle began to talk so confidently about his patient, that the funereal cloud that overhung Brandon had almost totally disappeared, and Major Jackson had quite unpacked his portmanteau.

About a week after the 'accident' there came one of Mr. Mark Wylder's strange letters to Mr. Jos. Larkin. This time it was from Marseilles, and bore date the 27th November. It was much the longest he had yet received, and was in the nature of a despatch, rather than of those short notes in which he had hitherto, for the most part, communicated.

Like the rest of his letters it was odd, but written, as it seemed, in better spirits.

'Dear Larkin, — You will be surprised to find me in this port, but I think my secret cruise is nearly over now, and you will say the plan was a masterstroke, and well executed by a poor devil, with nobody to advise him. I am coiling such a web round them, and making it fast, as you may see a spider, first to this point and then to the other, that I won't leave my persecutors one solitary chance of escape. I'll draw it quietly round and round — closer and closer — till they can neither blow nor budge, and then up to the yardarm they go, with what breath is left in them. You don't know yet *how* I am dodging, or why my measures are taken; but I'll shorten your long face a good inch with a genuine broad grin when you learn how it all was. I may see you to tell the story in four weeks' time; but keep this close. Don't mention where I write from, nor even so much as my name. I have reasons for everything, which you may guess, I dare say, being a sharp chap; and it is not for nothing, be very sure, that I am running this queer rig, masquerading, hiding, and dodging, like a runaway forger, which is not pleasant anyway, and if you doubt it, only try; but needs must when the old boy drives. He is a clever fellow, no doubt, but has been sometimes outwitted before now. You must arrange about Chelford and Lake. I don't know where Lake is staying. I don't suppose at Brandon; but he won't stay in the country nor spend his money to please you or I. Therefore you must have him at your house — be sure — and I will square it with you; I think three pounds a week ought to do it very handsome. Don't be a muff and give him expensive wines — a pint of sherry is plenty between you; and when he dines at his club half-a-pint does him. *I* know; but if he costs you more, I hereby promise to pay it. Won't that do? Well, about Chelford: I have been thinking he takes airs, and maybe he is on his high-horse about that awkward business about Miss Brandon. But there is no reason why Captain Lake should object. He has only to hand you a receipt in my name for the amount of cheques you may give him, and to lodge a portion of it where I told him, and the rest to buy Consols; and I suppose he will expect payment for his no-trouble. Every fellow, particularly these gentlemanlike fellows, they have a pluck at you when they can. If he is at that, give him at the rate of a hundred a-year, or a hundred and fifty if you think he won't do for less; though 100*l*. ought to be a good deal to Lake; and tell him I have a promise of the adjutancy of the county militia, if he likes that; and I am sure of a seat in Parliament either for the county or for Dollington, as you know, and can do better for him then; and I rely on you, one way or another, to make him undertake it. And now for myself: I think my vexation is very near ended. I have not fired a gun yet, and they little think what a raking broadside I'll give them. Any of the county people you meet, tell them I'm making a little excursion on the Continent; and if they go to particularise, you may say the places I have been at. Don't let anyone know more. I wish there was any way of stopping that old she' — (it looked like dragon or devil — but was traced over with a cloud of flourishes, and only 'Lady Chelford's mouth' was left untouched). 'Don't expect to hear from me so long a yarn for some time again; and don't write. I don't stay long anywhere, and don't carry my own name — and never ask for letters at the post. I've a good glass, and can see pretty far, and make a fair guess enough what's going on aboard the enemy.

'I remain always,
'Dear Larkin,
'Ever yours truly,

'MARK WYLDER.'

'He hardly trusts Lake more than he does me, I presume,' murmured Mr. Larkin, elevating his tall bald head with an offended and supercilious air;

and letting the thin, open letter fall, or rather throwing it with a slight whisk upon the table.

‘No, I take leave to think he certainly does *not*. Lake has got private directions about the disposition of a portion of the money. Of course, if there are persons to be dealt with who are not pleasantly approachable by respectable professional people — in fact it would not suit me. It is really rather a compliment, and relieves me of the unpleasant necessity of saying — no.’

Yet Mr. Larkin was very sore, and curious, and in a measure, hated both Lake and Wylder for their secret confidences, and was more than ever resolved to get at the heart of Mark’s mystery.

CHAPTER XLII.

A PARAGRAPH IN THE COUNTY PAPER.

The nature of his injury considered, Captain Lake recovered with wonderful regularity and rapidity. In four weeks he was out rather pale and languid but still able to walk without difficulty, leaning on a stick, for ten or fifteen minutes at a time. In another fortnight he had made another great advance, had thrown away his crutch handled stick, and recovered flesh and vigour. In a fortnight more he had grown quite like himself again; and in a very few weeks more, I read in the same county paper, transmitted to me by the same fair hands, but this time not with a cross, but three distinct notes of admiration standing tremulously at the margin of the paragraph, the following to me for a time incredible, and very nearly to this day amazing, announcement: —

‘MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.

‘The auspicious event so interesting to our county, which we have this day to announce, though for some time upon the *tapis*, has been attended with as little publicity as possible. The contemplated union between Captain Stanley Lake, late of the Guards, sole surviving son of the late General Williams Stanley Stanley Lake, of Plasrhwyn, and the beautiful and accomplished Miss Brandon, of Brandon Hall, in this county, was celebrated in the ancestral chapel of Brandon, situated within the manorial boundaries, in the immediate vicinity of the town of Gylingden, on yesterday. Although the marriage was understood to be strictly private — none but the immediate relations of the bride and bridegroom being present — the bells of Gylingden rang out merry peals throughout the day, and the town was tastefully decorated with flags, and brilliantly illuminated at night.

‘A deputation of the tenantry of the Gylingden and the Longmoor estates, together with those of the Brandon estate, went in procession to Brandon Hall in the afternoon, and read a well-conceived and affectionate address, which was responded to in appropriate terms by Captain Lake, who received them, with his beautiful bride at his side, in the great gallery — perhaps the noblest apartment in that noble ancestral mansion. The tenantry were afterwards handsomely entertained under the immediate direction of Josiah Larkin, Esq., of the Lodge, the respected manager of the Brandon estates, at the "Brandon Arms," in the town of Gylingden. It is understood that the great territorial influence of the Brandon family will obtain a considerable accession in the estates of the bridegroom in the south of England.'

There was some more which I need not copy, being very like what we usually see on such occasions.

I read this piece of intelligence half a dozen times over during breakfast. 'How that beautiful girl has thrown herself away!' I thought. 'Surely the Chelfords, who have an influence there, ought to have exerted it to prevent her doing anything so mad. His estates in the south of England, indeed! Why, he can't have £300 a year clear from that little property in Devon. He *is* such a liar; and so absurd, as if he could succeed in deceiving anyone upon the subject.'

So I read the paragraph over again, and laid down the paper, simply saying, 'Well, certainly, that *is* disgusting!'

I had heard of his duel. It was also said that it had in some way had reference to Miss Brandon. But this was the only rumoured incident which would at all have prepared one for the occurrence. I tried to recollect anything particular in his manner — there was nothing; and she positively seemed to dislike him. I had been utterly mystified, and so, I presume, had all the other lookers-on.

Well! after all, 'twas no particular business of mine.

At the club, I saw it in the 'Morning Post;' and an hour after, old Joe Gabloss, that prosy Argus who knows everything, recounted the details with patient precision, and in legal phrase, 'put in' letters from two or three country houses proving his statement.

So there was no doubting it longer: and Captain Stanley Lake, late of Her Majesty's —— Regiment of Guards, idler, scamp, coxcomb, and the beautiful Dorcas Brandon, heiress of Brandon, were man and wife.

I wrote to my fair friend, Miss Kybes, and had an answer confirming, if that were needed, the public announcement, and mentioning enigmatically, that it had caused ‘a great deal of conversation.’

The posture of affairs in the small world of Gylingden, except in the matter of the alliance just referred to, was not much changed.

Since the voluminous despatch from Marseilles, promising his return so soon, not a line had been received from Mark Wylder. He might arrive any day or night. He might possibly have received some unexpected check — if not checkmate, in that dark and deep game on which he seemed to have staked so awfully. Mr. Jos. Larkin sometimes thought one thing, sometimes another.

In the meantime, Captain Lake accepted the trust. Larkin at times thought there was a constant and secret correspondence going on between him and Mark Wylder, and that he was his agent in adjusting some complicated and villainous piece of diplomacy by means of the fund — secret-service money — which Mark had placed at his disposal.

He, Mr. Larkin, was treated like a child in this matter, and his advice never so much as asked, nor his professional honour accredited by the smallest act of confidence.

Sometimes his suspicions took a different turn, and he thought that Lake might be one of those ‘persecutors’ of whom Mark spoke with such mysterious hatred; and that the topic of their correspondence was, perhaps, some compromise, the subject or the terms of which would not bear the light.

Lake certainly made two visits to London, one of them of a week’s duration. The attorney being a sharp, long-headed fellow, who knew very well what business was, knew perfectly well, too, that two or three short letters might have settled any legitimate business which his gallant friend had in the capital.

But Lake was now married, and under the incantation whistled over him by the toothless Archdeacon of Mundlebury, had sprung up into a county magnate, and was worth cultivating, and to be treated tenderly.

So the attorney’s business was to smile and watch — to watch, and of course, to pray as heretofore — but specially to watch. He himself hardly knew all that was passing in his own brain. There are operations of physical nature which go on actively without your being aware of them; and the moral respiration, circulation, insensible perspiration, and all the rest of that peculiar moral system which exhibited its type in Jos. Larkin, proceeded automatically in the immortal structure of that gentleman.

Being very gentlemanlike in externals, with a certain grace, amounting very nearly to elegance, and having applied himself diligently to please the county people, that proud fraternity, remembering his father's estates, condoned his poverty, and took Captain Lake by the hand, and lifted him into their superb, though not very entertaining order.

There were solemn festivities at Brandon, and festive solemnities at the principal county houses in return. Though not much of a sportsman, Lake lent himself handsomely to all the sporting proceedings of the county, and subscribed in a way worthy of the old renown of Brandon Hall to all sorts of charities and galas. So he was getting on very pleasantly with his new neighbours, and was likely to stand very fairly in that dull, but not unfriendly society.

About three weeks after this great county marriage, there arrived, this time from Frankfort, a sharp letter, addressed to Jos. Larkin, Esq. It said: —

'My Dear Sir, — I think I have reason to complain. I have just seen by accident the announcement of the marriage at Brandon. I think as my friend, and a friend to the Brandon family, you ought to have done something to delay, if you could not stop it. Of course, you had the settlements, and devil's in it if you could not have beat about a while — it was not so quick with me — and not doubled the point in a single tack; and you know the beggar has next to nothing. Any way, it was your duty to have printed some notice that the thing was thought of. If you had put it, like a bit of news, in "Galignani," I would have seen it, and known what to do. Well, that ship's blew up. But I won't let all go. The cur will begin to try for the county or for Dollington. You must quietly stop that, mind; and if he persists, just you put an advertisement in "Galignani," saying *Mr. Smith will take notice, that the other party is desirous to purchase, and becoming very pressing*. Just you hoist that signal, and *somebody* will bear down, and blaze into him at all hazards — you'll see how. Things have not gone quite smooth with me since; but it won't be long till I run up my flag again, and take the command. Be perfectly civil with Stanley Lake till I come on board — that is indispensable; and keep this letter as close from every eye as sealed orders. You may want a trifle to balk S.L.'s electioneering, and there's an order on Lake for 200l. Don't trifle about the county and borough. He must have no footing in either till I return.

'Yours, dear Larkin,

'Very truly

'(but look after my business better),

'M. WYLDER.'

The order on Lake, a little note, was enclosed: —

'Dear Lake, — I wish you joy, and all the good wishes going, as I could not make the prize myself.

'Be so good to hand my lawyer, Mr. Jos. Larkin, of the Lodge, Gylingden, 200l. sterling, on my account.

'Yours, dear Lake,

'Very faithfully,

'M. WYLDER.

200l.)

'23rd Feb., &c. &c.'

When Jos. Larkin presented this little order, it was in the handsome square room in which Captain Lake transacted business — a lofty apartment, wainscoted in carved oak, and with a great stone mantelpiece, with the Wylder arms, projecting in bold relief, in the centre, and a florid scroll, with 'RESURGAM' standing forth as sharp as the day it was chiselled nearly three hundred years before.

There was some other business — Brandon business — to be talked over first; and that exhausted, Mr. Larkin sat as usual, with one long thigh crossed upon the other — his arm thrown over the back of his chair, and his tall, bald head a little back, and his small mild eyes twinkling through their pink lids on the enigmatical captain, who had entered upon the march of ambition in a spirit so audacious and conquering.

'I had a line from Mr. Mark Wylder yesterday afternoon, as usual without any address but the postmark;' and good Mr. Larkin laughed a mild, little patient laugh, and lifted his open hand, and shook his head. 'It really is growing too absurd — a mere order upon you to hand me 200l. How I'm to dispose of it, I have not the faintest notion.'

And he laughed again; at the same time he gracefully poked the little note, between two fingers, to Captain Lake, who glanced full on him, for a second, as he took it.

‘And how is Mark?’ enquired Lake, with his odd, sly smile, as he scrawled a little endorsement on the order. ‘Does he say anything?’

‘No; absolutely nothing — he’s a very strange client!’ said Larkin, laughing again. ‘There can be no objection, of course, to your reading it; and he thinks — he thinks — he’ll be here soon again — oh, here it is.’

Mr. Larkin had been fumbling, first in his deep waistcoat, and then in his breastpocket, as if for the letter, which was locked fast into the iron safe, with Chubb’s patent lock, in his office at the Lodge. But it would not have done to have kept a secret from Captain Lake, of Brandon; and therefore his not seeing the note was a mere accident.

‘Oh! no — stupid! — that’s Mullett and Hock’s. I have not got it with me; but it does not signify, for there’s nothing in it. I hope I shall soon be favoured with his directions as to what to do with the money.’

‘He’s an odd fellow; and I don’t know how he feels towards me; but on my part there is no feeling, I do assure you, but the natural desire to live on the friendly terms which our ties of family and our position in the county’ —

Stanley Lake was writing the cheque for 200l. meanwhile, and handed it to Larkin; and as that gentleman penned a receipt, the captain continued — his eyes lowered to the little vellum-bound book in which he was now making an entry: —

‘You have handed me a large sum, Mr. Larkin — 3,276l. 11s. 4d. I undertook this, you know, on the understanding that it was not to go on very long; and I find my own business pretty nearly as much as I can manage. Is Wylder at all definite as to when we may expect his return?’

‘Oh, dear no — quite as usual — he expects to be here soon; but that is all. I so wish I had brought his note with me; but I’m positive that is all.’

So, this little matter settled, the lawyer took his leave.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AN EVIL EYE LOOKS ON THE VICAR.

There were influences of a wholly unsuspected kind already gathering round the poor vicar, William Wylder; as worlds first begin in thinnest vapour, and whirl themselves in time into consistency and form, so do these dark machinations, which at times gather round unsuspecting mortals as points of revolution, begin nebulously and intangibly, and grow in volume and in density, till a colossal system, with its inexorable tendencies and forces, crushes into eternal darkness the centre it has enveloped.

Thou shalt not covet; thou shalt not cast an eye of desire; out of the heart proceed *murders*; — these dreadful realities shape themselves from so filmy a medium as thought!

Ever since his conference with the vicar, good Mr. Larkin had been dimly thinking of a thing. The good attorney's weakness was money. It was a speck at first; a metaphysical microscope of no conceivable power could have developed its exact shape and colour — a mere speck, floating, as it were, in a transparent kyst, in his soul — a mere germ — by-and-by to be an impish embryo, and ripe for action. When lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death.

The vicar's troubles grew and gathered, as such troubles will; and the attorney gave him his advice; and the business of the Rev. William Wylder gradually came to occupy a good deal of his time. Here was a new reason for wishing to know really how Mark Wylder stood. William had undoubtedly the reversion of the estate; but the attorney suspected sometimes — just from a faint phrase which had once escaped Stanley Lake — as the likeliest solution, that Mark Wylder had made a left-handed marriage somehow and somewhere, and that a subterranean wife and family would emerge at an unlucky moment, and squat upon that remainder, and defy the world to disturb them. This gave to his plans and dealings in relation to the vicar a character of irresolution and caprice foreign to his character, which was grim and decided enough when his data were clear, and his object in sight.

William Wylder, meanwhile, was troubled, and his mind clouded by more sorrows than one.

Poor William Wylder had those special troubles which haunt nervous temperaments and speculative minds, when under the solemn influence of religion. What the great Luther called, without describing them, his ‘tribulations’ — those dreadful doubts and apathies which at times menace and darken the radiant fabric of faith, and fill the soul with nameless horrors. The worst of these is, that unlike other troubles, they are not always safely to be communicated to those who love us best. These terrors and dubitations are infectious. Other spiritual troubles, too, there are; and I suppose our good vicar was not exempt from them any more than other Christians.

The best man, the simplest man that ever lived, has his reserves. The conscious frailty of mortality owes that sad reverence to itself, and to the esteem of others. You can’t be too frank and humble when you have wronged your neighbour; but keep your offences against God to yourself, and let your battle with your own heart be waged under the eye of Him alone. The frankness of the sentimental Jean Jacques Rousseau, and of my coarse friend, Mark Wylder, is but a damnable form of vicious egotism. A miserable sinner have I been, my friend, but details profit neither thee nor me. The inner man had best be known only to himself and his Maker. I like that good and simple Welsh parson, of Beaumaris, near two hundred years ago, who with a sad sort of humour, placed for motto under his portrait, done in stained glass, *nunc primum transparui*.

But the spiritual tribulation which came and went was probably connected with the dreadful and incessant horrors of his money trouble. The gigantic Brocken spectre projected from himself upon the wide horizon of his futurity.

The poor vicar! He felt his powers forsaking him. Hope, the life of action, was gone. Despair is fatalism, and can’t help itself. The inevitable mountain was always on his shoulders. He could not rise — he could not stir. He could scarcely turn his head and look up beseechingly from the corners of his eyes.

Why is that fellow so supine? Why is his work so ill done, when he ought most to exert himself? He disgusts the world with his hang-dog looks. Alas! with the need for action, the power of action is gone. Despair — distraction

— the Furies sit with him. Stunned, stupid, and wild — always agitated — it is not easy to compose his sermons as finely as heretofore. He is always jotting down little sums in addition and subtraction. The cares of the world — the miseries of what the world calls ‘difficulties’ and a ‘struggle’ — these were for the poor vicar; — the worst torture, for aught we know, which an average soul out of hell can endure. Other sorrows bear healing on their wings; — this one is the Promethean vulture. It is a falling into the hands of men, not of God. The worst is, that its tendencies are so godless. It makes men bitter; its promptings are blasphemous. Wherefore, He who knew all things, in describing the thorns which choke the word, places the *cares* of this world *first*, and *after* them the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things. So if money is a root of evil, the want of it, with debt, is root, and stem, and branches.

But all human pain has its intervals of relief. The pain is suspended, and the system recruits itself to endure the coming paroxysm. An hour of illusion — an hour of sleep — an hour’s respite of any sort, to six hours of pain — and so the soul, in anguish, finds strength for its long labour, abridged by neither death nor madness.

The vicar, with his little boy, Fairy, by the hand, used twice, at least, in the week to make, sometimes an hour’s, sometimes only half an hours, visit at Redman’s Farm. Poor Rachel Lake made old Tamar sit at her worsteds in the window of the little drawingroom while these conversations proceeded. The young lady was so intelligent that William Wylder was obliged to exert himself in controversy with her eloquent despair; and this combat with the doubts and terrors of a mind of much more than ordinary vigour and resource, though altogether feminine, compelled him to bestir himself, and so, for the time, found him entire occupation; and thus memory and forecast, and suspense, were superseded, for the moment, by absorbing mental action.

Rachel’s position had not been altered by her brother’s marriage. Dorcas had urged her earnestly to give up Redman’s Farm, and take up her abode permanently at Brandon. This kindness, however, she declined. She was grateful, but no, nothing could move her. The truth was, she recoiled from it with a species of horror.

The marriage had been, after all, as great a surprise to Rachel as to any of the Gylingden gossips. Dorcas, knowing how Rachel thought upon it, had grown reserved and impenetrable upon the subject; indeed, at one time, I think, she had half made up her mind to fight the old battle over again and resolutely exercise this fatal passion. She had certainly mystified Rachel, perhaps was mystifying herself.

Rachel grew more sad and strange than ever after this marriage. I think that Stanley was right, and that living in that solitary and darksome dell helped to make her hypochondriac.

One evening Stanley Lake stood at her door.

‘I was just thinking, dear Radie,’ he said in his sweet low tones, which to her ear always bore a suspicion of mockery in them, ‘how pretty you contrive to make this bright little garden at all times of the year — you have such lots of those evergreens, and ivy, and those odd flowers.’

‘They call them *immortelles* in France,’ said Rachel, in a cold strange tone, ‘and make chaplets of them to lay upon the coffin-lids and the graves.’

‘Ah, yes, to be sure, I have seen them there and in Père la Chaise — so they do; they have them in all the cemeteries — I forgot that. How cheerful; how very sensible. Don’t you think it would be a good plan to stick up a death’s-head and cross-bones here and there, and to split up old coffin-lids for your setting-sticks, and get old Mowlders, the sexton, to bury your roots, and cover them in with a “dust to dust,” and so forth, and plant a yew tree in the middle, and stick those bits of painted board, that look so woefully like gravestones, all round it, and then let old Tamar prowl about for a ghost? I assure you, Radie, I think you, all to nothing, the perversest fool I ever encountered or heard of in the course of my life.’

‘Well, Stanley, suppose you do, I’ll not dispute it. Perhaps you are right,’ said Rachel, still standing at the door of her little porch.

‘Perhaps,’ he repeated with a sneer; ‘I venture to say, *most positively*, I can’t conceive any sane reason for your refusing Dorcas’s entreaty to live with us at Brandon, and leave this triste, and unwholesome, and everyway objectionable place.’

‘She was very kind, but I can’t do it.’

‘Yes, you can’t do it, simply because it would be precisely the most sensible, prudent, and comfortable arrangement you could possibly make; you *won’t* do it — but you can and will practise all the airs and fooleries of a bad melodrama. You have succeeded already in filling Dorcas’s mind with surmise and speculation, and do you think the Gylingden people are either blind or dumb? You are taking, I've told you again and again, the very way to excite attention and gossip. What good can it possibly do you? You'll not believe until it happens, and when it does, you'd give your eyes you could undo it. It is so like you.'

'I have said how very kind I thought it of Dorcas to propose it. I can't explain to her all my reasons for declining; and to you I need not. But I cannot overcome my repugnance — and I won't try.'

'I wonder,' said Stanley, with a sly look of enquiry, 'that you who read the Bible — and a very good book it is no doubt — and believe in all sorts of things— '

'That will do, Stanley. I'm not so weak as you suppose.'

'You know, Radie, I'm a Sadducee and that sort of thing does not trouble me the least in the world. It is a little cold here. May we go into the drawingroom? You can't think how I hate this — house. We are always unpleasant in it.'

This auspicious remark he made taking off his hat, and placing it and his cane on her work-table.

But this was not a tempestuous conference by any means. I don't know precisely what they talked about. I think it was probably the pros and cons of that migration to Brandon, against which Rachel had pronounced so firmly.

'I can't do it, Stanley. My motives are unintelligible to you, I know, and you think me obstinate and stupid; but, be I what I may, my objections are insurmountable. And does it not strike you that my staying here, on the contrary, would — would tend to prevent the kind of conversation you speak of?'

'Not the least, dear Radie — that is, I mean, it could have no possible effect, unless the circumstances were first supposed, and then it could be of no appreciable use. And your way of life and your looks — for both are changed — are likely, in a little prating village, where every human being is watched and discussed incessantly, to excite conjecture; that is all, and that is *every thing*.'

It had grown dark while Stanley sat in the little drawingroom, and Rachel stood on her doorstep, and saw his figure glide away slowly into the thin mist and shadow, and turn upward to return to Brandon, by that narrow ravine where they had held rendezvous with Mark Wylder, on that ill-omened night when trouble began for all.

To Rachel's eyes, that disappearing form looked like the moping spirit of guilt and regret, haunting the scene of the irrevocable.

When Stanley took his leave after one of these visits — stolen visits, somehow, they always seemed to her — the solitary mistress of Redman's Farm invariably experienced the nervous reaction which follows the artificial calm of suppressed excitement. Something of panic or horror, relieved sometimes by a gush of tears — sometimes more slowly and painfully subsiding without that hysterical escape.

She went in and shut the door, and called Tamar. But Tamar was out of the way. She hated that little drawingroom in her present mood — its associations were odious and even ghastly; so she sat herself down by the kitchen fire, and placed her pretty feet — cold now — upon the high steel fender, and extended her cold hands towards the embers, leaning back in her rude chair.

And so she got the girl to light candles, and asked her a great many questions, and obliged her, in fact, to speak constantly though she seemed to listen but little. And when at last the girl herself, growing interested in her own narrative about a kidnapper, grew voluble and animated, and looked round upon the young lady at the crisis of the tale, she was surprised to remark, on a sudden, that she was gazing vacantly into the bars; and when Margery, struck by her fixed and melancholy countenance, stopped in the midst of a sentence, the young lady turned and gazed on her wistfully, with large eyes and pale face, and sighed heavily.

CHAPTER XLIV.

IN WHICH OLD TAMAR LIFTS UP HER VOICE IN PROPHECY.

Certainly Stanley Lake was right about Redman's Dell. Once the sun had gone down behind the distant hills, it was the darkest, the most silent, and the most solitary of nooks.

It was not, indeed, quite dark yet. The upper sky had still a faint gray twilight halo, and the stars looked wan and faint. But the narrow walk that turned from Redman's Dell was always dark in Stanley's memory; and Sadducees, although they believe neither in the resurrection nor the judgment, are no more proof than other men against the resurrections of memory and the penalties of association and of fear.

Captain Lake had many things to think of. Some pleasant enough as he measured pleasure, others troublesome. But as he mounted the stone steps that conducted the passenger up the steep acclivity to the upper level of the dark and narrow walk he was pursuing, one black sorrow met him and blotted out all the rest.

Captain Lake knew very well and gracefully practised the art of not seeing inconvenient acquaintances in the street. But here in this narrow way there met him full a hated shadow whom he would fain have 'cut,' by looking to right or left, or up or down, but which was not to be evaded — would not only have his salutation but his arm, and walked — a horror of great darkness, by his side — through this solitude.

Committed to a dreadful game, in which the stakes had come to exceed anything his wildest fears could have anticipated, from which he could not, according to his own canons, by any imaginable means recede — *here* was the spot where the dreadful battle had been joined, and his covenant with futurity sealed.

The young captain stood for a moment still on reaching the upper platform. A tiny brook that makes its way among briars and shingle to the more considerable mill-stream of Redman's Dell, sent up a hoarse babbling from the darkness beneath. Why exactly he halted there he could not have said. He glanced over his shoulder down the steps he had just scaled. Had there been light his pale face would have shown just then a malign anxiety, such as the face of an ill-conditioned man might wear, who apprehends danger of treading on a snake.

He walked on, however, without quickening his pace, waving very slightly from side to side his ebony walking-cane — thin as a pencil — as if it were a wand to beckon away the unseen things that haunt the darkness; and now he came upon the wider plateau, from which, the close copse receding, admitted something more of the light, faint as it was, that lingered in the heavens.

A tall gray stone stands in the centre of this space. There had once been a boundary and a stile there. Stanley knew it very well, and was not startled as the attorney was the other night when he saw it. As he approached this, some one said close in his ear,

'I beg your pardon, Master Stanley.'

He cowered down with a spring, as I can fancy a man ducking under a round-shot, and glanced speechlessly, and still in his attitude of recoil, upon the speaker.

'It's only me, Master Stanley — your poor old Tamar. Don't be afraid, dear.'

'I'm *not* afraid — woman. Tamar to be sure — why, of course, I know you; but what the devil brings you here?' he said.

Tamar was dressed just as she used to be when sitting in the open air at her knitting, except that over her shoulders she had a thin gray shawl. On her head was the same close linen nightcap, borderless and skull-like, and she laid her shrivelled, freckled hand upon his arm, and looking with an earnest and fearful gaze in his face she said —

'It has been on my mind this many a day to speak to you, Master Stanley; but whenever I meant to, summat came over me, and I couldn't.'

'Well, well, well,' said Lake, uneasily; 'I mean to call tomorrow, or next day, or some day soon, at Redman's Farm. I'll hear it then; this is no place, you know, Tamar, to talk in; besides I'm pressed for time, and can't stay now to listen.'

'There's no place like this, Master Stanley; it's so awful secret,' she said, with her hand still upon his arm.

'Secret! Why one place is as well as another; and what the devil have I to do with secrets? I tell you, Tamar, I'm in haste and can't stay. I *won't* stay.

There!’

‘Master Stanley, for the love of Heaven — you know what I’m going to speak of; my old bones have carried me here— ’tis years since I walked so far. I’d walk till I dropped to reach you — but I’d say what’s on my mind, ’tis like a message from heaven — and I *must* speak — aye, dear, I must.’

‘But I say I can’t stay. Who made you a prophet? You used not to be a fool, Tamar; when I tell you I can’t, that’s enough.’

Tamar did not move her fingers from the sleeve of his coat, on which they rested, and that thin pressure mysteriously detained him.

‘See, Master Stanley, if I don’t say it to *you*, I must to another,’ she said.

‘You mean to threaten me, woman,’ said he with a pale, malevolent look.

‘I’m threatening nothing but the wrath of God, who hears us.’

‘Unless you mean to do me an injury, Tamar, I don’t know what else you mean,’ he answered, in a changed tone.

‘Old Tamar will soon be in her coffin, and this night far in the past, like many another, and ‘twill be everything to you, one day, for weal or woe, to hearken to her words *now*, Master Stanley.’

‘Why, Tamar, haven’t I told you I’m ready to listen to you. I’ll go and see you — upon my honour I will — tomorrow, or next day, at the Dell; what’s the good of stopping me here?’

‘Because, Master Stanley, something told me ’tis the best place; we’re quiet, and you’re more like to weigh my words here — and you’ll be alone for a while after you leave me, and can ponder my advice as you walk home by the path.’

‘Well, whatever it is, I suppose it won’t take very long to say — let us walk on to the stone there, and then I’ll stop and hear it — but you must not keep me all night,’ he said, very peevishly.

It was only twenty steps further on, and the woods receded round it, so as to leave an irregular amphitheatre of some sixty yards across; and Captain Lake, glancing from the corners of his eyes, this way and that, without raising or turning his face, stopped listlessly at the timeworn white stone, and turning to the old crone, who was by his side, he said,

‘Well, then, you have your way; but speak low, please, if you have anything unpleasant to say.’

Tamar laid her hand upon his arm again; and the old woman’s face afforded Stanley Lake no clue to the coming theme. Its expression was quite as usual — not actually discontent or peevishness, but crimped and puckered all over with unchanging lines of anxiety and suffering. Neither was there any flurry in her manner — her bony arm and discoloured hand, once her fingers lay upon his sleeve, did not move — only she looked very earnestly in his face as she spoke.

‘You’ll not be angry, Master Stanley, dear? though if you be, I can’t help it, for I must speak. I’ve heard it all — I heard you and Miss Radie speak on the night you first came to see her, after your sickness; and I heard you speak again, by my room door, only a week before your marriage, when you thought I was asleep. So I’ve heard it all — and though I mayn’t understand all the ins and outs on’t, I know it well in the main. Oh, Master Stanley, Master Stanley! How can you go on with it?’

‘Come, Tamar, what do you want of me? What do you mean? What the d — is it all about?’

‘Oh! well you know, Master Stanley, what it’s about.’

‘Well, there *is* something unpleasant, and I suppose you have heard a smattering of it in your muddled way; but it is quite plain you don’t in the least understand it, when you fancy I can do anything to serve anyone in the smallest degree connected with that disagreeable business — or that I am personally in the least to blame in it; and I can’t conceive what business you had listening at the keyhole to your mistress and me, nor why I am wasting my time talking to an old woman about my affairs, which she can neither understand nor take part in.’

‘Master Stanley, it won’t do. I heard it — I could not help hearing. I little thought you had any such matter to speak — and you spoke so sudden like, I could not help it. You were angry, and raised your voice. What could old Tamar do? I heard it all before I knew where I was.’

‘I really think, Tamar, you’ve taken leave of your wits — you are quite in the clouds. Come, Tamar, tell me, once for all — only drop your voice a little, if you please — what the plague has got into your old head. Come, I say, what is it?’

He stooped and leaned his ear to Tamar; and when she had done, he laughed. The laugh, though low, sounded wild and hollow in that dark solitude.

‘Really, dear Tamar, you must excuse my laughing. You dear old witch, how the plague could you take any such frightful nonsense into your head?

I do assure you, upon my honour, I never heard of so ridiculous a blunder. Only that I know you are really fond of us, I should never speak to you again. I forgive you. But listen no more to other people's conversation. I could tell you how it really stands now, only I have not time; but you'll take my word of honour for it, you have made the most absurd mistake that ever an old fool tumbled into. No, Tamar, I can't stay any longer now; but I'll tell you the whole truth when next I go down to Redman's Farm. In the meantime, you must not plague poor Miss Radie with your nonsense. She has too much already to trouble her, though of quite another sort. Goodnight, foolish old Tamar.'

'Oh, Master Stanley, it will take a deal to shake my mind; and if it be so, as I say, what's to be done next — what's to be done — oh, what *is* to be done?'

'I say goodnight, old Tamar; and hold your tongue, do you see?'

'Oh, Master Stanley, Master Stanley! my poor child — my child that I nursed! — anything would be better than this. Sooner or later judgment will overtake you, so sure as you persist in it. I heard what Miss Radie said; and is not it true — is not it cruel — is not it frightful to go on?'

'You don't seem to be aware, my good Tamar, that you have been talking slander all this while, and might be sent to gaol for it. There, I'm not angry — only you're a fool. Goodnight.'

He shook her hand, and jerked it from him with suppressed fury, passing on with a quickened pace. And as he glided through the dark, towards splendid old Brandon, he ground his teeth, and uttered two or three sentences which no respectable publisher would like to print.

CHAPTER XLV.

DEEP AND SHALLOW.

Lawyer Larkin's mind was working more diligently than anyone suspected upon this puzzle of Mark Wylder. The investigation was a sort of scientific recreation to him, and something more. His sure instinct told him it was a secret well worth mastering.

He had a growing belief that Lake, and perhaps he *only* — except Wylder himself — knew the meaning of all this mysterious marching and countermarching. Of course, all sorts of theories were floating in his mind; but there was none that would quite fit all the circumstances. The attorney, had he asked himself the question, what was his object in these inquisitions, would have answered— 'I am doing what few other men would. I am, Heaven knows, giving to this affair of my absent client's, gratuitously, as much thought and vigilance as ever I did to any case in which I was duly remunerated. This is self-sacrificing and noble, and just the conscientious conduct I should expect from myself.'

But there was also this consideration, which you failed to define.

'Yes; my respected client, Mr. Mark Wylder, is suffering under some acute pressure, applied perhaps by my friend Captain Lake. Why should not I share in the profit — if such there be — by getting my hand too upon the instrument of compression? It is worth trying. Let us try.'

The Reverend William Wylder was often at the Lodge now. Larkin had struck out a masterly plan. The vicar's reversion, a very chimerical contingency, he would by no means consent to sell. His little man — little Fairy — oh! no, he could not. The attorney only touched on this, remarking in a friendly way —

'But then, you know, it is so mere a shadow.'

This indeed, poor William knew very well. But though he spoke quite meekly, the attorney looked rather black, and his converse grew somewhat dry and short.

This sinister change was sudden, and immediately followed the suggestion about the reversion; and the poor vicar was a little puzzled, and began to consider whether he had said anything *gauche* or offensive— 'it would be so very painful to appear ungrateful.'

The attorney had the statement of title in one hand, and leaning back in his chair, read it demurely in silence, with the other tapping the seal-end of his gold pencil-case between his lips.

'Yes,' said Mr. Larkin, mildly, 'it is so *very* shadowy — and that feeling, too, in the way. I suppose we had better, perhaps, put it aside, and maybe something else may turn up.' And the attorney rose grandly to replace the statement of title in its tin box, intimating thereby that the audience was ended.

But the poor vicar was in rather urgent circumstances just then, and his troubles had closed in recently with a noiseless, but tremendous contraction, like that iron shroud in Mr. Mudford's fine tale; and to have gone away into outer darkness, with no project on the stocks, and the attorney's countenance averted, would have been simply despair.

'To speak frankly,' said the poor vicar, with that hectic in his cheek that came with agitation, 'I never fancied that my reversionary interest could be saleable.'

'Neither is it, in all probability,' answered the attorney. 'As you are so seriously pressed, and your brother's return delayed, it merely crossed my mind as a thing worth trying.'

'It was very kind and thoughtful; but that feeling — the — my poor little man! However, I may be only nervous and foolish, and I think I'll speak to Lord Chelford about it.'

The attorney looked down, and took his nether lip gently between his finger and thumb. I rather think he had no particular wish to take Lord Chelford into council.

'I think before troubling his lordship upon the subject — if, indeed, on reflection, you should not think it would be a little odd to trouble him at all in reference to it — I had better look a little more carefully into the papers, and see whether anything in that direction is really practicable at all.'

'Do you think, Mr. Larkin, you can write that strong letter to stay proceedings which you intended yesterday?'

The attorney shook his head, and said, with a sad sort of dryness— 'I can't see my way to it.'

The vicar's heart sank with a flutter, and then swelled, and sank another bit, and his forehead flushed.

There was a silence.

'You see, Mr. Wylder, I relied, in fact, altogether upon this a — arrangement; and I don't see that any thing is likely to come of it.'

The attorney spoke in the same dry and reserved way, and there was a shadow on his long face.

'I have forfeited his goodwill somehow — he has ceased to take any interest in my wretched affairs; I am abandoned, and must be ruined.'

These dreadful thoughts filled in another silence; and then the vicar said —

'I am afraid I have, quite unintentionally, offended you, Mr. Larkin — perhaps in my ignorance of business; and I feel that I should be quite ruined if I were to forfeit your good offices; and, pray tell me, if I have said anything I ought not.'

'Oh, no — nothing, I assure you,' replied Mr. Larkin, with a lofty and gentle dryness. 'Only, I think, I have, perhaps, a little mistaken the relation in which I stood, and fancied, wrongly, it was in the light somewhat of a friend as well as of a professional adviser; and I thought, perhaps, I had rather more of your confidence than I had any right to, and did not at first see the necessity of calling in Lord Chelford, whose experience of business is necessarily very limited, to direct you. You remember, my dear Mr. Wylder, that I did not at all invite these relations; and I don't think you will charge me with want of zeal in your business.'

'Oh! my dear Mr. Larkin, my dear Sir, you have been my preserver, my benefactor — in fact, under Heaven, very nearly my last and only hope.'

'Well, I *had* hoped I was not remiss or wanting in diligence.'

And Mr. Larkin took his seat in his most gentlemanlike fashion, crossing his long legs, and throwing his tall head back, raising his eyebrows, and letting his mouth languidly drop a little open.

'My idea was, that Lord Chelford would see more clearly what was best for little Fairy. I am so very slow and so silly about business, and you so much my friend — I have found you so — that you might think only of me.'

'I should, of course, consider the little boy,' said Mr. Larkin, condescendingly; 'a most interesting child. I'm very fond of children myself, and should, of course, put the entire case — as respected him as well as yourself — to the best of my humble powers before you. Is there any thing else just now you think of, for time presses, and really we have ground to apprehend something unpleasant *tomorrow*. You ought not, my dear Sir — pray permit me to say — you really ought *not* to have allowed it to come to this.'

The poor vicar sighed profoundly, and shook his head, a contrite man. They both forgot that it was arithmetically impossible for him to have prevented it, unless he had got some money.

'Perhaps,' said the vicar, brightening up suddenly, and looking in the attorney's eyes for answer, 'Perhaps something might be done with the reversion, as a security, to borrow a sufficient sum, without selling.'

The attorney shook his high head, and whiskers gray and foxy, and meditated with the seal of his pencil case between his lips.

'I don't see it,' said he, with another shake of that long head.

'I don't know that any lender, in fact, would entertain such a security. If you wish it I will write to Burlington, Smith, and Company, about it — they are largely in policies and *post-obits*.'

'It is very sad — very sad, indeed. I wish so much, my dear Sir, I could be of use to you; but you know the fact is, we solicitors seldom have the command of our own money; always in advance — always drained to the uttermost shilling, and I am myself in the predicament you will see there.'

And he threw a little note from the Dollington Bank to Jos. Larkin, Esq., The Lodge, Gylingden, announcing the fact that he had overdrawn his account certain pounds, shillings, and pence, and inviting him forthwith to restore the balance.

The vicar read it with a vague comprehension, and in his cold fingers shook the hand of his fellow sufferer. Less than fifty pounds would not do! Oh, where was he to turn? It was *quite* hopeless, and poor Larkin pressed too!

Now, there was this consolation in 'poor Larkin's case,' that although he was quite run aground, and a defaulter in the Dollington Bank to the extent of 7*l*. 12*s*. 4*d*., yet in that similar institution, which flourished at Naunton, only nine miles away, there stood to his name the satisfactory credit of 564*l*. 11*s*. 7*d*. One advantage which the good attorney derived from his double account with the rival institutions was, that whenever convenient he could throw one of these certificates of destitution and impotence sadly under the eyes of a client in want of money like poor Will Wylder.

The attorney had no pleasure in doing people ill turns. But he had come to hear the distresses of his clients as tranquilly as doctors do the pangs of their patients. As he stood meditating near his window, he saw the poor vicar, with slow limbs and downcast countenance, walk under his laburnums and laurustinuses towards his little gate, and suddenly stop and turn round, and make about a dozen quick steps, like a man who has found a bright idea, towards the house, and then come to a thoughtful halt, and so turn and recommence his slow march of despair homeward.

At five o'clock — it was dark now — there was a tread on the doorsteps, and a double tattoo at the tiny knocker. It was the 'lawyer.'

Mr. Larkin entered the vicar's study, where he was supposed to be busy about his sermon.

'My dear Sir; thinking about you — and I have just heard from an old humble friend, who wants high interest, and of course is content to take security somewhat personal in its nature. I have written already. He's in the hands of Burlington, Smith, and Company. I have got exactly 55l. since I saw you, which makes me all right at Dollington; and here's my check for 50l. which you can send — or perhaps *I* had better send by this night's post — to those Cambridge people. It settles *that*; and you give me a line on this stamp, acknowledging the 50l. on account of money to be raised on your reversion. So that's off your mind, my dear Sir.'

'Oh, Mr. Larkin — my — my — you don't know, Sir, what you have done for me — the agony — oh, thank God! what a friend is raised up.'

And he clasped and wrung the long hands of the attorney, and I really think there was a little moisture in that gentleman's pink eyes for a moment or two.

When he was gone the vicar returned from the doorstep, radiant — not to the study but to the parlour.

'Oh, Willie, darling, you look so happy — you were uneasy this evening,' said his little ugly wife, with a beautiful smile, jumping up and clasping him.

'Yes, darling, I was — *very* uneasy; but thank God, it is over.'

And they cried and smiled together in that delightful embrace, while all the time little Fairy, with a paper cap on his head, was telling them half-a-dozen things together, and pulling Wapsie by the skirts.

Then he was lifted up and kissed, and smiled on by that sunshine only remembered in the sad old days — parental love. And there was high festival kept in the parlour that night. I am told six crumpets, and a new egg apiece besides at tea, to make merry with, and stories and little songs for Fairy. Willie was in his old college spirits. It was quite delightful; and little Fairy was up a great deal too late; and the vicar and his wife had quite a cheery chat over the fire, and he and she both agreed he would make a handsome sum by Eusebius.

Thus, if there are afflictions, there are also comforts: great consolations, great chastisements. There is a comforter, and there is a chastener. Every man must taste of death: every man must taste of life. It shall not be all bitter nor all sweet for any. It shall be life. The unseen ministers of a stupendous equity have their eyes and their hands about every man's portion; 'as it is written, he that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.'

It is the same earth for all; the same earth for the dead, great and small; dust to dust. The same earth for the living. 'Thorns, also, and thistles shall it bring forth,' and God provides the flowers too.

CHAPTER XLVI.

DEBATE AND INTERRUPTION.

Rachel beheld the things which were coming to pass like an awful dream. She had begun to think, and not without evidence, that Dorcas, for some cause or caprice, had ceased to think of Stanley as she once did. And the announcement, without preparation or apparent courtship, that her brother had actually won this great and beautiful heiress, and that, just emerged from the shades of death, he, a half-ruined scapegrace, was about to take his place among the magnates of the county, and, no doubt, to enter himself for the bold and splendid game of ambition, the stakes of which were now in his hand, towered before her like an incredible and disastrous illusion of magic.

Stanley's uneasiness lest Rachel's conduct should compromise them increased. He grew more nervous about the relations between him and Mark Wylder, in proportion as the world grew more splendid and prosperous for him.

Where is the woman who will patiently acquiesce in the reserve of her husband who shares his confidence with another? How often had Stanley Lake sworn to her there was no secret; that he knew nothing of Mark Wylder beyond the charge of his money, and making a small payment to an old Mrs. Dutton, in London, by his direction, and that beyond this, he was as absolutely in the dark as she or Chelford.

What, then, did Rachel mean by all that escaped her, when he was in danger?

'How the — could he tell? He really believed she was a little — *ever* so little — crazed. He supposed she, like Dorcas, fancied he knew everything about Wylder. She was constantly hinting something of the kind; and begging of him to make a disclosure — disclosure of what? It was enough to drive one mad, and would make a capital farce. Rachel has a ridiculous way of talking like an oracle, and treating as settled fact every absurdity she fancies. She is very charming and clever, of course, so long as she speaks of the kind of thing she understands. But when she tries to talk of serious business — poor Radie! she certainly does talk such nonsense! She can't reason; she runs away with things. It *is* the most tiresome thing you can conceive.'

'But you have not said, Stanley, that she does not suspect the truth.'

'Of course, I say it; I *have* said it. I swear it, if you like. I've said plainly, and I'm ready to swear it. Upon my honour and soul I know no more of his movements, plans, or motives, than you do. If you reflect you must see it. We were never good friends, Mark and I. It was no fault of mine, but I never liked him; and he, consequently, I suppose, never liked me. There was no intimacy or confidence between us. I was the last man on earth he would have consulted with. Even Larkin, his own lawyer, is in the dark. Rachel knows all this. I have told her fifty times over, and she seems to give way at the moment. Indeed the thing is too plain to be resisted. But as I said, poor Radie, she can't reason; and by the time I see her next, her old fancy possesses her. I can't help it; because with more reluctance than I can tell, I at length consent, at Larkin's *entreaty*, I may say, to bank and fund his money.'

But Dorcas's mind retained its first impression. Sometimes his plausibilities, his vehemence, and his vows disturbed it for a time; but there it remained like the picture of a camera obscura, into which a momentary light has been admitted, unseen for a second, but the images return with the darkness, and group themselves in their old colours and places again. Whatever it was Rachel probably knew it. There was a painful confidence between them; and there was growing in Dorcas's mind a feeling towards Rachel which her pride forbade her to define.

She did not like Stanley's stealthy visits to Redman's Farm; she did not like his moods or looks after those visits, of which he thought she knew nothing. She did not know whether to be pleased or sorry that Rachel had refused to reside at Brandon; neither did she like the stern gloom that overcast Rachel's countenance when Stanley was in the room, nor those occasional walks together, up and down the short yew walk, in which Lake looked so cold and angry, and Rachel so earnest. What was this secret? How dared her husband mask from her what he confided to another? How dared Rachel confer with him — influence him, perhaps, under her very eye, walking before the windows of Brandon — that Brandon which was *hers*, and to which she had taken Stanley, passing her gate a poor and tired wayfarer of the world, and made him — *what?* Oh, mad caprice! Oh, fit retribution!

A wild voice was talking this way, to-and-fro, and up and down, in the chambers of memory. But she would not let it speak from her proud lips. She smiled, and to outward seeming, was the same; but Rachel felt that the fashion of her countenance towards her was changed.

Since her marriage she had not hinted to Rachel the subject of their old conversations: burning beneath her feeling about it was now a deep-rooted anger and jealousy. Still she was Stanley's sister, and to be treated accordingly. The whole household greeted her with proper respect, and Dorcas met her graciously, and with all the externals of kindness. The change was so little, that I do not think any but she and Rachel saw it; and yet it was immense.

There was a dark room, a sort of anteroom, to the library, with only two tall and narrow windows, and hung with old Dutch tapestries, representing the battles and sieges of men in periwigs, pikemen, dragoons in buff coats, and musketeers with matchlocks — all the grim faces of soldiers, generals, drummers, and the rest, grown pale and dusky by time, like armies of ghosts.

Rachel had come one morning to see Dorcas, and, awaiting her appearance, sat down in this room. The door of the library opened, and she was a little surprised to see Stanley enter.

'Why, Stanley, they told me you were gone to Naunton.'

'Oh! did they? Well, you see, I'm here, Radie.'

Somehow he was not very well pleased to see her.

'I think you'll find Dorcas in the drawingroom, or else in the conservatory,' he added.

'I am glad, Stanley, I happened to meet you. Something *must* be done in the matter I spoke of immediately. Have you considered it?'

'Most carefully,' said Stanley, quietly.

'But you have done nothing.'

'It is not a thing to be done in a moment.'

'You can, if you please, do a great deal in a moment'

'Certainly; but I may repent it afterwards.'

'Stanley, you may regret postponing it, much more.'

'You have no idea, Rachel, how very tiresome you've grown.'

‘Yes, Stanley, I can quite understand it. It would have been better for you, perhaps for myself, I had died long ago.’

‘Well, that is another thing; but in the meantime, I assure you, Rachel, you are disposed to be very impertinent.’

‘Very impertinent; yes, indeed, Stanley, and so I shall continue to be until — — ‘

‘Pray how does it concern you? I say it is no business on earth of yours.’

Stanley Lake was growing angry.

‘Yes, Stanley, it *does* concern me.’

‘That is false.’

‘True, *true*, Sir. Oh, Stanley, it is a load upon my conscience — a mountain — a mountain between me and my hopes. I can’t endure the misery to which you would consign me; you *shall* do it — immediately, too’ (she stamped wildly as she said it), ‘and if you hesitate, Stanley, I shall be compelled to speak, though the thought of it makes me almost mad with terror.’

‘What is he to do, Rachel?’ said Dorcas, standing near the door.

It was a very awkward pause. The splendid young bride was the only person on the stage who looked very much as usual. Stanley turned his pale glare of fury from Rachel to Dorcas, and Dorcas said again,

‘What is it, Rachel, darling?’

Rachel, with a bright blush on her cheeks, stepped quickly up to her, put her arms about her neck and kissed her, and over her shoulder she cried to her brother —

‘Tell her, Stanley.’

And so she quickly left the room and was gone.

‘Well, Dorkie, love, what’s the matter?’ said Stanley sharply, at last breaking the silence.

‘I really don’t know — you, perhaps, can tell,’ answered she coldly.

‘You have frightened Rachel out of the room, for one thing,’ answered he with a sneer.

‘I simply asked her what she urged you to do — I think I have a claim to know. It is strange so reasonable a question from a wife should scare your sister from the room.’

‘I don’t quite see that — for my part, I don’t think *anything* strange in a woman. Rachel has been talking the rankest nonsense, in the most unreasonable temper conceivable; and because she can't persuade me to accept her views of what is Christian and sensible, she threatens to go mad — I think that is her phrase.'

'I don't think Rachel is a fool,' said Dorcas, quietly, her eye still upon Stanley.

'Neither do I — when she pleases to exert her good sense — but she can, when she pleases, both talk and act like a fool.'

'And pray, what does she want you to do, Stanley?'

'The merest nonsense.'

'But what is it?'

'I really can hardly undertake to say I very well understand it myself, and I have half-a-dozen letters to write; and really if I were to stay here and try to explain, I very much doubt whether I could. Why don't you ask *her*? If she has any clear ideas on the subject I don't see why she should not tell you. For my part, I doubt if she understands herself — *I* certainly don't.'

Dorcas smiled bitterly.

'Mystery already — mystery from the first. *I* am to know nothing of your secrets. You confer and consult in my house — you debate and decide upon matters most nearly concerning, for aught I know, my interests and my happiness — certainly deeply affecting you, and therefore which I have a *right* to know; and my entering the room is the signal for silence — a guilty silence — for departure and for equivocation. Stanley, you are isolating me. Beware — I may entrench myself in that isolation. You are choosing your confidant, and excluding me; rest assured you shall have no confidence of mine while you do so.'

Stanley Lake looked at her with a gaze at once peevish and inquisitive.

'You take a wonderfully serious view of Rachel's nonsense.'

'I do.'

'Certainly, you women have a marvellous talent for making mountains of molehills — you and Radie are adepts in the art. Never was a poor devil so lectured about nothing as I between you. Come now, Dorkie, be a good girl — you must not look so vexed.'

'I'm not vexed.'

'What then?'

'I'm only *thinking*.'

She said this with the same bitter smile. Stanley Lake looked for a moment disposed to break into one of his furies, but instead he only laughed his unpleasant laugh.

‘Well, I’m thinking too, and I find it quite possible to be vexed at the same time. I assure you, Dorcas, I really am busy; and it is too bad to have one’s time wasted in solemn lectures about stuff and nonsense. Do make Rachel explain herself, if she can — *I* have no objection, I assure you; but I must be permitted to decline undertaking to interpret that oracle.’ And so saying, Stanley Lake glided into the library and shut the door with an angry clap.

Dorcas did not deign to look after him. She had heard his farewell address, looking from the window at the towering and sombre clumps of her ancestral trees — pale, proud, with perhaps a peculiar gleam of resentment — or malignity — in her exquisite features.

So she stood, looking forth on her noble possessions — on terraces— ‘long rows of urns’ — noble timber — all seen in slanting sunlight and long shadows — and seeing nothing but the great word FOOL! in letters of flame in the air before her.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A THREATENING NOTICE.

Stanley Lake was not a man to let the grass grow under his feet when an object was to be gained. It was with a sure prescience that Mark Wylder's letter had inferred that Stanley Lake would aspire to the representation either of the county or of the borough of Dollington. His mind was already full of these projects.

Electioneering schemes are conducted, particularly at their initiation, like conspiracies — in fact, they *are* conspiracies, and therefore there was nothing remarkable in the intense caution with which Stanley Lake set about his. He was not yet 'feeling his way.' He was only preparing to feel his way.

All the data, except the muster-roll of electors, were *in nubibus* — who would retire — who would step forward, as yet altogether in the region of conjecture. There are men to whom the business of elections — a life of secrecy, excitement, speculation, and combat — has all but irresistible charms; and Tom Wealdon, the Town Clerk, was such a spirit.

A bold, frank, goodhumoured fellow — he played at elections as he would at cricket. Every faculty of eye, hand, and thought — his whole heart and soul in the game. But no ill-will — no malevolence in victory — no sourness in defeat. A successful *coup* made Tom Wealdon split with laughing. A ridiculous failure amused him nearly as much. He celebrated his last great defeat with a pic-nic in the romantic scenery of Nolton, where he and his comrades in disaster had a roaring evening, and no end of 'chaff' When he and Jos. Larkin carried the last close contest at Dollington, by a majority of two, he kicked the crown out of the grave attorney's chimney-pot, and flung his own wideawake into the river. He did not show much; his official station precluded prominence. He kept in the background, and did his spiriting gently. But Tom Wealdon, it was known — as things *are* known without evidence — was at the bottom of all the clever dodges, and long-headed manoeuvres. When, therefore, Mr. Larkin heard from the portly and veracious Mr. Larcom, who was on very happy relations with the proprietor of the Lodge, that Tom Wealdon had been twice quietly to Brandon to lunch, and had talked an hour alone with the captain in the library each time; and that they seemed very 'hernest like, and stopped of talking directly he (Mr. Larcom) entered the room with the postbag' — the attorney knew very well what was in the wind.

Now, it was not quite clear what was right — by which the good attorney meant prudent — under the circumstances. He was in confidential — which meant lucrative — relations with Mark Wylder. Ditto, ditto with Captain Lake, of Brandon. He did not wish to lose either. Was it possible to hold to both, or must he cleave only to one and despise the other?

Wylder might return any day, and Tom Wealdon would probably be one of the first men whom he would see. He must 'hang out the signal' in 'Galignani.' Lake could never suspect its meaning, even were he to see it. There was but one risk in it, which was in the coarse perfidy of Mark Welder himself, who would desire no better fun, in some of his moods, than boasting to Lake of the whole arrangement in Jos. Larkin's presence.

However, on the whole, it was best to obey Mark Wylder's orders, and accordingly 'Galignani' said: '*Mr. Smith will take notice that the other party is desirous to purchase, and becoming very pressing.*'

In the meantime Lake was pushing his popularity among the gentry with remarkable industry, and with tolerable success. Wealdon's two little visits explained perfectly the active urbanities of Captain Stanley Lake.

About three weeks after the appearance of the advertisement in 'Galignani,' one of Mark Wylder's letters reached Larkin. It was dated from Geneva(!) and said: —

'DEAR LARKIN, — I saw my friend *Smith* here in the café, who has kept a bright look out, I dare say; and tells me that Captain Stanley Lake is thinking of standing either for the county or for Dollington. I will thank you to apprise him that I mean to take my choice first; and please hand him the enclosed notice open as you get it; and, if you please, to let him run his eye also over this note to you, as I have my own reasons for wishing him to know that you have seen it.

'This is all I will probably trouble you about elections for some months to come, or, at least, weeks. It being time enough when I go back, and no squalls a-head just now at home, though foreign politics look muggy enough.

‘I have nothing particular at present about tenants or timber, except the three acres of oak behind Farmer Tanby’s — have it took down. Thomas Jones and me went over it last September, and it ought to bring near 3,000*l*. I must have a good handful of money by May next.

‘Yours, my dear Larkin,

‘Very truly,

‘MARK WYLDER.’

Folded in this was a thin slip of foreign paper, on which were traced these lines: —

‘*Private.*

‘DEAR LARKIN, — Don’t funk the interview with the beast Lake — a hyaena has no pluck in him. When he reads what I send him by your hand, he’ll be as mild as you please. Parkes must act for me as usual — no bluster about giving up. Lake’s afraid of yours,

‘M. W.’

Within was what he called his ‘notice’ to Stanley Lake, and it was thus conceived: —

‘*Private.*

‘DEAR LAKE — I understand you are trying to make all safe for next election in Dollington or the county. Now, understand at once, that *I won’t permit that*. There is not a country gentleman on the grand jury who is not your superior; and there is no extremity I will not make you feel — and you know what I mean — if you dare despise this first and not unfriendly warning.

‘Yours truly,

‘MARK WYLDER.’

Now there certainly was need of Wylder’s assurance that nothing unpleasant should happen to the conscious bearer of such a message to an officer and a gentleman. Jos. Larkin did not like it. Still there was a confidence in his own conciliatory manners and exquisite tact. Something, too, might be learned by noting Lake’s looks, demeanour, and language under this direct communication from the man to whom his relations were so mysterious.

Larkin looked at his watch; it was about the hour when he was likely to find Lake in his study. The attorney withdrew the little private enclosure, and slipt it, with a brief endorsement, into the neat sheaf of Wylder's letters, all similarly noted, and so locked it up in the iron safe. He intended being perfectly ingenuous with Lake, and showing him that he had 'no secrets — no concealments — all open as the day' — by producing the letter in which the 'notice' was enclosed, and submitting it for Captain Lake's perusal.

When Lawyer Larkin reached the dim chamber, with the Dutch tapestries, where he had for a little while to await Captain Lake's leisure, he began to anticipate the scene now so immediately impending more uncomfortably than before. The 'notice' was, indeed, so outrageous in its spirit, and so intolerable in its language, that, knowing something of Stanley's wild and truculent temper, he began to feel a little nervous about the explosion he was about to provoke.

The Brandon connection, one way or other, was worth to the attorney in hard cash between five and six hundred a-year. In influence, and what is termed 'position,' it was, of course, worth a great deal more. It would be a very serious blow to lose this. He did not, he hoped, care for money more than a good man ought; but such a loss, he would say, he could not afford.

Precisely the same, however, was to be said of his connection with Mark Wylder; and in fact, of late years, Mr. Jos. Larkin, of the Lodge, had begun to put by money so fast that he was growing rapidly to be a very considerable man indeed. 'Everything,' as he said, 'was doing very nicely;' and it would be a deplorable thing to mar, by any untoward act, this pilgrim's quiet and prosperous progress.

In this stage of his reverie he was interrupted by a tall, powdered footman, in the Brandon livery, who came respectfully to announce that his master desired to see Mr. Larkin.

Larkin's soul sneered at this piece of state. Why could he not put his head in at the door and call him? But still I think it impressed him, and that, diplomatically, Captain Lake was in the right to environ himself with the ceremonial of a lord of Brandon.

'Well, Larkin, how d'ye do? Anything about Raikes's lease?' said the great Captain Lake, rising from behind his desk, with his accustomed smile, and extending his gentlemanlike hand.

‘No, Sir — nothing, Captain Lake. He has not come, and I don’t think we should show any anxiety about it,’ replied the attorney, taking the captain’s thin hand rather deferentially. ‘I’ve had — a — such a letter from my — my client, Mr. Mark Wylder. He writes in a violent passion, and I’m really placed in a most disagreeable position.’

‘Won’t you sit down?’

‘A — thanks — a — well I thought, on the whole, having received the letter and the enclosure, which I must say very much surprises me — very much *indeed*.’ And Larkin looked reprovingly on an imaginary Mark Wylder, and shook his head a good deal.

‘He has not appointed another man of business?’

‘Oh, dear, no,’ said Larkin, quickly, with a faint, supercilious smile. ‘No, nothing of that kind. The thing — in fact, there has been some gossiping fellow. Do you happen to know a person at all versed in Gylingden matters — or, perhaps, a member of your club — named Smith?’

‘Smith? I don’t, I think, recollect any particular Smith, just at this moment. And what is Smith doing or saying?’

‘Why, he has been talking over election matters. It seems Wylder — Mr. Wylder — has met him in Geneva, from whence he dates; and he says — he says — oh, here’s the letter, and you’ll see it all there.’

He handed it to Lake, and kept his eye on him while he read it. When he saw that Lake, who bit his lip during the perusal, had come to the end, by his glancing up again at the date, Larkin murmured —

‘Something, you see, has gone wrong with him. I can’t account for the temper otherwise — so violent.’

‘Quite so,’ said Lake, quietly; ‘and where is the notice he speaks of here?’

‘Why, really, Captain Lake, I did not very well know, it *is such* a production — I could not say whether you would wish it presented; and in any case you will do me the justice to understand that I, for my part — I really don’t know how to speak of it.

‘Quite so,’ repeated Lake, softly, taking the thin, neatly folded piece of paper which Larkin, with a sad inclination of his body, handed to him.

Lake, under the 'lawyer's' small, vigilant eyes, quietly read Mark Wylder's awful threatenings through, twice over, and Larkin was not quite sure whether there was any change of countenance to speak of as he did so.

'This is dated the 29th,' said Lake, in the same quiet tone; 'perhaps you will be so good as to write a line across it, stating the date of your handing it to me.'

'I — of course — I can see no objection. I may mention, I suppose, that I do so at your request.'

And Larkin made a neat little endorsement to that effect, and he felt relieved. The hyaena certainly was not showing fight.

'And now, Mr. Larkin, you'll admit, I think, that I've exhibited no ill-temper, much less violence, under the provocation of that note.'

'Certainly; none whatever, Captain Lake.'

'And you will therefore perceive that whatever I now say, speaking in cool blood, I am not likely to recede from.'

Lawyer Larkin bowed.

'And may I particularly ask that you will so attend to what I am about to say, as to be able to make a note of it for Mr. Welder's consideration?'

'Certainly, if you desire; but I wish to say that in this particular matter I beg it may be clearly understood that Mr. Wylder is in no respect more my client than you, Captain Lake, and that I merely act as a most reluctant messenger in the matter.'

'Just so,' said Captain Lake.

'Now, as to my thinking of representing either county or borough,' he resumed, after a little pause, holding Mark Wylder's 'notice' between his finger and thumb, and glancing at it from time to time, as a speaker might at his notes, 'I am just as well qualified as he in every respect; and if it lies between him and me, I will undoubtedly offer myself, and accompany my address with the publication of this precious document which he calls his notice — the composition, in all respects, of a ruffian — and which will inspire every gentleman who reads it with disgust, abhorrence, and contempt. His threat I don't understand. I despise his machinations. I defy him utterly; and the time is coming when, in spite of his manoeuvring, I'll drive him into a corner and pin him to the wall. He very well knows that flitting and skulking from place to place, like an escaped convict, he is safe in writing what insults he pleases through the post. I can't tell how or where to find him. He is not only no gentleman, but no man — a coward as well as a ruffian. But his game of hide-and-seek cannot go on for ever; and when next I can lay my hand upon him, I'll make him eat that paper on his knees, and place my heel upon his neck.'

The peroration of this peculiar invective was emphasised by an oath, at which the half-dozen short grizzled hairs that surmounted the top of Mr. Jos. Larkin's shining bald head no doubt stood up in silent appeal.

The attorney was standing during this sample of Lake's parliamentary rhetoric a little flushed, for he did not know the moment when a blue flicker from the rhetorical thunderstorm might splinter his own bald head, and for ever end his connection with Brandon.

There was a silence, during which pale Captain Lake locked up Mark Wylder's warning, and the attorney twice cleared his voice.

'I need hardly say, Captain Lake, how I feel in this business. I — — '

'Quite so,' said the captain, in his soft low tones. 'I assure you I altogether acquit you of sympathy with any thing so utterly ruffianly,' and he took the hand of the relieved attorney with a friendly condescension. 'The only compensation I exact for your involuntary part in the matter is that you distinctly convey the tenor of my language to Mr. Wylder, on the first occasion on which he affords you an opportunity of communicating with him. And as to my ever again acting as his trustee; — though, yes, I forgot' — he made a sudden pause, and was lost for a minute in annoyed reflection— 'yes, I must for a while. It can't last very long; he *must* return soon, and I can't well refuse to act until at least some other arrangement is made. There are quite other persons and I can't allow them to starve.'

So saying, he rose, with his peculiar smile, and extended his hand to signify that the conference was at an end.

'And I suppose,' he said, 'we are to regard this little conversation, for the present, as confidential?'

'Certainly, Captain Lake, and permit me to say that I fully appreciate the just and liberal construction which you have placed upon my conduct — a construction which a party less candid and honourably-minded than yourself might have failed to favour me with.'

And with this pretty speech Larkin took his hat, and gracefully withdrew.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IN WHICH I GO TO BRANDON, AND SEE AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE IN THE TAPESTRY ROOM.

To my surprise, a large letter, bearing the Gylingden postmark, and with a seal as large as a florin, showing, had I examined the heraldry, the Brandon arms with the Lake bearings quartered thereon, and proving to be a very earnest invitation from Stanley Lake, found me in London just about this time.

I paused, I was doubtful about accepting it, for the business of the season was just about to commence in earnest, and the country had not yet assumed its charms. But I now know very well that from the first it was quite settled that down I should go. I was too curious to see the bride in her new relations, and to observe something of the conjugal administration of Lake, to allow anything seriously to stand in the way of my proposed trip.

There was a postscript to Lake's letter which might have opened my eyes as to the motives of this pressing invitation, which I pleased myself by thinking, though penned by Captain Lake, came in reality from his beautiful young bride.

This small appendix was thus conceived: —

'P.S. — Tom Wealdon, as usual, deep in elections, under the rose, begs you kindly to bring down whatever you think to be the best book or books on the subject, and he will remit to your bookseller. Order them in his name, but bring them down with you.'

So I was a second time going down to Brandon as honorary counsel, without knowing it. My invitations, I fear, were obtained, if not under false pretences, at least upon false estimates, and the laity rated my legal lore too highly.

I reached Brandon rather late. The bride had retired for the night. I had a very late dinner — in fact a supper — in the parlour. Lake sat with me chatting, rather cleverly, not pleasantly. Wealdon was at Brandon about sessions business, and as usual full of election stratagems and calculations. Stanley volunteered to assure me he had not the faintest idea of looking for a constituency. I really believe — and at this distance of time I may use strong language in a historical sense — that Captain Lake was the greatest liar I ever encountered with. He seemed to do it without a purpose — by instinct, or on principle — and would contradict himself solemnly twice or thrice in a week, without seeming to perceive it. I dare say he lied always, and about everything. But it was in matters of some moment that one perceived it.

What object could he gain, for instance, by the fib he had just told me? On second thoughts this night he coolly apprised me that he *had* some idea of sounding the electors. So, my meal ended, we went into the tapestry room where, the night being sharp, a pleasant bit of fire burned in the grate, and Wealdon greeted me.

My journey, though by rail, and as easy as that of the Persian gentleman who skimmed the air, seated on a piece of carpet, predisposed me to sleep. Such volumes of fine and various country air, and such an eight hours' procession of all sorts of natural pictures are not traversed without effect. Sitting in my well-stuffed chair, my elbows on the cushioned arms, the conversation of Lake and the Town Clerk now and then grew faint, and their faces faded away, and little 'fyttes' and fragments of those light and pleasant dreams, like fairy tales, which visit such stolen naps, superseded with their picturesque and musical illusions the realities and recollections of life.

Once or twice a nod a little too deep or sudden called me up. But Lake was busy about the Dollington constituency, and the Town Clerk's bluff face was serious and thoughtful. It was the old question about Rogers, the brewer, and whether Lord Adleston and Sir William could not get him; or else it had gone on to the great railway contractor, Dobbs, and the question how many votes his influence was really worth; and, somehow, I never got very far into the pros and cons of these discussions, which soon subsided into the fairy tale I have mentioned, and that sweet perpendicular sleep — all the sweeter, like everything else, for being contraband and irregular.

For one bout — I fancy a good deal longer than the others — my nap was much sounder than before, and I opened my eyes at last with the shudder and half horror that accompany an awakening from a general chill — a dismal and frightened sensation.

I was facing a door about twenty feet distant, which exactly as I opened my eyes, turned slowly on its hinges, and the figure of Uncle Lorne, in his loose flannel habiliments, ineffaceably traced upon my memory, like every other detail of that ill-omened apparition, glided into the room, and crossing the thick carpet with long, soft steps, passed near me, looking upon me with a malign sort of curiosity for some two or three seconds, and sat down by the declining fire, with a sidelong glance still fixed upon me.

I continued gazing on this figure with a dreadful incredulity, and the indistinct feeling that it must be an illusion — and that if I could only wake up completely, it would vanish.

The fascination was disturbed by a noise at the other end of the room, and I saw Lake standing close to him, and looking both angry and frightened. Tom Wealdon looking odd, too, was close at his elbow, and had his hand on Lake's arm, like a man who would prevent violence. I do not know in the least what had passed before, but Lake said —

'How the devil did he come in?'

'Hush!'was all that Tom Wealdon said, looking at the gaunt spectre with less of fear than inquisitiveness.

'What are you doing here, Sir?' demanded Lake, in his most unpleasant tones.

'Prophesying,' answered the phantom.

'You had better write your prophecies in your room, Sir — had not you? — and give them to the Archbishop of Canterbury to proclaim, when they are finished; we are busy here just now, and don't require revelations, if you please.'

The old man lifted up his long lean finger, and turned on him with a smile which I hate even to remember.

'Let him alone,' whispered the Town Clerk, in a significant whisper, 'don't cross him, and he'll not stay long.'

'*You*'re here, a scribe,' murmured Uncle Lorne, looking upon Tom Wealdon.

'Aye, Sir, a scribe and a Pharisee, a Sadducee and a publican, and a priest, and a Levite,' said the functionary, with a wink at Lake. 'Thomas Wealdon, Sir; happy to see you, Sir, so well and strong, and likely to enlighten the religious world for many a day to come. It's a long time, Sir, since I had the honour of seeing you; and I'm always, of course, at your command.'

'Pshaw!' said Lake, angrily.

The Town Clerk pressed his arm with a significant side nod and a wink, which seemed to say, 'I understand him; can't you let me manage him?'

The old man did not seem to hear what they said; but his tall figure rose up, and he extended the fingers of his left hand close to the candle for a few seconds, and then held them up to his eyes, gazing on his fingertips, with a horrified sort of scrutiny, as if he saw signs and portents gathered there, like Thomas Aquinas' angels at the needles' points, and then the same cadaverous grin broke out over his features.

'Mark Wylder is in an evil plight,' said he.

'Is he?' said Lake, with a sly scoff, though he seemed to me a good deal scared. 'We hear no complaints, however, and fancy he must be tolerably comfortable notwithstanding.'

'You know where he is,' said Uncle Lorne.

'Aye, in Italy; everyone knows that,' answered Lake.

'In Italy,' said the old man, reflectively, as if trying to gather up his ideas, 'Italy. Oh! yes, Vallombrosa — aye, Italy, I know it well.'

'So do we, Sir; thank you for the information,' said Lake, who nevertheless appeared strangely uneasy.

'He has had a great tour to make. It is nearly accomplished now; when it is done, he will be like me, *humano major*. He has seen the places which you are yet to see.'

'Nothing I should like better; particularly Italy,' said Lake.

'Yes,' said Uncle Lorne, lifting up slowly a different finger at each name in his catalogue. 'First, Lucus Mortis; then Terra Tenebrosa; next, Tartarus; after that, Terra Oblivionis; then Herebus; then Barathrum; then Gehenna, and then Stagium Ignis.'

'Of course,' acquiesced Lake, with an ugly sneer, and a mock bow.

'And to think that all the white citizens were once men and women!' murmured Uncle Lorne, with a scowl.

'Quite so,' whispered Lake.

'I know where he is,' resumed the old man, with his finger on his long chin, and looking down upon the carpet.

'It would be very convenient if you would favour us with his address,' said Stanley, with a gracious sneer.

'I know what became of him,' continued the oracle.

'You are more in his confidence than we are,' said Lake.

'Don't be frightened — but he's alive; I think they'll make him mad. It is a frightful plight. Two angels buried him alive in Vallombrosa by night; I saw it, standing among the lotus and hemlock. A negro came to me, a black clergyman with white eyes, and remained beside me; and the angels imprisoned Mark; they put him on duty forty days and forty nights, with his ear to the river listening for voices; and when it was over we blessed them; and the clergyman walked with me a long while, to-and-fro, to-and-fro upon the earth, telling me the wonders of the abyss.'

'And is it from the abyss, Sir, he writes his letters?' enquired the Town Clerk, with a wink at Lake.

'Yes, yes, very diligent; it behoves him; and his hair is always standing straight on his head for fear. But he'll be sent up again, at last, a thousand, a hundred, ten and one, black marble steps, and then it will be the other one's turn. So it was prophesied by the black magician.'

'I thought, Sir, you mentioned just now he was a clergyman,' suggested Mr. Wealdon, who evidently enjoyed this wonderful yarn.

'Clergyman and magician both, and the chief of the lying prophets with thick lips. He'll come here some night and see you,' said Uncle Lorne, looking with a cadaverous apathy on Lake, who was gazing at him in return, with a sinister smile.

'Maybe it was a vision, Sir,' suggested the Town Clerk.

'Yes, Sir; a vision, maybe,' echoed the cavernous tones of the old man; 'but in the flesh or out of the flesh, I saw it.'

'You have had revelations, Sir, I've heard,' said Stanley's mocking voice.

'Many,' said the seer; 'but a prophet is never honoured. We live in solitude and privations — the world hates us — they stone us — they cut us asunder, even when we are dead. Feel me — I'm cold and white all over —

I died too soon — I'd have had wings now only for that pistol. I'm as white as Gehazi, except on my head, when that blood comes.'

Saying which, he rose abruptly, and with long jerking steps limped to the door, at which, I saw, in the shade, the face of a dark-featured man, looking gloomily in.

When he reached the door Uncle Lorne suddenly stopped and faced us, with a countenance of wrath and fear, and threw up his arms in an attitude of denunciation, but said nothing. I thought for a moment the gigantic spectre was about to rush upon us in an access of frenzy; but whatever the impulse, it subsided — or was diverted by some new idea; his countenance changed, and he beckoned as if to some one in the corner of the room behind us, and smiled his dreadful smile, and so left the apartment.

'That d — d old madman is madder than ever,' said Lake, in his fellest tones, looking steadfastly with his peculiar gaze upon the closed door. 'Jermyn is with him, but he'll burn the house or murder some one yet. It's all d — d nonsense keeping him here — did you see him at the door? — he was on the point of assailing some of us. He ought to be in a madhouse.'

'He used to be very quiet,' said the Town Clerk, who knew all about him.

'Oh! very quiet — yes, of course, very quiet, and quite harmless to people who don't live in the house with him, and see him but once in half-a-dozen years; but you can't persuade me it is quite so pleasant for those who happen to live under the same roof, and are liable to be intruded upon as we have been tonight every hour of their existence.'

'Well, certainly it is not pleasant, especially for ladies,' admitted the Town Clerk.

'No, not pleasant — and I've quite made up my mind it sha'n't go on. It is too absurd, really, that such a monstrous thing should be enforced; I'll get a private Act, next Session, and regulate those absurd conditions in the will. The old fellow ought to be under restraint; and I rather think it would be better for himself that he were.'

'Who is he?' I asked, speaking for the first time.

'I thought you had seen him before now,' said Lake.

'So I have, but quite alone, and without ever learning who he was,' I answered.

‘Oh! He is the gentleman, Julius, for whom in the will, under which we take, those very odd provisions are made — such as I believe no one but a Wylder or a Brandon would have dreamed of. It is an odd state of things to hold one’s estate under condition of letting a madman wander about your house and place, making everybody in it uncomfortable and insecure and exposing him to the imminent risk of making away with himself, either by accident or design. I happen to know what Mark Wylder would have done — for he spoke very fiercely on the subject — perhaps he consulted you?’

‘No.’

‘No? well, he intended locking him quietly into the suite of three apartments, you know, at the far end of the old gallery, and giving him full command of the mulberry garden by the little private stair, and putting a good iron door to it; so that “my beloved brother, Julius, at present afflicted in mind” (Lake quoted the words of the will, with an unpleasant sneer), should have had his apartments and his pleasure grounds quite to himself.’

‘And would that arrangement of Mr. Wylder’s have satisfied the conditions of the will?’ said the Town Clerk.

‘I rather think, with proper precautions, it would. Mark Wylder was very shrewd, and would not have run himself into a fix,’ answered Lake. ‘I don’t know any man shrewder; he is, certainly.’

And Lake looked at us, as he added these last words, in turn, with a quick, suspicious glance, as if he had said something rash, and doubted whether we had observed it.

After a little more talk, Lake and the Town Clerk resumed their electioneering conference, and the lists of electors were passed under their scrutiny, name by name, like slides under the miscroscope.

There is a great deal in nature, physical and moral, that had as well not be ascertained. It is better to take things on trust, with something of distance and indistinctness. What we gain in knowledge by scrutiny is sometimes paid for in a ghastly sort of disgust. It is marvellous in a small constituency of 300 average souls, what a queer moral result one of these businesslike and narrow investigations which precede an election will furnish. How you find them rated and classified — what odd notes you make to them in the margin; and after the trenchant and rapid vivisection, what sinister scars and seams remain, and how gaunt and repulsive old acquaintances stand up from it.

The Town Clerk knew the constituency of Dollington at his fingers' ends; and Stanley Lake quietly enjoyed, as certain minds will, the nefarious and shabby metamorphosis which every now and then some familiar and respectable burgess underwent, in the spell of half-a-dozen dry sentences whispered in his ear; and all this minute information is trustworthy and quite without malice.

I went to my bedroom, and secured the door, lest Uncle Lorne, or Julius, should make me another midnight visit. So that mystery was cleared up. Neither ghost nor spectral illusion, but flesh and blood — though in my mind there has always been a horror of a madman akin to the ghostly or demoniac.

I do not know how late Tom Wealdon and Stanley Lake sat up over their lists; but I dare say they were in no hurry to leave them, for a dissolution was just then expected, and no time was to be lost.

When I saw Tom Wealdon alone next day in the street of Gylingden, he walked a little way with me, and, said Tom, with a grave wink —

'Don't let the captain up there be hard on the poor old gentleman. He's quite harmless — he would not hurt a fly. I know all about him; for Jack Ford and I spent five weeks in the Hall, about twelve years ago, when the family were away and thought the keeper was not kind to him. He's quite gentle, and sometimes he'd make you die o' laughing. He fancies, you know, he's a prophet; and says he's that old Sir Lorne Brandon that shot himself in his bedroom. Well, he is a rum one; and we used to draw him out — poor Jack and me. I never laughed so much, I don't think, in the same time, before or since. But he's as innocent as a child — and you know them directions in the will is very strong; and they say Jos. Larkin does not like the captain a bit too well — and he has the will off, every word of it; and I think, if Captain Lake does not take care, he may get into trouble; and maybe it would not be amiss if you gave him a hint.'

Tom Wealdon, indeed, was a goodnatured fellow: and if he had had his way, I think the world would have gone smoothly enough with most people.

CHAPTER XLIX.

LARCOM, THE BUTLER, VISITS THE ATTORNEY.

Now I may as well mention here an occurrence which, seeming very insignificant, has yet a bearing upon the current of this tale, and it is this. About four days after the receipt of the despatches to which the conference of Captain Lake and the attorney referred, there came a letter from the same prolific correspondent, dated 20th March, from Genoa, which altogether puzzled Mr. Larkin. It commenced thus: —

‘Genoa: 20th march.

‘DEAR LARKIN, — I hope you did the three commissions all right. Wealdon won’t refuse, I reckon — but don’t let Lake guess what the 150l. is for. Pay Martin for the job when finished; it is under 60l.. mind; and get it looked at first.’

There was a great deal more, but these were the passages which perplexed Larkin. He unlocked the iron safe, and took out the sheaf of Wylder’s letters, and conned the last one over very carefully.

‘Why,’ said he, holding the text before his eyes in one hand and with the fingers of the other touching the top of his bald forehead, ‘Tom Wealdon is not once mentioned in this, nor in any of them; and this palpably refers to some direction. And 150l.? — no such sum has been mentioned. And what is this job of Martin’s? Is it Martin of the China Kilns, or Martin of the bank? That, too, plainly refers to a former letter — not a word of the sort. This is very odd indeed.’

Larkin’s fingertips descended over his eyebrow, and scratched in a miniature way there for a few seconds, and then his large long hand descended further to his chin, and his underlip was, as usual in deep thought, fondled and pinched between his finger and thumb.

‘There has plainly been a letter lost, manifestly. I never knew anything wrong in this Gylingden office. Driver has been always correct; but it is hard to know any man for certain in this world. I don’t think the captain would venture anything so awfully hazardous. I really can’t suspect so monstrous a thing; but, *unquestionably*, a letter *has* been lost — and who's to *take* it?'

Larkin made a fuller endorsement than usual on this particular letter, and ruminated over the correspondence a good while, with his lip between his finger and thumb, and a shadow on his face, before he replaced it in its iron drawer.

'It is not a thing to be passed over,' murmured the attorney, who had come to a decision as to the first step to be taken, and he thought with a qualm of the effect of one of Wylder's confidential notes getting into Captain Lake's hands.

While he was buttoning his walking boots, with his foot on the chair before the fire, a tap at his study door surprised him. A hurried glance on the table satisfying him that no secret paper or despatch lay there, he called —

'Come in.'

And Mr. Larcom, the grave butler of Brandon, wearing outside his portly person a black garment then known as a 'zephyr,' a white choker, and black trousers, and well polished, but rather splay shoes, and, on the whole, his fat and serious aspect considered, being capable of being mistaken for a church dignitary, or at least for an eminent undertaker, entered the room with a solemn and gentlemanlike reverence.

'Oh, Mr. Larcom! a message, or business?' said Mr. Larkin, urbanely.

'Not a message, Sir; only an enquiry about them few shares,' answered Mr. Larcom, with another serene reverence, and remaining standing, hat in hand, at the door.

'Oh, yes; and how do you do, Mr. Larcom? Quite well, I trust. Yes — about the Naunton Junction. Well, I'm happy to tell you — but pray take a chair — that I have succeeded, and the directors have allotted you five shares; and it's your own fault if you don't make two ten-and-six a share. The Chowsleys are up to six and a-half, I see here,' and he pointed to the 'Times.' Mr. Larcom's fat face smiled, in spite of his endeavour to keep it under. It was part of his business to look always grave, and he coughed, and recovered his gravity.

'I'm very thankful, Sir,' said Mr. Larcom, 'very.'

'But do sit down, Mr. Larcom — pray do,' said the attorney, who was very gracious to Larcom. 'You'll get the scrip, you know, on executing, but the shares are allotted. They sent the notice for you here. And — and how are the family at Brandon — all well, I trust?'

Mr. Larcom blew his nose.

'All, Sir, well.'

'And — and let me give you a glass of sherry, Mr. Larcom, after your walk. I can't compete with the *Brandon* sherry, Mr. Larcom. Wonderful fine wine that! — but still I'm told this is not a *bad* wine notwithstanding.'

Larcom received it with grave gratitude, and sipped it, and spoke respectfully of it.

'And — and any news in that quarter of Mr. Mark Wylder — any — any *surmise*? I — you know — I'm interested for all parties.'

'Well, Sir, of Mr. Wylder, I can't say as I know no more than he's been a subjek of much unpleasant feelin', which I should say there has been a great deal of angry talk since I last saw you, Sir, between Miss Lake and the capting.'

'Ah, yes, you mentioned something of the kind; and your own impression, that Captain Lake, which I trust may turn out to be so, knows where Mr. Mark Wylder is at present staying.'

'I much misdoubt, Sir, it won't turn out to be no good story for no one,' said Mr. Larcom, in a low and sad tone, and with a long shake of his head.

'No good story — hey? How do you mean, Larcom?'

'Well, Sir, I know you won't mention me, Mr. Larkin.'

'Certainly not — go on.'

'When people gets hot a-talking they won't mind a body comin' in; and that's how the capting and Miss Rachel Lake they carried on their dispute like, though me coming into the room.'

'Just so; and what do you found your opinion about Mr. Mark Wylder on?'

'Well, Sir, I could not hear more than a word now and a sentince again; and pickin' what meaning I could out of what Miss Lake said, and the capting could not deny, I do suspeck, Sir, most serious, as how they have put Mr. Mark Wylder into a madhouse; and that's how I think it's gone with him; an' you'll never see him out again if the capting has his will.'

'Do you mean to say you actually think he's shut up in a madhouse at this moment?' demanded the attorney; his little pink eyes opened quite round, and his lank cheeks and tall forehead flushed, at the rush of wild ideas that whirred round him, like a covey of birds at the startling suggestion.

The butler nodded gloomily. Larkin continued to stare on him in silence, with his round eyes, for some seconds after.

'In a *mad*-house! Pooh, pooh! incredible! Pooh! impossible — *quite* impossible. Did either Miss Lake or the captain use the word madhouse?'

'Well, no.'

Or any other word — lunatic asylum, or a — bedlam, or — or *any* other word meaning the same thing?'

'Well, I can't say, Sir, as I remember; but I rayther think not. I only know for certain, I took it so; and I do believe as how Mr. Mark Wylder is confined in a madhouse, and the captain knows all about it, and won't do nothing to get him out.'

'H'm — very odd — very strange; but it is only from the general tenor of what passed, by a sort of guess work, you have arrived at that conclusion?'

Larcom assented.

'Well, Mr. Larcom, I think you have been led into an erroneous conclusion. Indeed, I may mention I have reason to think so — in fact, to *know* that such is the case. What you mention to me, you know, as a friend of the family, and holding, as I do, a confidential position — in fact, a *very* confidential one — alike in relation to Mr. Wylder and to the family of Brandon Hall, is of course sacred; and anything that comes from you, Mr. Larcom, is never heard in connection with your name beyond these walls. And let me add, it strikes me as highly important, both in the interests of the leading individuals in this unpleasant business, and also as pertaining to your own comfort and security, that you should carefully avoid communicating what you have just mentioned to any other party. You understand?'

Larcom did understand perfectly, and so this little visit ended.

Mr. Larkin took a turn or two up and down the room thinking. He stopped, with his fingertips to his eyebrow, and thought more. Then he took another turn, and stopped again, and threw back his head, and gazed for a while on the ceiling, and then he stood for a time at the window, with his lip between his finger and thumb.

No, it was a mistake; it could not be. It was Mark Wylder's penmanship — he could swear to it. There was no trace of madness in his letters, nor of restraint. It was not possible even that he was wandering from place to place under the coercion of a couple of keepers. No; Wylder was an energetic and somewhat violent person, with high animal courage, and would be sure to blow up and break through any such machination. No, no; with Mark Wylder it was quite out of the question — altogether visionary and impracticable. Persons like Larcom do make such absurd blunders, and so misapprehend the conversation of educated people.

Nothwithstanding all which, there remained in his mind an image of Mark Wylder, in the straw and darkness of a solitary continental madhouse — squalid, neglected, and becoming gradually that which he was said to be. And he always shaped him somehow after the outlines of a grizzly print he remembered in his boyish days, of a maniac chained in a Sicilian cell, grovelling under the lash of a half-seen gaoler, and with his teeth buried in his own arm.

Quite impossible! Mark Wylder was the last man in the world to submit to physical coercion. The idea, besides, could not be reconciled with the facts of the case. It was all a blundering chimera.

Mr. Larkin walked down direct to Gylingden, and paid a rather awful visit to Mr. Driver, of the postoffice. A foreign letter, addressed to him, had most positively been lost. He had called to mention the circumstance, lest Mr. Driver should be taken by surprise by official investigation. Was it possible that the letter had been sent by mistake to Brandon — to Captain Lake? Lake and Larkin, you know, might be mistaken. At all events, it would be well to make your clerks recollect themselves. (Mr. Larkin knew that Driver's 'clerks' were his daughters.) It is not easy to meet with a young fellow that is quite honest. But if they knew that they would be subjected to a sifting examination on oath, on the arrival of the commissioner, they might possibly prefer finding the letter, in which case there would be no more about it. Mr. Driver knew him (Mr. Larkin), and he might tell his young men if they got the letter for him they should hear no more of it.

The people of Gylingden knew very well that, when the rat-like glitter twinkled in Mr. Larkin's eyes, and the shadow came over his long face, there was mischief brewing.

CHAPTER L.

NEW LIGHTS.

A few days later 'Jos. Larkin, Esq., The Lodge, Gylingden,' received from London a printed form, duly filled in, and with the official signature attached, informing him that enquiry having been instituted in consequence of his letter, no result had been obtained.

The hiatus in his correspondence caused Mr. Larkin extreme uneasiness. He had a profound distrust of Captain Lake. In fact, he thought him capable of everything. And if there should turn out to be anything not quite straight going on at the postoffice of Gylingden — hitherto an unimpeached institution — he had no doubt whatsoever that that dark and sinuous spirit was at the bottom of it.

Still it was too prodigious, and too hazardous to be probable; but the captain had no sort of principle, and a desperately strong head. There was not, indeed, when they met yesterday, the least change or consciousness in the captain's manner. That, in another man, would have indicated something; but Stanley Lake was so deep — such a mask — in him it meant nothing.

Mr. Larkin's next step was to apply for a commissioner to come down and investigate. But before he had time to take this step, an occurrence took place to arrest his proceedings. It was the receipt of a foreign letter, of which the following is an exact copy: —

'VENICE: March 28.

'DEAR LARKIN, — I read a rumour of a dissolution during the recess. Keep a bright look out. Here's three things for you: —

'1. Try and get Tom Wealdon. He is a *sina que non*. [Mark's Latin was sailor-like.]

'2. Cash the enclosed order for 150l. more, for *the same stake*.

'3. Tell Martin the tiles I saw in August last will answer for the cowhouse; and let him put them down at once.

'In haste,

'Yours truly,

'M. WYLDER.'

Enclosed was an order on Lake for 150l.

When Larkin got this he was in his study.

'Why — why — this — *positively* this is the letter. *How's* this?'

And Mr. Larkin looked as much scared and astonished as if a spirit rose up before him.

'*This* is the letter — aye, this *is* the letter.'

He repeated this from time to time as he turned it over and looked at the postmark, and back again at the letter, and looked up at the date, and down at the signature, and read the note through.

'Yes, this is it — here it is — this is it. There's no doubt whatever — this is the letter referred to in the last — Wealdon, Martin, and the 150l.'

And the attorney took out his keys, looking pale and stern, like a man about to open the door upon a horror, and unlocked his safe, and took out the oft-consulted and familiar series — letters tied up and bearing the label, 'Mark Wylder, Esq.'

'Aye, here it is, Genoa, 20th, and this, Venice, 28th. Yes, the postmarks correspond; yet the letter from Genoa, dated 20th, refers back to the letter from Venice, written eight days later! the — Well — I can't comprehend — how in the name of — how in the name — — '

He placed the two letters on his desk, and read them over, and up and down, and pondered darkly over them.

'It is Mark Wylder's writing — I'll swear to it. What on earth *can* he mean? He can't possibly want to confuse us upon dates, as well as places, because that would simply render his letters, for purposes of business, nugatory, and there are many things he wishes attended to.'

Jos. Larkin rose from his desk, ruminating, and went to the window, and placed the letter against the pane. I don't think he had any definite motive in doing this, but something struck him that he had not remarked before.

There was something different in the quality of the ink that wrote the number of the date, 28th, from that used in the rest of the letter.

'What can that mean?' muttered Larkin, with a sort of gasp at his discovery; and shading his eyes with his hand, he scrutinised the numerals — '28th,' again;— 'a totally different ink!

He took the previous letter, frowned on it fiercely from his rat-like eyes, and then with an ejaculation, as like an oath as so good a man could utter, he exclaimed,

‘I have it!’

Then came a pause, and he said —

‘Both alike! — blanks left when the letters were written, and the dates filled in afterward — *not* the same hand I *think* — no, *not* the same — *positively* a different hand.’

Then Jos. Larkin examined these mysterious epistles once more.

‘There may be something in what Larcom said — a very great deal, possibly. If he was shut up somewhere they could make him write a set of these letters off at a sitting, and send them from place to place to be posted, to make us think he was travelling, and prevent our finding where they keep him. Here it is plain there was a slip in posting the wrong one first.’

Trepanned, kidnapped, hid away in the crypts of some remote madhouse — reduced to submission by privation and misery — a case as desperate as that of a prisoner in the Inquisition. What could be the motive for this elaborate and hideous fraud? Would it not be a more convenient course, as well as more merciful to put him to death? The crime would hardly be greater. Why should he be retained in that ghastly existence?

Well, if Stanley Lake were at the bottom of this horrid conspiracy, *he* certainly had a motive in clearing the field of his rival. And then — for the attorney had all the family settlements present to his mind — there was this clear motive for prolonging his life, that by the slip in the will under which Dorcas Brandon inherited, the bulk of her estate would terminate with the life of Mark Wylder; and this other motive too existed for retaining him in the house of bondage, that by preventing his marriage, and his having a family to succeed him, the reversion of his brother William was reduced to a certainty, and would become a magnificent investment for Stanley Lake whenever he might choose to purchase. Upon that purchase, however, the good attorney had cast his eye. He thought he now began to discern the outlines of a gigantic and symmetrical villainy emerging through the fog. If this theory were right, William Wylder’s reversion was certain to take effect; and it was exasperating that the native craft and daring of this inexperienced captain should forestall so accomplished a man of business as Jos. Larkin.

The attorney began to hate Stanley Lake as none but a man of that stamp can hate the person who mars a scheme of aggrandisement. But what was he to do exactly? If the captain had his eye on the reversion, it would require nice navigation to carry his plan successfully through.

On the other hand, it was quite possible that Wylder was a free agent, and yet, for purposes of secrecy, employing another person to post his letters at various continental towns; and this blunder might just as well have happened in this case, as in any other that supposed the same machinery.

On the whole, then, it was a difficult question. But there were Larcom's conclusions about the madhouse to throw into the balance. And though, as respected Mark Wylder, they were grisly, the attorney would not have been sorry to be quite sure that they were sound. What he most needed were ascertained data. With these his opportunities were immense.

Mr. Larkin eyed the Wylder correspondence now with a sort of reverence that was new to him. There was something supernatural and talismanic in the mystery. The sheaf of letters lay before him on the table, like Cornelius Agrippa's 'bloody book' — a thing to conjure with. What prodigies might it not accomplish for its happy possessor, if only he could read it aright, and command the spirits which its spells might call up before him? Yes, it was a stupendous secret. Who knew to what it might conduct? There was a shade of guilt in his tamperings with it, akin to the black art, which he felt without acknowledging. This little parcel of letters was, in its evil way, a holy thing. While it lay on the table, the room became the holy of holies in his dark religion; and the lank attorney, with tall bald head, shaded face, and hungry dangerous eyes, a priest or a magician.

The attorney quietly bolted his study door, and stood erect, with his hands in his pockets, looking sternly down on the letters. Then he took a little gazetteer off a tiny shelf near the bell-rope, where was a railway guide, an English dictionary, a French ditto, and a Bible, and with his sharp penknife he deftly sliced from its place in the work of reference the folded map of Europe.

It was destined to illustrate the correspondence, and Larkin sat down before it and surveyed, with a solemn stare, the wide scene of Mark Wylder's operations, as a general would the theatre of his rival's strategy.

Referring to the letters as he proceeded, with a sharp pen in red ink, he made his natty little note upon each town or capital in succession, from which Wylder had dated a despatch. Boulogne, for instance, a neat little red cross over the town, and beneath, ‘12th October, 1854;’ Brighton, ditto, ‘20th October, 1854;’ Paris, ditto, ‘17th November, 1854;’ Marseilles, ditto, ‘26th November, 1854;’ Frankfurt, ditto, ‘22nd February, 1855;’ Geneva, ditto, ‘10th March, 1855;’ Genoa, ditto, ‘20th March, 1855;’ Venice, ditto, ‘28th March, 1855.’

I may here mention that in the preceding notation I have marked the days and months exactly, but the years fancifully.

I don’t think that Mr. Larkin had read the ‘Wandering Jew.’ He had no great taste for works of fancy. If he had he might have been reminded, as he looked down upon the wild field of tactics just noted by his pen, of that globe similarly starred all over with little red crosses, which M. Rodin was wont to consult.

Now he was going into this business as he did into others, methodically. He, therefore, read what his gazetteer had to say about these towns and cities, standing, for better light, at the window. But though, the type being small, his eyes were more pink than before, he was nothing wiser, the information being of that niggardly historical and statistical kind which availed nothing in his present scrutiny. He would get Murray’s handbooks, and all sorts of works — he was determined to read it up. He was going into this as into a great speculative case, in which he had a heavy stake, with all his activity, craft, and unscrupulousness. It might be the making of him.

His treasure — his oracle — his book of power, the labelled parcel of Wylder’s letters, with the annotated map folded beside them — he replaced in their red-taped ligature in his iron safe, and with Chubb’s key in his pocket, took his hat and cane — the day was fine — and walked forth for Brandon and the captain’s study.

A pleasant day, a light air, a frosty sun. On the green the vicar, with his pretty boy by the hand, passed him, not a hundred yards off, like a ship at sea. There was a waving of hands, and smiles, and a shouted ‘beautiful day.’

‘What a position that poor fellow has got himself into!’ good Mr. Larkin thought, with a shrug of compassion, to himself. ‘That reversion! Why it’s nothing — I really don’t know why I think about it at all. If it were offered me this moment, positively I would not have it. Anything certain — *any* thing would be better.’

Little Fairy grew grave, in spite of the attorney's smiles, whenever he saw him. He was now saying — as holding his 'Wapsie's' hand, he capered round in front, looking up in his face —

'Why has Mr. Larkin no teeth when he laughs? Is he ever angry when he laughs — is he, Wapsie — oh, Wapsie, *is* he? Would you let him whip me, if I was naughty? I don't like him. Why does mamma say he is a good man, Wapsie?'

'Because, little man, he *is* a good man,' said the vicar, recalled by the impiety of the question. 'The best friend that Wapsie ever met with in his life.'

'But you would not give me to him, Wapsie?'

'Give you, darling! no — to no one but to God, my little man; for richer, for poorer, you're my own — your Wapsie's little man.'

And he lifted him up, and carried him in his arms against his loving heart, and the water stood in his eyes, as he laughed fondly into that pretty face.

But 'little man' by this time was struggling to get down and give chase to a crow grubbing near them for dainties, with a muddy beak, and 'Wapsie's' eyes followed, smiling, the wild vagaries of his little Fairy.

In the mean time Mr. Larkin had got among the noble trees of Brandon, and was approaching the lordly front of the Hall. His mind was busy. He had not very much fact to go upon. His theories were built chiefly of vapour, and every changing light or breath, therefore, altered their colouring and outlines.

'Maybe Mark Wylder is mad, and wandering in charge of a keeper; maybe he is in some mad doctor's house, and *not* mad; maybe in England, and there writes these letters which are sent from one continental town to another to be posted, and thus the appearance of locomotion is kept up. Perhaps he has been inveigled into the hands of ruffians, and is living as it were under the vault of an Inquisition, and compelled to write what ever his gaolers dictate. Maybe he writes not under physical but moral coercion. Be the fact how it may, those Lakes, brother and sister, have a guilty knowledge of the affair.

‘I will be firm — it is my duty to clear this matter up, if I can — we must do as we would be done by.’

CHAPTER LI.

A FRACAS IN THE LIBRARY.

It was still early in the day. Larcom received him gravely in the hall. Captain Lake was at home, as usual, up to one o'clock in the library — the most diligent administrator that Brandon had perhaps ever known.

'Well, Larkin — letters, letters perpetually, you see. Quite well, I hope? Won't you sit down — no bad news? You look rather melancholy. Your other client is not ill — nothing sad about Mark Wylder, I hope?'

'No — nothing sad, Captain Lake — nothing — but a good deal that is strange.'

'Oh, is there?' said Lake, in his soft tones, leaning forward in his easy chair, and looking on the shining points of his boots.

'I have found out a thing, Captain Lake, which will no doubt interest *you* as much as it does me. It will lead, I think, to a much more exact *guess* about Mr. Mark Wylder.'

There was a sturdy emphasis in the attorney's speech which was far from usual, and indicated something.

'Oh! you have? May one hear it?' said Lake, in the same silken tone, and looking down, as before, on his boots.

'I've discovered something about his letters,' said the attorney, and paused.

'Satisfactory, I hope?' said Lake as before.

'Foul play, Sir.'

'Foul play — is there? What is he doing now?' said Lake in the same languid way, his elbows on the arms of his chair, stooping forward, and looking serenely on the floor, like a man who is tired of his work, and enjoys his respite.

'Why, Captain Lake, the matter is this — it amounts, in fact, to *fraud*. It is plain that the letters are written in batches — several at a time — and committed to some one to carry from town to town, and post, *having previously filled in dates* to make them *correspond* with the exact period of posting them.'

The attorney's searching gaze was fixed on the captain, as he said this, with all the significance consistent with civility; but he could not observe the slightest indication of change. I dare say the captain felt his gaze upon him, and he undoubtedly heard his emphasis, but he plainly did not take either to himself.

'Indeed! that is very odd,' said Captain Lake.

'Very odd;' echoed the attorney.

It struck Mr. Larkin that his gallant friend was a little overacting, and showing perhaps less interest in the discovery than was strictly natural.

'But how can you show it?' said Lake with a slight yawn. 'Wylder *is* such a fellow. I don't the least pretend to understand him. It may be a freak of his.'

'I don't think, Captain Lake, that is exactly a possible solution here. I don't think, Sir, he would write two letters, one referring back to the other, at the same time, and post and date the latter more than a week *before* the other.'

'Oh!' said Lake, quietly, for the first time exhibiting a slight change of countenance, and looking peevish and excited; yes, that certainly does look very oddly.'

'And I think, Captain Lake, it behoves us to leave no stone unturned to sift this matter to the bottom.'

'With what particular purpose, I don't quite see,' said Lake. 'Don't you think possibly Mark Wylder might think us very impertinent?'

'I think, Captain Lake, on the contrary, we might be doing that gentleman the only service he is capable of receiving, and I know we should be doing something toward tracing and exposing the machinations of a conspiracy.'

'A conspiracy! I did not quite see your meaning. Then, you really think there is a conspiracy — formed *by* him or *against* him, which?'

'*Against* him, Captain Lake. Did the same idea never strike you?'

'Not, I think, that I can recollect.'

'In none of your conversations upon the subject with — with members of your family?' continued the attorney with a grave significance.

'I say, Sir, I don't recollect,' said Lake, glaring for an instant in his face very savagely. 'And it seems to me, that sitting here, you fancy yourself examining some vagrant or poacher at Gylingden sessions. And pray, Sir, have you no evidence in the letters you speak of but the insertion of dates, and the posting them in inverse order, to lead you to that strong conclusion?’

‘None, as supplied by the letters themselves,’ answered Larkin, a little doggedly, ‘and I venture to think that is rather strong.’

‘Quite so, to a mind like yours,’ said Lake, with a faint gleam of his unpleasant smile thrown upon the floor, ‘but other men don’t see it; and I hope, at all events, there’s a likelihood that Mark Wylder will soon return and look after his own business — I’m quite tired of it, and of’ (he was going to say *you*)— ‘of everything connected with it.’

‘This delay is attended with more serious mischief. The vicar, his brother, had a promise of money from him, and is disappointed — in very great embarrassments; and, in fact, were it not for some temporary assistance, which I may mention — although I don’t speak of such things — I afforded him myself, he must have been ruined.’

‘It is very sad,’ said Lake; ‘but he ought not to have married without an income.’

‘Very true, Captain Lake — there’s no defending that — it was wrong, but the retribution is terrible,’ and the righteous man shook his tall head.

‘Don’t you think he might take steps to relieve himself considerably?’

‘I don’t see it, Captain Lake,’ said the attorney, sadly and drily.

‘Well, you know best; but are not there resources?’

‘I don’t see, Captain Lake, what you point at.’

‘I’ll give him something for his reversion, if he chooses, and make him comfortable for his life.’

The attorney, somehow, didn’t seem to take kindly to this proposition. We know he had imagined for himself some little flirtation on this behalf, and cherished a secret *tendre* for the same reversion. Perhaps he had other plans, too. At all events it flashed the same suspicion of Lake upon his mind again; and he said —

‘I don’t know, Sir, that the Reverend Mr. Wylder would entertain anything in the nature of a sale of his reversion. I rather think the contrary. I don’t think his friends would advise it.’

‘And why not? It was never more than a contingency; and now they say Mark Wylder is married, and has children; they tell me he was seen at Ancona?’ said Lake tranquilly.

‘*They* tell you! who are *they?*’ said the attorney, and his dove’s eyes were gone again, and the rat’s eyes unequivocally looking out of the small pink lids.

‘They — they,’ repeated Captain Lake. ‘Why, of course, Sir, I use the word in its usual sense — that is, there was a rumour when I was last in town, and I really forget who told me. Some one, two, or three, perhaps.’

‘Do you think it’s true, Sir?’ persisted Mr. Larkin.

‘No, Sir, I don’t,’ said Captain Lake, fixing his eyes for a moment with a frank stare on the attorney’s face; ‘but it is quite possible it *may* be true.’

‘If it *is*, you know, Sir,’ said Jos. Larkin, ‘the reversion would be a bad purchase at a halfpenny. I don’t believe it either, Sir,’ resumed the attorney, after a little interval; ‘and I could not advise the party you named, Sir, to sell his remainder for a song.’

‘You’ll advise as you please, Sir, and no doubt not without sufficient reason,’ retorted Captain Lake.

There was a suspicion of a sneer — not in his countenance, not in his tone, not necessarily in his words — but somehow a suspicion, which stung the attorney like a certainty, and a pinkish flush tinged his forehead.

Perhaps Mr. Larkin had not yet formed any distinct plans, and was really in considerable dubitation. But as we know, perceiving that the situation of affairs, like all uncertain conjunctures, offered manifestly an opportunity for speculation, he was, perhaps, desirous, like our old friend, Sindbad, of that gleam of light which might show him the gold and precious stones with which the floor of the catacomb was strewn.

‘You see, Captain Lake, to speak quite frankly — there’s nothing like being perfectly frank and open — although you have not treated me with confidence, which, of course, was not called for in this particular instance — I may as well say, in passing, that I have no doubt on my mind you know a great deal more than you care to tell about the fate of Mr. Mark Wylder. I look upon it, Sir, that that party has been made away with.’

‘Old villain!’ exclaimed Lake, starting up, with a sudden access of energy, and his face looked whiter still than usual — perhaps it was only the light.

‘It won’t do, Sir,’ said Larkin, with a sinister quietude. ‘I say there’s been *foul play*. I think, Sir, you’ve got him into some foreign madhouse, or place of confinement, and I won't stop till it's sifted to the bottom. It is my duty, Sir.'

Captain Lake's slender hand sprang on the attorney's collar, coat and waistcoat together, and his knuckles, hard and sharp, were screwed against Mr. Larkin's jawbone, as he shook him, and his face was like a drift of snow, with two yellow fires glaring in it.

It was ferine and spectral, and so tremendously violent, that the long attorney, expecting nothing of the sort, was thrown out of his balance against the chimneypiece.

'You d — d old miscreant! I'll pitch you out of the window.'

'I — I say, let go. You're mad, Sir,' said the attorney, disengaging himself with a sudden and violent effort, and standing, with the back of a tall chair grasped in both hands, and the seat interposed between himself and Captain Lake. He was twisting his neck uncomfortably in his shirt collar, and for some seconds was more agitated, in a different way, than his patron was.

The fact was, that Mr. Larkin had a little mistaken his man. He had never happened before to see him in one of his violent moods, and fancied that his apathetic manner indicated a person more easily bullied. There was something, too, in the tone and look of Captain Lake which went a good way to confound and perplex his suspicions, and he half fancied that the masterstroke he had hazarded was a rank and irreparable blunder. Something of this, I am sure, appeared in his countenance, and Captain Lake looked awfully savage, and each gentleman stared the other full in the face, with more frankness than became two such diplomatists.

'Allow me to speak a word, Captain Lake.'

'You d — d old miscreant!' repeated the candescent captain.

'Allow me to say, you misapprehend.'

'You infernal old cur!'

'I mean no imputation upon *you*, Sir. I thought you might have committed a mistake — any man may; perhaps you have. I have acted, Captain Lake, with fidelity in all respects to you, and to every client for whom I've been concerned. Mr. Wylder is my client, and I was bound to say I was not satisfied about his present position, which seems to me unaccountable, except on the supposition that he is under restraint of some sort. I never said you were to blame; but you may be in error respecting Mr. Wylder. You may have taken steps, Captain Lake, under a mistake. I never went further than that. On reflection, you'll say so. I didn't upon my honour.'

'Then you did not mean to insult me, Sir,' said Lake.

'Upon my honour, and conscience, and soul, Captain Lake,' said the attorney, stringing together, in his vindication, all the articles he was assumed most to respect, 'I am perfectly frank, I do assure you. I never supposed for an instant more than I say. I could not imagine — I am amazed you have so taken it.'

'But you think I exercise some control or coercion over my cousin, Mr. Mark Wylder. He's not a man, I can tell you, wherever he is, to be bullied, no more than I am. I don't correspond with him. I have nothing to do with him or his affairs; I wash my hands of him.'

Captain Lake turned and walked quickly to the door, but came back as suddenly.

'Shake hands, Sir. We'll forget it. I accept what you say; but don't talk that way to me again. I can't imagine what the devil put such stuff in your head. I don't care twopence. No one's to blame but Wylder himself. I say I don't care a farthing. Upon my honour, I quite see — I now acquit you. You could not mean what you seemed to say; and I can't understand how a sensible man like you, knowing Mark Wylder, and knowing me, Sir, could use such — such *ambiguous* language. I have no more influence with him, and can no more affect his doings, or what you call his *fate* — and, to say the truth, care about them no more than the child unborn. He's his own master, of course. What the devil can you have been dreaming of. I don't even get a letter from him. He's *nothing* to me.'

'You have misunderstood me; but that's over, Sir. I may have spoken with warmth, fearing that you might be acting under some cruel misapprehension — that's all; and you don't think worse of me, I'm very sure, Captain Lake, for a little indiscreet zeal on behalf of a gentleman who has treated me with such unlimited confidence as Mr. Wylder. I'd do the same for you, Sir; it's my character.'

The two gentlemen, you perceive, though still agitated, were becoming reasonable, and more or less complimentary and conciliatory; and the masks which an electric gust had displaced for a moment, revealing gross and somewhat repulsive features, were being readjusted, while each looked over his shoulder.

I am sorry to say that when that good man, Mr. Larkin, left his presence, Captain Lake indulged in a perfectly blasphemous monologue. His fury was excited to a pitch that was very nearly ungovernable; and after it had exhibited itself in the way I have said, Captain Lake opened a little despatch-box, and took therefrom a foreign letter, but three days received. He read it through: his ill-omened smile expanded to a grin that was undisguisedly diabolical. With a scissors he clipt his own name where it occurred from the thin sheet, and then, in red ink and Roman capitals, he scrawled a line or two across the interior of the letter, enclosed it in an envelope, directed it, and then rang the bell.

He ordered the taxcart and two horses to drive tandem. The captain was rather a good whip, and he drove at a great pace to Dollington, took the train on to Charteris, there posted his letter, and so returned; his temper continuing savage all that evening, and in a modified degree in the same state for several days after.

CHAPTER LII.

AN OLD FRIEND LOOKS INTO THE GARDEN AT REDMAN'S FARM.

Lady Chelford, with one of those sudden changes of front which occur in female strategy, on hearing that Stanley Lake was actually accepted by Dorcas, had assailed both him and his sister, whom heretofore she had a good deal petted and distinguished, with a fury that was startling. As respects Rachel, we know how unjust was the attack.

And when the dowager opened her fire on Rachel, the young lady replied with a spirit and dignity to which she was not at all accustomed.

So soon as Dorcas obtained a hearing, which was not for sometime — for she, 'as a miserable and ridiculous victim and idiot,' was nearly as deep in disgrace as those 'shameless harpies the Lakes' — she told the whole truth as respected all parties with her superb and tranquil frankness.

Lady Chelford ordered her horses, and was about to leave Brandon next morning. But rheumatism arrested her indignant flight; and during her week's confinement to her room, her son contrived so that she consented to stay for 'the odious ceremony,' and was even sourly civil to Miss Lake, who received her advances quite as coldly as they were made.

To Miss Lake, Lord Chelford, though not in set terms, yet in many pleasant ways, apologised for his mother's impertinence. Dorcas had told *him* also the story of Rachel's decided opposition to the marriage.

He was so particularly respectful to her — he showed her by the very form into which he shaped his good wishes that he knew how frankly she had opposed the marriage — how true she had been to her friend Dorcas — and she understood him and was grateful.

In fact, Lord Chelford, whatever might be his opinion of the motives of Captain Lake and the prudence of Dorcas, was clearly disposed to make the best of the inevitable, and to stamp the new Brandon alliance with what ever respectability his frank recognition could give it.

Old Lady Chelford's bitter and ominous acquiescence also came, and the presence of mother and son at the solemnity averted the family scandal which the old lady's first access of frenzy threatened.

This duty discharged, she insisted, in the interest of her rheumatism, upon change of air; and on arriving at Duxley, was quite surprised to find Lady Dulhampton and her daughters there upon a similar quest.

About the matrimonial likelihoods of gentlemen with titles and estates Fame, that most tuft-hunting of divinities, is always distending her cheeks, and blowing the very finest flourishes her old trumpet affords.

Lord Chelford was not long away when the story of Lady Constance was again alive and vocal. It reached old Jackson through his sister, who was married to the brother of the Marquis of Dulhampton's solicitor. It reached Lake from Tom Twitters, of his club, who kept the Brandon Captain *au courant* of the town-talk; and it came to Dorcas in a more authentic fashion, though mysteriously, and rather in the guise of a conundrum than of a distinct bit of family intelligence, from no less a person than the old Dowager Lady Chelford herself.

Stanley Lake, who had begun to entertain hopes for Rachel in that direction, went down to Redman's Farm, and, after his bleak and bitter fashion, rated the young lady for having perversely neglected her opportunities and repulsed that most desirable *parti*. In this he was intensely in earnest, for the connection would have done wonders for Captain Lake in the county.

Rachel met this coarse attack with quiet contempt; told him that Lord Chelford had, she supposed, no idea of marrying out of his own rank; and further, that he, Captain Lake, must perfectly comprehend, if he could not appreciate, the reasons which would for ever bar any such relation.

But Rachel, though she treated the subject serenely in this interview, was sadder and more forlorn than ever, and lay awake at night, and, perhaps, if we knew all, shed some secret tears; and then with time came healing of these sorrows.

It was a fallacy, a mere chimera, that was gone; an impracticability too. She had smiled at it as such when Dorcas used to hint at it; but are there no castles in the clouds which we like to inhabit, although we know them altogether air-built, and whose evaporation desolates us?

Rachel's talks with the vicar were frequent; and poor little Mrs. William Wylder, who knew not the reason of his visits, fell slowly, and to the good man’s entire bewilderment, into a chronic jealousy. It expressed itself enigmatically; it was circumlocutory, sad, and mysterious.

‘Little Fairy was so pleased with his visit to Redman’s Farm to-day. He told me all about it; did not you, little man? But still you love poor old mamma best of all; you would not like to have a new mamma. Ah, no; you’d rather have your poor old, ugly Mussie. I wish I was handsome, my little man, and clever; but wishing is vain.’

‘Ah! Willie, there was a time when you could not see how ugly and dull your poor foolish little wife was; but it could not last for ever. How did it happen — oh, how? — you such a scholar, so clever, so handsome, my beautiful Willie — how did you ever look down on poor wretched me?’

‘I think it will be fine, Willie, and Miss Lake will expect you at Redman’s Farm; and little Fairy will go too; yes, you’d like to go, and mamma will stay at home, and try to be useful in her poor miserable way,’ and so on.

The vicar, thinking of other things, never seeing the reproachful irony in all this, would take it quite literally, assent sadly, and with little Fairy by the hand, set forth for Redman’s Farm; and the good little body, to the amazement of her two maids, would be heard passionately weeping in the parlour in her forsaken state.

At last there came a great upbraiding, a great *éclaircissement*, and laughter, and crying, and hugging; and the poor little woman, quite relieved, went off immediately, in her gratitude, to Rachel, and paid her quite an affectionate little visit.

Jealousy is very unreasonable. But have we no compensation in this, that the love which begets it is often as unreasonable? Look in the glass, and then into your own heart, and ask your conscience, next, ‘Am I really quite a hero, or altogether so lovely, as I am beloved?’ Keep the answer to yourself, but be tender with the vehement follies of your jealous wife. Poor mortals! It is but a short time we have to love, and be jealous, and love again.

One night, after a long talk in the morning with good William Wylder, and great dejection following, all on a sudden, Rachel sat up in her bed, and in a pleasant voice, and looking more like herself than she had for many months, she said —

‘I think I have found the true way out of my troubles, Tamar. At every sacrifice to be quite honest; and to that, Tamar, I have made up my mind at last, thank God. Come, Tamar, and kiss me, for I am free once more.’

So that night passed peacefully.

Rachel — a changed Rachel still — though more like her early self, was now in the tiny garden of Redman’s Farm. The early spring was already showing its bright green through the brown of winter, and sun and shower alternating, and the gay gossiping of sweet birds among the branches, were calling the young creation from its slumbers. The air was so sharp, so clear, so sunny, the mysterious sense of coming life so invigorating, and the sounds and aspect of nature so rejoicing, that Rachel with her gauntlets on, her white basket of flower seeds, her trowel, and all her garden implements beside her, felt her own spring of life return, and rejoiced in the glad hour that shone round her.

Lifting up her eyes, she saw Lord Chelford looking over the little gate.

‘What a charming day,’ said he, with his pleasant smile, raising his hat, ‘and how very pleasant to see you at your pretty industry again.’

As Rachel came forward in her faded gardening costume, an old silk shawl about her shoulders, and hoodwise over her head, somehow very becoming, there was a blush — he could not help seeing it — on her young face, and for a moment her fine eyes dropped, and she looked up, smiling a more thoughtful and a sadder smile than in old days. The picture of that smile so gay and fearless, and yet so feminine, rose up beside the sadder smile that greeted him now, and he thought of Ondine without and Ondine with a soul.

‘I am afraid I am a very impertinent — at least a very inquisitive — wayfarer; but I could not pass by without a word, even at the risk of interrupting you. And the truth is, I believe, if it had not been for that chance of seeing and interrupting you, I should not have passed through Redman’s Dell to-day.’

He laughed a little as he said this; and held her hands some seconds longer than is strictly usual in such a greeting.

‘You are staying at Brandon?’ said Rachel, not knowing exactly what to say.

‘Yes; Dorcas, who is always very good to me, made me promise to come whenever I was at Drackley. I arrived yesterday, and they tell me you stay so much at home, that possibly you might not appear in the upper world for two or three days; so I had not patience, you see.’

It was now Rachel's turn to laugh a musical little roulade; but somehow her talk was neither so gay, nor so voluble, as it used to be. She liked to listen; she would not for the world their little conversation ended before its time; but there was an unwonted difficulty in finding anything to say.

'It is quite true; I am more a stay-at-home than I used to be. I believe we learn to prize home more the longer we live.'

'What a wise old lady! I did not think of that; I have only learned that whatever is most prized is hardest to find.'

'And spring is come again,' continued Rachel, passing by this little speech, 'and my labours recommence. And though the day is longer, there is more to do in it, you see.'

'I don't wonder at your being a stay-at-home, for, to my eyes, it is the prettiest spot of earth in all the world; and if you find it half as hard to leave it as I do, your staying here is quite accounted for.'

This little speech, also, Rachel understood quite well, though she went on as if she did not.

'And this little garden costs, I assure you, a great deal of wise thought. In sowing my annuals I have so much to forecast and arrange; suitability of climate, for we have sun and shade here, succession of bloom and contrast of colour, and ever so many other important things.'

'I can quite imagine it, though it did not strike me before,' he said, looking on her with a smile of pleasant and peculiar interest, which somehow gave a reality to this playful talk. 'It is quite true; and I should not have thought of it — it is very pretty,' and he laughed a gentle little laugh, glancing over the tiny garden.

'But, after all, there is no picture of flowers, or still life, or even of landscape, that will interest long. You must be very solitary here at times — that is, you must have a great deal more resource than I, or, indeed, almost anyone I know, or this solitude must at times be oppressive. I hope so, at least, for that would force you to appear among us sometimes.'

'No, I am not lonely — that is, not lonelier than is good for me. I have such a treasure of an old nurse — poor old Tamar — who tells me stories, and reads to me, and listens to my follies and temper, and sometimes says very wise things, too; and the good vicar comes often — this is one of his days — with his beautiful little boy, and talks so well, and answers my follies and explains all my perplexities, and is really a great help and comfort.'

'Yes,' said Lord Chelford, with the same pleasant smile, 'he told me so; and seems so pleased to have met with so clever a pupil. Are you coming to Brandon this evening? Lake asked William Wylder, perhaps he will be with us. I do hope you will come. Dorcas says there is no use in writing; but that you know you are always welcome. May I say you'll come?'

Rachel smiled sadly on the snowdrops at her feet, and shook her head a little.

'No, I must stay at home this evening — I mean I have not spirits to go to Brandon. Thank Dorcas very much from me — that is, if you really mean that she asked me.'

'I am so sorry — I am so disappointed,' said Lord Chelford, looking gravely and enquiringly at her. He began, I think, to fancy some estrangement there. 'But perhaps tomorrow — perhaps even to-day — you may relent, you know. Don't say it is impossible.'

Rachel smiled on the ground, as before; and then, with a little sigh and a shake of her head, said —

'No.'

'Well, I must tell Dorcas she was right — you are very inexorable and cruel.'

'I am very cruel to keep you here so long — and I, too, am forgetting the vicar, who will be here immediately, and I must meet him in a costume less like the Woman of Endor.'

Lord Chelford, leaning on the little wicket, put his arm over, and she gave him her hand again.

'Goodbye,' said Rachel.

'Well, I suppose I, too, must say goodbye; and I'll say a great deal more,' said he, in a peculiar, odd tone, that was very firm, and yet indescribably tender. And he held her slender hand, from which she had drawn the gauntlet, in his. 'Yes, Rachel, I will — I'll say everything. We are old friends now — you'll forgive me calling you Rachel — it may be perhaps the last time.'

Rachel was standing there with such a beautiful blush, and downcast eyes, and her hand in his.

‘I liked you always, Rachel, from the first moment I saw you — I liked you better and better — indescribably — indeed, I do; and I’ve grown to like you so, that if I lose you, I think I shall never be the same again.’

There was a very little pause, the blush was deeper, her eyes lower still.

‘I admire you, Rachel — I like your character — I have grown to love you with all my heart and mind — quite desperately, I think. I know there are things against me — there are better-looking fellows than I — and — and a great many things — and I know very well that you will judge for yourself — quite differently from other girls; and I can’t say with what fear and hope I await what you may say; but this you may be sure of, you will never find anyone to love you better, Rachel — I think so well — and — and now — that is all. Do you think you could *ever* like me?’

But Rachel’s hand, on a sudden, with a slight quiver, was drawn from his.

‘Lord Chelford, I can’t describe how grateful I am, and how astonished, but it could never be — no — never.’

‘Rachel, perhaps you mean my mother — I have told her everything — she will receive you with all the respect you so well deserve; and with all her faults, she loves me, and will love you still more.’

‘No, Lord Chelford, no.’ She was pale now, and looking very sadly in his eyes. ‘It is not that, but only that you must never, never speak of it again.’

‘Oh! Rachel, darling, you must not say that — I love you so — so *desperately*, you don’t know.’

‘I can say nothing else, Lord Chelford. My mind is quite made up — I am inexpressibly grateful — you will never know how grateful — but except as a friend — and won’t you still be my friend? — I never can regard you.’

Rachel was so pale that her very lips were white as she spoke this in a melancholy but very firm way.

‘Oh, Rachel, it is a great blow — maybe if you thought it over! — I’ll wait any time.’

‘No, Lord Chelford, I’m quite unworthy of your preference; but time cannot change me — and I am speaking, not from impulse, but conviction. This is our secret — yours and mine — and we’ll forget it; and I could not bear to lose your friendship — you’ll be my friend still — won’t you? Goodbye.’

‘God bless you, Rachel!’ And he hurriedly kissed the hand she had placed in his, and without a word more, or looking back, he walked swiftly down the wooded road towards Gylingden.

So, then, it had come and gone — gone for ever.

‘Margery, bring the basket in; I think a shower is coming.’

And she picked up her trowel and other implements, and placed them in the porch, and glanced up towards the clouds, as if she saw them, and had nothing to think of but her gardening and the weather, and as if her heart was not breaking.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE VICAR'S COMPLICATIONS, WHICH LIVELY PEOPLE HAD BETTER NOT READ.

William Wylder's reversion was very tempting. But Lawyer Larkin knew the value of the precious metals, and waited for more data. The more he thought over his foreign correspondence, and his interview with Lake, the more steadily returned upon his mind the old conviction that the gallant captain was deep in the secret, whatever it might be.

Whatever his motive — and he always had a distinct motive, though sometimes not easily discoverable — he was a good deal addicted now to commenting, in his confidential talk, with religious gossips and others, upon the awful state of the poor vicar's affairs, his inconceivable prodigality, the unaccountable sums he had made away with, and his own anxiety to hand over the direction of such a hopeless complication of debt, and abdicate in favour of any competent skipper the command of the water-logged and foundering ship.

'Why, his Brother Mark could get him cleverly out of it — could not he?' wheezed the pork-butcher.

'More serious than you suppose,' answered Larkin, with a shake of his head.

'It can't go beyond five hundred, or say nine hundred — eh, at the outside?'

'Nine *hundred* — say double as many *thousand*, and I'm afraid you'll be nearer the mark. You'll not mention, of course, and I'm only feeling my way just now, and speaking conjecturally altogether; but I'm afraid it is enormous. I need not remind you not to mention.'

I cannot, of course, say how Mr. Larkin's conjectures reached so prodigious an elevation, but I can now comprehend why it was desirable that this surprising estimate of the vicar's liabilities should prevail. Mr. Jos. Larkin had a weakness for enveloping much of what he said and wrote in an honourable mystery. He liked writing *private* or *confidential* at top of his notes, without apparent right or even reason to impose either privacy or confidence upon the persons to whom he wrote. There was, in fact, often in the good attorney’s mode of transacting business just a *soupçon* or flavour of an *arrière pensée* of a remote and unseen plan, which was a little unsatisfactory.

Now, with the vicar he was imperative that the matter of the reversion should be strictly confidential — altogether ‘sacred,’ in fact.

‘You see, the fact is, my dear Mr. Wylder, I never meddle in speculative things. It is not a class of business that I like or would touch with one of my fingers, so to speak,’ and he shook his head gently; ‘and I may say, if I were supposed to be ever so slightly engaged in these risky things, it would be the *ruin* of me. I don t like, however, sending you into the jaws of the City sharks — I use the term, my dear Mr. Wylder, advisedly — and I make a solitary exception in your case; but the fact is, if I thought you would mention the matter, I could not touch it even for you. There’s Captain Lake, of Brandon, for instance — I should not be surprised if I lost the Brandon business the day after the matter reached his ears. All men are not like you and me, my dear Mr. Wylder. The sad experience of my profession has taught me that a suspicious man of the world, without religion, my dear Mr. Wylder,’ and he lifted his pink eyes, and shook his long head and long hands in unison— ‘without religion — will imagine anything. They can’t understand us.’

Now, the fifty pounds which good Mr. Larkin had procured for the improvident vicar, bore interest, I am almost ashamed to say, at thirty per cent. per annum, and ten per cent. more the first year. But you are to remember that the security was altogether speculative; and Mr. Larkin, of course, made the best terms he could.

	£ *s.* *d.*
Annual premium on a policy for £100 [double insurance being insisted upon by lender, to cover contingent expenses, and life not insurable, a delicacy of the lungs being admitted, on the ordinary scale]	10 0 0
Annuity payable to lender, clear of premium, the security being unsatisfactory	7 10 0
	£17 10 0

Ten pounds of which (the premium), together with four pounds ten shillings for expenses, &c. were payable in advance. So that thirty-two pounds, out of his borrowed fifty, were forfeit for these items within a year and a month. In the meantime the fifty pounds had gone, as we know, direct to Cambridge; and he was called upon to pay forthwith ten pounds for premium, and four pounds ten shillings for 'expenses.' *Quod impossibile.*

The attorney had nothing for it but to try to induce the lender to let him have another fifty pounds, pending the investigation of title — another fifty, of which he was to get, in fact, eighteen pounds. Somehow, the racking off of this bitter vintage from one vessel into another did not seem to improve its quality. On the contrary, things were growing decidedly more awful.

Now, there came from Messrs. Burlington and Smith a peremptory demand for the fourteen pounds ten shillings, and an equally summary one for twenty-eight pounds fourteen shillings and eight pence, their costs in this matter.

When the poor vicar received this latter blow, he laid the palm of his hand on the top of his head, as if to prevent his brain from boiling over. Twenty-eight pounds fourteen shillings and eight pence! *Quod impossibile.* again.

When he saw Larkin, that conscientious guardian of his client's interests scrutinised the bill of costs very jealously, and struck out between four and five pounds. He explained to the vicar the folly of borrowing insignificant and insufficient sums — the trouble, and consequently the cost, of which were just as great as of an adequate one. He was determined, if he could, to pull him through this. But he must raise a sufficient sum, for the expense of going into title would be something; and he would write sharply to Burlington, Smith, and Co., and had no doubt the costs would be settled for twenty-three pounds. And Mr. Jos. Larkin's opinion upon the matter was worthy of respect, inasmuch as he was himself, under the rose, the 'Co.' of that firm, and ministered its capital.

'The fact is you must, my dear Mr. Wylder, make an effort. It won't do peddling and tinkering in such a case. You will be in a worse position than ever, unless you boldly raise a thousand pounds — if I can manage such a transaction upon a security of the kind. Consolidate all your liabilities, and keep a sum in hand. You are well connected — powerful relatives — your brother has Huxton, four hundred, a year, whenever old — the — the present incumbent goes — and there are other things beside — but you must not allow yourself to be ruined through timidity; and if you go to the wall without an effort, and allow yourself to be slurred in public, what becomes of your chance of preferment?'

And now 'title' went up to Burlington, Smith, and Co. to examine and approve; and from that firm, I am sorry to say, a bill of costs was coming, when deeds were prepared and all done, exceeding three hundred and fifty pounds; and there was a little reminder from good Jos. Larkin for two hundred and fifty pounds more. This, of course, was to await Mr. Wylder's perfect convenience. The vicar knew *him* — *he* never pressed any man. Then there would be insurances in proportion; and interest, as we see, was not trifling. And altogether, I am afraid, our friend the vicar was being extricated in a rather embarrassing fashion.

Now, I have known cases in which goodnatured debauchees have interested themselves charitably in the difficulties of forlorn families; and I think *I* knew, almost before they suspected it, that their generous interference was altogether due to one fine pair of eyes, and a pretty *tournure*, in the distressed family circle. Under a like half-delusion, Mr. Jos. Larkin, in the guise of charity, was prosecuting his designs upon the vicar's reversion, and often most cruelly and most artfully, when he frankly fancied his conduct most praiseworthy.

And really I do not myself know, that, considering poor William's liabilities and his means, and how many chances there were against that reversion ever becoming a fact, that I would not myself have advised his selling it, if a reasonable price were obtainable.

'All this power will I give thee,' said the Devil, 'and the glory of them; for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it.' The world belongs to the rascals. It is like 'the turf,' where, everyone admits, an honest man can hardly hold his own. Jos. Larkin looked down on the seedy and distracted vicar from an immense moral elevation. He heard him talk of religion with disgust. He owed him costs, and, beside, costs also to Burlington, Smith, and Co. Was there not Talkative in 'Pilgrim's Progress?' I believe there are few things more provoking than that a man who owes you money, and can't pay the interest, should pretend to religion to your face, except, perhaps, his giving sixpence in charity.

The attorney was prosperous. He accounted for it by his attributes, and the blessing that waits on industry and integrity. He did not see that luck and selfishness had anything to do with it. No man ever failed but through his own fault — none ever succeeded but by his deservings. The attorney was in a position to lecture the Rev. Mr. Wylder. In his presence, religion, in the vicar's mouth, was an impertinence.

The vicar, on the other hand, was all that we know. Perhaps, in comparison, his trial is, in some sort, a blessing; and that there is no greater snare than the state of the man with whom all goes smoothly, and who mistakes his circumstances for his virtues.

The poor vicar and his little following were got pretty well into the Furcae Caudinae. Mr. Jos. Larkin, if he did not march him out, to do him justice, had had no hand in primarily bringing him there. There was no reason, however, why the respectable lawyer should not make whatever was to be fairly made of the situation. The best thing for both was, perhaps, that the one should sell and the other buy the reversion. Larkin had no apprehensions about the nature of the dealing. He was furnished with an excellent character — his cheques were always honoured — his 'tots' always unexceptionable — his vouchers never anything but exact. He had twice been publicly complimented in this sense, when managing Lord Hedgerow's estate. No man had, I believe, a higher reputation in his walk — few men were more formidable. I think it was Lawyer Larkin's private canon, in his dealings with men, that everything was moral that was not contrary to an Act of Parliament.

CHAPTER LIV.

BRANDON CHAPEL ON SUNDAY.

For a month and three days Mr. Jos. Larkin was left to ruminate without any new light upon the dusky landscape now constantly before his eyes. At the end of that time a foreign letter came for him to the Lodge. It was not addressed in Mark Wylder's hand — not the least like it. Mark's was a bold, free hand, and if there was nothing particularly elegant, neither was there anything that could be called vulgar in it. But this was a decidedly villainous scrawl — in fact it was written as a self-educated butcher might pen a bill. There was nothing impressed on the wafer, but a poke of something like the ferrule of a stick.

The interior corresponded with the address, and the lines slanted confoundedly. It was, however, on the whole, better spelled and expressed than the penmanship would have led one to expect. It said —

'MISTER LARKINS, — Respeckted Sir, I write you, Sir, to let you know has how there is no more Chance you shud ear of poor Mr. Mark Wylder — of hose orrible Death I make bold to acquainte you by this writing — which is Secret has yet from all — he bing Hid, and made away with in the dark. It is only Right is family shud know all, and his sad ending — wich I will tell before you, Sir, in full, accorden to my Best guess, as bin the family Lawyer (and, Sir, you will find it usful to Tell this in secret to Capten Lake, of Brandon Hall — But not on No account to any other). It is orrible, Sir, to think a young gentleman, with everything the world can give, shud be made away with so crewel in the dark. Though you do not rekelect me, Sir, I know you well, Mr. Larkins, haven seen you hoffen when a boy. I wud not wish, Sir, no noise made till I cum — which I am returning hoame, and will then travel to Gylingden strateways to see you.

Sir, your obedient servant,

'JAMES DUTTON.'

This epistle disturbed Mr. Jos. Larkin profoundly. He could recollect no such name as James Dutton. He did not know whether to believe this letter or not. He could not decide what present use to make of it, nor whether to mention it to Captain Lake, nor, if he did so, how it was best to open the matter.

Captain Lake, he was confident, knew James Dutton — why, otherwise, should that person have desired his intelligence communicated to him. At least it proved that Dutton assumed the captain to be specially interested in what concerned Mark Wylder's fate; and in so far it confirmed his suspicions of Lake. Was it better to wait until he had seen Dutton, and heard his story, before hinting at his intelligence and his name — or was it wiser to do that at once, and watch its effect upon the gallant captain narrowly, and trust to inspiration and the moment for striking out the right course.

If this letter was true there was not a moment to be lost in bringing the purchase of the vicar's reversion to a point. The possibilities were positively dazzling. They were worth risking something. I am not sure that Mr. Larkin's hand did not shake a little as he took the statement of title again out of the Wylder tin box No. 2.

Now, under the pressure of this enquiry, a thing struck Mr. Larkin, strangely enough, which he had quite overlooked before. There were certain phrases in the will of the late Mr. Wylder, which limited a large portion of the great estate in strict settlement. Of course an attorney's opinion upon a question of real property is not conclusive. Still they can't help knowing something of the barrister's special province; and these words were very distinct — in fact, they stunted down the vicar's reversion in the greater part of the property to a strict life estate.

Long did the attorney pore over his copy of the will, with his finger and thumb closed on his under lip. The language was quite explicit — there was no way out of it. It was strictly a life estate. How could he have overlooked that? His boy, indeed, would take an estate tail — and could disentail whenever — if ever — he came of age. But that was in the clouds. Mackleston-on-the-Moor, however, and the Great Barnford estate, were unaffected by these limitations; and the rental which he now carefully consulted, told him these jointly were in round numbers worth 2,300l. a year, and improvable.

This letter of Dutton's, to be sure, may turn out to be all a lie or a blunder. But it may prove to be strictly true; and in that case it will be *every* thing that the deeds should be executed and the purchase completed before the arrival of this person, and the public notification of Mark Wylder's death.

'What a world it is, to be sure!' thought Mr. Larkin, as he shook his long head over Dutton's letter. 'How smoothly and simply everything would go, if only men would stick to truth! Here's this letter — how much time and trouble it costs me — how much opportunity possibly sacrificed, simply by reason of the incurable mendacity of men.' And he knocked the back of his finger bitterly on the open page.

Another thought now struck him for the first time. Was there no mode of 'hedging,' so that whether Mark Wylder were living or dead the attorney should stand to win?

Down came the Brandon boxes. The prudent attorney turned the key in the door, and forth came the voluminous marriage settlement of Stanley Williams Lake, of Slobberligh, in the county of Devon, late captain, &c., &c. of the second part, and Dorcas Adderley Brandon, of Brandon Hall, in the county of &c., &c. of the second part, and so forth. And as he read this pleasant composition through, he two or three times murmured approvingly, 'Yes — yes — yes.' His recollection had served him quite rightly. There was the Five Oaks estate, specially excluded from settlement, worth 1,400l. a year; but it was conditioned that the said Stanley Williams Lake was not to deal with the said lands, except with the consent in writing of the said Dorcas, &c., who was to be a consenting party to the deed.

If there was really something 'unsound in the state of Lake's relations,' and that he could be got to consider Lawyer Larkin as a friend worth keeping, that estate might be had a bargain — yes, a *great* bargain.

Larkin walked off to Brandon, but there he learned that Captain *Brandon* Lake as he now chose to call himself, had gone that morning to London.

'Business, I venture to say, and he went into that electioneering without ever mentioning it either.'

So thought Larkin, and he did not like this. It looked ominous, and like an incipient sliding away of the Brandon business, Well, no matter, all things worked together for good. It was probably well that he should not be too much shackled with considerations of that particular kind in the important negotiation about Five Oaks.

That night he posted a note to Burlington, Smith, and Co., and by Saturday night's post there came down to the sheriff an execution for 123l. and some odd shillings, upon a judgment on a warrant to confess, at the suit of that firm, for costs and money advanced, against the poor vicar, who never dreamed, as he conned over his next day's sermon with his solitary candle, that the blow had virtually descended, and that his homely furniture, the silver spoons his wife had brought him, and the two shelves half full of old books which he had brought her, and all the rest of their little frugal trumpery, together with his own thin person, had passed into the hands of Messrs. Burlington, Smith, and Co.

The vicar on his way to the chapel passed Mr. Jos. Larkin on the green — not near enough to speak — only to smile and wave his hand kindly, and look after the good attorney with one of those yearning grateful looks, which cling to straws upon the drowning stream of life.

The sweet chapel bell was just ceasing to toll as Mr. Jos. Larkin stalked under the antique ribbed arches of the little aisle. Slim and tall, he glided, a chastened dignity in his long upturned countenance, and a faint halo of saint-hood round his tall bald head. Having whispered his orisons into his well-brushed hat and taken his seat, his dovelike eyes rested for a moment upon the Brandon seat.

There was but one figure in it — slender, light-haired, with his yellow moustache and pale face, grown of late a little fatter. Captain Brandon Lake was a very punctual churchgoer since the idea of trying the county at the next election had entered his mind. Dorcas was not very well. Lord Chelford had taken his departure, and your humble servant, who pens these pages, had gone for a few days to Malwich. There was no guest just then at Brandon, and the captain sat alone on that devotional dais, the elevated floor of the great oaken Brandon seat.

There were old Brandon and Wylder monuments built up against the walls. Figures cut in stone, and painted and gilded in tarnished splendour, according to the gorgeous barbarism of Elizabeth's and the first James's age; tablets in brass, marble-pillared monuments, and a couple of life-sized knights, armed *cap-à-pie*, on their backs in the aisle.

There is a stained window in the east which connoisseurs in that branch of mediaeval art admire. There is another very fine one over the Brandon pew — a freak, perhaps, of some of those old Brandons or Wylders, who had a strange spirit of cynicism mingling in their profligacy and violence.

Reader, you have looked on Hans Holbein's 'Dance of Death,' that grim, phantasmal pageant, symbolic as a dream of Pharaoh; and perhaps you bear in mind that design called 'The Elector,' in which the Prince, emerging from his palace gate, with a cloud of courtiers behind, is met by a poor woman, her little child by the hand, appealing to his compassion, despising whom, he turns away with a serene disdain. Beneath, in black letter, is inscribed the text '*Princeps induetur maerore et quiescere faciam superbiam potentium*' — and gigantic Death lays his fingers on the great man's ermine tippet.

It is a copy of this, which, in very splendid colouring, fills the window that lights the Brandon state seat in the chapel. The gules and gold were reflected on the young man's head, and with a vain augury, the attorney read again the solemn words from Holy Writ, *'Princeps induetur maerore.'* The golden glare rested like a glory on his head; but there was also a gorgeous stain of blood that bathed his ear and temple. His head was busy enough at that moment, though it was quite still, and his sly eyes rested on his Prayer-book; for Sparks, the millionaire clothier, who had purchased Beverley, and was a potent voice in the Dollington Bank, and whose politics were doubtful, and relations amphibious, was sitting in the pew nearly opposite, and showed his red, fat face and white whiskers over the oak wainscoting.

Jos. Larkin, like the rest of the congregation, was by this time praying, his elbows on the edge of the pew, his hands clasped, his thumbs under his chin, and his long face and pink eyes raised heavenward, with now and then a gentle downward dropping of the latter. He was thinking of Captain Lake, who was opposite, and, like him, praying.

He was thinking how aristocratic he looked and how well, in externals, he became the Brandon seat; and there were one or two trifles in the captain's attitude and costume of which the attorney, who, as we know, was not only good, but elegant, made a note. He respected his audacity and his mystery, and he wondered intensely what was going on in that small skull under the light and glossy hair, and anxiously guessed how vitally it might possibly affect him, and wondered what his schemes were after the election — *quiescere faciam superbiam potentium*; and more darkly about his relations with Mark Wylder — *Princeps induetur maerore*.

His eye was on the window now and then it dropped, with a vague presage, upon the sleek head of the daring and enigmatical captain, reading the Litany, from 'battle, murder, and sudden death, good Lord deliver us,' and he almost fancied he saw a yellow skull over his shoulder glowering cynically on the Prayer-book. So the good attorney prayed on, to the edification of all who saw, and mothers in the neighbouring seats were specially careful to prevent their children from whispering or fidgeting.

When the service was over Captain Lake went across to Mr. Sparks, and asked him to come to Brandon to lunch. But the clothier could not, and his brougham whirled him away to Naunton Friars. So Stanley Lake walked up the little aisle toward the communion table, thinking, and took hold of the railing that surrounded the brass monument of Sir William de Braundon, and seemed to gaze intently on the effigy, but was really thinking profoundly of other matters and once or twice his sly sidelong glance stole ominously to Jos. Larkin, who was talking at the church door with the good vicar.

In fact, he was then and there fully apprising him of his awful situation; and poor William Wylder looking straight at him, with white face and damp forehead, was listening stunned, and hardly understanding a word he said, and only the dreadful questions rising to his mouth, 'Can *anything* be done? Will the people come *to-day*?'

Mr. Larkin explained the constitutional respect for the Sabbath.

'It would be better, Sir — the publicity of an arrest' (it was a hard word to utter) 'in the town would be very painful — it would be better I think, that I should walk over to the prison — it is only six miles — and see the authorities there, and give myself up.'

And his lip quivered; he was thinking of the leavetaking — of poor Dolly and little Fairy.

'I've a great objection to speak of business to-day,' said Mr. Larkin, holily; 'but I may mention that Burlington and Smith have written very sternly; and the fact is, my dear Sir, we must look the thing straight in the face; they are determined to go through with it; and you know my opinion all along about the fallacy — you *must* excuse me, seeing all the trouble it has involved you in — the infatuation of hesitating about the sale of that miserable reversion, which they could have disposed of on fair terms. In fact, Sir, they look upon it that you don't want to pay them and of course, they are very angry.'

'I'm sure I was wrong. I'm such a fool!'

'I must only go to the Sheriff the first thing the morning and beg of him to hold over that thing, you know, until I have heard from Burlington and Smith; and I suppose I may say to them that you see the necessity of disposing of the reversion, and agree to sell it if it be not too late.'

The vicar assented; indeed, he had grown, under this urgent pressure, as nervously anxious to sell as he had been to retain it.

'And they can't come *to-day*?'

'Certainly not.'

And poor William Wylder breathed again in the delightful sense of even momentary escape, and felt he could have embraced his preserver.

'I'll be very happy to see you tomorrow, if you can conveniently look in — say at twelve, or halfpast, to report progress.'

So that was arranged; and again in the illusive sense of deliverance, the poor vicar's hopes brightened and expanded. Hitherto his escapes had not led to safety, and he was only raised from the pit to be sold to the Ishmaelites.

CHAPTER LV.

THE CAPTAIN AND THE ATTORNEY CONVERSE AMONG THE TOMBS.

I cannot tell whether that slender, silken machinator, Captain Lake, loitered in the chapel for the purpose of talking to or avoiding Jos. Larkin, who was standing at the doorway, in sad but gracious converse with the vicar.

He was certainly observing him from among the tombs in his sly way. And the attorney, who had a way, like him, of noting things without appearing to see them, was conscious of it, and was perhaps decided by this trifle to accost the gallant captain.

So he glided up the short aisle with a sad religious smile, suited to the place, and inclined his lank back and his tall bald head toward the captain in ceremonious greeting as he approached.

‘How d’ye do, Larkin? The fog makes one cough a little this evening.’

Larkin’s answer, thanks, and enquiries, came gravely in return. And with the same sad smile he looked round on the figures, some marble, some painted stone, of departed Brandons and Wylders, with garrulous epitaphs, who surrounded them in various costumes, quite a family group, in which the attorney was gratified to mingle.

‘*Ancestry*, Captain Lake — *your* ancestry — noble assemblage — monuments and timber. Timber like the Brandon oaks, and monuments like these — these are things which, whatever else he may acquire, the *novus homo*, Captain Brandon Lake — the *parvenu* — can never command.’

Mr. Jos. Larkin had a smattering of school Latin, and knew half-a-dozen French words, which he took out on occasion.

‘Certainly our good people do occupy some space here; more regular attendants in church, than, I fear, they formerly were; and their virtues more remarked, perhaps, than before the stone-cutter was instructed to publish them with his chisel,’ answered Lake, with one of his quiet sneers.

‘Beautiful chapel this, Captain Lake — beautiful chapel, Sir,’ said the attorney, again looking round with a dreary smile of admiration. But though his accents were engaging and he smiled — of course, a Sabbath-day smile — yet Captain Lake perceived that it was not the dove’s but the rat’s eyes that were doing duty under that tall bald brow.

‘Solemn thoughts, Sir — solemn thoughts, Captain Lake — silent mentors, eloquent monitors!’ And he waved his long lank hand toward the monumental groups.

‘Yes,’ said Lake, in the same mocking tone, that was low and sweet, and easily mistaken for something more amiable. ‘You and they go capitally together — so solemn, and eloquent, and godly — capital fellows! *I*’m not half good enough for such company — and the place is growing rather cold — is not it?’

‘A great many Wylders, Sir — a great many *Wylders*.’ And the attorney dropped his voice, and paused at this emphasis, pointing a long finger toward the surrounding effigies.

Captain Lake, after his custom, glared a single full look upon the attorney, sudden as the flash of a pair of guns from their embrasures in the dark; and he said quietly, with a wave of his cane in the same direction —

‘Yes, a precious lot of Wylders.’

‘Is there a *Wylder* vault here, Captain Brandon Lake?’

‘Hanged if I know! — what the devil’s that to you or me, Sir?’ answered the captain, with a peevish sullenness.

‘I was thinking, Captain Lake, whether in the event of its turning out that Mr. Mark Wylder was *dead*, it would be thought proper to lay his body here?’

‘Dead, Sir! — and what the plague puts that in your head? You are corresponding with him — aren’t you?’

‘I’ll tell you exactly how that is, Captain Lake. May I take the liberty to ask you for one moment to look up?’

As between these two gentlemen, this, it must be allowed, was an impertinent request. But Captain Lake did look up, and there was something extraordinarily unpleasant in his yellow eyes, as he fixed them upon the contracted pupils of the attorney, who, nothing daunted, went on —

‘Pray, excuse me — thank you, Captain Lake — they say one is better heard when looked at than when not seen; and I wish to speak rather low, for reasons.'

Each looked the other in the eyes, with that uncertain and sinister gaze which has a character both of fear and menace.

'I have received those letters, Captain Lake, of which I spoke to you when I last had the honour of seeing you, as furnishing, in certain circumstances connected with them, grave matter of suspicion, since when I have *not* received one with Mr. Wylder's signature. But I *have* received, only the other day, a letter from a new correspondent — a person signing himself James Dutton — announcing his belief that Mr. Mark Wylder is dead — *is dead* — and has been made away with by foul means; and I have arranged, immediately on his arrival, at his desire, to meet him professionally, and to hear the entire narrative, both of what he knows and of what he suspects.'

As Jos. Larkin delivered this with stern features and emphasis, the captain's countenance underwent such a change as convinced the attorney that some indescribable evil had befallen Mark Wylder, and that Captain Brandon Lake had a guilty knowledge thereof. With this conviction came a sense of superiority and a pleasant confidence in his position, which betrayed itself in a slight frown and a pallid smile, as he looked steadily in the young man's face, with his small, crafty, hungry eyes.

Lake knew that his face had betrayed him. He had felt the livid change of colour, and that twitching at his mouth and cheek which he could not control. The mean, tyrannical, triumphant gaze of the attorney was upon him, and his own countenance was his accuser.

Lake ground his teeth, and returned Jos. Larkin's intimidating smirk with a look of fury, which — for he now believed he held the winning cards — did not appal him.

Lake cleared his throat twice, but did not find his voice, and turned away and read half through the epitaph on Lady Mary Brandon, which is a pious and somewhat puritanical composition. I hope it did him good.

'You know, Sir,' said Captain Lake, but a little huskily, turning about and smiling at last, 'that Mark Wylder is nothing to me. We don't correspond: we have not corresponded. I know — upon my honour and soul, Sir — nothing on earth about him — what he's doing, where he is, or what's become of him. But I can't hear a man of business like you assert, upon what he conceives to be reliable information — situated as the Brandon title is — depending, I mean, in some measure, upon his life — that Mark Wylder is no more, without being a good deal shocked.'

'I quite understand, Sir — quite, Captain Lake. It is very serious, Sir, very; but I can't believe it has gone that length, quite. I shall know more, of course, when I've seen James Dutton. I can't think, I mean, he's been made away with in that sense; nor how that could benefit anyone; and I'd much rather, Captain Lake, move in this matter — since move I must — in your interest — I mean, as your friend and man of business — than in any way, Captain Lake, that might possibly involve you in trouble.'

'You *are* my man of business — aren't you? and have no grounds for ill-will — eh?' said the captain, drily.

'No ill-will certainly — quite the reverse. Thank Heaven, I think I may truly say, I bear ill-will to no man living; and wish you, Captain Lake, nothing but good, Sir — nothing but good.'

'Except a hasty word or two, I know no reason you should *not*,' said the captain, in the same tone.

'Quite so. But, Captain Brandon Lake, there is nothing like being completely above-board — it has been my rule through life; and I will say — it would not be frank and candid to say anything else — that I have of late been anything but satisfied with the position which, ostensibly your professional adviser and confidential man of business, I have occupied. Have I been consulted? — I put it to you; have I been trusted? Has there been any real confidence, Captain Lake, upon your part? You have certainly had relations with Mr. Mark Wylder — correspondence, for anything I know. You have entertained the project of purchasing the Reverend William Wylder's reversion; and you have gone into electioneering business, and formed connections of that sort, without once doing me the honour to confer with me on the subject. Now, the plain question is, do you wish to retain my services?'

'Certainly,' said Captain Lake, biting his lip, with a sinister little frown.

'Then, Captain Lake, upon the same principle, and speaking quite above-board, you must dismiss at once from your mind the idea that you *can* do so upon the terms you have of late seen fit to impose. I am speaking frankly when I say there must be a total change. I must *be* in reality what I am held out to the world as being — your trusted, and responsible, and *sole* adviser. I don't aspire to the position — I am willing at this moment to retire from it;

but I never yet knew a divided direction come to good. It is an office of great responsibility, and I for one will not consent to touch it on any other conditions than those I have taken the liberty to mention.'

'These are easily complied with — in fact I undertake to show you they have never been disturbed,' answered Lake, rather sullenly. 'So that being understood — eh? — I suppose we have nothing particular to add?'

And Captain Lake extended his gloved hand to take leave.

But the attorney looked down and then up, with a shadow on his face, and his lip in his finger and thumb, and he said —

'That's all very well, and a *sine qua non*, so far as it goes! but, my dear Captain Lake, let us be plain. You must see, my dear Sir, with such rumours, possibly about to get afloat, and such persons about to appear, as this James Dutton, that matters are really growing critical, and there's no lack of able solicitors who would on speculation, undertake a suit upon less evidence, perhaps, than may be forthcoming, to upset your title, under the will, through Mrs. Dorcas Brandon Lake — your joint title — in favour of the reversioner.'

Lake only bit his lip and shook his head. The attorney knew, however, that the danger was quite appreciated, and went on —

'You will, therefore, want a competent man — who has the papers at his fingers' ends, and knows how to deal ably — *ably*, Sir, with a fellow of James Dutton's stamp — at your elbow. The fact is, to carry you safely through you will need pretty nearly the undivided attention of a well-qualified, able, and confidential practitioner; and I need not say, such a man is not to be had for nothing.'

Lake nodded a seeming assent, which seemed to say, 'I have found it so.'

'Now, my dear Captain Lake, I just mention this — I put it before you — that is, because you know the county is not to be contested for nothing — and you'll want a very serious sum of money for the purpose, and possibly a petition — and I can, one way or another, make up, with an effort, about £15,000l. Now it strikes me that it would be a wise thing for you — the wisest thing, perhaps, my dear Captain Lake, you ever did — to place me in the same boat with yourself.'

'I don't exactly see.'

'I'll make it quite clear.' The attorney's tall forehead had a little pink flush over it at this moment, and he was looking down a little and poking the base of Sir William de Braundon's monument with the point of his umbrella. 'I wish, Captain Lake, to be perfectly frank, and, as I said, above-board. You'll want the money, and you must make up your mind to sell Five Oaks.'

Captain Lake shifted his foot, as if he had found it on a sudden on a hot flag.

'Sell Five Oaks — that's fourteen hundred a year,' said he.

'Hardly so much, but nearly, perhaps.'

'Forty-three thousand pounds were offered for it. Old Chudworth offered that about ten years ago.'

'Of course, Captain Lake, if you are looking for a fancy price from me I must abandon the idea. I was merely supposing a dealing between friends, and in that sense I ventured to name the extreme limit to which I could go. Little more than five per cent, for my money, if I insure — and possibly to defend an action before I've been six months in possession. I think my offer will strike you as a *great* one, considering the posture of affairs. Indeed, I apprehend, my friends will hardly think me justified in offering so much.'

The sexton was walking back and forward near the door, making the best clatter he decently could, and wondering the Captain and Lawyer Larkin could find no better place to talk in than the church.

'In a moment — in a moment,' said the lawyer, signalling to him to be quiet, as loftily as if chapel, hall, and sexton were his private property.

It was one of those moments into which a good deal of talk is fitted, and which seem somewhat of the longest to those who await its expiration.

The chapel was growing dark, and its stone and marble company of bygone Wylders and Brandons were losing themselves in shadow. Part of the periwig and cheek of Sir Marcus Brandon still glimmered whitish, as at a little distance did also the dim marble face and arm of the young Countess of Lydingworth, mourning these hundred and thirty years over her dead baby. Sir William Wylder, in ruff, rosettes, and full dress of James I.'s fashion, on his back, defunct, with children in cloaks kneeling at head and foot, was hardly distinguishable; and the dusky crimson and tarnished gold had gone out of view till morning. The learned Archbishop Brandon, a cadet, who filled the see of York in his day, and was the only unexceptionably godly personage of that long line, was praying, as usual, at his desk — perhaps to the saints and Virgin, for I believe he was before the

Reformation — in beard and skull-cap, as was evident from the black profile of head and uplifted hands, against the dim sky seen through the chapel window. A dusky glow from the west still faintly showed Hans Holbein's proud 'Elector,' in the Brandon window, fading, with Death himself, and the dread inscription, 'Princeps induetur maerore,' into utter darkness.

The ice once broken, Jos. Larkin urged his point with all sorts of arguments, always placing the proposed transaction in the most plausible lights and attitudes, and handling his subject in round and flowing sentences. This master of persuasion was not aware that Captain Lake was arguing the question for himself, on totally different grounds, and that it was fixed in his mind pretty much in these terms: —

'That old villain wants an exorbitant bribe — is he worth it?'

He knew what the lawyer thought he did *not* know — that Five Oaks was held by the lawyers to be possibly *without* those unfortunate limitations which affected all the rest of the estate. It was only a moot-point; but the doubt had led Mr. Jos. Larkin to the selection.

'I'll look in upon you between eight and nine in the morning, and I'll say yes or no then,' said the captain, as they parted under the old stone porch, the attorney with a graceful inclination, a sad smile, and a wave of his hand — the captain with his hands in the pockets of his loose coat, and a sidelong glance from his yellow eyes.

The sky, as he looked toward Brandon, was draped in black cloud, intensely black, meeting a black horizon — except for one little rent of deep crimson which showed westward behind those antique gables and lordly trees, like a lake of blood.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE BRANDON CONSERVATORY.

Captain Lake did look in at the Lodge in the morning, and remained an hour in conference with Mr. Jos. Larkin. I suppose everything went off pleasantly. For although Stanley Lake looked very pale and vicious as he walked down to the iron gate of the Lodge among the evergreens and bass-mats, the good attorney's countenance shone with a serene and heavenly light, so pure and bright, indeed, that I almost wonder his dazzled servants, sitting along the wall while he read and expounded that morning, did not respectfully petition that a veil, after the manner of Moses, might be suspended over the seraphic effulgence.

Somehow his 'Times' did not interest him at breakfast; these parliamentary wrangles, commercial speculations, and foreign disputes, are they not, after all, but melancholy and dreary records of the merest worldliness; and are there not moments when they become almost insipid? Jos. Larkin tossed the paper upon the sofa. French politics, relations with Russia, commercial treaties, party combinations, how men *can* so wrap themselves up in these things!

And he smiled ineffable pity over the crumpled newspaper — on the poor souls in that sort of worldly limbo. In which frame of mind he took from his coat pocket a copy of Captain Lake's marriage settlement, and read over again a covenant on the captain's part that, with respect to this particular estate of Five Oaks, he would do no act, and execute no agreement, deed, or other instrument whatsoever, in any wise affecting the same, without the consent in writing of the said Dorcas Brandon; and a second covenant binding him and the trustees of the settlement against executing any deed, &c., without a similar consent; and especially directing, that in the event of alienating the estate, the said Dorcas must be made an assenting party to the deed.

He folded the deed, and replaced it in his pocket with a peaceful smile and closed eyes, murmuring —

'I'm much mistaken if the gray mare's the better horse in that stud.'

He laughed gently, thinking of the captain's formidable and unscrupulous nature, exhibitions of which he could not fail to remember.

'No, no, Miss Dorkie won't give us much trouble.'

He used to call her 'Miss Dorkie,' playfully to his clerks. It gave him consideration, he fancied. And now with this Five Oaks to begin with — £1,400 a year — a great capability, immensely improvable, he would stake half he's worth on making it more than £2,000 within five years; and with other things at his back, an able man like him might before long look as high as she. And visions of the grand jury rose dim and splendid — an heiress and a seat for the county; perhaps he and Lake might go in together, though he'd rather be associated with the Hon. James Cluttworth, or young Lord Griddlestone. Lake, you see, wanted weight, and, nothwithstanding his connections, was, it could not be denied, a new man in the county.

So Wylder, Lake, and Jos. Larkin had each projected for himself, pretty much the same career; and probably each saw glimmering in the horizon the golden round of a coronet. And I suppose other modest men are not always proof against similar flatteries of imagination.

Jos. Larkin had also the vicar's business and reversion to attend to. The Rev. William Wylder had a letter containing three lines from him at eight o'clock, to which he sent an answer, whereupon the solicitor despatched a special messenger, one of his clerks to Dollington, with a letter to the sheriff's deputy, from whom he received duly a reply, which necessitated a second letter with a formal undertaking, to which came another reply; whereupon he wrote to Burlington, Smith, and Co., acquainting them respectfully, in diplomatic fashion, with the attitude which affairs had assumed.

With this went a private and confidential, non-official, note to Smith, desiring him to answer stiffly and press for an immediate settlement, and to charge costs fairly, as Mr. William Wylder would have ample funds to liquidate them. Smith knew what *fairly* meant, and his entries went down accordingly. By the same post went up to the same firm a proposition — an afterthought — sanctioned by a second miniature correspondence with his client, now sailing before the wind, to guarantee them against loss consequent against staying the execution in the sheriff's hands for a fortnight, which, if they agreed to, they were further requested to send a draft of the proposed undertaking by return, at foot of which, in pencil, he wrote, 'N.B. — *Yes*.'

This arrangement necessitated his providing himself with a guarantee from the vicar; and so the little account as between the vicar and Jos. Larkin, solicitor, and the vicar and Messrs. Burlington, Smith, and Co., solicitors, grew up and expanded with a tropical luxuriance.

About the same time — while Mr. Jos. Larkin, I mean, was thinking over Miss Dorkie's share in the deed, with a complacent sort of interest, anticipating a struggle, but sure of victory — that beautiful young lady was walking slowly from flower to flower, in the splendid conservatory which projects southward from the house, and rears itself in glacial arches high over the short sward and flowery patterns of the outer garden of Brandon. The unspeakable sadness of wounded pride was on her beautiful features, and there was a fondness in the gesture with which she laid her fingers on these exotics and stooped over them, which gave to her solitude a sentiment of the pathetic.

From the high glass doorway, communicating with the drawingrooms, at the far end, among towering ranks of rare and gorgeous flowers, over the encaustic tiles, and through this atmosphere of perfume, did Captain Stanley Lake, in his shooting coat, glide, smiling, toward his beautiful young wife.

She heard the door close, and looking half over her shoulder, in a low tone indicating surprise, she merely said:

'Oh!' receiving him with a proud sad look.

'Yes, Dorkie, I'm here at last. I've been for some weeks so insufferably busy,' and he laid his white hand lightly over his eyes, as if they and the brain within were alike weary.

'How charming this place is — the temple of Flora, and you the divinity!'

And he kissed her cheek.

'I'm now emancipated for, I hope, a week or two. I've been so stupid and inattentive. I'm sure, Dorkie, you must think me a brute. I've been shut up so in the library, and keeping such tiresome company — you've no idea; but I think you'll say it was time well spent, at least I'm sure you'll approve the result; and now that I have collected the facts, and can show you, darling, exactly what the chances are, you must consent to hear the long story, and when you have heard, give me your advice.'

Dorcas smiled, and only plucked a little flowery tendril from a plant that hung in a natural festoon above her.

'I assure you, darling, I am serious; you must not look so incredulous; and it is the more provoking, because I love you so. I think I have a right to your advice, Dorkie.'

'Why don't you ask Rachel, she's cleverer than I, and you are more in the habit of consulting her?'

'Now, Dorkie is going to talk her wicked nonsense over again, as if I had never answered it. What about Radie? I do assure you, so far from taking her advice, and thinking her an oracle, as you suppose, I believe her in some respects very little removed from a fool.'

'I think her very clever, on the contrary,' said Dorcas, enigmatically.

'Well, she is clever in some respects; she is gay, at least she used to be, before she fell into that transcendental parson's hands — I mean poor dear William Wylder; and she can be amusing, and talks very well, but she has no sense — she is utterly Quixotic — she is no more capable of advising than a child.'

'I should not have fancied that, although you say so, Stanley.' she answered carelessly, adding a geranium to her bouquet.

'You are thinking, I know, because you have seen us once or twice talking together — — '

Stanley paused, not knowing exactly how to construct the remainder of his sentence.

Dorcas added another blossom.

'I think that blue improves it wonderfully. Don't you?'

'The blue? Oh yes, certainly.'

'And now that little star of yellow will make it perfect,' said Dorcas.

'Yes — yellow — quite perfect,' said Stanley. 'But when you saw Rachel and me talking together, or rather Rachel talking to me, I do assure you, Dorcas, upon my sacred honour, one half of what she said I do not to this moment comprehend, and the whole was based on the most preposterous blunder; and I will tell you in a little time everything about it. I would this moment — I'd be delighted — only just until I have got a letter which I expect — a letter, I assure you, nothing more — and until I have got it, it would be simply to waste your time and patience to weary you with any such — any such.'

'*Secret*,' said Dorcas.

'*Secret*, then, if you will have it so,' retorted Stanley, suddenly, with one of those glares that lasted for just one fell moment; but he instantly recovered himself. '*Secret* — yes — but no secret in the evil sense — a secret only awaiting the evidence which I daily expect, and then to be stated fully and frankly to you, my only darling, and as completely blown to the winds.'

Dorcas looked in his strange face with her proud, sad gaze, like one guessing at a funereal allegory.

He kissed her cheek again, placing one arm round her slender waist, and with his other hand taking hers.

'Yes, Dorcas, my beloved, my only darling, you will yet know all it has cost me to retain from you even this folly; and when you have heard all — which upon my soul and honour, you shall the moment I am enabled to *prove* all — you will thank me for having braved your momentary displeasure, to spare you a great deal of useless and miserable suspense. I trust you, Dorcas, in everything implicitly. Why won't you credit what I say?'

'I don't urge you — I never have — to reveal that which you describe so strangely as a concealment, yet no secret; as an absurdity, and yet fraught with miserable suspense.'

'Ah, Dorcas, why will you misconstrue me? Why will you not believe me? I long to tell you this, which, after all, *is* an *utter* absurdity, a thousand times more than you can desire to hear it; but my doing so now, unfortified by the evidence I shall have in a very few days, would be attended with a danger which you will then understand. Won't you trust me?'

'And now for my advice,' said Dorcas, smiling down in her mysterious way upon a crimson exotic near her feet.

'Yes, darling, thank you. In sober earnest, your advice,' answered Lake; 'and you must advise me. Several of our neighbours — the Hillyards, the Ledwiches, the Wyndermeres, and ever so many more — have spoken to me very strongly about contesting the county, on the old Whig principles, at the election which is now imminent. There is not a man with a chance of acceptance to come forward, if I refuse. Now, you know what even moderate success in the House, when family and property go together, may accomplish. There are the Dodminsters. Do you think they would ever have got their title by any other means? There are the Forresters — — '

'I know it all, Stanley; and at once I say, go on. I thought you must have formed some political project, Mr. Wealdon has been with you so often; but you tell me nothing, Stanley.'

'Not, darling, till I know it myself. This plan, for instance, until you spoke this moment, was but a question, and one which I could not submit until I had seen Wealdon, and heard how matters stood, and what chances of success I should really have. So, darling, you have it all; and I am so glad you advise me to go on. It is five-and-thirty years since anyone connected with Brandon came forward. But it will cost a great deal of money, Dorkie.'

'Yes, I know. I've always heard it cost my uncle and Sir William Camden fifteen thousand pounds.'

'Yes, it will be expensive, Wealdon thinks — *very*, this time. The other side will spend a great deal of money. It often struck me as a great mistake, that, where there is a good income, and a position to be maintained, there is not a little put by every year to meet cases like this — what they call a reserve fund in trading companies.'

'I do not think there is much money. *You* know, Stanley.'

'Whatever there is, is under settlement, and we cannot apply it, Dorkie. The only thing to be done, it strikes me, is to sell a part of Five Oaks.'

'I'll not sell any property, Stanley.'

'And what *do* you propose, then?'

'I don't know. I don't understand these things. But there are ways of getting money by mortgages and loans, and paying them off, without losing the property.'

'I've the greatest possible objection to raising money in that way. It is, in fact, the first step towards ruin; and nobody has ever done it who has not regretted that he did not sell instead.'

'I won't sell Five Oaks, Stanley,' said the young lady, seriously.

'I only said a part,' replied Stanley.

'I won't sell at all.'

‘Oh? And *I* won’t mortgage,’ said Stanley. ‘Then the thing can’t go on?’

‘I can’t help it.’

‘But I’m resolved it *shall*,’ answered Stanley.

‘I tell you, Stanley, plainly, I will not sell. The Brandon estate shall not be diminished in my time.’

‘Why, you perverse idiot, don’t you perceive you impair the estate as much by mortgaging as by selling, with ten times the ultimate danger. I tell you *I* won’t mortgage, and *you shall sell*.’

‘This, Sir, is the first time I have been spoken to in such terms.’

‘And why do you contradict and thwart me upon business of which I know something and you nothing? What object on earth can I have in impairing the estate? I’ve as deep an interest in it as you. It is perfectly plain we should sell; and I am determined we shall. Come now, Dorcas — I’m sorry — I’m such a brute, you know, when I’m vexed. You mustn’t be angry; and if you’ll be a good girl, and trust me in matters of business — — ‘

‘Stanley, I tell you plainly once more, I never will consent to sell one acre of the Brandon estates.’

‘Then we’ll see what I can do without you, Dorkie,’ he said in a pleasant, musing way.

He was now looking down, with his sly, malign smile; and Dorcas could almost fancy two yellow lights reflected upon the floor.

‘I shall protect the property of my family, Sir, from your folly or your machinations; and I shall write to Chelford, as my trustee, to come here to advise me.’

‘And I snap my fingers at you both, and meet you with *defiance*;’ and Stanley’s singular eyes glared upon her for a few seconds.

Dorcas turned in her grand way, and walked slowly toward the door.

‘Stay a moment, I’m going,’ said Stanley, overtaking and confronting her near the door. ‘I’ve only one word. I don’t think you quite know me. It will be an evil day for you, Dorkie, when you quarrel with me.’

He looked steadily on her, smiling for a second or two more, and then glided from the conservatory.

It was the first time Dorcas had seen Stanley Lake’s features in that translated state which indicated the action of his evil nature, and the apparition haunted her for many a day and night.

CHAPTER LVII.

CONCERNING A NEW DANGER WHICH THREATENED CAPTAIN STANLEY LAKE.

The ambitious captain walked out, sniffing, white, and incensed. There was an air of immovable resolution in the few words which Dorcas had spoken which rather took him by surprise. The captain was a terrorist. He acted instinctively on the theory that any good that was to be got from human beings was to be extracted from their fears. He had so operated on Mark Wylder; and so sought to coerce his sister Rachel. He had hopes, too, of ultimately catching the good attorney napping, and leading him too, bound and docile, into his ergastulum, although he was himself just now in jeopardy from that quarter. James Dutton, too. Sooner or later he would get Master Jim into a fix, and hold him also spellbound in the same sort of nightmare.

It was not from malice. The worthy attorney had much more of that leaven than he. Stanley Lake did not care to smash any man, except such as stood in his way. He had a mercantile genius, and never exercised his craft, violence and ferocity, on men or objects, when no advantage was obtainable by so doing. When, however, fortune so placed them that one or other must go to the wall, Captain Stanley Lake was awfully unscrupulous. But, having disabled, and struck him down, and won the stakes, he would have given what remained of him his cold, white hand to shake, or sipped claret with him at his own table, and told him stories, and entertained him with sly, sarcastic sallies, and thought how he could make use of him in an amicable way.

But Stanley Lake's cold, commercial genius, his craft and egotism, were frustrated occasionally by his temper, which, I am afraid, with all its external varnish, was of the sort which is styled diabolical. People said also, what is true of most terrorists, that he was himself quite capable of being frightened; and also, that he lied with too fertile an audacity: and, like a man with too many bills afloat, forgot his endorsements occasionally, and did not recognise his own acceptances when presented after an interval.

Such were some of this dangerous fellow's weak points. But on the whole it was by no means a safe thing to cross his path; and few who did so came off altogether scathless.

He pursued his way with a vague feeling of danger and rage, having encountered an opposition of so much more alarming a character than he had anticipated, and found his wife not only competent *ferre aspectum* to endure his maniacal glare and scowl, but serenely to defy his violence and his wrath. He had abundance of matter for thought and perturbation, and felt himself, when the images of Larcom, Larkin, and Jim Dutton crossed the retina of his memory, some thrill of the fear which 'hath torment' — the fear of a terrible coercion which he liked so well to practise in the case of others.

In this mood he paced, without minding in what direction he went, under those great rows of timber which overarch the pathway leading toward Redman's Dell — the path that he and Mark Wylder had trod in that misty moonlight walk on which I had seen them set out together.

Before he had walked five minutes in this direction, he was encountered by a little girl in a cloak, who stopped and dropped a courtesy. The captain stopped also, and looked at her with a stare which, I suppose, had something forbidding in it, for the child was frightened. But the wild and menacing look was unconscious, and only the reflection of the dark speculations and passions which were tumbling and breaking in his soul.

'Well, child,' said he, gently, 'I think I know your face, but I forget your name.'

'Little Margery, please Sir, from Miss Lake at Redman's Farm,' she replied with a courtesy.

'Oh! to be sure, yes. And how is Miss Rachel?'

'Very bad with a headache, please, Sir.'

'Is she at home?'

'Yes, Sir, please.'

'Any message?'

'Yes, Sir, please — a note for you, Sir;' and she produced a note, rather, indeed, a letter.

'She desired me, Sir, please, to give it into your own hand, if I could, and not to leave it, please, Sir, unless you were at home when I reached.'

He read the direction, and dropped it unopened into the pocket of his shooting coat. The peevish glance with which he eyed it betrayed a presentiment of something unpleasant.

‘Any answer required?’

‘No, Sir, please — only to leave it.’

‘And Miss Lake is quite well?’

‘No, Sir, please — a bad headache to-day.’

‘Oh! I’m very sorry, indeed. Tell her so. She is at home, is she?’

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘Very well; that’s all. Say I am very sorry to hear she is suffering; and if I can find time, I hope to see her to-day; and remember to say I have not read her letter, but if I find it requires an answer, it shall have one.’

He looked round like a man newly awakened, and up among the great boughs and interlacing foliage of the noble trees, and the child made him two courtesies, and departed towards Redman’s Farm.

Lake sauntered back slowly toward the Hall. On his way, a rustic seat under the shadow invited him, and he sat down, drawing Rachel’s letter from his pocket.

What a genius they have for teasing! How women do contrive to waste our time and patience over nonsense! How ingeniously perverse their whimsies are! I do believe Beelzebub employs them still, as he did in Eden, for the special plague of us, poor devils. Here’s a lecture or an exhortation from Miss Radie, and a quantity of infinitely absurd advice, all which I am to read and inwardly digest, and discuss with her whenever she pleases. I’ve a great mind to burn it quietly.’

But he applied his match, instead, to his cigar; and having got it well lighted, he leaned back, and broke the seal, and read this letter, which, I suspect, notwithstanding his preliminary thoughts, he fancied might contain matter of more practical import: —

‘I write to you, my beloved and only brother, Stanley, in an altered state of mind, and with clearer views of duty than, I think, I have ever had before.’

‘Just as I conjectured,’ muttered Stanley, with a bitter smile, as he shook the ashes off the top of his cigar— ‘a woman’s homily.’

He read on, and a livid frown gradually contracted his forehead as he did so.

‘I do not know, Stanley, what your feelings may be. Mine have been the same ever since that night in which I was taken into a confidence so dreadful. The circumstances are fearful; but far more dreadful to me, the mystery in which I have lived ever since. I sometimes think I have only myself to blame. But you know, my poor brother, why I consented, and with what agony. Ever since, I have lived in terror, and worse, in degradation. I did not know, until it was too late, how great was my guilt. Heaven knows, when I consented to that journey, I did not comprehend its full purpose, though I knew enough to have warned me of my danger, and undertook it in great fear and anguish of mind. I can never cease to mourn over my madness. Oh! Stanley, you do not know what it is to feel, as I do, the shame and treachery of my situation; to try to answer the smiles of those who, at least, once loved me, and to take their hands; to kiss Dorcas and good Dolly; and feel that all the time I am a vile impostor, stained incredibly, from whom, if they knew me, they would turn in horror and disgust. Now, Stanley, I can bear anything but this baseness — anything but the life-long practice of perfidy — that, I will not and cannot endure. *Dorcas must know the truth.* That there is a secret jealously guarded from her, she does know — no woman could fail to perceive that; and there are few, Stanley, who would not prefer the certainty of the worst, to the anguish of such relations of mystery and reserve with a *husband*. She is clever, she is generous, and has many noble qualities. She will see what is right, and do it. Me she may hate, and must despise; but that were to me more endurable than friendship gained on false pretences. I repeat, therefore, Stanley, that *Dorcas must know the whole truth*. Do not suppose, my poor brother, that I write from impulse — I have deeply thought on the subject.’

‘*Deeply*,’ repeated Stanley, with a sneer.

‘And the more I reflect, the more am I convinced — if *you* will not tell her, Stanley, that *I* must. But it will be wiser and better, terrible as it may be, that the revelation should come from *you*, whom she has made her husband. The dreadful confidence would be more terrible from any other. Be courageous then, Stanley; you will be happier when you have disclosed the truth, and released, at all events, one of your victims.

‘Your sorrowful and only sister,

‘RACHEL.’

On finishing the letter, Stanley rose quickly to his feet. He had become gradually so absorbed in reading it, that he laid his cigar unconsciously beside him, and suffered it to go out. With downcast look, and an angry contortion, he tore the sheets of notepaper across, and was on the point of reducing them to a thousand little snow flakes, and giving them to the wind, when, on second thoughts, he crumpled them together, and thrust them into his breast pocket.

His excitement was too intense for foul terms, or even blasphemy. With the edge of his nether lip nipped in his teeth, and his clenched hands in his pockets, he walked through the forest trees to the park, and in his solitudes hurried onward as if his life depended on his speed. Gradually he recovered his self-possession. He sat down under the shade of a knot of beech trees, overlooking that ill-omened tarn, which we have often mentioned, upon a lichen-stained rock, his chin resting on his clenched hand, his elbow on his knee, and the heel of his other foot stamping out bits of the short, green sod.

'That d — d girl deserves to be shot for her treachery,' was the first sentence that broke from his white lips.

It certainly was an amazing outrage upon his self-esteem, that the secret which was the weapon of terror by which he meant to rule his sister Rachel, should, by her slender hand, be taken so easily from his grasp, and lifted to crush him.

The captain's plans were not working by any means so smoothly as he had expected. That sudden stab from Jos. Larkin, whom he always despised, and now hated — whom he believed to be a fifth-rate, pluckless rogue, without audacity, without invention; whom he was on the point of tripping up, that he should have turned short and garotted the gallant captain, was a provoking turn of fortune.

That when a dire necessity subjugated his will, his contempt, his rage, and he inwardly decided that the attorney's extortion must be submitted to, his wife — whom he never made any account of in the transaction, whom he reckoned carelessly on turning about as he pleased, by a few compliments and cajoleries — should have started up, cold and inflexible as marble, in his path, to forbid the payment of the black mail, and expose him to the unascertained and formidable consequences of Dutton's story, and the disappointed attorney’s vengeance — was another stroke of luck which took him altogether by surprise.

And to crown all, Miss Radie had grown tired of keeping her own secret, and must needs bring to light the buried disgraces which all concerned were equally interested in hiding away for ever.

Stanley Lake’s position, if all were known, was at this moment formidable enough. But he had been fifty times over, during his brief career, in scrapes of a very menacing kind; once or twice, indeed, of the most alarming nature. His temper, his craft, his impetus, were always driving him into projects and situations more or less critical. Sometimes he won, sometimes he failed; but his audacious energy hitherto had extricated him. The difficulties of his present situation were, however, appalling, and almost daunted his semi-diabolical energies.

From Rachel to Dorcas, from Dorcas to the attorney, and from him to Dutton, and back again, he rambled in the infernal litany he muttered over the inauspicious tarn, among the enclosing banks and undulations, and solitary and lonely woods.

‘Lake Avernus,’ said a hollow voice behind him, and a long grisly hand was laid on his shoulder.

A cold breath of horror crept from his brain to his heel, as he turned about and saw the large, blanched features and glassy eyes of Uncle Lorne bent over him.

‘Oh, Lake Avernus, is it?’ said Lake, with an angry sneer, and raising his hat with a mock reverence.

‘Ay! it is the window of hell, and the spirits in prison come up to see the light of it. Did you see him looking up?’ said Uncle Lorne, with his pallid smile.

‘Oh! of course — Napoleon Bonaparte leaning on old Dr. Simcock’s arm,’ answered Lake.

It was odd, in the sort of ghastly banter in which he played off this old man, how much hatred was perceptible.

‘No — not he. It is Mark Wylder,’ said Uncle Lorne; ‘his face comes up like a white fish within a fathom of the top — it makes me laugh. That’s the way they keep holiday. Can you tell by the sky when it is holiday in hell? *I* can.’

And he laughed, and rubbed his long fingers together softly.

‘Look! ha! ha! — Look! ha! ha! ha! — *Look!*’ he resumed pointing with his cadaverous forefinger towards the middle of the pool.

‘I told you this morning it was a holiday,’ and he laughed very quietly to himself.

‘Look how his nostrils go like a fish’s gills. It is a funny way for a gentleman, and *he’s* a gentleman. Every fool knows the Wylders are gentlemen — all gentlemen in misfortune. He has a brother that is walking about in his coffin. Mark has no coffin; it is all marble steps; and a wicked seraph received him, and blessed him till his hair stood up. Let me whisper you.’

‘No, not just at this moment, please,’ said Lake, drawing away, disgusted, from the maniacal leer and titter of the gigantic old man.

‘Aye, aye — another time — some night there’s aurora borealis in the sky. You know this goes under ground all the way to Vallambrosa?’

‘Thank you; I was not aware: that’s very convenient. Had you not better go down and speak to your friend in the water?’

‘Young man, I bless you for remembering,’ said Uncle Lorne, solemnly. ‘What was Mark Wylder’s religion, that I may speak to him comfortably?’

‘An Anabaptist, I conjecture, from his present situation,’ replied Lake.

‘No, that’s in the lake of fire, where the wicked seraphim and cherubim baptise, and anabaptise, and hold them under, with a great stone laid across their breasts. I only know two of their clergy — the African vicar, quite a gentleman, and speaks through his nose; and the archbishop with wings; his face is so burnt, he’s all eyes and mouth, and on one hand has only one finger, and he tickles me with it till I almost give up the ghost. The ghost of Miss Baily is a lie, he said, by my soul; and he likes you — he loves you. Shall I write it all in a book, and give it you? I meet Mark Wylder in three places sometimes. Don’t move, till I go down; he’s as easily frightened as a fish.’

And Uncle Lorne crept down the bank, tacking, and dodging, and all the time laughing softly to himself; and sometimes winking with a horrid, wily grimace at Stanley, who fervently wished him at the bottom of the tarn.

‘I say,’ said Stanley, addressing the keeper, whom by a beck he had brought to his side, ‘you don’t allow him, surely, to go alone now?’

‘No, Sir — since your order, Sir,’ said the stern, reserved official.

‘Nor to come into any place but this — the park, I mean?’

‘No, Sir.’

‘And do you mind, try and get him home always before nightfall. It is easy to frighten him. Find out what frightens him, and do it or say it. It is dangerous, don’t you see? and he might break his d — d neck any time among those rocks and gullies, or get away altogether from you in the dark.’

So the keeper, at the water’s brink, joined Uncle Lorne, who was talking, after his fashion, into the dark pool. And Stanley Lake — a general in difficulties — retraced his steps toward the park gate through which he had come, ruminating on his situation and resources.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MISS RACHEL LAKE BECOMES VIOLENT.

So soon as the letter which had so surprised and incensed Stanley Lake was despatched, and beyond recall, Rachel, who had been indescribably agitated before, grew all at once calm. She knew that she had done right. She was glad the die was cast, and that it was out of her power to retract.

She kneeled at her bedside, and wept and prayed, and then went down and talked with old Tamar, who was knitting in the shade by the porch.

Then the young lady put on her bonnet and cloak, and walked down to Gylingden, with an anxious, but still a lighter heart, to see her friend, Dolly Wylder.

Dolly received her in a glad sort of fuss.

'I'm so glad to see you, Miss Lake.'

'Call me Rachel; and won't you let me call you Dolly?'

'Well, Rachel, dear,' replied Dolly, laughing, 'I'm delighted you're come; I have such good news — but I can't tell it till I think for a minute — I must begin at the beginning.'

'Anywhere, everywhere, only if it is good news, let me hear it at once. I'll be sure to understand.'

'Well, Miss — I mean Rachel, dear — you know — I may tell you now — the vicar — my dear Willie — he and I — we've been in great trouble — oh, such trouble — Heaven *only* knows— ' and she dried her eyes quickly— 'money, my dear— ' and she smiled with a bewildered shrug— 'some debts at Cambridge — no fault of his — you can't imagine what a saving darling he is — but these were a few old things that mounted up with interest, my dear — you understand — and law costs — oh, you can't think — and indeed, dear Miss — well, *Rachel* — I forgot — I sometimes thought we must be quite ruined.'

‘Oh, Dolly, dear,’ said Rachel, very pale, ‘I feared it. I thought you might be troubled about money. I was not sure, but I was afraid; and, to say truth, it was partly to try your friendship with a question on that very point that I came here, and not indeed, Dolly, dear, from impertinent curiosity, but in the hope that maybe you might allow me to be of some use.’

‘How wonderfully good you are! How friends are raised up!’ and with a smile that shone like an April sun through her tears, she stood on tiptoe, and kissed the tall young lady, who — not smiling, but with a pale and very troubled face — bowed down and returned her kiss.

‘You know, dear, before he went, Mark promised to lend dear Willie a large sum of money. Well, he went away in such a hurry, that he never thought of it; and though he constantly wrote to Mr. Larkin — you have no idea, my dear Miss Lake, what a blessed angel that man is — oh! *such* a friend as has been raised up to us in that holy and wise man, words cannot express; but what was I saying? — oh, yes — Mark, you know — it was very kind, but he has so many things on his mind it quite escaped him — and he keeps, you know, wandering about on the Continent, and never gives his address; so he, can’t, you see, be written to; and the delay — but, Rachel, darling, are you ill?’

She rang the bell, and opened the window, and got some water.

‘My darling, you walked too fast here. You were very near fainting.’

‘No, dear — nothing — I am quite well now — go on.’

But she did not go on immediately, for Rachel was trembling in a kind of shivering fit, which did not pass away till after poor Dolly, who had no other stimulant at command, made her drink a cup of very hot milk.

‘Thank you, darling. You are too good to me, Dolly. Oh! Dolly, you are too good to me.’

Rachel’s eyes were looking into hers with a careworn, entreating gaze, and her cold hand was pressed on the back of Dolly’s.

Nearly ten minutes passed before the talk was renewed.

‘Well, now, what do you think — that good man, Mr. Larkin, just as things were at the worst, found a way to make everything — oh, blessed mercy! — the hand of Heaven, my dear — quite right again — and we’ll be so happy. Like a bird I could sing, and fly almost — a foolish old thing — ha! ha! ha! — such an old goose!’ and she wiped her eyes again.

‘Hush! is that Fairy? Oh, no, it is only Anne singing. Little man has not been well yesterday and to-day. He won’t eat, and looks pale, but he slept very well, my darling man; and Doctor Buddle — I met him this morning — so kindly took him into his room, and examined him, and says it may be nothing at all, please Heaven,’ and she sighed, smiling still.

‘Dear little Fairy — where is he?’ asked Rachel, her sad eyes looking toward the door.

‘In the study with his Wapsie. Mrs. Woolaston, she is such a kind soul, lent him such a beautiful old picture book— “Woodward’s Eccentricities” it is called — and he’s quite happy — little Fairy, on his little stool at the window.’

‘No headache or fever?’ asked Miss Lake cheerfully, though, she knew not why, there seemed something ominous in this little ailment.

‘None at all; oh, none, thank you; none in the world. I’d be so frightened if there was. But, thank Heaven, Doctor Buddle says there’s nothing to make us at all uneasy. My blessed little man! And he has his canary in the cage in the window, and his kitten to play with in the study. He’s quite happy.’

‘Please Heaven, he’ll be quite well tomorrow — the darling little man,’ said Rachel, all the more fondly for that vague omen that seemed to say, ‘He’s gone.’

‘Here’s Mr. Larkin!’ cried Dolly, jumping up, and smiling and nodding at the window to that long and natty apparition, who glided to the hall-door with a sad smile, raising his well-brushed hat as he passed, and with one grim glance beyond Mrs. Wylder, for his sharp eye half detected another presence in the room.

He was followed, not accompanied — for Mr. Larkin knew what a gentleman he was — by a young and bilious clerk, with black hair and a melancholy countenance, and by old Buggs — his conducting man — always grinning, whose red face glared in the little garden like a great bunch of hollyhocks. He was sober as a judge all the morning, and proceeded strictly on the principle of business first, and pleasure afterward. But his orgies, when off duty, were such as to cause the good attorney, when complaints reached him, to shake his head, and sigh profoundly, and sometimes to lift up his mild eyes and long hands; and, indeed, so scandalous an appendage was Buggs, that if he had been less useful, I believe the pure attorney, who, in the uncomfortable words of John Bunyan, ‘had found a cleaner road to hell,’ would have cashiered him long ago.

‘There is that awful Mr. Buggs,’ said Dolly, with a look of honest alarm. ‘I often wonder so Christian a man as Mr. Larkin can countenance him. He is hardly ever without a black eye. He has been three nights together without once putting off his clothes — think of that; and, my dear, on Friday week he fell through the window of the Fancy Emporium, at two o’clock in the morning; and Doctor Buddle says if the cut on his jaw had been half an inch lower, he would have cut some artery, and lost his life — wretched man!’

‘They have come about law business, Dolly!’ enquired the young lady, who had a profound, instinctive dread of Mr. Larkin.

‘Yes, my dear; a most important windfall. Only for Mr. Larkin, it never could have been accomplished, and, indeed, I don’t think it would ever have been thought of.’

‘I hope he has some one to advise him,’ said Miss Lake, anxiously. ‘I — I think Mr. Larkin a very cunning person; and you know your husband does not understand business.’

‘Is it Mr. Larkin, my dear? Mr. Larkin! Why, my dear, if you knew him as we do, you’d trust your life in his hands.’

‘But there are people who know him still better; and I think they fancy he is a very crafty man. I do not like him myself, and Dorcas Brandon dislikes him too; and, though I don’t think we could either give a reason — I don’t know, Dolly, but I should not like to trust him.’

‘But, my dear, he is an excellent man, and such a friend, and he has managed all this most troublesome business so delightfully. It is what they call a reversion.’

‘William Wylder is not selling his reversion?’ said Rachel, fixing a wild and startled look on her companion.

‘Yes, reversion, I am sure, is the name. And why not, dear? It is most unlikely we should ever get a farthing of it any other way, and it will give us enough to make us quite happy.’

‘But, my darling, don’t you know the reversion under the will is a great *fortune*? He must not think of it;’ and up started Rachel, and before Dolly could interpose or remonstrate, she had crossed the little hall, and entered the homely study, where the gentlemen were conferring.

William Wylder was sitting at his desk, and a large sheet of law scrivenery, on thick paper, with a stamp in the corner, was before him. The bald head of the attorney, as he leaned over him, and indicated an imaginary line with his gold pencil-case, was presented toward Miss Lake as she entered.

The attorney had just said '*there*, please,' in reply to the vicar's question, 'Where do I write my name?' and red Buggs, grinning with his mouth open, like an overheated dog, and the sad and bilious young gentleman, stood by to witness the execution of the cleric's autograph.

Tall Jos. Larkin looked up, smiling with his mouth also a little open, as was his wont when he was particularly affable. But the rat's eyes were looking at her with a hungry suspicion, and smiled not.

'William Wylder, I am so glad I'm in time,' said Rachel, rustling across the room.

'*There*,' said the attorney, very peremptorily, and making a little furrow in the thick paper with the seal end of his pencil.

'Stop, William Wylder, don't sign; I've a word to say — you *must* pause.'

'If it affects our business, Miss Lake, I do request that you address yourself to me; if not, may I beg, Miss Lake, that you will defer it for a moment.'

'William Wylder, lay down that pen; as you love your little boy, lay it *down*, and hear me,' continued Miss Lake.

The vicar looked at her with his eyes wide open, puzzled, like a man who is not quite sure whether he may not be doing something wrong.

'I — really, Miss Lake — pardon me, but this is very irregular, and, in fact, unprecedented!' said Jos. Larkin. 'I think — I suppose, you can hardly be aware, Ma'am, that I am here as the Rev. Mr. Wylder's confidential solicitor, acting solely for him, in a matter of a strictly private nature.'

The attorney stood erect, a little flushed, with that peculiar contraction, mean and dangerous, in his eyes.

'Of course, Mr. Wylder, if you, Sir, desire me to leave, I shall instantaneously do so; and, indeed, unless you proceed to sign, I had better go, as my time is generally, I may say, a little pressed upon, and I have, in fact, some business elsewhere to attend to.'

'What *is* this law-paper?' demanded Rachel, laying the tips of her slender fingers upon it.

'Am I to conclude that you withdraw from your engagement?' asked Mr. Larkin. 'I had better, then, communicate with Burlington and Smith by this post; as also with the sheriff, who has been very kind.'

'Oh, no! — oh, no, Mr. Larkin! — pray, I'm quite ready to sign.'

'Now, William Wylder, you *sha'n't* sign until you tell me whether this is a sale of your reversion.'

The young lady had her white hand firmly pressed upon the spot where he was to sign, and the ring that glittered on her finger looked like a talisman interposing between the poor vicar and the momentous act he was meditating.

'I think, Miss Lake, it is pretty plain you are not acting for yourself here — you have been sent, Ma'am,' said the attorney, looking very vicious, and speaking a little huskily and hurriedly; 'I quite conceive by whom.'

'I don't know what you mean, Sir,' replied Miss Lake, with grave disdain.

'You have been commissioned, Ma'am, I venture to think, to come here to watch the interests of another party.'

'I say, Sir, I don't in the least comprehend you.'

'I think it is pretty obvious, Ma'am — Miss Lake, I beg pardon — you have had some conversation with your *brother*,' answered the attorney, with a significant sneer.

'I don't know what you mean, Sir, I repeat. I've just heard, in the other room, from your wife, William Wylder, that you were about selling your reversion in the estates, and I want to know whether that is so; for if it be, it is the act of a madman, and I'll prevent it, if I possibly can.'

'Upon my word! possibly' — said the vicar, his eyes very wide open, and looking with a hesitating gaze from Rachel to the attorney— 'there may be something in it which neither you nor I know; does it not strike you — had we not better consider?'

'Consider *what*, Sir?' said the attorney, with a snap, and losing his temper somewhat. 'It is simply, Sir, that this young lady represents Captain Lake, who wishes to get the reversion for himself.'

'That is utterly false, Sir!' said Miss Lake, flashing and blushing with indignation. 'You, William, are a *gentleman*; and such inconceivable meanness cannot enter *your* mind.'

The attorney, with what he meant to be a polished sarcasm, bowed and smiled toward Miss Lake.

Pale little Fairy, sitting before his ‘picture-book,’ was watching the scene with round eyes and round mouth, and that mixture of interest, awe, and distress, with which children witness the uncomprehended excitement and collision of their elders.

‘My dear Miss Lake, I respect and esteem you; you quite mistake, I am persuaded, my good friend Mr. Larkin; and, indeed, I don’t quite comprehend; but if it were so, and that your brother really wished — do you think he does, Mr. Larkin? — to buy the reversion, he might think it more valuable, perhaps.’

‘I can say with certainty, Sir, that from that quarter you would get nothing like what you have agreed to take; and I must say, once for all, Sir, that — quite setting aside every consideration of honour and of conscience, and of the highly prejudicial position in which you would place me as a man of business, by taking the very *short turn* which this young lady, Miss Lake, suggests — your letters amount to an equitable agreement to sell, which, on petition, the court would compel you to do.’

‘So you see, my dear Miss Lake, there is no more to be said,’ said the vicar, with a careworn smile, looking upon Rachel’s handsome face.

‘Now, now, we are all friends, aren’t we?’ said poor Dolly, who could not make anything of the debate, and was staring, with open mouth, from one speaker to another. ‘We are all agreed, are not we? You are all so good, and fond of Willie, that you are actually ready almost to quarrel for him.’ But her little laugh produced no echo, except a very joyless and flushed effort from the attorney, as he looked up from consulting his watch.

‘Eleven minutes past three,’ said he, ‘and I’ve a meeting at my house at halfpast: so, unless you complete that instrument *now*, I regret to say I must take it back unfinished, and the result may be to defeat the arrangement altogether, and if the consequences should prove serious, I, at least, am not to blame.’

‘Don’t sign, I entreat, I *implore* of you. William Wylder, you *shan’t*.’

‘But, my dear Miss Lake, we have considered everything, and Mr. Larkin and I agree that my circumstances are such as to make it inevitable.’

‘Really, this is child’s play; *there*, if you please,’ said the attorney, once more.

Rachel Lake, during the discussion, had removed her hand. The faintly-traced line on which the vicar was to sign was now fairly presented to him.

‘Just in your usual way,’ murmured Mr. Larkin.

So the vicar’s pen was applied, but before he had time to trace the first letter of his name, Rachel Lake resolutely snatched the thick, bluish sheet of scrivenery, with its handsome margins, and red ink lines, from before him, and tore it across and across, with the quickness of terror, and in fewer seconds than one could fancy, it lay about the floor and grate in pieces little bigger than dominoes.

The attorney made a hungry snatch at the paper, over William Wylder’s shoulder, nearly bearing that gentleman down on his face, but his clutch fell short.

‘Hallo! Miss Lake, Ma’am — the paper!’

But wild words were of no avail. The whole party, except Rachel, were aghast. The attorney’s small eye glanced over the ground and hearthstone, where the bits were strewn, like

Ladies’ smocks, all silver white,
That paint the meadows with delight.

He had nothing for it but to submit to fortune with his best air. He stood erect; a slanting beam from the window glimmered on his tall, bald head, and his face was black and menacing as the summit of a thunder-crowned peak.

‘You are not aware, Miss Lake, of the nature of your act, and of the consequences to which you have exposed yourself, Madam. But that is a view of the occurrence in which, except as a matter of deep regret, I cannot be supposed to be immediately interested. I will mention, however, that your interference, your *violent* interference, Madam, may be attended with most serious consequences to my reverend client, for which, of course, you constituted yourself fully responsible, when you entered on the course of unauthorised interference, which has resulted in destroying the articles of agreement, prepared with great care and labour, for his protection; and retarding the transmission of the document, by at least four-and-twenty hours, to London. You may, Madam, I regret to observe, have ruined my client.’

‘Saved him, I hope.’

‘And run yourself, Madam, into a *very* serious scrape.’

‘Upon that point you have said quite enough, Sir. Dolly, William, don’t look so frightened; you’ll both live to thank me for this.’

All this time little Fairy, unheeded, was bawling in great anguish of soul, clinging to Rachel’s dress, and crying— ‘Oh! he’ll hurt her — he’ll hurt her — he’ll hurt her. Don’t let him — don’t let him. Wapsie, don’t let him. Oh! the frightle man! — don’t let him — he’ll hurt her — the frightle man!’ And little man’s cheeks were drenched in tears, and his wee feet danced in an agony of terror on the floor, as, bawling, he tried to pull his friend Rachel into a corner.

‘Nonsense, little man,’ cried his father, with quick reproof, on hearing this sacrilegious uproar. ‘Mr. Larkin never hurt anyone; tut, tut; sit down, and look at your book.’

But Rachel, with a smile of love and gratification, lifted the little man up in her arms, and kissed him; and his thin, little legs were clasped about her waist, and his arms round her neck, and he kissed her with his wet face, devouringly, blubbering ‘the frightle man — you doatie! — the frightle man!’

‘Then, Mr. Wylder, I shall have the document prepared again from the draft. You’ll see to that, Mr. Buggs, please; and perhaps it will be better that you should look in at the Lodge.’

When he mentioned the Lodge, it was in so lofty a way that a stranger would have supposed it something very handsome indeed, and one of the sights of the county.

‘Say, about nine o’clock tomorrow morning. Farewell, Mr. Wylder, farewell. I regret the enhanced expense — I regret the delay — I regret the risk — I regret, in fact, the whole scene. Farewell, Mrs. Wylder.’ And with a silent bow to Rachel — perfectly polished, perfectly terrible — he withdrew, followed by the sallow clerk, and by that radiant scamp, old Buggs, who made them several obeisances at the door.

‘Oh, dear Miss Lake — Rachel, I mean — Rachel, dear, I hope it won’t be all off. Oh, you don’t know — Heaven only knows — the danger we are in. Oh, Rachel, dear, if this is broken off, I don’t know what is to become of us — I don’t know.’

Dolly spoke quite wildly, with her hands on Rachel’s shoulders. It was the first time she had broken down, the first time, at least, the vicar had seen her anything but cheery, and his head sank, and it seemed as if his last light had gone out, and he was quite benighted.

‘Do you think,’ said he, ‘there is much danger of that? Do you really think so?’

‘Now, don’t blame me,’ said Miss Lake, ‘and don’t be frightened till you have heard me. Let us sit down here — we shan’t be interrupted — and just answer your wretched friend, Rachel, two or three questions, and hear what she has to say.’

Rachel was flushed and excited, and sat with the little boy still in her arms.

So, in reply to her questions, the vicar told her frankly how he stood; and Rachel said— ‘Well, you must not think of selling your reversion. Oh! think of your little boy — think of Dolly — if *you* were taken away from her.’

‘But,’ said Dolly, ‘Mr. Larkin heard from Captain Lake that Mark is privately married, and actually has, he says, a large family; and he, you know, has letters from him, and Mr. Larkin thinks, knows more than anyone else about him; and if that were so, none of us would ever inherit the property. So’ —

‘*Do* they say that Mark is married? Nothing can be more *false*. I *know* it is altogether a falsehood. He neither is nor ever will be married. If my brother *dared* say that in my presence, I would make him confess, before you, that he *knows* it cannot be. Oh! my poor little Fairy — my poor Dolly — my poor good friend, William! What shall I say? I am in great distraction of mind.’ And she hugged and kissed the pale little boy, she herself paler.

‘Listen to me, good and kind as you are. You are never to call me your friend, mind that. I am a most unhappy creature forced by circumstances to be your enemy, for a time — not always. You have no conception *how*, and may never even suspect. Don’t ask me, but listen.’

Wonder stricken and pained was the countenance with which the vicar gazed upon her, and Dolly looked both frightened and perplexed.

‘I have a little more than three hundred a-year. There is a little annuity charged on Sir Hugh Landon’s estate, and his solicitor has written, offering me six hundred pounds for it. I will write tonight accepting that offer, and you shall have the money to pay those debts which have been pressing so miserably upon you. *Don’t* thank — not a word — but listen. I would so like, Dolly, to come and live with you. We could unite our incomes. I need only bring poor old Tamar with me, and I can give up Redman's Farm in September next. I should be so much happier; and I think my income and yours joined would enable us to live without any danger of getting into debt. Will you agree to this, Dolly, dear; and promise me, William Wylder, that you will think no more of selling that reversion, which may be the splendid provision of your dear little boy. Don't thank me — don't say anything now; and oh! don't reject my poor entreaty. Your refusal would almost make me mad. I would try, Dolly, to be of use. I think I could. Only try me.'

She fancied she saw in Dolly's face, under all her gratitude, some perplexity and hesitation, and feared to accept a decision then. So she hurried away, with a hasty and kind goodbye.

A fortnight before, I think, during Dolly's jealous fit, this magnificent offer of Rachel's would, notwithstanding the dreadful necessities of the case, have been coldly received by the poor little woman. But that delusion was quite cured now — no reserve, or doubt, or coldness left behind. And Dolly and the vicar felt that Rachel's noble proposal was the making of them.

CHAPTER LIX.

AN ENEMY IN REDMAN'S DELL.

Jos. Larkin grew more and more uncomfortable about the unexpected interposition of Rachel Lake as the day wore on. He felt, with an unerring intuition, that the young lady both despised and suspected him. He also knew that she was impetuous and clever, and he feared from that small white hand a fatal mischief — he could not tell exactly how — to his plans.

Jim Dutton's letter had somehow an air of sobriety and earnestness, which made way with his convictions. His doubts and suspicions had subsided, and he now believed, with a profound moral certainty, that Mark Wylder was actually dead, within the precincts of a madhouse or of some lawless place of detention abroad. What was that to the purpose? Dutton might arrive at any moment. Low fellows are always talking; and the story might get abroad before the assignment of the vicar's interest. Of course there was something speculative in the whole transaction, but he had made his book well, and by his 'arrangement' with Captain Lake, whichever way the truth lay, he stood to win. So the attorney had no notion of allowing this highly satisfactory arithmetic to be thrown into confusion by the fillip of a small gloved finger.

On the whole he was not altogether sorry for the delay. Everything worked together he knew. One or two covenants and modifications in the articles had struck him as desirable, on reading the instrument over with William Wylder. He also thought a larger consideration should be stated and acknowledged as paid, say 22,000l. The vicar would really receive just 2,200l. 'Costs' would do something to reduce the balance, for Jos. Larkin was one of those oxen who, when treading out corn, decline to be muzzled. The remainder was — the vicar would clearly understand — one of those ridiculous pedantries of law, upon which our system of crotchets and fictions insisted. And William Wylder, whose character, simply and sensitively honourable, Mr. Larkin appreciated, was to write to Burlington and Smith a letter, for the satisfaction of their speculative and nervous client, pledging his honour, as a gentleman, and his conscience, as a

Christian, that in the event of the sale being completed, he would never do, countenance, or permit, any act or proceeding, whatsoever, tending on any ground to impeach or invalidate the transaction.

'I've no objection — have I? — to write such a letter,' asked the vicar of his adviser.

'Why, I suppose you have no intention of trying to defeat your own act, and that is all the letter would go to. I look on it as wholly unimportant, and it is really not a point worth standing upon for a second.'

So that also was agreed to.

Now while the improved 'instrument' was in preparation, the attorney strolled down in the evening to look after his clerical client, and keep him 'straight' for the meeting at which he was to sign the articles next day.

It was by the drowsy faded light of a late summer's evening that he arrived at the quaint little parsonage. He maintained his character as 'a nice spoken gentleman,' by enquiring of the maid who opened the door how the little boy was. 'Not so well — gone to bed — but would be better, everyone was sure, in the morning.' So he went in and saw the vicar, who had just returned with Dolly from a little ramble. Everything promised fairly — the quiet mind was returning — the good time coming — all the pleasanter for the storms and snows of the night that was over.

'Well, my good invaluable friend, you will be glad — you will rejoice with us, I know, to learn that, after all, the sale of our reversion is unnecessary.'

The attorney allowed his client to shake him by both hands, and he smiled a sinister congratulation as well as he could, grinning in reply to the vicar's pleasant smile as cheerfully as was feasible, and wofully puzzled in the meantime. Had James Dutton arrived and announced the death of Mark — no; it could hardly be *that* — decency had not yet quite taken leave of the earth; and stupid as the vicar was, he would hardly announce the death of his brother to a Christian gentleman in a fashion so outrageous. Had Lord Chelford been invoked, and answered satisfactorily? Or Dorcas — or had Lake, the diabolical sneak, interposed with his long purse, and a plausible hypocrisy of kindness, to spoil Larkin's plans? All these fanciful queries flitted through his brain as the vicar's hands shook both his, and he laboured hard to maintain the cheerful grin with which he received the news, and his guileful rapacious little eyes searched narrowly the countenance of his client.

So after a while, Dolly assisting, and sometimes both talking together, the story was told, Rachel blessed and panegyrised, and the attorney's congratulations challenged and yielded once more. But there was something not altogether joyous in Jos. Larkin's countenance, which struck the vicar, and he said —

'You don't see any objection?' and paused.

'Objection? Why, *objection*, my dear Sir, is a strong word; but I fear I do see a difficulty — in fact, several difficulties. Perhaps you would take a little turn on the green — I must call for a moment at the reading-room — and I'll explain. You'll forgive me, I hope, Mrs. Wylder,' he added, with a playful condescension, 'for running away with your husband, but only for a few minutes — ha, ha!'

The shadow was upon Jos. Larkin's face, and he was plainly meditating a little uncomfortably, as they approached the quiet green of Gylingden.

'What a charming evening,' said the vicar, making an effort at cheerfulness.

'Delicious evening — yes,' said the attorney, throwing back his long head, and letting his mouth drop. But though his face was turned up towards the sky, there was a contraction and a darkness upon it, not altogether heavenly.

'The offer,' said the attorney, beginning rather abruptly, 'is no doubt a handsome offer at the first glance, and it may be well meant. But the fact is, my dear Mr. Wylder, six hundred pounds would leave little more than a hundred remaining after Burlington and Smith have had their costs. You have no idea of the expense and trouble of title, and the inevitable costliness, my dear Sir, of all conveyancing operations. The deeds, I have little doubt, in consequence of the letter you directed me to write, have been prepared — that is, in draft, of course — and then, my dear Sir, I need not remind you, that there remain the costs to me — those, of course, await your entire convenience — but still it would not be either for your or my advantage that they should be forgotten in the general adjustment of your affairs, which I understand you to propose.'

The vicar's countenance fell. In fact, it is idle to say that, being unaccustomed to the grand scale on which law costs present themselves on occasion, he was unspeakably shocked and he grew very pale and silent on hearing these impressive sentences.

‘And as to Miss Lake’s residing with you — I speak now, you will understand, in the strictest confidence, because the subject is a painful one; as to her residing with you, as she proposes, Miss Lake is well aware that I am cognizant of circumstances which render any such arrangement absolutely impracticable. I need not, my dear Sir, be more particular — at present, at least. In a little time you will probably be made acquainted with them, by the inevitable disclosures of time, which, as the wise man says, “discovers all things.”’

‘But — but what’ — stammered the pale vicar, altogether shocked and giddy.

‘You will not press me, my dear Sir; you’ll understand that, just now, I really *cannot* satisfy any particular enquiry. Miss Lake has spoken, in charity I *will* hope and trust, without thought. But I am much mistaken, or she will herself, on half-an-hour’s calm consideration, see the moral impossibilities which interpose between her, to me, most amazing plan and its realisation.’

There was a little pause here, during which the tread of their feet on the soft grass alone was audible.

‘You will quite understand,’ resumed the attorney, ‘the degree of confidence with which I make this communication; and you will please, specially not to mention it to any person whatsoever. I do not except, in fact, *any*. You will find, on consideration, that Miss Lake will not press her residence upon you. No; I’ve no doubt Miss Lake is a very intelligent person, and, when not excited, will see it clearly.’

The attorney’s manner had something of that reserve, and grim sort of dryness, which supervened whenever he fancied a friend or client on whom he had formed designs was becoming impracticable. Nothing affected him so much as that kind of unkindness.

Jos. Larkin took his leave a little abruptly. He did not condescend to ask the vicar whether he still entertained Miss Lake’s proposal. He had not naturally a pleasant temper — somewhat short, dark, and dangerous, but by no means noisy. This temper, an intense reluctance ever to say ‘thank you,’ and a profound and quiet egotism, were the ingredients of that ‘pride’ on which — a little inconsistently, perhaps, in so eminent a Christian — he piqued himself. It must be admitted, however, that his pride was not of that stamp which would prevent him from listening to other men's private talk, or reading their letters, if anything were to be got by it; or from prosecuting his small spites with a patient and virulent industry; or from stripping a man of his possessions, and transferring them to himself by processes from which most men would shrink.

'Well,' thought the vicar, 'that munificent offer is unavailing, it seems. The sum insufficient, great as it is; and other difficulties in the way.'

He was walking homewards, slowly and dejectedly; and was now beginning to feel alarm lest the purchase of the reversion should fail. The agreement was to have gone up to London by this day's mail, and now could not reach till the day after tomorrow — four-and-twenty hours later than was promised. The attorney had told him it was a 'touch-and-go affair,' and the whole thing might be off in a moment; and if it *should* miscarry what inevitable ruin yawned before him? Oh, the fatigue of these monotonous agitations — this never-ending suspense! Oh, the yearning unimaginable for quiet and rest! How awfully he comprehended the reasonableness of the thanksgiving which he had read that day in the churchyard— 'We give Thee hearty thanks for that it hath pleased Thee to deliver this our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world.'

With the attorney it was different. Making the most of his height, which he fancied added much to the aristocratic effect of his presence, with his head thrown back, and swinging his walking cane easily between his finger and thumb by his side, he strode languidly through the main street of Gylingden, in the happy belief that he was making a sensation among the denizens of the town.

And so he moved on to the mill-road, on which he entered, and was soon deep in the shadows of Redman's Dell.

He opened the tiny garden-gate of Redman's Farm, looking about him with a supercilious benevolence, like a man conscious of bestowing a distinction. He was inwardly sensible of a sort of condescension in entering so diminutive and homely a place — a kind of half amusing disproportion between Jos. Larkin, Esq., of the Lodge, worth, already, £27,000, and on the high road to greatness, and the trumpery little place in which he found himself.

Old Tamar was sitting in the porch, with her closed Bible upon her knees; there was no longer light to read by. She rose up, like the 'grim, white woman who haunts yon wood,' before him.

Her young lady had walked up to Brandon, taking the little girl with her, and she supposed would be back again early.

Mr. Larkin eyed her for a second to ascertain whether she was telling lies. He always thought everyone might be lying. It was his primary impression here. But there was a recluse and unearthly character in the face of the crone which satisfied him that she would never think of fencing with such weapons with him.

Very good. Mr. Larkin would take a short walk, and as his business was pressing, he would take the liberty of looking in again in about half-an-hour, if she thought her mistress would be at home then.

So, although the weird white woman who leered after him so strangely as he walked with his most lordly air out of the little garden, and down the darkening road towards Gylingden, could not say, he resolved to make trial again.

In the meantime Rachel had arrived at Brandon Hall. Dorcas — whom, if the truth were spoken, she would rather not have met — encountered her on the steps. She was going out for a lonely, twilight walk upon the terrace, where many a beautiful Brandon of other days, the sunshine of whose smile glimmered only on the canvas that hung upon those ancestral walls, and whose sorrows were hid in the grave and forgotten by the world, had walked in other days, in the pride of beauty, or in the sadness of desertion.

Dorcas paused upon the doorsteps, and received her sister-in-law upon that elevation.

'Have you really come all this way, Rachel, to see *me* this evening?' she said, and something of sarcasm thrilled in the cold, musical tones.

'No, Dorcas,' said Rachel, taking her proffered hand in the spirit in which it was given, and with the air rather of a defiance than of a greeting; 'I came to see my brother.'

'You are frank, at all events, Rachel, and truth is better than courtesy; but you forget that your brother could not have returned so soon.'

'Returned?' said Rachel; 'I did not know he had left home.'

'It's strange he should not have consulted you. I, of course, knew nothing of it until he had been more than an hour upon his journey.'

Rachel Lake made no answer but a little laugh.

'He'll return tomorrow; and perhaps your meeting may still be in time. I was thinking of a few minutes' walk upon the terrace, but you are fatigued: you had better come in and rest.'

'No, Dorcas, I won't go in.'

'But, Rachel, you are tired; you must come in with me, and drink tea, and then you can go home in the brougham,' said Dorcas, more kindly.

'No, Dorcas, no; I will not drink tea nor go in; but I *am* tired, and as you are so kind, I will accept your offer of the carriage.'

Larcom had, that moment, appeared in the vestibule, and received the order.

'I'll sit in the porch, if you will allow me, Dorcas; you must not lose your walk.'

'Then you won't come into the house, you won't drink tea with me, and you won't join me in my little walk; and why not any of these?'

Dorcas smiled coldly, and continued,

'Well, I shall hear the carriage coming to the door, and I'll return and bid you goodnight. It is plain, Rachel, you do not like my company.'

'True, Dorcas, I do *not* like your company. You are unjust; you have no confidence in me; you prejudge me without proof; and you have quite ceased to love me. Why should I like your company?'

Dorcas smiled a proud and rather sad smile at this sudden change from the conventional to the passionate; and the direct and fiery charge of her kinswoman was unanswered.

She stood meditating for a minute.

'You think I no longer love you, Rachel, as I did. Perhaps young ladies' friendships are never very enduring; but, if it be so, the fault is not mine.'

'No, Dorcas, the fault is not yours, nor mine. The fault is in circumstances. The time is coming, Dorcas, when you will know all, and, maybe, judge me mercifully. In the meantime, Dorcas, *you* cannot like *my* company, because you do not like me; and I do not like yours, just because, in spite of all, I do love you still; and in yours I only see the image of a lost friend. You may be restored to me soon — maybe *never* — but till then, I have lost you.'

'Well,' said Dorcas, 'it may be there is a wild kind of truth in what you say, Rachel, and — no matter — *time*, as you say, and *light* — I don't understand you, Rachel; but there is this in you that resembles me — we both hate hypocrisy, and we are both, in our own ways, proud. I'll come back, when I hear the carriage, and see you for a moment, as you won't stay, or come with me, and bid you goodbye.'

So Dorcas went her way; and alone, on the terrace, looking over the stone balustrade — over the rich and sombre landscape, dim and vaporous in the twilight — she still saw the pale face of Rachel — paler than she liked to see it. Was she ill? — and she thought how lonely she would be if Rachel were to die — how lonely she was now. There was a sting of compunction — a yearning — and then started a few bitter and solitary tears.

In one of the great stone vases, that are ranged along the terrace, there flourished a beautiful and rare rose. I forget its name. Some of my readers will remember. It is first to bloom — first to wither. Its fragrant petals were now strewn upon the terrace underneath. One blossom only remained untarnished, and Dorcas plucked it, and with it in her fingers, she returned to the porch where Rachel remained.

'You see, I have come back a little before my time,' said Dorcas. 'I have just been looking at the plant you used to admire so much, and the leaves are shed already, and it reminded me of our friendship, Radie; but I am sure you are right; it will all bloom again, after the winter, you know, and I thought I would come back, and say *that*, and give you this relic of the bloom that is gone — the last token,' and she kissed Rachel, as she placed it in her fingers, 'a token of remembrance and of hope.'

'I will keep it, Dorkie. It was kind of you,' and their eyes met regretfully.

'And — and, I think, I do trust you, Radie,' said the heiress of Brandon; 'and I hope you will try to like me on till — till spring comes, you know. And, I wish,' she sighed softly, 'I wish we were as we used to be. I am not very happy; and — here's the carriage.'

And it drew up close to the steps, and Rachel entered; and her little handmaid of up in the seat behind; and Dorcas and Rachel kissed their hands, and smiled, and away the carriage glided; and Dorcas, standing on the steps, looked after it very sadly. And when it disappeared, she sighed again heavily, still looking in its track; and I think she said 'Darling!'

CHAPTER LX.

RACHEL LAKE BEFORE THE ACCUSER.

Twilight was darker in Redman's Dell than anywhere else. But dark as it was, there was still light enough to enable Rachel, as she hurried across the little garden, on her return from Brandon, to see a long white face, and some dim outline of the figure to which it belonged, looking out upon her from the window of her little drawingroom.

But no, it could not be; who was there to call at so odd an hour? She must have left something — a bag, or a white basket upon the window-sash. She was almost startled, however, as she approached the porch, to see it nod, and a hand dimly waved in token of greeting.

Tamar was in the kitchen. Could it be Stanley! But faint as the outline was she saw, she fancied that it was a taller person than he. She felt a sort of alarm, in which there was some little mixture of the superstitious, and she pushed open the door, not entering the room, but staring in toward the window, where against the dim, external light, she clearly saw, without recognising it, a tall figure, greeting her with mop and moe.

'Who is that?' cried Miss Lake, a little sharply.

'It is I, Miss Lake, Mr. Josiah Larkin, of the Lodge,' said that gentleman, with what he meant to be an air of dignified firmness, and looking very like a tall constable in possession; 'I have taken the liberty of presenting myself, although, I fear, at a somewhat unseasonable hour, but in reference to a little business, which, unfortunately, will not, I think, bear to be deferred.'

'No bad news, Mr. Larkin, I hope — nothing has happened. The Wylders are all well, I hope?'

'Quite well, so far as I am aware,' answered the attorney, with a grim politeness; 'perfectly. Nothing has occurred, as yet at least, affecting the interests of that family; but something is — I will not say threatened — but I may say mooted, which, were any attempt seriously made to carry it into execution, would, I regret to say, involve very serious consequences to a party whom for, I may say, many reasons, I should regret being called upon to affect unpleasantly.'

'And pray, Mr. Larkin, can I be of any use?'

'*Every* use, Miss Lake, and it is precisely for that reason that I have taken the liberty of waiting upon you, at what, I am well aware, is a somewhat unusual hour.'

'Perhaps, Mr. Larkin, you would be so good as to call in the morning — any hour you appoint will answer me,' said the young lady, a little stiffly. She was still standing at the door, with her hand upon the brass handle.

'Pardon me, Miss Lake, the business to which I refer is really urgent.'

'*Very* urgent, Sir, if it cannot wait till tomorrow morning.'

'Very true, quite true, very urgent indeed,' replied the attorney, calmly; 'I presume, Miss Lake, I may take a chair?'

'Certainly, Sir, if you insist on my listening tonight, which I should certainly decline if I had the power.'

'Thank you, Miss Lake.' And the attorney took a chair, crossing one leg over the other, and throwing his head back as he reclined in it with his long arm over the back — the 'express image,' as he fancied, of a polished gentleman, conducting a diplomatic interview with a clever and highbred lady.

'Then it is plain, Sir, I *must* hear you tonight,' said Miss Lake, haughtily.

'Not that, exactly, Miss Lake, but only that *I* must *speak* tonight — in fact, I have no choice. The subject of our conference really is, as you will find, an urgent one, and tomorrow morning, which we should each equally prefer, would be possibly too late — too late, at least, to obviate a very painful situation.'

'You will make it, I am sure, as short as you can, Sir,' said the young lady, in the same tone.

'Exactly my wish, Miss Lake,' replied Mr. Jos. Larkin.

'Bring candles, Margery.'

And so the little drawingroom was illuminated; and the bald head of the tall attorney, and the gloss on his easy, black frock-coat, and his gold watch-chain, and the long and large gloved hand, depending near the carpet, with the glove of the other in it. And Mr. Jos. Larkin rose with a negligent and lordly case, and placed a chair for Miss Lake, so that the light might fall full upon her features, in accordance with his usual diplomatic arrangement, which he fancied, complacently, no one had ever detected; he himself resuming his easy *pose* upon his chair, with his back, as much as was practicable, presented to the candles, and the long, bony fingers of the arm which rested on the table, negligently shading his observing little eyes, and screening off the side light from his expressive features.

These arrangements, however, were disconcerted by Miss Lake's sitting down at the other side of the table, and quietly requesting Mr. Larkin to open his case.

'Why, really, it is hardly a five minutes' matter, Miss Lake. It refers to the vicar, the Rev. William Wylder, and his respectable family, and a proposition which he, as my client, mentioned to me this evening. He stated that you had offered to advance a sum of 600l. for the liquidation of his liabilities. It will, perhaps, conduce to clearness to dispose of this part of the matter first. May I therefore ask, at this stage, whether the Rev. William Wylder rightly conceived you, when he so stated your meaning to me?'

'Yes, certainly, I am most anxious to assist them with that little sum, which I have now an opportunity of procuring.'

'A — exactly — yes — well, Miss Lake, that is, of course, very kind of you — very kind, indeed, and creditable to your feelings; but, as Mr. William Wylder's solicitor, and as I have already demonstrated to him, I must now inform you, that the sum of six hundred pounds would be absolutely *useless* in his position. No party, Miss Lake, in his position, ever quite apprehends, even if he could bring himself fully to state, the aggregate amount of his liabilities. I may state, however, to you, without betraying confidence, that ten times that sum would not avail to extricate him, even temporarily, from his difficulties. He sees the thing himself now; but drowning men will grasp, we know, at straws. However, he *does* see the futility of this; and, thanking you most earnestly, he, through me, begs most gratefully to decline it. In fact, my dear Miss Lake — it is awful to contemplate — he has been in the hands of sharks, harpies, my dear Madam; but I'll beat about for the money, in the way of loan, if possible, and, one way or another, I am resolved, if the thing's to be done, to get him straight.'

There was here a little pause, and Mr. Larkin, finding that Miss Lake had nothing to say, simply added —

'And so, for these reasons, and with these views, my dear Miss Lake, we beg, most respectfully, and I will say gratefully, to decline the proffered advance, which, I will say, at the same time, does honour to your feelings.'

‘I am sorry,’ said Miss Lake, ‘you have had so much trouble in explaining so simple a matter. I will call early tomorrow, and see Mr. Wylder.’

‘Pardon me,’ said the attorney, ‘I have to address myself next to the second portion of your offer, as stated to me by Mr. W. Wylder, that which contemplates a residence in his house, and in the respectable bosom, I may say, of that, in many respects, unblemished family.’

Miss Lake stared with a look of fierce enquiry at the attorney.

‘The fact is, Miss Lake, that that is an arrangement which under existing circumstances I could not think of advising. I think, on reflection, you will see, that Mr. Wylder — the Reverend William Wylder and his lady — could not for one moment seriously entertain it, and that I, who am bound to do the best I can for them, could not dream of advising it.’

‘I fancy it is a matter of total indifference, Sir, what you may and what you may not advise in a matter quite beyond your province — I don’t in the least understand, or desire to understand you — and thinking your manner impertinent and offensive, I beg that you will now be so good as to leave my house.’

Miss Rachel was very angry — although nothing but her bright colour and the vexed flash of her eye showed it.

‘I were most unfortunate — most unfortunate indeed, Miss Lake, if my manner could in the least justify the strong and undue language in which you have been pleased to characterise it. But I do not resent — it is not my way— “beareth all things,” Miss Lake, “beareth all things” — I hope I try to practise the precept; but the fact of being misunderstood shall not deter me from the discharge of a simple duty.’

‘If it is part of your duty, Sir, to make yourself intelligible, may I beg that you will do it without further delay.’

‘My principal object in calling here was to inform you, Miss Lake, that you must quite abandon the idea of residing in the vicar’s house, as you proposed, unless you wish me to state explicitly to him and to Mrs. Wylder the insurmountable objections which exist to any such arrangement. Such a task, Miss Lake, would be most painful to me. I hesitate to discuss the question even with you; and if you give me your word of honour that you quite abandon that idea, I shall on the instant take my leave, and certainly, for the present, trouble you no further upon a most painful subject.’

‘And now, Sir, as I have no intention whatever of tolerating your incomprehensibly impertinent interference, and don’t understand your meaning in the slightest degree, and do not intend to withdraw the offer I have made to good Mrs. Wylder, you will I hope perceive the uselessness of prolonging your visit, and be so good as to leave me in unmolested possession of my poor residence.’

‘If I wished to do you an injury, Miss Lake, I should take you at your word. I don’t — I wish to spare you. Your countenance, Miss Lake — you must pardon my frankness, it is my way — *your countenance* tells only too plainly that you now comprehend my allusion.’

There was a confidence and significance in the attorney’s air and accent, and a peculiar look of latent ferocity in his evil countenance, which gradually excited her fears, and fascinated her gaze.

‘Now, Miss Lake, we are sitting here in the presence of Him who is the searcher of hearts, and before whom nothing is secret — your eye is upon mine and mine on yours — and I ask you, *do you remember the night of the 29th of September last*?’

That mean, pale, taunting face! the dreadful accents that vibrated within her! How could that ill-omened man have divined her connection with the incidents — the unknown incidents — of that direful night? The lean figure in the black frock-coat, and black silk waistcoat, with that great gleaming watch-chain, the long, shabby, withered face, and flushed, bald forehead; and those paltry little eyes, in their pink setting, that nevertheless fascinated her like the gaze of a serpent. How had that horrible figure come there — why was this meeting — whence his knowledge? An evil spirit incarnate he seemed to her. She blanched before it — every vestige of colour fled from her features — she stared — she gaped at him with a strange look of imbecility — and the long face seemed to enjoy and protract its triumph.

Without removing his gaze he was fumbling in his pocket for his notebook, which he displayed with a faint smile, grim and pallid.

‘I see you *do* remember that night — *as well you may*, Miss Lake,’ he ejaculated, in formidable tones, and with a shake of his bald head.

‘Now, Miss Lake, you see this book. It contains, Madam, the skeleton of a case. The bones and joints, Ma’am, of a case. I have it here, noted and prepared. There is not a fact in it without a note of the name and address of the witness who can prove it — the *witness* — observe me.’

Then there was a pause of a few seconds, during which he still kept her under his steady gaze.

'On that night, Miss Lake, the 29th September, you drove in Mr. Mark Wylder's taxcart to the Dollington station, where, notwithstanding your veil, and your caution, you were *seen* and *recognised*. The same occurred at Charteris. You accompanied Mr. Mark Wylder in his midnight flight to London, Miss Lake. Of your stay in London I say nothing. It was protracted to the 2nd October, when you arrived in the down train at Dollington at twelve o'clock at night, and took a cab to the "White House," where you were met by a gentleman answering the description of your brother, Captain Lake. Now, Miss Lake, I have stated no particulars, but do you think that knowing all this, and knowing the *fraud* by which your absence was covered, and perfectly understanding, as every man conversant with this sinful world must do, the full significance of all this, I could dream of permitting you, Miss Lake, to become domesticated as an inmate in the family of a pure-minded, though simple and unfortunate clergyman?'

'It may become my duty,' he resumed, 'to prosecute a searching enquiry, Madam, into the circumstances of Mr. Mark Wylder's disappearance. If you have the slightest regard for your own honour, you will not precipitate that measure, Miss Lake; and so sure as you persist in your unwarrantable design of residing in that unsuspecting family, I will publish what I shall then feel called upon by my position to make known; for I will be no party to seeing an innocent family compromised by admitting an inmate of whose real character they have not the faintest suspicion, and I shall at once set in motion a public enquiry into the circumstances of Mr. Mark Wylder's disappearance.'

Looking straight in his face, with the same expression of helplessness, she uttered at last a horrible cry of anguish that almost thrilled that callous Christian.

'I think I'm going mad!'

And she continued staring at him all the time.

'Pray compose yourself, Miss Lake — there's no need to agitate yourself — nothing of all this need occur if you do not force it upon me — *nothing*. I beg you'll collect yourself — shall I call for water, Miss Lake?'

The fact is the attorney began to apprehend hysterics, or something even worse, and was himself rather frightened. But Rachel was never long overwhelmed by any shock — fear was not for her — her brave spirit stood her in stead; and nothing rallied her so surely as the sense that an attempt was being made to intimidate her.

‘What have I heard — what have I endured? Listen to me, you cowardly libeller. It is true that I was at Dollington, and at Charteris, on the night you name. Also true that I went to London. Your hideous slander is garnished with two or three bits of truth, but only the more villainous for that. All that you have dared to insinuate is utterly false. Before Him who judges all, and knows all things — *utterly* and *damnably* false!’

The attorney made a bow — it was his best. He did not imitate a gentleman happily, and was never so vulgar as when he was finest.

One word of her wild protest he did not believe. His bow was of that grave but mocking sort which was meant to convey it. Perhaps if he had accepted what she said it might have led him to new and sounder conclusions. Here was light, but it glared and flashed in vain for him.

Miss Lake was naturally perfectly frank. Pity it was she had ever had a secret to keep! These frank people are a sore puzzle to gentlemen of Lawyer Larkin’s quaint and sagacious turn of mind. They can’t believe that anybody ever speaks quite the truth: when they hear it — they don’t recognise it, and they wonder what the speaker is driving at. The best method of hiding your opinion or your motives from such men, is to tell it to them. They are owls. Their vision is formed for darkness, and light blinds them.

Rachel Lake rang her bell sharply, and old Tamar appeared.

‘Show Mr. — Mr. — ; show him to the door,’ said Miss Lake.

The attorney rose, made another bow, and threw back his head, and moved in a way that was oppressively gentlemanlike to the door, and speedily vanished at the little wicket. Old Tamar holding her candle to lighten his path, as she stood, white and cadaverous, in the porch.

‘She’s a little bit noisy tonight,’ thought the attorney, as he descended the road to Gylingden; ‘but she’ll be precious sober by tomorrow morning — and I venture to say we shall hear nothing more of that scheme of hers. A reputable inmate, truly, and a pleasant *éclaircissement* (this was one of his French words, and pronounced by him with his usual accuracy, precisely as it is spelt) — a pleasant *éclaircissement* — whenever that London excursion and its creditable circumstances come to light.’

CHAPTER LXI.

IN WHICH DAME DUTTON IS VISITED.

Duly next morning the rosy-fingered Aurora drew the gold and crimson curtains of the east, and the splendid Apollo, stepping forth from his chamber, took the reins of his unrivalled team, and driving four-in-hand through the sky, like a great swell as he is, took small note of the staring hucksters and publicans by the roadside, and sublimely overlooked the footsore and ragged pedestrians that crawl below his level. It was, in fact, one of those brisk and bright mornings which proclaim a universal cheerfulness, and mock the miseries of those dismal wayfarers of life, to whom returning light is a renewal of sorrow, who, bowing toward the earth, resume their despairing march, and limp and groan under heavy burdens, until darkness, welcome, comes again, and their eyelids drop, and they lie down with their loads on, looking up a silent supplication, and wishing that death would touch their eyelids in their sleep, and their journey end where they lie.

Captain Lake was in London this morning. We know he came about electioneering matters; but he had not yet seen Leverett. Perhaps on second thoughts he rightly judged that Leverett knew no more than he did of the matter. It depended on the issue of the great debate that was drawing nigh. The Minister himself could not tell whether the dissolution was at hand; and could no more postpone it, when the time came, than he could adjourn an eclipse.

Notwithstanding the late whist party of the previous night, the gallant captain made a very early toilet. With his little bag in his hand, he went down stairs, thinking unpleasantly, I believe, and jumped into the Hansom that awaited him at the door, telling the man to go to the —— station. They had hardly turned the corner, however, when he popped his head forward and changed the direction.

He looked at his watch. He had quite time to make his visit, and save the down-train after.

He did not know the City well. Many men who lived two hundred miles away, and made a flying visit only once in three years, knew it a great deal better than the London-bred rake who had lived in the West-end all his days.

Captain Lake looked peevish and dangerous, as he always did, when he was anxious. In fact he did not know what the next ten minutes might bring him. He was thinking what had best be done in any and every contingency. Was he still abroad, or had he arrived? was he in Shive's Court, or, cursed luck! had he crossed him yesterday by the down-train, and was he by this time closeted with Larkin in the Lodge? Lake, so to speak, stood at his wicket, and that accomplished bowler, Fortune, ball in hand, at the other end; will it be swift round-hand, or a slow twister, or a shooter, or a lob? Eye and hand, foot and bat, he must stand tense, yet flexible, lithe and swift as lightning, ready for everything — cut, block, slip, or hit to leg. It was not altogether pleasant. The stakes were enormous! and the suspense by no means conducive to temper.

Lake fancied that the man was driving wrong, once or twice, and was on the point of cursing him to that effect, from the window. But at last, with an anxious throb at his heart, he recognised the dingy archway, and the cracked brown marble tablet over the keystone, and he recognised Shive's Court.

So forth jumped the captain, so far relieved, and glided into the dim quadrangle, with its square of smoky sky overhead; and the prattle of children playing on the flags, and the scrape of a violin from a window, were in his ears, but as it were unheard. He was looking up at a window, with a couple of sooty scarlet geraniums in it. This was the court where Dame Dutton dwelt. He glided up her narrow stair and let himself in by the latch; and with his cane made a smacking like a harlequin's sword upon the old woman's deal table, crying: 'Mrs. Dutton; Mrs. Dutton. Is Mrs. Dutton at home?'

The old lady, who was a laundress, entered, in a short blue cotton wrapper, wiping the suds from her shrunken but sinewy arms with her apron, and on seeing the captain, her countenance, which was threatening, became very reverential indeed.

'How d'ye do, Mrs. Dutton? Quite well. Have you heard lately from Jim?'

'No.'

‘You’ll see him soon, however, and give him this note, d’ye see, and tell him I was here, asking about you and him, and very well, and glad if I can serve him again? don’t forget that, *very* glad. Where will you keep that note? Oh! your tea-caddy, not a bad safe; and see, give him this, it’s ten pounds. You won’t forget; and you want a new gown, Mrs. Dutton. I’d choose it thyself, only I’m such a bad judge; but you’ll choose it for me, won’t you? and let me see it on you when next I come,’ and with a courtesy and a great beaming smile on her hot face, she accepted the five-pound note, which he placed in her hand.

In another moment the captain was gone. He had just time to swallow a cup of coffee at the ‘Terminus Hotel,’ and was gliding away towards the distant walls of Brandon Hall.

He had a coupé all to himself. But he did not care for the prospect. He saw Lawyer Larkin, as it were, reflected in the plate-glass, with his hollow smile and hungry eyes before him, knowing more than he should do, paying him compliments, and plotting his ruin.

‘Everything would have been quite smooth only for that d —— fellow. The Devil fixed him precisely there for the express purpose of fleecing and watching, and threatening him — perhaps worse. He hated that sly, double-dealing reptile of prey — the arachnida of social nature — the spiders with which also naturalists place the scorpions. I dare say Mr. Larkin would have had as little difficulty in referring the gallant captain to the same family.

While Stanley Lake is thus scanning the shabby, but dangerous image of the attorney in the magic mirror before him, that eminent limb of the law was not inactive in the quiet town of Gylingden. Under ordinary circumstances his ‘pride’ would have condemned the vicar to a direful term of suspense, and he certainly would not have knocked at the door of the pretty little gabled house at the Dollington end of the town for many days to come. The vicar would have had to seek out the attorney, to lie in wait for and to woo him.

But Jos. Larkin’s pride, like all his other passions — except his weakness for the precious metals — was under proper regulation. Jim Dutton might arrive at any moment, and it would not do to risk his publishing the melancholy intelligence of Mark Wylder’s death before the transfer of the vicar’s reversion; and to prevent that risk the utmost promptitude was indispensable.

At nine o'clock, therefore, he presented himself, attended by his legal henchmen as before.

'Another man might not have come here, Mr. Wylder, until his presence had been specially invited, after the — the — — ' when he came to define the offence it was not very easy to do so, inasmuch as it consisted in the vicar's having unconsciously very nearly escaped from his fangs; 'but let that pass. I have had, I grieve to say, by this morning's post a most serious letter from London;' the attorney shook his head, while searching his pocket. 'I'll read just a passage or two if you'll permit me; it comes from Burlington and Smith. I protest I have forgot it at home; however, I may mention, that in consequence of the letter you authorised me to write, and guaranteed by your bond, on which they have entered judgment, they have gone to the entire expense of drawing the deeds, and investigating title, and they say that the purchaser will positively be off, unless the articles are in their office by twelve o'clock tomorrow; and, I grieve to say, they add, that in the event of the thing falling through, they will issue execution for the amount of their costs, which, as I anticipated, a good deal exceeds four hundred pounds. I have, therefore, my dear Mr. Wylder, casting aside all unpleasant feeling, called to entreat you to end and determine any hesitation you may have felt, and to execute without one moment's delay the articles which are prepared, and which must be in the postoffice within half an hour.'

Then Mr. Jos. Larkin entered pointedly and briefly into Miss Lake's offer, which he characterised as 'wholly nugatory, illusory, and chimerical;' told him he had spoken on the subject, yesterday evening, to the young lady, who now saw plainly that there really was nothing in it, and that she was not in a position to carry out that part of her proposition, which contemplated a residence in the vicar's family.

This portion of his discourse he dismissed rather slightly and mysteriously; but he contrived to leave upon the vicar's mind a very painful and awful sort of uncertainty respecting the young lady of whom he spoke.

Then he became eloquent on the madness of further indecision in a state of things so fearfully menacing, freely admitting that it would have been incomparably better for the vicar never to have moved in the matter, than, having put his hand to the plough, to look back as he had been doing. If he declined his advice, there was no more to be said, but to bow his head to the storm, and that ponderous execution would descend in wreck and desolation.

So the vicar, very much flushed, in panic and perplexity, and trusting wildly to his protesting lawyer's guidance, submitted. Buggs and the bilious youngster entered with the deed, and the articles were duly executed, and the vicar signed also a receipt for the fanciful part of the consideration, and upon it and the deed he endorsed a solemn promise, in the terms I have mentioned before, that he would never take any step to question, set aside, or disturb the purchase, or any matter connected therewith.

Then the attorney, now in his turn flushed and very much elated, congratulated the poor vicar on his emancipation from his difficulties; and 'now that it was all done and over, told him, what he had never told him before, that, considering the nature of the purchase, he had got a *splendid* price for it.'

The good man had also his agreement from Lake to sell Five Oaks.

The position of the good attorney, therefore, in a commercial point of view, was eminently healthy and convenient. For less than half the value of Five Oaks alone, he was getting that estate, and a vastly greater one beside, to be succeeded to on Mark Wylder's death.

No wonder, then, that the good attorney was more than usually bland and happy that day. He saw the pork-butcher in his back-parlour, and had a few words to say about the chapel-trust, and his looks and talk were quite edifying. He met two little children in the street, and stopped and smiled as he stooped down to pat them on the heads, and ask them whose children they were, and gave one of them a halfpenny. And he sat afterwards, for nearly ten minutes, with lean old Mrs. Mullock, in her little shop, where toffey, toys, and penny books for young people were sold, together with baskets, teacups, straw-mats, and other adult ware; and he was so friendly and talked so beautifully, and although, as he admitted in his lofty way, 'there might be differences in fortune and position,' yet were we not all members of one body? And he talked upon this theme till the good lady, marvelling how so great a man could be so humble, was called to the receipt of custom, on the subject of 'paradise' and 'lemon-drops,' and the heavenly-minded attorney, with a celestial condescension, recognised his two little acquaintances of the street, and actually adding another halfpenny to his bounty — escaped, with a hasty farewell and a smile, to the street, as eager to evade the thanks of the little people, and the admiration of Mrs. Mullock.

It is not to be supposed, that having got one momentous matter well off his mind, the good attorney was to be long rid of anxieties. The human mind is fertile in that sort of growth. As well might the gentleman who shaves suppose, as his fingers glide, after the operation, over the polished surface of his chin — *factus ad unguem* — that he may fling his brush and strop into the fire, and bury his razor certain fathoms in the earth. No! One crop of cares will always succeed another — not very oppressive, nor in any wise grand, perhaps — worries, simply, no more; but needing a modicum of lather, the looking glass, the strop, the diligent razor, delicate manipulation, and stealing a portion of our precious time every day we live; and this must go on so long as the state of man is imperfect, and plenty of possible evil in futurity.

The attorney must run up to London for a day or two. What if that mysterious, and almost illegible brute, James Dutton, should arrive while he was away. Very unpleasant, possibly! For the attorney intended to keep that gentleman very quiet. Sufficient time must be allowed to intervene to disconnect the purchase of the vicar's remainder from the news of Mark Wylder's demise. A year and a-half, maybe, or possibly a year might do. For if the good attorney was cautious, he was also greedy, and would take possession as early as was safe. Therefore arrangements were carefully adjusted to detain that important person, in the event of his arriving; and a note, in the good attorney's hand, inviting him to remain at the Lodge till his return, and particularly requesting that 'he would kindly abstain from mentioning to *anyone*, during his absence, any matter he might intend to communicate to him in his professional capacity or otherwise.'

This, of course, was a little critical, and made his tomorrow's journey to London a rather anxious prospect.

In the meantime our friend, Captain Lake, arrived in a hired fly, with his light baggage, at the door of stately Brandon. So soon as the dust and ashes of railway travel were removed, the pale captain, in changed attire, snowy cambric, and with perfumed hair and handkerchief, presented himself before Dorcas.

'Now, Dorkie, darling, your poor soldier has come back, resolved to turn over a new leaf, and never more to reserve another semblance of a secret from you,' said he, so soon as his first greeting was over. 'I long to have a good talk with you, Dorkie. I have no one on earth to confide in but you. I think,' he said, with a little sigh, 'I would never have been so reserved with you, darling, if I had had anything pleasant to confide; but all I have to say is triste and tiresome — only a story of difficulties and petty vexations. I want to talk to you, Dorkie. Where shall it be?'

They were in the great drawingroom, where I had first seen Dorcas Brandon and Rachel Lake, on the evening on which my acquaintance with the princely Hall was renewed, after an interval of so many years.

'This room, Stanley, dear?'

'Yes, this room will answer very well,' he said, looking round. 'We can't be overheard, it is so large. Very well, darling, listen.'

CHAPTER LXII.

THE CAPTAIN EXPLAINS WHY MARK WYLDER ABSCONDED.

‘How delicious these violets are!’ said Stanley, leaning for a moment over the fragrant purple dome that crowned a china stand on the marble table they were passing. ‘You love flowers, Dorkie. Every perfect woman is, I think, a sister of Flora’s. You are looking pale — you have not been ill? No! I’m very glad you say so. Sit down for a moment and listen, darling. And first I’ll tell you, upon my honour, what Rachel has been worrying me about.’

Dorcas sate beside him on the sofa, and he placed his slender arm affectionately round her waist.

‘You must know, Dorkie, that before his sudden departure, Mark Wylder promised to lend William, his brother, a sum sufficient to relieve him of all his pressing debts.’

‘Debts! I never knew before that he had any,’ exclaimed Dorcas. ‘Poor William! I am so sorry.’

‘Well, he has, like other fellows, only he can’t get away as easily, and he has been very much pressed since Mark went, for he has not yet lent him a guinea, and in fact Rachel says she thinks he is in danger of being regularly sold out. She does not say she knows it, but only that she suspects they are in a great fix about money.’

‘Well, you must know that *I* was the sole cause of Mark Wylder’s leaving the country.’

‘*You*, Stanley!’

‘Yes, *I*, Dorkie. I believe I thought I was doing a duty; but really I was nearly mad with *jealousy*, and simply doing my utmost to drive a rival from *your* presence. And yet, without hope for myself, *desperately* in love.’

Dorcas looked down and smiled oddly; it was a sad and bitter smile, and seemed to ask whither has that desperate love, in so short a time, flown?

‘I know I was right. He was a stained man, and was liable at any moment to be branded. It was villainous in him to seek to marry you. I told him at last that, unless he withdrew, your friends should know all. I expected he would show fight, and that a meeting would follow; and I really did not much care whether I were killed or not. But he went, on the contrary, rather quietly, threatening to pay me off, however, though he did not say how. He's a cunning dog, and not very soft-hearted; and has no more conscience than that,' and he touched his finger to the cold summit of a marble bust.

'He is palpably machinating something to my destruction with an influential attorney on whom I keep a watch, and he has got some fellow named Dutton into the conspiracy; and not knowing how they mean to act, and only knowing how utterly wicked, cunning, and bloody-minded he is, and that he hates me as he probably never hated anyone before, I must be prepared to meet him, and, if possible, to blow up that Satanic cabal, which without *money* I can't. It was partly a mystification about the election; of course, it will be expensive, but nothing like the other. Are you ill, Dorkie?'

He might well ask, for she appeared on the point of fainting.

Dorcas had read and heard stories of men seemingly no worse than their neighbours — nay, highly esteemed, and praised, and liked — who yet were haunted by evil men, who encountered them in lonely places, or by night, and controlled them by the knowledge of some dreadful crime. Was Stanley — her husband — whose character she had begun to discern, whose habitual mystery was, somehow, tinged in her mind with a shade of horror, one of this two-faced, diabolical order of heroes?

Why should he dread this cabal, as he called it, even though directed by the malignant energy of the absent and shadowy Mark Wylder? What could all the world do to harm him in free England, if he were innocent, if he were what he seemed — no worse than his social peers?

Why should it be necessary to buy off the conspirators whom a guiltless man would defy and punish?

The doubt did not come in these defined shapes. As a halo surrounds a saint, a shadow rose suddenly, and enveloped pale, scented, smiling Stanley, with the yellow eyes. He stood in the centre of a dreadful medium, through which she saw him, ambiguous and awful; and she sickened.

'Are you ill, Dorkie, darling?' said the apparition in accents of tenderness. 'Yes, you *are* ill.'

And he hastily threw open the window, close to which they were sitting, and she quickly revived in the cooling air.

She saw his yellow eyes fixed upon her features, and his face wearing an odd expression — was it interest, or tenderness, or only scrutiny; to her there seemed a light of insincerity and cruelty in its pallor.

‘You are better, darling; thank Heaven, you are better.’

‘Yes — yes — a great deal better; it is passing away.’

Her colour was returning, and with a shivering sigh, she said —

‘Oh? Stanley, you must speak truth; I am your wife. Do they know anything very bad — are you in their power?’

‘Why, my dearest, what on earth could put such a wild fancy in your head?’ said Lake, with a strange laugh, and, as she fancied, growing still paler. ‘Do you suppose I am a highwayman in disguise, or a murderer, like — what’s his name — Eugene Aram? I must have expressed myself very ill, if I suggested anything so tragical. I protest before Heaven, my darling, there is not one word or act of mine I need fear to submit to any court of justice or of honour on earth.’

He took her hand, and kissed it affectionately, and still fondling it gently between his, he resumed —

‘I don’t mean to say, of course, that I have always been better than other young fellows; I’ve been foolish, and wild, and — and — I’ve done wrong things, occasionally — as all young men will; but for high crimes and misdemeanors, or for melodramatic situations, I never had the slightest taste. There’s no man on earth who can tell anything of me, or put me under any sort of pressure, thank Heaven; and simply because I have never in the course of my life done a single act unworthy of a gentleman, or in the most trifling way compromised myself. I swear it, my darling, upon my honour and soul, and I will swear it in any terms — the most awful that can be prescribed — in order totally and for ever to remove from your mind so amazing a fancy.’

And with a little laugh, and still holding her hand, he passed his arm round her waist, and kissed her affectionately.

‘But you are perfectly right, Dorkie, in supposing that I *am* under very considerable apprehension from their machinations. Though they cannot slur our fair fame, it is quite possible they may very seriously affect our property. Mr. Larkin is in possession of all the family papers. I don’t like it, but it is too late now. The estates have been back and forward so often between the Brandons and Wylders, I always fancy there may be a screw loose, or a frangible link somewhere, and he's deeply interested for Mark Wylder.'

'You are better, darling; I think you are better,' he said, looking in her face, after a little pause.

'Yes, dear Stanley, much better; but why should you suppose any plot against our title?'

'Mark Wylder is in constant correspondence with that fellow Larkin. I wish we were quietly rid of him, he is such an unscrupulous dog. I assure you, I doubt very much if the deeds are safe in his possession; at all events, he ought to choose between us and Mark Wylder. It is monstrous his being solicitor for both. The Wylders and Brandons have always been contesting the right to these estates, and the same thing may arise again any day.'

'But tell me, Stanley, how do you want to apply money? What particular good can it do us in this unpleasant uncertainty?'

'Well, Dorkie, believe me I have a sure instinct in matters of this kind. Larkin is plotting treason against us. Wylder is inciting him, and will reap the benefit of it. Larkin hesitates to strike, but that won't last long. In the meantime, he has made a distinct offer to buy Five Oaks. His doing so places him in the same interest with us; and, although he does not offer its full value, still I should sleep sounder if it were concluded; and the fact is, I don't think we are safe until that sale *is* concluded.'

Dorcas looked for a moment earnestly in his face, and then down, in thought.

'Now, Dorkie, I have told you all. Who is to advise you, if not your husband? Trust my sure conviction, and promise me, Dorcas, that you will not hesitate to join me in averting, by a sacrifice we shall hardly feel, a really stupendous blow.'

He kissed her hand, and then her lips, and he said —

'You *will*, Dorkie, I *know* you will. Give me your promise.'

'Stanley, tell me once more, are you really quite frank when you tell me that you apprehend no personal injury from these people — apart, I mean, from the possibility of Mr. Larkin's conspiring to impeach our rights in favour of Mr. Wylder?'

'Personal injury? None in life, my darling.'

'And there is really no secret — nothing — *tell* your wife — nothing you fear coming to light?'

‘I swear again, nothing. *Won’t* you believe me, darling?’

‘Then, if it be so, Stanley, I think we should hesitate long before selling any part of the estate, upon a mere conjecture of danger. You or I may over-estimate that danger, being so nearly affected by it. We must take advice; and first, we must consult Chelford. Remember, Stanley, how long the estate has been preserved. Whatever may have been their crimes and follies, those who have gone before us never impaired the Brandon estate; and, without full consideration, without urgent cause, I, Stanley, will not begin.’

‘Why, it is only Five Oaks, and we shall have the money, you forget,’ said Stanley.

‘Five Oaks is an estate in itself; and the idea of dismembering the Brandon inheritance seems to me like taking a plank from a ship — all will go down when that is done.’

‘But you *can’t* dismember it; it is only a life estate.’

‘Well, perhaps so; but Chelford told me that one of the London people said he thought Five Oaks belonged to me absolutely.’

‘In that case the inheritance *is* dismembered already.’

‘I will have no share in selling the old estate, or any part of it, to strangers, Stanley, except in a case of necessity; and we must do nothing precipitately; and I must insist, Stanley, on consulting Chelford before taking any step. He will view the question more calmly than you or I can; and we owe him that respect, Stanley, he has been so very kind to us.’

‘Chelford is the very last man whom I would think of consulting,’ answered Stanley, with his malign and peevish look.

‘And why?’ asked Dorcas.

‘Because he is quite sure to advise against it,’ answered Stanley, sharply. ‘He is one of those Quixotic fellows who get on very well in fair weather, while living with a duke or duchess, but are sure to run you into mischief when they come to the inns and highways of common life. I know perfectly, he would protest against a compromise. Discharge Larkin — fight him — and see us valiantly stript of our property by some cursed law-quibble; and think we ought to be much more comfortable so, than in this house, on the terms of a compromise with a traitor like Larkin. But *I* don’t think so, nor any man of sense, nor anyone but a hairbrained, conceited knight-errant.’

‘I think Chelford one of the most sensible as well as honourable men I know; and I will take no step in selling a part of our estate to that odious

Mr. Larkin, without consulting him, and at least hearing what he thinks of it.'

Stanley's eyes were cast down — and he was nipping the struggling hairs of his light moustache between his lips — but he made no answer. Only suddenly he looked up, and said quietly,

'Very well. Goodbye for a little, Dorkie,' and he leaned over her and kissed her cheek, and then passed into the hall, where he took his hat and cane.

Larcom presented him with a note, in a sealed envelope. As he took it from the salver he recognised Larkin's very clear and large hand. I suspect that grave Mr. Larcom had been making his observations and conjectures thereupon.

The captain took it with a little nod, and a peevish side-glance. It said —

'MY DEAR CAPTAIN BRANDON LAKE, — Imperative business calls me to London by the early train tomorrow. Will you therefore favour me, if convenient, *by the bearer*, with the small note of consent, which must accompany the articles agreeing to sell.

'I remain, &c. &c. &c.'

Larkin's groom was waiting for an answer.

'Tell him I shall probably see Mr. Larkin myself,' said the captain, snappishly; and so he walked down to pretty little Gylingden.

On the steps of the reading-room stood old Tom Ruddle, who acted as marker in the billiard-room, treasurer, and book-keeper beside, and swept out the premises every morning, and went to and fro at the proper hours, between that literary and sporting institution and the postoffice; and who, though seldom sober, was always well instructed in the news of the town.

'How do you do, old Ruddle — quite well?' asked the captain with a smile. 'Who have you got in the rooms?'

Well, Jos. Larkin was not there. Indeed he seldom showed in those premises, which he considered decidedly low, dropping in only now and then, like the great county gentlemen, on sessions days, to glance at the papers, and gossip on their own high affairs.

But Ruddle had seen Mr. Jos. Larkin on the green, not five minutes since, and thither the gallant captain bent his steps.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE ACE OF HEARTS.

‘So you are going to London — *tomorrow*, is not it?’ said Captain Lake, when on the green of Gylingden where visitors were promenading, and the militia bands playing lusty polkas, he met Mr. Jos. Larkin, in lavender trousers and kid gloves, new hat, metropolitan black frock-coat, and shining French boots — the most elegant as well as the most Christian of provincial attorneys.

‘Ah, yes — I think — should my engagements permit — of starting early tomorrow. The fact is, Captain Lake, our poor friend the vicar, you know, the Rev. William Wylder, has pressing occasion for some money, and I can’t leave him absolutely in the hands of Burlington and Smith.’

‘No, of course — quite so,’ said Lake, with that sly smile which made every fellow on whom it lighted somehow fancy that the captain had divined his secret. ‘Very honest fellows, with good looking after — eh?’

The attorney laughed a little awkwardly, with his pretty pink blush over his long face.

‘Well, I’m far from saying that, but it is their business, you know, to take care of *their* client; and it would not do to give them the handling of *mine*. Can I do anything, Captain Lake, for you while in town?’

‘Nothing on earth, thank you very much. But I am thinking of doing something for you. You’ve interested yourself a great deal about Mark Wylder’s movements.’

‘Not more than my duty clearly imposed.’

‘Yes; but notwithstanding it will operate, I’m afraid, as you will presently see, rather to his prejudice. For to prevent your conjectural interference from doing him a more serious mischief, I will now, and here, if you please, divulge the true and only cause of his absconding. It is fair to mention, however, that your knowing it will make you fully as odious to him as I am — and that, I assure you, is very odious indeed. There were four witnesses beside myself — Lieutenant-Colonel Jermyn, Sir James Carter, Lord George Vanbrugh, and Ned Clinton.

‘*Witnesses*! Captain Lake. Do you allude to a legal matter?’ enquired Larkin, with his look of insinuating concern and enquiry.

‘Quite the contrary — a very lawless matter, indeed. These four gentlemen, beside myself, were present at the occurrence. But perhaps you’ve heard of it?’ said the captain, ‘though that’s not likely.’

‘Not that I recollect, Captain Lake,’ answered Jos. Larkin.

‘Well, it is not a thing you’d forget easily — and indeed it was a very well kept secret, as well as an ugly one,’ and Lake smiled in his sly quizzical way.

‘And *where*, Captain Lake, did it occur, may I enquire?’ said Larkin, with his charming insinuation.

‘You may, and you shall hear — in fact, I’ll tell you the whole thing. It was at Gray’s Club, in Pall Mall. The whist party were old Jermyn, Carter, Vanbrugh, and Wylder. Clinton and I were at piquet, and were disturbed by a precious row the old boys kicked up. Jermyn and Carter were charging Mark Wylder, in so many words, with not playing fairly — there was an ace of hearts on the table played by him, and before three minutes they brought it home — and in fact it was quite clear that poor dear Mark had helped himself to it in quite an irregular way.’

‘Oh, dear, Captain Lake, oh, dear, how shocking — how inexpressibly shocking! Is not it *melancholy*?’ said Larkin, in his finest and most pathetic horror.

‘Yes; but don’t cry till I’ve done,’ said Lake, tranquilly. ‘Mark tried to bully, but the cool old heads were too much for him, and he threw himself at last entirely on our mercy — and very abject he became, poor thing.’

‘How well the mountains look! I am afraid we shall have rain tomorrow.’

Larkin uttered a short groan.

‘So they sent him into the small card-room, next that we were playing in. I think we were about the last in the club — it was past three o’clock — and so the old boys deliberated on their sentence. To bring the matter before the committee were utter ruin to Mark, and they let him off, on these conditions — he was to retire forthwith from the club; he was never to play any game of cards again; and, lastly, he was never more to address any one of the gentlemen who were present at his detection. Poor dear devil! — how he did jump at the conditions; — and provided they were each and all strictly observed, it was intimated that the occurrence should be kept secret. Well, you know, that was letting poor old Mark off in a coach; and I do assure you, though we had never liked one another, I really was very glad they did not move his expulsion — which would have involved his quitting the service — and I positively don't know how he could have lived if that had occurred.'

'I do solemnly assure you, Captain Lake, what you have told me has beyond expression amazed, and I will say, horrified me,' said the attorney, with a slow and melancholy vehemence. 'Better men might have suspected something of it — I do solemnly pledge my honour that nothing of the kind so much as crossed my mind — not naturally suspicious, I believe, but all the more shocked, Captain Lake, on that account'

'He was poor then, you see, and a few pounds were everything to him, and the temptation immense; but clumsy fellows ought not to try that sort of thing. There's the highway — Mark would have made a capital garrotter.'

The attorney groaned, and turned up his eyes. The band was playing 'Pop goes the weasel,' and old Jackson, very well dressed and buckled up, with a splendid smile upon his waggish, military countenance, cried, as he passed, with a wave of his hand, 'How do, Lake — how do, Mr. Larkin — beautiful day!'

'I've no wish to injure Mark; but it is better that you should know at once, than go about poking everywhere for information.'

'I do assure you — — '

'And having really no wish to hurt him,' pursued the captain, 'and also making it, as I do, a point that you shall repeat this conversation as little as possible, I don't choose to appear singular, as your sole informant, and I've given you here a line to Sir James Carter — he's member, you know, for Huddlesbury. I mention, that Mark, having broken his promise, and played for heavy stakes, too, both on board his ship, and at Plymouth and Naples, which I happen to know; and also by accosting me, whom, as one of the gentlemen agreeing to impose these conditions, he was never to address, I felt myself at liberty to mention it to you, holding the relation you do to me as well as to him, in consequence of the desirableness of placing you in possession of the true cause of his absconding, which was simply my telling him that I would not permit him, slurred as he was, to marry a lady who was totally ignorant of his actual position; and, in fact, that unless he withdrew, I must acquaint the young lady's guardian of the circumstances.'

There was quite enough probability in this story to warrant Jos. Larkin in turning up his eyes and groaning. But in the intervals, his shrewd eyes searched the face of the captain, not knowing whether to believe one syllable of what he related.

I may as well mention here, that the attorney did present the note to Sir J. Carter with which Captain Lake had furnished him; indeed, he never lost an opportunity of making the acquaintance of a person of rank; and that the worthy baronet, so appealed to, and being a blunt sort of fellow, and an old acquaintance of Stanley's, did, in a short and testy sort of way, corroborate Captain Lake's story, having previously conditioned that he was not to be referred to as the authority from whom Mr. Larkin had learned it.

The attorney and Captain Brandon Lake were now walking side by side over the more sequestered part of the green.

'And so,' said the captain, coming to a standstill, 'I'll bid you goodbye, Larkin; what stay, I forgot to ask, do you make in town?'

'Only a day or two.'

'You'll not wait for the division on Trawler's motion?'

'Oh, dear, no. I calculate I'll be here again, certainly, in three days' time. And, I suppose, Captain Lake, you received my note?'

'You mean just now? Oh, yes; of course it is all right; but one day is as good as another; and you have got my agreement signed.'

'Pardon me, Captain Brandon Lake; the fact is, one day, in this case, does *not* answer as well as another, for I must have drafts of the deeds prepared by my conveyancer in town, and the note is indispensable. Perhaps, if there is any difficulty, you will be so good as to say so, and I shall then be in a position to consider the case in its new aspect.'

'What the devil difficulty *can* there be, Sir? I can't see it, any more than what *hurry* can possibly exist about it,' said Lake, stung with a momentary fury. It seemed as though everyone was conspiring to perplex and torment him; and he, like the poor vicar, though for very different reasons, had grown intensely anxious to sell. He had grown to dread the attorney, since the arrival of Dutton's letter. He suspected that his journey to London had for its object a meeting with that person. He could not tell what might be going on in the dark. But the possibility of such a conjunction might well dismay him.

On the other hand, the more Mr. Larkin relied upon the truth of Dutton's letter, the cooler he became respecting the purchase of Five Oaks. It was, of course, a very good thing; but not his first object. The vicar's reversion in that case was everything; and of it he was now sure.

'There is no difficulty about the note, Sir; it contains but four lines, and I've given you the form. No difficulty can exist but in the one quarter; and the fact is,' he added, steadily, 'unless I have that note before I leave tomorrow-morning, I'll assume that you wish to be off, Captain Lake, and I will adapt myself to circumstances.'

'You may have it *now*,' said the captain, with a fierce carelessness. 'D — d nonsense! Who could have fancied any such stupid hurry? Send in the morning, and you shall have it.' And the captain rather savagely turned away, skirting the crowd who hovered about the band, in his leisurely and now solitary ramble.

The captain was sullen that evening at home. He was very uncomfortable. His heart was failing him for the things that were coming to pass. One of his maniacal tempers, which had often before thrown him, as it were, 'off the rails,' was at the bottom of his immediate troubles. This proneness to sudden accesses of violence and fury was the compensation which abated the effect of his ordinary craft and self-command.

He had done all he could to obviate the consequences of his folly in this case. He hoped the attorney might not succeed in discovering Jim Dutton's whereabouts. At all events, he had been beforehand, and taken measures to quiet that person's dangerous resentment. But it was momentous in the critical state of things to give this dangerous attorney a handsome share in his stake — to place him, as he had himself said, 'in the same boat,' and enlist all his unscrupulous astuteness in maintaining his title: and if he went to London disappointed, and that things turned out unluckily about Dutton, it might be a very awful business indeed.

Dinner had been a very dull *tête-à-tête*. Dorcas sat stately and sad — looking from the window toward the distant sunset horizon, piled in dusky gold and crimson clouds, against the faded, green sky — a glory that is always melancholy and dreamy. Stanley sipped his claret, his eyes upon the cloth. He raised them and looked out, too; and the ruddy light tinted his pale features.

A gleam of good humour seemed to come with it, and he said, ‘I was just thinking, Dorkie, that for you and me, *alone*, these great rooms are a little dreary. Suppose we have tea in the tapestry room.’

‘The Dutch room, Stanley — I think so — I should like it very well. So, I am certain, would Rachel. I’ve written to her to come. I hope she will. I expect her at nine. The brougham will be with her. She wrote such an odd note to-day, addressed to you; but *I opened it*. Here it is.’

She did not watch his countenance, or look in his direction, as he read it. She addressed herself, on the contrary, altogether to her Liliputian white lap-dog, Snow, and played with his silken ears; and chatted with him as ladies will.

A sealed envelope broken. That scoundrel, Larcom, knew perfectly it was meant for *me*. He was on the point of speaking his mind, which would hardly have been pleasant to hear, upon this piece of detective impertinence of his wife’s. He could have smashed all the glass upon the table. But he looked serene, and leaned back with the corner of Rachel’s note between two fingers. It was a case in which he clearly saw he must command himself.

CHAPTER LXIV.

IN THE DUTCH ROOM.

His heart misgave him. He felt that a crisis was coming; and he read —

‘I cannot tell you, my poor brother, how miserable I am. I have just learned that a very dangerous person has discovered more about that dreadful evening than we believed known to anybody in Gylingden. I am subjected to the most agonising suspicions and *insults*. Would to Heaven I were dead! But living, I cannot endure my present state of mind longer. Tomorrow morning I will see Dorcas — poor Dorcas! — and tell her all. I am weary of urging you, *in vain*, to do so. It would have been much better. But although, after that interview, I shall, perhaps, never see her more, I shall yet be happier, and, I think, relieved from suspense, and the torments of mystery. So will she. At all events, it is her *right* to know all — and she shall.

‘YOUR OUTCAST AND MISERABLE SISTER.’

On Stanley’s lips his serene, unpleasant smile was gleaming, as he closed the note carelessly. He intended to speak, but his voice caught. He cleared it, and sipped a little claret.

‘For a clever girl she certainly does write the most wonderful rubbish. Such an effusion! And she sends it tossing about, from hand to hand, among the servants. I’ve anticipated her, however, Dorkie.’ And he took her hand and kissed it. ‘She does not know I’ve told you *all* myself.’

Stanley went to the library, and Dorcas to the conservatory, neither very happy, each haunted by an evil augury, and a sense of coming danger. The deepening shadow warned Dorcas that it was time to repair to the Dutch room, where she found lights and tea prepared.

In a few minutes more the library door opened and Stanley Lake peeped in.

‘Radie not come yet?’ said he entering. ‘We certainly are much pleasanter in this room, Dorkie, more, in proportion, than we two should have been in the drawingroom.’

He seated himself beside her, drawing his chair very close to hers, and taking her hand in his. He was more affectionate this evening than usual. What did it portend? she thought. She had already begun to acquiesce in Rachel's estimate of Stanley, and to fancy that whatever he did it was with an unacknowledged purpose.

'Does little Dorkie love me?' said Lake, in a sweet undertone.

There was reproach, but love too, in the deep soft glance she threw upon him.

'You must promise me not to be frightened at what I am going to tell you,' said Lake.

She heard him with sudden panic, and a sense of cold stole over her. He looked like a ghost — quite white — smiling. She knew something was coming — the secret she had invoked so long — and she was appalled.

'Don't be frightened, darling. It is necessary to tell you; but it is really not much when you hear me out. You'll say so when you have quite heard me. So you won't be frightened?'

She was gazing straight into his wild yellow eyes, fascinated, with a look of expecting terror.

'You are nervous, darling,' he continued, laying his hand on hers. 'Shall we put it off for a little? You are frightened.'

'Not much frightened, Stanley,' she whispered.

'Well, we had better wait. I see, Dorcas, you *are* frightened and nervous. Don't keep looking at me; look at something else, can't you? You make yourself nervous that way. I promise, upon my honour, I'll not say a word about it till you bid me.'

'I know, Stanley — I know.'

'Then, why won't you look down, or look up, or look any way you please, only don't stare at me so.'

'Yes — oh, yes,' and she shut her eyes.

'I'm sorry I began,' he said, pettishly. 'You'll make a fuss. You've made yourself quite nervous; and I'll wait a little.'

'Oh! no, Stanley, *now* — for Heaven's sake, *now*. I was only a little startled; but I am quite well again. Is it anything about marriage? Oh, Stanley, in mercy, tell me was there any other engagement?'

'Nothing, darling — nothing on earth of the sort;' and he spoke with an icy little laugh. 'Your poor soldier is altogether yours, Dorkie,' and he kissed her cheek.

'Thank God for that!' said Dorcas, hardly above her breath.

'What I have to say is quite different, and really nothing that need affect you; but Rachel has made such a row about it. Fifty fellows, I know, are in much worse fixes; and though it is not of so much consequence, still I think I should not have told you; only, without knowing it, you were thwarting me, and helping to get me into a serious difficulty by your obstinacy — or what you will — about Five Oaks.'

Somehow trifling as the matter was, Stanley seemed to grow more and more unwilling to disclose it, and rather shrank from it now.

'Now, Dorcas, mind, there must be no trifling. You must not treat me as Rachel has. If you can't keep a secret — for it *is* a secret — say so.
Shall I tell you?'

'Yes, Stanley — yes. I'm your wife.'

'Well, Dorcas, I told you something of it; but only a part, and some circumstances I *did* intentionally colour a little; but I could not help it, unless I had told everything; and no matter what you or Rachel may say, it was kinder to withhold it as long as I could.'

He glanced at the door, and spoke in a lower tone.

And so, with his eyes lowered to the table at which he sat, glancing ever and anon sideways at the door, and tracing little figures with the tip of his finger upon the shining rosewood, he went on murmuring his strange and hateful story in the ear of his wife.

It was not until he had spoken some three or four minutes that Dorcas suddenly uttered a wild scream, and started to her feet. And Stanley also rose precipitately, and caught her in his arms, for she was falling.

As he supported her in her chair, the library door opened, and the sinister face of Uncle Lorne looked in, and returned the captain's stare with one just as fixed and horrified.

'Hush!' whispered Uncle Lorne, and he limped softly into the room, and stopped about three yards away, 'she is not dead, but sleepeth.'

'Hallo! Larcom,' shouted Lake.

'I tell you she's dreaming the same dream that I dreamt in the middle of the night.'

‘Hallo! Larcom.’

‘Mark’s on leave tonight, in uniform; his face is flattened against the window. This is his lady, you know.’

‘Hallo! D — you — are you there?’ shouted the captain, very angry.

‘I saw Mark following you like an ape, on all-fours; such nice white teeth! grinning at your heels. But he can’t bite yet — ha, ha, ha! Poor Mark!’

‘Will you be so good, Sir, as to touch the bell?’ said Lake, changing his tone.

He was afraid to remove his arm from Dorcas, and he was splashing water from a glass upon her face and forehead.

‘No — no. No bell yet — time enough — ding, dong. You say, dead and gone.’

Captain Lake cursed him and his absent keeper between his teeth; still in a rather flurried way, prosecuting his conjugal attentions.

‘There was no bell for poor Mark; and he’s always listening, and stares so. A cat may look, you know.’

‘Can’t you touch the bell, Sir? What are you standing there for?’ snarled Lake, with a glare at the old man. He looked as if he could have murdered him.

‘Standing between the living and the dead!’

‘Here, Reuben, here; where the devil have you been — take him away. He has terrified her. By —— he ought to be shot.’

The keeper silently slid his arm into Uncle Lorne’s, and, unresisting, the old man talking to himself the while, drew him from the room.

Larcom, about to announce Miss Lake, and closely followed by that young lady, passed the grim old phantom on the lobby.

‘Be quick, you are wanted there,’ said the attendant as he passed.

Dorcas, pale as marble, sighing deeply again and again, her rich black hair drenched in water, which trickled over her cheeks, like the tears and moisture of agony, was recovering. There was water spilt on the table, and the fragments of a broken glass upon the floor.

The moment Rachel saw her, she divined what had happened, and, gliding over, she placed her arm round her.

‘You’re better, darling. Open the window, Stanley. Send her maid.’

‘Aye, send her maid,’ cried Captain Lake to Larcom. ‘This is your d — d work. A nice mess you have made of it among you.’

‘Are you better, Dorcas?’ said Rachel.

‘Yes — much better. I’m glad, darling, I understand you now. Radie, kiss me.’

Next morning, before early family prayers, while Mr. Jos. Larkin was locking the despatch box which was to accompany him to London Mr. Larcom arrived at the Lodge.

He had a note for Mr. Larkin’s hand, which he must himself deliver; and so he was shown into that gentleman’s official cabinet, and received with the usual lofty kindness.

‘Well, Mr. Larcom, pray sit down. And can I do anything for you, Mr. Larcom?’ said the good attorney, waving his long hand toward a vacant chair.

‘A note, Sir.’

‘Oh, yes; very well.’ And the tall attorney rose, and, facing the rural prospect at his window, with his back to Mr. Larcom, he read, with a faint smile, the few lines, in a delicate hand, consenting to the sale of Five Oaks.

He had to look for a time at the distant prospect to allow his smile to subside, and to permit the conscious triumph which he knew beamed through his features to discharge itself and evaporate in the light and air before turning to Mr. Larcom, which he did with an air of sudden recollection.

‘Ah — all right, I was forgetting; I must give you a line.’

So he did, and hid away the note in his despatch-box, and said —

‘The family all quite well, I hope?’ whereat Larcom shook his head.

‘My mistress’ — he always called her so, and Lake the capting— ‘has been takin’ on hoffle, last night, whatever come betwixt ‘em. She was fainted outright in her chair in the Dutch room; and he said it was the old gentleman — Old Flannels, we calls him, for shortness — but lor’ bless you, she’s too used to him to be frightened, and that’s only a make-belief; and Miss Dipples, her maid, she says as how she was worse up stairs, and she’s made up again with Miss Lake, which *she* was very glad, no doubt, of the making friends, I do suppose; but it’s a bin a bad row, and I suspeck amost he’s used vilins.’

‘Compulsion, I suppose; you mean constraint?’ suggested Larkin, very curious.

‘Well, that may be, Sir, but I amost suspeck she’s been hurted somehow. She got them crying fits up stairs, you know; and the capting, he’s hoffle bad-tempered this morning, and he never looked near her once, after his sister came; and he left them together, talking and crying, and he locked hisself into the library, like one as knowed he’d done something to be ashamed on, half the night.’

‘It’s not happy, Larcom, I’m much afraid; it’s *not* happy,’ and the attorney rose, shaking his tall bald head, and his hands in his pockets, and looked down in meditation.

‘In the Dutch room, after tea, I suppose?’ said the attorney.

‘Before tea, Sir, just as Miss Lake harrived in the brougham.’

And so on. But there was no more to be learned, and Mr. Larcom returned and attended the captain very reverentially at his solitary breakfast.

Mr. Jos. Larkin was away for London. And a very serene companion he was, if not very brilliant. Everything was going perfectly smoothly with him. A celestial gratitude glowed and expanded within his breast. His angling had been prosperous hitherto, but just now he had made a miraculous draught, and his nets and his heart were bursting. Delightful sentiment, the gratitude of a righteous man; a man who knows that his heart is not set upon the things of the world; who has, like King Solomon, made wisdom his first object, and who finds riches added thereto!

There was no shadow of self-reproach to slur the sunny landscape. He had made a splendid purchase from Captain Lake it was true. He drew his despatch-box nearer to him affectionately, as he thought on the precious records it contained. But who in this wideawake world was better able to take care of himself than the gallant captain? If it were not the best thing for the captain, surely it would not have been done. Whom have I defrauded? My hands are clean! He had made a still better purchase from the vicar; but what would have become of the vicar if he had not been raised up to purchase? And was it not speculative, and was it not possible that he should lose all that money, and was it not, on the whole, the wisest thing that the vicar, under his difficulties, could have been advised to do?

So reasoned the good attorney, as with a languid smile and a sigh of content, his long hand laid across the cover of the despatch-box by his side, he looked forth through the plate-glass window upon the sunny fields and hedgerows that glided by him, and felt the blessed assurance, ‘look, whatsoever he doeth it shall prosper,’ mingling in the hum of surrounding nature. And as his eyes rested on the flying diorama of trees, and farmsteads, and standing crops, and he felt already the pride of a great landed proprietor, his long fingers fiddled pleasantly with the rough tooling of his morocco leather box; and thinking of the signed articles within, it seemed as though an angelic hand had placed them there while he slept, so wondrous was it all; and he fancied under the red tape a label traced in the neatest scrivenery, with a pencil of light, containing such gratifying testimonials to his deserts, ‘as well done good and faithful servant,’ ‘the saints shall inherit the earth,’ and so following; and he sighed again in the delicious luxury of having secured both heaven and mammon. And in this happy state, and volunteering all manner of courtesies, opening and shutting windows, lending his railway guide and his newspapers whenever he had an opportunity, he at length reached the great London terminus, and was rattling over the metropolitan pavement, with his hand on his despatch-box, to his cheap hotel near the Strand.

CHAPTER LXV.

I REVISIT BRANDON HALL.

Rachel Lake was courageous and energetic; and, when once she had taken a clear view of her duty, wonderfully persistent and impracticable. Her dreadful interview with Jos. Larkin was always in her mind. The bleached face, so meek, so cruel, of that shabby spectre, in the small, low parlour of Redman's Farm, was always before her. There he had spoken the sentences which made the earth tremble, and showed her distinctly the cracking line beneath her feet, which would gape at his word into the fathomless chasm that was to swallow her. But, come what might, she would not abandon the vicar and his little boy, and good Dolly, to the arts of that abominable magician.

The more she thought, the clearer her conviction. She had no one to consult with; she knew the risk of exasperating that tall man of God, who lived at the Lodge. But, determined to brave all, she went down to see Dolly and the vicar at home.

Poor Dolly was tired; she had been sitting up all night with sick little Fairy. He was better to-day; but last night he had frightened them so, poor little man! he began to rave about eleven o'clock; and more or less his little mind continued wandering until near six, when he fell into a sound sleep, and seemed better for it; and it was such a blessing there certainly was neither scarlatina nor smallpox, both which enemies had appeared on the northern frontier of Gylingden, and were picking down their two or three cases each in that quarter.

So Rachel first made her visit to little man, sitting up in his bed, very pale and thin, and looking at her, not with his pretty smile, but a languid, earnest wonder, and not speaking. How quickly and strikingly sickness tells upon children. Little man's frugal store of toys, chiefly the gifts of pleasant Rachel, wild beasts, Noah and his sons, and part of a regiment of foot soldiers, with the usual return of broken legs and missing arms, stood peacefully mingled upon the board across his bed which served as a platform.

But little man was leaning back; his fingers once so busy, lay motionless on the coverlet, and his tired eyes rested on the toys with a joyless, earnest apathy.

'Didn't play with them a minute,' said the maid.

'I'll bring him a new box. I'm going into the town; won't that be pretty?' said Rachel, parting his golden locks over the young forehead, and kissing him; and she took his little hand in hers — it was hot and dry.

'He looks better — a little better, don't you think; just a little better?' whispered his mamma, looking, as all the rest were, on that wan, sad little face.

But he really looked worse.

'Well, he can't look better, you know, dear, till there's a decided change. What does Doctor Buddle say?'

'He saw him yesterday morning. He thinks it's all from his stomach, and he's feverish; no meat. Indeed he won't eat anything, and you see the light hurts his eyes.

There was only a chink of the shutter open.

'But it is always so when he is ever so little ill, my precious little man; and I *know* if he thought it anything the *least* serious, Doctor Buddle would have looked in before now, he's so very kind.'

'I wish my darling could get a little sleep. He's very tired, nurse,' said Rachel.

'Yes'm, very tired'm; would he like his precious head lower a bit? No; very well, darling, we'll leave it so.'

'Dolly, darling, you and nurse must be so tired sitting up. I have a little wine at Redman's Farm. I got it, you remember, more than a year ago, when Stanley said he was coming to pay me a visit. I never take any, and a little would be so good for you and poor nurse. I'll send some to you.'

So coming down stairs Rachel said, 'Is the vicar at home?' Yes, he was in the study, and there they found him brushing his seedy hat, and making ready for his country calls in the neighbourhood of the town. The hour was dull without little Fairy; but he would soon be up and out again, and he would steal up now and see him. He could not go out without his little farewell at the bedside, and he would bring him in some pretty flowers.

'You've seen little Fairy!' asked the good vicar, with a very anxious smile, 'and you think him better, dear Miss Lake, don't you?'

‘Why, I can’t say that, because you know, so soon as he’s better, he’ll be quite well; they make their recoveries all in a moment.’

‘But he does not look worse?’ said the vicar, lifting his eyes eagerly from his boot, which he was buttoning on the chair.

‘Well, he *does* look more *tired*, but that must be till his recovery begins, which will be, please Heaven, immediately.’

‘Oh, yes, my little man has had two or three attacks *much* more serious than this, and always shook them off so easily, I was reminding Dolly, always, and good Doctor Buddle assures us it is none of those horrid complaints.’

And so they talked over the case of the little man, who with Noah and his sons, and the battered soldiers and animals before him, was fighting, though they only dimly knew it, silently in his little bed, the great battle of life or death.

‘Mr. Larkin came to me the evening before last,’ said Rachel, ‘*and told me* that the little sum I mentioned — now don’t say a word till you have heard me — was not sufficient; so I want to tell you what I have quite resolved on. I have been long intending some time or other to change my place of residence, perhaps I shall go to Switzerland, and I have made up my mind to sell my rentcharge on the Dulchester estate. It will produce, Mr. Young says, a very large sum, and I wish to lend it to you, either *all* or as much as will make you *quite* comfortable — you must not refuse. I had intended leaving it to my dear little man up stairs; and you must promise me solemnly that you will not listen to the advice of that bad, cruel man, Mr. Larkin.’

‘My dear Miss Lake, you misunderstood him. But what can I say — how can I thank you?’ said the vicar, clasping her hand.

‘A wicked and merciless man, I say,’ repeated Miss Lake. ‘From my observation of him, I am certain of two things — I am sure that he has some reason for thinking that your brother, Mark Wylder, is dead; and secondly, that he is himself deeply interested in the purchase of your reversion. I feel a little ill; Dolly, open the window.’

There was a silence for a little while, and Rachel resumed: —

‘Now, William Wylder, I am convinced, that you and your wife (and she kissed Dolly), and your dear little boy, are marked out for plunder — the objects of a conspiracy; and I’ll lose my life, but I’ll prevent it.’

‘Now, maybe, Willie, upon my word, perhaps, she’s quite right; for, you know, if poor Mark is dead, then would not *he* have the estate *now*; is not that it, Miss Lake, and — and, you know, that would be dreadful, to sell it all for next to nothing, is not that what you mean, Miss Lake — Rachel dear, I mean.’

‘Yes, Dolly, stripping yourselves of a splendid inheritance, and robbing your poor little boy. I protest, in the name of Heaven, against it, and you have no excuse now, William, with my offer before you; and, Dolly, it will be inexcusable *wickedness* in you, if you allow it.’

‘Now, Willie dear, do you hear that — do you hear what she says?’

‘But, Dolly darling — dear Miss Lake, there is no reason whatever to suppose that poor Mark is dead,’ said the vicar, very pale.

‘I tell you again, I am convinced the attorney *believes* it. He did not say so, indeed; but, cunning as he is, I think I’ve quite seen through his plot; and even in what he said to me, there was something that half betrayed him every moment. And, Dolly, if you allow this sale, you deserve the ruin you are inviting, and the remorse that will follow you to your grave.’

‘Do you hear that, Willie?’ said Dolly, with her hand on his arm.

‘But, dear, it is too late — I *have* signed this — this instrument — and it is too late. I hope — God help me — I have not done wrong. Indeed, whatever happens, dear Miss Lake, may Heaven for ever bless you. But respecting good Mr. Larkin, you are, indeed, in error; I am sure you have quite misunderstood him. You don’t know how kind — how *disinterestedly* good he has been; and *now*, my dear Miss Lake, it is too late — *quite* too late.’

‘No; it is *not* too late. Such wickedness as that cannot be lawful — I won’t believe the law allows it,’ cried Rachel Lake. ‘It is all a fraud — even if you have signed — all a fraud. You must procure able advice at once. Your enemy is that dreadful Mr. Larkin. Write to some good attorney in London. I’ll pay everything.’

‘But, dear Miss Lake, I can’t,’ said the vicar, dejectedly; ‘I am bound in honour and conscience not to disturb it — I have written to Messrs. Burlington and Smith to that effect. I assure you, dear Miss Lake, we have not acted inconsiderately — nothing has been done without careful and deep consideration.’

‘You *must* employ an able attorney immediately. You have been duped. Your little boy must not be ruined.’

‘But — but I do assure you, I have so pledged myself by the letter I have mentioned, that I *could* not — no, it is *quite impossible*,’ he added, as he recollected the strong and pointed terms in which he had pledged his honour and conscience to the London firm, to guarantee them against any such disturbance as Miss Lake was urging him to attempt.

‘I am going into the town, Dolly, and so are you,’ said Rachel, after a little pause. ‘Let us go together.’

And to this Dolly readily assented; and the vicar, evidently much troubled in mind, having run up to the nursery to see his little man, the two ladies set out together. Rachel saw that she had made an impression upon Dolly, and was resolved to carry her point. So, in earnest terms, again she conjured her, at least, to lay the whole matter before some friend on whom she could rely; and Dolly, alarmed and eager, quite agreed with Rachel, that the sale must be stopped, and she would do whatever dear Rachel bid her.

‘But do you think Mr. Larkin really supposes that poor Mark is dead?’

‘I do, dear — I suspect he knows it.’

‘And what makes you think that, Rachel, darling?’

‘I can’t define — I’ve no proofs to give you. One knows things, sometimes. I perceived it — and I think I can’t be mistaken; and now I’ve said all, and pray ask me no more upon that point.’

Rachel spoke with a hurried and fierce impatience, that rather startled her companion.

It is wonderful that she showed her state of mind so little. There was, indeed, something feverish, and at times even fierce, in her looks and words. But few would have guessed her agony, as she pleaded with the vicar and his wife; or the awful sense of impending consequences that closed over her like the shadow of night, the moment the excitement of her pleading was over— ‘Rachel, are you mad? — Fly, fly, fly!’ was always sounding in her ears. The little street of Gylingden, through which they were passing, looked strange and dreamlike. And as she listened to Mrs. Crinkle’s babble over the counter, and chose his toys for poor little ‘Fairy,’ she felt like one trifling on the way to execution.

But her warnings and entreaties, I have said, were not quite thrown away; for, although the vicar was inflexible, she had prevailed with his wife, who, at parting, again promised Rachel, that if she could do it, the sale should be stopped.

When I returned to Brandon, a few mornings later, Captain Lake received me joyfully at his solitary breakfast. He was in an intense electioneering excitement. The evening papers for the day before lay on the breakfast table.

'A move of some sort suspected — the opposition prints all hinting at tricks and ambuscades. They are whipping their men up awfully. Old Wattles, not half-recovered, went by the early train yesterday, Wealdon tells me. It will probably kill him. Stower went up the day before. Lee says he saw him at Charteris. He never speaks — only a vote — and a fellow that never appears till the minute.'

'Brittle, the member for Stoney-Muckford, was in the next carriage to me yesterday; and he's a slow coach, too,' I threw in. 'It does look as if the division was nearer than they pretend.'

'Just so. I heard from Gybes last evening — what a hand that fellow writes — only a dozen words— "Look out for squalls," and "keep your men in hand." I've sent for Wealdon. I wish the morning papers were come. I'm a quarter past eleven — what are you? The post's in at Dollington fifty minutes before we get our letters here. D — d nonsense — it's all that heavy 'bus of Driver's — I'll change that. They leave London at five, and get to Dollington at halfpast ten, and Driver never has them in sooner than twenty minutes past eleven! D — d humbug! I'd undertake to take a dog-cart over the ground in twenty minutes.'

'Is Larkin here?' I asked.

'Oh, no — run up to town. I'm so glad he's away — the clumsiest dog in England — nothing clever — no invention — only a bully — the people hate him. Wealdon's my man. I wish he'd give up that town-clerkship — it can't be worth much, and it's in his way — I'd make it up to him somehow. Will you just look at that — it's the 'Globe' — only six lines, and tell me what *you* make of it?'

'It does look like it, certainly.'

'Wealdon and I have jotted down a few names here,' said Lake, sliding a list of names before me; 'you know some of them, I think — rather a strong committee; don't you think so? Those fellows with the red cross before have promised.'

'Yes; it's very strong — capital!' I said, crunching my toast. 'Is it thought the writs will follow the dissolution unusually quickly?'

'They must, unless they want a very late session. But it is quite possible the government may win — a week ago they reckoned upon eleven.'

And as we were talking the post arrived.

'Here they are!' cried Lake, and grasping the first morning paper he could seize on, he tore it open with a greater display of energy than I had seen that languid gentleman exhibit on any former occasion.

CHAPTER LXVI.

LADY MACBETH.

‘Here it is,’ said the captain. ‘Beaten’ — then came an oath— ‘three votes — how the devil was that? — there it is, by Jove — no mistake — majority against ministers, three! Is that the “Times?” What does *it* say?’

‘A long leader — no resignation — immediate dissolution. That is what I collect from it.’

‘How on earth could they have miscalculated so! Swivell, I see, voted in the majority; that’s very odd; and, by Jove, there’s Surplice, too, and he’s good for seven votes. Why his own paper was backing the ministers! What a fellow that is! That accounts for it all. A difference of fourteen votes.’

And thus we went on, discussing this unexpected turn of luck, and reading to one another snatches of the leading articles in different interests upon the subject.

Then Lake, recollecting his letters, opened a large-sealed envelope, with S.C.G. in the corner.

‘This is from Gybes — let us see. Oh! *before* the division. “It looks a little fishy,” he says — well, so it does— “We may take the division tonight. Should it prove adverse, you are to expect an immediate dissolution; this on *the best authority*. I write to mention this, as I may be too much hurried tomorrow.”’

We were discussing this note when Wealdon arrived.

‘Well, captain; great news, Sir. The best thing, I take it, could have happened ministers, ha, ha, ha! A rotten house — down with it — blow it up — three votes only — but as good as three hundred for the purpose — of the three hundred, grant but three, you know — of course, they don’t think of resigning.’

‘Oh, dear, no — an immediate dissolution. Read that,’ said Lake, tossing Gybes’ note to him.

‘Ho, then, we’ll have the writs down hot and heavy. We must be sharp. The sheriff’s all right; that’s a point. You must not lose an hour in getting your committee together, and printing your address.’

‘Who’s on the other side?’

‘You’ll have Jennings, of course; but they are talking of four different men, already, to take Sir Harry Twisden’s place. *He’ll* resign; that’s past a doubt now. He has his retiring address written; Lord Edward Mordun read it; and he told FitzStephen on Sunday, after church, that he’d never sit again.’

‘Here, by Jove, is a letter from Mowbray,’ said Lake, opening it. ‘All about his brother George. Hears I’m up for the county. Lord George ready to join and go halves. What shall I say?’

‘Could not have a better man. Tell him you desire no better, and will bring it at once before your committee; and let him know, the moment they meet; and tell him *I* say he knows Wealdon pretty well — he may look on it as settled. That will be a spoke in Sir Harry’s wheel.’

‘Sir Harry who?’ said Lake.

‘Bracton. I think it’s only to spoil your game, you see,’ answered Wealdon.

‘Abundance of malice; but I don’t think he’s countenanced?’

‘He’ll try to get the start of you; and if he does, one or other must go to the wall; for Lord George is too strong to be shook out. Do *you* get forward at once; that’s your plan, captain.’

Then the captain recurred to his letters, which were a larger pack than usual this morning, chatting all the time with Wealdon and me on the tremendous topic, and tossing aside every letter that did not bear on the coming struggle.

‘Who can this be?’ said Lake, looking at the address of one of these. ‘Very like my hand,’ and he examined the seal. It was only a large wafer-stamp, so he broke it open, and drew out a shabby, very ill-written scroll. He turned suddenly away, talking the while, but with his eyes upon the note, and then he folded, or rather crumpled it up, and stuffed it into his pocket, and continued his talk; but it was now plain to me there was something more on his mind, and he was thinking of the shabby letter he had just received.

But, no matter; the election was the pressing topic, and Lake was soon engaged in it again.

There was now a grand *coup* under discussion — the forestalling of all the horses and vehicles along the line of railway, and in all the principal posting establishments throughout the county.

‘They’ll want to keep it open for a bid from the other side. It is a heavy item any way; and if you want to engage them now, you’ll have to give double what they got last time.’

But Lake was not to be daunted. He wanted the seat, and would stick at nothing to secure it; and so, Wealdon got instructions, in his own phrase, to go the whole animal.

As I could be of no possible use in local details, I left the council of war sitting, intending a stroll in the grounds.

In the hall, I met the mistress of the house, looking very handsome, but with a certain witchlike beauty, very pale, something a little haggard in her great, dark eyes, and a strange, listening look. Was it watchfulness? was it suspicion? She was dressed gravely but richly, and received me kindly — and, strange to say, with a smile that, yet, was not joyful.

‘I hope she is happy. Lake is such a beast; I hope he does not bully her.’

In truth, there were in her exquisite features the traces of that mysterious misery and fear which seemed to fall wherever Stanley Lake’s ill-omened confidences were given.

I walked down one of the long alleys, with tall, close hedges of beech, as impenetrable as cloister walls to sight, and watched the tench basking and flickering in the clear pond, and the dazzling swans sailing majestically along.

What a strange passion is ambition, I thought. Is it really the passion of great minds, or of little. Here is Lake, with a noble old place, inexhaustible in variety; with a beautiful, and I was by this time satisfied, a very singular and interesting woman for his wife, who must have married him for love, pure and simple; a handsome fortune; the power to bring his friends — those whom he liked, or who amused him — about him, and to indulge luxuriously every reasonable fancy, willing to forsake all, and follow the beck of that phantom. Had he knowledge, public talents, training? Nothing of the sort. Had he patriotism, any one noble motive or fine instinct to prompt him to public life? The mere suggestion was a sneer. It seemed to me, simply, that Stanley Lake was a lively, amusing, and even intelligent man, without any internal resource; vacant, peevish, with an unmeaning passion for corruption and intrigue, and the sort of egotism which craves distinction. So I supposed.

Yet, with all its weakness, there was a dangerous force in the character which, on the whole, inspired an odd mixture of fear and contempt. I was bitten, however, already, by the interest of the coming contest. It is very hard to escape that subtle and intoxicating poison. I wondered what figure Stanley would make as a hustings orator, and what impression in his canvass. The latter, I was pretty confident about. Altogether, curiosity, if no deeper sentiment, was highly piqued; and I was glad I happened to drop in at the moment of action, and wished to see the play out.

At the door of her boudoir, Rachel Lake met Dorcas.

‘I am so glad, Radie, dear, you are come. You must take off your things, and stay. You must not leave me tonight. We’ll send home for whatever you want; and you won’t leave me, Radie, I’m certain.’

‘I’ll stay, dear, as you wish it,’ said Rachel, kissing her.

‘Did you see Stanley? I have not seen him to-day,’ said Dorcas.

‘No, dear; I peeped into the library, but he was not there; and there are two men writing in the Dutch room, very busily,’

‘It must be about the election.’

‘What election, dear?’ asked Rachel.

‘There is going to be an election for the county, and — only think — he intends coming forward. I sometimes think he is mad, Radie.’

‘I could not have supposed such a thing. If I were he, I think I should fly to the antipodes. I should change my name, sear my features with vitriol, and learn another language. I should obliterate my past self altogether; but men are so different, so audacious — some men, at least — and Stanley, ever since his ill-omened arrival at Redman’s Farm, last autumn, has amazed and terrified me.’

‘I think, Radie, we have both courage — *you* have certainly; you have shown it, darling, and you must cease to blame yourself; I think you a *heroine*, Radie; but you know *I* see with the wild eyes of the Brandons.’

‘I am grateful, Dorcas, that you don’t hate me. Most women I am sure would abhor me — yes, Dorcas — *abhor* me.’

‘You and I against the world, Radie!’ said Dorcas, with a wild smile and a dark admiration in her look, and kissing Rachel again. ‘I used to think myself brave; it belongs to women of our blood; but this is no common strain upon courage, Radie. I’ve grown to fear Stanley somehow like a ghost; I fear it is even worse than he says,’ and she looked with a horrible enquiry into Rachel’s eyes.

‘So do *I*, Dorcas,’ said Rachel, in a firm low whisper, returning her look as darkly.

‘What’s done cannot be undone,’ said Rachel, sadly, after a little pause, unconsciously quoting from a terrible soliloquy of Shakespeare.

‘I know what you mean, Radie; and you warned me, with a strange second-sight, before the evil was known to either of us. It was an irrevocable step, and I took it, not seeing all that has happened, it is true; but forewarned. And this I will say, Radie, if I *had* known the worst, I think even that would not have deterred me. It was madness — it *is* madness, for I love him still. Rachel, though I know him and his wickedness, and am filled with horror — I love him desperately.’

‘I am very glad,’ said Rachel, ‘that you do know everything. It is so great a relief to have companionship. I often thought I must go mad in my solitude.’

‘Poor Rachel! I think you wonderful — I think you a heroine — I do, Radie; you and I are made for one another — the same blood — something of the same wild nature; I can admire you, and understand you, and will always love you.’

‘I’ve been with William Wylder and Dolly. That wicked attorney, Mr. Larkin, is resolved on robbing them. I wish they had anyone able to advise them. Stanley I am sure could save them; but he does not choose to do it. He was always so angry when I urged him to help them, that I knew it would be useless asking him; I don’t think he knows what Mr. Larkin has been doing; but, Dorcas, I am afraid the very same thought has been in his mind.’

‘I hope not, Radie,’ and Dorcas sighed deeply. ‘Everything is so wonderful and awful in the light that has come.’

That morning, poor William Wylder had received a letter from Jos. Larkin, Esq., mentioning that he had found Messrs. Burlington and Smith anything but satisfied with him — the vicar. What exactly he had done to disoblige them he could not bring to mind. But Jos. Larkin told him that he had done all in his power 'to satisfy them of the *bonâ fide* character' of his reverend client's dealings from the first. But 'they still express themselves dissatisfied upon the point, and appear to suspect a disposition to shilly-shally.' I have said 'all I could to disabuse them of the unpleasant prejudice; but I think I should hardly be doing my duty if I were not to warn you that you will do wisely to exhibit no hesitation in the arrangements by which your agreement is to be carried out, and that in the event of your showing the slightest disposition to qualify the spirit of your strong note to them, or in anywise disappointing their client, you must be prepared, from what I know of the firm, for very sharp practice indeed.'

What could they do to him, or why should they hurt him, or what had he done to excite either the suspicion or the temper of the firm? They expected their client, the purchaser, in a day or two. He was already grumbling at the price, and certainly would stand no trifling. Neither would Messrs. Burlington and Smith, who, he must admit, had gone to very great expense in investigating title, preparing deeds, &c., and who were noted as a very expensive house. He was aware that they were in a position to issue an execution on the guarantee for the entire amount of their costs; but he thought so extreme a measure would hardly be contemplated, notwithstanding their threats, unless the purchaser were to withdraw or the vendor to exhibit symptoms of — he would not repeat their phrase — irresolution in his dealing. He had, however, placed the vicar's letter in their hands, and had accompanied it with his own testimony to the honour and character of the Rev. William Wylder, which he was happy to say seemed to have considerable weight with Messrs. Burlington and Smith. There was also this passage, 'Feeling acutely the anxiety into which the withdrawal of the purchaser must throw you — though I trust nothing of that sort may occur — I told them that rather than have you thrown upon your beam-ends by such an occurrence, I would myself step in and purchase on the terms agreed on. This will, I trust, quiet them on the subject of their costs, and also prevent any low *dodging* on the part of the purchaser.'

This letter would almost seem to have been written with a supernatural knowledge of what was passing in Gylingden, and was certainly well contrived to prevent the vicar from wavering.

But all this time the ladies are conversing in Dorcas's boudoir.

'This election frightens me, Radie — everything frightens me now — but this is *so* audacious. If there be powers either in heaven or hell, it seems like a defiance and an invocation. I am glad you are here, Radie — I have grown so nervous — so superstitious, I believe; watching always for signs and omens. Oh, darling, the world's ghastly for me now.'

'I wish, Dorcas, we were away — as you used to say — in some wild and solitary retreat, living together — two recluses — but all that is visionary — quite visionary now.'

Dorcas sighed.

'You know, Rachel, the world must not see this — we will carry our heads high. Wicked men, and brave and suffering women — that is the history of our family — and men and women always quite unlike the rest of the world — unlike the human race; and somehow they interest me unspeakably. I wish I knew more about those proud, forlorn beauties, whose portraits are fading on the walls. Their spirit, I am sure, is in us, Rachel; and their pictures and traditions have always supported me. When I was a little thing, I used to look at them with a feeling of melancholy and mystery. They were in my eyes, reserved prophetesses, who could speak, if they would, of my own future.'

'A poor support, Dorcas — a broken reed. I wish we could find another — the true one, in the present, and in the coming time.'

Dorcas smiled faintly, and I think there was a little gleam of a ghastly satire in it. I am afraid that part of her education which deals with futurity had been neglected.

'I am more likely to turn into a Lady Macbeth than a *dévote*,' said she, coldly, with the same painful smile. 'I found myself last night sitting up in my bed, talking in the dark about it.'

There was a silence for a time, and Rachel said, —

'It is growing late, Dorcas.'

'But you must not go, Rachel — you *must* stay and keep me company — you must, *indeed*, Radie,' said Dorcas.

‘So I will,’ she answered; ‘but I must send a line to old Tamar; and I promised Dolly to go down to her tonight, if that darling little boy should be worse — I am very unhappy about him.’

‘And is he in danger, the handsome little fellow?’ said Dorcas.

‘Very great danger, I fear,’ said Rachel. ‘Doctor Buddle has been very kind — but he is, I am afraid, more desponding than poor William or Dolly imagines — Heaven help them!’

‘But children recover wonderfully. What is his ailment?’

‘Gastric fever, the doctor says. I had a foreboding of evil the moment I saw him — before the poor little man was put to his bed.’

Dorcas rang the bell.

‘Now, Radie, if you wish to write, sit down here — or if you prefer a message, Thomas can take one very accurately; and he shall call at the vicar’s, and see Dolly, and bring us word how the dear little boy is. And don’t fancy, darling, I have forgotten what you said to me about duty — though I would call it differently — only I feel so wild, I can think of nothing clearly yet. But I am making up my mind to a great and bold step, and when I am better able, I will talk it over with you — my only friend, Rachel.’

And she kissed her.

CHAPTER LXVII.

MR. LARKIN IS VIS-A-VIS WITH A CONCEALED COMPANION.

The time had now arrived when our friend Jos. Larkin was to refresh the village of Gylingden with his presence. He had pushed matters forward with wonderful despatch. The deeds, with their blue and silver stamps, were handsomely engrossed — having been approved in draft by Crompton S. Kewes, the eminent Queen's Counsel, on a case furnished by Jos. Larkin, Esq., The Lodge, Brandon Manor, Gylingden, on behalf of his client, the Reverend William Wylder; and in like manner on behalf of Stanley Williams Brandon Lake, of Brandon Hall, in the county of —— , Esq.

In neither draft did Jos. Larkin figure as the purchaser by name. He did not care for advice on any difficulty depending on his special relations to the vendors in both these cases. He wished, as was his custom, everything above-board, and such 'an opinion' as might be published by either client in the 'Times' next day if he pleased it. Besides these matters of Wylder and of Lake, he had also a clause to insert in a private Act, on behalf of the trustees of the Baptist Chapel, at Naunton Friars; a short deed to be consulted upon on behalf of his client, Pudder Swynfen, Esq., of Swynfen Grange, in the same county; and a deed to be executed at Shillingsworth, which he would take *en route* for Gylingden, stopping there for that night, and going on by next morning's train.

Those little trips to town paid very fairly.

In this particular case his entire expenses reached exactly £5 3s., and what do you suppose was the good man's profit upon that small item? Precisely £62 7s.! The process is simple, Jos. Larkin made his own handsome estimate of his expenses, and the value of his time to and from London, and then he charged this in its entirety — shall we say integrity — to each client separately. In this little excursion he was concerned for no less than *five*.

His expenses, I say, reached exactly £5 3*s*. But he had a right to go to Dondale's if he pleased, instead of that cheap hostelry near Covent Garden. He had a right to a handsome lunch and a handsome dinner, instead of that economical fusion of both meals into one, at a cheap eating-house, in an out-of-the-way quarter. He had a right to his pint of high-priced wine, and to accomplish his wanderings in a cab, instead of, as the Italians say, 'partly on foot, and partly walking.' Therefore, and on this principle, Mr. Jos. Larkin had 'no difficulty' in acting. His savings, if the good man chose to practise self-denial, were his own — and it was a sort of problem while he stayed, and interested him curiously — keeping down his bill in matters which he would not have dreamed of denying himself at home.

The only client among his wealthy supporters, who ever went in a grudging spirit into one of these little bills of Jos. Larkin's, was old Sir Mulgrave Bracton — the defunct parent of the Sir Harry, with whom we are acquainted.

'Don't you think, Mr. Larkin, you could perhaps reduce *this*, just a little?'

'Ah, the expenses?'

'Well, yes.'

Mr. Jos. Larkin smiled — the smile said plainly, 'what would he have me live upon, and where?' We do meet persons of this sort, who would fain 'fill our bellies with the husks' that swine digest; what of that — we must remember who we are — *gentlemen* — and answer this sort of shabbiness, and every other endurable annoyance, as Lord Chesterfield did — with a bow and a smile.

'I think so,' said the baronet, in a bluff, firm way.

'Well, the fact is, when I represent a client, Sir Mulgrave Bracton, of a certain rank and position, I make it a principle — and, as a man of business, I find it tells — to present myself in a style that is suitably handsome.'

'Oh! an expensive house — *where* was this, now?'

'Oh, Sir Mulgrave, pray don't think of it — I'm only too happy — pray, draw your pen across the entire thing.'

'I think so,' said the baronet unexpectedly. 'Don't you think if we said a pound a-day, and your travelling expenses?'

'Certainly — *any*thing — what*ever* you please, Sir.'

And the attorney waved his long hand a little, and smiled almost compassionately; and the little alteration was made, and henceforward he spoke of Sir Mulgrave as not quite a pleasant man to deal with in money matters; and his confidential friends knew that in a transaction in which he had paid money out of his own pocket for Sir Mulgrave he had never got back more than seven and sixpence in the pound; and, what made it worse, it was a matter connected with the death of poor Lady Bracton! And he never lost an opportunity of conveying his opinion of Sir Mulgrave, sometimes in distinct and confidential sentences, and sometimes only by a sad shake of his head, or by awfully declining to speak upon the subject.

In the present instance Jos. Larkin was returning in a heavenly frame of mind to the Lodge, Brandon Manor, Gylingden. Whenever he was away he interpolated ‘Brandon Manor,’ and stuck it on his valise and hat-case; and liked to call aloud to the porters tumbling among the luggage— ‘Jos. Larkin, Esquire, *Brandon Manor, if* you please;’ and to see the people read the inscription in the hall of his dingy hostelry. Well might the good man glow with a happy consciousness of a blessing. In small things as in great he was prosperous.

This little excursion to London would cost him, as I said, exactly £5 3s. It might have cost him £13 10s. and at that sum his expenses figured in his ledger; and as he had five clients on this occasion, the total reached £67 10s., leaving a clear profit, as I have mentioned, of £62 7s. on this item.

But what was this little tip from fortune, compared with the splendid pieces of scrivenery in his despatch box. The white parchment — the blue and silver stamps in the corner — the German text and flourishes at the top, and those broad, horizontal lines of recital, `habendum,’ and so forth — marshalled like an army in procession behind his march of triumph into Five Oaks, to take the place of its deposed prince? From the captain’s deed to the vicar’s his mind glanced fondly.

He would yet stand the highest man in his county. He had found time for a visit to the King-at-Arms and the Heralds’ Office. He would have his pictures and his pedigree. His grandmother had been a Howard. Her branch, indeed, was a little under a cloud, keeping a small provision-shop in the town of Dwiddleston. But this circumstance need not be in prominence. She was a Howard — *that* was the fact he relied on — no mortal could gainsay it; and he would be, first, J. Howard Larkin, then Howard Larkin, simply; then Howard Larkin Howard, and the Five Gaks’ Howards would come to be very great people indeed. And the Brandons had intermarried with other Howards, and Five Oaks would naturally, therefore, go to Howards; and so he and his, with clever management, would be anything but *novi homines* in the county.

‘He shall be like a tree planted by the water-side, that will bring forth his fruit in due season. His leaf also shall not wither. So thought this good man complacently. He liked these fine consolations of the Jewish dispensation — actual milk and honey, and a land of promise on which he could set his foot. Jos. Larkin, Esq., was as punctual as the clock at the terminus. He did not come a minute too soon or too late, but precisely at the moment which enabled him, without fuss, and without a tiresome wait, to proceed to the details of ticket, luggage, selection of place, and ultimate ascension thereto.

So now having taken all measures, gliding among the portmanteaus, hand-barrows, and porters, and the clangorous bell ringing, he mounted, lithe and lank, into his place.

There was a pleasant evening light still, and the gas-lamps made a purplish glow against it. The little butter-cooler of a glass lamp glimmered from the roof. Mr. Larkin established himself, and adjusted his rug and mufflers about him, for, notwithstanding the season, there had been some cold, rainy weather, and the evening was sharp; and he set his two newspapers, his shilling book, and other triumphs of cheap literature in sundry shapes, in the vacant seat at his left hand, and made everything handsome about him. He glanced to the other end of the carriage, where sat his solitary fellow-passenger. This gentleman was simply a mass of cloaks and capes, culminating in a queer battered felt hat; his shoulders were nestled into the corner, and his face buried among his loose mufflers. They sat at corners diagonally opposed, and were, therefore, as far apart as was practicable — an arrangement, not sociable, to be sure, but on the whole, very comfortable, and which neither seemed disposed to disturb.

Mr. Larkin had a word to say to the porter from the window, and bought one more newspaper; and then looked out on the lamplit platform, and saw the officials loitering off to the clang of the carriage doors; then came the whistle, and then the clank and jerk of the start. And so the brick walls and lamps began to glide backward, and the train was off.

Jos. Larkin tried his newspaper, and read for ten minutes, or so, pretty diligently; and then looked for a while from the window, upon receding hedgerows and farmsteads, and the level and spacious landscape; and then he leaned back luxuriously, his newspaper listlessly on his knees, and began to read, instead, at his ease, the shapeless, wrapt-up figure diagonally opposite.

The quietude of the gentleman in the far corner was quite singular. He produced neither tract, nor newspaper, nor volume — not even a pocketbook or a letter. He brought forth no cigar-case, with the stereotyped, ‘Have you any objection to my smoking a cigar?’ He did not even change his attitude ever so little. A burly roll of cloaks, rugs, capes, and loose wrappers, placed in the corner, and *tanquam cadaver*, passive and motionless.

I have sometimes in my travels lighted on a strangely shaped mountain, whose huge curves, and sombre colouring have interested me indefinably. In the rude mass at the far angle, Mr. Jos. Larkin, I fancy, found some such subject of contemplation. And the more he looked, the more he felt disposed to look.

As they got on there was more night fog, and the little lamp at top shone through a halo. The fellow-passenger at the opposite angle lay back, all cloaks and mufflers, with nothing distinct emerging but the felt hat at top, and the tip — it was only the tip now — of the shining shoe on the floor.

The gentleman was absolutely motionless and silent. And Mr. Larkin, though his mind was pretty universally of the inquisitive order, began in this particular case to feel a special curiosity. It was partly the monotony and their occupying the carriage all to themselves — as the two uncommunicative seamen did the Eddystone Lighthouse — but there was, beside, an indistinct feeling, that, in spite of all these wrappers and swathings, he knew the outlines of that figure; and yet the likeness must have been of the rudest possible sort.

He could not say that he recognised anything distinctly — only he fancied that some one he knew was sitting there, unrevealed, inside that mass of clothing. And he felt, moreover, as if he ought to be able to guess who he was.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE COMPANION DISCLOSES HIMSELF.

But this sort of musing and wonderment leads to nothing; and Mr. Jos. Larkin being an active-minded man, and practical withal, in a little while shook it off, and from his breastpocket took a tiny treasure of a pocketbook, in which were some banknotes, precious memoranda in pencil, and half-a-dozen notes and letters, bearing upon cases and negotiations on which, at this juncture, he was working.

Into these he got, and now and then brought out a letter bearing on some point of speculation, and read it through, and then closed his eyes for three minutes at a time, and thought. But he had not his tin boxes there; and, with a man of his stamp, speculation, which goes upon guess as to dates and quantities, which are all ascertainable by reference to black and white, soon loses its interest. And the evidence in his pocket being pretty soon exhausted, he glanced again at his companion over the way.

He had not moved all this while. He had a high stand-up collar to the cape he wore, which covered his cheeks and nose and outside was loosely swathed a large, cream-coloured, cashmere handkerchief. The battered felt hat covered his forehead and eyebrows, and left, in fact, but a narrow streak of separation between.

Through this, however, for the first time, Jos. Larkin now saw the glitter of a pair of eyes gazing at him, he fancied. At all events there was the glitter, and the gentleman was awake.

Jos. returned the gentleman’s gaze. It was his lofty aristocratic stare; and he expected to see the glittering lights that peeped through the dark chink between brim and collar shut up under its rebuke. But nothing of the kind took place, and the ocular exercises of the attorney were totally ineffectual.

If the fellow knew that his fixed stare was observed through his narrow embrasure — and Larkin thought he could hardly be insensible to the reproof of his return fire — he must be a particularly impertinent person. It would be ridiculous, however, to continue a contest of this kind; so the attorney lowered the window and looked out. Then he pulled it up, and took to his newspaper again, and read the police cases, and a very curious letter from a poorhouse doctor, describing a boy who was quite blind in daylight, but could see very fairly by gas or candle light, and then he lighted upon a very odd story, and said to be undergoing special sifting at the hands of Sir Samuel Squailes, of a policeman on a certain beat, in Fleet Street, not far from Temple Bar, who every night saw, at or about the same hour, a certain suspicious-looking figure walk along the flagway and enter a passage. Night after night he pursued this figure, but always lost it in the same passage. On the last occasion, however, he succeeded in keeping him in view, and came up with him in a court, when he was rewarded with a sight of such a face as caused him to fall to the ground in a fit. This was the Clampcourt ghost, and I believe he was left in that debatable state, and never after either exploded or confirmed.

So having ended all these studies, the attorney lifted up his eyes again, as he lowered his newspaper, and beheld the same glittering gaze fixed upon him through the same horizontal cranny.

He fancied the eyes were laughing. He could not be sure, of course, but at all events the persistent stare was extremely, and perhaps determinedly, impertinent. Forgetting the constitutional canon through which breathes the genuine spirit of British liberty, he felt for a moment that he was such a king as that cat had no business to look at; and he might, perhaps, have politely intimated something of the kind, had not the enveloped offender made a slight and lazy turn which, burying his chin still deeper in his breast, altogether concealed his eyes, and so closed the offensive scrutiny.

In making this change in his position, slight as it was, the gentleman in the superfluous clothing reminded Mr. Jos. Larkin very sharply for an instant of — *some*body. There was the rub; who could it be?

The figure was once more a mere mountain of rug. What was the peculiarity in that slight movement — something in the knee? something in the elbow? something in the general character?

Why had he not spoken to him? The opportunity, for the present, was past. But he was now sure that his fellow-traveller was an acquaintance, who had probably recognised him. Larkin — except when making a mysterious trip at election times, or in an emergency, in a critical case — was a frank, and as he believed could be a fascinating *compagnon de voyage*, such and so great was his urbanity on a journey. He rather liked talking with people; he sometimes heard things not wholly valueless, and once or twice had gathered hints in this way, which saved him trouble, or money, which is much the same thing. Therefore upon principle he was not averse from that direst of bores, railway conversation.

And now they slackened speed, with a long, piercing whistle, and came to a standstill at ‘East Had*don*’ (with a jerk upon the last syllable), ‘East Had*don*, East Had*don*,’ as the herald of the station declared, and Lawyer Larkin sat straight up, very alert, with a budding smile, ready to blow out into a charming radiance the moment his fellow-traveller rose perpendicular, as was to be expected, and peeped from his window.

But he seemed to know intuitively that Larkin intended telling him, *apropos* of the station, that story of the Haddon property, and Sir James Wotton’s will, which as told by the good attorney and jumbled by the clatter, was perhaps a little dreary. At all events he did not stir, and carefully abstained from wakening, and in a few seconds more they were again in motion.

They were now approaching Shillingsworth, where the attorney was to get out, and put up for the night, having a deed with him to be executed in that town, and so sweetening his journey with this small incident of profit.

Now, therefore, looking at his watch, and consulting his time table, he got his slim valise from under on top of the seat before him, together with his hat-case, despatch-box, stick, and umbrella, and brushed off with his handkerchief some of the gritty railway dust that lay drifted in exterior folds and hollows of his coat, rebuttoned that garment with precision, arranged his shirt-collar, stuffed his muffler into his coatpocket, and made generally that rude sacrifice to the graces with which natty men precede their exit from the dust and ashes of this sort of sepulture.

At this moment he had just eight minutes more to go, and the glitter of the pair of eyes, staring between the muffler and the rim of the hat, met his view once more.

Mr. Larkin’s cigar-case was open in his hand in a moment, and with such a smile as a genteel perfumer offers his wares with, he presented it toward the gentleman who was built up in the stack of garments.

He merely shook his head with the slightest imaginable nod and a wave of a pudgy hand in a soiled dogskin glove, which emerged for a second from under a cape, in token that he gratefully declined the favour.

Mr. Larkin smiled and shrugged regretfully, and replaced the case in his coat pocket. Hardly five minutes remained now. Larkin glanced round for a topic.

‘My journey is over for the present, Sir, and perhaps you would find these little things entertaining.’

And he tendered with the same smile ‘Punch,’ the ‘Penny Gleaner,’ and ‘Gray’s Magazine,’ a religious serial. They were, however, similarly declined in pantomime.

‘He’s not particularly polite, whoever he is,’ thought Mr. Larkin, with a sniff. However, he tried the effect of a direct observation. So getting one seat nearer, he said: —

‘Wonderful place Shillingsworth, Sir; one does not really, until one has visited it two or three times over, at all comprehend its wealth and importance; and how justly high it deserves to hold its head amongst the provincial emporia of our productive industry.’

The shapeless traveller in the corner touched his ear with his pudgy dogskin fingers, and shook his hand and head a little, in token either that he was deaf, or the noise such as to prevent his hearing, and in the next moment the glittering eyes closed, and the pantomimist appeared to be asleep.

And now, again, the train subsided to a standstill, and Shillingsworth resounded through the night air, and Larkin scrambled forward to the window, by which sat the enveloped gentleman, and called the porter, and, with many unheeded apologies, pulled out his various properties, close by the knees of the tranquil traveller. So, Mr. Larkin was on the platform, and his belongings stowed away against the wall of the station-house.

He made an enquiry of the guard, with whom he was acquainted, about his companion; but the guard knew nothing of the ‘party,’ neither did the porter, to whom the guard put a similar question.

So, as Larkin walked down the platform, the whistle sounded and the train glided forward, and as it passed him, the gentleman in the cloak and queer hat was looking out. A lamp shone full on him. Mr. Larkin’s heart stood still for a moment, and then bounded up as if it would choke him.

‘It’s him, by —— !’ and Mr. Larkin, forgetting syntax, and propriety, and religion, all together, and making a frantic race to keep up with the train, shouted —

‘Stop it, stop it — hollo! — stop — stop — ho, stop!’

But he pleaded with the winds; and before he had reached the end of the platform, the carriage windows were flying by him with the speed of wheel-spokes, and the end of the coupé, with its red lantern, sailed away through the cutting.

‘Forgot summat, Sir,’ said the porter, touching his hat.

‘Yes — signal — stop him, can you?’

The porter only scratched his head, under his cap, and smiled sheepishly after the train. Jos. Larkin knew, the next moment, he had talked nonsense.

‘I — I — yes — I have — have you an engine here: — express — I’ll pay anything.’

But, no, there was ‘no engine — not nearer than the junction, and she might not be spared.’

‘How far is the junction?’

‘Nineteen and a-half.’

‘Nineteen miles! They’ll never bring me there, by horse, under two hours, they are so cursed tedious. Why have not you a spare engine at a place like this? Shillingsworth! Nice management! Are you certain? Where’s the station-master?’

All this time he kept staring after the faint pulsations on the air that indicated the flight of the engine.

But it would not do. The train — the image upon earth of the irrevocable, the irretrievable — was gone, neither to be overtaken nor recalled. The telegraph was not then, as now, whispering secrets all over England, at the rate of two hundred miles a second, and five shillings per twenty words. Larkin would have given large money for an engine, to get up with the train that was now some five miles on its route, at treble, quadruple, the common cost of such a magical appliance; but all was vain. He could only look and mutter after it wildly. Vain to conjecture for what station that traveller in the battered hat was bound! Idle speculation! Mere distraction!

Only that Mr. Larkin was altogether the man he was, I think he would have cursed freely.

CHAPTER LXIX.

OF A SPECTRE WHOM OLD TAMAR SAW.

Little Fairy, all this while, continued, in our Church language, ‘sick and weak.’ The vicar was very sorry, but not afraid. His little man was so bright and merry, that he seemed to him the very spirit of life. He could not dream of his dying. It was sad, to be sure, the little man so many days in his bed, too languid to care for toy or story, quite silent, except when, in the night time, those weird monologues began which showed that the fever had reached his brain. The tones of his pleasant little voice, in those sad flights of memory and fancy, busy with familiar scenes and occupations, sounded wild and plaintive in his ear. And when ‘Wapsie’ was mentioned, sometimes the vicar’s eyes filled, but he smiled through this with a kind of gladness at the child’s affection. ‘It will soon be over, my darling! You will be walking with Wapsie in a week again.’ The sun could as soon cease from shining as little Fairy from living. The thought he would not allow near him.

Doctor Buddle had been six miles away that evening with a patient, and looked in at the vicar’s long after the candles were lighted.

He was not satisfied with little Fairy — not at all satisfied. He put his hand under the clothes and felt his thin, slender limbs — thinner than ever now. Dry and very hot they were — and little man babbling his nonsense about little boys, and his ‘Wapsie,’ and toys, and birds, and the mill-stream, and the churchyard — of which, with so strange a fatality, children, not in romance only, but reality, so often prattle in their feverish wanderings.

He felt his pulse. He questioned his mamma, and cross-examined the nurse, and looked grave and very much annoyed; and then bethought him of something to be tried; and having given his directions to the maid, he went home in haste, and returned in half an hour with the something in a phial — a few drops in water, and little man sat up, leaning on his Wapsie’s arm, and ‘took it very good,’ his nurse said, approvingly; and he looked at them all wonderingly, for two or three moments, and so tired; and they laid him down again, and then his spoken dreams began once more.

Doctor Buddle was dark and short in his answers to voluble little Mrs. Wylder — though, of course, quite respectful — and the vicar saw him down the narrow stairs, and they turned into the study for a moment, and, said Buddle, in an under tone —

‘He’s very ill — I can say nothing else.’

And there was a pause.

The little colour he had receded from the vicar’s face, for the looks and tones of goodnatured Buddle were not to be mistaken. He was reading little Fairy’s death warrant.

‘I see, doctor — I see; you think he’ll die,’ said the vicar, staring at him. ‘Oh doctor, my little Fairy!’

The doctor knew something of the poor vicar’s troubles — of course in a village most things of the kind *are* known — and often, in his brisk, rough way, he thought as, with a nod and a word, he passed the lank cleric, under the trees or across the common, with his bright, prattling, sunny-haired little boy by the hand — or encountered them telling stories on the stile, near the castle meadow — what a gleam of sunshine was always dancing about his path, in that smiling, wayward, loving little fellow — and now a long Icelandic winter was coming, and his path was to know that light no more.

‘With children, you know, I — I always say there’s a chance — but you are right to look the thing in the face — and I’ll be here the first call in the morning; and you know where to find me, in the meantime;’ and the doctor shook hands very hard with the vicar at the hall-door, and made his way homeward — the vicar’s eyes following him till he was out of sight.

Then William Wylder shut the hall-door, and turned about.

Little Fairy’s drum was hanging from a peg on the hat-stand — the drum that was to sound no more in the garden, or up and down the hall, with the bright-haired little drummer’s song. There would be no more interruption now — the vicar would write his sermons undisturbed; no more consolations claimed — no more broken toys to be mended — some of the innocent little rubbish lay in the study. It should never move from that —

nor his drum — nor that little hat and cape, hanging on their peg, with the tiny boots underneath.

No more prattling at unseasonable times — no more crying — no more singing — no more laughing; all these interruptions were quiet now, and altogether gone— 'Little man! little Fairy! Oh, was it possible!' But memory would call up the vicar from his half-written sermon. He would miss his troublesome little man, when the sun shone out that he used to welcome — when the birds hopped on the window-stone, to find the crumbs that little man used to strew there; and when his own little canary— 'Birdie' he used to call him — would sing and twitter in his cage — and the time came to walk out on his lonely visits.

He must walk alone by the shopdoors — where the little man was so admired — and up the mill-road, and in the castle meadow and over the stile where they used to sit.

Poor Dolly! Her Willie would not tell her yet. He kneeled down in the study— 'Little man's' top, and some cut paper nondescripts, were lying where he had left them, at his elbow — and he tried to pray, and then he remembered that his darling ought to know that he was going into the presence of his Maker.

Yes, he would tell poor Dolly first, and then his little man. He would repeat his hymn with him, and pray — and so he went up the nursery stairs.

Poor Dolly, very tired, had gone to lie down for a little. He would not disturb her — no, let her enjoy for an hour more her happy illusion.

When he went into the nursery little Fairy was sitting up, taking his medicine; the nurse's arm round his thin shoulders. He sat down beside him, weeping gently, his thin face turned a little away, and his hand on the coverlet.

Little man looked wonderingly from his tired eyes on Wapsie, and his thin fingers crept on his hand, and Wapsie turned about, drying his eyes, and said —

'Little man! my darling!'

'He's like himself, Sir, while he's sitting up — his little head quite right again.'

'My head's quite right, Wapsie,' the little man whispered, sadly.

‘Thank God, my darling!’ said the vicar. The tears were running down his cheeks while he parted little Fairy’s golden hair with his fingers.

‘When I am quite well again,’ whispered the little man, ‘won’t you bring me to the castle meadow, where the wee river is, and we’ll float races with daisies and buttercups — the way you did on my birthday.’

‘They say that little mannikin — — ‘ suddenly the vicar stopped. ‘They say that little mannikin won’t get well.’

‘And am I always to be sick, here in my little bed, Wapsie?’ whispered little Fairy, in his dreamy, earnest way, that was new to him.

‘No, darling; not always sick: you’ll be happier than ever — but not here; little man will be taken by his Saviour, that loves him best of all — and he’ll be in heaven — and only have a short time to wait, and maybe his poor Wapsie will come to him, please God, and his darling mamma — and we’ll all be happy together, for ever, and never be sick or sorry any more, my treasure — my little Fairy — my darling.’

And little man looked on him with his tired eyes, not quite understanding what it meant, nor why Wapsie was crying; and the nurse said —

‘He’d like to be dozin’, Sir, he’s so tired, please.’ So down the poor little fellow lay, his ‘Wapsie’ praying by his bedside.

When, in a little time, poor Dolly returned, her Willie took her round the waist, as on the day when she accepted him, and led her tenderly into the other room, and told her all, and they hugged and wept together.

‘Oh, Dolly, Dolly!’

‘Oh, Willie, darling! Oh, Willie, our precious treasure — our only one.’

And so they walked up and down that room, his arm round her waist, and in that sorrowful embrace, murmuring amid their sobs to one another, their thoughts and remembrances of ‘little man.’ How soon the treasure grows a retrospect!

Then Dolly bethought her of her promise to Rachel.

‘She made me promise to send for her if he was worse — she loved him so — everyone loved him — they could not help — oh, Willie! our bright darling.’

‘I think, Dolly, we could not live here. I’d like to go on some mission, and maybe come back in a great many years — maybe, Dolly, when we are old. I’d like to see the place again — and — and the walks — but not, I think, for a long time. He was such a darling.’

Perhaps the vicar was thinking of the churchyard, and how he would like, when his time came, to lie beside the golden-haired little comrade of his walks. So Dolly despatched the messenger with a lantern, and thus it was there came a knocking at the door of Redman's Farm at that unseasonable hour. For some time old Tamar heard the clatter in her sleep; disturbing and mingling with her dreams. But in a while she wakened quite, and heard the double knocks one after another in quick succession; and huddling on her clothes, and muttering to herself all the way, she got into the hall, and standing a couple of yards away from the door, answered in shrill and querulous tones, and questioning the messenger in the same breath.

How could she tell what it might or might not portend? Her alarms quickly subsided, however, for she knew the voice well.

So the story was soon told. Poor little Fairy; it was doubtful if he was to see another morning; and the maid being wanted at home, old Tamar undertook the message to Brandon Hall, where her young mistress was, and sallied forth in her cloak and bonnet, under the haunted trees of Redman's Dell.

Tamar had passed the age of ghostly terrors. There are a certain sober literality and materialism in old age which abate the illusions of the supernatural as effectually as those of love; and Tamar, though not without awe, for darkness and solitude, even were there no associations of a fearful kind in the locality, are suggestive and dismal to the last.

Her route lay, as by this time my reader is well aware, by that narrow defile reached from Redman's Farm by a pathway which scales a flight of rude steps, the same which Stanley Lake and his sister had mounted on the night of Mark Wylder's disappearance.

Tamar knew the path very well. It was on the upper level of it that she had held that conference with Stanley Lake, which obviously referred to that young gentleman's treatment of the vanished Mark. As she came to this platform, round which the trees receded a little so as to admit the moonlight, the old woman was tired.

She would have gladly chosen another spot to rest in, but fatigue was imperious; and she sat down under the gray stone which stood perpendicularly there, on what had once been the step of a stile, leaning against the rude column behind her.

As she sat here she heard the clank of a step approaching measuredly from the Brandon side. It was twelve o'clock now; the chimes from the Gylingden church-tower had proclaimed that in the distance some minutes before. The honest Gylingden folk seldom heard the tower chimes tell eleven, and gentle and simple had, of course, been long in their beds.

The old woman had a secret hatred of this place, and the unexpected sounds made her hold her breath. She peeped round the stone, in whose shadow she was sitting. The steps were not those of a man walking briskly with a purpose: they were the desultory strides of a stroller lounging out an hour's watch. The steps approached. The figure was visible — that of a short broadish man, with a mass of cloaks, rugs, and mufflers across his arm.

Carrying them with a sort of swagger, he came slowly up to the part of the pathway opposite to the pillar, where he dropped those draperies in a heap upon the grass; and availing himself of the clear moonlight, he stopped nearly confronting her.

It was the face of Mark Wylder — she knew it well — but grown fat and broader, and there was — but this she could not see distinctly — a purplish scar across his eyebrow and cheek. She quivered with terror lest he should have seen her, and might be meditating some mischief. But she was seated close to the ground, several yards away, and in the sharp shadow of the old block of stone.

He consulted his watch, and she sat fixed and powerless as a portion of the block on which she leaned, staring up at this, to her, terrific apparition. Mark Wylder's return boded, she believed, something tremendous.

She saw the glimmer of the gold watch, and, distinctly, the great black whiskers, and the face pallid in the moonlight. She was afraid for a minute, during which he loitered there, that he was going to seat himself upon the cloaks which he had just thrown upon the ground, and felt that she could not possibly escape detection for many seconds more. But she was relieved; for, after a short pause, leaving these still upon the ground, he turned, and walked slowly, like a policeman on his beat, toward Brandon.

With a gasp she began to recover herself; but she felt too faint and ill to get up and commence a retreat towards Redman's Farm. Besides, she was sure he would return — she could not tell how soon — and although the clump of alders hid her from view, she could not tell but that the next moment would disclose his figure retracing his leisurely steps, and ready to pursue and overtake, if by a precipitate movement she had betrayed her presence.

In due time the same figure, passing at the same rate, did emerge again, and approached just as before, only this time he was carelessly examining some small but clumsy steel instrument which glittered occasionally in the light. From Tamar’s description of it, I conclude it was a revolver.

He passed the pile of cloaks but a few steps, and again turned toward Brandon. So soon as he was once more concealed by the screen of underwood, old Tamar, now sufficiently recovered, crept hurriedly away in the opposite direction, half dead with terror, until she had descended the steps, and was buried once more in friendly darkness.

Old Tamar did not stop at Redman’s Farm; she passed it and the mills, and never stopped till she reached the Vicarage. In the hall, she felt for a moment quite overpowered, and sitting in one of the old chairs that did duty there, she uttered a deep groan, and looked with such a gaze in the face of the maid who had admitted her, that she thought the old woman was dying.

Sick rooms, even when, palpably, doctors, nurses, friends, have all ceased to hope, are not to those who stand in the *very* nearest and most tender relations to the patient, altogether chambers of despair. There are those who hover about the bed and note every gleam and glow of subsiding life, and will read in sunset something of the colours of the dawn, and cling wildly to these hallucinations of love; and no one has the heart to tear them from them.

Just now, Dolly fancied that ‘little man was better — the darling! the treasure! oh, precious little man! He was coming back!’

So, she ran down with this light of hope in her face, and saw old Tamar in the hall, and gave her a glass of the wine which Rachel had provided, and the old woman’s spirit came again.

‘She was glad — yes, very glad. She was thankful to hear the dear child was better.’ But there was a weight upon her soul, and a dreadful horror on her countenance still.

‘Will you please, Ma’am, write a little note — my old hand shakes so, she could hardly read my writing — to my mistress — Miss Radie, Ma’am. I see pen and ink on the table there. I was not able to go up to the Hall, Ma’am, with the message. There’s something on the road I could not pass.’

‘Something! What was it?’ said Dolly, staring with round eyes in the old woman’s woeful face, her curiosity aroused for a moment.

‘Something, Ma’am — a person — I can’t exactly tell — above the steps, in the Blackberry path. It would cost my young mistress her life. For Heaven’s sake, Ma’am, write, and promise, if you send for her, she shall get the note.’

So, Dolly made the promise, and bringing old Tamar with her into the study, penned these odd lines from her dictation, merely adjusting the grammar.

‘MISS RADIE, DEAR, — If coming down tonight from Brandon, this is to tell you, it is as much as your life is worth to pass the Blackberry walk above the steps. My old eyes have seen him there, walking back and forward, lying at catch for some one, this night — the great enemy of man; you can suppose in what shape.

‘Your dutiful and loving servant,

TAMAR.’

So, old Tamar, after a little, took her departure; and it needed a great effort to enable her to take the turn up the dark and lonely mill-road, leading to Redman’s Farm; so much did she dread the possibility of again encountering the person she had just described.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE MEETING IN THE LONG POND ALLEY.

I suppose there were few waking heads at this hour in all the wide parish of Gylingden, though many a usually idle one was now busy enough about the great political struggle which was to muster its native forces, both in borough and county, and agitate these rural regions with the roar and commotion of civil strife.

But generals must sleep like other men; and even Tom Wealdon was snoring in the fairy land of dreams.

The night was very still — a sharp night, with a thin moon, like a scimitar, hanging bright in the sky, and a myriad of intense stars blinking in the heavens, above the steep roofs and spiral chimneys of Brandon Hall, and the ancient trees that surrounded it.

It was late in the night, as we know. The family, according to their custom, had sought their slumbers early; and the great old house was perfectly still.

One pair, at least, of eyes, however, were wide open; one head busy; and one person still in his daily costume. This was Mr. Larcom — the grave *major domo*, the bland and attached butler. He was not busy about his plate, nor balancing the cellar book, nor even perusing his Bible.

He was seated in that small room or closet which he had, years ago, appropriated as his private apartment. It is opposite the housekeeper's room — a sequestered, philosophic retreat. He dressed in it, read his newspaper there, and there saw his select acquaintance. His wardrobe stood there. The iron safe in which he kept his keys, filled one of its nooks. He had his two or three shelves of books in the recess; not that he disturbed them much, but they were a grave and gentlemanlike property, and he liked them for their binding, and the impression they produced on his visitors. There was a meditative fragrance of cigars about him, and two or three Havannah stumps under the grate.

The fact is, he was engaged over a letter, the writing of which, considering how accomplished a gentleman he was, he had found rather laborious and tedious. The penmanship was, I am afraid, clumsy, and the spelling here and there, irregular. It was finished however, and he was now reading it over with care.

It was thus expressed: —

‘RESPECTET SIR, — In accordens with your disier, i av took my pen to say a fue words. There has cum a leter for a sertun persen this morning, with a Lundun posmark, and i do not now hand nor sele, but bad writting, which i have not seen wot contanes, but I may, for as you told me offen, you are anceus for welfare of our famly, as i now to be no more than trewth, so I am anceus to ascest you Sir, wich my conseynce is satesfid, but leter as trubeled a sertun persen oufull, hoo i new was engry, and look oufull put about, wich do not offen apen, and you may sewer there is sumthing in wind, he is alday so oufull peefish, you will not thing worse of me speeken plane as yo disier, there beeing a deel to regret for frends of the old famly i feer in a sertun resent marrege, if I shud lern be chance contense of letter i will sewer rite you. — i Remane your humbel servant,

‘JOHN LARCOM.’

Just as grave Mr. Larcom had ended the perusal of this bulletin, he heard a light step on the stair, at the end of the passage, which made his manly heart jump unpleasantly within his fat ribs. He thrust the unfolded letter roughly into the very depths of his breeches pocket, and blew out both candles; and then listened, as still as a mouse.

What frightened him was the certainty that the step, which he well knew, was Stanley Lake’s. And Stanley being a wideawake and violent person, and his measures sharp and reckless, Mr. Larcom cherished a nervous respect for him.

He listened; the captain’s step came lightly to the foot of the stairs, and paused. Mr. Larcom prepared to be fast asleep in the chair, in the event of the captain’s making a sudden advance, and entering his sanctum. But this movement was not executed.

There was a small door at the foot of the stairs. It shut with a spring lock, of which Captain Lake had a latchkey. Mr. Larcom accidentally had another — a cylindrical bit of steel, with a hinge in the end of it, and a few queer wards.

Now, of this little door he heard the two iron bolts stealthily drawn, and then the handle of the spring lock turned, and the door cautiously opened, and as gently closed.

Mr. Larcom's fears now naturally subsided, and curiosity as naturally supervened. He drew near his window; and it was well he had extinguished his lights, for as he did so, Captain Lake's light figure, in a gray paletot and cloth cap, glided by like a spirit in the faint moonlight.

This phenomenon excited the profoundest interest in the corresponding friend of the family, who, fumbling his letter between his finger and thumb in his breeches' pocket, standing on tip-toe, with mouth agape, and his head against the shutter, followed the receding figure with a greedy stare.

Mr. Larcom had no theory whatsoever to account for this procedure on the part of his master. It must be something very extraordinary, and well worth investigating — of course, for the benefit of the family — which could have evoked the apparition which had just crossed his window. With his eyes close to the window pane, he saw his master glide swiftly along the short terrace which covers this side of the house, and disappear down the steps, like a spectre sinking into the earth.

It is a meeting, thought Mr. Larcom, taking courage, for he already felt something of the confidence and superiority of possessing a secret; and as quickly as might be, the trustworthy man, with his latchkey in his pocket, softly opened the portal through which the object of his anxiety had just emerged, closed the door behind him, and stood listening intently in the recess of the entrance, where he heard the now more careless step of the captain, treading, as he thought, the broad yew-walk, which turns at a right angle at the foot of the terrace step. The black yew hedge was a perfect screen.

Here was obviously resented a chance of obtaining the command of a secret of greater or less importance. It was a considerable stake to play for, and well worth a trifling risk.

He did not hesitate to follow — but with the soft tread of a polite butler, doing his offices over the thick carpet of a drawingroom — and it was in his mind— 'Suppose he does discover me, what then? *I*'m as much surprised as he! Thomas Brewen, the footman, who is under notice to leave, has twice, to the captain's knowledge, played me the same trick, and stole out through the gunroom window at night, and denied it afterwards; so I sat up to detect him, and hearing the door open, and a step, I pursued, and find I've made a mistake; and beg pardon with proper humility — supposing the master is on the same errand — what can he say? It will bring me a present, and a hint to say nothing of my having seen him in the yew-walk at this hour.'

Of course he did not run through all this rigmarole in detail; but the situation, the excuse, and the result, were present to his mind, and filled him with a comfortable assurance.

Therefore, with decision and caution, he followed Captain Lake's march, and reaching the yew-walk, he saw the slim figure in the cap and paletot turn the corner, and enter the broad walk between the two wall-like beech hedges, which led direct to the first artificial pond — a long, narrow parallelogram, round which the broad walk passed in two straight lines, fenced with the towering beech hedges, shorn as smooth as the walls of a nunnery.

When the butler reached the point at which Captain Lake had turned, he found himself all at once within fifty steps of that eccentric gentleman, who was talking, but in so low a tone, that not even the sound of the voices reached him, with a rather short, broad-shouldered person, buttoned up in a surtout, and wearing a queer, Germanesque, felt hat, battered and crushed a good deal.

Mr. Larcom held his breath. He was profoundly interested. After a while, with an oath, he exclaimed —

'That's *him!*'

Then, after another pause, he gasped another oath: —

'It *is* him!'

The square-built man in the surtout had a great pair of black whiskers; and as he stood opposite Lake, conversing, with, now and again, an earnest gesture, he showed a profile which Mr. Larcom knew very well; and now they turned and walked slowly side by side along the broad walk by that perpendicular wall of crisp brown leaves, he recognised also a certain hitch in his shoulder, which made him swear and asseverate again.

He would have given something to hear what was passing. He thought uneasily whether there might not be a side-path or orifice anywhere through which he might creep so as to get to the other side of the hedge and listen. But there was no way, and he must rest content with such report as his eyes might furnish.

‘They’re not quarrelling no ways,’ murmured he.

And, indeed, they walked together, stopping now and again, as it seemed, very amicably. Captain Lake seemed to have most to say.

‘He’s awful cowed, he is; I never did think to see Mr. Wylder so affeard of Lake; he *is* affeard; yes, he is — *that* he is.

And indeed there was an indescribable air of subservience in the demeanour of the square-built gentleman very different from what Mark Wylder once showed.

He saw the captain take from the pocket of his paletot a square box or packet, it might be jewels or only papers, and hand them to his companion, who popped them into his left-hand surtout pocket, and kept his hand there as if the freightage were specially valuable.

Then they talked earnestly a little longer, standing together by the pond; and then, side-by-side, they paced down the broad walk by its edge. It was a long walk. Honest Larcom would have followed if there had been any sort of cover to hide his advance; but there being nothing of the kind he was fain to abide at his corner. Thence he beheld them come at last slowly to a standstill, talk evidently a little more, and finally they shook hands — an indefinable something still of superiority in Lake’s air — and parted.

The captain was now all at once walking at a swift pace, alone, towards Larcom’s post of observation, and his secret confederate nearly as rapidly in an opposite direction. It would not do for the butler to be taken or even seen by Lake, nor yet to be left at the outside of the door and barred out. So the captain had hardly commenced his homeward walk, when Larcom, though no great runner, threw himself into an agitated amble, and reached and entered the little door just in time to escape observation. He had not been two minutes in his apartment again when he once more beheld the figure of his master cross the window, and heard the small door softly opened and closed, and the bolts slowly and cautiously drawn again into their places. Then there was a pause. Lake was listening to ascertain whether anyone was stirring, and being satisfied, reascended the stairs, leaving the stout and courteous butler ample matter for romantic speculation.

It was now the butler’s turn to listen, which he did at the halfopened door of his room. When he was quite assured that all was quiet, he shut and bolted his door, closed the window-shutters, and relighted his pair of wax candles.

Mr. Larcom was a good deal excited. He had seen strange things that night. He was a good deal blown and heated by his run, and a little wild and scared at the closeness of the captain's unconscious pursuit. His head beside was full of amazing conjectures. After a while he took his crumpled letter from his pocket, unfolded and smoothed it, and wrote upon a blank half-page —

'RESPECTED SIR, — Since the above i ave a much to tel mos surprisen, the gentleman you wer anceous of tiding mister M. W. is cum privet, and him and master met tonite nere 2 in morning, in the long pond allee, so is near home then we suposed, no more at present Sir from your

'humbel servent JOHN

'LARCOM.

'i shall go to dolington day arter tomorrow by eleven o'clock trane if you ere gong, Sir.'

When the attorney returned, between eleven and twelve o'clock next morning, this letter awaited him. It did not, of course, surprise him, but it conclusively corroborated all his inferences.

Here had been Mark Wylder. He had stopped at Dollington, as the attorney suspected he would, and he had kept tryst, in the Brandon grounds, with sly Captain Lake, whose relations with him it became now more difficult than ever clearly to comprehend.

Wylder was plainly under no physical coercion. He had come and gone unattended. For one reason or other he was, at least, as strongly interested as Lake in maintaining secrecy.

That Mark Wylder was living was the grand fact with which he had just then to do. How near he had been to purchasing the vicar's reversion! The engrossed deeds lay in the black box there. And yet it might be all true about Mark's secret marriage. At that moment there might be a whole rosary of sons, small and great, to intercept the inheritance; and the Reverend William Wylder might have no more chance of the estates than he had of the crown.

What a deliverance for the good attorney. His money was quite safe. The excellent man's religion was, we know, a little Jewish, and rested upon temporal rewards and comforts. He thought, I am sure, that a competent staff of angels were placed specially in charge of the interests of Jos. Larkin, Esq., who attended so many services and sermons on Sundays, and led a life of such ascetic propriety. He felt quite grateful to them, in his priggish way — their management in this matter had been so eminently satisfactory. He regretted that he had not an opportunity of telling them so personally. I don’t say that he would have expressed it in these literal terms; but it was fixed in his mind that the carriage of his business was supernaturally arranged. Perhaps he was right, and he was at once elated and purified, and his looks and manner that afternoon were more than usually meek and celestial.

CHAPTER LXXI.

SIR HARRY BRACTON'S INVASION OF GYLINGDEN.

Jim Dutton had not turned up since, and his letter was one of those mares' nests of which gentlemen in Mr. Larkin's line of business have so large an experience. Of Mark Wylder not a trace was discoverable. His enquiries on this point were, of course, conducted with caution and remoteness. Gylingden, however, was one of those places which, if it knows anything, is sure to find a way of telling it, and the attorney was soon satisfied that Mark's secret visit had been conducted with sufficient caution to baffle the eyes and ears of the good folk of the town.

Well, one thing was plain. The purchase of the reversion was to wait, and fraudulent as was the price at which he had proposed to buy it, he was now resolved to get it for less than half that sum, and he wrote a short note to the vicar, which he forthwith despatched.

In the meantime there was not a moment to be lost in clenching the purchase of Five Oaks. And Mr. Jos. Larkin, with one of his 'young men' with him in the taxcart, reached Brandon Hall in a marvellously short time after his arrival at home.

Jos. Larkin, his clerk, and the despatch-box, had a short wait in the Dutch room, before his admission to the library, where an animated debate was audible. The tremendous contest impending over the county was, of course, the theme. In the Dutch room, where they waited, there was a large table, with a pyramid of blank envelopes in the middle, and ever so many cubic feet of canvassing circulars, six chairs, and pens and ink. The clerks were in the housekeeper's room at that moment, partaking of refreshment. There was a gig in the courtyard, with a groom at the horse's head, and Larkin, as he drew up, saw a chaise driving round to the stable yard. People of all sorts were coming and going, and Brandon Hall was already growing like an inn.

'How d'ye do, dear Larkin?' said Captain Brandon Stanley Lake, the hero of all this debate and commotion, smiling his customary sly greeting, and extending his slim hand across the arm of his chair— 'I'm so sorry you were away — this thing has come, after all, so suddenly — we are getting on famously though — but I'm awfully fagged.' And, indeed, he looked pale and tired, though smiling. 'I've a lot of fellows with me; they've just run in to luncheon; won't you take something?'

But Jos. Larkin, smiling after his sort, excused himself. He was glad they had a moment to themselves. He had brought the money, which he knew would be acceptable at such a moment, and he thought it would be desirable to sign and seal forthwith, to which the captain, a little anxiously, agreed. So he got in one of the clerks who were directing the canvassing circulars, and gave him the draft, approved by his counsel, to read aloud, while he followed with his eye upon the engrossed deed.

The attorney told down the money in bank bills. He fancied that exception might be taken to his cheque for so large a sum, and was eager to avoid delay, and came from London so provided.

The captain was not sorry, for in truth he was in rather imminent jeopardy just then. He had spoken truth, strangely enough, when he mentioned his gambling debts as an incentive to his marriage with the heiress of Brandon, in that Sunday walk with Rachel in the park; and hardly ten minutes had passed when Melton Hervey, trustiest of aide-de-camps, was on his way to Dollington to make a large lodgment to the captain's credit in the county bank, and to procure a letter of credit for a stupendous sum in favour of Messrs. Hiram and Jacobs, transmitted under cover to Captain Lake's town solicitor. The captain had signed, sealed, and delivered, murmuring that formula about hand and seal, and act and deed, and Dorcas glided in like a ghost, and merely whispering an enquiry to Lake, did likewise, the clerk deferentially putting the query, 'this is your hand and seal, &c.?' and Jos. Larkin drawing a step or two backward.

Of course the lady saw that lank and sinister man of God quite distinctly, but she did not choose to do so, and Larkin, with a grand sort of prescience, foresaw a county feud between the Houses of Five Oaks and Brandon, and now the lady had vanished. The money, carefully counted, was rolled in Lake's pocket book, and the bright new deed which made Jos. Larkin, of the Lodge, Esq., master of Five Oaks, was safely locked into the box, under his long arm, and the attorney vanished, bowing very much, and concealing his elation under a solemn sort of *nonchalance*.

The note, which by this time the vicar had received, though short, was, on the whole, tremendous. It said: —

‘(*Private.*)

REV. AND DEAR SIR, — I have this moment arrived from London, where I deeply regret to state the negotiation on which we both relied to carry you comfortably over your present difficulties has fallen through, in consequence of what I cannot but regard as the inexcusable caprice of the intending purchaser. He declines stating any reason for his withdrawal. I fear that the articles were so artfully framed by his solicitors, in one particular which it never entered into my mind to refer to anything like trick or design, that we shall find it impossible to compel him to carry out what, in the strongest terms, I have represented to Messrs. Burlington and Smith as a bargain irrevocably concluded in point of honour and morality. The refusal of their own client to make the proposed investment has alarmed those gentlemen, I regret to add, for the safety of their costs, which, as I before apprised you, are, though I cannot say excessive, certainly *very heavy*; and I fear we must be prepared for extreme measures upon their part. I have carefully reconsidered the very handsome proposal which Miss Lake was so good as to submit; but the result is that, partly on technical, and partly on other grounds, I continue of the clear opinion that the idea is absolutely impracticable, and must be peremptorily laid aside in attempting to arrive at an estimate of any resources which you may be conscious of commanding. If, under these deplorably untoward circumstances, you still think I can be of any use to you, may I beg that you will not hesitate to say how.

‘I remain, my dear and reverend Sir, with profound regrets and sympathy, yours very sincerely,

‘JOS. H. LARKIN.’

He had already imported the H. which was to germinate, in a little while, into Howard.

When Jos. Larkin wanted to get a man’s property a bargain — and he had made two or three excellent hits, though, comparatively, on a very small scale — he liked so to contrive matters as to bring his client to his knees, begging him to purchase on the terms he wished; and then Jos. Larkin came forward, in the interests of humanity, and unable to resist the importunities of ‘a party whom he respected,’ he did ‘what, at the time, appeared a very risky thing, although it has turned out tolerably safe in the long run.’

The screw was now twisted pretty well home upon the poor vicar, who, if he had any sense at all, would, remembering Larkin’s expressions only a week before, suggest his buying, and so, the correspondence would disclose, in a manner most honourable to the attorney, the history of the purchase.

But the clouds had begun to break, and the sky to clear, over the good vicar, just at the point where they had been darkest and most menacing.

Little Fairy, after all, was better. Goodnatured Buddle had been there at nine, quite amazed at his being so well, still reserved and cautious, and afraid of raising hopes. But when he came back, at eleven, and had completed his examination, he told them, frankly, that there was a decided change; in fact, that the little man, with, of course, great care, might do very well, and *ought* to recover, if nothing went wrong.

Honest Buddle was delighted. He chuckled over the little man’s bed. He could not suppress his grins. He was a miracle of a child! a prodigy! By George, it was the most extraordinary case he had ever met with! It was all that bottle, and that miraculous child; they seemed made for one another. From two o’clock, last night, the action of his skin has commenced, and never ceased since. When he was here last night, the little fellow’s pulse was a hundred and forty-four, and now down to ninety-seven!

The doctor grew jocular; and who can resist a doctor’s jokes, when they garnish such tidings as he was telling. Was ever so pleasant a doctor! Laughter through tears greeted these pleasantries; and oh, such transports of gratitude broke forth when he was gone!

It was well for Driver, the postmaster, and his daughters, that all the circulars made up that day in Brandon Hall were not despatched through the Gylingden postoffice. It was amazing how so many voters could find room to one county. Next day, it was resolved, the captain’s personal canvass was to commence. The invaluable Wealdon had run through the list of his tomorrow’s visits, and given him an inkling of the idiosyncrasies, the feuds, and the likings of each elector in the catalogue. ‘Busy times, Sir!’ Tom Wealdon used to remark, with a chuckle, from time to time, in the thick of the fuss and conspiration which was the breath of his nostrils; and, doubtless, so they are, and were, and ever will be, until the time-honoured machinery of our election system has been overhauled, and adapted to the civilisation of these days.

Captain Brandon Lake was as much as possible at head quarters in these critical times; and, suddenly, Mr. Crump; the baker, and John Thomas, of the delft, ironmongery, sponge, and umbrella shop, at the corner of Church Street, in Gylingden, were announced by the fatigued servant. They bowed, and stood, grinning, near the door; and the urbane and cordial captain, with all a candidate's good fellowship, shook them both by the hands, and heard their story; and an exciting one it was.

Sir Harry Bracton had actually invaded the town of Gylingden. There was a rabble of the raff of Queen's Bracton along with him. He, with two or three young swells by him, had made a speech, from his barouche, outside the 'Silver Lion,' near the green; and he was now haranguing from the steps of the Court House. They had a couple of flags, and some music. It was 'a regular, planned thing;' for the Queen's Bracton people had been dropping in an hour before. The shopkeepers were shutting their windows. Sir Harry was 'chaffing the capting,' and hitting him very hard 'for a hupstart' — and, in fact, Crump was more particular in reporting the worthy baronet's language than was absolutely necessary. And it was thought that Sir Harry was going to canvass the town.

The captain was very much obliged, indeed, and begged they would go into the parlour, and take luncheon; and, forthwith, Wealdon took the command. The gamekeepers, the fifty hay-makers in the great meadow, they were to enter the town from the top of Church Street, where they were to gather all the boys and blackguards they could. The men from the gas-works, the masons, and blacksmiths, were to be marched in by Luke Samways. Tom Wealdon would, himself, in passing, give the men at the coal-works a hint. Sir Harry's invasion was the most audacious thing on record; and it was incumbent on Gylingden to make his defeat memorably disgraceful and disastrous.

His barouche was to be smashed, and burnt on the green; his white topcoat and hat were to clothe the effigy, which was to swing over the bonfire. The captured Bracton banners were to hang in the coffee-room of the 'Silver Lion,' to inspire the roughs. What was to become of the human portion of the hostile pageant, Tom, being an official person, did not choose to hint.

All these, and fifty minor measures, were ordered by the fertile Wealdon in a minute, and suitable messengers on the wing to see after them. The captain, accompanied by Mr. Jekyl, myself, and a couple of the grave scriveners from the next room, were to go by the back approach and Redman's Dell to the Assembly Rooms, which Crump and Thomas, already on their way in the fly, undertook to have open for their reception, and furnished with some serious politicians from the vicinity. From the windows, the captain, thus supported, was to make his maiden speech, one point in which Tom Wealdon insisted upon, and that was an injunction to the 'men of Gylingden' on no account to break the peace. 'Take care to say it, and we'll have it well reported in the "Chronicle," and our lads won't mind it, nor hear it neither, for that matter.'

So, there was mounting in hot haste in the courtyard of old Brandon, and a rather ponderous selection of walking-sticks by the politicians — of whom I was one — intended for the windows of the assembly room.

Lake rode; Tom Wealdon, myself, and two scriveners, squeezed into the dog-cart, which was driven by Jekyl, and away we went. It was a pleasant drive, under the noble old trees. But we were in no mood for the picturesque. A few minutes brought us into the Blackberry hollow, which debouches into Redman's Dell.

Here, the road being both steep and rugged, our speed abated. The precipitous banks shut out the sunlight, except at noon, and the road through this defile, overhung by towering trees and rocks, was even now in solemn shadow. The cart-road leading down to Redman's Dell, and passing the mills near Redman's Farm, diverges from the footpath with which we are so well acquainted, near that perpendicular block of stone which stands a little above the steps which the footpath here descends.

CHAPTER LXXII.

MARK WYLDER'S HAND.

Just at the darkest point of the road, a little above the rude column which I have mentioned, Lake's horse, a young one, shied, stopped short, recoiling on its haunches, and snorted fiercely into the air. At the same time, the two dogs which had accompanied us began to bark furiously beneath in the ravine.

The tall form of Uncle Lorne was leaning against a tree at the edge of the ravine, with his left hand extended towards us, and his right pointing down the precipice. Perhaps it was this odd apparition that startled Lake's horse.

'I told you he was coming up — lend him a hand,' yelled Uncle Lorne, in great excitement.

No one at such a moment minded his maunderings: but many people afterwards thought that the crazed old man, in one of his night-rambles, had seen that which, till now, no one had imagined; and that Captain Lake himself, whose dislike of him was hardly disguised, suspected him, at times of that alarming knowledge.

Lake plunged the spurs into his beast, which reared so straight that she toppled backward toward the edge of the ravine.

'Strike her on the head; jump off,' shouted Wealdon.

But he did neither.

'D — it! put her head down; lean forward,' bellowed Wealdon again.

But it would not do. With a crash among briars, and a heavy thump from beneath that shook the earth, the mare and her rider went over. A shout of horror broke from us all; and Jekyl, watching the catastrophe, was very near pulling our horse over the edge, and launching us all together, like the captain, into the defile.

In a moment more we were all on the ground, and scrambling down the side of the ravine, among rocks, boughs, brambles, and ferns, in the deep shadows of the gorge, the dogs still yelling furiously from below.

'Here he is,' cried Jekyl. 'How are you, Lake? Much hurt, old boy? By Jove, he's killed, I think.'

Lake groaned.

He lay about twelve feet below the edge. The mare, now lying near the bottom of the gorge, had, I believe, fallen upon him, and then tumbled over.

Strange to say, Lake was conscious, and in a few seconds, he said, in reply to the horrified questions of his friend —

‘I’m *all* smashed. Don’t move me;’ and, in a minute more— ‘Don’t mind that d — d brute; she’s killed. Let her lie.’

It appeared very odd, but so it was, he appeared eager upon this point, and, faint as he was, almost savage.

‘Tell them to let her lie there.’

Wealdon and I, however, scrambled down the bank. He was right. The mare lay stone dead, on her side, at the bottom. He lifted her head, by the ear, and let it fall back.

In the meantime the dogs continued their unaccountable yelling close by.

‘What the devil’s that?’ said Wealdon.

Something like a stunted, blackened branch was sticking out of the peat, ending in a set of short, thickish twigs. This is what it seemed. The dogs were barking at it. It was, really, a human hand and arm, disclosed by the slipping of the bank; undermined by the brook, which was swollen by the recent rains.

The dogs were sniffing and yelping about it.

‘It’s a hand!’ cried Wealdon, with an oath.

‘A hand?’ I echoed.

We were both peering at it, having drawn near, stooping and hesitating as men do in a curious horror.

It was, indeed, a human hand and arm, disclosed from about the elbow, enveloped in a discoloured coat-sleeve, which fell back from the limb, and the fingers, like it black, were extended in the air. Nothing more of the body to which it belonged, except the point of a knee, in stained and muddy trousers, protruding from the peat, was visible.

It must have lain there a considerable time, for, notwithstanding the antiseptic properties of that sort of soil, mixed with the decayed bark and fibre of trees, a portion of the flesh of the hand was decomposed, and the naked bone disclosed. On the little finger something glimmered dully.

In this livid hand, rising from the earth, there was a character both of menace and appeal; and on the finger, as I afterwards saw at the inquest, glimmered the talismanic legend ‘Resurgam — I will rise again!’ It was the corpse of Mark Wylder, which had lain buried here undiscovered for many months. A horrible odour loaded the air. Perhaps it was this smell of carrion, from which horses sometimes recoil with a special terror, that caused the swerving and rearing which had ended so fatally. At that moment we heard a voice calling, and raising our eyes, saw Uncle Lorne looking down from the rock with an agitated scowl.

‘I’ve done with him now — *emeritus* — he touches me, no more. Take him by the hand, merciful lads, or they’ll draw him down again.’

And with these words Uncle Lorne receded, and I saw him no more.

As yet we had no suspicion whose was the body thus unexpectedly discovered.

We beat off the dogs, and on returning to Lake, found Jekyl trying to raise him a little against a tree. We were not far from Redman’s Farm, and it was agreed, on hasty consultation, that our best course would be to carry Lake thither at once by the footpath, and that one of us — Wealdon undertook this — should drive the carriage on, and apprising Rachel on the way of the accident which had happened, and that her brother was on his way thither, should drive on to Buddle’s house, sending assistance to us from the town.

It was plain that Stanley Lake’s canvass was pretty well over. There was not one of us who looked at him that did not feel convinced that he was mortally hurt. I don’t think he believed so himself then; but we could not move him from the place where he lay without inflicting so much pain, that we were obliged to wait for assistance.

‘D — the dogs, what are they barking for?’ said Lake, faintly. He seemed distressed by the noise.

‘There’s a dead body partly disclosed down there — some one murdered and buried; but one of Mr. Juke’s young men is keeping them off.’

Lake made an effort to raise himself, but with a grin and a suppressed moan he abandoned it.

‘Is there no doctor — I’m very much hurt?’ said Lake, faintly, after a minute’s silence.

We told him that Buddle had been sent for; and that we only awaited help to get him down to Redman's Farm.

When Rachel heard the clang of hoofs and the rattle of the taxcart driving down the mill-road, at a pace so unusual, a vague augury of evil smote her. She was standing in the porch of her tiny house, and old Tamar was sitting knitting on the bench close by.

'Tamar, they are galloping down the road, I think — what can it mean?' exclaimed the young lady, scared she could not tell why; and old Tamar stood up, and shaded her eyes with her shrunken hand.

Tom Wealdon pulled up at the little wicket. He was pale. He had lost his hat, too, among the thickets, and could not take time to recover it. Altogether he looked wild.

He put his hand to where his hat should have been in token of salutation, and said he —

'I beg pardon, Miss Lake, Ma'am, but I'm sorry to say your brother the captain's badly hurt, and maybe you could have a shakedown in the parlour ready for him by the time I come back with the doctor, Ma'am?'

Rachel, she did not know how, was close by the wheel of the vehicle by this time.

'Is it Sir Harry Bracton? He's in the town, I know. Is Stanley shot?'

'Not shot; only thrown, Miss, into the Dell; his mare shied at a dead body that's there. You'd better stay where you are, Miss; but if you could send up some water, I think he'd like it. Going for the doctor, Ma'am; goodbye, Miss Lake.'

And away went Wealdon, wild, pale, and hatless, like a man pursued by robbers.

'Oh! Tamar, he's killed — Stanley's killed — I'm sure he's killed, and all's discovered' — and Rachel ran wildly up the hill a few steps, but stopped and returned as swiftly.

'Thank God, Miss,' said old Tamar, lifting up her trembling fingers and white eyes to Heaven. 'Better dead, Miss, than living on in sin and sorrow, better discovered than hid by daily falsehood and cruelty. Old Tamar's tired of life; she's willing to go, and wishin' for death this many a day. Oh! Master Stanley, my child!'

Rachel went into the parlour and kneeled down, with white upturned face and clasped hands. But she could not pray. She could only look her wild supplication; — deliverance — an issue out of the terrors that beset her; and ‘oh! poor miserable lost Stanley!’ It was just a look and an inarticulate cry for mercy.

An hour after Captain Stanley Brandon Lake, whose ‘election address’ was figuring that evening in the ‘Dollington Courier,’ and in the ‘County Chronicle,’ lay with his clothes still on, in the little drawingroom of Redman’s Farm, his injuries ascertained, his thigh broken near the hip, and his spine fractured. No hope — no possibility of a physical reascension, this time.

Meanwhile, in the Blackberry Dell, Doctor Buddle was assisting at a different sort of inquisition. The two policemen who constituted the civil force of Gylingden, two justices of the peace, the doctor, and a crowd of amateurs, among whom I rank myself, were grouped in the dismal gorge, a little to windward of the dead body, which fate had brought to light, while three men were now employed in cautiously disinterring it.

When the operation was completed, there remained no doubt whatever on my mind: discoloured and disfigured as were both clothes and body, I was sure that the dead man was no other than Mark Wylder. When the clay with which it was clotted was a little removed, it became indubitable. The great whiskers; the teeth so white and even; and oddly enough, one black lock of hair which he wore twisted in a formal curl flat on his forehead, remained undisturbed in its position, as it was fixed there at his last toilet for Brandon Hall.

In the rude and shallow grave in which he lay, his purse was found, and some loose silver mixed in the mould. The left hand, on which was the ring of ‘the Persian magician,’ was bare; the right gloved, with the glove of the other hand clutched firmly in it.

The body was got up in a sheet to a sort of spring cart which awaited it, and so conveyed to the ‘Silver Lion,’ in Gylingden, where it was placed in a disused coachhouse to await the inquest. There the examination was continued, and his watch (the chain broken) found in his waistcoat pocket. In his coatpocket were found (of course, in no very presentable condition) his cigar-case, his initials stamped on it, for Mark had, in his day, a keen sense of property; his handkerchief, also marked; a pocketbook with some entries nearly effaced; and a letter unopened, and sealed with Lord Chelford’s seal. The writing was nearly washed away, but the letters ‘lwich,’ or ‘twich,’ were still legible near the corner, and it turned out to be a letter to Dulwich, which Mark Wylder had undertaken to put in the Gylingden postoffice, on the last night on which he appeared at Brandon.

The whole town was in a ferment that night. Great debate and conjecture in the reading-room, and even on the benches of the billiard-room. The ‘Silver Lion’ did a great business that night. Mine host might have turned a good round sum only by showing the body, were it not that Edwards, the chief policeman, had the keys of the coachhouse. Much to-ing and fro-ing there was between the town and Redman’s Farm, the respectable inhabitants all sending or going up to enquire how the captain was doing. At last Doctor Buddle officially interfered. The constant bustle was injurious to his patient. An hourly bulletin up to twelve o’clock should be in the hall of the ‘Brandon Arms;’ and Redman’s Dell grew quiet once more.

When William Wylder heard the news, he fainted; not altogether through horror or grief, though he felt both; but the change in his circumstances was so amazing and momentous. It was a strange shock — immense relief — immense horror — quite overwhelming.

Mark had done some goodnatured things for him in a small five-pound way; he had promised him that loan, too, which would have lifted him out of his Slough of Despond, and he clung with an affectionate gratitude to these exhibitions of brotherly love. Besides, he had accustomed himself — the organ of veneration standing prominent on the top of the vicar’s head — to regard Mark in the light of a great practical genius— ‘natus rebus agendis;’ he knew men so thoroughly — he understood the world so marvellously! The vicar was not in the least surprised when Mark came in for a fortune. He had always predicted that Mark must become *very* rich, and that nothing but indolence could prevent his ultimately becoming a very great man. The sudden and total disappearance of so colossal an object was itself amazing.

There was another person very strongly, though differently, affected by the news. Under pretext of business at Naunton, Jos. Larkin had driven off early to Five Oaks, to make inspection of his purchase. He dined like a king in disguise, at the humble little hostelry of Naunton Friars, and returned in the twilight to the Lodge, which he would make the dower-house of Five Oaks, with the Howard shield over the door. He was gracious to his domestics, but the distance was increased: he was nearer to the clouds, and they looked smaller.

‘Well, Mrs. Smithers,’ said he, encouragingly, his long feet on the fender, for the evening was sharp, and Mrs. S. knew that he liked a bit of fire at his tea ‘any letters — any calls — any news stirring?’

‘No letters, nor calls, Sir, please, except the butcher’s book. I s’pose, Sir, you were viewing the body?’

‘What body?’

‘Mr. Wylder’s, please, Sir.’

‘The vicar!’ exclaimed Mr. Larkin, his smile of condescension suddenly vanishing.

‘No, Sir; Mr. *Mark* Wylder, please; the gentleman, Sir, as was to ‘av married Miss Brandon.’

‘What the devil do you mean, woman?’ ejaculated the attorney, his back to the fire, standing erect, and a black shadow over his amazed and offended countenance.

‘The devil,’ in such a mouth, was so appalling and so amazing, that the worthy woman gazed, thunderstruck, upon him for a moment.

‘Beg your pardon, Sir; but his body’s bin found, Sir.’

‘You mean Mr. *Mark*?’

‘Yes, please, Sir; in a hole near the mill road — it’s up in the “Silver Lion” now, Sir.’

‘It must be the vicar’s — it must,’ said Jos. Larkin, getting his hat on, sternly, and thinking how likely he was to throw himself into the mill race, and impossible it was that Mark, whom he and Larcom had both seen alive and well last night — the latter, indeed, *this morning* — could possibly be the man. And thus comforting himself, he met old Major Jackson on the green, and that gentleman’s statement ended with the words; ‘and in an advanced stage of decomposition.’

‘That settles the matter,’ said Larkin, breathing again, and with a toss of his head, and almost a smile of disdain: ‘for I saw Mr. Mark Wylder late last night at Shillingsworth.’

Leaving Major Jackson in considerable surprise, Mr. Larkin walked off to Edwards' dwelling, at the top of Church Street, and found that active policeman at home. In his cool, grand, official way, Mr. Larkin requested Mr. Edwards to accompany him to the 'Silver Lion,' where in the same calm and commanding way, he desired him to attend him to view the corpse. In virtue of his relation to Mark Wylder, and of his position as sole resident and legal practitioner, he was obeyed.

The odious spectacle occupied him for some minutes. He did not speak while they remained in the room. On coming out there was a black cloud upon the attorney's features, and he said, sulkily, to Edwards, who had turned the key in the lock, and now touched his hat as he listened,

'Yes, there is a resemblance, but it is all a mistake. I travelled as far as Shillingsworth last night with Mr. Mark Wylder: he was perfectly well. This can't be he.'

But there was a terrible impression on Mr. Jos. Larkin's mind that this certainly *was* he, and with a sulky nod to the policeman, he walked darkly down to the vicar's house. The vicar had been sent for to Naunton to pray with a dying person; and Mr. Larkin, disappointed, left a note to state that in writing that morning, as he had done, in reference to the purchase of the reversion, through Messrs. Burlington and Smith, he had simply expressed his own surmises as to the probable withdrawal of the intending purchaser, but had received no formal, nor, indeed, *any* authentic information, from either the party or the solicitors referred to, to that effect. That he mentioned this lest misapprehension should arise, but not as attaching any importance to the supposed discovery which seemed to imply Mr. Mark Wylder's death. That gentleman, on the contrary, he had seen alive and well at Shillingsworth on the night previous; and he had been seen in conference with Captain Lake at a subsequent hour, at Brandon.

From all this the reader may suppose that Mr. Jos. Larkin was not quite in a comfortable state, and he resolved to get the deeds, and go down again to the vicar's, and persuade him to execute them. He could make William Wylder, of course, do whatever he pleased.

There were a good many drunken fellows about the town, but there was an end of election demonstrations in the Brandon interest. Captain Lake was not going in for that race; he would be on another errand by the time the writ came down.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE MASK FALLS.

There was a ‘stop press’ that evening in the county paper— ‘We have just learned that a body has been disinterred, early this afternoon, under very strange circumstances, in the neighbourhood of Gylingden; and if the surmises which are afloat prove well-founded, the discovery will set at rest the speculations which have been busy respecting the whereabouts of a certain gentleman of large property and ancient lineage, who, some time since, mysteriously disappeared, and will, no doubt, throw this county into a state of very unusual excitement. We can state, upon authority, that the coroner will hold his inquest on the body, tomorrow at twelve o’clock, in the town of Gylingden.

There was also an allusion to Captain Lake’s accident — with the expression of a hope that it would ‘prove but a trifling one,’ and an assurance ‘that his canvass would not be prevented by it — although for a few days it might not be a personal one. But his friends might rely on seeing him at the hustings, and hearing him too, when the proper time arrived.’

It was quite well known, however, in Gylingden, by this time, that Captain Lake was not to see the hustings — that his spine was smashed — that he was lying on an extemporised bed, still in his clothes, in the little parlour of Redman’s Farm — cursing the dead mare in gasps — railing at everybody — shuddering whenever they attempted to remove his clothes — hoping, in broken sentences, that his people would give Bracton and — good licking. Bracton’s outrage was the cause of the entire thing — and so help him Heaven, so soon as he should be on his legs again, he would make him feel it, one way or other.

Buddle thought he was in so highly excited a state, that his brain must have sustained some injury also.

He asked Buddle about ten o’clock (having waked up from a sort of stupor)— ‘what about Jim Dutton?’ and then, whether there was not some talk about a body they had found, and what it was. So Buddle told him all that was yet known, and he listened very attentively.

‘But Larkin has been corresponding with Mark Wylder up to a very late day, and if this body has been so long buried, how the devil can it be he? And if it be as bodies usually are after such a time, how can anybody pretend to identify it? And I happen to know that Mark Wylder is living,’ he added, suddenly.

The doctor told him not to tire himself talking, and offered, if he wished to make a statement before a magistrate, to arrange that one should attend and receive it.

‘I rather dislike it, because Mark wants to keep it quiet; but if, on public grounds, it is desirable, I will make it, of course. You’ll use your discretion in mentioning the subject.’

So the captain was now prepared to acknowledge the secret meeting of the night before, and to corroborate the testimony of his attorney and his butler.

Stanley Lake had now no idea that his injuries were dangerous. He said he had a bad bruise under his ribs, and a sprained wrist, and was a little bit shaken; and he talked of his electioneering as only suspended for a day or two.

Buddle, however, thought the case so imminent, that on his way to the ‘Brandon Arms,’ meeting Larkin, going, attended by his clerk, again to the vicar’s house, he stopped him for a moment, and told him what had passed, adding, that Lake was so frightfully injured, that he might begin to sink at any moment, and that by next evening, at all events, he might not be in a condition to make a deposition.

‘It is odd enough — very odd,’ said Larkin. ‘It was only an hour since, in conversation with our policeman, Edwards, that I mentioned the fact of my having myself travelled from London to Shillingsworth last night with Mr. Mark Wylder, who went on by train in this direction, I presume, to meet our unfortunate friend, Captain Lake, by appointment. Thomas Sleddon, of Wadding Hall — at this moment in the “Brandon Arms” — is just the man; if you mention it to him, he’ll go up with you to Redman’s Farm, and take the deposition. Let it be a *deposition*, do you mind; a statement is mere hearsay.’

Comforted somewhat, reassured in a certain way, and in strong hopes that, at all events, such a muddle would be established as to bewilder the jury, Mr. Jos. Larkin, with still an awful foreboding weighing at his heart, knocked at the vicar's door, and was shown into the study. A solitary candle being placed, to make things bright and pleasant for the visitor, who did not look so himself, the vicar, very pale, and appearing to have grown even thinner since he last saw him, entered, and shook his hand with an anxious attempt at a smile, which faded almost instantly.

'I am so delighted that you have come. I have passed a day of such dreadful agitation. Poor Mark!'

'There is no doubt, Sir, whatsoever that he is perfectly well. Three different persons — unexceptionable witnesses — can depose to having seen him last night, and he had a long conference with Captain Lake, who is by this time making his deposition. It is with respect to the other little matter — the execution of the deed of conveyance to Messrs. Burlington and Smith's clients. You know my feeling about the note I wrote this morning a little — I will not say incautiously, because with a client of your known character and honour, no idea of the sort can find place — but I will say thoughtlessly. If there be any hanging back, or appearance of it, it may call down unpleasant — indeed, to be quite frank, ruinous — consequences, which, I think, in the interest of your family, you would hardly be justified in invoking upon the mere speculation of your respected brother's death.'

There was a sound of voices at the door. 'Do come in — pray do,' was heard in Dolly's voice. 'Won't you excuse me, but pray do. Willie, darling, don't you wish him to come in?'

'Most particularly. Do *beg* of him, in my name — and I know Mr. Larkin would wish it so much.'

And so Lord Chelford, with a look which, at another time, would have been an amused one, quite conscious of the oddity of his introduction, came in and slightly saluted Mr. Larkin, who was for a few seconds pretty obviously confounded, and with a pink flush all over his bald forehead, tried to smile, while his hungry little eyes searched the viscount with fear and suspicion.

Larkin's tone was now much moderated. Any sort of dealing was good enough for the simple vicar; but here was the quiet, sagacious peer, who had shown himself, on two remarkable committees, so quick and able a man of business, and the picture of the vicar's situation, and of the powers and terrors of Messrs. Burlington and Smith, were to be drawn with an exacter pencil, and far more delicate colouring.

Lord Chelford listened so quietly that the tall attorney felt he was making way with him, and concluded his persuasion by appealing to him for an opinion.

'That is precisely as I said. I knew my friend, Mr. Larkin, would be only too glad of an opinion in this difficulty from you,' threw in the vicar.

The opinion came — very clear, very quiet, very unpleasant — dead against Mr. Larkin's view, and concluding with the remark that he thought there was more in the affair than had yet come to light.

'I don't see exactly how, my lord,' said Mr. Larkin, a little loftily, and redder than usual.

'Nor do I, Mr. Larkin, at present; but the sum offered is much too small, and the amount of costs and other drawbacks utterly monstrous, and the result is, after deducting all these claims, including your costs, Mr. Larkin — — '

Here Mr. Larkin threw up his chin a little, smiling, and waving his long hand, and saying, 'Oh! as to *mine*,' in a way that plainly expressed, 'They are merely put down for form's sake. It is playing at costs. You know Jos. Larkin — he never so much as dreamed of looking for them.'

'There remain hardly nine hundred and fifty pounds applicable to the payment of the Reverend Mr. Wylder's debts — a sum which would have been ample, before this extraordinary negotiation was commenced, to have extricated him from all his pressing difficulties, and which I would have been only too happy at being permitted to advance, and which, and a great deal more, Miss Lake, whose conduct has been more than kind — quite noble — wished to place in your client's hands.'

'*That*,' said the attorney, flushing a little, 'I believe to have been technically impossible; and it was accompanied by a proposition which was on other grounds untenable.'

'You mean Miss Lake's proposed residence here — an arrangement, it appears to me, every way most desirable.'

'I objected to it on, I will say, *moral* grounds, my lord. It is painful to me to disclose what I know, but that young lady accompanied Mr. Mark

Wylder, my lord, in his midnight flight from Dollington, and remained in London, under, I presume, his protection for some time.'

'That statement, Sir, is, I happen to *know*, utterly contrary to fact. The young lady you mention never even saw Mr. Mark Wylder, since she took leave of him in the drawingroom at Brandon; and I state this not in vindication of her, but to lend weight to the caution I give you against ever again presuming to connect her name with your surmises.'

The peer's countenance was so inexpressibly stern, and his eyes poured such a stream of fire upon the attorney, that he shrank a little, and looked down upon his great fingers which were drumming, let us hope, some sacred music upon the table.

'I am truly rejoiced, my lord, to hear you say so. Except to the young party herself, and in this presence, I have never mentioned it; and I can show you the evidence on which my conclusions rested.'

'Thank you — no Sir; my evidence is conclusive.'

I don't know what Mr. Larkin would have thought of it; it was simply Rachel's letter to her friend Dolly Wylder on the subject of the attorney's conference with her at Redman's Farm. It was a frank and passionate denial of the slander, breathing undefinably, but irresistibly, the spirit of truth.

'Then am I to understand, in conclusion,' said the attorney, that defying all consequences, the Rev. Mr. Wylder refuses to execute the deed of sale?'

'Certainly,' said Lord Chelford, taking this reply upon himself.

'You know, my dear Mr. Wylder, I told you from the first that Messrs. Burlington and Smith were, in fact, a very sharp house; and I fear they will execute any powers they possess in the most summary manner.' The attorney's eye was upon the vicar as he spoke, but Lord Chelford answered.

'The powers you speak of are quite without parallel in a negotiation to purchase; and in the event of their hazarding such a measure, the Rev. Mr. Wylder will apply to a court of equity to arrest their proceedings. My own solicitor is retained in the case.'

Mr. Larkin's countenance darkened and lengthened visibly, and his eyes assumed their most unpleasant expression, and there was a little pause, during which, forgetting his lofty ways, he bit his thumb-nail rather viciously.

‘Then I am to understand, my lord, that I am superseded in the management of this case?’ said the attorney at last, in a measured way, which seemed to say, ‘you had better think twice on this point.’

‘Certainly, Mr. Larkin,’ said the viscount.

‘I’m not the least surprised, knowing, I am sorry to say, a good deal of the ways of the world, and expecting very little gratitude, for either good will or services.’ This was accompanied with a melancholy sneer directed full upon the poor vicar, who did not half understand the situation, and looked rather guilty and frightened. ‘The Rev. Mr. Wylder very well knows with what reluctance I touched the case — a nasty case; and I must be permitted to add, that I am very happy to be quite rid of it, and only regret the manner in which my wish has been anticipated, a discourtesy which I attribute, however, to female influence.’

The concluding sentence was spoken with a vile sneer and a measured emphasis directed at Lord Chelford, who coloured with a sudden access of indignation, and stood stern and menacing, as the attorney, with a general bow to the company, and a lofty *nonchalance*, made his exit from the apartment.

Captain Lake was sinking very fast next morning. He made a statement to Chelford, who was a magistrate for the county, I suppose to assist the coroner’s inquest. He said that on the night of Mark Wylder’s last visit to Brandon, he had accompanied him from the Hall; that Mark had seen some one in the neighbourhood of Gylingden, a person pretending to be his wife, or some near relative of hers, as well as he, Captain Lake, could understand, and was resolved to go to London privately, and have the matter arranged there. He waited near the ‘White House,’ while he, Stanley Lake, went to Gylingden and got his taxcart at his desire. He could give particulars as to that. Captain Lake overtook him, and he got in and was driven to Dollington, where he took the up-train. That some weeks afterwards he saw him at Brighton; and the night before last, by appointment, in the grounds of Brandon; and that he understood Larkin had some lights to throw upon the same subject.

The jury were not sworn until two o’clock. The circumstances of the discovery of the body were soon established. But the question which next arose was very perplexed — was the body that of Mr. Mark Wylder? There could be no doubt as to a general resemblance; but, though marvellously preserved, in its then state, certainty was hardly attainable. But there was a perfectly satisfactory identification of the dress and properties of the corpse as those of Mr. Mark Wylder. On the other hand there was the testimony of Lord Chelford, who put Captain Lake's deposition in evidence, as also the testimony of Larkin, and the equally precise evidence of Larcom, the butler.

The proceedings had reached this point when an occurrence took place which startled Lord Chelford, Larkin, Larcom, and every one in the room who was familiar with Mark Wylder's appearance.

A man pushed his way to the front of the crowd, and for a moment it seemed that Mark Wylder stood living before them.

'Who are you?' said Lord Chelford.

'Jim Dutton, Sir; I come by reason of what I read in the "Chronicle" over night, about Mr. Mark Wylder being found.'

'Do you know anything of him?' asked the coroner.

'Nowt,' answered the man bluffly, 'only I writ to Mr. Larkin, there, as I wanted to see him. I remember him well when I was a boy. I seed him in the train from Lunnon t'other night; and he seed me on the Shillingsworth platform, and I think he took me for some one else. I was comin' down to see the Captain at Brandon — and seed him the same night.'

'Why have you come here?' asked the coroner.

'Thinkin' I might be mistook,' answered the man. 'I *was* twice here in England, and three times abroad.'

'For whom?'

'Mr. Mark Wylder,' answered he.

'It is a wonderful likeness,' said Lord Chelford.

Larkin stared at him with his worst expression; and Larcom, I think, thought he was the devil.

I was as much surprised as any for a few seconds. But there were points of difference — Jim Dutton was rather a taller and every way a larger man than Mark Wylder. His face, too, was broader and coarser, but in features and limbs the relative proportions were wonderfully preserved. It was such an exaggerated portrait as a rustic genius might have executed upon a signboard. He had the same black, curly hair, and thick, black whiskers: and the style of his dress being the same, helped the illusion. In fact, it was a rough, but powerful likeness — startling at the moment — unexceptionable at a little distance — but which failed on a nearer and exacter examination. There was, beside, a scar, which, however, was not a very glaring inconsistency, although it was plainly of a much older standing than the date of Mark's disappearance. All that could be got from Jim Dutton was that 'he thought he might be mistook' and so attended. But respecting Mr. Mark Wylder he could say 'nowt.' He knew 'nowt.'

Lord Chelford was called away at this moment by an urgent note. It was to request his immediate attendance at Redman's Farm, to see Captain Lake, who was in a most alarming state. The hand was Dorcas's — and Lord Chelford jumped into the little pony carriage which awaited him at the door of the 'Silver Lion.'

When he reached Redman's Farm, Captain Lake could not exert himself sufficiently to speak for nearly half-an-hour. At the end of that time he was admitted into the tiny drawingroom in which the captain lay. He was speaking with difficulty.

'Did you see Buddle, just now?'

'No, not since morning.'

'He seems to have changed — bad opinion — unless he has a *law* object — those d — d doctors — never can know. Dorcas thinks — I'll do no good. Don't you think — he may have an object — and not believe I'm in much danger? You don't?'

Lake's hand, with which he clutched and pulled Chelford's, was trembling.

'You must reflect, my dear Lake, how very severe are the injuries you have sustained. You certainly *are* in danger — *great* danger.'

Lake became indescribably agitated, and uttered some words, not often on his lips, that sounded like desperate words of supplication. Not that seaworthy faith which floats the spirit through the storm, but fragments of its long-buried wreck rolled up from the depths and flung madly on the howling shore.

'I'd like to see Rachel,' at last he said, holding Chelford's hand in both his, very hard. 'She's clever — and I don't think she gives me up yet, no — a drink! — and they think I'm more hurt than I really am — Buddle, you know — only an apothecary — village;' and he groaned.

His old friend, Sir Francis Seddley, summoned by the telegraph, was now gliding from London along the rails for Dollington station; but another — a pale courier — on the sightless coursers of the air, was speeding with a different message to Captain Stanley Lake, in the small and sombre drawingroom in Redman's Dell.

I had promised Chelford to run up to Redman's Farm, and let him know if the jury arrived at a verdict during his absence. They did so; finding that the body was that of Marcus Wylder, Esquire, of Raddiston, and 'that he had come by his death in consequence of two wounds inflicted with a sharp instrument, in the region of the heart, by some person or persons unknown, at a period of four weeks since or upwards.'

Chelford was engaged in the sick room, as I understood, in conference with the patient. It was well to have heard, without procrastination, what he had to say; for next morning, at a little past four o'clock, he died.

A nurse who had been called in from the county infirmary, said he made a very happy ending. He mumbled to himself, in his drowsy state, as she was quite sure, in prayer; and he made a very pretty corpse when he was laid out, and his golden hair looked so nice, and he was all so slim and shapely.

Rachel and Dorcas were sitting in the room with him — not expecting the catastrophe then. Both tired; both silent; the nurse dozing a little in her chair, near the bed's head; and Lake said, in his clear, low tone, on a sudden, just as he spoke when perfectly well —

'Quite a mistake, upon my honour.'

As a clear-voiced sentence sometimes speaks out in sleep, followed by silence, so no more was heard after this — no more for ever. The nurse was the first to perceive 'the change.'

'There's a change, Ma'am' — and there was a pause. 'I'm afraid, Ma'am, he's gone,' said the nurse.

Both ladies, in an instant, were at the bedside, looking at the peaked and white countenance, which was all they were ever again to see of Stanley; the yellow eyes and open mouth.

Rachel's agony broke forth in a loud, wild cry. All was forgotten and forgiven in that tremendous moment.

'Oh! Stanley, Stanley! — brother, brother, oh, brother!'

There was the unchanged face, gaping its awful farewell of earth. All over! — never to stir more.

‘Is he dead?’ said Dorcas, with the peculiar sternness of agony.

There could be no doubt. It was a sight too familiar to deceive the nurse.

And Dorcas closed those strange, wild eyes that had so fatally fascinated her, and then she trembled, without speaking or shedding a tear. Her looks alarmed the nurse, who, with Rachel’s help, persuaded her to leave the room. And then came one of those wild scenes which close such tragedies — paroxysms of despair and frantic love, over that worthless young man who lay dead below stairs; such as strike us sometimes with a desolate scepticism, and make us fancy that all affection is illusion, and perishable with the deceits and vanities of earth.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

WE TAKE LEAVE OF OUR FRIENDS.

The story which, in his last interview with Lord Chelford, Stanley Lake had related, was, probably, as near the truth as he was capable of telling.

On the night when Mark Wylder had left Brandon in his company they had some angry talk; Lake's object being to induce Mark to abandon his engagement with Dorcas Brandon. He told Stanley that he would not give up Dorcas, but that he, Lake, must fight him, and go to Boulogne for the purpose, and they should arrange matters so that one or other *must* fall. Lake laughed quietly at the proposition, and Mark retorted by telling him he would so insult him, if he declined, as to compel a meeting. When they reached that lonely path near the flight of stone steps, Stanley distinctly threatened his companion with a disclosure of the scandalous incident in the card-room of the club, which he afterwards related, substantially as it had happened, to Jos. Larkin. When he took this decisive step, Lake's nerves were strung, I dare say, to a high pitch of excitement. Mark Wylder, he knew, carried pistols, and, all things considered, he thought it just possible he might use them. He did not, but he struck Lake with the back of his hand in the face, and Lake, who walked by his side, with his fingers on the handle of a dagger in his coat pocket, instantly retorted with a stab, which he repeated as Mark fell.

He solemnly averred that he never meant to have used the dagger, except to defend his life. That he struck in a state of utter confusion, and when he saw Mark dead, with his feet on the path, and his head lying over the edge, he would have given a limb almost to bring him back. The terror of discovery and ruin instantly supervened.

He propped the body against the bank, and tried to stanch the bleeding. But there could be no doubt that he was actually dead. He got the body easily down the nearly precipitous declivity. Lake was naturally by no means wanting in resource, and a certain sort of coolness, which supervened when the momentary distraction was over.

He knew it would not do to leave the body so, among the rocks and brambles. He recollected that only fifty yards back they had passed a spade and pick, lying, with some other tools, by the side of the path, near that bit of old wall which was being removed. Like a man doing things in a dream, without thought or trouble, only waiting and listening for a moment before he disturbed them, he took away the implements which he required; and when about to descend, a sort of panic and insurmountable disgust seized him; and in a state of supernatural dismay, he felt for a while disposed to kill himself. In that state it was he reached Redman's Farm, and his interview with Rachel occurred. It was the accidental disclosure of the blood, in which his shirt sleeve was soaked, that first opened Rachel's eyes to the frightful truth.

After her first shock, all her terrors were concentrated on the one point — Stanley's imminent danger. He must be saved. She made him return; she even accompanied him as far as the top of the rude flight of steps I have mentioned so often, and there awaited his return — the condition imposed by his cowardice — and made more dreadful by the circumstance that they had heard retreating footsteps along the walk, and Stanley saw the tall figure of Uncle Julius or Lorne, as he called himself, turning the far corner.

There was a long wait here, lest he should return; but he did not appear, and Stanley — though I now believe observed by this strange being — executed his horrible task, replaced the implements, and returned to Rachel, and with her to Redman's Farm; where — his cool cunning once more ascendant — he penned those forgeries, closing them with Mark Wylder's seal, which he compelled his sister — quite unconscious of all but that their despatch by post, at the periods pencilled upon them, was essential to her wretched brother's escape. It was the success of this, his first stratagem, which suggested that long series of frauds which, with the aid of Jim Dutton, selected for his striking points of resemblance to Mark Wylder, had been carried on for so long with such consummate art in a different field.

It was Lake's ungoverned fury, when Larkin discovered the mistake in posting the letters in wrong succession, which so nearly exploded his ingenious system. He wrote in terms which roused Jim Dutton's wrath. Jim had been spinning theories about the reasons of his mysterious, though very agreeable occupation, and announced them broadly in his letter to Larkin. But he had cooled by the time he reached London, and the letter from Lake, received at his mother's and appointing the meeting at Brandon, quieted that mutiny.

I never heard that Jim gave any member of the family the least trouble afterward. He handed to Lord Chelford a parcel of those clever and elaborate forgeries, with which Lake had last furnished him, with a pencilled note on each, directing the date and town at which it was to be despatched. Years after, when Jim was emigrating, I believe Lord Chelford gave him a handsome present.

Lord Chelford was advised by the friend whom he consulted that he need not make those painful particulars public, affecting only a dead man, and leading to no result.

Lake admitted that Rachel had posted the letters in London, believing them to be genuine, for he pretended that they were Wylder's. It is easy to look grave over poor Rachel's slight, and partly unconscious, share in the business of the tragedy. But what girl of energy and strong affections would have had the melancholy courage to surrender her brother to public justice under the circumstances? Lord Chelford, who knew all, says that she 'acted nobly.'

'Now, Joseph, being a just man, was minded to put her away privily.' The *law* being what? That she was to be publicly stigmatised and punished. His *justice* being what? Simply that he would have her to be neither — but screened and parted 'with privily.' Let the Pharisees who would have *summum jus* against their neighbours, remember that God regards the tender and compassionate, who forbears, on occasion, to put the law in motion, as the *just* man.

The good vicar is a great territorial magnate now; but his pleasures and all his ways are still simple. He never would enter Brandon as its master, and never will, during Dorcas Brandon's lifetime. And although with her friend, Rachel Lake, she lives abroad, chiefly in Italy and Switzerland, Brandon Hall, by the command of its proprietor, lies always at her disposal.

I don't know whether Rachel Lake will ever marry. The tragic shadow of her life has not chilled Lord Chelford's strong affection. Neither does the world know or suspect anything of the matter. Old Tamar died three years since, and lies in the pretty little churchyard of Gylingden. And Mark's death is, by this time, a nearly forgotten mystery.

Jos. Larkins's speculations have not turned out luckily. The trustees of Wylder, a minor, tried, as they were advised they must, his title to Five Oaks, by ejectment. A point had been overlooked — as sometimes happens — and Jos. Larkin was found to have taken but an estate for the life of Mark Wylder, which terminated at his decease. The point was carried on to the House of Lords, but the decision of 'the court below' was ultimately affirmed.

The flexible and angry Jos. Larkin then sought to recoup himself out of the assets of the deceased captain; but here he failed. In his cleverness — lest the inadequate purchase-money should upset his bargain — he omitted the usual covenant guaranteeing the vendor's title to sell the fee-simple, and recited, moreover, that, grave doubts existing on the point, it was agreed that the sum paid should not exceed twelve years' purchase. Jos. then could only go upon the point that it was known to Lake at the period of the sale that Mark Wylder was dead. Unluckily, however, for Jos.'s case, one of his clever letters, written during the negotiation, turned up, and was put in evidence, in which he pressed Captain Lake with the fact, that he, the purchaser, was actually in possession of information to the effect that Mark was dead, and that he was, therefore, buying under a liability of having his title litigated, with a doubtful result, the moment he should enter into possession. This shut up the admirable man, who next tried a rather bold measure, directed against the Reverend William Wylder. A bill was filed by Messrs. Burlington and Smith, to compel him to execute a conveyance to their client — on the terms of the agreement. The step was evidently taken on the calculation that he would strike, and offer a handsome compromise; but Lord Chelford was at his elbow — the suit was resisted. Messrs. Burlington and Smith did not care to run the awful risk which Mr. Larkin, behind the scenes, invited them to accept for his sake. There was first a faltering; then a bold renunciation and exposure of Mr. Jos. Larkin by the firm, who, though rather lamely, exonerated themselves as having been quite taken in by the Gylingden attorney.

Mr. Jos. Larkin had a holy reliance upon his religious reputation, which had always stood him in stead. But a worldly judge will sometimes disappoint the expectations of the Christian suitor; and the language of the Court, in commenting upon Mr. Jos. Larkin, was, I am sorry to say, in the highest degree offensive— 'flagitious,' 'fraudulent,' and kindred epithets, were launched against that tall, bald head, in a storm that darkened the air and obliterated the halo that usually encircled it. He was dismissed, in a tempest, with costs. He vanished from court, like an evil spirit, into the torture-chamber of taxation.

The whole structure of rapine and duplicity had fallen through with a dismal crash. Shrewd fellows wondered, as they always do, when a rash game breaks down, at the infatuation of the performer. But the cup of his tribulation was not yet quite full. Jos. Larkin's name was ultimately struck from the roll of solicitors and attorneys, and there were minute and merciless essays in the papers, surrounding his disgrace with a dreadful glare. People say he has not enough left to go on with. He had lodgings somewhere near Richmond, as Howard Larkin, Esq., and is still a religious character. I am told that he shifts his place of residence about once in six months, and that he has never paid one shilling of rent for any, and has sometimes positively received money for vacating his abode. So substantially valuable is a thorough acquaintance with the capabilities of the law. I saw honest Tom Wealdon about a fortnight ago — grown stouter and somewhat more phlegmatic by time, but still the same in good nature and inquisitiveness. From him I learned that Jos. Larkin is likely to figure once more in the courts about some very ugly defalcations in the cash of the Penningstal Mining Company, and that this time the persecutions of that eminent Christian are likely to take a different turn, and, as Tom said, with a gloomy shrewdness, to end in 'ten years penal.'

Some summers ago, I was, for a few days, in the wondrous city of Venice. Everyone knows something of the enchantment of the Italian moon, the expanse of dark and flashing blue, and the phantasmal city, rising like a beautiful spirit from the waters. Gliding near the Lido — where so many rings of Doges lie lost beneath the waves — I heard the pleasant sound of female voices upon the water — and then, with a sudden glory, rose a sad, wild hymn, like the musical wail of the forsaken sea: —

The spouseless Adriatic mourns her lord.

The song ceased. The gondola which bore the musicians floated by — a slender hand over the gunwale trailed its fingers in the water. Unseen I saw Rachel and Dorcas, beautiful in the sad moonlight, passed so near we could have spoken — passed me like spirits — never more, it may be, to cross my sight in life.

UNCLE SILAS

A TALE OF BARTRAM-HAUGH

First published in 1864, this is Le Fanu’s best known novel and probably his most widely admired. A gothic thriller, the story concerns young Maud Ruthyn and her relationship with her mysterious uncle Silas. This central relationship is reflected in the title under which the novel was first serialised in the *Dublin University Magazine* between July and December 1864: *Maud Ruthyn and Uncle Silas*. Accused of murder and shunned by society, Silas lives alone in his sinister mansion, Bartram-Haugh. When Maud is sent to live with Silas after her father’s death, her faith in her uncle’s innocence is sorely tested by her terrifying experiences – but the reader (and Maud) is kept guessing until the final shocking conclusion.

The novel is based on Le Fanu’s own short story ‘A Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess’ (1839). Indeed, although the novel is set in Britain, apparently in order to appeal to British readers and thus to secure Le Fanu a readership in that country, Elizabeth Bowen famously remarked that she saw the tale as ‘an Irish story transposed to an English setting’.

The atmosphere of mounting unease and mystery, the sinister old house and the motifs of the wicked relative and the imprisoned, terrorised heroine all betray the influence of the eighteenth-century master of the gothic, Ann Radcliffe and her many imitators. This is true of much ‘sensation’ fiction and with this novel, Le Fanu earns his place alongside Wilkie Collins and M. E. Braddon as a master of the genre. The plot unfolds gradually, building a sense of mystery and oppression, aided by Maud’s first-person narrative, which allows readers to experience at first hand the horrors heaped upon her by characters like the repugnant cad Dudley and the sadistic French governess Madam de la Rougierre. But it is the enigma surrounding the inscrutable Byronic anti-hero Silas that provides the main interest and which makes *Uncle Silas* a classic of sensation and Gothic fiction.

The title page of the first edition

A poster for the 1947 film adaptation

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A still from the 1968 television adaptation

A 1987 BBC television adaptation, re-titled ‘The Dark Angel’, starred Peter O’Toole as Silas

TO THE RIGHT HON.

THE COUNTESS OF GIFFORD,

AS A TOKEN OF RESPECT, SYMPATHY, AND ADMIRATION

This Tale

IS INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR

A PRELIMINARY WORD

The writer of this Tale ventures, in his own person, to address a very few words, chiefly of explanation, to his readers. A leading situation in this ‘Story of Bartram-Haugh’ is repeated, with a slight variation, from a short magazine tale of some fifteen pages written by him, and published long ago in a periodical under the title of ‘A Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess,’ and afterwards, still anonymously, in a small volume under an altered title. It is very unlikely that any of his readers should have encountered, and still more so that they should remember, this trifle. The bare possibility, however, he has ventured to anticipate by this brief explanation, lest he should be charged with plagiarism — always a disrespect to a reader.

May he be permitted a few words also of remonstrance against the promiscuous application of the term ‘sensation’ to that large school of fiction which transgresses no one of those canons of construction and morality which, in producing the unapproachable ‘Waverley Novels,’ their great author imposed upon himself? No one, it is assumed, would describe Sir Walter Scott’s romances as ‘sensation novels;’ yet in that marvellous series there is not a single tale in which death, crime, and, in some form, mystery, have not a place.

Passing by those grand romances of ‘Ivanhoe,’ ‘Old Mortality,’ and ‘Kenilworth,’ with their terrible intricacies of crime and bloodshed, constructed with so fine a mastery of the art of exciting suspense and horror, let the reader pick out those two exceptional novels in the series which profess to paint contemporary manners and the scenes of common life; and remembering in the ‘Antiquary’ the vision in the tapestried chamber, the duel, the horrible secret, and the death of old Elspeth, the drowned fisherman, and above all the tremendous situation of the tide-bound party under the cliffs; and in ‘St. Ronan’s Well,’ the long-drawn mystery, the suspicion of insanity, and the catastrophe of suicide; — determine whether an epithet which it would be a profanation to apply to the structure of any, even the most exciting of Sir Walter Scott’s stories, is fairly applicable to tales which, though illimitably inferior in execution, yet observe the same limitations of incident, and the same moral aims.

The author trusts that the Press, to whose masterly criticism and generous encouragement he and other humble labourers in the art owe so much, will insist upon the limitation of that degrading term to the peculiar type of fiction which it was originally intended to indicate, and prevent, as they may, its being made to include the legitimate school of tragic English romance, which has been ennobled, and in great measure founded, by the genius of Sir Walter Scott.

CHAPTER I

AUSTIN RUTHYN, OF KNOWL, AND HIS DAUGHTER

It was winter — that is, about the second week in November — and great gusts were rattling at the windows, and wailing and thundering among our tall trees and ivied chimneys — a very dark night, and a very cheerful fire blazing, a pleasant mixture of good round coal and spluttering dry wood, in a genuine old fireplace, in a sombre old room. Black wainscoting glimmered up to the ceiling, in small ebony panels; a cheerful clump of wax candles on the tea-table; many old portraits, some grim and pale, others pretty, and some very graceful and charming, hanging from the walls. Few pictures, except portraits long and short, were there. On the whole, I think you would have taken the room for our parlour. It was not like our modern notion of a drawingroom. It was a long room too, and every way capacious, but irregularly shaped.

A girl, of a little more than seventeen, looking, I believe, younger still; slight and rather tall, with a great deal of golden hair, dark grey-eyed, and with a countenance rather sensitive and melancholy, was sitting at the tea-table, in a reverie. I was that girl.

The only other person in the room — the only person in the house related to me — was my father. He was Mr. Ruthyn, of Knowl, so called in his county, but he had many other places, was of a very ancient lineage, who had refused a baronetage often, and it was said even a viscounty, being of a proud and defiant spirit, and thinking themselves higher in station and purer of blood than two-thirds of the nobility into whose ranks, it was said, they had been invited to enter. Of all this family lore I knew but little and vaguely; only what is to be gathered from the fireside talk of old retainers in the nursery.

I am sure my father loved me, and I know I loved him. With the sure instinct of childhood I apprehended his tenderness, although it was never expressed in common ways. But my father was an oddity. He had been early disappointed in Parliament, where it was his ambition to succeed.

Though a clever man, he failed there, where very inferior men did extremely well. Then he went abroad, and became a connoisseur and a collector; took a part, on his return, in literary and scientific institutions, and also in the foundation and direction of some charities. But he tired of this mimic government, and gave himself up to a country life, not that of a sportsman, but rather of a student, staying sometimes at one of his places and sometimes at another, and living a secluded life.

Rather late in life he married, and his beautiful young wife died, leaving me, their only child, to his care. This bereavement, I have been told, changed him — made him more odd and taciturn than ever, and his temper also, except to me, more severe. There was also some disgrace about his younger brother — my uncle Silas — which he felt bitterly.

He was now walking up and down this spacious old room, which, extending round an angle at the far end, was very dark in that quarter. It was his wont to walk up and down thus, without speaking — an exercise which used to remind me of Chateaubriand's father in the great chamber of the Château de Combourg. At the far end he nearly disappeared in the gloom, and then returning emerged for a few minutes, like a portrait with a background of shadow, and then again in silence faded nearly out of view.

This monotony and silence would have been terrifying to a person less accustomed to it than I. As it was, it had its effect. I have known my father a whole day without once speaking to me. Though I loved him very much, I was also much in awe of him.

While my father paced the floor, my thoughts were employed about the events of a month before. So few things happened at Knowl out of the accustomed routine, that a very trifling occurrence was enough to set people wondering and conjecturing in that serene household. My father lived in remarkable seclusion; except for a ride, he hardly ever left the grounds of Knowl; and I don't think it happened twice in the year that a visitor sojourned among us.

There was not even that mild religious bustle which sometimes besets the wealthy and moral recluse. My father had left the Church of England for some odd sect, I forget its name, and ultimately became, I was told, a Swedenborgian. But he did not care to trouble me upon the subject. So the old carriage brought my governess, when I had one, the old housekeeper, Mrs. Rusk, and myself to the parish church every Sunday. And my father, in the view of the honest rector who shook his head over him— 'a cloud without water, carried about of winds, and a wandering star to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness' — corresponded with the 'minister' of his church, and was provokingly contented with his own fertility and illumination; and Mrs. Rusk, who was a sound and bitter churchwoman, said he fancied he saw visions and talked with angels like the rest of that 'rubbitch.'

I don't know that she had any better foundation than analogy and conjecture for charging my father with supernatural pretensions; and in all points when her orthodoxy was not concerned, she loved her master and was a loyal housekeeper.

I found her one morning superintending preparations for the reception of a visitor, in the hunting-room it was called, from the pieces of tapestry that covered its walls, representing scenes *à la Wouvermans*, of falconry, and the chase, dogs, hawks, ladies, gallants, and pages. In the midst of whom Mrs. Rusk, in black silk, was rummaging drawers, counting linen, and issuing orders.

'Who is coming, Mrs. Rusk?'

Well, she only knew his name. It was a Mr. Bryerly. My papa expected him to dinner, and to stay for some days.

'I guess he's one of those creatures, dear, for I mentioned his name just to Dr. Clay (the rector), and he says there *is* a Doctor Bryerly, a great conjurer among the Swedenborg sect — and that's him, I do suppose.'

In my hazy notions of these sectaries there was mingled a suspicion of necromancy, and a weird freemasonry, that inspired something of awe and antipathy.

Mr. Bryerly arrived time enough to dress at his leisure, before dinner. He entered the drawingroom — a tall, lean man, all in ungainly black, with a white choker, with either a black wig, or black hair dressed in imitation of one, a pair of spectacles, and a dark, sharp, short visage, rubbing his large hands together, and with a short brisk nod to me, whom he plainly regarded merely as a child, he sat down before the fire, crossed his legs, and took up a magazine.

This treatment was mortifying, and I remember very well the resentment of which *he* was quite unconscious.

His stay was not very long; not one of us divined the object of his visit, and he did not prepossess us favourably. He seemed restless, as men of busy habits do in country houses, and took walks, and a drive, and read in the library, and wrote half a dozen letters.

His bedroom and dressing-room were at the side of the gallery, directly opposite to my father's, which had a sort of anteroom *en suite*, in which were some of his theological books.

The day after Mr. Bryerly's arrival, I was about to see whether my father's water caraffe and glass had been duly laid on the table in this anteroom, and in doubt whether he was there, I knocked at the door.

I suppose they were too intent on other matters to hear, but receiving no answer, I entered the room. My father was sitting in his chair, with his coat and waistcoat off, Mr. Bryerly kneeling on a stool beside him, rather facing him, his black scratch wig leaning close to my father's grizzled hair. There was a large tome of their divinity lore, I suppose, open on the table close by. The lank black figure of Mr. Bryerly stood up, and he concealed something quickly in the breast of his coat.

My father stood up also, looking paler, I think, than I ever saw him till then, and he pointed grimly to the door, and said, 'Go.'

Mr. Bryerly pushed me gently back with his hands to my shoulders, and smiled down from his dark features with an expression quite unintelligible to me.

I had recovered myself in a second, and withdrew without a word. The last thing I saw at the door was the tall, slim figure in black, and the dark, significant smile following me: and then the door was shut and locked, and the two Swedenborgians were left to their mysteries.

I remember so well the kind of shock and disgust I felt in the certainty that I had surprised them at some, perhaps, debasing incantation — a suspicion of this Mr. Bryerly, of the ill-fitting black coat, and white choker — and a sort of fear came upon me, and I fancied he was asserting some kind of mastery over my father, which very much alarmed me.

I fancied all sorts of dangers in the enigmatical smile of the lank high-priest. The image of my father, as I had seen him, it might be, confessing to this man in black, who was I knew not what, haunted me with the disagreeable uncertainties of a mind very uninstructed as to the limits of the marvellous.

I mentioned it to no one. But I was immensely relieved when the sinister visitor took his departure the morning after, and it was upon this occurrence that my mind was now employed.

Some one said that Dr. Johnson resembled a ghost, who must be spoken to before it will speak. But my father, in whatever else he may have resembled a ghost, did not in that particular; for no one but I in his household — and I very seldom — dared to address him until first addressed by him. I had no notion how singular this was until I began to go out a little among friends and relations, and found no such rule in force anywhere else.

As I leaned back in my chair thinking, this phantasm of my father came, and turned, and vanished with a solemn regularity. It was a peculiar figure, strongly made, thick-set, with a face large, and very stern; he wore a loose, black velvet coat and waistcoat. It was, however, the figure of an elderly rather than an old man — though he was then past seventy — but firm, and with no sign of feebleness.

I remember the start with which, not suspecting that he was close by me, I lifted my eyes, and saw that large, rugged countenance looking fixedly on me, from less than a yard away.

After I saw him, he continued to regard me for a second or two; and then, taking one of the heavy candlesticks in his gnarled hand, he beckoned me to follow him; which, in silence and wondering, I accordingly did.

He led me across the hall, where there were lights burning, and into a lobby by the foot of the back stairs, and so into his library.

It is a long, narrow room, with two tall, slim windows at the far end, now draped in dark curtains. Dusky it was with but one candle; and he paused near the door, at the left-hand side of which stood, in those days, an oldfashioned press or cabinet of carved oak. In front of this he stopped.

He had odd, absent ways, and talked more to himself, I believe, than to all the rest of the world put together.

‘She won’t understand,’ he whispered, looking at me enquiringly. ‘No, she won’t. *Will* she?’

Then there was a pause, during which he brought forth from his breast pocket a small bunch of some half-dozen keys, on one of which he looked frowningly, every now and then balancing it a little before his eyes, between his finger and thumb, as he deliberated.

I knew him too well, of course, to interpose a word.

'They are easily frightened — ay, they are. I'd better do it another way.'

And pausing, he looked in my face as he might upon a picture.

'They *are* — yes — I had better do it another way — another way; yes — and she'll not suspect — she'll not suppose.'

Then he looked steadfastly upon the key, and from it to me, suddenly lifting it up, and said abruptly, 'See, child,' and, after a second or two, '*Remember* this key.'

It was oddly shaped, and unlike others.

'Yes, sir.' I always called him 'sir.'

'It opens that,' and he tapped it sharply on the door of the cabinet. 'In the daytime it is always here,' at which word he dropped it into his pocket again. 'You see? — and at night under my pillow — you hear me?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You won't forget this cabinet — oak — next the door — on your left — you won't forget?'

'No, sir.'

'Pity she's a girl, and so young — ay, a girl, and so young — no sense — giddy. You say, you'll *remember*?'

'Yes, sir.'

'It behoves you.'

He turned round and looked full upon me, like a man who has taken a sudden resolution; and I think for a moment he had made up his mind to tell me a great deal more. But if so, he changed it again; and after another pause, he said slowly and sternly— 'You will tell nobody what I have said, under pain of my displeasure.'

'Oh! no, sir!'

'Good child!'

'*Except*,' he resumed, 'under one contingency; that is, in case I should be absent, and Dr. Bryerly — you recollect the thin gentleman, in spectacles and a black wig, who spent three days here last month — should come and enquire for the key, you understand, in my absence.'

'Yes, sir.'

So he kissed me on the forehead, and said —

'Let us return.'

Which, accordingly, we did, in silence; the storm outside, like a dirge on a great organ, accompanying our flitting.

CHAPTER II

UNCLE SILAS

When we reached the drawingroom, I resumed my chair, and my father his slow and regular walk to and fro, in the great room. Perhaps it was the uproar of the wind that disturbed the ordinary tenor of his thoughts; but, whatever was the cause, certainly he was unusually talkative that night.

After an interval of nearly half an hour, he drew near again, and sat down in a high-backed armchair, beside the fire, and nearly opposite to me, and looked at me steadfastly for some time, as was his wont, before speaking; and said he —

‘This won’t do — you must have a governess.’

In cases of this kind I merely set down my book or work, as it might be, and adjusted myself to listen without speaking.

‘Your French is pretty well, and your Italian; but you have no German. Your music may be pretty good — I’m no judge — but your drawing might be better — yes — yes. I believe there are accomplished ladies — finishing governesses, they call them — who undertake more than any one teacher would have professed in my time, and do very well. She can prepare you, and next winter, then, you shall visit France and Italy, where you may be accomplished as highly as you please.’

‘Thank you, sir.’

‘You shall. It is nearly six months since Miss Ellerton left you — too long without a teacher.’

Then followed an interval.

‘Dr. Bryerly will ask you about that key, and what it opens; you show all that to *him*, and no one else.’

‘But,’ I said, for I had a great terror of disobeying him in ever so minute a matter, ‘you will then be absent, sir — how am I to find the key?’

He smiled on me suddenly — a bright but wintry smile — it seldom came, and was very transitory, and kindly though mysterious.

‘True, child; I’m glad you are so wise; *that*, you will find, I have provided for, and you shall know exactly where to look. You have remarked how solitarily I live. You fancy, perhaps, I have not got a friend, and you are nearly right — *nearly*, but not altogether. I have a very sure friend — *one* — a friend whom I once misunderstood, but now appreciate.'

I wondered silently whether it could be Uncle Silas.

'He'll make me a call, some day soon; I'm not quite sure when. I won't tell you his name — you'll hear that soon enough, and I don't want it talked of; and I must make a little journey with him. You'll not be afraid of being left alone for a time?'

'And have you promised, sir?' I answered, with another question, my curiosity and anxiety overcoming my awe. He took my questioning very goodhumouredly.

'Well — *promise*? — no, child; but I'm under condition; he's not to be denied. I must make the excursion with him the moment he calls. I have no choice; but, on the whole, I rather like it — remember, I say, I rather *like* it.'

And he smiled again, with the same meaning, that was at once stern and sad. The exact purport of these sentences remained fixed in my mind, so that even at this distance of time I am quite sure of them.

A person quite unacquainted with my father's habitually abrupt and odd way of talking, would have fancied that he was possibly a little disordered in his mind. But no such suspicion for a moment troubled me. I was quite sure that he spoke of a real person who was coming, and that his journey was something momentous; and when the visitor of whom he spoke did come, and he departed with him upon that mysterious excursion, I perfectly understood his language and his reasons for saying so much and yet so little.

You are not to suppose that all my hours were passed in the sort of conference and isolation of which I have just given you a specimen; and singular and even awful as were sometimes my *tête-a-têtes* with my father, I had grown so accustomed to his strange ways, and had so unbounded a confidence in his affection, that they never depressed or agitated me in the manner you might have supposed. I had a great deal of quite a different sort of chat with good old Mrs. Rusk, and very pleasant talks with Mary Quince, my somewhat ancient maid; and besides all this, I had now and then a visit of a week or so at the house of some one of our country neighbours, and occasionally a visitor — but this, I must own, very rarely — at Knowl.

There had come now a little pause in my father's revelations, and my fancy wandered away upon a flight of discovery. Who, I again thought, could this intending visitor be, who was to come, armed with the prerogative to make my stay-at-home father forthwith leave his household goods — his books and his child — to whom he clung, and set forth on an unknown knight-errantry? Who but Uncle Silas, I thought — that mysterious relative whom I had never seen — who was, it had in old times been very darkly hinted to me, unspeakably unfortunate or unspeakably vicious — whom I had seldom heard my father mention, and then in a hurried way, and with a pained, thoughtful look. Once only he had said anything from which I could gather my father's opinion of him, and then it was so slight and enigmatical that I might have filled in the character very nearly as I pleased.

It happened thus. One day Mrs. Rusk was in the oak-room, I being then about fourteen. She was removing a stain from a tapestry chair, and I watched the process with a childish interest. She sat down to rest herself — she had been stooping over her work — and threw her head back, for her neck was weary, and in this position she fixed her eyes on a portrait that hung before her.

It was a full-length, and represented a singularly handsome young man, dark, slender, elegant, in a costume then quite obsolete, though I believe it was seen at the beginning of this century — white leather pantaloons and topboots, a buff waistcoat, and a chocolate-coloured coat, and the hair long and brushed back.

There was a remarkable elegance and a delicacy in the features, but also a character of resolution and ability that quite took the portrait out of the category of mere fops or fine men. When people looked at it for the first time, I have so often heard the exclamation— 'What a wonderfully handsome man!' and then, 'What a clever face!' An Italian greyhound stood by him, and some slender columns and a rich drapery in the background. But though the accessories were of the luxurious sort, and the beauty, as I have said, refined, there was a masculine force in that slender oval face, and a fire in the large, shadowy eyes, which were very peculiar, and quite redeemed it from the suspicion of effeminacy.

'Is not that Uncle Silas?' said I.

‘Yes, dear,’ answered Mrs. Rusk, looking, with her resolute little face, quietly on the portrait.

‘He must be a very handsome man, Mrs. Rusk. Don’t you think so?’ I continued.

‘He *was*, my dear — yes; but it is forty years since that was painted — the date is there in the corner, in the shadow that comes from his foot, and forty years, I can tell you, makes a change in most of us;’ and Mrs. Rusk laughed, in cynical goodhumour.

There was a little pause, both still looking on the handsome man in topboots, and I said —

‘And why, Mrs. Rusk, is papa always so sad about Uncle Silas?’

‘What’s that, child?’ said my father’s voice, very near. I looked round, with a start, and flushed and faltered, receding a step from him.

‘No harm, dear. You have said nothing wrong,’ he said gently, observing my alarm. ‘You said I was always sad, I think, about Uncle Silas. Well, I don’t know how you gather that; but if I were, I will now tell you, it would not be unnatural. Your uncle is a man of great talents, great faults, and great wrongs. His talents have not availed him; his faults are long ago repented of; and his wrongs I believe he feels less than I do, but they are deep. Did she say any more, madam?’ he demanded abruptly of Mrs. Rusk.

‘Nothing, sir,’ with a stiff little courtesy, answered Mrs. Rusk, who stood in awe of him.

‘And there is no need, child,’ he continued, addressing himself to me, ‘that you should think more of him at present. Clear your head of Uncle Silas. One day, perhaps, you will know him — yes, very well — and understand how villains have injured him.

Then my father retired, and at the door he said —

‘Mrs. Rusk, a word, if you please,’ beckoning to that lady, who trotted after him to the library.

I think he then laid some injunction upon the housekeeper, which was transmitted by her to Mary Quince, for from that time forth I could never lead either to talk with me about Uncle Silas. They let me talk on, but were reserved and silent themselves, and seemed embarrassed, and Mrs. Rusk sometimes pettish and angry, when I pressed for information.

Thus curiosity was piqued; and round the slender portrait in the leather pantaloons and topboots gathered many-coloured circles of mystery, and the handsome features seemed to smile down upon my baffled curiosity with a provoking significance.

Why is it that this form of ambition — curiosity — which entered into the temptation of our first parent, is so specially hard to resist? Knowledge is power — and power of one sort or another is the secret lust of human souls; and here is, beside the sense of exploration, the undefinable interest of a story, and above all, something forbidden, to stimulate the contumacious appetite.

CHAPTER III

A NEW FACE

I think it was about a fortnight after that conversation in which my father had expressed his opinion, and given me the mysterious charge about the old oak cabinet in his library, as already detailed, that I was one night sitting at the great drawingroom window, lost in the melancholy reveries of night, and in admiration of the moonlighted scene. I was the only occupant of the room; and the lights near the fire, at its farther end, hardly reached to the window at which I sat.

The shorn grass sloped gently downward from the windows till it met the broad level on which stood, in clumps, or solitarily scattered, some of the noblest timber in England. Hoar in the moonbeams stood those graceful trees casting their moveless shadows upon the grass, and in the background crowning the undulations of the distance, in masses, were piled those woods among which lay the solitary tomb where the remains of my beloved mother rested.

The air was still. The silvery vapour hung serenely on the far horizon, and the frosty stars blinked brightly. Everyone knows the effect of such a scene on a mind already saddened. Fancies and regrets float mistily in the dream, and the scene affects us with a strange mixture of memory and anticipation, like some sweet old air heard in the distance. As my eyes rested on those, to me, funereal but glorious woods, which formed the background of the picture, my thoughts recurred to my father's mysterious intimations and the image of the approaching visitor; and the thought of the unknown journey saddened me.

In all that concerned his religion, from very early association, there was to me something of the unearthly and spectral.

When my dear mamma died I was not nine years old; and I remember, two days before the funeral, there came to Knowl, where she died, a thin little man, with large black eyes, and a very grave, dark face.

He was shut up a good deal with my dear father, who was in deep affliction; and Mrs. Rusk used to say, 'It is rather odd to see him praying with that little scarecrow from London, and good Mr. Clay ready at call, in the village; much good that little black whipper-snapper will do him!'

With that little black man, on the day after the funeral, I was sent out, for some reason, for a walk; my governess was ill, I know, and there was confusion in the house, and I dare say the maids made as much of a holiday as they could.

I remember feeling a sort of awe of this little dark man; but I was not afraid of him, for he was gentle, though sad — and seemed kind. He led me into the garden — the Dutch garden, we used to call it — with a balustrade, and statues at the farther front, laid out in a carpet-pattern of brilliantly-coloured flowers. We came down the broad flight of Caen stone steps into this, and we walked in silence to the balustrade. The base was too high at the spot where we reached it for me to see over; but holding my hand, he said, 'Look through that, my child. Well, you can't; but *I* can see beyond it — shall I tell you what? I see ever so much. I see a cottage with a steep roof, that looks like gold in the sunlight; there are tall trees throwing soft shadows round it, and flowering shrubs, I can't say what, only the colours are beautiful, growing by the walls and windows, and two little children are playing among the stems of the trees, and we are on our way there, and in a few minutes shall be under those trees ourselves, and talking to those little children. Yet now to me it is but a picture in my brain, and to you but a story told by me, which you believe. Come, dear; let us be going.'

So we descended the steps at the right, and side by side walked along the grass lane between tall trim walls of evergreens. The way was in deep shadow, for the sun was near the horizon; but suddenly we turned to the left, and there we stood in rich sunlight, among the many objects he had described.

'Is this your house, my little men?' he asked of the children — pretty little rosy boys — who assented; and he leaned with his open hand against the stem of one of the trees, and with a grave smile he nodded down to me, saying —

'You see now, and hear, and *feel* for yourself that both the vision and the story were quite true; but come on, my dear, we have further to go.'

And relapsing into silence we had a long ramble through the wood, the same on which I was now looking in the distance. Every now and then he made me sit down to rest, and he in a musing solemn sort of way would relate some little story, reflecting, even to my childish mind, a strange suspicion of a spiritual meaning, but different from what honest Mrs. Rusk used to expound to me from the Parables, and, somehow, startling in its very vagueness.

Thus entertained, though a little awfully, I accompanied the dark mysterious little 'whipper-snapper' through the woodland glades. We came, to me quite unexpectedly, in the deep sylvan shadows, upon the grey, pillared temple, four-fronted, with a slanting pedestal of lichen-stained steps, the lonely sepulchre in which I had the morning before seen poor mamma laid. At the sight the fountains of my grief reopened, and I cried bitterly, repeating, 'Oh! mamma, mamma, little mamma!' and so went on weeping and calling wildly on the deaf and the silent. There was a stone bench some ten steps away from the tomb.

'Sit down beside me, my child,' said the grave man with the black eyes, very kindly and gently. 'Now, what do you see there?' he asked, pointing horizontally with his stick towards the centre of the opposite structure.

'Oh, *that* — that place where poor mamma is?'

'Yes, a stone wall with pillars, too high for either you or me to see over. But — — '

Here he mentioned a name which I think must have been Swedenborg, from what I afterwards learnt of his tenets and revelations; I only know that it sounded to me like the name of a magician in a fairy tale; I fancied he lived in the wood which surrounded us, and I began to grow frightened as he proceeded.

'But Swedenborg sees beyond it, over, and *through* it, and has told me all that concerns us to know. He says your mamma is not there.'

'She is taken away!' I cried, starting up, and with streaming eyes, gazing on the building which, though I stamped my feet in my distraction, I was afraid to approach. 'Oh, *is* mamma taken away? Where is she? Where have they brought her to?'

I was uttering unconsciously very nearly the question with which Mary, in the grey of that wondrous morning on which she stood by the empty sepulchre, accosted the figure standing near.

'Your mamma is alive but too far away to see or hear us. Swedenborg, standing here, can see and hear her, and tells me all he sees, just as I told you in the garden about the little boys and the cottage, and the trees and flowers which you could not see. You believed in when *I* told you. So I can tell you now as I did then; and as we are both, I hope, walking on to the same place just as we did to the trees and cottage. You will surely see with your own eyes how true the description is which I give you.'

I was very frightened, for I feared that when he had done his narrative we were to walk on through the wood into that place of wonders and of shadows where the dead were visible.

He leaned his elbow on his knee, and his forehead on his hand, which shaded his downcast eyes. In that attitude he described to me a beautiful landscape, radiant with a wondrous light, in which, rejoicing, my mother moved along an airy path, ascending among mountains of fantastic height, and peaks, melting in celestial colouring into the air, and peopled with human beings translated into the same image, beauty, and splendour. And when he had ended his relation, he rose, took my hand, and smiling gently down on my pale, wondering face, he said the same words he had spoken before —

'Come, dear, let us go.'

'Oh! no, no, *no* — not now,' I said, resisting, and very much frightened.

'Home, I mean, dear. We cannot walk to the place I have described. We can only reach it through the gate of death, to which we are all tending, young and old, with sure steps.'

'And where is the gate of death?' I asked in a sort of whisper, as we walked together, holding his hand, and looking stealthily. He smiled sadly and said —

'When, sooner or later, the time comes, as Hagar's eyes were opened in the wilderness, and she beheld the fountain of water, so shall each of us see the door open before us, and enter in and be refreshed.'

For a long time following this walk I was very nervous; more so for the awful manner in which Mrs. Rusk received my statement — with stern lips and upturned hands and eyes, and an angry expostulation: 'I do wonder at you, Mary Quince, letting the child walk into the wood with that limb of darkness. It is a mercy he did not show her the devil, or frighten her out of her senses, in that lonely place!'

Of these Swedenborgians, indeed, I know no more than I might learn from good Mrs. Rusk's very inaccurate talk. Two or three of them crossed in the course of my early life, like magic-lantern figures, the disk of my very circumscribed observation. All outside was and is darkness. I once tried to read one of their books upon the future state — heaven and hell; but I grew after a day or two so nervous that I laid it aside. It is enough for me to know that their founder either saw or fancied he saw amazing visions, which, so far from superseding, confirmed and interpreted the language of the Bible; and as dear papa accepted their ideas, I am happy in thinking that they did not conflict with the supreme authority of holy writ.

Leaning on my hand, I was now looking upon that solemn wood, white and shadowy in the moonlight, where, for a long time after that ramble with the visionary, I fancied the gate of death, hidden only by a strange glamour, and the dazzling land of ghosts, were situate; and I suppose these earlier associations gave to my reverie about my father's coming visitor a wilder and a sadder tinge.

CHAPTER IV

MADAME DE LA ROUGIERRE

On a sudden, on the grass before me, stood an odd figure — a very tall woman in grey draperies, nearly white under the moon, courtesying extraordinarily low, and rather fantastically.

I stared in something like a horror upon the large and rather hollow features which I did not know, smiling very unpleasantly on me; and the moment it was plain that I saw her, the grey woman began gobbling and cackling shrilly — I could not distinctly hear *what* through the window — and gesticulating oddly with her long hands and arms.

As she drew near the window, I flew to the fireplace, and rang the bell frantically, and seeing her still there, and fearing that she might break into the room, I flew out of the door, very much frightened, and met Branston the butler in the lobby.

'There's a woman at the window!' I gasped; 'turn her away, please.'

If I had said a man, I suppose fat Branston would have summoned and sent forward a detachment of footmen. As it was, he bowed gravely, with a —

'Yes,'m — shall,'m.'

And with an air of authority approached the window.

I don't think that he was pleasantly impressed himself by the first sight of our visitor, for he stopped short some steps of the window, and demanded rather sternly —

'What ye doin' there, woman?'

To this summons, her answer, which occupied a little time, was inaudible to me. But Branston replied —

'I wasn't aware, ma'am; I heerd nothin'; if you'll go round *that* way, you'll see the hall-door steps, and I'll speak to the master, and do as he shall order.'

The figure said something and pointed.

'Yes, that's it, and ye can't miss the door.'

And Mr. Branston returned slowly down the long room, and halted with out-turned pumps and a grave inclination before me, and the faintest amount of interrogation in the announcement —

‘Please,’m, she says she’s the governess.’

‘The governess! *What* governess?’

Branston was too well-bred to smile, and he said thoughtfully —

‘P’raps,’m, I’d best ask the master?’

To which I assented, and away strode the flat pumps of the butler to the library.

I stood breathless in the hall. Every girl at my age knows how much is involved in such an advent. I also heard Mrs. Rusk, in a minute or two more, emerge I suppose from the study. She walked quickly, and muttered sharply to herself — an evil trick, in which she indulged when much ‘put about.’ I should have been glad of a word with her; but I fancied she was vexed, and would not have talked satisfactorily. She did not, however, come my way; merely crossing the hall with her quick, energetic step.

Was it really the arrival of a governess? Was that apparition which had impressed me so unpleasantly to take the command of me — to sit alone with me, and haunt me perpetually with her sinister looks and shrilly gabble?

I was just making up my mind to go to Mary Quince, and learn something definite, when I heard my father’s step approaching from the library: so I quietly reentered the drawingroom, but with an anxious and throbbing heart.

When he came in, as usual, he patted me on the head gently, with a kind of smile, and then began his silent walk up and down the room. I was yearning to question him on the point that just then engrossed me so disagreeably; but the awe in which I stood of him forbade.

After a time he stopped at the window, the curtain of which I had drawn, and the shutter partly opened, and he looked out, perhaps with associations of his own, on the scene I had been contemplating.

It was not for nearly an hour after, that my father suddenly, after his wont, in a few words, apprised me of the arrival of Madame de la Rougierre to be my governess, highly recommended and perfectly qualified. My heart sank with a sure presage of ill. I already disliked, distrusted, and feared her.

I had more than an apprehension of her temper and fear of possibly abused authority. The large-featured, smirking phantom, saluting me so oddly in the moonlight, retained ever after its peculiar and unpleasant hold upon my nerves.

‘Well, Miss Maud, dear, I hope you’ll like your new governess — for it’s more than *I* do, just at present at least,’ said Mrs. Rusk, sharply — she was awaiting me in my room. ‘I hate them French-women; they’re not natural, I think. I gave her her supper in my room. She eats like a wolf, she does, the great rawboned hannimal. I wish you saw her in bed as I did. I put her next the clock-room — she’ll hear the hours betimes, I’m thinking. You never saw such a sight. The great long nose and hollow cheeks of her, and oogh! such a mouth! I felt a’most like little Red Riding-Hood — I did, Miss.’

Here honest Mary Quince, who enjoyed Mrs. Rusk’s satire, a weapon in which she was not herself strong, laughed outright.

‘Turn down the bed, Mary. She’s very agreeable — she is, just now — all newcomers is; but she did not get many compliments from me, Miss — no, I rayther think not. I wonder why honest English girls won’t answer the gentry for governesses, instead of them gaping, scheming, wicked furriners? Lord forgi’ me, I think they’re all alike.’

Next morning I made acquaintance with Madame de la Rougierre. She was tall, masculine, a little ghastly perhaps, and draped in purple silk, with a lace cap, and great bands of black hair, too thick and black, perhaps, to correspond quite naturally with her bleached and sallow skin, her hollow jaws, and the fine but grim wrinkles traced about her brows and eyelids. She smiled, she nodded, and then for a good while she scanned me in silence with a steady cunning eye, and a stern smile.

‘And how is she named — what is Mademoiselle’s name?’ said the tall stranger.

‘*Maud*, Madame.’

‘Maud! — what pretty name! Eh bien! I am very sure my dear Maud she will be very good little girl — is not so? — and I am sure I shall love you vary moche. And what ‘av you been learning, Maud, my dear cheaile — music, French, German, eh?’

‘Yes, a little; and I had just begun the use of the globes when my governess went away.’

I nodded towards the globes, which stood near her, as I said this.

‘Oh! yes — the globes;’ and she spun one of them with her great hand. ‘Je vous expliquerai tout cela à fond.’

Madame de la Rougierre, I found, was always quite ready to explain everything ‘à fond;’ but somehow her ‘explications,’ as she termed them, were not very intelligible, and when pressed her temper woke up; so that I preferred, after a while, accepting the expositions just as they came.

Madame was on an unusually large scale, a circumstance which made some of her traits more startling, and altogether rendered her, in her strange way, more awful in the eyes of a nervous *child,* I may say, such as I was. She used to look at me for a long time sometimes, with the peculiar smile I have mentioned, and a great finger upon her lip, like the Eleusinian priestess on the vase.

She would sit, too, sometimes for an hour together, looking into the fire or out of the window, plainly seeing nothing, and with an odd, fixed look of something like triumph — very nearly a smile — on her cunning face.

She was by no means a pleasant *gouvernante* for a nervous girl of my years. Sometimes she had accesses of a sort of hilarity which frightened me still more than her graver moods, and I will describe these by-and-by.

CHAPTER V

SIGHTS AND NOISES

There is not an old house in England of which the servants and young people who live in it do not cherish some traditions of the ghostly. Knowl has its shadows, noises, and marvellous records. Rachel Ruthyn, the beauty of Queen Anne's time, who died of grief for the handsome Colonel Norbrooke, who was killed in the Low Countries, walks the house by night, in crisp and sounding silks. She is not seen, only heard. The tapping of her high-heeled shoes, the sweep and rustle of her brocades, her sighs as she pauses in the galleries, near the bedroom doors; and sometimes, on stormy nights, her sobs.

There is, beside, the 'linkman', a lank, dark-faced, blackhaired man, in a sable suit, with a link or torch in his hand. It usually only smoulders, with a deep red glow, as he visits his beat. The library is one of the rooms he sees to. Unlike 'Lady Rachel,' as the maids called her, he is seen only, never heard. His steps fall noiseless as shadows on floor and carpet. The lurid glow of his smouldering torch imperfectly lights his figure and face, and, except when much perturbed, his link never blazes. On those occasions, however, as he goes his rounds, he ever and anon whirls it around his head, and it bursts into a dismal flame. This is a fearful omen, and always portends some direful crisis or calamity. It occurs, only once or twice in a century.

I don't know whether Madame had heard anything of these phenomena; but she did report which very much frightened me and Mary Quince. She asked us who walked in the gallery on which her bedroom opened, making a rustling with her dress, and going down the stairs, and breathing long breaths here and there. Twice, she said, she had stood at her door in the dark, listening to these sounds, and once she called to know who it was. There was no answer, but the person plainly turned back, and hurried towards her with an unnatural speed, which made her jump within her door and shut it.

When first such tales are told, they excite the nerves of the young and the ignorant intensely. But the special effect, I have found, soon wears out The tale simply takes it's place with the rest. It was with Madame's narrative.

About a week after its relation, I had my experience of a similar sort. Mary Quince went downstairs for a night-light, leaving me in bed, a candle burning in the room, and being tired. I fell asleep before her return. When I awoke the candle had been extinguished. But I heard a step softly approaching. I jumped up — quite forgetting the ghost, and thinking only of Mary Quince — and opened the door, expecting to see the light of her candle. Instead, all was dark, and near me I heard the fall of a bare foot on the oak floor. It was as if some one had stumbled. I said, 'Mary,' but no answer came, only a rustling of clothes and a breathing at the other side of the gallery, which passed off towards the upper staircase. I turned into my room, freezing with horror, and clapt my door. The noise wakened Mary Quince, who had returned and gone to her bed half an hour before.

About a fortnight after this, Mary Quince, a very veracious spinster, reported to me, that having got up to fix the window, which was rattling, at about four o'clock in the morning, she saw a light shining from the library window. She could swear to its being a strong light, streaming through the chinks of the shutter, and moving. No doubt the link was waved about his head by the angry 'linkman.'

These strange occurrences helped, I think, just then to make me nervous, and prepared the way for the odd sort of ascendency which, through my sense of the mysterious and supernatural, that repulsive Frenchwoman was gradually, and it seemed without effort, establishing over me.

Some dark points of her character speedily emerged from the prismatic mist with which she had enveloped it.

Mrs. Rusk's observation about the agreeability of newcomers I found to be true; for as Madame began to lose that character, her goodhumour abated very perceptibly, and she began to show gleams of another sort of temper, that was lurid and dangerous.

Notwithstanding this, she was in the habit of always having her Bible open by her, and was austerely attentive at morning and evening services, and asked my father, with great humility, to lend her some translations of Swedenborg's books, which she laid much to heart.

When we went out for our walk, if the weather were bad we generally made our promenade up and down the broad terrace in front of the windows. Sullen and malign at times she used to look, and as suddenly she would pat me on the shoulder caressingly, and smile with a grotesque benignity, asking tenderly, 'Are you fatigue, ma chère?' or 'Are you cold-a, dear Maud?'

At first these abrupt transitions puzzled me, sometimes half frightened me, savouring, I fancied, of insanity. The key, however, was accidentally supplied, and I found that these accesses of demonstrative affection were sure to supervene whenever my father's face was visible through the library windows.

I did not know well what to make of this woman, whom I feared with a vein of superstitious dread. I hated being alone with her after dusk in the schoolroom. She would sometimes sit for half an hour at a time, with her wide mouth drawn down at the corners, and a scowl, looking into the fire. If she saw me looking at her, she would change all this on the instant, affect a sort of languor, and lean her head upon her hand, and ultimately have recourse to her Bible. But I fancied she did not read, but pursued her own dark ruminations, for I observed that the open book might often lie for half an hour or more under her eyes and yet the leaf never turned.

I should have been glad to be assured that she prayed when on her knees, or read when that book was before her; I should have felt that she was more canny and human. As it was, those external pieties made a suspicion of a hollow contrast with realities that helped to scare me; yet it was but a suspicion — I could not be certain.

Our rector and the curate, with whom she was very gracious, and anxious about my collects and catechism, had an exalted opinion of her. In public places her affection for me was always demonstrative.

In like manner she contrived conferences with my father. She was always making excuses to consult him about my reading, and to confide in him her sufferings, as I learned, from my contumacy and temper. The fact is, I was altogether quiet and submissive. But I think she had a wish to reduce me to a state of the most abject bondage. She had designs of domination and subversion regarding the entire household, I now believe, worthy of the evil spirit I sometimes fancied her.

My father beckoned me into the study one day, and said he —

‘You ought not to give poor Madame so much pain. She is one of the few persons who take an interest in you; why should she have so often to complain of your ill-temper and disobedience? — why should she be compelled to ask my permission to punish you? Don’t be afraid, I won’t concede that. But in so kind a person it argues much. Affection I can’t command — respect and obedience I may — and I insist on your rendering *both* to Madame.’

‘But sir,’ I said, roused into courage by the gross injustice of the charge, ‘I have always done exactly as she bid me, and never said one disrespectful word to Madame.’

‘I don’t think, child, *you* are the best judge of that. Go, and *amend*.’ And with a displeased look he pointed to the door. My heart swelled with the sense of wrong, and as I reached the door I turned to say another word, but I could not, and only burst into tears.

‘There — don’t cry, little Maud — only let us do better for the future. There — there — there has been enough.’

And he kissed my forehead, and gently put me out and closed the door.

In the schoolroom I took courage, and with some warmth upbraided Madame.

‘Wat wicked cheaile!’ moaned Madame, demurely. ‘Read aloud those three — yes, *those* three chapters of the Bible, my dear Maud.’

There was no special fitness in those particular chapters, and when they were ended she said in a sad tone —

‘Now, dear, you must commit to memory this pretty priaire for umility of art.’

It was a long one, and in a state of profound irritation I got through the task.

Mrs. Rusk hated her. She said she stole wine and brandy whenever the opportunity offered — that she was always asking her for such stimulants and pretending pains in her stomach. Here, perhaps, there was exaggeration; but I knew it was true that I had been at different times despatched on that errand and pretext for brandy to Mrs. Rusk, who at last came to her bedside with pills and a mustard blister only, and was hated irrevocably ever after.

I felt all this was done to torture me. But a day is a long time to a child, and they forgive quickly. It was always with a sense of danger that I heard Madame say she must go and see Monsieur Ruthyn in the library, and I think a jealousy of her growing influence was an ingredient in the detestation in which honest Mrs. Rusk held her.

CHAPTER VI

A WALK IN THE WOOD

Two little pieces of by-play in which I detected her confirmed my unpleasant suspicion. From the corner of the gallery I one day saw her, when she thought I was out and all quiet, with her ear at the keyhole of papa's study, as we used to call the sitting-room next his bedroom. Her eyes were turned in the direction of the stairs, from which only she apprehended surprise. Her great mouth was open, and her eyes absolutely goggled with eagerness. She was devouring all that was passing there. I drew back into the shadow with a kind of disgust and horror. She was transformed into a great gaping reptile. I felt that I could have thrown something at her; but a kind of fear made me recede again toward my room. Indignation, however, quickly returned, and I came back, treading briskly as I did so. When I reached the angle of the gallery again. Madame, I suppose, had heard me, for she was halfway down the stairs.

'Ah, my dear Cheaile, I am so glad to find you, and you are dress to come out. We shall have so pleasant walk.'

At that moment the door of my father's study opened, and Mrs. Rusk, with her dark energetic face very much flushed, stepped out in high excitement.

'The Master says you may have the brandy-bottle, Madame and I'm glad to be rid of it — *I* am.'

Madame courtesied with a great smirk, that was full of intangible hate and insult.

'Better your own brandy, if drink you must!' exclaimed Mrs. Rusk. 'You may come to the store-room now, or the butler can take it.'

And off whisked Mrs. Rusk for the back staircase.

There had been no common skirmish on this occasion, but a pitched battle.

Madame had made a sort of pet of Anne Wixted, an underchambermaid, and attached her to her interest economically by persuading me to make her presents of some old dresses and other things. Anne was such an angel!

But Mrs. Rusk, whose eyes were about her, detected Anne, with a brandy-bottle under her apron, stealing upstairs. Anne, in a panic, declared the truth. Madame had commissioned her to buy it in the town, and convey it to her bedroom. Upon this, Mrs. Rusk impounded the flask; and, with Anne beside her, rather precipitately appeared before 'the Master.' He heard and summoned Madame. Madame was cool, frank, and fluent. The brandy was purely medicinal. She produced a document in the form of a note. Doctor Somebody presented his compliments to Madame de la Rougierre, and ordered her a table-spoonful of brandy and some drops of laudanum whenever the pain of stomach returned. The flask would last a whole year, perhaps two. She claimed her medicine.

Man's estimate of woman is higher than woman's own. Perhaps in their relations to men they are generally more trustworthy — perhaps woman's is the juster, and the other an appointed illusion. I don't know; but so it is ordained.

Mrs. Rusk was recalled, and I saw, as you are aware, Madame's procedure during the interview.

It was a great battle — a great victory. Madame was in high spirits. The air was sweet — the landscape charming — I, so good — everything so beautiful! Where should we go? *this* way?

I had made a resolution to speak as little as possible to Madame, I was so incensed at the treachery I had witnessed; but such resolutions do not last long with very young people, and by the time we had reached the skirts of the wood we were talking pretty much as usual.

'I don't wish to go into the wood, Madame.

'And for what?'

'Poor mamma is buried there.'

'Is *there* the vault?' demanded Madame eagerly.

I assented.

'My faith, curious reason; you say because poor mamma is buried there you will not approach! Why, cheaile, what would good Monsieur Ruthyn say if he heard such thing? You are surely not so unkain', and I am with you. *Allons*. Let us come — even a little part of the way.'

And so I yielded, though still reluctant.

There was a grass-grown road, which we easily reached, leading to the sombre building, and we soon arrived before it.

Madame de la Rougierre seemed rather curious. She sat down on the little bank opposite, in her most languid pose — her head leaned upon the tips of her fingers.

'How very sad — how solemn!' murmured Madame. 'What noble tomb! How triste, my dear cheaile, your visit 'ere must it be, remembering a so sweet maman. There is new inscription — is it not new?' And so, indeed, it seemed.

'I am fatigue — maybe you will read it aloud to me slowly and solemnly, my dearest Maud?'

As I approached, I happened to look, I can't tell why, suddenly, over my shoulder; I was startled, for Madame was grimacing after me with a vile derisive distortion. She pretended to be seized with a fit of coughing. But it would not do: she saw that I had detected her, and she laughed aloud.

'Come here, dear cheaile. I was just reflecting how foolish is all this thing — the tomb — the epitaph. I think I would 'av none — no, no epitaph. We regard them first for the oracle of the dead, and find them after only the folly of the living. So I despise. Do you think your house of Knowl down there is what you call haunt, my dear?'

'Why?' said I, flushing and growing pale again. I felt quite afraid of Madame, and confounded at the suddenness of all this.

'Because Anne Wixted she says there is ghost. How dark is this place! and so many of the Ruthyn family they are buried here — is not so? How high and thick are the trees all round! and nobody comes near.'

And Madame rolled her eyes awfully, as if she expected to see something unearthly, and, indeed, looked very like it herself.

'Come away, Madame,' I said, growing frightened, and feeling that if I were once, by any accident, to give way to the panic that was gathering round me, I should instantaneously lose all control of myself. 'Oh, come away! do, Madame — I'm frightened.'

'No, on the contrary, sit here by me. It is very odd, you will think, ma chêre — un goût bizarre, vraiment! — but I love very much to be near to the dead people — in solitary place like this. I am not afraid of the dead people, nor of the ghosts. 'Av you ever see a ghost, my dear?'

'Do, Madame, *pray* speak of something else.'

‘Wat little fool! But no, you are not afraid. I ‘av seen the ghosts myself. I saw one, for example, last night, shape like a monkey, sitting in the corner, with his arms round his knees; very wicked, old, old man his face was like, and white eyes so large.’

‘Come away, Madame! you are trying to frighten me,’ I said, in the childish anger which accompanies fear. Madame laughed an ugly laugh, and said —

‘Eh bien! little fool! — I will not tell the rest if you are really frightened; let us change to something else.’

‘Yes, yes! oh, do — pray do.’

‘Wat good man is your father!’

‘Very — the kindest darling. I don’t know why it is, Madame, I am so afraid of him, and never could tell him how much I love him.’

This confidential talking with Madame, strange to say, implied no confidence; it resulted from fear — it was deprecatory. I treated her as if she had human sympathies, in the hope that they might be generated somehow.

‘Was there not a doctor from London with him a few months ago? Dr. Bryerly, I think they call him.’

‘Yes, a Doctor Bryerly, who remained a few days. Shall we begin to walk towards home, Madame? Do, pray.’

‘Immediately, cheaile; and does your father suffer much?’

‘No — I think not.’

‘And what then is his disease?’

‘Disease! he has *no* disease. Have you heard anything about his health, Madame?’ I said, anxiously.

‘Oh no, ma foi — I have heard nothing; but if the doctor came, it was not because he was quite well.’

‘But that doctor is a doctor in theology, I fancy. I know he is a Swedenborgian; and papa is so well, he *could* not have come as a physician.’

‘I am very glad, ma chère, to hear; but still you know your father is old man to have so young cheaile as you. Oh, yes — he is old man, and so uncertain life is. ‘As he made his will, my dear? Every man so rich as he, especially so old, aught to ‘av made his will.’

‘There is no need of haste, Madame; it is quite time enough when his health begins to fail.’

‘But has he really compose no will?’

‘I really don’t know, Madame.’

‘Ah, little rogue! you will not tell — but you are not such fool as you feign yourself. No, no; you know everything. Come, tell me all about — it is for your advantage, you know. What is in his will, and when he wrote?’

‘But, Madame, I really know nothing of it. I can’t say whether there is a will or not. Let us talk of something else.’

‘But, cheaile, it will not kill Monsieur Ruthyn to make his will; he will not come to lie here a day sooner by cause of that; but if he make no will, you may lose a great deal of the property. Would not that be pity?’

‘I really don’t know anything of his will. If papa has made one, he has never spoken of it to me. I know he loves me — that is enough.’

‘Ah! you are not such little goose — you do know everything, of course. Come tell me, little obstinate, otherwise I will break your little finger. Tell me everything.’

‘I know nothing of papa’s will. You don’t know, Madame, how you hurt me. Let us speak of something else.’

‘You do know, and you must tell, petite dure-tête, or I will break a your little finger.’

With which words she seized that joint, and laughing spitefully, she twisted it suddenly back. I screamed while she continued to laugh.

‘Will you tell?’

‘Yes, yes! let me go,’ I shrieked.

She did not release it immediately however, but continued her torture and discordant laughter. At last she finally released my finger.

‘So she is going to be good cheaile, and tell everything to her affectionate gouvernante. What do you cry for, little fool?’

‘You’ve hurt me very much — you have broken my finger,’ I sobbed.

‘Rub it and blow it and give it a kiss, little fool! What cross girl! I will never play with you again — never. Let us go home.’

Madame was silent and morose all the way home. She would not answer my questions, and affected to be very lofty and offended.

This did not last very long, however, and she soon resumed her wonted ways. And she returned to the question of the will, but not so directly, and with more art.

Why should this dreadful woman's thoughts be running so continually upon my father's will? How could it concern her?

CHAPTER VII

CHURCH SCARSDALE

I think all the females of our household, except Mrs. Rusk, who was at open feud with her and had only room for the fiercer emotions, were more or less afraid of this inauspicious foreigner.

Mrs. Rusk would say in her confidences in my room —

‘Where does she come from? — is she a French or a Swiss one, or is she a Canada woman? I remember one of *them* when I was a girl, and a nice limb *she* was, too! And who did she live with? Where was her last family? Not one of us knows nothing about her, no more than a child; except, of course, the Master — I do suppose he made enquiry. She’s always at hugger-mugger with Anne Wixted. I’ll pack that *one* about her business, if she doesn’t mind. Tattling and whispering eternally. It’s not about her own business she’s a-talking. Madame de la Rougepot, I call her. She *does* know how to paint up to the ninety-nines — she does, the old cat. I beg your pardon, Miss, but *that* she is — a devil, and no mistake. I found her out first by her thieving the Master’s gin, that the doctor ordered him, and filling the decanter up with water — the old villain; but she’ll be found out yet, she will; and all the maids is afraid on her. She’s not right, they think — a witch or a ghost — I should not wonder. Catherine Jones found her in her bed asleep in the morning after she sulked with you, you know, Miss, with all her clothes on, whatever was the meaning; and I think she has frightened *you,* Miss and has you as nervous as anythink — I do,’ and so forth.

It was true. I *was* nervous, and growing rather more so; and I think this cynical woman perceived and intended it, and was pleased. I was always afraid of her concealing herself in my room, and emerging at night to scare me. She began sometimes to mingle in my dreams, too — always awfully; and this nourished, of course, the kind of ambiguous fear in which, in waking hours, I held her.

I dreamed one night that she led me, all the time whispering something so very fast that I could not understand her, into the library, holding a candle in her other hand above her head. We walked on tiptoe, like criminals at the dead of night, and stopped before that old oak cabinet which my father had indicated in so odd a way to me. I felt that we were about some contraband practice. There was a key in the door, which I experienced a guilty horror at turning, she whispering in the same unintelligible way, all the time, at my ear. I *did* turn it; the door opened quite softly, and within stood my father, his face white and malignant, and glaring close in mine. He cried in a terrible voice, 'Death!' Out went Madame's candle, and at the same moment, with a scream, I waked in the dark — still fancying myself in the library; and for an hour after I continued in a hysterical state.

Every little incident about Madame furnished a topic of eager discussion among the maids. More or less covertly, they nearly all hated and feared her. They fancied that she was making good her footing with 'the Master;' and that she would then oust Mrs. Rusk — perhaps usurp her place — and so make a clean sweep of them all. I fancy the honest little housekeeper did not discourage that suspicion.

About this time I recollect a pedlar — an odd, gipsified-looking man — called in at Knowl. I and Catherine Jones were in the court when he came, and set down his pack on the low balustrade beside the door.

All sorts of commodities he had — ribbons, cottons, silks, stockings, lace, and even some bad jewellry; and just as he began his display — an interesting matter in a quiet country house — Madame came upon the ground. He grinned a recognition, and hoped 'Madamasel' was well, and 'did not look to see *her* here.'

'Madamasel' thanked him. 'Yes, vary well,' and looked for the first time decidedly 'put out.'

'Wat a pretty things!' she said. 'Catherine, run and tell Mrs. Rusk. She wants scissars, and lace too — I heard her say.'

So Catherine, with a lingering look, departed; and Madame said —

'Will you, dear cheaile, be so kind to bring here my purse, I forgot on the table in my room; also, I advise you, bring *your*.'

Catherine returned with Mrs. Rusk. Here was a man who could tell them something of the old Frenchwoman, at last! Slyly they dawdled over his wares, until Madame had made her market and departed with me. But when the coveted opportunity came, the pedlar was quite impenetrable. 'He forgot everything; he did not believe as he ever saw the lady before. He called a

Frenchwoman, all the world over, Madamasel — that wor the name on ‘em all. He never seed her in partiklar afore, as he could bring to mind. He liked to see ‘em always, ‘cause they makes the young uns buy.’

This reserve and oblivion were very provoking, and neither Mrs. Rusk nor Catherine Jones spent sixpence with him; — he was a stupid fellow, or worse.

Of course Madame had tampered with him. But truth, like murder, will out some day. Tom Williams, the groom, had seen her, when alone with him, and pretending to look at his stock, with her face almost buried in his silks and Welsh linseys, talking as fast as she could all the time, and slipping *money*, he did suppose, under a piece of stuff in his box.

In the mean time, I and Madame were walking over the wide, peaty sheepwalks that lie between Knowl and Church Scarsdale. Since our visit to the mausoleum in the wood, she had not worried me so much as before. She had been, indeed, more than usually thoughtful, very little talkative, and troubled me hardly at all about French and other accomplishments. A walk was a part of our daily routine. I now carried a tiny basket in my hand, with a few sandwiches, which were to furnish our luncheon when we reached the pretty scene, about two miles away, whither we were tending.

We had started a little too late; Madame grew unwontedly fatigued and sat down to rest on a stile before we had got halfway; and there she intoned, with a dismal nasal cadence, a quaint old Bretagne ballad, about a lady with a pig’s head: —

‘This lady was neither pig nor maid,
And so she was not of human mould;
Not of the living nor the dead.
Her left hand and foot were warm to touch;
Her right as cold as a corpse’s flesh!
And she would sing like a funeral bell, with a ding-dong tune.
The pigs were afraid, and viewed her aloof;

And women feared her and stood afar.
She could do without sleep for a year and a day;
She could sleep like a corpse, for a month and more.
No one knew how this lady fed —

On acorns or on flesh.
Some say that she’s one of the swine-possessed,
That swam over the sea of Gennesaret.
A mongrel body and demon soul.
Some say she’s the wife of the Wandering Jew,
And broke the law for the sake of pork;
And a swinish face for a token doth bear,
That her shame is now, and her punishment coming.’

And so it went on, in a gingling rigmarole. The more anxious I seemed to go on our way, the more likely was she to loiter. I therefore showed no signs of impatience, and I saw her consult her watch in the course of her ugly minstrelsy, and slyly glance, as if expecting something, in the direction of our destination.

When she had sung to her heart’s content, up rose Madame, and began to walk onward silently. I saw her glance once or twice, as before, toward the village of Trillsworth, which lay in front, a little to our left, and the smoke of which hung in a film over the brow of the hill. I think she observed me, for she enquired —

‘Wat is that a smoke there?’

‘That is Trillsworth, Madame; there is a railway station there.’

‘Oh, le chemin de fer, so near! I did not think. Where it goes?’

I told her, and silence returned.

Church Scarsdale is a very pretty and odd scene. The slightly undulating sheepwalk dips suddenly into a wide glen, in the lap of which, by a bright, winding rill, rise from the sward the ruins of a small abbey, with a few solemn trees scattered round. The crows’ nests hung untenanted in the trees; the birds were foraging far away from their roosts. The very cattle had forsaken the place. It was solitude itself.

Madame drew a long breath and smiled.

‘Come down, come down, cheaile — come down to the churchyard.’

As we descended the slope which shut out the surrounding world, and the scene grew more sad and lonely. Madame’s spirits seemed to rise.

‘See ‘ow many gravestones — one, *two* hundred. Don’t you love the dead, cheaile? I will teach you to love them. You shall see me die here to-day, for half an hour, and be among them. That is what I love.’

We were by this time at the little brook’s side, and the low churchyard wall with a stile, reached by a couple of stepping-stones, across the stream, immediately at the other side.

‘Come, now!’ cried Madame, raising her face, as if to sniff the air; ‘we are close to them. You will like them soon as I. You shall see five of them. Ah, ça ira, ça ira, ça ira! Come cross quickily! I am Madame la Morgue — Mrs. Deadhouse! I will present you my friends, Monsieur Cadavre and Monsieur Squelette. Come, come, leetle mortal, let us play. Ouaah!’ And she uttered a horrid yell from her enormous mouth, and pushing her wig and bonnet back, so as to show her great, bald head. She was laughing, and really looked quite mad.

‘No, Madame, I will not go with you,’ I said, disengaging my hand with a violent effort, receding two or three steps.

‘Not enter the churchyard! Ma foi — wat mauvais goût! But see, we are already in shade. The sun he is setting soon — where well you remain, cheaile? I will not stay long.’

‘I’ll stay here,’ I said, a little angrily — for I *was* angry as well as nervous; and through my fear was that indignation at her extravagances which mimicked lunacy so unpleasantly, and were, I knew, designed to frighten me.

Over the stepping-stones, pulling up her dress, she skipped with her long, lank legs, like a witch joining a Walpurgis. Over the stile she strode, and I saw her head wagging, and heard her sing some of her ill-omened rhymes, as she capered solemnly, with many a grin and courtesy, among the graves and headstones, towards the ruin.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SMOKER

Three years later I learned — in a way she probably little expected, and then did not much care about — what really occurred there. I learned even phrases and looks — for the story was related by one who had heard it told — and therefore I venture to narrate what at the moment I neither saw nor suspected. While I sat, flushed and nervous, upon a flat stone by the bank of the little stream, Madame looked over her shoulder, and perceiving that I was out of sight, she abated her pace, and turned sharply towards the ruin which lay at her left. It was her first visit, and she was merely exploring; but now, with a perfectly shrewd and businesslike air, turning the corner of the building, she saw, seated upon the edge of a gravestone, a rather fat and flashily-equipped young man, with large, light whiskers, a jerry hat, green cutaway coat with gilt buttons, and waistcoat and trousers rather striking than elegant in pattern. He was smoking a short pipe, and made a nod to Madame, without either removing it from his lips or rising, but with his brown and rather good-looking face turned up, he eyed her with something of the impudent and sulky expression that was habitual to it.

‘Ha, Deedle, you are there! an’ look so well. I am here, too, quite *a*lon; but my friend, she wait outside the churchyard, by-side the leetle river, for she must not think I know you — so I am come *a*lon.’

‘You’re a quarter late, and I lost a fight by you, old girl, this morning,’ said the gay man, and spat on the ground; ‘and I wish you would not call me Diddle. I’ll call you Granny if you do.’

‘Eh bien! *Dud,* then. She is vary nice — wat you like. Slim waist, wite teeth, vary nice eyes — dark — wat you say is best — and nice leetle foot and ankle.’

Madame smiled leeringly. Dud smoked on.

‘Go on,’ said Dud, with a nod of command.

‘I am teach her to sing and play — she has such sweet voice!

There was another interval here.

‘Well, that isn’t much good. I hate women’s screechin’ about fairies and flowers. Hang her! there’s a scarecrow as sings at Curl’s Divan. Such a caterwauling upon a stage! I’d like to put my two barrels into her.’

By this time Dud’s pipe was out, and he could afford to converse.

‘You shall see her and decide. You will walk down the river, and pass her by.’

‘That’s as may be; howsoever, it would not do, nohow, to buy a pig in a poke, you know. And s’pose I shouldn’t like her, arter all?’

Madame sneered, with a patois ejaculation of derision.

‘Vary good! Then some one else will not be so ‘ard to please — as you will soon find.’

‘Some one’s bin a-lookin’ arter her, you mean?’ said the young man, with a shrewd uneasy glance on the cunning face of the French lady.

‘I mean precisely — that which I mean,’ replied the lady, with a teazing pause at the break I have marked.

‘Come, old ‘un, none of your d —— old chaff, if you want me to stay here listening to you. Speak out, can’t you? There’s any chap as has bin a-lookin’ arter her — is there?’

‘Eh bien! I suppose some.’

‘Well, you *suppose,* and *I* suppose — we may *all* suppose, I guess; but that does not make a thing be, as wasn’t before; and you tell me as how the lass is kep’ private up there, and will be till you’re done educating her — a precious good ‘un that is!’ And he laughed a little lazily, with the ivory handle of his cane on his lip, and eyeing Madame with indolent derision.

Madame laughed, but looked rather dangerous.

‘I’m only chaffin’, you know, old girl. *You*’ve bin chaffin’ — w’y shouldn’t *I*? But I don’t see why she can’t wait a bit; and what’s all the d —— d hurry for? *I*’m in no hurry. I don’t want a wife on my back for a while. There’s no fellow marries till he’s took his bit o’ fun, and seen life — is there! And why should I be driving with her to fairs, or to church, or to meeting, by jingo! — for they say she’s a Quaker — with a babby on each knee, only to please them as will be dead and rotten when *I*’m only beginning?’

‘Ah, you are such charming fellow; always the same — always sensible. So I and my friend we will walk home again, and you go see Maggie Hawkes. Good-a-by, Dud — good-a-by.’

‘Quiet, you fool! — can’t ye?’ said the young gentleman, with the sort of grin that made his face vicious when a horse vexed him. ‘Who ever said I wouldn’t go look at the girl? Why, you know that’s just what I come here for — don’t you? Only when I think a bit, and a notion comes across me, why shouldn’t I speak out? I’m not one o’ them shilly-shallies. If I like the girl, I’ll not be mug in and mug out about it. Only mind ye, I’ll judge for myself. Is that her acoming?’

‘No; it was a distant sound.’

Madame peeped round the corner. No one was approaching.

‘Well, you go round that a-way, and you only look at her, you know, for she is such fool — so nairvous.’

‘Oh, is that the way with her?’ said Dud, knocking out the ashes of his pipe on a tombstone, and replacing the Turkish utensil in his pocket. ‘Well, then, old lass, goodbye,’ and he shook her hand. ‘And, do ye see, don’t ye come up till I pass, for I’m no hand at play-acting; an’ if you called me “sir,” or was coming it dignified and distant, you know, I’d be sure to laugh, a’most, and let all out. So goodbye, d’ye see, and if you want me again be sharp to time, mind.

From habit he looked about for his dogs, but he had not brought one. He had come unostentatiously by rail, travelling in a third-class carriage, for the advantage of Jack Briderly’s company, and getting a world of useful wrinkles about the steeplechase that was coming off next week.

So he strode away, cutting off the heads of the nettles with his cane as he went; and Madame walked forth into the open space among the graves, where I might have seen her, had I stood up, looking with the absorbed gaze of an artist on the ruin.

In a little while, along the path, I heard the clank of a step, and the gentleman in the green cutaway coat, sucking his cane, and eyeing me with an offensive familiar sort of stare the while, passed me by, rather hesitating as he did so.

I was glad when he turned the corner in the little hollow close by, and disappeared. I stood up at once, and was reassured by a sight of Madame, not very many yards away, looking at the ruin, and apparently restored to her right mind. The last beams of the sun were by this time touching the uplands, and I was longing to recommence our walk home. I was hesitating about calling to Madame, because that lady had a certain spirit of opposition within her, and to disclose a small wish of any sort was generally, if it lay in her power, to prevent its accomplishment.

At this moment the gentleman in the green coat returned, approaching me with a slow sort of swagger.

‘I say, Miss, I dropped a glove close by here. May you have seen it?’

‘No, sir,’ I said, drawing back a little, and looking, I dare say, both frightened and offended.

‘I do think I must ‘a dropped it close by your foot, Miss.’

‘No, sir,’ I repeated.

‘No offence, Miss, but you’re sure you didn’t hide it?’

I was beginning to grow seriously uncomfortable.

‘Don’t be frightened, Miss; it’s only a bit o’ chaff. I’m not going to search.’

I called aloud, ‘Madame, Madame!’ and he whistled through his fingers, and shouted, ‘Madame, Madame,’ and added, ‘She’s as deaf as a tombstone, or she’ll hear that. Gi’e her my compliments, and say I said you’re a beauty, Miss;’ and with a laugh and a leer he strode off.

Altogether this had not been a very pleasant excursion. Madame gobbled up our sandwiches, commending them every now and then to me. But I had been too much excited to have any appetite left, and very tired I was when we reached home.

‘So, there is lady coming tomorrow?’ said Madame, who knew everything. ‘Wat is her name? I forget.’

‘Lady Knollys,’ I answered.

‘Lady Knollys — wat odd name! She is very young — is she not?’

‘Past fifty, I think.’

‘Hélas! She’s vary old, then. Is she rich?’

‘I don’t know. She has a place in Derbyshire.’

‘Derbyshire — that is one of your English counties, is it not?’

‘Oh yes, Madame,’ I answered, laughing. ‘I have said it to you twice since you came;’ and I gabbled through the chief towns and rivers as catalogued in my geography.

‘Bah! to be sure — of course, cheaile. And is she your relation?’

‘Papa’s first cousin.’

‘Won’t you presenta me, pray? — I would so like!’

Madame had fallen into the English way of liking people with titles, as perhaps foreigners would if titles implied the sort of power they do generally with us.

‘Certainly, Madame.’

‘You will not forget?’

‘Oh no.’

Madame reminded me twice, in the course of the evening, of my promise. She was very eager on this point. But it is a world of disappointment, influenza, and rheumatics; and next morning Madame was prostrate in her bed, and careless of all things but flannel and James’s powder.

Madame was *désolée*; but she could not raise her head. She only murmured a question.

‘For ‘ow long time, dear, will Lady Knollys remain?’

‘A very few days, I believe.’

‘Hélas! ‘ow onlucky! maybe tomorrow I shall be better Ouah! my ear. The laudanum, dear cheaile!’

And so our conversation for that time ended, and Madame buried her head in her old red cashmere shawl.

CHAPTER IX

MONICA KNOLLYS

Punctually Lady Knollys arrived. She was accompanied by her nephew, Captain Oakley.

They arrived a little before dinner; just in time to get to their rooms and dress. But Mary Quince enlivened my toilet with eloquent descriptions of the youthful Captain whom she had met in the gallery, on his way to his room, with the servant, and told me how he stopped to let her pass, and how ‘he smiled so ‘ansom.’

I was very young then, you know, and more childish even than my years; but this talk of Mary Quince’s interested me, I must confess, considerably. I was painting all sort of portraits of this heroic soldier, while affecting, I am afraid, a hypocritical indifference to her narration, and I know I was very nervous and painstaking about my toilet that evening. When I went down to the drawingroom, Lady Knollys was there, talking volubly to my father as I entered — a woman not really old, but such as very young people fancy aged — energetic, bright, saucy, dressed handsomely in purple satin, with a good deal of lace, and a rich point — I know not how to call it — not a cap, a sort of head-dress — light and simple, but grand withal, over her greyish, silken hair.

Rather tall, by no means stout, on the whole a good firm figure, with something kindly in her look. She got up, quite like a young person, and coming quickly to meet me with a smile —

‘My young cousin!’ she cried, and kissed me on both cheeks. ‘You know who I am? Your cousin Monica — Monica Knollys — and very glad, dear, to see you, though she has not set eyes on you since you were no longer than that paper-knife. Now come here to the lamp, for I must look at you. Who is she like? Let me see. Like your poor mother, I think, my dear; but you’ve the Aylmer nose — yes — not a bad nose either, and, come I very good eyes, upon my life — yes, certainly something of her poor mother — not a bit like you, Austin.’

My father gave her a look as near a smile as I had seen there for a long time, shrewd, cynical, but kindly too, and said he —

‘So much the better, Monica, eh?’

‘It was not for me to say — but you know, Austin, you always were an ugly creature. How shocked and indignant the little girl looks! You must not be vexed, you loyal little woman, with Cousin Monica for telling the truth. Papa was and will be ugly all his days. Come, Austin, dear, tell her — is not it so?’

‘What! depose against myself! That’s not English law, Monica.’

‘Well, maybe not; but if the child won’t believe her own eyes, how is she to believe me? She has long, pretty hands — you have — and very nice feet too. How old is she?’

‘How old, child?’ said my father to me, transferring the question.

She recurred again to my eyes.

‘That is the true grey — large, deep, soft — very peculiar. Yes, dear, very pretty — long lashes, and such bright tints! You’ll be in the Book of Beauty, my dear, when you come out, and have all the poet people writing verses to the tip of your nose — and a very pretty little nose it is!’

I must mention here how striking was the change in my father’s spirit while talking and listening to his odd and voluble old Cousin Monica. Reflected from bygone associations, there had come a glimmer of something, not gaiety, indeed, but like an appreciation of gaiety. The gloom and inflexibility were gone, and there was an evident encouragement and enjoyment of the incessant sallies of his bustling visitor.

How morbid must have been the tendencies of his habitual solitude, I think, appeared from the evident thawing and brightening that accompanied even this transient gleam of human society. I was not a companion — more childish than most girls of my age, and trained in all his whimsical ways, never to interrupt a silence, or force his thoughts by unexpected question or remark out of their monotonous or painful channel.

I was as much surprised at the goodhumour with which he submitted to his cousin’s saucy talk; and, indeed, just then those black-panelled and pictured walls, and that quaint, misshapen room, seemed to have exchanged their stern and awful character for something wonderfully pleasanter to me, notwithstanding the unpleasantness of the personal criticism to which the plain-spoken lady chose to subject me.

Just at that moment Captain Oakley joined us. He was my first actual vision of that awful and distant world of fashion, of whose splendours I had already read something in the three-volumed gospel of the circulating library.

Handsome, elegant, with features almost feminine, and soft, wavy, black hair, whiskers and moustache, he was altogether such a knight as I had never beheld, or even fancied, at Knowl — a hero of another species, and from the region of the demigods. I did not then perceive that coldness of the eye, and cruel curl of the voluptuous lip — only a suspicion, yet enough to indicate the profligate man, and savouring of death unto death.

But I was young, and had not yet the direful knowledge of good and evil that comes with years; and he was so very handsome, and talked in a way that was so new to me, and was so much more charming than the well-bred converse of the humdrum county families with whom I had occasionally sojourned for a week at a time.

It came out incidentally that his leave of absence was to expire the day after tomorrow. A Lilliputian pang of disappointment followed this announcement. Already I was sorry to lose him. So soon we begin to make a property of what pleases us.

I was shy, but not awkward. I was flattered by the attention of this amusing, perhaps rather fascinating, young man of the world; and he plainly addressed himself with diligence to amuse and please me. I dare say there was more effort than I fancied in bringing his talk down to my humble level, and interesting me and making me laugh about people whom I had never heard of before, than I then suspected.

Cousin Knollys meanwhile was talking to papa. It was just the conversation that suited a man so silent as habit had made him, for her frolic fluency left him little to supply. It was totally impossible, indeed, even in our taciturn household, that conversation should ever flag while she was among us.

Cousin Knollys and I went into the drawingroom together, leaving the gentlemen — rather ill-assorted, I fear — to entertain one another for a time.

‘Come here, my dear, and sit near me,’ said Lady Knollys, dropping into an easy chair with an energetic little plump, ‘and tell me how you and your papa get on. I can remember him quite a cheerful man once, and rather amusing — yes, indeed — and now you see what a bore he is — all by shutting himself up and nursing his whims and fancies. Are those your drawings, dear?'

'Yes, very bad, I'm afraid; but there are a few, *better*, I think in the portfolio in the cabinet in the hall.'

'They are by *no* means bad, my dear; and you play, of course?'

'Yes — that is, a little — pretty well, I hope.'

'I dare say. I must hear you by-and-by. And how does your papa amuse you? You look bewildered, dear. Well, I dare say, amusement is not a frequent word in this house. But you must not turn into a nun, or worse, into a puritan. What is he? A Fifth-Monarchy-man, or something — I forget; tell me the name, my dear.'

'Papa is a Swedenborgian, I believe.'

'Yes, yes — I forgot the horrid name — a Swedenborgian, that is it. I don't know exactly what they think, but everyone knows they are a sort of pagans, my dear. He's not making one of *you*, dear — is he?'

'I go to church every Sunday.'

'Well, that's a mercy; Swedenborgian is such an ugly name, and besides, they are all likely to be damned, my dear, and that's a serious consideration. I really wish poor Austin had hit on something else; I'd much rather have no religion, and enjoy life while I'm in it, than choose one to worry me here and bedevil me hereafter. But some people, my dear, have a taste for being miserable, and provide, like poor Austin, for its gratification in the next world as well as here. Ha, ha, ha! how grave the little woman looks! Don't you think me very wicked? You know you do; and very likely you are right. Who makes your dresses, my dear? You *are* such a figure of fun!'

'Mrs. Rusk, I think, ordered *this* dress. I and Mary Quince planned it. I thought it very nice. We all like it very well.'

There was something, I dare say, very whimsical about it, probably very absurd, judged at least by the canons of fashion, and old Cousin Monica Knollys, in whose eye the London fashions were always fresh, was palpably struck by it as if it had been some enormity against anatomy, for she certainly laughed very heartily; indeed, there were tears on her cheeks when she had done, and I am sure my aspect of wonder and dignity, as her hilarity proceeded, helped to revive her merriment again and again as it was subsiding.

‘There, you mustn’t be vexed with old Cousin Monica,’ she cried, jumping up, and giving me a little hug, and bestowing a hearty kiss on my forehead, and a jolly little slap on my cheek. ‘Always remember your cousin Monica is an outspoken, wicked old fool, who likes you, and never be offended by her nonsense. A council of three — you all sat upon it — Mrs. Rusk, you said, and Mary Quince, and your wise self, the weird sisters; and Austin stepped in, as Macbeth, and said, ‘What is’t ye do?’ you all made answer together, ‘A something or other without a name!’ Now, seriously, my dear, it is quite unpardonable in Austin — your papa, I mean — to hand you over to be robed and bedizened according to the whimsies of these wild old women — aren’t they old? If they know better, it’s positively *fiendish.* I’ll blow him up — I will indeed, my dear. You know you’re an heiress, and ought not to appear like a jack-pudding.’

‘Papa intends sending me to London with Madame and Mary Quince, and going with me himself, if Doctor Bryerly says he may make the journey, and then I am to have dresses and everything.’

‘Well, that is better. And who is Doctor Bryerly — is your papa ill?’

‘Ill; oh no; he always seems just the same. You don’t think him ill-*looking* ill, I mean?’ I asked eagerly and frightened.

‘No, my dear, he looks very well for his time of life; but why is Doctor What’s-his-name here? Is he a physician, or a divine, or a horse-doctor? and why is his leave asked?’

‘I — I really don’t understand.’

‘Is he a what d’ye call’em — a Swedenborgian?’

‘I believe so.’

‘Oh, I see; ha, ha, ha! And so poor Austin must ask leave to go up to town. Well, go he shall, whether his doctor likes it or not, for it would not do to send you there in charge of your Frenchwoman, my dear. What’s her name?’

‘Madame de la Rougierre.’

CHAPTER X

LADY KNOLLYS REMOVES A COVERLET

Lady Knollys pursued her enquiries.

‘And why does not Madame make your dresses, my dear? I wager a guinea the woman’s a milliner. Did not she engage to make your dresses?’

‘I — I really don’t know; I rather think not. She is my governess — a finishing governess, Mrs. Rusk says.’

‘Finishing fiddle! Hoitytoity! and my lady’s too grand to cut out your dresses and help to sew them? And what *does* she do? I venture to say she’s fit to teach nothing but devilment — not that she has taught *you* much, my dear — *yet* at least. I’ll see her, my dear; where is she? Come, let us visit Madame. I should so like to talk to her a little.’

‘But she is ill,’ I answered, and all this time I was ready to cry for vexation, thinking of my dress, which must be very absurd to elicit so much unaffected laughter from my experienced relative, and I was only longing to get away and hide myself before that handsome Captain returned.

‘Ill! is she? what’s the matter?’

‘A cold — feverish and rheumatic, she says.’

‘Oh, a cold; is she up, or in bed?’

‘In her room, but not in bed.’

‘I should so like to see her, my dear. It is not mere curiosity, I assure you. In fact, curiosity has nothing on earth to do with it. A governess may be a very useful or a very useless person; but she may also be about the most pernicious inmate imaginable. She may teach you a bad accent, and worse manners, and heaven knows what beside. Send the housekeeper, my dear, to tell her that I am going to see her.’

‘I had better go myself, perhaps,’ I said, fearing a collision between Mrs. Rusk and the bitter Frenchwoman.

‘Very well, dear.’

And away I ran, not sorry somehow to escape before Captain Oakley returned.

As I went along the passage, I was thinking whether my dress could be so very ridiculous as my old cousin thought it, and trying in vain to recollect any evidence of a similar contemptuous estimate on the part of that beautiful and garrulous dandy. I could not — quite the reverse, indeed. Still I was uncomfortable and feverish — girls of my then age will easily conceive how miserable, under similar circumstances, such a misgiving would make them.

It was a long way to Madame's room. I met Mrs. Rusk bustling along the passage with a housemaid.

'How is Madame?' I asked.

'Quite well, I believe,' answered the housekeeper, drily. 'Nothing the matter that *I* know of. She eat enough for two to-day. I wish *I* could sit in my room doing nothing.'

Madame was sitting, or rather reclining, in a low armchair, when I entered the room, close to the fire, as was her wont, her feet extended near to the bars, and a little coffee equipage beside her. She stuffed a book hastily between her dress and the chair, and received me in a state of langour which, had it not been for Mrs. Rusk's comfortable assurances, would have frightened me.

'I hope you are better, Madame,' I said, approaching.

'Better than I deserve, my dear cheaile, sufficiently well. The people are all so good, trying me with every little thing, like a bird; here is café — Mrs. Rusk-a, poor woman, I try to swallow a little to please her.'

'And your cold, is it better?'

She shook her head languidly, her elbow resting on the chair, and three fingertips supporting her forehead, and then she made a little sigh, looking down from the corners of her eyes, in an interesting dejection.

'Je sens des lassitudes in all the members — but I am quaite 'appy, and though I suffer I am console and oblige des bontés, ma chère, que vous avez tous pour moi;' and with these words she turned a languid glance of gratitude on me which dropped on the ground.

'Lady Knollys wishes very much to see you, only for a few minutes, if you could admit her.'

‘Vous savez les malades see *never* visitors,’ she replied with a startled sort of tartness, and a momentary energy. ‘Besides, I cannot converse; je sens de temps en temps des douleurs de tête — of head, and of the ear, the right ear, it is parfois agony absolutely, and now it is here.’

And she winced and moaned, with her eyes closed and her hand pressed to the organ affected.

Simple as I was, I felt instinctively that Madame was shamming. She was overacting; her transitions were too violent, and beside she forgot that I knew how well she could speak English, and must perceive that she was heightening the interest of her helplessness by that pretty tessellation of foreign idiom. I therefore said with a kind of courage which sometimes helped me suddenly —

‘Oh, Madame, don’t you really think you might, without much inconvenience, see Lady Knollys for a very few minutes?’

‘Cruel cheaile! you know I have a pain of the ear which makes me ‘orribly suffer at this moment, and you demand me whether I will not converse with strangers. I did not think you would be so unkain, Maud; but it is impossible, you must see — quite impossible. I never, you *know*, refuse to take trouble when I am able — never — *never*.’

And Madame shed some tears, which always came at call, and with her hand pressed to her ear, said very faintly,

‘Be so good to tell your friend how you see me, and how I suffer, and leave me, Maud, for I wish to lie down for a little, since the pain will not allow me to remain longer.’

So with a few words of comfort which could not well be refused, but I dare say betraying my suspicion that more was made of her sufferings than need be, I returned to the drawingroom.

‘Captain Oakley has been here, my dear, and fancying, I suppose, that you had left us for the evening, has gone to the billiard-room, I think,’ said Lady Knollys, as I entered.

That, then, accounted for the rumble and smack of balls which I had heard as I passed the door.

‘I have been telling Maud how detestably she is got up.’

‘Very thoughtful of you, Monica!’ said my father.

‘Yes, and really, Austin, it is quite clear you ought to marry; you want some one to take this girl out, and look after her, and who’s to do it? She’s a dowdy — don’t you see? Such a dust! And it *is* really such a pity; for she’s a very pretty creature, and a clever woman could make her quite charming.’

My father took Cousin Monica’s sallies with the most wonderful goodhumour. She had always, I fancy, been a privileged person, and my father, whom we all feared, received her jolly attacks, as I fancy the grim Front-de-Boeufs of old accepted the humours and personalities of their jesters.

‘Am I to accept this as an overture?’ said my father to his voluble cousin.

‘Yes, you may, but not for myself, Austin — I’m not worthy. Do you remember little Kitty Weadon that I wanted you to marry eight-and-twenty years ago, or more, with a hundred and twenty thousand pounds? Well, you know, she has got ever so much now, and she is really a most amiable old thing, and though *you* would not have her then, she has had her second husband since, I can tell you.’

‘I’m glad I was not the first,’ said my father.

‘Well, they really say her wealth is absolutely immense. Her last husband, the Russian merchant, left her everything. She has not a human relation, and she is in the best set.’

‘You were always a matchmaker, Monica,’ said my father, stopping, and putting his hand kindly on hers. ‘But it won’t do. No, no, Monica; we must take care of little Maud some other way.’

I was relieved. We women have all an instinctive dread of second marriages, and think that no widower is quite above or below that danger; and I remember, whenever my father, which indeed was but seldom, made a visit to town or anywhere else, it was a saying of Mrs. Rusk —

‘I shan’t wonder, neither need you, my dear, if he brings home a young wife with him.’

So my father, with a kind look at her, and a very tender one on me, went silently to the library, as he often did about that hour.

I could not help resenting my Cousin Knollys’ officious recommendation of matrimony. Nothing I dreaded more than a stepmother. Good Mrs. Rusk and Mary Quince, in their several ways, used to enhance, by occasional anecdotes and frequent reflections, the terrors of such an intrusion. I suppose they did not wish a revolution and all its consequences at Knowl, and thought it no harm to excite my vigilance.

But it was impossible long to be vexed with Cousin Monica.

‘You know, my dear, your father is an oddity,’ she said. ‘I don’t mind him — I never did. You must not. Cracky, my dear, cracky — decidedly cracky!’

And she tapped the corner of her forehead, with a look so sly and comical, that I think I should have laughed, if the sentiment had not been so awfully irreverent.

‘Well, dear, how is our friend the milliner?’

‘Madame is suffering so much from pain in her ear, that she says it would be quite impossible to have the honour— ‘

‘Honour — fiddle! I want to see what the woman’s like. Pain in her ear, you say? Poor thing! Well, dear, I think I can cure that in five minutes. I have it myself, now and then. Come to my room, and we’ll get the bottles.

So she lighted her candle in the lobby, and with a light and agile step she scaled the stairs, I following; and having found the remedies, we approached Madame’s room together.

I think, while we were still at the end of the gallery, Madame heard and divined our approach, for her door suddenly shut, and there was a fumbling at the handle. But the bolt was out of order.

Lady Knollys tapped at the door, saying— ‘we’ll come in, please, and see you. I’ve some remedies, which I’m sure will do you good.’

There was no answer; so she opened the door, and we both entered. Madame had rolled herself in the blue coverlet, and was lying on the bed, with her face buried in the pillow, and enveloped in the covering.

‘Perhaps she’s asleep?’ said Lady Knollys, getting round to the side of the bed, and stooping over her.

Madame lay still as a mouse. Cousin Monica set down her two little vials on the table, and, stooping again over the bed, began very gently with her fingers to lift the coverlet that covered her face. Madame uttered a slumbering moan, and turned more upon her face, clasping the coverlet faster about her.

‘Madame, it is Maud and Lady Knollys. We have come to relieve your ear. Pray let me see it. She can’t be asleep, she’s holding the clothes so fast. Do, pray, allow me to see it.’

CHAPTER XI

LADY KNOLLYS SEES THE FEATURES

Perhaps, if Madame had murmured, ‘It is quite well — pray permit me to sleep,’ she would have escaped an awkwardness. But having adopted the rôle of the exhausted slumberer, she could not consistently speak at the moment; neither would it do by main force, to hold the coverlet about her face, and so her presence of mind forsook her. Cousin Monica drew it back and hardly beheld the profile of the sufferer, when her goodhumoured face was lined and shadowed with a dark curiosity and a surprise by no means pleasant. She stood erect beside the bed, with her mouth firmly shut and drawn down at the corners, in a sort of recoil and perturbation, looking down upon the patient.

‘So that’s Madame de la Rougierre?’ at length exclaimed Lady Knollys, with a very stately disdain. I think I never saw anyone look more shocked.

Madame sat up, very flushed. No wonder, for she had been wrapped so close in the coverlet. She did not look quite at Lady Knollys, but straight before her, rather downward, and very luridly.

I was very much frightened and amazed, and felt on the point of bursting into tears.

‘So, Mademoiselle, you have married, it seems, since I had last the honour of seeing you? I did not recognise Mademoiselle under her new name.’

‘Yes — I *am* married, Lady Knollys; I thought everyone who knew me had heard of that. Very respectably married, for a person of my rank. I shall not need long the life of a governess. There is no harm, I hope?’

‘I hope not,’ said Lady Knollys, drily, a little pale, and still looking with a dark sort of wonder upon the flushed face and forehead of the governess, who was looking downward, straight before her, very sulkily and disconcerted.

‘I suppose you have explained everything satisfactorily to Mr. Ruthyn, in whose house I find you?’ said Cousin Monica.

'Yes, certainly, everything he requires — in effect there is *nothing* to explain. I am ready to answer to any question. Let *him* demand me.'

'Very good, Mademoiselle.'

'*Madame*, if you please.'

'I forgot — *Madame* — yes, I shall apprise him of everything.'

Madame turned upon her a peaked and malign look, smiling askance with a stealthy scorn.

'For myself, I have nothing to conceal. I have always done my duty. What fine scene about nothing absolutely — what charming remedies for a sick person! Ma foi! how much oblige I am for these so amiable attentions!'

'So far as I can see, Mademoiselle — Madame, I mean — you don't stand very much in need of remedies. Your ear and head don't seem to trouble you just now. I fancy these pains may now be dismissed.'

Lady Knollys was now speaking French.

'Mi ladi has diverted my attention for a moment, but that does not prevent that I suffer frightfully. I am, of course, only poor governess, and such people perhaps ought not to have pain — at least to show when they suffer. It is permitted us to die, but not to be sick.'

'Come, Maud, my dear, let us leave the invalid to her repose and to nature. I don't think she needs my chloroform and opium at present.'

'Mi ladi is herself a physic which chases many things, and powerfully affects the ear. I would wish to sleep, notwithstanding, and can but gain that in silence, if it pleases mi ladi.'

'Come, my dear,' said Lady Knollys, without again glancing at the scowling, smiling, swarthy face in the bed; 'let us leave your instructress to her *concforto*.'

'The room smells all over of brandy, my dear — does she drink?' said Lady Knollys, as she closed the door, a little sharply.

I am sure I looked as much amazed as I felt, at an imputation which then seemed to me so entirely incredible.

'Good little simpleton!' said Cousin Monica, smiling in my face, and bestowing a little kiss on my cheek; 'such a thing as a tipsy lady has never been dreamt of in your philosophy. Well, we live and learn. Let us have our tea in my room — the gentlemen, I dare say, have retired.'

I assented, of course, and we had tea very cosily by her bedroom fire.

‘How long have you had that woman?’ she asked suddenly, after, for her, a very long rumination.

‘She came in the beginning of February — nearly ten months ago — is not it?’

‘And who sent her?’

‘I really don’t know; papa tells me so little — he arranged it all himself, I think.’

Cousin Monica made a sound of acquiescence — her lips closed and a nod, frowning hard at the bars.

‘It *is* very odd!’ she said; ‘how people *can* be such fools!’ Here there came a little pause. ‘And what sort of person is she — do you like her?’

‘Very well — that is, *pretty* well. You won’t tell? — but she rather frightens me. I’m sure she does not intend it, but somehow I am very much afraid of her.’

‘She does not beat you?’ said Cousin Monica, with an incipient frenzy in her face that made me love her.

‘Oh no!’

‘Nor ill-use you in any way?’

‘No.’

‘Upon your honour and word, Maud?’

‘No, upon my honour.’

‘You know I won’t tell her anything you say to me; and I only want to know, that I may put an end to it, my poor little cousin.’

‘Thank you, Cousin Monica very much; but really and truly she does not ill-use me.’

‘Nor threaten you, child?’

‘Well, *no* — no, she does not threaten.’

‘And how the plague *does* she frighten you, child?’

‘Well, I really — I’m half ashamed to tell you — you’ll laugh at me — and I don’t know that she wishes to frighten me. But there is something, is not there, ghosty, you know, about her?’

‘*Ghosty* — is there? well, I’m sure I don’t know, but I suspect there’s something devilish — I mean, she seems roguish — does not she? And I really think she has had neither cold nor pain, but has just been shamming sickness, to keep out of my way.'

I perceived plainly enough that Cousin Monica's damnatory epithet referred to some retrospective knowledge, which she was not going to disclose to me.

'You knew Madame before,' I said. 'Who is she?'

'She assures me she is Madame de la Rougierre, and, I suppose, in French phrase she so calls herself,' answered Lady Knollys, with a laugh, but uncomfortably, I thought.

'Oh, dear Cousin Monica, do tell me — is she — is she very wicked? I am so afraid of her!'

'How should I know, dear Maud? But I do remember her face, and I don't very much like her, and you may depend on it. I will speak to your father in the morning about her, and don't, darling, ask me any more about her, for I really have not very much to tell that you would care to hear, and the fact is I *won't* say any more about her — there!'

And Cousin Monica laughed, and gave me a little slap on the cheek, and then a kiss.

'Well, just tell me this — — '

'Well, I *won't* tell you this, nor anything — not a word, curious little woman. The fact is, I have little to tell, and I mean to speak to your father, and he, I am sure, will do what is right; so don't ask me any more, and let us talk of something pleasanter.'

There was something indescribably winning, it seemed to me, in Cousin Monica. Old as she was, she seemed to me so girlish, compared with those slow, unexceptionable young ladies whom I had met in my few visits at the county houses. By this time my shyness was quite gone, and I was on the most intimate terms with her.

'You know a great deal about her, Cousin Monica, but you won't tell me.'

'Nothing I should like better, if I were at liberty, little rogue; but you know, after all, I don't really say whether I *do* know anything about her or not, or what sort of knowledge it is. But tell me what you mean by ghosty, and all about it.'

So I recounted my experiences, to which, so far from laughing at me, she listened with very special gravity.

‘Does she write and receive many letters?’

I had seen her write letters, and supposed, though I could only recollect one or two, that she received in proportion.

‘Are *you* Mary Quince?’ asked my lady cousin.

Mary was arranging the window-curtains, and turned, dropping a courtesy affirmatively toward her.

‘You wait on my little cousin, Miss Ruthyn, don’t you?’

‘Yes,’m,’ said Mary, in her genteelest way.

‘Does anyone sleep in her room?’

‘Yes,’m, *I* — please, my lady.’

‘And no one else?’

‘No,’m — please, my lady.’

‘Not even the *governess*, sometimes?

‘No, please, my lady.’

‘Never, you are quite sure, my dear?’ said Lady Knollys, transferring the question to me.

‘Oh, no, never,’ I answered.

Cousin Monica mused gravely, I fancied even anxiously, into the grate; then stirred her tea and sipped it, still looking into the same point of our cheery fire.

‘I like your face, Mary Quince; I’m sure you are a good creature,’ she said, suddenly turning toward her with a pleasant countenance. ‘I’m very glad you have got her, dear. I wonder whether Austin has gone to his bed yet!’

‘I think not. I am certain he is either in the library or in his private room — papa often reads or prays alone at night, and — and he does not like to be interrupted.’

‘No, no; of course not — it will do very well in the morning.’

Lady Knollys was thinking deeply, as it seemed to me.

‘And so you are afraid of goblins, my dear,’ she said at last, with a faded sort of smile, turning toward me; ‘well, if *I* were, I know what *I* should do — so soon as I, and good Mary Quince here, had got into my bedchamber for the night, I should stir the fire into a good blaze, and bolt the door — do you see, Mary Quince? — bolt the door and keep a candle lighted all night. You'll be very attentive to her, Mary Quince, for I — I don't think she is very strong, and she must not grow nervous: so get to bed early, and don't leave her alone — do you see? — and — and remember to bolt the door, Mary Quince, and I shall be sending a little Christmas-box to my cousin, and I shan't forget you. Goodnight.'

And with a pleasant courtesy Mary fluttered out of the room.

CHAPTER XII

A CURIOUS CONVERSATION

We each had another cup of tea, and were silent for awhile.

‘We must not talk of ghosts now. You are a superstitious little woman, you know, and you shan’t be frightened.’

And now Cousin Monica grew silent again, and looking briskly around the room, like a lady in search of a subject, her eye rested on a small oval portrait, graceful, brightly tinted, in the French style, representing a pretty little boy, with rich golden hair, large soft eyes, delicate features, and a shy, peculiar expression.

‘It is odd; I think I remember that pretty little sketch, very long ago. I think I was then myself a child, but that is a much older style of dress, and of wearing the hair, too, than I ever saw. I am just forty-nine now. Oh dear, yes; that is a good while before I was *born*. What a strange, pretty little boy! a mysterious little fellow. Is he quite sincere, I wonder? What rich golden hair! It is very clever — a French artist, I dare say — and who *is* that little boy?’

‘I never heard. Some one a hundred years ago, I dare say. But there is a picture downstairs I am so anxious to ask you about!’

‘Oh!’ murmured Lady Knollys, still gazing dreamily on the crayon.

‘It is the full-length picture of Uncle Silas — I want to ask you about him.’

At mention of his name, my cousin gave me a look so sudden and odd as to amount almost to a start.

‘Your uncle Silas, dear? It is very odd, I was just thinking of him;’ and she laughed a little.

‘Wondering whether that little boy could be he.’

And up jumped active Cousin Monica, with a candle in her hand, upon a chair, and scrutinised the border of the sketch for a name or a date.

‘Maybe on the back?’ said she.

And so she unhung it, and there, true enough, not on the back of the drawing, but of the frame, which was just as good, in pen-and-ink round

Italian letters, hardly distinguishable now from the discoloured wood, we traced —

'*Silas Aylmer Ruthyn, Ætate* viii. 15 *May*, 1779.'

'It is very odd I should not have been told or remembered who it was. I think if I had *ever* been told I *should* have remembered it. I do recollect this picture, though, I am nearly certain. What a singular child's face!'

And my cousin leaned over it with a candle on each side, and her hand shading her eyes, as if seeking by aid of these fair and half-formed lineaments to read an enigma.

The childish features defied her, I suppose; their secret was unfathomable, for after a good while she raised her head, still looking at the portrait, and sighed.

'A very singular face,' she said, softly, as a person might who was looking into a coffin. 'Had not we better replace it?'

So the pretty oval, containing the fair golden hair and large eyes, the pale, unfathomable sphinx, remounted to its nail, and the *funeste* and beautiful child seemed to smile down oracularly on our conjectures.

'So is the face in the large portrait — *very* singular — more, I think, than that — handsomer too. This is a sickly child, I think; but the full-length is so manly, though so slender, and so handsome too. I always think him a hero and a mystery, and they won't tell me about him, and I can only dream and wonder.'

'He has made more people than you dream and wonder, my dear Maud. I don't know what to make of him. He is a sort of idol, you know, of your father's, and yet I don't think he helps him much. His abilities were singular; so has been his misfortune; for the rest, my dear, he is neither a hero nor a wonder. So far as I know, there are very few sublime men going about the world.'

'You really must tell me all you know about him, Cousin Monica. Now don't refuse.'

'But why should you care to hear? There is really nothing pleasant to tell.'

'That is just the reason I wish it. If it were at all pleasant, it would be quite commonplace. I like to hear of adventures, dangers, and misfortunes;

and above all, I love a mystery. You know, papa will never tell me, and I dare not ask him; not that he is ever unkind, but, somehow, I am afraid; and neither Mrs. Rusk nor Mary Quince will tell me anything, although I suspect they know a good deal.'

'I don't see any good in telling you, dear, nor, to say the truth, any great harm either.'

'No — now that's *quite* true — no harm. There *can't* be, for I *must* know it all some day, you know, and better now, and from *you*, than perhaps from a stranger, and in a less favourable way.'

'Upon my word, it is a wise little woman; and really, that's not such bad sense after all.'

So we poured out another cup of tea each, and sipped it very comfortably by the fire, while Lady Knollys talked on, and her animated face helped the strange story.

'It is not very much, after all. Your uncle Silas, you know, is living?'

'Oh yes, in Derbyshire.'

'So I see you do know something of him, sly girl! but no matter. You know how very rich your father is; but Silas was the younger brother, and had little more than a thousand a year. If he had not played, and did not care to marry, it would have been quite enough — ever so much more than younger sons of dukes often have; but he was — well, a *mauvais sujet* — you know what that is. I don't want to say any ill of him — more than I really know — but he was fond of his pleasures, I suppose, like other young men, and he played, and was always losing, and your father for a long time paid great sums for him. I believe he was really a most expensive and vicious young man; and I fancy he does not deny that now, for they say he would change the past if he could.

I was looking at the pensive little boy in the oval frame — aged eight years — who was, a few springs later, 'a most expensive and vicious young man,' and was now a suffering and outcast old one, and wondering from what a small seed the hemlock or the wallflower grows, and how microscopic are the beginnings of the kingdom of God or of the mystery of iniquity in a human being's heart.

'Austin — your papa — was very kind to him — *very*; but then, you know, he's an oddity, dear — he *is* an oddity, though no one may have told you before — and he never forgave him for his marriage. Your father, I suppose, knew more about the lady than I did — I was young then — but there were various reports, none of them pleasant, and she was not visited, and for some time there was a complete estrangement between your father and your uncle Silas; and it was made up, rather oddly, on the very occasion which some people said ought to have totally separated them. Did you ever hear anything — anything *very* remarkable — about your uncle?'

'No, never, they would not tell me, though I am sure they know. Pray go on.'

'Well, Maud, as I have begun, I'll complete the story, though perhaps it might have been better untold. It was something rather shocking — indeed, *very* shocking; in fact, they insisted on suspecting him of having committed a murder.'

I stared at my cousin for some time, and then at the little boy, so refined, so beautiful, so *funeste*, in the oval frame.

'Yes, dear,' said she, her eyes following mine; 'who'd have supposed he could ever have — have fallen under so horrible a suspicion?'

'The wretches! Of course, Uncle Silas — of course, he's innocent?' I said at last.

'Of course, my dear,' said Cousin Monica, with an odd look; 'but you know there are some things as bad almost to be suspected of as to have done, and the country gentlemen chose to suspect him. They did not like him, you see. His politics vexed them; and he resented their treatment of his wife — though I really think, poor Silas, he did not care a pin about her — and he annoyed them whenever he could. Your papa, you know, is very proud of his family — *he* never had the slightest suspicion of your uncle.'

'Oh no!' I cried vehemently.

'That's right, Maud Ruthyn,' said Cousin Monica, with a sad little smile and a nod. 'And your papa was, you may suppose, very angry.'

'Of course he was,' I exclaimed.

'You have no idea, my dear, *how* angry. He directed his attorney to prosecute, by wholesale, all who had said a word affecting your uncle's character. But the lawyers were against it, and then your uncle tried to fight his way through it, but the men would not meet him. He was quite slurred. Your father went up and saw the Minister. He wanted to have him a Deputy-

Lieutenant, or something, in his county. Your papa, you know, had a very great influence with the Government. Beside his county influence, he had two boroughs then. But the Minister was afraid, the feeling was so very strong. They offered him something in the Colonies, but your father would not hear of it — that would have been a banishment, you know. They would have given your father a peerage to make it up, but he would not accept it, and broke with the party. Except in that way — which, you know, was connected with the reputation of the family — I don’t think, considering his great wealth, he has done very much for Silas. To say truth, however, he was very liberal before his marriage. Old Mrs. Aylmer says he made a vow *then* that Silas should never have more than five hundred a year, which he still allows him, I believe, and he permits him to live in the place. But they say it is in a very wild, neglected state.’

‘You live in the same county — have you seen it lately, Cousin Monica?’

‘No, not very lately,’ said Cousin Monica, and began to hum an air abstractedly.

CHAPTER XIII

BEFORE AND AFTER BREAKFAST

Next morning early I visited my favourite full-length portrait in the chocolate coat and topboots. Scanty as had been my cousin Monica’s notes upon this dark and eccentric biography, they were everything to me. A soul had entered that enchanted form. Truth had passed by with her torch, and a sad light shone for a moment on that enigmatic face.

There stood the *roué* — the duellist — and, with all his faults, the hero too! In that dark large eye lurked the profound and fiery enthusiasm of his ill-starred passion. In the thin but exquisite lip I read the courage of the paladin, who would have ‘fought his way,’ though single-handed, against all the magnates of his county, and by ordeal of battle have purged the honour of the Ruthyns. There in that delicate half-sarcastic tracery of the nostril I detected the intellectual defiance which had politically isolated Silas Ruthyn and opposed him to the landed oligarchy of his county, whose retaliation had been a hideous slander. There, too, and on his brows and lip, I traced the patience of a cold disdain. I could now see him as he was — the prodigal, the hero, and the martyr. I stood gazing on him with a girlish interest and admiration. There was indignation, there was pity, there was hope. Some day it might come to pass that I, girl as I was, might contribute by word or deed towards the vindication of that long-suffering, gallant, and romantic prodigal. It was a flicker of the Joan of Arc inspiration, common, I fancy, to many girls. I little then imagined how profoundly and strangely involved my uncle’s fate would one day become with mine.

I was interrupted by Captain Oakley’s voice at the window. He was leaning on the windowsill, and looking in with a smile — the window being open, the morning sunny, and his cap lifted in his hand.

‘Good-morning, Miss Ruthyn. What a charming old place! quite the setting for a romance; such timber, and this really *beautiful* house. I *do* so like these white and black houses — wonderful old things. By-the-by, you treated us very badly last night — you did, indeed; upon my word, now, it really was too bad — running away, and drinking tea with Lady Knollys —

so she says. I really — I should not like to tell you how very savage I felt, particularly considering how very short my time is.'

I was a shy, but not a giggling country miss. I knew I was an heiress; I knew I was somebody. I was not the least bit in the world conceited, but I think this knowledge helped to give me a certain sense of security and self-possession, which might have been mistaken for dignity or simplicity. I am sure I looked at him with a fearless enquiry, for he answered my thoughts.

'I do really assure you, Miss Ruthyn, I am quite serious; you have no idea how very much we have missed you.'

There was a little pause, and, like a fool, I lowered my eyes, and blushed.

'I — I was thinking of leaving to-day; I am so unfortunate — my leave is just out — it is so unlucky; but I don't quite know whether my aunt Knollys will allow me to go.'

'*I*? — certainly, my dear Charlie, *I* don't want you at all,' exclaimed a voice — Lady Knollys's — briskly, from an open window close by; 'what could put that in your head, dear?'

And in went my cousin's head, and the window shut down.

'She is *such* an oddity, poor dear Aunt Knollys,' murmured the young man, ever so little put out, and he laughed. 'I never know quite what she wishes, or how to please her; but she's *so* goodnatured; and when she goes to town for the season — she does not always, you know — her house is really very gay — you can't think — — '

Here again he was interrupted, for the door opened, and Lady Knollys entered. 'And you know, Charles,' she continued, 'it would not do to forget your visit to Snodhurst; you wrote, you know, and you have only tonight and tomorrow. You are thinking of nothing but that moor; I heard you talking to the gamekeeper; I know he is — is not he, Maud, the brown man with great whiskers, and leggings? I'm very sorry, you know, but I really must spoil your shooting, for they do expect you at Snodhurst, Charlie; and do not you think this window a little too much for Miss Ruthyn? Maud, my dear, the air is very sharp; shut it down, Charles, and you'd better tell them to get a fly for you from the town after luncheon. Come, dear,' she said to me. 'Was not that the breakfast bell? Why does not your papa get a gong? — it is so hard to know one bell from another.'

I saw that Captain Oakley lingered for a last look, but I did not give it, and went out smiling with Cousin Knollys, and wondering why old ladies are so uniformly disagreeable.

In the lobby she said, with an odd, goodnatured look —

‘Don’t allow any of his lovemaking, my dear. Charles Oakley has not a guinea, and an heiress would be very convenient. Of course he has his eyes about him. Charles is not by any means foolish; and I should not be at all sorry to see him well married, for I don’t think he will do much good any other way; but there are degrees, and his ideas are sometimes very impertinent.’

I was an admiring reader of the *Albums*, the *Souvenirs*, the *Keepsakes*, and all that flood of Christmas-present lore which yearly irrigated England, with pretty covers and engravings; and floods of elegant twaddle — the milk, not destitute of water, on which the babes of literature were then fed. On this, my genius throve. I had a little album, enriched with many gems of original thought and observation, which I jotted down in suitable language. Lately, turning over these faded leaves of rhyme and prose, I lighted, under this day’s date, upon the following sage reflection, with my name appended: —

‘Is there not in the female heart an ineradicable jealousy, which, if it sways the passions of the young, rules also the *advice* of the *aged*? Do they not grudge to youth the sentiments (though Heaven knows how *shadowed* with sorrow) which they can *no longer inspire*, perhaps even *experience*; and does not youth, in turn, sigh over the envy which has *power to blight*?

MAUD AYLMER RUTHYN.’

‘He has not been making love to me,’ I said rather tartly, ‘and he does not seem to me at all impertinent, and I really don’t care the least whether he goes or stays.’

Cousin Monica looked in my face with her old waggish smile, and laughed.

‘You’ll understand those London dandies better some day, dear Maud; they are very well, but they like money — not to keep, of course — but still they like it and know its value.’

At breakfast my father told Captain Oakley where he might have shooting, or if he preferred going to Dilsford, only half an hour's ride, he might have his choice of hunters, and find the dogs there that morning.

The Captain smiled archly at me, and looked at his aunt. There was a suspense. I hope I did not show how much I was interested — but it would not do. Cousin Monica was inexorable.

'Hunting, hawking, fishing, fiddle-de-dee! You know, Charlie, my dear, it is quite out of the question. He is going to Snodhurst this afternoon, and without quite a rudeness, in which I should be involved too, he really can't — you know you can't, Charles! and — and he *must* go and keep his engagement.'

So papa acquiesced with a polite regret, and hoped another time.

'Oh, leave all that to me. When you want him, only write me a note, and I'll send him or bring him if you let me. I always know where to find him — don't I, Charlie? — and we shall be only too happy.'

Aunt Monica's influence with her nephew was special, for she 'tipped' him handsomely every now and then, and he had formed for himself agreeable expectations, besides, respecting her will. I felt rather angry at his submitting to this sort of tutelage, knowing nothing of its motive; I was also disgusted by Cousin Monica's tyranny.

So soon as he had left the room, Lady Knollys, not minding me, said briskly to papa, 'Never let that young man into your house again. I found him making speeches, this morning, to little Maud here; and he really has not two pence in the world — it is amazing impudence — and you know such absurd things do happen.'

'Come, Maud, what compliments did he pay you?' asked my father.

I was vexed, and therefore spoke courageously. 'His compliments were not to me; they were all to the house,' I said, drily.

'Quite as it should be — the house, of course; it is that he's in love with,' said Cousin Knollys.

'Twas on a widow's jointure land,
The archer, Cupid, took his stand.'

'Hey! I don't quite understand,' said my father, slily.

'Tut! Austin; you forget Charlie is my nephew.'

'So I did,' said my father.

‘Therefore the literal widow in this case *can* have no interest in view but one, and that is yours and Maud’s. I wish him well, but he shan’t put my little cousin and her expectations into his empty pocket — *not* a bit of it. And *there’s* another reason, Austin, why you should marry — you have no eye for these things, whereas a clever *woman* would see at a glance and prevent mischief.’

‘So she would,’ acquiesced my father, in his gloomy, amused way. ‘Maud, you must try to be a clever woman.’

‘So she will in her time, but that is not come yet; and I tell you, Austin Ruthyn, if you won’t look about and marry somebody, somebody may possibly marry you.’

‘You were always an oracle, Monica; but *here* I am lost in total perplexity,’ said my father.

‘Yes; sharks sailing round you, with keen eyes and large throats; and you have come to the age precisely when men *are* swallowed up alive like Jonah.’

‘Thank you for the parallel, but you know that was not a happy union, even for the fish, and there was a separation in a few days; not that I mean to trust to that; but there’s no one to throw me into the jaws of the monster, and I’ve no notion of jumping there; and the fact is, Monica, there’s no monster at all.’

‘I’m not so sure.’

‘But I’m quite sure,’ said my father, a little drily. ‘You forget how old I am, and how long I’ve lived alone — I and little Maud;’ and he smiled and smoothed my hair, and, I thought, sighed.

‘No one is ever too old to do a foolish thing,’ began Lady Knollys.

‘Nor to say a foolish thing, Monica. This has gone on too long. Don’t you see that little Maud here is silly enough to be frightened at your fun.’

So I was, but I could not divine how he guessed it.

‘And well or ill, wisely or madly, I’ll *never* marry; so put that out of your head.’

This was addressed rather to me, I think, than to Lady Knollys, who smiled a little waggishly on me, and said —

‘To be sure, Maud; maybe you are right; a stepdame is a risk, and I ought to have asked you first what you thought of it; and upon my honour,’ she continued merrily but kindly, observing that my eyes, I know not exactly from what feeling, filled with tears, ‘I’ll never again advise your papa to marry, unless you first tell me you wish it.’

This was a great deal from Lady Knollys, who had a taste for advising her friends and managing their affairs.

‘I’ve a great respect for instinct. I believe, Austin, it is truer than reason, and yours and Maud’s are both against me, though I know I have reason on my side.’

My father’s brief wintry smile answered, and Cousin Monica kissed me, and said —

‘I’ve been so long my own mistress that I sometimes forget there are such things as fear and jealousy; and are you going to your governess, Maud?’

CHAPTER XIV

ANGRY WORDS

I was going to my governess, as Lady Knollys said; and so I went. The undefinable sense of danger that smote me whenever I beheld that woman had deepened since last night's occurrence, and was taken out of the region of instinct or prepossession by the strange though slight indications of recognition and abhorrence which I had witnessed in Lady Knollys on that occasion.

The tone in which Cousin Monica had asked, 'are you going to your governess?' and the curious, grave, and anxious look that accompanied the question, disturbed me; and there was something odd and cold in the tone as if a remembrance had suddenly chilled her. The accent remained in my ear, and the sharp brooding look was fixed before me as I glided up the broad dark stairs to Madame de la Rougierre's chamber.

She had not come down to the schoolroom, as the scene of my studies was called. She had decided on having a relapse, and accordingly had not made her appearance downstairs that morning. The gallery leading to her room was dark and lonely, and I grew more nervous as I approached; I paused at the door, making up my mind to knock.

But the door opened suddenly, and, like a magic-lantern figure, presented with a snap, appeared close before my eyes the great muffled face, with the forbidding smirk, of Madame de la Rougierre.

'Wat you mean, my dear cheaile?' she inquired with a malevolent shrewdness in her eyes, and her hollow smile all the time disconcerting me more even than the suddenness of her appearance; 'wat for you approach so softly? I do not sleep, you see, but you feared, perhaps, to have the misfortune of wakening me, and so you came — is it not so? — to leesten, and looke in very gentily; you want to know how I was. Vous êtes bien aimable d'avoir pensé à moi. Bah!' she cried, suddenly bursting through her irony. 'Wy could not Lady Knollys come herself and leesten to the keyhole to make her report? Fi donc! wat is there to conceal? Nothing. Enter, if you please. Every one they are welcome!' and she flung the door wide, turned her back upon me, and, with an ejaculation which I did not understand, strode into the room.

'I did not come with any intention, Madame, to pry or to intrude — you don't think so — you *can't* think so — you can't possibly mean to insinuate anything so insulting!'

I was very angry, and my tremors had all vanished now.

'No, not for *you*, dear cheaile; I was thinking to miladi Knollys, who, without cause, is my enemy. Every one has enemy; you will learn all that so soon as you are little older, and without cause she is mine. Come, Maud, speak a the truth — was it not miladi Knollys who sent you here doucement, doucement, so quaite to my door — is it not so, little rogue?'

Madame had confronted me again, and we were now standing in the middle of her floor.

I indignantly repelled the charge, and searching me for a moment with her oddly-shaped, cunning eyes, she said —

'That is good cheaile, you speak a so direct — I like that, and am glad to hear; but, my dear Maud, that woman — — '

'Lady Knollys is papa's cousin,' I interposed a little gravely.

'She does hate a me so, you av no idea. She as tryed to injure me several times, and would employ the most innocent person, unconsciously you know, my dear, to assist her malice.'

Here Madame wept a little. I had already discovered that she could shed tears whenever she pleased. I have heard of such persons, but I never met another before or since.

Madame was unusually frank — no one ever knew better when to be candid. At present I suppose she concluded that Lady Knollys would certainly relate whatever she knew concerning her before she left Knowl; and so Madame's reserves, whatever they might be, were dissolving, and she growing childlike and confiding.

'Et comment va monsieur votre père aujourd'hui?'

'Very well,' I thanked her.

'And how long miladi Knollys her visit is likely to be?'

'I could not say exactly, but for some days.'

'Eh bien, my dear cheaile, I find myself better this morning, and we must return to our lessons. Je veux m'habiller, ma chère Maud; you will wait me in the schoolroom.’

By this time Madame, who, though lazy, could make an effort, and was capable of getting into a sudden hurry, had placed herself before her dressing-table, and was ogling her discoloured and bony countenance in the glass.

‘Wat horror! I am so pale. Quel ennui! wat bore! Ow weak av I grow in two three days!’

And she practised some plaintive, invalid glances into the mirror. But on a sudden there came a little sharp inquisitive frown as she looked over the frame of the glass, upon the terrace beneath. It was only a glance, and she sat down languidly in her armchair to prepare, I suppose, for the fatigues of the toilet.

My curiosity was sufficiently aroused to induce me to ask —

‘But why, Madame, do you fancy that Lady Knollys dislikes you?’

‘’Tis not fancy, my dear Maud. Ah ha, no! Mais c’est toute une histoire — too tedious to tell now — some time maybe — and you will learn when you are little older, the most violent hatreds often they are the most without cause. But, my dear cheaile, the hours they are running from us, and I must dress. Vite, vite! so you run away to the schoolroom, and I will come after.’

Madame had her dressing-case and her mysteries, and palpably stood in need of repairs; so away I went to my studies. The room which we called the schoolroom was partly beneath the floor of Madame’s bedchamber, and commanded the same view; so, remembering my governess’s peering glance from her windows, I looked out, and saw Cousin Monica making a brisk promenade up and down the terrace-walk. Well, that was quite enough to account for it. I had grown very curious, and I resolved when our lessons were over to join her and make another attempt to discover the mystery.

As I sat over my books, I fancied I heard a movement outside the door. I suspected that Madame was listening. I waited for a time, expecting to see the door open, but she did not come; so I opened it suddenly myself, but Madame was not on the threshold nor on the lobby. I heard a rustling, however, and on the staircase over the banister I saw the folds of her silk dress as she descended.

She is going, I thought, to seek an interview with Lady Knollys. She intends to propitiate that dangerous lady; so I amused some eight or ten minutes in watching Cousin Monica's quick march and right-about face upon the parade-ground of the terrace. But no one joined her.

'She is certainly talking to papa,' was my next and more probable conjecture. Having the profoundest distrust of Madame, I was naturally extremely jealous of the confidential interviews in which deceit and malice might make their representations plausibly and without answer.

'Yes, I'll run down and see — see *papa*; she shan't tell lies behind my back, horrid woman!'

At the study-door I knocked, and forthwith entered. My father was sitting near the window, his open book before him, Madame standing at the other side of the table, her cunning eyes bathed in tears, and her pockethandkerchief pressed to her mouth. Her eyes glittered stealthily on me for an instant: she was sobbing — *désolée*, in fact — that grim grenadier lady, and her attitude was exquisitely dejected and timid. But she was, notwithstanding, reading closely and craftily my father's face. He was not looking at her, but rather upward toward the ceiling, reflectively leaning on his hand, with an expression, not angry, but rather surly and annoyed.

'I ought to have heard of this before, Madame,' my father was saying as I came in; 'not that it would have made any difference — not the least; mind that. But it was the kind of thing that I ought to have heard, and the omission was not strictly right.'

Madame, in a shrill and lamentable key, opened her voluble reply, but was arrested by a nod from my father, who asked me if I wanted anything.

'Only — only that I was waiting in the schoolroom for Madame, and did not know where she was.'

'Well, she is here, you see, and will join you upstairs in a few minutes.'

So back I went again, huffed, angry, and curious, and sat back in my chair with a clouded countenance, thinking very little about lessons.

When Madame entered, I did not lift my head or eyes.

'Good cheaile! reading,' said she, as she approached briskly and reassured.

'No,' I answered tartly; 'not good, nor a child either; I'm not reading, I've been thinking.'

'Très-bien!' she said, with an insufferable smile, 'thinking is very good also; but you look unhappy — very, poor cheaile. Take care you are not grow jealous for poor Madame talking sometime to your papa; you must not, little fool. It is only for a your good, my dear Maud, and I had no objection you should stay.'

'*You*! Madame!' I said loftily. I was very angry, and showed it through my dignity, to Madame's evident satisfaction.

'No — it was your papa, Mr. Ruthyn, who weesh to speak alone; for me I do not care; there was something I weesh to tell him. I don't care who know, but Mr. Ruthyn he is deeferent.'

I made no remark.

'Come, leetle Maud, you are not to be so cross; it will be much better you and I to be good friends together. Why should a we quarrel? — wat nonsense! Do you imagine I would anywhere undertake a the education of a young person unless I could speak with her parent? — wat folly! I would like to be your friend, however, my poor Maud, if you would allow — you and I together — wat you say?'

'People grow to be friends by liking, Madame, and liking comes of itself, not by bargain; I like every one who is kind to me.'

'And so I. You are like me in so many things, my dear Maud! Are you quaite well to-day? I think you look fateague; so I feel, too, vary tire. I think we weel put off the lessons to tomorrow. Eh? and we will come to play la grace in the garden.'

Madame was plainly in a high state of exultation. Her audience had evidently been satisfactory, and, like other people, when things went well, her soul lighted up into a sulphureous goodhumour, not very genuine nor pleasant, but still it was better than other moods.

I was glad when our calisthenics were ended, and Madame had returned to her apartment, so that I had a pleasant little walk with Cousin Monica.

We women are persevering when once our curiosity is roused, but she gaily foiled mine, and, I think, had a mischievous pleasure in doing so. As we were going in to dress for dinner, however, she said, quite gravely —

'I am sorry, Maud, I allowed you to see that I have any unpleasant impressions about that governess lady. I shall be at liberty some day to explain all about it, and, indeed, it will be enough to tell your father, whom I have not been able to find all day; but really we are, perhaps, making too much of the matter, and I cannot say that I know anything against Madame that is conclusive, or — or, indeed, at all; but that there are reasons, and — you must not ask any more — no, you must not.'

That evening, while I was playing the overture to Cenerentola, for the entertainment of my cousin, there arose from the tea-table, where she and my father were sitting, a spirited and rather angry harangue from Lady Knollys' lips; I turned my eyes from the music towards the speakers; the overture swooned away with a little hesitating babble into silence, and I listened.

Their conversation had begun under cover of the music which I was making, and now they were too much engrossed to perceive its discontinuance. The first sentence I heard seized my attention; my father had closed the book he was reading, upon his finger, and was leaning back in his chair, as he used to do when at all angry; his face was a little flushed, and I knew the fierce and glassy stare which expressed pride, surprise, and wrath.

'Yes, Lady Knollys, there's an animus; I know the spirit you speak in — it does you no honour,' said my father.

'And I know the spirit *you* speak in, the spirit of *madness*,' retorted Cousin Monica, just as much in earnest. 'I can't conceive how you *can* be so *demented*, Austin. What has perverted you? are you *blind*?'

'*You* are, Monica; your own unnatural prejudice — *unnatural* prejudice, blinds you. What is it all? — *nothing*. Were I to act as you say, I should be a *coward* and a traitor. I see, I *do* see, all that's real. I'm no Quixote, to draw my sword on illusions.'

'There should be no halting here. How *can* you — do you ever *think*? I wonder if you can breathe. I feel as if the evil one were in the house.'

A stern, momentary frown was my father's only answer, as he looked fixedly at her.

'People need not nail up horseshoes and mark their door-stones with charms to keep the evil spirit out,' ran on Lady Knollys, who looked pale and angry, in her way, 'but you open your door in the dark and invoke unknown danger. How can you look at that child that's — she's *not* playing,' said Knollys, abruptly stopping.

My father rose, muttering to himself, and cast a lurid glance at me, as he went in high displeasure to the door. Cousin Monica, now flushed a little, glanced also silently at me, biting the tip of her slender gold cross, and doubtful how much I had heard.

My father opened the door suddenly, which he had just closed, and looking in, said, in a calmer tone —

‘Perhaps, Monica, you would come for a moment to the study; I’m sure you have none but kindly feelings towards me and little Maud, there; and I thank you for your goodwill; but you must see other things more reasonably, and I think you will.’

Cousin Monica got up silently and followed him, only throwing up her eyes and hands as she did so, and I was left alone, wondering and curious more than ever.

CHAPTER XV

A WARNING

I sat still, listening and wondering, and wondering and listening; but I ought to have known that no sound could reach me where I was from my father’s study. Five minutes passed and they did not return. Ten, fifteen. I drew near the fire and made myself comfortable in a great armchair, looking on the embers, but not seeing all the scenery and *dramatis personae* of my past life or future fortunes, in their shifting glow, as people in romances usually do; but fanciful castles and caverns in blood-red and golden glare, suggestive of dreamy fairyland, salamanders, sunsets, and palaces of fire-kings, and all this partly shaping and partly shaped by my fancy, and leading my closing eyes and drowsy senses off into dreamland. So I nodded and dozed, and sank into a deep slumber, from which I was roused by the voice of my cousin Monica. On opening my eyes, I saw nothing but Lady Knollys’ face looking steadily into mine, and expanding into a goodnatured laugh as she watched the vacant and lacklustre stare with which I returned her gaze.

‘Come, dear Maud, it is late; you ought to have been in your bed an hour ago.’

Up I stood, and so soon as I had begun to hear and see aright, it struck me that Cousin Monica was more grave and subdued than I had seen her.

‘Come, let us light our candles and go together.’

Holding hands, we ascended, I sleepy, she silent; and not a word was spoken until we reached my room. Mary Quince was in waiting, and tea made.

‘Tell her to come back in a few minutes; I wish to say a word to you,’ said Lady Knollys.

The maid accordingly withdrew.

Lady Knollys’ eyes followed her till she closed the door behind her.

‘I’m going in the morning.’

‘So soon!’

‘Yes, dear; I could not stay; in fact, I should have gone to-*night, but it was too late, and I leave instead in the morning.’

‘I am so sorry — so *very* sorry,’ I exclaimed, in honest disappointment, and the walls seemed to darken round me, and the monotony of the old routine loomed more terrible in prospect.

‘So am I, dear Maud.’

‘But can’t you stay a little longer; *won’t* you?’

‘No, Maud; I’m vexed with Austin — very much vexed with your father; in short, I can’t conceive anything so entirely preposterous, and dangerous, and insane as his conduct, now that his eyes are quite opened, and I must say a word to you before I go, and it is just this: — you must cease to be a mere child, you must try and be a woman, Maud: now don’t be frightened or foolish, but hear me out. That woman — what does she call herself — Rougierre? I have reason to believe is — in fact, from circumstances, *must* be your enemy; you will find her very deep, daring, and unscrupulous, I venture to say, and you can’t be too much on your guard. Do you quite understand me, Maud?’

‘I do,’ said I, with a gasp, and my eyes fixed on her with a terrified interest, as if on a warning ghost.

‘You must bridle your tongue, mind, and govern your conduct, and command even your features. It is hard to practise reserve; but you must — you must be secret and vigilant. Try and be in appearance just as usual; don’t quarrel; tell her nothing, if you do happen to know anything, of your father’s business; be always on your guard when with her, and keep your eye upon her everywhere. Observe everything, disclose nothing — do you see?’

‘Yes,’ again I whispered.

‘You have good, honest servants about you, and, thank God, they don’t like her. But you must not repeat to them one word I am now saying to you. Servants are fond of dropping hints, and letting things ooze out in that way, and in their quarrels with her would compromise you — you understand me?’

‘I do,’ I sighed, with a wild stare.

‘And — and, Maud, don’t let her meddle with your food.’

Cousin Monica gave me a pale little nod, and looked away.

I could only stare at her; and under my breath I uttered an ejaculation of terror.

‘Don’t be so frightened; you must not be foolish; I only wish you to be upon your guard. I have my suspicions, but I may be quite wrong; your father thinks I am a fool; perhaps I am — perhaps not; maybe he may come to think as I do. But you must not speak to him on the subject; he’s an odd man, and never did and never will act wisely, when his passions and prejudices are engaged.’

‘Has she ever committed any great crime?’ I asked, feeling as if I were on the point of fainting.

‘No, dear Maud, I never said anything of the kind; don’t be so frightened: I only said I have formed, from something I know, an ill opinion of her; and an unprincipled person, under temptation, is capable of a great deal. But no matter how wicked she may be, you may defy her, simply by assuming her to be so, and acting with caution; she is cunning and selfish, and she’ll do nothing desperate. But I would give her no opportunity.’

‘Oh, dear! Oh, Cousin Monica, don’t leave me.’

‘My dear, I *can’t* stay; your papa and I — we’ve had a quarrel. I know I’m right, and he’s wrong, and he’ll come to see it soon, if he’s left to himself, and then all will be right. But just now he misunderstands me, and we’ve not been civil to one another. I could not think of staying, and he would not allow you to come away with me for a short visit, which I wished. It won’t last, though; and I do assure you, my dear Maud, I am quite happy about you now that you are quite on your guard. Just act respecting that person as if she were capable of any treachery, without showing distrust or dislike in your manner, and nothing will remain in her power; and write to me whenever you wish to hear from me, and if I can be of any real use, I don’t care, I’ll come: so there’s a wise little woman; do as I’ve said, and depend upon it everything will go well, and I’ll contrive before long to get that nasty creature away.’

Except a kiss and a few hurried words in the morning when she was leaving, and a pencilled farewell for papa, there was nothing more from Cousin Monica for some time.

Knowl was dark again — darker than ever. My father, gentle always to me, was now — perhaps it was contrast with his fitful return to something like the world’s ways, during Lady Knollys’ stay — more silent, sad, and isolated than before. Of Madame de la Rougierre I had nothing at first particular to remark. Only, reader, if you happen to be a rather nervous and very young girl, I ask you to conceive my fears and imaginings, and the kind of misery which I was suffering. Its intensity I cannot now even myself recall. But it overshadowed me perpetually — a care, an alarm. It lay down with me at night and got up with me in the morning, tinting and disturbing my dreams, and making my daily life terrible. I wonder now that I lived through the ordeal. The torment was secret and incessant, and kept my mind in unintermitting activity.

Externally things went on at Knowl for some weeks in the usual routine. Madame was, so far as her unpleasant ways were concerned, less tormenting than before, and constantly reminded me of ‘our leetle vow of friendship, you remember, dearest Maud!’ and she would stand beside me, and looked from the window with her bony arm round my waist, and my reluctant hand drawn round in hers; and thus she would smile, and talk affectionately and even playfully; for at times she would grow quite girlish, and smile with her great carious teeth, and begin to quiz and babble about the young ‘faylows,’ and tell bragging tales of her lovers, all of which were dreadful to me.

She was perpetually recurring, too, to the charming walk we had had together to Church Scarsdale, and proposing a repetition of that delightful excursion, which, you may be sure, I evaded, having by no means so agreeable a recollection of our visit.

One day, as I was dressing to go out for a walk, in came good Mrs. Rusk, the housekeeper, to my room.

‘Miss Maud, dear, is not that too far for you? It is a long walk to Church Scarsdale, and you are not looking very well.’

‘To Church Scarsdale?’ I repeated; ‘I’m not going to Church Scarsdale; who said I was going to Church Scarsdale? There is nothing I should so much dislike.’

‘Well, I never!’ exclaimed she. ‘Why, there’s old Madame’s been downstairs with me for fruit and sandwiches, telling me you were longing to go to Church Scarsdale — — ‘

‘It’s quite untrue,’ I interrupted. ‘She knows I hate it.’

‘She does?’ said Mrs. Rusk, quietly; ‘and you did not tell her nothing about the basket? Well — if there isn’t a story! Now what may she be after — what is it — what *is* she driving at?’

‘I can’t tell, but I won’t go.’

‘No, of course, dear, you won’t go. But you may be sure there’s some scheme in her old head. Tom Fowkes says she’s bin two or three times to drink tea at Farmer Gray’s — now, could it be she’s thinking to marry him?’ And Mrs. Rusk sat down and laughed heartily, ending with a crow of derision.

‘To think of a young fellow like that, and his wife, poor thing, not dead a year — maybe she’s got money?’

‘I don’t know — I don’t care — perhaps, Mrs. Rusk, you mistook Madame. I will go down; I am going out.’

Madame had a basket in her hand. She held it quietly by her capacious skirt, at the far side, and made no allusion to the preparation, neither to the direction in which she proposed walking, and prattling artlessly and affectionately she marched by my side.

Thus we reached the stile at the sheepwalk, and then I paused.

‘Now, Madame, have not we gone far enough in this direction? — suppose we visit the pigeon-house in the park?’

‘Wat folly! my dear a Maud — you cannot walk so far.’

‘Well, towards home, then.’

‘And wy not a this way? We ave not walk enough, and Mr. Ruthyn he will not be pleased if you do not take proper exercise. Let us walk on by the path, and stop when you like.’

‘Where do you wish to go, Madame?’

‘Nowhere particular — come along; don’t be fool, Maud.’

‘This leads to Church Scarsdale.’

‘A yes indeed! wat sweet place! bote we need not a walk all the way to there.’

‘I’d rather not walk outside the grounds to-day, Madame.’

‘Come, Maud, you shall not be fool — wat you mean, Mademoiselle?’ said the stalworth lady, growing yellow and greenish with an angry mottling, and accosting me very gruffly.

‘I don’t care to cross the stile, thank you, Madame. I shall remain at this side.’

‘You shall do wat I tell you!’ exclaimed she.

‘Let go my arm, Madame, you hurt me,’ I cried.

She had griped my arm very firmly in her great bony hand, and seemed preparing to drag me over by main force.

‘Let me go,’ I repeated shrilly, for the pain increased.

‘La!’ she cried with a smile of rage and a laugh, letting me go and shoving me backward at the same time, so that I had a rather dangerous tumble.

I stood up, a good deal hurt, and very angry, notwithstanding my fear of her.

‘I’ll ask papa if I am to be so illused.’

‘Wat av I done?’ cried Madame, laughing grimly from her hollow jaws; I did all I could to help you over— ‘ow could I prevent you to pull back and tumble if you would do so? That is the way wen you petites Mademoiselles are naughty and hurt yourself they always try to make blame other people. Tell a wat you like — you think I care?’

‘Very well, Madame.’

‘Are a you coming?’

‘No.’

She looked steadily in my face and very wickedly. I gazed at her as with dazzled eyes — I suppose as the feathered prey do at the owl that glares on them by night. I neither moved back nor forward, but stared at her quite helplessly.

‘You are nice pupil — charming young person! So polite, so obedient, so amiable! I will walk towards Church Scarsdale,’ she continued, suddenly breaking through the conventionalism of her irony, and accosting me in savage accents. ‘You weel stay behind if you dare. I tell you to accompany — do you hear?’

More than ever resolved against following her, I remained where I was, watching her as she marched fiercely away, swinging her basket as though in imagination knocking my head off with it.

She soon cooled, however, and looking over her shoulder, and seeing me still at the other side of the stile, she paused, and beckoned me grimly to follow her. Seeing me resolutely maintain my position, she faced about, tossed her head, like an angry beast, and seemed uncertain for a while what course to take with me.

She stamped and beckoned furiously again. I stood firm. I was very much frightened, and could not tell to what violence she might resort in her exasperation. She walked towards me with an inflamed countenance, and a slight angry wagging of the head; my heart fluttered, and I awaited the crisis in extreme trepidation. She came close, the stile only separating us, and stopped short, glaring and grinning at me like a French grenadier who has crossed bayonets, but hesitates to close.

CHAPTER XVI

DOCTOR BRYERLY LOOKS IN

What had I done to excite this ungovernable fury? We had often before had such small differences, and she had contented herself with being sarcastic, teasing, and impertinent.

‘So, for future you are gouvernante and I the cheaile for you to command — is not so? — and you must direct where we shall walk. Très-bien! we shall see; Monsieur Ruthyn he shall know everything. For me I do not care — not at all — I shall be rather pleased, on the contrary. Let him decide. If I shall be responsible for the conduct and the health of Mademoiselle his daughter, it must be that I shall have authority to direct her wat she must do — it must be that she or I shall obey. I ask only witch shall command for the future — voilà tout!’

I was frightened, but resolute — I dare say I looked sullen and uncomfortable. At all events, she seemed to think she might possibly succeed by wheedling; so she tried coaxing and cajoling, and patted my cheek, and predicted that I would be ‘a good cheaile,’ and not ‘vex poor Madame,’ but do for the future ‘wat she tell a me.’

She smiled her wide wet grin, smoothed my hand, and patted my cheek, and would in the excess of her conciliatory paroxysm have kissed me; but I withdrew, and she commented only with a little laugh, and a ‘Foolish little thing! but you will be quite amiable just now.’

‘Why, Madame,’ I asked, suddenly raising my head and looking her straight in the face, ‘do you wish me to walk to Church Scarsdale so particularly to-day?’

She answered my steady look with a contracted gaze and an unpleasant frown.

‘Wy do I? — I do not understand a you; there is *no* particular day — wat folly! Wy I like Church Scarsdale? Well, it is such pretty place. There is all! Wat leetle fool! I suppose you think I want to keel a you and bury you in the churchyard?’

And she laughed, and it would not have been a bad laugh for a ghoul.

‘Come, my dearest Maud, you are not a such fool to say, if *you* tell me me go thees a way, I weel go that; and if you say, go that a way, I weel go thees — you are rasonable leetle girl — come along — *alons donc* — we shall av soche agreeable walk — weel a you?’

But I was immovable. It was neither obstinacy nor caprice, but a profound fear that governed me. I was then afraid — yes, *afraid*. Afraid of *what*? Well, of going with Madame de la Rougierre to Church Scarsdale that day. That was all. And I believe that instinct was true.

She turned a bitter glance toward Church Scarsdale, and bit her lip. She saw that she must give it up. A shadow hung upon her drab features. A little scowl — a little sneer — wide lips compressed with a false smile, and a leaden shadow mottling all. Such was the countenance of the lady who only a minute or two before had been smiling and murmuring over the stile so amiably with her idiomatic ‘blarney,’ as the Irish call that kind of blandishment.

There was no mistaking the malignant disappointment that hooked and warped her features — my heart sank — a tremendous fear overpowered me. Had she intended poisoning me? What was in that basket? I looked in her dreadful face. I felt for a minute quite frantic. A feeling of rage with my father, with my Cousin Monica, for abandoning me to this dreadful rogue, took possession of me, and I cried, helplessly wringing my hands —

‘Oh! it is a shame — it is a shame — it is a shame!’

The countenance of the gouvernante relaxed. I think she in turn was frightened at my extreme agitation. It might have worked unfavourably with my father.

‘Come, Maud, it is time you should try to control your temper. You shall not walk to Church Scarsdale if you do not like — I only invite. *There*! It is quite as you please, where we shall walk then? Here to the peegeon-house? I think you say. Tout bien! Remember I concede you everything. Let us go.’

We went, therefore, towards the pigeon-house, through the forest trees; I not speaking as the children in the wood did with their sinister conductor, but utterly silent and scared; she silent also, meditating, and sometimes with a sharp side-glance gauging my progress towards equanimity. Her own was rapid; for Madame was a philosopher, and speedily accommodated herself to circumstances. We had not walked a quarter of an hour when every trace of gloom had left her face, which had assumed its customary brightness, and she began to sing with a spiteful hilarity as we walked forward, and indeed seemed to be approaching one of her waggish, frolicsome moods. But her fun in these moods was solitary. The joke, whatever it was, remained in her own keeping. When we approached the ruined brick tower — in old times a pigeon-house — she grew quite frisky, and twirled her basket in the air, and capered to her own singing.

Under the shadow of the broken wall, and its ivy, she sat down with a frolicsome *plump*, and opened her basket, inviting me to partake, which I declined. I must do her justice, however, upon the suspicion of poison, which she quite disposed of by gobbling up, to her own share, everything which the basket contained.

The reader is not to suppose that Madame's cheerful demeanour indicated that I was forgiven. Nothing of the kind. One syllable more, on our walk home, she addressed not to me. And when we reached the terrace, she said —

'You will please, Maud, remain for two — three minutes in the Dutch garden, while I speak with Mr. Ruthyn in the study.'

This was spoken with a high head and an insufferable smile; and I more haughtily, but quite gravely, turned without disputing, and descended the steps to the quaint little garden she had indicated.

I was surprised and very glad to see my father there. I ran to him, and began, 'Oh! papa!' and then stopped short, adding only, 'may I speak to you now?'

He smiled kindly and gravely on me.

'Well, Maud, say your say.'

'Oh, sir, it is only this: I entreat that our walks, mine and Madame's may be confined to the grounds.'

'And why?'

'I — I'm afraid to go with her.'

'*Afraid!*' he repeated, looking hard at me. 'Have you lately had a letter from Lady Knollys?'

'No, papa, not for two months or more.'

There was a pause.

'And why *afraid*, Maud?'

‘She brought me one day to Church Scarsdale; you know what a solitary place it is, sir; and she frightened me so that I was afraid to go with her into the churchyard. But she went and left me alone at the other side of the stream, and an impudent man passing by stopped and spoke to me, and seemed inclined to laugh at me, and altogether frightened me very much, and he did not go till Madame happened to return.’

‘What kind of man — young or old?’

‘A young man; he looked like a farmer’s son, but very impudent, and stood there talking to me whether I would or not; and Madame did not care at all, and laughed at me for being frightened; and, indeed, I am very uncomfortable with her.’

He gave me another shrewd look, and then looked down cloudily and thought.

‘You say you are uncomfortable and frightened. How is this — what causes these feelings?’

‘I don’t know, sir; she likes frightening me; I am afraid of her — we are all afraid of her, I think. The servants, I mean, as well as I.’

My father nodded his head contemptuously, twice or thrice, and muttered, ‘A pack of fools!’

‘And she was so very angry to-day with me, because I would not walk again with her to Church Scarsdale. I am very much afraid of her. I— ‘ and quite unpremeditatedly I burst into tears.

‘There, there, little Maud, you must not cry. She is here only for your good. If you are afraid — even *foolishly* afraid — it is enough. Be it as you say; your walks are henceforward confined to the grounds; I’ll tell her so.’

I thanked him through my tears very earnestly.

‘But, Maud, beware of prejudice; women are unjust and violent in their judgments. Your family has suffered in some of its members by such injustice. It behoves us to be careful not to practise it.’

That evening in the drawingroom my father said, in his usual abrupt way —

‘About my departure, Maud: I’ve had a letter from London this morning, and I think I shall be called away sooner than I at first supposed, and for a little time we must manage apart from one another. Do not be alarmed. You shall not be in Madame de la Rougierre’s charge, but under the care of a relation; but even so, little Maud will miss her old father, I think.’

His tone was very tender, so were his looks; he was looking down on me with a smile, and tears were in his eyes. This softening was new to me. I felt a strange thrill of surprise, delight, and love, and springing up, I threw my arms about his neck and wept in silence. He, I think, shed tears also.

'You said a visitor was coming; some one, you mean, to go away with. Ah, yes, you love him better than me.'

'No, dear, no; but I *fear* him; and I am sorry to leave you, little Maud.'

'It won't be very long,' I pleaded.

'No, dear,' he answered with a sigh.

I was tempted almost to question him more closely on the subject, but he seemed to divine what was in my mind, for he said —

'Let us speak no more of it, but only bear in mind, Maud, what I told you about the oak cabinet, the key of which is here,' and he held it up as formerly: 'you remember what you are to do in case Doctor Bryerly should come while I am away?'

'Yes, sir.'

His manner had changed, and I had returned to my accustomed formalities.

It was only a few days later that Dr. Bryerly actually did arrive at Knowl, quite unexpectedly, except, I suppose, by my father. He was to stay only one night.

He was twice closeted in the little study upstairs with my father, who seemed to me, even for him, unusually dejected, and Mrs. Rusk inveighing against 'them rubbitch,' as she always termed the Swedenborgians, told me 'they were making him quite shaky-like, and he would not last no time, if that lanky, lean ghost of a fellow in black was to keep prowling in and out of his room like a tame cat.'

I lay awake that night, wondering what the mystery might be that connected my father and Dr. Bryerly. There was something more than the convictions of their strange religion could account for. There was something that profoundly agitated my father. It may not be reasonable, but so it is. The person whose presence, though we know nothing of the cause of that effect, is palpably attended with pain to anyone who is dear to us, grows odious, and I began to detest Doctor Bryerly.

It was a grey, dark morning, and in a dark pass in the gallery, near the staircase, I came full upon the ungainly Doctor, in his glossy black suit.

I think, if my mind had been less anxiously excited on the subject of his visit, or if I had not disliked him so much, I should not have found courage to accost him as I did. There was something sly, I thought, in his dark, lean face; and he looked so low, so like a Scotch artisan in his Sunday clothes, that I felt a sudden pang of indignation, at the thought that a great gentleman, like my father, should have suffered under his influence, and I stopped suddenly, instead of passing him by with a mere salutation, as he expected, ‘May I ask a question, Doctor Bryerly?’

‘Certainly’

‘Are you the friend whom my father expects?’

‘I don’t quite see.’

‘The friend, I mean, with whom he is to make an expedition to some distance, I think, and for some little time?’

‘No,’ said the Doctor, with a shake of his head.

‘And who is he?’

‘I really have not a notion, Miss.’

‘Why, he said that *you knew*,’ I replied.

The Doctor looked honestly puzzled.

‘Will he stay long away? pray tell me.’

The Doctor looked into my troubled face with inquiring and darkened eyes, like one who half reads another’s meaning; and then he said a little briskly, but not sharply —

‘Well, *I* don’t know, I’m sure, Miss; no, indeed, you must have mistaken; there’s nothing that *I* know.’

There was a little pause, and he added —

‘No. He never mentioned any friend to me.’ I fancied that he was made uncomfortable by my question, and wanted to hide the truth. Perhaps I was partly right.

‘Oh! Doctor Bryerly, pray, *pray* who is the friend, and where is he going?’

‘I do *assure* you,’ he said, with a strange sort of impatience, ‘I don’t know; it is all nonsense.’

And he turned to go, looking, I think, annoyed and disconcerted.

A terrific suspicion crossed my brain like lightning.

‘Doctor, one word,’ I said, I believe, quite wildly. ‘Do you — do you think his mind is at all affected?’

‘Insane?’ he said, looking at me with a sudden, sharp inquisitiveness, that brightened into a smile. ‘Pooh, pooh! Heaven forbid! not a saner man in England.’

Then with a little nod he walked on, carrying, as I believed, notwithstanding his disclaimer, the secret with him. In the afternoon Doctor Bryerly went away.

CHAPTER XVII

AN ADVENTURE

For many days after our quarrel, Madame hardly spoke to me. As for lessons, I was not much troubled with them. It was plain, too, that my father had spoken to her, for she never after that day proposed our extending our walks beyond the precincts of Knowl.

Knowl, however, was a very considerable territory, and it was possible for a much better pedestrian than I to tire herself effectually, without passing its limits. So we took occasionally long walks.

After some weeks of sullenness, during which for days at a time she hardly spoke to me, and seemed lost in dark and evil abstraction, she once more, and somewhat suddenly, recovered her spirits, and grew quite friendly. Her gaieties and friendliness were not reassuring, and in my mind presaged approaching mischief and treachery. The days were shortening to the wintry span. The edge of the red sun had already touched the horizon as Madame and I, overtaken at the warren by his last beams, were hastening homeward.

A narrow carriage-road traverses this wild region of the park, to which a distant gate gives entrance. On descending into this unfrequented road, I was surprised to see a carriage standing there. A thin, sly postilion, with that pert, turned-up nose which the old caricaturist Woodward used to attribute to the gentlemen of Tewkesbury, was leaning on his horses, and looked hard at me as I passed. A lady who sat within looked out, with an extra-fashionable bonnet on, and also treated us to a stare. Very pink and white cheeks she had, very black glossy hair and bright eyes — fat, bold, and rather cross, she looked — and in her bold way she examined us curiously as we passed.

I mistook the situation. It had once happened before that an intending visitor at Knowl had entered the place by that park-road, and lost several hours in a vain search for the house.

‘Ask him, Madame, whether they want to go to the house; I dare say they have missed their way,’ whispered I.

‘*Eh bien,* they will find again. I do not choose to talk to postboys; *allons*!’

But I asked the man as we passed, ‘Do you want to reach the house?’

By this time he was at the horses’ heads, buckling the harness.

‘Noa,’ he said in a surly tone, smiling oddly on the winkers, but, recollecting his politeness, he added, ‘Noa, thankee, misses, it’s what they calls a picnic; we’ll be takin’ the road now.’

He was smiling now on a little buckle with which he was engaged.

‘Come — nonsense!’ whispered Madame sharply in my ear, and she whisked me by the arm, so we crossed the little stile at the other side.

Our path lay across the warren, which undulates in little hillocks. The sun was down by this time, blue shadows were stretching round us, colder in the splendid contrast of the burnished sunset sky.

Descending over these hillocks we saw three figures a little in advance of us, not far from the path we were tracing. Two were standing smoking and chatting at intervals: one tall and slim, with a high chimney-pot, worn a little on one side, and a white greatcoat buttoned up to the chin; the other shorter and stouter, with a dark-coloured wrapper. These gentlemen were facing rather our way as we came over the edge of the eminence, but turned their backs on perceiving our approach. As they did so, I remember so well each lowered his cigar suddenly with the simultaneousness of a drill. The third figure sustained the picnic character of the group, for he was repacking a hamper. He stood suddenly erect as we drew near, and a very ill-looking person he was, low-browed, square-chinned, and with a broad, broken nose. He wore gaiters, and was a little bandy, very broad, and had a closely-cropped bullet head, and deep-set little eyes. The moment I saw him, I beheld the living type of the burglars and bruisers whom I had so often beheld with a kind of scepticism in *Punch*. He stood over his hamper and scowled sharply at us for a moment; then with the point of his foot he jerked a little fur cap that lay on the ground into his hand, drew it tight over his lowering brows, and called to his companions, just as we passed him—

‘Hallo! mister. How’s this?’

‘All right,’ said the tall person in the white greatcoat, who, as he answered, shook his shorter companion by the arm, I thought angrily.

This shorter companion turned about. He had a muffler loose about his neck and chin. I thought he seemed shy and irresolute, and the tall man gave him a great jolt with his elbow, which made him stagger, and I fancied a little angry, for he said, as it seemed, a sulky word or two.

The gentleman in the white surtout, however, standing direct in our way, raised his hat with a mock salutation, placing his hand on his breast, and forthwith began to advance with an insolent grin and an air of tipsy frolic.

'Jist in time, ladies; five minutes more and we'd a bin off. Thankee, Mrs. Mouser, ma'am, for the honour of the meetin', and more particular for the pleasure of making your young lady's acquaintance — niece, ma'am? daughter, ma'am? granddaughter, by Jove, is it? Hallo! there, mild 'n, I say, stop packin'.' This was to the ill-favoured person with the broken nose. 'Bring us a couple o' glasses and a bottle o' curaçoa; what are you fear'd on, my dear? this is Lord Lollipop, here, a reg'lar charmer, wouldn't hurt a fly, hey Lolly? Isn't he pretty, Miss? and I'm Sir Simon Sugarstick — so called after old Sir Simon, ma'am; and I'm so tall and straight, Miss, and slim — ain't I? and ever so sweet, my honey, when you come to know me, just like a sugarstick; ain't I, Lolly, boy?'

'I'm Miss Ruthyn, tell them, Madame,' I said, stamping on the ground, and very much frightened.

'Be quaite, Maud. If you are angry, they will hurt us; leave me to speak,' whispered the gouvernante.

All this time they were approaching from separate points. I glanced back, and saw the ruffianly-looking man within a yard or two, with his arm raised and one finger up, telegraphing, as it seemed, to the gentlemen in front.

'Be quaite, Maud,' whispered Madame, with an awful adjuration, which I do not care to set down. 'They are teepsy; don't seem 'fraid.'

I *was* afraid — terrified. The circle had now so narrowed that they might have placed their hands on my shoulders.

'Pray, gentlemen, wat you want? *weel* a you 'av the goodness to permit us to go on?'

I now observed for the first time, with a kind of shock, that the shorter of the two men, who prevented our advance, was the person who had accosted me so offensively at Church Scarsdale. I pulled Madame by the arm, whispering, 'Let us run.'

'Be quaite, my dear Maud,' was her only reply.

'I tell you what,' said the tall man, who had replaced his high hat more jauntily than before on the side of his head, 'We've caught you now, fair game, and we'll let you off on conditions. You must not be frightened, Miss. Upon my honour and soul, I mean no mischief; do I, Lollipop? I call him Lord Lollipop; it's only chaff, though; his name's Smith. Now, Lolly, I vote we let the prisoners go, when we just introduce them to Mrs. Smith; she's sitting in the carriage, and keeps Mr. S. here in precious good order, I promise you. There's easy terms for you, eh, and we'll have a glass o' curaçoa round, and so part friends. Is it a bargain? Come!'

'Yes, Maud, we must go — wat matter?' whispered Madame vehemently.

'You shan't,' I said, instinctively terrified.

'You'll go with Ma'am, young 'un, won't you?' said Mr. Smith, as his companion called him.

Madame was holding my arm, but I snatched it from her, and would have run; the tall man, however, placed his arms round me and held me fast with an affectation of playfulness, but his grip was hard enough to hurt me a good deal. Being now thoroughly frightened, after an ineffectual struggle, during which I heard Madame say, 'You fool, Maud, weel you come with me? see wat you are doing,' I began to scream, shriek after shriek, which the man attempted to drown with loud hooting, peals of laughter, forcing his handkerchief against my mouth, while Madame continued to bawl her exhortations to 'be quaite' in my ear.

'I'll lift her, I say!' said a gruff voice behind me.

But at this instant, wild with terror, I distinctly heard other voices shouting. The men who surrounded me were instantly silent, and all looked in the direction of the sound, now very near, and I screamed with redoubled energy. The ruffian behind me thrust his great hand over my mouth.

'It is the gamekeeper,' cried Madame. '*Two* gamekeepers — we are safe — thank Heaven!' and she began to call on Dykes by name.

I only remember, feeling myself at liberty — running a few steps — seeing Dykes' white furious face — clinging to his arm, with which he was bringing his gun to a level, and saying, 'Don't fire — they'll murder us if you do.'

Madame, screaming lustily, ran up at the same moment.

'Run on to the gate and lock it — I'll be wi' ye in a minute,' cried he to the other gamekeeper; who started instantly on this mission, for the three ruffians were already in full retreat for the carriage.

Giddy — wild — fainting — still terror carried me on.

‘Now, Madame Rogers — s’pose you take young Misses on — I must run and len’ Bill a hand.’

‘No, no; you moste not,’ cried Madame. ‘I am fainting myself, and more villains they may be near to us.’

But at this moment we heard a shot, and, muttering to himself and grasping his gun, Dykes ran at his utmost speed in the direction of the sound.

With many exhortations to speed, and ejaculations of alarm, Madame hurried me on toward the house, which at length we reached without further adventure.

As it happened, my father met us in the hall. He was perfectly transported with fury on hearing from Madame what had happened, and set out at once, with some of the servants, in the hope of intercepting the party at the park-gate.

Here was a new agitation; for my father did not return for nearly three hours, and I could not conjecture what might be occurring during the period of his absence. My alarm was greatly increased by the arrival in the interval of poor Bill, the under-gamekeeper, very much injured.

Seeing that he was determined to intercept their retreat, the three men had set upon him, wrested his gun, which exploded in the struggle, from him, and beat him savagely. I mention these particulars, because they convinced everybody that there was something specially determined and ferocious in the spirit of the party, and that the fracas was no mere frolic, but the result of a predetermined plan.

My father had not succeeded in overtaking them. He traced them to the Lugton Station, where they had taken the railway, and no one could tell him in what direction the carriage and posthorses had driven.

Madame was, or affected to be, very much shattered by what had occurred. Her recollection and mine, when my father questioned us closely, differed very materially respecting many details of the *personnel* of the villanous party. She was obstinate and clear; and although the gamekeeper corroborated my description of them, still my father was puzzled. Perhaps he was not sorry that some hesitation was forced upon him, because although at first he would have gone almost any length to detect the persons, on reflection he was pleased that there was not evidence to bring them into a court of justice, the publicity and annoyance of which would have been inconceivably distressing to me.

Madame was in a strange state — tempestuous in temper, talking incessantly — every now and then in floods of tears, and perpetually on her knees pouring forth torrents of thanksgiving to Heaven for our joint deliverance from the hands of those villains. Notwithstanding our community of danger and her thankfulness on my behalf, however, she broke forth into wrath and railing whenever we were alone together.

‘Wat fool you were! so disobedient and obstinate; if you ‘ad done wat *I* say, then we should av been quaite safe; those persons they were tipsy, and there is nothing so dangerous as to quarrel with tipsy persons; I would ‘av brought you quaite safe — the lady she seem so nice and quaite, and we should ‘av been safe with her — there would ‘av been nothing absolutely; but instead you would scream and pooshe, and so they grow quite wild, and all the impertinence and violence follow of course; and that a poor Bill — all his beating and danger to his life it is cause entairely by you.’

And she spoke with more real virulence than that kind of upbraiding generally exhibits.

‘The beast!’ exclaimed Mrs. Rusk, when she, I, and Mary Quince were in my room together, ‘with all her crying and praying, I’d like to know as much as she does, maybe, about them rascals. There never was sich like about the place, long as I remember it, till she came to Knowl, old witch! with them unmerciful big bones of hers, and her great bald head, grinning here, and crying there, and her nose everywhere. The old French hypocrite!’

Mary Quince threw in an observation, and I believe Mrs. Rusk rejoined, but I heard neither. For whether the housekeeper spoke with reflection or not, what she said affected me strangely. Through the smallest aperture, for a moment, I had had a peep into Pandemonium. Were not peculiarities of Madame’s demeanour and advice during the adventure partly accounted for by the suggestion? Could the proposed excursion to Church Scarsdale have had any purpose of the same sort? What was proposed? How was Madame interested in it? Were such immeasurable treason and hypocrisy possible? I could not explain nor quite believe in the shapeless suspicion that with these light and bitter words of the old housekeeper had stolen so horribly into my mind.

After Mrs. Rusk was gone I awoke from my dismal abstraction with something like a moan and a shudder, with a dreadful sense of danger.

‘Oh! Mary Quince,’ I cried, ‘do you think she really knew?’

‘*Who*, Miss Maud?’

‘Do you think Madame knew of those dreadful people? Oh, no — say you don’t — you don’t believe it — tell me she did not. I’m distracted, Mary Quince, I’m frightened out of my life.’

‘There now, Miss Maud, dear — there now, don’t take on so — why should she? — no sich a thing. Mrs. Rusk, law bless you, she’s no more meaning in what she says than the child unborn.’

But I was really frightened. I was in a horrible state of uncertainty as to Madame de la Rougierre’s complicity with the party who had beset us at the warren, and afterwards so murderously beat our poor gamekeeper. How was I ever to get rid of that horrible woman? How long was she to enjoy her continual opportunities of affrighting and injuring me?

‘She hates me — she hates me, Mary Quince; and she will never stop until she has done me some dreadful injury. Oh! will no one relieve me — will no one take her away? Oh, papa, papa, papa! you will be sorry when it is too late.’

I was crying and wringing my hands, and turning from side to side, at my wits’ ends, and honest Mary Quince in vain endevoured to quiet and comfort me.

CHAPTER XVIII

A MIDNIGHT VISITOR

The frightful warnings of Lady Knollys haunted me too. Was there no escape from the dreadful companion whom fate had assigned me? I made up my mind again and again to speak to my father and urge her removal. In other things he indulged me; here, however, he met me drily and sternly, and it was plain that he fancied I was under my cousin Monica's influence, and also that he had secret reasons for persisting in an opposite course. Just then I had a gay, odd letter from Lady Knollys, from some country house in Shropshire. Not a word about Captain Oakley. My eye skimmed its pages in search of that charmed name. With a peevish feeling I tossed the sheet upon the table. Inwardly I thought how ill-natured and unwomanly it was.

After a time, however, I read it, and found the letter very goodnatured. She had received a note from papa. He had 'had the impudence to forgive *her* for *his* impertinence.' But for my sake she meant, notwithstanding this aggravation, really to pardon him; and whenever she had a disengaged week, to accept his invitation to Knowl, from whence she was resolved to whisk me off to London, where, though I was too young to be presented at Court and come out, I might yet — besides having the best masters and a good excuse for getting rid of Medusa — see a great deal that would amuse and surprise me.

'Great news, I suppose, from Lady Knollys?' said Madame, who always knew who in the house received letters by the post, and by an intuition from whom they came.

'Two letters — you and your papa. She is quite well, I hope?'

'Quite well, thank you, Madame.'

Some fishing questions, dropped from time to time, fared no better. And as usual, when she was foiled even in a trifle, she became sullen and malignant.

That night, when my father and I were alone, he suddenly closed the book he had been reading, and said —

‘I heard from Monica Knollys to-day. I always liked poor Monnie; and though she’s no witch, and very wrong-headed at times, yet now and then she does say a thing that’s worth weighing. Did she ever talk to you of a time, Maud, when you are to be your own mistress?’

‘No,’ I answered, a little puzzled, and looking straight in his rugged, kindly face.

‘Well, I thought she might — she’s a rattle, you know — always *was* a rattle, and that sort of people say whatever comes uppermost. But that’s a subject for me, and more than once, Maud, it has puzzled me.’

He sighed.

‘Come with me to the study, little Maud.’

So, he carrying a candle, we crossed the lobby, and marched together through the passage, which at night always seemed a little awesome, darkly wainscoted, uncheered by the cross-light from the hall, which was lost at the turn, leading us away from the frequented parts of the house to that misshapen and lonely room about which the traditions of the nursery and the servants’ hall had had so many fearful stories to recount.

I think my father had intended making some disclosure to me on reaching this room. If so, he changed his mind, or at least postponed his intention.

He had paused before the cabinet, respecting the key of which he had given me so strict a charge, and I think he was going to explain himself more fully than he had done. But he went on, instead, to the table where his desk, always jealously locked, was placed, and having lighted the candles which stood by it, he glanced at me, and said —

‘You must wait a little, Maud; I shall have something to say to you. Take this candle and amuse yourself with a book meanwhile.’

I was accustomed to obey in silence. I chose a volume of engravings, and ensconced myself in a favourite nook in which I had often passed a half-hour similarly. This was a deep recess by the fireplace, fenced on the other side by a great old escritoir. Into this I drew a stool, and, with candle and book, I placed myself snugly in the narrow chamber. Every now and then I raised my eyes and saw my father either writing or ruminating, as it seemed to me, very anxiously at his desk.

Time wore on — a longer time than he had intended, and still he continued absorbed at his desk. Gradually I grew sleepy, and as I nodded, the book and room faded away, and pleasant little dreams began to gather round me, and so I went off into a deep slumber.

It must have lasted long, for when I wakened my candle had burnt out; my father, having quite forgotten me, was gone, and the room was dark and deserted. I felt cold and a little stiff, and for some seconds did not know where I was.

I had been wakened, I suppose, by a sound which I now distinctly heard, to my great terror, approaching. There was a rustling; there was a breathing. I heard a creaking upon the plank that always creaked when walked upon in the passage. I held my breath and listened, and coiled myself up in the innermost recess of my little chamber.

Sudden and sharp, a light shone in from the nearly-closed study door. It shone angularly on the ceiling like a letter L reversed. There was a pause. Then some one knocked softly at the door, which after another pause was slowly pushed open. I expected, I think, to see the dreaded figure of the linkman. I was scarcely less frightened to see that of Madame de la Rougierre. She was dressed in a sort of grey silk, which she called her Chinese silk — precisely as she had been in the daytime. In fact, I do not think she had undressed. She had no shoes on. Otherwise her toilet was deficient in nothing. Her wide mouth was grimly closed, and she stood scowling into the room with a searching and pallid scrutiny, the candle held high above her head at the full stretch of her arm.

Placed as I was in a deep recess, and in a seat hardly raised above the level of the floor, I escaped her, although it seemed to me for some seconds, as I gazed on this spectre, that our eyes actually met.

I sat without breathing or winking, staring upon the formidable image which with upstretched arm, and the sharp lights and hard shadows thrown upon her corrugated features, looked like a sorceress watching for the effect of a spell.

She was plainly listening intensely. Unconsciously she had drawn her lower lip altogether between her teeth, and I well remember what a deathlike and idiotic look the contortion gave her. My terror lest she should discover me amounted to positive agony. She rolled her eyes stealthily from corner to corner of the room, and listened with her neck awry at the door.

Then to my father’s desk she went. To my great relief, her back was towards me. She stooped over it, with the candle close by; I saw her try a key — it could be nothing else — and I heard her blow through the wards to clear them.

Then, again, she listened at the door, candle in hand, and then with long tiptoe steps came back, and papa's desk in another moment was open, and Madame cautiously turning over the papers it contained.

Twice or thrice she paused, glided to the door, and listened again intently with her head near the ground, and then returned and continued her search, peeping into papers one after another, tolerably methodically, and reading some quite through.

While this felonious business was going on, I was freezing with fear lest she should accidentally look round and her eyes light on me; for I could not say what she might not do rather than have her crime discovered.

Sometimes she would read a paper twice over; sometimes a whisper no louder than the ticking of a watch, sometimes a brief chuckle under her breath, bespoke the interest with which here and there a letter or a memorandum was read.

For about half an hour, I think, this went on; but at the time it seemed to me all but interminable. On a sudden she raised her head and listened for a moment, replaced the papers deftly, closed the desk without noise, except for the tiny click of the lock, extinguished the candle, and rustled stealthily out of the room, leaving in the darkness the malign and hag-like face on which the candle had just shone still floating filmy in the dark.

Why did I remain silent and motionless while such an outrage was being committed? If, instead of being a very nervous girl, preoccupied with an undefinable terror of that wicked woman, I had possessed courage and presence of mind, I dare say I might have given an alarm, and escaped from the room without the slightest risk. But so it was; I could no more stir than the bird who, cowering under its ivy, sees the white owl sailing back and forward under its predatory cruise.

Not only during her presence, but for more than an hour after, I remained cowering in my hiding-place, and afraid to stir, lest she might either be lurking in the neighborhood, or return and surprise me.

You will not be astonished, that after a night so passed I was ill and feverish in the morning. To my horror, Madame de la Rougierre came to visit me at my bedside. Not a trace of guilty consciousness of what had passed during the night was legible in her face. She had no sign of late watching, and her toilet was exemplary.

As she sat smiling by me, full of anxious and affectionate enquiry, and smoothed the coverlet with her great felonious hand, I could quite comprehend the dreadful feeling with which the deceived husband in the 'Arabian Nights' met his ghoul wife, after his nocturnal discovery.

Ill as I was, I got up and found my father in that room which adjoined his bedchamber. He perceived, I am sure, by my looks, that something unusual had happened. I shut the door, and came close beside his chair.

'Oh, papa, I have such a thing to tell you!' I forgot to call him 'Sir.' 'A secret; and you won't say who told you? Will you come down to the study?'

He looked hard at me, got up, and kissing my forehead, said— 'Don't be frightened, Maud; I venture to say it is a mare's nest; at all events, my child, we will take care that no danger reaches you; come, child.'

And by the hand he led me to the study. When the door was shut, and we had reached the far end of the room next the window, I said, but in a low tone, and holding his arm fast —

'Oh, sir, you don't know what a dreadful person we have living with us — Madame de la Rougierre, I mean. Don't let her in if she comes; she would guess what I am telling you, and one way or another I am sure she would kill me.'

'Tut, tut, child. You *must* know that's nonsense,' he said, looking pale and stern.

'Oh no, papa. I am horribly frightened, and Lady Knollys thinks so too.'

'Ha! I dare say; one fool makes many. We all know what Monica thinks.'

'But I *saw* it, papa. She stole your key last night, and opened your desk, and read all your papers.'

'Stole my key!' said my father, staring at me perplexed, but at the same instant producing it. 'Stole it! Why here it is!'

'She unlocked your desk; she read your papers for ever so long. Open it now, and see whether they have not been stirred.'

He looked at me this time in silence, with a puzzled air; but he did unlock the desk, and lifted the papers curiously and suspiciously. As he did so he uttered a few of those inarticulate interjections which are made with closed lips, and not always intelligible; but he made no remark.

Then he placed me on a chair beside him, and sitting down himself, told me to recollect myself, and tell him distinctly all I had seen. This accordingly I did, he listening with deep attention.

‘Did she remove any paper?’ asked my father, at the same time making a little search, I suppose, for that which he fancied might have been stolen.

‘No; I did not see her take anything.’

‘Well, you are a good girl, Maud. Act discreetly. Say nothing to anyone — not even to your cousin Monica.’

Directions which, coming from another person would have had no great weight, were spoken by my father with an earnest look and a weight of emphasis that made them irresistibly impressive, and I went away with the seal of silence upon my lips.

‘Sit down, Maud, *there*. You have not been very happy with Madame de la Rougierre. It is time you were relieved. This occurrence decides it.’

He rang the bell.

‘Tell Madame de la Rougierre that I request the honour of seeing her for a few minutes here.’

My father’s communications to her were always equally ceremonious. In a few minutes there was a knock at the door, and the same figure, smiling, courtesying, that had scared me on the threshold last night, like the spirit of evil, presented itself.

My father rose, and Madame having at his request taken a chair opposite, looking, as usual in his presence, all amiability, he proceeded at once to the point.

‘Madame de la Rougierre, I have to request you that you will give me the key now in your possession, which unlocks this desk of mine.’

With which termination he tapped his gold pencil-case suddenly on it.

Madame, who had expected something very different, became instantly so pale, with a dull purplish hue upon her forehead, that, especially when she had twice essayed with her white lips, in vain, to answer, I expected to see her fall in a fit.

She was not looking in his face; her eyes were fixed lower, and her mouth and cheek sucked in, with a strange distortion at one side.

She stood up suddenly, and staring straight in his face, she succeeded in saying, after twice clearing her throat —

‘I cannot comprehend, Monsieur Ruthyn, unless you intend to insult me.’

‘It won’t do, Madame; I must have that false key. I give you the opportunity of surrendering it quietly here and now.’

‘But who dares to say I possess such thing?’ demanded Madame, who, having rallied from her momentary paralysis, was now fierce and voluble as I had often seen her before.

‘You know, Madame, that you can rely on what I say, and I tell you that you were seen last night visiting this room, and with a key in your possession, opening this desk, and reading my letters and papers contained in it. Unless you forthwith give me that key, and any other false keys in your possession — in which case I shall rest content with dismissing you summarily — I will take a different course. You know I am a magistrate; — and I shall have you, your boxes, and places upstairs, searched forthwith, and I will prosecute you criminally. The thing is clear; you aggravate by denying; you must give me that key, if you please, instantly, otherwise I ring this bell, and you shall see that I mean what I say.’

There was a little pause. He rose and extended his hand towards the bell-rope. Madame glided round the table, extended her hand to arrest his.

‘I will do everything, Monsieur Ruthyn — whatever you wish.’

And with these words Madame de la Rougierre broke down altogether. She sobbed, she wept, she gabbled piteously, all manner of incomprehensible roulades of lamentation and entreaty; coyly, penitently, in a most interesting agitation, she produced the very key from her breast, with a string tied to it. My father was little moved by this piteous tempest. He coolly took the key and tried it in the desk, which it locked and unlocked quite freely, though the wards were complicated. He shook his head and looked her in the face.

‘Pray, who made this key? It is a new one, and made expressly to pick this lock.’

But Madame was not going to tell any more than she had expressly bargained for; so she only fell once more into her old paroxysm of sorrow, self-reproach, extenuation, and entreaty.

‘Well,’ said my father,’ I promised that on surrendering the key you should go. It is enough. I keep my word. You shall have an hour and a half to prepare in. You must then be ready to depart. I will send your money to you by Mrs. Rusk; and if you look for another situation, you had better not refer to me. Now be so good as to leave me.’

Madame seemed to be in a strange perplexity. She bridled up, dried her eyes fiercely, and dropped a great courtesy, and then sailed away towards the door. Before reaching it she stopped on the way, turning half round, with a peaked, pallid glance at my father, and she bit her lip viciously as she eyed him. At the door the same repulsive pantomime was repeated, as she stood for a moment with her hand upon the handle. But she changed her bearing again with a sniff, and with a look of scorn, almost heightened to a sneer, she made another very low courtesy and a disdainful toss of her head, and so disappeared, shutting the door rather sharply behind her.

CHAPTER XIX

AU REVOIR

Mrs. Rusk was fond of assuring me that Madame ‘did not like a bone in my skin.’ Instinctively I knew that she bore me no goodwill, although I really believe it was her wish to make me think quite the reverse. At all events I had no desire to see Madame again before her departure, especially as she had thrown upon me one momentary glance in the study, which seemed to me charged with very peculiar feelings.

You may be very sure, therefore, that I had no desire for a formal leavetaking at her departure. I took my hat and cloak, therefore, and stole out quietly.

My ramble was a sequestered one, and well screened, even at this late season, with foliage; the pathway devious among the stems of old trees, and its flooring interlaced and groined with their knotted roots. Though near the house, it was a sylvan solitude; a little brook ran darkling and glimmering through it, wild strawberries and other woodland plants strewed the ground, and the sweet notes and flutter of small birds made the shadow of the boughs cheery.

I had been fully an hour in this picturesque solitude when I heard in the distance the ring of carriage-wheels, announcing to me that Madame de la Rougierre had fairly set out upon her travels. I thanked heaven; I could have danced and sung with delight; I heaved a great sigh and looked up through the branches to the clear blue sky.

But things are oddly timed. Just at this moment I heard Madame’s voice close at my ear, and her large bony hand was laid on my shoulder. We were instantly face to face — I recoiling, and for a moment speechless with fright.

In very early youth we do not appreciate the restraints which act upon malignity, or know how effectually fear protects us where conscience is wanting. Quite alone, in this solitary spot, detected and overtaken with an awful instinct by my enemy, what might not be about to happen to me at that moment?

‘Frightened as usual, Maud,’ she said quietly, and eyeing me with a sinister smile, ‘and with cause you think, no doubt. Wat ‘av you done to injure poor Madame? Well, I think I know, little girl, and have quite discover the cleverness of my sweet little Maud. Eh — is not so? Petite carogne — ah, ha, ha!’

I was too much confounded to answer.

‘You see, my dear cheaile,’ she said, shaking her uplifted finger with a hideous archness at me, ‘you could not hide what you ‘av done from poor Madame. You cannot look so innocent but I can see your pretty little villany quite plain — you dear little diablesse.

‘Wat I ‘av done I ‘av no reproach of myself for it. If I could explain, your papa would say I ‘av done right, and you should thank me on your knees; but I cannot explain yet.’

She was speaking, as it were, in little paragraphs, with a momentary pause between each, to allow its meaning to impress itself.

‘If I were to choose to explain, your papa he would implore me to remain. But no — I would not — notwithstanding your so cheerful house, your charming servants, your papa’s amusing society, and your affectionate and sincere heart, my sweet little maraude.

‘I am to go to London first, where I ‘av, oh, so good friends! next I will go abroad for some time; but be sure, my sweetest Maud, wherever I may ‘appen to be, I will remember you — ah, ha! Yes; *most certainly*, I will remember you.

‘And although I shall not be always near, yet I shall know everything about my charming little Maud; you will not know how, but I shall indeed, *everything*. And be sure, my dearest cheaile, I will some time be able to give you the sensible proofs of my gratitude and affection — you understand.

‘The carriage is waiting at the yew-tree stile, and I must go on. You did not expect to see me — here; I will appear, perhaps, as suddenly another time. It is great pleasure to us both — this opportunity to make our adieux. Farewell! my dearest little Maud. I will never cease to think of you, and of some way to recompense the kindness you ‘av shown for poor Madame.’

My hand hung by my side, and she took, not it, but my thumb, and shook it, folded in her broad palm, and looking on me as she held it, as if meditating mischief. Then suddenly she said —

‘You will always remember Madame, I *think*, and I will remind you of me beside; and for the present farewell, and I hope you may be as ‘appy as you deserve.’

The large sinister face looked on me for a second with its latent sneer, and then, with a sharp nod and a spasmodic shake of my imprisoned thumb, she turned, and holding her dress together, and showing her great bony ankles, she strode rapidly away over the gnarled roots into the perspective of the trees, and I did not awake, as it were, until she had quite disappeared in the distance.

Events of this kind made no difference with my father; but every other face in Knowl was gladdened by the removal. My energies had returned, my spirits were come again. The sunlight was happy, the flowers innocent, the songs and flutter of the birds once more gay, and all nature delightful and rejoicing.

After the first elation of relief, now and then a filmy shadow of Madame de la Rougierre would glide across the sunlight, and the remembrance of her menace return with an unexpected pang of fear.

‘Well, if *there* isn’t impittens!’ cried Mrs. Rusk. ‘But never you trouble your head about it, Miss. Them sort’s all alike — you never saw a rogue yet that was found out and didn’t threaten the honest folk as he was leaving behind with all sorts; there was Martin the gamekeeper, and Jervis the footman, I mind well how hard they swore all they would not do when they was a-going, and who ever heard of them since? They always threatens that way — them sort always does, and none ever the worse — not but she would if she could, mind ye, but there it is; she can’t do nothing but bite her nails and cuss us — not she — ha, ha, ha!’

So I was comforted. But Madame’s evil smile, nevertheless, from time to time, would sail across my vision with a silent menace, and my spirits sank, and a Fate, draped in black, whose face I could not see, took me by the hand, and led me away, in the spirit, silently, on an awful exploration from which I would rouse myself with a start, and Madame was gone for a while.

She had, however, judged her little parting well. She contrived to leave her glamour over me, and in my dreams she troubled me.

I was, however, indescribably relieved. I wrote in high spirits to Cousin Monica; and wondered what plans my father might have formed about me, and whether we were to stay at home, or go to London, or go abroad. Of the last — the pleasantest arrangement, in some respects — I had nevertheless an occult horror. A secret conviction haunted me that were we to go abroad, we should there meet Madame, which to me was like meeting my evil genius.

I have said more than once that my father was an odd man; and the reader will, by this time, have seen that there was much about him not easily understood. I often wonder whether, if he had been franker, I should have found him less odd than I supposed, or more odd still. Things that moved me profoundly did not apparently affect him at all. The departure of Madame, under the circumstances which attended it, appeared to my childish mind an event of the vastest importance. No one was indifferent to the occurrence in the house but its master. He never alluded again to Madame de la Rougierre. But whether connected with her exposure and dismissal, I could not say, there did appear to be some new care or trouble now at work in my father's mind.

'I have been thinking a great deal about you, Maud. I am anxious. I have not been so troubled for years. Why has not Monica Knollys a little more sense?'

This oracular sentence he spoke, having stopped me in the hall; and then saying, 'We shall see,' he left me as abruptly as he appeared.

Did he apprehend any danger to me from the vindictiveness of Madame?

A day or two afterwards, as I was in the Dutch garden, I saw him on the terrace steps. He beckoned to me, and came to meet me as I approached.

'You must be very solitary, little Maud; it is not good. I have written to Monica: in a matter of detail she is competent to advise; perhaps she will come here for a short visit.'

I was very glad to hear this.

'*You* are more interested than for my time *I* can be, in vindicating his character.'

'Whose character, sir?' I ventured to enquire during the pause that followed.

One trick which my father had acquired from his habits of solitude and silence was this of assuming that the context of his thoughts was legible to others, forgetting that they had not been spoken.

'Whose? — your uncle Silas's. In the course of nature he must survive me. He will then represent the family name. Would you make some sacrifice to clear that name, Maud?'

I answered briefly; but my face, I believe, showed my enthusiasm.

He turned on me such an approving smile as you might fancy lighting up the rugged features of a pale old Rembrandt.

'I can tell you, Maud; if my life could have done it, it should not have been undone — *ubi lapsus, quid feci*. But I had almost made up my mind to change my plan, and leave all to time — *edax rerum* — to illuminate or to *consume*. But I think little Maud would like to contribute to the restitution of her family name. It may cost you something — are you willing to buy it at a sacrifice? Is there — I don't speak of fortune, that is not involved — but is there any other honourable sacrifice you would shrink from to dispel the disgrace under which our most ancient and honourable name must otherwise continue to languish?'

'Oh, none — none indeed, sir — I am delighted!'

Again I saw the Rembrandt smile.

'Well, Maud, I am sure there is *no* risk; but you are to suppose there is. Are you still willing to accept it?'

Again I assented.

'You are worthy of your blood, Maud Ruthyn. It will come soon, and it won't last long. But you must not let people like Monica Knollys frighten you.'

I was lost in wonder.

'If you allow them to possess you with their follies, you had better recede in time — they may make the ordeal as terrible as hell itself. You have zeal — have you nerve?'

I thought in such a cause I had nerve for anything.

'Well, Maud, in the course of a few months — and it may be sooner — there must be a change. I have had a letter from London this morning that assures me of that. I must then leave you for a time; in my absence be faithful to the duties that will arise. To whom much is committed, of him will much be required. You shall promise me not to mention this conversation to Monica Knollys. If you are a talking girl, and cannot trust yourself, say so, and we will not ask her to come. Also, don't invite her to talk about your uncle Silas — I have reasons. Do you quite understand my conditions?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Your uncle Silas,' he said, speaking suddenly in loud and fierce tones that sounded from so old a man almost terrible, 'lies under an intolerable slander. I don't correspond with him; I don't sympathise with him; I never quite did. He has grown religious, and that's well; but there are things in which even religion should not bring a man to acquiesce; and from what I can learn, he, the person primarily affected — the cause, though the innocent cause — of this great calamity — bears it with an easy apathy which is mistaken, and liable easily to be mistaken, and such as no Ruthyn, under the circumstances, ought to exhibit. I told him what he ought to do, and offered to open my purse for the purpose; but he would not, or *did* not; indeed, he *never* took my advice; he followed his own, and a foul and dismal shoal he has drifted on. It is not for his sake — why should I?-that I have longed and laboured to remove the disgraceful slur under which his ill-fortune has thrown us. He troubles himself little about it, I believe — he's meek, meeker than I. He cares less about his children than I about you, Maud; he is selfishly sunk in futurity — a feeble visionary. I am not so. I believe it to be a duty to take care of others beside myself. The character and influence of an ancient family is a peculiar heritage — sacred but destructible; and woe to him who either destroys or suffers it to perish!'

This was the longest speech I ever heard my father speak before or after. He abruptly resumed —

'Yes, we will, Maud — you and I — we'll leave one proof on record, which, fairly read, will go far to convince the world.'

He looked round, but we were alone. The garden was nearly always solitary, and few visitors ever approached the house from that side.

'I have talked too long, I believe; we are children to the last. Leave me, Maud. I think I know you better than I did, and I am pleased with you. Go, child — I'll sit here.'

If he had acquired new ideas of me, so had I of him from that interview. I had no idea till then how much passion still burned in that aged frame, nor how full of energy and fire that face, generally so stern and ashen, could appear. As I left him seated on the rustic chair, by the steps, the traces of that storm were still discernible on his features. His gathered brows, glowing eyes, and strangely hectic face, and the grim compression of his mouth, still showed the agitation which, somehow, in grey old age, shocks and alarms the young.

CHAPTER XX

AUSTIN RUTHYN SETS OUT ON HIS JOURNEY

The Rev. William Fairfield, Doctor Clay's somewhat bald curate, a mild, thin man, with a high and thin nose, who was preparing me for confirmation, came next day; and when our catechetical conference was ended, and before lunch was announced, my father sent for him to the study, where he remained until the bell rang out its summons.

'We have had some interesting — I may say *very* interesting — conversation, your papa and I, Miss Ruthyn,' said my reverend *vis-à-vis*, so soon as nature was refreshed, smiling and shining, as he leaned back in his chair, his hand upon the table, and his finger curled gently upon the stem of his wine-glass. 'It never was your privilege, I believe, to see your uncle, Mr. Silas Ruthyn, of Bartram-Haugh?'

'No — never; he leads so retired — so *very* retired a life.'

'Oh, no, — of course, no; but I was going to remark a likeness — I mean, of course, a *family* likeness — only *that* sort of thing — you understand — between him and the profile of Lady Margaret in the drawingroom — is not it Lady Margaret? — which you were so good as to show me on Wednesday last. There certainly *is* a likeness. I *think* you would agree with me, if you had the pleasure of seeing your uncle.'

'You know him, then? I have never seen him.'

'Oh dear, yes — I am happy to say, I know him very well. I have that privilege. I was for three years curate of Feltram, and I had the honour of being a pretty constant visitor at Bartram-Haugh during that, I may say, protracted period; and I think it really never has been my privilege and happiness, I may say, to enjoy the acquaintance and society of so very experienced a Christian, as my admirable friend, I may call him, Mr. Ruthyn, of Bartram-Haugh. I look upon him, I do assure you, quite in the light of a saint; not, of course, in the Popish sense, but in the very highest, you will understand me, which *our* Church allows, — a man built up in faith — full of faith — faith and grace — altogether exemplary; and I often ventured to regret, Miss Ruthyn, that Providence in its mysterious dispensations should have placed him so far apart from his brother, your respected father. His influence and opportunities would, no doubt, we may venture to hope, at least have been blessed; and, perhaps, we — my valued rector and I — might possibly have seen more of him at church, than, I deeply regret, we *have* done.' He shook his head a little, as he smiled with a sad complacency on me through his blue steel spectacles, and then sipped a little meditative sherry.

'And you saw a good deal of my uncle?'

'Well, a *good* deal, Miss Ruthyn — I may say a *good* deal — principally at his own house. His health is wretched — miserable health — a sadly afflicted man he has been, as, no doubt, you are aware. But afflictions, my dear Miss Ruthyn, as you remember Doctor Clay so well remarked on Sunday last, though birds of ill omen, yet spiritually resemble the ravens who supplied the prophet; and when they visit the faithful, come charged with nourishment for the soul.

'He is a good deal embarrassed pecuniarily, I should say,' continued the curate, who was rather a good man than a very well-bred one. 'He found a difficulty — in fact it was not in his power — to subscribe generally to our little funds, and — and objects, and I used to say to him, and I really felt it, that it was more gratifying, such were his feeling and his power of expression, to be refused by him than assisted by others.'

'Did papa wish you to speak to me about my uncle?' I enquired, as a sudden thought struck me; and then I felt half ashamed of my question.

He looked surprised.

'No, Miss Ruthyn, certainly not. Oh dear, no. It was merely a conversation between Mr. Ruthyn and me. He never suggested my opening that, or indeed any other point in my interview with you, Miss Ruthyn — not the least.'

'I was not aware before that Uncle Silas was so religious.'

He smiled tranquilly, not quite up to the ceiling, but gently upward, and shook his head in pity for my previous ignorance, as he lowered his eyes —

'I don't say that there may not be some little matters in a few points of doctrine which we could, perhaps, wish otherwise. But these, you know, are speculative, and in all essentials he is Church — not in the perverted modern sense; far from it — unexceptionably Church, strictly so. Would there were more among us of the same mind that is in him! Ay, Miss Ruthyn, even in the highest places of the Church herself.'

The Rev. William Fairfield, while fighting against the Dissenters with his right hand, was, with his left, hotly engaged with the Tractarians. A good man I am sure he was, and I dare say sound in doctrine, though naturally, I think, not very wise. This conversation with him gave me new ideas about my uncle Silas. It quite agreed with what my father had said. These principles and his increasing years would necessarily quiet the turbulence of his resistance to injustice, and teach him to acquiesce in his fate.

You would have fancied that one so young as I, born to wealth so vast, and living a life of such entire seclusion, would have been exempt from care. But you have seen how troubled my life was with fear and anxiety during the residence of Madame de la Rougierre, and now there rested upon my mind a vague and awful anticipation of the trial which my father had announced, without defining it.

An 'ordeal' he called it, requiring not only zeal but nerve, which might possibly, were my courage to fail, become frightful, and even intolerable. What, and of what nature, could it be? Not designed to vindicate the fair fame of the meek and submissive old man — who, it seemed, had ceased to care for his bygone wrongs, and was looking to futurity — but the reputation of our ancient family.

Sometimes I repented my temerity in having undertaken it. I distrusted my courage. Had I not better retreat, while it was yet time? But there was shame and even difficulty in the thought. How should I appear before my father? Was it not important — had I not deliberately undertaken it — and was I not bound in conscience? Perhaps he had already taken steps in the matter which committed *him*. Besides, was I sure that, even were I free again, I would not once more devote myself to the trial, be it what it might? You perceive I had more spirit than courage. I think I had the mental attributes of courage; but then I was but a hysterical girl, and in so far neither more nor less than a coward.

No wonder I distrusted myself; no wonder also my will stood out against my timidity. It was a struggle, then; a proud, wild resolve against constitutional cowardice.

Those who have ever had cast upon them more than their strength seemed framed to bear — the weak, the aspiring, the adventurous and self-sacrificing in will, and the faltering in nerve — will understand the kind of agony which I sometimes endured.

But, again, consolation would come, and it seemed to me that I must be exaggerating my risk in the coming crisis; and certain at least, if my father believed it attended with real peril, he would never have wished to see me involved in it. But the silence under which I was bound was terrifying — double so when the danger was so shapeless and undivulged.

I was soon to understand it all — soon, too, to know all about my father's impending journey, whither, with what visitor, and why guarded from me with so awful a mystery.

That day there came a lively and goodnatured letter from Lady Knollys. She was to arrive at Knowl in two or three days' time. I thought my father would have been pleased, but he seemed apathetic and dejected.

'One does not always feel quite equal to Monica. But for you — yes, thank God. I wish she could only stay, Maud, for a month or two; I may be going then, and would be glad — provided she talks about suitable things — very glad, Maud, to leave her with you for a week or so.'

There was something, I thought, agitating my father secretly that day. He had the strange hectic flush I had observed when he grew excited in our interview in the garden about Uncle Silas. There was something painful, perhaps even terrible, in the circumstances of the journey he was about to make, and from my heart I wished the suspense were over, the annoyance past, and he returned.

That night my father bid me goodnight early and went upstairs. After I had been in bed some little time, I heard his hand-bell ring. This was not usual. Shortly after I heard his man, Ridley, talking with Mrs. Rusk in the gallery. I could not be mistaken in their voices. I knew not why I was startled and excited, and had raised myself to listen on my elbow. But they were talking quietly, like persons giving or taking an ordinary direction, and not in the haste of an unusual emergency.

Then I heard the man bid Mrs. Rusk goodnight and walk down the gallery to the stairs, so that I concluded he was wanted no more, and all must therefore be well. So I laid myself down again, though with a throbbing at my heart, and an ominous feeling of expectation, listening and fancying footsteps.

I was going to sleep when I heard the bell ring again; and, in a few minutes, Mrs. Rusk's energetic step passed along the gallery; and, listening intently, I heard, or fancied, my father's voice and hers in dialogue. All this was very unusual, and again I was, with a beating heart, leaning with my elbow on my pillow.

Mrs. Rusk came along the gallery in a minute or so after, and stopping at my door, began to open it gently. I was startled, and challenged my visitor with —

'Who's there?'

'It's only Rusk, Miss. Dearie me! and are you awake still?'

'Is papa ill?'

'Ill! not a bit ill, thank God. Only there's a little black book as I took for your prayer-book, and brought in here; ay, here it is, sure enough, and he wants it. And then I must go down to the study, and look out this one, "C, 15;" but I can't read the name, noways; and I was afraid to ask him again; if you be so kind to read it, Miss — I suspeck my eyes is a-going.'

I read the name; and Mrs. Rusk was tolerably expert at finding out books, as she had often been employed in that way before. So she departed.

I suppose that this particular volume was hard to find, for she must have been a long time away, and I had actually fallen into a doze when I was roused in an instant by a dreadful crash and a piercing scream from Mrs. Rusk. Scream followed scream, wilder and more terror-stricken. I shrieked to Mary Quince, who was sleeping in the room with me:— 'Mary, do you hear? what is it? It is something dreadful.'

The crash was so tremendous that the solid flooring even of my room trembled under it, and to me it seemed as if some heavy man had burst through the top of the window, and shook the whole house with his descent. I found myself standing at my own door, crying, 'Help, help! murder! murder!' and Mary Quince, frightened half out of her wits, by my side.

I could not think what was going on. It was plainly something most horrible, for Mrs. Rusk's screams pealed one after the other unabated, though with a muffled sound, as if the door was shut upon her; and by this time the bells of my father's room were ringing madly.

‘They are trying to murder him!’ I cried, and I ran along the gallery to his door, followed by Mary Quince, whose white face I shall never forget, though her entreaties only sounded like unmeaning noises in my ears.

‘Here! help, help, help!’ I cried, trying to force open the door.

‘Shove it, shove it, for God’s sake! he’s across it,’ cried Mrs. Rusk’s voice from within; ‘drive it in. I can’t move him.’

I strained all I could at the door, but ineffectually. We heard steps approaching. The men were running to the spot, and shouting as they did so —

‘Never mind; hold on a bit; here we are; all right;’ and the like.

We drew back, as they came up. We were in no condition to be seen. We listened, however, at my open door.

Then came the straining and bumping at the door. Mrs. Rusk’s voice subsided to a sort of wailing; the men were talking all together, and I suppose the door opened, for I heard some of the voices, on a sudden, as if in the room; and then came a strange lull, and talking in very low tones, and not much even of that.

‘What is it, Mary? what *can* it be?’ I ejaculated, not knowing what horror to suppose. And now, with a counterpane about my shoulders, I called loudly and imploringly, in my horror, to know what had happened.

But I heard only the subdued and eager talk of men engaged in some absorbing task, and the dull sounds of some heavy body being moved.

Mrs. Rusk came towards us looking half wild, and pale as a spectre, and putting her thin hands to my shoulders, she said— ‘Now, Miss Maud, darling, you must go back again; ’tisn’t no place for you; you’ll see all, my darling, time enough — you will. There now, there, like a dear, do get into your room.’

What was that dreadful sound? Who had entered my father’s chamber? It was the visitor whom we had so long expected, with whom he was to make the unknown journey, leaving me alone. The intruder was Death!

CHAPTER XXI

ARRIVALS

My father was dead — as suddenly as if he had been murdered. One of those fearful aneurisms that lie close to the heart, showing no outward sign of giving way in a moment, had been detected a good time since by Dr. Bryerly. My father knew what must happen, and that it could not be long deferred. He feared to tell me that he was soon to die. He hinted it only in the allegory of his journey, and left in that sad enigma some words of true consolation that remained with me ever after. Under his rugged ways was hidden a wonderful tenderness. I could not believe that he was actually dead. Most people for a minute or two, in the wild tumult of such a shock, have experienced the same skepticism. I insisted that the doctor should be instantly sent for from the village.

‘Well, Miss Maud, dear, I *will* send to please you, but it is all to no use. If only you saw him yourself you’d know that. Mary Quince, run you down and tell Thomas, Miss Maud desires he’ll go down this minute to the village for Dr. Elweys.’

Every minute of the interval seemed to me like an hour. I don’t know what I said, but I fancied that if he were not already dead, he would lose his life by the delay. I suppose I was speaking very wildly, for Mrs. Rusk said —

‘My dear child, you ought to come in and see him; indeed but you should, Miss Maud. He’s quite dead an hour ago. You’d wonder all the blood that’s come from him — you would indeed; it’s soaked through the bed already.’

‘Oh, don’t, don’t, *don’t*, Mrs. Rusk.’

‘Will you come in and see him, just?

‘Oh, no, no, no, no!’

‘Well, then, my dear, don’t of course, if you don’t like; there’s no need. Would not you like to lie down, Miss Maud? Mary Quince, attend to her. I must go into the room for a minute or two.’

I was walking up and down the room in distraction. It was a cool night; but I did not feel it. I could only cry:— 'Oh, Mary, Mary! what shall I do? Oh, Mary Quince! what shall I do?'

It seemed to me it must be near daylight by the time the Doctor arrived. I had dressed myself. I dared not go into the room where my beloved father lay.

I had gone out of my room to the gallery, where I awaited Dr. Elweys, when I saw him walking briskly after the servant, his coat buttoned up to his chin, his hat in his hand, and his bald head shining. I felt myself grow cold as ice, and colder and colder, and with a sudden sten my heart seemed to stand still.

I heard him ask the maid who stood at the door, in that low, decisive, mysterious tone which doctors cultivate —

'In *here*?'

And then, with a nod, I saw him enter.

'Would not you like to see the Doctor, Miss Maud?' asked Mary Quince.

The question roused me a little.

'Thank you, Mary; yes, I must see him.'

And so, in a few minutes, I did. He was very respectful, very sad, semi-undertakerlike, in air and countenance, but quite explicit. I heard that my dear father 'had died palpably from the rupture of some great vessel near the heart.' The disease had, no doubt, been 'long established, and is in its nature incurable.' It is 'consolatory in these cases that in the act of dissolution, which is instantaneous, there can be no suffering.' These, and a few more remarks, were all he had to offer; and having had his fee from Mrs. Rusk, he, with a respectful melancholy, vanished.

I returned to my room, and broke into paroxysms of grief, and after an hour or more grew more tranquil.

From Mrs. Rusk I learned that he had seemed very well — better than usual, indeed — that night, and that on her return from the study with the book he required, he was noting down, after his wont, some passages which illustrated the text on which he was employing himself. He took the book, detaining her in the room, and then mounting on a chair to take down another book from a shelf, he had fallen, with the dreadful crash I had heard, dead upon the floor. He fell across the door, which caused the difficulty in opening it. Mrs. Rusk found she had not strength to force it open. No wonder she had given way to terror. I think I should have almost lost my reason.

Everyone knows the reserved aspect and the taciturn mood of the house, one of whose rooms is tenanted by that mysterious guest.

I do not know how those awful days, and more awful nights, passed over. The remembrance is repulsive. I hate to think of them. I was soon draped in the conventional black, with its heavy folds of crape. Lady Knollys came, and was very kind. She undertook the direction of all those details which were to me so inexpressibly dreadful. She wrote letters for me beside, and was really most kind and useful, and her society supported me indescribably. She was odd, but her eccentricity was leavened with strong common sense; and I have often thought since with admiration and gratitude of the tact with which she managed my grief.

There is no dealing with great sorrow as if it were under the control of our wills. It is a terrible phenomenon, whose laws we must study, and to whose conditions we must submit, if we would mitigate it. Cousin Monica talked a great deal of my father. This was easy to her, for her early recollections were full of him.

One of the terrible dislocations of our habits of mind respecting the dead is that our earthly future is robbed of them, and we thrown exclusively upon retrospect. From the long look forward they are removed, and every plan, imagination, and hope henceforth a silent and empty perspective. But in the past they are all they ever were. Now let me advise all who would comfort people in a new bereavement to talk to them, very freely, all they can, in this way of the dead. They will engage in it with interest, they will talk of their own recollections of the dead, and listen to yours, though they become sometimes pleasant, sometimes even laughable. I found it so. It robbed the calamity of something of its supernatural and horrible abruptness; it prevented that monotony of object which is to the mind what it is to the eye, and prepared the faculty for those mesmeric illusions that derange its sense.

Cousin Monica, I am sure, cheered me wonderfully. I grow to love her more and more, as I think of all her trouble, care, and kindness.

I had not forgotten my promise to dear papa about the key, concerning which he had evinced so great an anxiety. It was found in the pocket where he had desired me to remember he always kept it, except when it was placed, while he slept, under his pillow.

'And so, my dear, that wicked woman was actually found picking the lock of your poor papa's desk. I *wonder* he did not punish her — you know that is *burglary*.'

'Well, Lady Knollys, you know she is gone, and so I care no more about her — that is, I mean, I need not fear her.'

'No, my dear, but you must call me Monica — do you mind — I'm your cousin, and you call me Monica, unless you wish to vex me. No, of course, you need not be afraid of her. And she's gone. But I'm an old thing, you know, and not so tender-hearted as you; and I confess I should have been very glad to hear that the wicked old witch had been sent to prison and hard labour — I should. And what do you suppose she was looking for — what did she want to steal? I think I can guess — what do *you* think?'

'To read the papers; maybe to take banknotes — I'm not sure,' I answered.

'Well, I think most likely she wanted to get at your poor papa's *will* — that's *my* idea.

'There is nothing surprising in the supposition, dear,' she resumed. 'Did not you read the curious trial at York, the other day? There is nothing so valuable to steal as a will, when a great deal of property is to be disposed of by it. Why, you would have given her ever so much money to get it back again. Suppose you go down, dear — I'll go with you, and open the cabinet in the study.'

'I don't think I can, for I promised to give the key to Dr. Bryerly, and the meaning was that *he* only should open it.'

Cousin Monica uttered an inarticulate 'H'm!' of surprise or disapprobation.

'Has he been written to?'

'No, I do not know his address.'

'Not know his address! come, that is curious,' said Knollys, a little testily.

I could not — no one now living in the house could furnish even a conjecture. There was even a dispute as to which train he had gone by — north or south — they crossed the station at an interval of five minutes. If

Dr. Bryerly had been an evil spirit, evoked by a secret incantation, there could not have been more complete darkness as to the immediate process of his approach.

‘And how long do you mean to wait, my dear? No matter; at all events you may open the *desk*; you may find papers to direct you — you may find Dr. Bryerly’s address — you may find, heaven knows what.’

So down we went — I assenting — and we opened the desk. How dreadful the desecration seems — all privacy abrogated — the shocking compensation for the silence of death!

Henceforward all is circumstantial evidence — all conjectural — except the *litera scripta*, and to this evidence every notebook, and every scrap of paper and private letter, must contribute — ransacked, bare in the light of day — what it can.

At the top of the desk lay two notes sealed, one to Cousin Monica, the other to me. Mine was a gentle and loving little farewell — nothing more — which opened afresh the fountains of my sorrow, and I cried and sobbed over it bitterly and long.

The other was for ‘Lady Knollys.’ I did not see how she received it, for I was already absorbed in mine. But in awhile she came and kissed me in her girlish, goodnatured way. Her eyes used to fill with tears at sight of my paroxysms of grief. Then she would begin, ‘I remember it was a saying of his,’ and so she would repeat it — something maybe wise, maybe playful, at all events consolatory — and the circumstances in which she had heard him say it, and then would follow the recollections suggested by these; and so I was stolen away half by him, and half by Cousin Monica, from my despair and lamentation.

Along with these lay a large envelope, inscribed with the words ‘Directions to be complied with immediately on my death.’ One of which was, ‘Let the event be *forthwith* published in the *county* and principal *London* papers.’ This step had been already taken. We found no record of Dr. Bryerly’s address.

We made search everywhere, except in the cabinet, which I would on no account permit to be opened except, according to his direction, by Dr. Bryerly’s hand. But nowhere was a will, or any document resembling one, to be found. I had now, therefore, no doubt that his will was placed in the cabinet.

In the search among my dear father's papers we found two sheafs of letters, neatly tied up and labelled — these were from my uncle Silas.

My cousin Monica looked down upon these papers with a strange smile; was it satire — was it that indescribable smile with which a mystery which covers a long reach of years is sometimes approached?

These were odd letters. If here and there occurred passages that were querulous and even abject, there were also long passages of manly and altogether noble sentiment, and the strangest rodomontade and maunderings about religion. Here and there a letter would gradually transform itself into a prayer, and end with a doxology and no signature; and some of them expressed such wild and disordered views respecting religion, as I imagine he can never have disclosed to good Mr. Fairfield, and which approached more nearly to the Swedenborg visions than to anything in the Church of England.

I read these with a solemn interest, but my cousin Monica was not similarly moved. She read them with the same smile — faint, serenely contemptuous, I thought — with which she had first looked down upon them. It was the countenance of a person who amusedly traces the working of a character that is well understood.

'Uncle Silas is very religious?' I said, not quite liking Lady Knollys' looks.

'Very,' she said, without raising her eyes or abating her old bitter smile, as she glanced over a passage in one of his letters.

'You don't think he *is*, Cousin Monica?' said I. She raised her head and looked straight at me.

'Why do you say that, Maud?'

'Because you smile incredulously, I think, over his letters.'

'Do I?' said she; 'I was not thinking — it was quite an accident. The fact is, Maud, your poor papa quite mistook me. I had no prejudice respecting him — no theory. I never knew what to think about him. I do not think Silas a product of nature, but a child of the Sphinx, and I never could understand him — that's all.'

'I always felt so too; but that was because I was left to speculation, and to glean conjectures as I might from his portrait, or anywhere. Except what you told me, I never heard more than a few sentences; poor papa did not like me to ask questions about him, and I think he ordered the servants to be silent.'

'And much the same injunction this little note lays upon me — not quite, but something like it; and I don't know the meaning of it.'

And she looked enquiringly at me.

'You are not to be *alarmed* about your uncle Silas, because your being afraid would unfit you for an *important service* which you have undertaken for your family, the nature of which I shall soon understand, and which, although it is quite *passive*, would be made very sad if *illusory fears* were allowed to *steal into your mind*.'

She was looking into the letter in poor papa's handwriting, which she had found addressed to her in his desk, and emphasised the words, I suppose, which she quoted from it.

'Have you any idea, Maud, darling, what this *service* may be?' she enquired, with a grave and anxious curiosity in her countenance.

'None, Cousin Monica; but I have thought long over my undertaking to do it, or submit to it, be it what it may; and I will keep the promise I voluntarily made, although I know what a coward I am, and often distrust my courage.'

'Well, I am not to frighten you.'

'How could you? Why should I be afraid? *Is* there anything frightful to be disclosed? Do tell me — you *must* tell me.'

'No, darling, I did not mean *that* — I don't mean that; — I could, if I would; I — I don't know exactly what I meant. But your poor papa knew him better than I — in fact, I did not know him at all — that is, ever quite understood him — which your poor papa, I see, had ample opportunities of doing.' And after a little pause, she added— 'So you do not know what you are expected to do or to undergo.'

'Oh! Cousin Monica, I know you think he committed that murder,' I cried, starting up, I don't know why, and I felt that I grew deadly pale.

'I don't believe any such thing, you little fool; you must not say such horrible things, Maud,' she said, rising also, and looking both pale and angry. 'Shall we go out for a little walk? Come, lock up these papers, dear, and get your things on; and if that Dr. Bryerly does not turn up tomorrow, you must send for the Rector, good Doctor Clay, and let him make search for the will — there may be directions about many things, you know; and, my dear Maud, you are to remember that Silas is *my* cousin as well as your uncle. Come, dear, put on your hat.’

So we went out together for a little cloistered walk.

CHAPTER XXII

SOMEBODY IN THE ROOM WITH THE COFFIN

When we returned, a 'young' gentleman had arrived. We saw him in the parlour as we passed the window. It was simply a glance, but such a one as suffices to make a photograph, which we can study afterwards, at our leisure. I remember him at this moment — a man of six-and-thirty — dressed in a grey travelling suit, not over-well made; light-haired, fat-faced, and clumsy; and he looked both dull and cunning, and not at all like a gentleman.

Branston met us, announced the arrival, and handed me the stranger's credentials. My cousin and I stopped in the passage to read them.

'*That's* your uncle Silas's,' said Lady Knollys, touching one of the two letters with the tip of her finger.

'Shall we have lunch, Miss?'

'Certainly.' So Branston departed.

'Read it with me, Cousin Monica,' I said. And a very curious letter it was. It spoke as follows: —

'How can I thank my beloved niece for remembering her aged and forlorn kinsman at such a moment of anguish?'

I had written a note of a few, I dare say, incoherent words by the next post after my dear father's death.

'It is, however, in the hour of bereavement that we most value the ties that are broken, and yearn for the sympathy of kindred.'

Here came a little distich of French verse, of which I could only read *ciel* and *l'amour*.

'Our quiet household here is clouded with a new sorrow. How inscrutable are the ways of Providence! I — though a few years younger — how much the more infirm — how shattered in energy and in mind — how mere a burden — how entirely *de trop* — am spared to my sad place in a world where I can be no longer useful, where I have but one business — prayer, but one hope — the tomb; and he — apparently so robust — the centre of so much good — so necessary to you — so necessary, alas! to me — is taken! He is gone to his rest — for us, what remains but to bow our heads, and murmur, “His will be done”? I trace these lines with a trembling hand, while tears dim my old eyes. I did not think that any earthly event could have moved me so profoundly. From the world I have long stood aloof. I once led a life of pleasure — alas! of wickedness — as I now do one of austerity; but as I never was rich, so my worst enemy will allow I never was avaricious. My sins, I thank my Maker, have been of a more reducible kind, and have succumbed to the discipline which Heaven has provided. To earth and its interests, as well as to its pleasures, I have long been dead. For the few remaining years of my life I ask but quiet — an exemption from the agitations and distractions of struggle and care, and I trust to the Giver of all Good for my deliverance — well knowing, at the same time, that whatever befalls will, under His direction, prove best. Happy shall I be, my dearest niece, if in your most interesting and, in some respects, forlorn situation, I can be of any use to you. My present religious adviser — of whom I ventured to ask counsel on your behalf — states that I ought to send some one to represent me at the melancholy ceremony of reading the will which my beloved and now happy brother has, no doubt, left behind; and the idea that the experience and professional knowledge possessed by the gentleman whom I have selected may possibly be of use to you, my dearest niece, determines me to place him at your disposal. He is the junior partner in the firm of Archer and Sleigh, who conduct any little business which I may have from time to time; may I entreat your hospitality for him during a brief stay at Knowl? I write, even for a moment, upon these small matters of business with an effort — a painful one, but necessary. Alas! my brother! The cup of bitterness is now full. Few and evil must the remainder of my old days be. Yet, while they last, I remain always for my beloved niece, that which all her wealth and splendour cannot purchase — a loving and faithful kinsman and friend,

SILAS RUTHYN.’

‘Is not it a kind letter?’ I said, while tears stood in my eyes.

‘Yes,’ answered Lady Knollys, drily.

‘But don’t you think it so, really?’

‘Oh! kind, very kind,’ she answered in the same tone, ‘and perhaps a little cunning.’

‘Cunning! — how?’

‘Well, you know I’m a peevish old Tabby, and of course I scratch now and then, and see in the dark. I dare say Silas is sorry, but I don’t think he is in sackcloth and ashes. He has reason to be sorry and anxious, and I say I think he is both; and you know he pities you very much, and also himself a good deal; and he wants money, and you — his beloved niece — have a great deal — and altogether it is an affectionate and prudent letter: and he has sent his attorney here to make a note of the will; and you are to give the gentleman his meals and lodging; and Silas, very thoughtfully, invites you to confide your difficulties and troubles to *his* solicitor. It is very kind, but not imprudent.’

‘Oh, Cousin Monica, don’t you think at such a moment it is hardly natural that he should form such petty schemes, even were he capable at other times of practising so low? Is it not judging him hardly? and you, you know, so little acquainted with him.’

‘I told you, dear, I’m a cross old thing — and there’s an end; and I really don’t care two pence about him; and of the two I’d much rather he were no relation of ours.’

Now, was not this prejudice? I dare say in part it was. So, too, was my vehement predisposition in his favour. I am afraid we women are factionists; we always take a side, and nature has formed us for advocates rather than judges; and I think the function, if less dignified, is more amiable.

I sat alone at the drawingroom window, at nightfall, awaiting my cousin Monica’s entrance.

Feverish and frightened I felt that night. It was a sympathy, I fancy, with the weather. The sun had set stormily. Though the air was still, the sky looked wild and storm-swept. The crowding clouds, slanting in the attitude of flight, reflected their own sacred aspect upon my spirits. My grief darkened with a wild presaging of danger, and a sense of the supernatural fell upon me. It was the saddest and most awful evening that had come since my beloved father’s death.

All kinds of shapeless fears environed me in silence. For the first time, dire misgivings about the form of faith affrighted me. Who were these

Swedenborgians who had got about him — no one could tell how — and held him so fast to the close of his life? Who was this bilious, bewigged, blackeyed Doctor Bryerly, whom none of us quite liked and all a little feared; who seemed to rise out of the ground, and came and went, no one knew whence or whither, exercising, as I imagined, a mysterious authority over him? Was it all good and true, or a heresy and a witchcraft? Oh, my beloved father! was it all well with you?

When Lady Knollys entered, she found me in floods of tears, walking distractedly up and down the room. She kissed me in silence; she walked back and forward with me, and did her best to console me.

'I think, Cousin Monica, I would wish to see him once more. Shall we go up?'

'Unless you really wish it very much, I think, darling, you had better not mind it. It is happier to recollect them as they were; there's a change, you know, darling, and there is seldom any comfort in the sight.'

'But I do wish it *very* much. Oh! won't you come with me?'

And so I persuaded her, and up we went hand in hand, in the deepening twilight; and we halted at the end of the dark gallery, and I called Mrs. Rusk, growing frightened.

'Tell her to let us in, Cousin Monica,' I whispered.

'She wishes to see him, my lady — does she?' enquired Mrs. Rusk, in an undertone, and with a mysterious glance at me, as she softly fitted the key to the lock.

'Are you quite sure, Maud, dear?'

'Yes, yes.'

But when Mrs. Rusk entered bearing the candle, whose beam mixed dismally with the expiring twilight, disclosing a great black coffin standing upon trestles, near the foot of which she took her stand, gazing sternly into it, I lost heart again altogether and drew back.

'No, Mrs. Rusk, she won't; and I am very glad, dear,' she added to me. 'Come, Mrs. Rusk, come away. Yes, darling,' she continued to me, 'it is much better for you;' and she hurried me away, and downstairs again. But the awful outlines of that large black coffin remained upon my imagination with a new and terrible sense of death.

I had no more any wish to see him. I felt a horror even of the room, and for more than an hour after a kind of despair and terror, such as I have never experienced before or since at the idea of death.

Cousin Monica had had her bed placed in my room, and Mary Quince's moved to the dressing-room adjoining it. For the first time the superstitious awe that follows death, but not immediately, visited me. The idea of seeing my father enter the room, or open the door and look in, haunted me. After Lady Knollys and I were in bed, I could not sleep. The wind sounded mournfully outside, and the small sounds, the rattlings, and strainings that responded from within, constantly startled me, and simulated the sounds of steps, of doors opening, of knockings, and so forth, rousing me with a palpitating heart as often as I fell into a doze.

At length the wind subsided, and these ambiguous noises abated, and I, fatigued, dropped into a quiet sleep. I was awakened by a sound in the gallery — which I could not define. A considerable time had passed, for the wind was now quite lulled. I sat up in my bed a good deal scared, listening breathlessly for I knew not what.

I heard a step moving stealthily along the gallery. I called my cousin Monica softly; and we both heard the door of the room in which my father's body lay unlocked, some one furtively enter, and the door shut.

'What can it be? Good Heavens, Cousin Monica, do you hear it?'

'Yes, dear; and it is two o'clock.'

Everyone at Knowl was in bed at eleven. We knew very well that Mrs. Rusk was rather nervous, and would not, for worlds, go alone, and at such an hour, to the room. We called Mary Quince. We all three listened, but we heard no other sound. I set these things down here because they made so terrible an impression upon me at the time.

It ended by our peeping out, all three in a body, upon the gallery. Through each window in the perspective came its blue sheet of moonshine; but the door on which our attention was fixed was in the shade, and we thought we could discern the glare of a candle through the keyhole. While in whispers we were debating this point together, the door opened, the dusky light of a candle emerged, the shadow of a figure crossed it within, and in another moment the mysterious Doctor Bryerly — angular, ungainly, in the black cloth coat that fitted little better than a coffin — issued from the chamber, candle in hand; murmuring, I suppose, a prayer — it sounded like a farewell — as much frightened as if I had just seen a sorcerer stealing stepped cautiously upon the gallery floor, shutting and locking the door upon the dead; and then having listened for a second, the saturnine figure, casting a gigantic and distorted shadow upon the ceiling and side-wall from the lowered candle, strode lightly down the long dark passage, away from us.

I can only speak for myself, and I can honestly say that I felt as much frightened as if I had just seen a sorcerer stealing from his unhallowed business. I think Cousin Monica was also affected in the same way, for she turned the key on the inside of the door when we entered. I do not think one of us believed at the moment that what we had seen was a Doctor Bryerly of flesh and blood, and yet the first thing we spoke of in the morning was Doctor Bryerly's arrival. The mind is a different organ by night and by day.

CHAPTER XXIII

I TALK WITH DOCTOR BRYERLY

Doctor Bryerly had, indeed, arrived at halfpast twelve o'clock at night. His summons at the hall-door was little heard at our remote side of the old house of Knowl; and when the sleepy, half-dressed servant opened the door, the lank Doctor, in glossy black clothing, was standing alone, his portmanteau on its end upon the steps, and his vehicle disappearing in the shadows of the old trees.

In he came, sterner and sharper of aspect than usual.

'I've been expected? I'm Doctor Bryerly. Haven't I? So, let whoever is in charge of the body be called. I must visit it forthwith.'

So the Doctor sat in the back drawingroom, with a solitary candle; and Mrs. Rusk was called up, and, grumbling much and very peevish, dressed and went down, her ill-temper subsiding in a sort of fear as she approached the visitor.

'How do you do, Madam? A sad visit this. Is anyone watching in the room where the remains of your late master are laid?'

'No.'

'So much the better; it is a foolish custom. Will you please conduct me to the room? I must pray where he lies — no longer *he*! And be good enough to show me my bedroom, and so no one need wait up, and I shall find my way.'

Accompanied by the man who carried his valise, Mrs. Rusk showed him to his apartment; but he only looked in, and then glanced rapidly about to take 'the bearings' of the door.

'Thank you — yes. Now we'll proceed, here, along here? Let me see. A turn to the right and another to the left — yes. He has been dead some days. Is he yet in his coffin?'

'Yes, sir; since yesterday afternoon.'

Mrs. Rusk was growing more and more afraid of this lean figure sheathed in shining black cloth, whose eyes glittered with a horrible sort of cunning, and whose long brown fingers groped before him, as if indicating the way by guess.

‘But, of course, the lid’s not on; you’ve not screwed him down, hey?’

‘No, sir.’

‘That’s well. I must look on the face as I pray. He is in his place; I here on earth. He in the spirit; I in the flesh. The neutral ground lies there. So are carried the vibrations, and so the light of earth and heaven reflected back and forward — apaugasma, a wonderful though helpless engine, the ladder of Jacob, and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Thanks, I’ll take the key. Mysteries to those who *will* live altogether in houses of clay, no mystery to such as will use their eyes and read what is revealed. *This* candle, it is the longer, please; no — no need of a pair, thanks; just this, to hold in my hand. And remember, all depends upon the willing mind. Why do you look frightened? Where is your faith? Don’t you know that spirits are about us at all times? Why should you fear to be near the body? The spirit is everything; the flesh profiteth nothing.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Mrs. Rusk, making him a great courtesy in the threshold.

She was frightened by his eerie talk, which grew, she fancied, more voluble and energetic as they approached the corpse.

‘Remember, then, that when you fancy yourself alone and wrapt in darkness, you stand, in fact, in the centre of a theatre, as wide as the starry floor of heaven, with an audience, whom no man can number, beholding you under a flood of light. Therefore, though your body be in solitude and your mortal sense in darkness, remember to walk as being in the light, surrounded with a cloud of witnesses. Thus walk; and when the hour comes, and you pass forth unprisoned from the tabernacle of the flesh, although it still has its relations and its rights’ — and saying this, as he held the solitary candle aloft in the doorway, he nodded towards the coffin, whose large black form was faintly traceable against the shadows beyond— ‘you will rejoice; and being clothed upon with your house from on high, you will not be found naked. On the other hand, he that loveth corruption shall have enough thereof. Think upon these things. Goodnight.’

And the Swedenborgian Doctor stepped into the room, taking the candle with him, and closed the door upon the shadowy still-life there, and on his own sharp and swarthy visage, leaving Mrs. Rusk in a sort of panic in the dark alone, to find her way to her room the best way she could.

Early in the morning Mrs. Rusk came to my room to tell me that Doctor Bryerly was in the parlour, and begged to know whether I had not a message for him. I was already dressed, so, though it was dreadful seeing a stranger in my then mood, taking the key of the cabinet in my hand, I followed Mrs. Rusk downstairs.

Opening the parlour door, she stepped in, and with a little courtesy said, —

'Please, sir, the young mistress — Miss Ruthyn.'

Draped in black and very pale, tall and slight, 'the young mistress' was; and as I entered I heard a newspaper rustle, and the sound of steps approaching to meet me.

Face to face we met, near the door; and, without speaking, I made him a deep courtesy.

He took my hand, without the least indication on my part, in his hard lean grasp, and shook it kindly, but familiarly, peering with a stern sort of curiosity into my face as he continued to hold it. His ill-fitting, glossy black cloth, ungainly presence, and sharp, dark, vulpine features had in them, as I said before, the vulgarity of a Glasgow artisan in his Sabbath suit. I made an instantaneous motion to withdraw my hand, but he held it firmly.

Though there was a grim sort of familiarity, there was also decision, shrewdness, and, above all, kindness, in his dark face — a gleam on the whole of the masterly and the honest — that along with a certain paleness, betraying, I thought, restrained emotion, indicated sympathy and invited confidence.

'I hope, Miss, you are pretty well?' He pronounced 'pretty' as it is spelt. 'I have come in consequence of a solemn promise exacted more than a year since by your deceased father, the late Mr. Austin Ruthyn of Knowl, for whom I cherished a warm esteem, being knit besides with him in spiritual bonds. It has been a shock to you, Miss?'

'It has, indeed, sir.'

'I've a doctor's degree, I have — Doctor of Medicine, Miss. Like St. Luke, preacher and doctor. I was in business once, but this is better. As one footing fails, the Lord provides another. The stream of life is black and angry; how so many of us get across without drowning, I often wonder. The best way is not to look too far before — just from one stepping-stone to another; and though you may wet your feet, He won't let you drown — He has not allowed me.'

And Doctor Bryerly held up his head, and wagged it resolutely.

'You are born to this world's wealth; in its way a great blessing, though a great trial, Miss, and a great trust; but don't suppose you are destined to exemption from trouble on that account, any more than poor Emmanuel Bryerly. As the sparks fly upwards, Miss Ruthyn! Your cushioned carriage may overturn on the highroad, as I may stumble and fall upon the footpath. There are other troubles than debt and privation. Who can tell how long health may last, or when an accident may happen the brain; what mortifications may await you in your own high sphere; what unknown enemies may rise up in your path; or what slanders may asperse your name — ha, ha! It is a wonderful equilibrium — a marvellous dispensation — ha, ha!' and he laughed with a shake of his head, I thought a little sarcastically, as if he was not sorry my money could not avail to buy immunity from the general curse.

'But what money can't do, *prayer* can — bear that in mind, Miss Ruthyn. We can all pray; and though thorns and snares, and stones of fire lie strewn in our way, we need not fear them. He will give His angels charge over us, and in their hands they will bear us up, for He hears and sees everywhere, and His angels are innumerable.'

He was now speaking gently and solemnly, and paused. But another vein of thought he had unconsciously opened in my mind, and I said —

'And had my dear papa no other medical adviser?'

He looked at me sharply, and flushed a little under his dark tint. His medical skill was, perhaps, the point on which his human vanity vaunted itself, and I dare say there was something very disparaging in my tone.

'And if he *had* no other, he might have done worse. I've had many critical cases in my hands, Miss Ruthyn. I can't charge myself with any miscarriage through ignorance. My diagnosis in Mr. Ruthyn's case has been verified by the result. But I was *not* alone; Sir Clayton Barrow saw him, and took my view; a note will reach him in London. But this, excuse me, is not to the present purpose. The late Mr. Ruthyn told me I was to receive a key from you, which would open a cabinet where he had placed his will — ha! thanks, — in his study. And, I think, as there may be directions about the funeral, it had better be read forthwith. Is there any gentleman — a relative or man of business — near here, whom you would wish sent for?'

'No, none, thank you; I have confidence in you, sir.'

I think I spoke and looked frankly, for he smiled very kindly, though with closed lips.

'And you may be sure, Miss Ruthyn, your confidence shall not be disappointed.' Here was a long pause. 'But you are very young, and you must have some one by in your interest, who has some experience in business. Let me see. Is not the Rector, Dr. Clay, at hand? In the town? — very good; and Mr. Danvers, who manages the estate, *he* must come. And get Grimston — you see I know all the names — Grimston, the attorney; for though he was not employed about this will, he has been Mr. Ruthyn's solicitor a great many years: we must have Grimston; for, as I suppose you know, though it is a short will, it is a very strange one. I expostulated, but you know he was very decided when he took a view. He read it to you, eh?'

'No, sir.'

'Oh, but he told you so much as relates to you and your uncle, Mr. Silas Ruthyn, of Bartram-Haugh?'

'No, indeed, sir.'

'Ha! I wish he had.'

And with these words Doctor Bryerly's countenance darkened.

'Mr. Silas Ruthyn is a religious man?'

'Oh, *very*!' said I.

'You've seen a good deal of him?'

'No, I never saw him,' I answered.

'H'm? Odder and odder! But he's a good man, isn't he?'

'Very good, indeed, sir — a very religious man.'

Doctor Bryerly was watching my countenance as I spoke, with a sharp and anxious eye; and then he looked down, and read the pattern of the carpet like bad news, for a while, and looking again in my face, askance, he said —

'He was very near joining *us* — on the point. He got into correspondence with Henry Voerst, one of our best men. They call us Swedenborgians, you know; but I dare say that won't go much further, now. I suppose, Miss

Ruthyn, one o'clock would be a good hour, and I am sure, under the circumstances, the gentlemen will make a point of attending.'

'Yes, Dr. Bryerly, the notes shall be sent, and my cousin, Lady Knollys, would I am sure attend with me while the will is being read — there would be no objection to her presence?'

'None in the world. I can't be quite sure who are joined with me as executors. I'm almost sorry I did not decline; but it is too late regretting. One thing you must believe Miss Ruthyn: in framing the provisions of the will I was never consulted — although I expostulated against the only very unusual one it contains when I heard it. I did so strenuously, but in vain. There was one other against which I protested — having a right to do so — with better effect. In no other way does the will in any respect owe anything to my advice or dissuasion. You will please believe this; also that I am your friend. Yes, indeed, it is my duty.'

The latter words he spoke looking down again, as it were in soliloquy; and thanking him, I withdrew.

When I reached the hall, I regretted that I had not asked him to state distinctly what arrangements the will made so nearly affecting, as it seemed, my relations with my uncle Silas, and for a moment I thought of returning and requesting an explanation. But then, I bethought me, it was not very long to wait till one o'clock — so *he*, at least, would think. I went upstairs, therefore, to the 'schoolroom,' which we used at present as a sitting-room, and there I found Cousin Monica awaiting me.

'Are you quite well, dear?' asked Lady Knollys, as she came to meet and kiss me.

'Quite well, Cousin Monica.'

'No nonsense, Maud! you're as white as that handkerchief — what's the matter? Are you ill — are you frightened? Yes, you're trembling — you're terrified, child.'

'I believe I *am* afraid. There *is* something in poor papa's will about Uncle Silas — about *me*. I don't know — Doctor Bryerly says, and he seems so uncomfortable and frightened himself, I am sure it is something very bad. I am *very* much frightened — I am — I *am*. Oh, Cousin Monica! you won't leave me?'

So I threw my arms about her neck, clasping her very close, and we kissed one another, I crying like a frightened child — and indeed in experience of the world I was no more.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE OPENING OF THE WILL

Perhaps the terror with which I anticipated the hour of one, and the disclosure of the unknown undertaking to which I had bound myself, was irrational and morbid. But, honestly, I doubt it; my tendency has always been that of many other weak characters, to act impetuously, and afterwards to reproach myself for consequences which I have, perhaps, in reality, had little or no share in producing.

It was Doctor Bryerly's countenance and manner in alluding to a particular provision in my father's will that instinctively awed me. I have seen faces in a nightmare that haunted me with an indescribable horror, and yet I could not say wherein lay the fascination. And so it was with his — an omen, a menace, lurked in its sallow and dismal glance.

'You must not be so frightened, darling,' said Cousin Monica. 'It is foolish; it *is, really*; they can't cut off your head, you know: they can't really harm you in any essential way. If it involved a risk of a little money, you would not mind it; but men are such odd creatures — they measure all sacrifices by money. Doctor Bryerly would look just as you describe, if you were doomed to lose 500*l*., and yet it would not kill you.'

A companion like Lady Knollys is reassuring; but I could not take her comfort altogether to heart, for I felt that she had no great confidence in it herself.

There was a little French clock over the mantelpiece in the schoolroom, which I consulted nearly every minute. It wanted now but ten minutes of one.

'Shall we go down to the drawingroom, dear?' said Cousin Knollys, who was growing restless like me.

So downstairs we went, pausing by mutual consent at the great window at the stairhead, which looks out on the avenue. Mr. Danvers was riding his tall, grey horse at a walk, under the wide branches toward the house, and we waited to see him get off at the door. In his turn he loitered there, for the good Rector's gig, driven by the Curate, was approaching at a smart ecclesiastical trot.

Doctor Clay got down, and shook hands with Mr. Danvers; and after a word or two, away drove the Curate with that upward glance at the windows from which so few can refrain.

I watched the Rector and Mr. Danvers loitering on the steps as a patient might the gathering of surgeons who are to perform some unknown operation. They, too, glanced up at the window as they turned to enter the house, and I drew back. Cousin Monica looked at her watch.

'Four minutes only. Shall we go to the drawingroom?'

Waiting for a moment to let the gentlemen get by on the way to the study, we, accordingly, went down, and I heard the Rector talk of the dangerous state of Grindleston bridge, and wondered how he could think of such things at a time of sorrow. Everything about those few minutes of suspense remains fresh in my recollection. I remember how they loitered and came to a halt at the corner of the oak passage leading to the study, and how the Rector patted the marble head and smoothed the inflexible tresses of William Pitt, as he listened to Mr. Danvers' details about the presentment; and then, as they went on, I recollect the boisterous nose-blowing that suddenly resounded from the passage, and which I then referred, and still refer, intuitively to the Rector.

We had not been five minutes in the drawingroom when Branston entered, to say that the gentlemen I had mentioned were all assembled in the study.

'Come, dear,' said Cousin Monica; and leaning on her arm I reached the study door. I entered, followed by her. The gentlemen arrested their talk and stood up, those who were sitting, and the Rector came forward very gravely, and in low tones, and very kindly, greeted me. There was nothing emotional in this salutation, for though my father never quarrelled, yet an immense distance separated him from all his neighbours, and I do not think there lived a human being who knew him at more than perhaps a point or two of his character.

Considering how entirely he secluded himself, my father was, as many people living remember, wonderfully popular in his county. He was neighbourly in everything except in seeing company and mixing in society. He had magnificent shooting, of which he was extremely liberal. He kept a pack of hounds at Dollerton, with which all his side of the county hunted through the season. He never refused any claim upon his purse which had the slightest show of reason. He subscribed to every fund, social, charitable, sporting, agricultural, no matter what, provided the honest people of his county took an interest in it, and always with a princely hand; and although he shut himself up, no one could say that he was inaccessible, for he devoted hours daily to answering letters, and his checque-book contributed largely in those replies. He had taken his turn long ago as High Sheriff; so there was an end of that claim before his oddity and shyness had quite secluded him. He refused the Lord-Lieutenancy of his county; he declined every post of personal distinction connected with it. He could write an able as well as a genial letter when he pleased; and his appearances at public meetings, dinners, and so forth were made in this epistolary fashion, and, when occasion presented, by magnificent contributions from his purse.

If my father had been less goodnatured in the sporting relations of his vast estates, or less magnificent in dealing with his fortune, or even if he had failed to exhibit the intellectual force which always characterised his letters on public matters, I dare say that his oddities would have condemned him to ridicule, and possibly to dislike. But every one of the principal gentlemen of his county, whose judgment was valuable, has told me that he was a remarkably able man, and that his failure in public life was due to his eccentricities, and in no respect to deficiency in those peculiar mental qualities which make men feared and useful in Parliament.

I could not forbear placing on record this testimony to the high mental and the kindly qualities of my beloved father, who might have passed for a misanthrope or a fool. He was a man of generous nature and powerful intellect, but given up to the oddities of a shyness which grew with years and indulgence, and became inflexible with his disappointments and affliction.

There was something even in the Rector’s kind and ceremonious greeting which oddly enough reflected the mixed feelings in which awe was not without a place, with which his neighbours had regarded my dear father.

Having done the honours — I am sure looking woefully pale — I had time to glance quietly at the only figure there with which I was not tolerably familiar. This was the junior partner in the firm of Archer and Sleigh who represented my uncle Silas — a fat and pallid man of six-and-thirty, with a sly and evil countenance, and it has always seemed to me, that ill dispositions show more repulsively in a pale fat face than in any other.

Doctor Bryerly, standing near the window, was talking in a low tone to Mr. Grimston, our attorney.

I heard good Dr. Clay whisper to Mr. Danvers —

'Is not that Doctor Bryerly — the person with the black — the black — it's a wig, I think — in the window, talking to Abel Grimston?'

'Yes; that's he.'

'Odd-looking person — one of the Swedenborg people, is not he?' continued the Rector.

'So I am told.'

'Yes,' said the Rector, quietly; and he crossed one gaitered leg over the other, and, with fingers interlaced, twiddled his thumbs, as he eyed the monstrous sectary under his orthodox old brows with a stern inquisitiveness. I thought he was meditating theologic battle.

But Dr. Bryerly and Mr. Grimston, still talking together, began to walk slowly from the window, and the former said in his peculiar grim tones —

'I beg pardon, Miss Ruthyn; perhaps you would be so good as to show us which of the cabinets in this room your late lamented father pointed out as that to which this key belongs.'

I indicated the oak cabinet.

'Very good, ma'am — very good,' said Doctor Bryerly, as he fumbled the key into the lock.

Cousin Monica could not forbear murmuring —

'Dear! what a brute!'

The junior partner, with his dumpy hands in his pocket, poked his fat face over Mr. Grimston's shoulder, and peered into the cabinet as the door opened.

The search was not long. A handsome white paper enclosure, neatly tied up in pink tape, and sealed with large red seals, was inscribed in my dear father's hand:— 'Will of Austin R. Ruthyn, of Knowl.' Then, in smaller characters, the date, and in the corner a note— 'This will was drawn from my instructions by Gaunt, Hogg, and Hatchett, Solicitors, Great Woburn Street, London, A.R.R.'

‘Let *me* have a squint at that indorsement, please, gentlemen,’ half whispered the unpleasant person who represented my uncle Silas.

‘’Tis*n’t* an indorsement. There, look — a memorandum on an envelope,’ said Abel Grimston, gruffly.

‘Thanks — all right — that will do,’ he responded, himself making a pencil-note of it, in a long clasp-book which he drew from his coatpocket.

The tape was carefully cut, and the envelope removed without tearing the writing, and forth came the will, at sight of which my heart swelled and fluttered up to my lips, and then dropped down dead as it seemed into its place.

‘Mr. Grimston, you will please to read it,’ said Doctor Bryerly, who took the direction of the process. ‘I will sit beside you, and as we go along you will be good enough to help us to understand technicalities, and give us a lift where we want it.’

‘It’s a short will,’ said Mr. Grimston, turning over the sheets ‘*very* — considering. Here’s a codicil.’

‘I did not see that,’ said Doctor Bryerly.

‘Dated only a month ago.’

‘Oh!’ said Doctor Bryerly, putting on his spectacles. Uncle Silas’s ambassador, sitting close behind, had insinuated his face between Doctor Bryerly’s and the reader’s of the will.

‘On behalf of the surviving brother of the testator,’ interposed the delegate, just as Abel Grimston had cleared his voice to begin, ‘I take leave to apply for a copy of this instrument. It will save a deal of trouble, if the young lady as represents the testator here has no objection.’

‘You can have as many copies as you like when the will is proved,’ said Mr. Grimston.

‘I know that; but supposing as all’s right, where’s the objection?’

‘Just the objection there always is to acting irregular,’ replied Mr. Grimston.

‘You don’t object to act disobliging, it seems.’

‘You can do as I told you,’ replied Mr. Grimston.

‘Thank you for nothing,’ murmured Mr. Sleigh.

And the reading of the will proceeded, while he made elaborate notes of its contents in his capacious pocketbook.

'I, Austin Alymer Ruthyn Ruthyn, being, I thank God, of sound mind and perfect recollection,' &c, &c.; and then came a bequest of all his estates real, chattels real, copyrights, leases, chattels, money, rights, interests, reversions, powers, plate, pictures, and estates and possessions whatsoever, to four persons — Lord Ilbury, Mr. Penrose Creswell of Creswell, Sir William Aylmer, Bart., and Hans Emmanuel Bryerly, Doctor of Medicine, 'to have and to hold,' &c. &c. Whereupon my Cousin Monica ejaculated 'Eh?' and Doctor Bryerly interposed —

'Four trustees, ma'am. We take little but trouble — you'll see; go on.'

Then it came out that all this multifarious splendour was bequeathed in trust for me, subject to a bequest of 15,000*l.* to his only brother, Silas Aylmer Ruthyn, and 3,500*l.* each to the two children of his said brother; and lest any doubt should arise by reason of his, the testator's decease as to the continuance of the arrangement by way of lease under which he enjoyed his present habitation and farm, he left him the use of the mansion-house and lands of Bartram-Haugh, in the county of Derbyshire, and of the lands of so-and-so and so-and-so, adjoining thereto, in the said county, for the term of his natural life, on payment of a rent of 5*s*. per annum, and subject to the like conditions as to waste, &c., as are expressed in the said lease.

'By your leave, may I ask is them dispositions all the devises to my client, which is his only brother, as it seems to me you've seen the will before?' enquired Mr. Sleigh.

'Nothing more, unless there is something in the codicil,' answered Dr. Bryerly.

But there was no mention of him in the codicil.

Mr. Sleigh threw himself back in his chair, and sneered, with the end of his pencil between his teeth. I hope his disappointment was altogether for his client. Mr. Danvers fancied, he afterwards said, that he had probably expected legacies which might have involved litigation, or, at all events, law costs, and perhaps a stewardship; but this was very barren; and Mr. Danvers also remarked, that the man was a very low practitioner, and wondered how my uncle Silas could have commissioned such a person to represent him.

So far the will contained nothing of which my most partial friend could have complained. The codicil, too, devised only legacies to servants, and a sum of 1,000*l.*, with a few kind words, to Monica, Lady Knollys, and a further sum of 3,000*l.* to Dr. Bryerly, stating that the legatee had prevailed upon him to erase from the draft of his will a bequest to him to that amount, but that, in consideration of all the trouble devolving upon him as trustee, he made that bequest by his codicil; and with these arrangements the permanent disposition of his property was completed.

But that direction to which he and Doctor Bryerly had darkly alluded, was now to come, and certainly it was a strange one. It appointed my uncle Silas my sole guardian, with full parental authority over me until I should have reached the age of twenty-one, up to which time I was to reside under his care at Bartram-Haugh, and it directed the trustees to pay over to him yearly a sum of 2,000*l.* during the continuance of the guardianship for my suitable maintenance, education, and expenses.

You have now a sufficient outline of my father's will. The only thing I painfully felt in this arrangement was, the break-up — the dismay that accompanies the disappearance of home. Otherwise, there was something rather pleasurable in the idea. As long as I could remember, I had always cherished the same mysterious curiosity about my uncle, and the same longing to behold him. This was about to be gratified. Then there was my cousin Milicent, about my own age. My life had been so lonely, that I had acquired none of those artificial habits that induce the fine-lady nature — a second, and not always a very amiable one. She had lived a solitary life, like me. What rambles and readings we should have together! what confidences and castle-buildings! and then there was a new country and a fine old place, and the sense of interest and adventure that always accompanies change in our early youth.

There were four letters all alike with large, red seals, addressed respectively to each of the trustees named in the will. There was also one addressed to Silas Alymer Ruthyn, Esq., Bartram-Haugh Manor, &c. &c., which Mr. Sleigh offered to deliver. But Doctor Bryerly thought the postoffice was the more regular channel. Uncle Silas's representative was questioning Doctor Bryerly in an undertone.

I turned my eyes on my cousin Monica — I felt so inexpressibly relieved — expecting to see a corresponding expression in her countenance. But I was startled. She looked ghastly and angry. I stared in her face, not knowing what to think. Could the will have personally disappointed her? Such doubts, though we fancy in afterlife they belong to maturity and experience only, do sometimes cross our minds in youth. But the suggestion wronged Lady Knollys, who neither expected nor wanted anything, being rich, childless, generous, and frank. It was the unexpected character of her countenance that scared me, and for a moment the shock called up corresponding moral images.

Lady Knollys, starting up, raised her head, so as to see over Mr. Sleigh's shoulder, and biting her pale lip, she cleared her voice and demanded —

'Doctor Bryerly, pray, sir, is the reading concluded?'

'Concluded? Quite. Yes, nothing more,' he answered with a nod, and continued his talk with Mr. Danvers and Abel Grimston.

'And to whom,' said Lady Knollys, with an effort, 'will the property belong, in case — in case my little cousin here should die before she comes of age?'

'Eh? Well — wouldn't it go to the heir-at-law and next of kin?' said Doctor Bryerly, turning to Abel Grimston.

'Ay — to be sure,' said the attorney, thoughtfully.

'And who is that?' pursued my cousin.

'Well, her uncle, Mr. Silas Ruthyn. He's both heir-at-law and next of kin,' pursued Abel Grimston.

'Thank you,' said Lady Knollys.

Doctor Clay came forward, bowing very low, in his standing collar and single-breasted coat, and graciously folded my hand in his soft wrinkled grasp —

'Allow me, my dear Miss Ruthyn, while expressing my regret that we are to lose you from among our little flock — though I trust but for a short, a very short time — to say how I rejoice at the particular arrangement indicated by the will we have just heard read. My curate, William Fairfield, resided for some years in the same spiritual capacity in the neighbourhood of your, I will say, admirable uncle, with occasional intercourse with whom he was favoured — may I not say blessed? — a true Christian Churchman — a Christian gentleman. Can I say more? A most happy, happy choice.' A very low bow here, with eyes nearly closed, and a shake of the head. 'Mrs.

Clay will do herself the honour of waiting upon you, to pay her respects, before you leave Knowl for your temporary sojourn in another sphere.'

So, with another deep bow — for I had become a great personage all at once — he let go my hand cautiously and delicately, as if he were setting down a curious china tea-cup. And I courtesied low to him, not knowing what to say, and then to the assembly generally, who all bowed. And Cousin Monica whispered, briskly, 'Come away,' and took my hand with a very cold and rather damp one, and led me from the room.

CHAPTER XXV

I HEAR FROM UNCLE SILAS

Without saying a word, Cousin Monica accompanied me to the schoolroom, and on entering she shut the door, not with a spirited clang, but quietly and determinedly.

‘Well, dear,’ she said, with the same pale, excited countenance, ‘that certainly is a sensible and charitable arrangement. I could not have believed it possible, had I not heard it with my ears.’

‘About my going to Bartram-Haugh?’

‘Yes, exactly so, under Silas Ruthyn’s guardianship, to spend two — *three* — of the most important years of your education and your life under that roof. Is *that*, my dear, what was in your mind when you were so alarmed about what you were to be called upon to do, or undergo?’

‘No, no, indeed. I had no notion what it might be. I was afraid of something serious,’ I answered.

‘And, my dear Maud, did not your poor father speak to you as if it *was* something serious?’ said she. ‘And so it *is*, I can tell you, something serious, and *very* serious; and I think it ought to be prevented, and I certainly *will* prevent it if I possibly can.’

I was puzzled utterly by the intensity of Lady Knollys’ protest. I looked at her, expecting an explanation of her meaning; but she was silent, looking steadfastly on the jewels on her right-hand fingers, with which she was drumming a staccato march on the table, very pale, with gleaming eyes, evidently thinking deeply. I began to think she *had* a prejudice against my uncle Silas.

‘He is not very rich,’ I commenced.

‘Who?’ said Lady Knollys.

‘Uncle Silas,’ I replied.

‘No, certainly; he’s in debt,’ she answered.

‘But then, how very highly Doctor Clay spoke of him!’ I pursued.

‘Don’t talk of Doctor Clay. I do think that man is the greatest goose I ever heard talk. I have no patience with such men,’ she replied.

I tried to remember what particular nonsense Doctor Clay had uttered, and I could recollect nothing, unless his eulogy upon my uncle were to be classed with that sort of declamation.

‘Danvers is a very proper man and a good accountant, I dare say; but he is either a very deep person, or a fool — *I* believe a fool. As for your attorney, I suppose he knows his business, and also his interest, and I have no doubt he will consult it. I begin to think he best man among them, the shrewdest and the most reliable, is that vulgar visionary in the black wig. I saw him look at you, Maud, and I liked his face, though it is abominably ugly and vulgar, and cunning, too; but I think he’s a just man, and I dare say with right feelings — I’m *sure* he has.’

I was quite at a loss to divine the gist of my cousin’s criticism.

‘I’ll have some talk with Dr. Bryerly; I feel convinced he takes my view, and we must really think what had best be done.’

‘Is there anything in the will, Cousin Monica, that does not appear?’ I asked, for I was growing very uneasy. ‘I wish you would tell me. What view do you mean?’

‘No view in particular; the view that a desolate old park, and the house of a *neglected* old man, who is very poor, and has been desperately foolish, is not the right place for you, particularly at your years. It is quite shocking, and I *will* speak to Doctor Bryerly. May I ring the bell, dear?’

‘Certainly;’ and I rang it.

‘When does he leave Knowl?’

I could not tell. Mrs. Rusk, however, was sent for, and she could tell us that he had announced his intention of taking the night train from Drackleton, and was to leave Knowl for that station at halfpast six o’clock.

‘May Rusk give or send him a message from me, dear?’ asked Lady Knollys.

Of course she might.

‘Then please let him know that I request he will be so good as to allow me a very few minutes, just to say a word before he goes.’

‘You kind cousin!’ I said, placing my two hands on her shoulders, and looking earnestly in her face; ‘you are anxious about me, more than you say. Won’t you tell me why? I am much more unhappy, really, in ignorance, than if I understood the cause.’

‘Well, dear, haven’t I told you? The two or three years of your life which are to form you are destined to be passed in utter loneliness, and, I am sure, neglect. You can’t estimate the disadvantage of such an arrangement. It is full of disadvantages. How it could have entered the head of poor Austin — although I should not say that, for I am sure I do understand it, — but how he could for any purpose have directed such a measure is quite inconceivable. I never heard of anything so foolish and abominable, and I will prevent it if I can.’

At that moment Mrs. Rusk announced that Doctor Bryerly would see Lady Knollys at any time she pleased before his departure.

‘It shall be this moment, then,’ said the energetic lady, and up she stood, and made that hasty general adjustment before the glass, which, no matter under what circumstances, and before what sort of creature one’s appearance is to be made, is a duty that every woman owes to herself. And I heard her a moment after, at the stairhead, directing Branston to let Dr. Bryerly know that she awaited him in the drawingroom.

And now she was gone, and I began to wonder and speculate. Why should my cousin Monica make all this fuss about, after all, a very natural arrangement? My uncle, whatever he might have been, was now a good man — a religious man — perhaps a little severe; and with this thought a dark streak fell across my sky.

A cruel disciplinarian! had I not read of such characters? — lock and key, bread and water, and solitude! To sit locked up all night in a dark out-of-the-way room, in a great, ghosty, oldfashioned house, with no one nearer than the other wing. What years of horror in one such night! Would not this explain my poor father’s hesitation, and my cousin Monica’s apparently disproportioned opposition? When an idea of terror presents itself to a young person’s mind, it transfixes and fills the vision, without respect of probabilities or reason.

My uncle was now a terrible old martinet, with long Bible lessons, lectures, pages of catechism, sermons to be conned by rote, and an awful catalogue of punishments for idleness, and what would seem to him impiety. I was going, then, to a frightful isolated reformatory, where for the first time in my life I should be subjected to a rigorous and perhaps barbarous discipline.

All this was an exhalation of fancy, but it quite overcame me. I threw myself, in my solitude, on the floor, upon my knees, and prayed for deliverance — prayed that Cousin Monica might prevail with Doctor Bryerly, and both on my behalf with the Lord Chancellor, or the High Sheriff, or whoever else my proper deliverer might be; and when my cousin returned, she found me quite in an agony.

‘Why, you little fool! what fancy has taken possession of you now?’ she cried.

And when my new terror came to light, she actually laughed a little to reassure me, and she said —

‘My dear child, your uncle Silas will never put you through your duty to your neighbour; all the time you are under his roof you’ll have idleness and liberty enough, and too much, I fear. It is neglect, my dear, not discipline, that I’m afraid of.’

‘I think, dear Cousin Monica, you are afraid of something more than neglect,’ I said, relieved, however.

‘I *am* afraid of more than neglect,’ she replied promptly; ‘but I hope my fears may turn out illusory, and that possibly they may be avoided. And now, for a few hours at least, let us think of something else. I rather like that Doctor Bryerly. I could not get him to say what I wanted. I don’t think he’s Scotch, but he is very cautious, and I am sure, though he would not say so, that he thinks of the matter exactly as I do. He says that those fine people, who are named as his co-trustees, won’t take any trouble, and will leave everything to him, and I am sure he is right. So we must not quarrel with him, Maud, nor call him hard names, although he certainly is intolerably vulgar and ugly, and at times very nearly impertinent — I suppose without knowing, or indeed very much caring.’

We had a good deal to think of, and talked incessantly. There were bursts and interruptions of grief, and my kind cousin’s consolations. I have often since been so lectured for giving way to grief, that I wonder at the patience exercised by her during this irksome visit. Then there was some reading of that book whose claims are always felt in the terrible days of affliction. After that we had a walk in the yew garden, that quaint little cloistered quadrangle — the most solemn, sad, and antiquated of gardens.

‘And now, my dear, I must really leave you for two or three hours. I have ever so many letters to write, and my people must think I’m dead by this time.’

So till tea-time I had poor Mary Quince, with her gushes of simple prattle and her long fits of vacant silence, for my companion. And such a one, who can con over by rote the old friendly gossip about the dead, talk about their ways, and looks, and likings, without much psychologic refinement, but with a simple admiration and liking that never measured them critically, but always with faith and love, is in general about as comfortable a companion as one can find for the common moods of grief.

It is not easy to recall in calm and happy hours the sensations of an acute sorrow that is past. Nothing, by the merciful ordinance of God, is more difficult to remember than pain. One or two great agonies of that time I do remember, and they remain to testify of the rest, and convince me, though I can see it no more, how terrible all that period was.

Next day was the funeral, that appalling necessity; smuggled away in whispers, by black familiars, unresisting, the beloved one leaves home, without a farewell, to darken those doors no more; henceforward to lie outside, far away, and forsaken, through the drowsy heats of summer, through days of snow and nights of tempest, without light or warmth, without a voice near. Oh, Death, king of terrors! The body quakes and the spirit faints before thee. It is vain, with hands clasped over our eyes, to scream our reclamation; the horrible image will not be excluded. We have just the word spoken eighteen hundred years ago, and our trembling faith. And through the broken vault the gleam of the Star of Bethlehem.

I was glad in a sort of agony when it was over. So long as it remained to be done, something of the catastrophe was still suspended. Now it was all over.

The house so strangely empty. No owner — no master! I with my strange momentary liberty, bereft of that irreplaceable love, never quite prized until it is lost. Most people have experienced the dismay that underlies sorrow under such circumstances.

The apartment of the poor outcast from life is now dismantled. Beds and curtains taken down, and furniture displaced; carpets removed, windows open and doors locked; the bedroom and anteroom were henceforward, for many a day, uninhabited. Every shocking change smote my heart like a reproach.

I saw that day that Cousin Monica had been crying for the first time, I think, since her arrival at Knowl; and I loved her more for it, and felt consoled. My tears have often been arrested by the sight of another person weeping, and I never could explain why. But I believe that many persons experience the same odd reaction.

The funeral was conducted, in obedience to his brief but peremptory direction, very privately and with little expense. But of course there was an attendance, and the tenants of the Knowl estate also followed the hearse to the mausoleum, as it is called, in the park, where he was laid beside my dear mother. And so the repulsive ceremonial of that dreadful day was over. The grief remained, but there was rest from the fatigue of agitation, and a comparative calm supervened.

It was now the stormy equinoctial weather that sounds the wild dirge of autumn, and marches the winter in. I love, and always did, that grand undefinable music, threatening and bewailing, with its strange soul of liberty and desolation.

By this night's mail, as we sat listening to the storm, in the drawingroom at Knowl, there reached me a large letter with a great black seal, and a wonderfully deep-black border, like a widow's crape. I did not recognise the handwriting; but on opening the funereal missive, it proved to be from my uncle Silas, and was thus expressed: —

'MY DEAREST NIECE, — This letter will reach you, probably, on the day which consigns the mortal remains of my beloved brother, Austin, your dear father, to the earth. Sad ceremony, from taking my mournful part in which I am excluded by years, distance, and broken health. It will, I trust, at this season of desolation, be not unwelcome to remember that a substitute, imperfect — unworthy — but most affectionately zealous, for the honoured parent whom you have just lost, has been appointed, in me, your uncle, by his will. I am aware that you were present during the reading of it, but I think it will be for our mutual satisfaction that our new and more affectionate relations should be forthwith entered upon. My conscience and your safety, and I trust convenience, will thereby be consulted. You will, my dear niece, remain at Knowl, until a few simple arrangements shall have been completed for your reception at this place. I will then settle the details of your little journey to us, which shall be performed as comfortably and easily as possible. I humbly pray that this affliction may be sanctified to us all, and that in our new duties we may be supported, comforted, and directed. I need not remind you that I now stand to you *in loco parentis*, which means in the relation of father, and you will not forget that you are to remain at Knowl until you hear further from me.

‘I remain, my dear niece, your most affectionate uncle and guardian,

SILAS RUTHYN.’

‘P.S. — Pray present my respects to Lady Knollys, who, I understand, is sojourning at Knowl. I would observe that a lady who cherishes, I have reason to fear, unfriendly feelings against your uncle, is not the most desirable companion for his ward. But upon the express condition that I am not made the subject of your discussions — a distinction which could not conduce to your forming a just and respectful estimate of me — I do not interpose my authority to bring your intercourse to an immediate close.’

As I read this postscript, my cheek tingled as if I had received a box on the ear. Uncle Silas was as yet a stranger. The menace of authority was new and sudden, and I felt with a pang of mortification the full force of the position in which my dear father’s will had placed me.

I was silent, and handed the letter to my cousin, who read it with a kind of smile until she came, as I supposed, to the postscript, when her countenance, on which my eyes were fixed, changed, and with flushed cheeks she knocked the hand that held the letter on the table before her, and exclaimed —

‘Did I ever hear! Well, if this isn’t impertinence! *What* an old man that is!’

There was a pause, during which Lady Knollys held her head high with a frown, and sniffed a little.

‘I did not intend to talk about him, but now I *will*. I’ll talk away just whatever I like; and I’ll stay here just as long as you let me, Maud, and you need not be one atom afraid of him. Our intercourse to an “immediate close,” indeed! I only wish he were here. He should hear something!’

And Cousin Monica drank off her entire cup of tea at one draught, and then she said, more in her own way —

'I'm better!' and drew a long breath, and then she laughed a little in a waggish defiance. 'I wish we had him here, Maud, and *would* not we give him a bit of our minds! And this before the poor will is so much as proved!'

'I am almost glad he wrote that postscript; for although I don't think he has any authority in that matter while I am under my own roof,' I said, extemporising a legal opinion, 'and, therefore, shan't obey him, it has somehow opened my eyes to my real situation.'

I sighed, I believe, very desolately, for Lady Knollys came over and kissed me very gently and affectionately.

'It really seems, Maud, as if he had a supernatural sense, and heard things through the air over fifty miles of heath and hill. You remember how, just as he was probably writing that very postscript yesterday, I was urging you to come and stay with me, and planning to move Dr. Bryerly in our favour. And so I will, Maud, and to me you *shall* come — my guest, mind — I should be so delighted; and really if Silas is under a cloud, it has been his own doing, and I don't see that it is your business to fight his battle. He can't live very long. The suspicion, whatever it is dies with him, and what could poor dear Austin prove by his will but what everybody knew quite well before — his own strong belief in Silas's innocence? What an awful storm! The room trembles. Don't you like the sound? What they used to call 'wolving' in the old organ at Dorminster!'

CHAPTER XXVI

THE STORY OF UNCLE SILAS

And so it was like the yelling of phantom hounds and hunters, and the thunder of their coursers in the air — a furious, grand and supernatural music, which in my fancy made a suitable accompaniment to the discussion of that enigmatical person — martyr — angel — demon — Uncle Silas — with whom my fate was now so strangely linked, and whom I had begun to fear.

‘The storm blows from that point,’ I said, indicating it with my hand and eye, although the window shutters and curtains were closed. ‘I saw all the trees bend that way this evening. That way stands the great lonely wood, where my darling father and mother lie. Oh, how dreadful on nights like this, to think of them — a vault! — damp, and dark, and solitary — under the storm.’

Cousin Monica looked wistfully in the same direction, and with a short sigh she said —

‘We think too much of the poor remains, and too little of the spirit which lives for ever. I am sure they are happy.’ And she sighed again. ‘I wish I dare hope as confidently for myself. Yes, Maud, it is sad. We are such materialists, we can’t help feeling so. We forget how well it is for us that our present bodies are not to last always. They are constructed for a time and place of trouble — plainly mere temporary machines that wear out, constantly exhibiting failure and decay, and with such tremendous capacity for pain. The body lies alone, and so it ought, for it is plainly its good Creator’s will; it is only the tabernacle, not the person, who is clothed upon after death, Saint Paul says, “with a house which is from heaven.” So Maud, darling, although the thought will trouble us again and again, there is nothing in it; and the poor mortal body is only the cold ruin of a habitation which *they* have forsaken before we do. So this great wind, you say, is blowing toward us from the wood there. If so, Maud, it is blowing from Bartram-Haugh, too, over the trees and chimneys of that old place, and the mysterious old man, who is quite right in thinking I don’t like him; and I can fancy him an old enchanter in his castle, waving his familiar spirits on the wind to fetch and carry tidings of our occupations here.'

I lifted my head and listened to the storm, dying away in the distance sometimes — sometimes swelling and pealing around and above us — and through the dark and solitude my thoughts sped away to Bartram-Haugh and Uncle Silas.

'This letter,' I said at last, 'makes me feel differently. I think he is a stern old man — is he?'

'It is twenty years, now, since I saw him,' answered Lady Knollys. 'I did not choose to visit at his house.'

'Was that before the dreadful occurrence at Bartram-Haugh?'

'Yes — before, dear. He was not a reformed rake, but only a ruined one then. Austin was very good to him. Mr. Danvers says it is quite unaccountable how Silas can have made away with the immense sums he got from his brother from time to time without benefiting himself in the least. But, my dear, he played; and trying to help a man who plays, and is unlucky — and some men are, I believe, habitually unlucky — is like trying to fill a vessel that has no bottom. I think, by-the-by, my hopeful nephew, Charles Oakley, plays. Then Silas went most unjustifiably into all manner of speculations, and your poor father had to pay everything. He lost something quite astounding in that bank that ruined so many country gentlemen — poor Sir Harry Shackleton, in Yorkshire, had to sell half his estate. But your kind father went on helping him, up to his marriage — I mean in that extravagant way which was really totally useless.'

'Has my aunt been long dead?'

'Twelve or fifteen years — more, indeed — she died before your poor mamma. She was very unhappy, and I am sure would have given her right hand she had never married Silas.'

'Did you like her?'

'No, dear; she was a coarse, vulgar woman.'

'Coarse and vulgar, and Uncle Silas's wife!' I echoed in extreme surprise, for Uncle Silas was a man of fashion — a beau in his day — and might have married women of good birth and fortune, I had no doubt, and so I expressed myself.

‘Yes, dear; so he might, and poor dear Austin was very anxious he should, and would have helped him with a handsome settlement, I dare say, but he chose to marry the daughter of a Denbigh innkeeper.’

‘How utterly incredible!’ I exclaimed.

‘Not the least incredible, dear — a kind of thing not at all so uncommon as you fancy.’

‘What! — a gentleman of fashion and refinement marry a person— ‘

‘A barmaid! — just so,’ said Lady Knollys. ‘I think I could count half a dozen men of fashion who, to my knowledge, have ruined themselves just in a similar way.’

‘Well, at all events, it must be allowed that in this he proved himself altogether unworldly.’

‘Not a bit unworldly, but very vicious,’ replied Cousin Monica, with a careless little laugh. ‘She was very beautiful, curiously beautiful, for a person in her station. She was very like that Lady Hamilton who was Nelson’s sorceress — elegantly beautiful, but perfectly low and stupid. I believe, to do him justice, he only intended to ruin her; but she was cunning enough to insist upon marriage. Men who have never in all their lives denied themselves the indulgence of a single fancy, cost what it may, will not be baulked even by that condition if the *penchant* be only violent enough.’

I did not half understand this piece of worldly psychology, at which Lady Knollys seemed to laugh.

‘Poor Silas, certainly he struggled honestly against the consequences, for he tried after the honeymoon to prove the marriage bad. But the Welsh parson and the innkeeper papa were too strong for him, and the young lady was able to hold her struggling swain fast in that respectable noose — and a pretty prize he proved!’

‘And she died, poor thing, broken-hearted, I heard.’

‘She died, at all events, about ten years after her marriage; but I really can’t say about her heart. She certainly had enough ill-usage, I believe, to kill her; but I don’t know that she had feeling enough to die of it, if it had not been that she drank: I am told that Welsh women often do. There was jealousy, of course, and brutal quarrelling, and all sorts of horrid stories. I visited at Bartram-Haugh for a year or two, though no one else would. But when that sort of thing began, of course I gave it up; it was out of the question. I don’t think poor Austin ever knew how bad it was. And then came that odious business about wretched Mr. Charke. You know he — he committed suicide at Bartram.’

‘I never heard about that,’ I said; and we both paused, and she looked sternly at the fire, and the storm roared and ha-ha-ed till the old house shook again.

‘But Uncle Silas could not help that,’ I said at last.

‘No, he could not help it,’ she acquiesced unpleasantly.

‘And Uncle Silas was’ — I paused in a sort of fear.

‘He was suspected by some people of having killed him’ — she completed the sentence.

There was another long pause here, during which the storm outside bellowed and hooted like an angry mob roaring at the windows for a victim. An intolerable and sickening sensation overpowered me.

‘But *you* did not suspect him, Cousin Knollys?’ I said, trembling very much.

‘No,’ she answered very sharply. ‘I told you so before. Of course I did not.’

There was another silence.

‘I wish, Cousin Monica,’ I said, drawing close to her, ‘you had not said *that* about Uncle Silas being like a wizard, and sending his spirits on the wind to listen. But I’m very glad you never suspected him.’ I insinuated my cold hand into hers, and looked into her face I know not with what expression. She looked down into mine with a hard, haughty stare, I thought.

‘Of *course* I never suspected him; and *never* ask me *that* question again, Maud Ruthyn.’

Was it family pride, or what was it, that gleamed so fiercely from her eyes as she said this? I was frightened — I was wounded — I burst into tears.

‘What is my darling crying for? I did not mean to be cross. *Was* I cross?’ said this momentary phantom of a grim Lady Knollys, in an instant translated again into kind, pleasant Cousin Monica, with her arms about my neck.

‘No, no, indeed — only I thought I had vexed you; and, I believe, thinking of Uncle Silas makes me nervous, and I can’t help thinking of him nearly always.'

'Nor can I, although we might both easily find something better to think of. Suppose we try?' said Lady Knollys.

'But, first, I must know a little more about that Mr. Charke, and what circumstances enabled Uncle Silas's enemies to found on his death that wicked slander, which has done no one any good, and caused some persons so much misery. There is Uncle Silas, I may say, ruined by it; and we all know how it darkened the life of my dear father.'

'People will talk, my dear. Your uncle Silas had injured himself before that in the opinion of the people of his county. He was a black sheep, in fact. Very bad stories were told and believed of him. His marriage certainly was a disadvantage, you know, and the miserable scenes that went on in his disreputable house — all that predisposed people to believe ill of him.'

'How long is it since it happened?'

'Oh, a long time; I think before you were born,' answered she.

'And the injustice still lives — they have not forgotten it yet?' said I, for such a period appeared to me long enough to have consigned anything in its nature perishable to oblivion.

Lady Knollys smiled.

'Tell me, like a darling cousin, the whole story as well as you can recollect it. Who was Mr. Charke?'

'Mr. Charke, my dear, was a gentleman on the turf — that is the phrase, I think — one of those London men, without birth or breeding, who merely in right of their vices and their money are admitted to associate with young dandies who like hounds and horses, and all that sort of thing. That set knew him very well, but of course no one else. He was at the Matlock races, and your uncle asked him to Bartram-Haugh; and the creature, Jew or Gentile, whatever he was, fancied there was more honour than, perhaps, there really was in a visit to Bartram-Haugh.'

'For the kind of person you describe, it *was*, I think, a rather unusual honour to be invited to stay in the house of a man of Uncle Ruthyn's birth.'

'Well, so it was perhaps; for though they knew him very well on the course, and would ask him to their tavern dinners, they would not, of course, admit him to the houses where ladies were. But Silas's wife was not much regarded at Bartram-Haugh. Indeed, she was very little seen, for she was every evening tipsy in her bedroom, poor woman!'

'How miserable!' I exclaimed.

'I don't think it troubled Silas very much, for she drank gin, they said, poor thing, and the expense was not much; and, on the whole, I really think he was glad she drank, for it kept her out of his way, and was likely to kill her. At this time your poor father, who was thoroughly disgusted at his marriage, had stopped the supplies, you know, and Silas was very poor, and as hungry as a hawk, and they said he pounced upon this rich London gamester, intending to win his money. I am telling you now all that was said afterwards. The races lasted I forget how many days, and Mr. Charke stayed at Bartram-Haugh all this time and for some days after. It was thought that poor Austin would pay all Silas's gambling debts, and so this wretched Mr. Charke made heavy wagers with him on the races, and they played very deep, besides, at Bartram. He and Silas used to sit up at night at cards. All these particulars, as I told you, came out afterwards, for there was an inquest, you know, and then Silas published what he called his "statement," and there was a great deal of most distressing correspondence in the newspapers.'

'And why did Mr. Charke kill himself?' I asked.

'Well, I will tell you first what all are agreed about. The second night after the races, your uncle and Mr. Charke sat up till between two and three o'clock in the morning, quite by themselves, in the parlour. Mr. Charke's servant was at the Stag's Head Inn at Feltram, and therefore could throw no light upon what occurred at night at Bartram-Haugh; but he was there at six o'clock in the morning, and very early at his master's door by his direction. He had locked it, as was his habit, upon the inside, and the key was in the lock, which turned out afterwards a very important point. On knocking he found that he could not awaken his master, because, as it appeared when the door was forced open, his master was lying dead at his bedside, not in a pool, but a perfect pond of blood, as they described it, with his throat cut.'

'How horrible!' cried I.

'So it was. Your uncle Silas was called up, and greatly shocked of course, and he did what I believe was best. He had everything left as nearly as possible in the exact state in which it had been found, and he sent his own servant forthwith for the coroner, and, being himself a justice of the peace, he took the depositions of Mr. Charke’s servant while all the incidents were still fresh in his memory.’

‘Could anything be more straightforward, more right and wise?’ I said.

‘Oh, nothing of course,’ answered Lady Knollys, I thought a little drily.

CHAPTER XXVII

MORE ABOUT TOM CHARKE'S SUICIDE

So the inquest was held, and Mr. Manwaring, of Wail Forest, was the only juryman who seemed to entertain the idea during the inquiry that Mr. Charke had died by any hand but his own.

'And how *could* he fancy such a thing?' I exclaimed indignantly.

'Well, you will see the result was quite enough to justify them in saying as they did, that he died by his own hand. The window was found fastened with a screw on the inside, as it had been when the chambermaid had arranged it at nine o'-clock; no one could have entered through it. Besides, it was on the third story, and the rooms are lofty, so it stood at a great height from the ground, and there was no ladder long enough to reach it. The house is built in the form of a hollow square, and Mr. Charke's room looked into the narrow courtyard within. There is but one door leading into this, and it did not show any sign of having been open for years. The door was locked upon the inside, and the key in the lock, so that nobody could have made an entrance that way either, for it was impossible, you see, to unlock the door from the outside.'

'And how could they affect to question anything so clear?' I asked.

'There did come, nevertheless, a kind of mist over the subject, which gave those who chose to talk unpleasantly an opportunity of insinuating suspicions, though they could not themselves find the clue of the mystery. In the first place, it appeared that he had gone to bed very tipsy, and that he was heard sing ing and noisy in his room while getting to bed — not the mood in which men make away with themselves. Then, although his own razor was found in that dreadful blood (it is shocking to have to hear all this) near his right hand, the fingers of his left were cut to the bone. Then the memorandum book in which his bets were noted was nowhere to be found. That, you know, was very odd. His keys were there attached to a chain. He wore a great deal of gold and trinkets. I saw him, wretched man, on the course. They had got off their horses. He and your uncle were walking on the course.’

‘Did he look like a gentleman?’ I inquired, as I dare say, other young ladies would.

‘He looked like a Jew, my dear. He had a horrid brown coat with a velvet cape, curling black hair over his collar, and great whiskers, very high shoulders, and he was puffing a cigar straight up into the air. I was shocked to see Silas in such company.’

‘And did his keys discover anything?’ I asked.

‘On opening his travelling desk and a small japanned box within it a vast deal less money was found than was expected — in fact, very little. Your uncle said that he had won some of it the night before at play, and that Charke complained to him when tipsy of having had severe losses to counterbalance his gains on the races. Besides, he had been paid but a small part of those gains. About his book it appeared that there were little notes of bets on the backs of letters, and it was said that he sometimes made no other memorandum of his wagers — but this was disputed — and among those notes there was not one referring to Silas. But, then, there was an omission of all allusion to his transactions with two other well-known gentlemen. So that was not singular.’

‘No, certainly; that was quite accounted for,’ said I.

‘And then came the question,’ continued she, ‘what motive could Mr. Charke possibly have had for making away with himself.’

‘But is not that very difficult to make out in many cases?’ I interposed.

‘It was said that he had some mysterious troubles in London, at which he used to hint. Some people said that he really was in a scrape, but others that there was no such thing, and that when he talked so he was only jesting. There was no suspicion during the inquest that your uncle Silas was involved, except those questions of Mr. Manwaring’s.’

‘What were they?’ I asked.

‘I really forget; but they greatly offended your uncle, and there was a little scene in the room. Mr. Manwaring seemed to think that some one had somehow got into the room. Through the door it could not be, nor down the chimney, for they found an iron bar across the flue, near the top in the masonry. The window looked into a courtyard no bigger than a ball-room. They went down and examined it, but, though the ground beneath was moist, they could not discover the slightest trace of a footprint. So far as they could make out, Mr. Charke had hermetically sealed himself into his room, and then cut his throat with his own razor.'

'Yes,' said I, 'for it was all secured — that is, the window and the door — upon the inside, and no sign of any attempt to get in.'

'Just so; and when the walls were searched, and, as your uncle Silas directed, the wainscoting removed, some months afterwards, when the scandal grew loudest, then it was evident that there was no concealed access to the room.'

'So the answer to all those calumnies was simply that the crime was impossible,' said I. 'How dreadful that such a slander should have required an answer at all!'

'It was an unpleasant affair even then, although I cannot say that anyone supposed Silas guilty; but you know the whole thing was disreputable, that Mr. Charke was a discreditable inmate, the occurrence was horrible, and there was a glare of publicity which brought into relief the scandals of Bartram-Haugh. But in a little time it became, all on a sudden, a great deal worse.'

My cousin paused to recollect exactly.

'There were very disagreeable whispers among the sporting people in London. This person, Charke, had written two letters, Yes — two. They were published about two months after, by the villain to whom they were written; he wanted to extort money. They were first talked of a great deal among that set in town; but the moment they were published they produced a sensation in the country, and a storm of newspaper commentary. The first of these was of no great consequence, but the second was very startling, embarrassing, and even alarming.'

'What was it, Cousin Monica?' I whispered.

'I can only tell you in a general way, it is so very long since I read it; but both were written in the same kind of slang, and parts as hard to understand as a prize fight. I hope you never read those things.'

I satisfied this sudden educational alarm, and Lady Knollys proceeded.

'I am afraid you hardly hear me, the wind makes such an uproar. Well, listen. The letter said distinctly, that he, Mr. Charke, had made a very profitable visit to Bartram-Haugh, and mentioned in exact figures for how much he held your uncle Silas's I.O.U.'s, for he could not pay him. I can't say what the sum was. I only remember that it was quite frightful. It took away my breath when I read it.'

'Uncle Silas had lost it?' I asked.

'Yes, and owed it; and had given him those papers called I.O.U.'s promising to pay, which, of course, Mr. Charke had locked up with his money; and the insinuation was that Silas had made away with him, to get rid of this debt, and that he had also taken a great deal of his money.

'I just recollect these points which were exactly what made the impression,' continued Lady Knollys, after a short pause; 'the letter was written in the evening of the last day of the wretched man's life, so that there had not been much time for your uncle Silas to win back his money; and he stoutly alleged that he did not owe Mr. Charke a guinea. It mentioned an enormous sum as being actually owed by Silas; and it cautioned the man, an agent, to whom he wrote, not to mention the circumstance, as Silas could only pay by getting the money from his wealthy brother, who would have the management; and he distinctly said that he had kept the matter very close at Silas's request. That, you know, was a very awkward letter, and all the worse that it was written in brutally high spirits, and not at all like a man meditating an exit from the world. You can't imagine what a sensation the publication of these letters produced. In a moment the storm was up, and certainly Silas did meet it bravely — yes, with great courage and ability. What a pity he did not early enter upon some career of ambition! Well, well, it is idle regretting. He suggested that the letters were forgeries. He alleged that Charke was in the habit of boasting, and telling enormous falsehoods about his gambling transactions, especially in his letters. He reminded the world how often men affect high animal spirits at the very moment of meditating suicide. He alluded, in a manly and graceful way, to his family and their character. He took a high and menacing tone with his adversaries, and he insisted that what they dared to insinuate against him was physically impossible.'

I asked in what form this vindication appeared.

'It was a letter, printed as a pamphlet; everybody admired its ability, ingenuity, and force, and it was written with immense rapidity.'

'Was it at all in the style of his letters?' I innocently asked.

My cousin laughed.

'Oh, dear, no! Ever since he avowed himself a religious character, he had written nothing but the most vapid and nerveless twaddle. Your poor dear father used to send his letters to me to read, and I sometimes really thought that Silas was losing his faculties; but I believe he was only trying to write in character.'

'I suppose the general feeling was in his favour?' I said.

'I don't think it was, anywhere; but in his own county it was certainly unanimously against him. There is no use in asking why; but so it was, and I think it would have been easier for him with his unaided strength to uproot the Peak than to change the convictions of the Derbyshire gentlemen. They were all against him. Of course there were predisposing causes. Your uncle published a very bitter attack upon them, describing himself as the victim of a political conspiracy: and I recollect he mentioned that from the hour of the shocking catastrophe in his house, he had forsworn the turf and all pursuits and amusements connected with it. People sneered, and said he might as well go as wait to be kicked out.'

'Were there lawsuits about all this?' I asked.

'Everybody expected that there would, for there were very savage things printed on both sides, and I think, too, that the persons who thought worst of him expected that evidence would yet turn up to convict Silas of the crime they chose to impute; and so years have glided away, and many of the people who remembered the tragedy of Bartram-Haugh, and took the strongest part in the denunciation, and ostracism that followed, are dead, and no new light had been thrown upon the occurrence, and your uncle Silas remains an outcast. At first he was quite wild with rage, and would have fought the whole county, man by man, if they would have met him. But he had since changed his habits and, as he says, his aspirations altogether.'

'He has become religious.'

'The only occupation remaining to him. He owes money; he is poor; he is isolated; and he says, sick and religious. Your poor father, who was very decided and inflexible, never helped him beyond the limit he had prescribed, after Silas's *mésalliance*. He wanted to get him into Parliament, and would have paid his expenses, and made him an allowance; but either Silas had grown lazy, or he understood his position better than poor Austin, or he distrusted his powers, or possibly he really is in ill-health; but he objected his religious scruples. Your poor papa thought self-assertion possible, where an injured man has right to rely upon, but he had been very long out of the world, and the theory won't do. Nothing is harder than to get a person who has once been effectually slurred, received again. Silas, I think, was right. I don't think it was practicable.

'Dear child, how late it is!' exclaimed Lady Knollys suddenly, looking at the Louis Quatorze clock, that crowned the mantelpiece.

It was near one o'clock. The storm had a little subsided, and I took a less agitated and more confident view of Uncle Silas than I had at an earlier hour of that evening.

'And what do you think of him?' I asked.

Lady Knollys drummed on the table with her finger points as she looked into the fire.

'I don't understand metaphysics, my dear, nor witchcraft. I sometimes believe in the supernatural, and sometimes I don't. Silas Ruthyn is himself alone, and I can't define him, because I don't understand him. Perhaps other souls than human are sometimes born into the world, and clothed in flesh. It is not only about that dreadful occurrence, but nearly always throughout his life; early and late he has puzzled me. I have tried in vain to understand him. But at one time of his life I am sure he was awfully wicked — eccentric indeed in his wickedness — gay, frivolous, secret, and dangerous. At one time I think he could have made poor Austin do almost anything; but his influence vanished with his marriage, never to return again. No; I don't understand him. He always bewildered me, like a shifting face, sometimes smiling, but always sinister, in an unpleasant dream.'

CHAPTER XXVIII

I AM PERSUADED

So now at last I had heard the story of Uncle Silas's mysterious disgrace. We sat silent for a while, and I, gazing into vacancy, sent him in a chariot of triumph, chapletted, ringed, and robed through the city of imagination, crying after him, 'Innocent! innocent! martyr and crowned!' All the virtues and honesties, reason and conscience, in myriad shapes — tier above tier of human faces — from the crowded pavement, crowded windows, crowded roofs, joined in the jubilant acclamation, and trumpeters trumpeted, and drums rolled, and great organs and choirs through open cathedral gates, rolled anthems of praise and thanksgiving, and the bells rang out, and cannons sounded, and the air trembled with the roaring harmony; and Silas Ruthyn, the full-length portrait, stood in the burnished chariot, with a proud, sad, clouded face, that rejoiced not with the rejoicers, and behind him the slave, thin as a ghost, white-faced, and sneering something in his ear: while I and all the city went on crying 'Innocent! innocent! martyr and crowned!' And now the reverie was ended; and there were only Lady Knollys' stern, thoughtful face, with the pale light of sarcasm on it, and the storm outside thundering and lamenting desolately.

It was very good of Cousin Monica to stay with me so long. It must have been unspeakably tiresome. And now she began to talk of business at home, and plainly to prepare for immediate flight, and my heart sank.

I know that I could not then have defined my feelings and agitations. I am not sure that I even now could. Any misgiving about Uncle Silas was, in my mind, a questioning the foundations of my faith, and in itself an impiety. And yet I am not sure that some such misgiving, faint, perhaps, and intermittent, may not have been at the bottom of my tribulation.

I was not very well. Lady Knollys had gone out for a walk. She was not easily tired, and sometimes made a long excursion. The sun was setting now, when Mary Quince brought me a letter which had just arrived by the post. My heart throbbed violently. I was afraid to break the broad black seal. It was from Uncle Silas. I ran over in my mind all the unpleasant mandates which it might contain, to try and prepare myself for a shock. At last I opened the letter. It directed me to hold myself in readiness for the journey to Bartram-Haugh. It stated that I might bring two maids with me if I wished so many, and that his next letter would give me the details of my route, and the day of my departure for Derbyshire; and he said that I ought to make arrangements about Knowl during my absence, but that he was hardly the person properly to be consulted on that matter. Then came a prayer that he might be enabled to acquit himself of his trust to the full satisfaction of his conscience, and that I might enter upon my new relations in a spirit of prayer.

I looked round my room, so long familiar, and now so endeared by the idea of parting and change. The old house — dear, dear Knowl, how could I leave you and all your affectionate associations, and kind looks and voices, for a strange land!

With a great sigh I took Uncle Silas's letter, and went down stairs to the drawingroom. From the lobby window, where I loitered for a few moments, I looked out upon the well-known forest-trees. The sun was down. It was already twilight, and the white vapours of coming night were already filming their thinned and yellow foliage. Everything looked melancholy. How little did those who envied the young inheritrex of a princely fortune suspect the load that lay at her heart, or, bating the fear of death, how gladly at that moment she would have parted with her life!

Lady Knollys had not yet returned, and it was darkening rapidly; a mass of black clouds stood piled in the west, through the chasms of which was still reflected a pale metallic lustre.

The drawingroom was already very dark; but some streaks of this cold light fell upon a black figure, which would otherwise have been unseen, leaning beside the curtains against the window frame.

It advanced abruptly, with creaking shoes; it was Doctor Bryerly.

I was startled and surprised, not knowing how he had got there. I stood staring at him in the dusk rather awkwardly, I am afraid.

'How do you do, Miss Ruthyn?' said he, extending his hand, long, hard, and brown as a mummy's, and stooping a little so as to approach more nearly, for it was not easy to see in the imperfect light. 'You're surprised, I dare say, to see me here so soon again?'

‘I did not know you had arrived. I am glad to see you, Doctor Bryerly. Nothing unpleasant, I hope, has happened?’

‘No, nothing unpleasant, Miss. The will has been lodged, and we shall have probate in due course; but there has been something on my mind, and I’m come to ask you two or three questions which you had better answer very considerately. Is Miss Knollys still here?’

‘Yes, but she is not returned from her walk.’

‘I am glad she is here. I think she takes a sound view, and women understand one another better. As for me, it is plainly my duty to put it before you as it strikes me, and to offer all I can do in accomplishing, should you wish it, a different arrangement. You don’t know your uncle, you said the other day?’

‘No, I’ve never seen him.’

‘You understand your late father’s intention in making you his ward?’

‘I suppose he wished to show his high opinion of my uncle’s fitness for such a trust.’

‘That’s quite true; but the nature of the trust in this instance is extraordinary.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘Why, if you die before you come to the age of twenty-one, the entire of the property will go to him — do you see? — and he has the custody of your person in the meantime; you are to live in his house, under his care and authority. You see now, I think, how it is; and I did not like it when your father read the will to me, and I said so. Do *you*?’

I hesitated to speak, not sure that I quite comprehended him.

‘And the more I think of it, the less I like it, Miss,’ said Doctor Bryerly, in a calm, stern tone.

‘Merciful Heaven! Doctor Bryerly, you can’t suppose that I should not be as safe in my uncle’s house as in the Lord Chancellor’s?’ I ejaculated, looking full in his face.

‘But don’t you see, Miss, it is not a fair position to put your uncle in,’ replied he, after a little hesitation.

‘But suppose *he* does not think so. You know, if he does, he may decline it.’

‘Well that’s true — but he won’t. Here is his letter’ — and he produced it — ‘announcing officially that he means to accept the office; but I think he ought to be told it is not *delicate*, under all circumstances. You know, Miss, that your uncle, Mr. Silas Ruthyn, was talked about unpleasantly once.’

‘You mean’ — I began.

‘I mean about the death of Mr. Charke, at Bartram-Haugh.’

‘Yes, I have heard that,’ I said; he was speaking with a shocking *aplomb*.

‘We assume, of course, *unjustly*; but there are many who think quite differently.’

‘And possibly, Doctor Bryerly, it was for that very reason that my dear papa made him my guardian.’

‘There can be no doubt of that, Miss; it was to purge him of that scandal.’

‘And when he has acquitted himself honourably of that trust, don’t you think such a proof of confidence so honourably fulfilled must go far to silence his traducers?’

‘Why, if all goes well, it may do a little; but a great deal less than you fancy. But take it that you happen to *die*, Miss, during your minority. We are all mortal, and there are three years and some months to go; how will it be then? Don’t you see? Just fancy how people will talk.’

‘I think you know that my uncle is a religious man?’ said I.

‘Well, Miss, what of that?’ he asked again.

‘He is — he has suffered intensely,’ I continued. ‘He has long retired from the world; he is very religious. Ask our curate, Mr. Fairfield, if you doubt it.’

‘But I am not disputing it, Miss; I’m only supposing what may happen — an accident, we’ll call it smallpox, diphtheria, *that’s* going very much. Three years and three months, you know, is a long time. You proceed to Bartram-Haugh, thinking you have much goods laid up for many years; but your Creator, you know, may say, “Thou fool, this day is thy soul required of thee.” You go — and what pray is thought of your uncle, Mr. Silas Ruthyn, who walks in for the entire inheritance, and who has long been abused like a pickpocket, or worse, in his own county, I’m told?’

‘You are a religious man, Doctor Bryerly, according to your lights?’ I said.

The Swedenborgian smiled.

‘Well, knowing that he is so too, and having yourself experienced the power of religion, do not you think him deserving of every confidence? Don’t you think it well that he should have this opportunity of exhibiting both his own character and the reliance which my dear papa reposed on it, and that we should leave all consequences and contingencies in the hands of Heaven?’

‘It appears to have been the will of Heaven hitherto,’ said Doctor Bryerly — I could not see with what expression of face, but he was looking down, and drawing little diagrams with his stick on the dark carpet, and spoke in a very low tone— ‘that your uncle should suffer under this ill report. In countervailing the appointment of Providence, we must employ our reason, with conscientious diligence, as to the means, and if we find that they are as likely to do mischief as good, we have no right to expect a special interposition to turn our experiment into an ordeal. I think you ought to weigh it well — I am sure there are reasons against it. If you make up your mind that you would rather be placed under the care, say of Lady Knollys, I will endeavour all I can to effect it.’

‘That could not be done without his consent, could it?’ said I.

‘No, but I don’t despair of getting that — on terms, of course,’ remarked he.

‘I don’t quite understand,’ I said.

‘I mean, for instance, if he were allowed to keep the allowance for your maintenance — eh?’

‘I mistake my uncle Silas very much,’ I said, ‘if that allowance is any object whatever to him compared with the moral value of the position. If he were deprived of that, I am sure he would decline the other.’

‘We might try him at all events,’ said Doctor Bryerly, on whose dark sinewy features, even in this imperfect light, I thought I detected a smile.

‘Perhaps,’ said I, ‘I appear very foolish in supposing him actuated by any but sordid motives; but he is my near relation, and I can’t help it, sir.’

‘That is a very serious thing, Miss Ruthyn,’ he replied. ‘You are very young, and cannot see it at present, as you will hereafter. He is very religious, you say, and all that, but his house is not a proper place for you. It is a solitude — its master an outcast, and it has been the repeated scene of all sorts of scandals, and of one great crime; and Lady Knollys thinks your having been domesticated there will be an injury to you all the days of your life.'

'So I do, Maud,' said Lady Knollys, who had just entered the room unperceived,— 'How do you do, Doctor Bryerly? — a serious injury. You have no idea how entirely that house is condemned and avoided, and the very name of its inmates tabooed.'

'How monstrous — how cruel!' I exclaimed.

'Very unpleasant, my dear, but perfectly natural. You are to recollect that quite independently of the story of Mr. Charke, the house was talked about, and the county people had cut your uncle Silas long before that adventure was dreamed of; and as to the circumstance of your being placed in his charge by his brother, who took, from strong family feeling, a totally one-sided view of the affair from the first, having the slightest effect in restoring his position in the county, you must quite give that up. Except me, if he will allow me, and the clergyman, not a soul in the country will visit at Bartram-Haugh. They may pity you, and think the whole thing the climax of folly and cruelty; but they won't visit at Bartram, or know Silas, or have anything to do with his household.'

'They will see, at all events, what my dear papa's opinion was.'

'They know that already,' answered she, 'and it has not, and ought not to have, the slightest weight with them. There are people there who think themselves just as great as the Ruthyns, or greater; and your poor father's idea of carrying it by a demonstration was simply the dream of a man who had forgotten the world, and learned to exaggerate himself in his long seclusion. I know he was beginning himself to hesitate; and I think if he had been spared another year that provision of his will would have been struck out.'

Doctor Bryerly nodded, and he said —

'And if he had the power to dictate *now*, would he insist on that direction? It is a mistake every way, injurious to you, his child; and should you happen to die during your sojourn under your uncle's care, it would woefully defeat the testator's object, and raise such a storm of surmise and inquiry as would awaken all England, and send the old scandal on the wing through the world again.'

‘Doctor Bryerly will, I have no doubt, arrange it all. In fact, I do not think it would be very difficult to bring Silas to terms; and if you do not consent to his trying, Maud, mark my words, you will live to repent it.’

Here were two persons viewing the question from totally different points; both perfectly disinterested; both in their different ways, I believe, shrewd and even wise; and both honourable, urging me against it, and in a way that undefinably alarmed my imagination, as well as moved my reason. I looked from one to the other — there was a silence. By this time the candles had come, and we could see one another.

‘I only wait your decision, Miss Ruthyn,’ said the trustee, ‘to see your uncle. If his advantage was the chief object contemplated in this arrangement, he will be the best judge whether his interest is really best consulted by it or no; and I think he will clearly see that it is *not* so, and will answer accordingly.’

‘I cannot answer now — you must allow me to think it over — I will do my best. I am very much obliged, my dear Cousin Monica, you are so very good, and you too, Doctor Bryerly.’

Doctor Bryerly by this time was looking into his pocketbook, and did not acknowledge my thanks even by a nod.

‘I must be in London the day after tomorrow. Bartram-Haugh is nearly sixty miles from here, and only twenty of that by rail, I find. Forty miles of posting over those Derbyshire mountains is slow work; but if you say *try*, I’ll see him tomorrow morning.’

‘You must say try — you *must*, my dear Maud.’

‘But how can I decide in a moment? Oh, dear Cousin Monica, I am so distracted!’

‘But *you* need not decide at all; the decision rests with *him*. Come; he is more competent than you. You *must* say yes.’

Again I looked from her to Doctor Bryerly, and from him to her again. I threw my arms about her neck, and hugging her closely to me, I cried —

‘Oh, Cousin Monica, dear Cousin Monica, advise me. I am a wretched creature. You must advise me.’

I did not know till now how irresolute a character was mine.

I knew somehow by the tone of her voice that she was smiling as she answered —

‘Why, dear, I have advised you; I *do* advise you;’ and then she added, impetuously, ‘I entreat and implore, if you really think I love you, that you will *follow* my advice. It is your duty to leave your uncle Silas, whom you believe to be more competent than you are, to decide, after full conference with Doctor Bryerly, who knows more of your poor father’s views and intentions in making that appointment than either you or I.’

‘Shall I say, yes?’ I cried, drawing her close, and kissing her helplessly.’ Oh, tell me — tell me to say, yes.’

‘Yes, of course, *yes*. She agrees, Doctor Bryerly, to your kind proposal.’

‘I am to understand so?’ he asked.

‘Very well — yes, Doctor Bryerly,’ I replied.

‘You have resolved wisely and well,’ said he, briskly, like a man who has got a care off his mind.

‘I forgot to say, Doctor Bryerly — it was very rude — that you must stay here tonight.’

‘He *can’t*, my dear,’ interposed Lady Knolly’s; ‘it is a long way.’

‘He will dine. Won’t you, Doctor Bryerly?’

‘No; he can’t. You know you can’t, sir,’ said my cousin, peremptorily. ‘You must not worry him, my dear, with civilities he can’t accept. He’ll bid us goodbye this moment. Goodbye, Doctor Bryerly. You’ll write immediately; don’t wait till you reach town. Bid him goodbye, Maud. I’ll say a word to you in the hall.’

And thus she literally hurried him out of the room, leaving me in a state of amazement and confusion, not able to review my decision — unsatisfied, but still unable to recall it.

I stood where they had left me, looking after them, I suppose, like a fool.

Lady Knollys returned in a few minutes. If I had been a little cooler I was shrewd enough to perceive that she had sent poor Doctor Bryerly away upon his travels, to find board and lodging halfway to Bartram, to remove him forthwith from my presence, and thus to make my decision — if mine it was — irrevocable.

‘I applaud you, my dear,’ said Cousin Knollys, in her turn embracing me heartily. ‘You are a sensible little darling, and have done exactly what you ought to have done.’

‘I hope I have,’ I faltered.

‘Hope? fiddle! stuff! the thing’s as plain as a pikestaff.’

And in came Branston to say that dinner was served.

CHAPTER XXIX

HOW THE AMBASSADOR FARED

Lady Knollys, I could plainly see, when we got into the brighter lights at the dinner table, was herself a good deal excited; she was relieved and glad, and was garrulous during our meal, and told me all her early recollections of dear papa. Most of them I had heard before; but they could not be told too often.

Notwithstanding my mind sometimes wandered, *often* indeed, to the conference so unexpected, so suddenly decisive, possibly so momentous; and with a dismayed uncertainly, the question — had I done right? — was always before me.

I dare say my cousin understood my character better, perhaps, after all my honest self-study, then I do even now. Irresolute, suddenly reversing my own decisions, impetuous in action as she knew me, she feared, I am sure, a revocation of my commission to Doctor Bryerly, and thought of the countermand I might send galloping after him.

So, kind creature, she laboured to occupy my thoughts, and when one theme was exhausted found another, and had always her parry prepared as often as I directed a reflection or an enquiry to the reopening of the question which she had taken so much pains to close.

That night I was troubled. I was already upbraiding myself. I could not sleep, and at last sat up in bed, and cried. I lamented my weakness in having assented to Doctor Bryerly's and my cousin's advice. Was I not departing from my engagement to my dear papa? Was I not consenting that my Uncle Silas should be induced to second my breach of faith by a corresponding perfidy?

Lady Knollys had done wisely in despatching Doctor Bryerly so promptly; for, most assuredly, had he been at Knowl next morning when I came down I should have recalled my commission.

That day in the study I found four papers which increased my perturbation. They were in dear papa's handwriting, and had an indorsement in these words— 'Copy of my letter addressed to —— , one of the trustees named in my will.’ Here, then, were the contents of those four sealed letters which had excited mine and Lady Knollys’ curiosity on the agitating day on which the will was read.

It contained these words: —

‘I name my oppressed and unhappy brother, Silas Ruthyn, residing at my house of Bartram-Haugh, as guardian of the person of my beloved child, to convince the world if possible, and failing that, to satisfy at least all future generations of our family, that his brother, who knew him best, had implicit confidence in him, and that he deserved it. A cowardly and preposterous slander, originating in political malice, and which never have been whispered had he not been poor and imprudent, is best silenced by this ordeal of purification. All I possess goes to him if my child dies under age; and the custody of her person I commit meanwhile to him alone, knowing that she is as safe in his as she could have been under my own care. I rely upon your remembrance of our early friendship to make this known wherever an opportunity occurs, and also to say what your sense of justice may warrant.’

The other letters were in the same spirit. My heart sank like lead as I read them. I quaked with fear. What had I done? My father’s wise and noble vindication of our dishonoured name I had presumed to frustrate. I had, like a coward, receded from my easy share in the task; and, merciful Heaven, I had broken my faith with the dead!

With these letters in my hand, white with fear, I flew like a shadow to the drawingroom where Cousin Monica was, and told her to read them. I saw by her countenance how much alarmed she was by my looks, but she said nothing, only read the letters hurriedly, and then exclaimed —

‘Is this all, my dear child? I really fancied you had found a second will, and had lost everything. Why, my dearest Maud, we knew all this before. We quite understood poor dear Austin’s motive. Why are you so easily disturbed?’

‘Oh, Cousin Monica, I think he was right; it all seems quite reasonable now; and I — oh, what a crime! — it must be stopped.’

‘My dear Maud, listen to reason. Doctor Bryerly has seen your uncle at Bartram at least two hours ago. You *can’t* stop it, and why on earth should you if you could? Don’t you think your uncle should be consulted?’ said she.

‘But he has *decided*. I have his letter speaking of it as settled; and Doctor Bryerly — oh, Cousin Monica, he’s gone *to tempt him*.’

‘Nonsense, girl! Doctor Bryerly is a good and just man, I do believe, and has, beside, no imaginable motive to pervert either his conscience or his judgment. He’s not gone to tempt him — stuff! — but to unfold the facts and invite his consideration; and I say, considering how thoughtlessly such duties are often undertaken, and how long Silas has been living in lazy solitude, shut out from the world, and unused to discuss anything, I do think it only conscientious and honourable that he should have a fair and distinct view of the matter in all its bearings submitted to him before he indolently incurs what may prove the worst danger he was ever involved in.’

So Lady Knollys argued, with feminine energy, and I must confess, with a good deal of the repetition which I have sometimes observed in logicians of my own sex, and she puzzled without satisfying me.

‘I don’t know why I went to that room,’ I said, quite frightened; ‘or why I went to that press; how it happened that these papers, which we never saw there before, were the first things to strike my eye to-day.’

‘What do you mean, dear?’ said Lady Knollys.

‘I mean this — I think I was *brought* there, and that *there* is poor papa’s appeal to me, as plain as if his hand came and wrote it upon the wall.’ I nearly screamed the conclusion of this wild confession.

‘You are nervous, my darling; your bad nights have worn you out. Let us go out; the air will do you good; and I do assure you that you will very soon see that we are quite right, and rejoice conscientiously that you have acted as you did.’

But I was not to be satisfied, although my first vehemence was quieted. In my prayers that night my conscience upbraided me. When I lay down in bed my nervousness returned fourfold. Everybody at all nervously excitable has suffered some time or another by the appearance of ghastly features presenting themselves in every variety of contortion, one after another, the moment the eyes are closed. This night my dear father’s face troubled me — sometimes white and sharp as ivory, sometimes strangely transparent like glass, sometimes all hanging in cadaverous folds, always with the same unnatural expression of diabolical fury.

From this dreadful vision I could only escape by sitting up and staring at the light. At length, worn out, I dropped asleep, and in a dream I distinctly heard papa's voice say sharply outside the bed-curtain:— 'Maud, we shall be late at Bartram-Haugh.'

And I awoke in a horror, the wall, as it seemed, still ringing with the summons, and the speaker, I fancied, standing at the other side of the curtain.

A miserable night I passed. In the morning, looking myself like a ghost, I stood in my nightdress by Lady Knollys' bed.

'I have had my warning,' I said. 'Oh, Cousin Monica, papa has been with me, and ordered me to Bartram-Haugh; and go I will.'

She stared in my face uncomfortably, and then tried to laugh the matter off; but I know she was troubled at the strange state to which agitation and suspense had reduced me.

'You're taking too much for granted, Maud,' said she; 'Silas Ruthyn, most likely, will refuse his consent, and insist on your going to Bartram-Haugh.'

'Heaven grant!' I exclaimed; 'but if he doesn't, it is all the same to me, go I will. He may turn me out, but I'll go, and try to expiate the breach of faith that I fear is so horribly wicked.'

We had several hours still to wait for the arrival of the post. For both of us the delay was a suspense; for me an almost agonising one. At length, at an unlooked-for moment, Branston did enter the room with the postbag. There was a large letter, with the Feltram postmark, addressed to Lady Knollys — it was Doctor Bryerly's despatch; we read it together. It was dated on the day before, and its purport was thus: —

'RESPECTED MADAM, — I this day saw Mr. Silas Ruthyn at Bartram-Haugh, and he peremptorily refuses, on any terms, to vacate the guardianship, or to consent to Miss Ruthyn's residing anywhere but under his own immediate care. As he bases his refusal, first upon a conscientious difficulty, declaring that he has no right, through fear of personal contingencies, to abdicate an office imposed in so solemn a way, and so naturally devolving on him as only brother to the deceased; and secondly upon the effect such a withdrawal, at the instance of the acting trustee, would have upon his own character, amounting to a public self-condemnation; and as he refused to discuss these positions with me, I could make no way whatsoever with him. Finding, therefore, that his mind was quite made up, after a short time I took my leave. He mentioned that preparations for his niece's reception are being completed, and that he will send for her in a few days; so that I think it will be advisable that I should go down to Knowl, to assist Miss Ruthyn with any advice she may require before her departure, to discharge servants, get inventories made, and provide for the care of the place and grounds during her minority.

'I am, respected Madam, yours truly,

HANS E. BRYERLY.'

I can't describe to you how chapfallen and angry my cousin looked. She sniffed once or twice, and then said, rather bitterly, in a subdued tone: —

'Well, *now*; I hope you are pleased?'

'No, no, no; you *know* I'm not — grieved to the heart, my only friend, my dear Cousin Monica; but my conscience is at rest; you don't know what a sacrifice it is; I am a most unhappy creature. I feel an indescribable foreboding. I am frightened; but you won't forsake me, Cousin Monica.'

'No, darling, never,' she said, sadly.

'And you'll come and see me, won't you, as often as you can?'

'Yes, dear; that is if Silas allows me; and I'm sure he will,' she added hastily, seeing, I suppose, my terror in my face. 'All I can do, you may be sure I will, and perhaps he will allow you to come to me, now and then, for a short visit. You know I am only six miles away — little more than half an hour's drive, and though I hate Bartram, and detest Silas — Yes, I *detest Silas*,' she repeated in reply to my surprised gaze— 'I *will* call at Bartram — that is, I say, if he allows me; for, you know, I haven't been there for a quarter of a century; and though I never understood Silas, I fancy he forgives no sins, whether of omission or commission.'

I wondered what old grudge could make my cousin judge Uncle Silas always so hardly — I could not suppose it was justice. I had seen my hero indeed lately so disrespectfully handled before my eyes, that he had, as idols will, lost something of his sacredness. But as an article of faith, I still cultivated my trust in his divinity, and dismissed every intruding doubt with an exorcism, as a suggestion of the evil one. But I wronged Lady Knollys in suspecting her of pique, or malice, or anything more than that tendency to take strong views which some persons attribute to my sex.

So, then, the little project of Cousin Monica's guardianship, which, had it been poor papa's wish, would have made me so very happy, was quite knocked on the head, to revive no more. I comforted myself, however, with her promise to re-open communications with Bartram-Haugh, and we grew resigned.

I remember, next morning, as we sat at a very late breakfast, Lady Knollys, reading a letter, suddenly made an exclamation and a little laugh, and read on with increased interest for a few minutes, and then, with another little laugh, she looked up, placing her hand, with the open letter in it, beside her tea-cup.

'You'll not guess whom I've been reading about,' said she, with her head the least thing on one side, and an arch smile.

I felt myself blushing — cheeks, forehead, even down to the tips of my fingers. I anticipated the name I was to hear. She looked very much amused. Was it possible that Captain Oakley was married?

'I really have not the least idea,' I replied, with that kind of overdone carelessness which betrays us.

'No, I see quite plainly you have not; but you can't think how prettily you blush,' answered she, very much diverted.

'I really don't care,' I replied, with some little dignity, and blushing deeper and deeper.

'Will you make a guess?' she asked.

'I *can't* guess.'

'Well, shall I tell you?'

'Just as you please.'

'Well, I will — that is, I'll read a page of my letter, which tells it all. Do you know Georgina Fanshawe?' she asked.

'Lady Georgina? No.'

'Well, no matter; she's in Paris now, and this letter is from her, and she says — let me see the place— "Yesterday, what do you think? — quite an apparition! — you shall hear. My brother Craven yesterday insisted on my accompanying him to Le Bas' shop in that odd little antique street near the Grève; it is a wonderful old curiosity shop. I forget what they call them here. When we went into this place it was very nearly deserted, and there were so many curious things to look at all about, that for a minute or two I did not observe a tall woman, in a grey silk and a black velvet mantle, and quite a nice new Parisian bonnet. You will be *charmed*, by-the-by, with the new shape — it is only out three weeks, and is quite *indescribably* elegant, *I* think, at least. They have them, I am sure, by this time at Molnitz's, so I need say no more. And now that I am on this subject of dress, I have got your lace; and I think you will be very ungrateful if you are not *charmed* with it." Well, I need not read all that — here is the rest;' and she read —

'"But you'll ask about my mysterious *dame* in the new bonnet and velvet mantle; she was sitting on a stool at the counter, not buying, but evidently selling a quantity of stones and trinkets which she had in a card-box, and the man was picking them up one by one, and, I suppose, valuing them. I was near enough to see such a darling little pearl cross, with at least half a dozen really good pearls in it, and had begun to covet them for my set, when the lady glanced over my shoulder, and she knew me — in fact, we knew one another — and who do you think she was? Well — you'll not guess in a week, and I can't wait so long; so I may as well tell you at once — she was that horrid old Mademoiselle Blassemare whom you pointed out to me at Elverston; and I never forgot her face since — nor she, it seems, mine, for she turned away very quickly, and when I next saw her, her veil was down."'

'Did not you tell me, Maud, that you had lost your pearl cross while that dreadful Madame de la Rougierre was here?'

'Yes; but— '

'I know; but what has she to do with Mademoiselle de Blassemare, you were going to say — they are one and the same person.'

'Oh, I perceive,' answered I, with that dim sense of danger and dismay with which one hears suddenly of an enemy of whom one has lost sight for a time.

'I'll write and tell Georgie to buy that cross. I wager my life it is yours,' said Lady Knollys, firmly.

The servants, indeed, made no secret of their opinion of Madame de la Rougierre, and frankly charged her with a long list of larcenies. Even Anne Wixted, who had enjoyed her barren favour while the gouvernante was here, hinted privately that she had bartered a missing piece of lace belonging to me with a gipsy pedlar, for French gloves and an Irish poplin.

'And so surely as I find it is yours, I'll set the police in pursuit.'

'But you must not bring me into court,' said I, half amused and half alarmed.

'No occasion, my dear; Mary Quince and Mrs. Rusk can prove it perfectly.'

'And why do you dislike her so very much?' I asked.

Cousin Monica leaned back in her chair, and searched the cornice from corner to corner with upturned eyes for the reason, and at last laughed a little, amused at herself.

'Well, really, it is not easy to define, and, perhaps, it is not quite charitable; but I know I hate her, and I know, you little hypocrite, you hate her as much as I;' and we both laughed a little.

'But you must tell me all you know of her history.'

'Her history?' echoed she. 'I really know next to nothing about it; only that I used to see her sometimes about the place that Georgina mentions, and there were some unpleasant things said about her; but you know they may be all lies. The worst I *know* of her is her treatment of you, and her robbing the desk' — (Cousin Monica always called it her *robbery*)— 'and I think that's enough to hang her. Suppose we go out for a walk?'

So together we went, and I resumed about Madame; but no more could I extract — perhaps there was not much more to hear.

CHAPTER XXX

ON THE ROAD

All at Knowl was indicative of the break-up that was so near at hand. Doctor Bryerly arrived according to promise. He was in a whirl of business all the time. He and Mr. Danvers conferred about the management of the estate. It was agreed that the grounds and gardens should be let, but not the house, of which Mrs. Rusk was to take the care. The gamekeeper remained in office, and some outdoor servants. But the rest were to go, except Mary Quince, who was to accompany me to Bartram-Haugh as my maid.

‘Don’t part with Quince,’ said Lady Knollys, peremptorily ‘they’ll want you, but *don’t*.’

She kept harping on this point, and recurred to it half a dozen times every day.

‘They’ll say, you know, that she is not fit for a lady’s maid, as she certainly is *not*, if it in the least signified in such a wilderness as Bartram-Haugh; but she is attached, trustworthy, and honest; and those are qualities valuable everywhere, especially in a solitude. Don’t allow them to get you a wicked young French milliner in her stead.’

Sometimes she said things that jarred unpleasantly on my nerves, and left an undefined sense of danger. Such as: —

‘I know she’s true to you, and a good creature; but is she shrewd enough?’

Or, with an anxious look: —

‘I hope Mary Quince is not easily frightened.’

Or, suddenly: —

‘Can Mary Quince write, in case you were ill?’

Or,

‘Can she take a message exactly?’

Or,

‘Is she a person of any enterprise and resource, and cool in an emergency?’

Now, these questions did not come all in a string, as I write them down here, but at long intervals, and were followed quickly by ordinary talk; but they generally escaped from my companion after silence and gloomy thought; and though I could extract nothing more defined than these questions, yet they seemed to me to point at some possible danger contemplated in my good cousin's dismal ruminations.

Another topic that occupied my cousin's mind a good deal was obviously the larceny of my pearl cross. She made a note of the description furnished by the recollection, respectively, of Mary Quince, Mrs. Rusk, and myself. I had fancied her little vision of the police was no more than the result of a momentary impulse; but really, to judge by her methodical examinations of us, I should have fancied that she had taken it up in downright earnest.

Having learned that my departure from Knowl was to be so very soon, she resolved not to leave me before the day of my journey to Bartram-Haugh; and as day after day passed by, and the hour of our leavetaking approached, she became more and more kind and affectionate. A feverish and sorrowful interval it was to me.

Of Doctor Bryerly, though staying in the house, we saw almost nothing, except for an hour or so at tea-time. He breakfasted very early, and dined solitarily, and at uncertain hours, as business permitted.

The second evening of his visit, Cousin Monica took occasion to introduce the subject of his visit to Bartram-Haugh.

'You saw him, of course?' said Lady Knollys.

'Yes, he saw me; he was not well. On hearing who I was, he asked me to go to his room, where he sat in a silk dressing-gown and slippers.'

'About business principally,' said Cousin Monica, laconically.

'That was despatched in very few words; for he was quite resolved, and placed his refusal upon grounds which it was difficult to dispute. But difficult or no, mind you, he intimated that he would hear nothing more on the subject — so that was closed.'

'Well; and what is his religion now?' inquired she, irreverently.

'We had some interesting conversation on the subject. He leans much to what we call the doctrine of correspondents. He is read rather deeply in the writings of Swedenborg, and seemed anxious to discuss some points with one who professes to be his follower. To say truth, I did not expect to find him either so well read or so deeply interested in the subject.'

‘Was he angry when it was proposed that he should vacate the guardianship?’

‘Not at all. Contrariwise, he said he had at first been so minded himself. His years, his habits, and something of the unfitness of the situation, the remoteness of Bartram-Haugh from good teachers, and all that, had struck him, and nearly determined him against accepting the office. But then came the views which I stated in my letter, and they governed him; and nothing could shake them, he said, or induce him to re-open the question in his own mind.’

All the time Doctor Bryerly was relating his conference with the head of the family at Bartram-Haugh my cousin commented on the narrative with a variety of little ‘pishes’ and sneers, which I thought showed more of vexation than contempt.

I was glad to hear all that Doctor Bryerly related. It gave me a kind of confidence; and I experienced a momentary reaction. After all, could Bartram-Haugh be more lonely than I had found Knowl? Was I not sure of the society of my Cousin Millicent, who was about my own age? Was it not quite possible that my sojourn in Derbyshire might turn out a happy though very quiet remembrance through all my afterlife? Why should it not? What time or place would be happy if we gave ourselves over to dismal imaginations?

So the summons reached me from Uncle Silas. The hours at Knowl were numbered.

The evening before I departed I visited the full-length portrait of Uncle Silas, and studied it for the last time carefully, with deep interest, for many minutes; but with results vaguer than ever.

With a brother so generous and so wealthy, always ready to help him forward; with his talents; with his lithe and gorgeous beauty, the shadow of which hung on that canvas — what might he not have accomplished? whom might he not have captivated? And yet where and what was he? A poor and shunned old man, occupying a lonely house and place that did not belong to him, married to degradation, with a few years of suspected and solitary life before him, and then swift oblivion his best portion.

I gazed on the picture, to fix it well and vividly in my remembrance. I might still trace some of its outlines and tints in its living original, whom I was next day to see for the first time in my life.

So the morning came — my last for many a day at Knowl — a day of partings, a day of novelty and regrets. The travelling carriage and post horses were at the door. Cousin Monica's carriage had just carried her away to the railway. We had embraced with tears; and her kind face was still before me, and her words of comfort and promise in my ears. The early sharpness of morning was still in the air; the frosty dew still glistened on the window-panes. We had made a hasty breakfast, my share of which was a single cup of tea. The aspect of the house how strange! Uncarpeted, uninhabited, doors for the most part locked, all the servants but Mrs. Rusk and Branston departed. The drawingroom door stood open, and a charwoman was washing the bare floor. I was looking my last — for who could say how long? — on the old house, and lingered. The luggage was all up. I made Mary Quince get in first, for every delay was precious; and now the moment was come. I hugged and kissed Mrs. Rusk in the hall.

'God bless you, Miss Maud, darling. You must not fret; mind, the time won't be long going over — *no* time at all; and you'll be bringing back a fine young gentleman — who knows? as great as the Duke of Wellington, for your husband; and I'll take the best of care of everything, and the birds and the dogs, till you come back; and I'll go and see you and Mary, if you'll allow, in Derbyshire;' and so forth.

I got into the carriage, and bid Branston, who shut the door, goodbye, and kissed hands to Mrs. Rusk, who was smiling and drying her eyes and courtesying on the hall-door steps. The dogs, who had started gleefully with the carriage, were called back by Branston, and driven home, wondering and wistful, looking back with ears oddly cocked and tails dejected. My heart thanked them for their kindness, and I felt like a stranger, and very desolate.

It was a bright, clear morning. It had been settled that it was not worth the trouble changing from the carriage to the railway for sake of five-and-twenty miles, and so the entire journey of sixty miles was to be made by the post road — the pleasantest travelling, if the mind were free. The grander and more distant features of the landscape we may see well enough from the window of the railway-carriage; but it is the foreground that interests and instructs us, like a pleasant gossiping history; and *that* we had, in old days, from the postchaise window. It was more than travelling picquet. Something of all conditions of life — luxury and misery — high spirits and low; — all sorts of costume, livery, rags, millinery; faces buxom, faces wrinkled, faces kind, faces wicked; — no end of interest and suggestion, passing in a procession silent and vivid, and all in their proper scenery. The golden corn-sheafs — the old dark-alleyed orchards, and the high streets of antique towns. There were few dreams brighter, few books so pleasant.

We drove by the dark wood — it always looked dark to me — where the ‘mausoleum’ stands — where my dear parents both lay now. I gazed on its sombre masses not with a softened feeling, but a peculiar sense of pain, and was glad when it was quite past.

All the morning I had not shed a tear. Good Mary Quince cried at leaving Knowl; Lady Knollys’ eyes were not dry as she kissed and blessed me, and promised an early visit; and the dark, lean, energetic face of the housekeeper was quivering, and her cheeks wet, as I drove away. But I, whose grief was sorest, never shed a tear. I only looked about from one familiar object to another, pale, excited, not quite apprehending my departure, and wondering at my own composure.

But when we reached the old bridge, with the tall osiers standing by the buttress, and looked back at poor Knowl — the places we love and are leaving look so fairy-like and so sad in the clear distance, and this is the finest view of the gabled old house, with its slanting meadow-lands and noble timber reposing in solemn groups — I gazed at the receding vision, and the tears came at last, and I wept in silence long after the fair picture was hidden from view by the intervening uplands.

I was relieved, and when we had made our next change of horses, and got into a country that was unknown to me, the new scenery and the sense of progress worked their accustomed effects on a young traveller who had lived a particularly secluded life, and I began to experience, on the whole, a not unpleasurable excitement.

Mary Quince and I, with the hopefulness of inexperienced travellers, began already to speculate about our proximity to Bartram-Haugh, and were sorely disappointed when we heard from the nondescript courier — more like a ostler than a servant, who sat behind in charge of us and the luggage, and represented my guardian’s special care — at nearly one o’clock, that we had still forty miles to go, a considerable portion of which was across the high Derbyshire mountains, before we reached Bartram-Haugh.

The fact was, we had driven at a pace accommodated rather to the convenience of the horses than to our impatience; and finding, at the quaint little inn where we now halted, that we must wait for a nail or two in a loose shoe of one of our relay, we consulted, and being both hungry, agreed to beguile the time with an early dinner, which we enjoyed very sociably in a queer little parlour with a bow window, and commanding, with a litle garden for foreground, a very pretty landscape.

Good Mary Quince, like myself, had quite dried her tears by this time, and we were both highly interested, and I a little nervous, too, about our arrival and reception at Bartram. Some time, of course, was lost in this pleasant little parlour, before we found ourselves once more pursuing our way.

The slowest part of our journey was the pull up the long mountain road, ascending zig-zag, as sailors make way against a head-wind, by tacking. I forget the name of the pretty little group of houses — it did not amount to a village — buried in trees, where we got our *four* horses and two postilions, for the work was severe. I can only designate it as the place where Mary Quince and I had our tea, very comfortably, and bought some gingerbread, very curious to look upon, but quite uneatable.

The greater portion of the ascent, when we were fairly upon the mountain, was accomplished at a walk, and at some particularly steep points we had to get out and go on foot. But this to me was quite delightful. I had never scaled a mountain before, and the ferns and heath, the pure boisterous air, and above all the magnificent view of the rich country we were leaving behind, now gorgeous and misty in sunset tints, stretching in gentle undulations far beneath us, quite enchanted me.

We had just reached the summit when the sun went down. The low grounds at the other side were already lying in cold grey shadow, and I got the man who sat behind to point out as well as he could the site of Bartram-Haugh. But mist was gathering over all by this time. The filmy disk of the moon which was to light us on, so soon as twilight faded into night, hung high in air. I tried to see the sable mass of wood which he described. But it was vain, and to acquire a clear idea of the place, as of its master, I must only wait that nearer view which an hour or two more would afford me.

And now we rapidly descended the mountain side. The scenery was wilder and bolder than I was accustomed to. Our road skirted the edge of a great heathy moor. The silvery light of the moon began to glimmer, and we passed a gipsy bivouac with fires alight and caldrons hanging over them. It was the first I had seen. Two or three low tents; a couple of dark, withered crones, veritable witches; a graceful girl standing behind, gazing after us; and men in odd-shaped hats, with gaudy waistcoats and bright-coloured neck-handkerchiefs and gaitered legs, stood lazily in front. They had all a wild tawdry display of colour; and a group of alders in the rear made a background of shade for tents, fires, and figures.

I opened a front window of the chariot, and called to the postboys to stop. The groom from behind came to the window.

‘Are not those gipsies?’ I enquired.

‘Yes, please’m, them’s gipsies, sure, Miss,’ he answered, glancing with that odd smile, half contemptuous, half superstitious, with which I have since often observed the peasants of Derbyshire eyeing those thievish and uncanny neighbours.

CHAPTER XXXI

BARTRAM-HAUGH

In a moment a tall, lithe girl, blackhaired, blackeyed, and, as I thought, inexpressibly handsome, was smiling, with such beautiful rings of pearly teeth, at the window; and in her peculiar accent, with a suspicion of something foreign in it, proposing with many courtesies to tell the lady her fortune.

I had never seen this wild tribe of the human race before — children of mystery and liberty. Such vagabondism and beauty in the figure before me! I looked at their hovels and thought of the night, and wondered at their independence, and felt my inferiority. I could not resist. She held up her slim oriental hand.

'Yes, I'll hear my fortune,' I said, returning the sibyl's smile instinctively.

'Give me some money, Mary Quince. No, *not* that,' I said, rejecting the thrifty sixpence she tendered, for I had heard that the revelations of this weird sisterhood were bright in proportion to the kindness of their clients, and was resolved to approach Bartram with cheerful auguries. 'That five-shilling piece,' I insisted; and honest Mary reluctantly surrendered the coin.

So the feline beauty took it, with courtesies and 'thankees,' smiling still, and hid it away as if she stole it, and looked on my open palm still smiling; and told me, to my surprise, that there was *somebody* I liked very much, and I was almost afraid she would name Captain Oakley; that he would grow very rich, and that I should marry him; that I should move about from place to place a great deal for a good while to come. That I had some enemies, who should be sometimes so near as to be in the same room with me, and yet they should not be able to hurt me. That I should see blood spilt and yet not my own, and finally be very happy and splendid, like the heroine of a fairy tale.

Did this strange, girlish charlatan see in my face some signs of shrinking when she spoke of enemies, and set me down for a coward whose weakness might be profitable? Very likely. At all events she plucked a long brass pin, with a round bead for a head, from some part of her dress, and holding the point in her fingers, and exhibiting the treasure before my eyes, she told me that I must get a charmed pin like that, which her grandmother had given to her, and she ran glibly through a story of all the magic expended on it, and told me she could not part with it; but its virtue was that you were to stick it through the blanket, and while it was there neither rat, nor cat, nor snake — and then came two more terms in the catalogue, which I suppose belonged to the gipsy dialect, and which she explained to mean, as well as I could understand, the first a malevolent spirit, and the second 'a cove to cut your throat,' could approach or hurt you.

A charm like that, she gave me to understand, I must by hook or by crook obtain. She had not a second. None of her people in the camp over there possessed one. I am ashamed to confess that I actually paid her a pound for this brass pin! The purchase was partly an indication of my temperament, which could never let an opportunity pass away irrevocably without a struggle, and always apprehended 'Some day or other I'll reproach myself tor having neglected it!' and partly a record of the trepidations of that period of my life. At all events I had her pin, and she my pound, and I venture to say I was the gladder of the two.

She stood on the roadside bank courtseying and smiling, the first enchantress I had encountered, and I watched the receding picture, with its patches of firelight, its dusky groups and donkey carts, white as skeletons in the moonlight, as we drove rapidly away.

They, I suppose, had a wild sneer and a merry laugh over my purchase, as they sat and ate their supper of stolen poultry, about their fire, and were duly proud of belonging to the superior race.

Mary Quince, shocked at my prodigality, hinted a remonstrance.

'It went to my heart, Miss, it did. They're such a lot, young and old, all alike thieves and vagabonds, and many a poor body wanting.'

'Tut, Mary, never mind. Everyone has her fortune told some time in her life, and you can't have a good one without paying. I think, Mary, we must be near Bartram now.'

The road now traversed the side of a steep hill, parallel to which, along the opposite side of a winding river, rose the dark steeps of a corresponding upland, covered with forest that looked awful and dim in the deep shadow, while the moonlight rippled fitfully upon the stream beneath.

‘It seems to be a beautiful country,’ I said to Mary Quince, who was munching a sandwich in the corner, and thus appealed to, adjusted her bonnet, and made an inspection from *her* window, which, however, commanded nothing but the heathy slope of the hill whose side we were traversing.

‘Well, Miss, I suppose it is; but there’s a deal o’ mountains — is not there?’

And so saying, honest Mary leaned back again, and went on with her sandwich.

We were now descending at a great pace. I knew we were coming near. I stood up as well as I could in the carriage, to see over the postilions’ heads. I was eager, but frightened too; agitated as the crisis of the arrival and meeting approached. At last, a long stretch of comparatively level country below us, with masses of wood as well as I could see irregularly overspreading it, became visible as the narrow valley through which we were speeding made a sudden bend.

Down we drove, and now I did perceive a change. A great grass-grown park-wall, overtopped with mighty trees; but still on and on we came at a canter that seemed almost a gallop. The old grey park-wall flanking us at one side, and a pretty pastoral hedgerow of ash-trees, irregularly on the other.

At last the postilions began to draw bridle, and at a slight angle, the moon shining full upon them, we wheeled into a wide semicircle formed by the receding park-walls, and halted before a great fantastic iron gate, and a pair of tall fluted piers, of white stone, all grass-grown and ivy-bound, with great cornices, surmounted with shields and supporters, the Ruthyn bearings washed by the rains of Derbyshire for many a generation of Ruthyns, almost smooth by this time, and looking bleached and phantasmal, like giant sentinels, with each a hand clasped in his comrade’s, to bar our passage to the enchanted castle — the florid tracery of the iron gate showing like the draperies of white robes hanging from their extended arms to the earth.

Our courier got down and shoved the great gate open, and we entered, between sombre files of magnificent forest trees, one of those very broad straight avenues whose width measures the front of the house. This was all built of white stone, resembling that of Caen, which parts of Derbyshire produce in such abundance.

So this was Bartram, and here was Uncle Silas. I was almost breathless as I approached. The bright moon shining full on the white front of the old house revealed not only its highly decorated style, its fluted pillars and doorway, rich and florid carving, and balustraded summit, but also its stained and mossgrown front. Two giant trees, overthrown at last by the recent storm, lay with their upturned roots, and their yellow foliage still flickering on the sprays that were to bloom no more, where they had fallen, at the right side of the courtyard, which, like the avenue, was studded with tufted weeds and grass.

All this gave to the aspect of Bartram a forlorn character of desertion and decay, contrasting almost awfully with the grandeur of its proportions and richness of its architecture.

There was a ruddy glow from a broad window in the second row, and I thought I saw some one peep from it and disappear; at the same moment there was a furious barking of dogs, some of whom ran scampering into the courtyard from a half-closed side door; and amid their uproar, the bawling of the man in the back seat, who jumped down to drive them off, and the crack of the postilions' whips, who struck at them, we drew up before the lordly doorsteps of this melancholy mansion.

Just as our attendant had his hand on the knocker the door opened, and we saw, by a not very brilliant candlelight, three figures — a shabby little old man, thin, and very much stooped, with a white cravat, and looking as if his black clothes were too large, and made for some one else, stood with his hand upon the door; a young, plump, but very pretty female figure, in unusually short petticoats, with fattish legs, and nice ankles, in boots, stood in the centre; and a dowdy maid, like an old charwoman, behind her.

The household paraded for welcome was not certainly very brilliant. Amid the riot the trunks were deliberately put down by our attendant, who kept shouting to the old man at the door, and to the dogs in turn; and the old man was talking and pointing stiffly and tremulously, but I could not hear what he said.

'Was it possible — could that mean-looking old man be Uncle Silas?'

The idea stunned me; but I almost instantly perceived that he was much too small, and I was relieved, and even grateful. It was certainly an odd mode of procedure to devote primary attention to the trunks and boxes, leaving the travellers still shut up in the carriage, of which they were by this time pretty well tired. I was not sorry for the reprieve, however: being nervous about first impressions, and willing to defer mine, I sat shyly back, peeping at the candle and moonlight picture before me, myself unseen.

‘Will you tell — yes or no — is my cousin in the coach?’ screamed the plump young lady, stamping her stout black boot, in a momentary lull.

Yes, I was there, sure.

‘And why the puck don’t you let her out, you stupe, you?’

‘Run down, Giblets, you never do nout without driving, and let Cousin Maud out. You’re very welcome to Bartram.’ This greeting was screamed at an amazing pitch, and repeated before I had time to drop the window, and say ‘thank you.’ ‘I’d a let you out myself — there’s a good dog, you would na’ bite Cousin’ (the parenthesis was to a huge mastiff, who thrust himself beside her, by this time quite pacified)— ‘only I daren’t go down the steps, for the governor said I shouldn’t.’

The venerable person who went by the name of Giblets had by this time opened the carriage door, and our courier, or ‘boots’ — he looked more like the latter functionary — had lowered the steps, and in greater trepidation than I experienced when in after-days I was presented to my sovereign, I glided down, to offer myself to the greeting and inspection of the plain-spoken young lady who stood at the top of the steps to receive me.

She welcomed me with a hug and a hearty buss, as she called that salutation, on each cheek, and pulled me into the hall, and was evidently glad to see me.

‘And you’re tired a bit, I warrant; and who’s the old ‘un, who?’ she asked eagerly, in a stage whisper, which made my ear numb for five minutes after. ‘Oh, oh, the maid! and a precious old ‘un — ha, ha, ha! But lawk! how grand she is, with her black silk, cloak and crape, and I only in twilled cotton, and rotten old Coburg for Sundays. Odds! it’s a shame; but you’ll be tired, you will. It’s a smartish pull, they do say, from Knowl. I know a spell of it, only so far as the “Cat and Fiddle,” near the Lunnon-road. Come up, will you? Would you like to come in first and talk a bit wi’ the governor? Father, you know, he’s a bit silly, he is, this while.’ I found that the phrase meant only *bodily* infirmity. ‘He took a pain o’ Friday, newralgie — something or other he calls it — rheumatics it is when it takes old “Giblets” there; and he's sitting in his own room; or maybe you'd like better to come to your bedroom first, for it is dirty work travelling, they do say.'

Yes; I preferred the preliminary adjustment. Mary Quince was standing behind me; and as my voluble kinswoman talked on, we had each ample time and opportunity to observe the personnel of the other; and she made no scruple of letting me perceive that she was improving it, for she stared me full in the face, taking in evidently feature after feature; and she felt the material of my mantle pretty carefully between her finger and thumb, and manually examined my chain and trinkets, and picked up my hand as she might a glove, to con over my rings.

I can't say, of course, exactly what impression I may have produced on her. But in my cousin Milly I saw a girl who looked younger than her years, plump, but with a slender waist, with light hair, lighter than mine, and very blue eyes, rather round; on the whole very good-looking. She had an odd swaggering walk, a toss of her head, and a saucy and imperious, but rather goodnatured and honest countenance. She talked rather loud, with a good ringing voice, and a boisterous laugh when it came.

If *I* was behind the fashion, what would Cousin Monica have thought of her? She was arrayed, as she had stated, in black twilled cotton expressive of her affliction; but it was made almost as short in the skirt as that of the prints of the Bavarian broom girls. She had white cotton stockings, and a pair of black leather boots, with leather buttons, and, for a lady, prodigiously thick soles, which reminded me of the navvy boots I had so often admired in *Punch*. I must add that the hands with which she assisted her scrutiny of my dress, though pretty, were very much sunburnt indeed.

'And what's *her* name?' she demanded, nodding to Mary Quince, who was gazing on her awfully, with round eyes, as an inland spinster might upon a whale beheld for the first time.

Mary courtesied, and I answered.

'Mary Quince,' she repeated. 'You're welcome, Quince. What shall I call her? I've a name for all o' them. Old Giles there, is Giblets. He did not like it first, but he answers quick enough now; and Old Lucy Wyat there,' nodding toward the old woman, 'is Lucia de l'Amour.' A slightly erroneous reading of Lammermoor, for my cousin sometimes made mistakes, and was not much versed in the Italian opera. ‘You know it’s a play, and I call her L’Amour for shortness;’ and she laughed hilariously, and I could not forbear joining; and, winking at me, she called aloud, ‘L’Amour.’

To which the crone, with a high-cauled cap, resembling Mother Hubbard, responded with a courtesy and ‘Yes,’m.’

‘Are all the trunks and boxes took up?’

They were.

‘Well, we’ll come now; and what shall I call you, Quince? Let me see.’

‘According to your pleasure, Miss,’ answered Mary, with dignity, and a dry courtesy.

‘Why, you’re as hoarse as a frog, Quince. We’ll call you Quinzy for the present. That’ll do. Come along, Quinzy.’

So my Cousin Milly took me under the arm, and pulled me forward; but as we ascended, she let me go, leaning back to make inspection of my attire from a new point of view.

‘Hallo, cousin,’ she cried, giving my dress a smack with her open hand. ‘What a plague do you want of all that bustle; you’ll leave it behind, lass, the first bush you jump over.’

I was a good deal astounded. I was also very near laughing, for there was a sort of importance in her plump countenance, and an indescribable grotesqueness in the fashion of her garments, which heightened the outlandishness of her talk, in a way which I cannot at all describe.

What palatial wide stairs those were which we ascended, with their prodigious carved banisters of oak, and each huge pillar on the landing-place crowned with a shield and carved heraldic supporters; florid oak panelling covered the walls. But of the house I could form no estimate, for Uncle Silas’s housekeeping did not provide light for hall and passages, and we were dependent on the glimmer of a single candle; but there would be quite enough of this kind of exploration in the daylight.

So along dark oak flooring we advanced to my room, and I had now an opportunity of admiring, at my leisure, the lordly proportions of the building. Two great windows, with dark and tarnished curtains, rose half as high again as the windows of Knowl; and yet Knowl, in its own style, is a fine house. The door-frames, like the window-frames, were richly carved;

the fireplace was in the same massive style, and the mantelpiece projected with a mass of very rich carving. On the whole I was surprised. I had never slept in so noble a room before.

The furniture, I must confess, was by no means on a par with the architectural pretensions of the apartment. A French bed, a piece of carpet about three yards square, a small table, two chairs, a toilet table — no wardrobe — no chest of drawers. The furniture painted white, and of the light and diminutive kind, was particularly ill adapted to the scale and style of the apartment, one end only of which it occupied, and that but sparsely, leaving the rest of the chamber in the nakedness of a stately desolation. My cousin Milly ran away to report progress to 'the Governor,' as she termed Uncle Silas.

'Well, Miss Maud, I never did expect to see the like o' that!' exclaimed honest Mary Quince, 'Did you ever see such a young lady? She's no more like one o' the family than I am. Law bless us! and what's she dressed like? Well, well, well!' And Mary, with a rueful shake of her head, clicked her tongue pathetically to the back of her teeth, while I could not forbear laughing.

'And such a scrap o' furniture! Well, well, well!' and the same ticking of the tongue followed.

But, in a few minutes, back came Cousin Milly, and, with a barbarous sort of curiosity, assisted in unpacking my trunks, and stowing away the treasures, on which she ventured a variety of admiring criticisms, in the presses which, like cupboards, filled recesses in the walls, with great oak doors, the keys of which were in them.

As I was making my hurried toilet, she entertained me now and then with more strictly personal criticisms.

'Your hair's a shade darker than mine — it's none the better o' that though — is it? Mine's said to be the right shade. I don't know — what do you say?'

I conceded the point with a good grace.

'I wish my hands was as white though — you do lick me there; but it's all gloves, and I never could abide 'em. I think I'll try though — they *are* very white, sure.'

'I wonder which is the prettiest, you or me? *I* don't know, *I*'m sure — which do *you* think?'

I laughed outright at this challenge, and she blushed a little, and for the first time seemed for a moment a little shy.

‘Well, you *are* a half an inch longer than me, I think — don’t you?’

I was fully an inch taller, so I had no difficulty in making the proposed admission.

‘Well, you do look handsome! doesn’t she, Quinzy, lass? but your frock comes down almost to your heels — it does.’

And she glanced from mine to hers, and made a little kick up with the heel of the navvy boot to assist her in measuring the comparative distance.

‘Maybe mine’s a thought too short?’ she suggested. ‘Who’s there? Oh! it’s you, is it?’ she cried as Mother Hubbard appeared at the door. ‘Come in, L’Amour — don’t you know, lass, you’re always welcome?’

She had come to let us know that Uncle Silas would be happy to see me whenever I was ready; and that my cousin Millicent would conduct me to the room where he awaited me.

In an instant all the comic sensations awakened by my singular cousin’s eccentricities vanished, and I was thrilled with awe. I was about to see in the flesh — faded, broken, aged, but still identical — that being who had been the vision and the problem of so many years of my short life.

CHAPTER XXXII

UNCLE SILAS

I thought my odd cousin was also impressed with a kind of awe, though different in degree from mine, for a shade overcast her face, and she was silent as we walked side by side along the gallery, accompanied by the crone who carried the candle which lighted us to the door of that apartment which I may call Uncle Silas's presence chamber.

Milly whispered to me as we approached —

'Mind how you make a noise; the governor's as sharp as a weasel, and nothing vexes him like that.'

She was herself toppling along on tiptoe. We paused at a door near the head of the great staircase, and L'Amour knocked timidly with her rheumatic knuckles.

A voice, clear and penetrating, from within summoned us to enter. The old woman opened the door, and the next moment I was in the presence of Uncle Silas.

At the far end of a handsome wainscoted room, near the hearth in which a low fire was burning, beside a small table on which stood four waxlights, in tall silver candlesticks, sat a singular-looking old man.

The dark wainscoting behind him, and the vastness of the room, in the remoter parts of which the light which fell strongly upon his face and figure expended itself with hardly any effect, exhibited him with the forcible and strange relief of a finely painted Dutch portrait. For some time I saw nothing but him.

A face like marble, with a fearful monumental look, and, for an old man, singularly vivid strange eyes, the singularity of which rather grew upon me as I looked; for his eyebrows were still black, though his hair descended from his temples in long locks of the purest silver and fine as silk, nearly to his shoulders.

He rose, tall and slight, a little stooped, all in black, with an ample black velvet tunic, which was rather a gown than a coat, with loose sleeves, showing his snowy shirt some way up the arm, and a pair of wrist buttons, then quite out of fashion, which glimmered aristocratically with diamonds.

I know I can't convey in words an idea of this apparition, drawn as it seemed in black and white, venerable, bloodless, fiery-eyed, with its singular look of power, and an expression so bewildering — was it derision, or anguish, or cruelty, or patience?

The wild eyes of this strange old man were fixed upon me as he rose; an habitual contraction, which in certain lights took the character of a scowl, did not relax as he advanced toward me with his thin-lipped smile. He said something in his clear, gentle, but cold voice, the import of which I was too much agitated to catch, and he took both my hands in his, welcomed me with a courtly grace which belonged to another age, and led me affectionately, with many inquiries which I only half comprehended, to a chair near his own.

'I need not introduce my daughter; she has saved me that mortification. You'll find her, I believe, goodnatured and affectionate; *au reste*, I fear a very rustic Miranda, and fitted rather for the society of Caliban than of a sick old Prospero. Is it not so, Millicent?'

The old man paused sarcastically for an answer, with his eyes fixed severely on my odd cousin, who blushed and looked uneasily to me for a hint.

'I don't know who they be — neither one nor t'other.'

'Very good, my dear,' he replied, with a little mocking bow. 'You see, my dear Maud, what a Shakespearean you have got for a cousin. It's plain, however, she has made acquaintance with some of our dramatists: she has studied the rôle of *Miss Hoyden* so perfectly.'

It was not a reasonable peculiarity of my uncle that he resented, with a good deal of playful acrimony, my poor cousin's want of education, for which, if he were not to blame, certainly neither was she.

'You see her, poor thing, a result of all the combined disadvantages of want of refined education, refined companionship, and, I fear, naturally, of refined tastes; but a sojourn at a good French conventual school will do wonders, and I hope to manage by-and-by. In the meantime we jest at our misfortunes, and love one another, I hope, cordially.'

He extended his thin, white hand with a chilly smile towards Milly, who bounced up, and took it with a frightened look; and he repeated, holding her hand rather slightly I thought, ‘Yes, I hope, very cordially,’ and then turning again to me, he put it over the arm of his chair, and let it go, as a man might drop something he did not want from a carriage window.

Having made this apology for poor Milly, who was plainly bewildered, he passed on, to her and my relief, to other topics, every now and then expressing his fears that I was fatigued, and his anxiety that I should partake of some supper or tea; but these solicitudes somehow seemed to escape his remembrance almost as soon as uttered; and he maintained the conversation, which soon degenerated into a close, and to me a painful examination, respecting my dear father’s illness and its symptoms, upon which I could give no information, and his habits, upon which I could.

Perhaps he fancied that there might be some family predisposition to the organic disease of which his brother died, and that his questions were directed rather to the prolonging of his own life than to the better understanding of my dear father’s death.

How little was there left to this old man to make life desirable, and yet how keenly, I afterwards found, he clung to it. Have we not all of us seen those to whom life was not only *undesirable*, but positively painful — a mere series of bodily torments, yet hold to it with a desperate and pitiable tenacity — old children or young, it is all the same.

See how a sleepy child will put off the inevitable departure for bed. The little creature’s eyes blink and stare, and it needs constant jogging to prevent his nodding off into the slumber which nature craves. His waking is a pain; he is quite worn out, and peevish, and stupid, and yet he implores a respite, and deprecates repose, and vows he is not sleepy, even to the moment when his mother takes him in her arms, and carries him, in a sweet slumber, to the nursery. So it is with us old children of earth and the great sleep of death, and nature our kind mother. Just so reluctantly we part with consciousness, the picture is, even to the last, so interesting; the bird in the hand, though sick and moulting, so inestimably better than all the brilliant tenants of the bush. We sit up, yawning, and blinking, and stupid, the whole scene swimming before us, and the stories and music humming off into the sound of distant winds and waters. It is not time yet; we are not fatigued; we are good for another hour still, and so protesting against bed, we falter and drop into the dreamless sleep which nature assigns to fatigue and satiety.

He then spoke a little eulogy of his brother, very polished, and, indeed, in a kind of way, eloquent. He possessed in a high degree that accomplishment, too little cultivated, I think, by the present generation, of expressing himself with perfect precision and fluency. There was, too, a good deal of slight illustrative quotation, and a sprinkling of French flowers, over his conversation, which gave to it a character at once elegant and artificial. It was all easy, light, and pointed, and being quite new to me, had a wonderful fascination.

He then told me that Bartram was the temple of liberty, that the health of a whole life was founded in a few years of youth, air, and exercise, and that accomplishments, at least, if not education, should wait upon health. Therefore, while at Bartram, I should dispose of my time quite as I pleased, and the more I plundered the garden and gipsied in the woodlands, the better.

Then he told me what a miserable invalid he was, and how the doctors interfered with his frugal tastes. A glass of beer and a mutton chop — his ideal of a dinner — he dared not touch. They made him drink light wines, which he detested, and live upon those artificial abominations all liking for which vanishes with youth.

There stood on a side-table, in its silver coaster, a long-necked Rhenish bottle, and beside it a thin pink glass, and he quivered his fingers in a peevish way toward them.

But unless he found himself better very soon, he would take his case into his own hands, and try the dietary to which nature pointed.

He waved his fingers toward his bookcases, and told me his books were altogether at my service during my stay; but this promise ended, I must confess, disappointingly. At last, remarking that I must be fatigued, he rose, and kissed me with a solemn tenderness, placed his hand upon what I now perceived to be a large Bible, with two broad silk markers, red and gold, folded in it — the one, I might conjecture, indicating the place in the Old, the other in the New Testament. It stood on the small table that supported the waxlights, with a handsome cut bottle of eau-de-cologne, his gold and jewelled pencil-case, and his chased repeater, chain, and seals, beside it.

There certainly were no indications of poverty in Uncle Silas's room; and he said impressively —

'Remember that book; in it your father placed his trust, in it he found his reward, in it lives my only hope; consult it, my beloved niece, day and night, as the oracle of life.'

Then he laid his thin hand on my head, and blessed me, and then kissed my forehead.

'No — a!' exclaimed Cousin Milly's lusty voice. I had quite forgotten her presence, and looked at her with a little start. She was seated on a very high oldfashioned chair; she had palpably been asleep; her round eyes were blinking and staring glassily at us; and her white legs and navvy boots were dangling in the air.

'Have you anything to remark about Noah?' enquired her father, with a polite inclination and an ironical interest.

'No — a,' she repeated in the same blunt accents; 'I didn't snore; did I? No — a.'

The old man smiled and shrugged a little at me — it was the smile of disgust.

'Good night, my dear Maud;' and turning to her, he said, with a peculiar gentle sharpness, 'Had not you better wake, my dear, and try whether your cousin would like some supper?'

So he accompanied us to the door, outside which we found L'Amour's candle awaiting us.

'I'm awful afraid of the Governor, I am. Did I snore that time?'

'No, dear; at least, I did not hear it,' I said, unable to repress a smile.

'Well, if I didn't, I was awful near it,' she said, reflectively.

We found poor Mary Quince dozing over the fire; but we soon had tea and other good things, of which Milly partook with a wonderful appetite.

'I *was* in a qualm about it,' said Milly, who by this time was quite herself again. 'When he spies me a-napping, maybe he don't fetch me a prod with his pencil-case over the head. Odd! girl, it *is* sore.'

When I contrasted the refined and fluent old gentleman whom I had just left, with this amazing specimen of young ladyhood, I grew sceptical almost as to the possibility of her being his child.

I was to learn, however, how little she had, I won't say of his society, but even of his presence — that she had no domestic companion of the least pretensions to education — that she ran wild about the place — never, except in church, so much as saw a person of that rank to which she was born — and that the little she knew of reading and writing had been picked up, in desultory half-hours, from a person who did not care a pin about her manners or decorum, and perhaps rather enjoyed her grotesqueness — and that no one who was willing to take the least trouble about her was competent to make her a particle more refined than I saw her — the wonder ceased. We don't know how little is heritable, and how much simply training, until we encounter some-such spectacle as that of my poor cousin Milly.

When I lay down in my bed and reviewed the day, it seemed like a month of wonders. Uncle Silas was always before me; the voice so silvery for an old man — so preternaturally soft; the manners so sweet, so gentle; the aspect, smiling, suffering, spectral. It was no longer a shadow; I had now seen him in the flesh. But, after all, was he more than a shadow to me? When I closed my eyes I saw him before me still, in necromantic black, ashy with a pallor on which I looked with fear and pain, a face so dazzlingly pale, and those hollow, fiery, awful eyes! It sometimes seemed as if the curtain opened, and I had seen a ghost.

I had seen him; but he was still an enigma and a marvel. The living face did not expound the past, any more than the portrait portended the future. He was still a mystery and a vision; and thinking of these things I fell asleep.

Mary Quince, who slept in the dressing-room, the door of which was close to my bed, and lay open to secure me against ghosts, called me up; and the moment I knew where I was I jumped up, and peeped eagerly from the window. It commanded the avenue and courtyard; but we were many windows removed from that over the hall-door, and immediately beneath ours lay the two giant lime trees, prostrate and uprooted, which I had observed as we drove up the night before.

I saw more clearly in the bright light of morning the signs of neglect and almost of dilapidation which had struck me as I approached. The courtyard was tufted over with grass, seldom from year to year crushed by the carriage-wheels, or trodden by the feet of visitors. This melancholy verdure thickened where the area was more remote from the centre; and under the windows, and skirting the walls to the left, was reinforced by a thick grove of nettles. The avenue was all grass-grown, except in the very centre, where a narrow track still showed the roadway The handsome carved balustrade of the courtyard was discoloured with lichens, and in two places gapped and broken; and the air of decay was heightened by the fallen trees, among whose sprays and yellow leaves the small birds were hopping.

Before my toilet was completed, in marched my cousin Milly. We were to breakfast alone that morning, ‘and so much the better,’ she told me. Sometimes the Governor ordered her to breakfast with him, and ‘never left off chaffing her’ till his newspaper came, and ‘sometimes he said such things he made her cry,’ and then he only ‘boshed her more,’ and packed her away to her room; but she was by chalks nicer than him, talk as he might. ‘*Was* not she nicer? was not she? was not she?’ Upon this point she was so strong and urgent that I was obliged to reply by a protest against awarding the palm of elegance between parent and child, and declaring I liked her very much, which I attested by a kiss.

‘I know right well which of us you do think’s the nicest, and no mistake, only you’re afraid of him; and he had no business boshing me last night before you. I knew he was at it, though I couldn’t twig him altogether; but wasn’t he a sneak, now, wasn’t he?’

This was a still more awkward question; so I kissed her again, and said she must never ask me to say of my uncle in his absence anything I could not say to his face.

At which speech she stared at me for a while, and then treated me to one of her hearty laughs, after which she seemed happier, and gradually grew into better humour with her father.

‘Sometimes, when the curate calls, he has me up — for he’s as religious as six, he is — and they read Bible and prays, ho — don’t they? You’ll have that, lass, like me, to go through; and maybe I don’t hate it; oh, no!’

We breakfasted in a small room, almost a closet, off the great parlour, which was evidently quite disused. Nothing could be homelier than our equipage, or more shabby than the furniture of the little apartment. Still, somehow, I liked it. It was a total change; but one likes ‘roughing it’ a little at first.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE WINDMILL WOOD

I had not time to explore this noble old house as my curiosity prompted; for Milly was in such a fuss to set out for the ‘blackberry dell’ that I saw little more than just so much as I necessarily traversed in making my way to and from my room.

The actual decay of the house had been prevented by my dear father; and the roof, windows, masonry, and carpentry had all been kept in repair. But short of indications of actual ruin, there are many manifestations of poverty and neglect which impress with a feeling of desolation. It was plain that not nearly a tithe of this great house was inhabited; long corridors and galleries stretched away in dust and silence, and were crossed by others, whose dark arches inspired me in the distance with an awful sort of sadness. It was plainly one of those great structures in which you might easily lose yourself, and with a pleasing terror it reminded me of that delightful old abbey in Mrs. Radcliffe’s romance, among whose silent staircases, dim passages, and long suites of lordly, but forsaken chambers, begirt without by the sombre forest, the family of La Mote secured a gloomy asylum.

My cousin Milly and I, however, were bent upon an open-air ramble, and traversing several passages, she conducted me to a door which led us out upon a terrace overgrown with weeds, and by a broad flight of steps we descended to the level of the grounds beneath. Then on, over the short grass, under the noble trees, we walked; Milly in high goodhumour, and talking away volubly, in her short garment, navvy boots, and a weather-beaten hat. She carried a stick in her gloveless hand. Her conversation was quite new to me, and resembled very much what I would have fancied the holiday recollections of a schoolboy; and the language in which it was sustained was sometimes so outlandish, that I was forced to laugh outright — a demonstration which she plainly did not like.

Her talk was about the great jumps she had made — how she snowballed the chaps’ in winter — how she could slide twice the length of her stick beyond ‘Briddles, the cow-boy.’

With this and similar conversation she entertained me.

The grounds were delightfully wild and neglected. But we had now passed into a vast park beautifully varied with hollows and uplands, and such glorious old timber massed and scattered over its slopes and levels. Among these, we got at last into a picturesque dingle; the grey rocks peeped from among the ferns and wild flowers, and the steps of soft sward along its sides were dark in the shadows of silver-stemmed birch, and russet thorn, and oak, under which, in the vaporous night, the Erl-king and his daughter might glide on their aërial horses.

In the lap of this pleasant dell were the finest blackberry bushes, I think, I ever saw, bearing fruit quite fabulous; and plucking these, and chatting, we rambled on very pleasantly.

I had first thought of Milly's absurdities, to which, in description, I cannot do justice, simply because so many details have, by distance of time, escaped my recollection. But her ways and her talk were so indescribably grotesque that she made me again and again quiver with suppressed laughter.

But there was a pitiable and even a melancholy meaning underlying the burlesque.

This creature, with no more education than a dairymaid, I gradually discovered had fine natural aptitudes for accomplishment — a very sweet voice, and wonderfully delicate ear, and a talent for drawing which quite threw mine into the shade. It was really astonishing.

Poor Milly, in all her life, had never read three books, and hated to think of them. One, over which she was wont to yawn and sigh, and stare fatiguedly for an hour every Sunday, by command of the Governor, was a stout volume of sermons of the earlier school of George III., and a drier collection you can't fancy. I don't think she read anything else. But she had, notwithstanding, ten times the cleverness of half the circulating library misses one meets with. Besides all this, I had a long sojourn before me at Bartram-Haugh, and I had learned from Milly, as I had heard before, what a perennial solitude it was, with a ludicrous fear of learning Milly's preposterous dialect, and turning at last into something like her. So I resolved to do all I could for her — teach her whatever I knew, if she would allow me — and gradually, if possible, effect some civilising changes in her language, and, as they term it in boarding-schools, her demeanour.

But I must pursue at present our first day's ramble in what was called Bartram Chase. People can't go on eating blackberries always; so after a while we resumed our walk along this pretty dell, which gradually expanded into a wooded valley — level beneath and enclosed by irregular uplands, receding, as it were, in mimic bays and harbours at some points, and running out at others into broken promontories, ending in clumps of forest trees.

Just where the glen which we had been traversing expanded into this broad, but wooded valley, it was traversed by a high and close paling, which, although it looked decayed, was still very strong.

In this there was a wooden gate, rudely but strongly constructed, and at the side we were approaching stood a girl, who was leaning against the post, with one arm resting on the top of the gate.

This girl was neither tall nor short — taller than she looked at a distance; she had not a slight waist; sooty black was her hair, with a broad forehead, perpendicular but low; she had a pair of very fine, dark, lustrous eyes, and no other good feature — unless I may so call her teeth, which were very white and even. Her face was rather short, and swarthy as a gipsy's; observant and sullen too; and she did not move, only eyed us negligently from under her dark lashes as we drew near. Altogether a not unpicturesque figure, with a dusky, red petticoat of drugget, and tattered jacket of bottle-green stuff, with short sleeves, which showed her brown arms from the elbow.

'That's Pegtop's daughter,' said Milly.

'Who is Pegtop?' I asked.

'He's the miller — see, yonder it is,' and she pointed to a very pretty feature in the landscape, a windmill, crowning the summit of a hillock which rose suddenly above the level of the treetops, like an island in the centre of the valley.

'The mill not going to-day, Beauty?' bawled Milly.

'No — a, Beauty; it baint,' replied the girl, loweringly, and without stirring.

'And what's gone with the stile?' demanded Milly, aghast. 'It's tore away from the paling!'

'Well, so it be,' replied the wood nymph in the red petticoat, showing her fine teeth with a lazy grin.

‘Who’s a bin and done all that?’ demanded Milly.

‘Not you nor me, lass,’ said the girl.

‘’Twas old Pegtop, your father, did it,’ cried Milly, in rising wrath.

‘‘Appen it wor,’ she replied.

‘And the gate locked.’

‘That’s it — the gate locked,’ she repeated, sulkily, with a defiant side-glance at Milly.

‘And where’s Pegtop?’

‘At t’other side, somewhere; how should I know where he be?’ she replied.

‘Who’s got the key?’

‘Here it be, lass,’ she answered, striking her hand on her pocket.

‘And how durst you stay us here? Unlock it, huzzy, this minute!’ cried Milly, with a stamp.

Her answer was a sullen smile.

‘Open the gate this instant!’ bawled Milly.

‘Well, I *won’t.*’

I expected that Milly would have flown into a frenzy at this direct defiance, but she looked instead puzzled and curious — the girl’s unexpected audacity bewildered her.

‘Why, you fool, I could get over the paling as soon as look at you, but I won’t. What’s come over you? Open the gate, I say, or I’ll make you.’

‘Do let her alone, dear,’ I entreated, fearing a mutual assault. ‘She has been ordered, may be, not to open it. Is it so, my good girl?’

‘Well, thou’rt not the biggest fool o’ the two,’ she observed, commendatively, ‘thou’st hit it, lass.’

‘And who ordered you?’ exclaimed Milly.

‘Faython.’

‘Old Pegtop. Well, *that’s* summat to laugh at, it is — our servant a-shutting us out of our own grounds.’

‘No servant o’ yourn!’

‘Come, lass, what do you mean?’

‘He be old Silas’s miller, and what’s that to thee?’

With these words the girl made a spring on the hasp of the padlock, and then got easily over the gate.

'Can't you do that, cousin?' whispered Milly to me, with an impatient nudge. 'I *wish* you'd try.'

'No, dear — come away, Milly,' and I began to withdraw.

'Lookee, lass, 'twill be an ill day's work for thee when I tell the Governor,' said Milly, addressing the girl, who stood on a log of timber at the other side, regarding us with a sullen composure.

'We'll be over in spite o' you,' cried Milly.

'You lie!' answered she.

'And why not, huzzy?' demanded my cousin, who was less incensed at the affront than I expected. All this time I was urging Milly in vain to come away.

'Yon lass is no wild cat, like thee — that's why,' said the sturdy portress.

'If I cross, I'll give you a knock,' said Milly.

'And I'll gi' thee another,' she answered, with a vicious wag of the head.

'Come, Milly, *I'll* go if *you* don't,' I said.

'But we must not be beat,' whispered she, vehemently, catching my arm; 'and ye *shall* get over, and *see* what I will gi' her!'

'I'll *not* get over.'

'Then I'll break the door, for ye *shall* come through,' exclaimed Milly, kicking the stout paling with her ponderous boot.

'Purr it, purr it, purr it!' cried the lass in the red petticoat with a grin.

'Do you know who this lady is?' cried Milly, suddenly.

'She is a prettier lass than thou,' answered Beauty.

'She's *my* cousin Maud — Miss Ruthyn of Knowl — and she's a deal richer than the Queen; and the Governor's taking care of her; and he'll make old Pegtop bring you to reason.'

The girl eyed me with a sulky listlessness, a little inquisitively, I thought.

'See if he don't,' threatened Milly.

'You positively *must* come,' I said, drawing her away with me.

'Well, shall we come in?' cried Milly, trying a last summons.

'You'll not come in that much,' she answered, surlily, measuring an infinitesimal distance on her finger with her thumb, which she pinched against it, the gesture ending with a snap of defiance, and a smile that showed her fine teeth.

'I've a mind to shy a stone at you,' shouted Milly.

'Faire away; I'll shy wi' ye as long as ye like, lass; take heed o' yerself;' and Beauty picked up a round stone as large as a cricket ball.

With difficulty I got Milly away without an exchange of missiles, and much disgusted at my want of zeal and agility.

'Well, come along, cousin, I know an easy way by the river, when it's low,' answered Milly. 'She's a brute — is not she?'

As we receded, we saw the girl slowly wending her way towards the old thatched cottage, which showed its gable from the side of a little rugged eminence embowered in spreading trees, and dangling and twirling from its string on the end of her finger the key for which a battle had so nearly been fought.

The stream was low enough to make our flank movement round the end of the paling next it quite easy, and so we pursued our way, and Milly's equanimity returned, and our ramble grew very pleasant again.

Our path lay by the river bank, and as we proceeded, the dwarf timber was succeeded by grander trees, which crowded closer and taller, and, at last, the scenery deepened into solemn forest, and a sudden sweep in the river revealed the beautiful ruin of a steep old bridge, with the fragments of a gatehouse on the farther side.

'Oh, Milly darling!' I exclaimed, 'what a beautiful drawing this would make! I should so like to make a sketch of it.'

'So it would. *Make* a picture — *do*! — here's a stone that's pure and flat to sit upon, and you look very tired. Do make it, and I'll sit by you.'

'Yes, Milly, I *am* tired, a little, and I *will* sit down; but we must wait for another day to make the picture, for we have neither pencil nor paper. But it is much too pretty to be lost; so let us come again tomorrow.'

'Tomorrow be hanged! you'll do it to-day, bury-me-wick, but you *shall*; I'm wearying to see you make a picture, and I'll fetch your conundrums out o' your drawer, for do't you shall.'

CHAPTER XXXIV

ZAMIEL

It was all vain my remonstrating. She vowed that by crossing the stepping-stones close by she could, by a short cut, reach the house, and return with my pencils and block-book in a quarter of an hour. Away then, with many a jump and fling, scampered Milly's queer white stockings and navvy boots across the irregular and precarious stepping-stones, over which I dared not follow her; so I was fain to return to the stone so 'pure and flat,' on which I sat, enjoying the grand sylvan solitude, the dark background and the grey bridge mid-way, so tall and slim, across whose ruins a sunbeam glimmered, and the gigantic forest trees that slumbered round, opening here and there in dusky vistas, and breaking in front into detached and solemn groups. It was the setting of a dream of romance.

It would have been the very spot in which to read a volume of German folklore, and the darkening colonnades and silent nooks of the forest seemed already haunted with the voices and shadows of those charming elves and goblins.

As I sat here enjoying the solitude and my fancies among the low branches of the wood, at my right I heard a crashing, and saw a squat broad figure in a stained and tattered military coat, and loose short trousers, one limb of which flapped about a wooden leg. He was forcing himself through. His face was rugged and wrinkled, and tanned to the tint of old oak; his eyes black, beadlike, and fierce, and a shock of sooty hair escaped from under his battered wideawake nearly to his shoulders. This forbidding-looking person came stumping and jerking along toward me, whisking his stick now and then viciously in the air, and giving his fell of hair a short shake, like a wild bull preparing to attack.

I stood up involuntarily with a sense of fear and surprise, almost fancying I saw in that wooden-legged old soldier, the forest demon who haunted Der Freischütz.

So he approached shouting —

'Hollo! you — how came you here? Dost 'eer?'

And he drew near panting, and sometimes tugging angrily in his haste at his wooden leg, which sunk now and then deeper than was convenient in the sod. This exertion helped to anger him, and when he halted before me, his dark face smirched with smoke and dust, and the nostrils of his flat drooping nose expanded and quivered as he panted, like the gills of a fish; an angrier or uglier face it would not be easy to fancy.

‘Ye’ll all come when ye like, will ye? and do nout but what pleases yourselves, won’t you? And who’rt thou? Dost ‘eer — who *are* ye, I say; and what the deil seek ye in the woods here? Come, bestir thee!’

If his wide mouth and great tobacco-stained teeth, his scowl, and loud discordant tones were intimidating, they were also extremely irritating. The moment my spirit was roused, my courage came.

‘I am Miss Ruthyn of Knowl, and Mr. Silas Ruthyn, your master, is my uncle.’

‘Hoo!’ he exclaimed more gently, ‘an’ if Silas be thy uncle thou’lt be come to live wi’ him, and thou’rt she as come overnight — eh?’

I made no answer, but I believe I looked both angrily and disdainfully.

‘And what make ye alone here? and how was I to know’t, an’ Milly not wi’ ye, nor no one? But Maud or no Maud, I wouldn’t let the Dooke hisself set foot inside the palin’ without Silas said let him. And you may tell Silas them’s the words o’ Dickon Hawkes, and I’ll stick to’m — and what’s more I’ll tell him *myself* — I will; I’ll tell him there be no use o’ my striving and straining hee, day an’ night and night and day, watchin’ again poachers, and thieves, and gipsies, and they robbing lads, if rules won’t be kep, and folk do jist as they pleases. Dang it, lass, thou’rt in luck I didn’t heave a brick at thee when I saw thee first.’

‘I’ll complain of you to my uncle,’ I replied.

‘So do, and and ‘appen thou’lt find thyself in the wrong box, lass; thou canst na’ say I set the dogs arter thee, nor cau’d thee so much as a wry name, nor heave a stone at thee — did I? Well? and where’s the complaint then?’

I simply answered, rather fiercely,

‘Be good enough to leave me.’

‘Well, I make no objections, mind. I’m takin’ thy word — thou’rt Maud Ruthyn— ‘appen thou be’st and ‘appen thou baint. I’m not aweer on’t, but I takes thy word, and all I want to know’s just this, did Meg open the gate to thee?’

I made him no answer, and to my great relief I saw Milly striding and skipping across the unequal stepping-stones.

‘Hallo, Pegtop! what are you after now?’ she cried, as she drew near.

‘This man has been extremely impertinent. You know him, Milly?’ I said.

‘Why that’s Pegtop Dickon. Dirty old Hawkes that never was washed. I tell you, lad, ye’ll see what the Governor thinks o’t — a-ha! He’ll talk to you.’

‘I done or said nout — not but I *should*, and there’s the fack — she can’t deny’t; she hadn’t a hard word from I; and I don’t care the top o’ that thistle what no one says — not I. But I tell thee, Milly, I stopped *some* o’ thy pranks, and I’ll stop more. Ye’ll be shying no more stones at the cattle.’

‘Tell your tales, and welcome, cried Milly. ‘I wish I was here when you jawed cousin. If Winny was here she’d catch you by the timber toe and put you on your back.’

‘Ay, she’ll be a good un yet if she takes arter thee,’ retorted the old man with a fierce sneer.

‘Drop it, and get away wi’ ye,’ cried she, ‘or maybe I’d call Winny to smash your timber leg for you.’

‘A-ha! there’s more on’t. She’s a sweet un. Isn’t she?’ he replied sardonically.

‘You did not like it last Easter, when Winny broke it with a kick.’

‘’Twas a kick o’ a horse,’ he growled with a glance at me.

‘’Twas no such thing— ’twas Winny did it — and he laid on his back for a week while carpenter made him a new one.’ And Milly laughed hilariously.

‘I’ll fool no more wi’ ye, losing my time; I won’t; but mind ye, I’ll speak wi’ Silas.’ And going away he put his hand to his crumpled wideawake, and said to me with a surly difference —

‘Good evening, Miss Ruthyn — good evening, ma’am — and ye’ll please remember, I did not mean nout to vex thee.’

And so he swaggered away, jerking and waddling over the sward, and was soon lost in the wood.

‘It’s well he’s a little bit frightened — I never saw him so angry, I think; he is awful mad.’

‘Perhaps he really is not aware how very rude he is,’ I suggested.

‘I hate him. We were twice as pleasant with poor Tom Driver — he never meddled with any one, and was always in liquor; Old Gin was the name he went by. But this brute — I do hate him — he comes from Wigan, I think, and he’s always spoiling sport — and he whops Meg — that’s Beauty, you know, and I don’t think she’d be half as bad only for him. Listen to him whistlin’.’

‘I did hear whistling at some distance among the trees.’

‘I declare if he isn’t callin’ the dogs! Climb up here, I tell ye,’ and we climbed up the slanting trunk of a great walnut tree, and strained our eyes in the direction from which we expected the onset of Pegtop’s vicious pack.

But it was a false alarm.

‘Well, I don’t think he *would* do that, after all — *hardly*; but he is a brute, sure!’

‘And that dark girl who would not let us through, is his daughter, is she?’

‘Yes, that’s Meg — Beauty, I christened her, when I called him Beast; but I call him Pegtop now, and she’s Beauty still, and that’s the way o’t.’

‘Come, sit down now, an’ make your picture,’ she resumed so soon as we had dismounted from our position of security.

‘I’m afraid I’m hardly in the vein. I don’t think I could draw a straight line. My hand trembles.’

‘I wish you could, Maud,’ said Milly, with a look so wistful and entreating, that considering the excursion she had made for the pencils, I could not bear to disappoint her.

‘Well, Milly, we must only try; and if we fail we can’t help it. Sit you down beside me and I’ll tell you why I begin with one part and not another, and you’ll see how I make trees and the river, and — yes, *that* pencil, it is hard and answers for the fine light lines; but we must begin at the beginning, and learn to copy drawings before we attempt real views like this. And if you wish it, Milly, I’m resolved to teach you everything I know, which, after all, is not a great deal, and we shall have such fun making sketches of the same landscapes, and then comparing.’

And so on, Milly, quite delighted, and longing to begin her course of instruction, sat down beside me in a rapture, and hugged and kissed me so heartily that we were very near rolling together off the stone on which we were seated. Her boisterous delight and goodnature helped to restore me, and both laughing heartily together, I commenced my task.

‘Dear me! who’s that?’ I exclaimed suddenly, as looking up from my block-book I saw the figure of a slight man in the careless morning-dress of a gentleman, crossing the ruinous bridge in our direction, with considerable caution, upon the precarious footing of the battlement, which alone offered an unbroken passage.

This was a day of apparitions! Milly recognised him instantly. The gentleman was Mr. Carysbroke. He had taken The Grange only for a year. He lived quite to himself, and was very good to the poor, and was the only gentleman, for ever so long, who had visited at Bartram, and oddly enough nowhere else. But he wanted leave to cross through the grounds, and having obtained it, had repeated his visit, partly induced, no doubt, by the fact that Bartram boasted no hospitalities, and that there was no risk of meeting the county folk there.

With a stout walking-stick in his hand, and a short shooting-coat, and a wideawake hat in much better trim than Zamiel’s, he emerged from the copse that covered the bridge, walking at a quick but easy pace.

‘He’ll be goin’ to see old Snoddles, I guess,’ said Milly, looking a little frightened and curious; for Milly, I need not say, was a bumpkin, and stood in awe of this gentleman’s good-breeding, though she was as brave as a lion, and would have fought the Philistines at any odds, with the jawbone of an ass.

‘‘Appen he won’t see us,’ whispered Milly, hopefully.

But he did, and raising his hat, with a cheerful smile, that showed very white teeth, he paused.

‘Charming day, Miss Ruthyn.’

I raised my head suddenly as he spoke, from habit appropriating the address; it was so marked that he raised his hat respectfully to me, and then continued to Milly —

‘Mr. Ruthyn, I hope, quite well? but I need hardly ask, you seem so happy. Will you kindly tell him, that I expect the book I mentioned in a day or two, and when it comes I’ll either send or bring it to him immediately?’

Milly and I were standing, by this time, but she only stared at him, tongue-tied, her cheeks rather flushed, and her eyes very round, and to facilitate the dialogue, as I suppose, he said again —

‘He’s quite well, I hope?’

Still no response from Milly, and I, provoked, though myself a little shy, made answer —

‘My uncle, Mr. Ruthyn, is very well, thank you,’ and I felt that I blushed as I spoke.

‘Ah, pray excuse me, may I take a great liberty? you are Miss Ruthyn, of Knowl? Will you think me very impertinent — I’m afraid you will — if I venture to introduce myself? My name is Carysbroke, and I had the honour of knowing poor Mr. Ruthyn when I was quite a little boy, and he has shown a kindness for me since, and I hope you will pardon the liberty I fear I’ve taken. I think my friend, Lady Knollys, too, is a relation of yours; what a charming person she is!’

‘Oh, is not she? such a darling!’ I said, and then blushed at my outspoken affection.

But he smiled kindly, as if he liked me for it; and he said —

‘You know whatever I think, I dare not quite say that; but frankly I can quite understand it. She preserves her youth so wonderfully, and her fun and her goodnature are so entirely girlish. What a sweet view you have selected,’ he continued, changing all at once. ‘I’ve stood just at this point so often to look back at that exquisite old bridge. Do you observe — you’re an artist, I see — something very peculiar in that tint of the grey, with those odd cross stains of faded red and yellow?’

‘I do, indeed; I was just remarking the peculiar beauty of the colouring — was not I, Milly?’

Milly stared at me, and uttered an alarmed ‘Yes,’ and looked as if she had been caught in a robbery.

‘Yes, and you have so very peculiar a background,’ he resumed. ‘It was better before the storm though; but it is very good still.’

Then a little pause, and ‘Do you know this country at all?’ rather suddenly.

‘No, not in the least — that is, I’ve only had the drive to this place; but what I did see interested me very much.’

‘You will be charmed with it when you know it better — the very place for an artist. I’m a wretched scribbler myself, and I carry this little book in my pocket,’ and he laughed deprecatingly while he drew forth a thin fishing-book, as it looked. ‘They are mere memoranda, you see. I walk so much and come unexpectedly on such pretty nooks and studies, I just try to make a note of them, but it is really more writing than sketching; my sister says it is a cipher which nobody but myself understands. However, I’ll try and explain just two — because you really ought to go and see the places. Oh, no; not that,’ he laughed, as accidentally the page blew over, ‘that’s the Cat and Fiddle, a curious little pot-house, where they gave me some very good ale one day.’

Milly at this exhibited some uneasy tokens of being about to speak, but not knowing what might be coming, I hastened to observe on the spirited little sketches to which he meant to draw my attention.

‘I want to show you only the places within easy reach — a short ride or drive.’

So he proceeded to turn over two or three, in addition to the two he had at first proposed, and then another; then a little sketch just tinted, and really quite a charming little gem, of Cousin Monica’s pretty gabled old house; and every subject had its little criticism, or its narrative, or adventure.

As he was about returning this little sketch-book to his pocket, still chatting to me, he suddenly recollected poor Milly, who was looking rather lowering; but she brightened a good deal as he presented it to her, with a little speech which she palpably misunderstood, for she made one of her odd courtesies, and was about, I thought, to put it into her large pocket, and accept it as a present.

‘Look at the drawings, Milly, and then return it,’ I whispered.

At his request I allowed him to look at my unfinished sketch of the bridge, and while he was measuring distances and proportions with his eye, Milly whispered rather angrily to me.

‘And why should I?’

‘Because he wants it back, and only meant to lend it to you,’ whispered I.

‘*Lend* it to me — and after you! Bury-me-wick if I look at a leaf of it,’ she retorted in high dudgeon. ‘Take it, lass; give it him yourself — I’ll not,’ and she popped it into my hand, and made a sulky step back.

‘My cousin is very much obliged,’ I said, returning the book, and smiling for her, and he took it smiling also and said —

‘I think if I had known how very well you draw, Miss Ruthyn, I should have hesitated about showing you my poor scrawls. But these are not my best, you know; Lady Knollys will tell you that I can really do better — a great deal better, I think.’

And then with more apologies for what he called his impertinence, he took his leave, and I felt altogether very much pleased and flattered.

He could not be more than twenty-nine or thirty, I thought, and he was decidedly handsome — that is, his eyes and teeth, and clear brown complexion were — and there was something distinguished and graceful in his figure and gesture; and altogether there was the indescribable attraction of intelligence; and I fancied — though this, of course, was a secret — that from the moment he spoke to us he felt an interest in me. I am not going to be vain. It was a *grave* interest, but still an interest, for I could see him studying my features while I was turning over his sketches, and he thought I saw nothing else. It was flattering, too, his anxiety that I should think well of his drawing, and referring me to Lady Knollys. Carysbroke — had I ever heard my dear father mention that name? I could not recollect it. But then he was habitually so silent, that his not doing so argued nothing.

CHAPTER XXXV

WE VISIT A ROOM IN THE SECOND STOREY

Mr. Carysbroke amused my fancy sufficiently to prevent my observing Milly's silence, till we had begun our return homeward.

'The Grange must be a pretty house, if that little sketch be true; is it far from this?'

''Twill be two mile.'

'Are you vexed, Milly?' I asked, for both her tone and looks were angry.

'Yes, I am vexed; and why not lass?'

'What has happened?'

'Well, now, that is rich! Why, look at that fellow, Carysbroke: he took no more notice to me than a dog, and kep' talking to you all the time of his pictures, and his walks, and his people. Why, a pig's better manners than that.'

'But, Milly dear, you forget, he tried to talk to you, and you would not answer him,' I expostulated.

'And is not that just what I say — I can't talk like other folk — ladies, I mean. Every one laughs at me; an' I'm dressed like a show, I am. It's a shame! I saw Polly Shives — what a lady she is, my eyes! — laughing at me in church last Sunday. I was minded to give her a bit of my mind. An' I know I'm queer. It's a shame, it is. Why should *I* be so rum? it is a shame! I don't want to be so, nor it isn't my fault.'

And poor Milly broke into a flood of tears, and stamped on the ground, and buried her face in her short frock, which she whisked up to her eyes; and an odder figure of grief I never beheld.

'And I could not make head or tail of what he was saying,' cried poor Milly through her buff cotton, with a stamp; 'and you twigged every word o't. An' why am I so? It's a shame — a shame! Oh, ho, ho! it's a shame!'

'But, my dear Milly, we were talking of *drawing*, and you have not learned yet, but you shall — I'll teach you; and then you'll understand all about it.'

‘An’ every one laughs at me — even you; though you try, Maud, you can scarce keep from laughing sometimes. I don’t blame you, for I know I’m queer; but I can’t help it; and it’s a shame.’

‘Well, my dear Milly, listen to me: if you allow me, I assure you, I’ll teach you all the music and drawing I know. You have lived very much alone; and, as you say, ladies have a way of speaking of their own that is different from the talk of other people.’

‘Yes, that they have, an’ gentlemen too — like the Governor, and that Carysbroke; and a precious lingo it is — dang it — why, the devil himself could not understand it; an’ I’m like a fool among you. I could ‘most drown myself. It’s a shame! It is — you know it is. — It’s a shame!’

‘But I’ll teach you that lingo too, if you wish it, Milly; and you shall know everything that I know; and I’ll manage to have your dresses better made.’

By this time she was looking very ruefully, but attentively, in my face, her round eyes and nose swelled, and her cheeks all wet.

‘I think if they were a little longer — yours is longer, you know;’ and the sentence was interrupted by a sob.

‘Now, Milly, you must not be crying; if you choose you may be just as the same as any other lady — and you shall; and you will be very much admired, I can tell you, if only you will take the trouble to quite unlearn all your odd words and ways, and dress yourself like other people; and I will take care of that if you let me; and I think you are very clever, Milly; and I know you are very pretty.’

Poor Milly’s blubbered face expanded into a smile in spite of herself; but she shook her head, looking down.

‘Noa, noa, Maud, I fear ‘twon’t be.’ And indeed it seemed I had proposed to myself a labour of Hercules.

But Milly was really a clever creature, could see quickly, and when her ungainly dialect was mastered, describe very pleasantly; and if only she would endure the restraint and possessed the industry requisite, I did not despair, and was resolved at least to do my part.

Poor Milly! she was really very grateful, and entered into the project of her education with great zeal, and with a strange mixture of humility and insubordination.

Milly was in favour of again attacking ‘Beauty’s’ position on her return, and forcing a passage from this side; but I insisted on following the route by which we had arrived, and so we got round the paling by the river, and were treated to a provoking grin of defiance by ‘Beauty,’ who was talking across the gate to a slim young man, arrayed in fustian, and with an odd-looking cap of rabbit-skin on his head, which, on seeing us, he pulled sheepishly to the side of his face next to us, as he lounged, with his arm under his chin, on the top bar of the gate.

After our encounter of to-day, indeed, it was Miss ‘Beauty’s’ wont to exhibit a kind of jeering disdain in her countenance whenever we passed.

I think Milly would have engaged her again, had I not reminded her of her undertaking, and exerted my new authority.

‘Look at that sneak, Pegtop, there, going up the path to the mill. He makes belief now he does not see us; but he does, though, only he’s afraid we’ll tell the Governor, and he thinks Governor won’t give him his way with you. I hate that Pegtop: he stopped me o’ riding the cows a year ago, he did.’

I thought Pegtop might have done worse. Indeed it was plain that a total reformation was needed here; and I was glad to find that poor Milly seemed herself conscious of it; and that her resolution to become more like other people of her station was not a mere spasm of mortification and jealousy, but a genuine and very zealous resolve.

I had not half seen this old house of Bartram-Haugh yet. At first, indeed, I had but an imperfect idea of its extent. There was a range of rooms along one side of the great gallery, with closed window-shutters, and the doors generally locked. Old L’Amour grew cross when we went into them, although we could see nothing; and Milly was afraid to open the windows — not that any Bluebeard revelations were apprehended, but simply because she knew that Uncle Silas’s order was that things should be left undisturbed; and this boisterous spirit stood in awe of him to a degree which his gentle manners and apparent quietude rendered quite surprising.

There were in this house, what certainly did not exist at Knowl, and what I have never observed, thought they may possibly be found in other old houses — I mean, here and there, very high hatches, which we could only peep over by jumping in the air. They crossed the long corridors and great galleries; and several of them were turned across and locked, so as to intercept the passage, and interrupt our explorations.

Milly, however, knew a queer little, very steep and dark back stair, which reached the upper floor; so she and I mounted, and made a long ramble through rooms much lower and ruder in finish than the lordly chambers we had left below. These commanded various views of the beautiful though neglected grounds; but on crossing a gallery we entered suddenly a chamber, which looked into a small and dismal quadrangle, formed by the inner walls of this great house, and of course designed only by the architect to afford the needful light and air to portions of the structure.

I rubbed the window-pane with my handkerchief and looked out. The surrounding roof was steep and high. The walls looked soiled and dark. The windows lined with dust and dirt, and the window-stones were in places tufted with moss, and grass, and groundsel. An arched doorway had opened from the house into this darkened square, but it was soiled and dusty; and the damp weeds that overgrew the quadrangle drooped undisturbed against it. It was plain that human footsteps tracked it little, and I gazed into that blind and sinister area with a strange thrill and sinking.

‘This is the second floor — there is the enclosed courtyard’ — I, as it were, soliloquised.

‘What are you afraid of, Maud? you look as ye’d seen a ghost,’ exclaimed Milly, who came to the window and peeped over my shoulder.

‘It reminded me suddenly, Milly, of that frightful business.’

‘What business, Maud? — what a plague are ye thinking on?’ demanded Milly, rather amused.

‘It was in one of these rooms — maybe this — yes, it certainly *was* this — for see, the panelling has been pulled off the wall — that Mr. Charke killed himself.’

I was staring ruefully round the dim chamber, in whose corners the shadows of night were already gathering.

‘Charke! — what about him? — who’s Charke?’ asked Milly.

‘Why, you must have heard of him,’ said I.

‘Not as I’m aware on,’ answered she. ‘And he killed himself, did he, hanged himself, eh, or blowed his brains out?’

‘He cut his throat in one of these rooms — *this* one, I’m sure — for your papa had the wainscoting stripped from the wall to ascertain whether there was any second door through which a murderer could have come; and you see these walls are stripped, and bear the marks of the woodwork that has been removed,' I answered.

'Well, that *was* awful! I don't know how they have pluck to cut their throats; if I was doing it, I'd like best to put a pistol to my head and fire, like the young gentleman did, they say, in Deadman's Hollow. But the fellows that cut their throats, they must be awful game lads, I'm thinkin', for it's a long slice, you know.'

'Don't, don't, Milly dear. Suppose we come away,' I said, for the evening was deepening rapidly into night.

'Hey and bury-me-wick, but here's the blood; don't you see a big black cloud all spread over the floor hereabout, don't ye see?' Milly was stooping over the spot, and tracing the outline of this, perhaps, imaginary mapping, in the air with her finger.

'No, Milly, you could not see it: the floor is too dark, and it's all in shadow. It must be fancy; and perhaps, after all, this is not the room.'

'Well — I think, I'm *sure* it *is*. Stand — just look.'

'We'll come in the morning, and if you are right we can see it better then. Come away,' I said, growing frightened.

And just as we stood up to depart, the white high-cauled cap and large sallow features of old L'Amour peeped in at the door.

'Lawk! what brings you here?' cried Milly, nearly as much startled as I at the intrusion.

'What brings *you* here, miss?' whistled L'Amour through her gums.

'We're looking where Charke cut his throat,' replied Milly.

'Charke the devil!' said the old woman, with an odd mixture of scorn and fury. ''Tisn't his room; and come ye out of it, please. Master won't like when he hears how you keep pulling Miss Maud from one room to another, all through the house, up and down.'

She was gabbling sternly enough, but dropped a low courtesy as I passed her, and with a peaked and nodding stare round the room, the old woman clapped the door sharply, and locked it.

'And who has been a talking about Charke — a pack o lies, I warrant. I s'pose you want to frighten Miss Maud here' (another crippled courtesy) ‘wi’ ghosts and like nonsense.’

‘You’re out there: ’twas she told me; and much about it. Ghosts, indeed! I don’t vally them, not I; if I did, I know who’d frighten me,’ and Milly laughed.

The old woman stuffed the key in her pocket, and her wrinkled mouth pouted and receded with a grim uneasiness.

‘A harmless brat, and kind she is; but wild — wild — she will be wild.’

So whispered L’Amour in my ear, during the silence that followed, nodding shakily toward Milly over the banister, and she courtesied again as we departed, and shuffled off toward Uncle Silas’s room.

The Governor is queerish this evening,’ said Milly, when we were seated at our tea. ‘You never saw him queerish, did you?’

‘You must say what you mean, more plainly, Milly. You don’t mean ill, I hope?’

‘Well! I don’t know what it is; but he does grow very queer sometimes — you’d think he was dead a’most, maybe two or three days and nights together. He sits all the time like an old woman in a swound. Well, well, it is awful!’

‘Is he insensible when in that state?’ I asked, a good deal alarmed.

‘I don’t know; but it never signifies anything. It won’t kill him, I do believe; but old L’Amour knows all about it. I hardly ever go into the room when he’s so, only when I’m sent for; and he sometimes wakes up and takes a fancy to call for this one or that. One day he sent for Pegtop all the way to the mill; and when he came, he only stared at him for a minute or two, and ordered him out o’ the room. He’s like a child a’most, when he’s in one o’ them dazes.’

I always knew when Uncle Silas was ‘queerish,’ by the injunctions of old L’Amour, whistled and spluttered over the banister as we came upstairs, to mind how we made a noise passing master’s door; and by the sound of mysterious to-ings and froings about his room.

I saw very little of him. He sometimes took a whim to have us breakfast with him, which lasted perhaps for a week; and then the order of our living would relapse into its old routine.

I must not forget two kind letters from Lady Knollys, who was detained away, and delighted to hear that I enjoyed my quiet life; and promised to apply, in person, to Uncle Silas, for permission to visit me.

She was to be for the Christmas at Elverston, and that was only six miles away from Bartram-Haugh, so I had the excitement of a pleasant look forward.

She also said that she would include poor Milly in her invitation; and a vision of Captain Oakley rose before me, with his handsome gaze turned in wonder on poor Milly, for whom I had begun to feel myself responsible.

CHAPTER XXXVI

AN ARRIVAL AT DEAD OF NIGHT

I have sometimes been asked why I wear an odd little turquois ring — which to the uninstructed eye appears quite valueless and altogether an unworthy companion of those jewels which flash insultingly beside it. It is a little keepsake, of which I became possessed about this time.

‘Come, lass, what name shall I give you?’ cried Milly, one morning, bursting into my room in a state of alarming hilarity.

‘My own, Milly.’

‘No, but you must have a nickname, like every one else.’

‘Don’t mind it, Milly.’

‘Yes, but I will. Shall I call you Mrs. Bustle?’

‘You shall do no such thing.’

‘But you must have a name.’

‘I refuse a name.’

‘But I’ll give you one, lass.’

‘And *I* won’t have it.’

‘But you can’t help me christening you.’

‘I can decline answering.’

‘But I’ll make you,’ said Milly, growing very red.

Perhaps there was something provoking in my tone, for I certainly was very much disgusted at Milly’s relapse into barbarism.

‘You can’t,’ I retorted quietly.

‘See if I don’t, and I’ll give ye one twice as ugly.’

I smiled, I fear, disdainfully.

‘And I think you’re a minx, and a slut, and a fool,’ she broke out, flushing scarlet.

I smiled in the same unchristian way.

‘And I’d give ye a smack o’ the cheek as soon as look at you.’

And she gave her dress a great slap, and drew near me, in her wrath. I really thought she was about tendering the ordeal of single combat.

I made her, however, a paralysing courtesy, and, with immense dignity, sailed out of the room, and into Uncle Silas's study, where it happened we were to breakfast that morning, and for several subsequent ones.

During the meal we maintained the most dignified reserve; and I don't think either so much as looked at the other.

We had no walk together that day.

I was sitting in the evening, quite alone, when Milly entered the room. Her eyes were red, and she looked very sullen.

'I want your hand, cousin,' she said, at the same time taking it by the wrist, and administering with it a sudden slap on her plump cheek, which made the room ring, and my fingers tingle; and before I had recovered from my surprise, she had vanished.

I called after her, but no answer; I pursued, but she was running too; and I quite lost her at the cross galleries.

I did not see her at tea, nor before going to bed; but after I had fallen asleep I was awakened by Milly, in floods of tears.

'Cousin Maud, will ye forgi' me — you'll never like me again, will ye? No — I know ye won't — I'm such a brute — I hate it — it's a shame. And here's a Banbury cake for you — I sent to the town for it, and some taffy — won't ye eat it? and here's a little ring— 'tisn't as pretty as your own rings; and ye'll wear it, maybe, for my sake — poor Milly's sake, before I was so bad to ye — if ye forgi' me; and I'll look at breakfast, and if it's on your finger I'll know you're friends wi' me again; and if ye don't, I won't trouble you no more; and I think I'll just drown myself out o' the way, and you'll never see wicked Milly no more.'

And without waiting a moment, leaving me only half awake, and with the sensations of dreaming, she scampered from the room, in her bare feet, with a petticoat about her shoulders.

She had left her candle by my bed, and her little offerings on the coverlet by me. If I had stood an atom less in terror of goblins than I did, I should have followed her, but I was afraid. I stood in my bare feet at my bedside, and kissed the poor little ring and put it on my finger, where it has remained ever since and always shall. And when I lay down, longing for morning, the image of her pale, imploring, penitential face was before me for hours; and I repented bitterly of my cool provoking ways, and thought myself, I dare say justly, a thousand times more to blame than Milly.

I searched in vain for her before breakfast. At that meal, however, we met, but in the presence of Uncle Silas, who, though silent and apathetic, was formidable; and we, sitting at a table disproportionably large, under the cold, strange gaze of my guardian, talked only what was inevitable, and that in low tones; for whenever Milly for a moment raised her voice, Uncle Silas would wince, place his thin white fingers quickly over his ear, and look as if a pain had pierced his brain, and then shrug and smile piteously into vacancy. When Uncle Silas, therefore, was not in the talking vein himself — and that was not often — you may suppose there was very little spoken in his presence.

When Milly, across the table, saw the ring upon my finger, she, drawing in her breath, said, ‘Oh!’ and, with round eyes and mouth, she looked so delighted; and she made a little motion, as if she was on the point of jumping up; and then her poor face quivered, and she bit her lip; and staring imploringly at me, her eyes filled fast with tears, which rolled down her round penitential cheeks.

I am sure I felt more penitent than she. I know I was crying and smiling, and longing to kiss her. I suppose we were very absurd; but it is well that small matters can stir the affections so profoundly at a time of life when great troubles seldom approach us.

When at length the opportunity did come, never was such a hug out of the wrestling ring as poor Milly bestowed on me, swaying me this way and that, and burying her face in my dress, and blubbering —

‘I was so lonely before you came, and you so good to me, and I such a devil; and I’ll never call you a name, but Maud — my darling Maud.’

‘You must, Milly — Mrs. Bustle. I’ll be Mrs. Bustle, or anything you like. You must.’ I was blubbering like Milly, and hugging my best; and, indeed, I wonder how we kept our feet.

So Milly and I were better friends than ever.

Meanwhile, the winter deepened, and we had short days and long nights, and long fireside gossipings at Bartram-Haugh. I was frightened at the frequency of the strange collapses to which Uncle Silas was subject. I did not at first mind them much, for I naturally fell into Milly’s way of talking about them.

But one day, while in one of his ‘queerish’ states, he called for me, and I saw him, and was unspeakably scared.

In a white wrapper, he lay coiled in a great easy chair. I should have thought him dead, had I not been accompanied by old L'Amour, who knew every gradation and symptom of these strange affections.

She winked and nodded to me with a ghastly significance, and whispered —

'Don't make no noise, miss, till he talks; he'll come to for a bit, anon.'

Except that there was no sign of convulsions, the countenance was like that of an epileptic arrested in one of his contortions.

There was a frown and smirk like that of idiotcy, and a strip of white eyeball was also disclosed.

Suddenly, with a kind of chilly shudder, he opened his eyes wide, and screwed his lips together, and blinked and stared on me with a fatuised uncertainty, that gradually broke into a feeble smile.

'Ah! the girl — Austin's child. Well, dear, I'm hardly able — I'll speak tomorrow — next day — it is tic — neuralgia, or something — *torture* — tell her.'

So, huddling himself together, he lay again in his great chair, with the same inexpressible helplessness in his attitude, and gradually his face resumed its dreadful cast.

'Come away, miss: he's changed his mind; he'll not be fit to talk to you noways all day, maybe,' said the old woman, again in a whisper.

So forth we stole from the room, I unspeakably shocked. In fact, he looked as if he were dying, and so, in my agitation, I told the crone, who, forgetting the ceremony with which she usually treated me, chuckled out derisively,

'A-dying is he? Well, he be like Saint Paul — he's bin a-dying daily this many a day.'

I looked at her with a chill of horror. She did not care, I suppose, what sort of feelings she might excite, for she went on mumbling sarcastically to herself. I had paused, and overcame my reluctance to speak to her again, for I was really very much frightened.

'Do you think he is in danger? Shall we send for a doctor?' I whispered.

'Law bless ye, the doctor knows all about it, miss.' The old woman's face had a gleam of that derision which is so shocking in the features of feebleness and age.

‘But it is a *fit*, it is paralytic, or something horrible — it can’t be *safe* to leave him to chance or nature to get through these terrible attacks.’

‘There’s no fear of him, ’tisn’t no fits at all, he’s nout the worse o’t. Jest silly a bit now and again. It’s been the same a dozen year and more; and the doctor knows all about it,’ answered the old woman sturdily. ‘And ye’ll find he’ll be as mad as bedlam if ye make any stir about it.’

That night I talked the matter over with Mary Quince.

‘They’re very dark, miss; but I think he takes a deal too much laudlum,’ said Mary.

To this hour I cannot say what was the nature of those periodical seizures. I have often spoken to medical men about them, since, but never could learn that excessive use of opium could altogether account for them. It was, I believe, certain, however, that he did use that drug in startling quantities. It was, indeed, sometimes a topic of complaint with him that his neuralgia imposed this sad necessity upon him.

The image of Uncle Silas, as I had seen him that day, troubled and affrighted my imagination, as I lay in my bed; I had slept very well since my arrival at Bartram. So much of the day was passed in the open air, and in active exercise, that this was but natural. But that night I was nervous and wakeful, and it was past two o’clock when I fancied I heard the sound of horses and carriage-wheels on the avenue.

Mary Quince was close by, and therefore I was not afraid to get up and peep from the window. My heart beat fast as I saw a postchaise approach the courtyard. A front window was let down, and the postilion pulled up for a few seconds.

In consequence of some directions received by him, I fancied he resumed his route at a walk, and so drew up at the hall-door, on the steps of which a figure awaited his arrival. I think it was old L’Amour, but I could not be quite certain. There was a lantern on the top of the balustrade, close by the door. The chaise-lamps were lighted, for the night was rather dark.

A bag and valise, as well as I could see, were pulled from the interior by the postboy, and a box from the top of the vehicle, and these were carried into the hall.

I was obliged to keep my cheek against the window-pane to command a view of the point of debarkation, and my breath upon the glass, which dimmed it again almost as fast as I wiped it away, helped to obscure my vision. But I saw a tall figure, in a cloak, get down and swiftly enter the house, but whether male or female I could not discern.

My heart beat fast. I jumped at once to a conclusion. My uncle was worse — was, in fact, dying; and this was the physician, too late summoned to his bedside.

I listened for the ascent of the doctor, and his entrance at my uncle's door, which, in the stillness of the night, I thought I might easily hear, but no sound reached me. I listened so for fully five minutes, but without result. I returned to the window, but the carriage and horses had disappeared.

I was strongly tempted to wake Mary Quince, and take counsel with her, and persuade her to undertake a reconnoissance. The fact is, I was persuaded that my uncle was in extremity, and I was quite wild to know the doctor's opinion. But, after all, it would be cruel to summon the good soul from her refreshing nap. So, as I began to feel very cold, I returned to my bed, where I continued to listen and conjecture until I fell asleep.

In the morning, as was usual, before I was dressed, in came Milly.

'How is Uncle Silas?' I eagerly enquired.

'Old L'Amour says he's queerish still; but he's not so dull as yesterday,' answered she.

'Was not the doctor sent for?' I asked.

'Was he? Well, that's odd; and she said never a word o't to me,' answered she.

'I'm asking only,' said I.

'I don't know whether he came or no,' she replied; 'but what makes you take that in your head?'

'A chaise arrived here between two and three o'clock last night.'

'Hey! and who told you?' Milly seemed all on a sudden highly interested.

'I saw it, Milly; and some one, I fancy the doctor, came from it into the house.'

'Fudge, lass! who'd send for the doctor? 'Twasn't he, I tell you. What was he like?' said Milly.

‘I could only see clearly that he, or *she*, was tall, and wore a cloak,’ I replied.

‘Then ’twasn’t him nor t’other I was thinking on, neither; and I’ll be hanged but I think it will be Cormoran,’ cried Milly, with a thoughtful rap with her knuckle on the table.

Precisely at this juncture a tapping came to the door.

‘Come in,’ said I.

And old L’Amour entered the room, with a courtesy.

‘I came to tell Miss Quince her breakfast’s ready,’ said the old lady.

‘Who came in the chaise, L’Amour?’ demanded Milly.

‘What chaise?’ spluttered the beldame tartly.

‘The chaise that came last night, past two o’clock,’ said Milly.

‘That’s a lie, and a damn lie!’ cried the beldame. ‘There worn’t no chaise at the door since Miss Maud there come from Knowl.’

I stared at the audacious old menial who could utter such language.

‘Yes, there was a chaise, and Cormoran, as I think, be come in it,’ said Milly, who seemed accustomed to L’Amour’s daring address.

‘And there’s another damn lie, as big as the t’other,’ said the crone, her haggard and withered face flushing orange all over.

‘I beg you will not use such language in my room,’ I replied, very angrily. ‘I saw the chaise at the door; your untruth signifies very little, but your impertinence here I will not permit. Should it be repeated, I will assuredly complain to my uncle.’

The old woman flushed more fiercely as I spoke, and fixed her bleared glare on me, with a compression of her mouth that amounted to a wicked grimace. She resisted her angry impulse, however, and only chuckled a little spitefully, saying,

‘No offence, miss: it be a way we has in Derbyshire o’ speaking our minds. No offence, miss, were meant, and none took, as I hopes,’ and she made me another courtesy.

‘And I forgot to tell you, Miss Milly, the master wants you this minute.’

So Milly, in mute haste, withdrew, followed closely by L’Amour.

CHAPTER XXXVII

DOCTOR BRYERLY EMERGES

When Milly joined me at breakfast, her eyes were red and swollen. She was still sniffing with that little sobbing hiccough, which betrays, even were there no other signs, recent violent weeping. She sat down quite silent.

‘Is he worse, Milly?’ I enquired, anxiously.

‘No, nothing’s wrong wi’ him; he’s right well,’ said Milly, fiercely.

‘What’s the matter then, Milly dear?’

‘The poisonous old witch! ’Twas just to tell the Gov’nor how I’d said ’twas Cormoran that came by the po’shay last night.’

‘And who is Cormoran?’ I enquired.

‘Ay, there it is; I’d like to tell, and you want to hear — and I just daren’t, for he’ll send me off right to a French school — hang it — hang them all! — if I do.’

‘And why should Uncle Silas care?’ said I, a good deal surprised.

‘They’re a-tellin’ lies.’

‘Who?’ said I.

‘L’Amour — that’s who. So soon as she made her complaint of me, the Gov’nor asked her, sharp enough, did anyone come last night, or a po’shay; and she was ready to swear there was no one. Are ye quite sure, Maud, you really did see aught, or ‘appen ’twas all a dream?’

‘It was no dream, Milly; so sure as you are there, I saw exactly what I told you,’ I replied.

‘Gov’nor won’t believe it anyhow; and he’s right mad wi’ me; and he threatens me he’ll have me off to France; I wish ’twas under the sea. I hate France — I do — like the devil. Don’t you? They’re always a-threatening me wi’ France, if I dare say a word more about the po’shay, or — or anyone.’

I really was curious about Cormoran; but Cormoran was not to be defined to me by Milly; nor did she, in reality, know more than I respecting the arrival of the night before.

One day I was surprised to see Doctor Bryerly on the stairs. I was standing in a dark gallery as he walked across the floor of the lobby to my uncle's door, his hat on, and some papers in his hand.

He did not see me; and when he had entered Uncle Silas's door, I went down and found Milly awaiting me in the hall.

'So Doctor Bryerly is here,' I said.

'That's the thin fellow, wi' the sharp look, and the shiny black coat, that went up just now?' asked Milly.

'Yes, he's gone into your papa's room,' said I.

''Appen 'twas he come 'tother night. He may be staying here, though we see him seldom, for it's a barrack of a house — it is.'

The same thought had struck me for a moment, but was dismissed immediately. It certainly was *not* Doctor Bryerly's figure which I had seen.

So, without any new light gathered from this apparition, we went on our way, and made our little sketch of the ruined bridge. We found the gate locked as before; and, as Milly could not persuade me to climb it, we got round the paling by the river's bank.

While at our drawing, we saw the swarthy face, sooty locks, and old weather-stained red coat of Zamiel, who was glowering malignly at us from among the trunks of the forest trees, and standing motionless as a monumental figure in the side aisle of a cathedral. When we looked again he was gone.

Although it was a fine mild day for the wintry season, we yet, cloaked as we were, could not pursue so still an occupation as sketching for more than ten or fifteen minutes. As we returned, in passing a clump of trees, we heard a sudden outbreak of voices, angry and expostulatory; and saw, under the trees, the savage old Zamiel strike his daughter with his stick two great blows, one of which was across the head. 'Beauty' ran only a short distance away, while the swart old wood-demon stumped lustily after her, cursing and brandishing his cudgel.

My blood boiled. I was so shocked that for a moment I could not speak; but in a moment more I screamed —

'You brute! How dare you strike the poor girl?'

She had only run a few steps, and turned about confronting him and us, her eyes gleaming fire, her features pale and quivering to suppress a burst of weeping. Two little rivulets of blood were trickling over her temple.

'I say, fayther, look at that,' she said, with a strange tremulous smile, lifting her hand, which was smeared with blood.

Perhaps he was ashamed, and the more enraged on that account, for he growled another curse, and started afresh to reach her, whirling his stick in the air. Our voices, however, arrested him.

'My uncle shall hear of your brutality. The poor girl!'

'Strike him, Meg, if he does it again; and pitch his leg into the river tonight, when he's asleep.'

'I'd serve *you* the same;' and out came an oath. 'You'd have her lick her fayther, would ye? Look out!'

And he wagged his head with a scowl at Milly, and a flourish of his cudgel.

'Be quiet, Milly,' I whispered, for Milly was preparing for battle; and I again addressed him with the assurance that, on reaching home, I would tell my uncle how he had treated the poor girl.

''Tis you she may thank for't, a wheedling o' her to open that gate,' he snarled.

'That's a lie; we went round by the brook,' cried Milly.

I did not think proper to discuss the matter with him; and looking very angry, and, I thought, a little put out, he jerked and swayed himself out of sight. I merely repeated my promise of informing my uncle as he went, to which, over his shoulder, he bawled —

'Silas won't mind ye *that*;' snapping his horny finger and thumb.

The girl remained where she had stood, wiping the blood off roughly with the palm of her hand, and looking at it before she rubbed it on her apron.

'My poor girl,' I said, 'you must not cry. I'll speak to my uncle about you.'

But she was not crying. She raised her head, and looked at us a little askance, with a sullen contempt, I thought.

'And you must have these apples — won't you?' We had brought in our basket two or three of those splendid apples for which Bartram was famous.

I hesitated to go near her, these Hawkeses, Beauty and Pegtop, were such savages. So I rolled the apples gently along the ground to her feet.

She continued to look doggedly at us with the same expression, and kicked away the apples sullenly that approached her feet. Then, wiping her temple and forehead in her apron, without a word, she turned and walked slowly away.

‘Poor thing! I’m afraid she leads a hard life. What strange, repulsive people they are!’

When we reached home, at the head of the great staircase old L’Amour was awaiting me; and with a courtesy, and very respectfully, she informed me that the Master would be happy to see me.

Could it be about my evidence as to the arrival of the mysterious chaise that he summoned me to this interview? Gentle as were his ways, there was something undefinable about Uncle Silas which inspired fear; and I should have liked few things less than meeting his gaze in the character of a culprit.

There was an uncertainty, too, as to the state in which I might find him, and a positive horror of beholding him again in the condition in which I had last seen him.

I entered the room, then, in some trepidation, but was instantly relieved. Uncle Silas was in the same health apparently, and, as nearly as I could recollect it, in precisely the same rather handsome though negligent garb in which I had first seen him.

Doctor Bryerly — what a marked and vulgar contrast, and yet, somehow, how reassuring! — sat at the table near him, and was tying up papers. His eyes watched me, I thought, with an anxious scrutiny as I approached; and I think it was not until I had saluted him that he recollected suddenly that he had not seen me before at Bartram, and stood up and greeted me in his usual abrupt and somewhat familiar way. It was vulgar and not cordial, and yet it was honest and indefinably kind.

Up rose my uncle, that strangely venerable, pale portrait, in his loose Rembrandt black velvet. How gentle, how benignant, how unearthly, and inscrutable!

‘I need not say how she is. Those lilies and roses, Doctor Bryerly, speak their own beautiful praises of the air of Bartram. I almost regret that her carriage will be home so soon. I only hope it may not abridge her rambles.

It positively does me good to look at her. It is the glow of flowers in winter, and the fragrance of a field which the Lord hath blessed.'

'Country air, Miss Ruthyn, is a right good kitchen to country fare. I like to see young women eat heartily. You have had some pounds of beef and mutton since I saw you last,' said Dr. Bryerly.

And this sly speech made, he scrutinised my countenance in silence rather embarrassingly.

'My system, Doctor Bryerly, as a disciple of Aesculapius you will approve — health first, accomplishment afterwards. The Continent is the best field for elegant instruction, and we must see the world a little, by-and-by, Maud; and to me, if my health be spared, there would be an unspeakable though a melancholy charm in the scenes where so many happy, though so many wayward and foolish, young days were passed; and I think I should return to these picturesque solitudes with, perhaps, an increased relish. You remember old Chaulieu's sweet lines —

Désert, aimable solitude,
Séjour du calme et de la paix,
Asile où n'entrèrent jamais
Le tumulte et l'inquiétude.

I can't say that care and sorrow have not sometimes penetrated these sylvan fastnesses; but the tumults of the world, thank Heaven! — never.'

There was a sly scepticism, I thought, in Doctor Bryerly's sharp face; and hardly waiting for the impressive 'never,' he said —

'I forgot to ask, who is your banker?'

'Oh! Bartlet and Hall, Lombard Street,' answered Uncle Silas, dryly and shortly.

Dr. Bryerly made a note of it, with an expression of face which seemed, with a sly resolution, to say, 'You shan't come the anchorite over me.'

I saw Uncle Silas's wild and piercing eye rest suspiciously on me for a moment, as if to ascertain whether I felt the spirit of Doctor Bryerly's almost interruption; and, nearly at the same moment, stuffing his papers into his capacious coat pockets, Doctor Bryerly rose and took his leave.

When he was gone, I bethought me that now was a good opportunity of making my complaint of Dickon Hawkes. Uncle Silas having risen, I hesitated, and began,

'Uncle, may I mention an occurrence — which I witnessed?'

‘Certainly, child,’ he answered, fixing his eye sharply on me. I really think he fancied that the conversation was about to turn upon the phantom chaise.

So I described the scene which had shocked Milly and me, an hour or so ago, in the Windmill Wood.

‘You see, my dear child, they are rough persons; their ideas are not ours; their young people must be chastised, and in a way and to a degree that we would look upon in a serious light. I’ve found it a bad plan interfering in strictly domestic misunderstandings, and should rather not.’

‘But he struck her violently on the head, uncle, with a heavy cudgel, and she was bleeding very fast.’

‘Ah?’ said my uncle, dryly.

‘And only that Milly and I deterred him by saying that we would certainly tell you, he would have struck her again; and I really think if he goes on treating her with so much violence and cruelty he may injure her seriously, or perhaps kill her.’

‘Why, you romantic little child, people in that rank of life think absolutely nothing of a broken head,’ answered Uncle Silas, in the same way.

‘But is it not horrible brutality, uncle?’

‘To be sure it is brutality; but then you must remember they are brutes, and it suits them,’ said he.

I was disappointed. I had fancied that Uncle Silas’s gentle nature would have recoiled from such an outrage with horror and indignation; and instead, here he was, the apologist of that savage ruffian, Dickon Hawkes.

‘And he is always so rude and impertinent to Milly and to me,’ I continued.

‘Oh! impertinent to you — that’s another matter. I must see to that. Nothing more, my dear child?’

‘Well, there *was* nothing more.’

‘He’s a useful servant, Hawkes; and though his looks are not prepossessing, and his ways and language rough, yet he is a very kind father, and a most honest man — a thoroughly moral man, though severe — a very rough diamond though, and has no idea of the refinements of polite society. I venture to say he honestly believes that he has been always unexceptionably polite to you, so we must make allowances.'

And Uncle Silas smoothed my hair with his thin aged hand, and kissed my forehead.

'Yes, we must make allowances; we must be kind. What says the Book? — "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Your dear father acted upon that maxim — so noble and so awful — and I strive to do so. Alas! dear Austin, *longo intervalle*, far behind! and you are removed — my example and my help; you are gone to your rest, and I remain beneath my burden, still marching on by bleak and alpine paths, under the awful night.

O nuit, nuit douloureuse! O toi, tardive aurore!
Viens-tu? vas-tu venir? es-tu bien loin encore?

And repeating these lines of Chenier, with upturned eyes, and one hand lifted, and an indescribable expression of grief and fatigue, he sank stiffly into his chair, and remained mute, with eyes closed for some time. Then applying his scented handkerchief to them hastily, and looking very kindly at me, he said —

'Anything more, dear child?'

'Nothing, uncle, thank you, very much, only about that man, Hawkes; I dare say that he does not mean to be so uncivil as he is, but I am really afraid of him, and he makes our walks in that direction quite unpleasant.'

'I understand quite, my dear. I will see to it; and you must remember that nothing is to be allowed to vex my beloved niece and ward during her stay at Bartram — nothing that her old kinsman, Silas Ruthyn, can remedy.'

So with a tender smile, and a charge to shut the door 'perfectly, but without clapping it,' he dismissed me.

Doctor Bryerly had not slept at Bartram, but at the little inn in Feltram, and he was going direct to London, as I afterwards learned.

'Your ugly doctor's gone away in a fly,' said Milly, as we met on the stairs, she running up, I down.

On reaching the little apartment which was our sitting-room, however, I found that she was mistaken; for Doctor Bryerly, with his hat and a great pair of woollen gloves on, and an old Oxford grey surtout that showed his lank length to advantage, buttoned all the way up to his chin, had set down his black leather bag on the table, and was reading at the window a little volume which I had borrowed from my uncle’s library.

It was Swedenborg’s account of the other worlds, Heaven and Hell.

He closed it on his finger as I entered, and without recollecting to remove his hat, he made a step or two towards me with his splay, creaking boots. With a quick glance at the door, he said —

‘Glad to see you alone for a minute — very glad.’

But his countenance, on the contrary, looked very anxious.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A MIDNIGHT DEPARTURE

‘I’m going this minute — I — I want to know’ — another glance at the door — ‘are you really quite comfortable here?’

‘Quite,’ I answered promptly.

‘You have only your cousin’s company?’ he continued, glancing at the table, which was laid for two.

‘Yes; but Milly and I are very happy together.’

‘That’s very nice; but I think there are no teachers, you see — painters, and singers, and that sort of thing that is usual with young ladies. No teachers of that kind — of *any* kind — are there?’ ‘No; my uncle thinks it better I should lay in a store of health, he says.’

‘I know; and the carriage and horses have not come; how soon are they expected?’

‘I really can’t say, and I assure you I don’t much care. I think running about great fun.’

‘You walk to church?’

‘Yes; Uncle Silas’s carriage wants a new wheel, he told me.’

‘Ay, but a young woman of your rank, you know, it is not usual she should be without the use of a carriage. Have you horses to ride?’

I shook my head.

‘Your uncle, you know, has a very liberal allowance for your maintenance and education.’

I remembered something in the will about it, and Mary Quince was constantly grumbling that ‘he did not spend a pound a week on our board.’

I answered nothing, but looked down.

Another glance at the door from Doctor Bryerly’s sharp black eyes.

‘Is he kind to you?’

‘Very kind — most gentle and affectionate.’

‘Why doesn’t he keep company with you? Does he ever dine with you, or drink tea, or talk to you? Do you see much of him?’

‘He is a miserable invalid — his hours and regimen are peculiar. Indeed I wish very much you would consider his case; he is, I believe, often insensible for a long time, and his mind in a strange feeble state sometimes.’

‘I dare say — worn out in his young days; and I saw that preparation of opium in his bottle — he takes too much.’

‘Why do you think so, Doctor Bryerly?’

‘It’s made on water: the spirit interferes with the use of it beyond a certain limit. You have no idea what those fellows can swallow. Read the “Opium Eater.” I knew two cases in which the quantity exceeded De Quincy’s. Aha! it’s new to you?’ and he laughed quietly at my simplicity.

‘And what do you think his complaint is?’ I asked.

‘Pooh! I haven’t a notion; but, probably, one way or another, he has been all his days working on his nerves and his brain. These men of pleasure, who have no other pursuit, use themselves up mostly, and pay a smart price for their sins. And so he’s kind and affectionate, but hands you over to your cousin and the servants. Are his people civil and obliging?’

‘Well, I can’t say much for them; there is a man named Hawkes, and his daughter, who are very rude, and even abusive sometimes, and say they have orders from my uncle to shut us out from a portion of the grounds; but I don’t believe that, for Uncle Silas never alluded to it when I was making my complaint of them to-day.’

‘From what part of the grounds is that?’ asked Doctor Bryerly, sharply.

I described the situation as well as I could.

‘Can we see it from this?’ he asked, peeping from the window.

‘Oh, no.’

Doctor Bryerly made a note in his pocketbook here, and I said —

‘But I am really quite sure it was a story of Dickon’s, he is such a surly, disobliging man.’

‘And what sort is that old servant that came in and out of his room?’

‘Oh, that is old L’Amour,’ I answered, rather indirectly, and forgetting that I was using Milly’s nickname.

‘And is *she* civil?’ he asked.

No, she certainly was not; a most disagreeable old woman, with a vein of wickedness. I thought I had heard her swearing.

‘They don’t seem to be a very engaging lot,’ said Doctor Bryerly;’ but where there’s one, there will be more. See here, I was just reading a passage,’ and he opened the little volume at the place where his finger marked it, and read for me a few sentences, the purport of which I well remember, although, of course, the words have escaped me.

It was in that awful portion of the book which assumes to describe the condition of the condemned; and it said that, independently of the physical causes in that state operating to enforce community of habitation, and an isolation from superior spirits, there exist sympathies, aptitudes, and necessities which would, of themselves, induce that depraved gregariousness, and isolation too.

‘And what of the rest of the servants, are they better?’ he resumed.

We saw little or nothing of the others, except of old ‘Giblets,’ the butler, who went about like a little automaton of dry bones, poking here and there, and whispering and smiling to himself as he laid the cloth; and seeming otherwise quite unconscious of an external world.

‘This room is not got up like Mr. Ruthyn’s: does he talk of furnishings and making things a little smart? No! Well, I must say, I think he might.’

Here there was a little silence, and Doctor Bryerly, with his accustomed simultaneous glance at the door, said in low, cautious tones, very distinctly —

‘Have you been thinking at all over that matter again, I mean about getting your uncle to forego his guardianship? I would not mind his first refusal. You could make it worth his while, unless he — that is — unless he’s very unreasonable indeed; and I think you would consult your interest, Miss Ruthyn, by doing so and, if possible, getting out of this place.’

‘But I have not thought of it at all; I am much happier here than I had at all expected, and I am very fond of my cousin Milly.’

‘How long have you been here exactly?’

I told him. It was some two or three months.

‘Have you seen your other cousin yet — the young gentleman?’

‘No.’

‘H’m! Aren’t you very lonely?’ he enquired.

‘We see no visitors here; but that, you know, I was prepared for.’

Doctor Bryerly read the wrinkles on his splay boot intently and peevishly, and tapped the sole lightly on the ground.

'Yes, it is very lonely, and the people a bad lot. You'd be pleasanter somewhere else — with Lady Knollys, for instance, eh?'

'Well, *there* certainly. But I am very well here: really the time passes very pleasantly; and my uncle is so kind. I have only to mention anything that annoys me, and he will see that it is remedied: he is always impressing that on me.'

'Yes, it is not a fit place for you,' said Doctor Bryerly. 'Of course, about your uncle,' he resumed, observing my surprised look, 'it is all right: but he's quite helpless, you know. At all events, *think* about it. Here's my address — Hans Emmanuel Bryerly, M.D., 17 King Street, Covent Garden, London — don't lose it, mind,' and he tore the leaf out of his notebook.

'Here's my fly at the door, and you must — you must' (he was looking at his watch)— 'mind you *must* think of it seriously; and so, you see, don't let anyone see that. You'll be sure to leave it throwing about. The best way will be just to scratch it on the door of your press, inside, you know; and don't put my name — you'll remember that — only the rest of the address; and burn this. Quince is with you?'

'Yes,' I answered, glad to have a satisfactory word to say.

'Well, don't let her go; it's a bad sign if they wish it. Don't consent, mind; but just tip me a hint and you'll have me down. And any letters you get from Lady Knollys, you know, for she's very plain-spoken, you'd better burn them offhand. And I've stayed too long, though; mind what I say, scratch it with a pin, and burn that, and not a word to a mortal about it. Goodbye; oh, I was taking away your book.'

And so, in a fuss, with a slight shake of the hand, getting up his umbrella, his bag, and tin box, he hurried from the room; and in a minute more, I heard the sound of his vehicle as it drove away.

I looked after it with a sigh; the uneasy sensations which I had experienced respecting my sojourn at Bartram-Haugh were re-awakened.

My ugly, vulgar, true friend was disappearing beyond those gigantic lime trees which hid Bartram from the eyes of the outer world. The fly, with the doctor's valise on top, vanished, and I sighed an anxious sigh. The shadow of the overarching trees contracted, and I felt helpless and forsaken; and glancing down the torn leaf, Doctor Bryerly's address met my eye, between my fingers.

I slipt it into my breast, and ran upstairs stealthily, trembling lest the old woman should summon me again, at the head of the stairs, into Uncle Silas's room, where under his gaze, I fancied, I should be sure to betray myself.

But I glided unseen and safely by, entered my room, and shut my door. So listening and working, I, with my scissors' point, scratched the address where Doctor Bryerly had advised. Then, in positive terror, lest some one should even knock during the operation, I, with a match, consumed to ashes the tell-tale bit of paper.

Now, for the first time, I experienced the unpleasant sensations of having a secret to keep. I fancy the pain of this solitary liability was disproportionately acute in my case, for I was naturally very open and very nervous. I was always on the point of betraying it *apropos des bottes* — always reproaching myself for my duplicity; and in constant terror when honest Mary Quince approached the press, or goodnatured Milly made her occasional survey of the wonders of my wardrobe. I would have given anything to go and point to the tiny inscription, and say:— 'This is Doctor Bryerly's address in London. I scratched it with my scissors' point, taking every precaution lest anyone — you, my good friends, included — should surprise me. I have ever since kept this secret to myself, and trembled whenever your frank kind faces looked into the press. There — you at last know all about it. Can you ever forgive my deceit?'

But I could not make up my mind to reveal it; nor yet to erase the inscription, which was my alternative thought. Indeed I am a wavering, irresolute creature as ever lived, in my ordinary mood. High excitement or passion only can inspire me with decision. Under the inspiration of either, however, I am transformed, and often both prompt and brave.

'Some one left here last night, I think, Miss,' said Mary Quince, with a mysterious nod, one morning. ''Twas two o'clock, and I was bad with the toothache, and went down to get a pinch o' red pepper — leaving the candle a-light here lest you should awake. When I was coming up — as I was crossing the lobby, at the far end of the long gallery — what should I hear, but a horse snorting, and some people a-talking, short and quiet like. So I looks out o' the window; and there surely I did see two horses yoked to a shay, and a fellah a-pullin' a box up o' top; and out comes a walise and a bag; and I think it was old Wyat, please'm, that Miss Milly calls L'Amour, that stood in the doorway a-talking to the driver.'

'And who got into the chaise, Mary?' I asked.

'Well, Miss, I waited as long as I could; but the pain was bad, and me so awful cold; I gave it up at last, and came back to bed, for I could not say how much longer they might wait. And you'll find, Miss,'twill be kep' a secret, like the shay as you saw'd, Miss, last week. I hate them dark ways, and secrets; and old Wyat — she does tell stories, don't she? — and she as ought to be partickler, seein' her time be short now, and she so old. It is awful, an old un like that telling such crams as she do.'

Milly was as curious as I, but could throw no light on this. We both agreed, however, that the departure was probably that of the person whose arrival I had accidentally witnessed. This time the chaise had drawn up at the side door, round the corner of the left side of the house; and, no doubt, driven away by the back road.

Another accident had revealed this nocturnal move. It was very provoking, however, that Mary Quince had not had resolution to wait for the appearance of the traveller. We all agreed, however, that we were to observe a strict silence, and that even to Wyat — L'Amour I had better continue to call her — Mary Quince was not to hint what she had seen. I suspect, however, that injured curiosity asserted itself, and that Mary hardly adhered to this self-denying resolve.

But cheerful wintry suns and frosty skies, long nights, and brilliant starlight, with good homely fires in our snuggery — gossipings, stories, short readings now and then, and brisk walks through the always beautiful scenery of Bartram-Haugh, and, above all, the unbroken tenor of our life, which had fallen into a serene routine, foreign to the idea of danger or misadventure, gradually quieted the qualms and misgivings which my interview with Doctor Bryerly had so powerfully resuscitated.

My cousin Monica, to my inexpressible joy, had returned to her country-house; and an active diplomacy, through the postoffice, was negotiating the reopening of friendly relations between the courts of Elverston and of Bartram.

At length, one fine day, Cousin Monica, smiling pleasantly, with her cloak and bonnet on, and her colour fresh from the shrewd air of the

Derbyshire hills, stood suddenly before me in our sitting-room. Our meeting was that of two school-companions long separated. Cousin Monica was always a girl in my eyes.

What a hug it was; what a shower of kisses and ejaculations, enquiries and caresses! At last I pressed her down into a chair, and, laughing, she said —

‘You have no idea what self-denial I have exercised to bring this visit about. I, who detest writing, have actually written five letters to Silas; and I don’t think I said a single impertinent thing in one of them! What a wonderful little old thing your butler is! I did not know what to make of him on the steps. Is he a struldbrug, or a fairy, or only a ghost? Where on earth did your uncle pick him up? I’m sure he came in on All Hallows E’en, to answer an incantation — not your future husband, I hope — and he’ll vanish some night into gray smoke, and whisk sadly up the chimney. He’s the most venerable little thing I ever beheld in my life. I leaned back in the carriage and thought I should absolutely die of laughing. He’s gone up to prepare your uncle for my visit; and I really am very glad, for I’m sure I shall look as young as Hebe after *him*. But who is this? Who are you, my dear?’

This was addressed to poor Milly, who stood at the corner of the chimneypiece, staring with her round eyes and plump cheeks in fear and wonder upon the strange lady.

‘How stupid of me,’ I exclaimed. ‘Milly, dear, this is your cousin, Lady Knollys.’

‘And so *you* are Millicent. Well, dear, I am very glad to see you.’ And Cousin Monica was on her feet again in an instant, with Milly’s hand very cordially in hers; and she gave her a kiss upon each cheek, and patted her head.

Milly, I must mention, was a much more presentable figure than when I first encountered her. Her dresses were at least a quarter of a yard longer. Though very rustic, therefore, she was not so barbarously grotesque, by any means.

CHAPTER XXXIX

COUSIN MONICA AND UNCLE SILAS MEET

Cousin Monica, with her hands upon Milly's shoulders, looked amusedly and kindly in her face. 'And,' said she, 'we must be very good friends — you funny creature, you and I. I'm allowed to be the most saucy old woman in Derbyshire — quite incorrigibly privileged; and nobody is ever affronted with me, so I say the most shocking things constantly.'

'I'm a bit that way, myself; and I think,' said poor Milly, making an effort, and growing very red; she quite lost her head at that point, and was incompetent to finish the sentiment she had prefaced.

'You think? Now, take my advice, and never wait to think my dear; talk first, and think afterwards, that is my way; though, indeed, I can't say I ever think at all. It is a very cowardly habit. Our cold-blooded cousin Maud, there, thinks sometimes; but it is always such a failure that I forgive her. I wonder when your little pre-Adamite butler will return. He speaks the language of the Picts and Ancient Britons, I dare say, and your father requires a little time to translate him. And, Milly dear, I am very hungry, so I won't wait for your butler, who would give me, I suppose, one of the cakes baked by King Alfred, and some Danish beer in a skull; but I'll ask you for a little of that nice bread and butter.'

With which accordingly Lady Knollys was quickly supplied; but it did not at all impede her utterance.

'Do you think, girls, you could be ready to come away with me, if Silas gives leave, in an hour or two? I should so like to take you both home with me to Elverston.'

'How delightful! you darling,' cried I, embracing and kissing her; 'for my part, I should be ready in five minutes; what do you say, Milly?'

Poor Milly's wardrobe, I am afraid, was more portable than handsome; and she looked horribly affrighted, and whispered in my ear —

'My best petticoat is away at the laundress; say in a week, Maud.'

'What does she say?' asked Lady Knollys.

'She fears she can't be ready,' I answered, dejectedly.

‘There’s a deal of my slops in the wash,’ blurted out poor Milly, staring straight at Lady Knollys.

‘In the name of wonder, what does my cousin mean?’ asked Lady Knollys.

‘Her things have not come home yet from the laundress,’ I replied; and at this moment our wondrous old butler entered to announce to Lady Knollys that his master was ready to receive her, whenever she was disposed to favour him; and also to make polite apologies for his being compelled, by his state of health, to give her the trouble of ascending to his room.

So Cousin Monica was at the door in a moment, over her shoulder calling to us, ‘Come, girls.’

‘Please, not yet, my lady — you alone; and he requests the young ladies will be in the way, as he will send for them presently.’

I began to admire poor ‘Giblets’ as the wreck of a tolerably respectable servant.

‘Very good; perhaps it is better we should kiss and be friends in private first,’ said Cousin Knollys, laughing; and away she went under the guidance of the mummy.

I had an account of this *tête-à-tête* afterwards from Lady Knollys.

‘When I saw him, my dear,’ she said, ‘I could hardly believe my eyes; such white hair — such a white face — such mad eyes — such a deathlike smile. When I saw him last, his hair was dark; he dressed himself like a modern Englishman; and he really preserved a likeness to the full-length portrait at Knowl, that you fell in love with, you know; but, angels and ministers of grace! such a spectre! I asked myself, is it necromancy, or is it delirium tremens that has reduced him to this? And said he, with that odious smile, that made me fancy myself half insane —

‘“You see a change, Monica.”

‘What a sweet, gentle, insufferable voice he has! Somebody once told me about the tone of a glass flute that made some people hysterical to listen to, and I was thinking of it all the time. There was always a peculiar quality in his voice.

‘“I do see a change, Silas,” I said at last; “and, no doubt, so do you in me — a great change.”

'"There has been time enough to work a greater than I observe in you since you last honoured me with a visit," said he.

'I think he was at his old sarcasms, and meant that I was the same impertinent minx he remembered long ago, uncorrected by time; and so I am, and he must not expect compliments from old Monica Knollys.

'"It is a long time, Silas; but that, you know, is not my fault," said I.

'"Not your fault, my dear — your instinct. We are all imitative creatures: the great people ostracised me, and the small ones followed. We are very like turkeys, we have so much good sense and so much generosity. Fortune, in a freak, wounded my head, and the whole brood were upon me, pecking and gobbling, gobbling and pecking, and you among them, dear Monica. It wasn't your fault, only your instinct, so I quite forgive you; but no wonder the peckers wear better than the pecked. You are robust; and I, what I am."

'"Now, Silas, I have not come here to quarrel. If we quarrel now, mind, we can never make it up — we are too old, so let us forget all we can, and try to forgive something; and if we can do neither, at all events let there be truce between us while I am here."

'"My personal wrongs I can quite forgive, and I do, Heaven knows, from my heart; but there are things which ought not to be forgiven. My children have been ruined by it. I may, by the mercy of Providence, be yet set right in the world, and so soon as that time comes, I will remember, and I will act; but my children — you will see that wretched girl, my daughter — education, society, all would come too late — my children have been ruined by it."

'"I have not done it; but I know what you mean," I said. "You menace litigation whenever you have the means; but you forget that Austin placed you under promise, when he gave you the use of this house and place, never to disturb my title to Elverston. So there is my answer, if you mean that."

'"I mean what I mean," he replied, with his old smile.

'"You mean then," said I, "that for the pleasure of vexing me with litigation, you are willing to forfeit your tenure of this house and place."

'"Suppose I *did* mean precisely that, why should I forfeit anything? My beloved brother, by his will, has given me a right to the use of Bartram-Haugh for my life, and attached no absurd condition of the kind you fancy to his gift."

‘Silas was in one of his vicious old moods, and liked to menace me. His vindictiveness got the better of his craft; but he knows as well as I do that he never could succeed in disturbing the title of my poor dear Harry Knollys; and I was not at all alarmed by his threats; and I told him so, as coolly as I speak to you now.

‘“Well, Monica,” he said, “I have weighed you in the balance, and you are not found wanting. For a moment the old man possessed me: the thought of my children, of past unkindness, and present affliction and disgrace, exasperated me, and I was mad. It was but for a moment — the galvanic spasm of a corpse. Never was breast more dead than mine to the passions and ambitions of the world. They are not for white locks like these, nor for a man who, for a week in every month, lies in the gate of death. Will you shake hands? *Here* — I *do* strike a truce; and I *do* forget and forgive *everything*.”

‘I don’t know what he meant by this scene. I have no idea whether he was acting, or lost his head, or, in fact, why or how it occurred; but I am glad, darling, that, unlike myself, I was calm, and that a quarrel has not been forced upon me.’

When our turn came and we were summoned to the presence, Uncle Silas was quite as usual; but Cousin Monica’s heightened colour, and the flash of her eyes, showed plainly that something exciting and angry had occurred.

Uncle Silas commented in his own vein upon the effect of Bartram air and liberty, all he had to offer; and called on me to say how I liked them. And then he called Milly to him, kissed her tenderly, smiled sadly upon her, and turning to Cousin Monica, said —

‘This is my daughter Milly — oh! she has been presented to you downstairs, has she? You have, no doubt, been interested by her. As I told her cousin Maud, though I am not yet quite a Sir Tunbelly Clumsy, she is a very finished Miss Hoyden. Are not you, my poor Milly? You owe your distinction, my dear, to that line of circumvallation which has, ever since your birth, intercepted all civilisation on its way to Bartram. You are much obliged, Milly, to everybody who, whether naturally or *un*-naturally, turned a sod in that invisible, but impenetrable, work. For your accomplishments — rather singular than fashionable — you are indebted, in part, to your cousin, Lady Knollys. Is not she, Monica? *Thank* her, Milly.’

‘This is your *truce*, Silas,’ said Lady Knollys, with a quiet sharpness. ‘I think, Silas Ruthyn, you want to provoke me to speak in a way before these young creatures which we should all regret.’

‘So my badinage excites your temper, Monnie. Think how you *would* feel, then, if I had found you by the highway side, mangled by robbers, and set my foot upon your throat, and spat in your face. But — stop this. Why have I said this? simply to emphasize my forgiveness. See, girls, Lady Knollys and I, cousins long estranged, forget and forgive the past, and join hands over its buried injuries.’

‘Well, *be* it so; only let us have done with ironies and covert taunts.’

And with these words their hands were joined; and Uncle Silas, after he had released hers, patted and fondled it with his, laughing icily and very low all the time.

‘I wish so much, dear Monica,’ he said, when this piece of silent by-play was over, ‘that I could ask you to stay tonight; but absolutely I have not a bed to offer, and even if I had, I fear my suit would hardly prevail.’

Then came Lady Knollys’ invitation for Milly and me. He was very much obliged; he smiled over it a great deal, meditating. I thought he was puzzled; and amid his smiles, his wild eyes scanned Cousin Monica’s frank face once or twice suspiciously.

There was a difficulty — an *undefined* difficulty — about letting us go that day; but on a future one — soon — *very* soon — he would be most happy.

Well, there was an end of that little project, for to-day at least; and Cousin Monica was too well-bred to urge it beyond a certain point.

‘Milly, my dear, will you put on your hat and show me the grounds about the house? May she, Silas? I should like to renew my acquaintance.’

‘You’ll see them sadly neglected, Monnie. A poor man’s pleasure grounds must rely on Nature, and trust to her for effects. Where there is fine timber, however, and abundance of slope, and rock, and hollow, we sometimes gain in picturesqueness what we lose by neglect in luxury.’

Then, as Cousin Monica said she would cross the grounds by a path, and meet her carriage at a point to which we would accompany her, and so make her way home, she took leave of Uncle Silas; a ceremony whereat — without, I thought, much zeal at either side — a kiss took place.

‘Now, girls!’ said Cousin Knollys, when we were fairly in motion over the grass, ‘what do you say — will he let you come — yes or no? I can’t say, but I think, dear,’ — this to Milly— ‘ he ought to let you see a little more of the world than appears among the glens and bushes of Bartram. Very pretty they are, like yourself; but very wild, and very little seen. Where is your brother, Milly; is not he older than you?’

‘I don’t know where; and he is older by six years and a bit.’

By-and-by, when Milly was gesticulating to frighten some herons by the river’s brink into the air, Cousin Monica said confidentially to me —

‘He has run away, I’m told — I wish I could believe it — and enlisted in a regiment going to India, perhaps the best thing for him. Did you see him here before his judicious self-banishment?’

‘No.’

‘Well, I suppose you have had no loss. Doctor Bryerly says from all he can learn he is a very bad young man. And now tell me, dear, *is* Silas kind to you?’

‘Yes, always gentle, just as you saw him to-day; but we don’t see a great deal of him — very little, in fact.’

‘And how do you like your life and the people?’ she asked.

‘My life, very well; and the people, *pretty* well. There’s an old women we don’t like, old Wyat, she is cross and mysterious and tells untruths; but I don’t think she is dishonest — so Mary Quince says — and that, you know, is a point; and there is a family, father and daughter, called Hawkes, who live in the Windmill Wood, who are perfect savages, though my uncle says they don’t mean it; but they are very disagreeable, rude people; and except them we see very little of the servants or other people. But there has been a mysterious visit; some one came late at night, and remained for some days, though Milly and I never saw them, and Mary Quince saw a chaise at the side-door at two o’clock at night.’

Cousin Monica was so highly interested at this that she arrested her walk and stood facing me, with her hand on my arm, questioning and listening, and lost, as it seemed, in dismal conjecture.

‘It is not pleasant, you know,’ I said.

‘No, it is not pleasant,’ said Lady Knollys, very gloomily.

And just then Milly joined us, shouting to us to look at the herons flying; so Cousin Monica did, and smiled and nodded in thanks to Milly, and was again silent and thoughtful as we walked on.

'You are to come to me, mind, both of you girls,' she said, abruptly;' you *shall*. I'll manage it.'

When silence returned, and Milly ran away once more to try whether the old gray trout was visible in the still water under the bridge, Cousin Monica said to me in a low tone, looking hard at me —

'You've not seen anything to frighten you, Maud? Don't look so alarmed, dear,' she added with a little laugh, which was not very merry, however. 'I don't mean frighten in any awful sense — in fact, I did not mean frighten at all. I meant — I can't exactly express it — anything to vex, or make you uncomfortable; have you?'

'No, I can't say I have, except that room in which Mr. Charke was found dead.'

'Oh! you saw that, did you? — I should like to see it so much. Your bedroom is not near it?'

'Oh, no; on the floor beneath, and looking to the front. And Doctor Bryerly talked a little to me, and there seemed to be something on his mind more than he chose to tell me; so that for some time after I saw him I really was, as you say, frightened; but, except that, I really have had no cause. And what was in your mind when you asked me?'

'Well, you know, Maud, you are afraid of ghosts, banditti, and *every*thing; and I wished to know whether you were uncomfortable, and what your particular bogle was just now — that, I assure you, was all; and I know,' she continued, suddenly changing her light tone and manner for one of pointed entreaty, 'what Doctor Bryerly said; and I *implore* of you, Maud, to think of it seriously; and when you come to me, you shall do so with the intention of remaining at Elverston.'

'Now, Cousin Monica, is this fair? You and Doctor Bryerly both talk in the same awful way to me; and I assure you, you don't know how nervous I am sometimes, and yet you won't, either of you, say what you mean. Now, Monica, dear cousin, won't you tell me?'

'You see, dear, it is so lonely; it's a strange place, and he so odd. I don't like the place, and I don't like him. I've tried, but I can't, and I think I never shall. He may be a very — what was it that good little silly curate at Knowl used to call him? — a very advanced Christian — that is it, and I hope he is; but if he is only what he used to be, his utter seclusion from society removes the only check, except personal fear — and he never had much of that — upon a very bad man. And you must know, my dear Maud, what a prize you are, and what an immense trust it is.'

Suddenly Cousin Monica stopped short, and looked at me as if she had gone too far.

'But, you know, Silas may be very good *now*, although he was wild and selfish in his young days. Indeed I don't know what to make of him; but I am sure when you have thought it over, you will agree with me and Doctor Bryerly, that you must not stay here.'

It was vain trying to induce my cousin to be more explicit.

'I hope to see you at Elverston in a very few days. I will *shame* Silas into letting you come. I don't like his reluctance.'

'But don't you think he must know that Milly would require some little outfit before her visit?'

'Well, I can't say. I hope that is all; but be it what it may, I'll *make* him let you come, and *immediately*, too.'

After she had gone, I experienced a repetition of those undefined doubts which had tortured me for some time after my conversation with Dr. Bryerly. I had truly said, however, I was well enough contented with my mode of life here, for I had been trained at Knowl to a solitude very nearly as profound.

CHAPTER XL

IN WHICH I MAKE ANOTHER COUSIN'S ACQUAINTANCE

My correspondence about this time was not very extensive. About once a fortnight a letter from honest Mrs. Rusk conveyed to me how the dogs and ponies were, in queer English, oddly spelt; some village gossip, a critique upon Doctor Clay's or the Curate's last sermon, and some severities generally upon the Dissenters' doings, with loves to Mary Quince, and all good wishes to me. Sometimes a welcome letter from cheerful Cousin Monica; and now, to vary the series, a copy of complimentary verses, without a signature, very adoring — very like Byron, I then fancied, and now, I must confess, rather vapid. Could I doubt from whom they came?

I had received, about a month after my arrival, a copy of verses in the same hand, in a plaintive ballad style, of the soldierly sort, in which the writer said, that as living his sole object was to please me, so dying I should be his latest thought; and some more poetic impieties, asking only in return that when the storm of battle had swept over, I should 'shed a tear' on seeing 'the *oak lie*, where it fell.' Of course, about this lugubrious pun, there could be no misconception. The Captain was unmistakably indicated; and I was so moved that I could no longer retain my secret; but walking with Milly that day, confided the little romance to that unsophisticated listener, under the chestnut trees. The lines were so amorously dejected, and yet so heroically redolent of blood and gunpowder, that Milly and I agreed that the writer must be on the verge of a sanguinary campaign.

It was not easy to get at Uncle Silas's 'Times' or 'Morning Post,' which we fancied would explain these horrible allusions; but Milly bethought her of a sergeant in the militia, resident in Feltram, who knew the destination and quarters of every regiment in the service; and circuitously, from this authority, we learned, to my infinite relief, that Captain Oakley's regiment had still two years to sojourn in England.

I was summoned one evening by old L'Amour, to my uncle's room. I remember his appearance that evening so well, as he lay back in his chair; the pillow; the white glare of his strange eye; his feeble, painful smile.

‘You’ll excuse my not rising, dear Maud, I am so miserably ill this evening.’

I expressed my respectful condolence.

‘Yes; I *am* to be pitied; but pity is of no use, dear,’ he murmured, peevishly. ‘I sent for you to make you acquainted with your cousin, my son. Where are you Dudley?’

A figure seated in a low lounging chair, at the other side of the fire, and which till then I had not observed, at these words rose up a little slowly, like a man stiff after a day’s hunting; and I beheld with a shock that held my breath, and fixed my eyes upon him in a stare, the young man whom I had encountered at Church Scarsdale, on the day of my unpleasant excursion there with Madame, and who, to the best of my belief, was also one of that ruffianly party who had so unspeakably terrified me in the warren at Knowl.

I suppose I looked very much affrighted. If I had been looking at a ghost I could not have felt much more scared and incredulous.

When I was able to turn my eyes upon my uncle he was not looking at me; but with a glimmer of that smile with which a father looks on a son whose youth and comeliness he admires, his white face was turned towards the young man, in whom I beheld nothing but the image of odious and dreadful associations.

‘Come, sir,’ said my uncle, we must not be too modest. Here’s your cousin Maud — what do you say?’

‘How are ye, Miss?’ he said, with a sheepish grin.

‘Miss! Come, come. Miss us, no Misses,’ said my uncle; ‘she is Maud, and you Dudley, or I mistake; or we shall have you calling Milly, madame. She’ll not refuse you her hand, I venture to think. Come, young gentleman, speak for yourself.’

‘How are ye, Maud?’ he said, doing his best, and drawing near, he extended his hand.’ You’re welcome to Bartram-Haugh, Miss.’

‘Kiss your cousin, sir. Where’s your gallantry? On my honour, I disown you,’ exclaimed my uncle, with more energy than he had shown before.

With a clumsy effort, and a grin that was both sheepish and impudent, he grasped my hand and advanced his face. The imminent salute gave me strength to spring back a step or two, and he hesitated.

My uncle laughed peevishly.

'Well, well, that will do, I suppose. In my time first-cousins did not meet like strangers; but perhaps we were wrong; we are learning modesty from the Americans, and old English ways are too gross for us.'

'I have — I've seen him before — that is;' and at this point I stopped.

My uncle turned his strange glare, in a sort of scowl of enquiry, upon me.

'Oh! — hey! why this is news. You never told me. Where have you met — eh, Dudley?'

'Never saw her in my days, so far as I'm aweer on,' said the young man.

'No! Well, then, Maud, will *you* enlighten us?' said Uncle Silas, coldly.

'I *did* see that young gentleman before,' I faltered.

'Meaning *me*, ma'am?' he asked, coolly.

'Yes — certainly *you*. I *did*, uncle,' answered I.

'And where was it, my dear? Not at Knowl, I fancy. Poor dear Austin did not trouble me or mine much with his hospitalities.'

This was not a pleasant tone to take in speaking of his dead brother and benefactor; but at the moment I was too much engaged upon the one point to observe it.

'I met' — I could not say my cousin— 'I met him, uncle — your son — that young gentleman — I *saw* him, I should say, at Church Scarsdale, and afterwards with some other persons in the warren at Knowl. It was the night our gamekeeper was beaten.'

'Well, Dudley, what do you say to that?' asked Uncle Silas.

'I never *was* at them places, so help me. I don't know where they be; and I never set eyes on the young lady before, as I hope to be saved, in all my days,' said he, with a countenance so unchanged and an air so confident that I began to think I must be the dupe of one of those strange resemblances which have been known to lead to positive identification in the witness-box, afterwards proved to be utterly mistaken.

'You look so — so *uncomfortable*, Maud, at the idea of having seen him before, that I hardly wonder at the vehemence of his denial. There was plainly something disagreeable; but you see as respects him it is a total mistake. My boy was always a truth-telling fellow — you may rely implicitly on what he says. You were *not* at those places?'

'I wish I may —— ,' began the ingenuous youth, with increased vehemence.

‘There, there — that will do; your honour and word as a gentleman — and *that* you are, though a poor one — will quite satisfy your cousin Maud. Am I right, my dear? I do assure you, as a gentleman, I never knew him to say the thing that was not.’

So Mr. Dudley Ruthyn began, not to curse, but to swear, in the prescribed form, that he had never seen me before, or the places I had named, ‘since I was weaned, by — — ‘

‘That’s enough — now shake hands, if you won’t kiss, like cousins,’ interrupted my uncle.

And very uncomfortably I did lend him my hand to shake.

‘You’ll want some supper, Dudley, so Maud and I will excuse your going. Goodnight, my dear boy,’ and he smiled and waved him from the room.

‘That’s as fine a young fellow, I think, as any English father can boast for his son — true, brave, and kind, and quite an Apollo. Did you observe how finely proportioned he is, and what exquisite features the fellow has? He’s rustic and rough, as you see; but a year or two in the militia — I’ve a promise of a commission for him — he’s too old for the line — will form and polish him. He wants nothing but manner; and I protest when he has had a little drilling of that kind, I do believe he’ll be as pretty a fellow as you’d find in England.’

I listened with amazement. I could discover nothing but what was disagreeable in the horrid bumpkin, and thought such an instance of the blindness of parental partiality was hardly credible.

I looked down, dreading another direct appeal to my judgment; and Uncle Silas, I suppose, referred those downcast looks to maiden modesty, for he forbore to task mine by any new interrogatory.

Dudley Ruthyn’s cool and resolute denial of ever having seen me or the places I had named, and the inflexible serenity of his countenance while doing so, did very much shake my confidence in my own identification of him. I could not be *quite* certain that the person I had seen at Church Scarsdale was the very same whom I afterwards saw at Knowl. And now, in this particular instance, after the lapse of a still longer period, could I be perfectly certain that my memory, deceived by some accidental points of resemblance, had not duped me, and wronged my cousin, Dudley Ruthyn?

I suppose my uncle had expected from me some signs of acquiesence in his splendid estimate of his cub, and was nettled at my silence. After a short interval he said —

‘I’ve seen something of the world in my day, and I can say without a misgiving of partiality, that Dudley is the material of a perfect English gentleman. I am not blind, of course — the training must be supplied; a year or two of good models, active self-criticism, and good society. I simply say that the *material* is there.’

Here was another interval of silence.

‘And now tell me, child, what these recollections of Church — Church — *what*?’

‘Church Scarsdale,’ I replied.

‘Yes, thank you — Church Scarsdale and Knowl — are?’

So I related my stories as well as I could.

‘Well, dear Maud, the adventure of Church Scarsdale is hardly so terrific as I expected,’ said Uncle Silas with a cold little laugh; ‘and I don’t see, if he had really been the hero of it, why he should shrink from avowing it. I know I should not. And I really can’t say that your pic-nic party in the grounds of Knowl has frightened me much more. A lady waiting in the carriage, and two or three tipsy young men. Her presence seems to me a guarantee that no mischief was meant; but champagne is the soul of frolic, and a row with the gamekeepers a natural consequence. It happened to me once — forty years ago, when I was a wild young buck — one of the worst rows I ever was in.’

And Uncle Silas poured some eau-de-cologne over the corner of his handkerchief, and touched his temples with it.

‘If my boy had been there, I do assure you — and I know him — he would say so at once. I fancy he would rather *boast* of it. I never knew him utter an untruth. When you know him a little you’ll say so.’

With these words Uncle Silas leaned back exhausted, and languidly poured some of his favourite eau-de-cologne over the palms of his hands, nodded a farewell, and, in a whisper, wished me goodnight.

‘Dudley’s come,’ whispered Milly, taking me under the arm as I entered the lobby. ‘But I don’t care: he never gives me nout; and he gets money from Governor, as much as he likes, and I never a sixpence. It’s a shame!’

So there was no great love between the only son and only daughter of the younger line of the Ruthyns.

I was curious to learn all that Milly could tell me of this new inmate of Bartram-Haugh; and Milly was communicative without having a great deal to relate, and what I heard from her tended to confirm my own disagreeable impressions about him. She was afraid of him. He was a 'woundy ugly customer in a wax, she could tell me.' He was the only one 'she ever knowed as had pluck to jaw the Governor.' But he was 'afeard on the Governor, too.'

His visits to Bartram-Haugh, I heard, were desultory; and this, to my relief, would probably not outlast a week or a fortnight. 'He *was* such a fashionable cove:' he was always 'a gadding about, mostly to Liverpool and Birmingham, and sometimes to Lunnun, itself.' He was 'keeping company one time with Beauty, Governor thought, and he was awfully afraid he'd a married her; but that was all bosh and nonsense; and Beauty would have none of his chaff and wheedling, for she liked Tom Brice;' and Milly thought that Dudley never 'cared a crack of a whip for her.' He used to go to the Windmill to have 'a smoke with Pegtop;' and he was a member of the Feltram Club, that met at the 'Plume o' Feathers.' He was 'a rare good shot,' she heard; and 'he was before the justices for poaching, but they could make nothing of it.' And the Governor said 'it was all through spite of him — for they hate us for being better blood than they.' And 'all but the squires and those upstart folk loves Dudley, he is so handsome and gay — though he be a bit cross at home.' And, 'Governor says, he'll be a Parliament man yet, spite o' them all.'

Next morning, when our breakfast was nearly ended, Dudley tapped at the window with the end of his clay pipe — a 'churchwarden' Milly called it — just such a long curved pipe as Joe Willet is made to hold between his lips in those charming illustrations of 'Barnaby Rudge' — which we all know so well — and lifting his 'wideawake' with a burlesque salutation, which, I suppose, would have charmed the 'Plume of Feathers,' he dropped, kicked and caught his 'wideawake,' with an agility and gravity, as he replaced it, so inexpressibly humorous, that Milly went off in a loud fit of laughter, with the ejaculation —

'Did you ever?'

It was odd how repulsively my confidence in my original identification always revived on unexpectedly seeing Dudley after an interval.

I could perceive that this piece of comic by-play was meant to make a suitable impression on me. I received it, however, with a killing gravity; and after a word or two to Milly, he lounged away, having first broken his pipe, bit by bit, into pieces, which he balanced in turn on his nose and on his chin, from which features he jerked them into his mouth, with a precision which, along with his excellent pantomime of eating them, highly excited Milly's mirth and admiration.

CHAPTER XLI

MY COUSIN DUDLEY

Greatly to my satisfaction, this engaging person did not appear again that day. But next day Milly told me that my uncle had taken him to task for the neglect with which he was treating us.

‘He did pitch into him, sharp and short, and not a word from him, only sulky like; and I so frightened, I durst not look up almost; and they said a lot I could not make head or tail of; and Governor ordered me out o’ the room, and glad I was to go; and so they had it out between them.’

Milly could throw no light whatsoever upon the adventures at Church Scarsdale and Knowl; and I was left still in doubt, which sometimes oscillated one way and sometimes another. But, on the whole, I could not shake off the misgivings which constantly recurred and pointed very obstinately to Dudley as the hero of those odious scenes.

Oddly enough, though, I now felt far less confident upon the point than I did at first sight. I had begun to distrust my memory, and to suspect my fancy; but of this there could be no question, that between the person so unpleasantly linked in my remembrance with those scenes, and Dudley Ruthyn, a striking, though possibly only a general resemblance did exist.

Milly was certainly right as to the gist of Uncle Silas’s injunction, for we saw more of Dudley henceforward.

He was shy; he was impudent; he was awkward; he was conceited; — altogether a most intolerable bumpkin. Though he sometimes flushed and stammered, and never for a moment was at his ease in my presence, yet, to my inexpressible disgust, there was a self-complacency in his manner, and a kind of triumph in his leer, which very plainly told me how satisfied he was as to the nature of the impression he was making upon me.

I would have given worlds to tell him how odious I thought him. Probably, however, he would not have believed me. Perhaps he fancied that ‘ladies’ affected airs of indifference and repulsion to cover their real feelings. I never looked at or spoke to him when I could avoid either, and then it was as briefly as I could. To do him justice, however, he seemed to have no liking for our society, and certainly never seemed altogether comfortable in it.

I find it hard to write quite impartially even of Dudley Ruthyn's personal appearance; but, with an effort, I confess that his features were good, and his figure not amiss, though a little fattish. He had light whiskers, light hair, and a pink complexion, and very good blue eyes. So far my uncle was right; and if he had been perfectly gentlemanlike, he really might have passed for a handsome man in the judgment of some critics.

But there was that odious mixture of *mauvaise honte* and impudence, a clumsiness, a slyness, and a consciousness in his bearing and countenance, not distinctly boorish, but *low*, which turned his good looks into an ugliness more intolerable than that of feature; and a corresponding vulgarity pervading his dress, his demeanour, and his very walk, marred whatever good points his figure possessed. If you take all this into account, with the ominous and startling misgivings constantly recurring, you will understand the mixed feelings of anger and disgust with which I received the admiration he favoured me with.

Gradually he grew less constrained in my presence, and certainly his manners were not improved by his growing ease and confidence.

He came in while Milly and I were at luncheon, jumped up, with a 'right-about face' performed in the air, sitting on the sideboard, whence grinning slyly and kicking his heels, he leered at us.

'Will you have something, Dudley?' asked Milly.

'No, lass; but I'll look at ye, and maybe drink a drop for company.'

And with these words, he took a sportsman's flask from his pocket; and helping himself to a large glass and a decanter, he compounded a glass of strong brandy-and-water, as he talked, and refreshed himself with it from time to time.

'Curate's up wi' the Governor,' he said, with a grin. 'I wanted a word wi' him; but I s'pose I'll hardly git in this hour or more; they're a praying and disputing, and a Bible-chopping, as usual. Ha, ha! But 'twon't hold much longer, old Wyat says, now that Uncle Austin's dead; there's nout to be made o' praying and that work no longer, and it don't pay of itself.'

'O fie! For shame, you sinner!' laughed Milly. 'He wasn't in a church these five years, he says, and then only to meet a young lady. Now, isn't he a sinner, Maud — isn't he?'

Dudley, grinning, looked with a languishing slyness at me, biting the edge of his wideawake, which he held over his breast.

Dudley Ruthyn probably thought there was a manly and desperate sort of fascination in the impiety he professed.

‘I wonder, Milly,’ said I, ‘at your laughing. How *can* you laugh?’

‘You’d have me cry, would ye?’ answered Milly.

‘I certainly would not have you laugh,’ I replied.

‘I know I wish *some* one ‘ud cry for me, and I know who,’ said Dudley, in what he meant for a very engaging way, and he looked at me as if he thought I must feel flattered by his caring to have my tears.

Instead of crying, however, I leaned back in my chair, and began quietly to turn over the pages of Walter Scott’s poems, which I and Milly were then reading in the evenings.

The tone in which this odious young man spoke of his father, his coarse mention of mine, and his low boasting of his irreligion, disgusted me more than ever with him.

‘They parsons be slow coaches — awful slow. I’ll have a good bit to wait, I s’pose. I should be three miles away and more by this time — drat it!’ He was eyeing the legging of the foot which he held up while he spoke, as if calculating how far away that limb should have carried him by this time. ‘Why can’t folk do their Bible and prayers o’ Sundays, and get it off their stomachs? I say, Milly lass, will ye see if Governor be done wi’ the Curate? Do. I’m a losing the whole day along o’ him.’

Milly jumped up, accustomed to obey her brother, and as she passed me, whispered, with a wink —

‘*Money*.’

And away she went. Dudley whistled a tune, and swung his foot like a pendulum, as he followed her with his side-glance.

‘I say, it is a hard case, Miss, a lad o’ spirit should be kept so tight. I haven’t a shilling but what comes through his fingers; an’ drat the tizzy he’ll gi’ me till he knows the reason why.’

‘Perhaps,’ I said, ‘my uncle thinks you should earn some for yourself.’

‘I’d like to know how a fella’s to earn money now-a-days. You wouldn’t have a gentleman to keep a shop, I fancy. But I’ll ha’ a fistful jist now, and no thanks to he. Them executors, you know, owes me a deal o’ money. Very honest chaps, of course; but they’re cursed slow about paying, I know.’

I made no remark upon this elegant allusion to the executors of my dear father's will.

'An' I tell ye, Maud, when I git the tin, I know who I'll buy a farin' for. I do, lass.'

The odious creature drawled this with a sidelong leer, which, I suppose, he fancied quite irresistible.

I am one of those unfortunate persons who always blushed when I most wished to look indifferent; and now, to my inexpressible chagrin, with its accustomed perversity, I felt the blush mount to my cheeks, and glow even on my forehead.

I saw that he perceived this most disconcerting indication of a sentiment the very idea of which was so detestable, that, equally enraged with myself and with him, I did not know how to exhibit my contempt and indignation.

Mistaking the cause of my discomposure, Mr. Dudley Ruthyn laughed softly, with an insufferable suavity.

'And there's some'at, lass, I must have in return. Honour thy father, you know; you would not ha' me disobey the Governor? No, you wouldn't — would ye?'

I darted at him a look which I hoped would have quelled his impertinence; but I blushed most provokingly — more violently than ever.

'I'd back them eyes again' the county, I would,' he exclaimed, with a condescending enthusiasm. 'You're awful pretty, you are, Maud. I don't know what came over me t'other night when Governor told me to buss ye; but dang it, ye shan't deny me now, and I'll have a kiss, lass, in spite o' thy blushes.'

He jumped from his elevated seat on the sideboard, and came swaggering toward me, with an odious grin, and his arms extended. I started to my feet, absolutely transported with fury.

'Drat me, if she baint a-going to fight me!' he chuckled humorously.

'Come, Maud, you would not be ill-natured, sure? Arter all, it's only our duty. Governor bid us kiss, didn't he?'

'Don't — *don't*, sir. Stand back, or I'll call the servants.'

And as it was I began to scream for Milly.

‘There’s how it is wi’ all they cattle! You never knows your own mind — ye don’t,’ he said, surlily. ‘You make such a row about a bit o’ play. Drop it, will you? There’s no one a-harming you — is there? *I*’m not, for sartain.’

And, with an angry chuckle, he turned on his heel, and left the room.

I think I was perfectly right to resist, with all the vehemence of which I was capable, this attempt to assume an intimacy which, notwithstanding my uncle’s opinion to the contrary, seemed to me like an outrage.

Milly found me alone — not frightened, but very angry. I had quite made up my mind to complain to my uncle, but the Curate was still with him; and, by the time he had gone, I was cooler. My awe of my uncle had returned. I fancied that he would treat the whole affair as a mere playful piece of gallantry. So, with the comfortable conviction that he had had a lesson, and would think twice before repeating his impertinence, I resolved, with Milly’s approbation, to leave matters as they were.

Dudley, greatly to my comfort, was huffed with me, and hardly appeared, and was sulky and silent when he did. I lived then in the pleasant anticipation of his departure, which, Milly thought, would be very soon.

My uncle had his Bible and his consolations; but it cannot have been pleasant to this old *roué*, converted though he was — this refined man of fashion — to see his son grow up an outcast, and a Tony Lumpkin; for whatever he may have thought of his natural gifts, he must have known how mere a boor he was.

I try to recall my then impressions of my uncle’s character. Grizzly and chaotic the image rises — silver head, feet of clay. I as yet knew little of him.

I began to perceive that he was what Mary Quince used to call ‘dreadful particular’ — I suppose a little selfish and impatient. He used to get cases of turtle from Liverpool. He drank claret and hock for his health, and ate woodcock and other light and salutary dainties for the same reason; and was petulant and vicious about the cooking of these, and the flavour and clearness of his coffee.

His conversation was easy, polished, and, with a sentimental glazing, cold; but across this artificial talk, with its French rhymes, racy phrases, and fluent eloquence, like a streak of angry light, would, at intervals, suddenly gleam some dismal thought of religion. I never could quite satisfy myself whether they were affectations or genuine, like intermittent thrills of pain.

The light of his large eyes was very peculiar. I can liken it to nothing but the sheen of intense moonlight on burnished metal. But that cannot express it. It glared white and suddenly — almost fatuous. I thought of Moore’s lines whenever I looked on it: —

Oh, ye dead! oh, ye dead! whom we know by the light you give
From your cold gleaming eyes, though you move like men who live.

I never saw in any other eye the least glimmer of the same baleful effulgence. His fits, too — his hoverings between life and death — between intellect and insanity — a dubious, marsh-fire existence, horrible to look on!

I was puzzled even to comprehend his feelings toward his children. Sometimes it seemed to me that he was ready to lay down his soul for them; at others, he looked and spoke almost as if he hated them. He talked as if the image of death was always before him, yet he took a terrible interest in life, while seemingly dozing away the dregs of his days in sight of his coffin.

Oh! Uncle Silas, tremendous figure in the past, burning always in memory in the same awful lights; the fixed white face of scorn and anguish! It seems as if the Woman of Endor had led me to that chamber and showed me a spectre.

Dudley had not left Bartram-Haugh when a little note reached me from Lady Knollys. It said —

‘DEAREST MAUD, — I have written by this post to Silas, beseeching a loan of you and my Cousin Milly. I see no reason your uncle can possibly have for refusing me; and, therefore, I count confidently on seeing you both at Elverston tomorrow, to stay for at least a week. I have hardly a creature to meet you. I have been disappointed in several visitors; but another time we shall have a gayer house. Tell Milly — with my love — that I will not forgive her if she fails to accompany you.

‘Believe me ever your affectionate cousin,

‘MONICA KNOLLYS.’

Milly and I were both afraid that Uncle Silas would refuse his consent, although we could not divine any sound reason for his doing so, and there were many in favour of his improving the opportunity of allowing poor Milly to see some persons of her own sex above the rank of menials.

At about twelve o’clock my uncle sent for us, and, to our great delight, announced his consent, and wished us a very happy excursion.

CHAPTER XLII

ELVERSTON AND ITS PEOPLE

So Milly and I drove through the gabled high street of Feltram next day. We saw my gracious cousin smoking with a man like a groom, at the door of the 'Plume of Feathers.' I drew myself back as we passed, and Milly popped her head out of the window.

'I'm blessed,' said she, laughing, 'if he hadn't his thumb to his nose, and winding up his little finger, the way he does with old Wyat — L'Amour, ye know; and you may be sure he said something funny, for Jim Jolliter was laughin', with his pipe in his hand.'

'I wish I had not seen him, Milly. I feel as if it were an ill omen. He always looks so cross; and I dare say he wished us some ill,' I said.

'No, no, you don't know Dudley: if he were angry, he'd say nothing that's funny; no, he's not vexed, only shamming vexed.'

The scenery through which we passed was very pretty. The road brought us through a narrow and wooded glen. Such studies of ivied rocks and twisted roots! A little stream tinkled lonely through the hollow. Poor Milly! In her odd way she made herself companionable. I have sometimes fancied an enjoyment of natural scenery not so much a faculty as an acquirement. It is so exquisite in the instructed, so strangely absent in uneducated humanity. But certainly with Milly it was inborn and hearty; and so she could enter into my raptures, and requite them.

Then over one of those beautiful Derbyshire moors we drove, and so into a wide wooded hollow, where was our first view of Cousin Monica's pretty gabled house, beautified with that indescribable air of shelter and comfort which belongs to an old English residence, with old timber grouped round it, and something in its aspect of the quaint old times and bygone merrymakings, saying sadly, but genially, 'Come in: I bid you welcome. For two hundred years, or more, have I been the home of this beloved old family, whose generations I have seen in the cradle and in the coffin, and whose mirth and sorrows and hospitalities I remember. All their friends, like you, were welcome; and you, like them, will here enjoy the warm illusions that cheat the sad conditions of mortality; and like them you will go your way, and others succeed you, till at last I, too, shall yield to the general law of decay, and disappear.'

By this time poor Milly had grown very nervous; a state which she described in such very odd phraseology as threw me, in spite of myself — for I affected an impressive gravity in lecturing her upon her language — into a hearty fit of laughter.

I must mention, however, that in certain important points Milly was very essentially reformed. Her dress, though not very fashionable, was no longer absurd. And I had drilled her into speaking and laughing quietly; and for the rest I trusted to the indulgence which is always, I think, more honestly and easily obtained from well-bred than from underbred people.

Cousin Monica was out when we arrived; but we found that she had arranged a double-bedded room for me and Milly, greatly to our content; and good Mary Quince was placed in the dressing-room beside us.

We had only just commenced our toilet when our hostess entered, as usual in high spirits, welcomed and kissed us both again and again. She was, indeed, in extraordinary delight, for she had anticipated some stratagem or evasion to prevent our visit; and in her usual way she spoke her mind as frankly about Uncle Silas to poor Milly as she used to do of my dear father to me.

'I did not think he would let you come without a battle; and you know if he chose to be obstinate it would not have been easy to get you out of the enchanted ground, for so it seems to be with that awful old wizard in the midst of it. I mean, Silas, your papa, my dear. Honestly, is not he very like Michael Scott?'

'I never saw him,' answered poor Milly. 'At least, that I'm aware of,' she added, perceiving us smile. 'But I do think he's a thought like old Michael Dobbs, that sells the ferrets, maybe you mean him?'

'Why, you told me, Maud, that you and Milly were reading Walter Scott's poems. Well, no matter. Michael Scott, my dear, was a dead wizard, with ever so much silvery hair, lying in his grave for ever so many years, with just life enough to scowl when they took his book; and you'll find him in the "Lay of the Last Minstrel," exactly like your papa, my dear. And my people tell me that your brother Dudley has been seen drinking and smoking about Feltram this week. How long does he remain at home? Not very long, eh? And, Maud, dear, he has not been making love to you? Well, I see; of course he has. And *apropos* of lovemaking, I hope that impudent creature, Charles Oakley, has not been teasing you with notes or verses.'

'Indeed but he has though,' interposed Miss Milly; a good deal to my chagrin, for I saw no particular reason for placing his verses in Cousin Monica's hands. So I confessed the two little copies of verses, with the qualification, however, that I did not know from whom they came.

'Well now, dear Maud, have not I told you fifty times over to have nothing to say to him? I've found out, my dear, he plays, and he is very much in debt. I've made a vow to pay no more for him. I've been such a fool, you have no notion; and I'm speaking, you know, against myself; it would be such a relief if he were to find a wife to support him; and he has been, I'm told, very sweet upon a rich old maid — a button-maker's sister, in Manchester.'

This arrow was well shot.

'But don't be frightened: you are richer as well as younger; and, no doubt, will have your chance first, my dear; and in the meantime, I dare say, those verses, like Falstaff's *billet-doux,* you know, are doing double duty.'

I laughed, but the button-maker was a secret trouble to me; and I would have given I know not what that Captain Oakley were one of the company, that I might treat him with the refined contempt which his deserts and my dignity demanded.

Cousin Monica busied herself about Milly's toilet, and was a very useful lady's maid, chatting in her own way all the time; and, at last, tapping Milly under the chin with her finger, she said, very complacently —

'I think I have succeeded, Miss Milly; look in the glass. She really is a very pretty creature.'

And Milly blushed, and looked with a shy gratification, which made her still prettier, on the mirror.

Milly indeed was very pretty. She looked much taller now that her dresses were made of the usual length. A little plump she was, beautifully fair, with such azure eyes, and rich hair.

'The more you laugh the better, Milly, for you've got very pretty teeth — very pretty; and if you were my daughter, or if your father would become president of a college of magicians, and give you up to me, I venture to say I would place you very well; and even as it is we must try, my dear.’

So down to the drawingroom we went; and Cousin Monica entered, leading us both by the hands.

By this time the curtains were closed, and the drawingroom dependent on the pleasant glow of the fire, and the slight provisional illumination usual before dinner.

‘Here are my two cousins,’ began Lady Knollys: ‘this is Miss Ruthyn, of Knowl, whom I take the liberty of calling Maud; and this is Miss Millicent Ruthyn, Silas’s daughter, you know, whom I venture to call Milly; and they are very pretty, as you will see, when we get a little more light, and they know it very well themselves.’

And as she spoke, a frank-eyed, gentle, prettyish lady, not so tall as I, but with a very kind face, rose up from a book of prints, and, smiling, took our hands.

She was by no means young, as I then counted youth — past thirty, I suppose — and with an air that was very quiet, and friendly, and engaging. She had never been a mere fashionable woman plainly; but she had the ease and polish of the best society, and seemed to take a kindly interest both in Milly and me; and Cousin Monica called her Mary, and sometimes Polly. That was all I knew of her for the present.

So very pleasantly the time passed by till the dressing-bell rang, and we ran away to our room.

‘Did I say anything very bad?’ asked poor Milly, standing exactly before me, so soon as our door was shut.

‘Nothing, Milly; you are doing admirably.’

‘And I do look a great fool, don’t I?’ she demanded.

‘You look extremely pretty, Milly; and not a bit like a fool.’

‘I watch everything. I think I’ll learn it at last; but it comes a little troublesome at first; and they do talk different from what I used — you were quite right there.’

When we returned to the drawingroom, we found the party already assembled, and chatting, evidently with spirit.

The village doctor, whose name I forget, a small man, grey, with shrewd grey eyes, sharp and mulberry nose, whose conflagration extended to his rugged cheeks, and touched his chin and forehead, was conversing, no doubt agreeably, with Mary, as Cousin Monica called her guest.

Over my shoulder, Milly whispered —

‘Mr. Carysbroke.’

And Milly was quite right: that gentleman chatting with Lady Knollys, his elbow resting on the chimneypiece, was, indeed, our acquaintance of the Windmill Wood. He instantly recognised us, and met us with his pleased and intelligent smile.

‘I was just trying to describe to Lady Knollys the charming scenery of the Windmill Wood, among which I was so fortunate as to make your acquaintance, Miss Ruthyn. Even in this beautiful county I know of nothing prettier.’

Then he sketched it, as it were, with a few light but glowing words.

‘What a sweet scene!’ said Cousin Monica: ‘only think of her never bringing me through it. She reserves it, I fancy, for her romantic adventures; and you, I know, are very benevolent, Ilbury, and all that kind of thing; but I am not quite certain that you would have walked along that narrow parapet, over a river, to visit a sick old woman, if you had not happened to see two very pretty demoiselles on the other side.’

‘What an ill-natured speech! I must either forfeit my character for disinterested benevolence, so justly admired, or disavow a motive that does such infinite credit to my taste,’ exclaimed Mr. Carysbroke. ‘I think a charitable person would have said that a philanthropist, in prosecuting his virtuous, but perilous vocation, was unexpectedly *rewarded* by a vision of angels.’

‘And with these angels loitered away the time which ought to have been devoted to good Mother Hubbard, in her fit of lumbago, and returned without having set eyes on that afflicted Christian, to amaze his worthy sister with poetic babblings about wood-nymphs and such pagan impieties,’ rejoined Lady Knollys.

‘Well, be just,’ he replied, laughing; ‘did not I go next day and see the patient?’

‘Yes; next day you went by the same route — in quest of the dryads, I am afraid — and were rewarded by the spectacle of Mother Hubbard.’

‘Will nobody help a humane man in difficulties?’ Mr. Carysbroke appealed.

‘I do believe,’ said the lady whom as yet I knew only as Mary, ‘that every word that Monica says is perfectly true.’

‘And if it be so, am I not all the more in need of help? Truth is simply the most dangerous kind of defamation, and I really think I’m most cruelly persecuted.’

At this moment dinner was announced, and a meek and dapper little clergyman, with smooth pink cheeks, and tresses parted down the middle, whom I had not seen before, emerged from shadow.

This little man was assigned to Milly, Mr. Carysbroke to me, and I know not how the remaining ladies divided the doctor between them.

That dinner, the first at Elverston, I remember as a very pleasant repast. Everyone talked — it was impossible that conversation should flag where Lady Knollys was; and Mr. Carysbroke was very agreeable and amusing. At the other side of the table, the little pink curate, I was happy to see, was prattling away, with a modest fluency, in an undertone to Milly, who was following my instructions most conscientiously, and speaking in so low a key that I could hardly hear at the opposite side one word she was saying.

That night Cousin Monica paid us a visit, as we sat chatting by the fire in our room; and I told her —

‘I have just been telling Milly what an impression she has made. The pretty little clergyman — *il en est épris* — he has evidently quite lost his heart to her. I dare say he’ll preach next Sunday on some of King Solomon’s wise sayings about the irresistible strength of women.’

‘Yes,’ said Lady Knollys,’ or maybe on the sensible text, “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour,” and so forth. At all events, I may say, Milly, whoso findeth a husband such as he, findeth a tolerably good thing. He is an exemplary little creature, second son of Sir Harry Biddlepen, with a little independent income of his own, beside his church revenues of ninety pounds a year; and I don’t think a more harmless and docile little husband could be found anywhere; and I think, Miss Maud, *you* seemed a good deal interested, too.’

I laughed and blushed, I suppose; and Cousin Monica, skipping after her wont to quite another matter, said in her odd frank way —

‘And how has Silas been? — not cross, I hope, or very odd. There was a rumour that your brother, Dudley, had gone a soldiering to India, Milly, or somewhere; but that was all a story, for he has turned up, just as usual. And what does he mean to do with himself? He has got some money now — your poor father's will, Maud. Surely he doesn't mean to go on lounging and smoking away his life among poachers, and prizefighters, and worse people. He ought to go to Australia, like Thomas Swain, who, they say, is making a fortune — a great fortune — and coming home again. That's what your brother Dudley should do, if he has either sense or spirit; but I suppose he won't — too long abandoned to idleness and low company — and he'll not have a shilling left in a year or two. Does he know, I wonder, that his father has served a notice or something on Dr. Bryerly, telling him to pay sixteen hundred pounds of poor Austin's legacy to *him*, and saying that he has paid debts of the young man, and holds his acknowledgments to that amount? He won't have a guinea in a year if he stays here. I'd give fifty pounds he was in Van Diemen's Land — not that I care for the cub, Milly, any more than you do; but I really don't see any honest business he has in England.'

Milly gaped in a total puzzle as Lady Knollys rattled on.

'You know, Milly, you must not be talking about this when you go home to Bartram, because Silas would prevent your coming to me any more if he thought I spoke so freely; but I can't help it: so you must promise to be more discreet than I. And I am told that all kinds of claims are about to be pressed against him, now that he is thought to have got some money; and he has been cutting down oak and selling the bark, Doctor Bryerly has been told, in that Windmill Wood; and he has kilns there for burning charcoal, and got a man from Lancashire who understands it — Hawk, or something like that.'

'Ay, Hawkes — Dickon Hawkes; that's Pegtop, you know, Maud,' said Milly.

'Well, I dare say; but a man of very bad character, Dr. Bryerly says; and he has written to Mr. Danvers about it — for that is what they call waste, cutting down and selling the timber, and the oakbark, and burning the willows, and other trees that are turned into charcoal. It is all *waste*, and Dr. Bryerly is about to put a stop to it.'

'Has he got your carriage for you, Maud, and your horses?' asked Cousin Monica, suddenly.

'They have not come yet, but in a few weeks, Dudley says, positively— '

Cousin Monica laughed a little and shook her head.

‘Yes, Maud, the carriage and horses will always be coming in a few weeks, till the time is over; and meanwhile the old travelling chariot and posthorses will do very well;’ and she laughed a little again.

‘That’s why the stile’s pulled away at the paling, I suppose; and Beauty — Meg Hawkes, that is — is put there to stop us going through; for I often spied the smoke beyond the windmill,’ observed Milly.

Cousin Monica listened with interest, and nodded silently.

I was very much shocked. It seemed to me quite incredible. I think Lady Knollys read my amazement and my exalted estimate of the heinousness of the procedure in my face, for she said —

‘You know we can’t quite condemn Silas till we have heard what he has to say. He may have done it in ignorance; or, it is just possible, he may have the right.’

‘Quite true. He may have the right to cut down trees at Bartram-Haugh. At all events, I am sure he thinks he has,’ I echoed.

The fact was, that I would not avow to myself a suspicion of Uncle Silas. Any falsehood there opened an abyss beneath my feet into which I dared not look.

‘And now, dear girls, goodnight. You must be tired. We breakfast at a quarter past nine — not too early for you, I know.’

And so saying, she kissed us, smiling, and was gone.

I was so unpleasantly occupied, for some time after her departure, with the knaveries said to be practised among the dense cover of the Windmill Wood, that I did not immediately recollect that we had omitted to ask her any particulars about her guests.

‘Who can Mary be?’ asked Milly.

‘Cousin Monica says she’s engaged to be married, and I think I heard the Doctor call her *Lady* Mary, and I intended asking her ever so much about her; but what she told us about cutting down the trees, and all that, quite put it out of my head. We shall have time enough tomorrow, however, to ask questions. I like her very much, I know.’

‘And I think,’ said Milly, ‘it is to Mr. Carysbroke she’s to be married.’

‘Do you?’ said I, remembering that he had sat beside her for more than a quarter of an hour after tea in very close and lowtoned conversation; ‘and have you any particular reason?' I asked.

'Well, I heard her once or twice call him "dear," and she called him his Christian name, just like Lady Knollys did — Ilbury, I think — and I saw him gi' her a sly kiss as she was going upstairs.'

I laughed.

'Well, Milly,' I said, 'I remarked something myself, I thought, like confidential relations; but if you really saw them kiss on the staircase, the question is pretty well settled.'

'Ay, lass.'

'You're not to say *lass*.'

'Well, *Maud, then*. I did see them with the corner of my eye, and my back turned, when they did not think I could spy anything, as plain as I see you now.'

I laughed again; but I felt an odd pang — something of mortification — something of regret; but I smiled very gaily, as I stood before the glass, unmaking my toilet preparatory to bed.

'Maud — Maud — fickle Maud! — What, Captain Oakley already superseded! and Mr. Carysbroke — oh! humiliation — engaged.' So I smiled on, very much vexed; and being afraid lest I had listened with too apparent an interest to this impostor, I sang a verse of a gay little chanson, and tried to think of Captain Oakley, who somehow had become rather silly.

CHAPTER XLIII

NEWS AT BARTRAM GATE

Milly and I, thanks to our early Bartram hours, were first down next morning; and so soon as Cousin Monica appeared we attacked her.

‘So Lady Mary is the *fiancée* of Mr. Carysbroke,’ said I, very cleverly; ‘and I think it was very wicked of you to try and involve me in a flirtation with him yesterday.’

‘And who told you that, pray?’ asked Lady Knollys, with a pleasant little laugh.

‘Milly and I discovered it, simple as we stand here,’ I answered.

‘But you did not flirt with Mr. Carysbroke, Maud, did you?’ she asked.

‘No, certainly not; but that was not your doing, wicked woman, but my discretion. And now that we know your secret, you must tell us all about her, and all about him; and in the first place, what is her name — Lady Mary what?’ I demanded.

‘Who would have thought you so cunning? Two country misses — two little nuns from the cloisters of Bartram! Well, I suppose I must answer. It is vain trying to hide anything from you; but how on earth did you find it out?’

‘We’ll tell you that presently, but you shall first tell us who she is,’ I persisted.

‘Well, that I will, of course, without compulsion. She is Lady Mary Carysbroke,’ said Lady Knollys.

‘A relation of Mr. Carysbroke’s,’ I asserted.

‘Yes, a relation; but who told you he was Mr. Carysbroke?’ asked Cousin Monica.

‘Milly told me, when we saw him in the Windmill Wood.’

‘And who told you, Milly?’

‘It was L’Amour,’ answered Milly, with her blue eyes very wide open.

‘What does the child mean? L’Amour! You don’t mean *love*?’ exclaimed Lady Knollys, puzzled in her turn.

‘I mean old Wyat; *she* told me and the Governor.’

‘You’re *not* to say that,’ I interposed.

‘You mean your father?’ suggested Lady Knollys.

‘Well, yes; father told her, and so I knew him.’

‘What could he mean?’ exclaimed Lady Knollys, laughing, as it were, in soliloquy; ‘and I did not mention his name, I recollect now. He recognised you, and you him, when you came into the room yesterday; and now you must tell me how you discovered that he and Lady Mary were to be married.’

So Milly restated her evidence, and Lady Knollys laughed unaccountably heartily; and she said —

‘They *will* be *so* confounded! but they deserve it; and, remember, *I* did not say so.’

‘Oh! we acquit you.’

‘All I say is, such a deceitful, dangerous pair of girls — all things considered — I never heard of before,’ exclaimed Lady Knollys. ‘There’s no such thing as conspiring in your presence.’

‘Good morning. I hope you slept well.’ She was addressing the lady and gentleman who were just entering the room from the conservatory. ‘You’ll hardly sleep so well tonight, when you have learned what eyes are upon you. Here are two very pretty detectives who have found out your secret, and entirely by your imprudence and their own cleverness have discovered that you are a pair of betrothed lovers, about to ratify your vows at the hymeneal altar. I assure you I did not tell of you; you betrayed yourselves. If you will talk in that confidential way on sofas, and call one another stealthily by your Christian names, and actually kiss at the foot of the stairs, while a clever detective is scaling them, apparently with her back toward you, you must only take the consequences, and be known prematurely as the hero and heroine of the forthcoming paragraph in the “Morning Post.”’

Milly and I were horribly confounded, but Cousin Monica was resolved to place us all upon the least formal terms possible, and I believe she had set about it in the right way.

‘And now, girls, I am going to make a counter-discovery, which, I fear, a little conflicts with yours. This Mr. Carysbroke is Lord Ilbury, brother of this Lady Mary; and it is all my fault for not having done my honours better; but you see what clever matchmaking little creatures they are.’

‘You can’t think how flattered I am at being made the subject of a theory, even a mistaken one, by Miss Ruthyn.’

And so, after our modest fit was over, Milly and I were very merry, like the rest, and we all grew a great deal more intimate that morning.

I think altogether those were the pleasantest and happiest days of my life: gay, intelligent, and kindly society at home; charming excursions — sometimes riding — sometimes by carriage — to distant points of beauty in the county. Evenings varied with music, reading, and spirited conversation. Now and then a visitor for a day or two, and constantly some neighbour from the town, or its dependencies, dropt in. Of these I but remember tall old Miss Wintletop, most entertaining of rustic old maids, with her nice lace and thick satin, and her small, kindly round face — pretty, I dare say, in other days, and now frosty, but kindly — who told us such delightful old stories of the county in her father’s and grandfather’s time; who knew the lineage of every family in it, and could recount all its duels and elopements; give us illustrative snatches from old election squibs, and lines from epitaphs, and tell exactly where all the old-world highway robberies had been committed: how it fared with the chief delinquents after the assizes; and, above all, where, and of what sort, the goblins and elves of the county had made themselves seen, from the phantom postboy, who every third night crossed Windale Moor, by the old coach-road, to the fat old ghost, in mulberry velvet, who showed his great face, crutch, and ruffles, by moonlight, at the bow window of the old court-house that was taken down in 1803.

You cannot imagine what agreeable evenings we passed in this society, or how rapidly my good Cousin Milly improved in it. I remember well the intense suspense in which she and I awaited the answer from Bartram-Haugh to kind Cousin Monica’s application for an extension of our leave of absence.

It came, and with it a note from Uncle Silas, which was curious, and, therefore, is printed here: —

‘MY DEAR LADY KNOLLYS, — To your kind letter I say yes (that is, for another week, not a fortnight), with all my heart. I am glad to hear that my starlings chatter so pleasantly; at all events the refrain is not that of

Sterne’s. They can get out; and do get out; and shall get out as much as they please. I am no gaoler, and shut up nobody but myself. I have always thought that young people have too little liberty. My principle has been to make little free men and women of them from the first. In morals, altogether — in intellect, more than we allow — *self*-education is that which abides; and *it* only begins where constraint ends. Such is my theory. My practice is consistent. Let them remain for a week longer, as you say. The horses shall be at Elverston on Tuesday, the 7th. I shall be more than usually sad and solitary till their return; so pray, I selfishly entreat, do not extend their absence. You will smile, remembering how little my health will allow me to see of them, even when at home; but as Chaulieu so prettily says — I stupidly forget the words, but the sentiment is this— “although concealed by a sylvan wall of leaves, impenetrable — (he is pursuing his favourite nymphs through the alleys and intricacies of a rustic labyrinth) — yet, your songs, your prattle, and your laughter, faint and far away, inspire my fancy; and, through my ears, I see your unseen smiles, your blushes, your floating tresses, and your ivory feet; and so, though sad, am happy; though alone, in company;” — and such is my case.

‘One only request, and I have done. Pray remind them of a promise made to me. The Book of Life — the fountain of life — it must be drunk of, night and morning, or their spiritual life expires.

‘And now, Heaven bless and keep you, my dear cousin; and with all assurances of affection to my beloved niece and my child, believe me ever yours affectionately.

‘SILAS RUTHYN.’

Said Cousin Monica, with a waggish smile —

‘And so, girls, you have Chaulieu and the evangelists; the French rhymester in his alley, and Silas in the valley of the shadow of death; perfect liberty, and a peremptory order to return in a week; — all illustrating one another. Poor Silas! old as he is, I don’t think his religion fits him.’

I really rather liked his letter. I was struggling hard to think well of him, and Cousin Monica knew it; and I really think if I had not been by, she would often have been less severe on him.

As we were all sitting pleasantly about the breakfast table a day or two after, the sun shining on the pleasant wintry landscape, Cousin Monica suddenly exclaimed —

‘I quite forgot to tell you that Charles Oakley has written to say he is coming on Wednesday. I really don’t want him. Poor Charlie! I wonder how they manage those doctors’ certificates. I know nothing ails him, and he’d be much better with his regiment.’

Wednesday! — how odd. Exactly the day after my departure. I tried to look perfectly unconcerned. Lady Knollys had addressed herself more to Lady Mary and Milly than to me, and nobody in particular was looking at me. Notwithstanding, with my usual perversity, I felt myself blushing with a brilliancy that may have been very becoming, but which was so intolerably provoking that I would have risen and left the room but that matters would have been so infinitely worse. I could have boxed my odious ears. I could almost have jumped from the window.

I felt that Lord Ilbury saw it. I saw Lady Mary’s eyes for a moment resting gravely on my tell-tale — my lying cheeks — for I really had begun to think much less celestially of Captain Oakley. I was angry with Cousin Monica, who, knowing my blushing infirmity, had mentioned her nephew so suddenly while I was strapped by etiquette in my chair, with my face to the window, and two pair of most disconcerting eyes, at least, opposite. I was angry with myself — generally angry — refused more tea rather dryly, and was laconic to Lord Ilbury, all which, of course, was very cross and foolish; and afterwards, from my bedroom window, I saw Cousin Monica and Lady Mary among the flowers, under the drawingroom window, talking, as I instinctively knew, of that little incident. I was standing at the glass.

‘My odious, stupid, *perjured* face’ I whispered, furiously, at the same time stamping on the floor, and giving myself quite a smart slap on the cheek. ‘I *can’t* go down — I’m ready to cry — I’ve a mind to return to Bartram to-day; I am *always* blushing; and I wish that impudent Captain Oakley was at the bottom of the sea.’

I was, perhaps, thinking more of Lord Ilbury than I was aware; and I am sure if Captain Oakley had arrived that day, I should have treated him with most unjustifiable rudeness.

Notwithstanding this unfortunate blush, the remainder of our visit passed very happily for me. No one who has not experienced it can have an idea how intimate a small party, such as ours, will grow in a short time in a country house.

Of course, a young lady of a well-regulated mind cannot possibly care a pin about any one of the opposite sex until she is well assured that he is beginning, at least, to like her better than all the world beside; but I could not deny to myself that I was rather anxious to know more about Lord Ilbury than I actually did know.

There was a 'Peerage,' in its bright scarlet and gold uniform, corpulent and tempting, upon the little marble table in the drawingroom. I had many opportunities of consulting it, but I never could find courage to do so.

For an inexperienced person it would have been a matter of several minutes, and during those minutes what awful risk of surprise and detection. One day, all being quiet, I did venture, and actually, with a beating heart, got so far as to find out the letter 'Il,' when I heard a step outside the door, which opened a little bit, and I heard Lady Knollys, luckily arrested at the entrance, talk some sentences outside, her hand still upon the door-handle. I shut the book, as Mrs. Bluebeard might the door of the chamber of horrors at the sound of her husband's step, and skipped to a remote part of the room, where Cousin Knollys found me in a mysterious state of agitation.

On any other subject I would have questioned Cousin Monica unhesitatingly; upon this, somehow, I was dumb. I distrusted myself, and dreaded my odious habit of blushing, and knew that I should look so horribly guilty, and become so agitated and odd, that she would have reasonably concluded that I had quite lost my heart to him.

After the lesson I had received, and my narrow escape of detection in the very act, you may be sure I never trusted myself in the vicinity of that fat and cruel 'Peerage,' which possessed the secret, but would not disclose without compromising me.

In this state of tantalizing darkness and conjecture I should have departed, had not Cousin Monica quite spontaneously relieved me.

The night before our departure she sat with us in our room, chatting a little farewell gossip.

'And what do you think of Ilbury?' she asked.

‘I think him clever and accomplished, and amusing; but he sometimes appears to me very melancholy — that is, for a few minutes together — and then, I fancy, with an effort, reengages in our conversation.’

‘Yes, poor Ilbury! He lost his brother only about five months since, and is only beginning to recover his spirits a little. They were very much attached, and people thought that he would have succeeded to the title, had he lived, because Ilbury is *difficile* — or a philosopher — or a *Saint Kevin*; and, in fact, has begun to be treated as a premature old bachelor.’

‘What a charming person his sister, Lady Mary, is. She has made me promise to write to her,’ I said, I suppose — such hypocrites are we — to prove to Cousin Knollys that I did not care particularly to hear anything more about him.

‘Yes, and so devoted to him. He came down here, and took The Grange, for change of scene and solitude — of all things the worst for a man in grief — a morbid whim, as he is beginning to find out; for he is very glad to stay here, and confesses that he is much better since he came. His letters are still addressed to him as Mr. Carysbroke; for he fancied if his rank were known, that the county people would have been calling upon him, and so he would have found himself soon involved in a tiresome round of dinners, and must have gone somewhere else. You saw him, Milly, at Bartram, before Maud came?’

Yes, she had, when he called there to see her father.

‘He thought, as he had accepted the trusteeship, that he could hardly, residing so near, omit to visit Silas. He was very much struck and interested by him, and he has a better opinion of him — you are not angry, Milly — than some ill-natured people I could name; and he says that the cutting down of the trees will turn out to have been a mere slip. But these slips don’t occur with clever men in other things; and some persons have a way of always making them in their own favour. And, to talk of other things, I suspect that you and Milly will probably see Ilbury at Bartram; for I think he likes you very much.’

You; did she mean *both*, or only me?

So our pleasant visit was over. Milly’s good little curate had been much thrown in her way by our deep and dangerous cousin Monica. He was most laudably steady; and his flirtation advanced upon the field of theology, where, happily, Milly's little reading had been concentrated. A mild and earnest interest in poor, pretty Milly's orthodoxy was the leading feature of his case; and I was highly amused at her references to me, when we had retired at night, upon the points which she had disputed with him, and her anxious reports of their lowtoned conferences, carried on upon a sequestered ottoman, where he patted and stroked his crossed leg, as he smiled tenderly and shook his head at her questionable doctrine. Milly's reverence for her instructor, and his admiration, grew daily; and he was known among us as Milly's confessor.

He took luncheon with us on the day of our departure, and with an adroit privacy, which in a layman would have been sly, presented her, in right of his holy calling, with a little book, the binding of which was mediaeval and costly, and whose letter-press dealt in a way which he commended, with some points on which she was not satisfactory; and she found on the fly-leaf this little inscription:— 'Presented to Miss Millicent Ruthyn by an earnest well-wisher, 1st December 1844.' A text, very neatly penned, followed this; and the 'presentation' was made unctiously indeed, but with a blush, as well as the accustomed smile, and with eyes that were lowered.

The early crimson sun of December had gone down behind the hills before we took our seats in the carriage.

Lord Ilbury leaned with his elbow on the carriage window, looking in, and he said to me —

'I really don't know what we shall do, Miss Ruthyn; we shall all feel so lonely. For myself, I think I shall run away to Grange.'

This appeared to me as nearly perfect eloquence as human lips could utter.

His hand still rested on the window, and the Rev. Sprigge Biddlepen was standing with a saddened smirk on the door steps, when the whip smacked, the horses scrambled into motion, and away we rolled down the avenue, leaving behind us the pleasantest house and hostess in the world, and trotting fleetly into darkness towards Bartram-Haugh.

We were both rather silent. Milly had her book in her lap, and I saw her every now and then try to read her 'earnest well-wisher's' little inscription, but there was not light to read by.

When we reached the great gate of Bartram-Haugh it was dark. Old Crowl, who kept the gate, I heard enjoining the postilion to make no avoidable noise at the hall-door, for the odd but startling reason that he believed my uncle 'would be dead by this time.'

Very much shocked and frightened, we stopped the carriage, and questioned the tremulous old porter.

Uncle Silas, it seemed, had been 'silly-ish' all yesterday, and 'could not be woke this morning,' and 'the doctor had been here twice, being now in the house.'

'Is he better?' I asked, tremblingly.

'Not as I'm aweer on, Miss; he lay at God's mercy two hours agone; 'appen he's in heaven be this time.'

'Drive on — drive fast,' I said to the driver. 'Don't be frightened, Milly; please Heaven we shall find all going well.'

After some delay, during which my heart sank, and I quite gave up Uncle Silas, the aged little servant-man opened the door, and trotted shakily down the steps to the carriage side.

Uncle Silas had been at death's door for hours; the question of life had trembled in the scale; but now the doctor said 'he might do.'

'Where was the doctor?'

'In master's room; he blooded him three hours agone.'

I don't think that Milly was so frightened as I. My heart beat, and I was trembling so that I could hardly get upstairs.

CHAPTER XLIV

A FRIEND ARISES

At the top of the great staircase I was glad to see the friendly face of Mary Quince, who stood, candle in hand, greeting us with many little courtesies, and a very haggard and pallid smile.

‘Very welcome, Miss, hoping you are very well.’

‘All well, and you are well, Mary? and oh! tell us quickly how is Uncle Silas?’

‘We thought he was gone, Miss, this morning, but doing fairly now; doctor says in a trance like. I was helping old Wyat most of the day, and was there when doctor blooded him, an’ he spoke at last; but he must be awful weak, he took a deal o’ blood from his arm, Miss; I held the basin.’

‘And he’s better — decidedly better?’ I asked.

‘Well, he’s better, doctor says; he talked some, and doctor says if he goes off asleep again, and begins a-snoring like he did before, we’re to loose the bandage, and let him bleed till he comes to his self again; which, it seems to me and Wyat, is the same thing a’most as saying he’s to be killed offhand, for I don’t believe he has a drop to spare, as you’ll say likewise, Miss, if you’ll please look in the basin.’

This was not an invitation with which I cared to comply. I thought I was going to faint. I sat on the stairs and sipped a little water, and Quince sprinkled a little in my face, and my strength returned.

Milly must have felt her father’s danger more than I, for she was affectionate, and loved him from habit and relation, although he was not kind to her. But I was more nervous and more impetuous, and my feelings both stimulated and overpowered me more easily. The moment I was able to stand I said — thinking of nothing but the one idea —

‘We must see him — *come*, Milly.’

I entered his sitting-room; a common ‘dip’ candle hanging like the tower of Pisa all to one side, with a dim, long wick, in a greasy candlestick, profaned the table of the fastidious invalid. The light was little better than darkness, and I crossed the room swiftly, still transfixed by the one idea of seeing my uncle.

His bedroom door beside the fireplace stood partly open, and I looked in.

Old Wyat, a white, high-cauled ghost, was pottering in her slippers in the shadow at the far side of the bed. The doctor, a stout little bald man, with a paunch and a big bunch of seals, stood with his back to the fireplace, which corresponded with that in the next room, eyeing his patient through the curtains of the bed with a listless sort of importance.

The head of the large four-poster rested against the opposite wall. Its foot was presented toward the fireplace; but the curtains at the side, which alone I could see from my position, were closed.

The little doctor knew me, and thinking me, I suppose, a person of consequence, removed his hands from behind him, suffering the skirts of his coat to fall forward, and with great celerity and gravity made me a low but important bow; then choosing more particularly to make my acquaintance he further advanced, and with another reverence he introduced himself as Doctor Jolks, in a murmured diapason. He bowed me back again into my uncle's study, and the light of old Wyat's dreadful candle.

Doctor Jolks was suave and pompous. I longed for a fussy practitioner who would have got over the ground in half the time.

Coma, madam; coma. Miss Ruthyn, your uncle, I may tell you, has been in a very critical state; highly so. Coma of the most obstinate type. He would have sunk — he must have gone, in fact, had I not resorted to a very extreme remedy, and bled him freely, which happily told precisely as we could have wished. A wonderful constitution — a marvellous constitution — prodigious nervous fibre; the greatest pity in the world he won't give himself fair play. His habits, you know, are quite, I may say, destructive. We do our best — we do all we can, but if the patient won't cooperate it can't possibly end satisfactorily.'

And Jolks accompanied this with an awful shrug. 'Is there *anything*? Do you think change of air? What an awful complaint it is,' I exclaimed.

He smiled, mysteriously looking down, and shook his head undertakerlike.

'Why, we can hardly call it a *complaint*, Miss Ruthyn. I look upon it he has been poisoned — he has had, you understand me,' he pursued, observing my startled look, 'an overdose of opium; you know he takes opium habitually; he takes it in laudanum, he takes it in water, and, most dangerous of all, he takes it solid, in lozenges. I've known people take it moderately. I've known people take it to excess, *but* they all were particular as to *measure,* and *that* is exactly the point I've tried to impress upon him. The habit, of course, you understand is formed, there's no uprooting that; but he won't *measure* — he goes by the eye and by sensation, which I need not tell you, Miss Ruthyn, is going by *chance;* and opium, as no doubt you are aware, is strictly a poison; a poison, no doubt, which habit will enable you to partake of, I may say, in considerable quantities, without fatal consequences, but still a poison; and to exhibit a poison *so*, is, I need scarcely tell you, to trifle with death. He has been so threatened, and for a time he changes his haphazard mode of dealing with it, and then returns; he may escape — of course, that is possible — but he may any day overdo the thing. I don't think the present crisis will result seriously. I am very glad, independently of the honour of making your acquaintance, Miss Ruthyn, that you and your cousin have returned; for, however zealous, I fear the servants are deficient in intelligence; and as in the event of a recurrence of the symptoms — which, however, is not probable — I would beg to inform you of their nature, and how exactly best to deal with them.'

So upon these points he delivered us a pompous little lecture, and begged that either Milly or I would remain in the room with the patient until his return at two or three o'clock in the morning; a reappearance of the coma 'might be very bad indeed.'

Of course Milly and I did as we were directed. We sat by the fire, scarcely daring to whisper. Uncle Silas, about whom a new and dreadful suspicion began to haunt me, lay still and motionless as if he were actually dead.

'Had he attempted to poison himself?'

If he believed his position to be as desperate as Lady Knollys had described it, was this, after all, improbable? There were strange wild theories, I had been told, mixed up in his religion.

Sometimes, at an hour's interval, a sign of life would come — a moan from that tall sheeted figure in the bed — a moan and a pattering of the lips.

Was it prayer — *what* was it? who could guess what thoughts were passing behind that white-fillited forehead?

I had peeped at him: a white cloth steeped in vinegar and water was folded round his head; his great eyes were closed, so were his marble lips; his figure straight, thin, and long, dressed in a white dressing-gown, looked like a corpse 'laid out' in the bed; his gaunt bandaged arm lay outside the sheet that covered his body.

With this awful image of death we kept our vigil, until poor Milly grew so sleepy that old Wyat proposed that she should take her place and watch with me.

Little as I liked the crone with the high-cauled cap, she would, at all events, keep awake, which Milly could not. And so at one o'clock this new arrangement began.

'Mr. Dudley Ruthyn is not at home?' I whispered to old Wyat.

'He went away wi' himself yesternight, to Cloperton, Miss, to see the wrestling; it was to come off this morning.'

'Was he sent for?'

'Not he.'

'And why not?'

'He would na' leave the sport for this, I'm thinking,' and the old woman grinned uglily.

'When is he to return?'

'When he wants money.'

So we grew silent, and again I thought of suicide, and of the unhappy old man, who just then whispered a sentence or two to himself with a sigh.

For the next hour he had been quite silent, and old Wyat informed me that she must go down for candles. Ours were already burnt down to the sockets.

'There's a candle in the next room,' I suggested, hating the idea of being left alone with the patient.

'Hoot! Miss. I *dare* na' set a candle but wax in his presence,' whispered the old woman, scornfully.

'I think if we were to stir the fire, and put on a little more coal, we should have a great deal of light.'

‘He’ll ha’ the candles,’ said Dame Wyat, doggedly; and she tottered from the chamber, muttering to herself; and I heard her take her candle from the next room and depart, shutting the outer door after her.

Here was I then alone, but for this unearthly companion, whom I feared inexpressibly, at two o’clock, in the vast old house of Bartram.

I stirred the fire. It was low, and would not blaze. I stood up, and, with my hand on the mantelpiece, endeavoured to think of cheerful things. But it was a struggle against wind and tide — vain; and so I drifted away into haunted regions.

Uncle Silas was perfectly still. I would not suffer myself to think of the number of dark rooms and passages which now separated me from the other living tenants of the house. I awaited with a false composure the return of old Wyat.

Over the mantelpiece was a looking-glass. At another time this might have helped to entertain my solitary moments, but now I did not like to venture a peep. A small thick Bible lay on the chimneypiece, and leaning its back against the mirror, I began to read in it with a mind as attentively directed as I could. While so engaged in turning over the leaves, I lighted upon two or three odd-looking papers, which had been folded into it. One was a broad printed thing, with names and dates written into blank spaces, and was about the size of a quarter of a yard of very broad ribbon. The others were mere scraps, with ‘Dudley Ruthyn’ penned in my cousin’s vulgar round-hand at the foot. While I folded and replaced these, I really don’t know what caused me to fancy that something was moving behind me, as I stood with my back toward the bed. I do not recollect any sound whatever; but instinctively I glanced into the mirror, and my eyes were instantly fixed by what I saw.

The figure of Uncle Silas rose up, and dressed in a long white morning gown, slid over the end of the bed, and with two or three swift noiseless steps, stood behind me, with a deathlike scowl and a simper. Preternaturally tall and thin, he stood for a moment almost touching me, with the white bandage pinned across his forehead, his bandaged arm stiffly by his side, and diving over my shoulder, with his long thin hand he snatched the Bible, and whispered over my head— ‘The serpent beguiled her and she did eat;’ and after a momentary pause, he glided to the farthest window, and appeared to look out upon the midnight prospect.

It was cold, but he did not seem to feel it. With the same inflexible scowl and smile, he continued to look out for several minutes, and then with a great sigh, he sat down on the side of his bed, his face immovably turned towards me, with the same painful look.

It seemed to me an hour before old Wyat came back; and never was lover made happier at sight of his mistress than I to behold that withered crone.

You may be sure I did not prolong my watch. There was now plainly no risk of my uncle's relapsing into lethargy. I had a long hysterical fit of weeping when I got into my room, with honest Mary Quince by my side.

Whenever I closed my eyes, the face of Uncle Silas was before me, as I had seen it reflected in the glass. The sorceries of Bartram were enveloping me once more.

Next morning the doctor said he was quite out of danger, but very weak. Milly and I saw him; and again in our afternoon walk we saw the doctor marching under the trees in the direction of the Windmill Wood.

'Going down to see that poor girl there?' he said, when he had made his salutation, prodding with his levelled stick in the direction. 'Hawke, or Hawkes, I think.'

'Beauty's sick, Maud,' exclaimed Milly.

'*Hawkes*. She's upon my dispensary list. Yes,' said the doctor, looking into his little notebook— 'Hawkes.'

'And what is her complaint?'

'Rheumatic fever.'

'Not infectious?'

'Not the least — no more, as we say, Miss Ruthyn, than a broken leg,' and he laughed obligingly.

So soon as the doctor had departed, Milly and I agreed to follow to Hawkes' cottage and enquire more particularly how she was. To say truth, I am afraid it was rather for the sake of giving our walk a purpose and a point of termination, than for any very charitable interest we might have felt in the patient.

Over the inequalities of the upland slope, clumped with trees, we reached the gabled cottage, with its neglected little farmyard. A rheumatic old woman was the only attendant; and, having turned her ear in an attitude of attention, which induced us in gradually exalted keys to enquire how Meg was, she informed us in very loud tones that she had long lost her hearing and was perfectly deaf. And added considerately —

'When the man comes in, 'appen he'll tell ye what ye want.'

Through the door of a small room at the further end of that in which we were, we could see a portion of the narrow apartment of the patient, and hear her moans and the doctor's voice.

'We'll see him, Milly, when he comes out. Let us wait here.'

So we stood upon the door-stone awaiting him. The sounds of suffering had moved my compassion and interested us for the sick girl.

'Blest if here isn't Pegtop,' said Milly.

And the weather-stained red coat, the swarthy forbidding face and sooty locks of old Hawkes loomed in sight, as he stumped, steadying himself with his stick, over the uneven pavement of the yard. He touched his hat gruffly to me, but did not seem half to like our being where we were, for he looked surlily, and scratched his head under his wideawake.

'Your daughter is very ill, I'm afraid,' said I.

'Ay — she'll be costin' me a handful, like her mother did,' said Pegtop.

'I hope her room is comfortable, poor thing.'

'Ay, that's it; she be comfortable enough, I warrant — more nor I. It be all Meg, and nout o' Dickon.'

'When did her illness commence?' I asked.

'Day the mare wor shod — *Saturday*. I talked a bit wi' the workus folk, but they won't gi'e nout — dang 'em — an' how be *I* to do't? It be all'ays hard bread wi' Silas, an' a deal harder now she' ta'en them pains. I won't stan' it much longer. Gammon! If she keeps on that way I'll just cut. See how the workus fellahs 'ill like *that*!'

'The Doctor gives his services for nothing,' I said.

'An' *does* nothin', bless him! ha, ha. No more nor that old deaf gammon there that costs me three tizzies a week, and haint worth a h'porth — no more nor Meg there, that's making all she can o' them pains. They be all a foolin' o' me, an' thinks I don't know't. Hey? *we*'ll see.'

All this time he was cutting a bit of tobacco into shreds on the window-stone.

'A workin' man be same as a hoss; if he baint cared, he can't work— 'tisn't in him:' and with these words, having by this time stuffed his pipe with tobacco, he poked the deaf lady, who was pattering about with her back toward him, rather viciously with the point of his stick, and signed for a light.

‘It baint in him, you can’t get it out o’ ‘im, no more nor ye’ll draw smoke out o’ this,’ and he raised his pipe an inch or two, with his thumb on the bowl, ‘without backy and fire. ’Tisn’t in it.’

‘Maybe I can be of some use?’ I said, thinking.

‘Maybe,’ he rejoined.

By this time he received from the old deaf abigail a flaming roll of brown paper, and, touching his hat to me, he withdrew, lighting his pipe and sending up little white puffs, like the salute of a departing ship.

So he did not care to hear how his daughter was, and had only come here to light his pipe!

Just then the Doctor emerged.

‘We have been waiting to hear how your poor patient is to-day?’ I said.

‘Very ill, indeed, and utterly neglected, I fear. If she were equal to it — but she’s not — I think she ought to be removed to the hospital immediately.’

‘That poor old woman is quite deaf, and the man is so surly and selfish! Could you recommend a nurse who would stay here till she’s better? I will pay her with pleasure, and anything you think might be good for the poor girl.’

So this was settled on the spot. Doctor Jolks was kind, like most men of his calling, and undertook to send the nurse from Feltram with a few comforts for the patient; and he called Dickon to the yard-gate, and I suppose told him of the arrangement; and Milly and I went to the poor girl’s door and asked, ‘May we come in?’

There was no answer. So, with the conventional construction of silence, we entered. Her looks showed how ill she was. We adjusted her bedclothes, and darkened the room, and did what we could for her — noting, beside, what her comfort chiefly required. She did not answer any questions. She did not thank us. I should almost have fancied that she had not perceived our presence, had I not observed her dark, sunken eyes once or twice turned up towards my face, with a dismal look of wonder and enquiry.

The girl was very ill, and we went every day to see her. Sometimes she would answer our questions — sometimes not. Thoughtful, observant, surly, she seemed; and as people like to be thanked, I sometimes wonder that we continued to throw our bread upon these ungrateful waters. Milly was specially impatient under this treatment, and protested against it, and finally refused to accompany me into poor Beauty's bedroom.

'I think, my good Meg,' said I one day, as I stood by her bed — she was now recovering with the sure reascent of youth— 'that you ought to thank Miss Milly.'

'I'll *not* thank her,' said Beauty, doggedly.

'Very well, Meg; I only thought I'd ask you, for I think you ought.'

As I spoke, she very gently took just the tip of my finger, which hung close to her coverlet, in her fingers, and drew it beneath, and before I was aware, burying her head in the clothes, she suddenly clasped my hand in both hers to her lips, and kissed it passionately, again and again, sobbing. I felt her tears.

I tried to withdraw my hand, but she held it with an angry pull, continuing to weep and kiss it.

'Do you wish to say anything, my poor Meg?' I asked.

'Nout, Miss,' she sobbed gently; and she continued to kiss my hand and weep. But suddenly she said, 'I won't thank Milly, for it's a' *you*; it baint her, she hadn't the thought — no, no, it's a' you, Miss. I cried hearty in the dark last night, thinkin' o' the apples, and the way I knocked them awa' wi' a pur o' my foot, the day father rapped me ower the head wi' his stick; it was kind o' you and very bad o' me. I wish you'd beat me, Miss; ye're better to me than father or mother — better to me than a'; an' I wish I could die for you, Miss, for I'm not fit to look at you.'

I was surprised. I began to cry. I could have hugged poor Meg.

I did not know her history. I have never learned it since. She used to talk with the most utter self-abasement before me. It was no religious feeling — it was a kind of expression of her love and worship of me — all the more strange that she was naturally very proud. There was nothing she would not have borne from me except the slightest suspicion of her entire devotion, or that she could in the most trifling way wrong or deceive me.

I am not young now. I have had my sorrows, and with them all that wealth, virtually unlimited, can command; and through the retrospect a few bright and pure lights quiver along my life's dark stream — dark, but for them; and these are shed, not by the splendour of a splendid fortune, but by two or three of the simplest and kindest remembrances, such as the poorest and homeliest life may count up, and beside which, in the quiet hours of memory, all artificial triumphs pale, and disappear, for they are never quenched by time or distance, being founded on the affections, and so far heavenly.

CHAPTER XLV

A CHAPTER-FULL OF LOVERS

We had about this time a pleasant and quite unexpected visit from Lord Ilbury. He had come to pay his respects, understanding that my uncle Silas was sufficiently recovered to see visitors. ‘And I think I’ll run upstairs first, and see him, if he admits me, and then I have ever so long a message from my sister, Mary, for you and Miss Millicent; but I had better dispose of my business first — don’t you think so? — and I shall return in a few minutes.’

And as he spoke our tremulous old butler returned to say that Uncle Silas would be happy to see him. So he departed; and you can’t think how pleasant our homely sitting-room looked with his coat and stick in it — guarantees of his return.

‘Do you think, Milly, he is going to speak about the timber, you know, that Cousin Knollys spoke of? I do hope not.’

‘So do I,’ said Milly. ‘I wish he’d stayed a bit longer with us first, for if he does, father will sure to turn him out of doors, and we’ll see no more of him.’

‘Exactly, my dear Milly; and he’s so pleasant and goodnatured.’

‘And he likes you awful well, he does.’

‘I’m sure he likes us both equally, Milly; he talked a great deal to you at Elverston, and used to ask you so often to sing those two pretty Lancashire ballads,’ I said; ‘but you know when you were at your controversies and religious exercises in the window, with that pillar of the church, the Rev. Spriggs Biddlepen— ‘

‘Get awa’ wi’ your nonsense, Maud; how could I help answering when he dodged me up and down my Testament and catechism? — an I ‘most hate him, I tell you, and Cousin Knollys, you’re such fools, I do. And whatever you say, the lord likes you uncommon, and well you know it, ye hussy.’

‘I know no such thing; and you don’t think it, *you* hussy, and I really don’t care who likes me or who doesn’t, except my relations; and I make the lord a present to you, if you’ll have him.’

In this strain were we talking when he reentered the room, a little sooner than we had expected to see him.

Milly, who, you are to recollect, was only in process of reformation, and still retained something of the Derbyshire dairymaid, gave me a little clandestine pinch on the arm just as he made his appearance.

‘I just refused a present from her,’ said odious Milly, in answer to his enquiring look, ‘because I knew she could not spare it.’

The effect of all this was that I blushed one of my overpowering blushes. People told me they became me very much; I hope so, for the misfortune was frequent; and I think nature owed me that compensation.

‘It places you both in a most becoming light,’ said Lord Ilbury, quite innocently. ‘I really don’t know which most to admire — the generosity of the offer or of the refusal.’

‘Well, it *was* kind, if you but knew. I’m ‘most tempted to tell him,’ said Milly.

I checked her with a really angry look, and said, ‘Perhaps you have not observed it; but I really think, for a sensible person, my cousin Milly here talks more nonsense than any twenty other girls.’

‘A twenty-girl power! That’s an immense compliment. I’ve the greatest respect for nonsense, I owe it so much; and I really think if nonsense were banished, the earth would grow insupportable.’

‘Thank you, Lord Ilbury,’ said Milly, who had grown quite easy in his company during our long visit at Elverston; ‘and I tell you, Miss Maud, if you grow saucy, I’ll accept your present, and what will you say then?’

‘I really don’t know; but just now I want to ask Lord Ilbury how he thinks my uncle looks; neither I nor Milly have seen him since his illness.’

‘Very much weaker, I think; but he may be gaining strength. Still, as my business was not quite pleasant, I thought it better to postpone it, and if you think it would be right, I’ll write to Doctor Bryerly to ask him to postpone the discussion for a little time.’

I at once assented, and thanked him; indeed, if I had had my way, the subject should never have been mentioned, I felt so hardhearted and rapacious; but Lord Ilbury explained that the trustees were constrained by the provisions of the will, and that I really had no power to release them; and I hoped that Uncle Silas also understood all this.

‘And now,’ said he, ‘we’ve returned to Grange, my sister and I, and it is nearer than Elverston, so that we are really neighbours; and Mary wants Lady Knollys to fix a time she owes us a visit, you know — and you really must come at the same time; it will be so very pleasant, the same party exactly meeting in a new scene; and we have not half explored our neighbourhood; and I’ve got down all those Spanish engravings I told you of, and the Venetian missals, and all the rest. I think I remember very accurately the things you were most interested by, and they’re all there; and really you must promise, you and Miss Millicent Ruthyn. And I forgot to mention — you know you complained that you were ill supplied with books, so Mary thought you would allow her to share her supply — they are the new books, you know — and when you have read yours, you and she can exchange.’

What girl was ever quite frank about her likings? I don’t think I was more of a cheat than others; but I never could tell of myself. It is quite true that this duplicity and reserve seldom deceives. Our hypocrisies are forced upon some of our sex by the acuteness and vigilance of all in this field of enquiry; but if we are sly, we are also lynx-eyed, capital detectives, most ingenious in fitting together the bits and dovetails of a cumulative case; and in those affairs of love and liking, have a terrible exploratory instinct, and so, for the most part, when detected we are found out not only to be in love, but to be rogues moreover.

Lady Mary was very kind; but had Lady Mary of her own mere motion taken all this trouble? Was there no more energetic influence at the bottom of that welcome chest of books, which arrived only half an hour later? The circulating library of those days was not the epidemic and ubiquitous influence to which it has grown; and there were many places where it could not find you out.

Altogether that evening Bartram had acquired a peculiar beauty — a bright and mellow glow, in which even its gate-posts and wheelbarrow were interesting, and next day came a little cloud — Dudley appeared.

‘You may be sure he wants money,’ said Milly. ‘He and father had words this morning.’

He took a chair at our luncheon, found fault with everything in his own laconic dialect, ate a good deal notwithstanding, and was sulky, and with

Milly snappish. To me, on the contrary, when Milly went into the hall, he was mild and whimpering, and disposed to be confidential.

‘There’s the Governor says he hasn’t a bob! Danged if I know how an old fellah in his bedroom muddles away money at that rate. I don’t suppose he thinks I can git along without tin, and he knows them trustees won’t gi’e me a tizzy till they get what they calls an opinion — dang ‘em! Bryerly says he doubts it must all go under settlement. They’ll settle me nicely if they do; and Governor knows all about it, and won’t gi’e me a danged brass farthin’, an’ me wi’ bills to pay, an’ lawyers — dang ‘em — writing letters. He knows summat o’ that hisself, does Governor; and he might ha’ consideration a bit for his own flesh and blood, *I* say. But he never does nout for none but hisself. I’ll sell his books and his jewels next fit he takes — that’s how I’ll fit him.’

This amiable young man, glowering, with his elbows on the table and his fingers in his great whiskers, followed his homily, where clergymen append the blessing, with a muttered variety of very different matter.

‘Now, Maud,’ said he, pathetically, leaning back suddenly in his chair, with all his conscious beauty and misfortunes in his face, ‘is not it hard lines?’

I thought the appeal was going to shape itself into an application for money; but it did not.

‘I never know’d a reel beauty — first-chop, of course, I mean — that wasn’t kind along of it, and I’m a fellah as can’t git along without sympathy — that’s why I say it — an’ isn’t it hard lines? Now, *say* it’s hard lines — *haint* it, Maud?’

I did not know exactly what hard lines meant, but I said —

‘I suppose it is very disagreeable.’

And with this concession, not caring to hear any more in the same vein, I rose, intending to take my departure.

‘No, that’s jest it. I knew ye’d say it, Maud. Ye’re a kind lass — ye be— ’tis in yer pretty face. I like ye awful, I do — there’s not a handsomer lass in Liverpool nor Lunnon itself — *no* where.’

He had seized my hand, and trying to place his arm about my waist, essayed that salute which I had so narrowly escaped on my first introduction.

‘*Don’t*, sir,’ I exclaimed in high indignation, escaping at the same moment from his grasp.

‘No offence, lass; no harm, Maud; you must not be so shy — we’re cousins, you know — an’ I wouldn’t hurt ye, Maud, no more nor I’d knock my head off. I wouldn’t.’

I did not wait to hear the rest of his tender protestations, but, without showing how nervous I was, I glided out of the room quietly, making an orderly retreat, the more meritorious as I heard him call after me persuasively— ‘Come back, Maud. What are ye afeard on, lass? Come back, I say — do now; there’s a good wench.’

As Milly and I were taking our walk that day, in the direction of the Windmill Wood, to which, in consequence perhaps of some secret order, we had now free access, we saw Beauty, for the first time since her illness, in the little yard, throwing grain to the poultry.

‘How do you find yourself to-day, Meg? I am *very* glad to see you able to be about again; but I hope it is not too soon.’

We were standing at the barred gate of the little enclosure, and quite close to Meg, who, however, did not choose to raise her head, but, continuing to shower her grain and potato-skins among her hens and chickens, said in a low tone —

‘Father baint in sight? Look jist round a bit and say if ye see him.’

But Dickon’s dusky red costume was nowhere visible.

So Meg looked up, pale and thin, and with her old grave, observant eyes, and she said quietly —

‘’Tisn’t that I’m not glad to see ye; but if father was to spy me talking friendly wi’ ye, now that I’m hearty, and you havin’ no more call to me, he’d be all’ays a watching and thinkin’ I was tellin’ o’ tales, and ‘appen he’d want me to worrit ye for money, Miss Maud; an’ ’tisn’t here he’d spend it, but in the Feltram pottusses, he would, and we want for nothin’ that’s good for us. But that’s how ‘twould be, an’ he’d all’ays be a jawing and a lickin’ of I; so don’t mind me, Miss Maud, and ‘appen I might do ye a good turn some day.’

A few days after this little interview with Meg, as Milly and I were walking briskly — for it was a clear frosty day — along the pleasant slopes of the sheepwalk, we were overtaken by Dudley Ruthyn. It was not a pleasant surprise. There was this mitigation, however: we were on foot, and he driving in a dog-cart along the track leading to the moor, with his dogs and gun. He brought his horse for a moment to a walk, and with a careless nod to me, removing his short pipe from his mouth, he said —

‘Governor’s callin’ for ye, Milly; and he told me to send you slick home to him if I saw you, and I think he’ll gi’e ye some money; but ye better take him while he’s in the humour, lass, or mayhap ye’ll go long without.’

And with those words, apparently intent on his game, he nodded again, and, pipe in mouth, drove at a quick trot over the slope of the hill, and disappeared.

So I agreed to await Milly’s return while she ran home, and rejoined me where I was. Away she ran, in high spirits, and I wandered listlessly about in search of some convenient spot to sit down upon, for I was a little tired.

She had not been gone five minutes, when I heard a step approaching, and looking round, saw the dog-cart close by, the horse browsing on the short grass, and Dudley Ruthyn within a few paces of me.

‘Ye see, Maud, I’ve bin thinkin’ why you’re so vexed wi’ me, an’ I thought I’d jest come back an’ ask ye what I may a’ done to anger ye so; there’s no sin in that, I think — is there?’

‘I’m not angry. I did not say so. I hope that’s enough,’ I said, startled; and, notwithstanding my speech, *very* angry, for I felt instinctively that Milly’s despatch homeward was a mere trick, and I the dupe of this coarse stratagem.

‘Well then, if ye baint angry, so much the better, Maud. I only want to know why you’re afeard o’ me. I never struck a man foul, much less hurt a girl, in my days; besides, Maud, I likes ye too well to hurt ye. Dang it, lass, you’re my cousin, ye know, and cousins is all’ays together and lovin’ like, an’ none says again’ it.’

‘I’ve nothing to explain — there *is* nothing to explain. I’ve been quite friendly,’ I said, hurriedly.

‘*Friendly!* Well, if there baint a cram! How can ye think it friendly, Maud, when ye won’t a’most shake hands wi’ me? It’s enough to make a fellah sware, or cry a’most. Why d’ye like aggravatin’ a poor devil? Now baint ye an ill-natured little puss, Maud, an’ I likin’ ye so well? You’re the prettiest lass in Derbyshire; there’s nothin’ I wouldn’t do for ye.’

And he backed his declaration with an oath.

‘Be so good, then, as to reenter your dog-cart and drive away,’ I replied, very much incensed.

‘Now, there it is again! Ye can’t speak me civil. Another fellah’d fly out, an’ maybe kiss ye for spite; but I baint that sort, I’m all for coaxin’ and kindness, an’ ye won’t let me. What *be* you drivin’ at, Maud?’

‘I think I’ve said very plainly, sir, that I wish to be alone. You’ve *nothing* to say, except utter nonsense, and I’ve heard quite enough. Once for all, I beg, sir, that you will be so good as to leave me.’

‘Well, now, look here, Maud; I’ll do anything you like — burn me if I don’t — if you’ll only jest be kind to me, like cousins should. What did I ever do to vex you? If you think I like any lass better than you — some fellah at Elverston’s bin talkin’, maybe — it’s nout but lies an’ nonsense. Not but there’s lots o’ wenches likes me well enough, though I be a plain lad, and speaks my mind straight out.’

‘I can’t see that you are so frank, sir, as you describe; you have just played a shabby trick to bring about this absurd and most disagreeable interview.’

‘And supposin’ I did send that fool, Milly, out o’ the way, to talk a bit wi’ you here, where’s the harm? Dang it, lass, ye mustn’t be too hard. Didn’t I say I’d do whatever ye wished?’

‘And you *won’t*,’ said I.

‘Ye mean to get along out o’ this? Well, now, I *will*. There! No use, of course, askin’ you to kiss and be friends, before I go, as cousins should. Well, don’t be riled, lass, I’m not askin’ it; only mind, I do like you awful, and ‘appen I’ll find ye in better humour another time. Goodbye, Maud; I’ll make ye like me at last.’

And with these words, to my comfort, he addressed himself to his horse and pipe, and was soon honestly on his way to the moor.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE RIVALS

All the time that Dudley chose to persecute me with his odious society, I continued to walk at a brisk pace toward home, so that I had nearly reached the house when Milly met me, with a note which had arrived for me by the post, in her hand.

‘Here, Milly, are more verses. He is a very persevering poet, whoever he is.’ So I broke the seal; but this time it was prose. And the first words were ‘Captain Oakley!’

I confess to an odd sensation as these remarkable words met my eye. It might possibly be a proposal. I did not wait to speculate, however, but read these sentences traced in the identical handwriting which had copied the lines with which I had been twice favoured.

‘Captain Oakley presents his compliments to Miss Ruthyn, and trusts she will excuse his venturing to ask whether, during his short stay in Feltram, he might be permitted to pay his respects at Bartram-Haugh. He has been making a short visit to his aunt, and could not find himself so near without at least attempting to renew an acquaintance which he has never ceased to cherish in memory. If Miss Ruthyn would be so very good as to favour him with ever so short a reply to the question he ventures most respectfully to ask, her decision would reach him at the Hall Hotel, Feltram.’

‘Well, he’s a roundabout fellah, anyhow. Couldn’t he come up and see you if he wanted to? They poeters, they do love writing long yarns — don’t they?’ And with this reflection, Milly took the note and read it through again.

‘It’s jolly polite anyhow, isn’t it Maud?’ said Milly, who had conned it over, and accepted it as a model composition.

I must have been, I think, naturally a rather shrewd girl; and considering how very little I had seen of the world — nothing in fact — I often wonder now at the sage conclusions at which I arrived.

Were I to answer this handsome and cunning fool according to his folly, in what position should I find myself? No doubt my reply would induce a rejoinder, and that compel another note from me, and that invite yet another from him; and however his might improve in warmth, they were sure not to abate. Was it his impertinent plan, with this show of respect and ceremony, to drag me into a clandestine correspondence? Inexperienced girl as I was, I fired at the idea of becoming his dupe, and fancying, perhaps, that there was more in merely answering his note than it would have amounted to, I said —

'That kind of thing may answer very well with button-makers, but ladies don't like it. What would your papa think of it if he found that I had been writing to him, and seeing him without his permission? If he wanted to see me he could have' — (I really did not know exactly what he could have done)— 'he could have timed his visit to Lady Knollys differently; at all events, he has no right to place me in an embarrassing situation, and I am certain Cousin Knollys would say so; and I think his note both shabby and impertinent.'

Decision was not with me an intellectual process. When quite cool I was the most undecided of mortals, but once my feelings were excited I was prompt and bold.

'I'll give the note to Uncle Silas,' I said, quickening my pace toward home; 'he'll know what to do.'

But Milly, who, I fancy, had no objection to the little romance which the young officer proposed, told me that she could not see her father, that he was ill, and not speaking to anyone.

'And arn't ye making a plaguy row about nothin'? I lay a guinea if ye had never set eyes on Lord Ilbury you'd a told him to come, and see ye, an' welcome.'

'Don't talk like a fool, Milly. You never knew me do anything deceitful. Lord Ilbury has no more to do with it, you know very well, than the man in the moon.'

I was altogether very indignant. I did not speak another word to Milly. The proportions of the house are so great, that it is a much longer walk than you would suppose from the hall-door to Uncle Silas's room. But I did not cool all that way; and it was not till I had just reached the lobby, and saw the sour, jealous face, and high caul of old Wyat, and felt the influence of that neighbourhood, that I paused to reconsider. I fancied there was a cool consciousness of success behind all the deferential phraseology of Captain Oakley, which nettled me extremely. No; there could be no doubt. I tapped softly at the door.

‘What is it *now*, Miss?’ snarled the querulous old woman, with her shrivelled fingers on the door-handle.

‘Can I see my uncle for a moment?’

‘He’s tired, and not a word from him all day long.’

‘Not ill, though?’

‘Awful bad in the night,’ said the old crone, with a sudden savage glare in my face, as if *I* had brought it about.

‘Oh! I’m very sorry. I had not heard a word of it.’

‘No one does but old Wyat. There’s Milly there never asks neither — his own child!’

‘Weakness, or what?’

‘One o’ them fits. He’ll slide awa’ in one o’ them some day, and no one but old Wyat to know nor ask word about it; that’s how ‘twill be.’

‘Will you please hand him this note, if he is well enough to look at it, and say I am at the door?’

She took it with a peevish nod and a grunt, closing the door in my face, and in a few minutes returned —

‘Come in wi’ ye,’ said Dame Wyat, and I appeared.

Uncle Silas, who, after his nightly horror or vision, lay extended on a sofa, with his faded yellow silk dressing-gown about him, his long white hair hanging toward the ground, and that wild and feeble smile lighting his face — a glimmer I feared to look upon — his long thin arms lay by his sides, with hands and fingers that stirred not, except when now and then, with a feeble motion, he wet his temples and forehead with eau de Cologne from a glass saucer placed beside him.

‘Excellent girl! dutiful ward and niece!’ murmured the oracle; ‘heaven reward you — your frank dealing is your own safety and my peace. Sit you down, and say who is this Captain Oakley, when you made his acquaintance, what his age, fortune, and expectations, and who the aunt he mentions.’

Upon all these points I satisfied him as fully as I was able.

'Wyat — the white drops,' he called, in a thin, stern tone. 'I'll write a line presently. I can't see visitors, and, of course, you can't receive young captains before you've come out. Farewell! God bless you, dear.'

Wyat was dropping the 'white' restorative into a wine-glass and the room was redolent of ether. I was glad to escape. The figures and whole *mise en scène* were unearthly.

'Well, Milly,' I said, as I met her in the hall, 'your papa is going to write to him.'

I sometimes wonder whether Milly was right, and how I should have acted a few months earlier.

Next day whom should we meet in the Windmill Wood but Captain Oakley. The spot where this interesting *rencontre* occurred was near that ruinous bridge on my sketch of which I had received so many compliments. It was so great a surprise that I had not time to recollect my indignation, and, having received him very affably, I found it impossible, during our brief interview, to recover my lost altitude.

After our greetings were over, and some compliments neatly made, he said —

'I had such a curious note from Mr. Silas Ruthyn. I am sure he thinks me a very impertinent fellow, for it was really anything but inviting — extremely rude, in fact. But I could not quite see that because he does not want me to invade his bedroom — an incursion I never dreamed of — I was not to present myself to you, who had already honoured me with your acquaintance, with the sanction of those who were most interested in your welfare, and who were just as well qualified as he, I fancy, to say who were qualified for such an honour.'

'My uncle, Mr. Silas Ruthyn, you are aware, is my guardian; and this is my cousin, his daughter.'

This was an opportunity of becoming a little lofty, and I improved it. He raised his hat and bowed to Milly.

'I'm afraid I've been very rude and stupid. Mr. Ruthyn, of course, has a perfect right to — to — in fact, I was not the least aware that I had the honour of so near a relation's — a — a — and what exquisite scenery you have! I think this country round Feltram particularly fine; and this Bartram-Haugh is, I venture to say, about the very most beautiful spot in this beautiful region. I do assure you I am tempted beyond measure to make Feltram and the Hall Hotel my headquarters for at least a week. I only regret the foliage; but your trees show wonderfully, even in winter, so many of them have got that ivy about them. They say it spoils trees, but it certainly beautifies them. I have just ten days' leave unexpired; I wish I could induce you to advise me how to apply them. What shall I do, Miss Ruthyn?'

'I am the worst person in the world to make plans, even for myself, I find it so troublesome. What do you say? Suppose you try Wales or Scotland, and climb up some of those fine mountains that look so well in winter?'

'I should much prefer Feltram. I so wish you would recommend *it*. What is this pretty plant?'

'We call that Maud's myrtle. She planted it, and it's very pretty when it's full in blow,' said Milly.

Our visit to Elverston had been of immense use to us both.

'Oh! planted by *you?*' he said, very softly, with a momentary corresponding glance. 'May I — ever so little — just a leaf?'

And without waiting for permission, he held a sprig of it next his waistcoat.

'Yes, it goes very prettily with those buttons. They are *very* pretty buttons; are not they, Milly? A present, a souvenir, I dare say?'

This was a terrible hit at the button-maker, and I thought he looked a little oddly at me, but my countenance was so 'bewitchingly simple' that I suppose his suspicions were allayed.

Now, it was very odd of me, I must confess, to talk in this way, and to receive all those tender allusions from a gentleman about whom I had spoken and felt so sharply only the evening before. But Bartram was abominably lonely. A civilised person was a valuable waif or stray in that region of the picturesque and the brutal; and to my lady reader especially, because she will probably be hardest upon me, I put it — can you not recollect any such folly in your own past life? Can you not in as many minutes call to mind at least six similar inconsistencies of your own practising? For my part, I really can't see the advantage of being the weaker sex if we are always to be as strong as our masculine neighbours.

There was, indeed, no revival of the little sentiment which I had once experienced. When these things once expire, I do believe they are as hard to revive as our dead lapdogs, guinea-pigs, and parrots. It was my perfect coolness which enabled me to chat, I flatter myself, so agreeably with the refined Captain, who plainly thought me his captive, and was probably now and then thinking what was to be done to utilise that little bit of Bartram, or to beautify some other, when he should see fit to become its master, as we rambled over these wild but beautiful grounds.

It was just about then that Milly nudged me rather vehemently, and whispered ‘Look there!’

I followed with mine the direction of her eyes, and saw my odious cousin, Dudley, in a flagrant pair of cross-barred peg-tops, and what Milly before her reformation used to call other ‘slops’ of corresponding atrocity, approaching our refined little party with great strides. I really think that Milly was very nearly ashamed of him. I certainly was. I had no apprehension, however, of the scene which was imminent.

The charming Captain mistook him probably for some rustic servant of the place, for he continued his agreeable remarks up to the very moment when Dudley, whose face was pale with anger, and whose rapid advance had not served to cool him, without recollecting to salute either Milly or me, accosted our elegant companion as follows: —

‘By your leave, master, baint you summat in the wrong box here, don’t you think?’

He had planted himself directly in his front, and looked unmistakably menacing.

‘May I speak to him? Will you excuse me?’ said the Captain blandly.

‘Ow — ay, they’ll excuse ye ready enough, I dessay; you’re to deal wi’ me though. Baint ye in the wrong box now?’

‘I’m not conscious, sir, of being in a box at all,’ replied the Captain, with severe disdain. ‘It strikes me you are disposed to get up a row. Let us, if you please, get a little apart from the ladies if that is your purpose.’

‘I mean to turn you out o’ this the way ye came. If you make a row, so much the wuss for you, for I’ll lick ye to fits.’

‘Tell him not to fight,’ whispered Milly; ‘he’ll a no chance wi’ Dudley.’

I saw Dickon Hawkes grinning over the paling on which he leaned.

‘Mr. Hawkes,’ I said, drawing Milly with me toward that unpromising mediator, ‘pray prevent unpleasantness and go between them.’

‘An’ git licked o’ both sides? Rather not, Miss, thank ye,’ grinned Dickon, tranquilly.

‘Who are you, sir?’ demanded our romantic acquaintance, with military sternness.

‘I’ll tell you who you are — you’re Oakley, as stops at the Hall, that Governor wrote, overnight, not to dare show your nose inside the grounds. You’re a half-starved cappen, come down here to look for a wife, and — — ‘

Before Dudley could finish his sentence, Captain Oakley, than whose face no regimentals could possibly have been more scarlet, at that moment, struck with his switch at Dudley’s handsome features.

I don’t know how it was done — by some ‘devilish cantrip slight.’ A smack was heard, and the Captain lay on his back on the ground, with his mouth full of blood.

‘How do ye like the taste o’ that?’ roared Dickon, from his post of observation.

In an instant Captain Oakley was on his feet again, hatless, looking quite frantic, and striking out at Dudley, who was ducking and dipping quite coolly, and again the same horrid sound, only this time it was double, like a quick postman’s knock, and Captain Oakley was on the grass again.

‘Tapped his smeller, by — !’ thundered Dickon, with a roar of laughter.

‘Come away, Milly — I’m growing ill,’ said I.

‘Drop it, Dudley, I tell ye; you’ll kill him,’ screamed Milly.

But the devoted Captain, whose nose, and mouth, and shirt-front formed now but one great patch of blood, and who was bleeding beside over one eye, dashed at him again.

I turned away. I felt quite faint, and on the point of crying, with mere horror.

‘Hammer away at his knocker,’ bellowed Dickon, in a frenzy of delight.

‘He’ll break it now, if it ain’t already,’ cried Milly, alluding, as I afterwards understood, to the Captain’s Grecian nose.

‘Brayvo, little un!’ The Captain was considerably the taller.

Another smack, and, I suppose, Captain Oakley fell once more.

‘Hooray! the dinner-service again, by —— ,’ roared Dickon. ‘Stick to that. Over the same ground — subsoil, I say. He han’t enough yet.’

In a perfect tremor of disgust, I was making as quick a retreat as I could, and as I did, I heard Captain Oakley shriek hoarsely —

‘You’re a d —— prizefighter; I can’t box you.’

‘I told ye I’d lick ye to fits,’ hooted Dudley.

‘But you’re the son of a gentleman, and by —— you shall fight me *as* a gentleman.’

A yell of hooting laughter from Dudley and Dickon followed this sally.

‘Gi’e my love to the Colonel, and think o’ me when ye look in the glass — won’t ye? An’ so you’re goin’ arter all; well, follow what’s left o’ yer nose. Ye forgot some o’ yer ivories, didn’t ye, on th’ grass?’

These and many similar jibes followed the mangled Captain in his retreat.

CHAPTER XLVII

DOCTOR BRYERLY REAPPEARS

No one who has not experienced it can imagine the nervous disgust and horror which such a spectacle as we had been forced in part to witness leaves upon the mind of a young person of my peculiar temperament.

It affected ever after my involuntary estimate of the principal actors in it. An exhibition of such thorough inferiority, accompanied by such a shock to the feminine sense of elegance, is not forgotten by any woman. Captain Oakley had been severely beaten by a smaller man. It was pitiable, but also undignified; and Milly's anxieties about his teeth and nose, though in a certain sense horrible, had also a painful suspicion of the absurd.

People say, on the other hand, that superior prowess, even in such barbarous contests, inspires in our sex an interest akin to admiration. I can positively say in my case it was quite the reverse. Dudley Ruthyn stood lower than ever in my estimation; for though I feared him more, it was by reason of these brutal and cold-blooded associations.

After this I lived in constant apprehension of being summoned to my uncle's room, and being called on for an explanation of my meeting with Captain Oakley, which, notwithstanding my perfect innocence, looked suspicious, but no such inquisition resulted. Perhaps he did not suspect me; or, perhaps, he thought, not in his haste, all women are liars, and did not care to hear what I might say. I rather lean to the latter interpretation.

The exchequer just now, I suppose, by some means, was replenished, for next morning Dudley set off upon one of his fashionable excursions, as poor Milly thought them, to Wolverhampton. And the same day Dr. Bryerly arrived.

Milly and I, from my room window, saw him step from his vehicle to the courtyard.

A lean man, with sandy hair and whiskers, was in the chaise with him. Dr. Bryerly descended in the unchangeable black suit that always looked new and never fitted him.

The Doctor looked careworn, and older, I thought, by several years, than when I last saw him. He was not shown up to my uncle's room; on the contrary, Milly, who was more actively curious than I, ascertained that our tremulous butler informed him that my uncle was not sufficiently well for an interview. Whereupon Dr. Bryerly had pencilled a note, the reply to which was a message from Uncle Silas, saying that he would be happy to see him in five minutes.

As Milly and I were conjecturing what it might mean, and before the five minutes had expired, Mary Quince entered.

'Wyat bid me tell you, Miss, your uncle wants you *this minute*.'

When I entered his room, Uncle Silas was seated at the table, with his desk before him. He looked up. Could anything be more dignified, suffering, and venerable?

'I sent for you, dear,' he said very gently, extending his thin, white hand, and taking mine, which he held affectionately while he spoke, 'because I desire to have no secrets, and wish you thoroughly to know all that concerns your own interests while subject to my guardianship; and I am happy to think, my beloved niece, that you requite my candour. Oh, here is the gentleman. Sit down, dear.'

Doctor Bryerly was advancing, as it seemed, to shake hands with Uncle Silas, who, however, rose with a severe and haughty air, not the least overacted, and made him a slow, ceremonious bow. I wondered how the homely Doctor could confront so tranquilly that astounding statue of hauteur.

A faint and weary smile, rather sad than comtemptuous, was the only sign he showed of feeling his repulse.

'How do *you* do, Miss?' he said, extending his hand, and greeting me after his ungallant fashion, as if it were an afterthought.

'I think I may as well take a chair, sir,' said Doctor Bryerly, sitting down serenely, near the table, and crossing his ungainly legs.

My uncle bowed.

'You understand the nature of the business, sir. Do you wish Miss Ruthyn to remain?' asked Doctor Bryerly.

‘I *sent* for her, sir,’ replied my uncle, in a very gentle and sarcastic tone, a smile on his thin lips, and his strangely-contorted eyebrows raised for a moment contemptuously. ‘This gentleman, my dear Maud, thinks proper to insinuate that I am robbing you. It surprises me a little, and, no doubt, you — I’ve nothing to conceal, and wished you to be present while he favours me more particularly with his views. I’m right, I think, in describing it as *robbery*, sir?’

‘Why,’ said Doctor Bryerly thoughtfully, for he was treating the matter as one of right, and not of feeling, ‘it would be, certainly, taking that which does not belong to you, and converting it to your own use; but, at the worst, it would more resemble *thieving*, I think, than robbery.’

I saw Uncle Silas’s lip, eyelid, and thin cheek quiver and shrink, as if with a thrill of tic-douloureux, as Doctor Bryerly spoke this unconsciously insulting answer. My uncle had, however, the self-command which is learned at the gaming-table. He shrugged, with a chilly, sarcastic, little laugh, and a glance at me.

‘Your note says *waste*, I think, sir?’

‘Yes, waste — the felling and sale of timber in the Windmill Wood, the selling of oak bark and burning of charcoal, as I’m informed,’ said Bryerly, as sadly and quietly as a man might relate a piece of intelligence from the newspaper.

‘Detectives? or private spies of your own — or, perhaps, my servants, bribed with my poor brother’s money? A very high-minded procedure.’

‘Nothing of the kind, sir.’

My uncle sneered.

‘I mean, sir, there has been no undue canvass for evidence, and the question is simply one of right; and it is our duty to see that this inexperienced young lady is not defrauded.’

‘By her own uncle?’

‘By anyone,’ said Doctor Bryerly, with a natural impenetrability that excited my admiration.

‘Of course you come armed with an opinion?’ said my smiling uncle, insinuatingly.

‘The case is before Mr. Serjeant Grinders. These bigwigs don’t return their cases sometimes so quickly as we could wish.’

‘Then you have *no* opinion?’ smiled my uncle.

‘My solicitor is quite clear upon it; and it seems to me there can be no question raised, but for form’s sake.’

‘Yes, for form’s sake you take one, and in the meantime, upon a nice question of law, the surmises of a thick-headed attorney and of an ingenious apoth — I beg pardon, physician — are sufficient warrant for telling my niece and ward, in my presence, that I am defrauding her!’

My uncle leaned back in his chair, and smiled with a contemptuous patience over Doctor Bryerly’s head, as he spoke.

‘I don’t know whether I used that expression, sir, but I am speaking merely in a technical sense. I mean to say, that, whether by mistake or otherwise, you are exercising a power which you don’t lawfully possess, and that the effect of that is to impoverish the estate, and, by so much as it benefits you, to wrong this young lady.’

‘I’m a technical defrauder, I see, and your manner conveys the rest. I thank my God, sir, I am a *very* different man from what I once was.’ Uncle Silas was speaking in a low tone, and with extraordinary deliberation. ‘I remember when I should have certainly knocked you down, sir, or *tried* it, at least, for a great deal less.’

‘But seriously, sir, what *do* you propose?’ asked Doctor Bryerly, sternly and a little flushed, for I think the old man was stirred within him; and though he did not raise his voice, his manner was excited.

‘I propose to defend my rights, sir,’ murmured Uncle Silas, very grim. ‘I’m not without an opinion, though you are.’

You seem to think, sir, that I have a pleasure in annoying you; you are quite wrong. I hate annoying anyone — constitutionally — I *hate* it; but don’t you see, sir, the position I’m placed in? I wish I could please everyone, and do my duty.’

Uncle Silas bowed and smiled.

‘I’ve brought with me the Scotch steward from Tolkingden, *your* estate, Miss, and if you let us we will visit the spot and make a note of what we observe, that is, assuming that you admit waste, and merely question our law.’

‘If you please, sir, you and your Scotchman shall do *no such thing*; and, bearing in mind that I neither deny nor admit anything, you will please further never more to present yourself, under any pretext whatsoever, either in this house or on the grounds of Bartram-Haugh, during my lifetime.’

Uncle Silas rose up with the same glassy smile and scowl, in token that the interview was ended.

‘Goodbye, sir,’ said Doctor Bryerly, with a sad and thoughtful air, and hesitating for a moment, he said to me, ‘Do you think, Miss, you could afford me a word in the hall?’

‘Not a word, sir,’ snarled Uncle Silas, with a white flash from his eyes.

There was a pause.

‘Sit where you are, Maud.’

Another pause.

‘If you have anything to say to my ward, sir, you will please to say it *here*.’

Doctor Bryerly’s dark and homely face was turned on me with an expression of unspeakable compassion.

‘I was going to say, that if you think of any way in which I can be of the least service, Miss, I’m ready to act, that’s all; mind, *any* way.’

He hesitated, looking at me with the same expression as if he had something more to say; but he only repeated —

‘That’s all, Miss.’

‘Won’t you shake hands, Doctor Bryerly, before you go?’ I said, eagerly approaching him.

Without a smile, with the same sad anxiety in his face, with his mind, as it seemed to me, on something else, and irresolute whether to speak it or be silent, he took my fingers in a very cold hand, and holding it so, and slowly shaking it, his grave and troubled glance unconsciously rested on Uncle Silas’s face, while in a sad tone and absent way he said —

‘Goodbye, Miss.’

From before that sad gaze my uncle averted his strange eyes quickly, and looked, oddly, to the window.

In a moment more Doctor Bryerly let my hand go with a sigh, and with an abrupt little nod to me, he left the room; and I heard that dismallest of sounds, the retreating footsteps of a true friend, *lost*.

‘Lead us not into temptation; if we pray so, we must not mock the eternal Majesty of Heaven by walking into temptation of our own accord.’

This oracular sentence was not uttered by my uncle until Doctor Bryerly had been gone at least five minutes.

‘I’ve forbid him my house, Maud — first, because his perfectly unconscious insolence tries my patience nearly beyond endurance; and again, because I have heard unfavourable reports of him. On the question of right which he disputes, I am perfectly informed. I am your tenant, my dear niece; when I am gone you will learn how *scrupulous* I have been; you will see how, under the pressure of the most agonising pecuniary difficulties, the terrific penalty of a misspent youth, I have been careful never by a hair’s breadth to transgress the strict line of my legal privileges; alike, as your tenant, Maud, and as your guardian; how, amid frightful agitations, I have kept myself, by the miraculous strength and grace vouchsafed me — *pure*.

‘The world,’ he resumed after a short pause, ‘has no faith in any man’s conversion; it never forgets what he was, it never believes him anything better, it is an inexorable and stupid judge. What I was I will describe in blacker terms, and with more heartfelt detestation, than my traducers — a reckless prodigal, a godless profligate. Such I was; what I am, I am. If I had no hope beyond this world, of all men most miserable; but with that hope, a sinner saved.’

Then he waxed eloquent and mystical. I think his Swedenborgian studies had crossed his notions of religion with strange lights. I never could follow him quite in these excursions into the region of symbolism. I only recollect that he talked of the deluge and the waters of Mara, and said, ‘I am washed — I am sprinkled,’ and then, pausing, bathed his thin temples and forehead with eau de Cologne; a process which was, perhaps, suggested by his imagery of sprinkling and so forth.

Thus refreshed, he sighed and smiled, and passed to the subject of Doctor Bryerly.

‘Of Doctor Bryerly, I know that he is sly, that he loves money, was born poor, and makes nothing by his profession. But he possesses many thousand pounds, under my poor brother’s will, of *your money*; and he has glided with, of course a modest “nolo episcopari,” into the acting trusteeship, with all its multitudinous opportunities, of your immense property. That is not doing so badly for a visionary Swedenborgian. Such a man *must* prosper.

But if he expected to make money of me, he is disappointed. Money, however, he will make of his trusteeship, as you will see. It is a dangerous resolution. But if he will seek the life of Dives, the worst I wish him is to find the death of Lazarus. But whether, like Lazarus, he be borne of angels into Abraham's bosom, or, like the rich man, only dies and is buried, and *the rest*, neither living nor dying do I desire his company.'

Uncle Silas here seemed suddenly overtaken by exhaustion. He leaned back with a ghastly look, and his lean features glistened with the dew of faintness. I screamed for Wyat. But he soon recovered sufficiently to smile his odd smile, and with it and his frown, nodded and waved me away.

CHAPTER XLVIII

QUESTION AND ANSWER

My uncle, after all, was not ill that day, after the strange fashion of his malady, be it what it might. Old Wyat repeated in her sour laconic way that there was 'nothing to speak of amiss with him.' But there remained with me a sense of pain and fear. Doctor Bryerly, notwithstanding my uncle's sarcastic reflections, remained, in my estimation, a true and wise friend. I had all my life been accustomed to rely upon others, and here, haunted by many unavowed and ill-defined alarms and doubts, the disappearance of an active and able friend caused my heart to sink.

Still there remained my dear Cousin Monica, and my pleasant and trusted friend, Lord Ilbury; and in less than a week arrived an invitation from Lady Mary to the Grange, for me and Milly, to meet Lady Knollys. It was accompanied, she told me, by a note from Lord Ilbury to my uncle, supporting her request; and in the afternoon I received a message to attend my uncle in his room.

'An invitation from Lady Mary Carysbroke for you and Milly to meet Monica Knollys; have you received it?' asked my uncle, so soon as I was seated. Answered in the affirmative, he continued —

'Now, Maud Ruthyn, I expect the truth from you; I have been frank, so shall you. Have you ever heard me spoken ill of by Lady Knollys?'

I was quite taken aback.

I felt my cheeks flushing. I was returning his fierce cold gaze with a stupid stare, and remained dumb.

'Yes, Maud, you *have*.'

I looked down in silence.

'I *know* it; but it is right you should answer; have you or have you not?'

I had to clear my voice twice or thrice. There was a kind of spasm in my throat.

'I am trying to recollect,' I said at last.

'*Do* recollect,' he replied imperiously.

There was a little interval of silence. I would have given the world to be, on any conditions, anywhere else in the world.

‘Surely, Maud, you don’t wish to deceive your guardian? Come, the question is a plain one, and I know the truth already. I ask you again — have you ever heard me spoken ill of by Lady Knollys?’

‘Lady Knollys,’ I said, half articulately,’ speaks very freely, and often half in jest; but,’ I continued, observing something menacing in his face, ‘I have heard her express disapprobation of some things you have done.’

‘Come, Maud,’ he continued, in a stern, though still a low key, ‘did she not insinuate that charge — then, I suppose, in a state of incubation, the other day presented here full-fledged, with beak and claws, by that scheming apothecary — the statement that I was defrauding you by cutting down timber upon the grounds?’

‘She certainly did mention the circumstance; but she also argued that it might have been through ignorance of the extent of your rights.’

‘Come, come, Maud, you must not prevaricate, girl. I *will* have it. Does she not habitually speak disparagingly of me, in your presence, and *to* you? *Answer*.’

I hung my head.

‘Yes or no?’

‘Well, perhaps so — yes,’ I faltered, and burst into tears.

‘There, don’t cry; it may well shock you. Did she not, to your knowledge, say the same things in presence of my child Millicent? I know it, I repeat — there is no use in hesitating; and I command you to answer.’

Sobbing, I told the truth.

‘Now sit still, while I write my reply.’

He wrote, with the scowl and smile so painful to witness, as he looked down upon the paper, and then he placed the note before me —

‘Read that, my dear.’

It began —

‘MY DEAR LADY KNOLLYS. — You have favoured me with a note, adding your request to that of Lord Ilbury, that I should permit my ward and my daughter to avail themselves of Lady Mary’s invitation. Being perfectly cognisant of the ill-feeling you have always and unaccountably cherished toward me, and also of the terms in which you have had the delicacy and the conscience to speak of me before and to my child and my ward, I can only express my amazement at the modesty of your request, while peremptorily refusing it. And I shall conscientiously adopt effectual measures to prevent your ever again having an opportunity of endeavouring to destroy my influence and authority over my ward and my child, by direct or insinuated slander.

'Your defamed and injured kinsman,
SILAS RUTHYN.'

I was stunned; yet what could I plead against the blow that was to isolate me? I wept aloud, with my hands clasped, looking on the marble face of the old man.

Without seeming to hear, he folded and sealed his note, and then proceeded to answer Lord Ilbury.

When that note was written, he placed it likewise before me, and I read it also through. It simply referred him to Lady Knollys 'for an explanation of the unhappy circumstances which compelled him to decline an invitation which it would have made his niece and his daughter so happy to accept.'

'You see, my dear Maud, how frank I am with you,' he said, waving the open note, which I had just read, slightly before he folded it. 'I think I may ask you to reciprocate my candour.'

Dismissed from this interview, I ran to Milly, who burst into tears from sheer disappointment, so we wept and wailed together. But in my grief I think there was more reason.

I sat down to the dismal task of writing to my dear Lady Knollys. I implored her to make her peace with my uncle. I told her how frank he had been with me, and how he had shown me his sad reply to her letter. I told her of the interview to which he had himself invited me with Dr. Bryerly; how little disturbed he was by the accusation — no sign of guilt; quite the contrary, perfect confidence. I implored of her to think the best, and remembering my isolation, to accomplish a reconciliation with Uncle Silas. 'Only think,' I wrote, 'I only nineteen, and two years of solitude before me. What a separation!' No broken merchant ever signed the schedule of his bankruptcy with a heavier heart than did I this letter.

The griefs of youth are like the wounds of the gods — there is an ichor which heals the scars from which it flows: and thus Milly and I consoled ourselves, and next day enjoyed our ramble, our talk and readings, with a wonderful resignation to the inevitable.

Milly and I stood in the relation of *Lord Duberly* to *Doctor Pangloss*. I was to mend her 'cackleology,' and the occupation amused us both. I think at the bottom of our submission to destiny lurked a hope that Uncle Silas, the inexorable, would relent, or that Cousin Monica, that siren, would win and melt him to her purpose.

Whatever comfort, however, I derived from the absence of Dudley was not to be of very long duration; for one morning, as I was amusing myself alone, with a piece of worsted work, thinking, and just at that moment not unpleasantly, of many things, my cousin Dudley entered the room.

'Back again, like a bad halfpenny, ye see. And how a' ye bin ever since, lass? Purely, I warrant, be your looks. I'm jolly glad to see ye, I am; no cattle going like ye, Maud.'

'I think I must ask you to let go my hand, as I can't continue my work,' I said, very stiffly, hoping to chill his enthusiasm a little.

'Anything to pleasure ye, Maud, 'tain't in my heart to refuse ye nout. I a'bin to Wolverhampton, lass — jolly row there — and run over to Leamington; a'most broke my neck, faith, wi' a borrowed horse arter the dogs; ye would na care, Maud, if I broke my neck, would ye? Well, 'appen, jest a little,' he goodnaturedly supplied, as I was silent.

'Little over a week since I left here, by George; and to me it's half the almanac like; can ye guess the reason, Maud?'

'Have you seen your sister, Milly, or your father, since your return?' I asked coldly.

'*They'll* keep, Maud, never mind 'em; it be you I want to see — it be you I wor thinkin' on a' the time. I tell ye, lass, I'm all'ays a thinkin' on ye.'

'I think you ought to go and see your father; you have been away, you say, some time. I don't think it is respectful,' I said, a little sharply.

'If ye bid me go I'd a'most go, but I could na quite; there's nout on earth I would na do for you, Maud, excep' leaving you.'

'And that,' I said, with a petulant flush, 'is the only thing on earth I would ask you to do.'

'Blessed if you baint a blushin', Maud,' he drawled, with an odious grin.

His stupidity was proof against everything.

‘It is *too* bad!’ I muttered, with an indignant little pat of my foot and mimic stamp.

‘Well, you lasses be queer cattle; ye’re angry wi’ me now, cos ye think I got into mischief — ye do, Maud; ye know’t, ye buxsom little fool, down there at Wolverhampton; and jest for that ye’re ready to turn me off again the minute I come back; ’tisn’t fair.’

‘I don’t *understand* you, sir; and I *beg* that you’ll leave me.’

‘Now, didn’t I tell ye about leavin’ ye, Maud? ’tis the only thing I can’t compass for yer sake. I’m jest a child in yere hands, I am, ye know. I can lick a big fellah to pot as limp as a rag, by George!’ — (his oaths were not really so mild)— ‘ye see summat o’ that t’other day. Well, don’t be vexed, Maud; ’twas all along o’ you; ye know, I wor a bit jealous, ‘appen; but anyhow I can do it; and look at me here, jest a child, I say, in yer hands.’

‘I wish you’d go away. Have you nothing to do, and no one to see? Why *can’t* you leave me alone, sir?’

‘‘Cos I can’t, Maud, that’s jest why; and I wonder, Maud, how can you be so ill-natured, when you see me like this; how can ye?’

‘I wish Milly would come,’ said I peevishly, looking toward the door.

‘Well, I’ll tell you how it is, Maud. I may as well have it out. I like you better than any lass that ever I saw, a deal; you’re nicer by chalks; there’s none like ye — there isn’t; and I wish you’d have me. I ha’n’t much tin — father’s run through a deal, he’s pretty well up a tree, ye know; but though I baint so rich as some folk, I’m a better man, ‘appen; and if ye’d take a tidy lad, that likes ye awful, and ‘id die for your sake, why here he is.’

‘What can you mean, sir?’ I exclaimed, rising in indignant bewilderment.

‘I mean, Maud, if ye’ll marry me, you’ll never ha’ cause to complain; I’ll never let ye want for nout, nor gi’e ye a wry word.’

‘Actually a proposal!’ I ejaculated, like a person speaking in a dream.

I stood with my hand on the back of a chair, staring at Dudley; and looking, I dare say, as stupefied as I felt.

‘There’s a good lass, ye would na deny me,’ said the odious creature, with one knee on the seat of the chair behind which I was standing, and attempting to place his arm lovingly round my neck.

This effectually roused me, and starting back, I stamped upon the ground with actual fury.

‘What has there ever been, sir, in my conduct, words, or looks, to warrant this unparalleled audacity? But that you are as stupid as you are impertinent, brutal, and ugly, you must, long ago, sir, have seen how I dislike you. How dare you, sir? Don’t presume to obstruct me; I’m going to my uncle.’

I had never spoken so violently to mortal before.

He in turn looked a little confounded; and I passed his extended but motionless arm with a quick and angry step.

He followed me a pace or two, however, before I reached the door, looking horridly angry, but stopped, and only swore after me some of those ‘wry words’ which I was never to have heard. I was myself, however, too much incensed, and moving at too rapid a pace, to catch their import; and I had knocked at my uncle’s door before I began to collect my thoughts.

‘Come in,’ replied my uncle’s voice, clear, thin, and peevish.

I entered and confronted him.

‘Your son, sir, has insulted me.’

He looked at me with a cold curiosity steadly for a few seconds, as I stood panting before him with flaming cheeks.

‘Insulted you?’ repeated he. ‘Egad, you surprise me!’

The ejaculation savoured of ‘the old man,’ to borrow his scriptural phrase, more than anything I had heard from him before.

‘*How?*’ he continued; ‘how has Dudley *insulted* you, my dear child? Come, you’re excited; sit down; take time, and tell me all about it. I did not know that Dudley was here.’

‘I — he — it *is* an insult. He knew very well — he *must* know I dislike him; and he presumed to make a proposal of marriage to me.’

‘O — o — oh!’ exclaimed my uncle, with a prolonged intonation which plainly said, Is that the mighty matter?

He looked at me as he leaned back with the same steady curiosity, this time smiling, which somehow frightened me, and his countenance looked to me wicked, like the face of a witch, with a guilt I could not understand.

‘And that is the amount of your complaint. He made you a formal proposal of marriage!’

‘Yes; he proposed for me.’

As I cooled, I began to feel just a very little disconcerted, and a suspicion was troubling me that possibly an indifferent person might think that, having no more to complain of, my language was perhaps a little exaggerated, and my demeanour a little too tempestuous.

My uncle, I dare say, saw some symptoms of this misgiving, for, smiling still, he said —

‘My dear Maud, however just, you appear to me a little cruel; you don’t seem to remember how much you are yourself to blame; you have one faithful friend at least, whom I advise your consulting — I mean your looking-glass. The foolish fellow is young, quite ignorant in the world’s ways. He is in love — desperately enamoured.

Aimer c’est craindre, et craindre c’est souffrir.

And suffering prompts to desperate remedies. We must not be too hard on a rough but romantic young fool, who talks according to his folly and his pain.’

CHAPTER XLIX

AN APPARITION

‘But, after all,’ he suddenly resumed, as if a new thought had struck him, ‘is it quite such folly, after all? It really strikes me, dear Maud, that the subject may be worth a second thought. No, no, you won’t refuse to hear me,’ he said, observing me on the point of protesting. ‘I am, of course, assuming that you are fancy free. I am assuming, too, that you don’t care twopence about Dudley, and even that you fancy you dislike him. You know in that pleasant play, poor Sheridan — delightful fellow! — all our fine spirits are dead — he makes Mrs. Malaprop say there is nothing like beginning with a little aversion. Now, though in matrimony, of course, that is only a joke, yet in love, believe me, it is no such thing. His own marriage with Miss Ogle, I *know*, was a case in point. She expressed a positive horror of him at their first acquaintance; and yet, I believe, she would, a few months later, have died rather than not have married him.’

I was again about to speak, but with a smile he beckoned me into silence.

‘There are two or three points you must bear in mind. One of the happiest privileges of your fortune is that you may, without imprudence, marry simply for love. There are few men in England who could offer you an estate comparable with that you already possess; or, in fact, appreciably increase the splendour of your fortune. If, therefore, he were in all other respects eligible, I can’t see that his poverty would be an objection to weigh for one moment. He is quite a rough diamond. He has been, like many young men of the highest rank, too much given up to athletic sports — to that society which constitutes the aristocracy of the ring and the turf, and all that kind of thing. You see, I am putting all the worst points first. But I have known so many young men in my day, after a madcap career of a few years among prizefighters, wrestlers, and jockeys — learning their slang and affecting their manners — take up and cultivate the graces and the decencies. There was poor dear Newgate, many degrees lower in that kind of frolic, who, when he grew tired of it, became one of the most elegant and accomplished men in the House of Peers. Poor Newgate, he’s gone, too! I could reckon up fifty of my early friends who all began like Dudley, and all turned out, more or less, like Newgate.'

At this moment came a knock at the door, and Dudley put in his head most inopportunely for the vision of his future graces and accomplishments.

'My good fellow,' said his father, with a sharp sort of playfulness, 'I happen to be talking about my son, and should rather not be overheard; you will, therefore, choose another time for your visit.'

Dudley hesitated gruffly at the door, but another look from his father dismissed him.

'And now, my dear, you are to remember that Dudley has fine qualities — the most affectionate son in his rough way that ever father was blessed with; most admirable qualities — indomitable courage, and a high sense of honour; and lastly, that he has the Ruthyn blood — the purest blood, I maintain it, in England.'

My uncle, as he said this, drew himself up a little, unconsciously, his thin hand laid lightly over his heart with a little patting motion, and his countenance looked so strangely dignified and melancholy, that in admiring contemplation of it I lost some sentences which followed next.

'Therefore, dear, naturally anxious that my boy should not be dismissed from home — as he must be, should you persevere in rejecting his suit — I beg that you will reserve your decision to this day fortnight, when I will with much pleasure hear what you may have to say on the subject. But till then, observe me, not a word.'

That evening he and Dudley were closeted for a long time. I suspect that he lectured him on the psychology of ladies; for a bouquet was laid beside my plate every morning at breakfast, which it must have been troublesome to get, for the conservatory at Bartram was a desert. In a few days more an anonymous green parrot arrived, in a gilt cage, with a little note in a clerk's hand, addressed to 'Miss Ruthyn (of Knowl), Bartram-Haugh,' &c. It contained only 'Directions for caring green parrot,' at the close of which, *underlined*, the words appeared— 'The bird's name is Maud.'

The bouquets I invariably left on the tablecloth, where I found them — the bird I insisted on Milly's keeping as her property. During the intervening fortnight Dudley never appeared, as he used sometimes to do before, at luncheon, nor looked in at the window as we were at breakfast. He contented himself with one day placing himself in my way in the hall in his shooting accoutrements, and, with a clumsy, shuffling kind of respect, and hat in hand, he said —

‘I think, Miss, I must a spoke uncivil t’other day. I was so awful put about, and didn’t know no more nor a child what I was saying; and I wanted to tell ye I’m sorry for it, and I beg your pardon — very humble, I do.’

I did not know what to say. I therefore said nothing, but made a grave inclination, and passed on.

Two or three times Milly and I saw him at a little distance in our walks. He never attempted to join us. Once only he passed so near that some recognition was inevitable, and he stopped and in silence lifted his hat with an awkward respect. But although he did not approach us, he was ostentatious with a kind of telegraphic civility in the distance. He opened gates, he whistled his dogs to ‘heel,’ he drove away cattle, and then himself withdrew. I really think he watched us occasionally to render these services, for in this distant way we encountered him decidedly oftener than we used to do before his flattering proposal of marriage.

You may be sure that we discussed, Milly and I, that occurrence pretty constantly in all sorts of moods. Limited as had been her experience of human society, she very clearly saw *now* how far below its presentable level was her hopeful brother.

The fortnight sped swiftly, as time always does when something we dislike and shrink from awaits us at its close. I never saw Uncle Silas during that period. It may seem odd to those who merely read the report of our last interview, in which his manner had been more playful and his talk more trifling than in any other, that from it I had carried away a profounder sense of fear and insecurity than from any other. It was with a foreboding of evil and an awful dejection that on a very dark day, in Milly’s room, I awaited the summons which I was sure would reach me from my punctual guardian.

As I looked from the window upon the slanting rain and leaden sky, and thought of the hated interview that awaited me, I pressed my hand to my troubled heart, and murmured, ‘O that I had wings like a dove! then would I flee away, and be at rest.’

Just then the prattle of the parrot struck my ear. I looked round on the wire cage, and remembered the words, ‘The bird’s name is Maud.’

‘Poor bird!’ I said. ‘I dare say, Milly, it longs to get out. If it were a native of this country, would not you like to open the window, and then the door of that cruel cage, and let the poor thing fly away?'

'Master wants Miss Maud,' said Wyat's disagreeable tones, at the halfopen door.

I followed in silence, with the pressure of a near alarm at my heart, like a person going to an operation.

When I entered the room, my heart beat so fast that I could hardly speak. The tall form of Uncle Silas rose before me, and I made him a faltering reverence.

He darted from under his brows a wild, fierce glance at old Wyat, and pointed to the door imperiously with his skeleton finger. The door shut, and we were alone.

'A chair?' he said, pointing to a seat.

'Thank you, uncle, I prefer standing,' I faltered.

He also stood — his white head bowed forward, the phosphoric glare of his strange eyes shone upon me from under his brows — his fingernails just rested on the table.

'You saw the luggage corded and addressed, as it stands ready for removal in the hall?' he asked.

I had. Milly and I had read the cards which dangled from the trunk-handles and gun-case. The address was— 'Mr. Dudley R. Ruthyn, Paris, *viâ* Dover.'

'I am old — agitated — on the eve of a decision on which much depends. Pray relieve my suspense. Is my son to leave Bartram to-day in sorrow, or to remain in joy? Pray answer quickly.'

I stammered I know not what. I was incoherent — wild, perhaps; but somehow I expressed my meaning — my unalterable decision. I thought his lips grew whiter and his eyes shone brighter as I spoke.

When I had quite made an end, he heaved a great sigh, and turning his eyes slowly to the right and the left, like a man in a helpless distraction, he whispered —

'God's will be done.'

I thought he was upon the point of fainting — a clay tint darkened the white of his face; and, seeming to forget my presence, he sat down, looking with a despairing scowl on his ashy old hand, as it lay upon the table.

I stood gazing at him, feeling almost as if I had murdered the old man — he still gazing askance, with an imbecile scowl, upon his hand.

‘Shall I go, sir?’ I at length found courage to whisper.

‘*Go?*’ he said, looking up suddenly; and it seemed to me as if a stream of cold sheet-lightning had crossed and enveloped me for a moment.

‘Go? — oh! — a — yes — *yes*, Maud — go. I must see poor Dudley before his departure,’ he added, as it were, in soliloquy.

Trembling lest he should revoke his permission to depart, I glided quickly and noiselessly from the room.

Old Wyat was prowling outside, with a cloth in her hand, pretending to dust the carved door-case. She frowned a stare of enquiry over her shrunken arm on me, as I passed. Milly, who had been on the watch, ran and met me. We heard my uncle’s voice, as I shut the door, calling Dudley. He had been waiting, probably, in the adjoining room. I hurried into my chamber, with Milly at my side, and there my agitation found relief in tears, as that of girlhood naturally does.

A little while after we saw from the window Dudley, looking, I thought, very pale, get into a vehicle, on the top of which his luggage lay, and drive away from Bartram.

I began to take comfort. His departure was an inexpressible relief. His final departure! a distant journey!

We had tea in Milly’s room that night. Firelight and candles are inspiring. In that red glow I always felt and feel more safe, as well as more comfortable, than in the daylight — quite irrationally, for we know the night is the appointed day of such as love the darkness better than light, and evil walks thereby. But so it is. Perhaps the very consciousness of external danger enhances the enjoyment of the well-lighted interior, just as the storm does that roars and hurtles over the roof.

While Milly and I were talking, very cosily, a knock came to the room-door, and, without waiting for an invitation to enter, old Wyat came in, and glowering at us, with her brown claw upon the door-handle, she said to Milly —

‘Ye must leave your funnin’, Miss Milly, and take your turn in your father’s room.’

‘Is he ill?’ I asked.

She answered, addressing not me, but Milly —

‘A wrought two hours in a fit arter Master Dudley went. ‘Twill be the death o’ him, I’m thinkin’, poor old fellah. I wor sorry myself when I saw

Master Dudley a going off in the moist to-day, poor fellah. There's trouble enough in the family without a' that; but 'twon't be a family long, I'm thinkin'. Nout but trouble, nout but trouble, since late changes came.'

Judging by the sour glance she threw on me as she said this, I concluded that I represented those 'late changes' to which all the sorrows of the house were referred.

I felt unhappy under the ill-will even of this odious old woman, being one of those unhappily constructed mortals who cannot be indifferent when they reasonably ought, and always yearn after kindness, even that of the worthless.

'I must go. I wish you'd come wi' me, Maud, I'm so afraid all alone,' said Milly, imploringly.

'Certainly, Milly,' I answered, not liking it, you may be sure; 'you shan't sit there alone.'

So together we went, old Wyat cautioning us for our lives to make no noise.

We passed through the old man's sitting-room, where that day had occurred his brief but momentous interview with me, and his parting with his only son, and entered the bedroom at the farther end.

A low fire burned in the grate. The room was in a sort of twilight. A dim lamp near the foot of the bed at the farther side was the only light burning there. Old Wyat whispered an injunction not to speak above our breaths, nor to leave the fireside unless the sick man called or showed signs of weariness. These were the directions of the doctor, who had been there.

So Milly and I sat ourselves down near the hearth, and old Wyat left us to our resources. We could hear the patient breathe; but he was quite still. In whispers we talked; but our conversation flagged. I was, after my wont, upbraiding myself for the suffering I had inflicted. After about half an hour's desultory whispering, and intervals, growing longer and longer, of silence, it was plain that Milly was falling asleep.

She strove against it, and I tried hard to keep her talking; but it would not do — sleep overcame her; and I was the only person in that ghastly room in a state of perfect consciousness.

There were associations connected with my last vigil there to make my situation very nervous and disagreeable. Had I not had so much to occupy my mind of a distinctly practical kind — Dudley's audacious suit, my uncle's questionable toleration of it, and my own conduct throughout that most disagreeable period of my existence, — I should have felt my present situation a great deal more.

As it was, I thought of my real troubles, and something of Cousin Knollys, and, I confess, a good deal of Lord Ilbury. When looking towards the door, I thought I saw a human face, about the most terrible my fancy could have called up, looking fixedly into the room. It was only a 'three-quarter,' and not the whole figure — the door hid that in a great measure, and I fancied I saw, too, a portion of the fingers. The face gazed toward the bed, and in the imperfect light looked like a livid mask, with chalky eyes.

I had so often been startled by similar apparitions formed by accidental lights and shadows disguising homely objects, that I stooped forward, expecting, though tremulously, to see this tremendous one in like manner dissolve itself into its harmless elements; and now, to my unspeakable terror, I became perfectly certain that I saw the countenance of Madame de la Rougierre.

With a cry, I started back, and shook Milly furiously from her trance.

'Look! look!' I cried. But the apparition or illusion was gone.

I clung so fast to Milly's arm, cowering behind her, that she could not rise.

'Milly! Milly! Milly! Milly!' I went on crying, like one struck with idiotcy, and unable to say anything else.

In a panic, Milly, who had seen nothing, and could conjecture nothing of the cause of my terror, jumped up, and clinging to one another, we huddled together into the corner of the room, I still crying wildly, 'Milly! Milly! *Milly*!' and nothing else.

'What is it — where is it — what do you see?' cried Milly, clinging to me as I did to her.

'It will come again; it will come; oh, heaven!'

'What — what is it, Maud?'

'The face! the face!' I cried. 'Oh, Milly! Milly! Milly!'

We heard a step softly approaching the open door, and, in a horrible *sauve qui peut*, we rushed and stumbled together toward the light by Uncle

Silas’s bed. But old Wyat’s voice and figure reassured us.

‘Milly,’ I said, so soon as, pale and very faint, I reached my apartment, ‘no power on earth shall ever tempt me to enter that room again after dark.’

‘Why, Maud dear, what, in Heaven’s name, did you see?’ said Milly, scarcely less terrified.

‘Oh, I can’t; I can’t; I can’t, Milly. Never ask me. It is haunted. The room is haunted *horribly*.’

‘Was it Charke?’ whispered Milly, looking over her shoulder, all aghast.

‘No, no — don’t ask me; a fiend in a worse shape.’ I was relieved at last by a long fit of weeping; and all night good Mary Quince sat by me, and Milly slept by my side. Starting and screaming, and drugged with sal-volatile, I got through that night of supernatural terror, and saw the blessed light of heaven again.

Doctor Jolks, when he came to see my uncle in the morning, visited me also. He pronounced me very hysterical, made minute enquiries respecting my hours and diet, asked what I had had for dinner yesterday. There was something a little comforting in his cool and confident pooh-poohing of the ghost theory. The result was, a regimen which excluded tea, and imposed chocolate and porter, earlier hours, and I forget all beside; and he undertook to promise that, if I would but observe his directions, I should never see a ghost again.

CHAPTER L

MILLY'S FAREWELL

A few days' time saw me much better. Doctor Jolks was so contemptuously sturdy and positive on the point, that I began to have comfortable doubts about the reality of my ghost; and having still a horror indescribable of the illusion, if such it were, the room in which it appeared, and everything concerning it, I would neither speak, nor, so far as I could, think of it.

So, though Bartram-Haugh was gloomy as well as beautiful, and some of its associations awful, and the solitude that reigned there sometimes almost terrible, yet early hours, bracing exercise, and the fine air that predominates that region, soon restored my nerves to a healthier tone.

But it seemed to me that Bartram-Haugh was to be to me a vale of tears; or rather, in my sad pilgrimage, that valley of the shadow of death through which poor Christian fared alone and in the dark.

One day Milly ran into the parlour, pale, with wet cheeks, and, without saying a word, threw her arms about my neck, and burst into a paroxysm of weeping.

'What is it, Milly — what's the matter, dear — what is it?' I cried aghast, but returning her close embrace heartily.

'Oh! Maud — Maud darling, he's going to send me away.'

'Away, dear! *where* away? And leave me alone in this dreadful solitude, where he knows I shall die of fear and grief without you? Oh! no — no, it *must* be a mistake.'

'I'm going to France, Maud — I'm going away. Mrs. Jolks is going to London, day ar'ter tomorrow, and I'm to go wi' her; and an old French lady, he says, from the school will meet me there, and bring me the rest o' the way.'

'Oh — ho — ho — ho — ho — o — o — o!' cried poor Milly, hugging me closer still, with her head buried in my shoulder, and swaying me about like a wrestler, in her agony.

‘I never wor away from home afore, except that little bit wi’ you over there at Elverston; and you wor wi’ me then, Maud; an’ I love ye — better than Bartram — better than a’; an’ I think I’ll die, Maud, if they take me away.’

I was just as wild in my woe as poor Milly; and it was not until we had wept together for a full hour — sometimes standing — sometimes walking up and down the room — sometimes sitting and getting up in turns to fall on one another’s necks, — that Milly, plucking her handkerchief from her pocket, drew a note from it at the same time, which, as it fell upon the floor, she at once recollected to be one from Uncle Silas to me.

It was to this effect: —

‘I wish to apprise my dear niece and ward of my plans. Milly proceeds to an admirable French school, as a pensionnaire, and leaves this on Thursday next. If after three months’ trial she finds it in any way objectionable, she returns to us. If, on the contrary, she finds it in all respects the charming residence it has been presented to me, you, on the expiration of that period, join her there, until the temporary complication of my affairs shall have been so far adjusted as to enable me to receive you once more at Bartram. Hoping for happier days, and wishing to assure you that three months is the extreme limit of your separation from my poor Milly, I have written this, feeling alas! unequal to seeing you at present.

‘Bartram, Tuesday.

‘P.S. — I can have no objection to your apprising Monica Knollys of these arrangements. You will understand, of course, not a copy of this letter, but its substance.’

Over this document, scanning it as lawyers do a new Act of Parliament, we took comfort. After all, it was limited; a separation not to exceed three months, possibly much shorter. On the whole, too, I pleased myself with thinking Uncle Silas’s note, though peremptory, was kind.

Our paroxysms subsided into sadness; a close correspondence was arranged. Something of the bustle and excitement of change supervened. If it turned out to be, in truth, a ‘charming residence,’ how very delightful our meeting in France, with the interest of foreign scenery, ways, and faces, would be!

So Thursday arrived — a new gush of sorrow — a new brightening up — and, amid regrets and anticipations, we parted at the gate at the farther end of the Windmill Wood. Then, of course, were more goodbyes, more embraces, and tearful smiles. Good Mrs. Jolks, who met us there, was in a huge fuss; I believe it was her first visit to the metropolis, and she was in proportion heated and important, and terrified about the train, so we had not many last words.

I watched poor Milly, whose head was stretched from the window, her hand waving many adieux, until the curve of the road, and the clump of old ash-trees, thick with ivy, hid Milly, carriage and all, from view. My eyes filled again with tears. I turned towards Bartram. At my side stood honest Mary Quince.

‘Don’t take on so, Miss; ‘twon’t be no time passing; three months is nothing at all,’ she said, smiling kindly.

I smiled through my tears and kissed the good creature, and so side by side we reentered the gate.

The lithe young man in fustian, whom I had seen talking with Beauty on the morning of our first encounter with that youthful Amazon, was awaiting our re-entrance with the key in his hand. He stood half behind the open wicket. One lean brown cheek, one shy eye, and his sharp upturned nose, I saw as we passed. He was treating me to a stealthy scrutiny, and seemed to shun my glance, for he shut the door quickly, and busied himself locking it, and then began stubbing up some thistles which grew close by, with the toe of his thick shoe, his back to us all the time.

It struck me that I recognised his features, and I asked Mary Quince.

‘Have you seen that young man before, Quince?’

‘He brings up game for your uncle, sometimes, Miss, and lends a hand in the garden, I believe.’

‘Do you know his name, Mary?’

‘They call him Tom, I don’t know what more, Miss.’

‘Tom,’ I called; ‘please, Tom, come here for a moment.’

Tom turned about, and approached slowly. He was more civil than the Bartram people usually were, for he plucked off his shapeless cap of rabbit-skin with a clownish respect.

'Tom, what is your other name, — Tom *what*, my good man?' I asked.

'Tom Brice, ma'am.'

'Haven't I seen you before, Tom Brice?' I pursued, for my curiosity was excited, and with it much graver feelings; for there certainly *was* a resemblance in Tom's features to those of the postilion who had looked so hard at me as I passed the carriage in the warren at Knowl, on the evening of the outrage which had scared that quiet place.

''Appen you may have, ma'am,' he answered, quite coolly, looking down the buttons of his gaiters.

'Are you a good whip — do you drive well?'

'I'll drive a plough wi' most lads hereabout,' answered Tom.

'Have you ever been to Knowl, Tom?'

Tom gaped very innocently.

'Anan,' he said.

'Here, Tom, is half-a-crown.'

He took it readily enough.

'That be very good,' said Tom, with a nod, having glanced sharply at the coin.

I can't say whether he applied that term to the coin, or to his luck, or to my generous self.

'Now, Tom, you'll tell me, have you ever been to Knowl?'

'Maught a' bin, ma'am, but I don't mind no sich place — no.'

As Tom spoke this with great deliberation, like a man who loves truth, putting a strain upon his memory for its sake, he spun the silver coin two or three times into the air and caught it, staring at it the while, with all his might.

'Now, Tom, recollect yourself, and tell me the truth, and I'll be a friend to you. Did you ride postilion to a carriage having a lady in it, and, I think, several gentlemen, which came to the grounds of Knowl, when the party had their luncheon on the grass, and there was a — a quarrel with the gamekeepers? Try, Tom, to recollect; you shall, upon my honour, have no trouble about it, and I'll try to serve you.'

Tom was silent, while with a vacant gape he watched the spin of his half-crown twice, and then catching it with a smack in his hand, which he thrust into his pocket, he said, still looking in the same direction —

‘I never rid postilion in my days, ma’am. I know nout o’ sich a place, though ‘appen I maught a’ bin there; Knowl, ye ca’t. I was ne’er out o’ Derbyshire but thrice to Warwick fair wi’ horses be rail, an’ twice to York.’

‘You’re certain, Tom?’

‘Sartin sure, ma’am.’

And Tom made another loutish salute, and cut the conference short by turning off the path and beginning to hollo after some trespassing cattle.

I had not felt anything like so nearly sure in this essay at identification as I had in that of Dudley. Even of Dudley’s identity with the Church Scarsdale man, I had daily grown less confident; and, indeed, had it been proposed to bring it to the test of a wager, I do not think I should, in the language of sporting gentlemen, have cared to ‘back’ my original opinion. There was, however, a sufficient uncertainty to make me uncomfortable; and there was another uncertainty to enhance the unpleasant sense of ambiguity.

On our way back we passed the bleaching trunks and limbs of several ranks of barkless oaks lying side by side, some squared by the hatchet, perhaps sold, for there were large letters and Roman numerals traced upon them in red chalk. I sighed as I passed them by, not because it was wrongfully done, for I really rather leaned to the belief that Uncle Silas was well advised in point of law. But, alas! here lay low the grand old family decorations of Bartram-Haugh, not to be replaced for centuries to come, under whose spreading boughs the Ruthyns of three hundred years ago had hawked and hunted!

On the trunk of one of these I sat down to rest, Mary Quince meanwhile pattering about in unmeaning explorations. While thus listlessly seated, the girl Meg Hawkes, walked by, carrying a basket.

‘Hish!’ she said quickly, as she passed, without altering a pace or raising her eyes; ‘don’t ye speak nor look — fayther spies us; I’ll tell ye next turn.’

‘Next turn’ — when was that? Well, she might be returning; and as she could not then say more than she had said, in merely passing without a pause, I concluded to wait for a short time and see what would come of it.

After a short time I looked about me a little, and I saw Dickon Hawkes — Pegtop, as poor Milly used to call him — with an axe in his hand, prowling luridly among the timber.

Observing that I saw him, he touched his hat sulkily, and by-and-by passed me, muttering to himself. He plainly could not understand what business I could have in that particular part of the Windmill Wood, and let me see it in his countenance.

His daughter did pass me again; but this time he was near, and she was silent. Her next transit occurred as he was questioning Mary Quince at some little distance; and as she passed precisely in the same way, she said —

‘Don’t you be alone wi’ Master Dudley nowhere for the world’s worth.’

The injunction was so startling that I was on the point of questioning the girl. But I recollected myself, and waited in the hope that in her future transits she might be more explicit. But one word more she did not utter, and the jealous eye of old Pegtop was so constantly upon us that I refrained.

There was vagueness and suggestion enough in the oracle to supply work for many an hour of anxious conjecture, and many a horrible vigil by night. Was I never to know peace at Bartram-Haugh?

Ten days of poor Milly’s absence, and of my solitude, had already passed, when my uncle sent for me to his room.

When old Wyat stood at the door, mumbling and snarling her message, my heart died within me.

It was late — just that hour when dejected people feel their anxieties most — when the cold grey of twilight has deepened to its darkest shade, and before the cheerful candles are lighted, and the safe quiet of the night sets in.

When I entered my uncle’s sitting-room — though his window-shutters were open and the wan streaks of sunset visible through them, like narrow lakes in the chasms of the dark western clouds — a pair of candles were burning; one stood upon the table by his desk, the other on the chimneypiece, before which his tall, thin figure stooped. His hand leaned on the mantelpiece, and the light from the candle just above his bowed head touched his silvery hair. He was looking, as it seemed, into the subsiding embers of the fire, and was a very statue of forsaken dejection and decay.

‘Uncle!’ I ventured to say, having stood for some time unperceived near his table.

‘Ah, yes, Maud, my dear child — my *dear* child.’

He turned, and with the candle in his hand, smiling his silvery smile of suffering on me. He walked more feebly and stiffly, I thought, than I had ever seen him move before.

‘Sit down, Maud — pray sit there.’

I took the chair he indicated.

‘In my misery and my solitude, Maud, I have invoked you like a spirit, and you appear.’

With his two hands leaning on the table, he looked across at me, in a stooping attitude; he had not seated himself. I continued silent until it should be his pleasure to question or address me.

At last he said, raising himself and looking upward, with a wild adoration — his fingertips elevated and glimmering in the faint mixed light —

‘No, I thank my Creator, I am not quite forsaken.’

Another silence, during which he looked steadfastly at me, and muttered, as if thinking aloud —

‘My guardian angel! — my guardian angel! Maud, *you* have a heart.’ He addressed me suddenly— ‘Listen, for a few moments, to the appeal of an old and broken-hearted man — your guardian — your uncle — your *suppliant*. I had resolved never to speak to you more on this subject. But I was wrong. It was pride that inspired me — mere pride.’

I felt myself growing pale and flushed by turns during the pause that followed.

‘I’m very miserable — very nearly desperate. What remains for me — what remains? Fortune has done her worst — thrown in the dust, her wheels rolled over me; and the servile world, who follow her chariot like a mob, stamp upon the mangled wretch. All this had passed over me, and left me scarred and bloodless in this solitude. It was not my fault, Maud — I say it was no fault of mine; I have no remorse, though more regrets than I can count, and all scored with fire. As people passed by Bartram, and looked upon its neglected grounds and smokeless chimneys, they thought my plight, I dare say, about the worst a proud man could be reduced to. They could not imagine one half its misery. But this old hectic — this old epileptic — this old spectre of wrongs, calamities, and follies, had still one hope — my manly though untutored son — the last male scion of the Ruthyns. Maud, have I lost him? His fate — my fate — I may say *Milly's fate*; — we all await your sentence. He loves you, as none but the very young can love, and that once only in a life. He loves you desperately — a most affectionate nature — a Ruthyn, the best blood in England — the last man of the race; and I — if I lose him I lose all; and you will see me in my coffin, Maud, before many months. I stand before you in the attitude of a suppliant — shall I kneel?'

His eyes were fixed on me with the light of despair, his knotted hands clasped, his whole figure bowed toward me. I was inexpressibly shocked and pained.

'Oh, uncle! uncle!' I cried, and from very excitement I burst into tears.

I saw that his eyes were fixed on me with a dismal scrutiny. I think he divined the nature of my agitation; but he determined, notwithstanding, to press me while my helpless agitation continued.

'You see my suspense — you see my miserable and frightful suspense. You are kind, Maud; you love your father's memory; your pity your father's brother; you would not say no, and place a pistol at his head?'

'Oh! I must — I must — I *must* say no. Oh! spare me, uncle, for Heaven's sake. Don't question me — don't press me. I could not — I *could* not do what you ask.'

'I yield, Maud — I yield, my dear. I will *not* press you; you shall have time, your *own* time, to think. I will accept no answer now — no, *none*, Maud.'

He said this, raising his thin hand to silence me.

'There, Maud, enough. I have spoken, as I always do to you, frankly, perhaps too frankly; but agony and despair will speak out, and plead, even with the most obdurate and cruel.'

With these words Uncle Silas entered his bedchamber, and shut the door, not violently, but with a resolute hand, and I thought I heard a cry.

I hastened to my own room. I threw myself on my knees, and thanked Heaven for the firmness vouchsafed me; I could not believe it to have been my own.

I was more miserable in consequence of this renewed suit on behalf of my odious cousin than I can describe. My uncle had taken such a line of importunity that it became a sort of agony to resist. I thought of the possibility of my hearing of his having made away with himself, and was every morning relieved when I heard that he was still as usual. I have often wondered since at my own firmness. In that dreadful interview with my uncle I had felt, in the whirl and horror of my mind, on the very point of submitting, just as nervous people are said to throw themselves over precipices through sheer dread of falling.

CHAPTER LI

SARAH MATILDA COMES TO LIGHT

Some time after this interview, one day as I sat, sad enough, in my room, looking listlessly from the window, with good Mary Quince, whom, whether in the house or in my melancholy rambles, I always had by my side, I was startled by the sound of a loud and shrill female voice, in violent hysterical action, gabbling with great rapidity, sobbing, and very nearly screaming in a sort of fury.

I started up, staring at the door.

'Lord bless us!' cried honest Mary Quince, with round eyes and mouth agape, staring in the same direction.

'Mary — Mary, what can it be?'

'Are they beating some one down yonder? I don't know where it comes from,' gasped Quince.

'I will — I will — I'll see her. It's her I want. Oo — hoo — hoo — hoo — oo — o — Miss Maud Ruthyn of Knowl. Miss Ruthyn of Knowl. Hoo — hoo — hoo — hoo — oo!'

'What on earth can it be?' I exclaimed, in great bewilderment and terror.

It was now plainly very near indeed, and I heard the voice of our mild and shaky butler evidently remonstrating with the distressed damsel.

'I'll see her,' she continued, pouring a torrent of vile abuse upon me, which stung me with a sudden sense of anger. What had I done to be afraid of anyone? How dared anyone in my uncle's house — in *my* house — mix my name up with her detestable scurrilities?

'For Heaven's sake, Miss, don't ye go out,' cried poor Quince; 'it's some drunken creature.'

But I was very angry, and, like a fool as I was, I threw open the door, exclaiming in a loud and haughty key —

'Here is Miss Ruthyn of Knowl. Who wants to see her?'

A pink and white young lady, with black tresses, violent, weeping, shrill, voluble, was flouncing up the last stair, and shook her dress out on the lobby; and poor old Giblets, as Milly used to call him, was following in her wake, with many small remonstrances and entreaties, perfectly unheeded.

The moment I looked at this person, it struck me that she was the identical lady whom I had seen in the carriage at Knowl Warren. The next moment I was in doubt; the next, still more so. She was decidedly thinner, and dressed by no means in such ladylike taste. Perhaps she was hardly like her at all. I began to distrust all these resemblances, and to fancy, with a shudder, that they originated, perhaps, only in my own sick brain.

On seeing me, this young lady — as it seemed to me, a good deal of the barmaid or lady's-maid species — dried her eyes fiercely, and, with a flaming countenance, called upon me peremptorily to produce her 'lawful husband.' Her loud, insolent, outrageous attack had the effect of enhancing my indignation, and I quite forget what I said to her, but I well remember that her manner became a good deal more decent. She was plainly under the impression that I wanted to appropriate her husband, or, at least, that he wanted to marry me; and she ran on at such a pace, and her harangue was so passionate, incoherent, and unintelligible, that I thought her out of her mind: she was far from it, however. I think if she had allowed me even a second for reflection, I should have hit upon her meaning. As it was, nothing could exceed my perplexity, until, plucking a soiled newspaper from her pocket, she indicated a particular paragraph, already sufficiently emphasised by double lines of red ink at its sides. It was a Lancashire paper, of about six weeks since, and very much worn and soiled for its age. I remember in particular a circular stain from the bottom of a vessel, either of coffee or brown stout. The paragraph was as follows, recording an event a year or more anterior to the date of the paper: —

'MARRIAGE. — On Tuesday, August 7, 18 — , at Leatherwig Church, by the Rev. Arthur Hughes, Dudley R. Ruthyn, Esq., only son and heir of Silas Ruthyn, Esq., of Bartram-Haugh, Derbyshire, to Sarah Matilda, second daughter of John Mangles, Esq., of Wiggan, in this county.'

At first I read nothing but amazement in this announcement, but in another moment I felt how completely I was relieved; and showing, I believe, my intense satisfaction in my countenance — for the young lady eyed me with considerable surprise and curiosity — I said —

‘This is extremely important. You must see Mr. Silas Ruthyn this moment. I am certain he knows nothing of it. I will conduct you to him.’

‘No more he does — I know that myself,’ she replied, following me with a self-asserting swagger, and a great rustling of cheap silk.

As we entered, Uncle Silas looked up from his sofa, and closed his *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

‘What is all this?’ he enquired, drily.

‘This lady has brought with her a newspaper containing an extraordinary statement which affects our family,’ I answered.

Uncle Silas raised himself, and looked with a hard, narrow scrutiny at the unknown young lady.

‘A libel, I suppose, in the paper?’ he said, extending his hand for it.

‘No, uncle — no; only a marriage,’ I answered.

‘Not Monica?’ he said, as he took it. ‘Pah, it smells all over of tobacco and beer,’ he added, throwing a little eau de Cologne over it.

He raised it with a mixture of curiosity and disgust, saying again ‘pah,’ as he did so.

He read the paragraph, and as he did his face changed from white, all over, to lead colour. He raised his eyes, and looked steadily for some seconds at the young lady, who seemed a little awed by his strange presence.

‘And you are, I suppose, the young lady, Sarah Matilda *née* Mangles, mentioned in this little paragraph?’ he said, in a tone you would have called a sneer, were it not that it trembled.

Sarah Matilda assented.

‘My son is, I dare say, within reach. It so happens that I wrote to arrest his journey, and summon him here, some days since — some days since — some days since,’ he repeated slowly, like a person whose mind has wandered far away from the theme on which he is speaking.

He had rung his bell, and old Wyat, always hovering about his rooms, entered.

‘I want my son, immediately. If not in the house, send Harry to the stables; if not there, let him be followed, instantly. Brice is an active fellow, and will know where to find him. If he is in Feltram, or at a distance, let Brice take a horse, and Master Dudley can ride it back. He must be here without the loss of one moment.’

There intervened nearly a quarter of an hour, during which whenever he recollected her, Uncle Silas treated the young lady with a hyper-refined and ceremonious politeness, which appeared to make her uneasy, and even a little shy, and certainly prevented a renewal of those lamentations and invectives which he had heard faintly from the stairhead.

But for the most part Uncle Silas seemed to forget us and his book, and all that surrounded him, lying back in the corner of his sofa, his chin upon his breast, and such a fearful shade and carving on his features as made me prefer looking in any direction but his.

At length we heard the tread of Dudley’s thick boots on the oak boards, and faint and muffled the sound of his voice as he cross-examined old Wyat before entering the chamber of audience.

I think he suspected quite another visitor, and had no expectation of seeing the particular young lady, who rose from her chair as he entered, in an opportune flood of tears, crying —

‘Oh, Dudley, Dudley! — oh, Dudley, could you? Oh, Dudley, your own poor Sal! You could not — you would not — your lawful wife!’

This and a good deal more, with cheeks that streamed like a window-pane in a thunder-shower, spoke Sarah Matilda with all her oratory, working his arm, which she clung to, up and down all the time, like the handle of a pump. But Dudley was, manifestly, confounded and dumbfoundered. He stood for a long time gaping at his father, and stole just one sheepish glance at me; and, with red face and forehead, looked down at his boots, and then again at his father, who remained just in the attitude I have described, and with the same forbidding and dreary intensity in his strange face.

Like a quarrelsome man worried in his sleep by a noise, Dudley suddenly woke up, as it were, with a start, in a half-suppressed exasperation, and shook her off with a jerk and a muttered curse, as she whisked involuntarily into a chair, with more violence than could have been pleasant.

‘Judging by your looks and demeanour, sir, I can almost anticipate your answers,’ said my uncle, addressing him suddenly. ‘Will you be good enough — pray, madame (parenthetically to our visitor), command yourself for a few moments. Is this young person the daughter of a Mr. Mangles, and is her name Sarah Matilda?'

'I dessay,' answered Dudley, hurriedly.

'Is she your wife?'

'Is she my wife?' repeated Dudley, ill at ease.

'Yes, sir; it is a plain question.'

All this time Sarah Matilda was perpetually breaking into talk, and with difficulty silenced by my uncle.

'Well, 'appen she says I am — does she?' replied Dudley.

'Is she your wife, sir?'

'Mayhap she so considers it, after a fashion,' he replied, with an impudent swagger, seating himself as he did so.

'What do *you* think, sir?' persisted Uncle Silas.

'I don't think nout about it,' replied Dudley, surlily.

'Is that account true?' said my uncle, handing him the paper.

'They wishes us to believe so, at any rate.'

'Answer directly, sir. We have our thoughts upon it. If it be true, it is capable of *every* proof. For expedition's sake I ask you. There is no use in prevaricating.'

'Who wants to deny it? It *is* true — there!'

'*There!* I knew he would,' screamed the young woman, hysterically, with a laugh of strange joy.

'Shut up, will ye?' growled Dudley, savagely.

'Oh, Dudley, Dudley, darling! what have I done?'

'Bin and ruined me, jest — that's all.'

'Oh! no, no, no, Dudley. Ye know I wouldn't. I could not — *could* not hurt ye, Dudley. No, no, no!'

He grinned at her, and, with a sharp side-nod, said —

'Wait a bit.'

'Oh, Dudley, don't be vexed, dear. I did not mean it. I would not hurt ye for all the world. Never.'

'Well, never mind. You and yours tricked me finely; and now you've got me — that's all.'

My uncle laughed a very odd laugh.

‘I knew it, of course; and upon my word, madame, you and he make a very pretty couple,’ sneered Uncle Silas.

Dudley made no answer, looking, however, very savage.

And with this poor young wife, so recently wedded, the low villain had actually solicited me to marry him!

I am quite certain that my uncle was as entirely ignorant as I of Dudley’s connection, and had, therefore, no participation in this appalling wickedness.

‘And I have to congratulate you, my good fellow, on having secured the affections of a very suitable and vulgar young woman.’

‘I baint the first o’ the family as a’ done the same,’ retorted Dudley.

At this taunt the old man’s fury for a moment overpowered him. In an instant he was on his feet, quivering from head to foot. I never saw such a countenance — like one of those demon-grotesques we see in the Gothic side-aisles and groinings — a dreadful grimace, monkey-like and insane — and his thin hand caught up his ebony stick, and shook it paralytically in the air.

‘If ye touch me wi’ that, I’ll smash ye, by —— !’ shouted Dudley, furious, raising his hands and hitching his shoulder, just as I had seen him when he fought Captain Oakley.

For a moment this picture was suspended before me, and I screamed, I know not what, in my terror. But the old man, the veteran of many a scene of excitement, where men disguise their ferocity in calm tones, and varnish their fury with smiles, had not quite lost his self-command. He turned toward me and said —

‘Does he know what he’s saying?’

And with an icy laugh of contempt, his high, thin forehead still flushed, he sat down trembling.

‘If you want to say aught, I’ll hear ye. Ye may jaw me all ye like, and I’ll stan’ it.’

‘Oh, I may speak? Thank you,’ sneered Uncle Silas, glancing slowly round at me, and breaking into a cold laugh.

‘Ay, I don’t mind cheek, not I; but you must not go for to do that, ye know. Gammon. I won’t stand a blow — I won’t fro *no* one.

‘Well, sir, availing myself of your permission to speak, I may remark, without offence to the young lady, that I don’t happen to recollect the name Mangles among the old families of England. I presume you have chosen her chiefly for her virtues and her graces.’

Mrs. Sarah Matilda, not apprehending this compliment quite as Uncle Silas meant it, dropped a courtesy, notwithstanding her agitation, and, wiping her eyes, said, with a blubbered smile —

‘You’re very kind, sure.’

‘I hope, for both your sakes, she has got a little money. I don’t see how you are to live else. You’re too lazy for a gamekeeper; and I don’t think you could keep a pot-house, you are so addicted to drinking and quarrelling. The only thing I am quite clear upon is, that you and your wife must find some other abode than this. You shall depart this evening: and now, Mr. and Mrs. Dudley Ruthyn, you may quit this room, if you please.’

Uncle Silas had risen, and made them one of his old courtly bows, smiling a deathlike sneer, and pointing to the door with his trembling fingers.

‘Come, will ye?’ said Dudley, grinding his teeth. ‘You’re pretty well done here.’

Not half understanding the situation, but looking woefully bewildered, she dropped a farewell courtesy at the door.

‘Will ye *cut*?’ barked Dudley, in a tone that made her jump; and suddenly, without looking about, he strode after her from the room.

‘Maud, how shall I recover this? The vulgar *villain* — the *fool*! What an abyss were we approaching! and for me the last hope gone — and for me utter, utter, irretrievable ruin.’

He was passing his fingers tremulously back and forward along the top of the mantelpiece, like a man in search of something, and continued so, looking along it, feebly and vacantly, although there was nothing there.

‘I wish, uncle — you do not know how much I wish — I could be of any use to you. Maybe I can?’

He turned, and looked at me sharply.

‘Maybe you can,’ he echoed slowly. ‘Yes, maybe you can,’ he repeated more briskly.’ Let us — let us see — let us think — that d —— fellow! —

my head!'

'You're not well, uncle?'

'Oh! yes, very well. We'll talk in the evening — I'll send for you.'

I found Wyat in the next room, and told her to hasten, as I thought he was ill. I hope it was not very selfish, but such had grown to be my horror of seeing him in one of his strange seizures, that I hastened from the room precipitately — partly to escape the risk of being asked to remain.

The walls of Bartram House are thick, and the recess at the doorway deep. As I closed my uncle's door, I heard Dudley's voice on the stairs. I did not wish to be seen by him or by his 'lady', as his poor wife called herself, who was engaged in vehement dialogue with him as I emerged, and not caring either to reenter my uncle's room, I remained quietly ensconced within the heavy door-case, in which position I overheard Dudley say with a savage snarl —

'You'll jest go back the way ye came. I'm not goin' wi' ye, if that's what ye be drivin' at — dang your impitins!'

'Oh! Dudley, dear, what have I done — what *have* I done — ye hate me so?'

'What a' ye done? Ye vicious little beast, ye! You've got us turned out an' disinherited wi' yer d —— d bosh, that's all; don't ye think it's enough?'

I could only hear her sobs and shrill tones in reply, for they were descending the stairs; and Mary Quince reported to me, in a horrified sort of way, that she saw him bundle her into the fly at the door, like a truss of hay into a hay-loft. And he stood with his head in at the window, scolding her, till it drove away.

'I knew he wor jawing her, poor thing! By the way he kep' waggin' his head — an' he had his fist inside, a shakin' in her face I'm sure he looked wicked enough for anything; an' she a crying like a babby, an' lookin' back, an' wavin' her wet hankicher to him — poor thing! — and she so young! 'Tis a pity. Dear me! I often think, Miss, 'tis well for me I never was married. And see how we all would like to get husbands for all that, though so few is happy together. 'Tis a queer world, and them that's single is maybe the best off after all.'

CHAPTER LII

THE PICTURE OF A WOLF

I went down that evening to the sitting-room which had been assigned to Milly and me, in search of a book — my good Mary Quince always attending me. The door was a little open, and I was startled by the light of a candle proceeding from the fireside, together with a considerable aroma of tobacco and brandy.

On my little work-table, which he had drawn beside the hearth, lay Dudley's pipe, his brandy-flask, and an empty tumbler; and he was sitting with one foot on the fender, his elbow on his knee, and his head resting in his hand, weeping. His back being a little toward the door, he did not perceive us; and we saw him rub his knuckles in his eyes, and heard the sounds of his selfish lamentation.

Mary and I stole away quietly, leaving him in possession, wondering when he was to leave the house, according to the sentence which I had heard pronounced upon him.

I was delighted to see old 'Giblets' quietly strapping his luggage in the hall, and heard from him in a whisper that he was to leave that evening by rail — he did not know whither.

About half an hour afterwards, Mary Quince, going out to reconnoitre, heard from old Wyat in the lobby that he had just started to meet the train.

Blessed be heaven for that deliverance! An evil spirit had been cast out, and the house looked lighter and happier. It was not until I sat down in the quiet of my room that the scenes and images of that agitating day began to move before my memory in orderly procession, and for the first time I appreciated, with a stunning sense of horror and a perfect rapture of thanksgiving, the value of my escape and the immensity of the danger which had threatened me. It may have been miserable weakness — I think it was. But I was young, nervous, and afflicted with a troublesome sort of conscience, which occasionally went mad, and insisted, in small things as well as great, upon sacrifices which my reason now assures me were absurd. Of Dudley I had a perfect horror; and yet had that system of solicitation, that dreadful and direct appeal to my compassion, that placing of my feeble girlhood in the seat of the arbiter of my aged uncle's hope or despair, been long persisted in, my resistance might have been worn out — who can tell? — and I self-sacrificed! Just as criminals in Germany are teased, and watched, and cross-examined, year after year, incessantly, into a sort of madness; and worn out with the suspense, the iteration, the self-restraint, and insupportable fatigue, they at last cut all short, accuse themselves, and go infinitely relieved to the scaffold — you may guess, then, for me, nervous, self-diffident, and alone, how intense was the comfort of knowing that Dudley was actually married, and the harrowing importunity which had just commenced for ever silenced.

That night I saw my uncle. I pitied him, though I feared him. I was longing to tell him how anxious I was to help him, if only he could point out the way. It was in substance what I had already said, but now strongly urged. He brightened; he sat up perpendicularly in his chair with a countenance, not weak or fatuous now, but resolute and searching, and which contracted into dark thought or calculation as I talked.

I dare say I spoke confusedly enough. I was always nervous in his presence; there was, I fancy, something mesmeric in the odd sort of influence which, without effort, he exercised over my imagination.

Sometimes this grew into a dismal panic, and Uncle Silas — polished, mild — seemed unaccountably horrible to me. Then it was no longer an accidental fascination of electro-biology. It was something more. His nature was incomprehensible by me. He was without the nobleness, without the freshness, without the softness, without the frivolities of such human nature as I had experienced, either within myself or in other persons. I instinctively felt that appeals to sympathies or feelings could no more affect him than a marble monument. He seemed to accommodate his conversation to the moral structure of others, just as spirits are said to assume the shape of mortals. There were the sensualities of the gourmet for his body, and there ended his human nature, as it seemed to me. Through that semi-transparent structure I thought I could now and then discern the light or the glare of his inner life. But I understood it not.

He never scoffed at what was good or noble — his hardest critic could not nail him to one such sentence; and yet, it seemed somehow to me that his unknown nature was a systematic blasphemy against it all. If fiend he was, he was yet something higher than the garrulous, and withal feeble, demon of Goethe. He assumed the limbs and features of our mortal nature. He shrouded his own, and was a profoundly reticent Mephistopheles. Gentle he had been to me — kindly he had nearly always spoken; but it seemed like the mild talk of one of those goblins of the desert, whom Asiatic superstition tells of, who appear in friendly shapes to stragglers from the caravan, beckon to them from afar, call them by their names, and lead them where they are found no more. Was, then, all his kindness but a phosphoric radiance covering something colder and more awful than the grave?

‘It is very noble of you, Maud — it is angelic; your sympathy with a ruined and despairing old man. But I fear you will recoil. I tell you frankly that less than twenty thousand pounds will not extricate me from the quag of ruin in which I am entangled — lost!’

‘Recoil! Far from it. I’ll do it. There must be some way.’

‘Enough, my fair young protectress — celestial enthusiast, enough. Though you do not, yet I recoil. I could not bring myself to accept this sacrifice. What signifies, even to me, my extrication? I lie a mangled wretch, with fifty mortal wounds on my crown; what avails the healing of one wound, when there are so many beyond all cure? Better to let me perish where I fall; and reserve your money for the worthier objects whom, perhaps, hereafter may avail to save.’

‘But I *will* do this. I must. I cannot see you suffer with the power in my hands unemployed to help you,’ I exclaimed.

‘Enough, dear Maud; the will is here — enough: there is balm in your compassion and goodwill. Leave me, ministering angel; for the present I cannot. If you *will*, we can talk of it again. Goodnight.’

And so we parted.

The attorney from Feltram, I afterwards heard, was with him nearly all that night, trying in vain to devise by their joint ingenuity any means by which I might tie myself up. But there were none. I could not bind myself.

I was myself full of the hope of helping him. What was this sum to me, great as it seemed? Truly nothing. I could have spared it, and never felt the loss.

I took up a large quarto with coloured prints, one of the few books I had brought with me from dear old Knowl. Too much excited to hope for sleep in bed, I opened it, and turned over the leaves, my mind still full of Uncle Silas and the sum I hoped to help him with.

Unaccountably one of those coloured engravings arrested my attention. It represented the solemn solitude of a lofty forest; a girl, in Swiss costume, was flying in terror, and as she fled flinging a piece of meat behind her which she had taken from a little market-basket hanging upon her arm. Through the glade a pack of wolves were pursuing her.

The narrative told, that on her return homeward with her marketing, she had been chased by wolves, and barely escaped by flying at her utmost speed, from time to time retarding, as she did so, the pursuit, by throwing, piece by piece, the contents of her basket, in her wake, to be devoured and fought for by the famished beasts of prey.

This print had seized my imagination. I looked with a curious interest on the print: something in the disposition of the trees, their great height, and rude boughs, interlacing, and the awful shadow beneath, reminded me of a portion of the Windmill Wood where Milly and I had often rambled. Then I looked at the figure of the poor girl, flying for her life, and glancing terrified over her shoulder. Then I gazed on the gaping, murderous pack, and the hoary brute that led the van; and then I leaned back in my chair, and I thought — perhaps some latent association suggested what seemed a thing so unlikely — of a fine print in my portfolio from Vandyke's noble picture of Belisarius. Idly I traced with my pencil, as I leaned back, on an envelope that lay upon the table, this little inscription. It was mere fiddling; and, absurd as it looked, there was nothing but an honest meaning in it:— '20,000*l*. Date Obolum Belisario!' My dear father had translated the little Latin inscription for me, and I had written it down as a sort of exercise of memory; and also, perhaps, as expressive of that sort of compassion which my uncle's fall and miserable fate excited invariably in me. So I threw this queer little memorandum upon the open leaf of the book, and again the flight, the pursuit, and the bait to stay it, engaged my eye. And I heard a voice near the hearthstone, as I thought, say, in a stern whisper, 'Fly the fangs of Belisarius!'

'What's that?' said I, turning sharply to Mary Quince.

Mary rose from her work at the fireside, staring at me with that odd sort of frown that accompanies fear and curiosity.

‘You spoke? Did you speak?’ I said, catching her by the arm, very much frightened myself.

‘No, Miss; no, dear!’ answered she, plainly thinking that I was a little wrong in my head.

There could be no doubt it was a trick of the imagination, and yet to this hour I could recognise that clear stern voice among a thousand, were it to speak again.

Jaded after a night of broken sleep and much agitation, I was summoned next morning to my uncle’s room.

He received me *oddly*, I thought. His manner had changed, and made an uncomfortable impression upon me. He was gentle, kind, smiling, submissive, as usual; but it seemed to me that he experienced henceforth toward me the same half-superstitous repulsion which I had always felt from him. Dream, or voice, or vision — which had done it? There seemed to be an unconscious antipathy and fear. When he thought I was not looking, his eyes were sometimes grimly fixed for a moment upon me. When I looked at him, his eyes were upon the book before him; and when he spoke, a person not heeding what he uttered would have fancied that he was reading aloud from it.

There was nothing tangible but this shrinking from the encounter of our eyes. I said he was kind as usual. He was even more so. But there was this new sign of our silently repellant natures. Dislike it could not be. He knew I longed to serve him. Was it shame? Was there not a shade of horror in it?

‘I have not slept,’ said he. ‘For me the night has passed in thought, and the fruit of it is this — I *cannot*, Maud, accept your noble offer.’

‘I am *very* sorry,’ exclaimed I, in all honesty.

‘I know it, my dear niece, and appreciate your goodness; but there are many reasons — none of them, I trust, ignoble — and which together render it impossible. No. It would be misunderstood — my honour shall not be impugned.’

‘But, sir, that could not be; you have never proposed it. It would be all, from first to last, *my* doing.’

‘True, dear Maud, but I know, alas! more of this evil and slanderous world than your happy inexperience can do. Who will receive our testimony? None — no, not one. The difficulty — the insuperable moral difficulty is this — that I should expose myself to the plausible imputation of having worked upon you, unduly, for this end; and more, that I could not hold myself quite free from blame. It is your voluntary goodness, Maud. But you are young, inexperienced; and it is, I hold it, my duty to stand between you and any dealing with your property at so unripe an age. Some people may call this Quixotic. In my mind it is an imperious mandate of conscience; and I peremptorily refuse to disobey it, although within three weeks an execution will be in this house!'

I did not quite know what an execution meant; but from two harrowing novels, with whose distresses I was familiar, I knew that it indicated some direful process of legal torture and spoliation.

'Oh, uncle I — oh, sir! — you cannot allow this to happen. What will people say of me? And — and there is poor Milly — and *everything*! Think what it will be.'

'It cannot be helped — *you* cannot help it, Maud. Listen to me. There will be an execution here, I cannot say exactly how soon, but, I think, in a little more than a fortnight. I must provide for your comfort. You must leave. I have arranged that you shall join Milly, for the present, in France, till I have time to look about me. You had better, I think, write to your cousin, Lady Knollys. She, with all her oddities, has a heart. Can you say, Maud, that I have been kind?'

'You have never been anything but kind,' I exclaimed.

'That I've been self-denying when you made me a generous offer?' he continued. 'That I now act to spare you pain? You may tell her, not as a message from me, but as a fact, that I am seriously thinking of vacating my guardianship — that I feel I have done her an injustice, and that, so soon as my mind is a little less tortured, I shall endeavour to effect a reconciliation with her, and would wish ultimately to transfer the care of your person and education to *her*. You may say I have no longer an interest even in vindicating my name. My son has wrecked himself by a marriage. I forgot to tell you he stopped at Feltram, and this morning wrote to pray a parting interview. If I grant it, it shall be the last. I shall never see him or correspond with him more.'

The old man seemed much overcome, and held his hankerchief to his eyes.

'He and his wife are, I understand, about to emigrate; the sooner the better,' he resumed, bitterly. 'Deeply, Maud, I regret having tolerated his suit to you, even for a moment. Had I thought it over, as I did the whole case last night, nothing could have induced me to permit it. But I have lived for so long like a monk in his cell, my wants and observation limited to the narrow compass of this chamber, that my knowledge of the world has died out with my youth and my hopes: and I did not, as I ought to have done, consider many objections. Therefore, dear Maud, on this one subject, I entreat, be silent; its discussion can effect nothing now. I was wrong, and frankly ask you to forget my mistake.'

I had been on the point of writing to Lady Knollys on this odious subject, when, happily, it was set at rest by the disclosure of yesterday; and being so, I could have no difficulty in acceding to my uncle's request. He was conceding so much that I could not withhold so trifling a concession in return.

'I hope Monica will continue to be kind to poor Milly after I am gone.'

Here there were a few seconds of meditation.

'Maud, you will not, I think, refuse to convey the substance of what I have just said in a letter to Lady Knollys, and perhaps you would have no objection to let me see it when it is written. It will prevent the possibility of its containing any misconception of what I have just spoken: and, Maud, you won't forget to say whether I have been kind. It would be a satisfaction to me to know that Monica was assured that I never either teased or bullied my young ward.'

With these words he dismissed me; and forthwith I completed such a letter as would quite embody what he had said; and in my own glowing terms, being in high goodhumour with Uncle Silas, recorded my estimate of his gentleness and goodnature; and when I submitted it to him, he expressed his admiration of what he was pleased to call my cleverness in so exactly conveying what he wished, and his gratitude for the handsome terms in which I had spoken of my old guardian.

CHAPTER LIII

AN ODD PROPOSAL

As I and Mary Quince returned from our walk that day, and had entered the hall, I was surprised most disagreeably by Dudley's emerging from the vestibule at the foot of the great staircase. He was, I suppose, in his travelling costume — a rather soiled white surtout, a great coloured muffler in folds about his throat, his 'chimney-pot' on, and his fur cap sticking out from his pocket. He had just descended, I suppose, from my uncle's room. On seeing me he stepped back, and stood with his shoulders to the wall, like a mummy in a museum.

I pretended to have a few words to say to Mary before leaving the hall, in the hope that, as he seemed to wish to escape me, he would take the opportunity of getting quickly off the scene.

But he had changed his mind, it would seem, in the interval; for when I glanced in that direction again he had moved toward us, and stood in the hall with his hat in his hand. I must do him the justice to say he looked horribly dismal, sulky, and frightened.

'Ye'll gi'e me a word, Miss — only a thing I ought to say — for your good; by —— , mind, it's for *your* good, Miss.'

Dudley stood a little way off, viewing me, with his hat in both hands and a 'glooming' countenance.

I detested the idea of either hearing or speaking to him; but I had no resolution to refuse, and only saying 'I can't imagine what you can wish to speak to me about,' I approached him. 'Wait there at the banister, Quince.'

There was a fragrance of alcohol about the flushed face and gaudy muffler of this odious cousin, which heightened the effect of his horribly dismal features. He was speaking, besides, a little thickly; but his manner was dejected, and he was treating me with an elaborate and discomfited respect which reassured me.

'I'm a bit up a tree, Miss,' he said shuffling his feet on the oak floor. 'I behaved a d —— fool; but I baint one o' they sort. I'm a fellah as 'ill fight his man, an' stan' up to 'm fair, don't ye see? An' *baint* one o' they sort — no, *dang* it, I baint.'

Dudley delivered his puzzling harangue with a good deal of undertoned vehemence, and was strangely agitated. He, too, had got an unpleasant way of avoiding my eye, and glancing along the floor from corner to corner as he spoke, which gave him a very hang-dog air.

He was twisting his fingers in his great sandy whisker, and pulling it roughly enough to drag his cheek about by that savage purchase; and with his other hand he was crushing and rubbing his hat against his knee.

'The old boy above there be half crazed, I think; he don't mean half as he says thof, not he. But I'm in a bad fix anyhow — a regular sell it's been, and I can't get a tizzy out of him. So, ye see, I'm up a tree, Miss; and he sich a one, he'll make it a wuss mull if I let him. He's as sharp wi' me as one o' them lawyer chaps, dang 'em, and he's a lot of I O's and rubbitch o' mine; and Bryerly writes to me he can't gi'e me my legacy, 'cause he's got a notice from Archer and Sleigh a warnin' him not to gi'e me as much as a bob; for I signed it away to governor, he says — which I believe's a lie. I may a' signed some writing— 'appen I did — when I was a bit cut one night. But that's no way to catch a gentleman, and 'twon't stand. There's justice to be had, and 'twon't *stand*, I say; and I'm not in 'is hands that way. Thof I may be a bit up the spout, too, I don't deny; only I baint agoin' the whole hog all at once. I'm none o' they sort. He'll find I baint.'

Here Mary Quince coughed demurely from the foot of the stair, to remind me that the conversation was protracted.

'I don't very well understand,' I said gravely; 'and I am now going upstairs.'

'Don't jest a minute, Miss; it's only a word, ye see. We'll be goin' t' Australia, Sary Mangles, an' me, aboard the *Seamew*, on the 5th. I'm for Liverpool tonight, and she'll meet me there, an' — an', please God Almighty, ye'll never see me more; an I'd rather gi'e ye a lift, Maud, before I go: an' I tell ye what, if ye'll just gi'e me your written promise ye'll gi'e me that twenty thousand ye were offering to gi'e the Governor, I'll take ye cleverly out o' Bartram, and put ye wi' your cousin Knollys, or anywhere ye like best.'

'Take me from Bartram — for twenty thousand pounds! Take me away from my guardian! You seem to forget, sir,' my indignation rising as I spoke, 'that I can visit my cousin, Lady Knollys, whenever I please.'

'Well, that is as it may be,' he said, with a sulky deliberation, scraping about a little bit of paper that lay on the floor with the toe of his boot.

'It *is* as it may be, and that is as I say, sir; and considering how you have treated me — your mean, treacherous, and infamous suit, and your cruel treason to your poor wife, I am amazed at your effrontery.'

I turned to leave him, being, in truth, in one of my passions.

'Don't ye be a flying' out,' he said peremptorily, and catching me roughly by the wrist,' I baint a-going to vex ye. What a mouth you be, as can't see your way! Can't ye speak wi' common sense, like a woman — dang it — for once, and not keep brawling like a brat — can't ye see what I'm saying? I'll take ye out o' all this, and put ye wi' your cousin, or wheresoever you list, if ye'll gi'e me what I say.'

He was, for the first time, looking me in the face, but with contracted eyes, and a countenance very much agitated.

'Money?' said I, with a prompt disdain.

'Ay, money — twenty thousand pounds — *there*. On or off?' he replied, with an unpleasant sort of effort.

'You ask my promise for twenty thousand pounds, and you shan't have it.'

My cheeks were flaming, and I stamped on the ground as I spoke.

If he had known how to appeal to my better feelings, I am sure I should have done, perhaps not quite that, all at once at least, but something handsome, to assist him. But this application was so shabby and insolent! What could he take me for? That I should suppose his placing me with Cousin Monica constituted her my guardian? Why, he must fancy me the merest baby. There was a kind of stupid cunning in this that disgusted my goodnature and outraged my self-importance.

'You won't gi'e me that, then?' he said, looking down again, with a frown, and working his mouth and cheeks about as I could fancy a man rolling a piece of tobacco in his jaw.

'Certainly *not*, sir,' I replied.

'*Take* it, then,' he replied, still looking down, very black and discontented.

I joined Mary Quince, extremely angry. As I passed under the carved oak arch of the vestibule, I saw his figure in the deepening twilight. The picture remains in its murky halo fixed in memory. Standing where he last spoke in the centre of the hall, not looking after me, but downward, and, as well as I could see, with the countenance of a man who has lost a game, and a ruinous wager too — that is black and desperate. I did not utter a syllable on the way up. When I reached my room, I began to reconsider the interview more at my leisure. I was, such were my ruminations, to have agreed at once to his preposterous offer, and to have been driven, while he smirked and grimaced behind my back at his acquaintances, through Feltram in his dog-cart to Elverston; and then, to the just indignation of my uncle, to have been delivered up to Lady Knolly's guardianship, and to have handed my driver, as I alighted, the handsome fare of 20.000*l*. It required the impudence of Tony Lumpkin, without either his fun or his shrewdness, to have conceived such a prodigious practical joke.

'Maybe you'd like a little tea, Miss?' insinuated Mary Quince.

'What impertinence!' I exclaimed, with one of my angry stamps on the floor. 'Not you, dear old Quince,' I added. 'No — no tea just now.'

And I resumed my ruminations, which soon led me to this train of thought— 'Stupid and insulting as Dudley's proposition was, it yet involved a great treason against my uncle. Should I be weak enough to be silent, may he not, wishing to forestall me, misrepresent all that has passed, so as to throw the blame altogether upon me?'

This idea seized upon me with a force which I could not withstand; and on the impulse of the moment I obtained admission to my uncle, and related exactly what had passed. When I had finished my narrative, which he listened to without once raising his eyes, my uncle cleared his throat once or twice, as if to speak. He was smiling — I thought with an effort, and with elevated brows. When I concluded, he hummed one of those sliding notes, which a less refined man might have expressed by a whistle of surprise and contempt, and again he essayed to speak, but continued silent. The fact is, he seemed to me very much disconcerted. He rose from his seat, and shuffled about the room in his slippers, I believe affecting only to be in search of something, opening and shutting two or three drawers, and turning over some books and papers; and at length, taking up some loose sheets of manuscript, he appeared to have found what he was looking for, and began to read them carelessly, with his back towards me, and with another effort to clear his voice, he said at last —

‘And pray, what could the fool mean by all that?’

‘I think he must have taken me for an idiot, sir,’ I answered.

‘Not unlikely. He has lived in a stable, among horses and ostlers; he has always seemed to me something like a centaur — that is a centaur composed not of man and horse, but of an ape and an ass.’

And upon this jibe he laughed, not coldly and sarcastically, as was his wont, but, I thought, flurriedly. And, continuing to look into his papers, he said, his back still toward me as he read —

‘And he did not favour you with an exposition of his meaning, which, except in so far as it estimated his deserts at the modest sum you have named, appears to me too oracular to be interpreted without a kindred inspiration?’

And again he laughed. He was growing more like himself.

‘As to your visiting your cousin, Lady Knollys, the stupid rogue had only five minutes before heard me express my wish that you should do so before leaving this. I am quite resolved you shall — that is, unless, dear Maud, you should yourself object; but, of course, we must wait for an invitation, which, I conjecture, will not be long in coming. In fact, your letter will naturally bring it about, and, I trust, open the way to a permanent residence with her. The more I think it over, the more am I convinced, dear niece, that as things are likely to turn out, my roof would be no desirable shelter for you; and that, under all circumstances, hers would. Such were my motives, Maud, in opening, through your letter, a door of reconciliation between us.’

I felt that I ought to have kissed his hand — that he had indicated precisely the future that I most desired; and yet there was within me a vague feeling, akin to suspicion — akin to dismay which chilled and overcast my soul.

‘But, Maud,’ he said, ‘I am disquieted to think of that stupid jackanapes presuming to make you such an offer! A creditable situation truly — arriving in the dark at Elverston, under the solitary escort of that wild young man, with whom you would have fled from my guardianship; and, Maud, I tremble as I ask myself the question, would he have conducted you to Elverston at all? When you have lived as long in the world as I, you will appreciate its wickedness more justly.’ Here there was a little pause.

‘I know, my dear, that were he convinced of his legal marriage with that young woman,’ he resumed, perceiving how startled I looked, ‘such an idea, of course, would not have entered his head; but he does not believe any such thing. Contrary to fact and logic, he does honestly think that his hand is still at his disposal; and I certainly do suspect that he would have employed that excursion in endeavouring to persuade you to think as he does. Be that how it may, however, it is satisfactory to me to know that you shall never more be troubled by one word from that ill-regulated young man. I made him my adieux, such as they were, this evening; and never more shall he enter the walls of Bartram-Haugh while we two live.'

Uncle Silas replaced the papers which had ostensibly interested him so much, and returned. There was a vein which was visible near the angle of his lofty temple, and in moments of agitation stood out against the surrounding pallor in a knotted blue cord; and as he came back smiling askance, I saw this sign of inward tumult.

'We can, however, afford to despise the follies and knaveries of the world, Maud, as long as we act, as we have hitherto done, with perfect confidence in each other. Heaven bless you, dear Maud! Your report troubled me, I believe, more than it need — troubled me a good deal; but reflection assures me it is nothing. He is gone. In a few days' time he will be on the sea. I will issue my orders tomorrow morning, and he will never more, during his brief stay in England, gain admission to Bartram-Haugh. Goodnight, my good niece; I thank you.'

And so I returned to Mary Quince, on the whole happier than I had left her, but still with the confused and jarring vision I could not interpret perpetually rising before me; and as, from time to time, shapeless anxieties agitated me, relieving them by appeals to Him who alone is wise and strong.

Next day brought me a goodnatured gossiping letter from dear Milly, written in compulsory French, which was, in some places, very difficult to interpret. She gave me a very pleasant account of the place, and her opinion of the girls who were inmates, and mentioned some of the nuns with high commendation. The language plainly cramped poor Milly's genius; but although there was by no means so much fun as an honest English letter would have brought me, there could be no mistake about her liking the place, and she expressed her honest longing to see me in the most affectionate terms.

This letter came enclosed in one to my uncle, from the proper authority in the convent; and as there was neither address within, nor postmark without, I was as much in the dark as ever as to poor Milly's whereabouts.

Pencilled across the envelope of this letter, in my uncle's hand, were the words, 'Let me have your answer when sealed, and I will transmit it. — S.R.'

When, accordingly, some days later, I did place my letter to Milly in my uncle's hands, he told me the reason of his reserves on the subject.

'I thought it best, dear Maud, not to plague you with a secret, and Milly's present address is one. It will in a few weeks become the rallying-point of our diverse routes, when you shall meet her, and I join you both. Nobody, until the storm shall have blown over, must know where I am to be found, except my lawyer; and I think you would prefer ignorance to the trouble of keeping a secret on which so much may depend.'

This being reasonable, and even considerate, I acquiesced.

In that interval there reached me such a charming, gay, and affectionate letter — a very *long* letter, too — though the writer was scarcely seven miles away, from dear Cousin Monica, full of pleasant gossip, and rose-coloured and golden castles in the air, and the kindest interest in poor Milly, and the warmest affection for me.

One other incident varied that interval, if possible more pleasantly than those. It was the announcement, in a Liverpool paper, of the departure of the *Seamew*, bound for Melbourne; and among the passengers were reported 'Dudley Ruthyn, Esquire, of Bartram-H., and Mrs. D. Ruthyn.'

And now I began to breathe freely, I plainly saw the end of my probation approaching: a short excursion to France, a happy meeting with Milly, and then a delightful residence with Cousin Monica for the remainder of my nonage.

You will say then that my spirits and my serenity were quite restored. Not quite. How marvellously lie our anxieties, in filmy layers, one over the other! Take away that which has lain on the upper surface for so long — the care of cares — the only one, as it seemed to you, between your soul and the radiance of Heaven — and straight you find a new stratum there. As physical science tells us no fluid is without its skin, so does it seem with this fine medium of the soul, and these successive films of care that form upon its surface on mere contact with the upper air and light.

What was my new trouble? A very fantastic one, you will say — the illusion of a self-tormentor. It was the face of Uncle Silas which haunted me. Notwithstanding the old pale smile, there was a shrinking grimness, and the always-averted look.

Sometimes I fancied his mind was disordered. I could not account for the eerie lights and shadows that flickered on his face, except so. There was a look of shame and fear of me, amazing as that seems, in the sheen of his peaked smile.

I thought, ‘Perhaps he blames himself for having tolerated Dudley’s suit — for having urged it on grounds of personal distress — for having altogether lowered, though under sore temptation, both himself and his office; and he thinks that he has forfeited my respect.’

Such was my analysis; but in the *coup-d’oeil* of that white face that dazzled me in darkness, and haunted my daily reveries with a faded light, there was an intangible character of the insidious and the terrible.

CHAPTER LIV

IN SEARCH OF MR. CHARKE'S SKELETON

On the whole, however, I was unspeakably relieved. Dudley Ruthyn, Esq., and Mrs. D. Ruthyn, were now skimming the blue waves on the wings of the *Seamew*, and every morning widened the distance between us, which was to go on increasing until it measured a point on the antipodes. The Liverpool paper containing this golden line was carefully preserved in my room; and like the gentleman who, when much tried by the shrewish heiress whom he had married, used to retire to his closet and read over his marriage settlement, I used, when blue devils haunted me, to unfold my newspaper and read the paragraph concerning the *Seamew*.

The day I now speak of was a dismal one of sleety snow. My own room seemed to me cheerier than the lonely parlour, where I could not have had good Mary Quince so decorously.

A good fire, that kind and trusty face, the peep I had just indulged in at my favourite paragraph, and the certainty of soon seeing my dear cousin Monica, and afterwards affectionate Milly, raised my spirits.

'So,' said I, 'as old Wyat, you say, is laid up with rheumatism, and can't turn up to scold me, I think I'll run up stairs and make an exploration, and find poor Mr. Charke's skeleton in a closet.'

'Oh, law, Miss Maud, how can you say such things!' exclaimed good old Quince, lifting up her honest grey head and round eyes from her knitting.

I had grown so familiar with the frightful tradition of Mr. Charke and his suicide, that I could now afford to frighten old Quince with him.

'I am quite serious. I am going to have a ramble upstairs and downstairs, like goosey-goosey-gander; and if I do light upon his chamber, it is all the more interesting. I feel so like Adelaide, in the "Romance of the Forest," the book I was reading to you last night, when she commenced her delightful rambles through the interminable ruined abbey in the forest.'

'Shall I go with you, Miss?'

'No, Quince; stay there; keep a good fire, and make some tea. I suspect I shall lose heart and return very soon;' and with a shawl about me, cowl fashion, over my head, I stole upstairs.

I shall not recount with the particularity of the conscientious heroine of Mrs. Ann Radcliffe, all the suites of apartments, corridors, and lobbies, which I threaded in my ramble. It will be enough to mention that I lighted upon a door at the end of a long gallery, which, I think, ran parallel with the front of the house; it interested me because it had the air of having been very long undisturbed. There were two rusty bolts, which did not evidently belong to its original securities, and had been, though very long ago, somewhat clumsily superadded. Dusty and rusty they were, but I had no difficulty in drawing them back. There was a rusty key, I remember it well, with a crooked handle in the lock; I tried to turn it, but could not. My curiosity was piqued. I was thinking of going back and getting Mary Quince's assistance. It struck me, however, that possibly it was not locked, so I pulled the door and it opened quite easily. I did not find myself in a strangely-furnished suite of apartments, but at the entrance of a gallery, which diverged at right angles from that through which I had just passed; it was very imperfectly lighted, and ended in total darkness.

I began to think how far I had already come, and to consider whether I could retrace my steps with accuracy in case of a panic, and I had serious thoughts of returning.

The idea of Mr. Charke was growing unpleasantly sharp and menacing; and as I looked down the long space before me, losing itself among ambiguous shadows, lulled in a sinister silence, and as it were inviting my entrance like a trap, I was very near yielding to the cowardly impulse.

But I took heart of grace and determined to see a little more. I opened a side-door, and entered a large room, where were, in a corner, some rusty and cobwebbed bird-cages, but nothing more. It was a wainscoted room, but a white mildew stained the panels. I looked from the window: it commanded that dismal, weed-choked quadrangle into which I had once looked from another window. I opened a door at its farther end, and entered another chamber, not quite so large, but equally dismal, with the same prisonlike look-out, not very easily discerned through the grimy panes and the sleet that was falling thickly outside. The door through which I had entered made a little accidental creak, and, with my heart at my lips, I gazed at it, expecting to see Charke, or the skeleton of which I had talked so lightly, stalk in at the halfopen aperture. But I had an odd sort of courage which was always fighting against my cowardly nerves, and I walked to the door, and looking up and down the dismal passage, was reassured.

Well, one room more — just that whose deep-set door fronted me, with a melancholy frown, at the opposite end of the chamber. So to it I glided, shoved it open, advancing one step, and the great bony figure of Madame de la Rougierre was before me.

I could see nothing else.

The drowsy traveller who opens his sheets to slip into bed, and sees a scorpion coiled between them, may have experienced a shock the same in kind, but immeasurably less in degree.

She sat in a clumsy old armchair, with an ancient shawl about her, and her bare feet in a delft tub. She looked a thought more withered. Her wig shoved back disclosed her bald wrinkled forehead, and enhanced the ugly effect of her exaggerated features and the gaunt hollows of her face. With a sense of incredulity and terror I gazed, freezing, at this evil phantom, who returned my stare for a few seconds with a shrinking scowl, dismal and grim, as of an evil spirit detected.

The meeting, at least then and there, was as complete a surprise for her as for me. She could not tell how I might take it; but she quickly rallied, burst into a loud screeching laugh, and, with her old Walpurgis gaiety, danced some fantastic steps in her bare wet feet, tracking the floor with water, and holding out with finger and thumb, in dainty caricature, her slammakin old skirt, while she sang some of her nasal patois with an abominable hilarity and emphasis.

With a gasp, I too recovered from the fascination of the surprise. I could not speak though for some seconds, and Madame was first.

‘Ah, dear Maud, what surprise! Are we not overjoy, dearest, and cannot speak? I am full of joy — quite charmed — *ravie* — of seeing you. So are you of me, your face betray. Ah! yes, thou dear little baboon! here is poor Madame once more! Who could have imagine?’

‘I thought you were in France, Madame,’ I said, with a dismal effort.

‘And so I was, dear Maud; I ‘av just arrive. Your uncle Silas he wrote to the superioress for gouvernante to accompany a young lady — that is you, Maud — on her journey, and she send me; and so, ma chère, here is poor Madame arrive to charge herself of that affair.'

'How soon do we leave for France, Madame?' I asked.

'I do not know, but the old women — wat is her name?'

'Wyat,' I suggested.

'Oh! oui, Waiatt; — she says two, three week. And who conduct you to poor Madame's apartment, my dear Maud?' She inquired insinuatingly.

'No one, I answered promptly: 'I reached it quite accidentally, and I can't imagine why you should conceal yourself.' Something like indignation kindled in my mind as I began to wonder at the sly strategy which had been practised upon me.

'I 'av not conceal myself, Mademoiselle,' retorted the governness. 'I 'av act precisally as I 'av been ordered. Your uncle, Mr. Silas Ruthyn, he is afraid, Waiatt says, to be interrupted by his creditors, and everything must be done very quaitly. I have been commanded to avoid *me faire voir*, you know, and I must obey my employer — voilà tout!'

'And for how long have you been residing here?' I persisted, in the same resentful vein.

''Bout a week. It is soche triste place! I am so glad to see you, Maud! I've been so isolée, you dear leetle fool!'

'You are *not* glad, Madame; you don't love me — you never did,' I exclaimed with sudden vehemence.

'Yes, I am *very* glad; you know not, chère petite *niaise*, how I 'av desire to educate you a leetle more. Let us understand one another. You think I do not love you, Mademoiselle, because you have mentioned to your poor papa that little *dérèglement* in his library. I have repent very often that so great indiscretion of my life. I thought to find some letters of Dr. Braierly. I think that man was trying to get your property, my dear Maud, and if I had found something I would tell you all about. But it was very great *sottise*, and you were very right to denounce me to Monsieur. Je n'ai point de rancune contre vous. No, no, none at all. On the contrary, I shall be your *gardienne tutelaire* — wat you call? — guardian angel — ah, yes, that is it. You think I speak *par dérision*; not at all. No, my dear cheaile, I do not speak *par moquerie*, unless perhaps the very least degree in the world.'

And with these words Madame laughed unpleasantly, showing the black caverns at the side of her mouth, and with a cold, steady malignity in her gaze.

‘Yes,’ I said; ‘I know what you mean, Madame — you *hate* me.’

‘Oh! wat great ogly word! I am shock! *vous me faites honte*. Poor Madame, she never hate any one; she loves all her friends, and her enemies she leaves to Heaven; while I am, as you see, more gay, more *joyeuse* than ever, they have not been ‘appy — no, they have not been fortunate these others. Wen I return, I find always some of my enemy they ‘av die, and some they have put themselves into embarrassment, or there has arrived to them some misfortune;’ and Madame shrugged and laughed a little scornfully.

A kind of horror chilled my rising anger, and I was silent.

‘You see, my dear Maud, it is very natural you should think I hate you. When I was with Mr. Austin Ruthyn, at Knowl, you know you did not like a me — never. But in consequence of our intimacy I confide you that which I ‘av of most dear in the world, my reputation. It is always so. The pupil can *calomniate*, without been discover, the gouvernante. ‘Av I not been always kind to you, Maud? Which ‘av I use of violence or of sweetness the most? I am, like other persons, *jalouse de ma réputation*; and it was difficult to suffer with patience the banishment which was invoked by you, because chiefly for your good, and for an indiscretion to which I was excited by motives the most pure and laudable. It was you who spied so cleverly — eh! and denounce me to Monsieur Ruthyn? Helas! wat bad world it is!’

‘I do not mean to speak at all about that occurrence, Madame; I will not discuss it. I dare say what you tell me of the cause of your engagement here is true, and I suppose we must travel, as you say, in company; but you must know that the less we see of each other while in this house the better.’

‘I am not so sure of that, my sweet little *béte*; your education has been neglected, or rather entirely abandoned, since you ‘av arrive at this place, I am told. You must not be a *bestiole*. We must do, you and I, as we are ordered. Mr. Silas Ruthyn he will tell us.’

All this time Madame was pulling on her stockings, getting her boots on, and otherwise proceeding with her dowdy toilet. I do not know why I stood there talking to her. We often act very differently from what we would have done upon reflection. I had involved myself in a dialogue, as wiser generals than I have entangled themselves in a general action when they meant only an affair of outposts. I had grown a little angry, and would not betray the least symptom of fear, although I felt that sensation profoundly.

‘My beloved father thought you so unfit a companion for me that he dismissed you at an hour’s notice, and I am very sure that my uncle will think as he did; you are *not* a fit companion for me, and had my uncle known what had passed he would never have admitted you to this house — never!’

‘Helas! *Quelle disgrace*! And you really think so, my dear Maud,’ exclaimed Madame, adjusting her wig before her glass, in the corner of which I could see half of her sly, grinning face, as she ogled herself in it.

‘I do, and so do you, Madame,’ I replied, growing more frightened.

‘It may be — we shall see; but everyone is not so cruel as you, *ma chère petite calomniatrice*.’

‘You shan’t call me those names,’ I said, in an angry tremor.

‘What name, dearest cheaile?’

‘*Calomniatrice* — that is an insult.’

‘Why, my most foolish little Maud, we may say rogue, and a thousand other little words in play which we do not say seriously.

‘You are not playing — you never play — you are angry, and you hate me,’ I exclaimed, vehemently.

‘Oh, fie! — wat shame! Do you not perceive, dearest cheaile, how much education you still need? You are proud, little demoiselle; you must become, on the contrary, quaite humble. Je ferai baiser le babouin à vous — ha, ha, ha! I weel make a you to kees the monkey. You are too proud, my dear cheaile.’

‘I am not such a fool as I was at Knowl,’ I said; ‘you shall not terrify me here. I will tell my uncle the whole truth,’ I said.

‘Well, it may be that is the best,’ she replied, with provoking coolness.

‘You think I don’t mean it?’

‘Of course you *do*,’ she replied.

‘And we shall see what my uncle thinks of it.’

‘We shall see, my dear,’ she replied, with an air of mock contrition.

‘Adieu, Madame!’

‘You are going to Monsieur Ruthyn? — very good!’

I made her no answer, but more agitated than I cared to show her, I left the room. I hurried along the twilight passage, and turned into the long gallery that opened from it at right angles. I had not gone half-a-dozen steps on my return when I heard a heavy tread and a rustling behind me.

‘I am ready, my dear; I weel accompany you,’ said the smirking phantom, hurrying after me.

‘Very well,’ was my reply; and threading our way, with a few hesitations and mistakes, we reached and descended the stairs, and in a minute more stood at my uncle’s door.

My uncle looked hard and strangely at us as we entered. He looked, indeed, as if his temper was violently excited, and glared and muttered to himself for a few seconds; and treating Madame to a stare of disgust, he asked peevishly —

‘Why am I disturbed, pray?’

‘Miss Maud a Ruthyn, she weel explain,’ replied Madame, with a great courtesy, like a boat going down in a ground swell.

‘*Will* you explain, my dear?’ he asked, in his coldest and most sarcastic tone.

I was agitated, and I am sure my statement was confused. I succeeded, however, in saying what I wanted.

‘Why, Madame, this is a grave charge! Do you admit it, pray?’

Madame, with the coolest possible effrontery, denied it all; with the most solemn asseverations, and with streaming eyes and clasped hands, conjured me melodramatically to withdraw that intolerable story, and to do her justice. I stared at her for a while astounded, and turning suddenly to my uncle, as vehemently asserted the truth of every syllable I had related.

‘You hear, my dear child, you hear her deny everything; what am I to think? You must excuse the bewilderment of my old head. Madame de la — that lady has arrived excellently recommended by the superioress of the place where dear Milly awaits you, and such persons are particular. It strikes me, my dear niece, that you must have made a mistake.’

I protested here. But he went on without seeming to hear the parenthesis —

‘I know, my dear Maud, that you are quite incapable of wilfully deceiving anyone; but you are liable to be deceived like other young people. You were, no doubt, very nervous, and but half awake when you fancied you saw the occurrence you describe; and Madame de — de— ‘

‘De la Rougierre,’ I supplied.

‘Yes, thank you — Madame de la Rougierre, who has arrived with excellent testimonials, strenuously denies the whole thing. Here is a conflict, my dear — in my mind a presumption of mistake. I confess I should prefer that theory to a peremptory assumption of guilt.’

I felt incredulous and amazed; it seemed as if a dream were being enacted before me. A transaction of the most serious import, which I had witnessed with my own eyes, and described with unexceptionable minuteness and consistency, is discredited by that strange and suspicious old man with an imbecile coolness. It was quite in vain my reiterating my statement, backing it with the most earnest asseverations. I was beating the air. It did not seem to reach his mind. It was all received with a simper of feeble incredulity.

He patted and smoothed my head — he laughed gently, and shook his while I insisted; and Madame protested her purity in now tranquil floods of innocent tears, and murmured mild and melancholy prayers for my enlightenment and reformation. I felt as if I should lose my reason.

‘There now, dear Maud, we have heard enough; it is, I do believe, a delusion. Madame de la Rougierre will be your companion, at the utmost, for three or four weeks. Do exercise a little of your self-command and good sense — you know how I am tortured. Do not, I entreat, add to my perplexities. You may make yourself very happy with Madame if you will, I have no doubt.’

‘I propose to Mademoiselle,’ said Madame, drying her eyes with a gentle alacrity, ‘to profit of my visit for her education. But she does not seem to weesh wat I think is so useful.’

‘She threatened me with some horrid French vulgarism — *de faire baiser le babouin à moi*, whatever that means; and I know she hates me,’ I replied, impetuously.

‘Doucement — doucement!’ said my uncle, with a smile at once amused and compassionate. ‘Doucement! ma chère.’

With great hands and cunning eyes uplifted, Madame tearfully — for her tears came on short notice — again protested her absolute innocence. She had never in all her life so much as heard one so villain phrase.

‘You see, my dear, you have misheard; young people never attend. You will do well to take advantage of Madame’s short residence to get up your French a little, and the more you are with her the better.’

‘I understand then, Mr. Ruthyn, you weesh I should resume my instructions?’ asked Madame.

‘Certainly; and converse all you can in French with Mademoiselle Maud. You will be glad, my dear, that I’ve insisted on it,’ he said, turning to me, ‘when you have reached France, where you will find they speak nothing else. And now, dear Maud — no, not a word more — you must leave me. Farewell, Madame!’

And he waved us out a little impatiently; and I, without one look toward Madame de la Rougierre, stunned and incensed, walked into my room and shut the door.

CHAPTER LV

THE FOOT OF HERCULES

I stood at the window — still the same leaden sky and feathery sleet before me — trying to estimate the magnitude of the discovery I had just made. Gradually a kind of despair seized me, and I threw myself passionately on my bed, weeping aloud.

Good Mary Quince was, of course, beside me in a moment, with her pale, concerned face.

‘Oh, Mary, Mary, she’s come — that dreadful woman, Madame de la Rougierre, has come to be my governess again; and Uncle Silas won’t hear or believe anything about her. It is vain talking; he is prepossessed. Was ever so unfortunate a creature as I? Who could have fancied or feared such a thing? Oh, Mary, Mary, what am I to do? what is to become of me? Am I never to shake off that vindictive, terrible woman?’

Mary said all she could to console me. I was making too much of her. What was she, after all, more than a governess? — she could not hurt me. I was not a child no longer — she could not bully me now; and my uncle, though he might be deceived for a while, would not be long finding her out.

Thus and soforth did good Mary Quince declaim, and at last she did impress me a little, and I began to think that I had, perhaps, been making too much of Madame’s visit. But still imagination, that instrument and mirror of prophecy, showed her formidable image always on its surface, with a terrible moving background of shadows.

In a few minutes there was a knock at my door, and Madame herself entered. She was in walking costume. There had been a brief clearing of the weather, and she proposed our making a promenade together.

On seeing Mary Quince she broke into a rapture of compliment and greeting, and took what Mr. Richardson would have called her passive hand, and pressed it with wonderful tenderness.

Honest Mary suffered all this somewhat reluctantly, never smiling, and, on the contrary, looking rather ruefully at her feet.

‘Weel you make a some tea? When I come back, dear Mary Quince, I ‘av so much to tell you and dear Miss Maud of all my adventures while I ‘av been away; it will make a you laugh ever so much. I was — what you theenk? — near, ever so near to be married!’ And upon this she broke into a screeching laugh, and shook Mary Quince merrily by the shoulder.

I sullenly declined going out, or rising; and when she had gone away, I told Mary that I should confine myself to my room while Madame stayed.

But self-denying ordinances self-imposed are not always long observed by youth. Madame de la Rougierre laid herself out to be agreeable; she had no end of stories — more than half, no doubt, pure fictions — to tell, but all, in that triste place, amusing. Mary Quince began to entertain a better opinion of her. She actually helped to make beds, and tried to be in every way of use, and seemed to have quite turned over a new leaf; and so gradually she moved me, first to listen, and at last to talk.

On the whole, these terms were better than a perpetual skirmish; but, notwithstanding all her gossip and friendliness, I continued to have a profound distrust and even terror of her.

She seemed curious about the Bartram-Haugh family, and all their ways, and listened darkly when I spoke. I told her, bit by bit, the whole story of Dudley, and she used, whenever there was news of the Seamew, to read the paragraph for my benefit; and in poor Milly’s battered little Atlas she used to trace the ship’s course with a pencil, writing in, from point to point, the date at which the vessel was ‘spoken’ at sea. She seemed amused at the irrepressible satisfaction with which I received these minutes of his progress; and she used to calculate the distance; — on such a day he was two hundred and sixty miles, on such another five hundred; the last point was more than eight hundred — good, better, best — best of all would be those ‘deleecious antipode, w’ere he would so soon promener on his head twelve thousand mile away;’ and at the conceit she would fall into screams of laughter.

Laugh as she might, however, there was substantial comfort in thinking of the boundless stretch of blue wave that rolled between me and that villainous cousin.

I was now on very odd terms with Madame. She had not relapsed into her favourite vein of oracular sarcasm and menace; she had, on the contrary, affected her goodhumoured and genial vein. But I was not to be deceived by this. I carried in my heart that deep-seated fear of her which her unpleasant goodhumour and gaiety never disturbed for a moment. I was very glad, therefore, when she went to Todcaster by rail, to make some purchases for the journey which we were daily expecting to commence; and happy in the opportunity of a walk, good old Mary Quince and I set forth for a little ramble.

As I wished to make some purchases in Feltram, I set out, with Mary Quince for my companion. On reaching the great gate we found it locked. The key, however, was in it, and as it required more than the strength of my hand to turn, Mary tried it. At the same moment old Crowle came out of the sombre lodge by its side, swallowing down a mouthful of his dinner in haste. No one, I believe, liked the long suspicious face of the old man, seldom shorn or washed, and furrowed with great, grimy perpendicular wrinkles. Leering fiercely at Mary, not pretending to see me, he wiped his mouth hurriedly with the back of his hand, and growled —

'Drop it.'

'Open it, please, Mr. Crowle,' said Mary, renouncing the task.

Crowle wiped his mouth as before, looking inauspicious; shuffling to the spot, and muttering to himself, he first satisfied himself that the lock was fast, and then lodged the key in his coatpocket, and still muttering, retraced his steps.

'We want the gate open, please,' said Mary.

No answer.

'Miss Maud wants to go into the town,' she insisted.

'We wants many a thing we can't get,' he growled, stepping into his habitation.

'Please open the gate,' I said, advancing.

He half turned on his threshold, and made a dumb show of touching his hat, although he had none on.

'Can't, ma'am; without an order from master, no one goes out here.'

'You won't allow me and my maid to pass the gate?' I said.

‘’Tisn’t *me*, ma’am,’ said he; ‘but I can’t break orders, and no one goes out without the master allows.’

And without awaiting further parley, he entered, shutting his hatch behind him.

So Mary and I stood, looking very foolish at one another. This was the first restraint I had experienced since Milly and I had been refused a passage through the Windmill paling. The rule, however, on which Crowle insisted I felt confident could not have been intended to apply to me. A word to Uncle Silas would set all right; and in the meantime I proposed to Mary that we should take a walk — my favourite ramble — into the Windmill Wood.

I looked toward Dickon’s farmstead as we passed, thinking that Beauty might have been there. I did see the girl, who was plainly watching us. She stood in the doorway of the cottage, withdrawn into the shade, and, I fancied, anxious to escape observation. When we had passed on a little, I was confirmed in that belief by seeing her run down the footpath which led from the rear of the farmyard in the direction contrary to that in which we were moving.

‘So,’ I thought, ‘poor Meg falls from me!’

Mary Quince and I rambled on through the wood, till we reached the windmill itself, and seeing its low arched door open, we entered the chiaro-oscuro of its circular basement. As we did so I heard a rush and the creak of a plank, and looking up, I saw just a foot — no more — disappearing through the trap-door.

In the case of one we love or fear intensely, what feats of comparative anatomy will not the mind unconsciously perform? Constructing the whole living animal from the turn of an elbow, the curl of a whisker, a segment of a hand. How instantaneous and unerring is the instinct!

‘Oh, Mary, what have I seen!’ I whispered, recovering from the fascination that held my gaze fast to the topmost rounds of the ladder, that disappeared in the darkness above the open door in the loft. ‘Come, Mary — come away.’

At the same instant appeared the swarthy, sullen face of Dickon Hawkes in the shadow of the aperture. Having but one serviceable leg, his descent was slow and awkward, and having got his head to the level of the loft he stopped to touch his hat to me, and to hasp and lock the trap-door.

When this was done, the man again touched his hat, and looked steadily and searchingly at me for a second or so, while he got the key into his pocket.

'These fellahs stores their flour too long 'ere, ma'am. There's a deal o' trouble a-looking arter it. I'll talk wi' Silas, and settle that.'

By this time he had got upon the worn-tiled floor, and touching his hat again, he said —

'I'm a-goin' to lock the door, ma'am!'

So with a start, and again whispering —

'Come, Mary — come away' —

With my arm fast in hers, we made a swift departure.

'I feel very faint, Mary,' said I. 'Come quickly. There's nobody following us?'

'No, Miss, dear. That man with the wooden leg is putting a padlock on the door.'

'Come *very* fast,' I said; and when we had got a little farther, I said, 'Look again, and see whether anyone is following.'

'No one, Miss,' answered Mary, plainly surprised. 'He's putting the key in his pocket, and standin' there a-lookin' after us.'

'Oh, Mary, did not you see it?'

'What, Miss?' asked Mary, almost stopping.

'Come on, Mary. Don't pause. They will observe us,' I whispered, hurrying her forward.

'What did you see, Miss?' repeated Mary.

'*Mr. Dudley*,' I whispered, with a terrified emphasis, not daring to turn my head as I spoke.

'Lawk, Miss!' remonstrated honest Quince, with a protracted intonation of wonder and incredulity, which plainly implied a suspicion that I was dreaming.

'Yes, Mary. When we went into that dreadful room — that dark, round place — I saw his foot on the ladder. *His* foot, Mary I can't be mistaken. *I won't be questioned*. You'll *find* I'm right. He's *here*. He never went in that ship at all. A fraud has been practised on me — it is infamous — it is terrible. I'm frightened out of my life. For heaven's sake, look back again, and tell me what you see.'

'*Nothing*, Miss,' answered Mary, in contagious whispers, 'but that wooden-legged chap, standin' hard by the door.'

'And no one with him?'

'No one, Miss.'

We got without pursuit through the gate in the paling. I drew breath so soon as we had reached the cover of the thicket near the chestnut hollow, and I began to reflect that whoever the owner of the foot might be — and I was still instinctively certain that it was no other than Dudley — concealment was plainly his object. I need not, then, be at all uneasy lest he should pursue us.

As we walked slowly and in silence along the grassy footpath, I heard a voice calling my name from behind. Mary Quince had not heard it at all, but I was quite certain.

It was repeated twice or thrice, and, looking in considerable doubt and trepidation under the hanging boughs, I saw Beauty, not ten yards away, standing among the underwood.

I remember how white the eyes and teeth of the swarthy girl looked, as with hand uplifted toward her ear, she watched us while, as it seemed, listening for more distant sounds.

Beauty beckoned eagerly to me, advancing, with looks of great fear and anxiety, two or three short steps toward me.

'*She* baint to come,' said Beauty, under her breath, so soon as I had nearly reached her, pointing without raising her hand at Mary Quince.

'Tell her to sit on the ash-tree stump down yonder, and call ye as loud as she can if she sees any fellah a-comin' this way, an' rin ye back to me;' and she impatiently beckoned me away on her errand.

When I returned, having made this dispositions, I perceived how pale the girl was.

'Are you ill, Meg?' I asked.

'Never ye mind. Well enough. Listen, Miss; I must tell it all in a crack, an' if she calls, rin awa' to her, and le' me to myself, for if faything or t'other un wor to kotch me here, I think they'd kill me a'most. Hish!'

She paused a second, looking askance, in the direction where she fancied Mary Quince was. Then she resumed in a whisper —

‘Now, lass, mind ye, ye’ll keep what I say to yourself. You’re not to tell that un nor any other for your life, mind, a word o’ what I’m goin’ to tell ye.’

‘I’ll not say a word. Go on.’

‘Did ye see Dudley?’

‘I think I saw him getting up the ladder.’

‘In the mill? Ha! that’s him. He never went beyond Todcaster. He staid in Feltram after.’

It was my turn to look pale now. My worst conjecture was established.

CHAPTER LVI

I CONSPIRE

‘That’s a bad un, he is — oh, Miss, Miss Maud! It’s nout that’s good as keeps him an’ fayther — (mind, lass, ye promised you would not tell no one) — as keeps them two a-talkin’ and a-smokin’ secret-like together in the mill. An’ fayther don’t know I found him out. They don’t let me into the town, but Brice tells me, and he knows it’s Dudley; and it’s nout that’s good, but summat very bad. An’ I reckon, Miss, it’s all about you. Be ye frightened, Miss Maud?’

I felt on the point of fainting, but I rallied.

‘Not much, Meg. Go on, for Heaven’s sake. Does Uncle Silas know he is here?’

‘Well, Miss, they were with him, Brice told me, from eleven o’clock to nigh one o’ Tuesday night, an’ went in and come out like thieves, ‘feard ye’d see ‘em.’

‘And how does Brice know anything bad?’ I asked, with a strange freezing sensation creeping from my heels to my head and down again — I am sure deadly pale, but speaking very collectedly.

‘Brice said, Miss, he saw Dudley a-cryin’ and lookin’ awful black, and says he to fayther, “’Tisn’t in my line nohow, an’ I can’t;” and says fayther to he, “No one likes they soart o’ things, but how can ye help it? The old boy’s behind ye wi’ his pitchfork, and ye canna stop.” An’ wi’ that he bethought him o’ Brice, and says he, “What be ye a-doin’ there? Get ye down wi’ the nags to blacksmith, do ye.” An’ oop gits Dudley, pullin’ his hat ower his brows, an’ says he, “I wish I was in the *Seamew*. I’m good for nout wi’ this thing a-hangin’ ower me.” An’ that’s all as Brice heard. An’ he’s afeard o’ fayther and Dudley awful. Dudley could lick him to pot if he crossed him, and he and fayther ‘ud think nout o’ havin’ him afore the justices for poachin’, and swearin’ him into gaol.’

‘But why does he think it’s about *me*?’

‘Hish!’ said Meg, who fancied she heard a sound, but all was quiet. ‘I can’t say — we’re in danger, lass. I don’t know why — but *he* does, an’ so do I, an', for that matter, so do *ye*.'

'Meg, I'll leave Bartram.'

'Ye can't.'

'Can't. What do you mean, girl?'

'They won't let ye oot. The gates is all locked. They've dogs — they've bloodhounds, Brice says. Ye *can't* git oot, mind; put that oot o' your head.

'I tell ye what ye'll do. Write a bit o' a note to the lady yonder at Elverston; an' though Brice be a wild fellah, and 'appen not ower good sometimes, he likes me, an' I'll make him take it. Fayther will be grindin' at mill tomorrow. Coom ye here about one o'clock — that's if ye see the mill-sails aturnin' — and me and Brice will meet ye here. Bring that old lass wi' ye. There's an old French un, though, that talks wi' Dudley. Mind ye, that un knows nout o' the matter. Brice be a kind lad to me, whatsoe'er he be wi' others, and I think he won't split. Now, lass, I must go. God help ye; God bless ye; an', for the world's wealth, don't ye let one o' them see ye've got ought in your head, not even that un.'

Before I could say another word, the girl had glided from me, with a wild gesture of silence, and a shake of her head.

I can't at all account for the state in which I was. There are resources both of energy and endurance in human nature which we never suspect until the tremendous voice of necessity summons them into play. Petrified with a totally new horror, but with something of the coldness and impassiveness of the transformation, I stood, spoke, and acted — a wonder, almost a terror, to myself.

I met Madame on my return as if nothing had happened. I heard her ugly gabble, and looked at the fruits of her hour's shopping, as I might hear, and see, and talk, and smile, in a dream.

But the night was dreadful. When Mary Quince and I were alone, I locked the door. I continued walking up and down the room, with my hands clasped, looking at the inexorable floor, the walls, the ceiling, with a sort of imploring despair. I was afraid to tell my dear old Mary. The least indiscretion would be failure, and failure destruction.

I answered her perplexed solicitudes by telling her that I was not very well — that I was uneasy; but I did not fail to extract from her a promise that she would not hint to mortal, either my suspicions about Dudley, or our rencontre with Meg Hawkes.

I remember how, when, after we had got, late at night, into bed, I sat up, shivering with horror, in mine, while honest Mary's tranquil breathing told how soundly she slept. I got up, and looked from the window, expecting to see some of those wolfish dogs which they had brought to the place prowling about the courtyard. Sometimes I prayed, and felt tranquillised, and fancied that I was perhaps to have a short interval of sleep. But the serenity was delusive, and all the time my nerves were strung hysterically. Sometimes I felt quite wild, and on the point of screaming. At length that dreadful night passed away. Morning came, and a less morbid, though hardly a less terrible state of mind. Madame paid me an early visit. A thought struck me. I knew that she loved shopping, and I said, quite carelessly —

'Your yesterday's shopping tempts me, Madame, and I must get a few things before we leave for France. Suppose we go into Feltram to-day, and make my purchases, you and I?'

She looked from the corner of her cunning eye in my face without answering. I did not blench, and she said —

'Vary good. I would be vary 'appy,' and again she looked oddly at me.

'Wat hour, my dear Maud? One o'clock? I think that weel de very well, eh?'

I assented, and she grew silent.

I wonder whether I did look as careless as I tried. I do not know. Through the whole of this awful period I was, I think, supernatural; and I even now look back with wonder upon my strange self-command.

Madame, I hoped, had heard nothing of the order which prohibited my exit from the place. She would herself conduct me to Feltram, and secure, by accompanying me, my free egress.

Once in Feltram, I would assert my freedom, and manage to reach my dear cousin Knollys. Back to Bartram no power should convey me. My heart swelled and fluttered in the awful suspense of that hour.

Oh, Bartram-Haugh! how came you by those lofty walls? Which of my ancestors had begirt me with an impassable barrier in this horrible strait?

Suddenly I remembered my letter to Lady Knollys. If I were disappointed in effecting my escape through Feltram, all would depend upon it.

Having locked my door, I wrote as follows: —

‘Oh, my beloved cousin, as you hope for comfort in *your* hour of fear, aid me now. Dudley has returned, and is secreted somewhere about the grounds. It is a *fraud*. They all pretend to me that he is gone away in the *Seamew*; and he or they had his name published as one of the passengers. Madame de la Rougierre has appeared! She is here, and my uncle insists on making her my close companion. I am at my wits’ ends. I cannot escape — the walls are a prison; and I believe the eyes of my gaolers are always upon me. Dogs are kept for pursuit — yes, *dogs*! and the gates are locked against my escape. God help me! I don’t know where to look, or whom to trust. I fear my uncle more than all. I think I could bear this better if I knew what their plans are, even the worst. If ever you loved or pitied me, dear cousin, I conjure you, help me in this extremity. Take me away from this. Oh, darling, for God’s sake take me away!

‘Your distracted and terrified cousin,
MAUD’
‘Bartram-Haugh.’

I sealed this letter jealously, as if the inanimate missive would burst its cerements, and proclaim my desperate appeal through all the chambers and passages of silent Bartram.

Old Quince, greatly to cousin Monica’s amusement, persisted in furnishing me with those capacious pockets which belonged to a former generation. I was glad of this old-world eccentricity now, and placed my guilty letter, that, amidst all my hypocrisies, spoke out with terrible frankness, deep in this receptacle, and having hid away the pen and ink, my accomplices, I opened the door, and resumed my careless looks, awaiting Madame’s return.

‘I was to demand to Mr. Ruthyn the permission to go to Feltram, and I think he will allow. He want to speak to you.’

With Madame I entered my uncle’s room. He was reclining on a sofa, his back towards us, and his long white hair, as fine as spun glass, hung over the back of the couch.

‘I was going to ask you, dear Maud, to execute two or three little commissions for me in Feltram.’

My dreadful letter felt lighter in my pocket, and my heart beat violently.

‘But I have just recollected that this is a market-day, and Feltram will be full of doubtful characters and tipsy persons, so we must wait till tomorrow; and Madame says, very kindly, that she will, as she does not so much mind, make any little purchases to-day which cannot conveniently wait.’

Madame assented with a courtesy to Uncle Silas, and a great hollow smile to me.

By this time Uncle Silas had raised himself from his reclining posture, and was sitting, gaunt and white, upon the sofa.

‘News of my prodigal to-day,’ he said, with a peevish smile, drawing the newspaper towards him. ‘The vessel has been spoken again. How many miles away, do you suppose?’

He spoke in a plaintive key, looking at me, with hungry eyes, and a horribly smiling countenance.

‘How far do you suppose Dudley is to-day?’ and he laid the palm of his hand on the paragraph as he spoke. *Guess*!’

For a moment I fancied this was a theatric preparation to give point to the disclosure of Dudley’s real whereabouts.

‘It was a very long way. Guess!’ he repeated.

So, stammering a little and pale, I performed the required hypocrisy, after which my uncle read aloud for my benefit the line or two in which were recorded the event, and the latitude and longitude of the vessel at the time, of which Madame made a note in her memory, for the purpose of making her usual tracing in poor Milly’s Atlas.

I cannot say how it really was, but I fancied that Uncle Silas was all the time reading my countenance, with a grim and practised scrutiny; but nothing came of it, and we were dismissed.

Madame loved shopping, even for its own sake, but shopping with opportunities of peculation still more. She she had had her luncheon, and was dressed for the excursion, she did precisely what I now most desired — she proposed to take charge of my commissions and my money; and thus entrusted, left me at liberty to keep tryst at the Chestnut Hollow.

So soon as I had seen Madame fairly off, I hurried Mary Quince, and got my things on quickly. We left the house by the side entrance, which I knew my uncle’s windows did not command. Glad was I to feel a slight breeze, enough to make the mill-sails revolve; and as we got further into the grounds, and obtained a distant view of the picturesque old windmill, I felt inexpressibly relieved on seeing that it was actually working.

We were now in the Chestnut Hollow, and I sent Mary Quince to her old point of observation, which commanded a view of the path in the direction of the Windmill Wood, with her former order to call ‘I’ve found it,’ as loudly as she could, in case she should see anyone approaching.

I stopped at the point of our yesterday’s meeting. I peered under the branches, and my heart beat fast as I saw Meg Hawkes awaiting me.

CHAPTER LVII

THE LETTER

‘Come away, lass,’ whispered Beauty, very pale; ‘he’s here — Tom Brice.’

And she led the way, shoving aside the leafless underwood, and we reached Tom. The slender youth, groom or poacher — he might answer for either — with his short coat and gaitered legs, was sitting on a low horizontal bough, with his shoulder against the trunk.

‘*Don’t* ye mind; sit ye still, lad,’ said Meg, observing that he was preparing to rise, and had entangled his hat in the boughs. ‘Sit ye still, and hark to the lady. He’ll take it, Miss Maud, if he can; wi’ na ye, lad?’

‘E’es, I’ll take it,’ he replied, holding out his hand.

‘Tom Brice, you won’t deceive me?’

‘Noa, sure,’ said Tom and Meg nearly in the same breath.

‘You are an honest English lad, Tom — you would not betray me?’ I was speaking imploringly.

‘Noa, sure,’ repeated Tom.

There was something a little unsatisfactory in the countenance of this light-haired youth, with the sharpish upturned nose. Throughout our interview he said next to nothing, and smiled lazily to himself, like a man listening to a child’s solemn nonsense, and leading it on, with an amused irony, from one wise sally to another.

Thus it seemed to me that this young clown, without in the least intending to be offensive, was listening to me with a profound and lazy mockery.

I could not choose, however; and, such as he was, I must employ him or none.

‘Now, Tom Brice, a great deal depends on this.’

‘That’s true for her, Tom Brice,’ said Meg, who now and then confirmed my asseverations.

‘I’ll give you a pound *now*, Tom,’ and I placed the coin and the letter together in his hand. ‘And you are to give this letter to Lady Knollys, at

Elverston; you know Elverston, don’t you?’

‘He does, Miss. Don’t ye, lad?’

‘E’es.’

‘Well, do so, Tom, and I’ll be good to you so long as I live.’

‘D’ye hear, lad?’

‘E’es,’ said Tom; ‘it’s very good.’

‘You’ll take the letter, Tom? ‘I said, in much greater trepidation as to his answer than I showed.

‘E’es, I’ll take the letter,’ said he, rising, and turning it about in his fingers under his eye, like a curiosity.

‘Tom Brice,’ I said, ‘If you can’t be true to me, say so; but don’t take the letter except to give it to Lady Knollys, at Elverston. If you won’t promise that, let me have the note back. Keep the pound; but tell me that you won’t mention my having asked you to carry a letter to Elverston to anyone.’

For the first time Tom looked perfectly serious. He twiddled the corner of my letter between his finger and thumb, and wore very much the countenance of a poacher about to be committed.

‘I don’t want to chouce ye, Miss; but I must take care o’ myself, ye see. The letters goes all through Silas’s fingers to the post, and he’d know damn well this worn’t among ‘em. They do say he opens ‘em, and reads ‘em before they go; an’ that’s his diversion. I don’t know; but I do believe that’s how it be; an’ if this one turned up, they’d all know it went be hand, and I’d be spotted for’t.’

‘But you know who I am, Tom, and I’d save you,’ said I, eagerly.

‘Ye’d want savin’ yerself, I’m thinkin’, if that feel oot,’ said Tom, cynically. ‘I don’t say, though, I’ll not take it — only this — I won’t run my head again a wall for no one.’

‘Tom,’ I said, with a sudden inspiration, ‘give me back the letter, and take me out of Bartram; take me to Elverston; it will be the best thing — for *you*, Tom, I mean — it will indeed — that ever befell you.’

With this clown I was pleading, as for my life; my hand was on his sleeve. I was gazing imploringly in his face.

But it would not do; Tom Brice looked amused again, swung his head a little on one side, grinning sheepishly over his shoulder on the roots of the trees beside him, as if he were striving to keep himself from an uncivil fit of laughter.

‘I’ll do what a wise lad may, Miss; but ye don’t know they lads; they bain’t that easy come over; and I won’t get knocked on the head, nor sent to gaol ‘appen, for no good to thee nor me. There’s Meg there, she knows well enough I could na’ manage that; so I won’t try it, Miss, by no chance; no offence, Miss; but I’d rayther not, an’ I’ll just try what I can make o’this; that’s all I can do for ye.’

Tom Brice, with these words, stood up, and looked uneasily in the direction of the Windmill Wood.

‘Mind ye, Miss, coom what will, ye’ll not tell o’ me?’

‘Whar ‘ill ye go now, Tom?’ inquired Meg, uneasily.

‘Never ye mind, lass,’ answered he, breaking his way through the thicket, and soon disappearing.

‘E’es that ‘ill be it — he’ll git into the sheepwalk behind the mound. They’re all down yonder; git ye back, Miss, to the hoose — be the side-door; mind ye, don’t go round the corner; and I’ll jest sit awhile among the bushes, and wait a good time for a start. And goodbye, Miss; and don’t ye show like as if there was aught out o’ common on your mind. Hish!’

There was a distant hallooing.

‘That be fayther!’ she whispered, with a very blank countenance, and listened with her sunburnt hand to her ear.

’Tisn’t me, only Davy he’ll be callin’,’ she said, with a great sigh, and a joyless smile. ‘Now git ye away i’ God’s name.’

So running lightly along the path, under cover of this thick wood, I recalled Mary Quince, and together we hastened back again to the house, and entered, as directed, by the side-door, which did not expose us to be seen from the Windmill Wood, and, like two criminals, we stole up by the backstairs, and so through the side-gallery to my room; and there sat down to collect my wits, and try to estimate the exact effect of what had just occurred.

Madame had not returned. That was well; she always visited my room first, and everything was precisely as I had left it — a certain sign that her prying eyes and busy fingers had not been at work during my absence.

When she did appear, strange to say, it was to bring me unexpected comfort. She had in her hand a letter from my dear Lady Knollys — a gleam of sunlight from the free and happy outer world entered with it. The moment Madame left me to myself, I opened it and read as follows: —

‘I am so happy, my dearest Maud, in the immediate prospect of seeing you. I have had a really kind letter from poor Silas — *poor* I say, for I really compassionate his situation, about which he has been, I do believe, quite frank — at least Ilbury says so, and somehow he happens to know. I have had quite an affecting, changed letter. I will tell you all when I see you. He wants me ultimately to undertake that which would afford me the most unmixed happiness — I mean the care of you, my dear girl. I only fear lest my too eager acceptance of the trust should excite that vein of opposition which is in most human beings, and induce him to think over his offer less favourably again. He says I must come to Bartram, and stay a night, and promises to lodge me comfortably; about which last I honestly do not care a pin, when the chance of a comfortable evening’s gossip with you is in view. Silas explains his sad situation, and must hold himself in readiness for early flight, if he would avoid the risk of losing his personal liberty. It is a sad thing that he should have so irretrievably ruined himself, that poor Austin’s liberality seems to have positively precipitated his extremity. His great anxiety is that I should see you before you leave for your short stay in France. He thinks you must leave before a fortnight. I am thinking of asking you to come over here; I know you would be just as well at Elverston as in France; but perhaps, as he seems disposed to do what we all wish, it may be safer to let him set about it in his own way. The truth is, I have so set my heart upon it that I fear to risk it by crossing him even in a trifle. He says I must fix an early day next week, and talks as if he meant to urge me to make a longer visit than he defined. I shall be only too happy. I begin, my dear Maud, to think that there is no use in trying to control events, and that things often turn out best, and most exactly to our wishes, by being left quite to themselves. I think it was Talleyrand who praised the talent of *waiting* so much. In high spirits, and with my head brimful of plans, I remain, dearest Maud, ever your affectionate cousin,

MONICA.’

Here was an inexplicable puzzle! A faint radiance of hope, however, began to overspread a landscape only a few minutes before darkened by total eclipse; but construct what theory I might, all were inconsistent with many well-established and awful incongruities, and their wrecks lay strown over the troubled waters of the gulf into which I gazed.

Why was Madame here? Why was Dudley concealed about the place? Why was I a prisoner within the walls? What were those dangers which Meg Hawkes seemed to think so great and so imminent as to induce her to risk her lover's safety for my deliverance? All these menacing facts stood grouped together against the dark certainty that never were men more deeply interested in making away with one human being, than were Uncle Silas and Dudley in removing me.

Sometimes to these dreadful evidences I abandoned my soul. Sometimes, reading Cousin Monica's sunny letter, the sky would clear, and my terrors melt away like nightmares in the morning. I never repented, however, that I had sent my letter by Tom Brice. Escape from Bartram-Haugh was my hourly longing.

That evening Madame invited herself to tea with me. I did not object. It was better just then to be on friendly relations with everybody, if possible, even on their own terms. She was in one of her boisterous and hilarious moods, and there was a perfume of brandy.

She narrated some compliments paid her that morning in Feltram by that 'good crayature' Mrs. Litheways, the silkmercer, and what ''ansom faylow' was her new foreman — (she intended plainly that I should 'queez' her) — and how 'he follow' her with his eyes wherever she went. I thought, perhaps, he fancied she might pocket some of his lace or gloves. And all the time her great wicked eyes were rolling and glancing according to her ideas of fascination, and her bony face grinning and flaming with the 'strong drink' in which she delighted. She sang twaddling chansons, and being, as was her wont under such exhilarating influences, in a vapouring mood, she vowed that I should have my carriage and horses immediately.

'I weel try what I can do weeth your Uncle Silas. We are very good old friends, Mr. Ruthyn and I,' she said with a leer which I did not understand, and which yet frightened me.

I never could quite understand why these Jezebels like to insinuate the dreadful truth against themselves; but they do. Is it the spirit of feminine triumph overcoming feminine shame, and making them vaunt their fall as an evidence of bygone fascination and existing power? Need we wonder? Have not women preferred hatred to indifference, and the reputation of witchcraft, with all its penalties, to absolute insignificance? Thus, as they enjoyed the fear inspired among simple neighbours by their imagined traffic with the father of ill, did Madame, I think, relish with a cynical vainglory the suspicion of her satanic superiority.

Next morning Uncle Silas sent for me. He was seated at his table, and spoke his little French greeting, smiling as usual, pointing to a chair opposite.

'How far, I forget,' he said, carelessly laying his newspaper on the table, 'did you yesterday guess Dudley to be?'

'Eleven hundred miles I thought it was.'

'Oh yes, so it was;' and then there was an abstracted pause. 'I have been writing to Lord Ilbury, your trustee,' he resumed. I ventured to say, my dear Maud — (for having thoughts of a different arrangement for you, more suitable under my distressing circumstances, I do not wish to vacate without some expression of your estimate of my treatment of you while under my roof) — I ventured to say that you thought me kind, considerate, indulgent, — may I say so?'

I assented. What could I say?

'I said you had enjoyed our poor way of living here — our rough ways and liberty. Was I right?'

Again I assented.

'And, in fact, that you had nothing to object against your poor old uncle, except indeed his poverty, which you forgave. I think I said truth. Did I, dear Maud?'

Again I acquiesced.

All this time he was fumbling among the papers in his coatpocket.

'That is satisfactory. So I expected you to say,' he murmured. 'I expected no less.'

On a sudden a frightful change spread across his face. He rose like a spectre with a white scowl.

‘Then how do you account for that?’ he shrieked in a voice of thunder, and smiting my open letter to Lady Knollys, face upward, upon the table.

I stared at my uncle, unable to speak, until I seemed to lose sight of him; but his voice, like a bell, still yelled in my ears.

‘There! young hypocrite and liar! explain that farrago of slander which you bribed my servant to place in the hands of my kinswoman, Lady Knollys.’

And so on and on it went, I gazing into darkness, until the voice itself became indistinct, grew into a buzz, and hummed away into silence.

I think I must have had a fit.

When I came to myself I was drenched with water, my hair, face, neck, and dress. I did not in the least know where I was. I thought my father was ill, and spoke to him. Uncle Silas was standing near the window, looking unspeakably grim. Madame was seated beside me, and an open bottle of ether, one of Uncle Silas’s restoratives, on the table before me.

‘Who’s that — who’s ill — is anyone dead?’ I cried.

At last I was relieved by long paroxysms of weeping. When I was sufficiently recovered, I was conveyed into my own room.

CHAPTER LVIII

LADY KNOLLYS' CARRIAGE

Next morning — it was Sunday — I lay on my bed in my dressing-gown, dull, apathetic, with all my limbs sore, and, as I thought, rheumatic, and feeling so ill that I did not care to speak or lift my head. My recollection of what had passed in Uncle Silas's room was utterly confused, and it seemed to me as if my poor father had been there and taken a share — I could not remember how — in the conference.

I was too exhausted and stupid to clear up this horrible muddle, and merely lay with my face toward the wall, motionless and silent, except for a great sigh every now and then.

Good Mary Quince was in the room — there was some comfort in that; but I felt quite worn out, and had rather she did not speak to me; and indeed for the time I felt absolutely indifferent as to whether I lived or died.

Cousin Monica this morning, at pleasant Elverston, all-unconscious of my sad plight, proposed to Lady Mary Carysbroke and Lord Ilbury, her guests, to drive over to church at Feltram, and then pay us a visit at Bartram-Haugh, to which they readily agreed.

Accordingly, at about two o'clock, this pleasant party of three arrived at Bartram. They walked, having left the carriage to follow when the horses were fed; and Madame de la Rougierre, who was in my uncle's room when little Giblets arrived to say that the party were in the parlour, whispered for a little with my uncle, who then said —

'Miss Maud Ruthyn has gone out to drive, but I shall be happy to see Lady Knollys here, if she will do me the favour to come upstairs and see me for a few moments; and you can mention that I am very far from well.'

Madame followed him out upon the lobby, and added, holding him by the collar, and whispering earnestly in his ear —

'Bring hair ladysheep up by the backstairs — mind, the *back*stairs.'

And the next moment Madame entered my room, with long tiptoe steps, and looking, Mary Quince said, as if she were going to be hanged.

On entering she looked sharply round, and being satisfied of Mary Quince's presence, she turned the key in the door, and made some affectionate enquiries about me in a whisper; and then she stole to the window and peeped out, standing back some way; after which she came to my bedside, murmured some tender sentences, drew the curtain a little, and making some little fidgety adjustments about the room; among the rest she took the key from the lock, quietly, and put it into her pocket.

This was so odd a procedure that honest Mary Quince rose stoutly from her chair, pointing to the lock, with her frank little blue eyes fixed on Madame, and she whispered— 'Won't you put the key in the lock, please?'

'Oh, certainly, Mary Queence; but it is better it shall be locked, for I think her uncle he is coming to see her, and I am sure she would be very much frightened, for he is very much displease, don't you see? and we can tell him she is not well enough, or asleep, and so he weel go away again, without any trouble.'

I heard nothing of this, which was conducted in close whispers; and Mary, although she did not give Madame credit for caring whether I was frightened or not, and suspected her motives in everything, acquiesced grudgingly, fearing lest her alleged reason might possibly be the true one.

So Madame hovered about the door, uneasily; and of what went on elsewhere during that period Lady Knollys afterwards gave me the following account: —

'We were very much disappointed; but of course I was glad to see Silas, and your little hobgoblin butler led me upstairs to his room a different way, I think, from that I came before; but I don't know the house of Bartram well enough to speak positively. I only know that I was conducted quite across his bedroom, which I had not seen on my former visit, and so into his sitting-room, where I found him.

'He seemed very glad to see me, came forward smiling — I disliked his smile always — with both hands out, and shook mine with more warmth than I ever remembered in his greeting before, and said —

'"My dear, *dear* Monica, how *very* good of you — the very person I longed to see! I have been miserably ill, the sad consequence of still more miserable anxiety. Sit down, pray, for a moment."

'And he paid me some nice little French compliment in verse.

'"And where is Maud?" said I.

‘“I think Maud is by this time about halfway to Elverston,” said the old gentleman. “I persuaded her to take a drive, and advised a call there, which seemed to please her, so I conjecture she obeyed.”

‘“How *very* provoking!” cried I.

‘“My poor Maud will be sadly disappointed, but you will console her by a visit — you have promised to come, and I shall try to make you comfortable. I shall be happier, Monica, with this proof of our perfect reconciliation. You won’t deny me?”

‘“Certainly not. I am only too glad to come,” said I; “and I want to thank you, Silas.”

‘“For what?” said he.

‘“For wishing to place Maud in my care. I am very much obliged to you.”

‘“I did not suggest it, I must say, Monica, with the least intention of obliging *you*,” said Silas.

‘I thought he was going to break into one of his ungracious moods.

‘“But I *am* obliged to you — very much obliged to you, Silas; and you sha’n’t refuse my thanks.”

‘“I am happy, at all events, Monica, in having won your goodwill; we learn at last that in the affections only are our capacities for happiness; and how true is St. Paul’s preference of love — the principle that abideth! The affections, dear Monica, are eternal; and being so, celestial, divine, and consequently happy, deriving happiness, and bestowing it.”

‘I was always impatient of his or anybody else’s metaphysics; but I controlled myself, and only said, with my customary impudence —

‘“Well, dear Silas, and when do you wish me to come?”

‘“The earlier the better,” said he.

‘“Lady Mary and Ilbury will be leaving me on Tuesday morning. I can come to you in the afternoon, if you think Tuesday a good day.”

‘“Thank you, dear Monica. I shall be, I trust, enlightened by that day as to my enemies’ plans. It is a humiliating confession, Monica, but I am past feeling that. It is quite possible that an execution may be sent into this house tomorrow, and an end of all my schemes. It is not likely, however — hardly possible — before three weeks, my attorney tells me. I shall hear from him tomorrow morning, and then I shall ask you to name a very early day. If we are to have an unmolested fortnight certain, you shall hear, and name your own day.”

‘Then he asked me who had accompanied me, and lamented ever so much his not being able to go down to receive them; and he offered luncheon, with a sort of Ravenswood smile, and a shrug, and I declined, telling him that we had but a few minutes, and that my companions were walking in the grounds near the house.

‘I asked whether Maud was likely to return soon?

‘“Certainly not before five o’clock.” He thought we should probably meet her on our way back to Elverston; but could not be certain, as she might have changed her plans.

‘So then came — no more remaining to be said — a very affectionate parting. I believe all about his legal dangers was strictly true. How he could, unless that horrid woman had deceived him, with so serene a countenance tell me all those gross untruths about Maud, I can only admire.’

In the meantime, as I lay in my bed, Madame, gliding hither and thither, whispering sometimes, listening at others, I suddenly startled them both by saying —

‘Whose carriage?’

‘What carriage, dear?’ inquired Quince, whose ears were not so sharp as mine.

Madame peeped from the window.

‘’Tis the physician, Doctor Jolks. He is come to see your uncle, my dear,’ said Madame.

‘But I hear a female voice,’ I said, sitting up.

‘No, my dear; there is only the doctor,’ said Madame. ‘He is come to your uncle. I tell you he is getting out of his carriage,’ and she affected to watch the doctor’s descent.

‘The carriage is driving away!’ I cried.

‘Yes, it is draiving away,’ she echoed.

But I had sprung from my bed, and was looking over her shoulder, before she perceived me.

‘It is Lady Knollys!’ I screamed, seizing the window-frame to force it up, and, vainly struggling to open it, I cried —

‘I’m here, Cousin Monica. For God’s sake, Cousin Monica — Cousin Monica!’

‘You are mad, Meess — go back,’ screamed Madame, exerting her superior strength to force me back.

But I saw deliverance and escape gliding away from my reach, and, strung to unnatural force by desperation, I pushed past her, and beat the window wildly with my hands, screaming —

‘Save me — save me! Here, here, Monica, here! Cousin, cousin, oh! save me!’

Madame had seized my wrists, and a wild struggle was going on. A window-pane was broken, and I was shrieking to stop the carriage. The Frenchwoman looked black and haggard as a fury, as if she could have murdered me.

Nothing daunted — frantic — I screamed in my despair, seeing the carriage drive swiftly away — seeing Cousin Monica’s bonnet, as she sat chatting with her *vis-à-vis*.

‘Oh, oh, oh!’ I shrieked, in vain and prolonged agony, as Madame, exerting her strength and matching her fury against my despair, forced me back in spite of my wild struggles, and pushed me sitting on the bed, where she held me fast, glaring in my face, and chuckling and panting over me.

I think I felt something of the despair of a lost spirit.

I remember the face of poor Mary Quince — its horror, its wonder — as she stood gaping into my face, over Madame’s shoulder, and crying —

‘What is it, Miss Maud? What is it, dear?’ And turning fiercely on Madame, and striving to force her grasp from my wrists, ‘Are you hurting the child? Let her go — let her go.’

‘I *weel* let her go. Wat old fool are you, Mary Queence! She is mad, I think. She ‘as lost hair head.’

‘Oh, Mary, cry from the window. Stop the carriage!’ I cried.

Mary looked out, but there was by this time, of course, nothing in sight.

‘Why don’t a you stop the carriage?’ sneered Madame. ‘Call a the coachman and the postilion. W’ere is the footman? Bah! *elle a le cerveau mal timbré*.’

‘Oh, Mary, Mary, is it gone — is it gone? Is there nothing there?’ cried I, rushing to the window; and turning to Madame, after a vain straining of my eyes, my face against the glass —

‘Oh, cruel, cruel, wicked woman! why have you done this? What was it to you? Why do you persecute me? What good *can* you gain by my ruin?’

‘Rueen! Par bleu! ma chère, you talk too fast. Did not a you see it, Mary Queence? It was the doctor’s carriage, and Mrs. Jolks, and that eempudent faylow, young Jolks, staring up to the window, and Mademoiselle she come in soche shocking déshabille to show herself knocking at the window. ‘Twould be very nice thing, Mary Queence, don’t you think?’

I was sitting now on the bedside, crying in mere despair. I did not care to dispute or to resist. Oh! why had rescue come so near, only to prove that it could not reach me? So I went on crying, with a clasping of my hands and turning up of my eyes, in incoherent prayer. I was not thinking of Madame, or of Mary Quince, or any other person, only babbling my anguish and despair helplessly in the ear of heaven.

‘I did not think there was soche fool. Wat *enfant gaté*! My dear cheaile, wat a can you *mean* by soche strange language and conduct? Wat for should a you weesh to display yourself in the window in soche ‘orrible déshabille to the people in the doctor’s coach?’

‘It was *Cousin Knollys* — Cousin Knollys. Oh, Cousin Knollys! You’re gone — you’re gone — you’re *gone*!’

‘And if it was Lady Knollys’ coach, there was certainly a coachman and a footman; and whoever has the coach there was young gentlemen in it. If it was Lady Knollys’ carriage it would ‘av been *worse* than the doctor.’

‘It is no matter — it is all over. Oh, Cousin Monica, your poor Maud — where is she to turn? Is there no help?’

That evening Madame visited me again, in one of her sedate and moral moods. She found me dejected and passive, as she had left me.

‘I think, Maud, there is news; but I am not certain.’

I raised my head and looked at her wistfully.

‘I think there is letter of *bad* news from the attorney in London.’

‘Oh!’ I said, in a tone which I am sure implied the absolute indifference of dejection.

‘But, my dear Maud, if’t be so, we shall go at once, you and me, to join Meess Millicent in France. La belle France! You weel like so moche! We shall be so gay. You cannot imagine there are such naice girl there. They all love a me so moche, you will be delight.’

‘How soon do we go?’ I asked.

‘I do not know. Bote I was to bring in a case of eau de cologne that came this evening, and he laid down a letter and say:— “The blow has descended, Madame! My niece must hold herself in readiness.” I said, “For what, Monsieur?” *twice*; bote he did not answer. I am sure it is *un procès*. They ‘av ruin him. Eh bien, my dear. I suppose we shall leave this triste place immediately. I am so rejoice. It appears to me *un cimetière*!’

‘Yes, I should like to leave it,’ I said, sitting up, with a great sigh and sunken eyes. It seemed to me that I had quite lost all sense of resentment towards Madame. A debility of feeling had supervened — the fatigue, I suppose, and prostration of the passions.

‘I weel make excuse to go into his room again,’ said Madame; ‘and I weel endeavor to learn something more from him, and I weel come back again to you in half an hour.’

She departed. But in half an hour did not return. I had a dull longing to leave Bartram-Haugh. For me, since the departure of poor Milly, it had grown like the haunt of evil spirits, and to escape on any terms from it was a blessing unspeakable.

Another half-hour passed, and another, and I grew insufferably feverish. I sent Mary Quince to the lobby to try and see Madame, who, I feared, was probably to-ing and fro-ing in and out of Uncle Silas’s room.

Mary returned to tell me that she had seen old Wyat, who told her that she thought Madame had gone to her bed half an hour before.

CHAPTER LIX

A SUDDEN DEPARTURE

‘Mary,’ said I, ‘I am miserably anxious to hear what Madame may have to tell; she knows the state I am in, and she would not like so much trouble as to look in at my door to say a word. Did you hear what she told me?’

‘No, Miss Maud,’ she answered, rising and drawing near.

‘She thinks we are going to France immediately, and to leave this place perhaps for ever.’

‘Heaven be praised for that, if it be so, Miss!’ said Mary, with more energy than was common with her, ‘for there is no luck about it, and I don’t expect to see you ever well or happy in it.’

‘You must take your candle, Mary, and make out her room, upstairs; I found it accidentally myself one evening.’

‘But Wyat won’t let us upstairs.’

‘Don’t mind her, Mary; I tell you to go. You must try. I can’t sleep till we hear.’

‘What direction is her room in, Miss?’ asked Mary.

‘Somewhere in *that* direction, Mary,’ I answered, pointing. ‘I cannot describe the turns; but I think you will find it if you go along the great passage to your left, on getting to the top of the stairs, till you come to the cross-galleries, and then turn to your left; and when you have passed four or perhaps five doors, you must be very near it, and I am sure she will hear if you call.’

‘But will she tell me — she *is* such a rum un, Miss?’ suggested Mary.

‘Tell her exactly what I have said to you, and when she learns that you already know as much as I do, she may — unless, indeed, she wishes to torture me. If she won’t, perhaps at least you can persuade her to come to me for a moment. Try, dear Mary; we can but fail.’

‘Will you be very lonely, Miss, while I am away?’ asked Mary, uneasily, as she lighted her candle.

‘I can’t help it, Mary. Go. I think if I heard we were going, I could almost get up and dance and sing. I can’t bear this dreadful uncertainty any longer.’

‘If old Wyat is outside, I’ll come back and wait here a bit, till she’s out o’ the way,’ said Mary; ‘and, anyhow, I’ll make all the haste I can. The drops and the sal-volatile is here, Miss, by your hand.’

And with an anxious look at me, she made her exit, softly, and did not immediately return, by which I concluded that she had found the way clear, and had gained the upper story without interruption.

This little anxiety ended, its subsidence was followed by a sense of loneliness, and with it, of vague insecurity, which increased at last to such a pitch, that I wondered at my own madness in sending my companion away; and at last my terrors so grew, that I drew back into the farthest corner of the bed, with my shoulders to the wall, and my bedclothes huddled about me, with only a point open to peep at.

At last the door opened gently.

‘Who’s there?’ I cried, in extremity of horror, expecting I knew not whom.

‘Me, Miss,’ whispered Mary Quince, to my unutterable relief; and with her candle flared, and a wild and pallid face, Mary Quince glided into the room, locking the door as she entered.

I do not know how it was, but I found myself holding Mary fast with both my hands as we stood side by side on the floor.

‘Mary, you are terrified; for God’s sake, what is the matter?’ I cried.

‘No, Miss,’ said Mary, faintly, ‘not much.’

‘I see it in your face. What is it?’

‘Let me sit down, Miss. I’ll tell you what I saw; only I’m just a bit queerish.’

Mary sat down by my bed.

‘Get in, Miss; you’ll take cold. Get into bed, and I’ll tell you. It is not much.’

I did get into bed, and gazing on Mary’s frightened face, I felt a corresponding horror.

‘For mercy’s sake, Mary, say what it is?’

So again assuring me ‘it was not much,’ she gave me in a somewhat diffuse and tangled narrative the following facts: —

On closing my door, she raised her candle above her head and surveyed the lobby, and seeing no one there she ascended the stairs swiftly. She passed along the great gallery to the left, and paused a moment at the cross gallery, and then recollected my directions clearly, and followed the passage to the right.

There are doors at each side, and she had forgotten to ask me at which Madame's was. She opened several. In one room she was frightened by a bat, which had very nearly put her candle out. She went on a little, paused, and began to lose heart in the dismal solitude, when on a sudden, a few doors farther on, she thought she heard Madame's voice.

She said that she knocked at the door, but receiving no answer, and hearing Madame still talking within, she opened it.

There was a candle on the chimneypiece, and another in a stable lantern near the window. Madame was conversing volubly on the hearth, with her face toward the window, the entire frame of which had been taken from its place: Dickon Hawkes, the Zamiel of the wooden leg, was supporting it with one hand, as it leaned imperfectly against the angle of the recess. There was a third figure standing, buttoned up in a surtout, with a bundle of tools under his arm, like a glazier, and, with a silent thrill of fear, she distinctly recognised the features as those of Dudley Ruthyn.

‘'Twas him, Miss, so sure as I sit here! Well, like that, they were as mute as mice; three pairs of eyes were on me. I don't know what made me so study like, but som'at told me I should not make as though I knew any but Madame; and so I made a courtesy, as well as I could, and I said, "Might I speak a word wi' ye, please, on the lobby?"

‘Mr. Dudley was making belief be this time to look out at window, wi' his back to me, and I kept looking straight on Madame, and she said, "They're mendin' my broken glass, Mary," walking between them and me, and coming close up to me very quick; and so she marched me backward out o' the door, prating all the time.

‘When we were on the lobby, she took my candle from my hand, shutting the door behind her, and she held the light a bit behind her ear; so'twas full on my face, as she looked sharp into it; and, after a bit, she said again, in her queer lingo — there was two panes broke in her room, and men sent for to mend it.

‘I was awful frightened when I saw Mr. Dudley, for I could not believe any such thing before, and I don't know how I could look her in the face as I did and not show it. I was as smooth and cool as yonder chimneypiece, and she has an awful evil eye to stan' against; but I never flinched, and I think she's puzzled, for as cunning as she is, whether I believe all she said, or knowed 'twas a pack o' stories. So I told her your message, and she said she had not heard another word since; but she did believe we had not many more days here, and would tell you if she heard tonight, when she brought his soup to your uncle, in half an hour's time.'

I asked her, as soon as I could speak, whether she was perfectly certain as to the fact that the man in the surtout was Dudley, and she made answer —

'I'd swear to him on that Bible, Miss.'

So far from any longer wishing Madame's return that night, I trembled at the idea of it. Who could tell who might enter the room with her when the door opened to admit her?

Dudley, so soon as he recovered the surprise, had turned about, evidently anxious to prevent recognition; Dickon Hawkes stood glowering at her. Both might have hope of escaping recognition in the imperfect light, for the candle on the chimneypiece was flaring in the air, and the light from the lantern fell in spots, and was confusing.

What could that ruffian, Hawkes, be doing in the house? Why was Dudley there? Could a more ominous combination be imagined? I puzzled my distracted head over all Mary Quince's details, but could make nothing of their occupation. I know of nothing so terrifying as this kind of perpetual puzzling over ominous problems.

You may imagine how the long hours of that night passed, and how my heart beat at every fancied sound outside my door.

But morning came, and with its light some reassurance. Early, Madame de la Rougierre made her appearance; she searched my eyes darkly and shrewdly, but made no allusion to Mary Quince's visit. Perhaps she expected some question from me, and, hearing none, thought it as well to leave the subject at rest.

She had merely come in to say that she had heard nothing since, but was now going to make my uncle's chocolate; and that so soon as her interview was ended she would see me again, and let me hear anything she should have gleaned.

In a little while a knock came to my door, and Mary Quince was ordered by old Wyat into my uncle's room. She returned flushed, in a huge fuss, to say that I was to be up and dressed for a journey in half an hour, and to go straight, when dressed, to my uncle's room.

It was good news; at the same time it was a shock. I was glad. I was stunned. I jumped out of bed, and set about my toilet with an energy quite new to me. Good Mary Quince was busily packing my boxes, and consulting as to what I should take with me, and what not.

Was Mary Quince to accompany me? He had not said a word on that point; and I feared from his silence she was to remain. There was comfort, however, in this — that the separation would not be for long; I felt confident of that; and I was about to join Milly, whom I loved better than I could have believed before our separation; but whatsoever the conditions might be, it was an indescribable relief to have done with Bartram-Haugh, and leave behind me its sinister lines of circumvallation, its haunted recesses, and the awful spectres that had lately appeared within its walls.

I stood too much in awe of my uncle to fail in presenting myself punctually at the close of the half-hour. I entered his sitting-room under the shadow of sour old Wyat's high-cauled cap; she closed the door behind me, and the conference commenced.

Madame de la Rougierre sat there, dressed and draped for a journey, and with a thick black lace veil on. My uncle rose, gaunt and venerable, and with a harsh and severe countenance. He did not offer his hand; he made me a kind of bow, more of repulsion than of respect. He remained in a standing position, supporting his crooked frame by his hand, which he leaned on a despatch-box; he glared on me steadily with his wild phosphoric eyes, from under the dark brows I have described to you, now corrugated in lines indescribably stern.

'You shall join my daughter at the Pension, in France; Madame de la Rougierre shall accompany you,' said my uncle, delivering his directions with the stern monotony and the measured pauses of a person dictating an important despatch to a secretary.' Old Mrs. Quince shall follow with me, or, if alone, in a week. You shall pass tonight in London; tomorrow night you proceed thence to Dover, and cross by the mail-packet. You shall now sit down and write a letter to your cousin Monica Knollys, which I will first read and then despatch. Tomorrow you shall write a note to Lady Knollys, from *London*, telling her how you have got over so much of your journey, and that you cannot write from Dover, as you must instantly start by the packet on reaching it; and that until my affairs are a little settled, you cannot write to her from France, as it is of high importance to my safety that no clue should exist as to our address. Intelligence, however, shall reach her through my attorneys, Archer and Sleigh, and I trust we shall soon return. You will, please, submit that latter note to Madame de la Rougierre, who has my directions to see that it contains no *libels* upon my character. Now, sit down.'

So, with those unpleasant words tingling in my ears, I obeyed.

'*Write*,' said he, when I was duly placed. 'You shall convey the substance of what I say in your own language. The immiment danger this morning announced of an execution — rememher the word,' and he spelled it for me — 'being put into this house either this afternoon or tomorrow, compels me to anticipate my plans, and despatch you for France this day. That you are starting with an attendant.' Here an uneasy movement from Madame, whose dignity was perhaps excited. 'An *attendant*,' he repeated, with a discordant emphasis; 'and you can, if you please — but I don't *solicit* that justice — say that you have been as kindly treated here as my unfortunate circumstances would permit. That is all. You have just fifteen minutes to write. Begin.'

I wrote accordingly. My hysterical state had made me far less combative than I might have proved some months since, for there was much that was insulting as well as formidable in his manner. I completed my letter, however, to his satisfaction in the prescribed time; and he said, as he laid it and its envelope on the table —

'Please to remember that this lady is not your attendant only, but that she has authority to direct every detail respecting your journey, and will make all the necessary payments on the way. You will please, then, implicitly to comply with her directions. The carriage awaits you at the hall-door.'

Having thus spoken, with another grim bow, and 'I wish you a safe and pleasant journey,' he receded a step or two, and I, with an undefinable kind of melancholy, though also with a sense of relief, withdrew.

My letter, I afterwards found, reached Lady Knollys, accompanied by one from Uncle Silas, who said— 'Dear Maud apprises me that she has written to tell you something of our movements. A sudden crisis in my miserable affairs compels a break-up as sudden here. Maud joins my daughter at the Pension, in France. I purposely omit the address, because I mean to reside in its vicinity until this storm shall have blown over; and as the consequences of some of my unhappy entanglements might pursue me even there, I must only for the present spare you the pain and trouble of keeping a secret. I am sure that for some little time you will excuse the girl's silence; in the meantime you shall hear of them, and perhaps circuitously, from me. Our dear Maud started this morning *en route* for her destination, very sorry, as am I, that she could not enjoy first a flying visit to Elverston, but in high spirits, notwithstanding, at the new life and sights before her.'

At the door my beloved old friend, Mary Quince, awaited me.

'Am I going with you, Miss Maud?'

I burst into tears and clasped her in my arms.

'I'm not,' said Mary, very sorrowfully; 'and I never was from you yet, Miss, since you wasn't the length of my arm.'

And kind old Mary began to cry with me.

'Bote you are coming in a few days, Mary Quince,' expostulated Madame. 'I wonder you are soche fool. What is two, three days? Bah! nonsense, girl.'

Another farewell to poor Mary Quince, quite bewildered at the suddenness of her bereavement. A serious and tremulous bow from our little old butler on the steps. Madame bawling through the open window to the driver to make good speed, and remember that we had but nineteen minutes to reach the station. Away we went. Old Crowle's iron *grille* rolled back before us. I looked on the receding landscape, the giant trees — the palatial, time-stained mansion. A strange conflict of feelings, sweet and bitter, rose and mingled in the reverie. Had I been too hard and suspicious with the inhabitants of that old house of my family? Was my uncle *justly* indignant? Was I ever again to know such pleasant rambles as some of those I had enjoyed with dear Millicent through the wild and beautiful woodlands I was leaving behind me? And there, with my latest glimpse of the front of Bartram-Haugh, I beheld dear old Mary Quince gazing after us. Again my tears flowed. I waved my handkerchief from the window; and now the park-wall hid all from view, and at a great pace, throught the steep wooded glen, with the rocky and precipitous character of a ravine, we glided; and when the road next emerged, Bartram-Haugh was a misty mass of forest and chimneys, slope and hollow, and we within a few minutes of the station.

CHAPTER LX

THE JOURNEY

Waiting for the train, as we stood upon the platform, I looked back again toward the wooded uplands of Bartram; and far behind, the fine range of mountains, azure and soft in the distance, beyond which lay beloved old Knowl, and my lost father and mother, and the scenes of my childhood, never embittered except by the sibyl who sat beside me.

Under happier circumstances I should have been, at my then early age, quite wild with pleasurable excitement on entering London for the first time. But black Care sat by me, with her pale hand in mine: a voice of fear and warning, whose words I could not catch, was always in my ear. We drove through London, amid the glare of lamps, toward the West-end, and for a little while the sense of novelty and curiosity overcame my despondency, and I peeped eagerly from the window; while Madame, who was in high goodhumour, spite of the fatigues of our long railway flight, screeched scraps of topographic information in my ear; for London was a picture-book in which she was well read.

‘That is Euston Square, my dear — Russell Square. Here is Oxford Street — Haymarket. See, there is the Opera House — Hair Majesty’s Theatre. See all the carriages waiting;’ and so on, till we reached at length a little narrow street, which she told me was off Piccadilly, where we drew up before a private house, as it seemed to me — a family hotel — and I was glad to be at rest for the night.

Fatigued with the peculiar fatigue of railway travelling, dusty, a little chilly, with eyes aching and wearied, I ascended the stairs silently, our garrulous and bustling landlady leading the way, and telling her oft-told story of the house, its noble owner in old time, and how those fine drawingrooms were taken every year during the Session by the Bishop of Rochet-on-Copeley, and at last into our double-bedded room.

I would fain have been alone, but I was too tired and dejected to care very much for anything.

At tea, Madame expanded in spirit, like a giant refreshed, and chattered and sang; and at last, seeing that I was nodding, advised my going to bed, while she ran across the street to see ‘her dear old friend, Mademoiselle St. Eloi, who was sure to be up, and would be offended if she failed to make her ever so short a call.’

I cared little what she said, and was glad to be rid of her even for a short time, and was soon fast asleep.

I saw her, I know not how much later, poking about the room, like a figure in a dream, and taking off her things.

She had her breakfast in bed next morning, and I was, to my comfort, left to take mine in solitary possession of our sitting-room; where I began to wonder how little annoyance I had as yet suffered from her company, and began to speculate upon the chances of my making the journey with tolerable comfort.

Our hostess gave me five minutes of her valuable time. Her talk ran chiefly upon nuns and convents, and her old acquaintance with Madame; and it seemed to me that she had at one time driven a kind of trade, no doubt profitable enough, in escorting young ladies to establishments on the Continent; and although I did not then quite understand the tone in which she spoke to me, I often thought afterwards that Madame had represented me as a young person destined for the holy vocation of the veil.

When she was gone, I sat listlessly looking out of the window, and saw some chance equipages drive by, and now and then a fashionable pedestrian; and wondered if this quiet thoroughfare could really be one of the arteries so near the heart of the tumultuous capital.

I think my nervous vitality must have burnt very low just then, for I felt perfectly indifferent about all the novelty and world of wonders beyond, and should have hated to leave the dull tranquillity of my window for an excursion through the splendours of the unseen streets and palaces that surrounded me.

It was one o’clock before Madame joined me; and finding me in this dull mood, she did not press me to accompany her in her drive, no doubt well pleased to be rid of me.

After tea that evening, as we sat alone in our room, she entertained me with some very odd conversation — at the time unintelligible — but which acquired a tolerably distinct meaning from the events that followed.

Two or three times that day Madame appeared to me on the point of saying something of grave import, as she scanned me with her bleak wicked stare.

It was a peculiarity of hers, that whenever she was pressed upon by an anxiety that really troubled her, her countenance did not look sad or solicitous, as other people's would, but simply wicked. Her great gaunt mouth was compressed and drawn down firmly at the corners, and her eyes glared with a dismal scowl.

At last she said suddenly —

'Are you ever grateful, Maud?'

'I hope so, Madame,' I answered.

'And how do you show your gratitude? For instance, would a you do great deal for a person who would run *risque* for your sake?'

It struck me all at once that she was sounding me about poor Meg Hawkes, whose fidelity, notwithstanding the treason or cowardice of her lover, Tom Brice, I never doubted; and I grew at once wary and reserved.

'I know of no opportunity, thank Heaven, for any such service, Madame. How can anyone serve me at present, by themselves incurring danger? What do you mean?'

'Do you like, for example, to go to that French Pension? Would you not like better some other arrangement?'

'Of course there are other arrangements I should like better; but I see no use in talking of them; they are not to be,' I answered.

'What other arrangements do you mean, my dear cheaile?' enquired Madame. 'You mean, I suppose, you would like better to go to Lady Knollys?'

'My uncle does not choose it at present; and except with his consent nothing can be done!'

'He weel never consent, dear cheaile.'

'But he *has* consented — not immediately indeed, but in a short time, when his affairs are settled.'

'*Lanternes*! They will never be settle,' said Madame.

'At all events, for the present I am to go to France. Milly seems very happy, and I dare say I shall like it too. I am very glad to leave Bartram-

Haugh, at all events.’

‘But your uncle weel bring you back there,’ said Madame, drily.

‘It is doubtful whether he will ever return to Bartram himself,’ I said.

‘Ah!’ said Madame, with a long-drawn nasal intonation, ‘you theenk I hate you. You are quaite wrong, my dear Maud. I am, on the contrary, very much interested for you — I am, I assure you, dear a cheaile.’

And she laid her great hand, with joints misshapen by old chilblains, upon the back of mine. I looked up in her face. She was not smiling. On the contrary, her wide mouth was drawn down at the corners ruefully, as before, and she gazed on my face with a scowl from her abysmal eyes.

I used to think the flare of that irony which lighted her face so often immeasurably worse than any other expression she could assume; but this lacklustre stare and dismal collapse of feature was more wicked still.

‘Suppose I should bring you to Lady Knollys, and place you in her charge, what would a you do then for poor Madame?’ said this dark spectre.

I was inwardly startled at these words. I looked into her unsearchable face, but could draw thence nothing but fear. Had she made the same overture only two days since, I think I would have offered her half my fortune. But circumstances were altered. I was no longer in the panic of despair. The lesson I had received from Tom Brice was fresh in my mind, and my profound distrust of her was uppermost. I saw before me only a tempter and betrayer, and said —

‘Do you mean to imply, Madame, that my guardian is not to be trusted, and that I ought to make my escape from him, and that you are really willing to aid me in doing so?’

This, you see, was turning the tables upon her. I looked her steadily in the face as I spoke. She returned my gaze with a strange stare and a gape, which haunted me long after; and it seemed as we sat in utter silence that each was rather horribly fascinated by the other’s gaze.

At last she shut her mouth sternly, and eyes me with a more determined and meaning scowl, and then said in a low tone —

‘I believe, Maud, that you are a cunning and wicked little thing.’

‘Wisdom is not cunning, Madame; nor is it wicked to ask your meaning in explicit language,’ I replied.

‘And so, you clever cheaile, we two sit here, playing at a game of chess, over this little table, to decide which shall destroy the other — is it not so?’

‘I will not allow you to destroy me,’ I retorted, with a sudden flash.

Madame stood up, and rubbed her mouth with her open hand. She looked to me like some evil being seen in a dream. I was frightened.

‘You are going to hurt me!’ I ejaculated, scarce knowing what I said.

‘If I were, you deserve it. You are very *malicious*, ma chère: or, it may be, only very stupid.’

A knock came to the door.

‘Come in,’ I cried, with a glad sense of relief.

A maid entered.

‘A letter, please, ‘m,’ she said, handing it to me.

‘For *me*,’ snarled Madame, snatching it.

I had seen my uncle’s hand, and the Feltram postmark.

Madame broke the seal, and read. It seemed but a word, for she turned it about after the first momentary glance, and examined the interior of the envelope, and then returned to the line she had already read.

She folded the letter again, drawing her nails in a sharp pinch along the creases, as she stared in a blank, hesitating way at me.

‘You are stupid little ingrate, I am employ by Monsieur Ruthyn, and of course I am faithful to my employer. I do not want to talk to you. *There*, you may read that.’

She jerked the letter before me on the table. It contained but these words: —

Bartram-Haugh:
‘*30th January, 1845*.
‘MY DEAR MADAME,
‘Be so good as to take the halfpast eight o’clock train to *Dover* tonight. Beds are prepared. — Yours very truly,
SILAS RUTHYN.’

I cannot say what it was in this short advice that struck me with fear. Was it the thick line beneath the word ‘Dover,’ that was so uncalled for, and gave me a faint but terrible sense of something preconcerted?

I said to Madame —

‘Why is “Dover” underlined?’

‘I do not know, little fool, no more than you. How can I tell what is passing in your oncle’s head when he make that a mark?’

‘Has it not a meaning, Madame?’

‘How can you talk like that?’ she answered, more in her old way. ‘You are either mocking of me, or you are becoming truly a fool!’

She rang the bell, called for our bill, saw our hostess; while I made a few hasty prepartions in my room.

‘You need not look after the trunks — they will follow us all right. Let us go, cheaile — we ‘av half an hour only to reach the train.’

No one ever fussed like Madame when occasion offered. There was a cab at the door, into which she hurried me. I assumed that she would give all needful directions, and leaned back, very weary and sleepy already, though it was so early, listening to her farewell screamed from the cab-step, and seeing her black cloak flitting and flapping this way and that, like the wings of a raven disturbed over its prey.

In she got, and away we drove through a glare of lamps, and shop-windows, still open; gas everywhere, and cabs, busses, and carriages, still thundering through the streets. I was too tired and too depressed to look at those things. Madame, on the contrary, had her head out of the window till we reached the station.

‘Where are the rest of the boxes?’ I asked, as Madame placed me in charge of her box and my bag in the office of the terminus.

‘They will follow with Boots in another cab, and will come safe with us in this train. Mind those two, we weel bring in the carriage with us.’

So into a carriage we got; in came Madame’s box and my bag; Madame stood at the door, and, I think, frightened away intending passengers, by her size and shrillness.

At last the bell rang her into her place, the door clapt, the whistle sounded, and we were off.

CHAPTER LXI

OUR BEDCHAMBER

I had passed a miserable night, and, indeed, for many nights had not had my due proportion of sleep. Still I sometimes fancy that I may have swallowed something in my tea that helped to make me so irresistibly drowsy. It was a very dark night — no moon, and the stars soon hid by the gathering clouds. Madame sat silent, and ruminating in her place, with her rugs about her. I, in my corner similarly enveloped, tried to keep awake. Madame plainly thought I was asleep already, for she stole a leather flask from her pocket, and applied it to her lips, causing an aroma of brandy.

But it was vain struggling against the influence that was stealing over me, and I was soon in a profound and dreamless slumber.

Madame awoke me at last, in a huge fuss. She had got out all our things and hurried them away to a close carriage which was awaiting us. It was still dark and starless. We got along the platform, I half asleep, the porter carrying our rugs, by the glare of a pair of gas-jets in the wall, and out by a small door at the end.

I remember that Madame, contrary to her wont, gave the man some money. By the puzzling light of the carriage-lamps we got in and took our seats.

'Go on,' screamed Madame, and drew up the window with a great chuck; and we were enclosed in darkness and silence, the most favourable conditions for thought.

My sleep had not restored me as it might; I felt feverish, fatigued, and still very drowsy, though unable to sleep as I had done.

I dozed by fits and starts, and lay awake, or half-awake, sometimes, not thinking but in a way imagining what kind of a place Dover would be; but too tired and listless to ask Madame any questions, and merely seeing the hedges, grey in the lamplight, glide backward into darkness, as I leaned back.

We turned off the main road, at right angles, and drew up.

'Get down and poosh it, it is open,' screamed Madame from the window.

A gate, I suppose, was thus passed; for when we resumed our brisk trot, Madame bawled across the carriage —

‘We are now in the ‘otel grounds.’

And so all again was darkness and silence, and I fell into another doze, from which, on waking, I found that we had come to a standstill, and Madame was standing on the low step of an open door, paying the driver. She, herself, pulled her box and the bag in. I was too tired to care what had become of the rest of our luggage.

I descended, glancing to the right and left, but there was nothing visible but a patch of light from the lamps on a paved ground and on the wall.

We stepped into the hall or vestibule, and Madame shut the door, and I thought I heard the key turn in it. We were in total darkness.

‘Where are the lights, Madame — where are the people?’ I asked, more awake than I had been.

‘’Tis pass three o’clock, cheaile, bote there is always light here.’ She was groping at the side; and in a moment more lighted a lucifer match, and so a bedroom candle.

We were in a flagged lobby, under an archway at the right, and at the left of which opened long flagged passages, lost in darkness; a winding stair, barely wide enough to admit Madame, dragging her box, led upward under a doorway, in a corner at the right.

‘Come, dear cheaile, take your bag; don’t mind the rugs, they are safe enough.’

‘But where are we to go? There is no one!’ I said, looking round in wonder. It certainly was a strange reception at an hotel.

‘Never mind, my dear cheaile. They know me here, and I have always the same room ready when I write for it. Follow me quaitely.’

So she mounted, carrying the candle. The stair was steep, and the march long. We halted at the second landing, and entered a gaunt, grimy passage. All the way up we had not heard a single sound of life, nor seen a human being, nor so much as passed a gaslight.

‘Viola! here ’tis, my dear old room. Enter, dearest Maud.’

And so I did. The room was large and lofty, but shabby and dismal. There was a tall four-post bed, with its foot beside the window, hung with dark-green curtains, of some plush or velvet texture, that looked like a dusty pall. The remaining furniture was scant and old, and a ravelled square of threadbare carpet covered a patch of floor at the bedside. The room was grim and large, and had a cold, vault-like atmosphere, as if long uninhabited; but there were cinders in the grate and under it. The imperfect light of our mutton-fat candle made all this look still more comfortless.

Madame placed the candle on the chimneypiece, locked the door, and put the key in her pocket.

'I always do so in '*otel*' said she, with a wink at me.

And, then with a long 'ha!' expressive of fatigue and relief, she threw herself into a chair.

'So 'ere we are at last!' said she; 'I'm glad. *There's* your bed, Maud. *Mine* is in the dressing-room.'

She took the candle, and I went in with her. A shabby press bed, a chair, and table were all its furniture; it was rather a closet than a dressing-room, and had no door except that through which we had entered. So we returned, and very tired, wondering, I sat down on the side of my bed and yawned.

'I hope they will call us in time for the packet,' I said.

'Oh yes, they never fail,' she answered, looking steadfastly on her box, which she was diligently uncording.

Uninviting as was my bed, I was longing to lie down in it; and having made those ablutions which our journey rendered necessary, I at length lay down, having first religiously stuck my talismanic pin, with the head of sealing-wax, into the bolster.

Nothing escaped the restless eye of Madame.

'Wat is that, dear cheaile?' she enquired, drawing near and scrutinising the head of the gipsy charm, which showed like a little ladybird newly lighted on the sheet.

'Nothing — a charm — folly. Pray, Madame, allow me to go to sleep.'

So, with another look and a little twiddle between her finger and thumb, she seemed satisfied; but, unhappily for me, she did not seem at all sleepy. She busied herself in unpacking and displaying over the back of the chair a whole series of London purchases — silk dresses, a shawl, a sort of lace demi-coiffure then in vogue, and a variety of other articles.

The vainest and most slammakin of women — the merest slut at home, a milliner's lay figure out of doors — she had one square foot of looking-glass upon the chimneypiece, and therein tried effects, and conjured up grotesque simpers upon her sinister and weary face.

I knew that the sure way to prolong this worry was to express my uneasiness under it, so I bore it as quietly as I could; and at last fell fast asleep with the gaunt image of Madame, with a festoon of grey silk with a cerise stripe, pinched up in her finger and thumb, and smiling over her shoulder across it into the little shaving-glass that stood on the chimney.

I awoke suddenly in the morning, and sat up in my bed, having for a moment forgotten all about our travelling. A moment more, however, brought all back again.

'Are we in time, Madame?'

'For the packet?' she enquired, with one of her charming smiles, and cutting a caper on the floor. 'To be sure; you don't suppose they would forget. We have two hours yet to wait.'

'Can we see the sea from the window?'

'No, dearest cheaile; you will see't time enough.

'I'd like to get up,' I said.

'Time enough, my dear Maud; you are fatigued; are you sure you feel quite well?'

'Well enough to get up; I should be better, I think, out of bed.'

'There is no hurry, you know; you need not even go by the next packet. Your uncle, he tell me, I may use my discretion.'

'Is there any water?'

'They will bring some.'

'Please, Madame, ring the bell.'

She pulled it with alacrity. I afterwards learnt that it did not ring.

'What has become of my gipsy pin?' I demanded, with an unaccountable sinking of the heart.

'Oh! the little pin with the red top? maybe it 'as fall on the ground; we weel find when you get up.'

I suspected that she had taken it merely to spite me. It would have been quite the thing she would have liked. I cannot describe to you how the loss of this little 'charm' depressed and excited me. I searched the bed; I turned over all the bedclothes; I searched in and outside; at last I gave up.

‘How odious!’ I cried; ‘somebody has stolen it merely to vex me.’

And, like a fool as I was, I threw myself on my face on the bed and wept, partly in anger, partly in dismay.

After a time, however, this blew over. I had a hope of recovering it. If Madame had stolen it, it would turn up yet. But in the meantime its disappearance troubled me like an omen.

‘I am afraid, my dear cheaile, you are not very well. It is really very odd you should make such fuss about a pin! Nobody would believe! Do you not theenk it would be a good plan to take a your breakfast in your bed?

She continued to urge this point for some time. At last, however, having by this time quite recovered my self-command, and resolved to preserve ostensibly fair terms with Madame, who could contribute so essentially to make me wretched during the rest of my journey, and possibly to prejudice me very seriously on my arrival, I said quietly —

‘Well, Madame, I know it is very silly; but I had kept that foolish little pin so long and so carefully, that I had grown quite fond of it; but I suppose it is lost, and I must content myself, though I cannot laugh as you do. So I will get up now, and dress.’

‘I think you will do well to get all the repose you can,’ answered Madame; ‘but as you please,’ she added, observing that I was getting up.

So soon as I had got some of my things on, I said —

‘Is there a pretty view from the window?’

‘No,’ said Madame.

I looked out and saw a dreary quadrangle of cut stone, in one side of which my window was placed. As I looked a dream rose up before me.

‘This hotel,’ I said, in a puzzled way. ‘*Is* it a hotel? Why this is just like — it *is* the inner court of Bartram-Haugh!’

Madame clapped her large hands together, made a fantastic *chassé* on the floor, burst into a great nasal laugh like the scream of a parrot, and then said —

‘Well, dearest Maud, is not clever trick?’

I was so utterly confounded that I could only stare about me in stupid silence, a spectacle which renewed Madame’s peals of laughter.

‘We are at Bartram-Haugh!’ I repeated, in utter consternation. ‘How was this done?’

I had no reply but shrieks of laughter, and one of those Walpurgis dances in which she excelled.

'It is a mistake — is it? *What* is it?'

'All a mistake, of course. Bartram-Haugh, it is so like Dover, as all philosophers know.'

I sat down in total silence, looking out into the deep and dark enclosure, and trying to comprehend the reality and the meaning of all this.

'Well, Madame, I suppose you will be able to satisfy my uncle of your fidelity and intelligence. But to me it seems that his money has been ill-spent, and his directions anything but well observed.'

'Ah, ha! Never mind; I think he will forgive me,' laughed Madame.

Her tone frightened me. I began to think, with a vague but overpowering sense of danger, that she had acted under the Machiavellian directions of her superior.

'You have brought me back, then, by my uncle's orders?'

'Did I say so?'

'No; but what you have said can have no other meaning, though I can't believe it. And why have I been brought here? What is the object of all this duplicity and trick. I *will* know. It is not possible that my uncle, a gentleman and a kinsman, can be privy to so disreputable a manouvre.'

'First you will eat your breakfast, dear Maud; next you can tell your story to your uncle, Monsieur Ruthyn; and then you shall hear what he thinks of my so terrible misconduct. What nonsense, cheaile! Can you not think how many things may 'appen to change a your uncle's plans? Is he not in danger to be arrest? Bah! You are cheaile still; you cannot have intelligence more than a cheaile. Dress yourself, and I will order breakfast.'

I could not comprehend the strategy which had been practised on me. Why had I been so shamelessly deceived? If it were decided that I should remain here, for what imaginable reason had I been sent so far on my journey to France? Why had I been conveyed back with such mystery? Why was I removed to this uncomfortable and desolate room, on the same floor with the apartment in which Charke had met his death, and with no window commanding the front of the house, and no view but the deep and weed-choked court, that looked like a deserted churchyard in a city?

‘I suppose I may go to my own room?’ I said.

‘Not to-day, my dear cheaile, for it was all disarrange when we go ‘way; ‘twill be ready again in two three days.’

‘Where is Mary Quince?’ I asked.

‘Mary Quince! — she has follow us to France,’ said Madame, making what in Ireland they call a bull.

‘They are not sure where they will go or what will do for day or two more. I will go and get breakfast. Adieu for a moment.’

Madame was out of the door as she said this, and I thought I heard the key turn in the lock.

CHAPTER LXII

A WELL-KNOWN FACE LOOKS IN

You who have never experienced it can have no idea how angry and frightened you become under the sinister insult of being locked into a room, as on trying the door I found I was.

The key was in the lock; I could see it through the hole. I called after Madame, I shook at the solid oak-door, beat upon it with my hands, kicked it — but all to no purpose.

I rushed into the next room, forgetting — if indeed I had observed it, that there was no door from it upon the gallery. I turned round in an angry and dismayed perplexity, and, like prisoners in romances, examined the windows.

I was shocked and affrighted on discovering in reality what they occasionally find — a series of iron bars crossing the window! They were firmly secured in the oak woodwork of the window-frame, and each window was, besides, so compactly screwed down that it could not open. This bedroom was converted into a prison. A momentary hope flashed on me — perhaps all the windows were secured alike! But it was no such thing: these gaol-like precautions were confined to the windows to which I had access.

For a few minutes I felt quite distracted; but I bethought me that I must now, if ever, control my terrors and exert whatever faculties I possessed.

I stood upon a chair and examined the oak-work. I thought I detected marks of new chiselling here and there. The screws, too, looked new; and they and the scars on the woodwork were freshly smeared over with some coloured stuff by way of disguise.

While I was making these observations, I heard the key stealthily stirred. I suspect that Madame wished to surprise me. Her approaching step, indeed, was seldom audible; she had the soft tread of the feline tribe.

I was standing in the centre of the room confronting her when she entered.

‘Why did you lock the door, Madame?’ I demanded.

She slipped in suddenly with an insidious smirk, and locked the door hastily.

‘Hish!’ whispered Madame, raising her broad palm; and then screwing in her cheeks, she made an ogle over her shoulder in the direction of the passage.

‘Hish! be quiate, cheaile, weel you, and I weel tale you everything presently.’

She paused, with her ear laid to the door.

‘Now I can speak, ma chère; I weel tale a you there is bailiff in the house, two, three, four soche impertinent fallows! They have another as bad as themselve to make a leest of the furniture: we most keep them out of these rooms, dear Maud.’

‘You left the key in the door on the outside,’ I retorted; ‘that was not to keep them out, but me in, Madame.’

‘*Deed* I leave the key in the door?’ ejaculated Madame, with both hands raised, and such a genuine look of consternation as for a moment shook me.

It was the nature of this woman’s deceptions that they often puzzled though they seldom convinced me.

‘I re-ally think, Maud, all those so frequent changes and excitements they weel overturn my poor head.’

‘And the windows are secured with iron bars — what are they for?’ I whispered sternly, pointing with my finger at these grim securities.

‘That is for more a than forty years, when Sir Phileep Aylmer was to reside here, and had this room for his children’s nursery, and was afraid they should fall out.’

‘But if you look you will find these bars have been put here very recently: the screws and marks are quite new.’

‘*Eendeed!*’ ejaculated Madame, with prolonged emphasis, in precisely the same consternation. ‘Why, my dear, they told a me down stair what I have tell a you, when I ask the reason! Late a me see.’

And Madame mounted on a chair, and made her scrutiny with much curiosity, but could not agree with me as to the very recent date of the carpentry.

There is nothing, I think, so exasperating as that sort of falsehood which affects not to see what is quite palpable.

'Do you mean to say, Madame, that you really think those chisellings and screws are forty years old?'

'How can I tell, cheaile? What does signify whether it is forty or only fourteen years? Bah! we av other theeng to theenk about. Those villain men! I am glad to see bar and bolt, and lock and key, at least, to our room, to keep soche faylows out!'

At that moment a knock came to the door, and Madame's nasal 'in moment' answered promptly, and she opened the door, stealthily popping out her head.

'Oh, that is all right; go you long, no ting more, go way.'

'Who's there?' I cried.

'Hold a your tongue,' said Madame imperiously to the visitor, whose voice I fancied I recognised— '*go* way.'

Out slipped Madame again, locking the door; but this time she returned immediately, bearing a tray with breakfast.

I think she fancied that I would perhaps attempt to break away and escape; but I had no such thought at that moment. She hastily set down the tray on the floor at the threshold, locking the door as before.

My share of breakfast was a little tea; but Madame's digestion was seldom disturbed by her sympathies, and she ate voraciously. During this process there was a silence unusual in her company; but when her meal was ended she proposed a reconnaissance, professing much uncertainty as to whether my Uncle had been arrested or not.

'And in case the poor old gentleman be poot in what you call stone jug, where are *we* to go my dear Maud — to Knowl or to Elverston? You must direct.'

And so she disappeared, turning the key in the door as before. It was an old custom of hers, locking herself in her room, and leaving the key in the lock; and the habit prevailed, for she left it there again.

With a heavy heart I completed my simple toilet, wondering all the while how much of Madame's story might be false and how much, if any, true. Then I looked out upon the dingy courtyard below, in its deep damp shadow, and thought, 'How could an assassin have scaled that height in safety, and entered so noiselessly as not to awaken the slumbering gamester?' Then there were the iron bars across my window. What a fool had I been to object to that security!

I was labouring hard to reassure myself, and keep all ghastly suspicions at arm's length. But I wished that my room had been to the front of the house, with some view less dismal.

Lost in these ruminations of fear, as I stood at the window I was startled by the sound of a sharp tread on the lobby, and by the key turning in the lock of my door.

In a panic I sprang back into the corner, and stood with my eyes fixed upon the door. It opened a little, and the black head of Meg Hawkes was introduced.

'Oh, Meg!' I cried; 'thank God!'

'I guessed'twas you, Miss Maud. I am feared, Miss.'

The miller's daughter was pale, and her eyes, I thought, were red and swollen.

'Oh, Meg! for God's sake, what is it all?'

'I darn't come in. The old un's gone down, and locked the cross-door, and left me to watch. They think I care nout about ye, no more nor themselves. I donna know all, but summat more nor her. They tell her nout, she's so gi'n to drink; they say she's not safe, an' awful quarrelsome. I hear a deal when fayther and Master Dudley be a-talkin' in the mill. They think, comin' in an' out, I don't mind; but I put one think an' t'other together. An' don't ye eat nor drink nout here, Miss; hide away this; it's black enough, but wholesome anyhow!' and she slipt a piece of a coarse loaf from under her apron. '*Hide* it mind. Drink nout but the water in the jug there — it's clean spring.'

'Oh, Meg! Oh, Meg! I know what you mean,' said I, faintly.

'Ay, Miss, I'm feared they'll try it; they'll try to make away wi' ye somehow. I'm goin' to your friends arter dark; I darn't try it no sooner. I'll git awa to Ellerston, to your lady-cousin, and I'll bring 'em back wi' me in a rin; so keep a good hairt, lass. Meg Hawkes will stan' to ye. Ye were better to me than fayther and mother, and a';' and she clasped me round the waist, and buried her head in my dress; 'an I'll gie my life for ye, darling, and if they hurt ye I'll kill myself.'

She recovered her sterner mood quickly —

'Not a word, lass,' she said, in her old tone. 'Don't ye try to git away — they'll *kill* ye — ye *can't* do't. Leave a' to me. It won't be, whatever it is, till two or three o’clock in the morning. I’ll ha’e them a’ here long afore; so keep a brave heart — there’s a darling.’

I suppose she heard, or fancied she heard, a step approaching, for she said —

‘Hish!’

Her pale wild face vanished, the door shut quickly and softly, and the key turned again in the lock.

Meg, in her rude way, had spoken softly — almost under her breath; but no prophecy shrieked by the Pythoness ever thundered so madly in the ears of the hearer. I dare say that Meg fancied I was marvellously little moved by her words. I felt my gaze grow intense, and my flesh and bones literally freeze. She did not know that every word she spoke seemed to burst like a blaze in my brain. She had delivered her frightful warning, and told her story coarsely and bluntly, which, in effect, means distinctly and concisely; and, I dare say, the announcement so made, like a quick bold incision in surgery, was more tolerable than the slow imperfect mangling, which falters and recedes and equivocates with torture. Madame was long away. I sat down at the window, and tried to appreciate my dreadful situation. I was stupid — the imagery was all frightful; but I beheld it as we sometimes see horrors — heads cut off and houses burnt — in a dream, and without the corresponding emotions. It did not seem as if all this were really happening to me. I remember sitting at the window, and looking and blinking at the opposite side of the building, like a person unable but striving to see an object distinctly, and every minute pressing my hand to the side of my head and saying —

‘Oh, it won’t be — it won’t be — Oh no! — never! — it could not be!’ And in this stunned state Madame found me on her return.

But the valley of the shadow of death has its varieties of dread. The ‘horror of great darkness’ is disturbed by voices and illumed by sights. There are periods of incapacity and collapse, followed by paroxysms of active terror. Thus in my journey during those long hours I found it — agonies subsiding into lethargies, and these breaking again into frenzy. I sometimes wonder how I carried my reason safely through the ordeal.

Madame locked the door, and amused herself with her own business, without minding me, humming little nasal snatches of French airs, as she smirked on her silken purchases displayed in the daylight. Suddenly it struck me that it was very dark, considering how early it was. I looked at my watch; it seemed to me a great effort of concentration to understand it. Four o'clock, it said. Four o'clock! It would be dark at five — *night* in one hour!

'Madame, what o'clock is it? Is it evening?' I cried with my hand to my forehead, like a person puzzled.

'Two three minutes past four. It had five minutes to four when I came upstairs,' answered she, without interrupting her examination of a piece of darned lace which she was holding close to her eyes at the window.

'Oh, Madame! *Madame!* I'm frightened,' cried I, with a wild and piteous voice, grasping her arm, and looking up, as shipwrecked people may their last to heaven, into her inexorable eyes. Madame looked frightened too, I thought, as she stared into my face. At last she said, rather angrily, and shaking her arm loose —

'What you mean, cheaile?'

'Oh save me, Madame! — oh save me! — oh save me, Madame!' I pleaded, with the wild monotony of perfect terror, grasping and clinging to her dress, and looking up, with an agonised face, into the eyes of that shadowy Atropos.

'Save a you, indeed! Save! What *niaiserie*!'

'Oh, Madame! Oh, *dear* Madame! for God's sake, only get me away — get me from this, and I'll do everything you ask me all my life — I will — *indeed*, Madame, I will! Oh save me! save me! *save* me!'

I was clinging to Madame as to my guardian angel in my agony.

'And who told you, cheaile, you are in any danger?' demanded Madame, looking down on me with a black and witchlike stare.

'I am, Madame — I am — in great danger! Oh, Madame, think of me — take pity on me! I have none to help me — there is no one but God and you!'

Madame all this time viewed me with the same dismal stare, like a sorceress reading futurity in my face.

'Well, maybe you are — how can I tell? Maybe your uncle is mad — maybe you are mad. You have been my enemy always — why should I care?'

Again I burst into wild entreaty, and, clasping her fast, poured forth my supplications with the bitterness of death.

‘I have no confidence in you, little Maud; you are little rogue — petite traîtresse! Reflect, if you can, how you ‘av always treat Madame. You ‘av attempt to ruin me — you conspire with the bad domestics at Knowl to destroy me — and you expect me here to take a your part! You would never listen to me — you ‘ad no mercy for me — you join to hunt me away from your house like wolf. Well, what you expect to find me now? *Bah*!’

This terrific ‘Bah!’ with a long nasal yell of scorn, rang in my ears like a clap of thunder.

‘I say you are mad, petite insolente, to suppose I should care for you more than the poor hare it will care for the hound — more than the bird who has escape will love the oiseleur. I do not care — I ought not care. It is your turn to suffer. Lie down on your bed there, and suffer quaitely.’

CHAPTER LXIII

SPICED CLARET

I did not lie down; but I despaired. I walked round and round the room, wringing my hands in utter distraction. I threw myself at the bedside on my knees. I could not pray; I could only shiver and moan, with hands clasped, and eyes of horror turned up to heaven. I think Madame was, in her malignant way, perplexed. That some evil was intended me I am sure she was persuaded; but I dare say Meg Hawkes had said rightly in telling me that she was not fully in their secrets.

The first paroxysm of despair subsided into another state. All at once my mind was filled with the idea of Meg Hawkes, her enterprise, and my chances of escape. There is one point at which the road to Elverston makes a short ascent: there is a sudden curve there, two great ash-trees, with a roadside stile between, at the right side, covered with ivy. Driving back and forward, I did not recollect having particularly remarked this point in the highway; but now it was before me, in the thin light of the thinnest segment of moon, and the figure of Meg Hawkes, her back toward me, always ascending towards Elverston. It was constantly the same picture — the same motion without progress — the same dreadful suspense and impatience.

I was now sitting on the side of the bed, looking wistfully across the room. When I did not see Meg Hawkes, I beheld Madame darkly eyeing first one then another point of the chamber, evidently puzzling over some problem, and in one of her most savage moods — sometimes muttering to herself, sometimes protruding, and sometimes screwing up her great mouth.

She went into her own room, where she remained, I think, nearly ten minutes, and on her return there was that in the flash of her eyes, the glow of her face, and the peculiar fragrance that surrounded her, that showed she had been partaking of her favourite restorative.

I had not moved since she left my room.

She paused about the middle of the floor, and looked at me with what I can only describe as her wild-beast stare.

'You are a very secrete family, you Ruthyns — you are so coning. I hate the coning people. By my faith, I weel see Mr. Silas Ruthyn, and ask wat he mean. I heard him tell old Wyat that Mr. Dudley is gone away tonight. He shall tell me everything, or else I weel make echec et mat aussi vrai que je vis.'

Madame's words had hardly ceased, when I was again watching Meg Hawkes on the steep road, mounting, but never reaching, the top of the acclivity, on the way to Elverston, and mentally praying that she might be brought safely there. Vain prayer of an agonised heart! Meg's journey was already frustrated: she was not to reach Elverston in time.

Madame revisited her apartment, and returned, not, I think, improved in temper. She walked about the room, hustling the scanty furniture hither and thither as she encountered it. She kicked her empty box out of her way, with a horrid crash, and a curse in French. She strode and swaggered round the room, muttering all the way, and turning the corners of her course with a furious whisk. At last, out of the door she went. I think she fancied she had not been sufficiently taken into confidence as to what was intended for me.

It was now growing late, and yet no succour! I was seized, I remember, with a dreadful icy shivering.

I was listening for signals of deliverance. At ever distant sound, half stifled with a palpitation, these sounds piercing my ear with a horrible and exaggerated distinctness— 'Oh Meg! — Oh cousin Monica! — Oh come! Oh Heaven, have mercy! — Lord, have mercy!' I thought I heard a roaring and jangle of voices. Perhaps it came from Uncle Silas's room. It might be the tipsy violence of Madame. It might — merciful Heaven! — be the arrival of friends. I started to my feet; I listened, quivering with attention. Was it in my brain? — was it real? I was at the door, and it seemed to open of itself. Madame had forgotten to lock it; she was losing her head a little by this time. The key stood in the gallery door beyond; it too, was open. I fled wildly. There was a subsiding sound of voices in my uncle's room. I was, I know not how, on the lobby at the great stairhead outside my uncle's apartment. My hand was on the banisters, my foot on the first step, when below me and against the faint light that glimmered through the great window on the landing I saw a bulky human form ascending, and a voice said 'Hush!' I staggered back, and at that instant fancied, with a thrill of conviction, I heard Lady Knollys's voice in Uncle Silas' room.

I don’t know how I entered the room; I was there like a ghost. I was frightened at my own state.

Lady Knollys was not there — no one but Madame and my guardian.

I can never forget the look that Uncle Silas fixed on me as he cowered, seemingly as appalled as I.

I think I must have looked like a phantom newly risen from the grave.

‘What’s that? — where do you come from?’ whispered he.

‘Death! death!’ was my whispered answer, as I froze with terror where I stood.

‘What does she mean? — what does all this mean?’ said Uncle Silas, recovering wonderfully, and turning with a withering sneer on Madame. ‘Do you think it right to disobey my plain directions, and let her run about the house at this hour?’ ‘Death! death! Oh, pray to God for you and me!’ I whispered in the same dreadful tones.

My uncle stared strangely at me again; and after several horrible seconds, in which he seemed to have recovered himself, he said, sternly and coolly —

‘You give too much place to your imagination, niece. Your spirits are in an odd state — you ought to have advice.’

‘Oh, uncle, pity me! Oh, uncle, you are good! you’re kind; you’re kind when you think. You could not — you could not — could not! Oh, think of your brother that was always so good to you! He sees me here. He sees us both. Oh, save me, uncle — save me! — and I’ll give up everything to you. I’ll pray to God to bless you — I’ll never forget your goodness and mercy. But don’t keep me in doubt. If I’m to go, oh, for God’s sake, shoot me now!’

‘You were always odd, niece; I begin to fear you are insane,’ he replied, in the same stern icy tone.

‘Oh, uncle — oh! — am I? Am I *mad*?’

‘I hope not; but you’ll conduct yourself like a sane person if you wish to enjoy the privileges of one.’

Then, with his finger pointing at me, he turned to Madame, and said, in a tone of suppressed ferocity —

‘What’s the meaning of this? — why is she here?’

Madame was gabbling volubly, but to me it was only a shrilly noise. My whole soul was concentrated in my uncle, the arbiter of my life, before whom I stood in the wildest agony of supplication.

That night was dreadful. The people I saw dizzily, made of smoke or shining vapour, smiling or frowning, I could have passed my hand through them. They were evil spirits.

'There's no ill intended you; by —— there's none,' said my uncle, for the first time violently agitated. 'Madame told you why we've changed your room. You told her about the bailiffs, did not you? 'with a stamp of fury he demanded of Madame, whose nasal roullades of talk were running on like a accompaniment all the time. She had told me indeed only a few hours since, and now it sounded to me like the echo of something heard a month ago or more.

'You can't go about the house, d — n it, with bailiffs in occupation. There now — there's the whole thing. Get to your room, Maud, and don't vex me. There's a good girl.'

He was trying to smile as he spoke these last words, and, with quavering soft tones, to quiet me; but the old scowl was there, the smile was corpse-like and contorted, and the softness of his tones was more dreadful than another man's ferocity.

'There, Madame, she'll go quite gently, and you can call if you want help. Don't let it happen again.'

'Come, Maud,' said Madame, encircling but not hurting my arm with her grip; 'let us go, my friend.'

I did go, you will wonder, as well you may — as you may wonder at the docility with which strong men walk through the pressroom to the drop, and thank the people of the prison for their civility when they bid them goodbye, and facilitate the fixing of the rope and adjusting of the cap. Have you never wondered that they don't make a last battle for life with the unscrupulous energy of terror, instead of surrendering it so gently in cold blood, on a silent calculation, the arithmetic of despair?

I went upstairs with Madame like a somnambulist. I rather quickened my step as I drew near my room. I went in, and stood a phantom at the window, looking into the dark quadrange. A thin glimmering crescent hung in the frosty sky, and all heaven was strewn with stars. Over the steep roof at the other side spread on the dark azure of the night this glorious blazonry of the unfathomable Creator. To me a dreadful scroll — inexorable eyes — the cloud of cruel witnesses looking down in freezing brightness on my prayers and agonies.

I turned about and sat down, leaning my head upon my arms. Then suddenly I sat up, as for the first time the picture of Uncle Silas's littered room, and the travelling bags and black boxes plied on the floor by his table — the desk, hat-case, umbrella, coats, rugs, and mufflers, all ready for a journey — reached my brain and suggested thought. The *mise en scène* had remained in every detail fixed upon my retina; and how I wondered— 'When is he going — how soon? Is he going to carry me away and place me in a madhouse?'

'Am I — am I mad?' I began to think. 'Is this all a dream, or is it real?'

I remembered how a thin polite gentleman, with a tall grizzled head and a black velvet waistcoat, came into the carriage on our journey, and said a few words to me; how Madame whispered him something, and he murmured 'Oh!' very gently, with raised eyebrows, and a glance at me, and thenceforward spoke no more to me, only to Madame, and at the next station carried his hat and other travelling chattels into another carriage. Had she told him I was mad?

These horrid bars! Madame always with me! The direful hints that dropt from my uncle! My own terrific sensations! — All these evidences revolved in my brain, and presented themselves in turn like writings on a wheel of fire.

There came a knock to the door —

Oh, Meg! Was it she? No; old Wyat whispered Madame something about her room.

So Madame reentered, with a little silver tray and flagon in her hands, and a glass. Nothing came from Uncle Silas in ungentlemanlike fashion.

'Drink, Maud,' said Madame, raising the cover, and evidently enjoying the fragrant steam.

I could not. I might have done so had I been able to swallow anything — for I was too distracted to think of Meg's warning.

Madame suddenly recollected her mistake of that evening, and tried the door; but it was duly locked. She took the key from her pocket and placed it in her breast.

'You weel 'av these rooms to yourself, ma chère. I shall sleep downstairs tonight.'

She poured out some of the hot claret into the glass abstractedly, and drank it off.

‘’Tis very good — I drank without theenk. Bote ’tis very good. Why don’t you drink some?’

‘I could not’, I repeated. And Madame boldly helped herself.

‘Vary polite, certally, to Madame was it to send nothing at all for *hair*’ (so she pronounced ‘her’); ‘bote is all same thing.’ And so she ran on in her tipsy vein, which was loud and sarcastic, with a fierce laugh now and then.

Afterwards I heard that they were afraid of Madame, who was given to cross purposes, and violent in her cups. She had been noisy and quarrelsome downstairs. She was under the delusion that I was to be conveyed away that night to a remote and safe place, and she was to be handsomely compensated for services and evidence to be afterwards given. She was not to be trusted, however, with the truth. That was to be known but to three people on earth.

I never knew, but I believe that the spiced claret which Madame drank was drugged. She was a person who could, I have been told. Drink a great deal without exhibiting any change from it but an inflamed colour and furious temper. I can only state for certain what I saw, and that was, that shortly after she had finished the claret she laid down upon my bed, and, I now know, fell asleep. I then thought she was *feigning* sleep only, and that she was really watching me.

About an hour after this I suddenly heard a little *clink* in the yard beneath. I peeped out, but saw nothing. The sound was repeated, however — sometimes more frequently, sometimes at long intervals. At last, in the deep shadow next the farther wall, I thought I could discover a figure, sometimes erect, sometimes stooping and bowing toward the earth. I could see this figure only in the rudest outline mingling with the dark.

Like a thunderbolt it smote my brain. ‘They are making my grave!’

After the first dreadful stun I grew quite wild, and ran up and down the room wringing my hands and gasping prayers to heaven. Then a calm stole over me — such a dreadful calm as I could fancy glide over one who floated in a boat under the shadow of the ‘Traitor’s Gate,’ leaving life and hope and trouble behind.

Shortly after there came a very low tap at my door; then another, like a tiny post-knock. I could never understand why it was I made no answer.

Had I done so, and thus shown that I was awake, it might have sealed my fate. I was standing in the middle of the floor staring at the door, which I expected to see open, and admit I knew not what troop of spectres.

CHAPTER LXIV

THE HOUR OF DEATH

It was a very still night and frosty. My candle had long burnt out. There was still a faint moonlight, which fell in a square of yellow on the floor near the window, leaving the rest of the room in what to an eye less accustomed than mine had become to that faint light would have been total darkness. Now, I am sure, I heard a soft whispering outside my door. I knew that I was in a state of siege! The crisis was come, and strange to say, I felt myself grow all at once resolute and self-possessed. It was not a subsidence, however, of the dreadful excitement, but a sudden screwing-up of my nerves to a pitch such as I cannot describe.

I suppose the people outside moved with great caution; and the perfect solidity of the floor, which had not anywhere a creaking board in it, favoured their noiseless movements. It was well for me that there were in the house three persons whom it was part of their plan to mystify respecting my fate. This alone compelled the extreme caution of their proceedings. They suspected that I had placed furniture against the door, and were afraid to force it, lest a crash, a scream, perhaps a long and shrilly struggle, might follow.

I remained for a space which I cannot pretend to estimate in the same posture, afraid to stir — afraid to move my eye from the door.

A very peculiar grating sound above my head startled me from my watch — something of the character of sawing, only more crunching, and with a faint continued rumble in it — utterly inexplicable. It sounded over that portion of the roof which was farthest from the door, toward which I now glided; and as I took my stand under cover of the projecting angle of a clumsy old press that stood close by it, I perceived the room a little darkened, and I saw a man descend and take his stand upon the window-stone. He let go a rope, which, however, was still fast round his body, and employed both his hands, with apparently some exertion, about something at the side of the window, which in a moment more, in one mass, bars and all, swung noiselessly open, admitting the frosty night-air; and the man, whom I now distinctly saw to be Dudley Ruthyn, kneeled on the sill, and stept, after a moment's listening, into the room. His foot made no sound upon the floor; his head was bare, and he wore his usual short shooting-jacket.

I cowered to the ground in my post of observation. He stood, as it seemed to me irresolutely for a moment, and then drew from his pocket an instrument which I distinctly saw against the faint moonlight. Imagine a hammer, one end of which had been beaten out into a longish tapering spike, with a handle something longer than usual. He drew stealthily to the window, and seemed to examine this hurriedly, and tested its strength with a twist or two of his hand. And then he adjusted it very carefully in his grasp, and made two or three little experimental picks with it in the air.

I remained perfectly still, with a terrible composure, crouched in my hiding-place, my teeth clenched, and prepared to struggle like a tigress for my life when discovered. I thought his next measure would be to light a match. I saw a lantern, I fancied, on the windowsill. But this was not his plan. He stole, in a groping way, which seemed strange to me, who could distinguish objects in this light, to the side of my bed, the exact position of which he evidently knew; he stooped over it. Madame was breathing in the deep respiration of heavy sleep. Suddenly but softly he laid, as it seemed to me, his left hand over her face, and nearly at the same instant there came a scrunching blow; an unnatural shriek, beginning small and swelling for two or three seconds into a yell such as are imagined in haunted houses, accompanied by a convulsive sound, as of the motion of running, and the arms drumming on the bed; and then another blow — and with a horrid gasp he recoiled a step or two, and stood perfectly still. I heard a horrible tremor quivering through the joints and curtains of the bedstead — the convulsions of the murdered woman. It was a dreadful sound, like the shaking of a tree and rustling of leaves. Then once more he steps to the side of the bed, and I heard another of those horrid blows — and silence — and another — and more silence — and the diabolical surgery was ended. For a few seconds, I think, I was on the point of fainting; but a gentle stir outside the door, close to my ear, startled me, and proved that there had been a watcher posted outside. There was a little tapping at the door.

'Who's that?' whispered Dudley, hoarsely.

'A friend,' answered a sweet voice.

And a key was introduced, the door quickly unlocked, and Uncle Silas entered. I saw that frail, tall, white figure, the venerable silver locks that resembled those upon the honoured head of John Wesley, and his thin white hand, the back of which hung so close to my face that I feared to breathe. I could see his fingers twitching nervously. The smell of perfumes and of ether entered the room with him.

Dudley was trembling now like a man in an ague-fit.

‘Look what you made me do!’ he said, maniacally.

‘Steady, sir!’ said the old man, close beside me.

‘Yes, you damned old murderer! I’ve a mind to do for you.’

‘There, Dudley, like a dear boy, don’t give way; it’s done. Right or wrong, we can’t help it. You must be quiet,’ said the old man, with a stern gentleness.

Dudley groaned.

‘Whoever advised it, you’re a gainer, Dudley,’ said Uncle Silas.

Then there was a pause.

‘I hope that was not heard,’ said Uncle Silas.

Dudley walked to the window and stood there.

‘Come, Dudley, you and Hawkes must use expedition. You know you must get that out of the way.’

‘I’ve done too much. I won’t do nout; I’ll not touch it. I wish my hand was off first; I wish I was a soger. Do as ye like, you an’ Hawkes. I won’t go nigh it; damn ye both — and *that*!’ and he hurled the hammer with all his force upon the floor.

‘Come, come, be reasonable, Dudley, dear boy. There’s nothing to fear but your own folly. You won’t make a noise?’

‘Oh, oh, my God!’ said Dudley, hoarsely, and wiped his forehead with his open hand.

‘There now, you’ll be all well in a minute,’ continued the old man.

‘You said ‘twouldn’t hurt her. If I’d a known she’d a screeched like that I’d never a done it. ’Twas a damn lie. You’re the damndest villain on earth.’

‘Come, Dudley!’ said the old man under his breath, but very sternly, ‘make up your mind. If you don’t choose to go on, it can’t be helped; only it's a pity you began. For *you* it is a good deal — it does not much matter for *me*.'

'Ay, for *you*!' echoed Dudley, through his set teeth. 'The old talk!'

'Well, sir,' snarled the old man, in the same low tones, 'you should have thought of all this before. It's only taking leave of the world a year or two sooner, but a year or two's something. I'll leave you to do as you please.'

'Stop, will you? Stop here. I know it's a fixt thing now. If a fella does a thing he's damned for, you might let him talk a bit anyhow. I don't care much if I was shot.'

'There now — *there* — just stick to that, and don't run off again. There's a box and a bag here; we must change the direction, and take them away. The box has some jewels. Can you see them? I wish we had a light.'

'No, I'd rayther not; I can see well enough. I wish we were out o' this. *Here's* the box.'

'Pull it to the window,' said the old man, to my inexpressible relief advancing at last a few steps.

Coolness was given me in that dreadful moment, and I knew that all depended on my being prompt and resolute. I stood up swiftly. I often thought if I had happened to wear silk instead of the cachmere I had on that night, its rustle would have betrayed me.

I distinctly saw the tall stooping figure of my uncle, and the outline of his venerable tresses, as he stood between me and the dull light of the window, like a shape cut in card.

He was saying 'just to *there*,' and pointing with his long arm at that contracting patch of moonlight which lay squared upon the floor. The door was about a quarter open, and just as Dudley began to drag Madame's heavy box, with my jewel-case in it, across the floor from her room, inhaling a great breath — with a mental prayer for help — I glided on tiptoe from the room and found myself on the gallery floor.

I turned to my right, simply by chance, and followed a long gallery in the dark, not running — I was too fearful of making the least noise — but walking with the tiptoe-swiftness of terror. At the termination of this was a cross-gallery, one end of which — that to my left — terminated in a great window, through which the dusky night-view was visible. With the instinct of terror I chose the darker, and turned again to my right; hurrying through this long and nearly dark passage, I was terrified by a light, about thirty feet before me, emerging from the ceiling. In spotted patches this light fell through the door and sides of a stable lantern, and showed me a ladder, down which, from an open skylight I suppose for the cool night-air floated in my face, came Dickon Hawkes notwithstanding his maimed condition, with so much celerity as to leave me hardly a moment for consideration.

He sat on the last round of the ladder, and tightened the strap of his wooden leg.

At my left was a door-case open, but no door. I entered; it was a short passage about six feet long, leading perhaps to a backstair, but the door at the end was locked.

I was forced to stand in this recess, then, which afforded no shelter, while Pegtop stumped by with his lantern in his hand. I fancy he had some idea of listening to his master unperceived, for he stopped close to my hiding-place, blew out the candle, and pinched the long snuff with his horny finger and thumb.

Having listened for a few seconds, he stumped stealthily along the gallery which I had just traversed, and turned the corner in the direction of the chamber where the crime had just been committed, and the discovery was impending. I could see him against the broad window which in the daytime lighted this long passage, and the moment he had passed the corner I resumed my flight.

I descended a stair corresponding with that backstair, as I am told, up which Madame had led me only the night before. I tried the outer door. To my wild surprise it was open. In a moment I was upon the step, in the free air, and as instantaneously was seized by the arm in the gripe of a man.

It was Tom Brice, who had already betrayed me, and who was now, in surtout and hat, waiting to drive the carriage with the guilty father and son from the scene of their abhorred outrage.

CHAPTER LXV

IN THE OAK PARLOUR

So it was vain: I was trapped, and all was over.

I stood before him on the step, the white moon shining on my face. I was trembling so that I wonder I could stand, my helpless hands raised towards him, and I looked up in his face. A long shuddering moan— 'Oh — oh — oh!' was all I uttered.

The man, still holding my arm, looked, I thought frightened, into my white dumb face.

Suddenly he said, in a wild, fierce whisper —

'Never say another word' (I had not uttered one). 'They shan't hurt ye, Miss; git ye in; I don't care a damn!'

It was an uncouth speech. To me it was the voice of an angel. With a burst of gratitude that sounded in my own ears like a laugh, I thanked God for those blessed words.

In a moment more he had placed me in the carriage, and almost instantly we were in motion — very cautiously while crossing the court, until he had got the wheels upon the grass, and then at a rapid pace, improving his speed as the distance increased. He drove along the side of the back-approach to the house, keeping on the grass; so that our progress, though swaying like that of a ship in a swell, was very nearly as noiseless.

The gate had been left unlocked — he swung it open, and remounted the box. And we were now beyond the spell of Bartram-Haugh, thundering — Heaven be praised! — along the Queen's highway, right in the route to Elverston. It was literally a gallop. Through the chariot windows I saw Tom stand as he drove, and every now and then throw an awful glance over his shoulder. Were we pursued? Never was agony of prayer like mine, as with clasped hands and wild stare I gazed through the windows on the road, whose trees and hedges and gabled cottages were chasing one another backward at so giddy a speed.

We were now ascending that identical steep, with the giant ash-trees at the right and the stile between, which my vision of Meg Hawkes had presented all that night, when my excited eye detected a running figure within the hedge. I saw the head of some one crossing the stile in pursuit, and I heard Brice's name shrieked.

'Drive on — on — on!' I screamed.

But Brice pulled up. I was on my knees on the floor of the carriage, with clasped hands, expecting capture, when the door opened, and Meg Hawkes, pale as death, her cloak drawn over her black tresses, looked in.

'Oh! — ho! — ho! — thank God!' she screamed. 'Shake hands, lass. Tom, yer a good un! He's a good lad, Tom.'

'Come in, Meg — you must sit by me,' I said, recovering all at once.

Meg made no demur. 'Take my hand,' I said offering mine to her disengaged one.

'I can't, Miss — my arm's broke.'

And so it was, poor thing! She had been espied and overtaken in her errand of mercy for me, and her ruffian father had felled her with his cudgel, and then locked her into the cottage, whence, however, she had contrived to escape, and was now flying to Elverston, having tried in vain to get a hearing in Feltram, whose people had been for hours in bed.

The door being shut upon Meg, the steaming horses were instantly at a gallop again.

Tom was still watching as before, with many an anxious glance to rearward, for pursuit. Again he pulled up, and came to the window.

'Oh, what is it?' cried I.

''Bout that letter, Miss; I couldn't help. 'Twas Dickon, he found it in my pocket. That's a'.'

'Oh yes! — no matter — thank you — thank Heaven! Are we near Elverston?'

''Twill be a mile, Miss: and please'm to mind I had no finger in't.'

'Thanks — thank you — you're very good — I shall *always* thank you, Tom, as long as I live!'

At length we entered Elverston. I think I was half wild. I don't know how I got into the hall. I was in the oak-parlour, I believe, when I saw cousin Monica. I was standing, my arms extended. I could not speak; but I ran with a loud long scream into her arms. I forget a great deal after that.

CONCLUSION

Oh, my beloved cousin Monica! Thank Heaven, you are living still, and younger, I think, than I in all things but in years.

And Milly, my dear companion, she is now the happy wife of that good little clergyman, Sprigge Biddlepen. It has been in my power to be of use to them, and he shall have the next presentation to Dawling.

Meg Hawkes, proud and wayward, and the most affectionate creature on earth, was married to Tom Brice a few months after these events; and, as both wished to emigrate, I furnished them with the capital, and I am told they are likely to be rich. I hear from my kind Meg often, and she seems very happy.

My dear old friends, Mary Quince and Mrs. Rusk, are, alas! growing old, but living with me, and very happy. And after long solicitation, I persuaded Doctor Bryerly, the best and truest of ministers, with my dearest friend's concurrence, to undertake the management of the Derbyshire estates. In this I have been most fortunate. He is the very person for such a charge — so punctual, so laborious, so kind, and so shrewd.

In compliance with medical advice, cousin Monica hurried me away to the Continent, where she would never permit me to allude to the terrific scenes which remain branded so awfully on my brain. It needed no constraint. It is a sort of agony to me even now to think of them.

The plan was craftily devised. Neither old Wyat nor Giles, the butler, had a suspicion that I had returned to Bartram. Had I been put to death, the secret of my fate would have been deposited in the keeping of four persons only — the two Ruthyns, Hawkes, and ultimately Madame. My dear cousin Monica had been artfully led to believe in my departure for France, and prepared for my silence. Suspicion might not have been excited for a year after my death, and then would never, in all probability, have pointed to Bartram as the scene of the crime. The weeds would have grown over me, and I should have lain in that deep grave where the corpse of Madame de la Rougierre was unearthed in the darksome quadrangle of Bartram-Haugh.

It was more than two years after that I heard what had befallen at Bartram after my flight. Old Wyat, who went early to Uncle Silas's room, to her surprise — for he had told her that he was that night to accompany his son, who had to meet the mailtrain to Derby at five o'clock in the morning — saw her old master lying on the sofa, much in his usual position.

'There was nout much strange about him,' old Wyat said, 'but that his scent-bottle was spilt on its side over on the table, and he dead.'

She thought he was not quite cold when she found him, and she sent the old butler for Doctor Jolks, who said he died of too much 'loddlum.'

Of my wretched uncle's religion what am I to say? Was it utter hypocrisy, or had it at any time a vein of sincerity in it? I cannot say. I don't believe that he had any heart left for religion, which is the highest form of affection, to take hold of. Perhaps he was a sceptic with misgivings about the future, but past the time for finding anything reliable in it. The devil approached the citadel of his heart by stealth, with many zigzags and parallels. The idea of marrying me to his son by fair means, then by foul, and, when that wicked chance was gone, then the design of seizing all by murder, supervened. I dare say that Uncle Silas thought for a while that he was a righteous man. He wished to have heaven and to escape hell, if there were such places. But there were other things whose existence was not speculative, of which some he coveted, and some he dreaded more, and temptation came. 'Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.' There comes with old age a time when the heart is no longer fusible or malleable, and must retain the form in which it has cooled down. 'He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.'

Dudley had disappeared; but in one of her letters, Meg, writing from her Australian farm, says: 'There's a fella in toon as calls hisself Colbroke, wi' a good hoose o' wood, 15 foot length, and as by 'bout as silling o' the pearler o' Bartram — only lots o' rats, they do say, my lady — a bying and sellin' of goold back and forred wi' the diggin foke and the marchants. His chick and mouth be wry wi' scar o' burns or vitterel, an' no wiskers, bless you; but my Tom ee toll him he knowed him for Master Doodley. I ant seed him; but he sade ad shute Tom soon is look at 'im, an' denide it, wi' mouthful o' curses and oaf. Tom baint right shure; if I seed un wons i'd no for sartin; but 'appen,'twil best be let be.' This was all.

Old Hawkes stood his ground, relying on the profound cunning with which their actual proceedings had been concealed, even from the suspicions of the two inmates of the house, and on the mystery that habitually shrouded Bartram-Haugh and all its belongings from the eyes of the outer world.

Strangely enough, he fancied that I had made my escape long before the room was entered; and, even if he were arrested, there was no evidence, he was certain, to connect *him* with the murder, all knowledge of which he would stoutly deny.

There was an inquest on the body of my uncle, and Dr. Jolks was the chief witness. They found that his death was caused by ‘an excessive dose of laudanum, accidentally administered by himself.’

It was not until nearly a year after the dreadful occurrences at Bartram that Dickon Hawkes was arrested on a very awful charge, and placed in gaol. It was an old crime, committed in Lancashire, that had found him out. After his conviction, as a last chance, he tried a disclosure of all the circumstances of the unsuspected death of the Frenchwoman. Her body was discovered buried where he indicated, in the inner court of Bartram-Haugh, and, after due legal enquiry, was interred in the churchyard of Feltram.

Thus I escaped the horrors of the witness-box, or the far worse torture of a dreadful secret.

Doctor Bryerly, shortly after Lady Knollys had described to him the manner in which Dudley entered my room, visited the house of Bartram-Haugh, and minutely examined the windows of the room in which Mr. Charke had slept on the night of his murder. One of these he found provided with powerful steel hinges, very craftily sunk and concealed in the timber of the window-frame, which was secured by an iron pin outside, and swung open on its removal. This was the room in which they had placed me, and this the contrivance by means of which the room had been entered. The problem of Mr. Charke’s murder was solved.

* * *

I have penned it. I sit for a moment breathless. My hands are cold and damp. I rise with a great sigh, and look out on the sweet green landscape and pastoral hills, and see the flowers and birds and the waving boughs of glorious trees — all images of liberty and safety; and as the tremendous nightmare of my youth melts into air, I lift my eyes in boundless gratitude to the God of all comfort, whose mighty hand and outstretched arm delivered me. When I lower my eyes and unclasp my hands, my cheeks are wet with tears. A tiny voice is calling me ‘Mamma!’ and a beloved smiling face, with his dear father’s silken brown tresses, peeps in.

‘Yes, darling, our walk. Come away!’

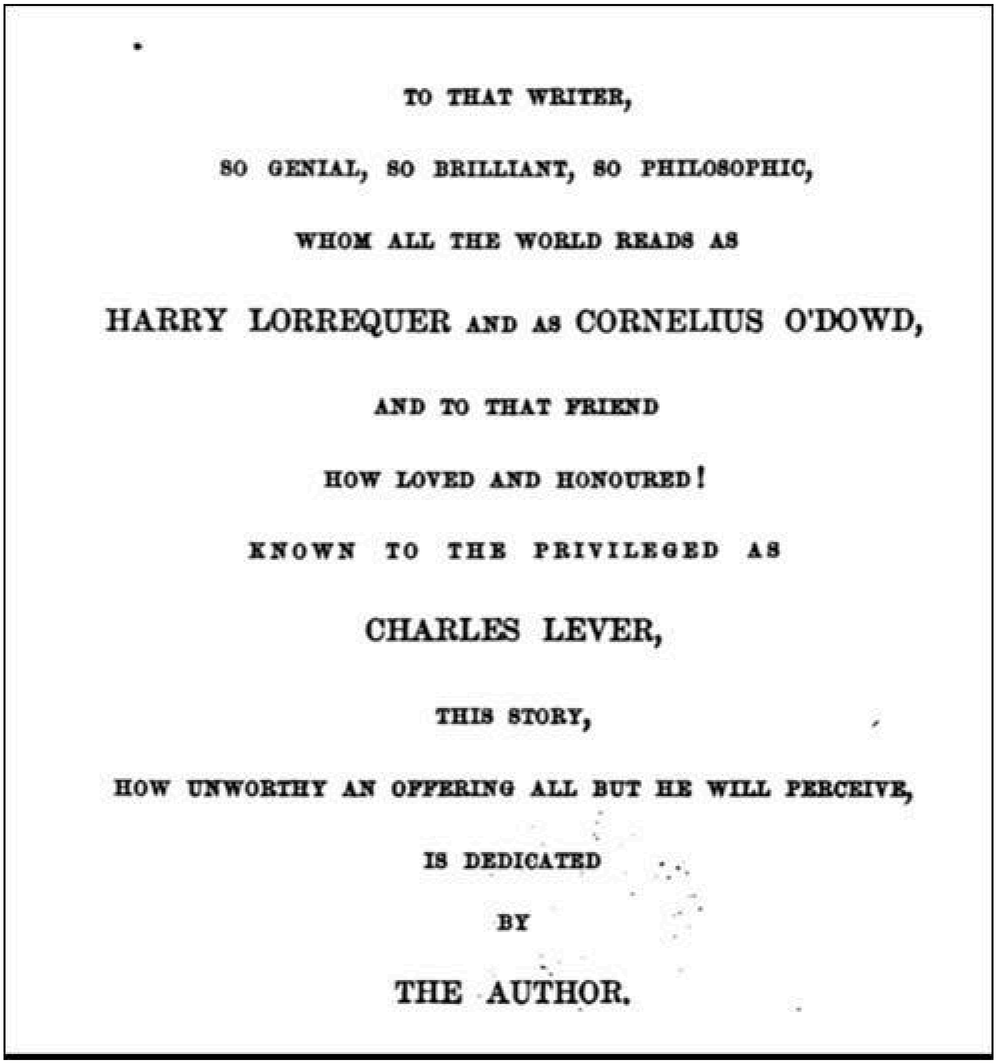
I am Lady Ilbury, happy in the affection of a beloved and noblehearted husband. The shy useless girl you have known is now a mother — trying to be a good one; and this, the last pledge, has lived.

I am not going to tell of sorrows — how brief has been my pride of early maternity, or how beloved were those whom the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. But sometimes as, smiling on my little boy, the tears gather in my eyes, and he wonders, I can see, why they come, I am thinking — and trembling while I smile — to think, how strong is love, how frail is life; and rejoicing while I tremble that, in the deathless love of those who mourn, the Lord of Life, who never gave a pang in vain, conveys the sweet and ennobling promise of a compensation by eternal reunion. So, through my sorrows, I have heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Write, from hencefore blessed are the dead that die in the Lord!’

This world is a parable — the habitation of symbols — the phantoms of spiritual things immortal shown in material shape. May the blessed second-sight be mine — to recognise under these beautiful forms of earth the ANGELS who wear them; for I am sure we may walk with them if we will, and hear them speak!

GUY DEVERELL

Guy Deverell was published by Richard Bentley in three volumes in 1865, having first been serialised in the *Dublin University Magazine* between January and July of that year. The fourth of Le Fanu's sensation novels, it takes on another typical theme of the genre – illegitimacy. The story concerns Monsieur Varbarierre's attempts to restore the Marlowe estate to Guy Deverell, after it is usurped by the decadent Sir Jekyl.



TO THAT WRITER,

SO GENIAL, SO BRILLIANT, SO PHILOSOPHIC,

WHOM ALL THE WORLD READS AS

HARRY LORREQUER AND AS CORNELIUS O'DOWD,

AND TO THAT FRIEND

HOW LOVED AND HONOURED!

KNOWN TO THE PRIVILEGED AS

CHARLES LEVER,

THIS STORY,

HOW UNWORTHY AN OFFERING ALL BUT HE WILL PERCEIVE,

IS DEDICATED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

The novel was dedicated to Le Fanu's one-time editor and fellow Irishman, Charles Lever

GUY DEVERELL.

BY

J. S. LE FANU

AUTHOR OF 'UNCLE SILAS,' 'WYLDER'S HAND,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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The title page of the first edition (second volume)

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VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.

Sir Jekyl Marlowe at the Plough Inn.

The pretty little posting station, known as the Plough Inn, on the Old London Road, where the Sterndale Road crosses it, was in a state of fuss and awe, at about five o'clock on a fine sharp October evening, for Sir Jekyl Marlowe, a man of many thousand acres, and M.P. for the county, was standing with his back to the fire, in the parlour, whose bow-window looks out on the ancient thoroughfare I have mentioned, over the row of scarlet geraniums which beautify the window-stone.

"Hollo!" cried the Baronet, as the bell-rope came down in answer to an energetic but not angry pull, and he received Mrs. Jones, his hostess, who entered at the moment, with the dismantled bell-handle still in his hand. "At my old tricks, you see. I've been doing you a mischief, hey? but we'll set it right in the bill, you know. How devilish well you look! wonderful girl, by Jove! Come in, my dear, and shut the door. Not afraid of me. I want to talk of ducks and mutton-chops. I've had no luncheon, and I'm awfully hungry," said the comely Baronet in a continued chuckle.

The Baronet was, by that awful red-bound volume of dates, which is one of the melancholy drawbacks of aristocracy, set down just then, and by all whom it might concern, ascertainable to be precisely forty-nine years and three months old; but so well had he worn, and so cleverly was he got up, that he might have passed for little more than forty.

He was smiling, with very white teeth, and a gay leer on pretty Mrs. Jones, an old friend, with black eyes and tresses, and pink cheeks, who bore her five-and-thirty years as well almost as he did his own burthen. The slanting autumnal sun became her, and she simpered and courtesied and blushed the best she could.

"Well, you pretty little devil, what can you do for me — hey? You know we're old friends — hey? What have you got for a hungry fellow? and don't stand at the door there, hang it — come in, can't you? and let me hear what you say."

So Mrs. Jones, with a simpering bashfulness, delivered her bill of fare off book.

The Baronet was a gallant English gentleman, and came of a healthy race, though there were a ‘beau’ and an archbishop in the family; he could rough it goodhumouredly on beefsteak and port, and had an accommodating appetite as to hours.

“That will do very nicely, my dear, thank you. You’re just the same dear hospitable little rogue I remember you — how long is it, by Jove, since I stopped here that day, and the awful thunderstorm at night, don’t you recollect? and the whole house in such a devil of a row, egad!” And the Baronet chuckled and leered, with his hands in his pockets.

“Three years, by Jove, I think — eh?”

“Four years in August last, Sir Jekyl,” she answered, with a little toss of her head and a courtesy.

“Four years, my dear — four devils! Is it possible? why upon my life it has positively improved you.” And he tapped her cheek playfully with his finger. “And what o’clock is it?” he continued, looking at his watch, “just five. Well, I suppose you’ll be ready in half-an-hour — eh, my dear?”

“Sooner, if you wish, Sir Jekyl.”

“No, thank you, dear, that will do very nicely; and stay,” he added, with a pluck at her pink ribbon, as she retreated: “you’ve some devilish good port here, unless it’s all out — old Lord Hogwood’s stock — eh?”

“More than two dozen left, Sir Jekyl; would you please some?”

“You’ve hit it, you wicked little conjurer — a bottle; and you must give me a few minutes after dinner, and a cup of coffee, and tell me all the news — eh?”

The Baronet, standing on the threadbare hearthrug, looked waggishly, as it were, through the panels of the shut door, after the fluttering cap of his pretty landlady. Then he turned about and reviewed himself in the sea-green mirror over the chimneypiece, adjusted his curls and whiskers with a touch or two of his fingers’ ends, and plucked a little at his ample silk necktie, and shook out his tresses, with his chin a little up, and a saucy simper.

But a man tires even of that prospect; and he turned on his heel, and whistled at the smoky mezzotint of George III. on the opposite wall. Then he turned his head, and looked out through the bow-window, and his whistling stopped in the middle of a bar, at sight of a young man whom he espied, only a yard or two before the covered porch of the little inn.

This young gentleman was, it seemed, giving a parting direction to some one in the doorway. He was tall, slender, rather dark, and decidedly handsome. There were, indeed, in his air, face, and costume, that indescribable elegance and superiority which constitute a man "distinguished looking."

When Sir Jekyl beheld this particularly handsome young man, it was with a disagreeable shock, like the tap on a big drum, upon his diaphragm. If anyone had been there he would have witnessed an odd and grizzly change in the pleasant Baronet's countenance. For a few seconds he did not move. Then he drew back a pace or two, and stood at the further side of the fire, with the mantelpiece partially between him and the young gentleman who spoke his parting directions, all unconscious of the haggard stare which made Sir Jekyl look a great deal less young and goodnatured than was his wont.

This handsome young stranger, smiling, signalled with his cane, as it seemed, to a companion, who had preceded him, and ran in pursuit.

For a time Sir Jekyl did not move a muscle, and then, with a sudden pound on the chimneypiece, and a great oath, he exclaimed —

"I could not have believed it! What the devil can it mean?"

Then the Baronet bethought him— "What confounded stuff one does talk and think, sometimes! Half the matter dropt out of my mind. Twenty years ago, by Jove, too. *More* than that, egad! How could I be such an ass?"

And he countermarched, and twirled on his heel into his old place, with his back to the fire, and chuckled and asked again —

"How the plague *could* I be such a fool?"

And after some more of this sort of catechism he began to ruminate oddly once more, and, said he —

"It's plaguy *odd*, for all that."

And he walked to the window, and, with his face close to the glass, tried in vain to see the stranger again. The bow-window did not command the road far enough to enable him to see any distance; and he stuck his hat on his head, and marched by the bar, through the porch, and, standing upon the road itself, looked shrewdly in the same direction.

But the road makes a bend about there, and between the hedgerows of that wooded country the vista was not far.

With a cheerful air of carelessness, Sir Jekyl returned and tapped on the bar window.

"I say, Mrs. Jones, who's that good-looking young fellow that went out just now?"

"The gentleman in the low-crowned hat, sir, with the goldheaded cane, please?"

"Yes, a tall young fellow, with large dark eyes, and brown hair."

"That will be Mr. Strangers, Sir Jekyl."

"Does he sleep here tonight?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"And what's his business?"

"Oh, dear! No business, Sir Jekyl, please. He's a real gentleman, and no end of money."

"I mean, how does he amuse himself?"

"A looking after prospects, and old places, and such like, Sir Jekyl. Sometimes riding and sometimes a fly. Every day some place or other."

"Oh! pencils and paint-boxes — eh?"

"I 'aven't seen none, sir. I can't say how that will be."

"Well, and what is he about; where is he gone; where is he now?" demanded the Baronet.

"What way did Mr. Strangers go, Bill, just now?" the lady demanded of boots, who appeared at the moment.

"The Abbey, ma'am."

"The Abbey, please, Sir Jekyl."

"The Abbey — that's Wail Abbey — eh? How far is it?"

"How far will it be, Bill?"

"'Taint a mile all out, ma'am."

"Not quite a mile, Sir Jekyl."

"A good ruin — isn't it?" asked the Baronet.

"Well, they do say it's *very* much out of repair; but I never saw it myself, Sir Jekyl."

"Neither did I," said Sir Jekyl. "I say, my good fellow, you can point it out, I dare say, from the steps here?"

"Ay, please, Sir Jekyl."

"You'll have dinner put back, Sir — please, Sir Jekyl?" asked Mrs. Jones.

"Back or forward, *any* way, my dear child. Only I'll have my walk first."

And kissing and waving the tips of his fingers, with a smile to Mrs. Jones, who courtesied and simpered, though her heart was perplexed with culinary solicitudes "how to keep the water from getting into the trout, and prevent the ducks of overroasting," the worthy Baronet, followed by Bill, stept through the porch, and on the ridge of the old highroad, his own heart being oddly disturbed with certain cares which had given him a long respite; there he received Bill's directions as to the route to the Abbey.

It was a clear frosty evening. The red round sun by this time, near the horizon, looked as if a tall man on the summit of the western hill might have touched its edge with his finger. The Baronet looked on the declining luminary as he buttoned his loose coat across his throat, till his eyes were almost dazzled, thinking all the time of nothing but that handsome young man; and as he walked on briskly toward the Abbey, he saw little pale green suns dancing along the road and wherever else his eyes were turned.

"I'll see this fellow face to face, and talk a bit with him. I dare say if one were near he's not at all so like. It *is* devilish odd though; twenty-five years and not a relation on earth — and dead — hang him! Egad, its like the Wandering Jew, and the what do you call 'em, *vitæ*. Ay, here it is."

He paused for a moment, looking at the pretty stile which led a little pathway across the fields to the wooded hollow by the river, where the ruin stands. Two old white stone, fluted piers, once a doorway, now tufted with grass, and stained and worn by time, and the stile built up between.

"I know, of course, there's nothing in it; but it's so odd — it *is* so *devilish* odd. I'd like to know all about it," said the Baronet, picking the dust from the fluting with the point of his walking-cane. "Where has he got, I wonder, by this time?" So he mounted the stile, and paused near the summit to obtain a commanding view.

"Well, I suppose he's got among the old walls and rubbish by this time. I'll make him out; he'll break cover."

And he skipped down the stile on the other side, and whistled a little, cutting gaily in the air with his cane as he went.

But for all he could do the same intensely uncomfortable curiosity pressed upon him as he advanced. The sun sank behind the distant hills, leaving the heavens flooded with a discoloured crimson, and the faint silver of the moon in the eastern sky glimmered coldly over the fading landscape, as he suddenly emerged from the hedged pathway on the rich meadow level by the slow river's brink, on which, surrounded by lofty timber, the ruined Abbey stands.

The birds had come home. Their vesper song had sunk with the setting sun, and in the sad solitude of twilight the grey ruins rose dimly before him.

"A devilish good spot for a picnic!" said he, making an effort to recover his usual agreeable vein of thought and spirits.

So he looked up and about him, and jauntily marched over the sward, and walked along the line of the grey walls until he found a doorway, and began his explorations.

Through dark passages, up broken stairs, over grass-grown piles of rubbish, he peeped into all sorts of roofless chambers. Everything was silent and settling down into night. At last, by that narrow doorway, which in such buildings so oddly gives entrance here and there into vast apartments, he turned into that grand chamber, whose stone floor rests on the vaults beneath; and there the Baronet paused for a moment with a little start, for at the far end, looking towards him, but a little upward, with the faint reflected glow that entered through the tall row of windows, on the side of his face and figure, stood the handsome young man of whom he was in pursuit.

The Baronet being himself only a step or two from the screw stairs, and still under the shadow of the overhanging arch in the corner, the stranger saw nothing of him, and to announce his approach, though not much of a musician, he hummed a bar or two briskly as he entered, and marched across and about as if thinking of nothing but architecture or the picturesque.

"Charming ruin this, sir," exclaimed he, raising his hat, so soon as he had approached the stranger sufficiently near to make the address natural. "Although I'm a resident of this part of the world, I'm ashamed to say I never saw it before."

The young man raised his hat too, and bowed with a ceremonious grace, which, as well as his accent, had something foreign in it.

"While I, though a stranger, have been unable to resist its fascination, and have already visited it three times. You have reason to be proud of your county, sir, it is full of beauties."

The stranger's sweet, but peculiar, voice thrilled the Baronet with a recollection as vivid and detested. In fact this well-seasoned man of the world was so much shocked that he answered only with a bow, and cleared his voice, and chuckled after his fashion, but all the time felt a chill creeping over his back.

There was a broad bar of a foggy red light falling through the ivy-girt window, but the young man happened to stand at that moment in the shadow beside it, and when the Baronet's quick glance, instead of detecting some reassuring distinction of feature or expression, encountered only the ambiguous and obscure, he recoiled inwardly as from something abominable.

"Beautiful effect — beautiful sky!" exclaimed Sir Jekyl, not knowing very well what he was saying, and waving his cane upwards towards the fading tints of the sky.

The stranger emerged from his shadow and stood beside him, and such light as there was fell full upon his features, and as the Baronet beheld he felt as if he were in a dream.

CHAPTER II.

The Baronet Visits Wardlock Manor.

In fact Sir Jekyl would have been puzzled to know exactly what to say next, so odd were his sensations, and his mind so preoccupied with a chain of extremely uncomfortable conjecture, had not the handsome young gentleman who stood beside him at the gaping window with its melancholy folds of ivy, said —

"I have often tried to analyse the peculiar interest of ruins like these — the mixture of melancholy and curiosity. I have seen very many monasteries abroad — perhaps as old as this, even older — still peopled with their monks, with very little interest indeed, and no sympathy; and yet here I feel a yearning after the bygone age of English monasticism, an anxiety to learn all about their ways and doings, and a sort of reverence and sadness I can't account for, unless it be an expression of that profound sympathy which mortals feel with every expression of decay and dissolution."

The Baronet fancied that he saw a lurking smile in the young man's face, and recoiled from psychologic talk about mortality.

"I dare say you're right, sir, but I am the worst metaphysician in the world." He thought the young man smiled again. "In your liking for the picturesque, however, I quite go with you. Do you intend extending your tour to Wales and Scotland?"

"I can hardly call this little excursion a tour. The fact is, my curiosity is pretty much limited to this county; there are old reasons which make me feel a very particular interest in it," said the young man, with a very pointed carelessness and a smile, which caused the Baronet inwardly to wince.

"I should be very happy," said Sir Jekyl, "if you would take Marlowe in your way: there are some pictures there, as well as some views you might like to see. I am Sir Jekyl Marlowe, and own two or three places in this county, which are thought pretty — and, may I give you my card?"

The snowy parallelogram was here presented and accepted with a mutual bow. The stranger was smiling oddly as Sir Jekyl introduced himself, with an expression which he fancied he could read in spite of the dark, as implying “rather old news you tell me.”

“And — and — what was I going to say? — oh! — yes — if I can be of any use to you in procuring access to any house or place you wish to see, I shall be very happy. You are at present staying at my occasional quarters, the ‘Plough.’ I’m afraid you’ll think me very impertinent and intrusive; but I should like to be able to mention your name to some of my friends, who don’t usually allow strangers to see their places.”

This was more like American than English politeness; but the Baronet was determined to know all about the stranger, commencing with his name, and the laws of good breeding, though he knew them very well, were not likely to stand long in his way when he had made up his mind to accomplish an object.

“My name is Guy Strangways,” said the stranger.

“O — ho — it’s very odd!” exclaimed the Baronet, in a sharp snarl, quite unlike his previous talk. I think the distance between them was a little increased, and he was looking askance upon the young gentleman, who made him a very low foreign bow.

There was a silence, and just then a deep metallic voice from below called, “Guy — hollo!”

“Excuse me — just a moment,” and the young man was gone. The Baronet waited.

“He’ll be back,” muttered Sir Jekyl, “in a minute.”

But the Baronet was mistaken. He waited at that open window, whistling out upon the deepening twilight, till the edges of the ivy began to glitter in the moonbeams, and the bats to trace their zigzags in the air; and at last he gave over expecting.

He looked back into the gloomy void of that great chamber, and listened, and felt rather angry at his queer sensations. He had not turned about when the stranger withdrew, and did not know the process of his vanishing, and for the first time it struck him, “who the plague could the fellow who *called* him be?”

On the whole he wished himself away, and he lighted a cigar for the sake of its vulgar associations, and made his way out of the ruins, and swiftly through darkened fields toward the Old London Road; and was more comfortable than he cared to say, when he stepped through the porch into the open hall of the “Plough,” and stopped before the light at the bar, to ask his hostess once more, quite in his old way, whether Mr. Strangways had returned.

“No, not yet; always uncertain; his dinner mostly overdone.”

“Has he a friend with him?”

“Yes, sir, sure.”

“And what is he like?”

“Older man, Sir Jekyl, a long way than young Mr. Guy Strangways; some relation I do think.”

“When do they leave you?”

“Tomorrow evening, with a chaise and pair for Aukworth.”

“Aukworth? why, that’s another of my properties! — ha, ha, ha, by Jove! Does he know the Abbey here is mine?”

“I rayther think not, Sir Jekyl. Would you please to wish dinner?”

“To be sure, you dear little quiz, dinner by all means; and let them get my horses to in half-an-hour; and if Mr. Strangways should return before I go, I’d like to see him, and don’t fail to let me know — do ye see?”

Dinner came and went, but Mr. Strangways did not return, which rather vexed Sir Jekyl, who, however, left his card for that gentleman, together with an extremely polite note, which he wrote at the bar with his hat on, inviting him and his companion to Marlowe, where he would be at home any time for the next two months, and trusted they would give him a week before they left the country.

It was now dark, and Sir Jekyl loitered under the lamplight of his chaise for a while, in the hope that Mr. Strangways would turn up. But he did not; and the Baronet jumped into the vehicle, which was forthwith in motion.

He sat in the corner, with one foot on the cushion, and lighted a cigar. His chuckling was all over, and his quizzing, for the present. Mrs. Jones had not a notion that he was in the least uneasy, or on any but hospitable thoughts intent. But anyone who now looked in his face would have seen at a glance how suddenly it had become overcast with black care.

“Guy Strangways!” he thought; “those two names, and his wonderful likeness! Prowling about this county! Why this more than another? He seemed to take a triumphant pleasure in telling me of his special fancy for this county. And his voice — a tenor they call it — I hate that sweet sort of voice. Those d —— singing fellows. I dare say he sings. They never do a bit of good. It's very odd. It's the same voice. I forgot that odd silvery sound. The *same*, by Jove! I'll come to the bottom of the whole thing. D —— me, I will!"

Then the Baronet puffed away fast and earnestly at his cigar, and then lighted another, and after that a third. They steadied him, I dare say, and helped to oil the mechanism of thought. But he had not recovered his wonted cheer of mind when the chaise drew up at a pair of timeworn fluted piers, with the gable of an oldfashioned dwelling-house overlooking the road at one side. An iron gate admitted to a courtyard, and the hall door of the house was opened by an oldfashioned footman, with some flour on the top of his head.

Sir Jekyl jumped down.

"Your mistress quite well, hey? My daughter ready?" inquired the Baronet. "Where are they? No, I'll not go up, thank you; I'll stay here," and he entered the parlour. "And, do you see, you just go up and ask your mistress if she wishes to see me."

By this time Sir Jekyl was poking up the fire and frowning down on the bars, with the flickering glare shooting over his face.

"Can the old woman have anything to do with it? Pooh! no. I'd like to see her. But who knows what sort of a temper she's in?"

As he thus ruminated, the domestic with the oldfashioned livery and floured head returned to say that his mistress would be happy to see him.

The servant conducted him up a broad stair with a great oak banister, and opening a drawingroom door, announced —

"Sir Jekyl Marlowe."

He was instantly in the room, and a tall, thin old lady, with a sad and stately mien, rose up to greet him.

"How is little mamma?" cried the Baronet, with his old chuckle. "An age since we met, hey? How well you look!"

The old lady gave her thin mittened hand to her son-in-law, and looked a grim and dubious sort of welcome upon him.

"Yes, Jekyl, an age; and only that Beatrix is here, I suppose another age would have passed without my seeing you. And an old woman at my years has not many ages between her and the grave."

The old lady spoke not playfully, but sternly, like one who had suffered long and horribly, and who associated her sufferings with her visitor; and in her oblique glance was something of deep-seated antipathy.

"Egad! you're younger than I, though you count more years. You live by clock and rule, and you show it. You're as fresh as that bunch of flowers there; while I am literally knocking myself to pieces — and I know it — by late hours, and all sorts of nonsense. So you must not be coming the old woman over me, you know, unless you want to frighten me. And how is Beatrix? How do, Beatrix? All ready, I see. Good child."

Beatrix at this moment was entering. She was tall and slightly formed, with large dark eyes, hair of soft shadowy black, and those tints of pure white and rich clear blush, scarlet lips, and pearly teeth, and long eyelashes, which are so beautiful in contrast and in harmony. She had the prettiest little white nose, and her face was formed in that decided oval which so heightens the charm of the features. She was not a tragic heroine. Her smile was girlish and natural — and the little ring of pearls between her lips laughed beautifully — and her dimples played on chin and cheek as she smiled.

Her father kissed her, and looked at her with a look of gratification, as he might on a good picture that belonged to him; and turning her smiling face, with his finger and thumb upon her little dimpled chin, toward Lady Alice, he said —

"Pretty well, this girl, hey?"

"I dare say, Jekyl, she'll do very well; she's not formed yet, you know," — was stately Lady Alice's qualified assent. She was one of that school who are more afraid of spoiling people than desirous of pleasing them by admiration. "She promises to be like her darling mother; and that is a melancholy satisfaction to me, and, of course, to you. You'll have some tea, Jekyl?"

The Baronet was standing, hat in hand, with his outside coat on, and his back to the fire, and a cashmere muffler loosely about his throat.

"Well, as it is here, I don't mind."

"May I run down, grandmamma, and say goodbye to Ellen and old Mrs. Mason?"

"Surely — you mean, of course to the parlour? You may have them there."

"And you must not be all night about it, Beatrix. We'll be going in a few minutes. D'ye mind?"

"I'm quite ready, papa," said she; and as she glided from the room she stole a glance at her bright reflection in the mirror.

"You are always in a hurry, Jekyl, to leave me when you chance to come here. I should be sorry, however, to interfere with the pleasanter disposition of your time."

"Now, little mother, you mustn't be huffed with me. I have a hundred and fifty things to look after at Marlowe when I get there. I have not had a great deal of time, you know — first the session, then three months knocking about the world."

"You never wrote to me since you left Paris," said the old lady, grimly.

"Didn't I? That was very wrong! But you knew those were my holidays, and I detest writing, and you knew I could take care of myself; and it is so much better to tell one's adventures than to put them into letters, don't you think?"

"If one could tell them all in five minutes," replied the old lady, drily.

"Well, but you'll come over to Marlowe — you really must — and I'll tell you everything there — the truth, the whole truth, and as much more as you like."

This invitation was repeated every year, but like Don Juan's to the statue, was not expected to lead to a literal visit.

"You have haunted rooms there, Jekyl," she said, with an unpleasant smile and a nod. "You have not kept house in Marlowe for ten years, I think. Why do you go there now?"

"Caprice, whim, what you will," said the Baronet, combing out his favourite whisker with the tips of his fingers, while he smiled on himself in the glass upon the chimneypiece, "I wish *you'd* tell me, for *I* really don't know, except that I'm tired of Warton and Dartbroke, as I am of all monotony. I like change, you know."

"Yes; you *like change*," said the old lady, with a dignified sarcasm.

"I'm afraid it's a true bill," admitted Sir Jekyl, with a chuckle, "So you'll come to Marlowe and see us there — won't you?"

"No, Jekyl — certainly *not*," said the old lady, with intense emphasis.

A little pause ensued, during which the Baronet twiddled at his whisker, and continued to smile amusedly at himself in the glass.

"I wonder you could think of asking me to Marlowe, considering all that has happened there. I sometimes wonder at myself that I can endure to see you at all, Jekyl Marlowe; and I don't think, if it were not for that dear girl, who is so like her sainted mother, I should ever set eyes on you again."

"I'm glad we have that link. You make me love Beatrix better," he replied. He was now arranging the elaborate breast-pin with its tiny chain, which was at that date in vogue.

"And so you are going to keep house at Marlowe?" resumed the lady, stiffly, not heeding the sentiment of his little speech.

"Well, so I purpose."

"I don't like that house," said the old lady, with a subdued fierceness.

"Sorry it does not please you, little mother," replied Sir Jekyl.

"You know I don't like it," she repeated.

"In that case you need not have told me," he said.

"I choose to tell you. I'll say so as often as I see you — as often as I like."

It was an odd conference — back to back — the old lady stiff and high — staring pale and grimly at the opposite wall. The Baronet looking with a quizzical smile on his handsome face in the mirror — now plucking at a whisker — now poking at a curl with his fingertip — and now in the same light way arranging the silken fall of his necktie.

"There's nothing my dear little mamma can say, I'll not listen to with pleasure."

"There is much I might say you could not listen to with pleasure." The cold was growing more intense, and bitter in tone and emphasis, as she addressed the Italian picture of Adonis and his two dogs hanging on the distant wall.

"Well, with *respect*, *not* with pleasure — no," said he, and tapped his white upper teeth with the nail of his middle finger.

"Assuming, then, that you speak truth, it is high time, Jekyl Marlowe, that you should alter your courses — here's your daughter, just come out. It is ridiculous, your affecting the vices of youth. Make up as you will — you're past the middle age — you're an elderly man now."

"You can't vex me that way, you dear old mamma," he said, with a chuckle, which looked for the first time a little vicious in the glass. "We baronets, you know, are all booked, and all the world can read our ages; but you women manage better — you and your two dear sisters, Winifred and Georgiana."

“They are *dead*,” interrupted Lady Alice, with more asperity than pathos.

“Yes, I know, poor old souls — to be sure, peers’ daughters die like other people, I’m afraid.”

“And when they do, are mentioned, if not with sorrow, at least with decent respect, by persons, that is, who know how to behave themselves.”

There was a slight quiver in Lady Alice’s lofty tone that pleased Sir Jekyl, as you might have remarked had you looked over his shoulder into the glass.

“Well, you know, I was speaking not of deaths but births, and only going to say if you look in the peerage you’ll find all the men, poor devils, pinned to their birthdays, and the women left at large, to exercise their veracity on the point; but you need not care — you have not pretended to youth for the last ten years I think.”

“You are excessively impertinent, sir.”

“I *know* it,” answered Sir Jekyl, with a jubilant chuckle.

A very little more, the Baronet knew, and Lady Alice Redcliffe would have risen gray and grim, and sailed out of the room. Their partings were often after this sort.

But he did not wish matters to go quite that length at present. So he said, in a sprightly way, as if a sudden thought had struck him —

“By Jove, I believe I *am devilish* impertinent, without knowing it though — and you have forgiven me so often, I’m sure you *will* once more, and I am really so much obliged for your kindness to Beatrix. I am, indeed.”

So he took her hand, and kissed it.

CHAPTER III.

Concerning two Remarkable Persons who appeared in Wardlock Church.

Lady Alice carried her thin Roman nose some degrees higher; but she said —

"If I say anything disagreeable, it is not for the pleasure of giving you pain, Jekyl Marlowe; but I understand that you mean to have old General Lennox and his artful wife to stay at your house, and if so, I think it an arrangement that had better be dispensed with. I don't think her an eligible acquaintance for Beatrix, and you know very well she's *not* — and it is not a respectable or creditable kind of thing."

"Now, what d — d fool, I beg pardon — but who the plague has been filling your mind with those ridiculous stories — my dear little mamma? You know how ready I am to confess; you *might* at least; I tell you everything; and I do assure you I *never* admired her. She's good looking, I know; but so are fifty pictures and statues I've seen, that don't please me."

"Then it's true, the General and his wife are going on a visit to Marlowe?" insisted Lady Alice, drily.

"No, they are not. D —— me, I'm not thinking of the General and his wife, nor of any such d — d trumpery. I'd give something to know who the devil's taking these cursed liberties with my name."

"Pray, Jekyl Marlowe, command your language. It can't the least signify who tells me; but you see I do sometimes get a letter."

"Yes, and a precious letter too. Such a pack of lies did any human being ever hear fired off in a sentence before? I'm *épris* of Mrs. General Lennox. Thumper number one! She's a lady of — I beg pardon — easy virtue. Thumper number two! and I invite her and her husband down to Marlowe, to make love of course to her, and to fight the old General. Thumper number three!"

And the Baronet chuckled over the three "thumpers" merrily.

"Don't talk slang, if you please — gentlemen don't, at least in addressing ladies."

"Well, then, I won't; I'll speak just as you like, only you must not blow me up any more; for really there is no cause, and we here only two or three minutes together, you know; and I want to tell you something, or rather to ask you — do you ever hear anything of those *Deverells*, you know?"

Lady Alice looked quite startled, and turned quickly half round in her chair, with her eyes on Sir Jekyl's face. The Baronet's smile subsided, and he looked with a dark curiosity in hers. A short but dismal silence followed.

"You've heard from them?"

"No!" said the lady, with little change in the expression of her face.

"Well, *of* them?"

"No," she repeated; "but *why* do you ask? It's *very* strange!"

"*What's* strange? Come, now, you *have* something to say; tell me what it is."

"I wonder, Jekyl, you ask for them, in the first place."

"Well — well, of course; but what next?" murmured the Baronet, eagerly: "why is it so strange?"

"Only because I've been thinking of them — a great deal — for the last few days; and it seemed very odd your asking; and in fact I fancy the same thing has happened to us both."

"Well, may be; but what *is* it?" demanded the Baronet, with a sinister smile.

"I have been startled; most painfully and powerfully affected; I have seen the most extraordinary resemblance to my beautiful, *murdered* Guy."

She rose, and wept passionately, standing with her face buried in her handkerchief.

Sir Jekyl frowned with closed eyes and upturned face, waiting like a patient man bored to death, for the subsidence of the storm which he had conjured up. Very pale, too, was that countenance, and contracted for a few moments with intense annoyance.

"I saw the same fellow," said the Baronet, in a subdued tone, so soon as there was a subsidence, "this evening; he's at that little inn on the Sterndale Road. Guy Strangways he calls himself; I talked with him for a few minutes; a gentlemanly young man; and I don't know what to make of it. So I thought I'd ask you whether *you* could help me to a guess; and that's all."

The old lady shook her head.

"And I don't think you need employ quite such hard terms," he said.

"I don't want to speak of it at all," said she; "but if I do I can't say less; nor I won't — no, never!"

"You see it's very odd, those two names," said Sir Jekyl, not minding; "and as you say, the likeness so astonishing — I — I — what do *you* think of it?"

"Of course it's an accident," said the old lady.

"I'm glad you think so," said he, abruptly.

"Why, what could it be? you don't believe in apparitions?" she replied, with an odd sort of dryness.

"I rather think not," said he; "I meant he left no very near relation, and I fancied those Deverell people might have contrived some trick, or intended some personation, or something, and I thought that you, perhaps, had heard something of their movements."

"Nothing — what could they have done, or why should they have sought to make any such impression? I don't understand it. It is very extraordinary. But the likeness in church amazed and shocked me, and made me ill."

"In church, you say?" repeated Sir Jekyl.

"Yes, in church," and she told him in her own way, what I shall tell in mine, as follows: —

Last Sunday she had driven, in her accustomed state, with Beatrix, to Wardlock church. The church was hardly five hundred yards away, and the day bright and dry. But Lady Alice always arrived and departed in the coach, and sat in the Redcliffe seat, in the centre of the gallery. She and Beatrix sat face to face at opposite sides of the pew.

As Lady Alice looked with her cold and steady glance over the congregation in the aisle, during the interval of silence that precedes the commencement of the service, a tall and graceful young man, with an air of semi-foreign fashion, entered the church, accompanied by an elderly gentleman, of whom she took comparatively little note.

The young man and his friend were ushered into a seat confronting the gallery. Lady Alice gazed and gazed transfixed with astonishment and horror. The enamelled miniature on her bosom was like; but there, in that clear, melancholy face, with its large eyes and wavy hair, was a resurrection. In that animated sculpture were delicate tracings and touches of nature's chisel, which the artist had failed to represent, which even memory had neglected to fix, but which all now returned with the startling sense of identity in a moment.

She had put on her gold spectacles, as she always did on taking her seat, and opened her "Morning Service," bound in purple Russia, with its golden clasp and long ribbons fringed with the same precious metal, with the intent to mark the proper psalms and lessons at her haughty leisure. She therefore saw the moving image of her dead son before her, with an agonizing distinctness that told like a blight of palsy on her face.

She saw his elderly companion also distinctly. A round-shouldered man, with his short caped cloak still on. A grave man, with a large, high, bald forehead, a heavy, hooked nose, and great hanging moustache and beard. A dead and ominous face enough, except for the piercing glance of his full eyes, under very thick brows, and just the one you would have chosen out of a thousand portraits, for a plotting high-priest or an old magician.

This magus fixed his gaze on Lady Alice, not with an ostentation of staring, but sternly from behind the dark embrasure of his brows; and leaning a little sideways, whispered something in the ear of his young companion, whose glance at the same moment was turned with a dark and fixed interest upon the old lady.

It was a very determined stare on both sides, and of course illbred, but mellowed by distance. The congregation were otherwise like other country congregations, awaiting the offices of their pastor, decent, listless, while this great stare was going on, so little becoming the higher associations and solemn aspect of the place. It was, with all its conventional screening, a fierce, desperate scrutiny, cutting the dim air with a steady congreve fire that crossed and glared unintermittent by the ears of deceased gentlemen in ruffs and grimy doublets, at their posthumous devotions, and brazen knights praying on their backs, and under the eyes of all the gorgeous saints, with glories round their foreheads, in attitudes of benediction or meekness, who edified believers from the eastern window.

Lady Alice drew back in her pew. Beatrix was in a young-lady reverie, and did not observe what was going on. There was nothing indeed to make it very conspicuous. But when she looked at Lady Alice, she was shocked at her appearance, and instantly crossed, and said —

"I am afraid you are ill, grandmamma; shall we come away?"

The old lady made no answer, but got up and took the girl's arm, and left the seat very quietly. She got down the gallery stairs, and halted at the old window on the landing, and sate there a little, ghastly and still mute.

The cold air circulating upward from the porch revived her.

"I am better, child," said she, faintly.

"Thank Heaven," said the girl, whose terror at her state proved how intensely agitated the old lady must have been.

Mrs. Wrattles, the sextoness, emerging at that moment with repeated courtesies, and whispered condolence and inquiries, Lady Alice, with a stiff condescension, prayed her to call her woman, Mason, to her.

So Lady Alice, leaning slenderly on Mason's stout arm, insisted that Beatrix should return and sit out the service; and she herself, for the first time within the memory of man, returned from Wardlock church on foot, instead of in her coach. Beatrix waited until the congregation had nearly disgorged itself and dispersed, before making her solitary descent.

When she came down, without a chaperon, at the close of the rector's discourse, the floured footman in livery, with his goldheaded cane, stood as usual at the coach door only to receive her, and convey the order to the coachman, "home."

The churchyard gate, as is usual, I believe, in old places of that kind, opens at the south side, and the road to Wardlock manor leads along the churchyard wall and round the corner of it at a sharp angle just at the point where the clumsy old stone mausoleum or vault of the Deverell family overlooks the road, with its worn pilasters and beetle-browed cornice.

Now that was a Sunday of wonders. It had witnessed Lady Alice's pedestrian return from church, an act of humiliation, almost of penance, such as the memory of Wardlock could furnish no parallel to; and now it was to see another portent, for her ladyship's own gray horses, fat and tranquil beasts, who had pulled her to and from church for I know not how many years, under the ministration of the careful coachman, with exemplary sedateness, on this abnormal Sabbath took fright at a musical performance of two boys, one playing the Jew's harp and the other drumming tambourine-wise on his hat, and *suadente diabolo* and so forth, set off at a gallop, to the terror of all concerned, toward home. Making the sharp turn of the road, where the tomb of the Deverells overhangs it from the churchyard, the near-gray came down, and his off-neighbour reared and plunged frightfully.

The young lady did not scream, but, very much terrified, she made voluble inquiries of the air and hedges from the window, while the purple coachman pulled hard from the box, and spoke comfortably to his horses, and the footman, standing out of reach of danger, talked also in his own vein.

Simultaneously with all this, as if emerging from the old mausoleum, there sprang over the churchyard fence, exactly under its shadow, that young man who had excited emotions so various in the Baronet and in Lady Alice, and seized the horse by the head with both hands, and so cooperated that in less than a minute the two horses were removed from the carriage, and he standing, hat in hand, before the window, to assure the young lady that all was quite safe now.

So she descended, and the grave footman, with the Bible and Prayer-book, followed her steps with his goldheaded rod of office, while the lithe and handsome youth, his hat still in air which stirred his rich curls, walked beside her with something of that romantic deference which in one so elegant and handsome has an inexpressible sentiment of the tender in it.

He walked to the door of Wardlock Manor, and I purposely omit all he said, because I doubt whether it would look as well in this unexceptionable type as it sounded from his lips in Beatrix Marlowe's pretty ear.

If the speaker succeed with his audience, what more can oratory do for him? Well! he was gone. There remained in Beatrix's ear a music; in her fancy a heaven-like image — a combination of tint, and outline, and elegance, which made every room and scene without it lifeless, and every other object homely. These little untold impressions are of course liable to fade and vanish pretty quickly in absence, and to be superseded even sooner. Therefore it would be unwarranted to say that she was in love, although I can't deny that she was haunted by that slightly foreign young gentleman.

This latter portion of the adventure was not divulged by old Lady Alice, because Beatrix, I suppose, forgot to tell her, and she really knew nothing about it. All the rest, her own observation and experience, she related with a grim and candid particularity.

CHAPTER IV.

The Green Chamber at Marlowe.

So the Baronet, with a rather dreary chuckle, said: —

"I don't think, to say truth, there is anything in it. I really can't see why the plague I should bore myself about it. You know your pew in the middle of the gallery, with that painted hatchment thing, you know...."

"Respect the dead," said Lady Alice, looking down with a dry severity on the table.

"Well, yes; I mean, you know, it is so confoundedly conspicuous, I can't wonder at the two fellows, the old and young, staring a bit at it, and, perhaps, at *you*, you know," said Sir Jekyl, in his impertinent vein. "But I agree with you they are no ghosts, and I really shan't trouble my head about them any more. I wonder I was such a fool — hey? But, as you say, you know, it is unpleasant to be reminded of — of those things; it can't be helped now, though."

"Now, nor ever," said Lady Alice, grimly.

"Exactly; neither now, nor ever," repeated Sir Jekyl; "and we both know it can't possibly be poor — I mean anyone concerned in that transaction; so the likeness must be accidental, and therefore of no earthly significance — eh?"

Lady Alice, with elevated brows, fiddled in silence with some crumbs on the table with the tip of her thin finger.

"I suppose Beatrix is ready; may I ring the bell?"

"Oh! here she is. Now, bid grandmamma goodnight," said the Baronet.

So slim and pretty Beatrix, in her cloak, stooped down and placed her arms about the neck of the old lady, over whose face came a faint flush of tender sunset, and her old grey eyes looked very kindly on the beautiful young face that stooped over her, as she said, in a tone that, however, was stately —

"Goodbye, my dear child; you are warm enough — you are certain?"

"Oh! yes, dear grandmamma — my cloak, and this Cashmere thing."

"Well, darling, goodnight. You'll not forget to write — you'll not fail? Goodnight, Beatrix, dear — goodbye."

"Goodnight," said the Baronet, taking the tips of her cold fingers together, and addressing himself to kiss her cheek, but she drew back in one of her whims, and said, stiffly, "There, not tonight. Goodbye, Jekyl."

"Well," chuckled he, after his wont, "another time; but mind, you're to come to Marlowe."

He did not care to listen to what she replied, but he called from the stairs, as he ran down after his daughter —

"Now, mind, I won't let you off this time; you really must come. Goodnight, *au revoir* — goodnight."

I really think that exemplary old lady hated the Baronet, who called her "little mamma," and invited her every year, without meaning it, most goodnaturedly, to join his party under the ancestral roof-tree. He took a perverse sort of pleasure in these affectionate interviews, in fretting her not very placid temper — in patting her, as it were, wherever there was a raw, and in fondling her against the grain; so that his caresses were cruel, and their harmony, such as it was, amounted to no more than a flimsy deference to the scandalous world.

But Sir Jekyl knew that there was nothing in this quarter to be gained in love by a different tactique; there was a dreadful remembrance, which no poor lady has ostrich power to digest, in the way; it lay there, hard, cold, and irreducible; and the morbid sensation it produced was hatred. He knew that "little mamma," humanly speaking, ought to hate him. His mother indeed she was not; but only the stepmother of his deceased wife. Motherin-law is not always a very sweet relation, but with the prefix "step" the chances are, perhaps, worse.

There was, however, as you will by-and-by see, a terrible accident, or something, always remembered, gliding in and out of Wardlock Manor like the Baronet's double, walking in behind him when he visited her, like his evil genius, and when they met affectionately, standing by his shoulder, black and scowling, with clenched fist.

Now pretty Beatrix sat in the right corner of the chariot, and Sir Jekyl, her father, in the left. The lamps were lighted, and though there was moonlight, for they had a long stretch of road always dark, because densely embowered in the forest of Penlake. Tier over tier, file behind file, nodding together, the great trees bent over like plumed warriors, and made a solemn shadow always between their ranks.

Marlowe was quite new to Beatrix; but still too distant, twelve miles away, to tempt her to look out and make observations as she would on a nearer approach.

"You don't object to my smoking a cigar, Beatrix? The smoke goes out of the window, you know," said the Baronet, after they had driven about a mile in silence.

What young lady, so appealed to by a parent, ever did object? The fact is, Sir Jekyl did not give himself the trouble to listen to her answer, but was manifestly thinking of something quite different, as he lighted his match.

When he threw his last stump out of the window they were driving through Penlake Forest, and the lamplight gleamed on broken rows of wrinkled trunks and ivy.

"I suppose she told you all about it?" said he, suddenly pursuing his own train of thought.

"Who?" inquired Beatrix.

"I never was a particular favourite of her's, you know — grandmamma's, I mean. She does not love me, poor old woman! And she has a knack of making herself precious disagreeable, in which I try to imitate her, for peace' sake, you know; for, by George, if I was not uncivil now and then, we could never get on at all."

Sir Jekyl chuckled after his wont, as it were, between the bars of this recitative, and he asked —

"What were the particulars — the adventure on Sunday — that young fellow, you know?"

Miss Beatrix had heard no such interrogatory from her grandmamma, whose observations in the church-aisle were quite as unknown to her; and thus far the question of Sir Jekyl was a shock.

"Did not grandmamma tell you about it?" he pursued.

"About what, papa?" asked Beatrix, who was glad that it was dark.

"About her illness — a young fellow in a pew down in the aisle staring at her. By Jove! one would have fancied that sort of thing pretty well over. Tell me all about it."

The fact was that this was the first she had heard of it.

"Grandmamma told me nothing of it," said she.

"And did not you see what occurred? Did not you see him staring?" asked he.

Beatrix truly denied.

"You young ladies are always thinking of yourselves. So you saw nothing, and have nothing to tell? That will do," said Sir Jekyl, drily; and silence returned.

Beatrix was relieved on discovering that her little adventure was unsuspected. Very little was there in it, and nothing to reflect blame upon her. From her exaggeration of its importance, and her quailing as she fancied her father was approaching it, I conclude that the young gentleman had interested her a little.

And now, as Sir Jekyl in one corner of the rolling chariot brooded in the dark over his disappointed conjectures, so did pretty Beatrix in the other speculate on the sentences which had just fallen from his lips, and long to inquire some further particulars, but somehow dared not.

Could that tall and handsome young man, who had come to her rescue so unaccountably — the gentleman with those large, soft, dark eyes, which properly belong to heroes — have been the individual whose gaze had so mysteriously affected her grandmamma? What could the associations have been that were painful enough so to overcome that grim, white woman? Was he a relation? Was he an outcast member of that proud family? Or, was he that heir-at-law, or embodied Nemesis, that the yawning sea or grave will sometimes yield up to plague the guilty or the usurper?

For all or any of these parts he seemed too young. Yet Beatrix fancied instinctively that he could be no other than the basilisk who had exercised so strange a spell over her grim, but withal kind old kinswoman.

Was there not, she thought, something peculiar in the look he threw across the windows of old stone-fronted Wardlock manor — reserved, curious, half-smiling — as if he looked on an object which he had often heard described, and had somehow, from personal associations or otherwise, an interest in? It was but a momentary glance just as he took his leave; but there was, she thought, that odd character in it.

By this time the lamps were flashing on the village windows and shop-fronts; and at the end of the old gabled street, under a canopy of dark trees, stood the great iron gate of Marlowe.

Sir Jekyl rubbed the glass and looked out when they halted at the gate. The structures of his fancy had amused him, rather fearfully indeed, and he was surprised to find that they were entering the grounds of Marlowe so soon.

He did not mind looking out, or speaking to the old gamekeeper, who pulled open the great barriers, but lay back in his corner sullenly, in the attitude of a gentleman taking a nap.

Beatrix, however, looked out inquisitively, and saw by the misty moonlight a broad level studded with majestic timber — singly, in clumps, and here and there in solemn masses; and soon rose the broad-fronted gabled house before them, with its steep roofs and its hospitable clumps of twisted chimneys showing black against the dim sky.

Miss Marlowe's maid, to whom the scene was quite as new as to her mistress, descended from the back seat, in cloaks and mufflers, and stood by the hall-door steps, that shone white in the moonlight, before their summons had been answered.

Committing his daughter to her care, the Baronet — who was of a bustling temperament, and never drank tea except from motives of gallantry — called for Mrs. Gwynn, the housekeeper, who presently appeared.

She was an odd-looking woman — some years turned of fifty, thin, with a longish face and a fine, white, glazed skin. There was something queer about her eyes: you soon discovered it to arise from their light colour and something that did not quite match in their pupils.

On entering the hall, where the Baronet had lighted a candle, having thrown his hat on the table, and merely loosed his muffler and one or two buttons of his outside coat, she smiled a chill gleam of welcome with her pale lips, and dropped two sharp little courtesies.

"Well, old Donica, and how do ye do?" said the Baronet, smiling, with a hand on each thin grey silk shoulder. "Long time since I saw you. But, egad! you grow younger and younger, you pretty old rogue;" and he gave her pale, thin cheek a playful tap with his fingers.

"Pretty well, please, Sir Jekyl, thank ye," she replied, receding a little with dry dignity. "Very welcome, sir, to Marlowe. Miss Beatrix looks very well, I am happy to see; and you, sir, also."

"And you're glad to see us, I know?"

"Certainly, sir, glad to see you," said Mrs. Gwynn, with another short courtesy.

"The servants not all come? No, nor Ridley with the plate. He'll arrive tomorrow; and — and we shall have the house full in little more than a week. Let us go up and look at the rooms; I forget them almost, by Jove — I really do — it's so long since. Light you another, and we'll do very well."

"You'll see them better by daylight, sir. I kept everything well aired and clean. The house looks wonderful — it do," replied Mrs. Gwynn, accompanying the Baronet up the broad oak stairs.

"If it looks as fresh as you, Donica, it's a miracle of a house — egad! you're a wonder. How you skip by my side, with your little taper, like a sylph in a ballet, egad!"

"You wear pretty well yourself, Sir Jekyl," drily remarked the white-faced sylph, who had a sharp perpendicular line between her eyebrows, indicative of temper.

"So they tell me, by Jove. We're pretty well on though, Donnie — eh? Everyone knows my age — printed, you know, in the red book. You've the advantage of me there — eh, Don?"

"I'm just fifty-six, sir, and I don't care if all the world knewd it."

"All the world's curious, I dare say, on the point; but I shan't tell them, old Gwynn," said Sir Jekyl.

"Curious or no, sir, it's just the truth, and I don't care to hide it. Past that folly now, sir, and I don't care if I wor seventy, and a steppin' like a— "

"A sylph," supplied he.

"Yes — a sylph — into my grave. It's a bad world, and them that's suffered in it soon tires on it, sir."

"*You* have not had a great deal to trouble you. Neither chick, nor child, nor husband, egad! So here we are."

They were now standing on the gallery, at the head of the great staircase.

"These are the rooms your letter says are not furnished — eh? Let us come to the front gallery."

So, first walking down the gallery in which they were, to the right, and then entering a passage by a turn on the left, they reached the front gallery which runs parallel to that at the head of the stairs.

"Where have you put Beatrix?"

"She wished the room next mine, please, sir, upstairs," answered the housekeeper.

"Near the front — eh?"

"The left side, please, sir, as you look from the front," replied she.

"*From* the front?" he repeated.

"From the front," she reiterated.

"Over there, then?" he said, pointing upward to the left.

"That will be about it, sir," she answered.

"How many rooms have we here in a row?" he asked, facing down the gallery, with its file of doors at each side.

"Four bedrooms and three dressing-rooms at each side."

"Ay, well now, I'll tell you who's coming, and how to dispose of them."

So Sir Jekyl quartered his friends, as he listed, and then said he —

"And the large room at the other end, here to the right — come along."

And Sir Jekyl marched briskly in the direction indicated.

"Please, sir," said the slim, pale housekeeper, with the odd leer in her eye, overtaking him quietly.

"Ay, here it is," said he, not minding her, and pushing open the door of a dressing-room at the end of the gallery. "Inside this, I remember."

"But that's the green chamber, sir," continued Mrs. Gwynn, gliding beside him as he traversed the floor.

"The room we call Sir Harry's room, I know — capital room — eh?"

"I don't suppose," began the pale lady, with a sinister sharpness.

"Well?" he demanded, looking down in her face a little grimly.

"It's the green chamber, sir," she said, with a hard emphasis.

"You said so before, eh?" he replied.

"And I did not suppose, sir, you'd think of putting anyone there," she continued.

"Then you're just as green as the chamber," said Sir Jekyl, with a chuckle.

And he entered the room, holding the candle high in air, and looking about him a little curiously, the light tread and sharp pallid face of Donica Gwynn following him.

CHAPTER V.

Sir Jekyl bethinks him of Pelter and Crowe.

The Baronet held his candle high in air, as I have said, as he gazed round him inquisitively. The thin housekeeper, with her pale lips closed, and her odd eyes dropped slantingly toward the floor, at the corner of the room, held hers demurely in her right finger and thumb, her arms being crossed.

The room was large, and the light insufficient. Still you could not help seeing at a glance that it must be, in daylight, a tolerably cheerful one. It was roomy and airy, with a great bow-window looking to the front of the building, of which it occupied the extreme left, reaching about ten feet from the level of the more ancient frontage of the house. The walls were covered with stamped leather, chiefly green and gold, and the whole air of the room, even in its unarranged state, though somewhat quaint and faded, was wonderfully gay and cozy.

“This is the green chamber, sir,” she repeated, with her brows raised and her eyes still lowered askance, and some queer wrinkles on her forehead as she nodded a sharp bitter emphasis.

“To be sure it is, damme! — why not?” he said, testily, and then burst into a short laugh.

“You’re not a going, I suppose, Sir Jekyl, to put anyone into it?” said she.

“I don’t see, for the life of me, why I should not — eh? a devilish comfortable room.”

“Hem! I can’t but suppose you are a joking me, Sir Jekyl,” persisted the gray silk phantom.

“Egad! you forget how old we’re growing; why the plague should I quiz you! I want the room for old General Lennox, that’s all — though I’m not bound to tell you for whom I want it — am I?”

“There’s a plenty o’ rooms without this one, Sir Jekyl,” persevered the lady, sternly.

“Plenty, of course; but none so good,” said he, carelessly.

“No one ever had luck that slept in it,” answered the oracle, lifting her odd eyes and fixing them on Sir Jekyl.

“I don’t put them here for luck. We want to make them comfortable,” answered Sir Jekyl, poking at the furniture as he spoke.

“You know what was your father’s wish about it, sir?” she insisted.

“My father’s wish — egad, he did not leave many of his wishes unsatisfied — eh?” he answered, with another chuckle.

“And your poor lady’s wish,” she said, a good deal more sharply.

“I don’t know why the devil I’m talking to you, old Gwynn,” said the Baronet, turning a little fiercely about.

“*Dying* wishes,” emphasised she.

“It is time, Heaven knows, all that stuff should stop. You slept in it yourself, in my father’s time. I remember you, here, Donica, and I don’t think I ever heard that you saw a ghost — did I?” he said, with a sarcastic chuckle.

She darted a ghastly look to the far end of the chamber, and then, with a strange, half-frozen fury, she said —

“I wish you goodnight, Sir Jekyl,” and glided like a shadow out of the room.

“Saucy as ever, by Jupiter,” he ejaculated, following her with his glance, and trying to smile; and as the door shut, he looked again down the long apartment as she had just done, raising the candle again.

The light was not improved of course by the disappearance of Mrs. Gwynn’s candle, and the end of the room was dim and unsatisfactory. The great four-poster, with dark curtains, and a plume at each corner, threw a vague shadow on the back wall and up to the ceiling, as he moved his candle, which at the distance gave him an uncomfortable sensation, and he stood for a few seconds sternly there, and then turned on his heel and quitted the room, saying aloud, as he did so —

“What a d — d fool that old woman is — always *was*!”

If there was a ghost there, the Baronet plainly did not wish it to make its exit from the green chamber by the door, for he locked it on the outside, and put the key in his pocket. Then, crossing the dressing-room I have mentioned, he entered the passage which crosses the gallery in which he and Mrs. Gwynn, a few minutes before, had planned their dispositions. The dressing-room door is placed close to the window which opens at the end of the corridor in the front of the house. Standing with his back to this, he looked down the long passage, and smiled.

For a man so little given to the melodramatic, it was a very well expressed smile of mystery — the smile of a man who knows something which others don't suspect, and would be surprised to learn.

It was the Baronet's fancy, as it had been his father's and his grandfather's before him, to occupy very remote quarters in this old house. Solitary birds, their roost was alone.

Candle in hand, Sir Jekyl descended the stairs, marched down the long gaunt passage, which strikes rearward so inflexibly, and at last reaches the foot of a back staircase, after a march of a hundred and forty feet, which I have measured.

At top of this was a door at his left, which he opened, and found himself in his own bedroom.

You would have said on looking about you that it was the bedroom of an old campaigner or of a natty gamekeeper — a fellow who rather liked roughing it, and had formed tastes in the matter like the great Duke of Wellington. The furniture was slight and plain, and looked like varnished deal; a French bed, narrow, with chintz curtains, and a plain white coverlet, like what one might expect in a barrack dormitory or an hospital; a little strip of carpet lying by the bed, and a small square of Turkey carpet under the table by the fire, hardly broke the shining uniformity of the dark oak floor; a pair of sporting prints decorated the sides of the chimneypiece, and an oil-portrait of a grey hunter hung in the middle. There were fishing-rods and gun-cases, I dare say the keys were lost of many, they looked so old and dingy.

The Baronet's luggage, relieved of its black japanned casings, lay on the floor, with his hat-case and travelling-desk. A pleasant fire burnt in the grate, and a curious abundance of waxlights, without which Sir Jekyl, such was his peculiarity, could not exist, enlivened the chamber.

As he made his toilet at his homely little dressing-table, he bethought him suddenly, and rang the bell in his shirtsleeves.

"My letters."

"Yes, sir."

And up came a salver well laden with letters, pamphlets, and newspapers, of all shapes and sizes.

"And tell Miss Beatrix I shan't have any tea, and get some brandy from Mrs. Gwynn, and cold water and a tumbler, and let them leave me alone —

d’ye see? — and give me that.”

It was a dressing-gown which Tomlinson’s care had already liberated from its valise, and expanded before the fire.

The Baronet’s tastes, as we might see, were simple. He could dine on a bit of roast mutton, and a few glasses of sherry. But his mutton was eight years old, and came all the way from Dartbroke, and his sherry cost more than other men’s Madeira, and he now lighted one of those priceless cigars, which so many fellows envied, and inhaled the disembodied aroma of a tobacco which, perhaps, Jove smokes in his easy chair on Olympus, but which I have never smelt on earth, except when Sir Jekyl dispensed the inestimable treasures of his cigar-case.

Now, the Baronet stood over his table, with a weed between his lips, tall in his flowered silk dressing-gown, his open hands shoving apart the pile of letters, as a conjurer at an exhibition spreads his pack of cards.

“Ha! poor little thing!” he murmured, with a sly simper, in a petting tone, as he plucked an envelope, addressed in a lady’s hand, between two fingers, caressingly, from the miscellaneous assortment.

He looked at it, but reserved it as a *bon-bouche* in his waistcoat pocket, and pursued his examination.

There were several from invited guests, who were either coming or not, with the customary expressions, and were tossed together in a little isolated litter for conference with Mrs. Gwynn in the morning.

“Not a line from Pelter and Crowe! the d — d fellows don’t waste their ink upon me, except when they furnish their costs. It’s a farce paying fellows to look after one’s business — no one ever does it but yourself. If those fellows were worth their bread and butter, they’d have known all about this thing, whatever it is, and I’d have had it all *here*, d —— it, tonight.”

Sir Jekyl, it must be confessed, was not quite consistent about this affair of the mysterious young gentleman; for, as we have seen, he himself had a dozen times protested against the possibility of there being anything in it, and now he was seriously censuring his respectable London attorneys for not furnishing him with the solid contents of this “windbag.”

But it was only his talk that was contradictory. Almost from the moment of his first seeing that young gentleman, on the open way under the sign of the “Plough,” there lowered a fantastic and cyclopean picture, drawn in smoke or vapour, volcanic and thunderous, all over his horizon, like those prophetic and retrospective pageants with which Doree loves to paint his mystic skies. It was wonderful, and presaged unknown evil; and only cowed him the more that it baffled analysis and seemed to mock at reason.

"Pretty fellows to keep a look-out! It's well I can do it for myself — who knows where we're driving to, or what's coming? Signs enough — whatever they mean — he that runs may read, egad! Not that there's anything in it *necessarily*. But it's not about drawing and ruins and that stuff — those fellows have come down here. Bosh! looking after my property. I'd take my oath they are advised by some lawyer; and if Pelter and Crowe were sharp, they'd know by whom, and all about it, by Jove!"

Sir Jekyl jerked the stump of his cigar over his shoulder into the grate as he muttered this, looking surlily down on the unprofitable papers that strewed the table.

He stood thinking, with his back to the fire, and looking rather cross and perplexed, and so he sat down and wrote a short letter. It was to Pelter and Crowe, but he began, as he did not care which got it, in his usual way —

"My dear Sir, — I have reason to suspect that those ill-disposed people, who have often threatened annoyance, are at last seriously intent on mischief. You will be good enough, therefore, immediately to set on foot inquiries, here and at the other side of the water, respecting the movements of the D —— family, who, I fancy, are at the bottom of an absurd, though possibly troublesome, demonstration. I don't fear them, of course. But I think you will find that some members of that family are at present in this country, and disposed to be troublesome. You will see, therefore, the urgency of the affair, and will better know than I where and how to prosecute the necessary inquiries. I do not, of course, apprehend the least *danger* from their machinations; but you have always thought *annoyance* possible; and if any be in store for me, I should rather not have to charge it upon our supineness. You will, therefore, exert your vigilance and activity on my behalf, and be so good as to let me know, at the earliest possible day — which, I think, need not be later than Wednesday next — the result of your inquiries through the old channels. I am a little disappointed, in fact, at not having heard from you before now on the subject.

"Yours, my dear sir, very sincerely,

"Jekyl M. Marlowe."

Sir Jekyl never swore on paper, and, as a rule, commanded his temper very creditably in that vehicle. But all people who had dealings with him knew very well that the rich Baronet was not to be trifled with. So, understanding that it was strong enough, he sealed it up for the postoffice in the morning, and dropped it into the postbag, and with it the unpleasant subject for the present.

And now, a little brandy and water, and the envelope in the well-known female hand; and he laughed a little over it, and looked at himself in the glass with a vaunting complacency, and shook his head playfully at the envelope. It just crossed his sunshine like the shadow of a flying vapour—"that cross-grained old Gwynn would not venture to meddle?" But the envelope was honestly closed, and showed no signs of having been fiddled with.

He made a luxury of this little letter, and read it in his easy chair, with his left leg over the arm, with the fragrant accompaniment of a weed.

"Jealous, by Jove!" he ejaculated, in high glee; "little fool, what's put that in your head?"

"Poor, little, fluttering, foolish thing!" sang the Baronet, and then laughed, not cynically, but indulgently rather.

"How audacious the little fools are upon paper! Egad, it's a wonder there is not twice as much mischief in the world as actually happens. We must positively burn this little extravagance."

But before doing so he read it over again; then smiling still, he gallantly touched it to his lips, and reperused it, as he drew another cigar from the treasury of incense which he carried about him. He lighted the note, but did not apply it to his cigar, I am bound to say — partly from a fine feeling, and partly, I am afraid, because he thought that paper spoiled the flavour of his tobacco. So, with a sentimental smile, a gentle shrug, and a sigh of the Laurence Sterne pattern, he converted that dangerous little scrawl into ashes — and he thought, as he inhaled his weed —

"It is well for you, poor little fanatics, that we men take better care of you than you do of yourselves, sometimes!"

No doubt; and Sir Jekyl supposed he was thinking only of his imprudent little correspondent, although there was another person in whom he was nearly interested, who might have been unpleasantly compromised also, if that document had fallen into other hands.

CHAPTER VI.

Sir Jekyl's Room is Visited.

It was near one o'clock. Sir Jekyl yawned and wound his watch, and looked at his bed as if he would like to be in it without the trouble of getting there; and at that moment there came a sharp knock at his door, which startled him, for he thought all his people were asleep by that time.

"Who's there?" he demanded in a loud key.

"It's me, sir, please," said Donica Gwynn's voice.

"Come in, will you?" cried he; and she entered.

"Are you sick?" he asked.

"No, sir, thank you," she replied, with a sharp courtesy.

"You look so plaguy pale. Well, I'm glad you're not. But what the deuce can you want of me at this hour of night? Eh?"

"It's only about that room, sir."

"Oh, curse the room! Talk about it in the morning. You ought to have been in your bed an hour ago."

"So I was, sir; but I could not sleep, sir, for thinking of it."

"Well, go back and think of it, if you must. How can I stop you? Don't be a fool, old Gwynn."

"No more I will, sir, please, if I can help, for fools we are, the most on us; but I could not sleep, as I said, for thinking o't; and so I thought I'd jist put on my things again, and come and try if you, sir, might be still up."

"Well, you see I'm up; but I want to get to bed, Gwynn, and not to talk here about solemn bosh; and you must not bore me about that green chamber — do you see? — tonight, like a good old girl; it will do in the morning — won't it?"

"So it will, sir; only I could not rest in my bed, until I said, seeing as you mean to sleep in this room, it would never do. It won't. I can't stand it."

"Stand what? Egad! it seems to me you're demented, my good old Donica."

"No, Sir Jekyl," she persisted, with a grim resolution to say out her say. "You know very well, sir, what's running in my head. You know it's for no good anyone sleeps there. General Lennox, ye say; well an' good. You know well what a loss Mr. Deverell met with in that room in Sir Harry, your father's time."

"And you slept in it, did not you, and saw something? Eh?"

"Yes, I *did*" she said, in a sudden fury, with a little stamp on the floor, and a pale, staring frown.

After a breathless pause of a second or two she resumed.

"And you know what your poor lady saw there, and never held up her head again. And well you know, sir, how your father, Sir Harry, on his deathbed, desired it should be walled up, when you were no more than a boy; and your good lady did the same many a year after, when *she* was a dying. And I tell ye, Sir Jekyl, ye'll sup sorrow yourself yet if you don't. And take a fool's counsel, and shut up that door, and never let no one, friend or foe, sleep there; for well I know it's not for nothing, with your dead father's dying command, and your poor dear lady's dying entreaty against it, that you put anyone to sleep there. I don't know who this General Lennox may be — a good gentleman or a bad; but I'm sure it's for no righteous reason he's to lie there. You would not do it for nothing."

This harangue was uttered with a volubility, which, as the phrase is, took Sir Jekyl aback. He was angry, but he was also perplexed and a little stunned by the unexpected vehemence of his old housekeeper's assault, and he stared at her with a rather bewildered countenance.

"You're devilish impertinent," at last he said, with an effort. "You rant there like a madwoman, just because I like you, and you've been in our family, I believe, since before I was born; you think you may say what you like. The house is mine, I believe, and I rather think I'll do what I think best in it while I'm here."

"And you going to sleep in this room!" she broke in. "What else can it be?"

"You mean — what the devil do you mean?" stammered the Baronet again, unconsciously assuming the defensive.

"I mean you know very well *what*, Sir Jekyl," she replied.

"It was my father's room, hey? — when I was a boy, as you say. It's good enough for his son, I suppose; and I don't ask *you* to lie in the green chamber."

"*I'll* be no party, sir, if you please, to any one lying there," she observed, with a stiff courtesy, and a sudden hectic in her cheek.

"Perhaps you mean because my door's a hundred and fifty feet away from the front of the house, if any mischief should happen, I'm too far away — as others were before me — to prevent it, eh?" said he, with a flurried sneer.

"What I mean, I mean, sir — you ought not; that's all. You won't take it amiss, Sir Jekyl — I'm an old servant — I'm sorry, sir; but I'a made up my mind what to do."

"You're not thinking of any folly, surely? You seemed to me always too much afraid, or whatever you call it, of the remembrance, you know, of what you *saw* there — eh? — *I* don't know, of course, *what* — to speak of it to me. I never pressed you, because you seemed — you know you did — to have a horror; and surely you're not going now to talk among the servants or other people. You can't be far from five-and-thirty years in the family."

"Four-and-thirty, Sir Jekyl, next April. It's a good while; but I won't see no more o' that; and unless the green chamber be locked up, at the least, and used no more for a bedroom, I'd rather go, sir. Nothing may happen, of course, Sir Jekyl — it's a hundred to one nothing *would* happen; but ye see, sir, I've a feeling about it, sir; and there has been these things ordered by your father that was, and by your poor lady, as makes me feel queer. Nothing being done accordingly, and I could not rest upon it, for sooner or later it would come to this, and stay I could not. I judge no one — Heaven forbid, — Sir Jekyl — oh, no! my own conscience is as much as I can look to; so sir, if you please, so soon as you can suit yourself I'll leave, sir."

"Stuff! old Gwynn; don't mind talking tonight," said the Baronet, more kindly than he had spoken before; "we'll see about it in the morning. Goodnight. We must not quarrel about nothing. I was only a schoolboy when you came to us, you know."

But in the morning "old Gwynn" was resolute. She was actually going, so soon as the master could suit himself. She was not in a passion, nor in a panic, but in a state of gloomy and ominous obstinacy.

"Well, you'll give me a little time, won't you, to look about me?" said the Baronet, peevishly.

"Such is my intention, sir."

“And see, Gwynn, not a word about that — that green chamber, you know, to Miss Beatrix.”

“As you please, sir.”

“Because if you begin to talk, they’ll all think we are haunted.”

“Whatever you please to order, sir.”

“And it was not — it was my grandfather, you know, who built it.”

“Ah, so it was, sir;” and Gwynn looked astonished and shook her head, as though cowed by the presence of a master-spirit of evil.

“One would fancy you saw his ghost, Gwynn; but he was not such a devil as your looks would make him, only a bit wild, and a favourite with the women, Gwynn — always the best judge of merit — hey? Beau Marlowe they called him — the best dressed man of his day. How the devil could such a fellow have any harm in him?”

There is a fine picture, full length, of Beau Marlowe, over the chimneypiece of the great hall of Marlowe. He has remarkably gentlemanlike hands and legs; the gloss is on his silk stockings still. His features are handsome, of that type which we conventionally term aristocratic; high, and smiling with a Louis-Quatorze insolence. He wears a very fine coat of cut velvet, of a rich, dusky red, the technical name of which I forget. He was of the gilded and powdered youth of his day.

He certainly was a handsome fellow, this builder of the “green chamber,” and he has not placed his candle under a bushel. He shines in many parts of the old house, and has repeated himself in all manner of becoming suits. You see him, three-quarters, in the parlour, in blue and silver; you meet him in crayon, and again in small oil, oval; and you have him in half a dozen miniatures.

We mention this ancestor chiefly because when his aunt, Lady Mary, left him a legacy, he added the green chamber to the house.

It seems odd that Sir Jekyl, not fifty yet, should have had a grandfather who was a fashionable and wicked notoriety of mature years, and who had built an addition to the family mansion so long as a hundred and thirty years ago. But this gentleman had married late, as rakes sometimes do, and his son, Sir Harry, married still later — somewhere about seventy; having been roused to this uncomfortable exertion by the proprietorial airs of a nephew who was next in succession. To this matrimonial explosion Sir Jekyl owed his entrance and agreeable sojourn upon the earth.

“I won’t ask you to stay now; you’re in a state. I’ll write to town for Sinnott, as you insist on it, but you won’t leave us in confusion, and you’ll make her *au fait* — won’t you? Give her any hints she may require; and I know I shall have you back again when you cool a little, or at all events when we go back to Dartbroke; for I don’t think I shall like this place.”

So Donica Gwynn declared herself willing to remain till Mrs. Sinnott should arrive from London; and preparations for the reception of guests proceeded with energy.

CHAPTER VII.

The Baronet Pursues.

Sir Jekyl Marlowe was vexed when the letters came, and none from Pelter and Crowe. There are people who expect miracles from their doctors and lawyers, and, in proportion to their accustomed health and prosperity, are unreasonable when anything goes wrong. The Baronet's notion was that the legal firm in question ought to think and even dream of nothing else than his business. It was an impertinence their expecting *him* to think about it. What were *they* there for? He knew that London was a pretty large place, and England still larger; and that it was not always easy to know what everybody was about in either, and still less what each man was doing on the Continent. Pelter and Crowe had some other clients too on their hands, and had hitherto done very satisfactorily. But here was a serious-looking thing — the first really uncomfortable occurrence which had taken place under his reign — the first opportunity for exhibiting common vigilance — and he ventured to say those fellows did not know these Strangways people were in these kingdoms at all!

Sir Jekyl, though an idle fellow, was a man of action, so he ordered his horse, and rode nine miles to the "Plough Inn," where he hoped to see Mr. Strangways again, improve his intimacy, and prevail with the gentlemen to return with him to Marlowe, and spend a fortnight there, when, or the devil was in it, he should contrive to get at the bottom of their plans.

He looked shrewdly in at the open door as he rode up, and halloed for some one to take his horse. The little porch smiled pleasantly, and the two gables and weather-cock, in the sunlight; and the farmer on the broad and dingy panel, in his shirtsleeves, low-crowned, broadleafed hat, crimson waistcoat, canary-coloured shorts, and blue stockings, and flaxen wig, was driving his plump horses, and guilding his plough undiscouraged, as when last he saw him.

Boots and Mrs. Jones came out. Sir Jekyl was too eager to wait to get down; so from the saddle he accosted his buxom hostess, in his usual affable style. The Baronet was not accustomed to be crossed and thwarted as much as, I have been told, men with less money sometimes are; and he showed his mortification in his face when he learned that the two gentlemen had left very early that morning.

"This morning! Why you said yesterday they would not go till *evening*. Hang it, I wish you could tell it right; and what the d — l do you mean by Strangers? Call him Strangways, can't you. It's odd people can't say names."

He must have been very much vexed to speak so sharply; and he saw, perhaps, how much he had forgotten himself in the frightened look which good Mrs. Jones turned upon him.

"I don't mean you, my good little soul. It's *their* fault; and where are they gone to? I wanted to ask them both over to Marlowe. Have you a notion?"

"They took our horses as far as the 'Bell and Horns,' at Slowton." She called shrilly to Boots, "They're not stoppin' at the 'Bell and Horns,' sure. Come here, and tell Sir Jekyl Marlowe about Mr. Strangers."

"You said last night they were going to Awkworth;" and Sir Jekyl chuckled scornfully, for he was vexed.

"They changed their minds, sir."

"Well, we'll say so. You're a wonderful fascinating sex. Egad! if you could only carry anything right in your heads for ten minutes, you'd be too charming." And at this point Boots emerged, and Sir Jekyl continued, addressing him —

"Well, where are the gentlemen who left this morning?" asked he.

"They'll be at the 'Bell and Horns,' sir."

"Where's that?"

"Slowton, sir."

"I know. What hour did they go?"

"Eight o'clock, sir."

"Just seven miles. The Sterndale Road, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

And that was all Boots had to tell.

"Will ye please to come in, sir?" inquired Mrs. Jones.

"No, my good creature. I haven't time. The old gentleman — what's his name?"

"I don't know, Sir, please. He calls the young gentleman Guy, and the young gentleman calls him *sir*."

"And both the same name?"

"We calls 'em both Strangers, please, sir."

"I know. Servants, had they?"

"Yes, sir, please. But they sent 'em on."

"Rich — don't want for money, I suppose. Eh?"

"Oh! plenty money, sir."

"And the servants called the men Strangways, I suppose, eh?"

"Yes, Sir Jekyl, please; and so the letters came."

"You never happened to hear any other name?"

"No, Sir Jekyl."

"*Think.*"

Mrs. Jones did think, but could recall nothing.

"Nothing with a D?"

"D, sir! What, sir?"

"No matter what," said the Baronet. "No name beginning with D — eh?"

"No, sir. You don't think they're going by a false name?" inquired the lady, curiously.

"What the devil puts that in your head? Take care of the law; you must not talk that way, you foolish little rogue."

"I did not know, sir," timidly answered Mrs. Jones, who saw in Sir Jekyl, the Parliament-man, Deputy-Lieutenant, and Grand Juror, a great oracle of the law.

"I only wanted to know whether you had happened to hear the name of the elder of the two gentlemen, and could recollect what letter it begins with."

"No, sir, please."

"So you've no more to tell me?"

"Nothing, sir."

"If they come back tell them I rode over to offer them some shooting, and to beg they'd remember to come to Marlowe. You won't forget?"

"No sir."

"Do they return here?"

"I think not, sir."

"Well, I believe there's nothing else," and the Baronet looked up reflectively, as if he expected to find a memorandum scribbled on the blue sky, leaning with his hand on the back of his horse. "No, nothing. You won't forget my message, that's all. Goodbye, my dear."

And touching the tips of his gloves to his lips, with a smile and a nod he cantered down the Sterndale Road.

He pulled up at the "Bell and Horns," in the little town of Slowton, but was disappointed. The entire party, servants and all, had taken the train two hours before, at the station three miles away.

Now Sir Jekyl was blooded, and the spirit of the chase stirred within him. So he rode down in his jack-boots, and pulled up his steaming horse by the station, and he went in and made inquiry.

A man like him is received even at one of these cosmopolitan rallying-points within his own county with becoming awe. The station-master was awfully courteous, and the subaltern officials awfully active and obliging, and the resources of the establishment were at once placed at his sublime disposal. Unhappily, two branch lines converge at this point, causing the usual bustle, and there was consequently a conflict and confusion in the evidence; so that Sir Jekyl, who laughed and chatted agreeably amidst all the reverential zeal that surrounded him, could arrive at nothing conclusive, but leaned to the view that the party had actually gone to Awkworth, only by rail, instead of by road.

Sir Jekyl got on his horse and walked him through the town, uncertain what to do next. This check had cooled him; his horse had his long trot home still. It would not do to follow to Awkworth; to come in, after a four-and-twenty miles' ride, bespattered like a courier, merely to invite these gentlemen, *vivâ voce*, who had hardly had his note of invitation a score hours. It would be making too much of them with a vengeance.

As he found himself once more riding under the boughs of Marlowe, the early autumnal evening already closing in, Sir Jekyl experienced one of those qualms and sinkings of the heart, which overcome us with a vague anticipation of evil.

The point of the road which he had now gained, commands a view of the old hall of Marlowe, with that projecting addition, and its wide bow-window, every pane of which was now flaming in the sunset light, which indicated the green chamber.

The green chamber! Just at that moment the glare of its broad window flashed with a melancholy and vengeful light upon his brain, busied with painful retrospects and harassing conjecture.

Old Gwynn going away! It was an omen. Marlowe without old Gwynn. Troy without its palladium. Old Gwynn going with something like a denunciation on her lips! That stupid old woman at Wardlock, too, who really knew nothing about it, undertaking also to prophesy! Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings! There was no sense in it — scarcely articulation. Still it was the croak of the raven — the screech of the owl.

He looked across the gentle slope at the angle of the inauspicious room. Why should old General Lennox be placed within the unhallowed precincts of that chamber? The image of old Gwynn as she gabbled her grim protest on the preceding night, rose before him like a ghost. What business was it of hers, and how could she divine his motives? Still, if there was anything wrong, did not this vehement warning make the matter worse.

An old man he felt himself on a sudden that evening, and for the first time. There was some failure of the electric fire, and a subsidence of the system. His enterprise was gone. Why should he take guilt, if such it were, on his soul for vanity and vexation of spirit? If guilt it were, was it not of a kind inexcusably cold-blooded and long-headed. Old Gwynn, he did not like to lose you on those terms — just, too, as those unknown actors were hovering at the wing, and about to step upon the stage, this old man and young, who, instinctively he felt, were meditating mischief against him. Mischief — *what*? Such, perhaps, as might shatter the structure of his greatness, and strew its pinnacles in the dust. Perhaps all this gloom was but the depression of a long ride, and still longer fast. But he was accustomed to such occasional strains upon his strength without any such results. Ah, no! He had come within the edge of the shadow of judgment, and its darkness was stealing over him, and its chill touched his heart.

These were the dreamy surmisings with which he rode slowly toward the house, and a few good resolutions in a nebulous state hovered uncomfortably about him.

No letter of any interest had come by the early post, and Sir Jekyl sat down *tête-à-tête* with his pretty daughter, in very dismal spirits, to dinner.

CHAPTER VIII.

The House begins to Fill.

Beatrix was fond of her father, who was really a goodnatured man, in the common acceptance of the term, that is to say, he had high animal spirits, and liked to see people pleasant about him, and was probably as kind as a tolerably selfish and vicious man can be, and had a liking, moreover, for old faces, which was one reason why he hated the idea of his housekeeper's leaving him. But Beatrix was also a little in awe of him, as girls often are of men of whom they see but little, especially if they have something of the masculine decision of temper.

"You may all go away now," said the Baronet suddenly to the servants, who had waited at dinner; and when the liveried phantoms had withdrawn, and the door had closed on the handsome calves of tall and solemn Jenkins, he said —

"Nothing all day — no adventure, or visitor, Trixie — not a word of news or fun, I dare say?"

"Nothing — not a creature, papa; only the birds and dogs, and some new music."

"Well, it is not much worse than Wardlock, I suppose; but we shall have a gay house soon — at all events plenty of people. Old General Lennox is coming. His nephew, Captain Drayton, is very rich; he will be Lord Tewkesbury — that is, if old Tewkesbury doesn't marry; and, at all events, he has a very nice property, and does not owe a guinea. You need not look modest, Trixie. You may do just as you please, only I'd be devilish glad you liked one another — there, don't be distressed, I say; I'll mention it no more if you don't like; but he'll be here in a few days, and you mayn't think him so bad."

After this the Baronet drank two glasses of sherry in silence, slowly, and with a gloomy countenance, and then, said he —

"I think, Trixie, if you were happily placed, I should give the whole thing up. I'm tired of that cursed House of Commons. You can't imagine what a bore it is, when a fellow does not want anything from them, going down there for their d —— d divisions. I'm not fit for the hounds either. I can't ride as I used — egad! I'm as stiff as a rusty hinge when I get up in the morning. And I don't much like this place, and I'm tired to death of the other two. When you marry I'll let them, or, at all events, let them alone. I'm tired of all those servants. I know they're robbing me, egad! You would not believe what my gardens cost me last year, and, by Jove, I don't believe all that came to my table was worth two hundred pounds. I'll have quite a different sort of life. I haven't any time to myself, looking after all those confounded people one must keep about them. Keepers, and gardeners, and devil knows who beside. I don't like London half as well as the Continent. I hate dinner-parties, and the season, and all the racket. It doesn't pay, and I'm growing old — you'll not mind if I smoke it?" (he held a cigar between his fingers)— "a complaint that doesn't mend by time, you know. Oh! yes, I *am* old, you little rogue. Everybody knows I'm just fifty; and the fact is I'm tired of the whole thing, stock, lock, and barrel; and I believe what little is to be got of life is best had — that is, if you know how to look for it — abroad. A fellow like me who has got places and properties — egad! they expect him to live *pro bono publico*, and not to care or think twopence about himself — at least it comes to that. How is old Gwynn?"

"Very well, I think."

"And what has she to say for herself; what about things in general?"

"She's not very chatty, poor old Gwynn, and I think she seems a little — just ever so little — cross."

"So she does — damnably cross. She was always a bit of a vixen, and she isn't improving, poor old thing; but don't be afraid, I like old Donnie for all that, though I don't think I ever quite understood her, and I don't expect either." These observations concluded the conversation subsided, and a long silence supervened.

"I wonder who the devil he is," said the Baronet abruptly, as he threw the stump of his cigar into the fire. "If it's a fluke, it's as like a miracle as anything I ever saw."

He recollected that he was talking without an interlocutor, and looked for a moment hesitatingly at his daughter.

"And your grandmamma told you nothing of her adventure in church?"

"No, papa — not a word."

"It seems to me, women can hold their tongues sometimes, but always in the wrong places."

Here he shook the ashes of his cigar into the grate.

"Old Granny's a fool — isn't she, Trixie, and a little bit vicious — eh?"

Sir Jekyl put his question dreamily, in a reverie, and it plainly needed no answer. So Beatrix was spared the pain of making one; which she was glad of, for Lady Alice was good to her after her way, and she was fond of her.

"We must ask her to come, you know. You write. Say I thought *you* would have a better chance of prevailing. She won't, you know; and so much the better."

So as the Baronet rose, and stood gloomily with his back to the fire; the young lady rose also, and ran away to the drawingroom and her desk; and almost at the same moment a servant entered the room, with a letter, which had come by the late post.

Oddly enough, it had the Slowton postmark.

"Devilish odd!" exclaimed Sir Jekyl, scowling eagerly on it; and seating himself hastily on the side of a chair, he broke it open and read at the foot the autograph, "Guy Strangways."

It was with the Napoleonic thrill, "I have them, then, these English!" that Sir Jekyl read, in a gentlemanlike, rather foreign hand, a ceremonious and complimentary acceptance of his invitation to Marlowe, on behalf both of the young man and of his elder companion. His correspondent could not say exactly, as their tour was a little desultory, where a note would find them; but as Sir Jekyl Marlowe had been so good as to permit them to name a day for their visit, they would say so and so.

"Let me see — what day's this — why, that will be" — he was counting with the tips of his fingers, pianowise, on the table— "Wednesday week, eh?" and he tried it over again with nature's "Babbage's machine" and of course with an inflexible result. "Wednesday week — Wednesday," and he heaved a great sigh, like a man with a load taken off him.

"Well, I'm devilish glad. I hope nothing will happen to stop them now. It can't be a *ruse* to get quietly off the ground? No — that would be doing it too fine." He rang the bell.

"I want Mrs. Gwynn."

The Baronet's spirit revived within him, and he stood erect, with his back to the fire, and his hands behind him, and when the housekeeper entered, he received her with his accustomed smile.

"Glad to see you, Donnie. Glass of sherry? No — well, sit down — won't take a chair! — why's that? Well, we'll be on pleasanter terms soon — you'll find it's really no choice of mine. I can't help using that stupid green room. Here are two more friends coming — not till Wednesday week though — two gentlemen. You may put them in rooms beside one another — wherever you like — only not in the garrets, of course. *Good* rooms, do ye see."

"And what's the gentlemen's names, please, Sir Jekyl," inquired Mrs. Gwynn.

"Mr. Strangways, the young gentleman; and the older, as well as I can read it, is Mr. Varbarriere."

"Thank ye, sir."

The housekeeper having again declined the kindly distinction of a glass of sherry, withdrew.

In less than a week guests began to assemble, and in a few days more old Marlowe Hall began to wear a hospitable and pleasant countenance.

The people were not, of course, themselves all marvels of agreeability. For instance, Sir Paul Blunket, the great agriculturist and eminent authority on liquid manures, might, as we all know, be a little livelier with advantage. He is short and stolid; he wears a pale blue muslin neck-handkerchief with a white stripe, carefully tied. His countenance, I am bound to say, is what some people would term heavy — it is frosty, painfully shaven, and shines with a glaze of transparent soap. He has small, very light blue round eyes, and never smiles. A joke always strikes him with unaffected amazement and suspicion. Laughter he knows may imply ridicule, and he may himself possibly be the subject of it. He waits till it subsides, and then talks on as before on subjects which interest him.

Lady Blunket, who accompanies him everywhere, though not tall, is stout. She is delicate, and requires nursing; and, for so confirmed an invalid, has a surprising appetite. John Blunket, the future baronet, is in the Diplomatic Service, I forget exactly where, and by no means young; and lean Miss Blunket, at Marlowe with her parents, though known to be older than her brother, is still quite a girl, and giggles with her partner at dinner, and is very *naïve* and animated, and sings arch little chansons discordantly to the guitar, making considerable play with her eyes, which are black and malignant.

This family, though neither decorative nor entertaining, being highly respectable and ancient, make the circuit of all the good houses in the county every year, and are wonderfully little complained of. Hither also they had brought in their train pretty little Mrs. Maberly, a cousin, whose husband, the Major, was in India — a garrulous and goodhumoured siren, who smiled with pearly little teeth, and blushed easily.

At Marlowe had already assembled several single gentlemen too. There was little Tom Linnett, with no end of money and spirits, very goodnatured, addicted to sentiment, and with a taste for practical joking too, and a very popular character notwithstanding.

Old Dick Doocey was there also, a colonel long retired, and well known at several crack London clubs; tall, slight, courtly, agreeable, with a capital elderly wig, a little deaf, and his handsome high nose a little reddish. Billy Cobb — too, a gentleman who could handle a gun, and knew lots about horses and dogs — had arrived.

Captain Drayton had arrived: a swell, handsome, cleverish, and impertinent, and, as young men with less reason will be, egotistical. He would not have admitted that he had deigned to make either plan or exertion with that object, but so it happened that he was placed next to Miss Beatrix, whom he carelessly entertained with agreeable ironies, and anecdotes, and sentiments poetic and perhaps a little vapid. On the whole, a young gentleman of intellect, as well as wealth and expectations, and who felt, not unnaturally, that he was overpowering. Miss Beatrix, though not quite twenty, was *not* overpowered, however, neither was her heart preoccupied. There was, indeed, a shadow of another handsome young gentleman — only a shadow, in a different style — dark, and this one light; and she heart-whole, perhaps fancy-free, amused, delighted, the world still new and only begun to be explored. One London season she had partly seen, and also made her annual tour twice or thrice of all the best county-houses, and so was not nervous among her peers.

CHAPTER IX.

Dinner.

Of the two guests destined for the green chamber, we must be permitted to make special mention.

General and Lady Jane Lennox had come. The General, a tall, soldier-like old gentleman, who held his bald and pink, but not very high forehead, erect, with great grey projecting moustache, twisted up at the corners, and bristling grey eyebrows to correspond, over his frank round grey eyes — a gentleman with a decidedly military bearing, imperious but kindly of aspect, goodnatured, prompt, and perhaps a little stupid.

Lady Jane — everybody knows Lady Jane — the most admired of London belles for a whole season. Golden brown hair, and what young Thrumly of the Guards called, in those exquisite lines of his, "slumbrous eyes of blue," under very long lashes and exquisitely-traced eyebrows, such brilliant lips and teeth, and such a sweet oval face, and above all, so beautiful a figure and wonderful a waist, might have made one marvel how a lady so well qualified for a title, with noble blood, though but a small *dot*, should have wrecked herself on an old general, though with eight thousand a year. But there were stories and reasons why the simple old officer, just home from India, who knew nothing about London lies, and was sure of his knighthood, and it was said of a baronetage, did not come amiss.

There were people who chose to believe these stories, and people who chose to discredit them. But General Lennox never had even heard them; and certainly, it seemed nobody's business to tell him now. It might not have been quite pleasant to tell the General. He was somewhat muddled of apprehension, and slow in everything but fighting; and having all the oldfashioned notions about hair-triggers, and "ten paces," as the proper ordeal in a misunderstanding, people avoided uncomfortable topics in his company, and were for the most part disposed to let well alone.

Lady Jane had a will and a temper; but the General held his ground firmly. As brave men as he have been henpecked; but somehow he was not of the temperament which will submit to be bullied even by a lady; and as he was indulgent and easily managed, that tactique was the line she had adopted. Lady Jane was not a riant beauty. Luxurious, funeste, sullen, the mystery and melancholy of her face was a relief among the smirks and simpers of the ball-room, and the novelty of the style interested for a time even the *blazé* men of twenty seasons.

Several guests of lesser note there were; and the company had sat down to dinner, when the Reverend Dives Marlowe, rector of the succulent family living of Queen's Chorleigh, made his appearance in the parlour, a little to the surprise of his brother the Baronet, who did not expect him quite so soon.

The Rector was a tall man and stalwart, who had already acquired that convex curve which indicates incipient corpulence, and who, though younger than his brother, looked half a dozen years his senior. With a broad bald forehead, projecting eyebrows, a large coarse mouth, and with what I may term the rudiments of a double chin — altogether an ugly and even repulsive face, but with no lack of energy and decision — one looked with wonder from this gross, fierce, clerical countenance to the fine outlines and proportions of the Baronet's face, and wondered how the two men could really be brothers.

The cleric shook his brother's hand in passing, and smiled and nodded briefly here and there, right and left, and across the table his recognition, and chuckled a harsher chuckle than his brother's, as he took his place, extemporized with the quiet legerdemain of a consummate butler by Ridley; and answered in a brisk, abrupt voice the smiling inquiries of friends.

"Hope you have picked up an appetite on the way, Dives," said the Baronet. Dives generally carried a pretty good one about with him. "Good air on the way, and pretty good mutton here, too — my friends tell me."

"Capital air — capital mutton — capital fish," replied the ecclesiastic, in a brisk, businesslike tone, while being a man of nerve, he got some fish, although that esculent had long vanished, and even the entrées had passed into history, and called over his shoulder for the special sauces which his soul loved, and talked, and compounded his condiments with energy and precision.

The Rector was a shrewd and gentlemanlike, though not a very pretty, apostle, and had made a sufficient toilet before presenting himself, and snapped and gobbled his fish, in a glossy, single-breasted coat, with standing collar; a ribbed silk waistcoat, covering his ample chest, almost like a cassock, and one of those transparent muslin dog-collars which High Churchmen affect.

"Well, Dives," cried Sir Jekyl, "how do the bells ring? I gave them a chime, poor devils" (this was addressed to Lady Blunket at his elbow), "by way of compensation, when I sent them Dives."

"Pretty well; they don't know how to pull 'em, I think, quite," answered Dives, dabbing a bit of fish in a pool of sauce, and punching it into shape with his bit of bread. "And how is old Parson Moulders?" continued the Baronet, pleasantly.

"I haven't heard," said the Hector, and drank off half his glass of hock.

"Can't believe it, Dives. Here's Lady Blunket knows. He's the aged incumbent of Droughton. A devilish good living in my gift; and of course you've been asking how the dear old fellow is."

"I haven't, upon my word; not but I ought, though," said the Rev. Dives Marlowe, as if he did not see the joke.

"He's very severe on you," simpered fat Lady Blunket, faintly, across the table, and subsided with a little cough, as if the exertion hurt her.

"Is he? Egad! I never perceived it." The expression was not clerical, but the speaker did not seem aware he had uttered it. "How dull I must be! Have you ever been in this part of the world before, Lady Jane?" continued he, turning towards General Lennox's wife, who sat beside him.

"I've been to Wardlock, a good many years ago; but that's a long way from this, and I almost forget it," answered Lady Jane, in her languid, haughty way.

"In what direction is Wardlock," she asked of Beatrix, raising her handsome, unfathomable eyes for a moment.

"You can see it from the bow-window of your room — I mean that oddly-shaped hill to the right."

"That's from the green chamber," said the Rector. "I remember the view. Isn't it?"

"Yes. They have put Lady Jane in the haunted room," said Beatrix, smiling and nodding to Lady Jane.

"And what fool, pray, told you that," said the Baronet, perhaps just a little sharply.

"Old Gwynn seems to think so," answered Beatrix, with the surprised and frightened look of one who fancies she has made a blunder. "I — of course we know it is all folly."

"You must not say that — you shan't disenchant us," said Lady Jane. "There's nothing I should so like as a haunted room; it's a charming idea — isn't it, Arthur?" she inquired of the General.

"We had a haunted room in my quarters at Puttypoor," observed the General, twiddling the point of one of his moustaches. "It was the store-room where we kept pickles, and olives, and preserves, and plates, and jars, and glass bottles. And every night there was a confounded noise there; jars, and bottles, and things tumbling about, made a devil of a row, you know. I got Smith — my servant Smith, you know, a very respectable man — uncommon steady fellow, Smith — to watch, and he did. We kept the door closed, and Smith outside. I gave him half-a-crown a night and his supper — very well for Smith, you know. Sometimes he kept a light, and sometimes I made him sit in the dark with matches ready."

"Was not he very much frightened?" asked Beatrix, who was deeply interested in the ghost.

"I hope you gave him a smelling-bottle?" inquired Tom Linnett, with a tender concern.

"Well, I don't suppose he was," said the General, smiling goodhumouredly on pretty Beatrix, while he loftily passed by the humorous inquiry of the young gentleman. "He was, in fact, on dooty, you know; and there were occasional noises and damage done in the store-room — in fact, just the same as if Smith was not there."

"Oh, possibly Smith himself among the bottles!" suggested Linnett.

"He always got in as quick as he could," continued the General; "but could not see anyone. Things were broken — bottles sometimes."

"How very strange," exclaimed Beatrix, charmed to hear the tale of wonder.

"We could not make it out; it was very odd, you know," resumed the narrator.

"*You* weren't frightened, General?" inquired Linnett.

"*No*, sir," replied the General, who held that a soldier's courage, like a lady's reputation, was no subject for jesting, and conveyed that sentiment by a slight pause, and a rather alarming stare from under his fierce grey eyebrows. “No one was frightened, I suppose; we were all men in the house, sir.”

“At home, I think, we’d have suspected a rat or a cat,” threw in the Rector.

“Some did, sir,” replied the General; “and we made a sort of a search; but it wasn’t. There was a capital tiled floor, not a hole you could put a ramrod in; and no cat, neither — high windows, grated; and the door always close; and every now and then something broken by night.”

“Delightful! That’s what Mrs. Crowe, in that charming book, you know, “The Night Side of Nature,” calls, I forget the name; but it’s a German word, I think — the noisy ghost it means. Racket — something, isn’t it, Beet?” (the short for Beatrix). “I do so *devour* ghosts!” cried sharp old Miss Blunket, who thought Beatrix’s enthusiasm became her; and chose to exhibit the same pretty fanaticism.

“I didn’t *say* it was a ghost, mind ye,” interposed the General, with a grave regard for his veracity; “only we were puzzled a bit. There *was* something there we all knew; and something that could reach up to the high shelves, and break things on the floor too, you see. We had been watching, off and on, I think, some three or four weeks, and I heard one night, early, a row in the store-room — a devil of a row it was; but Smith was on dooty, as we used to say, that night, so I left it to him; and he could have sung out, you know, if he wanted help — poor fellow! And in the morning my native fellow told me that poor Smith was dead in the store-room; and, egad! so he was, poor fellow!”

“How awful!” exclaimed Beatrix.

And Miss Blunket, in girlish horror, covered her fierce black eyes with her lank fingers.

“A bite of a cobra, by Jove! above the knee, and another on the hand. A fattish fellow, poor Smith, the natives say they go faster — that sort of man; but no one can stand a fair bite of a cobra — I defy you. We killed him after.”

“What! *Smith?*” whispered Linnett in his neighbour’s ear.

“He lay in a basket; you never saw such a brute,” continued the General; “he was very near killing another of my people.”

“So *there* was your ghost?” said Doocey, archly.

“Worse than a ghost,” observed Sir Paul Blunket.

“A dooced deal,” acquiesced the General gravely.

“You’re very much annoyed with vermin out there in India?” remarked Sir Paul.

“So we are, sir,” agreed the General.

“It’s very hard, you see, to meet with a genuine ghost, Miss Marlowe; they generally turn out impostors,” said Doocey.

“I should like to think my room was haunted,” said Lady Jane.

“Oh! *dear* Lady Jane, how *can* you be so *horribly* brave?” cried Miss Blunket.

“We have no cobras here, at all events,” said Sir Paul, nodding to Sir Jekyl, with the gravity becoming such a discovery.

“No,” said Sir Jekyl, gloomily. I suppose he was thinking of something else.

The ladies now floated away like summer clouds, many-tinted, golden, through the door, which Doocey held gracefully open; and the mere mortals of the party, the men, stood up in conventional adoration, while the divinities were translated, as it were, before their eyes, and hovered out of sight and hearing into the resplendent regions of candelabra and mirrors, nectar and ambrosia, tea and plumcake, and clouds of silken tapestry, and the musical tinkling of their own celestial small-talk.

CHAPTER X.

Inquiries have been made by Messrs, Pelter and Crowe.

Before repairing to bed, such fellows, young or old, as liked a talk and a cigar, and some sherry — or, by'r lady, brandy and water — were always invited to accompany Sir Jekyl to what he termed the back settlement, where he bivouacked among deal chairs and tables, with a little camp-bed, and plenty of wax candles and a brilliant little fire.

Here, as the Baronet smoked in his homely little "hut," as he termed it, after his guests had dispersed to their bedrooms, the Rev. Dives Marlowe that night knocked at the door, crying, "May I come in, Jekyl?"

"Certainly, dear Dives."

"You really mean it?"

"Never was parson so welcome."

"By Jove!" said the Rector, "it's later than I thought — you're sure I don't bore you."

"Not sure, but you *may*, Dives," said Sir Jekyl, observing his countenance, which was not quite pleasant. "Come in, and say your say. Have a weed, old boy?"

"Well, well — a — we're alone. I don't mind — I don't generally — not that there's any harm; but some people, very good people, object — the weaker brethren, you know."

"Consummate asses, we call them; but weaker brethren, as you say, does as well."

The Rector was choosing and sniffing out a cigar to his heart's content.

"Milk for babes, you know," said the Rector, making his preparations. "Strong meats— "

"And strong cigars; but you'll find these as mild as you please. Here's a match."

The Rector sat down, with one foot on the fender, and puffed away steadily, looking into the fire; and his brother, at the opposite angle of the fender, employed himself similarly.

“Fine old soldier, General Lennox,” said the cleric, at last. “What stay does he make with you?”

“As long as he pleases. Why?” said Sir Jekyl.

“Only he said something tonight in the drawingroom about having to go up to town to attend a Board of the East India Directors,” answered the parson.

“Oh, did he?”

“And I think he said the day after tomorrow. I thought he told you, perhaps.”

“Upon my life I can’t say — perhaps he did,” said Sir Jekyl, carelessly. “Lennox is a wonderful fine old fellow, as you say, but a little bit slow, you know; and his going or staying would not make very much difference to me.”

“I thought he told his story pretty well at dinner — that haunted room and the cobra, you remember,” said the Rector.

The Baronet grunted an assent, and nodded, without removing his cigar. The brothers conducted their conversation, not looking on one another, but each steadily into the grate.

“And, apropos of haunted rooms, Lady Jane mentioned they are in the green chamber,” continued the Rector.

“Did she? I forgot — so they are, I think,” answered the Baronet.

Here they puffed away in silence for some time.

“You know, Jekyl, about that room? Poor Amy, when she was dying, made you promise — and you did promise, you know — and she got me to promise to remind you to shut it up; and then, you know, my father wished the same,” said the Rector.

“Come, Dives, my boy, somebody has been poking you up about this. You have been hearing from my old motherin-law, or talking to her, the goosey old shrew!”

“Upon my honour!” said the Rector, solemnly resting the wrist of his cigar-hand upon the black silk vest, and motioning his cheroot impressively, “you are quite mistaken. One syllable I have not heard from Lady Alice upon the subject, nor, indeed, upon any other, for two months or more.”

“Come, come, Dives, old fellow, you’ll not come the inspired preacher over me. Somebody’s been at you, and if it was not poor old Lady Alice it was stupid old Gwynn. You need not deny it — ha! ha! ha! your speaking countenance proclaims it, my dear boy."

"I'm not thinking of denying it. Old Donica Gwynn did write to me," said the pastor.

"Let me see her note?" said Sir Jekyl.

"I threw it in the fire; but I assure you there was nothing in it that would or could have vexed you. Nothing, in fact, but an appeal to me to urge you to carry out the request of poor Amy, and not particularly well spelt or written, and certainly not the sort of thing I should have liked anyone to see but ourselves, so I destroyed it as soon as I had read it."

"I'd like to have known what the plague could make you come here two days — of course I'm glad to see you — two days before you intended, and what's running in your mind."

"Nothing in particular — nothing, I assure you, but this. I'm certain it will be talked about — it will — the women will talk. You'll find there will be something very unpleasant; take my advice, my dear Jekyl, and just do as you promised. My poor father wished it, too — in fact, directed it, and — and it ought to be done — you know it ought."

"Upon my soul I know no such thing. I'm to pull down my house, I suppose, for a sentiment? What the plague harm does the room to anybody? It doesn't hurt me, nor you."

"It may hurt *you* very much, Jekyl."

"I can't see it; but if it does, that's my affair," said Sir Jekyl, sulkily.

"But, my dear Jekyl, surely you ought to consider your promise."

"Come, Dives, no preaching. It's a very good trade, I know, and I'll do all I can for you in it; but I'm no more to be humbugged by a sermon than you are. Come! How does the dog I sent you get on? Have you bottled the pipe of port yet, and how is old Moulders, as I asked you at dinner? Talk of shooting, eating and drinking, and making merry, and getting up in your profession — by-the-bye, the Bishop is to be here in a fortnight, so manage to stay and meet him. Talk of the port, and the old parson's death, and the tithes small and great, and I'll hear you with respect, for I shall know you are speaking of things you understand, and take a real interest in; but pray don't talk any more about that stupid old room, and the stuff and nonsense these women connect with it; and, once for all, believe me when I say I have no notion of making a fool of myself by shutting up or pulling down a room which we want to use — I'll do no such thing," and Sir Jekyl clenched the declaration with an oath, and chucking the stump of his cigar into the fire, stood up with his back to it, and looked down on his clerical Mentor, the very impersonation of ungodly obstinacy.

"I had some more to say, Jekyl, but I fancy you don't care to hear it."

"Not a word of it," replied the Baronet.

"That's enough for me," said the parson, with a wave of his hand, like a man who has acquitted himself of a duty.

"And how soon do you say the Bishop is to be here?" he inquired, after a pause.

"About ten days, or *less* — egad! I forget," answered Sir Jekyl, still a good deal ruffled.

The Rector stood up also, and hummed something like "Rule Britannia" for a while. I am afraid he was thinking altogether of himself by this time, and suddenly recollecting that he was not in his own room, he wished his brother goodnight, and departed.

Sir Jekyl was vexed. There are few things so annoying, when one has made up his mind to a certain course, as to have the unavowed misgivings and evil auguries of one's own soul aggravated by the vain but ominous dissuasions of others.

"I wish they'd keep their advice to themselves. What hurry need there be? Do they want me to blow up the room with old Lennox and his wife in it? I don't care twopence about it. It's a gloomy place." Sir Jekyl was charging the accidental state of his own spirits upon the aspect of the place, which was really handsome and cheerful, though antique.

"They're all in a story, the fools! What is it to me? I don't care if I never saw it again. They may pull it down after Christmas, if they like, for me. And Dives, too, the scamp, talking pulpit. He thinks of nothing but side-dishes and money. As worldly a dog as there is in England!"

Jekyl Marlowe could get angry enough on occasion, but he was not prone to sour tempers and peevish humours. There was, however, just now, something to render him uncomfortable and irritable, and that was that his expected guests, Mr. Guy Strangways and M. Varbarriere had not kept tryste. The day appointed for their visit had come and gone, and no appearance made. In an ordinary case a hundred and fifty accidents might account for such a miscarriage; but there was in this the unavowed specialty which excited and sickened his mind, and haunted his steps and his bed with suspicions; and he fancied he could understand a little how Herod felt when he was mocked of the wise men.

Next morning's postbag brought Sir Jekyl two letters, one of which relieved, and the other rather vexed him, though not very profoundly. This latter was from his motherin-law, Lady Alice, in reply to his civil note, and much to his surprise, accepting his invitation to Marlowe.

"Cross-grained old woman! She's coming, for no reason on earth but to vex me. It shan't though. I'll make her most damnably welcome. We'll amuse her till she has not a leg to stand on; we'll take her an excursion every second day, and bivouac on the side of a mountain, or in the bottom of a wet valley. We'll put the young ponies to the phaeton, and Dutton shall run them away with her. I'll get up theatricals, and balls, and concerts; and I'll have breakfast at nine instead of ten. I'll entertain her with a vengeance, egad! We'll see who'll stand it longest."

A glance at the foot of the next letter, which was a large document, on a bluish sheet of letter-paper, showed him what he expected, the official autograph of Messrs. Pelter and Crowe; it was thus expressed —

"My dear Sir Jekyl Marlowe, —

"Pursuant to yours of the — th, and in accordance with the instructions therein contained, we have made inquiries, as therein directed, in all available quarters, and have received answers to our letters, and trust that the copies thereof, and the general summary of the correspondence, which we hope to forward by this evening's post, will prove satisfactory to you. The result seems to us clearly to indicate that your information has not been well founded, and that there has been no movement in the quarter to which your favour refers, and that no member — at all events no prominent member — of that family is at present in England. In further execution of your instructions, as conveyed in your favour as above, we have, through a reliable channel, learned that Messrs. Smith, Rumsey, and Snagg, have nothing in the matter of Deverell at present in their office. Nor has there been, we are assured, any correspondence from or on the part of any of those clients for the last five terms or more. Notwithstanding, therefore, the coincidence of the date of your letter with the period to which, on a former occasion, we invited your attention, as indicated by the deed of 1809— "

"What the plague is that?" interpolated Sir Jekyl. "They want me to write and ask, and pop it down in the costs;" and after a vain endeavour to recall it, he read the passage over again with deliberate emphasis.

"Notwithstanding, therefore, the coincidence of the date of your letter with the period to which, on a former occasion, we invited your attention, as indicated by the deed of 1809, we are clear upon the evidence of the letters, copies of which will be before you as above by next post, that there is no ground for supposing any unusual activity on the part or behalf of the party or parties to whom you have referred.

"Awaiting your further directions,
"I have the honour to remain,
"My dear Sir Jekyl Marlowe,
"Your obedient servant,
"N. Crowe.
"For Pelter and Crowe.

"Sir Jekyl Marlowe, Bart.
"Marlowe, Old Swayton."

When Sir Jekyl read this he felt all on a sudden a dozen years younger. He snapped his fingers, and smiled, in spite of himself. He could hardly bring himself to acknowledge, even in soliloquy, how immensely he was relieved. The sun shone delightfully: and his spirits returned quite brightly. He would have liked to cricket, to ride a steeplechase — anything that would have breathed and worked him well, and given him a fair occasion for shouting and cheering.

CHAPTER XI.

Old Gryston Bridge.

Very merry was the Baronet at the social breakfast-table, and the whole party very gay, except those few whose natures were sedate or melancholic.

“A tremendous agreeable man, Sir Jekyl — don’t you think so, Jennie?” said General Lennox to his wife, as he walked her slowly along the terrace at the side of the house.

“I think him intolerably noisy, and sometimes absolutely vulgar,” answered Lady Jane, with a languid disdain, which conveyed alike her estimate of her husband’s discernment and of Sir Jekyl’s merits.

“Well, I thought he was agreeable. Some of his jokes I think, indeed, had not much sense in them. But sometimes I don’t see a witty thing as quick as cleverer fellows do, and they were all laughing, except you; and I don’t think you like him, Jennie.”

“I don’t dislike him. I dare say he’s a very worthy soul; but he gives me a headache.”

“He *is* a little bit noisy, maybe. Yes, he certainly *is*,” acquiesced the honest General, who in questions of taste and nice criticism, was diffident of his own judgment, and leaned to his wife’s. “But I thought he was rather a pleasant fellow. I’m no great judge; but I like to see fellows laughing, and that sort of thing. It looks goodhumoured, don’t you think?”

“I hate goodhumour,” said Lady Jane.

The General, not knowing exactly what to say next, marched by her side in silence, till Lady Jane let go his arm, and sat down on the rustic seat which commands so fine a view, and, leaning back, eyed the landscape with a dreamy indolence, as if she was going to “cut” it.

The General scanned it with a military eye, and his reconnoitering glance discerned, coming up the broad walk at his right, their host, with pretty Mrs. Maberly on his arm, doing the honours plainly very agreeably.

On seeing the General and Lady Jane, he smiled, quickened his pace, and raised his hat.

“So glad we have found you,” said he. “Charming weather, isn’t it? *You* must determine, Lady Jane, what’s to be done to-day. There are two things you really ought to see — Gryston Bridge and Hazelden Castle. I assure you the great London artists visit both for studies. We’ll take our luncheon there, it’s such a warm, bright day — that is, if you like the plan — and, which do you say?”

“My husband always votes for me. What does Mrs. Maberly say?” and Lady Jane looked in her face with one of her winning smiles.

“Yes, what does Mrs. Maberly say?” echoed the General, gallantly.

“So you won’t advise?” said the Baronet, leaning toward Lady Jane, a little reproachfully.

“I won’t advise,” she echoed, in her indolent way.

“Which is the best?” inquired Mrs. Maberly, gleefully. “What a charming idea!”

“For my part, I have a headache, you know, Arthur — I told you, dear; and I shall hardly venture a long excursion, I think. What do you advise to-day?”

“Well, I think it might do you good — hey? What do *you* say, Sir Jekyl?”

“So very sorry to hear Lady Jane is suffering; but I really think your advice, General Lennox — it’s so very fine and mild — and I think it might amuse Lady Jane;” and he glanced at the lady, who, however, wearing her bewitching smile, was conversing with Mrs. Maberly about a sweet little white dog, with long ears and a blue ribbon, which had accompanied her walk from the house.

“Well, dear, Sir Jekyl wants to know. What do you say?” inquired the General.

“Oh, pray arrange as you please. I dare say I can go. It’s all the same,” answered Lady Jane, without raising her eyes from silvery little Bijou, on whom she bestowed her unwonted smiles and caresses.

“You belong to Beatrix, you charming little fairy — I’m sure you do; and is not it very wicked to go out with other people without leave, you naughty little truant?”

“You must not attack her so. She really loves Beatrix; and though she has come out just to take the air with me, I don’t think she cares twopence about me; and I know I don’t about her.”

"What a cruel speech!" cried pretty Mrs. Maberly, with a laugh that showed her exquisite little teeth.

"The *fact* is cruel — if you will — not the speech — for she can't hear it," said Sir Jekyl, patting Bijou.

"So they *act* love to your face, poor little dog, and say what they please of you behind your back," murmured Lady Jane, soothingly, to little Bijou, who wagged his tail and wriggled to her feet. "Yes, they do, poor little dog!"

"Well, I shall venture — may I? I'll order the carriages at one. And we'll say Gryston Bridge," said Sir Jekyl, hesitating notwithstanding, inquiry plainly in his countenance.

"Sir Jekyl's waiting, dear," said General Lennox, a little imperiously.

"I really don't care. *Yes*, then," she said, and, getting up, she took the General's arm and walked away, leaving Mrs. Maberly and her host to their *tête-à-tête*.

Gryston Bridge is one of the prettiest scenes in that picturesque part of the country. A river slowly winds its silvery way through the level base of a beautifully irregular valley. No enclosure breaks the dimpling and undulating sward — for it is the common of Gryston — which rises in soft pastoral slopes at either side, forming the gentle barriers of the valley, which is closed in at the further end by a bold and Alpine hill, with a base rising purple and domelike from the plain; and in this perspective the vale of Gryston diverges, and the two streams, which at its head unite to form the slow-flowing current of the Greet, are lost to sight. Trees of nature's planting here and there overhang its stream, and others, solitarily or in groups, stud the hillsides and the soft green plain. A strange row of tall, gray stones, Druidic or monumental, of a bygone Cyclopean age, stand up, timeworn and mysterious, on a gentle slope, with a few bending thorn and birch trees beside them, in the near distance; and in the foreground, the steep, Gothic bridge of Gretford, or Gryston, spans the river, with five tall arches, and a loopholed gatehouse, which once guarded the pass, now roofless and ruined.

In this beautiful and sequestered scene the party from Marlowe had loitered away that charming afternoon. The early sunset had been rapidly succeeded by twilight, and the moon had surprised them. The servants were packing up hampers of plates and knives and forks, and getting the horses to for the return to Marlowe; while, in the early moonlight a group stood upon the bridge, overlooking from the battlement the sweet landscape in its changing light.

Sir Jekyl could see that Captain Drayton was by Beatrix's side, and concluded, rightly, I have no doubt, that his conversation was tinted by the tender lights of that romantic scenery.

"The look back on this old bridge from those Druidic stones there by moonlight is considered very fine. It is no distance — hardly four hundred steps from this — although it looks so misty," said the Baronet to Lady Jane, who leaned on his arm. "Suppose we make a little party, will you venture?"

I suppose the lady acquiesced, for Sir Jekyl ordered that the carriages should proceed round by the road, and take them up at the point where these Druidic remains stand.

The party who ventured this little romantic walk over the grass, were General Lennox, in charge of the mature Miss Blunket, who loved a frolic with all her girlish heart; Sir Jekyl, with Lady Jane upon his arm; and Captain Drayton, who escorted Beatrix. Marching gaily, in open column, as the General would have said, they crossed the intervening hollow, and reached the hillock, on which stand these ungainly relics of a bygone race; and up the steep bank they got, each couple as best they could. Sir Jekyl and Lady Jane, for he knew the ground, by an easy path, were first to reach the upper platform.

Sir Jekyl, I dare say, was not very learned about the Druids, and I can't say exactly what he was talking about, when on a sudden he arrested both his step and his sentence, for on one of these great prostrate stones which strew that summit, he saw standing, not a dozen steps away, well illuminated by the moon, the figure of that very Guy Strangways, whom he so wished and hated to see — whom he had never beheld without such strange sensations, and had not expected to see again.

The young man took no note of them apparently. He certainly did not recognise Sir Jekyl, whose position placed his face in the shade, while that of Mr. Strangways was full in the white light of the moon.

They had found him almost in the act of descending from his pedestal; and he was gone in a few moments, before the Baronet had recovered from his surprise.

The vivid likeness which he bore to a person whom the Baronet never wished to think of, and the suddenness of his appearance and his vanishing, had reimpressed him with just the same secret alarms and misgivings as when first he saw him; and the serene confidence induced by the letter of Messrs. Pelter and Crowe was for a moment demolished. He dropped Lady Jane's arm, and forgetting his chivalry, strode to the brow of the hillock, over which the mysterious young man had disappeared. He had lost sight of him, but he emerged in a few seconds, about fifty yards away, from behind a screen of thorn, walking swiftly toward the road close by, on which stood a chaise, sharp in the misty moonlight.

Just in time to prevent his shouting after the figure, now on the point of reentering the vehicle, he recollected and checked himself. Confound the fellows, if they did not appreciate his hospitality, should he run after them; or who were they that he should care a pin about them? Had he not Pelter and Crowe's letter? And suppose he did overtake and engage the young rogue in talk, what could he expect but a parcel of polite lies. Certainly, under the circumstances, pursuit would have been specially undignified; and the Baronet drew himself up on the edge of the eminence, and cast a haughty half-angry look after the young gentleman, who was now stepping into the carriage; and suddenly he recollected how very ill he had treated Lady Jane, and he hastened to rejoin her.

But Sir Jekyl, in that very short interval, had lost something of his spirits. The sight of that young man had gone far to undo the tranquillising effect of his attorneys' letter. He would not have cared had this unchanged phantom of the past and his hoary mentor been still in England, provided it were at a distance. But here they were, on the confines of his property, within a short drive of Marlowe, yet affecting to forget his invitation, his house, and himself, and detected prowling in its vicinity like spies or poachers by moonlight. Was there not something insidious in this? It was not for nothing that so well-bred a person as that young man thus trampled on all the rules of courtesy for the sake of maintaining his incognito, and avoiding the obligations of hospitality.

So reasoned Sir Jekyl Marlowe, and felt himself rapidly relapsing into that dreamy and intense uneasiness, from which for a few hours he had been relieved.

"A thousand apologies, Lady Jane," cried he, as he ran back and proffered his arm again. "I was afraid that fellow might be one of a gang — a very dangerous lot of rogues — poachers, I believe. There were people robbed here about a year ago, and I quite forgot when I asked you to come. I should never have forgiven myself — so selfishly forgetful — never, had you been frightened."

Sir Jekyl could, of course, tell fibs, especially by way of apology, as plausibly as other men of the world. He had here turned a negligence skilfully into a gallantry, and I suppose the lady forgave him.

The carriages had now arrived at the bend of this pretty road; and our Marlowe friends got in, and the whole cortège swept away merrily towards that old mansion. Sir Jekyl had been, with an effort, very lively all the way home, and assisted Lady Jane to the ground, smiling, and had a joke for General Lennox as he followed; and a very merry party mustered in the hall, prattling, laughing, and lighting their candles, to run upstairs and dress for a late dinner.

CHAPTER XII.

The Strangers appear again.

Sir Jekyl was the last of the party in the hall; and the last joke and laugh had died away on the lobby above him, and away fled his smiles like the liveries and brilliants of Cinderella to the region of illusions, and black care laid her hand on his shoulder and stood by him.

The bland butler, with a grave bow, accosted him in mild accents —

“The two gentlemen, sir, as you spoke of to Mrs. Sinnott, has arrived about five minutes before you, sir; and she has, please sir, followed your directions, and had them put in the rooms in the front, as you ordered, sir, should be kept for them, before Mrs. Gwynn left.”

“*What* two gentlemen?” demanded Sir Jekyl, with a thrill. “Mr. Strangways and M. Varbarriere?”

“Them, sir, I think, is the names — Strangways, leastways, I am sure on, ‘aving lived, when young, with a branch of the Earl of Dilbury’s family, if you please, sir — which Strangways is the name.”

“A good-looking young gentleman, tall and slight, eh?”

“Yes, sir; and a heavy gentleman haccompanies him — something in years — a furriner, as I suppose, and speaking French or Jarmin; leastways, it is not English.”

“Dinner in twenty minutes,” said Sir Jekyl, with the decision of the Duke of Wellington in action; and away he strode to his dressing-room in the back settlements, with a quick step and a thoughtful face.

“I shan’t want you, Tomlinson, you need not stay,” said he to his man; but before he let him go, he asked carelessly a word or two about the new guests, and learned, in addition to what he already knew, nothing but that they had brought a servant with them.

“So much the worse,” thought Sir Jekyl; “those confounded fellows hear everything, and poke their noses everywhere. I sometimes think that rascal, Tomlinson, pries about here.”

And the Baronet, half-dressed, opened the door of his study, as he called it, at the further end of his homely bedchamber, and looked round.

It is or might be a comfortable room, of some five-and-twenty feet square, surrounded by bookshelves, as homely as the style of the bedroom, stored with volumes of the “Annual Register,” “Gentleman’s Magazine,” and “Universal History” sort — long rows in dingy gilding — moved up here when the old library of Marlowe was broken up. The room had a dusty air of repose about it. A few faded pieces of oldfashioned furniture, which had probably been quartered here in genteel retirement, long ago, when the principal sitting-rooms were undergoing a more modern decoration.

Here Sir Jekyl stood with a sudden look of dejection, and stared listlessly round on the compact wall of books that surrounded him, except for the one door-case, that through which he had entered, and the two windows, on all sides. Sir Jekyl was in a sort of collapse of spirits. He stepped dreamily to the far shelf and took down a volume of Old Bailey Reports, and read the back of it several times, then looked round once more dejectedly, and blew the top of the volume, and wondered at the quantity of dust there, and replacing it, heaved a deep sigh. Dust and death are old associations, and his thoughts were running in a gloomy channel.

“Is it worth all this?” he thought. “I’m growing tired of it — utterly. I’m half sorry I came here; perhaps they are right. It might be a devilish good thing for me if this rubbishy old house were burnt to the ground — and I in it, by Jove! ‘Out, out, brief candle!’ What’s that Shakspeare speech?— ‘A tale told by an idiot — a play played by an idiot’ — egad! I don’t know why I do half the things I do.”

When he looked in the glass he did not like the reflection.

“Down in the mouth — hang it! this will never do,” and he shook his curls, and smirked, and thought of the ladies, and bustled away over his toilet; and when it was completed, as he fixed in his jewelled wrist-buttons, the cold air and shadow of his good or evil angel’s wing crossed him again, and he sighed. Capricious were his moods. Our wisdom is so frivolous, and our frivolities so sad. Is there time here to think out anything completely? Is it possible to hold by our conclusions, or even to remember them long? And this trifling and suffering are the woof and the warp of an eternal robe — wedding garment, let us hope — maybe winding-sheet, or — toga molesta.

Sir Jekyl, notwithstanding his somewhat interrupted toilet, was in the drawingroom before many of his guests had assembled. He hesitated for a moment at the door, and turned about with a sickening thrill, and walked to the table in the outer hall, or vestibule, where the postbag lay. He had no object in this countermarch, but to postpone for a second or two the meeting with the gentlemen whom, with, as he sometimes fancied, very questionable prudence, he had invited under his roof.

And now he entered, frank, gay, smiling. His eyes did not search, they were, as it were, smitten instantaneously with a sense of pain, by the image of the young man, so handsome, so peculiar, sad, and noble, the sight of whom had so moved him. He was conversing with old Colonel Doocey, at the further side of the fireplace. In another moment Sir Jekyl was before him, his hand very kindly locked in his.

“Very happy to see you here, Mr. Strangways.”

“I am very much honoured, Sir Jekyl Marlowe,” returned the young gentleman, in that low sweet tone which he also hated. “I have many apologies to make. We have arrived two days later than your note appointed; but an accident— “

“Pray, not a word — your appearance here is the best compensation you can make me. Your friend, Monsieur Varbarriere, I hope— “

“My uncle — yes; he, too, has the honour. Will you permit me to present him? Monsieur Varbarriere,” said the young man, presenting his relative.

A gentleman at this summons turned suddenly from General Lennox, with whom he had been talking; a high-shouldered, portly man, taller a good deal when you approached him than he looked at first; his hair, “all silvered,” brushed up like Louis Philippe’s, conically from his forehead; grey, heavily projecting eyebrows, long untrimmed moustache and beard; altogether a head and face which seemed to indicate that combination of strong sense and sensuality which we see in some of the medals of Roman Emperors; a forehead projecting at the brows, and keen dark eyes in shadow, observing all things from under their grizzled penthouse; these points, and a hooked nose, and a certain weight and solemnity of countenance, gave to the large and rather pallid aspect, presented suddenly to the Baronet, something, as we have said, of the character of an old magician. Voluminous plaited black trousers, slanting in to the foot, foreshadowed the peg-top of more recent date; a loose and long black velvet waistcoat, with more gold chain and jewellery generally than Englishmen are accustomed to wear, and a wide and clumsy black coat, added to the broad and thick-set character of his figure.

As Sir Jekyl made his complimentary speech to this gentleman, he saw that his steady and shrewd gaze was attentively considering him in a way that a little tried his patience; and when the stranger spoke it was in French, and in that peculiar metallic diapason which we sometimes hear among the Hebrew community, and which brings the nasals of that tongue into sonorous and rather ugly relief.

"England is, I dare say, quite new to you, Monsieur Varbarriere?" inquired Sir Jekyl.

"I have seen it a very long time ago, and admire your so fine country very much," replied the pallid and bearded sage, speaking in French still, and in those bell-like tones which rang and buzzed unpleasantly in the ear.

"You find us the same foggy and tasteless islanders as before," said the host. "In art, indeed, we have made an advance; *there*, I think, we have capabilities, but we are as a people totally deficient in that fine decorative sense which expresses itself so gracefully and universally in your charming part of the world."

When Sir Jekyl talked of France, he was generally thinking of Paris.

"We have our barbarous regions, as you have; our vineyards are a dull sight after all, and our forest trees you, with your grand timber, would use for broomsticks."

"But your capital; why every time one looks out at the window it is a fillip to one's spirits. To me, preferring France so infinitely, as I do," said Sir Jekyl, replying in his guest's language, "it appears a mystery why any Frenchman, who can help it, ever visits our dismal region."

The enchanter here shrugged slowly, with a solemn smile.

"No wonder our actions are mysterious to others, since they are so often so to ourselves."

"You are best acquainted with the south of France?" said Sir Jekyl, without any data for such an assumption, and saying the reverse of what he suspected.

"Very well with the south; pretty well, indeed, with most parts."

Just at this moment Mr. Ridley's bland and awful tones informed the company that dinner was on the table, and Sir Jekyl hastened to afford to Lady Blunket the support of his vigorous arm into the parlour.

It ought to have been given to Lady Jane; but the Blunket was a huffy old woman, and, on the score of a very decided seniority, was indulged.

Lady Blunket was not very interesting, and was of the Alderman's opinion, that conversation prevents one's tasting the green fat; Sir Jekyl had, therefore, time, with light and careless glances, to see pretty well, from time to time, what was going on among his guests. Monsieur Varbarriere had begun to interest him more than Mr. Guy Strangways, and his eye oftener reviewed that ponderous and solemn face and form than any other at the table. It seemed that he liked his dinner, and attended to his occupation. But though taciturn, his shrewd eyes glanced from time to time on the host and his guests with an air of reserved observation that showed his mind was anything but sluggish during the process. He looked wonderfully like some of those enchanters whom we have seen in illustrations of Don Quixote.

"A deep fellow," he thought, "an influential fellow. That gentleman knows what he's about; that young fellow is in his hands."

CHAPTER XIII.

In the DrawingRoom.

Sir Jekyl heard snatches of conversation, sometimes here, sometimes there.

Guy Strangways was talking to Beatrix, and the Baronet heard him say, smiling —

"But you don't, I'm sure, believe in the elixir of life; you only mean to mystify us." He was looking more than ever — identical with that other person, whom it was not pleasant to Sir Jekyl to be reminded of — horribly like, in this white waxlight splendour.

"But there's another process, my uncle, Monsieur Varbarriere, says, by slow refrigeration: you are first put to sleep, and in that state frozen; and once frozen, without having suffered death, you may be kept in a state of suspended life for twenty or thirty years, neither conscious, nor growing old; arrested precisely at the point of your existence at which the process was applied, and at the same point restored again whenever for any purpose it may be expedient to recall you to consciousness and activity."

One of those restless, searching glances which the solemn, portly old gentleman in black directed, from time to time, as he indulged his taciturn gulosity, lighted on the Baronet at this moment, and Sir Jekyl felt that they exchanged an unintentional glance of significance. Each averted his quickly; and Sir Jekyl, with one of his chuckles, for the sake merely of saying something, remarked —

"I don't see how you can restore people to life by freezing them."

"He did not speak, I think, of restoring life — did you, Guy?" said the bell-toned diapason of the old gentleman, speaking his nasal French.

"Oh, no — suspending merely," answered the young man.

"To restore life, you must have recourse, I fancy, to a higher process," continued the sage, with an ironical gravity, and his eye this time fixed steadily on Sir Jekyl's; "and I could conceive none more embarrassing to the human race, *under certain circumstances*," and he shrugged slowly and shook his head.

“How delightful! — no more death!” exclaimed enthusiastic Miss Blunket.

“Embarrassing, of course, I mean, to certain of the survivors.”

This old gentleman was hitting his tenderest points rather hard and often. Was it by chance or design? Who was he?

So thought the Baronet as he smiled and nodded.

“Do you know who that fat old personage is who dresses like an undertaker and looks like a Jew?” asked Captain Drayton of Beatrix.

“I think he is a relative of Mr. Strangways.”

“And who is Mr. Strangways?”

“He’s at my right, next me,” answered she in a low tone, not liking the very clear and distinct key in which the question was put.

But Captain Drayton was not easily disconcerted, being a young gentleman of a bold and rather impertinent temperament, and he continued leaning back in his chair and looking dreamily into his hock-glass.

“Not a friend of yours, is he?”

“Oh, no.”

“Really — not a friend. You’re *quite* certain?”

“Perfectly. We never saw either — that is, papa met them at some posting place on his way from London, and invited them; but I think he knows nothing more.”

“Well, I did not like to say till I knew, but I think him — the old fellow — I have not seen the young man — a most vulgar-looking old person. He’s a wine-jobber, or manager of a factory, or something. You never saw — I know Paris by heart — you *never saw* such a thing in gentlemanly society there.”

And the young lady heard him say, *sotto voce*, “Brute!” haughtily to himself, as an interjection, while he just raised the fingertips of the hand which rested on the table, and let them descend again on the snowy napery. The subject deserved no more troublesome gesture.

“And where is the young gentleman?” asked Captain Drayton, after a little interval.

Beatrix told him again.

“Oh! *That’s* he! Isn’t his French very bad — did it strike you? Bad *accent* — I can tell in a moment. That’s not an accent one hears anywhere.”

Oddly enough, Sir Jekyl at the same time, with such slight interruptions as his agreeable attentions to Lady Blunket imposed, was, in the indistinct way in which such discussions are mentally pursued, observing upon the peculiarities of his two new guests, and did not judge them amiss.

The elder was odd, take him for what country you pleased. Bearded like a German, speaking good French, with a good accent, but in the loud full tones of a Spaniard, and with a quality of voice which resounds in the synagogue, and a quietude of demeanour much more English than continental. His dress, such as I have described it, fine in material, but negligent and easy, though odd. Reserved and silent he was, a little sinister perhaps, but his bearing unconstrained and gracious when he spoke. There was, indeed, that odd, watchful glance from under his heavy eyebrows, which, however, had nothing sly, only observant, in it. Again he thought, "Who could he be?" On the whole, Sir Jekyl was in nowise disposed to pronounce upon him as Captain Drayton was doing a little way down the table; nor yet upon Guy Strangways, whom he thought, on the contrary, an elegant young man, according to French notions of the gentlemanly, and he knew the French people a good deal better than the youthful Captain did.

The principal drawingroom of Marlowe is a very large apartment, and people can talk of one another in it without any risk of detection.

"Well, Lady Jane," said the Baronet, sitting down before that handsome woman, and her husband the General, so as to interrupt a conjugal *tête-à-tête*, probably a particularly affectionate one, for he was to leave for London next day. "I saw you converse with Monsieur Varbarriere. What do you think of him?"

"I don't think I conversed with him — did I? He talked to me; but I really did not take the trouble to think about him."

The General laughed triumphantly, and glanced over his shoulder at the Baronet. He liked his wife's contempt for the rest of the sex, and her occasional — *only* occasional — enthusiasm for him.

"Now you are much too clever, Lady Jane, to be let off so. I really want to know something about him, which I don't at present; and if anyone can help me to a wise conjecture, you, I am certain, can."

"And don't you really know who he is?" inquired General Lennox, with a haughty military surprise.

“Upon my honour, I have not the faintest idea,” answered Sir Jekyl. “He may be a cook or a rabbi, for anything I can tell.”

The General’s white eyebrows went some wrinkles up the slanting ascent of his pink forehead, and he plainly looked his amazement that Lady Jane should have been subjected at Marlowe to the risk of being accosted on equal terms by a cook or a rabbi. His lips screwed themselves unconsciously into a small o, and his eyes went in search of the masquerading menial.

“We had a cook,” said the General, still eyeing M. Varbarriere, “at Futtychur, a French fellow, fat like that, but shorter — a capital cook, by Jove! and a very gentlemanly man. He wore a white cap, and he had a very good way of stewing tomatas and turkeys, I think it was, and — yes it was — and a monstrous gentlemanlike fellow he was; rather too expensive though; he cost us a great deal,” and the General winked slyly. “I had to speak to him once or twice. But an uncommon gentlemanlike man.”

“He’s not a cook, my dear. He may be a banker, perhaps,” said Lady Jane, languidly.

“You have exactly hit my idea,” said Sir Jekyl. “It was his knowing all about French banking, General, when you mentioned that trick that was played you on the Bourse.”

At this moment the massive form and face of M. Varbarriere was seen approaching with Beatrix by his side. They were conversing, but the little group we have just been listening to dropped the discussion of M. Varbarriere, and the Baronet said that he hoped General Lennox would have a fine day for his journey, and that the moon looked particularly bright and clear.

“I want to show Monsieur Varbarriere the drawings of the house, papa; they are in this cabinet. He admires the architecture very much.”

The large enchanter in black made a solemn bow of acquiescence here, but said nothing and Beatrix took from its nook a handsome red-leather portfolio, on the side of which, in tall golden letters, were the words —

VIEWS AND ELEVATIONS
OF
MARLOWE MANOR HOUSE.
PAULO ABRUZZI,

ARCHITECT.
1711.

“Capital drawing, I am told. He was a young man of great promise,” said Sir Jekyl, in French. “But the style is quite English, and, I fear, will hardly interest an eye accustomed to the more graceful contour of southern continental architecture.”

“Your English style interests me very much. It is singular, and suggests hospitality, enjoyment, and mystery.”

Monsieur Varbarriere was turning over these tinted drawings carefully.

“Is not that very true, papa — hospitality, enjoyment, mystery?” repeated Beatrix. “I think that faint character of mystery is so pleasant. We have a mysterious room here.” She had turned to M. Varbarriere.

“Oh, a dozen,” interrupted Sir Jekyl. “No end of ghosts and devils, you know. But I really think you excel us in that article. I resided for five weeks in a haunted house once, near Havre, and the stories were capital, and there were some very good noises too. We must get Dives to tell it by-and-by; he was younger than I, and more frightened.”

“And Mademoiselle says you have a haunted apartment here,” said the ponderous foreigner with the high forehead and projecting brows.

“Yes, of course. We are very much haunted. There is hardly a crooked passage or a dark room that has not a story,” said Sir Jekyl. “Beatrix, why don’t you sing us a song, by-the-bye?”

“May I beg one other favour first, before the crowning one of the song?” said M. Varbarriere, with an imposing playfulness. “Mademoiselle, I am sure, tells a story well. Which, I entreat, is the particular room you speak of?”

“We call it the green chamber,” said Beatrix.

“The green chamber — what a romantic title!” exclaimed the large gentleman in black, graciously; “and where is it situated?” he pursued.

“We must really put you into it,” said Sir Jekyl.

“Nothing I should like so well,” he observed, with a bow.

“That is, of course, whenever it is deserted. You have not been plagued with apparitions, General? Even Lady Jane — and there are no ghost-seers like ladies, I’ve observed — has failed to report anything horrible.”

His hand lay on the arm of her chair, and, as he spoke, for a moment pressed hers, which, not choosing to permit such accidents, she, turning carelessly and haughtily toward the other speakers, slipped away.

CHAPTER XIV.

Music.

“And pray, Mademoiselle Marlowe, in what part of the house is this so wonderful room situated?” persisted the grave and reverend signor.

“Quite out of the question to describe to one who does not already know the house,” interposed Sir Jekyl. “It is next the six-sided dressing-room, which opens from the hatchment gallery — that is its exact situation; and I’m afraid I have failed to convey it,” said Sir Jekyl, with one of his playful chuckles.

The Druidic-looking Frenchman shrugged and lifted his fingers with a piteous expression of perplexity, and shook his head.

“Is there not among these drawings a view of the side of the house where this room lies?” he inquired.

“I was looking it out,” said Beatrix.

“I’ll find it, Trixie. Go you and sing us a song,” said the Baronet.

“I’ve got them both, papa. Now, Monsieur Varbarriere, here they are. This is the front view — this is the side.”

“I am very much obliged,” said Monsieur examining the drawings curiously. “The room recedes. This large bow-window belongs to it. Is it not so? — wide room? — how long? You see I want to understand everything. Ah! yes, here is the side view. It projects from the side of the older building, I see. How charming! And this is the work of the Italian artist? The style is quite novel — a mixture partly Florentine — really very elegant. Did he build anything more here?”

“Yes, a very fine row of stables, and a temple in the grounds,” said Sir Jekyl. “You shall see them tomorrow.”

“The chamber green. Yes, very clever, very pretty;” and having eyed them over again carefully, he said, laying them down —

“A curious as well as a handsome old house, no doubt. Ah! very curious, I dare say,” said the sage Monsieur Varbarriere. “Are there here the ground plans?”

"We have them somewhere, I fancy, among the title-deeds, but none here," said Sir Jekyl, a little stiffly, as if it struck him that his visitor's curiosity was a trifle less ceremonious than, all things considered, it might be.

Pretty Beatrix was singing now to her own accompaniment; and Captain Drayton, twisting the end of his light moustache, stood haughtily by her side. The music in his ear was but a half-heard noise. Indeed, although he had sat out operas innumerable, like other young gentlemen, who would sit out as many hours of a knife-grinder's performance, or of a railway whistle, if it were the fashion, had but an imperfect recollection of the airs he had paid so handsomely to hear, and was no authority on music of any sort.

Now Beatrix was pretty — more than pretty. Some people called her lovely. She sang in that rich and plaintive contralto — so rare and so inexplicably moving — the famous "Come Gentil," from Don Pasquale. When she ceased, the gentleman at her other side, Guy Strangways, sighed — not a complimentary — a real sigh.

"That is a wonderful song, the very spirit of a serenade. Such distance — such gaiety — such sadness. Your Irish poet, Thomas Moore, compares some spiritual music or kind voice to sunshine spoken. This is *moonlight* — moonlight *sung*, and *so* sung that I could dream away half a life in listening, and yet sigh when it ceases."

Mr. Guy Strangway's strange, dark eyes looked full on her, as with an admiring enthusiasm he said these words.

The young lady smiled, looking up for a moment from the music-stool, and then with lowered eyes again, and that smile of gratification which is so beautiful in a lovely girl's face.

"It is quite charming, really. I'm no musician, you know; but I enjoy good music extravagantly, especially singing," said Captain Drayton. "I don't aspire to talk sentiment and that kind of poetry." He was, perhaps, near using a stronger term— "a mere John Bull; but it *is*, honestly, charming."

He had his glass in his eye, and turned back the leaf of the song to the title-page.

"Don Pasquale — yes. Sweet opera that. How often I have listened to Mario in it! But never, Miss Marlowe, with more real pleasure than to the charming performance I have just heard."

Captain Drayton was not making his compliment well, and felt it somehow. It was clumsy — it was dull — it was meant to override the tribute offered by Guy Strangways, whose presence he chose, in modern phrase, to ignore; and yet he felt that he had, as he would have expressed it, rather "put his foot in it;" and, with just a little flush in his cheek and rather angry eyes, he stooped over the piano and read the Italian words half aloud.

"By-the-bye," he said, suddenly recollecting a topic, "what a sweet scene that is of Gryston Bridge? Have you ever been to see it before?"

"Once since we came, we rode there, papa and I," answered Miss Marlowe. "It looked particularly well this evening — quite beautiful in the moonlight."

"Is it possible, Miss Marlowe, that *you* were there this evening? I and my uncle stopped on our way here to admire the exquisite effect of the steep old bridge, with a wonderful foreground of Druidic monuments, as they seemed to me."

"Does your father preserve that river?" asked Captain Drayton, coolly pretermitting Mr. Strangways altogether.

"I really don't know," she replied, in a slight and hurried way that nettled the Captain; and, turning to Guy Strangways, she said, "Did you see it *from* the bridge?"

"No, Mademoiselle; from the mound in which those curious stones are raised," answered Mr. Strangways.

Captain Drayton felt that Miss Marlowe's continuing to talk to Mr. Strangways, while *he* was present and willing to converse, was extremely offensive, choosing to entertain a low opinion in all respects of that person. He stooped a little forward, and stared at the stranger with that illbred gaze of insolent surprise which is the peculiar weapon of Englishmen, and which very distinctly expresses, "who the devil are you?"

Perhaps it was fortunate for the harmony of the party that just at this moment, and before Captain Drayton could say anything specially impertinent, Sir Jekyl touched Drayton on the shoulder, saying —

"Are you for whist?"

"No, thanks — I'm no player."

"Oh! Mr. Strangways — I did not see — do *you* play?"

Mr. Strangways smiled, bowed, and shook his head.

"Drayton, did I present you to Mr. Strangways?" and the Baronet made the two young gentlemen technically known to one another — though, of course, each knew the other already.

They bowed rather low, and a little haughtily, neither smiling. I suppose Sir Jekyl saw something a little dangerous in the countenance of one at least of the gentlemen as he approached, and chose to remind them, in that agreeable way, that he was present, and wished them acquainted, and of course friendly.

He had now secured old Colonel Doocey to make up his party — the sober old Frenchman and Sir Paul Blunket making the supplementary two; and before they had taken their chairs round the card-table, Captain Drayton said, with a kind of inclination rather insolent than polite —

"You are of the Dilbury family, of course? I never knew a Strangways yet — I mean, of course, a Strangways such as one would be likely to meet, you know — who was not."

"You know one now, sir; for I am not connected ever so remotely with that distinguished family. My family are quite another Strangways."

"No doubt quite as respectable," said Captain Drayton, with a bow, a look, and a tone that would have passed for deferential with many; but which, nevertheless, had the subtle flavour of an irony in it.

"Perhaps more so; my ancestors are the Strangways of Lynton; you are aware they had a peerage down to the reign of George II."

Captain Drayton was not as deep as so fashionable and moneyed a man ought to have been in extinct peerages, and therefore he made a little short supercilious bow, and no answer. He looked drowsily toward the ceiling, and then —

"The Strangways of Lynton are on the Continent or something — one does not hear of them," said Captain Drayton, slightly but grandly. "We are the Draytons of Drayton Forest, in the same county."

"Oh! then my uncle is misinformed. He thought that family was extinct, and lamented over it when we saw the house and place at a distance."

Captain Drayton coloured a little above his light yellow moustache. He was no Drayton, but a remotely collateral Smithers, with a queen's letter constituting him a Drayton.

"Aw — yes — it is a fine old place — quite misinformed. I can show you our descent if you wish it."

If Drayton had collected his ideas a little first he would not have made this condescension.

“Your descent is high and pure — *very* high, I assume — mine is only respectable — presentable, as you say, but by no means so high as to warrant my inquiring into that of other people.”

“Inquiry! of course. I did not say inquiry,” and with an effort Captain Drayton almost laughed.

“Nothing more dull,” acquiesced Mr. Strangways slightly.

Both gentlemen paused — each seemed to expect something from the other — each seemed rather angrily listening for it. The ostensible attack had all been on the part of the gallant Captain, who certainly had not been particularly well bred. The Captain, nevertheless, felt that Mr. Strangways knew perfectly all about Smithers, and that Smithers really had not one drop of the Drayton blood in his veins; and he felt in the sore and secret centre of his soul that the polished, handsome young gentleman, so easy, so graceful, with that suspicion of a foreign accent and of foreign gesture, had the best of the unavowed battle. He had never spoken a word or looked a look in the course of this little dialogue which could have suggested an idea of altercation, or any kind of mutual unpleasantness, to the beautiful young girl; who, with one hand on the keys of the piano, touched them so lightly with her fingers as to call forth a dream of an air rather than the air itself.

To her Guy Strangways turned, with his peculiar smile — so winning, yet so deep — an enigmatic smile that had in it a latent sadness and fierceness, and by its very ambiguousness interested one.

“I upbraid myself for losing these precious moments while you sit here, and might, perhaps, be persuaded to charm us with another song.”

So she was persuaded; Captain Drayton still keeping guard, and applauding, though with no special goodwill toward the unoffending stranger.

The party broke up early. The ladies trooped to their bedroom candles and ascended the great staircase, chatting harmoniously, and bidding mutual sweet goodnights as in succession they reached their doors. The gentlemen, having sat for awhile lazily about the fire, or gathered round the tray whereon stood sherry and seltzer water, repaired also to the cluster of bedchamber candlesticks without, and helped themselves, talking together in like sociable manner.

“Would you like to come to my room and have a cigar, Monsieur Varbarriere?” asked the Baronet in French.

Monsieur was much obliged, and bowed very suavely, but declined.

“And you, Mr. Strangways?”

He also, with many thanks, a smile and a bow, declined.

“My quarters are quite out of reach of the inhabited part of the house — not very far from two hundred feet from this spot, by Jove! right in the rear. You must really come to me there some night; you’ll be amused at my deal furniture and rustic barbarism; we often make a party there and smoke for half an hour.”

So, as they were not to be persuaded, the Baronet hospitably accompanied them to their rooms, at the common dressing-room door of which stood little Jacque Duval with his thin, bronzed face, candle in hand, bowing, to receive his master.

CHAPTER XV.

M. Varbarriere converses with his Nephew.

Here then Sir Jekyl bid them goodnight, and descended the great staircase, and navigated the long line of passage to the back stairs leading up to his own homely apartment.

The elder man nodded to Jacque, and moved the tips of his fingers towards the door — a silent intimation which the adroit valet perfectly understood; so, with a cheerful bow, he withdrew.

There was a gay little spluttering fire in the grate, which the sharpness of the night made very pleasant. The clumsy door was shut, and the room had an air of comfortable secrecy which invited a talk.

It was not to come, however, without preparation. He drew a chair before the fire, and sat down solemnly, taking a gigantic cigar from his case, and moistening it diligently between his lips before lighting it. Then he pointed to a chair beside the hearth, and presented his cigar-case to his young companion, who being well versed in his elder's ways, helped himself, and having, like him, foreign notions about smoking, had of course no remorse about a cigar or two in their present quarters.

Up the chimney chiefly whisked the narcotic smoke. Over the ponderous features and knotted forehead of the sage flushed the uncertain light of the fire, revealing all the crows' feet — all the lines which years, thought, passion, or suffering had traced on that large, sombre, and somewhat cadaverous countenance, reversing oddly some of its shadows, and glittering with a snakelike brightness on the eyes, which now gazed grimly into the bars under their heavy brows.

The large and rather flat foot, shining in French leather, of the portly gentleman in the ample black velvet waistcoat, rested on the fender, and he spoke not a word until his cigar was fairly smoked out and the stump of it in the fire. Abruptly he began, without altering his pose or the direction of his gaze.

"You need not make yourself more friendly with any person here than is absolutely necessary."

He was speaking French, and in a low tone that sounded like the boom of a distant bell.

Young Strangways bowed acquiescence.

"Be on your guard with Sir Jekyl Marlowe. Tell him *nothing*. Don't let him be kind to you. He will have no kind motive in being so. Fence with his questions — don't answer them. Remember he is an artful man without any scruple. I know him and all about him."

M. Varbarriere spoke each of these little sentences in an isolated way, as a smoker might, although he was no longer smoking, between his puffs. "Therefore, not a word to him — no obligations — no intimacy. If he catches you by the hand, even by your little finger, in the way of friendship, he'll cling to it, so as so impede your *arm*, should it become necessary to exert it."

"I don't understand you, sir," said the young man, in a deferential tone, but looking very hard at him.

"You *partly* don't understand me; the nature of my direction, however, is clear. Observe it strictly."

There was a short silence here.

"I don't understand, sir, what covert hostility can exist between us; that is, why I should, in your phrase, keep my hand free to exert it against him."

"No, I don't suppose you do."

"And I can't help regretting that, if such are our possible relations, I should find myself as a guest under his roof," said the young man, with a pained and almost resentful look.

"You can't help regretting, and — you can't help the circumstance," vibrated his Mentor, in a metallic murmur, his cadaverous features wearing the same odd character of deep thought and apathy.

"I don't know, with respect to *him* — I know, however, how it has affected me — that I have felt unhappy, and even guilty since this journey commenced, as if I were a traitor and an impostor," said the young man, with a burst of impatience.

"Don't, sir, use phrases which reflect back upon *me*," said the other, turning upon him with a sudden sternness. "All you have done is by my direction."

The ample black waistcoat heaved and subsided a little faster than before, and the imposing countenance was turned with pallid fierceness upon the young man.

"I am sorry, uncle."

"So you should — you'll see one day how little it is to me, and how much to you."

Here was a pause. The senior turned his face again toward the fire. The little flush that in wrath always touched his forehead subsided slowly. He replaced his foot on the fender, and chose another cigar.

"There's a great deal you don't see now that you will presently. I did not want to see Sir Jekyl Marlowe any more than you did or do; but I did want to see this place. You'll know hereafter why. I'd rather not have met him. I'd rather not be his guest. Had he been as usual at Dartbroke, I should have seen all I wanted without that annoyance. It is an accident his being here — another, his having invited me; but no false ideas and no trifling chance shall regulate, much less stop, the action of the machine which I am constructing and will soon put in motion."

And with these words he lighted his cigar, and after smoking for a while he lowered it, and said —

"Did Sir Jekyl put any questions to you, with a view to learn particulars about you or me?"

"I don't recollect that he did. I rather think not; but Captain Drayton did."

"I know, *Smithers*?"

"Yes, sir."

"With an object?" inquired the elder man.

"I think not — merely impertinence," answered Guy Strangways.

"You are right — it is nothing to him. I do not know that even Marlowe has a suspicion. Absolutely impertinence."

And upon this M. Varbarriere began to smoke again with resolution and energy.

"You understand, Guy; you may be as polite as you please — but no friendship — nowhere — you must remain quite unembarrassed."

Here followed some more smoke, and after it the question —

"What do you think of the young lady, Mademoiselle Marlowe?"

"She sings charmingly, and for the rest, I believe she is agreeable; but my opportunities have been very little."

"What do you think of our fellow Jacque — is he trustworthy?"

"Perfectly, so far as I know."

"You never saw him peep into letters, or that kind of thing?"

"Certainly not."

"There is a theory which must be investigated, and I should like to employ him. You know nothing against him, nor do I."

"Suppose we go to our beds?" resumed the old gentleman, having finished his cigar.

A door at either side opened from the dressing-room, by whose fire they had been sitting.

"See which room is meant for me — Jacque will have placed my things there."

The young man did as he was bid, and made his report.

"Well, get you to bed, Guy, and remember — no friendships and no follies."

And so the old man rose, and shook his companion's hand, not smiling, but with a solemn and thoughtful countenance, and they separated for the night.

Next morning as the Rev. Dives Marlowe stood in his natty and unexceptionable clerical costume on the hall-door steps, looking with a pompous and, perhaps, a somewhat forbidding countenance upon the morning prospect before him, his brother joined him.

"Early bird, Dives, pick the worm — eh? Healthy and wise already, and wealthy to be. Slept well, eh?"

"Always well here," answered the parson. He was less of a parson and more like himself with Jekyl than with anyone else. His brother was so uncomfortably amused with his clerical airs, knew him so well, and so undisguisedly esteemed him of the earth earthy, that the cleric, although the abler as well as the better read man, always felt invariably a little sheepish before him, in his silk vest and single-breasted coat with the standing collar, and the demi-shovel, which under other eyes he felt to be imposing properties.

"You look so like that exemplary young man in Watt's hymns, in the oldfashioned toggery, Dives — the fellow with the handsome round cheeks, you know, piously saluting the morning sun that's rising with a lot of spokes stuck out of it, don't you remember?"

"I look like something that's ugly, I dare say," said the parson, who had not got up in a good temper. "There never was a Marlowe yet who hadn't ugly points about him. But a young man, though never so ugly, is rather a bold comparison — eh? seeing I'm but two years your junior, Jekyl."

"Bitterly true — every word — my dear boy. But let us be pleasant. I've had a line to say that old Moulders is very ill, and really dying this time. Just read this melancholy little bulletin."

With an air which seemed to say, "well, to please you," he took the note and read it. It was from his steward, to mention that the Rev. Abraham Moulders was extremely ill of his old complaint, and that there was something even worse the matter, and that Doctor Winters had said that morning he could not possibly get over this attack.

"Well, Dives, there is a case of 'sick and weak' for you; you'll have prayers for him at Queen's Chorleigh, eh?"

"Poor old man!" said Dives, solemnly, with his head thrown back, and his thick eyebrows elevated a little, and looking straight before him as he returned the note, "he's very ill, indeed, unless this reports much too unfavourably."

"Too favourably, you mean," suggested the Baronet.

"But you know, poor old man, it is only wonderful he has lived so long. The old people about there say he is eighty-seven. Upon my word, old Jenkins says he told him, two years ago, himself, he was eighty-five; and Doctor Winters, no chicken — just sixty — says his father was in the same college with him, at Cambridge, nearly sixty-seven years ago. You know, my dear Jekyl, when a man comes to that time of life, it's all idle — a mere pull against wind and tide, and everything. It is appointed unto all men once to die, you know, and the natural term is threescore years and ten. All idle — all in vain!"

And delivering this, the Rev. Dives Marlowe shook his head with a supercilious melancholy, as if the Rev. Abraham Moulders' holding out in that way against the inevitable was a piece of melancholy bravado, against which, on the part of modest mortality, it was his sad duty to protest.

Jekyl's cynicism was tickled, although there was care at his heart, and he chuckled.

"And how do you know you have any interest in the old fellow's demise?"

The Rector coughed a little, and flushed, and looked as careless as he could, while he answered —

"I said nothing of the kind; but you have always told me you meant the living for me. I've no reason, only your goodness, Jekyl."

"No goodness at all," said Jekyl, kindly. "You shall have it, of course. I always meant it for you, Dives, and I wish it were better, and I'm very glad, for I'm fond of you, old fellow."

Hereupon they both laughed a little, shaking hands very kindly.

"Come to the stable, Dives," said the Baronet, taking his arm. "You must choose a horse. You don't hunt now?"

"I have not been at a cover for *ten* years," answered the reverend gentleman, speaking with a consciousness of the demi-shovel.

"Well, come along," continued the Baronet. "I want to ask you — let's be serious" (everybody likes to be serious over his own business). "What do you think of these foreign personages?"

"The elder, I should say, an able man," answered Dives; "I dare say could be agreeable. It is not easy to assign his exact rank though, nor his profession or business. You remarked he seems to know something in detail and technically of nearly every business one mentions."

"Yes; and about the young man — that Mr. Guy Strangways, with his foreign accent and manner — did anything strike you about him?"

"Yes, certainly, could not fail. The most powerful likeness, I think, I ever saw in my life."

They both stopped, and exchanged a steady and anxious look, as if each expected the other to say more; and after a while the Rev. Dives Marlowe added, with an awful sort of nod —

"Guy Deverell."

The Baronet nodded in reply.

"Well, in fact, he appeared to me something *more* than like — the same — identical."

"And old Lady Alice saw him in Wardlock Church, and was made quite ill," said the Baronet gloomily. "But you know he's gone these thirty years; and there is no necromancy now-a-days; only I wish you would take any opportunity, and try and make out all about him, and what they want. I brought them here to pump them, by Jove; but that old fellow seems deuced reserved and wary. Only, like a good fellow, if you can find or make an opportunity, you must get the young fellow on the subject — for I don't care to tell you, Dives, I have been devilish uneasy about it. There are things that make me confoundedly uncomfortable; and I have a sort of foreboding it would have been better for me to have blown up this house than to have come here; but ten to one — a hundred to one — there's nothing, and I'm only a fool."

As they thus talked they entered the gate of the stableyard.

CHAPTER XVI.

Containing a Variety of Things.

"Guy Deverell left no issue," said Dives.

"No; none in the world; neither chick nor child. I need not care a brass farthing about any that can't inherit, if there were any; but there isn't one; there's no real danger, you see. In fact, there *can't* be *any* — eh? *I* don't see it. Do *you*? You were a sharp fellow always, Dives. *Can* you see anything threatening in it?"

"*It! What?*" said the Rev. Dives Marlowe. "I see *nothing — nothing whatever — absolutely* nothing. Surely you can't fancy that a mere resemblance, however strong, where there can't possibly be identity, and the fact that the young man's name is Guy, will make a case for alarm!"

"Guy *Strangways*, you know," said Sir Jekyl.

"Well, what of Strangways? I don't see."

"Why, Strangways, you remember, or *don't* remember, was the name of the fellow that was always with — with — that cross-grained muff."

"With Guy Deverell, you mean?"

"Ay, with him that night, and constantly, and abroad I think at those German gaming-places where he played so much."

"I forgot the name. I remember hearing there *was* a person in your company that unlucky night; but you never heard more of him?"

"No, of course; for he owed me a precious lot of money;" and from habit he chuckled, but with something of a frown. "He could have given me a lot of trouble, but so could I him. My lawyers said he could not seriously affect me, but he might have annoyed me; and I did not care about the money, so I did not follow him; and, as the lawyers say, we turned our backs on one another."

"Strangways," murmured the Rector, musingly.

"Do you remember him now?" asked Sir Jekyl.

"No; that is, I'm not sure. I was in orders then though, and could hardly have met him. I am sure I should recollect him if I had. What was he like?"

“A nasty-looking Scotch dog, with freckles — starved and tall — a hungry hound — large hands and feet — as ugly a looking cur as you ever beheld.”

“But Deverell, poor fellow, was a bit of a dandy — wasn’t he? How did he come to choose such a companion?”

“Well, maybe he was not quite as bad as he describes, and his family was good, I believe; but there must have been something more, he hung about him so. Yes, he *was* a most objectionable-looking fellow — so awkward, and not particularly well dressed; but a canny rascal, and knew what he was about. I could not make out what use Deverell made of him, nor exactly what advantage he made of Deverell.”

“I can’t for the life of me, see, Jekyl, anything in it except a resemblance, and that is positively nothing, and a Christian name, that is all, and Guy is no such uncommon one. As for Strangways, he does not enter into it at all — a mere accidental association. Where is that Strangways — is he living?”

“I don’t know now; ten years ago he was, and Pelter and Crowe thought he was going to do me some mischief, a prosecution or something, they thought, to extort money; but I knew they were wrong. I had a reason — at least it was unlikely, because I rather think he had repaid me that money about then. A year or so before a large sum of money was lodged to my account by Herbert Strangways, that was his name, at the International Bank in Lombard Street; in fact it was more than I thought he owed me — interest, I suppose, and that sort of thing. I put Pelter and Crowe in his track, but they could make out nothing. The bank people could not help us. Unluckily I was away at the time and the lodgment was two months old when I heard of it. There were several raw Scotch-looking rascals, they said, making lodgments about then, and they could not tell exactly what sort of fellow made this. I wanted to make out about him. What do you think of it?”

“I don’t see anything suspicious in it. He owed you the money and chose to pay.”

“He was protected by the Statute of Limitations, my lawyer said, and I could not have recovered it. Doesn’t it look odd?”

“Those Scotch fellows.”

“He’s not Scotch, though.”

"Well, whatever he is, if he has good blood he's proud, perhaps, and would rather pay what he owes than not."

"Well, of course, a fellow's glad of the money; but I did not like it; it looked as if he wanted to get rid of the only pull I had on him, and was going to take steps to annoy me, you see."

"That's ten years ago?"

"Yes."

"Well, considering how short life is, I think he'd have moved before now if he had ever thought of it. It is a quarter of a *century* since poor Deverell's time. It's a good while, you know, and the longer you wait in matters of that kind the less your chance;" and with a brisk decision the Rector added, "I'll stake, I think, all I'm worth, these people have no more connection with poor Deverell than Napoleon Bonaparte, and that Strangways has no more notion of moving any matter connected with that unhappy business than he has of leading an Irish rebellion."

"I'm glad you take that view — I know it's the sound one. I knew you *would*. I think it's just a little flicker of gout. If I had taken Vichy on my way back I'd never have thought of it. I've no one to talk to. It's a comfort to see you, Dives. I wish you'd come oftener." And he placed his hand very kindly on his brother's shoulder.

"So I will," said Dives, not without kindness in his eyes, though his mouth was forbidding still. "You must not let chimeras take hold of you. I'm very glad I was here."

"Did you remark that fat, mountainous French fellow, in that cursed suit of black, was very inquisitive about the green chamber?" asked Sir Jekyl, relapsing a little.

"No, I did not hear him mention it; what was it?" asked Dives.

"Well, not a great deal; only he seemed to want to know all about that particular room and its history, just as if there was already something in his head about it."

"Well, I told you, Jekyl," said Dives, in a subdued tone and looking away a little, "you ought to do something decisive about that room, all things considered. If it were mine, I can tell you, I should pull it down — not, of course, in such a way as to make people talk and ask questions, but as a sort of improvement. I'd make a conservatory, or something; you *want* a conservatory, and the building is positively injured by it. It is not the same architecture. You might put something there twice as good. At all events I'd get rid of it."

"So I will — I *intend* — I think you're right — I really do. But it was brought about by little Beatrix talking about haunted rooms, you know, and that sort of nonsense," said Sir Jekyl.

"Oh! then she mentioned it? He only asked questions about what she told him. Surely you're not going to vex yourself about that?"

Sir Jekyl looked at him and laughed, but not quite comfortably.

"Well, I told you, you know, I do believe it's great; and whatever it is, I know, Dives, you've done me a great deal of good. Come, now, I've a horse I think you'll like, and you shall have him; try him to-day, and I'll send him home for you if he suits you."

While the groom was putting up the horse, Sir Jekyl, who was quick and accurate of eye, recognised the dark-faced, intelligent little valet, whom he had seen for a moment, candle in hand, at the dressing-room door, last night, to receive his guests.

With a deferential smile, and shrug, and bow, all at once, this little gentleman lifted his cap with one hand, removing his German pipe with the other.

He had been a courier — clever, active, gay — a man who might be trusted with money, papers, diamonds. Beside his native French, he spoke English very well, and a little German. He could keep accounts, and write a neat little foreign hand with florid capitals. He could mend his own clothes, and even his shoes. He could play the flute a little, and very much the fiddle. He was curious, and liked to know what was taking place. He liked a joke and the dance, and was prone to the tender passion, and liked, in an honest way, a little bit of intrigue, or even espionage. Such a man he was as I could fancy in a light company of that marvellous army of Italy, of which Napoleon I. always spoke with respect and delight.

In the stableyard, as I have said, the Baronet found this dark sprite smoking a German pipe; and salutations having been exchanged, he bid him try instead two of his famous cigars, which he presented, and then he questioned him on tobacco, and on his family, the theatres, the railways, the hotels; and finally Sir Jekyl said,

"I wish you could recollect a man like yourself — I want one confoundedly. I shall be going abroad in August next year, and I'd give him five thousand francs a year, or more even, with pleasure, and keep him probably as long as he liked to stay with me. Try if you can remember such a fellow. Turn it over in your mind — do you see? and I don't care how soon he comes into my service."

The man lifted his cap again, and bowed even lower, as he undertook to "turn it over in his mind;" and though he smiled a great deal, it was plain his thoughts were already seriously employed in turning the subject over, as requested by the Baronet.

Next morning M. Varbarriere took a quiet opportunity, in the hall, of handing to his host two letters of introduction, as they are called — one from the Baronet's old friend, Charteris, attached to the embassy at Paris — a shrewd fellow, a man of the world, amphibious, both French and English, and equally at home on either soil — speaking unmistakably in high terms of M. Varbarriere as of a gentleman very much respected in very high quarters. The other was equally handsome. But Charteris was exactly the man whose letter in such a case was to be relied upon.

The Baronet glanced over these, and said he was very glad to hear from his friend Charteris — the date was not a week since — but laughed at the formality, regretting that he had not a note from Charteris to present in return, and then gracefully quoted an old French distich, the sentiment of which is that "chivalry proclaims itself, and the gentleman is no more to be mistaken than the rose," and proceeded to ask his guest, "How is Charteris — he had hurt his wrist when I saw him last — and is there any truth in the report about his possible alliance with that rich widow?" and so forth.

When Sir Jekyl got into his sanctum I am afraid he read both letters with a very microscopic scrutiny, and he resolved inwardly to write a very sifting note to Charteris, and put it upon him, as an act of friendship, to make out every detail of the past life and adventures of M. Varbarriere, and particularly whether he had any young kinsman, nephew or otherwise, answering a certain description, all the items of which he had by rote.

But writing of letters is to some people a very decided bore. The Baronet detested it, and his anxieties upon these points being intermittent, the interrogatories were not so soon despatched to his friend Charteris.

Old General Lennox was away for London this morning; and his host took a seat beside him in the brougham that was to convey him to the station, and was dropped on the way at the keeper's lodge, when he bid a kind and courteous adieu to his guest, whom he charged to return safe and soon, and kissed his hand, and waved it after the florid smiling countenance and bushy white eyebrows that were protruded from the carriage-window as it glided away.

“You can manage it all in a day or two, can’t you?” said the Baronet, cordially, as he held the General’s wrinkled hand, with its knobby and pink joints, in his genial grasp. “We positively won’t give you more than three days’ leave. Capital shooting when you come back. I’m going to talk it over with the keeper here — that is, if you come back before we’ve shot them all.”

“Oh! yes, hang it, you must leave a bird or two for me,” laughed the General, and he bawled the conclusion of the joke as the vehicle drove away; but Sir Jekyl lost it.

Sir Jekyl was all the happier for his morning’s talk with his brother. An anxiety, if only avowed and discussed, is so immensely lightened; but Dives had scouted the whole thing so peremptorily that the Baronet was positively grateful. Dives was a wise and clear-headed fellow. It was delightful his taking so decided a view. And was it not on reflection manifestly, even to him, the sound view?

CHAPTER XVII.

The Magician Draws a Diagram.

The Baronet approached Marlowe Manor on the side at which the stables and out-offices lie, leaving which to his left, he took his way by the path through the wood which leads to the terrace-walk that runs parallel to the side of the old house on which the green chamber lies.

On this side the lofty timber approaches the walks closely, and the green enclosure is but a darkened strip and very solitary. Here, when Sir Jekyl emerged, he saw M. Varbarriere standing on the grass, and gazing upward in absorbed contemplation of the building, which on the previous evening seemed to have excited his curiosity so unaccountably.

He did not hear the Baronet's approaching step on the grass. Sir Jekyl felt both alarmed and angry; for although it was but natural that his guest should have visited the spot and examined the building, it yet seemed to him, for the moment, like the act of a spy.

"Disappointed, I'm afraid," said he. "I told you that addition was the least worth looking at of all the parts of this otherwise ancient house."

He spoke with a sort of sharpness that seemed quite uncalled for; but it was unnoticed.

M. Varbarriere bowed low and graciously.

"I am much interested — every front of this curious and handsome house interests me. This indeed, as you say, is a good deal spoiled by that Italian incongruity — still it is charming — the contrast is as beautiful frequently as the harmony — and I am perplexed."

"Some of my friends tell me it spoils the house so much I ought to pull it down, and I have a great mind to do so. Have you seen the lake? I should be happy to show it to you if you will permit me."

The Baronet, as he spoke, was, from time to time, slyly searching the solemn and profound face of the stranger; but could find there no clue to the spirit of his investigation. There was no shrinking — no embarrassment — no consciousness. He might as well have looked on the awful surface of the sea, in the expectation of discovering there the secrets of its depths.

M. Varbarriere, with a profusion of gratitude, regretted that he could not just then visit the lake, as he had several letters to write; and so he and his host parted smiling at the hall-door; and the Baronet, as he pursued his way, felt some stirrings of that mental dyspepsia which had troubled him of late.

"The old fellow had not been in the house two hours," such was his train of thought, "when he was on the subject of that green chamber, in the parlour and in the drawingroom — again and again recurring to it; and here he was just now, alone, absorbed, and gazing up at its windows, as if he could think of nothing else!"

Sir Jekyl felt provoked, and almost as if he would like a crisis; and half regretted that he had not asked him— "Pray can I give you any information; is there anything you particularly want to know about that room? question me as you please, you shall see the room — you shall sleep in it if you like, so soon as it is vacant. Pray declare yourself, and say what you want."

But second thoughts are said to be best, if not always wisest; and this brief rehearing of the case against his repose ended in a "dismiss," as before. It was so natural, and indeed inevitable, that he should himself inspect the original of those views which he had examined the night before with interest, considering that, being a man who cared not for the gun or the fishing-rod, and plainly without sympathies with either georgics or bucolics, he had not many other ways of amusing himself in these country quarters.

M. Varbarriere, in the meantime, had entered his chamber. I suppose he was amused, for so soon as he closed the door he smiled with a meditative sneer. It was not a fiendish one, not even moderately wicked; but a sneer is in the countenance what irony is in the voice, and never pleasant.

If the Baronet had seen the expression of M. Varbarriere's countenance as he sat down in his easy-chair, he would probably have been much disquieted — perhaps not without reason.

M. Varbarriere was known in his own neighbourhood as a dark and inflexible man, but with these reservations kind; just in his dealings, bold in enterprise, and charitable, but not on impulse, with a due economy of resource, and a careful measurement of desert; on the whole, a man to be respected and a little feared, but a useful citizen.

Instead of writing letters as, of course, he had intended, M. Varbarriere amused himself by making a careful little sketch on a leaf of his pocketbook. It seemed hardly worth all the pains he bestowed upon it; for, after all, it was but a parallelogram with a projecting segment of a circle at one end, and a smaller one at the side, and he noted his diagram with figures, and pondered over it with a thoughtful countenance, and made, after a while, a little cross at one end of it, and then fell a-whistling thoughtfully, and nodded once or twice, as a thought struck him; and then he marked another cross at one of its sides, and reflected in like manner over this, and as he thought, fiddling with his pencil at the foot of the page, he scribbled the word "hypothesis." Then he put up his pocketbook, and stood listlessly with his hands in the pockets of his vast black trowsers, looking from the window, and whistled a little more, the air hurrying sometimes, and sometimes dragging a good deal, so as to come at times to an actual standstill.

On turning the corner of the mansion Sir Jekyl found himself on a sudden in the midst of the ladies of his party, just descending from the carriages which had driven them round the lake. He was of that gay and gallant temperament, as the reader is aware, which is fired with an instantaneous inspiration at sight of this sort of plumage and flutter.

"What a fortunate fellow am I!" exclaimed Sir Jekyl, forgetting in a moment everything but the sunshine, the gay voices, and the pretty sight before him. "I had laid myself out for a solitary walk, and lo! I'm in the midst of a paradise of graces, nymphs, and what not!"

"We have had such a charming drive round the lake," said gay little Mrs. Maberly.

"The lake never looked so well before, I'm sure. So stocked, at least, with fresh-water sirens and mermaids. Never did mirror reflect so much beauty. An instinct, you see, drew me this way. I assure you I was on my way to the lake; one of those enamoured sprites who sing us tidings in such tiny voices, we can't distinguish them from our own fancies, warbled a word in my ear, only a little too late, I suppose."

The Baronet was reciting his admiring nonsense to pretty Mrs. Maberly, but his eye from time to time wandered to Lady Jane, and rested for a moment on that haughty beauty, who, with downcast languid eyes, one would have thought neither heard nor saw him.

This gallant Baronet was so well understood that every lady expected to hear that kind of tender flattery whenever he addressed himself to the fair sex. It was quite inevitable, and simply organic and constitutional as blackbird's whistle and kitten's play, and, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, I am sure, meant absolutely nothing.

"But those sprites always come with a particular message; don't they?" said old Miss Blunket, smiling archly from the corners of her fierce eyes. "Don't you think so, Mr. Linnett?"

"You are getting quite above me," answered that sprightly gentleman, who was growing just a little tired of Miss Blunket's attentions. "I suppose it's spiritualism. I know nothing about it. What do you say, Lady Jane?"

"I think it very heathen," said Lady Jane, tired, I suppose, of the subject.

"I like to be heathen, now and then," said Sir Jekyl, in a lower key; he was by this time beside Lady Jane. "I'd have been a most pious Pagan. As it is, I can't help worshipping in the Pantheon, and trying sometimes even to make a proselyte."

"Oh! you wicked creature!" cried little Mrs. Maberly. "I assure you, Lady Jane, his conversation is quite frightful."

Lady Jane glanced a sweet, rather languid, sidelong smile at the little lady.

"You'll not get Lady Jane to believe all that mischief of me, Mrs. Maberly. I appeal for my character to the General."

"But he's hundreds of miles away, and can't hear you," laughed little Mrs. Maberly, who really meant nothing satirical.

"I forgot; but he'll be back tomorrow or next day," replied Sir Jekyl, with rather a dry chuckle, "and in the meantime I must do without one, I suppose. Here we are, Mr. Strangways, all talking nonsense, the pleasantest occupation on earth. Do come and help us."

This was addressed to Guy Strangways, who with his brother angler, Captain Doocey, in the picturesque negligence and black wideawakes of fishermen, with baskets and rods, approached.

"Only too glad to be permitted to contribute," said the young man, smiling, and raising his hat.

"And pray permit me, also," said courtly old Doocey. "I could talk it, I assure you, before he was born. I've graduated in the best schools, and was a doctor of nonsense before *he* could speak even a word of sense."

"Not a bad specimen to begin with. Leave your rods and baskets there; some one will bring them in. Now we are so large a party, you must come and look at my grapes. I am told my black Hamburgs are the finest in the world."

So, chatting and laughing, and some in other moods, toward those splendid graperies they moved, from which, as Sir Jekyl used to calculate, he had the privilege of eating black Hamburg and other grapes at about the rate of one shilling each.

"A grapery — how delightful!" cried little Mrs. Maberly.

"I quite agree with you," exclaimed Miss Blunket, who effervesced with a girlish enthusiasm upon even the most difficult subjects. "It is not the grapes, though they are so pretty, and a — bacchanalian — no, I don't mean that — why do you laugh at me so? — but the atmosphere. Don't you love it? it is so like Lisbon — at least what I fancy it, for I never was there; but at home, I bring my book there, and enjoy it so. I call it mock Portugal."

"It has helped to dry her," whispered Linnett so loud in Doocey's ear as to make that courteous old dandy very uneasy.

It was odd that Sir Jekyl showed no sort of discomfort at sight of Guy Strangways on his sudden appearance; a thrill he felt indeed whenever he unexpectedly beheld that handsome and rather singular-looking young man — a most unpleasant sensation — but although he moved about him like a resurrection of the past, and an omen of his fate, he yet grew in a sort of way accustomed to this haunting enigma, and could laugh and talk apparently quite carelessly in his presence. I have been told of men, the victims of a spectral illusion, who could move about a saloon, and smile, and talk, and listen, with their awful tormentor gliding always about them and spying out all their ways.

Just about this hour the clumsy old carriage of Lady Alice Redcliffe stood at her hall-door steps, in the small square courtyard of Wardlock Manor, and the florid iron gates stood wide open, resting on their piers. The coachman's purple visage looked loweringly round; the footman, with his staff of office in hand, leaning on the doorpost, gazed with a peevish listlessness through the open gateway across the road; the near horse had begun to hang his head, and his off-companion had pawed a considerable hole in Lady Alice's nattily-kept gravel enclosure. From these signs one might have reasonably conjectured that these honest retainers, brute and human, had been kept waiting for their mistress somewhat longer than usual.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Another Guest Prepares to Come.

Lady Alice was at that moment in her bonnet and ample black velvet cloak and ermines, and the rest of her travelling costume, seated in her stately parlour, which, like most parlours of tolerably old mansions in that part of the country, is wainscoted in very black oak. In her own way Lady Alice evinced at least as much impatience as her dependants out of doors; she tapped with her foot monotonously upon her carpet; she opened and shut her black shining leather bag, and plucked at and rearranged its contents; she tattooed with her pale prolix fingers on the table; sometimes she sniffed a little; sometimes she muttered. As often as she fancied a sound, she raised her chin imperiously, and with a supercilious fixity, stared at the door until expectation had again expired in disappointment, when she would pluck out her watch, and glancing disdainfully upon it, exclaim —

"Upon my life!" or, "Very pretty behaviour!"

At last, however, the sound of a vehicle — a "fly" it was — unmistakably made itself heard at the hall-door, and her ladyship, with a preparatory shake of her head, as a pugnacious animal shakes its ears, and a "hem," and a severe and pallid countenance, sat up, very high and stiffly, in her chair.

The door opened, and the splendid footman inquired whether her ladyship would please to see Mrs. Gwynn.

"Show her in," said Lady Alice with a high look and an awful quietude.

And our old friend, Donica, just as thin, pallid, and, in her own way, self-possessed, entered the room.

"Well, Donica Gwynn, you've come at *last*! you have kept my horses standing at the door — a thing I never do myself — for three-quarters of an hour and four minutes!"

Donica Gwynn was sorry; but she could not help it. She explained how the delay had occurred, and, though respectful, her explanation was curt and dry in proportion to the sharpness and dryness of her reception.

"Sit down, Donica," said the lady, relenting loftily. "How do you do?"

"Pretty well, I thank your ladyship; and I hope I see *you* well, my lady."

“As well as I can ever be, Donica, and that is but poorly. I’m going, you know, to Marlowe.”

“I’m raything glad on it, my lady.”

“And I wish to know *why*?” said Lady Alice.

“I wrote the why and the wherefore, my lady, in my letter,” answered the ex-house-keeper, looking askance on the table, and closing her thin lips tightly when she had spoken.

“Your letter, my good Donica, it is next to impossible to read, and quite impossible to understand. What I want to know distinctly is, why you have urged me so vehemently to go to Marlowe.”

“Well, my lady, I thought I said pretty plain it was about my Lady Jane, the pretty creature you had on visits here, and liked so well, poor thing; an’ it seemed to me she’s like to be in danger where she is. I can’t explain how exactly; but General Lennox is gone up to London, and I think, my lady, you ought to get her out of that unlucky room, where he has put her; and, at all events, to keep as near to her as you can yourself, at *all* times.”

“I’ve listened to you, Donica, and I can’t comprehend you. I see you are hinting at something; but unless you are explicit, I don’t see that I can be of any earthly use.”

“You can, my lady — that is, you *may*, if you only do as I say — I *can’t* explain it more, nor I *won’t*,” said Donica, peremptorily, perhaps bitterly.

“There can be no good reason, Donica, for reserve upon a point of so much moment as you describe this to be. Wherever reserve exists there is mystery, and wherever mystery — *guilt*.”

So said Lady Alice, who was gifted with a spirit of inquiry which was impatient of disappointment.

“Guilt, indeed!” repeated Gwynn, in an under-key, with a toss of her head and a very white face; “there’s secrets enough in the world, and no guilt along of ‘em.”

“What room is it you speak of — the green chamber, is not it?”

“Yes, sure, my lady.”

“I think you are all crazed about ghosts and devils over there,” exclaimed Lady Alice.

“Not much of ghosts, but devils, maybe,” muttered Gwynn, oddly, looking sidelong over the floor.

“It is that room, you say,” repeated Lady Alice.

"Yes, my lady, the green chamber."

"Well, what about it — come, woman, did not you sleep for years in that room?"

"Ay, my lady, a good while."

"And what did you see there?"

"A deal."

"*What*, I say?"

"Well, supposin' I was to say devils," replied Donica.

Lady Alice sneered.

"What did poor Lady Marlowe see there?" demanded Donica, looking with her odd eyes askance at Lady Alice's carpet, and backing her question with a nod.

"Well, you know I never heard exactly; but my darling creature was, as you remember, dying of a consumption at the time, and miserably nervous, and fancied things, no doubt, as people do."

"Well, she did; I knew it," said Donica.

"You may have conjectured — every one can do that; but I rather think my poor dear Amy would have told *me*, had she cared to divulge it to any living being. I am persuaded she herself suspected it was an illusion — fancy; but I know she had a horror of the room, and I am sure my poor girl's dying request ought to have been respected."

"So it ought, my lady," said Donica, turning up her eyes, and raising her lean hands together, while she slowly shook her head. "So I said to him, and in like manner his own father's dying *orders*, for such they was, my lady; and they may say what they will of Sir Harry, poor gentleman! But he was a kind man, and good to many that had not a good word for him after, though there may a' been many a little thing that was foolish or the like; but there is mercy above for all, and the bishop that is now, then he was the master of the great school where our young gentlemen used to go to, was with him."

"When he was dying?" said Lady Alice.

"Ay, my lady, a beautiful summer it was, and the doctor, nor I, thought it would be nothing to speak of; but he was anxious in his mind from the first, and he wrote for Doctor Wyndale — it was the holidays then — asking him to come to him; and he did, but Sir Harry had took an unexpected turn for the worse, and not much did he ever say, the Lord a' mercy on us, after that good gentleman, he's the bishop now, came to Marlowe, and he prayed by his bed, and closed his eyes; and I, in and out, and wanted there every minute, could not but hear some of what he said, which it was not much."

"He said something about that green chamber, as you call it, I always understood?" said Lady Alice, interrogatively.

"Yes, my lady, he wished it shut up, or taken down, or summat that way; but 'man proposes and God disposes,' and there's small affection and less gratitude to be met with now-a-days."

"I think, Donica Gwynn, and I always thought, that you knew a good deal more than you chose to tell me. Some people are reserved and secret, and I suppose it is your way; but I don't think it could harm you to treat me more as your friend."

Donica rose, and courtesied as she said —

"You have always treated me friendly, I'm sure, my lady, and I hope I am thankful; and this I know, I'll be a faithful servant to your ladyship so long as I continue in your ladyship's service."

"I know that very well; but I wish you were franker with me, that's all — here are the keys."

So Donica, with very little ceremony, assumed the keys of office.

"And pray what *do* you mean exactly?" said Lady Alice, rising and drawing on her glove, and not looking quite straight at the housekeeper as she spoke; "do you mean to say that Lady Jane is giddy or imprudent? Come, be distinct."

"I can't say what she is, my lady, but she may be brought into folly some way. I only know this much, please my lady, it will be good for her you should be nigh, and your eye and thoughts about her, at least till the General returns."

"Well, Gwynn, I see you don't choose to trust me."

"I have, my lady, spoke that free to you as I would not to any other, I think, alive."

"No, Gwynn, you don't trust me; you have your reasons, I suppose; but I think you are a shrewd woman — shrewd and mean well. I don't suppose that you could talk as you do without a reason; and though I can't see any myself, not believing in apparitions or — or— "

She nearly lost the thread of her discourse at this point, for as she spoke the word apparition, the remembrance of the young gentleman whom she had seen in Wardlock Church rose in her memory — handsome, pale, with sealed lips, and great eyes — unreadable as night — the resurrection of another image. The old yearning and horror overpowered the train of her thoughts, and she floundered into silence, and coughed into her handkerchief, to hide her momentary confusion.

"What was I going to say?" she said, briskly, meaning to refer her breakdown to that little fit of coughing, and throwing on Gwynn the onus of setting her speech in motion again.

"Oh! yes. I *don't* believe in those things not a bit. But Jennie, poor thing, though she has not treated me quite as she might, is a young wife, and very pretty; and the house is full of wicked young men from London; and her old fool of a husband chooses to go about his business and leave her to her devices — *that's* what you mean, Gwynn, and that's what I *understand*."

"I have said all I can, my lady; you can help her, and be near her night and day," said Donica.

"Sir Jekyl in his invitation bid me choose my own room — so I shall. I'll choose that oddly-shaped little room that opens into hers — if I remember rightly, the room that my poor dear Amy occupied in her last illness."

"And, my lady, do you take the key of the door, and keep it in your bag, please."

"Of the door of communication between the two rooms?"

"Yes, my lady."

"*Why* should I take it; you would not have me lock her up?"

"Well, no, to be sure, my lady."

"Then *why*?"

"Because there is no bolt to her door, inside or out. You will see what I mean, my lady, when you are there."

"Because she can't secure her door without it, I'm to take possession of her key!" said Lady Alice, with a dignified sneer.

"Well, my lady, it may seem queer, but you'll see what I mean."

Lady Alice tossed her stately head.

"Any commands in particular, please, my lady, before you leave?" inquired Donica, with one of her dry little courtesies.

"No; and I must go. Just hand this pillow and bag to the man; and I suppose you wish your respects to Miss Beatrix?"

To all which, in her own way, Donica Gwynn assented; and the old lady, assisted by her footman, got into the carriage, and nodded a pale and silent farewell to her housekeeper; and away drove the old carriage at a brisk pace toward Marlowe Manor.

CHAPTER XIX.

Lady Alice takes Possession.

What to the young would seem an age; what, even in the arithmetic of the old, counts for something, about seventeen years had glided into the eternal past since last Lady Alice had beheld the antique front and noble timber of Marlowe Manor; and memory was busy with her heart, and sweet and bitter fancies revisiting her old brain, as her saddened eyes gazed on that fair picture of the past. Old faces gone, old times changed, and she, too, but the shadow of her former self, soon, like those whom she remembered there, to vanish quite, and be missed by no one.

"Where is Miss Beatrix?" inquired the old lady, as she set her long slim foot upon the oak flooring of the hall. "I'll rest a moment here." And she sat down upon a carved bench, and looked with sad and dreaming eyes through the open door upon the autumnal landscape flushed with the setting sun, the season and the hour harmonising regretfully with her thoughts.

Her maid came at the summons of the footman. "Tell her that granny has come," said the old woman gently. "*You* are quite well, Jones?"

Jones made her smirk and courtesy, and was quite well; and so tripped up the great stair to apprise her young mistress.

"Tell the new housekeeper, please, that Lady Alice Redcliffe wishes very much to see her for a moment in the hexagon dressing-room at the end of the hatchment-gallery," said the old lady, names and localities coming back to her memory quite naturally in the familiar old hall.

And as she spoke, being an active-minded old lady, she rose, and before her first message had reached Beatrix, was ascending the well-known stairs, with its broad shining steps of oak, and her hand on its ponderous banister, feeling strangely, all in a moment, how much more she now needed that support, and that the sum of the seventeen years was something to her as to others.

On the lobby, just outside this dressing-room door, which stood open, letting the dusky sunset radiance, so pleasant and so sad, fall upon the floor and touch the edges of the distant banisters, she was met by smiling Beatrix.

“Darling!” cried the girl, softly, as she threw her young arms round the neck of the stately and thin old lady. “Darling, darling, I’m so glad!”

She had been living among strangers, and the sight and touch of her true old friend was reassuring.

Granny’s thin hands held her fondly. It was pretty to see this embrace, in the glow of the evening sun, and the rich brown tresses of the girl close to the ashen locks of old Lady Alice, who, with unwonted tears in her eyes, was smiling on her very tenderly. She was softened that evening. Perhaps it was her real nature, disclosed for a few genial moments, generally hidden under films of reserve or pride — the veil of the flesh.

“I think she does like her old granny,” said Lady Alice, with a gentle little laugh; one thin hand on her shoulder, the other smoothing back her thick girlish tresses.

“I do love you, granny; you were always so good to me, and you are so — so *fond* of me. Now, you are tired, darling; you must take a little wine — here is Mrs. Sinnott coming — Mrs. Sinnott.”

“No, dear, no wine; I’m very well. I wish to see Mrs. Sinnott, though. She’s your new housekeeper, is not she?”

“Yes; and I’m so glad poor, good old Donnie Gwynn is with you. You know she would not stay; but our new housekeeper is, I’m told, a very good creature too. Grandmamma wants to speak to you, Mrs. Sinnott.”

Lady Alice by this time had entered the dressing-room, three sides of which, projecting like a truncated bastion, formed a great window, which made it, for its size, the best lighted in the house. In the wall at the right, close to this entrance, is the door which admits to the green chamber; in the opposite wall, but nearer the window, a door leading across the end of the hatchment-gallery, with its large high window, by a little passage, screened off by a low oak partition, and admitting to a bedroom on the opposite side of the gallery.

In the middle of the Window dressing-room stood Lady Alice, and looked round regretfully, and said to herself, with a little shake of the head —

“Yes, yes, poor thing!”

She was thinking of poor Lady Marlowe, whom, with her usual perversity, although a step-daughter, she had loved very tenderly, and who in her last illness had tenanted these rooms, in which, seventeen years ago, this old lady had sat beside her and soothed her sickness, and by her tenderness, no doubt, softened those untold troubles which gathered about her bed as death drew near.

"How do you do, Mrs. Sinnott?" said stately Lady Alice, recovering her dry and lofty manner.

"Lady Alice Redcliffe, my grandmamma," said Beatrix, in an undertoned introduction, in the housekeeper's ear.

Mrs. Sinnott made a fussy little courtesy.

"Your ladyship's apartments, which is at the other end of the gallery, please, is quite ready, my lady."

"I don't mean to have those rooms, though — that's the reason I sent for you — please read this note, it is from Sir Jekyl Marlowe. By-the-bye, is your master at home?"

"No, he was out."

"Well, be so good as to read this."

And Lady Alice placed Beatrix's note of invitation in Mrs. Sinnott's hand, and pointed to a passage in the autograph of Sir Jekyl, which spoke thus: —

"P.S. — Do come, dearest little mamma, and you shall command everything. Choose your own apartments and hours, and, in short, rule us all. With all my worldly goods I thee endow, and place Mrs. Sinnott at your orders."

"Well, Mrs. Sinnott, I choose *these* apartments, if you please," said Lady Alice, sitting down stiffly, and thereby taking possession.

"Very well, my lady," said Mrs. Sinnott, dropping another courtesy; but her sharp red nose and little black eyes looked sceptical and uneasy; "and I suppose, Miss," here she paused, looking at Beatrix.

"You are to do whatever Lady Alice directs," said the young lady.

"This here room, you know, Miss, is the dressing-room properly of the green chamber."

"Lady Jane does not use it, though?" replied the new visitor.

"But the General, when he comes back," insinuated Mrs. Sinnott.

"Of course, he shall have it. I'll remove then; but in the meantime, liking these rooms, from old remembrances, best of any, I will occupy them, Beatrix; *this* as a dressing-room, and the apartment *there* as bedroom. I hope I don't give you a great deal of trouble," added Lady Alice, addressing the housekeeper, with an air that plainly said that she did not care a pin whether she did or not.

So this point was settled, and Lady Alice sent for her maid and her boxes; and rising, she approached the door of the green chamber, and pointing to it, said to Beatrix —

“And so Lady Jane has this room. Do you like her, Beatrix?”

“I can’t say I know her, grandmamma.”

“No, I dare say not. It is a large room — too large for my notion of a cheerful bedroom.”

The old lady drew near, and knocked.

“She’s not there?”

“No, she’s in the terrace-garden.”

Lady Alice pushed the door open, and looked in.

“A very long room. That room is longer than my drawingroom at Wardlock, and that is five and thirty feet long. Dismal, I say — though so much light, and that portrait — Sir Harry smirking there. What a look of duplicity in that face! He was an old man when I can remember him; an old beau; a wicked old man, rouged and whitened; he used to paint under his eyelashes, and had, they said, nine or ten sets of false teeth, and always wore a black curled wig that made his contracted countenance more narrow. There were such lines of cunning and meanness about his eyes, actually crossing one another. Jekyl hated him, I think. I don’t think anybody but a fool could have really liked him; he was so curiously selfish, and so contemptible; he was attempting the life of a wicked young man at seventy!”

Lady Alice had been speaking as it were in soliloquy, staring drearily on the clever portrait in gold lace and ruffles, stricken by the spell of that painted canvas into a dream.

“Your grandpapa, my dear, was not a good man; and I believe he injured my poor son irreparably, and your *father*. Well — these things, though never forgotten, are best not spoken of when people happen to be connected. For the sake of others we bear our pain in silence; but the heart knoweth its own bitterness.”

And so saying, the old lady drew back from the threshold of Lady Jane’s apartment, and closed the door with a stern countenance.

CHAPTER XX.

An Altercation.

Almost at the same moment Sir Jekyl entered the hexagon, or, as it was more pleasantly called, the Window dressing-room, from the lobby. He was quite radiant, and, in that warm evening light, struck Lady Alice as looking quite marvellously youthful.

"Well, Jekyl Marlowe, you see you have brought me here at last," said the old lady, extending her hand stiffly, like a wooden marionette, her thin elbow making a right angle.

"So I have; and I shall always think the better of my eloquence for having prevailed. You're a thousand times welcome, and not tired, I hope; the journey is not much after all."

"Thanks; no, the distance is not much, the fatigue nothing," said Lady Alice, drawing her fingers horizontally back from his hospitable pressure. "But it is not always distance that separates people, or fatigue that depresses one."

"No, of course; fifty things; rheumatism, temper, hatred, affliction: and I am so delighted to see you! Trixie, dear, would not grandmamma like to see her room? Send for— "

"Thank you, I mean to stay here," said Lady Alice.

"*Here!*" echoed Sir Jekyl, with a rather bewildered smile.

"I avail myself of the privilege you give me; your postscript to Beatrix's note, you know. You tell me there to choose what rooms I like best," said the old lady, drily, at the same time drawing her bag toward her, that she might be ready to put the documents in evidence, in case he should dispute it.

"Oh! did I?" said the Baronet, with the same faint smile.

Lady Alice nodded, and then threw back her head, challenging contradiction by a supercilious stare, her hand firmly upon the bag as before.

"But this room, you know; it's anything but a comfortable one — don't you think?" said Sir Jekyl.

“I like it,” said the inflexible old lady, sitting down.

“And I’m afraid there’s a little difficulty,” he continued, not minding. “For this is General Lennox’s dressing-room. Don’t you think it might be awkward?” and he chuckled agreeably.

“General Lennox is absent in London, on business,” said Lady Alice, grim as an old Diana; “and Jane does not use it, and there *can* be no *intelligible* objection to my having it in his absence.”

There was a little smile, that yet was not a smile, and a slight play about Sir Jekyl’s nostrils, as he listened to this speech. They came when he was vicious; but with a flush, he commanded himself, and only laughed slightly, and said —

“It is really hardly a concern of mine, provided my guests are happy. You don’t mean to have your bed into this room, do you?”

“I mean to sleep *there*,” she replied drily, stabbing with her long forefinger toward the door on the opposite side of the room.

“Well, I can only say I’d have fancied, for other reasons, these the very last rooms in the house you would have chosen — particularly as this really belongs to the green chamber. However, you and Lady Jane can arrange that between you. You’d have been very comfortable where we would have put you, and you’ll be very *un*comfortable here, I’m afraid; but perhaps I’m not making allowance for the affection you have for Lady Jane, the length of time that has passed since you’ve seen her, and the pleasure of being so near her.”

There was an agreeable irony in this; for the Baronet knew that they had never agreed very well together, and that neither spoke very handsomely of the other behind her back. At the same time, this was no conclusive proof of unkindness on Lady Alice’s part, for her goodwill sometimes showed itself under strange and uncomfortable disguises.

“Beatrix, dear, I hope they are seeing to your grandmamma’s room; and you’ll want candles, it is growing dark. Altogether I’m afraid you’re very uncomfortable, little mother; but if *you* prefer it, you know, of course I’m silent.”

With these words he kissed the old lady’s chilly cheek, and vanished.

As he ran down the darkening stairs the Baronet was smiling mischievously; and when, having made his long straight journey to the foot of the back stairs, he reascended, and passing through the two little anterooms, entered his own homely bedchamber, and looked at his handsome and wonderfully preserved face in the glass, he laughed outright two or three comfortable explosions at intervals, and was evidently enjoying some fun in anticipation.

When, a few minutes later, that proud sad beauty, Lady Jane, followed by her maid, sailed rustling into the Window dressing-room — I call it so in preference — and there saw, by the light of a pair of wax candles, a stately figure seated on the sofa at the further end in grey silk draperies, with its feet on a boss, she paused in an attitude of sublime surprise, with just a gleam of defiance in it.

"How d' y' do, Jenny, my dear?" said a voice, on which, as on the tones of an old piano, a few years had told a good deal, but which she recognised with some little surprise, for notwithstanding Lady Alice's note accepting the Baronet's invitation, he had talked and thought of her actually coming to Marlowe as a very unlikely occurrence indeed.

"Oh! oh! Lady Alice Redcliffe!" exclaimed the young wife, setting down her bedroom candle, and advancing with a transitory smile to her old kinswoman, who half rose from her throne and kissed her on the cheek as she stooped to meet her salutation. "You have only arrived a few minutes; I saw your carriage going round from the door."

"About forty minutes — hardly an hour. How you have filled up, Jane; you're quite an imposing figure since I saw you. I don't think it unbecoming; your *embonpoint* does very well; and you're quite well?"

"*Very* well — and you?"

"I'm pretty well, dear, a good deal fatigued; and so you're a wife, Jennie, and very happy, I hope."

"I can't say I have anything to trouble me. I am quite happy, that is, as happy as other people, I suppose."

"I hear nothing but praises of your husband. I shall be so happy to make his acquaintance," continued Lady Alice.

"He has had to go up to town about business this morning, but he's to return very soon."

"How soon, dear?"

"In a day or two," answered the young wife.

"Tomorrow?" inquired Lady Alice, drily.

"Or next day," rejoined Lady Jane, with a little stare.

“Do you *really*, my dear Jane, expect him here the day after tomorrow?”

“He said he should be detained only a day or two in town.”

Old Lady Alice shook her incredulous head, looking straight before her.

“I don’t think he can have said that, Jane, for he wrote to a friend of mine, the day before yesterday, mentioning that he should be detained by business at least a week.”

“Oh! did he?”

“Yes, and Jekyl Marlowe, I dare say, thinks he will be kept there *longer*.”

“I should fancy *I* am a better opinion, rather, upon that point, than Sir Jekyl Marlowe,” said Lady Jane, loftily, and perhaps a little angrily.

The old lady, with closed lips, at this made a little nod, which might mean anything.

“And I can’t conceive how it can concern Sir Jekyl, or even you, Lady Alice, what business my husband may have in town.”

It was odd how sharp they were growing upon this point.

“Well, Sir Jekyl’s another thing; but *me*, of course, it does concern, because I shall have to give him up his room again when he returns.”

“What room?” inquired Lady Jane, honestly puzzled.

“*This* room,” answered the old lady, like one conscious that she drops, with the word, a gage of battle.

“But this is *my* room.”

“You don’t use it, Lady Jane. *I* wish to occupy it. I shall, of course, give it up on your husband’s return; in the meantime I deprive you of nothing by taking it. Do I?”

“That’s not the question, Lady Alice. It is *my* room — it is *my dressing*-room — and I don’t mean to give it up to *any* one. You are the last person on earth who would allow *me* to take such a liberty with *you*. I don’t *understand* it.”

“Don’t be excited, my dear Jenny,” said Lady Alice — an exhortation sometimes a little inconsistently administered by members of her admirable sex when they are themselves most exciting.

“I’m not in the least excited, Lady Alice; but I’ve had a note from you,” said Lady Jane, in rather a choking key.

“You have,” acquiesced her senior.

“And I connect your extraordinary intrusion here, with it.”

Lady Alice nodded.

"I do, and — and I'm right. You mean to insult me. It is a shame — an *outrage*. What do you mean, madam?"

"I'd have you to remember, Jane Chetwynd (the altercation obliterated her newly-acquired name of Lennox), that I am your relation and your senior."

"Yes, you're my cousin, and my senior by fifty years; but an old woman may be very impertinent to a young one."

"*Compose* yourself, if you please, *compose* yourself," said Lady Alice, in the same philosophic vein, but with colour a little heightened.

"I don't know what you mean — you're a disgraceful old woman. I'll complain to my husband, and I'll tell Sir Jekyl Marlowe. Either you or I must leave this house tonight," declaimed Lady Jane, with a most beautiful blush, and eyes flashing lurid lightnings.

"You forget yourself, my dear," said the old lady, rising grimly and confronting her.

"No, I don't, but *you* do. It's perfectly disgusting and intolerable," cried Lady Jane, with a stamp.

"One moment, if you please — you can afford to listen for one moment, I suppose," said the old lady, in a very low, dry tone, laying two of her lean fingers upon the snowy arm of the beautiful young lady, who, with a haughty contraction and an uplifted head, withdrew it fiercely from her touch. "You forget your maid, I think. You had better tell her to withdraw, hadn't you?"

"I don't care; why should I?" said Lady Jane, in a high key.

"Beatrix, dear, run into my bedroom for a moment," said "Granny" to that distressed and perplexed young lady, who, accustomed to obey, instantly withdrew.

CHAPTER XXI.

Lady Alice in Bed.

"We may be alone together, if *you* choose it; if not, *I* can't help it," said Lady Alice, in a very low and impressive key.

"Well, it's nothing to me," said Lady Jane, more calmly and sullenly— "nothing at all — but as you insist — Cecile, you may go for a few minutes."

This permission was communicated sulkily, in French.

"Now, Jane, you shall hear me," said the old lady, so soon as the maid had disappeared and the doors were shut; "you must hear me with patience, if not with respect — *that* I don't expect — but remember you have no mother, and I am an old woman and your kinswoman, and it is my duty to speak— "

"I'm rather tired standing," interrupted Lady Jane, in a suppressed passion. "Besides, you say you don't want to be overheard, and you can't know who may be on the *lobby there*," and she pointed with her jewelled fingers at the door. "I'll go into my bedroom, if you please; and I have not the slightest objection to hear everything you can possibly say. Don't fancy I'm the least afraid of you."

Saying which Lady Jane, taking up her bedroom candle, rustled out of the room, without so much as looking over her shoulder to see whether the prophetess was following.

She did follow, and I dare say her lecture was not mitigated by Lady Jane's rudeness. That young lady was lighting her candles on her dressing-table when her kinswoman entered and shut the door, without an invitation. She then seated herself serenely, and cleared her voice.

"I live very much out of the world — in fact, quite to myself; but I learn occasionally what my relations are doing; and I was grieved, Jane, to hear a great deal that was very unpleasant, to say the least, about you."

Something between a smile and a laugh was her only answer.

"Yes, extremely foolish. I don't, of course, say there was anything wicked, but very foolish and reckless. I know perfectly how you were talked of; and I know also why you married that excellent but old man, General Lennox."

"I don't think anyone talked about me. Everybody is talked about. There has been enough of this rubbish. I burnt your odious letter," broke in Lady Jane, incoherently.

"And would, no doubt, burn the writer, if you could."

As there was no disclaimer, Lady Alice resumed.

"Now, Jane, you have married a most respectable old gentleman; I dare say you have nothing on earth to conceal from him — remember I've said all along I don't suppose there is — but as the young wife of an old man, you ought to remember how very delicate your position is."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, *generally*," answered the old lady, oracularly.

"I do declare this is perfectly insufferable! What's the meaning of this lecture? I'm as little likely, madam, as *you* are to disgrace myself. You'll please to walk out of my room."

"And how dare you talk to me in that way, young lady; how dare you attempt to hector me like your maid there?" broke out old Lady Alice, suddenly losing her self-command. "You know what I mean, and what's more, *I* do, too. We *both* know it — you a young bride — what does Jekyl Marlowe invite you down here for? Do you think I imagine he cares twopence about your stupid old husband, and that I don't know he was once making love to you? Of course I do; and I'll have nothing of the sort here — and that's the reason I've come, and that's why I'm in that dressing-room, and that's why I'll write to your husband, so sure as you give me the slightest uneasiness; and you had better think well what you do."

The old lady, in a towering passion, with a fierce lustre in her cheeks, and eyes flashing lightning over the face of her opponent, vanished from the room.

Lady Alice had crossed the disputed territory of the Window dressing-room, and found herself in her elected bedroom before she had come to herself. She saw Lady Jane's face still before her, with the lurid astonishment and fear, white and sharp, on it, as when she had threatened a letter to General Lennox.

She sat down a little stunned and confused about the whole thing, incensed and disgusted with Lady Jane, and confirmed in her suspicion by a look she did not like in that young lady's face, and which her peroration had called up. She did not hear the shrilly rejoinder that pursued her through the shut door. She had given way to a burst of passion, and felt a little hot and deaf and giddy.

When the party assembled at dinner Lady Jane exerted herself more than usual. She was agreeable, and even talkative, and her colour had not been so brilliant since her arrival. She sat next to Guy Strangways, and old Lady Alice at the other side of the table did not look triumphant, but sick and sad; and to look at the two ladies you would have set her down as the defeated and broken-spirited, and Lady Jane as the victrix in the late encounter.

The conversation at this end of the table resembled a dance, in which sometimes each man sets to his partner and turns her round, so that the whole company is frisking and spinning together; sometimes two perform; sometimes a *cavalier seul*. Thus was it with the talk of this section of the dinner-table, above the salt, at which the chief people were seated.

"I've just been asked by Lady Blunket how many miles it is to Wardlock, and I'm ashamed to say I can't answer her," cried Sir Jekyl diagonally to Lady Alice, so as to cut off four people at his left hand, whose conversation being at the moment in a precarious way, forthwith expired, and the Baronet and his motherin-law were left in possession of this part of the stage.

The old lady, as I have said, looked ill and very tired, and as if she had grown all at once very old; and instead of answering, she only nodded once or twice, and signed across the table to Lady Jane.

"Oh! I forgot," said Sir Jekyl; "you know Wardlock and all our distances, don't you, Lady Jane — can you tell me?"

"I don't remember," said Lady Jane, hardly turning toward him; "ten or twelve miles — is not it? it may be a good deal more. I don't really recollect;" and this was uttered with an air which plainly said, "I don't really care."

"I generally ride my visits, and a mile or two more or less does not signify; but one ought to know all the distances for thirty miles round; you don't know otherwise who's your neighbour."

"Do you think it an advantage to know that any particular person *is* your neighbour?" inquired impertinent Drayton, with his light moustache, leaning back and looking drowsily into his glasses after his wont.

"Oh! Mr. Drayton, the country without neighbours — how dreadful!" exclaimed Miss Blunket. "Existence without friends."

"Friends — bosh!" said Drayton, confidentially, to his wine.

"There's Drayton scouting friendship, the young cynic!" cried Sir Jekyl. "Do call him to order, Lady Jane."

"I rather incline to agree with Mr. Drayton," said Lady Jane, coldly.

"Do you mean to say you have no friends?" said Sir Jekyl, in well-bred amazement.

"Quite the contrary — I have too many."

"Come — that's a new complaint. Perhaps they are very new friends?" inquired the Baronet.

"Some of them very old, indeed; but I've found that an old friend means only an old person privileged to be impertinent."

Lady Jane uttered a musical little laugh that was very icy as she spoke, and her eye flashed a single insolent glance at old Lady Alice.

At another time perhaps a retort would not have been wanting, but now the old woman's eye returned but a wandering look, and her face expressed nothing but apathy and sadness.

"Grandmamma, dear, I'm afraid you are very much tired," whispered Beatrix when they reached the drawingroom, sitting beside her after she had made her comfortable on a sofa, with cushions to her back; "you would be better lying down, I think."

"No, dear — no, darling. I think in a few minutes I'll go to my room. I'm not very well. I'm tired — *very* tired."

And poor old granny, who was speaking very gently, and looking very pale and sunken, sighed deeply — it was almost a moan.

Beatrix was growing very much alarmed, and accompanied, or rather assisted, the old lady up to the room, where, aided by her and her maid, she got to her bed in silence, sighing deeply now and then.

She had not been long there when she burst into tears; and after a violent paroxysm she beckoned to Beatrix, and threw her lean old arms about her neck, saying —

"I'm sorry I came, child; I don't know what to think. I'm too old to bear this agitation — it will kill me."

Then she wept more quietly, and kissed Beatrix, and whispered— "Send her out of the room — let her wait in the dressing-room."

The maid was sitting at the further end of the apartment, and the old lady was too feeble to raise her voice so as to be heard there. So soon as her maid had withdrawn Lady Alice said —

"Sit by me, Beatrix, darling. I am very nervous, and tell me who is that young man who sat beside Jane Lennox at dinner."

As she ended her little speech Lady Alice, who, though I dare say actually ill enough, yet did not want to lose credit for all the exhaustion she fancied beside, closed her eyelids, and leaned a little back on her pillow motionless. This prevented her seeing that if she were nervous Beatrix was so also, though in another way, for her colour was heightened very prettily as she answered.

"You mean the tall, slight young man at Lady Jane's right?" inquired Beatrix.

"That beautiful but melancholy-looking young man whom we saw at Wardlock Church," said Lady Alice, forgetting for the moment that she had never divulged the result of her observations from the gallery to any mortal but Sir Jekyl. Beatrix, who forgot nothing, and knew that her brief walk at Wardlock with that young gentleman had not been confessed to anyone, was confounded on hearing herself thus, as she imagined, taxed with her secret.

She was not more secret than young ladies generally are; but whom could she have told at Wardlock? which of the old women of that time-honoured sisterhood was she to have invited to talk romance with her? and now she felt very guilty, and was blushing in silent confusion at the pearl ring on her pretty, slender finger, not knowing what to answer, or how to begin the confession which she fancied her grandmamma was about to extort.

Her grandmamma, however, relieved her on a sudden by saying —

"I forgot, dear, I told you nothing of that dreadful day at Wardlock Church, the day I was so ill. I told your papa *only*; but the young man is here, and I may as well tell you now that he bears a supernatural likeness to my poor lost darling. Jekyl knew how it affected me, and he never told me. It was so like Jekyl. I think, dear, I should not have come here at all had I known that dreadful young man was here."

"Dreadful! How is he dreadful?" exclaimed Beatrix.

"From his likeness to my lost darling — my dear boy — my poor, precious, murdered Guy," answered the old lady, lying back, and looking straight toward the ceiling with upturned eyes and clasped hands. She repeated— “Oh! Guy — Guy — Guy — my poor child!”

She looked like a dying nun praying to her patron saint.

“His name is Strangways — Mr. Guy Strangways,” said Beatrix.

“Ah, yes, darling! Guy was the name of my dear boy, and Strangways was the name of his companion — an evil companion, I dare say.”

Beatrix knew that the young man whom her grandmamma mourned had fallen in a duel, and that, reasonably or unreasonably, her father was blamed in the matter. More than this she had never heard. Lady Alice had made her acquainted with thus much; but with preambles so awful that she had never dared to open the subject herself, or to question her “Granny” beyond the point at which her disclosure had stopped.

That somehow it reflected on Sir Jekyl prevented her from inquiring of any servant, except old Donica, who met her curiosity with a sound jobation, and told her if ever she plagued her with questions about family misfortunes like that, she would speak to Sir Jekyl about it. Thus Beatrix only knew how Guy Deverell had died — that her grandmamma chose to believe he had been murdered, and insisted beside in blaming her father, Sir Jekyl, somehow for the catastrophe.

CHAPTER XXII.

How Everything went on.

"Go down, dear, to your company," resumed Lady Alice, sadly; "they will miss you. And tell your father, when he comes to the drawingroom, I wish to see him, and won't detain him long."

So they parted, and a little later Sir Jekyl arrived with a knock at the old lady's bedroom door.

"Come in — oh! yes — Jekyl — well, I've only a word to say. Sit down a moment at the bedside."

"And how do you feel now, you dear old soul?" inquired the Baronet, cheerfully. He looked strong and florid, as gentleman do after dinner, with a genial air of contentment, and a fragrance of his wonderful sherry about him; all which seemed somehow brutal to the nervous old lady.

"Wonderfully, considering the surprise you had prepared for me, and which might as well have killed me as not," she made answer.

"I know, to be sure — Strangways, you mean. Egad! I forgot. Trixie ought to have told you."

"*You* ought to have told me. I don't think I should have come here, Jekyl, had I known it."

"If I had known *that*," thought Sir Jekyl, with a regretful pang, "I'd have made a point of telling you." But he said aloud —

"Yes. It was a *sottise*; but *I*'ve got over the likeness so completely that I forgot how it agitated you. But I ought to tell you they have no connexion with the family — none in the world. Pelter and Crowe, you know — devilish sharp dogs — my lawyers in town — they are regular detectives, by Jove! and know everything — and particularly have had for years a steady eye upon them and their movements; and I have had a most decided letter from them, assuring me that there has not been the slightest movement in that quarter, and therefore there is, absolutely, as I told you from the first, nothing in it."

"And what Deverells are now living?" inquired the old lady, very pale.

"Two first cousins, they tell me — old fellows now; and one of them has a son or two; but not one called Guy, and none answering this description, you see; and neither have a shadow of a claim, or ever pretended; and as for that unfortunate accident— "

"Pray *spare* me," said the old lady, grimly.

"Well, they did not care a brass farthing about the poor fellow, so they would never move to give me trouble in that matter; and, in fact, people never do stir in law, and put themselves to serious expense, purely for a sentiment — even a bad one."

"I remember some years ago you *were* very *much* alarmed, Jekyl."

"No, I was not. Who the plague says that? There's nothing, thank Heaven, I need fear. One does not like to be worried with lawsuits — that's all — though there is and can be no real danger in them."

"And was it from these cousins you apprehended lawsuits?" inquired Lady Alice.

"No, not exactly — no, not at all. I believe that fellow Strangways — that fellow that used to live on poor Guy — I fancy he was the mover of it — indeed I know he was."

"What did they proceed for?" asked the old lady. "You never told me — you are so secret, Jekyl."

"They did not proceed at all — how could I? Their attorneys had cases before counsel affecting me — that's all I ever heard; and they say now it was all Strangways' doing — that is, Pelter and Crowe say so. I wish I *were* secret."

Old Lady Alice here heaved a deep groan, and said, not with asperity, but with a fatigued abhorrence —

"Go away; I wonder I can bear you near me."

"Thank you very much," said the Baronet, rising, with one of his pleasant chuckles. "I can't tell you how glad I am to see you here, and I know you'll be very glad to see me in the morning, when you are a little rested."

So he kissed the tips of his fingers and touched them playfully to the back of her thin hand, which she withdrew with a little frown, as if they chilled her. And by her direction he called in her maid, whom he asked very smilingly how she did, and welcomed to Marlowe; and she, though a little *passé*, having heard the fame of Sir Jekyl, and many stories of his brilliant adventures, was very modest and fluttered on the occasion. And with another little petting speech to Lady Alice, the radiant Baronet withdrew.

It is not to be supposed that Lady Alice's tremors communicated themselves to Beatrix. Was it possible to regard that handsome, refined young man, who spoke in that low, sweet voice, and smiled so intelligently, and talked so pleasantly, and with that delicate flavour of romance at times, in the light of a goblin?

The gentlemen had made their whist-party. The Rev. Dives Marlowe was chatting to, not with, Lady Jane, who sat listlessly on an ottoman. That elderly girl, Miss Blunket, with the *naïve* ways, the animated, smiling, and rather malevolent countenance, had secured little Linnett, who bore his imprisonment impatiently and wearily it must be owned. When Miss Blunket was enthusiastic it was all very well; but her playfulness was wicked, and her satire gaily vitriolic.

"Mr. Marlowe is fascinated, don't you think?" she inquired of harmless little Linnett, glancing with an arch flash of her fierce eyes at the Rev. Dives.

"She's awfully handsome," said Linnett, honestly.

"Oh, dear, you wicked creature, you can't think I meant that. She is some kind of cousin, I think — is not she? And her husband has that great living — what's its name? — and no relation in the Church; and Lady Jane, they say, rules him — and Sir Jekyl, some people say, rules her."

Linnett returned her arch glance with an honest stare of surprise.

"I had no idea of that, egad," said he.

"She thinks him so wise in all worldly matters, you know; and people in London fancied she would have been the second Lady Marlowe, if she had not met General Lennox just at a critical time, and fallen in love with him;" and as she said this she laughed.

"Really!" exclaimed Linnett; and he surveyed Lady Jane in this new light wonderingly.

"I really don't know; I heard it said merely; but very likely, you know, it is not true," she answered with an artless giggle.

"I knew you were quizzing — though, by Jove, you did sell me at first; but I really think Sir Jekyl's a little spoony on that pretty little Mrs. Maberly. Is she a widow?"

“Oh, dear, no — at least, not quite; she has a husband in India, but then, poor man, he’s so little in the way she need hardly wish him dead.”

“I *see*,” said Linnett, looking at Mrs. Maberly with a grave interest.

While Miss Blunket was entertaining and instructing little Linnett with this sort of girlish chatter, and from the whist-table, between the deals, arose those critical discussions and reviews, relieved now and then by a joke from the Baronet, or from his partner, Colonel Doocey, at the piano, countenanced by old Lady Blunket, who had come to listen and remained to doze, Beatrix, her fingers still on the keys, was listening to young Strangways.

There are times, lights, accidents, under which your handsome young people become incredibly more handsome, and this Guy Strangways now shared in that translated glory, as he leaned on the back of a tall carved chair, sometimes speaking, sometimes listening.

“It is quite indescribable, Miss Marlowe, how your music interests me — I should say, haunts me. I thought at first it was because you loved ballad music, which I also love; but it is not that — it is something higher and more peculiar.”

“I am sure you were right at first, for I *know* I am a very indifferent musician,” said Beatrix, looking down under her long lashes on the keys over which the jewelled fingers of her right hand wandered with hardly a tinkle, just tracing dreamily one of those sweet melancholy airs which made in fancy an accompaniment to the music of that young fellow’s words.

How beautiful she looked, too, with eyes lowered and parted lips, and that listening smile — not quite a smile — drinking in with a strange rapture of pride and softness the flatteries which she refused and yet invited.

“It *is* something higher and mysterious, which, perhaps, I shall never attempt to explain, unless, indeed, I should risk talking very wildly — too wildly for you to understand, or, if you did, perhaps — to forgive.”

“You mentioned a Breton ballad you once heard,” said Beatrix, frightened, as girls will sometimes become whenever the hero of their happy hours begins on a sudden to define.

“Yes,” he said, and the danger of the crisis was over. “I wish so much I could remember the air, you would so enter into its character, and make its wild unfathomable melancholy so beautifully touching in your clear contralto.”

“You must not flatter me; I want to hear more of that ballad.”

“If flattery be to speak more highly than one thinks, who can flatter Miss Marlowe?” Again the crisis was menacing. “Besides, I did not tell you we are leaving, I believe, in a day or two, and on the eve of so near a departure, may I not improve the few happy moments that are left me, and be permitted the privilege of a leavetaking, to speak more frankly, and perhaps less wisely than one who is destined to be all his life a neighbour?”

“Papa, I am sure, will be very sorry to hear that you and Monsieur Varbarriere are thinking of going so soon; I must try, however, to improve the time, and hear all you can tell me of those interesting people of Brittany.”

“Yes, they are. I will make them another visit — a sadder visit, Mademoiselle — for me a far more interesting one. You have taught me how to hear and see them. I never felt the spirit of Villemarque, or the romance and melancholy of that antique region, till I had the honour of knowing you.”

“My friends always laughed at me about Brittany. I suppose different people are interested by different subjects; but I do not think anyone could read at all about that part of the world and not be fascinated. You promised to tell all you remember of that Breton ballad.”

“Oh, yes; the haunted lady, the beautiful lady, the heiress of Carlowel, now such a grand ruin, became enamoured of a mysterious cavalier who wooed her; but he was something not of flesh and blood, but of the spirit world.”

“There is exactly such a legend, *so* far, at least, of a castle on the Rhine. I must show it to you. Do you read German?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle.”

“And does the ballad end tragically?”

“Most tragically. You shall hear.”

“Where are you, Guy?” in French, inquired a deep ringing voice.

And on the summons, Guy glanced over his shoulder, and replied.

“Oh,” exclaimed the same voice, “I demand pardon. I am disturbing conversation, I fear; but an old man in want of assistance will be excused. I want my road book, Guy, and you have got it. Pray, run upstairs and fetch it.”

With great pleasure, of course, Guy Strangways ran upstairs to tumble over block-books, letters, diaries, and the general residuum of a half-emptied valise.

Miss Beatrix played a spirited march, which awoke Lady Blunket, whom she had forgotten; and that interesting woman, to make up for lost time, entertained her with a history of the unreasonableness of Smidge, her maid, and a variety of other minute afflictions, which, she assured Beatrix seriously, disturbed her sleep.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Divan.

That night Sir Jekyl led the gentlemen in a body to his outpost quarters, in the rear of civilisation, where they enjoyed their cigars, brandy and water, and even "swipes," prodigiously. It is a noble privilege to be so rich as Sir Jekyl Marlowe. The Jewish price for frankincense was thrice its own weight in gold. How much did that aromatic blue canopy that rolled dimly over this Turkish divan cost that offhanded Sybarite? How many scruples of fine gold were floating in that cloud?

Varbarriere was in his way charmed with his excursion. He enjoyed the jokes and stories of the younkers, and the satiric slang and imperturbable goodhumour of their host. The twinkle of his eye, from its deep cavern, and the suavity of his solemn features, testified to his profound enjoyment of a meeting to which he contributed, it must be owned, for his own share, little but smoke.

In fact, he was very silent, very observant — observant of more things than the talk perhaps.

All sorts of things were talked about. Of course, no end of horse and dog anecdote — something of wine, something of tobacco, something of the beauties of the opera and the stage, and those sad visions, the fallen angelic of the demimonde — something, but only the froth and sparkle, of politics — light conjecture, and pungent scandal, in the spirit of gay satire and profligate comedy.

"He's a bad dog, St. Evermore. Did not you hear that about the duel?" said Drayton.

"What?" asked the Baronet, with an unconscious glance at Guy Strangways.

"He killed that French fool — what's his name? — unfairly, they say. There has been a letter or something in one of the Paris papers about it. Fired before his time, I think, and very ill feeling against the English in consequence."

"Oh!" said the Baronet.

"But you know," interposed Doocey, who was an older clubman than Drayton, and remembering further back, thought that sort of anecdote of the duel a little maladroit just then and there, "St. Evermore has been talked about a good deal; there were other things — that horse, you know; and they say, by Jove! he was licked by Tromboni, at the wings of the opera, for what he called insulting his wife; and Tromboni says he's a marquess, and devil knows what beside, at home, and wanted to fight, but St. Evermore wouldn't, and took his licking."

"He's not a nice fellow by any means; but he's devilish good company — lots of good stories and capital cigars," said Drayton.

At this point M. Varbarriere was seized with a fit of coughing; and Sir Jekyl glanced sharply at him; but no, he was not laughing.

The conversation proceeded agreeably, and some charming stories were told of Sir Paul Blunket, who was not present; and in less than an hour the party broke up and left Sir Jekyl to his solitary quarters.

The Baronet bid his last guest goodnight at the threshold, and then shut his door and locked himself in. It was his custom, here, to sleep with his door locked.

"What was that fellow laughing at — Varbarriere? I'm certain he was laughing. I never saw a fellow with so completely the cut of a charlatan. I'll write to Charteris tonight. I *must* learn all about him."

Then Sir Jekyl yawned, and reflected what a fool Drayton was, what a fellow to talk, and what asses all fellows were at that age; and, being sleepy, he postponed his letter to Charteris to the next morning, and proceeded to undress.

Next morning was bright and pleasant, and he really did not see much good in writing the letter; and so he put it off to a more convenient time.

Shortly after the ladies had left the drawingroom for their bedrooms, Beatrix, having looked in for a moment to her grandmamma's room, and, with a kiss and a goodnight, taken wing again, there entered to Lady Alice, as the old plays express it, then composing herself for the night, Lady Jane's maid, with —

"Please, my lady, my lady wants to know if your ladyship knows where her ladyship's key may be?"

"*What* key?"

"The key of her bedchamber, please, my lady."

“Oh! the key of my dressing-room. Tell Lady Jane that I have got the key of the Window dressing-room, and mean to keep it,” replied the old lady, firmly.

The maid executed a courtesy, and departed; and Lady Alice sank back again upon her pillow, with her eyes and mouth firmly closed, and the countenance of an old lady who is conscious of having done her duty upon one of her sex.

About two minutes later there came a rustle of a dressing-gown and the patter of a swift-slippered tread through the short passage from the dressing-room, and, without a knock, Lady Jane, with a brilliant flush on her face, ruffled into the room, and, with her head very high, and flashing eyes, demanded —

“Will you be so good, Lady Alice Redcliffe, as to give me the key of my bedroom?”

To which Lady Alice, without opening her eyes, and with her hands mildly clasped, in the fashion of a mediæval monument, over her breast, meekly and firmly made answer —

“If you mean the key of the Window dressing-room, Jane, I have already told your maid that I mean to *keep* it!”

“And I’ll not leave the room till I get it,” cried Lady Jane, standing fiercely beside the monument.

“Then you’ll not leave the room tonight, Jane,” replied the statuesque sufferer on the bed.

“We shall *see* that. Once more, will you give me my key or not?”

“The key of my dressing-room door is in my possession, and I mean to keep it,” repeated the old lady, with a provoking mildness.

“You shan’t, madam — you’ll do no such thing. You shall give up the key you have stolen. I’ll lose my life but I’ll make you.”

“Jane, Jane,” said the old lady, “you are sadly changed for the worse since last I saw you.”

“And if *you’re* not, it’s only because there was no room for it. Sadly changed indeed — very true. I don’t suffer you to bully me as you used at Wardlock.”

“May Heaven forgive and pardon you!” ejaculated the old lady, with great severity, rising perpendicularly and raising both her eyes and hands.

"Keep your prayers for yourself, madam, and give me my key," demanded the incensed young lady.

"I'll do no such thing; I'll do as I said; and I'll pray how I please, ma'am," retorted the suppliant, fiercely.

"Your prayers don't signify twopence. You've the temper of a fiend, as all the world knows; and no one can live in the same house with you," rejoined Lady Jane.

"That's a wicked lie: my servants live all their days with me."

"Because they know no one else would take them. But you've the temper of a fury. You haven't a friend left, and everyone hates you."

"Oh! oh! oh!" moaned Lady Alice, sinking back, with her hand pressed to her heart piteously, and closing her eyes, as she recollected how ill she was.

"Ho! dear me!" exclaimed Lady Jane, in high disdain. "Had not you better restore my key before you die, old lady?"

"Jane!" exclaimed Lady Alice, recovering in an instant, "have you no feeling — you know the state I'm in; and you're bent on killing me with your unfeeling brutality?"

"You're perfectly well, ma'am, and you look it. I wish I was half as strong; you oblige me to come all this way, this bitter night, you odious old woman."

"I see how it is, and why you want the key. A very little more, and I'll write to General Lennox."

"Do; and he'll horsewhip you."

Lady Jane herself was a little stunned at this speech, when she heard it from her own lips; and I think would have recalled it.

"Thank you, Jane; I hope you'll *remember* that. Horsewhip me! No doubt you wish it; but General Lennox is a gentleman, I hope, *although* he has married you; and I don't suppose he would murder a miserable old woman to gratify you."

"You know perfectly what I mean — if you were a *man* he would horsewhip you; you have done nothing but insult me ever since you entered this house."

"Thank you; it's quite plain. I shan't forget it. I'll ask him, when he comes, whether he's in the habit of beating women. It is not usual, I believe, among British officers. It *usen't* at least; but everything's getting on — young ladies, and, I suppose, old men — all getting on famously."

“Give me my key, if you please; and cease talking like a fool,” cried Lady Jane.

“And what *do* you want of that key? Come, now, young lady, what is it?”

“I don’t choose to have my door lie open, and I won’t. I’ve no bolt to the inside, and I *will* have my key, madam.”

“If that’s your object, set your mind at ease. I’ll lock your door myself when you have got to your bed.”

“So that if the house takes fire I shall be burnt to death!”

“Pooh! nonsense!”

“And if I am they’ll hang *you*, I hope.”

“Thank you. Flogged and hanged!” And Lady Alice laughed an exceeding bitter laugh. “But the wicked violence of your language and *menaces* shan’t deter me from the duty I’ve prescribed to myself. I’ll define my reasons if you like, and I’ll write as soon as you please to General Lennox.”

“I think you’re *mad* — I do, I assure you. I’ll endure it for once, but depend on it I’ll complain to Sir Jekyl Marlowe, in my husband’s absence, in the morning; and if this sort of thing is to go on, I had better leave the house forthwith — that’s all.”

And having uttered these dignified sentences with becoming emphasis, she sailed luridly away.

“Goodnight, Jane,” said Lady Alice, with a dry serenity.

“Don’t dare, you insupportable old woman, to wish me goodnight,” burst out Lady Jane, whisking round at the threshold.

With which speech, having paused for a moment in defiance, she disappeared, leaving the door wide open, which is, perhaps, as annoying as clapping it, and less vulgar.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Guy Strangways and M. Varbarriere converse.

When M. Varbarriere and his nephew this night sat down in their dressing-room, the elder man said —

“How do you like Sir Jekyl Marlowe?”

“A most agreeable host — very lively — very hospitable,” answered Guy Strangways.

“Does it strike you that he is *anxious* about anything?”

The young man looked surprised.

“No; that is, I mean, he appears to me in excellent spirits. Perhaps, sir, I do not quite apprehend you?”

“Not unlikely,” said the old gentleman. “He does not question you?”

“No, sir.”

“Yet he suspects me, and I think suspects you,” observed M. Varbarriere.

The young man looked pained, but said nothing.

“That room where poor Lady Marlowe was — was so shocked — the green chamber — it is connected with the misfortunes of your family.”

“How, sir?”

“Those papers you have heard my lawyer mention as having been lost at Dubois’ Hotel in London, by your grandfather, it is my belief were lost in this house and in that room.”

A gentleman smoking a cigar must be very much interested indeed when he removes his weed from his lips and rests the hand whose fingers hold it upon his knee, to the imminent risk of its going out while he pauses and listens.

“And how, sir, do you suppose this occurred — by what agency?” inquired the handsome young gentleman.

“The ghost,” answered M. Varbarriere, with a solemn sneer.

Guy Strangways knew he could not be serious, although, looking on his countenance, he could discern there no certain trace of irony as he proceeded.

"Many years later, poor Lady Marlowe, entering that room late at night — her maid slept there, and she being ill, for a change, in the smaller room adjoining (you don't know those rooms, but I have looked in at the door) — beheld what we call the ghost, and never smiled or held up her head after," said the portly old gentleman between the puffs of his cigar.

"Beheld the ghost!"

"So they say, and I believe it — what they *call* the ghost."

"Did she make an alarm or call her husband?"

"Her husband slept in that remote room at the very back of the house, which, as you see, he still occupies, quite out of hearing. You go downstairs first, then upstairs; and as he slept the greater part of two hundred feet away from the front of the house, of course he was out of the question;" and M. Varbarriere sneered again solemnly.

"A housekeeper named Gwynn, I am told, knows all about it, but I believe she is gone."

"And do you really think, sir, that my grandfather lost those deeds *here*?"

"I always thought so, and so I told your father, and my information got him into a bad scrape."

"You don't, I know, think it occurred supernaturally?" said Guy, more and more bewildered.

"Supernaturally; of course it was — how else could it be?" answered the old gentleman, with a drowsy irony. "That room has been haunted, as I have heard, by a devil from the time it was built, in the reign of George II. Can you imagine why General Lennox was put to sleep there?"

The young man shook his head. The old one resumed his smoking, leaving his problem unsolved.

"It shall be my business to evoke and to lay that devil," said the elderly gentleman, abruptly.

"Ought not Lady Jane Lennox to be warned if you really think there is any — any *danger*?"

"The danger is to *General* Lennox, as I suppose."

"I don't understand, sir."

"No, you don't — better not. I told your poor father my belief once, and it proved fatal knowledge to him. In the day that he ate thereof he died. Bah! it is better to keep your mind to yourself until you have quite made it up — you understand? — and even then till the time for action has come, and not even then, unless you want help. Who will sum up the mischief one of those prating fellows does in a lifetime?"

The gentlemen were silent hereupon for a period which I may measure by half a cigar.

"That green chamber — it is a hypocrite," said the solemn old man, looking drowsily on the smoke that was ascending the chimney, into which he threw the butt-end of his cigar— "mind you, a hypocrite. I have my theory. But we will not talk; no — *you* will be less embarrassed, and *I* more useful, with this reserve. For the purpose I have in view I will do fifty things in which you could and would have no partnership. Will you peep into that letter, Monsieur?" The ponderous gentleman grew dramatic here. "Will you place your ear to that door, *s'il vous plait* — your eye to that keyhole? Will you oblige me by bribing that domestic with five pounds sterling? Bah! I will be all ear, all eye — omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent! — by *all* means for this END — ay, all means — what *you* call secret, shabby, blackguard;" and the sonorous voice of the old man, for the first time since his arrival, broke into a clangorous burst of laughter, which, subsiding into a sort of growl, died, at last, quite away. The old gentleman's countenance looked more thoughtful and a shade darker than he had seen it. Then rising, he stood with his back to the fire, and fumbled slowly at the heavy links of his watch-chain, like a ghostly monk telling his beads, while he gazed, in the abstraction of deep thought, on the face of the young man.

Suddenly his face grew vigilant, his eyes lighted up, and some stern lines gathered about them, as he looked down full upon his nephew.

"Guy," said he, "you'll keep your promise — your word — your oath — that not one syllable of what passes between us is divulged to mortal, and that all those points on which I have enjoined reserve shall be held by you scrupulously secret."

Guy bowed his acquiescence.

"What nonsense was that going on at the piano tonight? Well, you need not answer, but there must be no more of it. I won't burden you with painful secrets. You will understand me hereafter; but no more of *that* — observe me."

The old gentleman spoke this injunction with a lowering nod, and that deliberate and peremptory emphasis to which his metallic tones gave effect.

Guy heard this, leaning in an unchanged attitude on his elbow over the chimneypiece, in silence and with downcast eyes.

"Yes, Guy," said the old man, walking suddenly up to him, and clapping his broad hand upon his shoulder, "I will complete the work I have begun for you. Have confidence in me, don't mar it, and you shall know all, and after I am gone, perhaps admire the zealous affection with which I laboured in your interest. Goodnight, and Heaven bless you, dear Guy;" and so they parted for the night.

Guy Strangways had all his life stood in awe of this reserved despotic uncle — kind, indulgent in matters of pleasure and of money, but habitually secret, and whenever he imposed a command, tyrannical. Yet Guy felt that even here there was kindness; and though he could not understand his plans, of his motives he could have no doubt.

For M. Varbarriere, indeed, his nephew had a singular sort of respect. More than one-half of his character was enveloped in total darkness to his eyes. Of the traits that were revealed some were positively evil. He knew, by just one or two proofs, that he was proud and vindictive, and could carry revenge for a long time, like a cold stone, in his sleeve. He could break out into a devil of a passion, too, on occasion; he could be as unscrupulous, in certain ways, as Machiavel; and, it was fixed in Guy's mind, had absolutely no religion whatsoever. What were the evidences? M. Varbarriere led a respectable life, and showed his solemn face and person in church with regularity, and was on very courteous relations with the clergy, and had built the greater part of a church in Pontaubrique, where prayers are, I believe, still offered up for him. Ought not all this to have satisfied Guy? And yet he knew quite well that solemn M. Varbarriere did not believe one fact, record, tradition, or article of the religion he professed, or of any other. Had he denounced, ridiculed, or controverted them? — Never. On the contrary, he kept a civil tongue in his head, or was silent. What, then, were the proofs which had long quite settled the question in Guy's mind? They consisted of some half-dozen smiles and shrugs, scattered over some fifteen years, and delivered impressively at significant moments.

But with all this he was kindly. The happiness of a great number of persons depended upon M. Varbarriere, and they were happy. His wine-estates were well governed. His great silk-factory in the south was wisely and benevolently administered. He gave handsomely to every deserving charity. He smiled on children and gave them small coins. He loved flowers, and no man was more idolised by his dogs.

Guy was attached by his kindness, and he felt that be his moral system exactly what it might, he had framed one, and acted under it, and he instinctively imbibed for him that respect which we always cherish for the man who has submitted his conduct consistently to a code or principle self-imposed by intellect — even erring.

CHAPTER XXV.

Lady Alice talks with Guy Strangways.

When Guy had bid this man goodnight and entered his chamber, he threw himself into his easy-chair beside the fire, which had grown low and grey in the grate. He felt both sad and alarmed. He now felt assured that M. Varbarriere was fashioning and getting together the parts of a machine which was to work evil against their host and his family. His family? His *daughter* Beatrix. He had no other.

Already implicated in deception, the reasons for which he knew not, the direction of which he only suspected — bound as he was to secrecy by promises the most sacred, to his stern old kinsman and benefactor, he dared not divulge the truth. Somehow the blow meditated, he was confident, against this Baronet, was to redound to *his* advantage. What a villain should he appear when all was over! Sir Jekyl his host, too, frank and hospitable — how could he have earned the misfortune, be it great or small, that threatened? And the image of Beatrix — like an angel — stood between her father and the unmasked villain, Guy, who had entered the house in a borrowed shape, ate and drank and slept, talked and smiled, and, he now feared, *loved*, and in the end — struck!

When Mr. Guy Strangways came down next morning he looked very pale. His breakfast was a sham. He talked hardly at all, and smiled but briefly and seldom.

M. Varbarriere, on the contrary, was more than usually animated, and talked in his peculiar vein rather more than was his wont; and after breakfast, Sir Jekyl placed his hand kindly on Guy Strangways' arm as he looked dismally from the window. The young man almost started at the kindly pressure.

"Very glad to hear that Monsieur Varbarriere has changed his mind," said Sir Jekyl, with a smile.

What change was this? thought Guy, whose thoughts were about other plans of his uncle's, and he looked with a strange surprise in Sir Jekyl's face.

"I mean his ill-natured idea of going so soon. I'm so glad. You know you have seen nothing yet, and we are going to kill a buck to-day, so you had better postpone the moor tomorrow, and if you like to take your rod in the afternoon, you will find — Barron tells me — some very fine trout, about half a mile lower down the stream than you fished yesterday — a little below the bridge."

Guy thanked him, I fancy, rather oddly. He heard him in fact as if it was an effort to follow his meaning, and he really did feel relieved when his goodnatured host was called away, the next moment, to settle a disputed question between the two sportsmen, Linnett and Doocey.

"How is grandmamma this morning?" inquired Sir Jekyl of Beatrix, before she left the room.

"Better, I think. She says she will take a little turn up and down the broad walk, by-and-by, and I am to go with her."

"Very pleasant for you, Trixie," said her papa, with one of his chuckles. "So you can't go with your ladies to Lonsted to-day?"

"No — it can't be helped; but I'm glad poor granny can take her little walk."

"Not a bit of you, Trixie."

"Yes, *indeed*, I am. Poor old granny!"

The incredulous Baronet tapped her cheek with his finger, as he chuckled again roguishly, and with a smile and a shake of his head, their little talk ended.

In the hall he found Guy Strangways in his angling garb, about to start on a solitary excursion. He preferred it. He was very much obliged. He did not so much care for the chase, and liked walking even better than riding.

The Baronet, like a well-bred host, allowed his guests to choose absolutely their own methods of being happy, but he could not but perceive something in the young gentleman's manner that was new and uncomfortable. Had he offended him — had anything occurred during the sitting after dinner last night? Well, he could not make it out, but his manner was a little odd and constrained, and in that slanting light from above, as he had stood before him in the hall, he certainly did look confoundedly like that other Guy whose memory was his chief spoil-sport. But it crossed him only like a neuralgic pang, to be forgotten a minute later. And so the party dispersed — some mounted, to the park; others away with the keeper and dogs for the moor; and Strangways, dejected, on his solitary river-side ramble.

His rod and fly-book were but pretexts — his object was solitude. It was a beautiful autumnal day, a low sun gilding the red and yellow foliage of wood and hedgerow, and the mellow songs of birds were quivering in the air. The cheer and the melancholy of autumn were there — the sadness of a pleasant farewell.

“It is well,” thought Strangways, “that I have been so startled into consciousness, while I yet have power to escape my fate — that beautiful girl! I did not know till last night how terrible I shall find it to say farewell. But, cost what it may, the word must be spoken. She will never know what it costs me. I may call it a dream, but even dreams of paradise are forgotten; my dream — never! All after-days dark without her. All my future life a sad reverie — a celestial remembrance — a vain yearning. These proud English people — and those dark designs, what are they? No, they shan’t hurt her — never. I’ll denounce him first. What is it to me what becomes of me if I have saved her — in so few days grown to be so much to me — my idol, my darling, though she may never know it?”

Guy Strangways, just five-and-twenty, had formed, on the situation, many such tremendous resolutions as young gentlemen at that period of life are capable of. He would speak to her no more; he would think of her no more; he would brave his uncle’s wrath — shield her from all possibility of evil — throw up his own stakes, be they what they might — and depart in silence, and never see Beatrix again.

The early autumn evening had begun to redden the western clouds, as Guy Strangways, returning, approached the fine old house, and passing a thick group of trees and underwoods, he suddenly found himself before Beatrix and Lady Alice. I dare say they had been talking about him, for Beatrix blushed, and the old lady stared at him from under her grey brows, with lurid half-frightened eyes, as she leaned forward, her thin fingers grasping the arms of the rustic chair, enveloped in her ermine-lined mantle.

Lady Alice looked on him as an old lady might upon a caged monster — with curiosity and fear. She was beginning to endure his presence, though still with an awe nearly akin to horror — though that horror was fast disappearing — and there was a strange yearning, too, that drew her towards him.

He had seen Beatrix that morning. The apparition had now again risen in the midst of his wise resolutions, and embarrassed him strangely. The old lady's stare, too, was, you may suppose, to a man predisposed to be put out, very disconcerting. The result was that he bowed very low indeed before the ladies, and remained silent, expecting, like a ghost, to be spoken to.

"Come here, sir, if you please," said the old lady, with an odd mixture of apprehension and command. "How d'ye do, Mr. Strangways? I saw you yesterday you know, at dinner; and I saw you some weeks since at Wardlock Church. I have been affected by a resemblance. Merciful Heaven, it is miraculous! And things of that sort affect me now more than they once might have done. I'm a sickly old woman, and have lost most of my dearest ties on earth, and cannot expect to remain much longer behind them."

It was odd, but the repulsion was still active, while at the same time she was already, after a fashion, opening her heart to him.

It was not easy to frame an answer, on the moment, to this strange address. He could only say, as again he bowed low —

"I do recollect, Lady Alice, having seen you in Wardlock Church. My uncle, Monsieur Varbarriere— "

At this point the handsome young gentleman broke down. His uncle had whispered him, as they sat side by side —

"Look at that old lady costumed in mourning, in the seat in the gallery with the marble tablet and two angels — do you see? — on the wall behind. That is Lady Alice Redcliffe. I'll tell you more about her by-and-by."

"By-and-by," as Guy Strangways had come to know, indicated in M. Varbarriere's vocabulary that period which was the luminous point in his perspective, at which his unexplained hints and proceedings would all be cleared up. The sudden rush of these recollections and surmises in such a presence overcame Guy Strangways, and he changed colour and became silent.

The old lady, however, understood nothing of the causes of his sudden embarrassment, and spoke again.

"Will you forgive an old woman for speaking with so little reserve? — your voice, too, sir, so wonderfully resembles it — wonderfully."

Old Lady Alice dried her eyes a little here, and Guy, who felt that his situation might soon become very nearly comical, said very gently —

“There are, I believe, such likenesses. I have seen one or two such myself.” And then to Beatrix, aside, “My presence and these recollections, I fear, agitate Lady Alice.”

But the old lady interposed in a softened tone— “No, sir; pray don’t go; pray remain. You’ve been walking, fishing. What a sweet day, and charming scenery near here. I know it all very well. In my poor girl’s lifetime I was a great deal here. She was very accomplished — she drew beautifully — poor thing; my pretty Beatrix here is very like her. You can’t remember your poor mamma? No, hardly.”

All this time Lady Alice was, with aristocratic ill-breeding, contemplating the features of Guy Strangways, as she might a picture, with saddened eyes. She was becoming accustomed to the apparition. It had almost ceased to frighten her; and she liked it even, as a help to memory.

Five minutes later she was walking feebly up and down the plateau, in the last level beams of the genial sunset, leaning on the arm of the young man, who could not refuse this courtesy to the garrulous old lady, although contrary to his prudent resolutions — it retained him so near to Beatrix.

“And, Mr. Strangways, it is not every day, you know, I can walk out; and Trixie here will sometimes bring her work into the boudoir — and if you would pay me a visit there, and read or talk a little, you can’t think what a kindness you would do me.”

What could he do but hear and smile, and declare how happy it would make him? Although here, too, he saw danger to his wise resolutions. But have not the charities of society their claims?

These were their parting words as they stood on the stone platform, under the carved armorial bearings of the Marlowes, at the hall-door; and old Lady Alice, when she reached her room, wept softer and happier tears than had wet her cheeks for many a year.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Some Talk of a Survey of the Green Chamber.

The red sunset beam that had lighted the group we have just been following, glanced through the windows of M. Varbarriere's dressing-room, and lighted up a letter he was at that moment reading. It said —

"The woman to whom you refer is still living. We heard fully about her last year, and, we are informed, is now in the service of Lady Alice Redcliffe, of Wardlock, within easy reach of Marlowe. We found her, as we thought, reliable in her statements, though impracticable and reserved; but that is eight years since. She was, I think, some way past fifty then."

M. Varbarriere looked up here, and placed the letter in his pocket, beholding his valet entering.

"Come in, Jacques," exclaimed the ponderous old gentleman, in the vernacular of the valet.

He entered gaily bowing and smiling.

"Well, my friend," he exclaimed goodhumouredly, "you look very happy, and no wonder — you, a lover of beauty, are fortunate in a house where so much is treasured."

"Ah! Monsieur mocks himself of me. But there are many beautiful ladies assembled here, my faith!"

"What do you think of Lady Jane Lennox?"

"Oh, heavens! it is an angel!"

"And only think! she inhabits, all alone, that terrible green chamber!" exclaimed the old gentleman, with an unwonted smile, "I have just been wondering about that green chamber, regarding which so many tales of terror are related, and trying from its outward aspect to form some conjecture as to its interior, you understand, its construction and arrangements. It interests me so strangely. Now, I dare say, by this time so curious a sprite as you — so clever — so potent with that fair sex who hold the keys of all that is worth visiting, there is hardly a nook in this house, from the cellar to the garret, worth looking at, into which you have not contrived a peep during this time?"

“Ah, my faith! Monsieur does me too much honour. I may have been possibly, but I do not know to which of the rooms they accord that name.”

Now upon this M. Varbarriere described to him the exact situation of the apartment.

“And who occupies the room at present, Monsieur?”

“Lady Jane Lennox, I told you.”

“Oh! then I am sure I have not been there. That would be impossible.”

“But there must be no impossibility here,” said the old gentleman, with a grim “half joke and whole earnest” emphasis. “If you satisfy me during our stay in this house I will make you a present of five thousand francs — you comprehend? — this day three weeks. I am curious in my way as you are in yours. Let us see whether your curiosity cannot subserve mine. In the first place, on the honour of a gentleman — your father was a Captain of Chasseurs, and his son will not dishonour him — you promise to observe the strictest silence and secrecy.”

Jacques bowed and smiled deferentially; their eyes met for a moment, and Monsieur Varbarriere said —

“You need not suppose anything so serious — *mon ami* — there is no tragedy or even *fourberie* intended. I have heard spiritual marvels about that apartment; I am inquisitive. Say, I am composing a philosophy and writing a book on the subject, and I want some few facts about the proportions of it. See, here is a sketch — oblong square — that is the room. You will visit it — you take some pieces of cord — you measure accurately the distance from this wall to that — you see? — the length; then from this to this — the breadth. If any projection or recess, you measure its depth or prominence most exactly. If there be any door or buffet in the room, beside the entrance, you mark where. You also measure carefully the thickness of the wall at the windows and the door. I am very curious, and all this you shall do.”

The courier shrugged, and smiled, and pondered.

“Come, there may be difficulties, but such as melt before the light of your genius and the glow of this,” and he lifted a little column of a dozen golden coins between his finger and thumb.

“Do you think that when we, the visitors, are all out walking or driving, a chambermaid would hesitate for a couple of these counters to facilitate your enterprise and enable you to do all this? Bah! I know them too well.”

“I am flattered of the confidence of Monsieur. I am *ravi* of the opportunity to serve him.”

There was something perhaps cynical in the imposing solemnity of gratitude with which M. Varbarriere accepted these evidences of devotion.

“You must so manage that she will suppose nothing of the fact that it is *I* who want all these foolish little pieces of twine,” said the grave gentleman; “she would tell everybody. What will you say to her?”

“Ah, Monsieur, please, it will be Margery. She is a charming rogue, and as discreet as myself. She will assist, and I will tell her nothing but fibs; and we shall make some money. She and I together in the servants’ hall — she shall talk of the ghosts and the green chamber, and I will tell how we used to make wagers who would guess, without having seen it, the length of such a room in the Chateau Mauville, when we were visiting there — how many windows — how high the chimneypiece; and then the nearest guesser won the pool. You see, Monsieur — you understand? — Margery and I, we will play this little trick. And so she will help me to all the measurements before, without sharing of my real design, quite simply.”

“Sir, I admire your care of the young lady’s simplicity,” said M. Varbarriere, sardonically. “You will procure all this for me as quickly as you can, and I shan’t forget my promise.”

Jacques was again radiantly grateful.

“Jacques, you have the character of being always true to your chief. I never doubted your honour, and I show the esteem I hold you in by undertaking to give you five thousand francs in three weeks’ time, provided you satisfy me while here. It would not cost me much, Jacques, to make of you as good a gentleman as your father.”

Jacques here threw an awful and indescribable devotion into his countenance.

“I don’t say, mind you, I’ll do it — only that if I pleased I very easily might. You shall bring me a little plan of that room, including all the measurements I have mentioned, if possible tomorrow — the sooner the better; that to begin with. Enough for the present. Stay; have you had any talk with Sir Jekyl Marlowe — you must be quite frank with me — has he noticed you?”

“He has done me that honour.”

“Frequently?”

"Once only, Monsieur."

"Come, let us hear what passed."

M. Varbarriere had traced a slight embarrassment in Jacques' countenance.

So with a little effort and as much gaiety as he could command, Jacques related tolerably truly what had passed in the stableyard.

A lurid flush appeared on the old man's forehead for a moment, and he rang out fiercely —

"And why the devil, sir, did you not mention that before?"

"I was not aware, Monsieur, it was of any importance," he answered deferentially.

"Jacques, you must tell me the whole truth — did he make you a present?"

"No, Monsieur."

"He gave you nothing then or since?"

"*Pas un sous, Monsieur* — nothing."

"Has he *promised* you anything?"

"Nothing, Monsieur."

"But you understand what he means?"

"Monsieur will explain himself."

"You understand he has made you an offer in case you consent to transfer your service."

"Monsieur commands my allegiance."

"You have only to say so if you wish it."

"Monsieur is my generous chief. I will not abandon him for a stranger — never, while he continues his goodness and his preference for me."

"Well, you belong to *me* for a month, you know, by our agreement. After that you may consider what you please. In the meantime be true to me; and not one word, if you please, of me or my concerns to anybody."

"Certainly, Monsieur. I shall be found a man of honour now as always."

"I have no doubt, Jacques; as I told you, I know you to be a gentleman — I rely upon you."

M. Varbarriere looked rather grimly into his eye as he uttered this compliment; and when the polite little gentleman had left the room, M. Varbarriere bethought him how very little he had to betray — how little he knew about him, his nephew, and his plans; and although he would not have liked his inquiries to be either baulked or disclosed, he could yet mentally snap his fingers at Monsieur.

CHAPTER XXVII.

M. Varbarriere talks a little more freely.

After his valet left him, M. Varbarriere did not descend, but remained in his dressing-room, thinking profoundly; and, after a while, he opened his pocketbook, and began to con over a number of figures, and a diagram to which these numbers seemed to refer.

Sometimes standing at the window, at others pacing the floor, and all the time engrossed by a calculation, like a man over a problem in mathematics.

For two or three minutes he had been thus engaged when Guy Strangways entered the room.

"Ho! young gentleman, why don't you read your prayer-book?" said the old man, with solemn waggery.

"I don't understand," said the young gentleman.

"No, you don't. I am the old sphynx, you see, and some of my riddles I can't make out, even myself. My faith! I have been puzzling my head till it aches over my notebook; and I saw you walking with that old lady, Lady Alice Redcliffe, up and down so affectionately. *There* is another riddle! My faith! the house itself is an enigma. And Sir Jekyl — what do you think of *him*; is he going to marry?"

"To marry!" echoed Guy Strangways.

"Ay, to marry. I do not know, but he is so sly. We must not let him marry, you know; it would be so cruel to poor little Mademoiselle Beatrix — eh?"

Guy Strangways looked at him doubtingly.

"He is pretty old, you know, but so am I, and *older*, my faith! But I think he is making eyes at the *married* ladies — eh?"

"I have not observed — perhaps so," answered Guy, carelessly. "He does walk and talk a great deal with that pretty Madame Maberly."

"Madame Maberly? Bah!" And M. Varbarriere's "bah" sounded like one of those long sneering slides played sometimes on a deep chord of a double bass. "No, no, it is that fine woman, Miladi Jane Lennox."

"Lady Jane! I fancied she did not like him. I mean that she positively *dis*liked him; and to say truth, I never saw, on his part, the slightest disposition to make himself agreeable.”

“I do not judge by words or conduct — in presence of others those are easily controlled; it is when the eyes meet — you can’t mistake. Bah! I knew the first evening we arrived. Now see, you must have your eyes about you, Guy. It is *your* business, not mine. Very important to you, mon petit garçon; of no sort of imaginable consequence to me, except as your friend; therefore you shall watch and report to me. You understand?”

Guy flushed with a glow of shame and anger, and looked up with gleaming eyes, expecting to meet the deep-set observation of the old man. Had their eyes encountered, perhaps a quarrel would have resulted, and the fates and furies would have had the consequences in their hands; but M. Varbarriere was at the moment reading his attorney’s letter again. Guy looked out of the window, and thought resolutely.

“One duplicity I have committed. It is base enough to walk among these people masked, but to be a spy — *never*.”

And he clenched his hand and pressed his foot upon the floor.

It was dreadful to know that these moral impossibilities were expected of him. It was terrible to feel that a rupture with his best, perhaps his only friend, was drawing slowly but surely on; but he was quite resolved. Nothing on earth could tempt him to the degradation of which his kinsman seemed to think so lightly.

Happily, perhaps, for the immediate continuance of their amicable relations, the thoughts of M. Varbarriere had taken a new turn, or rather reverted to the channel from which they had only for a few minutes diverged.

“You were walking with that old woman, Lady Alice Redcliffe. She seemed to talk a great deal. How did she interest you all that time?”

“To say truth, she did *not* interest me all that time. She talked vaguely about family afflictions, and the death of her son; and she looked at me at first as if I were a brigand, and said I was very like some one whom she had lost.”

“Then she’s a friendly sort of old woman, at least on certain topics, and garrulous? Who’s there? Oh! Jacques; very good, you need not stay.”

The old gentleman was by this time making his toilet.

“Did she happen to mention a person named Gwynn, a housekeeper in her service?”

"No."

"I'm glad she is an affable old lady; we shall be sure to hear something useful," said the old gentleman, with an odd smile. "That housekeeper I must see and sift. They tell me she's impracticable; *they* found her so. I shall see. While you live, Guy, do your own business; no one else will do it, be sure. I did mine, and I've got on."

The old gentleman, who was declaiming before the looking-glass in his shirtsleeves and crimson silk suspenders, brushing up that pyramid of grizzled hair which added to the solemnity of his effect, now got into his black silk waistcoat. The dressing-bell had rung, and the candles had superseded daylight.

"You'll observe all I told you, Guy. Sir Jekyl shan't marry — he would grow what they call impracticable, like Madame Gwynn; Miss Beatrix, *she* shan't marry either — it would make, perhaps, new difficulties; and you, I may as well tell you, *can't* marry her. When you know the reasons you will see that such an event *could not be contemplated*. You understand?"

And he dropped his haircomb, with which he had been bestowing a last finish on his spire of hair, upon his dressing-table, with a slight emphasis.

"Therefore, Guy, you will understand you must not be a fool about that young lady; there are many others to speak to; and if you allow yourself to like her, you will be a miserable stripling till you forget her."

"There is no need, sir, to warn me; I have resolved to avoid any such feeling. I have sense enough to see that there are obstacles insurmountable to my ever cherishing that ambition, and that I never could be regarded as worthy."

"Bravo! young man, that is what I like; you are as modest as the devil; and *here*, I can tell you, modesty, which is so often silly, is as wise as the serpent. You understand?"

The large-chested gentleman was now getting into his capacious coat, having buttoned his jewelled wrist-studs in; so he contemplated himself in the glass, with a touch and a pluck here and there.

"One word more, about that old woman. Talk to her all you please, and let *her* talk — and talk *more* than you, so much the better; but observe, she will question you about yourself and your connections, and one word you shall not answer; observe she learns nothing from you, that is, in the spirit of your solemn promise to me."

M. Varbarriere had addressed this peremptory reminder over his shoulder, and now retouched his perpendicular cone of hair, which waved upwards like a grey flame.

"Guy, you will be late," he called over his shoulder. "Come, my boy; we must not be walking in with the entremets."

And he plucked out that huge chased repeater, a Genevan masterpiece, which somehow harmonised, with his air of wealth and massiveness, and told him he had hut eight minutes left; and with an injunction to haste, which Guy, with a start, obeyed, this sable and somewhat mountainous figure swayed solemnly from the room.

"Who *is* that Monsieur Varbarriere?" inquired Lady Alice of her host, as the company began to assemble in the drawingroom, before that gentleman had made his appearance.

"I have not a notion."

"Are you serious? No, you're *not* serious," served Lady Alice.

"I'm *always* serious when I talk to you."

"Thank you. I'm sure that is meant for a compliment," said the old lady, curtly.

"And I assure you I mean what I say," continued Sir Jekyl, not minding the parenthesis. "I really don't know, except that he comes from France — rather a large place, you know — *where* he comes from. I have not a notion what his business, calling, or trade may be."

"*Trade!*" replied Lady Alice, with dry dignity.

"Trade, to be sure. *You're* a tradesman yourself, you know — a miner — *I* bought twenty-two shares in that for you in June last; you're an iron ship-builder — you have fifteen in that; you're a 'bus-man — you have ten there; and you were devilish near being a brewer, only it stopped."

"Don't talk like a fool — a joint-stock company I hope is one thing, and a — a — the other sort of thing quite another, I fancy."

"You fancy, yes; but it is not. It's a firm — Smith, Brown, Jones, Redcliffe, and Co., omnibus drivers, brewers, and so forth. So if he's not a rival, and doesn't interfere with *your* little trade, I really don't care, my dear little mamma, what sort of shop my friend Varbarriere may keep; but as I said, I don't know; maybe he's too fine a fellow to meddle, like us, with vats and 'busses."

"It appears odd that you should know absolutely nothing about your own guests," remarked Lady Alice.

"Well, it would be odd, only I do," answered Sir Jekyl— "all one needs to know or ask. He presented his papers, and comes duly accredited — a letter from old Philander the Peer. Do you remember Peery still? I don't mind him; he was always a noodle, though in a question of respectability he's not quite nothing; and another from Bob Charteris — you don't know him — Attaché at Paris; a better or more reliable quarter one could not hear from. I'll let you read them tomorrow; they speak unequivocally for his respectability; and I think the inference is even that he has a soul above 'busses. Here he is."

M. Varbarriere advanced with the air of a magician about to conduct a client to his magic mirror, toward Lady Alice before whom he made a low bow, having been presented the day before, and he inquired with a grave concern how she now felt herself and expressed with a sonorous suavity his regrets and his hopes.

Lady Alice, having had a good account of him, received him on the whole very graciously; and being herself a good Frenchwoman, the conversation flowed on agreeably.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Some private Talk of Varbarriere and Lady Alice at the Dinner-table.

At dinner he was placed beside the old lady. He understood good cookery, and with him to dine was to analyse and contemplate. He was usually taciturn and absorbed during the process; but on this occasion he made an effort, and talked a good deal in a grave, but, as the old lady thought, an agreeable and kindly vein.

Oddly enough, he led the conversation to his nephew, and found his companion very ready indeed to listen, as perhaps he had anticipated, and even to question him on this theme with close but unavowed interest.

“He bears two names which, united, remind me of some of my bitterest sorrows — Guy was my dear son’s Christian name, and Mr. Strangways was his most particular friend; and there is a likeness too,” she continued, looking with her dim and clouded eyes upon Guy at the other side, whom fate had placed beside Miss Blunket— “a likeness so wonderful as to make me, at times, quite indescribably nervous; at times it is — how handsome! don’t you consider him wonderfully handsome? — at times the likeness is so exact as to become all but insupportable.”

She glanced suddenly as she spoke, and saw an expression on the countenance of M. Varbarriere, who looked for no such inspection at that moment, which she neither liked nor understood.

No, it was *not* pleasant, connected with the tone in which she spoke, the grief and the agitation she recounted, and above all with the sad and horrible associations connected indissolubly in her mind with those names and features. It was a face both insincere and mocking — such a countenance as has perhaps shocked us in childhood, when in some grief or lamentation, looking up for sympathy, we behold a face in which lurks a cruel enjoyment, or a sense of an undivulged joke.

Perhaps he read in the old lady’s face something of the shock she experienced; for he said, to cover his indiscretion, “I was, at the moment, reminded of a strange mistake which once took place in consequence of a likeness. Some of the consequences were tragic, but the rest so ridiculous that I can never call the adventure to mind without feeling the comedy prevail. I was thinking of relating it, but, on recollection, it is too vulgar."

M. Varbarriere, I am certain, was telling fibs; but he did it well. He did not hasten to change his countenance, but allowed that expression to possess his features serenely after she had looked, and only shifted it for a grave and honest one when he added —

"You think then, perhaps, that, my nephew had formerly the honour of being a companion of Mr. Redcliffe, your son?"

"Oh, dear, no. He was about Jekyl's age. I dare say I had lost him before that young man was born."

"Oh! that surprises me very much. Monsieur Redcliffe — your son — is it possible he should have been so much older?"

"My son's name was Deverell," said the old lady, sadly.

"Ah! that's very odd. He, Guy, then, had an uncle who had a friend of that name — Guy Deverell — long ago, in this country. That is very interesting."

"*Is* not it?" repeated Lady Alice, with a gasp. "I feel, somehow, it must be he — a tall, slight young man."

"Alas! madam, he is much changed if it be he. He must have been older than your son, madam. He must be, I think, near sixty now, and grown rather stout. I've heard him talk at times of his friend Guy Deverell."

"And with affection, doubtless."

"Well, yes, with affection, certainly, and with great indignation of his death — the mode of it."

"Ah! yes," said Lady Alice, flushing to the roots of her grey hair, and looking down on her plate.

Here there was silence for the space of a minute or more.

"Yes, Monsieur Varbarriere; but you know, even though we cannot always forget, we must forgive."

"Champagne, my lady?" inquired the servant over her shoulder.

"*No*, thank you," murmured Lady Alice.

M. Varbarriere took some and sipped it, wondering how Sir Jekyl contrived to get such wines, and mentally admitting that even in the champagne countries it would task him — M. Varbarriere — to find its equal. And he said —

"Yes, Lady Alice, divine philosophy, but not easy to practise. I fear it is as hard to do one as the other."

"And how *is* Mr. Strangways?" inquired Lady Alice.

They were talking very confidentially and in a low tone, as if old Strangways' health was the subject of conspiracy.

"Growing old, Lady Alice; he has not spared himself; otherwise well."

"And this, you say, is his nephew?" continued the old lady. "And you?"

"I am Guy's uncle — his *mother's* brother."

"And his mother, is *she* living?"

"No, poor thing! gone long ago."

Lady Alice looked again unexpectedly into M. Varbarriere's face, and there detected the same unreliable expression.

"Monsieur Varbarriere," said old Lady Alice a little sternly in his ear, "you will pardon me, but it seems to me that you are trifling, and not quite sincere in all you tell me."

In a moment the gravity of all the Chief Justices that ever sat in England was gathered in his massive face.

"I am shocked, madam, at your thinking me capable of trifling. How have I showed, I entreat, any evidences of a disposition so contrary to my feelings?"

"I tell you frankly — in your countenance, Monsieur Varbarriere; and I observed it before, Monsieur."

"Believe me, I entreat, madam, when I assure you, upon the honour of a gentleman, every word I have said is altogether true. Nor would it be easy for me to describe how profound is my sympathy with you."

From this time forth Lady Alice saw no return, of that faint but odious look of banter that had at first shocked and then irritated her; and fortified by the solemn assurance he had given, she fell into a habit of referring it to some association unconnected with herself, and tried to make up for her attack upon him by an increased measure of courtesy.

Dwelling on those subjects that most interested Lady Alice, he and she grew more and more confidential, and she came, before they left the parlour, to entertain a high opinion of both the wisdom and the philanthropy of M. Varbarriere.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The Ladies and Gentlemen resume Conversation in the Drawingroom.

“Dives, my boy,” said the Baronet, taking his stand beside his brother on the hearthrug, when the gentlemen had followed the ladies into the drawingroom, and addressing him comfortably over his shoulder, “the Bishop’s coming tomorrow.”

“Ho!” exclaimed Dives, bringing his right shoulder forward, so as nearly to confront his brother. They had both been standing side by side, with their backs, according to the good old graceful English fashion, to the fire.

“Here’s his note — came tonight. He’ll be here to dinner, I suppose, by the six o’clock fast train to Slowton.”

“Thanks,” said Dives, taking the note and devouring it energetically.

“Just half a dozen lines of three words each — always so, you know. Poor old Sammy! I always liked old Sammy — a good old cock at school he was — great fun, you know, but always a gentleman.”

Sir Jekyl delivered these recollections standing with his hands behind his back, and looking upwards with a smile to the ceiling, as the Rev. Dives Marlowe read carefully every word of the letter.

“Sorry to see his hand begins to shake a little,” said Dives, returning the interesting manuscript.

“Time for it, egad! He’s pretty well on, you know. We’ll all be shaky a bit before long, Dives.”

“How long does he stay?”

“I think only a day or two. I have his first note upstairs, if I did not burn it,” answered the Baronet.

“I’m glad I’m to meet him — *very* glad indeed. I think it’s five years since I met his lordship at the consecration of the new church of Clopton Friars. I always found him very kind — very. He likes the school-house fellows.”

“You’d better get up your parochial experiences a little, and your theology, eh? They say he expects his people to be alive. You used to be rather good at theology — usen’t you?”

Dives smiled.

“Pretty well, Jekyl.”

“And what do you want of him, Dives?”

“Oh! he could be useful to me in fifty ways. I was thinking — you know there’s that archdeaconry of Priors.” Dives replied pretty nearly in a whisper.

“By Jove! yes — a capital thing — I forgot it;” and Sir Jekyl laughed heartily.

“Why do you laugh, Jekyl?” he asked, a little drily.

“I — I really don’t know,” said the Baronet, laughing on.

“I don’t see anything absurd or unreasonable in it. That archdeaconry has always been held by some one connected with the county families. Whoever holds it must be fit to associate with the people of that neighbourhood, who won’t be intimate, you know, with everybody; and the thing really is little more than a feather, the house and place are expensive, and no one that has not something more than the archdeaconry itself can afford it.”

The conversation was here arrested by a voice which inquired —

“Pray, can you tell me what day General Lennox returns?”

The question was Lady Alice’s. She had seemed to be asleep — probably was — and opening her eyes suddenly, had asked it in a hard, dry tone.

“*I?*” said Sir Jekyl. “I don’t know, I protest — maybe tonight — maybe tomorrow. Come when he may, he’s very welcome.”

“You have not heard?” she persisted.

“No, I have not,” he answered, rather tartly, with a smile.

Lady Alice nodded, and raised her voice —

“Lady Jane Lennox, you’ve heard, no doubt — pray, when does the General return?”

If the scene had not been quite so public, I dare say this innocent little inquiry would have been the signal for one of those keen encounters to which these two fiery spirits were prone.

“He has been detained unexpectedly,” drawled Lady Jane.

“You hear from him constantly?” pursued the old lady.

“Every day.”

“It’s odd he does not say when you may look for him,” said Lady Alice.

“Egad, you want to make her jealous, I think,” interposed Sir Jekyl.

“Jealous? Well, I think a young wife may very reasonably be jealous, though not exactly in the vulgar sense, when she is left without a clue to her husband’s movements.”

“You said you were going to write to him. I wish you would, Lady Alice,” said the young lady, with an air of some contempt.

“I can’t believe he has not said how soon his return may be looked for,” observed the old lady.

“I suppose he’ll say whenever he can, and in the meantime I don’t intend plaguing him with inquiries he can’t answer.” And with these words she leaned back fatigued, and with a fierce glance at Sir Jekyl, who was close by, she added, so loud that I wonder Lady Alice did not hear her— “Why don’t you stop that odious old woman?”

“Stop an odious old woman! — why, who ever did? Upon my honour, I know no way but to kill her,” chuckled the Baronet.

Lady Jane deigned no reply.

“Come here, Dives, and sit by me,” croaked the old lady, beckoning him with her thin, long finger. “I’ve hardly seen you since I came.”

“Very happy, indeed — very much obliged to you, Lady Alice, for wishing it.”

And the natty but somewhat forbidding-looking Churchman sat himself down in a prie-dieu chair vis-à-vis to the old gentlewoman, and folded his hands, expecting her exordium.

“Do you remember, Sir Harry, your father?”

“Oh, dear, yes. I recollect my poor father very well. We were at Oxford then or just going. How old was I? — pretty well out of my teens.”

It must be observed that they sat in a confidential proximity — nobody listened — nobody cared to approach.

“You remember when he died, poor man?”

“Yes — poor father! — we were at home — Jekyl and I — for the holidays — I believe it *was* — a month or so. The Bishop, you know, was with him.”

“I know. He’s coming tomorrow.”

“Yes; so my brother here just told me — an excellent, exemplary, pious prelate, and a true friend to my poor father. He posted fifty miles — from Doncaster — in four hours and a half, to be with him. And a great comfort he was. I shall never forget it to him.”

“I don’t think you cared for your father, Dives; and Jekyl positively disliked him,” interposed Lady Alice agreeably.

“I trust there was no feeling so unchristian and monstrous ever harboured in my brother’s breast,” replied Dives, loftily, and with a little flush in his cheeks.

“You can’t believe any such thing, my dear Dives; and you know you did not care if he was at the bottom of the Red Sea, and I don’t wonder.”

“Pray don’t, Lady Alice. If you think such things, I should prefer not hearing them,” murmured Dives, with clerical dignity.

“And what I want to ask you now is this,” continued Lady Alice; “you are of course aware that he told the Bishop that he wanted that green chamber, for some reason or another, pulled down?”

Dives coughed, and said —

“Well, yes, I *have* heard.”

“What was his reason, have you any notion?”

“He expressed none. My father gave, I believe, no reason. I never heard any,” replied the Reverend Dives Marlowe.

“You may be very sure he had a reason,” continued Lady Alice.

“Yes, very likely.”

“And why is it not done?” persisted Lady Alice.

“I can no more say why, than you can,” replied Dives.

“But why don’t you see to it?” demanded she.

“See to it! Why, my dear Lady Alice, you must know I have no more power in the matter than Doocey there, or the man in the moon. The house belongs to Jekyl. Suppose you speak to him.”

“You’ve a tongue in your head, Dives, when you’ve an object of your own.”

Dives flushed again, and looked, for an apostle, rather forbidding.

“I have not the faintest notion, Lady Alice, to what you allude.”

“Whatever else he may have been, Dives, he was your father,” continued Lady Alice, not diverted by this collateral issue; “and as his son, it was and is your business to give Jekyl no rest till he complies with that dying injunction.”

“Jekyl’s his own master; what can I do?”

“Do as you do where your profit’s concerned; tease him as you would for a good living, if he had it to give.”

"I don't press my interests much upon Jekyl. I've never teased him or anybody else, for anything," answered Dives, grandly.

"Come, come, Dives Marlowe; you have duties on earth, and something to think of besides yourself."

"I trust I don't need to be reminded of that, Lady Alice," said the cleric, with a bow and a repulsive meekness.

"Well, speak to your brother."

"I *have* alluded to the subject, and an opportunity *may* occur again."

"*Make* one — make an opportunity, Dives."

"There are rules, Lady Alice, which we must all observe."

"Come, come, Dives Marlowe," said the lady, very tartly, "remember you're a clergyman."

"I hope I *do*, madam; and I trust *you* will too."

And the Rector rose, and with an offended bow, and before she could reply, made a second as stiff, and turned away to the table, where he took up a volume and pretended to read the title.

"Dives," said the old lady, making no account of his huff, "please to tell Monsieur Varbarriere that I should be very much obliged if he would afford me a few minutes here, if he is not better engaged; that is, it seems to me he has nothing to do there."

M. Varbarriere was leaning back in his chair, his hands folded, and the points of his thumbs together; his eyes closed, and his bronzed and heavy features composed, as it seemed, to deep thought; and one of his large shining shoes beating time slowly to the cadences of his ruminations.

The Reverend Dives Marlowe was in no mood just at that moment to be trotted about on that offensive old lady's messages. But it is not permitted to gentlemen, even of his sacred calling, to refuse, in this wise, to make themselves the obedient humble servants of the fair sex, and to tell them to go on their own errands.

Silently he made her a slight bow, secretly resolving to avail himself sparingly of his opportunities of cultivating her society for the future.

Perhaps it was owing to some mesmeric reciprocity, but exactly at this moment M. Varbarriere opened his eyes, arose, and walked towards the fireplace, as if his object had been to contemplate the ornaments over the chimneypiece; and arriving at the hearthrug, and beholding Lady Alice, he courteously drew near, and accosted her with a deferential gallantry, saving the Reverend Dives Marlowe, who was skirting the other side of the round table, the remainder of his tour.

CHAPTER XXX.

Varbarriere picks up something about Donica Gwynn.

Drawingroom conversation seldom opens like an epic in the thick of the plot, and the introductory portions, however graceful, are seldom worth much. M. Varbarriere and Lady Alice had been talking some two or three minutes, when she made this inquiry.

"When did you last see the elder Mr. Strangways, whom you mentioned at dinner?"

"Lately, very lately — within this year."

"Did he seem pretty well?"

"Perfectly well."

"What does he think about it all?"

"I find a difficulty. If Lady Alice Redcliffe will define her question — — "

"I mean — well, I should have asked you first, whether he ever talked to you about the affairs of that family — the Deverell family — I mean as they were affected by the loss of a deed. I don't understand these things well; but it involved the loss, they say, of an estate; and then there was the great misfortune of my life."

M. Varbarriere here made a low and reverential bow of sympathy; he knew she meant the death of her son.

"Upon this latter melancholy subject he entirely sympathises with you. His grief of course has long abated, but his indignation survives."

"And well it may, sir. And what does he say of the paper that disappeared?"

"He thinks, madam, that it was stolen."

"Ha! So do I."

The confidential and secret nature of their talk had drawn their heads together, and lowered their voices.

"He thinks it was abstracted by one of the Marlowe family."

"Which of them? Go on, sir."

"Well, by old Sir Harry Marlowe, the father of Sir Jekyl."

"It certainly *was* he; it could have been no other; it was stolen, that is, I don't suppose by his hand; I don't know, perhaps it was; he was capable of a great deal; *I* say nothing, Monsieur Varbarriere."

Perhaps that gentleman thought she had said a good deal; but he was as grave on this matter as she.

"You seem, madam, very positive. May I be permitted to inquire whether you think there exists proof of the fact?"

"I don't speak from proof, sir."

Lady Alice sat straighter, and looked full in his face for a moment, and said —

"I am talking to you, Monsieur Varbarriere, in a very confidential way. I have not for ever so many years met a human being who cared, or indeed knew anything of my poor boy as his friend. I have at length met you, and I open my mind, my conjectures, my suspicions; but, you will understand, in the strictest confidence."

"I have so understood all you have said, and in the same spirit I have spoken and mean to speak, madam, if you permit me, to you. I do feel an interest in that Deverell family, of whom I have heard so much. There was a servant, a rather superior order of person, who lived as housekeeper — a Mrs. Gwynn — to whom I would gladly have spoken, had chance thrown her in my way, and from whom it was hoped something important might be elicited."

"She is my housekeeper now," said Lady Alice.

"Oh! and— "

"I think she's a sensible person; a respectable person, I believe, in her rank of life, although they chose to talk scandal about her; as what young woman who lived in the same house with that vile old man, Sir Harry Marlowe, could escape scandal? But, poor thing! there was no evidence that ever I could learn; nothing but lies and envy: and she has been a very faithful servant to the family."

"And is now in your employment, madam?"

"My housekeeper at Wardlock," responded Lady Alice.

"Residing there now?" inquired M. Varbarriere.

Lady Alice nodded assent.

I know not by what subtle evidences, hard to define, seldom if ever remembered, we sometimes come to a knowledge, by what seems an intuition, of other people's intentions. M. Varbarriere was as silent as Lady Alice was; his heavy bronzed features were still, and he looking down on one of those exquisite wreaths of flowers that made the pattern of the carpet; his brown, fattish hands were folded in his lap. He was an image of an indolent reverie.

Perhaps there was something special and sinister in the composure of those large features. Lady Alice's eye rested on his face, and instantly a fear smote her. She would have liked to shake him by the arm, and cry, "In God's name, do you mean us any harm?" But it is not permitted even to old ladies such as she to explode in adjuration, and shake up old gentlemen whose countenances may happen to strike them unpleasantly.

As people like to dispel an omen, old Lady Alice wished to disturb the unpleasant pose and shadows of those features. So she spoke to him, and he looked up like his accustomed self.

"You mentioned Mr. Herbert Strangways just now, Monsieur. I forget what relation you said he is to the young gentleman who accompanies you, Mr. Guy Strangways."

"Uncle, madam."

"And, pray, does he perceive — did he ever mention a most astonishing likeness in that young person to my poor son?"

"He has observed a likeness, madam, but never seemed to think it by any means so striking as you describe it. Your being so much moved by it has surprised me."

Here Lady Alice's old eyes wandered toward the spot where Guy Strangways stood, resting them but a moment; every time she looked so at him, this melancholy likeness struck her with a new force. She sighed and shuddered, and removed her eyes. On looking again at M. Varbarriere, she saw the same slightly truculent shadow over his features, as again he looked drowsily upon the carpet.

She had spent nearly a quarter of a century in impressing her limited audience with the idea that if there were thunderbolts in heaven they ought to fall upon Sir Jekyl Marlowe. Yet, now that she saw in that face something like an evil dream, a promise of judgment coming, a feeling of compunction and fear agitated her.

She looked over his stooping shoulders and saw pretty Beatrix leaning on the back of her father's chair, the young lady pleading gaily for some concession, Sir Jekyl laughing her off.

“How pretty she looks tonight — poor Trixie!” said Lady Alice, unconsciously.

M. Varbarriere raised his head, and looked, directed by her gaze, toward father and daughter. But his countenance did not brighten. On the contrary, it grew rather darker, and he looked another way, as if the sight offended him.

“Pretty creature she is — pretty Beatrix!” exclaimed the old lady, looking sadly and fondly across at her.

No response was vouchsafed by M. Varbarriere.

“Don’t you think so? Don’t you think my granddaughter very lovely?”

Thus directly appealed to, M. Varbarriere conceded the point, but not with effusion.

“Yes, Mademoiselle is charming — she is very charming — but I am not a critic. I have come to that time of life, Lady Alice, at which our admiration of mere youth, with its smooth soft skin and fresh tints, supersedes our appreciation of beauty.”

In making this unsatisfactory compliment, he threw but one careless glance at Beatrix.

“That girl, you know, is heiress of all this — nothing but the title goes to Dives, and the small estate of Grimalston,” said Lady Alice. “Of course I love my grandchild, but it always seems to me wrong to strip a title of its support, and send down the estates by a different line.”

“Miss Beatrix Marlowe has a great deal too much for her own happiness. It is a disproportioned fortune, and in a young lady so sensible will awake suspicions of all her suitors. ‘You are at my feet, sir,’ she will think, ‘but is your worship inspired by love or by avarice?’ She is in the situation of that prince who turned all he touched into gold; while it feeds the love of money, it starves nature.”

“I don’t think it has troubled her head much as yet. If she had no dot whatever, she could not be less conscious,” said the old lady.

“Some people might go through life and never feel it; and even of those who do, I doubt if there is one who would voluntarily surrender the consequence or the power of exorbitant wealth for the speculative blessing of friends and lovers more sincere. I could quite fancy, notwithstanding, a lady, either wise or sensitive, choosing a life of celibacy in preference to marriage under conditions so suspicious. Miss Marlowe would be a happier woman with only four or five hundred pounds a-year."

"Well, maybe so," said the old lady, dubiously, for she knew something of the world as well as of the affections.

"She will not, most likely, give it away; but if it were taken, she would be happier. Few people have nerve for an operation, and yet many are the more comfortable when it is performed."

"Beatrix has only been out one season, and that but interruptedly. She has been very much admired, though, and I have no doubt will be very suitably married."

"There are disadvantages, however."

"I don't understand," said Lady Alice, a little stiffly.

"I mean the tragedy in which Sir Jekyl is implicated," said M. Varbarriere, rising, and looking, without intending it, so sternly at Lady Alice, that she winced under it.

"Yes, to be sure, but you know the world does not mind that — the world does not choose to believe ill of fortune's minions — at least, to remember it. A few oldfashioned people view it as you and I do; but Jekyl stands very well. It is a wicked world, Monsieur Varbarriere."

"It is not for me to say. Every man has profited, more or less, at one time or another, by its leniency. Perhaps I feel in this particular case more strongly than others; but, notwithstanding the superior rank, wealth, and family of Sir Jekyl Marlowe, I should not, were I his equal, like to be tied to him by a close family connexion."

Lady Alice did not feel anger, nor was she pleased. She did not look down abashed at discovering that this stranger seemed to resent on so much higher ground than she the death of her son. She compressed her thin lips, looking a little beside the stern gentleman in black, at a distant point on the wall, and appeared to reflect.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Lady Jane puts on her Brilliants.

That evening, by the late post, had arrived a letter, in old General Lennox's hand, to his wife. It had come at dinner-time, and it was with a feeling of *ennui* she read the address. It was one of those billets which, in Swift's phrase, would "have kept cool;" but, subsiding on the ottoman, she opened it — conjugal relations demanded this attention; and Lady Jane, thinking "what a hand he writes!" ran her eye lazily down those crabbed pages in search of a date to light her to the passage where he announced his return; but there was none, so far as she saw.

"What's all this about? 'Masterson, the silkmercer at Marlowe — a very' — something— 'fellow — *honest*.' Yes, that's the word. So he may be, but I shan't buy his horrid trash, if that's what you mean," said she, crumpling up the stupid old letter, and leaning back, not in the sweetest temper, and with a sidelong glance of lazy defiance through her half-closed lashes, at the unconscious Lady Alice.

And now arrived a sleek-voiced servant, who, bowing beside Lady Jane, informed her gently that Mr. Masterson had arrived with the parcel for her ladyship.

"The parcel! what parcel?"

"I'm not aware, my lady."

"Tell him to give it to my maid. Ridiculous rubbish!" murmured Lady Jane, serenely.

But the man returned.

"Mr. Masterson's direction from the General, please, my lady, was to give the parcel into your own hands."

"Where is he?" inquired Lady Jane, rising with a lofty fierceness.

"In the small breakfast-parlour, my lady."

"Show me the way, please."

When Lady Jane Lennox arrived she found Mr. Masterson cloaked and muffled, as though off a journey, and he explained, that having met General Lennox yesterday accidentally in Oxford Street, in London, from whence he had only just returned, he had asked him to take charge of a parcel, to be delivered into her ladyship's own hands, where, accordingly, he now placed it.

Lady Jane did not thank him; she was rather conscious of herself conferring a favour by accepting anything at his hands; and when he was gone she called her maid, and having reached her room and lighted her candles, she found a very beautiful set of diamonds.

"Why, these are really superb, beautiful brilliants!" exclaimed the handsome young lady. The cloud had quite passed away, and a beautiful light glowed on her features.

Forthwith to the glass she went, in a charming excitement.

"Light all the candles you can find!" she exclaimed.

"Well, my eyes, but them is beautiful, my lady!" ejaculated the maid, staring with a smirk, and feeling that at such a moment she might talk a little, without risk, which, indeed, was true.

So with bedroom and dressing-table candles, and a pair purloined even from old Lady Alice's room, a tolerably satisfactory illumination was got up, and the jewels did certainly look dazzling.

The pendants flashed in her ears — the exquisite collar round her beautiful throat — the tiara streamed livid fire over her low Venus-like forehead, and her eager eyes and parted lips expressed her almost childlike delight.

There are silver bullets against charmed lives. There are women from whose snowy breasts the fire-tipped shafts of Cupid fall quenched and broken; and yet a handful of these brilliant pellets will find their way through that wintry whiteness, and lie lodged in her bleeding heart.

After I know not how long a time spent before the glass, it suddenly struck Lady Jane to inquire of the crumpled letter, in which the name of Masterson figured, and of whose contents she knew, in fact, nothing, but that they named no day for the General's return. She had grown curious as to who the donor might be. Were those jewels a gift from the General's rich old sister, who had a splendid suit, she had heard, which she would never put on again? Had they come as a bequest? How was it, and whose were they?

And now with these flashing gems still dangling so prettily in her ears, and spanning her white throat, as she still stood before the glass, she applied herself to spell out her General’s meaning in better temper than for a long time she had read one of that gallant foozle’s kindly and honest rigmaroles. At first the process was often interrupted by those glances at the mirror which it is impossible under ordinary circumstances to withhold; but as her interest deepened she drew the candle nearer, and read very diligently the stiffly written lines before her.

They showed her that the magnificent present was from himself alone. I should be afraid to guess how many thousand pounds had been lavished upon those jewels. An uxorious fogey — a wicked old fool — perhaps we, outside the domestic circle, may pronounce him. Lady Jane within that magic ring saw differently.

The brief, blunt, soldier-like affection that accompanied this magnificent present, and the mention of a little settlement of the jewels, which made them absolutely hers in case her “old man” should die, and the little conjecture “I wonder whether you would sometimes miss him?” smote her heart strangely.

“What a gentleman — what an old darling!” — and she — how heinously had she requited his manly but foolish adoration.

“I’ll write to him this moment,” she said, quite pale.

And she took the casket in her hands and laid it on her bed, and sat down on the side of it, and trembled very much, and suddenly burst into tears, insomuch that her maid was startled, and yielding forthwith to her sympathy, largely leavened with curiosity, she came and stood by her and administered such consolation as people will who know nothing of your particular grief, and like, perhaps, to discover its causes.

But after a while her mistress asked her impatiently what she meant, and, to her indignation and surprise, ordered her out of the room.

“I wish he had not been so good to me. I wish he had ever been unkind to me. I wish he would beat me, Good Heaven! is it all a dream?”

So, quite alone, with one flashing pendant in her ear, with the necklace still on — incoherently, wildly, and affrighted — raved Lady Jane, with a face hectic and wet with tears.

Things appeared to her all on a sudden, quite in a new character, as persons suddenly called on to leave life, see their own doings as they never beheld them before; so with a shock, and an awakening, tumbled about her the whole structure of her illusions, and a dreadful void with a black perspective for the first time opened round her.

She did not return to the drawingroom. When Beatrix, fearing she might be ill, knocked at the door of the green chamber, and heard from the far extremity Lady Jane's clear voice call "Come in," she entered. She found her lying in her clothes, with the counterpane thrown partially over her, upon the funereal-looking old bed, whose dark green curtains depended nearly from the ceiling.

"Well!" exclaimed Lady Jane, almost fiercely, rising to her elbow, and staring at Beatrix.

"I — you told me to come in. I'm afraid I mistook."

"Did I? I dare say. I thought it was my maid. I've got such a bad headache."

"I'm very sorry. Can I do anything?"

"No, Beatrix — no, thank you; it will go away of itself."

"I wish so much, Lady Jane, you would allow me to do anything for you. I — I sometimes fear I have offended you. You seemed to like me, I thought, when I saw you this spring in London, and I've been trying to think how I have displeased you."

"*Displeased* me! *you* displease *me*! Oh! Beatrix, Beatrix, dear, you don't know, you can never know. I — it is a feeling of disgust and despair. I hate myself, and I'm frightened and miserable, and I wish I dare cling to you."

She looked for a moment as if she would have liked to embrace her, but she turned away and buried her face in her pillow.

"Dear Lady Jane, you must not be so agitated. You certainly are not well," said Beatrix, close to the bedside, and really a good deal frightened. "Have you heard — I hope you have not — any ill news?"

If Lady Jane had been dead she could not have seemed to hear her less.

"I hope General Lennox is not ill?" inquired she timidly.

"Ill? No — I don't know; he's very well. I hope he's very well. I hope he is; and — and I know what I wish for myself."

Beatrix knew what her grandmamma thought of Lady Jane's violence and temper, and she began to think that something must have happened to ruffle it that evening.

"I wish you'd go, dear, you *can* do nothing for me," said Lady Jane, ungraciously, with a sudden and sombre change of manner.

“Well, dear Lady Jane, if you think of anything I can do for you, pray send for me; by-and-by you might like me to come and read to you; and would you like me to send your maid?”

“Oh! no — no, no, *no* — nothing — goodnight,” repeated Lady Jane, impatiently.

So Beatrix departed, and Lady Jane remained alone in the vast chamber, much more alone than one would be in a smaller one.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Conciliation.

That night again, old Lady Alice, just settling, and having actually swallowed her drops, was disturbed by a visit from Lady Jane, who stood by her dishevelled, flushed, and with that storm-beaten look which weeping leaves behind it. She looked eager, even imploring, so that Lady Alice challenged her with —

"What on earth, Jane, brings you to my bedside at this hour of the night?"

"I've come to tell you, Lady Alice, that I believe I was wrong the other night to speak to you as I did."

"I thought, Jane," replied the old lady with dignity, "you would come to view your conduct in that light."

"I thought you were right all the time; that is, I thought you meant kindly. I wished to tell you so," said Lady Jane.

"I am glad, Jane, you can now speak with temper."

"And I think you are the only person alive, except poor Lennox, who really cares for me."

"I knew, Jane, that reflection and conscience would bring you to this form of mind," said Lady Alice.

"And I think, when I come to say all this to you, you ought not to receive me so."

"I meant to receive you kindly, Jane; one can't always in a moment forget the pain and humiliation which such scenes produce. It will help me, however, your expressing your regret as you do."

"Well, I believe I am a fool — I believe I deserve this kind of treatment for lowering myself as I have done. The idea of my coming in here, half dressed, to say all this, and being received in this — in this indescribable way!"

"If you don't feel it, Jane, I'm sorry you should have expressed any sorrow for your misconduct," replied Lady Alice, loftily.

"Sorrow, madam! I never said a word about sorrow. I said I thought you cared for me, and I don't think so now. I am sure you don't, and I care just as little for you, not a pin, madam, with your ridiculous airs."

"Very good, dear — then I suppose you are quite satisfied with your former conduct?"

"Perfectly — of *course* I am, and if I had had a notion what kind of person you are I should not have come near you, I promise you."

Lady Alice smiled a patient smile, which somehow rather provoked the indignant penitent.

"I'd as soon have put my hand in the fire, madam. I've borne too much from you — a great deal too much; it is you who should have come to me, madam, and I don't care a farthing about you."

"And I'm still under sentence, I presume, when General Lennox, returns with his horsewhip," suggested Lady Alice, meekly.

"It would do you nothing but good."

"You are excessively *impertinent*," said Lady Alice, a little losing her self-command.

"So are you, madam."

"And I desire you'll leave my room," pursued Lady Alice.

"And don't you address me while we remain in this house," exclaimed Lady Jane, with flaming cheeks.

"Quit the room!" cried Lady Alice, sitting up with preternatural rigidity.

"Open the door!" exclaimed Lady Jane, fiercely, to the scared maid, "and carry this candle."

And the maid heard her mutter forcibly as she marched before her through the passage— "wicked old frump."

I am afraid it was one of those cases of incompatibility of temper, or faults on both sides, in which it is, on the whole, more for the interests of peace and goodwill that people should live apart, than attempt that process under the same roof.

There was a smoking party that night in Sir Jekyl's room. A line had reached him from General Lennox, regretting his long stay in town, and fearing that he could hardly hope to rejoin his agreeable party at Marlowe before a week or possibly ten days. But he hoped that they had not yet shot all the birds — and so, with that mild joke and its variations, the letter humorously concluded.

He had also had a letter from the London legal firm — this time the corresponding limb of the body was Crowe — who, in reply to some fresh interrogatories of the Baronet's, wrote to say that his partner, Mr. Pelter, being called to France by legal business connected with Craddock and Maddox, it devolved on him to "assure Sir Jekyl that, so far as they could ascertain, everything in the matter to which he referred was perfectly quiet, and that no ground existed for apprehending any stir whatsoever."

These letters from Pelter and Crowe, who were shrewd and by no means sanguine men of business, had always a charming effect on his spirits — not that he quite required them, or that they gave him any new ideas or information, but they were pleasant little fillips, as compliments are to a beauty. He was, therefore, this evening, more than usually lively, and kept the conversation in a very merry amble.

Guy Strangways was absent; but his uncle, M. Varbarriere, was present, and in his solemn, sly, porcine way, enjoyed himself with small exertion and much unction, laughing sometimes sardonically and without noise, at things which did not seem to amuse the others so much; but, in all he said, very courteous, and in his demeanour suave and bowing. He was the last man to take leave of his host, on the threshold, that night.

"I always lock myself in," said Sir Jekyl, observing his guest's eye rest for a moment on the key, on which his own finger rested, "and I can't think why the plague I do," he added, laughing, "except that my father did so before me."

"It makes your pleasant room more a hermitage, and you more of a recluse," said Monsieur Varbarriere.

"It is very well to be a recluse at pleasure, and take monastic vows of five hours' duration, and shut yourself up from the world, with the key of the world, nevertheless, in your pocket," said Sir Jekyl.

Monsieur Varbarriere laughed, and somehow lingered, as if he expected more.

"You don't mean that you assert your liberty at capricious hours, and affright your guests in the character of a ghost?" said Monsieur Varbarriere, jocosely.

Sir Jekyl laughed.

"No," said he, "on the contrary, I make myself more of a prisoner than you imagine. My man sleeps in the little room in which you now stand, and draws his little camp-bed across the door. I can't tell you the least why I do this, only it was my father's custom also, and I fancy my throat would be cut if my guard did not lie across the threshold. The world is a mad tree, and we are branches, says the Italian proverb. Goodnight, Monsieur Varbarriere."

"Goodnight," said the guest, with a bow and a smile; and both, with a little laugh, shook hands and parted.

Monsieur Varbarriere was a tolerably early riser, and next morning was walking in the cheering morning sun, under the leaves of the evergreens, glittering with dew. A broad walk, wide enough for a pony-carriage, sweeps along a gentle wooded elevation, commanding a wide prospect of that rich country.

He leaned on the low parapet, and with his pocket field-glass lazily swept the broad landscape beneath. Lowering his telescope, he stood erect, and looked about him, when, to his surprise, for he did not think that either was an early riser, he saw Sir Jekyl Marlowe and Lady Jane Lennox walking side by side, and approaching.

Monsieur Varbarriere was blessed with very long and clear sight, for his time of life. There was something in the gait of these two persons, and in the slight gesture that accompanied their conversation, as they approached, which struck M. Varbarriere as indicating excitement, though of different kinds.

In the pace of the lady, who carried her head high, with a slight wave sometimes to this side, sometimes to that, was as much of what we term swagger as is compatible with feminine grace. Sometimes a sudden halt, for a moment, and a "left face" movement on her companion. Sir Jekyl, on the other hand, bore himself, he thought, like a gentleman a good deal annoyed and irritated.

All this struck M. Varbarriere in a very few seconds, during which, uncertain whether he ought to come forward or not, he hesitated where he stood.

It was plain, however, that he was quite unobserved standing in a recess of the evergreens; so he leaned once more upon the parapet, and applied his glass to his eye.

Now he was right in his conjecture. This had been a very stormy walk, though the cool grey light of morning is not the season for exciting demonstrations. We will take them up in the midst of their conversation, a little before Monsieur Varbarriere saw them — just as Sir Jekyl said with a slight sneer —

“Oh, of course, it was very kind.”

“More, it’s *princely*, sir,” cried Lady Jane.

“Well, princely — very princely — only, pray, dear Jane, do not talk so very loud; you can’t possibly wish the keepers and milkmaids to hear every word you say.”

“I don’t care, Jekyl. I think you have made me mad.”

“You *are* a bit mad, Jane, but it is not I who made you so.”

“Yes, Jekyl, you’ve made me mad — you have made me a fiend; but, bad as I am, I can never face that good man more.”

“Now don’t — now don’t. What *can* be the matter with you?” urged Sir Jekyl in a low tone.

“This, sir — I’ll see him no more — you must. You *shall* take me away.”

“Now, now, now — *come*! Are you talking like a sane person, Jane? What the devil can have come over you about these trumpery diamonds?”

“You shan’t talk that way.”

“Come! I venture to say they are nothing like as valuable as you fancy, and whatever they are, Lennox got them a devilish good bargain, rely on it. He knows perfectly well what he’s about. Everyone knows how rich he is, and the wife of a fellow like that ought to have jewels; people would talk — I give you my honour they would, if you had not; and then he is in town, with nothing to keep him there — no business, I mean — an old military man, and he wants to keep you in goodhumour.”

“It’s a lie. I know what you mean.”

“Upon my soul, it’s fact,” he laughed, looking very pale. “Surely you don’t mistake an old East Indian general for a Joseph!”

“Talk any way but that, you wretch! I know him. It’s no use — he’s the soul of honour. Oh Jekyl, Jekyl! why did not you marry me when you might, and save me from all this?”

“Now, Janet, *is* this reasonable — you know you never thought of it — you know it would not have done — would you have liked Beatrix? Besides, you have really done better — a great *deal* better — he’s not so old as he looks — I dare say not much older than I — and a devilish deal richer, and — a — what the devil you want, for the life of me, I can’t see.”

It was about at this point in their conversation that, on a sudden, they came upon Monsieur Varbarriere, looking through his field-glass. Lady Jane moved to turn short about, but Sir Jekyl pressed his arm on hers impatiently, and kept her straight.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Lady Jane and Beatrix play at Croquet.

"Good morning, Monsieur Varbarriere," cried the Baronet, who divined truly that the fattish elderly gentleman with the bronzed features, and in the furred surtout, had observed them.

"Ah!" cried Monsieur Varbarriere, turning toward them genially, his oddly shaped felt hat in one hand, and his field-glass still extended in the other. "What a charming morning! I have been availing myself of the clear sunlight to study this splendid prospect, partly as a picture, partly as a map."

Lady Jane with her right hand plucked some wild flowers from the bank, which at that side rises steeply from the walk, while the gentlemen exchanged salutations.

"I've just been pointing out some of our famous places to Lady Jane Lennox. A little higher up the walk the view is much more commanding. What do you say to a walk here after breakfast? There's a capital glass in the hall, much more powerful than that can be. Suppose we come by-and-by?"

"You are very good — I am so obliged — my curiosity has been so very much piqued by all I have seen."

Monsieur Varbarriere was speaking, as usual, his familiar French, and pointed with his telescope toward a peculiarly shaped remote hillock.

"I have just been conjecturing could that be that Gryston which we passed by on our way to Marlowe."

"Perfectly right, by Jove! what an eye for locality you must have!"

"Have I? Well, sometimes, perhaps," said the foreign gentleman, laughing.

"The eye of a general. Yes, you are quite right — it is Gryston."

Now Sir Jekyl was frank and hearty in his talk; but there was an air — a something which would have excited the observation of Monsieur Varbarriere, even had he remarked nothing peculiar in the bearing of his host and his companion as they approached. There was a semi-abstraction, a covert scrutiny of that gentleman's countenance, and a certain sense of uneasiness.

Some more passed — enough to show that there was nothing in the slightest degree awkward to the two pedestrians in having so unexpectedly fallen into an ambuscade while on their route — and then Sir Jekyl, with a word of apology to Lady Jane, resumed his walk with her towards the pleasure-grounds near the house.

That day Lady Jane played croquet with Beatrix, while Sir Jekyl demonstrated half the country, from the high grounds, to Monsieur Varbarriere.

The croquet-ground is pretty — flowerbeds lie round it, and a "rockery," as they called it, covered with clambering flowers and plants, and backed by a thick grove of shrubs and evergreens, fenced it in to the north.

Lady Jane was kind, ill-tempered, capricious; played wildly, lazily, badly.

"Do you like people in spite of great faults ever, Beatrix?" she asked, suddenly.

"Every one has great faults," said Trixie, sporting a little bit of philosophy.

"No, they have not; there are very good people, and I hate them," said Lady Jane, swinging her mallet slowly like a pendulum, and gazing with her dark deep eyes full into her companion's face.

"Hate the good people!" exclaimed Beatrix; "then how do you feel towards the bad?"

"There are some whose badness suits me, and I like them; there are others whose badness does not, and them I hate as much as the good almost."

Trixie was puzzled; but she concluded that Lady Jane was in one of her odd moods, and venting her ill temper in those shocking eruptions of levity.

"How old are you, Beatrix?"

"Nineteen."

"Ha! and I am five-and-twenty — six years. There is a great deal learned in those six years. I don't recollect what I was like when I was nineteen."

She did not sigh; Lady Jane was not given to sighing, but her face looked sad and sullen.

"It all came of my having no friend," she said, abruptly. "Not one. That stupid old woman might have been one, but she would not. I had no one —

it was fate; and here I am, such as I am, and I don’t blame myself or anything. But I wish I had one true friend.”

“I am sure, Lady Jane, you must have many friends,” said Beatrix.

“Don’t be a little hypocrite, Beatrix; why should I more than another? Friends are not picked up like daisies as we walk along. If you have neither mother nor sisters, nor kith nor kin to care about you, you will find it hard to make strangers do so. As for old Lady Alice, I think she always hated me; she did nothing but pick holes in everything I said or did; I never heard anything from her but the old story of my faults. And then I was thrown among women of the world — heartless, headless creatures. I don’t blame them, they knew no better — perhaps there is no better; but I do blame that egotistical old woman, who, if she had but controlled her temper, might have been of so much use to me, and *would* not. Religion, and good principles, and all that, whether it is true or false, is the safest plan; and I think if she had been moderately kind and patient, she might have made me as good as others. Don’t look at me as if I had two heads, dear. I’m not charging myself with any enormity. I only say it is the happiest way, even if it be the way of fools.”

“Shall we play any more?” inquired Beatrix, after a sufficient pause had intervened to soften the transition.

“Yes, certainly. Which is my ball?”

“The red. You are behind your hoop.”

“Yes; and — and it seems to me, Beatrix, you are a cold little stick, like your grandmamma, as you call her, though she’s no grandmamma of yours.”

“Think me as stupid as you please, but you must not think me cold; and, indeed, you wrong poor old granny.”

“We’ll talk no more of her. I think her a fool and a savage. Come, it’s your turn, is not it, to play?”

So the play went on for a while in silence, except for those questions and comments without which it can hardly proceed.

“And now you have won, have not you?” said Lady Jane.

“Should you like another game?” asked Beatrix.

“Maybe by-and-by; and — I sometimes wish you liked me, Beatrix; but I don’t know you, and you are little better than a child still; and — no — it could not be — it never could — you’d be sure to hate me in a little while.”

"But I do like you, Lady Jane. I liked you very much in London, you were so kind; and I don't know why you were so changed to me when you came here; you seem to have taken a positive dislike to me."

"So I had, child — I detested you," said Lady Jane, but in a tone that had something mocking in it. "Everything has grown — how shall I express it? — disgusting to me — yes, *disgusting*. You had done nothing to cause it; you need not look so contrite. I could not help it either. I am odious — and I can't love or like anybody."

"I am sure, Lady Jane, you are not at all like what you describe."

"You think me faultless, do you?"

Beatrix smiled.

"Well, I see you don't. What *is* my fault?" demanded Lady Jane, looking on her not with a playful, but with a lowering countenance.

"It is a very conceited office — pointing out other people's faults, even if one understood them, which I do not."

"Well, I give you leave; tell me one, to begin with," persisted Lady Jane Lennox.

Beatrix laughed.

"I wish, Lady Jane, if you insist on my telling your faults, that you would not look so stern."

"Stern — do I?" said Lady Jane; "I did not intend; it was not with you, but myself, that I was angry; not angry either, for my faults have been caused by other people, and to say truth, I don't very much wish to mend them."

"No, Lady Jane," said Beatrix, merrily. "I won't say in cold blood anything disagreeable. I don't say, mind, that I really could tell you any one fault you may fancy you have — but I won't try."

"Well, let us walk round this oval; I'll tell you what you think. You think I am capricious — and so I may appear — but I am not; on the contrary, my likings or aversions are always on good grounds, and last very long. I don't say people always know the grounds, but they know it is not whim; they know — those that have experienced either — that my love and aversion are both very steady. You think I am ill-tempered, too, but I am not — I am isolated and unhappy; but my temper is easy to get on with — and I don't know why I am talking to you," she exclaimed, with a sudden change in her looks and tone, “as if you and I could ever by any possibility become friends. Goodbye, Beatrix; I see your grandmamma beckoning.”

So she was — leaning upon the arm of her maid, a wan lank figure — motioning her toward her.

“Coming, grandmamma,” cried Beatrix, and smiled, and turning to say a parting word to Lady Jane, she perceived that she was already moving some way off toward the house.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

General Lennox receives a Letter.

Monsieur Varbarriere was charmed with his host this morning. Sir Jekyl spent more than an hour in pointing out and illustrating the principal objects in the panorama that spread before and beneath them as they stood with field-glasses scanning the distance, and a very agreeable showman he made.

Very cheery and healthful among the breezy copse to make this sort of rural survey. As they parted in the hall, Monsieur Varbarriere spoke his eloquent appreciation of the beauties of the surrounding country; and then, having letters to despatch by the post, he took his leave, and strode up with pounding steps to his dressing-room.

Long before he reached it, his smile had quite subsided, and it was with a solemn and stern countenance that he entered and nodded to his valet, whom he found awaiting him there.

“Well, Jacques, any more offers? Does Sir Jekyl still wish to engage you?”

“I can assure Monsieur there has not been a word since upon that affair.”

“*Good!*” said Monsieur Varbarriere, after a second’s scrutiny of the valet’s dark, smirking visage.

The elderly gentleman unlocked his desk, and taking forth a large envelope, he unfolded the papers enclosed in it.

“Have we anything to note to-day about that apartment verd? Did you manage the measurement of the two recesses?”

“They are three feet and a half wide, two feet and a half deep, and the pier between them is, counting in the carved case, ten feet and six inches; and there is from the angle of the room at each side, that next the window and that opposite, to the angle of the same recesses, counting in, in like manner, the carved case, two feet and six inches exactly. Here Monsieur has the threads of measurement,” added Jacques, with a charming bow, handing a little paper, containing certain pieces of tape cut at proper lengths and noted in pen and ink, to his master.

“Were you in the room yourself since?”

“This afternoon I am promised to be again introduced.”

“Try both — particularly that to your right as you stand near the door — and rap them with your knuckles, and search as narrowly as you can.”

Monsieur Jacques bowed low and smiled.

“And now about the other room,” said Monsieur Varbarriere; “have you had an opportunity?”

“I have enjoyed the permission of visiting it, by the kindness of Sir Jekyl’s man.”

“He does not suppose any object?” inquired Monsieur Varbarriere.

“None in the world — nothing — merely the curiosity of seeing everything which is common in persons of my rank.”

Monsieur Varbarriere smiled dimly.

“Well, there is a room opening at the back of Sir Jekyl’s room — what is it?”

“His study.”

Varbarriere nodded— “Go on.”

“A room about the same size, surrounded on all sides except the window with books packed on shelves.”

“Where is the door?”

“There is no door, visible at least, except that by which one enters from Sir Jekyl Marlowe’s room,” answered Monsieur Jacques.

“Any sign of a door?”

Monsieur Jacques smiled a little mysteriously.

“When my friend, Monsieur Tomlinson, Sir Jekyl’s gentleman, had left me alone for a few minutes, to look at some old books of travels with engravings, for which I had always a liking, I did use my eyes a little, Monsieur, upon other objects, but could see nothing. Then, with the head of my stick I took the liberty to knock a little upon the shelves, and one place I did find where the books are not real, but made of wood.”

“Made of wood?” repeated Monsieur Varbarriere.

“Yes — bound over to imitate the tomes; and all as old and dingy as the books themselves.”

“You knew by the sound?”

“Yes, Monsieur, by the sound. I removed, moreover, a real book at the side, and I saw there wood.”

“Whereabout is that in the wall?”

"Next to the corner, Monsieur, which is formed by the wall in which the windows are set — it is a dark corner, nearly opposite the door by which you enter."

"That's a door," said Monsieur Varbarriere, rising deliberately as if he were about to walk through it.

"I think Monsieur conjectures sagely."

"What more did you see, Jacques?" demanded Monsieur Varbarriere, resuming his seat quietly.

"Nothing, Monsieur; for my good friend returned just then, and occupied my attention otherwise."

"You did not give him a hint of your discovery?"

"Not a word, sir."

"Jacques, you must see that room again, quietly. You are very much interested, you know, in those books of travel. When you have a minute there to yourself again, you will take down in turn every volume at each side of that false bookcase, and search closely for hinge or bolt — there must be something of the kind — or keyhole — do you see? Rely upon me, I will not fail to consider the service handsomely. Manage that, if possible, to-day."

"I will do all my possible, Monsieur."

"I depend upon you, Jacques. Adieu."

With a low bow and a smirk, Jacques departed.

Monsieur Varbarriere bolted his dressing-room door, and sat down musing mysteriously before his paper. His large, fattish, freckled hand hung down over the arm of the low chair, nearly to the carpet, with his heavy gold pencil-case in its fingers. He heaved one deep, unconscious sigh, as he leaned back. It was not that he quailed before any coming crisis. He was not a soft-hearted or nervous general, and had quite made up his mind. But he was not without good nature in ordinary cases, and the page he was about to open was full of terror and bordered all round with black.

Lady Jane Lennox was at that moment seated also before her desk, very pale, and writing a few very grateful and humble lines of thanks to her General — vehement thanks — vehement self-abasement — such as surprised him quite delightfully. He read them over and over, smiling with all his might, under his stiff white moustache, and with a happy moisture in his twinkling grey eyes, and many a murmured apostrophe, "Poor little thing — how pleased she is — poor little Janet!” and resolving how happy they two should be, and how much sunshine was breaking into their world.

Monsieur Varbarriere was sitting in deep thought before his desk.

“Yes, I think I *may*,” was the result of his ruminations.

And in his bold clear hand he indited the following letter, which we translate: —

Private and Confidential.

Marlowe Manor, — th October, 1849.

General Lennox.

Sir, — I, in the first place, beg you to excuse the apparent presumption of my soliciting a private audience of a gentleman to whom I have the honour to be but so slightly known, and of claiming the protection of an honourable secrecy. The reason of my so doing will be obvious when I say that I have certain circumstances to lay before you which nearly affect your honour. I decline making any detailed statement by letter, nor will I explain my meaning at Marlowe Manor; but if, without *fracas*, you will give me a private meeting, at any place between this and London, I will make it my business to see you, when I shall satisfy you that I have not made this request without the gravest reasons. May I entreat that your reply may be addressed to me, *poste restante*, Slowton.

Accept the assurance, &c., &c., &c.,

H. Varbarriere.

Thus was the angelic messenger, musical with silvery wings, who visited honest General Lennox in his lodgings off Piccadilly, accompanied all the way, in the long flight from Slowton to the London terminus, by a dark spirit of compensation, to appal him with a doubt.

Varbarriere’s letter had been posted at Wardlock by his own servant Jacques — a precaution he chose to adopt, as he did not care that anyone at the little town of Marlowe, far less at the Manor, should guess that he had anything on earth to say to General Lennox.

When the two letters reached that old gentleman, he opened Lady Jane’s first; for, as we know, he had arrived at the amorous age, and was impatient to read what his little Jennie had to say; and when he had read it once, he had of course to read it all over again; then he kissed it and laughed tremulously over it, and was nearer to crying than he would have confessed to anyone — even to her; and he read it again at the window, where he was seen by seedy Captain Fezzy, who was reading *Bell's Life*, across, the street, in the three-pair-of-stairs window, and by Miss Dignum, the proprietress, from the drawingroom, with a countenance so radiant and moved as to interest both spectators from their different points of view.

Thus, with many reperusals and pleasant castle-buildings, and some airs gently whistled in his reveries, he had nearly forgotten M. Varbarriere's letter.

He was so gratified — he always knew she cared for her old man, little Jennie — she was not demonstrative, all the better perhaps for that; and here, in this delightful letter, so grateful, so sad, so humble, it was all confessed — demonstrated, at last; and old General Lennox thought infinitely better of himself, and far more adoringly of his wife than ever, and was indescribably proud and happy. Hitherto his good angel had had it all his own way; the other spirit was now about to take his turn — touched him on the elbow and presented Monsieur Varbarriere's letter, with a dark smile.

"Near forgetting this, by Jove!" said the old gentleman with the white moustache and eyebrows, taking the letter in his gnarled pink fingers.

"What the devil can the fellow mean? I think he's a fool," said the General, very pale and stern, when he had read the letter twice through.

If the people at the other side had been studying the transition of human countenance, they would have had a treat in the General's, now again presented at his drawingroom window, where he stood leaning grimly on his knuckles.

Still oftener, and more microscopically, was this letter spelled over than the other.

"It can't possibly refer to Jane. It *can't*. I put that out of my head — *quite*," said the poor General energetically to himself, with a short wave of his hand like a little sabre-cut in the air.

But what could it be? He had no kinsman near enough in blood to "affect his honour." But these French fellows had such queer phrases. The only transaction he could think of was the sale of his black charger in Calcutta for two hundred guineas, to that ill-conditioned fellow, Colonel Bardell, who, he heard, had been grumbling about that bargain, as he did about every other.

"I should not be surprised if he said I cheated him about that horse!"

And he felt quite obliged to Colonel Bardell for affording this hypothesis.

"Yes, Bardell was coming to England — possibly at Marlowe now. He knows Sir Jekyl. Egad, that's the very thing. He's been talking; and this officious old French bourgeois thinks he's doing a devilish polite thing in telling me what a suspected dog I am."

The General laughed, and breathed a great sigh of relief, and recalled all the cases he could bring up in which fellows had got into scrapes unwittingly about horseflesh, and how savagely fellows sometimes spoke when they did not like their bargains.

CHAPTER XXXV.

The Bishop at Marlowe.

So he laboured in favour of his hypothesis with an uneasy sort of success; but, for a few seconds, on one sore point of his heart had there been a pressure, new, utterly agonising, and there remained the sense of contusion.

The General took his hat, and came and walked off briskly into the city a long way, thinking he had business; but when he reached the office, preferring another day — wishing to be back at Marlowe — wishing to see Varbarriere — longing to know the worst.

At last he turned into a city coffee-house, and wrote a reply on a quarto sheet of letter-paper to Monsieur Varbarriere. He was minded first to treat the whole thing with a well-bred contempt, and simply to mention that as he expected soon to be at Marlowe, he would not give Monsieur Varbarriere the trouble of making an appointment elsewhere.

But, seated in his box, he read Monsieur Varbarriere's short letter over again before committing himself, and it struck him that it was *not* an intimation to be trifled with — it had a certain gravity which did not lose its force by frequent reading. The gentleman himself, too — reserved, shrewd, with an odd mixture of the unctuous and the sardonic — his recollection of this person, the writer, came unpleasantly in aid of the serious impression which his letter was calculated to make; and he read again —

"I have certain circumstances to lay before you which nearly affect your honour."

The words smote his heart again with a tremendous augury; somehow they would not quite fit his hypothesis about the horse, but it might be something else. Was there any lady who might conceive herself jilted? Who could guess what it might be?

Jennie's letter he read then again in his box, with the smell of beefsteaks, the glitter of pewter pots, and the tread of waiters about him.

Yes, it was — he defied the devil himself to question it — an affectionate, loving, grateful letter. And Lady Alice had gone to Marlowe, and was staying there — Lady Alice Redcliffe, that stiff, austere duenna —

Jane's kinswoman. He was glad of it, and often thinking of it. But, no — oh! no — it could not possibly refer to Jane: upon that point he had perfectly made up his mind.

Well, with his pen between his fingers, he considered when he could go, and where he should meet this vulgar Frenchman. He could not leave London tomorrow, nor next day, and the day following he had to give evidence on the question of compensation to that native prince, and so on: so at last he wrote, naming the nearest day he could command, and requesting, in a postscript which he opened the letter to add, that Monsieur Varbarriere would be so very good as to let him know a little more distinctly to what specific subject his letter referred, as he had in vain taxed his recollection for the slightest clue to his meaning; and although he was perfectly satisfied that he could not have the smallest difficulty in clearing up anything that could possibly be alleged against him as a soldier or a gentleman — having, he thanked Heaven, accomplished his career with honour — he yet could not feel quite comfortable until he heard something more explicit.

As the General, with this letter in his pocket, was hurrying to the postoffice, the party at Marlowe were admiring a glorious sunset, and Monsieur Varbarriere was describing to Lady Jane Lennox some gorgeous effects of sunlight which he had witnessed from Lisbon on the horizon of the Atlantic.

The Bishop had already arrived, and was in his dressing-room, and Dives was more silent and thoughtful than usual.

Yes, the Bishop had arrived. He was venerable, dignified, dapper, with, for his time of life, a wonderfully shapely leg in his black silk stocking. There was in his manner and tones that suavity which reminds one at the same time of heaven and the House of Lords. He did not laugh. He smiled and bowed sometimes. There was a classical flavour in his conversation with gentlemen, and he sometimes conversed with ladies, his leg crossed horizontally, the ankle resting on his knee, while he mildly stroked the shapely limb I have mentioned, and murmured well-bred Christianity, to which, as well as to his secular narratives, the ladies listened respectfully.

Don't suppose he was a hypocrite or a Pharisee. He was as honest as most men, and better than many Christians. He was a bachelor, and wealthy; but if he had amassed a good deal of public money, he had also displayed a good deal of public spirit, and had done many princely and even some kind actions. His family were not presentable, making a livelihood by unmentionable practices, such as shopkeeping and the like. Still he cut them with moderation, having maintained affable though clandestine relations with his two maiden aunts, who lived and died in Thames Street, and having twice assisted a nephew, though he declined seeing him, who was a skipper of a Russian brig.

He was a little High-Church. But though a disciplinarian in ecclesiastical matters, and with notions about self-mortification, his rule as master of the great school he had once governed had been kindly and popular as well as firm. I do not know exactly what interest got him his bishopric. Perhaps it was his reputation only; and that he was thinking of duty, and his fasts, and waked in his cell one morning with a mitre on instead of his nightcap. The Trappist, mayhap, in digging his grave had lighted on a pot of gold.

“I had no idea,” exclaimed Miss Blunket, when the Bishop’s apron and silk stockings had moved with the Rev. Dives Marlowe to the opposite extremity of the drawingroom, where the attentive Rector was soon deep in demonstrations, which evidently interested the right reverend prelate much, drawn from some manuscript notes of an ancestor of Dives’s who had filled that see, which had long known him no more, and where he had been sharp in his day in looking up obscure rights and neglected revenues.

“I had no idea the Bishop was so young; he’s by *no means* an old-looking man; and so very admirable a prelate — is not he?”

“He has neglected one of St. Paul’s conditions though,” said Sir Jekyl; “but you will not think the worse of him for that. It may be mended, you know.”

“What’s that?” inquired Miss Blunket.

“Why, he’s not the husband of one wife.”

“Nonsense, you wretch!” cried Miss Blunket, with a giggle, jerking a violet which she was twiddling between her fingers at the Baronet.

“He has written a great deal, has not he?” continued Miss Blunket. “His tract on mortification has gone to fifteen thousand copies, I see by the newspaper.”

“I wonder he has never married,” interposed Lady Blunket, drowsily, with her usual attention to the context.

“I wonder he never tried it as a species of mortification,” suggested Sir Jekyl.

“You horrid Vandal! Do you hear him, mamma?” exclaimed Miss Blunket.

Lady Blunket rather testily — for she neither heard nor understood very well, and her daughter’s voice was shrill — asked —

“*What* is it? You are always making mountains of molehills, my dear, and *startling* one.”

Old Lady Alice Redcliffe’s entrance at this moment made a diversion. She entered, tall, grey, and shaky, leaning on the arm of pretty Beatrix, and was encountered near the door by the right reverend prelate, who greeted her with a dignified and apostolic gallantry, which contrasted finely with Sir Jekyl’s jaunty and hilarious salutation.

The Bishop was very much changed since she had seen him last. He, no doubt, thought the same of her. Neither intimated this little reflection to the other. Each estimated, with something of wonder and pity, the other’s decay, and neither appropriated the lesson.

“I dare say you think me very much altered,” said Lady Alice, so soon as she had made herself comfortable on the ottoman.

“I was about putting the same inquiry of myself, Lady Alice; but, alas! why should we? ‘Never continueth in one stay,’ you know; change is the universal law, and the greatest, last.”

The excellent prelate delivered this *ex cathedrâ*, as an immortal to a mortal. It was his duty to impress old Lady Alice, and he courteously included himself, being a modest priest, who talked of sin and death as if bishops were equally subject to them with other men.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Old Scenes recalled.

At dinner the prelate, who sat beside Lady Alice, conversed in the same condescending spirit, and with the same dignified humility, upon all sorts of subjects — upon the new sect, the Huggletonians, whom, with doubtful originality, but considerable emphasis, he likened to “lost sheep.”

“Who’s lost his sheep, my lord?” inquired Sir Paul Blunket across the table.

“I spoke metaphorically, Sir Paul. The Huggletonians, the sheep who should have been led by the waters of comfort, have been suffered to stray into the wilderness.”

“Quite so — I see. Shocking name that — the Huggletonians. I should not like to be a Huggletonian, egad!” said Sir Paul Blunket, and drank some wine. “Lost sheep, to be sure — yes; but that thing of bringing sheep to water — you see — it’s a mistake. When a wether takes to drinking water, it’s a sign he’s got the rot.”

The Bishop gently declined his head, and patiently allowed this little observation to blow over.

Sir Paul Blunket, having delivered it, merely added, after a decent pause, as he ate his dinner —

“Dartbroke mutton this — five years old — eh?”

“Yes. I hope you like it,” answered his host.

Sir Paul Blunket, having a bit in his mouth, grunted politely —

“Only for your own table, though?” he added, when he’d swallowed it.

“That’s all,” answered Sir Jekyl.

“Never pay at market, you know,” said Sir Paul Blunket. “I consider any sheep kept beyond two years as lost.”

“A lost sheep, and sell him as a Huggletonian,” rejoined Sir Jekyl.

“It is twenty years,” murmured the Bishop in Lady Alice’s ear, for he preferred not hearing that kind of joke, “since I sate in this parlour.”

“Ha!” sighed Lady Alice.

"Long *before* that I used, in poor Sir Harry's time, to be here a good deal — a hospitable, kind man, in the main."

"I never liked him," croaked Lady Alice, and wiped her mouth.

They sat so very close to Sir Jekyl that the Bishop merely uttered a mild ejaculation, and bowed toward his plate.

"The arrangements of this room — the portraits — are just what I remember them."

"Yes, and you were here — let me see — just thirty years since, when Sir Harry died — weren't you?"

"So I was, my dear Lady Alice — very true," replied the Bishop in his most subdued tones, and he threw his head back a little, and nearly closed his eyes; and she fancied he meant, in a dignified way, to say, "I should prefer not speaking of those particular recollections while we sit so near our host." The old lady was much of the same mind, and said to him quietly —

"I'll ask you a few questions by-and-by. You remember Donica Gwynn. She's living with me now — the housekeeper, you know."

"Yes, perfectly, a very nice-looking quiet young woman — how is she?"

"A dried-up old woman now, but very well," said Lady Alice.

"Yes, to be sure; she must be elderly now," said he, hastily; and the Bishop mentally made up one of those little sums in addition, the result of which surprises us sometimes in our elderly days so oddly.

When the party transferred themselves to the drawingroom, Lady Alice failed to secure the Bishop, who was seized by the Rev. Dives Marlowe and carried into a recess — Sir Jekyl having given his clerical brother the key of a cabinet in which were deposited more of the memoranda, and a handsome collection of the official and legal correspondence of that episcopal ancestor whose agreeable MSS. had interested the Bishop so much before dinner.

Jekyl, indeed, was a goodnatured brother. As a matchmaking mother will get the proper persons under the same roof, he had managed this little meeting at Marlowe. When the ladies went away to the drawingroom, he had cried —

"Dives, I want you here for a moment," and so he placed him on the chair which Lady Jane Lennox had occupied beside him, and what was more to the purpose, beside the Bishop; and, as Dives was a good scholar, well made up on controversies, with a very pretty notion of ecclesiastical law and a turn for Latin verse, he and the prelate were soon in a state of very happy and intimate confidence. This cabinet, too, was what the game of chess is to the lovers — a great opportunity — a seclusion; and Dives knowing all about the papers, was enabled really to interest the Bishop very keenly.

So Lady Alice, who wanted to talk with him, was doomed to a jealous isolation, until that friend, of whom she was gradually coming to think very highly indeed, Monsieur Varbarriere, drew near, and they fell into conversation, first on the recent railway collision, and then on the fruit and flower show, and next upon the Bishop.

They both agreed what a charming and venerable person he was, and then Lady Alice said —

"Sir Harry Marlowe, I told you — the father, you know, of Jekyl there," and she dropped her voice as she named him, "was in possession at the time when the deed affecting my beloved son's rights was lost."

"Yes, madame."

"And it was the Bishop there who attended him on his deathbed."

"Ho!" exclaimed M. Varbarriere, looking more curiously for a moment at that dapper little gentleman in the silk apron.

"They said he heard a great deal from poor wretched Sir Harry. I have never had an opportunity of asking him in private about it, but I mean tomorrow, please Heaven."

"It may be, madame, in the highest degree important," said Monsieur Varbarriere, emphatically.

"How can it be? My son is dead."

"Your son is" —— and M. Varbarriere, who was speaking sternly and with a pallid face, like a man deeply excited, suddenly checked himself, and said —

"Yes, very true, your son is dead. Yes, madame, he is dead."

Old Lady Alice looked at him with a bewildered and frightened gaze.

"In Heaven's name, sir, what do you mean?"

"Mean — mean — why, what have I said?" exclaimed Monsieur Varbarriere, very tartly, and looking still more uncomfortable.

"I did not say you had said anything, but you do mean something."

"No, madame, I *forgot* something; the tragedy to which you referred is not to be supposed to be always as present to the mind of another as it naturally is to your own. We forget in a moment of surprise many things of which at another time we need not to be reminded, and so it happened with me."

Monsieur Varbarriere stood up and fiddled with his gold double eyeglasses, and seemed for a while disposed to add more on that theme, but, after a pause, said —

"And so it was to the *Bishop* that Sir Harry Marlowe communicated his dying wish that the green chamber should be shut up?"

"Yes, to him; and I have heard that more passed than is suspected, but of that I know nothing; only I mean to put the question to him directly, when next I can see him alone."

Monsieur Varbarriere again looked with a curious scrutiny at the Bishop, and then he inquired —

"He is a prelate, no doubt, who enjoys a high reputation for integrity?"

"This I know, that he would not for worlds utter an untruth," replied Lady Alice.

"What a charming person is Lady Jane Lennox!" exclaimed Monsieur Varbarriere, suddenly diverging.

"H'm! do you think so? Well, yes, she is very much admired."

"It is not often you see a pair so unequal in years so affectionately attached," said Monsieur Varbarriere.

"I have never seen her husband, and I can't, therefore, say how they get on together; but I'm glad to hear you say so. Jane has a temper, you know, which *every* one might not get on with; that is," she added, fearing lest she had gone a little too far, "sometimes it is not quite pleasant."

"No doubt she was much admired and much pursued," observed Varbarriere.

"Yes, I said she was admired," answered Lady Alice, drily.

"How charming she looks, reading her book at this moment!" exclaimed Varbarriere.

She was leaning back on an ottoman, with a book in her hand; her rich wavy hair, her jewels and splendid dress, her beautiful braceleted arms, and exquisitely haughty features, and a certain negligence in her *pose*, recalled some of those voluptuous portraits of the beauties of the Court of Charles II.

Sir Jekyl was seated on the other side of the cushioned circle, leaning a little across, and talking volubly, and, as it seemed, earnestly. It is one of those groups in which, marking the silence of the lady and the serious earnestness of her companion, and the flush of both countenances, one concludes, if there be nothing to forbid, that the talk is at least romantic.

Lady Alice was reserved, however; she merely said —

"Yes, Jane looks very well; she's always well got up."

Monsieur Varbarriere saw her glance with a shrewd little frown of scrutiny at the Baronet and Lady Jane, and he knew what was passing in her mind; she, too, suspected what was in his, for she glanced at him, and their eyes met for a moment and were averted. Each knew what the other was thinking; so Lady Alice said —

"For an old gentleman, Jekyl is the most romantic I know; when he has had his wine, I think he'd flirt with any woman alive. I dare say he's boring poor Jane to death, if we knew but all. She can't read her book. I assure you I've seen him, when nobody better was to be had, making love to old Susan Blunket — Miss Blunket there — after dinner, of course: and by the time he has played his rubber of whist he's quite a sane man, and continues so until he comes in after dinner next evening. We all know Jekyl, and never mind him." Having thus spoken, she asked Monsieur Varbarriere whether he intended a long stay in England, and a variety of similar questions.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

In which Lady Alice pumps the Bishop.

Lady Jane Lennox, who complained of a headache, departed early for her room. The Baronet's passion for whist returned, and he played with more than his usual spirit and hilarity; Monsieur Varbarriere, his partner, was also in great force, and made some very creditable sallies between the deals. All went, in fact, merry as a marriage-bell. But in that marriage-bell booms unmarked the selfsame tone which thrills in the funeral-knell. There was its somewhat of bitter rising probably in each merry soul in that gay room. Black care walked silently among those smiling guests, and on an unseen salver presented to each his sprig of rue or rosemary. Another figure also, lank, obsequious, smirking dolorously, arrayed in the Marlowe livery, came in with a bow, and stood with an hour-glass in his long yellow claw at the back of Sir Jekyl's chair; you might see the faint lights of his hollow eyes reflected on the Baronet's cards.

"A little chilly tonight, is not it?" said Sir Jekyl, and shook his shoulders. "Have we quite light enough, do you think?"

In that serene company there were two hearts specially sore, each with a totally different anguish.

In Lady Alice's old ears continually beat these words, "Your son is" —— ending, like an interrupted dream, in nothing. Before her eyes was Varbarriere's disturbed countenance as he dropped the curtain over his meaning, and affected to have forgotten the death of Guy Deverell.

"Your son is" —— Merciful Heaven! could he have meant living?

Could that shape she had seen in its coffin, with the small blue mark in its serene forehead, where the bullet had entered, been a simulacrum — not her son — a cast — a fraud?

Her reason told her loudly such a thought was mere insanity; and yet what could that sudden break in Varbarriere's sentence have been meant to conceal, and what did that recoiling look imply?

"Your son is" —— It was for ever going on. She knew there was something to tell, something of which M. Varbarriere was thoroughly cognisant, and about which nothing could ever induce him to open his lips.

If it was not "your son is living," she cared not what else it might be, and *that* — could it? — no, it could not be. A slight hectic touched each thin cheek, otherwise she looked as usual. But as she gazed dreamily over the fender, with clouded eyes, her temples were throbbing, and she felt sometimes quite wild, and ready to start to her feet and adjure that awful whist-player to disclose all he knew about her dead boy.

Beatrix was that evening seated near the fireplace, and Drayton making himself agreeable, with as small trouble as possible to himself. Drayton! Well, he was rather amusing — cleverish — well enough up upon those subjects which are generally supposed to interest young ladies; and, with an affectation of not caring, really exerting himself to be entertaining. Did he succeed? If you were to judge by her animated looks and tones, you would have said very decidedly. Drayton's self-love was in a state of comfort, even of luxury, that evening. But was there anything in the triumph?

A pale face, at the farther end of the room, with a pair of large, dark, romantic eyes, a face that had grown melancholy of late, she saw every moment, though she had not once looked in that direction all the evening.

As Drayton saw her smile at his sallies, with bright eyes and heightened colour, leaning back in her cushioned chair, and looking under her long lashes into the empty palm of her pretty hand, he could not see that little portrait — painted on air with the colours of memory — that lay there like a locket; — neither his nor any other eyes, but hers alone.

Guy Strangways was at the farther end of the room, where were congregated Lady Blunket and her charming daughter, and that pretty Mrs. Maberly of whom we have spoken; and little Linnett, mounted straddlewise on his chair, leaning with his elbows on the back, and his chin on his knuckles, helped to entertain them with his inexhaustible agreeabilities. Guy Strangways had indeed very little cast upon him, for Linnett was garrulous and cheerful, and reinforced beside by help from other cheery spirits.

Here was Guy Strangways undergoing the isolation to which he had condemned himself; and over there, engrossed by Drayton, the lady whose peer he had never seen. Had she missed him? He saw no sign. Not once even casually had she looked in his direction; and how often, though she could not know it, had his eyes wandered toward her! Dull to him was the hour without her, and she was engrossed by another, who, selfish and shallow, was merely amusing himself and pleasing his vanity.

How is it that people in love see so well without eyes? Beatrix saw, without a glance, exactly where Guy Strangways was. She was piqued and proud, and chose perhaps to show him how little he was missed. It was his presence, though he suspected it so little, that sustained that animation which he resented; and had *he* left the room, Drayton would have found, all at once, that she was tired.

Next day was genial and warm, one of those days that bygone summer sometimes gives us back from the past to the wintry close of autumn, as in an old face that we love we sometimes see a look, transitory and how pathetic, of the youth we remember. Such days, howsoever pleasant, come touched with the melancholy of a souvenir. And perhaps the slanting amber light nowhere touched two figures more in harmony with its tone than those who now sat side by side on the rustic seat, under the two beech trees at the farther end of the pleasure-ground of Marlowe.

Old Lady Alice, with her cushions disposed about her, and her cloaks and shawls, had one arm of the seat; and the Bishop, gaitered and prudently buttoned up in a surtout of the finest black cloth, and with that grotesque (bequeathed of course by the Apostles) shovel-hat upon his silvery head, leaned back upon the other, and, with his dapper leg crossed, and showing the neat sole of his shoe to Lady Alice, stroked and patted, after his wont, the side of his calf.

“Upwards of three-and-thirty years,” said the Bishop.

“Yes, about that — about three-and-thirty years; and what did you think of him? A very bad man, I’m sure.”

“Madam, *de mortuis*. We have a saying, ‘concerning the dead, nothing but good.’”

“Nothing but *truth*, say I,” answered Lady Alice. “Praise can do them no good, and falsehood will do us a great deal of harm.”

“You put the point strongly, Lady Alice; but when it is said, ‘nothing but good,’ we mean, of course, nothing but the good we may *truly* speak of them.”

“And that, as you know, my lord, in his case was not much. You were with him to the moment of his death — nearly a week, was it not?”

“Three days precisely.”

“Did he know from the first he was dying?” inquired Lady Alice.

“He was not aware that his situation was desperate until the end of the second day. Nor was it; but he knew he was in danger, and was very much agitated, poor man; very anxious to live and lead a better life.”

“And you prayed with him?”

“Yes, yes; he was very much agitated, though; and it was not easy to fix his thoughts, poor Sir Harry! It was very sad. He held my hand in his — my hand — all the time I sat by the bed, saying, ‘Don’t you think I’ll get over it? — I feel that I shall — I feel quite safe while I hold your hand.’ I never felt a hand tremble as his did.”

“You prayed for him, and read with him?” said Lady Alice. “And you acted, beside, as his confessor, did not you, and heard some revelation he had to make?”

“You forget, my dear Lady Alice, that the office of confessor is unknown to the Church. It is not according to our theory to extract a specific declaration of particular sins.”

“H’m! I remember they told me that you refused at school to read the Absolution to the boys of your house until they had made confession and pointed out an offender they were concealing.”

The Bishop hemmed and slightly coloured. It might have amused an indifferent auditor to see that eminent and ancient divine taken to task, and made even to look a little foolish, by this old woman, and pushed into a corner, as a wild young curate might be by him on a question of Church doctrine.

“Why, as to that, the fact may be so; but it was under very special circumstances, Lady Alice. The Church refuses even the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper to an intending communicant who is known to be living in wilful sin; and here was a wilful concealment of a grave offence, to which all had thus made themselves, and were continuing to make themselves, accessory. It is, I allow, a doubtful question, and I do not say I should be prepared to adopt that measure now. The great Martin Luther has spoken well and luminously on the fallacy of taking his convictions at any one period of his life as the measure of his doctrine at a later one. The grain of mustard-seed, the law of perpetual expansion and development, applies to faith as well as to motive and action, to the Christian as a spiritual individual as well as to the Church as an aggregate.”

This apology for his faith did the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Queen’s Copely urge in his citation before old Lady Alice Redcliffe, whom one would have thought he might have afforded to despise in a Christian way; but for wise purposes the instincts of self-defence and self-esteem, and a jealousy of even our smallest neighbour’s opinion, is so deeply implanted, that we are ready to say a good word for ourselves to anyone who misconceives the perfect wisdom of our words, or the equally perfect purity of our motives.

VOLUME II.

CHAPTER I.

Lady Alice and Varbarriere tête-à-tête in the Library.

“Well, he told you something, did not he?” persisted Lady Alice.

“In the sense of a distinct disclosure, nothing,” said the Bishop, looking demurely over his horizontal leg on the neatly-shorn grass. “He did speak to me upon subjects — his wishes, and I have no doubt he intended to have been much more explicit. In fact, he intimated as much; but he was overtaken by death — unable to speak when I saw him next morning.”

“He spoke to you, I know, about pulling down or blowing up that green chamber,” said Lady Alice, whose recollections grew a little violent in proportion to the Bishop’s reserve and her own impatience.

“He did not suggest quite such strong measures, but he did regret that it had ever been built, and made me promise to urge upon his son, as you once before mentioned you were aware, so soon as he should come of age, to shut it up.”

“And you did urge him?”

“Certainly, Lady Alice,” said the Bishop, with dignity. “I viewed it in the light of a duty, and a very sacred one, to do so.”

“He told you the reason, then?” inquired Lady Alice.

“He gave me no reason on earth for his wish; perhaps, had he been spared for another day, he would have done so; but he expressed himself strongly indeed, with a kind of horror, and spoke of the Italian who built, and his father who ordered it, in terms of strong disapprobation, and wished frequently it had never been erected. Perhaps you would like to take a little turn. How very pretty the flowers still are!”

“Very. No, thank you, I’ll sit a little. And there was something more. I know perfectly there was, my lord; what was it, pray?” answered the old lady.

“It was merely something that I took charge of,” said the Bishop, cautiously.

“You need not be so reserved with me, my lord; I’m not, as you very well know, a talking old woman, by any means. I know something of the matter already, and have never talked about it; and as the late Lady Marlowe was my poor daughter by marriage, you may talk to me, I should hope, a little more freely than to a total stranger."

The Bishop, I fancy, thought there was something in this appeal, and was, perhaps, amused at the persistency of women, for he smiled sadly for a second or two on his gaiter, and he said, looking before him with his head a little on one side —

"You give me credit, my dear Lady Alice, for a great deal more reserve than I have, at least on this occasion, exercised. I have very little to disclose, and I am not forbidden by any promise, implied or direct, to tell you the very little I know."

He paused.

"Well, my lord, *pray* go on," insisted Lady Alice.

"Yes, on the whole," said the Bishop, thoughtfully, "I prefer telling you. In the room in which he died, in this house, there is, or was, a sort of lock-up place."

"That was the room in which Jekyl now sleeps," interrupted Lady Alice.

"I am not aware."

"The room at the extreme back of the house. You go through a long passage on the same level as the hall, and then, at the head of the far backstair, into a small room on your left, and through that into the bedroom, I mean. It was there, I know, his coffin lay, for I saw him in it."

"As well as I recollect, that must have been the room. I know it lay as you describe. He gave me some keys that were placed with his purse under his pillow, and directed me to open the press, and take out a box, resembling a small oak plate-chest, which I did, and, by his direction, having unlocked it, I took out a very little trunk-shaped box, covered with stamped red leather, and he took it from me, and the keys, and that time said no more."

"Well?"

"In the evening, when I returned, he said he had been thinking about it, and wished to place it and the key in my care, as his boy was not of age, and it contained something, the value of which, as I understood, might be overlooked, and the box mislaid. His direction to me was to give it to his son, the present Sir Jekyl, on his coming of age, and to tell him from him that he was to do what was right with it. I know those were his words, for he was exhausted, and not speaking very distinctly; and I repeated them carefully after him, and as he said, ‘correctly;’ after a short time he added, ‘I think I shall tell you more about it tomorrow;’ but, as I told you, he was unable to speak next morning.”

“And what did that red box contain?” asked Lady Alice.

“I can’t tell. I never unlocked it. I tied it round with a tape and sealed it, and so it remained.”

“Then, Jekyl got it when he came of age?”

“I had him, about that time, at my house. He examined the box, and, when he had satisfied himself as to its contents, he secured it again with his own seal, and requested me to keep it for him for some short time longer.”

“Have you got it still in your possession?”

“No. I thought it best to insist at last on his taking it into his own keeping. I’ve brought it with me here — and I gave it to him on the day of my arrival.”

“Very heavy, was it?”

“On the contrary, very light.”

“H’m! Thank you, my lord; it is very good of you to converse so long with an old woman such as I.”

“On the contrary, Lady Alice, I am much obliged to you. The fact is, I believe it is better to have mentioned these circumstances. It may, perhaps, prove important that some member of the family should know exactly what took place between me and the late Sir Harry Marlowe during his last illness. You now know everything. I have reminded him, as I thought it right, of the earnest injunction of his father, first with respect to that room, the green chamber; and he tells me that he means to comply with it when his party shall have broken up. And about the other matter, the small box, I mentioned that he should do what is right with it. He asked me if I had seen what the box contained; and on my saying no, he added that he could not tell what his father meant by telling him to do what was right with it — in fact, that he could do nothing with it.”

“Quite an Italian evening!” exclaimed the Bishop, after a pause, rising, and offering his arm to Lady Alice.

And so their conference ended.

Next day, contrary to her secluded custom, and for the first time, Lady Alice glided feebly into the new library of Marlowe, of which all the guests were free.

Quite empty, except of that silent company in Russia leather and gold, in vellum, and other fine suits; all so unobtrusive and quiet; all so obsequiously at her service; all ready to speak their best, their brightest, and wisest thoughts, or to be silent and neglected, and yet never affronted; always alert to serve and speak, or lie quiet.

Quite deserted! No, not quite. There, more than half hidden by that projection and carved oak pilaster, sate Monsieur Varbarriere, in an easy-chair and a pair of gold spectacles, reading easily his vellum quarto.

“Pretty room!” exclaimed Lady Alice in soliloquy, so soon as she had detected the corpulent and grave student.

Monsieur Varbarriere laid down his book with a look of weariness, and seeing Lady Alice, smiled benignly, and rose and bowed, and his sonorous bass tones greeted her courteously from the nook in which he stood framed in oak, like a portrait of a rich and mysterious burgomaster.

“What a pretty room!” repeated the old lady; “I believe we are *tête-à-tête*.”

“Quite so; I have been totally alone; a most agreeable surprise, Lady Alice. Books are very good company; but even the best won’t do always; and I was beginning to weary of mine.”

M. Varbarriere spoke French, so did Lady Alice; in fact, for that gentleman’s convenience, all conversations with him in that house were conducted in the same courtly language.

Lady Alice looked round the room to satisfy herself that they were really alone; and having made her commendatory criticisms on the apartment once more,

“Very pretty,” echoed Monsieur Varbarriere; “I admire the oak, especially in a library, it is so solemn and contemplative. The Bishop was here to-day, and admired the room very much. An agreeable and good man the Bishop appears to be.”

“Yes; a good man; an excellent man. I had a very interesting conversation with him yesterday. I may as well tell you, Monsieur Varbarriere — I know I may rely upon you — I have not come to my time of life without knowing pretty well, by a kind of instinct, whom I may trust; and I well know how you sympathise with me about my lost son.”

“Profoundly, madame;” and Monsieur Varbarriere, with his broad and brown hand on his breast, bowed slowly and very deep.

CHAPTER II.

M. Varbarriere orders his Wings.

In her own way, with interjections, and commentary and occasional pauses for the sake of respiration, old Lady Alice related the substance of what the Bishop had communicated to her.

"And what do you suppose, Monsieur Varbarriere, to have been the contents of that red leather box?" asked Lady Alice.

Monsieur Varbarriere smiled mysteriously and nodded.

"I fancy, Lady Alice, I have the honour to have arrived at precisely the same conclusion with yourself," said he.

"Well, I dare say. You see now what is involved. You understand now why I should be, for his own sake, more than ever grieved that my boy is gone," she said, trembling very much.

Monsieur Varbarriere bowed profoundly.

"And why it is, sir, that I do insist on your explaining your broken phrase of the other evening."

Monsieur Varbarriere in his deep oak frame stood up tall, portly, and erect. A narrow window, with stained heraldic emblazonry, was partly behind him, and the light from above fell askance on one side of his massive countenance, throwing such dark downward bars of shadow on his face, that Lady Alice could not tell whether he was scowling or smiling, or whether the effect was an illusion.

"What phrase, pray, does your ladyship allude to?" he inquired.

"You spoke of my boy — my poor Guy — as if you knew more of him than you cared to speak — as if you were on the point of disclosing, and suddenly recollected yourself," replied Lady Alice.

"You mean when I had the honour to converse with you the night before last in the drawingroom," said he, a little brusquely, observing that the old lady was becoming vehemently excited.

"Yes; when you left me under the impression that you thought my son still living," half screamed Lady Alice, like a woman in a fury.

“Bah!” thundered the sneering diapason of Monsieur Varbarriere, whose good manners totally forsook him in his angry impatience, and his broad foot on the floor enforced his emphasis with a stamp.

“What do you mean, you foreign masquerader, whom nobody knows? What *can* it be? Sir, you have half distracted me. I’ve heard of people getting into houses — I’ve heard of magicians — I’ve heard of the devil — I have heard of charlatans, sir. I’d like to know what right, if you know nothing of my dear son, you have to torture me with doubts— “

“Doubts!” repeated Varbarriere, if less angrily, even more contemptuously. “Pish!”

“You may say *pish*, sir, or any rudeness you please; but depend upon this, if you do know *anything* of any kind, about my darling son, I’ll have it from you if there be either laws or men in England,” shrieked Lady Alice.

Varbarriere all at once subsided, and looked hesitatingly. In tones comparatively quiet, but still a little ruffled, he said —

“I’ve been, I fear, very rude; everyone that’s angry is. I think you are right. I ought never to have approached the subject of your domestic sorrow. It was not my doing, madame; it was *you* who insisted on drawing me to it.”

“You told me that you had seen my son, and knew Mr. Strangways intimately.”

“I did *not*!” cried Varbarriere sternly, with his head thrown back; and he and Lady Alice for a second or two were silent. “That is, I beg pardon, you *misapprehended* me. I’m sure I never could have said I had seen your son, Mr. Guy Deverell, or that I had a particularly intimate acquaintance with Mr. Strangways.”

“It won’t do,” burst forth Lady Alice again; “I’ll not be fooled — I won’t be fooled, sir.”

“Pray, then, pause for one moment before you have excited an alarm in the house, and possibly decide me on taking my leave for ever,” said Varbarriere, in a low but very stern tone. “Whatever I may be — charlatan, conjurer, devil — if you but knew the truth, you would acknowledge yourself profoundly and everlastingly indebted to me. It *is* quite true that I am in possession of facts of which you had not even a suspicion; it is true that the affairs of those nearest to you in blood have occupied my profoundest thoughts and most affectionate care. I believe, if you will but exercise the self-command of which I have no doubt you are perfectly capable, for a very few days, I shall have so matured my plans as to render their defeat impracticable. On the other hand, if you give me any trouble, or induce the slightest suspicion anywhere that I have taken an interest of the kind I describe, I shall quit England, and you shall go down to your grave in *darkness*, and with the conviction, moreover, that you have blasted the hopes for which you ought to have sacrificed not your momentary curiosity only, but your unhappy life."

Lady Alice was awed by the countenance and tones of this strange man, who assumed an authority over her, on this occasion, which neither of her deceased lords had ever ventured to assert in their lifetimes.

Her fearless spirit would not, however, succumb, but looked out through the cold windows of her deep-set eyes into the fiery gaze of her *master*, as she felt him, daringly as before.

After a short pause, she said —

"You would have acted more wisely, Monsieur Varbarriere, had you spoken to me on other occasions as frankly as you have just now done."

"Possibly, madame."

"Certainly, monsieur."

M. Varbarriere bowed.

"Certainly, sir. But having at length heard so much, I am willing to concede what you say. I trust the delay may not be long. — I think you ought to tell me soon. I suppose we had better talk no more in the interim," she added, suddenly turning as she approached the threshold of the room, and recovering something of her lofty tone— "upon that, to me, terrible subject."

"*Much* better, madame," acquiesced M. Varbarriere.

"And we meet otherwise as before," said the old lady, with a disdainful condescension and a slight bow.

"I thank you, madame, for that favour," replied M. Varbarriere, reverentially, approaching the door, which, as she drew near to withdraw, he opened for her with a bow, and they parted.

"I hope she'll be quiet, that old grey wildcat. I must get a note from her to Madame Gwynn. The case grows stronger; a little more and it will be irresistible, if only that stupid and ill-tempered old woman can be got to govern herself for a few days."

That evening, in the drawingroom, Monsieur Varbarriere was many degrees more respectful than ever to that old grey wildcat, at whom that morning he had roared in a way so utterly ungentlemanlike and ferocious.

People at a distance might have almost fancied a sexagenarian caricature of a love-scene. There had plainly been the lovers' quarrel. The lady carried her head a little high, threw sidelong glances on the carpet, had a little pink flush in her cheeks, and spoke little; listened, but smiled not; while the gentleman sat as close as he dare, and spoke earnestly and low.

Monsieur Varbarriere was, in fact, making the most of his time, and recovering all he could of his milder influence over Lady Alice, and did persuade and soften; and at length he secured a promise of the note he wanted to Mrs. Gwynn, pledging his honour that she would thoroughly approve the object of it, so soon as he was at liberty to disclose it.

That night, taking leave of Sir Jekyl, Monsieur Varbarriere said —

"You've been so good as to wish me to prolong my visit, which has been to me so charming and so interesting. I have ventured, therefore, to enable myself to do so, by arranging an absence of two days, which I mean to devote to business which will not bear postponement."

"Very sorry to lose you, even for the time you say; but you must leave your nephew, Mr. Strangways, as a hostage in our hands to secure your return."

"He shall remain, as you are so good as to desire it, to enjoy himself. As for me, I need no tie to hold me to my engagement, and only regret every minute stolen for other objects from my visit."

There was some truth in these complimentary speeches. Sir Jekyl was now quite at ease as to the character of his guests, whom he had at first connected with an often threatened attack, which he profoundly dreaded, however lightly he might talk of its chances of success. The host, on the whole, liked his guests, and really wished their stay prolonged; and Monsieur Varbarriere, who silently observed many things of which he did not speak, was, perhaps, just now particularly interested in his private perusal of that little romance which was to be read only at Marlowe Manor.

"I see, Guy, you have turned over a new leaf — no fooling now — you must not relapse, mind. I shall be away for two days. If longer, address me at Slowton. May I rely on your good sense and resolution — knowing what are our probable relations with this family — to continue to exercise the same caution as I have observed in your conduct, with much satisfaction, for the last two evenings? Well, I suppose I may. If you cannot trust yourself — fly. Get away — pack. You may follow me to Slowton, make what excuse you please; but don't loiter here. Goodnight."

Such was the farewell spoken by Varbarriere to his nephew, as he nodded his goodnight on the threshold of their dressing-room.

In the morning Monsieur Varbarriere's place knew him no more at the breakfast-table. With his valise, despatch-box, and desk, he had glided away, in the frosty sunlight, in a Marlowe postchaise, to the "Plough Inn," on the Old London Road, where, as we know, he had once sojourned before. It made a slight roundabout to the point to which his business really invited his route; and as he dismissed his vehicle here, I presume it was done with a view to mystify possible inquirers.

At the "Plough Inn" he was received with an awful bustle and reverence. The fame of the consideration with which he was entertained at Marlowe had reached that modest hostelry, and Monsieur Varbarriere looked larger, grander, more solemn in its modest hall, than ever; his valise was handled with respect, and lifted in like an invalid, not hauled and trundled like a prisoner; and the desk and despatch-box, as the more immediate attendants on his person, were eyed with the respect which such a confidence could not fail to inspire.

So Monsieur Varbarriere, having had his appetising drive through a bright country and keen air, ate his breakfast very comfortably; and when that meal was over, ordered a "fly," in which he proceeded to Wardlock, and pulled up at the hall-door of Lady Alice's reserved-looking, but comfortable old redbrick mansion.

CHAPTER III.

Monsieur Varbarriere talks with Donica Gwynn.

The footman opened the door in deshabille and unshorn, with a countenance that implied his sense of the impertinence of this disturbance of his gentlemanlike retirement. There was, however, that in the countenance of Monsieur Varbarriere, as well as the intangible but potent "aura" emitted by wealth, which surrounded him — an influence which everybody feels and no one can well define, which circumambiates a rich person and makes it felt, nobody knows how, that he *is* wealthy — that brought the flunky to himself; and adjusting his soiled necktie hastily with one hand, he ran down to the heavy but commanding countenance that loomed on his from the window of the vehicle.

"This is Wardlock?" demanded the visitor.

"Wardlock Manor? — yes, sir," answered the servant.

"I've a note from Lady Alice Redcliffe, and a few words to Mrs. Gwynn the housekeeper. She's at home?"

"Mrs. Gwynn? — yes, sir."

"Open the door, please," said Monsieur Varbarriere, who was now speaking good frank English with wonderful fluency, considering his marked preference for the French tongue elsewhere.

The door flew open at the touch of the footman; and Monsieur Varbarriere entered the staid mansion, and was shown by the servant into the wainscoted parlour in which Lady Alice had taken leave of the ancient retainer whom he was about to confer with.

When Mrs. Gwynn, with that mixture of curiosity and apprehension which an unexpected visit is calculated to inspire, entered the room, very erect and natty, she saw a large round-shouldered stranger, standing with his back toward her, arrayed in black, at the window, with his grotesque high-crowned hat on.

Turning about he removed this with a slight bow and a grave smile, and with his sonorous foreign accent inquired —

"Mrs. Gwynn, I suppose?"

“Yes, sir, that is my name, if you please.”

“A note, Mrs. Gwynn, from Lady Alice Redcliffe.”

And as he placed it in the thin and rather ladylike fingers of the housekeeper, his eyes rested steadily on her features, as might those of a process-server, whose business it might be hereafter to identify her.

Mrs. Gwynn read the note, which was simply an expression of her mistress’s wish that she should answer explicitly whatever questions the gentleman, M. Varbarriere, who would hand it to her, and who was, moreover, a warm friend of the family, might put to her.

When Mrs. Gwynn, with the help of her spectacles, had spelled through this letter, she in turn looked searchingly at Monsieur Varbarriere, and began to wonder unpleasantly what line his examination might take.

“Will you, Mrs. Gwynn, allow me the right to sit down, by yourself taking a chair?” said Monsieur Varbarriere, very politely, smiling darkly, and waving his hand toward a seat.

“I’m very well as I am, I thank you, sir,” replied Gwynn, who did not very much like the gentleman’s looks, and thought him rather like a great roguish Jew pedlar whom she had seen long ago at the fair of Marlowe.

“Nay, but pray sit down — I can’t while you stand — and our conversation may last some time — pray do.”

“I can talk as well, sir, one way as t’other,” replied she, while at the same time, with a sort of fidgeted impatience, she did sit down and fold her hands in her lap.

“We have all, Mrs. Gwynn, a very high opinion of you; I mean Lady Alice and the friends of her family, among whom I reckon myself.”

“It’s only of late as I came to my present misses, you’re aware, sir, ‘aving been, from, I may say, my childhood in the Marlowe family.”

“I know — the Marlowe family — it’s all one, in fact; but I may say, Mrs. Gwynn, that short, comparatively, as has been your time with Lady Alice, you are spoken of with more respect and liking by that branch of the family than by Sir Jekyl.”

“I’ve done nothing to disoblege Sir Jekyl, as Lady Alice knows. Will you be so kind, sir, as to say what you want of me, having business to attend to upstairs?”

“Certainly, it is only a trifle or two.”

Monsieur Varbarriere cleared his voice.

"Having ascertained all about that *secret door* that opens into the green chamber at Marlowe, we would be obliged to you to let us know at what time, to your knowledge, it was first used."

His large full eyes, from under his projecting brows, stared full upon her shrinking gaze as he asked this question in tones deep and firm, but otherwise as civil as he could employ.

It was vain for Mrs. Gwynn to attempt to conceal her extreme agitation. Her countenance showed it — she tried to speak, and failed; and cleared her throat, and broke down again.

"Perhaps you'd like some water," said Varbarriere, rising and approaching the bell.

"No," said Donica Gwynn, rising suddenly and getting before him. "Let be."

He saw that she wished to escape observation.

"As you please, Mrs. Gwynn — sit down again — I shan't without your leave — and recover a little."

"There's nothing wrong with me, sir," replied Donica, now in possession of her voice, very angrily; "there's nothing to cause it."

"Well, Mrs. Gwynn, it's quite excusable; I know all about it."

"What *are* you, a builder or a hartist?"

"Nothing of the kind; I'm a gentleman without a profession, Mrs. Gwynn, and one who will not permit you to be compromised; one who will protect you from the slightest suspicion of anything unpleasant."

"I don't know what you're a-driving at," said Mrs. Gwynn, still as white as death, and glancing furiously.

"Come, Mrs. Gwynn, you're a sensible woman. You *do* know *perfectly*. You have maintained a respectable character."

"Yes, sir!" said Donica Gwynn, and suddenly burst into a paroxysm of hysterical tears.

"Listen to me: you have maintained a respectable character, I know it: nothing whatever to injure that character shall ever fall from my lips; no human being — but two or three just as much interested in concealing all about it as you or I — shall ever know anything about it; and Sir Jekyl Marlowe has consented to take it down, so soon as the party at present at Marlowe shall have dispersed."

"Lady Alice — I'll never like to see her again," sobbed Donica.

"Lady Alice has no more suspicion of the existence of that door than the Pope of Rome has; and what is more, never shall. You may rely upon me to observe the most absolute silence and secrecy — nay, more, if necessary for the object of concealment — so to mislead and mystify people, that they can never so much as surmise the truth, *provided* — pray observe me — *provided* you treat me with the most *absolute candour*. You must not practise the least reserve or concealment. On tracing the slightest shadow of either in your communication with me, I hold myself free to deal with the facts in my possession, precisely as may seem best to myself. You understand?"

"Not Lady Alice, nor none of the servants, nor — nor a creature living, please."

"*Depend* on me," said Varbarriere.

"Well, sure I may; a gentleman would not break his word with such as me," said Donica, imploringly.

"We can't spend the whole day repeating the same thing over and over," said Varbarriere, rather grimly; "I've said my say — I know everything that concerns *you* about it, without your opening your lips upon the subject. You occupied that room for two years and a half during Sir Harry's lifetime — you see I know it all. *There!* you are perfectly safe. I need not have made you any promise, but I do — perfectly safe with me — and the room shall vanish this winter, and no one but ourselves know anything of that door — do you understand? — *provided*— "

"Yes, sir, please — and what do you wish to know more from me? I don't know, I'm sure, why I should be such a fool as to take on so about it, as if *I* could help it, or was ever a bit the worse of it myself. There's been many a one has slep' in that room and never so much as knowd there was a door but that they came in by."

"To be sure; so tell me, do you recollect Mr. Deverell's losing a paper in that room?"

"Well, I do mind the time he said he lost it there, but I know no more than the child unborn."

"Did Sir Harry never tell you?"

"They said a deal o' bad o' Sir Harry, and them that should a' stood up for him never said a good word for him. Poor old creature! — I doubt if he had pluck to do it. I don't think he had, poor fellow!"

“Did he ever *tell* you he had done it? Come, remember your promise.”

“No, upon my soul — never.”

“Do you *think* he took it?”

Their eyes met steadily.

“Yes, I do,” said she, with a slight defiant frown.

“And *why* do you think so?”

“Because, shortly after the row began about that paper, he talked with me, and said there was something a-troubling of him, and he wished me to go and live in a farmhouse at Applehythe, and keep summat he wanted kep safe, as there was no one in all England so true as me — poor old fellow! He never told me, and I never asked. But I laid it down in my own mind it was the paper Mr. Deverell lost, that’s all.”

“Did he ever show you that paper?”

“No.”

“Did he tell you where it was?”

“He never said he had it.”

“Did he show you where that thing was which he wanted you to take charge of?”

“Yes, in the press nigh his bed’s head.”

“Did he open the press?”

“Ay.”

“Well?”

“He showed me a sort of a box, and he said that was all.”

“A little trunk of stamped red leather — was that like it?”

“That was just it.”

“Did he afterwards give it into anybody’s charge?”

“I know no more about it. I saw it there, that’s all. I saw it once, and never before nor since.”

“Is there more than one secret door into that room?” pursued Varbarriere.

“More than one; no, never as I heard or thought.”

“Where is the door placed with which *you* are acquainted?”

“Why? Don’t you know?”

“Suppose I know of two. We have discovered a second. Which is the one you saw used? *Come!*”

Parenthetically it is to be observed that no such discovery had been made, and Varbarriere was merely fishing for information without disclosing his ignorance.

"In the recess at the right of the bed's head."

"Yes; and how do you open it? I mean from the green chamber?"

"I never knowd any way how to open it — it's from t'other side. There's a way to bolt it, though."

"Ay? How's that?"

"There's an ornament of scrowl-work, they calls it, bronze-like, as runs down the casing of the recess, shaped like letter esses. Well, the fourteenth of them, reckoning up from the bottom, next the wall, turns round with your finger and thumb; so if anyone be in the green chamber, and knows the secret, they can stop the door being opened."

"I see — thank you. You've been through the passage leading from Sir Harry's room that was — Sir Jekyl Marlowe's room, at the back of the house, to the secret door of the green chamber?"

"No, never. I know nothink o' that, no more nor a child."

"No?"

"No, nothink at all."

Varbarriere had here been trying to establish another conjecture.

There was a pause. Varbarriere, ruminating darkly, looked on Donica Gwynn. He then closed his pocketbook, in which he had inscribed a few notes, and said —

"Thank you, Mrs. Gwynn. Should I want anything more I'll call again; and you had better not mention the subject of my visit. Let me see the pictures — that will be the excuse — and do *you* keep *your* secret, and I'll keep mine."

"No, I thank you, sir," said Donica, drily, almost fiercely, drawing back from his proffered douceur.

"Tut, tut — pray do."

"No, I thank you."

So he looked at the pictures in the different rooms, and at some old china and snuff-boxes, to give a colour to his visit; and with polite speeches and dark smiles, and a general courtesy that was unctuous, he took his leave of Donica Gwynn, whom he left standing in the hall with a flushed face and a sore heart.

CHAPTER IV.

A Story of a Magician and a Vampire.

The pleasant autumn sun touched the steep roofs and mullioned windows of Marlowe Manor pleasantly that morning, turning the thinning foliage of its noble timber into gold, and bringing all the slopes and undulations of its grounds into relief in its subdued glory. The influence of the weather was felt by the guests assembled in the spacious breakfast-parlour, and gay and animated was the conversation.

Lady Jane Lennox, that “superbly handsome creature,” as old Doocey used to term her, had relapsed very much into her old ways. Beatrix had been pleased when, even in her impetuous and uncertain way, that proud spirit had seemed to be drawn toward her again. But that was past, and that unruly nature had broken away once more upon her own solitary and wayward courses. She cared no more for Beatrix, or, if at all, it was plainly not kindly.

In Lady Jane’s bold and mournful isolation there was something that interested Beatrix, ungracious as her ways often were, and she felt sore at the unjust repulse she had experienced. But Beatrix was proud, and so, though wounded, she did not show her pain — not that pain, nor another far deeper.

Between her and Guy Strangways had come a coldness unintelligible to her, an estrangement which she would have felt like an insult, had it not been for his melancholy looks and evident loss of spirits.

There is a very pretty room at Marlowe; it is called (*why*, I forget) Lady Mary’s boudoir; its door opens from the first landing on the great stair. An oak floor, partly covered with a Turkey carpet, one tall window with stone shafts, a high oldfashioned stone chimneypiece, and furniture perhaps a little incongruous, but pleasant in its incongruity. Tapestry in the Teniers style — Dutch village festivals, with no end of figures, about half life-size, dancing, drinking, making music; old boors, and young and fair-haired maidens, and wrinkled vraus, and here and there gentlemen in doublets and plumed hats, and ladies, smiling and bareheaded, and fair and plump, in great stomachers. These pleasant subjects, so lifelike, with children, cocks and hens, and dogs interspersed, helped, with a Louis Quatorze suit of pale green, and gold chairs cushioned with Utrecht velvet, to give to this room its character so mixed, of gaiety and solemnity, something very quaint and cheery.

This room had old Lady Alice Redcliffe selected for her sitting-room, when she found herself unequal to the exertion of meeting the other ladies in the drawingroom, and hither she had been wont to invite Guy Strangways, who would occasionally pass an hour here wonderfully pleasantly and happily — in fact, as many hours as the old lady would have permitted, so long as Beatrix had been her companion.

But with those self-denying resolutions we have mentioned came a change. When Beatrix was there the young gentleman was grave and rather silent, and generally had other engagements which at least shortened his visit. This was retorted by Beatrix, who, a few minutes after the arrival of the visitor whom old Lady Alice had begun to call her secretary, would, on one pretence or another, disappear, and leave the old princess and her secretary to the uninterrupted enjoyment of each other's society.

Now since the night on which Varbarriere in talking with Lady Alice had, as we have heard, suddenly arrested his speech respecting her son — leaving her in uncertainty how it was to have been finished — an uncertainty on which her morbid brain reflected a thousand horrid and impossible shapes, the old lady had once more conceived something of her early dread of Guy Strangways. It was now again subsiding, although last night, under the influence of laudanum, in her medicated sleep her son had been sitting at her bedside, talking incessantly, she could not remember what.

Guy Strangways had just returned from the Park for his fishing-rod and angler's gear, when he was met in the hall by the grave and courteous butler, who presented a tiny pencilled note from Lady Alice, begging him to spare her half an hour in Lady Mary's boudoir.

Perhaps it was a bore. But habitual courtesy is something more than "mouth honour, breath." Language and thought react upon one another marvellously. To restrain its expression is in part to restrain the feeling; and thus a well-bred man is not only in words and demeanour, but inwardly and sincerely, more gracious and noble than others.

How oddly things happen sometimes!

Exactly as Guy Strangways arrived on the lobby, a little gloved hand — it was Beatrix's — was on the door-handle of Lady Mary's boudoir. It was withdrawn, and she stood looking for a second or two at the young gentleman, who had evidently been going in the same direction. He, too, paused; then, with a very low bow, advanced to open the door for Miss Marlowe.

"No, thank you — I — I think I had better postpone my visit to grandmamma till I return. I'm going to the garden, and should like to bring her some flowers."

"I'm afraid I have arrived unluckily — she would, I know, have been so glad to see you," said Guy Strangways.

"Oh, I've seen her twice before to-day. You were going to make her a little visit now."

"I — if you wish it, Miss Marlowe, I'll defer it."

"She would be very little obliged to me, I'm sure; but I must really go," said Beatrix, recollecting on a sudden that there was no need of so long a parley.

"It would very much relieve the poor secretary's labours, and make his little period of duty so much happier," said Guy, forgetting his wise resolutions strangely.

"I am sure grandmamma would prefer seeing her visitors singly — it makes a great deal more of them, you know."

And with a little smile and such a pretty glow in her cheeks, she passed him by. He bowed and smiled faintly too, and for a moment stood gazing after her into the now vacant shadow of the old oak wainscoting, as young Numa might after his vanished Egeria, with an unspoken, burning grief and a longing at his heart.

"I'm sure she can't like me — I'm sure she *dis*likes me. So much the better — Heaven knows I'm glad of it."

And with an aching heart he knocked, turned the handle, and entered the pretty apartment in which Lady Alice, her thin shoulders curved, as she held her hands over the fire, was sitting alone.

She looked at him over her shoulder strangely from her hollow eyes, without moving or speaking for a time. He bowed gravely, and said —

"I have this moment received your little note, Lady Alice, and have hastened to obey."

She sat up straight and sighed.

"Thanks — I have not been very well — so nervous — so very nervous," she repeated, without removing her sad and clouded gaze from his face.

"We all heard with regret that you had not been so well," said he.

"Well, we'll not talk of it — you're very good — I'm glad you've come — very nervous, and almost wishing myself back at Wardlock — where indeed I should have returned, only that I should have been wishing myself back again before an hour — miserably nervous."

And Lady Alice sniffed at her smelling-salts, and added —

"And Monsieur Varbarriere gone away on business for some days — is not he?"

"Yes — quite uncertain — possibly for two, or perhaps three, he said," answered Guy.

"And he's very — he knows — he knows a great deal — I forget what I was going to say — I'm half asleep to-day — no sleep — a very bad night."

And old Lady Alice yawned drearily into the fire.

"Beatrix said she'd look in; but everyone forgets — you young people are so selfish."

"Mademoiselle Marlowe was at the door as I came in, and said she would go on instead to the garden first, and gather some flowers for you."

"Oh! h'm! — very good — well, I can't talk to-day; suppose you choose a book, Mr. Strangways, and read a few pages — that is, if you are quite at leisure?"

"Perfectly — that is, for an hour — unfortunately I have then an appointment. What kind of book shall I take?" he asked, approaching one of the two tall bookstands that flanked an oval mirror opposite the fireplace.

"Anything, provided it is old."

Nearly half an hour passed in discussing what to read — the old lady not being in the mood that day to pursue the verse readings which had employed Guy Strangways hitherto.

"This seems a curious old book," he said, after a few minutes. "Very old French — I think upon witchcraft, and full of odd narratives."

"That will do very well."

"I had better try to translate it — the language is so antiquated."

He leaned the folio on the edge of the chimneypiece, and his elbow beside it, supporting his head on his hand, and so read aloud to the *exigeante* old lady, who liked to see people employed about her, even though little of comfort, amusement, or edification resulted from it.

The narrative which Lady Alice had selected was entitled thus: —

“CONCERNING A REMARKABLE REVENGE AFTER SEPULTURE.

“In the Province of Normandy, in the year of grace 1405, there lived a young gentleman of Styrian descent, possessing estates in Hungary, but a still more opulent fortune in France. His park abutted on that of the Chevalier de St. Aubrache, who was a man also young, of ancient lineage, proud to excess, and though wealthy, by no means so wealthy as his Styrian neighbour.

“This disparity in riches excited the wrath of the jealous nobleman, who having once admitted the passions of envy and hatred to his heart, omitted no opportunity to injure him.

“The Chevalier de St. Aubrache, in fact, succeeded so well— “

Just at this point in the tale, Beatrix, with her flowers, not expecting to find Guy Strangways still in attendance, entered the room.

“You need not go; come in, dear — you’ve brought me some flowers — come in, I say; thank you, Beatrix, dear — they are very pretty, and very sweet too. Here is Mr. Strangways — sit by me, dear — reading a curious old tale of witchcraft. Tell her the beginning, pray.”

So Strangways told the story over again in his best way, and then proceeded to read as follows: —

“The Chevalier de St. Aubrache, in fact, succeeded so well, that on a point of law, aided by a corrupt judge in the Parliament of Rouen, he took from him a considerable portion of his estate, and subsequently so managed matters without committing himself, that he lost his life unfairly in a duel, which the Chevalier secretly contrived.

“Now there was in the household of the gentleman so made away with, a certain Hungarian, older than he, a grave and politic man, and reputed to have studied the art of magic deeply. By this man was the corpse of the deceased gentleman duly coffined, had away to Styria, and, it is said, there buried according to certain conditions, with which the Hungarian magician, who had vowed a terrible revenge, was well acquainted.

"In the meantime the Chevalier de St. Aubrache had espoused a very beautiful demoiselle of the noble family of D'Ayenterre, by whom he had one daughter, so beautiful that she was the subject of universal admiration, which increased in the heart of her proud father that affection which it was only natural that he should cherish for her.

"It was about the time of Candlemas, a full score of years after the death of his master, that the Hungarian magician returned to Normandy, accompanied by a young gentleman, very pale indeed, but otherwise so exactly like the gentleman now so long dead, that no one who had been familiar with his features could avoid being struck, and indeed, affrighted with the likeness.

"The Chevalier de St. Aubrache was at first filled with horror, like the rest; but well knowing that the young man whom he, the stranger, so resembled, had been actually killed as aforesaid, in combat, and having never heard of vampires, which are among the most malignant and awful of the manifestations of the Evil One, and not recognising at all the Hungarian magician, who had been careful to disguise himself effectually; and, above all, relying on letters from the King of Hungary, with which, under a feigned name, as well as with others from the Archbishop of Toledo in Spain, he had come provided, he received him into his house; when the grave magician, who resembled a doctor of a university, and the fair-seeming vampire, being established in the house of their enemy, began to practise, by stealth, their infernal arts."

The old lady saw that in the reader's countenance, as he read this odd story, which riveted her gaze. Perhaps conscious of her steady and uncomfortable stare, as well as of a real parallel, he grew obviously disconcerted, and at last, as it seemed, even agitated as he proceeded.

"Young man, for Heaven's sake, will you tell me who you are?" said Lady Alice, her dark old eyes fixed fearfully on his face, as she rose unconsciously from her chair.

The young man, very pale, turned a despairing and almost savage look from her to Beatrix, and back to her again.

"You are not a Strangways," she continued.

He looked steadily at her, as if he were going to speak, then dropped his glance suddenly and remained silent.

“I say, I know your name is not Strangways,” said the old lady, in increasing agitation.

“I can tell you nothing about myself,” said he again, fixing his great dark eyes, that looked almost wild in his pallid face, full upon her, with a strange expression of anguish.

“In the Almighty’s name, are you Guy Deverell?” she screamed, lifting up her thin hands between him and her in her terror.

The young man returned her gaze oddly, with, she fancied, a look of baffled horror in his face. It seemed to her like an evil spirit detected.

He recovered, however, for a few seconds, something of his usual manner. Instead of speaking, he bowed twice very low, and, on the point of leaving the room, he suddenly arrested his departure, turning about with a stamp on the floor; and walking back to her, he said, very gently —

“Yes, yes, why should I deny it? My name *is* Guy Deverell.”

And was gone.

CHAPTER V.

Farewell.

“Oh! grandmamma, *what* is it?” said Beatrix, clasping her thin wrist.

The old lady, stooping over the chair on which she leaned, stared darkly after the vanished image, trembling very much.

“*What* is Deverell — why should the name be so dreadful — is there anything — oh! grandmamma, *is* there anything very bad?”

“I don’t know — I am confused — did you ever see such a face? My gracious Heaven!” muttered Lady Alice.

“Oh! grandmamma, darling, tell me what it is, I implore of you.”

“Yes, dear, everything; another time. I can’t now. I might do a mischief. I might prevent — you must promise me, darling, to tell no one. You must not say his name is Deverell. *You* say nothing about it. That dreadful, dreadful story!”

The folio was lying with crumpled leaves, back upward, on the floor, where it had fallen.

“There is something plainly fearful in it. *You* think so, grandmamma; something discovered; something going to happen. Send after him, grandmamma; call him back. If it is anything you can prevent, I’ll ring.”

“Don’t *touch* the bell,” cried granny, sharply, clutching at her hand, “don’t *do* it. See, Beatrix, you promise me you say nothing to anyone of what you’ve witnessed — *promise*. I’ll tell you all I know when I’m better. He’ll come again. I *wish* he’d come again. I’m sure he will, though I hardly think I could bear to see him. I don’t know what to think.”

The old lady threw herself back in her chair, not affectedly at all, but looking so awfully haggard and agitated that Beatrix was frightened.

“Call nobody, there’s a darling; just open the window; I shall be better.”

And she heaved some of those long and heavy sighs which relieve hysterical oppression; and, after a long silence, she said —

“It is a long time since I have felt so ill, Beatrix. Remember this, darling, my papers are in the black cabinet in my bedroom at home — I mean

Wardlock. There is not a great deal. My jointure stops, you know; but whatever little there is, is for you, darling."

"You're not to talk of it, granny, darling, you'll be quite well in a minute; the air is doing you good. May I give you a little wine? — Well, a little water?"

"Thanks, dear; I *am* better. Remember what I told you, and particularly your promise to mention what you heard to no one. I mean the — the — strange scene with that young man. I think I will take a glass of wine. I'll tell you all when I'm better — when Monsieur Varbarriere comes back. It is important for a time, especially having heard what I have, that I should wait a little."

Granny sipped a little sherry slowly, and the tint of life, such as visits the cheek of the aged, returned to hers, and she was better.

"I'd rather not see him any more. It's all like a dream. I don't know what to make of it," muttered granny; and she began audibly to repeat passages, tremblingly and with upturned eyes, from her prayer-book.

Perplexed, anxious, excited, Beatrix looked down on the collapsed and haggard face of the old lady, and listened to the moaned petition, "Lord, have mercy upon us!" which trembled from her lips as it might from those of a fainting sinner on a deathbed.

Guy Deverell, as I shall henceforward call him, thinking of nothing but escape into solitude, was soon a good way from the house. He was too much agitated, and his thoughts too confused at first, to estimate all the possible consequences of the sudden disclosure he had just made.

What would Varbarriere, who could be stern and violent, say or do, when he learned it? Here was the one injunction on which he had been ever harping violated. He felt how much he owed to the unceasing care of that able and disinterested friend through all his life, and how had he repaid it all!

"Anything but deception — anything but that. I could not endure the agony of my position longer — yes, agony."

He was now wandering by the bank of the solitary river, and looked back at the picturesque gables of Marlowe Manor through the trees; and he felt that he was leaving all that could possibly interest him in existence in leaving Marlowe. Always was rising in his mind the one thought, "What does she think of my deception and my agitation — what can she think of *me*?"

It is not easy, even in silence and alone, when the feelings are at all ruffled, to follow out a train of thought. Guy thought of his approaching farewell to his uncle: he sometimes heard his great voice thundering in despair and fury over his ruined schemes — schemes, be they what they might, at least unselfish. Then he thought of the effect of the discovery on Sir Jekyl, who, no doubt, had special reasons for alarm connected with this name — a secret so jealously guarded by Varbarriere. Then he thought of his future. His commission in the French army awaited him. A life of drudgery or listlessness? No such thing! a career of adventure and glory — ending in a baton or death! Death is so romantic in the field! There are always some beautiful eyes to drop in secret those tears which are worth dying for. It is not a crowded trench, where fifty corpses pig together in the last noisome sleep — but an apotheosis!

He was sure he had done well in yielding to the impulse that put an end to the tedious treachery he had been doomed to practise; and if well, then *wisely* — so, no more retrospection.

All this rose and appeared in fragments like a wreck in the eddies of his mind.

One thing was clear — he must leave Marlowe forthwith. He could not meet his host again. He stood up. It is well to have hit upon anything to be done — anything quite certain.

With rapid steps he now returned to Marlowe, wondering how far he had walked, as it seemed to him, in so mere a moment of time.

The house was deserted; so fine a day had tempted all its inmates but old Lady Alice abroad. He sent to the village of Marlowe for a chaise, while Jacques, who was to await where he was the return of his master, Monsieur Varbarriere, got his luggage into readiness, and he himself wrote, having tried and torn up half a dozen, a note to Sir Jekyl, thanking him for his hospitality, and regretting that an unexpected occurrence made his departure on so short notice unavoidable. He did not sign it. He would not write his assumed name. Sir Jekyl could have no difficulty in knowing from which of his guests it came, perhaps would not even miss the signature.

The chaise stood at the doorsteps, his luggage stowed away, his dark short travelling cloak about his shoulders, and his note to Sir Jekyl in his fingers.

He entered the great hall, meaning to place it on the marble table where Sir Jekyl's notes and newspapers usually awaited him, and there he encountered Beatrix.

There was no one else. She was crossing to the outer door, and they almost met before they came to a stop.

"Oh! Mr. Strangways."

"Pray call me by my real name, Deverell. Strangways was my mother's; and in obedience to those who are wiser than I, during my journey I adopted it, although the reasons were not told me."

There was a little pause here.

"I am very glad I was so fortunate as to meet you, Miss Marlowe, before I left. I'm just going, and it would be such a privilege to know that you had not judged me very hardly."

"I'm sure papa will be very sorry you are going — a break-up is always a sad event — we miss our guests so much," she said, smiling, but a little pale.

"If you knew my story, Miss Marlowe, you would acquit me," he said, bursting forth all at once. "Misfortune overtook me in my early childhood, before I can remember. I have no right to trouble you with the recital; and in my folly I superadded this — the worst — that madly I gave my love to one who could not return it — who, perhaps, ought not to have returned it. Pardon me, Miss Marlowe, for talking of these things; but as I am going away, and wished you to understand me, I thought, perhaps, you would hear me. Seeing how hopeless was my love, I never told it, but resolved to see her no more, and so to the end of my days will keep my vow; but this is added, that for her sake my life becomes a sacrifice — a real one — to guard her from sorrows and dangers, which I believe *did* threaten her, and to save her from which I devote myself, as perhaps she will one day understand. I thought I would just tell you so much before I went, and — and — that *you* are that lady. Farewell, dear Miss Marlowe, most beautiful — beloved."

He pressed her hand, he kissed it passionately, and was gone.

It was not until she had heard the vehicle drive rapidly away that she quite recovered herself. She went into the front hall, and, through the window, standing far back, watched the receding chaise. When it was out of sight, humming a gay air, she ran upstairs, and into her bedroom, when, locking the door, she wept the bitterest tears, perhaps, she had ever shed, since the days of her childhood.

CHAPTER VI.

At the Bell and Horns.

With the reader's permission, I must tell here how Monsieur Varbarriere proceeded on his route to Slowton.

As he mounted his vehicle from the steps of Wardlock, the flunky, who was tantalised by the very unsatisfactory result of his listening at the parlour-door, considered him curiously.

"Go on towards the village," said M. Varbarriere to the driver, in his deep foreign accents.

And so soon as they were quite out of sight of the Wardlock flunky, he opened the front window of his nondescript vehicle, and called —

"Drive to Slowton."

Which, accordingly, was done. M. Varbarriere, in profound goodhumour, a flood of light and certainty having come upon him, sat back luxuriously in a halo of sardonic glory, and was smiling to himself, as men sometimes will over the chess-board when the rest of their game is secure.

At the Bell and Horns he was received with a reverential welcome.

"A gentleman been inquiring for Monsieur Varbarriere?" asked the foreign gentleman in black, descending.

"A gentleman, sir, as has took number seven, and expects a gentleman to call, but did not say who, which his name is Mr. Rumsey?"

"Very good," said Monsieur Varbarriere.

Suddenly he recollected that General Lennox's letter might have reached the postoffice, and, plucking a card from his case, wrote an order on it for his letters, which he handed to Boots, who trudged away to the postoffice close by.

Varbarriere was half sorry now that he had opened his correspondence with old General Lennox so soon. He had no hope that Donica Gwynn's reserves would have melted and given way so rapidly in the interview which had taken place. He was a man who cared nothing about penal justice, who had embraced the world's ethics early, and looked indulgently on escapades of human nature, and had no natural turn for cruelty, although he could be cruel enough when an object was to be accomplished.

"I don't think I'd have done it, though he deserves it richly, and has little right to look for quarter at my hands."

And whichever of the gentlemen interested he may have alluded to, he cursed him under his breath ardently.

In number seven there awaited him a tall and thin man of business, of a sad countenance and bilious, with a pale drab-coloured and barred muslin cravat, tied with as much precision as a curate's; a little bald at the very top of his head; a little stooped at his shoulders. He did not smile as Monsieur Varbarriere entered the room. He bowed in a meek and suffering way, and looked as if he had spent the morning in reading Doctor Blewish's pamphlet "On the Ubiquity of Disguised Cholera Morbus," or our good Bishop's well-known tract on "Self-Mortification." There was a smell of cigars in the room, which should not have been had he known that Monsieur Varbarriere was to be here so early. His chest was weak, and the doctors ordered that sort of fumigation.

Monsieur Varbarriere set his mind at ease by preparing himself to smoke one of the notable large cigars, of which he carried always a dozen rounds or so in his case.

"You have brought the cases and opinions with you?" inquired Varbarriere.

The melancholy solicitor replied by opening a tin box, from which he drew several sheafs of neatly labelled papers tied up in red tape; the most methodical and quiet of attorneys, and one of the most efficient to be found.

"Smoke away; you like it, so do I; we can talk too, and look at these," said Varbarriere, lighting his cigar.

Mr. Rumsey bowed, and meekly lighted his also.

Then began the conference on business.

"Where are Gamford's letters? — these? — ho!"

And as Monsieur Varbarriere read them, puffing away as fast as a furnace, and threw each down as he would play a card, in turn, he would cry "Bah!"— "Booh!" — or, "Did you ever read such Galamathias?" — and, at last —

"Who was right about that *benet* — you or I? I told you what he was."

“You will perceive just now, I think, sir, that there are some things of value there notwithstanding. You can’t see their importance until you shall have looked into the enlarged statement we have been enabled by the result of some fresh discoveries to submit to counsel.”

“Give me that case. Fresh discoveries, have you? I venture to say, when you’ve heard my notes, you’ll open your eyes. No, I mean the cigar-case; well, you may give me that too.”

So he took the paper, with its bluish briefing post pages, and broad margin, and the opinions of Mr. Serjeant Edgeways and Mr. Whaulbane, Q.C., copied in the same large, round hand at the conclusion.

“Well, these opinions are stronger than I expected. There is a bit here in Whaulbane’s I don’t like so well — what you call fishy, you know. But you shall hear just now what I can add to our proofs, and you will see what becomes of good Mr. Whaulbane’s doubts and queries. You said always you did not think they had destroyed the deed?”

“If well advised, they did not. I go that length. Because the deed, although it told against them while a claimant in the Deverell line appeared, would yet be an essential part of their case in the event of their title being attacked from the Bracton quarter; and therefore the fact is, they could not destroy it.”

“They are both quite clear upon the question of secondary evidence of the contents of a lost deed, I see,” said Varbarriere, musingly, “and think our proof satisfactory. Those advocates, however — *why* do they? — always say their say with so many reserves and misgivings, that you begin to think they know very little more of the likelihoods of the matter, with all their pedantry, than you do yourself.”

“The glorious uncertainty of the law!” ejaculated Mr. Rumsey, employing a phrase which I have heard before, and with the nearest approach to a macerated smile which his face had yet worn.

“Ay,” said Varbarriere, in his metallic tones of banter, “the glorious uncertainty of the law. That must be true, for you’re always saying it; and it must be pleasant too, if one could only see it; for, my faith! you look almost cheerful while you say it.”

“It makes counsel cautious, though it does not cool clients when they’re once fairly blooded,” said Mr. Rumsey. “A client is a wonderful thing sometimes. There would not be half the money made of our profession if men kept their senses when they go into law; but they seldom do. Lots of cool gamblers at every other game, but no one ever keeps his head at law."

"That's encouraging; thank you. Suppose I take your advice, and draw stakes?" said Varbarriere.

"You have no notion," said Mr. Rumsey, resignedly.

"Well, I believe you're right, monsieur; and I believe *I* am right too; and if you have any faith in your favourite oracles, so must you; but, have you done your cigar? Well, take your pen for a moment and listen to me, and note what I say. When Deverell came down with his title-deeds to Marlowe, they gave him the Window dressing-room for his bedroom, and the green chamber, with the bed taken down, for his dressing-room; and there he placed his papers, with the key turned in the door. In the morning his attorney came. It was a meeting about a settlement of the mortgage; and when the papers were overhauled it was found that that deed had been abstracted. Very good. Now listen to what I have to relate concerning the peculiar construction of that room."

So Monsieur Varbarriere proceeded to relate minutely all he had ascertained that day, much to the quiet edification of Mr. Rumsey, whose eyes brightened, and whose frontal wrinkles deepened as he listened.

"I told you I suspected some legerdemain about that room long ago; the idea came to me oddly. When on a visit to the Marquis de Mirault he told me that in making alterations in the chateau they had discovered a false door into one of the bedrooms. The tradition of this contrivance, which was singularly artful, was lost. It is possible that the secret of it perished with its first possessor. By means of this door the apartment in question was placed in almost immediate conjunction with another, which, except through this admirably concealed door, could not be reached from it without a long circuit. The proximity of the rooms, in fact, had been, by reason of the craft with which they were apparently separated, entirely overlooked."

The attorney observed, sadly —

"The French are an ingenious people."

"The curiosity of my friend was excited," continued Varbarriere, "and with some little search among family records he found that this room, which was constructed in the way of an addition to the chateau, had been built about the beginning of the eighteenth century, during the marquisate of one of the line, who was celebrated as *un homme à bonnes fortunes*, you understand, and its object was now quite palpable."

"A man, no doubt, of ability — a long-headed gentleman," mused the melancholy attorney.

"Well, at Marlowe I saw a collection of elevations of the green chamber, as it is called, built only two or three years later — and, mind this, by the same architect, an Italian, called Paulo Abruzzi, a remarkable name, which I perfectly remembered as having been mentioned by my friend the Marquis as the architect of his ancestral relic of Cupid's legerdemain. But here is the most remarkable circumstance, and to which my friend Sir Jekyl quite innocently gave its proper point. The room under this chamber, and, of course, in the same building, was decorated with portraits painted in the panel, and one of them was this identical Marquis de Mirault, with the date 1711, and the Baronet was good enough to tell me that he had been a very intimate friend, and had visited his grandfather, at Marlowe."

CHAPTER VII.

M. Varbarriere’s Plans.

Varbarriere solemnly lighted a cigar, and squinted at its glowing point with his great dark eyes, in which the mild attorney saw the lurid reflection. When it was well lighted he went on —

“You may suppose how this confirmed my theory. I set about my inquiries quietly, and was convinced that Sir Jekyl knew all about it, by his disquietude whenever I evinced an interest in that portion of the building. But I managed matters very slyly, and collected proof very nearly demonstrative; and at this moment he has not a notion who I am.”

“No. It will be a surprise when he does learn,” answered the attorney, sadly.

“A fine natural hair-dye is the air of the East Indies: first it turns light to black, and then black to grey. Then, my faith! — a bronzed face with plenty of furrows, a double chin, and a great beard to cover it, and eleven stone weight expanded to seventeen stone — *Corpo di Bacco!* — and six pounds!”

And Monsieur Varbarriere laughed like the clang and roar of a chime of cathedral bells.

“It will be a smart blow,” said the attorney, almost dreamily.

“Smash him,” said Varbarriere. “The Deverell estate is something over five thousand a-year; and the mesne rates, with four per cent. interest, amount to 213,000*l.*”

“He’ll defend it,” said the knight of the sorrowful countenance, who was now gathering in his papers.

“I hope he will,” growled Varbarriere, with a chuckle. “He has not a leg to stand on — all the better for *you*, at all events; and then I’ll bring down that other hammer on his head.”

“The criminal proceedings?” murmured the sad attorney.

“Ay. I can prove that case myself — he fired before his time, and killed him, I’m certain simply to get the estate. I was the only person present — poor Guy! Jekyl had me in his pocket then. The rascal wanted to thrust me down and destroy me afterwards. He employed that Jew house, Röbenzahl and Isaacs — the villain! Luck turned, and I am a rich fellow now, and his turn is coming. Vive la justice éternelle! Vive la bagatelle! Bravo! Bah!"

Monsieur Varbarriere had another pleasant roar of laughter here, and threw his hat at the solemn attorney's head.

"You'll lunch with me," said Varbarriere.

"Thanks," murmured the attorney.

"And now the war — the campaign — what next?"

"You'll make an exact note," the attorney musingly replied, "of what that woman Wynn or Gwynn can prove; also what the Lord Bishop of what's-his-name can prove; and it strikes me we shall have to serve some notice to intimidate Sir Jekyl about that red-leather box, to prevent his making away with the deed, and show him we know it is there; or perhaps apply for an order to make him lodge the deed in court; but Tom Weavel — he's always in town — will advise us. You don't think that woman will leave us in the lurch?"

"No," said Varbarriere, as if he was thinking of something else. "That Donica Gwynn, you mean. She had that green chamber to herself, you see, for a matter of three years."

"Yes."

"And she's one of those old domestic Dianas who are sensitive about scandal — you understand — and she knows what ill-natured people would say; so I quieted her all I could, and I don't think she'll venture to recede. No; she certainly won't."

"How soon can you let me have the notes, sir?"

"Tomorrow, when I return. I've an appointment to keep by rail tonight, and I'll make a full memorandum from my notes as I go along."

"Thanks — and what are your instructions?"

"Send back the cases with copies of the new evidence."

"And assuming a favourable opinion, sir, are my instructions to proceed?"

"Certainly, my son, forthwith — the grass it must not grow under our feet."

"Of course subject to counsel's opinion?" said the attorney, sadly.

"To be sure."

"And which first — the action or the indictment? or both together?" asked Mr. Rumsey.

"*That* for counsel too. Only my general direction is, let the onset be as sudden, violent, and determined as possible. You see?"

The attorney nodded gently, tying up his last bundle of papers as softly as a lady might knot her ribbon round the neck of her lap-dog.

"You see?"

"Yes, sir; your object is destruction. Delenda est Carthago — that's the word," murmured Mr. Rumsey, plaintively.

"Yes — ha, ha! — what you call double him up!" clanged out Varbarriere, with an exulting oath and a chuckle.

The attorney had locked up his despatch-box now, and putting the little bunch of keys deep into his trowsers pocket, he said, "Yes, that's the word; but I suppose you have considered— "

"*What?* I'm tired considering."

"I was going to say whether some more certain result might not be obtainable by negotiation; that is, if you thought it a case for negotiation."

"*What* negotiation? What do you mean?"

"Well, you see there are materials — there's something to yield at both sides," said the attorney, very slowly, in a diplomatic reverie.

"But why should you think of a compromise? — the worst thing I fancy could happen to *you*."

There was a general truth in this. It is not the ferryman's interest to build a bridge, nor was it Mr. Rumsey's that his client should walk high and dry over those troubled waters through which it was his privilege and profit to pilot him. But he had not quite so much faith in this case as Monsieur Varbarriere had, and he knew that his wealthy and resolute client could grow savage enough in defeat, and had once or twice had stormy interviews with him after failures.

"If the young gentleman and young lady liked one another, for instance, the conflicting claims might be reconciled, and a marriage would in that case arrange the difference."

"There's nothing very deep in that," snarled Varbarriere, "but there is everything impracticable. Do you think Guy Deverell, whose father that *lache* murdered before my eyes, could ever endure to call *him* father? Bah! If I thought so I would drive him from my presence and never behold him more. No, no, no! There is more than an estate in all this — there is justice, there is *punishment*."

Monsieur Varbarriere, with his hands in his pockets, took a turn up and down the room, and his solemn steps shook the floor, and his countenance was agitated by violence and hatred.

The pale, thin attorney eyed him with a gentle and careworn observation. His respected client was heaving with a great toppling swagger as he to-ed and fro-ed in his thunderstorm, looking as black as the Spirit of Evil.

This old-maidish attorney was meek and wise, but by no means timid. He was accustomed to hear strong language, and sometimes even oaths, without any strange emotion. He looked on this sort of volcanic demonstration scientifically, as a policeman does on drunkenness — knew its stages, and when it was best left to itself.

Mr. Rumsey, therefore, poked the fire a little, and then looked out of the window.

"You don't go to town tonight?"

"Not if you require me here, sir."

"Yes, I shall have those memoranda to give you — and tell me now, I think you know your business. Do you think, as we now stand, success is *certain*?"

"Well, sir, it certainly is very strong — very; but I need not tell you a case will sometimes take a queer turn, and I never like to tell a client that anything is absolutely certain — a case is sometimes carried out of its legitimate course, you see; the judges may go wrong, or the jury bolt, or a witness may break down, or else a bit of evidence may start up — it's a responsibility we never take on ourselves to say that of any case; and you know there has been a good deal of time — and that sometimes raises a feeling with a jury."

"Ay, a quarter of a century, but it can't be helped. For ten years of that time I could not show, I owed money to everybody. Then, when *I* was for striking on the criminal charge for *murder*, or *manslaughter*, or whatever you agreed it was to be, you all said I must begin with the civil action, and first oust him from Guy Deverell's estate. Well, *there* you told me I could not move till he was twenty-five, and now you talk of the good deal of time — *ma foi!* — as if it was I who delayed, and not *you*, messieurs. But enough, past is past. We have the present, and I'll use it."

“We are to go on, then?”

“Yes, we’ve had to wait too long. Stop for nothing, drive right on, you see, at the fastest pace counsel can manage. If I saw the Deverell estate where it should be, and a judgment for the mesne rates, and Sir Jekyl Marlowe in the dock for his crime, I don’t say I should sing *nunc dimittis*; but, *parbleu*, sir, it would be very agreeable — ha! ha! ha!”

CHAPTER VIII.

Tempest.

“Does Mr. Guy Deverell know anything of the measures you contemplate in his behalf?” inquired the attorney.

“Nothing. Do you think me a fool? Young men *are* such asses!”

“You know, however, of course, that he will act. The proceedings, you know, must be in his name.”

“Leave that to me.”

Varbarriere rang the bell and ordered luncheon. There were grouse and trout — he was in luck — and some cream cheese, for which rural delicacy he had a fancy. They brew very great ale at Slowton, like the Welsh, and it was a novelty to the gentleman of foreign habits, who eat as fastidiously as a Frenchman, and as largely as a German. On the whole it was satisfactory, and the high-shouldered, Jewish-looking sybarite shook hands in a very friendly way with his attorney in the afternoon, on the platform at Slowton, and glided off toward Chester, into which ancient town he thundered, screaming like a monster rushing on its prey; and a victim awaited him in the old commercial hotel; a tall, white-headed military-looking man, with a white moustache twirled up fiercely at the corners; whose short pinkish face and grey eyes, as evening deepened, were pretty constantly presented at the window of the coffee-room next the street door of the inn. From that post he saw all the shops and gas-lamps, up and down the street, gradually lighted. The gaselier in the centre of the coffee-room, with its six muffed glass globes, flared up over the rumpled and coffee-stained morning newspapers and the almanac, and the battered and dissipated-looking railway guide, with corners curled and back coming to pieces, which he consulted every ten minutes through his glasses.

How many consultations he had had with the waiter upon the arrival of trains due at various hours, and how often the injunction had been repeated to see that no mistake occurred about the private room he had ordered; and how reiterated the order that any gentleman inquiring for General Lennox should be shown at once into his presence, the patient waiter with the bilious complexion could tell.

As the time drew near, the General having again conferred with the waiter, conversed with the porter, and even talked a little with Boots — withdrew to his small square sitting-room and pair of candles upstairs, and awaited the arrival of Monsieur Varbarriere, with his back to the fire, in a state of extreme fidget.

That gentleman's voice he soon heard upon the passage, and the creaking of his heavy tread; and he felt as he used, when a young soldier, on going into action.

The General stepped forward. The waiter announced a gentleman who wished to see him; and Varbarriere's dark visage and mufflers, and sable mantle loomed behind; his felt hat in his hand, and his wavy cone of grizzled hair was bowing solemnly.

"Glad you're come — how d'ye do?" and Varbarriere's fat brown hand was seized by the General's pink and knotted fingers in a very cold and damp grasp. "Come in and sit down, sir. What will you take? — tea, or dinner, or what?"

"Very much obliged. I have ordered something, by-and-by, to my room — thank you very much. I thought, however, that you might possibly wish to see me immediately, and so I am here, at all events, as you soldiers say, to report myself," said Varbarriere, with his unctuous politeness.

"Yes, it *is* better, I'd rather have it now," answered the General in a less polite and more literal way. "A chair, sir;" and he placed one before the fire, which he poked into a blaze. "I — I hope you are not fatigued," — here the door shut, and the waiter was gone; "and I want to hear, sir, if you please, the — the meaning of the letter you favoured me with."

The General by this time had it in his hand open, and tendered it, I suppose for identification, to M. Varbarriere, who, however, politely waved it back.

"I quite felt the responsibility I took upon myself when I wrote as I did. That responsibility of course I accept; and I have come all this way, sir, for no other purpose than to justify my expressions, and to invite you to bring them to the test."

"Of *course*, sir. Thank you," said the General.

Varbarriere had felt a momentary qualm about this particular branch of the business which he had cut out for himself. When he wrote to General Lennox he was morally *certain* of the existence of a secret passage into that green room, and also of the relations which he had for some time suspected between Sir Jekyl and his fair guest. On the whole it was not a bad *coup* to provide, by means of the old General's jealousy, such literal proof as he still required of the concealed entrance, through which so much villany had been accomplished — and so his letter — and now its consequences — about which it was too late to think.

General Lennox, standing by the table, with one candle on the chimneypiece and his glasses to his eyes, read aloud, with some little stumbling, these words from the letter of Monsieur Varbarriere: —

"The reason of my so doing will be obvious when I say that I have certain circumstances to lay before you which nearly affect your honour. I decline making any detailed statement by letter; nor will I explain my meaning at Marlowe Manor. But if, without *fracas*, you will give me a private meeting, at any place between this and London, I will make it my business to see you, when I shall satisfy you that I have not made this request without the gravest reasons."

"Those are the passages, sir, on which you are so good as to offer me an explanation; and first, there's the phrase, you know, 'certain circumstances to lay before you which nearly affect your *honour*;' that's a word, you know, sir, that a fellow *feels* in a way — in a way that can't be triffled with."

"Certainly. Put your question, General Lennox, how you please," answered Varbarriere, with a grave bow.

"Well, how — how — exactly — I'll — I will put my question. I'd like to know, sir, in what relation — in — yes — in what relation, as a soldier, sir, or as a gentleman, sir, or as — *what*?"

"I am very much concerned to say, sir, that it is in the very nearest and most sacred interest, sir — as a *husband*."

General Lennox had sat down by this time, and was gazing with a frank stern stare full into the dark countenance of his visitor; and in reply he made two short little nods, clearing his voice, and lowering his eyes to the table.

It was a very trifling way of taking it. But Varbarriere saw his face flush fiercely up to the very roots of his silver hair, and he fancied he could see the vessels throbbing in his temples.

"I — very good, sir — thank you," said the General, looking up fiercely and shaking his ears, but speaking in a calm tone.

"Go on, pray — let me know — I say — in God's name, don't keep me."

"Now, sir, I'll tell it to you briefly — I'll afterwards go into whatever proof you desire. I have reason, I deeply regret it, to believe — in fact to know — that an immoral intimacy exists between Sir Jekyl Marlowe and Lady Jane Lennox."

"It's a lie, sir!" screamed the General— "a damned lie, sir — a damned lie, sir — a *damned* lie, sir."

His gouty claw was advanced trembling as if to clutch the muffler that was folded about Monsieur Varbarriere's throat, but he dropped back in his seat again shaking, and ran his fingers through his white hair several times. There was a silence which even M. Varbarriere did not like.

Varbarriere was not the least offended at his violence. He knew quite well that the General did not understand what he said, or mean, or remember it — that it was only the wild protest of agony. For the first time he felt a compunction about that old foozle, who had hitherto somehow counted for nothing in the game he was playing, and he saw him, years after, as he had shrieked at him that night, with his claw stretched towards his throat, ludicrous, and also terrible.

"My God! sir," cried the old man, with a quaver that sounded like a laugh, "do you tell me so?"

"It's true, sir," said Varbarriere.

"Now, sir, I'll not interrupt you — tell all, pray — hide nothing," said the General.

"I was, sir, accidentally witness to a conversation which is capable of no other interpretation; and I have legal proof of the existence of a secret door, connecting the apartment which has been assigned to you, at Marlowe, with Sir Jekyl's room."

"The damned villain! What a fool," and then very fiercely he suddenly added, "You can prove all this, sir? I hope you can."

"All this, and more, sir. I suspect, sir, there will hardly be an attempt to deny it."

"Oh, sir, it's terrible; but I was such a fool. I had no business — I deserve it all. Who'd have imagined such villains? But, d —— me, sir, I can't believe it.”

There was a tone of anguish in the old man’s voice which made even his grotesque and feeble talk terrible.

“I say there can’t be such devils on earth;” and then he broke into an incoherent story of all his trust and love, and all that Jane owed him, and of her nature which was frank and generous, and how she never hid a thought from him — open as heaven, sir. What business was it of his, d —— him! What did he mean by trying to set a man against his wife? No one but a scoundrel ever did it.

Varbarriere stood erect.

“You may submit how you like, sir, to your fate; but you shan’t insult me, sir, without answering it. My note left it optional to you to exact my information or to remain in the darkness, which it seems you prefer. If you wish it, I’ll make my bow — it’s nothing to me, but two can play at that game. I’ve fought perhaps oftener than you, and you shan’t bully *me*.”

“I suppose you’re right, sir — don’t go, pray — I think I’m half *mad*, sir,” said General Lennox, despairingly.

“Sir, I make allowance — I forgive your language, but if you want to talk to me, it must be with proper respect. I’m as good a gentleman as you; my statement is, of course, strictly true, and if you please you can test it.”

CHAPTER IX.

Guy Deverell at Slowton.

“Come, sir, I have a right to know it — have you not an object in fooling me?” said General Lennox, relapsing all on a sudden into his ferocious vein.

“In telling you the truth, sir, I *have* an object, perhaps — but seeing that it *is* the truth, and concerns you so nearly, you need not trouble yourself about *my* object,” answered Varbarriere, with more self-command than was to have been expected.

“I *will* test it, sir. I will try you,” said the General, sternly. “By —— I’ll sift it to the bottom.”

“So you ought, sir; that’s what I mean to help you to,” said Varbarriere.

“How, sir? — say *how*, and by Heaven, sir, I’ll shoot him like a dog.”

“The way to do it I’ve considered. I shall place you *probably* in possession of such proof as will thoroughly convince you.”

“Thank you, sir, go on.”

“I shall be at Marlowe tomorrow — you must arrive late — on no account earlier than halfpast twelve. I will arrange to have you admitted by the glass door — through the conservatory. Don’t bring your vehicle beyond the bridge, and leave your luggage at the Marlowe Arms. The object, sir, is this,” said Varbarriere, with deliberate emphasis, observing that the General’s grim countenance did not look as apprehensive as he wished, “that your arrival shall be unsuspected. No one must know anything of it except myself and another, until you shall have reached your room. Do you see?”

“Thanks, sir — yes,” answered the General, looking as unsatisfactorily as before.

“There are two recesses with shelves — one to the right, the other to the left of the bed’s head as you look from the door. The secret entrance I have mentioned lies through that at the right. You must not permit any alarm which may be intended to reach Sir Jekyl. Secure the door, and do you sit up and watch. There’s a way of securing the secret door from the inside —

which I'll explain — that would *prevent* his entrance — don't allow it. The whole — pardon me, sir — *intrigue* will in that case be disclosed without the possibility of a prevarication. You have followed me, I hope, distinctly."

"I — I'm a little flurried, I believe, sir; I have to apologise. I'll ask you, by-and-by, to repeat it. I think I should like to be alone, sir. She wrote me a letter, sir — I wish I had died when I got it."

When Varbarriere looked at him, he saw that the old East Indian was crying.

"Sir, I grieve with you," said Varbarriere, funereally. "You can command my presence whenever you please to send for me. I shall remain in this house. It will be absolutely necessary, of course, that you should see me again."

"Thank you, sir. I know — I'm sure you mean kindly — but God only knows all it is."

He had shaken his hand very affectionately, without any meaning — without knowing that he had done so.

Varbarriere said —

"Don't give way, sir, too much. If there is this sort of misfortune, it is much better discovered — *much* better. You'll think so just now. You'll view it quite differently in the morning. Call for me the moment you want me — farewell, sir."

So Varbarriere was conducted to his bedroom, and made, beside his toilet, conscientious inquiries about his late dinner, which was in an advanced state of preparation; and when he went down to partake of it, he had wonderfully recovered the interview with General Lennox. Notwithstanding, however, he drank two glasses of sherry, contrary to gastronomic laws, before beginning. Then, however, he made, even for him, a very good dinner.

He could not help wondering what a prodigious fuss the poor old fogey made about this little affair. He could not enter the least into his state of mind. She was a fine woman, no doubt; but there were others — no stint — and he had been married quite long enough to sober and acquire an appetite for liberty.

What was the matter with the old fellow? But that it was insufferably comical, he could almost find it in his heart to pity him.

Once or twice as he smoked his cigar he could not forbear shaking with laughter, the old Philander's pathetics struck him so sardonically.

I really think the state of that old gentleman, who certainly had attained to years of philosophy, was rather serious. That is, I dare say that a competent medical man with his case under observation at that moment would have pronounced him on the verge either of a fit or of insanity.

When Varbarriere had left the room, General Lennox threw himself on the red damask sofa, which smelled powerfully of yesterday's swell bagman's tobacco, never perceiving that stale fragrance, nor the thinness of the cushion which made the ribs and vertebræ of the couch unpleasantly perceptible beneath. Then, with his knees doubled up, and the "Times" newspaper over his face, he wept, and moaned, and uttered such plaintive and hideous maunderings as would do nobody good to hear of.

A variety of wise impulses visited him. One was to start instantaneously for Marlowe and fight Sir Jekyl that night by candlelight; another, to write to his wife for the last time as his wife — an eternal farewell — which perhaps would have been highly absurd, and affecting at the same time.

About two hours after Varbarriere's departure for dinner, he sent for that gentleman, and they had another, a longer, and a more collected interview — if not a happier one.

The result was, that Varbarriere's advice prevailed, as one might easily foresee, having a patient so utterly incompetent to advise himself.

The attorney, having shaken hands with Monsieur Varbarriere, and watched from the platform the gradual disappearance of the train that carried him from the purlieus of Slowton, with an expression of face plaintive as that with which Dido on the wild sea banks beheld the receding galleys of Æneas, loitered back again dolorously to the hostelry.

He arrived at the door exactly in time to witness the descent of Guy Deverell from his chaise. I think he would have preferred not meeting him, it would have saved him a few boring questions; but it was by no means a case for concealing himself. He therefore met him with a melancholy frankness on the steps.

The young man recognised him.

"Mr. Rumsey? — How do you do? Is my uncle here?"

"He left by the last train. I hope I see you well, sir."

"Gone? and where to?"

"He did not tell me." That was true, but the attorney had seen his valise labelled "Chester" by his direction. "He went by the London train, but he said he would be back tomorrow. Can *I* do anything? Your arrival was not expected."

"Thank you. I think not. It was just a word with my uncle I wished. You say he will be here again in the morning?"

"Yes, so he said. I'm waiting to see him."

"Then I can't fail to meet him if I remain." The attorney perceived, with his weatherwise experience, the traces of recent storm, both in the countenance and the manner of this young man, whose restiveness just now might be troublesome.

"Unless your business is urgent, I think — if you'll excuse me — you had better return to Marlowe," remarked the attorney. "You'll find it more comfortable quarters, a good deal, and your uncle will be very much hurried while here, and means to return to Marlowe tomorrow evening."

"But I shan't. I don't mean to return; in fact, I wish to speak to him here. I've delayed you on the steps, sir, very rudely; the wind is cold."

So he bowed, and they entered together, and the attorney, whose curiosity was now a little piqued, found he could make nothing of him, and rather disliked him; his reserve was hardly fair in so very young a person, and practised by one who had not yet won his spurs against so redoubted a champion as the knight of the rueful countenance.

Next morning, as M. Varbarriere had predicted, General Lennox, although sleep had certainly had little to do with the change, was quite a different man in some respects — in no wise happier, but much more collected; and now he promptly apprehended and retained Monsieur Varbarriere's plan, which it was agreed was to be executed that night.

More than once Varbarriere's compunctions revisited him as he sped onwards that morning from Chester to Slowton. But as men will, he bullied these misgivings and upbraidings into submission. He had been once or twice on the point of disclosing this portion of the complication to his attorney, but an odd sort of shyness prevented. He fancied that possibly the picture and his part in it were not altogether pretty, and somehow he did not care to expose himself to the secret action of the attorney's thoughts.

Even in his own mind it needed the strong motive which had first prompted it. Now it was no longer necessary to explore the mystery of that secret door through which the missing deed, and indeed the Deverell estate, had been carried into old Sir Harry's cupboard. But what was to be done? He had committed himself to the statement. General Lennox had a right to demand — in fact, *he* had promised — a distinct explanation.

Yes, a distinct explanation, and, further, a due corroboration by proof of that explanation. It was all due to Monsieur Varbarriere, who had paid that debt to his credit and conscience, and behold what a picture! Three familiar figures, irrevocably transformed, and placed in what a halo of infernal light.

"The thing could not be helped, and, whether or no, it was only right. Why the devil should I help Jekyl Marlowe to deceive and disgrace that withered old gentleman? I don't think it would have been a pleasant position for me."

And all the respectabilities hovering near cried "hear, hear, hear!" and Varbarriere shook up his head, and looked magisterial over the havoc of the last livid scene of the tragedy he had prepared; and the porter crying "Slowton!" opened the door, and released him.

CHAPTER X.

Uncle and Nephew.

When he reached his room, having breakfasted handsomely in the coffee-room, and learned that early Mr. Rumsey had accomplished a similar meal in his own sitting-room, he repaired thither, and entered forthwith upon their talk.

It was a bright and pleasant morning; the poplar trees in front of the hotel were all glittering in the mellow early sunlight, and the birds twittering as pleasantly as if there was not a sorrow or danger on earth.

“Well, sir, true to my hour,” said Monsieur Varbarriere, in his deep brazen tones, as smiling and wondrously he entered the attorney’s apartment.

“Good morning, sir — how d’ye do? Have you got those notes prepared you mentioned?”

“That I have, sir, as you shall see, pencil though; but that doesn’t matter — no?”

The vowel sounded grandly in the upward slide of Varbarriere’s titanic double bass.

The attorney took possession of the pocketbook containing these memoranda, and answered —

“No, I can read it very nicely. Your nephew is here, by-the-bye; he came last night.”

“Guy? What’s brought him here?”

M. Varbarriere’s countenance was overcast. What had gone wrong? Some chamber in his mine had exploded, he feared, prematurely.

Varbarriere opened the door, intending to roar for Guy, but remembering where he was, and the dimensions of the place, he tugged instead at the bell-rope, and made his summons jangle wildly through the lower regions.

“Hollo!” cried Varbarriere from his threshold, anticipating the approaching waiter; “a young gentleman — a Mr. Guy Strangways, arrived last evening?”

“Strangways, please, sir? Strangways? No, sir, I don’t think we ‘av got no gentleman of that name in the ‘ouse, sir.”

"But I know you *have*. Go, make out where he is, and let him know that his uncle, Monsieur Varbarriere, has just arrived, and wants to see him — *here*, may I?" with a glance at the attorney.

"Certainly."

"There's some mischief," said Varbarriere, with a lowering glance at the attorney.

"It looks uncommon like it," mused that gentleman, sadly.

"Why doesn't he come?" growled Varbarriere, with a motion of his heel like a stamp. "What do you think he has done? Some cursed sottise."

"Possibly he has proposed marriage to the young lady, and been refused."

"Refused! I hope he has."

At this juncture the waiter returned.

"Well?"

"No, sir, please. No one hin the 'ouse, sir. No such name."

"Are you sure?" asked Varbarriere of the attorney, in an under diapason.

"Perfectly — said he'd wait here for you. I told him you'd be here this morning," answered he, dolorously.

"Go down, sir, and get me a list of the gentlemen in the house. I'll pay for it," said Varbarriere, with an imperious jerk of his hand.

The ponderous gentleman in black was very uneasy, and well he might. So he looked silently out of the window which commands a view of the inn yard, and his eyes wandered over a handsome manure-heap to the chicken-coop and paddling ducks, and he saw three horses' tails in perspective in the chiaro-oscuro of the stable, in the open door of which a groom was rubbing a curb chain. He thought how wisely he had done in letting Guy know so little of his designs. And as he gloomily congratulated himself on his wise reserve, the waiter returned with a slate, and a double column of names scratched on it.

Varbarriere having cast his eye over it, suddenly uttered an oath.

"Number 10 — that's the gentleman. Go to number 10, and tell him his uncle wants him here," roared Varbarriere, as if on the point of knocking the harmless waiter down. "Read there!" he thundered, placing the slate, with a clang, before the meek attorney, who read opposite to number 10, "Mr. G. Deverell."

He pursed his mouth and looked up lackadaisically at his glowering client, saying only "Ha!"

A minute after and Guy Deverell in person entered the room. He extended his hand deferentially to M. Varbarriere, who on his part drew himself up black as night, and thrust his hands half way to the elbows in his trowsers pockets, glaring thunderbolts in the face of the contumacious young man.

"You see *that*?" jerking the slate with another clang before Guy. "Did *you* give that name? Look at number *ten*, sir." Varbarriere was now again speaking French.

"Yes, sir, Guy Deverell — my own name. I shall never again consent to go by any other. I had no idea what it might involve — never."

The young man was pale, but quite firm.

"You've broken your word, sir; you have ended your relations with me," said Varbarriere, with a horrible coldness.

"I am sorry, sir — I *have* broken my promise, but when I could not keep it without a worse deception. To the consequences, be they what they may, I submit, and I feel, sir, more deeply than you will ever know all the kindness you have shown me from my earliest childhood until now."

"Infinitely flattered," sneered Varbarriere, with a mock bow. "You have, I presume, disclosed your name to the people at Marlowe as frankly as to those at Slowton?"

"Lady Alice Redcliffe called me by my true name, and insisted it was mine. I could not deny it — I admitted the truth. Mademoiselle Marlowe was present also, and heard what passed. In little more than an hour after this scene I left Marlowe Manor. I did not see Sir Jekyl, and simply addressed a note to him saying that I was called away unexpectedly. I did not repeat to him the disclosure made to Lady Alice. I left that to the discretion of those who had heard it."

"Their *discretion* — very good — and now, Monsieur Guy Deverell, I have *done* with you. I shan't leave you as I took you up, absolutely penniless. I shall so place you as to enable you with diligence to earn your bread without degradation — that is all. You will be so good as to repair forthwith to London and await me at our quarters in St. James's Street. I shall send you, by next post, a cheque to meet expenses in town — no, pray don't thank me; you might have thanked me by your obedience. I shan't do much more to merit thanks. Your train starts from hence, I think, in half an hour."

Varbarriere nodded angrily, and moved his hand towards the door.

"Farewell, sir," said Guy, bowing low, but proudly.

"One word more," said Varbarriere, recollecting suddenly; "you have not arranged a correspondence with any person? answer me on your honour."

"No, sir, on my honour."

"Go, then. Adieu!" and Varbarriere turned from him brusquely, and so they parted.

"Am I to understand, sir," inquired the attorney, "that what has just occurred modifies our instructions to proceed in those cases?"

"Not at all, sir," answered Varbarriere, firmly.

"You see the civil proceedings must all be in the name of the young gentleman — a party who is of age — and you see what I mean."

"I undertake personally the entire responsibility; you are to proceed in the name of Guy Deverell, and what is more, use the utmost despatch, and spare no cost. When shall we open the battle?"

"Why, I dare say next term."

"That is less than a month hence?"

"Yes, sir."

"By my faith, his hands will be pretty full by that time," said Varbarriere, exultingly. "We must have the papers out again. I can give you all this day, up to halfpast five o'clock. We must get the new case into shape for counsel. You run up to town this evening. I suspect I shall follow you tomorrow; but I must run over first to Marlowe. I have left my things there, and my servant; and I suppose I must take a civil leave of my enemy — there are courtesies, you know — as your prizefighters shake hands in the ring."

The sun was pretty far down in the west by the time their sederunt ended. M. Varbarriere got into his short mantle and mufflers, and donned his ugly felt hat, talking all the while in his deep metallic tones, with his sliding cadences and resounding emphases. The polite and melancholy attorney accompanied his nutritious client to the door, and after he had taken his seat in his vehicle, they chatted a little earnestly through the window, agreeing that they had grown very "strong" indeed — anticipating nothing but victory, and in confidential whispers breathing slaughter.

As Varbarriere, with his thick arm stuffed through one of the upholstered leathern loops with which it is the custom to flank the windows of all sorts of carriages, and his large varnished boot on the vacant cushion at the other side, leaned back and stared darkly and dreamily through the plate glass on the amber-tinted landscape, he felt rather oddly approaching such persons and such scenes — a crisis with a remoter and more tremendous crisis behind — the thing long predicted in the whisperings of hope — the real thing long dreamed of, and now greeted strangely with a mixture of exultation and disgust.

There are few men, I fancy, who so thoroughly enjoy their revenge as they expected. It is one of those lusts which has its *goût de revers*— "sweet in the mouth, bitter in the belly;" one of those appetites which will allow its victim no rest *till* it is gratified, and no peace *afterward*. Now, M. Varbarriere was in for it, he was already coming under the solemn shadow of its responsibilities, and was chilled. It involved other people, too, besides its proper object — people who, whatever else some of them might be, were certainly, as respected him and his, innocent. Did he quail, and seriously think of retiring *re infectâ*? No such thing! It is wonderful how steadfast of purpose are the disciples of darkness, and how seldom, having put their hands to the plough, they look back.

All this while Guy Deverell, in exile, was approaching London with brain, like every other, teeming with its own phantasmagoria. He knew not what particular danger threatened Marlowe Manor, which to him was a temple tenanted by Beatrix alone, the living idol whom he worshipped. He was assured that somehow his consent, perhaps cooperation, was needed to render the attack effectual, and here would arise his opportunity, the self-sacrifice which he contemplated with positive pleasure, though, of course, with a certain awe, for futurity was a murky vista enough beyond it.

Varbarriere's low estimate of young men led *him* at once to conclude that this was an amorous escapade, a bit of romance about that pretty wench, Mademoiselle Beatrix. Why not? The fool, fooling according to his folly, should not arrest wisdom in her march. Varbarriere was resolved to take all necessary steps in his nephew's name, without troubling the young man with a word upon the subject. He would have judgment and execution, and he scoffed at the idea that his nephew, Guy, would take measures to have him — his kinsman, guardian, and benefactor — punished for having acted for his advantage without his consent.

CHAPTER XI.

In Lady Mary's Boudoir.

The red sunset had faded into darkness as M. Varbarriere descended from his carriage at the doorsteps of Marlowe. The dressing-bell had not yet rung. Everyone was quite well, the solemn butler informed him graciously, as if *he* had kept them in health expressly to oblige M. Varbarriere. That gentleman's dark countenance, however, was not specially illuminated on the occasion. The intelligence he really wanted referred to old Lady Alice, to whom the inexcusable folly and perfidy of Guy had betrayed his name.

Upon this point he had grown indescribably uncomfortable as he drew near to the house. Had the old woman been conjecturing and tattling? Had she called in Sir Jekyl himself to counsel? How was he, Varbarriere, to meet Sir Jekyl? He must learn from Lady Alice's lips how the land lay.

"And Lady Alice," he murmured with a lowering countenance, "pretty well, I hope? Downstairs to-day, eh?"

The butler had not during his entire visit heard the "foreign chap" talk so much English before.

"Lady Halice was well in 'ealth."

"In the drawingroom?"

"No, sir, in Lady Mary's boudoir."

"And Sir Jekyl?"

"In 'is hown room, sir."

"Show me to the boudoir, please; I have a word for Lady Alice."

A few moments more and he knocked at the door of that apartment, and was invited to enter with a querulous drawl that recalled the association of the wild cat with which in an irreverent moment he had once connected that august old lady.

So Varbarriere entered and bowed and stood darkly in the door-frame, reminding her again of the portrait of a fat and cruel burgomaster. "Oh! it's you? come back again, Monsieur Varbarriere? Oh! — I'm very glad to see you."

"Very grateful — very much flattered; and your ladyship, how are *you*?"

"Pretty well — ailing — always ailing — delicate health and *cruelly* tortured in mind. What else can I expect, sir, but sickness?"

"I hope your mind has not been troubled, Lady Alice, since I had the honour of last seeing you."

"Now, *do* you really hope that? Is it *possible* you *can* hope that my mind, in the state in which you left it has been one minute at ease since I saw you? Beside, sir, I have heard something that for reasons quite inexplicable *you* have chosen to conceal from me."

"May I ask what it is? I shall be happy to explain."

"Yes, the name of that young man — it is *not* Strangways, that was a falsehood; his name, sir, is Guy Deverell!"

And saying this Lady Alice, after her wont, wept passionately.

"That is perfectly true, Lady Alice; but I don't see what value that information can have, apart from the explanatory particulars I promised to tell you; but not for a few days. If, however, you desire it, I shall postpone the disclosure no longer. You will, I am sure, first be so good as to tell me, though, whether anyone but you knows that the foolish young man's name is Deverell?"

"No; no one, except Beatrix, not a creature. She was present, but has been, at my request, perfectly silent," answered Lady Alice, eagerly, and gaped darkly at Varbarriere, expecting his revelation.

M. Varbarriere thought, under the untoward circumstances, that a disclosure so imperfect as had been made to Lady Alice was a good deal more dangerous than one a little fuller. He therefore took that lady's hand very reverentially, and looking with his full solemn eyes in her face, said —

"It is not only true, madam, that his name is Guy Deverell, but equally true that he is the lawful son, as well as the namesake, of that Guy Deverell, your *son*, who perished by the hand of Sir Jekyl Marlowe in a duel. Shot down foully, as that Mr. Strangways avers who was his companion, and who was present when the fatal event took place."

"Gracious Heaven, sir! My son married?"

"Yes, madam, *married* more than a year before his death. All the proofs are extant, and at this moment in England."

"Married! my boy married, and never told his mother! Oh, Guy, Guy, *Guy* is it credible?"

"It is not a question, madam, but an absolute certainty, as I will show you whenever I get the papers to Wardlock."

"And to whom, sir, pray, was my son married?" demanded Lady Alice, after a long pause.

"To my sister, madam."

Lady Alice gaped at him in astonishment.

"Was she a person at all his equal in life? — a person of — of any education, I mean?" inquired Lady Alice, with a gasp, sublimely unconscious of her impertinence.

"As good a lady as you are," replied Varbarriere, with a swarthy flush upon his forehead.

"I should like to *know* she was a *lady*, at all events."

"She was a lady, madam, of pure blood, incapable of a mean thought, incapable, too, of anything low-bred or impertinent."

His sarcasm sped through and through Lady Alice without producing any effect, as a bullet passes through a ghost.

"It is a great surprise, sir, but *that* will be satisfactory. I suppose you can show it?"

Varbarriere smiled sardonically and answered nothing.

"My son married to a Frenchwoman! Dear, dear, *dear!* Married! You can feel for me, monsieur, knowing as I do nothing of the person or family with whom he connected himself."

Lady Alice pressed her lean fingers over her heart, and swept the wall opposite, with dismal eyes, sighing at intervals, and gasping dolorously.

The old woman's egotism and impertinence did not vex him long or much. But the pretence of being absolutely above irritation from the feminine gender, in any extant sage, philosopher, or saint, is a despicable affectation. Man and woman were created with inflexible relations; each with the power in large measure or in infinitesimal doses, according to opportunity, to infuse the cup of the other's life with sweet or bitter — with nectar or with poison. Therefore great men and wise men have winced and will wince under the insults of small and even of old women.

"A year, you say, before my poor boy's death?"

"Yes, about that; a little more."

"Mademoiselle Varbarriere! H'm," mused Lady Alice.

"I did not say Varbarriere was the name," sneered he, with a deep-toned drawl.

"Why, you said, sir, did not you, that the Frenchwoman he married was your sister?"

"I said the lady who accepted him was my sister. I never said her name was Varbarriere, or that she was a Frenchwoman."

"Is not your name Varbarriere, sir?" exclaimed Lady Alice, opening her eyes very wide.

"Certainly, madam. A *nom de guerre*, as we say in France, a name which I assumed with the purchase of an estate, about six years ago, when I became what you call a naturalised French subject."

"And pray, sir, what *is* your name?"

"*Varbarriere*, madam. I did bear an English name, being of English birth and family. May I presume to inquire particularly whether you have divulged the name of my nephew to anyone?"

"No, to no one; neither has Beatrix, I am certain."

"You now know, madam, that the young man is your own grandson, and therefore entitled to at least as much consideration from you as from me; and I again venture to impress upon you this fact, that if prematurely his name be disclosed, it may, and indeed *must* embarrass my endeavours to reinstate him in his rights."

As he said this Varbarriere made a profound and solemn bow; and before Lady Alice could resume her catechism, that dark gentleman had left the room.

As he emerged from the door he glanced down the broad oak stair, at the foot of which he heard voices. They were those of Sir Jekyl and his daughter. The Baronet's eye detected the dark form on the first platform above him.

"Ha! Monsieur Varbarriere — very welcome, monsieur — when did you arrive?" cried his host in his accustomed French.

"Ten minutes ago."

"Quite well, I hope."

"Perfectly; many thanks — and Mademoiselle Beatrix?"

The large and sombre figure was descending the stairs all this time, and an awful shadow, as he did so, seemed to overcast the face and form of the young lady, to whom, with a dark smile, he extended his hand.

“Quite well, Beatrix, too — *all* quite well — even Lady Alice in her usual health,” said Sir Jekyl.

“*Better* — I’m glad to hear,” said Varbarriere.

“Better! Oh dear, no — that would never do. But her temper is just as lively, and all her ailments flourishing. By-the-bye, your nephew had to leave us suddenly.”

“Yes — business,” said Varbarriere, interrupting.

Beatrix, he was glad to observe, had gone away to the drawingroom.

“He’ll be back, I hope, immediately?” continued the Baronet. “He’s a fine young fellow. Egad, he’s about as good-looking a young fellow as I know. I should be devilish proud of him if I were you. When does he come back to us?”

“Immediately, I hope; business, you know; but nothing very long. We are both, I fear, a very tedious pair of guests; but you have been so pressing, so hospitable — — “

“Say rather, so selfish, monsieur,” answered Sir Jekyl, laughing. “Our whist and cigars have languished ever since you left.”

M. Varbarriere laughed a double-bass accompaniment to the Baronet’s chuckle, and the dressing-bell ringing at that moment, Sir Jekyl and he parted agreeably.

CHAPTER XII.

The Guests Together.

Varbarriere marched slowly up, and entered his dressing-room with a “glooming” countenance and a heavy heart. Everything looked as if he had left it but half an hour ago. He poked the fire and sat down.

He felt like a surgeon with an operation before him. There was a loathing of it, but he did not flinch.

Reader, you think you understand other men. Do you understand yourself? Did you ever quite succeed in defining your own motives, and arriving at the moral base of any action you ever did? Here was Varbarriere sailing with wind and tide full in his favour, right into the haven where he would be — yet to look in his face you would have said “*there* is a sorrowful man,” and had you been able to see within, you would have said, “*there* is a man divided against himself.” Yes, as every man *is*. Several spirits, quite distinct, not blending, but pleading and battling very earnestly on opposite sides, all in possession of the “house” — but one dominant, always with a disputed sway, but always carrying his point — always the prosperous bully.

Yes, every man is a twist of many strands. Varbarriere was compacted of several Varbarrieres — one of whom was the stronger and the most infernal. His feebler associates commented upon him — despised him — feared him — sought to restrain him but knew they could not. He tyrannised, and was to the outer world the one and indivisible Varbarriere.

Monsieur Varbarriere the tyrant was about to bring about a *fracas* that night, against which the feebler and better Varbarrieres protested. Varbarriere the tyrant held the knife over the throat of a faithless woman — the better Varbarrieres murmured words of pity and of faint remonstrance. Varbarriere the tyrant scrupled not to play the part of spy and traitor for his ends; the nobler Varbarrieres upbraided him sadly, and even despised him. But what were these feeble angelic Varbarrieres? The ruler is the state, *l’état c’est moi!* and Varbarriere the tyrant carried all before him.

As the dark and somewhat corpulent gentleman before the glass adjusted his necktie and viewed his shirt-studs, he saw in his countenance, along with the terrible resolution of that tyrant, the sorrows and fears of the less potent spirits; and he felt, though he would not accept, their upbraidings and their truth; so with a stern and heavy heart he descended to the drawingroom.

He found the party pretty nearly assembled, and the usual buzz and animation prevailing, and he smiled and swayed from group to group, and from one chair to another.

Doocey was glad, monstrous glad to see him.

"I had no idea how hard it was to find a good player, until you left us — our whist has been totally ruined. The first night we tried Linnett; he thinks he plays, you know; well, I do assure you, you never *witnessed* such a thing — such a *caricature*, by Jupiter — forgetting your lead — revoking — *every*thing, by Jove. You may guess what a chance we had — *my* partner, I give you my honour, against old Sir Paul Blunket, as dogged a player as there is in England, egad, and Sir Jekyl there. We tried Drayton next night — the most conceited fellow on earth, and *no head* — Sir Paul had him. I never saw an old fellow so savage. Egad, they were calling one another names across the table — you'd have *died* laughing; but we'll have some play now you've come back, and I'm very glad of it."

Varbarriere, while he listened to all this, smiling his fat dark smile, and shrugging and bowing slightly as the tale required these evidences, was quietly making his observations on two or three of the persons who most interested him. Beatrix, he thought, was looking ill — certainly much paler, and though very pretty, rather sad — that is, she was ever and anon falling into little abstractions, and when spoken to, waking up with a sudden little smile.

Lady Jane Lennox — she did not seem to observe him — was seated like a sultana on a low cushioned seat, with her rich silks circling grandly round her. He looked at her a little stealthily and curiously, as men eye a prisoner who is about to suffer execution. His countenance during that brief glance was unobserved, but you might have read there something sinister and cruel.

"I forget — *had* the Bishop come when you left us?" said Sir Jekyl, laying his hand lightly from behind on the arm of Varbarriere. The dark-featured man winced — Sir Jekyl's voice sounded unpleasantly in his reverie.

"Ah! Oh! The Bishop? Yes — the Bishop was here when I left; he had been here a day or two," answered Varbarriere, with a kind of effort.

"Then I need not introduce you — you're friends already," said Sir Jekyl.

At which moment the assembled party learned that dinner awaited them, and the murmured arrangements for the procession commenced, and the drawingroom was left to the click of the Louis Quatorze clock and the sadness of solitude.

"We had such a dispute, Monsieur Varbarriere, while you were away," said Miss Blunket.

"About me, I hope," answered the gentleman addressed, in tolerable English, and with a gallant jocularity.

"Well, no — not about you," said old Miss Blunket, timidly. "But I so wished for you to take part in the argument."

"And why wish for me?" answered the sardonic old fellow, amused, maybe the least bit in the world flattered.

"Well, I think you have the power, Monsieur Varbarriere, of putting a great deal in very few words — I mean, of making an argument so clear and short."

Varbarriere laughed indulgently, and began to think Miss Blunket a rather intelligent person.

"And what was the subject, pray?"

"Whether life was happier in town or country."

"Oh! the old debate — country mouse against town mouse," replied Varbarriere.

"Ah, just so — so true — I don't think *any*one said that, and — and — I do wish to know which side you would have taken."

"The condition being that it should be all country or all town, of course, and that we were to retain our incomes?"

"Yes, certainly," said Miss Blunket, awaiting his verdict with a little bit of bread suspended between her forefinger and thumb.

"Well, then, I should pronounce at once for the country," said Varbarriere.

"I'm so glad — that's just what I said. I'm sure, said I, I should have Monsieur Varbarriere on my side if he were here. I'm so glad I was right. Did not you hear me say that?" said she, addressing Lady Jane Lennox, whose steady look, obliquely from across the table a little higher up, disconcerted her.

Lady Jane was not thinking of the debate, and asked in her quiet haughty way —

“What is it?”

“Did I not say, yesterday, that Monsieur Varbarriere would vote for the country, in our town or country argument, if he were here?”

“Oh! did you? Yes, I believe you did. I was not listening.”

“And which side, pray, Lady Jane, would you have taken in that ancient debate?” inquired Varbarriere, who somehow felt constrained to address her.

“Neither side,” answered she.

“What! neither town nor country — and how then?” inquired Varbarriere, with a shrug and a smile.

“I think there is as much hypocrisy and slander in one as the other, and I should have a new way — people living like the Chinese, in boats, and never going on shore.”

Varbarriere laughed — twiddled a bit of bread between his finger and thumb, and leaned back, and looked down, still smiling, by the edge of his plate; and was there not a little flush under the dark brown tint of his face?

“That would be simply prison,” ejaculated Miss Blunket.

“Yes, prison; and is not anything better than liberty with its liabilities? Why did Lady Hester Stanhope go into exile in the East, and why do sane men and women go into monasteries?”

Varbarriere looked at her with an odd kind of interest, and sighed without knowing it; and he helped himself curiously to sweetbread, a minute later, and for a time his share in the conversation flagged.

Lady Jane, he thought, was looking decidedly better than when he left — very well, in fact — very well indeed — not at all like a person with anything pressing heavily on her mind.

He glanced at her again. She was talking to old Sir Paul Blunket in a bold careless way, which showed no sign of hidden care or fear.

“Have you been to town since?” inquired Sir Jekyl, who happened to catch Varbarriere’s eye at that moment, and availed himself of a momentary lull in what we term the conversation, to put his question.

"No; you think I have been pleasuring, but it was good honest business, I assure you."

"Lady Alice here fancied you might have seen the General, and learned something about his plans," continued Sir Jekyl.

"What General? — Lennox — eh?" inquired Varbarriere.

"Yes. What's your question, Lady Alice?" said the Baronet, turning to that lady, and happily not observing an odd expression in Varbarriere's countenance.

"No question; he has not been to London," answered the old lady, drawing her shawl which she chose to dine in about her, chillily.

"Is it anything *I* can answer?" threw in Lady Jane, who, superbly tranquil as she looked, would have liked to pull and box Lady Alice's ears at that moment.

"Oh no, I fancy not; it's only the old question, when are we to see the General; is he coming back at all?"

"I wish anyone could help me to an answer," laughed Lady Jane, with a slight uneasiness, which might have been referred to the pique which would not have been unnatural in a handsome wife neglected.

"I begin to fear I shall leave Marlowe without having seen him," said Lady Alice, peevishly.

"Yes, and it is not complimentary, you know; he disappeared just the day before you came, and he won't come back till you leave; men are such mysterious fellows, don't you think?" said Sir Jekyl.

"It doesn't look as if he liked her company. Did he ever meet you, Lady Alice?" inquired Sir Paul Blunket in his bluff way, without at all intending to be uncivil.

"*That*, you think, would account for it; much obliged to you, Sir Paul," said Lady Alice, sharply.

Sir Paul did not see it, or what she was driving at, and looked at her therefore with a grave curiosity, for he did not perceive that she was offended.

"Sir Paul has a way of hitting people very hard, has not he, Lady Alice? and then leaving them to recover of themselves," said Sir Jekyl.

"There's not a great deal of civility wasted among you," observed Lady Alice.

“I only meant,” said Sir Paul, who felt that he should place himself right, “that I could not see why General Lennox should avoid Lady Alice, unless he was acquainted with her. There’s nothing in that.”

“By-the-bye, Lady Alice,” said Sir Jekyl, who apprehended a possible scene from that lady’s temper, and like a good shepherd wished to see his flock pasture peaceably together— “I find I can let you have any quantity you like of that plant you admired yesterday. I forget its name, and the Bishop says he has got one at the Palace with a scarlet blossom; so, perhaps, if you make interest with him — what do you say, my lord?”

So having engaged the good Bishop in floral conversation with that fiery spirit, the Baronet asked Sir Paul whether he believed all that was said about the great American cow; and what he thought of the monster parsnip: and thus he set him and Lady Alice ambling on different tracts, so that there was no risk of their breaking lances again.

CHAPTER XIII.

A Visitor in the Library.

The company were now pecking at those fruits over which Sir Jekyl was wont to chuckle grimly, making pleasant satire on his gardener, vowing he kept an Aladdin's garden, and that his greengages were emeralds, and his gooseberries rubies.

In the midst of the talk, the grave and somewhat corpulent butler stood behind his master's chair, and murmured something mildly in his ear.

"What's his name?" inquired Sir Jekyl.

"Pullet, please, sir."

"Pullet! I never heard of him. If he had come a little earlier with a knife and fork in his back, we'd have given a good account of him."

His jokes were chuckled to Lady Alice, who received them drowsily.

"Where have you put him?"

"In the library, please, sir."

"What kind of looking person?"

"A middlish sort of a person, raything respectable, I should say, sir; but dusty from his journey."

"Well, give him some wine, and let him have dinner, if he has not had it before, and bring in his card just now."

All this occurred without exciting attention or withdrawing Sir Jekyl from any sustained conversation, for he and Lady Alice had been left high and dry on the bank together by the flow and ebb of talk, which at this moment kept the room in a rattle; and Sir Jekyl only now and then troubled her with a word.

"Pullet!" thought Sir Jekyl, he knew not why, uneasily. "Who the devil's Pullet, and what the plague can Pullet want? It can't be Paulett — can it? There's nothing on earth Paulett can want of me, and he would not come at this hour. Pullet — Pullet — let us see." But he *could* not see, there was not a soul he knew who bore that name.

"He's eating his dinner, sir, the gentleman, sir, in the small parlour, and says you'll know him quite well, sir, when you see him," murmured the butler, “and more— “

“Have you got his card?”

“He said, sir, please, it would be time enough when he had heat his dinner.”

“Well, so it will.”

And Sir Jekyl drank a glass of claret, and returned to his ruminations.

“So, I shall know Pullet quite well when I see him,” mused the Baronet, “and he’ll let me have his card when he has had his dinner — a cool gentleman, whatever else he may be.” About this Pullet, however, Sir Jekyl experienced a most uncomfortable suspense and curiosity. A bird of ill omen he seemed to him — an angel of sorrow, he knew not why, in a mask.

While the Baronet sipped his claret, and walked quite alone in the midst of his company, picking his anxious steps, and hearing strange sounds through his valley of the shadow of death, the promiscuous assemblage of ladies and gentlemen dissolved itself. The fair sex rose, after their wont, smiled their last on the sable file of gentlemen, who stood politely, napkin in hand, simpering over the backs of their chairs, and, some of them majestically alone, others sliding their fair hands affectionately within the others’ arms, glided through the door in celestial procession.

“I shall leave you tomorrow, Sir Jekyl,” began the Bishop, gravely, changing his seat to one just vacated beside his host, and bringing with him his principal chattels, his wine-glasses and napkin.

“I do hope, my lord, you’ll reconsider that,” interrupted Sir Jekyl, laying his fingers kindly on the prelate’s purple sleeve. A dismal cloud in Sir Jekyl’s atmosphere was just then drifting over him, and he clung, as men do under such shadows, to the contact of good and early friendship.

“I am, I assure you, very sorry, and have enjoyed your hospitality much — *very* much; but we can’t rest long, you know: we hold a good many strings, and matters won’t wait our convenience.”

“I’m only afraid you are overworked; but, of course, I understand how you feel, and shan’t press,” said Sir Jekyl.

“And I was looking for you to-day in the library,” resumed the Bishop, “anxious for a few minutes, on a subject I glanced at when I arrived.”

“I — I *know*,” said Sir Jekyl, a little hesitatingly.

“Yes, the dying wish of poor Sir Harry Marlowe, your father,” murmured the Bishop, looking into his claret-glass, which he slowly turned about by the stem; and, to do him justice, there was not a quarter of a glassful remaining in the bottom.

"I know — to be sure. I quite agree with your lordship's view. I wish to tell you that — quite, I assure you. I don't — I *really* don't at all understand his reasons; but, as you say, it is a case for implicit submission. I intend, I assure you, actually to take down that room during the spring. It is of no real use, and rather spoils the house."

"I am happy, my dear Sir Jekyl, to hear you speak with so much decision on the subject — truly happy;" and the venerable prelate laid his hand with a gentle dignity on the cuff of Sir Jekyl's dress-coat, after the manner of a miniature benediction. "I *may* then discharge *that* quite from my mind?"

"Certainly — quite, my lord. I accept your views implicitly."

"And the *box* — the other wish — you know," murmured the Bishop.

"I must honestly say, I can't the least understand what can have been in my poor father's mind when he told me to — to do what was right with it — was not that it? For I do assure you, for the life of me, I can't think of anything to *be* done with it but let it *alone*. I pledge you my honour, however, if I ever do get the least inkling of his meaning, I will respect it as implicitly as the other."

"Now, now, that's exactly what I wish. I'm perfectly satisfied you'll do what's right."

And as he spoke the Bishop's countenance brightened, and he drank slowly, looking up toward the ceiling, that quarter of a glass of claret on which he had gazed for so long in the bottom of the crystal chalice.

Just then the butler once more inclined his head from the back of Sir Jekyl's chair, and presented a card to his master on the little salver at his left side. It bore the inscription, "Mr. Pelter, Camelia Villa," and across this, perpendicularly, after the manner of a joint "acceptance" of the firm, was written— "Pelter and Crowe, Chambers, Lincoln's Inn Fields," in bold black pencilled lines.

"Why did not you tell me that before?" whispered the Baronet, tartly, half rising, with the card in his hand.

"I was not haware, Sir Jekyl. The gentleman, said his name exactly like Pullet."

"In the library? Well — tell him I'm coming," said Sir Jekyl; and his heart sank, he knew not why.

"Beg your pardon, my lord, for a moment — my man of business, all the way from London, and I fancy in a hurry. I shall get rid of him with a word or two — you'll excuse me? Dives, will you oblige me — take my place for a moment, and see that the bottle does not stop; or, Doocey, will you? — Dives is doing duty at the foot."

Doocey had hopes that the consultation with the butler portended a bottle of that wonderful Constantia which he had so approved two days before, and took his temporary seat hopefully.

Sir Jekyl, with a general apology and a smile glided away without fuss, and the talk went on much as before.

When the parlour-door shut behind Sir Jekyl, his face darkened. "I know it's some *stupid* thing," he thought, as he walked down the gallery with rapid steps, toward the study, the sharp air agitating, as he did so, his snowy necktie and glossy curls.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Pelter? — very happy to see you. I had not a notion it was you — the stupid fellow gave me quite another name. Quite well, I hope?"

"Quite well, Sir Jekyl, I thank you — a — quite well," said the attorney, a stoutish, short, wealthy-looking man, with a massive gold chain, a resolute countenance, and a bullet head, with close-cut greyish hair.

Pelter was, indeed, an able, pushing fellow, without Latin or even English grammar, having risen in the office from a small clerkship, and, perhaps, was more useful than his gentlemanlike partner.

"Well — a — well, and what has brought you down here? Very glad to see you, you know; but you would not run down for fun, I'm afraid," said Sir Jekyl.

"Au — no — au, well, Sir Jekyl, it has turned out, sir — by gad, sir, I believe them fellows *are* in England, after all!"

"What do you mean by them fellows?" said Sir Jekyl, with a very dark look, unconsciously repeating the attorney's faulty grammar.

"Strangways and Deverell, you know — I mean them — Herbert Strangways, and a young man named Deverell — they're in England, I've been informed, very private — and Strangways has been with Smith, Rumsey, and Snagg — the office — you know; and there is something on the stocks there."

As the attorney delivered this piece of intelligence he kept his eye shrewdly on Sir Jekyl, rather screwed and wrinkled, as a man looks against a storm.

"Oh! — is that all? There's nothing very alarming, is there, in that? — though, d —— me, I don't see, Mr. Pelter, how you reconcile your present statement with what you and your partner wrote to me twice within the last few weeks."

"Very true, Sir Jekyl; perfectly true, sir. Our information misled us totally; they have been devilish sharp, sir — devilish sly. We never were misled before about that fellow's movements — not that they were ever of any real importance."

"And why do you think them — but maybe you don't — of more consequence now?"

Pelter looked unpleasantly important, and shook his head.

"What *is* it — I suppose I may *know*?" said Sir Jekyl.

"It looks queerish, Sir Jekyl, there's no denying that — in fact, very queerish indeed — both me and my partner think so. You recollect the deed?"

"No — devil a deed — d —— them all! — I don't remember one of them. Why, you seem to forget it's nearly ten years ago," interrupted the Baronet.

"Ah! — no — not *ten* — the copy of the deed that we got hold of, pretending to be a marriage settlement. It was brought us, you know, in a very odd way, but quite fair."

"Yes, I do remember — yes, to be sure — that thing you thought was a forgery, and put in our way to frighten us. Well, and do you fancy that's a genuine thing now?"

"I always thought it might — I think it *may* — in fact, I think it *is*. We have got a hint they rely on it. And here's a point to be noted: the deed fixes five-and-twenty as the period of his majority; and just as he attains that age, his father being nearly that time dead, they put their shoulders to the wheel."

"Put their d — d numbskulls under it, you mean. How can they move — how can they stir? I'd like to know how they can touch my title? I don't care a curse about them. What the plague's frightening you and Crowe *now*? I'm blest if I don't think you're growing old. Why can't you stick to your own view? — you say one thing one day and another the next. Egad, there’s no knowing where to have you.”

The Baronet was talking bitterly, scornfully, and with all proper contempt of his adversaries, but there’s no denying he looked very pale.

“And there certainly is activity there; cases have been with counsel on behalf of Guy Deverell, the son and heir of the deceased,” pursued Mr. Pelter, with his hands in his pockets, looking grimly up into the Baronet’s face.

“Won’t you sit down? — do sit down, Pelter; and you haven’t had wine?” said Sir Jekyl.

“Thanks — I’ve had some sherry.”

“Well, you must have some claret. I’d like a glass myself.”

He had rung the hell, and a servant appeared.

“Get claret and glasses for two.”

The servant vanished deferentially.

“I’m not blaming you, mind; but is it not odd we should have known nothing of this son, and this pretended marriage till now?”

“Odd! — oh dear, no! — you don’t often know half so much of the case at the other side — nothing at all often till it’s on the file.”

“Precious satisfactory!” sneered Sir Jekyl.

“When we beat old Lord Levesham, in Blount and Levesham, they had not a notion, no more than the man in the moon, what we were going on, till we produced the release, and got a direction, egad.” And the attorney laughed over that favourite recollection.

CHAPTER XIV.

Pelter opens his mind.

"Take a glass of claret. This is '34. Maybe you'd like some port better?"

"No, thanks, this will do very nicely," said the accommodating attorney. "Thirty-four? So it is, egad! and uncommon fine too."

"I hope you can give me a day or two — not business, of course — I mean by way of holiday," said Sir Jekyl. "A little country air will do you a world of good — set you up for the term."

Mr. Pelter smiled, and shook his head shrewdly.

"Quite out of the question, Sir Jekyl, I thank you all the same — business tumbling in too fast just now — I daren't stay away another day — no, no — ha, ha, ha! no rest for us, sir — no rest for the wicked. But this thing, you know, looks rather queerish, we thought — a little bit urgent: the other party has been so sly; and no want of money, sir — the sinews of war — lots of tin there."

"Yes, of course; and lots of tin here, too. I fancy fellows don't like to waste money only to hold their own; but, egad, if it comes to be a pull at the long purse, all the worse for them," threw in the Baronet.

"And their intending, you know, to set up this marriage," continued the attorney without minding; "and that Herbert Strangways being over here with the young pretender, as we call him, under his wing; and Strangways is a deuced clever fellow, and takes devilish sound view of a case when he lays his mind to it. It was he that reopened that great bankruptcy case of Onslow and Grawley, you remember."

Sir Jekyl assented, but did not remember.

"And a devilish able bit of chess-play that was on both sides — no end of concealed property — brought nearly sixty thousand pounds into the fund, egad! The creditors passed a vote, you remember — spoke very handsomely of him. Monstrous able fellow, egad!"

"A monstrous able fellow he'll be if he gets my property, egad! It seems to me you Pelter and Crowe are half in love with him," said Sir Jekyl, flushed and peevish.

“We’ll hit him a hard knock or two yet, for all that — ha, ha! — or I’m mistaken,” rejoined old Mr. Pelter.

“Do you know him?” inquired Sir Jekyl; and the servant at the same time appearing in answer to his previous summons, he said —

“Go to the parlour and tell Mr. Doocey — you know *quietly* — that I am detained by business, but that we’ll join them in a little time in the drawingroom.”

So the servant, with a reverence, departed.

“I say, *do* you?”

“Just a little. Seven years ago, when I was at Havre, he was stopping there too. A very gentlemanlike man — sat beside him twice at the table d’hôte. I could see he knew d — d well who I was — wide awake, very agreeable man, very — wonderful well-informed. Wonderful ups and downs that fellow’s had — clever fellow — ha, ha, ha! — I mentioned you, Sir Jekyl; I wanted to hear if he’d say anything — fishing, hey? Old file, you know” — and the attorney winked and grinned agreeably at Sir Jekyl. “Capital claret this — cap-i-tal, by Jupiter! It came in natural enough. We were talking of England, you see. He was asking questions; and so, talking of country gentlemen, and county influence, and parliamentary life, you know, I brought in *you*, and asked him if he knew Sir Jekyl Marlowe.” Another wink and a grin here. “I asked, a bit suddenly, you know, to see how he’d take it. Did not show, egad! more than that decanter — ha, ha, ha! — devilish cool dog — monstrous clever fellow — not a bit; and he said he did not know you — had not that honour; but he knew a great deal of you, and he spoke very handsomely — upon my honour — quite au — au — handsomely of you, he did.”

“Vastly obliged to him,” said Sir Jekyl; but though he sneered I think he was pleased. “You don’t recollect what he said, I dare say?”

“Well, I can*not* exactly.”

“Did he mention any unpleasantness ever between us?” continued Sir Jekyl.

“Yes, he said there had, and that he was afraid Sir Jekyl might not remember his name with satisfaction; but he, for his part, liked to forget and forgive — that kind of thing, you know, and young fellows being too hotheaded, you know. I really — I don’t think he bears you personally any ill-will.”

"There has certainly been time enough for anger to cool a little, and I really, for my part, never felt anything of the kind towards him; I can honestly say *that*, and I dare say he knows it. I merely want to protect myself against — against madmen, egad!" said Sir Jekyl.

"I think that copy of a marriage settlement you showed me had no names in it," he resumed.

"No, the case is all put like a moot point, not a name in it. It's all nonsense, too, because every man in my profession knows a copying clerk never has a notion of the meaning of anything — letter, deed, pleading — nothing he copies — not an iota, by Jove!"

"Finish the bottle; you must not send it away," said Sir Jekyl.

"Thanks, I'm doing very nicely; and now as they may open fire suddenly, I want to know" — here the attorney's eyes glanced at the door, and his voice dropped a little— "any information of a confidential sort that may guide us in — in — — "

"Why, I fancy it's *all* confidential, isn't it?" answered Sir Jekyl.

"Certainly — but aw — but — I meant — you know — there was aw — a — there was a talk, you know, about a deed. Eh?"

"I — I — *yes*, I've heard — I know what you mean," answered Sir Jekyl, pouring a little claret into his glass. "They — those fellows — they lost a deed, and they were d — d impertinent about it; they wanted — you know it's a long time ago — to try and slur my poor father about it — I don't know exactly how, only, I think, there would have been an action for slander very likely about it, if it had not stopped of itself."

Sir Jekyl sipped his claret.

"I shan't start till three o'clock train tomorrow, if you have anything to say to me," said the attorney, looking darkly and expectingly in Sir Jekyl's face.

"Yes, I'll think over everything. I'd like to have a good talk with you in the morning. You sleep here, you know, of course."

"Very kind. I hope I shan't be in your way, Sir Jekyl. Very happy."

Sir Jekyl rang the bell.

"I shan't let you off tomorrow, unless you really can't help it," he said; and, the servant entering, "Tell Mrs. Sinnott that Mr. Pelter remains here tonight, and would wish — *do* you? — to run up to your room. Where's your luggage?"

“Precious light luggage it is. I left it at the hotel in the town — a small valise, and a — — “

“Get it up here, do you mind, and let us know when Mr. Pelter’s room is ready.”

“Don’t be long about dressing; we must join the ladies, you know, in the drawingroom. I wish, Pelter, there was no such thing as business; and that all attorneys, except you and Crowe, of course, were treated in this and the next world according to their deserts,” an ambiguous compliment at which Pelter nodded slyly, with his hands in his pockets.

“You’ll have to get us all the information you can scrape together, Sir Jekyl. You see they may have evidence of that deed — I mean the lost one, you know — and proving a marriage and the young gentleman legitimate. It may be a serious case — upon my word a *very* serious case — do you see? And term begins, you know, immediately so there really is no time to lose, and there’s no harm in being ready.”

“I’ll have a long talk with you about it in the morning, and I am devilish glad you came — curse the whole thing!”

The servant here came to say that Mr. Pelter’s room was ready, and his luggage sent for to the town.

“Come up, then — we’ll look at your room.”

So up they went, and Pelter declared himself charmed.

“Come to my room, Mr. Pelter — it’s a long way off, and a confoundedly shabby crib; but I’ve got some very good cigars there,” said Sir Jekyl, who was restless, and wished to hear the attorney more fully on this hated business.

CHAPTER XV.

The Pipe of Peace.

Sir Jekyl marched Mr. Pelter down the great stair again, intending to make the long journey rearward. As they reached the foot of the stairs, Monsieur Varbarriere, candle in hand, was approaching it on the way to his room. He was walking leisurely, as large men do after dinner, and was still some way off.

"By Jove! Why did not you tell me?" exclaimed the attorney, stopping short. "By the law! you've *got* him here."

"Monsieur Varbarriere?" said the Baronet.

"Mr. Strangways, sir — *that's* he."

"*That* Strangways!" echoed the Baronet.

"Herbert Strangways," whispered Mr. Pelter, and by this time M. Varbarriere was under the rich oak archway, and stopped, smiling darkly, and bowing a little to the Baronet, who was for a moment surprised into silence.

"How do you do, Mr. Strangways, sir?" said the attorney, advancing with a shrewd resolute smile, and extending his hand.

M. Varbarriere, without the slightest embarrassment, took it, bowing with a courtly gravity.

"Ah, Monsieur Pelter? — yes, indeed — very happy to meet you again."

"Yes, sir — very happy, Mr. Strangways; so am I. Did not know you were in this part of the world, Mr. Strangways, sir. You remember Havre, sir?"

"Perfectly — yes. You did not know me by the name of Varbarriere, which name I adopted on purchasing the Varbarriere estates shortly after I met you at Havre, on becoming a naturalised subject of France."

"Wonderful little changed, Monsieur Barvarrian — fat, sir — a little stouter — in good case, Mr. Strangways; but six years, you *know*, sir, does not *count* for *nothing* — ha, ha, ha!"

"You have the goodness to flatter me, I fear," answered Varbarriere, with a smile somewhat contemptuous, and in his deep tones of banter.

"This is my friend, Mr. Strangways, if he'll allow me to call him so — Mr. Herbert Strangways, Sir Jekyl," said the polite attorney, presenting his own guest to the Baronet.

"And so, Monsieur Varbarriere, I find I have an additional reason to rejoice in having made your acquaintance, inasmuch as it revives a very old one, so old that I almost fear you may have forgotten it. You remember our poor friend, Guy Deverell, and— "

"Perfectly, Sir Jekyl, and I was often tempted to ask you the same question; but — but you know there's a *melancholy* — and we were so very happy here, I had not courage to invite the sadness of the retrospect, though a very remote one. I believe I was right, Sir Jekyl. Life's true philosophy is to extract from the present all it can yield of happiness, and to bury our dead out of our sight."

"I dare say — I'm much of that way of thinking myself. And — dear me! — I — I suppose I'm very much altered." He was looking at Varbarriere, and trying to recover in the heavy frame and ponderous features before him the image of that Herbert Strangways whom, in the days of his early coxcombry, he had treated with a becoming impertinence.

"No — you're wonderfully little changed — I say honestly — quite wonderfully like what I remember you. And I — I know what a transformation I am — perfectly," said Varbarriere.

And he stood before Sir Jekyl, as he would display a portrait, full front — Sir Jekyl held a silver candlestick in his hand, Monsieur Varbarriere his in his — and they stood face to face — in a dream of the past.

Varbarriere's mystic smile expanded to a grin, and the grin broke into a laugh — deep and loud — not insulting — not sneering.

In that explosion of sonorous and enigmatic merriment Sir Jekyl joined — perhaps a little hesitatingly and coldly, for he was trying, I think, to read the riddle — wishing to be quite sure that he might be pleased, and accept these vibrations as sounds of reconciliation.

There was nothing quite to forbid it.

"I see," said Monsieur Varbarriere, in tones still disturbed by laughter, "in spite of your politeness, Sir Jekyl, what sort of impression my metamorphosis produces. Where is the rawboned youth — so tall and gawky, that, egad! London bucks were ashamed to acknowledge him in the street, and when they did speak could not forbear breaking his gawky bones with their jokes? — ha, ha, ha! Now, lo! here he stands — the grand old black swine, on hind legs — hog-backed — and with mighty paunch and face all draped in fat. Bah! ha, ha, ha! What a magician is Father Time! Look and laugh, sir — you cannot laugh more than I."

"I laugh at your fantastic caricature, so utterly unlike what I see. There's a change, it's true, but no more than years usually bring; and, by Jove! I'd much rather any day grow a little full, for *my* part, than turn, like some fellows, into a scarecrow."

"No, no — no scarecrow, certainly," still laughed Varbarriere.

"Egad, no," laughed the attorney in chorus. "No corners there, sir — ribs well covered — hey? nothing like it coming on winter;" and grinning pleasantly, he winked at Sir Jekyl, who somehow neither heard nor saw him, but said —

"Mr. Pelter, my law adviser here, was good enough to say he'd come to my room, which you know so well, Monsieur Varbarriere, and smoke a cigar. You can't do better — pray let me persuade you."

He was in fact tolerably easily persuaded, and the three gentlemen together — Sir Jekyl feeling as if he was walking in a dream, and leading the way affably — reached that snuggery which Varbarriere had visited so often before.

"Just *one* — they *are* so good," said he. "We are to go to the drawingroom — aren't we?"

"Oh, certainly. I think you'll like these — they're rather good, Mr. Pelter. You know them, Monsieur Varbarriere."

"I've hardly ever smoked such tobacco. Once, by a chance, at Lyons, I lighted on a box very like these — that is, about a third of them — but hardly so good."

"We've smoked some of these very pleasantly together," said Sir Jekyl, cultivating genial relations.

Varbarriere, who had already one between his lips, grunted a polite assent with a nod. You would have thought that his whole soul was in his tobacco, as his dark eyes dreamily followed the smoke that thinly streamed from his lips. His mind, however, was busy in conjecturing what the attorney had come about, and how much he knew of his case and his plans. So the three gentlemen puffed away in silence for a time.

“Your nephew, Mr. Guy Strangways, I hope we are soon to see him again?” asked Sir Jekyl, removing his cigar for a moment.

“You are very good. Yes, I hope. In fact, though I call it business, it is only a folly which displeases me, which he has promised shall end; and whenever I choose to shake hands, he will come to my side. There is no real quarrel, mind,” and Varbarriere laughed, “only I must cure him of his nonsense.”

“Well, then we may hope very soon to see Mr. Strangways. I *call* him Strangways, you know, because he has assumed that name, I suppose, permanently.”

“Well, I think so. His real name is Deverell — a very near relation, and, in fact, representative of our poor friend Guy. His friends all thought it best he should drop it, with its sad associations, and assume a name that may be of some little use to him among more affluent relatives,” said M. Varbarriere, who had resolved to be frank as day and harmless as doves, and to disarm suspicion adroitly.

“A particularly handsome fellow — a distinguished-looking young man. How many things, Monsieur Varbarriere, we wish undone as we get on in life!”

The attorney lay back in his chair, his hands in his pockets, his heels on the carpet, his cigar pointing up to the ceiling, and his eyes closed luxuriously. He intended making a note of everything.

“I hope to get him on rapidly in the French service,” resumed Varbarriere, “and I can make him pretty comfortable myself while I live, and more so after I’m gone; and in the meantime I am glad to put him in a field where he must exert himself, and see something of labour as well as of life.”

There was a knock at the door, and the intelligence that Mr. Pelter’s luggage was in his room. He would have stayed, perhaps, but Sir Jekyl, smiling, urged haste, and as his cigar was out, he departed. When he was quite gone, Sir Jekyl rose smiling, and extended his hand to Varbarriere, who took it smiling in his own way; also, Sir Jekyl was looking in the face of the large man who stood before him, and returning his gaze a little cloudily; and laughing, both shook hands for a good while, and there was nothing but this lowtoned laughter between them.

“At all events, Herbert, I’m glad we have met, very glad — very, very. I did not think I’d have felt it quite this way. I’ve your forgiveness to ask for a great deal. I never mistook a man so much in my life. I believe you are a devilish good fellow; but — but I fancied, you know, for a long time, that you had taken a hatred to me, and — and I have done you great injustice; and I wish very much I could be of any use to — to that fine young fellow, and show any kindness worth the name towards you."

Sir Jekyl's eyes were moist, he was smiling, and he was shaking Varbarriere's powerful hand very kindly. I cannot analyse his thoughts and feelings in that moment of confusion. It had overcome him suddenly — it had in some strange way even touched Varbarriere. Was there dimly seen by each a kindly solution of a life-long hatred — a possibility of something wise, perhaps self-sacrificing, that led to reconciliation and serenity in old days?

Varbarriere leaned his great shoulders to the wall, his hand still in Sir Jekyl's, still smiling, and looked almost sorrowfully, while he uttered something between a long pant and a sigh.

"Wonderful thing life is — terrible battle, life!" murmured Varbarriere, leaning against the wall, with his dark eyes raised to the far cornice, and looking away and through and beyond it into some far star.

There are times when your wideawake gentlemen dream a little, and Sir Jekyl laughed a pensive and gentle little laugh, shaking his head and smiling sadly in reply.

"Did you ever read Vathek?" asked the Baronet, "rather a good horror — the fire, you know — ah, ha! — that's a fire every fellow has a spark of in him; I know I have. I've had everything almost a fellow wants; but this I know, if I were sure that death was only rest and darkness, there's hardly a day I live I would not choose it." And with this sentiment came a sincere and odd little laugh.

"My faith! I believe it's true," said Varbarriere with a shrug, and a faint smile of satiety on his heavy features.

"We must talk lots together, Herbert — talk a great deal. You'll find I'm not such a bad fellow after all. Egad, I'm *very* glad you're here!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A Rencontre in the Gallery.

It was time now; however, that they should make their appearance in the drawingroom; so, for the present, Varbarriere departed. He reached his dressing-room in an undefined state — a sort of light, not of battle fires, but of the dawn in his perspective; when, all on a sudden, came the image of a white-moustached, white-browed, grim old military man, glancing with a clear, cold eye, that could be cruel, from the first-class carriage window, up and down the platform of a gas-lit station, some hour and a half away from Slowton, and then sternly at his watch.

"The stupid old fogey!" thought Varbarriere, with a pang, as he revised his toilet hurriedly for the drawingroom. "Could that episode be evaded?"

There was no time to arrive at a clear opinion on this point, nor, indeed, to ascertain very clearly what his own wishes pointed at. So, in a state rather anarchic, he entered the gallery, *en route* for the drawingroom.

Monsieur Varbarriere slid forth, fat and black, from his doorway, with wondrous little noise, his bulk considered, and instantly on his retina, lighted by the lamp at the cross galleries, appeared the figure of a tall thin female, attired in a dark cloak and bonnet, seated against the opposite wall, not many steps away. Its head turned, and he saw Donica Gwynn. It was an odd sort of surprise; he had just been thinking of her.

"Oh! I did not think as you were here, sir; I thought you was in Lunnon."

"Yet here I am, and you too, both unexpectedly." A suspicion had crossed his mind. "How d'ye do, Mrs. Gwynn?"

"Well, I thank you, sir."

"Want *me* here?"

"No, sir; I was wrote for by missus please."

"Yes," he said very slowly, looking hard at her. "Very good, Mrs. Gwynn; have you anything to say to me?"

It would not do, of course, to protract this accidental talk; he did not care to be seen *tête-à-tête* with Donica Gwynn in the gallery.

"No, sir, please, I han't nothing to say, sir," and she courtesied.

"Very well, Mrs. Gwynn; we're quite secret, hey?" and with another hard look, but only momentary, in her face, he proceeded toward the head of the staircase.

"Beg parding, sir, but I think you dropt something." She was pointing to a letter, doubled up, and a triangular corner of which stuck up from the floor, a few yards away.

"Oh! thank you," said Varbarriere, quickly retracing his steps, and picking it up.

A terrible fact for the world to digest is this, that some of our gentlemen attorneys are about the most slobbering men of business to be found within its four corners. They will mislay papers, and even lose them; they are dilatory and indolent — quite the reverse of our sharp, lynx-eyed, energetic notions of that priesthood of Themis, and prone to every sort and description of lay irregularity in matters of order and pink tape.

Our friend Pelter had a first-rate staff, and a clockwork partner beside in Crowe, so that the house was a very regular one, and was himself, in good measure, the fire, bustle, and impetus of the firm. But every virtue has its peccant correspondent. If Pelter was rapid, decided, daring, he was also a little hand-over-hand. He has been seen in a hurry to sweep together and crunch like a snowball a drift of banknotes, and stuff them so impressed into the bottom of his greatcoat pocket! What more can one say?

This night, fussing out at his bedroom door, he plucked his scented handkerchief from his pocket, and, as he crossed his threshold, with it flirted forth a letter, which had undergone considerable attrition in that receptacle, and was nothing the whiter, I am bound to admit, especially about the edges, for its long sojourn there.

Varbarriere knew the handwriting and I. M. M. initials in the left-hand lower angle. So, with a nod and a smile, he popped it into his trowsers pocket, being that degree more cautious than Pelter.

Sir Jekyl was once more in high spirits. To do him justice, he had not affected anything. There had been an effervescence — he hardly knew how it came about. But his dangers seemed to be dispersing; and, at the worst, were not negotiation and compromise within his reach?

Samuel Pelter, Esq., gentleman attorney and a solicitor of the High Court of Chancery, like most prosperous men, had a comfortable confidence in himself; and having heard that Lady Alice Redcliffe was quarrelling with her lawyer, thought there could be no harm in his cultivating her acquaintance.

The old lady was sitting in a high-backed chair, very perpendicularly, with several shawls about and around her, stiff and pale; but her dusky eyes peered from their sunken sockets, in grim and isolated observation.

Pelter strutted up. He was not, perhaps, a distinguished-looking man — rather, I fear, the contrary. His face was broad and smirking, with a short, broad, blue chin, and a close crop of iron-grey on his round head, and plenty of crafty crow’s-feet and other lines well placed about.

He stood on the hearthrug, within easy earshot of Lady Alice, whom he eyed with a shrewd glance, “taking her measure,” as his phrase was, and preparing to fascinate his prey.

“Awful smash that, ma’am, on the Smather and Sham Junction,” said Pelter, having fished up a suitable topic. “Frightful thing — fourteen killed — and they say upwards of seventy badly hurt. I’m no chicken, Lady Alice, but by Jove, ma’am, I can’t remember any such casualty — a regular ca-tas-trophe, ma’am!”

And Pelter, with much feeling, gently lashed his paunch with his watch-chain and bunch of seals, an obsolete decoration, which he wore — I believe still wears.

Lady Alice, who glowered sternly on him during this speech, nodded abruptly with an inarticulate sound, and then looked to his left, at a distant picture.

“I trust I see you a great deal better, Lady Alice. I have the pleasure, I believe, to address Lady Alice Redcliffe — aw, haw, h’m,” and the attorney executed his best bow, a ceremony rather of agility than grace. “I had the honour of seeing you, Lady Alice Redcliffe, at a shower-flow — flower-show, I mean — in the year — let me see — egad, ma’am, twelve — no — no — *thirteen* years ago. How time does fly! Of course all them years — *thirteen*, egad! — has not gone for nothing. I dare say you don’t perceive the alterations in yourself — no one does — I wish no one else did — that was always my wish to Mrs. P. of a morning — *my* good lady, Mrs. Pelter — ha, ha, ha! Man can’t tether time or tide, as the Psalm says, and every year scribbles a wrinkle or two. You were suffering, I heard then, ma’am, chronic cough, ma’am — and all that. I hope it’s abated — I know it will, ma’am — my poor lady is a martyr to it — troublesome thing — very — awful troublesome! Lady Alice.”

There was no reply, Lady Alice was still looking sternly at the picture.

“I remember so well, ma’am, you were walking a little lame then, linked with Lord Lumdlebury — (we have had the honour to do business occasionally for his lordship) — and I was informed by a party with me that you had been with Pincendorf. I don’t think much of them jockeys, ma’am, for my part; but if it was anything of a callosity— “

Without waiting for any more, Lady Alice Redcliffe rose in solemn silence to her full height, beckoned to Beatrix, and said grimly —

“I’ll change my seat, dear, to the sofa — will you help me with these things?”

Lady Alice glided awfully to the sofa, and the gallant Mr. Pelter instituted a playful struggle with Beatrix for possession of the shawls.

“I remember the time, miss, I would not have let you carry your share; but, as I was saying to Lady Alice Redcliffe— “

He was by this time tucking a shawl about her knees, which, so soon as she perceived, she gasped to Beatrix —

“Where’s Jekyl? — I can’t have *this* any longer — call him here.”

“As I was saying to you, Lady Alice, ma’am, our joints grow a bit rusty after sixty; and talking of feet, I passed the Smather and Slam Junction, ma’am, only two hours after the collision; and, egad! there were three feet all in a row cut off by the instep, quite smooth, ma’am, lying in the blood there, a pool as long as the passage upstairs — awful sight!”

Lady Alice rose up again, with her eyes very wide, and her mouth very close, apparently engaged in mental prayer, and her face angry and pink, and she beckoned with tremulous fingers to Sir Jekyl, who was approaching with one of his provoking smiles.

“I say, Mr. Pelter, my friend Doocey wants you over there; they’re at loggerheads about a law point, and I can’t help them.”

“Hey! if it’s *practice* I can give them a wrinkle maybe;” and away stumped the attorney, his fists in his pockets, smirking, to the group indicated by his host.

“Hope I haven’t interrupted a conversation? What can I do for you?” said Sir Jekyl, gaily.

“What do you *mean*, Jekyl Marlowe — what *can* you mean by bringing such persons here? What pleasure can you *possibly* find in low and *dreadful* society? — none of your family liked it. Where did you find that man? How on earth did you procure such a person? If I *could* — if I had been well enough, I’d have rung the bell and ordered your servant to remove him. I’d have gone to my bedroom, sir, only that even there I could not have felt safe from his intrusions. It’s utterly intolerable and preposterous!”

“I had no idea my venerable friend, Pelter, could have pursued a lady so cruelly; but rely upon me, I’ll protect you.”

“I think you had better cleanse your house of such persons; at all events, I insist they shan’t be allowed to make their horrible sport of me!” said Lady Alice, darting a fiery glance after the agreeable attorney.

CHAPTER XVII.

Old Donnie and Lady Jane.

"Can you tell me, child, anything about that horrible fat old Frenchman, who has begun to speak English since his return?" asked Lady Jane Lennox of Beatrix, whom she stopped, just touching her arm with the tip of her finger, as she was passing. Lady Jane was leaning back indolently, and watching the movements of M. Varbarriere with a disagreeable interest.

"That's Monsieur Varbarriere," answered Beatrix.

"Yes, I know that; but who is he — what is he? I wish he were gone," replied she.

"I really know nothing of him," replied Beatrix, with a smile.

"Yes, you do know something about him: for instance, you know he's the uncle of that handsome young man who accompanied him." This Lady Jane spoke with a point which caused on a sudden a beautiful scarlet to tinge the young girl's cheeks.

Lady Jane looked at her, without a smile, without archness, with a lowering curiosity and something of pain, one might fancy, even of malignity.

Lady Jane hooked her finger in Beatrix's bracelet, and lowering her eyes to the carpet, remained silent, it seemed to the girl undecided whether to speak or not on some doubtful subject. With a vague interest Beatrix watched her handsome but sombre countenance, till Lady Jane appearing to escape from her thoughts, with a little toss of her beautiful head and a frown, said, looking up —

"Beatrix, I have such frightful dreams sometimes. I am ill, I think; I am horribly nervous tonight."

"Would you like to go to your room? Maybe if you were to lie down, Lady Jane— "

"By-and-by, perhaps — yes." She was still stealthily watching Varbarriere.

"I'll go with you — shall I?" said Beatrix.

"No, you shan't," answered Lady Jane, rudely.

“And why, Lady Jane?” asked Beatrix, hurt and surprised.

“You shall never visit my room; you are a good little creature. I could have loved you, Beatrix, but now I can’t.”

“Yet I like you, and you meet me so! why is this?” pleaded Beatrix.

“I can’t say, little fool; who ever knows why they like or dislike? I don’t. The fault, I suppose, is mine, not yours. I never said it was yours. If you were ever so little wicked,” she added, with a strange little laugh, “perhaps I could; but it is not worth talking about,” and with a sudden change from this sinister levity to a seriousness which oscillated strangely between cruelty and sadness, she said —

“Beatrix, you like that young man, Mr. Strangways?” Again poor Beatrix blushed, and was about to falter an exculpation and a protest; but Lady Jane silenced it with a grave and resolute “*Yes — you like him*;” and after a little pause, she added— “Well, if you don’t marry *him*, marry no one else;” and shortly after this, Lady Jane sighed heavily.

This speech of hers was delivered in a way that prevented evasion or girlish hypocrisy, and Beatrix had no answer but that blush which became her so; and dropping her eyes to the ground, she fell into a reverie, from which she was called up by Lady Jane, who said suddenly —

“What can that fat Monsieur Varbarriere be? He looks like Torquemada, the Inquisitor — mysterious, plausible, truculent — what do you think? Don’t you fancy he could poison you in an ice or a cup of coffee; or put you into Cardinal Ballue’s cage, and smile on you once a year through the bars?”

Beatrix smiled, and looked on the unctuous old gentleman with an indulgent eye, comparatively.

“I can’t see him so melodramatically, Lady Jane,” she laughed. “To me he seems a much more commonplace individual, a great deal less interesting and atrocious, and less like the abbot.”

“What abbot?” said Lady Jane, sharply, “Now really that’s very odd.”

“I meant,” said Beatrix, laughing, “the Abbot of Quedlinberg, in Canning’s play, who is described, you know, as very corpulent and cruel.”

“Oh, I forgot; I don’t think I ever read it; but it chimed in so oddly with my dreams.”

“How, what do you mean?” cried Beatrix, amused.

"I dreamed some one knocked at night at my door, and when I said 'come in,' that Monsieur Varbarriere put in his great face, with a hood on like a friar's, smiling like — like an assassin; and somehow I have felt a disgust of him ever since."

"Well, I really think he would look rather well in a friar's frock and hood," said Beatrix, glancing at the solemn old man again with a little laugh. "He would do very well for Mrs. Radcliff's one-handed monk, or Schedone, or some of those awful ecclesiastics that scare us in books."

"I think him positively odious, and I hate him," said Lady Jane, quietly rising. "I mean to steal away — will you come with me to the foot of the stair?"

"Come," whispered Beatrix; and as Lady Jane lighted her candle, in that arched recess near the foot of the stair, where, in burnished silver, stand the files of candles, awaiting the fingers which are to bear them off to witness the confidences of toilet or of dejection, she said —

"Well, as you won't take me with you, we must part here. Goodnight, Lady Jane."

Lady Jane turned as if to kiss her, but only patted her on the cheek, and said coldly —

"Goodbye, little fool — now run back again."

When Lady Jane reached the gallery at the top of the staircase, she, too, saw Donica Gwynn seated where Varbarriere had spoken to her.

"Ha! Donica," cried she suddenly, in the accents of early girlhood, "I'm so glad to see you, Donica. You hardly know me now?"

And Lady Jane, in the light of one transient, happy smile, threw her jewelled arms round the neck of the old housekeeper, whose visits of weeks at a time to Wardlock were nearly her happiest remembrances of that staid old mansion.

"You dear old thing! you were always good to me; and I such a madcap and such a fury! Dull enough now, Donnie, but not a bit better."

"My poor Miss Jennie!" said old Donica Gwynn, with a tender little laugh, her head just a little on one side, looking on her old pet and charge with such a beautiful, soft lighting up of love in her hard old face as you would not have fancied could have beamed there. Oh! most pathetic mystery, how in our poor nature, layer over layer, the angelic and the evil, the mean and the noble, lie alternated. How sometimes, at long intervals, in the wintriest life and darkest face, the love of angels will suddenly beam out, and show you, still unwrecked, the eternal capacity for heaven.

"And grown such a fine 'oman — bless ye — I allays said she would — didn't I?"

"You always stood up for me, old Donnie Don. Come into my room with me now, and talk. Yes — come, and talk, and talk, and talk — I have no one, Bonnie, to talk with now. If I had I might be different — I mean better. You remember poor mamma, Donnie — don't you?"

"*Dear!* to be sure — yes, and a nice creature, and a pretty — there's a look in your face sometimes reminds me on her, Miss Jennie. And I allays said you'd do well — didn't I? — and see what a great match, they tell me, you a' made! Well well! and how you *have* grown! — a fine lady, bless you," and she laughed so softly over those thin, girlish images of memory, you'd have said the laugh was as far away and as sad as the remembrance.

"Sit down, Donnie Don," she said, when they had entered the room. "Sit down, and tell me everything — how all the old people are, and how the old place looks — you live there now? *I* have nothing to tell, only I'm married, as you know — and — and I think a most good-for-nothing creature."

"Ah, no, pretty Miss Jane, there was good in you always, only a little bit hasty, and *that* anyone as had the patience could see; and I knowed well you'd be better o' that little folly in time."

"I'm not better, Donnie — I'm worse — I *am* worse, Donnie. I know I am — not better."

"Well, dear! and jewels, and riches, and coaches, and a fine gentleman adoring you — not very young, though. Well, maybe all the better. Did you never hear say, it's better to be an old man's darling than a young man's slave?"

"Yes, Donnie, it's very well; but let us talk of Wardlock — and he's *not* a fine man, Donnie, who put that in your head — he's old, and ugly, and" — she was going to say stupid, but the momentary bitterness was rebuked by an accidental glimpse of the casket in which his splendid present was secured— "and tell me about Wardlock, and the people — is old Thomas Jones there still?"

"No, he's living at Glastonhowe now, with his grandson that's married — very happy; but you would not believe how old he looks, and they say can't remember nothink as he used to, but very comfortable."

“And Turpin, the gardener?”

“Old Turpin be dead, miss, two years agone; had a fit a few months before, poor old fellow, and never was strong after. Very deaf he was of late years, and a bit cross sometimes about the vegetables, they do say; but he was a goodnatured fellow, and decent allays; and though he liked a mug of ale, poor fellow, now and then, he was very regular at church.”

“Poor old Turpin dead! I never heard it — and *old*? he used to wear a kind of flaxen wig.”

“Old! dearie me, that he was, miss, you would not guess how old — there’s eighty-five years on the gravestone that Lady Alice put over him, from the parish register, in Wardlock churchyard, bless ye!”

“And — and as I said just now about my husband, General Lennox, that he was old — well, he *is* old, but he’s a good man, and kind, and such a gentleman.”

“And you love him — and what more is needed to make you both happy?” added Donica; “and glad I am, miss, to see you so comfortably married — and such a nice, good, grand gentleman; and don’t let them young chaps be coming about you with their compliments, and fine talk, and lovemaking.”

“What do you mean, woman? I should hope I know how to behave myself as well as ever Lady Alice Redcliffe did. It is *she* who has been talking to you, and, I suppose, to every one, the stupid, wicked hag.”

“Oh, Miss Jennie, dear!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

Alone — Yet not alone.

“Well, Donnie, don’t talk about *her*; talk about Wardlock, and the people, and the garden, and the trees, and old Wardlock church,” said Lady Jane, subsiding almost as suddenly as she flamed up. “Do you remember the brass tablet about Eleanor Faukes, well-beloved and godly, who died in her twenty-second year, in the year of grace sixteen hundred and thirty-four? See how I remember it! Poor Eleanor Faukes! I often think of her — and do you remember how you used to make me read the two lines at the end of the epitaph? ‘What you are I was; what I am you shall be.’ Do you remember?”

“Ay, miss, that I do. I wish I could think o’ them sorts o’ things allays — it’s very good, miss.”

“Perhaps it is, Donnie. It’s very sad and very horrible, at all events, death and judgment,” answered Lady Jane.

“Have you your old Bible yet, miss?”

“Not here,” answered Lady Jane, colouring a little; but recollecting, she said, “I *have* got a very pretty one, though,” and she produced a beautiful volume bound in velvet and gold.

“A deal handsomer, Miss Jennie, but not so well read, I’m afeared,” said Donica Gwynn, looking at the fresh binding and shining gilt leaves.

“There it is, Donnie Don; but I feel like you, and I *do* like the old one best, blurred and battered; poor old thing, it looked friendly, and this like a fashionable chaplain. I have not seen it for a long time, Donnie; perhaps it’s lost, and this is only a show one, as you see.”

And after a few seconds she added, a little bitterly, almost angrily, “I never read my Bible now. I never open it,” and then came an unnatural little laugh.

“Oh! Miss Jennie, dear — I mean my Lady Jane — don’t say that, darling — *that* way, anyhow, don’t say it. Why should not you read your Bible, and love it, better now nor ever, miss — the longer you live the more you’ll want it, and when sorrow comes, what have you but that?”

“It’s all denunciation, all hard names, and threats, Donnie. If people believed themselves what they *say* every Sunday in church, miserable sinners, and I dare say they are, they’d sicken and quake at sight of it. I hope I may come to like it some day, Donnie,” she added, with a short sigh.

“I mind, Miss Jennie — I mean my Lady Jane.”

“No, you’re to call me Jennie still, or I’ll drop Donnie Don, and call you Mrs. Gwynn,” said Lady Jane, with her hands on Donica’s thin shoulders, playfully, but with a very pensive face and tone.

Donica smiled for a moment, and then her face saddened too, and she said —

“And I mind, Miss Jennie, when it was the same way with me, only with better reason, for I was older than you, and had lived longer than ever you did without a thought of God; but I tell you, miss, you’ll find your only comfort there at last; it is not much, maybe, to the like o’ me, that can’t lay her mind down to it, but it’s *some*think; ay, I mind the time I durst not open it, thinking I’d only meet summat there to vex me. But ’tisn’t so: there’s a deal o’ good nature in the Bible, and ye’ll be sure to stumble on somethink kind whenever you open it.”

Lady Jane made no answer. She looked down with a careworn gaze on her white hand, the fleeting tenement of clay; jewelled rings glimmered on its fingers — the vanities of the world, and under it lay the Bible, the eternal word. She was patting the volume with a little movement that made the brilliants flash. You would have thought she was admiring her rings, but that her eyes were so sad and her gaze so dreamy.

“And I hear the mistress, Lady Alice, acoming up — yes, ’tis her voice. Goodnight, Miss Jennie, dear.”

“Goodnight, dear old Donnie.”

“And you’ll promise me you’ll read a bit in it every night.”

“Where’s the use in promising, Donnie? Don’t we promise everything — the whole Christian religion, at our baptism — and how do we keep it?”

“You must promise you’ll read, if ’twas only a verse every night, Miss Jennie, dear — it may be the makin’ o’ ye. I hear Lady Alice acalling.”

“You’re a good old thing — I like you, Donnie — you’d like to make me better — happier, that is — and I love you — and I promise for this night, at all events, I will read a verse, and maybe more, if it turns out goodnatured, as you say. Goodnight.”

And she shook old Gwynn by both hands, and kissed her; and as she parted with her, said —

“And, Donnie, you must tell my maid I shan’t want her tonight — and I *will* read, Donnie — and now, goodnight again.”

So handsome Lady Jane was alone.

“It seems to me as if I had not time to think — God help me, God help me,” said Lady Jane. “Shall I read it? That odious book, that puts impossibilities before us, and calls eternal damnation eternal justice!”

“Goodnight, Jane,” croaked Lady Alice’s voice, and the key turned in the door.

With a pallid glance from the corners of her eyes, of intense contempt — *hatred*, even, at the moment, she gazed on the door, as she sate with her fingers under her chin; and if a look could have pierced the panels, hers would have shot old Lady Alice dead at the other side. For about a minute she sat so, and then a chilly little laugh rang from her lips; and she thought no more for a while of Lady Alice, and her eyes wandered again to her Bible.

“Yes, that odious book! with just power enough to distract us, without convincing — to embitter our short existence, without directing it; I *hate* it.”

So she said, and looked as if she would have flung it into the farthest corner of the room. She was spited with it, as so many others are, because it won’t do for us what we must do for ourselves.

“When sorrow comes, poor Donnie says — *when* it comes — little she knows how long it has been here! Life — such a dream — such an agony often. Surely it pays the penalty of all its follies. Judgment indeed! The all-wise Creator sitting in judgment upon creatures like us, living but an hour, and walking in a dream!”

This kind of talk with her, as with many others, was only the expression of a form of pain. She was perhaps in the very mood to read, that is, with the keen and anxious interest that accompanies and indicates a deep-seated grief and fear.

It was quite true what she said to old Donica. These pages had long been sealed for her. And now, with a mixture of sad antipathy and interest, as one looks into a coffin, she did open the book, and read here and there in a desultory way, and then, leaning on her hand, she mused dismally; then made search for a place she wanted, and read and wept, wept aloud and long and bitterly.

The woman taken, and "set in the midst," the dreadful Pharisees standing round. The Lord of life, who will judge us on the last day, hearing and *saving*! Oh, blessed Prince, whose service is perfect freedom, how wise are thy statutes! "More to be desired are they than gold — *sweeter* also than honey." Standing between thy poor tempted creatures and the worst sorrow that can befall them — a sorrow that softens, not like others, as death approaches, but is transformed, and stands like a giant at the bedside. May they see thy interposing image — may they see thy face now and for ever.

Rest for the heavy-laden! The broken and the contrite he will not despise. Read and take comfort, how he dealt with that poor sinner. Perfect purity, perfect mercy. Oh, noblest vision that ever rose before contrite frailty! Lift up the downcast head — let the poor heart break no more — you shall rise from the dust an angel.

Suddenly she lifted up her pale face, with an agony and a light on her countenance, with hands clasped, and such a look from the abyss, in her upturned eyes.

Oh! was it possible — could it be true? A *friend* — such a *friend*!

Then came a burst of prayer — wild resolutions — agonised tears. She knew that in all space, for her, was but one place of safety — to lie at the wounded feet of her Saviour, to clasp them, to bathe them with her tears. An hour — more — passed in this agony of stormy hope breaking in gleams through despair. Prayer — cries for help, as from the drowning, and vows frantic — holy, for the future.

"Yes, once more, thank God, I can dare with safety — here and now — to see him for the last time. In the morning I will conjure old Lady Alice to take me to Wardlock. I will write to London. Arthur will join me there. I'd like to go abroad — never into the world again — never — never — never. He will be pleased. I'll try to make amends. He'll never know what a wretch I've been. But he shall see the change, and be happier. Yes, yes, yes." Her beautiful long hair was loose, its rich folds clasped in her strained fingers — her pale upturned face bathed in tears and quivering— "The Saviour's feet! — No happiness but there — wash them with my tears — dry them with this hair." And she lifted up her eyes and hands to heaven.

Poor thing! In the storm, as cloud and rack fly by, the momentary gleam that comes — what is it? Do not often these agitations subside in darkness? Was this to be a lasting sunshine, though saddened for her? Was she indeed safe now and for ever?

But is there any promise that repentance shall arrest the course of the avenger that follows sin on earth? Are broken health or blighted fame restored when the wicked man "turneth away from the wickedness that he hath committed;" and do those consequences that dog iniquity with "feet of wool and hands of iron," stay their sightless and soundless march so soon as he begins to do "that which is lawful and right?" It is enough for him to know that he that does so "shall save his soul alive."

CHAPTER XIX.

Varbarriere the Tyrant debates with the weaker Varbarrieres.

"May I see you, Monsieur Varbarriere, tomorrow, in the room in which I saw you to-day, at any hour you please after halfpast eleven?" inquired Lady Alice, a few minutes after that gentleman had approached her.

"Certainly, madam; perhaps I can at this moment answer you upon points which cause you anxiety; pray command me."

And he sate like a corpulent penitent on a low prie-dieu chair beside her knee, and inclined his ear to listen.

"It is only to learn whether my — my poor boy's son, my grandson, the young man in whom I must feel so deep an interest, is about to return here?"

"I can't be quite certain, madam, of that; but I can promise that he will do himself the honour to present himself before you, whenever you may please to appoint, at your house of Wardlock."

"Yes, that would be better still. He could come there and see his old grandmother. I would like to see him soon. I have a great deal to say to him, a great deal to tell him that would interest him; and the pictures; I know you will let him come. Do you really mean it, Monsieur Varbarriere?"

M. Varbarriere smiled a little contemptuously, and bowed most deferentially.

"Certainly madam, I mean what I say; and if I did *not* mean it, still I would say I do."

There was something mazy in this sentence which a little bewildered old Lady Alice's head, and she gazed on Varbarriere with a lacklustre frown.

"Well, then, sir, the upshot of the matter is that *I may* rely on what you say, and expect my grandson's visit at Wardlock?"

"Certainly, madam, you *may* expect it," rejoined Varbarriere, oracularly.

"And pray, Monsieur Varbarriere, are you married?" inquired the old lady, with the air of a person who had a right to be informed.

"Alas, madam, may I say Latin? — Infandum, regina, jubes renovare dolorem; you stir up my deepest grief. I am, indeed, what you call an old bachelor."

"Well, so I should suppose; I don't see what business you would have had to marry."

"Nor I either," he replied.

"And you are very rich, I suppose."

"The rich man never says he is rich, and the poor man never says he is poor. What shall I say? Pretty well! Will that do?"

"H'm, yes; you ought to make a settlement, Monsieur Varbarriere."

"On your grandson, madam?"

"Yes, my grandson, he's nothing the worse of that, sir — and your nephew."

"Madam, the idea is beneficent, and does honour to your heart. I have, to say truth, had an idea of doing something for him by my will, though not by settlement; you are quite in advance of me, madam — I shall reflect."

Monsieur Varbarriere was, after his wont, gravely amusing himself, so gravely that old Lady Alice never suspected an irony. Old Lady Alice had in her turn taken up the idea of a solution of all family variance, by a union between Guy Deverell and Beatrix, and her old brain was already at the settlements.

"Lady Alice, you must positively give us up our partner, Monsieur Varbarriere, our game is arrested; and, egad, Pelter, poor fellow, is bursting with jealousy!"

Lady Alice turned disdainfully from Sir Jekyl.

"Monsieur Varbarriere, pray don't allow me to detain you now. I should be very glad to see you, if you had no particular objection, tomorrow."

"Only too happy; you do me, madam, a great deal of honour;" and with a bow and a smile Monsieur Varbarriere withdrew to the whist-table.

He did not play that night by any means so well as usual. Doocey, who was his partner, was, to say the least, disappointed, and Sir Jekyl and Sir Paul made a very nice thing of it, in that small way which makes domestic whist-players happy and serene. When they wound up, Doocey was as much irritated as a perfectly well-bred gentleman could be.

"Well, Sir Paul; we earned our winnings, eh? Four times the trick against honours, not bad play, I think," said Sir Jekyl, as they rose.

"Captain Doocey thinks our play had nothing to do with it," observed Sir Paul, with a faint radiance of complacent banter over his bluff face, as he put his adversary's half-crowns into his trowsers pocket.

"I never said *that*, Sir Paul, of course; you mistake me, but *we* might, don't you think, Monsieur Varbarriere, have played a little better? for instance, we should have played our queen to the lead of spades. I'm sure that would have given us the trick, don't you see, and you would have had the lead, and played diamonds, and forced Sir Jekyl to ruff with his ace, and made my knave good, and that would have given us the lead and trick."

"Our play goes for nothing, you see, Sir Paul," said Sir Jekyl.

"No; Captain Doocey thinks play had nothing to do with it," said Sir Paul Blunket.

"'Gad, I think play had everything to do with it — not *yours*, though," said Doocey, a little tartly.

"I must do you *all* justice," interposed Varbarriere, "you're all right — everyone played well except me. I do pretty well when I'm in the vein, but I'm not tonight; it was a very bad performance. I played execrably, Captain Doocey."

"Oh! no, I won't allow that; but you know once or twice you certainly did not play according to your own principles, I mean, and I couldn't therefore see exactly what you meant, and I dare say it was as much my fault as yours."

And Doocey, with his finger on Varbarriere's sleeve, fell into one of those *resumés* which mysteriously interest whist-players, and Varbarriere listened to his energetic periods with his hands in his pockets, benignant but bored, and assented with a good grace to his own condemnation. And smothering a yawn as he moved away, again pleaded guilty to all the counts, and threw himself on the mercy of the court.

"What shall we do tomorrow?" exclaimed Sir Jekyl, and he heard a voice repeat "tomorrow," and so did Varbarriere. "I'll turn it over, and at breakfast I'll lay half a dozen plans before you, and you shall select. It's a clear frosty night; we shall have a fine day. You don't leave us, Mr. Pelter, till the afternoon, d'ye see? and mind, Lady Alice Redcliffe sits in the boudoir, at the first landing on the great stair; the servant will show you the way; don't fail to pay her a visit, d'ye mind, Pelter; she's huffed, you left her so suddenly; don't mind her at first; just amuse her a little, and I think she's going to change her lawyer."

Pelter, with his hands in his pockets, smiled shrewdly and winked on Sir Jekyl.

"Thanks; I know it, I heard it; you can give us a lift in that quarter, Sir Jekyl, and I shan't forget to pay my respects."

When the ladies had gone, and the gentlemen stood in groups by the fire, or sat listless before it, Sir Jekyl, smiling, laid his hand on Varbarriere's shoulder, and asked him in a low tone —

"Will you join Pelter in my room, and wind up with a cigar?"

"I was going, that is, tempted, only ten minutes ago, to ask leave to join your party," began Varbarriere.

"It is not a party — we should be only three," said Sir Jekyl, in an eager whisper.

"All the more inviting," continued Varbarriere, smiling. "But I suddenly recollected that I shall have rather a busy hour or two — three or four letters to write. My people of business in France never give me a moment; they won't pay my rent or cork a bottle, my faith! without a letter."

"Well, I'm sorry you can't; but you must make it up to me, and see, you must take two or three of these to your dressing-room," and he presented his case to M. Varbarriere.

"Ha! you are very good; but, *no*; I like to connect them with your room, they must not grow too common, they shall remain a treat. No, no, I won't; ha, ha, ha! Thank you very much," and he waved them off, laughing and shaking his head.

Somehow he could not brook accepting this trifling present. To be sure, here he was a guest at free quarters, but at this he stuck; he drew back and waved away the cigar-case. It was not logical, but he could not help it.

When Pelter and Sir Jekyl sat in the Baronet's chamber, under their canopy of tobacco-smoke over their last cigar,

"See, Pelter," said Sir Jekyl, "it won't do to *seem* anxious; the fact is I'm *not* anxious; I believe he has a lot of money to leave that young fellow. Suppose they marry; the Deverells are a capital old family, don't you see, and it will make up everything, and stop people talking about — about old nonsense. I'll settle all, and I don't care a curse, and I'll not be very long in the way. I can't keep always young, I'm past fifty."

"Judging by his manner, you know, I should say any proposition you may have to make he'd be happy to listen to," said Mr. Pelter.

"You're sleepy, Pelter."

"Well, a little bit," said the attorney, blinking, yawning, and grinning all together.

"And, egad, I think you want to be shaved," said Sir Jekyl, who did not stand on ceremony with his attorney.

"Should not wonder," said Mr. Pelter, feeling his chin over sleepily with his finger and thumb. "My shave was at halfpast four, and what is it now? — halfpast eleven, egad! I thought it was later. Goodnight, Sir Jekyl — those *are* cigars, magnificent, by Jove! — and about that Strangways' business, I would not be in too great a hurry, do you see? I would not open anything, till I saw whether they were going to move, or whether there was anything in it. I would not put it in his head, d'ye see, hey?" and from habit Pelter winked.

And with that salutation, harmless as the kiss apostolic, Mr. Pelter, aided by a few directions from Sir Jekyl, toddled away to his bedchamber yawning, and the Baronet, after his wont, locked himself into his room in very tolerable spirits.

There was a sofa in Varbarriere's dressing-room, on which by this time, in a great shawl dressing-gown, supine lay our friend; like the painted stone monument of the Chief Justice of Chester in Wardlock church, you could see on the wall sharply defined in shadow the solemn outline of his paunch. He was thinking — not as we endeavour to trace thought in narrative, like a speech, but crossing zigzag from point to point, and back and forward. A man requires an audience, and pen and paper, to think in train at all. His ideas whisked and jolted on somewhat in this fashion: —

"It is to be *avoided*, if possible. My faith! it is now just twelve o'clock! A dangerous old blockhead. I must avoid it, if only for time to think in. There was nothing this evening to imply such relations — Parbleu! a pleasant situation if it prove all a mistake. These atrabilious countrymen and women of mine are so odd, they may mislead a fellow accustomed like me to a more intriguing race and a higher *finesse*. Ah! no; it is certainly true. The *fracas* will end everything. That old white monkey will be sure to blunder me into it. Better reconsider things, and wait. What shall I tell him? No excuse, I must go through with it, or I suppose he will call for pistols — curse him! I'll give Sir Jekyl a hint or two. He must see her, and make all ready. The old fool will blaze away at me, of course. Well! I shall fight him or not, as I may be moved. No one in this country need fight now who does not wish it. Rather a comfortable place to live in, if it were not for the climate. I forgot to ask Jacques whether Guy took all his luggage! What o'clock now? Come, by my faith! it is time to decide."

CHAPTER XX.

M. Varbarriere decides.

Varbarriere sat up on the side of his sofa.

"Who brought that woman, Gwynn, here? What do they want of her?" It was only the formula by which interrogatively to express the suspicion that pointed at Sir Jekyl and his attorney. "Soft words for me while tampering with my witnesses, then laugh at me. Why did not I ask Lady Alice whether she really wrote for her?"

Thus were his thoughts various as the ingredients of that soup called harlequin, which figures at low French taverns, in which are floating bits of chicken, cheese, potato, fish, sausage, and so forth — the flavour of the soup itself is consistent, nevertheless. The tone of Varbarriere's ruminations, on the whole, was decided. He wished to avert the exposure which his interference alone had invited.

He looked at his watch — he had still a little more than half an hour for remedial thought and action — and now, what is to be done to prevent *ce vieux singe blanc* from walking into the green chamber, and keeping watch and ward at his wife's bedside until that spectre shall emerge through the wall, whom with a curse and a stab he was to lay?

Well, what precise measures were to be taken? First he must knock up Sir Jekyl in his room, and tell him positively that General Lennox was to be at Marlowe by one o'clock, having heard stories in town, for the purpose of surprising and punishing the guilty. Sir Jekyl would be sharp enough to warn Lady Jane; or should he suggest that it would be right to let her know, in order to prevent her from being alarmed at the temper and melodramatics of her husband, and to secure that coolness and preparation which were necessary? It required some delicacy and tact, but he was not afraid. Next, he must meet General Lennox, and tell him in substance that he had begun to hope that he had been himself practised upon. Yes, that would do — and he might be as dark as he pleased on the subject of his information.

Varbarriere lighted his bedroom candle, intending to march forthwith to Sir Jekyl's remote chamber.

Great events, as we all know, turn sometimes upon small pivots. Before he set out, he stood for a moment with his candle in one hand, and in his reverie he thrust the other into the pocket of his voluminous black trowsers, and there it encountered, unexpectedly, the letter he had that evening picked up on the floor of the gallery. It had quite dropped out of his mind. Monsieur Varbarriere was a Jupiter Scapin. He had not the smallest scruple about reading it, and afterwards throwing it into the fire, though it contained other men's secrets, and was another man's property.

This was a letter from Sir Jekyl Marlowe to Pelter and Crowe, and was in fact upon the special subject of Herbert Strangways. Unlucky subject! unlucky composition! Now there was, of course, here a great deal of that sort of communication which occurs between a clever attorney and his clever client, which is termed "privileged," and is not always quite fit to see the light. Did ever beauty read letter of compliment and adoration with keener absorption?

Varbarriere's face rather whitened as he read, and his fat sneer was not pleasant to see.

He got through it, and recommenced. Sometimes he muttered and sometimes he thought; and the notes of this oration would have read nearly thus: —

"So the question is to be opened whether the *anonymous payment* — he lies, it was in *my name*! — through the bankers protects me technically from pursuit; and I'm to be 'run by the old Hebrew pack from cover to cover,' over the Continent — bravo! — till I vanish for seven years more." Here Monsieur Varbarriere laughed in lurid contempt.

The letter went on in the same vein — contemptuous, cruel, he fancied. Everyone *is* cruel in self-defence; and in its allusions and spirit was something which bitterly recalled the sufferings which in younger and weaker days that same Baronet, pursuing the same policy, had inflicted upon him. Varbarriere remembered when he was driven to the most ignominious and risky shifts, to ridiculous disguises; he remembered his image in the cracked shaving-glass in the garret in his lair near Notre Dame — the red wig and moustache, and the goggles.

How easily an incautious poke will re-awake the dormant neuralgia of toothache; and tooth, cheek, ear, throat, brain, are all throbbing again in the reinduced anguish! With these sharp and vivid recollections of humiliation, fear, and suffering, all stirred into activity by this unlucky letter, that savage and vindictive feeling which had for so long ruled the life of Herbert Strangways, and had sunk into an uneasy doze under the narcotic of this evening's interview, rose up suddenly, wide awake and energetic.

He looked at his watch. The minute-hand showed him exactly how long he had been reading this confidence of client to attorney. "You will, will you?" murmured Varbarriere, with his jaw a little fiercely set, and a smile. "He will *checkmate* me, he thinks, in two or three moves. He does not see, clever fellow, that I will checkmate him in *one*!"

Now, this letter had *preceded* all that had occurred this evening to soften old animosities — though, strictly examined, that was not very much. It did not seem quite logical then, that it should work so sudden a revolution. I cannot, however, say positively; for in Varbarriere's mind may have long lain a suspicion that Sir Jekyl was not now altogether what he used to be, that he did not quite know all he had inflicted, and that time had made him wiser, and therefore gentler of heart. If so, the letter had knocked down this hypothesis, and its phrases, one or two of them, were of that unlucky sort which not only recalled the thrill of many an old wound, but freshly galled that vanity which never leaves us, till ear and eye grow cold, and light and sound are shut out by the coffin-lid.

So Varbarriere, being quite disenchanted, wondered at his own illusions, and sighed bitterly when he thought what a fool he had been so near making of himself. And thinking of these things, he stared grimly on his watch, and by one of those movements that betray one's abstraction, held it to his ear, as if he had fancied it might have gone down.

There it was, thundering on at a gallop. The tread of unseen fate approaching. Yes, it was time he should go. Jacques peeped in.

"You've done as I ordered?"

"Yes Monsieur."

"Here, lend me a hand with my cloak — very good. The servants, the butler, have they retired?"

"So I believe, Monsieur."

"My hat — thanks. The lights all out on the stairs and lobbies?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Go before — is that lighted?"

"Yes, sir."

This referred to one of those little black lanterns which belong to Spanish melodrama, with a semi-cylindrical horn and a black slide. We have most of us seen such, and handled if not possessed them.

"Leporello! hey, Jacques?" smiled Varbarriere sardonically, as he drew his short black cloak about him.

"Monsieur is always right," acquiesced the man, who had never heard of Leporello before.

"Get on, then."

And the valet before, the master following, treading cautiously, they reached the stairhead, where Varbarriere listened for a moment, then descended and listened again at the foot, and so through the hall into the long gallery, near the end of which is a room with a conservatory.

This they entered. The useful Jacques had secured the key of the glass door into the conservatory, which also opened the outer one; and Varbarriere, directing him to wait there quietly till his return, stepped out into the open air and faint moonlight. A moment's survey was enough to give him the lie of the ground, and recognising the file of tufted lime-trees, rising dark in the mist, he directed his steps thither, and speedily got upon the broad avenue, bordered with grass and guarded at either side by these rows of giant limes.

On reaching the carriageway, standing upon a slight eminence, Varbarriere gazed down the misty slope toward the gatehouse, and then toward Marlowe Manor, in search of a carriage or a human figure. Seeing none, he strolled onward toward the gate, and soon *did* see, airy and faint in the haze and distance, a vehicle approaching. It stopped some two hundred yards nearer the gate than he, a slight figure got out, and after a few words apparently, the driver turned about, and the slim, erect figure came gliding stiffly along in his direction. As he approached Varbarriere stood directly before him.

"Ha! here I am waiting, General," said Varbarriere, advancing. "I — I suppose we had better get on at once to the house?"

General Lennox met him with a nod.

"Don't care, sir. Whatever you think best," answered the General, as sternly as if he were going into action.

"Thanks for your confidence, General. I think so;" and side by side they walked in silence for a while toward the house.

"Lady Alice Redcliffe here?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's well. And, sir," he continued, suddenly stopping short, and turning full on Varbarriere— "for God's sake, *do* you think it is *certainly true*?"

"You had better come, sir, and judge for yourself," pursued Varbarriere.

"D —— you, sir — you think I'll wait over your cursed riddles. I'd as soon wait in hell, sir. You don't know, sir — it's the tortures of the damned. Egad, no man has a right — no man could stand it."

"I think it *is*, sir. I think it's *true*, sir. I *think* it's true. I'm nearly *sure* it's true," answered Varbarriere, with a pallid frown, not minding his anathema. "How *can* I say more?"

General Lennox looked for a while on the ground, then up and about dismally, and gave his neck a little military shake, as if his collar sat uneasily.

"A lonely life for me, sir. I wish to God the villain had shot me first. I was very fond of her, sir — desperately fond — madness, sir. I was thinking I would go back to India. Maybe you'll advise with me, sir, tomorrow? I have no one."

CHAPTER XXI.

At the Green Chamber.

As they approached the house, Jacques, who sat awaiting M. Varbarriere's return, behind the door facing the conservatory, was disagreeably surprised by a visit from the butler.

"Here I am!" exclaimed Jacques very cheerfully, feeling that he could not escape.

"Ow! haw! Mr. Jack, by gad!" exclaimed the butler, actually jumping back in panic, and nearly extinguishing his candle on his breast.

It was his custom, on hearing a noise or seeing a light, to make a ceremonious reconnoissance in assertion of his character, not of course in expectation of finding anything; and here at length he thought he had lighted on a burglar, and from the crown of his head to his heels froze thrills of terror. "And what the devil, Mr. Jack, are you doing here, please, sir?"

"Waiting, my friend, to admit Monsieur, my master," answered Jacques, who was adroit enough to know that it is sometimes cunning to be frank.

In fact it was the apparition of M. Varbarriere, in his queer hat and cloak, crossing a window, which had inspired the butler with a resolution to make his search.

"Haw! dear me! yes, I saw him, Mr. Jack, I did; and what, Mr. Jack, is the doors opened for at these hours, unbeknown to me?"

"My most dear friend, I am taking every care, as you see; but my master, he choose to go out, and he choose to come in. Jacques is nothing but what you call the latchkey."

"And what is he a-doing hout o' doors this time o' night, Mr. Jack? I never knowd afore sich a think to 'appen. Why it looks like a stragethim, that's what it does, Mr. Jack — a stragethim."

And the butler nodded with the air of a moral constable.

"It's a folly, Monsieur. My faith! a little *ruse* of love, I imagine."

"You don't mean to say he's hout a-larkin?"

Jacques, who only conjectured the sense of the sentence, winked and smiled.

"Well, I don't think it's not the way he should be."

"My master is most generous man. My friend, you shall see he shall know how kind you have been. Monsieur, my master, he is a *prince*!" murmured Jacques, eloquently, his fingers on the butler's cuff, and drew back to read in his countenance how it worked.

"It must not hoccur again, Mr. Jack, wile ere," replied the butler, with another grave shake of his head.

"Depend yourself on me," whispered Jacques again in his ear, while he squeezed the prudent hand of the butler affectionately. "But you must go way."

"I do depend on you, Mr. Jack, but I don't like it, mind — I don't like it, and I won't say nothink of it till I hear more from you."

So the butler withdrew, and the danger disappeared.

"You will please to remember, sir," said Varbarriere, as they approached the house, "that this is of the nature of a military movement — a surprise; there must be no sound — no alarm."

"Quite so," whispered old Lennox, with white lips. He was clutching something nervously under the wide sleeve of his loose drab overcoat. He stopped under the shadow of a noble clump of trees about fifty steps away from the glass door they were approaching.

"I — I almost wish, sir — I'll go back — I don't think I can go on, sir."

Varbarriere looked at his companion with an unconscious sneer, but said nothing.

"By —— , sir, if I find it true, I'll kill him, sir."

The old man had in his gouty grip one of those foolish daggers once so much in vogue, but which have now gone out of use, and Varbarriere saw it glimmer in the faint light.

"Surely, Colonel Lennox, you don't mean — you can't mean — you're not going to resort to violence, sir?"

"By —— , sir, he had best look to it."

Varbarriere placed his hand on the old man's sleeve, he could feel the tremor of his thin wrist through it.

"General Lennox, if I had fancied that you could have harboured such a thought, I never should have brought you here."

The General, with his teeth clenched, made him no reply but a fierce nod.

“Remember, sir, you have the courts of law, and you have the code of honour — either or both. One step more I shall not take with you, if you mean that sort of violence.”

“What do you mean, sir?” asked the General, grimly.

“I mean this, sir, you shall learn nothing by this night’s procedure, unless you promise me, upon your honour as a soldier, sir, and a gentleman, that you will not use that dagger or any other weapon.”

General Lennox looked at him with a rather glassy stare.

“You’re right, sir, I dare say,” said Lennox, suddenly and helplessly.

“You promise?”

“Ay, sir.”

“Upon your honour?”

“Upon my honour; ay, sir, my honour.”

“I’m satisfied, General. Now observe, you must be silent, and as noiseless as you can. If Sir Jekyl be apprised of your arrival, of course the — the experiment fails.”

General Lennox nodded. Emerging into the moonlight, Varbarriere saw how pale and lean his face looked.

Across the grass they pace side by side in silence. The glass door opened without a creak or a hitch. Jacques politely secured it, and, obeying his master’s gesture, led the way through the gallery to the hall.

“You’ll remember, General, that you arrived late; you understand? and having been observed by me, were admitted; and — and all the rest occurred naturally.”

“Yes, sir, any d — d lie you like. All the world’s lying — why should not I?”

At the foot of the staircase Jacques was dismissed, having lighted bedroom candles for the two gentlemen, so that they lost something of their air of Spanish conspirators, and they mounted the stairs together in a natural and domestic fashion.

When they had crossed the lobby, and stood at the door of the dressing-room, Varbarriere laid his hand on General Lennox’s arm —

“Stop here a moment; you must knock at Lady Alice’s door over there, and get the key of your room. She locks the door and keeps the key at night. Make no noise, you know.”

They had been fortunate hitherto in having escaped observation; and Varbarriere's strategy had, up to this point, quite succeeded.

"Very quietly, mind," whispered he, and withdrew behind the angle of the wall, toward the staircase.

Old Lennox was by this time at the door which he had indicated, and knocked. There was a little fuss audible within, but no answer. He knocked again more sharply, and he heard the gabble of female voices; and at last a rather nervous inquiry, "Who's there, please?"

"General Lennox, who wants the key of his room," answered he, in no mood to be trifled with. The General was standing, grim as fate, and stark as Corporal Trim, bedroom candle in hand, outside her door.

"He's *not* General Lennox — send him about his business," exclaimed an imperious female voice from the state bed, in which Lady Alice was sitting, measuring some mysterious drops in a graduated glass.

"My lady says she's sorry she can't find it tonight, sir, being at present in bed, please, sir."

"Come, child — no nonsense — I want my key, and I'll have it," replied the General, so awfully that the maid recoiled.

"I think, my lady, he'll be rude if he doesn't get it."

"What's the man like?"

"A nice-spoken gentleman, my lady, and dressed very respectable."

"You never *saw* General Lennox?"

"No, my lady, please."

Neither had Lady Alice; but she had heard him minutely described.

"A lean ugly old man is he, with white bristly whiskers, you know, and a white head, and little grey eyes, eh?"

They had no notion that their little confidence was so distinctly audible to the General without, who stood eyeing the panel fiercely as a sentry would a suspicious figure near his beat, and with fingers twitching with impatience to clutch his key.

"What sort of nose?" demanded the unseen speaker— "long or short?"

"Neither, please, my lady; bluish, raything, I should say."

"But it is either long or short, *decidedly*, and I forget which," said Lady Alice— "'Tisn't he!"

The General ground his teeth with impatience, and knocked so sharp a signal at the door that Lady Alice bounced in her bed.

"Lord bless us! How dare he do that? — tell him how dare he."

"Lady Alice, sir, would be much obliged if you'd be so good not knock so loud, sir, please," said the maid at the door, translating the message.

"Tell your mistress I'm General Lennox, and must have my key," glared the General, and the lady's-maid, who was growing nervous, returned.

"He looks, my lady, like he'd beat us, please, if he does not get the key, my lady."

"Sha'n't have it, the brute! We don't know he is — a robber, maybe. Bolt the door, and tell him to bring Monsieur Varbarriere to the lobby, and if *he* says he's General Lennox he shall have the key."

With trembling fingers the maid *did* bolt the door, and once more accost the soldier, who was chafing on the threshold.

"Please, sir, my lady is not well, having nervous pains, please sir, in her head tonight, and therefore would be 'appy if you would be so kind to bring Mister Barvarrian" (the name by which our corpulent friend was known in the servants' hall) "to her door, please, when she'll try what she may do to oblige you, sir."

"They don't know me," said the General, accosting Varbarriere, who was only half a dozen steps removed, and whom he had rejoined. "You must come to the door, they say, and tell them it's all right."

Perhaps with some inward sense of the comic, Varbarriere presented himself at the door, when, his voice being recognised, and he himself reconnoitred through the keyhole and reported upon, the maid presented herself in an extemporised drapery of cloaks and shawls, like a traveller in winter, and holding these garments together with one hand, with the other presented the key, peering anxiously in the General's face.

"Key, sir, please."

"I thank you," said the General, with a nod, to which she responded with such a courtesy as her costume permitted. The door shut, and as the gentlemen withdrew they heard the voices of the inmates again busy with the subject.

"Goodnight," whispered Varbarriere, looking in the General's blue eye with his own full and steady gaze.

"I know you'll remember your promise," said he.

"Yes — what?"

"No *violence*" replied Varbarriere.

"No, of course, I said so. Goodbye."

"You must appear — your *manner*, mind — just as usual. Nothing to alarm — you may defeat all else."

"I see."

Varbarriere pressed his hand encouragingly. It felt like death.

"Don't fear me," said General Lennox. "We'll see — we'll see, sir; goodbye."

He spoke in a low, short, resolute tone, almost defiant; but looked very ill. Varbarriere had never taken leave of a man on the drop, but thought that this must be like it.

He beckoned to him as the General moved toward the dressing-room door, and made an earnest signal of silence. Lennox nodded, applied the key, and Varbarriere was gone.

CHAPTER XXII.

In the Green Chamber.

General Lennox opened the door suddenly, and stood in the green chamber, holding his candle above his temple, and staring with a rather wild countenance and a gathered brow to the further end of the room. A candle burned on the table, and the Bible lay beside it. No one was there but the inmate of the bed, who sat up with a scared face. He locked the door in silence, and put the key in his pocket.

"Who's there? — who is it? O my God! Arthur, is it you?" she cried. It was not a welcome. It was as if she had seen a ghost — but she smiled.

"You're well? quite well? and happy? no doubt happy?" said Lennox, setting down his candle on the table near the bed, "and glad to see me?"

"Yes, Arthur; Arthur, what's the matter? You're ill — *are* you ill?"

"Ho! no, very well, quite well — very well indeed."

There was that in his look and manner that told her she was ruined. She froze with a horror she had never dreamed of before.

"There's something, Arthur — there is — you won't tell me."

"That's strange, and *you* tell *me* everything."

"What do you *mean*, sir? Oh, Arthur, what *do* you mean?"

"Mean! Nothing!"

"I was afraid you were angry, and I've done nothing to vex you — nothing. You looked so angry — it's so unreasonable and odd of you. But I am glad to see you, though you don't seem glad to see me. You've been a long time away, Arthur, in London, very long. I hope all your business is settled, I hope. And I'm very glad to hear you're not ill — indeed I am. Why are you vexed?"

"Vexed! ho! I'm vexed, am I? that's odd."

She was making a desperate effort to seem as usual, and talked on.

"We have had old Lady Alice Redcliffe here, my chaperon, all this while, if you please, and takes such ridiculous care of me, and locks me into my room every night. She means kindly, but it is very foolish."

"Yes, it is, d — d foolish."

"We have been employed very much as usual — walking, and driving, and croquet. Beatrix and I have been very much together, and Sir Paul and Lady Blunket still here. I don't think we have had any arrival since you left us. Mr. Guy Strangways has gone away, and Monsieur Varbarriere returned to-day."

She was gabbling as merrily as she could, feeling all the time on the point of fainting.

"And the diamonds came?" the General said, suddenly, with a sort of laugh.

"Oh! yes, the diamonds, so beautiful. I did not thank you in my letter — not half enough. They are beautiful — so exquisitely beautiful — brilliants — and so becoming; you have no idea. I hope you got my letter. Indeed I felt it all, every word, Arthur, only I could not say half what I wished. Don't you believe me, Arthur?"

"Lie down, woman, and take your sleep; you sleep *well*? you *all* do — of course you sleep? Lie down."

"You are angry, Arthur; you are excited; something has happened — something bad — what is it? For God's sake, Arthur, tell me what it is. Why won't you tell me?"

"Nothing — nothing strange — quite common."

"Oh! Arthur, tell me at once, or kill me. You look as if you hated me."

"*Hate* you! — There's a hereafter. God sees."

"I can't understand you, Arthur; you wish to distract me. I'd rather know anything. For mercy's sake speak out."

"Lie you down, and wait."

She did lie down. The hour of judgment had come as a thief in the night. The blood in her temples seemed to drum on the pillow. There was not a clear thought in her brain, only the one stunning consciousness.

"He knows all! I am ruined." Yet the feminine instinct of *finesse* was not quite overpowered.

Having placed the candle on the chimneypiece, so that the curtain at the foot of the bed throw its shadow over that recess in which the sorcerer Varbarriere had almost promised to show the apparition, old Lennox sat down at the bedside, next this mysterious point of observation. Suddenly it crossed him, as a break of moonlight will the blackest night of storm, that he must act more wisely. Had he not alarmed his wife? — what signal might not be contrived to warn off her guilty accomplice?

"Jennie," said he, with an effort, in a more natural tone, "I'm tired, very tired. We'll sleep. I'll tell you all in the morning. Go to sleep."

"Goodnight," she murmured.

"That will do; go to sleep," he answered.

Gently, gently, she stole a peep at that pretty watch that stood in its little slanting stand at her bedside. There was still twenty minutes — Heaven be praised for its mercy! — and she heard old Lennox at the far side of this "great bed of Ware," making an ostentation of undressing. His boots tumbled on the floor. She heard his watchguard jingle on the stand, and his keys and purse dropped in turn on the table. She heard him adjust the chair, as usual, on which he was wont to deposit his clothes as he removed them; she fancied she even heard him yawn. Her heart was throbbing as though it would choke her, and she was praying as she never prayed before — for a reprieve. And yet her respiration was long and deep, as if in the sleep she was counterfeiting.

Lennox, at the other side, put off his muffler, his outer coat, the frock-coat he wore, the waistcoat. She dared not look round to observe his progress. But at last he threw himself on the bed with a groan of fatigue, and pulled the coverlet over him, and lay without motion, like a man in need of rest.

Lady Jane listened. She could not hear him breathe. She waited some five minutes, and then she murmured, "Arthur." No answer. "*Arthur.*" Again no answer; and she raised herself on her elbow, cautiously, and listened; and after a little pause, quick as light she got out of bed, glided to the chimneypiece, and lighted a taper at the candle there, listened again for a moment, and on tiptoe, in bare feet, glided round the foot of the bed, and approached the recess at the other side of the bed's head, and instantly her fingers were on one of those little flowers in the ormolu arabesque that runs along the edge of the wooden casing.

Before she could turn it a gouty hand over her shoulder took hold of hers, and, with a low sudden cry, she saw her husband.

"Can't I do that for you? What is it?" said he.

Her lips were white, and she gazed in his face without saying a word.

He was standing there unbooted, in his trowsers, with those crimson silk suspenders on, with the embroidery of forget-me-nots, which she had described as “her work” — I am afraid inaccurately — a love-token — hypocrisy on hypocrisy.

Asmodeus, seated on the bed’s head, smirked down sardonically on the tableau, and clapped his apish hands.

“Get to your bed there. If you make a sign, by —— , I’ll kill you.”

She made no answer. She gazed at him dumbly. He was not like himself. He looked like a villain.

He did not lie down again. He sat by the little table, on which his watch, his keys, and loose shillings lay. The night was chill, but he did not feel it then.

He sat in his shirtsleeves, his chin on his breast, eyeing from under his stern white brows the shadowy arch through which the figure was to emerge.

Suddenly he heard the swift steps of little, naked feet on the carpet come round the foot of the bed, and his wife wildly threw herself at his feet, and clasped them in an agony. He could feel every sinew in her arms vibrate in the hysterical strain of her entreaty.

“Oh, Arthur! oh, darling, take me away from this, for God’s sake. Come down with me; come to the drawingroom, or to the dressing-room; take me away; you’ll be happier, indeed you will, than ever you were; you’ll never repent it, darling; do what I say. I’ll be the best wife, indeed I will. See, I’ve been reading my Bible; look at it. I’m quite changed — quite changed. God only knows how changed. Oh, Arthur, Arthur, if you ever loved me, take me away; come from this room — come, you’ll never repent it. Oh, Arthur, be wise, be merciful! The more you forgive the more you’ll be loved. It is not I, but God says that. I’m praying to you as I would to Him, and He forgives us when we implore: take pity on me; you’ll never be sorry. Have mercy, Arthur, have mercy — you are kind, I know you’re kind, you would not ruin your wretched Jennie. Oh, take pity before it is too late, and take me from this dreadful room. You’ll be glad, indeed you will; there never was such a wife as I’ll be to you, the humblest, the most loving, and you’ll be happier than ever you were. Oh, Arthur, Arthur, I’m praying to you as if you were God, for mercy; don’t say no! Oh, can you; can you; can you?”

General Lennox was moved, but not from his course. He never saw before such a face of misery. It was like the despairing pleading of the last day. But alas! in this sort of quarrel there can be no compromise; reconciliation is dishonour.

“Go and lie down. It’s all over between us,” said he in a tone that left her no room for hope. With a low, long cry, and her fingers clasped over her forehead, she retraced her steps, and lay down, and quietly drew her icy feet into the bed, awaiting the inevitable. Lennox resumed his watch.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Morning.

Monsieur Varbarriere was standing all this while with his shadow to the doorpost of the Window dressing-room, and his dark eyes fixed on the further door which admits to the green chamber. His bedroom candle, which was dwindling, stood on the table at his elbow.

He heard a step crossing the lobby softly toward his own room, and whispered,

"Who's there?"

"Jacques Duval, at Monsieur's service."

Monsieur took his candle, and crossed the floor to meet Jacques, who was approaching, and he signed to him to stop. He looked at his watch. It was now twenty minutes past one.

"Jacques," said he, in a whisper, "there's no mistake about those sounds?"

"No, Monsieur, not at all."

"Three nights running, you say?"

"Monsieur is perfectly right."

"Steps, you say?"

"Yes, sir, footsteps."

"It could not have been the wind, the shaking or creaking of the floor or windows?"

"Ah no, Monsieur, not at all as that."

"The steps quick, not slow; wasn't it?"

"Quick, sir, as one in haste and treading lightly would walk."

"And this as you sat in the butler's room?"

"Monsieur recollects exactly."

Varbarriere knew that the butler's room exactly underlay that dingy library that abutted on Sir Jekyl's bedchamber, and on that account had placed his sentinel to watch there.

"Always about the same time?" he asked.

“Very nearly, Monsieur, a few minutes, sometimes before, sometimes after; only trifle, in effect *nothing*,” answered Jacques.

“Jacques, you must leave my door open, so that, should I want you, you can hear me call from the door of that dressing-room; take care you keep awake, but don’t move.”

So saying, Varbarriere returned to his place of observation. He set down his candle near the outer door, and listened, glowering as before at the far one. The crisis was near at hand, so near that, on looking at his watch again, he softly approached the door of the green chamber, and there, I am sorry to say, he listened diligently.

But all was disappointingly silent for a while longer. Suddenly he heard a noise. A piece of furniture shoved aside it seemed, a heavy step or two, and the old man’s voice exclaim “Ha!” with an interrogatory snarl in it. There was a little laugh, followed by a muffled blow or a fall, and a woman’s cry, sharp and momentary— “Oh, God! oh, God!” and a gush of smothered sobs, and the General’s grim voice calling “silence!” and a few stern words from him, and fast talking between them, and Lady Jane calling for light, and then more wild sobbing. There had been no sound of a struggle.

Varbarriere stood, stooping, scowling, open-mouthed, at the door, with his fingers on the handle, hardly breathing. At last he gasped —

“That d —— old ape! has he hurt her?” He listened, but all was silent. Did he still hear smothered sobs? He could not be certain. His eyes were glaring on the panel of the door; but on his retina was a ghostly image of beautiful Lady Jane, bloodstained, with glazing eyes, like Cleopatra dying of her asps.

After a while he heard some words from the General in an odd ironical tone. Then came silence again — continued silence — half an hour’s silence, and then a sound of some one stirring.

He knew the tread of the General about the room. Whatever was to occur *had* occurred. That was his conclusion. Perhaps the General was coming to *his* room to look for him. It was time he should withdraw, and so he did.

“You may get to your bed, Jacques, and come at the usual hour.”

So, with his accustomed civilities, Monsieur Jacques disappeared. But old Lennox did not visit Varbarriere, nor even emerge from his room.

After an hour Varbarriere revisited the dressing-room next the green chamber. He waited long without hearing anything, and at length he heard a step — was it the General's again, or Sir Jekyl's? — whoever it was, he seemed to be fidgeting about the room, collecting and packing his things, Varbarriere fancied, for a journey; and then he heard him draw the writing-table a little, and place a chair near it, and as the candle was shining through the keyhole, he supposed the General had placed himself to write at it.

Something had happened, he felt sure. Had Lennox despatched Sir Jekyl, or Sir Jekyl wounded the General? Or had Lady Jane been killed? Or was all right, and no one of the actors stretched on the green baize carpet before the floats? He would believe that, and got quickly to his bed, nursing that comfortable conclusion the while. But when he shut his eyes, a succession of pale faces smeared with blood came and looked at him, and would not be ordered away. So he lighted his candle again, and tried to exorcise these visitors with the pages of a French Review, until very late sleep overtook him.

Jacques was in his room at the usual hour, eight o'clock; and Varbarriere started up in his bed at the sound of his voice, with a confused anticipation of a catastrophe. But the cheerful squire had nothing to relate except how charming was the morning, and to hand a letter to Monsieur.

Varbarriere's mind was not upon letters that morning, but on matters nearer home.

"General Lennox has not been downstairs yet?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Nor Sir Jekyl?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Where's my watch? there — yes — eight o'clock. H'm. When does Lady Jane's maid go to her?"

"Not until the General has advanced himself pretty well in his toilet, the entrance being through his dressing-room."

"The General used to be down early?"

"Yes, Monsieur, halfpast eight I remember."

"And Sir Jekyl?"

"About the same hour."

"And Lady Jane is called, I suppose, a little before that hour?"

"Yes, about a quarter past eight, Monsieur. Will Monsieur please to desire his cup of coffee?"

"Yes, everything — quickly — I wish to dress; and what's this? a letter."

It was from Guy Deverell, as Varbarriere saw at a glance, and not through the post.

"My nephew hasn't come?" sternly demanded Varbarriere, with a kind of start, on reading the signature, which he did before reading the letter.

"No, Monsieur, a young man has conveyed it from Slowton."

Whereupon Varbarriere, with a striped silk nightcap of many colours pending over his corrugated forehead, read the letter through the divided bed-curtains.

His nephew, it appeared, had arrested his course at Birmingham, and turned about, and reached Slowton again about the hour at which M. Varbarriere had met old Lennox in the grounds of Marlowe.

"What a fanfaronnade! These young fellows — what asses they are!" sneered Varbarriere.

It was not, in truth, very wise. This handsome youth announced his intention to visit Marlowe that day, to see Monsieur Varbarriere for, perhaps, the last time before setting forth for Algeria, where he knew a place would at once be found for him in the ranks of those brave soldiers whom France had sent there. His gratitude to his uncle years could never abate, but it was time he should cease to task his generosity, and he was quite resolved henceforward to fight his way single-handed in the world, as so many other young fellows did. Before taking his departure he thought he should present himself to say his adieux to M. Varbarriere — even to his host, Sir Jekyl Marlowe; and there was a good deal more of such stuff.

"Sir Jekyl! stuff! His uncle! lanterns! He wants to see that pretty Miss Beatrix once more! *voila tout!* He has chosen his time well. Who knows what confusion may be here to day? No matter."

By this time he had got his great quilted dressing-gown about him, in the folds of which Varbarriere looked more unwieldy still than in his drawingroom costume.

"I must read about that Algeria; have they got any diseases there? plague — yellow fever — ague! By my faith! if the place is tolerably healthy, it would be no such bad plan to let the young fool take a turn on that gridiron, and learn thoroughly the meaning of independence."

So Monsieur Varbarriere, with a variety of subjects to think over, pursued his toilet.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Doctor’s Visit.

Sir Jekyl’s hour was eight o’clock, and punctually his man, Tomlinson, knocked at his door.

“Hollo! Is that Tomlinson?” answered the voice from within.

“Yes, sir, please.”

“See, Tomlinson, I say, it’s very ridiculous; but I’m hanged if I can stir, that confounded gout’s got hold of my foot again. You’ll have to force the door. Send some one down to the town for Doctor Pratt — d’ye see? — and get me some handkerchiefs, and don’t be all day.”

The faithful Tomlinson listening, with a snowy shirt and a pair of socks on his arm and the tips of his fingers fiddling with the door-handle, listening at the other side of the panel, with forehead inclined forward and mouth open, looked, I am sorry to say, a good deal amused, although he answered in a concerned tone; and departed to execute his orders.

“Guv’nor took in toe again,” he murmured, with a solemn leer, as he paused before the butler’s broad Marseilles waistcoat.

“As how?” inquired he.

“The gout; can’t stir a peg, and he’s locked hisself in, as usual, over night.”

“Lawk!” exclaimed the butler, and I dare say both would have liked to laugh, but neither cared to compromise himself.

“Chisel and mallet, Mr. Story, we shall want, if you please, and some one to go at once for the doctor to the town.”

“I know — yes — hinstantly,” ejaculated the butler.

So things proceeded. Pratt, M. D., the medical practitioner of the village, whose yellow hall door and broad brass plate, and shop window round the corner, with the two time-honoured glass jars, one of red the other of green fluid, representing physic in its most attractive hues, were not more widely known than his short, solemn, red face, blue chin, white whiskers, and bald pate, was roused by the messenger’s summons, at his toilet, and peeped over his muslin blind to discover the hand that was ringing so furiously among his withered hollyhocks; and at the same time Tomlinson and the butler were working with ripping chisel, mallet, and even a poker, to effect an entrance.

“Ha! Dives,” said the Baronet, as that divine, who had heard the sad news, presented himself at the now open door. “I sent for you, my dear fellow. A horrid screw in my left toe this time. Such a spoil-sport! curse it, but it won’t be anything. I’ve sent for Pratt, and you’ll tell the people at breakfast, you know, that I’m a prisoner; only a trifle though, I hope — down to dinner maybe. There’s the gong — run down, like a dear fellow.”

“Not flying — well fixed in the toe, eh?” said Dives, rather anxiously, for he did not like Sir Jekyl’s constrained voice and sunken look.

“Quite fixed — blazing away — just the thing Pratt likes — confounded pain though. Now run down, my dear fellow, and make my excuses, but say I hope to be down to dinner, mind.”

So, with another look, Dives went down, not quite comfortable, for on the whole he liked Jekyl, who had done a great deal for him; he did not like tragedies, he was very comfortable as he stood, and quite content to await the course of nature.

“Is that d — d doctor *ever* coming?” asked Sir Jekyl, dismally.

“He’ll be here, sir, please, in five minutes — so he said, sir.”

“I know, but there’s been *ten* since, curse him.”

“Shall I send again, sir?” asked Tomlinson.

“Do; say I’m in pain, and can’t think what the devil’s keeping him.”

Beatrix in a moment more came running up in consternation.

“How do you feel now, papa? Gout, is it not?” she asked, having obtained leave to come in; “not very bad, I hope.”

The Baronet smiled with an effort.

“Gout’s never very pleasant, a hot thumbscrew on one’s toe, my dear, but that’s all; it will be nothing. Pratt’s coming, and he’ll get me right in a day or two — only the great toe. I beg pardon for naming it so often — very waspish though, that’s all. Don’t stay away, or the people will fancy something serious; and possibly I may be down, in a slipper though, to dinner. So run down, Trixie, darling.”

And Trixie, with the same lingering look that Dives had cast on him, only more anxious, betook herself to the parlour as he had desired.

In a little while Doctor Pratt had arrived. As he toddled through the hall he encountered the Rev. Dives on his way to the breakfast-parlour. Pratt had suffered some rough handling and damage at the hands of Time, and Dives was nothing the better of the sarcastic manipulations of the same ancient god, since they had last met. Still they instantly recognised, and shook hands cordially, and when the salutation was over —

"Well, and what's wrong with the Baronet?"

"Gout; he drinks two glasses of port, I've observed, at dinner, and it always disagrees with him. Pray do stop it — the port, I mean."

"Hand or foot?"

"The great toe — the best place, isn't it?"

"No better, sir. There's nothing, nothing of the stomach? — I brought this in *case*," and he held up a phial.

"No, but I don't like his looks; he looks so haggard and exhausted."

"H'm, I'd like to see him at once; I don't know his room though."

So Dives put him in charge of a guide, and they parted.

"Well, Sir Jekyl, how d'ye do, hey? and how's all this? Old enemy, hey — all in the foot — fast in the toe — isn't he?" began the Doctor as he entered the Baronet's room.

"Ay, in the toe. Sit down there, Pratt, beside me."

"Ah, ha! nervous; you think I'll knock him, eh? Ha, ha, ha! No, no, no! Don't be afraid. Nothing wrong in the stomach — no chill — retching?"

"No."

"*Head* all right, too; nothing queer there?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing in the knuckles — old acquaintance, you know, when you meet, sometimes a squeeze by the hand, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, nothing in the hand," said the Baronet, a little testily.

"Nor any wandering sensations here, you know, and there, hey?" said the little fellow, sitting down briskly by his patient.

"No; curse it."

"Troublesome to talk, hey?" asked Pratt, observing that he seemed faint, and talked low and with effort.

"No — yes — that is, *tired*."

"I see, no pain; all nicely fixed in the toe; *that* could not be better, and what do you refer it to? By Jove, it's eighteen, *nineteen* months since your last! When you came down to Dartbroke, for the Easter, you know, and wrote to me for the thing with the ether, hey? You've been at that d — d bin, I'm afraid, the forbidden fruit, hey? Egad, sir, I call it fluid gout, and the crust nothing but chalk-stone."

"*No — I haven't*," croaked the Baronet savagely.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Doctor, drumming on his fat knee with his stethoscope. "Won't admit — won't allow, hey?" As he spoke he was attempting to take him by the wrist.

"Pulse? How are we there, eh?"

"Turn that d — d fellow out of the room, and bolt the door, will you?" muttered Sir Jekyl, impatiently.

"Hey? I see. How are *you*, Mr. Tomlinson — no return of that bronchial annoyance, eh? I'll ask you just now — we'll just make Sir Jekyl Marlowe a little more comfortable first, and I've a question or two — we'd be as well alone, you see — and do you mind? You'll be in the way, you know; we may want you, you know."

So the docile Tomlinson withdrew with a noiseless alacrity, and Doctor Pratt, in deference to his patron, bolted the mangled door.

"See, Pratt, you're tiring me to death, with your beastly questions. Wait, will you? Sit down. You'll promise me you won't tell this to anyone."

"What?"

"Do hold your tongue, like a dear fellow, and listen. Upon your honour, you don't tell, till I give you leave, what's the matter with me. Come — d —— you; yes or no?"

"Well, you know I must, if you insist; but I'd rayther not."

"You *must*. On your honour you won't tell, and you'll call it gout?"

"Why — why, if it *is* not gout, eh? don't you see? it would not *do*."

"Well, good morning to you, Doctor Pratt, for I'm hanged if you prescribe for me on any other terms."

"Well, don't you see, I say I must, if you insist, don't you see; it may be — it may be — egad! it might be very serious to let you wait."

"You promise?"

"Yes, I *do*. *There!*"

"Gout, mind, and nothing else; all gout, upon your honour."

"Aw, well! *Yes.*"

"Upon your *honour*; why the devil can't you speak!"

"Upon my honour, of course."

"You kill me, making me talk. Well, 'tisn't in the toe — it's up here," and he uncovered his right shoulder and chest, showing some handkerchiefs and his nightshirt soaked in blood.

"What the devil's all this?" exclaimed the Doctor, rising suddenly, and the ruddy tints of his face fading into a lilac hue. "Why — why, you're *hurt*; egad, you're hurt. We must examine it. What is it with — how the plague did it all come about?"

"The act of God," answered Sir Jekyl, with a faint irony in his tone.

"The — ah! — well, I don't understand."

"I mean the purest accident."

"Bled a lot, egad! These things seem pretty dry — bleeding away *still*? You must not keep it so hot — the sheet only."

"I think it's stopped — the things are sticking — I feel them."

"So much the better; but we must not leave it this way — and — and I daren't disturb it, you know, without help, so we'll have to take Tomlinson into confidence."

"'Gad, you'll do no such thing."

"But, my dear sir, I *must* tell you, this thing, whatever it is, looks very serious. I can *tell* you, it's not to be trifled with, and this sort of nonsense may be as much as your life's worth, egad."

"You shan't," said Sir Jekyl.

"You'll allow me to speak with your brother?"

"No, you shan't."

"Ho, now, Sir Jekyl, really now— "

"Promised — your honour."

"'Tisn't a fair position," said the practitioner, shaking his head, with his hands stuffed in his pockets, and staring dismally at the bloodstained linen. "I'll tell you what we must do — there are two supernumeraries I happen to know at the county hospital, and Hicks is a capital nurse. I'll write a line and they'll send her here. There's a room in there, eh? yes, well, she can be quartered *there*, and talk with no one but you and me; in fact, see no one except in your presence, don't you see? and egad, we *must* have her, or I'll give up the *case*."

"Well, yes; send for her."

CHAPTER XXV.

The Patient interrogated.

So Doctor Pratt scribbled a few lines on the back of his card, and Tomlinson was summoned to the door, and told to expedite its despatch, and "send one of the men in a dog-cart as hard as he could peg, and to be sure to see Doctor Hoggins," who had been an apprentice once of honest Pratt's.

"Tell her not to wait for dressing, or packing, or anything. She'll come just as she is, and we'll send again for her things, d'ye mind? and let him drive quick. It's only two miles, he must not be half an hour about it;" and in a low whisper, with a frown and a nod, he added to Tomlinson on the lobby, "I *want* her here."

So he sat down very grave by Sir Jekyl, and took his pulse, very low and inflammatory, he thought.

"You lost a good deal of blood? It is not all here, eh?"

"No; I lost some beside."

"Mind, now, don't move. You may bring it on again; and you're not in a condition to spare any. How did it happen?"

"A knife or something."

"A thrust, eh? Not a *cut*; I mean a *stab*?"

"Yes."

"About how long ago? What hour?"

Sir Jekyl hesitated.

"Oh! now come, Sir Jekyl, I beg pardon, but I really must know the *facts*."

"Remember your promise — awfully tired."

"Certainly. What o'clock?"

"Between one and two."

"You must have some claret;" and he opened the door and issued orders accordingly. The Doctor had his fingers on his pulse by this time.

"Give me some water; I'm dying of thirst," said the patient.

The Doctor obeyed.

"And there's no gout at all, then?" said he.

“Not a bit,” answered Sir Jekyl, pettishly; his temper and his breath seemed to be failing him a little.

“Did you feel faint when it happened, or after?”

“Just for a moment, when it happened, then pretty well; and when I got here, in a little time, worse, very faint; I think I did faint, but a little blood always does that for me. But it’s not deep, I know by the feel — only the muscle.”

“H’m. I shan’t disturb these things till the nurse comes; glad there’s no gout, no complication.”

The claret-jug was soon at the bedside, and the Doctor helped his patient to a few spoonfuls, and felt his pulse again.

“I must go home for the things, d’ye see? I shan’t be long away though. Here, Tomlinson, you’ll give Sir Jekyl a spoonful or a glassful of this claret, d’ye mind, as often as he requires it. About every ten minutes a little to wet his lips; and mind, now, Sir Jekyl, drink any quantity rather than let yourself go down.”

As he went from the room he signed to Tomlinson, who followed him quietly.

“See, now, my good fellow, this is rather a serious case, you understand me; and he must not be let down. Your master, Sir Jekyl, I say, he must be kept up. Keep a little claret to his lips, and if you see any pallor or moisture in his face, give it him by a glassful at a time; and go on, do you mind, till he begins to look natural again, for he’s in a very critical state; and if he were to faint, d’ye see, or anything, it might be a very serious thing; and you’d better ring for another bottle or two; but don’t leave him on any account.”

They were interrupted here by a tapping in Sir Jekyl’s room. Lying on his back, he was rapping with his penknife on the table.

“Why the plague don’t you come?” he muttered, as Tomlinson drew near. “Where’s Pratt? tell him I want him.”

“Hey — no — no *pain*?” asked the Doctor.

“No; I want to know — I want to know what the devil you’ve been saying to him out there.”

“Nothing; only a direction.”

“Do you think — do you think I’m in *danger*?” said Sir Jekyl.

"Well, *no*. You needn't be if you mind, but — but don't refuse the claret, mind, and don't be afraid of it if you feel a — a sinking, you know, any quantity; and I'll be back before the nurse comes from the hospital; and — and don't be excited, for you'll do very well if you'll only do as I tell you."

The Doctor nodded, standing by the bed, but he did not look so cheerfully as he spoke.

"I'll be back in twenty minutes. Don't be fidgety, you know; don't stir, and you'll do very nicely, I say."

When the Doctor was gone, Sir Jekyl said —

"Tomlinson."

"Yes, sir, please."

"Tomlinson, come here; let me see you."

"Yes, Sir Jekyl; sir— "

"I say, Tomlinson, you'll tell the truth, mind."

"Yes, sir, please."

"Did that fellow say anything?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"Out with it."

"'Twas claret, Sir Jekyl, please, sir."

"None of your d — d lies, sir. I heard him say 'serious.' What *was* it?"

"Please, sir, he said as how you were to be kep up, sir, which it might be serious if otherwise. So he said, sir, please, it might be serious if you was not properly kep up with claret, please, sir."

"Come, Tomlinson — see I *must* know. Did he say I was in a bad way — likely to die? — come." His face was certainly hollow and earthy enough just then to warrant forebodings.

"No, sir; certainly not, sir. No, sir, please, nothing of the kind."

The Baronet looked immeasurably more like himself.

"Give me some wine — a glass," said he.

The Doctor, stumping away rapidly to his yellow door, and red and green twin bottles, in the village, was thinking how the deuce this misadventure of Sir Jekyl's had befallen. The Baronet's unlucky character was well known wherever he resided or had property.

"Who the devil did it, I wonder?" conjectured the Doctor. "Two o'clock at night. Some pretty fury with a scissors, maybe. We'll know time enough;

these things always come out — always come out, egad! It’s a shame for him getting into scrapes at his time of life.”

In the breakfast-parlour, very merry was the party then assembled, notwithstanding the absence of some of its muster-roll. Lady Jane Lennox, an irregular breakfaster, stood excused. Old Lady Alice was no more expected than the portrait of Lady Mary in her bedroom. General Lennox had business that morning, and was not particularly inquired after. Sir Jekyl, indeed, was missed — bustling, goodnatured, lively — his guests asked after him with more than a conventional solicitude.

“Well, and how is papa now?” inquired Sir Paul, who knew what gout was, and being likely to know it again, felt a real interest in the Baronet’s case. “No *acute* pain, I hope?”

“I’m afraid he *is* in pain, more than he admits,” answered Beatrix.

“Tomlinson told me it’s all in the — the extremity, though that’s well. Intelligent fellow, Tomlinson. Mine is generally what they call atonic, not attended with much pain, you know;” and he illustrated his disquisition by tendering his massive mulberry knuckles for the young lady’s contemplation, and fondling them with the glazed fingers of the other hand, while his round blue eyes stared, with a slow sort of wonder, in her face, as if he expected a good deal in the way of remark from the young lady to mitigate his astonishment.

Lady Blunket, who was beside her, relieved this embarrassment, and nodding at her ear, said —

“Flannel — *flannel*, chiefly. Sir Paul, there, his medical man, Doctor Duddle, we have great confidence in *him* — relies very much on warmth. My poor father used to take Regent’s — Regent’s — I forget what — a *bottle*. But Doctor Duddle would not hear of Sir Paul there attempting to put it to his lips. Regent’s — *what* is it? I shall forget my own name soon. *Water* is it? At all events he won’t hear of it — diet and flannel, that’s his method. My poor father, you know, died of gout, quite suddenly, at Brighton. Cucumber, they said.”

And Lady Blunket, overcome by the recollection, touched her eyes with her handkerchief.

“Cucumber and salmon, it was, *I* recollect,” said Sir Paul, with a new accession of intelligence.

“But he passed away most happily, Miss Marlowe,” continued Lady Blunket. “I have some verses of poor mamma’s. *She* was *very* religious, you know; they have been very much admired.”

“Ay — yes,” said Sir Paul, “he was helped *twice* — very im*pru*dent!”

“I was mentioning dear mamma’s verses, you remember.”

Sir Paul not being quite so well up in this aspect of the case, simply grunted and became silent; and indeed I don’t think he had been so loquacious upon any other morning or topic since his arrival at Marlowe.

“They are beautiful,” continued Lady Blunket, “and so resigned. I was most anxious, my dear, to place a tablet under the monument, you know, at Maisly; a mural tablet, just like the Tuftons’, you know; they are very reasonable, inscribed with dear mamma’s verses; but I can’t persuade Sir Paul, he’s so poor, you know; but certainly, some day or other, I’ll do it myself.”

The irony about Sir Paul’s poverty, though accompanied by a glance from her ladyship’s pink eyes, was lost on that excellent man, who was by this time eating some hot broil.

Their judicious conversation was not without an effect commensurate with the rarity of the exertion, for between them they had succeeded in frightening poor Beatrix a good deal.

In other quarters the conversation was proceeding charmingly. Linnett was describing to Miss Blunket the exploits of a terrier of his, among a hundred rats let loose together — a narrative to which she listened with a pretty girlish alternation of terror and interest; while the Rev. Dives Marlowe and old Doocey conversed earnestly on the virtues of colchicum, and exchanged confidences touching their gouty symptoms and affections; and Drayton, assisted by an occasional parenthesis from that prodigious basso, Varbarriere, was haranguing Beatrix and Mrs. Maberly on pictures, music, and the way to give agreeable dinners; and now Beatrix asked old Lady Blunket in what way she would best like to dispose of the day. What to do, where to drive, an inquiry into which the other ladies were drawn, and the debate, assisted by the gentlemen, grew general and animated.

CHAPTER XXVI.

General Lennox appears.

In the midst of this animation the butler whispered in the ear of the Rev. Dives Marlowe, who, with a grave face, but hardly perceived, slid away, and met the Doctor in the hall.

“Aw — *see* — this is a — rather nasty case, I am bound to tell you, Mr. Marlowe; he’s in a rather critical state. He’ll see you, I dare say, by-and-by, and I hope he’ll get on satisfactorily. I hope he’ll *do*; but I must tell you, it’s a — it’s a — serious *case*, sir.”

“Nothing since?” asked Dives, a good deal shocked.

“Nothing since, sir,” answered the Doctor, with a nod, and his eyebrows raised as he stood ruminating a little, with his fists in his pockets. “But — but — you’ll do *this*, sir, if you please — you’ll call in some physician, in whom you have confidence, for I’ll tell you frankly, it’s not a case in which I’d like to be alone.”

“It’s very sudden, sir; whom do you advise?” said Dives, looking black and pallid.

“Well, you know, it ought to be *soon*. I’d like him at once — you can’t send very far. There’s Ponder, I would not desire better, if you approve. Send a fellow riding, and don’t spare horseflesh, mind, to Slowton. He’ll find Ponder there if he’s quick, and let him bring him in a chaise and four, and pay the fellows well, and they’ll not be long coming. They’d better be quick, for there’s something must be done, and I can’t undertake it alone.”

Together they walked out to the stableyard, Dives feeling stunned and odd. The Doctor was reserved, and only waited to see things in train. Almost while Dives pencilled his urgent note on the back of a letter, the groom had saddled one of the hunters and got into his jacket, and was mounted and away.

Dives returned to the house. From the steps he looked with a sinking heart after the man cantering swiftly down the avenue, and saw him in the distance like a dwindling figure in a dream, and somehow it was to him an effort to remember what it was all about. He felt the cold air stirring his dark locks, streaked with silver, and found he had forgot his hat, and so came in.

“You have seen a great deal of art, Monsieur Varbarriere,” said Drayton, accosting that gentleman admiringly, in the outer hall, where they were fitting themselves with their “wideawakes” and “jerries.” “It is so pleasant to meet anyone who really understands it and has a feeling for it. You seem to me to lean more to painting than to statuary.”

“Painting is the more popular art, because the more literal. The principles of statuary are abstruse. The one, you see, is a repetition — the other a translation. Colour is more than outline, and the painter commands it. The man with the chisel has only outline, and must render nature into white stone, with the *natural* condition of being inspected from every point, and the *unnatural* one, in solid anatomy, of immobility. It is a greater triumph, but a less effect.”

Varbarriere was lecturing this morning, according to his lights, more copiously and *ex cathedrâ* than usual. Perhaps his declamations and antithesis represented the constraint which he placed on himself, like those mental exercises which sleepless men prescribe to wrest their minds from anxious and exciting preoccupations.

“Do you paint, sir?” asked Drayton, who was really interested.

“Bah! never. I can make just a little scratching with my pencil, enough to remind. But paint — oh — ha, ha, ha! — no. ’Tis an art I can admire; but should no more think to practise than the dance.”

And the ponderous M. Varbarriere pointed his toe and made a mimic pirouette, snapped his fingers, and shrugged his round shoulders.

“Alas! sir, the more I appreciate the dance, the more I despair of figuring in the ballet, and so with painting. Perhaps, though, *you* paint?”

“Well, I just draw a little — what you call scratching, and I have tried a little tinting; but I’m sure it’s very bad. I don’t care about fools, of course, but I should be afraid to show it to anyone who knew anything about it — to you, for instance,” said Drayton, who, though conceited, had sense enough at times to be a little modest.

“What is it?” said Miss Blunket, skipping into the hall, with a pretty little basket on her arm, and such a coquettish little hat on, looking so naïve and girlish, and so remarkably tattooed with wrinkles. “Shall I run away — is it a secret?”

"Oh, no; we have no secrets," said Drayton.

"No secrets," echoed Varbarriere.

"And won't you tell? I'm such a curious, foolish, wretched creature;" and she dropped her eyes like a flower-girl in a play.

What lessons, if we only could take them, are read us every hour! What a giant among liars is vanity! Here was this withered witch, with her baptismal registry and her looking-glass, dressing herself like a strawberry girl, and fancying herself charming!

"Only about my drawings — nothing."

"Ah, I know. Did Mr. Drayton show them to you?"

"No, Mademoiselle; I've not been so fortunate."

"He showed them to me, though. It's not any harm to tell, is it? and they really *are* — Well, I won't say all I think of them."

"I was just telling Monsieur Varbarriere, it is not everyone I'd show those drawings to. Was not I, Monsieur?" said Drayton, with a fine irony.

"So he was, upon my honour," said Varbarriere, gravely.

"He did not mean it, though," simpered Miss Blunket, "if *you* can't — *I*'ll try to induce him to show them to you; they are —— Oh! here is Beatrix."

"How is your papa now, Mademoiselle?" asked Varbarriere, anxious to escape.

"Just as he was, I think, a little low, the Doctor says."

"Ah!" said Varbarriere, and still his dark eyes looked on hers with grave inquiry.

"He always *is* low for a day or two; but he says this will be nothing. He almost hopes to be down this evening."

"Ah! Yes. That's very well," commented Varbarriere, with pauses between, and his steady, clouded gaze unchanged.

"We are going to the garden; are you ready, darling?" said she to Miss Blunket.

"Oh, quite," and she skipped to the door, smiling this way and that, as she stood in the sun on the step. "Sweet day," and she looked back on Beatrix and the invitation, glanced slightly on Drayton, who looked loweringly after them unmoved, and thought —

"Why the plague does she spoil her walks with that frightful old humbug? There's no escaping that creature."

We have only conjecture as to which of the young ladies, now running down the steps, Mr. Drayton's pronouns referred to.

"You fish to-day?" asked Varbarriere, on whose hands time dragged strangely.

"We were thinking of going down to that pretty place Gryston. Linnett was there on Saturday morning. It was Linnett's trout you thought so good at luncheon."

And with such agreeable conversation they loitered a little at the door, and suddenly, with quick steps, there approached, and passed them by, an apparition.

It was old General Lennox. He had been walking in the park — about the grounds — he knew not where, since daybreak. Awfully stern he looked, fatigued, draggled he well might be, gloveless, one hand in his pocket, the other clenched on his thumb like a child's in a convulsion. His thoughts were set on something remote, for he brushed by the gentlemen, and not till he had passed did he seem to hear Drayton's cheery salutation, and stopping and turning towards them suddenly, he said, very grimly —

"Beg your pardon— "

"Nothing, General, only wishing you good-morning," answered Drayton.

"Yes, charming morning. I've been walking. I've been out — a — thank you," and that lead-coloured and white General vanished like a wicked ghost.

"'Gad, he looks as if he'd got a licking. Did you ever see a fellow look so queer?"

"He's been overworking his mind — business, you know — wants rest, I suspect," said Varbarriere, with a solemn nod.

"They say fellows make themselves mad that way. I wonder has he had any breakfast; did you see his trowsers all over mud?"

"I half envy your walk to Gryston," said Varbarriere, glancing up towards the fleecy clouds and blue sky, and down again to the breezy landscape. "It's worth looking at, a very pretty bit, that steep bridge and glen."

"No notion of coming; maybe you will?"

Varbarriere smiled and shook his head.

"No angler, sir, never was," he said.

"A bad day, rather, at all events," said Drayton; "a grey day is the thing for us."

“Ah, yes, a grey day; so my nephew tells me; a pretty good angler, I believe.”

Varbarriere did not hear Drayton’s answer, whatever it was; he was thinking of quite other things, and more and more feverishly every minute. The situation was for him all in darkness. But there remained on his mind the impression that something worse even than a guilty discovery had occurred last night, and the spectre that had just crossed them in the hall was not a sight to dissipate those awful shadows.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Lady Alice Redcliffe makes General Lennox's Acquaintance.

Old General Lennox stopped a servant on the stairs, and learned from the staring domestic where Lady Alice Redcliffe then was.

That sad and somewhat virulent old martyr was at that moment in her accustomed haunt, Lady Mary's boudoir, and in her wonted attitude over the fire, pondering in drowsy discontent over her many miseries, when a sharp knock at the door startled her nerves and awakened her temper.

Her "come in" sounded sharply, and she beheld for the first time in her life the General, a tall lean old man, with white bristles on brow and cheek, with his toilet disordered by long and rather rapid exercise, and grim and livid with no transient agitation.

"Lady Alice Redcliffe?" inquired he, with a stiff bow, remaining still inclined, his eyes still fixed on her.

"*I* am Lady Alice Redcliffe," returned that lady, haughtily, having quite forgotten General Lennox and all about him.

"My name is Lennox," he said.

"Oh, *General* Lennox? I was told you were here last night," said the old lady, scrutinising him with a sort of surprised frown; his dress and appearance were a little wild, and not in accordance with her ideas on military precision. "I am happy, General Lennox, to make your acquaintance. You've just arrived, I dare say?"

"I arrived yesterday — last night — last night late. I — I'm much obliged. May I say a word?"

"Certainly, General Lennox," acquiesced the old lady, looking harder at him— "certainly, but I must remind you that I have been a sad invalid, and therefore very little qualified to discuss or advise;" and she leaned back with a fatigued air, but a curious look nevertheless.

"I — I — it's about my wife, ma'am. We can — we can't live any longer together." He was twirling his gold eyeglass with trembling fingers as he spoke.

"You have been quarrelling — h'm?" said Lady Alice, still staring hard at him, and rising with more agility than one might have expected; and shutting the door, which the old General had left open, she said, "Sit down, sir — quarrelling, eh?"

"A quarrel, madam, that can never be made up — by —— , *never*." The General smote his gouty hand furiously on the chimneypiece as he thus spake.

"Don't, General Lennox, *don't*, pray. If you can't command yourself, how can you hope to bear with one another's infirmities? A quarrel? H'm."

"Madam, we've separated. It's worse, ma'am — all over. I thought, Lady — Lady — I thought, madam, I might ask you, as the only early friend — a friend, ma'am, and a kinswoman — to take her with you for a little while, till some home is settled for her; *here* she can't stay, of course, an hour. That villain! May —— damn him."

"Who?" asked Lady Alice, with a kind of scowl, quite forgetting to rebuke him this time, her face darkening and turning very pale, for she saw it was another great family disgrace.

"Sir Jekyl Marlowe, ma'am, of Marlowe, Baronet, Member of Parliament, Deputy Lieutenant," bawled the old General, with shrill and trembling voice. "I'll drag him through the law courts, and the divorce court, and the House of Lords." He held his right fist up with its trembling knuckles working, as if he had them in Sir Jekyl's cravat, "drag him through them all, ma'am, till the dogs would not pick his bones; and I'll shoot him through the head, by —— , I'll shoot him through the head, and his family ashamed to put his name on his tombstone."

Lady Alice stood up, with a face so dismal it almost looked wicked.

"I see, sir; I see there's something very bad; I'm sorry, sir; I'm very sorry; I'm *very* sorry."

She had a hand of the old General's in each of hers, and was shaking them with a tremulous clasp.

Such as it was, it was the first touch of sympathy he had felt. The old General's grim face quivered and trembled, and he grasped *her* hands too, and then there came those convulsive croupy sobs, so dreadful to hear, and at last tears, and this dried and bleached old soldier wept loud and piteously. Outside the door you would not have known what to make of these cracked, convulsive sounds. You would have stopped in horror, and fancied some one dying. After a while he said —

"Oh! ma'am, I was very fond of her — I *was*, desperately. If I could know it was all a dream, I'd be content to die. I wish, ma'am, you'd advise me. I'll go back to India, I think; I could not stay here. You'll know best, madam, what she ought to do. I wish everything the best for her — you'll see, ma'am — you'll know best."

"Quite — quite; yes, these things are best settled by men of business. There are papers, I believe, drawn up, arranged by lawyers, and things, and I'm sorry, sir— "

And old Lady Alice suddenly began to sob.

"I'll — I'll do what I can for the poor thing," she said. "I'll take her to Wardlock — it's quite solitary — no prying people — and then to — perhaps it's better to go abroad; and you'll not make it public sooner than it must be; and it's a great blow to me, sir, a terrible blow. I wish she had placed herself more under direction; but it's vain looking back — she always refused advice, poor, poor wretched thing! Poor Jennie! We must be resigned, sir; and — and, sir, for God's sake, no fighting — no pistoling. That sort of thing is never heard of now; and if you do, the whole world will be ringing with it, and the unfortunate creature the gaze of the public before she need be, and perhaps some great crime added — some one killed. Do you promise?"

"Ma'am, it's hard to promise."

"But you *must*, General Lennox, or I'll take measures to stop it this moment," cried Lady Alice, drying her eyes and glaring at him fiercely.

"Stop it! *who'll* stop it?" holloed the General with a stamp.

"*You'll* stop it, General," exclaimed the old lady; "your own common sense; your own compassion; your own self-respect; and not the less that a poor old woman that sympathises with you implores it."

There was here an interval.

"Ma'am, ma'am, it's not easy; but I will — I *will*, ma'am. I'll go this moment; I will, ma'am; I can't trust myself here. If I met him, ma'am, by Heaven I *couldn't*."

"Well, thank you, *thank* you, General Lennox — *do* go; there's not much chance of meeting, for he's ill; but go, don't stay a moment, and write to me to Wardlock, and you shall hear everything. There — go. Goodbye."

So the General was gone, and Lady Alice stood for a while bewildered, looking at the door through which he had vanished.

It is well when these sudden collapses of the overwrought nerves occur. More dejected, more broken, perhaps, he looked, but much more like the General Lennox whom his friends remembered. Something of the panic and fury of his calamity had subsided, too; and though the grief must, perhaps, always remain pretty much unchanged, yet he could now estimate the situation more justly, and take his measures more like a sane man.

In this better, if not happier mood, Varbarriere encountered him in that overshadowed back avenue which leads more directly than the main one to the little town of Marlowe.

Varbarriere was approaching the house, and judged, by the General's slower gait, that he was now more himself.

The large gentleman in the Germanesque felt hat raised that grotesque headgear, French fashion, as Lennox drew nigh.

The General, with two fingers, made him a stern, military salute in reply, and came suddenly to a standstill.

"May I walk a little with you, General Lennox?" inquired Varbarriere.

"Certainly, sir. *Walk?* By all means; I'm going to London," rejoined the General, without, however, moving from the spot where he had halted.

"Rather a long stretch for me," thought Varbarriere, with one of those inward thrills of laughter which sometimes surprise us in the gravest moods and in the most unsuitable places. He looked sober enough, however, and merely said —

"You, know, General, there's some one ill up there," and he nodded mysteriously toward the house.

"Is there? Ay. Well, yes, I dare say," and he laughed with a sudden quaver. "I was not sure; the old woman said something. I'm glad, sir."

"I — I think I *know* what it is, sir," said Varbarriere.

"So do I, sir," said the General, with another short laugh.

"You recollect, General Lennox, what you promised me?"

"Ay, sir; how can I help it?" answered he.

"How can you help it! I don't quite see your meaning," replied Varbarriere, slowly. "I can only observe that it gives me new ideas of a soldier's estimate of his promise."

“Don’t blame me, sir, if I lost my head a little, when I saw that villain there, in *my* room, sir, by — — “ and the General cursed him here parenthetically through his clenched teeth; “I felt, sir, as — as if the sight of him struck me in the face — mad, sir, for a minute — I suppose, *mad*, sir; and — it occurred. I say, sir, I can’t help it — and I couldn’t help it, by —— I couldn’t.”

Varbarriere looked down with a peevish sneer on the grass and innocent daisies at his feet, his heel firmly placed, and tapping the sole of his boot from that pivot on the sward, like a man beating time to a slow movement in an overture.

“Very good, sir! It’s your own affair. I suppose you’ve considered consequences, if anything should go wrong?”

And without awaiting an answer, he turned and slowly pursued his route toward the house. I don’t suppose, in his then frame of mind, the General saw consequences very clearly, or cared about them, or was capable, when the image of Sir Jekyl presented itself, of any emotions but those of hatred and rage. He had gone now, at all events; the future darkness; the past irrevocable.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Bishop sees the Patient.

In the hall Varbarriere met the Reverend Dives Marlowe.

"Well, sir, how is Sir Jekyl?" asked he.

The parson looked bilious and lowering.

"To say truth, Monsieur, I can't very well make out what the Doctor thinks. I suspect he does not understand very well himself. *Gout*, he says, but in a very sinking state; and we've sent for the physician at Slowton; and altogether, sir, I'm very uneasy."

I suppose if the blow had fallen, the reverend gentleman would in a little while have become quite resigned, as became him. There were the baronetcy and some land; but on the whole, when Death drew near smirking, and offered on his tray, with a handsome black pall over it, these sparkling relics of the late Sir Jekyl Marlowe, Bart., the Rev. Dives turned away; and though he liked these things well enough, put them aside honestly, and even with a sort of disgust. For Jekyl, as I have said, though the brothers could sometimes exchange a sharp sally, had always been essentially kind to him; and Dives was not married, and, in fact, was funding money, and in no hurry; and those things were sure to come to him if he lived, sooner or later.

"And what, may I ask, do you suppose it *is*?" inquired Varbarriere.

"Well, *gout*, you know — he's positive; and, poor fellow, he's got it in his foot, and a very nasty thing it is, I know, even *there*. We all of us have it hereditarily — our family." The apostle and martyr did not want him to suppose he had earned it. "But I am very anxious, sir. Do *you* know anything of gout? May it be *there* and somewhere else at the same time? Two members of our family died of it in the stomach, and one in the head. It has been awfully fatal with us."

Varbarriere shook his head. He had never had a declared attack, and had no light to throw on the sombre prospect. The fact is, if that solemn gentleman had known for certain exactly how matters stood, and had not been expecting the arrival of his contumacious nephew, he would have been many miles on his way to London by this time.

"You know — you know, *sinking* seems very odd as a symptom of common gout in the great toe," said Dives, looking in his companion's face, and speaking rather like a man seeking than communicating information. "We must not frighten the ladies, you know; but I'm very much afraid of something in the stomach, eh? and possibly the heart."

"After all, sir," said Varbarriere, with a brisk effort, "Doctor — a — what's his name? — he's but a rural practitioner — an apothecary — is not it so?"

"The people here say, however, he's a very clever fellow, though," said Dives, not much comforted.

"We may hear a different story when the Slowton doctor comes. I venture to think we shall. I always fancied when gout was well out in the toe, the internal organs were safe. Oh! there's the Bishop."

"Just talking about poor Jekyl, my lord," said Dives, with a sad smile of deference, the best he could command.

"And — and how *is* my poor friend and pupil, Sir Jekyl? — better, I trust," responded the apostle in gaiters and apron.

"Well, my lord, we hope — I trust everything satisfactory; but the Doctor has been playing the sphinx with us, and I don't know exactly what to make of him."

"I saw Doctor Pratt for a moment, and expressed my wish to see his patient — my poor pupil — before I go, which must be — yes — within an hour," said the Bishop, consulting his punctual gold watch. "But he preferred my postponing until Doctor — I forget his name — very much concerned, *indeed*, that a second should be thought necessary — from Slowton — should have arrived. It — it gives me — I — I can't deny, a rather serious idea of it. Has he had many attacks?"

"Yes, my lord, several; never threatened seriously, but once — at Dartbroke, about two years ago — in the stomach."

"Ah! I forgot it was the stomach. I remember his illness though," said the Bishop, graciously.

"Not *actually* the stomach — only threatened," suggested Dives, deferentially. "I have made acquaintance with it myself, too, slightly; never so sharply as poor Jekyl. I *wish* that other doctor would come! But even at best it's not a pleasant visitor."

"I dare say — I can well suppose it. *I* have reason to be *very* thankful. I've *never* suffered. My poor *father* knew what it was — suffered horribly. I remember him at Buxton for it — horribly."

The Bishop was fond of this recollection, people said, and liked it to be understood that there was gout in the family, though he could not show that aristocratic gules himself.

At this moment Tomlinson approached, respectfully — I might even say religiously — and with such a reverence as High-Churchmen make at the creed, accosted the prelate, in low tones like distant organ-notes, murmuring Sir Jekyl's compliments to "his lordship, and would be very 'appy to see his lordship whenever it might be his convenience." To which his lordship assented, with a grave "*Now*, certainly, I shall be most happy," and turning to Dives —

"This, I hope, looks well. I fancy he must feel better. Let us hope;" and with slightly uplifted hand and eyes, the good Bishop followed Tomlinson, feeling so oddly as he threaded the same narrow half-lighted passages, whose corners and panelling came sharply on his memory as he passed them, and ascended the steep back stair with the narrow stained-glass slits, by which he had reached, thirty years ago, the sick-chamber of the dying Sir Harry Marlowe.

The Bishop sighed, looking round him, as he stood on the lobby outside the little anteroom. The light fell through the slim coloured orifice opposite on the oak before him, just as it did on the day he last stood there. The banisters, above and below, looked on him like yesterday's acquaintances; and the thoughtful frown of the heavy oak beams overhead seemed still knit over the same sad problem.

"*Thirty* years ago!" murmured the Bishop, with a sad smile, nodding his silvery head slightly, as his saddened eyes wandered over these things. "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou so regardest him?"

Tomlinson, who had knocked at the Baronet's door, returned to say he begged his lordship would step in.

So with another sigh, peeping before him, he passed through the small room that interposed, and entered Sir Jekyl's, and took his hand very kindly and gravely, pressing it, and saying in the low tone which becomes a sick-chamber —

"I trust, my dear Sir Jekyl, you feel better."

"Thank you, pretty well; very good of you, my lord, to come. It's a long way, from the front of the house — a journey. He told me you were in the hall."

"Yes, it is a large house; interesting to me, too, from earlier recollections."

"You were in this room, a great many years ago, with my poor father. He died here, you know."

"I'm afraid you're distressing yourself speaking. Yes; oddly enough, I recognised the passages and back stairs; the windows, too, are peculiar. The *furniture*, though, that's changed — is not it?"

"So it is. I hated it," replied Sir Jekyl. "Balloon-hacked blue silk things — faded, you know. It's curious you should remember, after such a devil of a time — such a great number of years, my lord. I hated it. When I had that fever here in this room — thirteen — fourteen years ago — ay, by Jove, it's *fifteen* — they were going to write for *you*."

"Excuse me, my dear friend, but it seems to me you *are* exerting yourself too much," interposed the prelate again.

"Oh dear no! it does me good to talk. I had all sorts of queer visions. People fancy, you know, they see things; and I used to think I saw him — my poor father, I mean — every night. There were six of those confounded blue-backed chairs in this room, and a nasty idea got into my head. I had a servant — poor Lewis — then a very trustworthy fellow, and liked me, I think; and Lewis told me the doctors said there was to be a crisis on the night week of the first consultation — seven days, you know."

"I really fear, Sir Jekyl, you are distressing yourself," persisted the Bishop, who did not like the voluble eagerness and the apparent fatigue, nevertheless, with which he spoke.

"Oh! it's only a word more — it doesn't, I assure you — and I perceived he sat on a different chair, d'ye see, every night, and on the fourth night he had got on the fourth chair; and I liked his face less and less every night. You know he hated me about Molly — about *nothing* — he always hated me; and as there were only six chairs, it got into my head that he'd get up on my bed on the seventh, and that I should die in the crisis. So I put all the chairs out of the room. They thought I was raving; but I was quite right, for he did not come again, and here I am;" and with these words there came the rudiments of his accustomed chuckle, which died out in a second or two, seeming to give him pain.

"Now, you'll promise me not to talk so much at a time till you're better. I am glad, sir — very glad, Sir Jekyl, to have enjoyed your hospitality, and to have even this opportunity of thanking you for it. It is very delightful to me occasionally to find myself thus beholden to my old pupils. I have had the pleasure of spending a few days with the Marquis at Queen's Dykely; in fact, I came direct from him to you. You recollect him — Lord Elstowe he was then? You remember Elstowe at school?"

"To be sure; remember him very well. We did not agree, though — always thought him a cur," acquiesced Sir Jekyl.

The Bishop cleared his voice.

"He was asking for you, I assure you, very kindly — very kindly indeed, and seems to remember his school-days very affectionately, and — and pleasantly, and quite surprised me with his minute recollections of all the boys."

"They all hated him," murmured Sir Jekyl. "I did, I know."

"And — and I think we shall have a fine day. I drive always with two windows open — a window in front and one at the side," said the Bishop, whose mild and dignified eyes glanced at the windows, and the pleasant evidences of sunshine outside, as he spoke, "I was almost afraid I should have to start without the pleasure of saying goodbye. You remember the graceful farewell in Lucretius? I venture to say your brother does. I made your class recite it, do you remember?"

And the Bishop repeated three or four hexameters with a look of expectation at his old pupil, as if looking to him to take up the recitation.

"Yes, I am sure of it. I think I remember; but, egad! I've quite forgot my Latin, any I knew," answered the Baronet, who was totally unable to meet the invitation; "I — I don't know how it is, but I'm sorry you have to go to-day, very sorry; — sorry, of course, any time, but particularly I feel as if I should get well again very soon — that is, if you were to stay. Do you think you can?"

"Thank you, my dear Marlowe, thank you very much for that feeling," said the good Bishop, much gratified, and placing his old hand very kindly in that of the patient, just as Sir Jekyl suddenly remembered his doing once at his bedside in the sick-house in younger days, long ago, when he was a schoolboy, and the Bishop master; and both paused for a moment in one of those dreams of the past that make us smile so sadly.

CHAPTER XXIX.

In the Yard of the Marlowe Arms.

The Bishop looked at his watch, and smiled, shaking his head.

"Time flies. I must, I fear, take my leave."

"Before you go," said Sir Jekyl, "I must tell you I've been thinking over my promise about that odious green chamber, and I'll pledge you my honour I'll fulfil it. I'll not leave a stone of it standing; I won't, I assure you. To the letter I'll fulfil it."

"I never doubted it, my dear Sir Jekyl."

"And must you really leave me to-day?"

"No choice, I regret."

"It's very unlucky. You can't think how your going affects me. It seems so odd and unlucky, so depressing just now. I'd have liked to talk to you, though I'm in no danger, and know it. I'd like to hear what's to be said, clergymen are generally so pompous and weak; and to be sure," he said, suddenly recollecting his brother, "there's Dives, who is neither — who is a good clergyman, and learned. I say so, of course, my lord, with submission to you; but still it isn't quite the same — you know the early association; and it makes me uncomfortable and out of spirits your going away. You don't think you could possibly postpone?"

"No, my dear friend, quite impossible; but I leave you — tell him I said so — in excellent hands; and I'm glad to add, that so far as I can learn you're by no means in a dying state."

The Bishop smiled.

"Oh! I know that," said Sir Jekyl, returning that cheerful expansion; "I know that very well, my Lord: a fellow always knows pretty well when he's in anything of a fix — I mean his life at all in question; it is not the least that, but a sort of feeling or fancy. What does Doctor Pratt say it *is*?"

"Oh! gout, as *I* understand."

"Ah! yes, I have had a good deal in my day. Do you think I could tempt you to return, maybe, when your business — this particular business, I mean — is over?"

The Bishop smiled and shook his head.

"I find business — mine at least — a very tropical plant; as fast as I head it down, it throws up a new growth. I was not half so hard worked, I do assure you, when I was better able to work, at the school, long ago. You haven't a notion what it is."

"Well, but you'll come back some time, not very far away?"

"Who knows?" smiled the Bishop. "It is always a temptation. I can say that truly. In the meantime, I shall expect to hear that you are much better. Young Marlowe — I mean Dives," and the Bishop laughed gently at the tenacity of his old school habits, "will let me hear; and so for the present, my dear Sir Jekyl, with many, many thanks for a very pleasant sojourn, and with all good wishes, I bid you farewell, and may God bless you."

So having shaken his hand, and kissing his own as he smiled another farewell at the door, the dignified and good prelate disappeared mildly from the room, Jekyl following him with his eyes, and sighing as the door closed on him.

As Sir Jekyl leaned back against his pillows, there arrived a little note, in a tall hand; some of the slim l's, b's, and so on, were a little spiral with the tremor of age.

"Lady Halice Redcliffe, Sir Jekyl, please sir, sends her compliments and hopes you may be able to read it, and will not leave for Warlock earlier than halfpast one o'clock."

"Very well. Get away and wait in the outer room," said Sir Jekyl, flushing a little, and looking somehow annoyed.

"I hate the sight of her hand. It's sealed, too. I wish that cursed old woman was where she ought to be; and she chooses *now* because she knows I'm ill, and can't bear worry."

Sir Jekyl twirled the little note round in his fingers and thumb with a pinch. The feverish pain he was suffering did not improve his temper, and he was intemperately disposed to write across the back of the unopened note something to this effect:— "Ill and suffering; the pleasure of your note might be too much for me; pray keep it till tomorrow."

But curiosity and something of a dread that discovery had occurred prompted him to open it, and he read —

"Having had a most painful interview with unhappy General Lennox, and endured mental agitation and excitement which are too much for my miserable health and nerves, I mean to return to Wardlock as early to-day as my strength will permit, taking with me, at his earnest request, *your victim*."

"D — n her!" interposed Sir Jekyl through his set teeth.

"I think you will see," he read on, "that this house is no longer a befitting residence for your poor innocent girl. As I am charged for a time with the care of the ruined wife of your friend and guest, you will equally see that it is quite impossible to offer my darling Beatrix an asylum at Wardlock. The Fentons, however, will, I am sure, be happy to receive her. She must leave Marlowe, of course, before I do. While here, she is under *my care*; but this house is no home for her; and you can hardly wish that *she* should be *sacrificed* in the ruin of the poor wife whom you have made an *outcast*."

"Egad! it's the devil sent that fiend to torture me so. It's all about, I suppose," exclaimed Sir Jekyl, with a gasp. "Unlucky! The stupid old fribble, to think of his going off with his story to that Pharisaical old tattler!"

The remainder of the letter was brief.

"I do not say, Jekyl Marlowe, that I regret your illness. You have to thank a merciful Providence that it is unattended with danger; and it affords an opportunity for reflection, which may, if properly improved, lead to some awakening of conscience — to a proper estimate of your past life, and an amendment of the space that remains. I need hardly add, that an amended life involves reparation, so far as practicable, to *all* whom you or, in your interest, *yours* may have injured.

"In deep humiliation and sorrow,

"Alice Redcliffe."

"I wish you were in a deep pond, you plaguy old witch. That fellow, Herbert Strangways — Varbarriere — he's been talking to her. I know what she means by all that cant."

Then he read over again the passages about "your victim," and "General Lennox," your "friend and guest." And he knocked on the table, and called as well as he could— "Tomlinson," who entered.

"Where's General Lennox?"

"Can't say, Sir Jekyl, please, sir— 'avn't saw him to-day."

"Just see, please, if he's in the house, and let him know that I'm ill, but very anxious to see him. You may say *very* ill, do you mind, and only wish a word or two."

Tomlinson bowed and disappeared.

"Don't care if he strikes me again. I've a word to say, and he *must* hear it," thought Sir Jekyl.

But Tomlinson returned with the intelligence that General Lennox had gone down to the town, and was going to Slowton station; and his man, with some of his things, followed him to the Marlowe Arms, in the town close by.

In a little while he called for paper, pen, and ink, and with some trouble wrote an odd note to old General Lennox.

"General Lennox,

"You must hear me. By —— ," and here followed an oath and an imprecation quite unnecessary to transcribe. "Your wife is innocent as an angel! I have been the fiend who would, if he could, have ruined her peace and yours. From your hand I have met my deserts. I lie now, I believe, on my deathbed. I wish you knew the whole story. The truth would deify her and make you happy. I am past the age of romance, though not of vice. I speak now as a dying man. I would not go out of the world with a perjury on my soul; and, by —— , I swear your wife is as guiltless as an angel. I am ill able to speak, but will see and satisfy you. Bring a Bible and a pistol with you — let me swear to every answer I make you; and if I have not convinced you before you leave, I promise to shoot myself through the head, and save you from all further trouble on account of

"Jekyl Marlowe."

"Now see, Tomlinson, don't lose a moment. Send a fellow running, do you mind, and let him tell General Lennox I'm in pain — *very* ill — mind and — and all that; and get me an answer; and he'll put this in *his* hand."

Sir Jekyl was the sort of master who is obeyed. The town was hardly three-quarters of a mile away. His messenger accomplished the distance as if for a wager.

The waiter flourished his napkin in the hall of the Marlowe Arms, and told him —

"No General, *nothing* was there, as he heerd."

"Who do you want?" said the fat proprietress, with a red face and small eyes and a cap and satin bow, emerging from a side door, and superseding the waiter, who said— "A hofficer, isn't it?" as he went aside.

“Oh! from the Manor,” continued the proprietress in a conciliatory strain, recognising the Marlowe button, though she did not know the man. “Can I do anything?”

And she instinctively dropped a courtesy — a deference to the far-off Baronet; and then indemnifying herself by a loftier tone to the menial.

“A note for General Lennox, ma’am.”

“General Lennox? — I know, I think, a millentery man, white-’aired and spare?”

“I must give it ‘im myself, ma’am, thankee,” said he, declining the fat finger and thumb of the curious hostess, who tossed her false ringlets with a little fat frown, and whiffled —

“Here, tell him where’s the tall, thin gemm’n, with white mistashes, that’s ordered the hosses — that’ll be him, I dessay,” she said to the waiter, reinstated, and waddled away with a jingle of keys in her great pocket. So to the back yard they went, the thin, little, elderly waiter skipping in front, with a jerk or two of his napkin.

“Thankee, that’s him,” said the messenger.

CHAPTER XXX.

About Lady Jane.

The General was walking up and down the jolty pavement with a speed that seemed to have no object but to tire himself, his walking-stick very tightly grasped, his lips occasionally contracting, and his hat now and then making a vicious wag as he traversed his beat.

"Hollo!" said the General, drawing up suddenly, as the man stood before him with the letter, accosting him with his hand to his cap. "Hey! *well*, sir?"

"Letter, please, sir."

The General took it, stared at the man, I think, without seeing him, for a while, and then resumed his march, with his cane, sword-fashion, over his shoulder. The messenger waited, a little perplexed. It was not until he had made a third turn that the General, again observing the letter in his hand, looked at it, and again at the messenger, who was touching his cap, and stopping short, said —

"Well — ay! *This?* — aw — you *brought* it, didn't you?"

So the General broke it open — he had not his glasses with him — and, holding it far away, read a few lines with a dreadful glare, and then bursting all on a sudden into such a storm of oaths and curses as scared the sober walls of that unmilitary hostelry, he whirled his walking-stick in the air, with the fluttering letter extended toward the face of the astounded messenger, as if in another second he would sweep his head off.

At the sound of this hoarse screech the kitchen-wench looked open-mouthed out of the scullery-window with a plate dripping in her hand. "Boots," with his fist in a "Wellington," held his blacking-brush poised in air, and gazed also; and the hostler held the horse he was leading into the stable by the halter, and stood at the door gaping over his shoulder.

"Tell your master I said he may go to *hell*, sir," said the General, scrunching the letter like a snowball in his fist, and stamping in his fury.

What more he said I know not. The man withdrew, and, once or twice, turned about, sulkily, half puzzled and half angered, perhaps not quite sure whether he ought not to "lick" him.

“What’ll be the matter now?” demanded the proprietress, looking from under her balustrade of brown ringlets from the back door.

“‘Drat me if I know; he’s a rum un, that he be,” replied the man with the Marlowe button. “When master hears it he’ll lay his whip across that old cove’s shouthers, I’m thinking.”

“I doubt he’s not right in his head; he’s bin a-walkin’ up an’ down the same way ever since he ordered the chaise, like a man beside himself. *Will* ye put *them* horses to?” she continued, raising her voice; “why, the ‘arniss is on ‘em this half-hour. Will ye put ‘em to or *no*?” and so, in something of an angry panic, she urged on the preparations, and in a few minutes more General Lennox was clattering through the long street of the town, on his way to Slowton, and the London horrors of legal consultations, and the torture of the slow processes by which those whom God hath joined together are sundered.

“Send Donica Gwynn to me,” said Lady Alice to the servant whom her bell had summoned to Lady Mary’s boudoir.

When Donica arrived —

“Shut the door, Donica Gwynn,” said she, “and listen. Come a little nearer, please. Sir Jekyl Marlowe is ill, and, of course, we cannot all stay here.” Lady Alice looked at her dubiously.

“Fit o’ the gout, my lady, I’m told.”

“Yes, an attack of gout.”

“It does not hold long with him, not like his poor father, Sir Harry, that would lie six months at a time in flannel. Sir Jekyl, law bless you, my lady! He’s often ‘ad his toe as red as fire overnight, and before supper tomorrow walking about the house. He says, Tomlinson tells me, this will be nothink at all; an’ it might fret him sore, my lady, and bring on a worse fit, to see you all go away.”

“Yes, very true, Gwynn; but there’s something more at present,” observed Lady Alice, demurely.

Donica folded her hands, and with curious eyes awaited her mistress’s pleasure.

Lady Alice continued in a slightly altered tone —

“It’s not altogether *that*. In fact, Gwynn, there has been — you’re not to talk, d’ye see, — I know you *don’t* talk; but there has been — there has been a *something* — a *quarrel* — between Lady Jane and her husband, the

General; and for a time, at least, she will remain with me at Wardlock, and I may possibly go abroad with her for a little."

Donica Gwynn's pale sharp face grew paler and sharper, as during this announcement she eyed her mistress askance from her place near the door; and as Lady Alice concluded, Donica dropped her eyes to the Turkey carpet, and seemed to read uncomfortable mysteries in its blurred pattern. Then Donica looked up sharply, and asked —

"And, please, my lady, what is your ladyship's orders?"

"Well, Gwynn, you must get a 'fly' now from the town, and go on before us to Wardlock. We shall leave this probably in little more than an hour, in the carriage. Tell Lady Jane, with my compliments, that I hope she will be ready by that time — or no, you may give her my love — don't say compliments — and say, I will either go and see her in her room, or if she prefer, I will see her here, or anywhere else; and you can ask her what room at Wardlock she would like best — do you mind? Whatever room she would like best she shall have, except *mine*, of course, and the moment you get there you'll set about it."

"Yes, ma'am, please, my lady."

Donica looked at her mistress as if expecting something more; and her mistress looked away darkly, and said nothing.

"I'll return, my lady, I suppose, and tell you what Miss Jane says, ma'am?"

"Do," answered Lady Alice, and, closing her eyes, she made a sharp nod, which Donica knew was a signal of dismissal.

Old Gwynn, mounting the stairs, met Mrs. Sinnott with those keys of office which she had herself borne for so many years.

"Well, Mrs. Sinnott, ma'am, how's the master now?" she inquired.

"Doctor's not bin yet from Slowton, Mrs. Gwynn; we don't know nothink only just what you heard this morning from Mr. Tomlinson."

"Old Pratt, baint *he* here neither?"

"No, but the nurse be come."

"Oh! *respeckable*, I hope? But no ways, Mrs. Sinnott, ma'am, take my advice, and on no account don't you give her her will o' the bottle; there's none o' them hospital people but likes it — jest what's enough, and no more, I would say."

"Oh! no! no!" answered Mrs. Sinnott, scornfully. "I knows somethink o' them sort, too — leave 'em to me."

"Lady Alice going away this afternoon."

"And what for, Mrs. Gwynn?" asked the housekeeper.

"Sir Jekyl's gout."

"Fidgets! Tiresome old lass, baint she? law," said Mrs. Sinnott, who loved her not.

"She don't know Sir Jekyl's constitution like I does. Them little attacks o' gout, why he makes nothink o' them, and they goes and comes quite 'armless. I'm a-going back to Wardlock, Mrs. Sinnott, this morning, and many thanks for all civilities while 'ere, lest I should not see you when a-leavin'."

So with the housekeeper's smiles, and conventional courtesies, and shaking of hands, these ladies parted, and Mrs. Gwynn went on to the green chamber.

As she passed through the Window dressing-room her heart sank. She knew, as we are aware, a good deal about that green chamber, more than she had fancied Lady Jane suspected. She blamed herself for not having talked frankly of it last night. But Lady Jane's *éclat* of passion at one period of their interview had checked her upon any such theme; and after all, what could the green chamber have to do with it? Had not the General arrived express very late last night? It was some London story that sent him down from town in that hurry, and Sir Jekyl laid up in gout too. Some o' them jealous stories, and a quarrel over it. It will sure be made up again — ay, ay.

And so thinking, she knocked, and receiving no answer, she opened the door and peeped in. There was but a narrow strip of one shutter open.

"Miss Jennie, dear," she called. Still no answer. "Miss Jennie, darling." No answer still. She understood those sulky taciturnities well, in which feminine tempest sometimes subsides, and was not at all uneasy. On the floor, near the foot of the bed, lay the General's felt hat and travelling coat. Standing, there, she drew the curtain and saw Lady Jane, her face buried in the pillow, and her long hair lying wildly on the coverlet and hanging over the bedside.

"Miss Jennie, dear — Miss Jennie, darling; it's me — old Donnie, miss. Won't you speak to me?"

Still no answer, and Donica went round, beginning to feel uneasy, to the side where she lay.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Lady Jane's Toilet.

"Miss Jennie, *darling*, it's *me*," she repeated, and placed her fingers on the young lady's shoulder. It was with an odd sense of relief she saw the young lady turn her face away.

"Miss Jennie, dear; it's me — old Donnie — don't you know me?" cried Donica once more. "Miss, dear, my lady, what's the matter you should take on so? — only a few wry words — it will all be made up, dear."

"Who told you — who says it will be made up?" said Lady Jane, raising her head slowly, very pale, and, it seemed to old Gwynn, grown so thin in that one night. "Don't mind — it will *never* be made up — no, Donnie, never; it oughtn't. Is my — is General Lennox in the house?"

"Gone down to the town, miss, I'm told, in a bit of a tantrum — going off to Lunnon. It's the way wi' them all — off at a word; and then cools, and back again same as ever."

Lady Jane's fingers were picking at the bedclothes, and her features were sunk and peaked as those of a fever-stricken girl.

"The door is shut to — outer darkness. I asked your God for mercy last night, and see what he has done for me!"

"Come, Miss Jennie, dear, you'll be happy yet. Will ye come with me to Wardlock?"

"That I will, Donnie," she answered, with a sad alacrity, like a child's.

"I'll be going, then, in half an hour, and you'll come with me."

Lady Jane's tired wild eyes glanced on the gleam of light in the halfopen shutter with the wavering despair of a captive.

"I wish we were there. I wish we were — you and I, Donnie — just you and I."

"Well, then, what's to hinder? My missus sends her love by me, to ask you to go there, till things be smooth again 'twixt you and your old man, which it won't be long, Miss Jennie, dear."

"I'll go," said Lady Jane, gliding out of her bed toward the toilet, fluttering along in her bare feet and nightdress. "Donnie, I'll go."

"That water's cold, miss; shall I fetch hot?"

"Don't mind — no; very nice. Oh, Donnie, Donnie, Donnie! my heart, my heart! what is it?"

"Nothink, my dear — nothink, darlin'."

"I wish it was dark again."

"Time enough, miss."

"That great sun shining! They'll all be staring. Well, *let* them."

"Won't you get your things on, darling? I'll dress you. You'll take cold."

"Oh, Donnie! I wish I could cry. My head! I don't know what it is. If I could cry I think I should be better. I must see him, Donnie."

"But he's gone away, miss."

"*Gone! Is* he?"

"Ay, sure I told ye so, dear, only this minute. To Lunnon, I hear say."

"Oh! yes, I forgot; yes, I'll dress. Let us make haste. I wish I knew. Oh! Donnie, Donnie! oh! my heart, Donnie, Donnie — my heart's breaking."

"There, miss, dear, don't take on so; you'll be better when we gets into the air, you will. What will ye put on? — here's a purple mornin' silk."

"Yes; very nice. Thank you. Oh! Donnie, I wish we were away."

"So we shall, miss, presently, please God. Them's precious bad pins — Binney and Clew — bends like lead; *there's* two on 'em. Thompson's mixed shillin' boxes — them's the best. Miss Trixie allays has 'em. Your hair's beautiful, miss, allays was; but dearie me! what a lot you've got! and so beautiful fine! I take it in handfuls — floss silk — and the weight of it! Beautiful hair, miss. Dearie me, what some 'id give for that!"

Thus old Gwynn ran on; but fixed, pale, and wild was the face which would once have kindled in the conscious pride of beauty at the honest admiration of old Donnie, who did not rise into raptures for everyone and on all themes, and whose eulogy was therefore valuable.

"I see, Donnie — nothing bad has happened?" said Lady Jane, with a scared glance at her face.

"Bad? Nonsense! I told you, Miss Jennie, 'twould all be made up, and so it will, please God, miss."

But Lady Jane seemed in no wise cheered by her promises, and after a silence of some minutes, she asked suddenly, with the same painful look —

"Donnie, tell me the truth, for God's sake; how is he?"

Donica looked at her with dark inquiry.

"The General is gone, you know, ma'am."

"*Stop* — you *know*," cried Lady Jane, seizing her fiercely by the arm, with a wild fixed stare in her face.

"Who?" said Donica.

"Not he. I mean— "

"Who?" repeated Gwynn.

"How is Sir Jekyl?"

It seemed as if old Donica's breath was suspended. Shade after shade her face darkened, as with wide eyes she stared in the gazing face of Lady Jane, who cried, with a strange laugh of rage —

"Yes — Sir Jekyl — how *is* he?"

"Oh, Miss Jane! — oh, Miss Jane! — oh, Miss Jane! — and is *that* it?"

Lady Jane's face was dark with other fiercer passions.

"Can't you answer, and not talk?" said she.

Donica's eyes wandered to the far end of the room to the fatal recess, and she was shaking her head, as if over a tale of horror.

"Yes, I see, you know it all, and you'll *hate* me now, as the others will, and I don't care."

Suspicions are one thing — faint, phantasmal; certainties quite another. Donica Gwynn looked appalled.

"Oh! poor Miss Jennie!" she cried at last, and burst into tears. Before this old domestic Lady Jane was standing — a statue of shame, of defiance — the fallen angelic.

"You're doing that to make me mad."

"Oh! no, miss; I'm sorry."

There was silence for a good while.

"The curse of God's upon this room," said Donica, fiercely, drying her eyes. "I wish you had never set foot in it. Come away, my lady. I'll go and send at once for a carriage to the town, and we'll go together, ma'am, to Wardlock. Shall I, ma'am?"

"Yes, I'll go," said Lady Jane. "Let us go, you and I. I won't go with Lady Alice. I won't go with her."

"Goodbye, my lady; goodbye, Miss Jennie dear; I'll be here again presently."

Dressed for the journey, with her cloak on and bonnet, Lady Jane sat in an armchair, haggard, listless, watching the slow shuffling of her own foot upon the floor, while Donica departed to complete the arrangements for their journey.

CHAPTER XXXII.

The two Doctors consult.

The doctor from Slowton had arrived at last. The horses, all smoking with the break-neck speed at which they had been driven, stood at the hall-door steps. The doctor himself, with Pratt and the nurse, were upstairs in the patient’s room. The Rev. Dives Marlowe, looking uncomfortable and bilious, hovered about the back stairs that led to Sir Jekyl’s apartment, to waylay the doctors on their way down, and listened for the sound of their voices, to gather from their tones something of their spirits and opinions respecting his brother, about whose attack he had instinctive misgivings. The interview was a long one. Before it was over Dives had gradually ascended to the room outside the Baronet’s, and was looking out of the window on the prospect below with the countenance with which one might look on a bad balance-sheet.

The door opened, the doctors emerged — the Slowton man first, Pratt following, both looking grave as men returning from the sacrament.

“Oh! Mr. Dives Marlowe — the Rev. Dives Marlowe,” murmured Pratt as the door was shut.

The lean practitioner from Slowton bowed low, and the ceremony over —

“Well, gentlemen?” inquired the Rev. Dives Marlowe.

“We are about to compare notes, and discuss the case a little — Doctor Pratt and I — and we shall then, sir, be in a position to say something a — a — definite, we hope.”

So the Rev. Dives withdrew to the stairhead, exchanging bows with the priests of Æsculapius, and there awaited the opening of the doors. When that event came, and the Rev. Dives entered —

“Well, Mr. Marlowe,” murmured the Slowton doctor, a slight and dismal man of five-and-fifty— “we think, sir, that your brother, Sir Jekyl Marlowe, is not in immediate danger; but it would not be right or fair to conceal the fact that he is in a very critical state — highly so, in fact; and we think it better on the whole that some member of his family should advise him, if he has anything to arrange — a — a will, or any particular business, that he should see to it; and we think that — we are quite agreed upon this, Doctor Pratt?"

Pratt bowed assent, forgetful that he had not yet heard what they were agreed on.

"We think he should be kept very quiet; he's very low, and must have claret. We have told the nurse in what quantities to administer it, and some other things; she's a very intelligent woman, and your servants can take their directions from her."

Dives felt very oddly. We talk of Death all our lives, but know nothing about him until he stands in our safe homesteads suddenly before us, face to face. He is a much grizzlier object than we had fancied when busied with a brother or a child. What he is when he comes for ourselves, the few who have seen him waiting behind the doctor and live can vaguely remember.

"Good Lord, sir!" said Dives, "is he really in that state? I had no idea."

"Don't mis*take* us, sir. We don't say he may not, if everything goes right, do very well. Only the case is critical, and we should deceive you if we shrank from telling you so; is not that your view, Doctor — Dr. Pratt?"

Dr. Pratt was of course quite clear on the point.

"And you are in very able hands here," and the Slowton doctor waved his yellow fingers and vouchsafed a grave smile and nod of approbation toward Pratt, who wished to look indifferent under the compliment, but simpered a little in spite of himself.

The Rev. Dives Marlowe accompanied the two doctors downstairs, looking like a man going to execution.

"You need not be afraid, sir," said Dives, laying his hand on the Slowton leech's sleeve. The grave gentleman stopped and inclined his ear to listen, and the three stood huddled together on the small landing, Dives' nervous fingers in the banister.

"I don't quite see, sir," observed the doctor.

"I give him up, sir; you need not be afraid to tell me."

"You are right, perhaps, to give him up; but I always say exactly what I think. Doctor — a — *Pratt* and I — we tell you frankly — we think him in a very critical state; but it's quite on the cards he may recover; and we have given very full directions to the nurse, who appears to be a very intelligent person; and don't let him shift his attitude unnecessarily, it may prejudice him, and be in fact attended with danger — very *serious* danger; and Doctor Pratt shall look in at five o'clock — you were so good as to say, Doctor Pratt, you would look in at five. Doctor Pratt will look in *then*, and do anything that may be necessary; and if there should be the slightest symptom of hæmorrhage send for him instantly, and the nurse knows what to do; and I think — I think I have said everything now."

"Hæmorrhage, sir! But *what* hæmorrhage? Why, what hæmorrhage is apprehended?" asked Dives, amazed.

"Internal or external it may occur," said the doctor; and Pratt, coughing and shaking his chops, interposed hurriedly and said —

"Yes, there may be a bleeding, it may come to that."

"He has bled a great deal already, you are aware," resumed the Slowton doctor, "and in his exhausted state a return of that might of course be very bad."

"But I don't understand," persisted Dives. "I beg pardon, but I really must. What *is* this hæmorrhage? it is not connected with gout, is it?"

"Gout, sir! no; who said gout? A bad wound, that seems to run toward the lung," answered the Slowton man.

"Wound! how's this? I did not hear," and Dives looked frightened, and inquiringly on Pratt, who said —

"Not hear, didn't you? Why, Sir Jekyl undertook to tell you, and would not let me. He took me in for a while, poor fellow, quite, and said 'twas gout, that's all. I'm surprised he did not tell you."

"No — *no* — not a word; and — and you think, sir, it may begin bleeding afresh?"

"That's what we chiefly apprehend. Farewell, sir. I find I have not a moment. I must be at Todmore in three quarters of an hour. A sad case that at Todmore; only a question of a few days, I'm afraid; and a very fine young fellow."

"Yes," said Dives— "I — I — it takes me by surprise. Pray, Dr. Pratt, don't go for a moment," and he placed his hand on his arm.

"Farewell, sir," said the Slowton doctor, and putting up his large gold watch, and bowing gravely, he ran at a quiet trot down the stairs, and jumped into his chaise at the back entrance, and vanished.

"You did not tell me," began Dives.

"No," said Pratt, promptly, "he said he'd tell *himself*, and did not choose me."

"And you think — you think it's very bad?"

"Very bad, sir."

"And you think he'll not get over it?"

"He may not, sir."

"It's frightful, Doctor, frightful. And how was it, do you know?"

"No more than the man in the moon. You must not tease him with questions, mind, to-day. In a day or two you may ask him. But he said, upon his honour, no one was to blame but himself."

"Merciful Heavens! sir. To think of his going this way!"

"Very sad, sir. But we'll do all we can, and possibly may pull him through."

With slow steps Dives began to ascend the stairs toward his brother's room. He recollected that he had not bid Pratt goodbye, and gave him his adieux over the banister; and then, with slow and creaking steps, mounted, and paused on the lobby, to let his head clear and to think how he should accost him.

Dives was not a Churchman to pester people impertinently about their sins; and out of the pulpit, where he lashed the vice but spared the man, he was a well-bred divine, and could talk of sheep, and even of horses, and read everything from St. Paul to Paul de Kock; and had ridden till lately after the hounds, and gave *recherché* little dinners, such as the New Testament character whose name, with a difference in pronunciation, he inherited might have praised, and well-iced champagne, which, in his present uncomfortable state, that fallen gentleman would have relished. And now he stood in a sombre mood, with something of panic at the bottom of it, frightened that the ice upon which men held Vanity Fair, and roasted oxen, and piped and danced, and gamed, should prove so thin; and amazed to see his brother drowning among the fragments in that black pool, and no one minding, and he unable to help him.

And it came to him like a blow and a spasm. "The special minister of Christ! — am I what I'm sworn to be? Can I go in and talk to him of those things that concern eternity with any effect? Will he mind me? Can I even now feel the hope, and lead the prayer as I ought to do?"

And Dives, in a sort of horror, as from the pit, lifted up his eyes, and prayed “have mercy on me!” and saw a misspent hollow life behind, and judgment before him; and blamed himself, too, for poor Jekyl, and felt something of the anguish of his namesake in the parable, and yearned for the safety of his brother.

Dives, in fact, was frightened for himself and for Jekyl, and in those few moments, on the lobby, his sins looked gigantic and the vast future all dismay; and he felt that, bad as poor Jekyl might be, *he* was worse — a false soldier — a Simon Magus — chaff, to be burnt up with unquenchable fire!

“I wish to God the Bishop had stayed over this night,” said Dives, with clasped hands, and again turning his eyes upward. “We must send after him. I’ll write to implore of him. Oh, yes, he’ll come.”

Even in this was a sense of relief; and treading more carefully, he softly turned the handle of the outer door, and listened, and heard Jekyl’s cheerful voice say a few words to the nurse. He sighed with a sense of relief, and calling up a sunnier look, he knocked at Jekyl’s halfopen door, and stepped to his bedside.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Varbarriere in the Sick-room.

“Well, Jekyl, my dear fellow — and how do you feel now? There, don’t; you must not move, they told me,” said Dives, taking his brother’s hand, and looking with very anxious eyes in his face, while he managed his best smile.

“Pretty well — nothing. Have they been talking? What do they say?” asked Sir Jekyl.

“Say? Well, not much; those fellows never do; but they expect to have you all right again, if you’ll just do what you’re bid, in a week or two.”

“Pratt’s coming at five,” he said. “What is it now?”

Dives held his watch to Jekyl, who nodded.

“Do you think I’ll get over it, Dives?” he asked at length, rather ruefully.

“Get over? To be sure you will,” answered Dives, doing his best. “It might be better for you, my dear Jekyl, if it *were* a little more serious. We all need to be pulled up a little now and then. And there’s nothing like an alarm of — of that kind for making a man think a little; for, after all, health is only a long day, and a recovery but a reprieve. The sentence stands against us, and we must, sooner or later, submit.”

“Yes, to be sure. We’re all mortal, Dives — is not that your discovery?” said Sir Jekyl.

“A discovery it is, my dear fellow, smile as we may — a discovery to me, and to you, and to all — whenever the truth, in its full force, opens on our minds.”

“That’s when we’re going to die, I suppose,” said Sir Jekyl.

“*Then*, of course; but often, in the mercy of God, long before it. That, in fact, is what we call people’s growing serious, or religious; their perceiving, as a fact, that they *are* mortal, and resolving to make the best preparation they can for the journey.”

“Come, Dives, haven’t those fellows been talking of me — eh? — as if I were worse than you say?” asked the Baronet, oddly.

“The doctors, you mean? They said exactly what I told you. But it is not, my dear Jekyl, when we are sick and frightened, and maybe despairing, that these things are best thought on; but when we are, like you and me, likely to live and enjoy life — *then* is the time. I’ve been thinking myself, my dear Jekyl, a good deal for some time past. I have been living too much in the spirit of the world; but I hope to do better.”

“To do better — to be sure. You’ve always been hoping to do better; and I’ve given you a lift or two,” said the Baronet, who, in truth, never much affected his brother’s pulpit-talk, as he called it, and was falling into his old cynical vein.

“But, seriously, my dear fellow, I do. My mind has been troubled thinking how unworthy I have been of my calling, and how fruitless have been my opportunities, my dear brother, with you. I’ve never improved them; and I’d be so glad — now we are likely to have a few quiet days — if you’ll let me read a little with you.”

“Sermons, do you mean?” interposed the Baronet.

“Well, what’s better? — a little of the Bible?”

“Come now, Dives, those doctors *have* been shaking their heads over me. I say, you must tell me. Do they say I’m in a bad way?”

“They think you’ll recover.”

“Did they tell you what it is?”

“Yes. A wound.”

“They had no business, d —— them,” said Sir Jekyl, flushing.

“Don’t, don’t, my dear Jekyl; they could not help it. I pressed that doctor — I forget his name — and he really could not help saying.”

“Well, well, it doesn’t much signify; I’d have told you myself by-and-by. But you must not tell — I’ve a reason — you must not tell anyone, mind. It was my fault, and I’m greatly to blame; and I’ll tell you in a little while — a day or two — all about it.”

“Yes, so you can. But, my dear Jekyl, you look much fatigued; you are exerting yourself.”

Here the nurse interposed with the claret-jug, and intimated that the Rev. Dives was making her patient feverish, and indeed there was an unpleasantly hot hectic in each cheek. But the Baronet had no notion of putting himself under the command of the supernumerary, and being a contumacious and troublesome patient, told her to sit in the study and leave him alone.

"I've a word to say, Dives. I must see that fellow Herbert Strangways."

"*Who?*" said Dives, a good deal alarmed, for he feared that his brother's mind was wandering.

"Herbert — that fellow Varbarriere. I forgot I had not told you. Herbert Strangways, you remember; they're the same. And I want to see him. Better now than tomorrow. I may be feverish then."

"By Jove! It's very surprising. Do you really mean— "

"Yes; he is. I do; they are the same. You remember Herbert, of course — Herbert Strangways — the fellow I had that long chase after all over Europe. He has things to complain of, you know, and we might as well square the account in a friendlier way, eh? — don't you think?"

"And was it he — was there any altercation?" stammered Dives.

"That did *this*, you mean," said Sir Jekyl, moving his hand toward the wound. "Not a bit — no. He seems reasonable; and I should like — you know they are very old blood, and there's nothing against it — that all should be made up. And if that young fellow and Beatrix — don't you see? Is Tomlinson there?"

"In the outer room," said Dives.

"Call him. Tomlinson, I say, you take my compliments to Monsieur Varbarriere, and say, if he has no objection to see me for a few minutes here, I should be very happy. Try and make him out, and bring me word."

So Tomlinson disappeared.

"And, Dives, it tires me; — so will you — I'm sure you will — see Pelter, after we've spoken with that fellow Herbert, and consult what we had best do, you know. I dare say the young people would come to like one another — he's a fine young fellow; and that, you know, would be the natural way of settling it — better than law or fighting."

"A great deal — a great deal, certainly."

"And you may tell him I have that thing — the deed, you know — my poor father— "

"I — I always told you, my dear Jekyl, I'd rather know nothing of all that — in fact, I *do* know nothing; and I should not like to speak to Pelter on that subject. You can, another time, you know," said Dives.

"Well, it's in the red trunk in there."

"Pray, dear Jekyl, don't — I assure you I'd rather know nothing — I — I can't; and Pelter will understand you better when he sees you. But I'll talk to him with pleasure about the other thing, and I quite agree with you that any reasonable arrangement is better than litigation."

"Very well, be it so," said Sir Jekyl, very tired.

"I'm always drinking claret now — give me some — the only quick way of making blood — I've lost a lot."

"And you must not talk so much, Jekyl," said Dives, as he placed the glass at his lips; "you'll wear yourself out."

"Yes, I *am* tired," said the Baronet; "I'll rest till Strangways comes."

And he closed his eyes, and was quiet for a time. And Dives, leaning back in his chair at the bedside, felt better assured of Jekyl's recovery, and his thoughts began to return to their wonted channel, and he entertained himself with listlessly reading and half understanding a tedious sculling match in a very old copy of "Bell's Life," which happened to lie near him.

A tap at the outer door called up Dives from Sandy Dick's sweep round a corner, and Jekyl said —

"Tell him to come in — and stay — you're not to say I'm hurt — do you mind?"

"My dear Jekyl, I — I shan't say anything. There he's knocking again."

"Well, tell him — come in!"

"Come in!" echoed Dives, in a louder key.

And Monsieur Varbarriere entered with that mysterious countenance and cautious shuffle with which men enter a sick-chamber.

"Very sorry to hear you've been suffering," began Varbarriere, in a low tone.

"Thanks — you're very good, I'm sure," said Sir Jekyl, with a faint smile. "I — I wished very much to see you. I expect to be better very soon, and I thought I might have a word, as you are so good, in the meantime."

"Very happy, indeed — most happy, as long as you please; but you must not try too much. You know they say you may disturb gout if you try too much, particularly at first," said Varbarriere, knowing very well how little gout really had to do with it.

"Oh! no danger — doing very nicely," said Sir Jekyl.

"That's well — that's very good," said Varbarriere, with a leisurely sympathy, looking on him all the time, and calling to mind how the Comte de Vigny looked after he received the sword-thrust of which he died in Varbarriere's house, to which he had been carried after his duel with young D'Harnois. And he came to the conclusion that Sir Jekyl looked a great deal better than the Comte had done — and, in fact, that he would do very well.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Guy Deverell arrives.

"Sit down, Herbert, I shan't keep you long. *There*, I've just been saying to Dives I think it's a pity we should quarrel any more — that is, if we can help it; and I don't see why we should not be friendly — I mean more friendly than, in fact, we have ever been — I don't; do you?"

"Why, I see no reason — none; that is, of course, with the reservations that are — that are always assumed — I don't see any."

Varbarriere was answering plausibly, politely, smiling. But it was not like last night, when for a few transient moments he had seemed moved from his equilibrium. There was no emotion now. It was diplomatic benignity. Still it was something. Here was his foe willing to hear reason.

"It was just in my mind — Dives and I talking — I think I've seen some signs of liking between the young people — I mean your nephew and Beatrix."

"Indeed!" interrupted Varbarriere, prolonging the last syllable after his wont, and raising his thick eyebrows in very naturally acted wonder.

"Well, yes — only a sort of conjecture, you know — haven't you?"

"Well, I — ha, ha! If I ever observed anything, it hasn't remained in my mind. But she is so lovely — Miss Marlowe — that I should not wonder. And you think— "

"I think," said Sir Jekyl, supplying the pause, "if it be so, we ought not to stand in the way; and here's Dives, who thinks so too."

"I — in fact, my brother, Jekyl, mentioned it, of course, to me — it would be a very happy mode of — of making matters — a — *happy*; and — and that, I think, was all that passed," said Dives, thus unexpectedly called into the debate.

"This view comes on me quite by surprise. That the young fellow should adore at such a shrine is but to suppose him mortal," said Varbarriere, with something of his French air. "But — but you know the young lady — that's quite another thing — quite. Young ladies, you know, are not won all in a moment."

“No, of course. We are so far all in the clouds. But I wished to say so much to you; and I prefer talking face to face, in a friendly way, to sending messages through an attorney.”

“A thousand thanks. I value the confidence, I assure you — yes, much better — quite right. And — and I shall be taking my leave tomorrow morning — business, my dear Sir Jekyl — and *greatly* regret it; but I’ve outstayed my time very considerably.”

“Very sorry too — and only too happy if you could prolong it a little. *Could* you, do you think?”

Varbarriere shook his head, and thanked him with a grave smile again — but it was impossible.

“It is a matter — such an arrangement, should it turn out practicable — on which we should reflect and perhaps consult a little. It sounds not unpromisingly, however; we can talk again perhaps, if you allow it, before I go.”

“So we can — you won’t forget, and I shall expect to see you often and soon, mind.”

And so for the present they parted, Dives politely seeing him to the head of the stairs.

“I think he entertains it,” said Sir Jekyl to his brother.

“Yes, certainly, he does — yes, he entertains it. But I suspect he’s a cunning fellow, and you’ll want all the help you can get, Jekyl, if it comes to settling a bargain.”

“I dare say,” said Sir Jekyl, very tired.

Meanwhile our friend Varbarriere was passing through the conservatory, the outer door of which stood open ever so little, tempering the warmth of its artificial atmosphere. He stopped before a file of late exotics, looking at them with a grave meaning smile, and smelling at them abstractedly.

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Selfish rogue! Could it be? A wedding, in which Guy, the son of that murdered friend, should act bridegroom, and the daughter of his murderer, bride; while he, the murderer, stood by smiling, and I, the witness, cried ‘Amen’ to the blessing! *Disgusting!* Never, *never* — bah! The proposition shows weakness. Good — *very* good! A comedown for you, Master Jekyl, when you sue for an alliance with Herbert Strangways! Oh! ho! ho! *Never!*”

A little while later, Varbarriere, who was standing at the hall-door steps, saw a chaise approaching. He felt a presentiment of what was coming. It pulled up at the door.

"No melodrama — no *fracas* — no foolery. Those young turkeys, my faith! they will be turkeys still. Here he comes, the hero of the piece! Well, what does it matter?" This was not articulated, spoken only in thought, and aloud he said —

"Ha! — Guy?"

And the young man was on the ground in a moment, pale and sad, and hesitated deferentially, not knowing how his uncle might receive him.

"So, here you are," said Varbarriere, coolly but not ill-humouredly. "Those rambles of yours are not much to the purpose, my friend, and cost some money — don't you see?"

Guy bowed sadly, and looked, Varbarriere saw, really distressed.

"Well, never mind — the expense need not trouble us," said Varbarriere, carelessly extending his hand, which Guy took. "We may be very good friends in a moderate way; and I'm not sorry you came, on the whole. Don't mind going in for a few minutes — you're very well — and let us come this way for a little."

So side by side they turned the corner of the house, and paced up and down the broad quiet walk under the windows.

"We must leave this immediately, Guy, Sir Jekyl is ill — more seriously I believe, than they fancy; not dangerously, but still a tedious thing. They call it gout, but I believe there is something more."

"Indeed! How sudden!" exclaimed Guy. And to do him justice, he seemed both shocked and sad, although perhaps all his sorrow was not on Sir Jekyl's account.

"And I'll be frank with you, Guy," continued Varbarriere. "I think I can see plainly, maybe, what has drawn you here. It is not I — it is not business — it is not Sir Jekyl. Who or what can it be?"

"I — I thought, sir, my letter had explained."

"And I am going away in the morning — and some of the party probably to-day; for there's no chance of Sir Jekyl's coming down for some time," continued Varbarriere, not seeming to hear Guy's interruptions.

"*Very* sorry!" said Guy, sincerely, and his eyes glanced along the empty windows.

"And so, you see, this visit here leads pretty much to nothing," continued Varbarriere. "And it might be best to keep that carriage for a few minutes — eh? — and get into it, and drive back again to Slowton."

"Immediately, sir?"

"Immediately — yes. I'll join you there in the morning, and we can talk over your plans then. I do not know exactly — we must consider. I don't want to part in unkindness. I wish to give you a lift, Guy, if you'll let me." So said Varbarriere in his offhand way.

Guy bowed deferentially.

"And see, nephew; there's a thing — *attend*, if you please," said Varbarriere, lowering his voice.

"I attend, sir."

"See — you answer upon your honour — do you hear?"

"I do, sir. You hear nothing but truth from me."

"Well, yes — very good. Is there — have you any correspondence in this house?" demanded the ponderous uncle, and his full dark eyes turned suddenly on the young man.

"No, sir, no correspondence."

"No one writes to you?"

"No, sir."

"Nor you to anyone?"

"No, sir."

"There must be no nonsense of that kind, Guy — I've told you so before — put it quite out of your head. You need not speak — I am merely discussing a hypothesis — quite out of your head. Nothing could ever come of it but annoyance. You know, of course, to whom all this relates; and I tell you it can't be. There are reasons you shall hear elsewhere, which are final."

What Guy might have answered does not appear, for at that moment old Doocey joined them.

"Oh! come back — how d'ye do? — going to break up here, I fancy;" this was to Varbarriere; "Sir Jekyl's in for a regular fit of it evidently. Old Sir Paul Blunket was talking to Pratt, their doctor here — and old fellows, you know, go into particulars" (Doocey, of course, was rather a young fellow), "and generally know more about things of this sort — and he says Dr. Pratt thinks he'll not be on his legs for a month, egad. So he says he's going either tonight or tomorrow — and I'm off this evening; so is Linnett. Can I do anything for you at Llandudno? Going there first, and I want to see a little of North Wales before the season grows too late."

Varbarriere was grateful, but had nothing to transmit to Llandudno.

"And — and Drayton — *he's* going to stay," and he looked very sly. "An attraction, you know, *there*; besides, I believe he's related — is not he? — and, of course, old Lady Alice Redcliffe stays for chaperon. A great chance for Drayton."

There was a young man at his elbow who thought Doocey the greatest coxcomb and fool on earth, except, perhaps, Drayton, and who suffered acutely and in silence under his talk.

"Drayton's very spoony on her — eh? — the young lady, Miss Marlowe — haven't you observed?" murmured old Doocey, with a sly smile, to Varbarriere.

"Very suitable it would be — fine estate, I'm told," answered Varbarriere; "and a good-looking young fellow too."

"A — *rather*," acquiesced Doocey. "The kind of fellow that pays very well in a ball-room; he's got a lot to say for himself."

"And good family," contributed Varbarriere, who was not sorry that old Doocey should go on lowering his extinguisher on Guy's foolish flame.

"Well — well — *family*, you know — there's nothing very much of that — they — they — there was — it's not the family name, you know. But no one minds family now — all money — *we*'re a devilish deal better family, and so is Mr. Strangways here — all to nothing. I was telling him the other day who the Draytons are."

Precisely at this moment, through a halfopen upper window, there issued a sudden cry, followed by sobs and women's gabble.

All stopped short — silent, and looking up —

"Some one crying," exclaimed Doocey, in an under-key.

And they listened again.

"Nothing bad, I hope," muttered Varbarriere, anxiously looking up like the rest.

A maid came to the window to raise the sash higher, but paused, seeing them.

"Come away, I say — hadn't we better?" whispered Doocey.

“Let’s go in and ask how he is,” suggested Varbarriere suddenly, and toward the hall-door they walked.

Was it something in the tone and cadence of this cry that made each in that party of three feel that a dreadful tragedy was consummated? I can’t say — only they walked faster than usual, and in silence, like men anticipating evil news and hastening to a revelation.

CHAPTER XXXV.

I am Thine and Thou art Mine, Body and Soul, for ever.

In order to understand the meaning of this cry, it will be necessary to mention that so soon as the corpulent and sombre visitor had left the bedroom of Sir Jekyl Marlowe, Dives lent his reverend aid to the nurse in adjusting his brother more comfortably in his bed; and he, like Varbarriere, took instinctively a comfortable and confident view of Sir Jekyl's case, so that when the officious handmaid of Æsculapius assumed her airs of direction he put aside her interference rather shortly. At all events, there was abundance of time to grow alarmed in, and certainly no need for panic just now. So Dives took his leave for the present, the Baronet having agreed with him that his visitors had better be allowed to disperse to their own homes, a disposition to do so having manifested itself here and there among them.

Sir Jekyl, a little more easy in consequence of these manipulations, was lying back on pillows, with that pleasant confidence in his case at which a sanguine man so easily arrives, and already beginning to amuse himself with pictures in the uncertain future. The hospital nurse, sitting by a fire in that dim and faded study which opened from the sick-room, now and then rose, and with soundless steps drew near the halfopen door, and sometimes peeped, and sometimes only listened. The patient was quiet. The woman sat down in that drowsy light, and ruminated, looking into the fire, with her feet on the fender, and a good deal of stocking disclosed; when, all on a sudden, she heard a rustling of a loose dress near her, and looking over her shoulder, surprised, still more so, saw a pale and handsome lady cross the floor from near the window to the door of Sir Jekyl's room, which she closed as she entered it.

With her mouth open, the nurse stood up and gazed in the direction in which she had disappeared. Sir Jekyl, on the other hand, witnessed her entrance with a silent amazement, scarcely less than the nurse's. A few hurried steps brought her to his bedside, and looking down upon him with great agony, and her hands clasped together, she said, with a kind of sob —

“Thank God, thank God! — alive, alive! Oh, Jekyl, what hours of torture!”

“Alive! to be sure I’m alive, little fool!” said the Baronet, with an effort, smiling uncomfortably. “They have not been telling you it’s anything serious?”

“They told me nothing. I’ve heard nothing. I’ve seen no one but Gwynn. Oh, Jekyl! tell me the truth; what do they say? — there’s so much blood on the floor.”

“Why, my precious child, don’t worry yourself about it; they evidently think it’s nothing at all. I know it’s nothing, only what they call, just, the muscles — you know — a little sore. I’ll be on my legs again in a week.”

“I’m going to Wardlock, Jekyl; you’ll hear news of me from there.”

Had the tone or the look something ineffably ominous? I know not.

“Come, Jennie, none of that,” he answered. “No folly. I’ve behaved very badly. *I*’ve been to blame; altogether *my* fault. Don’t tease yourself about what can’t be helped. We must not do anything foolish, though. I’m tired of the world; so are you, Jennie; we are both sick of it. If we choose to live out of it, what the plague do we really lose?”

At this moment the nurse, slowly opening the door a little, said, with a look of quiet authority —

“Please, sir, the doctor said particular you were not to talk, sir.”

“D — n you and the doctor — get out of that, and shut the door!” cried the Baronet; and the woman vanished, scared.

“Give me your hand, Jennie darling, and don’t look as if the sky had fallen. I’m not going to make my bow yet, I promise you.”

“And then, I suppose, a duel,” said Lady Jane, wringing her hands in an agony.

“Duel, you little fool! Why, there’s no such thing now, that is, in these countries. Put fighting quite out of your head, and listen to me. You’re right to keep quiet for a little time, and Wardlock is as good a place as any. I shall be all right again in a few days.”

“I can look no one in the face; no — never again — and Beatrix; and — oh, Jekyl, how will it be? I am half wild.”

“To be sure, everyone’s half wild when an accident happens, till they find it really does not signify two pence. Can’t you listen to me, and not run from one thing to another? and I’ll tell you everything.”

With a trembling hand he poured some claret into a tumbler and drank it off, and was stronger.

"He'll take steps, you know, and I'll help all I can; and when you're at liberty, by — I'll marry you, Jane, if you'll accept me. Upon my honour and soul, Jennie, I'll do exactly whatever you like. *Don't* look so. *What* frightens you? I tell you we'll be happier than you can think or imagine."

Lady Jane was crying wildly and bitterly.

"Fifty times happier than ever we could have been if this — this annoyance had not happened. We'll travel. I'll lay myself out to please you, every way, and make you happy; upon my soul I will, Jennie. I owe you everything I can do. We'll travel. We'll not try pharisaical England, but abroad, where people have common sense. Don't, don't go on crying, darling, that way; you can't hear me; and there's really nothing to tease yourself about — quite the contrary, you'll see; you'll like the people abroad much better than here — more common sense and good nature; positively better people, and a devilish deal more agreeable and — and cleverer. And why do you go on crying, Jennie? You must not; hang it! you'll put me in the dumps. You don't seem to hear me."

"Yes, I do, I do; but it's all over, Jekyl, and I've come to bid you farewell, and on earth we'll never meet again," said Lady Jane, still weeping violently.

"Come, little Jennie, you shan't talk like a fool. I've heard you long enough; you must listen to me — I have more to say."

"Jekyl, Jekyl, I am sorry — oh! I'm sorry, for your sake, and for mine, I ever saw your face, and sorrier that I am to see you no more; but I've quite made up my mind — nothing shall change me — nothing — never. Goodbye, Jekyl. God forgive us. God bless you."

"Come, Jane, I say, don't talk that way. What do you mean?" said the Baronet, holding her hand fast in his, and with his other hand encircling her wrist. "If you really do want to make me ill, Jennie, you'll talk in that strain. I know, of course, I've been very much to blame. It was all my fault, I said — I *say* — everything; but now you will be free, Jennie. I wish I had been worthy of you; I wish I had. No, you must not go. Wait a moment. I say, Jennie, I wish to Heaven I had made you marry me when you might; but I'll not let you go now; by Heaven, I'll never run a risk of losing you again."

"No, Jekyl, no, I've made up my mind; it is all no use, I'll go. It is all over — quite over, for ever. Goodbye, Jekyl. God bless you. You'll be happier when we have parted — in a few days — a great deal happier; and as for me, I think I'm broken-hearted."

"By —— , Jennie, you shan't go. I'll make you swear; you shall be my wife — by Heaven, you shall; we'll live and die together. You'll be happier than ever you were; we have years of happiness. I'll be whatever you like. I'll go to church — I'll be a Puseyite, or a Papist, or anything you like best. I'll — I'll— "

And with these words Sir Jekyl let go her hand suddenly, and with a groping motion in the air, dropped back on the pillows. Lady Jane cried wildly for help, and tried to raise him. The nurse was at her side, she knew not how. In ran Tomlinson, who, without waiting for directions, dashed water in his face. Sir Jekyl lay still, with waxen face, and a fixed deepening stare.

"Looks awful bad!" said Tomlinson, gazing down upon him.

"The wine — the claret!" cried the woman, as she propped him under the head.

"My God! what is it?" said Lady Jane, with white lips.

The woman made no answer, but rather shouldered her, as she herself held the decanter to his mouth; and they could hear the glass clinking on his teeth as her hand trembled, and the claret flowed over his still lips and down upon his throat.

"Lower his head," said the nurse; and she wiped his shining forehead with his handkerchief; and all three stared in his face, pale and stern.

"Call the doctor," at last exclaimed the nurse. "He's not right."

"Doctor's gone, I think," said Tomlinson, still gaping on his master.

"*Send* for him, *man*! I tell ye," cried the nurse, scarce taking her eyes from the Baronet.

Tomlinson disappeared.

"Is he better?" asked Lady Jane, with a gasp.

"He'll never be better; I'm 'feared he's gone, ma'am," answered the nurse, grimly, looking on his open mouth, and wiping away the claret from his chin.

"It can't be, my good Lord! it can't — quite well this minute — talking — why, it can't — it's only weakness, nurse! for God's sake, he's not — it is not — it can’t be,” almost screamed Lady Jane.

The nurse only nodded her head sternly, with her eyes still riveted on the face before her.

“He ought ‘a bin let alone — the talkin’s done it,” said the woman in a savage undertone.

In fact she had her own notions about this handsome young person who had intruded herself into Sir Jekyl’s sick-room. She knew Beatrix, and that this was not she, and she did not like or encourage the visitor, and was disposed to be sharp, rude, and high with her.

Lady Jane sat down, with her fingers to her temple, and the nurse thought she was on the point of fainting, and did not care.

Donica Gwynn entered, scared by a word and a look from Tomlinson as he passed her on the stair. She and the nurse, leaning over Sir Jekyl, whispered for a while, and the latter said —

“Quite easy — off like a child — all in a minute;” and she took Sir Jekyl’s hand, the fingers of which were touching the table, and laid it gently beside him on the coverlet.

Donica Gwynn began to cry quietly, looking on the familiar face, thinking of presents of ribbons long ago, and schoolboy days, and many small goodnatured remembrances.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

In the Chaise.

Hearing steps approaching, Donica recollected herself, and said, locking the room door —

"Don't let them in for a minute."

"Who is she?" inquired the nurse, following Donica's glance.

"Lady Jane Lennox."

The woman looked at her with awe and a little involuntary courtesy, which Lady Jane did not see.

"A relation — a — a sort of a niece like of the poor master — a'most a daughter like, allays."

"Didn't know," whispered the woman, with another faint courtesy; "but she's better out o' this, don't you think, ma'am?"

"Drink a little wine, Miss Jennie, dear," said Donica, holding the glass to her lips. "Won't you, darling?"

She pushed it away gently, and got up, and looked at Sir Jekyl in silence.

"Come away, Miss Jennie, darling, come away, dear, there's people at the door. It's no place for you," said Donica, gently placing her hand under her arm, and drawing her toward the study door. "Come in here, for a minute, with old Donnie."

Lady Jane did go out unresisting, hurriedly, and weeping bitterly.

Old Donica glanced almost guiltily over her shoulder; the nurse was hastening to the outer door. "Say nothing of us," she whispered, and shut the study door.

"Come, Miss Jennie, darling; do as I tell you. They must not know."

They crossed the floor; at her touch the false door with its front of fraudulent books opened. They were now in a dark passage, lighted only by the reflection admitted through two or three narrow lights near the ceiling, concealed effectually on the outside.

The reader will understand that I am here describing the architectural arrangements, which I myself have seen and examined. At the farther end of this room, which is about twenty-three feet long, is a niche, in which stands a sort of cupboard. This swings upon hinges, secretly contrived, and you enter another chamber of about the same length. This room is almost as ill-lighted as the first, and was then stored with dusty old furniture, piled along both sides, the lumber of fifty years ago. From the side of this room a door opens upon the gallery, which door has been locked for half a century, and I believe could hardly be opened from without.

At the other end of this dismal room is a recess, in one side of which is fixed an open press, with shelves in it; and this unsuspected press revolves on hinges also, shutting with a concealed bolt, and is, in fact, a door admitting to the green chamber.

It is about five years since I explored, under the guidance of the architect employed to remove this part of the building, this mysterious suite of rooms; and knowing, as I fancied, thoroughly the geography of the house, I found myself with a shock of incredulity thus suddenly in the green chamber, which I fancied still far distant. Looking to my diary, in which I that day entered the figures copied from the ground plan of the house, I find a little column which explains how the distance from front to rear, amounting to one hundred and seventy-three feet, is disposed of.

Measuring from the western front of the house, with which the front of the Window dressing-room stands upon a level, that of the green chamber receding about twelve feet: —

	ft.	in.
Window dressing-room or hexagon	12	0
Green chamber	38	0
Recess	2	0
First dark room	23	0
Recess	1	6
Second dark room	23	0
Recess	1	6
Study	25	0
Wall	1	0
Sir Jekyl's bedroom	27	0
Anteroom	10	0

Stair, bow-window of which forms part of the eastern front	9	0
	173	0

I never spoke to anyone who had made the same exploration who was not as much surprised as I at the unexpected solution of a problem which seemed to have proposed bringing the front and rear of this ancient house, by a “devilish cantrip slight,” a hundred feet at least nearer to one another than stone mason and foot-rule had ordained.

The rearward march from the Window dressing-room to the foot of the back stair, which ascends by the eastern wall of the house, hardly spares you a step of the full distance of one hundred and seventy-three feet, and thus impresses you with an idea of complete separation, which is enhanced by the remote ascent and descent. When you enter Sir Jekyl’s room, you quite forget that its great window looking rearward is in reality nineteen feet nearer the front than the general line of the rear; and when you stand in that moderately proportioned room, his study, which appears to have no door but that which opens into his bedroom, you could not believe without the evidence of these figures, that there intervened but two rooms of three-and-twenty feet in length each, between you and that green chamber, whose bow-window ranks with the front of the house.

Now Lady Jane sat in that hated room once more, a room henceforward loathed and feared in memory, as if it had been the abode of an evil spirit. Here, gradually it seemed, opened upon her the direful vista of the future; and as happens in tales of magic mirrors, when she looked into it her spirit sank and she fainted.

When she recovered consciousness — the window open — eau de cologne, sal volatile, and all the rest around her, with cloaks about her knees, and a shawl over her shoulders, she sat and gazed in dark apathy on the floor for a time. It was the first time in her life she had experienced the supernatural panic of death.

Where was Jekyl now? All irrevocable! Nothing in this moment’s state changeable for ever, and ever, and ever!

This gigantic and inflexible terror the human brain can hardly apprehend or endure; and, oh! when it concerns one for whom you would have almost died yourself!

"Where is he? How can I reach him, even with the tip of my finger, to convey that one drop of water for which he moans now and now, and through all futurity?" Vain your wild entreaties. Can the dumb earth answer, or the empty air hear you? As the roar of the wild beast dies in solitude, as the foam beats in vain the blind cold precipice, so everywhere apathy receives your frantic adjuration — no sign, no answer.

Now, when Donica returned and roused Lady Jane from her panic, she passed into a frantic state — the wildest self-upbraidings; things that made old Gwynn beat her lean hand in despair on the cover of her Bible.

As soon as this frenzy a little subsided, Donica laid her hand firmly on the young lady's arm.

"Come, Lady Jane, you must stop that," she said, sternly. "What *I* hear matters nothing, but there's others that must not. The house full o' servants; *think*, my darling, and don't let yourself *down*. Come away with me to Wardlock — this is no place any longer for you — and let your maid follow. Come along, Miss Jennie; come, darling. Come by the glass door, there is no one there, and the chaise waiting outside. Come, miss, you must not lower yourself before the like o' them that's about the house."

It was an accident; but this appeal did touch her pride.

"Well, Donnie, I will. It matters little who now knows everything. Wait one moment — my face. Give me a towel."

And with feminine precaution she hastily bathed her eyes and face, looking into the glass, and adjusted her hair.

"A thick veil, Donnie."

Old Gwynn adjusted it, and Lady Jane gathered in its folds in her hand; and behind this mask, with old Donnie near her, she glided downstairs without encountering anyone, and entered the carriage, and lay back in one of its corners, leaving to Gwynn, who followed, to give the driver his directions.

When they had driven about a mile, Lady Jane became strangely excited.

"I must see him again — I *must* see him. Stop it. I *will*. Stop it." She was tugging at the window, which was stiff. "Stop him, Gwynn. Stop him, woman, and turn back."

"Don't, Miss Jennie; don't, darling. Ye could not, miss. Ye would not face all them strangers, ma'am."

"Face them! What do you mean? *Face* them! How dare they? I despise them — I *defy* them! What is their staring and whispering to me? I'll go back. I'll return. I *will* see him again."

"Well, Miss Jennie, where's the good? He's cold by this time."

"I must see him again, Donnie — I *must*."

"You'll only see what will frighten you. You never saw a corpse, miss."

"Oh! Donnie, Donnie, Donnie, don't — you mustn't. Oh! Donnie, yes, he's gone, he is — he's *gone*, Donnie, and *I*'ve been his ruin. I — I — my wicked, wretched vanity. He's gone, lost for ever, and it's *I* who've done it all. It's *I*, Donnie. I've destroyed him."

It was well that they were driving in a lonely place, over a rough way, and at a noisy pace, for in sheer distraction Lady Jane screamed these wild words of unavailing remorse.

"Ah! my dear," expostulated Donica Gwynn. "*You*, indeed! Put that nonsense out of your head. *I* know all about him, poor master Jekyl; a wild poor fellow he was always. *You*, indeed! Ah! it's little you know."

Lady Jane was now crying bitterly into her handkerchief, held up to her face with both hands, and Donica was glad that her frantic fancy of returning had passed.

"Donnie," she sobbed at last— "Donnie, you must never leave me. Come with me everywhere."

"Better for you, ma'am, to stay with Lady Alice," replied old Donnie, with a slight shake of her head.

"I — I'd rather die. She always hated him, and hated me. I tell you, Gwynn, I'd swallow poison first," said Lady Jane, glaring and flushing fiercely.

"Odd ways, Miss Jane, but means kindly. We must a-bear with one another," said Gwynn.

"I hate her. She has brought this about, the dreadful old woman. Yes, she always hated me, and now she's happy, for she has ruined me — quite ruined — for nothing — all for nothing — the cruel, dreadful old woman. Oh, Gwynn, is it all true? My God! is it true, or am I mad?"

"Come, my lady, you must not take on so," said old Gwynn. "'Tisn't nothing, arter all, to talk so wild on. Doesn't matter here, shut up wi' me, where no one ‘ears ye but old Gwynn, but ye must not talk at that gate before others, mind; there’s no one talking o’ ye yet — not a soul at Marlowe; no one knows nor guesses nothing, only you be ruled by me; you *know* right well they can’t guess nothink; and you must not be a fool and put things in people’s heads, d’ye *see*?”

Donica Gwynn spoke this peroration with a low, stern emphasis, holding the young lady’s hand in hers, and looking rather grimly into her eyes.

This lecture of Donica’s seemed to awaken her to reflection, and she looked for a while into her companion’s face without speaking, then lowered her eyes and turned another way, and shook old Gwynn’s hand, and pressed it, and held it still.

So they drove on for a good while in silence.

“Well, then, I don’t care for one night — just one — and tomorrow I’ll go, and you with me; we’ll go tomorrow.”

“But, my lady mistress, *she* won’t like that, mayhap.”

“Then *I*’ll go alone, that’s all; for another night I’ll not stay under her roof; and I think if I were like myself nothing could bring me there even for an hour; but I am not. I am quite worn out.”

Here was another long silence, and before it was broken they were among the hedgerows of Wardlock; and the once familiar landscape was around her, and the old piers by the roadside, and the florid iron gate, and the quaint and staid old manorhouse rose before her like the scenery of a sick dream.

The journey was over, and in a few minutes more she was sitting in her temporary room, leaning on her hand, and still cloaked and bonneted, appearing to look out upon the antique garden, with its overgrown standard pear and cherry trees, but, in truth, seeing nothing but the sharp face that had gazed so awfully into space that day from the pillow in Sir Jekyl’s bedroom.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Old Lady Alice talks with Guy.

As Varbarriere, followed by Doocey and Guy, entered the hall, they saw Dives cross hurriedly to the library and shut the door. Varbarriere followed and knocked. Dives, very pallid, opened it, and looked hesitatingly in his face for a moment, and then said —

“Come in, come in, pray, and shut the door. You’ll be — you’ll be shocked, sir. He’s gone — gone. Poor Jekyl! It’s a terrible thing. He’s gone, sir, quite suddenly.”

His puffy, bilious hand was on Varbarriere’s arm with a shifting pressure, and Varbarriere made no answer, but looked in his face sternly and earnestly.

“There’s that poor girl, you know — my niece. And — and all so unexpected. It’s awful, sir.”

“I’m very much shocked, sir. I had not an idea there was any danger. I thought him looking very far from actual danger. I’m *very* much shocked.”

“And — and things a good deal at sixes and sevens, I’m afraid,” said Dives— “law business, you know.”

“Perhaps it would be well to detain Mr. Pelter, who is, I believe, still here,” suggested Varbarriere.

“Yes, certainly; thank you,” answered Dives, eagerly ringing the bell.

“And I’ve a chaise at the door,” said Varbarriere, appropriating Guy’s vehicle. “A melancholy parting, sir; but in circumstances so sad, the only kindness we can show is to withdraw the restraint of our presence, and to respect the sanctity of affliction.”

With which little speech, in the artificial style which he had contracted in France, he made his solemn bow, and, for the last time for a good while, shook the Rev. Dives, now Sir Dives Marlowe, by the hand.

When our friend the butler entered, it was a comfort to see one countenance on which was no trace of flurry. *Nil admirari* — his manner was a philosophy, and the convivial undertaker had acquired a grave suavity of demeanour and countenance, which answered all occasions —

imperturbable during the comic stories of an after-dinner sederunt — imperturbable now on hearing the other sort of story, known already, which the Rev. Dives Marlowe recounted, and offered, with a respectful inclination, his deferential but very short condolences.

Varbarriere in the meanwhile looked through the hall vestibule and from the steps, in vain, for his nephew! He encountered Jacques, however, but he had not seen Guy, which when Varbarriere, who was in one of his deep-seated fusses, heard, he made a few *sotto voce* ejaculations.

"Tell that fellow — he's in the stableyard, I dare say — who drove Mr. Guy from Slowton, to bring his chaise round this moment; we shall return. If his horses want rest, they can have it in the town, Marlowe, close by; I shall send a carriage up for you; and you follow, with all our things, immediately for Slowton."

So Jacques departed, and Varbarriere did not care to go upstairs to his room. He did not like meeting people; he did not like the chance of hearing Beatrix cry again; he wished to be away, and his temper was savage. He could have struck his nephew over the head with his cane for detaining him.

But Guy had been summoned elsewhere. As he walked listlessly before the house, a sudden knocking from the great window of Lady Mary's boudoir caused him to raise his eyes, and he saw the grim apparition of old Lady Alice beckoning to him. As he raised his hat, she nodded at him, pale, scowling like an evil genius, and beckoned him fiercely up with her crooked fingers.

Another bow, and he entered the house, ascended the great stair, and knocked at the door of the boudoir. Old Lady Alice's thin hand opened it. She nodded in the same inauspicious way, pointed to a seat, and shut the door before she spoke.

Then, he still standing, she took his hand, and said, in tones unexpectedly soft and fond —

"Well, dear, how have you been? It seems a long time, although it's really nothing. Quite well, I hope?"

Guy answered, and inquired according to usage; and the old lady said —

"Don't ask for me; never ask. I'm *never* well — always the same, dear, and I hate to think of myself. You've heard the dreadful intelligence — the frightful event. What *will* become of my poor niece? Everything in distraction. But Heaven's will be done. I shan't last long if this sort of thing is to continue — quite impossible. There — don't speak to me for a moment. I wanted to tell you, you must come to me; I have a great deal to say," she resumed, having smelt a little at her vinaigrette; "but not just now. I'm not equal to all this. You know how I've been tried and shattered."

Guy was too well accustomed to be more than politely alarmed by those preparations for swooning which Lady Alice occasionally saw fit to make; and in a little while she resumed —

"Sir Jekyl has been taken from us — he's gone — awfully suddenly. I wish he had had a little time for preparation. Ho, dear! *poor* Jekyl! Awful! But we all bow to the will of Providence. I fear there has been some dreadful mismanagement. I always said and knew that Pratt was a quack — positive infatuation. But there's no good in looking to secondary causes, Won't you sit down?"

Guy preferred standing. The hysterical ramblings of this selfish old woman did not weary or disgust him. Quite the contrary; he would have prolonged them. Was she not related to Beatrix, and did not this kindred soften, beautify, glorify that shrivelled relic of another generation, and make him listen to her in a second-hand fascination?

"You're to come to me — d'ye see? — but not immediately. There's a — there's some one there at present, and I possibly shan't be at home. I must remain with poor dear Beatrix a little. She'll probably go to Dartbroke, you know; yes, *that* would not be a bad plan, and I of course must consider her, poor thing. When you grow a little older you'll find you must often sacrifice yourself, my dear. I've served a long apprenticeship to that kind of thing. You must come to Wardlock, to my house; I have a great deal to say and tell you, and you can spend a week or so there very pleasantly. There are some pictures and books, and some walks, and everybody looks at the monuments in the church. There are two of them — the Chief Justice of Chester and Hugo de Redcliffe — in the "Gentleman's Magazine." I'll show it to you when you come, and you can have the carriage, provided you don't tire the horses; but you must come. I'm your kinswoman — I'm your relation — I've found it all out — very near — your poor dear father."

Here Lady Alice dried her eyes.

"Well, it's time enough. You see how shattered I am, and so pray don't urge me to talk any more just now. I'll write to you, perhaps, if I find myself able; and *you* write to *me*, mind, directly, and address to Wardlock

Manor, Wardlock. Write it in your pocketbook or you'll forget it, and put "to be forwarded" on it. Old Donica will see to it. She's very careful, I *think*; and you promise you'll come?"

Guy did promise; so she said —

"Well, dear, till we meet, goodbye; *there*, God bless you, dear."

And she drew his hand toward her, and he felt the loose soft leather of her old cheek on his as she kissed him, and her dark old eyes looked for a moment in his, and then she dismissed him with —

"There, dear, I can't talk any more at present; there, farewell. God bless you."

Down through that changed, mysterious house, through which people now trod softly, and looked demure, and spoke little on stair or lobby, and that in whispers, went Guy Deverell, and glanced upward, involuntarily, as he descended, hoping that he might see the beloved shadow of Beatrix on the wall, or even the hem of her garment; but all was silent and empty, and in a few seconds more he was again in the chaise, sitting by old Varbarriere, who was taciturn and ill-tempered all the way to Slowton.

By that evening all the visitors but the Rev. Dives Marlowe and old Lady Alice, who remained with Beatrix, had taken flight. Even Pelter, after a brief consultation with Dives, had fled Londonwards, and the shadow and silence of the chamber of death stole out under the door and pervaded all the mansion.

That evening Lady Alice recovered sufficient strength to write a note to Lady Jane, telling her that in consequence of the death of Sir Jekyl, it became her duty to remain with her niece for the present at Marlowe. It superadded many religious reflections thereupon; and offering to her visitor at Wardlock the use of that asylum, and the society and attendance of Donica Gwynn, it concluded with many wholesome wishes for the spiritual improvement of Lady Jane Lennox.

Strangely enough, these did not produce the soothing and elevating effect that might have been expected; for when Lady Jane read the letter she tore it into strips and then into small squares, and stamped upon the fragments more like her fierce old self than she had appeared for the previous four-and-twenty hours.

"Come, Donica, you write to say I leave this tomorrow, and that you come with me. You said you'd wish it — you must not draw back. You would not desert me?”

I fancy her measures were not quite so precipitate, for some arrangements were indispensable before starting for a long sojourn on the Continent. Lady Jane remained at Wardlock, I believe, for more than a week; and Donica, who took matters more peaceably in her dry way, obtained, without a row, the permission of Lady Alice to accompany the forlorn young wife on her journey.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Something more of Lady Jane Lennox.

"See, Doctor Pratt — how do you do? — you've been upstairs. I — I was anxious to see you — most anxious — this shocking, dreadful occurrence," said the Reverend Dives Marlowe, who waylaid the Doctor as he came down, and was now very pale, hurrying him into the library as he spoke, and shutting the door. "The nurse is gone, you know, and all quiet; and — and the quieter the better, because, you know, that poor girl Beatrix my niece, she has not a notion there was any hurt — a wound, you see, and knows nothing in fact. I'll go over and see that Slowton doctor — a — a gentleman. I forget his name. There's no need — I've considered it — none in the world — of a — a — that miserable ceremony, you know."

"I don't quite follow you, sir," observed Doctor Pratt, looking puzzled.

"I mean — I mean a — a coroner — that a — — "

"Oh! I see — I — I see," answered Pratt.

"And I went up, poor fellow; there's no blood — nothing. It may have been apoplexy, or any natural cause, for anything I know."

"Internal hæmorrhage — an abrasion, probably, of one of the great vessels; and gave way, you see, in consequence of his over-exerting himself."

"Exactly; a blood-vessel has given way — I see," said the Reverend Dives; "internal hæmorrhage. I see, exactly; and I — I know that Slowton doctor won't speak any more than you, my dear Pratt, but I may as well see him, don't you think? And — and there's really no need for all that terrible misery of an inquest."

"Well, you know, it's not for me; the — the family would act naturally."

"The family! why, look at that poor girl, my niece, in hysterics! I would not stake that — that *hat* there, I protest, on her preserving her wits, if all that misery were to be gone through."

"Does Lady Alice know anything of it?"

"Lady Alice Redcliffe? Quite right, sir — very natural inquiry; — not a syllable. She's, you know, not a — a person to conceal things; but she knows and suspects nothing; and no one — that nurse, you told me, thought the hurt was an operation — not a soul suspects."

And thus the Reverend Dives agreed with himself that the scandal might be avoided; and thus it came to pass that the county paper, with a border of black round the paragraph, announced the death of Sir Jekyl Marlowe, Baronet, at the family residence of Marlowe Manor, in this county, the immediate cause of his death being the rupture of a blood-vessel in the lungs, attended by internal hæmorrhage. By the death of Sir Jekyl Marlowe, it further stated, "a seat in Parliament and a deputy lieutenancy for this county become vacant." Then came a graceful tribute to Sir Jekyl's value as a country gentleman, followed by the usual summary from the "Peerage," and the fact that, leaving no male issue, he would be succeeded in his title and the bulk of his estates by his brother, the Reverend Dives Marlowe.

So in due course this brother figured as the Reverend Sir Dives Marlowe, and became proprietor of Marlowe Manor, where, however, he does not reside, preferring his sacred vocation, and the chance of preferment — for he has grown, they say, very fond of money — to the worldly life and expensive liabilities of a country gentleman.

The Reverend Sir Dives Marlowe, Bart., is still unmarried. It is said, however, that he was twice pretty near making the harbour of matrimony. Lady Bateman, the relict of Sir Thomas, was his first object, and matters went on satisfactorily until the stage of business was arrived at; when unexpectedly the lovers on both sides were pulled up and thrown on their haunches by a clause in Sir Thomas's will, the spirit of which is contained in the Latin words, *durante viduitate*. Over this they pondered, recovered their senses, shook hands, and in the name of prudence parted good friends, which they still are.

The second was the beautiful and accomplished Miss D'Acre. In earlier days the Reverend Dives would not have dreamed of anything so imprudent. Time, however, which notoriously does so much for us, if he makes us sages in some particulars, in others, makes us spoonies. It is hard to say what might have happened if a more eligible bridegroom had not turned up in George St. George Lighton, of Seymour Park, Esq. So that Dives' love passages have led to nothing, and of late years he has attempted no further explorations in those intricate ways.

I may as well here mention all I know further about Lady Jane Lennox. I cannot say exactly how soon she left Wardlock, but she did not await Lady Alice's return, and, I think, has never met her since.

Sir Jekyl Marlowe's death was, I suppose, the cause of the abandonment of General Lennox's resolution to proceed for a divorce. He remained in England for fully four months after the Baronet's death, evidently awaiting any proceedings which the family might institute, in consequence, against him. Upon this point he was fiercely obstinate, and his respectable solicitor even fancied him "cracked." With as little *fracas* as possible, a separation was arranged — no difficult matter — for the General was open-handed, and the lady impatient only to be gone. It was a well-kept secret; the separation, of course, a scandal, but its exact cause enveloped in doubt. A desperate quarrel, it was known, had followed the General's return from town, but which of the younger gentlemen, then guests at Marlowe, was the hero of the suspicion, was variously conjectured. The evidence of sojourners in the house only deepened the mystery. Lady Jane had not shown the least liking for anyone there. It was thought by most to have a reference to those old London stories which had never been quite proved. A few even went the length of conjecturing that something had turned up about the old General, which had caused the explosion.

With an elderly female cousin, Donica Gwynn, and her maid, she went abroad, where she has continued nearly ever since, living rather solitarily, but not an outcast — a woman who had been talked about unpleasantly, but never convicted — perhaps quite blameless, and therefore by no means excluded.

But a secret sorrow always sat at her heart. The last look of that bad man, who, she believed, had loved her truly though guiltily — summoned as he talked with her — irrevocably gone. Where was he now? How was it with him?

"Oh, Jekyl! Jekyl! If I could only know if we are ever to meet again — forgiven!"

With fingers clasped together under her cloak, and eyes upturned to the stars in the beautiful Italian skies, she used, as she walked to and fro alone on the terrace of her villa, to murmur these agonised invocations. The heedless air received them; the silent stars shone cold above, inexorably bright. But Time, who dims the pictures, as well as heals the wounds of the past, spread his shadows and mildews over these ghastly images; and as her unselfish sorrow subsided, the sense of her irrevocable forfeiture threw its everlengthening shadow over her mind.

"I see how people think — some wonder at me, some accept me, some flatter me — all suspect me."

So thought she, with a sense of sometimes nearly insupportable loneliness, of resentment she could not express, and of restlessness — dissatisfied with the present, hopeless of the future. It was a life without an object, without a retrospect — no technical compromise, but somehow a fall — a fall in which she bitterly acquiesced, yet which she fiercely resented.

I don't know that her Bible has yet stood her in stead much. She has practised vagaries — Tractarian sometimes, and sometimes Methodist. But there is a yearning, I am sure, which will some day lead her to hope and serenity.

It is about a year since I saw the death of General Lennox in the "Times," an event which took place rather suddenly at Vichy. I am told that his will contains no allusion to Lady Jane. This, however, was to have been expected, for the deed of separation had amply provided for her; so now she is free. But I have lately heard from old Lady Alice, who keeps her memory and activity wonderfully, and maintains a correspondence with old Donnie Gwynn, that she shows no symptom of a disposition to avail herself of her liberty. I have lived long enough to be surprised at nothing, and therefore should not wonder if hereafter she should do so.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The Last.

Old Lady Alice, who liked writing and reading letters, kept up an active correspondence with her grandson, and that dutiful young gentleman received them with an interest, and answered them with a punctuality that did him honour.

Shortly after Lady Jane Lennox's departure from Wardlock, Lady Alice Redcliffe and her fair young charge, Beatrix, arrived at that discreet old dower house. Old Lady Alice, who, when moved, could do a goodnatured thing, pitying the solitariness of her pretty guest, so soon as she thought her spirits would bear it, invited first the Miss Radlowes, and afterwards the Miss Wynkletons — lively young ladies of Beatrix's time of life — who helped to make Wardlock less depressing. These hospitalities led to "invites;" and so the time passed over without the tedium that might have been looked for, until the period drew near when Beatrix was to make the Italian tour she had arranged with that respectable and by no means disagreeable family, the Fentons of Appleby. A rumour reached Guy that Drayton was to be one of the party. This certainly was not pleasant. He alluded to it in his next letter, but Lady Alice chose to pass the subject by.

There had been no step actually taken in the threatened lawsuit since the death of Sir Jekyl. But there were unpleasant rumours, and Pelter and Crowe were in communication with the Rev. Sir Dives Marlowe on the subject, and he occasionally communicated his peevish sense of poor Jekyl's unreasonableness in having died just when everything was at sixes and sevens, and the unfairness of his having all the trouble and so little of the estates.

Varbarriere, I suppose, was on good terms once more with his nephew. There was no more talk of Algeria, and they were now again in London. That corpulent old gentleman used to smile with an unctuous scorn over the long letters with which Lady Alice occasionally favoured him.

"My faith! she must suppose I have fine leisure, good eyes also, to read all that. I wish, Guy, she would distinguish only you with her correspondence. I suppose if I answer her never, she will cease some time."

He had a letter from her while in London, on which he discoursed in the above vein. I doubt that he ever read it through.

Guy received one by the same post, in the conclusion of which she said —

"Beatrix Marlowe goes in a few days, with the Fentons, to Paris, and thence to Italy. My house will then be a desert, and I miserably solitary, unless you and your uncle will come to me, as you long since promised, and as you well know there is nothing to prevent. I have written to him, naming Wednesday week. I shall then have rooms in which to place you, and you positively must not refuse."

Under this hospitable pressure, Varbarriere resolved to make the visit to Wardlock — a flying visit of a day and night — rather to hear what she might have to say than to enjoy the excellent lady's society. From Slowton, having there got rid of their railway dust and vapour, the gentlemen reached Wardlock at the approach of evening. In the hall they found old Lady Alice, her thin stooping figure cloaked and shawled for a walk, and her close bonnet shading her hollow and wrinkled face.

Hospitable in her way, and really glad to see her guests, was the crone. She would have dismantled and unbonneted, and called for luncheon, and would have led the way into the parlour; but they would not hear of such things, having refreshed at Slowton, and insisted instead on joining the old lady in her walk.

There is a tall glass door in the back hall, which opens on the shorn grass, and through it they passed into the circumscribed but pretty pleasure-ground, a quadrangle, of which the old house, overgrown with jessamine and woodbine, formed nearly one side; the opposite garden wall, overtopped with ancient fruit-trees, another; and screens of tall-stemmed birch and ash, and an underwood of juniper and evergreens, the others; beds of brilliant verbena here and there patterned the green sod; and the whole had an air so quaint and cloister-like, as drew forth some honest sentences of admiration from old Varbarriere.

They strolled among these flowers in this pleasant seclusion for a time, until Lady Alice pronounced herself fatigued, and sat down upon a rustic seat, with due ceremony of adjustment and assistance.

"Sit down by me, Mr. Strangways. Which am I to call you, by-the-bye?"

“Which you please, madam,” answered Varbarriere, with the kind of smile he used with her — deferential, with, nevertheless, a suspicion of the scornful and amused in it, and as he spoke he was seated.

“As for you, grandson,” she continued, “you had better take a walk in the garden — you’ll find the door open;” she pointed with her parasol to the oldfashioned fluted door-case of Caen stone in the garden wall; “and I want to talk a little to my friend, M. de Varbarriere — Mr. Strangways, as I remember him.” And turning to that sage, she said —

“You got my letter, and have well considered it, I trust?”

“I never fail to consider well anything that falls from Lady Alice Redcliffe.”

“Well, sir, I must tell you — — “

These were the last words that Guy heard as he departed, according to orders, to visit her ladyship’s oldfashioned garden. Could a young fellow fancy a duller entertainment? Yet to Guy Deverell it was not dull. Everything he looked on here was beautified and saddened by the influence that had been there so recently and was gone.

Those same roses, whose leaves were dropping to the earth, she had seen but a day or two ago in their melancholy clusters; under these tall trees she had walked, here on this rustic seat she had rested; and Guy, like a reverent worshipper of relics, sat him down in the same seat, and, with a strange thrill, fancied he saw a pencilled word or two on the arm of it. But no, it was nothing, only the veining of the wood. Why do ladies use their pencils so much less than we men, and so seldom (those I mean whose relics are precious) trace a line by chance, and throw this bread upon the waters, where we poor devils pull cheerless against wind and tide?

Here were flowers, too, tied up on tall sticks. He wondered whether Beatrix ever tended these with her delicate fingers, and he rose and looked at the bass-mat with inexpressible feeling.

Then, on a sudden, he stopped by a little circle of annuals, overgrown, run into pod, all draggled, but in the centre a split stick and a piece of bleached paper folded and stuck across it. Had she written the name of the flower, which perhaps she sowed? and he plucked the stick from the earth, and with tender fingers unfolded the record. In a hideous scrawl, evidently the seedsman’s, “Lupines” sprawled across the weather-beaten brown paper.

He raised his eyes with a sigh, and perceived that the respectable gardener, in a blue body-coat with brass buttons, was at hand, and eyed him with a rather stern inquisitiveness. Guy threw the stick down carelessly, feeling a little foolish, and walked on with more swagger than usual.

And now he had entered that distant part of the garden where dark and stately yew hedges, cut here and there in arches, form a meditative maze. With the melancholy yearnings of a lover he gazed on these, no doubt the recent haunts of that beautiful creature who was his day-dream. With a friendly feeling he looked on the dark wall of yew on either side; and from this solemn walk he turned into another, and — saw Beatrix!

More beautiful than ever he thought her — her features a little saddened. Each gazed on the other, as the old stories truly say in such cases, with changing colour. Each had imagined the other more than a hundred miles away. Neither had fancied a meeting likely, perhaps possible. The matter hung upon the wills of others, who might never consent until too late. A few days would see Beatrix on her way to Italy with the Fentons; and yet here were she and Guy Deverell, by the sleight of that not ill-natured witch, old Lady Alice, face to face.

I don’t know exactly what Guy said. I don’t know what she answered. The rhetoric was chiefly his; but he held her hand in his, and from time to time pleaded, not quite in vain, for a word from the goddess with glowing cheeks and downcast eyes, by whose side he walked. Low were those tones, and few those words, that answered his impetuous periods; yet there was a magic in them that made him prouder and more blessed than ever his hopes had dared to promise.

Sometimes they stopped, sometimes they walked slowly on, quite unconscious whether they moved or paused — whether the birds sang or were silent — of all things but their love — in a beautiful dream.

They had surprised one another, and now in turn both were surprised by others; for under one of those airy arches cut so sharply in the yew hedge, on a sudden, stood old Lady Alice and Monsieur Varbarriere — the Enchanter and the Fairy at the close of a tale.

Indulgently, benevolently, the superior powers looked on. The young people paused, abashed. A sharp little nod from Lady Alice told them they were understood. Varbarriere came forward, and took the young lady’s hand very kindly, and held it very long, and at the close of his salutation, stooping towards her pretty ear, murmured something, smiling, which made her drop her eyes again.

"I think you both might have waited until I had spoken to you; however, it does not signify much. I don't expect to be of any great consequence, or in any great request henceforward."

Her grandson hastened to plead his excuses, which were received, I must allow, with a good grace.

In matters of true love, I have observed, where not only Cupid applauds, but Plutus smiles, Hymen seldom makes much pother about his share in the business. Beatrix did *not* make that tour with the Fentons. They, on the contrary, delayed their departure for rather more than a month; and I find Miss Fenton and Miss Arabella Fenton among the bridesmaids. Drayton did not attend the wedding, and oddly enough, was married only about three weeks after to Lady Justina Flynston, who was not pretty, and had but little money; and they say he has turned out rather cross, and hates the French and all their products, as "utter rot."

Varbarriere has established two great silk-factories, and lives in France, where they say gold pours in upon him in streams before which the last editor of "Aladdin" and Mr. Kightley of the "Ancient Mythology" hang their heads. His chief "object" is the eldest son of the happy union which we have seen celebrated a few lines back. They would have called the boy Herbert, but Varbarriere would not hear of anything but Guy. They say that he is a prodigy of beauty and cleverness. Of course, we hear accounts of infant phenomena with allowance. All I can say is, "If he's not handsome it's very odd, and he has at least as good a right to be clever as most boys going." And as in these pages we have heard something of a father, a son, and a grandson, each bearing the same name, I think I can't do better than call this tale after them — Guy Deverell.

THE END

ALL IN THE DARK

Serialised in the *Dublin University Magazine* between February and June 1866 before publication in two volumes by Richard Bentley later the same year, this novel was a departure for Le Fanu, being a fairly conventional story of middle-class life, with some autobiographical echoes. In the figure of the bogus mystic Dinah Perfect, however, it also satirises the contemporary mania for spiritualism.

Both M.R. James and H.P. Lovecraft claimed to have disliked the novel intensely, the former dismissing it as ‘a domestic story with a sham ghost’. Such criticisms were also made at the time of publication and bear out Le Fanu’s fears that his work in the sensation and ghost story genres had resulted in him becoming typecast as a writer of supernatural thrillers. For this reason, he later regretted ever publishing *All in the Dark* under his own name. Modern readers might care to make up their own minds.

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CHAPTER LXXI.

CHAPTER I.

GILROYD HALL AND ITS MISTRESS.

NEAR the ancient and pretty village of Saxton, with its gabled side to the road, stands an old redbrick house of moderate dimensions, called Gilroyd Hall, with some tall elms of very old date about it; and an ancient, brick walled garden, overtopping the road with standard fruit-trees, that have quite outgrown the common stature of such timber, and have acquired a sylvan and venerable appearance.

Here dwelt my aunt, an old maid, Miss Dinah Perfect by name; and here my Cousin William Maubray, the nephew whom she had in effect adopted, used to spend his holidays.

I shall have a good deal to say of her by-and-by, though my story chiefly concerns William Maubray, who was an orphan, and very nearly absolutely dependent upon the kindness of his aunt. Her love was true, but crossed and ruffled now and then by temper and caprice. Not an ill temper was hers, but whimsical and despotic, and excited oftenest upon the absurdities which she liked letting into her active and perverse little head, which must have been the proper nidus of all odd fancies, they so prospered and multiplied there.

On the whole, Gilroyd Hall and the village of Saxton were rather slow quarters for the holidays. Besides his aunt, William had but one companion under that steep and hospitable roof. This was little Violet Dark well, a child of about eleven years, when he had attained to the matured importance of seventeen, and was in the first eleven at Rugby, had his cap, and was, in fact, a person with a career to look back upon, and who had long left childish things behind him.

This little girl was — in some roundabout way, which, as a lazy man, I had rather take for granted than investigate — a kinswoman; and Miss Dinah Perfect had made her in some sort her property, and had her at least eight months out of the twelve down at Gilroyd Hall. Little Violet was lonely at home — an only daughter, with a father working sternly at the bar, not every day seen by her, and who seemed like a visitor in his own house hurried, reserved, unobtrusive, and a little awful.

To the slim, prettily-formed little girl, with the large dark eyes, brown hair and delicate bright tints, the country was delightful — the air, the flowers, the liberty; and old Aunt Dinah, though with a will and a temper, still so much kindlier and pleasanter than Miss Placey, her governess, in town; and good old Winnie Dobbs was so cosy and goodnatured.

To this little maid, in her pleasant solitude, the arrival of William Maubray for the holidays was an event full of interest and even of excitement. Shy as he was, and much in awe of all young lady-kind, she was far too young to be in his way. Her sparkling fuss and silvery prattle were even pleasant to him. There was life and something of comicality in her interruptions and unreasonableness. She made him visit her kittens and kiss them all round, and learn and recite their names; whistle after tea for her bullfinch, dig in her garden, mend and even nurse her doll, and perform many such tasks, quite beneath his dignity as a "swell" at Rugby, which, however, the gentle fellow did very merrily and industriously for the imperious little woman, with scant thanks, but some liking for his guerdon.

So, in his fancy, she grew to be mixed up with the pleasant influences of Gilroyd Hall, with the flowers and the birds, with the freaks of the little dog Pixie, with the stories he read there, and with his kindly welcomes and goodbyes.

Sitting, after breakfast, deep in his novel in the "study," with his white flannel cricket trousers on, for he was to play against Winderbroke for the town of Saxton that day, he received a smart tweak by the hair, at the back of his head, and, looking round, saw little Vi, perched on the rung of his oldfashioned chair, and dimly recollected having received several gentler tweaks in succession, without evincing the due attention.

"Pert little Vi! what's all this?" said the stalwart Rugby boy, turning round with a little shake of his head, and his sweet smile, and leaning on his elbow. The sunny landscape from the window, which was clustered round with roses, and a slanting sunbeam that just touched her hair, helped to make the picture very pretty.

"Great, big, old bear! you never listen to one word I say."

"Don't you call names, Miss," said Aunt Dinah, who had just glided into the room.

"What was little silver-hair saying? What does she want?" he replied, laughing at the child's indignation, and pursuing the nomenclature of

Southey's pleasant little nursery tale. "Golden-hair, I must call you, though," he said, looking on her sun-lit head; " and not quite golden either; it is brown, and very pretty brown, too Who called you Violet?" He was holding the tip of her pretty chin between his fingers, and looking in her large deep eyes. "Who called you Violet?"

"How should I know, Willie?" she replied, disengaging her chin with a little toss.

"Why, your poor mamma called you Violet. I told you so fifty times," said Aunt Dinah sharply.

"You said it was my godfathers and godmothers in my baptism, grannie!" said Miss Vi, not really meaning to be pert.

"Don't answer me, Miss — that's of course, your catechism — we're speaking of your poor mamma. 'Twas her mamma who called her Violet. What about it?"

"Nothing," answered William, gently looking up at his aunt, "only it is such a pretty name;" and glancing again at the child, "it goes so well with her eyes. She *is* a jolly little creature."

"She has some good features, I suppose, like every other child, and you should not try to turn her head. Nothing extraordinary. There's vanity enough in the world, and I insist, William, you don't try to spoil her."

"And what do you want of me, little woman?" asked William.

"You come out and sow my lupins for me."

"Why, foolish little woman, it isn't the season; they would not grow."

"Yes, they would though — you say that just because you don't like; you story!"

"*Violet!*" exclaimed Aunt Dinah, tapping the table with the seal end of her silver pencil-case. "Well, but he is, grannie, very disobliging. You do nothing now but read your tiresome old books, and never do anything I bid you."

"Really! Well, that's very bad; I really must do better," said William, getting up with a smile; "I *will* sow the lupins."

"What *folly!"* murmured Aunt Dinah, grimly.

"We'll get the hoe and trowel. But what's to be done? I forgot I'm to play for the town to-day; and I don't think I have time — no, certainly — no time to-day for the lupins;" and William shook his head, smiling disconsolately.

“Then I’ll *never* ask you to do anything for me again as long as I live — never — never — *never!*” she vowed with a tiny stamp.

“Yes you shall — you shall, indeed, and I’ll do ever so much; and may she come and look at the cricket?”

So, leave granted, she did, under old Winnie’s care; and when she returned, and for days after, she boasted of Willie’s long score, and how he caught the ball.

When he returned at the end of next “half” he found old Miss Dinah Perfect with her spectacles on, in her comfortable old drawingroom, in the cheer of a Christmas fire, with her head full of the fancies and terrors of a certain American tome, now laid with its face downwards upon the table — as she jumped up full of glee and affection, to greet him at the threshold.

It was about this period, as we all remember, that hats began to turn and heads with them, and tables approved themselves the most intelligent of quadrupeds; chests of drawers and other grave pieces of furniture babbled of family secrets, and houses resounded with those creaks and cracks with which Bacon, Shakespeare, and Lord Byron communicated their several inspirations in detest able grammar, to all who pleased to consult them.

Aunt Dinah was charmed. Her rapid genius loved a short-cut, and here was, by something better than a postoffice, a direct gossiping intimacy opened between her and the people on t’other side of the Styx.

She ran into this as into her other whimsies might and main, with all her heart and soul. She spent money very wildly, for her, upon the gospels of the new religion, with which the transatlantic press was teeming; and in her little green-papered dressing-room was accumulating a library upon her favourite craze, which might have grown to the dimensions of Don Quixote’s.

She had been practising for a year, however, and all the minor tables in her house had repeatedly prophesied before she disclosed her conversion to her nephew, or to anyone else except old Winnie.

It was no particular business of his if his aunt chose to converse with ghosts and angels by the mediation of her furniture. So, except that he now and then assisted at a *séance,* the phenomena of which were not very clear to him, though perfectly so to his aunt, and acquiesced in dimly and submissively by good old Winnie, things went on in their old course; and so, for some three or four years more, during which William Maubray read a great deal of all sorts of lore, and acquired an erudite smattering of old English authors, dramatists, divines, poets, and essayists, and time was tracing fine wrinkles about Aunt Dinah’s kind eyes and candid forehead, and adding graceful inches to the lithe figure of Violet Darkwell; and the great law of decay and renewal was asserting itself everywhere, and snows shrouding the dead world in winter, and summer fragrance, and glow of many hues in the gardens and fields succeeding, and births and deaths in all the newspapers every morning.

CHAPTER II.

A LETTER.

THE following letter, posted at Saxton, reached a rather solitary student in St. John’s College. Cambridge.

“DEAR WILLIAM,

“You will be sorry — I know you will — to hear that poor old auntie is not long for this world; I don’t know exactly what is wrong, but something I am certain very bad. As for Doctor Drake, I have no faith in him, or, indeed, in medicine, and don’t mean to trouble him except as a friend. I am quite happy in the expectation of the coming change, and have had within the last week, with the assistance of good old Winnie Dobbs, some very delightful *communications*, you know, I dare say, what I mean. Bring with you — for you *must* come *immediately,* if you care to see poor Aunt Dinah before she departs — a basket-bottle of eau de Cologne, like the former, you know the kind I mean, and buy it at the same place. You need not get the cameo ring for Doctor Drake; I shan’t make him a present — in fact, we are not now on terms. I had heard from many people of his incivility and want of temper; God forgive him his *ingratitude* however, as I do. The basket-bottle holds about a pint, *remember.* I want to tell you exactly what I can do for you by my will; I always told you, dear William, it was very *small;* still, as the people used to say, ‘every little makes a muckle,’ and though little, it will be a *help.* I cannot rest till you come; I know and am sure you love poor old auntie, and would like to close her eyes when the hour comes; therefore, dear Willie, come without delay. Also bring with you half a pound of the snuff, the same mixture as before; they make it up at Figgs’s — *get it there* — not in paper, observe; in a canister, and *rolled in lead,* as will be poor auntie before long! Old Dobbs will have your room and bed comfortable, as usual; come by the cross coach, at eight o’clock. Tea, and anything else you like, will *await* you.

“Ever your fond old

"AUNTIE.

"P.S. — I send you, *to guard against mistakes*, the exact proportions of the mixture — the *snuff* I mean, of course. I quite forgot a new collar for Psyche, *plated.* Make them engrave 'Mrs. Perfect, Gilroyd Hall,' upon it. Heaven bless you. We are all progressing upward. Amen! says your poor old Aunt Dinah, who loves you."

It was in his quiet college room by candlelight that William Maubray read this letter from his kind, wild, preposterous old aunt, who had been to him as a mother from his early days.

Aunt Dinah! was it possible that he was about to lose that familiar friend and face, the only person on earth who cared about him?

He read the letter over again. A person who did not know Aunt Dinah so well as he, would have argued from the commissions about scents, dog-collars, and snuff, that the old lady had no honest intention of dying. But he knew that incongruous and volatile soul too well to infer reliable consolation from those levities.

"Yes, yes — I shall lose her — she's gone," said the young man in great distress, laying the letter, with the gentleness of despair, upon the table, and looking down upon it in pain and rumination.

It would certainly make a change — possibly a fatal one — in his prospects. A sudden change. He read the letter through again, and then, with a sinking heart, he opened the window and looked out upon the moonlight prospect. There are times when in her sweetest moods nature seems unkind. Why all this smiling light — this cheer and serenity of sky and earth — when he was stricken only five minutes since, perhaps undone, by the message of that letter — that sorrow-laden burlesque?

This sort of suggestion, in such a moment, comes despairingly. The vastness of creation — the inflexibility of its laws, and "What is man, and what am I among men, that the great Projector of all this should look after ephemeral me and my concerns? The human sympathy that I could rely upon, and human power — frail and fleeting — but still enough — is gone, and in this solitary hour, as in the coming one of death, experience fails me, and I must rest all upon that which, according to my light, is faith, or theory, or chance!"

With a great sigh, and a heavy heart, William Maubray turned away from the window, and a gush of very true affection flooded his heart as he thought of kind old Aunt Dinah. He read the letter once more, to make out what gleams of comfort he could.

A handsome fellow was William Maubray — nearly three-and-twenty by this time — good at cricket — great at football: three years ago, in the school days, now, so old, tall, and lithe. A studious man in his own way — a little pale, with a broad forehead, good blue eyes, and delicately formed, but somewhat sad features.

He looked round his room. He had grown very fond of that homely apartment His eyes wandered over his few shelves of beloved old books, in all manner of dingy and decayed bindings — some of them two centuries and a half old, very few of later birth than a hundred years ago. Delightful companions — ready at a moment's call — ready to open their minds, and say their best sayings on any subject he might choose — resenting no neglect, obtruding no counsel, always the same serene, cheerful inalienable friends.

The idea of parting with them was insupportable, nearly. But if the break-up came, they *must* part company, and the world be a new one for him. The young man spent much of that night in dismal reveries and speculations over his future schemes and chances, all of which I spare the reader.

Good Dr. Sprague, whom he saw next day, heard the news with much concern. He had known Miss Perfect long ago, and was decorously sorry on her account. But his real regrets were for the young man.

"Well, you go, of course, and see your aunt, and I do trust it mayn't be quite so bad. Stay, you know, as long as she wants you, and don't despond. I could wish your reading had been in a more available direction but rely on it, you'll find a way to make a start and get into a profession, and with your abilities, I've no doubt you'll make your way in the world."

And the doctor, who was a shrewd as well as a kindly little gentleman, having buttoned the last button of his gaiter, stood, cap in hand, erect, and smiling confidently, he shook his hand with a "God bless you, Maubray," and a few minutes later William Maubray, with all his commissions slowed away in his portmanteau, had commenced his journey to Gilroyd Hall.

The moon was up, and the little town of Saxton very quiet, as Her Majesty's mail, dropping a bag at the post office, whirled through it, and pulled up at the further end, at the gate of Gilroyd Hall, there to drop our friend, an outside passenger.

The tall, florid iron gate was already locked. William tugged at the bell, and drew back a little to reconnoitre the premises. One of the old brick gables overhangs the road, with only a couple of windows high up, and he saw that his summons had put a light in motion within them. So he rejoined his hat-case, and his portmanteau, awaiting him on its end, in front of the white iron gate that looked like lacework in the moonlight.

"Ha! Tom; glad to see you."

"Welcome, Mr. William, Sir; she a wearyin' to see ye, and scarce thought you'd a come tonight."

The wicket beside the great gate was now open, and William shook hands with the old retainer, and glancing anxiously up at the stone-faced windows, as it were to read the countenance of the old house, he asked, "And how *is* she, Tom, tonight?"

"Complainin' an' downhearted a bit for *her*, that is now and again. She cried a good bout to-day wi' old Winnie, in the little parlour."

"She's up, then?"

"Ooh, ay; she's not a body to lay down while she's a leg to stan' on. But I do think she's nigh her endin'. Gie't to me," this referred to the portmanteau. "I do, poor old girl; and we's all be sorry, Master Willie." William's heart sank.

"Where is she?" he inquired.

"In the drawingroom, I think."

By this time they were standing in the oak-panelled hall, and some one looked over the banister from the lobby, upon them. It was old Winnie; the light of her candle was shining pleasantly on her ruddy and kindly face.

"Oh! Master Willie. Thank God, you're come at last Glad she'll be to see you."

Old Winnie ambled down the stairs with the corner of her apron to her eye, and shook him by both hands, and greeted him again very kindly, and ever Kissed him according to the tradition of a score of years.

"Is she *very* ill, Dobbs?" whispered he, looking pale. "Well, not to say *very* to look at, you'd say, but she's had a warnin', her and me sittin' in the bedroom, an’ she’s bin an’ made a new will; the lawyer’s bin up from Saxton. Don’t ye say I said nothing, mind; ‘twould only fret her, maybe.”

CHAPTER III.

MISS DINAH PERFECT AND HER GUESTS.

"Is she alone?" he asked, postponing the trying moment of seeing her.

"No, the doctor's with her still — Dr. Drake, and Miss Letty, his sister, you remember; they're drinkin' a cup o' tea, and some crumpets, and they'll all be right glad you're come."

"They ought to go away, don't you think?" mildly suggested William Maubray, a good deal shocked. "However, let me get to my room for two or three minutes, and I shall be ready then."

They passed the drawingroom door, and Miss Letty Drake's deliberate tones were audible from within. When he had got to his room he asked Dobbs —

"What was the *warning* you spoke of?"

"Well, dear me! It was the table; she and me, she makes me sit before her, poor thing, and we — well, there *is* cracks, sure, on and off! And she puts this an' that together; and so one way or other — it puzzles my poor head, how — she does make out a deal."

William Maubray was an odd, rather solitary young man, and more given to reading and thinking than is usual at his years, and he detested these incantations to which his aunt, Miss Perfect, had addicted herself, of late years, with her usual capricious impetuosity; and he was very uncomfortable on hearing that she was occupying her last days with these questionable divinations.

When, in a few minutes, William ran down to the drawingroom, and with a chill of anticipation opened the door of that comfortable rather than imposing chamber, the tall slim figure of his aunt rose up from her armchair beside the fire, for though it was early autumn, the fire was pleasant, and the night-air was frosty, and with light and wiry tread, stepped across the carpet to meet him. Her kind, energetic face was pale, and the smile she used to greet him with was nowhere, and she was arrayed from head to foot in deep mourning, in which, particularly as she abhorred the modern embellishment of crinoline, she looked more slim and tall even than she was.

The presence of her guests in nowise affected the greeting of the aunt and nephew, which was very affectionate, and even agitated, though silent.

"Good Willie, to come so quickly — I knew you would." Miss Perfect never wept, but she was very near tears at that moment, and there was a little silence, during which she held his hands, and then recollecting herself, dropt them, and continued more like herself.

"You did not expect to see me up and here; everything happens oddly with me. Here I am, you see, apparently, I dare say, much as usual. By halfpast twelve o'clock tomorrow night I shall be dead! There, don't mind now — I'll tell you all by-and-bye. This is my friend, Miss Drake, you know her."

They shook hands, Miss Drake smiling as brisk a smile as in a scene so awful she could hazard.

"And this, my kind friend Dr. Drake."

William had occasionally seen Dr. Drake in the streets of Saxton, and on the surrounding high roads at a distance, but he had never before had the honour of an interview.

The doctor was short and fat a little bald, and rather dusty, and somehow, William thought, resembled a jolly old sexton a good deal more than a physician. He rose up, with his hands in his trowsers pockets, and some snuff in the wrinkles of his black cloth waistcoat, and bowed, with raised eyebrows and pursed mouth, gravely to his plate of crumpet.

William Maubray looked again on his aunt, who was adjusting her black draperies in her chair, and then once more at the doctor, whose little eye he caught for a second, with a curious and even cunning expression in it; but it was averted with a sudden accession of melancholy once more — and William asked —

"I hope, Sir, there is nothing very imminent?"

The doctor cleared his voice, uneasily, and Aunt Dinah interposed with a nod, a little dryly —

"It is not quite in *his* department."

And whose department *is* it in? the student thought.

"I dare say Doctor Drake would tell you I'm very well — so, perhaps, in a sense, I am; but Doctor Drake has kindly come here as a friend."

Doctor Drake bowed, looking steadfastly into his cup.

"As a friend, dear Willie, just as you have come — an old friend." Miss Perfect spoke low, with a little tremor. in her voice, and was, I believe, near crying, but braced her resolution. William drew near gently and sat down beside her, and placing her hand upon his, she proceeded.

"My dear friend Miss Drake, there, does not agree with me, I'm aware; but Doctor Drake who has read more, and perhaps, *thought* more, thinks otherwise — at least, so I'm led to suppose."

The doctor coughed a little; Miss Drake raised her long chin, and with raised eyebrows, looked down on her finger tips which were drumming on the table, and my Cousin William glanced from one to the other, not quite understanding her drift "But," she continued, "I've apprised them already, and I tell *you* of course; it is — you'll remember the name — an intimation from Henbane."

"Poison!" said William, under his breath, with a look of pale inquiry at Doctor Drake, who at the moment was swallowing his tea very fast, and was seized on a sudden with an explosion of coughing, sneezing, and strangling, which compelled him to jump to his feet, and stagger about the room with his face in his pockethandkerchief and his back to the tea-table.

"When Dr. Henbane," said my aunt with severity, "I mean a — Doctor *Drake* — has quite done coughing, I'll go on."

There was a little pause.

"Confound it," thought William, who was half beside himself, "it's a very odd dying scene!"

The doctor, blowing his nose, returned very red and solemn, and explained, still coughing at intervals, that it was a little tea in the trachea; it invariably occurred to him when he drank tea in the evening; he *must* give it up; *"you* know, Letty." —

Miss Drake did not deign to assist him.

"She does not seem to know so much about it as you do," observed Aunt Dinah with an irony.

"Owing to my not *thinking* so much," replied Miss Letty, sarcastically.

*"*Henbane?" murmured William again, in a puzzled horror.

"H'm! — yes! — Henbane? you seem to have forgotten; one of those — one of the spirits who have attached themselves to me," and Aunt Dinah shot a quick glance at the doctor, who, though looking again at his crumpet, seemed to cower awfully under it.

"Oh — ay — Henbane?" exclaimed William in a tone of familiarity, which indicated anything but respect for that supernatural acquaintance. "Henbane, to be *sure"* And he looked on his aunt with a half amused recognition, which seemed to say, "Well — and what about that humbug?"

But Aunt Dinah said decisively —

"So much for the present; you shall hear *more* — everything, by-and-by."

And there followed a silence.

"Did you remember the snuff, dear William?" inquired the doomed lady, with rather an abrupt transition. "Certainly; shall I fetch it?" said William, half rising. Miss Perfect nodded, and away he went, somehow vastly relieved, and with his bedroom candle in his hand, mounted the oak stairs, which were broad and handsome in proportion to the other dimensions of that snug old house.

CHAPTER IV.

VIOLET DARKWELL.

AT the head of the stairs, the topmost step of which had been their bench, there rose to him two female figures. He did not instantly recognise them, for one candle only was burning, and it was on the little table nearly behind them. One was old Winnie Dobbs, the other Violet Darkwell; she stood up slight and girlish still, but looking taller than he had expected, with an old faded silk quilted shawl of Aunt Dinah’s about her shoulders, and hoodwise over her head, for the night was frosty.

“Ha! Vi — little Vi, I was going to say; dear me! how you have grown! So glad to see you.”

He had the girl’s slim hand in his, and was speaking as he felt, very kindly.

“We’ve been waiting here, Winnie and I, to hear what you thought of dear grannie,” — (grannie was merely a pet name in this case, defining no relationship*)*— *“*and what do you think, William?”

“I really don’t understand it,” he answered. *“I* — I hope it’s all nonsense; I really think so. She says she is very well; and the doctor — Drake, you know — I really think he was laughing, and one thing I’m quite certain of — it is connected in her mind with that foolish spirit-rapping.”

“And you don’t believe in it?” inquired the young lady.

“All bosh and nonsense. Not a bit of it,” he replied.

“Oh, William, I am so delighted to hear you say so! “ the exclaimed, much relieved by the promulgation of so valuable an opinion. “And you’re quite right, I *know,* about grannie. It *is,* really — is not it, Winnie? — all, all about that awful spirit-rapping. Grannie never speaks of it to me; I believe she’s afraid of frightening me; but old Winnie, here — you must not tell of her — she tells me all about it — everything; and I *am* so afraid of it; and it is *entirely* that. Grannie thinks she has got a message! fancy! How awful! And Winnie does not know what the words were; for grannie writes down the letters with a pencil, and tells her only what she thinks fit; and I am *so* delighted — you can’t think.”

“You good little Vi, I’m so glad to see you!” She laughed a low little laugh — the first for several days — as he shook her hand again; and he said —

Winnie, do, like a dear old thing, open my pormanteau — here’s the key — and fetch me a canister you’ll see at the top, with a great paper label, blue and red, on it.” Away went Winnie Dobbs, with his key and candle, and he said to the pretty girl who stood leaning lightly against the banister —

“My old friend, Vi! When I went into the drawing room just now, I looked all round for you, and could not think what had become of you, and was really afraid you had gone away to London. I don’t think I should ever care to come to Gilroyd Hall again; I should prefer seeing my aunt anywhere else — it would not be like itself if you were gone.”

“So you really missed me, William!” she laughed “I should think so. And another thing — you are not to call me William. Why don’t you call me Willie, or old bear, as you used to do? If you change old names, I’ll begin and call you Miss Darkwell.”

“How awful!”

“Indeed I will, and be as formal as you please, and treat you like a young lady, and you’ll never be ‘wicked little Vi ‘ any more.”

She was laughing as she leaned back, and he could see her small teeth, and he bethought him that she was looking really quite lovely; so with two fingers he picked up her little hand again, as it lay at her side, and he said —

“And we are always to be good friends, you know — great friends; and although you’ve no more dolls to mend, I’ll still be of use. I’m going to the bar, and I’ll manage all your law suits, if you let me; and when you are going to be married, I’ll draw your settlements, and you are to have me always for your counsel.”

She was still smiling, but said nothing, and looked wonderfully pretty, with the old gray silk hood wrapped all about her, so that sober old William was on the very point of kissing the slender hand he held in his. But a new feeling of shyness prevented, and he only shook her hand gently once more, and laid it by her side again, as you replace some precious thing you have been admiring where you found it.

“And you really think we may be happy about dear old grannie again?” she said.

The sound of Winnie's footsteps was heard approaching. "Yes; certainly. I'll try to get a word with Doctor Drake. I can't imagine anything serious. Won't you come to the drawingroom now?"

"No; not tonight; not while those people are there.

I was so wretched about dear grannie, I could not bear to go in at first; and now it would be odd, I think, going down when tea is over."

"As if I had brought you down from the nursery, as I often did, Vi, on my back. Well, old Winnie, have you got it?"

"Here, I think, Master William," answered Winnie.

"Yes; all right. So you won't come, Vi?"

"No."

"Quite made up your mind?"

"Quite, Willie."

"That's right — *Willie.*" said he, with a smile, and a nod of approbation. "I should so like to stay here a little longer, as you won't come, and hear all the news, and tell you mine; but Aunt Dinah would lose patience — I'm afraid she *has."*

"Yes, indeed; you had better go. Goodnight, bear."

"Goodnight, wicked little Vi. Remember we meet at breakfast — shan't we?"

"Oh, certainly. Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

And so the gray silk hood vanished, with a smile, prettily, round the corner, and William Maubray descended with his snuff to the drawingroom, with the pretty oval portrait of that young face still hovering before him in the air.

Miss Letty Drake, whose countenance was unpleasantly long in proportion to her height, and pallid, and her small figure bony, and who was dressed on this sad occasion in her silk "half-mourning," a sad and, it was thought, a dyed garment, which had done duty during many periods of affliction, as William entered the room, was concluding a sentence with a low and pointed asperity, thus— "which seems to me hardly compatible with Saint Paul's description of Christian charity," and a short silence followed these words.

"I was going to ring the bell, William," said the doomed lady of the house. "One would have thought you were *making* that snuff. Let me see it

— h’m. See, get off this cover. Ho! what is this? A lead wrapper!”

“You said, Aunt Dinah, you wished it.”

“Did I? Well, no matter. Get it open. Thanks. Yes; that’s it. Yes; very good. You take snuff, doctor, don’t you?”

“Aw — *yes,* certainly, nothing like it, I do believe — where a man is obliged to work his head — aw haw — a stimulus and a sedative.”

The doctor, it was averred, “worked” his occasionally with brandy and water, and not a great deal otherwise.

“No, many thanks; don’t care for perfumes; high toast is my snuff.” And Doctor Drake illustrated the fact by a huge pinch, which shed another brown shower over the wrinkles of his waistcoat.

“Letty, dear,” said Aunt Dinah, turning suddenly to Miss Drake, “we won’t quarrel; we can’t agree, but I won’t quarrel.”

“Well, dear, I’m glad to hear you say so. I’m sure, for my part, I never quarrel. ‘ Be ye angry, and let not the sun go down on your wrath.’”

CHAPTER V.

AUNT DINAH IS IN THE HORRORS, AND DOCTOR DRAKE PUTS HIS NIGHTCAP IN HIS POCKET.

"I WISH to say goodbye to you very kindly," said Aunt Dinah, quite sadly and gently, and somehow not like herself, "and — and I've tried to keep up; I know it must happen, and I'm sure it is for the best, but— "

"I hope and expect, my dear Dinah," interposed Miss Letty, sharply — she was pulling on her worsted "wrists."

— — "to see you in the enjoyment of many years of your accustomed health and spirits, and I have no doubt, humanly speaking, that I shall."

Miss Letty was quiet and peremptory, but also a little excited. And the doctor, for want of something better to do, cleared his voice, in a grand abstraction, and wound up his watch slowly, and held it to his ear, nobody knew exactly why.

"You won't believe me, but I know it, and so will you — too late; tomorrow night at twelve o'clock I shall be dead. I've tried to keep up — I have; I've tried it; but oh! Ho, ho, hoo, ooh," and poor Aunt Dinah quite broke down, and cried and hooted hysterically.

Dr. Drake had now before him an intelligible case, and took the command accordingly with decision. Up went the window; cold water was there, and spirit of hartshorn. And when she had a little recovered, the doctor, who was a goodnatured fellow, said —

"Now, Miss Perfect, Ma'am, it won't do, I tell you; it's only right; you may want some assistance; and if, as an old friend, you'll allow me to return and remain here for the night, a sofa, or an armchair, anything, I'll be most happy, I do assure you."

But Aunt Dinah, with many thanks, said, "No," peremptorily, and wilful man or woman, who will contend with?

So, like the awful banquet in Macbeth, Miss Dinah Perfect's tea-party broke down and up, and the guests, somewat scared, got into their walking wrappers, rather silently, and their entertainer remained behind unstrung and melancholic. '

But William Maubray, who came down to assist in the rummage for cloaks and umbrellas, asked leave, in his blunt modest way, to accompany Miss Letty and her brother, the doctor, to Saxton.

Now there seemed something real and grisly in Aunt Dinah's terror, which a little infected William Maubray; and the little party marched in silence along the frost-hardened road, white in moonlight, with the bare switchlike shadows of the trees across it, on their way to the pretty old town of Saxton.

At last the doctor said —

"She won't miss you, do you think?"

"She told me she'd like to be quiet for half an hour, and I should be so much obliged if you could tell me, whether you really, that is, *still* think that she ought to have a medical man in attendance tonight."

"Why, you know what hysteria is. Well, she is in a highly hysterical state. She's a woman who resists it would be safer, you see, if she gave way and cried a bit now and then, when nature prompts, but she won't, except under awful high pressure, and then it might be serious; those things sometimes run off into fits."

And so the doctor lectured William upon his aunt's nerves, until they had arrived at the door of his snug house in the High Street.

Here they shook hands; but William Maubray, who was unhappy about Aunt Dinah, after Miss Letty had mounted to her chamber, very urgently entreated the doctor to return and see how it might end.

With a bottle of valerian, his slippers, and a nightcap in his pocket, Doctor Drake did consent to return, and be smuggled into Gilroyd Hall.

"I don't know what to make of that spirit-rapping quite," said the doctor, as side by side they approached the Hall. "There's a quantity of books published on it — very unaccountable if half what they say is true. I suppose you've read it all. You read a lot, Miss Perfect tells me."

"I've read very little about it, except in the papers. She fancies she has had a message, telling her she is to die sometime tomorrow. I can't believe there's really anything more than self-deception; but is there not a danger?"

"How?" asked the doctor.

"I mean, being so nervous as you suppose, and quite convinced that she is to die at a particular time; might not her own mind — you know Lord Lyttelton died in consequence of such a persuasion."

William paused, Doctor Drake lowered, between his fingers, the cigar he was smoking, and they came to a halt, with a little wheel to the left, and the doctor, with his head aside, blowing the smoke up in a thin stream, looked with a thoughtful scrutiny up at the clear bright moon; perhaps a not unsuitable source of inspiration upon their crazy theme.

"I forget *which* Lord Lyttelton that was," said the doctor, wisely. "Isn't it *Lyttelton,* you say? But the thing is quite possible. There's a spirit you know she's always talking about. She calls him Henbane. Egad, Sir, I was devilish near laughing at tea when she named him so suddenly that time; I'd have been up a tree if I had, you know. You did not see what she was at, but I did. That Henbane's her gospel, egad, and she thinks it was he who told her — d'ye see? Come along. She'll be wondering where you are."

So on they went towards Gilroyd Hall, whose outline, black and sharp, against the luminous sky, was relieved at one point by the dull glow of candlelight through the red curtains of what William Maubray knew to be Aunt Dinah's bedchamber window.

"She is in her room, I think — there's light in her window," said William. The doctor nodded, chucking his cigar stump far away, for he knew Aunt Dinah's antipathy to tobacco, and they were now on the doorstep. He was thinking, if the case were to end tragically, what a capital paper he would make of it, beside the interesting letter he would send to the editor of the *Spatula.*

"Winnie's bin a callin' over the stairs for you, Master Willie. Missis wants ye to her room," said Tom, who awaited them on the doorsteps.

"I'll sit by the fire in the study," whispered the doctor. "I don't mind sitting up a night now and then. Give me a cloak or something. There's a sofa, and I'll do very well."

The principle of life was strong in Aunt Dinah, and three hours later that active-minded lady was lying wide awake on her bed, with a variety of topics, not all consisting with the assumed shortness of her hours, drifting in succession through her head. The last idea that struck her was the most congruous, and up she jumped, made a wild toilet, whose sole principle was warmth, tied a faded silk handkerchief over her nightcap, across her ears, and with her long white flannel dressing-gown about her, and a taper in her hand, issued, like the apparition of the Bleeding Nun, upon the gallery, and tapped sharply on William Maubray's door.

“William, William!” she called as she tapped, and from within William answered drowsily to the summons.

“Wait a moment,” said the lady, and

“In glided Margaret’s grimly ghost, And stood at William’s feet.”

“We *must* have a *séance,* my dear boy; I’m going to wake up old Winnie. It certainly has a connexion with your arrival; but anything like the cracking, knocking, and creaking of *everything,* I’ve never yet heard. I have no doubt — so sure as you sit there” — (William was sitting up in his bed with glazed eyes, and senses only half awake)— “that your poor dear mother is here tonight. We’re *sure* of Henbane; and — just get your clothes on — I’m going for Winnie, and we meet in the study, mind, in five minutes.”

And Aunt Dinah, having lighted William’s candle, disappeared, leaving him with a fund of cheerful ideas to make his yawning and bewildered toilet

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THE WITCHES ASSEMBLE.

A FEW minutes later she glided into the study, overthrowing a small table, round which her little *séances* were accustomed to be made, and which the doctor had providently placed against the door.

Aunt Dinah held under her arm the 8vo "Revelations of Elihu Bung, the Pennsylvanian Prophet," a contribution to spiritual science which distanced all contemporary competition; and the chapter which shows that a table of a light, smart build, after having served a proper apprenticeship to ' rapping,' may acquire the faculty of locomotion and self-direction, flashed on her recollection as she recognised prostrate at her feet, in the glimmer of her taper, the altar of their mysteries, which she had with reverent hands herself placed that evening in its wonted corner, at the opposite end of the room.

Such a manifestation was new to her. She looked on it, a little paler than usual, and bethought her of that other terrible chapter in which Elihu Bung avers that spirits, grown intimate by a long familiarity, will, in a properly regulated twilight — and her light at the moment was no more — make themselves visible to those whom they habitually favour with their advices.

Therefore she was strangely thrilled at sight of the indistinct and shadowy doctor, who, awakened by the noise, rose at the opposite end of the room from the sofa on which he had fallen asleep. Tall and thin, and quite unrecognisable by him, was the white figure at the door, with a taper elevated above its head, and which whispered with a horrid distinctness the word "Henbane!" — the first heard on his awakening, the last in his fancy as he dropped asleep, and which sounded to him like the apparition's considerate announcement of its name on entering the room; he echoed "Henbane" in a suppressed diapason, and Aunt Dinah, with an awful ejaculation, repeated the word from the distance, and sank into a chair.

"Henbane!" cried the doctor briskly, having no other exclamation ready and reassured by these evidences of timidity in the spectre, he exclaimed, "Hey, by Jove! what the plague!" and for some seconds he did not know distinctly where he was.

“Merciful goodness! Doctor Drake, why *will* you try to frighten people in this manner? Do you want to *kill* me, Sir?”

“I? Ho! Ha, ha! Ma’am,” replied the learned gentleman, incoherently.

“What are you doing *here,* Sir? I think you’re mad!” exclaimed Aunt Dinah, fiercely.

The doctor cleared his voice, and addressed himself to explain, and before his first period was reached, William and old Winnie, woefully sleepy, had arrived.

Luckily the person who approaches such oracles as “Henbane,” it is well known, must do so with a peaceful and charitable soul. So Miss Perfect was appeasable, and apologies being made and accepted, she thus opened her mind to the doctor —

“I don’t complain, Doctor Drake — William, light the candles over the chimneypiece — although you terrified me a great deal more than in my circumstances *I* ought to have been capable of.”

The candles were now lighted, and shone cheerfully upon the short, fat figure, and ruddy, roguish face of Doctor Drake, and as he was taking one of his huge pinches of snuff, she added —

“And I won’t deny that I *did* fancy for a moment you might be a spirit-form, and possibly that of Henbane.”

William Maubray, who was looking at the doctor, as Miss Perfect reverently lowered her voice at these words, exploded into something so like a laugh, though he tried to pass it off for a cough, that his aunt looked sharply on him in silence for a moment.

“And I’m blowed but I was a bit frightened too, Ma’am, when I saw you at the door there,” said the doctor.

“Well, let us try,” said Miss Perfect. “Come, we are four; let us try who are present — what spirits, and seek to communicate. You don’t object, Dr. Drake?”

“I? Ho! oh! dear no. I should not desire better — aw-haw — *instruction*, Ma’am,” answered the doctor.

I am afraid he was near saying “fun.”

“Winnie, place the table as usual. There, yes. Now let us arrange ourselves.”

The doctor sat down, still blinking, and with a great yawn inquired —

“Do we waw — haw — wa — w — want any particular information?”

"Let us first try whether they will communicate. We *always* want information," said Miss Perfect. "William, sit you there; Winnie, *there.* I'll take pencil and paper and record."

All being prepared, fingers extended, company intent, Aunt Dinah propounded the first question —

"Is there any spirit present?"

There was a long wait and no rejoinder.

"Didn't you hear something?" inquired the doctor. William shook his head.

"I thought I *felt* it," persisted the doctor. "What do *you* say, Ma'am?" addressing himself to Winnie, who looked, after her wont, towards her mistress for help.

"Did you feel anything?" demanded Miss Perfect, sharply.

"Nothing but a little wind like on the back of my head, as I think," replied Winnie, driven to the wall.

"Wind on her head! That's odd," said Miss Perfect, looking in the air as if she possessed the porcine gift of seeing it, "*very* odd!" she continued, with her small hand expanded in the air. "Not a breath stirring, and Winnie has no more imagination than that sofa pillow. You never fancy anything, Winnie?"

"Do I, Ma'am?" inquired Winnie Dobbs, mildly. "Well, *do* you, I say? No, you don't; of course you don't. You know you don't as well as I do."

"Well, I did think so, sure, Ma'am," answered Winnie.

"Pity we can't get an answer," remarked the doctor, and at the same moment William felt the pressure of a large foot in a slipper — under the table. It had the air of an intentional squeeze, and he looked innocently at the doctor, who was, however, so entirely unconscious, that it must have been an accident.

"I say it *is* a pity, Mr. Maubray, isn't it? for we *might* hear something that might interest Miss Perfect very much, possibly, I say?"

"I don't know; I can't say. I've never heard any thing," answered William, who would have liked to kick the table up to the ceiling and go off to bed.

"Suppose Ma'am, we try again," inquired Doctor Drake.

"Certainly," replied Aunt Dinah; "we must have patience."

"Will you ask, Ma'am, please, again if there's a spirit in the room?" solicited the doctor; and the question being put, there came an upward heave of the table.

"Well!" exclaimed the doctor, looking at Winnie, "did you feel that?"

"Tilt, Ma'am," said Winnie, who knew the intelligence would be welcome.

"What do *you* say?" inquired Miss Perfect triumphantly of William.

"Doctor Drake was changing his position just at the moment, and I perceived no other motion in the table — nothing but the little push he gave it," answered William.

"Oh, pooh! yes, of course, there was that," said the doctor a little crossly; "but I meant a sort of a start — a crack like, in the leaf of the table."

"I felt nothing of the kind," said William Maubray.

The doctor looked disgusted, and leaning back took a large pinch of snuff. There was a silence. Aunt Dinah's lips were closed with a thoughtful frown as she looked down upon the top of the table.

"It is very strange. I certainly never witnessed in this house more unequivocal evidences — *preliminary* evidences, of course — of spiritual activity."

"I think, Ma'am, I have read," said the doctor, with his hands in his pockets, "I *think,* somewhere, that if anyone of the manipulators happens to be an unbeliever— "

"An unbeliever in the manifestations, of course the spirits won't communicate," interrupted Miss Perfect, volubly laying down the law. "Winnie is a believer as much as I. We all know *that.* Nephew, how are you? Do you *believe?* You shake your head. Speak out Yes or no?"

"Well, I don't," said he, a little sheepishly.

"You don't? And, not believing, you sit here with your fingers on the table, keeping Doctor Drake out of his — his— "

She could not say bed, and the doctor relieved her by saying, "Oh, as to me, Ma'am, I'm only too happy; but you know it's a pity, all the same."

"Very true, doctor. Much obliged. We shall set it to rights. My dear William, you might have told us at starting; but we'll commence again. Sit by the fire, William; and I trust in a little time you may be convinced."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FAMILIAR SPEAKS.

SO the excommunicated William, with his feet upon the fender, leaning upon his elbow in the great chair, made himself comfortable by the fire, and heard his aunt propound the questions, and the answers by the previously appointed manifestations, duly noted down.

“Is there a spirit present?”

“Yes.”

“Are there more than one?”

“No.”

“Is it a male or female spirit?” No answer.

“Is it Henbane?”

“Yes” (emphatically).

William *was* surprised. All was now going smoothly, and he could not for a moment suspect a gentleman of Dr. Drake’s respectability of participating in a trick. But there was monotony in the matter of a quieting kind, and William grew too drowsy to keep his eyes long open.

“Did you give Miss Dinah Perfect a message on Monday last?”

“Yes.” —

“Did it concern her death?”

“Yes.”

“Is her death to take place at the time then appointed?”

Here the table made a positive jump, and in spite of a grasp made at it by the doctor’s fingers, it fell flat on the floor, and it must have been a very violent impulse, for Dr. Drake’s slipper was off, and he, very red, no doubt from his effort to prevent the wilful fall of the table. “Very extraordinary!” exclaimed he, standing up.

“Most wonderful!” said my aunt.

Good old fat Winnie sat with her fingers raised in the air, looking at the prostrate table with placid astonishment “That’s a tilt,” said the doctor, “that means *no* — a very *emphatic* tilt.”

“I think it was a *jump”* said my aunt, sadly.

“No, Ma’am, no — a tilt, a tilt, I’ll take my oath. Besides a jump has no meaning,” urged he with energy.

“Pardon me: when a question is received with marked impatience a jump is no unfrequent consequence.”

“Oh, ho!” groaned the doctor reflectively. “Then it counts for nothing.”

“Nothing,” said Miss Perfect in a low tone. “Winnie, get the table up again.”

“Suppose, Ma’am, to avoid mistakes,” said the doctor, after reflection, “suppose we put it upon it to express itself in language. Just ask it what about Miss Dinah Perfect’s death.”

“I’ve no objection,” said Miss Perfect; and in the terms prescribed by Dr. Drake the momentous question was put.

Hereupon the spelling commenced —

“A-D-J-O-U-R-N-E-D.”

“Postponed, put off, Ma’am!” said the doctor, expounding eagerly.

“I know; good Heaven! I understand,” answered Aunt Dinah faintly.

“Give her some water. *Here,* Ma’am,” said he, presenting a glass of water at her pale lips. She sipped a little.

“Now we’ll ask, Ma’am, please, for how long?” suggested the doctor.

And this question likewise having been propounded the table proceeded once more to spell —

“S-I-N-E D-I-E.”

‘It ends with *die?* said my poor aunt, faintly.

“*Sine die*, Ma’am. It means indefinitely, Ma’am; your death is postponed without a day named — for ever, Ma’am! It’s all over; and I’m very happy it has ended so. What a marvellous thing, Ma’am — give her some more water, please — those manifestations are. I hope, Ma’am, your mind is quite relieved — perfectly, Ma’am.” Miss Dinah Perfect was taken with a violent shivering, in which her very teeth chattered. Then she cried, and then she laughed; and finally Doctor Drake administered some of his ammonia and valerian, and she became, at last, composed.

With audible thanksgivings old Winnie accompanied her mistress up stairs to her room, where Aunt Dinah herself, who, notwithstanding her necromancy, was a well-intending, pious Churchwoman, descended to her knees at her bedside, and poured forth her gratitude for the reprieve, and then in a loud and distinct voice read to old Winnie Dobbs the twentieth chapter of the Second Book of Kings, in which we read how the good king Hezekiah obtained by prayer ten years more of the light of life. Then old Winnie persuaded her to have a glass of very hot port wine-negus, which agreed with her so well that she quickly fell asleep; and never did poor lady need repose more, or drink deeper and more tranquil draughts of that Lethe.

William Maubray was now wide awake, and he and the doctor, being a little chilly, sat before the study fire.

"It's jolly, isn't it?" exclaimed William for the seventh time. "But isn't it all very odd, Sir, and very unaccountable — I — I think?"

"Very, very odd, to be sure," said the doctor, poking the corner of a lump of coal— "very, no doubt."

"I wish I had been awake. I should like to see one of those things — those *séances*. I had no idea there really was anything so coherent."

"Very lucky for her," replied the doctor, with a sly little wink to William.

William looked inquiringly at the doctor, who smiled on the poker's end, and pushed the embers gently with it.

"You don't believe in it, Sir — do you?" inquired William, puzzled.

"I? Well, I don't know exactly what to say, you know. I put my foot in it on Sunday last, when I told her I did not believe a bit of it; nor more I *did.* Egad, you never saw a woman so angry, when I called it all bosh. You'd better not vex her that way, my boy — d'ye see? She lent me one of those wonderful queer books from America — very odd they are — and I read it to please her. So, you see, that's how we stand; very good friends again."

"And you are convinced it's true?" urged William, who, like other young men who sit up late, and read wild books, and drink strong coffee, was, under the rose, addicted to the supernatural.

"Why, you see, as Shakespeare says, there are more bubbles between heaven and earth than are dreamt of by the philosophers," observed the doctor with a little paraphrase. "I wish to live at peace with my neighbours; and I'd advise you to think over this subject, old fellow, and not to tease the old lady up stairs about it — that's all."

"I wish he'd speak out, and tell me what happened tonight, and tell me his real opinion," thought William Maubray. "I've read in some old medical book," he continued aloud, "that the vital electricity escapes and diffuses itself at the fingertips."

“Oh, to be sure! All sorts of theories. The hand’s a very mysterious organ. The hand of glory, you may be certain, was not altogether a story. The electric light has been seen at the fingertips in consumptive cases in the dark; and a patient convulsed, or in a state of extreme nervous exhaustion, will clench the hand so as to prevent the escape of this influence at the fingerpoints, and then joining hands, in love, you know, or friendship — and in fact it is, Sir, a very mysterious organ; and I’m prepared to believe a great deal that’s curious about its occult powers. Your aunt told you about the toad she saw climb over her coverlet one night, and turn into a hand and grasp her wrist.”

‘‘No,” said William.

‘‘Egad, she’s ready to swear to it. Last winter she was so frightened, she was not fit to stand for a week after. She reads too much of those books. Egad, Sir, she’ll turn her head, and that will be the end of it. However, we’ve pulled her through this, and I hope she’ll give it up, true or false. You see, there’s no good in it; and if she goes on, sooner or later she’ll frighten herself out of her wits.”

“But that toad was a very curious idea,” said William. “What does she make of it? Does she think it was a fancy only, or a real thing?”

“Pooh! A spirit of course. She calls it the key-spirit that unlocks the spirit-world, you see; and from the time it touches you, you are in rapport with the invisible world, and subject, as she says she is, to their visitations, you see — ha, ha, ha!”

William laughed too.

“Last winter?” he said. “She never told me.”

“Pooh! All fancies,” observed the doctor. “Better she should not talk of them. Those American people are all going mad. She’ll get touched in the upper story if she does not mind.”

CHAPTER VIII.

WILLIAM MAUBRAY'S VISION.

AFTER some more talk of this kind, they parted, and William Maubray, as he lay down again in his bed, wondered whether the doctor, whom he had heard described as a shrewd man, believed in the revelations at which he had assisted; or, was it possible — could he have been accessory to — Oh, no, it could not be!

The student, as I have said, had a sort of liking for the supernatural, and although now and then he had experienced a qualm in his solitary college chamber at dead of night, when, as he read a well-authenticated horror, the old press creaked suddenly, or the door of the inner-room swung slowly open of itself, it yet was "a pleasing terror" that thrilled him; and now as he lay this night awake, with a patch of moonlight spread askance on the floor — for Aunt Dinah insisted on a curfew, and he, "preferring the light that heaven sheds" to no lamp at all, left the window-shutter a little open, and for a while allowed his eyes to wander over the oldfashioned and faded furniture of the apartment, and his fancy to wander among those dreams of superstition with which he rather liked to try has courage.

He conned over his aunt's story of the toad, recounted *to* him by Doctor Drake, and which he had never heard before, until the nodding shadow of the sprig of jessamine on the floor took the shape of the sprawling reptile, and seemed to swagger clumsily towards his bed, and every noise in the curtains suggested its slimy clamberings.

Youth, fatigue, pure country air, in a little while overpowered these whimsies, and William Maubray fell into a deep sleep.

I am now going to relate a very extraordinary incident; but upon my honour the narrative is true. William Maubray dreamed that he was in the room in which he actually lay; that he was in bed, and that the moonlight entered the room, just as he had seen it before going to sleep. He thought that he heard a heavy tread travel se the room over his head; he heard the same slow and ponderous step descend the narrow back stair, that was separated from him only by the wall at the back of his bed. He knew intuitively that the person thus approaching came in quest of him, and he lay expecting, in a state of unaccountable terror. The handle of his door turned, and it seemed that his intending visitor paused, having opened the door about a hand's breadth, and William knew that he had only suspended, not abandoned his purpose, be it what it might. Then the door swung slowly open, and in the deep shadow, a figure of gigantic stature entered, paused beside his bed, and seized his wrist with a tremendous gripe.

For a time, unable to stir, he remained passive under its pressure. Then with a horrified struggle he awoke. There was no figure visible, but his wrist was actually compressed in a cold grasp, and, with a ghastly ejaculation, he sprang from his bed, and was released.

He had no means of lighting a candle; he had nothing for it but to bounce to the window, fling curtains and shutters wide, and admit the full flood of moonlight, which revealed the contents of the room, and showed that no figure but his own was there. But there were the marks of the grasp that had held him still visible. He secured his door, and made search, in a state of horror, but was convinced. There was no visible intruder in the chamber.

Now William got back into his bed. For the first time in his life he had experienced a paroxysm of that wild fear with which it had been so often his delight to trifle. He heard the clock at the stairhead strike hour after hour, and at last, after having experienced every stage in the subsidence of such horrors, fairly overcome by fatigue, he sunk to sleep.

How welcome and how beautiful shone the morning! Slanting by his window, the sunbeam touched the quivering jessamine leaves, and the clustering roses, and in the dewy air he heard the chirp and whistle of the happy birds. He threw up his window and breathed the perfumed air, and welcomed all the pleasant sounds of morning in that pleasant season.

"The cock he crew, Away then flew The fiends from the church-door."

And so the uncomfortable and odious shadows of the night winged their foul flight before these cheerful influences, and William Maubray, though he felt the want of his accustomed sleep, ran down the well-known stairs, and heard with a happy heart from Winnie Dobbs that his kind old aunt was ever so much better.

Doctor Drake had withdrawn from his uncomfortable bivouac, carrying with him his nightcap and slippers, and hastening to his toilet in the pleasant town of Saxton, where, no doubt, Miss Letty cross-questioned him minutely upon the occurrences of the night I have said before that the resources of Gilroyd were nothing very remarkable; still there was the Saxton Cricket Club, who practised zealously, and always welcomed William, whose hit to leg was famous, and even recorded as commendable in the annual volume of the great Mr. Lillywhite; where he was noted, in terms that perplexed Aunt Dinah, as a promising young bat, with a good defence. He fished a little; and he played at fives with young Trevor of Revington, whom nobody very much liked — the squire of Saxton, who assumed territorial and other airs that were oppressive, although Revington was only two thousand five hundred pounds a year; but in that modest neighbourhood, he was a very important person, and knew that fact very well.

He had of late distinguished Violet with a slight admiration, that ought to have been gratifying. Once or twice he paid old Miss Perfect a little neighbourly, condescending visit, and loitered a good deal about the garden, and that acre and a half of shrubbery, which she called "the grounds." He sometimes joined in the walk home from church, and sometimes in other walks; and Aunt Perfect was pleased and favourable, and many of the Saxton mothers and daughters were moved to envy and malice.

"I played to-day," said William, giving an account of his hours at tea to the ladies, "two rubbers of fives; with whom do you think?"

He stopped, smiling slily on Violet, who was steadfastly looking down on Miss Perfect's crest on her tea-spoon.

"Well, I'm sure you know by that unerring instinct which poets speak of," said William, "but it is hardly fair to ask you to name him."

Violet looked up, having blushed very prettily, but not very well pleased.

"Of course I mean Trevor — Vane Trevor — of Revington. It sounds very well. Trevor was two years my senior at school; he left at the end of the third half after I came; that makes him nearly twenty-five now. How old are you, Vi? — you'd make a very pretty mistress of Revington; yes, indeed, Vi, or anywhere else. Don't be vexed, but tell me exactly how old you are."

He tapped with his pencil on the table to hasten her answer, as he looked at her, smiling a little sadly.

“How old?” she repeated.

“Well?”

“Past seventeen. Why do you want to know?” she added laughing.

“Well, he’s not quite five-and-twenty yet; only twenty-four to your seventeen. Seven years is a very pretty difference.”

“What *are* you talking about, William? This kind of thing is thought very funny: it is very disagreeable. If people will talk nonsense, do let it be amusing. You used to be sometimes amusing.”

“That was long ago, when I told you ‘Sinbad the Sailor,’ and ‘The Romance of the Forest;’ before the romance of the shrubbery commenced.”

“Folly!” exclaimed Violet.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH MISS VIOLET SAYS WHAT SHE THINKS OF MR. VANE TREVOR, AND IS VIOLET NO LONGER.

“NOW, I tell you,” continued William Maubray, and he glanced at Aunt Dinah; but she was reading, with her gold spectacles on, the second of a series of old letters, which she had in an old stamped leather box beside her, and had forgotten all else. “You really must tell me what you think of Vane Trevor?”

Miss Vi fixed her glowing eyes full upon his for a moment, and then dropped them suddenly. His were full of their old, gentle, goodnatured mirth.

There was a little pause, and, suddenly looking up, she said rather petulantly:

“Think of him? Why, I suppose I think what everyone else does. I think him handsome; I think him agreeable; I think he has an estate; I think he looks like a gentleman; and I think he is the only man who appears in this neighbourhood that is not in one way or other a bore. Shall I sing you a song?.”

And with heightened colour and bright eyes, this handsome girl sat down to the piano, which had a cracked and ancient voice, like the reedy thrum of a hurdy-gurdy, contrasting quaintly with her own mellow tones, and she sang — nothing to the purpose, nothing with a sly, allegoric satire in it, but the first thing that came into her head — sweet and sad as a song of old times; and ancient Miss Perfect, for a verse or so, lowered her letter, and listened, smiling, with a little sigh; and William, listening also, fell into a brown study, as he looked on the pretty songstress, and her warblings mingled with his dreams.

“Thank you, little Vi,” said he, rising with a sudden smile, and standing beside her as the music ceased. “Very pretty — very sweet.”

“I am glad you like it, William,” she said, kindly.

“*William*, again!” he repeated.

“Well — *yes.”*

"And why not *Willie*, as it used to be?" he persisted. "Because it sounds foolish, somehow. I'm sure you think so. I do."

It seemed to him as, with a sad smile, he looked at her, thinking over the words that sounded so like a farewell, so light and cruel, too, that there yet was wisdom — that precocious wisdom with which nature accomplishes the weaker sex — in her decision; and something of approval lighted up his sad smile, and he said, with a little nod:

"I believe the young lady says wisely; yes, you are a wise little woman, and I submit."

Perhaps she was a little disappointed at his ready acquiescence; at all events she wound up with a loud chord on the piano, and, standing up, said:

"Yes, it sounds foolish, and so, indeed, I think does *William;* and people can't go on being children always, and talking nonsense; and you know we are no relations — at least that I know of — and I'll call you — yes I *will* — *Mr. Maubray.* People may be just as friendly, and yet — and yet call one another by their right names. And now, Mr. Maubray, will you have some tea?"

"No, thanks; no more tea tonight I'm sure it has lost its flavour. It would not taste like tea."

"What's the matter with the tea?" asked Miss Perfect, over the edge of her letter. "You don't like your tea, William? Is not it strong enough?"

"Quite; too much; almost bitter, and a little cold."

"Fancy, child," said Aunt Dinah, who apprehended a new attack on her tea-chest, and hated waste. "I think it particularly *good* this evening," and she sipped a little in evidence of her liking, and once more relapsed into reading.

"I can add water," said Violet, touching the little ivory handle of the tea-urn with the tip of her finger, and not choosing to apprehend William's allegory.

"No, thank you, Vi — Violet, I mean — Miss Darkwell; indeed, I forgot. What shall I read tonight?" and he strode listlessly to the little bookcase, whose polished surface flashed pleasantly to the flicker of the wood fire. "'Boswell's Johnson,'

'Sir Charles Grandison,'

'Bishop Horsley's Sermons,'

'Trimmer's Works,'

‘A Simple Story,’

‘Watts’ Sacred Songs,” Rasselas,’

‘Poems, by Alfred Tennyson.’”

His quiet voice as he read the names on the backs of Aunt Dinah’s miscellaneous collection, sounded changed and older, ever so much, in Violet’s ear. All on a sudden for both, a part of their lives had been cut off, and a very pleasant time changed irrevocably to a retrospect “I think ‘ Tennyson.’ What do you?” he asked, turning a smile that seemed faded now, but kindly as ever, upon her.

As the old name was gone, and the new intolerable, he compounded by calling her by none; and she, likewise, in her answer.

“Oh! yes, Tennyson, Tennyson, by all means; that is, if Miss Perfect wishes.”

“Yes — oh! to be sure; but haven’t you read it before?” acquiesced Miss Perfect.

William smiled at Violet, and said to Miss Dinah, “I think — and don’t you?” — this was to Vi, parenthetically, “that poetry is never heard fairly on a first reading. It resembles music — you must know it a little to enjoy it.”

“That’s just what I think,” said Violet, eagerly.

“Very good, young people,” said my aunt, with a little toss of her head. “For my part, I think there’s but one Book will bear repeated reading, and that is the Bible.”

“Not even ‘Elihu Bung?’” suggested William.

“There — read your poetry,” said Miss Perfect. “I shan’t interrupt; I’m reading these, looking back for the date of a family event.”

This was an exercise not unfrequently imposed on her by Henbane, who now and then made a slip in such matters, and thus perplexed and troubled Aunt Dinah, who had sometimes her secret misgivings about his accuracy and morality.

“What shall I read?” asked William in a lower tone. “Anything, ‘Mariana,’” she answered.

“The ‘Moated Grange,’” repeated William, and smiled. “‘The poetry of monotony.’ I could fancy, if a few pleasant faces were gone, this Gilroyd Hall, much as I like it, very like the Moated Grange.”

And without more preface he read that exquisite little poem through, and then leaned back in his chair, the book open upon the table; pretty Violet sat opposite, working at her crochet, in a reverie, as was he as he gazed on her.

"Where did she learn all that? How much wiser they are than we What a jolly ass *I* was at seventeen, and ail the fellows. What fools — weren't they? — in things like that; and by Jove! she's quite right, I could not go on *Vi-ing* her all my days, just because when she was a child she used to be here. They are certainly awfully wise in that sort of thing. Pretty head she has — busy, busy — quite a little world within it now, I dare say. What a wonder of wonders, that little casket! Pretty hair, awfully pretty; and the shape of her head, so pretty; yet the oval reminds me, right or wrong, of a serpent's head; but she has nothing of that in her, only the wisdom; yes, the wisdom, and, perhaps, the fascination. She'll make some fellow's heart sore yet; she'll make some great match, I dare say; but that's a long way off, eight years; yes, she'll be twenty-four then; time enough before her."

"Is there any cricket for tomorrow?" asked Vi on a sudden.

"No match. I'm going up to look at Revington. Trevor said he'd call for me early — eleven o'clock — for m*e,* mind; and you know I begin to feel an interest in Revington."

"Oh! it's very pretty, great old timber," she said, "and a handsome place, and a good estate — three thousand a year, only it owes some money. What an ambitious, audacious person I must be. I'm certain you think so, because it is quite plain I covet my neighbour's house, and his ox, and his ass, and everything that is his; and coveting, Dr. Mainwaring tells us, is the fountain-head of all iniquity, for how could a person so poor as I ever obtain all these fine things without fraud and chicanery?"

Miss Violet was talking a little recklessly and angrily, but she looked unusually handsome, her colour was so beautiful, and there was so strange a fire in her vexed eyes. What was the meaning of this half-suppressed scorn, and who its real object? How enigmatical they grow so soon as the summer hours of fascination, and of passion with its disguises and sorrows, in all their transient glow and beauty, approach — the season of hope, of triumph, and of aching hearts.

CHAPTER X.

VANE TREVOR IS DISCUSSED AND APPEARS.

It was in this mysterious turbulent frame of mind that old Winnie Dobbs, bearing the Bible and book of family prayers, surprised Miss Violet Darkwell, and recalled Aunt Dinah from the sound and fury of forty years ago, now signifying no more than the discoloured paper on which they were recorded.

"Dear me! can it be a quarter to ten already?" exclaimed Miss Perfect, plucking her watch from her side and inspecting it. "So it is; come in."

And fat Mrs. Podgers, the cook, and Tom, with his grimmest countenance, and the little girl with a cap on, looking mild and frightened.

So, according to the ancient usage of Gilroyd Hall, to William's lot fell the reading of the Bible, and to Aunt Dinah's that of the prayers, and then the little congregation broke up, and away went Vi to her bedroom, with old Winnie.

William was not worse, nor, I dare say, much better than other young Cambridge men of his day and college; but he liked these little "services" in which he officiated, and they entered into his serene and pleasant recollections of that sequestered habitation.

"Well, William dear, I thank God I am spared to be with you a little longer."

"Amen," he said, "you dear aunt, dear, dear old Aunt Dinah."

And they kissed very lovingly, and there war a silence, which Aunt Dinah in a few minutes broke by mentioning the very subject at that moment in his mind.

"You saw Violet a good deal grown — very pretty figure — in fact, I think her lovely; but we must not tell her so, you know. She has been very much admired, and a good, affectionate, amiable little soul she is. There's young Mr. Trevor. I can tell you people are beginning to talk about it. What do *you* think?" William set down his bedroom candle on the tea table, rubbed the apex of its extinguisher with the tip of his finger, and returned an answer answerless.

“He’s very good-looking; isn’t he? But he thinks a lot of himself; and don’t you think it would be an awful pity little Vi should be married so soon?”

“Then you think he means to ask her?” said Miss Perfect, her silver pencil-case to her chin, her head a little aside, and looking very curiously into her nephew’s eyes.

“I don’t know; I haven’t a notion. He said yesterday he thought her very pretty; but Trevor always talks like no end of a swell, and I really think he fancies a princess, or something of the sort, would hardly be good enough for him.”

“It would, of course, be a very good match for Vi,” said Miss Perfect, dropping her eyes, perhaps a little disappointed, and running her pencil-case back and forward slowly on the edge of William’s plated candlestick, from which they both seemed to look for inspiration; “but a girl so pretty as she may look higher than Mr. Trevor without presumption.”

“Yes, indeed, and there’s no hurry, Heaven knows.

I don’t think Trevor half good enough for her,” said William “Oh, I don’t say that, but — but more unlikely things have happened.”

“Does he — does he make *love* to her?” said William, who drew altogether upon the circulating library for his wisdom in those matters.

“He certainly admires her very much; he has been very attentive. I’m sure he likes her, and I can’t hear that he is anything but a straightforward, honourable young man.”

“I suppose he is,” said William; “I’m sure he’s that. And what does Violet — Miss Darkwell — say?”

“Say! Why, of course I can’t ask her to say anything till he speaks. I dare say she likes him, as why should she not? But that’s only conjecture, you know; and you are not to hint it to him, mind, if he should question or poke you on the subject.”

“Oh, no, certainly,” answered William, and there came a long pause. “But indeed, aunt, I don’t think Vane Trevor half good enough for her.”

“Oh! that’s for *them*, my dear, to settle. There’s nothing, in point of prudence, against it.”

“No — oh, no. Everything *very* well. Lucky fellow to be able to marry when he likes.”

"And — but I forgot you don't mind. You think there's nothing in it. Still I ma> tell you I have had — old Winnie and I — some answers."

"Table-rapping?" said William.

"A little *séance.* We sit down together, Winnie and I; and some responses, in my mind, can hardly refer to anything else, and most sweet and comforting they have been."

Once on this subject, my aunt was soon deep in it, and told her story of the toad which turned into a hand; whereupon William related his dream, and the evidences afforded by his waking senses of the reality of the visitation. My aunt was at once awestruck and delighted.

"Now, William, you'll read, I've no doubt, the wonderful experiences of others, having had such remarkable ones of your own. Since my hand was held in that spirit-hand — no doubt the same which seized yours — I have become accessible to impressions from the invisible world, such as I had no idea of before. You need not be uncomfortable or nervous. It is all benevolent — or, at worst, just. I've never seen or felt that hand but once; the relation is established for ever by a single pressure. I have satisfied Dr. Drake — a very intelligent man, and reasonable — convinced him, he admits. And now, dear William, there is another link between us; and if in the mysterious ways of Providence, you should after all be taken first, I shall have the happiness of communion with you. Goodnight, dear, and God bless you, and be careful to put out your candle."

So William departed, and notwithstanding Miss Perfect's grisly conversation, he slept soundly, and did not dream of the shadowy giant, nor even of Trevor and Violet.

Pleasant, listless Gilroyd Hall! thought William, as, after breakfast, he loitered up and down before the rich redbrick front of the old gabled house, with its profusion of small windows, with such thick, white sashes, and casings of white stone; and the pointed gables, with stone cornice and glittering weather-vane on the summit. That house, somehow, bore a rude resemblance to the old world dandyism which reigned in its younger days, and reminded William of the crimson coats, the bars of lace and quaint, gable-like cocked hats, which had, no doubt, for many a year passed in and out at its deep-porched door; where I could fancy lovers loitering in a charmed murmur, in summer shade, for an enchanted hour, till old Sir

Harry’s voice and whistle, and the pound of his crutch-handled cane, and the scamper and yelp of the dogs, were heard in the oak hall approaching.

Under the old chestnuts, clustered with ivy, Violet joined him.

“Well, how are we to-day? I think we were a little cross last night, weren’t we?” said William, with his old trick of lecturing little Vi.

“We! One of us may have been, but it was not I,” she answered.

“I think my watch is wrong. Did you happen to look at the clock as you passed?”

“Halfpast eleven.”

“Ah! so I thought. How many hours long, Miss— “(Vi he was going to say)— “Darkwell, are contained in half an hour’s waiting? The spirit of Mariana has come upon me:

‘She only said, “My life is dreary,”

“He cometh not,” she said;
She said, “I am a-weary, a-weary,
I would that I were dead!”’

Can’t you a little understand it, too? — not, of course, quite like me, but a little?”

Vi was not going to answer, but suddenly she changed her mind and said —

“I don’t know, but I think you were a great deal more agreeable when you were a schoolboy. I assure you, I’m serious. I think you’ve grown so tiresome and conceited. I suppose all young men in the universities are. ‘A little learning is a dangerous thing,’ you used to tell me, and I think I can now agree with you — at least it seems to make people vain and disagreeable.”

Maubray answered looking on her gently, but speaking as if in a pensive soliloquy, and wondering as he went along whether he had really turned into a coxcomb; fur he was one of those sensitive, because diffident souls on whom the lightest reproof tells, and induces self-examination.

“I don’t know,” he said, “that I’ve even got the little learning that qualifies for danger. I don’t think I am vain — that is, not a bit vainer than I used to be; but I’m sure I’m more disagreeable — that is, to you. My babble and dull jokes are very well for a child, but the child has grown up, and left childish things behind: and a young lady in her teens is more fastidious, and — and, in fact, is a sort of an angel whom I am not formed to talk to with a chance of being anything but a bore. Very unlearned, and yet a book-worm; very young and yet net very merry; not a bad fellow, I think, and yet, with hardly a friend on earth, and — by Jove! here comes Trevor at last.”

And Trevor entered the gate, and approached then.

CHAPTER XI.

UNDER THE CHESTNUTS.

VANE TREVOR was rather good-looking; a young gentleman of the slender and delicate type; his dark hair curled, and on his small forehead one of those tresses, twisted, barber-fashion, into a neat little Ionic volute, and his glossy whiskers were curled on each cheek into little rolls like pistol barrels. There was in his toilet something of elaboration and precision which was uncomfortable, and made one fear to shake hands with him, and wish him safely back again in his bandbox.

He approached simpering. There was a general air of May Fair — cameo studs, varnished boots, and lavender gloves — that had nothing of the rough and careless country in it.

"How do, Miss Darkwell — charming day, is not it? Everything really so fresh; you can't imagine — as I came along, and a — this, now really this little — a — *place,* it looks quite charming — quite, really, now — a — as you turn off the road, there's *everything* you know to *make* it charming." —

This latter period was delivered in a low tone, and with a gracious significance.

"How d'ye do, Maubray?"

"Quite well, thank you," said William, with a smile that had a flicker of unconscious amusement in it. Perhaps without knowing it, he was envying him at that moment. "He's a worse fool, by Jove! than I thought he was," was his mental criticism; but he felt more conscious of his clumsy shoes, and careless get-up. "That's the sort of thing they admire — why should a fellow be vexed — they can't help it — it's pure instinct."

"What delicious ground for croquet; positively I never saw anything so beautiful in my life. Do you play, Miss Darkwell?"

"Sometimes, at the Rectory — not here. The Miss Mainwarings play, and once or twice I've joined their party."

"But they have no ground there," insisted Mr. Trevor; "it's all on a slope. I happen to know it very well, because, in fact, it belongs to me. Old

Mainwaring pays me a pretty smart rent for it, at least he thinks so. Ha! ha! ha!" and Vane Trevor cackled gaily over his joke, such as it was.

"Do you play?" demanded Violet of William. "Croquet? — no, not much — just a little — once or twice — I'll do to fill a place if you want a very bad player."

"Oh, never mind, we'll pull you through, or push you — ha, ha, ha! — we will, indeed. You'll learn it a — in no time, it's so simple — isn't it, Miss Darkwell? And then if you can get up one of those Miss Mainwarings — awfully slow girls, I'm told, but they will do to play with *you,* Maubray, just by way of ballast, he's such a fast fellow — ha, ha, ha! You'll want a — a slow partner, eh?"

"Yes, and *you'll* want a clever one, so I surrender Miss Darkwell, just to balance the game," answered William, who was a little combative that morning.

"Egad, I should like uncommonly to be balanced that way, I can tell you; much better, I assure you, Miss Darkwell, than the sort of balancing I've been at the last two days, with my steward's books — ha, ha, ha! Awful slow work, figures. A regular dose of arithmetic. Upon my honour you'd pity me if you knew; you really would."

"You really would," echoed William, "if you knew how little he knows of it."

"Come, now, old fellow, none of your chaff, but get the balls and hoops, if Miss Darkwell will allow you, and we will choose the ground."

"Lots of ground — I'll choose that if you like — only *you'll* just run and get the hoops and balls, for we have none here," answered Maubray.

"No croquet!" ejaculated Mr. Trevor, expanding his lavender kid fingers, and elevating his eyebrows. "I thought everyone had croquet now — I mean, you know, the mallet-things, and hoops and balls, — and — and those little painted sticks, you know — and what are we to do, Miss Darkwell?"

"I really don't know. It's quite true; and besides we have not got Miss Mainwaring, you forget."

"Oh you'll send Maubray, won't you, to fetch her?"

"Yes," said Maubray, "I'll go with great pleasure, if Miss Darkwell wishes; but as I never saw the young lady before, I'm not quite sure that she'll come away with me."

"Well no — ha, ha, ha! — I don't think she'd run away with Maubray at *first sight?*"

"Particularly to come to *you?* replied Maubray.

"There now, let's be serious — there's a little fellow I saw at your gate — yes, there he is, Miss Darkwell. Suppose you let me send him to Revington. I've no end of those things there; and I'll give him a note to Sparks, and we shall have them in no time."

"A long time, I'm afraid," objected Violet.

"No, I assure you; a mere nothing; not twenty minutes. Do, pray, allow me."

And he wrote with a pencil, on the back of a card, an order to Sparks for the croquet apparatus, and away trotted the messenger.

"Three can play, you know, or two for that matter, as well as twenty, and so we can do quite well without troubling Miss Mainwaring."

There was now a knocking at the drawingroom window, where William had seen dimly through the glass, the form of Aunt Dinah at her knitting, with Psyche in her new collar, seated by her. All looked towards the signal, and Miss Perfect threw up the window and said:

"How do you do, Mr. Trevor? what a sweet morning."

"Perfectly charming," responded the master of Revington, with a tender emphasis and smiling toward Miss Perfect with his hat in his hand; and Aunt Dinah smiled and nodded again in return.

"William, I want you for a moment — here, dear, you need not come in."

The instinct which makes old ladies afford a dole now and then of a few minutes to lovers, is in harmony with the general rule of mercy and mitigation which alleviates every human situation.

As soon as Miss Dinah raised the window, William saw standing in the chiaro-oscuro of the apartment, a tall and rather handsome old clergyman. A little rusty was his black suit — a little dust was on his gaiters. It must have been he whom William had mistaken for the attorney who was to have visited his aunt that morning.

He had seen him walk his nag up to the door about an hour ago, and dismount.

The old clergyman was looking observantly and kindly on William; and, nodding to him, and with her thin hand extended toward her nephew, she said, “This is he!” with a proud smile in her old eyes, for she thought William the handsomest fellow alive.

“Happy to make your acquaintance, Sir,” said the cleric stepping forward and shaking William’s hand. “I knew your father, and grandfather, and your aunt and I are very old friends; and I’ve just been telling her how happy I shall be— “

“This is Doctor Wagget, my very good and kind old friend; you may have heard me speak of him often, I dare say,” interposed my aunt “And your reading, Sir, has been rather desultory, your aunt tells me, like my own, Sir — ha, ha, ha! We had rather give our time than pay it; read what is not exacted of us than what is. But I don’t know, Miss Perfect,” continued the doctor, turning to that lady, as if they were in consultation upon William’s case, “reading — that is in the case of a man who thinks — and I am sure our young friend here thinks for himself — resembles the browsing of cattle: they choose their own herbage, and the particular flowers and grasses that answer their special conditions best, eh? and so they thrive. Instinct directs us creatures, in the one as in the other; and so we read, he and I — ha, ha! what best nourishes, you see — what we can assimilate and enjoy. For plodding fellows, that devour the curriculum set before them — neither more nor less — are, you see, stall-fed, bulkier fellows; higher priced in the market; but they haven’t our flavour and texture. Oh, no — ha, ha — eh?”

The ecclesiastic was cheery and kindly, and in his manner was a curious mixture of energy and simplicity which William Maubray liked.

The conclusion of this little harangue he had addressed to William Maubray; and I am afraid that Miss Perfect was more interested by the picture on the lawn; for without reference to the doctor’s subject, she desired to know looking with a pleased inquisitiveness at the young people whether they were going to take a walk, or *what?* And prolonged her little *tête-à-tête* with William over the window-stool.

When William Maubray looked up again at Doctor Wagget, that divine had picked up a book, a trick of his, like that of the cattle from whom his illustration was borrowed, and who employ every moment’s pause at the wayside, in a pluck at the nearest foliage or turf of grass; and with the intimation, “you may as well join them,” Miss Perfect dismissed her nephew.

CHAPTER XII.

CROQUET.

WHILE William Maubray was thus employed, Mr. Trevor agreeably accosted Miss Violet.

"Now we are to choose the ground, you know, Miss Darkwell — you are to choose it, in fact. I think, don't you, it looks particularly smooth just there. By Jove it does! — really, now, just like a billiard-table, behind those a — those a — what-d'ye-callem's — the evergreens there."

"I think it does, really," said Miss Vi, gliding very contentedly into his ambuscade. "There's a little shade too."

"Yes, lots of shade; I hate the sun. I'm afraid my deeds are darkness, as Dr. Mainwaring says. There's only one sort of light I really like, now, upon my honour — the light — the light you — you know, the light that comes from Miss Darkwell's eyes — ha, ha! upon my honour."

The idea was not quite original, perhaps, but Miss Darkwell blushed a little, and smiled, as it were, on the leaves, and wondered how soon the messenger with the croquet things would return. And Mr. Trevor consulted his watch, and said he would allow him a quarter of an hour more, and added that he would willingly allow the poor little beggar an hour, or any time; for his part, the — the time, in fact, went only too fast for him.

Miss Perfect, looking over her spectacles, and then with elevated chin through them, said:

"Where have they gone to? can you see?"

"I don't know — I suppose sauntering about — they can't be very far," answered William, looking a little uneasily. And somehow forgetting that he was in the midst of a dialogue with Aunt Dinah, he strode away, whistling a little air, anxiously, in the direction in which he had left them.

"We have such a charming piece of ground here," exclaimed Violet, on whose cheeks was a flush, and in whose beautiful eyes a light which Maubray did not like.

"First rate; capital, by Jove! it is," exclaimed Trevor in corroboration.

“I don’t see anything very wonderful about it. I think the ground on the other side of these trees better, decidedly; and this is out of sight of the windows,” said William, a little drily.

“We don’t want a view of the windows — do we?” asked Mr. Trevor, with an agreeable simplicity, of Miss Darkwell. “The windows? I really did not think of them; but, perhaps, Mr. Maubray wishes to be within call for lunch.”

Mr. Trevor laughed pleasantly at this cruel sally.

“Well, yes, that, of course,” said William, “and, beside, my aunt might want to speak to me again, as she did just now; and I don’t want to be out of sight, in case she should.”

This was very bitter of William; and, perhaps, Miss Violet was a little put out, as she certainly was a little more flushed, and a short silence followed, during which, looking and walking slowly toward the gate, she asked, “ Is that the boy with the croquet?”

“Yes — no — *yes,* by Jove, it *is!* What wonderful eyes yours are, Miss Darkwell!”

The latter remark was in a tender undertone, the music of which was accompanied by the long-drawn screak of the iron gate, as the boy entered with a holland bag, mallets, and hoops.

The hoops were hardly placed, when Miss Perfect once more knocked at the window and beckoned.

“Aunt Dinah wants me again,” said William, and he went to the window, mallet in hand.

The old clergyman had gone away, and I think Aunt Dinah only wanted to give the lovers a few minutes.

“Villikens and his Dinah,” said Mr. Trevor, and exploded in repeated cachinations over his joke. “I vote we call him Villikens — capital name, isn’t it? — I really do. But, by Jove, I hope the old lady won’t go on calling him up from his game every minute. We’d have been a great deal better at the other side of the trees, where we were going to play, don’t you think?”

“He is coming at last,” said Miss Violet.

“Shall we be partners, you and I? Do let us, and give him two balls,” urged Mr. Trevor, graciously, and a little archly.

“Well, I think that’s dull, rather, isn’t it? one playing with two balls,” remonstrated Miss Darkwell.

And before the debate could proceed William Maubray had arrived. —

“Everyone for himself, eh?” said Trevor; and so the game set in, Trevor and William Maubray playing rather acrimoniously, and making savage roquets upon one another; and Miss Darkwell — though William dealt tenderly with her — was hard upon him, and, so far as her slender force would go, knocked him about inconveniently.

“Capital roquet, Miss Darkwell,” Trevor would cry, as William’s ball bounded away into perspective, and his heart felt sore, as if her ungrateful mallet had smitten it; and his reprisals on Trevor were terrific.

Thus, amid laughter, a little hypocritical, and honest hard knocks, the game proceeded, and Miss Darkwell, at its close, was the winner.

William Maubray could lose as goodhumouredly as any fellow at other games, but he was somehow sore and angry here. He was spited by Violet’s partial dealing. Violet, how unnatural! Little Vi! his bird! his property, it seemed, leagued with that coxcomb to whack him about — to make a butt and a fool of him.

“I’m not going to play any more. I’ll sit down here, if you like, and do” — *gooseberry*, he was on the point of saying, for he was very angry, and young enough, in his wrath, to talk away like a schoolboy— “and do audience, or rather spectator; or, if you choose, Trevor, to take that walk over the Warren you promised me, I’m ready. I’ll do exactly whatever Miss Darkwell prefers. If she wishes to play on with you, I’ll remain, and if she has had enough of us, I’ll go.”

“I can’t play — there is not time for another game,” said Miss Vi, peeping at her watch. “My aunt will want me in a few minutes about that old woman — old Widow Grey. I — I’m afraid I must go. Goodbye.”

“Awfully sorry! But, perhaps you can? Well, I suppose, no help for it,” said Trevor.

And they walked slowly to the door, where Miss Vi pronounced the conventional invitation to enter, which was, however, wistfully declined, and Trevor and William Maubray set out upon their walk, and Miss Vi, in the drawing room, sat down on the oldfashioned window-seat, and looked out, silent, and a little sulkily after them.

Miss Perfect glanced over her spectacles, with a stealthy and grave inquisitiveness, at the pretty girl.

“Well, dear, they went away?” she said, after a silence.

"Oh! yes; I was tired playing, and, I think, William wanted to go for a walk."

"There seemed to be a great deal of fun over the game," said Aunt Dinah, who wanted to hear everything.

"Yes, I believe so; but one tires of it. I do, I know:" and saying this, Violet took up her novel, and Aunt Dinah scrutinised her, from time to time, obliquely, over her crochet needles, and silence reigned in the drawingroom.

"Very pretty Miss Darkwell is. I quite envy you. Your cousin, isn't she?" said Trevor, graciously. He felt that William would be flattered by the envy, even playful, of Vane Trevor, Esq., of Revington.

"Cousin, or something, someway or other connected or related, I don't know exactly. Yes, I believe she is very well. She was prettier as a child, though. Isn't there a short way to the Warren?"

"Yes, I'll take you right. She looks, I'd say, about seventeen."

"Yes, I dare say," answered William. "Do you know those Miss Mainwarings — Doctor Mainwaring's daughters?"

But it would not do. Vane Trevor would go on talking of Violet Darkwell, in spite of William's dry answers and repeated divergences, unaccountably to that philosophical young gentleman's annoyance.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNSOCIABLE.

AT dinner, in the parlour of Gilroyd Hall, there was silence for some time. William looked a little gloomy, Violet rather fierce and stately, and Aunt Dinah eyed her two guests covertly, without remark, but curiously. At last she said to William —

"You took a walk with Mr. Trevor?"

"Yes, a tiresome one," he answered.

"Where?"

"All about and round that stupid Warren — six or seven miles," answered William.

"How very fatiguing!" exclaimed Violet, compassionately, as if to herself.

"No, not the exercise; that was the only thing that made it endurable," answered William, a little crossly. "But the place is uglier than I fancied, and Trevor *is* such a donkey."

Aunt Dinah, with her eyes fixed on William's, made a nod and a frown, to arrest that line of remark, which, she felt, might possibly prejudice Vi, and could do no possible good. And Miss Vi, looking all the time on the wing of the chicken on her plate, said, "The salt, please," and nothing more.

"Vi, my dear," said Miss Perfect, endeavouring to be cheery, "he asked my leave last Sunday to send you an Italian greyhound. He has two, he says, at Revington. Did he mention it to-day?"

"Perhaps he did. I really forget," said Miss Vi, carelessly, laying down her fork, and leaning back, with a languid defiance, for as she raised her eyes, she perceived that William was smiling.

"I know what you mean," she said, with a sudden directness to William. "You want me — that is, I *think* you want me to think *you* think— "

"Oh! do stop one moment. There are so many 'thinks' there. I'm quite bewildered among them all. Let's breathe an instant. You think I want to make you think that I think. Yes, now I have it, I *think*. Pray go on."

Polite!" said Miss Vi, and turned toward Aunt Dinah.

"Well, no," said William, for the first time laughing a little like himself; "it was not polite, but very rude and illbred, and I'm very sorry; and I assure you," he continued more earnestly, "I should be very angry, if any one else had made the stupid speech that I have just made: and, really, I believe it is just this — you have been too patient with me, and allowed me to go on lecturing you like an old tutor — and — and — really, I'm certain I've been a horrid bore."

Vi made no reply, but looked, and, no doubt, thought herself more illused for his apologies.

After tea she played industriously, having avowed a little cold, which prevented her singing. William had asked her. He turned over the leaves of a book, as he sat back in an elbow-chair, and Aunt Dinah was once more deep in her old box of letters, with her gold spectacles on.

They were as silent a party as could be fancied; more silent than at dinner. Still, the pleasant light of fire and candle — the handsome young faces and the kindly old one — and the general air of oldfashioned comfort that pervaded the apartment, made the picture pleasant; and the valses and the nigger ditties, with snatches of Verdi, and who knows what composer beside, made the air ring with a merry medley, which supplied the lack of conversation.

To William, with nothing but his book to amuse him, time moved slowly enough. But Violet had many things to think of; and one could see that her eyes saw other scenes and shapes far away, perhaps, from the music, and that she was reading to herself the romance that was unrolled within her pretty girlish head.

So prayers came, and William read the chapter; and I am afraid his thoughts wandered, and he felt a little sore and affronted, he could not tell why, for no one had illused him; and, when their devotions were over, Miss Vi took her candle, and bid grannie goodnight, with an embrace and a kiss, and William with a nod and a cold little smile, as he stood beside the door, having opened it for her.

He was growing formal in spite of himself, and she quite changed. What heartless, cruel creatures these pretty girls are!

She had quite vanished up the stairs, and he still held the door-handle in his fingers, and stood looking up the vacant steps, and, as it were, listening to distant music. Then, with a little sigh, he suddenly closed the door, and sat down drowsily before the fire, and began to think that he ought to return to his Cambridge chambers, his books, and monastic life: and he thought how fortunate those fellows were, who, like Trevor — what a goose that fellow is! — were born to idleness, respect, and admiration.

"Money! — d — n money — curse it! I wish I had a lot of it!" and William clutched the poker, but the fire did not want poking, and he gave it a rather vicious knock upon the bar, which startled Miss Perfect, and recalled his own thoughts from unprofitable speculations, upon the preposterous injustice of Fate, and some ultimate state of poetical compensation, in which scholars and men of mind, who played all sorts of games excellently, and noodles, who never did anything decently — in fact, he and Trevor — would be dealt with discriminately, and with common fairness.

"Don't, dear William, pray, make such a clatter. I'm *so* nervous."

"I beg a thousand pardons. I'm so stupid."

"Well, it does not signify — an accident — but don't mind touching the fire-irons," said Miss Perfect; "and how did your walk with Mr. Trevor proceed? Did he talk of anything?"

"Oh! didn't he? Fifty things. He's a wonderful fellow to talk, is Trevor," said William, looking with half-closed eyes into the fire.

"Oh, yes," persisted Aunt Dinah; "but was there anything — anything particular — anything that could interest us?"

"Next to nothing that could interest anyone," said William, uncommunicatively.

"Well, it would interest *me,* if he talked of Violet," said Aunt Dinah, coming directly to the point. *"Did he*?"

"Of Violet? Yes, I believe he did," answered William, rather reluctantly.

"Well, and why did not you say so? Of course, you knew that's what I meant," said Miss Perfect.

"How could I know, auntie?"

"I think, William Maubray, you are a little disagreeable tonight."

William, at these words, recollected that there was truth in the reproof. His mood was disagreeable to himself, and, therefore, to others.

"My dear auntie, I'm very sorry. I'm sure I have been — not a little, but *very* — and I beg your pardon. What was it? Yes — about Violet. He did, a great deal. In fact he talked about her till he quite tired me."

"He admires her, evidently. Did he talk of her good looks? She *is,* you know, extremely pretty," said Aunt Dinah.

"Yes, he thinks her very pretty. She *is* very pretty. In fact, I don't think — judging by the women who come to church — there is a good-looking girl, except herself, in this part of the world; and she would be considered pretty anywhere — *very* pretty."

"Revington is a very nice place, and the Trevors a good old family. The connection would be a very desirable one: and I — though, of course, not knowing, in the least, whether the young man had any serious intentions — I never alluded to the possibility to Vi herself, Yet, I do think she likes him."

"I should not wonder," said William.

"And he talked pretty frankly?" continued Aunt Dinah.

"I suppose so. He did not seem to have anything to conceal; and he always talks a great deal, an enormous quantity;" and William yawned, as it seemed, over the recollection.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SUNNY MORNING.

"I SUPPOSE, if he likes her, there's nothing to conceal in that?" challenged Miss Perfect.

"No, of course," replied William, spiritedly; "I think she's a thousand times too good for him, *every* way — that's what I think; and I wonder, young as she is, Vi can be such a fool. What can she see in him? He has got two thousand a-year, and that's all you can say for him."

"I don't know that — in fact, he strikes me as a very pretty young man, quite apart from his property," said Aunt Dinah, resolutely; "and I could quite understand a young girl's falling in love with him."

William, leaning with his elbow on the chimneypiece, smiled a little bitterly, and said, quietly, "I dare say."

"I don't say, mind, that she *is.* I don't know the least, whether she cares twopence about him," said Aunt Dinah.

"I hope she doesn't," rejoined William.

"And why so?" asked Aunt Dinah.

"Because, I'm perfectly certain he has not the least notion of ever asking her to marry him. He's *mi* thinking seriously about her, and never *will?* replied he.

"Well, it's nothing to vaunt of. You need not talk as if you wished her to be mortified," said Aunt Dinah.

"*I!* — I wish no such thing, I assure you; but, even if she admires and adores the fellow all you say, still I can't wish her his wife — because I'm sure he's not the least worthy of her. I assure you he's no better than a goose. You don't know him — you *can't* — as the fellows in the same school did — and Violet ought to do fifty times better."

"You said he does not think seriously about her," said Miss Perfect. "Remember, we are only talking, you and I together, and I assure you I never asked her whether she liked him or not, nor hinted a possibility of anything, as you say, serious coming of it; but what makes you think the young man disposed to trifle?"

"I didn't say to trifle," answered William; "but every fellow will go on like that where there's a pretty girl, and no one supposes they mean anything. And from what he said to-day, I would gather that he's thinking of some swell, whenever he marries, which he talks of like a thing so far away as to be nearly out of sight; in fact, nothing could be more contrary to any sign of there being any such notion in his head — and there isn't. I assure you he has no more idea, at present, of marrying than I have."

"H'm!" was the only sign of attention which Aunt Dinah emitted, with closed lips, as she looked gloomily into her work-basket, I believe for nothing.

William whistled "Rule Britannia," in a low key the little oval portrait of the Very Rev. Simeon Lewis Perfect, Dean of Crutch Friars, the sainted and ascetic parent of the eccentric old lady, who was poking in her work-basket, his own maternal grandfather; and a silence ensued, and the conversation expired.

Next morning, William, returning from his early saunter in the fields, saw the graceful head of Violet peeping through the open window of the parlour, through the jessamine and roses that clustered round it Her eyes glanced on him, and she smiled and nodded.

"Uncertain as the weather!" thought he, as he smiled and kissed his hand, approaching, "a lowering evening yesterday, and now so sunny a morning."

"How do you do, Miss Violet? you said you wanted a water-lily, so I found two in my morning's ramble, and here they are."

"How beautiful. Thank you very much. Where did you find them?" said Vi, quite glowing.

"In the Miller's Tarn," he answered. "I'm so glad you like them."

"Quite beautiful! The Miller's Tarn?"

She remembered that she had mentioned it yesterday as a likely place, but it was two miles away; four miles there and back, for a flower. It deserved her thanks, and she did thank him; and reminded him in tone and look of that little Vi of other years, very pleasantly yet somehow sadly.

"I mean to return to Cambridge tomorrow," said William, a little regretfully; he had glanced round at the familiar scene; "and I am sorry to leave so soon."

"And *must* you go?" asked Violet.

“Not quite *must,* but I think I ought. If I had brought with me some papers I have been transcribing for Doctor Sprague, I might have stayed a little longer, but they are locked up and he wants the copy on Tuesday, and so I can’t help it.”

“It was hardly worth while coming, Poor grannie will miss you very much.”

“And you, not at all.”

“I? Oh, yes, of course we shall all miss you.”

“Some, but not you, Vi.”

The old “Vi” passed quite unnoticed.

“I, and *why* not I?”

“Because your time is so pleasantly occupied.”

“I don’t know what you mean, said the young lady coldly, with a little toss of her head. “More riddles, I suppose.”

“Mine are poor riddles; very easily found out. Are we to have croquet to-day?”

“I’m sure I can’t tell,” replied she.

“Did not Trevor tell you he was coming here at eleven?” asked William.

“I don’t recollect that he said anything about coming to-day,” she answered carelessly.

“I did not say *to-day*,” said William provokingly.

“You did. I’m nearly certain. At all events I *understood* it, and really it does not the least signify.”

“Don’t be vexed — but he told me he had settled with you to come here to-day, at eleven, to play as he did yesterday,” said William.

“Ho! then I suppose I have been telling fibs as usual? I remark I never do anything right when *you* are here. You can’t think how pleasant it is to have some one by you always insinuating that you are about something shabby,”

“You put it in a very inexcusable light,” said William, laughing. “It may have been a vaunt of Trevor’s, for I think he’s addicted to boasting a little; or a misapprehension, or — or an indistinctness; there are fibs logical and fibs ethical, and fibs logical *and* ethical; but you don’t read logic, nor care for metaphysics.”

“Nor metaphysicians,” she acquiesced.

“Well,” said William, “he says he’s coming at eleven.”

“I think we are going to have prayers,” interrupted Violet, turning coldly from the window, through which William saw the little congregation of Gilroyd Hall assembling at the row of chairs by the parlour door, and Aunt Dinah’s slight figure gliding to the corner of the chimneypiece, to the right of the Very Rev. Simeon Lewis Perfect, sometime Dean of Crutch Friars, where the Bible and Prayer-book lay, and in the shadow her golden spectacles glimmered like a saintly glory round her chaste head.

So William hastened to do his office of deacon, and read the appointed chapter; and their serene devotions over, the little party of three, with the windows open, and the fragrance and twitterings of that summer-like morning entering through those leafy apertures, sat down to breakfast, and William did his best to entertain the ladies with recollections lively and awful of his college life.

“Halfpast nine, Miss Violet; don’t forget eleven,” said William, leaning by the window-frame, and looking out upon the bright and beautiful landscape. “I’ll go out just now and put down the hoops.”

“Going to play again to-day,” enquired Miss Perfect briskly; “charming morning for a game — is he coming, William?”

“Yes, at eleven,”

“H’m!” murmured Aunt Dinah, in satisfactory rumination. —

And William, not caring to be drawn into another discussion of this interesting situation, jumped from the window upon the sward, and strolled away toward the river.

CHAPTER XV.

DINNER AT REVINGTON

TREVOR did appear, and was received smilingly; and Aunt Dinah came out and sat a little apart on the rustic seat, and looked on cheerfully, the day was so very charming. Perhaps she fancied it a case for a chaperone, and being a little more in evidence, than a seat in the drawingroom window would make her, and with her work, and with Psyche at her feet, she pre sided very cheerily.

When, after two or three games, Trevor was taking his leave, Miss Violet Darkwell having, notwithstanding various nods and small frowns from grannie, persisted in announcing that she was tired, and had beside a long letter to write before Tom left for the town, the master of Revington said — (he and Maubray were knocking the balls about at random) —

"I say, Maubray, you must come over to Revington and have a mutton chop, or something. You really must; an old schoolfellow, you know; and I want to talk to you a bit, upon my honour I do. I'm totally alone, you know, at present, and you must come."

"But I'm going tomorrow, and this is my last evening here," said William, who felt unaccountably queer and reluctant.

What could Trevor want to talk to him about? There was something in Trevor's look and manner a little odd and serious — he fancied even embarrassed. Perhaps it is some nonsense about Vi!

"I want him to come and dine with me, Miss Perfect, and he says you can't spare him," said Trevor, addressing that lady. "I really do. I've no one to talk to. Do tell him to come."

"Certainly," said Aunt Dinah, with an imperious little nod to William Maubray. "*Go,* William, my dear, we shall see you tonight, and tomorrow morning. He'll be very happy I'm sure," said Aunt Dinah, who, like William Maubray possibly, anticipated a revelation.

So William, having no excuses, did walk over to Revington to dine. There was almost a pain at his heart as he paused for a moment at the stile, only one field away, and saw pretty Vi on the dark green grass, looking at the flowers, with little Psyche frisking beside her, and the kindly old front of Gilroyd Hall, and its lofty chestnuts in the sad evening light, and he sighed, thinking— "Why won't things stay as they are, as they *were?* What is the drift of this perpetual mutation? Is it really progress? Do we improve? Don't we" (he would have said Violet?) "grow more selfish and less high-minded? It is all a beautiful decay, and the end is death."

Violet was plainly intent on her flowers; she had her hoe and her rake, and her movements somehow were so pretty that, unseen, he paused for another moment.

"It is a blessed thing to have so little affection as that pretty creature; old times are nothing for her, and I, like a fool, yearn after them. The future for her no doubt looks all brilliant; for me it is a story, to the end of which I dare not look, and the pleasant past is a volume shut up and over; she is little Vi and Violet no longer, and even Miss Darkwell will very soon be like the song of a dead bird — a note only remembered; and I suppose I shall bring back the news tonight, a message from Mr. Vane Trevor, of Revington, to say that he lays his heart and his title-deeds at her feet. It's all over: I look on it as all settled."

Just at these words the edge of the red sun sank behind the hills, and the last level beams of sunset gave place to the tender gray of twilight, except on the uplands of Revington, where they lingered for a few seconds.

"Ay," said William allegorising; "the shade for William Maubray; the golden light of life for Vane Trevor!

Vane Trevor of Revington! William Maubray of —— nothing at all! — charming contrast."

And looking still on Gilroyd Hall, and the fading image of Violet Darkwell and Psyche frisking about, no longer white, but a moving gray spot on the sloping grass, he said, touching his fingertips to his lip, and waving them lightly towards her, "Goodbye, little Vi; goodbye, wicked little Vi; goodbye, dear, wicked little Vi, and may God bless you, you darling!"

So with a sigh he turned and walked up to Revington. It is a good ancestral looking place, only a little too large for the estate as it now is. The Trevors had parted from time to time with many acres, and a house upon a scale which would have corresponded with three times their income, was rather a tax upon what remained.

“I never liked this place,” thought William as the iron gate clanged behind him; “I always thought it gloomy, and stingy, and pompous. I wish he had let this dinner alone, I’d have been pleasanter at home, though it’s as well, perhaps, to hear what he has to say.

I think he *has* something to say; but, hang it, why could not he tell it as well at Gilroyd, and to the people it concerns? why need he bring *me* this stupid walk up his hill?” And William as he talked was switching the laurel leaves at his side with his cane, and leaving here and there half a leaf or a whole one on the gravel, and sometimes half a dozen — not quite unconsciously; there was something of defiance, I am afraid, in this trespass.

William came in the hall was not lighted; he was received in the dusk by a serious and rather broad gentleman in black, who took his hat and cane with a bow, led him through an anteroom, illuminated dismally by a single lamp, and announced his name at the drawing room, where Vane Trevor received him, advancing from the hearthrug to the middle of the room, in an unexceptionable evening toilet, and in French boots, and shook hands with just a little inclination which implied something of state, though smilingly performed.

Mr. Trevor was very conscious of the extent of the mansion of Revington, of the scale of the rooms, of the pictures, and in short of everything that was grand about him.

William was a little disgusted and rather uncomfortable, and ate his soup, and cutlets, and kickshaws, gloomily, while Trevor, leaning upon his elbow, talked away with a conscious superiority that was at once depressing and irritating.

They had a jug of claret — not the best even in Trevor’s cellar, I am afraid — after dinner, and sat facing the fire, and sipping that nectar.

“Snug little room this,” said Trevor, looking along *the* ceiling with his napkin over his knee, and his claret glass in his fingers. “It isn’t the parlour, only a sort of breakfast-room. The parlour, you know, is a — it’s considered a handsome room. Thirty-five feet by twenty.”

“Yes, I know,” said William, with a dry carelessness.

“Ah! well, yes — I dare say. A good many people — it’s an old place, rather — do know something about Revington.”

‘‘Especially those who have lived the greater part of ‘their lives within half a mile of it,” rejoined William.

“Ah, ha! — yes; to be sure; I forgot you have been so constantly at Gilroyd. What a nice little bit of a thing it is. I could fancy growing quite in love with it — isn’t it?”

“Yes,” said William, shortly, and filled his glass, and drank it in a hurry. He fancied that Trevor was about to come to the point.

CHAPTER XVI.

OVER THEIR CLARET.

"GREAT fun, croquet, isn't it? Awful fun with pretty girls," exclaimed Vane Trevor, rising, and standing on the hearthrug, with his back to the fire, and his glass in his hand, and simpering agreeably with his chin in the air. *"I* think it capital fun, I know. There's so much cheating — ha, ha! — isn't there? — and such lots of — of — whispering and conspiring — and — and — all that sort of thing, you know; and the girls like it awfully. At Torhampton we had capital games, and such glorious ground. Do you know the Torhamptons?"

"The Marquess? — no, of course I don't; how should I?" said William with a little laugh of disgust.

"Oh! well, I thought a — but Lady Louisa, she is so sweetly pretty; I was told off pretty often to play with her and we *had* such fun knocking the fellows about. Capital player and awfully clever — they're all clever — one of the cleverest families in England they're thought; the old lady is *so* witty — you can't imagine — and such a pleasant party staying there. I was almost the only fellow not a swell, by Jove, among them," and he ran his eye along his handsome cornices, with a sort of smile that seemed to say something different. "I fancy they wish to be civil, however, from something Lady Fanny said — I rather fancy they have an idea of putting up Lord Edward — you know, for the county, but don't let that go further, and I suppose they thought I might be of use. Won't you have some more claret?"

"I don't know them — I don't understand these things; I don't care if all the Marquesses in England were up the chimney," said William, cynically, throwing himself back in his chair, with his hands in his pockets, and looking sulkily into the fire.

"Well — ha, ha! — that need not prevent your filling your glass, eh?" laughed Trevor, graciously and in dulgently, as though he belonged himself to that order of Marquesses of whom Maubray spoke so slightly, and forgave him.

“Thanks; I will,” and so he did, and sipped a little; and after a little silence he asked with a surly quietude, “And why don’t you marry that lady — what’s her name —— *Louisa* — if she liked you?”

“It doesn’t *follow* that she likes me, and you know there are difficulties; and even if she did, it does not follow that I like *her;* don’t you see?” and he cackled in gay self-complacency; “that is, of course, I mean liking in the way you mean.”

Again this desultory conversation flagged for a little time, and Trevor, leaning on the chimneypiece, and looking down on William, remarked profoundly —

“It’s odd — isn’t it? — when you come to think of it, how few things follow from one another; I’ve observed it in conversation — almost nothing, by Jove!”

“Nothing from nothing, and nothing remains,” said William drowsily, to the fire, repeating his old arithmetical formula.

“And about marrying and that sort of thing; seriously, you know — your glass is empty again; do have some more.”

So William poured a little into his glass and his heart seemed to stop and listen, although he looked as if he only half heard, and was weary of the subject.

“And as we were saying, about marrying — and, by-the-bye, Maubray, it’s the sort of thing would just answer you, a quiet fellow — why don’t you think about it, old fellow, eh?”

It was a way Trevor had of always forgetting those little differences of circumstance which, in contrast, redounded to his importance, and he asked such questions, of course, quite innocently.

“You know very well I couldn’t,” said William, poking the fire, unbidden, with a few angry stabs. “How the devil can a fellow marry in college, and without a shilling?”

“Ah, ah, it isn’t *quite* so bad; come! But of course there is a difference, and, as you say, there’s lots of time to look about — only if a fellow is really spooney on a girl — I mean awfully spooney, the big wigs say, don’t they? — the best thing a fellow going to the bar can do is to marry, and have a wife and lots of babbies — it makes them work so hard — doesn’t it? You’re going to the bar, you say, and that is the way to get on, eh?”

"I'm glad there's any way, but I don't mean to try that," murmured William, a little bitterly, and after a pause, during which who knows what a dance his fancy led him? "I know that sort of talk very well; but I never could see what right a fellow has to carry off a poor girl to his den merely that her hunger, and misery, and cries may stimulate him to get on at the bar; and the fact is, some fellows are slaves, and some can do just as they please; and life is damnably bitter for some, and very pleasant for others, and that's the whole story; you can marry whenever you please, and I can't."

"I'm afraid it's a true bill," said Trevor, complacently; whereupon there issued a silence, and twice and again was William Maubray moved to break it with a question, and as often his voice seemed to fail him. At last, however, he did say, quite quietly —

"And why don't you marry, if you think it so good a thing?"

Was it something in William's tone and air, although he was trying his best to seem quite unconcerned, that elicited the quick, and somewhat cunning glance that Trevor shot on him?

At all events Trevor's manner became a little diplomatic and reserved.

"Why don't I? Oh! fifty reasons — a hundred. There art all sorts of difficulties; I don't mean, of course, anything mysterious — or that sort of bosh: this house and the property, everyone knows, are very well. I've been four years in possession, and I've no fault to find with Revington — either tenants or *this,*" and he nodded towards the ceiling, indicating that he meant the house.

"But — you know — for a fellow like me; we've been here, you know, a long time: there was a Trevor here in Henry the Fifth's time — but you know more history than I do."

Trevor considered his family and his domicile as a part of English history, and William, who was in an unpleasant mood just then, said —

"And the estate was larger, wasn't it?"

"Ah, ha — *yes certainly* — that is, there was another estate," acquiesced Trevor, eagerly, but looking a little put out. "The Torhamptons, by-the-bye, have got it now; a marriage, or something."

"A purchase, I thought," insisted Maubray.

"A *purchase*! very likely. It does not signify sixpence if the thing's gone, and gone it is. But you see, having been here for a longer time, I'm afraid, than you and I are likely to live; and having a sort of place among the people — you understand — a kind of a — quite undeserved — only because we have been here so long — that sort of an *influence* — or whatever it is — a fellow isn't as free as you'd fancy. By Jove! he's tied up, I can tell you; horribly tied up. A poor devil like me. Egad, he's not like a man with an income out of the funds — there's that sort of thing, I suppose it is the shadow — don't you see — of the old feudal thing, but so it is. There's a sort of rural opinion, a kind of loyalty, in a very small way, of course; but it *is* that sort of feeling — and there's no use, you know, in blinking it; and a fellow has to consider, you know, how his tenants and people would receive it; and — ask anyone — you can't conceive how a fellow's hampered, really hampered, now."

"Do you really think they care a farthing?" asked Maubray.

"Care! You've no idea," exclaimed his friend.

"Well, when I make my fortune, I'll keep it in the funds," said Maubray.

"I *strongly* advise you," said Trevor, with admirable solemnity. "Have some coffee? And — here's curacoa."

"When will he talk about Vi?" thought William, as he set down his coffee cup; "he can't have brought me here to dinner merely to hear that pompous lecture."

And indeed, it seemed to William that Trevor had something more to say, but did not know how to begin it

CHAPTER XVII.

MOONSHINE.

AND now, for they kept early hours at Gilroyd, William, with a peep at his watch, declared he must go, and Trevor popped on his fez and produced his cigars, and he set out with Maubray, in the moonlight, to see his friend out of the grounds.

As they walked down the slope, with the thick chestnuts of Gilroyd Hall and two of its chimneys full in view — the misty lights and impenetrable shadows of moonlight — and all the familiar distances translated into such soft and airy outline — the landscape threw them, I dare say, somewhat into musing, and that sort of sympathy with the pensive moods of nature which has, time out of mind, made moonlight the lamp of lovers. And some special associations of the scenery induced them to smoke on in silence for some time, insensibly slackening their pace, the night scene was so well worth lingering over.

"And your cousin — isn't she? — down there, how awfully pretty she is," said Trevor, at last, lowering his cigar between his fingers.

"Cousin? I suppose we're all cousins in some roundabout way related — I don't know how, Yes, she is — she's very pretty,"

"Darkwell: connected, are they, with the Darkwells of Shropshire?" asked Trevor.

"Perhaps — I really don't know — I never knew there were Darkwells in Shropshire," said William.

"Oh, dear, yes! I thought everyone knew that. Darkwell's the name of the place, too. A very old family," said Trevor.

"I did not know; but her father is a barrister, and lives in London, and has some sons, but I never saw them," answered William.

Trevor sighed. He was thinking what low fellows these sons might possibly be. A barrister. He remembered "young Boles's" father visiting Rugby once, a barrister, making fifteen hundred a year, a shabby, lean-looking fellow, with a stoop, and a seedy black frock coat, and grizzled whiskers, who talked in a sharp, dry way, with sometimes a little browbeating tendency — not a bit like, a gentleman. On the other hand, to be sure, there were lots of swells among them; but still there was the image of old Boles's father intruding into the moonlight, and poking about the old trees of Gilroyd. They had come to a halt under the mighty clump of beech trees that you can see against the sky from the distant road to Audminton, and, after a silence, Trevor said —

"I remember a thing I saw in a play in London, about a fellow that married a mermaid, or something of the sort; and, egad, they got on capitally till their family began to appear, and — and the situation began to grow too, too fishy, in fact for him; so, by Jove, he cut and run, and I forget how the play ends; but it was awfully funny."

"Yes," said William, "they ought to come to us like Aphrodite, from the foam of the sea, and have no kindred — in utter isolation."

"Who?" asked Trevor.

"Our beautiful brides!" exclaimed Maubray, a little mockingly.

"It's a confounded world we live in," resumed Trevor, after a little silence. "Look at me, now, for instance, how we are, and all this belongs to me, and has been ours for — goodness knows how many centuries and I assure you I sometimes feel I'd rather be a simple fellow with a few hundreds a-year, and my way to make in the world, and my liberty along with it, than all this."

"Suppose we exchange," said William, "I'll take the estate off your hands, and allow you three hundred a-year, and your liberty, and wish you joy of the pleasant excitement of making your way in the world, and applaud when you get on a bit, and condole when you're in the mud."

Trevor only smiled grandly, and shook his head at William's waggery.

"But seriously, just consider. You know I'm telling you things, old fellow, that I wouldn't say to everyone, and this won't, I know, go further" He resumed after a little interval spent in smoking, "But just think now. here's everything, as you see; but the estate owes some money; and I give you my honour, it does not bring me in, net, when everything's paid, three thousand a-year."

"Oh, no!" said William, in a tone which unconsciously implied, "a great deal less, as we all know."

"No, not three thousand — I wish it was," said Trevor, with an eager frankness, that savoured of annoyance. He had not intended to be quite believed. “And there’s the position. You’re expected to take a lead in things, you see, as if you had your six thousand a-year, egad, or whatever it is; and how the devil are you to manage it?

Don’t you see? And you tumble in love with a girl; and you find yourself encumbered with a pedigree — a confounded family tree, by Jove! and everyone expects you to marry accordingly. And I don’t say they’re not right, mind, for, by Jove! on the whole, I believe they are. So here I am with all this about me, and not a soul on earth to bully me, and yet I can’t do as I like. I don’t say, by Jove, that I do want to marry. I dare say it would not answer at all, at least for a jolly good number of years, and then I suppose, I must do as the rest of the world does. I must, you see, have some money, and I must have something of, you know, a — *family;* and that’s how I stand. Come along, it’s growing awfully late, and it’s very likely — ha — ha — ha! — I may die an old bachelor.”

“Well, you know,” said William, who thought that Trevor had spoken with extraordinary good sense, “there’s no such hurry. Fellows wait, as you say, and look about them: and it’s a very serious thing, by Jove! here we are at the gate; and I’ve had a very pleasant evening — *jolly*! I did not think two fellows, by them selves, could be so jolly, and that capital claret!” Poor William was no great judge, nor, for that matter, indeed, was his great friend, Mr. Trevor, who, however, knew its price, and laying his hand on William’s arm, said— “Well, old fellow, I’m glad — I really am — you enjoyed yourself; and I hope when next you come, you’ll have another glass or two with me. There’s one thing I say about wine, be it what it may — hang it, let it be real, and get it from a good house; and give my respects to the ladies — don’t forget; and when you come again, we must have more croquet. Let the balls and mallets stay where they are, you know, till then; and God bless you, Maubray, old boy, and if I can give you a lift, you know, any way, tell me, and I dare say my solicitor *can* give you a lift when you get to the bar. Sends out a lot of briefs, you know. I’ll speak to him, if you wish.”

“A good time before that,” laughed William. “Many thanks, though; I suppose I shall turn up in a few weeks again, and I’m beginning to take to the croquet rather, and we can have lots of play; but, by Jove! I’m keeping you all night — goodbye.”

So they shook hands, each thinking more highly of the other. I'm afraid our mutual estimates are seldom metaphysically justifiable.

"Well," thought Trevor, as he smoked his way up hill to the house, "no one can say I have not spoken plain enough. I should not like to have to give up that little acquaintance. It's an awfully slow part of the world. And now they know everything. If the old woman was thinking about anything, this will put it quite out of her head; and I can be careful, poor little thing! It would be a devil of a thing if she did grow to like me."

And with a lazy smile he let himself in, and had a little sherry and water, and *Bell's Life* in the drawing room.

William Maubray experienced an unaccountable expansion of spirits and sympathies, as he strode along the pathway that debouches close upon the gate of Gilroyd Hall. Everything looked so beautiful, and so interesting, and so serene. He loitered for a moment to gaze on the moon: and recollecting how late it was he rang at the bell fiercely, hoping to find Violet Darkwell still in the drawingroom.

"Well, Tom, my aunt in the drawingroom?" said William, as he confided his coat and hat to that faithful domestic.

"Ay, Sir, she be."

"And Miss Darkwell?"

"Gone up wi' Mrs. Winnie some time."

"Oh, that's all right, nothing like early sleep for young heads, Tom: it's rather late," said William Maubray, disappointed, in a cheerful tone.

So he opened the door, and found Aunt Dinah, in the drawingroom.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SUPPER.

"ELIHU BUNG" was open upon the table, also the Bible; and in the latter volume, it is but fair to say, she had been reading as William rang the bell. With her pleasant smile of welcome Miss Perfect greeted him.

"Now, sit down, William, and warm yourself at the fire — you are very cold, I dare say."

"Oh, no: it's quite a summer night."

"And, Thomas, tell Mrs. Podgers to send up something for Master William's supper."

Vainly William protested he could eat nothing; but Mrs. Podgers had been kept out of her bed — an allusion which was meant to make him feel, too, his late return — for the express purpose of broiling the bones with which he was to refresh himself; and Aunt Dinah, who had the military qualities strong within her, ordered Tom to obey her promptly.

"Well, dear William, how did you like your dinner? Everything very nice, I dare say. Had he anyone to meet you?"

"No, quite alone; everything very good and very pleasant — a very jolly evening, and Trevor very chatty chiefly about himself, of course."

Aunt Dinah looked at him with expectation, and William, who understood her, was not one of those agreeable persons who love to tantalise their neighbours, and force them to put their questions broadly.

"Violet has gone to bed?" said William.

"Oh, yes, some time."

"Yes, so Tom said," pursued William. "Well, I've no great news about Trevor's suit; in fact, I'm quite certain there's nothing in it."

Aunt Dinah's countenance fell.

"And why?" she enquired.

"He mentioned her. He admires her — he thinks her very pretty, and all that," said William.

"I should think so," interposed Miss Perfect, with the scorn of one who hears that Queen Anne is dead.

"But he made quite a long speech, at the same time — I mean in continuation — and there's nothing — nothing *serious* — nothing whatever — nothing on earth in it," concluded he.

"But what did he say? Come, try and remember. You are young, and don't know how reserved, and how hypocritical — all lovers are; they affect indifference often merely to conceal their feelings."

"I hope she does not like him," began William.

"I'm very sure she doesn't," interpolated Aunt Dinah rapidly; "no girl likes a man till she first knows that he likes her."

"Because he took care to make it perfectly clear that he could not think of marrying her," added William.

"Upon my life," exclaimed the old lady briskly, "remarkably civil! To invite her cousin to dinner in order to entertain him with such an uncalled-for impertinence. And what did you say, pray?"

"He did not mention her, you see, in connection with all this," said William.

"Oh! pooh! then I dare say there's nothing in it." exclaimed Aunt Dinah, vigorously grasping at this straw.

"Oh! But there is, I assure you. He made a long speech about his circumstances," commenced William.

"Well, surely he can afford to keep a wife," interrupted Dinah, again.

"And the upshot of it was just this — that he could not afford to marry without money — a lot of money and rank."

"Money and rank! Pretty well for a young coxcomb like Mr. Vane Trevor, upon my word."

This was perhaps a little inconsistent, for Aunt Dinah had of late been in the habit of speaking very highly of the young gentleman.

"Yes, I assure you, and he said it all in a very pointed way. It was, you see, a kind of explanation of his position, and although there was nothing — no actual connecting of it at all with Violet's name, you know he couldn't do that; yet there was no mistaking what he meant."

Aunt Dinah looked with compressed lips on a verse of the Bible which lay open before her.

"Well, and what did he mean?" she resumed defiantly. "That he can't marry Violet! And pray who ever asked him? I, for one, never encouraged him, and I can answer for Violet. And *you* always thought it would be a very disadvantageous thing for her, so young, and so extremely beautiful, as she unquestionably is; and I really don't know anyone here who has the smallest reason to look foolish on the occasion."

"Well, I thought I'd tell you," said William, "tell you what he said, I mean."

"Of course — quite right!" exclaimed she.

"And there could be *no* mistake as to his intention.

I know there isn't, and really, as it is so, I thought it rather honourable his being so explicit. Don't you?" said William.

"That's as it may be," said Aunt Dinah, oracularly shutting the Bible, and "Elihu Bung," and putting that volume on the top of the other; "young people nowadays are fuller a great deal of duplicity and worldliness, than old people used to be in my time. That's my opinion, and home goes his croquet in the morning. I've no notion of his coming about here, with his simpering airs and graces, getting my child, I may call her, talked about and sneered at."

"But," said William, who instinctively saw humiliation in anything that savoured of resentment, "don't you think any haste like that might connect in his view with what he said to me this evening?"

"At seven o'clock tomorrow morning, that's precisely what I wish," exclaimed Aunt Dinah.

At this moment Tom entered with the bones and other good things, and William, with the accommodating appetite of youth, on second thoughts accepted and honoured the repast.

"And, Thomas, mind at seven o'clock tomorrow morning, let Billy Willocks bring over those great hammers, and wooden balls, and iron things; they're horribly in the way in the hall, with my compliments, to Revington, to Mr. Trevor, and don't fail. He'll say — Billy Willocks — that they were forgotten at Gilroyd. At seven o'clock, mind, with Miss Perfect's compliments."

"I'm very glad, on the whole," said Miss Perfect, after about a minute had elapsed, "that that matter is quite off my mind."

William, who was eating his broiled drumstick, with diligence and in a genial mood, was agreeably abstracted, and made no effort to keep the conversation alive.

"He talks very grandly, no doubt, of his family. But he'll hardly venture his high and mighty airs with you or me. The Maubrays are older than the Trevors; and, for my part, I would not change the name of Perfect with any in England. We are Athelstanes, and took the name of Perfect in the civil wars, as I've told you. As to family, William, you could not stand higher. You have, thank God, splendid talents, and, as I am satisfied, excellent — indeed, magnificent prospects. Do you see much of your Cousin Winston at Cambridge?"

"Nothing," said William, who was, it must be confessed, a little surprised at his aunt's glowing testimony to his genius, and particularly to "his prospects," which he knew to be of a dismal character, and he conjectured that a supernatural light had been thrown upon both by Henbane.

"Do you mean to say that Winston Maubray has not sought you out or showed you any kindness?"

"I don't need his kindness, thank goodness. He could not be, in fact, of the least use to me; and I think he's ashamed of me rather."

"Ha!" ejaculated Aunt Dinah, with scorn.

"I spoke to him but once in my life — when Sir Richard came to Cambridge, and he and Winston called on Dr. Sprague, who presented me to my uncle," and William laughed.

"Well?"

"Well, he gave me two fingers to shake, and that sort of thing, and he said, ' Winston, here's your cousin,' and just took my hand, with a sort of slight bow."

"A bow! Well — a first cousin, and a *bow!"*

"Yes, and he pretended not to know me next day at cricket. I wish he was anywhere else, or that no one knew we were connected."

"Well, never mind. They'll be of use — of immense use to you. I'll tell you how," said Aunt Dinah, nodding resolutely to William.

CHAPTER XIX.

DEBATE.

"I'D rather work my own way, auntie. It would be intolerable to owe them anything," said! William Maubray.

"I don't say *Winston*, but Sir Richard — *he* can be of the most immense use to you, and without placing you or me under the slightest obligation."

This seemed one of Aunt Dinah's paradoxes, or of her scampish table's promises, and made a commensurate impression on William's mind.

"You saw Doctor Wagget here yesterday?"

"I know — yes — the old clergyman, isn't he, who paid you a visit?"

"Just so: he is a very old friend — *very* — and thinks it a most desirable arrangement."

"What arrangement?"

"You shall see," interrupted Aunt Dinah. "One moment's patience. I must first show you — a paper to read." She walked over to a little japanned cabinet, and as she fumbled at the lock, continued, "And when you — when you have read it — you — ah! *that's* it — when you have read it, I'll tell you exactly what I mean."

So saying she presented a large official-looking envelope to William, who found that it contained a letter and a paper, headed "Extract from the will and testament of the late Sir Nathaniel Maubray, of Queen's Maubray, bearing date — , and proved, &c., on — , 1831."

The letter was simply a courteous attorney's intimation that he enclosed herewith a copy, extract of the will, &c., as requested, together with a note of the expenses.

The extract was to the following effect:

"And I bequeath to my said son Richard the advowson of, and right of perpetual presentation to the living and vicarage of St. Maudlen of Caudley, otherwise Maudlin, in the diocese of Shovel-on-Headley, now absolutely vested in me, and to his heirs for ever, but upon the following conditions — namely, that if there be a kinsman, not being a son or stepson, of my said son or of his heir, &c., in possession, then, provided the said kinsman shall bear the name of Maubray, his father's name having been Maubray, and provided the said kinsman shall be in holy orders at the time of the said living becoming vacant, and shall be a good and religious man, and a proper person to be the incumbent of the said living, he shall appoint and nominate the said kinsman; and if there be two or more kinsmen so qualified, then him that is nearest of kin; and if there be two of equal consanguinity, then the elder of them; and if they be of the same age, then either, at the election of the bishop."

Then there was a provision that in case there were no such kinsman, the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral of Dawdle-cum-Drone should elect a cleric, being of the said diocese, but not of the said chapter, or of kin to anyone of the said chapter; and that the said Richard or his heir, should nominate the person so elected. And it was also conditioned that his son Richard should procure, if practicable, a private Act of Parliament to make these conditions permanent "He must have been a precious odd old fellow, my granduncle, observed William, as he sheathed the document again in the envelope.

"A conscientious man, anxious — with due regard to his family — to secure a good incumbent, and to prevent simony. The living is fifteen hundred a year, and there is this fact about it, that out of the seven last incumbents, three were made bishops. *Three!*"

"That's a great many," said William, with a yawn.

"And *you'll* make the fourth," said Aunt Dinah, spiritedly, and took a pinch of her famous snuff.

"I?" repeated William, not quite believing his ears.

"I am going to the bar."

"Into the Church you mean, dear William."

"But," remonstrated William, "but, I assure you, I, without a feeling of fitness in fact, I could not think of it."

"Into the Church, Sir." Aunt Dinah rose up, and as it were, mounted guard over him, as she sternly spoke these words.

William looked rather puzzled, and very much annoyed.

"Into — the — *Church*!" she repeated, with a terrible deliberation.

"My dear aunt," William began.

"Yes, the *Church.* Listen to me. I have reason to know you'll be a bishop. Now mind, William, I'll hear no nonsense on this subject. *Henbane!* Is that what, you mutter?"

"Well, speak out. *What* of Henbane? Suppose I have been favoured with a communication; suppose I have tried to learn by that most beautiful and innocent communion, something of the expediency of the course I proposed, and have succeeded. What then?"

William did not answer the challenge, and after a brief pause she continued —

"Come, come, my dear William, you know your poor old aunt loves you; you have been her first, and very nearly her only object, and you won't begin to vex her now, and after all to break her heart about nothing."

"But I assure you," William began.

"A moment's patience," broke in Aunt Dinah, "you won't let me speak. Of course you may argue till doomsday, if you keep all the talk to yourself. I say, William, there are not six peers in England can show as good blood as you, and I'll not hear of your being shut up in a beggarly garret in Westminster Hall, or the Temple, or wherever it is they put the — the paltry young barristers, when you might and *must* have a bishopric if you choose it, and marry a peer's daughter. And choose what you will, *I* choose that, and into the Church you go; yes, into the *Church,* the Church, Sir, the *Church!* and that's enough, I hope."

William was stunned and looked helplessly at his aunt, whom he loved very much. But the idea of going into the Church, the image of his old friend Dykes, turned into a demure curate as he had seen him three weeks ago. The form of stout Doctor Dalrymple, with his pimples and shovel hat, and a general sense of simony and blasphemy came sickenly over him; his likings, his conscience, his fears, his whole nature rose up against it in one abhorrent protest, and he said, very pale and in the voice of a sick man, gently placing his hand upon his aunt's arm, and looking with entreating eyes into hers:

"My dear aunt, to go into the Church without any kind of suitability, is a tremendous thing, for mere gain, a dreadful kind of sin. I know I'm quite unfit. I *could* not."

William did not know for how many years his aunt had been brooding over this one idea, how she had lived in this air-built castle, and what a crash of hopes and darkness of despair was in its downfall. But if he had, he could not help it. Down it must go. Orders were not for him. Deacon, priest, or bishop, William Maubray never could be.

Miss Perfect stared at him with pallid face.

"I tell you what, William," she exclaimed, "you had better think twice — you had better— "

"I *have* thought — indeed I have — for Doctor Sprague suggested the Church as a profession long ago; but I can't. I'm not fit."

"You had better grow fit, then, and give up your sins, Sir, and save both your soul and your prospects. It *can* be nothing but wickedness that prevents your taking orders — holy orders. Mercy on us! A blasphemy and a sin to take holy orders! What sort of state *can* you be in?"

"I wish to Heaven I *were* good enough, but I'm not. I may not be worse than a good many who go into the Church. Others may, but I couldn't."

"*You* couldn't! You conceited, young, provoking coxcomb! As if the world were looking for miracles of piety from *you? Who* on earth expects you to be one bit more pious than other curates who do their best? Who are you, pray, that anything more should be expected from you? Do your duty in that state of life to which it shall please God to call you. *That's* simple. We expect no more."

"But that's everything," said William, with a hopeless shake of his head.

"What's everything? I can't see. I don't comprehend you. Of course there's a pleasure in crossing and thwarting me. But of let or hindrance to your entering the Church, there is and can be none, except your secret resolution to lead a wicked life."

"I'm not worse than other fellows. I'm better, I believe, than many who do get ordained; but I do assure you, I have thought of it before now, often, and it is quite out of the question."

"You *won't*" said Aunt Dinah, aghast, in a low tone, and she gaped at him with flashing eyes, her gold spectacles shut up, and tightly grasped like a weapon in her hand. He had never seen her, or anyone, look so pallid. And after a pause, she said slowly, in a very low tone —

"Once more, William — yes or no."

"My dear aunt, forgive me; don't be vexed, but I must say no," moaned poor William Maubray thus sorely pressed.

Aunt Dinah Perfect looked at him in silence; the same white, bright stare. William was afraid that she was on the point of having a fit. Who could have imagined the discussion of his profession so convulsive and frightful an ordeal?

CHAPTER XX.

FAREWELL.

FOR a minute or two, I think she could not speak; she closed her lips tightly, and pressed two *of* her fingers on them, perhaps to hide some tremor there; and she went and placed one of her slender feet on the fender, and looked steadfastly on the macerated countenance of the Very Rev the Dean of Crutch Friars, who in his oval frame, over the chimneypiece, seemed to hear and endure William's perversities with the meekness of a good, sad, suffering Christian.

Aunt Dinah sighed twice, two deep, long, laborious sighs, and tapped the steel of her stays ferociously with her finger tips. In his distress and confusion, William rose irresolutely. He would have approached her, but he feared that his doing so would but precipitate an explosion, and he remained standing, with his fingers ex tended on the table as if on the keys of a piano, and looking wan and sad over his shoulder on the back of Aunt Dinah's natty oldfashioned cap.

"Well, young gentleman, you have made up your mind, and so have I," said Aunt Dinah, abruptly returning to the table. "You go your own way. I shall not interfere in your concerns. I shall see your face *no more — never*! I have done with you, and depend upon it I shan't change. I never change. I put you away from me. I wash ray hands of you. I have *done* with you. I shall send a hundred pounds to Dr. Sprague, when you leave tomorrow, first to pay college expenses, and the balance *you* may take, and that ends all between us. I hate the world, ungrateful, stiff-necked, rebellious, *heartless.* All I have been to you, you know. What you would have been without me, you also know, a beggar — simply a beggar. I shall now find other objects. You are free, Sir, henceforward. I hope you may enjoy your liberty, and that you may never have reason to repent your perversity and ingratitude as bitterly as I now see my folly. Go, Sir, goodnight, and let me see your face no more."

William stood looking on his transformed aunt; he felt his ears tingle with the insult of her speech, and a great ball seemed rising in his throat Her face was darkened by a dismal anger; her look was hard and cold, and it seemed to him that the gates of reconciliation were closed against him for ever, and that he had come into that place of exclusion at whose entrance hope is left behind.

William was proud, too, and sensitive. It was no equal battle. His obligations had never before been weighed against his claims, and he felt the cruel truth of Aunt Dinah's words beating him down into the dust.

With her chin in the air, and averted gaze, she sat stiff and upright in her accustomed chair by the fire. William stood looking at her for a time, his thoughts not very clear, and a great vague pain throbbing at his heart. There was that in her countenance which indicated something different from anger — a cold alienation.

William Maubray silently and softly left the room.

"He thinks it will be all over in the morning but ne does not know *me"* So thought Aunt Dinah, folding her cold hands together. "Gone to bed; his last night at Gilroyd."

Holding her mind stiffly in this attitude with a corresponding pose and look she sate, and in a minute more William Maubray entered the room very pale, his outside coat was on, and his hat in his hand. His lip trembled a little, and he walked very quickly to the side of her chair, laid his hand softly on her shoulder, and stooping down kissed her cheek, and without a word left the room.

' She heard the hall door open, and Tom's voice talking with him as their steps traversed the gravel, and the jarring sound of the iron gate on its hinges. "Goodnight," said the well-known voice, so long beloved; and "Goodnight, Mr. William, goodnight, Sir," in Tom's gruff voice, and a little more time the gate clanged, and Tom's lonely step came back.

"He had no business to open the gate without my order," said Miss Perfect.

She was thinking of blowing Tom up, but her pride prevented; and, as Tom entered in reply to her bell, she asked as nearly as she could in her usual way —

"My nephew did not take away his trunk?"

"No, Mum."

"He gave directions about his things, of course?"

"Yes, they're to follow, Mum, by the mornin' coach to Cambridge."

“H’m! very good; that’s all You had better get to your bed now. Goodnight”

And thus, with a dry and stately air, dismissed, he withdrew, and Aunt Dinah said, “I’m glad that’s off my mind; I’ve done right; I know I have. Who’d have thought? “But there’s no help, and I’m glad it’s over.”

Aunt Dinah sat for a long time in the drawingroom, uttering short sentences like these, from time to time. Then she read some verses in the Bible; and I don’t think she could have told you, when she closed the book, what they were about. She had thoughts of a *séance* with old Winnie Dobbs, but somehow she was not exactly in the mood.

“Master William is not in his room yet,” observed that ancient domestic.

“Master William has gone to Cambridge tonight,” said Miss Perfect, drily and coldly, “and his luggage follows in the morning. I can’t find my nightcap.”

So old Winnie, though surprised, was nothing wiser that night respecting the real character of the movement. And Aunt Dinah said her prayers stiffly; and, bidding old Winnie a peremptory goodnight, put out her candle, and restated to herself the fact she had already frequently mentioned: “I have acted rightly; I have nothing to regret. William will, I dare say, come to his senses, and recollect all he owes me.”

In the mean time, William, with no very distinct ideas, and only his huge pain and humiliation at his heart, trudged along the solitary road to Saxton. He sat down on the stile, under the great ash tree by the roadside, to gather up his thoughts. Little more than half an hour before, he had been so unusually happy; and now, here he sat shipwrecked, wounded, and forlorn.

He looked at his watch again. A dreadful three-quarters of an hour must elapse before the Cambridge coach would draw up at the Golden Posts, in High Street. Had he not better go on, and await its arrival there? Yet what need he care? What was it to him whether he were late or not? In his outcast desperation he fancied he would rather like to wear out his shoes and his strength in a long march to Cambridge. He would have liked to lift his dusty hat grimly to Violet, as he strode footsore and cheerless on his way. But alas! he was leaving Violet *there,* among those dark-tufted outlines, and under the high steep roof whose edge he could just discern. There could be no chance meeting. Farewell! Back to Cambridge he was going, and through Cambridge into space, where by those who once liked him he should be found no more; on that he was resolved.

So up he get again, without a plan, without a reason, as he had sat down; and he lifted his hat, and, with extended arm, waved his farewell toward Gilroyd. And the old ash tree looked down sadly, murmuring, in the fickle night breeze, over his folly.

CHAPTER XXI.

WILLIAM CONSULTS A SAGE.

STARTING afresh, at a pace wholly uncalled for by time or distance, William Maubray was soon in the silent street of Saxton, with the bright moonlight on one side of it, and the houses and half the road black in shadow on the other.

There was a light in Doctor Drake's front parlour, which he called his study. The doctor himself was in evidence, leaning upon the sash of the window, which he had lowered, and smoking dreamily from a "churchwarden" toward the brilliant moon. It was plain that Miss Letty had retired, and, in his desolation, human sympathy, some one to talk to, ever so little, on his sudden calamity — a friendly soul, who knew Aunt Dinah long and well, and was even half as wise as Doctor Drake was reputed to be, would be a Godsend. He yearned to shake the honest fellow's hand, and his haste was less, and subsided to a loitering pace, as he approached the window, from which he was hailed, but not in a way to make it quite clear what the learned physician exactly wanted.

"I shay — shizzy — shizhte — shizh-shizh-shizhte — V — V — Viator, I shay," said the doctor — playfully meaning, I believe, *Siste Viator*.

And Doctor Drake's long pipe, like a shepherd's crook was hospitably extended, so that the embers fell out on the highway, to arrest the wayfarer. So William stopped and said:

"What a sweet night — how beautiful, I'm so glad to find you still up, Doctor Drake."

"Alwayzh — all — alwayzh up," said the Doctor, oracularly, smiling rather at one side of his cheek, and with his eyes pretty nearly closed, and his long pipe swaying gently, horizontally, over the trottoir; "you'll look — insh'r pleashure — acquaintensh."

By this time the doctor, with his disengaged hand, had seized William's, and his pipe had dropped on the pavement, and was smashed.

"Bl — bloke — bl — boke!" murmured the doctor, smiling celestially, with a little vague wave of his fingers toward the fragments of his churchwarden, from the bowl of which the sparks were flitting lightly along High Street. “Blo — boke — my — p — p — phife!”

“I — shay, ole boy, you — come — in,” and he beckoned William, grandly, through the window.

William glanced at the door, and the doctor, comprehending, said, with awful solemnity:

“All — thingsh deeshenly — in an — in or — or — orrer, I shay. Come ole fellow — wone ye? — toothe th’ — th’ door sh’r — an’ you’ll norr regresh — no — never.”

William, though not very sharp on such points, perceived that Doctor Drake had been making merry in his study; and the learned gentleman received him at the hall-door, laying his hand lovingly and grandly on his arm.

“Howzhe th’ — th’ ladle — th’ admir’bl’ womr, over there, Mish Perfek?”

“My aunt is very well — perfectly well, thanks,” answered William.

“No thangs — I thang *you* sh’r — I thang Prover’l!” and the doctor sank with a comfortable sigh, and his back against the wall, shaking William’s hand slowly, and looking piously up at the cornice.

“She’s quite well, but I’ve something to tell you,” said William.

“Comle — comle — ong!” said the doctor, encouragingly, and led the way unsteadily into his study.

There was a jug of cold water, a “tumbler,” and a large black bottle on the table, to which the doctor waved a gracious introduction.

“Ole Tom, ole Tom, an’ w — wawr hizh dring the chryshle brook!”

The doctor was given to quotation in his cups, and this was his paraphrase of “The Hermit.”

“Thanks, no,” said William; “I have had my glass long ago. I’m going back to Cambridge, Sir; I’m going to make a push in life. I’ve been too long a burden on my aunt.”

“Admiral wom’le sh’r! Wurle — worry — no wurrier — ladle!” (worthier lady! I believe he meant) exclaimed the doctor, with growing enthusiasm.

Contented with these evidences of mental vigour, William, who must have spoken to the roadside trees, rather than refrain himself, proceeded to tell his woeful story — to which Doctor Drake listened, clinging rather to the chimneypiece with his right hand, and in his left sustaining a large glass of his favourite "Old Tom" and water, a little of which occasionally poured upon the hearthrug.

"And, Doctor Drake, you won't mention what I'm going to say?"

The doctor intended to say, "silent as the sepulchre," but broke down, and merely nodded, funereally pointing his finger perpendicularly toward the hearthstone; and having let go his hold on the chimney, he made an involuntary wheel backward, and sat down quite unexpectedly, and rather violently, in an elbow-chair.

"You promise, really and truly, Sir?" pressed William.

"Reel-reel-reelan'-tooral," repeated the doctor as nearly as he could.

And upon this assurance William Maubray proceeded to state his case, and feeling relieved as he poured forth his wrongs, waxed voluble; and the doctor sat and heard, looking like Solomon, and refreshing his lips now and again, as if William's oration parched them.

"And what, Sir, do you think I had best do?" said William, not very wisely it must be owned, applying to Philip, certainly not sober — for judgment.

"Return to my duty?" repeated William, interpreting as well as he could the doctor's somewhat vague articulation. "Why, I am certain I never left it. I have done all I could to please her; but this you know is what no one on earth could be expected to do — what no one *ought* to do."

"*Wrong*, sh'r!" exclaimed the doctor with decision. "Thersh — r — r — *right*, and th'rsh wrong — r — *ry* — an' *Wrong* — moshe admira'l ladle, Mish Perfeck I — moshe amiable; we all appresheay — sheniorib — bush pie — ri — pie — oribush — ole Latt'n, you know. I 'preshiay an' *love* Mish Perfey."

Senioribus prioribus. There was a want of clearness, William felt, in the doctor's views; still it weighed on dm that such as they were they were against him.

"The principle on which I have acted, Sir, can't be shaken. If I were, at my aunt's desire, now to enter the Church, I should do so entirely from worldly motives, which I know would be an impiety such as I could not endure to practise."

"Conn'ry toop — toop — prinsh'p'l — *connr'y* — conn'ry," murmured the doctor, with an awful shake to his head.

The coach was now seen to pass the windows, with a couple of outside passengers, and a pile of luggage on top, and pulled up some sixty yards lower down the street, at the Golden Posts. With a hasty shake of the hand, William Maubray took his leave, and mounted to his elevated seat, as the horses, with their looped traces hanging by them, emerged from the inn-yard gate, like shadows, by the rapid sleight-of-hand of groom and hostler — to replace the wayworn team, now snorting and shaking their flanks, with drooping necks, and emitting a white steam in the moonlight, as they waited to be led off to rest and comfort in the stables *of* the Golden Posts.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN ADVERTISEMENT.

CHILL was the night. The slight motion of the air was against them, and made a cutting breeze as they drove on. The gentleman who sat beside him in a huge cloak and fur cap, with several yards of cashmere swathing his throat and chin and chops, was taciturn, except when he offered William a cigar.

The cold, dark, and solitude helped his depression — and longing to see Dr. Sprague, to whom, in his helplessness, he looked for practical counsel. The way seemed more than usually long. There was one conclusion clearly fixed in the chaos of his thoughts. He had done with dependence. No matter to what level it might reduce him, he would earn his own bread. He was leaving Gilroyd Hall behind him, and all its dreams, to be dreamed no more. Perhaps there was in the surrounding gloom that romantic vista, which youth in its irrepressible hopefulness will open for itself. And William Maubray in the filmy perspective saw a shadow of himself as he would be a few years hence — wealthy, famous, the outcast restored, with the lawn and the chestnuts about him, and pretty old Gilroyd spreading its faint crimson gables and glittering window-frames behind, and old Aunt Dinah, and another form in the foreground, all smiles and tears, and welcome.

Poor fellow! He knows not how few succeed — how long it takes to make a fortune — how the process transforms, and how seldom that kind of gilding touches any but white heads, and when the sun is near its setting, and all the old things past or passing away.

In the morning William Maubray presented himself before Dr. Sprague, who asked him briskly— “How is Miss Perfect?”

“Quite well, Sir, thank you; but — but something very serious has happened — very serious Sir, and I am very anxious to ask your advice.”

“Eh!” said the doctor; “wait a moment,” and he quaffed what remained of his cup of tea, for William had surprised him at breakfast. “Hey? — nothing very bad, I hope?” and the doctor put on his spectacles and looked in

William's face, as a physician does into that of a patient, to read something of his case in his countenance.

So William reported the great debate, and alas! the division on the question of holy orders, to all which the good little man listened, leaning back in his chair, with leg crossed and his chin raised.

"You're in the right, Sir," he said, so soon as he had heard the young man out— "*perfectly*. What do you wish me to do? I'll write to Miss Perfect if you wish it."

"Very kind of you, Sir; but I'd rather not, on that subject, at least till I'm quite out of the way. I should not wish her to suppose that I could seek to return to my old position of obligation I must never cost her a farthing more."

So William explained his feelings fully and very candidly, and Doctor Sprague listened, and looked pleased though grave; and, said he —

"You haven't been writing for any of the magazines, or that sort of thing?"

"No, he had no resource of that kind. He had a good deal of loose manuscript, he confessed with a blush, but he had no introduction.

"Well, no," said Doctor Sprague, "you'd probably have a long wait, too long for your purpose. You have, you know, a trifle of your own, about twenty-three pounds a year, isn't it?" and he looked in the direction of his desk, where the memorandum was; "something thereabout, that I received for you. There's a money order for eleven pounds and something in my desk since yesterday."

"Don't you think, Sir, that I should apply that little annuity to pay back all I can to my aunt, who has been so good to me?"

"Tut-tut, your aunt would not accept a guinea, and would mistake your motive; don't talk of any such thing. Her past affection is a matter of kindly recollection. You could not reduce it to money — no, no; but on the whole I think you have resolved wisely. You must undertake, for a little, something in the way of tuition; I don't mean here. You're hardly well enough up in the business for that; but we'll find out something *here*" and he tapped the *Times,* which lay open on the table beside him, "I dare say, to suit you — not a school, that would not do either — a tutor in a country house. You need not stay away more than six months, and you'll have something to go on with then; and in the meantime you can send your manuscripts round, and try if you can't get into some of the periodicals.

"It is very odd, Sir, but some months since I spoke of such a plan when I was at Gilroyd, and my aunt was positively horrified; she is full of fancies, you know and she told me that none of my family had ever done anything of the kind."

"I don't know about *that;* but I've done it, I can tell you, and better men than I," said the doctor.

"I only mean that she made such a point of it; she would think I had done it expressly to vex her, or she might come wherever I was, and try to make me leave it."

"So she might," said the cleric, and laughed a little to himself, for he knew her, and fancied a scene, "but what can you do? I think you *must,* in fact, and the best way will be to tell her nothing about it. She has cut you, you know, for the present, and you need not, if you think it would vex her, go in your own name, do you see? We'll call you Mr. Herbert, you're descended maternally, you know, from Herberts; now — not for a moment, now, just hear me out: there shall be no deception, of course. *I'll* tell them that for certain family reasons I have advised you to take that measure. I'll take it all on myself, and say all I think of you, and know of you, and I saw, just now, in this very paper, something that I think would answer very nicely. Yes, yes, I'll make it all quite straight and easy. But you must do as I say."

The kind little gentleman was thinking that eccentric and fierce Miss Perfect might never forgive his engaging himself as a tutor, without at least that disguise, and he looked forward as he murmured *varium et mutabile semper*, to a much earlier *redintegratio amoris* than William dreamed of.

"It's unlucky her having made a point of it. But what is the poor fellow to do? She must not, however, be offended more than we can help and that will show a wish, as far as was practicable, to consult her feelings." Doctor Sprague looked along a column in the *Times*, and said he, after his scrutiny —

"I think there's just one of these you'll like — say which you prefer, and I'll tell you if it's the one I think."

So William conned over the advertisements, and, in Aunt Dinah's phrase, put on his considering cap, and having pondered a good while, "This one, I think?" he half decided and half inquired.

"The very thing!" said Dr. Sprague, cheerily. "One boy — country-house — just the thing; he'll be in his bed early, you know, and you can take your books and write away till twelve at night; and now you had better drop them a line — or stay, I'll do it; you can't sign your name, you know."

So, communications being opened, in a day or two it turned out that Doctor Sprague knew the gentleman who advertised. It was a very old and long interrupted acquaintance.

"He's a quiet, kind fellow, and Kincton Hall, they say, a pretty place and old. I'll write to Knox."

The Knoxes of Kincton Hall William had heard Trevor occasionally mention, but tried in vain to recollect what he used to say of them; six months, however, was no great venture, and the experiment could hardly break down very badly in that time.

"Maubray, your cousin, has quarrelled with his father, you heard?" —

"No."

"Oh, yes, just about the time when you left this — a few days ago. Young Maubray has some little property from his mother, and chooses to take his own way; and Sir Richard was here with me yesterday, very angry and violent, poor man, and vows (the doctor would not say "swears" which would have described the procedure more accurately) he'll cut him off with a shilling; but that's all moonshine. The estates are under settlement, and the young fellow knows it, and that's at the bottom of his independence; and he's gone abroad, I believe, to amuse himself: and he has been no credit to his college, from all I hear."

CHAPTER XXIII.

KINCTON HALL.

IN the parlour of Kincton Hall the family were assembled at breakfast; Mrs. Kincton Knox dispensed tea and coffee in a queenlike way hardly called for, seeing that her husband, daughter, and little son, formed the entire party.

Mrs. Kincton Knox was what some people call a clever woman — that is she did nearly everything with an object, but somehow she had not succeeded. Mr. Kincton Knox was not deputy lieutenant or a member for his county. Her daughter Clara — with blue eyes and golden hair — a handsome girl, now leaning back in her chair and looking listlessly through the window across the table — was admitted confidentially to be near five-and-twenty, and was in fact past eight-and-twenty, and unmarried still. There was not that intimacy between the Croydon family and the Kincton Knoxes for which she had laboured so cleverly and industriously. She was not among the patronesses, and only one of the committee, of the great county ball, at which the Prince figured, and which, on the plea of illness, she had with proper dignity declined attending. She blamed her daughter, she blamed her husband, she blamed the envy and combination of neighbours, for her failures. There was nothing that the wit and industry of women could do she had not done. She was the best bred and most far-seeing woman in the country round, radiant with a grave sort of fascination, always in supreme command, never for a moment losing sight of her object, yet, great or small, somehow never compassing it — a Vanderdecken, thwarted invisibly, and her crew growing old around her. Was ever admirable woman so persecuted by fortune?

Perhaps if the accomplished Mrs. Kincton Knox had been some twenty years before bereft of her brilliant intellect and shut up in a remote madhouse, or consigned under an unexceptionable epitaph to the family vault in Smolderton Church, the afflicted family might have prospered; for Miss Clara was really pretty, and could draw and sing better than most well-married young ladies of her rank in life. And, though he was not very bright, no man was more inoffensive and genial than portly old Kincton Knox, if only she had permitted his popularity to grow, and had left him and his belongings a little to nature.

“Hollo! What are those fellows doing?” exclaimed Kincton Knox, attracted by a sound of chopping from, without. “Hollo! ho!” and with his arms extended, he made a rush at the window, which he threw up, shouting, “Hollo there! stop that.”

A man stood erect with an axe in his hand, by the trunk of one of the great walnut trees.

“What the devil are you doing, Sir, cutting down my trees!” cried the old gentleman, his handsome face flushed with wrath, and his silver fork, with a bit of ham on the end of it, grasped fiercely in his left hand. “Who the devil ordered you, Sir, to — to how — pow — cut down my trees, Sir?”

“I’ve spoken to you till I’m tired, Kincton, about that tree; it buries us *in* perfect damp and darkness,” began the dignified lady in purple silk, and lace coif.

“Don’t you presume, Sir, to cut down a tree of mine without my orders; don’t you dare Sir; don’t — don’t attempt it, Sir, or it will be worse for you; take that hatchet away, Sir, and send Wall the gardener here this moment, Sir, to see what can be done, and I’ve a mind to send you about your business, and egad if I find you’ve injured the tree, I *will* too, Sir; send him this moment; get out of my sight, Sir.”

It was not more than once in two years that Mr. Kincton Knox broke out in this way, and only on extraordinary and sudden provocation. He returned to the table and sat down in his chair, having shut the windows with an unnecessary display of physical force. His countenance was red and lowering, and his eyes still staring and blinking rapidly, and his white waistcoat heaving, and even the brass buttons of his blue coat uneasy. You might have observed the tremulous shuffle of his fingers as his fist rested on the tablecloth, while he gazed through the window and muttered and puffed to the agitation of his chops.

Upon such unusual occasions Mrs. Kincton Knox was a little alarmed and even crestfallen. It was a sudden accession of mania in an animal usually perfectly docile, and therefore it was startling, and called not for chastisement so much as management.

“I may be pennitted to mention, now that there’s a little quiet, that it was I who ordered that tree to be removed — of course if it makes you violent to take it down, let it stand; let the house be darkened and the inhabitants take the ague. I’ve simply endeavoured to do what I thought right. I’m never thanked; I don’t expect thanks:

I hope I know my duty, and do it from higher motives.

But this I know, and you’ll see it when I’m in my grave, that if it were not for me, every single individual thing connected with you and yours would be in a state of the most inextricable neglect and confusion, and I may say ruin.”

“I object to the place being denuded. There is not much in that,” blustered Mr. Kincton Knox, plaintively.

He was now subsiding; and she, availing herself of this frame of mind, proceeded with even more force, and dignity, till interrupted by Miss Clara, who observed serenely —

“Mamma, that greedy little pig will choke himself with apricot-stones, if you allow him.”

Master Howard Seymour Knox — a stunted and bilious boy — scowled at Miss Clara, with muddy eyes, his mouth being too full for convenient articulation, and clutched his plate with both hands.

“My precious rosebud, be careful,” remonstrated his mamma with gentle fervour.

Stooping over his plate, a clatter of fruit-stones was heard upon it, and Master Howard ejaculated —

“You lie, you do, you tell-tale tit!”

“Oh! my love,” remonstrated Mrs. Kincton.

“Briggs shall box your ears for that, my fine fellow,” said Miss Clara.

“There’s another cram! I’d like to see her,” retorted the youth.

“Greedy little beast!” observed Clara.

“Clara, my love!” suggested her mamma.

“Not half so greedy as you. Who took the woodcock pie up to her bedroom? Ah-ha!” vociferated the young gentleman.

“Now I’ll do it myself!” exclaimed the languid young lady, rising with sudden energy.

“I’ll fling these in your ugly face, if you come near me,” cried he, jumping up, and behind his mamma’s chair, with a knife and fork in his right hand covered with Savory pie.

"I won't have this; I won't have it," said Mrs, Kincton Knox with peremptory dignity. "Howard, be quiet, my love; Clara, sit down."

"The *imp*! he'll never stop till he murders some one," exclaimed Miss Clara, with intense feeling, as she sat down with brilliant cheeks and flashing eyes. "Look at him, mamma; he's saying ha-ha, and shaking his knife he struck at me, the little murderer; and the liar!"

"Clara, I *insist,*" interposed Mrs. Kincton Knox.

"Yes, I do believe he's an actual devil," persisted the young lady.

"I *won't* have this," continued the *mater familias*, peremptorily.

"Ha, ha!" whispered the imp obliquely, from the other side, wagging his head, and clutching his knife and fork, while he touched the points of the fork, with a horrid significance, with the fingertip of his disengaged hand.

Miss Clara raised her hand, and opened her mouth to exclaim; but at this moment the servant entered with the letters, and the current of conversation was diverted.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WILLIAM IS SUMMONED.

MRS. KINCTON KNOX had no less than seven notes and letters, her husband one, and Miss Clara two crossed manuscripts, which engrossed her speedily; and, possibly, these figures would have indicated pretty accurately their relative influence in the household.

The matron deigned no account of her letters to mortal and exacted from all others an habitual candour in this respect; and so much had it grown to be a matter of conscience with her husband, that I don't think he could have slept in his bed if he had failed to submit any one such communication to her inspection.

Her own were now neatly arranged, one over the other, like the discarded cards in piquet, beside her plate.

"Well, my dear, what is it?" she said to her husband, accompanying the inquiry with a little motion, like a miniature beckoning, of her forefinger.

"Something about the *Times* — the tutor," he began.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Kincton Knox, interrupting, with a warning nod and an awful look, and a glance at Master Howard, who was fortunately so busy in tying bits of paper, in imitation of a kite-tail, on the string of the window-blind, that he had heard nothing.

"Oh!" murmured Mr. Kincton Knox, prolonging the interjection softly — he was accustomed, with a guilty and abject submission, every now and then, to receive that sort of awful signal— "I did not know." And he whistled a little through his round mouth, and looked a little frightened, and ashamed of his clumsiness, though he seldom knew in what exactly the danger consisted.

"Howard, my precious rosebud, I've told Rogers he may fire the pistol for you three times this morning; he says he has powder, and you may go now."

So away ran Master Howard to plague Rogers the footman; and Mrs. Kincton Knox said with a nod, —

" — *Now.*"

"Here," said he mildly, pushing the letter towards her, "*you'll* understand it better;" and she read aloud —

"MY DEAR SIR, — I venture to renew an old acquaintance at the instance of a young friend of mine, who has seen your advertisement in the *Times* for a tutor, and desires to accept that office. He is capitally qualified, as your advertisement says, 'to prepare a boy of twelve for school.' He is a fair scholar, and a gentleman, and for his character, I can undertake to answer almost as for my own. I feel pretty certain that you will like him. There is but one condition, to which I am sure you will not object."

"He shan't smoke or sit up all night, if that's it," said the lady loftily, by way of gloss.

"He and I agree," she read on, "that he should be received under the name of William Herbert" This paragraph she read twice over very deliberately. "As I have pressed upon him, for reasons which, you will readily believe, are not dishonourable — what strikes me as a strong objection to his accepting the position you offer under his own name."

"That's very odd, it strikes me. Why shouldn't he tell his name?" observed Mrs. Kincton Knox, with grim curiosity.

"I dare say he's a low person, and his name is not pretty," sneered Miss Clara, carelessly.

"Who is that Mr. Edmund? — Edward Sprague?" inquired the matron.

Mr. Kincton Knox testified to his character.

"But, just stop a moment — it is very odd. Why should he be, if he is a fit person to be received at Kincton — why should he be ashamed of his name?" repeated Mrs. Kincton Knox, grandly.

"Perhaps it may be as well to let it drop," suggested Kincton Knox, in the hope that he was anticipating his wife's wishes. But that grave lady raised her nose at his remark, and turned away, not vouchsafing an answer.

"Of course; I don't say it is not all quite proper; but say what you may, and take it how you please, it is a very odd condition."

There was a pause here. Clara did not care enough to engage in the discussion, and old Kincton Knox rumpled his *Times* uneasily, not knowing whether he was called on for a solution, and not caring to hazard one, for he was seldom lucky.

"Well, and what do you propose to do?" demanded his wife, who thus sometimes cruelly forced the peaceable old gentleman into debate.

“Why,” said he, cautiously, “whatever you think best, my dear.”

“I’m not likely to receive much assistance from you, Mr, Kincton Knox. However, provided I’m not *blamed* for doing my best, and my servants stormed at for obeying me— “

Mr. Kincton Knox glanced unconsciously and penitently at the walnut tree.

I suppose, as something *must* be done, and nothing will be done otherwise, I may as well take *this* trouble and responsibility upon myself.”

“And what am I to say to Sprague?” murmured Mr. Kincton Knox.

“I suppose the young man had better come. Mr. Sprague, you say, is a proper person, and I suppose we may rely upon what he says; I *hope* so, I’m sure, and, if he does not answer, why he can go about his business.”

In due course, therefore, Mr. Kincton Knox’s reply, which he had previously read aloud to his wife, was despatched.

So Fate had resolved that William Maubray should visit Kincton Hall, while Aunt Dinah was daily expecting the return of her prodigal to Gilroyd.

“If I don’t hear from William Maubray before Sunday, I shall write on Monday morning to Doctor Sprague,” said she, after a long silence at breakfast.

She looked at Violet, but the young lady was looking on the cloth, and with her fingertips stirring hither and thither some flowers that lay there — not her eyes, only her long eyelashes were visible — and the invitation to say something conveyed in Aunt Dinah’s glance, miscarried *“*And I think it very strange — not what I should have expected from William — that he has not written. I don’t mean an apology, that’s a matter between his own conscience and his Maker I mean some little inquiry.

Affection, of course we cannot command, but respect and courtesy we may.”

“I had thought better of William. I think Doctor Sprague will be surprised,” she resumed. “I did not think he could have parted on the terms he did, and never written a line after for nearly a week. He seems to me quite a changed person.”

“Just at that age,” said Miss Violet, in a low tone, looking nearer to her flowers, and growing interested in a rose whose rumpled leaves she was adjusting with her fingertips, “some one says — I read it lately somewhere — I forget who — they grow weary of home and home faces, and want change and adventure, that is action and danger, of one kind or another, what they are sent into the world for, I suppose — that and liberty.” She spoke very low, as if to her flowers, and when she ceased Miss Perfect, finding she had no more to say, added —

“And a wise business they make of it — fifty blunders in as many days, and begin looking out for wives before they know how to earn a guinea.”

Violet looked up and smiled, and popped her rose gently into the water glass beside her, and went on adjusting her flowers.

“Wives, indeed! Yes — just what his poor father did before him, and his grandfather, old Sir Everard, he was married, privately, at twenty! It runs in the blood, my dear, like gaming or drinking: and the next I shall hear of William, I dare say, will be a note to ask my blessing on his marriage!”

Again Miss Violet laughed softly, and smiling for a moment, with a pretty slip of verbena in her fingers, she added it to the growing bouquet in the glass.

“You may laugh, my dear, but it is what I’m afraid of I assure you I am serious.”

“But it may turn out very happy, or very splendid, you know; he may meet with a young lady more foolish than himself, and with a great dot.”

“No, my dear, he’s a soft, romantic goose, and I really think if it were not imprudent, the romance would lose all its attraction. I tell you, it runs in the family, and he’s not a bit wiser than his father, or his grandfather before him.”

“This will never do without a bit of blue. May I run out to the flowers?”

“Certainly, dear;” and Aunt Dinah peered through her spectacles at the half made-up bouquet in the glass.

“Yes, it does — it wants blue. Isn’t there blue verbena?”

And away ran Violet, and her pretty figure and gay face flitted before the windows in the early sun among the flowers. And Aunt Dinah looked for a moment with a smile and a sigh. Perhaps she was thinking of the time when it was morning sun and opening flowers for her, and young fellows — one of whom, long dead in India, was still a dream for her — used to talk their foolish flatteries, that sounded like muffled music in the distant air; and she looked down dreamily on the back of her slim wrinkled hand that lay on the table.

CHAPTER XXV.

W. MAUBRAY ARRIVES.

WHEN, a few days later, Maubray, who was a shy man stepped down from his fly, as the vehicle which conveyed him from the neighbouring railway station, though it more resembled a snail, was called, and found himself under the cold, gray, Ionic colonnade which received people at Kincton, with a dismal and exclusive hospitality, his heart sank, a chilly shadow descended upon him, and in the silent panic of the moment he felt tempted to reenter the vehicle, return to Dr. Sprague, and confess that he wanted nerve to fulfil his engagement.

William was conducted through the hall, up the great stairs, over a sombre lobby and up a second and narrower stair, to a gallery cold and dim, from which his room door opened. Upon this floor the quietude of desertion reigned. He looked from his low window into a small courtyard, formed on three sides by the house itself, and on the fourth by a rear of the offices, behind which a thick mass of autumnal foliage showed itself in the distance The circumscribed view was dreary and formal. How different from homely, genial old Gilroyd! But that was a dream, and this reality; and so his toilet proceeded rapidly, and he descended, looking by no means like a threadbare dominie, but handsome and presentable, and with the refinement of his good birth and breeding in his features.

“Can I see Mr. Kincton Knox?” inquired William of the servant in the hall.

“I’ll inquire, Sir,” and William was left in that tesselated and pillared apartment, while the servant entered his master’s study, and speedily returning, informed him with a superciliousness which was new to William, and decidedly uncomfortable, that he might enter.

It was a handsome study, stored with handsome books and sundry busts, one of the deceased Horace Kincton Knox, in porphyry, received William on a pedestal near the door, and looked alarmingly like a case of smallpox.

The present master of Kincton, portly, handsome, though threescore years had not passed over him in vain, with a bald forehead, and a sort of simple dignity, as William fancied, rose smiling, and came to meet him with his hand extended, and with a cordial glow about him, as though he had known him for years.

"You are very welcome, Sir — very happy to see you — very happy to make your acquaintance; and how is my good friend, Sprague? a very old friend of mine, though we have dropped out of sight a good deal; and I correspond very little, so we lose sight of one another; but he's well, and doing well too? I'm very happy to see you."

There was something homely and reassuring in this kind old man, which was very pleasant to William.

"Doctor Sprague was very well when I left him, and gave me this note, Sir, for you," replied William, presenting it to his host, who took it, and glanced at it as they stood on the hearthrug together; and as he read it, he observed:

"Very cold the weather is, very cold — at this time of year. You've had a cold drive. Not had luncheon yet? Two o'clock, you know: yes, about a quarter to two now, in a quarter of an hour."

He had by this time laid Doctor Sprague's note on the table.

"And the little boy, Sir, where is he?" suggested William.

"Oh, oh! little Howard! I suppose we shall see him at lunch."

"I should wish very much to hear any directions or suggestions, and to know something as to what he has been doing," said William.

"Very true — very right, Mr. — Mr.," and old Kincton Knox groped towards the note, intending to refresh his memory.

"*Herbert*," interposed William, colouring a little. "Doctor Sprague made a point of the name, and I believe, Sir, wrote particularly about it."

"Quite so — very right, Sir. It is *Herbert*. I quite approve — quite, Sir; and about the boy. The fact is, Mr. Herbert, I leave him very much to his mother. She can tell you much more what he has been doing — very young, you know, still — and — and she'll tell you all about him; and I hope you will be happy, I'm sure; and don't fail to tell the people whatever you want, you know; I live very much to myself — quiet room this — fond of books, I suppose? Well, I shall be always very happy to see you here; in fact it will be a great pleasure. We may as well sit down, do, pray; for you know ladies don't care very much for this sort of reading;" and he waved his short white hand towards the bookcases; "and sometimes one feels a little lonely; and Sprague tells me you have a turn for reading."

The door opened, and a servant announced that Mrs Kincton Knox wished to see Mr. Herbert in the schoolroom.

"Ho!" exclaimed the master of Kincton, with a grave countenance and a promptitude which savoured of discipline. "Well, at lunch I shall see you, Mr. Herbert; we'll meet in ten minutes or so; and, Edward, you'll show Mr. — a — Herbert to the schoolroom."

Across the hall was he conducted, to a room in which were some sporting prints and two dingy oil paintings of "sometime," favourite hunters who sniffed and heard their last of field and bugle a century ago. There were also some guns and fishing rods; and, through this to the schoolroom, where Mrs. Kincton Knox, in purple silk, with a turban on her head, loomed awfully before him as he entered, and made him a slight and rustling courtesy, which rather warned him off than greeted him.

"Mr. — a — a — Herbert?" said the lady of the prominent black eyes, with a lofty inquiry.

"I — a — Doctor Sprague — told me he had written very fully about the — the," stammered William, who began to feel like a concealed ticket-of-leave man.

"The *name, yes?* said Mrs. Kincton Knox, looking steadily on him, and then ensued a silence.

"He informed me that having explained the circumstances fully, and also that it was *his* not *my* particular wish, you had seen no difficulty in it," said William.

"Difficulty — none — there can be no difficulty when there's no constraint," replied Mrs. Kincton Knox, laying down a metaphysical axiom, as she sometimes did, which William could not quite clearly understand; "and although I have always maintained the position that where there's mystery there is guilt; yet feeling a confidence in Doctor Sprague's character and profession — of both of which Mr. Kincton Knox happened to know something — we have endeavoured to overcome our objection."

"I understood there was *no* objection," interposed William, flushing.

"Pray allow me. An objection satisfied is not necessarily an objection foregone; in this case, however, you are at liberty to treat it in that light. We waive our objection, and we have every reasonable confidence that we shall not have occasion to repent having done so.”

This was spoken graciously and condescendingly, for she thought that a person who looked so decidedly like a gentleman would rather conduce to the dignity of the Kincton “household.” But it did not seem to strike the young man at all in that light.

“You are about, Mr. — a — Sir, to undertake the charge of my precious child — sensitive, delicate — too delicate and too impressionable to have permitted his making all the progress I could have wished in the rudiments — you understand — of future education and accomplishment; a little wild, but full of affection, and of natural docility — but still unused — from the causes I have mentioned — to restraint or coercion. Your duty will therefore be a delicate one. I need not say that nothing of the nature of punishment will be permitted or endured. You will bear in mind the illustration of the sacred writer — the sun and the tempest, and the traveller’s cloak.” At this point William coughed slightly into his handkerchief. “Mild influences, in my mind, effect more than ever was accomplished by harshness; and such is the system under which our precious Howard must learn. Am I understood?”

“Quite,” said William. “I should not myself undertake the task of punishing any child; but I am afraid, unless the parents are prepared to pull him up now and then for idleness or inattention, you will find his progress far from satisfactory.”

That is a question quite for *them?* said Mrs. Kincton Knox, in her queenlike way.

William bowed.

“What I want chiefly in a person — in a gentleman in your capacity — is that he shall begin to — my precious child shall begin to associate with a superior mind, and imbibe rather by contact than task-work. Do I make myself clear? The — a — the — you know, of course, the kind of thing.”

William did not apprehend quite so clearly the nature of his duties as he would have wished, but said nothing.

“You and he will breakfast with us at halfpast nine. I regret I cannot ask you to lunch. But you and Howard will dine at three o’clock in this room, and have tea and any little thing that Mrs. Ridgeway, the housekeeper, may send you at six. The boy goes to his bed at halfpast nine, and I conclude you already know your own room."

"And where is my pupil?" inquired William.

Mrs. Kincton Knox rang the bell. "He shall be with you presently, Mr. *Herbert,* and you will please to bear in mind that the dear boy's health is just at present our first object, and that he must not be pressed to study more than he wishes."

Master Howard Seymour Knox entered, eyeing the tutor suspiciously and loweringly. He had, perhaps, heard confidently of possible canings, and viewed William Maubray with a sheepish kind of malevolence.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WILLIAM MAUBRAY BEGINS TO EXCITE AN INTEREST.

THERE was positively nothing to interest William Maubray pupil, and a great deal to irritate and disgust him. What can be more sterile than the nature of a selfish child spoiled by indulgence. It was one comfort, however, that he was not expected to accomplish a miracle, that is, to teach a boy who had the option of learning nothing, and often for two hours or more at a time he was relieved altogether of his company, when he went out to drive with Mrs. Kincton Knox, or to have a ride on his pony with the groom.

But the monotony and solitude grew dreadful. At breakfast he sat with, but not of, the party. Except, indeed, the kindly old gentleman, who lived in a monastic seclusion among his books and trees and flowers, and to whom William's occasional company was a cheer and a happiness, no one at the breakfast table seemed, after the first slight and silent salutation was over, conscious of his presence.

Miss Clara and her mamma talked of matters that interested them — their neighbours, and the fashions and the peerage, and even the furniture, as if William were a picture, or nothing at all.

He could not fail, notwithstanding his exclusion, to perceive that Clara was handsome — very handsome, indeed — quite a brilliant blonde, and with that confident and haughty air of — was it fashion — was it blood — was it the habit of being adored with incense and all sorts of worship — he could not tell. He only knew that it became her, and helped to overpower him.

We are not to suppose that all this time female curiosity at Kincton slumbered and slept over such a problem as William Maubray. Treat him how they might in his presence, he was a topic both of interest and inquiry in his absence. The few letters that reached him afforded no clue; they were addressed with uniform exactitude to "W. Herbert, Esq." The books he had brought with him to Kincton contributed no light; for William had not inscribed his name in his books. Miss Clara's maid, who was intensely interested in the investigation, brought a pockethandkerchief of the tutor's to her young mistress's room, where both she and her mamma conned over the initials "W.M." in a small but florid arabesque in the corner. It was, no doubt, a condescension such as William ought to have been proud of.

"There's five on 'em so, Miss — the rest unmarked, and nothing else marked, except three old shirts."

"Why, you goose, what can I care?" laughed Miss Clara. "I'm not his nurse, or his seamstress. Take it away this moment. What a pretty discussion!"

This "W.M.," however, was not without its interest, and two days later the maid exhibited an old copy of Feltham's "Resolves," abstracted from William's little file of books, with "William Martin" neatly inscribed on the fly-leaf, but in a hand so quaint and ancient, and with ink so brown, that even Miss Clara "pooh-poohed " the discovery.

Now, the young lady could not help in some sort requiting William's secret estimate of her good looks. She thought the young tutor decidedly handsome; in fact, there could be no question about it. He was well formed too; and with that undefinable grace which people are apt to refer to gentle blood. There was, moreover, a certain refinement and sensitiveness in his countenance utterly incompatible with the idea of vulgarity of any kind. Now, a tutor might be anything — a decayed nobleman or a chandler's son. Was not Louis Philippe an usher in a school? All you were to assume was that he could teach Latin grammar, and was in want of money.

There were some little signs of superfluity, too, in William's valuables. The butler, who was a native of Geneva, presuming on William's tutorship, had, on a fitting opportunity, begged leave to inspect his watch, and appraised it at twenty guineas among his fellow-servants. This and the massive gold chain, which also excited his admiration, were gifts from Miss Perfect, as was also that glorious dressing-case, presented on his attaining his twenty-first year, resplendent with gold and mother-o'-pearl, and which the same competent authority valued at seventy guineas at least. Now, those things, though little, and some not at all seen outside the walls of his own little bedroom, emitted, like the concealed relics of a saint, so to speak, a glory and a fragrance which permeated the house. It was quite impossible, then, that want of money had driven this Mr. Herbert, or whoever he was, into his present position.

On the plate on top of this resplendent dressing-case the maid, who, fired by Monsieur Drouet's report, had visited the treasure clandestinely, were inscribed, as she reported to Miss Clare, the same mysterious characters *"W.* M."

"I like the old gentleman — kind old man. What wonderful things books are; nourishment for all sorts and sizes of minds — poor old Mr. Kincton Knox. How he reads and positively enjoys them. Yet the best things in them might just as well never have been written or thought, for any real perception he has of them! A kind man; I like him so much; I feel so obliged to him. And what illbred, insupportable persons the ladies are; that pompous, strong-willed, stupid old woman; her magnificence positively stifles me; and the young lady, how disagreeably handsome she is, and how unpertinent. It must be a love of inflicting pain and degradation — how cruel, how shabby, how low!"

Such was William's review of the adult members of the family among whom he had come to reside, as he lay down with his fair hair on the pillow, and his sad eyes long open in the dark, looking at scenes and forms of the past, crossed and troubled by coming sorrows and apprehensions.

The ice and snow spread crisp and hard, and the frosty sun has little heat, but yet the thaw will come. And the radiance emitted by William's dressing-case, watch and other glories, began imperceptibly to tell upon the frozen rigour of his first reception. There was a word now and then about the weather, he was asked more graciously to take some more tea. The ladies sometimes smiled when they thus invited him, and Miss Clara began to take an interest in her brother, and even one day in her riding habit, in which she looked particularly well, looked into the schoolroom for a moment, just to give Howard a little box of bonbons she had promised him before she went out. —

May I, Mr. Herbert?" asked Miss Clara, with that smile which no one could resist.

"Certainly," said William, bowing very low, and she thought there was something haughty in his grave humility.

So she thanked him, smiling more, and made her present to Howard, who broke out with —

"This aint the one you said. You've been and eat it, you greedy!"

“Now!” pleaded Miss Clara, whose fingers tingled to box his ears, though she prolonged the word in her most coaxing tone, “Howard! Howard! could you? your own poor Clara! You shall come up and have any two others you like best, when I come back, if Mr. Herbert allows it,” and with a smile, and a light kiss on the boy’s forehead, who plunged away from her muttering, that brilliant vision vanished, leaving William standing for a moment wondering, and thinking how graceful and pretty she looked in that becoming get-up.

“Well,” thought William, that night compunctiously and pleased, “I believe I have done them an injustice. I forgot that I was a total stranger, and expected a reception different perhaps from what I was entitled to. But this perhaps is better; people whose liking and confidence move slowly, and whose friendship, bestowed gradually, is not suddenly withdrawn.”

And so he went to sleep more happily.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FROM KINCTON TO GILROYD.

A MONTH passed away with little change. Thanks to the very explicit injunction, constantly repeated, to teach his pupil no more than his pupil wished to learn, William Maubray got on wonderfully well with that ill-conditioned brat, who was "the hope of the house of Kincton Knox." Still, notwithstanding this, and all those flattering evidences of growing favour vouchsafed by the ladies of the mansion, the weeks were very long. Miss Clara, although now and then she beamed on him with a transient light, yet never actually conversed; and magnificent and dreary Mrs. Kincton Knox, whether gracious or repellent, was nearly equally insupportable.

Every time he walked out, and, pausing on the upland, looked long and mournfully in the direction in which he fancied lay Gilroyd, with its sunset blush of old red brick, its roses, deep green-sward and chestnut shadows, a sort of home sickness overcame him. Beyond that horizon there was affection, and in old times the never-failing welcome, the smile, the cordial sympathy, and the liberty that knew not Kincton. And with a pain and swelling at his heart came the scene of his expulsion — a mute, hurried leavetaking; the clang of the iron gate, never to open more for him; and Aunt Dinah's fierce and cruel gaze, like the sword of fire in the way, forbidding his return.

How was it with fierce and cruel Aunt Dinah all this time? "The boy will come to his senses," she was constantly repeating to herself, as she closed her book from which her thoughts had been straying, upon her finger, with a short sigh and a proud look. Or when she looked up from her work, with the same little sigh, on the pretty flower landscape, with its background of foliage, seen so sunnily through the jessamine and rose clusters, "Time will bring him to reason; a little time, a very little time."

But when a little time passed away, and no signs came with the next week of returning reason, Aunt Dinah grew fiercer and more warlike. "Sulky and obstinate! Ungrateful young man! Well, so be it. We'll see who can maintain silence longest. Let him cool; let him take his own time, I won't hurry him, I promise him," and so forth.

But another week passed, still in silence, and Miss Perfect "presented her compliments to Dr. Sprague, and begged to inquire whether her nephew, William Maubray, had returned to Cambridge a little more than a fortnight since. Not that she had the least right or *wish* to inquire minutely henceforward into his plans, place of residence, pursuits, or associates; but simply that having for so long a time taken an interest in him, and, as she hoped, been of some little use to him — if supporting and educating him entirely might so be deemed — she thought she had a claim to be informed how he was, whether well or ill. Beyond that she begged to be excused from asking, and requested that Doctor Sprague would be so good as to confine himself to answering that simple inquiry, and abstain from mentioning anything further about William Maubray."

In reply to this, Doctor Sprague "begged to inform Miss Perfect that when he last saw him, about ten days since, when he left Cambridge, her nephew, William Maubray, was very well. On his return from his recent visit to Gilroyd, he had remained but a week in his rooms, and had then left to prosecute a plan by which he hoped to succeed in laying a foundation for future efforts and success. Doctor Sprague was not very well, and had been ordered to take a little exceptional holiday abroad, and Miss Perfect's letter had reached him just on the eve of his departure for the continent."

Unobserved, almost to herself, there had been before Aunt Dinah's eyes, as she read her book, or worked at her crochet, or looked out wearied on the lawn, a little vignette representing a college tutor's chamber, Gothic in character, and a high-backed oaken chair, antiquated and carved, in which, like Faust philosophising to the respectful Vagner, sat Doctor Sprague, with his finger on the open letter she had sent him, exhorting and reproving the contumacious William Maubray, and in the act of despatching him, in a suit of sackcloth, with peas in his shoes, on a penitential pilgrimage to Gilroyd.

This pleasing shadow, like an illusion of the magic lantern, vanished in pitch darkness, as Miss Perfect read the good doctor's answer. With a pallid, patient smile, and feeling suddenly cold from her head to her feet, she continued to gaze in sore distress upon the letter. Had William enlisted, or had he embarked as steward on board an American steamer? Was he about working his passage to New Zealand, or had he turned billiard marker?

Neighbours dropped in now and then to pay a visit, and Violet had such conversation as the vicinity afforded, and chatted and laughed all she could. But Miss Perfect was very silent for some days after the arrival of Dr. Sprague's letter. She was more gentle, and smiled a good deal, but was wan, and sighed from time to time, and her dinner was a mere make-belief. And looking out of her bedroom window in the evening, toward Saxton, she did not hear old Winnie Dobbs, who had thrice accosted her. But after a little she turned to the patient old handmaid, and said —

"Pretty the old church looks in the sun; I sometimes wish I were there."

Old Winnie followed the direction of her eyes, and gazed also, saying mildly —

"Good sermons, indeed, Ma'am, and a good parson, kind to the poor; and very comfortable it is, sure, if they did not raise the stove so high. I think 'twas warmer before they raised it."

"For a hundred and fifty years the Gilroyd people have been all buried there," continued Aunt Dinah, talking more to the old church than to Winnie.

"Well, I should not wonder," said Winnie, "there is a deal o' them lies there. My grandmother minded the time old Lady Maubray was buried yonder, with that fine marble thing outside o' the church. The rails is gone very rusty now, and that coat of arms, and the writing, it's wearing out — it is worn, the rain or something; and indeed I sometimes do think where is the good of grandeur; when we die it's all equal, the time being so short as it is. Master Willie asked me to show it him last Sunday three weeks coming out o' church, and even his young eyes— "

"Don't name him, don't mention him," said Aunt Dinah suddenly in a tone of cold decision.

Winnie's guileless light blue eyes looked up in helpless wonder in her mistress's face.

"Don't name his name, Winnie Dobbs. He's *gone?* said she in the same severe tone.

"Gone!" repeated Winnie. "Yes, sure! but he'll come back."

"No, he shan't, Winnie; he'll darken my doors no more. Come what may, *that* shan't be. Perhaps, I may *assist* him occasionally still, but see him, never! He has renounced me, and I wash my hands of him." She was answering Winnie's look of consternation. "Let him go his own way as he chooses it — I've *done* with him."

There was a long pause here, during which ancient Winnie Dobbs stared with an imbecile incredulity at her mistress, who was looking still at the old church. Then old Winnie sighed. Then she shook her head, touching the tip of her tongue with a piteous little "tick, tick, tick," to the back of her teeth.

And Aunt Dinah continued drearily —

"And Miss Violet must find this very dull — I've no right to keep her here. She would be happier in some other home, poor child. I'm but a dismal companion, and how long is it since young Mr. Trevor was here? You don't remember — there, don't try, but it must be three weeks or more, and — and I do think he was very attentive. I mean, Winnie, but you are to say nothing below stairs, you know — I mean, I really think he was in love with Miss Vi."

"Well, indeed, they did talk about it — the neighbours; there was talk, a deal o' talk, and I don't know, but I often thought she liked him."

"Well, *that's* off too, *quite,* I think; you know it is very rude, impertinent, in fact, his never having called here once, or done more than just raise his hat to us in the church door on Sundays, ever since William Maubray went away. I look upon his conduct as altogether outrageous, and being the kind of person he is, I'm very glad he disclosed himself so early, and certainly it would have been a thousand pities the girl should have ever thought of him. So that's over too, and all the better it is, and I begin to grow tired of the whole thing — very tired, Winnie; and I believe the people over there," and she nodded toward the churchyard, "are best provided for, and it's time, Winnie, I should be thinking of joining them where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

"God forbid, Ma'am!" remonstrated old Winnie, mildly, and they turned together from the window to accomplish Aunt Dinah's toilet.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PIPING BULLFINCH.

NEXT Sunday Mr. Vane Trevor, after church, happened to be carried in one of the converging currents of decently-dressed Christianity into the main channel through the porch, almost side by side with the two Gilroyd ladies then emerging.

Mr. Vane Trevor, in pursuance of his prudent resolve, would have avoided this meeting. But so it was. In the crowded church porch, out of which the congregation emerges so slowly, with a sort of decent crush, almost pressed inconveniently against good Miss Perfect, the young gentleman found himself, and in a becoming manner, with a chastened simper, inquiring after their health, and making the proper remarks about the weather.

Aunt Dinah received these attentions very drily; but Miss Vi, in such an arch, becoming little shell-like bonnet, looked perfectly lovely; and to do her justice, was just as friendly as usual.

It was no contrivance of his, the meeting with this bewitching little bonnet where he did. How could he help the strange little thrill with which he found himself so near — and was it in human nature, or even in good manners, to deny himself a very little walk, perhaps only to the churchyard gate, beside Miss Violet Darkwell?

“How is my friend Maubray?” inquired Trevor of Miss Perfect, whom he found himself next.

“I really don’t know — I have not heard — I suppose he is very well,” she answered, with an icy severity that rather surprised the young man, who had heard nothing of the quarrel.

“I must write. I ought to have asked him when he meant to return. I am so anxious for an excuse to renew our croquet on the lawn at Gilroyd.”

This little speech was accompanied with a look which Violet could hardly mistake.

“I don’t think it likely,” said Miss Perfect, in the same dry tone.

"Any time within the next three weeks, the weather will answer charmingly," continued Trevor, addressing Miss Darkwell.

"But I rather think Miss Darkwell will have to make her papa a little visit. He's to return on the eighteenth, you remember, my dear; and he says, you know, you are to meet him at Richmond."

So said Aunt Dinah, who had no notion of this kind of trifling.

Trevor again saw the vision of a lean, vulgar, hardvoiced barrister, trudging beside him with a stoop, and a seedy black frock-coat; and for a minute was silent. But he looked across at pretty Miss Vi, so naturally elegant, and in another moment the barrister had melted into air, and he saw only that beautiful nymph.

"I want to look at old Lady Maubray's monument round the east end, here, of the church. You would not dislike, dear, to come — only a step. I must have any repairs done that may be needed. Good-morning, Mr, Trevor."

But Mr. Trevor begged leave to be of the party, knowing exactly where the monument stood.

There is a vein of lovemaking with which a country churchyard somehow harmonises very tenderly. Among the grass-grown graves the pretty small feet, stepping lightly and reverently, the hues and outlines of beauty and young life; the gay faces shadowed with a passing sadness — nothing ghastly, nothing desolate — only a sentiment of the solemn and the melancholy, and underlying that tender sadness, the trembling fountains of life and gladness, the pulses of youth and hope.

"Yes; very, very much neglected," said Miss Perfect. "We can do nothing with that marble, of course," she observed, nodding toward the arched cornice at top, which time and weather had sadly worn and furrowed. "It was her wish, my dear father often told me; she *would* have it outside, not in the church; but the rails, and this masonry — we must have that set to rights — *yes."*

And so, stepping lightly among weeds and long grass, and by humble headstones and timeworn tombs, they came forth under the shadow of the tall elms by the churchyard gate, and again Miss Perfect intimated a farewell to Trevor, who, however, said he would go home by the stile — a path which would lead him by the gate of Gilroyd; and before he had quite reached that, he had begun to make quite a favourable impression once more on the old lady; insomuch that, in her forgetfulness, she asked him at the gate of Gilroyd to come in, which very readily he did; and the little party sat down together in the drawingroom of Gilroyd, and chatted in a very kindly and agreeable way; and Vane Trevor, who, like Aunt Dinah, was a connoisseur in birds, persuaded her to accept a bullfinch, which he would send her next morning in a new sort of cage, which had just come out He waited in vain, however, for one of those little momentary absences, which, at other times, had left him and Violet alone. Miss Perfect, though mollified, sat him out very determinedly. So, at last, having paid a very long visit, Mr. Vane Trevor could decently prolong it no further, and he went away with an unsatisfactory and disappointed feeling, not quite reasonable, considering the inflexible rule he had imposed upon himself in the matter of Gilroyd Hall and its inhabitants.

"Maubray has told her all I said," thought Vane Trevor, as he pursued the solitary path along the uplands of Revington. "The old woman — what a bore she is — was quite plainly vexed at first; but that jolly little creature — Violet — Violet, it *is* a pretty name — she was exactly as usual. By Jove! I thought *she'd* have been a bit vexed; but she's an angel," he dreamed on, disappointed. "I don't think she can have even begun to care for me the least bit in the world — I really *don't."* He was looking down on the path, his hands in his pockets, and his cane under his arm; and he kicked a little stone out of his way at the emphatic word, rather fiercely. "And so much the better; there's no need of all that caution. Stuff! they know quite well I've no idea of marrying; and what more? And there's no danger of her, for she is plainly quite content with those terms, and does not care for me — now, that's all right."

It is not always easy to analyse one's own motives; but, beneath that satisfaction, there was very considerable soreness, and something like a resolution to make her like him, in spite of her coldness. The pretty, little, impertinent, cold, bewitching gipsy. It was so absurd.

She did not seem the least flattered by the distinction of his admiration.

Next morning, after breakfast, he drove down in his dog-cart, instead of sending the bird as he had proposed There were some ingenious contrivances in this model cage which required explanation. The oddest thing about the present was that the piping bullfinch sang two of Violet's favourite airs. Trevor had no small difficulty, and a diffuse correspondence, in his search for one so particularly accomplished.

When in the drawingroom at Gilroyd, he waved a feather before its eyes, and the little songster displayed his acquirements. Trevor stole a glance at Miss Vi; but she looked perfectly innocent, and smiled with a provoking simplicity on the bird. Miss Perfect was, however, charmed, and fancied she knew the airs, but was, honestly, a little uncertain.

"It is really too good of you, Mr. Trevor," she exclaimed.

"On the contrary, I'm much obliged by your accepting the charge. I'm a sort of wandering Arab, you know, and I shall be making the tour of my friends' country houses; so poor little Pipe would have been very lonely, perhaps neglected; and I should very likely have had a letter some day announcing his death, and that, for fifty reasons, would have half broken my heart;" whereat he laughed a little, for Aunt Dinah, and glanced one very meaning and tender ogle on Miss Violet.

"Well, Mr. Trevor, disguise it how you may you are very goodnatured," said Miss Perfect, much pleased with her new pet; "and I'm very much obliged."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MESSAGE IN THE "TIMES."

WITH this little speech, Aunt Dinah, thinking for the moment of nothing but her bird, and very much pleased with Mr. Trevor, carried the little songster away to her room, leaving the young people together at the open parlour window.

"I hope *you* like him?" Trevor said, in a low tone.

"Oh, *charming!*" replied Miss Vi.

"I should not for all the world — you'll never know the reason why, perhaps — have let him go to any place else, but here — upon my honour," said Mr. Vane Trevor, speaking very much in earnest.

"Miss Perfect, I can see, is charmed," said Violet.

"Ah, *yes* — you think so — very happy, I'm sure; but I shall miss him very much. I — you've no idea what company he has been to me: and what a lot of trouble I had in finding one to — in fact, the sort of one I wanted."

"They are very pretty, very sweet; but after all don't you think the natural song the best? I should be afraid of the repetition; I should tire of the same airs," said Miss Darkwell.

"Of others — yes, perhaps, I should, but of those, *never"* said Mr. Vane Trevor, eloquently.

No romantic young gentleman who means to walk in the straight and narrow path of prudence, does well in falling into such a dialogue of covert-meanings with so very pretty a girl as Miss Violet Darkwell. It is like going up in a balloon, among invisible and irresistible currents, and the prince of the powers of the air alone can tell how long a voyage you are in for, and in what direction you may come down.

The flattering tongues of men! sweet airy music attuned to love and vanity, to woman's pride and weakness, half despised, half cherished. Long after — a phrase — a fragment of a sentence, like a broken bar, or half remembered cadence of some sweet old air, that sounded in your young ears, in dances and merrymakings, now far and filmy as bygone dreams, turns up unbidden — comes back upon remembrance, and is told, with a saddened smile, to another generation. Drink in the sweet music at your pretty ears; it will not last always. There is a day for enjoyment, and a day for remembrance, and then the days of darkness.

A little blush — the glory, too, of ever so faint a smile! the beautiful flush of beauty's happy triumph was on the fair face of the girl, as she listened for a moment, with downcast eyes; and Vane Trevor, conceited young man as he was, had never felt so elated as when he saw that transient, but beautiful glow, answering to his folly.

I may look on her with different eyes, like the Choragus of an old play, and wonder and speculate which it is she likes — the flattery or the lover — or each for the sake of the other; or the flattery only, caring not that bullfinch's feather on the carpet for him? There is not much in her face to guide me; I can only see, for certain, that she is pleased.

"I shall never forget those airs; you sang them the first time I heard you sing; and I'm afraid I have been awfully unreasonable about them, asking you to sing them for me every time nearly I had an opportunity; and I — I assure you — I don't know what I shall do without my poor bird; and— "

Exactly at this point Aunt Dinah returned, and Mr. Vane Trevor, with admirable presence of mind, said:

"I was just saying to Miss Darkwell, I am sure I have heard her sing those little songs the bird whistles."

"So she does," interrupted Miss Perfect. "I could not think where I heard them. You know those airs, Vi?"

"Yes — I think they *are* among my songs," answered Violet, carelessly.

"It would be very good of you, Miss Perfect — now that I've parted with my musician, you know — if you would allow me — just perhaps once before I leave Revington — I shall be away probably some months — to look in some evening, when Miss Darkwell is at her music — it is very impertinent, I'm afraid, to ask — but knowing those airs so well, I should like so much to hear them sung, if you happened to be able to find them." The concluding words were to Violet.

"Oh, dear yes — won't you, Vi? — certainly, any evening, we shall be very happy; but you know we are very early people, and our tea hour seven o'clock."

"Oh, quite delightful," exclaimed the accommodating Vane Trevor. "I have no hours at all at Revington — when I'm alone there, I just eat when

I'm hungry and sleep when I'm sleepy."

"The certain way to lose your health!" exclaimed Miss Perfect.

"Very much obliged — I'll certainly turn up, you know, seven o'clock some evening."

And so he took his leave, and was haunted day and night by Violet Darkwell's beautiful downcast face, as he had seen it that morning.

"I knew I'd make her like me — by Jove, I knew I should — she does, I'm quite sure of it, she's beginning to like me, and if I choose I'll make her like me awfully."

Now, all the rest of that day, Trevor thought a great deal less than he had ever done before, of the pomps and vanities of Revington, and the vain glories of the Trevors of that ilk. Wrestling with love is sometimes like wrestling with an angel, and when the struggle seems well nigh over, and the athlete sure of his victory, one unexpected touch of the angelic hand sets him limping again for many a day. Little did he fancy that the chance meeting in the shadowy porch of Saxton Church would rivet again the sightless chains which it had taken some time and trouble to unclasp, and send him maundering and spiritless in his fetters among the woods and lonely paths of Revington; not yet, indeed, bewailing in vain his captivity, but still conscious of the invisible influence in which he was again entangled, and with no very clear analysis of the present, or thoughts for the future.

Time had brought no tidings of William Maubray, and, except on occasions, Aunt Dinah's fits of silence were growing longer, and her old face more wan and sad.

"Ungrateful creature!" said she, unconsciously aloud.

"Who, Ma'am?" asked old Winnie, mildly. Her mistress was disrobing for bed.

"Eh, who?" repeated Miss Perfect. "My nephew William Maubray, to think of his never once sending me a line, or a message! — we might all be dead here and he never know. Not that I care for his indifference and heartless ingratitude, for as I told you before, I shall never see his face again. You need not stare, you need not say a word, Winnie; it is quite fixed. You may go to see him at Cambridge if he's there, or wherever he is, but the door of Gilroyd he shall never enter more while I live, and he and his concerns shall trouble me just as little as I and mine do him."

It was about this time that William Maubray, who was permitted regularly to look into the *Times*, saw the following notification among its advertisements: —

"If the young gentleman who abruptly left his old relative's house, under displeasure, on the night of — , is willing to enter the Church, a path to reconciliation may be opened; but none otherwise. If he needs pecuniary assistance it will be supplied to the extent of £50, on his applying through his tutor, Doctor S — , but not directly."

"How insulting — how severe and unforgiving," murmured William. "How could she fancy it possible that I could accept the insult of her gift?"

With a swelling heart he turned to another part of the paper, and tried to read. But the odious serpent coiled and hissing at him from its little tabulated compartment, was too near, and he could think of nothing else,

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LORD OF BURLEIGH.

One morning at breakfast, the Kincton letters having arrived, Miss Clara, who had only one, tossed it carelessly to her mamma, who, having just closed one of her own, asked —

"Who is it?"

"Vane; he's coming here he says on Thursday, instead of Wednesday," answered the young lady.

"Cool young gentleman!" observed Mrs. Kincton Knox. "He ought to know that people don't invite themselves to Kincton — any news?"

"Yes; there has been an awful battle, and young Maubray has gone off, no one knows where, and everyone's curious to find out — quite irreconcilable, they say."

"Does he say what about?" inquired the old lady, taking up the letter.

"'No, nothing; only that," answered Clara.

"Mamma, Mr. Herbert's blushing all over, like fun," cried Master Howard from the other side of the table, with a great grin on his jam-bedaubed mouth, and his spoon pointed at poor William's countenance.

The ladies involuntarily glanced at William, who blushed more fiercely than ever, and began to fiddle with his knife and fork. Miss Clara's glance only, as it were, touched him and was instantly fixed on the view through the window, in apparent abstraction. Mrs. Kincton Knox's prominent dark eyes rested gravely a little longer on poor William's face, and the boy waving his spoon, and kicking his chair, cried, "Ha, ha!"

"Don't Sir, that's extremely rude — lay down your spoon; you're never to point at anyone, Sir. Mr. Herbert's quite ashamed of you, and so am I."

"Come here," said William.

"Oh, no! you all want me to hold my tongue. It's always so, and that great beast of a Clara," bawled "the hope of the house," as his mamma was wont to call him.

"Come to me," said poor William, mildly.

“Or, if you permit *me,* Mr. Herbert,” said Mrs. Kincton Knox. “*Howard!* I can’t tolerate this. You are to sit quiet, and eat your breakfast — do you hear — and do you like sardines? — Mr. Herbert, may I trouble you — thanks; and no personalities, mind — never; Mr. Herbert, a little more tea?”

The ladies fell into earnest conference that morning after breakfast, so soon as William and his pupil had withdrawn.

“W. M.! Everything marked with W. M. — Winston Maubray. Don’t you see?” said the old lady, with a nod, and her dark and prominent eyes fixed suddenly on her daughter.

“Yes, of course; and did you look at his face when I mentioned the quarrel with Sir Richard?” said the young lady.

“Did you ever see anything like it?” exclaimed her mother.

Miss Clara smiled mysteriously, and nodded her acquiescence.

“Why, my dear, it was the colour of that,” continued Mrs. Kincton Knox, pointing her finger fiercely at the red leather back of the chair that stood by them. “I don’t think there can be a doubt. I know there’s none in *my* mind.”

“It is very curious — very romantic. I only hope that we have not been using him very ill,” said Miss Clara, and she laughed more heartily than was her wont.

“I’ll! I don’t know what you mean. I trust, Clara, no one is ever illused at Kincton. It certainly would rather surprise me to hear anything of the kind,” retorted the lady of Kincton, loftily.

“Well, I did not mean ill, exactly. I ought to have said rudely. I hope we have not been treating him like a — a — *what* shall I say? — all this time,” and the young lady laughed again.

“We have shown him, Clara, all the kindness and consideration which a person entering this house in the capacity he chose to assume could possibly have expected. I don’t suppose he expected us to divine by witchcraft who and what he was; and I am very certain that he would not have thought as — as highly of us, if we had acted in the slightest degree differently.”

But though she spoke so confidently, Mrs. Kincton Knox, that perfect woman, was secretly troubled with misgivings of the same uncomfortable kind, and would have given a good deal to be able to modify the past, or even distinctly to call its incidents to mind.

"Of course, Clara, I shan't observe upon those odd coincidences to Mr. — Mr. *Herbert* himself. It is his wish to be private for the present. We have no right to pry. But there is certainly justifiable — I may say, even *called* for — some little modification of our own demeanour toward him, in short; and knowing now — as I feel confident we do — who he is, there is no need of the same degree of reserve and — and distance; and I am very glad, if for this reason only, that you may more frequently, my dear Clara, look in and see your little brother, who is so much shut up; it would be only kind."

In fact this old warrior, with the Roman nose and eagle eye, surveying the position, felt, in Cromwell's phrase, that the "Lord had delivered him into her hand." There he was domesticated, in what she might regard as a romantic incognito, without parental authority to impede or suspicion to alarm him! Could a more favourable conjuncture be fancied? How a little real kindness would tell just now upon his young heart! and he would have such an opportunity in his disguise of estimating and being touched by the real amiability of the Kincton Knoxes; and the Maubray estates and an old baronetage would close Miss Clara's campaigning with *eclat.*

The young lady did look into the schoolroom.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Herbert, you'll think me very tiresome," she said.

William had risen as she entered, with a bow.

"But mamma is thinking of taking Howard a drive, if you approve, and Howard, we are going to Bolton Priory. Mamma wishes so much to know whether you will allow him to come."

"I can have no objection. He's not now at his lessons. I'm sure it will do him a great deal of good."

Miss Clara, in a pretty attitude, leaning with one hand on the table, was smiling down on Master Howard, and caressingly running her taper fingers through his curls.

"Let my head be — will you!" he bawled, disengaging himself, with a bounce and a thump at her hand.

The young lady smiled and shrugged plaintively at William, who said, "Howard, I shall tell your mamma, if you are rude to Miss Knox, and I'll ask her not to take you out to-day."

"That's just it," retorted Master Howard. "That's the way you men always take her part against me, because you think she's young and pretty. Ah-ha! I wish you'd ask her maid — Winter."

“Be quiet, Sir,” said William, in so stern a tone, and with so angry a flash of his blue eyes, that the young gentleman was actually overawed, and returned lowering and muttering to the ship he had been rigging, only making an ugly grimace over his shoulder, and uttering the word “crocodile!”

Though Miss Clara smiled plaintively down upon the copy of Tennyson which lay open on the table, and turned over a page or two with her fingertip, serenely, she inwardly quaked while Howard declaimed, and in her soul wished him the fate of Cicero; and when she got to her room planted her chair before the cheval glass with a crash, and exclaimed, “I do believe that the fiendish imp is raised up expressly to torture me! Other parents would beat such a brat into a mummy, and knock his head off rather than their daughter should be degraded by him; but mine seem to like it positively. I wish — oh! don’t I, just!” And the aposiopesis and the look were eloquent.

But she had not yet left the schoolroom, and as she looked down on the open pages, she murmured, sadly, “The Lord of Burleigh!” And looking up she said to William, “I see you read my poet and my favourite poem, too, only I think it too heartrending. I can’t read it. I lose my spirits for the whole day after, and I wonder whether the story is really true,” she paused with a look of sad inquiry, and William answered that he had read it was so.

And she said, with a little sigh, “That only makes it sadder,” and she seemed to have something more to say, but did not; and after a moment, with a little smile and a nod, she went from the room. And William thought he had never seen her look so handsome, and had not before suspected her of so much mind and so much feeling, and he took the book up and read the poem through, and dreamed over it till the servant came with a knock at the door, and his mistress’s compliments, to know if Master Howard might go now.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A FRIEND APPEARS.

WILLIAM MAUBRAY'S harmless self love was flattered by the growing consideration with which he was treated. The more they saw of him plainly the better they liked him, and William began, too, dimly to fancy that there must be something very engaging about him.

A night or two later, his pupil having just gone to bed, a footman came with a little scrap of pink paper, pencilled over, in Mrs. Kincton Knox's hand, on a salver, for William, who found these words:

"It has just struck me that I might possibly prevail upon your goodnature, to look in upon our solitude for half an hour; though we don't like abridging your hours of liberty, it would really be quite a kindness to indulge me; and if you can lay your hand upon your volume of Tennyson, pray bring it with you."

Up got William, and with his book in his hand followed the servant, who announced Mr. Herbert at the drawingroom door, and William found himself in that vast apartment, the lights of which were crowded about the fire, and the rest comparatively dim.

"So good of you, Mr. Herbert," said Mrs. Kincton Knox, with a superb smile, and even extending her fingers in the solemn exuberance of her welcome. "It is so very kind of you to come; so unreasonable, I fear: we had a debate, I assure you," and she smiled with awful archness toward Miss Clara, "but my audacity carried it — you've brought the book too — he has brought the book, Clara; how very kind, is not it?"

Miss Clara answered by a glance at their visitor, almost grateful, and a smile at her mother, who continued —

"You have no idea, Mr. Herbert — pray sit where we can both hear and see you — how very lonely we are in these great rooms, when we are *tête-à-tête,* as you see."

William's remarks in reply were not very original or very many, but such as they were nothing could be more successful, and the ladies exchanged smiles of approbation over the timid little joke, which had all but broken down.

So William read aloud, and the ladies, each in her way, were charmed, and next night he was invited again, and there was more conversation and rather less reading, and so he grew much more easy and intimate, and began to look forward to these little reunions with a very pleasant interest: and Miss Clara's brilliant beauty and some little indications of a penchant very flattering began to visit his fancy oftener than I should have supposed likely; although it is hard to say when the wayside flowers on the longest journey quite lose their interest; or how much care and fatigue are needed to make a man cease to smile now and then, or whistle a stave on his way.

William and his pupil were walking down the thick fir wood that lies on the slope between Kincton and the Old London road, when just at a curve in the path, within twenty yards, whom should he come upon suddenly in this darksome by-way but Mr. Vane Trevor. They both stopped short.

"By Jove! Maubray?" exclaimed Trevor, after a pause, and he cackled one of his agreeable laughs.

"Did not expect to see you here, Trevor," replied William, looking on the whole rather dismally surprised.

"Why, what are you afraid of, old Maubray? I'm not going to do you any harm, upon my honour," and he laughed again, approaching his friend, who likewise advanced to meet him smiling, with rather an effort. "Very glad to see you, and I've a lot to tell you," said he. "I don't mean any nonsense, but really serious things."

"All well at home?" asked William, eagerly.

"Oh, dear, yes, quite well — all flourishing. It is not — it's nothing unpleasant, you know, only I mean something — it's of importance to me, by Jove! and to, I fancy, other people also; and I see you're puzzled. Can we get rid of that little wretch for a minute or two?" and he glanced at Howard Seymour Knox, to whom, he just remembered, he had not yet spoken.

"And how do you do, Howard, my boy? Flourishing, I see. Would you like to have a shot with my revolver? I left it at the gamekeeper's down there. Weil, give them this card, and they'll give it to you — and we'll try and shoot a rabbit — eh?"

Away went Master Howard, and Trevor said —

"And do tell me, what are you doing here, of all places in the world?"

"I'm a resident tutor — neither more nor less," said William Maubray, with a bitter gaiety.

"You mean you've come here to Kincton to teach that little cur — I hope you lick him a trifle?" inquired Trevor, "Yes; but I don't lick him, and in fact the situation —— that's the right word, isn't it? — is very, what's the word? We get on quietly, and they're all very civil to me, and it's very good of a swell like you to talk so to a poor devil of a pedagogue."

"Come Maubray, none of your chaff. I knew by your aunt's manner there was a screw loose somewhere — something about a living, wasn't there?"

It was plain, however, that Trevor was thinking of something that concerned him more nearly than William Maubray's squabble with his aunt.

"It's a long story," said William; "she wants me to go into the Church, and I won't, and so there's a quarrel, and that's all."

"And the supplies stopped?" exclaimed Trevor.

"Well, I think she would not stop them; she is very generous — but I could not, you know, it's time I should do something: and I'm here — Doctor Sprague thought it right — under the name of Herbert. They know it's an assumed name — we took care to tell them that — so there's no trick, you know, and please don't say my name's Maubray, it would half break my aunt's heart."

"Secret as the tomb, *Herbert*, I'll remember, and — and I hope that nasty little dog won't be coming back in a minute — it's a good way though — and, by Jove! it's very comical, though, and almost providential this, meeting you here, for I did want a friend to talk a bit to, awfully, and you know, Maubray, I really *have* always looked on you in the light of a friend."

There was a consciousness of the honour which such a distinction conferred in the tone in which this was spoken, and William, in the cynical irony which, in this interview, he had used with Trevor, interposed with —

"A humble friend, and very much flattered."

"You're no such thing, upon my honour, and I think you're joking. But I really do regard you as a friend, and I want to tell you no end of things, that I really think will surprise you."

William Maubray looked in Trevor's face, gravely and dubiously, and said he, with the air of a man of the world, "Well, I should like to hear — and any advice I can offer, it is not of any great value I fear, is quite at your service."

“Let’s sit down here,” said Trevor, and side by side they seated themselves on a rustic seat, and in the golden shade of the firs and pines, Vane Trevor began to *o*pen his case to William.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CONFIDENCE.

"I DON'T know what you'll think of it after all I've said, but I'm going to marry your cousin, Violet Darkwell," said Vane Trevor, after a little pause, and with a kind of effort, and a rather deprecatory smile.

"Oh?" exclaimed William Maubray, cheerily, and with a smile. But the smile was wan, and the voice sounded ever so far away.

"There's no use, Maubray, in a fellow's resisting his destiny; and there's an old saying, you know, about marriages being made in heaven. By Jove! when it comes to a certain point with a fellow, it's all over; no good struggling, and he may as well accomplish his — his destiny — by Jove, with a good grace. And — and I know, Maubray, you'll be glad to hear, and — and I really believe it's the best, and wisest thing I could have done — don't you think so?"

"I'm sure of that," said William, in the same tone, with the same smile. Everyone says it's better to marry, when a fellow can afford it; but I did not think you had a notion; that is for ever so long; and then some great lady."

"No more I had," answered Trevor. "By Jove! a month ago you weren't a more unlikely man; but how can I help it? You never were spooney on a girl in all your life, and of course you can't tell; but you've no idea how impossible it is for a fellow, when once he comes to be really in — in love — to — to make himself happy, and be content to lose her. *I* can't, I know."

"No, of course," answered William, with the same smile and an involuntary sigh.

"And then, you know, money and that sort of thing, it's all very fine, all very good in a wife; but by Jove! there's more than you think in — in fascination and beauty and manner, and that sort of thing. There's Sir John Sludgeleigh — old family, capital fellow — he chose to marry a woman from some of those cotton mill places, with no end of money, and by Jove, I think he has been ashamed to show ever since; you never saw such a brute. He's ashamed of her, and they say he'd give his right hand had he never set eyes on her. I can quite understand, of course, a fellow that has not a guinea left: but, by Jove, if you saw her, you could not conceive such a thing. And there's old Lord Ricketts, he married quite a nobody. Sweetly pretty, to be sure, but out of a boarding school, and so clever, you know, but no money, and no family, and he so awfully dipt; and she set herself to work and looked after everything, awfully clever, and at this moment the estate does not owe a guinea, and she found it with a hundred and twenty thousand pounds mortgage over it; and when he married her everyone said it was all up, and his ruin certain, and by Jove it was that marriage that saved him."

"Very curious!" said William, dismally.

"To be sure it is; there's no subject, I tell you, there's so much nonsense talked about as marriage: if a woman brings you a fortune or connexion, by Jove, she'll make you pay for it. I could tell you half a dozen who have been simply ruined by making what all the world thought wonderfully good marriages."

"I dare say," said William, in a dream.

"And then about family and connexion, really the thing, when you examine it, there's wonderfully little in it; the good blood of England isn't in the peerage at all, it is really, as a rule, all in the landed gentry. Now, look at us, for example; I give you leave to search the peerage through, and you'll not find *four* houses — I don't speak of titles, but families — older than we. Except four, there is not one as old. And really, if people are nice, and quite well bred, what more do you want?"

"Oh, nothing," sighed William.

"And do you know, I've rather a prejudice against barristers, I mean as being generally an awfully low, vulgar set; and I assure you, I know I may say whatever I think to you; but I, when I was thinking about all this thing, you know, I could not get the idea out of my head. I knew her father was a barrister, and he was always turning up in my mind; you know the sort of thing, as — as a sort of fellow one could not like."

"But he's a particularly gentlemanlike man," broke in William, to whom Sergeant Darkwell had always been very kind.

"Oh! you need not tell *me*, for I walked with him home to Gilroyd, last Sunday, from church. I did not know who he was — stupid of me not to guess — and you can't think what an agreeable — really nice fellow."

"I know him; he has been always very kind to me, and very encouraging about the bar," said Maubray.

"Yes," interrupted Trevor, "and they say, certain to rise, and very high too. Chancery, you know, and that — and — and such a really gentlemanlike fellow, might be anything, and so — and so clever, I'm sure."

"Come down to draw the settlements," thought William, with a pang. But he could not somehow say it There are events to which you can submit, but the details of which you shrink from. Here was for William, in some sort, a *death*. A familiar face gone. The rest was the undertaker's business. The stretching and shrouding, and screwing down, he had rather not hear of.

"You are going to tell the people here?" said William Maubray, not knowing well what to say.

"Tell them here, at Kincton! Not if I know it Why, I know pretty well, for fifty reasons, how *they'll* receive it. Oh! no, I'll just send them the prettiest little bit of a note in a week or two, when everything is quite settled, and I'll not mind seeing them again for some time, I can tell you. Here's this little wretch coming again. Well, Howard, have you got the revolver?" Master Howard's face was swollen with tears and fury.

"No, they wouldn't give it me. You knew right well they would not, without mamma told 'em. I wish mamma was hanged; I do; she's always a plaguing every one; her and that great brute, Clara."

This explosion seemed to divert Mr. Trevor extremely; but William was, of course, obliged to rebuke his pupil.

"If you say that again, Master Howard, I'll tell your mamma."

"I don't care."

"Very well, Sir."

"I say, come with me," said Trevor. "We'll ask mamma about the pistol, and I shall be here again in half an hour."

"Very well, do so, and just remember, though I don't much care," said Maubray, in an under tone, "they don't know my name here."

"All right," said Trevor; "I shan't forget," and he and his interesting companion took their departure, leaving William to his meditations.

"So! going to be married — little Vi — pretty little Vi — little Vi, that used to climb up at the back of my chair. I'll try and remember her always the same little wayward, beautiful darling. I've seen my last of her, at least for a long time, a very long time, and Gilroyd — I'll never see it again."

And thoughts, vague and sad, came swelling up the stormy channels of his heart, breaking wildly and mournfully one over the other, and poor William Maubray, in his solitude, wept some bitter tears.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LADIES MAKE INQUISITION.

ON the steps Vane Trevor was encountered by Mr. Kincton Knox, in his drab gaiters and portly white waistcoat, and white hat, and smiling in guileless hospitality, with both hands extended. “Very good, Vane, my dear boy — very happy — now we’ve got you, we’ll keep you three weeks at least. You must not be running away as usual. We’ll not let you off this time, mind.”

Vane knew that the hospitable exuberances of the worthy gentleman were liable to be overruled by another power, and did not combat the hospitable seizure, as vigorously as if there had been no appeal. But he chatted a while with the old gentleman, and promised to walk down and see the plantations, and the new road with him. By a sort of silent compromise, this outdoor department was abandoned to Mr. Kincton Know who seldom invaded the interior administration of the empire, and in justice, it must be alleged that the empress seldom interfered directly with the “woods and forests “ and contented herself with now and then lifting up her fine eyes, and mittened hands, as she surveyed his operations from the window in a resigned horror, and wondered how Mr, Kincton Knox could satisfy his conscience in wasting money the way he did!

She had learned, however, that his walks, trees, and roads, were points on which he might be raised to battle; and as she knew there was little harm in the pursuit, and really little, if anything done, more than was needed, and as some one *must* look after it, she conceded the point without any systematic resistance, and confined herself to the sort of silent protest I have mentioned.

While Vane Trevor lingered for a few minutes with the old gentleman, Master Howard Seymour Knox, who was as little accustomed to wait as Louis XIV., stumped into the drawingroom, to demand an order upon the gamekeeper’s wife for Vane Trevor’s revolver.

“Vane Trevor come?” exclaimed Clara.

“I want a note,” cried Howard.

“We shall hear all about the quarrel,” observed the old lady emphatically, and with a mysterious nod, to her daughter.

“I won’t be kept here all day,” cried Master Howard, with a stamp.

“Well, wait a moment,” cried Clara, “and you shall have the other box of bonbons. I’ll ring and send Brooks; but you’ve to tell me where Vane Trevor is.”

“No I won’t, till I get the bonbons.”

Miss Clara was on the point of bursting forth into invective, but being curious, she did not choose a rupture, and only said, “And why not, pray?”

“Because you cheated me of the shilling you promised me the same way, and I told all the servants, and they all said you were a beast.”

“I don’t know what you mean, Sir.”

“You do, right well,” he replied; “you asked me to tell you all about the tutor, and when I did you said it was not worth a farthing, and you would not give the shilling you promised; that was cheating; you cheat!”

“Do you hear him, mamma?”

“Howard, my dear! what’s all this? Tut, tut!” exclaimed Mrs Kincton Knox.

The arrival of the bonbons, however, did more to reestablish peaceful relations; and the boy, who was anxious to get away, delivered his news as rapidly as he could.

“Yes, Vane Trevor’s come. When I and Herbert were in the long larch walk he met us, and they seemed very glad to meet.”

“Ah! Like people who knew one another before? “ asked Miss Clara, eagerly, in tones little above a whisper.

“Yes, and Vane called Herbert, *Maubray* — yes he did.”

“*Maubray?* Are you *quite* sure of that?” demanded the elder lady, peering into his face and forgetting her dignity in the intensity of her curiosity.

“Yes, that I am, quite sure,” replied the boy wagging his head, and then spinning himself round on his heel.

“Be *quiet*, Sir,” hissed Miss Clara, clutching him by the arm; “answer me, — now do be a good boy and we’ll let you away in a minute. How do you remember the name was Maubray, and not some other name *like* Maubray?” —

“Because I remember Sir Richard Maubray that you and mamma’s always talking about.”

“We’re *not* always talking about him,” said Clara.

‛No, Sir, we’re *not”* repeated the matron, severely.

“I’ll tell you no more, if your both so cross. I *won’t?* retorted Master Howard, as distinctly as the bonbons would allow him.

“Well, *well, will* you have done, and answer my question? Did he call him Maubray often?” repeated Clara.

“Yes — *no.* He *did,* though — he called him Maubray twice. I’m sure of that.”

Mother and daughter exchanged glances at this point, and Mrs. Kincton made a very slow little bow with compressed lips, and her dark eyes steadily fixed on her daughter, and then there was a little “h’m!”

“And they seemed to know one another before?” said Mrs. Kincton Knox.

“Yes, I told you that before.”

“And glad to meet?” she continued.

“Yes, that is, *Vane.* I *don’t* think *Herbert* was.”

Again the ladies interchanged a meaning glance.

“Where is Vane Trevor now?” inquired the elder lady, gathering up her majestic manner again.

“He was talking to the governor at the hall-door.”

“Oh! then we shall see him in a moment,” said Mrs, Kincton Knox.

“Mind now, Howard, you’re not to say one word to Mr. Herbert or to Vane Trevor about your telling us anything,” added Miss Clara.

“Aint I though? I just will, both of them, my man, unless you pay me my shilling,” replied Master Howard.

“Mamma, do you *hear* him?” exclaimed Miss Clara in a piteous fury.

“What do you *mean,* Sir?” interposed his mamma vigorously, for she was nearly as much frightened as the young lady.

“I mean I’ll *tell* them; yes I *will,* I’m going,” and he skipped with a horrid grimace, and his thumb to his nose, toward the door.

“Come *back*, Sir; how dare you?” almost screamed Miss Clara.

“Here, Sir, take your shilling,” cried Mrs. Kincton Knox, with a stamp on the floor and flashing eye, fumbling hurriedly at her purse to produce the coin in question “There it is, Sir, and *remember?*

Whether the oracular “remember” was a menace on an entreaty I know not; but the young gentleman fixed the coin in his eye after the manner of an eyeglass, and with some horrid skips and a grin of triumph at Miss Clara, he made his exit.

"Where *can* he learn those vile, low tricks?" exclaimed Miss Clara. "I don't believe there is another such boy in England. He'll *disgrace* us, you'll find, and he'll kill *me,* I know."

"He has been extremely troublesome; and I'll speak to him by-and-by," said the matron.

"*Speak*, indeed; much he cares!"

"I'll make him care, though."

There was a little silence, and the ladies mentally returned to the more momentous topic from which the extortion of Howard Seymour had for a moment diverted them.

"What do you think of it?" murmured Mrs. Kincton Knox.

"Oh! I think there's but *one* thing to think," answered Miss Clara.

"I look upon it as *perfectly conclusive;* and, in fact, his appearance tallies so exactly with the descriptions we have heard that we hardly needed all this corroboration. As it is, I am satisfied."

At this moment the door opened, and Vane Trevor was announced.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TREVOR AND MAUBRAY IN THE DRAWINGROOM.

VANE TREVOR was a remote cousin, and so received as a kinsman; he entered and was greeted smilingly.

"We have secured *such* a treasure since we saw you — a tutor for my precious Howard; and such a young man — I can't tell you *half* what I think of him." (That, perhaps, was true). "He's so accomplished."

"Accomplished — is he?" said Trevor.

"Well, not, perhaps, in the common acceptation of the term, that I know of, but I referred particularly to that charming accomplishment of reading aloud with feeling and *point*, you know, so sadly neglected, and yet so conducive to real enjoyment and one's appreciation of good authors when cultivated. You would hardly believe what a resource it is to us poor solitaries. I am quite in love with Mr. Herbert; and I will answer for Clara there; she is as nearly so as a young lady ought to be."

Playfulness was not Mrs. Kincton Knox's happiest vein. She was tall, tragic, and ungainly; and her conscious graciousness made one uncomfortable, and her smile was intimidating.

"He certainly does read charmingly," threw in Miss Clara.

"We have grown, I fear," continued Mrs. Kincton Knox, "almost too dependent on him for the enjoyment of our evenings; and I sometimes say, quite seriously to my girl there, Clara, I do trust we are not spoiling Mr. Herbert."

"He does not look like a spoiled child — rather sad and seedy, doesn't he?" replied Vane Trevor.

"Does he?" said Miss Clara.

"You've seen him, then?" supplemented her mother.

"Yes; had that honour as I mounted the steep walk — how charming that walk is — among the fir-trees. But I did not see anything very unusual about him."

"I can only say I like him *extremely*," observed Mrs. Kincton Knox, in a tone which concluded debate.

“And what do you say, Miss Knox?” inquired Vane Trevor, with one of his arch cackles.

“No; young ladies are not to say all they think, like us old people,” interposed Mrs. Knox; “but he’s a very agreeable young man.”

“Is he?” said Vane Trevor, with irrepressible amazement “That’s the first time, by Jove! I ever heard poor Maubray” — and hereupon he stopped, remembering that Maubray’s identity was a secret, and he looked, perhaps, a little foolish.

Mrs. Kincton Knox coughed a little, though she was glad to be quite sure that Mr. Winston Maubray was safe under her roof, and did not want him or Vane Trevor to know that she knew it. She therefore coughed a little grandly, and also looked a little put out. But Miss Clara, with admirable coolness, said quite innocently —

“What of Mr. Maubray? What have you heard of him? *do* tell us. How is poor Sir Richard? We never saw his son, you know, here; and is the quarrel made up?”

“That’s just what I was going to tell you about,” said Vane Trevor, scrambling rather clumsily on his legs again after his tumble. “Not the least chance — none in the world — of a reconciliation. And the poor old fellow, in one of his fits of passion, got a fit, by Jove, and old Sprague at Cambridge told me one half his body is perfectly dead, paralytic, you know, and he can’t last; so Winston, you see, is more eligible than ever.”

“Poor old man! you ought not to speak with so much levity,” said Mrs. Kincton Knox. “I did not hear a word of it — how horrible! And when had poor Sir Richard his paralytic stroke?”

“About a week ago. He knew some people yesterday; but they say he’s awfully shaken, and his face all — you know — pulled up on one side, and hanging down at the other; old Sprague says, a horrible object; by Jove, you can’t help pitying him, though he was a fearful old screw.”

“Melancholy! — and he *was* such a handsome man! Dear me! Is his son like him?” said Mrs. Kincton Knox ruefully.

“Why, not particularly just now. They say the two sides of his face are pretty much alike; and his right limbs are about as lively as his left;” and Vane Trevor cackled very agreeably over this sally.

“So I should hope, Mr. Trevor,” said the matron of the high nose and dark brows with a gloomy superiority, “and if there is any objection to answering my question, I should rather not hear it jested upon, especially with so shocking a reference to Sir Richard's calamity — whom I knew, poor man! when he was as strong and as good looking as you are."

"But seriously," said Miss Clara, who saw that her mother had not left herself room to repeat her questions "what is he like? is he light or dark, or tall or shorter what?"

"Well, he's dark at night, you know, when he's put out his candle, and light enough in the daytime, when the sun's shining, and he's decidedly *short* sometimes — in his temper, I mean — he, he, he! — and tall in his talk always," replied Vane Trevor, and he enjoyed a very exhilarating laugh at his witty conceits.

"You used to be capable of a little conversation," said the matron grandly. "You seem to have abandoned yourself to — to— "

"To *chaff,* you were going to say," suggested Vane, waggishly.

"No, certainly not, that's a slang phrase such as is not usual among ladies, nor ever spoken at Kincton," retorted the old lady.

"Well, it *is* though, whenever I'm here," he replied agreeably. "But I'll really tell you all I can: there's nothing very remarkable in his appearance; he's rather tall, very light: he has light hair, blue eyes, pretty good bat."

"What's that?" demanded the elder lady.

"He handles the willow pretty well, and would treat you to a tolerably straight, well pitched, slow underhand.

"I think you intimated that you were about making yourself intelligible?" interposed Mrs. Kincton Knox.

"And don't *you* understand me?" inquired Vane Trevor of Miss Clara.

"Yes, I think it's cricket, aint it?" she replied.

"Well, you see I was intelligible; yes, cricket, of course," replied Vane.

"I can't say, I'm sure, where Miss Kincton Knox learned those phrases; it certainly was not in this drawingroom," observed her mamma, with a gloomy severity.

"Well, I mean he's a tolerably good cricketer, and he reads poetry, and quarrels with his father, and he's just going to step into the poor old fellow's shoes, for, jesting apart, he really is in an awful state from all I can hear."

"Is it thought he may linger long?" inquired Mrs. Kincton Knox; "though, indeed, poor man, it is hardly desirable he should, from all you say."

“Anything but desirable. I fancy he’s very shaky indeed, not safe for a week — may go any day — that’s what Sprague says, and he’s awfully anxious his son should come and see him; don’t you think he ought?” said Mr. Vane Trevor.

“That depends,” said the old lady thoughtfully, for the idea of her bird in the hand flitting suddenly away at old Sprague’s whistle, to the bush of uncertainty, was uncomfortable and alarming. “I have always understood that in a case like poor Sir Richard’s nothing can be more unwise, and, humanly speaking, more certain to precipitate a fatal catastrophe than a — a — adopting any step likely to be attended with agitation. Nothing of the kind, at least, ought to be hazarded for at least six weeks or so, *I* should say, and not even then unless the patient has rallied very decidedly, and in such a state as the miserable man now as, a reconciliation would be a mere delusion. I should certainly say no to any such proposition, and I can’t think how Dr. Sprague could contemplate such an experiment in any other light than as a possible *murder*.”

At this moment the drawingroom door opened, and William Maubray’s pale and sad face appeared at it.

“Howard says you wished to see me?” said he.

“We are very happy, indeed, to see you,” replied the old lady, graciously. “Pray come in and join us, Mr. Herbert. Mr. Herbert, allow me to introduce my cousin, Mr. Trevor. You have heard us speak of Mr. Vane Trevor, of Revington?”

“I had the pleasure — I met him on his way here, and we talked — and — and — I know him quite well,” said William, blushing, but coming out with his concluding sentence quite stoutly, for before Vane Trevor’s sly gaze he would have felt like a trickster if he had not.

But the ladies were determined to suspect nothing, and Mrs. Knox observed —

“We make acquaintance very quickly in the country — a ten minutes’ walk together. Mr. Herbert, would you object to poor Howard’s having a holiday? — and, pray, join us at lunch, and you really must not leave us now.”

“I — oh! very happy — yes — a holiday — certainly,” replied he, like a man whose thoughts were a little scattered, and he stood leaning on the back of a chair, and showing, as both ladies agreed, by his absent manner and pale and saddened countenance, that Vane Trevor had been delivering Doctor Sprague’s message, desiring his presence it the deathbed of the departing baronet.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THEY CONVERSE.

"We were discussing a knotty point, Mr. Herbert, when you arrived," said Mrs. Kincton Knox. "I say that nothing can warrant an agitating intrusion upon a sick bed. Mr. Trevor here was mentioning a case — a patient in a most critical state — who had an unhappy quarrel with his son. The old gentleman, a baronet, is now in a most precarious state." Miss Clara stole a glance at William, who was bearing it like a brick. "A paralytic stroke; and they talked of sending for his son! Was ever such madness heard of? If they want to kill the old man outright they could not go more direct to their object. I happen to know something of that awful complaint. My darling Clara's grandfather, my beloved father, was taken in that way — a severe paralytic attack, from which he was slowly recovering, and a servant stupidly dropped a china cup containing my dear father's gruel, and broke it — a kind of thing which always a little excited him — and not being able to articulate distinctly, or in any way adequately to express his irritation, he had, in about twenty minutes after the occurrence, a second seizure, which quite prostrated him, and in fact he never spoke intelligibly after, nor were we certain that he recognised one of his immediate family. So trifling are the ways, so mysterious — h — hem! — and apparently inadequate the causes, which of course, under Divine regulation, in paralytic affections, invariably overpower the patient. Now, what I say is this, don't you think a son, in such a case, instead of obtruding himself at the sick man's bedside, ought to wait quietly for a month or two — quietly, I would say, in France, or wherever he is, and to allow his father just to rally?

William had been looking rather dreamily on the carpet during this long statement, and I am afraid he had hardly listened to it as closely as he ought, and on being appealed to on the subject he did the best he could, and answered —

"It's an awful pity these quarrels."

"He knows something of the case, too," interposed Vane Trevor.

The ladies looked, one upon the flowers in the vase, and the other out of the window, in painful expectation of an immediate *éclaircissement.* But William only nodded a little frown at Trevor, to warn him off the dangerous ground he was treading, and he went on.

"The blame is always thrown on the young fellows; It isn't fair." William spoke a little warmly. "It's the fault of the old ones a great deal oftener, they are so dictatorial and unreasonable, and expect you to have no will or conscience, or body or soul, except as they please. They forget that they were young themselves once, and would not have submitted to it; and then they talk of you as a rebel, by Jove! and a — a *parricide* almost, for presuming to have either a thought or a scruple, or— "

On a sudden William perceived that, fired with his subject, he was declaiming a little more vehemently than was usual in drawingrooms, and his inspiration failed him.

"Hear, hear, hear!" cried Trevor, with a tiny clapping *of* his hands, and a laugh.

Miss Clara looked all aglow with his eloquence, and her mamma said grandly —

"There's truth, I'm *sorry* to say, in your remarks. Heaven knows *I've* suffered enough from unreasonableness, if ever mortal has. Here we sit in shadow of that great ugly, positively *ugly* tree there, and *there* it seems it must stand! *I* daren't remove it;" and Mrs. Kincton Knox lifted her head and her chin, and looked round like a queen shorn of her regalities, and inviting the indignant sympathy of the well affected. "There *is,* no question of it, a vast deal of unreasonableness and Selfishness among the old. We all feel it," and she happened to glance upon Miss Clara, who was smiling a little cynically on the snowy ringlets of her little white dog, Bijou. She continued fiercely, "And to return to the subject, I should think no son, who did not wish to kill his father, and to have the world believe so, would *think* of such a thing."

"Killing's a serious business," observed Trevor.

"A man killed," observed Mrs. Kincton Knox, "is a man lost to society. His place knows him no more. All his thoughts perish."

"And they're not often any great loss," moralised Trevor. "Very true!" acquiesced Mrs. Kincton Knox, with alacrity, recollecting how little rational matter her spouse ever contributed to the council board of Kincton. "Still, I maintain, a son would not like to be supposed to have caused the death of his father. That is, unless my views of human nature are much too favourable. What do *you* think, Mr. Herbert?" and the lady turned her prominent dark eyes with their whites so curiously veined, encouragingly upon the young man.

"I think if *I* were that fellow," he replied, and Mrs. Kincton Knox admired his diplomacy, "I should not run the risk."

"Quite right!" approved the lady radiantly.

Trevor looked at his watch and stood up.

"Your trunk and things, gone up to your room, Vane?" inquired Mrs. Kincton Knox.

"I've no trunk; ha, ha! and no things — he, he, he! no, upon my honour. I can't stay, really; I'm awfully sorry; but my plans were all upset, and I'm going back to the station, and must walk at an awful pace too; only half an hour — a very short visit; well, yes, but I could not deny myself — short as it is — and I hope to look in upon you again soon."

"It's very ill-natured, I think," said Miss Clara. "Very," said Mrs. Kincton Knox, yet both ladies were very well pleased to be relieved of Vane Trevor's agreeable society. He would have been in the way — unutterably de trop. His eye upon their operations would have been disconcerting; he would have been taking the — the tutor long walks, or trying, perhaps, to flirt with Clara, as he did two years ago, and never leaving her to herself. So the regrets and upbraidings with which they followed Vane Trevor, who had unconsciously been helping to mystify them, were mild and a little hypocritical

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE EVENING.

WILLIAM MAUBRAY was bidden to luncheon, and was sad and abstemious at that pleasant refection, and when it was over Mrs. Kincton Knox said —

"My dear Clara, it's quite out of the question my going with you to-day, I'm suffering so — that horrid neuralgia."

"Oh! darling! how sorry I am!" exclaimed Miss Clara, with a look of such beautiful pity and affection as must have moved William Maubray if he had the slightest liking for ministering angels. "What *can* I do for you? You must, you know, try something."

"No, love, no; nature — nature and rest. I shall lie down for a little; but you must have your ride all the same to Coverdale, and I am certain Mr. Herbert will be so kind as to accompany you."

William Maubray would have given a great deal for a solitary ramble; but of course, he was only too happy, and the happy pair scampered off on their ponies side by side, and two hours after Miss Clara walked into her mamma's room, looking cross and tired, and sat down silently in a chair before the cheval glass.

"Well, dear?" inquired her mother inquisitively.

"Nothing, mamma. I hope your head's better?"

"My head? Oh! yes, better, thanks. But how did you like your ride?"

"Very stupid," answered the young lady.

"I suppose you've been in one of your tempers, and never spoke a word — and you know he's so shy? Will you ever learn, Miss Kincton Knox, to command your miserable temper?" exclaimed her mother very grimly, but the young lady only flapped the folds of her skirt lazily with her whip.

"You quite mistake, mamma, I'm not cross; I'm only tired. I'm sorry you did not let him go off to the sick old man. He's plainly pining to go and give him his gruel and his medicine."

"Did he speak of him?" asked the old lady.

"No, nor of anything else: but he's plainly thinking of him, and thinks he has murdered him — at least he looks as if he was going to be hanged, and I don't care if he was," answered Miss Clara.

"You must make allowances, my dear Clara," said she. "You forget that the circumstances are very distressing."

"Very cheerful, I should say. Why he hates his father, I dare say. Did not you hear the picture he drew of him? and it's all hypocrisy, and I don't believe his father has really anything to do with his moping."

"And what do you suppose is the cause of it?" inquired Mrs. Kincton Knox.

"I really can't tell; perhaps he's privately married, or in love with a milliner perhaps, and that has been the cause of this quarrel," she said with an indolent mockery that might be serious, and, at all events, puzzled the elder lady.

"Ho! stuff, my dear child!" exclaimed her mother, with an uneasy scorn. "You had better call Brookes and get your habit off. And where did you leave him?"

"At the hall door," replied Miss Clara, as she walked out of the room.

"H'm stuff!" repeated Mrs. Kincton Knox, still more uneasily, for she knew that Clara had her wits about her.

"Married, indeed! It's probably just this — Vane Trevor has come here with a long foolish exhortation from Doctor — what's his name? — Sprague — and upset the young man a little, and perhaps agitated him. He'll be quite a different person tomorrow."

And so indeed it proved. Whatever his secret feelings, William Maubray was externally a great deal more like himself. In the state which follows such a shock as William had experienced before the monotony of sadness sets in, there is sometimes an oscillation of spirits from extreme depression to an equally morbid hilarity, the symbol of excitement only. So in a long ride, which William took with the young lady to-day, accompanied by his pupil, who, on his pony, entertained himself by pursuing the sheep on the hill side, Miss Clara found him very agreeable, and also ready at times to philosophise, eloquently and sadly, in the sort of Byronic vein into which bitter young lovers will break. So the sky was brightening, and William, who suspected nothing of the peculiar interest with which his varying moods were observed, was yet flattered by the gradual but striking improvement of his relations, accepted the interest displayed by the ladies as a feminine indication of compassion and appreciation, and expressed a growing confidence and gratitude, the indirect expressions of which they, perhaps, a little misapprehended.

In the evening Mrs. Kincton Knox called again for the "Lord of Burleigh," not being fertile in resource — Miss Clara turned her chair toward the fire, and with her feet on a boss, near the fender, leaned back, with a handscreen in her fingers, and listened.

"That is what I call poetry!" exclaimed the matron with the decision of a brigadier, and a nod of intimidating approbation, toward William, "and so charmingly read!"

"I'm afraid Miss Knox must have grown a little tired of it," suggested William.

"One can never tire of poetry so true to nature," answered Miss Clara.

"She's all romance, that creature," confidentially murmured her mamma, with a compassionating smile.

"What is it?" inquired Miss Clara.

"You're not to hear, but we were saying, weren't we, Mr. Herbert? that she has not a particle of romance in her nature," replied her mamma with her gloomy pleasantry.

"No romance certainly, and I'm afraid no common sense either," replied the young lady naively.

"Do you write poetry?" asked the old lady of William.

"You need not ask him, he could not read as he did, if he did not write," said Miss Clara turning round in an eager glow, which momentary enthusiasm some other feeling overpowered, and she turned away again a little bashfully.

"You do write, I see it confessed in your eyes," exclaimed Mrs. Kincton Knox. "He does, Clara, you're right I really think sometimes she's a — a — fairy."

"Ask him, mamma, to read us some of his verses," pleaded Clara, just a little timidly.

"You really must, Mr. Herbert — no, no, I'll hear of no excuses; our sex has its privileges, you know, and where we say must, opposition vanishes,"

"Really," urged William, "any little attempts of mine are so unworthy— "

“We must and will have them tomorrow evening; dear me, how the hours do fly. You have no idea, Clara dear, how late it is, quite dreadful. I’m really angry with you, Mr. Herbert, for beguiling us into such late hours.”

So the party broke up, and when Mrs. Kincton Knox entered her daughter’s room where she was in a dishevelled stage of preparation for bed, she said, her maid being just despatched on a message —

“I really wish, mamma, you’d stop about that Lord of Burleigh; I saw him look quite oddly when you asked for it again tonight, and he must know, unless he’s a fool, that you don’t care two pence about poetry, and you’ll just make him think we know who he is.”

“Pooh! nonsense, Clara! don’t be ridiculous,” said her mother, a little awkwardly, for she had a secret sense of Clara’s superiority. “I don’t want you to teach me what I’m to do, I hope, and who brought him here, pray, and investigated, and, in fact — here’s Brookes back again —— and you know we are to have his own verses tomorrow night, so we don’t want that, nor any more, if you’d rather not, and you can’t possibly be more sick of it than I am.”

“So, on the whole well pleased, the ladies betook themselves to their beds, and Mrs. Kincton Knox lay long awake, constructing her clumsy castles in the air.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

VANE TREVOR AT THE GATE OF GILROYD.

NEXT morning, at breakfast, as usual, the postbag brought its store of letters and news, and Mrs. Kincton Knox dispensed its contents in her usual magisterial manner. There were two addressed in Vane Trevor's handwriting; one to the tutor, which the matron recognised as she sent it round to him in Howard's hand, the other to herself.

"Pray, no ceremony with us," said the lady of the house, with a gorgeous complacency; "read your letter here, Mr. Herbert: we are all opening ours, you see."

So William Maubray, with an odd little flutter at his heart, opened the letter, which he knew would speak of those of whom it agitated him to think.

It was dated from Revington, whither, with a sort of home sickness new to him, Trevor had returned almost directly after his visit to Kincton.

Vane Trevor had, without intending it, left, perhaps, on Maubray's mind an impression, that a little more had occurred than the progress of the drama could actually show. He had not yet committed himself irrevocably; but he had quite made up his mind to take the decisive Step, and only awaited the opportunity.

The day after his arrival he joined the Gilroyd ladies as they left the Rectory, where — for the great law of change and succession is at work continually and everywhere — the Mainwarings were no more, and good old Doctor Wagget was now installed, and beginning to unpack and get his books into their shelves, and he and old Miss Wagget were still nodding, and kissing their bands, and smiling genially on the doorsteps on their departing visitors.

Just here Vane Trevor lighted upon them. How lovely Miss Violet Darkwell looked! Was not that a blush, or only the rosy shadow under her bonnet?

"A blush, by Jove!" thought Vane Trevor, and he felt as elated as, a few weeks before, he would have been had he got a peerage.

So they stopped in a little group on the road under the parsonage trees; and, the usual greeting accomplished, the young man accompanied them on their way toward Gilroyd, and said he —

"I looked in the other day, on my way back from Lowton, on my cousins, the Kincton Knoxes, at Kincton, you know, and, by Jove! I met — who do you think?"

"I haven't an idea," replied Miss Darkwell, to whom he had chiefly addressed himself.

"Anne Dowlass, I dare say, my roguish, runaway little girl," suggested Miss Perfect, inquisitively.

"Oh, no! not a girl," answered Trevor.

"Well, it was the Bishop of Shovel-on-Headley," said she firmly.

"No; by Jove! I don't think you'd guess in half an hour. Upon my honour! He! he! he! Well, what do you think of Maubray?"

"William?" repeated Miss Perfect, faintly, and in a tone such as would indicate sudden pain.

"Yes, by Jove! the very man, upon my honour — as large as life. He's— "

Suddenly, Vane Trevor recollected that he was not to divulge the secret of his being there in the office of tutor.

"Well, he's — what is he doing?" urged Aunt Dinah.

"He's — he's staying there; and, upon my honour — you won't tell, I know, but, upon my honour — the old lady, and — he! he! he! — the young one are both — I give you my honour — in love with him!"

And Trevor laughed shrilly.

"But, I really aint joking — I'm quite serious, I do assure you. The old woman told me, in so many words almost, that Clara's in love with him — awfully in love, by Jove!"

Trevor's narrative was told in screams of laughter.

"And, you know, she's really, awfully pretty: a stunning girl she was a year or two ago; and — you know that kind of thing could not be — both in the same house — and the girl in love with him — and nothing come of it. It's a case, I assure you; and it will be a match, as sure as I'm walking beside you."

"H'm!" ejaculated Aunt Dinah, with a quick little nod and closed lips, looking straight before her.

“How pretty that light is, breaking on the woods; how’ splendid the colours;” said Miss Darkwell.

“Yes — well! It really is now jolly!” responded Vane Trevor; and he would have made a pretty little speech on that text; but the presence of Miss Perfect, of course, put that out of the question.

Miss Perfect was silent during nearly all the rest of the walk; and the conversation remained to the young people, and Vane Trevor was as tenderly outspoken as a lunatic in his case dare be under restraint and observation.

They had reached the poplars, only a stone’s throw from the gate of Gilroyd, when Miss Perfect asked abruptly, “How was the young man looking?”

Vane Trevor had just ended a description of old Putties, the keeper of the “Garter,” whom he had seen removed in a drunken apoplexy to the hospital yesterday; and Aunt Dinah’s question for a moment puzzled him, but he quickly recovered the thread of the by-gone allusion.

“Oh! Maubray? I beg pardon. Maubray was looking very well, I think: a little like a hero in love, of course, you know, but very well. He was just going to lunch with the ladies when I left, and looked precious hungry, I can tell you. I don’t think you need trouble yourself about Maubray, Miss Perfect, I assure you you needn’t, for he’s taking very good care of himself every way, by Jove.”

“I don’t trouble myself,” said Aunt Dinah, rather sternly, interrupting Trevor’s agreeable cackle. “He has quite broken with me, as I already informed you — quite, and I don’t care who knows it. I shall never interfere with him or his concerns more. He shall never enter that gate, or see my face more; that’s no great privation, of course; but I don’t wish his death or destruction, little as he deserves of me, and that’s the reason I asked how he looked; and, having heard, I don’t desire to hear more about him, or to mention his name again.”

And Miss Perfect stared on Vane Trevor with a grim decision, which the young man was a little puzzled how to receive, and, with the gold head of his cane to his lip, looked up at a cloud, with a rueful and rather vacant countenance, intended to express something of a tragic sympathy.

He walked with them to the pretty porch; but Aunt Dinah was still absent and grim, and bid him goodbye, and shook hands at the door, without asking him in; and though he seemed to linger a little, there was nothing for it, but to take his departure, rather vexed.

That evening was silent and listless at Gilroyd, and though Miss Perfect left the parlour early, I think there was a séance, for, as she lay in her bed, Violet heard signs of life in the study beneath her, and Miss Perfect was very thoughtful, and old Winnie Dobbs very sleepy, ail next day.

It was odd, now that Vane Trevor had come to set his heart upon marrying Violet Darkwell, that his confidence in his claims, which he would have thought it simple lunacy to question a few weeks ago, began to waver. He began to think how that gentlemanlike Mr. Sergeant Darkwell, with the bright and thoughtful face, who was, no doubt, ambitious, would regard the rental and estate of Revington with those onerous charges upon it; how Miss Perfect, with her whims and fancies, and positive temper, might view the whole thing; and, lastly, whether he was quite so certain of the young lady’s “inclinations,” as the old novels have it, as he felt a little time before: and so he lay awake in an agitation of modesty, quite new to him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

VANE TREVOR WALKS DOWN TO SEE MISS VIOLET.

LOOKING at himself in his glass next morning, Vane Trevor pronounced the *coup d'œil* "awfully seedy. This sort of thing, by Jove, it will never do, it would wear out any fellow; where's the good in putting off? there's no screw loose, there's nothing against me; I hope I stand pretty well here — hang it —— I'll walk down to-day," and he looked over the slopes to sunny Gilroyd, "and if a good opportunity turns up, I'll speak to Miss Darkwell."

And though he had taken care, in secret mercy to his nerves, to state his resolve hypothetically, his heart made two or three strange throbs and experienced a kind of sinking like that said to attend, on the eve of battle, an order to prepare for action.

Accordingly, before twelve o'clock Vane Trevor walked into the porch of Gilroyd, and rang the bell beside the open door, and stood with the gold head of his cane to his chin, looking on the woodlands toward Revington, and feeling as he might have felt in an ominous dream.

"Miss Perfect at home?" he inquired of the maid, with a haggard simper.

"She was in the drawingroom," into which room, forgetting the preliminary of announcement, he pushed his way. She was not there, but he heard her talking to Winnie Dobbs in the gallery.

"Just passing by; afraid I'm very troublesome, but I could not resist," pleaded Vane Trevor, as he glanced over Miss Perfect's gray silk shoulder, and somewhat old fashioned collar, toward the door, expecting, perhaps, another apparition.

"I'm very glad you've come, Mr. Trevor. — Shall we sit down? for I want to ask you to satisfy me upon a point."

This was a day of agitations for Trevor, and his heart made an odd little dance, and a sudden drop, and though he smiled, he felt his cheek grow a little pale.

"By Jove!" thought Trevor as he placed himself near Aunt Dinah, "she'll save me a lot of trouble, and open the subject all in a sentence."

He was leaning against the window case, and the damask curtains, though somewhat the worse of the sun, made a gorgeous drapery about him, as with folded arms, and trying to look perfectly serene, he looked down on Miss Perfect's face. The lady seemed to have some little difficulty about speaking, and cleared her voice, and looked out of the window for help, and all the time the young man felt very oddly. At last she said —

"I had made up my mind not to allude to the subject, but last night, something occurred which has induced me just to ask a question or two." Aunt Dinah paused; and with rather pale lips, Vane Trevor smiled an assurance that he would be too happy to answer any question which Miss Perfect might please to ask.

Again a little silence — again the odd sensation in Vane's heart, and the same sickening sense of suspense, and he felt he could not stand it much longer.

"I said I would not allude again to William Maubray; but I have altered that resolution. I mean, however, to ask but a question or two."

"Oh?" was all that Trevor uttered, but he felt that he could have wished the old woman and William Maubray in a sack at the bottom of his best pond at Revington.

"I wish to know, the Kincton Knoxes, aren't they a leading people rather, in their part of the world?"

"Oh, dear, yes. Kincton is one of the best places in the county," ejaculated Trevor, who being a kinsman, bore a handsome testimony.

"And — and — the young lady, Miss Clara Knox, she, I suppose, is — is admired?"

"So she is, by Jove — I know, I admired her awfully — so admired that the fellows won't let one another marry her, by Jove! — he, he, he! Very fine girl, though, and I believe her father, or rather her mother, will give her a lot of money."

Miss Perfect looked on the table, not pleased, very thoughtfully, and Vane Trevor looked down at her foreshortened countenance listlessly.

"And you spoke, you remember, of an idea that — that in fact it would end in a marriage," resumed Miss Perfect.

"Did I really say? well, but you won't mention what I say, upon my honour, and quite seriously, I should not wonder a bit. It is not altogether what she said, you know, Mrs. Kincton Knox, I mean, though that was as strong as you could well imagine — but her manner; I know her perfectly, and when she wishes you to understand a thing — and I assure you that's what she wished me to suppose — and I, really I can't understand it; it seems to me perfectly incomprehensible, like a sort of infatuation, for she's one of the sharpest women alive, Mrs, Kincton Knox; but, by Jove, both she and Clara, they seem to have quite lost their heads about Maubray. I never heard anything like it, upon my honour."

And Trevor, who had by this time quite shaken off the chill of his suspense, laughed very hilariously, till Aunt Dinah said, with some displeasure —

"For the life of me, I can't see anything ridiculous in it. William Maubray is better connected than they, and he's the handsomest young man I ever beheld in my life; and if she has money enough of her own, for both, I can't see what objection or difficulty there can be."

"Oh! certainly — certainly not on those grounds; only what amused me was, there's a disparity; you know — she's, by Jove! she is — she's five years older, and that's something."

"And — and if it is to be, how soon do you suppose it likely?" asked Miss Perfect, fixing her eyes anxiously on him.

"Well, you know, I know no more than the man in the moon; but if they really mean it, I don't see what's to delay it," answered Trevor.

"Because" — hesitated Aunt Dinah, "I have reason to know that if that unfortunate young man — not that I have any reason to care more than anyone else, should marry before the lapse of five years, he will be utterly ruined, and undone by so doing."

Vane Trevor stood expecting an astounding revelation, but Aunt Dinah proceeded —

"And therefore as you are his friend — of course it's nothing to me — I thought you might as well hear it, and if you chose to take that trouble, let him know," said Miss Perfect.

He looked a little hard at Miss Perfect, and she as steadily on him.

"I will, certainly — that is, if you think I ought. But —— hope it won't get me into a scrape with the people there."

"I do think you ought," said Miss Perfect.

"I — I suppose hell understand the reason?" suggested Vane Trevor, half interrogatively.

“If you say — I think, if you say — that I said I had reason to know” — and Aunt Dinah paused.

Vane Trevor, looking a little amazed, repeated —

I’m to say, you said you had reason to know?”

“Yes, and — and — I think he’ll understand — and if he should not, you may say — a — yes, you may, it has reached me through Henbane.”

“I beg pardon — through what?” said Vane Trevor, inclining his ear.

“Henbane,” said Miss Perfect very sharply.

“Henbane?”— ‘

“*Yes.”*

By Jove!” exclaimed Trevor.

A considerable silence ensued, during which a variety of uncomfortable misgivings respecting the state of Miss Perfect’s mind floated through his own. He concluded, however, that there was some language of symbols established between Miss Perfect and her nephew, in which Henbane stood for some refractory trustee, or rich old uncle.

So he said, more like himself —

“Well, I shan’t forget I’ll take care to Jet him know, and you may depend upon me.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

VANE TREVOR OPENS HIS MIND.

AFTER a silence, Mr. Vane Trevor, whose thoughts were not *quite* abandoned to Henbane and his friend William Maubray, but had begun to flow in a more selfish channel, said —

“Miss Darkwell, I suppose, in the garden?”

“Violet’s gone for a few days to our friends, the Mainwarings, at their new Rectory; they seem to like it extremely.”

“Oh, *do* they? That’s delightful,” said Trevor, who looked very dismal. “And so Miss Darkwell is there?” Miss Perfect nodded.

“I’m — I’m very unlucky. I — I thought such a fine day, I — I might have induced you both to — to — there’s such a pretty drive to Wilton.”

“Yes — I know — I’m sure she’d have liked it of all things.”

“Do you *really* think so?” exclaimed the young man, inquiringly. “I wish — I wish very much I could — I could flatter myself.”

Aunt Dinah looked up, and at him earnestly but kindly, and said nothing, and so looked down again. There was encouragement in that look, and Trevor waxed eloquent. “I — I wish I could — I wish I dare — I — I think her so beautiful. I — I can’t express all I think, and I — there’s nothing I would not do to make her friends approve — a — a — in fact I should be so much obliged if I thought you would wish me well, and be my friend — and — and— “

And Vane Trevor, for want of anything distinct to add to all this, came to a pause.

And Miss Perfect, with a very honest surprise in her face, said:

“Am I to understand, Mr. Vane Trevor?” and she too came to a stop.

But with those magical words the floodgates of his eloquence were opened once more.

“Yes, I do. I do indeed. I mean to — to propose for Miss Darkwell, if — if I were sure that her friends liked the idea, and that I could think she really liked me. I came to-day with the intention of speaking to her.”

He was now standing erect, no longer leaning against the window shutter, and holding his walking-cane very hard in both hands, and impressing Miss Perfect with a conviction of his being thoroughly in earnest.

"I tell you frankly, Mr. Trevor," said Aunt Dinah, a little flushed with a sympathetic excitement, and evidently much pleased, "I did not expect this. I had fancied that you were not a likely person to marry, and to say truth, I sometimes doubted whether I ought to have allowed your visits here so frequently, at least as you have made them for the last few weeks. Of course I can see nothing that is not desirable, in fact highly advantageous in the proposal you make. Am I at liberty to write to Sergeant Darkwell on the subject?"

"Oh! certainly — exactly what I should wish."

"I'm very sure he will see it in the same light that I do. We all know the Trevors of Revington, the position they have always held; and though I detest the line they took in the great civil war, and think your poor father had no business helping to introduce machinery into this part of the world as he did, and I always said so, I yet can see the many amiable qualities of his son, and I have no doubt that you will make a kind and affectionate husband. I must, however, tell you candidly, that I have never spoken of you to Violet Darkwell as a — in fact, in any other light than that of an acquaintance, and I cannot throw any light upon her feelings. You can ascertain them best for yourself. My belief is, that a girl should be left quite free to accept or decline in such a case, and I know that her father thinks exactly as I do."

"I may write to Miss Darkwell, do you think? I suppose I had better?"

"No? said Miss Perfect, with decision; "were I you I should much prefer speaking. Depend upon it, there's more to be done by speaking. But as you are acquainted with her father, don't you think you might write to him? Violet may return in three days, but will not, I think, quite so soon; and meanwhile you will have heard from him."

"I think so. I'll do it, certainly; and I — I feel that you're my friend, Miss Perfect;" and he took her hand, and she took his very kindly.

"I've said my say; I highly approve, and I'm quite certain her father will also; he agrees with me on most points; he's a very superior man."

Vane Trevor, there and then, with Aunt Dinah's concurrence, wrote his letter to Mr. Sergeant Darkwell; and then he walked with Aunt Dinah in the garden, talking incessantly of Violet, and it must be added, very much pleased with Miss Perfect's evident satisfaction and elation; and he remained to dinner, a situation which two months ago would have appeared the most ludicrous and dismal in nature, and he gabbled of his lady love, asking questions and starting plans of all sorts.

And time flew so in this tête-à-tête, that they were surprised by the entrance of the household with the Bible and Prayer-book; and Mr. Vane Trevor, though not a particularly sober-minded youth, could not avoid accepting the rôle of the absent William Maubray, and officiated, much to the edification of the maids, in whose eyes the owner of Revington was a very high personage indeed; and "the chapter" for that evening delighted and overawed them, and they could hardly believe their eyes that the great squire of Revington was pent up with them in that small drawingroom, and kneeling and saying "amen," and repeating the Lord's Prayer after Miss Perfect, "as mild and humble" as one of themselves.

When he got home to Revington, not being able to tranquillise his mind, he vented his excitement upon the two letters which I have mentioned as having reached the family of Kincton, at the breakfast-table.

"Read that, Clara, my dear," said Mrs. Kincton Knox, with a funereal nod and in a cautious undertone.

Miss Clara read the letter, and when she came to the passage which related that poor old Sir Richard Maubray had had a second and much severer paralytic stroke, and was now in articulo, she raised her eyes for a moment to her mother's and both for a moment looked with a solemn shrewdness into the other's; Miss Clara dropped hers again to the letter, and then stole a momentary glance at William, who looked as if he were very ill.

As a *mm* who receives a letter announcing that judgment is marked, and bailiffs on his track, will hide away the awful crumpled note in his pocket, and try to beguile his friends by a pallid smile, and a vague and incoherent attempt to join in the conversation, so William strove to seem quite unconcerned, and the more he tried the more conscious was he of his failure.

CHAPTER XL.

MRS. KINCTON KNOX PROPOSES A WALK WITH WILLIAM.

IN fact William Maubray had received a conceited and exulting letter from Trevor, written in the expansion of his triumph once more as the Lord of Revington, the representative of the historic Trevors, the man of traditions and *prestige,* before whom the world bowed down and displayed its treasures, and who being restored to reason and self-estimation by his conversation with Miss Perfect, knew well what a prize he was — what a sacrifice he was making, and yet bore and gave away all with a splendid magnanimity.

So, as he says, "It is all virtually settled. I have talked fully with Miss Perfect, a very intelligent and superior woman, who looks upon the situation just as I could wish; and I have written announcing my intentions to her father, and under such auspices, and with the evidence I hope I have, of not being quite indifferent where I most wished to please, I almost venture to ask for your congratulations," &c.

"He is quite right, it *is* all over; she likes him, I saw that long ago; I fancied she would have been a little harder to please; they fall in love with any fellow that's tall, and pink, and white, and dresses absurdly, and talks like a fool, provided he has motiey — money — d — money!"

Such were the mutterings of William Maubray, as he leaned dismally on the window of the schoolroom, and looked out upon the sear and thinning foliage of the late autumn.

"This is very important — this about unfortunate Sir Richard; his son will succeed immediately; but he seems a good deal, indeed very much agitated; however, it's a great point in his favour otherwise." So said Mrs. Kincton Knox to her daughter, so soon as being alone together they could safely talk over the missives of the breakfast table.

"I rather think he has been summoned to the dying man, and he'll go — he must — and we shall never see more of him," said Miss Clara, with superb indifference.

"Yes, of course, it may have been, I was going to say so," said her mother, who, however, had not seen that view. "I'll make him come out and walk up and down the terrace with me a little, poor young man."

"You'll do him no good by that," said the young lady, with a sneer.

"We'll see that, Miss Kincton Knox; at all events, it will do no good sitting here, and sneering into the fire; please sit a little away and raise the hand screen, unless you really wish to ruin your complexion."

"It can't be of the least importance to anyone whether I do or not, certainly not to me" said the young lady, who, however, took her advice peevishly.

"You are one of those conceited young persons; pray allow me to speak, I'm your mother, and have a right I hope to speak in this house — who fancy that no one can see anything but they — I'm not disposed to flatter you; I never did flatter you; but I think the young man (her voice was lowered here) *likes* you — I *do.* I'm *sure* he does. It can't possibly be for *my* sake that he likes coming every evening to read all that stuff for us. You make no allowance for the position he is in, his father dying, in the very crisis of a painful domestic quarrel; it must be most uncomfortable; and then he's here in a position which precludes his littering any sentiments except such as should be found on the lips of a resident teacher. I've frequently observed him on the point of speaking in his real character, and chilled in a moment by the recollection of the apparent distance between us; but I think I know something of countenance, and tones, and those indications of feeling, which are more and more significant than words."

Miss Clara made no sign by look, word or motion; and after a little pause her mamma went on sturdily.

"Yes, I ought, at my time of life, and having been I may say a good deal admired in my day, and *married.*, and not quite as I *might* have been perhaps, but still pretty *well.* I ought to know something more of such matters than my *daughter*, I think, and I can't be mistaken. I don't say *passion*, I say a *liking* — a *fancy,* and that there *is* I'll stake my life. If you only take the trouble to think you'll see. I hold it quite impossible that a young man should be as he is, alone for several weeks in a country-house with a person, I will say, of your advantages and attractions without some such feeling, *im — possible."*

Miss Kincton Knox looked indolently on her fair image in the mirror at the further end of the room.

"In those rides he and Howard have taken with you, II — venture to say he has said things which *I* should have understood had I been by."

"I told you he never said anything — anything particular — anything he might not have said to anyone else," said the young lady, wearily. "He is evidently very shy, I allow."

"*Very I extremely* shy," acquiesced her mamma, eagerly; "and when all these things are considered, I don't think in the time you could possibly have expected more."

"I never expected anything," said Miss Clara, with another weary sneer.

"Didn't you? then I did," answered the matron.

Miss Clara simply yawned.

"You are in one of your unfortunate tempers. Don't you think, Miss Kincton Knox, even on the supposition that he *is* about leaving our house, that you may as well command your spirit of opposition and ill temper, which has uniformly defeated every endeavour of mine to — be of use to you, and here you are at eight-and-twenty." The young lady looked round alarmed, but there was no listener, "and you seem to have *learned nothing?*

"I'll write all round the country, and tell the people I'm eight-and-twenty or thirty, for anything I know, if you have no objection. I don't see any harm it can do; telling truth perhaps mayn't do one much good: but if I've learned nothing else, I've learned this at all events, that there's absolutely no good in the other course."

"I don't know what you mean by *courses.* No one I hope has been committing any fraud in this house. If you please to tell people you are thirty, which is perfectly contrary to fact, you must only take the consequences. Your miserable temper, Clara, has been the ruin of you, and when I'm in my grave you'll repent it."

Sc saying she left the room, and coming down in a few minutes in a black velvet garment, trimmed with ermine, and with a muff of the same judicial fur, she repaired to the schoolroom, where, much to William's relief, she graciously begged a holiday for Howard, and then asked William with, at the end of her invitation, a great smile, which plainly said, "I know you can hardly believe your ears but it's true notwithstanding," to lend an old woman his arm in a walk up and down the terrace.

William was of course at her service, though the honour was one which at that moment was almost oppressive.

CHAPTER XLI.

HOW THEY TALKED.

AFTER a few turns, and some little talk, Mrs. Kincton Knox said: —

"I'm afraid, Mr. Herbert, like most of us, young as you are, you have your troubles. You will excuse an old woman, old enough to be your mother, and who likes you, who really feels a very deep interest in you, for saying so. I wish — I wish, in fact, there was A little more confidence, but all in good time. I said you were — you were — it's perhaps impertinent of me to say I observed it, but my motive is not curiosity, nor, you will believe, unkind. I did see you were distressed this morning by the letter that reached you. I trust there was no illness, nor— "

"No, nothing — that is which I had not — which was not," he replied. "Nothing very unexpected."

"For if there was any necessity, any *wish* to leave Kincton for a little, I should offer my poor services as a substitute with your pupil, if you would trust him to me."

Although her graciousness was oppressive, and her playfulness awful, there were welcome signs of sympathy in this speech, and William Maubray greeted them with something like confidence, and, said he "It's awfully kind of you, Mrs. Kincton Knox, to think about me. I — I don't know exactly what to say, except that I am very grateful, and — and it's quite true, I've had a great deal of vexation and suffering — a kind of quarrel — a very bad quarrel, indeed, at home, as I call it, and — and some other things."

"Other things! — no doubt. There is one trouble to which the young are exposed, and from which old people are quite exempt. The course of true love, you know, as our great moralist says, never did run smooth."

Her prominent eyes were fixed with an awful archness upon Maubray, and conscious as he was, he blushed and paled under her gaze, and was dumb. "My maxim in all such cases is, *never despair.* When a young man is endowed, like you, with good looks, and refinement. You see I am talking to you almost as I would to a son, that darling boy of mine is such a link, and one grows so soon to know a *guest,* and those delightful evenings, and I think — I *think,* Mr. Herbert, —— can see a little with my old eyes, and I've divined your secret."

"I may — that is, I think it may have been — a *fancy,* just. I don't know," said William, very much put out "But I know. You may be perfectly certain you *are* in love, if you aint quite certain that you are *not.* Trust an old woman who has seen something of life — that is, of human nature," insisted Mrs. Kincton Knox.

"I — I don't know, I did not know it myself until, I think, within the last few days. I dare say I'm a great fool. I'm sure I am, in fact, and I ought not to have allowed — but I really did not know." He suspected that Trevor had told all he knew of his story, and that the women, with the sagacity of their sex had divined the rest.

"You see, Mr. Herbert, I have not guessed amiss. When I see a young person very much dejected and *distrait.*, I at: once suspect a *romance;* and now let me say a word of *comfort*, derived from observation. As I said before — I've known such things happen — *never despair* There is a spark of romance in our sex as well as in yours. I think I *may* be of use to you. I dare say things are not quite so desperate as they appear. But do trust me — do be frank."

"I will. I'll tell you everything. I — I don't know where to begin. But I'm so much obliged. I've no one to speak to, and— "

At this moment the "darling boy" Howard bounced from behind a thick shrub, with a shriek which was echoed by his fond mother, who, if anything so dignified could jump, *did* jump, and even William's manly heart made an uncomfortable bounce in his breast At the same time Master Howard Seymour turned his ankle, and tumbled with a second horrid roar on the walk, from which his mother and his instructor lifted him, not much hurt, but bellowing in a fury, and requiring to be conducted for comfort to the house.

"I shall call upon you again, Mr. Herbert, when my poor darling is better, and we can — there, there! my rosebud," began Mrs. Kincton Knox, distracted between her curiosity and her compassion.

"Shall I take him on my back? Get up. And so, he took the urchin, who was hopping round them in circles with hideous uproar, in his arms, and bore him away beside his anxious parent towards the house, where having ministered to the sufferer, Mrs. Kincton Knox looked into the drawingroom, and found Miss Clara seated by the fire, with her slender feet as usual, on a boss, reading her novel.

Mrs. Kincton Knox, stooping over her, kissed her, and Miss Clara, knowing that the unusual caress indicated something extraordinary, looked up with a dreary curiosity into her mother's face. When they were *tête-à-tête,* these ladies did not trouble one another much with smiles or caresses. Still her mother was smiling with a mysterious triumph, and nodded encouragingly upon her.

"Well?" asked Miss Clara.

"I think you'll find that I was right, and that somebody will ask you a question before long," answered her mother, with an oracular smile.

Miss Clara certainly did look a little interested at this intimation, and sat up with comparative energy, looking rather earnestly into her mother's prominent, hard brown eyes.

"He's been talking very, I may say, frankly to me, and although we were interrupted by — an accident, yet there was no mistaking him. At least that's *my* opinion."

And Mrs. Kincton Knox sat down, and with her imposing coiffure nodding over her daughter's ear, recounted, with perhaps some little colouring, her interesting conversation with William Maubray. While this conference was proceeding, the door opened, and Mr. Kincton Knox, his gloves, white hat, and stick in his hand, walked in.

It was one of Mrs. Kincton Knox's unpublished theories that her husband's presence in the drawingroom was a trespass, as that of a cow among the flowerbeds under the window.

As that portly figure in the gray woollen suit and white waistcoat entered mildly, the matron sat erect, and eyed him with a gaze of astonishment, which, however, was quite lost upon him, as he had not his spectacles on.

"I hope, Mr. Kincton Knox, your shoes are not covered with mud? — unless you are prepared to buy another carpet," she said, glancing at the clumsy articles in question.

"Oh, dear! no — I haven't been out — just going — but I want you and Clara to look over there," and he pointed with his stick, at which Mrs. Kincton Knox winced with the ejaculation, "The China!"

"You see those three trees," he continued, approaching the window with his stick extended.

"Yes, you *needn't* go on; *perfectly*," she answered.

"Well, the one to the right is, in fact, I think it's an ugly tree; I've been for a long time considering it. You see it there, Clara, on the rising ground, near the paling?"

She did.

"Well, I'm thinking of taking him down; what do you say?"

"*Do* lower your stick, Mr. Kincton Knox, *pray,* we can see perfectly without *breaking* anything," expostula*ted* his wife.

"Well, what do you say?" he repeated, pointing with his hand instead.

"Do you want my opinion as to what trees should come down?" said Mrs. Knox, with admirable perseverance. "I shall be happy to give it with respect to *all* — as to that particular tree it is so far away, I really don't think the question worth debating."

"Take it down, papa," said Miss Clara, who rather liked her father, and encouraged him when too much put down. "I really think you're always right about trees, I think you've such wonderful taste, I do indeed, and judgment about all those things."

The old man gave her a hearty kiss on the cheek, and smiling ruddily, said —

"Well, I think I ought; I've read something, and *thought* something on the subject, and as *you* don't dissent, my dear, and Clara says it's to come down — down it comes. She's looking very pretty; egad she is — wonderfully pretty, she is, today,"

"Folly!" exclaimed Miss Clara, pleased notwithstanding.

"Other people think her good-looking too, I can tell you," exclaimed her mother, whose thoughts were all in that channel, and who could not forbear saying something on the subject. "I think, even you, Mr. Kincton Knox, will see that I have done my duty by our child, and have been the means under Providence of promoting her happiness."

"And what is it?" said Mr. Kincton Knox, looking solemnly on his daughter.

"I don't know that there is anything at all," replied she quietly.

Mrs. Kincton Knox beckoned him imperiously, and they drew near the window, while the young lady resumed her novel.

“He’s in love with her,” she murmured.

“Who, my dear?”

“Mr. Maubray.”

“Oh! is he? — *what* Mr. Maubray?” inquired the old gentleman.

“Winston Maubray — probably *Sir* Winston Maubray, at this moment; his father, you know, is dying, if not dead.”

“Sir Richard, you mean?”

“Of course, I mean Sir Richard.”

“Yes, he is; he wasn’t a bad fellow, poor Maubray. But it’s a long time — thirty — *thirty-eight* years — yes — since we were at Oxford.”

“And his son’s in the house.”

“Here?”

“Yes, this house, *here?*

“Very happy to see him, I’m sure, very happy — we’ll do all in our power,” said Mr. Kincton Knox, very much at sea as to the cause of his arrival.

“You know Mr. Herbert?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that’s he — Mr. Herbert is Mr. Winston Maubray. If you were to stare till Doomsday it won’t change the fact; here he is, and *has* been — and has confessed to me that he likes Clara. He’s very modest, almost shy, and without any kind of management on my part; had I stooped to that as other mothers do, she’d have been married, no doubt, long ago — simply placing them under the same roof, perceiving that he was a gentleman; ascertaining *who* he *was*, I left the rest to — to — you see, and the consequence is — as I’ve told you, and — and *humanly* speaking — she’ll be Lady Maubray.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Kincton Knox.

“Perhaps you don’t like it?”

“Oh! like it? — very well; but she’s very young — there’s no great hurry; I would not *hurry* her.”

“Pooh!” exclaimed Mrs. Kincton Knox, turning abruptly away from her husband, one of whose teasing hallucinations was that Clara had hardly emerged from the nursery.

CHAPTER XLII.

CONFIDENCES.

MRS KINCTON KNOX, still in walking costume, entered the schoolroom, intending to invite the pseudo-tutor to continue his walk with her; and with one of her awful smiles she began:

“I’ve come to claim your promise, Mr. Maubray.”

The name had escaped her. It reverberated in her ear like a cannon-shot. Hardly less astounded stood our friend William before her. For a full minute she could not think of a presentable fib, and stared at him a good deal flushed, and dropped her huge, goggle eyes upon a “copy book” of Master Howard’s, which she raised and inspected with a sudden interest, and having read— “Necessity is the mo.”

“Necessity is the moth.”

“Necessity is the moth”“

“Necessity is the mo” upon its successive lines, she replaced it firmly, raised her head and said —

“I have addressed you by the name of Maubray, which I’ve learned, just five minutes since, is your real name; but, should you prefer my employing that of Herbert — my using the other, indeed, was simply an accident; and, perhaps, it *is* better — I shall certainly do so. Your little confidence has interested me unaffectedly — very much, indeed — deeply interested me; the more particularly as Mr. Kincton Knox was once acquainted with a family of your name. Sir Richard Maubray, possibly a relation.” William, who was still a little confused, assented, and the lady, with growing confidence, proceeded: —

“You mentioned some unhappy family discord; and it struck me — Mr. Kincton Knox, you know, and I — in fact, we have a good many friends, that possibly some — a — intervention— “

“Oh! thanks; *very* kind of you; but I don’t know anyone likely to have much influence — except, perhaps, Mr. Wagget; and I was thinking of writing to him, although I hardly know him sufficiently.”

“And, may I ask who Mr. Wagget is?” inquired the lady, who had intentions of taking the carriage of the affair.

“The clergyman — a very good man, I believe.”

“Oh! in attendance at the sick bed?” inquired the matron, with proper awe.

“No — no; not that I know of; but a very old friend of my aunt’s.”

“I see — I understand — and he and your aunt would unite their influence to reconcile you.”

“Oh, my quarrel, as we’ve been calling it, is with my aunt.”

“Oh! oh! — I see, and your father has taken it up?” suggested Mrs. Kincton Knox, promptly.

“My father’s dead,” said William, with the gravity becoming such an announcement.

“Oh! dear me! — I’m shocked to think I should — I beg your pardon. I ought to have anticipated. You have, I assure you, my deep sympathy — all our sympathies. I do recollect *now* having heard something of his illness; but, dear! oh, dear! *What* a world it is.”

William could only bow, with his former seriousness. It was more than twenty years since his excellent father had deceased; and though *he* could not remember, Mrs. Kincton Knox very well might, an event of that date. Still the fervour of her surprise and her sympathy were, considering all things, a little uncalled for.

“The rupture, then, is with your aunt — dear me! you must have wonderful self-command, admirable — admirable, in so young a person.” A brief pause followed this oracular speech.

“And your aunt is married?” inquired Mrs. Kincton Knox.

“No, unmarried — in fact an old maid,” he replied.

“Oh! yes, quite so. Then she’s Miss Maubray?” said the lady.

“No, Miss *Perfect*,” said he.

“Miss Perfect, *maternal* aunt, it must be,” and Mrs. Kincton Knox paused, a little perplexed, for she did not recollect that name in that interesting page in the Peerage, which she had looked into more than once. She concluded, however, it must be so, and said, slowly, “I see — I *see?*

“And what — you’ll do me the justice to believe, it aint curiosity but a higher motive that actuates me — what is the *ground* of this unhappy dispute?”

“She has set her heart on my going into the Church,” said William sadly, “and I’m not fit for it.”

“*Certainly*,” exclaimed Mrs. Kincton Knox, “nothing, begging the old lady’s pardon, *could* be more absurd — you’re *not* fit of course, nor is *it* fit for *you* — there is *no* fitness *whatever*. There’s the Very Rev the Earl of Epsom, and the Rev. Sir James St. Leger, and many others I could name. Can anything be more ridiculous r They both have their estates and position to look after: and their ordination vow pledges them to give their entire thoughts to their holy calling. I and Mr. Kincton Knox have had many arguments upon the subject; as you see, I’m quite with you. Mr. — Mr. *Herbert*, you must allow me still to call you by that name — that dear old name. I was going to say— “

William could only acquiesce — a little puzzled at her general exuberance; she seemed, in fact, quite tipsy with good nature. How little one can judge of character at first sight!

“And, of course, it is not for *me* to say — but your reserve about your name — I suppose *that* is at an end. Since the melancholy termination of your hopes and fears — I mean there can hardly be — now that you apprise me of your domestic loss.”

“It was entirely in deference to my *aunt’s* prejudices, that Doctor Sprague, in fact,” began William.

“I know, an old friend of poor Sir Richard’s; but whatever else you do, I suppose we must make up our minds to lose you for a week or so; your absence would be of course remarked upon, in fact, those feelings never survive the grave, and there are sacrifices to decorum. Your friends, and you know there are those here who feel an interest; *no* one could advise your staying away.’ “My aunt is not ill?” said William with a sudden and horrible misgiving, for the lady’s manner was unmistakably funereal.

“Ill? — I haven’t heard. I have not the honour of knowing Miss Purity,” said Mrs. Kincton Knox.

“*Perfect?* interrupted William— “thank God! I mean that she’s not ill.”

“I was thinking *not* of your aunt, but of your poor father; there are things to be looked after; you are of age.”

“Yes, three-and-twenty,” said William, with a coolness that under so sudden a bereavement was admirable.

“Not quite that, two-and-twenty last May,” said the student of the Peerage.

William knew *he* was right, but the point, an odd one for Mrs. Kincton Knox to raise — was not worth disputing.

“And, considering the circumstances under which, although you will not admit the estrangement, poor Sir Richard Maubray has been taken— “

“Sir Richard! Is Sir Richard dead?” exclaimed William.

“Dead! of course he is dead. Why you told me so yourself, this moment.”

“I — I *couldn’t;* I — I didn’t know — I — if I said anything like that, it was the merest slip.”

“He’s either dead or alive, Sir, I *suppose;* and, whether intentionally or by a *slip*, it is for you to determine; but I’m positive you did tell me that he’s *dead;* and if he be so, pray, as between friends, let there an end of concealments, which can have no object or effect but a few hours’ delay in making known a fact which must immediately appear in all the newspapers,” expostulated Mrs. Kincton Knox, as nearly offended as it was possible to be with so very eligible a young man, so opportunely placed, and in so docile a mood.

“He’s *dying,* at all events,” she added.

“*That* I know,” said William, with that coolness which had before struck Mrs. Kincton Knox, during this interview, as a new filial phenomenon.

“And although we shall miss you, *some* of us *very* much, yet, of course, knowing *all,* we have no claim — no rightonly you must pledge me your honour — you really must.” She was holding his hand and pressed it impressively between both hers, “that you won’t forget your Kincton friends — that so soon as you can, you will return, and give us at least those weeks on which we reckon.”

“It is very kind — it’s very good of you. It is very odd, but I had such a wish to go, just for a day or two — only to see Dr. Sprague — and to consult him about writing to Gilroyd before finally determining on a course of life. I was thinking of — in fact going away and leaving England altogether.”

Mrs. Kincton Knox stared, and at last asked —

“Who *is* Gilroyd?”

“My aunt’s house, a small place, Gilroyd Hall.”

“I was merely thinking of your attending poor Sir Richard’s obsequies.”

"The funeral? I — I should not like to attend it uninvited," answered William. "I don't know that I should be a welcome guest; in fact, I know I should not — young Maubray— "

"Your brother?" inquired the lady, who did not remember any such incumbrance in the record she had consulted.

"No, my cousin."

"*Cousin?* And what right *could* a cousin pretend to exclude *you* from your father's funeral?" exclaimed Mrs. Kincton Knox, unfeignedly amazed.

"I'm speaking of Sir Richard Maubray, my uncle. My father has been a long time dead — when I was a mere child."

"Oh, yes, of course — dead a long time," repeated Mrs. Kincton Knox, slowly, as the horrible bewilderment in which she had been lost began to clear away. "Oh, yes, your *uncle,* Sir Richard Maubray; of course — of course that would alter — I — *I* was speaking of your father — I did not know you had lost him so long ago — it, of course, it's quite another thing, and — a — and — you wish to go to Mrs. Purity?"

"No — *Perfect* — not to go there — not to Gilroyd, only to Cambridge, to see Doctor Sprague."

"Very well — a — very well — I don't see — I shall mention it to Mr. Kincton Knox; have you anything more to say to me, Mr. — Mr. — pray what am I to call you? Herbert, I suppose?"

"Nothing, but to thank you — you've been so good, so very kind to me."

"I — I make it a rule to be kind to — a — to *everybody.* I *endeavour* to be so — I believe I *have?* said the majestic lady with a dignity indescribably dry. "I shall mention your wish to Mr. Kincton Knox. Good-evening, Mr. — Mr. Herbert."

It seemed to our friend William, that the lady was very much offended with him; but what he had done to provoke her resentment he could not divine. He reproached himself after the door had closed, for not having asked her; but perhaps an opportunity would offer, or he might make one, he could not bear the idea of having wounded a heart which had shown such friendly leanings towards him.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MR. KINCTON KNOX RECEIVES A SUMMONS.

MR. KINCTON KNOX, with a couple of dogs at his heels, was tranquilly consulting his chief commissioner of woods and forests, when he was summoned from his sylvan discourses by a loud tapping on his study window, within whose frame he saw, like a full-length portrait of Mrs. Siddons, on a signboard, if such a thing exists, the commanding figure of his wife, who was beckoning him imperiously.

The window at which she stood was in fact a glass door opening upon two steps, to which the peaceable old gentleman of sixty-two wonderingly drew near.

"Come in," she exclaimed, beckoning again grimly, and superadding a fierce nod.

So up went the sash, and the little hatch which simulated a windowsill was pulled open by the old gentle man, who was vexed somewhat at the interruption.

She read this in his honest countenance, and said, as he entered —

"I don't mean to detain you, Mr. Kincton Knox, I shan't keep you more than five minutes away from your timber; but I think, for once, you may give that time to your *family.* It's becoming a little too much for me, perfectly unaided as I've always been."

"Well, I'm sorry you're annoyed. Something has happened, I suppose. What do you wish me to do?" said that accommodating gentleman in the gray tweed and copious white waistcoat.

"I told you, Mr. Kincton Knox, if you remember, when your friend, Doctor Sprague, of whose character, recollect, I know nothing, except from your representations — I *told you distinctly* my impression when that gentleman was persuading you to accept the person who's here in the capacity of tutor, under a feigned name. I then stated my conviction that there was danger in disguise. I declared myself unable to assign any creditable reason for such a step. Wiser people, however, thought differently

— my scruples were overruled by you and your friend Doctor — Doctor — *what's* his name?"

"Sprague — eh?" said her husband.

"Yes — Sprague. It is not the first time that my warning voice has been disregarded. It does not in this case signify much — fortunately very little; but it is not pleasant to have one's house made a scene of duplicity to please Dr. Sprague, or to convenience some low young puppy."

"I thought you said he was the son of my friend Maubray — Sir Richard, you know?"

"It signifies very little whose son he is; but he's not — I simply conjectured he might, and certainly everything was, artfully or not I can't say, laid in train to induce that belief on my part; but he's not — I thought it best to clear it up. He says he's some relation — goodness knows; but in point of everything else he's a mere pretender — the merest adventurer, and the sooner we part with him the better."

"And what do you wish me to do?" said Mr. Kincton Knox, with some little vehemence.

"I've given you my views," replied the lady.

"Yes, but you like to do everything yourself, and you always say I'm wrong whatever I say or *do?* said the old gentleman, sonorously, flushing a little, and prodding the point of his stick on the floor.

"See the young man and dismiss him," said his wife, peremptorily.

"Well, that's easily done, of course. But what has he *done?* there ought to be a *rea*son."

"The reason is that I'm tired of disguises. We can't go on in that absurd manner. It never was known at Kincton, and I— "

Suddenly Mrs. Kincton Knox paused in her sentence, and with a great rustling hurried to the study window, where she began to knock with a vehemence which alarmed her husband for the safety of his panes.

The object of the summons was Miss Clara in that exquisitely becoming black velvet cloak and little bonnet which was so nearly irresistible, all grace and radiance, and smiling — upon whom? Why, upon that odious tutor, to whom she was pointing out some of those flowers which she claimed to have planted and tended with her own fingers.

Her mother beckoned fiercely.

"Assist me, if you please, Mr. Kincton Knox; open this horrid window, no one else can."

So it was opened, and she called rather huskily to Clara to come in.

"I want to say a word to you, please."

And without condescending to perceive William Maubray, who had raised his hat, she said, with an appearance of excitement not of a pleasant kind, and in presence of which somehow the young lady's heart sunk with a sudden misgiving —

"We'll go up, my dear, to my room, I've a word to say, and I think Mr. Kincton Knox, as you ask me what you shall do, you may as well, in this instance, as usual, do nothing. I'll write. I'll do it myself. Come, Clara."

So, suspending questions until the apartment up stairs was reached, the young lady, in silence and with a very grave face, accompanied her mother.

"Charming day — sweet day — we shall soon have the storms, though — they must come; we had them ten days earlier last year. Will you come with me to the Farm-road plantation, and give me your ideas about what I'm going to do?"

And the old gentleman came down the two steps from the glass door upon the closely-shorn grass, looking a little red, but smiling kindly, for he saw no reason for what his wife intended, and thought the young man was about to be treated unfairly, and felt a liking for him.

"No; she can't come down again; I know her mother wants her, so you may as well come with me."

So off they set together, and I dare say William liked that ramble better than he would have done the other. The old man was sociable, genial, and modest, and had taken rather late in life, tempted thereto, no doubt, by solitude, to his books, some of which, such as "Captain Lemuel Gulliver's Travels," were enigmatical, and William was able to throw some lights which were new to the elderly student, who conceived a large and honest admiration for his young friend, and would have liked to see a great deal more of him than he was quite sure Mrs. Kincton Knox would allow.

In the course of their walk, William Maubray observed that he seemed even more than usually kindly, and once or twice talked a little mysteriously of women's caprices, and told him not to mind them; and told him also when he was at Oxford he had got once or twice a little dipped — young fellows always do — and he wanted to know — he was not, of course, to say a word about it — if fifty pounds would be of any use to him — he’d be so happy, and he could pay him any time, in ten years or twenty for that matter, for the old gentleman dimly intended to live on indefinitely.

But William did not need this kindly help, and when his pleasant ramble with the old man and his dogs was over, and he returned to the “schoolroom,” William found a note awaiting him on the table, in the large-hand of Mrs. Kincton Knox.

CHAPTER XLIV.

BACK TO CAMBRIDGE.

THE letter upon the table was thus: —

" — October, — 1860.

"Mrs. Kincton Knox understanding from Mr. *Herbert* that he wishes to visit Cambridge upon business, begs to say that she will oppose no difficulty to his departing on tomorrow morning with that view; she begs also to mention that Mr. Kincton Knox will write by an early post to the Rev. Dr. Sprague upon the subject of Mr. Herbert's engagement. A carriage will be at the door at eight o'clock, *a m.,* to convey Mr. Herbert to the railway station."

"What *have* I done? I've *certainly* offended her — she who wrote all those friendly little notes; I can't think of anything, unless that boy Howard has been telling lies. She'll give me an opportunity of explaining, I *suppose* and it will all be right; it can't be much."

Glad he was to get away even for two or three days to his old haunts, and to something like his old life. He made his preparations early for his next morning's journey, and sate in the evening with his ingenious pupil, wondering whether a change of mood might not bring him a relenting note on the usual pink paper inviting him to visit them in the drawingroom, and debating whether it might not be a wholesome lesson to the capricious old lady to excuse himself, and so impose on her the onus of explanation.

"I say, old chap, listen. What do you think?" said Master Howard, who had been whistling, and on a sudden, being prompted to speak, poked the point of his pen uncomfortably into the back of William's hand.

"Stop that, young un. I told you before you're not to do that. What have you got to say? Come."

"I say, I heard mamma, say to Clara this afternoon, that you aint to be trusted; and I told Clara I'd tell you, because she teased me; and mamma said you deceived papa. I heard every word."

"She could not have said that, because I never did anything of the kind," said William, flushing a little.

“Yes, but she did. I heard her, I’d swear; and Clara said, he’s a low person. I told her I’d tell you. She did, upon my word — a low person, and I said I’d tell you; and I’ll tell you ever so much more.”

“Not now, please, nor ever. I don’t want to hear that sort of thing, even if it *was* said. I’d rather not, unless it was said to myself.”

“And I heard Clara say, let him go about his business. I did, upon my honour.”

“I say, young un, this is one of your fibs to vex Miss Knox.”

Master Howard began to vociferate.

“Quiet, Sir! If your mamma had any complaint to make, she’d make it to me, I suppose; and if you say a word more on the subject, I’ll go in and mention the matter to your mamma,” said William, growing angry.

“Catch me telling you anything ever again, as long as I live, that’s all,” said Master Howard, and broke into mutterings; and then whistled a tune as loud as he could, with his hands in his pockets, and his heels on the table. But he did not succeed in disturbing William. Thoughts that are thoroughly unpleasant hold fast like bulldogs. It is only the pleasant ones that take wing at noise, like a flight of birds.

Away in due time went Master Howard — no sign appeared from the drawingroom — and William Maubray, who in his elevation and his fall had experienced for the second time something of the uncertainty of human affairs, went to his bed mortified and dismal, and feeling that, go where he would, repulse and insult awaited him.

His early breakfast despatched — William mounted the dog cart, which, in her official letter, Mrs. Kincton Knox had dignified with the title of carriage, and drove at a rapid pace away from Kincton, with a sense of relief and hope as the distance increased, and a rising confidence that somehow he was to see that abode of formality and caprice no more.

Doctor Sprague was now at Cambridge, and greeted him very kindly. He had not much news to tell. It was true Sir Richard Maubray was actually dead at Gliston, whence the body was to be removed that day to Wyndelston, where in about a week would be the funeral.

“No, William would not go — he was not recognised, it would not do — Sir Winston, as he now was, would take care to let him know he was not wanted.”

So said William in reply to the doctor’s question, and having related his experience of Kincton, Doctor Sprague told him frankly, that although Kincton Knox was a very good fellow, and very kind, though a little weak, you know, that he had always heard his wife was a *particularly* odious woman.

“Well, and what of Miss Perfect; any conciliatory symptoms in that quarter?” asked Doctor Sprague.

“Oh, none; she is very inflexible, Sir; her dislikes never change.”

While they were talking some letters arrived, one of which was actually from Kincton, and in the hand of its mistress.

“Hey? Haw! ha — ha! I protest, Maburay, the lady has cut you — *read?* and he threw the letter across the table to William.

CHAPTER XLV.

VIOLET DARKWELL AT GILROYD AGAIN.

"MRS. KINCTON KNOX" it said, "presents her compliments to the Rev. W. H. Sprague, and as Mr. Kincton Knox is suffering from gout in his hand, which though slight, prevents his writing, she is deputed to apprise him that the gentleman calling himself Mr. Herbert, who has been acting as tutor at Kincton, need not return to complete his engagement. Mr. Kincton Knox desires to remit to him, through your hands, the enclosed cheque, payable to you, and for the full amount of the term he was to have completed. Should the young man feel that, under the circumstances, he can have no right to retain the entire amount, he will be so good as to return that portion of the sum to which he feels himself unentitled. We wish to mention that we part with him not in consequence of any specific fault, so much as from a feeling, upon consideration, that we could no longer tolerate the practice of a concealment at Kincton, the character and nature of which — although we impute nothing — might not consist with our own ideas upon the subject."

"She begins in the third person and ends in the first," said Doctor Sprague, "otherwise it is a very fine performance. What am I to do about the check?"

"I will not touch a farthing," said William.

"Tut, tut; I think you've a right to it all, out if you object, we'll send them back all that represents the unexpired part of your engagement, but I'll have no Quixotism, I'm half sorry, Maubray, we ever thought of tuitions: we must think of some other way. You're quite right in resolving not to vex Miss Perfect more than you can help, I'm clear upon that; but I've been thinking of quite another thing — I have not time now to ten you all." He glanced at his watch. "But you can speak French, and you would have to reside in Paris. I think it would answer you very nicely, and I think you ought to let Miss Perfect know something of your plans, considering all she has done. I'll see you here again in an hour."

And William took his leave.

That evening Miss Violet Darkwell arrived at Gilroyd. She did not think old "grannie" looking well — was it a sadness or a feebleness — there was something unusual in her look that troubled her. *She* thought her Violet looking quite beautiful — *more* so than ever — so perhaps she was. And she asked her all sorts of questions about all sorts of things, and how the Mainwarings had arranged the rooms, for Aunt Dinah had known the house long ago, and whether the paint had ever been taken off that covered the old oak wainscot in the parlour, and ever so many other particulars besides.

And at last she said —

"Great news Mr. Trevor tells me of William." She had already resolved against opening the Trevor budget to its more interesting recesses. "William Maubray — he's going to marry — to make a great match in some respects — money, beauty— "

"Oh!" said Violet with a smile.

"Yes; a Miss Kincton Knox. He has been residing in the house; an only daughter. *Kincton* is the place." Something of this Violet had heard before she left Gilroyd, but not all; and Aunt Dinah went on —

"They are connected somehow with Mr. Trevor, whom I've grown to like extremely, and he saw William there; and from what he told me *I* look upon it as settled, and so in fact does he."

"It's very cold, isn't it, tonight?" said Miss Violet "That's all very nice — very well for William Maubray."

"Very well; better, perhaps, than he deserves. Had I been, however, as we used to be, I should have endeavoured to postpone it, to induce the parties to defer it for a little — in fact for five years. I may say, indeed, I should have made a point of it; because I — I happen to *know* that his marrying within that time will be attended with the worst consequences."

There was a silence.

"*Very* cold," repeated Miss Violet, drawing a little nearer to the fire.

"It seems odd, as a mere matter of *respect* — that's all, of course — he should not have written me a single line upon the subject," said Miss Perfect grimly.

"Well, perhaps not *very* odd," answered Miss Darkwell carelessly, yet somehow, ever so little, sadly. "I'm beginning to think it a worse world than I used to think it, and so hard to know anyone in it, except dear old grannie."

And up got the girl, and threw her pretty arms round old Aunt Dinah's neck, and kissed her.

"Little Vi, little Vi!" said Aunt Dinah, with a tender tremor in her voice, and she laughed a little.

"I think you are tired, darling. Your long drive," she added.

"I believe I *am*, grannie. Shall I run away to my bed?"

"God bless you, darling!" said grannie, and rang the bell for old Winnie Dobbs, who appeared; and away, with a second goodnight, they went.

"Well, old Winnie Dobbs, great doings, I hear. Grannie says Mr. William's to be married — a great lady, Miss Kincton Knox, she says — and very pretty — quite a beauty, quite a belle."

She was looking with a faint little smile down upon the trinkets she was laying upon the dressing-table, and she spoke in the tones in which people recall a very far-off remembrance.

"Well, she did tell me so, Miss Vi: and very glad I was, poor fellow; but very young. I that knew him when he was only the length o' my arm — to think of him now. But very sensible — always was; a good head — wiser than many an older body."

"You've never seen the lady?" said Vi.

"No; but Mr. Trevor's groom was stopping there last summer for a week with Mr. Trevor, you know, and he did not much like the family — that's the old lady — no one has a good word of her; and the young one, Miss Clara — do you like the name Clara, Miss?"

"Yes; a pretty name,. I think."

"Well, they don't say much about her; only she's very distant like."

"And *she's* the lady?" asked Violet.

"Ah! *that* she is, Miss — the only daughter,"

"She's tall?"

"Well, yes; he says she is."

"Taller than I, I dare say?"

"Well, he did not say that; you're a good height, you know yourself, Miss — a nice figure, yes indeed."

"And what colour is her hair?" asked Vi.

"Light — light hair, he said."

"Yes; he always liked light hair, I think," she said, still with the same faint smile and in the same soft and saddened tones. Vi was arranging her own rich dark brown tresses at the glass.

"And blue eyes — large — something the colour o' yours, he said, Miss; he used to take great notice to her, the groom — everything. She used to go out a ridin'. A hair-pin, Miss?"

"No, Winnie, thanks."

"He says she's a fine rider; showy, handsome, that sort, you know."

"And when is it all to be?"

"Well, they don't know; but once it's settled, I do suppose it won't be long delayed. Why should it?"

"*No* why, once it's settled, as you say."

"And is it not well for him, poor fellow, he should have some one to love him, and look after him? What's the good o' life without kindness? Both o' them handsome, and young, and loving. What more need they ask?" said old Winnie. "And if they aren't happy, who will?"

"Yes, old Winnie, they will, very happy, I'm sure; and now I'll bid you goodnight, I'm so *tired,* very tired; it's a long tedious way, and I'm always wishing to come back to you, and dear old grannie, and poor old Gilroyd, where we were all so happy, where I always feel so safe — but I believe we always fancy the old times the pleasantest — when I was a child. Goodnight, old Winnie."

CHAPTER XLVI.

VANE TREVOR AT THE WINDOW.

WILLIAM MAUBRAY liked the appointment which his kind friend, Doctor Sprague, had virtually secured for him. It was not a great deal in salary, but opening abundant opportunities for that kind of employment which he most coveted, and for which, in fact, a very little training would now suffice to accomplish him. Literary work, the ambition of so many, not a wise one perhaps for those who have any other path before them, but to which men will devote themselves, as to a perverse marriage, contrary to other men's warnings, and even to their own legible experiences of life — in a dream.

For three years he would sojourn in Paris. He preferred that distant exile to one at the gates of the early paradise from which he had been excluded. From thence he would send to his good friend, Doctor Sprague, those little intimations of his doings and his prosperings, which he, according to his wisdom, might transmit, for inspection to the old lady at Gilroyd, who might, if she pleased, re-open a distant correspondence with the outcast.

Doctor Sprague, at William's desire, had written to accept and arrange, and would hear by the return of post, or nearly, and then William might have to leave at a day's notice. Three years! It was a long time, and Aunt Dinah old! He might never see her or Gilroyd more, and a kind of home sickness fell upon him.

At Gilroyd that morning, Aunt Dinah and Vi sat at breakfast *tête-à-tête.* The spirits of the old lady were not altogether so bright, the alacrity was gone, and though she smiled there was a sadness and a subsidence. William was banished. The pang of that sharp decision was over. Some little help he should have circuitously through Doctor Sprague; but meet again on earth they never should. So that care was over: and now her other tie, pretty Violet Darkwell, she, too, was going: and although she sat beside her at the little breakfast-table, prattling pleasantly, and telling her all the news of her friends, the Mainwarings and their new neighbours, yet her voice sounded already faint in distance, and the old lady's cares were pretty well over. Our business here is work of some sort, and not for ourselves; and when that is ended it is time, as Fuller says, to put out the candle and go to bed.

"I'm going to see old Mrs. Wagget to-day. I promised her the day before I went to the Mainwarings," said Vi, recalling this engagement.

"But, my dear, some one may call here. Your friends and mine will be looking in," said Aunt Dinah, who knew that Trevor would arrive at about twelve o'clock.

"Well, I can return their visits all the same, and see them in their own houses," said Vi, "just as well."

"And what need to go to Mrs. Wagget to-day — tomorrow I fancy would answer," said Miss Perfect.

"But I *promised*,' you know, and she wrote to remind me."

"*Promised* to *leave* your old granny alone again the day after your return!" she exclaimed, a little huffed.

"Why, darling, it was you who made me promise, don't you recollect?" pleaded Miss Violet, "the day we paid them our last visit."

"H'm did I? Well, if there really was a promise, and I suppose you remember, we must keep it, I suppose." Aunt Dinah had made that kind of scrupulousness an emphatic point in Violet's simple education, and of course it could not now be trifled with. And now she did recollect the appointment, and something about walking to the school-house together at twelve o'clock — could anything be more unlucky? Aunt Dinah looked up at the sky; but no, it was *not* threatening — clear blue, with a pleasant white cloud or two, and a sea of sunshine.

"I'm so sorry, granny, we settled, it would have been so much pleasanter to have staid with you to-day, and I'm afraid it's very wicked; but that school, except to *very* good people, it is really insupportable," said Miss Vi, whose inflexible estimate of such appointments rather vexed Aunt Dinah, and not the less that she could not deny that it was her own work.

"It's right in the main," thought she. "But there are distinctions — there's danger, however, in casuistry, and so let it be." There was an odd little sense of relief too in the postponement of the crisis.

At about halfpast eleven, Vane Trevor arrived. He came by the path, and from the drawingroom window Miss Perfect, sitting there at her work, saw him, and knocked and beckoned with her slender mittened hand.

He looks pale, poor young man," he was smiling as he approached, "and haggard too," she pronounced, notwithstanding. "He's anxious, I dare say," and she pushed up the window as he approached. "What a sweet morning," she said, taking off her gold spectacles, and smiling with that soft look of sympathy which in such cases makes even old women's faces so pretty again.

"Charming morning — really quite charming."

She saw him peeping into the shadow of the room for a second figure. Aunt Dinah's hand was now within reach, and they exchanged a friendly greeting.

"My little Violet has returned," she said, still holding Trevor's hand kindly, " quite well — looking so well — and most unluckily I quite forgot; but I had made an appointment for her this morning with Mrs. Wagget, and I have always made the keeping of appointments so much a moral duty with her, that unless I had opened the subject on which you talked with me, and told her plainly that I expected your call, and that she must wait — which would have been not a favourable way of proceeding; and in fact I should have been obliged to say very badly what you would say, probably, very well; and indeed it is a thing that makes me nervous — always did. When my dear sister was proposed for, I refused to take the message, in fact — I could not — and — he spoke for himself — poor Charles Maubray — like a man — and — and a very happy" — Suddenly she stopped, and Trevor saw that tears were trickling slowly down her cheeks; and her lips were resolutely closed; and she fumbled for a minute or two among her silks and worsteds; and the young man felt that he liked her better than ever he did before; and he sat on the window-stone outside, and they chatted kindly for a long time. Then they took a little walk together among the flowers, and under the chestnuts, till it grew to be near two o'clock, and Aunt Dinah began to look for Violet's return; and if the great Duke of Wellington on the field of Waterloo consulted his watch half so often as Mr. Vane Trevor did his on the green sward of Gilroyd that afternoon, I'm not surprised at it having excited all the observation it did, and being noted in the history of that great day of thunder and suspense.

Not the Iron Duke, however, but his Imperial rival on the field, when lowering his glass, he muttered, "C'est les Prussien," is the fitter representative of our friend Vane Trevor, when, not Miss Violet Darkwell, but old Mrs. Wagget’s page, a thick and stunted “buttons,” in rifle green regimentals, moved down upon his flank, with a note in his hand for Miss Perfect, who was entreated by the writer to allow Miss Violet to stay dinner, with a promise that she should arrive safe at Gilroyd in the brougham that evening at nine!

There was nothing for it but submission. It would not do, in presence of that dwarfish page, who was eyeing Vane with the curiosity of a youthful gossip, to order the young lady home, detain the young gentleman where he stood, and thus by a feat of discipline compel a meeting.

So Miss Perfect despatched her reply, thanking — I hope it was sincerely — Felicia Honoria Wagget, and accepting the arrangement with the best grace she might.

“You must come in and take some luncheon,” said Aunt Dinah.

Gilroyd was somehow so charming a spot, its resources had grown so inexhaustible, and old Miss Perfect so sensible and altogether interesting that Trevor was glad to linger a little, and postpone the evil hour of departure. It came at last, however, and Aunt Dinah called old Winnie Dobbs, and went listlessly to her room to make her toilet for her solitary dinner.

CHAPTER XLVII.

MISS PERFECT'S TOILET.

"SHORT the evenings growing," said Aunt Dinah, looking out upon the slanting amber sunlight, that made the landscape all so golden. "Long shadows already!" and she glanced at her broad old gold watch. "How the years go over us; Winnie, you've been a long time with me now — ha, ha, a Long time. When first you came to me, you thought me such a shrew, and I thought you such a fool, that we both thought a parting must very soon come of it — an old termagant and an old goose," continued Miss Perfect, nodding her head at her image in the glass. "We were not altogether wrong in that, perhaps, old Dobbs — don't interrupt me — but, though we were neither lambs nor Solomons, we answered one another. We never parted, and we'll live on so, don't you think, to the end of the chapter, and a pretty long chapter it has been, and pretty near the end, Winnie Dobbs, it must be for both of us. 'Here endeth the first lesson,' and then comes the judgment, Winnie— 'here endeth the second lesson,' — our two great lessons, death and judgment: think of that, my good old Winnie, when you hear Doctor Mainwaring or Doctor Wagget, it is now, saying, 'here endeth the first lesson,' and 'here endeth the second lesson,' and much good may it do you."

Aunt Dinah's lectures on such themes were generally very odd, and her manner sometimes a little flighty — people who did not know her would have almost said waggish. But her handmaiden received them always with a reverent acquiescence, having as full a faith in her mistress as honest Sancho, in his most trusting moods, ever reposed in the wisdom of the Knight of La Mancha.

"Death and judgment, sure enough. Death, at any rate, that's certain," maundered old Dobbs.

"And judgment, too, I hope," said Aunt Dinah, sharply, "And judgment, too," supplemented Winnie.

"What do you mean, old Dobbs, as if one was more certain than the other?"

"Ay, indeed. What is there certain? — nothing — nothing," she continued, not exactly apprehending her mistress. *a* Tut, tut! Dobbs. Give me a pin — you don't intend — but you sometimes say things that make my flesh creep — *yes* — you don't know it — but you do."

"Dear me, Ma'am," ejaculated old Winnie, who was never very much startled by Aunt Dinah's violent remarks.

"So, I think, old Dobbs, we shall soon have a wedding here," said Miss Perfect, after a silence, changing the subject.

"Well, well, I should not wonder, Ma'am," answered she.

"But you're not to say one word about it to Miss Violet until she speaks to you — do you mind — not a word — and that will be, I think, tomorrow."

"Tomorrow!" exclaimed Winnie.

"Not the wedding, old goose, but the talk of it I think it will be all settled tomorrow, and I'm glad, and I'm sorry. Give me my snuff-box — thanks. She has never spoken to you on the subject?" said Aunt Dinah.

"No, no, Ma'am; never," answered Winnie.

"Nor to me. But I know all about it from another quarter, and I hope she'll not be a fool. She'll never have so good an offer again. I like him extremely. I have the best opinion of him, and the sergeant is very much pleased; indeed, it's quite unexceptionable, and I do expect, Winnie Dobbs, if she *should* talk to you, you'll not try to frighten her. You and I are old maids, and I believe we chose wisely; but we are not to frighten nervous girls by drawing terrific pictures of matrimony, and maundering about bad husbands and unprovided children; young girls are so easily frightened away from anything that's prudent: and, though we are old maids, there's a good deal to be said on the other side of the question — so, do you mind?"

"Dear me, Ma'am, I'd be sorry she wasn't to get a good husband, I would."

"And you remember the last evening, Friday last, when we were in the study, at the table, you know, where the word 'eminently' came. Do you remember?"

"Well, I ought to, I'm sure; but my old head is not as good at bringing a thing to mind as it used to be," hesitated Winnie.

"No more it is; but the word eminently was all we got that night, and you didn't know what the question was. Well, I'll tell you. I asked simply, will

Violet Darkwell's marriage — hook my body, please — will Violet Darkwell's marriage prove happy? and the answer was *eminently*."

"Ay, so it was, I'll be bound, though I can't bring it to mind; but it's a hard word for the like o' me to come round."

"You *are* provoking, Winnie Dobbs," exclaimed her mistress, looking at herself defiantly in the glass.

"Well, dear me! I often think I am," acquiesced Winnie.

"Well, Winnie, we are too old to change much now — the leopard his spots, and the Ethiopian his skin. There's no good in trying to teach an old dog tricks. They must make the best of us now, Winnie, such as we are; and if this wedding does happen, I'll trick you out in a new dress, silk every inch, for the occasion, and the handsomest cap I can find in Saxton. I'll make you such a dandy, you'll not know yourself in the looking-glass. You'll come to the church as her own maid, you know j but you're not to go away with her. You'll stay with me, Winnie. I don't think you'd like to leave Gilroyd."

Old Winnie hereupon witnessed a good and kindly confession.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE PRODIGAL.

THEN came one of those little silences, during which thoughts glide on with the stroke, as it were, of the last sentence or two; and old Winnie Dobbs said at last:

“But I don’t think it would be like a wedding if Master Willie wasn’t here.”

“Stop that,” said Miss Perfect, grimly, and placing the end of the comb, with which she had been adjusting her gray locks, that lay smoothly over her resolute forehead, on a sudden upon old Winnie’s wrist. “I never change my mind when once I’ve made it up. You don’t know, and you *can’t* know, for your wits are always wool-gathering, all I’ve done for that boy — young *man,* indeed, *I* ought to call him — nor the measure of his perversity and ingratitude. I’ve supported him — I’ve educated him — I’ve been everything to him — and at the first opportunity he has turned on me. If I were a total stranger, a Cam bridge doctor, or anything else that had never cared or thought about him, he’d have listened to what I had to say, and been influenced by it. He has refused me for his friend — renounced me — chosen other advisers — he’ll *soon* be married,”

“Dearie me!” interpolated old Winnie, in honest sympathy.

“And although Mr. Trevor wrote to him yesterday to mention my view and conviction, that his marriage ought to be postponed for some little time, I know perfectly it won’t have the slightest effect, no more than those birds twittering.”

The sparrows in the glittering ivy were gossiping merrily in the beams of the setting sun.

“I simply told his friend, Mr. Trevor, and left it to him to acquaint him, not as having any claim whatever on my particular regard any longer, but as a — a human being — just that; and *you* know, Winnie Dobbs, when I make a resolution I can keep it; you remember— “

Miss Perfect had reached this point in her cration when old Winnie, who had been looking out of the window with unusual scrutiny, on a sudden exclaimed— “I’m blest if here baint Master William a comin’!” Aunt Dinah uttered a little exclamation, with her shut hand pressing on her breast, as she looked over her old servant’s shoulder.

I don’t know how it was, but as William Maubray entered the old iron gate, he heard the swift tread of a light foot, and Aunt Dinah, hurrying from the red brick porch, ran towards him with a little cry, and “My darling!” and threw her thin arms round his neck, and they both stood still.

“Oh! Willie, you’ve come back.”

William did not answer, he was looking down in her face, pale, with his hands very gently on her shoulders.

“Come in, darling,” she said at last.

“*Am* I to come in?” said William, wistfully and *Softly.*

And she looked at him, pleadingly with tears in her eyes, and said —

“Poor old Aunt Dinah.”

And he leant down and kissed her.

“Come in, my boy — my Willie man — my only precious boy that I was so proud of.”

And William kissed her again, and cried over her thin shoulder, and she, close laid to his breast, sobbed also; each felt the tremble in the other’s kindly arms.

Thank God it was made up now — the two loving hearts so near again — sweet and bitter the angelic love and mortal sadness — the sense of uncertainty and parting mingling with the great affection that welled up from the eternal fountain of love. Improve the hours of light.

The time is near when the poor heart will tremble no more, and all the world of loving thoughts lie in dust and silence.

“I am going to give you the silver tobacco-box that was on Marston Moor — it is the most valuable thing I have — it has the inscription on the inside of the cover. It was in my foolish old head to send it to Doctor Sprague for you. It was your ancestor’s. The ‘Warwickshire Knight,’ we called him — Sir Edwin. He joined the Parliament, you know, and took the name of Perfect. I always intended the tobacco-box for you, Willie, even when I was offended — come in — come, my darling.”

And she drew in the prodigal with her arm in his, and her hand on his fingers, liking to feel as well as to see and to hear him — to be *quite* sure of him!

"Dinner, Tom, this minute," said she to old Tom, who, grinning, spoke his hearty word of welcome in the hall, "Master William is very hungry — he has come ever so far — tell Mrs. Podgers — come Willie — are you cold?"

So before the bright fire, which was pleasant that clear red, frosty evening, they sat — and looking fondly on him, her hand on his, she said —

"A little thin — certainly a little thin — have you been quite well, Willie — quite well?"

"Yes, quite well — all right — and how have you been?" he answered and asked.

"Very well — that is, pretty well — indeed I can't say I *have* — I've *not* been well — but time enough about that And tell me — and tell me about this news — about Miss Kincton Knox — is it true — is there really an engagement?"

"I've left them — I came from Cambridge. Engagement! by Jove! I — I don't know exactly what you mean."

So said William, who was struck by something more in Aunt Dinah's look and tone than could possibly arise from the contemplation merely of that engagement he had been fulfilling at Kincton.

"I — I heard — I thought — was not there — isn't there" — Aunt Dinah paused, gazing dubiously on William— "I mean — something of — of — she's very handsome — I'm told."

"Going to be married to Miss Kincton Knox! — I assure you, if you knew her, such an idea would strike you as the most absurdly incredible thing the people who invented it could possibly have told you" — and William actually laughed.

"Ha!" exclaimed she, rather dismally— "that's very odd — that is really very odd — it must have been a mistake — people do make such mistakes — it must — and you have heard of — Vi — it seems so odd — little Vi! There's no mistake *there,* for Mr. Trevor has had a long conversation with me, and has written to her father, and we both approve highly. But — but about Miss Kincton Knox — it was an odd mistake, though I can't say I'm sorry, because — but it does not signify now; you would never have waited, and so sure as you sit there, if you had not, you'd have regretted your precipitation all the days of your life."

And thrice she nodded darkly on William, in such a way as to assure him that Henbane had been looking after his interests.

After dinner she ordered Tom to call Winnie Dobbs, who had already had *her* chat with William.

"Winnie," said she, producing a large key from her bag, "you must go to the store-room and fetch one of the three bottles on the shelf."

"We dust them every week, old Winnie and I," said she as soon as Dobbs had gone. "They have been there fifteen years — Frontignac — the doctor ordered it — sillabubs in the morning, when I was recovering, and I don't think they did me a bit of good; and we must open one of them now."

William protested in vain.

"Yes, it's the kind of wine young people like — they like it — sweet wine — you *must.* I hear her coming. What are you dawdling there for, Winnie? Come in — bring it in — why *don't* you?"

So, sitting side by side, her hand on his, and looking often in his face as they talked, they sipped their wine; and old Winnie, standing by, had her glass, and drank their healths, and declared it was "a beautiful sight to see them." And Aunt Dinah sent Tom to Saxton for some muffins for tea. Mr. William liked muffins— "Be quiet — you know you do."

"I'm so sorry Violet should have been out, drinking tea at the Rectory; but you're to stay tonight; you say you'll be in time at Mr. Cleaver's chambers at five tomorrow evening; and you have a London up train at halfpast eleven at our station; and you must sleep at Gilroyd; it would not be like the old times if you didn't."

CHAPTER XLIX.

“AFTER DEATH MY GHOST SHALL HAUNT YOU.”

IT was a clear, frosty, moonlight night, and the stars blinking and staring fiercely in the dark sky, as William Maubray peeped between the drawing room shutters, and listened in vain for the ring of the wheels of the promised brougham; and Aunt Dinah returned just as he let the curtains fall together, having in her hand a little cardboard box tied round with a little blue ribbon.

“Blue, you see, for loyalty — not to princes, but to right — I tied it with blue ribbon,” said Aunt Dinah, sitting down beside him, and untying the knot, and taking out the silver box, with embossed windmills, trees, dogs, and Dutchmen upon it. “Here it is — the tobacco-box; it is yours, mind, and your eldest boy’s to have it — an heirloom,” said she, with a gentle smile, looking into that dim but sunny vista, and among the golden-haired and blue-eyed group, painted in fancy, where she would have no place; “and it’s never to go out of the family, and who knows what it may inspire. It was a brave man’s tobacco-box — my hero. The courtiers, I believe, did not smoke, and he did not like tobacco; indeed I can’t abide the smell, except in snuff — the kind you know you bring me sometimes; but he would not be different from the other officers about him, and so he did smoke; though, my dear father told me, always sparingly; and so, dear William, here it is, and I have had your name placed underneath, and you can take it with you.”

Hereupon the tea and muffins entered, and after a time the conversation took another turn.

“And I’m not sorry, William, about that Kincton Knox business; indeed I’m very glad; I never knew before — I never knew intimations — and you know I implicitly believe in them — so peremptory upon any point as on that; and you’re not to marry — mind, you shall promise me you will not — till after the expiration of five years.”

“I think I might promise you safely enough, I’ll never marry,” said William, with a little laugh.

“Don’t be rash — no — don’t promise more than I ask; but *that* you *must?* replied the old lady.

“You’ll not ask me to make promises, I’m sure?” said William; “I hate them so.”

“For five years,” said Miss Perfect, holding up her head a little sternly.

“For five years, dear aunt?” replied William, with a smile, and shaking his head.

“It is not much,” said Aunt Dinah, looking sadly down on her muffin, and chopping it lightly with the edge of her knife, as if she cut off the head of a miniature argument at every stroke. “I don’t think it’s *very* much for a person, that is, who says he’ll *never* marry.”

“I’ll never marry — I’m sure I shall never marry — and yet I can’t promise *anything.* I hate vows; they are sure to make you do the very thing you promise not to do,” said William, half provoked, half laughing, “and if I *were* to promise, I really can’t tell *what* the consequence might be.”

“Ha!” said Miss Perfect “Well! It *is* odd!” and up she got and stood very erect and grim on the hearthrug.

“Now, don’t, dear aunt, don’t be vexed with me; but I assure you I *could* not. I can’t make vows about the future; but I really and honestly think I shall *never* be a married man; it’s all — all — *odious*.”

“Well,” said she with an effort, “I *won’t* quarrel. It was not much — five years.” A little pause here she allowed for William to reflect upon its reasonableness, but he made no sign. “Not a great deal; but I won’t quarrel — *there* — I won’t,” and she extended her hand to him in amity, and he clasped it very affectionately.

“But I’ll speak to you seriously. I’m not fanciful, I think; I don’t believe things without *evidence*, and I don’t much care what very young, or very prejudiced people may think about me; that which I know I declare, and I don’t shrink an atom — no, not at the stake.”

William looked at her with respectful amazement.

“No — truth first — truth *always* — in the face of ridicule and bigotry. Never abandon the truth. I say I know perfectly well we are surrounded by spirits — disprove it if you can — and unequivocally have they declared themselves to me, and from that one among them, who is always near me, who is present at this moment, a friendly spirit — Henbane! Why should I hesitate to name him? — I have learned the *condition,* I may say, of your *fate,* and *I* won't hide it, nor suffer you, if I can help it, to disregard it. Marry for five years you shan't. If I be alive I'll leave no stone unturned to prevent it; and if I'm dead, there's nothing that spirit can do, if you so much as harbour the thought, I'll not do to prevent it. I'll be about you; be I good or evil, or mocking, I'll trouble you, I'll torment you, I'll pick her eyes out, but I won't suffer you to ruin yourself."

Preposterous as was this harangue, Aunt Dinah delivered it like a Pythoness, with a vehemence that half awed her nephew.

"I'll speak of this no more," she said, more like herself, after two or three minutes' silence. "I'll not mention it — I'll let it rest in your mind — it's nothing to me, but for your sake, my mind's made up though, and if I've power in this world or the next, you'll hear of me, remember that, William Maubray."

William was bound to listen to this flighty rigmarole with respect as coming from his aunt, but her spiritual thunders rather amused than alarmed him, and of Henbane he entertained. I must confess, the meanest possible opinion.

Connected with all this diablerie, indeed, there was but one phenomenon which had unpleasantly fastened upon his imagination, and that was the mysterious adventure which had befallen him in this old house of Gilroyd; when in his bed, his wrist was seized and held fast in the grasp of an unseen hand, and the intensely disagreeable sensations of that night recurred to his memory oftener than he would have cared to admit.

"I wonder you have so little curiosity, sometimes," said Aunt Dinah, speaking now, though gravely, much more in her usual way; "you young people think you are so far away from the world of spirits, material and sceptical. You've never once cared to ask me for Elihu Bung. I'll lend it to you with pleasure, while you are here. But that portion of the Almighty's empire has *no* interest — is dead — for you."

There was abundant truth in this reproach, for William indeed could not without great offence have told his aunt what rubbish he thought it all. But said he:

"I dare say it is very curious."

"Not a bit curious; that's not the word; it is serious and it's certain; bread and butter is not very curious; your foot is not very curious, nor your hat; but there they are, facts! that's all. I'm glad you say you have no present intention of marrying; in fact, dear William, the idea has caused me the most extreme anxiety, having the warning I *have;* as for me, however, my course is taken. I expect to be what we call a mocking spirit — yes, a mocking spirit — and I'll play you such tricks as will make you think twice, if such an idea should be in your head. Mind, I told you, though I be dead you shan't escape me," and she smiled oddly, and nodded her head, and then frowned a little bit.

"But I dare say it won't happen. Now that this Kincton Knox business has turned out a mistake — thank God — a *canard.* There's no hurry; you are too young. Remember it was on the 28th of September the warning came, five years, and you count from that; but goodness knows you have time enough. I think I hear the brougham."

William was already at the window and the gate-bell ringing.

"And William, remember, not a word to Violet about Mr. Trevor — not a hint."

"Oh! certainly," cried he, and he was at the hall door in time to open the carriage door, and take little Violet's hand.

"Oh! *you* come?" said she smiling, and descending lightly with a bouquet of old Miss Wagget's best flowers in her fingers. "I had not an idea — only just come, I suppose?"

"Yes, this evening: and you quite well, Violet?"

"Quite well, flourishing. Grannie is in the drawing room? And I'm glad you've come to Gilroyd; poor old grannie, I think she has been in very low spirits; let us go to her."

CHAPTER L.

VIOLET AND WILLIAM IN THE DRAWINGROOM.

VIOLET seemed merry and goodnatured, William thought, but somewhat cold. No one else would have perceived it; but this little chill, hardly measurable by the moral thermometer, was for him an Icelandic frost, in which his very heart ached.

This pretty girl kissed Aunt Dinah, and put off her bonnet, and out gushed her beautiful dark brown hair, but kept her other mufflers on, and said smilingly towards William, —

“I was so surprised to see him at the door, I could scarcely believe my eyes.”

“And looking very well — a little thin perhaps, but very well,” added Aunt Dinah.

“And how is Mr. Wagget?” asked William, who did not care to come formally under critical discussion.

“Oh, very well, and Miss Wagget too; but I don’t know that you’ve made her acquaintance. She’s quite charming, and I doubt very much whether so susceptible a person as you would do wisely in putting himself in her way.”

“She has been hearing that nonsense about Miss Kincton Knox,” thought William, and he said rather drily, —

“I’m not a bit susceptible. How did I ever show it?

I’d like to know who I ever was in love with in my life Susceptible, by Jove! but I see you’re laughing.”

Miss Vi looked curiously at him for a moment, and then she said, —

“We heard quite another account of him, didn’t we, grannie?”

“It was all a mistake though, it seems,” said Aunt Dinah.

“I should like to know who the kind person is who cares enough about me to invent all these lies.”

“The ladies there liked you extremely, we have the best authority for believing that,” said Miss Perfect.

“I don’t know; I’m sure they detest me now, and I really don’t know any reason they ever had for doing either.”

"Detest you, my dear!" exclaimed Aunt Dinah.

"Mrs. Kincton Knox is awfully offended with me, I don't know for what. I've nothing on earth to charge myself with, and I really don't care two pence, and I hate to think about them," said William testily; "and I'd rather talk about anything else."

Miss Vi looked at William, and glanced at Aunt Dinah, and then laughed, with a pleasant little silvery cadence.

"Dear me! Grannie, what a disappointment. We simple people in this part of the world have been lost for weeks in wonder and respect — we heard such stories of your prowess, and here comes the lady-killer home, harmless William Maubray, as he went."

"Just so," said he. "Not William the Conqueror — nothing of the kind; and I don't think it likely I shall ever try to kill a lady, nor a lady ever kill me. Weapons of iron won't do nowadays, and a knight-errant of that sort must arm himself with the precious metals, and know how to talk the modern euphuism, and be a much finer man than ever I can hope to be; and even so, when all's done, it's a poor profession enough. By Jove! I don't envy them their adventures, and their exploits, and their drubbings, and their Dulcineas — the best among them is often laid on his back; and I'm not ashamed to say I have more of Sancho Panza than of the Don in my nature."

"He rails like a wounded knight — doesn't he, grannie?" laughed Violet.

"I'd like to know who wounded me," said he.

"We'll take your own account, William," said Aunt Dinah, who saw that he was vexed and sore, "and whoever is to blame, I'm very glad. Oh! prayers," and the little household of Gilroyd trooped solemnly into the room, and the family devotions were performed, William officiating in his old capacity.

"William leaves us early tomorrow," said Aunt Dinah, glancing regretfully at him.

"Oh?" said Miss Violet.

"Yes, to London; and from London perhaps to Paris, there to remain for some time," said William, spiritedly.

"Charming excursion," exclaimed the young lady.

"Why London is not particularly lively at this moment, and I hope to be pretty hard worked in Paris. There's nothing very charming about it, but I'm glad to go;” and thinking this a little strong, he added, “because it is time I should begin, if ever I am to do any good for myself or anyone else.”

“He’s like the good boy in a storybook, he makes such wise reflections; and I’m certain he’ll grow rich and prosper,” said Miss Vi to Aunt Dinah. “My only wise saw is ‘Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.’ I learned it from Winnie, and I’m going to act on it now. Goodnight, dear old grannie,” and she kissed her in a fond little embrace. “All this wise talk makes one sleepy, I think; and I’ve been walking about with Miss Wagget all day. Goodnight” This was to William, with a smile.

“Goodnight,” he answered quietly, and a little bitterly, as without smiling he took her hand. Then he lighted her candle, and gave it to her, and stood at the door while she ran up the broad stair, humming an air.

He came back, looking sulky, and sat down with his hands in his pocket, looking at the fire-irons that rested on the fender.

“How do you think she’s looking?” asked Aunt Dinah.

“Very well; much as usual,” said William, with a dreary carelessness.

“I think she’s looking particularly beautiful,” said Miss Perfect.

“Perhaps so — very likely; but I’ve plenty of work before me, thank God, the sort of work I like; and I’m in no admiring mood, like Trevor and other fellows who have nothing better to do. I like work. ‘Man delights not me, nor woman neither.’ And, dear Aunt, I’m a little bit sleepy, too; but I’ll see you early, shan’t I?”

And William yawned dismally.

“Goodnight, dear, it is better,” said Aunt Dinah; a but I don’t know, it strikes me that you and Vi are not as friendly together as you used to be, and I think it is a pity.”

“Not so friendly,” exclaimed William. “Ha, ha! That did not strike me; but I assure you there’s no change, at least that I know of — none on my part, I’m sure. I suppose it’s just that our heads are full of other things; we have each got our business to think of — don’t you see? — and hers, you know, is very serious,” and William Maubray laughed again a little bitterly.

“Well, she is a dear little creature, an affectionate little soul. I’ve always found her quite the same,” said Aunt Dinah.

“I’m sure she is — I dare say — I don’t see why she shouldn’t, that is, as affectionate as other young ladies. You know it isn’t I who say she’s changed.”

“I did not say she’s changed more than you. I think you don’t seem so kindly as you used, and more disposed to be disagreeable; and I think, considering you have been so long together, and are so soon to part, and life is so uncertain, I think it a pity; and you can’t see even how pretty she is looking.”

“I must have been thinking of something else, for she is in particularly good looks;” and he added, quite like himself, “Yes, indeed, I think she improves every time I see her, but that may be the old partiality, you know. Goodnight, Aunt Dinah.”

Aunt Dinah took both his hands to hers, and kissed him.

“Goodnight, my dear William — my dear boy. You will never know, dear William, all the pain you have cost me. Pray, my dear child, for a reasonable spirit, and that you may have power to conquer the demon of pride — the besetting sin of youth, and, my dear William, you must reconsider the question of ordination, and pray for light. God bless you, and don’t forget to put out your candle. There” — another kiss— “Goodnight.”

CHAPTER LI.

A DREAM.

AFFECTIONATE, indeed!” said William, “I do believe they have no other idea but to mortify and wound everyone that seems to like them — cats and monkeys.”

William had closed the door; he poked his fire, and sat before it, eyeing it scornfully.

“I can’t think why anyone likes them — why we go on liking them — they are so odious. I suppose they used not to be so. There’s Aunt Dinah — kind, true old Aunt Dinah — she never could have been a heartless, insolent creature, like that — never. We are all growing worse; the world will soon be ripe for judgment.”

And William pulled off his coat as savagely as if he was going to fight “Old Crump” again, behind the chapel at Rugby.

“I hate myself for liking her. No, I don’t like her — for *admiring* her; but she *is* pretty. She *is* — there’s no good in denying it — she’s *awfully* pretty — *lovely!* and till that great goose, Trevor, came and turned her head with his boots, and his gloves, and his house, and his trumpery, she was the nicest little creature in the world. Yes, there was no one like her; not one on earth, I’ll maintain.”

And he knocked his hand so hard on the back of the chair beside him, that he thought his knuckles were bleeding.

“I wish they were, by Jove!” he said. “I don’t care what happens, I don’t care if I was knocked to smash, to think of that great gawky goose. What on earth can she see in him? Such rot!”

“Yes, she is — there’s no use in disputing it — she’s the prettiest girl I ever saw, in all my life? he went on, putting himself down and overbearing his affected indifference with honest vehemence. “Aunt Dinah has promised me her carte de visite. I’ll have it copied in large the first money I have, in Paris, at that great fellow’s there — and tinted; and I’ll make old Winnie get me a lock of her hair; I have the one safe when she was nine years old — so bright — who would have thought it would ever have grown so dark?

Winnie will get it for me. If I asked her, she'd only refuse, or put me off some way. I'll hang up her picture and the little drawing of Gilroyd in my garret in Paris, and I'll be a jolly old bachelor. Marry in five years, indeed? My poor aunt might easily find something more likely to fret about. Yes, I'll be the most tremendous, dry old quiz of a bachelor; and when she and her precious husband come to Paris, as they will some day, I'll get a peep at her, perhaps, in the theatres and places, from some dark corner, and I'll wonder what she will be like then — always handsome, those eyes, and her lips so scarlet, and her beautiful hair; and I'll compare her with little Vi of Gilroyd. She may be handsomer and more showy, but the little Vi of Gilroyd will always be the brightest and best."

In this mood William rambled over many old recollections of the place and people he was leaving, and he laid his waistcoat on the chair much more gently than his coat; and he thought how Aunt Dinah had taught him to say his prayers long ago, under that friendly roof, and so down he kneeled and said them with a sadder heart, and rose up with a great sigh, and a sense of leavetaking that made his heart ache.

And now his candle was out, and he soon fast asleep; and again he had a dream so strange that I must relate it.

The scenery of his dream, as before, presented simply the room in which he lay, with the flickering firelight in which he had gone to sleep. He lay, in his vision, in his bed, just as he really did, with his back to the fire and looking towards the curtains, which were closed on the side between him and the door, when he heard a sound of naked feet running up to his chamber door, which was flung open with a precipitation which made the windows rattle, and his bed-curtain was drawn aside, and Miss Perfect, with only a sheet, as it seemed, wrapt over her night dress, and with a face white, and fixed with horror, said, "Oh, my God! William, I'm dead — don't let me go!" and under the clothes she clasped his wrist with a hand that felt like cold metal. The figure crouched, with its features advanced towards his, and William Maubray could neither speak nor move, and lay so for some time, till with a "Ho!" he suddenly recovered the power of motion, and sprang out of bed at the side farthest from the visionary Aunt Dinah; and as he did so, he distinctly felt the grasp of a cold hand upon his wrist, which, just as before, vanished as he recovered the full possession of his waking faculties, leaving, however, its impression there.

William lighted his candle at the fire, and listened for a long time before he could find courage to look to the Other side of the bed. When he did, however, no sign of Aunt Dinah, sane or mad, was there. The door was shut, and the old fashioned furniture stood there prim and faded as usual, and everything maintained its old serenity. On his wrist, however, were the marks of a recent violent pressure, and William was seized with an uncontrollable anxiety about Aunt Dinah which quite overcame his panic; and getting on his clothes, and making a preliminary survey of the gallery, which was still and empty, he hurried to Aunt Dinah's door and knocked.

"It's I — William. How are you, aunt? are you quite well?" asked he, in reply to her.

"Who's there? what's all that?"

"I, William."

"Come in, child: you may. I'm in my bed: what takes you out of yours?"

"I had a dream, and fancied you were in my room, and — and ill."

"Pooh, pooh, my dear William, get back to your room. It is all a fancy. I've been here in bed for an hour or more, reading my dear father's sermon on the Woman of Endor."

. There she was, sitting up in a flannel dressing gown, with the sometime dean's large and legible manuscript before her, and no doubt investigating, with the lights thrown by Elihu Bung, the phenomena in which the witch of those remote times dealt.

"I heard you talk a little time ago," said Aunt Dinah, after a short and curious stare at William's pallid countenance.

"No," said William, "I didn't; I heard it too. It was that in fact that partly alarmed me. It is very odd."

"Were there knockings?" inquired she.

"No, no knocking," said William; "it opened, with a push."

"What, my dear?" demanded Aunt Dinah, sitting very erect as she gazed with a dark curiosity in William's face, and abandoned the dean's manuscript on the coverlet "The door," he answered. "It is very odd. It's the most horrid thing I ever heard of. I'm sorry I slept in that room."

CHAPTER LII.

NEXT MORNING.

AUNT DINAH leaned on her thin hand, looking with something like fear at William fixed and silently.

"What o'clock is it, aunt?" asked he.

"Three minutes to four," she replied, consulting her broad old gold watch, and then holding it to her ear. "Yes; three minutes to four. I thought it was later. You saw something, William Maubray — you *did.* You *have* seen something: haven't you?"

So William, bit by bit, scared and very uncomfortable, recounted his adventure, to which Miss Perfect listened attentively, and she said —

"Yes — it *is* remarkable — *very* wonderful — if anything can be said to be particularly so, where all is marvellous. I understand it, quite."

"And what is it?" asked he.

"The spirit key again — my name and image — don't you see? and 'don't let me go,' and the other intimation — take it all together, it's quite plain."

"Do tell me, dear aunt, what you mean?"

"It all connects, dear William, with what I told you; *the* grasp of that hand links you with the spirit world; *the* image was mine — my *double,* I do suppose. Hand me that snuff-box. It spoke as if after my death; it urged upon you to maintain your correspondence with me-'don't let me go' — and it plainly intimates that I shall have the power of doing as I promised and certainly shall, in case you should meditate disregarding my solemn warning about your marriage, and think of uniting yourself, William dear, to anyone, before the expiration of five years — there's the whole thing in a nutshell."

"May I sit here for a little?" asked William, who from childish years had been accustomed to visit his aunt's room often, and when she was ill used to sit there and read for her.

"Certainly, my dear: but don't go to sleep and fall into the fire."

Aunt Dinah resumed her sermon, with now and then a furtive reference to Elihu Bung, concealed under her pillow, and William Maubray sat near the bed with his feet on the fender: and thus for nearly five minutes — he looking on the bars, and she on her sermon and her volume of reference — at the end of that time she laid it again on the coverlet, and looked for some time thoughtfully on the back of William's head; and she said so suddenly as to make him start —

"Five years is nothing: it's quite ridiculous making a fuss about it I've known girls engaged that time, and longer, too: for ten and even twelve years."

"Pretty girls they must have been by that time," thought William, who was recovering from the panic of his vision. — .

"And I think they made fonder couples than people that are married three weeks after their engagement," added Aunt Dinah. "Therefore do have a little patience."

"But I'm in no hurry about anything," said William; "least of all about marriage. I have not an idea; and if I had I couldn't; and my honest belief is I shall die an old bachelor."

"H'm! I never mind what people say on that subject," said Miss Perfect; "but I hope what you've experienced tonight will be a warning. Yes, dear William, I'm very glad it has happened; it is always well to know the truth — it may affright, but when it comes in the shape of warning it is always welcome — that is it ought to be.

II — needed nothing more to convince me, but you did, and you've got it. Depend upon it, if you disobey you are a ruined man all your days; and if I die before the time, I'll watch you as an old gray cat watches a mouse — ha, ha, ha! and if you so much as think of it, I'll plague you — I will. Yes, William, I'll save you in spite of yourself, and mortal was never haunted and tormented as you'll be, till you give it up."

William could not have forborne a joke, though a kindly one, upon such a speech at another time; but somehow now he could not. The spectre of Aunt Dinah cowering at his bedside was present with him, and when she bid him goodnight, although he was ashamed to confess his trepidation, he hated a return to that oldfashioned room where he had twice experienced the same kind of visitation.

When he returned he made up his fire, drew his window curtains wide open to admit -the earliest streak of sunrise, pulled his bed-curtains back to the posts, and placed his candle on the table in the centre of the room, resolved that Aunt Dinah's double should not at all events steal on him unawares.

At last the pleasant October morning came. The wind that had blown wildly in the night was quiet now, having left its spoil of yellow leaves strewn upon the lawn or rustling over the gravel walks.

The cheerful yellow light cleared the room of all unearthly shadows, and the song of birds refreshed his ears, as he made his early toilet.

The joyous bark of little Psyche scampering before the windows, the call of the driver to his team, the whistling of birds, the voices of the inmates of the house, and at last the laugh of Violet Darkwell from the porch.

Beautiful music! like merry spirits in the air departing, soon to be heard no more. He stood with his hand on his half open door — smiling — scarcely breathing — listening, as never did Fanatico per la musica, to the favourite roulade of prima donna. It ceased — he listened still, and then sighed in the silence, and seemed to himself to waken.

In his ear that music sounded sadly, and his heart I was full as he ran down the stairs smiling. And pretty Violet's slender figure was leaning at the side of the; porch; and she looked up, knowing his step, with a smile, the old kindly smile, for a moment, and then, its character a little changed, something of the inscrutable but beautiful reserves of girlhood, which baffled, and interested, and pained William so. He would have liked to have called her Vi. The name was at his lips;! but there was something of pride, which even thus, while his boat is on the shore and his bark is on the sea,; restrained him.

"Miss — mind I'm calling you rightly — Miss Violet Darkwell, I'm so glad I've found you so early," he ' said, smiling, "my hours — I ought to say minutes — are so precious. I go at halfpast ten, and I hardly saw or heard you last night, you were so anxious to be off."

"You forget how wise we all were, and wisdom, though 'tis a very good thing, is not lively; and its chief use, I suppose, is that — a sort of lullaby, for I'm sure nobody ever minds it. You don't nor I, nor darling grannie: and I think if you wanted to be put to sleep there would be nothing like having a tranquil old sage, like Winnie Dobbs, at your bedside to repeat a string of her sayings, like ‘Early to bed and early to rise make a man healthy, wealthy, and wise;’ and besides being very wise, I think you were just, if it is not very disrespectful to say so, ever so little cross, so that altogether I thought it best to go to bed and to sleep as fast as I could.”

“I quite forget. Was I cross? I dare say I was. I think ill-temper is one expression of suffering; and I have not been very happy lately,” said William.

“You have been strangely misrepresented, then,” said the young lady, slily.

“So I have; and I do so wish you’d stop about that nonsense. You can’t conceive unless you knew the people— “

“I thought she was very pretty,” interrupted Miss Darkwell, innocently.

“So she is — perhaps — I dare say; but pretty or plain, as I said before, I’m not in love with her. Pm not in love, thank Heaven, with anyone and I”

“Come in to prayers, William, dear,” Aunt Dinah called aloud from the parlour door, “I’ve had breakfast early, expressly for you, and you must not delay it.”

CHAPTER LIII.

THE FLOWER.

AT breakfast the little party had a great deal to talk about, topics of hope, and topics of regret, glanced at in all sorts of spirits, sad and cheerful, black spirits and white, blue spirits and gray; but on the whole one would have said, looking on and a stranger to all that was possibly passing within, that it was a cheerful meal.

"Five miles and a half to the station, and the up train at eleven forty-five." The cab, or whatever it is, will be here at halfpast ten, and then goodbye. Farewell, perhaps, for three years to Gilroyd," so said William, as he and Violet Darkwell stood side by side, looking out from the window, upon the glowing autumnal landscape.

"Three years! you don't mean to say you'd stay away all that time, without ever coming to see grannie?"

"Of course if she wants me I'll come; but should she not, and should she at the same time continue, as I hope she will, quite well, and should I be kept close to my work, as I expect, it's sure to turn out as I say. Three years — yes, it *is* a long time — room for plenty of changes, and changes enough, great ones, there *will* be, no doubt." The uplands of Revington formed the background of the pretty prospect before him, and it needed the remembrance of the promise he had made to Aunt Dinah to prevent his speaking with less disguise, for he always felt of late an impetuous longing almost fierce to break through conventional hypocrisies, and lay bare his wounded heart, and upbraid, and implore, in the wildest passion before Violet Darkwell. To be alone with her, and yet say nothing of all that was swelling and rolling at his heart — was pain. And yet to be alone with her, even in this longing and vain anguish, and near her, was a strange despairing delight.

"Oh, yes, everyone changes, every day almost, except dear grannie and old Winnie Dobbs. I'm sure I change, and so do you, and what won't three years do? You've changed very much, and not for the better," and saying this Miss Violet laughed.

"My changes, be they what they may, don't seem to trouble you much," replied William.

"Trouble? — not at all. I dare say they are improvements, though I don't like them," laughed she.

"I don't think I'm a bit changed. I know I'm not, in fact. Tell me any one thing in which I'm changed."

"Well, it is generally; you have grown so disagreeable, that's all — it is not much to me, but I dare say it will be to other people," said she.

"I'm disagreeable — yes, of course — because I have my opinion about men and things, and fools and nonsense. I don't know anything I've said to you, at least since I came yesterday, that could annoy you. I have not mentioned a single subject that could possibly even interest you. I dare say it is tiresome my talking so much as Aunt Dinah makes me, about myself. But I couldn't help it."

"It won't do, William; you know very well how cross you always are now, at least with me, not that I mind it much, but there's no denying."

"You accused me of that before, and I said I was sorry, I — perhaps I am. I'm going away, and everything breaking up, you know, and you must make allowances. I used not to be cross long ago, and I'm not changed. No — I'm the same — I never said an unkind word to you, Vi, all the time when you were a little thing, and if ever I speak differently now, it is not from unkindness, only that things have gone wrong with me, and I've seen something of the world; and things happen to sour one, and — I don't know — but I'm not changed. You mustn't think it now that I'm going away. I'm such a fool, I'm such a beast, I can't help talking bitterly sometimes, and sometimes I think I am a — a fiend almost, but I hope I am not as bad as I seem."

So spoke this Penruddock, who fancied himself soured for life, and soliloquised at times in the vein of Elshender of Mucklestane Muir, but still cherished at the age of three-and-twenty some sparks of his original humanity.

"There goes Tom with my things to the gate. Yes, it ought to be here now," said William looking at his watch. "I'll send you something pretty from Paris if you let me; nothing very splendid you know, only a little reminder such as a poor beggar like me, can offer," and he laughed, not very merrily. "And I shall hear all the news from Aunt Dinah, and send her all mine; and I like flowers. I always remember the Gilroyd flowers along with you. You were always among them, you know, and will you give me that little violet — a namesake? No one ever refuses a flower, it is the keepsake everyone gets for the asking."

"Here it is," said Violet, with a little laugh, but looking not mockingly, but a little downward and oddly, and William placed it very carefully in a recess of his complicated purse, that was a cardcase also, and I know not what else beside. He was on the point of saying something very romantic and foolish, but suddenly recollected himself, and pulled up at the verge just before he went over.

"This is a souvenir of very old days, you know," said William, remembering Trevor, and how humiliating because vain any lovemaking of his own must prove, "of a very early friend — one of your earliest. Wasn't I?"

"Yes, so you were, a very goodnatured friend, and very useful. Sometimes a little bit prosy, you know, always giving me excellent advice; and I think I always, often at least, listened to your lectures with respect But why is it, will you tell me who know everything, that gentlemen always ask for a rose or a violet, or a flower of some sort, as a keepsake? Nothing so perishable. Would not a thimble or even a slipper be better? I suppose you have us all in what you used to call a hortus siccus, brown roses, and yellow violets, and venerable polyanthuses, thoroughly dried up and stiff as chips, and now and then with a sort of triumph review your prisoners, and please yourselves with these awful images of old maid-hood. How can we tell what witchcrafts go on over our withering types and emblems. Give me back my violet and you shall have a hair-pin instead."

"Many thanks; I'll keep my violet, however. It may grow dry and brown to other eyes, to mine it will never change. Just because it is an enchanted violet, and there is a spell upon my eyes as often as I look on it, and the glow and fragrance will never pass away."

"Very good song, and very well sung! only I suspect that's the usual speech, and you asked for the violet for an opportunity of making it."

At this moment Aunt Dinah entered the room accompanied by old Winnie Dobbs, supporting a small hamper tray fashion. William recognised the old commissariat of Gilroyd in this nutritious incumbrance, against which he had often and vainly protested, as he now did more faintly by a smile and lifting his hands.

"Now there's really very little in this; just a fowl cut up, half a ham, one of the Saxton plumcakes, and a pint bottle with a little sherry. You'll find bread by itself, and some salt in white paper, and a few Ripston pippins, and it is really no weight at all; is it, Winnie?"

"No, nothing to them porter fellows. What else be they paid for, if it baint to carry loads? what's a hamper like this here to one of them? and he'll want something on the way. You'll be hungry, you will, Master William."

"And whatever's left will be of use to you when you reach your destination," said Aunt Dinah, repeating her ancient formula on similar occasions. "Now, William, you promise me you'll not leave this behind. Surely you can't be such a fool as to be ashamed to take a little refreshment before the passengers. Well-bred people won't stare at you, and I know you won't vex me by refusing the little provision."

So William laughed and promised, and Miss Vi looked as if she could have quizzed him, but at this moment the Saxton vehicle from the Golden Posts pulled up at the iron gate of Gilroyd, and William glanced at his watch, and though he smiled, it was with the pale smile of a man going to execution, and trying to cheer his friends rather than being of good comfort himself.

CHAPTER LIV.

DOCTOR DRAKE GOES TO GILROYD.

"And now I must say farewell, and if I can, or if you want me, I'll come soon and see you again; and God bless you, Violet; and goodbye, my darling aunt. I'll write from London this evening, and let you know what my Paris address will be."

"God Almighty bless you, my precious Willie; and I'm very glad— "and here Aunt Dinah's sentence broke short,-and tears were in her eyes, and she bit her lip. "I am, my darling Willie, that we met; and you'll really come soon, if I write for you; and you won't forget your Bible and your prayers; and, oh! goodness gracious! have you forgot the tobacco-box?"

It was safe in his dressing-case. So another hurried farewell, and a smiling and kissing of hands. "Goodbye, goodbye!" from the cab window; and away it rattled, and William was gone; and the two ladies and old Winnie in the rear, stood silently looking for *a* minute or so where the carriage had been, and then they turned, with the faded smile of farewell still on their faces, and slowly reentered old Gilroyd Hall, which all in a moment had grown so lonely.

In the drawingroom they were silent. Violet was looking through the window, but not, I think, taking much note of the view, pretty as it is.

"I'm going away, and everything breaking up, and you roust make allowances" — William's words were in her lonely ears now. A breaking-up had partly come, and a greater was coming. William's words sounded like a prophecy. "Breaking-up." Poor Gilroyd! Many a pleasant summer day and winter evening had she known in that serene old place.

Pleasant times, no doubt, were before her — a more splendid home, perhaps. Still memory would always look back regretfully on those early times, and the familiar view of Gilroyd; its mellow pink-tinted brick, and window-panes, flashing in the setting sun, half seen through the stooping branches of the old chestnuts, would rise kindly and quaint before her, better beloved than the new and colder glories that might await her. Had the break-up indeed come? There was a foreboding of change, a presage as of death at her heart. When she looked at Miss Perfect she saw that she had been crying, and it made her heart heavier.

"Remember, he said he'd come to you whenever you write. You can bring him back whenever you please; and really Paris is no distance at all."

"I don't know, little Violet, I'm very low. It's all very true, what you say, but I've a misgiving. I've looked my last on my fine fellow — my boy. If I did as I am prompted, I think I should follow him to London, just to have one look more."

"You're tired, grannie, darling, and you look pale; you must have a little wine."

"Pooh, child — no — nothing," said Aunt Dinah, with a flicker of her usual manner; but there was a fatigue and feebleness in her look which Violet did not like.

"Give me my desk, like a darling," said Miss Perfect; and she wrote a note, pondering a good while over it: and she leaned back, tired, when she had completed it "I did my duty by him, I hope. I think he does me credit — a handsome fellow! I don't see anywhere — !"

There was a pause here, and a kind of groan, and, coming near, Violet Darkwell saw that she had fainted.

Great commotion was there in Gilroyd Hall. Miss Perfect's seizure did not pass away like a common swoon. Away went Tom for Doctor Drake, and Vi and the servants got poor Aunt Dinah, cold, and breathing heavily, and still insensible, to her bed.

Doctor Drake arrived quickly, and came up to her room, with his great coat buttoned up to his chin, looking rather stem, in a reserved but friendly sort of fuss.

"Hey — yes, yes — there it is. How long ago did this happen, my dear?"

"Not quite half an hour — in the drawingroom. Oh, Doctor Drake, is it anything very bad?" answered Violet.

"Well, my dear, it's serious — but I hope it will be all right; it's a smart little attack of apoplexy — upon my word it is. There was no convulsion — that's right. It was very well he came when he did — just caught me at the door. Open the window and door. Mrs. Dobbs, give me cold water. Have you a scissors? We'll cut the strings of her dress and staylace. One of you run down and bring up a kettleful of hot water. Her feet are a little cold. Get up her head a little more. We'll get her sitting up, if you please, in this armchair here. We'll bathe her feet, and you'll see she'll do very well, presently. It's not a case for bleeding; and bring up mustard. I think you'll see she'll come round in a little time."

And so on the doctor talked and directed, and actively treated his patient; and in a little time consciousness returned, and there was time at last, to think of William Maubray.

"Shall we telegraph a message to London?" asked Violet.

"Not a bit; she's going on as nicely as possible. He'd only be in the way here, and it would frighten her. She's doing capitally; and she may never have a return, if she just takes care. She must take care, you know, and I'll give you full directions how to treat her."

And so he did. Miss Vi being accurate and intelligent, and rising with the occasion, so that Doctor Drake that evening celebrated Miss Darkwell to his friend Dignum, of the Golden Posts, as a trump and a brick, and the nicest little creature he ever saw.

Mr. Vane Trevor, who had called at Gilroyd that morning, but found all things in confusion and panic, called again in the evening, and had the pleasure of an interview with Winnie Dobbs; but he could not see Miss Darkwell. The young lady had given peremptory directions respecting all visitors, and would not leave Miss Perfect's room.

Doctor Drake was honoured that evening by a call from the proprietor of Revington, and gave him a history of the case; and Trevor accompanied him back again to Gilroyd, where he was about to make his evening visit, and awaited his report in the little gravel courtyard, stealing now and then a wistful glance up to the oldfashioned stone-faced windows. But Violet did not appear. It might have been different — I can't say — had she known all that had passed between Miss Perfect and Vane Trevor respecting her. As it was, the young gentleman's long wait was rewarded only by the return of Doctor Drake, and a saunter with him back again to Saxton.

Pretty nearly the same was the routine of several subsequent days. Fruits and vegetables, too, with messages came down from Revington; and in his interviews with old Winnie Dobbs he betrayed a great solicitude that the young lady should not wear herself out with watching and attendance.

On Sunday he was in the churchyard almost as early as the doors opened, and loitered there till the bell ceased ringing; and sat in his pew so as to command an easy view of the church door, and not a late arrival escaped his observation. But Violet Darkwell did not appear; and Vane Trevor walked home with little comfort from the Rev. Dr. Wagget's learned sermon; and made his usual calls at Gilroyd and at Doctor Drake's, and began to think seriously of writing to Violet, and begging an interview, or even penning the promptings of his ardent passion in the most intelligible terms. And I have little doubt that had he had a friend by him, to counsel him ever so little in that direction, he would have done so.

CHAPTER LV.

SUSPENSE.

ONE day Trevor actually made up his mind to bring about the crisis; and pale as a man about to be hanged, and with the phantom of a smile upon his lips, after his accustomed inquiries, he told Mrs. Podgers, the cook, who, in the absence of Winnie Dobbs, officiated as hall-porter, to ask Miss Violet Darkwell if she would be so good as to give him just a moment. And on getting through his message his heart made two or three such odd jumps and rolls, that he was almost relieved when she told him that old Doctor Wagget had come by appointment, and that Miss Violet and Winnie were receiving the sacrament with the mistress, who, thank God, was getting on better every day.

"It's wiser for me to wait," thought Trevor, as he walked away, determined to take a long ride through the Warren, and over Calston Moor, and to tire himself effectually. "They never think what they're doing, girls are so hand-over-head — by Jove, if she had not Miss Perfect to talk to she might refuse me, and be awfully sorry for it in a day or two. I must only have patience, and wait till the old woman is better. I forget how the woman said she is to-day. No matter — old Drake will tell me. It's hanged unlucky, I know. I suppose she eat too much dinner with that great fellow, Maubray; or some nonsense — however, I'll think it over in my ride; or, by Jove, I'll take my gun and have a shot at the rabbits."

Miss Perfect was, indeed, better, and Doctor Drake, though a little reserved, spoke, on the whole, cheerily about her. And she saw a good deal of her kind old friend, Parson Wagget; and also, was pronounced well enough to see her lawyer, Mr. Jones, not that Doctor Drake quite approved of business yet, but he thought that so eager a patient as Miss Perfect might suffer more from delay and disappointment. So there were a few quiet interviews on temporal matters.

William was a little disquieted at receiving no letter from Gilroyd for some days after his arrival. But there came at last a short one from Doctor Drake, which mentioned that he had seen the ladies at Gilroyd that morning

— both as well as he could desire; and that Miss Per feet had got into a troublesome dispute with some tenants, which might delay her letter a little longer, and then it passed to shooting anecdotes and village news. Such as it was, he welcomed it fondly — enclosing as it did the air of Gilroyd — passing, as it must have done, in its townward flight from Saxton, the tall gate of Gilroyd — penned by the hand which had touched Violet Darkwell's that very day, and conned over by eyes on whose retinas her graceful image lingered still. Even tipsy Dr. Drake's letter was inexpressibly interesting, and kept all the poetry of his soul in play for that entire evening.

Miss Violet consulted with Miss Wagget, and agreed that in a day or two they might write a full account of Miss Perfect's attack and recovery to William, whom it had been judged best, while there was still any anxiety, to spare the suspense of a distant and doubtful illness.

But this is an uncertain world. The message, when it did go, went not by post but by telegraph, and was not of the cheery kind they contemplated.

When William returned to his lodgings that evening, oddly enough projecting a lutter to Aunt Dinah, in the vein of the agreeable Baron de Grimm, whose correspondence he had been studying, he found upon his table a telegram, only half an hour arrived.

It was sent "From the Rev. J. Wagget, Saxton Rectory, to M. William Maubray," &c., &c., and said simply —

"Miss Perfect is dangerously ill. Come to Gilroyd immediately."

A few hours later William was speeding northward in the dark, for a long time the only occupant of his carriage, looking out from time to time from the window, and wondering whether train had ever dragged so tediously before — thinking every moment of Gilroyd and dear old Aunt Dinah — reading the telegram over and over, and making for it sometimes a cheery, and sometimes the most portentous interpretation; then leaning back with closed eyes, and picturing a funereal group receiving him with tears, on the doorsteps at home. Then again looking out on the gliding landscape, and in his despairing impatience pressing his foot upon the opposite seat as if to impel the lagging train.

When William reached London he found at his old lodgings two letters, one from Doctor Sprague, the other from Miss Perfect, which had been lying there for some days.

Having a wait of two hours for his train he was glad to find even this obsolete intelligence. That which, of course, interested him most was written with a very aged tremble in the hand, and was very short, but bore the signature of "poor old auntie." It was as follows —

"MY DEAR WILLIE, "I suppose they given you some account of my indisposition — not much, and need not not you be disquieted. My old head is a little confused, some medicine I dare say, but shall well again in a day or two two. This note is under the rose. The doctor says I must not write, so you need not it. I have eaten a morsel for three days — so the pen a little. Do remember, dear boy, all told you, dear, about the five years. I dreamed much since. If you think of such a thing, I must do it. Willie, sorry I should be you shoul fear or dislike me. I should haunt torment Willie. But you will do right. When you go go to France, I will send £4 to amuse yourself with sights, &c. And Heaven bless and guard my precious Willie by every and influence, says his fond — .

"poor old AUNTIE.

"Better."

William Maubray's trouble increased on reading this letter. The slips and oddities of style instinctively alarmed him. There was something very bad the matter, he was sure. The letter was eight days old, the telegram scarce four-and-twenty hours. But however ill she might be, it was certain she was living when the message was despatched. So he went on assuring himself, although there lay on his mind a dreadful misgiving that he was summoned not to a sick bed, nor even to a deathbed, but to a funeral.

Early that evening William drove from the station toward Gilroyd. The people at Dolworth had heard nothing of Miss Perfect's illness. How should they, living so far away, and hardly ever seeing a Saxton face, and not caring enough about her to be very likely to inquire.

At last, at the sudden turn in the road, as it crosses the brow of Drindle Hill, the pretty little place, the ruddy brick and tall chestnuts, touched with the golden smile of sunset, and throwing long gray shadows over the undulating grass, revealed themselves. The small birds were singing their pleasant vespers, and the crows sailing home to the woods of Wyndleford, mottled the faint green sky, and filled the upper air with their mellowed cawings. The very spirit of peace seemed dreaming there. Pretty Gilroyd!

Now he was looking on the lawn, and could see the hall-door. Were the blinds down? He was gazing at Aunt Dinah's windows, but a cross-shadow prevented hi? seeing distinctly. There was no one on the steps, no one at the drawingroom window, not a living thing on the lawn. And now that view of Gilroyd was hidden from his eyes, and they were driving round the slope of the pretty road to the old iron gate, where, under the long shadow of the giant ash tree opposite, they pulled up. The driver had already run at the gateway.

Pushing his way through the wicket, William Maubray had reached the porch before any sign of life encountered him. There he was met by honest Tom. He looked awfully dismal and changed, as if he had not eaten, or dept, or spoken for ever so long. Aunt Dinah was dead. Yes, she was dead. And three or four dark shadows, deeper and deeper, seemed to fall on all around him, and William Maubray went into the parlour, and leaning on the chimneypiece, wept bitterly, with his face to the wall.

CHAPTER LVI.

SOME PARTICULARS.

THE air is forlorn — the house is vocal no *more* — love is gone.

"When was it, Tom? at what hour?" asked he. "Late cockcrow, just the gray of the morning. She was always early, poor little thing — somewhere betwixt five and six — it must 'a' bin. Will you please have something a'ter your ride?"

"Nothing, Tom, nothing, thanks, but I'd like very much to see Winnie. Call her, Tom, and I'll wait here — or no — I'll be in the drawingroom, tell her."

And to that room he went, standing for a while at the threshold, and making his desolate survey; and then to the window, and then from place to place.

The small table at which she used to sit in the evenings stood in its old place by the sofa. Her little basket of coloured worsted balls, the unfinished work with the ivory crotchet-needles stuck through it, were mere awaiting the return that was not to be. There lay the old piano open.

How well he knew that little oval landscape over the notes mellow by time, the lake and ruined tower, and solitary fisherman — poor enough, I dare say, as *a* work of art; but to William's mind always the sweetest and saddest little painting the world contained Under that roofless tower that lonely fisherman there had heard all Violet's pretty music, and before it poor Aunt Dinah's grand and plaintive minuets, until, years ago, she had abdicated the music-stool in favour of the lighter finger and the rich young voice.

He remembered dear Aunt Dinah's face as she, sitting by that little table there would lower her book or letter and listen to the pretty girl's song, sadly, in some untold poetry of memory. Oh, Aunt Dinah! — He did not know till now how much you were to him — how much of Gilroyd itself was in your kindly old face. The walls of Gilroyd speak and smile no more.

He heard old Winnie Dobbs talking to Tom in the passage, and her slow foot approaching. Poor Aunt Dinah's light step and pleasant tones would come no more on stair or lobby.

Such a welcome at Gilroyd, or anywhere, as the old one, for him would be no more — no, nowhere — never.

In came old Winnie. Could old Winnie be quite old Winnie, and Aunt Dinah gone? The yearnings of love were strong within him, and he hugged good old Dobbs on the threshold, and her fat arms were round him, and her fat fingers were grotesquely patting his back, and the sounds of sobbing were heard by the servants in the kitchen through the silent house. At last Winnie, drying her eyes, related all she had to tell.

"It *happened* early this morning, a little before sunrise? she went very quiet — like a child. She *talked* a deal about Master William, when she was well enough, an' more loving-like than ever. She *did* not wish to live: but she thought she would though — ay, she thought she'd do well, poor thing. Miss Vi was with her all *the* time she was br*eaking* her heart like about it; and Miss Wagget came down in the carriage, and took her away wi' her — and better, sure it was. This was no place for her — poor Miss Vi. Doctor Drake was very kind, and sat up all the night wi' her. And sure was Winnie, it doctors could a' saved her she would a' bin on her feet still; but everyone has their time. It's right, of course, to have the doctors in; but, dear me, we all know 'tis no more use than nothink — there's a time, you know, and, all is one, first or last., I have mine, and you yours, and she had hers — the dear mistress; and time and tide waits for no man; and as the tree falleth so it lieth; and man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward — and, in deed, that's true, dear knows. Would you like to see her, Master William?"

"Does she look happy — does she look like herself?" inquired William.

"Ah! that she does — asleep like, you'd say. You never saw quieter — just her own face. She is a very pretty corpse — poor little thing, she is."

"Perhaps, by-and-by — not yet. I could not now. You'll come with me to her room, in a little while, perhaps. But oh! Winnie, I don't think I could bear it."

"It is not in her room," said Winnie Dobbs. "She was very particular, you know, poor little thing, and would have her way; and she left a note in the looking-glass drawer for the rector — Mr. Wagget, you know that now is; and she made him promise it should be done as ordered, and so he did — only a scrap of a note, no bigger than a playing card; and I don't think you knew, unless she told you, but she had her coffin in the house this seven years — nigh eight a'most — upright in the little press by the left of the bed, in her room — the cupboard like in the wall. Dearie me! 'twas an odd fancy, poor little thing, and she'd dust it, and take it out, she would, wi' the door locked, her and me, once a month. She had a deal o' them queer fancies, she had; but she was very good, she was — very good to everyone, and a great many will miss her."

And Winnie cried again.

"I knew it must a' happened some time for certain — her or me must go — but who'd a' thought 'twas to be so soon? — who'd a' thought it ever? There's a great plate, silvered over, wi' her name on't, as Doctor Wagget took away to get her years and date put on; 'twill be back again tomorrow — poor thing — and she's not in her room — out in the gardener's house."

This was a disused outbuilding; for it was many a year since Gilroyd had boasted a gardener among its officers.

"Do you mean to say she has been carried out there!" inquired William, in unfeigned astonishment.

"Them was her directions — the little note as I told you — and Doctor Wagget went by her orders strict, as he said he would; and sure 'twas right he should, for she would not be denied."

So this odd conversation proceeded, and, indeed, with this strange direction of poor Aunt Dinah's, whose coffin lay on tressels in the little tiled room in the small two storied cubical brick domicile, which stood even with the garden wall, old Winnie's revelations ended.

William walked down to Saxton, and had a long talk with Doctor Drake, who was always sober up to nine o'clock, about poor Aunt Dinah's case; and he wrote to Doctor Wagget, not caring to present himself at the Rectory so late, to report his arrival. And in the morning Doctor Wagget came down and saw him at Gilroyd, when a conversation ensued, which I am about to relate.

CHAPTER LVII.

DOCTOR WAGGET: FURTHER PARTICULARS.

DOCTOR WAGGET found William in the study at Gilroyd; he met him without the conventional long face, and with a kindly look, and a little sad, and shaking his hand warmly, he said, "Ah, Sir, your good aunt, my old friend, Miss Perfect, we've lost her; my loss is small compared with yours, but I can grieve with you."

The doctor laid his hat, and gloves, and cane upon the table, and fixing his earnest eyes on William, he went on —

"We had a great deal of conversation in her last illness which will interest you. On religious subjects I found her views — poor lady — all very sound; indeed, if it had not been for that foolish spirit-rapping, which a little led her away — that is, confused her — I don't think there was anything in her opinions to which exception could have been taken. She had the sacrament twice, and I visited and prayed with her constantly, and very devout and earnest she was, and indeed her mind was: in a very happy state — very serene and hopeful."

"Thank you, Sir, it is a great comfort."

"And about that spiritualism, mind you, I don't say there's *nothing* in it," continued the rector, "there *may* be a great deal — in fact, a great deal too much — but make it what way we may, to my mind, it is too like what Scripture deals with as witchcraft to be tampered with. If there be no familiar spirit, it's nothing, and if there be, what is it? I talked very fully with the poor lady the last day but one I saw her on this subject, to which indeed she led me. I hope you don't practise it — no — that's right; nothing would induce me to sit at a séance, I should as soon think of praying to the devil. I don't say, of course, that everyone who does is as bad as I should be; it depends in some measure on the view you take. The spirit world is veiled from us, no doubt in mercy — in mercy, Sir, and we have no right to lift that veil; few do with impunity; but of that another time. She made a will, you know?"

"No, I did not hear."

“Oh, yes; Jones drew it; it’s in my custody; it leaves you everything. It is not a very great deal, you know; two annuities die with her; but it’s somewhere about four hundred a year, Jones says, and this house. So it makes you quite easy, you see.”

To William, who had never paid taxes, and knew nothing of servants’ wages, four hundred a year and a house was Aladdin’s lamp. The pale image of poor Aunt Dinah came with a plaintive smile, making him this splendid gift, and he burst into tears.

“I wish, Sir, I had been better to her. She was always so good to me. Oh, Sir, I’d give anything, I would, for a few minutes to tell her how much I really loved her; I’m afraid, Sir, she did not know.”

“Pooh! she knew very well. You need not trouble yourself on that point. You were better to her than a son to a mother. You are not to trouble yourself about that little — a — a — difference of opinion about taking orders; for I tell you plainly, she was wrong, and you were right; one of her fancies, poor little thing. But that’s not a matter to be trifled with, it’s a very awful step; I doubt whether we make quite solemnity enough about it; there are so few things in life irrevocable; but however that may be, you are better as you are, and there’s nothing to reproach yourself with on that head. When I said, by-the-bye, that she had left you everything, I ought to have excepted that little jewellery, which was left to Miss Darkwell, and a few books to me, that mad fellow, Bung, you know, among them, and an old silver salver to Saxton Church, which there was a tradition was stolen by a Puritan tenant of Sir — what’s-his-name — that had the tobacco-box, you know, from some church, she did not know what, in this county, when his troop was quartered at Hentley Towers. And — and she had a fancy it was that spirit, Henbane, you know, that told her to restore it to the Church — any church — and there are a few trifling legacies, you know, and that’s all.”

Then their conference diverged into the repulsive details of the undertaker, where we need not follow, and this over, the rector said: —

“You must come down and see us at the Rectory; Miss Darkwell, you know, is with us at present; something likely to be in that quarter very soon, you are aware,” he added, significantly; “very advantageous, everything, but all this, you know, delays it for a time; you’ll come over and see us, as often as you like; a very pretty walk across the fields — nothing to a young athlete like you, Sir, and we shall always be delighted to see you."

Well, this dreadful week passed over, and another, and William Maubray resigned his appointment at Paris, and resolved on the bar; and with Mr. Sergeant Darkwell's advice, ordered about twenty pounds' worth of law-books, to begin with, and made arrangements to enter his name at Lincoln's Inn, which was the learned Sergeant's, and to follow in the steps of that, the most interesting of all the sages of the law, past or present.

Vane Trevor looked in upon William very often. Gilroyd, William Maubray, even the servants, interested him; for there it was, and thus surrounded, he had seen Miss Violet Darkwell. There, too, he might talk of her; and William, too, with a bitter sort of interest, would listen, an angry contempt of Vane rising at his heart; yet he did not quite hate him, though he would often have been glad to break his head.

Trevor, too, had his grounds for vexation.

"I thought she'd have gone to church last Sunday," he observed to Maubray, and I must allow that he had made the same statement in various forms of language no less than five times in the course of their conversation. "I think she might; don't you? I can't see why she should not; can you? The relationship between her and poor Miss Perfect was a very roundabout affair; wasn't it?"

"Yes, so it was; but it isn't that — I told you before it couldn't be that; it's just that she was so fond of her; and really, here, I don't see any great temptation to come out; do you?"

"No — perhaps — no, of course, there may not; but I don't see any great temptation to shut one's self up either. I called at the Rectory yesterday, and did not see her. I have not seen her since poor Miss Perfect's death, in fact."

"So did I; I've called very often," answered William; "as often as you, I dare say, and I have not seen her; and that's odder, don't you think? and I gather from it, I suppose, pretty much what you do."

"Very likely; what is it?" said Vane.

"I mean that she doesn't expect much comfort or pleasure from our society."

William had a fierce and ill-natured pleasure in placing his friend Trevor in the same boat with himself, and then scuttling it.

Vane remarked that the rain was awfully tiresome, and then looking from the window, whistled an air from "I Puritani" abstractedly, and he said suddenly —

"There's a lot of affectation, I think, about grief — particularly among women — they like making a fuss about it."

"To be sure they do," replied William; "when anyone dies they make such a row — and lock themselves up — and all but take the veil; but, by Jove, they don't waste much compassion on the living. There are you, for instance, talking and thinking all day, and nightmared all night about her, and for anything you know she never troubles her head about you. It's awfully ridiculous, the whole thing."

"I thought you said she was very fond of your poor aunt?" said Vane, a little nettled.

"So I did — so she was — I was speaking of us — you and me — you know. I'm an old friend — the earliest she has almost — and you a lover — no one's listening — you need not be afraid — and you see how much she distinguishes us — by Jove, she likes old Wagget better!" and William laughed with dismal disgust, and proposed a walk — to which Vane, with a rueful impression that he was a particularly disagreeable fellow, acceded.

CHAPTER LVIII.

REVINGTON FLOWERS.

THAT very afternoon William did see Violet Darkwell; and he fancied he never saw her look so pretty as in her black silk dress. There was no crying — no scene — she met him gravely and sadly in the oldfashioned drawingroom of the Rectory, and was frankly glad to see him, and her wayward spirit seemed quite laid. His heart smote him for having acquiesced in Trevor's fancy that there could be affectation in her grief.

Good Miss Wagget being in a fuss with the schoolmistress of the Saxton Ragged School (why will benevolent people go on leavening the bread of knowledge which they offer with the bitterness of that insulting epithet?) — counting out copy-books, and primers, and slate-pencils, and rustling to and fro from the press to the hall-table, where they were getting those treasures into order — was little in the way of their conversation, except for an interjectional word now and then, or a smile or a nod, as she bustled in and out of the room, talking still to the matron in the hall.

Violet had a great deal to ask about old Winnie Pobbs, and the servants, and even little Psyche, and the bird, which latter inmate William did not somehow love, and regarded him in the light of an intruder who had established himself under false pretences, and was there with a design.

"I think papa means to take me with him to London," said Violet, in reply to William's question. "Mr and Mrs. Wagget — they are so kind — I think they would make me stay here a long time, if he would let me; but he says he will have a day in about three weeks, and will run down and see us, and I think be intends taking me away."

"What can the meaning of that be?" thought William. "More likely he comes to see Trevor, and bring matters to a decisive issue of some sort," and his heart sank at the thought; but why should William suffer these foolish agitations — had he not bid her farewell in his silent soul long ago?

What of this business of Trevor of Revington! Was it not the same to him in a day, or three weeks, or a year, since be must! And thus stoically armed, he looked up and saw Violet Darkwell's large eyes and oval face, and felt the pang again.

"In three weeks? Oh! I'm sorry, if he's to take you away — but I was thinking of going up to town to see him — about the bar — he has been so kind — and there are two or three things I want advice about — I'm going to the bar, you know."

"Papa seems always doubtful whether it is a good profession," said Miss Violet, wisely, "though he has succeeded very well; but it's sad, don't you think, being so shut away from one's friends as he is?"

"Well, for him I'm sure it is — in his case, I mean. I miss him I know, and so do you, I'm sur But my case would be very different. I've hardly a friend on earth to be cut off from. There's he) and Doctor Sprague, and Doctor Wagget here, and there's poor Winnie, and Tom — I can count them up you see, on the fingers of one hand — and I really don't think I've another friend on earth; and some of these I could see still, and none I think would miss me, very much; and the best friends I believe, as Doctor Wagget says, are books, they never die, or what's worse change; they are always the same, and won't go away, and they speak to you as they used to do, and always show you the same faces as long as you have sight to look at them."

"How sensible and amiable of Doctor Wagget to like his Johnson's Dictionary so much better than his sister," exclaimed Miss Vi, with a momentary flash of her old mood. "There's certainly one thing about books, as you say, they *never gro*w disagreeable; and if there— "she was growing to be sarcastic, but she reined in her fancy, and said sadly, instead, "About books I know very little — nothing; and about friends — you and I have lost the best friend we'll ever know."

And as she spoke "tears glimmered under her lashes, and she looked out of the window over the wooded slope towards Gilroyd, and after a little pause said in a gentle cheerful voice, with perhaps a little effort —

"How pretty it all looks to-day, the slanting sun — poor grannie used to like it so — and it is the sweetest light in the world, look!"

And William did look on the familiar landscape, faintly gilded in that aërial light, and looking still he said —

"You ought to come over some day with Miss Wagget, to see old Winnie."

"I should like very much in a little time, but not now; it would be very sad. I was looking at it from a distance, yesterday, from where you see the ash tree there; you know that view; Gilroyd looks so pretty from it; but I could not go in yet. I feel as if I never could go into the house again."

"And about friends," she resumed, "I sometimes think one has more than one suspects. Of course you like them differently in degree and differently even in the — the kind of liking. I reckon little Psyche among my friends."

"And the bird?" said William.

"Yes, the bullfinch," said Miss Vi, firmly; and at this moment Miss Wagget entered the room with a great bouquet in her hand, and exclaimed —

"Isn't this perfectly beautiful; it's positively wonderful for this time of year; look at it, my dear, all from the conservatory. It's a very nice taste. I wonder how he keeps it so beautifully, and very kind, I'm sure, to think of us; these are Revington flowers, Mr. Maubray. It is very kind of Mr. Trevor; you'll arrange them, won't you, dear?"

This was addressed to the young lady, and at the same time she held the bouquet towards William, to gaze on, and he stooped over and smelled at the flowers which were really odourless, in some confusion, and then turned his eyes on Violet, who blushed first a little, and then in a brilliant glow all over her face, and William looked down and smelled at the flowers again, and then he recollected it was time for him to go; so he bid Miss Wagget goodbye, and took his leave of Violet, whose large eyes, he thought, looked vexed, and on whose cheeks the fading scarlet still hovered; had he ever beheld her so handsome before, or with a sadder gaze? and he took her hand extended to him rather coldly, he fancied, and with a pale smile left the room, feeling as if he had just heard his sentence read. So he stood on the steps for a moment, bewildered, and answered good Doctor Wagget's cheery salutation and pleasantry that issued from the study window, rather confusedly.

CHAPTER LIX.

VANE TREVOR SEES MISS VIOLET.

NEXT morning William was surprised by a visit from Vane Trevor.

"Just dropped in to see how you are, old fellow, this morning."

"Very good of you," rejoined William with ironical gravity.

"Well, but *are* you well — is there anything wrong?" inquired Vane, who was struck by his friend's savage and distracted looks.

"Nothing — I'm quite well; what could go wrong with a fellow so magnificently provided for? The Lord of Gilroyd, with such lots of small talk, and fine friends, and lavender gloves, and clothes cut so exquisitely in the fashion," and William laughed rather horribly.

"Well, I admit you might get better traps, and if you like decent clothes why the devil don't you?"

Trevor could perceive that the whole of William's ironical sally was inspired by envy of him, and was gratified accordingly; and thought within himself, "Your shy, gawky, ill-dressed men always hate a jolly fellow with a good coat to his back just because the women know the difference, and I wonder where poor Maubray has been trying his arts and fascinations; he has been awfully shut up, that's clear," so thought Vane Trevor, as he added aloud —

"If you're going to London, as you say, I'll give you a note with pleasure to my man, if you like the sort of things he makes," said Trevor; "but I give you notice he won't do his best unless you seem to take an interest, you know."

"Thanks — no," laughed William, a little fiercely, "the tailor might do his office, but I should still want too many essentials. Where would be the good of that sort of thing without the rest, and I never could go the whole animal — the whole brute, and if I could I would not You may smile— "

"I am not smiling."

"But I swear to you I wouldn't."

"Oh, you're very well," said Trevor, encouragingly. "Quiet man. What good could that sort of thing do you at the bar, for instance? And when you're Lord Chancellor with your peerage and your fortune up in London, I shall be still plain Trevor of Revington down here, vegetating, by Jove!"

"I'll never be that, but I may do some good — a little perhaps. Enough to interest me in life, and that's all I want," said William, who was fiercely resolved on celibacy.

"lam going over to see the people at the Rectory — jolly old fellow old Wagget is; and I thought I'd just look in on you. You're not for a walk, are you?"

"No, thanks," said William very shortly, and added. "I'm sorry I can't, but I've letters this morning, and must be ready for the post."

"Well, goodbye then," said Trevor, and shook hands like a man going a long journey; and William glanced in his eyes, and saw what he was about, and thought, He'll be sure to see her this morning."

So William took leave of him, and stood for a while in a troubled brown study on the steps, with a great weight at his heart, and after a while recollecting himself he said, "Pish! Pshaw!" and lifting his head defiantly, he strode into the parlour, and sat himself down grimly to write, but could not get on; and took a walk instead in the direction of the London railway, with his back to the Rectory and to Revington.

Our friend Vane Trevor had made up his mind to see Miss Darkwell this day, and speak, and in fact arrange everything; and as usual the crisis being upon him his confidence in himself and his surroundings began to wane and he experienced the qualms of doubt, and the shiver of suspense. So, as there was usually between the prison and the gallows-tree a point at which the gentleman on the hurdle drew up and partook of a glass of something comfortable, Mr. Vane Trevor halted on his way at Gilroyd and had his word or two, and shake of the hand with William Maubray, and went on.

On he went looking much as usual, except for a little pallor, but feeling strange sensations at his heart, and now and then rehearsing his speech, and more and more agitated inwardly as he drew near the door of the Rectory.

It was early, but Miss Wagget and Miss Darkwell were at home, and Vane Trevor, wondering whether an opportunity would occur, crossed the hall and was announced.

Miss Darkwell was sitting near a window copying music and he went over and shook hands, and felt very oddly; and after a word or two, she looked down again and resumed her work. Old Miss Wagget led the conversation, and begun with a speech on her flowery and was eloquent in admiration and acknowledgments. Now, poor Miss Perfect had told Miss Wagget the whole story of the Revington courtship, and the rector's sister had quite taken Aunt Dinah's view of the case, and agreed that it was better the subject should be opened by the suitor himself; and, willing to make the opportunity desired at once, and dreaded, she recollected, on a sudden, that she had a word to say to her brother before he went out, and, with apologies, left the room and shut the door.

Miss Violet raised her eyes and looked after her a little anxiously, as if she would have liked to stop her. I think the young lady guessed pretty well what was in Vane Trevor's mind; but there was no averting the scene now, and she went on writing in a bar of crotchets in the treble, but placed the minim wrong in the bass.

There was a silence, during which the little French clock over the chimneypiece ticked very loud, and Miss Wagget's lapdog yawned and chose a new place on the hearthrug, and the young lady was looking more closely at her music, and, though with a little blush, very gravely industrious. Trevor looked through the window, and down at the dog, and round the room, and up at the clock, but for the life of him he could not think of anything to say. The silence was growing insupportable, and at last he stood up smiling the best he could, and drew near the window where Violet was sitting, and tapped his chin with his cane, and said: —

"Music — a ha! — copying music! — I — I — a — I used copy music pretty well; they said I did it uncommonly well; but I used to make those pops round like the copperplate, you know; you make them oval. They have a bookful of my copying at Kincton. They said — Clara did — they could read it just like print — and — and I wish von could give me some employment that way — I really wish you would. I'm afraid you find it awfully slow — don't you?"

"No — thanks; no, indeed — I'm very much obliged though, but I rather like it; I don't think it tiresome work at all."

"I — I should so like — and I was so glad to hear from Miss Wagget that you thought the flowers pretty — yesterday, I mean. These are beginning to look a little seedy — aren't they? I'll send over more to-day — I only wish, Miss Darkwell, I knew your pet flowers, that I might send a lot of them — I — I assure you I do."

Miss Darkwell here looked closer at her work, and drew two parallel lines connecting the stems of her semiquavers very nicely.

CHAPTER LX.

THE MOMENTOUS QUESTION.

"I-I REALLY would be so *very* much obliged if you would," resumed Trevor. "Do now, *pray* — tell me *anyone,* you like particularly!"

"I like all flowers so well," said Miss Violet, compelled to speak, "that I could hardly choose a favourite — at least, without thinking a great deal; and I should feel then as if I had slighted the rest."

"And awfully jealous I'm sure they'd be — I should — T know I should, indeed — I should, indeed. If I — if you — if I were a flower — I mean, the — the ugliest flower in the garden, by Jove, and that you preferred — a — a *any*thing — I — I think I'd almost wither away — I — I swear to you I do — I'd tear my leaves out — I would, indeed — and — and — I'm in earnest, I assure you — I am indeed, Miss Darkwell — I'm — I'm awfully in love with you — I'm — Psn — I've been waiting this long time to tell you. I wrote to your father for leave to speak to you — and poor Miss Perfect also — I — she was very kind; and I've come to — to say — that — that I hope you can like me enough — that if a life of the greatest devotion to your happiness — and — and the greatest devotion to your happiness," — he was trying here a bit of the speech he had prepared, but it would not come back, and so he shook himself free of it, and went on: "I'll — I'll try always — to make you happy — I will, indeed — and you shall do just as you please — and there's no one — I don't care what her birth or rank, I should be prouder to see in the — the — as — as mistress of Revington than you; and I — I hope — I — I hope very much you can like me enough to give me some encouragement to — to — hope."

And Miss Darkwell answered very low:

"I — I'm so sorry, Mr. Trevor — I'm very sorry; but I couldn't — I can't, indeed, say anything but — but just how sorry I am, and how much obliged for your liking me — and — it could not be." And Miss Violet Darkwell, with a very beautiful and bright colour, and eyes that looked darker than ever, stood up to go.

"I — pray don't — I — I'm sure you misunderstood me — I think I could — I — do pray — just a minute," said Vane Trevor, awfully confounded.

Miss Darkwell waited where she stood, looking down upon the carpet.

I — I don't want you to answer me now; I — I'd rather you didn't. I — I — you'll not answer me for a week. I — I'd rather you thought it over just a little — pray."

"It would make no difference, I assure you, Mr. Trevor. It would merely prolong what is very painful to me. It is very kind of you to think so well of me, and I'm very much obliged; but I think I'll go." And she extended her hand to take leave, and was on the point of going.

"But really, Miss Darkwell," said Mr. Trevor, who began to feel a little insulted, and to remember the Trevois, the Vanes, and the historic fame of Revington, 'I — I don t quite see — I think I — I — I do think I have right to — to some explanation."

There's nothing to explain; I've said everything," said Miss Vi very quietly.

"That's very easy, of course, to say; but I — I don't think it's using a fellow quite— "

"Did I ever lead you to think I thought otherwise?" exclaimed Miss Violet with a grave but fearless glance.

There was a pause. Trevor was angry, and looked it. At last he said —

"I did not say that — but — but I know — I know I'm not a mere nobody here. The Trevors of Revington are pretty well known, and they have always married in — in a certain rank; and I think when I've spoken to you as I have done, I might have expected something more than a simple no, and — and I think, if you did not appear to like me — at all events there was nothing to make me think you didn't, and that's why I say I think I've a right to ask for an explanation?"

"You can have no right to make me say one word more than I please. I've said all I mean to say — more than I need have said — and I won't say more," said Miss Violet Darkwell, with eyes that glowed indignantly, for there was an implied contrast in the lordly marriages of the Trevors with his own tender of his hand to the young lady which fired her pride.

Before he recovered she had reached the door, and with her fingers upon the handle she paused, and returned just a step or two, and said, extending her hand —

"And I think we might part a little more kindly, for you have no cause to blame me, and when you think a little you'll say so yourself. Goodbye."

Trevor did not well know how he shook hands with her. But she was gone. It was all over.

Grief — rage — disappointment — something like insult! He could not say that he had been insulted. But Revington was. The Trevors were. What a resource in such states of mind — denied to us men — are tears. Good furious weeping — the thunder and the rain — and then the air refreshed and the sky serene.

Mr. Vane Trevor felt as if he had been drinking too much brandy and water, and had been beaten heavily about the head; he was confounded and heated, and half blind. He walked very fast, and did not think where he was going until he stopped close to the gate of Gilroyd.

He went in, and rang the bell at the hall-door, which stood open. William came into the hall.

"Come in, Trevor," said he. He had taken his walk of a couple of miles, and was more serene.

"No. Come out and have a walk with me, will you?" answered Vane.

"Where?" asked William.

Anywhere. Wherever you like — here among the trees."

"I don't care if I do," said William, who saw that in Trevor's countenance which excited his curiosity; and out he came with his wideawake on, and Trevor walked beside him, looking very luridly on the ground, and marching very fast. William walked beside him, quietly waiting till the oracle should speak.

At last, wheeling round by the trunk of a huge old chestnut, he came suddenly to a full stop, and confronted his companion.

"Well, that's off my mind; all over; the best thing I dare say could happen to me, and I think she's a bit of a — I think she has a temper of her own. I didn't like any more shilly-shally, you know, in that undecided way, and I thought I might as well tell you that it's all off, and that I'm very pleased it is. She's very pretty, and all that; but hang it, there are other things, and it never would have done. I have not much of a temper of my own, I believe" (Trevor was really a goodhumoured fellow, but chose to charge himself with this little failing for the occasion), "and I could not get on with that kind of thing. It wouldn't have done — it couldn't — I thought I'd just come and tell you; and I think I'll run up to town; they want me to go to Kincton, but it's too slow; and — and Revington's such a wilderness. I wish some one would take it. I don't want to marry for ever so long. I don't know what put it in my head."

Mr. Vane Trevor resumed his walk at a slower pace, and he whistled a low and contemplative air, looking down on the grass with his hands in his pocket, and then he said again —

"I thought I'd just come down and tell you; and you're not to mention it, you know — not to that fellow Drake, or anyone, mind — not that I much care, but it would not do to be talked about, and you won't I know, thanks, and the Waggets are honourable people, they won't talk either, I suppose; and — and I depend on you; and — and you know you and I are friends all the same."

"Certainly no worse" said William, very truly, shaking his hand cordially.

"And I'll be off to-day. I'll go to the opera, or something tonight. I've been too long shut up; a fellow grows rusty, you know, in this tiresome comer. I wish some fool of a fellow would take a lease of it. Goodbye, old fellow; you must come up to town and see me when I'm settled, mind."

And so the) parted

CHAPTER LXI.

A DOUBT TROUBLES MAUBRAY.

I COME now to some incidents, the relation of which partakes, I can’t deny, of the marvellous. I can however, vouch for the literal truth of the narrative; so can William Maubray; so can my excellent friend Doctor Wagget; so also can my friend Doctor Drake, a shrewd and sceptical physician, all thoroughly cognizant of the facts. If, therefore, anything related in the course of the next two or three chapters should appear to you wholly incredible, I beg that you will not ascribe the prodigious character of the narrative to any moral laxities on the part of the writer.

I believe William Maubray liked Vane Trevor very honestly, and that he was as capable of friendship as any man I have ever met with; but this I will aver, that he had not been so cheerful since poor Aunt Dinah’s death as for the remainder of the day on which he had heard the authentic report of his friend’s overthrow.

Down to the town of Saxton, that evening, walked William, for in his comfortable moods he required human society, as he yearned for sympathy in his afflictions. He visited his hospitable friend, Doctor Drake, now in his pardonable elation on the occasion of his friend’s downfall, as he had done when writhing under the thunderbolts of poor Aunt Dinah.

In this case, however, he could not disclose what lay nearest, to his heart. It would not have done to commit poor Trevor’s little secret to Doctor Drake, nor yet to tell him how wildly in love he was, and how the events of this day had lighted up his hopes. In fact, Doctor Drake had long ceased to be the sort of doctor whom a gay fellow suffering from one of Cupid’s bow-shot wounds would have cared to consult, and William visited him on this occasion simply because he was elated, excited, and could not do without company of some sort.

At about halfpast nine o’clock Doctor Drake was called away to visit Mr. Thomas, the draper.

“Gouty pain in the duodenum — there’s a man, now, wansh — a — kill himself. He is killing himself. Advice! You might as well advise that ub —

bottle. You might, a bilious fellow — lithic acid — gouty— ‘sgouty a fellow, by Jove, Sir, as you’d like to see, and all I can do he wone rink his — his little — whatever it is, anyway but hot — hot. Sir, and with sugar — sugar, and you know that’s poison simple p — poison. You see me, any li’l’ thing I take — sometimes a liddle she’y, sometimes a li’l’ ole Tom, or branle; I take it cole, without — quite innocent — rather usefle — shlight impulse — all the organs — never affec’ the heaa — never touch the liver — that’s the way, Sir; that’s how you come to live long — lots o’ waw’r — cole waw’r, and just sprinkle over, that’s your sort, Sir, stick a’ that, Sir; cole, cole waw’r — lots o”waw’r, Sir; never make too stiff, you know, an’ you may go on all nigh’ — don’ go, you know, I mayn be half’n hour all nigh, Sir, an’ no harm done — no harm, Sir, rather usefle.”

By this time the doctor had got himself into his surtout, and selecting Mr. Thomas’s gouty cordials, ether and other bottles from his drawer, he set forth on his sanitary expedition, and the symposium ended.

So William walked musingly homeward. What a tender melancholy over everything! What a heavenly night! What a good, honest, clever fellow, Doctor Drake was! By Jove, he had forgotten to ask for Miss Drake, who was no doubt in the drawingroom — a jolly old creature was Miss Drake! Should he go back and drink some of her tea? He halted and turned, not right about, but right face, and hesitated in the moonlight. No, it was too late — he forgot how late it was. But he’d go down specially to drink tea with Miss Drake another evening. And so, he resumed that delicious walk homewards.

There was no use in denying it any longer to himself — none — he knew it — he felt it — he was in love with Violet Darkwell — awfully in love! And as every lover is an egotist, and is disposed on the whole to think pretty well of himself; the hypothesis did cross his fancy frequently that the downfall of his friend Trevor was somehow connected with the fortunes of William Maubray. Was there — might there not be — did he not remember signs and tokens, such as none but lovers’ eyes can read or see, that seemed to indicate a preference; might there not be a preoccupation?

What a charm in the enigmatic conditions of a lover’s happiness! How beautiful the castles in the air in which his habitation is! How she stands at the open portal, or leans from the casement in beautiful shadow, or golden light divine! How he reads his fate in air-drawn characters, in faintest signs, remembered looks, light words, a tone! How latent meanings hover in all she says, or sings, or looks, or does; and how imagination is enthralled by the mystery, and he never tires of exploring, and guessing and wondering, and sighing. Those deep reserves and natural wiles of girls are given to interest us others, with those sweet doubts and trembling hopes that constitute the suspense and excitement of romance.

William Maubray sat himself down in a delightful melancholy, in his great chair by the drawingroom fire, and ordered tea, and told old Winnie that she must come and have a cup, and keep him company and so she did very gladly, and William made her talk a great deal about poor Aunt Dinah, and this retrospect went on with a stream of marginal anecdote about Miss Violet, to every syllable of which, though maundered over in honest Winnie's harum-scarum prose, he listened breathlessly, as to the far-off music of angels. And when all was told out, led her back artfully, and heard the story bit by bit again, and listened to her topsy-turvy praises of Violet in a delightful dream, and would have kept her up all night narrating, but honest Homer nodded at last, and William was fain to let the muse take flight to her crib.

Then, leaning back in his chair, he mused alone, revolving sweet and bitter fancies, thinking how well Sergeant Darkwell thought of him, how near Violet still was, what easy access to the Rectory, how sure he was of the old people's good word, how miserable he should be, what a failure his life without her. How she had refused Vane Trevor — refused Revington. Was that a mere motiveless freak? Was there no special augury in his favour discernible in it? He had the Bar before him now — could not Sergeant Darkwell bring him forward, put him in the way of business? He was not afraid of his work — he liked it. Anything — everything, for sake of her. Besides, he was no longer penniless. He could make a settlement now. Thanks to poor dear Aunt Dinah, Gilroyd was his. Aunt Dinah!

And here the thought of her odd threatenings and prohibition crossed his brain. Five years! Nonsense!

Madness! *That* would never do. Five years before so young a man, looks like fifty. In a lover's chronicle it is an age. Quite impracticable. He would lay the case before Sergeant Darkwell and Doctor Wagget. He well knew how *they,* conscientious, good, clear-headed men, would treat it. But, alas! it troubled him — it vexed him. The menace was in his ear — a shadow stood by him. There were memoranda in his desk, and poor Aunt Dinah's last letter. He would read them over. He had fancied very likely that she meant more — and more *seriously*, than a reperusal would support. So eagerly he opened his desk, and got out these momentous papers.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE FURNITURE BEGINS TO TALK.

He read Aunt Dinah's letters over again, and marked the passage with his pencil, and read again, "Do remember, dear boy, all told you, dear, about the five years. I dreamed much since. If you think of such a thing I must do it."

This last sentence he underlined, *"If you think of such a thing, I must do it.* Sorry I shoul" (she means *should*) "fear or dislike me. I should haunt, torment Willie. But you will do right." *Do right.* She meant wait for five years, of course. My poor darling aunt! I wish you had never seen one of those odious books of American bosh — Elihu Bung! I wish Elihu Bung was sunk in a barrel at the bottom of the sea.

Then William looked to his diary, for about that period of his life he kept one for two years and seven months, and he read these entries:

" — Dear Aunt Dinah pressed me very much to give her a distinct promise not to marry for five years — marry indeed! I — poor, penniless William Maubray I shall never marry — yet I can't make this vow — and she threatened me saying, 'If I'm dead there's nothing that spirit can do, if you so much as harbour the thought, be I good, or evil, or mocking, I'll not do to prevent it. I'll trouble you, I'll torment you, I'll pick your eyes out, but I won't suffer you to ruin yourself.' And she said very often that she expected to be a *mocking* spirit; and said again, 'Mind I told you, though I be dead, you sha'n't escape me.' That night I had an odious nightmare. An apparition like my aunt came to my bedside, and caught my arm with its hand, and said quite distinctly, 'Oh! my God! William, I am dead; don't let me go.' I fancied I saw the impression of fingers on my arm; and think I never was so horrified in my life. And afterwards in her own bedroom, my aunt having heard my dream, returned to the subject of her warning and said, 'If I die before the time, I'll watch you as an old gray cat watches a mouse, if you so much as think of it I'll plague you; I'll save you in spite of yourself, and mortal was never haunted and tormented as you will be, till you give it up.' And saying this she laughed.

"The whole of this new fancy turns out to be one of the Henbane delusions. How I wish all those cursed books of spiritualism were with Don Quixote's library."

William had now the facts pretty well before him. He had moreover a very distinct remembrance of that which no other person had imagined or seen — the face of the apparition of Aunt Dinah, and the dark and pallid stare she had actually turned upon him, as he recounted the particulars of his vision. It had grown very late, and he was quite alone, communing in these odd notes, and with these strange remembrances with the dead. Perhaps all the strong tea he had drunk with old Winnie that night helped to make him nervous. One of his candles had burnt out by this time, and as he raised his eyes from these curious records, the room looked dark and indistinct, and the slim, black cabinet that stood against the wall at the further end of the room startled him, it looked so like a big muffled man.

I dare say he began to wish that he had postponed his scrutiny of his papers until the morning. At all events he began to experience those sensations, which in morbid moods of this kind, dispose us to change of scene. What was it that made that confounded cabinet, and its shadow, again look so queer, as he raised his eyes and the candle; just like a great fellow in a loose coat extending his arm to strike?

That was the cabinet which once, in a confidential mood, poor Aunt Dinah had described as the spiritual tympanum on which above all other sympathetic pieces of furniture in the house she placed her trust. Such a spirit-gauge was in no other room of Gilroyd. It thrummed so oracularly; it cracked with such a significant emphasis.

"Oh! I see; nothing but the shadow, as I move the candle. Yes, only that and nothing more. I wish it was out of that, it *is* such an ugly black beast of a box."

Now William put poor Aunt Dinah's letter carefully back in its place, as also his diary, and locked his desk; and just then the cabinet uttered one of those cracks which poor Aunt Dinah so much respected. In the supernatural silence it actually made him bounce. It was the first time in his life he had ever fancied such things could have a meaning.

"The fire's gone out; the room is cooling, and the wood of that ridiculous cabinet is contracting. What can it do but crack? I think I'm growing as mad as — he was on the point of saying as poor Aunt Dinah, but something restrained him, and he respectfully substituted as a March hare."

Here the cabinet uttered a fainter crack, which seemed to say, "I hear you;" and William paused, expecting almost to see something sitting on the top of it, or emerging through its doors, and he exclaimed, "Such disgusting nonsense!" and he looked round the room, and over his shoulder, as he placed his keys in his pocket.

His strong tea, and his solitude, and the channel into which he had turned his thoughts; the utter silence, the recent death, and the lateness of the hour, made the disgusted philosopher rise to take the candle which had not a great deal of life left in it, and shutting the door on the cabinet, whose loquacity he detested, he got to his bedroom in a suspicious and vigilant state; and he was glad when he got into his room. William locked his door on the inside. He lighted his candles, poked his fire, violently wrested his thoughts from uncomfortable themes, sat himself down by the fire and thought of Violet Darkwell. "Oh that I dare think it was for my sake she refused Vane Trevor!" and so on, building many airy castles, and declaiming eloquently over his work. The old wardrobe in the room made two or three warning starts and cracks, but its ejaculations were disrespectfully received.

"Fire away, old fool, much I mind *you!* A gentlemanlike cabinet may be permitted, but a vulgar cupboard, impudence."

So William got to his bed, and fell asleep: in no mood I think to submit to a five years' wait, if a chance of acceptance opened; and in the morning lie was astonished.

Again, my reader's incredulity compels me to aver in the most solemn manner that the particulars I now relate of William Maubray's history are strictly true. He is living to depose to all. My excellent friend Doctor Drake can certify to others, and as I said, the rector of the parish, to some of the oddest. Upon this evidence, not doubting, I found my narrative.

CHAPTER LXIII.

WILLIAM MAUBRAY IS TORMENTED.

ON the little table at his bedside, where his candle stood, to his surprise, on awakening, he saw one of the boots which he had put off in the passage on the previous night. There it was, no possible mistake about it; and what was more it was placed like one of his ornamental bronze weights; one of those indeed was fashioned like a buskin upon some papers.

What were these papers? With growing amazement he saw that they were precisely those which he had been reading the night before, and had carefully locked up in his desk — poor Aunt Dinah's warning letter — and his own notes of her threatening words!

It was little past seven now; he had left his shutters open as usual. Had he really locked his door? No doubt upon that point. The key was inside, and the door locked. The keys of his desk, what of them? There they were precisely where he had left them, on the chimneypiece. This certainly was *very* odd. Who was there in the house to play him such a trick? No one could have opened his door; his key stuck in the lock on the inside; and how else could anyone have entered? Who was there to conceive such a plot? and by what ingenuity could any merry devil play it off?

And who could know what was passing in his mind? Here was a symbol such as he could not fail to interpret, The heel of his boot on the warnings and entreaties of his poor dead aunt! could anything be more expressive?

William began to feel very oddly. He got on his clothes quickly, and went down to the drawingroom. His desk was just — had placed it; he unlocked it; his papers were not disturbed; nothing apparently had been moved but the letter and his diary.

William sat down utterly puzzled, and looked at the black japanned cabinet, with its straggling bass-reliefs of golden Chinamen, pagodas, and dragons glimmering in the cold morning light, with more real suspicion than he had ever eyed it before.

Old Winnie thought that day that Mr. William was unusually "dull." The fact is that he was beginning to acquire, not a hatred, but a fear of Gilroyd, and to revolve in his mind thoughts of selling the old house and place, or letting it, and getting out of reach of its ambiguous influences. He was constantly thinking over these things, puzzling his brain over an inscrutable problem, still brooding over the strange words of Aunt Dinah, "A mocking spirit; I'll trouble; I'll torment you. You shan't escape me. Though I be dead, I'll watch you as an old gray cat watches a mouse. If you so much as think of it, I'll plague you!" and so forth.

William walked over to the Rectory. He asked first for Miss Wagget — she was out; then for the rector — so was he.

"Are you *quite* sure the ladies are out — *both?*" he inquired, lingering.

"Yes, Sir. Miss Darkwell drove down with the mistress to the church, about the new cushions, I think."

"Oh! then I'll call another time;" and William's countenance brightened as he looked down on the pretty spire, and away he went on the wings of hope.

The church door was open, and sexton and clerk were there, and William, looking round the empty pews and up to the galleries, inquired for Miss Wagget. He was not lucky. The sexton mistook the inquiry for Mr. Wagget, and directed William to the vestry-room, at whose door he knocked with a beating heart, and entering, found the rector examining the register for the year'48.

"Ha! — found me out? Tracked to my lair," said he, saluting William with a wave of his hand, and a kindly smiling. "Not a word, though, till this is done — just a minute or two. Sit down."

"I'll wait in the church, Sir," said William, and slipped out to renew his search. But his news was disappointing. The ladies had driven away, neither clerk nor sexton could tell whither, except that it was through High Street; and William mounted the elevated ground about the yew tree, and gazed along the High Street, but all in vain, and along the upward road to Treworth, but equally without result: and the voice of the rector, who thought he was admiring the landscape, recalled him.

Mr. Wagget was not only an honourable and a religious man — he was kindly and gay; he enjoyed everything — his trees and his flowers, his dinner, his friends, even his business, but, above all things, his books; and herein was a powerful sympathy with the younger student, who was won besides to confidence by the genial spirits of the good man.

The loneliness of Gilroyd, too — insupportable, had it not been for the vicinity of Violet — made his company very welcome. So, falling into discourse, it naturally befell that William came to talk of that which lay nearest his heart at that moment — his unaccountable adventure of the night before.

"Very curious, and, as it seems to me, quite inexplicable," said Doctor Wagget, very much interested. "The best authenticated thing I've heard — *much* the best — of the kind. You must tell it all over again. It's the best and most satisfactory case I know."

Thus oddly encouraged, William again recounted his strange story, and unfolded something of the horror with which his doubts were fraught.

"You *said* nothing?" asked the parson.

"Nothing."

"Ha! It *is* the very *best* case I ever heard of or read. Everyone knows, in fact, there *have* been such things. *I* believe in apparitions. I don't put them in my sermons, though, because so many people *don't,* and it weakens one's influence to run unnecessarily into disputed subjects, and it is time enough to talk of such things when people are visited, as you have been. You must not be frightened, though; you've no need. If these things *be*, they form part of the great scheme of nature, and any evil that may befall you in consequence is as much a subject for legitimate prayer as sickness or any other affliction; indeed, more obviously so, because we are furnished with no other imaginable means than prayer alone, and a life' conformable to God's will to resist them. Poor little thing! She talked very flightily. I had a great deal of conversation, and latterly she listened, and I had hoped with some effect. Especially I urged her to clear her mind of all idea of spiritual action, except such as is presented for our comfort and warning in the Holy Scriptures. But here, you *see,* she, poor little thing, is restless, and you troubled.

It's the oddest case I ever heard of."

"Pray don't mention what I've told you, Sir, to anyone."

"Certainly not, for the world — not a human being, not even my sister. By-the-bye, couldn't you come over and dine with us, and sleep? you must sleep tonight by way of experiment."

So William promised, well pleased, and went; but, alas! this was a day of disappointments. Violet had gone again to make a short stay at the

Mainwarings.

"What can the Mainwarings want of her? She's always going there; what *is* there about them so charming?" demanded William of himself; and an outline of the military son of the family, Captain Mainwaring, possibly on leave and at home, disturbed him.

Now, to the further wonderment, and even delight of Doctor Wagget, a very curious result followed from the "experiment" of William's one night sojourn at the Rectory. At his host's request, he had locked his bedroom door, just as he had done at Gilroyd, and in the morning he found his stick, which he had left in the *hall,* tied fast in the loops in which in the daytime the curtains were gathered. There it hung across the bed over his head, an image, as it seemed to him, of suspended castigation.

The doctor was early at William's door, and found his guest's toilet half completed. In real panic, Maubray pointed out the evidence of this last freak.

"What an absurd ghost!" thought Mr. Wagget, in a pleasing terror, as he examined and pondered over the arrangement "It only shows that change of place won't do," said the rector. "Consider this, however," he resumed, after an interval consumed in search of consolation, "these manifestations, and very characteristic they are, if we assume they come from my poor friend, are made in furtherance of what she conceives your interests, in the spirit of that love which she manifested for you all her life, and you may be well assured they will never be pushed to such a point as to hurt you."

William got on the bed, and untied his stick, which on his way home he broke to pieces, as a thing bewitched, in a nervous paroxysm, and flung into the little brook that runs by Revington.

At breakfast, Miss Wagget asked of her brother, —

"Did you hear the noise at the hat-stand in the hall last night? Your hat was knocked down, and rolled all across the hall." (The parson and William glanced at one another here.) "It was certainly that horrid gray cat that comes in at the lobby window."

At mention of the gray cat the remembrance of poor Aunt Dinah's simile struck William.

"By Jove! my stick was at the hat-stand," exclaimed he.

"Your stick? but this was a hat," replied Miss Wagget, who did not see why he should be so floored by the recollection of his stick.

“Ha! your stick? so it was — was it?” exclaimed Doctor Wagget, with a sudden awe, equally puzzling.

And staring at her brother, and then again at William, Miss Wagget suffered the water from the tea-urn to overflow her cup and her saucer in succession.

CHAPTER LXIV.

AN AMBUSCADE.

GILROYD was awfully slow, and even the town of Saxton dull. Cricket was quite over. There was no football there. William Maubray used to play at the ancient game of quoits with Arthur Jones, Esq., the Saxton attorney, who was a little huffy when he lost, and very positive on points of play; but on the whole a good fellow. Sometimes in the smoking-room, under the reading-room, he and Doctor Drake played clattering games of backgammon, with sixpenny stakes, and called their throws loudly, and crowed ungenerously when they won.

But these gaieties and dissipations failed to restore William altogether to his pristine serenity. Although he had been now for four nights quite unmolested, he could not trust Gilroyd. It was a haunted house, and he the sport of a spirit. The place was bewitched, but so, unhappily, was the man. His visit to the Rectory proved that change of place could not deliver him. He was watched, and made to feel that hi? liberty was gone.

Violet Darkwell was not to return to the Rectory for a week or more, and William called on Doctor Wagget, looking ill, and unquestionably in miserable spirits. To the rector he had confessed something vaguely of his being in love, and cherishing hopes contrary to the terms which poor Aunt Dinah had sought to impose upon him.

A few nights later, emboldened by his long respite, he had written some stanzas, addressed to the young lady’s *carte de visite*, expressive of his hopes, and in the morning he had found his desk in his bedroom, though he had left it in the drawingroom, and his bedroom door was as usual locked. His desk was not open, nor was there any sign of the papers having been disturbed, but the verses he had that night written had been taken out and torn into small pieces, which were strewn on top of the desk.

Since then he had not had a single quiet night, and the last night was the oddest, and in this respect the most unpleasant, that they had set the servants talking.

“Tom, he’s a very steady old fellow, you know,” related William, “waked me up last night at about two o’clock. I called through the door not knowing but that it might be something.”

“I *know”* said the rector, with a mysterious nod.

“Yes, Sir; and he told me he had been awake and heard a loud knocking in the drawingroom, like the hammering of a nail, as indeed it proved to be; and he ran up to the drawingroom, and saw nothing unusual there, and then to the lobby, and there he saw a tall figure in a white dress run up the stairs, with a tread that sounded like bare feet, and as it reached the top it threw a hammer backward which hopped down the steps to his feet. It was the kitchen hammer, unhung from the nail there which we found had been pulled out of the wall. Without waiting to get my clothes on, down I went with him, but our search showed nothing but one very curious discovery.”

“Ha! Go on, Sir.”

“I must tell you, Sir, there was a print, a German coloured thing. I had forgotten it — it was in my poor aunt’s portfolio in a drawer there, of a great tabby cat pretending to doze, and in reality slyly watching a mouse that half emerges from its hole, approaching a bit of biscuit, and this we found nailed to the middle of the door.”

“The inside?”

“Yes.”

“You did not *see* anything of the apparition yourself?” asked Doctor Wagget.

“No, I was asleep. I’ve seen nothing whatever but such things as I’ve described; and the fact is I’m worried to death, and I don’t in the least know what to do.”

“I’ll tell you what,” said the clergyman, after a pause. “I’ll go down and spend the night at Gilroyd, if you allow me, and we’ll get Doctor Drake to come also, if you approve, and we’ll watch, Sir — we’ll spy it out — we’ll get at the heart of the mystery. Drake’s afraid of nothing, no more am I — and what do you say, may we go?”

So the bargain was concluded, and at nine o’clock that evening the parson and Doctor Drake in friendly chat together walked up to the door of Gilroyd, and were welcomed by William, who led these learned witch-finders into his study, which commanded easy access to both drawingroom and parlour, and to the back and the great staircase.

The study looked bright and pleasant — a cheery fire flashed on the silver teapot and cream-ewer, and old China tea things, and glimmered warmly over the faded gilded backs of the books. This and the candles lighted up the room so brightly that it needed an effort — notwithstanding the dark wainscot — to admit a thought of a ghost.

I don't know whether the parson had really any faith in ghosts or not. He thought he had and cultivated in private a taste for that curious luxury, though he was reserved on the subject among his parishioners. I don't think, however, if his nerves had been as much engaged as they might, he could have turned over the old tomes of the late Dean of Crutched Friars with so much interest as he did, or commented so energetically upon the authors and editions.

Doctor Drake was utterly sceptical, and being "threatened with one of his ugly colds," preferred brandy and water to tea — a little stimulus seasonably applied, often routing the enemy before he had time to make an impression. So, very snugly they sat round their table. The conversation was chiefly between the rector and the doctor, William being plainly out of spirits and a good deal in the clouds. The Churchman sipped his tea, and the physician his strong drink, and there was adjusted a plan for the operations of the night.

"Now, Mr. Maubray, you must do as we order; when we bid you, you go to bed — do you see? — everything must proceed precisely as usual, and Doctor Drake and I will sit up and watch here — you go, at your accustomed hour, and lock your door — mind, as usual — and we'll be on the alert, and ready to — to— "

"To arrest the cabinet — egad! — and garrotte the clock, if either so much as cracks while we are on duty," interposed Doctor Drake, poking William's flagging spirits with a joke, in vain.

"I dare say," was William's parting observation; "just because you are both here there will be nothing whatever tonight — I'm quite certain; but I'm awfully obliged to you all the same."

He was quite wrong, however, as all who please may learn from the sequel.

CHAPTER LXV.

PURSUIT.

WILLIAM MAUBRAY, in obedience to orders, went to his bed, having locked his chamber door. He grew tired of listening for sound or signal from the picket in the parlour; as he lay in his bed reading, his eyes failed him. He had walked fifteen miles that day, and in spite of his determination to remain awake, perhaps partly in consequence of it he fell into a profound slumber, from which he was awakened in a way that surprised him.

The sages in the study had drawn their armchairs about the fire. The servants had gone to bed — all was quiet, and it was now past one o'clock. The conversation was hardly so vigorous as at first — there were long pauses, during which the interlocutors yawned furtively into their hands, and I am sorry to add, that while Mr. Wagget was, at the physician's request, expounding to him the precise point on which two early heresies differed, Doctor Drake actually sank into a deep slumber, and snored so loud as to interrupt the speaker, who smiled, shrugged, shook his head, and being a charitable man, made excuses for his drowsiness, and almost immediately fell fast asleep himself.

The clergyman was wakened by some noise. He must have been asleep a long time, for the fire had subsided, and he felt cold, and was so stiff from long sitting in the same posture that he could hardly get up — one of the candles had burned out in the socket, and the other was very low.

On turning in the direction of the noise, the clergyman saw a gaunt figure in white gliding from the room. On seeing this form I am bound to confess the clergyman was so transported with horror, that he seized the sleeping doctor by the head, and shook it violently.

Up started the doctor, and also saw in the shadow the spectre which had paused in the hall, looking awfully tall.

The doctor's hand was on the candlestick, and uttering a prayer, he flung it, in a paroxysm of horror; but it was a wild shot, and hit the sofa near the study door, and rebounded under the table. The study was now dark, but not so the hall. One tall window admitted a wide sheet of moonlight. The clatter of the doctor's projectile seemed to affect the apparition, for it suddenly began to run round and round the hall, in wide circles, regularly crossing the broad strip of moonlight, and displaying its white draperies every time for half a second; the philosophers in the study could not tell whether each new revolution might not bring it into the room, to deal with them in some unknown way. One word they did not utter, but groped and pulled one another fiercely, and groaned, and panted, and snorted, like two men wrestling, and I am afraid that each would have liked to get his friend between himself and the object, which, after whirling some half dozen times round the hall, passed off as it seemed in the direction of the kitchen or the backstair.

The gentlemen in the study, still holding one another, though with a relaxed grasp, were now leaning with their backs to the chimneypiece.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" panted Doctor Drake nervously, and the rector sighed two or three times in great exhaustion. The physician was first to speak.

"Well! Hey! Where's your scepticism now?" said he.

"My friend — my good friend," replied the parson, "don't be alarmed. Where's your faith?"

"Was there a noise?" whispered the doctor; and they both listened.

"No," said the parson. "Pray shut the door. We must not be so — so unmanned, and we'll light the candle, if you can find it."

"Come along then," said the physician, who preferred the cleric's company just then.

"To the door," said the clergyman, gently pushing him before him.

When the candle was found and relighted, the gentlemen were much more cheerful. They looked about them. They stole into the hall and listened. They looked like Christian and Hopeful making their escape from Doubting Castle.

They hastened toward the back stair and the kitchen, and were satisfied without exploring. Then side by side they mounted the great stair, and reached William's door. They had to knock loudly before he awaked.

"Hollo! — I say!" shouted William from his bed.

"Let us in; Doctor Drake and I; we've a word to say" said the clergyman mildly.

"*Will* you open the door, Sir?" wildly shouted Doctor Drake, who hated the whole affair.

And they heard the bound of William's feet *on* the floor as he got out of bed, and in another moment the key turned, and William, candle in hand, stood at the open door.

"Well, any news — anything?" asked William.

"Get some clothes on and come down with us. *Yes,* We have seen something odd," said the clergyman.

"Could it have been Rebecca?" inquired William.

"Hoo! no, Sir — two feet taller," said the rector.

"*Four* feet taller," said Doctor Drake.

"Did you see its face?" asked William, using, awfully, the neuter gender.

"No," said the parson.

"But I did," said Drake— "as long as my arm."

The learned gentlemen stood very close together on the lobby, and looked over their shoulders.

"Come into my room, Sir — won't you? You may as well" (the "Sir" applying to both gentlemen), said William, doing the honours in his nightshirt.

"I don't see any great good," observed Doctor Drake, turning the key again in the door, as he followed the clergyman in, "we can do by going down again. It there was a chance of *finding* anything, but whatever it is it's gone by this time, and — and going down would be a mere flourish, don't you think?"

"I wish we had the bottle of Old Tom that's in the locker," said William, who, behind the curtain, was making an imperfect toilet; "but I suppose it's too far— "and they all looked a little uneasy.

"No, no," said the clergyman, morally, "we've had enough — quite enough."

"Unless we all went down *together* for it," said Doctor Drake.

"No, no, *pray* no more tonight," said the rector, peremptorily.

—— I've pipes and a lot of latachia here," said William emerging in trowsers and dressing-gown. "I've been, trying it for the last ten days. Suppose we smoke a little.'

"Very good idea," said the rector, who had no objection to an occasional pipe under the rose.

So they poked up the fire, and laid a block of coal on, and found that it was halfpast four o'clock, and they chatted, thoughtfully, but no more upon the subject of the apparition; and when daylight appeared they made a hasty toilet, had an early breakfast in the parlour; and the good Doctor Wagget, with his eyes very red, and looking as rakish as so respectable a clergyman could, appointed William an hour to meet him at the Rectory that day and the party broke up.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE GHOST REAPPEARS.

So soon as he was alone the real horror of his situation overpowered William Maubray. “They won’t say so, but the rector and Doctor Drake, from totally different points — with minds constituted as dissimilarly as minds can be — have both come to the conclusion that these persecutions are supernatural. No jury on their oaths, having all the facts before them, could find otherwise. I see and know that they are unaccountable, except in this way; and go where I will, I am dogged by the same cruel influence. Five years’ bondage! Where shall I be at the end of that time? What will have become of Violet Darkwell? I must abandon all my hopes — honestly abandon them — it is the price I must pay for the removal of this curse, which otherwise will extend itself, if there be meaning in the threat, to the unconscious object of my hopes.”

So raved William, “pacing up and walking down” in his despair.

That night he had his old nightmare again, and was visited by what poor Miss Perfect used to call “the spirit key.” In a horror he awaked, and found his wrist grasped by a cold hand precisely as before. This time the gripe was maintained for a longer time than usual, and William traced the hand to its real owner of flesh and blood. Thus was there a gleam of light; but it served Mm no further. in the evening, still agitated by his discovery, he visited Doctor Drake, who listened first with surprise, and then with downcast thoughtful look, and a grim smile.

“I’ll think it over,” said he. “I must be off now,” and he poked his finger toward the window, through which were visible his cob and gig; “they don’t leave me much time; but I’ll manage to be with you by nine this evening, and — and — I don’t care if we try that old Tom,” and the doctor winked comfortably at William. “We’ll be more to ourselves, you know; our rector’s all for tea. Goodbye, and I’ll turn it over carefully in my mind. I have an idea, but — but I’ll consider it — and — nine o’clock tonight, mind.”

Thus said the doctor as he climbed into his gig, and nodding over his shoulder to William Maubray, away he drove.

Like a restless soul as lie was, William toiled hither and thither through the little town of Saxton with his hands in his pockets, and his looks on the pavement, more like an unfortunate gentleman taking his walk in a prison yard, than the proprietor of Gilroyd pacing the High Street of Saxton, where he ranked second only to Trevor, Prince of Revington.

Repose is pleasant, but that of Saxton is sometimes too much for the most contemplative man who is even half awake. There are in the town eleven shops, small and great, and you may often look down the length of the High Street, for ten minutes at a time, and see nothing in motion but the motes in the sunshine.

William walked back to Gilroyd, and paid himself as it were a visit there, and was vexed to and he had missed the rector, who had called only half an hour before. The loss of this little diversion was serious. The day dragged heavily. Reader, if you repine at the supposed shortness of the allotted measure of your days, reside at Saxton for a year or two, and your discontent will be healed.

Even Doctor Drake was half an hour late for his appointment, and William was very glad to see that pillar of Saxton society at last.

When they had made themselves comfortable by the fire, and the physician had adjusted his grog, and William had got his cup of tea by him, after a little silence the doctor began to ask him all sorts of questions about his health and sensations.

“I don’t think,” said William, “except perhaps my spirits a little, and my appetite perhaps, this thing has affected my health at all.”

“No matter, answer my questions,” said the doctor, who after a while fell into a mysterious silence, and seemed amused, and after a little time further, he expressed a great wish to remain and watch as on the former occasion.

“But,” said William, very glad of the offer, “the rector is not coming, and you would wish some *one* with you.”

“No — no one — I don’t mind,” said the doctor, smiling with half-closed eyes into his tumbler. “Or, *yes*, we’ll have your man up when you go to bed; that will do.”

“I missed Dr. Wagget to-day; he called here,” said William.

"Not after nightfall, though," said the physician, with *a* screw of his lips and eyebrows. "I saw him early today; he's awfully frightened, and spoke like a sermon about it."

William looked sorely disquieted at this confirmation of his estimate of Dr. Wagget's opinion of the case. He and Drake exchanged a solemn glance, and the doctor lowering his eyes sipped some grog, and bursting into a mysterious fit of laughter which rather frightened William, who helplessly stood at the tea-table, and gazed on the spectacle. Everything began to puzzle him now; the doctor was like an awful grotesque in a dream. How could a goodnatured and shrewd man laugh thus, amid suffering and horrors such as he had witnessed?

"I beg your pardon, but I could not help laughing when I thought of the rector's long face to-day, and his long words, by Jove," and in a minute or two more, the doctor exploded suddenly again, with the old apology on recovering his gravity, and William's bewilderment increased.

The doctor insisted on William's adhering strictly to his tea and his hours, precisely as if he were alone.

And Tom came in, and the doctor, who was in nowise ceremonious, made him sit down by the fire, and furnished him with a glass of the grog he so recommended.

He then delivered to Tom a brief popular lecture on the subject he desired him to comprehend, and, having thus charged him, silence reigned; and then the doctor, after an interval, smoked half a dozen pipes, and by the time the last was out it was past three o'clock.

The doctor had left the study door open. The moon. was shining through the great hall window.

Put off your shoes, make no noise, and follow me close, with the candle, wherever I go. Don't *stir* till I do," whispered the doctor, repeating the directions he had already given— "Hish!"

The doctor had seen a tall, white figure in the hall — in the shade beyond the window.

"Hish!" said the doctor again, Seizing Tom by the arm, and pointing, with a mysterious nod or two, towards the figure.

"Lawk! — Oh! oh! — *law* bless us!" murmured the man; and the doctor with another "Hish," pushed him gently backward a little.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE PHANTOM IS TRACKED.

As the doctor made this motion, the figure in white crossed the hall swiftly, and stood at the study door. It looked potentiously tall, and was covered with a white drapery, a corner of which hung over its face. It entered the room, unlocked William Maubray's desk from which it took some papers; then locked the desk, carrying away which, it left the room.

"Follow, with the light," whiskered the doctor, himself pursuing on tiptoe.

Barefoot, the figure walked towards the kitchen, then turning to the left, it mounted the back stair; the doctor following pretty closely, and Tom with his candle in the rear.

On a peg in the gallery opposite to the door of William Maubray's bedroom, hung an old dressing-gown of his, into the pocket of which the apparition slipped the papers it had taken from his desk. Then it opened William's door, as easily as if he had not locked it upon the inside. The doctor and Tom followed, and saw the figure approach the bed and place the desk very neatly under the bolster, then return to the door, and shut and lock it on the inside. Then the figure marched in a stately way to the far side of the bed, drew both curtains, and stood at the bedside, like a ghost, for about a minute; after which it walked in the same stately way to the door, unlocked it, and walked forth again upon the gallery; the doctor still following, and Tom behind, bearing the light. Down the stairs it glided, and halted on the lobby, where it seemed to look from the window fixedly.

"Come along," said the doctor to Tom; and down the stairs he went, followed by the torch-bearer, and, on reaching the lobby, he clapped the apparition on the back, and shook it lustily by the arm.

With the sort of gasp and sob which accompany sudden immersion in cold water, William Maubray, for the ghost was he, awakened, dropped the coverlet, which formed his drapery, on the floor, and stood the picture of bewilderment and horror, in his nightshirt, staring at his friends and repeating— "Lord have mercy on us!"

"It's only Tom and I. Shake yourself up a bit, man Doctor Drake — here we are — all old friends."

And the doctor spoke very cheerily, and all sorts of encouraging speeches; but it was long before William got out of his horror, and even then he seemed for a good while on the point of fainting.

"I'll never be myself again," groaned William, in his nightshirt, seating himself, half dead, upon the lobby table.

Tom stood by, holding the candle aloft, and staring in his face and praying in short sentences, with awful unction; while the doctor kept all the time laughing and patting William on the shoulder and repeating, "Nonsense! — nonsense! — nonsense!"

When William had got again into his room, and had some clothes on, he broke again into talk:

"Somnambulism! — walk in my sleep. I could not have believed it possible. I — I never perceived the slightest tendency — I — the only thing was that catching my own wrist in my sleep and thinking it was another person who held me; but — but actually walking in my sleep, isn't it frightful?"

"I don't think you'll ever do it again — ha, ha, ha! said the doctor.

"And why not?" asked William " The fright of being wakened as you were, cures it That's the reason I shook you out of your doldrum," chuckled the doctor.

"I'm frightened — frightened out of my wits."

"Glad of it," said the doctor. "Be the less likely to do it again."

"Do you think I — I'm really cured?" asked William.

"Yes, I do; but you must change your habits a bit You've let yourself get into a dyspeptic, nervous state, and keep working your brain over things too much. You'll be quite well in a week or two; and I really do think you're cured of this trick. They seldom do it again — hardly ever — after the shock of being wakened. I've met half a dozen cases — always cured."

The doctor stayed with him the greater part of that night, which they spent so cheerfully that Drake's articulation became indistinct, though his learning and philosophy, as usual, shone resplendent.

It was not till he was alone, and the bright morning sun shone round him, that William Maubray quite apprehended the relief his spirits had experienced. For several days he had lived in an odious dream. It was now all cleared up, and his awful suspicions gone.

As HE turned from the parlour window to the breakfast table, the old Bible lying on the little book-shelf caught his EYE. He took it DOWN, AND laid IT beside HIM ON the table. Poor Aunt Dinah had kept it by her during her illness, preferring it to any other.

“I’ll read a chapter every day — by Jove, I will,” resolved William, in the grateful sense of his deliverance. “It’s only decent — it’s only the old custom. It may make me good some day, and hit or miss, it never did any man harm.”

So he turned over the leaves, and lighted on an open sheet of note paper. It was written over in poor Miss Perfect’s hand, with a perceptible tremble; and he read the following lines, bearing date only two days before her death: —

“DEAR WILLIE,

“To-day I am not quite so, but trust to be better; and wish you to know, that having conversed much with doctor, my friend, the rector, I make for future the Bible my only guide, and you are not to mind what I said about waiting five — only do all things — things — with prayer, and marry whenever you see goo, seeking first God’s blessing by pra — .

“So, lest anything should happen, to remove from your mind all anxiety, writes

“Your poor old fond

“AUNTIE.”

Thus ended the note, which William, with a strange mixture of feelings, kissed again and again, with a heart at once saddened and immensely relieved.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

SOME SMALL EVENTS AND PLANS.

WILLIAM MAUBRAY heard from Trevor, who affected boisterous spirits and the intensest enjoyment of his town life, though there was not a great deal doing just then to amuse anybody. He had been thinking of running over to Paris to the Sourburys, who had asked him to join their party, but thought he must go first to Kincton for a week or two, as the ladies insisted on a sort of promise he had made, and would not let him off. He hinted, moreover, that there was a perfectly charming Lady Louisa Sourbury, of whom he spoke in a rapture; and possibly all this, and a great deal more in the same vein, was intended to reach the ear of Miss Violet Darkwell, who was to learn that "there are maidens in Scotland more lovely by far, who would gladly," &c., &c., and also, that young Lochinvar was treading his measures and drinking his cups of wine with remarkable hilarity, notwithstanding the little scene which had taken place.

But Vane Trevor was not a topic which William would have cared to introduce, and it was in relation to quite other subjects that he was always thinking of Violet Darkwell.

"So," said the old rector, walking into the hall at Gilroyd, shaking his head, and smiling as he spoke, "We've found you out — the merry devil of Edmonton — hey? I don't know when I was so puzzled. It was really — a-ha! — a most perplexing problem — and — and Doctor Drake has been our Matthew Hopkins, our witch-finder, and a capital one he has proved. I dare say, between ourselves," continued the rector, in a low tone, like a man making a concession, "that several cases of apparently well authenticated apparitions are explicable — eh? — upon that supposition;" and, indeed, good Doctor Wagget devoted time and research to this inquiry, and has written already to two publishers on the subject of his volume, called "The Debatable Land;" and when, last summer, I passed a week at the Rectory, my admirable friend read to me his introduction, in which he says, "If apparitions *be* permitted, they are no more supernatural than water-spouts and other phenomena of rare occurrence, but, *ipso facto*, *natural.* In any case a Christian man, in presence of a disembodied spirit, should be no more disquieted than in that of an embodied one, i e., a human being under its mortal conditions.”

And the only subject on which I ever heard of his showing any real impatience is that of his night-watch in the study at Gilroyd, as slily described by Doctor Drake, who does not deny that he was himself confoundedly frightened by William Maubray’s first appearance, and insinuates a good deal about the rector, which the rector, with a dignified emphasis, declares to be “unmeaning travesty.”

In the meantime, Mr. Sergeant Darkwell made a flying visit to the Rectory, and Maubray had a long walk and *a* talk with him. I do not think that a certain shyness, very hard to get over where ages differ so considerably, permitted the young man to say that which most pressed for utterance; but he certainly did talk very fully about the “bar,” and its chances, and William quite made up his mind to make his bow before the world in the picturesque long robe and whalebone wig, which everyone of taste admires.

But the sergeant, who remained in that part of the world but for a day, when he donned his coif, and spread his sable winks for flight towards the great forensic rookery, whither instinct and necessity called him, carried away his beautiful daughter with him, and the sun of Saxton, Gilroyd, and all the world around was darkened.

In a matter like love, affording so illimitable a supply of that beautiful vaporous material of which the finest castles in the air are built, and upon which every matchmaker — and — and what person worthy to live is *not* a matchmaker? — speculates in a spirit of the most agreeable suspense and the most harmless gambling, it would be hard if the architects of such chateaux, and the “backers” of such and such events, were never in their incessant labours to light up a prophetic combination. Miss Wagget was a freemason of the order of the “Castle in the Air.”

Her magical trowel was always glittering in the sun, and her busy square never done adjusting this or that block of sunset cloud. She had, some little time since, laid the foundations in the firmament of such a structure for the use and occupation of William Maubray and Violet Darkwell; and she was now running it up at a rate which might have made sober architects stare.

The structure was even solidifying, according to the nebulous theory of astronomers. —

And this good lady used, in her charity, to read for WILLIAM IN his almost daily visits to the Rectory, ALL such passages in Violet's letters as she fancied would specially interest him.

Her love for the old scenes spoke very clearly in all these letters. But — and young ladies can perhaps say whether this was a good sign or a bad one — she never once mentioned William Maubray; no, no more than if such a person did not exist, although certainly she asked vaguely after the neighbours, and I venture to think that in her replies, Miss Wagget selected those whom she thought most likely to interest her correspondent All this time good Miss Wagget wrote constantly to remind the barrister in London of his promise to allow Violet to return to the Rectory for another little visit. It was so long delayed that William grew not only melancholy, but anxious. What might not be going on in London?

Were there no richer fellows than he, none more — more — what should he say? — more that style of man who is acceptable in feminine eyes?

Was not Violet peerless, go where she might? Could such a treasure remain long unsought? and if sought, alas! who could foresee the event?

And here he was alone, at Gilroyd, well knowing that distance, silence, absence, are sure at last to kill the most vigorous passion; and how could a mere fancy, of the flimsiest texture — such as his best hopes could only claim, by way of interest in her heart or in her head — survive these agencies of decay and death?

"Next week I think I shall run up to town. I must arrange about attending an equity draughtsman's. I'm determined, Sir, to learn my business thoroughly," said William.

"Right, Sir! I applaud you," replied the rector, to whom this was addressed. "I see you mean work, and are resolved to master your craft. It's a noble profession. I had an uncle at it who, everybody said, would have done wonders, but he died of smallpox in the Temple, before he had held a brief, I believe, though he had been some years called; but it would have come. *Macte Virtute.* I may live *to* see you charge a jury. Sir."

CHAPTER LXIX.

WILLIAM MAUBRAY IN LONDON.

VIOLET DARKWELL'S stay in London lengthened. Saxton was growing intolerable. William began to despond. He ran up to town, and stayed there a few weeks. He eat his dinner in Lincoln's Inn Hall for two terms, and dined every Sunday, and twice beside, at the Darkwells'.

The sergeant was so busy that, on these occasions, he appeared like a guest — an unexpected presence, and was still evidently haunted by briefs — fatigued and thoughtful; but very kind to William. In their short after-dinner sittings I do not think that William ever opened the subject that was nearest his heart. He had, I think, and with a great deal better reason than poor Vane Trevor of Revington, whose pale phantom sometimes flitted warningly before his imagination — horrible qualms about his money qualification.

After one of these Sunday dinners William and Sergeant Darkwell *tête-à-tête*, the barrister, in his quiet cheery way, had been counselling the student on some points, and relating bar stories, always pleasant to hear when told by bright and accurate men like him; and said he, as they rose, "and the first term you make a hundred pounds I give you leave to marry,"

William looked hard at his host. But his countenance was thoughtful, he had wandered away already to some other matter. In fact he looked quite innocent, and I believe he was, of thought of Violet.

"I give you leave to marry." Of course it was quite out of the question that he could have meant what the young man fancied he might mean. Still he thought he might lay down this general rule, and leave it to him to make the particular inference.

"I see," said William, in conference with himself as he trudged home that night, dejectedly. "He wishes me to understand that I shan't have his consent till then. A hundred pounds in a term! *He* had been seven years called before he made that. Could William hope to succeed so well? Not quite, he rather thought." And then grasping his stick hard he swore it was like Jacob's service for Rachel — a seven years' business; and all for a Rachel, who had no thought of waiting.

On all these occasions he saw Violet. But was there not a change, a sense of distance, and above all, was there not that awful old "she-cousin" (to borrow Sam Papy's convenient phrase), of Sergeant Darkwell, silent, vigilant, in stiff silk, whose thin face smiled not, and whose cold gray eyes followed him steadily everywhere, and who exercised an authority over Violet more than aunt-like?

William called again and again, but never saw pretty Violet without this prudent and dreadful old lady. *Her* indeed he twice saw alone. In a *tête-à-tête* she was not more agreeable. She listened to what few things, with a piteous ransacking of his invention and his memory he could bring up, and looked upon him with a silent suspicion and secret aversion under which his spirit gradually despaired and died within him. Glimpses of Violet, under the condition of this presence, were tantalising, even agonising sometimes. The liberty of speech so dear to Englishmen was denied him, life was gliding away in this speechless dream, the spell of that lean and silent old lady was upon him. How he yearned for the easy country life with its kindly chaperons and endless opportunities. Love, as we all know, is a madness, and it is the property of madmen to imagine conspiracies, and William began to think that there was an understanding between Sergeant Darkwell and the "she-cousin," and that she was there to prevent his ever having an opportunity of saying one confidential word in Violet's ear. It seemed to him, moreover, that this was unspeakably worse, that Violet was quite happy in this state of things. He began to suspect that he had been a fool, that his egotism had made him, in a measure, mad, and that it was time for him to awake and look the sad truth in the face.

William left London. He wavered in his allegiance to the bar. He doubted his fitness for it. Had he not money enough for all his wants? Why should he live a town life, and grieve his soul over contingent remainders, and follow after leading cases in objectless pursuit, and lose himself in Bacon's interminable Abridgment, all for nothing?

He returned to keep his next term, and suffer a like penance. It seemed to him there was a kind of coldness and reserve in Violet that was hardly tangible, and yet it was half breaking his heart She was further away than ever, and he could not win her back. He sate there under the eye of silent

Miss Janet Smedley — the inexorable she-cousin. There was no whispering in her presence. She was so silent you might hear a pin drop. Not a syllable escaped her observant ear. There was no speaking in her presence, and that presence never failed — though Violet's sometimes did. The situation was insupportable. Away went William again — and this time he made a portion of that charming tour of Brown, Jones, and Robinson, which for any comfort it gave his spirit, he might as well or better have made within the covers of Mr. Doyle's famous quarto.

Back to England with the home sickness of love came William. He had still a week before his term commenced.

"I can't stand it any longer," said he, as he paced the platform of the "railway" by which he had taken not an "up" but a "down" ticket "I know I'm right. I must go down and see Miss Wagget. I'd rather talk to her than to the doctor. I know very well she sees how it is, and she'll tell me what she thinks, and if she advises I'll speak to the sergeant when I go to town, and so I shall soon know one way or other," and he sighed profoundly, and with a yearning look townwards he took his place, and flew away toward Gilroyd

CHAPTER LXX.

VIOLET DARKWELL TELLS MISS WAGGET THAT QUEEN ANNE IS DEAD.

THE sun was near the western horizon, and sky and clouds were already flooded with the sunset glow, as William Maubray drove up to the high and formal piers of Gilroyd, with their tall urns at top — decorations which belong to old-world fancy — a little formal, like the stately dress of by-gone beauties and beaux, but with a sentiment and a prettiness of their own. Sad looked to him the smile of the old building and lordly trees in the fading sunlight; the windows sparkled redly in it, the ivy rustled in the light air, and the sparrows twittered and fluttered up and down among its glittering leaves — the time, the sights, and sounds recalling many an arrival at the same pleasant hour, and many a welcome look and tone — gone now — faint and far away in memory, and ever to grow more and more distant The hall door was opened — in went William without a summons — and in the hall he heard voices issuing from the drawingroom. Old Miss Wagget's kindly and cheering tones were distinctly audible, and Winnie Dobbs was making answer as he entered. From the two old women. as he stepped in, there was a simultaneous ejaculation, and Winnie's two hands were lifted in amaze, and she beamed on him with a ruddy smile of welcome, crying aloud, "Well, law. 'Tis him, sure enough!" and " There you are; what a charming surprise!" exclaimed Miss Wagget, trotting up to him with her hands extended, and shaking both his with a jolly little laugh.

"We walked over to pay our respects to good Winnie Dobbs here, little expecting to meet the lord of the castle. Ha, ha, ha! why we thought you were at Hamburg, and lo and behold! Here we have you! And I ventured to bring a friend, will you allow me to introduce?"

But Violet Darkwell — for she was the friend — not waiting for Miss Wagget's mock ceremony, came a step or two to meet him, and again, in Gilroyd, he held that prettiest of slender hands in his.

"Oh! pretty Vi, who could forget you? How I wish you liked me ever so little! Oh! that you were the mistress of Gilroyd!" These were his thoughts as with a smile and a quiet word or two of greeting he took her hand.

“Did you come through London?” asked Miss Wagget.

“No; direct here,” he answered.

“Surprised to find us, I dare say?” and she glanced at Violet. “Our friend here — like a good little creature, as she is — came down to keep me company for a week, and as much longer as I can make her stay, while my brother is at Westthorpe, and you must come over with us to tea.”

William acquiesced.

“And, Winnie Dobbs, you must tell me all you know of that Tummins family at the mill — are the)’ really tie-serving people? — there was a rumour, you know — young people, do you go out and take a ramble in the lawn, and I’ll join you. Winnie and I must talk for a minute or two.”

So Violet and William did go out, and stood for a minute in the old familiar porch.

“How pretty it looks — always — in the setting sun — it’s the light that suits Gilroyd. There’s something a little melancholy in this place, though cheery along with it — I don’t know how,” said William.

“So do I — I always thought that — like those minuets I used to play, that dear old grannie liked so well — something brilliant and oldfashioned, and plaintive,” replied the sweet voice of Violet Darkwell.

“Come out into the sunlight,” said William. “Oh! how pretty! isn’t it?”

Violet looked round with a sad smile that was beautiful on her girlish face.

“And the chestnut trees — I wonder how old they are,” said William. “I must see you once more, Violet, among the chestnut trees;” and he led her towards them, she going willingly, with a little laugh that sounded low and sadly.

Among their stems, he stopped before that of a solitary beech tree.

“Do you remember that tree?” said William, speaking very low.

“I do indeed,” said Violet, with the faintest little laugh in the world.

*“It’*s more than three years ago — it’s four years ago — since I carved them.” He was pointing to two lines of letters, already beginning to spread and close in as such memorials on the living bark will do — but still legible enough. They were —

Vi Darkwell.
William Maubray.

“These are going,” he said with a sigh, “like the old inscriptions in Saxton Churchyard; I believe it is impossible to make any lasting memorial; even memory fails as we grow old; God only remembers always; and this little carving here seems to me like an epitaph, times are so changed, and we — Vi Darkwell — William Maubray” — (he read slowly). “Little Vi is gone — dead and buried — and William Maubray — he did not know a great many things that he has found out since. He is dead and gone too, and I am here. He did not know himself; he thought the old things were to go on always; he did not know, Vi, how much he loved you — how desperately he loved you. *You* don’t know it — you *can’t* know it — or how much rather I’d die than lose you.”

She was looking down, the point of her little foot was smoothing this way and that the moss on the old roots that overlaced the ground.

“If I thought you could like me! Oh! Violet, can you — ever so little?” He took her hand in both his, and his handsome young face was as that of a man in some dreadful hour pleading for his life. There were the glow of hope, the rapture of entreaty, the lines of agony.

“I like you, William. I do like you,” she said, so low that no other ears but his, I think, could have heard it, and the little wood anemones nodded their pretty heads, and the groups of wood-sorrel round trembled, it seemed with joy; and William said, in a wild whisper —

“My darling — oh! Vi — my darling. My only love — dearer and dearer, every year. Oh! darling, my love is everlasting!” and he kissed her hand again and again, and he kissed her lips, and the leaves and flowers were hushed, nature was listening, pleased, and, I think, the angels looking down smiled on those fair young mortals, and those blessed moments that come with the glory of paradise, and being gone are remembered for ever.

“Why, young people, what has become of you?” cried the well known voice of Miss Wagget “Ho! here you are. I guessed I should find you among the trees; grand old timber, Mr. Maubray.” The guilty pair approached Miss Wagget side by side, looking as unconcerned as they could, and she talked on. “I sometimes think, Mr. Maubray, that Gilroyd must be a much older place than most people fancy. That house, now, what style is it in? My brother says there were such houses built in Charles the Second's time, but the timber you know is — particularly the oaks down there — the trees *are* enormously old, and there are traces of a moat. I don't understand these things, but my brother says, at the side of the house toward the road," and so on kind Miss Wagget laboured, little assisted by William, upon topics about which none of them were thinking.

That evening Miss Wagget was seized with a sort of musical frenzy, and sat down and played through ever so many old books of such pieces as were current in her youth, and very odd and quaint they sound now — more changed the fashion of our music even than of our language.

I'm afraid that the young people were not so attentive as they might, and William whispered incessantly, sitting beside Violet on the sofa.

It was rather late when that little musical party broke up.

To Gilroyd, William walked in a dream, in the air, all the world at his feet, a demigod. And that night when Vi, throwing her arms about Miss Wagget's neck, confided in her ear the momentous secret, the old lady exclaimed gaily —

"Thank you for nothing! a pinch for stale news! Why I knew it the moment I saw your face under the trees there, and I'm very happy. I'm delighted. I've b*een* planning it, and hoping for it this ever so long — *and* poor fellow! He *was* so miserable."

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE CHIMES OF SAXTON.

NEXT morning Miss Wagget was busy, in a great fuss, writing the news to her brother and the sergeant, and for the benefit of the latter she drew such a picture of William Maubray's virtues and perfections in general as must have made that sagacious man long to possess such a son-in-law. The good lady enclosed a dutiful little note to him from Violet, and wound up with an eloquent lecture, in which she demonstrated that if the sergeant were to oppose this palpable adjustment of Providence, he should be found to fight against Heaven, the consequences of which enter prise she left him to conjecture.

William also spent the entire forenoon over a letter to the same supreme authority; and the letters despatched, there intervened a few days of suspense and wonderful happiness, notwithstanding.

William was waiting in the little postoffice of Saxton when the answering letters came. Mrs. Beggs having sorted the contents of the mail with an anxious eye, delivered his letters, and at his desire, those for the Rectory, to William. There was a letter from the sergeant for him. There was no mistaking the tall and peculiar hand. There were two others addressed severally to the ladies at the Rectory. William did not care to read his in Mrs. Beggs's little parlour, so he took his leave cheerfully, even gaily, with an awful load at his heart.

In his pocket lay his fate sealed. Hardly a soul was stirring in the drowsy little street. Here and there a listless pair of eyes peeped through the miniature panes of a shop window. He could not read the letter where any eye could see him. He hurried round the corner of Garden Row, got on the road leading to Gilroyd, crossed the style that places you upon the path to the Rectory,. " and in the pretty field, with only half a dozen quiet cows for witnesses, opened and read his London letter.

It told him how well Mr. Sergeant Darkwell liked him, that he believed wedded happiness depended a great deal more on affection, honour, and kindness, than upon wealth. It said that he had aptitudes for the bar, and would no doubt do very well with exertion. It then mentioned what the sergeant could do for his daughter, which William thought quite splendid, and was more, Miss Wagget afterwards said, than she had reckoned upon.

For some years at least they were to live with the sergeant, "putting by your income, my dears, and funding at least five or six hundred a year," interposed Miss Wagget, who was in a wonderful fuss. "You'll be rich before you know where you are — you will, indeed! He's an admirable man — your father's an *admirable* man, my dear! I don't know such a man, except my brother, who's a man by himself, you know. But next after him your papa, my dear, is the very best man I ever heard of.

And you'll be married here, at Saxton — you shall, indeed.

You must remain with us, and be married from this, and I wonder my brother stays so long away, he'll be as glad as I. The sergeant shall come down to us for the wedding, and give you away at Saxton, and there's that beautiful spot Wyndel Abbey, so romantic and charming, the very place for a honeymoon, and only fifteen miles away."

And so, on and on, ran good Miss Wagget, arranging everything for the young people, and as it were, counting the turnpikes, and packing their trunks for the happy excursionists, and making them comfortable in the pretty little inn at Wyndel Abbey, where she had once spent a week.

Well would it be for castle-builders in general if their dreams proved all as true as those of fanciful and kindly Miss Wagget did, on this occasion.

It was agreed it was to be a very quiet wedding. At secluded Saxton, indeed, it would not have been easy to make it anything else. Sergeant Darkwell of course gave pretty Violet away.

Honest Dr. Drake was there, in an unprofessional blue coat and buff waistcoat, and with a bouquet in his buttonhole, in which not a single camomile flower figured. Miss Drake, too, in a lavender silk; and wishing the gay couple every good from her heart, notwithstanding her surprise that Sergeant Darkwell should have permitted his *child* to marry at so early an age as eighteen — *nineteen?* Well, one year here or there doesn't signify a great deal, she fancied. Good old Winnie Dobbs, too, in a purple silk and new bonnet, which must have been quite in the fashion, for all Saxton admired it honestly. A little way from the communion rails, behind the gentlefolks, she stood or kneeled, edified, only half credulous, smiling sometimes, and crying a great deal — thinking, I am sure, of kind old Aunt

Dinah, who was not to see that hour Winnie, I mention parenthetically, is still housekeeper at Gilroyd, and very happy, with nothing but a little rheumatism to trouble her.

Here every year William and Violet pass some time, and the happiest month of all the twelve, though the estates and title have come to him, and he is Sir William and she Lady Maubray. But the change has not spoiled either.

The honest affections and friendly nature delight in the old scenes and associates; and in summer sunsets, under the ancient chestnuts, they ramble sometimes, her hand locked in his; and often, I dare say, he runs over those delightful remembrances, still low — still in a lover's tone, she looking down on the grass and wild flowers, as she walks beside him and listens as she might to a sweet air, always welcome, the more welcome that she knows it so well; and they read the inscription on the beech tree, time has not effaced it yet, they read it smiling, in their happy dream, with that something of regret that belongs to the past, and all the tenderness that tones the uncertain mortal future.

Sometimes William says a word of Trevor, and she laughs, perhaps a little flattered at the remembrance of a conquest. Vane Trevor is very well, not married yet, they say, grown a little stout, not often at Revington. He does not put himself much in the way of Sir William, but is very friendly when they correspond on Saxton matters, workhouse, and others. He has not renewed his attentions at Kincton. Clara has grown "awfully old," he has been heard to remark. She has latterly declined gaieties, has got to the very topmost platform of High-churchism, from which a mere step-ladder may carry her still higher. Dean Sancroft, who fought the Rev. John Blastus in the great controversy, you must remember, on credence tables, candles, and superaltars, is not unfrequently an inmats of Kincton, and people begin to canvass probabilities.

But whither have I drifted? Let us come back to quiet old Saxton Church, and the marriage service. The Miss Mainwarings and a pretty Miss Darkwell; a cousin of the bride's, attended as bridesmaids. And with Sergeant Darkwell had arrived the "silent woman." She could not help her taciturnity any more than her steady gray eyes, which used to terrify William so, while he haunted the drawingroom in town. She attended, in very handsome and appropriate costume, and made Vi a very pretty present of oldfashioned jewellery, and was seen to dry her gray eyes during the beautiful “solemnisation of matrimony,” as good Doctor Wagget, in the old church, under the oak-roof which had looked down for so many centuries on so many young kneeling couples, in the soft glow of the old stained windows whose saints looked smiling on with arms crossed over their breasts, read the irrevocable words aloud, and the village congregation reverently listening, heard how these two young mortals, like the rest, had “given and pledged their troth, either to other, and declared the same by giving and receiving of a ring, and by joining of hands,” and how the good rector pronounced that “they be man and wife together,” in the name of the glorious Trinity.

As we walk to the village church, through the churchyard, among the gray, discoloured headstones that seem to troop slowly by us as we pass, the lesson of change and mortality is hardly told so sublimely as in the simple order of our services. The pages that follow the “Communion” open on the view like the stations in a pilgrimage. The “Baptism of Infants”— “A Catechism”— “The Order of Confirmation”— “The Solemnisation of Matrimony”— “The Visitation of the Sick”— “The Burial of the Dead.” So, the spiritual events of life are noted and provided for, and the journey marked from the first question— “Hath this child been already baptised or no?” down to the summing up of life’s story— “Man that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up and is cut down as a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.”

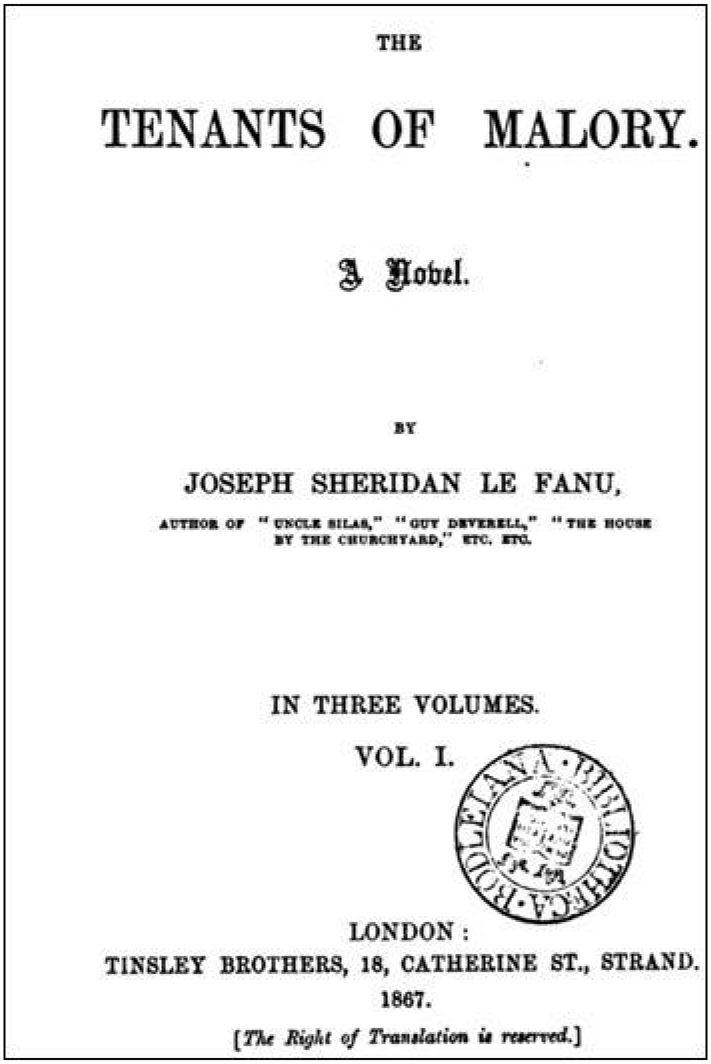
And so Doctor Wagget, after the blessing invoked, and his beautiful office ended, smilingly bids William “Kiss your wife,” and there is a fluttering of gay ribbons, and many smiling faces, and a murmuring of pleased voices, and greetings and good wishes, as they go to the vestry-room to sign Dr. Wagget’s ancient ledge of all such doings.

And now while the sun is shining and the bells of Saxton trembling in the air, I end my story.

THE END

THE TENANTS OF MALORY

Published in three volumes by Tinsley in 1867, this novel had first been serialised in the *Dublin University Magazine* between February and October of that year. It marks Le Fanu's return to the sensation or mystery genre and tells the story of Cleve Verney's attempts to win the hand of Margaret Fanshawe. The house known as 'Malory' in the novel is based on Penmon Priory near Beaumaris, North Wales, where the novel is set.



THE

TENANTS OF MALORY.

A Novel.

BY

JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU,

AUTHOR OF "UNCLE SILAS," "GUY DEVERELL," "THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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Penmon Priory in North Wales was the basis for Malory and its surroundings

VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING TWO LADIES WHO SAT IN THE MALORY PEW.

There were tenants at last in Malory; and the curiosity of the honest residents of Cardyllian, the small and antique town close by, was at once piqued and mortified by the unaccountable reserve of these people.

For four years, except from one twisted chimney in the far corner of the old house, no smoke had risen from its flues. Tufts of grass had grown up between the paving-stones of the silent stableyard, grass had crept over the dark avenue, which, making a curve near the gate, is soon lost among the sombre trees that throw a perpetual shadow upon it; the groves of nettles had spread and thickened among their trunks; and in the signs of neglect and decay, the monastic old place grew more than ever *triste*.

The pretty little Welsh town of Cardyllian stands near the shingle of a broad estuary, beyond which tower the noble Cambrian mountains. High and dim, tier above tier, undulating hills, broken by misty glens, and clothed with woods, rise from the opposite shore, and are backed, range behind range, by the dim outlines of Alpine peaks and slopes, and flanked by purple and gold-tinted headlands, rising domelike from the sea.

Between the town and the gray shingle stretches a strip of bright green sward, the Green of Cardyllian, along which rows of pleasant houses, with little gardens in front, look over the sea to the mountains.

It is a town quaint, old, and quiet. Many of the houses bear date anterior to the great civil wars of England, and on the oak beams of some are carved years of grace during which Shakespeare was still living among his friends, in Stratford-on-Avon.

At the end of long Castle Street rise the battlements and roofless towers of that grand old feudal fortress which helped to hold the conquest of Wales for the English crown in the days of tabards, lances, and the long-bow. Its other chief street strikes off at right angles, and up hill from this, taking its name from the ancient church, which, with its churchyard, stands divided from it by a low wall of red sandstone, surmounted by one of those tall and fanciful iron rails, the knack of designing which seems to be a lost art in these countries.

There are other smaller streets and by-lanes, some dark with a monastic stillness, others thinly built, with little gardens and old plum and pear trees peeping over grass-grown walls, and here and there you light upon a fragment of that ancient town wall from which, in the great troubles which have helped to build up the glory of England, plumed cavaliers once parleyed with steel-capped Puritans. Thus the tints and shadows of a great history rest faintly even upon this out-of-the-way and serene little town.

The permanent residents of Cardyllian for half the year are idle, and for mere occupation are led to inquire into and report one another's sins, vanities, and mishaps. Necessity thus educates them in that mutual interest in one another's affairs, and that taste for narrative, which pusillanimous people call prying and tattle. That the people now residing in Malory, scarcely a mile away, should have so totally defeated them was painful and even irritating.

It was next to impossible to take a walk near Cardyllian without seeing Malory; and thus their failure perpetually stared them in the face.

You can best see Malory from the high grounds which, westward of the town, overlook the estuary. About a mile away you descry a dark and rather wide-spread mass of wood, lying in a gentle hollow, which, I think, deepens its sombre tint. It approaches closely to the long ripple of the sea, and through the foliage are visible some old chimneys and glimpses of gray gables. The refectory of the friary that once stood there, built of gray and reddish stones, half hid in ivy, now does duty as a barn. It is so embowered in trees, that you can scarcely, here and there, gain a peep from without at its tinted walls; and the whole place is overhung by a sadness and silence that well accord with its cloistered traditions. That is Malory.

It was Sunday now. Over the graves and tombstones of those who will hear its sweet music no more, the bell had summoned the townsfolk and visitors to the old church of Cardyllian.

The little town boasts, indeed, a beautiful old church, Gothic, with side-aisles, and an antique stained window, from which gloried saints and martyrs look down, in robes as rich and brilliant as we see now-a-days only upon the kings and queens of our court cards. It has also some fine old monuments of the Verney family. The light is solemn and subdued. There is a very sweet-toned organ, which they say is as old as the reign of Charles I., but I do not know how truly. In the porch are hung in chains two sacrilegious round-shot, which entered the church when Cromwell’s general opened his fire, in those days of sorrow when the liberties of England were in the throes of birth. Beside the brilliant stained window, engraven upon a brass plate, is a record of the same “solemn times,” relating how certain careful men, to whom we are obliged, had taken down, enclosed in boxes, and buried, in hope of a typical resurrection, the ancient window which had for so long beautified “this church,” and thus saved it from the hands of “violent and fanatical men.”

When “the season” is still flourishing at Cardyllian, the church is sometimes very full. On the Sunday I speak of it was so. One pew, indeed, was quite relieved from the general pressure. It was the large panelled enclosure which stands near the communion rails, at the right as you look up the aisle toward the glowing window. Its flooring is raised a full foot higher than the surrounding level. This is the seat of the Verney family.

But one person performed his devotions in it, upon the day of which I speak. This was a tall, elegantly slight young man, with the indescribable air of careless fashion; and I am afraid he was much more peeped at and watched than he ought to have been by good Christians during divine service.

Sometimes people saw but the edge of his black whisker, and the waves of his dark hair, and his lavender-gloved hand resting on the edge of the pew. At other times — when, for instance, during the Litany, he leaned over with his arms resting on the edge of the pew — he was very satisfactorily revealed, and elicited a considerable variety of criticism. Most people said he was very handsome, and so, I think, he was — a dark young man, with very large, soft eyes, and very brilliant even teeth. Some people said he was spoiled by an insolent and selfish expression of countenance. Some ladies again said that his figure was perfect, while others alleged that there was a slight curve — not a stoop, but a bend at the shoulder, which they could not quite sanction.

The interest, and even anxiety with which this young gentleman was observed and afterwards discussed, were due to the fact that he was Mr. Cleve Verney, the nephew, not of the present Viscount Verney, but of the man who must very soon be so, and heir presumptive to the title — a position in the town of Cardyllian, hardly inferior to that of Prince of Wales.

But the title of Verney, or rather the right claimant of that title, was then, and had been for many years, in an extremely odd position. In more senses than one, a cloud rested upon him. For strong reasons, and great danger, he had vanished more than twenty years ago, and lived, ever since, in a remote part of the world, and in a jealous and eccentric mystery.

While this young gentleman was causing so many reprehensible distractions in the minds of other Christians, he was himself, though not a creature observed it, undergoing a rather wilder aberration of a similar sort himself.

In a small seat at the other side, which seems built for privacy, with a high panelling at the sides and back, sat a young lady, whose beauty riveted and engrossed his attention in a way that seemed to the young gentleman, of many London seasons, almost unaccountable.

There was an old lady with her — a ladylike old woman, he thought her — slight of figure, and rubrically punctual in her up-risings, and down-sittings. The seat holds four with comfort, but no more. The oak casing round it is high. The light visits it through the glorious old eastern window, mellowed and solemnized — and in this chiar'oscuro, the young lady's beauty had a transparent and saddened character which he thought quite peculiar. Altogether he felt it acting upon him with the insidious power of a spell.

The old lady — for the halo of interest of which the girl was the centre, included her — was dressed, he at first thought, in black, but now he was nearly sure it was a purple silk.

Though she wore a grave countenance, suitable to the scene and occasion, it was by no means sombre — a cheerful and engaging countenance on the contrary.

The young lady's dress was one of those rich Welsh linseys, which exhibit a drapery of thick ribbed, dark gray silk, in great measure concealed by a short but ample cloak or coat of black velvet — altogether a costume, the gravity of which struck him as demure and piquant.

Leaning over the side of his pew, Mr. Cleve Verney prayed with a remarkable persistence in the direction of this seat. After the Litany he thought her a great deal more beautiful than he had before it, and by the time the Communion service closed, he was sure he had never seen any one at all so lovely. He could not have fancied, in flesh and blood, so wonderful an embodiment of Guido's portrait of Beatrice Cenci. The exquisite brow, and large hazel eye, so clear and soft, so bold and shy. The face voluptuous, yet pure; *funeste* but innocent. The rich chestnut hair, the pearly whiteness, and scarlet lips, and the strange, wild, melancholy look — and a shadow of fate. Three-quarters, or full face, or momentary profile — in shade, now — in light — the same wonderful likeness still. The phantom of Beatrice was before him.

I can't say whether the young lady or the old observed the irregular worship directed towards their pew. Cleve did not think they did. He had no particular wish that they should. In fact, his interest was growing so strangely absorbing that something of that jealousy of observation which indicates a deeper sentiment than mere admiration, had supervened, and Mr. Cleve conducted his reconnoitring with slyness and caution.

That small pew over the way, he was nearly certain, belonged to Malory. Now Malory is a dower house of the Verneys. His own grandmother, the Venerable Dowager Lady Verney, as much to her annoyance the fashionable morning paper respectfully called her, was at that time the incumbent. But though she held it with the inflexible grip of an old lady whose rights were not to be trifled with, she would not reside, and the place was, as I have said, utterly neglected, and the old house very much out of repair.

Why, then, should the Malory pew be thus tenanted? These ladies, he had no doubt, sat there of right — for if the seat had been opened to the congregation at large, in the then state of pressure, it would have been filled. Could they possibly be of kindred to the Verneys, and sit where they did by virtue of an order from the Dowager?

So Cleve Verney began to count up cousins whom he had never seen, and left off no wiser.

Close by this dark Malory pew, is a small side-door of the church. There is another like it, a little lower down, in the opposite wall, not far from the Verney pew, and through these emerge thin files of worshippers, while the main column shuffles and pushes through the porch. So, when the Rector had pronounced his final blessing, Cleve Verney having improved the little silence that followed to get his hat and cane into his hand, glided from his seat before the mass of the congregation were astir, and emerging on the little gravel walk, stepped lightly down to the stone stile, from whence you command a view of every exit from the churchyard.

He stood with one foot upon it, like a man awaiting a friend, and looking listlessly toward the church. And as he loitered, a friend did turn up whom he very little expected to see. A young man, though hardly so young as Cleve — good-looking, decidedly, with light golden moustache, and a face so kind, frank, and merry, it made one happy to look at it.

"Ah! Sedley! I had not an idea. What brings you here?" said Cleve, smiling, and shaking his hand moderately, but keeping his large eyes steadily on the distant point at which he expected to see the unknown ladies emerge.

"Down here just for a day or two," answered Tom Sedley. "I was above you in the gallery. Did you see that beautiful creature in the Malory seat, right before you? By Jove, she's a stunning girl. There was an old woman with her. I think I never saw so beautiful a being."

"Well, I did see a pretty girl at the other side of the church, I *think*; isn't *that* she?" said Cleve, as he saw the two ladies — the younger with one of those short black veils which nearly obliterate the face of the wearer behind the intricacies of a thick lace pattern.

"By Jove! so it is," said Sedley; "come along — let us see where they go."

They were walking almost solitarily, followed only by an old servant who carried their books, toward the entrance at the further side of the churchyard, a small door opening upon a flight of steps by which you descend into one of the deserted back streets of Cardyllian.

Cleve and Sedley pursued as little conspicuously as possible. The quaint street, into which the stone stairs led them, follows the mouldering shelter of the old town wall.

Looking along the perspective of this street, if such the single row of small old houses confronting the dark ivied wall may be termed, the two young gentlemen saw the figures in pursuit of which they had entered it, proceeding in the direction of Malory.

"We mustn't get *too* near; let us wait a little, and let them go on," suggested Sedley in a whisper, as if the ladies could have overheard them.

Cleve laughed. He was probably the more eager of the two; but some men have no turn for confidences, and Cleve Verney was not in the habit of opening either his plans or his feelings to anyone.

CHAPTER II.

ALL THAT THE DRAPER'S WIFE COULD TELL.

This street, in a few hundred steps emerging from the little town, changes its character into that of a narrow rural road, overhung by noble timber, and descending with a gentle curve toward the melancholy woods of Malory.

"How beautifully she walks, too! By Jove, she's the loveliest being I ever beheld. She's the most perfectly beautiful girl in England. How I wish some d — d fellow would insult her, that I might smash him, and have an excuse for attending her home."

So spoke enthusiastic Tom Sedley, as they paused to watch the retreat of the ladies, leaning over the dwarf stone wall, and half hidden by the furrowed stem of a gigantic ash tree.

From this point, about a quarter of a mile distant from Malory, they saw them enter the wide iron gate and disappear in the dark avenue that leads up to that sombre place.

"*There!* I *said* it was Malory," exclaimed Sedley, laying his hand briskly on Cleve's arm.

"Well, I hope you're pleased; and tell me, now, what stay do you make at Cardyllian, Tom? Can you come over to Ware — not tomorrow, for I'm not quite sure that I shall be there, but on Tuesday, for a day or two?"

No — Tom Sedley couldn't. He must leave tomorrow, or, at latest, on Tuesday morning; and, for to-day, he had promised to go to afternoon service with the Etherges, and then home to tea with them. He was to meet the party on the Green.

So after a little talk, they turned together toward the town; and they parted near the Verney Arms, where Cleve's dog-cart awaited him. Having given his order in the hall, he walked into the coffee-room, in which, seated demurely, and quite alone, he found stout Mrs. Jones, the draper's wife — suave, sedate, wearing a subdued Sabbath smile upon her broad and somewhat sly countenance.

Her smile expanded as Cleve drew near. She made a great and gracious courtesy, and extended her short fat hand, which Cleve Verney took and shook — for the tradition of homelier, if not kindlier times, still lingered in Cardyllian, and there were friendly personal relations between the great family and the dozen and a half of shopkeepers who constituted its commercial strength.

So Cleve Verney joked and talked with her, leaning on the back of a chair, with one knee on the seat of it. He was pleased to have lighted upon such a gossip, as good Mrs. Jones, the draper, who was waiting for the return of her husband, who was saying a word to Mr. Watkyn Hughes, in the bar, about a loan of his black horse for a funeral next morning.

"So it seems Lady Verney has got a tenant in Malory?" he said at last.

"Yes, *indeed*, sir," she replied, in her most confidential manner; "and I *hope* — I do *indeed* — it may turn out such a thing as she would like."

Mrs. Jones usually spoke in low and significant tones, and with a mystery and caution worthy of deeper things than she often talked about.

"Why, is there anything odd?" asked the young gentleman curiously.

"Well, it is *not*, now, *altogether* what I would *wish* for Lady Verney. I haven't seen any of the Malory family, excepting in church to-day; not one, indeed, sir; they are very strange; they never *come* into the town — not once since ever they came to Malory! but *dear* me! you know, sir, that might *be*, and yet everything as we could wish, mightn't it; yes, sure; still, you know, people *will* be *talking*; it's a pity we don't mind our own business more, and let others be, isn't it, sir?"

"Great pity; but — but what's the matter?" urged Cleve Verney.

"Well, Master Cleve, you know, Cardyllian, and how we *do talk* here; I don't say *more* than *other* places, but we *do*, and I do not like *repeatin'* everything I hear. There's more mischief than good, *I* think, comes of repeatin' stories."

"Oh! come, pray what's the good of a story except to repeat it? I ought to know, perhaps I should tell Lady Verney about it," said Cleve, who was really curious, for nothing could be more quiet than the get up and demeanour of the ladies.

"They haven't been here, you know, very *long*," murmured Mrs. Jones, earnestly.

"No, I *don't* know. I know nothing about it; *how* long?"

"Well, about five weeks — a little more; and we never saw the gentleman once; he's never been down to the town since he came; never indeed, sir, not once."

"He shows his sense; doesn't he?"

"Ah, you were always pleasant, Master Cleve, but you don't think *so*; no, you don't *indeed*; his conduct is *really most singular*, he's never been outside the walls of Malory all that time, in the *daylight*; very odd; he has hired Christmass Owen's boat, and he goes out in it *every night*, unless twice, the wind was too high, and Owen didn't choose to venture his boat. He's a *tall* man, Christmass Owen says, and holds himself straight, like an officer, for people *will* be making *inquiries*, you know; and he has *gray* hair; not *quite* white, you know."

"How *should* I know?"

"Ah, ha, you were always *funny*; yes, indeed, but it *is* gray, gone *quite* gray, Christmass Owen says."

"Well, and what about the ladies?" inquired the young gentleman. "*They*'re not gone gray, *all*? though I shouldn't wonder much, in Malory."

"The *ladies*? *Well*. There's *two*, you know; there's Miss Sheckleton, that's the elderly lady, and all the Malory accounts in the town is opened in her name. Anne Sheckleton, very reg'lar she is. I have nothing to say concerning her. They don't spend a great *deal*, you understand, but their money is *sure*."

"Yes, of course; but, you said, didn't you? that there was something not quite right about them."

"Oh dear, no, sir; I did not say quite *that*; nothing *wrong*, no sure, but very odd, sir, and most *unpleasant*, and that is all."

"And that's a good deal; isn't it?" urged Cleve.

"Well, it *is* something; it is *indeed* a great *deal*," Mrs. Jones emphasised oracularly.

"And *what is* it, what do you know of them, or the people here what do they *say?*"

"Well, they say, putting this and that together, and some hints from the servant that comes down to order things up from the town — for servants, you know, will be talking — that the family is *mad*."

"*Mad!*" echoed Cleve.

"That's what they say."

"The whole family are *mad!* and yet continue to manage their affairs as they do! By Jove, it is a comfort to find that people can get on without heads, on emergency."

"They don't say, no, dear me! that *all* that's in the house are mad; *only* the old man and the young lady."

"And what is she mad upon?"

"Well, they don't say. I don't know — melancholy I do suppose."

"And what is the old gentleman's name?"

"We don't *know*, the *servants* don't know, they say; they were hired by Miss Sheckleton, in Chester, and never saw the old gentleman, nor the young lady, till after they were two or three days in Malory; and one night comes a carriage, with a madhouse gentleman, they do say, a doctor, in charge of the old gentleman, and the young lady, poor thing! and so they were handed over by him, to Miss Sheckleton."

"And what sort of lunacies do they commit? They're not pulling down the house among them, I hope?"

"Very gentle — very. I'm told, quite, as you may say, *manageable*. It's a very sad thing, sir, but *what* a world it is! yes, indeed. Isn't it?"

"Ay, so it is. — I've heard that, I think, before."

"You may have heard it from *me*, sir, and it's long been my feeling and opinion, dear me! The longer I live the more melancholy sights I see!"

"How long is Malory let for?"

"Can't say, indeed, sir. That is they may give it up every three months, but has the right to keep it two whole years, that is if they *like*, you understand."

"Well, it is rather odd. It was they who sat in the Malory seat to-day?"

"That was Miss Sheckleton, was the old lady; and the young one, didn't you think her very pretty, sir?"

"Yes — she's pretty," he answered carelessly. "But I really could not see very well."

"I was very near as she turned to leave — before she took down her veil — and I thought what a really *beautiful* creature she was!"

"And what do they call her?"

"Miss Margaret, sir."

"Margaret! a pretty name — rather. Oh! here's Mr. Jones;" and Mr. Jones was greeted — and talked a little — somewhat more distantly and formally than his goodwife had done — and Mr. and Mrs. Jones, with a dutiful farewell, set off upon their Sunday's ramble.

CHAPTER III.

HOME TO WARE.

"Mad!" thought Cleve. "What an awful pity if she is. She doesn't *look* mad — melancholy she may. She does not look a *bit* mad. By Jove, I don't *believe* a word of it. It's utterly out of the question that the quiet old lady there could bring a mad girl to church with her. And thus resolved, Cleve walked out of the coffee-room, and awaiting his conveyance, stood on the steps of the Verney Arms, from whence he saw Wynne Williams, the portly solicitor of Cardyllian, and of a wide circle of comfortable clients round it. Wynne Williams is omniscient. Nothing ever happens in Cardyllian that he does not know with precision.

"Wynne," Cleve called up the quiet little street, and the attorney, looking over his fat shoulder, arrested his deliberate walk, and marched swiftly back, smiling.

So there was another greeting; and some more questions ensued, and answers, and then said Cleve —

"So Malory's let, I hear."

"Yes," said the attorney, with a slight shrug.

"You don't like the bargain, I see," said Cleve.

"It's a mismanaged place, you know. Lady Verney won't spend a shilling on it, and we must only take what we can get. We haven't had a tenant for five years till now."

"And who has taken it?"

"The Reverend Isaac Dixie."

"The devil he has. Why old Dixie's not mad, is he?"

"No, he's no fool. More like the other thing — rather. Drove a hard bargain — but *I* wouldn't take it myself at the money."

"Doesn't he live there?"

"No. There's an old gentleman and two ladies; one of them an old woman."

"And what's the old gentleman's *name*, and the young lady's?"

"Don't know, indeed; and what does it matter?" The attorney was curious, and had taken some little trouble to find out. "The Reverend Isaac Dixie's the tenant, and Miss Sheckleton manages the family business; and devil a letter ever comes by post here, except to Miss Sheckleton or the servants."

"Old Mother Jones, the draper's wife, over the way, says the girl and the old fellow are mad."

"Don't believe it. More likely he's in a fix, and wants to keep out of sight and hearing just now, and Malory's the very place to hide a fellow in. It's just *possible*, you know, there may be a screw loose in the upper works; but I don't believe it, and don't for the world hint it to the old lady. She's half mad herself about mad people, and if she took that in her head, by Jove, she'd never forgive me," and the attorney laughed uneasily.

"You do think they're mad. By Jove, you *do*. I *know* you think they're mad."

"I *don't* think they're mad. I don't know anything about them," said the goodhumoured attorney, with Dundreary whiskers, leaning on the wooden pillar of the Verney Arms, and smiling provokingly in the young man's face.

"Come now, Wynne, I'll not tell the old lady, upon my honour. You may as well tell me all you know. And you *do* know; of *course*, you do; you *always* know. And these people living not a mile away! You *must* know."

"I see how it is. She's a pretty girl, and you want to pick up all about her, by way of inquiring after the old gentleman."

Verney laughed, and said —

"Perhaps you're right, though, I assure you, I didn't know it myself. But *is* the old fellow mad, or is there any madness among them?"

"I do assure you, I know no more than you do," laughed Mr. Wynne Williams. "He may be as sober as Solomon, or as mad as a hatter, for anything *I* know. It's nothing to me. He's only a visitor there, and the young lady, too, for that matter; and our tenant is the Reverend Isaac Dixie."

"Where is Dixie living now?"

"The old shop."

"I know. I wonder he has not wriggled on and up a bit. I always looked on Dixie as the bud of a dignitary; he has had time to burst into a Bishop since I saw him. Dixie and I have had some queer scenes together," and he laughed quietly over his recollections. "He and I spent three months once together in Malory — do you remember? I dare say *he* does. He was tutor and I pupil. Charming time. We used to read in the gunroom. That was the year they had the bricklayers and painters at Ware. Do you remember the day you came in exactly as I shied the ink-bottle at his head? I dare say the mark's on the wall still. By Jove, I'd have killed him, I suppose, if I'd had the luck to hit him. You must come over and see me before I go. I'm quite alone; but I can give you a mutton chop and some claret, and I want to show you the rifle I told you of. You'll be delighted with it."

And so this young man, with large dark eyes, smiled and waved his farewell, and, with a groom behind him, drove at a rapid pace down the street, and away toward Ware.

"He'll do that seven miles in five-and-thirty minutes," thought the attorney, looking after him drowsily; and his speculation taking another turn, he thought mistily of his political possibilities, for he had been three years in the House, and was looked upon as a clever young man, and one who, having many advantages, might yet be — who could tell where? and have power to make the fortunes of many deserving attorneys.

Cleve meanwhile was driving at a great pace toward Ware. I don't suppose a town life — a life of vice, a life of any sort, has power to kill the divine spark of romance in a young man born with imagination.

Malory had always had a strange and powerful interest for him. A dower house now, it had once been the principal mansion of his family. Over it, to his eye, hung, like the sombre and glowing phantasms of a cloudy sunset, the story of the romance, and the follies and the crimes of generations of the Verneys of Malory. The lordly old timber that rises about its chimneys and gables, seemed to him the mute and melancholy witnesses of bygone tragedies and glories.

There, too, in the Steward's House, a veritable relic of the ancient Friary, lived dreamy old Rebecca Mervyn; he wondered how he had forgotten to ask whether she was still there. She had seemed to his boyish fancy one of those delightful German ambiguities — half human, half ghost; her silent presents of toffy, and faint wintry smile and wandering gaze, used to thrill him with "a pleasing terror." He liked her, and yet he would have been afraid to sit alone in her latticed room with that silent lady, after twilight. Poor old Rebecca! It was eight years since he had last seen her tall, sad, silent form — silent, except when she thought herself alone, and used to whisper and babble as she looked with a wild and careworn gaze over the sea, toward the mighty mountains that built it round, line over line, till swell and peak are lost in misty distance. He used to think of the Lady of Branksome Tower, and half believe that old Rebecca was whispering with the spirits of the woods and cataracts, and lonely headlands, over the water.

"Is old Rebecca Mervyn there still?" he wondered on. "Unless she's dead, poor thing, she *is* — for my grandmother would never think of disturbing her, and she shall be my excuse for going up to Malory. I ought to see her."

The door of her quaint tenement stood by the courtyard, its carved stone chimney top rose by the roof of the dower-house, with which, indeed, it was connected. "It won't be like crossing their windows or knocking at their hall door. I shan't so much as enter the courtyard, and I really ought to see the poor old thing."

The duty would not have been so urgent had the face that appeared in church that day been less lovely.

He had never troubled himself for eight years about the existence of old Rebecca. And now that the image, after that long interval, suddenly returned, he for the first time asked himself why old Rebecca Mervyn was ever there? He had always accepted her presence as he did that of the trees, and urns, and old lead statues in the yew walk, as one of the properties of Malory. She was a sort of friend or client of his grandmother's — not an old servant plainly, not even a housekeeper. There was an unconscious refinement, and an air of ladyhood in this old woman. His grandmother used to call her Mrs. Mervyn, and treated her with a sort of distinction and distance that had in it both sympathy and reserve.

"I dare say Wynne Williams knows all about her, and I'll go and see her, at all events." So he thought as his swift trotter flew under the noble trees of Ware, along the picturesque road which commands the seaward view of that unrivalled estuary flanked by towering headlands, and old Pendillion, whose distant outline shews like a gigantic sphinx crouching lazily at the brink of the sea. Across the water now he sees the old town of Cardyllian, the church tower and the ruined Castle, and, further down, sad and sequestered, the dark wood and something of the gray front of Malory blurred in distance, but now glowing with a sort of charm that was fast deepening into interest.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE GREEN OF CARDYLLIAN.

Ware is a great house, with a palatial front of cut stone. The Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney seldom sees it. He stands next to the title, and that large residue of the estates which go with it. The title has got for the present into an odd difficulty, and cannot assert itself; and those estates are, pending the abeyance, compulsorily at nurse, where they have thriven, quite thrown off their ailments and incumbrances, and grown plethorically robust.

Still the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney is not, as the lawyers say, in perception of one shilling of their revenues. He feels indeed that he has grown in importance — that people seemed more pleased to see him, that he is listened to much better, that his jokes are taken and laughed at, and that a sceptical world seems to have come at last to give him credit for the intellect and virtues of which he is conscious. All this, however, is but the shadow of the substance which seems so near, and yet is intangible.

No wonder he is a little peevish. His nephew and heir presumptive — Cleve — runs down now and then for shooting and yachting; but his uncle does not care to visit Ware, and live in a corner of the house. I think he liked the people of Cardyllian and of the region round about, to suffer and resent with him. So they see his face but seldom.

Cleve Verney sat, after dinner, at an open window of Ware, with one foot on the broad window-stone, smoking his cigar and gazing across the dark blue sheet of water, whose ripples glimmered by this time in the moonlight, toward the misty wood of Malory.

Cleve Verney is a young man of accomplishment, and of talents, and of a desultory and tumultuous ambition, which sometimes engrosses him wholly, and sometimes sickens and loses its appetite. He is conceited — affecting indifference, he loves admiration. The object for the time being seizes his whole soul. The excitement of even a momentary pursuit absorbs him. He is reserved, capricious, and impetuous — knows not what self-mortification is, and has a pretty taste for dissimulation.

He is, I think, extremely handsome. I have heard ladies pronounce him fascinating. Of course, in measuring his fascinations, his proximity to a title and great estates was not forgotten; and he is as amiable as a man can be who possesses all the qualities I have described, and is selfish beside.

Now Cleve Verney was haunted, or rather possessed, for the present, by the beautiful phantom — sane or mad, saint or sinner — who had for so long, in that solemn quietude and monotony so favourable for the reception of fanciful impressions, stood or sat, Nun-like, book in hand, before him that day. So far from resisting, he encouraged this little delirium. It helped him through his solitary evening.

When his cigar was out, he still looked out toward Malory. He was cultivating his little romance. He liked the mystery of it. "Margaret — Margaret," he repeated softly. He fancied that he saw a light for a moment in the window of Malory, like a star. He could not be sure; it might be the light of a boat. Still it was an omen — the emblem of life — an answer of hope.

How very capricious all this was. Here was a young man, before whom yearly the new blown beauties of each London season passed in review — who fancied he had but to choose among them all — who had never experienced a serious passion, hardly even a passing sentiment — now strangely moved and interested by a person whom he had never spoken to — only seen — who had seemed unaffectedly unconscious of his presence; who possibly had not even seen him; of whose kindred and history he knew nothing, and between whom and himself there might stand some impassable gulf.

Cleve was in the mood to write verses, but that relief, like others, won't always answer the invocation of the sufferer. The muse is as coy as death. So instead, he wrote a line to the Rev. Isaac Dixie, of Clay Rectory, in which he said —

"My dear Dixie, — You remember when I used to call you '*Mr*. Dixie' and '*Sir*.' I conjure you by the memory of those happy days of innocence and Greek grammar, to take pity on my loneliness, and come here to Ware, where you will find me pining in solitude. Come just for a day. I know your heart is in your parish, and I shan't ask you to stay longer. The *Wave*, my cutter, is here; you used to like a sail (he knew that the Rev. Isaac Dixie suffered unutterably at sea, and loathed all nautical enjoyments), or you can stay in the house, and tumble over the books in the library. I will make you as comfortable as I can; only do come, and oblige

"Your old pupil,

"Cleve Verney.

"P.S. — I shall be leaving this *immediately*, so pray answer in person, by return. You'll get this at nine o'clock tomorrow morning, at Clay. If you take the 11·40 train to Llwynan — you see I have my "Bradshaw" by me — you will be there at four, and a fly will run you across to Cardyllian in little more than an hour, and there you will find me, expecting, at the Chancery; you know Wynne Williams's old house in Castle Street. I assure you, I really do want to see you, *particularly*, and you must not fail me. I shan't detain you a moment longer than your parish business will allow. Heavens, what a yarn have I post-scribbled!"

He walked down to the pretty little village of Ware, which consists of about a dozen and a-half of quaint little houses, and a small venerable church, situated by the road that winds through a wooded glen, and round the base of the hill by the shore of the moonlighted waters.

It was a romantic ramble. It was pleasanter, because it commanded, across the dark blue expanse, with its glimmering eddies, a misty view, now hardly distinguishable, of Malory, and pleasanter still, because his errand was connected with those tenants of old Lady Verney's of whom he was so anxious to learn *any*thing.

When Tom Sedley, with the light whiskers, merry face, and kind blue eyes, had parted company that afternoon, he walked down to the green of Cardyllian. In the middle of September there is a sort of second season there; you may then see a pretty gathering of muslins of all patterns, and silks of every hue, floating and rustling over the green, with due admixture of

"White waistcoats and black,
Blue waistcoats and gray,"

with all proper varieties of bonnet and hat — pork-pie, wideawake, Jerry, and Jim-Crow. There are nautical gentlemen, and gentlemen in Knickerbockers; fat commercial "gents" in large white waistcoats, and starched buff cravats; touring curates in spectacles and "chokers," with that smile proper to the juvenile cleric, curiously meek and pert; all sorts of persons, in short, making brief holiday, and dropping in and out of Cardyllian, some just for a day and off again in a fuss, and others dawdling away a week, or perhaps a month or two, serenely.

Its heyday of fashion has long been past and over; but though the “fast” people have gone elsewhere, it is still creditably frequented. Tom Sedley was fond of the old town. I don’t think he would have reviewed the year at its close, with a comfortable conscience, if he had not visited Cardyllian, “slow” as it certainly was, some time in its course.

It was a sunny Sunday afternoon, the green looked bright, and the shingle glittered lazily beyond it, with the estuary rippling here and there into gleams of gold, away to the bases of the glorious Welsh mountains, which rise up from the deepest purple to the thinnest gray, and with many a dim rift and crag, and wooded glen, and slope, varying their gigantic contour.

Tom Sedley, among others, showed his reverence for the Sabbath, by mounting a well brushed chimney-pot. No one, it is well established, can pray into a Jerry. The musical bell from the gray church tower hummed sweetly over the quaint old town, and the woods and hollows round about; and on a sudden, quite near him, Tom Sedley saw the friends of whom he had been in search!

The Etherage girls, as the ancient members of the family still called them, were two in number. Old Vane Etherage of Hazelden, a very pretty place, about twenty minutes’ walk from the green of Cardyllian, has been twice married. The result is, that the two girls belong to very different periods. Miss Charity is forty-five by the parish register, and Miss Agnes of the blue eyes and golden hair, is just nineteen and four months.

Both smiling after their different fashions, advanced upon Tom, who strode up to them, also smiling, with his chimney-pot in his hand.

Miss Charity of the long waist, and long thin brown face, and somewhat goggle eyes, was first up, and asked him very volubly, at least eleven kind questions, before she had done shaking his hand, all which he answered laughing, and at last, said he —

“Little Agnes, are you going to cut me? How well you look! Certainly there’s no place on earth like Cardyllian, for pretty complexions, is there?”

He turned for confirmation to the curiously brown thin countenance of Miss Charity, which smiled and nodded acquiescence. “You’re going tomorrow, you say; that's a great pity; everything looking so beautiful."

"*Everything*," acquiesced Tom Sedley, with an arch glance at Agnes, who blushed and said merrily —

"You're just the same old fool you always were; and we don't mind one word you say."

"Aggie, my dear!" said her sister, who carried down the practice of reproof from the nursery; and it was well, I suppose, that Miss Aggie had that arbitress of proprieties always beside her.

"I suppose you have no end of news to tell me. Is anyone going to be married? Is anyone dying, or anyone christened? I'll hear it all by-and-by. And who are your neighbours at Malory?"

"Oh, quite charming!" exclaimed Miss Agnes eagerly. "The most mysterious people that ever came to a haunted house. You know Malory has a ghost."

"Nonsense, child. Don't mind her, Mr. Sedley," said Miss Charity. "I *wonder* how you can talk so foolishly."

"Oh, that's nothing new. Malory's been haunted as long as *I* can remember," said Tom.

"Well, I did not think Mr. Sedley could have talked like that!" exclaimed Miss Charity.

"Oh, by Jove, I *know* it. *Everyone* knows it that ever lived here. Malory's *full* of ghosts. None but very queer people could think of living there; and, Miss Agnes, you were going to say — — "

"Yes, they are *awfully* mysterious. There's an old man who stalks about at night, like the ghost in "Hamlet," and never speaks, and there's a beautiful young lady, and a gray old woman who calls herself Anne Sheckleton. They shut themselves up so closely — you can't imagine. Some people think the old man is a maniac or a terrible culprit."

"Highly probable," said Tom; "and the old woman a witch, and the young lady a vampire."

"Well, hardly that," laughed Miss Agnes, "for they came to church to-day."

"How you *can* both talk such folly," interposed Miss Charity.

"But you know they would not let Mr. Pritchard up to the house," pleaded Miss Agnes. "Mr. Pritchard, the curate, you know" — this was to Tom Sedley— "he's a funny little man — he preached to-day — very good and zealous, and all that — and he wanted to push his way up to the house, and the cross old man they have put to keep the gate, took him by the collar, and was going to beat him. Old Captain Shrapnell says he *did* beat him with a child's cricket-bat; but *he hates* Mr. Pritchard, so I'm not sure; but, at all events, he was turned out in disgrace, and blushes and looks dignified ever since whenever Malory is mentioned. Now, everyone here knows what a good little man poor Mr. Pritchard is, so it must have been sheer hatred of religion that led to his being turned out in that way."

"But the ladies were in church, my dear Aggie; we *saw* them, Mr. Sedley, *to-day*; they were in the Malory pew."

"Oh, indeed?" said Tom Sedley, artfully; "and you saw them pretty distinctly, I dare say."

"The young lady is quite beautiful, *we* thought. I'm so sorry you were not in our seat; though, indeed, people ought not to be staring about them in church; but you would have admired her immensely."

"Oh, I saw them. They were the people nearly opposite to the Verneys' seat, in the small pew? Yes, they *were* — that is, the young lady, I mean, was perfectly lovely," said little Tom, who could not with any comfort practise a reserve.

"See, the people are beginning to hurry off to church; it must be time to go," said Charity.

So the little party walked up by the court-house into Castle Street, and turned into quaint old Church Street, walking demurely, and talking very quietly to the solemn note of the old bell.

CHAPTER V.

A VISIT TO HAZELDEN.

They all looked toward the Malory seat on taking their places in their own; but that retreat was deserted now, and remained so, as Tom Sedley at very brief intervals ascertained, throughout the afternoon service; after which, with a secret sense of disappointment, honest Sedley escorted the Etherage "girls" up the steep road that leads through the wooded glen of Hazelden to the hospitable house of old Vane Etherage.

Everyone in that part of the world knows that generous, pompous, and boisterous old gentleman. You could no more visit Cardyllian without seeing Vane Etherage, than you could visit Naples without seeing Vesuvius. He is a fine portly bust, but little more. In his waking hours he lives alternately in his Bath chair and in the great leathern easy chair in his study. He manages to shuffle very slowly, leaning upon his servant on one side, and propped on his crutch at the other, across the hall of the Cardyllian Club, which boasts about six-and-thirty members, besides visitors, and into the billiard-room, where he takes possession of the chair by the fire, and enjoys the agreeable conversation of Captain Shrapnell, hears all about the new arrivals, who they are, what screws are loose, and where, and generally all the gossip and scandal of the little commonwealth of Cardyllian.

Vane Etherage had served in the navy, and, I believe, reached the rank of captain. In Cardyllian he was humorously styled "the Admiral," when people spoke *of* him, not *to* him; for old Etherage was fiery and consequential, and a practical joke which commenced in a note from an imaginary secretary, announcing that "The Badger Hunt" would meet at Hazelden House on a certain day, and inducing hospitable preparations, for the entertainment of those nebulous sportsmen, was like to have had a sanguinary ending. It was well remembered that when young Sniggers of Sligh Farm apologised on that occasion, old Etherage had arranged with Captain Shrapnell, who was to have been his second, that the Admiral was to fight in his Bath chair — an evidence of resource and resolution which was not lost upon his numerous friends.

"How do you do, Sedley? Very glad to see you, Tom — very glad indeed, sir. You'll come tomorrow and dine; you must, indeed — and next day. You know our Welsh mutton — you do — you know it well; it's better here than in any other place in the world — in the whole world, sir — the Hazelden mutton, and, egad, you'll come here — you shall, sir — and dine here with us tomorrow; mind, you shall."

The Admiral wore a fez, from beneath which his gray hair bushed out rather wildly, and he was smoking through an enormous pipe as Tom Sedley entered his study, accompanied by the ladies.

"He says he's to go away tomorrow," said Miss Charity, with an upbraiding look at Sedley.

"Pooh — nonsense — not *he* — not *you*, Tom — not a bit, sir. We won't let you. Girls, we won't *allow* him to go. Eh? — No — no — you dine here tomorrow, *and* next day."

"You're very kind, sir; but I promised, if I am still in Cardyllian tomorrow, to run over to Ware, and dine with Verney."

"*What* Verney?"

"Cleve Verney."

"D —— him."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Miss Charity, grimly.

"Boh! — I *hate* him — I hate *all* the Verneys," bawled old Vane Etherage, as if hating were a duty and a generosity.

"Oh — no, papa — you *know* you don't — that would be *extremely wicked*," said Miss Charity, with that severe superiority with which she governed the Admiral.

"Begad, you're always telling me I'm wicked — and we know where the *wicked* go — that's catechism, I believe — so I'd like to know where's the difference between that and d — ing a fellow?" exclaimed the portly bust, and blew off his wrath with a testy laugh.

"I think we had better put off our bonnets and coats? — The language is becoming rather strong — and the tobacco," said Miss Charity, with dry dignity, to her sister, leaving the study as she did so.

"I thought it might be that *Kiffyn* Verney — the uncle fellow — Honourable Kiffyn Verney — *dis*-honourable, *I* call him — that old dog, sir, he's no better than a cheat — and I'd be glad of an opportunity to tell him so to his face, sir — you have no *idea*, sir, how he has behaved to me!"

"He has the character of being a very honourable, sir — I'm sorry you think so differently," said honest Tom Sedley, who always stood up for his friends, and their kindred— "and Cleve, I've known from my childhood, and I assure you, sir, a franker or more generous fellow I don't suppose there is on earth."

"I know nothing about the jackanape, except that he's nephew of his roguish uncle," said the florid old gentleman with the short high nose and double chin. "He wants to take up Llanderis, and he *shan't have* it. He's under covenant to renew the lease, and the devil of it is, that between me and Wynne Williams we have put the lease astray — and I can't find it — nor *he* either — but it will turn up — I don't care twopence about it — but no one shall humbug me — I won't be gammoned, sir, by all the Verneys in England. *Stuff* — sir!"

Then the conversation took a happier turn. The weather was sometimes a little squally with the Admiral — but not often — genial and boisterous — on the whole sunny and tolerably serene — and though he sometimes threatened high and swore at his servants, they knew it did not mean a great deal, and liked him.

People who lived all the year round in Cardyllian, which from November to May, every year, is a solitude, fall into those odd ways and little self-indulgences which gradually metamorphose men of the world into humorists and grotesques. Given a sparse population, and difficult intercommunication, which in effect constitute solitude, and you have the conditions of barbarism. Thus it was that Vane Etherage had grown uncouth to a degree that excited the amazement of old contemporaries who happened, from time to time, to look in upon his invalided retirement at Cardyllian.

The ladies and Tom Sedley, in the drawingroom, talked very merrily at tea, while old Vane Etherage, in his study, with the door between the rooms wide open, amused himself with a nautical volume and his terrestrial globe.

"So," said Miss Agnes, "you admired the Malory young lady — Margaret, our maid says, she is called — very much to-day?"

"I did, by Jove. Didn't you?" said Tom, well pleased to return to the subject.

"Yes," said Agnes, looking down at her spoon— "Yes, I admired her; that is, her features are very regular; she's what I call extremely handsome; but there are prettier girls."

"*Here* do you mean?"

"Yes — here."

"And who are they?"

"Well, I don't say here *now*; but I do think those Miss Dartmores, for instance, who were here last year, and who used to wear those blue dresses, were decidedly prettier. The heroine of Malory, whom you have fallen in love with, seems to me to want animation."

"Why, she couldn't show a great deal of animation over the Litany," said Tom.

"I did not see her then; I happened to be praying myself during the Litany," said Miss Agnes, recollecting herself.

"It's more than *I* was," said Tom.

"You ought not to talk that way, Mr. Sedley. It isn't *nice*. I wonder you can," said Miss Charity.

"I would not say it, of course, to strangers," said Tom. "But then, I'm so intimate here — and it's really true, that is, I mean, it was to-day."

"I wonder what you go to church for," said Miss Charity.

"Well, of course, you know, it's to pray; but I look at the bonnets a little, also; every fellow does. By Jove, if they'd only say truth, I'm certain the clergymen peep — I often saw them. There's that little fellow, the Rev. Richard Pritchard, the curate, you know — I'd swear I've seen that fellow watching you, Agnes, through the chink in the reading-desk door, while the sermon was going on; and I venture to say he did not hear a word of it."

"You ought to tell the rector, if you really saw that," said Miss Charity, severely.

"Pray do no such thing," entreated Agnes; "a pleasant situation for me!"

"Certainly, if Mr. Pritchard behaves himself as you describe," said Miss Charity; "but I've been for hours shut up in the same room with him — sometimes here, and sometimes at the school — about the children, and the widows' fund, and the parish charities, and I never observed the slightest levity; but you are joking, I'm sure."

"I'm *not*, upon my honour. I don't say it's the least harm. I don't see how he can help it; I know if *I* were up in the air — in a reading-desk, with a good chink in the door, where I thought no one could see me, and old

Doctor Splayfoot preaching his pet sermon over my head — *wouldn't* I peep? — that's all."

"Well, I really think, if he makes a habit of it, I *ought* to speak to Doctor Splayfoot. I think it's my *duty*," said Miss Charity, sitting up very stiffly, as she did when she spoke of duty; and when once the notion of a special duty got into her head, her inflexibility, as Tom Sedley and her sister Agnes knew, was terrifying.

"For mercy's sake, my dear Charry, do think of *me*! If you tell Doctor Splayfoot he'll be certain to tell it all to Wynne Williams and Doctor Lyster, and Price Apjohn, and every creature in Cardyllian will know everything about it, and a great deal more, before two hours; and once for all, if that ridiculous story is set afloat, into the church door I'll never set my foot again."

Miss Agnes' pretty face had flushed crimson, and her lip quivered with distress.

"How *can* you be such a fool, Aggie! I'll only say it was at *our seat* — and no one can possibly tell which it was at — you or me; and I'll certainly tell Dr. Splayfoot that Mr. Sedley saw it."

"And I'll tell the Doctor," said Sedley, who enjoyed the debate immensely, "that I neither saw nor said any such thing."

"I don't think, Thomas Sedley, you'd do anything so excessively wicked!" exclaimed Miss Charity, a little fiercely.

"Try me," said Tom, with an exulting little laugh.

"Every *gentleman* tells the truth," thrust she.

"Except where it makes mischief," parried Tom, with doubtful morality and another mischievous laugh.

"Well, I suppose I had better say nothing of *Christianity*. But what *you* do is your own affair! *my* duty I'll perform. I shall think it over; and I shan't be ruffled by any folly intended to annoy me." Miss Charity's thin brown cheeks had flushed to a sort of madder crimson. Excepting these flashes of irritability, I can't charge her with many human weaknesses. "I'll not say *who* he looked at — I've promised that; but unless I change my present opinion, Dr. Splayfoot shall hear the whole thing tomorrow. I think in a clergyman any such conduct in church is *unpardonable*. The effect on other people is positively ruinous. *You*, for instance, would not have talked about such things in the light you do, if you had not been encouraged in it, by seeing a clergyman conducting himself so."

"Mind, you've *promised* poor little Agnes, you'll not bring her into the business, no matter what *I* do," said Sedley.

"I have, certainly."

"Well, I'll stay in Cardyllian tomorrow, and I'll see Doctor Splayfoot." Sedley was buttoning his coat and pulling on his gloves, with a wicked smile on his goodhumoured face. "And I'll tell him that you think the curate ogles you through a hole in the reading-desk. That *you* like *him*, and *he's* very much gone about *you*; and that you wish the affair brought to a point; and that you're going to appeal to him — Doctor Splayfoot — to use his authority either to affect *that*, or to stop the ogling. I will, upon my honour!"

"And I shall speak to papa to prevent it," said Miss Charity, who was fierce and literal.

"And that will bring about a duel, and he'll be shot in his Bath chair, and I shall be hanged" — old Vane Etherage, with his spectacles on, was plodding away serenely at the little table by the fire, over his *Naval Chronicle*— "and Pritchard will be deprived of his curacy, and you'll go mad, and Agnes will drown herself like Ophelia, and a nice little tragedy you'll have brought about. Good night; I'll not disturb him" — he glanced toward the unconscious Admiral— "I'll see you both tomorrow, after I've spoken to the Rector." He kissed his hand, and was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

MALORY BY MOONLIGHT.

When Tom Sedley stepped out from the glass door on the gravel walk, among the autumn flowers and the evergreens in the pleasant moonlight, it was just nine o’clock, for in that primitive town and vicinage people keep still wonderfully early hours.

It is a dark and lonely walk, down the steep Hazelden Road, by the side of the wooded glen, from whose depths faintly rises the noise of the mill-stream. The path leads you down the side of the glen, with dense forest above and below you; the rocky steep ascending at the left hand, the wooded precipice descending into utter darkness at your right, and beyond that, rising black against the sky, the distant side of the wooded ravine. Cheery it was to emerge from the close overhanging trees, and the comparative darkness, upon the high road to Cardyllian, which follows the sweep of the estuary to the high street of the town, already quiet as at midnight.

The moon shone so broad and bright, the landscape looked so strange, and the air was so frosty and pleasant, that Tom Sedley could not resist the temptation to take a little walk which led him over the Green, and up the steep path overhanging the sea, from which you command so fine a view of the hills and headlands of the opposite side, and among other features of the landscape, of Malory, lying softly in its dark and misty woodlands.

Moonlight, distance, and the hour, aided the romance of my friend Tom Sedley, who stood in the still air and sighed toward that antique house.

With arms folded, his walking-cane grasped in his right hand, and passed, sword-fashion, under his left arm, I know not what martial and chivalric aspirations concerning death and combat rose in his goodnatured heart, for in some temperaments the sentiment of love is mysteriously associated with the combative, and our homage to the gentler sex connects itself magnanimously with images of wholesale assault and battery upon the other. Perhaps if he could have sung, a stave or two might have relieved his mind; or even had he been eloquent in the language of sentiment. But his vocabulary, unhappily, was limited, and remarkably prosaic, and not even having an appropriate stanza by rote, he was fain to betake himself to a cigar, smoking which he at his leisure walked down the hill toward Malory.

Halfway down, he seated himself upon the dwarf wall, at the roadside, and by the ivied stem of a huge old tree, smoked at his ease, and sighed now and then.

"I can't understand it — it is like some confounded witchcraft," said he. "I *can't* get her out of my head."

I dare say it was about the same time that his friend Cleve Verney was performing, though not with so sublime an enthusiasm, his romantic devotions in the same direction, across the water from Ware.

As he stood and gazed, he thought he saw a figure standing near the water's edge on the shingle that makes a long curve in front of Malory.

If a living figure, it was very still. It looked gray, nearly white, in the moonlight. Was there an upright shaft of stone there, or a post to moor the boats by? He could not remember.

He walked slowly down the road. "By Jove! I think it's moving," he said aloud, pulling up all at once and lowering his cigar. "No, it *isn't* moving, but it *did* move, I *think* — yes, it has changed its ground a little — hasn't it? Or is it only my stand-point that's changed?"

He was a good deal nearer now, and it did look much more like a human figure — tall and slight, with a thin gray cloak on — but he could not yet be *quite* certain. Was there not a resemblance in the proportions — tall and slight? The uncertainty was growing intense; there was a delightful confusion of conjecture. Tom Sedley dropped his cigar, and hastened forward with an instinctive stealthiness in his eagerness to arrive before this figure — if such it were — should be scared away by his approach.

He was now under the shadow of the tall trees that overhang the outer wall of Malory, and cast their shadows some way down upon the sloping shore, near the edge of which a tall female figure was undoubtedly standing, with her feet almost touching the ripple of the water, and looking steadfastly in the direction of the dim headland of Pendillion, which at the far side guards the entrance of the estuary.

In the wall of Malory, at some three hundred yards away from the gate, is a small door, a little sally-port that opens a nearly direct access from the house to the rude jetty where the boats are sometimes moored. This little door stood now wide open, and through it the figure had of course emerged.

Tom Sedley now for the first time began to feel a little embarrassed. The general privacy of the place, the fact that the jetty, and in point of law the strand itself, here, belonged to Malory, from which the private door which still stood open, showed that the lady had emerged — all these considerations made him feel as if he were guilty of an impertinence, and very nearly of a trespass.

The lady stood quite still, looking across the water. Tom Sedley was upon the road that skirts the wall of Malory, in the shadow of the great trees. It would not have done to walk straight across the shingle to the spot where the lady stood, neither could he place himself so as to intercept her return to the doorway, directly so, as a less obvious stratagem, he made a detour, and sauntering along the water's edge like a man intent solely on the picturesque, with a beating heart he approached the female, who maintained her pose quite movelessly until he approached within a few steps.

Then she turned, suddenly, revealing an old and almost agonized face, that looked, in the intense moonlight, white, and fixed as if cut in stone. There is something ludicrous in the sort of shock which Tom Sedley experienced. He stood staring at the old lady with an expression which, if she had apprehended it, would not have flattered her feminine self-esteem, if any of that good quality remained to her.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the old woman, with a nervous eagerness, drawing near. "But pray, can *you* see a sail in that direction, a yawl, sir, they call it, just *there*?" — she pointed— "I fancied about two miles beyond that vessel that lies at anchor *there*? I can't see it now, sir, can *you*?"

She had come so close that Sedley could see not only the deep furrows, but the finely etched wrinkles about the large eyes that gazed on him, and from him to the sea, with an imploring stare.

"There's no sail, ma'am, between us and Pendillion," said Sedley, having first raised his hat deferentially; for did not this strange old lady with her gray mantle drawn over her head, nevertheless, represent Malory, and was not Malory saddened and glorified by the presence of that beautiful being whom he had told himself a thousand times since morning service, he never, *never* could forget?

“Ha, ha! I thought I saw it, exactly, sir, in *that* direction; *pray* look more carefully, sir, my old eyes tire, and fail me.”

“No, ma’am, positively nothing there. How long ago is it since you first saw it?”

“Ten — twenty — minutes, it must be.”

“A yawl will run a good way in that time, ma’am,” said Tom with a little shake of his head, and a smile. “The yawl they had at Ware last year would make eight knots an hour in this breeze, light as it is. She might have been up to Bryll by this time, or down to Pendrewist, but there’s no sail, ma’am, either way.”

“Oh! sir, are you very sure?”

“Quite sure, ma’am. No sail in sight, except that brig just making the head of Pendillion, and that can’t be the sail you saw, for she wasn’t in sight twenty minutes since. There’s nothing more, ma’am, except boats at anchor.”

“Thank you, sir,” said the lady, still looking across the water, and with a deep sigh. “No, I suppose there’s none. It sometimes happens to me — fancy, I suppose, and long expectation, from my window, looking out. It’s a clear view, between the trees, across the bay to Pendillion; my eyes tire, I think; and so I fancy I see it. Knowing, that is, feeling so very sure, it will come again. Another disappointment for a foolish old woman. I sometimes think it’s all a dream.” She had turned and was now stumbling over the large loose stones toward the door. “Foolish dreams — foolish head — foolish old head, yet, sir, it *may* be that which goes away may come back, all except life. I’ve been looking out that way,” and she turned and moved her hand towards the distant headlands. “You see nothing?”

“No *sail*, ma’am,” answered Tom.

“No, no sail,” she repeated to the shingle under her feet, as she picked her steps again homeward.

“A little longer — another wait; wait patiently. Oh! God, how slowly years and months go over!”

“May I see you to the door, ma’am?” asked Tom Sedley, prosaically. The old lady, thinking, I dare say, of other things, made him no answer — a silence which he accepted as permission, and walked on beside her, not knowing what to say next, and terribly anxious to hit upon something, and try to found an acquaintance. The open door supplied him.

"Charming place this Cardyllian, ma'am. I believe no one ever was robbed in it. They leave their doors open half the night, just like that."

"Do they, indeed?" said she. I think she had forgotten her companion altogether in the interval. "I don't remember. It's fifteen years and upwards since I was there. I live here, at Malory." She nodded, and raised her eyes to his face as she spoke.

Suddenly she stopped, and looked at him more earnestly in silence for some seconds, and then said she —

"Sir, will you forgive me? Are you related to the Verneys?"

"No, I haven't that honour," said he, smiling. "I *know* Cleve Verney very well, and a very good fellow he is; but we're not connected; my name is Sedley — Thomas Sedley."

"Sedley!" she repeated once or twice, still looking at him, "I recollect the name. No — no connection, I dare say, Cleve; and how *is* Cleve?"

"Very well; he's at Ware, now, for a few days."

"Ah! I dare say, and very well; a pretty boy — very pretty; but not like — no, not the least."

"I've heard people say he's very like what his father was," said Tom.

"Oh! *yes*, I think so; there *is* a likeness," acquiesced she.

"His father's been dead a long time, you know?"

"I know; yes. Cleve is at Oxford or Cambridge by this time?" she continued.

Tom Sedley shook his head and smiled a little.

"Cleve has done with all that ever so long. He's in the House of Commons now, and likely to be a swell there, making speeches, and all that."

"I know — I know. I had forgot how long it is since; he was a clever boy, wild, and talkative; yes, yes, he'll do for Parliament, I suppose, and be a great man, some day, there. There was no resemblance though; and you, sir, are like him, he was so handsome — no one so handsome."

Tom Sedley smiled. He fancied he was only amused. But I am sure he was also pleased.

"And I don't know. I can make out nothing. No one can. There's a picture. I think they'd burn it, if they knew. It is drawn in chalks by a French artist; they colour so beautifully. It hangs in my room. I pray before it, every morning, for him."

The old lady moaned, with her hands folded together, and still looking steadfastly in his face.

"They'd burn it, I think, if they knew there was a picture. I was always told they were a cruel family. Well, I don't know, I forgive him; I've forgiven him long ago. You are very like the picture, and even more like what I remember him. The picture was taken just when he came of age. He was twenty-seven when I first saw him; he was brilliant, a beautiful creature, and when I looked in his face I saw the sorrow that has never left me. You are wonderfully like, sir; but there's a difference. You're not so handsome." Here was a blow to honest Tom Sedley, who again thought he was only amused, but was really chagrined.

"There is goodness and kindness in your face; his had little of that, nothing soft in it, but everything brilliant and interesting; and yet you are wonderfully like."

She pressed her hand on her thin bosom.

"The wind grows cold. A pain shoots through me while I look at you, sir. I feel as if I were speaking to a spirit, God help me! I have said more to you tonight, than I have spoken for ten years before; forgive me, sir, and thank you, very much."

She turned from him again, took one long look at the distant headland, and then, with a deep sigh, almost a sob, she hastened towards the door. He followed her.

"Will you permit me to see you to the house?" he pleaded, with a benevolence I fear not quite disinterested. She was by this time at the door, from which with a gesture, declining his offer, she gently waved him back, and disappeared within it, without another word. He heard the key turned in the lock, and remained without, as wise with respect to his particular quest as he had arrived.

CHAPTER VII.

A VIEW FROM THE REFECTORY WINDOW.

The old discoloured wall of Malory, that runs along the shore overshadowed by grand old timber, that looks to me darker than any other grove, is seven feet high, and as he could see neither through nor over it, and could not think of climbing it, after a few seconds spent in staring at the gray door, Tom Sedley turned about and walked down to the little hillock that stands by the roadside, next the strand, and from the top of this he gazed, during an entire cigar, upon the mullioned windows of Malory, and was gratified by one faint gleam of a passing candle from a gallery window.

"That's a nice old woman, odd as she is; she looks quite like a lady; she's certainly not the woman we saw in church to-day; how well she looked; what a nice figure, that time, as she stood looking from the shore; that cloak thing is loose to be sure; but, by Jove, she might have been a girl almost; and what large eyes she has got, and a well-shaped face. She must have been quite charming, about a hundred years ago; she's not the mother: she's too old; a grand-aunt, perhaps; what a long talk we had, and I such a fool, listening to all that rubbish, and never getting in a word about the people, that peerless creature!"

His walk home to Cardyllian was desultory and interrupted. I should not like to risk my credit by relating how often he halted on his way, and how long, to refresh his eyes with the dim outlines of the trees and chimneys of Malory; and how, very late and melancholy, and abstracted, he reached his crib in the Verney Arms.

Early next morning, in pursuance of a clever idea, Tom Sedley made, I admit, his most picturesque and becoming toilet. It consisted of his black velvet knickerbocker suit, with those refined jack-boots of shining leather, and the most charming jerry that had ever appeared in Cardyllian, and away he marched over the hill, while the good people of the town were champing their muffins and sipping their tea, to the back gate of Malory.

It stood half open, and with as careless a boldness as he could assume, in he went and walked confidently up the straight farmyard lane, girt with high thorn hedges. Here, bribing a rustic who showed symptoms of churlishness, with half-a-crown, he was admitted into a sort of farmyard, under pretext of examining the old monastic chapel and refectory, now used as a barn, and some other relics of the friary, which tourists were wont to admire.

From the front of the refectory there is a fine view of the distant mountains. Also, as Tom Sedley recollected, a foreground view, under the trees, in front of the hall-door, and there, with a sudden bound at his heart, he beheld the two ladies who had yesterday occupied the Malory pew, the old and the young, busy about the flowerbed, with garden gauntlets on, and trowel in hand.

They were chatting together cheerily enough, but he could not hear what they said. The young lady now stood up from her work, in a dress which looked to him like plain holland.

The young lady had pushed her hat a little back, and stood on the grass, at the edge of the flowers, with her trowel glittering in the early sun, in her slender right hand, which rested upon her left; her pretty right foot was advanced a little on the short grass, and showed just its tip, over the edge of the flowerbed. A homely dress and rustic appliances. But, oh! that oval, beautiful face!

Tom Sedley — the “peeping Tom” of this story — from his deep monastic window, between the parting of the tall trees, looked down upon this scene in a breathless rapture. From the palmy days of the Roman Pantheon down, was ever Flora so adored?

From under his Gothic arch, in his monkish shade, Tom could have stood, he fancied, for ever, gazing as friar has seldom gazed upon his pictured saint, on the supernatural portrait which his enthusiasm worshipped.

The young lady, as I have described her, looking down upon her old companion, said something with a little nod, and smiled; then she looked up at the tree tops from where the birds were chirping; so Tom had a fair view of her wonderful face, and though he felt himself in imminent danger of detection, he could not move. Then her eyes with a sidelong glance, dropped on the window where he stood, and passed on instantly.

With the instinct which never deceives us, he felt her glance touch him, and knew that he was detected. The young lady turned quietly, and looked seaward for a few moments. Tom relieved his suspense with a sigh; he hoped he might pass muster for a tourist, and that the privileges of such visitors had not been abridged by the recluses.

The young lady then quietly turned and resumed her work, as if nothing had happened; but, I think, she said something to her elderly companion, for that slim lady, in a Tweed shawl, closely brooched across her breast, stood up, walked a step or two backward upon the grass, and looked straight up at the window, with the inquisitive frown of a person a little dazzled or near-sighted.

Honest Tom Sedley, who was in a rather morbid state all this morning, felt his heart throb again, and drum against his ribs, as he affected to gaze in a picturesque absorption upon the distant headlands.

The old lady, on the other hand, having distinctly seen in the deep-carved panel of that antique wall, the full-length portrait of our handsome young friend, Tom Sedley, in his killing knickerbocker suit of black velvet, with his ivory-headed cane in his hand, and that “stunning” jerry which so exactly suited his countenance, and of which he believed no hatter but his own possessed the pattern, or could produce a similar masterpiece.

The old lady with her hand raised to fend off the morning sun that came flickering through the branches on her wrinkled forehead, and her light gray eyes peering on him, had no notion of the awful power of her gaze upon that “impudent young man.”

With all his might Tom Sedley gazed at the Welsh headlands, without even winking, while he felt the basilisk eye of the old spinster in gray Tweed upon him. So intense was his stare, that old Pendillion at last seemed to nod his mighty head, and finally to submerge himself in the sea. When he ventured a glance downward, he saw Miss Anne Sheckleton with quick steps entering the house, while the young lady had recommenced working at a more distant flowerbed, with the same quiet diligence.

It was to be feared that the old lady was taking steps for his expulsion. He preferred anticipating her measures, and not caring to be caught in the window, left the refectory, and walked down the stone stairs, whistling and tapping the wall with the tip of his cane.

To him, as the old play-books say, entered from the side next the house, and just as he set the sole of his resplendent boot upon the paving-stones, a servant. Short, strong, and surly was the man. He did not seem disposed for violence, however, for he touched an imaginary hatbrim as he came up, and informed Mr. Sedley, who was properly surprised and pained to hear it, that he had in fact committed a trespass; that since it had been let, the place was no longer open to the inspection of tourists; and, in short, that he was requested to withdraw.

Tom Sedley was all alacrity and regret. He had never been so polite to a groom in all his life. The man followed him down the back avenue, to see him out, which at another time would have stirred his resentment; and when he held the gate open for him to emerge, Tom gave him no less than three half-crowns — a prodigality whereat his eyes opened, if not his heart, and he made a gruff apology for the necessities imposed by duty, and Tom interrupted him with —

"Quite right, perfectly right! you could do nothing else. I hope the la —— your master is not vexed. You must say I told you to mention how very much pained I was at having made such a mistake. Say that I, Mr. Sedley, regret it very much, and beg to apologise. Pray don't forget. Good morning; and I'm very sorry for having given *you* so much trouble — this long walk."

This tenderness his bow-legged conductor was also in a mood to receive favourably. In fact, if he had not told him his name was Sedley, he might have settled affirmatively the question at that moment before his mind — whether the intruder from whom silver flowed so naturally and refreshingly might not possibly be the Prince of Wales himself, who had passed through the village of Ware, only seven miles away, three weeks before.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NIGHT SAIL.

Poor Tom Sedley! The little excitement of parting with the bull-necked keeper of his "garden of beauty", over, his spirits sank. He could not act the unconscious tourist again, and re-commit the premeditated mistake of the morning. His exclusion was complete.

Tom Sedley paid a visit that day at Hazelden, and was depressed, and dull, and absent to such a degree, that Miss Charity Etherage, after he had gone away, canvassed the matter very earnestly, and wondered whether he was quite well, and hoped he had not had bad news from London.

I don't know how Tom got over all that day; but at about four o'clock, having paid his penny at the toll-gate of the pier of Cardyllian, he was pacing up and down that breezy platform, and discussing with himself the possibility of remaining for another Sunday, on the chance of again seeing the Malory ladies in church. Lifting up his eyes, in his meditation, he saw a cutter less than a mile away, making swiftly for the pierhead, stooping to the breeze as she flew, and beating up the spray in sparkling clouds from her bows. His practised eye recognised at a glance the *Wave*, the victorious yacht of Cleve Verney. With this breeze it was a run without a tack from Ware jetty.

In less than five minutes she furled her sails, and dropped anchor close to the pier stair, and Cleve Verney in another minute stepped upon it from his punt.

"You're to come back in her, to Ware, this evening," said he, as they shook hands. "I'm so glad I've found you. I've to meet a friend at the Verney Arms, but our talk won't take very long; and how have you been amusing yourself all day? Rather slow, isn't it?"

Tom Sedley told his story.

"Well, and what's the *name*?" inquired Cleve.

"I can't tell; they don't know at the hotel; the Etherages don't know. I asked Castle Edwards, and *he* doesn't know either," said Sedley.

"Yes, but the fellow, the servant, who turned you out at Malory — — "

"He did not turn me out. I was *going*," interrupted Tom Sedley.

"Well, who *saw* you out? You made him a present; he'd have told you, of course. *Did* he?"

"I didn't ask him."

"Come, that's being very delicate indeed! All I can say is, if I were as spoony as you are, on that girl, I'd have learned all about her long ago. It's nothing to me; but if you find out her name, I know two or three fellows in town who know everything about everybody, and I'll make out the whole story — that is, if she's anybody."

"By Jove! that's very odd. There he *is*, just gone into the Golden Lion, that groom, that servant, that Malory man," exclaimed Tom Sedley very eagerly, and staring hard at the open door of the quaint little pot-house.

"Well, go; give him a pound, it's well worth it," laughed Cleve. "I'm serious, if you want to learn it; no fellow like that can resist a pound; and if *you* tell me the name, I'll make you out all the rest, I really will, when we get to town. There, don't let him get off, and you'll find me at the Verney Arms."

So saying, Cleve nodding his irresolute friend toward the Golden Lion, walked swiftly away to meet the Reverend Isaac Dixie. But Dixie was not at the Chancery; only a letter, to say that "most unhappily" that morning, Clay Rectory was to undergo an inspection by a Commissioner of Dilapidations; but that, D.V., he would place himself next day, at the appointed hour, at his honoured pupil's disposal.

"Those shovel-hatted martinets! they never allow a minute for common sense, or anything useful — always pottering over their clerical drill and pipeclay," said Cleve, who, when an idea once entered his mind, pursued it with a terrible concentration, and hated an hour's delay.

So out he came disappointed, and joined Sedley near the Golden Lion.

They said little for a time, but walked on, side by side, and found themselves sauntering along the road toward Malory together.

"Well, Sedley, I forgot, — what about the man? Did he tell you anything?"

"I do believe if a fellow once allows a girl to get into his head, ever so little, he's in a sort of way drunk — worse than drunk — systematically foolish," said honest Sedley, philosophizing. "I've been doing nothing but idiotic things ever since church time yesterday."

"Well, but what did he say?"

"He took the pound, and devil a thing he said. He wouldn't tell anything about them. I give you leave to laugh at me. I know I'm the greatest ass on earth, and I think he's the ugliest brute I ever saw, and the most uncivil; and, by Jove, if I stay here much longer, I think he'll get all my money from me. He doesn't ask for it, but I go on giving it to him; I can't help it; the beast!"

"Isn't there a saying about a sage, or something and his money being soon parted?" asked Cleve. "I think if I were so much gone about a girl as you are, and on such easy terms with that fellow, and tipped him so handsomely, I'd have learned her name, at least, before now."

"I can't; everything goes wrong with me. Why should I risk my reason, and fall in love with the moon? The girl wouldn't look at me; by Jove, she'll never even *see* me; and it's much better so, for nothing can possibly come of it, but pain to me, and fun to every one else. The late train does not stop at our station. I can't go tonight; but, by Jove, I'll be off in the morning. I *will*. Don't you think I'm right, Cleve?"

Tom Sedley stopped short, and faced his friend — who was, in most matters, his oracle — earnestly laying his hand upon his arm. Cleve laughed at his vehemence, for he knew Tom's impulsive nature, his generous follies, and terrible impetuosity, and, said he— "Right, Tom; always a philosopher! Nothing like the radical cure, in such a case, absence. If the cards won't answer, try the dice, if they won't do, try the balls. I'm afraid this is a bad venture; put your heart to sea in a sieve! No, Tom, that precious freightage is for a more substantial craft. I suppose you have seen your last of the young lady, and it would be a barren fib of friendship to say that I believe you have made any impression. Therefore, save yourself, fly, and try what absence will do, and work and play, and eating and drinking, and sleeping abundantly in a distant scene, to dissipate the fumes of your intoxication, steal you away from the enchantress, and restore you to yourself. Therefore I echo — go."

"I'm sure you think it, though you're half joking," said Tom Sedley.

"Well, let us come on. I've half a mind to go up myself and have a peep at the refectory," said Cleve.

"To what purpose?"

"Archæology," said Cleve.

"If you go in there, after what occurred this morning, by Jove, *I*'ll not wait for you," said Sedley.

"Well, come along; there's no harm, I suppose, in passing by. The Queen's highway, I hope, isn't shut up," answered Verney.

Sedley sighed, looked towards Malory, and not being in a mood to resist, walked on toward the enchanted forest and castle, by his companion's side.

When they came by the dark and narrow cross-road that skirts the southern side of Malory to the farmyard gate, nailed on its pier, on a square bit of board, in fresh black and white paint, they read the following words: —

Notice.

No admission at this gate to any but servants or others employed at Malory.

Any person found trespassing within the walls will be prosecuted according to law.

— September, 18 — .

When the young men, in a momentary silence, read this warning, the ingenuous countenance of Tom Sedley flushed crimson to the very roots of his hair, and Cleve Verney was seized with a fit of laughter that grew more and more violent the more grave and reproachful grew Tom Sedley's aspect.

"Well, Tom, I think, if we have any dignity left, we had better turn our backs upon this inhospitable refectory, and seek comfort elsewhere. By Jove! a pretty row you must have made up there this morning to oblige the governor to declare the place in a state of siege, and mount his artillery."

"Come away, Cleve; that is, as soon as you've done laughing at that board. Of course, you knew as well as I do, that my coming in, and looking as, I hope, any gentleman might, at that stupid old barn, this morning, could not possibly be the cause of that offensive notice. If you think it is pointed at me, of course, it's more amusing, but if not, hang me if I can see the joke."

Tom Sedley was out of spirits, and a little testy, and very silent all the way back to Cardyllian. He refused Cleve's invitation to Ware. He made up his mind to return to London in the morning; and this being his last evening in this part of the world, he must spend it at Hazelden.

So these young gentlemen dined together at the Verney Arms, and it grew dark as they sat by the open window at their wine, and the moon got up and silvered the distant peaks of shadowy mountains, and these companions grew silent and dreamy as they might in the spell of distant music.

But the people of Hazelden kept early hours, and Tom Sedley suddenly recollected that he must go. They parted, therefore, excellent friends, for Sedley had no suspicion that Cleve was his rival, and Cleve could afford to be amused at Sedley's rivalry.

When Verney got on board there was a light breeze. "We'll run down toward Penruthyn Priory," said he; and round went the cutter, leaning with the breeze, and hissing and snorting through the gentle swell as she flew on towards the headland on which stands that pretty monastic ruin.

She glided into the black shadow cast by the solemn wall of cloud that now hid the moon from sight, away from the hundred star-like lights of Cardyllian, flying swiftly backward on the left, close under the shapeless blackness of the hill, that rises precipitously from the sea, and over which lies the path from the town to Malory, and onward by the wooded grounds of that old mansion, now an indistinguishable mass of darkness, whose outline was hardly visible against the sky.

I dare say, the thought of crossing the lights of these windows, had its share in prompting this nautical freak, and towards these Cleve's gaze was turned, when, on a sudden, the man looking out at the bows shouted "Starboard;" but before the boat had time to feel the helm, the end of the cutter's boom struck the mast of a small boat; a shout from several voices rose suddenly, and was almost instantaneously far behind. Round went the yacht; they hailed the boat.

"She's lost her mast, I think," said one of Cleve's men.

"D —— you, where are your lights?" shouted a stern, fierce voice.

"No one overboard?" cried Cleve.

"No, no. You'll be the *Wave*, sure? Mr. Cleve Verney, from Ware?" replied a different voice.

"Who are these fellows, do you know?" asked Cleve of his men.

"That will be Christmass Owen, sir."

"Oh!" exclaimed Cleve. "And the other's the old gentleman from Malory?"

"Well, I think 'twill be him, sure."

In another minute the punt of the yacht was alongside the boat, with a message from Cleve, inviting the old gentleman on board, and offering to put him ashore wherever he liked best.

Shortly and grimly the courtesy was refused. The wrath of the old man, however, seemed to have subsided, and he gathered himself within the folds of his silence again. All had passed in a darkness like that of Styx. A dense screen of cloud had entirely hid the moon; and though so near, Cleve could not see the old man of Malory, about whom he was curious, with a strange and even tender sort of curiosity, which, certainly, no particular graciousness on his part had invited. In a few minutes more the boat, with the aid of another spar, was on her course again, and the *Wave* more than a mile away on hers.

CHAPTER IX.

THE REVEREND ISAAC DIXIE.

At five o'clock next day, Cleve Verney was again in Cardyllian.

Outside "The Chancery" stood a "fly," only just arrived. The Reverend Isaac Dixie had come only a minute or two before, and was waiting in the chamber which was still called the state room.

The room is long and panelled with oak, and at the further end is the fireplace. The ceiling above the cornice slopes at each side with the roof, so as to give it quite a chapel-like effect; a high carved oak mantelpiece, and a carved wainscotting embedding in its panels a symmetrical system of cupboards, closed the perspective, and, as Cleve entered at the door in the further wall, gave effect to the solitary figure of the Reverend Isaac Dixie, who was standing with his back to the fireplace on the threadbare hearthrug, waiting, with an angelic smile, and beating time to a sacred melody, I am willing to believe, with his broad flat foot.

This clerical gentleman looked some six or seven and forty years old, rather tall than otherwise, broad, bland, and blue-chinned, smiling, gaitered, and single-breasted.

"Capital place to read out the Ten Commandments," exclaimed Cleve. "Glad to see you, old Dixie. It's a long time since we met."

The clergyman stepped forward, his chin a little advanced, his head a little on one side, smiling rosily with nearly closed eyes, and with a broad hand expanded to receive his former pupil's greeting.

"I've obeyed the summons, you see; punctually, I hope. Delighted, my dear, distinguished young pupil, to meet you, and congratulate you on your brilliant successes, delighted, my dear Cleve," murmured the divine, in a mild rapture of affection.

"That's not so neat as the old speech, Dixie; don't you remember?" said Cleve, nevertheless shaking his great soft red hand kindly enough. "What was it? Yes, you were to be my *tutamen*, and I your *dulce decus*. Wasn't that it?"

"Ha, yes, I may have said it; a little classic turn, you know; ha, ha! not altogether bad — not altogether? We have had many agreeable conversations — colloquies — you and I, Mr. Verney, together, in other and very happy days," said the clergyman, with a tender melancholy smile, while his folded hands faintly smoothed one another over as if in a dream of warm water and washballs.

"Do you remember the day I shied that awful ink-bottle at your head? by Jove, it was as large as a tea-pot. If I had hit you that time, Dixie, I don't think we'd ever have found a mitre to fit your head."

"Arch, arch — ha, ha! dear me! yes — I had forgot that — yes, quite — you were always an arch boy, Cleve. Always arch, Mr. Verney.".

"Very arch — yes, it was what old Toler called the office bottle; do you remember? it weighed three or four pounds. I think you were glad it was broken; you never got one like it into the room again. I say if it had caught you on the head, what a deal of learning and other things the Church would have lost!"

Whenever it was Cleve's pleasure to banter, the Reverend Isaac Dixie took it in good part. It was his ancient habit, so on this occasion he simpered agreeably.

"It was in the little study at Malory. By-the-by, who are those people you have put into Malory?" continued Cleve.

"Ha — the — the people who occupy the *house*?" asked the clergyman, throwing out a question to gain time.

"Come — who are they?" said Cleve, a little briskly, throwing himself back in his seat at the same time, and looking in Dixie's face.

"Well, *I*'m the person responsible; in fact the lease is to me."

"Yes, I know that; go on."

"Well, I took it at the request of Miss Sheckleton, an elderly lady, whom — — "

"Whom I don't care to hear about," interrupted Cleve. "There's an old gentleman — there's a young lady; who are *they*? I want their names."

The Reverend Isaac Dixie was evidently a little puzzled. He coughed, he looked down, he simpered, and shook his head.

"You don't want to tell me, Dixie."

"There is *nothing* I should not be most happy to tell my distinguished pupil. I've been always frank, quite frank with you, Mr. Verney. I've never had a secret."

Cleve laughed gently.

"You wrong me if you think I have," and the Rector of Clay dropped his eyes and coloured a little and coughed. "But this is not mine — and there really *is* a difficulty."

"Insuperable?"

"Well, really, I'm *afraid* that term expresses it but too truly," acquiesced the clergyman.

"What a bore!" exclaimed Cleve.

"Shut the window, if it isn't too much trouble, like a dear old Dixie — a thousand thanks."

"I assure you I would not say it," resumed the Rector of Clay, "if it were not so — and I hope I'm in the habit of speaking truth — and this secret, if so trifling a thing may be seriously so termed, is not mine, and therefore not at my disposal."

"Something in that, old Dixie. Have a weed?" he added, tendering his cigars.

"Thanks, no; never smoke now," said he, closing his eyes, and lifting his hand as if in a benediction.

"Oh, to be sure, your bishop — I forgot," said Cleve.

"Yes, a-ha; strong opinions — very able lecture; you have no doubt read it."

"With delight and terror. Death riding on a pipeclay coloured horse. Sir Walter Raleigh, the man of sin, and the smoke of the Bottomless pit, smelling of cheroots. You used not to be such a fool, old Dixie. *I*'m your bishop now; I've said it, mind — and no one sees you," said Cleve, again offering his cigars.

"Well, well; anything, anything; thanks, just for *once, only* once;" and he selected one, with a playful bashfulness.

"I'm your bishop — I don't forget. But you must wait till I'm — what d'ye call it? — *consecrated* — *there*, you need not laugh. Upon my honour, I'm serious; you shall have your choice; I swear you shall," said Cleve Verney, who stood very near the title and estates of Verney, with all their comfortable advowsons appendant.

The Reverend Isaac Dixie smiled affably and meekly with prospective gratitude, and said he softly —

"I'm only too happy to think my distinguished, and I may say, honoured pupil, should deem me fit for a weighty charge in the Church; and I may say, although Clay has been considered a nice little thing, some years ago, yet, since the vicar's — I must say, most unreasonable — claim has been allowed, it is really, I should be ashamed to say how trifling in emolument; we have all our crosses to bear, my dear pupil, friend, and I may say, patron — but it is good, nay, pleasant to me to have suffered disappointments, since in their midst comes no trifling balm in the confidence you are pleased to evidence in my humble fitness."

The clergyman was moved. A gleam of the red western sun through the window, across his broad, meek, and simpering countenance, helped the effect of his blinking eyes, and he hastily applied his handkerchief.

"Isaac, Isaac, you shan't come that over me. I *don't* think you fit — not a bit. I'm not an Aristides, only a bishop; and I don't pretend to more conscience than the rest." His eye rested on him with an unconscious disdain. "And for the life of me, I don't know why I intend doing anything for you, except that I promised, and your name's lucky, I suppose; you used to keep telling me, don't you remember, that all the promises were to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? and you are Isaac, in the middle — *medio tutissimus* — and I think Isaac is the queerest mixture of Jew and muff in the Old Testament, and — and — so on."

The sentence ended so because Cleve was now lighting his cigar. The clergyman smiled affably, and even waggishly, as one who can bear to be quizzed, and has a confidence in the affection of the joker; and Cleve smoked on serenely and silently for a little.

"And those are really my intentions respecting you," he resumed; "but you are to do as I bid you in the mean time, you know. I say, you mustn't snub your bishop; and, upon my honour, I'm perfectly serious, you shall never see my face again, nor hear of me more, if you don't, this minute, tell me everything you know about those people at Malory."

"Are you really *serious*, Mr. Verney? — *really* so?"

"Yes, quite so; and I can keep my word, as you know. Who are they?"

"You are placing me in the most awkward possible position; pray consider whether you really *do* make a point of it."

"I *do* make a point of it."

"I, of course, keep *nothing* from *you*, when you press it in that way; and beside, although it *is* awkward, it is, in a measure *right*, inasmuch as you are connected with the property, I may say, and have a right to exact information, if you thus so insist upon it as a duty."

"Come, Dixie, who *are* they!" said Cleve, peremptorily.

"Well, he's in some difficulties just now, and it is really vital that his name should not be disclosed, so I entreat you won't mention it; and especially you won't mention me as having divulged it."

"Certainly; of course I don't want to set the beaks on your friend. I shan't mention his name, depend upon it, to mortal. I've just one reason for wishing to know, and I have brought you a journey, here and back, of a hundred and forty miles, precisely to answer me this question, and I *will* know."

"Well, Mr. Verney, my dear sir, I venture to wash my hands of consequences, and unfeignedly relying upon your promise, I tell you that the old gentleman now residing in very strict seclusion at Malory, is Sir Booth — — " he paused as if willing that Cleve should supply the surname, and so, perhaps, relieve him of a part of the disclosure.

"Sir Booth *what*?"

"Don't you know?"

"*No*. You can't mean Sir Booth Fanshawe."

"Sir Booth — Sir Booth Fanshawe; yes," said the clergyman, looking down bashfully, "I *do* mean Sir Booth Fanshawe."

"*By Jove!* And don't you think it was rather a liberty, bringing Sir Booth Fanshawe to occupy our house at Malory, after all that has passed?" demanded Cleve Verney, rather sternly.

"Well, *no*, it really did *not* — I'm grieved if I have erred in judgment; but it never *did* strike me in that light — never in that point of view; and Sir Booth doesn't know who it belongs to. It never struck me to tell him, and I don't think he has an idea."

"*I* don't care; but if my *uncle* hears, *he*'ll not like it, I can tell you."

"I should not for any earthly consideration have made myself accessory to anything that could possibly have given a moment's pain to my honoured patron, the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, or to my honoured pupil — — "

“Why, yes, my uncle might do you a mischief; as for me, I don’t care. Only I think it was rather cool, considering how savage he has always been — what a lot of money he has cost us — getting up contests and petitions, and vilifying us wherever he could. He has left no stone unturned — but that’s all over; and I think you’ve committed an indiscretion, because he hasn’t a guinea left, and my sensible old grandmother will positively make you pay the rent, and that will be as unpleasant as sharing your tithes with the vicar.”

“We are not all so wise as perhaps we should be in our generation,” said the Reverend Isaac Dixie, with an apostolic simper that was plaintive and simple. To quiet the reader’s uneasiness, however, I may mention that this good man had taken particular care to secure himself against a possible loss of a shilling in the matter. “And there are claims to which it is impossible to be deaf — there is a voice that seems to say, turn not thou away.”

“*Do* stop that. You know very well that Booth Fanshawe was once a man who could give you a lift; and you did not know, perhaps, that he is ruined.”

“Pardon me; but too well. It is to protect him against immediate and melancholy consequences that I ventured, at some little risk, perhaps, to seek for him an asylum in the seclusion of Malory.”

“Well, it wasn’t all sentiment, my dear Dixie; there’s a gold thread of a ravelled tuft running through it somewhere; for whatever the romance of Christianity may say, the practice of the apostles is, very much, nothing for nothing; and if old Fanshawe wasn’t worth obliging, I dare say Hammerdon wrote or spoke to you. Come, your looks confess it.”

“Lord Hammerdon, I have no hesitation in saying, did suggest — — “

“There, that will do. Will you come over to Ware, and dine with me? I’m sure old Jones can give you a bed.”

The Reverend Isaac Dixie, however, could not come. There was to be a religious meeting in the morning at Clay school-house; the bishop was to be there; and the rector was himself to move a resolution, and had not yet considered what he was to say.

So he stepped with a bland countenance and a deliberate stride into his fly again; and from its window smirked sadly, and waved his hand to the future patron of Fridon-cum-Fleece, as he drove away; and the clergyman, who was not always quite celestial, and could, on safe occasions, be sharp and savage enough, exploded in a coarse soliloquy over the money, and the day and the ease he had sacrificed to the curiosity of that young man, who certainly *had* some as *odious* points as it had ever been his lot to meet with.

CHAPTER X.

READING AN EPITAPH.

Cleve Verney next afternoon was again, on board his yacht. Wind and tide both favouring, the cutter was running under a press of canvas that brought her gunwale to the water's edge once more for Penruthyn Priory. This time it was no mere aquatic whim; it was pursuit.

Searching the wooded seaboard of Malory with his glass, from the terrace of Ware, he had seen an open sailboat waiting at the jetty. Down came a servant with cloaks and rugs. Cleve grew more and more interested as he adjusted the focus of his glass more exactly. On a sudden, from the little door in the boundary wall, emerged two ladies. There was no mistake; he could swear to them. They were the very same whom he had seen on Sunday in the Malory seat.

He watched till he saw the boat round the point, and then— "Yes," he thought, "they are certainly going to Penruthyn Priory."

And away went Cleve Verney in pursuit of the shadow which he secretly adored. From Ware to Penruthyn Priory is about six miles, and by the time the pursuing cutter was in motion the chase had made more than a mile of her course, and was within two of the landing point at the ruin.

Cleve saw the two ladies disembark. It was now plain that they had come either to visit the ruins, or for a walk in that wild and lonely park called the Warren. Cleve had brought his gun with him, only for an excuse.

Little more than five minutes after the arrival of the open boat, Cleve Verney set his foot upon the rude landing place, as old perhaps as the Priory itself; a clumsy little pier, constructed of great rocks, overgrown with sea-rack, over which slippery platform he strode with reckless haste, and up by that steep and pretty little winding lane, the trees overhanging which look centuries old, stooping and mantled in ivy. They may have heard the tinkle of the bells of the prior's mule, as he ambled beneath their boughs, and the solemn swell of the monkish requiem from the melancholy little churchyard close by, under the old Priory windows. The thick stone wall that fences this ancient by-road is clasped together with ivy, and hoar with lichens, irregular, and broken as the battlements of a ruined tower. The approach, and the place itself, are in their picturesque sadness and solitude the very scene and setting of such a romance as Cleve Verney was pursuing.

Into the Warren, by the stile up this road's side, went Cleve, and climbed the gray rocky hillock that commands an extensive view of that wild park; but there they were not.

Well, they must, then, have pursued the path up to the Priory, and thither he followed.

Oh, ho! here they are; the young lady at a little distance looking up at the singular ruin; the old lady engaged in an active discussion with shrewish old Mrs. Hughes, who was very deaf, and often a little tipsy, and who was now testily refusing the ladies admission within the iron gate which affords access to the ruins, of which she held the keys.

No situation could have been more fortunate for Cleve. The Warren and the Priory being his uncle's property, and the termagant Mrs. Hughes his officer, he walked up to the visitor, and inquired very courteously the object of the application, and forthwith ordered the portress to open the gate and deliver up her keys; which she did, a good deal frightened at sight of so unexpected a *deus ex machina*.

An unmistakable gentleman, handsome, and plainly a sort of prince in this region, the old lady, although she did not know to whom she was obliged, was pleased at his offer to act as cicerone here, and accepted it graciously.

"My young friend will be very glad; she draws a little, and enjoys such sights immensely. Margaret!" she called. The young lady turned, and Cleve saw before him once more in flesh and blood, that wonderful portrait of Beatrice Cenci, which had haunted him for three days.

The young lady heard what her companion had to say, and for a moment her large eyes rested on Cleve with a glance that seemed to him at once haughty, wild, and shy.

With one hand he held the gate open, and in the other his hat was raised respectfully, as side by side they walked into the open court. They each bowed as they passed, the elder lady very cheerily, the younger with a momentary glance of the same unconscious superiority, which wounded him more than his pride would have allowed; and a puzzled recollection flitted across his mind of having once heard, he could not remember when, that Booth Fanshawe had married a beautiful Italian, an heiress (a princess — wasn't she?) — at all events, a scion of one of their proud old houses, whose pedigrees run back into the Empire, and dwarf into parvenus the great personages of Debrett's Peerage. What made it worse was, that there was no shyness, no awkwardness. She talked a good deal to her companion, and laughed slightly once or twice, in a very sweet tone. The old lady was affable and friendly; the young lady, on the contrary, so far from speaking to him, seemed hardly to give herself the trouble of listening to what he said. This kind of exclusion, to which the petted young man certainly was not accustomed, galled him extremely, the more so that she looked, he thought, more beautiful than ever, and that her voice, and pretty, slightly foreign accent, added another charm to the spell.

He made them a graceful little lecture on the building, as they stood in the court. If she had any cleverness she would see with what a playful and rapid grace he could convey real information. The young lady looked from building to building as he described them, but with no more interest in the speaker, it seemed to him, than if the bell-man of Cardyllian had been reading it from a handbill. He had never done anything so well in the House of Commons, and here it was accepted as a piece of commonplace. The worst of it was that there was no finesse in all this. It was in perfect good faith that this beautiful young lady was treating him like a footman. Cleve was intensely piqued. Had she been less lovely, his passion might have recoiled into disgust; as it was, with a sort of vindictive adoration, he vowed that he would yet compel her to hang upon his words as angels' music, to think of him, to watch for him, to love him with all that wild and fiery soul which an intuition assured him was hers.

So, with this fierce resolve at his heart, he talked very agreeably with the accessible old lady, seeming, in a spirit, I dare say, altogether retaliatory, to overlook the young lady's presence a good deal.

"I've got the key of the church, also; you'll allow me, I hope, to show it to you. It is really very curious — a much older style than the rest of the building — and there are some curious monuments and epitaphs."

The old lady would be charmed, of course, and her young companion, to whom she turned, would like it also. So Cleve, acting as porter, opened the ponderous door, and the party entered this dim and solemn Saxon chapel, and the young lady paused and looked round her, struck, as it seemed with a sense of something new and very interesting.

"How strange! How rude it is, and irregular; not large, and yet how imposing!" murmured the girl, as she looked round with a momentary awe and delight. It was the first remark she had made, which it was possible for Cleve Verney to answer.

"That's so true! considering how small it is, it does inspire a wonderful awe," said he, catching at the opportunity. "It's very dark, to be sure, and that goes a long way; but its style is so rough and Cyclopean, that it overcomes one with a feeling of immense antiquity; and antiquity is always solemn, a gift from the people so remote and mysterious, as those who built this chapel, is affecting."

At this point Cleve Verney paused; either his ideas failed him, or he felt that they were leading him into an oration. But he saw that the young lady looked at him, as he spoke, with some interest, and he felt more elated than he had done for many a day.

"Is that a broken pillar?" asked Miss Sheckleton, — as I shall for the future call the elder lady.

"That's the font — very ancient — there's some odd carving about it, which has puzzled our antiquaries," said Cleve, leading the way to it.

The young lady had not followed. His exposition was to Miss Sheckleton, whose inquisitiveness protracted it. It was dry work for Cleve. The young lady had seated herself in a sort of oak stall, and was looking up at the groining of the round ribbed arches, at some distance. The effect was singular. She was placed in the deep chiaroscuro, a strong gleam of light entering through a circular aperture in the side wall, illuminated her head and face with a vivid and isolated effect; her rich chestnut hair was now disclosed, her bonnet having fallen back, as she gazed upward, and the beautiful oval face was disclosed in the surrounding shadow with the sudden brilliancy and isolation of a picture in a phantasmagoria.

Verney's eyes were not upon the font on which he was lecturing, his thoughts were wandering too, and Miss Sheckleton observed perhaps some odd vagueness and iteration in his remarks; but the young lady changed her position, and was now examining another part of the church.

Cleve either felt or fancied, seeing, as the Italians say, with the tail of his eye, that she was now, for a moment, looking at him, believing herself unseen. If this were so, was it not the beginning of a triumph? It made him strangely happy.

If Cleve had seen those sights in town, I can't say whether their effect would have been at all similar; but beautiful scenery, like music, predisposes to emotion. Its contemplation is the unconscious abandonment of the mind to sentiment, and once excite tenderness and melancholy, and the transition to love is easy upon small provocations. In the country our visions flit more palpably before us; there is nothing there, as amid the clatter and vulgarities of the town, to break our dreams. The beautiful rural stillness is monotony itself, and monotony is the spell and the condition of all mesmeric impressions. Hence young men, in part, are the dangers of those enchanted castles called country houses, in which you lose your heads and hearts; whither you arrive jubilant and free, and whence you are led by delicate hands, with a silken halter round your necks, with a gay gold ring in your obedient noses, and a tiny finger crooked therein, and with a broad parchment pinned upon your patient shoulders, proclaiming to the admiring world that your estates have gone the way of your liberties, and that you and they are settled for life.

"Now, *this*," said he, pointing to a block of carved stone placed in the aisle, "is the monument of old Martha Nokes; pray ask your young lady to come for one moment; it's worth reading."

"*Margaret!*" called the elder visitor, in the subdued tone suited to the sacred place. "Come, darling, and see this."

"This inscription is worth reading, and I can tell you about the old woman, for I remember her quite well. I was eight years old when she died. Old Martha Nokes; she died in her hundred and twentieth year."

The young lady stood by and listened and read. The epitaph related her length of service, her fidelity, and other virtues, and that "this stone was placed here in testimony of the sincere and merited esteem, respect, and affection cherished for the deceased, by Eleanor, Viscountess (Dowager) Verney, of Malory."

"There's some beautiful embroidery on satin, worked by her more than a hundred and fifteen years ago, at Ware," said Cleve Verney. "They say such work can't be had now. '*In the course of her long pilgrimage*,' you see by the epitaph, '*she had no less than twenty-three substantial offers of marriage, all which she declined, preferring her single state to the many* *cares and trials of wedded life, and willing also to remain to the end of her days in the service of the family of Verney, (to whom she was justly grateful,) and in which she had commenced her active and useful, though humble life, in the reign of King George the First*.' So you see she spent all her life with us; and I'll tell our people, if you should happen to pass near Ware — it's not an hour's sail across — and would care to see it, to show you her embroidery, and her portrait; and if there's anything else you think worth looking at; there are some pictures and bronzes — they'll be quite at your service; my uncle is hardly ever at Ware; and I only run down for a little boating and shooting, now and then."

"Thank you," said the old lady, and utter silence followed. Her young companion glanced at her for a moment, and saw her look blank and even confounded. She averted her gaze, and something, I suppose, struck her as comical, for, with a sudden little silvery laugh, she said —

"What a charming, funny old woman she must have been!"

And with this excuse she laughed more — and again, after a little interval. Nothing more contagious than this kind of laughter, especially when one has an inkling of the cause. Cleve looked at the font, and lowered his large eyes to the epitaph of the Virgin Martha Nokes, and bit his lips, but he *did* laugh a little in spite of himself, for there was something nearly irresistible in pleasant Miss Sheckleton's look of vacant consternation.

CHAPTER XI.

FAREWELL.

The young lady was instantly grave, with even a little fiery gleam of anger in her eyes, he thought. He could not help raising his also, now quite gravely and even respectfully, looking on her.

"I think you know who we are," she said a little suddenly and haughtily.

"You are at present living at Malory, I believe," said he, with a respectful evasion.

"Yes; but I mean *who* we are," said Margaret, very pale, very proud, and with her splendid hazel eyes fixed full upon him with the irresistible inspiration of truth.

"I *have* heard — in part accidentally — something."

"Yes," said the girl; "you are Mr. Cleve Verney, and my name is Fanshawe; and my father, Sir Booth Fanshawe, is at present living at Malory."

"My dear! are you *mad*?" gasped Miss Sheckleton aghast.

"Yes. We are the people who live at Malory, and my father had hoped that he might have escaped there the observation of all but the very few persons who take a friendly interest in him. The place was looked out and taken for us by a person of whom we know nothing — a clergyman, I believe. I have now, for the first time, learned from that gravestone to whom the place belongs. We know nothing of the townspeople or of neighbours. We have lived to ourselves; and if he had known that Malory belonged to the Verneys, I hope you believe he would neither have been mad or mean enough to come here, to live in the house of his enemies."

"Oh, Margaret! Margaret! you have ruined your father," said poor Miss Sheckleton, pale as a ghost, and with her trembling fingers in the air.

"I assure you, Miss Fanshawe," said Cleve, "you do me a cruel injustice, when you class me with Sir Booth Fanshawe's *enemies*. There have been those miserable money matters, in which *I* never had, nor *could* have had, any influence whatsoever. And there has been political hostility, in which I have been the victim rather than the aggressor. Of course, I've had to fight my battles as best I could; but I've never done anything unfair or unmanly. You plainly think me a personal enemy of Sir Booth's. It pains me that you do so. In the sense in which you seem to think it, I never was, nor in any sense could I continue to be so, in his present — his present— "

The young man hesitated for a word or a paraphrase to convey a painful meaning without offence.

"His present ruin, and his approaching exile," said the young lady.

"I'm sure, sir, what you say is exactly so," pleaded poor Miss Sheckleton, nervously. "It was, as you say, all about elections, and that kind of thing, which, with him, you know, never can be again. So, I'm sure, the feeling is all over. *Is*n't it, Mr. Verney?"

"I don't think it matters much," said the young lady, in the same tone of haughty defiance. "*I* don't — girls, I believe, never *do* understand business and politics. All I know is this — that my father has been ruined. My father has been ruined, and that, I hope, will satisfy his enemies. I know *he* thinks, and *other* people think — people in no way mixed up in his affairs — people who are *impartial* — that it was the cruelty and oppression of Mr. Kiffyn Verney, your uncle, I think you say — that drove him to ruin. Well, you now know that my father is at Malory."

"He does, darling. We may be overheard," said Miss Sheckleton in an imploring tremor.

But the young lady continued in the same clear tone —

"I can't say what is considered fair and manly, as you say, in political enmity; but, seeing what it has done, I have no reason to believe it very scrupulous or very merciful; therefore, with some diffidence, I ask only, whether you can promise that he shall not be molested for a few days, until some other refuge shall have been provided for us? And when we shall have left England for ever, you will have no more to fear from my father, and can afford, I think, to forget his name."

There was a kind of contradiction here, or rather one of those discords which our sense of harmony requires, and mysteriously delights in — for while her language was toned with something of the anguish of pleading, her mien and look were those of a person dictating terms to the vanquished. Had she but known all, they might have been inspired by the workings of his heart. Her colour had returned more brilliantly, her large eyes gleamed, and her beautiful eyebrow wore that *anguine* curve which is the only approach to a scowl which painters accord to angels. Thus, though her tones were pathetic, she stood like a beautiful image of Victory.

In the silence that followed, Cleve stood before her for a moment confounded. Too many feelings were on a sudden set in motion by this girl's harangue, to find a distinct resultant in words. His pride was stung — something of anger was stirred within him; his finer sympathies, too, were moved, and a deeper feeling still.

"I'm afraid you think me a very mean person, indeed," said Cleve. "To no one, not to my uncle, not to any living person, will I so much as hint that I know anything of Sir Booth Fanshawe's present place of abode. I don't think that we men are ever quite understood by *you*. I hope *that* is it. I *hope* it is not that you entertain a particularly ill opinion of *me*. I haven't deserved it, you'll find I *never* shall. I hope you will employ me. I hope, Miss Sheckleton, *you* will employ me, whenever, in *any* way, you think I can be of use. Your having, although I know it is perfectly accidental, come to Malory, places me under a kind of obligation, I wish you would allow me to think so, of hospitality; there is no room for generosity here; it would be a misplaced phrase; but I wish, *very* much, that you would put my goodwill to the proof, and rely upon my fidelity; only give me a trial."

I believe that every one who is speaking all in earnest, and, for the moment, quite from a good impulse, looks more beautiful in that momentary light of paradise, and certainly no handsomer young fellow, to my mind, could have been imagined than Cleve Verney, as he stood uncovered before the beautiful stranger, and pleaded for her good opinion.

The young lady was silent, and looked at Miss Sheckleton, as if deputing her to answer, and then looked away.

"You're very kind. I *know* you won't deceive us, Mr. Verney," said Miss Sheckleton, with an imploring look, and laying her hand unconsciously upon his arm. "I am sure you won't disappoint us; but it is a great difficulty; you've no idea, for Sir Booth feels very strongly, and in fact we don't mention the name of your family to him; and I'm sure — indeed I *know* — if he were aware that Malory was Verney property, he would never have come here, and if I were to tell him, he would leave it at once. It was a very old friend, Lord Hammerdon, who employed a clergyman, a Mr. Dixie, I think, a friend of his, to look out a suitable place in a very quiet neighbourhood; and so, without making — without, indeed, the *power* of making inquiry, we came down here, and have just made the discovery — two discoveries, indeed — for not only does the place belong to your family, but you, Mr. Verney are aware that Sir Booth is here."

"Sir Booth will do me the justice to trust my word. I assure you — I swear to you — no mortal shall learn the secret of his residence from me. I hope Miss Fanshawe believes me. I'm sure *you* do, Miss Sheckleton," said Cleve.

"We are *both very* much obliged," said the old lady.

The girl's eyes were lowered. Cleve thought she made just a perceptible inclination to intimate her acquiescence. It was clear, however, that her fears were satisfied. She raised her eyes, and they rested on him for a moment with a grave and even melancholy gaze, in which — was there confidence? That momentary, almost unconscious glance, was averted, but Cleve felt unaccountably happy and even proud.

"It is then understood," said he, "that I am not to charge myself with having caused, however unintentionally, any disturbance or embarrassment of your plans. Do you think — it would give me so much pleasure — that I might venture to call upon Sir Booth Fanshawe, to make him in person that offer of my humble services, in any way in which he might please to employ me, which I have already tendered to you?"

He saw the young lady turn an alarmed glance upon her companion, and press her hand slightly on her arm, and the old lady said quickly —

"Not for the world! Nothing would vex him more. That is, I mean, it is better he should not think that he has been recognised; he is impetuous, and, as you *must* know, a little fiery, and just now is suffering, and, in fact, I should not venture, although I need not say, I quite appreciate the feeling, and thank you very much."

A silence followed this little speech. The subject that had engrossed and excited the little party, was for the present exhausted, and no one was ready at the moment to start another.

"We have detained you here, most unreasonably, Mr. Verney, I'm afraid," said Miss Sheckleton, glancing towards the door. "The evenings have grown so short, and our boatman said we should be longer returning; and I think we should have been on our way home before now."

"I only wish you would allow me to set you down at Malory, in my boat, but I know that would not do, so you must allow me to see you on board your own."

More time had passed, a great deal, during this odd scene, than it takes to read this note of it. When they stepped forth from the door of the tenebrous little church, the mellow light of sunset was streaming along the broken pavement and grass, and glowing on the gray walls and ivy of the old building.

Margaret Fanshawe was very silent all the way down to the little stone pier, at which the boat was moored. But the old lady had quite recovered her garrulous good spirits and energy. There was something likeable and even winning in Miss Anne Sheckleton, sixty years though she looked. She did not hide her gray locks; they were parted smoothly over her intelligent forehead, and in her clear, pleasant face you could see at times a little gleam of waggery, and sometimes the tenderness of sentiment. So that there remained with her that inextinguishable youth of spirit that attracts to the last.

Cleve was not one of those fellows who don't understand even so much self-denial as is necessary to commend them to old ladies on occasion. He was wiser. He walked beside her slight figure and light firm step, talking agreeably, with now and then a stolen glance at the silent girl. Miss Sheckleton was an old woman such as I love. Such as remains young at three score, and is active still with youthful interests, and a vein of benevolent romance.

And now they stood at the gunwale of the boat, and Miss Sheckleton smiling a little anxiously, gave him her hand at parting.

"May I?" said he, in a tone respectful and even melancholy, at the same time, extending his hand with hesitation toward the young lady beside him.

There was a little motion in her hand, as if she would have shut or withdrawn it, but she looked at him with grave eyes; was there doubt in them, or was there confidence? and gave him her hand too, with a sad look. There was one strong violent throb at his heart as he pressed that slender gauge; and then it seemed to stand still for a moment; and he heard the evening breeze among the leaves, like a sigh along the shore. Was it an omen?

The next moment he was standing alone, with his hat in his hand, smiling and waving an adieu over the glittering waves to the receding boat.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH CLEVE VERNEY WAYLAYS AN OLD LADY.

Cleve visited the old Priory next day, but there had been no one to look at it since. He took a walk in the warren and killed some innocent rabbits, and returned an hour later. Still no one. He loitered about the ruins for some time longer, but nothing came of it. The next day in like manner, he again inspected the Priory, to the wonderment of Mrs. Hughes, who kept the keys, and his yacht was seen till sunset hovering about Penruthyn. He drove into the town also now and then, and looked in on the shopkeepers, and was friendly as usual; and on these occasions always took a ramble either over the hill or by the old Malory road, in the direction of the Dower House.

But the Malory people seemed to have grown still more cautious and reserved since the adventure of Penruthyn Priory. Sunday came, and Miss Anne Sheckleton sat alone in the Malory pew.

Cleve, who had been early in his place, saw the old lady enter alone and the door shut, and experienced a pang of disappointment — more than disappointment, it amounted to pain.

If in the dim light of the Malory seat he had seen, once more, the Guido that haunted him, he could with pleasure have sat out three services; with three of the longest of good Mr. Splayfoot's long sermons. But as it was, it dragged wofully — it made next to no way; the shrilly school-children and the deep-toned Mr. Bray sang more verses than ever to the solemn drone of the organ, and old Splayfoot preached as though he'd preach his last. Even Cleve's watch, which he peeped at with a frequency he grew ashamed of, limped and loitered over the minutes cruelly.

The service would not have seemed so nearly interminable if Cleve had not resolved to waylay and accost the lady at the other side — even at the risk of being snubbed for his pains; and to him, full of this resolve, the interval was miserable.

When the people stood up after the blessing, Cleve Verney had vanished. From the churchyard he had made his exit, by the postern door, from which he and his enamoured friend, Sedley, had descended a week before to the narrow road, under the town wall, leading to Malory.

Down this he walked listlessly till he reached that lonely part of the road which is overarched by trees; and here, looking over the sloping fields toward the sea, as if at the distant mountains, he did actually waylay Miss Sheckleton.

The old lady seemed a little flurried and shy, and would, he fancied, have gladly been rid of him. But that did not weigh much with Cleve, who, smiling and respectful, walked by her side after he had made his polite salutation. A few sentences having been first spoken about indifferent things, Cleve said —

"I have been to the old Priory twice since I met you there."

"Oh!" said Miss Anne Sheckleton, looking uneasily toward Malory. He thought she was afraid that Sir Booth's eye might chance to be observing them.

Cleve did not care. He rather enjoyed her alarm, and the chance of bringing matters to a crisis. *She* had not considered *him* much in the increased jealousy with which she had cloistered up her beautiful recluse ever since that day which burned in his memory, and cast a train of light along the darkness of the interval. Cleve would have been glad that the old man had discovered and attacked him. He thought he could have softened and even made him his friend.

"Do you never purpose visiting the ruin again?" asked Cleve. "I had hoped it interested you and Miss Fanshawe too much to be dropped on so slight an acquaintance."

"I don't know. Our little expeditions have been very few and very uncertain," hesitated Miss Sheckleton.

"Pray, don't treat me *quite* as a stranger," said Cleve, in a lone and earnest tone; "what I said the other day was not, I assure you, spoken upon a mere impulse. I hope, I am sure, that Miss Fanshawe gives me credit at least for sincerity."

He paused.

"Oh! certainly, Mr. Verney, we do."

"And I so wish you would tell her that I have been ever since thinking how I can be of any real use — ever so little — if only to prove my anxiety to make her trust me even a little."

"I think, Mr. Verney, it is quite enough if we don't *dis*trust you; and I can assure you we do not," said the spinster.

"My uncle, though not the sort of man you may have been led to suppose him — not at all an unkind man — is, I must allow, a little odd and difficult sometimes — you see I'm not speaking to you as a stranger — and he won't do things in a moment; still if I knew exactly what Sir Booth expected from him — if you think I might venture to ask an interview — — "

"Quite *impossible*! You must not *think* of it," exclaimed the lady with a look almost of terror, "just now, while all is so fresh, and feelings so excited, he's in no mood to be reasonable, and no good *could* come of it."

"Well, *you* know best, of course. But I expect to be called away, my stay at Ware can't be much longer. My uncle writes as if he wants me; and I wish so much, short as it is, that I could improve it to any useful purpose. I can't tell you how very much I pity Miss Fanshawe, immured in that gloomiest of all gloomy places. Such an unnatural and terrifying seclusion for one so very young."

"It is certainly very *triste*," said Miss Sheckleton.

"She draws, you told me, and likes the garden, and reads; you must allow me to lend you some books, won't you? *you* I say; and *you* can lend them to her," he added, seeing a hesitation, "and you need take no trouble about returning them. Just lock them up anywhere in the house when you've done with them, and I'll get them when you leave Malory, which I hope won't be for a long time, unless it be for a very much pleasanter residence."

Here came a pause; the eyes of the two pedestrians were directed toward Malory as they descended the road, but no sign of life was visible in that quarter.

"You got home very well that day from the Priory; I watched you all the way," said he at last.

"Oh! yes; the distance is nothing."

Another little pause followed.

"*You*'re not afraid, Miss Sheckleton, of venturing outside the walls. I fear, however, I've a great deal to answer for in having alarmed Miss Fanshawe, though quite unintentionally, for the safety of Sir Booth's incognito. The secret is known to *no* one but to *me* and the persons originally entrusted with it; I *swear* to you it's *so*. There's no reason on earth for your immuring yourselves as you do within those melancholy precincts; it excites curiosity, on the contrary, and people begin to pry and ask questions; and I trust you believe that I would not trifle or mislead you upon such a subject."

"You are very good," answered Miss Sheckleton, looking down. "Yes, we *are* obliged to be very careful; but it is hardly worth breaking a rule; we may possibly be here for so very short a time, you know. And about the books — — "

"Oh! about the books I'll hear nothing; there are books coming for me to Ware, and I shan't be there to receive them. And I shall be, I assure you, ever so much obliged if you'll only just give them house-room — they'll be so much safer — at Malory; and you won't deny me the pleasure of thinking that you and Miss Fanshawe will look over them?"

He fancied she did not like this; and thought she seemed embarrassed to find an evasion; but before she could speak, he continued, "and how is the little squirrel I saw in the boat the other day; Miss Fanshawe's, I suppose? Such a pretty little thing!"

"Oh! poor little Whisk. There has been a tragedy: some horrid thing, a wild cat or an owl, killed him the other night, and mangled him so; poor little, dear thing, you must not ask."

"Oh dear! I'm *so* sorry; and Miss Fanshawe can so ill spare a companion just now."

"Yes, it has been a great blow; and — and I think, Mr. Verney, I should prefer bidding you goodbye *here*," said Miss Sheckleton, stopping resolutely, and holding out her fingers for him to take; for she was on odd terms of suspicion and confidence — something more than mere chance acquaintance.

He looked towards the wood of Malory — now overlooking them, almost in the foreground; and, I think, if he had seen Miss Fanshawe under its shadows, nothing would have prevented his going right on — perhaps very rashly — upon the chance of even a word from her. But the groves were empty; neither "Erl King" nor his daughter were waiting for them. So, for simply nothing, it would not do to vex the old lady, with whom, for many reasons, it was desirable that he should continue upon good terms, and with real regret he did *there*, as she desired, take his leave, and slowly walk back to Cardyllian, now and then stealing a glance over the old side-walk of the steep road, thinking that just possibly his Guido might appear in the shadow to greet the old lady at the gate. But nothing appeared — she went in, and the darkness received her.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BOY WITH THE CAGE.

At Ware a letter awaited Cleve, from his uncle, the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney. He read it after dinner, with his back to the fire, by a candle, placed on the corner of the chimneypiece. He never was in any great haste to open his uncle's letters, except when he expected a remittance. I must allow they were not entertaining, and did not usually throw much light upon anything. But it was not safe to omit a single line, for his uncle knew them by rote, and in their after meetings asked him questions upon some passages, and referred pointedly to others. Uncle Kiffyn was in fact thin-skinned in his vanities, and was a person with whom it would have been highly inconvenient to have been on any but the very best terms.

Cleve had, therefore, to read these closely written despatches with more attention than even his friend Dixie read his Bible. They were a sore trouble, for their length was at times incredible.

As he read these letters, moans, and even execrations, escaped him, such as poets describe as issuing from the abode of torment— "Good heavens! mightn't he have said that in five words?" Then a "Pish!"— "Always grumbling about that executorship. Why did he take it? I do believe he likes it."

And then Cleve read,— "I see no reason why, with respect to you, I may not exercise — as between ourselves, at least — an absolute unreserve with relation to a fact of which, through a channel not necessary to particularise, I have just received an authentic assurance, to the effect, namely, that Sir Booth Fanshawe, whose ruin has been brought about, partly by his virtual insanity in opposing me with an insensate pertinacity and an intense ill feeling, on which I offer no observation, but involving an expense to which his impaired means were obviously inadequate, and partly by early follies, profligacies, and vices, is now living concealed in the Rue de —— , in Paris." Cleve laughed. "He is a person to whom neither courtesy nor forbearance, as it appears to me, can reasonably be held to be in any respect due from me. There has been a recent order, charging him, as you may have seen by the public papers, with £2,317 costs in the collateral suit connected with the trust cause, in which I was, though I by no means sought the position, the plaintiff, to foreclose the mortgage over Wycroft. I have written to apprise Milbanke of the fact, that he may take such steps as the nature of the case may suggest." "Well for Sir Booth he does not know he's so near! What's this? A postscript! well"— "P.S. — I have opened my letter to introduce this postscript, in consequence of a letter which has just reached me in course of post from Mr. Jos. Larkin, a solicitor, who was introduced to my notice about two years since by a member of the Brandon family, and who is unquestionably a man of some ability in his position in life. His letter is accompanied by a note from Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, and the two documents involve considerations so sudden, complicated, and momentous, that I must defer opening them, and request your presence at Verney House on the 15th proximo, when I mean to visit town for the purpose of arriving at a distinct solution of the several reports thus submitted upon a subject intimately connected with my private feelings, and with the most momentous interests of my house."

So abruptly ended the postscript, and for a moment Cleve was seriously alarmed. Could those meddling fellows who had agents everywhere have fished up some bit of Cardyllian gossip about his Malory romance?

He knew very well what the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney would think of that. His uncle could make or mar him. He knew that he had dangerous qualities, being a narrow man, with obstinate resentments. He was stunned for a moment; but then he reflected that all the romance in which he was living had been purely psychologic and internal, and that there was no overt act to support the case which he might not confess and laugh at.

"On the 15th proximo" — Very well; on the 15th he would be in town, and hear his uncle upon this subject, involving his "private feelings" and "the most momentous interests of his house." Could it be that his outcast uncle, who had been dragging out a villanous existence in Turkey, under the hospitable protection of the Porte — who was said to have killed the captain of a French man-of-war, in that contemplative retreat, and whom he was wont respectfully to call "the Old Man of the Mountains," was dead at last?

The postscript would bear this interpretation and a pompous liking for mystery, which was one of his uncle's small weaknesses, would account for his withholding the precise information, and nursing, and making much of his secret, and delivering it at last, like a Cabinet manifesto or a Sessional address.

"If the Old Man of the Mountains be really out of the way, it's an important event for us!"

And a dark smile lighted the young man's face, as he thought of the long train of splendid consequences that would awake at his deathbed, and begin to march before his funeral.

Ambition, they say, is the giant passion. But giants are placable and sleep at times. The spirit of emulation — the lust of distinction — *hominum volitare per ora — digito monstrarier* — in a wider, and still widening sphere — until all the world knows something about you — and so on and on — the same selfish aspiration, and at best, the same barren progress, till at last it has arrived — you are a thoroughly advertised and conspicuous mediocrity, still wishing, and often tired, in the midst of drudgery and importance and *éclat*, and then — on a sudden, the *other* thing comes — the first of the days of darkness which are many.

"Thy house shall be of clay, A clot under thy head; Until the latter day, The grave shall be thy bed."

But nature has her flowers and her fruits, as well as those coarse grains and vegetables on which overgrown reputations are stall-fed. The Commons lobby, the division list, the bureau, Hansard, the newspapers, the dreary bombast of the Right Hon. Marcus Tullius Countinghouse, the ironies of Mr. Swelter, the jokes of Mr. Rasp, — enjoy these shams while your faith is great — while you may, now, in the days of thy youth, before your time comes, and knowledge chills, and care catches you, and you are drawn in and ground under the great old machine which has been thundering round and round, and bruising its proper grist, ever since Adam and Eve walked out of Eden.

But beside all this delicious rape-cake and man-gold of politics, Cleve Verney had his transient perceptions of the flowers and fruits, as we say, that spring elsewhere. There are fancy, the regrets, the yearnings — something recluse in the human soul, which will have its day, a day, though brief it may be, of entire domination.

Now it came to pass, among the trees of lonely Malory, at eventide, when the golden air was flooded with the vesper songs of small birds, and the long gray shadows were stretching into distance, that a little brown Welsh boy, with dark lively eyes, and a wire cage in his hand, suddenly stood before Miss Margaret Fanshawe, who awaking from a reverie, with a startled look — for intruders were there unknown — fixed her great eyes upon him.

"You've climbed the wall, little gipsy," said the beautiful lady, with a shake of her head and a little frown, raising her finger threateningly. "What! You say nothing? This is a lonely place; don't you know there are ghosts here and fairies in Malory? And I'm one of them, perhaps," she continued, softening a little, for he looked at her with round eyes of wonder and awe.

"And what do you want here? and what have you got in that cage? Let me see it."

Breaking through an accidental cleft among the old trees, one sunset ray streamed on the face of this little Welsh Murillo; and now through the wires of the cage, gilding them pleasantly as he raised it in his hand, and showed two little squirrels hopping merrily within.

"Squirrels! How curious! My poor little Whisk, there's none like you, funny little Whisk, kind little Whisk, true little thing; you loved your mistress, and no one else, no one else. He's buried there, under that large rose-bush; I won't cry for you, little Whisk, any more, I said I wouldn't."

She looked wistfully toward the rose-bush, and the little headstone she had girlishly placed at her favourite's grave, and the little boy saw two great crystal tears glittering in her large eyes as she gazed; and she turned and walked a hasty step or two toward it. I don't know whether they fell or were dried, but when she came back she looked as at first.

"I'll buy one of these little things, they *are* very pretty, and I'll call it Frisk; and I'll please myself by thinking it's little Whisk's brother; it *may* be, you know," she said, unconsciously taking the little boy into the childish confidence. "What would you sell one of those little things for? perhaps you would not like to part with it, but I'll make it very happy, I shall be very kind to it."

She paused, but the little fellow only looked still silently and earnestly in her face.

"Is he deaf or dumb, or a sprite — who are you?" said the girl, looking at him curiously.

A short sentence in Welsh, prettiest of all pretty tongues, with its pleasant accent, was the reply.

“Then all my fine sentences have been thrown away, and not one word has he understood!”

Looking at his impenetrable face, and thus speaking, she smiled; and in that sudden and beautiful radiance he smiled merrily also.

All this happened under the trees close by the old Refectory wall, at the angle of which is a small door admitting into the stableyard. Opening this she called “Thomas Jones!” and the Cardyllian “helper,” so called, answered the invocation quickly.

“Make out from that little boy, what he is willing to take for one of his squirrels,” said she, and listened in suspense while the brief dialogue in Welsh proceeded.

“He says, my lady, he does not know, but will go home and ask; and if you give him a shilling for earnest, he’ll leave the cage here. So you may look at them for some time, my lady — yes, sure, and see which you would find the best of the two.”

“Oh, that’s charming!” said she, nodding and smiling her thanks to the urchin, who received the shilling and surrendered the cage, which she set down upon the grass in triumph; and seating herself upon the turf before them, began to talk to the imprisoned squirrels with the irrepressible delight with which any companionable creature is welcomed by the young in the monotony and sadness of solitude.

The sun went down, and the moon rose over Malory, but the little brown boy returned not. Perhaps his home was distant. But the next morning did not bring him back, nor the day, nor the evening; and, in fact, she saw his face no more.

“Poor little deserted squirrels! — two little foundlings! — what am I to think? Tell me, cousin Anne, was that little boy what he seemed, or an imp that haunts these woods, and wants to entangle me by a bargain uncompleted; or a compassionate spirit that came thus disguised to supply the loss of poor little Whisk; and how and when do you think he will appear again?”

She was lighting her bedroom candle in the faded old drawingroom of Malory, as, being about to part for the night, she thus addressed her gray cousin Anne. That old spinster yawned at her leisure, and then said —

“He’ll *never* appear again, dear.”

"I should really say, to judge by that speech, that you knew something about him," said Margaret Fanshawe, replacing her candle on the table as she looked curiously in her face.

The old lady smiled mysteriously.

"What is it?" said the girl; "you must tell me — you *shall* tell me. Come, cousin Anne, I don't go to bed tonight till you tell me all you know."

The young lady had a will of her own, and sat down, it might be for the night, in her chair again.

"As to knowing, my dear, I really *know nothing*; but I have my *suspicions*."

"H-m!" said Margaret, for a moment dropping her eyes to the table, so that only their long silken fringes were visible. Then she raised them once more gravely to her kinswoman's face. "Yes, I *will* know *what* you suspect."

"Well, I think that handsome young man, Mr. Cleve Verney, is at the bottom of the mystery," said Miss Sheckleton, with the same smile.

Again the young lady dropped her eyes, and was for a moment silent. "Was she pleased or *dis*-pleased? Proud and sad her face looked.

"There's no one here to tell him that I lost my poor little squirrel. It's quite impossible — the most unlikely idea imaginable."

"*I* told him on Sunday," said Miss Sheckleton, smiling.

"He had no business to talk about me."

"Why, dear, unless he was a positive brute, he could not avoid asking for you; so I told him you were *désolé* about your bereavement — your poor little Whisk, and he seemed so sorry and kind; and I'm perfectly certain he got these little animals to supply its place."

"And so has led me into taking a present?" said the young lady, a little fiercely— "he would not have taken that liberty — — "

"*Liberty*, my dear?"

"Yes, *liberty*; if he did not think that we were fallen, ruined people — — "

"Now, my dear child, your father's *not* ruined, I maintain it; there will be more left, I'm very certain, than he supposes; and I could have almost beaten you the other day for using that expression in speaking to Mr. Verney; but you *are* so *impetuous* — and then, could any one have done a more thoughtful or a kinder thing, and in a more perfectly delicate way? He *has*n’t made you a present; he has only contrived that a purchase should be thrown in your way, which of all others was exactly what you most wished; he has not appeared, and never *will* appear in it; and I know, for my part, I’m very much obliged to him — *if* he has done it — and I think he admires you too much to run a risk of offending you.”

“What?”

“I do — I think he admires you.”

The girl stood up again, and glanced at the mirror, I think, pleased, for a moment — and then took her candle, but paused by the table, looking thoughtfully. Was she paler than usual? or was it only that the light of the candle in her hand was thrown upward on her features? Then she said in a spoken meditation —

“There are dreams that have in them, I think, the germs of insanity; and the sooner we dissipate them, don’t you think, the better and the wiser?”

She smiled, nodded, and went away.

Whose dreams did she mean? Cleve Verney’s, Miss Sheckleton’s, or — could it be, her own?

CHAPTER XIV.

NEWS ABOUT THE OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAINS.

Next morning Margaret Fanshawe was unusually silent at breakfast, except to her new friends the squirrels, whose cage she placed on a little table close by, and who had already begun to attach themselves to her. To them she talked, as she gave them their nuts, a great deal of that silvery nonsense which is pleasant to hear as any other pleasant sound in nature. But good old Miss Sheckleton thought her out of spirits.

"She's vexing herself about my conjectures," thought the old lady. "I'm sorry I said a word about it. I believe *I* was a fool, but *she's* a greater one. She's young, however, and has that excuse."

"*How* old are you, Margaret?" said she abruptly, after a long silence.

"Twenty-two, my last birthday," answered the young lady, and looked, as if expecting a reason for the question.

"Yes; so I thought," said Miss Sheckleton. "The twenty-third of June — a midsummer birthday — your poor mamma used to say — the glow and flowers of summer — a brilliant augury."

"Brilliantly accomplished," added the girl; "don't you think so, Frisk, and you, little Comet? Are you not tired of Malory already, my friends? *My* cage is bigger, but so am I, don't you see; you'd be happier climbing and hopping among the boughs. What am *I* to you, compared with liberty? I did not *ask* for you, little fools, did I? You came to me; and I will open the door of your cage some day, and give you back to the unknown — to chance — from which you came."

"You're sad to-day, my child," said Miss Sheckleton, laying her hand gently on her shoulder. "Are you vexed at what I said to you last night?"

"What did you say?"

"About these little things — the squirrels."

"No, darling, I don't care. Why should I? They come from Fortune, and that little brown boy. They came no more to *me* than to *you*," said the girl carelessly. "Yes, another nut; you shall, you little wonders!"

"Now, that's just what I was going to say. *I* might just as well have bought them as *you*; and I must confess I coloured my guess a little, for I only mentioned poor Whisk in passing, and I really don't know that he heard me; and I think if he had thought of getting a squirrel for us, he'd have asked leave to send it to *me*. I could not have objected to that, you know; and that little boy may be ill, you know; or something may have happened to delay him, and he'll turn up; and you'll have to make a bargain, and pay a fair price for them yet."

"Yes, of course; I never thought anything else — eventually; and I knew all along you were jesting. I told these little creatures so this morning, over and over again. If they could speak they would say so. Would not you, you two dear little witches?"

So she carried out her pets with her, and hung their cage among the boughs of the tree that stood by the rustic seat to which she used to take her book.

"Well, I've relieved her mind," thought Miss Sheckleton.

But oddly enough, she found the young lady not sad, but rather cross and fierce all that afternoon — talking more bitterly than ever to her squirrels, about Malory, and with an angry kind of gaiety, of her approaching exile to France.

"It is not always easy to know how to please young ladies," thought Miss Sheckleton. "They won't always take the trouble to know their own minds. Poor thing! It *is* very lonely — very lonesome, to be sure; — and this little temper will blow over."

So, full of these thoughts, Miss Sheckleton repaired to that mysterious study door within which Sir Booth, dangerous as a caged beast, paced his floor, and stormed and ground his teeth, over — not his own vices, prodigalities, and madness, but the fancied villanies of mankind — glared through his window in his paroxysms, and sent his curses like muttered thunder across the sea over the head of old Pendillion — and then would subside, and write long, rambling, rubbishy letters to his attorneys in London, which it was Miss Sheckleton's business to enclose and direct, in her feminine hand, to her old friend Miss Ogden, of Bolton Street, Piccadilly, who saw after the due delivery of these missives, and made herself generally useful during the mystery and crisis of the Fanshawe affairs.

Outside the sombre precincts of Malory Margaret Fanshawe would not go. Old Miss Sheckleton had urged her. Perhaps it was a girlish perversity; perhaps she really disliked the idea of again meeting or making an acquaintance. At all events, she was against any more excursions. Thus the days were dull at Malory, and even Miss Sheckleton was weary of her imprisonment.

It is a nice thing to hit the exact point of reserve and difficulty at which an interest of a certain sort is piqued, without danger of being extinguished. Perhaps it is seldom compassed by art, and a fluke generally does it. I am absolutely certain that there was no design here. But there is a spirit of contrariety — a product of pride, of a sensitiveness almost morbid, of a reserve gliding into duplicity, a duplicity without calculation — which yet operates like design. Cleve was piqued — Cleve was angry. The spirit of the chase was roused, as often as he looked at the dusky woods of Malory.

And now he had walked on three successive days past the old gateway, and on each of them, loitered long on the wind-beaten hill that overlooks the grounds of Malory. But in vain. He was no more accustomed to wait than Louis XIV. Now wonder he grew impatient, and meditated the wildest schemes — even that of walking up to the hall-door, and asking to see Sir Booth and Miss Sheckleton, and, if need be, Miss Fanshawe. He only knew that, one way or another, he *must* see her. He was a young man of exorbitant impatience, and a violent will, and would control events.

There are consequences, of course, and these subjugators are controlled in their turn. Time, as mechanical science shows us, is an element in power; and patience is in durability. God waits, and God is might. And without patience we enter not into the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of power, and the kingdom of eternity.

Cleve Verney's romance, next morning, was doomed to a prosaic interruption. He was examining a chart of the Cardyllian estuary, which hangs in the library, trying to account for the boat's having touched the bank at low water, at a point where he fancied there was a fathom to spare, when the rustic servant entered with —

"Please, sir, a gentleman which his name is Mr. Larkin, is at the door, and wishes to see you, sir, on partickler business, please."

"Just wait a moment, Edward. Three fathom — two — four feet — by Jove! So it is. We might have been aground for five hours; a shame there isn't a buoy there — got off in a coach, by Jove! *Larkin*? Has he no card?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"Oh! yes — very good. Mr. Larkin — The Lodge. Does he look like a gatekeeper?"

"No, sir, please; quite the gentleman."

"What the devil can he want of me? Are you certain he did not ask for my uncle?"

"Yes, sir — the Honourable Mr. Verney — which I told him he wasn't here."

"And why did not you send him away, then?"

"He asked me if you were here, and wished to see you partickler, sir."

"Larkin — The Lodge; what is he like — tall or short — old or young?" asked Cleve.

"Tall gentleman, please, sir — not young — helderley, sir, rayther."

"By Jove! Larkin? I think it *is*. — Is he bald — a long face, eh?" asked Cleve with sudden interest.

"Yes, sir, a good deal in that way, sir — rayther."

"Show him in," said Cleve; "I shall hear all about it, now," he soliloquised as the man departed. "Yes, the luckiest thing in the world!"

The tall attorney, with the tall bald head and pink eyelids, entered simpering, with hollow jaws, and a stride that was meant to be perfectly easy and gentlemanlike. Mr. Larkin had framed his costume upon something he had once seen upon somebody whom he secretly worshipped as a great authority in quiet elegance. But every article in the attorney's wardrobe looked always new — a sort of lavender was his favourite tint — a lavender waistcoat, lavender trowsers, lavender gloves — so that, as the tall lank figure came in, a sort of blooming and vernal effect, in spite of his open black frock-coat, seemed to enter and freshen the chamber.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Larkin? My uncle is at present in France. Sit down, pray — can I be of any use?" said Cleve, who now recollected his appearance perfectly, and did not like it.

The attorney, smiling engagingly, more and more, and placing a very smooth new hat upon the table, sat himself down, crossing one long leg over the other, throwing himself languidly back, and letting one of his long arms swing over the back of his chair, so that his fingers almost touched the floor, said —

"Oh?" in a prolonged tone of mild surprise. "They quite misinformed me in town — not at Verney House — I did not allow myself time to call there; but my agents, they assured me that your uncle, the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, was at present down here at Ware, and a most exquisite retreat it certainly is. My occupations, and I may say my habits, call me a good deal among the residences of our aristocracy," he continued, with a careless grandeur and a slight wave of his hand, throwing himself a little more back, "and I have seen nothing, I assure you, Mr. Verney, more luxurious and architectural than this patrician house of Ware, with its tasteful colonnade, and pilastered front, and the distant view of the fashionable watering-place of Cardyllian, which also belongs to the family; nothing certainly lends a more dignified charm to the scene, Mr. Verney, than a distant view of family property, where, as in this instance, it is palpably accidental — where it is at all forced, as in the otherwise highly magnificent seat of my friend Sir Thomas Oldbull, baronet; so far from elevating, it pains one, it hurts one's taste" — and Mr. Jos. Larkin shrugged and winced a little, and shook his head— "Do *you* know Sir Thomas? — *no* — I dare say — he's quite a new man, Sir Thomas — we all look on him in that light in our part of the world — a — in fact, a *parvenu*," which word Mr. Larkin pronounced as if it were spelled *pair vennew*. "But, you know, the British Constitution, every man may go up — we can't help it — we can't keep them down. Money is power, Mr. Verney, as the old Earl of Coachhouse once said to me — and so it is; and when they make a lot of it, they come up, and we must only receive them, and make the best of them."

"Have you had breakfast, Mr. Larkin?" inquired Cleve, in answer to all this.

"Thanks, yes — at Llwynan — a very sweet spot — one of the sweetest, I should say, in this beauteous country."

"I don't know — I dare say — I think you wished to see me on business, Mr. Larkin?" said Cleve.

"I must say, Mr. Verney, you will permit me, that I really have been taken a little by surprise. I had expected confidently to find your uncle, the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, here, where I had certainly no hope of having the honour of finding you."

I must here interpolate the fact that no person in or out of England was more exactly apprised of the whereabout of the Verneys, uncle and nephew, at the moment when he determined to visit Ware, with the ostensible object of seeing the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke, and the real one of seeing Mr. Cleve, than was my friend Mr. Larkin. He was, however, as we know, a gentleman of ingenious morals and labyrinthine tastes. With truth he was, as it were, on bowing terms, and invariably spoke of her with respect, but that was all. There was no intimacy, she was an utterly impracticable adviser, and Mr. Larkin had grown up under a more convenient tuition.

"The information, however, I feel concerns you, my dear sir, as nearly, in a manner, as it does your uncle; in fact, your youth taken into account, more momentously than it can so old a gentleman. I would, therefore, merely venture to solicit one condition, and that is, that you will be so good as not to mention me to your uncle as having conveyed this information to you, as he might himself have wished to be the first person to open it, and my having done so might possibly induce in his mind an unpleasant feeling."

"I shan't see my uncle before the fifteenth," said Cleve Verney.

"A long wait, Mr. Verney, for such intelligence as it falls to my lot to communicate, which, in short, I shall be most *happy* to lay before you, provided you will be so good as to say you desire it on the condition I feel it due to all parties to suggest."

"You mean that my uncle need not be told anything about this interview. I don't see that he *need*, if it concerns *me*. What concerns *him*, I suppose you will tell him, Mr. Larkin."

"Quite so; that's quite my meaning; merely to avoid unpleasant feeling. I am most anxious to acquaint you — but you understand the delicacy of my position with your uncle — and that premised, I have now to inform you" — here he dropped his voice, and raised his hand a little, like a good man impressing a sublime religious fact— "that your uncle, the Honourable Arthur Verney, is no more."

The young man flushed up to the very roots of his hair. There was a little pink flush, also, on the attorney's long cheeks; for there was something exciting in even making such an announcement. The consequences were so unspeakably splendid.

Mr. Larkin saw a vision of permanent, confidential, and lucrative relations with the rich Verney family, such as warmed the cool tide of his blood, and made him feel for the moment at peace with all mankind. Cleve was looking in the attorney's eyes — the attorney in his. There was a silence for while you might count three or four. Mr. Larkin saw that his intended client, Cleve — the future Viscount Verney — was dazzled, and a little confounded. Recollecting himself, he turned his shrewd gaze on the marble face of Plato, who stood on his pedestal near the window, and a smile seraphic and melancholy lighted up the features and the sad pink eyes of the godly attorney. He raised them; he raised his great hand in the lavender glove, and shook his long head devoutly.

"Mysterious are the dealings of Providence, Mr. Verney; happy those who read the lesson, sir. How few of us so favoured! Wonderful are his ways!"

With a little effort, and an affectation of serenity, Cleve spoke —

"No very great wonder, however, considering he was sixty-four in May last." The young man knew his vagabond uncle Arthur's age to an hour, and nobody can blame him much for his attention to those figures. "It might not have happened, of course, for ten or twelve years, but it might have occurred, I suppose, at any moment. How did it happen? Do you know the particulars? But, is there — is there no" (he was ashamed to say hope) "no chance that he may still be living? — is it quite certain?"

"Perfectly certain, *perfectly*. In a family matter, I have always made it a rule to *be* certain before speaking. No trifling with sacred feelings, that has been my rule, Mr. Verney, and although in this case there are mitigations as respects the survivors, considering the life of privation and solitude, and, as I have reason to know, of ceaseless self-abasement and remorse, which was all that remained to your unhappy relative, the Honourable Arthur Verney, it was hardly to be desired that the event should be very much longer deferred."

Cleve Verney looked for a moment on the table, in the passing contagion of the good attorney's high moral tone.

Cleve just said "*yes*," in a low tone, and shook his head. But rallying, he remarked —

"You, of course, know how the title is affected by this event — and the estates?" And as he raised his eyes, he encountered the attorney's fixed upon him with that peculiar rat-like vigilance, concentrated and dangerous, which, as we know, those meek orbs sometimes assume when his own interests and objects were intensely present to his mind.

Cleve's eye shrank for a second under the enigmatic scrutiny which as instantly gave way, in turn, before *his* glance.

"Oh, certainly," said the attorney, "the public know always something of great houses, and their position; that is, *generally*, of course — details are quite another affair. But everyone knows the truly magnificent position, Mr. Verney, in which the event places your uncle, and I may say you. At the same time the House of Lords, *your* house, I may call it now, are, very properly, particular in the matter of evidence."

"Our consul, I suppose," said Cleve ——

"If he were cognisant of all the points necessary to put in proof, the case would be a very simple one indeed," said Mr. Larkin, with a sad smile, slowly shaking his tall head.

"Where, Mr. Larkin, did my poor uncle die?" inquired Cleve, with a little effort at the word "uncle."

"In Constantinople, sir — a very obscure quarter. His habits, Mr. Verney, were very strange; he lived like a rat — I beg pardon, I should say a *rabbit* in a burrow. Darkness, sir, obscurity — known, I believe, personally to but two individuals. Strange fate, Mr. Verney, for one born to so brilliant an inheritance. Known to but two individuals, one of whom died — what a thing life is! — but a few months before him, leaving, I may say, but one reliable witness to depose to his death; and, for certain reasons, that witness is most reluctant to leave Constantinople, and not very easily to be discovered, even there. You see, Mr. Verney, now, probably, something of the difficulty of the case. Fortunately, I have got some valuable information, confidential, I may say, in its nature, and with the aid of a few valuable local agents, providentially at this moment at my disposal, I think the difficulty may be quite overcome."

"If old Arthur Verney is dead, I'll find proof of the fact," said Cleve; "I'll send out people who will know how to come at it."

"You must be well advised, and very cautious, Mr. Verney — in fact, I may tell you, you can't be *too* cautious, for I happen to know that a certain low firm are already tampering with the witness."

"And how the devil can it concern any firm to keep us — my uncle Kiffyn Verney out of his rights?" said Mr. Cleve Verney, scornfully.

"Very true, Mr. Verney, in one sense, *no* motive; but I am older in the sad experience of the world than you, Mr. Verney. At your age I *could* not believe it, much later I *would* not. But, ah! Mr. Verney, in the long-run, the facts are too strong for us. Poor, miserable, fallen human nature, it is capable of *anything*. It is only too true, and too *horrible*. It sticks at *nothing*, my dear Mr. Verney, and their object is to command the witness by this means, and to dictate terms to you — in fact, my dear Mr. Verney, it is shocking to think of it — to *extort money*."

"I hope you over-estimate the difficulty. If the death *has* occurred I wager my life we'll *prove* it, and come what will I hope my uncle will never be persuaded to give those scoundrels a shilling."

"Certainly not — not a shilling — not a farthing — but I have taken prompt, and I trust decisive steps to checkmate those gentlemen. I am not at liberty, just at present, to disclose all I know; I don't say that I could exactly undertake the management of the case, but I shall be very happy to volunteer all the assistance in my power; and as I say, some accidental circumstances place me in a position to undertake that you shall not be defeated. A break down, I may mention, would be a more serious matter than you seem to suppose; in fact, I should prefer the Honourable Arthur Verney's living for twelve years more, with clear proof of his death at the end of that time, than matters as they stand at present, with a failure of the necessary proof."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Larkin; my uncle, I am sure, will also be *very* much obliged. I understand, of course, the sort of difficulty you apprehend."

"It's not conjectural, Mr. Verney, I wish it were — but it's past *that*; it *exists*," said the attorney, sadly.

"Well, I can only say, we are very much obliged," said Cleve, quite honestly. "I shan't forget your wish, that I should not mention our conversation to my uncle, and if you should learn anything further — — "

"*You* shall certainly hear it, Mr. Verney. I must now take my leave. Sweet day, and a beauteous country! How blest are you, Mr. Verney, in your situation! I allude to your scenery, and I may add, the architectural magnificence of this princely residence. What a row of windows as I approached the house! What a number of bedrooms you must have! Hardly so many, let us hope, as there are mansions, Mr. Verney, in that house to which we humbly trust we are proceeding." Mr. Larkin, who, on his way had called professionally upon a subscriber to the Gylingden Chapel — an "eminent Christian" — and talked accordingly — perceived that his meat was a little too strong for a babe of Mr. Verney's standing, and concluded more like an attorney of this world.

"Splendid and convenient residence, and in all respects suitable, Mr. Verney, to the fine position of usefulness, and, I may say, splendour, to which you are about being called," and he smiled round upon the bookcases and furniture, and waved his hand gently, as if in the act of diffusing a benediction over the chairs and tables.

"Won't you take something, Mr. Larkin, before you go?" asked Cleve.

"No — thanks — no, Mr. Verney — many thanks. It is but an hour since I had my modest *déjeuner* at that sweet little inn at Llwynan."

So on the doorsteps they parted; the attorney smiling quite celestially, and feeling all a-glow with affability, virtue, and a general sense of acceptance. In fact he was pleased with his morning's work for several reasons — pleased with himself, with Cleve Verney, and confident of gliding into the management of the Verney estates, and in great measure of the Verneys themselves; now seeing before him in the great and cloudy vista of his future, a new and gorgeous castle in the air. These *châteaux*, in the good man's horizon had, of late, been multiplying rapidly, and there was now quite a little city of palaces in his perspective — an airy pageant which, I think, he sometimes mistook for the New Jerusalem, he talked and smiled so celestially when it was in view.

CHAPTER XV.

WITHIN THE SANCTUARY.

"So the old man of the mountains is dead at last," thought Cleve. "Poor old sinner — what a mess he made of it — uncle Arthur! Fine cards, uncle, ill played, sir. I wonder what it all was. To judge by the result he must have been a precious fool. Of what sort was your folly, I wonder — weak brains, or violent will. They say he was clever, — a little bit mad, I dare say; an idea ran away with him, whip and spurs, but no bridle — not unlike me, I sometimes think, headstrong — headlong — but I'll never run in *your* track, though I may break my neck yet. And so this Viscount Verney, *de jure* — outlaw and renegade, *de facto* — has died in one of those squalid lanes of Constantinople, and lies among poor Asiatics, in a Turkish cemetery! This was the meaning of my uncle Kiffyn's letter — never was mortal in such a fuss and flurry about anything, as he is at this moment; and yet he must practise his affectation of indifference, and his airs of superiority — *what* a fool my uncle Kiffyn is!"

Cleve walked back to the study. Things looked changed, somehow. He had never perceived before how old and dingy the furniture was, and how shabby the paint and gilding had grown.

"This house must be made habitable, one of the first things," said he, "and we must take our right place in the county. The Hammerdons have been everything here. It must not be so."

Cleve went to the window and looked out. The timber of Ware is old and magnificent. The view of Malory and Cardyllian and all that Verney seaboard does make an imposing display across the water. The auctioneering slang of the attorney, had under its glare and vulgarity a pleasant foundation of truth, and as the young man viewed this landscape the sun seemed to brighten over it, and he smiled with a new and solemn joy swelling at his heart.

"I hope that attorney fellow, Larkin, will go on and work this thing properly. It would be too bad that any delay should occur for want of proof

— another name for want of energy — after the unfortunate old fellow has actually died."

Mr. Larkin's card was upon the table, and with the providence which in all small matters distinguished him, he had written under "The Lodge" his post-town, "Gylingden." So Cleve Verney wrote forthwith to tell him that although he had no authority to direct inquiries in the matter, and that his uncle would, of course, undertake *that*, he was yet so strongly of opinion that *no time* should be wasted, and that Mr. Larkin's services might be of the greatest possible value, that he could not forbear writing to say so; and also that he would take the first opportunity of pressing that view upon his uncle. So the letter found the good attorney that evening at "The Lodge." He needed no such spur. He was, in fact, very deep in the business already, and, with his own objects in view, was perhaps quite as much excited as either Cleve Verney or his uncle.

When Cleve had dispatched this note, the restlessness and fever of this new and great suspense were upon him. It was impossible to sit down and read his magazines and newspapers. Had he been a fisherman he might have taken his rod and fly-hook, and becalmed his excited spirit in that mysterious absorption. But he had never possessed patience enough for the gentle craft. It ought to be cultivated early for its metaphysical virtues — neither transient like music nor poisonous like opium. For a harassed or excited mind, priceless is the resource of being able to project itself into the condition of the otter or the crane, and think of *nothing* but fish.

Two sedatives, however, were at his disposal — cigars and the sea — and to them he betook himself. Away went the *Wave* over the sparkling sea, with a light breeze, toward the purple dome of Pendillion, streaked with dull yellow rock and towering softly in the distance. Delightful sea-breeze, fragrant cigars, and gently rising, misty woods of Malory with their romantic interest — and all seen under the glory of this great news from the East. The cutter seemed to dance and writhe along the waves in elation and delight, and the spray flew up like showers of brilliants from the hands of friendly Undines sporting round her bows. Trance-like it seemed, all musical and dreamy; and Cleve felt, for the hour, he could have lived and died in that luxurious fascination.

Away for Pendillion ran the cutter. He did not choose idle tongues in Cardyllian to prate of his hovering about Malory. He knew his yacht would be seen from the pier. Active Captain Shrapnell frequented it, and would forthwith report her course in the billiard and reading rooms, with such conjectures as might strike his ingenious mind. So the cutter should run for that remote headland for nearly an hour, and then with a change of tack for Penruthyn Priory, which was hidden from Cardyllian eyes by intervening promontories; and not one of the wiseacres could tell or guess where he had been.

When the sail of the yacht had grown like a gray speck in the distance, she was put about, and at a sharp angle ran to the rude pier of Penruthyn Priory, whence taking his gun as if for a ramble in the warren, he told his men to expect him in about two hours, at the turn of the tide.

Across the Warren there is a wild pathway which leads toward Malory, coming out upon the old road close by Llanderris churchyard, and within a few minutes' walk of the wooded grounds of the ancient Dower House of the Verneys.

Approached from this point, there is a peculiar melancholy in the old wood. The quiet little church of Llanderris, and the graveyard with its old yew tree, and the curve of the narrow road overhung by ivy-mantled ash trees form the foreground, as you approach the wildest side of the woodlands, which lie at the foot of the gentle descent.

The little by-road making a sweep skirts the rear of the Malory grounds. Here the great hawthorn hedges have, time out of mind, been neglected, and have grown gigantic and utterly irregular, stooping from the grassy bank like isolated trees, and leaving wide gaps through which you may see the darkened sward, the roots and stems of the forest trees within, and the vistas that break dimly into the distance.

Hours had passed since the *Wave* had left the jetty of Ware, and the autumnal sun was already declining in the early evening. There is no hour and no light, not even night and moonlight — so favourable to a certain pensive and half saddened vein of fancy, as that at which the day gives signs of approaching farewell, and gilds the landscape with a funereal splendour.

When Cleve reached the old road that descends by the churchyard, and through its double hedgerows looked down upon the enchanted grounds of Malory, he slackened his pace, and fell into a sort of reverie and rapture.

There are few of the impostures we commit more amusing, than that which we habitually practise upon ourselves in assigning the highest moral motives for doing what pleases us best.

"If my uncle Arthur had married some one whom he really loved, how differently all might have gone with him! Here am I, with more money ultimately awaiting me than I shall really care to spend. One thousand pounds with me will do more than two thousand with most other men. I don't play. I'm not on the turf. Why should I sacrifice my chance of happiness for the sake of a little more money, which I really don't want, or for the sake of party connection? If I can't make my way without the aid of a wife, I'm not fit for politics, and the sooner I turn to something else the better. Every man ought to consult his affections, and to make his home the centre of them. Where is the good of fortune, and money, and all that, if it does not enable one to do so? How can you love your children if you don't love their mother — if you hate her, by Jove — as I know fellows that do. Settlements, and political influence — all very fine — and we expect happiness to come of itself, when we have sold our last chance of it."

In this vein was Cleve Verney's contemplation — and even more virtuous and unworldly as he proceeded — in the elation of his new sense of omnipotence and glory. Had he been a little franker with himself he might have condensed it thus, "A fancy has taken possession of me, and I don't choose to deny myself."

Troubling his visions, however, was the image of his uncle, and the distant sound of his cold uncomfortable voice, and a sense of severity, selfishness, and danger, under his feeble smile. Against this teasing phantom with its solemn prattle, however, he closed his eyes and shook his ears. He had never enjoyed a sail or a walk so in all his life. Was nature ever so glorious before, or romance so noble and tender? What a pensive glow and glory was over everything! He walked down the steep little curve of the old road, and found himself on the path that follows the low bank and thorn trees which fence in the woods of Malory.

Walking slowly, and now and then pausing, he looked among the glittering trunks and down the opening aisles of the wood. But there was no sign of life. The weeds trembled and nodded in the shadow, and now and then a brown leaf fell. It was like the wood of the "Sleeping Beauty." The dusky sunlight touched it drowsily, and all the air was silent and slumbrous.

The path makes a turn round a thick clump of trees, and as he passed this, on a sudden he saw the beautiful young lady standing near the bank, her hat thrown on the ground, the thick folds of her chestnut hair all golden in the misty sunlight. Never so like the Guido before. The large eyes, the delicate, oval, and pearly tints, and the small vermilion mouth, its full lips parted, he could see the sunlight glitter on the edge of the little teeth within.

A thrill — a kind of shiver — passed through him, as if at sight of a beautiful spectre. She saw him stop, and in the momentary silence, he thought — was it fancy? — he saw a blush just tinge her cheeks. On the bank, glimmering in the sunlight, was the cage with the little squirrels hopping inside.

"What a sweet evening!" said he, "I've been down to Penruthyn Priory — I've grown so fond of that old place. I used not to care about it; but one changes — and now it seems to me the most interesting place in the world, except, perhaps, one. *You* tired of it very quickly, Miss Fanshawe. You have not half seen it, you know. Why don't you come and see it again?"

"I suppose we ought," said the young lady, "and I dare say we shall."

"Then do tomorrow, pray," said he.

She laughed, and said —

"An excursion like that must always depend on the whim of the hour, don't you think, to be the least pleasant? It loses its charm the moment it loses the air of perfect liberty and caprice; and I don't know whether we shall ever see the old Priory again."

"I'm very sorry," said Cleve. There was honest disappointment in his tone, and his dark soft eyes looked full in hers.

She laughed again a little, and looking at the pretty old Church of Llanderris, that stands among nodding ash trees on the near upland, she said —

"That old church is, I think, quite beautiful. I was exploring these woods with my little squirrels here, when I suddenly came upon this view, and here I stood for nearly ten minutes."

"I'm very much obliged, I know, to Llanderris Church, and I'm glad you admire it, for I like it very much myself," said Cleve. "And so you have got two squirrels. I was so sorry to hear last Sunday that you had lost your little pet, Whisk. Wasn't that his name?"

"Yes. Poor little Whisk!"

“And you’re not going to leave Malory?”

“Not immediately, I believe,” said Miss Fanshawe.

“That makes me very happy for *three* reasons,” he said, lowering his voice.— “First, it proves that you have some confidence, after all, in me; and next, because it shows that you are not so troubled here as you feared you might be; and the third reason — perhaps you shall never know until, at least, you can guess it.”

“Yes; papa is not talking of leaving immediately, and I’m glad of it, for I know it was important that he should be able for a little time longer to remain in England. And now, I think my little squirrels want their nuts, and I must go.”

“Poor little prisoners! You’re all prisoners here. You shut yourselves up so jealously,” said Cleve. “The monastic spirit still haunts this place, I think. It must be that old convent ground. Almost every day I walk by this old place, and never have seen you once, even through the grille, until to-day.”

She stooped to pick up the cage.

“I’m sure you’ll shake hands before you go, Miss Fanshawe, won’t you, through the grille — the hedge, I mean?”

“Well, I wish you goodbye,” she said, merrily, but without coming nearer.

“And we are good friends?”

“Oh, yes.”

“And — and I’ll tell you a secret, but you must forgive me.” As he spoke, Cleve Verney, with a step or two, mounted the bank and stood beside the young lady within the precincts of Malory.

“Don’t mind coming in, pray,” said she.

“Only for a moment — only one word,” besought Cleve.

“Well,” laughed Miss Fanshawe, though he thought a little uneasily, for she glanced toward the house, and he fancied was thinking of Sir Booth. “If you *will*, I can’t help it, only you must remember there are dogs in the yard, and,” she added, more gravely, “papa has so many notices up to keep people away, I think he’d be vexed.”

“Here I’m almost on neutral ground. It is only a step, and I’m gone. I want to tell you — you must forgive me — but it was I who ventured to send that little boy with those squirrels there. I knew how lonely you were, and I was selfish enough to wish to give you even so small an evidence of the sincerity of my professions — my anxiety to be employed."

"That little boy promised to return, but has never come back," said Miss Fanshawe, throwing back her head a little, and pushing back her rich tresses. He thought there was a brighter colour in her cheeks, and that she looked a little haughty.

"He could not help it, poor little fellow. He lives at Pendillion, nine miles across the water, and nearly thirty by the road. You must lay the whole blame upon me — you must, indeed. It's all my fault."

Miss Fanshawe was looking down upon the unconscious squirrels. There was something of disdain in this glance that fell from under her long silken lashes askance upon them, hopping and frisking within their wires, as if she meditated sending them away in disgrace.

"You must not be vexed with *them* either, it is all my doing, my fault, let me confess. I ran down in my boat to Pendillion, and looked up that little fellow who always has half-a-dozen squirrels. I had to go twice to find him, and then brought him here, and he met a lady in the wood. There was no mistaking the description, and so these little creatures are your happy captives — and — I hope you are not very angry with me."

The colour was brilliant in her cheeks, and gave a corresponding brilliancy to her great eyes; how were they so mysterious and yet so frank? She looked on him gravely in silence for a moment, and then down upon the little prisoners in the cage. Was she angry — was she embarrassed — was she secretly pleased? That odd, beautiful girl — he could not quite understand her.

But Mr. Cleve Verney was an impetuous orator; when he took fire upon a theme he ran on daringly —

"And I've done more — I'm even *more* guilty; I'll hide nothing — I've taken a great reward — I've got a talisman that I prize above anything — this little coin;" and there was a bright shilling fixed like a "charm" to his watchguard. "It is *mine* — you only can guess; no one shall ever know why I wore it next my heart, and you may blame, but you won't *quite* condemn me; and won't you make it up with these poor little squirrels, and tell me it's all forgiven, and — by Jove, here's Miss Sheckleton."

And so she was approaching with her firm light step, and pleasant smile, in the shadow of the great trees, and near enough already to greet Mr.

Verney with —

"How d'ye do? What a charming evening?" and having arrived at the hawthorn tree beside which they were standing, she added, in the low tone in which she habitually spoke of the Baronet— "Sir Booth is not very well this evening — he's in his room, and he'll stay at home reading the newspapers, at all events for an hour or so."

There was a want of tact in this little intimation which had an effect quite different from that which the goodnatured spinster intended; for Miss Fanshawe said, lifting the little cage, and looking in upon its tiny inhabitants in the sunlight —

"Then I had better run in and see him." And with a gay slight "Goodbye," she nodded to Mr. Cleve Verney. The smile was only a momentary light, and the great hazel eyes looked thoughtfully as she turned away; and as she disappeared among the old trees, it seemed to him that a dull shadow suddenly descended upon the trees, and the grass, and the landscape.

"We are always, Mr. Verney, in a fuss here; that is, we never know exactly what a post may bring us any morning or evening, or how suddenly we may have to go. You may guess what it is to *me*, who have to arrange everything," said the old lady, lifting her thin fingers and shaking her head. "As for Margaret there, she's both clever and energetic — but *no* experience; and therefore, I don't allow her to take her share. Poor thing, it is a sad thing for her, and this place so very solitary."

"You must make her come tomorrow," said Cleve, "and see the Priory; you only *half* saw it the other day, and I assure you it *is* really well worth looking at; and it will make an excuse to tempt her outside this gloomy place. I can't conceive anything worse than being shut up week after week in this solitude and darkness; you really *must* persuade her; at what hour do you think you will be there?"

"Well now, I really *will* try," said goodnatured Miss Sheckleton, "positively I will; and I think about three o'clock — I'll make an effort; and I'll send for the boat without asking her, and she can hardly refuse me, then. You have not been here very long, Mr. Verney?" she added, with a not unnatural curiosity.

"Only a minute or two before you came," he answered, a little inaccurately, I think. "Well, then, tomorrow, I hope to tempt her out a little, as you advise; and — and" — she glanced over her shoulder towards the house— “perhaps I had better bid you goodbye for the present, Mr. Verney; goodbye! How beautiful everything looks!”

She gave him her hand very cordially. Was there a sort of freemasonry and a romantic sympathy in that kindly farewell? Cleve felt that she at least half understood him. Even in reserved natures, there is an instinctive yearning for a confidant in such situations, and a friendly recognition, even at a distance, of one that promises to fill that place of sympathy.

So there they parted, with friendly looks, in a friendly spirit. Romantic and simple Miss Sheckleton, he felt that you were a true denizen of those regions in which of late, he had been soaring, unworldly, true. It is well for a time to put off the profound attorney-nature of man — we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out — and to abandon ourselves for a few happy moments, to the poetry and kindness which are eternal.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR VISITOR.

In romances, it is usual for lovers to dream a great deal, and always of the objects of their adorations. We acquiesce gravely and kindly in these conventional visions; but, on reflection, we must admit that lovers have no faculty of dreaming, and of selecting the subjects of their dreams, superior to that of ordinary persons. Cleve, I allow, sat up rather late that night, thinking, I venture to say, a great deal about the beautiful young lady who, whether for good or ill, now haunted his thoughts incessantly; and with this brilliant phantom, he walked romantically in the moonlight, by the chiming shingle of the sea. But I don't know what his dreams were about, or that he had any dreams at all; and, in fact, I believe he slept very soundly, but awoke in the morning with a vague anticipation of something very delightful and interesting. Why is it that when we first awake the pleasures or the horrors of the coming day seem always most intense?

Another bright autumnal day, with just breeze enough to fill the sails of the cutter. On his breakfast-table, from the postoffice of Ware, lay a letter, posted overnight, at Gylingden, by his newly revealed good angel, "very truly, his," Jos. Larkin. It said —

"My Dear Sir, — The interview with which you this morning honoured me, conveyed more fully even than your note implies your wishes on the subject of it. Believe me, I needed no fresh incentive to exertion in a matter so pregnant with serious results, and shall be only too happy to expend thought, time, and money, in securing *with promptitude* a successful termination of what in dilatory or inexperienced hands might possibly prove a most tedious and distressing case. I have before me directions of proofs on which I have partially acted, and mean in the sequel to do so completely. I may mention that there awaited me on my arrival a letter from my agent, to whom I more particularly referred in the conversation, which you were pleased to invite this morning, conveying information of very high importance, of which I shall be happy to apprise you in detail, when next I have the honour of a conference. I am not quite clear as to whether I mentioned this morning a person named Dingwell?— "

"No, you did not," interpolated Cleve.

"Who," continued the letter, "resides under circumstances of considerable delicacy on his part, at Constantinople, and who has hitherto acted as the correspondent and agent of the Jewish firm, through whom the Dowager Lady Verney and your uncle, the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, were accustomed, with a punctuality so honourable to their feelings, to forward the respective annuities, which they were so truly considerate, as mutually to allow for the maintenance of the unfortunate deceased. This gentleman, Mr. Dingwell, has been unhappily twice a bankrupt in London, in early life, and there are still heavy judgments against him; and as he is the only witness discoverable, competent from his habits of regular communication with your lamented uncle for years, to depose to his identity and his death; it is unfortunate that there should exist, for the special reasons I have mentioned, considerable risk and difficulty in his undertaking to visit London, for the purpose of making the necessary depositions; and I fear he cannot be induced to take that step without some considerable pecuniary sacrifice on your part. This will necessarily form one of the topics for discussion at the proposed conference of the 15th prox.; and it is no small point in our favour satisfactorily to be assured that a witness to the cardinal points to which I have referred, is actually produceable, and at this moment in communication with me.

"I have the honour to be, dear Sir,

"Very truly yours,

"Jos. Larkin.

"The Lodge, Gylingden.

"P.S. I may mention that the Jewish firm to which I have referred, have addressed to me a letter, apprising me of the decease of the Hon. Arthur Verney, a step which, as terminating the annuities on which they received an annual percentage, they would not, I presume, have adopted, had they not been absolutely certain of the event, and confident also that we must, if they were silent, be otherwise apprised of it."

I think our old friend, Jos. Larkin, wrote this letter with several views, one of which was that, in the event of his thinking proper, some years hence, notwithstanding his little flourishes of gratuitous service, to unmuzzle the ox who had trod out the corn, and to send in his little bill, it might help to show that he had been duly instructed to act in this matter at least by Mr. Cleve Verney. The other object, that of becoming the channel of negotiating terms with Mr. Dingwell, offered obvious advantages to a gentleman of acquisitive diplomacy and ingenious morals.

Cleve, however, had not yet learned to suspect this Christian attorney, and the letter on the whole was highly satisfactory.

“Capital man of business, this Mr. Larkin! Who could have expected an answer, and so full an answer, so immediately to his letter? That is the kind of attorney the world sighed for. Eager, prompt, clear, making his clients’ interests his own” — more literally sometimes than Cleve was yet aware— “disinterested, spirited, for was he not risking his time, skill, and even money, without having been retained in this matter, and with even a warning that he might possibly never be so? Did he not also come in the livery of religion, and discuss business, as it were, in a white robe and with a palm in his hand? And was it not more unlikely that a man who committed himself every hour to the highest principles should practise the lowest, than a person who shirked the subject of virtue, and thought religion incongruous with his doings?” Perhaps, Cleve thought, there *is* a little too much of that solemn flam. But who can object if it helps to keep him straight?

This was a day of surprises. Cleve had gone up to his room to replenish his cigar-case, when a chaise drove up to the hall door of Ware, and looking out he beheld with a sense of dismay his uncle’s man, Mr. Ridley, descending from his seat on the box, and opening the door of the vehicle, from which the thin stiff figure of the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney descended, and entered the house.

Could the devil have hit upon a more ill-natured plan for defeating the delightful hopes of that day? Why could not that teasing old man stay where he was? Heaven only knows for how many days he might linger at Ware, lecturing Cleve upon themes on which his opinion was not worth a pin, directing him to write foolish letters, and now and then asking him to *obleege* him by copying papers of which he required duplicates, benumbing him with his chilly presence, and teasing him by his exactions.

Cleve groaned when he saw this spectacle from his window, and muttered something, I don’t care what.

"Let him send for me if he wants me. I shan't pretend to have seen him," was Cleve's petulant resolve. But a knock at his room door, with an invitation from his uncle to visit him in the library, settled the question.

"How d'ye do, Cleve?" and his uncle, who was sitting in a great chair at the table, with some letters, noted, and folded into long slim parallelograms, already before him, put forth a thin hand for him to shake, throwing back his head, and fixing his somewhat dull grey eyes with an imperious sort of curiosity upon him, he said, "Yes — yes — recruiting. I was always in favour of making the most of the recess, about it. You make the most of it. I saw Winkledon and your friend Colonel Tellerton at Dyce's yesterday, and talked with 'em about it, and they both agreed with me, we are pretty sure of a stormy session, late sittings, and no end of divisions, and I am glad you are taking your holiday so sensibly. The *Wave's* here, isn't she? And you sail in her a good deal, I dare say, about it, and you've got yourself a good deal sunburnt. Yes, the sun does that; and you're looking very well, about it, I think, very well indeed."

To save the reader trouble, I mention here, that the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney has a habit of introducing the words "about it," as everybody is aware who has the honour of knowing him, without relation to their meaning, but simply to caulk, as it were, the seams of his sentences, to stop them where they open, and save his speech from foundering for want of this trifling half-pennyworth of oakum.

"Very lonely, sir, Ware is. You've come to stay for a little time perhaps."

"Oh! no. Oh, dear no. My view upon that subject is very decided indeed, as you know. I ask myself this question, — What good can I possibly do, about it, by residing for any time at Ware, until my income shall have been secured, and my proper position ascertained and recognised? I find myself, by the anomalous absurdity of our existing law, placed in a position, about it, of so much difficulty and hardship, that although the people must feel it very much, and the county regret it, I feel it only due to myself, to wash my hands about it, of the entire thing for the present, and to accept the position of a mere private person, which the existing law, in its wisdom, imposes upon me — don't you see?"

"It certainly is," acquiesced Cleve, "a gross absurdity that there should be no provision for such a state of things."

"Absurdity! my dear sir, I don't call it *absurdity* at all, I call it rank injustice, and a positive *cruelty*," said the feeble voice of this old gentleman with an eager quaver in it, while, as always occurred when he was suddenly called on for what he called his "sentiments" upon this intolerable topic, a pink flush suffused his thin temples and narrow forehead. "Here I am, about it, invested by opinion, don't you see, and a moral constraint, with the liabilities of a certain position, and yet excluded from its privileges and opportunities. And what, I ask myself, can come of such a thing, except the sort of thing, about it, which we see going on? Don't you see?"

"Any news of any kind from the East, sir?" asked Cleve.

"Well, now, wait — a — a — I'll come to it — I'm coming to that. I wrote to you to say that you were to meet me in town, d'ye see, on the fifteenth, and I mean to have a Mr. Larkin, an attorney, a very proper person in his rank of life — a very proper person — about it, to meet us and produce his papers, and make his statement again. And I may tell you that he's of opinion, and under the impression, that poor Arthur is *dead*, about it; and now you'll read this letter — very good, and now this — very good, and now this."

As he handed these papers over to Cleve in succession, the young gentleman thought his uncle's air a little grander than usual, and fancied there was a faint simper of triumph discernible under the imposing solemnity of his looks.

"A — well, that's all, at present; and immediately on receiving the first of these I wrote to the consul there — a very proper man, very well connected; I was, I may say, instrumental in getting his appointment for him — saying he'd obleege me by instituting inquiry and communicating the result, and possibly I may hear before the fifteenth; and I should be very glad, about it, to learn or know something definite, in which case, you see, there would be a natural solution of the complication, and poor Arthur's death, about it, would clear up the whole thing, as in fact it does in all such cases, don't you see?"

"Of course, sir, perfectly."

"And as to mourning and all that, about it, I don't quite see my way; no, I don't; because, d'ye see, I rather think there should be nothing of the kind: but it's time enough to decide what the house of Verney are to do when I shall have all the circumstances, don't you see, and everything."

Cleve acquiesced.

"And if the dissolution comes next autumn — as they apprehend it may — you'll have no annoyance from the old quarter — Sir Booth Fanshawe — he's quite ruined — about it; and he's been obliged to leave the country; he's in France, I understand, and I've directed our people in town to follow up the proceedings as sharply as possible. He has never spared me, egad, and has often distressed me very seriously by his malevolent and utterly wanton opposition where he had absolutely no chance whatever, and knew it, nor any object, I give you my honour, except to waste my money, when, owing to the absurd and cruel position I was placed in, he knew very well I could not have a great deal to throw away. I look upon a person of that kind as a mere nuisance; and I look upon it as a matter of dooty and of principle, about it, which one owes to society, don't you see, to exterminate them like vermin. And if you want to stop it, you mustn't let him off when you've got the advantage at last, don't you see? You must follow it up, and show evil-disposed people that if they choose to play that game they *may*, but that you won't let 'em off, about it, and that."

These were not very pleasant words in Cleve's ears.

"And, egad, sir, I'll make an example of that person — I owe it to the principle of fair political warfare, about it. What business had he to run me into six thousand pounds expense for nothing, when he had not really a hundred pounds at the time he could call his own? And I ask myself, where's the good of laws if there's no way of reaching a person who commits, from the worst possible motives, an outrage like that, and goes on doing that sort of thing, about it?"

Here the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney paused for a minute, and then looked at his watch.

"Just ten minutes still left me. I'll ask you to touch the bell, Cleve. I'm going to the railway — to Llwynan, about it, and to see the people at Heathcote Hall; and I've been thinking you ought to turn over in your mind what I said last Easter, when we were at Dawling Hill. If this affair of poor Arthur's should turn out to be quite true, I think the connection would recommend itself to most people," he said, grandly, "and in fact you might strengthen yourself very materially, about it. You could not do better than marry Ethel; depend upon it, the connection will serve you. Her uncle, you know — always some of that family — in the Cabinet; and Dorminster, they say — every one says it — Winkledon, for instance, and Colonel Tellers, about it — they both said the other day he'll very probably be Minister. Every one says that sort of thing, about it; and it has been my opinion a long time before people generally began to say so, and things of that sort, don't you see?"

As a general rule, Cleve knew that there was no use in fighting any favourite point with his uncle. He acquiesced and relied upon dilatory opportunities and passive resistance; so now he expressed himself most gratefully for the interest he had always taken in him, and seemed to lend an attentive ear, while the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney rambled on upon this theme in his wise and quietly dictatorial way. It was one of his pleasantest occupations, and secretly pleased his self-love, this management of Cleve Verney — really a promising young man — and whom he magnified, as he did everything else that belonged to him, and whose successes in the House, and growth in general estimation, he quietly took to himself as the direct consequence of his own hints and manipulations, and his "keeping the young man straight about it."

"He has an idea — the young man has — that I know something about it — that I have seen some public life, and known people — and things of that sort. He is a young man who can take a hint, and, egad, I think I've kept him pretty straight about it up to this, and put him on a right track, and things; and if I'm spared, I'll put him on, sir. I know pretty well about things, and you see the people talk to me, and they listen to me, about it, and I make him understand what he's about, and things."

And then came the parting. He gave Cleve ten pounds, which Mrs. Jones, the draper's wife, used to distribute for him among certain poor people of Cardyllian. So his small soul was not destitute of kindliness, after its fashion; and he drove away from Ware, and Cleve stood upon the steps, smiling, and waving his hand, and repeating, "On the fifteenth," and then suddenly was grave.

CHAPTER XVII.

THEY VISIT THE CHAPEL OF PENRUTHYN AGAIN.

Very grave was Cleve Verney as the vehicle disappeared. His uncle's conversation had been very dismal. "Ethel, indeed! What an old bore he is, to be sure! Well, no matter; we shall see who'll win the game. He is so obstinate and selfish." There was, indeed, an enemy in front — an up-hill battle before him. He prayed heaven, at all events, that the vindictive old gentleman might not discover the refuge of Sir Booth Fanshawe. Were he to do so, what a situation for Cleve! He would talk the matter over with his uncle's attorneys, who knew him, with whom he had often been deputed to confer on other things; who, knowing that he stood near the throne, would listen to him, and they would not be over zealous in hunting the old Baronet down. With those shrewd suspicious fellows, Cleve would put it all on election grounds. Sir Booth was in a kind of way popular. There would be a strong feeling against any extreme or vindictive courses being taken by his uncle, and this would endanger, or at all events embarrass Cleve very seriously.

Away shadows of the future — smoke and vapours of the pit! Let us have the sun and air of heaven while we may. What a charming day! how light and pleasant the breeze! The sails rattle, quiver and fill, and stooping to the breeze, away goes the *Wave* — and, with a great sigh, away go Cleve's troubles, for the present; and his eye travels along the seaboard, from Cardyllian on to Malory, and so to the dimmer outline of Penruthyn Priory.

As usual, they ran for Pendillion — the wind favouring — and at two o'clock Cleve stood on the sea-rocked stones of the rude pier of Penruthyn, and ordered his men to bring the yacht, seaward, round the point of Cardrwydd, and there to await him. There was some generalship in this. His interview of the morning had whetted his instincts of caution. Round Cardrwydd the men could not see, and beside he wanted no one — especially not that young lady, whom the sight might move to he knew not what capricious resolve, to see the *Wave* in the waters of Penruthyn.

Away went the yacht, and Cleve strolled up to the ancient Priory, from the little hillock beyond which is a view of the sea half way to Malory.

Three o’clock came, and no sail in sight.

“They’re not coming. I shan’t see her. They must have seen our sail. Hang it, I knew we tacked too soon. And she’s such an odd girl, I think, if she fancied I were here she’d rather stay at home, or go anywhere else. Three o’clock!” He held his watch to his ear for a moment. “By Jove! I thought it had stopped. That hour seems so long. I won’t give it up yet, though. That” — he was going to call him *brute*, but even under the irritation of the hypothesis he could not— “that oddity. Sir Booth, may have upset their plans or delayed them.”

So, with another long look over the lonely sea toward Malory, he descended from his post of observation, and sauntered, rather despondingly, by the old Priory, and down the steep and pretty old road, that sinuously leads to the shore and the ruinous little quay, for which boats of tourists still make. He listened and lingered on the way. His mind misgave him. He would have deferred the moment when his last hope was to go out, and the chance of the meeting, which had been his last thought at night, and his first in the morning, should lose itself in the coming shades of night. Yes, he would allow them a little time — it could not be much — and if a sail were not in sight by the time he reached the strand he would give all up, and set out upon his dejected walk to Cardrwydd.

He halted and lingered for awhile in that embowered part of the little by-road which opens on the shore, half afraid to terminate a suspense in which was still a hope. With an effort, then, he walked on, over the little ridge of sand and stones, and, lo! there was the boat with furled sails by the broken pier, and within scarce fifty steps the Malory ladies were approaching.

He raised his hat — he advanced quickly — not knowing quite how he felt, and hardly recollecting the minute after it was spoken, what he had said. He only saw that the young lady seemed surprised and grave. He thought she was even vexed.

“I’m so glad we’ve met you here, Mr. Verney,” said artful Miss Sheckleton. “I was just thinking, compared with our last visit, how little profit we should derive from our present. I’m such a dunce in ancient art and architecture, and in all the subjects, in fact, that help one to understand such a building as this, that I despaired of enjoying our excursion at all as I did our last; but, perhaps you are leaving, and once more is too much to impose such a task as you undertook on our former visit."

"Going away! You could not really think such a thing possible, while I had a chance of your permitting me to do the honours of our poor Priory."

He glanced at Miss Fanshawe, who was at the other side of the chatty old lady, as they walked up the dim monastic road; but the Guido was looking over the low wall into the Warren, and his glance passed by unheeded.

"I'm so fond of this old place," said Cleve, to fill in a pause. "I should be ashamed to say — you'd think me a fool almost — how often I take a run over here in my boat, and wander about its grounds and walls, quite alone. If there's a transmigration of souls, I dare say mine once inhabited a friar of Penruthyn — I feel, especially since I last came to Ware, such an affection for the old place."

"It's a very nice taste, Mr. Verney. You have no reason to be ashamed of it," said the old lady, decisively. "Young men, now-a-days, are so given up to horses and field games, and so little addicted to anything refined, that I'm quite glad when I discover any nice taste or accomplishment among them. You must have read a great deal, Mr. Verney, to be able to tell us all the curious things you did about this old place and others."

"Perhaps I'm only making a great effort — a show of learning on an extraordinary occasion. You must see how my stock lasts to-day. You are looking into that old park, Miss Fanshawe," said Cleve, slily crossing to her side. "We call it the Warren; but it was once the Priory Park. There is a very curious old grant from the Prior of Penruthyn, which my uncle has at Ware, of a right to pasture a certain number of cows in the park, on condition of aiding the verderer in keeping up the green underwood. There is a good deal of holly still there, and some relics of the old timber, but not much. There is not shelter for deer now. But you never saw anything like the quantity of rabbits; and there are really, here and there, some very picturesque fragments of old forest — capital studies of huge oak trees in the last stage of venerable decay and decrepitude, and very well worthy of a place in your sketch-book."

"I dare say; I should only fear my book is hardly worthy of them," said Miss Fanshawe.

"I forgot to show you this when you were here before." He stopped short, brushing aside the weeds with his walking-cane. "Here are the bases of the piers of the old park gate."

The little party stopped, and looked as people do on such old-world relics. But there was more than the conventional interest; or rather something quite different — something at once sullen and pensive in the beautiful face of the girl. She stood a little apart, looking down on that old masonry. "What is she thinking of?" he speculated; "is she sad, or is she offended? is it pride, or melancholy, or anger? or is it only the poetry of these dreamy old places that inspires her reverie? I don't think she has listened to one word I said about it. She seemed as much a stranger as the first day I met her here;" and his heart swelled with a bitter yearning, as he glanced at her without seeming to do so. And just then, with the same sad face, she stooped and plucked two pretty wild flowers that grew by the stones, under the old wall. It seemed to him like the action of a person walking in a dream — half unconscious of what she was doing, quite unconscious of everyone near her.

"What shall we do?" said Cleve, as soon as they had reached the enclosure of the buildings. "Shall we begin at the refectory and library, or return to the chapel, which we had not quite looked over when you were obliged to go, on your last visit?"

This question his eyes directed to Miss Fanshawe; but as she did not so receive it. Miss Sheckleton took on herself to answer for the party. So into the chapel they went — into shadow and seclusion. Once more among the short rude columns, the epitaphs, and round arches, in dim light, and he shut the heavy door with a clap that boomed through its lonely aisles, and rejoiced in his soul at having secured if it were only ten minutes' quiet and seclusion again with the ladies of Malory. It seemed like a dream.

"I quite forgot, Miss Fanshawe," said he, artfully compelling her attention, "to show you a really curious, and even mysterious tablet, which is very old, and about which are ever so many stories and conjectures."

He conveyed them to a recess between two windows, where in the shade is a very old mural tablet.

"It is elaborately carved, and is dated, you see, 1411. If you look near you will see that the original epitaph has been chipped off near the middle, and the word '*Eheu*,' which is Latin for 'alas!' cut deeply into the stone."

"What a hideous skull!" exclaimed the young lady, looking at the strange carving of that emblem, which projected at the summit of the tablet.

“Yes, what a diabolical expression! Isn’t it?” said Cleve.

“Are not those *tears*?” continued Miss Fanshawe, curiously.

“No, look more nearly and you will see. They are worms — great worms — crawling from the eyes, and knotting themselves, as you see,” answered Cleve.

“Yes,” said the lady, with a slight shudder, “and what a wicked grin the artist has given to the mouth. It is wonderfully powerful! What rage and misery! It is an awful image! Is that a tongue?”

“A tongue of fire. It represents a flame issuing from between the teeth; and on the scroll beneath, which looks, you see, like parchment shrivelled by fire are the words in Latin, ‘Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched;’ and here is the epitaph— ‘Hic sunt ruinæ, forma letifera, cor mortuum, lubrica lingua dæmonis, digitus proditor, nunc gehennæ favilla. Plorate. Plaudite.’ It is Latin, and the meaning is, ‘Here are ruins, fatal beauty, a dead heart, the slimy tongue of the demon, a traitor finger, now ashes of gehenna. Lament. Applaud.’ Some people say it is the tomb of the wicked Lady Mandeville, from whom we have the honour of being descended, who with her traitor finger indicated the place where her husband was concealed; and afterwards was herself put to death, they say, though I never knew any evidence of it, by her own son. All this happened in the Castle of Cardyllian, which accounts for her being buried in the comparative seclusion of the Priory, and yet so near Cardyllian. But antiquarians say the real date of that lady’s misdoings was nearly a century later; and so the matter rests an enigma probably to the day of doom.”

“It is a very good horror. What a pity we shall never know those sentences that have been cut away,” said Miss Fanshawe.

“That skull is worth sketching; won’t you try it?” said Cleve.

“No, not for the world. I shall find it only too hard to forget it, and I don’t mean to look at it again. Some countenances seize one with a tenacity and vividness quite terrible.”

“*Very* true,” said Cleve, with a meaning she understood, as he turned away with her. “We are not rich in wonders here, but the old church chest is worth seeing, it is curiously carved.”

He led them towards a niche in which it is placed near the communion rails. But said Miss Sheckleton —

"I'm a little tired, Margaret; you will look at it, dear; and Mr. Verney will excuse me. We have been delving and hoeing all the morning, and I shall rest here for a few minutes." And she sat down on the bench.

Miss Margaret Fanshawe looked at her a little vexed, Cleve thought; and the young lady said —

"Hadn't you better come? It's only a step, and Mr. Verney says it is really curious."

"I'm a positive old woman," said cousin Anne, "as you know, and really a little tired; and you take such an interest in old carving in wood — a thing I don't at all understand, Mr. Verney; she has a book quite full of really beautiful drawings, some taken at Brussels, and some at Antwerp. Go, dear, and see it, and I shall be rested by the time you come back."

So spoke goodnatured Miss Sheckleton, depriving Margaret of every evasion; and she accordingly followed Cleve Verney as serenely as she might have followed the verger.

"Here it is," said Cleve, pausing before the recess in which this antique kist is placed. He glanced towards Miss Sheckleton. She was a good way off — out of hearing, if people spoke low; and besides, busy making a pencilled note in a little book which she had brought to light. Thoughtful old soul!

"And about the way in which faces rivet the imagination and haunt the memory, I've never experienced it but once," said Cleve, in a very low tone.

"Oh! it has happened to me often, very often. From pictures, I think, always; evil expressions of countenance that are ambiguous and hard to explain, always something demoniacal, I think," said the young lady.

"There is nothing of the demon — never was, never could be — in the phantom that haunts me," said Cleve. "It is, on the contrary — I don't say angelic. Angels are very good, but not interesting. It is like an image called up by an enchanter — a wild, wonderful spirit of beauty and mystery. In darkness or light I always see it. You like to escape from yours. I would not lose mine for worlds; it is my good genius, my inspiration; and whenever that image melts into air, and I see it no more, the last good principle of my life will have perished."

The young lady laughed in a silvery little cadence that had a sadness in it, and said —

"Your superstitions are much prettier than mine. My good cousin Anne, there, talks of blue devils, and my familiars are, I think, of that vulgar troop; while yours are all *couleur de rose*, and so elegantly got up, and so perfectly presentable and well bred, that I really think I should grow quite tired of the best of them in a five-minutes' *tête-à-tête*."

"I must have described my apparition very badly," said Cleve. "That which is lovely beyond all mortal parallel can be described only by its effects upon one's fancy and emotions, and in proportion as these are intense, I believe they are incommunicable."

"You are growing quite too metaphysical for me," said Miss Margaret Fanshawe. "I respect metaphysics, but I never could understand them."

"It is quite true," laughed Cleve. "I *was* so. I hate metaphysics myself;' and they have nothing to do with this, they are so dry and detestable. But now, as a physician — as an exorcist — tell me, I entreat, in my sad case, haunted by a beautiful phantom of despair, which I have mistaken for my good angel, how am I to redeem myself from this fatal spell."

A brilliant colour tinged the young lady's cheeks, and her great eyes glanced on him for a moment, he thought, with a haughty and even angry brilliancy.

"I don't profess the arts you mention; but I doubt the reality of your spectre. I think it is an *illusion*, depending on an undue excitement in the organ of self-esteem, quite to be dispelled by restoring the healthy action of those other organs — of common sense. Seriously, I'm not competent to advise gentlemen, young or old, in their perplexities, real or fancied; but I certainly would say to any one who had set before him an object of ambition, the attainment of which he thought would be injurious to him, — be manly, have done with it, let it go, give it to the winds. Besides, you know that half the objects which young men set before them, the ambitions which they cherish, are the merest castles in the air, and that all but themselves can see the ridicule of their aspirations."

"You must not go, Miss Fanshawe; you have hot seen the carving you came here to look at. Here is the old church chest; but — but suppose the *patient* — let us call him — knows that the object of his — his *ambition* is on all accounts the best and noblest he could possibly have set before him. What then?"

"What then!" echoed Miss Fanshawe. "How can any one possibly tell — but the patient, as you call him, himself — what he should do. Your patient does not interest me; he wearies me. Let us look at this carving."

"Do you think he should despair because there is no present answer to his prayers, and his idol vouchsafes no sign or omen?" persisted Cleve.

"I don't think," she replied, with a cold impatience, "the kind of person you describe is capable of despairing in such a case. I think he would place too high a value upon his merits to question the certainty of their success — don't you?" said the young lady.

"Well, no; I *don't* think so. He is not an unreal person; I know him, and I know that his good opinion of himself is humbled, and that he adores with an entire abandonment of self the being whom he literally worships."

"Very adoring, perhaps, but rather — that's a great dog like a wolf-hound in that panel, and it has got its fangs in that pretty stag's throat," said Miss Fanshawe, breaking into a criticism upon the carving.

"Yes — but you were saying 'Very adoring, but rather' — what?" urged Cleve.

"Rather silly, don't you think? What business have people adoring others of whom they know nothing — who may not even like *them* — who may possibly *dis*like them extremely? I am tired of your good genius — I hope I'm not very rude — and of your friend's folly — tired as *you* must be; and I think we should both give him very much the same advice, *I* should say to him, pray don't sacrifice yourself; you are much too precious; consider your own value, and above all, remember that even should you make up your mind to the humiliation of the altar and the knife, the ceremonial may prove a fruitless mortification, and the opportunity of accomplishing your sacrifice be denied you by your divinity. And I think that's a rather well-rounded period: don't you?"

By this time Miss Margaret Fanshawe had reached her cousin, who stood up smiling.

"I'm ashamed to say I have been actually amusing myself here with my accounts. We have seen, I think, nearly everything now in this building. I should so like to visit the ruins at the other side of the courtyard."

"I shall be only too happy to be your guide, if you permit me," said Cleve.

And accordingly they left the church, and Cleve shut the door with a strange feeling both of irritation and anxiety.

"Does she dislike me? Or is she engaged? What can her odd speeches mean, if not one or other of these things? She warns me off, and seems positively angry at my approach. She took care that I should quite understand her ironies, and there was no mistaking the reality of her unaccountable resentment."

So it was with a weight at his heart, the like of which he had never experienced before, that Cleve undertook, and I fear in a rather spiritless way performed his duties as cicerone, over the other parts of the building.

Her manner seemed to him changed, chilled and haughty. Had there come a secret and sudden antipathy, the consequence of a too hasty revelation of feelings which he ought in prudence to have kept to himself for some time longer? And again came with a dreadful pang the thought that her heart was already won — the heart so cold and impenetrable to him — the passionate and docile worshipper of another man — some beast — some fool. But the first love — the only love worth having; and yet, of all loves the most ignorant — the insanest.

Bitter as gall was the outrage to his pride. He would have liked to appear quite indifferent, but he could not. He knew the girl would penetrate his finesse. She practised none herself; he could see and feel a change that galled him — very slight but intolerable. Would it not be a further humiliation to be less frank than she, and to practise an affectation which she despised.

Miss Sheckleton eyed the young people stealthily and curiously now and then, he thought. She suspected perhaps more than there really was, and she was particularly kind and grave at parting, and, he thought, observed him with a sort of romantic compassion which is so pretty in old ladies.

He did touch Miss Fanshawe's hand at parting, and she smiled a cold and transient smile as she gathered her cloaks about her, and looked over the sea, toward the setting sun. In that clear, mellow glory, how wonderfully beautiful she looked! He was angry with himself for the sort of adoration which glowed at his heart. What would he not have given to be indifferent, and to make her feel that he was so!

He smiled and waved his farewell to Miss Sheckleton. Miss Fanshawe was now looking toward Malory. The boat was gliding swiftly into distance, and disappeared with the sunset glittering on its sides, round the little headland, and Cleve was left alone.

His eyes dropped to the shingle, and broken shells, and seaweed, that lay beneath his feet, in that level stream of amber light. He thought of going away, thought what a fool he had been, thought of futurity and fate, with a sigh, and renounced the girl, washed out the portrait before which he had worshipped for so long, with the hand of defiance — the water of Lethe. Vain, vain; in sympathetic dyes, the shadow stained upon the brain, still fills his retina, glides before him in light and darkness, and will not be divorced.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLEVE AGAIN BEFORE HIS IDOL.

Cleve could not rest — he could not return to Ware. He would hear his fate defined by her who had grown so inexpressibly dear by being — unattainable! Intolerant of impediment or delay, this impetuous spirit would end all, and know all that very night.

The night had come — one that might have come in June. The moon was up — the air so sweetly soft — the blue of heaven so deep and liquid.

His yacht lay on the deep quiet shadow, under the pier of Cardyllian. He walked over the moonlighted green, which was now quite deserted. The early town had already had its tea and "pikelets." Alone — if lovers ever *are* alone — he walked along the shore, and heard the gentle sea ripple rush and sigh along the stones. He ascended the steep path that mounts the sea-beaten heights, overlooking Cardyllian on one side, and Malory on the other.

Before him lay the landscape on which he had gazed as the sun went down that evening, when the dull light from the gold and crimson sky fell softly round. And now, how changed everything! The moon's broad disk over the headland was silvering the objects dimly. The ivied castle at his left looked black against the sky. The ruins how empty now! How beautiful everything, and he how prodigious a fool! No matter. We have time enough to be wise. Away, tomorrow, or at latest, next day; and in due course would arrive the season — that tiresome House of Commons — and the routine of pleasure, grown on a sudden so insupportably dull.

So he had his walk in the moonlight toward Malory — the softest moonlight that ever fell from heaven — the air so still and sweet: it seemed an enchanted land. Down the hill toward Malory he sauntered, looking sometimes moonward, sometimes on the dark woods, and feeling as five weeks since he could not have believed himself capable of feeling, and so he arrived at the very gate of Malory.

Here stood two ladies, talking low their desultory comments on the beautiful scene, as they looked across the water toward the headland of

Pendillion. And these two ladies were the same from whom he had parted so few hours since. It was still very early everywhere except at Cardyllian, and these precincts of Malory, so entirely deserted at these hours that there seemed as little chance of interruption at the gate, as if they had stood in the drawingroom windows.

Cleve was under too intense and impetuous an excitement to hesitate. He approached the iron gate where, as at a convent grille, the old and the young recluse stood. The moonlight was of that intense and brilliant kind which defines objects clearly as daylight. The ladies looked both surprised; even Miss Anne Sheckleton looked grave.

"How very fortunate!" said Cleve, raising his hat, and drawing near. Just then, he did not care whether Sir Booth should chance to see him there or not, and it was not the turn of his mind to think, in the first place, of consequences to other people.

Happily, perhaps, for the quiet of Malory, one of Sir Booth's caprices had dispensed that night with his boat, and he was at that moment stretched in his long silk dressing-gown and slippers, on the sofa, in what he called his study. After the first instinctive alarm, therefore, Miss Anne Sheckleton had quite recovered her accustomed serenity and cheer of mind, and even interrupted him before he had well got to the end of his salutation to exclaim —

"Did you ever, anywhere, see such moonlight? It almost dazzles me."

"Quite splendid; and Malory looks so picturesque in this light." He was leaning on the pretty old gate, at which stood both ladies, sufficiently far apart to enable him, in a low tone, to say to the younger, without being overheard— "So interesting in every light, now! I wonder your men don't suspect me of being a poacher, or something else very bad, I find myself prowling about here so often, at this hour, and even later."

"I admire that great headland — Pendillion, isn't it? — so very much; by this light one might fancy it white with snow," said Miss Sheckleton.

"I wish you could see Cardrwydd Island *now*; the gray cliffs in this light are so white and transparent, you can hardly imagine so strange and beautiful an effect," said Cleve.

"I dare say," said Miss Sheckleton.

"You have only to walk about twenty steps across that little road towards the sea, and you have it full in view. Do let me persuade you," said Cleve.

"Well, I don't mind," said Miss Sheckleton. "Come, Margaret, dear," and these latter words she repeated in private exhortation, and then aloud she added— "We have grown so much into the habit of shutting ourselves up in our convent grounds, that we feel like a pair of runaway nuns whenever we pass the walls; however, I *must* see the island."

The twenty steps toward the sea came to be a hundred or more, and at last brought them close under the rude rocks that form the little pier; in that place, the party stopped, and saw the island rising in the distant sheen, white and filmy; a phantom island, with now and then a gleam of silvery spray, from the swell which was unfelt within the estuary, shooting suddenly across its points of shadow.

"Oh! how beautiful!" exclaimed Miss Fanshawe, and Cleve felt strangely elated in her applause. They were all silent, and Miss Sheckleton, still gazing on the distant cliffs, walked on a little, and a little more, and paused.

"How beautiful!" echoed Cleve, in tones as low, but very different. "Yes, how beautiful — how fatally beautiful; how beloved, and yet how cold. Cold, mysterious, wild as the sea; beautiful, adored and *cruel*. How *could* you speak as you did to-day? What have I done, or said, or thought, if you could read my thoughts? I tell you, ever since I saw you in Cardyllian church I've thought only of you; you haunt my steps; you inspire my hopes. I adore you, Margaret."

She was looking on him with parted lips, and something like fear in her large eyes, and how beautiful her features were in the brilliant moonlight.

"Yes, I *adore* you; I don't know what fate or fiend rules these things; but to-day it seemed to me that you hated me, and yet I adore you; *do* you hate me?"

"How wildly you talk; you can't love me; you don't know me," said this odd girl.

"I don't know you, and yet I love you; you don't know *me*, and yet I think you *hate* me. You talk of love as if it were a creation of reason and calculation. You don't know it, or you could not speak so; antipathies perhaps you do not experience; is there no caprice in *them*? I love you *in defiance* of calculation, and of reason, and of hope itself. I can no more help loving you than the light and air without which I should die. You're not going; you're not *so* cruel; it may be the last time you shall ever hear me speak. You won't believe me; no, not a word I say, although it's all as true as that this light shines from heaven. You'd believe one of your boatmen relating any nonsense he pleases about people and places here. You'll believe worse fellows, I dare say, speaking of higher and dearer things, *perhaps* — I can't tell; but *me*, on *this*, upon which I tell you, *all* depends for me, you won't believe. I never loved any mortal before. I did not know what it was, and now here I stand, telling you my bitter story, telling it to the sea, and the rocks, and the air, with as good a chance of a hearing. I read it in your manner and your words to-day. I felt it intuitively. You don't care for me; you can't like me; I see it in your looks. And now, will you tell me; for God's sake, Margaret, do tell me — is there not some one — you *do* like? I know there is."

"That's *quite* untrue — I mean there is *nothing* of the kind," said this young lady, looking very pale, with great flashing eyes; "and one word more of this kind tonight you are not to say to me. Cousin Anne," she called, "come, I'm going back."

"We are so much obliged to you, Mr. Verney," said Miss Sheckleton, returning; "we should never have thought of coming down here, to look for this charming view. Come, Margaret, darling, your papa may want me."

An inquisitive glance she darted furtively at the young people, and I dare say she thought that she saw something unusual in their countenances.

As *they* did not speak, Miss Sheckleton chatted on unheeded, till, on a sudden, Cleve interposed with —

"There's an old person — an old lady, I may call her — named Rebecca Mervyn, who lives in the steward's house, adjoining Malory, for whom I have a very old friendship; she was so kind to me, poor thing, when I was a boy. My grandmother has a very high opinion of her; and *she* was never very easily pleased. I suppose you have seen Mrs. Mervyn; you'd not easily forget her, if you have. They tell me in the town that she is quite well; the same odd creature she always was, and living still in the steward's house."

"I know — to be sure — I've seen her very often — that is, half-a-dozen times or more — and she *is* a very odd old woman, like that benevolent enchantress in the 'Magic Ring' — don't you remember? who lived in the castle with white lilies growing all round the battlements," answered Miss Sheckleton.

"I know," said Cleve, who had never read it.

“And if you want to see her, *here* she is, oddly enough,” whispered Miss Sheckleton, as the old woman with whom Sedley had conferred on the sea-beach came round the corner of the boundary wall near the gateway by which they were now standing, in her grey cloak, with dejected steps, and looking, after her wont, seaward toward Pendillion.

“No,” said Cleve, getting up a smile as he drew a little back into the shadow; “I’ll not speak to her now; I should have so many questions to answer, I should not get away from her for an hour.”

Almost as he spoke the old woman passed them, and entered the gate; as she did so, looking hard on the little party, and hesitating for a moment, as if she would have stopped outright. But she went on without any further sign.

“I breathe again,” said Cleve; “I was so afraid she would know me again, and insist on a talk.”

“Well, perhaps it is better she did not; it might not do, you know, if she mentioned your name, for *reasons*,” whispered Miss Sheckleton, who was on a sudden much more intimate with Cleve, much more friendly, much more kind, and somehow pitying.

So he bade goodnight. Miss Sheckleton gave him a little friendly pressure as they shook hands at parting. Miss Fanshawe neither gave nor refused her hand. He took it; he held it for a moment — that slender hand, all the world to him, clasped in his own, yet never to be his, lodged like a stranger’s for a moment there — then to go, for ever. The hand was carelessly drawn away; he let it go, and never a word spoke he.

The ladies entered the deep shadow of the trees. He listened to the light steps fainting into silent distance, till he could hear them no more.

Suspense — still suspense.

Those words spoken in her clear undertone — terrible words, that seemed at the moment to thunder in his ears, “loud as a trumpet with a silver sound” — were they, after all, words of despair, or words of hope?

“*One word more of this kind, tonight, you are not to say to me.*”

How was he to translate the word “tonight” in this awful text? It seemed, as she spoke it, introduced simply to add peremptoriness to her forbiddance. But was that its fair meaning? Did it not imply that the prohibition was limited only to that night? Might it not mean that he was free to speak more — possibly to hear more — at a future time?

A riddle? Well! he would read it in the way most favourable to his hopes; and who will blame him? He would have no oracles — no ambiguities — nothing but sharply defined certainty.

With an insolent spirit, instinct with an impatience and impetuosity utterly intolerant of the least delay or obstruction, the interval could not be long.

CHAPTER XIX.

CLEVE VERNEY TAKES A BOLD STEP.

When we seek danger he is sometimes — like death — hard to find. Cleve would not have disliked an encounter with Sir Booth Fanshawe; who could tell what might come of such a meeting? It was palpably so much the interest of that ruined gentleman to promote his wishes, that, if he would only command his temper and listen to reason, he had little doubt of enlisting him zealously in his favour. It was his own uncle who always appeared to him the really formidable obstacle.

Therefore, next night, Cleve fearlessly walked down to Malory. It was seven o'clock, and dark. It was a still, soft night. The moon not up yet, and all within the gate, dark as Erebus — silent, also, except for the fall of a dry leaf now and then, rustling sadly through the boughs.

At the gate for a moment he hesitated, and then with a sudden decision, pushed it open, entered, and the darkness received him. A little confused were his thoughts and feelings as he strode through that darkness and silence toward the old house. So dark it was, that to direct his steps, he had to look up for a streak of sky between the nearly meeting branches of the trees.

This trespass was not a premeditated outrage. It was a sudden inspiration of despair. He had thought of writing to Sir Booth. But to what mischief might not that fierce and impracticable old man apply his overt act? Suppose he were to send his letter on to the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney? In that case Mr. Cleve Verney might moralise with an income of precisely two hundred a year, for the rest of his days, upon the transitory nature of all human greatness. At the next election he would say a compulsory farewell to the House. He owed too much money to remain pleasantly in England, his incensed uncle would be quite certain to marry, and with Cleve Verney — ex-M.P., and quondam man of promise, and presumptive Earl of Verney — *conclamatum foret*.

He had therefore come to the gate of Malory in the hope of some such happy chance as befel the night before. And now disappointed, he broke through all considerations, and was walking in a sort of desperation, right into the lion's mouth.

He slackened his pace, however, and bethought him. Of course, he could not ask at this hour to see Miss Anne Sheckleton. Should he go and pay a visit to old Rebecca Mervyn? Hour and circumstances considered, would not that, also, be a liberty and an outrage? What would they think of it? What would *he* say of it in another fellow's case? Was he then going at this hour to pay his respects to Sir Booth Fanshawe, whom he had last seen and heard in the thunder and dust of the hustings, hurling language and grammar that were awful, at his head.

Cleve Verney was glad that he had pulled up before he stood upon the door steps; and he felt like an awakened somnambulist.

"I *can't* do this. It's *impossible*. What a brute I am growing," thought Cleve, awaking to realities. "There's nothing for it, I believe, but patience. If I were now to press for an answer, she would say 'No;' and were I to ask admission at the house at this hour, what would she — what would Miss Sheckleton, even, think of me? If I had nerve to go away and forget her, I should be happier — quite happy and quite good-for-nothing, and perfectly at my uncle's disposal. As it is, I'm *miserable* — a miserable *fool*. Everything against it — even the girl, I believe; and I here — partly in a vision of paradise, partly in the torments of the damned, wasting my life in the dream of an opium-eater, and without power to break from it, and see the world as it is."

He was leaning with folded arms, like the melancholy Jacques against the trunk of a forest tree, as this sad soliloquy glided through his mind, and he heard a measured step approaching slowly from the house.

"This is Sir Booth coming," thought he, with a strange, sardonic gladness. "We shall see what will come of it. Let us hear the old gentleman, by all means."

The step was still distant.

It would have been easy for him to retrace his steps, and to avoid the encounter. But it seemed to him that to stir would have been like moving a mountain, and a sort of cold defiance kept him there, and an unspeakable interest in the story which he was enacting, and a longing to turn over the leaf, and read the next decisive page. So he waited.

His conjecture was right, but the anticipated dialogue did not occur. The tall figure of Sir Booth appeared; some wrappers thrown across his arm. He stalked on and passed by Cleve, without observing, or rather, seeing him; for his eye had not grown like Cleve's accustomed to the darkness.

Cleve stood where he was till the step was lost in silence, and waited for some time longer, and heard Sir Booth's voice, as he supposed, hailing the boatmen from that solitary shore, and theirs replying, and he thought of the ghostly boat and boatmen that used to scare him in the "Tale of Wonder" beloved in his boyhood. For anything that remains to him in life, for any retrospect but one of remorse, he might as well be one of those phantom boatmen on the haunted lake. By this time he is gliding, in the silence of his secret thoughts, upon the dark sea outside Malory.

"Well!" thought Cleve, with a sudden inspiration, "he will not return for two hours at least. I *will* go on — no great harm in merely passing the house — and we shall see whether anything turns up."

On went Cleve. The approach to the old house is not a very long one. On a sudden, through the boughs, the sight of lighted windows met his eyes, and through the open sash of one of them, he heard faintly the pleasant sound of female prattle.

He drew nearer. He stood upon the esplanade before the steps, under the well-known gray front of the whole house. A shadow crossed the window, and he heard Miss Anne Sheckleton's merry voice speaking volubly, and then a little silence, of which he availed himself to walk with as distinct a tread as he could manage, at a little distance, in front of the windows, in the hope of exciting the attention of the inmates. He succeeded; for almost at the instant two shadowy ladies, the lights being within the room, and hardly any from without, appeared at the open window; Miss Sheckleton was in front, and Miss Fanshawe with her hand leaning upon her old cousin's shoulder, looked out also.

Cleve stopped instantly, and approached, raising his hat. This young gentleman was also a mere dark outline, and much less distinct than those he recognised against the cheery light of the drawingroom candles. But I don't think there was a moment's doubt about his identity. "Here I am, actually detected, trying to glide by unperceived," said Cleve, lying, as Mr. Fag says in the play, and coming up quickly to the open window. "You must think me quite mad, or the most impudent person alive; but what am I to do? I can't leave Ware, without paying old Rebecca — Mrs. Mervyn, you know — a visit. Lady Verney blows me up so awfully about it, and has put it on me as a duty. She thinks there's no one like old Rebecca; and really poor old Mervyn was always very kind to me when I was a boy. She lives, you know, in the steward's house. I can't come up here in daylight. I'm in such a dilemma. I must wait till Sir Booth has gone out in his boat, don't you see? and so I did; and if I had just got round the corner there, without your observing me, I should have been all right. I'm really quite ashamed. I must look so like a trespasser — a poacher — everything that is suspicious; but the case, you see, is really so difficult. I've told you everything, and I do hope you quite acquit me."

"Oh, yes," said Miss Sheckleton. "We *must*, you know. It's like a piece of a Spanish comedy; but what's to be done? You must have been very near meeting. Booth has only just gone down to the boat."

"We did meet — that is, he actually passed me by, but without seeing me. I heard him coming, and just stood, taking my chance; it was very dark you know."

"Well, I forgive you," said Miss Sheckleton. "I must, you know; but the dogs won't. You hear them in the yard. What good dear creatures they are; and when they hear us talking to you, they'll grow quite quiet, and understand that all is well, they are *so* intelligent. And there's the boat; look, Margaret, through *that* opening, you can just see it. When the moon gets up, it looks so pretty. I suppose it's my bad taste, but those clumsy fishing boats seem to me so much more picturesque than your natty yachts, though, of course, *they* are very nice in their way. Do you hear how *furious* you have made our great dog, poor old Neptune! He looks upon us, Margaret and I, as in his special charge; but it does not do, making such an uproar."

I fancy she was thinking of Sir Booth, for she glanced toward the boat; and perhaps the kind old lady was thinking of somebody else, also.

"I'll just run to the back window, and quiet him. I shan't be away a moment, Margaret, dear."

And away went Miss Sheckleton, shutting the door. Miss Fanshawe had not said a word, but remained at the window looking out. You might have thought his being there, or not, a matter of entire indifference to her. She had not said a word. She looked toward the point at which the rising splendour of the moon was already visible over the distant hills.

“Did you miss anything — I’m sure you did — yesterday? I found a pin at the jetty of Penruthyn. It is so pretty, I’ve been ever so much tempted to keep it; so very pretty, that somehow, I think it could not have belonged to any one but to you.”

And he took the trinket from his waistcoat pocket.

“Oh! I’m so glad,” said she; “I thought I had seen it this morning, and could not think what had become of it. I never missed it till this evening.”

He touched the fingers she extended to receive it. He took them in his hand, and held them with a gentle force.

“For one moment allow me to hold your hand; don’t take it from me yet. I *implore*, only while I say a few words, which you may make, almost by a look, a farewell — my eternal farewell. Margaret, I love you as no other man ever will love you. You think all this but the madness that young men talk. I know nothing of them. What I say is desperately true; no madness, but sad and irreparable reality. I never knew love but for you — and for you it is such idolatry as I think the world never imagined. You are never for one moment from my thoughts. Every good hope or thought I have, I owe to you. You are the good principle of my life, and if I lose you, I am lost myself.”

This strange girl was not a conventional young lady. I don’t pronounce whether she was better or worse for that. She did not drop her eyes, nor yet withdraw her hand. She left that priceless pledge in his, it seemed, unconsciously, and with eyes of melancholy and earnest inquiry, looked on the handsome young man that was pleading with her.

“It is strange,” she said, in a dreamy tone, as if talking with herself. “I said it was strange, for he does not, and cannot, know me.”

“Yes,” he answered, “I do know you — intuitively I know you. We have all faith in the beautiful. We cannot separate the beautiful and the good; they come both direct from God, they resemble him; and I know your power — you can make of me what you will. Oh, Margaret, will you shut me out for ever from the only chance of good I shall ever know? Can you ever, ever like me?”

There was a little silence, and she said, very low, “If I *were* to like you, would you love me better than anything else in all the world?”

“Than all the world — than all the world,” he reiterated, and she felt the hand of this young man of fashion, of ambition, who had years ago learned to sneer at all romance, quiver as it held her own.

"But first, if I were to allow any one to like me, I would say to him, you must know what you undertake. You must love me with your entire heart; heart and soul, you must give yourself altogether up to me. I must be everything to you — your present, your future, your happiness, your hope; for I will not bear to share your heart with anything on *earth*! And these are hard terms, but the only ones."

"I need make *no* vow, darling — *darling*. My life is what you describe, and I cannot help it; I adore you. Oh! Margaret, *can* you like me?"

Then Margaret Fanshawe answered, and in a tone the most sad, I think, that ever spoke; and to *him*, the sweetest and most solemn; like distant music in the night, funereal and plaintive, her words fell upon his entranced ear.

"If I were to say I could like you enough to *wait*, and *try* if I could like you more, it always seemed to me so awful a thing — try if I could like you more — would not the terms seem to you too hard?"

"Oh! Margaret, darling, say you *can* like me *now*. You know how I adore you," he implored.

"Here, then, is the truth. I do not like you well enough to say all that; no, I do *not*, but I like you too well to say *go*. I don't know how it *may* be, but if you choose to wait, and give me a very little time to resolve, I shall see clearly, and all uncertainty come to an end, *some*how, and God guide us all to good! That is the whole truth, Mr. Verney; and pray say no more at present. You shall not wait long for my answer."

"I agree, darling. I accept your terms. You don't know what delay is to me; but anything rather than despair."

She drew her hand to herself. He released it. It was past all foolish by-play with him, and the weight of a strange fear lay upon his heart.

This little scene took longer in speaking and acting, than it does in reading in this poor note of mine. When they looked up, the moon was silvering the tops of the trees, and the distant peaks of the Welsh mountains, and glimmering and flashing to and fro, like strings of diamonds, on the water.

And now Miss Anne Sheckleton entered, having talked old Neptune into good humour.

“Is there a chance of your visiting Penruthyn again?” asked Cleve, as if nothing unusual had passed. “You have not seen the old park. *Pray*, come tomorrow.”

Miss Sheckleton looked at the young lady, but she made no sign.

“*Shall* we? *I* see nothing against it,” said she.

“Oh! *do*. I entreat,” he persisted.

“Well, if it should be fine, and if nothing prevents, I think I may say, we *will*, about three o’clock tomorrow.”

Margaret did not speak; but was there not something sad and even gentle in her parting? The old enigma was still troubling his brain and heart, as he walked down the dark avenue once more. How would it all end? How would she at last pronounce?

The walk, next day, was taken in the Warren, as he had proposed. I believe it was a charming excursion; as happy, too, as under the bitter conditions of suspense it could be; but nothing worthy of record was spoken, and matters, I dare say, remained, ostensibly at least, precisely as they were.

CHAPTER XX.

HIS FATE.

Cleve Verney, as we know, was a young gentleman in whose character were oddly mingled impetuosity and caution. A certain diplomatic reserve and slyness had often stood him in stead in the small strategy of life, and here, how skillfully had he not managed his visits to Penruthyn, and hid from the peering eyes of Cardyllian his walks and loiterings about the enchanted woods of Malory.

Visiting good Mrs. Jones's shop next day to ask her how she did, and gossip a little across the counter, that lady, peering over her spectacles, received him with a particularly sly smile, which, being prone to alarms just then, he noted and did not like.

Confidential and voluble as usual, was this lady, bringing her black lace cap and purple ribbons close to the brim of Mr. Verney's hat, as she leaned over the counter, and murmured her emphatic intelligence and surmises deliberately in his ear. She came at last to say —

"You must be very *sol*itary, we all think, over there, at Ware, sir; and though you have your yacht to sail across in, and your dog-cart to trot along, and doesn't much mind, still it is not con*venient*, you know, for one that likes *this* side so much better than the other. We think, and *wonders*, we all do, you wouldn't stay awhile at the Verney Arms, over the way, and remain among us, you know, and be near everything you might like; the other side, you know, is very dull; we can't deny *that*, though its quite true that Ware is a very fine place — a really *beau*tiful place — but it *is* lonely, we must allow; *mustn't* we?"

"Awfully lonely," acquiesced Cleve, "but I don't quite see why I should live at the Verney Arms, notwithstanding."

"Well, they do say — you mustn't be angry with them, you know — but they do, that you like a walk to Malory," and this was accompanied with a wonderfully cunning look, and a curious play of the crow's-feet and wrinkles of her fat face, and a sly, gentle laugh. "But *I* don't mind."

"Don't mind *what*?" asked Cleve, a little sharply.

"*Well*, I don't mind what they *say*, but they *do* say you have made acquaintance with the Malory family — no harm in that, you know."

"No harm in the world, only a lie," said Cleve, with a laugh that was not quite enjoying. "I wish they would manage that introduction for me; I should like it extremely. I think the young lady rather pretty — don't you? — and I should not object to pay my respects, if you think it would not be odd. My Cardyllian friends know so much better than I what is the right thing to do. The fact is, I don't know one of our own tenants there, except for taking off my hat twice to the only sane one of the party, that old Miss Anne — Anne — *something* — you told me— "

"*Sheckleton* that will *be*," supplemented Mrs. Jones.

"Sheckleton. Very well; and my real difficulty is this — and upon my honour, I don't know how to manage it. My grandmother, Lady Verney, puts me under orders — and you know she does not like to be disobeyed — to go and see poor old Rebecca, Mrs. Mervyn, you know, at the steward's house, at Malory; and I am looking for a moment when these people are out of the way, just to run in for five minutes, and ask her how she does. And my friend, Wynne Williams, won't let me tell Lady Verney how odd these people are, he's so afraid of her hearing the rumour of their being mad. But the fact is, whenever I go up there and peep in through the trees, I see some of them about the front of the house, and I can't go up to the door, of course, without annoying them, for they wish to be quite shut up; and the end of it is, I say, that, among them, I shall get blown up by Lady Verney, and shan't know what to answer — by Jove! But you may tell my friends in Cardyllian, I am so much obliged to them for giving me credit for more cleverness than *they* have had in effecting an introduction; and talking of me about that pretty girl, Miss — oh! — what's her name? — at Malory. I only hope she's not mad; for if she is I must be also."

Mrs. Jones listened, and looked at him more gravely, for his story hung pretty well together, and something of its cunning died out of the expression of her broad face. But Cleve walked away a little disconcerted, and by no means in a pleasant temper with his good neighbours of Cardyllian; and made that day a long visit at Hazelden, taking care to make his approaches as ostentatiously as he could. And he was seen for an hour in the evening, walking on the green with the young ladies of that house, Miss Charity flanking the little line of march on one side, and he the other, pretty Miss

Agnes, of the golden locks, the pretty dimples, and brilliant tints, walking between, and listening, I'm afraid, more to the unphilosophic prattle of young Mr. Verney than to the sage conversation, and even admonitions and reminders, of her kind, but unexceptionable sister.

From the news-room windows, from the great bow-window of the billiard-room, this promenade was visible. It was a judicious demonstration, and gave a new twist to conjecture; and listless gentlemen, who chronicled and discussed such matters, observed upon it, each according to his modicum of eloquence and wisdom.

Old Vane Etherage, whose temperament, though squally, was placable, was won by the frank courtesy, and adroit flatteries of the artless young fellow who had canvassed boroughs and counties, and was master of a psychology of which honest old Etherage knew nothing.

That night, notwithstanding, Cleve was at the gate of Malory, and the two ladies were there.

"We have been looking at the boat ten minutes, just, since it left. Sir Booth is out as usual, and now see how far away; you can scarcely see the sail, and yet so little breeze."

"The breeze is rather from the shore, and you are sheltered here, all this old wood, you know. But you can hear it a little in the tops of the trees," Cleve answered, caring very little what way the breeze might blow, and yet glad to know that Sir Booth was on his cruise, and quite out of the way for more than an hour to come.

"We intended venturing out as far as the pier, there to enjoy once more that beautiful moonlight view, but Sir Booth went out tonight by the little door down there, and this has been left with its padlock on. So we must only treat this little recess as the convent parlour, with the grating here, at which we parley with our friends. *Do* you hear that foolish old dog again? I really believe he has got out of the yard," suddenly exclaimed goodnatured Miss Anne, who made the irregularities of old Neptune an excuse for trifling absences, very precious to Cleve Verney.

So now, she walked some ten or twenty steps toward the house, and stood there looking up the avenue, and prattling incessantly, though Cleve could not hear a word she said, except now and then the name of "Neptune," when she ineffectually accosted that remote offender.

"You have not said a word, Miss Fanshawe. You are not offended with me, I hope?" he murmured.

"Oh, no."

"You have not shaken hands," he continued, and he put his hand between the bars; "won't you?"

So she placed hers in his.

"And now, can you tell me nothing?"

"I've been thinking that I may as well speak now," she said, in very low tones. "There must be uncertainty, I believe, in all things, and faith in those who love us, and trust that all may end in good; and so, *blindly* — almost *blindly* — I say, yes, if you will promise me — oh! *promise*, that you will always love me, as you do now, and never change. If you love me, I shall love you, *always*; and if you change, I shall *die*. Oh! won't you promise?"

Poor fluttering heart! The bird that prunes its wing for the untried flight over the sea, in which to tire is to die, lonely, in the cold waste, may feel within its little breast the instinct of that irrevocable venture, the irresistible impulse, the far-off hope, the present fear and danger, as she did.

Promises! What are they? Who can answer for the follies of the heart, and the mutations of time? We know what we are; we know not what we may be. Idlest of all idle words are these promises for the affections, for the raptures and illusions, utterly mortal, whose duration God has placed quite beyond our control. Kill them, indeed, we may, but add one hour to their uncertain lives, never.

Poor trembling heart! "Promise never to change. Oh! won't you promise?" Promises spoken to the air, written in dust — yet a word, a look, like a blessing or a hope — ever so illusive, before the wing is spread, and the long and untried journey begins!

What Cleve Verney swore, and all the music he poured into those little listening ears in that enchanting hour, I know not.

Miss Anne Sheckleton came back. Through the convent bars Cleve took her hand, in a kind of agitation, a kind of tumult, with rapture in his handsome face, and just said, "She has told me, she *will*" and Miss Sheckleton said nothing, but put her arms round Margaret's neck, and kissed her many times, and holding her hand, looked up smiling, and took Cleve's also, and in the old spinster's eyes were glittering those diamond tears, so pure and unselfish that, when we see them, we think of those that angels are said to weep over the sorrows and the vanities of human life.

Swiftly flew the hour, and not till the sail was nearing the shore, and the voices of the boatmen were audible across the water, did the good old lady insist on a final farewell, and Cleve glided away, under the shadow of the trees that overhang the road, and disappeared round the distant angle of the wall of Malory.

CHAPTER XXI.

CAPTAIN SHRAPNELL.

The next afternoon Miss Charity Etherage and her sister Agnes, were joined in their accustomed walk upon the green of Cardyllian by Captain Shrapnell, a jaunty half-pay officer of five-and-fifty, who represented to his own satisfaction, the resident youth and fashion of that quiet watering-place.

"I give you my honour, Miss Etherage," said he, placing himself beside Miss Agnes, "I mistook you yesterday, for Lady Fanny Mersey. Charming person she is, and I need not say, perfectly lovely." A little arch bow gave its proper point to the compliment. "She has gone, however, I understand; left Llwynan yesterday. Is that young Verney's boat? No, oh no — nothing like so sharp. He's a very nice fellow, young Verney."

This was put rather interrogatively, and Miss Agnes, thinking that she had blushed a little, blushed more, to her inexpressible chagrin, for she knew that Captain Shrapnell was watching her with the interest of a gossip.

"Nice? I dare say. But I really know him so very slightly," said Miss Agnes.

"Come, come; that won't do," said the Captain, very archly. "You forget that I was sitting in our club window, yesterday evening, when a certain party were walking up and down. Ha, ha, you do. We're tolerably clear-sighted up there, and old Rogers keeps our windows rubbed; and the glass is quite brilliantly transparent, ha, ha, ha! hey?"

"I think your windows are made of multiplying glasses, and magnifying glasses, and every kind of glass that distorts and discolours," said Miss Agnes, a little pettishly. "I don't know how else it is that you all see such wonderful sights as you do, through them."

"Well, they *do*, certainly. Some of our friends do colour a little," said the Captain, with a waggish yet friendly grin, up at the great bow window. "But in this case, you'll allow there was no great opportunity for colour, the tints of nature are so beautiful," and Shrapnell fired off this little saying, with his bow and smile of fascination. "Nor, by Jove! for the multiplying glasses either, for more than three in that party would have quite spoiled it; now, *would*n't it, hey? ha, ha, ha! The two principals, and a gooseberry, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is a *gooseberry*?" inquired Miss Charity, peremptorily.

"A delightful object in the garden, Miss Etherage, a delightful object everywhere. The delight of the young especially, hey, Miss Agnes? ha, ha! hey? and one of the sweetest products of nature Eh, Miss Agnes? ha, ha, ha! Miss Etherage, I give you my honour every word I say is true."

"I do declare, Captain Shrapnell, it seems to me you have gone *perfectly mad*!" said Miss Charity, who was outspoken and emphatic.

"Always a mad fellow, Miss Etherage, ha, ha, ha! Very true; that's my character, hey? ha, ha, ha, egad! So the ladies tell me," said the gay, young Captain. "Wish I'd a guinea for every time they've called me mad, among them. I give you my honour I'd be a rich fellow this moment."

"Now, Captain Shrapnell," said Miss Charity, with a frank stare with her honest goggle eyes, "you are talking *the* greatest *nonsense I* ever heard in my life."

"Miss Agnes, here, does not think so, hey?" giggled the Captain. "Now, come, Miss Agnes, what do you think of young Verney, hey? There's a question."

How Miss Agnes hated the gibing, giggling wretch, and detested the club of whose prattle and gossip he was the inexhaustible spokesman; and would at that moment have hailed the appearance of a ship-of-war with her broadside directed upon the bow window of that haunt, with just, of course, such notice to her worthy father, whose gray head was visible in it, as was accorded to the righteous Lot — under orders, with shot, shell, rockets, and marlin-spikes, to blow the entire concern into impalpable dust.

It must be allowed that Miss Agnes was unjust; that it would not have been fair to visit upon the harmless and, on the whole, goodnatured persons who congregated in that lively receptacle, and read the *Times* through their spectacles there, the waggeries and exaggerations of the agreeable captain, and to have reached that incorrigible offender, and demolished his stronghold at so great a waste of human life.

"Come, now; I won't let you off, Miss Aggie. I say, *there's* a question. What do you say? Come, now, you really must tell us. What *do* you think of young Verney?"

"If you wish to know what *I* think," interposed Miss Charity, "I think he's *the very nicest* man I *ever* spoke to. He's *so* nice about religion. Wasn't he, Aggie?"

Here the Captain exploded.

"Religion! egad — do you really mean to tell me — ha, ha, ha! Upon my soul, that's the richest thing! — now, *really*!"

"My goodness! How frightfully wicked you are," exclaimed Miss Charity.

"True bill, egad! upon my soul, I'm afraid — ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, Captain Shrapnell, you *shall not* walk with us, if you swear," said Miss Charity.

"*Swear!* I didn't swear, did I? Very sorry if I did, upon my — I give you my word," said the Captain, politely.

"Yes, you *did*; and it's *extremely wicked*," said Miss Charity.

"Well, I won't; I swear to you I won't," vowed the Captain, a little inconsistently; "but now about Master Cleve Verney, Miss Agnes. I said I would not let you off, and I won't. I give you my honour, you shall say what you think of him, or, by Jove! — I conclude you can't trust yourself on the subject, ha, ha, ha! Hey?"

"You *are* mad, Captain Shrapnell," interposed Miss Charity, with weight.

"I can't say, really, I've formed any particular opinion. I think he is rather agreeable," answered Miss Agnes, under this pressure.

"Well, so do *I*" acquiesced the Captain.

"Master Cleve can certainly be agreeable when he chooses; and you think him devilish good-looking — don't you?"

"I really can't say — he has very good features — but — — "

"But what? Why every one allows that Verney's as good-looking a fellow as you'll meet with anywhere," persisted the Captain.

"*I* think him *per*fectly *be-au*tiful!" said Miss Charity, who never liked people by halves.

"Well — yes — he may be handsome," said Miss Agnes. "I'm no very great critic; but I can't conceive any girl falling in love with him."

"Oh! as to *that* — but — *why*?" said Captain Shapnell.

"His face, I think, is so selfish — somehow," she said.

"Is it now, really? — *how*?" asked the Captain. "I'm *am-azed* at you!" exclaimed Miss Charity.

"Well, there's a selfish hook — no, not a hook, a *curve* — of his nose, and a cruel crook of his shoulder," said Miss Agnes, in search of faults.

"You're determined to hit him by hook or by crook — ha, ha, ha — I say," pursued the Captain.

"A *hook*!" exclaimed Miss Charity, almost angrily; "there's *no* hook! I *wonder* at you — I really think, sometimes, Agnes, you're the greatest *fool* I ever met in the whole course of my life!"

"Well, I can't help thinking what I think," said Agnes.

"But you *don't* think *that* — you *know* you don't — you *can't* think it," decided her elder sister.

"No more she does," urged the Captain, with his teazing giggle; "she *doesn't* think it. You always know, when a girl abuses a man, she *likes* him; she does, by Jove! And I venture to say she thinks Master Cleve one of the very handsomest and most fascinating fellows she ever beheld," said the agreeable Captain.

"I really think what I said," replied Agnes, and her pretty face showed a brilliant colour, and her eyes had a handsome fire in them, for she was vexed; "though it is natural to think in a place like this, where all the men are more or less old and ugly, that any young man, even tolerably good-looking, should be thought a wonder."

"Ha, ha, ha! very good," said the Captain, plucking out his whisker a little, and twiddling his moustache, and glancing down at his easy waistcoat, and perhaps ever so little put out; but he also saw over his shoulder Cleve crossing the Green towards them from the jetty, and not perhaps being quite on terms to call him "Master Cleve" to his face, he mentioned a promise to meet young Owen of Henlwyd in the billiard-room for a great game of pyramid, and so took off his hat gracefully to the ladies, and, smirking, and nodding, and switching his cane, swaggered swiftly away toward the point of rendezvous.

So Cleve arrived, and joined the young ladies, and walked beside Agnes, chatting upon all sorts of subjects, and bearing some occasional reproofs and protests from Miss Charity with great submission and gaiety, and when Miss Charity caught a glimpse of "the Admiral's" bath-chair, with that used-up officer in it, *en route* for the Hazelden Road, and already near the bridge, she plucked her watch from her belt, with a slight pallor in her cheek, and "*declared*" she had not an idea how late it was. Cleve Verney accompanied the ladies all the way to Hazelden, and even went in, when bidden, and drank a cup of tea, at their early meal, and obeyed also a summons to visit the “Admiral” in his study.

“Very glad to see you, sir — very happy, Mr. Verney,” said Mr. Vane Etherage, with his fez upon his head, and lowering his pipe with the gravity of a Turk. “I wish you would come and dine at three o’clock — the true hour for dinner, sir — I’ve tried every hour, in my time, from twelve to halfpast eight — at three o’clock, sir, some day — any day — tomorrow. The Welsh mutton is the best on earth, and the Hazelden mutton is the best in Wales!” The “Admiral” always looked in the face of the person whom he harangued, with an expression of cool astonishment, which somehow aided the pomp of his delivery. “An unfortunate difference, Mr. Verney — a dispute, sir — has arisen between me and your uncle; but that, Mr. Verney, need not extend to his nephew; no, sir, it need *not*; no need it should. Shall we say tomorrow, Mr. Verney?”

I forget what excuse Mr. Verney made; it was sufficient, however, and he was quite unable to name an immediate day, but lived in hope. So having won golden opinions, he took his leave. And the good people of Cardyllian, who make matches easily, began to give Mr. Cleve Verney to pretty Miss Agnes Etherage.

While this marrying and giving in marriage was going on over many tea-tables, that evening, in Cardyllian, Mr. Cleve Verney, the hero of this new romance, had got ashore a little below Malory, and at nightfall walked down the old road by Llanderris church, and so round the path that skirts the woods of Malory, and down upon the shore that winds before the front of the old house.

As he came full in sight of the shore, on a sudden, within little more than a hundred paces away, he saw, standing solitary upon the shingle, a tall man, with a Tweed rug across his arm, awaiting a boat which was slowly approaching in the distance.

In this tall figure he had no difficulty in recognizing Sir Booth Fanshawe, whom he had confronted in other, and very different scenes, and who had passed so near him, in the avenue at Malory.

With one of those sudden and irresistible impulses, which, as they fail or succeed, are classed as freaks of madness, or inspirations of genius, he resolved to walk up to Sir Booth, and speak to him upon the subject then so near to his heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

SIR BOOTH SPEAKS.

The idea, perhaps, that sustained Cleve Verney in this move, was the sudden recurrence of his belief that Sir Booth would so clearly see the advantages of such a connexion as to forget his resentments.

Sir Booth was looking seaward, smoking a cigar, and watching the approach of the boat, which was still distant. As Cleve drew near, he saw Sir Booth eye him, he fancied, uneasily; and throwing back his head a little, and withdrawing his cheroot, ever so little from his lips, the Baronet demanded grimly —

“Wish to speak to *me*, sir?”

“Only a word, if you allow me,” answered Cleve, approaching.

On ascertaining that he had to deal with a gentleman, Sir Booth was confident once more.

“Well, sir, I hear you,” said he.

“You don’t recognise me, Sir Booth; and I fear when I introduce myself, you will hardly connect my name with anything pleasant or friendly. I only ask a patient hearing, and I am sure your own sense of fairness will excuse me personally.”

“Before you say, more, sir, I should like to know for whom you take me, and why; I don’t recollect *you* — I *think* — I can’t see very well — no one does in this sort of light; but I rather think, I never saw your face before, sir — nor you mine, I dare say — your guesses as to who I am, may be anything you please — and quite mistaken — and this is not a usual time, you know, for talking with strangers about business — and, in fact, I’ve come here for quiet and my health, and I can’t undertake to discuss other people’s affairs — I find my own as much as my health and leisure will allow me to attend to.”

“Sir Booth Fanshawe, you must excuse me for saying I know you perfectly. I am also well aware that you seek a little repose and privacy here, and you may rely implicitly upon my mentioning your name to no one; in fact, I have been for some weeks aware of your residing at Malory, and never *have* mentioned it to any one."

"Ha! you're *very* kind, indeed — taking *great* care of me, sir; you are very obliging," said Sir Booth, sarcastically, "I'm sure; ha, ha! I ought to be very grateful. And to whom, may I ask, do I owe all this attention to my — my *interests* and comforts?"

"I am connected, Sir Booth, with a house that has unfortunately been a good deal opposed, in politics, to yours. There are reasons which make this particularly painful to me, although I have been by the direction of others, whom I had no choice but to obey, more in evidence in these miserable contests than I could wish; I've really been little more than a passive instrument in the hands of others, absolutely without power, or even influence of my own in the matter. You don't recognise me, but you have seen me elsewhere. My name is Cleve Verney."

Sir Booth had not expected this name, as his countenance showed. With a kind of jerk, he removed his cigar from his lips, sending a shower of red sparks away on the breeze, and gazing on the young man with eyes like balls of stone, ready to leap from their sockets. I dare say he was very near exploding in that sort of language which, on occasion, he did not spare. But he controlled himself, and said merely, clearing his voice first, —

"That will do, sir, the name's enough; I can't be supposed to wish to converse with any one of that name, sir — no more I do."

"What I have to say, Sir Booth, affects *you*, it interests you very *nearly*," answered Cleve.

"But, sir, I am going out in that boat — I wish to smoke my cigar — I've come down here to live to myself, and to be alone when I choose it," said Sir Booth, with suppressed exasperation.

"One word, I beg — you'll not regret it, Sir Booth," pleaded Cleve.

"Well, sir, come — I *will* hear it; but I tell you beforehand, I have pretty strong views as to how I have been used, and it is not likely to lead to much," said Sir Booth, with one of those sudden changes of purpose to which fiery men are liable.

So, as briefly and as persuasively as he could, Cleve Verney disclosed his own feelings, giving to the date of his attachment, skilfully, a retrospective character, and guarding the ladies of Malory from the unreasonable temper of this violent old man; and, in fact, from Cleve's statement you would have gathered that he was not even conscious that the ladies were now residing at Malory. He closed his little confession with a formal proposal.

Was there something — ever so little — in the tone of this latter part of his brief speech, that reflected something of the confidence to which I have alluded, and stung the angry pride of this ruined man? He kept smoking his cigar a little faster, and looked steadily at the distant boat that was slowly approaching against the tide.

When Cleve concluded, the old man lowered his cigar and laughed shortly and scornfully.

"You do us a great deal of honour, Mr. Verney — too much honour, by — ," scoffed the Baronet.

"Be so good at all events as to answer me this one question frankly — yes or no. Is your uncle, Kiffyn Verney, aware of your speaking to me on this subject?"

"*No*, Sir Booth, he is not," said Cleve; "he knows nothing of it. I ought, perhaps, to have mentioned that at first."

"So you ought," said Sir Booth, brusquely.

"And I beg that you won't mention the subject to him."

"You may be very sure I shan't, sir," said the Baronet, fiercely. "Why, d — n it, sir, what do you mean? Do you know what you're saying? You come here, and you make a proposal for my daughter, and you think I should be so charmed, that rather than risk your alliance I should practise any meanness you think fit. D — n you, sir, how dare you suppose I could fancy your aspiring to my daughter a thing to hide like a *mésalliance*?"

"Nothing of the kind, Sir Booth."

"*Every*thing of the kind, sir. Do you know who you are, sir? You have not a farthing on earth, sir, but what you get from your uncle."

"I beg your pardon — allow me, Sir Booth — I've six hundred a-year of my own. I know it's very little; but I've been thought to have some energies; I know I have some friends. I have still my seat in the House, and this Parliament may last two or three years. It is quite possible that I may quarrel with my uncle; I can't help it; I'm quite willing to take my chance of that; and I entreat, Sir Booth, that you won't make this a matter of personal feeling, and attribute to me the least sympathy with the miserable doings of my uncle."

Sir Booth listened to him, looking over the sea as before, as if simply observing the approach of the boat, but he spoke this time in a mitigated tone.

"You're no young man," said he, "if you don't owe money. I never knew one with a rich old fellow at his back who didn't."

He paused, and Cleve looked down.

"In fact, you don't know how much you owe. If you were called on to book up, d'ye see, there might remain very little to show for your six hundred a-year. You're just your uncle's nephew, sir, and nothing more. When you quarrel with him you're a ruined man."

"I don't see *that*— " began Cleve.

"But I do. If he quarrels with you, he'll never rest till he ruins you. That's his character. It might be very different if you had a *gentleman* to deal with; but you must look the thing in the face. You may never succeed to the title. We old fellows have our palsies and apoplexies; and you, young fellows, your fevers and inflammations. Here you are quite well, and a fever comes, and turns you off like a gaslight the day after; and, besides, if you quarrel he'll marry, and, where are you *then*? And I tell you frankly, if Mr. Kiffyn Verney has objections to me, I've stronger to him. There's no brother of mine disgraced. Why, his elder brother — it's contamination to a gentleman to name him."

"He's dead, sir; Arthur Verney is dead," said Cleve, who was more patient under Sir Booth's bitter language than under any other circumstances he would have been.

"Oh! Well, that does not very much matter," said Sir Booth. "But this is the upshot: I'll have nothing underhand — all above board, sir — and if Mr. Kiffyn Verney writes a proper apology — by —— , he owes me one — and puts a stop to the fiendish persecutions he has been directing against me, and himself submits the proposal you have — yes — done me the honour to make, and undertakes to make suitable settlements, I shan't stand in the way; I shan't object to your speaking to my daughter, though I can't the least tell how she'll take it! and I tell you from myself *I* don't like it — I *don't*, by —— , I don't *like* it. He's a bad fellow — a nasty dog, sir, as any in England — but *that's* what I say, sir, and I shan't alter; and you'll please never to mention the subject to me again except on these conditions. Except from him I decline to *hear* of it — not a word — and — and, sir, you'll please to regard my name as a secret; it has been hitherto; my liberty depends on it. Your uncle can't possibly know I'm here?" he added, sharply.

"When last I saw him — a very short time since — he thought you were in France. You, of course, rely upon my honour, Sir Booth, that no one living shall hear from me one syllable affecting your safety."

"Very good, sir. I never supposed you would; but I mean *every* one — these boatmen, and the people here. No one is to know who I am; and what I've said is my *ultimatum*, sir. And I'll have no correspondence, sir — no attempt to visit *any* where. You understand. By —— , if you do, I'll let your uncle, Mr. Kiffyn Verney, know the moment I learn it. Be so good as to *leave* me."

"Good night, sir," said Cleve.

Sir Booth nodded slightly.

The tall old man went stalking and stumbling over the shingle, toward the water's edge, still watching the boat, his cigar making a red star in the dusk, by which Christmass Owen might have steered; and the boatmen that night heard their mysterious steersman from Malory, as he sat with his hand on the tiller, talking more than usual to himself, now and then d —— ing unknown persons, and backing his desultory babble to the waves, with oaths that startled those sober-tongued Dissenters.

Cleve walked slowly up that wide belt of rounded gray stones, that have rattled and rolled for centuries there, in every returning and retreating treating tide, and turned at last and looked toward the tall, stately figure of the old man now taking his place in the boat. Standing in the shadow, he watched it receding as the moonlight came out over the landscape. His thoughts began to clear, and he was able to estimate, according to his own gauges and rashness, the value and effect of his interview with the angry and embittered man.

He wondered at the patience with which he had borne this old man's impertinence — unparaleled impertinence; yet even now he could not resent it. He was the father of that beautiful Margaret. The interview was a mistake — a very mortifying ordeal it had proved — and its result was to block his path with new difficulties.

Not to approach except through the mediation of his Uncle Kiffyn! He should like to see how his uncle would receive a proposal to mediate in this matter. Not to visit — not to write — neither to see nor to hear of her!

Submission to such conditions was not to be dreamed of. He trampled on them, and defied all consequences.

Cleve stood on the gray shingle looking after the boat, now running swiftly with the tide. A patch of seaweed, like an outstretched hand, lay at his feet, and in the fitful breeze lifted a warning finger, again, and again, and again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARGARET HAS HER WARNING.

Next evening, I believe, Cleve saw Margaret Fanshawe, by favour of that kindest of chaperons, Miss Anne Sheckleton, at the spot where by chance they had met before — at the low bank that fences the wood of Malory, near the steep road that descends by the old church of Llanderris.

Here, in the clear glow of sunset, they met and talked under the old trees, and the good old spinster, with her spectacles on, worked at her crochet industriously, and often peered over it this way and that, it must be confessed, nervously; and with a prudence with which Cleve would gladly have dispensed, she hurried this hazardous meeting to a close.

Not ten minutes later Margaret Fanshawe stood alone at the old refectory window, which commands through the parting trees a view of the sea and the distant headland, now filmed in the aerial lights of the sunset. I should not wonder if she had been drawn thither by the fanciful hope of seeing the passing sail of Cleve Verney's yacht — every sign and relic grows so interesting! Now is with them the season of all such things: romance has sent forth her angels; the woods, the clouds, the sea, the hills, are filled with them. Now is the play of fancy and the yearning of the heart — and the aching comes in its time.

Something sadder and gentler in the face than ever before. Undine has received a soul, and is changed. The boat has passed, and to catch the last glimpse of its white wing she crosses to the other side of the window, and stretches, with a long, strange gaze, till it is gone — quite gone — and everything on a sudden is darker.

With her hand still on the worn stone-shaft of the window, she leans and looks, in a dream, till the last faint tint of sunset dies on the gray mountain, and twilight is everywhere. So, with a sigh, a vague trouble, and yet a wondrous happiness at her heart, she turns to leave the stone-floored chamber, and at the head of the steps that lead down from its door she is startled.

The pale old woman, with large, earnest eyes, was at the foot of this stone stair, with her hand on the rude banister. It seemed to Margaret as if she had been waiting for her. Her great vague eyes were looking into hers as she appeared at the door.

Margaret arrested her step, and a little frown of fear for a moment curved her eyebrows. She did fear this old Rebecca Mervyn with an odd apprehension that she had something unpleasant to say to her.

"I'm coming up to you," said the old woman, sadly, still looking at her as she ascended the steps.

Margaret's heart misgave her, but somehow she had not nerve to evade the interview, or rather, she had felt that it was coming and wished it over.

Once or twice in passing, the old woman had seemed to hesitate, as if about to speak to her, but had changed her mind and passed on. Only the evening before, just at the hour when the last ray of the sun comes from the west, and all the birds are singing their last notes, as she was tying up some roses, on the short terrace round the corner of the old mansion, she turned and raised her eyes, and in the window of the old building called the "Steward's House," the lattice being open, she saw, looking steadfastly upon her, from the shadows within, the pale face of this old woman. In its expression there was something ominous, and when she saw Margaret looking straight at her, she did not turn away, but looked on sadly, as unmoved as a picture, till Margaret, disconcerted, lowered her eyes, and went away.

As this old woman ascended the stairs, Margaret crossed the floor to the window — light is always reassuring — and leaning at its side, looked back, and saw Rebecca Mervyn already within the spacious chamber, and drawing near slowly from the shadow.

"You wish to speak to me, Mrs. Mervyn?" said the young lady, who knew her name, although now for the first time she spoke to her.

"Only a word. Ah! — yes — you *are* — *very* beautiful," she said, with a deep sigh, as she stood looking at her, with a strange sadness and compassion in her gaze, that partook of the past, and the prophetic.

A little blush — a little smile — a momentary gleam of that light of triumph, in beauty so beautiful — showed that the fair apparition was mortal.

“Beauty! — ah! — yes! If *it* were not here, neither would *they*. Miss Margaret! — poor thing! I’ve seen him. I knew him, although it is a great many years,” said old Rebecca. “The moment my eyes lighted on him, I knew him; there is something about them all, peculiar — the Verneys, I mean. I should know a Verney anywhere, in any crowd, in any disguise. I’ve dreamt of him, and thought of him, and watched for him, for — how many years? God help me, I forget! Since I was as young as you are. Cleve Verney is handsome, but there were others, long before — oh! ever so much more beautiful. The Verney features — ah! — yes — thinking always, dreaming, watching, burnt into my brain; they have all some points alike. I knew Cleve by that; he is more like that than to his younger self; a handsome boy he was — but, I beg pardon, it is so hard to keep thoughts from wandering.”

This old woman, from long solitude, I suppose, talked to others as if she were talking to herself, and rambled on, flightily and vaguely. But on a sudden she laid her hand upon Margaret’s wrist, and closing it gently, held her thus, and looked in her face with great concern.

“Why does he come so stealthily? *death* comes so, to the young and beautiful. My poor sister died in Naples. No one knew there was danger the day before she was sent away there, despaired of. Well may I say the angel of death — beautiful, insidious — that’s the way they come — stealthily, mysterious — when I saw his handsome face about here — I shuddered — in the twilight — in the dark.”

Margaret’s cheek flushed, and she plucked her wrist to disengage it from the old woman’s hand.

“You had better speak to my cousin, Miss Sheckleton. It is she who receives Mr. Verney when he comes. She has known him longer than I; at least, made his acquaintance earlier,” said the young lady. “I don’t, I confess, understand what you mean. I’ve been trying, and I can’t; perhaps *she* will?”

“I must say this; it is on my mind,” said the old woman, without letting her hand go. “There is something horrible in the future. You do not know the Verneys. They are a *cruel* race. It would be better to suffer an evil spirit into the house. Poor young lady! To be another *innocent victim*! Break it off — expel him! Shut out, if you can, his face from your thoughts and memory. It is one who knows them well who warns you. It will not come to good."

In the vague warning of this old woman, there was an echo of an indefinite fear that had lain at her own heart, for days. Neither, apart, was anything; but one seconding the other was ominous and depressing.

"Let me go, please," she said, a little brusquely; "it is growing dark, and I *must* go in. I'm sure, however, you mean what you say kindly; and I thank you for the intention — thank you very much."

"Yes — go — I shall stay here; from here one can see across to Pendillion, and the sea there; it *will* come again, I know it will, some day or night. My old eyes are weary with watching. I should know the sail again, although it is a long, long time — I've lost count of the years."

Thus saying, she drew near the window, and without a word of farewell to Margaret, became absorbed in gazing; and Margaret left her, ran lightly down the steps, and in a minute more was in the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SIR BOOTH IN A PASSION.

Days passed, during which Cleve Verney paid stolen visits at Malory, more cautiously managed than ever; and nearly every afternoon did the good people of Cardyllian see him walk the green, to and fro, with the Etherage girls, so that the subject began to be canvassed very gravely, and even Miss Charity was disposed to think that he certainly *did* like Agnes, and confided to her friend, Mrs. Brindley, of "The Cottage," that if Aggie married, *she* should *give up*. *Nothing* could induce *her*, Miss Charity, to marry, she solemnly assured her friends.

And I must do that spinster the justice to say, that there was not the faintest flavour of sour grapes in the acerbity with which she pronounced against the "shocking folly of girls marrying," for she might undoubtedly have been married, having had in her youth several unexceptionable offers, none of which had ever moved her.

I know not what hopes Sir Booth may have founded upon his conversation with Cleve Verney. Men in the Baronet's predicament nurse their hopes fondly, and their mustard seeds grow rapidly into great trees, in whose branches they shelter their families, and roost themselves. He grew gracious at times in the contemplation of brilliant possibilities, and one day, to her amazement and consternation, opened the matter briefly to Miss Sheckleton, who fancied that she was discovered, and he on the point of exploding, and felt as if she were going to faint.

Happily for her, he fancied that Cleve must have seen Margaret accidentally during some of his political knight-errantries in the county which he had contested with Sir Booth. We know, as well as Miss Sheckleton, how this really was.

Sir Booth's dreams, however, were broken with a crash. To Miss Anne Sheckleton came a letter from Sir Booth's attorneys, informing the Baronet that Mr. Kiffyn Fulke Verney had just served them with a notice which seemed to threaten a wantonly vexatious and expensive proceeding, and then desired to know what course, having detailed the respective consequences of each, he would wish them to take.

Now Sir Booth broke into one of his frenzies, called up Miss Sheckleton, damned and cursed the whole Verney family, excommunicated them, and made the walls of Malory ring with the storm and thunder he launched at the heads of the ancient race who had built them.

Scared and pale Miss Anne Sheckleton withdrew.

"My dear, something has happened: he has had a letter from his law people, and Mr. Kiffyn Verney has directed, I think, some unexpected proceedings. How I wish they would stop these miserable lawsuits, and leave your papa at peace. Your papa's attorneys think they can gain nothing by worrying him, and it *is* so unfortunate just now."

So spoke Miss Sheckleton, who had found Margaret, with her bullfinch and her squirrels, in that pretty but melancholy room which is darkened by the old forest, through whose shafted stems shadowy perspectives open, and there, as in the dimness of a monastic library, she was busy over the illumination of her vellum Psalter, with gold and ultramarine, and all other vivid pigments.

Margaret stood up, and looked in her face rather pale, and with her small hand pressed to her heart.

"He's *very* angry," added Miss Sheckleton, with a dark look, and a nod.

"Are we going to leave this?" inquired the girl in almost a whisper.

"He did not say; I fancy not. No, he'd have said so the first thing," answered the old lady.

"Well, we can do nothing; it can't be helped, I suppose?" said Miss Margaret, looking down very sadly on her mediæval blazonry.

"Nothing, my dear! nothing on earth. No one can be more anxious that all this kind of thing should cease, than Cleve Verney, as you know; but what can even *he* do?" said Miss Sheckleton.

Margaret looked through the window, down the sylvan glade, and sighed.

"His uncle, Kiffyn Verney," resumed Anne Sheckleton, "is such a disagreeable, spiteful man, and such a feud has been between them, I really don't see how it is to end; but Cleve, you know, is so clever, and so devoted, I'm sure he'll find some way."

Margaret sighed again, and said, —

"Papa, I suppose, is *very* angry."

I think Sir Booth Fanshawe was the only person on earth whom that spirited girl really feared. I'm afraid there was not much good in that old man, and that most of the things I have heard of him were true. Unlike other violent men, he was not easily placable; and generally, when it was not very troublesome, remembered and executed his threats. She remembered dimly scenes between him and her dead mother. She remembered well her childish dread of his severity, and her fear of his eye and his voice had never left her.

Miss Sheckleton just lifted her fingers in the air, and raised her eyes to the ceiling, with a little shake of her head.

Margaret sighed again. I suppose she was thinking of that course of true love that never yet ran smooth, upon which the freightage of her life was ventured.

Her spinster friend looked on her sad, pale face, gazing dreamily into the forest. The solemn shadow of the inevitable, the sorrows of human life, had now for the first time begun to touch her young face. The old story was already telling itself to her, in those ominous musical tones that swell to solemn anthem soon; and sometimes, crash and howl at last over such wreck, and in such darkness as we shut our eyes and ears upon, and try to forget.

Old Anne Sheckleton's face saddened at the sight with a beautiful softness. She laid her thin hand on the girl's shoulder, and then put her arms about her neck, and kissed her, and said,— "All will come right, darling, you'll see;" and the girl made answer by another kiss; and they stood for a minute, hand locked in hand, and the old maid smiled tenderly, a cheerful smile but pale, and patted her cheek and nodded, and with another kiss, left the room, with a mournful presage heavy at her heart.

As she passed, the stern voice of Sir Booth called to her.

"Yes," she answered.

"A word or two," he said, and she went to his room.

"I've been thinking," said he, looking at her steadily and fiercely — had some suspicion lighted up his mind since he had spoken to her?— "that young man, Cleve Verney; I believe he's still at Ware. Do you know him?"

"I should know his appearance. I saw him two or three times during that contest for the county, two years since; but he did not see me, I'm sure."

This was an evasion, but the vices of slavery always grow up under a tyranny.

"Well, *Margaret* — does *she* correspond with any one?" demanded he.

"I can answer for it, positively. Margaret has no correspondence. She writes to *no* one," she answered.

"That fellow is still at Ware. So, Christmass Owen told me last night — a place of the Verneys, at the other side — and he has got a boat. I should not wonder if he were to come here, trying to see her."

So Sir Booth followed out his hypothesis, and waxed wroth, and more wroth as he proceeded, and so chafed himself into one of his paroxysms of temper. I know not what he said; but when she left him, poor Miss Sheckleton was in tears, and, trembling, told Margaret, that if it were not for *her*, she would not remain another day in his house. She related to Margaret what had passed, and said, —

"I almost hope Cleve Verney may not come again while we remain here. I really don't know what might be the consequence of your papa's meeting him here, in his present state of exasperation! Of course to Cleve it would be very little; but your existence, my poor child, would be made so miserable! And as for me, I tell you frankly, I should be compelled to leave you. Every one knows what Booth Fanshawe is when he is angry — how cruel he *can* be. I know he's your father, my dear, but we can't be blind to facts, and we both know that his misfortunes have not improved his temper."

Cleve nevertheless saw the ladies that day, talked with them earnestly and hurriedly, for Miss Anne Sheckleton was nervous, and miserable till the interview ended, and submitted to the condition imposed by that kindly and panic-stricken lady, which was on no account to visit Malory as heretofore for two or three days, by the end of which time she hoped Sir Booth's anger and suspicions might have somewhat subsided.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN WHICH THE LADIES PEEP INTO CARDYLLIAN.

“My dear child,” said Miss Sheckleton next day, “is not this a very wild freak, considering you have shut yourself up so closely, and not without reason? Suppose among the visitors at Cardyllian there should happen to be one who has seen and known you, how would it be if he or she should meet and recognise you?”

“Rely on me, dear old cousin; no one shall know me.”

The young lady, in a heavy, gray, Highland shawl, was standing before the looking-glass in her room as she spoke.

“Girls look all alike in these great shawls, and I shall wear my thick lace veil, through which I defy anyone to see a feature of my face; and even my feet, in these strong, laced boots, are disguised. *Now — see!* I should not know myself in the glass among twenty others. I might meet you a dozen times in Cardyllian and you should not recognise me. Look and say.”

“H-m — well! I must allow it would not be easy to see through all this,” said Miss Sheckleton; “but don’t forget and lift your veil, when you come into the town — the most unlikely people are there sometimes. Who do you think I had a bow from the other day, but old Doctor Bell, who lives in York; and the same evening in Castle Street whom should I see but my Oxford Street dressmaker! It does not matter, you know, where a solitary old maid like me is seen; but it would be quite different in your case, and who knows what danger to your papa might result from it?”

“I shan’t forget — I really shan’t,” said the girl.

“Well, dear, I’ve said all I could to dissuade you; but if you *will* come, I suppose you must,” said Miss Anne.

“It’s just as you say — a fancy,” answered Margaret; “but I feel that if I were disappointed I should die.”

I think, and Miss Sheckleton thought so too, that this pretty girl was very much excited that day, and could not endure the terrible stillness of Malory. Uncertainty, suspense, enforced absence from the person who loved her best in the world, and who yet is very near; dangers and hopes, quite new — no wonder if all these incidents of her situation did excite her.

It was near a week since the elder lady had appeared in the streets and shops of Cardyllian. Between the banks of the old sylvan road she and her mysterious companion walked in silence into steep Church Street, and down that quaint quarter of the town presenting houses of all dates from three centuries ago, and by the church, still older, down into Castle Street, in which, as we know, stands the shop of Jones, the draper. Empty of customers was this well-garnished shop when the two ladies of Malory entered it; and Mrs. Jones raised her broad, bland, spectacled face, with a smile and a word of greeting to Miss Anne Sheckleton, and an invitation to both ladies to "be seated," and her usual inquiry, as she leaned over the counter, "And what will you be pleased to want?" and the order, "John, get down the gray linseys — not *them* — those over yonder — yes, sure, you'd like to see the best — I *know* you would."

So some little time was spent over the linseys, and then, —

"You're to measure thirteen yards, John, for Miss Anne Sheckleton, and send it over, with trimmin's and linin's, to Miss Pritchard. Miss Anne Sheckleton will speak to Miss Pritchard about the trimmin's herself."

Then Mrs. Jones observed, —

"*What* a day this has been — hasn't it, miss? And such weather, *al*together, I really don't remember in Cardyllian, *I* think *ever*."

"Yes, charming weather," acquiesced Miss Sheckleton; and just then two ladies came in and bought some velvet ribbon, which caused an interruption.

"What a pretty girl," said Miss Anne, so soon as the ladies had withdrawn. "Is that her mother?"

"Oh, no — dear, no, miss; they are sisters," half laughed Mrs. Jones. "Don't you know who they are? No! Well, they are the Miss Etherages. There, they're going down to the green. She'll meet him there. She's going to make a *very great* match, ma'am — yes, indeed."

"Oh! But whom is she going to meet?" asked Miss Anne, who liked the good lady's gossip.

"Oh! you *don't know*! Well, dear me! I thought every one knew that. Why, Mr. Cleve, of course — young Mr. Verney. He meets her every afternoon on the green here, and walks home with the young ladies. It has been a *very* old liking — you understand — between them, and lately he has grown very pressing, and they do say — them that should know — that the Admiral — we call him — Mr. Vane Etherage — her father, has spoke to him. She has a good fortune, you know — yes, indeed — the two Miss Etherages has — we count them quite heiresses here in Cardyllian, and a very good old family too. Everybody here is pleased it is to be, and they do say Mr. Kiffyn — that is, the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney — will be very glad, too, he should settle at last, and has wrote to the young lady's father, to say how well pleased he is; for Mr. Cleve has been" — here she dropped her voice to a confidential murmur, approaching her spectacles to the very edge of her customer's bonnet, as she rested her fat arms upon the counter— "wild. Oh, dear! they do tell such *stories* of him! A pity, Miss Sheckleton — *is*n't it? — there should be so many stories to his prejudice. But, *dear* me! he *has* been wild, miss; and now, you see, on that account it is Mr. Kiffyn — the Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney — is so well pleased he should settle and take a wife that will be so liked by the people at Ware as well as at this side."

Miss Anne Sheckleton had been listening with an uneasiness, which the draper's wife fancied she saw, yet doubted her own observation; for she could not understand why her old spinster customer should care a farthing about the matter, the talk about his excursions to Malory having been quite suspended and abolished by the sustained and vigorous gossip to which his walks with Agnes Etherage, and his ostentatious attentions, had given rise.

"But Miss Etherage is hardly the kind of person — is she? — whom a young man of fashion, such as I suppose young Mr. Verney to be, would think of. She must have been very much shut up with her old father, at that quiet little place of his," suggested Miss Sheckleton.

"Shut up, miss! Oh, dear me! Nothing of *that* sort, miss. She is out with her sister, Miss Charity, every day, about the schools, and the Sunday classes, and the lending library, and the clothing charity, and all them things; very good of *her*, you know. I often say to her— 'I *wonder*, Miss Agnes — that's her name — you're not *tired* with all your walks; I do, indeed;' and she only laughs. She has a very pretty laugh too, she has; and as Mr. Cleve said to me once — that's two years ago, now — the first year he was spoke of in Cardyllian about her. We did think then there was something to be, and now it is all on again, and the old people — as we may call them — is well pleased it should."

"Yes, but I mean that Miss Etherage has seen nothing of the world — nothing of society, except what is to be met with at Hazelden — isn't that the name of the place? — and in her little excursions into this town. Isn't it so?" said Miss Sheckleton.

"Oh, no! — bless you, no. Miss Agnes Etherage — they pay visits — she and her sister — at all the great houses; a week here, and a fortnight there, round the two counties, this side and the other. She's a great favourite, is Miss Agnes. She can play and sing, dear me, very nice, she can: I have *heard* her. You would *wonder* now, what a bright little thing she is."

"But even so. I don't think that town-bred young men ever care much for country-bred young ladies. Not that they mayn't be a great deal better; but, somehow, they don't suit, I think — they don't get on."

"But, mark you this," said Mrs. Jones. "He always liked her. We always saw he liked her. There's property too — a good estate; and all goes to them two girls; and Miss Charity, we all know, will never marry; no more will the Admiral — I mean Mr. Etherage himself — with them legs of his; and Mr. Kiffyn — Master Cleve's uncle — spoke to our lawyer here once about it, as if it was a thing he would like — that the Hazelden property should be joined to the Ware estate."

"Joined together in holy wedlock," laughed Miss Sheckleton; but she was not particularly cheerful. And some more intending purchasers coming in and seizing upon the communicative Mrs. Jones, who had only time to whisper, "They do say — them that *should* know — that it will be in spring next; but I'm not to tell; so you'll please remember it's a secret."

"Shall we go, dear?" whispered Miss Sheckleton to her muffled companion, who forthwith rose and accompanied her from the shop, followed by the eyes of Mrs. Jones's new visitors, who were more interested on hearing that "it was Miss Anne Sheckleton and the other Malory lady," and they slipped out to the doorstep, and under the awning peeped after the mysterious ladies, until an accidental backward glance from Miss Sheckleton routed them, and the *materfamilias* entered a little hastily but gravely, and with her head high, and her young ladies tittering.

As Cleve Verney walked to and fro beside pretty Agnes Etherage that day, and talked as usual, gaily and fluently, there seemed on a sudden to come a sort of blight over the harvest of his thoughts — both corn and flowers. He repeated the end of his sentence, and forgot what he was going to say; and Miss Charity said, "Well? go on; I want so much to hear the end;" and looking up she thought he looked a little pale.

"Yes, certainly, I'll tell you the end when I can remember it. But I let myself think of something else for a moment, and it has flown away— "

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Miss Charity, "just a moment. Look there, Aggie! Aren't those the Malory ladies?"

"Where?" said Cleve. "Oh! I see. Very like, I think — the old lady, I mean."

"Yes, oh certainly," replied Agnes, "it is the old lady, and I'm nearly certain the young lady also; *who else* can it be? It must be she."

"They are going over the hill to Malory," said Miss Charity. "I don't know what it is about that old lady that I think so *wonderfully* nice, and so perfectly charming; and the young lady is *the* most perfectly — beautiful — person, all to *nothing*, I ever saw in my life. Don't you think so, Mr. Verney?"

"Your sister, I'm sure, is very much obliged," said he, with a glance at Agnes. "But this Malory young lady is so muffled in that great shawl that there is very little indeed to remind one of the young lady we saw in church — "

"What o'clock is that?" interrupted Miss Charity, as the boom of the clock from the church tower sounded over the green.

So it seemed their hour had come, and the little demonstration on the green came to a close, and Cleve that evening walked with the Hazelden ladies only so far as the bridge; there taking his leave with an excuse. He felt uncomfortable somehow. That Margaret Fanshawe should have actually come down to Cardyllian was a singular and almost an unaccountable occurrence!

Cleve Verney had certainly not intended the pantomime which he presented to the window of the Cardyllian reading-room for the eyes that had witnessed it.

Cleve was uncomfortable. It is always unpleasant to have to explain — especially where the exculpation involves a disclosure that is not noble.

VOLUME II.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE OAK PARLOUR — A MEETING AND PARTING.

"Gossiping place Cardyllian is," said Miss Anne Sheckleton, after they had walked on a little in silence. "What nonsense the people do talk. I never heard anything like it. Did you ever hear such a galamathias?"

The young lady walking by her side answered by a cold little laugh —

"Yes, I suppose so. All small country towns *are*, I believe," said she.

"And that good old soul, Mrs. Jones, she does invent the most absurd gossip about every body that imagination can conceive. Wilmot told me the other day that she had given her to understand that your father is a madman, sent down here by London doctors for change of air. I make it a point never to mind one word she says; although her news, I confess, does amuse me."

"Yes, it is, very foolish. Who are those Etherages?" said Margaret.

"Oh! They are village people — oddities," said Miss Sheckleton. "From all I can gather, you have no idea what absurd people they are."

"He was walking with them. Was not he?" asked the young lady.

"Yes — I think so," answered her cousin.

Then followed a long silence, and the elder lady at length said —

"How fortunate we have been in our weather; haven't we? How beautiful the hills look this evening!" said the spinster; but her words did not sound as if she cared about the hills or the light. I believe the two ladies were each acting a part.

"Yes," said Margaret; "so they do."

The girl felt as if she had walked fifty miles instead of two — quite worn out — her limbs aching with a sense of fatigue; it was a trouble to hold her head up. She would have liked to sit down on the old stone bench they were passing now, and to die there like a worn-out prisoner on a march.

Two or three times that evening as they sat unusually silent and listless, Miss Anne Sheckleton peeped over her spectacles, lowering her work for a moment, with a sad inquiry, into her face, and seemed on the point of speaking. But there was nothing inviting to talk, in Margaret's face, and when she spoke there was no reference to the subject on which Miss Sheckleton would have liked to speak.

So, at last, tired, with a pale, wandering smile, she kissed the kind old spinster, and bid her good night. When she reached her room, however, she did not undress, but having secured her door, she sat down to her little desk, and wrote a letter; swiftly and resolutely the pen glided over the page. Nothing added — nothing erased; each line remained as she penned it first.

Having placed this letter in its envelope, and addressed it to "Cleve Verney, Esq., Ware," she opened her window. The air was mild; none of the sharpness in it that usually gives to nights at that time of year, a frosty foretaste of winter. So sitting by the window, which, placed in one of the gables of the old house, commands a view of the uplands of Cardyllian, and to the left, of the sea, and the misty mountains — she sat there, leaning upon her hand.

Here, with the letter on her lap, she sat, pale as a meditating suicide, and looking dreamily over the landscape. It is, at times, some little incident of by-play, or momentary hesitation of countenance, that gives its whole character and force to a situation. Before the retina of Margaret one image was always visible, that of Cleve Verney as she saw him to-day, looking under Agnes Etherage's bonnet, with interest, into her eyes, as he talked and walked by her side, on the Green of Cardyllian.

Of course there are false prophecies as well as true, in love; illusions as well as inspirations, and fancied intimations may mislead. But Margaret could not doubt here. All the time she smiled and assumed her usual tone and manner, there was an agony at her heart.

Miss Fanshawe would trust no one with her secret. She was not like other girls. Something of the fiery spirit of her southern descent she had inherited. She put on the shawl and veil she had worn that day, unbarred the hall-door, and at two o'clock, when Cardyllian was locked in the deepest slumber, glided through its empty streets, to the little wooden portico, over which that day she had read "Postoffice," and placed in it the letter which next morning made quite a little sensation in the Postoffice *coterie*.

Under the awful silence and darkness of the old avenue, she reached again the hall-door of Malory. She stood for a moment upon the steps looking seaward — I think towards Ware — pale as a ghost, with one slender hand clenched, and a wild sorrow in her face. She cared very little, I think, whether her excursion were discovered or not. The messenger had flown from her empty hand; her voice could not recall it, or delay it for an hour — quite irrevocable, and all was over.

She entered the hall, closed and barred the door again, ascended to her room, and lay awake, through the long night, with her hand under her cheek, not stunned, not dreaming, but in a frozen apathy, in which she saw all with a despairing clearness.

Next day Cleve Verney received a note, in a hand which he knew not; but having read — could not mistake — a cold, proud note, with a gentle cruelty, ending all between them, quite decisively, and not deigning a reason for it.

I dare say that Cleve could not himself describe with much precision the feelings with which he read this letter.

Cleve Verney, however, could be as impetuous and as rash too, on occasion, as other people. There was something of rage in his soul which scouted all consequences. Could temerity be imagined more audacious than his?

Right across from Ware to the jetty of Malory ran his yacht, audaciously, in open sea, in broad daylight. There is, in the Dower House, a long low room, wainscoted in black shining panels from floor to ceiling, and which in old times was called the oak parlour. It has two doors, in one of its long sides, the farther opening near the stairs, the other close to the hall door.

Up the avenue, up the steps, into the hall, and, taking chance, into this room, walked Cleve Verney, without encountering interruption or even observation. *Fortuna favet fortibus*, so runs the legend in faded gold letters, under the dim portrait of Sir Thomas Verney, in his armour, fixed in the panel of the hall. So it had proved with his descendant.

Favoured by fortune, without having met a human being, and directed by the same divinity it would seem, he had entered the room I have described; and at the other end, alone, awaiting Miss Sheckleton, who was to accompany her in a little ramble among the woods, stood Miss Fanshawe, dressed for her walk.

In came Cleve pale with agitation; approached her quickly, and stopped short, saying —

"I've come; I'm here to ask — how could you — my God! — how *could* you write the letter you sent this morning?"

Miss Fanshawe was leaning a little against the oak window-frame, and did not change this pose, which was haughty and almost sullen.

"*Why* I wrote that letter, *no* one has a right to ask me, and I shall say no more than is contained in the letter itself." She spoke so coldly and quietly that there seemed almost a sadness in her tones.

"I don't think you can really mean it," said Cleve, "I'm *sure* you can't; you can't *possibly* think that any one would use another so, without a reason."

"*Not* without a reason," said she.

"But I say, surely I have a right to hear it," urged Cleve. "Is it fair to condemn me, as your letter does, unheard, and to punish me, in ignorance?"

"*Not* in ignorance; at this moment, you *know* the reason perfectly," replied the girl, and he felt as if her great hazel eyes lighted up all the dark labyrinths of his brain, and disclosed every secret that lurked there.

Cleve was for a moment embarrassed, and averted his eyes. It was true. He *did* know; he could not fail to guess the cause. He had been cursing his ill luck all the morning, and wondering what malign caprice could have led her, of all times and places, at that moment, to the Green of Cardyllian.

In the "Arabian Nights," that delightful volume which owes nothing to trick or book-craft, and will preserve its charm undimmed through all the mutations of style and schools, which, projecting its images from the lamp and hues of a dazzling fancy, can no more be lectured into neglect than the magic lantern, and will preserve its popularity while the faculty of imagination and the sense of colour remain, we all remember a parallel. In the "Sultan's Purveyor's Story," where the beautiful favourite of Zobaïde is about to make the bridegroom of her love quite happy, and in the moment of his adoration, starts up transformed with a "lamentable cry," and hate and fury in her aspect, all about an unfortunate "ragout made with garlic," and thereupon, with her own hand and a terrible scourge, lashes him, held down by slaves, into a welter of blood, and then orders the executioner to strike off, at the wrist, his offending hand.

"*Yes!* you *do* know, self-convicted, *why* I think it better for both that we should part now — better that we should thus early be undeceived; with little pain and less reluctance, forget the precipitation and folly of an hour, and go our several ways through life apart. You are fickle; you are selfish; you are reckless; you are quite unworthy of the love you ask for; if you are trifling with that young lady, Miss Etherage, how cruel and unmanly! and if *not*, by what right do you presume to stand here?"

Could he ever forget that beautiful girl as he saw her before him there, almost terrible — her eyes — the strange white light that seemed to flicker on her forehead — her attitude, Italian more than English, statuesque and wild?

On a sudden came another change, sad as a broken-hearted death and farewell — the low tone — the fond lingering — of an unspeakable sorrow, and eternal leavetaking.

"In either case my resolution is taken. I have said *Farewell*; and I will see you no more — no more — never."

And as she spoke, she left the room by the door that was beside her.

It was a new sensation for Cleve Verney to feel as he did at that moment. A few steps he followed toward the door, and then hesitated. Then with a new impulse, he did follow and open it. But she was gone. Even the sound of her step was lost.

He turned back, and paused for a minute to collect his thoughts. Of course this must not be. The idea of giving her up so, was simple nonsense, and not to be listened to.

The door at which the young lady had left the room but two or three minutes before, now opened, and Miss Sheckleton's natty figure and kind old face came in. Quite aghast she looked at him.

"For God's sake, Mr. Verney, why are you here? How *can* you be so rash?" she almost gasped. "You *must* go, *instantly*."

"How could you advise the cruelty and folly of that letter?" he said, impetuously.

"What letter?"

"Oh! Miss Sheckleton, do let us be frank; only say what have I done or said, or thought, that I should be condemned and discarded without a hearing?"

Hereupon Miss Sheckleton, still urging his departure in frightened whispers, protested her innocence of his meaning, and at last bethought her of persuading him, to leave the house, and meet her for the purpose of explaining all, of which he soon perceived she was honestly ignorant, in their accustomed trysting-place.

There, accordingly, among the old trees, they met, and discussed, and she blamed and pitied him; and promised, with such caution as old ladies use in speaking for the resolves of the young of their own sex, that Margaret should learn the truth from her, although she could not of course say what she might think of it, taking as she did such decided, and, sometimes, strange views of things.

So they parted kindly. But Cleve’s heart was disquieted within him, and his sky this evening was wild and stormy.

CHAPTER II.

JUDÆUS APELLA.

On the stillest summer day did you ever see nature quite still, even that circumscribed nature that hems you round with densest trees, as you lounge on your rustic seat, in lazy contemplation, amid the shorn grass of your flowerbeds, while all things are oppressed and stifled with heat and slumber? Look attentively, and you will see a little quiver like a dying pulse, in the hanging flower-bells, and a light faint tremble in this leaf and that. Of nature, which is, being interpreted, life, the law is motion, and this law controls the moral as well as the physical world. Thus it is that there is nowhere any such thing as absolute repose, and everywhere we find change and action.

Over Malory, if anywhere, broods the spirit of repose. Buried in deep forest — fenced on one side by the lonely estuary — no town or village lying beyond it; seaward the little old-world road that passes by it is quite forsaken by traffic. Even the sound of children's laughter and prattle is never heard there, and little but the solemn caw of the rooks and the baying of the night-dog. Yet chance was then invading that quiet seclusion with an unexpected danger.

A gentleman driving that day to the "George Inn" at Cardyllian, from a distant station on the Great London line, and having picked up from his driver, a Cardyllian man, all he could about Malory, and an old Mrs. Mervyn who lived there, stopped suddenly at the corner of the old road, which, two miles below Cardyllian, turns off inland, and rambles with many pleasant windings into the road that leads to Penruthyn Priory.

This gentleman, whose dress was in the cheap and striking style, and whose jewellery was conspicuous, was high-shouldered, with a very decided curve, though not exactly a hunch. He was small, with rather long arms. His hair, whiskers, and beard were glossy black, and his features Jewish. He switched and twirled a black walking-cane, with silver knobs on it, in his hand, and he had two or three rings on his fingers.

His luggage had gone on to the “George,” and whenever opportunity occurred along that solitary road he renewed his inquiries about Malory, with a slight peculiarity of accent which the unsophisticated rustics in that part of the world had never heard before.

By this time it was evening, and in the light of the approaching sunset, he might now, as the view of the sea and the distant mountains opened, have enjoyed a pleasure for which, however, he had no taste; these evening glows and tints were to him but imperfect light, and he looked along the solemn and shadowy hills as he would have run his eye along the shops in Cheapside — if with any interest, simply to amuse himself with a calculation of what they might be worth in money.

He was now passing the pretty churchyard of Llanderris. The gray headstones and grass-grown graves brought home to him no passing thought of change and mortality; death was to him an arithmetical formula by which he measured annuities and reversions and policies. And now he had entered the steep road that leads down with an irregular curve to Malory.

He looked down upon the grand old wood. He had a smattering of the value of timber, and remembered what a hit Rosenthal and Solomons had made of their purchase of the wood at East Milton, when the railway was about to be made there; and what a nice bit of money they had made of their contract for sleepers and all sorts of other things. Could not Jos. Larkin, or some better man, be found to get up a little branch line from Llwynan to Cardyllian? His large mouth almost watered as he thought of it; and how that eight or nine miles of rail would devour every inch of timber that grew there — not a branch would be lost.

But now he was descending toward Malory, and the banks at the right hand and the left shut out the view. So he began to descend the slope at his leisure, looking up and about him and down at the worn road for material for thought, for his mind was bustling and barren.

The road is not four steps across. It winds steeply between high banks. Over these stoop and mingle in the perspective, the gray stems of tall ash trees mantled in ivy, which here and there climbs thickly among the boughs, and makes a darker umbrage among the foliage of the trees. Beneath, ascending the steep banks, grow clumps of nettles, elder, hazel, and thorn. Only down the slope of the road can the passenger see anything of the country it traverses, for the banks out-top him on either side. The rains have washed its stones so bare, wearing a sort of gulley in the centre, as to give it the character in some sort of a forest ravine.

The sallow, hatchet-faced man, with prominent black eyes, was walking up this steep and secluded road. Those sharp eyes of his were busy. A wild bee hummed over his head, and he cut at it pleasantly with his stick, but it was out of reach, and he paused and eyed its unconscious flight, with an ugly smile, as if he owed it a grudge for having foiled him. There was little life in that secluded and dark track. He spied a small dome-shaped black beetle stumbling through the dust and pebbles, across it.

The little man drew near and peered at it with his piercing eyes and a pleasant grin. He stooped. The point of his pale nose was right over it. Across the desert the beetle was toiling. His path was a right line. The little man looked across to see what he was aiming at, or where was his home. There was nothing particular that he could perceive in the grass and weeds at the point witherward he was tending in a right line. The beetle sprawled and stumbled over a little bead of clay, recovered his feet and his direction, and plodded on in a straight line. The little man put his stick, point downward, before him. The beetle rounded it carefully, and plodded on inflexibly in the same direction. Then he of the black eyes and long nose knocked him gently in the face, and again and again, jerking him this way or that. Still, like a prizefighter he rallied between the rounds, and drove right on in his old line. Then the little man gave him a sharper knock, which sent him a couple of feet away, on his back; right and left sprawled and groped the short legs of the beetle, but alas! in vain. He could not right himself. He tried to lurch himself over, but in vain. Now and then came a frantic gallop with his little feet; it was beating the air. This was pleasant to the man with the piercing eyes, who stooped over, smiling with his wide mouth, and showing his white fangs. I wonder what the beetle thought of his luck — what he thought of it all. The paroxysms of hope, when his feet worked so hard, grew shorter. The intervals of despair and inaction grew longer. The beetle was making up his mind that he must lie on his back and die slowly, or be crushed under a hoof, or picked up and swallowed by a wandering farmyard fowl.

Though it was pleasant to witness his despair, the man with the prominent eyes tired of the sight, he gave him a poke under the back, and tumbled him up again on his feet, and watched him. The beetle seemed a little bothered for a while, and would have shaken himself I'm sure if he could. But he soon came to himself, turned in his old direction, and, as it seemed to the observer, marched stumbling on with indomitable perseverance toward the selfsame point. I know nothing of beetle habits. I can make no guess why he sought that particular spot. Was it merely a favourite haunt, or were there a little beetle brood, and a wife awaiting him there? A strong instinct of some sort urged him, and a most heroic perseverance.

And now I suppose he thought his troubles over, and that his journey was about surely to be accomplished. Alas! it will never be accomplished. There is an influence near which you suspect not. The distance is lessening, the green grass, and dock leaves, and mallows, very near. Alas! there is no sympathy with your instinct, with the purpose of your life, with your labours and hopes. An inverted sympathy is *there*; a sympathy with the difficulty — with "the Adversary" — with death. The little man with the sharp black eyes brought the point of his stick near the beetle's back, having seen enough of his pilgrimage, and squelched him.

The pleasure of malice is curious. There are people who flavour their meals with their revenges, whose future is made interesting by the hope that this or that person may come under their heel. Which is pleasantest, building castles in the air for ourselves, or dungeons in pandemonium for our enemies? It is well for one half of the human race that the other has not the disposal of them. More rare, more grotesque, more exquisitely fiendish, is that sport with the mysteries of agony, that lust of torture, that constitute the desire and fruition of some monstrous souls.

Now, having ended that beetle's brief life in eternal darkness, and reduced all his thoughts and yearnings to cypher, and dissolved his persevering and resolute little character, never to be recombined, this young gentleman looked up among the yellow leaves in which the birds were chirping their evening gossip, and treated them to a capital imitation of a wild cat, followed by a still happier one of a screech-owl, which set all the sparrows in the ivy round twittering in panic; and having sufficiently amused himself, the sun being now near the horizon, he bethought him of his mission to Malory. So on he marched whistling an air from an opera, which, I am bound to admit, he did with the brilliancy and precision of a little flageolet, in so much that it amounted to quite a curiously pretty accomplishment, and you would have wondered how a gentleman with so unmistakeable a vein of the miscreant in him, could make such sweet and bird-like music.

A little boy riding a tired donkey into Cardyllian, pointed out to him the gate of the old place, and with a jaunty step, twirling his cane, and whistling as he went, he reached the open space before the door steps.

The surly servant who happened to see him as he hesitated and gaped at the windows, came forth, and challenged him with tones and looks the reverse of hospitable.

“Oh! Mrs. Mervyn?” said he; “well, she doesn’t live here. Get ye round that corner there, and you’ll see the steward’s house with a hatch-door to it, and you may ring the bell, and leave, d’ye mind, by the back way. You can follow the road by the rear o’ the house.”

So saying, he warned him off peremptorily with a flunkey’s contempt for a mock gentleman, and the sallow man with the black eyes and beard, not at all put out by that slight treatment, for he had seen all sorts of adventures, and had learned unaffectedly to despise contempt, walked listlessly round the corner of the old house, with a somewhat knock-kneed and ungainly stride, on which our bandy friend sneered gruffly.

CHAPTER III.

MR. LEVI VISITS MRS. MERVYN.

And now the stranger stood before the steward’s house, which is an old stone building, just three stories high, with but few rooms, and heavy stone shafts to the windows, with little diamond lattices in them, all stained and gray with age — antiquaries assign it to the period of Henry VII. — and when the Jewish gentleman, his wide, loose mouth smiling in solitary expectation, slapped and rattled his cane upon the planks of the hatch, as people in old times called “house!” to summon the servants, he was violating the monastic silence of a building as old as the bygone friars, with their matin bells and solemn chants.

A little Welsh girl looked over the clumsy banister, and ran up with his message to Mrs. Mervyn.

“Will you please come up stairs, sir, to the drawingroom?” asked the child.

He was amused at the notion of a “drawingroom” in such a place, and with a lazy sneer climbed the stairs after her.

This drawingroom was very dark at this hour, except for the patch of red light that came through the lattice and rested on the old cupboard opposite, on which stood, shelf above shelf, a grove of coloured delf candlesticks, teacups, jugs, men, women, teapots, and beasts, all in an old-world style, a decoration which prevails in humble Welsh chambers, and which here was a property of the house, forgotten, I presume, by the great house of Verney, and transmitted from tenant to tenant, with the lumbering furniture.

The flighty old lady, Mrs. Mervyn of the large eyes, received him with an oldfashioned politeness and formality which did not in the least embarrass her visitor, who sate himself down, smiling his moist, lazy smile, with his knees protruded under the table, on which his elbows rested, and with his heels on the rung of his chair, while his hat and cane lay in the sunlight beside him.

“The maid, I think, forgot to mention your name, sir?” said the old lady gently, but in a tone of inquiry.

"Very like, ma'am — very like, indeed — because, I think, I forgot to mention my name to her," he drawled pleasantly. "I've taken a deal of trouble — I have — to find you out, ma'am, and two hundred and forty-five miles here, ma'am, and the same back again — a journey of four hundred and ninety miles — is not just nothing. I'm glad to see you, ma'am — happy to find you in your drawingroom, ma'am — hope you find yourself as well, ma'am, as your numerous friends could wish you. My name, ma'am, is Levi, being junior governor of the firm of Goldshed and Levi, well known on 'Change, ma'am, and justly appreciated by a large circle of friends, as you may read upon this card."

The card which he tendered did not, it must be allowed, speak of these admiring friends, but simply announced that "Goldshed and Levi" were "Stockbrokers," pursuing their calling at "Offices — 10, Scroop Street, Gimmel Lane," in the City. And having held this card before her eyes for a sufficient time, he put it into his pocket.

"You see, ma'am, I've come all this way for our house, to ask you whether you would like to hear some news of your governor, ma'am?"

"Of whom, sir?" inquired the tall old lady, who had remained standing all this time, as she had received him, and was now looking at him with eyes, not of suspicion, but of undisguised fear.

"Of your husband, ma'am, I mean," drawled he, eyeing her with his cunning smile.

"You don't mean, sir — — " said she faintly, and thereupon she was seized with a trembling, and sat down, and her very lips turned white, and Mr. Levi began to think "the old girl was looking uncommon queerish," and did not like the idea of "its happening," under these circumstances.

"There, ma'am — don't take on! Where's the water? Da-a-a-mn the drop!" he exclaimed, turning up mugs and jugs in a flurry. "I say — Mary Anne — Jane — chick-a-biddy — girl — be alive there, will ye?" howled the visitor over the banister. "Water, can't ye? Old woman's sick!"

"Better now, sir — better — just open that — a little air, please," the old lady whispered.

With some hurried fumbling he succeeded in getting the lattice open.

"Water, will you? What a time you're about it, little beast!" he bawled in the face of the child.

"Much better, thanks — very much better," whispered the old lady.

"Of course, you're better, ma'am. Here it is at la-a-ast. Have some water, ma'am? Do. Give her the water, you little fool."

She sipped a little.

"Coming round — all right," he said tenderly. "What cattle them old women are! drat them." A little pause followed.

"A deal better now, ma'am?"

"I'm startled, sir."

"Of course you're startled, ma'am."

"And faint."

"Why not, ma'am?"

Mrs. Rebecca Mervyn breathed three or four great sighs, and began to look again like a living woman.

"Now she looks quite nice," (he pronounced it ni-i-ishe) "doesn't she? You may make tracksh, young woman; go, will you?"

"I feel so much better," said the old lady when they were alone, "pray go on."

"You do — quite — ever so much better. *Shall* I go on?"

"Pray do, sir."

"Well now, see, if I do, there must be no more of that, old lady. If you can't talk of the governor, we'll just let him alone," said Levi, sturdily.

"For God's sake, sir, if you mean my husband, tell me all you know."

"All aint a great deal, ma'am; but a cove has turned up who knew him well."

"Some one who knew him?"

"Just so, ma'am." He balanced whether he should tell her that he was dead or not, but decided that it would be more convenient, though less tragic, to avoid getting up a new scene like the other, so he modified his narrative. "He's turned up, ma'am, and knew him very intimate; and has got a meogny" (he so pronounced mahogany) "desk of his, gave in charge to him, since he could not come home at present, containing a law paper, ma'am, making over to his son and yours some property in England."

"Then, he is not coming?" said she.

"Not as I knowzh, ma'am."

"He has been a long time away," she continued.

"So I'm informed, ma'am," he observed.

"I'll tell you how it was, and when he went away."

"Thank ye, ma'am," he interposed. "I've heard — melancholy case, ma'am; got seven penn'orth, didn't he, and never turned up again?"

"Seven what, sir?"

"Seven years, ma'am; seven penn'orth we call it, ma'am, familiar like."

"I don't understand you, sir — I don't know what it means; I saw him sail away. It went off, off, off."

"I'll bet a pound it did, ma'am," said Mr. Levi.

"Only to be for a very short time; the sail — I could see it very far — how pretty they look on the sea; but very lonely, I think — too lonely."

"A touch of solitary, ma'am," acquiesced Levi.

"Away, in the yacht," she dreamed on.

"The royal yacht, ma'am, no doubt."

"The yacht, we called it. He said he would return next day; and it went round Pendillion — round the headland of Pendillion, I lost it, and it never came again; but I think it will, sir — don't you? I'm sure it will — he was so confident; only smiled and nodded, and he said, 'No, I won't say goodbye.' He would not have said that if he did not mean to return — he could not so deceive a lonely poor thing like me, that adored him."

"No, he couldn't ma'am, not he; no man could. Betray the girl that adored him! Ba-a-ah! impossible," replied Mr. Levi, and shook his glossy ringlets sleepily, and dropped his eyelids, smiling. This old girl amused him, her romance was such a joke. But the light was perceptibly growing more dusky, and business must not wait upon fun, so Mr. Levi said —

"He'sh no chicken by this time, ma'am — your son, ma'am; I'm told he'sh twenty-sheven yearsh old — thatsh no chicken — twenty-sheven next birthday."

"Do you know anything of him, sir? Oh, no, he doesn't," she said, looking dreamily with her great sad eyes upon him.

"Jest you tell me, ma'am, where was he baptised, and by what name?" said her visitor.

A look of doubt and fear came slowly and wildly into her face as she looked at him.

"Who is he — I've been speaking to you, sir?"

"Oh! yesh, mo-o-st *beautiful*, you 'av, ma'am," answered he; "and I am your son's best friend — and yours, ma'am; only you tell me where to find him, and he'sh a made man, for all his dayzh."

"Where has he come from? — a stranger," she murmured.

"I *told* you, ma'am."

"I don't know you, sir; I don't know your name," she dreamed on.

"Benjamin Levi. I'll *spell* it for you, if you like," he answered, beginning to grow testy. "I told you my name, and showed you my ca-a-ard. Bah! it ravels at one end, as fast as it knits at the other."

And again he held the card of the firm of Goldshed and Levi, with his elbows on the table, between the fingers of his right and left hand, bowed out like an oldfashioned shopboard, and looking as if it would spring out elastically into her face.

"*There*, ma'am, that'sh the ticket!" said he, eyeing her over it.

"Once, sir, I spoke of business to a stranger, and I was always sorry; I did mischief," said the old woman, with a vague remorsefulness.

"I'm *no* stranger, ma'am, begging your pardon," he replied, insolently; "you don't half know what you're saying, I do think. Goldshed and Levi — not know us; sich precious rot, I *never*!"

"I did mischief, sir."

"I only want to know where to find your son, ma'am, if you know, and if you won't tell, you *ruin* that poor young man. It aint a pound to me, but it'sh a deal to him," answered the goodnatured Mr. Levi.

"I'm very sorry, sir, but I once did mischief by speaking to a gentleman whom I didn't know. Lady Verney made me promise, and I'm sure she was right, never to speak about business without first consulting some member of her family. I don't understand business — never did," pleaded she.

"Well, here's a go! not understaan'? Why, there's *nothing* to understaan'. It isn't business. S-o-n," he spelt "*son*. H-u-s-b-a-n-d — *uzbaan*' that aint business — da-a-m me! *Where's* the business? Ba-ah!"

"Sir," said the old lady, drawing herself up, "I've answered you. It was about my husband — God help me — I spoke before, and did mischief without knowing it. I won't speak of him to strangers, except as Lady Verney advises — to any stranger — especially to you, sir."

There was a sound of steps outside, which, perhaps, modified the answer of Mr. Levi. He was very much chagrined, and his great black eyes looked very wickedly upon her helpless face.

"Ha, ha, ha! as you please, ma'am. It isn't the turn of a shilling to *me*, but you *ru*-in the *poo-or* young man, your son, for da-a-am me, if I touch his bushinesh again, if it falls through *now*; mind you *that*. So, having *ruined* your own flesh and blood, you tell me to go as I came. It's *nauthing* to me — mind that — but ru-in to him; here's my hat and stick — I'm going, only just I'll give you one chance more for that poor young man, just a minute to think again." He had stood up, with his hat and cane in his hand. "Just one chance — you'll be sending for me again, and I won't come. No — no — never, da-a-am me!"

"Good evening, sir," said the lady.

Mr. Levi bit his thumb-nail.

"You don't know what you're a-doing, ma'am," said he, trying once more.

"I can't, sir — I *can't*," she said, distractedly.

"Come, think — I'm going — *going*; just think — what do you shay?"

He waited.

"I won't speak, sir."

"You won't?"

"No, sir."

He lingered for a moment, and the red sunlight showed like a flush of anger on his sallow face. Then, with an insolent laugh, he turned, sticking his hat on his head, and walked down the stairs, singing.

Outside the hatch, he paused for a second.

"I'll get it all another way," he thought. "Round here," he said, "wasn't it — the back way. Good evening, you stupid old crazy cat," and he saluted the windows of the steward's house with a vicious twitch of his cane.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. BENJAMIN LEVI RECOGNISES AN ACQUAINTANCE.

Mr. Benjamin Levi, having turned the corner of the steward's house, found himself before two great piers, passing through the gate of which he entered the stableyard, at the further side of which was a second gate, which he rightly conjectured would give him access to that back avenue through which he meant to make his exit.

He glanced round this great quadrangle, one end of which was overlooked by the rear of the old house, and that quaint old refectory with its clumsy flight of stone steps, from the windows of which our friend Sedley had observed the ladies of Malory while engaged in their garden work.

There was grass growing between the paving stones, and moss upon the walls, and the stable doors were decaying upon their rusty hinges. Commenting, as so practical a genius naturally would, upon the surrounding capabilities and decay, Mr. Levi had nearly traversed this solitude when he heard some one call, "Thomas Jones!" twice or thrice, and the tones of the voice arrested him instantly.

He was a man with a turn for musical business, and not only dabbled in concerts and little operatic speculations, but, having a naturally musical ear, had a retentive memory for voices — and this blind man's faculty stood him in stead here, for, with a malicious thrill of wonder and delight, he instantly recognised this voice.

The door of that smaller yard which is next the house opened now, and Sir Booth Fanshawe entered, bawling with increased impatience— "Thomas Jones!"

Sir Booth's eye lighted on the figure of Mr. Levi, as he stood close by the wall at the other side, hoping to escape observation.

With the same instinct Sir Booth stepped backward hastily into an open stable door, and Mr. Levi skipped into another door, within which unfortunately, a chained dog, Neptune, was dozing.

The dog flew the length of his tether at Mr. Levi's legs, and the Jewish gentleman sprang forth more hastily even than he had entered.

At the same moment, Sir Booth's pride determined *his* vacillation, and he strode boldly forward and said —

"I think I know you, sir; don't I?"

As there was still some little distance between them, Mr. Levi affected near-sightedness, and, compressing his eyelids, smiled dubiously, and said —

"Rayther think not, sir. No, sir — I'm a stranger; my name is Levi — of Goldshed and Levi — and I've been to see Mrs. Mervyn, who lives here, about her young man. I don't know you, sir — no — it is a mishtake."

"No, Mr. Levi — you *do* know me — you do," replied Sir Booth, with a grim oath, approaching, while his fingers clutched at his walking-stick with an uneasy gripe, as if he would have liked to exercise it upon the shoulders of the Israelite.

"Oh! crikey! Ay, to be sure — why, it's Sir Booth Fanshawe! I beg pardon, Sir Booth. We thought you was in France; but no matter, Sir Booth Fanshawe, none in the world, for all that little bushiness is blow'd over, quite. We have no interest — no more than your horse — in them little securities, upon my shoul; we sold them two months ago to Sholomons; we were glad to sell them to Sholomons, we were; he hit us pretty hard with some of Wilbraham and Cumming's paper, and I don't care if he never sees a shilling of it — we would rayther *like* it." And Mr. Levi again made oath to that confession of feeling.

"Will you come into the house and have a glass of sherry or something?" said Sir Booth, on reflection.

"Well, I don't mind," said Mr. Levi.

And in he went and had a glass of sherry and a biscuit, and grew friendly and confidential.

"Don't you be running up to town, Sir Booth — Sholomons is looking for you. Clever man, Sholomons, and you should get quietly out of this country as soon as you conveniently can. He thinks you're in France now. He sent Rogers — you know Rogers?"

He paused so long here that Sir Booth had to answer "No."

"Well, he sent him — a good man, Rogers, you know, but drinks a bit — after you to Vichy, ha, ha, ha! Crikey! it *was* rich. Sholomons be blowed! It was worth a pound to see his face — ugly fellow. You know Sholomons?”

And so Mr. Levi entertained his host, who neither loved nor trusted him, and at his departure gave him all sorts of friendly warnings and sly hints, and walked and ran partly to the “George,” and got a two-horse vehicle as quickly as they could harness the horses, and drove at great speed to Llywnan, where he telegraphed to his partner to send a writ down by the next train for Sir Booth, the message being from Benjamin Levi, George Inn, Cardyllian, to Goldshed and Levi, &c., &c., London.

Mr. Levi took his ease in his inn, sipped a good deal of brandy and water, and smoked many cigars, with a serene mind and pleasant anticipations, for, if nothing went wrong, the telegram would be in his partner’s hand in ample time to enable him, with his accustomed diligence, to send down a “beak” with the necessary documents by the night train who would reach Cardyllian early, and pay his little visit at Malory by nine o’clock in the morning.

Mr. Levi, as prosperous gentlemen will, felt his solitude, though luxurious, too dull for the effervescence of his spirits, and having questioned his host as to the amusements of Cardyllian, found that its normal resources of that nature were confined to the billiard and reading rooms, where, on payment of a trifling benefaction to the institution, he enjoyed, as a “visitor,” the exhilarating privileges of a member of the club.

In the billiard-room, accordingly, that night, was the fragrance of Mr. Levi’s cheroot agreeably perceptible, the sonorous drawl of his peculiar accent vocal amongst pleasanter intonations, and his “cuts,” “double doubles,” and “long crosses,” painfully admired by the gentlemen whose shillings he pocketed at pool. And it was pleasant to his exquisitively commercial genius to think that the contributions of the gentlemen to whom he had “given a lesson,” and whose “eyes he had opened,” would constitute a fund sufficient to pay his expenses at the “George,” and even to leave something towards his return fare to London.

The invalid who was suffering from asthma in the bedroom next his was disturbed by his ejaculations as he undressed, and by his repeated bursts of laughter, and rang his bell and implored the servant to beg of the two gentlemen who were conversing in the next room to make a little less noise, in consideration of his indisposition.

The manner in which he had "potted" the gentlemen in the billiard-room, right and left, and the uncomfortable admiration of his successes exhibited in their innocent countenances, had, no doubt, something to do with these explosions of merriment. But the chief source of his amusement was the anticipated surprise of Sir Booth, when the little domiciliary visit of the next morning should take place, and the recollection of his own adroitness in mystifying the Baronet.

So he fell into a sweet slumber, uncrossed by even an ominous dream, not knowing that the shrewd old bird for whom his chaff was spread and his pot simmering had already flown with the scream of the whistle on the wings of the night train to Chester, and from that centre to an unknown nook, whence, in a day or two more, he had flitted to some continental roost, which even clever Mr. Levi could not guess.

Next morning early, the ladies were on their way to London, through which they were to continue their journey, and to join Sir Booth abroad.

Two persons were, therefore, very much disappointed next day at Malory; but it could not be helped. One was Cleve Verney, who tried the inexorable secrecy of the servant in every way, but in vain; possibly because the servant did not himself know where "the family" were gone. The other was Mr. Benjamin Levi, who resented Sir Booth's selfish duplicity with an exasperation which would hardly have been appeased by burning that "old mizzled robber" alive.

Mr. Levi flew to Chester with his "beak" in a third-class carriage, and thence radiated telegraphic orders and entreaties affecting Sir Booth wherever he had a friend, and ready, on a hint by the wires, to unleash his bailiff on his track, and fix him on the soil, immovable as the petrified witch of Mucklestane Muir, by the spell of his parchment legend.

But no gleam of light rewarded his labours. It was enough to ruffle even Mr. Levi's temper, which, accordingly, *was* ruffled. To have been so near! To have had his hand, as it were, upon the bird. If he had only had the writ himself in his pocket he might have dropped, with his own fingers, the grain of salt upon his tail. But it was not to be. At the moment of possession, Mr. Levi was balked. He could grind curses under his white teeth, and did not spare them now. Some of them were, I dare say, worthy of that agile witch, "Cuttie Sark," as she stood baffled on the "key-stane" of the bridge, with Meggie's severed tail in her grip.

In the meantime, for Cleve Verney, Malory is stricken with a sudden blight. Its woods are enchanted no longer; it is dark, now, and empty. His heart aches when he looks at it.

He missed his accustomed walk with the Etherage girls. He wrote to tell old Vane Etherage that he was suffering from a severe cold, and could not dine with him, as he had promised. The cold was a lie — but was he really well? Are the spirits no part of health; and where were his?

About a fortnight later, came a letter from his good friend, Miss Sheckleton. How delightfully interesting, though it contained next to nothing. But how interesting! How often he read it through! How every solitary moment was improved by a glance into it!

It was a foreign letter. It would be posted, she said, by a friend in Paris. She could not yet tell, even to a friend so kind as he, the address which would find them. She hoped, however, *very* soon to be at liberty to do so. *All* were well. Her young friend had never alluded since to the subject of the last painful interview. *She*, Miss Sheckleton, could not, unless a favourable opening presented, well invite a conversation on the matter. She had no doubt, however, that an opportunity would occur. She understood the peculiar character of her beautiful young cousin, and saw a difficulty, and even danger, in pressing the question upon her, possibly prematurely. When he, Cleve, wrote — which she supposed he would so soon as he was in possession of her address — he could state exactly what he wished her to say. Meanwhile, although as she had before hinted, dear Margaret was admired and *sought* by a man both of rank and fortune, with very great constancy, (she thought it not improbable that Cleve had already suspected that affair,) there was in *her* opinion nothing to apprehend, at least at present, in that gentleman's suit — flattered, of course, she must be by a constancy so devoted; but she hardly thought there was a chance that the feeling would grow to anything beyond *that*. So, she bid God bless him, and wrote Anne Sheckleton at the foot of the page.

The physician who, mistaking a complaint, administers precisely the concoction which debilitates the failing organ, or inflames the tortured nerve, commits just such an innocent cruelty as good Miss Sheckleton practised, at the close of her letter, upon Cleve Verney.

She had fancied that he knew something of the suit to which she referred for the purpose of relieving an anxiety to which her thoughtful allusion introduced him, in fact, for the first time.

Who was this faithful swain? He knew enough of Sir Booth Fanshawe's surroundings, his friends and intimates, to count up four, or five, or six possible rivals. He knew what perseverance might accomplish, and absence undo, and his heart was disquieted within him.

If he had consulted his instinct, he would have left Ware forthwith, and pursued to the Continent, and searched every town in France; but he could not act quite according to impulse. He had told the Cardyllian people that he was not to leave Ware till the fourteenth; would no remark attend his sudden departure, following immediately upon the mysterious flitting of the Malory people? He knew what wonderful stories might thereupon arise in Cardyllian, and how sure they would be, one way or another, to reach his uncle Kiffyn, and how that statesman's suspicions might embarrass him. Then a letter might easily reach Ware while he was away, and be lost, or worse.

So he resolved to see out the rest of his time where he was. In Cardyllian church, how dark and cold looked the cavity of the Malory pew! The saints and martyrs in the great eastern window were subdued, and would not glow, and their glories did not burn, but only smouldered that day. And oh! how long was Dr. Splayfoot's sermon! And how vague was his apprehension of the "yarn" to which Miss Charity Etherage treated him all the way from the church porch to the top of Castle Street.

He was glad when the fifteenth, which was to call him away from Ware, approached. He was glad to leave this changed place, glad to go to London — *anywhere*.

Just as all was ready for his flight by the night train, on the evening of the 14th, to his great joy, came a letter, a note, almost, so short, from kind Anne Sheckleton.

All — underlined — were well. There was nothing more, in fact, but one satisfactory revelation, which was the address which would now find them.

So Cleve Verney made the journey to London that night in better spirits.

CHAPTER V.

A COUNCIL OF THREE.

Messrs. Goldshed and Levi have a neat office in Scroop Street. As stockbrokers, strictly, they don't, I am told, do anything like so large a business as many of their brethren. Those brethren, for the most part, are not proud of them. Their business is of a somewhat contraband sort. They have been examined once or twice uncomfortably before Parliamentary Committees. They have been savagely handled by the great Mr. Hackle, the Parliamentary counsel. In the great insurance case of "The executors of Shakerly *v.* The Philanthropic Union Company," they were hideously mangled and eviscerated by Sergeant Bilhooke, whose powers are well known. They have been called "harpies," "ghouls," "Madagascar bats," "vermin," "wolves," and "mousing owls," and are nothing the worse of it. Some people think, on the contrary, rather the better, as it has helped to advertise them in their particular line, which is in a puffing, rigging, fishy, speculative, "queerish" business, at which moral stockbrokers turn up their eyes and noses, to the amusement of Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, who have — although the sober office in Scroop Street looks sometimes a little neglected — no end of valuable clients, of the particular kind whom they covet, and who frequent the other office, in Wormwood Court, which looks so dirty, mean, and neglected, and yet is the real seat of power.

The "office" in Wormwood Court is an oldfashioned, narrow-fronted, dingy house. It stands apart, and keeps its own secrets, having an uninhabited warehouse on one side, and a shabby timber-yard at the other. In front is a flagged courtyard, with dingy grass sprouting here and there, and lines of slimy moss, grimed with soot.

The gate is, I believe, never opened — I don't know that its hinges would work now. If you have private business with the firm on a wet day, you must jump out of your cab in the street, and run up through the side door, through the rain, over the puddled flags, and by the famous log of mahogany which the Messrs. Goldshed and Levi and their predecessors have sold, in bill transactions, nearly six thousand distinct times, without ever losing sight of it.

In the street this day there stood a cab, at that door. Mr. Jos. Larkin, the Gylingden attorney, was in consultation with the firm. They were sitting in "the office," the front room which you enter at your right from the hall. A high, oldfashioned chimneypiece cuts off the far angle of the room, obliquely. It is wainscoted in wood, in tiny square panels, except over the fireplace, where one great panel runs across, and up to the ceiling, with somebody's coat of arms carved in relief upon it. This woodwork has been painted white, long ago, but the tint has degenerated to a cream or buff colour, and a good washing would do it no harm. Mr. Levi and others have pencilled little sums in addition, subtraction, and multiplication on it. You can see the original oak where the hat-rack was removed, near the window, as also in those places where gentlemen have cut their names or initials.

The window is covered with dust and dirt, beaten by the rain into all sorts of patterns. A chastened light enters through this screen, and you can't see from without who is in the room.

People wonder why Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, with so well-appointed an office in Scroop Street, will keep this private office in so beggarly a state; without a carpet, only a strip of nearly-obliterated oil-cloth on its dirty floor. Along the centre of the room extends a great old, battered, oblong mahogany quadrangle, full of drawers, with dingy brass handles, and having midway a sort of archway, like a bridge under a railway embankment, covered with oil-cloth of an undistinguishable pattern, blotched with old stains of red ink and black, and dribblings of sealing-wax, curling up here and there dustily, where office-knives, in fiddling fingers, have scarred its skin. On top of this are two clumsy desks. Behind one sits the junior partner, on a high wooden stool, and behind the other, the senior, on a battered office chair, with one of its haircloth angles protruding, like the corner of a cocked hat, in front, dividing the short, thick legs of Mr. Goldshed, whose heels were planted on the rungs, bending his clumsy knees, and reminding one of the attitude in which an indifferent rider tries to keep his seat on a restive horse.

Goldshed is the senior in every sense. He is bald, he is fat, he is short. He has gems on his stumpy fingers, and golden chains, in loops and curves, cross the old black velvet waistcoat, which is always wrinkled upward by the habit he has of thrusting his broad, short hands into his trousers pockets.

At the other side, leaning back in his chair, and offering, he flatters himself, a distinguished contrast to the vulgar person opposite, sat Mr. Jos. Larkin, of the Lodge, Gylingden. His tall, bald head was thrown a little back; one arm, in its glossy black sleeve, hung over the back of his chair, with his large red knuckles near the floor. His pink eyes wore their meek and dovelike expression; his mouth a little open, in repose; an air of resignation and beatitude, which, together with his well-known elegance, his long, lavender tinted trousers, and ribbed silk waistcoat of the same favourite hue, presented a very perfect picture, in this vulgar Jewish setting, of a perfect Christian gentleman.

"If everything favours, Mr. Goldshed, Mr. Dingwell may be in town tomorrow evening. He sends for me immediately on his arrival, to my quarters, you understand, and I will send him on to you, and you to Mrs. Sarah Rumble's lodgings."

"*Mish* Rumble," drawled Goldshed; "not married — *a girl, Mish*."

"Yes, *Mrs.* Rumble," continued Larkin, gently, "there's no harm in saying Mrs.; many ladies in a position of responsibility, prefer that style to *Miss*, for obvious reasons."

Here Goldshed, who was smiling lazily, winked at his junior, who returned that signal in safety, for Mr. Larkin, whose countenance was raised toward the ceiling, had closed his eyes. The chaste attorney's discretion amused them, for Miss Sarah Rumble was an industrious, careworn girl of two-and-fifty, taciturn, and with a brown pug face, and tresses somewhat silvery.

"We are told by the apostle," continued Mr. Larkin, musingly, "not only to avoid evil, but the appearance of evil. I forgot, however, our religions differ."

"Yes — ay — our religions differ, he says; they differ, Levi, don't they?"

"Yes, they do," drawled that theologian.

"Yes, they do; we see our way to that," concluded Goldshed.

Larkin sighed.

There was a short silence here. Mr. Larkin opened his pink eyelids, and showing his small, light blue eyes, while he maintained his easy and gentlemanlike attitude.

The senior member of the firm looked down on his desk, thoughtfully, and picked at an old drop of sealing wax with his office knife, and whistled a few slow bars, and Mr. Levi, looking down also, scribbled the cipher of the firm thirteen times, with flourishes, on a piece of paper.

Mr. Goldshed worked his short thick knees and his heels a little uneasily; the office chair was growing a little bit frisky, it seemed.

"Nishe shailing, Mr. Larkin, and oh, dear! a great lot of delicashy! What do you think?" said Mr. Goldshed, lifting up the office knife, with the edge toward the attorney, and letting it fall back two or three times, between his finger and thumb, dubiously. "The parties being swells, makesh it more delicate — ticklish — ticklish; do you shinsherely think it's all quite straight?"

"Of course, it's straight. I should hope, Mr. Goldshed, I have never advised any course that was not so," said Mr. Larkin, loftily.

"I don't mean religious — law blesh you — I mean *safe*," said Mr. Goldshed, soothingly.

A light pink flush touched the bald forehead of the attorney.

"Whatever is right, sir, is safe; and that, I think, can hardly be wrong — I *hope* not — by which all parties are benefited," said the attorney.

"All parties be diddled — except our shelves. I'm thinking of my shelf — and Mr. Levi, here — and, of courshe, of *you*. Very much of you," he added, courteously.

Mr. Larkin acknowledged his care by a faint meek bow.

"They're swells," repeated Mr. Goldshed.

"He saysh they're swelsh," repeated Mr. Levi, whose grave look had something of the air of a bully in it, fixing his dark prominent eyes on Mr. Larkin, and turning his cheek that way a little, also. "There's a danger in handling a swell — in them matters specially."

"Suppose theresh a contempt?" said Mr. Goldshed, whose chair grew restive, and required management as he spoke.

"He saysh a *contempt*," repeated Mr. Levi, "or shomething worse," and he heightened the emphasis with an oath.

"I'll guarantee you for twopence, Mr. Levi; and pray consider me, and do *not* swear," urged Mr. Larkin.

"If you guarantee us, with a penalty," began Mr. Levi, who chose to take him literally.

"I said *that*, of *course*, Mr. Levi, by way of illustration, only; no one, of *course*, dreams of guaranteeing another without a proper consideration. I should have hoped you *could* not have misunderstood me. I don't understand guarantees, it is a business I have never touched. I'm content, I hope, with the emoluments of my profession, and what my landed property gives me. I only mean this — that there *is* no risk. What do *we* know of Mr. Dingwell, that is not perfectly above board — perfectly? I challenge the world upon *that*. If anything should happen to fall through, *we*, surely, are not to blame. At the same time if you — looking at it with your experience — apprehend any risk, of course, I couldn't think of allowing you to go on. I can arrange, this evening, and not very far from this house, either."

As Mr. Larkin concluded, he made a feint of rising.

"Ba-ah!" exclaimed Levi. "You don't think we want to back out of thish transhaction, Mr. Larkin? *no*-o-oh! That's not the trick of thish offishe — is it, gov'nor? He saysh *no*."

"No," echoed Goldshed.

"No, never — noways! you hear him?" reiterated Mr. Levi. "In for a penny, in for a pound — in for a shilling, in for a thousand. Ba-ah! — No, never."

"No, noways — never!" reverberated Goldshed, in deep, metallic tones. "But, Levi, there, must look an inch or two before his noshe — and sho must I — and sho, my very good friend, Mr. Larkin, must *you* — a bit before your noshe. I don't see no great danger. We all know, the Honourable Arthur Verney is *dead*. We are *sure* of *that* — and all the rest is not worth the odd ha'pensh in that book," and he touched the mighty ledger lying by him, in which millions were entered. "The *rest* is Dingwell's affair."

"Just so, Mr. Goldshed," acquiesced Mr. Larkin. "We go together in that view."

"Dingwell be blowed! — what need *we* care for Dingwell?" tolled out Mr. Goldshed, with his ringing bass.

"Ba-ah! — drat him!" echoed the junior.

"Yes — a — quite as you say — but where's the good of imprecation? With *that* exception, I quite go with you. It's Dingwell's affair — not *ours*. *We*, of course, go straight — and *I* certainly have no reason to suspect Dingwell of anything crooked or unworthy."

"Oh, no — ba-ah! — *nothing*!" said Levi.

"Nor I," added Goldshed.

"It'sh delicate — it *izh* delicate — but very promishing," said Mr. Goldshed, who was moistening a cigar in his great lips. "Very — and *nothing* crooked about it."

"Nothing crooked — *no*!" repeated Mr. Levi, shaking his glossy curls slowly. "But very delicate."

"Then, gentlemen, it's understood — I'm at liberty to assume — that Mr. Dingwell finds one or other of you here whenever he calls after dark, and you'll arrange at once about the little payments."

To which the firm having promptly assented, Mr. Larkin took his leave, and, being a client of consideration, was accompanied to the shabby doorstep by Mr. Levi, who, standing at the hall-door, with his hands in his pockets, nodded slily to him across the flagged courtyard, into the cab window, in a way which Mr. Jos. Larkin of the Lodge thought by many degrees too familiar.

"Well — *there's* a cove!" said Mr. Levi, laughing lazily, and showing his long rows of ivory fangs, as he pointed over his shoulder, with the point of his thumb, towards the street.

"Rum un!" said Mr. Goldshed, laughing likewise, as he held his lighted cigar between his fingers.

And they laughed together tranquilly for a little, till, with a sudden access of gravity, Mr. Goldshed observed, with a little wag of his head —

"He's da-a-am clever!"

"Ay — yes — da-a-am clever!" echoed Levi.

"Not as much green as you'd put your finger on — I tell you — no muff — devilish good lay, as *you* shall see," continued Goldshed.

"Devilish good — no, no muff — nothing green," repeated Mr. Levi, lighting his cigar. "Good head for speculation — might be a bit too clever, I'm thinking," and he winked gently at his governor.

"Believe you, my son, if we'd let him — but we won't — will we?" drawled Mr. Goldshed, jocosely.

"Not if I knows it," said Mr. Levi, sitting on the table, with his feet on the stool, and smoking towards the wall.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. DINGWELL ARRIVES.

Messrs. Goldshed and *Levi* owned four houses in Rosemary Court, and Miss Sarah Rumble was their tenant. The court is dark, ancient, and grimy. Miss Rumble let lodgings, worked hard, led an anxious life, and subsisted on a remarkably light diet, and at the end of the year never had a shilling over. Her Jewish landlords used to pay her a visit now and then, to receive the rent, and see that everything was right. These visits she dreaded; they were grumbling and minatory, and enlivened by occasional oaths and curses. But though it was part of their system to keep their tenants on the alert by perpetual fault-findings and menaces, they knew very well that they got every shilling the house brought in, that Miss Rumble lived on next to nothing, and never saved a shilling, and was, in fact, *their* underfed, overworked, and indefatigable slave.

With the uncomplaining and modest charity of the poor, Sarah Rumble maintained her little orphan niece and nephew by extra labour at needlework, and wonderful feats of domestic economy.

This waste of resources Mr. Levi grudged. He had never done complaining of it, and demonstrating that it could only be accomplished by her holding the house at too low a rent; how else could it be? Why was she to keep other people's brats at the expense of Messrs. Goldshed and Levi? What was the workhouse for? This perpetual pressure was a sore trouble to the poor woman, who had come to love the children as if they were her own; and after one of Mr. Levi's minatory visits she often lay awake sobbing, in the terror and yearnings of her unspeakable affection, whilst its unconscious objects lay fast asleep by her side.

From Mr. Levi, in his accustomed vein, Miss Rumble had received full instructions for the reception and entertainment of her new lodger, Mr. Dingwell. He could not say when he would arrive, neither the day nor the hour; and several days had already elapsed, and no arrival had taken place. This evening she had gone down to "the shop," so designated, as if there had been but one in London, to lay out a shilling and seven pence very carefully, leaving her little niece and nephew in charge of the candle and the house, and spelling out their catechism for next day.

A tapping came to the door; not timid, nor yet menacing; a sort of double knock, delivered with a walking-cane; on the whole a sharp but gentlemanlike summons, to which the little company assembled there were unused. The children lifted their eyes from the book before them, and stared at the door without answering. It opened with a latch, which, without more ado, was raised, and a tall, white-haired gentleman, with a stoop, and a very brown skin, looked in inquisitively, and said, with a smile that was not pleasant, and a voice not loud but somewhat harsh and cold —

"Mrs. or *Miss* Rumble hereabouts, my dears?"

"Miss Rumble; that's aunt, please, sir;" answered the little girl, slipping down from her chair, and making a courtesy.

"Well, *she's* the lady I want to speak with, my love. Where *is* she?" said the gentleman, glancing round the homely chamber from under his white eyebrows with a pair of cold, gray, restless eyes.

"She's — she's" —— hesitated the child.

"Not in bed, I see; nor in the cupboard" (the cupboard door was open). "Is she up the chimney, my charming child?"

"No, sir, please; she's gone to Mrs. Chalk's for the bacon."

"Mrs. Chalk's for the bacon?" echoed the gentleman. "Very good! Excellent woman! excellent bacon, I dare say. But how far away is it? — how soon shall we have your aunt back again?"

"Just round the corner, please, sir; aunt's never no time," answered the child. "Would you please call in again?"

"Charming young lady! So accomplished! Who taught you your grammar? So polite — so *suspicious*. Do you know the meaning of that word, my dear?"

"No, sir, please."

"And I'm vastly obliged for your invitation to call again; but I find your company much too agreeable to think of going away; so, if you allow me — and do shut that door, my sweet child; many thanks — I'll do myself the honour to sit down, if I may venture, and continue to enjoy your agreeable conversation, till your aunt returns to favour us with her charming presence — and bacon."

The old gentleman was glancing from under his brows, from corner to corner of this homely chamber; an uneasy habit, not curiosity; and, during his ceremonious speech, he kept bowing and smiling, and set down a black leather bag that he had in his hand, on the deal table, together with his walking-cane, and pulled off his gloves, and warmed his hands at the tiny bit of fire. When his back was toward them the children exchanged a glance, and the little boy looked frightened, and on the point of bursting into tears.

"*Hish!*" whispered the girl, alarmed, for she could not tell what effect the demonstration might have upon the stranger— "*quiet!*" — and she shook her finger in urgent warning at Jemmie. "A *very* nice gent, as has money for aunty — *there*!"

So the tears that stood in Jemmie's big eyes were not followed by an outcry, and the gentleman, with his hat and outside wrapper on, stood, now, with his back to the little fire, looking, in his restless way, over the children's heads, with his white, cold eyes, and the same smile. There was a dreamy idea haunting Lucy Maria's head that this gentleman was very like a white animal she had seen at the Surrey Zoological Gardens when her uncle had treated her to that instructive show; the same sort of cruel grin, and the same restless oscillation before the bars of its cage.

"Hey! so she'll be back again?" said he, recollecting the presence of the two children; "the excellent lady, your aunt, I mean. Superb apartment this is, but it strikes me, hardly sufficiently *lighted*, hey? *One* halfpenny candle, however brilliant, can hardly do justice to such a room; pretty taper — very pretty — isn't it? Such nice mutton fat, my dear young lady, and such a fine long snuff — like a chimney, with a Quaker's hat on the top of it — you don't see such fine things everywhere! And who's this young gentleman, who enjoys the distinction of being admitted to your salon; a page, or what?"

"It's Jemmie, sir; stand up, and bow to the gentleman, Jemmie."

Jemmie slipped down on the floor, and made a very alarmed bow, with his great eyes staring deprecatingly in the visitor's face.

"I'm charmed to make your acquaintance. What grace and ease! It's perfectly charming! I'm too much honoured, Mr. Jemmie. And so exquisitely got up, too! There's only one little toilet refinement I would venture to recommend. The worthy lady, Mrs. Chalks, who contributes bacon to this house, and, I presume, candles — could, I dare say, also supply another luxury, with which you are not so well acquainted, called *soap* — one of the few perfectly safe cosmetics. Pray try it; you'll find it soluble in water. And, ho? reading too! What have you been reading out of that exquisite little volume?"

"Catechism, please sir," answered the little girl.

"Ho, Catechism? Delightful! What a wonderful people we English are!" The latter reflection was made for his own entertainment, and he laughed over it in an undertone. "Then your aunt teaches you the art of godliness? You've read about Babel, didn't you? — the accomplishment of getting up to heaven is so nice!"

"Sunday school, sir, please," said the girl.

"Oh, it's *there* you learn it? Well, I shall ask you only one question in your Catechism, and that's the first — what's your name?"

"Lucy Maria."

"Well, Lucy Maria and Mr. Jemmie, I trust your theological studies may render you at last as pious as I am. You know how death and sin came into the world, and you know what they are. Sin is doing anything on earth that's pleasant, and death's the penalty of it. Did you ever see any one dead, my sweet child — not able to raise a finger or an eyelid? rather a fix, isn't it? — and screwed up in a stenching box to be eaten by worms — all alone, under ground? *You*'ll be so, egad, and your friend, Jemmie, there, perhaps before me — though I'm an old boy. Younkers go off sometimes by the score. I've seen 'em trundled out in fever and plague, egad, lying in rows, like plucked chickens in a poulterer's shop. And they say you have scarlatina all about you *here*, now; bad complaint, you know, that kills the little children. You need not frighten yourselves though, because it *must* happen, sooner or later — die you *must*. It's the penalty, you know, because Eve once eat an apple."

"Yes, sir."

"Rather hard lines on us, isn't it? She eat an apple, and sin, and death, and colic — I never eat an apple in consequence — *colic* came into the world, and cider, as a consequence — the worst drink ever invented by the devil. And now go on and learn your Church Catechism thoroughly, and you'll both turn into angels. Upon my life, I think I see the feathers beginning to sprout from your shoulders already. You'll have wings, you know, if all goes right, and tails for anything I know."

The little boy looked in his face perplexed and frightened — the little girl, answering his haggard grin with an attempted smile, showed also bewilderment and dismay in her eyes. They were both longing for the return of their aunt.

Childish nature, which is only human nature without its scarf skin, is always afraid of irony. It is not its power, but its treachery that is dreadful — the guise of friendship hiding a baleful purpose underneath. One might fancy the seasoned denizens of Gehenna welcoming, complimenting, and instructing new comers with these profound derisions. How children delight in humour! how they wince and quail under irony! Be it ever so rudely fashioned and clumsily handled, still it is to them a terrible weapon. If children are to be either ridiculed or rebuked, let it be honestly, in direct terms. We should not scare them with this jocularity of devils.

Having thus amused himself with the children for a time, he unlocked his leather bag, took out two or three papers, ordered the little girl to snuff the candle, and pulled it across the table to the corner next himself, and, sitting close by, tried to read, holding the letter almost in the flame, screwing his white eyebrows together, and shifting his position, and that of the candle also, with very little regard to the studious convenience of the children.

He gave it up. The red and smoky light tried his eyes too severely. So, not well pleased, he locked his letters up again.

"Cat's eyes — owls! How the devil they read by it passes my comprehension. Any more candles here — hey?" he demanded with a sudden sharpness that made the children start.

"Three, please sir."

"Get 'em."

"On the nail in the closet, please sir."

"Get 'em, d — n it!"

"Closet's locked, please sir. Aunt has the key."

"Ha!" he snarled, and looked at the children as if he would like to pick a quarrel with them.

"Does your aunt allow you to let the fire out on nights like this — hey? You're a charming young lady, *you* — and this young gentleman, in manners and appearance, everything the proudest aunt could desire; but I'm curious to know whether either one or the other is of the slightest earthly use; and secondly, whether she keeps a birch-rod in that closet — hey? — and now and then *flogs* you — ha, ha, ha! The expense of the rod is trifling, the pain not worth mentioning, and soon over, but the moral effects are admirable, better and more durable — take my word for it — than all the catechisms in Paternoster Row."

The old gentleman seemed much tickled by his own pleasantries, and laughed viciously as he eyed the children.

"You did not tell me a fib, I hope, my dear, about your aunt? She's a long time about coming; and, I say, do put a little coal on the fire, will you?"

"Coal's locked up, please sir," said the child, who was growing more afraid of him every minute.

"'Gad, it seems to me that worthy woman's afraid you'll carry off the bricks and plaster. Where's the poker? Chained to the wall, I suppose. Well, there's a complaint called kleptomania — it comes with a sort of irritation at the tips of the fingers, and I should not be surprised if you and your friend Jemmie, there, had got it."

Jemmie looked at his fingers' ends, and up in the gentleman's face, in anxious amazement.

"But there's a cure for it — essence of cane — and if that won't do, a capital charm — nine tails of a gray cat, applied under competent direction. Your aunt seems to understand that disorder — it begins with an itching in the fingers, and ends with a pain in the back — ha, ha, ha! You're a pair of theologians, and, if you've read John Bunyan, no doubt understand and enjoy an allegory."

"Yes, sir, please, we will," answered poor Lucy Maria, in her perplexity.

"And we'll be very good friends, Miss Maria Louise, or whatever your name is, I've no doubt, provided you play me no tricks and do precisely whatever I bid you; and, upon my soul, if you don't, Til take the devil out of my pocket and frighten you out of your wits, I will — ha, ha, ha! — so sure as you live, into *fits*!"

And the old gentleman, with an ugly smile on his thin lips, and a frown between his white eyebrows, fixed his glittering gaze on the child and wagged his head.

You may be sure she was relieved when, at that moment, she heard her aunt's well-known step on the lobby, and the latch clicked, the door opened, and Miss Rumble entered.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. DINGWELL MAKES HIMSELF COMFORTABLE.

“Ah! — *ho!* you are Miss Rumble — hey?” said the old gentleman, fixing a scrutinising glance from under his white eyebrows upon Sally Rumble, who stood in the doorway, in wonder, not unmixed with alarm; for people who stand every hour in presence of Giant Want, with his sword at their throats, have lost their faith in fortune, and long ceased to expect a benevolent fairy in any stranger who may present himself dubiously, and anticipate rather an enemy. So, looking hard at the gentleman who stood before the little fire, with his hat on, and the light of the solitary dipt candle shining on his by no means pleasant countenance, she made him a little frightened courtesy, and acknowledged that she was Sally Rumble, though she could not tell what was to follow.

“I’ve been waiting; I came here to see you — pray, shut the door — from two gentlemen, Jews whom you know — *friends* — don’t be uneasy — friends of *mine*, friends of *yours* — Mr. Goldshed and Mr. Levi, the kindest, sweetest, sharpest fellows alive, and here’s a note from them — you can *read*?”

“Read! Law bless you — yes, sir,” answered Sally.

“Thanks for the blessing: read the note; it’s only to tell you I’m the person they mentioned this morning, Mr. Dingwell. Are the rooms ready? You can make me comfortable — eh?”

“In a humble way, sir,” she answered, with a courtesy.

“Yes, of course; I’m a humble fellow, and — I hear you’re a sensible young lady. These little pitchers here, of course, have ears: I’ll say all that’s necessary as we go up: there’s a fellow with a cab at the door, isn’t there? Well, there’s some little luggage of mine on it — we must get it up stairs; give the Hamal something to lend a hand; but first let me see my rooms.”

“Yes, sir,” said Sally, with another courtesy, not knowing what a Hamal meant. And Mr. Dingwell, taking up his bag and stick, followed her in silence, as with the dusky candle she led the way up the stairs.

She lighted a pair of candles in the drawingroom. There was some fire in the grate. The rooms looked better than he had expected; there were curtains, and an old Turkish carpet, and some shabby, and some handsome, pieces of furniture.

"It will do, it will do — ha, ha, ha! How like a pawnbroker's store it looks — no two things match in it; but it is not bad: those Jew fellows, of course, did it? All this stuff isn't yours?" said Mr. Dingwell.

"Law bless you, no, sir," answered Sally, with a dismal smile and a shake of her head.

"Thanks again for your blessing. And the bedroom?" inquired he.

She pushed open the door.

"Capital looking-glass," said he, standing before his dressing-table— "cap-i-tal! if it weren't for that great seam across the middle — ha, ha, ha! funny effect, by Jove! Is it colder than usual, here?"

"No, sir, please; a nice evening."

"Devilish nice, by Allah! I'm cold through and through my great coat. Will you please poke up that fire a little? Hey! what a grand bed we've got! what tassels and ropes! and, by Jove, carved angels or *Cupids* — I hope Cupids — on the foot-board!" he said, running the tip of his cane along the profile of one of them. "They must have got this a wonderful bargain. Hey! I hope no one died in it last week?"

"Oh, la! sir; Mr. Levi is a very pitickler gentleman; he wouldn't for all he's worth."

"Oh! not he, I know; very particular."

Mr. Dingwell was holding the piece of damask curtain between his finger and thumb, and she fancied was sniffing at it gently.

"Very particular, but I'm more so. We, English, are the dirtiest dogs in the world. They ought to get the Turks to teach 'em to wash and be clean. I travelled in the East once, for a commercial house, and know something of them. Can you make coffee?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"Very strong?"

"Yes, sir, sure."

"*Very*, mind. As strong as the devil it must be, and as clear as — as your conscience." He was getting out a tin case, as he spoke. "Here it is. I got it in — I forget the name — a great place, near one of your bridges. I suppose it's as good as any to be had in this place. Of course it isn't *all* coffee. We must go to the *heathen* for that; but if they haven't ground up toasted skeletons, or anything dirty in it, I'm content. I'm told you can't eat or drink a mouthful here without swallowing something you never bargained for. Everything is drugged. Look at our Caiquejees! You have no such men in your padded Horseguards. And what do they live on? Why, a crust of brown bread and a melon, and now and then a dish of pilauf! But it's good — it's pure — it's what it calls itself. You d —— d Christian cheats, you're an opprobrium to commerce and civilisation; you're the greatest oafs on earth, with all your police and spies. Why it's only to *will* it, and you *don't*; you let it go on. We are assuredly a beastly people!"

"Sugar, please, sir?"

"No, thank you."

"Take milk, sir?"

"Heaven forbid! Milk, indeed! I tell you what, Mrs. — What's your name? — I tell you, if the Sultan had some of your great fellows — your grocers, and bakers, and dairymen, and brewers, egad! — out there, he'd have 'em on their ugly faces and bastinado their great feet into custard pudding! I've seen fellows — and devilish glad I *was* to see it, I can tell you — screaming like stuck pigs, and their eyes starting out of their heads, and their feet like bags of black currant jelly, ha, ha, ha! — for a good deal less. Now, you see, ma'am, I have high notions of honesty; and this tin case I'm going to give you will give me three small cups of coffee, as strong as I've described, six times over; do you understand? — six times three, eighteen; *eighteen* small cups of coffee; and don't let those pretty little foxes' cubs down stairs meddle with it. Tell 'em I know what I'm about, and they'd better not, ha, ha, ha! nor with anything that belongs to me, to the value of a single piastre."

Miss Sarah Rumble was a good deal dismayed by the jubilant severity of Mr. Dingwell's morals. She would have been glad had he been of a less sharp and cruel turn of pleasantry. Her heart was heavy, and she wished herself a happy deliverance, and had a vague alarm about the poor little children's falling under suspicion, and of all that might follow. But what could she do? Poverty is so powerless, and has so little time to weigh matters maturely, or to prepare for any change; its hands are always so full, and its stomach so empty, and its spirits so dull.

"I wish those d —— d curtains were off the bed," and again they underwent the same disgusting process; "and the bedclothes, egad! They purify nothing here. You know *nothing* about *them* either, of course? No — but they would not like to kill me. *No*; — that would not do. Knock their little game on the head, eh? I suppose it *is* all right. What's prevalent here now? What sort of — I mean what sort of *death* — fever, smallpox, or scarlatina — eh? Much sickness going?"

"Nothink a'most, sir; a little measles among the children."

"No objection to that; it heads them down a bit, and does not trouble us. But what among the *grown* people?"

"Nothink to signify in the court here, for three months a'most."

"And *then*, ma'am, what *was* it, pray? Give those to your boy" (they were his boots); "let him rub 'em up, ma'am, he's not a bit too young to begin; and, egad! he had better do 'em *well*, too;" and thrusting his feet into a great pair of slippers, he reverted to his question— "What sickness was *then*, ma'am, three months ago, here in this pleasant little prison-yard of a place — hey?"

"Fever, please, sir, at No. 4. Three took it, please: two of 'em went to hospital."

"And never walked out?"

"Don't know, indeed, sir — and one died, please, sir, in the court here, and he left three little children."

"I hope they're gone away?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"Well, that's a release. Rest his soul, he's dead! as our immortal bard, that says everything so much better than anyone else, says; and rest our souls, *they're* gone with their vile noise. So your bill of mortality is not much to signify; and make that coffee — d'ye see? — this moment, and let me have it as hot as — as the final abode of Dissenters and Catholics — I see you believe in the Church Catechism — immediately, if you please, to the next room."

So, with a courtesy, Sally Rumble tripped from the room, with the coffee-case in her hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LODGER AND HIS LANDLADY.

Sally was beginning to conceive a great fear of her guest, and terror being the chief spring of activity, in a marvellously short time the coffee was made, and she, with Lucy Maria holding the candle behind her, knocking at what they called the drawingroom door. When, in obedience to his command, she entered, he was standing by the chimneypiece, gazing at her through an atmosphere almost hazy with tobacco smoke. He had got on his dressing-gown, which was pea-green, and a scarlet fez, and stood with his inquisitive smile and scowl, and his long pipe a little removed from his lips.

"Oh, it's *you*? yes; no one — do you mind — except Mr. Larkin, or Mr. Levi, or Mr. Goldshed, ever comes in to me — always charmed to see *you*, and *them* — but there ends my public; so, my dear lady, if any person should ask to see Mr. Dingwell, from New York in America, you'll simply say there's no such person here — yes — there's — *no* — *such* — *person* — *here* — upon my honour. And you're no true woman if you don't say so with pleasure — because it's a fib."

Sarah Rumble courtesied affirmatively.

"I forgot to give you this note — my letter of introduction. Here, ma'am, take it, and read it, if you can. It comes from those eminent harpies, the Messrs. Goldshed and Levi — your landlords, aren't they?"

Another courtesy from grave, dark-browed Miss Rumble acknowledged the fact.

"It is pleasant to be accredited by such gentlemen — good landlords, I dare say?"

"I've nothing to say against Mr. Levi; and I'm 'appy to say, sir, my rent's bin always paid up punctual," she said.

"Yes, just so — capital landlord! charming tenant; and I suspect if you didn't, they'd find a way to make you — eh? Your coffee's not so bad — you may make it next time just a degree stronger, bitter as wormwood and verjuice, please — black and bitter, ma'am, as English prejudice. It isn't badly made, however — no, it *is* really *good*. It isn't a common Christian virtue, making good coffee — the Mahometans have a knack of it, and you must be a bit of a genius, ma'am, for I think you'll make it very respectably by tomorrow evening, or at latest, by next year. You shall do everything well for me, madam. The Dingwells are always d — d flighty, wicked, unreasonable people, ma'am, and you'll find me a regular Dingwell, and *worse*, madam. Look at me — don't I look like a vampire. I tell you, ma'am, I've been buried, and they would not let me rest in my grave, and they've called me up by their infernal incantations, and here I am, ma'am, an evoked spirit. I have not read that bit of paper. How do they introduce me — as Mr. Dingwell, or Mr. Dingwell's ghost? I'm wound up in a sort of way; but I'm deficient in blood, ma'am, and in heat. You'll have to keep the fire up always like *this*, Mrs. Rumble. You'd better mind, or you'll have me a bit too like a corpse to be pleasant. Egad! I frighten myself in the glass, ma'am. There is what they call transfusion of blood *now*, ma'am, and a very sensible thing it is. Pray, don't you think so?"

"I do suppose what you say's correct, sir."

"When a fellow comes out of the grave, ma'am — that's sherry in that bottle; be kind enough to fill this glass — he's chilly, and he wants blood, Mrs. Rumble. A gallon, or so, transfused into my veins wouldn't hurt me. You can't *make* blood fast enough for the wear and tear of life, especially in a place like merry England, as the poets call it — and merry England is as damp all over as one of your charnel vaults under your dirty churches. Egad! it's enough to make a poor ghost like me turn vampire, and drain those rosy little brats of yours — ha, ha, ha! — *your* children, are they, Mrs. Rumble — eh?"

"No, sir, please — my brother's children."

"Your *brother's* — ho! He doesn't live *here*, I hope?"

"He's dead, sir."

"Dead — is he?"

"Five years last May, sir."

"Oh! that's good. And their mother? — some more sherry, please."

"Dead about four years, poor thing! They're orphans, sir, please."

"'Gad! I *do* please; it's a capital arrangement, ma'am, as they *are* here, and you mustn't let 'em go among the children that swarm about places like this. Egad! ma'am, I've no fancy for scarlatina or smallpox, or any sort or description of your nursery maladies."

"They're very 'ealthy, sir, I thank you," said grave Sarah Rumble, a little mistaking Mr. Dingwell's drift.

"Very glad to hear it, ma'am."

"Very kind o' you, sir," she said, with a courtesy.

"Kind, of course, yes, very kind," he echoed.

"Very 'ealthy, indeed, sir, I'm thankful to say."

"Well, yes, they do look well — for town brats, you know — plump and rosy — hang 'em, little skins of sweet red wine; egad! enough to make a fellow turn vampire, as I said. Give me a little more sherry — thank you, ma'am. Any place near here where they sell ice?"

"Yes, sir, there's Mr. Candy's hice-store, in Love Lane, sir."

"You must arrange to get me a pound, or so, every day at twelve o'clock, broken up in lumps, like sugar, and keep it in a cold cellar; do you mind, ma'am?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"How old are *you*, ma'am? Well, *no*, you need not mind — hardly a fair question; a steady woman — a lady who has seen the world — *some*thing of it, hey?" said he; "so have *I* — I'm a steady old fellow, egad! — you must give me a latchkey, ma'am."

"Yes, sir."

"Some ten or twelve years will see us out; curious thing life, ma'am, eh? ha, ha, ha! — Sparkling cup, ma'am, while it lasts — *some*times; pity the flask has so few glasses, and is flat so soon; isn't it so, ma'am?"

"I never drank wine, sir, but once."

"No! where was that?"

"At Mr. Snelly's wedding, twenty years since."

"'Gad! you'd make a good Turk, ma'am — don't mistake me — it's only they drink no wine. You've found life an up-hill business, then, hey?"

Mrs. Rumble sighed profoundly, shook her head, and said, —

"I've 'ad my trials, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha! to be sure, why not? then you're a bit *tired*, I dare say; what do you think of death?"

"I wish I was ready, sir."

"An ugly fellow, hey? I don't like the smell of him, ma'am."

"We has our hopes, sir."

"Oh! sure and certain hope — yes, the resurrection, hey?"

"Yes, sir, there's only one thing troubles me — them poor little children. I wouldn't care how soon I went if they was able to do for themselves."

"They do that very early in London — girls especially; and you're giving them such an excellent training — Sunday school — eh — and Church Catechism, I see. The righteous are never forsaken, my excellent mother used to tell me; and if the Catechism does not make little Miss what's-her-name righteous, I'm afraid the rosy little rogue has a spice of the devil in her."

"God forbid, sir."

"Amen, of course. I'm sure they're all right — I hope they are — for I'll whip 'em both; I give you fair warning, on my honour, I will, if they give me the least trouble."

"I'll be very careful, sir, and keep them out of the way," said the alarmed Sarah Rumble.

"Oh! I don't care about *that*; *let* 'em run about, as long as they're good; I've no objection in life to children — quite the contrary — plump little rogues — I like 'em — only, egad! if they're naughty, I'll turn 'em up, mind."

Miss Rumble looked at him with as much alarm as if the threat had been to herself.

He was grinning at her in return, and nodded once or twice sharply.

"Yes, ma'am, lollypops and sugar-candy when they're good; but, egad! when they're naughty, ma'am, you'll hear 'em squalling."

Miss Rumble made an alarmed courtesy.

"'Gad, I forgot how cold this d —— d town is. I say, you'll keep a fire in my bedroom, please; lay on enough to carry me through the night, do you mind?"

"Yes, sir."

"And poke this fire up, and put some more wood, or coal, on it; I don't expect to be ever warm again — in *this* world, eh? — ha, ha, ha! I remember our gardener, when we were boys, telling me a story of a preacher in a hard frost, telling his congregation that hell was a terribly cold place, lest if he described what good fires they kept there they'd all have been wishing to get into it. Did you ever know any one, ma'am, of my name, *Dingwell*, before, eh? Where were you born?"

"London, sir, please."

"Ho! Canterbury was *our* place; we were great people, the Dingwells, there once. My father failed, though — fortune of war — and I've seen all the world since; 'gad, I've met with queer people, ma'am, and one of those chances brings me here now. If I had not met the oddest fish I ever set my eyes on, in the most out-o'-the-way-place on earth, I should not have had the happiness of occupying this charming apartment at this moment, or of making your acquaintance, or that of your plump little Cupid and Psyche, down stairs. London, I suppose, is pretty much what it always was, where any fellow with plenty of money may have plenty of fun. Lots of sin in London, ma'am, eh? Not quite so good as Vienna. But the needs and pleasures of all men, according to their degree, are wonderfully provided for; wherever money is there is a market — for the cabman's copper and the guinea of the gentleman he drives — everything for money, ma'am — bouquets, and smiles, and coffins, wooden or leaden, according to your relative fastidiousness. But things change very fast, ma'am. Look at this map; I should not know the town — a wilderness, egad! and no one to tell you where fun is to be found."

She gazed, rather frightened, at this leering, giggling old man, who stood with his shoulders against the chimneypiece, and his hands tumbling over his shillings in his pockets, and his sinister and weary face ever so little flushed with his sherry and his talk.

"Well, if you can give a poor devil a wrinkle of any sort — hey? — it will be a charity; but, egad! I'm as sleepy as the Homilies," and he yawned direfully. "Do, like an angel, go and see to my room, I can scarcely keep my eyes open."

From the next room she heard him *hi-yeawing* in long-drawn yawns, and talking in snatches to himself over the fire, and when she came back he took the candle and said, —

"Beaten, ma'am, fairly beaten tonight. Not quite what I was, though I'm good for something still; but an old fellow can't get on without his sleep."

Mr. Dingwell's extraordinary communicativeness would have quite charmed her, had it not been in a faint way racy of corruption, and followed with a mocking echo of insult, which she caught, but could not accurately interpret. The old rascal was irrepressibly garrulous; but he was too sleepy to talk much more, and looked ruefully worn out.

He took the bedroom candle with a great yawn, and staggering, I am bound to say only with sleep, he leaned for a moment against the doorway of his room, and said, in his grimmer vein, —

“You’ll bring me a cup of coffee, mind, at eight o’clock — *black*, no milk, no sugar — and a bit of dry toast, as thin as a knife and as hard as a tile; *do* you understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And why the devil don’t you say so? And, lest I should forget, Mr. Levi will be here tomorrow, at eleven, with another gentleman. Show them both up; and, I say, there are several things I’m particular about, and I’ll put them on paper — egad! that’s the best way — tomorrow, and I’ll post it up in my room, like a firmaun, and you had better attend to them, that’s all;” and holding up his candle, as he stood in the doorway, he gazed round the bedroom, and seemed satisfied, and shut the door sharply in her face, without turning about, or perhaps intending that rudeness, as she was executing her valedictory courtesy.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH MR. DINGWELL PUTS HIS HAND TO THE POKER.

At eleven o’clock next morning, Mr. Dingwell was refreshed, and ready to receive his expected visitors. He had just finished a pipe as he heard their approaching steps upon the stairs, and Miss Sarah Rumble pushed open the door and permitted Mr. Levi and his friend to enter and announce themselves. Mr. Dingwell received them with a slight bow and a rather sarcastic smile.

Mr. Levi entered first, with his lazy smile showing his glittering fangs, and his fierce, cunning, prominent eyes swept the room, and rested on Mr. Dingwell. Putting down his hat on the middle of the narrow table, he stooped across, extending his lank arm and long hand toward the white-headed old man with the broad forehead and lean brown face, who happened to turn to the chimneypiece just then, to look for a paper, and so did not shake hands.

“And Mr. Larkin?” said Mr. Dingwell, with the same smile, as he turned about and saw that slim, bald, pink-eyed impersonation of Christianity overtopping the dark and glossy representative of the Mosaic dispensation.

“Sit down, pray — though — eh? — has my friend, Miss Rumble, left us chairs enough?” said Mr. Dingwell, looking from corner to corner.

“Quite ample; thanks, many thanks,” answered Mr. Larkin, who chose, benignantly, to take this attention to himself. “Three chairs, yes, and three of us; pray, Mr. Dingwell, don’t take any trouble.”

“Oh! thank you; but I was not thinking of taking any trouble, only I should not like to be left without a chair. Miss Sarah Rumble, I dare say she’s very virtuous, but she’s not brilliant,” he continued as he approached. “*There*, for instance, her pot-house habits! She leaves my old hat on the centre of the table!” and with a sudden sweep of the ebony stem of his long pipe, he knocked Mr. Levi’s hat upon the floor, and kicked it into the far corner of the room.

“Da-a-am it; that’sh my hat!” said Mr. Levi, looking after it.

"So much the better for *me*," said Mr. Dingwell, with an agreeable smile and a nod.

"An error — quite a mistake," interposed Mr. Larkin, with officious politeness. "Shall *I* pick it up, Mr. Levi?"

"Leave it lay," said Mr. Levi, sulkily; "no use now. It's got its allowance, I expect."

"Gentlemen, you'll not detain me longer than is necessary, if you please, because I hate business, on *principle*, as a Jew does ham — I beg pardon Mr. Levi, I forgot for a moment — the greatest respect for your religion, but I do hate business as I hate an attorney— 'Gad! there is my foot in it again: Mr. Larkin, no reflection, I assure you, on your excellent profession, which everyone respects. But life's made up of hours: they're precious, and I don't want to spoil 'em."

"A great trust, sir, a great trust, Mr. Dingwell, is *time*. Ah, sir, how little we make of it, with eternity yawning at our feet, and retribution before us!"

"*Our* and *us*; you don't narrow it to the legal profession, Mr. Larkin?"

"I speak of time, generally, Mr. Dingwell, and of eternity and retribution as applicable to all professions," said Mr. Larkin, sadly.

"I don't follow you, sir. Here's a paper, gentlemen, on which I have noted exactly what I can prove."

"Can I have it, Mr. Dingwell?" said the attorney, whose dovelike eyes for a moment contracted with a hungry, rat-like look.

"No, I think, *no*," said Mr. Dingwell, withdrawing it from the long, red fingers extended to catch the paper; Mr. Levi's fingers, at a more modest distance, were also extended, and also disappointed; "anything I write myself I have a kind of feeling about it; I'd rather keep it to myself, or put it in the fire, than trouble the most artless Jew or religious attorney I know with the custody of it: so, if you just allow me, I'll read it. It's only half a dozen lines, and I don't care if you make a note of it, Mr. Larkin."

"Well," he resumed, after he had glanced through the paper, Mr. Larkin sitting expectant *arrectis auribus*, and with a pen in his fingers, "you may say that I, Mr. Dingwell, knew the late Honourable Arthur Verney, otherwise Hakim Frank, otherwise Hakim Giaour, otherwise Mamhoud Ali Ben-Nezir, for five years and two months, and upwards — three days, I think — immediately preceding his death; for the latter four years very intimately. That I frequently procured him small loans of money, and saw him, one way or another, nearly every day of my life: that I was with him nearly twice a day during his last illness: that I was present when he expired, and was one of the three persons who saw him buried: and that I could point out his grave, if it were thought desirable to send out persons acquainted with his appearance, to disinter and identify the body."

"No need of that, I think," said Mr. Larkin, looking up and twiddling his eyeglass on his finger.

He glanced at Levi, who was listening intensely, and almost awfully, and, reading no sign in his face, he added, —

"*However*, I see no harm in making the note."

So on went Mr. Dingwell, holding a pair of gold glasses over his nose.

"I can perfectly identify him as the Hon. Arthur Verney, having transacted business for him respecting an annuity which was paid him by his family; written letters for him when his hand was affected; and read his letters for him when he was ill, which latter letters, together with a voluminous correspondence found in his box, and now in my possession, I can identify also as having been in *his*."

"I don't see any need, my dear Mr. Dingwell, of your mentioning your having written any letters for him; it has, in fact, no bearing that I can recognise upon the case. I should, in fact, apprehend complicating the case. You might find it difficult to specify, and we to produce, the particular letters referred to; so I should simply say you *read* them to him, at his desire, before he despatched them for England; that is, of course, assuming that you did so."

"Very good, sir; knock it out, and put that in; and I can prove that these letters, which can easily, I suppose, be identified by the writers of them in England, were in his possession, and that several of them I can recollect his having read to me on the day he received them. That's pretty nearly what strikes me — eh?"

"Yes, sir — certainly, Mr. Dingwell — most important; but surely he had a servant; had he not, my dear sir? — an attendant of some sort? they're to be had there for next to nothing, I think," hesitated Mr. Larkin.

"Certainly — so there was — yes; but he started for Egypt in a boat full of tiles, or onions, or something, a day or two after the Hakim was buried, and I'm afraid they'll find it rather hard to find him. I think he said Egypt, but I won't swear."

And Mr. Dingwell laughed, very much tickled, with intense sarcastic enjoyment; so much so that Mr. Larkin, though I have seldom before or since heard of his laughing, *did* suddenly laugh a short, explosive laugh, as he looked down on the table, and immediately looked very grave and sad, and pinked up to the very summit of his narrow bald head; and coughing a little, he said, —

"Thank you, Mr. Dingwell; this will suffice very nicely for an outline, and I can consult with our adviser as to its particular sufficiency — is not that your impression, Mr. Levi?"

"You lawyer chaps undusta-ans that line of business best; I know no more about it than watchmaking — only don't shleep over it, for it's costing us a da-a-am lot of money," said Mr. Levi, rising with a long yawn and a stretch, and emphasising it with a dismal oath; and shutting his great glaring eyes and shaking his head, as if he were being victimised at a pace which no capital could long stand.

"Certainly, Mr. Levi," said the attorney, "you quite take me with you there. We are all contributing, except, perhaps, our valued friend, Mr. Dingwell, our quota towards a very exhausting expense."

"Da-a-md exhausting," interposed Mr. Levi.

"Well, pray allow me my own superlative," said the attorney, with religious grandeur. "I do say it is very exhausting; though we are all, I hope, *cheerfully* contributing — — "

"Curse you! to be sure you are," said Mr. Dingwell, with an abrupt profanity that startled Mr. Larkin. "Because you all expect to make money by it; and I'm contributing my time, and trouble, and danger, egad! for precisely the same reason. And now, before you go — just a moment, if you please, as we are on the subject — who's Chancellor of the Exchequer here?"

"Who advances the necessary funds?" interpreted Mr. Larkin, with his politest smile.

"Yes," said the old man, with a sharp menacing nod. "Which of you two comes down, as you say, with the dust? Who pays the piper for this dance of yours, gentlemen? — the Christian or the Jew? I've a word for the gentleman who holds the purse — or, as we Christians would say, who carries the bag;" and he glanced from one to the other with a sniff, and another rather vicious wag of his head.

"I believe, sir, you may address us both as *voluntary* contributors towards a fund for carrying on, for the *present*, this business of the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, who will, of course, recoup us," said Mr. Larkin, cautiously.

He used to say sometimes to his conducting man, with a smile, sly and holy, up at the yellow letters of one of the tin deed-boxes on his shelves at the Lodge, after an adroit conversation, "I think it will puzzle him, rather, to make an *assumpsit* out of *that*."

"Well, you talk of *allowing* me — as you term it — four pounds a week. I'll not take it," said Mr. Dingwell.

"My hye! That'sh liberal, shir, uncommon 'anshome, be Ga-a-ad!" exclaimed Mr. Levi, in a blessed mistake as to the nature of Mr. Dingwell's objection.

"I know, gentlemen, this business can't advance without me — to me it may be worth something; but you'll make it worth a great deal more to yourselves, and whatever else you may find me, you'll find me no fool; and I'll not take one piastre less than five-and-twenty pounds a week."

"Five-and-twenty pounsh!" howled Mr. Levi; and Mr. Larkin's small pink eyes opened wide at the prodigious idea.

"You gentlemen fancy you're to keep me here in this black-hole making *your* fortunes, and living on the wages of a clerk, egad! You shall do no such thing, I promise you; you shall pay me what I say. I'll see the town, sir, and I'll have a few guineas in my pocket, or I'll know the reason why. I didn't come ALL the way here for nothing — d — n you both!"

"Pray, sir, a moment," pleaded Mr. Larkin.

"*Pray*, sir, as much as you like; but *pay*, also, if you please. Upon my life, you *shall*! Fortune owes me something, and egad! I'll enjoy myself while I can."

"Of course, sir; quite reasonable — so you should; but, my dear Mr. Dingwell, five-and-twenty pounds! — we can hardly be expected, my dear sir, to see our way."

"'Gad, sir! *I* see *mine*, and I'll go it," laughed Mr. Dingwell, with a most unpleasant glare in his eyes.

"On reflection, you will see, my dear Mr. Dingwell, the extreme inexpediency of anything in the least resembling a *fraycas*" (Mr. Larkin so pronounced his French) “in your particular case. I should certainly, my dear sir, recommend a most cautious line.”

“Cautious as the devil,” seconded Mr. Levi.

“You think I’m afraid of my liabilities,” croaked Mr. Dingwell, with a sudden flush across his forehead, and a spasm of his brows over his wild eyes, and then he laughed, and wagged his head.

“That’s right — quite right,” almost sighed Mr. Larkin— “do — do — *pray* do — just *reflect* for only a *moment* — and you’ll *see* it.”

“To be sure, I *see* it, and *you* shall see it, too. Egad! I know something, sir, at my years. I know how to deal with screws, and bullies, and schemers, sir — and that is by *going straight at* them — and I’ll tell you what, sir, if you don’t pay me the money I name, I’ll make you regret it.”

For a moment, Mr. Larkin, for one, did almost regret his share in this uncomfortable and highly “speculative” business. If this Mr. Dingwell chose to turn restive and extortionate, it would have been better it had never entered into his ingenious head, and he could already see in the Jew’s eyes the sulky and ferocious expression that seemed to forebode defeat.

“If you don’t treat me, as I say, with common fairness, I’ll go straight to young Mr. Verney myself, and put you out of the baby-house altogether.”

“*What* babby-houshe?” demanded Mr. Levi, glowering, and hanging the corners of his great halfopen mouth with a sullen ferocity.

“Your castle — in the air — your d — d plot, sir.”

“If you mean you’re going to turn stag,” began the Jew.

“*There* — do — pray, Mr. Levi — you — you *mistake*,” interposed Mr. Larkin, imploringly, who had heard tales of this Mr. Dingwell’s mad temper.

“I say,” continued Levi, “if you’re going to split — — “

“Split, sir!” cried Mr. Dingwell, with a malignant frown, and drawing his mouth together into a puckered ring, as he looked askance at the Jew. “What the devil do you mean by *split*, sir? ‘Gad! sir, I’d split your black head for you, you little Jew miscreant!”

Mr. Larkin saw with a qualm that the sinews of that evil face were quivering with an insane fury, and that even under its sun-darkened skin it had turned pale, while the old man’s hand was instinctively extended towards the poker, of which he was thinking, and which was uncomfortably near.

"No, no, *no* — pray, gentlemen — I *entreat* — only *think*," urged Mr. Larkin, seriously alarmed for the Queen's peace and his own precious character, and for the personal safety of his capitalist and his witness.

Mr. Larkin confronted the Jew, with his great hands upon Mr. Levi's shoulders, so as to prevent his advance; but that slender Hebrew, who was an accomplished sparrer, gave the godly attorney a jerk by the elbows which quite twirled him about, to his amazement and chagrin.

"'Andsh off, old chap," said the Jew, grimly, to Mr. Larkin, who had not endured such a liberty since he was at his cheap day-school, nearly forty years ago.

But Mr. Larkin interposed again, much alarmed, for behind him he thought he heard the clink of the fire-irons.

"He thinks he may say what he pleases," cried the old man's voice furiously, with a kind of choking laugh.

"No, sir — no, Mr. Dingwell — I assure you — *do*, Mr. Levi — how *can* you mind him?" he added in an undertone, as he stood between.

"I *don't* mind him, Mr. Larkin: only I won't let no one draw it that sort. I won't stand a lick of a poker for no one; he shan't come that over me" — and concurrently with this the shrill voice of Mr. Dingwell was yelling —

"Because I'm — because I'm — I'm — every d — d little whipper-snapper — because they think I'm down, the *wretches*, I'm to submit to their insults!"

"I *don't* want to hurt him, Mr. Larkin; if I did, I'd give'm his tea in a mug this minute; but I don't, I say — only he shan't lift a poker to *me*."

"No one, my dear sir, has touched a poker; no one, Mr. Levi, ever dreamed of such a thing. Pray, my dear sir, my dear Mr. Dingwell, don't misconceive; we use slang phrases, now and then, without the *least* meaning or disrespect: it has become quite the tong. I assure you — it was only last week, at Nyworth Castle, where I had the honour to be received, Lady Mary Wrangham used the phrase *yarn*, for a long story."

"D — n you, can't you answer my question?" said Mr. Dingwell, more in his accustomed vein.

"Certainly, sir, we'll reply to it. Do, Mr. Levi, *do* leave the room; your presence at this moment only leads to excitement."

Levi, for a moment, pondered fiercely, and then nodded a sulky acquiescence.

"I shall overtake you in the court, Mr. Levi, if you can wait two or three minutes there."

The Jew nodded over his shoulder, and was gone.

"Mr. Dingwell, sir, I can't, I assure you. It's not in my power; it is in the hands of quite other people, on whom, ultimately, of course, these expenses will fall, to sanction the outlay by way of weekly allowance, which you suggest. It is true I am a contributor, but not exactly in cash; only in money's worth — advice, experience, and technical knowledge. But I will apply in the proper quarter, without delay. I wish, Mr. Dingwell, I *were* the party; you and I would not, I venture to think, be long in settling it between us."

"No, to be sure, you're all such liberal fellows — it's always some one else that puts us under the screw," laughed Mr. Dingwell, discordantly, with his face still flushed, and his hand trembling visibly, "you never have the stock yourselves — not you, — there's always, Mr. Sheridan tells us, you know, in that capital play of his, a d —— d unconscionable fellow in the background, and in Shakspeare's play, *Shylock*, you remember, he hasn't the money himself, but Tubal, a wealthy Hebrew of his tribe, will furnish him. Hey! I suppose they gave the immortal Shakspeare a squeeze in his day; he understood 'em. But Shylock and Tubal are both dead and rotten long ago. It's a comfort you can't escape death, with all your cunning, d — n you."

But Mr. Larkin spoke peaceably to Mr. Dingwell. The expense, up to a certain time, would, of course, fall upon Mr. Kiffyn Verney; after that, however, Mr. Larkin and the Jew firm would feel it. But be it how it might, they could not afford to quarrel with Mr. Dingwell; and Mr. Dingwell was a man of a flighty and furious temper.

CHAPTER X.

CLEVE VERNEY SEES THE CHATEAU DE CRESSERON.

I fancy that these estimates, on a rather large scale, moved by Mr. Dingwell, were agreed to, for sufficient reasons, by the parties interested in disputing them.

Mr. Dingwell kept very close during the daytime. He used to wander listlessly to and fro, between his bedroom and his drawingroom, with his hands in the pockets of his dressing-gown, and his feet in a pair of hard leather slippers, with curled-up toes and no heels, that clattered on the boards like sabots.

Miss Sarah Rumble fancied that her lodger was a little shy of the windows; when he looked out into the court, he stood back a yard or more from the windowsill.

Mr. Larkin, indeed, made no secret of Mr. Dingwell's uncomfortable position, in his conferences with the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney. Mr. Dingwell had been a bankrupt, against whom many transactions to which the Court had applied forcible epithets, had been proved; to whom, in fact, that tribunal had refused quarter; and who had escaped from its fangs by a miracle. There were judgments, however, in force against him; there was a warrant procurable any day for his arrest; he was still "in contempt;" I believe he was an "outlaw;" and, in fact, there was all but a price set on his head. Thus, between him and his outcast acquaintance, the late Hon. Arthur Verney, had subsisted some strong points of sympathy, which had no doubt helped to draw them into that near intimacy which stood the Hon. Kiffyn, no less than Mr. Dingwell (to whose mill it was bringing very comfortable grist), so well in stead, at this moment.

It behoved Mr. Dingwell, therefore, to exercise caution. Many years had passed since he figured as a London trader. But time, the obliterator, in some cases works slowly; or rather, while the pleasant things of memory are sketched in with a pencil, the others are written in a bold, legible, round hand, as it were, with a broadnibbed steel pen, and the best durable japanned ink; on which Father Time works his India-rubber in vain, till his gouty old fingers ache, and you can fancy him whistling curses through his gums, and knocking his bald pate with his knuckles. Mr. Dingwell, on the way home, was, to his horror, half recognised by an ancient Cockney at Malta. Time, therefore, was not to be relied upon, though thirty years had passed; and Mr. Dingwell began to fear that a debtor is never forgotten, and that the man who is thoroughly dipt, like the lovely woman who stoops to folly, has but one way to escape consequences, and that is to die — a step which Mr. Dingwell did not care to take.

The meeting on the 15th, at the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney's house, Mr. Dingwell was prevented by a cold from attending. But the note of his evidence sufficed, and the consultation, at which Mr. Larkin assisted, was quite satisfactory. The eminent parliamentary counsel who attended, and who made, that session, nearly fifty-thousand pounds, went to the heart of the matter direct; was reverentially listened to by his junior, by the parliamentary agent, by the serious Mr. Larkin, at whom he thrust sharp questions, in a peremptory and even fierce way, like a general in action, to whom minutes are everything; treated them once or twice to a recollection or short anecdote, which tended to show what a clever, sharp fellow the parliamentary counsel was, which, indeed, was true; and talked to no one quite from a level, except to one Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, to whom he spoke confidentially in his ear, and who himself quickly grew into the same confidential relations.

"I'm glad you take my view — Mr. — Mr. Forsythe — very happy about it, that we should be in accord. I've earned some confidence in my opinion, having found it more than once, I may say, come out right; and it gives me further confidence that you take my view," said the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, grandly.

That eminent parliamentary counsel, Forsythe, was on his way to the door, when Mr. Verney interposed with this condescension.

"Oh! Ha! Do I? Very happy. What is it?" said Forsythe, smiling briskly, glancing at his watch and edging towards the door, all together.

"I mean the confident view — the cheerful — about it," said the Hon. Mr. Verney, a little flushed, and laying his thin hand on his counsel's arm.

"Certainly — confident, of course, smooth sailing, *quite*. I see no hitch *at present*."

Mr. Forsythe was now, more decidedly, going. But he could not treat the Hon. Kiffyn Verney quite like an ordinary client, for he was before him occasionally in Committees of the House of Commons, and was likely soon to be so in others of the Lords, and therefore, chafing and smiling, he hesitated under the light pressure of the old gentleman's stiff fingers.

"And you know the, I may say, *absurd* state of the law, about it — there was, you know, my unfortunate brother, Arthur — you are aware — *civiliter mortuus*, stopping the way, you know, for nearly twenty years, about it, ever since my poor father, Lord Verney, you know, expired, about it, and I've been, as you know, in the most painful position — *absurd*, you know."

"*Quite* so; I'm *afraid*— " Forsythe was again edging toward the door.

"And I always contended that where the heir was civilly dead, about it, the law should make proper provision — don't you see?"

"Quite so, only *fair* — a very wise and politic statute — and I wish very much, with your experience, you'd turn your attention to draw one. I'm obliged to be off now, to meet the New Discount directors; consultation at my chambers."

And so, smiling, Forsythe, Q.C., did vanish, at last.

All this over, Mr. Cleve Verney proposed to himself a little excursion, of a day or two, to Paris, to which his uncle saw no objection.

Not very far from the ancient town of Caen, where the comparative quietude of Normandy, throughout the throes of the great revolution, has spared so many relics of the bygone France, is an old château, still habitable — still, after a fashion, comfortable — and which you may have at a very moderate rent indeed.

Here is an old wood, cut in a quincunx; old ponds stocked with carp; great old stables gone to decay; and the château itself, is indescribably picturesque and sad.

It is the Château de Cresseron — withdrawn in historic seclusion, amid the glories and regrets of memory, quite out of the tide of modern traffic.

Here, by the side of one of the ponds, one evening, was an old lady, throwing in little bits of bread to the carp that floated and flitted, like golden shadows, this way and that, as the crumbs sank in the water, when she heard a well-known voice near her which made her start.

"Good heavens! Mr. Verney! *You* here?" she exclaimed, with such utter wonderment, her little bit of bread raised in her fingers, that Cleve Verney, though in no merry mood, could not help smiling.

"Yes — here indeed — and after all, is it quite so wonderful?" said he.

"Well, of course you know, Mr. Verney, I'm very glad to see you. Of course, you know *that*; but I'm very far from being certain that you have done a wise or a prudent thing in coming here, and I don't know that, under the circumstances, I *ought* to be glad to see you; in fact, I'm afraid it is *very rash*," said Miss Sheckleton, growing more decided as she proceeded.

"No, not rash. I've been very miserable; *so* miserable, that the worst certainty which this visit might bring upon me would be almost a relief compared with the intolerable suspense I have lived in; therefore, you see, it really is not rash."

"I'm very bad at an argument," persisted the old lady; "but it *is* rash, and *very* rash. You can't conceive," and here she lowered her voice, "the state of exasperation in which he is."

"He," of course, could only mean Sir Booth Fanshawe; and Cleve answered, —

"I assure you, I can't blame him. I don't wonder. I think a great deal has been very wantonly done to aggravate his misfortunes; but surely, he can't fancy that I could sympathise with any such proceedings, or feel anything but horror and disgust. Surely, *you* would not allow him to connect me, however slightly? I *know* you would not."

"My dear Mr. Verney, you don't know Booth Fanshawe, or rather, you do, I believe, know him a great deal too well, to fancy that I could venture to speak to him upon the subject. *That*, I assure you, is quite out of the question; and I may as well tell you frankly, if he were at home, I mean *here*, I should have begged you at once, inhospitable as it might seem, to leave this place, and trust to time and to letters, but *here* I would not have allowed you to linger."

"He's away from home, then!" exclaimed Cleve.

"Yes; but he'll be back tonight at ten o'clock."

"At ten o'clock," repeated Cleve, and the young man thought what a treasure of minutes there was in the interval. "And Miss Fanshawe — Margaret — she's quite well?"

"Yes, she's quite well," answered kind Miss Sheckleton, looking in his earnest eyes, and thinking that he looked a little thin and pale. "She's quite well, and, I hope, *you* have been."

“Oh, yes,” answered the young man, “as well as a man with a good many troubles can be. In fact, I may tell *you*, I’ve been very unhappy. I was thinking of writing to Sir Booth.”

“*Don’t*,” implored Miss Sheckleton, looking quite wildly into his eyes, and with her hand upon his arm, as if to arrest the writing of that letter, “you have no notion how he feels. I assure you, an allusion — the slightest thing is quite enough to set him in a blaze. The other day, for instance, I did not know what it was, till I took up the paper he had been reading, and I found there something about the Verney peerage, and proof that Arthur Verney was dead, and your uncle to get it; and really I can’t wonder — some people seem so unaccountably fortunate, and others, everything goes wrong with — even *I* felt vexed when I read it, though, of course, any good fortune happening to *you*, I should be very glad of. But he did not see any of us till next day — even Macklin.”

“Yes, it is very true,” said Cleve, “my uncle *is* dead, and we shall prove it, that is, my uncle Kiffyn will. But you are quite right to distinguish as you do. It involves nothing for me. Since it has come so near, I have lost all faith in it’s ever reaching me. I have, I can’t call it a conviction, but a *superstition*, that it never will. I must build my own fortunes from their foundations, with my own hand. There is but one success on earth that can make me very proud and very happy. Do you think, that having come all this way, in that hope, on that one chance, that Margaret will see me?”

“I wish you had written to me before coming,” said Anne Sheckleton, after a little pause. “I should have liked to find out first, all I could, from herself; she is so odd. I’ve often told you that she *is* odd. I think it would have been wiser to write to me before coming over, and I should have talked to her, — that is, of course, if she had allowed me, — for I can’t in the least say that she would even hear me on the subject.”

“Well,” said Cleve, with a sigh, “I have come — I am here — and go I cannot without seeing her — I cannot — and you, I think, are too kind to wish that I should. Yes, Miss Sheckleton, you have been my true friend throughout this — what shall I call it? — wild and terrible dream — for I cannot believe it real — I wonder at it myself — I ought to wish I had never seen her — but I cannot — and I think on the result of this visit depends the whole course of my life. You’ll not see me long, I think, in the House of Commons, nor in England; but I’ll tell you more by-and-by.”

The sun had gone down now. A red and melancholy glow, rising from piles of western cloud, melted gradually eastward into the deep blue of night in which the stars were already glimmering.

Along one of the broad avenues cut through the forest that debouches upon the courtyard of the quaint old château they were now walking, and, raising his eyes, he saw Margaret approaching from the antique house.

CHAPTER XI.

SHE COMES AND SPEAKS.

"She is coming, Mr. Verney," said Miss Sheckleton, speaking low and quietly; but her voice sounded a little strangely, and I think the goodnatured spinster was agitated.

Cleve, walking by her side, made no answer. He saw Margaret approach, and while she was yet a good way off, suddenly stop. She had not seen them there before. There seemed no indecision. It was simply that she was startled, and stood still.

"Pray, Miss Sheckleton, do you go on alone. *Entreat* her not to refuse me a few minutes," said he.

"I will — she shall — I will, indeed, Mr. Verney," said Miss Sheckleton, very much fidgetted. "But you had better remain where we were, just now; I will return to you, and — there are some French servants at the house — will you think me very strange — unkind, I am sure, you will *not* — if I say it is only common prudence that you should not be seen at the house? You understand why I say so."

"Certainly. I shall do whatever you think best," he answered. They had arrested their walk, as Margaret had done, during this little parley. Perhaps she was uncertain whether her approach had been observed. The sun had gone down by this time, and the twilight had begun to make distant objects a little indistinct.

But there was no time for man[oe]uvring here, for Miss Fanshawe resumed her walk, and her cousin, Anne Sheckleton, advanced alone to meet her.

"Margaret, dear, a friend has unexpectedly arrived," began Miss Sheckleton.

"And gone, perhaps," answered Margaret Fanshawe, in one of her moods. "*Better* gone — come, darling, let us turn, and go towards home — it is growing so dark."

And with these words, taking Miss Sheckleton's hand in hers, she turned towards the house, not choosing to see the friend whom that elderly lady had so eagerly indicated.

Strangely did Cleve Verney feel. That beautiful, cruel girl! — what could she mean? — how could she treat him so? Is there not, in strange countries, where people meet, a kindlier impulse than elsewhere? — and here — could anything be more stony and utterly cruel? The same wonderful *Cenci* — the same low, sweet voice — the same laugh, even — just for a moment heard — but now — how unspeakably cruel! He could see that Miss Sheckleton was talking earnestly to her, as they walked slowly away. It all seemed like a dream. The formal old wood — the grey château in the background, rising, with its round turrets, and conical tops, and steep roofs against the rose-tinted sky of evening; and in the foreground — not two score steps away — those figures — that girl to whom so lately he was so near being all the world — to whom, it now appeared, he was absolutely nothing — oh! that he had never heard, in Shakspeare's phrase, that mermaid voice!

His pride was wounded. With a yearning that amounted to agony, he watched their receding steps. Follow them he would not. He leaned against the tree by which Miss Sheckleton had left him, and half resolved to quit that melancholy scene of his worst disaster without another look or word — with only the regrets of all a life.

When Miss Sheckleton had reached Margaret, before the young lady spoke, she saw, by her unusual paleness and by something at once of pain and anger in her face, that she had seen Cleve Verney.

"Well, Margaret, if you *will* go, you *will*; but, before you make it irreparable, you must, at least, think."

"Think of what?" said Margaret, a little disdainfully.

"Think that he has come all this way for nothing but the chance of seeing you; of perhaps saying a few words to set himself right."

"If he wished to speak to me, he might have said so," she answered. "Not that I see any reason to change my mind on that point, or any good that can come, possibly, or for ever, if he could talk and I listen for so long."

"Well, but you can't doubt what he has come for," said Miss Sheckleton.

"I don't doubt, because I don't mean to think about it," said the young lady, looking fiercely up toward the gilded weather vanes that glimmered on the grey pinnacles of the château.

“Yes, but it *is* not a matter of doubt, or of thinking, but of fact, for he *did* say so,” pleaded Miss Sheckleton.

“I wish we were in Italy, or some out-of-the-way part of Spain,” said the handsome girl, in the same vein, and walking still onward; “I always said this was too near England, too much in the current.”

“No, dear, it is a quiet place,” said good Anne Sheckleton.

“No, cousin Anne, it is the most *un*quiet place in all the world,” answered the girl, in a wild, low tone, as she walked on.

“And he wants to speak to you; he entreats a few words, a very few.”

“You *know* I ought not,” said she.

“I know you *ought*, my dear; you’ll be sorry for it, all your days, Margaret, if you don’t,” replied Anne Sheckleton.

“Come home, dear, come home, darling,” said the girl, peremptorily, but sadly.

“I say, Margaret, if you let him go without speaking to him, you will regret it all your days.”

“You have no right to talk this way, cousin Anne; I am unhappy enough as it is. Let us go on,” she said.

“If you send him away, as I say, it is all over between you.”

“So it is, it *is* all over; let the dead rest.”

“The world is wide enough; there are many beautiful creatures there, and he is himself so beautiful, and so clever; be very sure you care nothing for him, before you send him away, for you will never see him again,” said Miss Anne Sheckleton.

“I know — I am sure — I have thought of everything. I have made up my account long ago, for now, and for all my days,” said she.

“So you *have*,” answered Miss Sheckleton. “But while you have a moment still allowed you, Margaret, review it, I implore of you.”

“Come, darling, come — come — you ought not to have spoken to me; why have you said all this?” said Margaret, sadly and hurriedly.

“Now, Margaret darling, you are going to stay for a moment, and I will call him.”

“*No!*” said the girl, passionately, “my mind’s made up; not in haste, cousin Anne, but long ago. I’ve looked my last on him.”

“Darling, listen: you know *I’ve* seen him, he’s looking ill, I think; and I’ve told him that you *must* speak to him, Margaret; and I tell *you* you must," said Miss Sheckleton, blushing in her eagerness.

"No, cousin Anne, let there be an end of this between us; I thought it was over long ago. To him, I will never, never — while life remains — never speak more."

As she thus spoke, walking more hurriedly toward the house, she heard a voice beside her say, —

"Margaret! Margaret, *darling* — one word!"

And turning suddenly, she saw Cleve Verney before her. Under the thick folds of her chestnut hair, her features were pale as marble, and for a time it seemed to him he saw nothing but her wild, beautiful eyes fixed upon him.

Still as a statue, she stood confronting him. One little foot advanced, and her tiny hand closed, and pressed to her heart in the attitude in which an affrighted nun might hold her crucifix.

"Yes, Margaret," he said at last, "I was as near going — as you were near leaving me — unheard; but, thank God! *that* is not to be. No, Margaret darling, you *could* not. Wild as my words may sound in your ears, you will listen to them, for they shall be few; you will listen to them, for you are too good to condemn any one that ever loved you, unheard."

There was a little pause, during which all that passed was a silent pressure of Miss Sheckleton's hand upon Margaret's, as very pale, and with her brow knit in a painful anxiety, she drew hurriedly back, and left the two young people together, standing by the roots of the old tree, under the faint, rose-tinted sky of evening.

Lovers' promises or lovers' cruelties — which oaths are most enduring? Where now were Margaret's vows? Oh! inexhaustible fountain of pity, and beautiful mutability of woman's heart! In the passion avowed, so often something of simulation; in the feeling disowned, so often the true and beautiful life. Who shall read this wonderful riddle, running in romance, and in song, and in war, the world's history through?

"Margaret, will you hear me?" he pleaded.

To her it was like a voice in a dream, and a form seen there, in that dreamland in which we meet the dead, without wonder, forgetting time and separation.

"I don't know that I ought to change my purpose. I don't know why I do; but we shall never meet again, I am sure, so speak on."

"Yes, Margaret, I will speak on, and tell you how entirely you have mistaken and wronged me," said Cleve Verney, in the same sad and passionate tones.

Goodnatured Anne Sheckleton, watching at a little distance, saw that the talk — at first belonging altogether to Mr. Verney, at last began to divide itself a little; then side by side they walked a few steps, and then paused again: and so once more a short way, the lady looking down, and then on and on to the margin of that long straight pond, on which in their season are floating water-lilies, and, under its great oblong mirror, gliding those golden fishes which are, as we have seen, one of our spinster friend's kindly resources in this quaint exile. And so the twilight deepened: and Miss Sheckleton saw these two figures like shadows gliding side by side, to and fro, along the margin, till the moonlight came and lighted the still pool over, and dappled the sward with the shadows of the trees, and made the old château in the background, with its white front, its turrets and pinnacles and gilded vanes, look filmy as a fairy castle.

Wrapping her cloak about her, she sat herself down upon the marble seat close by, unobserved and pleased, watching this picture of Lorenzo and Jessica, and of all such moonlighted colloquies, with a wonderful and excited interest — with, indeed, a mixture of melancholy and delight and fear.

Half-hour after half-hour glided by, as she looked on this picture, and read in fancy the romance that was weaving itself out of the silvery thread of their discourse in this sad old scene. And then she looked at her watch, and wondered how the time had sped, and sighed; and smiling and asking no question, came before them, and in a low, gentle warning, told them that the hour for parting had come.

As they stood side by side in the moonlight, did the beautiful girl, with the flush of that romantic hour, never, never to be forgotten, on her cheek, with its light in her wonderful eyes, ever look so beautiful before? Or did that young man, Cleve Verney, whom she thought she understood, but did not, ever look so handsome? — the enthusiasm and the glow of his victory in his strangely beautiful face.

There were a few silent moments: and she thought could fancy paint a more beautiful young couple than these!

There are scenes — only momentary — so near Paradise — sights, so nearly angelic, that they touch us with a mysterious ecstasy and sorrow. In the glory and translation of the moment, the feeling of its transitoriness, and the sense of our mortal lot, cross and thrill us with a strange pain, like the anguish that mingles in the rapture of sublime music. So, Miss Sheckleton, very pale, smiling very tenderly, sobbed and wept, one would have said bitterly, for a little while; and, drying her eyes quickly, saw before her the same beautiful young faces, looking upon hers; and the old lady took their hands and pressed them, and smiled a great deal through her tears, and said — "All, at last, as I wished it: God bless you both — God Almighty bless you, my darling:" and she put her arms about Margaret's neck, and kissed her very tenderly.

And then came the reminder, that must not be slighted. The hour had come, indeed, and Cleve must positively go. Miss Sheckleton would hear of no further delay — no, not another minute. Her fear of Sir Booth was profound; so, with a "God bless you, darling," and a very pale face, and — why should there not be? — one long, long kiss, Cleve Verney took his leave, and was gone; and the sailing moon lost herself among clouds, so darkness stole swiftly over the landscape.

Margaret Fanshawe drew her dear old cousin near to her, and in her turn, placing her arms round her neck, folded her close, and Anne Sheckleton could feel the wild throbbing of the young girl's heart close to her own.

Margaret was not weeping, but she stood very pale, with her arms still laid on her cousin's shoulders, and looked almost wildly down into her wistful eyes.

"Cousin Anne — oh, darling! you must pray for me," said Margaret Fanshawe. "I thought it could never be; I thought I knew myself, but all *that* is vain: there is another will above us — Fate — Eternal Fate, and I am where I am, I know not how."

"Why, Margaret, darling, it is what I have been longing for — the very best thing that could have happened; you ought to be the happiest girl in the world," urged Miss Anne Sheckleton, cheerily.

"No, darling; I am not happy, except in this, that I know I love him, and would not give him up for all the world; but it seems to me to have been, from first to last, a fatality, and I can't shake off the fear that lies at my heart."

“Hush, dear — I hear wheels, I think,” said Miss Sheckleton, listening.

Margaret was preoccupied, and did not listen. I don’t think she cared much at that moment who came or went, except that one to whom her love was now irrevocably given.

“No; I can’t hear — no; but he will be here immediately. We must not be out, you know; he may ask for me, and he is so — so very — what shall I say?”

Margaret did not mind. She turned a wild and plaintive look upward towards the struggling moon — now emerging, now lost again.

“Come, darling — let us go,” said Margaret.

And she looked round her gently, as if awaking from a dream.

“Yes, darling, come,” she continued, placing her hand on Anne Sheckleton’s arm.

“And you are not to tease yourself, Margaret, dear, with fancies and follies. As I said before, you ought to be one of the happiest girls in existence.”

“So I am,” she answered, dreamily— “very happy — oh! wonderfully happy — but there is the feeling of something — *fatal*, as I said; and, be it what it may, let it come. I could not lose him now, for all the world.”

She was looking up, as she spoke, towards the broken moonlight, herself as pale, and a strange plaintive smile of rapture broke over her beautiful face, as if answering the smile of a spirit in the air.

“Come quickly, darling, come,” whispered Miss Sheckleton, and they walked side by side in silence to the house, and so to Margaret’s room, where she sat down by the window, looking out, and kind Anne Sheckleton sat by the table, with her thin old hand to her cheek, watching her fondly, and awaiting an opportunity to speak, for she was longing to hear a great deal more.

CHAPTER XII.

CLEVE VERNEY HAS A VISITOR.

So Cleve Verney returned direct to England, and his friends thought his trip to Paris, short as it was, had done him a world of good. What an alterative and tonic a little change of air sometimes is!

The Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney was, in his high, thin-minded way, at last tolerably content, and more pompous and respected than ever. The proof of his succession to the peerage of Verney was in a perfectly satisfactory state. He would prove it, and take his seat next session. He would add another to the long list of Lord Viscounts Verney of Malory to be found in the gold and scarlet chronicle of such dignities. He had arranged with the trustees for a provisional possession of Verney House, the great stone mansion which glorifies one side of the small parallelogram called Verney Square. Already contractors had visited it and explored its noble chambers and long corridors, with foot-rule and notebook, getting together material for tenders, and Cleve had already a room there when he came up to town. Some furniture had been got in, and some servants were established there also, and so the stream of life had begun to transfuse itself from the old town residence of the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney into these long-forsaken channels.

Here, one morning, called a gentleman named Dingwell, whom Cleve Verney, happening to be in town, desired the servant to show into the room where he sat, with his breakfast, and his newspapers about him.

The tall old man entered, with a slight stoop, leering, Cleve thought, a little sarcastically over his shoulder as he did so.

Mr. Dingwell underwent Mr. Cleve Verney’s reception, smiling oddly, under his white eyebrows, after his wont.

“I suspect some little mistake, isn’t there?” said he, in his cold, harsh, quiet tones. “You can hardly be the brother of my old friend, Arthur Verney. I had hoped to see Mr. Kiffyn Fulke Verney — I — eh?”

“I’m his nephew.”

"Oh! *nephew*? Yes — another generation — yes, of course. I called to see the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney. I was not able to attend the consultation, or whatever you call it. You know I'm your principal witness, eh? Dingwell's my name."

"Oh, to be sure — I beg pardon, Mr. Dingwell," said Cleve, who, by one of those odd slips of memory, which sometimes occur, had failed to connect the name with the case, on its turning up thus unexpectedly.

"I hope your admirable uncle, Kiffyn Verney, is, at all events, *alive* and *approachable*," said the old man, glancing grimly about the room; "though perhaps *you*'re his next heir, and the hope is hardly polite."

This impertinence of Mr. Dingwell's, Mr. Cleve Verney, who knew his importance, and had heard something of his odd temper, resented only by asking him to be seated.

"*That*," said the old man, with a vicious laugh and a smirk, also angry, "is a liberty which I was about to take uninvited, by right of my years and fatigue, eh?"

And he sat down with the air of a man who is rather nettled than pleased by an attention.

"And what about Mr. Kiffyn Verney?" he asked, sharply.

"My uncle is in the country," answered Cleve, who would have liked to answer the fool according to his folly, but he succumbed to the necessity, inculcated with much shrewdness, garnished with some references to Scripture, by Mr. Jos. Larkin, of indulging the eccentricities of Mr. Dingwell's temper a little.

"Then he *is* alive? I've heard such an account of the Verneys, their lives are so brittle, and snap so suddenly; my poor friend Arthur told me, and that Jew fellow, Levi, here, who seems so intimate with the family — d — n him! — says the same: no London house likes to insure them. Well, I see you don't like it: no one does; the smell of the coffin, sir; time enough when we are carrion, and fill it. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, sir, *quite*," said Cleve, drily.

"No young man likes the sight of that stinking old lantern-jawed fellow, who shall be nameless, looking over his spade so slily; but the best way is to do as I've done. Since you must meet him *one* day, go up to him, and make his acquaintance, and shake hands; and egad! when you've grown a little bit intimate, he's not half so disgusting, and sometimes he's even a little bit funny."

"If I were thinking of the profession of a sexton, or an undertaker, I might," began Cleve, who felt a profound disgust of this old Mr. Dingwell, "but as I don't, and since by the time it comes to my turn, I shall be pretty well past seeing and smelling — — "

"Don't be too sure of that," said Mr. Dingwell, with one of his ugly smirks. "Some cheerful people think *not*, you know. But it isn't about such matters that I want to trouble you; in fact, I came to say a word to your uncle; but as I can't see him, you can tell him, and urge it more eloquently too, than I can. You and he are both orators by profession; and tell him he must give me five hundred pounds immediately."

"Five hundred pounds! *Why?*" said Cleve, with a scornful surprise.

"Because I want it," answered the old gentleman, squaring himself, and with the corner of his mouth drawn oddly in, his white head a little on one side, and his eyebrows raised, with altogether an air of vicious defiance.

"You have had your allowance raised very much, sir — it is an exorbitant allowance — what reason can you now urge for this request?" answered Cleve.

"The *same* reason, sir, precisely. If I don't get it I shall go away, *re infecta*, and leave you to find out proof of the death how you may."

Cleve was very near giving this unconscionable old extortioner a bit of his mind, and ordering him out of the house on the instant. But Mr. Larkin had been so very urgent on the point, that he commanded himself.

"I hardly think, sir, you can be serious," said Cleve.

"Egad, sir! you'll find it a serious matter if you don't; for, upon my soul, unless I'm paid, and *well* paid for it, I'll depose to nothing."

"That's plain speaking, at all events," said Mr. Cleve Verney.

"Oh! sir, I'll speak more plainly still," said Mr. Dingwell, with a short sarcastic bow. "I never mince matters; life is too short for circumlocutions."

"*Verney* life, at all events, by your account, sir, and I don't desire them. I shall mention the matter to my uncle to-day in my letter, but I really can't undertake to do more; for I may tell you frankly, Mr. Dingwell, I can't, for the life of me, understand what you can possibly want of such a sum."

"I suppose, young gentleman, you have your pleasures, and I have mine, and they're not to be had without money; and egad, sir! if you fancy it's for love of your old uncle or of you, that I'm here, and taking all this trouble, you are very much mistaken; and if I help you to this house, and the title, and estates, I'll take leave to help myself to some little amusement — money, I mean, also. Cool fellows, egad!"

The brown features of the old man flushed angrily as he laughed.

"Well, Mr. Dingwell, I can only repeat what I have said, and I will also speak to Mr. Larkin. I have no power in the business myself, and you had better talk to him," said Cleve.

"I prefer the fountain-head, sir. I don't care twopence how you arrange it among yourselves; but you must give me the money by Saturday."

"Rather an early day, Mr. Dingwell; however, as I said, the question is for my uncle; it can't affect me," said Cleve.

Mr. Dingwell mused angrily for a little, and Cleve thought his face one of the wickedest he had ever seen while in this state of excited rumination.

"You all — *both* owe me more in that man's death — there are very odd circumstances about it, I can tell you — than, perhaps, you at present imagine," said Mr. Dingwell, looking up suddenly, with a dismal sneer, which subsided into an equally dismal stare.

Cleve, for a second or two, returned the stare, while the question crossed his mind: "Can the old villain mean that my miserable uncle met his death by foul means, in which he took a part, and intends to throw that consideration in with his averred services, to enhance his claim?"

"You had better tell your uncle, with my compliments," said Mr. Dingwell, "that he'll make a kettle of fish of the whole affair, in a way he doesn't expect, unless he makes matters square with me. I often think I'm a d —— d fool, sir, to let you off as I do."

"I don't see, Mr. Dingwell, that you are letting us off, as you say, so very easily," answered Cleve, with a cold smile.

"No, you *don't* see, but I'll *make* you see it," said Mr. Dingwell, very tartly, and with an unpleasant laugh. "Arthur Verney was always changing his quarters — was never in the light. He went by different nicknames. There were in all Constantinople but two men, except myself, the Consul, and the stockbroker, who cashed the money-orders for him, who could identify him, or who knew his name. He lived in the dark, and not very cleanly — you'll excuse the simile — like one of your sewer-rats. He died suddenly and oddly, sir, like a candle on which has fallen a drop of water, with a splutter and a flash, in a moment — one of your Verney deaths, sir. You might as well hope to prove the death of a particular town-dog there, without kennel, or master, or name, a year after his brothers had eaten him." Cleve knew that old Dingwell in this spoke the truth and lied not. Lord Verney had written to great people there, who had set small ones in motion, with a result very like what Dingwell described. Arthur Verney was a gipsy — seldom sleeping for two weeks in the same house — with so many different names that it was vain attempting to trace him, and merely emerging when he wanted money. "So, sir," said Mr. Dingwell, with a smirk, "I see my value."

"I don't recollect that my uncle ever disputed it," replied Mr. Cleve Verney.

"I understand your difficulty perfectly. The presumption of English law, ha! ha! ha! is in favour of the duration of human life, whenever you can't prove a death. So, English law, which we can't dispute — for it is the perfection of human wisdom — places the putrid body of my late friend Arthur in the robes, coronet, and staff of the Verneys, and would give him the spending of the rents, too, but that you can't make a horse drink, though you may bring him to the water. At all events, sir, my festering friend in the shroud will hold secure possession of the estates against all comers till he exhausts that patient presumption, and sees Kiffyn, and you, sir, and every Verney now alive, laid with their faces upward. So, sir, you see I know my value. I have the grand arcanum; I hold in my hand the Philosopher's Stone that can turn your pewter and brass into gold. I hold it fast, sir, and, egad! I'll run away with it, unless I see a reason." And the old gentleman laughed, and shrugged and expanded his slender hands with a deprecation that was menacing.

Cleve was very angry, but he was also alarmed; for Mr. Dingwell looked quite capable of any treason against the Verney interest to which his avarice or his spites might prompt him. A wild, cold, wandering eye; a play of the nostrils, and a corrugation of the brows that gave to his smile, or his laugh, a menace that was villanous, and almost insane — warned the young man of the quality of the beast, and invited him to the exercise of all his self-control.

"I am quite certain, Mr. Dingwell, that my uncle will do whatever is reasonable and fair, and I am also sure that he feels his obligations to you. I shall take care that he hears all that you have said, and you understand that I literally have neither power nor influence in his decision."

"Well, he feels his obligations," said Mr. Dingwell. "That is pleasant."

"Certainly; and, as I said, whatever is fair and reasonable I am certain he will do," said Cleve Verney.

"Fair and reasonable — that is exactly the thing — the *value*; and you know —

'The worth precise of anything Is so much money as 'twill bring.'

And I'll make it bring what I say; and I make it a rule to treat money matters in the grossest terms, because that is the only language which is at once intelligible and direct — and grossness I believe to be the soul of business; and so, sir, tell him with my compliments, I shall expect five hundred pounds at ten o'clock in the morning, in Bank of England notes."

At this moment the servant announced the Rev. Isaac Dixie, and Mr. Dingwell stood up, and, looking with a kind of amusement and scorn round the room upon the dusty portraits, made a sharp bow to Cleve Verney, and saying, —

"That's all; good morning, sir" — with another nod, turned about, and walked jauntily out of the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE REV. ISAAC DIXIE SETS FORTH ON A MISSION.

There was, as Cleve knew, a basis of truth in all that Mr. Dingwell had said, which made his voice more grating, his eye more alarming, and his language more disgusting.

Would that Fortune had sent them, Cleve thought, some enchanted horse, other than that beast, to fly them into the fairyland of their long-deferred ambition! Would that she had sent them a Rarey, to lead him by a metaphoric halter, and quell, by his art, the devil within him — the evil spirit before which something in Cleve's nature quailed, because it seemed to know nothing but appetite, and was destitute of sympathy and foresight.

Dingwell was beset with dangers and devils of his own; but he stood in his magic circle, making mouths and shaking his fist, and cursing at them. He seemed to have no imagination to awe, or prudence to restrain him. He was aware, and so was Cleve, that Larkin knew all about his old bankruptcy, the judgments against him, the impounded forgeries on which he had been on the brink of indictment, and his escape from prison; and yet he railed at Larkin, and defied the powerful Verneys, as if he had been an angel sent to illuminate, to lecture, and to rule them.

Mr. Larkin was usually an adroit and effectual tamer of evil beasts, in such case as this Mr. Dingwell. He waved his thin wand of red-hot iron with a light and firm hand, and made every raw smoke in turn, till the lion was fit to lie down with the lamb. But this Dingwell was an eccentric brute; he had no awe for the superior nature, no respect for the imposing airs of the tamer — not the slightest appreciation even of his cautery. On the contrary, he seemed to like the sensation, and amuse himself with the exposure of his sores to the inspection of Mr. Larkin, who began to feel himself drawn into an embarrassing and highly disreputable confidence.

Mr. Larkin had latterly quite given up the idea of frightening Mr. Dingwell, for when he tried that method, Mr. Dingwell had grown uncomfortably lively and skittish, and, in fact, frightened the exemplary Mr. Larkin confoundedly. He had recapitulated his own enormities with an elation and frightful merriment worthy of a scandalous corner at a Walpurges ball; had demonstrated that he perfectly understood the game of the serious attorney, and showed himself so curiously thick of skin, and withal so *sportive* and formidable a rhinoceros, that Mr. Larkin then and there learned a lesson, and vowed no more to try the mesmerism that succeeded with others, or the hot rod of iron under which they winced and gasped and succumbed.

Such a systematic, and even dangerous defiance of everything good, he had never encountered before. Such a person exactly as this Mr. Dingwell he could not have imagined. There was, he feared, a vein of insanity in that unfortunate man.

He had seen quite enough of the horrid adroitness of Mr. Dingwell's horse-play, and felt such qualms whenever that animal capered and snorted, that he contented himself with musing and wondering over his idiosyncrasies, and adopted a soothing treatment with him — talked to him in a friendly, and even tender way — and had some vague plans of getting him ultimately into a madhouse.

But Mr. Dingwell was by this time getting into his cab, with a drapery of mufflers round him, and telling the man through the front window to drive to Rosemary Court; he threw himself back into a corner, and chuckled and snorted in a conceited ecstasy over his victory, and the money which was coming to minister to no good in this evil world.

Cleve Verney leaned back in his chair, and there rose before him a view of a moonlighted wood, an old château, with its many peaked turrets, and steep roofs, showing silvery against the deep, liquid sky of night, and with a sigh, he saw on the white worn steps, that beautiful, wonderful shape that was his hope and his fate; and as he leaned on his hand, the Reverend Isaac Dixie, whose name had strangely summoned this picture from the deep sea of his fancy, entered the room, smiling rosily, after his wont, and extending his broad hand, as he marched with deliberate strides across the floor, as much as to say— "Here I am, your old tutor and admirer, who always predicted great things for you; I know you are charmed, as I am; I know how you will greet me."

"Ha! old Dixie," and Cleve got up, with a kind of effort, and not advancing very far, shook hands.

"So you have got your leave — a week — or *how* long?"

"I've arranged for next Sunday, that's all, my dear Mr. Verney; some little inconvenience, but very happy — always happy."

"Come, I want to have a talk with you," said Cleve, drawing the clergyman to a chair. "Don't you remember — you ought, you know — what Lord Sparkish (isn't it?) says in Swift's Polite Conversations— ''Tis as cheap sitting as standing.'"

The clergyman took the chair, simpering bashfully, for the allusion was cruel, and referred to a time when the Reverend Isaac Dixie, being as yet young in the ways of the world, and somewhat slow in apprehending literary ironies, had actually put his pupil through a grave course of "Polite Conversation," which he picked up among some odd volumes of the works of the great Dean of St. Patrick's, on the schoolroom shelf at Malory.

"And for my accomplishment of saying smart things in a polite way, I am entirely obliged to you and Dean Swift," said Cleve, mischievously.

"Ah! ah! you were always fond of a jest, my dear Mr. Verney; you liked poking fun, you did, at your old tutor; but you know how that really was — I have explained it so often; still, I do allow, the jest is not a bad one."

But Cleve's mind was already on quite another subject.

"And now, Dixie," said he, with a sharp glance into the clergyman's eyes, "you know, or at least you guess, what it is I want you to do for me?"

The clergyman looked down by his gaiter, with his head a little a-one-side, and his mouth a little pursed; and said he, after a momentary silence, —

"I really, I may say, *unaffectedly*, assure you that I do not."

"You're a queer fellow, old Dixie," said Cleve; "you won't be vexed, but you are always a little bit too clever. I did not tell you exactly, but I told you enough to enable you to guess it. Don't you remember our last talk? Come now, Dixie, you're no muff."

"I hope not, my dear Cleve; I may be, but I don't pretend to that character, though I have still, I apprehend, much to learn in the world's ways."

"Yes, of course," said the young man; and tapped his small teeth that glittered under his moustache, with the end of his pencil-case, while he lazily watched the face of the clergyman from under his long lashes.

"And I assure you," continued the clergyman, "if I were to pretend that I did apprehend your intentions, I should be guilty of an inaccuracy amounting, in fact, to an untruth."

He thought he detected something a little mocking in the handsome face of the young gentleman, and could not tell, in the shadow of the window-curtain, whether those even white teeth were not smiling at him outright; and a little nettled, but not forgetting himself, he went on, —

"You know, my dear Cleve, it is nothing on earth to *me* — absolutely; I act merely to oblige — merely, I mean, to be useful — if in my power, consistently with all other considerations, and I speak, I humbly, but confidently hope, habitually the truth" ——

"Of *course* you do," said the young gentleman, with emphasis, and growing quite serious again. "It is very kind, I know, your coming all this way, and managing your week's absence; and you may for the present know just as little or as much of the matter as you please; only mind, this is — not of course in any wrong sense — a dark business — awfully quiet. They say that, in England, a talent for speaking may raise a man to anything, but I think a talent for holding one's tongue is sometimes a better one. And — I'm quite serious, old Dixie — I'll not forget your fidelity to me, upon my honour — really, never; and as you know, I may yet have the power of proving it."

The Rev. Isaac Dixie folded his hands, and hung his head sideways in a meek modesty, and withal smiled so rosily and gloriously, as he sate in front of the window, that had it happened an hour before sunrise, the sparrows in the ivy all along the stable walls, would undoubtedly have mistaken it for the glow of Aurora, and commenced their chirping and twittering salutations to the dawn an hour too soon.

"It is very gratifying, *very*, you cannot readily estimate, my dear, and — may I not say? — my *illustrious* pupil, *how* gratifying to me, quite irrespective of all those substantially kind intentions which you are pleased to avow in my behalf, to hear from your lips so frank and — may I say, — almost affectionate a declaration; so just an estimate of my devotion to your interests, and I may say, I hope, of my character generally?"

The Rector of Clay was smiling with a huge bashfulness, and slowly folding and rubbing one hand over the other, with his head gently inclined, and his great blue chin upon his guileless, single-breasted, black silk bosom, as he spoke all this in mellow effusion.

“Now, Dixie,” said the young man, while a very anxious expression for the first time showed itself in his face, “I want you to do me a kindness — a kindness that will tie me to you all the days of my life. It is something, but not much; chiefly that you will have to keep a secret, and take some little trouble, which I know you don’t mind; but nothing serious, not the slightest irregularity, a trifle, I assure you, and chiefly, as I said, that you will have to keep a secret for me.”

Dixie also looked a good deal graver as he bowed his acquiescence, trying to smile on, and still sliding his hands softly, one over the other.

“I know you guess what it is — no matter — we’ll not discuss it, dear Dixie; it’s quite past that now. You’ll have to make a little trip for me — you’ll not mind it; only across what you used to call the herring-pond; and you must wait at the Silver Lion at Caen; it is the best place there — I wish it was better — not a soul will you see — I mean English, no one but quite French people; and there is quite amusement, for a day or so, in looking over the old town. Just wait there, and I’ll let you know everything before you have been two days there. I’ve got your passport; you shall have no trouble. And you need not go to a bank; there’s gold here; and you’ll keep it, and spend it for me till I see you; and you must go *to-day*.”

“And, of course, I know it is nothing *wrong*, my dear Cleve; but we are told to avoid even the *appearance* of evil. And in any case, I should not, of course, for the world offend your uncle — Lord Verney, I may call him now — the head of the family, and my very kind patron; for I trust I never forget a kindness; and if it should turn out to be anything which by any chance he might misinterpret, I may reckon upon your religious silence, my dear Cleve, as respects my name?”

“Silence! of course — I’d die before I should tell, under any pressure. I think you know I can keep a secret, and my own especially. And never trust my honour more if your name is ever breathed in connexion with any little service you may render me.”

He pressed the Rev. Isaac Dixie’s hand very earnestly as he spoke.

“And now, will you kindly take charge of this for me, and do as I said?” continued Cleve, placing the gold in Dixie’s not unwilling hand. “And on this paper I have made a note of the best way — all about the boat and the rest; and God bless you, my dear Dixie, goodbye.”

"And God bless *you*, my dear Cleve," reciprocated the clergyman, and they shook hands again, and the clergyman smiled blandly and tenderly; and as he closed the door, and crossed the hall, grew very thoughtful, and looked as if he were getting into a possible mess.

Cleve, too, was very pale as he stood by the window, looking into the sooty garden at the back of Verney House.

CHAPTER XIV.

OVER THE HERRING-POND.

Like the vision that had visited Cleve as he sate in the breakfast-room of Verney House, awaiting the Rev. Isaac Dixie, the old Château de Cresseron shared that night in the soft yet brilliant moonlight. That clergyman — vulgar I am afraid; worldly, perhaps; certainly not beautiful — had undertaken this foreign mission into the land of romance; and among its shadows and enchanted lights, and heroic phantoms, looked, I am afraid, incongruous, as the long-eared, shaggy head of Bottom in the fairy-haunted wood near Athens.

In the ancient town of Caen, in the Silver Lion, the Rev. Isaac Dixie that evening made himself partially understood, and altogether comfortable. He had an excellent dinner, and partook, moderately of course, of the very best vintage in the crypt of that venerable inn. Why should he not? Was he not making harmless holiday, and guilty of no extravagance; for had not Mr. Cleve Verney buckled a long purse to his girdle, and told him to dip his fingers in it as often and as deep as he pleased? And if he undertook the task — trod out Cleve Verney's corn, surely it was no business of his to call for a muzzle, and deny himself his heart's content.

In that exquisite moonlight, having had his cup of coffee, the Rev. Isaac Dixie made a loitering promenade: everything was bewitching — a little wonderful, he fancied — a little strange — from his shadow, that looked so sharp on the white road, to the gothic fronts and gables of old carved houses, emitting ruddy glimmerings from diamond casemates high in air, and half-melting in the deep liquid sky, gleaming with stars over his head.

All was perfectly French in language and costume: not a note of the familiar English accent mingled in the foreign hum of life. He was quite at his ease. To all censorious eyes he walked invisible; and, shall I tell it? Why not? For in truth, if his bishop, who abhors that narcotic, and who, I am sure, never reads novels, and therefore cannot read it here, learns nothing of it, the telling can hurt nobody. He smoked three great cheroots, mild and fragrant, that evening, in the ancient streets of Caen, and returned to his inn, odorous of that perfume.

It would have been altogether a delicious excursion, had there not been a suspense and an anxiety to trouble the divine. The Rev. Isaac Dixie regretted now that he had not asked Cleve to define his object. He suspected, but did not know its nature. He had no idea how obstinately and amazingly the problem would recur to his mind, and how serious would grow his qualms as the hour of revelation drew near.

The same moon is shining over the ancient streets of Caen, and over smoke-canopied Verney House, and over the quaint and lonely Château de Cresseron. In a tapestried room in this old French house candles were burning, the window open, and Margaret Fanshawe sitting at it, and looking out on the moonlit woods and waters, and breathing the still air, that was this night soft as summer, in the raptures of a strange dream: a dream no more; the uncertainty is over, and all her griefs. No longer is she one of that forlorn race that hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. She is not born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward, but translated. Is it so? Alas! alas! the angelic voice has not yet proclaimed "that God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." These words are for the glorified, who have passed the gates of death.

In this bliss, as in all that pertains to love, reason has small share. The heart rejoices as the birds sing. A great suspense — the greatest care that visits the young heart — has ended in a blessed certainty, and in so far the state resembles heaven; but, as in all mortal happiness, there mingles in this also a sadness like distant music.

Old Sir Booth Fanshawe is away on one of his mysterious journeys, and cannot return for three or four days, at soonest. I do not know whether things are beginning to look brighter with Sir Booth, or whether his affairs are being "managed" into *utter* ruin. Meanwhile, the evil spirit has departed from the house, and the spirit of music has come, music with yet a cadence of sadness in it.

This fair, quaint landscape, and beautiful moonlight! Who ever looks on such a scene that does not feel a melancholy mingling in his delight?

“The moon shines bright: — in such a night as this, When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees, And they did make no noise; in such a night, Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls, And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents, Where Cresid lay that night. In such a night Stood Dido, with a willow in her hand, Upon the wild seabanks, and waved her love To come again to Carthage.”

Thus, in the visions of the Seer who lies in Stratford-on-Avon, moonlight and love and melancholy are related; and so it is, and will be, to the end of time, till mortal love is no more, and sadness ends, and the moon is changed to blood, and all things are made new.

And now over the moonlit water, through the boughs of the old trees, the still night air is thrilled with a sweet contralto — a homely song — the echo of childish days and the nursery. Poor Milly! her maid who died so early, whose lover was a young sailor, far away, used to sing it for her in the summer evenings, when they sat down under the hawthorns, on Winnockhough, looking toward the sea, though the sea was many a mile away: —

“As Eve went forth from Paradise, She, weeping, bore away One flower that, reared, in tears and sighs, Is growing to this day.

“Where’er the children of the fall Are toiling to this hour, It blooms for each, it blooms for all, And Love we call this flower.

“Red roses of the bygone year Are mingled with the mould, And other roses will appear Where they grew pale and old.

“But where it grew, no other grows, No bloom restores the sere; So this resembles not the rose, And knows no other year.

“So, welcome, when thy bloom is red, The glory of thy light; And welcome when thy bloom is shed, The long sleep of my night.”

And now the song is ended, and, listening, nature seems to sigh; and looking toward the old château, the front next you is in shadow, the window is open, and within you see *two* ladies. The elder is standing by the girl, who sits still at the open window, looking up into the face of her old friend — the old friend who has known, in the early days of romance, what love is, for whom now “the bloom is shed, and mingling with the mould,” but who remembers sadly the blush and glory of its light that died five-and-thirty years ago upon Canadian snows.

Gently the old lady takes her hand, and sits beside her girlish kinswoman, and lays her other hand over that, and smiles with a strange look of affection, and admiration, and immeasurable compassion, that somehow seems to translate her, it is so sad and angelic. I cannot hear what she is saying, but the young lady looks up, and kisses her thin cheek, and lays her head upon her old shoulder.

Behind, high over the steep roofs and pinnacles, and those glimmering weather-vanes, that seem sometimes to melt quite away, hangs the moon, unclouded — meet emblem of a pure love — no longer crossed by the sorrows of true love’s course — Dian the Chaste, with her sad, pure, and beautifully misleading light — alas! the emblem, also, of mutation.

In a few concise and somewhat dry sentences, as old prison stones bear the records which thin hands, long since turned to dust, have carved, the world’s corridors and corners bear the tracings of others that were busy two thousand years ago; and the inscriptions that tell the trite story of human fears and sadness, cut sharp and deep in the rock, tell simply and briefly how Death was the King of Terrors, and the shortness of Life the bitter wonder, and black Care the companion of the wayfarers who marched by the same route to the same goal, so long ago. These gigantic griefs and horrors are all in a nutshell. A few words tell them. Their terror is in their truth. There is no use in expanding them: they are sublimely simple. Among the shadowy men and women that people these pages, I see them everywhere — plots too big and complicated to be got, by any compression, within the few pages and narrow covers of the book of their lives: Care, in her old black weeds, and Death, with stealthy foot and blow like thunder.

Twelve months had come and gone for ever since the Reverend Isaac Dixie made that little trip to Caen, every month bringing his portion of blossom, fruit, or blight to every mortal. All had gone well and gloriously in this Verney Peerage matter.

The death of the late Honourable Arthur Verney was proved; and the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, as next heir, having complied with the proper forms, duly succeeded to the ancient peerage of the Verneys. So the dream was accomplished more splendidly, perhaps, than if the prize had come earlier, for the estates were in such condition as they had never attained to since the great rebellion; and if Viscount Verney was not among the more potent of his peers, the fault was not in the peerage and its belongings.

I don’t know that Lord Verney was on the whole a happier man than the Honourable Kiffyn had been. He had become somewhat more exacting; his pride pronounced itself more implacably; men felt it more, because he was really formidable. Whatever the Viscount in the box might be, the drag he drove was heavy, and men more alert in getting out of his way than they would, perhaps, had he been a better whip.

He had at length his heart’s desire; but still there was something wanting. He was not quite where he ought to be. With his boroughs, and his command of one county, and potent influence in another, he ought to have been decidedly a greater man. He could not complain of being slighted. The minister saw him when he chose; he was listened to, and in all respects courteously endured. But there was something unsatisfactory. He was not *telling*, as he had expected. Perhaps he had no very clear conceptions to impress. He had misgivings, too, that secretly depressed and irritated him. He saw Twyndle’s eye wander wildly, and caught him yawning stealthily into his hand, while he was giving him his view of the affair of the “the Matilda Briggs,” and the right of search. He had seen Foljambe, of the Treasury, suddenly laugh at something he thought was particularly wise, while unfolding to that gentleman, in the drawingroom, after dinner, his ideas about local loans, in aid of agriculture. Foljambe did not laugh outright. It was only a tremulous qualm of a second, and he was solemn again, and rather abashed. Lord Verney paused, and looked for a second, with stern inquiry in his face, and then proceeded politely. But Lord Verney never thought or spoke well of Foljambe again; and often reviewed what he had said, in secret, to try and make out where the absurdity lay, and was shy of ventilating that particular plan again, and sometimes suspected that it was the boroughs and the county, and not Kiffyn Lord Verney, that were listened to.

As the organ of self-esteem is the region of our chief consolations and irritations (and its condition regulates temper), this undivulged mortification, you may be sure, did not make Lord Verney, into whose ruminations was ever trickling, through a secret duct, this fine stream of distilled gall, brighter in spirits, or happier in temper.

Oh! vanity of human wishes! Not that the things we wish for are not in themselves pleasant, but that we forget that, as in nature every substance has its peculiar animalcule and infestings, so every blessing has, too minute to be seen at a distance, but quite inseparable, its parasite troubles.

Cleve Verney, too, who stood so near the throne, was he happy? The shadow of care was cast upon him. He had grown an anxious man. “Verney’s looking awfully thin, don’t you think, and seedy? and he’s always writing long letters, and rather cross,” was the criticism of one of his club friends. “Been going a little too fast, I dare say.”

Honest Tom Sedley thought it was this pending peerage business, and the suspense; and reported to his friend the confident talk of the town on the subject. But when the question was settled, with a brilliant facility, his good humour did not recover. There was still the same cloud over his friend, and Tom began to fear that Cleve had got into some very bad scrape, probably with the Hebrew community.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. CLEVE VERNEY PAYS A VISIT TO ROSEMARY COURT.

That evoked spirit, Dingwell, was now *functus officio*, and might be dismissed. He was as much afraid of the light of London — even the gaslight — as a man of his audacity could be of anything. Still he lingered there.

Mr. Larkin had repeatedly congratulated the Verney peer, and his young friend and patron, Cleve, upon his own masterly management, and the happy result of the case, as he called it. And although, with scriptural warning before him, he would be the last man in the world to say, “Is not this great Babylon that I have builded?” Yet he did wish Lord Viscount Verney, and Cleve Verney, M.P., distinctly to understand that *he*, Mr. Larkin, had been the making of them. There were some things — very many things, in fact, all desirable — which those distinguished persons could effect for the good attorney of Glyngden, and that excellent person in consequence presented himself diligently at Verney House.

On the morning I now speak of, he was introduced to the library, where he found the peer and his nephew.

“I ventured to call, my lord — how do you do, Mr. Verney? — to invite your lordship’s attention to the position of Mr. Dingwell, who is compelled by lack of funds to prolong his stay in London. He is, I may say, most anxious to take his departure quietly and expeditiously, for Constantinople, where, I venture to think, it is expedient for all parties, that his residence should be fixed, rather than in London, where he is in hourly danger of detection and arrest, the consequence of which, my lord; — it will probably have struck your lordship’s rapid apprehension already, — would be, I venture to think, a very painful investigation of his past life, and a concomitant discrediting of his character, which although, as your lordship would point out to me, it cannot disturb that which is already settled, would yet produce an unpleasant effect out of doors, which, it is to be feared, he would take care to aggravate by all means in his power, were he to refer his detention here, and consequent arrest, to any fancied economy on your lordship's part."

"I don't quite follow you about it, Mr. Larkin," said Lord Verney, who generally looked a little stern when he was puzzled. "I don't quite apprehend the drift — be good enough to sit down — about it — of your remarks, as they bear upon Mr. Dingwell's wishes, and my conduct. Do *you*, Cleve?"

"I conjecture that Dingwell wants more money, and can't be got out of London without it," said Cleve.

"Eh? Well, that *did* occur to me; of *course*, that's plain enough — about it — and *what* a man that must be! and — God bless me! about it — all the money he has got from me! It's incredible, Mr. — a — *Larkin*, three hundred pounds, you know, and he wanted *five*, and that absurdly enormous weekly payment besides!"

"Your lordship has exactly, as usual, touched the point, and anticipated, with your wonted accuracy, the line at the other side; and indeed, I may also say, all that may be urged by way of argument, *pro* and *con*. It is a wonderful faculty!" added Mr. Larkin, looking down with a contemplative smile, and a little wondering shake of the head.

"Ha, ha! Something of the same sort has been remarked in our family about it," said the Viscount, much pleased. "It facilitates business, rather, I should hope — about it."

The attorney shook his head, reflectively, raising his hands, and said, "No one but a professional man can have an *idea*!"

"And what do you suggest?" asked Cleve, who was perhaps a little tired of the attorney's compliments.

"Yes, what do you suggest, Mr. — Mr. *Larkin*? Your suggestion I should be prepared to consider. Anything, Mr. Larkin, suggested by you *shall* be considered," said Lord Verney grandly, leaning back in his chair, and folding his hands.

"I am much — very much — flattered by your lordship's confidence. The former money, I have reason to think, my lord, went to satisfy an old debt, and I have reason to *know* that his den has been discovered by another creditor, from whom, even were funds at his disposal to leave England tonight, escape would be difficult, if not impossible."

"How much money does he want?" asked Mr. Cleve Verney.

"A *moment*, a *moment*, please. I was going to say," said Lord Verney, "if he wants money — about it — it would be desirable to state the amount."

Mr. Larkin, thus called on, cleared his voice, and his dovelike eyes contracted, and assumed their rat-like look, and he said, watching Lord Verney's face, —

"I am afraid, my lord, that less than three hundred — — "

Lord Verney contracted his brows, and nodded, after a moment.

"Three hundred pounds. Less, I say, my lord, will not satisfy the creditor, and there will remain something still in order to bring him back, and to keep him quiet there for a time; and I think, my lord, if you will go the length of *five* hundred — — "

"'Gad, it's growing quite serious, Mr. — Mr. Sir, I confess I don't half understand this *person*, Mr. Ding — Dong — whatever it is — it's going rather too *fast* about it. I — I — and that's my clear opinion— " and Lord Verney gazed and blinked sternly at the attorney, and patted his fragrant pockethandkerchief several times to his chin— "very unreasonable and monstrous, and, considering all I've done, very *ungrateful*."

"Quite so, my lord; monstrously ungrateful. I can't describe to your lordship the trouble I have had with that extraordinary and, I fear I must add, fiendish person. I allude, of course, my lord, in my privileged character as having the honour of confidential relations with your lordship, to that unfortunate man, Dingwell. I assure you, on one occasion, he seized a poker in his lodgings, and threatened to dash my brains out."

"Very good, sir," said Lord Verney, whose mind was busy upon quite another point; "and suppose I *do*, what do we gain, I ask, by assisting him?"

"Simply, my lord, he is so incredibly reckless, and, as I have said, *fiendish*, that if he were disappointed, I do think he will stick at nothing, even to the length of swearing that his evidence for your lordship was *perjured*, for the purpose of being revenged, and your generosity to him pending the inquiry, or rather the preparation of proofs, would give a colour unfortunately even to that monstrous allegation. Your lordship can have no idea — the elevation of your own mind prevents it — of the desperate character with whom we have had to deal."

"Upon my life, sir, a pleasant position you seem to have brought me into," said Lord Verney, flushing a good deal.

"My lord, it was inevitable," said Mr. Larkin, sadly.

“I don’t think he could have helped it, really,” said Cleve Verney.

“And who says he could?” asked Lord Verney, tartly. “I’ve all along said it could not well be helped, and that’s the reason I *did* it, don’t you see? but I may be allowed to say, I suppose, that the position is a most *untoward* one; and so it is, egad!” and Lord Verney got up in his fidget, and walked over to the window, and to the chimneypiece, and to the table, and fiddled with a great many things.

“I remember my late brother, Shadwell Verney — he’s dead, poor Shadwell — had a world of trouble with a fellow — about it — who used to extort money from him — something I suppose — like this Mr. Ringwood — or I mean — you know his name — till he called in the police, and put an end to it.”

“Quite true, my lord, quite true; but don’t you think, my lord, such a line with Mr. Dingwell might lead to a *fraycas*, and the possible unpleasantness to which *I* ventured to allude? *You* have seen him, Mr. Verney?”

“Yes; he’s a beast, he really *is*; a little bit mad, I almost think.”

“A little bit mad, precisely so; it really is, my lord, most melancholy. And I am so clearly of opinion that if we quarrel definitively with Mr. Dingwell, we may find ourselves in an extremely difficult position, that were the case my own, I should have no hesitation in satisfying Mr. Dingwell, even at a sacrifice, rather than incur the annoyance I anticipate. If you allow me, my lord, to conduct the matter with Mr. Dingwell, I think I shall succeed in getting him away quietly.”

“It seems to me a very serious sum, Mr. Larkin,” said Lord Verney.

“Precisely so, my lord; serious — very serious; but your lordship made a remark once in my hearing which impressed me powerfully: it was to the effect that where an object is to be accomplished, it is better to expend a little too much power, than anything too little.” I think that Mr. Larkin invented this remark of Lord Verney’s, which, however, his lordship was pleased to recognise, notwithstanding.

So the attorney took his departure, to call again next day.

“Clever man that Mr. — Mr. Larkin — vastly clever,” said Lord Verney. “I rather think there’s a great deal in what he says — it’s very disgusting — about it; but one must consider, you know — there’s no harm in considering — and — and that Mr. — Dong — Dingleton, isn’t it? — about it — a most offensive person. I must consider — I shall think it over, and give him my ideas tomorrow."

Cleve did not like an expression which had struck him in the attorney's face that day, and he proposed next day to write to Mr. Dingwell, and actually did so, requesting that he would be so good as to call at Verney House.

Mr. Dingwell did not come; but a note came by post, saying that the writer, Mr. Dingwell, was not well enough to venture a call.

What I term Mr. Larkin's rat-like eyes, and a certain dark and even wicked look that crosses the attorney's face, when they appear, had left a profound sense of uncertainty in Cleve's mind respecting that gentleman's character and plans. It was simply a conviction that the attorney meditated something odd about Mr. Dingwell, and that no good man could look as he had looked.

There was no use in opening his suspicion, grounded on so slight a thing as a look, to his uncle, who, though often timid and hesitating, and in secret helpless, and at his wits' end for aid in arriving at a decision, was yet, in a matter where vanity was concerned, or a strong prejudice or caprice involved, often incredibly obstinate.

Mr. Larkin's look teased Cleve. Larkin might grow into an influence very important to that young gentleman, and was not lightly to be quarrelled with. He would not quarrel with him; but he would see Dingwell, if indeed that person were still in London; a fact about which he had begun to have some odd misgivings. The note was written in a straight, cramp hand, and Mr. Larkin's face was in the background always. He knew Mr. Dingwell's address; an answer, real or forged, had reached him from it. So, full of dark dreams and conjectures, he got into a cab, and drove to the entrance of Rosemary Court, and knocked at Miss Sarah Rumble's door.

That good lady, from the shadow, looked suspiciously on him.

"Is Mr. Dingwell at home?"

"Mr. Dingwell, sir?" she repeated.

"Yes. Is he at home?"

"Mr. Dingwell, sir? *No* sir."

"Does not Mr. Dingwell live here?"

"There *was* a gentleman, please, sir, with a name like that. Go *back*, child," she said, sharply to Lucy Maria, who was peeping in the background, and who might not be edified, perhaps, by the dialogue. "Beg parding, sir," she continued, as the child disappeared; "they *are* so tiresome! There was an old gentleman lodging here, sir, please, which his name was like that I do remember."

Cleve Verney did not know what to think.

"Is there anyone in the house who knows Mr. Dingwell? I've come to be of use to him; perhaps he could see me. Will you say Mr. Verney?"

"Mr. — *what*, sir, please?"

"Verney — here's my card; perhaps it is better."

As the conversation continued, Miss Rumble had gradually come more and more forward, closing the door more and more as she did so, so that she now confronted Cleve upon the step, and could have shut the door at her back, had he made any attempt to get in; and she called over her shoulder to Lucy Maria, and whispered something, and gave her, I suppose, the card; and in a minute more Miss Rumble opened the door wide, and showed "the gentleman" upstairs, and told him on the lobby she hoped he would not be offended, but that she had such positive orders as to leave her no choice; and that in fact Mr. Dingwell was in the drawingroom, and would be happy to see him, and almost at the same moment she threw open the door and introduced him, with a little courtesy, and —

"This way, please, sir; here's the gentleman, please, sir."

There he *did* find Mr. Dingwell, smoking a cigar, in his fez, slippers, and pea-green silk dressing-gown, with a cup of black coffee on the little table beside him, his *Times* and a few magazines there also. He looked, in vulgar parlance, "seedy," like an old fellow who had been raking the night before, and was wofully tired, and in no very genial temper.

"Will you excuse an old fellow, Mr. Verney, and take a chair for yourself? I'm not very well to-day. I suppose, from your note, you thought I had quitted London. It was not to be expected so old a plant should take root; but it's sometimes not worth moving 'em again, and they remain where they are, to wither, ha, ha, ha!"

"I should be sorry it was for any such purpose; but I am happy to find you still here, for I was really anxious to call and thank you."

"*Anxious* — to *thank me*! Are you really *serious*, Mr. Verney?" said Dingwell, lowering his cigar again, and looking with a stern smile in his visitor's face.

"Yes, sir; I *did* wish to call and tell you," said Cleve, determined not to grow angry; "and I *am* here to say that we are very much obliged."

"*We?*"

"Yes; my uncle and I."

"Oh, yes; well, it *is* something. I hope the coronet becomes him, and his robes. I venture to say he has got up the masquerading properties already; it's a pity there isn't a coronation or something at hand; and I suppose he'll put up a monument to my dear friend Arthur — a mangy old dog he was, you'll allow me to say, though he was my friend, and very kind to me; and I, the most grateful fellow he ever met; I've been more grieved about him than any other person I can remember, upon my soul and honour — and a devilish dirty dog he was."

This last reflection was delivered in a melancholy aside, after the manner of a soliloquy, and Cleve did not exactly know how to take this old fellow's impertinence.

"Arthur Verney — poor fellow! your uncle. He had a great deal of the pride of his family, you know, along with utter degradation. Filthy dog! — pah!" And Mr. Dingwell lifted both his hands, and actually used that unpleasant utensil called a "spittoon," which is seen in taverns, to give expression, it seemed, to his disgust.

"But he had his pride, dear Arthur; he was proud, and wished for a tombstone. When he was dying, he said, 'I should like a monument — not of course in a cathedral, for I have been living so darkly, and a good deal talked about; but there's an old church or abbey near Malory (that I'm sure was the name of the place) where our family has been accustomed to bury its quiet respectabilities and its *mauvais sujets*; and I think they might give me a pretty little monument there, quite quietly.' I think you'll do it, for you're a grateful person, and like thinking people; and he certainly did a great deal for his family by going out of it, and the little vanity of a monument would not cost much, and, as he said himself, no one would ever see it; and I promised, if I ever had an opportunity, to mention the subject to your uncle."

Cleve bowed.

"'And,' said he, 'there will be a little conflict of feeling. I am sure they'd like the *monument*, but they would not make an ostentation of *me*. But remind them of my Aunt Deborah. Poor old girl! she ran away with a fiddler.' Egad, sir! these were his very words, and I've found, on inquiring here, they were quite true. She ran away with a fiddler — egad! and I don't know how many little fiddlers she had; and, by Jove! he said if I came back I should recognise a possible cousin in every street-fiddler I met with, for music is a talent that runs in families. And so, when Atropos cut his fiddlestring, and he died, she took, he said, to selling mutton pies, for her maintenance, in Chester, and being properly proud as a Verney, though as a fiddler's widow necessitous, he said she used to cry, behind her little table, 'Hot mutton pies!' and then, *sotto voce*, 'I hope nobody hears me;' and you may rely upon that family anecdote, for I had it from the lips of that notorious member of your family, your uncle Arthur, and he hoped that they would comply with the tradition, and reconcile the Verney pride with Verney exigencies, and concede him the secret celebration of a monument."

"If you are serious — — "

"Serious about a monument, sir! who the devil could be lively on such a subject?" and Mr. Dingwell looked unaccountably angry, and ground his teeth, and grew white. "A monument, cheap and nasty, I dare say; it isn't much for a poor devil from whom you've got everything. I suppose you'll speak to your uncle, sir."

"I'll speak to him, sir."

"Yes, *do*, pray, and prevail. I'm not very strong, sir, and there's something that remains for you and me to do, sir."

"What is that?"

"To rot under ground, sir; and as I shall go first, it would be pleasant to me to be able to present your affectionate regards to your uncle, when I meet him, and tell him that you had complied with his little fancy about the monument, as he seemed to make a point that his name should not be blotted totally from the records of his family."

Cleve was rather confirmed in his suspicions about the sanity of this odious old man — as well he might — and, at all events, was resolved to endure him without a row.

"I shall certainly remember, and mention all you have said, sir," said Cleve.

"Yes," said the old man, in a grim meditation, looking down, and he chucked away the stump of his cigar, "it's a devilish hard case, Kismet!" he muttered.

“I suppose you find our London climate very different from that you have grown accustomed to?” said Cleve, approaching the point on which he desired some light.

“I lived in London for a long time, sir. I was — as perhaps you know — junior partner in the great Greek house of Prinkipi and Dingwell — d —— n Prinkipi! say I. He ran us into trouble, sir; then came a smash, sir, and Prinkipi levanted, making a scapegoat of me, the most vilified and persecuted Greek merchant that ever came on ’Change! And, egad! if they could catch me, even now, I believe they’d bury me in a dungeon for the rest of my days, which, in that case, would not be many. I’m here, therefore, I may say, at the risk of my life.”

“A very anxious situation, indeed, Mr. Dingwell; and I conclude you intend but a short stay here?”

“Quite the contrary, sir. I mean to stay as long as I please, and that may be as long as I live.”

“Oh! I had thought from something that Mr. Larkin said,” began Cleve Verney.

“Larkin! He’s a religious man, and does not put his candle under a bushel. He’s very particular to say his prayers; and provided he says *them*, he takes leave to say what he likes beside.”

Mr. Dingwell was shooting his arrows as freely as Cupid does; but Cleve did not take this satire for more than its worth.

“He may think it natural I should wish to be gone, and so I do,” continued the old man, setting down his coffee cup, “if I could get away without the trouble of going, or was sure of a tolerably comfortable berth, at my journey’s end; but I’m old, and travelling shakes me to pieces, and I have enemies elsewhere, as well as here; and the newspapers have been printing sketches of my life and adventures, and poking up attention about me, and awakening the slumbering recollection of persons by whom I had been, in effect, forgotten, *every*-where. No rest for the wicked, sir. I’m pursued; and, in fact, what little peace I might have enjoyed in this, the closing period of my life, has been irreparably wrecked by my visit and public appearance here, to place your uncle, and by consequence *you*, in the position now secured to you. What do you think of me?”

“I think, sir, you have done us a great service; and I know we are very much obliged,” said Cleve, with his most engaging smile.

"And do you know what I think of myself? I think I'm a d —— d fool, unless I look for some advantage."

"Don't you think, sir, you have found it, on the whole, advantageous, your coming here?" insinuated Cleve.

"Barren, sir, as a voyage on the Dead Sea. The test is this — what have I by it? not five pounds, sir, in the world. Now, I've opened my mind a little to you upon this subject, and I'm of the same mind still; and if I've opened Aladdin's garden to you, with its fruitage of emeralds, rubies, and so forth, I expect to fill my snuff-box with the filings and chippings of your gigantic jewellery."

Cleve half repented his visit, now that the presence of the insatiable Mr. Dingwell, and his evident appetite for more money, had justified the representations of the suspected attorney.

"I shall speak to Mr. Larkin on the subject," said Cleve Verney.

"D —— n Larkin, sir! Speak to me."

"But, Mr. Dingwell, I have really, as I told you before, no authority to speak; and no one has the least power in the matter but my uncle."

"And what the devil did you come here for?" demanded Mr. Dingwell, suddenly blazing up into one of his unaccountable furies. "I suppose you expected me to congratulate you on your success, and to ask leave to see your uncle in his coronet — ha, ha, ha! — or his cap and bells, or whatever he wears. By —— sir, I hope he holds his head high, and struts like a peacock, and has pleasant dreams; time enough for nightmares, sir, hereafter, eh? Uneasy rests the head that wears the crown! Good evening, sir; I'll talk to Mr. Larkin."

And with these words Mr. Dingwell got up, looking unaccountably angry, and made a half-sarcastic, half-furious bow, wherewith he dismissed Mr. Cleve Verney, with more distinct convictions than ever that the old gentleman was an unmitigated beast, and more than half a lunatic.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN LORD VERNEY'S LIBRARY.

Who should light upon Cleve that evening as he walked homeward but our friend Tom Sedley, who was struck by the anxious pallor and melancholy of his face.

Goodnatured Sedley took his arm, and said he, as they walked on together, —

"Why don't you smile on your luck, Cleve?"

"How do you know what my luck is?"

"All the world knows that pretty well."

"All the world knows everything but its own business."

"Well, people do say that your uncle has lately got the oldest peerage — one of them — in England, and an estate of thirty-seven thousand a year, for one thing, and that you are heir-presumptive to these trifles."

"And that heirs-presumptive often get nothing but their heads in their hands."

"No, you'll not come Saint Denis nor any other martyr over us, my dear boy; we know very well how you stand in that quarter."

"It's pleasant to have one's domestic relations so happily arranged by such very competent persons. I'm much obliged to all the world for the parental interest it takes in my private concerns."

"And it also strikes some people that a perfectly safe seat in the House of Commons is not to be had for nothing by every fellow who wishes it."

"But suppose I *don't* wish it."

"Oh! we may suppose anything."

Tom Sedley laughed as he said this, and Cleve looked at him sharply, but saw no uncomfortable meaning in his face.

"There is no good in talking of what one has not tried," said he. "If you had to go down to that tiresome House of Commons every time it sits; and had an uncle like mine to take you to task every time you missed a division — you'd soon be as tired of it as I am."

"I see, my dear fellow, you are bowed down under a load of good luck." They were at the door of Tom Sedley's lodgings by this time, and opening it, he continued, "I've something in my room to show you; just run up with me for a minute, and you'll say I'm a conjuror."

Cleve, not to be got into good spirits that evening, followed him upstairs, thinking of something else.

"I've got a key to your melancholy, Cleve," said he, leading the way into his drawingroom. "Look *there*," and he pointed to a clever copy in crayons of the famous Beatrice Cenci, which he had hung over his chimneypiece.

Tom Sedley laughed, looking in Cleve's eyes. A slight flush had suddenly tinged his visitor's face, as he saw the portrait. But he did not seem to enjoy the joke, on the contrary, he looked a little embarrassed and angry. "That's Guido's portrait — well, what about it?" he asked, rather surlily.

"Yes, of course; but who is it like?"

"Very few, I dare say, for *it* is very pretty; and except on canvas, there is hardly such a thing as a pretty girl to be seen. Is that all? for the life of me, I can't see where the conjuring lies."

"Not in the picture, but the *likeness*; don't you see it?"

"*No*" said Cleve. "I must go; are you coming?"

"Not see it!" said Tom. "Why if it were painted for her, it could not be more like. Why, it's the Flower of Cardyllian, the Star of Malory. It is *your* Miss Fanshawe — *my* Margaret — *our* Miss Margaret Fanshawe. I'm making the fairest division I can, you see; and I would not be without it for all the world."

"She would be very much gratified if she heard it. It is so flattering to a young lady to have a fellow buy a coloured lithograph, and call it by her name, and crack jokes and spout mock heroics over it. It is the modern way of celebrating a lady's name. Don't you seriously think, Sedley, it would be better to smash it with a poker, and throw it into the fire, than go on taking such liberties with any young lady's name?"

"Upon my honour, Cleve, you mistake me; you do me great injustice. You used to laugh at me, you know, when I'm quite sure, thinking over it now, you were awfully gone about her yourself. I never told any one but you why I bought that picture; it isn't a lithograph, but painted, or drawn, or whatever they call it, with chalks, and it cost five guineas; and no one but you ever heard me mention Miss Fanshawe's name, except the people at

Cardyllian, and then only as I might mention any other, and always with respect."

"What does it signify?" interrupted Cleve, in the middle of a forced yawn. "I'm tired to-day, and cross — don't you see; and man delights not me, nor woman neither. So, if you're coming, come, for I must go."

"And, really, Cleve, the Cardyllian people do say (I've had letters) that you were awfully in love with her yourself, and always haunting those woods of Malory while she was there, and went away immediately she left, and have never been seen in Cardyllian since."

"Those Cretans were always liars, Tom Sedley. That comes direct from the club. I can fancy old Shrapnell in the light of the bow-window, composing his farrago of dreams, and lies, and chuckling and cackling over it."

"Well, I don't say that Shrapnell had anything to do with it; but I did hear at first they thought you were gone about little Agnes Etherage."

"Oh! they found that out — did they?" said Cleve. "But you know those people — I mean the Cardyllian people — as well, or better than I, and really, as a kindness to me, and to save me the trouble of endless explanations to my uncle, I would be so much obliged if you would not repeat their follies — unless, of course, you happen to believe them."

Cleve did not look more cheerful as he drove away in a cab which he took to get rid of his friend Tom Sedley. It was mortifying to find how vain were his clever stratagems, and how the rustic chapmen of that Welsh village and their wives had penetrated his diplomacy. He thought he had killed the rumours about Malory, and yet that grain of mustard seed had grown while his eye was off it, with a gigantic luxuriance, and now was large enough to form a feature in the landscape, and quite visible from the windows of Ware — if his uncle should happen to visit that mansion — overtopping the roofs and chimneys of Cardyllian. His uncle meditated an early visit to Cardyllian, and a short stay at Ware, before the painters and gilders got possession of the house; a sort of ovation in demi-toilette, grand and friendly, and a foretaste of the splendours that were coming. Cleve did hope that those beasts would be quiet while Lord Verney was (as he in his grand manner termed it) "among them." He knew the danger of a vague suspicion seizing on his mind, how fast it clung, how it fermented like yeast, fantastic and obstinate as a foolish woman's jealousy — and as men sometimes will, he even magnified this danger. Altogether, Cleve was not causelessly anxious and alarmed. He had in the dark to navigate a channel which even in broad daylight tasked a good steersman.

When Cleve reached Verney House it was eight o'clock. Lord Verney had ordered his brougham at halfpast, and was going down to the House; he had something to say on Lord Frompington's bill. It was not very new, nor very deep, nor very much; but he had been close at it for the last three weeks. He had amused many gentlemen — and sometimes even ladies — at many dinner parties, with a very exact recital of his views. I cannot say that they were exactly *his*, for they were culled, perhaps unconsciously, from a variety of magazine articles and pamphlets, which happened to take Lord Verney's view of the question.

It is not given to any mortal to have his heart's desire in everything. Lord Verney had a great deal of this world's good things — wealth, family, rank. But he chose to aim at official station, and here his stars denied him.

Some people thought him a goose, and some only a bore. He was, as we know, pompous, conceited, obstinate, also weak and dry. His grandfather had been a cabinet minister, respectable and silent; and was not he wiser, brighter, and more learned than his grandfather? "Why on earth should not *he*?" His influence commanded two boroughs, and virtually two counties. The minister, therefore, treated him with distinction; and spoke of him confidentially as horribly foolish, impracticable, and at times positively impertinent.

Lord Verney was subject to small pets and huffs, and sometimes was affronted with the Premier for four or five weeks together, although the fact escaped his notice. And when the viscount relented, he would make him a visit to quiet his mind, and show him that friendly relations were reestablished; and the minister would say, "Here comes that d —— d Verney; I suppose I must give him half-an-hour!" and when the peer departed, thinking he had made the minister happy, the minister was seriously debating whether Lord Verney's boroughs were worth the price of Lord Verney's society.

His lordship was now in that sacred apartment, his library; where not even Cleve had a right to disturb him uninvited. Preliminaries, however, were now arranged; the servant announced him, and Cleve was commanded to enter.

"I have just had a line to say I shall be in time at halfpast ten o'clock, about it. Frompington's bill won't be on till then; and take that chair and sit down, about it, won't you? I've a good many things on my mind; people put things upon me. *Some* people think I have a turn for business, and they ask me to consider and direct matters about *theirs*, and I do what I can. There was poor Wimbledon, who died, about it, seven years ago. You remember Wimbledon — or — I say — you either remember him or you don't recollect him; but in either case it's of no importance. Let me see: Lady Wimbledon — she's connected with you, about it — your mother, remotely — remotely also with us, the Verneys. I've had a world of trouble about her settlements — I can't describe — I can't describe — I was not well advised, in fact, to accept the trust at all. Long ago, when poor Frompington — I mean poor Wimbledon, of course — have I been saying Wimbledon?"

Cleve at once satisfied him.

"Yes, of course. When poor Wimbledon looked as healthy and as strong as I do at this moment, about it — a long time ago. Poor Wimbledon! — he fancied, I suppose, I had some little turn, about it, for business — *some* of my friends *do* — and I accepted the trust when poor Wimbledon looked as little likely to be hurried into eternity, about it, as I do. I had a regard for him, poor Wimbledon, and he had a respect for me, and thought I could be of use to him after he was dead, and I have endeavoured, and people think I *have*. But Lady Wimbledon, the dowager, poor woman! She's very long-winded, poor soul, and gives me an infinity of trouble. One can't say to a lady, 'You are detaining me; you are wandering from the subject; you fail to come to the point.' It would be taking a liberty, or something, about it. I had not seen Lady Wimbledon, simple 'oman, for seven years or more. It's a very entangled business, and I confess it seems rather unfair, that I should have my time, already sufficiently occupied with other, as I think, more important affairs, so seriously interrupted and abridged. There's going to be a bill filed — yes, and a great deal of annoyance. She has one unmarried daughter, Caroline, about it, who is not to have any power over her money until she is thirty-one. She's not that now. It was hardly fair to me, putting it in trust so long. She is a very superior person — a young woman one does not meet with every day, about it; and — and very apprehensive — a great deal of mind — quite unusual. Do you know her?"

The viscount raised his eyes toward the ceiling with a smile that was mysterious and pleased.

Cleve did know that young lady of eight-and-twenty, and her dowager mamma, "simple 'oman," who had pursued him with extraordinary spirit and tenacity for several years, but that was past and over. Cleve experienced a thrill of pain at his heart. He suspected that the old torturing idea was again active in his uncle's mind.

Yes, he *did* know them — ridiculous old woman; and the girl — he believed she'd marry any one; he fancied she would have done *him* that honour at one time, and he fancied that the trust, if it was to end when she was thirty-one, could not be very long in force.

"My dear Cleve, don't you think that's rather an odd way of speaking of a young lady? People used not in my time — that is, when I was a young man of two or three-and-twenty, about it — to talk so of young ladies. It was not considered a thing that ought to be done. I — I never heard a word of the kind."

Lord Verney's chivalry had actually called a little pink flush to his old cheeks, and he looked very seriously still at the cornice, and tapped a little nervous tattoo with his pencil-case on the table as he did so.

"I really did not mean — I only meant — in fact, uncle, I tell *you* everything; and poor Caroline is *so* much older than I, it always struck me as amusing."

"Their man of business in matters of law is Mr. Larkington, about it. *Our* man, you know — you know him."

"Oh, yes. They could not do better. Mr. Larkin — a very shrewd fellow. I went, by-the-by, to see that old man, Dingwell."

"Ah, well, very good. We'll talk of that by-and-by, if you please; but it has been occurring to my mind, Cleve, that — that you should look about you. In fact, if you don't like one young lady, you may like another. It strikes me I never saw a greater number of pretty young women, about it, than there are at present in town. I do assure you, at that ball — where was it? — the place I saw you, and sent you down to the division — don't you remember? — and next day, I told you, I think, they never said so much as 'I'm obliged to you' for what I had done, though it was the saving of them, about it. I say I was quite struck; the spectacle was quite charming, about it, from no other cause; and you know there is Ethel — I always said Ethel —

and there *can* be no objection there; and I have distinct reasons for wishing you to be well connected, about it — in a political sense — and there is no harm in a little *money*; and, in fact, I have made up my mind, my dear Cleve, it is indispensable, and you *must* marry. I'm quite clear upon the point."

"I can promise you, my dear uncle, that I shan't marry without your approbation."

"Well, I rather took that for granted," observed Lord Verney, with dry solemnity.

"Of course. I only say it's very difficult sometimes to see what's wisest. I have you, I know, uncle, to direct me; but you must allow I have also your example. You relied entirely upon yourself for your political position. You made it without the aid of any such step, and I should be only too proud to follow your example."

"A — yes — but the cases are different; there's a difference, about it. As I said in the debate on the Jewish Disabilities, there arc no two cases, about it, precisely parallel; and I've given my serious consideration to the subject, and I am satisfied that for every reason you ought to choose a wife *immediately*; there's *no* reason against it, and you ought to choose a wife, about it, immediately; and my mind is made up quite decidedly, and I have spoken repeatedly; but now I tell you I recognise no reason for further delay — no reason against the step, and every reason for it; and in short, I shall have no choice but to treat any dilatory procedure in the matter as amounting to a distinct trifling with my known wishes, desire, and opinion."

And the Right Hon. Lord Viscount Verney smote his thin hand emphatically at these words, upon the table, as he used to do in his place in the House.

Then followed an impressive silence, the peer holding his head high, and looking a little flushed; and Cleve very pale, with the ghost of the smile he had worn a few minutes before.

There are instruments that detect and measure with a beautiful accuracy, the presence and force of invisible influences — heat, electricity, air, moisture. If among all these "meters" — electronometers, hygrometers, anemometers — an *odynometer*, to detect the presence and measure the intensity of hidden *pain*, were procurable, and applied to the breast of that pale, smiling young man at that moment, I wonder to what degree in its scale its index would have pointed!

Cleve intended to make some slight and playful remark, he knew not what, but his voice failed him.

He had been thinking of this possibility — of this *hour* — for many a day, as some men will of the Day of Judgment, and putting it aside as a hateful thought, possibly never to be embodied in *fact*, and here it was come upon him, suddenly, inevitably, in all its terrors.

"Well, certainly, uncle, — as you wish it. I must look about me — seriously. I know you wish me to be happy. I'm very grateful; you have always bestowed so much of your thought and care upon me — *too* good, a great deal."

So spoke the young man — white as that sheet of paper on which his uncle had been pencilling two or three of what he called his thoughts — and almost as unconscious of the import of the words he repeated.

"I'm glad, my dear Cleve, you are sensible that I have been, I may say, kind; and now let me say that I think Ethel has a great deal in her favour. There are others, however, I am well aware, and there is time to look about, but I should wish something settled *this* season — in fact, before we break up, about it; in short I have, as I said, made up my mind. I don't act without reasons; I never do, and mine are conclusive; and it was on this topic, my dear Cleve, I wished to see you. And now I think you may as well have some dinner. I'm afraid I've detained you here rather long."

And Lord Verney rose, and moved toward a bookcase with Hansard in it, to signify that the conference was ended, and that he desired to be alone in his study.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN OVATION.

Cleve had no dinner; he had supped full of horrors. He got on his coat and hat, and appeared nowhere that evening, but took an immense walk instead, in the hope I dare say of tiring out his agony — perhaps simply because quietude and uninterrupted thought were unendurable.

Next day hope began a little to revive. An inventive mind is inexhaustible; and are not the resources of delay always considerable?

Who could have been acting upon his uncle's mind in this matter? The spring of Lord Verney's action was seldom quite within himself. All at once he recollected that he had come suddenly upon what seemed an unusually secret conference between his uncle and Mr. Larkin about ten days since; it was in the library. He was sure the conversation had some reference to him. His uncle looked both annoyed and embarrassed when he came into the room; even the practised countenance of Mr. Larkin betrayed some faint signs of confusion.

Larkin he knew had been down in the neighbourhood of Ware, and probably in Cardyllian. Had anything reached him about the Malory romance? Mr. Larkin was a man who would not stick at trifles in hunting up evidence, and all that concerned *him* would now interest Mr. Larkin, and Cleve had too high an opinion of that gentleman's sagacity not to assume that if he had obtained the clue to his mystery he would make capital of the secret with Lord Verney. *Viscera magnorum domuum* — nothing like secret relations — confidences, — and what might not come of this? Of course, the first result would be a peremptory order on which Lord Verney had spoken last night. The only safety for the young man, it will be concluded, is to marry him suitably forthwith.

And — by Jove! — a flash of light! He had it! The whole thing was clear now. Yes; *he* was to be married to Caroline Oldys, because Mr. Larkin was the professional right hand of that family, and so the attorney would glide ultimately into the absolute command of the House of Verney!

To think of that indescribably vulgar rogue's actually shaping the fortunes and meting out the tortures of Cleve Verney.

How much of our miseries result from the folly of those who would serve us! Here was Viscount Verney with, as respected Cleve, the issues of life very much in his fingers, dropping through sheer imbecility into the coarse hands of that odious attorney!

Cleve trembled with rage as he thought of the degradation to which that pompous fool, Lord Verney, was consigning him, yet what was to be done? Cleve was absolutely at the disposal of the peer, and the peer was unconsciously placing himself in the hands of Mr. Larkin, to be worked like a puppet, and spoken for by the Pharisaical attorney.

Cleve's theory hung together plausibly. It would have been gross folly to betray his jealousy of the attorney, whose opportunities with his uncle he had no means of limiting or interrupting, and against whom he had as yet no case.

He was gifted with a pretty talent for dissimulation; Mr. Larkin congratulated himself in secret upon Cleve's growing esteem and confidence. The young gentleman's manner was gracious and even friendly to a degree that was quite marked, and the unconscious attorney would have been startled had he learned on a sudden how much he hated him.

Ware — that great house which all across the estuary in which its princely front was reflected, made quite a feature in the landscape sketched by so many tourists, from the pier on the shingle of Cardyllian on bright summer days, was about to be rehabilitated, and very splendid doings were to follow.

In the mean time, before the architects and contractors, the plumbers, and painters, and carpenters, and carvers, and gilders had taken possession, and before those wonderful artists in stucco who were to encrust and overspread the ceilings with noble designs, rich and graceful and light, of fruit and flowers and cupids, and from memory, not having read the guide-book of Cardyllian and its vicinity for more than a year, I should be afraid to say what arabesques, and imagery beside, had entered with their cements and their scaffolding; and before the three brother artists had got their passports for England who were to paint on the panels of the doors such festive pieces as Watteau loved. In short, before the chaos and confusion that attend the throes of that sort of creation had set in, Lord Verney was to make a visit of a few days to Ware, and was to visit Cardyllian and to receive a congratulatory address from the corporation of that ancient town, and to inspect the gas-works (which I am glad to say are hid away in a little hollow), and the two fountains which supply the town — constructed, as the inscription tells, at the expense of “the Right Honourable Kiffyn Fulke, Nineteenth Viscount Verney, and Twenty-ninth Baron Penruthyn, of Malory.” What else his lordship was to see, and to do, and to say on the day of his visit the county and other newspapers round about printed when the spectacle was actually over, and the great doings matter of history.

There were arches of evergreens and artificial flowers of paper, among which were very tolerable hollyhocks, though the roses were startling. Under these, Lord Viscount Verney and the “distinguished party” who accompanied him passed up Castle Street to the town-hall, where he was received by the mayor and town-councillors, accompanied and fortified by the town-clerk and other functionaries, all smiling except the mayor, on whom weighed the solemn responsibility of having to read the address, a composition, and no mean one, of the Rev. Dr. Splayfoot, who attended with parental anxiety “to see the little matter through,” as he phrased it, and was so awfully engaged that Mrs. Splayfoot, who was on his arm, and asked him twice, in a whisper, whether the tall lady in purple silk was Lady Wimbledon, without receiving the slightest intimation that she was so much as heard, remarked testily that she hoped he would not write many more addresses, inasmuch as it made him illbred to that degree that if the town-hall had fallen during the reading, he never would have perceived it till he had shaken his ears in kingdom-come. Lord Verney read his answer, which there was much anxiety and pressure to hear.

“Now it really *was* beautiful — *wasn’t* it?” our friend Mrs. Jones, the draper, whispered, in particular reference to that part of it, in which the viscount invoked the blessing of the Almighty upon himself and his doings, gracefully admitting that in contravention of the Divine will and the decrees of heaven, even he could not be expected to accomplish much, though with the best intentions. And Captain Shrapnell, who felt that the sentiment was religious, and was anxious to be conspicuous, standing with his hat in his hand, with a sublime expression of countenance, said in an audible voice—“*Amen*.”

All this over, and the building inspected, the distinguished party were conducted by the mayor, the militia band accompanying their march — [air — “The Meeting of the Waters”] — to the “Fountains” in Gunner’s Lane, to which I have already alluded.

Here they were greeted by a detachment of the Llanwthyn Temperance Union, headed by short, fat Thomas Pritchard, the interesting apostle of total abstinence, who used to preach on the subject alternately in Welsh and English in all the towns who would hear his gospel, in most of which he was remembered as having been repeatedly fined for public intoxication, and known by the familiar pet-name of “Swipey Tom,” before his remarkable conversion.

Mr. Pritchard now led the choir of the Lanwthyn Temperance Union, consisting of seven members, of various sizes, dressed in their Sunday costume, and standing in a row in front of fountain No. 1 — each with his hat in his left hand and a tumbler of fair water in his right.

Good Mrs. Jones, who had a vague sense of fun, and remembered anecdotes of the principal figure in this imposing spectacle, did laugh a little modestly into her handkerchief, and answered the admonitory jog of her husband’s elbow by pleading— “*Poor* fellows! Well, you know it *is* odd — there’s no denying *that* you *know*;” and from the background were heard some jeers from the excursionists who visited Cardyllian for that gala, which kept Hughes, the Cardyllian policeman, and Evans, the other “horney,” who had been drafted from Llwynan, to help to overawe the turbulent, very hot and active during that part of the ceremony.

Particularly unruly was John Swillers, who, having failed as a publican in Liverpool, in consequence of his practice of drinking the greater part of his own stock in trade, had migrated to “The Golden Posts” in Church Street, Cardyllian, where he ceased to roll his barrel, set up his tressels, and had tabernacled for the present, drinking his usual proportion of his own liquors, and expecting the hour of a new migration.

Over the heads of the spectators and the admiring natives of Cardyllian were heard such exhortations as “Go it, Swipey.” “There’s gin in that,” “Five shillin’s for his vorship, Swipey,” “I say, Swipey Tom, pay your score at the Golden Posts, will ye?” “Will ye go a bit on the stretcher, Swipey?” “Here’s two horneys as ‘ll take ye home arter that.”

And these interruptions, I am sorry to say, continued, notwithstanding the remonstrances which Mr. Hughes addressed almost pathetically to John Swillers of the Golden Posts, as a respectable citizen of Cardyllian, one from whose position the police were led to expect assistance and the populace an example. There was something in these expostulations which struck John Swillers, for he would look with a tipsy solemnity in Hughes's face while he delivered them, and once took his hand, rather affectionately, and said, "That's your sort." But invariably these unpleasant interpolations were resumed, and did not cease until this moral exhibition had ended with the last verse of the temperance song, chanted by the deputation with great vigour, in unison, and which, as the reader will perceive, had in it a Bacchanalian character, which struck even the gravest listeners as a hollow mockery: —

Refreshing more than sinful swipes, The weary man Who quaffs a can, That sparkling foams through leaden pipes.

Chorus.

Let every man Then, fill his can, And fill the glass Of every lass In brimming bumpers sparkling clear, To pledge the health of Verney's Peer!

And then came a chill and ghastly "hip-hip, hurrah," and with some gracious inquiries on Lord Verney's part, as to the numbers, progress, and finances of "their interesting association," and a subscription of ten pounds, which Mr. John Swillers took leave to remark, "wouldn't be laid out on water, by *no* means," the viscount, with grand and radiant Mr. Larkin at his elbow, and frequently murmuring in his ear — to the infinite disgust of my friend, Wynne Williams, the Cardyllian attorney, thus out-strutted and out-crowed on his own rustic elevation — was winning golden opinions from all sorts of men.

The party went on, after the wonders of the town had been exhausted, to look at Malory, and thence returned to a collation, at which toasts were toasted and speeches spoken, and Captain Shrapnell spoke, by arrangement, for the ladies of Cardyllian in his usual graceful and facetious manner, with all the puns and happy allusions which a month's private diligence, and, I am sorry to say, some shameless plagiarisms from three old numbers of poor Tom Hood's "Comic Annual," could get together, and the gallant captain concluded by observing that the noble lord whom they had that day the honour and happiness to congratulate, intended, he understood, everything that was splendid and liberal and handsome, and that the town of Cardyllian, in the full radiance of the meridian sunshine, whose golden splendour proceeded from the *south*— "The cardinal point at which the great house of Ware is visible from the Green of Cardyllian" — (hear, hear, and laughter)— "there remained but one grievance to be redressed, and that set to rights, every ground of complaint would slumber for ever, he might say, in the great bed of Ware" — (loud cheers and laughter)— "and what was that complaint? He was instructed by his fair, lovely, and beautiful clients — the ladies of Cardyllian — some of whom he saw in the gallery, and some still more happily situated at the festive board" — (a laugh). "Well, he was, he repeated, instructed by them to say that there was one obvious duty which the noble lord owed to his ancient name — to the fame of his public position — to the coronet, whose golden band encircled his distinguished brow — and above all, to the ancient feudal dependency of Cardyllian" — (hear, hear)— "and that was to select from his county's beauty, fascination, and accomplishment, and he might say loveliness, a partner worthy to share the ermine and the coronet and the name and the — ermine" (hear, hear) "of the ancient house of Verney" (loud cheers); "and need he add that when the selection was made, it was hoped and trusted and aspired after, that the selection would not be made a hundred miles away from the ivied turrets, the feudal ruins, the gushing fountains, and the spacious town-hall of Cardyllian" (loud and long-continued cheering, amid which the gallant captain, very hot, and red, and smiling furiously, sat down with a sort of lurch, and drank off a glass of champagne, and laughed and giggled a little in his chair, while the "cheering and laughter" continued).

And Lord Verney rose, not at all hurt by this liberty, very much amused on the contrary, and in high good humour his lordship said, —

"Allow me to say — I am sure you will" — (hear, hear, and cries of "We will")— "I say, I am sure you will permit me to say that the ladies of Cardyllian, a-a-about it, seem to me to have chosen a very eloquent spokesman in the gallant, and I have no doubt, distinguished officer who has just addressed the house. We have all been entertained by the eloquence of Captain Scollop" — [here the mayor deferentially whispered something to the noble orator]— "I beg pardon — Captain Grapnell — who sits at the table, with his glass of wine, about it — and very good wine it is — his glass, I say, where it should be, in his hand" — (hear, hear, and laughter, and “You got it there, captain”). “And I assure the gallant captain I did not mean to be severe — only we were all joking — and I do say that he has his hand — my gallant friend, Captain Grabblet, has it — where every gallant officer’s ought to be, about it, and that is, upon his weapon” — (hear, hear, laughter, and cries of “His lordship’s too strong for you, captain”). “I don’t mean to hurt him, though, about it,” (renewed cries of hear, and laughter, during which the captain shook his ears a little, smiling into his glass rather foolishly, as a man who was getting the worst of it, and knew it, but took it pleasantly). “No, it would not be fair to the ladies about it,” (renewed laughter and cheering), “and all I *will* say is this, about it — there are parts of Captain Scraplet’s speech, which I shan’t undertake to answer at this moment. I feel that I am trespassing, about it, for a much longer time than I had intended,” (loud cries of “No, no, go on, go on,” and cheering, during which the mayor whispered something to the noble lord, who, having heard it twice or thrice repeated, nodded to the mayor in evident apprehension, and when silence was restored, proceeded to say), “I have just heard, without meaning to say anything unfair of the gallant captain, Captain Scalpel, that he is hardly himself qualified to give me the excellent advice, about it, which I received from him; for they tell me that he has rather run away, about it, from his colours, on that occasion.” (Great laughter and cheering). “I should be sorry to wound Captain Shat — Scat — Scrap, the gallant captain, to wound him, I say, even in front.” (Laughter, cheering, and a voice from the gallery “Hit him hard, and he won’t swell,” “Order.”) “But I think I was bound to make that observation in the interest of the ladies of Cardyllian, about it;” (renewed laughter); “and, for my part, I promise my gallant friend — my — captain — about it — that although I may take some time, like himself” (loud laughter); “although I cannot let fall, about it, any observation that may commit me, yet I do promise to meditate on the excellent advice he has been so good as to give me, about it.” And the noble lord resumed his seat amid uproarious cheering and general laughter, wondering what had happened to put him in the vein, and regretting that some of the people at Downing Street had not been present to hear it, and witness its effect.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OLD FRIENDS ON THE GREEN.

Tom Sedley saw the Etherage girls on the green, and instead of assisting as he had intended, at the great doings in the town, he walked over to have a talk with them.

People who know Cardyllian remember the two seats, partly stone, partly wood, which are placed on the green, near the margin of the sea — seats without backs — on which you can sit with equal comfort, facing the water and the distant mountains, or the white-fronted town and old Castle of Cardyllian. Looking toward this latter prospect, the ladies sat, interested, no doubt, though they preferred a distant view, in the unusual bustle of the quiet old place.

On one of these seats sat Charity and Agnes, and as he approached, smiling, up got Charity and walked some steps towards him! looking kindly, but not smiling, for that was not her wont, and with her thin hand, in doe-skin glove, extended to greet him.

"How are you, Thomas Sedley? when did you come?" asked Miss Charity, much gladder to see him than she appeared.

"I arrived this morning; you're all well, I hope;" he was looking at Agnes, and would have got away from Miss Charity, but that she held him still by the hand.

"All very well, thank you, except Agnes. I don't think she's very well. I have ever so much to tell you when you and I have a quiet opportunity, but not now," — she was speaking in a low tone;— "and now go and ask Agnes how she is."

So he did. She smiled a little languidly, he thought, and was not looking very strong, but prettier than ever — so *very* pretty! She blushed too, very brilliantly, as he approached; it would have been flattering had he not seen Cleve Verney walking quickly over the green toward the Etherage group. For whom was the blush? Two gentlemen had fired simultaneously.

"Your bird? I rather think *my* bird? — isn't it?"

Now Tom Sedley did not think the bird his, and he felt, somehow, strangely vexed. And he got through his greeting uncomfortably; his mind was away with Cleve Verney, who was drawing quickly near.

"Oh! Mr. Verney, *what* a time it is since we saw you last!" exclaimed emphatic Miss Charity; "I really began to think you'd *never* come."

"Very good of you, Miss Etherage, to think about me."

"And you never gave me your subscription for our poor old women, last winter!"

"Oh! my subscription? I'll give it now — what was it to be — a pound?"

"No, you promised only ten shillings, but it *ought* to be a pound. I think less would be *shameful*."

"Then, Miss Agnes, shall it be a pound?" he said, turning to her with a laugh — with his fingers in his purse, "whatever you say I'll do."

"*Agnes* — of *course*, a pound," said Charity, in her nursery style of admonition.

"Charity says it must be a pound," answered Agnes.

"And *you* say so?"

"Of course, I must."

"Then a pound it *is* — and mind," he added, laughing, and turning to Miss Charity with the coin in his fingers, "I'm to figure in your book of benefactors — your golden book of saints, or *martyrs*, rather; but you need not put down my name, only 'The old woman's friend,' or 'A lover of flannel' or 'A promoter of petticoats,' or any other benevolent alias you think becoming."

"'The old woman's friend,' will do very nicely," said Charity, gravely. "Thank you, Mr. Verney, and we were *so* glad to hear that your uncle has succeeded at last to the peerage. He can be of such *use* — you really would be — he and you *both*, Mr. Verney — quite amazed and shocked, if you knew how much poverty there is in this town."

"It's well he does not know just now, for he wants all his wits about him. This is a critical occasion, you know, and the town expects great things from a practised orator. I've stolen away, just for five minutes, to ask you the news. We are at Ware, for a few days; only two or three friends with us. They came across in my boat to-day. We are going to set all the tradespeople on earth loose upon the house in a few days. It is to be done in an incredibly short time; and my uncle is talking of getting down some of his old lady relations to act chaperon, and we hope to have you all over there. You know it's all made up, that little coldness between my uncle and your father. I'm so glad. Your father wrote him such a nice note to-day explaining his absence — he never goes into a crowd, he says — and Lord Verney wrote him a line to say, if he would allow him, he would go up to Hazelden to pay his respects this afternoon."

This move was a suggestion of Mr. Larkin's, who was pretty well up in election strategy.

"I've ascertained, my lord, he's good for a hundred and thirty-seven votes in the county, and your lordship has managed him with such consummate tact that a very little more will, with the Divine blessing, induce the happiest, and I may say, considering the disparity of your lordship's relations and his, the most *dutiful* feelings on his part — resulting, in fact, in your lordship's obtaining the absolute command of the constituency. You were defeated, my lord, last time, by only forty-three votes, with his influence against you. If your lordship were to start your nephew, Mr. Cleve Verney, for it next time, having made your ground good with him, he would be returned, humanly speaking, by a sweeping majority."

"So, Lord Verney's going up to see papa! Agnes, *we* ought to be at home. He must have luncheon."

"No — a thousand thanks — but all that's explained. There's luncheon to be in the town-hall — it's part of the programme — and speeches — and all that kind of rubbish; so he can only run up for a few minutes, just to say, 'How do ye do?' and away again. So, pray, don't think of going all that way, and he'll come here to be introduced, and make your acquaintance. And now tell me all your news."

"Well, those odd people went away from Malory" — began Charity.

"Oh, yes, I heard, I think, something of that," said Cleve, intending to change the subject, perhaps; but Miss Charity went on, for in that eventless scene an occurrence of any kind is too precious to be struck out of the record on any ground.

"They went away as mysteriously as they came — almost — and so suddenly" ——

"You forgot, Charity, dear, Mr. Verney was at Ware when they went, and here two or three times after they left Malory."

"So I *was*," said Cleve, with an uneasy glance at Tom Sedley; "I *knew* I had heard something of it."

"Oh, yes; and they say that the old man was both mad and in debt."

"What a combination!" said Cleve.

"Yes, I assure you, and a Jew came down with twenty or thirty bailiffs — I'm only telling you what Mr. Apjohn heard, and the people here tell us — and a mad doctor, and people with strait waistcoats, and they surrounded Malory; but he was gone! — not a human being knew where — and that handsome girl, wasn't she quite *bee-au-tiful*?"

"Oh, what everyone says, you know, *must* be true," said Cleve.

"What do *you* say?" she urged upon Tom Sedley.

"Oh, I say ditto to everyone, of course."

"Well, I should think so, for you know you are quite desperately in love with her," said Miss Charity.

"*I?* Why, I really never spoke to her in all my life. Now, if you had said Cleve Verney."

"Oh, yes! If you had named *me*. But, by Jove! there they go. Do you see? My uncle and the mayor, and all the lesser people, trooping away to the town-hall. Goodbye! I haven't another moment. You'll be here, I *hope*, when we get out; *do, pray*. I have not a moment."

And he meant a glance for Miss Agnes, but it lost itself in air, for that young lady was looking down, in a little reverie, on the grass, at the tip of her tiny boot.

"*There's* old Miss Christian *out*, I *declare*!" exclaimed Charity. "Did you ever *hear* of such a thing? I *wonder* whether Doctor Lyster knows she is out to-day. I'll just go and speak to her. If he doesn't, I'll simply tell her she is *mad*!"

And away marched Miss Charity, bent upon finding out, as she said, all about it.

"Agnes," said Tom Sedley, "it seemed to me to-day, you were not glad to see me. Are you vexed with me?"

"Vexed? No, indeed!" she said, gently, and looking up with a smile.

"And your sister said — — " Tom paused, for he did not know whether Charity's whisper about her not having been "very strong" might not be a confidence.

"*What* does Charity say?" asked Agnes, almost sharply, while a little flush appeared in her cheeks.

"Well, she said she did not think you were so strong as usual. That was all."

"That was *all* — no great consequence," said she, with a little smile upon the grass and sea-pinks — a smile that was bitter.

"You can't think I meant that, little Agnes, *I* of all people; but I never was good at talking. And you *know* I did not mean that."

"People often say — *I* do, I know — what they mean without intending it," she answered, carelessly. "I *know* you would not make a rude speech — I'm sure of that; and as to what we say accidentally, can it signify very much? Mr. Verney said he was coming back after the speeches, and Lord Verney, he said, didn't he? I wonder you don't look in at the town-hall. You could make us laugh by telling all about it, by-and-by — that is, if we happen to see you again."

"Of *course* you should see me again."

"I meant this evening; tomorrow, perhaps, we should," said she.

"If I went there; but I'm not going. I think that old fellow, Lord Verney, Cleve's uncle, is an impertinent old muff. Every one knows he's a muff, though he *is* Cleve's uncle; he gave me just one finger to-day, and looked at me as if I ought to be anywhere but where I was. I have as good a right as *he* to be in Cardyllian, and I venture to say the people like me a great deal better than they like him, or ever will."

"And so you punish him by refusing your countenance to this — what shall I call it? — gala."

"Oh! of course you take the Verneys' part against me; they are swells, and I am a nobody."

He thought Miss Agnes coloured a little at this remark. The blood grows sensitive and capricious when people are ailing, and a hint is enough to send it to and fro; but she said only, —

"I never heard of the feud before. I thought that you and Mr. Verney were very good friends."

"So we were; so we *are* — Cleve and I. Of course, I was speaking of the old lord. Cleve, of course, no one ever hears anything but praises of Cleve. I suppose I ought to beg your pardon for having talked as I did of old Lord

Verney; it's petty treason, isn't it, to talk lightly of a Verney, in Cardyllian or its neighbourhood?" said Sedley, a little sourly.

"I don't know *that*; but I dare say, if you mean to ask leave to fish or shoot, it might be as well not to attack them."

"Well, I shan't in your hearing."

And with this speech came a silence.

"I don't think, somehow, that Cleve is as frank with me as he used to be. Can you imagine any reason?" said Tom, after an interval.

"*I?* No, upon my word — unless you are as frank to him about his uncle, as you have been with me."

"Well, I'm *not*. I never spoke to him about his uncle. But Shrapnell, who tells me all the news of Cardyllian while I'm away" — this was pointedly spoken— "said, I thought, that he had not been down here ever since the Malory people left, and I find that he was here for a week — at least at Ware — last autumn, for a fortnight; and he never told me, though he knew, for I said so to him, that I thought that he had stayed away; and I think that was very odd."

"He may have thought that he was not bound to account to you for his time and movements," said Miss Agnes.

"Well, he *was* here; Mrs. Jones was good enough to tell me so, though other people make a secret of it. *You* saw him here, I dare say."

"Yes, he *was* here, for a few days. I think in October, or the end of September."

"Oh! thank you. But, as I said, I had heard that already from Mrs. Jones, who is a most inconvenient gossip upon nearly *all* subjects."

"I rather like Mrs. Jones; you mean the 'draper,' as we call her? and if Mr. Verney is not as communicative as you would have him, I really can't help it. I can only assure you, for your comfort, that the mysterious tenants of Malory had disappeared long before that visit."

"I know perfectly well when they went away," said Sedley, drily.

Miss Agnes nodded with a scarcely perceptible smile.

"And I know — that is, I found out afterwards — that he admired her, I mean the young lady — Margaret, they called her — awfully. He never let me know it himself, though. I hate fellows being so close and dark about everything, and I've found out other things; and, in short, if people don't like to tell me their — *secrets* I won't call them, for everyone in Cardyllian knows all about them — I'm hanged if I ask them. All I know is, that Cleve is going to live a good deal at Ware, which means at Cardyllian, which will be a charming thing, a positive blessing, — won't it? — for the inhabitants and neighbours; and that I shall trouble them very little henceforward with my presence. There's Charity beckoning to me; would you mind my going to see what she wants?"

So, dismissed, away he ran like a "fielder" after a "by," as he had often run over the same ground before.

"Thomas Sedley, I want you to tell Lyster, the apothecary, to send a small bottle of *sal volatile* to Miss Christian immediately. I'd go myself — it's only round the corner — but I'm afraid of the crowd. If he can give it to you now, perhaps you'd bring it, and I'll wait here."

When he brought back the phial, and Miss Charity had given it with a message at Miss Christian's trelliced door, she took Tom's arm, and said, —

"She has not been looking well."

"You mean Agnes?" conjectured he.

"Yes, of course. She's not herself. She does not tell me, but I *know* the cause, and, as an old friend of ours, and a friend, beside, of Mr. Cleve Verney, I must tell you that I think he is using her *disgracefully*."

"Really?"

"Yes, *most flagitiously*."

"How do you mean? Shrapnell wrote me word that he was very attentive, and used to join her in her walks; and afterwards he said that he had been mistaken, and discovered that he was awfully in love with the young lady at Malory."

"*Don't* believe a *word* of it. I *wonder* at Captain Shrapnell circulating such *insanity*. He must *know* how it really was, and *is*. I look upon it as *perfectly wicked*, the way that Captain Shrapnell talks. You're not to mention it, *of course*, to anyone. It would be *scandalous* of you, Thomas Sedley, to *think* of breathing a *word* to *mortal* — *mind that*; but I'm certain you *wouldn't*."

"What a beast Cleve Verney has turned out!" exclaimed Tom Sedley. "Do you think she still cares for him?"

"Why, of course she does. If he had been paying his addresses to *me*, and that *I* had grown by his perseverance and *devotion* to like him, do you think, Thomas Sedley, that although I might give him up in consequence of his misconduct, that I could ever cease to feel the same kind of feeling about him?" And as she put this incongruous case, she held Tom Sedley's arm firmly, showing her bony wrist above her glove; and with her gaunt brown face and saucer eyes turned full upon him, rather fiercely, Tom felt an inward convulsion at the picture of Cleve's adorations at this shrine, and the melting of the nymph, which by a miracle he repressed.

"But *you* may have more constancy than Agnes," he suggested.

"Don't talk like a *fool*, Thomas Sedley. *Every nice girl* is the *same*."

"May I talk to Cleve about it?"

"On *no account*. No *nice* girl could marry him *now*, and an apology would be simply *ridiculous*. *I* have not spoken to him on the subject, and though I had intended cutting him, my friend Mrs. Splayfoot was so clear that I should meet him just as usual, that I do control the *expression* of my feelings, and endeavour to talk to him indifferently, though I should like *uncommonly* to tell him how *odious* I shall always think him."

"Yes, I remember," said Tom, who had been pondering. "Cleve *did* tell me, that time — it's more than a year ago now — it was a year in autumn — that he admired Agnes, and used to walk with you on the green every day; he *did* certainly. I must do him that justice. But suppose Agnes did not show that she liked him, he might not have seen any harm."

"That's the way you men always take one another's parts. I must say, I think it is *odious*!" exclaimed Charity, with a flush in her thin cheeks, and a terrible emphasis.

"But, I say, *did* she let him see that she liked him?"

"*No*, of *course* she didn't. No *nice* girl *would*. But of course he *saw* it," argued Charity.

"Oh, then she *showed* it?"

"No, she did *not* show it; there was *nothing* in *any*thing she *said* or *did*, that *could* lead *any*one, by look, or word, or act, to imagine that she liked him. How *can* you be so *perverse* and *ridiculous*, Thomas Sedley, to think she'd *show* her liking? Why, even *I* don't know it. I never *saw* it. She's a *great* deal *too nice*. You don't *know* Agnes. I should not venture to *hint* at it myself. Gracious goodness! What a *fool* you are, Thomas Sedley! Hush."

The concluding caution was administered in consequence of their having got very near the seat where Agnes was sitting.

“Miss Christian is only nervous, poor old thing! and Thomas Sedley has been getting *sal volatile* for her, and she’ll be quite well in a day or two. Hadn’t we better walk a little up and down; it’s growing too cold for you to sit any longer, Agnes, dear. Come.”

And up got obedient Agnes, and the party of three walked up and down the green, conversing upon all sorts of subjects but the one so ably handled by Charity and Tom Sedley in their two or three minutes’ private talk.

And now the noble lord and his party, and the mayor, and the corporation, and Mr. Larkin, and Captain Shrapnell, and many other celebrities, were seen slowly emerging from the lane that passes the George Inn, upon the green; and the peer having said a word or two to the mayor, and also to Lady Wimbledon, and bowed and pointed toward the jetty, the main body proceeded slowly toward that point, while Lord Verney, accompanied by Cleve, walked grandly towards the young ladies who were to be presented.

Tom Sedley, observing this movement, took his leave hastily, and, in rather a marked way, walked off at right angles with Lord Verney’s line of march, twirling his cane.

CHAPTER XIX.

VANE ETHERAGE GREETS LORD VERNEY.

So the great Lord Verney, with the flush of his brilliant successes in the town-hall still upon his thin cheeks, and a countenance dry and solemn, to which smiling came not easily, made the acquaintance of the Miss Etherages, and observed that the younger was "sweetly pretty, about it, and her elder sister appeared to him a particularly sensible young woman, and was, he understood, very useful in the charities, and things." And he repeated to them in his formal way, his hope of seeing them at Ware, and was as gracious as such a man can be, and instead of attorneys and writs sent grouse and grapes to Hazelden.

And thus this narrow man, who did not easily forgive, expanded and forgave, and the secret of the subsidence of the quarrel, and of the Christian solution of the "difficulty," was simply Mr. Vane Etherage's hundred and thirty votes in the county.

What a blessing to these counties is representative government, with its attendant institution of the canvass! It is the one galvanism which no material can resist. It melts every heart, and makes the coldest, hardest, and heaviest metals burst into beautiful flame. Granted that at starting, the geniality, repentance, kindness, are so many arrant hypocrisies; yet who can tell whether these repentances, in white sheets, taper in hand, these offerings of birds and fruits, these smiles and compliments, and "Christian courtesies," may not end in improving the man who is compelled to act like a good fellow and accept his kindly canons, and improve *him* also with whom these better relations are established? As muscle is added to the limb, so strength is added to the particular moral quality we exercise, and kindness is elicited, and men perhaps end by having some of the attributes which they began by affecting. At all events, any recognition of the kindly and peaceable social philosophy of Christianity is, so far as it goes, good.

"What a sensible, nice, hospitable old man Lord Verney is; I think him *the* most sensible and the *nicest man* I *ever* met," said Miss Charity, in an enthusiasm which was quite genuine, for she was, honestly, no respecter of persons. “And young Mr. Verney certainly looked very handsome, but I don’t like him.”

“Don’t like him! *Why?*” said Agnes, looking up.

“Because I think him perfectly *odious*,” replied Miss Charity.

Agnes was inured to Miss Charity’s adjectives, and even the fierce flush that accompanied some of them failed to alarm her.

“Well, I rather like him,” she said, quietly.

“You *can’t* like him, Agnes. It is not a matter of opinion at all; it’s just simply a matter of *fact* — and you *know* that he is a most *worldly*, *selfish*, *cruel*, and *I* think, *wicked* young man, and you need not talk about him, for he’s *odious*. And here comes Thomas Sedley again.”

Agnes smiled a faint and bitter smile.

“And what do you think of *him*?” she asked.

“Thomas Sedley? Of course I like him; we all like him. Don’t you?” answered Charity.

“Yes, pretty well — very well. I suppose he has faults, like other people. He’s goodhumoured, selfish, of course — I fancy they all are. And papa likes him, I think; but really, Charrie, if you want to know, I don’t care if I never saw him again.”

“Hush!”

“*Well!* You’ve got rid of the Verneys, and here I am again,” said Tom, approaching. “They are going up to Hazelden to see your father.”

And so they were — up that pretty walk that passes the mills and ascends steeply by the precipitous side of the wooded glen, so steep, that in two places you have to mount by rude flights of steps — a most sequestered glen, and utterly silent, except for the sound of the mill-stream tinkling and crooning through the rocks below, unseen through the dense boughs and stems of the wood beneath.

If Lord Verney in his conciliatory condescension was grand, so was Vane Etherage on the occasion of receiving and forgiving him at Hazelden. He had considered and constructed a little speech, with some pomp of language, florid and magnanimous. He had sat in his bath-chair for half an hour at the little iron gate of the flower-garden of Hazelden, no inmate of which had ever seen him look, for a continuance, so sublimely important, and indeed solemn, as he had done all that morning.

Vane Etherage had made his arrangements to receive Lord Verney with a dignified deference. He was to be wheeled down the incline about two hundred yards, to "the bower," to meet the peer at that point, and two lusty fellows were to push him up by Lord Verney's side to the house, where wine and other comforts awaited him.

John Evans had been placed at the mill to signal to the people above at Hazelden, by a musket-shot, the arrival of Lord Verney at that stage of his progress. The flagstaff and rigging on the green platform at Hazelden were fluttering all over with all the flags that ever were invented, in honour of the gala.

Lord Verney ascended, leaning upon the arm of his nephew, with Mr. Larkin and the mayor for supporters, Captain Shrapnell, Doctor Lyster, and two or three other distinguished inhabitants of Cardyllian bringing up the rear.

Lord Verney carried his head high, and grew reserved and rather silent as they got on, and as they passed under the solemn shadow of the great trees by the mill, an overloaded musket went off with a sound like a cannon, as Lord Verney afterwards protested, close to the unsuspecting party, and a loud and long whoop from John Evans completed the concerted signal.

The Viscount actually jumped, and Cleve felt the shock of his arm against his side.

"D —— you, John Evans, what the *devil* are you *doing*?" exclaimed Captain Shrapnell, who, turning from white to crimson, was the first of the party to recover his voice.

"Yes, sir, thank you — very good," said Evans, touching his hat, and smiling incessantly with the incoherent volubility of Welsh politeness. "A little bit of a squib, sir, if you please, for Captain Squire Etherage — very well, I thank you — to let him know Lord Verney — very much obliged, sir — was at the mill — how do you do, sir? — and going up to Hazelden, if you please, sir."

And the speech subsided in a little, gratified laugh of delighted politeness.

"You'd better not do that *again*, though," said the Captain, with a menacing wag of his head, and availing himself promptly of the opportunity of improving his relations with Lord Verney, he placed himself by his side, and assured him that though he was an old campaigner, and had smelt powder in all parts of the world, he had never heard such a report from a musket in all his travels and adventures before; and hoped Lord Verney's hearing was not the worse of it. He had known a general officer deafened by a shot, and, by Jove! his own ears were singing with it still, accustomed as he was, by Jupiter! to such things.

His lordship, doing his best on the festive occasion, smiled uncomfortably, and said, —

"Yes — thanks — ha, ha! I really thought it was a cannon, or the gas-works — about it."

And Shrapnell called back and said, —

"Don't you be coming on with that thing, John Evans — do you mind? — Lord Verney's had quite enough of that. You'll excuse me, Lord Verney, I thought you'd wish so much said," and Lord Verney bowed graciously.

The answering shot and cheer which were heard from above announced to John Evans that the explosion had been heard at Hazelden, and still smiling and touching his heart, he continued his voluble civilities— "Very good, sir, very much obliged, sir, very well, I thank you; I hope you are very well, sir, very good indeed, sir," and so forth, till they were out of hearing.

The shot, indeed, was distinctly heard at the gay flagstaff up at Hazelden, and the Admiral got under weigh, and proceeded down the incline charmingly till they had nearly reached the little platform at the bower, where, like Christian in his progress, he was to make a halt.

But his plans at this point were disturbed. Hardly twenty yards before they reached it, one of his men let go, the drag upon the other suddenly increased, and resulted in a pull, which caused him to trip, and tripping as men while in motion downhill will, he butted forward, charging headlong, and finally tumbling on his face, he gave to the rotatory throne of Mr. Etherage such an impulse as carried him quite past the arbour, and launched him upon the steep descent of the gravel-walk with a speed every moment accelerated.

"Stop her! — ease her! — d —— you, Williams!" roared the Admiral, little knowing how idle were his orders. The bath-chair had taken head, the pace became furious; the running footmen gave up pursuit in despair, and Mr. Vane Etherage was obliged to concentrate his severest attention, as he never did before, on the task of guiding his flying vehicle, a feat which was happily favoured by the fact that the declivity presented no short turns.

The sounds were heard below — a strange ring of wheels, and a powerful voice bawling, "Ease her! stop her!" and some stronger expressions.

"Can't be a carriage, about it, *here*?" exclaimed Lord Verney, halting abruptly, and only restrained from skipping upon the side bank by a sense of dignity.

"Never mind, Lord Verney! don't mind — I'll take care of you — I'm your vanguard," exclaimed Captain Shrapnell, with a daredevil gaiety, inspired by the certainty that it could not be a carriage, and the conviction that the adventure would prove nothing more than some children and nursery maids playing with a perambulator.

His feelings underwent a revulsion, however, when old Vane Etherage, enveloped in cloak, and shawls, his hat gone, and his long grizzled hair streaming backward, with a wild countenance, and both hands working the directing handle, came swooping into sight, roaring, maniacally, "Ease her! back her!" and yawing frightfully in his descent upon them.

Captain Shrapnell, they say, turned pale at the spectacle; but he felt he must now go through with it, or for ever sacrifice that castle-in-the-air, of which the events of the day had suggested the ground-plan and elevation.

"Good heaven! he'll be killed, about it!" exclaimed Lord Verney, peeping from behind a tree, with unusual energy; but whether he meant Shrapnell, or Etherage, or both, I don't know, and nobody in that moment of sincerity minded much what he meant. I dare say a front-rank man in a square at Waterloo did not feel before the gallop of the Cuirassiers as the gallant Captain did before the charge of the large invalid who was descending upon him. All he meditated was a decent show of resistance, and as he had a stout walking-stick in his hand, something might be done without risking his bones. So, as the old gentleman thundered downward, roaring, "Keep her off — keep her clear," Shrapnell, roaring "*I*'m your man!" nervously popped the end of his stick under the front wheel of the vehicle, himself skipping to one side, unhappily the wrong one, for the chair at this check spun round, and the next spectacle was Mr. Vane Etherage and Captain Shrapnell, enveloped in cloaks and mufflers, and rolling over and over in one another's arms, like athletes in mortal combat, the Captain's fist being visible, as they rolled round, at Mr. Vane Etherage's back, with his walking-stick still clutched in it.

The chair was lying on its side, the gentlemen were separated, and Captain Shrapnell jumped to his feet.

"Well, Lord Verney, I believe I did something there!" said the gallant Captain, with the air of a man who has done his duty, and knows it.

"Done something! you've broke my neck, you lubber!" panted Mr. Vane Etherage, who, his legs not being available, had been placed sitting with some cloaks about him, on the bank.

Shrapnell grinned and winked expressively, and confidentially whispered, "Jolly old fellow he is — no one minds the Admiral; we let him talk."

"Lord Verney," said his lordship, introducing himself with a look and air of polite concern.

"No, my name's Etherage," said the invalid, mistaking — he fancied that Jos. Larkin, who was expounding his views of the accident grandly to Cleve Verney in the background, could not be less than a peer— "I live up there, at Hazelden — devilish near being *killed here*, by that lubber there. Why I was running at the rate of five-and-twenty knots an hour, if I was making *one*; and I remember it right well, sir, there's a check down there, just before you come to the mill-stile, and the wall there; and I'd have run my bows right into it, and not a bit the worse, sir, if that d —— fellow had just kept out of the — the — king's course, you know; and egad! I don't know now how it is — I suppose I'm smashed, sir."

"I hope not, sir. I am Lord Verney — about it; and it would pain me extremely to learn that any serious injuries, or — or — things — had been sustained, about it."

"I'll tell that in a moment," said Doctor Lyster, who was of the party, briskly.

So after a variety of twists and wrenches and pokes, Vane Etherage was pronounced sound and safe.

"I don't know how the devil I escaped!" exclaimed the invalid.

"By tumbling on *me* — very simply," replied Captain Shrapnell with a spirited laugh.

"You may set your mind at rest, Shrapnell," said the Doctor, walking up to him, with a congratulatory air. "He's all right, this time; but you had better mind giving the old fellow any more rolls of that sort — the pitcher to the well, you know — and the next time might smash him."

"I'm more concerned about smashing myself, thank you. The next time he may roll to the devil — and through whoever he pleases for me — knocked down with that blackguard old chair, and that great hulking fellow on top of me — all for trying to be of use, egad! when everyone of you funked it — and not a soul asks about *my* bones, egad! or my neck either."

"Oh! come, Shrapnell, you're not setting up for an old dog yet. There's a difference between you and Etherage," said the Doctor.

"I hope so," answered the Captain, sarcastically, "but civility is civility all the world over; and I can tell you, another fellow would make fuss enough about the pain I'm suffering."

It was found, further, that one wheel of the bath-chair was disorganised, and the smith must come from the town to get it to rights, and that Vane Etherage, who could as soon have walked up a rainbow as up the acclivity to Hazelden, must bivouac for a while where he sat.

So there the visit was paid, and the exciting gala of that day closed, and the Viscount and his party marched down, with many friends attendant, to the jetty, and embarked in the yacht for Ware.

CHAPTER XX.

REBECCA MERVYN READS HER LETTER.

The evenings being short, the shops alight, and the good people of Cardyllian in their houses, Tom Sedley found the hour before dinner hang heavily on his hands. So he walked slowly up Castle Street, and saw Mr. Robson, the worthy postmaster, standing, with his hands in his pockets, at the open door.

"No letter for me, I dare say?" asked Sedley.

"No, sir — nothing."

"I don't know how to kill the time. I wish my dinner was ready. You dined, like a wise man, at one o'clock, I dare say?"

"We do — we dine early here, sir."

"I know it; a capital plan. I do it myself, whenever I make any stay here."

"And you can eat a bit o' something hearty at tea then."

"To be sure; that's the good of it. I don't know what to do with myself. I'll take a walk round by Malory. Can I leave the Malory letters for you?"

"You're only joking, sir."

"I was not, upon my honour. I'd be glad to bolt your shutters, or to twig your steps — anything to do. I literally don't know what to do with myself."

"There's no family at Malory, you know, now, sir."

"Oh! I did not know. I knew the other family had gone. No letters to be delivered then?"

"Well, sir, there *is* — but you're only joking."

"What is it?"

"A letter to Mrs. Rebecca Mervyn — but I would not think of troubling a gentleman with it."

"Old Rebecca? why I made her acquaintance among the shingles and cockles on the sea-shore last year — a charming old sea-nymph, or whatever you call it."

"We all have a great respect for Mrs. Mervyn, down here, in Cardyllian. The family has a great opinion of her, and they think a great deal of her, like us," said Mr. Robson, who did not care to hear any mysterious names applied to her without a protest.

"Well — so I say — so have I. I'll give her the letter, and take a receipt," said Sedley, extending his hand.

"There really *is* a receipt, sir, wanting," said the official, amused. "It came this morning — and if you'll come in — if it isn't too much trouble — I'll show it to you, please, sir."

In he stepped to the postoffice, where Mr. Robson showed him a letter which he had that afternoon received. It said, —

"Sir, — I enclose five shillings, represented by postage-stamps, which will enable you to pay a messenger on whom you can depend, to deliver a letter which I place along with this in the postoffice, into the hand of Mrs. Mervyn, Steward's House, Malory, Cardyllian, to whom it is addressed, and which is marked with the letter D at the left-hand corner.

"I am, sir,

"Your obt. servant,

"J. Dingwell."

"The letter is come," said Mr. Robson, taking it out of a pigeon-hole in a drawer, and thumbing it, and smiling on it with a gentle curiosity.

"Yes — that's it," said Tom Sedley, also reading the address. "'Mrs. Mervyn' — what a queer old ghost of a lady she is— 'Malory,' that's the ground — and the letter D in the corner. Well, I'm quite serious. I'll take the letter with pleasure, and see the old woman, and put it into her hand. I'm not joking, and I shall be back again in an hour, I dare say, and I'll tell you what she says, and how she looks — that is, assuming it is a love-letter."

"Well, sir, as you wish it; and it's very kind of you, and the old lady must sign a receipt, for the letter's registered — but it's too much trouble for you, sir, isn't it really?"

"Nonsense; give me the letter. If you won't, I can't help it."

"And this receipt should be signed."

"And the receipt also."

So away went our friend, duly furnished, and marched over the hill we know so well, that overhangs the sea, and down by the narrow old road to Malory, thinking of many things.

The phantom of the beautiful lady of Malory was very much faded now. Even as he looked down on the old house and woodlands, the romance came not again. It was just a remembered folly, like others, and excited or pained him little more. But a new trouble vexed him. How many of our blessings do we take for granted, enjoy thanklessly, like our sight, our hearing, our health, and only appreciate when they are either withdrawn or in danger!

Captain Shrapnell had written among his gossip some jocular tattle about Cleve's devotion to Miss Agnes Etherage, which had moved him oddly and uncomfortably; but the next letter disclosed the mystery of Cleve's clandestine visits to Malory, and turned his thoughts into a new channel.

But here was all revived, and worse. Charity, watching with a woman's eyes, and her opportunities, had made to him a confidence about which there could be no mistake; and then Agnes was so changed — not a bit glad to see him! And did not she look pretty? Was there not a slight look of pride — a reserve — that was new — a little sadness — along with the heightened beauty of her face and figure? How on earth had he been so stupid as not to perceive how beautiful she was all this time? Cleve had more sense. By Jove! she was the prettiest girl in England, and that selfish fellow had laid himself out to make her fond of him, and, having succeeded, jilted her! And now she would not care for any one but him.

There was a time, he thought, when he, Tom Sedley, might have made her like him. What a fool he was! And that was past — unimproved — irrevocable — and now she never could. Girls may affect those second likings, he thought, but they never really care after the first. It is pride, or pique, or friendship, or convenience — anything but love.

Love! And what had he to do with love? Who would marry him on four hundred a year, and no expectations? And now he was going to teaze himself because he had not stepped in before Cleve Verney and secured the affections of little Agnes. What a fool he was! What business had he dreaming such dreams? He had got on very well without falling in love with Agnes. Why should he begin now? If he found *that* folly gaining upon him, he would leave Cardyllian without staying his accustomed week, and never return till the feeling had died as completely as last year's roses.

Down the hill he marched in his new romance, as he had done more than a year ago, over the same ground, in his old one, when in the moonlight, on the shingle, he had met the same old lady of whom he was now in quest.

The old trees of Malory rose up before him, dark and silent, higher and higher as he approached. It was a black night — no moon; even the stars obscured by black lines of cloud as he pushed open the gate, and entered the deeper darkness of the curving carriage-road that leads up through the trees.

It was six o'clock now, and awfully dark. When he reached the open space before the hall-door, he looked up at the dim front of the house, but no light glimmered there. The deep-mouthed dog in the stableyard was yelling his challenge, and he further startled the solitary woods by repeated doubleknocks that boomed through the empty hall and chambers of the deserted house.

Despairing of an entrance at last, and not knowing which way to turn, he took the way by chance which led him to the front of the steward's house, from the diamond casement of which a light was shining. The door lay open; only the latch was closed, such being the primitive security that prevails in that region of poverty and quietude.

With his stick he knocked a little tattoo, and a candle was held over the clumsy banister, and the little servant girl inquired in her clear Welsh accent what he wanted.

So, preliminaries over, he mounted to that chamber in which Mr. Levi had been admitted to a conference among the delft and porcelain, stags, birds, officers, and huntsmen, who, in gay tints and oldfashioned style, occupied every coigne of vantage, and especially that central dresser, which mounted nearly to the beams of the ceiling.

The room is not large, the recesses are deep, the timber-work is of clumsy oak, and the decorations of old-world teapots, jugs, and beasts of the field, and cocked-hatted gentlemen in gorgeous colouring and gilding, so very gay and splendid, reflecting the candlelight and the wavering glare of the fire from a thousand curves and angles; the old shining furniture, and carved oak clock; the room itself, and all its properties so perfectly neat and tidy, not one grain of dust or single cob-web to be seen in any nook or crevice, that Tom Sedley was delighted with the scene.

What a delightful retreat, he thought, from the comfortless affectations of the world. Here was the ideal of snugness, and of brightness, and warmth. It amounted to a kind of beauty that absolutely fascinated him. He looked kindly on the old lady, who had laid down her knitting, and looked at him through a pair of round spectacles, and thought that he would like to adopt her for his housekeeper, and live a solitary life of lonely rabbit-shooting in Penruthyn Park, trout-fishing in the stream, and cruising in an imaginary yacht on the estuary and the contiguous seaboard.

This little plan, or rather vision, pictured itself to Tom Sedley's morbid and morose imagination as the most endurable form of life to which he could now aspire.

The old lady, meanwhile, was looking at him with an expression of wonder and anxiety, and he said —

"I hope, Mrs. Mervyn, I have not disturbed you much. It is not quite so late as it looks, and as the postmaster, Mr. Robson, could not find a messenger, and I was going this way, I undertook to call and give you the letter, having once had the pleasure of making your acquaintance, although you do not, I'm afraid, recollect me."

"I knew it, the moment his face entered the room. It was the same face," she repeated, as if she had seen a picture, not a face.

"Just under the walls of Malory; you were anxious to learn whether a sail was in sight, in the direction of Pendillion," said he, suggesting.

"No, there was none; it was not there. People — other people — would have tired of watching long ago; my old eyes never dazzled, sir. And *he* came, so like. He came — I thought it — was a spirit from the sea; and here he is. There's something in your voice, sir, and your face. It is wonderful; but not a Verney — no, you told me so. They are cruel men — one way or other they were all cruel, but some more than others — my God! much more. There's something in the eyes — the setting, the light — it can't be mistaken; something in the curve of the chin, very pretty — but you're no Verney, you told me — and see how he comes here a second time, smiling — and yet when he goes, it is like waking from a dream where they were, as they all used to look, long ago; and there's a pain at my heart, for weeks after. It never can be again, sir; I'm growing old. If it ever comes, it will find me so changed — or dead, I sometimes begin to think, and try to make up my mind. There's a good world, you know, where we'll all meet and be happy, no more parting or dying, sir. Yet I'd like to see him even once, here, just as he was, a beautiful mortal. God is so good; and while there's life there is hope."

"Certainly, hope, there's always hope; everyone has something to vex them. *I* have, I know, Mrs. Mervyn; and I was just thinking what a charming drawingroom this is, and how delightful it must be, the quiet and comfort, and glow of such a room. There is no drawingroom on earth I should like so well," said goodnatured Tom Sedley, whose sympathies were easy, and who liked saying a pleasant thing when he could; "And this is the letter, and here is a printed receipt, which, when you have been so kind as to sign it, I've promised to give my friend, Mr. Robson of the postoffice."

"Thank you, sir; this is registered, they call it. I had one a long time ago, with the same kind of green ribbon round it. Won't you sit down while I sign this?"

"Many thanks," said Sedley, sitting down gravely at the table, and looking so thoughtful, and somehow so much at home, that you might have fancied his dream of living in the Steward's House had long been accomplished.

"I'd rather not get a letter, sir; I don't know the handwriting of this address, and a letter can but bring me sorrow. There is but one welcome chance which could befall me, and that *may* come yet, just a *hope*, sir. Sometimes it brightens up, but it has been low all to-day."

"Sorry you have been out of spirits, Mrs. Mervyn, I know what it is; I've been so myself, and I *am* so, rather, just now," said Tom, who was, in this homely seclusion, tending towards confidence.

"There are now but two handwritings that I should know; one is his, the other Lady Verney's; all the rest are dead; and this is neither."

"Well, Mrs. Mervyn, if it does not come from either of the persons you care for, it yet may tell you news of them," remarked Tom Sedley, sagely.

"Hardly, sir. I hear every three months from Lady Verney. I heard on Tuesday last. Thank God, she's well. No, it's nothing concerning her, and I think it may be something bad. I am afraid of this letter, sir — *tell* me I need not be afraid of it."

"I know the feeling, Mrs. Mervyn; I've had it myself, when duns were troublesome. But you have nothing of the kind in this happy retreat; which I really do envy you from my heart."

"Envy! Ah, sir — happy retreat! Little you know, sir. I have been for weeks and months at a time half wild with anguish, dreaming of the sea. How can he know?"

"Very true, I can't know; I only speak of it as it strikes me at the moment. I fancy I should so like to live here, like a hermit, quite out of the persecutions of luck and the nonsense of the world."

"You are wonderfully like at times, sir — it is beautiful, it is frightful — when I moved the candle then — — "

"I'll sit any way you like best, Mrs. Mervyn, with pleasure, and you can move the candle, and try; if it amuses — no, I mean interests you."

If some of his town friends could have peeped in through a keyhole, and seen Tom Sedley and old Rebecca Mervyn seated at opposite sides of the table, in this very queer old room, so like Darby and Joan, it would have made matter for a comical story.

"Like a flash it comes!"

Tom Sedley looked at the wild, large eyes that were watching him — the round spectacles now removed — across the table, and could not help smiling.

"Yes, the *smile* — it *is* the smile! You told me, sir, your name was Sedley, not Verney."

"My name is Thomas Sedley. My father was Captain Sedley, and served through a part of the Peninsular campaign. He was not twenty at the battle of Vittoria, and he was at Waterloo. My mother died a few months after I was born."

"Was *she* a Verney?"

"No; she was distantly connected, but her name was Melville," said he.

"Connected. That accounts for it, perhaps."

"Very likely."

"And your father — dead?" she said, sadly.

"Yes; twenty years ago."

"I know, sir; I remember. They are all locked up *there*, sir, and shan't come out till old Lady Verney dies. But he was not related to the Verneys?"

"No, they were friends. He managed two of the estates after he left the army, and very well, I'm told."

"Sedley — Thomas Sedley — I remember the name. I did not know the name of Sedley — except on one occasion — I was sent for, but it came to nothing. I lived so much in the dark about things," and she sighed.

"I forgot, Mrs. Mervyn, how late it is growing, and how much too long I have stayed here admiring your pretty room, and I fear interrupting you," said Tom, suddenly remembering his dinner, and standing up— "If you kindly give me the receipt, I'll leave it on my way back."

Mrs. Mervyn had clipped the silken cord, and was now reading the letter, and he might as well have addressed his little speech to the china shepherdess, with the straw disc and ribbons on her head, in the bodice and short petticoat of flowered brocade, leaning against a tree, with a lamb with its hind leg and tail broken off, looking affectionately in her face.

"I can't make it out, sir; your eyes are young — perhaps you would read it to me — it is not very long."

"Certainly, with pleasure" — and Tom Sedley sat down, and, spreading the letter on the table, under the candles, read as follows to the old lady opposite: —

"Private.

"Madam, — As an old and intimate friend of your reputed husband, I take leave to inform you that he placed a sum of money in my hands for the use of your son and his, if he be still living. Should he be so, will you be so good as to let me know where it will reach him. A line to Jos. Larkin, Esq., at the Verney Arms, Cardyllian, or a verbal message, if you desire to see him, will suffice. Mr. Larkin is the solvent and religious attorney of the present Lord Verney, and you have my consent to advise with him on the subject.

"I have the honour to be,

"Madam,

"Your obedient servant,

"J. Dingwell."

"P.S. — You are aware, I suppose, madam, that I am the witness who proved the death of the late Hon. Arthur Verney, who died of a low fever in Constantinople, in July twelve months."

"*Died!* My God! Died! did you say *died*?"

"Yes. I thought you knew. It was proved a year ago nearly. The elder brother of the present Lord Verney."

There followed a silence while you might count ten, and then came a long, wild, and bitter cry.

The little girl started up, with white lips, and said, "Lord bless us!" The sparrows in the ivy about the windows fluttered — even Tom Sedley was chilled and pierced by that desolate scream.

"I'm very sorry, really, I'm awfully sorry," Tom exclaimed, finding himself, he knew not how, again on his feet, and gazing at the white, imploring face of the trembling old woman. “I really did not know — I had not an idea you felt such an interest in any of the family. If I had known, I should have been more careful. I’m shocked at what I’ve done.”

“Oh! Arthur — oh! Arthur. He’s gone — *after all*, after *all*. If we could have only met for one minute, just for one look.” She was drawing back the window-curtain, looking towards the dark Pendillion and the starless sea. “He said he’d come again — he went — and my heart misgave me. I said, he’ll never come again — my beautiful Arthur — never — never — never. Oh, darling, darling. If I could even see your grave.”

“I’m awfully sorry, ma’am; I wish I could be of any use,” said honest Tom Sedley, speaking very low and kindly, standing beside her, with, I think, tears in his eyes. “I wish so much, ma’am, you could employ me any way. I’d be so glad to be of any use, about your son, or to see that Mr. Larkin. I don’t like his face, ma’am, and would not advise your trusting him too much.”

“Our little child’s dead. Oh! Arthur — Arthur! — a beautiful little thing; and you, my darling, — that I watched for, so long — never to come again — never, never — never — I have no one now.”

“I’ll come to you and see you in the morning,” said Tom.

And he walked home in the dark, and stopped on the summit of the hill, looking down upon the twinkling lights of the town, and back again toward solemn Malory, thinking of what he had seen, and what an odd world it was.

CHAPTER XXI.

BY RAIL TO LONDON.

About an hour later, Tom Sedley, in solitude, meditated thus —

"I wonder whether the Etherages" — (meaning pretty Miss Agnes)— "would think it a bore if I went up to see them. It's too late for tea. I'm afraid they mightn't like it. No one, of course, like Cleve now. They'd find me very dull, I dare say. I don't care, I'll walk up, and if I see the lights in the drawingroom windows, I'll try."

He did walk up; he did see the lights in the drawingroom windows; and he did try, with the result of finding himself upon the drawingroom carpet a minute after, standing at the side of Agnes, and chatting to Miss Charity.

"How is your father?" asked Tom, seeing the study untenanted.

"Not at *all* well, *I* think; he had an accident to-day. Didn't you hear?"

"*Accident!* No, I didn't."

"Oh! yes. Somehow, when Lord Verney and the other people were coming up here to-day, he was going to meet them, and among them they overturned his bath-chair, and I don't know really who's to blame. Captain Shrapnell says he saved his life; but, however it happened, he was upset and very much shaken. I see you laughing, Thomas Sedley! What on earth *can* you see in it to laugh at? It's so exactly like Agnes — she *laughed*! you did, *indeed*, Agnes, and if I had not *seen* it, with my *own eyes*, I *could* not have *believed* it!"

"I knew papa was not hurt, and I could not help laughing, if you put me to death for it, and they say he drove over Lord Verney's foot."

"That would not break my heart," said Sedley. "Did you hear the particulars from Cleve?"

"No, I did not see Mr. Verney to speak to, since the accident," said Miss Charity. "By-the-by, who was the tall, good-looking girl, in the sealskin coat, he was talking to all the way to the jetty? I think she was Lady Wimbledon's daughter."

"So she was; has she rather large blue eyes?"

"Yes."

“Oh! it must be she; that’s Miss Caroline Oldys. She’s such a joke; she’s elder than Cleve.”

“Oh! that’s impossible; she’s decidedly younger than Mr. Cleve Verney, and, I think, extremely pretty.”

“Well, perhaps she *is* younger, and I *do* believe she’s pretty; but she’s a fool, and she has been awfully in love with him for I don’t know how many years — every one was laughing at it, two or three seasons ago; she *is* such a muff!”

“What *do* you mean by a muff?” demanded Charity.

“Well, a goose, then. Lord Verney’s her guardian or trustee, or something; and they say, that he and Lady Wimbledon had agreed to promote the affair. Just like them. She is such a scheming old woman; and Lord Verney is such a — I was going to say, such a *muff*, — but he is such a *spoon*. Cleve’s wide awake, though, and I don’t think he’ll do *that* for them.”

I believe there may have been, at one time, some little foundation in fact for the theory which supposed the higher powers favourable to such a consummation. But time tests the value of such schemes, and it would seem that Lady Wimbledon had come to the conclusion that the speculation was a barren one: for, this night, in her dressing-gown, with her wig off, and a silken swathing about her bald head, she paid a very exciting visit to her daughter’s room, and blew her up in her own awful way, looking like an angry Turk. “She wondered how any person with Caroline’s *experience* could be such an *idiot* as to let that young man go on making a fool of her. He had no other idea but the one of making a *fool* of her before the world. She, Lady Wimbledon, would have no more of any such insensate folly — her prospects should not be ruined, if she could prevent it, and prevent it she *could* and *would* — there should be an end of that odious nonsense; and if she chose to make herself the laughing-stock of the world, she, Lady Wimbledon, would do her duty and take her down to Slominton, where they would be quiet enough at all events; and Cleve Verney, she ventured to say, with a laugh, would not follow her.”

The young lady was in tears, and blubbered in her romantic indignation till her eyes and nose were inflamed, and her mamma requested her to look in the glass, and see what a figure she had made of herself, and made her bathe her face for an hour, before she went to bed.

There was no other young lady at Ware, and Cleve smiled in his own face, in his looking-glass, as he dressed for dinner.

"My uncle will lose no time — I did not intend this; but I see very well what he means, and he'll be disappointed and grow suspicious, if I draw back; and she has really nothing to recommend her, poor Caroline, and he'll find that out time enough, and meanwhile I shall get over some months quietly."

There was no great difficulty in seeing, indeed, that the noble host distinguished Lady Wimbledon and her daughter. And Lord Verney, leaning on Cleve's arm, asked him lightly what he thought of Miss Caroline Oldys; and Cleve, who had the gift of presence of mind, rather praised the young lady.

"My uncle would prefer Ethel, when he sees a hope in that direction, I shan't hear much more of Caroline, and so on — and we shall be growing older — and the chapter of accidents — and all that."

For a day or two Lord Verney was very encouraging, and quite took an interest in the young lady, and showed her the house and the place, and unfolded all the plans which were about to grow into realities, and got Cleve to pull her across the lake, and walked round to meet them, and amused the young man by contriving that little opportunity. But Lady Wimbledon revealed something to Lord Verney, that evening, over their game of *ecarté*, which affected his views.

Cleve was talking to the young lady, but he saw Lord Verney look once or twice, in the midst of a very serious conversation with Lady Wimbledon, at Caroline Oldys and himself, and now without smiling.

It was Lady Wimbledon's deal, but she did not deal, and her opponent seemed also to have forgotten the cards, and their heads inclined one toward the other as the talk proceeded.

It was about the hour when ladies light their bedroom candles, and ascend. And Lady Wimbledon and Caroline Oldys had vanished in a few minutes more, and Cleve thought, "She has told him something that has given him a new idea." His uncle was rather silent and dry for the rest of that evening, but next morning seemed pretty much as usual, only Lord Verney took an opportunity of saying to him —

"I have been considering, and I have heard things, and, with reference to the subject of my conversation with you, in town, I think you ought to direct your thoughts to *Ethel*, about it — you ought to have money — don't you see? It's very important — money — very well to be *le fils de ses [oe]uvres*, and that kind of thing; but a little money does no harm; on the contrary, it is very desirable. Other people keep that point in view; I don't see why we should not. I ask myself this question: — How is it that people get on in the world? And I answer — in great measure by amassing money; and arguing from *that*, I think it desirable you should have some money to begin with, and I've endeavoured to put it logically, about it, that you may see the drift of what I say." And he made an excuse and sent Cleve up to town next day before him.

I have been led into an episode by Miss Charity's question about Miss Caroline Oldys; and returning to Hazelden, I find Tom Sedley taking his leave of the young ladies for the night, and setting out for the Verney Arms with a cigar between his lips.

Next morning he walked down to Malory again, and saw old Rebecca, who seemed, in her odd way, comforted on seeing him, but spoke little — almost nothing; and he charged her to tell neither Dingwell, of whom he had heard nothing but evil, nor Jos. Larkin, of whom he had intuitively a profound suspicion, — anything about her own history, or the fate of her child, but to observe the most cautious reserve in any communications they might seek to open with her. And having delivered this injunction in a great variety of language, he took his leave, and got home very early to his breakfast, and ran up to London, oddly enough, in the same carriage with Cleve Verney.

Tom Sedley was angry with Cleve, I am afraid not upon any very high principle. If Cleve had trifled with the affections of Miss Caroline Oldys, I fear he would have borne the spectacle of her woes with considerable patience. But if the truth must be told, honest Tom Sedley was leaving Cardyllian in a pet. Anger, grief, jealousy, were seething in his goodnatured heart. Agnes Etherage — *his* little Agnes — she had belonged to him as long as he could remember; she was gone, and he never knew how much he had liked her until he had lost her.

Gone? No; in his wanton cruelty this handsome outlaw had *slain* his deer — had *shot* his sweet bird dead, and there she lay in the sylvan solitude she had so beautified — *dead*; and he — heartless archer — went on his way smiling, having darkened the world for harmless Tom Sedley. Could he like him ever again?

Well, the world brooks no heroics now; there are reserves. Men cultivate a thick skin — nature's buff-coat — in which, with little pain and small loss of blood, the modern man-at-arms rides cheerily through life's battle. When point or edge happen to go a little through, as I have said, there are reserves. There is no good in roaring, grinning, or cursing. The scathless only laugh at you; therefore wipe away the blood quietly and seem all you can like the rest. Better not to let them see even *that*. Is there not sometimes more of curiosity than of sympathy in the scrutiny? Don't you even see, at times, just the suspicion of a smile on your friend's pitying face, as he prescribes wet brown paper or basilicon, or a cob-web, according to his skill?

So Tom and Cleve talked a little — an acquaintance would have said, just as usual — and exchanged newspapers, and even laughed a little now and then; but when at Shillingsworth the last interloper got out, and Tom and Cleve were left to themselves, the ruling idea asserted itself, and Sedley looked hurriedly out of the window, and grew silent for a time, and pretended not to hear Cleve when he asked him whether he had seen the report of Lord Verney's visit to Cardyllian, as displayed in the county paper of that day, which served to amuse him extremely.

"I don't think," said Tom Sedley, at last, abruptly, "that nice, pretty little creature, Agnes Etherage — the nicest little thing, by Jove, I think I ever saw — I say she is not looking well."

"Is not she really?" said Cleve, very coolly cutting open a leaf in his magazine.

"Didn't you observe?" exclaimed Tom, rather fiercely.

"Well, no, I can't say I did; but you know them so much better than I," answered Cleve; "it can't be very much; I dare say she's well by this time."

"How *can* you speak that way, Verney, knowing all you do?"

"Why, *what* do I know?" exclaimed Cleve, looking up in unaffected wonder.

"You know all about it — *why* she's out of spirits, *why* she's looking so delicate, *why* she's not like herself," said Tom, impatiently.

"Upon my soul I do *not*," said Cleve Verney, with animation.

"That's odd, considering you've half broken her heart," urged Tom.

"I broken her heart?" repeated Cleve. "Now, really, Sedley, do pray think what you're saying."

"I say I think you've broken her heart, and her sister thinks so too; and it's an awful shame," insisted Tom, very grimly.

"I really do think the people want to set me mad," said Cleve, testily. "If anyone says that I have ever done anything that could have made any of that family, who are in their senses, fancy that I was in love with Miss Agnes Etherage, and that I wished her to suppose so, it is simply an *untruth*. I never did, and I don't intend; and I can't see, for the life of me, Tom Sedley, what business it is of yours. But thus much I do say, upon my honour, it is a lie. Miss Charity Etherage, an old maid, with no more sense than a snipe, living in that barbarous desert, where if a man appears at all, during eight months out of the twelve, he's a prodigy, and if he walks up the street with a Cardyllian lady, he's pronounced to be over head and ears in love, and of course meditating marriage — I say she's not the most reliable critic in the world in an affair of that sort; and all I say is, that I've given *no* grounds for any such idea, and I mean it, upon my honour; and I've seldom been so astonished in my life before."

There was an air of frank and indignant repudiation in Cleve's manner and countenance, which more even than his words convinced Tom Sedley, who certainly was aware how little the Cardyllian people knew of the world, and what an eminently simple maiden in all such matters the homely Miss Charity was. So Tom extended his hand and said —

"Well, Cleve, I'm so glad, and I beg your pardon, and I know you say truth, and pray shake hands; but though you are not to blame — I'm now quite *sure* you're not — the poor girl is very unhappy, and her sister very angry."

"I can't help *that*. How on earth can *I* help it? I'm very sorry, though I'm not sure that I ought to care a farthing about other people's nonsense, and huffs, and romances. I could tell you things about myself, lots of things you'd hardly believe — *real dreadful* annoyances. I tell you Tom, I hate the life I'm leading. You only see the upper surface, and hardly that. I'm worried to death, and only that I owe so much money, and can't get away, I can tell you — I don't care two pins whether you believe it or not — I should have been feeding sheep in Australia a year ago."

"Better where you are, Cleve."

“How the devil do *you* know? Don’t be offended with me, Tom, only make allowances, and if I sometimes talk a bit like a Bedlamite don’t repeat my ravings; that’s all. Look at that windmill; isn’t it pretty?”

CHAPTER XXII.

LADY DORMINSTER'S BALL.

Cleve Verney was in harness again — attending the House with remarkable punctuality; for the eye of the noble peer, his uncle, was upon him. He had the division lists regularly on his table, and if Cleve's name was missing from any one of even moderate importance, his uncle took leave to ask an explanation. Cleve had also reasons of his own for working diligently at the drudgery of public life. His march was not upon solid ground, but over a quaking bog, every undulation and waver of which was answered by a qualm at his heart.

Still it was only some nice management of time and persons; it was a mere matter of presence of mind, of vigilance, of resource, to which he felt — at least hoped he might be found equal, and all *must* end well. Was not his uncle sixty-six his last birthday? People might natter and say he looked nothing like it; but the red book so pronounced, and there is no gainsaying that sublime record. After all, his uncle was not an everlasting danger. Time and the hour will end the longest day; and then must come the title, and estates, and a quiet heart at last.

When the House did not interfere, Cleve was of course seen at all the proper places. On the night of which I am now speaking there was among others Lady Dorminster's ball, and a brilliant muster of distinguished persons.

On that crowded floor, in those celebrated salons, in an atmosphere of light and music, in which moved so much of what is famous, distinguished, splendid, is seen the figure of Cleve Verney. Everyone knew that slight and graceful figure, and the oval face, delicate features, and large, dark, dreamy eyes, that never failed to impress you with the same ambiguous feeling. It was Moorish, it was handsome; but there was a shadow there — something secret and selfish, and smilingly, silently insolent.

This session he had come out a little, and made two speeches of real promise. The minister had complimented his uncle upon them, and had also complimented him. The muse was there; something original and above routine — genius perhaps — and that passion for distinction which breaks a poor man's heart, and floats the rich to greatness.

A man of Cleve's years, with his position, with his promise, with London life and Paris life all learned by rote, courted and pursued, wary, contemptuous, sensual, clever, ambitious — is not young. The whole chaperon world, with its wiles, was an open book for him. For him, like the man in the German legend, the earth under which they mined and burrowed had grown to his eyes transparent, and he saw the gnomes at work. For him young ladies' smiles were not light and magic — only marsh fires and tricks. To him old and young came up and simpered or fawned; but they dimpled, or ogled, or grinned, all in the Palace of Truth. Truth is power, but not always pretty. For common men the surface is best; all beyond is knowledge — an acquisition of sorrow.

Therefore, notwithstanding his years, the clear olive oval of his handsome face, the setting — void of line or colour — of those deep dark eyes, so enthusiastic, yet so cold, the rich wave of his dark hair, and the smooth transparency of temples and forehead, and all the tints and signs of beautiful youth, Cleve Verney was well stricken in years of knowledge; and of that sad gift he would not have surrendered an iota in exchange for the charms and illusions of innocence, so much for the most part do men prefer power to happiness.

"How d'ye do, Miss Oldys?" said this brilliant young man of actualities and expectations.

"Oh, Mr. Verney, *you* here!"

This Miss Caroline Oldys was just nine-and-twenty. Old, like him, in the world's dismal psychology, but with one foolish romance still at her heart; betrayed into a transient surprise, smiling in genuine gladness, almost forgetting herself, and looking quite country-girlish in the momentary effusion. It is not safe affecting an emotion with men like Cleve, especially when it does not flatter them. He did not care a farthing whether she was surprised or not, or glad or sorry. But her very eye and gesture told him that she had marked him as he stood there, and had chosen the very seat on which her partner had placed her of malice aforethought. Fine acting does it need to succeed with a critic like Cleve.

"Yes, I here — and where's the wonder?"

"Why, — who was it? — *some* one told me only half an hour ago, you were somewhere in France."

"Well, if it was a man he told a story, and if a lady she made a mistake," said Cleve, coolly but tartly, looking steadily at her. "And the truth is, I wanted a yacht, and I went down to look at her, tried her, liked her, and bought her. Doesn't it sound very like a marriage?"

Caroline laughed.

"That's your theory — we're all for sale, and handed over to the best bidder."

"Pretty waltz," said Cleve, waving his slender hand just the least in the world to the music. "Pretty thing!"

He did not use much ceremony with this young lady — his cousin in some remote way — who, under the able direction of her mother, Lady Wimbledon, had once pursued him in a barefaced way for nearly three years; and who, though as we have seen, her mother had by this time quite despaired, yet liked him with all the romance that remained to her.

"And who are you going to marry, Caroline? There's Sedley — I see him over there. What do you say to Sedley?"

"No, thanks — much obliged — but Sedley, you know, has seen his fate in that mysterious lady in Wales, or somewhere."

"Oh? has he?" He signed to Sedley to come to them.

Looking through the chinks and chasms that now and then opened in the distinguished mob of which he formed a unit, he occasionally saw the stiff figure and small features of his pompous uncle, Lord Verney, who was talking affably to Lady Wimbledon. Lord Verney did not wear his agreeable simper. He had that starch and dismal expression, rather, which came with grave subjects, and he was tapping the fingers of his right hand upon the back of his left, in time to the cadence of his periods, which he did when delivering matter particularly well worth hearing. It plainly did not displease Lady Wimbledon, whatever his discourse might be. "I'm to be married to Caroline, I suppose. I wish that old woman was at the bottom of the Red Sea."

Cleve looked straight in the eyes of the Honourable Miss Caroline Oldys, and said he, with a smile, "Lady Wimbledon and my uncle are deep in some mystery — is it political? Have you an idea?"

Caroline Oldys had given up blushing very long ago indeed; but there was the confusion, without the tint of a blush in her face, as he said these words.

"I dare say — mamma's a great politician."

"Oh! I know that. By Jove, my uncle's looking this way. I hope he's not coming."

"Would you mind taking me to mamma?"

"No — pray stay for a moment. Here's Sedley."

And the young man, whom we know pretty well, with the bold blue eyes and golden moustaches, and good frank handsome face, approached smiling.

"How are you, Sedley?" said Cleve, giving him two fingers. "Caroline Oldys says you've had an adventure. Where was it?"

"The lady in black, you know, in Wales," reminded Miss Oldys.

"Oh! to be sure," said Sedley, laughing. "A lady in gray, it was. I saw her twice. But that's more than a year old, and there has been nothing ever since."

"*Do* go on."

Sedley laughed.

"It was at Cardyllian, in the church. She lived at Malory — that dark old place you went to see with the Verneys, the day you were at Cardyllian — don't you remember?"

"Oh, yes, — what a romantic place!"

"What an awfully cross old fellow, old enough to be her father, but with the air of her husband, guarding her like a dragon, and eyeing every fellow that came near as if he'd knock him down; a lean, white-whiskered, bald old fellow, with bushy eyebrows, and a fierce face, and eyes jumping out of his head, and lame of one foot, too. Not a beauty, by any means."

"Where did you see *him*?" said Cleve.

"I did not see him — but Christmass Owen the boatman told me."

"Well, and which is your fate — which is to kill you — the husband or wife?" inquired Cleve, looking vaguely among the crowd.

"Oh, the wife, as he calls her, is really quite beautiful, melancholy and that, you know. I'd have found out all about them, but they left before I had time to go back, but Verney was at Cardyllian, when I was there."

"When was that?" asked Cleve.

"I mean when these people were at Malory. Cleve was much more gone about her than I was — at least so I've heard," answered Sedley.

"That's very ungrateful of you, Sedley. I never interfered, upon my honour. I saw her once in church, and accompanied him in his pursuit at his earnest request, and I never saw her again. Are you going on to the Halbury's, Caroline?"

"Yes; are you?"

"No, quite used up. Haven't slept since Wednesday night."

Here a partner came to claim Miss Caroline.

"I'll go with you," said Sedley.

"Very well," answered Cleve, without looking back. "Come to my lodgings, Sedley — we'll smoke, shall we? I've got some capital cigars."

"I don't care. I'm going on also."

"What a delicious night!" exclaimed Tom Sedley, looking up at the stars. "Suppose we walk — it isn't far."

"I don't care — let us walk," said Cleve.

So walk they did. It was not far to Cleve's lodgings, in a street off Piccadilly. The young men had walked rather silently; for, as it seemed to Sedley, his companion was not in a temper to talk a great deal, or very pleasantly.

"And what about this gray woman? Did you ever follow it up? Did the romance take fire where it ought? Is it a mutual flame?" asked Cleve, like a tired man who feels he must say something, and does not care what. "I don't think you mentioned her since the day you showed me that Beatrice Cenci, over your d —— d chimneypiece."

"Of course I'd have told you if there had been anything to tell," said Tom.

"They haven't been at Malory since?"

"Oh! no — frightened away — you'll never see them there again. There's nothing absolutely in it, and never was, not even an adventure. Nothing but the little that happened long ago — and you know all about that," continued Sedley. "She's a wonderfully beautiful creature, though; I wish you saw her again, Cleve. You're such a clever fellow, you'd make a poem of her, or something — she'd bring you back to the days of chivalry, and that style of thing. I'm a sort of fellow, you know, that feels a lot, and I think, I *think* some too; but I haven't the knack of saying it, or writing it — I'm not particularly good at anything; but I went that morning, you know, into the

Refectory — you know — there are such a lot of stairs, and long places and doors, it makes a fellow quite foolish — and there she was — don't you remember? — I wish I could describe her to you gardening there with her gloves on."

"Don't try — you've tried so often — there's a good fellow; but just tell me her name?" said Cleve, looking straight before him, above the lamps and the slanting slates and chimneys, into the deep sky, where brilliantly, spite of London smoke, shone the clear sad moon.

"Her name? — I never found out, except Margaret — I don't know; but I believe they did not want their name told."

"That did not look well — did it?" suggested Cleve.

"Well, no more it generally does; but it is not her fault. It was — in fact it was — for I *did* find it out, I may as well tell you — old Sir Booth Fanshawe, you know he's broken — not worth a guinea — and always running about from place to place to avoid pursuit, in fact. It can't signify, you know, now that I think of it, mentioning him, because, of course, he's gone somewhere else long ago."

So said romantic little Sedley, and Cleve sneered.

"I see you can tell a fib on occasion, Tom, like another man. So you found out the name, and knew it all the time you were protesting ignorance. And who told you *that*? People here thought Sir Booth had gone to Italy."

"Well, it was — but you mustn't tell him I told you. There was a Jew fellow down at Malory, with a writ and a lot of fellows to nab him; but the old fellow was off; and the Jew, thinking that Wynne Williams knew where he was, came to his office and offered him a hatfull of money to tell, and he was going to kick him out; and that's the way *he* found out it was old Sir Booth; and he is awfully afraid of getting into a scrape about it, if the old people heard who the tenant was."

"So he would — the worst scrape he ever was in, with my *uncle*, at all events. And that d — d Larkin would get into the management of everything, I suppose. I hope, you have not been telling everyone?"

"Not a soul — not a human being."

"There are some of the Cardyllian people that hardly come under that term; and, by Jove, if you breathe it to one of them, it's all over the town, and my uncle will be sure to hear it; and poor Wynne Williams! — you'll be the ruin of him, very likely."

"I tell you, except to you, I *swear* to you, I haven't mentioned it to a soul on earth," exclaimed Tom.

"Well, I do think, as a matter of conscience and fairness, you ought to hold your tongue, and keep faith with poor Wynne," said Cleve, rudely, "and I think he was a monstrous fool to tell you. You know I'm interested," continued Cleve, perceiving that his vehemence surprised Tom Sedley; "because I have no faith in Larkin — I think him a sneak and a hypocrite, and a rogue — of course that's in confidence, and he's doing all in his power to get a fast hold of my uncle, and to creep into Wynne Williams's place, and a thing like this, with a hard unreasonable fellow like my uncle, would give him such a lift as you can't imagine."

"But, I'm not going to tell; unless *you* tell, or *he*, I don't know who's to tell it — *I* won't, I know."

"And about Sir Booth — of course he's not in England now — but neither is he in Italy," said Tom.

"It's well he has you to keep his 'log' for him," said Cleve.

"He's in France."

"Oh!"

"Yes, in the north of France, somewhere near Caen," said Tom Sedley.

"I wonder you let him get so near England. It seems rather perilous, doesn't it?"

"So one would think, but *there* he is. Tom Blackmore, of the Guards — you know him?"

"No, I don't."

"Well he saw old Fanshawe there. He happened to be on leave."

"Old Fanshawe?"

"No, Tom Blackmore. He likes poking into out-of-the-way places."

"I dare say."

"He has such a turn for the picturesque and all that, and draws very nicely."

"The long bow, I dare say."

"Well, no matter, he was there — old Fanshawe I mean — Blackmore saw him. He knows his appearance perfectly — used to hunt with his hounds, and that kind of thing, and often talked to him, so he could not be mistaken — and there he was as large as life."

"Well?"

"He did not know Tom a bit, and Tom asked no questions — in fact, he did not care to know where the poor old fellow hides himself — he preferred not — but Madame something or other — I forget her name — gave him a history, about as true as Jack the Giant-Killer, of the eccentric English gentleman, and told him that he had taken a great old house, and had his family there, and a most beautiful young wife, and was as jealous as fifty devils; so you see Margaret must have been there. Of course that was she," said Tom.

"And you said so to your friend Blackmore?" suggested Cleve Verney.

"Yes," said Tom.

"It seems to me you want to have him caught."

"Well, I did not think — I hope not — and I did not know you took any interest in him," said Sedley, quite innocently.

"Interest! *I* — me! Interest, indeed! Why the devil should *I* take an interest in Sir Booth Fanshawe? Why you seem to forget all the trouble and annoyance he has cost me. Interest, indeed! Quite the contrary. Only, I think, one would not like to get any poor devil into worse trouble than he's in, for no object, or to be supposed to be collecting information about him."

"No one could suppose anything like that of me," said Tom Sedley.

"I beg your pardon; they can suppose anything of anybody," answered Cleve, and, seeing that Tom looked offended, he added, "and the more absurd and impossible, the more likely. I wish you heard the things that have been said of *me* — enough to make your hair stand on end, by Jove!"

"Oh! I dare say."

They were now turning into the street where Cleve had taken lodgings.

"I could not stand those fellows any longer. My uncle has filled the house with them — varnish and paint and that stifling plaster — so I've put up here for a little time."

"I like these streets. I'm not very far away from you here," said Tom. "And talking of that affair at Caen, you know, he said, by Jove he did, that he saw *you* there."

"Who said?"

"Tom Blackmore of the Guards."

"Then Tom Blackmore of the Guards *lies* — that's all. I never saw him — I never spoke to him — I don't know him; and how should he know me? And if he did, I wasn't there; and if I had been, what the devil was it to him? So besides telling lies, he tells *impertinent* lies, and he ought to be kicked."

"Well, of course as you say so, he must have made a mistake; but Caen is as open to you as to him, and there's no harm in the place; and he knows you by appearance."

"He knows everybody by appearance, it seems, and nobody knows him; and, by Jove, he describes more like a bailiff than a Guardsman."

"He's a thorough gentleman in every *idea*. Tom Blackmore is as nice a little fellow as there is in the world," battled Tom Sedley for his friend.

"Well, I wish you'd persuade that faultless gentleman to let me and my concerns alone. I have a reason in this case; and I don't mind if I tell you I *was* at Caen, and I suppose he *did* see me. But there was no romance in the matter, except the romance of the Stock Exchange and a Jew; and I wish, Tom, you'd just consider *me* as much as you do the old baronet, for my own sake, that is, for *I*'m pretty well dipped too, and don't want everyone to know when or where I go in quest of my Jews. I *was* — not very far from that about four months ago; and if you go about telling everyone, by Jove my uncle will guess what brought me there, and old fellows don't like *post-obits* on their own lives."

"My dear Cleve, I had not a notion — — "

"Well, all you can do for me now, having spread the report, is to say that I *was*n't there — I'm serious. Here we are."

VOLUME III.

CHAPTER I.

A LARK.

"There's some 'Old Tom,' isn't there? Get it, and glasses and cold water, *here*," said Cleve to his servant, who, patient, polite, sleepy, awaited his master. "You used to like it — and here are cigars;" and he shook out a shower upon his drawingroom table cover. "And where did you want to go at this time of night?"

"To Wright's, to see the end of the great game of billiards — Seller and Culverin, you know; I've two pounds on it."

"I don't care if I go with you, just now. What's this? — When the devil did this come?" Cleve had picked up and at one pale glance read a little note that lay on the table; and then he repeated coolly enough —

"I say, when did this come?"

"Before one, sir, I think," said Shepperd.

"Get me my coat," and Shepperd disappeared.

"Pestered to *death*," he said, moodily. "See, you have got the things here, and cigars. I shan't be five minutes away. If I'm longer, don't wait for me; but finish this first."

Cleve had turned up the collar of his outer coat, and buttoned it across his chin, and pulled a sort of travelling cap down on his brows, and away he went, looking very pale and anxious.

He did not come back in five minutes; nor in ten, twenty, or forty minutes. The "Old Tom" in the bottle had run low; Sedley looked at his watch; he could wait no longer.

When he got out upon the flagway, he felt the agreeable stimulus of the curious "Old Tom" sufficiently to render a little pause expedient for the purpose of calling to mind with clearness the geographical bearings of Wright's billiard-rooms — whither accordingly he sauntered — eastward, along deserted and echoing streets, with here and there a policeman poking into an area, or loitering along his two-mile-an-hour duty march, and now and then regaled by the unearthly music of love-sick cats among the roofs.

These streets and squares, among which he had in a manner lost himself, had in their day been the haunts and quarters of fashion, a fairy world, always migrating before the steady march of business. Sedley had quite lost his reckoning. If he had been content to go by Ludgate-hill, he would have been at Wright's half an hour before. Sedley did not know these dingy and respectable old squares; he had not even seen a policeman for the last twenty minutes, and was just then quite of the Irish lawyer's opinion that life is not long enough for short cuts.

In a silent street he passed a carriage standing near a lamp. The driver on the flagway looked hard at him. Sedley was not a romantic being only; he had also his waggish mood, and loved a lark when it came. He returned the fellow's stare with a glance as significant, slackening his pace.

"Well?" said Sedley.

"Well!" replied the driver.

"Capital!" answered Sedley.

"Be you him?" demanded the driver, after a pause.

"No; be *you*?" answered Sedley.

The driver seemed a little puzzled, and eyed Sedley doubtfully; and Sedley looked into the carriage, which, however, was empty, and then at the house at whose rails it stood; but it was dark from top to bottom.

He had thoughts of stepping in and availing himself of the vehicle; but seeing no particular fun in the procedure, and liking better to walk, he merely said, nodding toward the carriage —

"Lots of room."

"Room enough, I dessay."

"How long do you mean to wait?"

"As long as I'm paid for."

"Give my love to your mother."

"Feard she won't vally it."

"Take care of yourself — for *my* sake."

Doubtless there was a retort worthy of so sprightly a dialogue; but Sedley could not hear distinctly as he paced on, looking up at the moon, and thinking how beautifully she used to shine, and was no doubt then shining, on the flashing blue sea at Cardyllian, and over the misty mountains. And he thought of his pretty cousin Agnes Etherage; and "Yes," said he within himself, quickening his pace, "if I win that two pounds at Wright's, I'll put two pounds to it, the two pounds I should have lost, that is — there's nothing extravagant in that — and give little Agnes something pretty; I said I would; and though it was only joke, still it's a promise."

Some tradesmen's bills that morning had frightened him, and as he periodically did, he had bullied himself into resolutions of economy, out of which he ingeniously reasoned himself again. "What shall it be? I'll look in tomorrow at Dymock and Rose's — they have lots of charming little French trifles. Where the deuce are we now?"

He paused, and looking about him, and then down a stable-lane between two oldfashioned houses of handsome dimensions, he saw a fellow in a great coat loitering slowly down it, and looking up vigilantly at the two or three windows in the side of the mansion.

"A robbery, by George!" thought Sedley, as he marked the prowling vigilance of the man, and his peculiar skulking gait.

He had no sort of weapon about him, not even a stick; but he is one of the best sparrers extant, and thinks pluck and "a fist-full of fives" well worth a revolver.

Sedley hitched his shoulders, plucked off the one glove that remained on, and followed him softly a few steps, dogging him down the lane, with that shrewd, stern glance which men exchange in the prize-ring. But when on turning about the man in the surtout saw that he was observed, he confirmed Sedley's suspicions by first pausing irresolutely, and ultimately withdrawing suddenly round the angle.

Sedley had not expected this tactique. For whatever purpose, the man had been plainly watching the house, and it was nearly three o'clock. Thoroughly blooded now for a "lark," Sedley followed swiftly to the corner, but could not see him; so, as he returned, a low window in the side wall opened, and a female voice said, "Are you there?"

"Yes," replied Tom Sedley, confidentially drawing near.

"Take this."

"All right" — and thereupon he received first a bag and then a box, each tolerably heavy.

Sedley was amused. A mystification had set in; a quiet robbery, and he the receiver. He thought of dropping the booty down the area of the respectable house round the corner, but just then the man in the surtout emerged from the wing, so to speak, and marching slowly up the perspective of the lane, seemed about to disturb him, but once more changed his mind, and disappeared.

"What is to happen next?" wondered Tom Sedley. In a few minutes a door which opens from the back yard or garden of the house from which he had received his burthen, opened cautiously, and a woman in a cloak stepped out, carrying another bag, a heavy one it also seemed, and beckoning to him, said, so soon as he was sufficiently near —

"Is the carriage come?"

"Yes'm," answered Tom, touching his hat, and affecting as well as he could the ways of a porter or a cabman.

"When they comes," she resumed, "you'll bring us to where it is, mind, and fetch the things with you — and mind ye, no noise nor talking, and walk as light as you can."

"All right," said Tom, in the same whisper in which she spoke.

It could not be a robbery — Tom had changed his mind; there was an air of respectability about the servant that conflicted with that theory, and the discovery that the carriage was waiting to receive the party was also against it.

Tom was growing more interested in his adventure; and entering into the fuss and mystery of the plot.

"Come round, please, and show me where the carriage stands," said the woman, beckoning to Tom, who followed her round the corner.

She waited for him, and laid her hand on his elbow, giving him a little jog by way of caution.

"Hush — not a word above your breath, mind," she whispered; "*I* see that's it; well, it needn't come no nearer, mind."

"All right, ma'am."

"And there's the window," she added in a still more cautious whisper, and pointing with a nod and a frown at a window next the hall door, through the shutter of which a dim light was visible.

"Ha!" breathed Tom, looking wise, "and all safe *there*?"

"We're never sure; sometimes awake; sometimes not; sometimes quiet; sometimes quite wild-like; and the window pushed open, for hair! Hoffle he is!"

"And always was," hazarded Tom.

“Wuss now, though,” whispered she, shaking her head ruefully, and she returned round the angle of the house and entered the door through which she had issued, and Tom set down his load not far from the same point.

Before he had waited many minutes the same door reopened, and two ladies, as he judged them to be from something in their air and dress, descended the steps together, followed by the maid carrying the black-leather bag as before. They stopped just under the door, which the servant shut cautiously and locked; and then these three female figures stood for a few seconds whispering together; and after that they turned and walked up the lane towards Tom Sedley, who touched his hat as they approached, and lifted his load again.

The two ladies were muffled in cloaks. The taller wore no hat or bonnet; but had instead a shawl thrown over her head and shoulders, hoodwise. She walked, leaning upon the shorter lady, languidly, like a person very weak, or in pain, and the maid at the other side, placed her arm tenderly round her waist, under her mufflers, and aided her thus as she walked. They crossed the street at the end of the stable-lane, and walked at that side toward the carriage. The maid signed to Tom, who carried his luggage quickly to its destination on the box, and was in time to open the carriage-door.

“Don’t you mind,” said the woman, putting Tom unceremoniously aside, and herself aiding the taller lady into the oldfashioned carriage. As she prepared to get in, Tom for a moment fancied a recognition; something in the contour of the figure, muffled as it was, for a second struck him; and at the same moment all seemed like a dream, and he stepped backward involuntarily in amazement. Had he not seen the same gesture. The arm, exactly so, and that slender hand in a gardening glove, holding a tiny trowel, under the dark foliage of old trees.

The momentary gesture was gone. The lady leaning back, a muffled figure, in the corner of the carriage, silent. Her companion, who he thought looked sharply at him, from within, now seated herself beside her; and the maid also from her place inside, told him from the window —

“Bid him drive now where he knows, quickly,” and she pulled up the window.

Tom was too much interested now to let the thread of his adventure go. So to the box beside the driver he mounted, and delivered the order he had just received.

Away he drove swiftly, Citywards, through silent and empty streets. Tom quickly lost his bearings; the gas lamps grew few and far between; he was among lanes and arches, and sober, melancholy streets, such as he had never suspected of an existence in such a region.

Here the driver turned suddenly up a narrow way between old brick walls, with tufts of dingy grass here and there at top, and the worn mortar lines overlaid with velvet moss. This short passage terminated in two tall brick piers, surmounted by worn and mossgrown balls of stone.

Tom jumped down and pushed back the rusty iron gates, and they drove into an unlighted, melancholy courtyard; and Tom thundered at a tall narrow hall-door, between chipped and worn pilasters of the same white stone, surmounted by some carved heraldry, half effaced.

Standing on the summit of the steps he had to repeat his summons, till the cavernous old mansion pealed again with the echo, before a light gave token of the approach of a living being to give them greeting.

Tom opened the carriage door, and let down the steps, perhaps a little clumsily, but he was getting through his duties wonderfully.

The party entered the spacious wainscoted hall, in which was an old wooden bench, on which, gladly, it seemed, the sick lady sat herself down. A great carved doorway opened upon a square second hall or lobby, through which the ray of the single candle glanced duskily, and touched the massive banisters of a broad staircase.

This must have been the house of a very great man in its day, a Lord Chancellor, perhaps, one of those Hogarthian mansions in which such men as my Lord Squanderfield might have lived in the first George’s days.

“How could any man have been such an idiot,” thought Sedley, filled with momentary wonder, “as to build a palace like this in such a place?”

“Dear me! what a place — what a strange place!” whispered the elder lady, “where are we to go?”

“Upstairs, please’m,” said the woman with a brass candlestick in her hand.

“I hope there’s fire, and more light, and — and proper comfort there?”

“Oh! yes’m, please; everythink as you would like, please.”

“Come, dear,” said the old lady tenderly, giving her arm to the languid figure resting in the hall.

So guided and lighted by the servant they followed her up the great well staircase.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW VOICE.

The ladies ascended, led by the maid with the candle, and closely followed by their own servant, and our friend Tom Sedley brought up the rear, tugging the box and the bag with him.

At the stairhead was a great gallery from which many doors opened. Tom Sedley halted close by the banister for orders, depositing his luggage beside him. The maid set the candle down upon a table, and opened one of these tall doors, through which he saw an angle of the apartment, a fire burning in the grate, and a pleasant splendour of candlelight; he saw that the floor was carpeted, and the windows curtained, and though there was disclosed but a corner of a large room, there were visible such pieces of furniture as indicated general comfort.

In a large armchair, at the further side of the fireplace, sat the lady who had thrilled him with a sudden remembrance. She had withdrawn the shawl that hung in hood-like fashion over her head, and there was no longer a doubt. The Beatrice Cenci was there — his Guido — very pale, dying he thought her, with her white hands clasped, and her beautiful eyes turned upward in an agony of prayer.

The old lady, Miss Sheckleton, came near, leaned over her, kissed her tenderly, and caressingly smoothed her rich chestnut hair over her temples, and talked gently in her ear, and raised her hand in both hers, and kissed it, and drawing a chair close to hers, she sat by her, murmuring in her ear with a countenance of such kindness and compassion, that Tom Sedley loved her for it.

Looking up, Miss Sheckleton observed the door open, and Tom fancied perceived him in the perspective through it, for she rose suddenly, shut it, and he saw no more. Tom had not discovered in the glance of the old lady any sign of recognition, and for the sake of appearances he had buttoned his gray wrapper close across his throat and breast so as to conceal the evidences of his ball costume; his shining boots, however, were painfully conspicuous, but for that incongruity there was no help.

And now the servant who had let them in told Tom to bring the box and bag into the servants’ room, to which she led him across the gallery.

There was a large fire, which was pleasant, a piece of matting on the floor, a few kitchen utensils ranged near the fireplace, a deal table, and some common kitchen chairs. Dismal enough would the room have looked, notwithstanding its wainscoting, had it not been for the glow diffused by the fire.

By this fire, on a kitchen chair, and upon his own opera hat, which he wished specially to suppress, sat Tom Sedley, resolved to see his adventure one hour or so into futurity, before abandoning it, and getting home to his bed, and in the meantime doing his best to act a servant, as he fancied such a functionary would appear in his moments of ease unbending in the kitchen or the servants’ hall. The maid who had received the visitors in the hall, Anne Evans by name, square, blackhaired, slightly pitted with smallpox, and grave, came and sat down at the other side of the fire, and eyed Tom Sedley in silence.

Now and then Tom felt uncomfortably about his practical joke, which was degenerating into a deception. But an hour or so longer could not matter much; and might he not make himself really useful if the services of a messenger were required?

Anne Evans was considering him in silence, and he turned a little more toward the fire, and poked it, as he fancied a groom would poke a fire for his private comfort.

“Are you servant to the ladies?” at last she asked.

Tom smiled at the generality of the question, but interpreting in good faith —

“No,” said he, “I came with the carriage.”

“Servant to the gentleman?” she asked.

“What gentleman?”

“You know well.”

Tom had not an idea, but could not well say so. He therefore poked the fire again, and said, “Go on, miss; I’m listening.”

She did not go on, however, for some time, and then it was to say —

“My name is Anne Evans. What may your name be?”

“Can’t tell that. I left my name at home,” said Tom, mysteriously.

“Won’t tell?”

"Can't."

"I'm only by the month. Come in just a week tomorrow," observed Anne Evans.

"They'll not part with you in a month, Miss Evans. No; they has some taste and feelin' among them. I wouldn't wonder if you was here for ever!" said Tom, with enthusiasm; "and what's this place, miss — this house I mean — whose house is it?"

"Can't say, only I hear it's bought for a brewery, to be took down next year."

"Oh, criky!" said Tom; "that's a pity."

There was a short pause.

"I saw you 'ide your 'at," said Anne Evans.

"Not 'ide it," said Tom; "only sits on it — always sits on my 'at."

Tom produced it, let it bounce up like a jack-in-a-box, and shut it down again.

Miss Evans was neither amused nor surprised.

"Them's hopera 'ats — first quality — they used to come in boxes on 'em, as long as from here to you, when I was at Mr. Potterton's, the hatter. Them's for gents — they air — and not for servants."

"The gov'nor gives me his old uns," said Tom, producing the best fib he could find.

"And them French boots," she added, meditatively.

"Perquisite likewise," said Tom.

Miss Anne Evans closed her eyes, and seemed disposed to take a short nap in her chair. But on a sudden she opened them to say —

"I think you're the gentleman himself."

"The old gentleman?" said Tom.

"No. The young un."

"I'm jest what I tell you, not objectin' to the compliment all the same," said Tom.

"And a ring on your finger?"

"A ring on my finger — yes. I wear it two days in the week. My granduncle's ring, who was a gentleman, being skipper of a coal brig."

"What's the lady's name?"

"Can't tell, Miss Evans; dussn't."

"Fuss about nothin'!" said she, and closed her eyes again, and opened them in a minute more, to add, "but I think you're him, and that's *my* belief."

"No, I ain't miss, as you'll see, by-and-by."

"Tisn't nothin' to me, only people *is* so close."

The door opened, and a tall woman in black, with a black net cap on, came quietly but quickly into the room.

"You're the man?" said she, with an air of authority, fixing her eyes askance on Tom.

"Yes 'm, please."

"Well, you don't go on no account, for you'll be wanted just now."

"No, ma'am."

"Where's the box and bag you're in charge of?"

"Out here," said Tom.

"Hish, man, quiet; don't you know there's sickness? Walk easy, *can't* you? *please*, consider."

Tom followed her almost on tip-toe to the spot where the parcels lay.

"Gently now; into this room, please," and she led the way into that sitting-room into which Tom Sedley had looked some little time since, from the stairhead.

The beautiful young lady was gone, but Miss Sheckleton was standing at the further door of the room with her hands clasped, and her eyes raised in prayer, and her pale cheeks wet with tears.

Hearing the noise, she gently closed the door, and hastily drying her eyes, whispered, "Set them down *there*," pointing to a sofa, on which Tom placed them accordingly. "Thanks — that will do. You may go."

When Sedley had closed the door —

"Oh, Mrs. Graver," whispered Anne Sheckleton, clasping her wrists in her trembling fingers, "is she *very* ill?"

"Well, ma'am, she *is* ill."

"But, oh, my God, you don't think we are going to lose her?" she whispered wildly, with her imploring gaze in the nurse's eyes.

"Oh, no, please God, ma'am, it will all be right. You must not fuss yourself, ma'am. You must not let her see you like this, on no account."

"Shall I send for him now?"

"No, ma'am; he'd only be in the way. *I*'ll tell you when; and his man's here, ready to go, any minute. I must go back to her now, ma'am. Hish!"

And Mrs. Graver disappeared with a little rustle of her dress, and no sound of steps. That solemn bird floated very noiselessly round sick beds, and you only heard, as it were, the hovering of her wings.

And then, in a minute more, in glided Miss Sheckleton, having dried her eyes very carefully.

And now came a great knocking at the hall door, echoing dully through the house. It was Doctor Grimshaw, who had just got his coat off, and was winding his watch, when he was called from his own bedside by this summons, and so was here after a long day's work, to make a new start, and await the dawn in this chamber of pain.

In he came, and Miss Sheckleton felt that light and hope entered the room with him. Florid, portly, genial, with a light, hopeful step, and a good, decided, cheery manner, he inspired confidence, and seemed to take command, not only of the case, but of the ailment itself.

Miss Sheckleton knew this good doctor, and gladly shook his hand; and he recognised her with a hesitating look that seemed to ask a question, but was not meant to do so, and he spoke cheerfully to the patient, and gave his directions to the nurse, and in about half an hour more told good Anne Sheckleton that she had better leave the patient.

So, with the docility which an able physician inspires, good Anne Sheckleton obeyed, and in the next room — sometimes praying, sometimes standing and listening, sometimes wandering from point to point, in the merest restlessness — she waited and watched for more than an hour, which seemed to her longer than a whole night, and at last tapped very gently at the door, a lull having come for a time in the sick chamber, and unable longer to endure her suspense.

A little bit of the door was opened, and Anne Sheckleton saw the side of Mrs. Graver's straight nose, and one of her wrinkled eyes, and her grim mouth.

"How is she?" whispered Miss Sheckleton, feeling as if she was herself about to die.

"Pretty well, ma'am," answered the nurse, but with an awful look of insincerity, under which the old lady's heart sank down and down, as if it had foundered.

"One word to Dr. Grimshaw," she whispered, with white lips.

"You *can't*, ma'am," murmured the nurse, sternly, and about to shut the door in her face.

"Wait, *wait*," whispered the voice of kind old Doctor Grimshaw, and he came into the next room to Miss Sheckleton, closing the door after him.

"Oh, doctor!" she gasped.

"Well, Miss Sheckleton, I hope she'll do very well; I've just given her something — a slight stimulant — and I've every confidence everything will be well. Don't make yourself uneasy; it is not going on badly."

"Oh, Doctor Grimshaw, shall I send for him? He'd never forgive me; and I promised her, darling Margaret, to send."

"*Don't* send — on *no account* yet. Don't bring him here — he's better away. I'll tell you when to send."

The doctor opened the door.

"Still quiet?"

"Yes, sir," whispered Mrs. Graver.

Again he closed the door.

"Nice creature she seems. A relation of yours?" asked the Doctor.

"My cousin."

"When was she married?"

"About a year ago."

"Never any tendency to consumption?"

"Never."

"Nothing to make her low or weak? Is she hysterical?"

"No, hardly that, but nervous and excitable."

"I know; very good. I think she'll do very nicely. If anything goes the least wrong I'll let you know. Now stay quiet in there."

And he shut the door, and she heard his step move softly over the next room floor, so great was the silence; and she kneeled down and prayed as helpless people pray in awful peril; and more time passed, and more, slowly, very slowly. Oh, would the dawn ever come, and the daylight again?

Voices and moans she heard from the room. Again she prayed on her knees to the throne of mercy, in the agony of her suspense, and now over the strange roofs spread the first faint gray of the coming dawn; and there came a silence in the room, and on a sudden was heard a new tiny voice crying.

“The little child!” cried old Anne Sheckleton, springing to her feet, with clasped hands, in the anguish of delight, and such a gush of tears — as she looked up, thanking God with her smiles — as comes only in such moments.

Margaret’s clear voice faintly said something; Anne could not hear what.

“A boy,” answered the cheery voice of Doctor Grimshaw.

“Oh! he’ll be so glad!” answered the faint clear voice in a kind of rapture.

“Of course he will,” replied the same cheery voice. And another question came, too low for old Anne Sheckleton’s ears.

“A *beautiful* boy! as fine a fellow as you could desire to look at. Bring him here, nurse.”

“Oh! the darling!” said the same faint voice. “I’m so *happy*.”

“Thank God! thank God! thank God!” sobbed delighted Anne Sheckleton, her cheeks still streaming in showers of tears as she stood waiting at the door for the moment of admission, and hearing the sweet happy tones of Margaret’s voice sounding in her ears like the voice of one who had just now died, heard faintly through the door of heaven.

For thus it has been, and thus to the end, it will be — the “sorrow” of the curse is remembered no more, “for joy that a man is born into the world.”

CHAPTER III.

CLEVE COMES.

Tom Sedley was dozing in his chair, by the fire, when he was roused by Mrs. Graver’s voice.

“You’ll take this note at once, please, to your master; there’s a cab at the door, and the lady says you mustn’t make no delay.”

It took some seconds to enable Tom to account for the scene, the actor and his own place of repose, his costume, and the tenor of the strange woman’s language. In a little while, however, he recovered the context, and the odd passage in his life became intelligible.

Still half asleep, Tom hurried downstairs, and in the hall, with a shock, read the address, “Cleve Verney, Esq.” At the hall-door steps he found a cab, into which he jumped, telling the man to drive to Cleve Verney’s lodgings.

There were expiring lights in the drawingroom, the blinds of which were up, and as the cab stopped at the steps a figure appeared at one of the windows, and Cleve Verney opened it, and told the driver, “Don’t mind knocking, I’ll go down.”

“Come upstairs,” said Cleve, as he stood at the open door, addressing Sedley, and mistaking him for the person whom he had employed.

Up ran Tom Sedley at his heels.

“Hollo! *Sedley* — what brings *you* here?” said Cleve, when Tom appeared in the light of the candles. “You don’t mean to say the ball has been going on till now — or is it a scrape?”

“Nothing — only this I’ve been commissioned to give you,” and he placed Miss Sheckleton’s note in his hand.

Cleve had looked wofully haggard and anxious as Tom entered. But his countenance changed now to an ashy paleness, and there was no mistaking his extreme agitation.

He opened the note — a very brief one it seemed — and read it.

“Thank God!” he said with a great sigh, and then he walked to the window and looked out, and returned again to the candles and read the note once more.

“How did you know I was up, Tom?”

“The lights in the windows.”

“Yes. Don’t let the cab go.”

Cleve was getting on his coat, and speaking like a man in a dream.

“I say, Tom Sedley, how did *you* come by this note?” he said, with a sudden pause, and holding Miss Sheckleton’s note in his fingers.

“Well, quite innocently,” hesitated Sedley.

“How the devil was it, sir? Come, you may as well — by heaven, Sedley, you *shall* tell me the truth!”

Tom looked on his friend Cleve, and saw his eyes gleaming sharply on him, and his face very white.

“Of course I’ll tell you, Cleve,” said Tom, and with this exordium he stumbled honestly through his story, which by no means quieted Cleve Verney.

“You d —— d little Paul Pry!” said he. “Well, you have got hold of a secret now, like the man in the iron mask, and by —— you had better keep it.”

A man who half blames himself already, and is in a position which he hates and condemns, will stand a great deal more of hard language, and even of execration, than he would under any other imaginable circumstances.

“You can’t blame me half as much as I do myself. I assure you, Cleve, I’m awfully sorry. It was the merest lark — at first — and then — when I saw that beautiful — that young lady— “

“Don’t talk of that lady any more; I’m her husband. *There*, you have it all, and if you whisper it to mortal you *may ruin* me; but one or other of us shall die for it!”

Cleve was talking in a state of positive exasperation.

“Whisper it! — tell it! You don’t in the least understand me, Cleve,” said Tom, collecting himself, and growing a little lofty; “I don’t whisper or tell things; and as for daring or not daring, I don’t know what you mean; and I hope, if occasion for *dying* came, I should funk it as little as any other fellow.”

“I’m going to this d —— d place now. I don’t much care what you do: I almost wish you’d shoot me.”

He struck his hand on the table, looking not at Tom Sedley, but with a haggard rage through the window, and away toward the gray east; and without another word to Sedley, he ran down, shutting the hall-door with a crash that showed more of his temper than of his prudence, and Tom saw him jump into the cab and drive away.

The distance is really considerable, but in Cleve's intense reverie time and space contracted, and before he fancied they had accomplished half the way, he found himself at the tall door and stained pilasters and steps of the old redbrick house.

Anne Evans, half awake, awaited his arrival on the steps. He ran lightly up the stairs, under her covert scrutiny; and, in obedience to Mrs. Graver's gesture of warning, as she met him with raised hand and her frowning "Hish" at the head of the stairs, he checked his pace, and in a whisper he made his eager inquiries. She was going on very nicely.

"I must see Miss Sheckleton — the old lady — where is she?" urged Cleve.

"Here, sir, please" — and Mrs. Graver opened a door, and he found tired Miss Sheckleton tying on her bonnet, and getting her cloak about her.

"Oh! Cleve, dear" — she called him "Cleve" now— "I'm so delighted; she's doing *very* well; the doctor's quite *pleased* with her, and it's a boy, Cleve, and — and I wish you joy with all my heart."

And as she spoke, the kind old lady was shaking both his hands, and smiling up into his handsome face, like sunshine; but that handsome face, though it smiled down darkly upon her, was, it seemed to her, strangely joyless, and even troubled.

"And Cleve, dear, my *dear* Mr. Verney — I'm *so* sorry; but I must go immediately. I make his chocolate in the morning, and he sometimes calls for it at halfpast seven. This miserable attack that has kept him here, and the risk in which he is at every day he stays in this town, it *is so* distracting. And if I should not be at home and ready to see him when he calls, he'd be sure to suspect something; and I really see nothing but ruin from his temper and violence to all of us, if he were to find out how it is. So goodbye, and God bless you. The doctor says he thinks you may see her in a very little time — half an hour or so — if you are very careful not to let her excite or agitate herself; and — God bless you — I shall be back, for a little, in an hour or two."

So that kindly, fluttered, troubled, and happy old lady disappeared; and Cleve was left again to his meditations.

"Where's the doctor?" asked Cleve of the servant.

"In the sitting-room, please, sir, writing; his carriage is come, sir, please."

And thus saying, Mistress Anne Evans officiously opened the door, and Cleve entered. The doctor, having written a prescription, and just laid down his pen, was pulling on his glove.

Cleve had no idea that he was to see Doctor Grimshaw. Quite another physician, with whom he had no acquaintance, had been agreed upon between him and Miss Sheckleton. As it turned out, however, that gentleman was now away upon an interesting visit, at a country mansion, and Doctor Grimshaw was thus unexpectedly summoned.

Cleve was unpleasantly surprised, for he had already an acquaintance with that good man, which he fancied was not recorded in his recollection to his credit. I think if the doctor's eye had not been directed toward the door when he entered, that Cleve Verney would have drawn back; but that would not do now.

"Doctor Grimshaw?" said Cleve.

"Yes, sir;" said the old gentleman.

"I think, Doctor Grimshaw, you know me?"

"Oh, yes, sir; of course I do;" said the Doctor, with an uncomfortable smile, ever so little bitter, and a slight bow, "Mr. Verney, yes." And the doctor paused, looking toward him, pulling on his other glove, and expecting a question.

"Your patient, Doctor Grimshaw, doing very well, I'm told?"

"Nicely, sir — very nicely now. I was a little uncomfortable about her just at one time, but doing very well now; and it's a boy — a fine child. Good morning, sir."

He had taken up his hat.

"And Doctor Grimshaw, just one word. May I beg, as a matter of professional *honour*, that this — all this, shall be held as strictly *secret* — everything connected with it as strictly confidential?"

The doctor looked down on the carpet with a pained countenance. "Certainly, sir," he said, drily. "That's all, I suppose? Of course, Mr. Verney, I shan't — since such I suppose to be the wish of all parties — mention the case."

“Of *all* parties, certainly; and it is in tenderness to others, not to myself, that I make the request.”

“I’m sorry it should be necessary, sir;” said Doctor Grimshaw, almost sternly. “I know Miss Sheckleton and her family; this poor young lady, I understand, is a cousin of hers. I am *sorry*, sir, upon her account, that any mystery should be desirable.”

“It *is* desirable, and, in fact, *indispensable*, sir,” said Cleve, a little stiffly, for he did not see what right that old doctor had to assume a lecturer’s tone toward him.

“No one shall be compromised by me, sir,” said the doctor, with a sad and offended bow.

And the Doctor drove home pretty well tired out. I am afraid that Cleve did not very much care whom he might compromise, provided he himself were secure. But even from himself the utter selfishness, which toned a character passionate and impetuous enough to simulate quite unconsciously the graces of magnanimity and tenderness, was hidden.

Cleve fancied that the cares that preyed upon his spirits were for Margaret, and when he sometimes almost regretted their marriage, that his remorse was principally for her, that all his caution and finesse were exacted by his devotion to the interests of his young wife, and that the long system of mystery and deception, under which her proud, frank, spirit was pining, was practised solely for her advantage.

So Cleve was in his own mind something of a hero — self-sacrificing, ready, if need be, to shake himself free, for sake of his love and his liberty, of all the intoxications and enervations of his English life, and *fortis colonus*, to delve the glebe of Canada or to shear the sheep of Australia. He was not conscious that all these were the chimeras of insincerity, that ambition was the breath of his nostrils, and that his idol was — himself.

And if he mistakes himself, do not others mistake him also, and clothe him with the nobleness of their own worship? Can it be that the lights and the music and the incense that surround him are but the tributes of a beautiful superstition, and that the idol in the midst is cold and dumb?

Cleve, to do him justice, was moved on this occasion. He did — shall I say? — yearn to behold her again. There was a revival of tenderness, and he waited with a real impatience to see her.

He did see her — just a little gleam of light in the darkened room; he stood beside the bed, clasping that beautiful hand that God had committed to his, smiling down in that beautiful face that smiled unutterable love up again into his own.

"Oh! Cleve, darling — oh, Cleve! I'm so happy."

The languid hands are clasped on his, the yearning eyes, and the smile, look up. It is like the meeting of the beloved after shipwreck.

"And look, Cleve;" and with just ever so little a motion of her hand she draws back a silken coverlet, and he sees in a deep sleep a little baby, and the beautiful smile of young maternity falls upon it like a blessing and a caress. "Isn't it a darling? *Poor* little thing! how quietly it sleeps. I think it is the dearest little thing that ever was seen — *our* little baby!"

Is there a prettier sight than the young mother smiling, in this the hour of her escape, upon the treasure she has found? The wondrous gift, at sight of which a new fountain of love springs up — never, while life remains, to cease its flowing. Looking on such a sight in silence, I think I hear the feet of the angels round the bed — I think I see their beautiful eyes smiling on the face of the little mortal, and their blessed hands raised over the head of the fair young mother.

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE’S REMORSE

“Teach me, ye groves, some art to ease my pain, Some soft resentments that may leave no stain On her loved name, and then I will complain.”

Next day, after dinner, Lord Verney said to Cleve, as they two sat alone, “I saw you at Lady Dorminster’s last night. I saw you — about it. It seems to me you go to too many places, with the House to attend to; you stay too long; one can look in, you know. Sometimes one meets a person; I had a good deal of interesting conversation last night, for instance, with the French Ambassador. No one takes a hint better; they are very good listeners, the French, and that is the way they pick up so much information and opinion, and things. I had a cup of tea, and we talked about it, for half-an-hour, until I had got my ideas well before him. A very able man, a brilliant person, and seemed — he appeared to go with me — about it — and very well up upon our history — and things — and — and — looking at you, it struck me — you’re looking a good deal cut up, about it — and — and as if you were doing too much. And I said, you know, you were to look about, and see if there was any young person you liked — that was suitable — and — that kind of thing; but you know you must not fatigue yourself, and I don’t want to hurry you; only it is a step you ought to take with a view to strengthen your position — ultimately. And — and — I hear it is too late to consider about Ethel — that would have been very nice, it struck me; but that is now out of the question, I understand — in fact, it is certain, although the world don’t know it yet; and therefore we must consider some other alliance; and I don’t see any very violent hurry. We must look about — and — and — you’ll want some money, Cleve, when you have made up your mind.”

“You are always too good,” said Cleve.

“I — I mean with your *wife* — about it;” and Lord Verney coughed a little. “There’s never any harm in a little money; the more you get, the more you can do. I always was of that opinion. Knowledge is power, and money is power, though in different ways; that was always my idea. What I want to impress on your mind, however, at this moment, particularly, is, that there is nothing very pressing as to time; we can afford a little time. The Onslow motto, you know, *it* conveys it, and your mother was connected with the Onslows."

It would not be easy to describe how the words of his noble uncle relieved Cleve Verney. Every sentence lifted a load from his burthen, or cut asunder some knot in the cordage of his bonds. He had not felt so much at ease since his hated conversation with Lord Verney in the library.

Not very long after this, Cleve made the best speech by many degrees he had ever spoken — a really forcible reply upon a subject he had very carefully made up, of which, in fact, he was a master. His uncle was very much pleased, and gave his hearers to understand pretty distinctly from what fountain he had drawn his inspiration, and promised them better things still, now that he had got him fairly in harness, and had him into his library, and they put their heads together; and he thought his talking with him a little did him no harm, Cleve's voice was so good, he could make himself heard — you must be able to reach their ears or you can hardly hope to make an impression; and Lord Verney's physician insisted on his sparing his throat.

So Lord Verney was pleased. Cleve was Lord Verney's throat, and the throat emitted good speeches, and everyone knew where the head was. Not that Cleve was deficient; but Cleve had very unusual advantages.

Tom Sedley and Cleve were on rather odd terms now. Cleve kept up externally their old intimacy when they met. But he did not seek him out in those moods which used to call for honest Tom Sedley, when they ran down the river together to Greenwich, when Cleve was lazy, and wanted to hear the news, and say what he liked, and escape from criticism of every kind, and enjoy himself indolently.

For Verney now there was a sense of constraint wherever Tom Sedley was. Even in Tom's manner there was a shyness. Tom had learned a secret, which he had not confided to him. He knew he was safe in Tom Sedley's hands. Still he was in his power, and Sedley knew it, and that galled his pride, and made an estrangement.

In the early May, "when winds are sweet though they unruly be," Tom Sedley came down again to Cardyllian. Miss Charity welcomed him with her accustomed emphasis upon the Green. How very pretty Agnes looked. But how cold her ways had grown.

He wished she was not so pretty — so *beautiful*, in fact. It pained him, and somehow he had grown strange with her; and she was changed, grave, and silent, rather, and, as it seemed, careless quite whether he was there or not, although he could never charge her with positive unkindness, much less with rudeness. He wished she would be rude. He would have liked to upbraid her. But her gentle, careless cruelty was a torture that justified no complaint, and admitted no redress.

He could talk volubly and pleasantly enough for hours with Charity, not caring a farthing whether he pleased her or not, and thinking only whether Agnes, who sat silent at her work, liked his stories and was amused by his fun; and went away elated for a whole night and day because a joke of his had made her laugh. Never had Tom felt more proud and triumphant in all his days.

But when Charity left the room to see old Vane Etherage in the study, a strange silence fell upon Tom. You could hear each stitch of her tambour-work. You could hear Tom's breathing. He fancied she might hear the beating of his heart. He was ashamed of his silence. He could have been eloquent had he spoken from that loaded heart. But he dare not, and failing this he must be silent.

By this time Tom was always thinking of Agnes Etherage, and wondering at the perversity of fate. He was in love. He could not cheat himself into any evasion of that truth — a tyrant truth that had ruled him mercilessly; and there was she pining for love of quite another, and bestowing upon him, who disdained it, all the treasure of her heart, while even a look would have been cherished with gratitude by Sedley.

What was the good of his going up every day to Hazelden, Tom Sedley thought, to look at her, and talk to Charity, and laugh, and recount entertaining gossip, and make jokes, and be agreeable, with a heavy and strangely suffering heart, and feel himself every day more and more in love with her, when he knew that the sound of Cleve's footsteps, as he walked by, thinking of himself, would move her heart more than all Tom Sedley, adoring her, could say in his lifetime?

What a fool he was! Before Cleve appeared she was fancy free; no one else in the field, and his opportunities unlimited. He had lapsed his time, and occasion had spread its wings and flown.

"What beautiful sunshine! What do you say to a walk on the Green?" said Tom to Charity, and listening for a word from Agnes. She raised her pretty eyes and looked out, but said nothing.

"Yes. I think it would be very nice; and there is no wind. What do *you* say, Agnes?"

"I don't know. I'm lazy to-day, I think, and I have this to finish," said Agnes.

"But you ought to take a walk, Agnes; it would do you good; and Thomas Sedley and I are going for a walk on the Green."

"Pray, do," pleaded Tom, timidly.

Agnes smiled and shook her head, looking out of the window, and, making no other answer, resumed her work.

"You are *very* obstinate," remarked Charity.

"Yes, and lazy, like the donkeys on the Green, where you are going; but you don't want me particularly — I mean *you*, Charrie — and Mr. Sedley, I know, will excuse me, for I really feel that it would tire me to-day. It would tire me to death," said Agnes, winding up with an emphasis.

"Well, *I'll* go and put on my things, and if you *like* to come you *can* come, and if you don't you can stay where you are. But I wish you would not be a fool. It is a beautiful day, and nothing on earth to prevent you."

"I don't like the idea of a walk to-day. I know I should feel tired immediately, and have to bring you back again; and I've really grown interested in this little bit of work, and I feel as if I must finish it to-day."

"Why *need* you finish it to-day? You *are* such a goose, Agnes," said Charity, marching out of the room.

Tom remained there standing, his hat in his hand, looking out of the window — longing to speak, his heart being full, yet not knowing how to begin, or how to go on if he had begun.

Agnes worked on diligently, and looked out from the window at her side over the shorn grass and flowerbeds, through the old trees in the foreground — over the tops of the sloping forest, with the background of the grand Welsh mountains, and a glimpse of the estuary, here and there, seen through the leaves, stretching far off, in dim gold and gray.

"You like that particular window," said Tom, making a wonderful effort; "I mean, why do you like always to sit there?" He spoke in as careless a way as he could, looking still out of his window, which commanded a different view.

"This window! oh, my frame stands here always, and when one is accustomed to a particular place, it puts one out to change."

Then Agnes dropped her pretty eyes again to her worsted, and worked and hummed very faintly a little air, and Tom's heart swelled within him, and he hummed as faintly the same gay air.

"I thought perhaps you liked that view?" said Tom Sedley, arresting the music.

She looked out again.

"Well, it's very pretty."

"The best from these windows; some people think, I believe, the prettiest view you have," said Tom, gathering force, "the water is always so pretty."

"Yes, the water," she assented listlessly.

"Quite a romantic view," continued Sedley, a little bitterly.

"Yes, every pretty view *is* romantic," she acquiesced, looking out for a moment again. "If one knew exactly what *romantic* means — it's a word we use so often, and so vaguely."

"And can't you define it, Agnes?"

"Define it? I really don't think I could."

"Well, that does surprise me."

"You are so much more clever than I, of course it does."

"No, quite the contrary; you are clever — I'm serious, I assure you — and I'm a dull fellow, and I know it quite well — *I* can't define it; but *that* doesn't surprise me."

"Then we are both in the same case; but I won't allow it's stupidity — the idea is quite undefinable, and that is the real difficulty. You can't describe the perfume of a violet, but you know it quite well, and I really think flowers a more interesting subject than romance."

"Oh, really! not, surely, than the romance of *that* view. It *is* so romantic!"

"You seem quite in love with it," said she, with a little laugh, and began again with a grave face to stitch in the glory of her saint in celestial yellow worsted.

"The water — yes — and the old trees of Ware, and just that tower, at the angle of the house."

Agnes just glanced through her window, but said nothing.

"I think," said Sedley, "if *I* were peopling this scene, you know, I should put my hero in that Castle of Ware — that is, if I could invent a romance, which, of course, I couldn't." He spoke with a meaning, I think.

"Why should there be heroes in romances?" asked Miss Agnes, looking nevertheless toward Ware, with her hand and the needle resting idly upon the frame. "Don't you think a romance ought to resemble reality a little; and do you ever find such a monster as a hero in the world? *I* don't expect to see one, I know," and she laughed again, but Tom thought, a little bitterly, and applied once more diligently to her work, and hummed a few bars of her little air again.

And Tom, standing now in the middle of the room, leaning on the back of a chair, by way of looking still upon the landscape which they had been discussing, was really looking, unobserved, on her, and thinking that there was not in all the world so pretty a creature.

Charity opened the door, equipped for the walk, and bearing an alpaca umbrella, such as few gentlemen would like to walk with in May Fair.

"Well, you won't come, I see. I think you are very obstinate. Come, Thomas Sedley. Goodbye, Agnes;" and with these words the worthy girl led forth my friend Tom, and as they passed the corner of the house, he saw Agnes standing in the window, looking out sadly, with her fingertips against the pane.

"She's lonely, poor little thing!" thought he, with a pang. "Why wouldn't she come? Listlessness — apathy, I suppose. How selfish and odious any trifling with a girl's affections is;" and then aloud to Charity, walking by her side, he continued, "You have not seen Cleve since the great day of Lord Verney's visit, I suppose?"

"No, nothing of him, and don't desire to see him. He has been the cause of a great deal of suffering, as you see, and I think he has behaved *odiously*. She's very odd; she doesn't choose to confide in me. I don't think it's nice or kind of her, but, of course, it's her own affair; only this is plain to me, that she'll never think of any one else now but Cleve Verney."

"It's an awful pity," said Tom Sedley, quite sincerely.

They were walking down that steep and solitary road, by which Vane Etherage had made his memorable descent a few months since, now in deep shadow under the airy canopy of transparent leaves, and in total silence, except for the sounds, far below, of the little mill-stream struggling among the rocks.

"Don't you know Mr. Cleve Verney pretty well?"

"Intimately — that is, I *did*. I have not lately seen so much of him."

"And do you think, Thomas Sedley, that he will ever come forward?" said blunt Miss Charity.

"Well, I happen to know that Cleve Verney has no idea of anything of the kind. In fact, I should be deceiving you, if I did not say distinctly that I know he won't."

Tom was going to say he *can't*, but checked himself. However, I think he was not sorry to have an opportunity of testifying to this fact, and putting Cleve Verney quite out of the field of conjecture as a possible candidate.

"Then I must say," said Miss Charity, flushing brightly, "that Mr. Verney is a villain."

From this strong position Tom could not dislodge her, and finding that expostulation involved him in a risk of a similar classification, he abandoned Cleve to his fate.

Up and down the Green they walked until Miss Flood espied and arrested Charity Etherage, and carried her off upon a visit of philanthropy in her pony-carriage, and Tom Sedley transferred his charge to fussy, imperious Miss Flood; and he felt strangely incensed with her, and walked the Green, disappointed and bereft. Was not Charity Agnes's sister? While he walked with her, he could talk of Agnes. He was still in the halo of Hazelden, and near Agnes. But now he was adrift, in the dark. He sat down, looking toward the upland woods that indicate Hazelden, and sighed with a much more real pain than he had ever sighed toward Malory; and he thought evil of meddling Miss Flood, who had carried away his companion. After a time he walked away toward Malory, intending a visit to his old friend Rebecca Mervyn, and thinking all the way of Agnes Etherage.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. MERVYN'S DREAM.

He found himself, in a little time, under the windows of the steward's house. Old Rebecca Mervyn was seated on the bench beside the door, plying her knitting-needles; she raised her eyes on hearing his step.

"Ha, he's come!" she said, lowering her hands to her knees, and fixing her dark wild gaze upon him, "I ought to have known it — so strange a dream must have had a meaning."

"They sometimes have, ma'am, I believe. I hope you are pretty well, Mrs. Mervyn."

"No, sir, I am not well."

"Very sorry, very sorry indeed, ma'am," said Tom Sedley. "I've often thought this must be a very damp, unhealthy place — too much crowded up with trees; they say nothing is more trying to health. You'd be much better, I'm sure, anywhere else."

"Nowhere else; my next move shall be my last. I care not how soon, sir."

"Pray, don't give way to low spirits; you really mustn't," said Tom.

"Tell me what it is, sir; for I know you have come to tell me something."

"No, I assure you; merely to ask you how you are, and whether I can be of any use."

"Oh! sir; what use? — *no*."

"Do you wish me to give any message to that fellow, Dingwell? Pray make use of me in any way that strikes you. I hear he is on the point of leaving England again."

"I'm glad of it," exclaimed the old lady. "Why do I say so? I'm glad of nothing; but I'm sure it's better. What business could he and Mr. Larkin, and that Jew, have with my child, who, thank God, is in Heaven, and out of the reach of their hands, *evil* hands, I dare say."

"So I rather think also, ma'am; and Mr. Larkin tried, did he?"

"Larkin; — yes, that was the name. He came here, sir, about the time I saw you; and he talked a great deal about my poor little child. It is dead, you know, but I did not tell him so. I promised Lady Verney I'd tell nothing to strangers — they all grow angry then. Mr. Larkin was angry, I think. But I do not speak — and you advised me to be silent — and though he said he was their lawyer, I would not answer a word.”

“I have no doubt you acted wisely, Mrs. Mervyn; you cannot be too cautious in holding any communication with such people.”

“I’d tell you, sir — if I dare; but I’ve promised, and I *dare*n’t. Till old Lady Verney’s gone, I daren’t. I know nothing of law papers — my poor head! How should I? And *she* could not half understand them. So I promised. *You* would understand them. Time enough — time enough.”

“I should be only too happy, whenever you please,” said Tom, making ready tender of his legal erudition.

“And you, sir, have come to tell me something; what is it?”

“I assure you I have nothing particular to say; I merely called to inquire how you are.”

“Nothing more needless, sir; how can a poor lonely old woman be, whose last hope has perished and left her alone in the world? For twenty years — more, *more* than twenty — I have been watching, day and night; and now, sir, I look at the sea no more. I will never see those headlands again. I sit here, sir, from day to day, thinking; and, oh, dear, I wish it was all over.”

“Any time you should want me, I should be only too happy, and this is my address.”

“And you have nothing to tell me?”

“No, ma’am, nothing more than I said.”

“It was wonderful: I dreamed last night I was looking toward Pendillion, watching as I used; the moon was above the mountain, and I was standing by the water, so that the sea came up to my feet, and I saw a speck of white far away, and something told me it was his sail at last, and nearer and nearer, very fast it came; and I walked out in the shallow water, with my arms stretched out to meet it, and when it came very near, I saw it was Arthur himself coming upright in his shroud, his feet on the water, and with his feet, hands, and face, as white as snow, and his arms stretched to meet mine; and I felt I was going to die; and I covered my eyes with my hands, praying to God to receive me, expecting his touch; and I heard the rush of the water about his feet, and a voice — it was *yours*, not his — said, ‘Look at me,’ and I did look, and saw you, and you looked like a man that had been drowned — your face as white as his, and your clothes dripping, and sand in your hair; and I stepped back, saying, ‘My God! how have you come here?’ and you said, ‘Listen, I have great news to tell you;’ and I waked with a shock. I don’t believe in dreams more I believe than other people, but this troubles me still.”

“Well, thank God, I have had no accident by land or by water,” said Tom Sedley, smiling in spite of himself at the awful figure he cut in the old lady’s vision; “and I have no news to tell, and I think it will puzzle those Jews and lawyers to draw me into their business, whatever it is. I don’t like that sort of people; you need never be afraid of me, ma’am, I detest them.”

“Afraid of *you*, sir! Oh no. You have been very kind. See, this view here is under the branches; you can’t see the water from this, only those dark paths in the wood; and I walk round sometimes through that hollow and on the low road toward Cardyllian in the evening, when no one is stirring, just to the ash tree, from which you can see the old church and the churchyard; and oh! sir, I wish I were lying there.”

“You must not be talking in that melancholy way, ma’am,” said Tom, kindly; “I’ll come and see you again if you allow me; I think you are a great deal too lonely here; you ought to go out in a boat, ma’am, and take a drive now and then, and just rattle about a little, and you can’t think how much good it would do you; and — I must go — and I hope I shall find you a great deal better when I come back” — and with these words he took his leave, and as he walked along the low narrow road that leads by the inland track to Cardyllian, of which old Rebecca Mervyn spoke, whom should he encounter but Miss Charity coming down the hill at a brisk pace with Miss Flood in that lady’s pony-carriage. Smiling, hat in hand, he got himself well against the wall to let them pass; but the ladies drew up, and Miss Charity had a message to send home if he, Thomas Sedley, would be so good as to call at Jones’s they would find a messenger, merely to tell Agnes that she was going to dine with Miss Flood, and would not be home till seven o’clock.

So Tom Sedley undertook it; smiled and bowed his adieus, and then walked faster toward the town, and instead of walking direct to Mrs. Jones’s, sauntered for a while on the Green, and bethought him what mistakes such messengers as Mrs. Jones could provide sometimes make, and so resolved himself to be Miss Charity’s Mercury.

Sedley felt happier, with an odd kind of excited and unmeaning happiness, as he walked up the embowered steep toward Hazelden, than he had felt an hour or two before while walking down it. When he reached the little flowery platform of closely-mown grass, on which stands the pretty house of Hazelden, he closed the iron gate gently and looked toward the drawingroom windows that reach the grass, and felt a foolish flutter at his heart as he saw that the frame stood in Agnes's window without its mistress.

"Reading now, I suppose," whispered Tom, as if he feared to disturb her. "She has changed her place and she is reading;" and he began to speculate whether she sat on the ottoman, or on the sofa, or in the cushioned armchair, with her novel in her hands. But his sidelong glances could not penetrate the panes, which returned only reflections of the sky or black shadow, excepting of the one object, the deserted frame which stood close to their surface.

There was a time, not long ago either, when Tom Sedley would have run across the grass to the drawingroom windows, and had he seen Agnes within would have made a semi-burglarious entry through one of them. But there had come of late, on a sudden, a sort of formality in his relations with Agnes; and so he walked round by the hall-door, and found the drawingrooms empty, and touching the bell, learned that Miss Agnes had gone out for a walk.

"I've a message to give her from Miss Charity; have you any idea which way she went?"

He found himself making excuses to the servant for his inquiry. A short time since he would have asked quite frankly where she was, without dreaming of a reason; but now had grown, as I say, a reserve, which has always the more harmless incidents of guilt. He was apprehensive of suspicion; he was shy even of this old servant, and was encountering this inquiry by an explanation of his motives.

"I saw her go by the beech-walk, sir," said the man.

"Oh! thanks; very good."

And he crossed the grass, and entered the beech-walk, which is broad and straight, with towering files of beech at each side, and a thick screen of underwood and evergreens, and turning the clump of rhododendrons at the entrance of the walk, he found himself, all on a sudden, quite close to Agnes, who was walking toward him.

She stopped. He fancied she changed colour: had she mistaken him for some one else?

“Well, Agnes, I see the sun and the flowers prevailed, though we couldn’t; and I’m glad, at all events, that you have had a little walk.”

“Oh! yes, after all, I couldn’t really resist; and is Charity coming?”

“No, you are not to expect her till tea-time. She’s gone with Miss Flood somewhere, and she sent me to tell you.”

“Oh! thanks;” and Agnes hesitated, looking towards home, as if she intended returning.

“You may as well walk once more up and down; it does look so jolly, doesn’t it?” said Tom; “pray do, Agnes.”

“Well, yes, once more I will; but that is all, for I really am a little tired.”

They set out in silence, and Tom, with a great effort, said, —

“I wonder, Agnes, you seem so cold, I mean so unfriendly, with me; I think you do; and you must be quite aware of it; you must, *indeed*, Agnes. I *think* if you knew half the pain you are giving me — I really do — that you wouldn’t.”

The speech was very inartificial, but it had the merit of going direct to the point, and Miss Agnes began, —

“I haven’t been at all unfriendly.”

“Oh! but you *have* — *indeed* you have — you are quite *changed*. And I don’t know what I have done — I wish you’d tell me — to deserve it; because — even if there was — another — anything — no matter what — I’m an old friend, and I think it’s very unkind; *you* don’t perceive it, perhaps, but you are awfully changed.”

Agnes laughed a very little, and she answered, looking down on the walk before her, as Sedley thought, with a very pretty blush; and I believe there was.

“It is a very serious accusation, and I don’t deserve it. No, indeed, and even if it were true, it rather surprises me that it should in the least interest you; because we down here have seen so little of you that we might very reasonably suspect that you had begun to forget us.”

“Well, I *have* been an *awful* fool, it is quite true, and you have punished me, not more than I deserve; but I think you might have remembered that you had not on earth a better friend — I mean a more earnest one — particularly *you*, Agnes, than I.”

"I really don't know what I have done," pleaded she, with another little laugh.

"I was here, you know, as intimate almost as a brother. I don't say, of course, there are not many things I had no right to expect to hear anything about; but if I had, and been thought worthy of confidence, I would at all events have spoken honestly. But — may I speak quite frankly, Agnes? You won't be offended, will you?"

"No; I shan't — I'm quite sure."

"Well, it was only this — you *are* changed, Agnes, you know you are. Just this moment, for instance, you were going home, only because *I* came here, and you fancied I might join you in your walk; and this change began when Cleve Verney was down here staying at Ware, and used to walk with you on the Green."

Agnes stopped short at these words and drew back a step, looking at Sedley with an angry surprise.

"I don't understand you — I'm certain I don't. I can't conceive what you mean," she said.

Sedley paused in equal surprise.

"I — I beg pardon; I'm awfully sorry — you'll never know *how* sorry — if I have said anything to vex you; but I *did* think it was some influence or something connected with that time."

"I really don't pretend to understand you," said Agnes, coldly, with eyes, however, that gleamed resentfully. "I do recollect perfectly Mr. Cleve Verney's walking half-a-dozen times with Charity and me upon the Green, but what that can possibly have to do with your fancied wrongs, I cannot imagine. I fancied you were a friend of Mr. Verney's."

"So I was — so I am; but no such friend as I am of yours — *your* friend, Agnes. There's no use in saying it; but, Agnes, I'd die for you — I would indeed."

"I thought it very strange, your coming so very seldom to inquire for papa, when he was so poorly last year, when you were at Cardyllian. *He* did not seem to mind it; but considering, as you say, how much you once used to be here, it did strike me as very unkind — I may as well say what I really thought — not only unkind, but rude. So that if there has been any change, you need not look to other people for the cause of it."

"If you knew how I blame myself for that, I think, bad as it was, you'd forgive me."

"I think it showed that you did not very much care what became of us."

"Oh! Agnes, you did not think that — you never thought it. Unless *you* are happy, I *can't* be happy, nor even then unless I think you have forgiven me; and I think if I could be sure you liked me ever so little, even in the old way, I should be one of the happiest fellows in the world. I don't make any excuses — I was the stupidest fool on earth — I only throw myself on your mercy, and ask you to forgive me."

"I've nothing to forgive," said Agnes, with a cruel little laugh, but changing colour.

"Well — well, *forget* — oh, *do*! and shake hands like your old self. You've no idea how miserable I have been."

Lowering her eyes, with a very beautiful blush and a smile — a little shy, and so gratified — and a little silvery laugh, Agnes relented, and did give her hand to Tom Sedley.

"Oh, Agnes! Oh, Agnes! I'm so happy and so grateful! Oh, Agnes, you won't take it away — just for a moment."

She drew her hand to remove it, for Tom was exceeding his privilege, and kissing it.

"*Now* we are friends," said Agnes, laughing.

"Are we *quite* friends?"

"Yes, quite."

"You must not take your hand away — one moment more. Oh, Agnes! I can never tell you — never, how I love you. You are my darling, Agnes, and I can't live without you."

Agnes said something — was it reproof or repulse? He only knew that the tones were very sad and gentle, and that she was drawing her hand away.

"Oh, darling, I adore you! You would not make me miserable for life. There is nothing I won't do — nothing I won't try — if you'll only say you like me — ever so little. Do sit down here just for a moment" — there was a rustic seat beside them— "only for a moment."

She did sit down, and he beside her. That "moment" of Tom Sedley's grew as such moments will, like the bean that Jack sowed in his garden, till it reached — Titania knows whither! I know that Miss Charity on her return surprised it still growing.

"I made the tea, Agnes, fancying you were in your room. I've had such a search for you. I really think you might have told Edward where you were going. Will you drink tea with us, Thomas Sedley, this evening? though I am afraid you'll find it perfectly cold."

If Miss Charity had been either suspicious or romantic, she would have seen by a glance at the young people's faces what had happened; but being neither, and quite preoccupied with her theory about Cleve Verney, and having never dreamed of Tom Sedley as possibly making his *début* at Hazelden in the character of a lover — she brought her prisoners home with only a vague sense now and then that there was either something a little odd in their manner or in her own perceptions, and she remarked, looking a little curiously at Tom, in reference to some query of hers, —

"I've asked you that question twice without an answer, and now you say something totally unmeaning."

CHAPTER VI.

TOM HAS A "TALK" WITH THE ADMIRAL.

"Will *you* tell her?" whispered Sedley to Agnes.

"Oh, no. Do *you*," she entreated.

They both looked at Charity, who was preparing the little dog's supper of bread and milk in a saucer.

"I'll go in and see papa, and you shall speak to her," said Agnes.

Which Tom Sedley did, so much to her amazement that she set the saucer down on the table beside her, and listened, and conversed for half an hour; and the poodle's screams, and wild jumping and clawing at her elbow, at last reminded her that he had been quite forgotten.

So, while its mistress was apologising earnestly to poor Bijou, and superintending his attentions to the bread and milk, now placed upon the floor, in came Agnes, and up got Charity, and kissed her with a frank, beaming smile, and said, —

"I'm *excessively* glad, Agnes. I was always *so* fond of Thomas Sedley; and I *wonder* we never thought of it before."

They were all holding hands in a ring by this time.

"And what do you think Mr. Etherage will say?" inquired Tom.

"Papa! why of *course* he will be *delighted*," said Miss Charity. "He likes you *extremely*."

"But you know, Agnes might do so much better. She's such a treasure, there's no one that would not be proud of her, and no one could help falling in love with her, and the Ad —— I mean Mr. Etherage, may think me so presumptuous; and, you know, he may think me quite too poor."

"If you mean to say that papa would object to you because you have only four hundred a year, you think most meanly of him. I know *I* should not like to be connected with anybody that I thought so meanly of, because that kind of thing I look upon as really *wicked*; and I should be sorry to think papa was wicked. I'll go in and tell him all that has happened this moment."

In an awful suspense, pretty Agnes and Tom Sedley, with her hand in both his, stood side by side, looking earnestly at the double door which separated them from this conference.

In a few minutes they heard Vane Etherage's voice raised to a pitch of testy bluster, and then Miss Charity's rejoinder with shrill emphasis.

"Oh! gracious goodness! he's very angry. What shall we do?" exclaimed poor little Agnes, in wild helplessness.

"I *knew* it — I *knew* it — I *said* how it would be — he can't endure the idea, he thinks it such audacity. I knew he must, and I really think I shall lose my reason. I could not — I *could* not live. Oh! Agnes, I *could*n't if he prevents it."

In came Miss Charity, very red and angry.

"He's just in one of his odd tempers. I don't mind one *word* he says tonight. He'll be quite different, you'll *see*, in the morning. We'll sit up here, and have a good talk about it, till it's time for you to go; and you'll see I'm quite right. I'm *surprised*," she continued, with severity, "at his talking as he did tonight. I consider it quite worldly and *wicked*! But I contented myself with telling him that he did not think one word of what he said, and that he *knew* he didn't, and that he'd tell me so in the morning; and instead of feeling it, as I thought he would, he said something intolerably rude."

Old Etherage, about an hour later, when they were all in animated debate, shuffled to the door, and put in his head, and looked surprised to see Tom, who looked alarmed to see him. And the old gentleman bid them all a glowering good night, and shortly afterwards they heard him wheeled away to his bedroom, and were relieved.

They sat up awfully late, and the old servant, who poked into the room oftener than he was wanted towards the close of their sitting, looked wan and bewildered with drowsiness; and at last Charity, struck by the ghastly resignation of his countenance, glanced at the French clock over the chimneypiece, and ejaculated —

"Why, merciful goodness! is it possible? A quarter to one! It *can't possibly be*. Thomas Sedley, *will* you look at your watch, and tell us what o'clock it really is?"

His watch corroborated the French clock.

"*If* papa heard this! I really can't the least *conceive* how it happened. I did not think it could have been *eleven*. Well, it is *undoubtedly* the *oddest* thing that *ever* happened in this house!"

In the morning, between ten and eleven, when Tom Sedley appeared again at the drawingroom windows, he learned from Charity, in her own emphatic style of narration, what had since taken place, which was not a great deal, but still was uncomfortably ambiguous.

She had visited her father at his breakfast in the study, and promptly introduced the subject of Tom Sedley, and he broke into this line of observation —

"I'd like to know what the deuce Tom Sedley means by talking of business to girls. I'd like to know it. I say, if he has anything to say, why doesn't he *say* it, that's what *I* say. Here I *am*. What has he to *say*. I don't object to hear him, be it sense or be it nonsense — out with it! That's my maxim; and be it sense or be it nonsense, I won't have it at second-*hand*. That's *my* idea."

Acting upon this, Miss Charity insisted that he ought to see Mr. Etherage; and, with a beating heart, he knocked at the study door, and asked an audience.

"Come in," exclaimed the resonant voice of the Admiral. And Tom Sedley obeyed.

The Admiral extended his hand, and greeted Tom kindly, but gravely.

"Fine day, Mr. Sedley; very fine, sir. It's an odd thing, Tom Sedley, but there's more really fine weather up here, at Hazelden, than anywhere else in Wales. More sunshine, and a *deal* less rain. You'd hardly believe, for you'd fancy on this elevated ground we should naturally have *more* rain, but it's *less*, by several inches, than anywhere else in Wales! And there's next to no damp — the hygrometer tells *that*. And a curious thing, you'll have a southerly wind up here when it's blowing from the east on the estuary. You can see it, by Jove! Now just look out of that window; did you ever see such sunshine as that? There's a clearness in the air up here — at the *other* side, if you go up, you get *mist* — but there's something about it here that I would not change for any place in the world."

You may be sure Tom did not dispute any of these points.

"By Jove, Tom Sedley, it would be a glorious day for a sail round the point of Penruthyn. I'd have been down with the tide, sir, this morning if I had been as I was ten years ago; but a fellow doesn't like to be lifted into his yacht, and the girls did not care for sailing; so I sold her. There wasn't such a boat — take her for everything — in the *world* — *never*!"

“The *Feather*; wasn’t she, sir?” said Tom.

“The *Feather*! that she was, sir. A name pretty well known, I venture to think. Yes, the *Feather* was her name.”

“I *have*, sir; yes, indeed, often heard her spoken of,” said Tom, who had heard one or two of the boatmen of Cardyllian mention her with a guarded sort of commendation. I never could learn, indeed, that there was anything very remarkable about the boat; but Tom would just then have backed any assertion of the honest Admiral’s with a loyal alacrity, bordering, I am afraid, upon unscrupulousness.

“There are the girls going out with their trowels, going to poke among those flowers; and certainly, I’ll do them justice to say, their garden prospers. I don’t see such flowers *any*where; do you?”

“*Nowhere!*” said Tom, with enthusiasm.

“By, there they’re at it — grubbing and raking. And, by-the-by, Tom, what was that? Sit down for a minute.”

Tom felt as if he was going to choke, but he sat down.

“What was that — some nonsense Charity was telling me last night?”

Thus invited, poor Sedley, with many hesitations, and wanderings, and falterings, did get through his romantic story. And Mr. Etherage did not look pleased by the recital; on the contrary, he carried his head unusually high, and looked hot and minatory, but he did not explode. He continued looking on the opposite wall, as he had done as if he were eyeing a battle there, and he cleared his voice.

“As I understand it, sir, there’s not an income to make it at all prudent. I don’t want my girls to marry; I should, in fact, miss them very much; but if they do, there ought to be a settlement, don’t you see? there should be a settlement, for *I* can’t do so much for them as people suppose. The property is settled, and the greater part goes to my grand-nephew after me; and I’ve invested, as you know, all my stock and money in the quarry at Llanrwyd; and if she married you, she should live in London the greater part of the year. And I don’t see how you could get on upon what you both have; I don’t, sir. And I must say, I think you ought to have spoken to me before paying your addresses, sir. I don’t think that’s unreasonable; on the contrary, I think it *reasonable, perfectly* so, and only right and fair. And I must go further, sir; I must say this, I don’t see, sir, without a proper competence, what pretensions you had to address my child.”

"None, sir; none in the world, Mr. Etherage. I know, sir, I've been thinking of my presumption ever since. I betrayed myself into it, sir; it was a kind of surprise. If I had reflected I should have come to you, sir; but — but you have no idea, sir, how I adore her." Tom's eye wandered after her through the window, among the flowers. "Or what it would be to me to — to have to" ——

Tom Sedley faltered, and bit his lip, and started up quickly and looked at an engraving of old Etherage's frigate, which hung on the study wall.

He looked at it for some time steadfastly. Never was man so affected by the portrait of a frigate, you would have thought. Vane Etherage saw him dry his eyes stealthily two or three times, and the old gentleman coughed a little, and looked out of the window, and would have got up, if he could, and stood close to it.

"It's a beautiful day, certainly; wind coming round a bit to the south, though — south by east; that's always a squally wind with us; and — and — I assure you I like you, Tom; upon my honour I do, Tom Sedley — better, sir, than any young fellow I know. I think I *do* — I am *sure*, in fact, I do. But this thing — it wouldn't do — it really wouldn't; no, Tom Sedley, it wouldn't *do*; if you reflect you'll see it. But, of course, you may get on in the world. Rome wasn't built in a day."

"It's very kind of you, sir; but the time's so long, and so many chances," said Sedley, with a sigh like a sob; "and when I go away, sir, the sooner I die, the happier for me."

Tom turned again quickly toward the frigate — the *Vulcan* — and old Etherage looked out of the window once more, and up at the clouds.

"Yes," said the admiral, "it will; we shall have it from south by east. And, d'ye hear, Tom Sedley? I — I've been thinking there's no need to make any fuss about this — this thing; just let it be as if you had never said a word about it, do you mind, and come here just as usual. Let us put it out of our heads; and if you find matters improve, and still wish it, there's nothing to prevent your speaking to me; only Agnes is perfectly free, you understand, and you are not to make any change in your demeanour — a — or — I mean to be more with my daughters, or anything *marked*, you understand. People begin to talk here, you know, in the club-house, on very slight grounds! and — and — you understand now; and there mustn't be any nonsense; and I like you, sir — I like you, Thomas Sedley; I do — I do, indeed, sir."

And old Vane Etherage gave him a very friendly shake by the hand, and Tom thanked him gratefully, and went away reprieved, and took a walk with the girls, and told them, as they expressed it, *everything*; and Vane Etherage thought it incumbent on him to soften matters a little by asking him to dinner; and Tom accepted; and when they broke up after tea, there was another mistake discovered about the hour, and Miss Charity most emphatically announced that it was *perfectly unaccountable*, and must *never* occur again; and I hope, for the sake of the venerable man who sat up, resigned and affronted, to secure the hall-door and put out the lamps after the party had broken up, that these irregular hours were kept no more at Hazelden.

CHAPTER VII.

ARCADIAN RED BRICK, LILAC, AND LABURNUM.

As time proceeds, renewal and decay, its twin principles of mutation, are everywhere and necessarily active, applying to the moral as well as to the material world. Affections displace and succeed one another. The most beautiful are often the first to die. Characteristics in their beginning, minute and unsubstantial as the fairy brood that people the woodland air, enlarge and materialize till they usurp the dominion of the whole man, and the people and the world are changed.

Sir Booth Fanshawe is away at Paris just now, engaged in a great negotiation, which is to bring order out of chaos, and inform him at last what he is really worth *per annum*. Margaret and her cousin, Miss Sheckleton, have revisited England; their Norman retreat is untenanted for the present.

With the sorrow of a great concealment upon her, with other sorrows that she does not tell, Margaret looks sad and pale.

In a small old suburban house, that stands alone, with a rural affectation, on a little patch of shorn grass, embowered in lilacs and laburnums, and built of a deep vermillion brick, the residence of these ladies is established.

It is a summer evening, and a beautiful little boy, more than a year old, is sprawling, and babbling, and rolling, and laughing on the grass upon his back. Margaret, seated on the grass beside him, prattles and laughs with him, and rolls him about, delighted, and adoring her little idol.

Old Anne Sheckleton, sitting on the bench, smiling happily, under the window, which is clustered round with roses, contributes her quota of nonsense to the prattle.

In the midst of this comes a ring at the bell in the jessamine-covered wall, and a tidy little maid runs out to the green door, opens it, and in steps Cleve Verney.

Margaret is on her feet in a moment, with the light of a different love, something of the old romance, in the glad surprise, “Oh, darling, it is you!”

and her arms are about his neck, and he stoops and kisses her fondly, and in his face for a moment, is reflected the glory of that delighted smile.

"Yes, darling. Are you better?"

"Oh, yes — ever so much; I'm always well when you are here; and look, see our poor little darling."

"So he is."

"We have had such fun with him — haven't we, Anne? I'm sure he'll be so like you."

"Is this in his favour, cousin Anne?" asked Cleve, taking the old lady's hand.

"Why should it not?" said she gaily.

"A question — well, I take the benefit of the doubt," laughed Cleve. "No, darling," he said to Margaret, "you mustn't sit on the grass; it is damp; you'll sit beside our Cousin Anne, and be prudent."

So he instead sat down on the grass, and talked with them, and prattled and romped with the baby by turns, until the nurse came out to convey him to the nursery, and he was handed round to say what passes for "Good night," and give his tiny paw to each in turn.

"You look tired, Cleve, darling."

"So I am, my Guido; can we have a cup of tea?"

"Oh, yes. I'll get it in a moment," said active Anne Sheckleton.

"It's too bad disturbing you," said Cleve.

"No trouble in the world," said Anne, who wished to allow them a word together; "besides, I must kiss baby in his bed."

"Yes, darling, I *am* tired," said Cleve, taking his place beside her, so soon as old Anne Sheckleton was gone. "That old man" ——

"Lord Verney, do you mean?"

"Yes; he has begun plaguing me again."

"What is it about, darling?"

"Oh, fifty things; he thinks, among others, I ought to marry," said Cleve, with a dreary laugh.

"Oh, I thought he had given up that," she said, with a smile that was very pale.

"So he did for a time; but I think he's possessed. If he happens to take up an idea that's likely to annoy other people, he never lets it drop till he teases them half to death. He thinks I should marry *money* and political connection, and I don't know what all, and I'm quite tired of the whole thing. What a vulgar little box this is — isn't it, darling? I almost wish you were back again in that place in France."

"But I can see you so much oftener here, Cleve," pleaded Margaret, softly, with a very sad look.

"And where's the good of seeing me here, dear Margaret? Just consider, I always come to you anxious; there's always a risk, besides, of discovery."

"Where you are is to me a paradise."

"Oh, darling, do *not* talk rubbish. This vulgar, odious little place! No place can be *either* — *quite*, of course — where *you* are. But you must see what it is — a paradise" — and he laughed peevishly— "of red brick, and lilacs, and laburnums — a paradise for old Mr. Dowlas, the tallow-chandler."

There was a little tremor in Margaret's lip, and the water stood in her large eyes; her hand was, as it were, on the coffin-edge; she was looking in the face of a dead romance.

"Now, you really must not shed tears over *that* speech. You are too much given to weeping, Margaret. What have I said to vex you? It merely amounts to this, that we live just now in the future; we can't well deny *that*, darling. But the time will come at last, and my queen enjoy her own."

And so saying he kissed her, and told her to be a good little girl; and from the window Miss Sheckleton handed them tea, and then she ran up to the nursery.

"You *do* look very tired, Cleve," said Margaret, looking into his anxious face.

"I *am* tired, darling," he said, with just a degree of impatience in his tone; "I said so — horribly tired."

"I wish so much you were liberated from that weary House of Commons."

"Now, my wise little woman is talking of what she doesn't understand — not the least; besides, what would you have me turn to? I should be totally without resource and pursuit — don't you see? We must be reasonable. No, it is not that in the least that tires me, but I'm really overwhelmed with anxieties, and worried by my uncle, who wants me to marry, and thinks I can marry whom I please — that's all."

“I sometimes think, Cleve, I’ve spoiled your fortunes,” with a great sigh, said Margaret, watching his face.

“Now, where’s the good of saying that, my little woman? I’m only talking of my uncle’s teasing me, and wishing he’d let us both alone.”

Here came a little pause.

“Is that the baby?” said Margaret, raising her head and listening.

“I don’t hear our baby or any one else’s,” said Cleve.

“I fancied I heard it cry, but it wasn’t.”

“You must think of me more, and of that child less, darling — you must, indeed,” said Cleve, a little sourly.

I think the poor heart was pleased, thinking this jealousy; but I fear it was rather a splenetic impulse of selfishness, and that the baby was, in his eyes, a bore pretty often.

“Does the House sit tonight, Cleve, darling?”

“Does it, indeed? Why it’s sitting now. We are to have the second reading of the West India Bill on tonight, and I must be there — yes — in an hour” — he was glancing at his watch— “and heaven knows at what hour in the morning we shall get away.”

And just at this moment old Anne Sheckleton joined them. “She’s coming with more tea,” she said, as the maid emerged with a little tray, “and we’ll place our cups on the window-stone when we don’t want them. Now, Mr. Verney, is not this a charming little spot just at this light?”

“I almost think it is,” said Cleve, relenting. The golden light of evening was touching the formal poplars, and the other trees, and bringing out the wrinkles of the old bricks duskily in its flaming glow.

“Yes, just for about fifteen minutes in the twenty-four hours, when the weather is particularly favourable, it *has* a sort of Dutch picturesqueness; but, on the whole, it is not the sort of cottage that I would choose for a permanent dovecot. I should fear lest my pigeons should choke with dust.”

“No, there’s no dust here; it is the quietest, most sylvan little lane in the world.”

“Which is a wide place,” said Cleve. “Well, with smoke then.”

“Nor smoke either.”

“But I forgot, love does not die of smoke or of anything else,” said Cleve.

“No, of course, love is eternal,” said Margaret.

"Just so; the King never dies. Les roix meurent-ils? Quelquefois, madame. Alas, theory and fact conflict. Love is eternal in the abstract; but nothing is more mortal than a particular love," said Cleve.

"If you think so, I wonder you ever wished to marry," said Margaret, and a faint tinge flushed her cheeks.

"I thought so, and yet I did wish to marry," said Cleve. "It is perishable, but I can't live without it," and he patted her cheek, and laughed a rather cold little laugh.

"No, love never dies," said Margaret, with a gleam of her old fierce spirit. "But it may be killed."

"It is terrible to kill anything," said Cleve.

"To kill love," she answered, "is the worst murder of all."

"A veritable murder," he acquiesced, with a smile and a slight shrug; "once killed, it never revives."

"You like talking awfully, as if I might lose your love," said she, haughtily; "as if, were I to vex you, you never could forgive."

"Forgiveness has nothing to do with it, my poor little woman. I no more called my love into being than I did myself; and should it die, either naturally or violently, I could no more call it to life, than I could Cleopatra or Napoleon Bonaparte. It is a principle, don't you see? that comes as direct as life from heaven. We can't create it, we can't restore it; and really about love, it is worse than mortal, because, as I said, I am sure it has *no* resurrection — no, it has no resurrection."

"That seems to me a reason," she said, fixing her large eyes upon him with a wild resentment, "why you should cherish it *very* much while it lives."

"And *don't* I, darling?" he said, placing his arms round her neck, and drawing her fondly to his breast, and in the thrill of that momentary effusion was something of the old feeling when to lose her would have been despair, to gain her heaven, and it seemed as if the scent of the woods of Malory, and of the soft sea breeze, was around them for a moment.

And now he is gone, away to that tiresome House — lost to her, given up to his ambition, which seems more and more to absorb him; and she remains smiling on their beautiful little baby, with a great misgiving at her heart, to see Cleve no more for four-and-twenty hours more.

As Cleve went into the House, he met old Colonel Thongs, sometime whip of the “outs.”

“You’ve heard about old Snowdon?”

“No.”

“In the Cabinet, by Jove!”

“Really?”

“Fact. Ask your uncle.”

“By Jove, it *is* very unlooked for; no one thought of him; but I dare say he’ll do very well.”

“We’ll soon try that.”

It *was* a *very* odd appointment. But Lord Snowdon was gazetted; a dull man, but laborious; a man who had held minor offices at different periods of his life, and was presumed to have a competent knowledge of affairs. A dull man, owing all to his dulness, quite below many, and selected as a negative compromise for the vacant seat in the Cabinet, for which two zealous and brilliant competitors were contending.

“I see it all,” thought Cleve; “that’s the reason why Caroline Oldys and Lady Wimbledon are to be at Ware this autumn, and I’m to be married to the niece of a Cabinet minister.”

Cleve sneered, but he felt very uneasy.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRIUMVIRATE.

That night Lord Verney waited to hear the debate in the Commons — waited for the division, — and brought Cleve home with him in his brougham.

He explained to Cleve on the way how much better the debate might have been. He sometimes half regretted his seat in the Commons; there were so many things unsaid that ought to have been said, and so many things said that had better have been omitted. And at last he remarked —

“Your uncle Arthur, my unfortunate brother, had a great natural talent for speaking. It’s a talent of the Verney’s — about it. We all have it; and *you* have got it also; it is a gift of very decided importance in debate; it can hardly be over-estimated in that respect. Poor Arthur might have done very well, but he didn’t, and he’s gone — about it; and I’m very glad, for your own sake, you are cultivating it; and it would be a very great misfortune, I’ve been thinking, if our family were not to marry, and secure a transmission of those hereditary talents and — and things — and — what’s your opinion of Miss Caroline Oldys? I mean, quite frankly, what sort of wife you think she would make.”

“Why, to begin with, she’s been out a long time; but I fancy she’s gentle — and foolish; and I believe her mother bullies her.”

“I don’t know what you call bullying, my good sir; but she appears to me to be a very affectionate mother; and as to her being foolish — about it — I can’t perceive it; on the contrary, I’ve conversed with her a good deal — and things — and I’ve found her very superior indeed to any young woman I can recollect having talked to. She takes an interest in things which don’t interest or — or — interest other young persons; and she likes to be instructed about affairs — and, my dear Cleve, I think where a young person of merit — either rightly or wrongly interpreting what she conceives to be your attentions — becomes decidedly *épris* of you, she ought to be — a — *considered* — her feelings, and things; and I thought I might as well mention my views, and go — about it — straight to the point; and I think you will perceive that it is reasonable, and that's the position — about it; and you know, Cleve, in these circumstances you may reckon upon me to do anything in reason that may still lie in my power — about it."

"You have always been too kind to me."

"You shall find me so still. Lady Wimbledon takes an interest in you, and Miss Caroline Oldys will, I undertake to say, more and more decidedly as she comes to know you better."

And so saying, Lord Verney leaned back in the brougham as if taking a doze, and after about five minutes of closed eyes and silence he suddenly wakened up and said —

"It is, in fact, it strikes me, high time, Cleve, you should marry — about it — and you must have money, too; you want money, and you shall have it."

"I'm afraid money is not one of *Caroline's* strong points."

"You need not trouble yourself upon that point, sir; if *I*'m satisfied I fancy *you* may. I've quite enough for both, I presume; and — and so, we'll let that matter rest."

And the noble lord let himself rest also, leaning stiffly back with closed eyes, and nodding and swaying silently with the motion of the carriage.

I believe he was only ruminating after his manner in these periods of apparent repose. He opened his eyes again, and remarked —

"I have talked over this affair carefully with Mr. Larkin — a most judicious and worthy person — about it — and you can talk to him, and so on, when he comes to town, and I should rather wish you to do so."

Lord Verney relapsed into silence and the semblance, at least, of slumber.

"So Larkin's at the bottom of it; I knew he was," thought Cleve, with a pang of hatred which augured ill for the future prospects of that good man. "He has made this alliance for the Oldys and Wimbledon faction, and I'm Mr. *Larkin's parti*, and am to settle the management of everything upon him; and what a judicious diplomatist he is — and how he has put his foot in it. A blundering hypocritical coxcomb — D — n him."

Then his thoughts wandered away to Larkin, and to his instrument, Mr. Dingwell, "who looks as if he came from the galleys. We have heard nothing of him for a year or more. Among the Greek and Malay scoundrels again, I suppose; the Turks are too good for him."

But Mr. Dingwell had not taken his departure, and was not thinking of any such step *yet*, at least. He had business still on his hands, and a mission unaccomplished.

Still in the same queer lodgings, and more jealously shut up during the daytime than ever, Mr. Dingwell lived his odd life, professing to hate England — certainly in danger there — he yet lingered on for a set purpose, over which he brooded and laughed in his hermitage.

To so chatty a person as Mr. Dingwell solitude for a whole day was irksome. Sarah Rumble was his occasional resource, and when she brought him his cup of black coffee he would make her sit down by the wall, like a servant at prayers, and get from her all the news of the dingy little neighbourhood, with a running commentary of his own flighty and savage irony, and he would sometimes entertain her, between the whiffs of his long pipe, with talk of his own, which he was at no pains to adapt to her comprehension, and delivered rather for his own sole entertainment.

"The world, the flesh, and the devil, ma'am. The two first we know pretty well — hey? the other we take for granted. I suppose there *is* somebody of the sort. We are all pigs, ma'am — unclean animals — and this is a sty we live in — slime and abomination. Strong delusion is, unseen, circling in the air. Our ideas of beauty, delights of sense, vanities of intellect — all a most comical and frightful cheat — egad! What fun we must be, ma'am, to the spirits who *have* sight and intellect! I think, ma'am, we're meant for their pantomime — don't you? Our airs, and graces, and dignities, and compliments, and beauties, and dandies — our metal coronets, and lawn sleeves, and whalebone wigs — fun, ma'am, lots of fun! And here we are, a wonderful work of God. Eh? Come, ma'am — a word in your ear — all *putrefaction* — pah! nothing clean but fire, and that makes us roar and vanish — a very odd position we're placed in; hey, ma'am?"

Mr. Dingwell had at first led Sarah Rumble a frightful life, for she kept the door where the children were peremptorily locked, at which he took umbrage, and put her on fatigue duty, more than trebling her work by his caprices, and requiting her with his ironies and sneers, finding fault with everything, pretending to miss money out of his desk, and every day threatening to invoke Messrs. Levi and Goldshed, and invite an incursion of the police, and showing in his face, his tones — his jeers pointed and envenomed by revenge — that his hatred was active and fiendish.

But Sarah Rumble was resolute. He was not a desirable companion for childhood of either sex, and the battle went on for a considerable time; and poor Sarah in her misery besought Messrs. Levi and Goldshed, with many tears and prayers, that he might depart from her; and Levi looked at Goldshed, and Goldshed at Levi, quite gravely, and Levi winked, and Goldshed nodded, and said, “A bad boy;” and they spoke comfortably, and told her they would support her, but Mr. Dingwell must remain her inmate, but they’d take care he should do her no harm.

Mr. Dingwell had a latchkey, which he at first used sparingly and timidly; with time, however, his courage grew, and he was out more or less every night. She used to hear him go out after the little household was in bed, and sometimes she heard him lock the hall-door, and his step on the stairs when the sky was already gray with the dawn.

And gradually finding company such as he affected out of doors, I suppose, he did not care so much for the seclusion of his fellow-lodgers, and ceased to resent it almost, and made it up with Sarah Rumble.

And one night, having to go up between one and two for a match-box to the lobby, she encountered Mr. Dingwell coming down. She was dumb with terror, for she did not know him, and took him for a burglar, he being somehow totally changed — she was too confused to recollect exactly, only that he had red hair and whiskers, and looked stouter.

She did not know him in the least till he laughed. She was near fainting, and leaned with her shoulder to the corner of the wall; and he said —

“I’ve to put on these; you keep my secret, mind; you may lose me my life, else.”

And he took her by the chin, and gave her a kiss, and then a slap on the cheek that seemed to her harder than play, for her ear tingled with it for an hour after, and she uttered a little cry of fright, and he laughed, and glided out of the hall-door, and listened for the tread of a policeman, and peeped slily up and down the court; and then, with his cotton umbrella in his hand, walked quietly down the passage and disappeared.

Sarah Rumble feared him all the more for this little rencontre and the shock she had received, for there was a suggestion of something felonious in his disguise. She was, however, a saturnine and silent woman, with few acquaintances, and no fancy for collecting or communicating news. There was a spice of danger, too, in talking of this matter; so she took counsel of the son of Sirach, who says, “If thou hast heard a word, let it die with thee, and, behold, it will not burst thee.”

Sarah Rumble kept his secret, and henceforward, at such hours kept close, when in the deep silence of the night she heard the faint creak of his stealthy shoe upon the stair, and avoided him as she would a meeting with a ghost.

Whatever were his amusements, Messrs. Goldshed and Levi grumbled savagely at the cost of them. They grumbled because grumbling was a principle of theirs in carrying on their business.

“No matter how it turns out, keep always grumbling to the man who led you into the venture, especially if he has a claim to a share of the profits at the close.”

So whenever Mr. Larkin saw Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, he heard mourning and imprecation. The Hebrews shook their heads at the Christian, and chaunted a Jeremiad, in duet, together, and each appealed to the other for the confirmation of the dolorous and bitter truths he uttered. And the iron safe opened its jaws and disgorged the private ledger of the firm, which ponderous and greasy tome was laid on the desk with a pound, and opened at this transaction — the matter of Dingwell, Verney, &c.; and Mr. Levi would run his black nail along the awful items of expenditure that filled column after column.

“Look at that — look here — look, will you? — look, I say: you never sawed an account like that — never — all this here — look — down — and down — and down — and down— “

“Enough to frighten the Bank of England!” boomed Mr. Goldshed.

“Look down thish column,” resumed Levi, “and thish, and thish, and thish — there’s nine o’ them — and not one stiver on th’ other side. Look, look, look, look, *look*! Daam, it’sh all a quaag, and a quickshand — nothing but shink and shwallow, and give ush more” — and as he spoke Levi was knocking the knuckles of his long lean fingers fiercely upon the empty columns, and eyeing Larkin with a rueful ferocity, as if he had plundered and half-murdered him and his partner, who sat there innocent as the babes in the wood.

Mr. Larkin knew quite well, however, that so far from regretting their investment, they would not have sold their ventures under a very high figure indeed.

“And that beast Dingwell, talking as if he had us all in quod, by —— , and always whimperin’, and whinin’, and swearin’ for more — why you’d say, to listen to his rot, ’twas *him* had *us* under his knuckle — you would — the lunatic!”

“And may I ask what he wants just at present?” inquired Mr. Larkin.

“What he always wants, and won’t be easy never till he gets it — a walk up the mill, sir, and his head cropped, and six months’ solitary, and a touch of corporal now and again. I never saw’d a cove as wanted a teazin’ more; that’s what he wants. What he’s looking for, of course, is different, only he shan’t get it, nohow. And I think, looking at that book there, as I showed you this account in — considering what me and the gov’nor here has done — ‘twould only be fair you should come down with summut, if you goes in for the lottery, with other gentlemen as pays their pool like bricks, and never does modest, by no chance.”

“He has pushed that game a little too far,” said Mr. Larkin; “I have considered his feelings a great deal too much.”

“Yesh, but *we* have feelinsh. The *Gov’nor* has feelinsh; I have *feelinsh*. Think what state our feelinsh is in, lookin’ at that there account,” said Mr. Levi, with much pathos.

Mr. Larkin glanced toward the door, and then toward the window.

“We are quite *alone*?” said he, mildly.

“Yesh, without you have the devil in your pocket, as old Dingwell saysh,” answered Levi, sulkily.

“For there are subjects of a painful nature, as you know, gentlemen, connected with this particular case,” continued Mr. Larkin.

“Awful painful; but we’ll sta-an’ it,” said Goldshed, with unctuous humour; “we’ll sta-an’ it, but wishes it over quick;” and he winked at Levi.

“Yesh, he wishes it over quick,” echoed Levi; “the gov’nor and me, we wishes it over quick.”

“And so do I, *most* assuredly; but we must have a little patience. If deception does lurk here — and you know I warned you I suspected it — we must not prematurely trouble Lord Verney.”

“He might throw up the sponge, he might, I *know*,” said Levi, with a nod.

“I don’t know what course Lord Verney might think it right in such a case to adopt; I only know that until I am in a position to reduce suspicion to certainty, it would hardly consist with right feeling to torture his mind upon the subject. In the meantime he is — a — growing" ——

"Growing warm in his berth," said Goldshed.

"Establishing himself, I should say, in his position. He has been incurring, I need hardly tell you, enormous expense in restoring (I might say *rebuilding*) the princely mansions of Ware, and of Verney House. He applied much ready money to that object, and has charged the estates with nearly sixty thousand pounds besides." Mr. Larkin lowered his tones reverentially at the mention of so considerable a sum.

"I know Sirachs, did nigh thirty thoushand o' that," said Mr. Goldshed.

"And that tends to — to — as I may say, *steady* him in his position; and I may mention, in confidence, gentlemen, that there are other measures on the *tapis*" (he pronounced taypis) "which will further and still more decidedly fix him in his position. It would pain us all deeply, gentlemen, that a premature disclosure of my uneasiness should inspire his lordship with a panic in which he might deal ruinously with his own interests, and, in fact, as you say, Mr. Levi, throw up the — the" ——

"Sponge," said Levi, reflectively.

"But I may add," said Mr. Larkin, "that I am impatiently watching the moment when it may become my duty to open my suspicions fully to Lord Verney; and that I have reason to know that that moment cannot now be distant."

"Here's Tomlinshon comin' up, gov'nor," said Mr. Levi, jumping off the table on which he had been sitting, and sweeping the great ledger into his arms, he pitched it into its berth in the safe, and locked it into that awful prison-house.

"I said he would," said Goldshed, with a lazy smile, as he unlocked a door in the lumbering office table at which he sat. "Don't bring out them overdue renewals; we'll not want them till next week."

Mr. Tomlinson, a tall, thin man, in faded drab trousers, with a cotton umbrella swinging in his hand, and a long careworn face, came striding up the court.

"You won't do *that* for him?" asked Levi.

"No, not to-day," murmured Mr. Goldshed, with a wink. And Mr. Tomlinson's timid knock and feeble ring at the door were heard.

And Mr. Larkin put on his well-brushed hat, and pulled on his big lavender gloves, and stood up at his full length, in his black glossy coat, and waistcoat and trowsers of the accustomed hue, and presents the usual lavender-tinted effect, and a bland simper rests on his lank cheeks, and his small pink eyes look their adieux upon Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, on whom his airs and graces are quite lost; and with his slim silk umbrella between his great finger and thumb, he passes loftily by the cotton umbrella of Mr. Tomlinson, and fancies, with a pardonable egotism, that that poor gentleman, whose head is full of his bill-book and renewals, and possible executions, and preparing to deceive a villanous omniscience, and to move the compassion of Pandemonium — is thinking of *him*, and mistaking him, possibly, for a peer, or for some other type of British aristocracy.

The sight of that unfortunate fellow, Tomlinson, with a wife, and a seedy hat, and children, and a cotton umbrella, whose little business was possibly about to be knocked about his ears, moved a lordly pity in Mr. Larkin's breast, and suggested contrasts, also, of many kinds, that were calculated to elate his good humour; and as he stepped into the cab, and the driver waited to know "where," he thought he might as well look in upon the recluse of Rosemary Court, and give him, of course with the exquisite tact that was peculiar to him, a hint or two in favour of reason and moderation; for really it *was quite* true what Mr. Levi had said about the preposterous presumption of a person in Mr. Dingwell's position affecting the airs of a dictator.

So being in the mood to deliver a lecture, to the residence of that uncomfortable old gentleman he drove, and walked up the flagged passage to the flagged courtyard, and knocked at the door, and looked up at the square ceiling of sickly sky, and strode up the narrow stairs after Mrs. Rumble.

"How d'ye do, sir? Your *soul*, particularly, quite well, I trust. Your spiritual concerns flourishing to-day?" was the greeting of Mr. Dingwell's mocking voice.

"Thanks, Mr. Dingwell; I'm very well," answered Mr. Larkin, with a bow which was meant to sober Mr. Dingwell's mad humour.

Sarah Rumble, as we know, had a defined fear of Mr. Dingwell, but also a vague terror; for there was a great deal about him ill-omened and mysterious. There was a curiosity, too, active within her, intense and rather ghastly, about all that concerned him. She did not care, therefore, to get up and go away from the small hole in the carpet which she was darning on the lobby, and through the door she heard faintly some talk she didn't understand, and Mr. Dingwell's voice, at a high pitch, said —

"D —— you, sir, do you think I'm a fool? Don't you think I've *your letter*, and a copy of my own? If we draw swords, egad, sir, mine's the longer and sharper, as you'll feel. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, lawk!" gasped Sarah Rumble, standing up, and expecting the clash of rapiers.

"Your face, sir, is as white and yellow — you'll excuse me — as an old turban. I beg your pardon; but I want you to understand that I see you're frightened, and that I won't be bullied *by* you."

"I don't suppose, sir, you meditate totally ruining yourself," said Mr. Larkin, with dignity.

"I tell you, sir, if anything goes wrong with me, I'll make a clean breast of it — *everything* — ha, ha, ha! — upon my honour — and we two shall grill together."

Larkin had no idea he was going in for so hazardous and huge a game when he sat down to play. His vision was circumscribed, his prescience small. He looked at the beast he had imported, and wished him in a deep grave in Scutari, with a turbaned-stone over his head, the scheme quashed, and the stakes drawn.

But wishing would not do. The spirit was evoked — in nothing more manageable than at first; on the contrary, rather more insane. Nerve was needed, subtlety, patience, and he must manage him.

"Why the devil did you bring me here, sir, if you were not prepared to treat me properly? You know my circumstances, and you want to practise on my misfortunes, you vile rogue, to mix me up in your fraudulent machinations."

"Pray, sir, not so loud. Do — *do* command yourself," remonstrated Larkin, almost affectionately.

"Do you think I'm come all this way, at the risk of my life, to be *your* slave, you shabby, canting attorney? I'd better be where I was, or in kingdom come. By Allah! sir, you *have* me, and I'm your *master*, and you shan't buy my soul for a piastre."

There came a loud knock at the hall-door, and if it had been a shot and killed them both, the debaters in the drawingroom could not have been more instantaneously breathless.

Down glided Sarah Rumble, who had been expecting this visit, to pay the taxman.

And she had hardly taken his receipt, when Mr. Larkin, very pink, endeavouring to smile in his discomfiture, and observing with a balmy condescension, “A sweet day, Mrs. Rumble,” appeared in the hall, shook his ears a little, and adjusted his hat, and went forth, and Rosemary Court saw him no more for some time.

CHAPTER IX.

IN VERNEY HOUSE.

Mr. Larkin got into his cab, and ordered the cabman, in a loud voice, to drive to Verney House.

"Didn't he know Verney House? He thought every cabman in London knew Verney House! The house of Lord Viscount Verney, in —— Square. Why it fills up a whole side of it!"

He looked at his watch. He had thirty-seven minutes to reach it in. It was partly to get rid of a spare half hour, that he had paid his unprofitable visit to Rosemary Court.

Mr. Larkin registered a vow to confer no more with Mr. Dingwell. He eased his feelings by making a note of this resolution in that valuable little memorandum book which he carried about with him in his pocket.

"*Saw Mr. Dingwell this day — as usual impracticable and illbred to a hopeless degree — waste of time and worse — resolved that this gentleman being inaccessible to reason, is not to be argued, but DEALT with, should occasion hereafter arise for influencing his conduct.*"

Somewhere about Temple Bar, Mr. Larkin's cab got locked in a string of vehicles, and he put his head out of window, not being sorry for an opportunity of astonishing the citizens by calling to the driver —

"I say, my good fellow, can't you get on? I told Lord Verney to expect me at halfpast one. Do, pray, get me out of this, *any* way, and you shall have a gratuity of half-a-crown. Verney House is a good way from this. *Do* try. His lordship will be as much obliged to you as I am."

Mr. Larkin's assiduities and flatteries were, in truth, telling upon Lord Verney, with whom he was stealing into a general confidence which alarmed many people, and which Cleve Verney hated more than ever.

With the pretty mansion of Hazelden, the relations, as Lord Verney would have said of the House of Ware, were no longer friendly. This was another instance of the fragility of human arrangements, and the vanity of human hopes. The altar had been erected, the swine sacrificed, and the augurs and haruspices on both sides had predicted nothing but amity and concord.

Game, fruit, and venison, went and came,— “Much good may it do your good heart.” “It was ill-killed,” &c. Master Shallow and Master Page could not have been more courteous on such occasions. But on the *fête champêtre* had descended a sudden procella. The roses were whirling high in the darkened air, the flatteries and laughter were drowned in thunder, and the fiddles and glasses smashed with hailstones as large as potatoes.

A general election had come and gone, and in that brief civil war old Vane Etherage was found at the wrong side. In Lord Verney’s language neighbour meant something like vassal, and Etherage who had set up his banner and arrayed his power on the other side, was a rebel — the less forgivable that he had, as was authentically demonstrated, by this step himself inflicted that defeat in the county which had wounded Lord Verney to the quick.

So silence descended upon the interchange of civil speeches; the partridges and pheasants, winged from Ware in a new direction, and old Vane Etherage stayed his friendly hand also; and those tin cases of Irish salmon, from the old gentleman’s fisheries, packed in ice, as fresh as if they had sprung from the stream only half an hour before, were no longer known at Ware; and those wonderful fresh figs, green and purple, which Lord Verney affected, for which Hazelden is famous, and which Vane Etherage was fond of informing his guests were absolutely unequalled in any part of the known world! England could not approach them for bulk and ripeness, nor foreign parts — and he had eaten figs wherever figs grow — for aroma and flavour, no longer crossed the estuary. Thus this game of beggar-my-neighbour began. Lord Verney recalled his birds, and Mr. Etherage withdrew his figs. Mr. Etherage lost his great black grapes; and Lord Verney sacrificed his salmon, and in due time Lord Verney played a writ, and invited an episode in a court of law, and another, more formidable, in the Court of Chancery.

So the issues of the war were knit again, and Vane Etherage was now informed by his lawyers there were some very unpleasant questions mooted affecting the title to the Windermore estate, for which he payed a trifling rent to the Verneys.

So, when Larkin went into Verney House, he was closeted with its noble master for a good while, and returning to a smaller library — devoted to blue books and pamphlets — where he had left a despatch-box and umbrella during his wait for admission to his noble client, he found Cleve busy there.

"Oh, Mr. Larkin. How d'ye do? Anything to say to me?" said the handsome young man, whose eye looked angry though he smiled.

"Ah, thanks. No — *no*, Mr. Verney. I hope and trust I see you well; but no, I had not any communication to make. Shall I be honoured, Mr. Verney, with any communication from you?"

"I've nothing to say, thanks, except of course to say how much obliged I am for the very particular interest you take in my affairs."

"I should be eminently gratified, Mr. Verney, to merit your approbation; but I fear, sir, as yet I can hardly hope to have merited your thanks," said Mr. Larkin, modestly.

"You won't let me thank you; but I quite understand the nature and extent of your kindness. My uncle is by no means so reserved, and he has told me very frankly the care you have been so good as to take of me. He's more obliged even than I am, and so, I am told, is Lady Wimbledon also."

Cleve had said a great deal more than at starting he had at all intended. It would have been easy to him to have dismissed the attorney without allusion to the topic that made him positively hateful in his eyes; but it was not easy to hint at it, and quite command himself also, and the result illustrated the general fact that total abstinence is easier than moderation.

Now the effect of this little speech of Cleve's upon the attorney, was to abash Mr. Larkin, and positively to confound him, in a degree quite unusual in a Christian so armed on most occasions with that special grace called presence of mind. The blood mounted to his hollow cheeks, and up to the summit of his tall bald head; his eyes took their rat-like character, and looked dangerously in his for a second, and then down to the floor, and scanned his own boots; and he bit his lip, and essayed a little laugh, and tried to look innocent, and broke down in the attempt. He cleared his voice once or twice to speak, but said nothing; and all this time Cleve gave him no help whatsoever, but enjoyed his evident confusion with an angry sneer.

"I hope Mr. Cleve Verney," at length Mr. Larkin began, "where duty and expediency pull in opposite directions, I shall always be found at the right side."

"The winning side at all events," said Cleve.

"The *right* side, I venture to repeat. It has been my misfortune to be misunderstood more than once in the course of my life. It is our duty to submit to misinterpretation, as to other afflictions, patiently. I hope I have done so. My first duty is to my client."

"*I*'m no client of yours, sir."

"Well, conceding that, sir, to your *uncle* — to Lord *Verney*, I will say — to his views of what the interests of his house demand, and to his feelings."

"Lord Verney has been good enough to consult *me*, hitherto, upon this subject; a not quite unnatural confidence, I venture to think; more than you seem to suspect. He seems to think, and so do I, that I've a voice in it, and has not left me absolutely in the hands — in a matter of so much importance and delicacy — of his country lawyer."

"I had no power in this case, sir; not even of mentioning the subject to you, who certainly, in one view, are more or less affected by it."

"Thank you for the concession," sneered Cleve.

"I make it unaffectedly, Mr. Cleve Verney," replied Larkin, graciously.

"My uncle, Lord Verney, has given me leave to talk to you upon the subject. I venture to decline that privilege. I prefer speaking to him. He seems to think that *I* ought to be allowed to advise a little in the matter, and that with every respect for *his* wishes; *mine* also are entitled to be a little considered. Should I ever talk to you, Mr. Larkin, it shan't be to ask your advice. I'm detaining you, sir, and I'm also a little busy myself."

Mr. Larkin looked at the young man a second or two a little puzzled; but encountering only a look of stern impatience, he made his best bow, and the conference ended.

A few minutes later, in came our old friend, Tom Sedley.

"Oh! Sedley! Very glad to see you here; but I thought you did not want to see my uncle just now; and this is the most likely place, except the library, to meet him in."

"He's gone; I saw him go out this moment. I should not have come in otherwise; and you mustn't send me away, dear Cleve, I'm in such awful trouble. Everything has gone wrong with us at Hazelden. You know that quarrying company — the slates, that *odious* fellow, Larkin, led him into, before the election and all the other annoyances began."

"You mean the Llanrwyd company?"

"Yes; so I do."

"But that's quite ruined, you know. Sit down."

"I know. He has lost — frightfully — and Mr. Etherage must pay up ever so much in calls beside; and unless he can get it on a mortgage of the Windermore estate, he can't possibly pay them — and I've been trying, and the result is just this — they won't lend it anywhere till the litigation is settled."

"Well, what can I do?" said Cleve, yawning stealthily into his hand, and looking very tired. I am afraid these tragic confidences of Tom Sedley's did not interest Cleve very much; rather bored him, on the contrary.

"They won't lend, I say, while this litigation is pending."

"Depend upon it they won't," acquiesced Cleve.

"And in the meantime, you know, Mr. Etherage would be ruined."

"Well, I see; but, I say again, what can I do?"

"I want you to try if anything can be done with Lord Verney," said Tom, beseechingly.

"Talk to my uncle? I wish, dear Tom, you could teach me how to do that."

"It can't do any harm, Cleve — it can't," urged Tom Sedley, piteously.

"Nor one particle of good. You might as well talk to that picture — I do assure you, you might."

"But it could be no pleasure to him to ruin Mr. Etherage!"

"I'm not so sure of that; between ourselves, forgiving is not one of his weaknesses."

"But I say it's quite impossible — an old family, and liked in the county — it would be a scandal for ever!" pleaded Tom Sedley, distractedly.

"Not worse than that business of Booth Fanshawe," said Cleve, looking down; "no, he never forgives anything. I don't think he perceives he's taking a revenge; he has not *mind* enough for repentance," said Cleve, who was not in good humour with his uncle just then.

"Won't you try? you're such an eloquent fellow, and there's really so much to be said."

"I do assure you, there's no more use than in talking to the chimneypiece; if you make a point of it, of course, I will; but, by Jove, you could hardly choose a worse advocate just now, for he's teasing me to do what I *can't* do. If you heard my miserable story, it would make you laugh; it's like a thing in a *petite comédie*, and it's breaking my heart."

“Well, then, you’ll try — won’t you try?” said Tom, overlooking his friend’s description of his own troubles.

“Yes; as you desire it, I’ll try; but I don’t expect the slightest good from it, and possibly some mischief,” he replied.

“A thousand thanks, my dear Cleve; I’m going down tonight. Would it be too much to ask you for a line, or, if it’s *good* news, a telegram to Llwynan.”

“I may safely promise you that, I’m sorry to say, without risk of trouble. You mustn’t think me unkind, but it would be cruel to let you hope when there is not, really, a chance.”

So Tom drove away to his club, to write his daily love letter to Agnes Etherage, in time for post; and to pen a few lines for old Vane Etherage, and try to speak comfortably to that family, over whose pretty home had gathered so awful a storm.

CHAPTER X.

A THUNDERSTORM

“That night a child might understand The de’il had business on his hand.”

I ended my last chapter with mention of a metaphoric storm; but a literal storm broke over the city of London on that night, such as its denizens remembered for many a day after. The lightning seemed, for more than an hour, the continuous pulsations of light from a sulphurous furnace, and the thunder pealed with the cracks and rattlings of one long roar of artillery. The children, waked by the din, cried in their beds in terror, and Sarah Rumble got her dress about her, and said her prayers in panic.

After a while the intervals between the awful explosions were a little more marked, and Miss Rumble’s voice could be heard by the children, comforting and reassuring in the brief lulls; although had they known what a fright their comforter was herself in, their confidence in her would have been impaired.

Perhaps there was a misgiving in Sarah Rumble’s mind that the lightnings and thunders of irate heaven were invoked by the presence of her mysterious lodger. Was even she herself guiltless, in hiding under her roof-tree that impious old sinner, whom Rosemary Court disgorged at dead of night, as the churchyard does a ghost — about whose past history — whose doings and whose plans, except that they were wicked — she knew no more than about those of an evil spirit, had she chanced, in one of her spectre-seeing moods, to spy one moving across the lobby.

His talk was so cold and wicked; his temper so fiendish; his nocturnal disguises and outgoings so obviously pointed to secret guilt; and his relations with the meek Mr. Larkin, and with those potent Jews, who, grumbling and sullen, yet submitted to his caprices, as genii to those of the magician who has the secret of command, — that Mr. Dingwell had in her eyes something of a supernatural horror surrounding him. In the thunderstorm, Sarah Rumble vowed secretly to reconsider the religious propriety of harbouring this old man; and amid these qualms, it was with something of fear and anger that, in a silence between the peals of the now subsiding storm, she heard the creak of his shoe upon the stair.

That even on such a night, with the voice of divine anger in the air, about his ears, he could not forego his sinister excursion, and for once at these hours remain decorously in his rooms! Her wrath overcame her fear of him. She would *not* have her house burnt and demolished over her head, with thunderbolts, for *his* doings.

She went forth, with her candle in her hand, and stood at the turn of the banister, confronting Mr. Dingwell, who, also furnished with a candle, was now about midway down the last flight of stairs.

"Egeria, in the thunder!" exclaimed the hard, scoffing tones of Mr. Dingwell; whom, notwithstanding her former encounter with him, she would hardly have recognised in his ugly disguise.

"A hoffle night for anyone to go out, sir," she said, rather sternly, with a courtesy at the same time.

"Hoffle, is it?" said Mr. Dingwell, amused, with mock gravity.

"The hofflest, sir, I think I hever 'ave remembered."

"Why, ma'am, it isn't *raining*; I put my hand out of the window. There's none of that hoffle rain, ma'am, that gives a fellow rheumatism. I hope there's no unusual fog — is there?"

"*There*, sir;" exclaimed she, as another loud peal rattled over Rosemary Court, with a blue glare through the lobby window and the fanlight in the hall. She paused, and lifted her hand to her eyes till it subsided, and then murmured an ejaculation.

"I like thunder, my dear. It reminds me of your name, dear Miss Rumble;" and he prolonged the name with a rolling pronunciation. "Shakespeare, you know, who says everything better than anyone else in the world, makes that remarkable old gentleman, King Lear, say, 'Thunder, *rumble* thy bellyfull!' Of course, *I* would not say *that* in a drawingroom, or to you; but kings are so refined they may say things *we* can't, and a genius like Shakespeare hits it off."

"I would not go out, sir, on such a night, without I was very sure it was about something *good* I was a-going," said Miss Rumble, very pale.

"You labour under electro-phobia, my dear ma'am, and mistake it for piety. I'm not a bit afraid of that sort of artillery, ma'am. Here we are, two or three millions of people in this town; and two or three million of shots, and we'll see by the papers, I venture to say, not three shots tell. Don't you think if Jupiter really meant mischief he could manage something better?"

"I know, sir, it ought to teach us" — here she winced and paused; for another glare, followed by another bellow of the thunder, "long, loud, and deep," interposed. "It should teach us some godly fear, if we has none by nature."

Mr. Dingwell looked at his watch.

"Oh! Mr. Dingwell, it is hoffle. I wish you would only see it, sir."

"*See* the *thunder* — eh?"

"My poor mother. She always made us go down on our knees, and say our prayers — she would — while the thunder was."

"You'd have had rather long prayers tonight. How your knees must have ached — egad! I don't wonder you dread it, Miss Sarah."

"And so I *do*, Mr. Dingwell, and so I should. Which I think all other sinners should dread it also."

"Meaning *me*."

"And take warning of the wrath to come."

Here was another awful clap.

"Hoffle it is, Mr. Dingwell, and a warnin' to *you*, sent special, mayhap."

"Hardly fair to disturb all the town for *me*, don't you think?"

"You're an old man, Mr. Dingwell."

"And you're an old woman, Miss Sarah," said he — not caring to be reminded of his years by other people, though he playfully called himself on occasions an old "boy"— "as old as Abraham's wife, whose namesake you are, though you have not lighted on an Abraham yet, nor become the mother of a great nation."

"Old enough to be good enough, as my poor mother used to say, sir; I am truly; and sorry I am, Mr. Dingwell, to see you, on this hoffle night, bent on no good. I'm afraid, sir — oh, sir, sir, oughtn't you think, with them sounds in your ears, Mr. Dingwell?"

"The most formidable thunder, my dear Sarah, proceeds from the silvery tongue of woman. I can stand any other. *It* frightens me. So, egad, if you please, I'll take refuge in the open air, and go out, and patter a prayer."

And with a nod and a smirk, having had fooling enough, he glided by Miss Rumble, who made him an appalled courtesy, and, setting down his candle on the hall-table, he said, touching his false whiskers with his finger tips, “Mind, not a word about these — upon my soul —— you’d *better* not.”

She made another courtesy. He stopped and looked at her for an answer.

“Can’t you *speak*?” he said.

“No, sir — sure — not a word,” she faltered.

“Good girl!” he said, and opened the door, with his latchkey in his pocket, on pitchy darkness, which was instantaneously illuminated by the lightning, and another awful roar of thunder broke over their heads.

“The voice of heaven in warning!” she murmured to herself, as she stood by the banisters, dazzled by the gleam, and listening to the reverberation ringing in her ears. “I pray God he may turn back yet.”

He looked over his shoulder.

“Another shot, Miss Rumble — missed again, you see.” He nodded, stepped out upon the flags, and shut the door. She heard his steps in the silence that followed, traversing the court.

“Oh dear! but I wish he *was* gone, right out — a hoffle old man he is. There’s a weight on my conscience like, and a fright in my heart, there is, ever since he camed into the ‘ouse. He is so presumptious. To see that hold man made hup with them rings and whiskers, like a robber or a play-actor! And defyin’ the blessed thunder of heaven — a walking hout, a mockin’ and darin’ it, at these hours — Oh *law*!”

The interjection was due to another flash and peal.

“I wouldn’t wonder — no more I would — if that flash was the death o’ ‘im!”

CHAPTER XI.

THE PALE HORSE.

Sally Rumble knocked at the usual hour at the old man's door next morning.

"Come in, ma'am," he answered, in a weary, peevish voice. "Open the window-shutter, and give me some light, and hand me my watch, please."

All which she did.

"I have not closed my eyes from the time I lay down."

"Not ailing, sir, I hope?"

"Just allow me to count, and I'll tell you, my dear."

He was trying his pulse.

"Just as I thought, egad. The pale horse in the Revelation, ma'am, he's running a gallop in my pulse; it has been threatening the last three days, and now I'm in for it, and I should not be surprised, Miss Sally, if it ended in a funeral in our alley."

"God forbid, sir."

"Amen, with all my heart. Ay, the pale horse; my head's splitting; oblige me with the looking-glass, and a little less light will answer. Thank you — very good. Just draw the curtain open at the foot of the bed; please, hold it nearer — thank you. Yes, a ghost, ma'am — ha, ha — at last, I do suppose. My eyes, too — I've seen pits, with the water drying up, hollow — ay, ay; sunk — and — now — did you see? Well, look at my tongue — here" — and he made the demonstration; "you never saw a worse tongue than *that*, I fancy; that tongue, ma'am, is eloquent, *I* think."

"Please God, sir, you'll soon be better."

"Draw the curtain a bit more; the light falls oddly, or — does it? — my face. Did you ever see, ma'am, a face so nearly the colour of a coffin-plate?"

"Don't be talking, sir, please, of no such thing," said Sally Rumble, taking heart of grace, for women generally pluck up a spirit when they see a man floored by sickness. "I'll make you some whey or barley-water, or would you like some weak tea better?"

"Ay; will you draw the curtain close again, and take away the looking-glass? Thanks. I believe I've drunk all the water in the carafe. Whey — well, I suppose it's the right thing; *caudle* when we're coming *in*, and *whey*, ma'am, when we're going *out*. Baptism of Infants, Burial of the Dead! My poor mother, how she did put us through the prayer-book, and Bible — Bible. Dear me."

"There's a very good man, sir, please — the Rev. Doctor Bartlett, though he's gone rather old. He came in, and read a deal, and prayed, every day with my sister when she was sick, poor thing."

"Bartlett? What's his Christian name? You need not speak loud — it plays the devil with my head."

"The Reverend Thomas Bartlett, please, sir."

"Of Jesus?"

"What, sir, please?"

"Jesus *College*."

"Don't know, I'm sure, sir."

"Is he old?"

"Yes, sir, past seventy."

"Ha — well I don't care a farthing about him," said Mr. Dingwell.

"Will you, please, have in the apothecary, sir? I'll fetch him directly, if you wish."

"No — *no* apothecary, *no* clergyman; I don't believe in the Apostles' Creed, ma'am, and I do believe in the jokes about apothecaries. If I'm to go, I'll go quietly, if you please."

Honest Sally Rumble was heavy at heart to see this old man, who certainly did look ghastly enough to suggest ideas of the undertaker and the sexton, in so unsatisfactory a plight as to his immortal part. Was he a Jew? — there wasn't a hair on his chin — or a Roman Catholic? — or a member of any one of those multitudinous forms of faith which she remembered in a stout volume, adorned with woodcuts, and entitled "A Dictionary of all Religions," in a back parlour of her granduncle, the tallow-chandler?

"Give me a glass of cold water, ma'am," said the subject of her solicitude.

"Thank you — that's the best drink — *slop*, I think you call it — a sick man can swallow."

Sally Rumble coughed a little, and fidgeted, and at last she said: "Please, sir, would you wish I should fetch any other sort of a minister?"

"Don't plague me, pray; I believe in the prophet Rabelais and *je m'en vais chercher un grand peutêtre* — the two great chemists, Death, who is going to analyse, and Life, to recombine me. I tell you, ma'am, my head is bursting; I'm very ill; I'll talk no more."

She hesitated. She lingered in the room, in her great perplexity; and Mr. Dingwell lay back, with a groan.

"I'll tell you what you may do: go down to your landlord's office, and be so good as to say to either of those d —— d Jew fellows — I don't care which — that I am as you see me; it mayn't signify, it may blow over; but I've an idea it is serious; and tell them I said they had better know that I am *very ill*, and that I've taken no step about it."

With another weary groan Mr. Dingwell let himself down on his pillow, and felt worse for his exertion, and very tired and stupid, and odd about the head, and would have been very glad to fall asleep; and with one odd pang of fear, sudden and cold, at his heart, he thought, "I'm going to die — I'm going to die — at last — I'm going to die."

The physical nature in sickness acquiesces in death; it is the instructed mind that recoils; and the more versed about the unseen things of futurity, unless when God, as it were, prematurely glorifies it, the more awfully it recoils.

Mr. Dingwell was not more afraid than other sinners who have lived for the earthy part of their nature, and have taken futurity pretty much for granted, and are now going to test by the stake of *themselves* the value of their loose guesses.

No; he had chanced a great many things, and they had turned out for the most part better than he expected. Oh! no; the whole court, and the adjoining lanes, and, in short, the whole city of London, must go as he would — lots of company, it was not to be supposed it was anything very bad — and he was so devilish tired, *over*-fatigued — queer — worse than sea-sickness — that headache — fate — the change — an end — what was it? At all events, a rest, a sleep — sleep — could not be very bad; lots of sleep, sir, and the chance — the chance — oh, yes, things go pretty well, and I have not had my good luck yet. I wish I could sleep a bit — yes, let kingdom-come be all sleep — and so a groan, and the brain duller, and more pain, and the immense fatigue that demands the enormous sleep.

When Sarah Rumble returned, Mr. Dingwell seemed, she thought, a great deal heavier. He made no remark, as he used to do, when she entered the room. She came and stood by the bedside, but he lay with his eyes closed, not asleep; she could see by the occasional motion of his lips, and the fidgety change of his posture, and his weary groanings. She waited for a time in silence.

"Better, sir?" she half-whispered, after a minute or two.

"No," he said, wearily.

Another silence followed, and then she asked, "Would you like a drink, Mr. Dingwell, sir?"

"Yes — water."

So he drank a very little, and lay down again.

Miss Sarah Rumble stayed in the room, and nearly ten minutes passed without a word.

"What did he say?" demanded Mr. Dingwell so abruptly that Sarah Rumble fancied he had been dreaming.

"Who, sir, please?"

"The Jew — landlord," he answered.

"Mr. Levi's acoming up, sir, please — he expected in twenty minutes," replied she.

Mr. Dingwell groaned; and two or three minutes more elapsed, and silence seemed to have reestablished itself in the darkened chamber, when Mr. Dingwell raised himself up with a sudden effort, and he said —

"Sarah Rumble, fetch me my desk." Which she did, from his sitting-room.

"Put your hand under the bolster, and you'll find two keys on a ring, and a pocketbook. *Yes.* Now, Sarah Rumble, unlock that desk. Very good. Put out the papers on the coverlet before me; first bolt the door. Thank you, ma'am. There are a parcel of letters among those, tied across with a red silk cord — just so. Put them in my hand — thank you — and place all the rest back again neatly — *neatly*, if you please. Now lock the desk; replace it, and come here; but first give me pen and ink, and bolt the door — try it again."

And as she did so he scrawled an address upon the blank paper in which these letters were wrapt.

The brown visage of his grave landlady was graver than ever, as she returned to listen for further orders.

"Mrs. Sarah Rumble, I take you for an honest person; and as I may die this time, I make a particular request of *you* — take this little packet, and slip it between the feather-bed and the mattress, as near the centre as your arm will reach — thank you — remember it's there. If I die, ma'am, you'll find a ten-pound note wrapped about it, which I give to you; you need not thank — that will do. The letters addressed as they are you will deliver, without showing them, or *saying one word to anyone* but to the gentleman himself, into whose hands you must deliver them. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, please; I'm listening."

"Well, *attend*. There are two Jew gentlemen — your landlord, Mr. Levi, and the *old* Jew, who have been with me once or twice — you know *them*; that makes *two*; and there is Mr. Larkin, the tall gentleman who has been twice here with them, with the lavender waistcoat and trousers, the eyeglass with the black ribbon, the black frock coat — heigho! oh, dear, my head! — the red grizzled whiskers, and bald head."

"The religious gentleman, please, sir?"

"Exactly; the religious gentleman. Well, *attend*. The two Jews and the religious gentleman together make *three*; and those three gentlemen are *robbers*."

"*What*, sir?"

"*Robbers* — robbers! Don't you know what '*robbers*' means? They are all three *robbers*. Now, I don't think they'll want to fiddle with my money till I'm dead."

"Oh, Lord, sir!"

"'Oh, Lord!' of course. That will do. They won't touch my money till I'm dead, if they trust you; but they *will* want my desk — at least Larkin will. I shan't be able to look after things, for my head is very bad, and I shall be too drowsy — soon knocked up; so give 'em the desk, if they ask for it, and these keys from under the pillow; and if they ask you if there are any other papers, say *no*; and don't you tell them one word about the letters you've put between the beds here. If you betray me — you're a religious woman — yes — and believe in God — may God d — n you; and He will, for you'll be accessory to the villany of those three miscreants. And now I’ve done what in me lies; and that is all — my last testament.”

And Mr. Dingwell lay down wearily. Sarah Rumble knew that he was very ill; she had attended people in fever, and seen them die. Mr. Dingwell was already perceptibly worse. As she was coming up with some whey, a knock came to the door, and opening it she saw Mr. Levi, with a very surly countenance, and his dark eyes blazing fiercely on her.

“How’sh Dingwell now?” he demanded, before he had time to enter, and shut the door; “*worse*, is he?”

“Well, he’s duller, sir.”

“In his bed? Shut the door.”

“Yes, sir, please. Didn’t get up this morning. He expected you two hours ago, sir.”

Levi nodded.

“What doctor did you fetch?” he asked.

“No doctor, please, sir. I thought you and *him* would choose.”

Levi made no answer; so she could not tell by his surly face, which underwent no change, whether he approved or not. He looked at his watch.

“Larkin wasn’t here to-day?”

“Mr. Larkin? No, sir, please.”

“Show me Dingwell’s room, till I have a look at him,” said the Jew, gloomily.

So he followed her upstairs, and entered the darkened room without waiting for any invitation, and went to the window, and pulled open a bit of the shutter.

“What’s it for?” grumbled Dingwell indistinctly from his bed.

“So you’ve bin and done it, you have,” said the Jew, walking up with his hands in his pockets, and eyeing him from a distance as he might a glandered horse.

Dingwell was in no condition to retort on this swarthy little man, who eyed him with a mixture of disgust and malignity.

“How long has he been thish way?” said the Jew, glowering on Sarah Rumble.

“Only to-day in bed, please, sir; but he has bin lookin’ awful bad this two or three days, sir.”

“Do you back it for *fever*?”

"I think it's *fever*, sir."

"I s'pose you'd twig fever fasht enough? Seen lotsh of fever in your time?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"It *ish* fever, ten to one in fifties. Black death going, ma'am — *my* luck. Look at him there, d —— n him, he'sh got it."

Levi looked at him surlily for a while with eyes that glowed like coals.

"This comsh o' them cursed holes you're always a-going to; there's always fever and everything there, you great old buck goat."

Dingwell made an effort to raise himself, and mumbled, half awake —

"Let me — I'll talk to him — how dare you — when I'm better — *quiet*" — and he laid down his head again.

"When you *are*, you cursed sink. Look at all we've lost by you."

He stood looking at Dingwell savagely.

"He'll *die*," exclaimed he, making an angry nod, almost a butt, with his head toward the patient, and he repeated his prediction with a furious oath.

"See, you'll send down to the apothecary's for that chloride of lime, and them vinegars and things — or — no; you must wait here, for Larkin will come; and don't you let him go, mind. Me and Mr. Goldshed will be here in no time. Tell him the doctor's coming; and us — and I'll send up them things from the apothecary, and you put them all about in plates on the floor and tables. Bad enough to lose our money, and cursed bad; but I won't take this — come out o' this room — if *I* can help."

And he entered the drawingroom, shutting Dingwell's door, and spitting on the floor, and then he opened the window.

"He'll *die* — do you *think* he'll die?" he exclaimed again.

"He's in the hands of God, sir," said Sally Rumble.

"He won't be long there — he'll die — I say he *will* — he will;" and the little Jew swore and stamped on the floor, and clapped his hat on his head, and ran down the stairs, in a paroxysm of business and fury.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH HIS FRIENDS VISIT THE SICK.

Mr. Levi, when Sarah Rumble gave him her lodger’s message, did not, as he said, “vally it a turn of a halfpenny.” He could not be very ill if he could send his attendant out of doors, and deliver the terms in which his messages were to be communicated. Mr. Levi’s diagnosis was that Mr. Dingwell’s attack was in the region of the purse or pocketbook, and that the “dodge” was simply to get the partners and Mr. Larkin together for the purpose of extracting more money.

Mr. Larkin was in town, and he had written to that gentleman’s hotel; also he had told Mr. Goldshed, who took the same view, and laughed in his lazy diapason over the weak invention of the enemy.

Levi accordingly took the matter very easily, and hours had passed before his visit, which was made pretty late in the afternoon, and he was smiling over his superior sagacity in seeing through Dingwell’s little dodge, as he walked into the court, when an officious little girl, in her mother’s bonnet, running by his knee, said, pompously —

“You’d better not go there, sir.”

“And why so, chickabiddy?” inquired Mr. Levi, derisively.

“No, you’d better not; there’s a gentleman as has took the fever there.”

“Where?” said Mr. Levi, suddenly interested.

“In Mrs. Rumble’s.”

“*Is* there? — how do you know?”

“Lucy Maria Rumbles, please, sir, she told me, and he’s *very bad*.”

The fashion of Levi’s countenance was changed as he turned from her suddenly, and knocked so sharply at the door that the canary, hanging from the window in his cage over the way, arrested his song, and was agitated for an hour afterwards.

So Mr. Levi was now thoroughly aroused to the danger that had so suddenly overcast his hopes, and threatened to swallow in the bottomless sea of death the golden stake he had ventured.

It was not, nevertheless, until eight o'clock in the evening, so hard a thing is it to collect three given men [what then must be the office of whip to Whig or Tory side of the House?] that the two Jews and Mr. Larkin were actually assembled in Mr. Dingwell's bedroom, now reeking with disinfectants and prophylactic fluids.

The party were in sore dismay, for the interesting patient had begun to maunder very preposterously in his talk. They listened, and heard him say —

"That's a lie — I say, I'd nail his tongue to the table. Bells won't ring for it — lots of bells in England; you'll not find 'em *here*, though."

And then it went off into a mumbling, and Mr. Goldshed, who was listening disconsolately, exclaimed, "My eyesh!"

"Well, how do you like it, guv'nor? I said he'd walk the plank, and so he will," said Levi. "He will — he will;" and Levi clenched his white teeth, with an oath.

"*There*, Mr. Levi, *pray*, pray, none of *that*," said Mr. Larkin.

The three gentlemen were standing in a row, from afar off observing the patient, with an intense scrutiny of a gloomy and, I may say, a savage kind.

"He was an unfortunate agent — no energy, except for his pleasures," resentfully resumed Mr. Larkin, who was standing furthest back of the three speculators. "Indolent, impracticable enough to ruin fifty cases; and now here he lies in a fever, contracted, you think, Mr. Levi, in some of his abominable haunts."

Mr. Larkin did not actually say "d —— him," but he directed a very dark, sharp look upon his acquaintance in the bed.

"Abawminable, to be sure, abawminable. Bah! It's all true. The hornies has their eye on him these seven weeks past — curse the beasht," snarled Mr. Levi, clenching his fists in his pockets, "and every da — a — m muff that helped to let me in for this here rotten business."

"Meaning *me*, sir?" said Mr. Larkin, flushing up to the top of his head a fierce pink.

Levi answered nothing, and Mr. Larkin did not press his question.

It is very easy to be companionable and goodhumoured while all goes pleasantly. It is failure, loss, and disappointment, that try the sociable qualities; even those three amiable men felt less amicable under the cloud than they had under the sunshine.

So they all three looked in their several ways angrily and thoughtfully at the gentleman in the typhus fever, who said rather abruptly —

“She killed herself, sir; foolish ‘oman! Capital dancing, gentlemen! Capital dancing, ladies! Capital — capital — admirable dancing. God help us!” and so it sunk again into mumbling.

“Capital da-a-ancing, and who pays the piper?” asked Mr. Goldshed, with a rather ferocious sneer. “It has cost us fifteen hundred to two thousand!”

“And a doctor,” suggested Levi.

“Doctor, the devil! I say; I’ve paid through the nose,” or, as he pronounced that organ through which his metallic declamation droned, *noshe*. “It’s Mr. Larkin’s turn now; it’s all da-a-am rot; a warm fellow like you, Mr. Larkin, putting all the loss on me; how can I sta-a-an’ that — sta-a-an’ all the losses, and share the profits — ba-a-ah, sir; that couldn’t pay nohow.”

“I think,” said Mr. Larkin, “it may be questionable how far a physician would be, just in this imminent stage of the attack, at all useful, or even desirable; but, Miss Rumble, if I understand you, he is quite *compos* — I mean, quite, so to speak, in his senses, in the early part of the day.”

He paused, and Miss Rumble from the other side of the bed contributed her testimony.

“Well, that being so,” began Mr. Larkin, but stopped short as Mr. Dingwell took up his parable, forgetting how wide of the mark the sick man’s interpolations were.

“That’s a vulture over there — devilish odd birds,” said Mr. Dingwell’s voice, with an unpleasant distinctness; “you just tie a turban on a stick,” and then he was silent.

Mr. Larkin cleared his voice and resumed —

“Well, as I was saying, when the attack, whatever it is, has developed itself, a medical man may possibly be available; but in the mean time, as he is spared the possession of his faculties, and we all agree, gentlemen, whatever particular form of faith may be respectively ours, that some respect is due to futurity; I would say, that a clergyman, at all events, might make him advantageously a visit tomorrow, and afford him an opportunity at least of considering the interests of his soul.”

“Oh! da — a — m his shoul, it’s his *body*. We must try to keep him together,” said Mr. Goldshed, impatiently. “If he dies the money’s all lost, every shtiver; if he don't, he's a sound speculation; we must raise a doctor among us, Mr. Larkin."

"It is highly probable indeed that before long the unfortunate gentleman may require medical advice," said Mr. Larkin, who had a high opinion of the "speculation," whose pulse was at this moment unfortunately at a hundred and twenty. "The fever, my dear sir, if such it be, will have declared itself in a day or two; in the meantime, nursing is all that is really needful, and Miss Rumble, I have no doubt, will take care that the unhappy gentleman is properly provided in that respect."

The attorney, who did not want at that moment to be drawn into a discussion on contributing to expenses, smiled affectionately on Miss Rumble, to whom he assigned the part of good Samaritan.

"He'll want some one at night, sir, please; I could not undertake myself, sir, for both day and night," said brown Miss Rumble, very quietly.

"*There!* That'sh it!" exclaimed Levi, with a vicious chuckle, and a scowl, extending his open hand energetically toward Miss Rumble, and glaring from Mr. Larkin to his partner.

"Nothing but *pay*; down with the dust, Goldshed and Levi. Bleed like a pair o' beashtly pigs, Goldshed and Levi, *do*! There's death in that fellow's face, I say. It's all bosh, doctors and nurses; throwing good money after bad, and then, five pounds to bury him, drat him!"

"Bury? ho, no! the parish, the workhoushe-authorities shall bury him," said Mr. Goldshed, briskly.

"Dead — dead — dead, as a Mameluke — dead as a Janizary — eh? eh? — bowstrung!" exclaimed, Mr. Dingwell, and went off into an indistinct conversation in a foreign language.

"Stuff a stocking down his throat, will you?" urged Mr. Levi; a duty, however, which no one undertook.

"I see that cove's booked; he looks just like old Solomon's looked when *he* had it. It isn't no use; all rot, throwing good money arter bad, I say; let him be; let him die."

"I'll *not* let him die; no, he shan't. I'll *make* him pay. I made the Theatre of Fascination pay," said Mr. Goldshed serenely, alluding to a venture of his devising, by which the partnership made ever so much money in spite of a prosecution and heavy fines and other expenses.

“I say ’tisn’t my principle to throw up the game, by no means — *no* — with my ball in hand, and the stakes in the pocket — *never*!”

Here Mr. Goldshed wagged his head slowly with a solemn smile, and Mr. Dingwell, from the bed, said with a moan —

“Move it, will you? That way — I wish you’d help — b-bags, sir — sacks, sir — awfully hard lying — full of ears and — ay — *noses* — egad! — why not? cut them all off, I say. D — n the Greeks! Will you move it? *Do* move that sack — it hurts his ribs — ribs — *I* never got the bastinado.”

“Not but what you deserved it,” remarked Mr. Levi.

And Mr. Dingwell’s babbling went on, but too indistinctly to be unravelled.

“I say,” continued Mr. Goldshed, sublimely, “if that ‘ere speculative thing in the bed there comes round, and gets all square and right, I’ll make him pay. I’m not funked — who’s afraid — wiry old brick!”

“I think so,” acquiesced Mr. Larkin with gentle solemnity; “Mr. Dingwell is certainly, as you say, wiry. There are many things in his favour, and Providence, Mr. Goldshed — Providence is over us all.”

“Providence, to be sure,” said Mr. Goldshed, who did not disdain help from any quarter. “Where does he keep his money, ma’am?”

“Under his bolster, please, sir — under his head,” answered Sarah Rumble.

“Take it out, please,” said Mr. Goldshed.

She hesitated.

“*Give* the man hish money, woman, ca-a-ant you?” bawled Mr. Levi fiercely, and extending his arm toward the bed.

“You had better — *yes*, ma’am, the money belongs to Messrs. Goldshed and Levi,” said Mr. Larkin, interposing in the character of the *vir pietate gravis*.

Sally Rumble, recollecting Mr. Dingwell’s direction, “Let ‘em have the money, too, if they press for it,” obeyed, and slid her hand under his bolster, and under his head, from the other side where she was standing; and Dingwell, feeling the motion, I suppose, raised his head and stared with sunken eyes dismally at the three gentlemen, whom he plainly did not recognise, or possibly saw in the shapes of foxes, wolves, or owls, which Æsop would have metaphorically assigned them, and with a weary groan he closed his wandering eyes again, and sank down on the pillow.

Miss Rumble drew forth a roll of banknotes with a string tied round them.

"Take the money, Levi," said Goldshed, drawing a step backward.

"Take it yourself, guv'nor," said Levi, waving back Miss Sally Rumble, and edging back a little himself.

"Well," said Goldshed, quietly, "I see you're afraid of that infection."

"I believe you," answered Levi.

"So am I," said Goldshed, uneasily.

"And no wonder!" added Mr. Larkin, anticipating himself an invitation to accept the questionable trust.

"Put them notes down on the table there," said Mr. Goldshed.

And the three gentlemen eyed the precious roll of paper as I have seen people at a chemical lecture eye the explodable compounds on the professor's table.

"I tell you what, ma'am," said Goldshed, "you'll please get a dry bottle and a cork, and put them notes into it, and cork it down, ma'am, and give it to Mr. Levi."

"And count them first, please, Miss Rumble — shan't she, Mr. Goldshed?" suggested Mr. Larkin.

"What for? — isn't the money ours?" howled Mr. Levi, with a ferocious stare on the attorney's meek face.

"Only, Mr. Goldshed, with a view to distinctness, and to prevent possible confusion in any future account," said Mr. Larkin, who knew that Dingwell had got money from the Verneys, and thought that if there was anything recovered from the wreck he had as good a right to his salvage as another.

Mr. Goldshed met his guileless smile with an ugly sneer, and said —

"Oh, count them, to be sure, for the gentleman. It isn't a ha'penny to me."

So Miss Rumble counted seventy-five pounds in bank notes and four pounds in gold, which latter Mr. Goldshed committed to her in trust for the use of the patient, and the remainder were duly bottled and corked down according to Mr. Goldshed's grotesque precaution, and in this enclosure Mr. Levi consented to take the money in hand, and so it was deposited for the night in the iron safe in Messrs. Goldshed and Levi's office, to be uncorked in the morning by old Rosenthal, the cashier, who would, no doubt, be puzzled by the peculiarity of the arrangement, and with the aid of a corkscrew, lodged to the credit of the firm.

Mr. Goldshed next insisted that Dingwell's life, fortunately for that person, was too important to the gentlemen assembled there to be trifled with; and said that sage —

"We'll have the best doctor in London — six pounds' worth of *him* — d'y see? And under him a clever *young* doctor to look in four times a day, and we'll arrange with the young 'un on the principal of no cure no pay — that is, we'll give fifty pounds this day six weeks, if the party in bed here is alive at that date."

And upon this basis I believe an arrangement was actually completed. The great Doctor Langley, when he called, and questioned Miss Rumble, and inspected the patient, told Mr. Levi, who was in waiting, that the old gentleman had been walking about in a fever for more than a week before he took to his bed, and that the chances were very decidedly against his recovery.

A great anxiety overcame Mr. Larkin like a summer cloud, and the serene sunshine of that religious mind was overcast with storm and blackness. For the recovery of Mr. Dingwell were offered up, in one synagogue at least, prayers as fervent as any ever made for that of our early friend Charles Surface, and it was plain that never was patriarch, saint, or hero, mourned as the venerable Mr. Dingwell would be, by at least three estimable men, if the fates were to make away with him on this critical occasion.

The three gentlemen, as they left his room on the evening I have been describing, cast their eyes upon Mr. Dingwell's desk, and hesitated, and looked at one another, darkly, for a moment in silence.

"There'sh no reason why we shouldn't," drawled Mr. Goldshed.

"I object to the removal of the desk," said Mr. Larkin, with a shake of his head, closing his eyes, and raising his hand as if about to pronounce a benediction on the lid of it. "If he's spared it might become a very serious thing — I decidedly object."

"Who want'sh to take the man's desk!" drawled Mr. Goldshed, surlily.

"Who want'sh to take it?" echoed Levi, and stared at him with an angry gape.

"But there will be no harm, I shay, in looking what paper'sh there," continued Mr. Goldshed. "Does he get letters?"

"Only two, sir, please, as I can remember, since he came here."

"By po-sht, or by ha-a-an'?" inquired Goldshed.

"By 'and, sir, please; it was your Mr. Solomons as fetched 'em here, sir."

He lifted up the desk, swayed it gently, and shook it a little, looking at it as if it were a musical box about to strike up, and so set it down again softly. "There'sh papersh in that box," he hummed thoughtfully to himself.

"I think I may speak here," said Mr. Larkin, looking up sadly and loftily, as he placed his hat upon his bald head, "with some little authority as a professional man — if in no higher capacity — and I may take upon myself to say, that by no possibility can the contents of that desk affect the very simple and, in a certain sense, direct transactions in which our clients' interests, and in a degree ours also, are involved, and I object on higher grounds still, I hope, to any irregularity as respects that desk."

"If you're confident, Mr. Larkinsh, there'sh nothing in it can affect the bushiness we're on, I would not give you a cancel' Queen's head for the lot."

"Perfectly confident, my dear Mr. Goldshed."

"He'sh perfectly confident," repeated Mr. Levi in his guv'nor's ear, from over his shoulder.

"Come along then," said Mr. Goldshed, shuffling slowly out of the room, with his hands in his pockets.

"It's agreed then, gentlemen, there's no tampering with the desk?" urged Mr. Larkin, entreatingly.

"Shertainly," said Mr. Goldshed, beginning to descend the stairs.

"Shertainly," repeated Mr. Levi, following him.

And the three gentlemen, in grave and friendly guise, walked away together, over the flagged court. Mr. Larkin did not half like taking the arms of these gentlemen, but the quarter of the town was not one where he was likely to meet any of either the spiritual or the terrestrial aristocracy with whom he desired specially to stand well. So he moved along conscious, not unpleasantly, of the contrast which a highbred gentleman must always present in juxtaposition with such persons as Goldshed and Levi. They walked through the dingy corridor called Caldwell Alley, and through Ive's Lane, and along the market, already flaring and glaring with great murky jets of gas wavering in the darkening stalls, and thence by the turn to the left into the more open street, where the cabstand is, and then having agreed to dine together at the "Three Roses" in Milk Lane in half an hour, the gentlemen parted — Messrs. Goldshed and Levi to fly in a cab to meet their lawyer at their office, and Mr. Larkin to fly westward to his hotel, to inquire for a letter which he expected. So smiling they parted; and, so soon as Mr. Larkin was quite out of sight, Mr. Levi descended from their cab, and with a few parting words which he murmured in Mr. Goldshed's ear, left him to drive away by himself, while he retraced his steps at his leisure to Rosemary Court, and finding the door of Miss Rumble's house open with Lucy Maria at it, entered and walked straight up to Mr. Dingwell's drawingroom, with a bunch of small keys in his hand, in his coatpocket.

He had got just two steps into the room towards the little table on which the patient's desk stood, when from the other side of that piece of furniture, and the now open desk, there rose up the tall form of Mr. Jos. Larkin, of the Lodge.

The gentlemen eyed one another for a few seconds in silence, for the surprise was great. Mr. Larkin did not even set down the parcel of letters, which he had been sorting like a hand at whist, when Mr. Levi had stepped in to divert his attention.

"I thought, Mr. Larkinsh, I might as well drop in just to give you a lift," said Levi, with an elaborate bow, a politeness, and a great smile, that rather embarrassed the good attorney.

"Certainly, Mr. Levi, I'm always happy to see you — always happy to see *any* man — I have never done anything I am ashamed of, nor shrunk from any duty, nor do I mean to do so now."

"Your hands looksh pretty full."

"Yes, sir, *pretty* tolerably full, sir," said Mr. Larkin, placing the letters on the desk; "and I may add so do *yours*, Mr. Levi; those keys, as you observe, might have given one a lift in opening this desk, had I not preferred the *other* course," said Mr. Larkin, loftily, "of simply requesting Mr. Dingwell's friend, the lady at present in charge of his papers, to afford me, at her own discretion, such access to the papers possibly affecting my client as I may consider necessary or expedient, as his legal adviser."

"You have changed your view of your duty, rather; haven't you, Mr. Larkinsh?"

"No, sir, *no*; simply my action on a point of expediency. Of course, there was some weight, too, sir, in the suggestions made by a gentleman of Mr. Goldshed's experience and judgment; and I don't hesitate to say that his — his ideas had their proper weight with me. And I may say, once for all, Mr.

Levi, I'll not be hectored, or lectured, or *bullied* by you, Mr. Levi," added Mr. Larkin, in a new style, feeling, perhaps, that his logical and moral vein was not quite so happy as usual.

"Don't frighten ush, Larkins, pray don't, only just give me leave to see what them letters is about," said Levi, taking his place by him; "did you put any of them in your pocket?"

"No, sir; upon my *soul*, Mr. Levi, I did no such thing," said Mr. Larkin, with a heartiness that had an effect upon the Jew. "The occasion is so serious that I hardly regret having used the expression," said Mr. Larkin, who had actually blushed at his own oath. "There was just one letter possibly worth looking at."

"That da-a-am foolish letter you wrote him to Constantinople?"

"I wrote him *no* foolish letter, sir. I wrote him no letter, sir, I should fear to have posted on the market cross, or read from the pulpit, Mr. Levi. I only wonder, knowing all you do of Mr. Dingwell's unfortunate temper, and reckless habits of assertion, that you should attach the smallest weight to an expression thrown out by him in one of his diabolical and — and — lamentable frenzies. As to my having abstracted a letter of his — an imputation at which I smile — I can, happily, cite evidence other than my own." He waved his hand toward Miss Rumble. "This lady has happily, I will say, been in the room during my very brief examination of my client's half-dozen papers. Pray, madam, have I taken one of these — or, in fact, put it in my pocket?"

"No, sir, please," answered Miss Rumble, who spoke in good faith, having, with a lively remembrance of Mr. Dingwell's description of the three gentlemen who had visited the sick that day, as "three robbers," kept her eye very steadily upon the excellent Mr. Larkin, during the period of his search.

Mr. Levi would have liked to possess that letter. It would have proved possibly a useful engine in the hands of the Firm in future dealings with the adroit and high-minded Mr. Larkin. It was not to be had, however, if it really existed at all; and when some more ironies and moralities had been fired off on both sides, the gentlemen subsided into their ordinary relations, and ultimately went away together to dine on turtle, sturgeon, salmon, and I know not what meats, at the famous "Three Roses" in Milk Lane.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. DINGWELL THINKS OF AN EXCURSION.

If Mr. Dingwell had been the most interesting, beautiful, and, I will add, wealthy of human beings, instead of being an ugly and wicked old bankrupt, Messrs. Goldshed, Levi, and Larkin could not have watched the progress of his complaint with greater trepidation, or hailed the first unequivocal symptoms of his recovery with more genuine delight. I doubt if any one of them would have experienced the same intense happiness at the restoration of wife, child, or parent.

They did not, it is true, re-assemble in Mr. Dingwell's apartments in Rosemary Court. There was not one of those gentlemen who did not set a proper value upon his own life; and they were content with the doctor's report. In due course, the oracle pronounced Mr. Dingwell out of danger, but insisted on change of air.

Well, that could be managed, of course. It *must* be managed, for did not the doctor say, that without it the patient might not ultimately recover. If it could have been dispensed with, the risk would have been wisely avoided. But Mr. Dingwell's recovery depended on it, and Mr. Dingwell must be *made* to recover.

Whither should they send him? Stolen treasure or murdered body is jealously concealed by the malefactor; but not more shrinkingly than was Mr. Dingwell by those gentlemen who had him in charge. Safe enough he was while he remained in his dingy seclusion in Rosemary Court, where he lay as snugly as Asmodeus in the magician's phial, and secure against all but some such accident as the irruption of the student Don Cleophas Leandro Peres Zambullo, through the skylight. But where was to be found a rural habitation — salubrious and at the same time sufficiently secret. And if they did light upon one resembling that where the water-fiends played their pranks —

"On a wild moor, all brown and bleak, Where broods the heath-frequenting grouse, There stood a tenement antique — Lord Hoppergollop's country house.

“Here silence reigned with lips of glue, And undisturbed, maintained her law, Save when the owl cried— ‘Whoo! whoo! whoo!’ Or the hoarse crow croaked— ‘Caw! caw! caw!’”

If I say they did find so eligible a mansion for their purpose, was it likely that their impracticable and incorrigible friend, Mr. Dingwell, would consent to spend six weeks in the “deserted mansion” as patiently as we are told Molly Dumpling did?

I think not. And when the doctor talked of country air, the patient joked peevishly about the “grove of chimneys,” and “the sweet shady side of Pall Mall.”

“I think, Mrs. Rumble,” said he, one day, “I’m not going to die this bout at all events. I’m looking better, I think — eh?”

“Looking very bad, sir, please. I can’t see no improvement,” said Sarah Rumble.

“Well, ma’am, you try to keep my spirits up, thank you. I’m shut up too much — that’s the sole cause of it *now*. If I could creep out a bit at night.”

“God forbid, sir.”

“Thank you, ma’am, again. I say if I could get out a little I should soon get my strength back again; but sitting in this great padded chair I might as well be in bed; can’t go out in the daytime you know — too many enemies. The owl’s been moulting, ma’am — devilish sick — the moulting owl. If the old bird could flutter out a bit. I’m living like a *monk*, I was going to say — egad, I wish I was. Give me those d —— bitters; they haven’t done me a bit of good — thanks.”

“If you was to go to the country, sir,” insinuated Miss Sarah Rumble.

“Yes, if I *was*, as you express it, I should die in a week. If air could have killed me, the curious atmosphere of this charming court would have killed me long ago. I’m not one of those air-plants, ma’am. What I want is a little fillip, ma’am — a little amusement — anything out of this prison; and I’m not going to squat on a moor, or to roost in a wood, to please a pack of fellows that don’t care if I were on the treadmill, provided they could take me out whenever they want me. My health, indeed! They simply want me out of the way. My health! Their consideration for me is truly affecting. We’ll not mind the bitters, yet. It’s time for my claret.”

He drank it, and seemed to doze for a little. Mrs. Rumble quickly settled the medicine bottles and other things that had been put out of their places, every now and then looking at the sunken face of the old man, in his deathlike nap — his chin sunk on his breast, the stern carving of his massive forehead, the repulsive lines of a grim selfishness, and a certain evil shadow, made that face in its repose singularly unlovely.

Suddenly he waked.

"I say, Mrs. Rumble, I've been thinking — what about that old clergyman you mentioned — that Mr. Bartlett. I think I *will* see him — suppose he lectures me; his hard words won't break my bones, and I think he'd amuse me; so you may as well get him in, any time — I don't care when."

Sarah Rumble was only too glad to give her wicked tenant a chance, such as it was, and next day, at about one o'clock, a gentle-looking old clergyman, with thin white hair, knocked at his door, and was admitted. It was the Rev. Thomas Bartlett.

"I can't rise, sir, to receive you — you'll excuse me; but I'm still very ill," said Mr. Dingwell.

"Pray don't stir, sir," said the clergyman.

"I *can't*," said Mr. Dingwell. "Will *you* kindly sit in that chair, near the fire? What I have to say is private, and if you please we'll speak very low. My head isn't recovered yet."

"Certainly," said the old gentleman, placing himself as Dingwell wished.

"Thank you very much, sir. Now I can manage it. Isn't your name Thomas, sir — the Reverend Thomas Bartlett?" said Mr. Dingwell, looking at him shrewdly from under his white eyebrows.

"That's my name, sir."

"*My* name's Dingwell. You don't remember? I'll try to bring it to your mind. About twenty-nine years ago you were one of the curates at St. Wyther's in the Fields?"

"Yes, sir, I was," answered the clergyman, fixing his eyes in turn inquisitively on him.

"I was the witness — do you remember me, now — to the ceremony, when that unfortunate fellow, Verney, married Miss — I have a note of her name — hang it! — Rebecca, was it? — *Yes, Rebecca* — it was Rebecca Mervyn. You married Verney to Miss Mervyn, and *I* witnessed it."

"I remember very well, sir, that a gentleman did accompany Mr. Verney; and I remember the marriage extremely well, because there occurred very distressing circumstances respecting that Mr. Verney not very long after, which fixed that marriage in my mind; but having seen you once only, sir, I can't pretend to recollect your face."

"There has been some time, too, sir, since then," said Mr. Dingwell, with a cynical sneer, and a shrug. "But I think I should have recognized you; that's perhaps owing to my having a remarkably retentive memory for faces; however it's of no great consequence here. It isn't a matter of identification at all. I only want to know, as Verney's dead, whether you can tell what has become of that poor lady, or can find any clue to her whereabouts — there was a baby — a little child — if they are still living."

"She did write to me twice, sir, within a few years after the marriage. He treated her very ill, sir," said the clergyman.

"Infamously, I fancy," said Dingwell; "and how long ago was that, sir?"

"Oh! a long time; twenty — ay, five — ay, eight-and-twenty years since," said the old gentleman.

Dingwell laughed.

His visitor stared.

"Yes, it's a good while," said Mr. Dingwell; "and looking over that gulf, sir, you may fill your glass, and sing —

"'Many a lad I liked is dead, And many a lass grown old.'

Eight-and-twenty years! Gad, sir, she's had time to grow gray; and to be dead and buried; and to serve a handsome period of her term in purgatory. I forgot, though; *you* don't follow me there. I was thinking of the French curé, who made part of my journey here with me."

"No, sir; Church of England, thank God; the purest faith; the most scriptural, I believe, on earth. You, sir, I assume, are of the same Church," said he.

"Well, I can't say I am, sir; nor a Catholic, nor a Quaker," said the invalid.

"I hope, sir, there's no tendency to rationalism?"

"No, sir, I thank you; to no ism whatsoever invented by any other man; Dingwellism for Dingwell; Smithism for Smith. Every man has a right to his opinion, in my poor judgment."

"And pray, sir, if neither Romanist nor Protestant, what *are* you?" inquired the clergyman, as having a right to ask.

"*Porcus de gruge epicuri*, at your service," said the sick man, with a feeble smirk.

"I had hoped, sir, it might have been for some profitable purpose you had sent for me," said the disappointed pastor.

"Well, sir, I was baptized in the Church of England, although I don't subscribe the Articles; so I served in your regiment, you see, though I don't wear the uniform any longer."

"I thought, sir, you might have wished some conversation upon religious subjects."

"And haven't we had it, sir? — sorry we don't agree. I'm too old to turn out of my own way; but, though I can't learn yours, I shall be happy to teach you something of mine, if you wish it."

"I think, sir, as I have other calls to make," said the old clergyman, much offended, and rising to take his leave as he spoke. "I had better wish you a good afternoon."

"Pray, sir, stay a moment; I never knew a clergyman in such a hurry before to leave a sick man; as no man knows, according to your theory, when he's going to be converted — and how should I? The mildew of death is whitening each of us at this moment; the last golden sands are running out. D — it, give me a chance."

This incongruous harangue was uttered so testily — even fiercely — that the good clergyman was puzzled, and began to doubt in what state his fever might have left Mr. Dingwell's brain.

"Don't you see, sir? Do sit down — a little patience won't do either of us any harm."

"Certainly, sir," hesitated the clergyman, looking hard at him, "but I have not a great deal of time."

"Nor I a great deal of strength; I shan't keep you long, sir."

The Rev. Thomas Bartlett sat down again, and glanced meekly an invitation to Mr. Dingwell to begin.

"Nine-and-twenty years, sir, since you married that unlucky pair. Now, I need not say by what particular accidents, for the recollection is painful, I was in afterlife thrown into the society of that unfortunate illused dog, poor Arthur Verney; I knew him intimately. I was the only friend he had left, and I was with him when he died, infamously neglected by all his family. He had just got his half-yearly payment of a beggarly annuity, on which he subsisted; *he* — the rightful Viscount Verney, and the head of his family — ha, ha, ha! By Jove, sir, I can't help laughing, though I pity him. Having that little sum in his hand, said he to me, ‘You take charge of this for my son, if you can find him; and I rely on your friendship to look him up if ever you revisit England; this is for him; and he was baptized by the Rev. Thomas Bartlett, as my wife wrote to tell me just eight-and-twenty years ago, and he, no doubt, can enable you to trace him.’ That’s what *he* said — what say *you*, sir?”

“Old Lady Verney placed the child in charge of the gentleman who then managed the Verney property. I heard all about it from a Mr. Wynne Williams, a Welsh lawyer. The child died when only a year old; you know *he* would have been the heir apparent.”

“Poor Arthur said *no*, sir. I asked him — a Scotch marriage, or some of those crooked wedlocks on which they found bigamies and illegitimacies. ‘No,’ Arthur said, ‘he has no technical case, and he may be miserably poor; this is all I can do, and I charge you with it.’ It was very solemn, sir. Where does that lawyer live?”

“At this moment I can’t recollect, sir — some place near which the Verneys have estates.”

“Cardyllian?”

“The very place, sir.”

“I know it, sir; I’ve been there when I was a boy. And his name was *Wynne* Williams?”

“I *think* it was,” said the clergyman.

“And you have nothing more to say about the poor child?” asked Mr. Dingwell.

“There *is* nothing more, I fancy, sir,” said Mr. Bartlett. “Can I give you any more information?”

“Not any, sir, that I can think of at present. Many thanks, Mr. Bartlett, for your obliging call. Wait a moment for the servant.”

And Mr. Dingwell, thinking fiercely, rang his hand-bell long and viciously.

“Ha! Mrs. Rumble; you’ll show this gentleman out. Goodbye, sir, and many thanks.”

“Good day, sir.”

“Ha, ha, ha! It’s a good subject, and a fertile!” muttered Mr. Dingwell, so soon as he was alone.

For the rest of that evening Mr. Dingwell seemed to find ample amusement in his own thoughts, and did not trouble Mrs. Rumble with that contemptuous and cynical banter, which she was obliged to accept, when he pleased, for conversation.

The only thing she heard him say was— “I’ll go *there*.”

Now Malory had already been proved to be a safe hiding place for a gentleman in Mr. Dingwell’s uncomfortable circumstances. The air was unexceptionable, and Lord Verney was easily persuaded to permit the old man to sojourn, for a few weeks, in the Steward’s House, under the care of old Mrs. Mervyn’s servant, aided by one provided by Messrs. Goldshed and Levi.

There were two rooms in the steward’s house which old Mrs. Mervyn never used, and some furniture removed from the Dower House adjoining, rendered them tolerably comfortable. A letter from old Lady Verney opened and explained the request, which amounted to a command, that she would permit the invalid, in whom Lord Verney took an interest, to occupy, for a fortnight or so, the spare rooms in the Steward’s House.

So all was made ready, and the day fixed for Mr. Dingwell’s arrival.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SURPRISE.

Mr. Dingwell, already much more like himself, having made the journey by easy stages, was approaching Malory by night, in a postchaise. Fatigue, sickness, or some other cause, perhaps, exasperated his temper specially that night.

Well made up in mufflers, his head was frequently out at the window.

"The old church, by Jove!" he muttered, with a dismal grin, as going slowly down the jolty hill: beneath the ancient trees, the quaint little church of Llanderris and its quiet churchyard appeared at the left of the narrow road, white in the moonlight.

"A new crop of fools, fanatics, and hypocrites come up, since I remember them, and the old ones gone down to enrich that patch of ground and send up their dirty juice in nettles, and thistles, and docks. 'In sure and certain hope.' Why should not they, the swine! as well as their masters, cunning, and drunken, and sneaks. I'd like to pay a fellow to cut their epitaphs. Why should I spare them a line of truth. Here I am, plain Mr. Dingwell. They don't care much about me; and when my Lord Verney went down the other day, to show them what a fool they have got for a master, amid congenial rejoicings, I don't hear that they troubled their heads with many regrets for my poor friend Arthur. Ha! There's the estuary, and Pendillion. These things don't change, my Lord Verney. Pity Lord Verney doesn't wear as well as Pendillion. There is Ware, over the water, if we had light to see it — to think of that shabby little whey-faced fool! Here we are; these are the trees of Malory, egad!"

And with a shrug he repeated Homer's words, which say— "As are the generations of leaves, such are those of men."

Up the avenue of Malory they were driving, and Dingwell looked out with a dismal curiosity upon the lightless front of the old house.

"Cheerful reception!" he muttered. "Suppose we pick a hole in your title — a hole in your *pocket* — hey!"

Dingwell's servant was at the door of the steward's house as they drew up, and helped the snarling old invalid down.

When he got to the room the servant said —

"There's coffee, and everythink as you desired."

"I'll take breath first, if you please — coffee afterwards."

"Mrs. Mervyn hopes, sir, as how you'll parding her tonight, being so late, and not in good 'ealth herself, which she would been hup to receive you hotherwise," said the man, delivering his message eloquently.

"Quite time enough tomorrow, and tomorrow — and tomorrow; and I don't care if our meeting creeps away, as that remarkable person, William Shakespeare, says— 'in this petty pace.' This is more comfortable, egad! than Rosemary Court. I don't care, I say, if it creeps in that pretty pace, till we are both in heaven. What's Hecuba to me, or I to Hecuba? So help me off with these things."

Lord Verney, on whom, in his moods, Mr. Dingwell commented so fully, was dispensing his hospitalities just then, on the other side of the estuary, at his princely mansion of Ware. The party was, it is true, small — very small, in fact. Lady Wimbledon had been there, and the Hon. Caroline Oldys, but they were now visiting Cardyllian at the Verney Arms.

Mr. Jos. Larkin, to his infinite content, was at Ware, and deplored the unchristian feelings displayed by Mr. Wynne Williams, whom he had by this time formally supplanted in the management of Lord Verney's country affairs, and who had exhibited "a nasty feeling," he "might say a petulance quite childish," last Sunday, when Mr. Larkin had graced Cardyllian Church with his personal devotions, and refused to vacate, in his favour, the small pew which he held as proprietor of Plasdwllyn, but which Mr. Larkin chose to think he occupied in virtue of his former position of solicitor to Lord Verney.

Cleve Verney being still in London, received one morning from his uncle the following short and astounding note, as he sat at breakfast: —

"My Dear Cleve — The time having arrived for taking that step, which the stability of our house of Verney has long appeared to demand, all preliminaries being satisfactorily adjusted, and the young lady and Lady Wimbledon, with a very small party of their relations, as you may have observed by the public papers, at present at the hotel of Cardyllian, nothing remains unaccomplished by way of preparation, but your presence at Ware, which I shall expect on Friday next, when you can meet Miss Caroline Oldys in those new and more defined relations which our contemplated alliance suggests. That event is arranged to take place on the Wednesday following. Mr. Larkin, who reports to me the substance of a conversation with you, and who has my instructions to apprise you fully of any details you may desire to be informed of, will see you on the morning of tomorrow, in the library at Verney House, at a quarter-past eleven o'clock. He leaves Ware by the mail train tonight. You will observe that the marriage, though not strictly private, is to be conducted without *éclat*, and has not been anywhere announced. This will explain my not inviting you to bring down any friend of yours to Ware for the occasion."

So it ends with the noble lord's signature, and a due attestation of the state of his affections towards Cleve.

With the end of his uncle's letter, an end of that young gentleman's breakfast — only just begun — came also.

Cleve did not start up and rap out an oath. On the contrary, he sat very still, with something, almost a smile, on his pale, patient face. In a little while he folded the letter up gently, and put it in his pocket. Then he did get up and go to the window looking out upon the piece of ground at the rear of Verney House, and the sooty leaves and sparrows that beautified it. For a long time he enjoyed that view, and then took a swift walk for nearly half an hour in the streets — drowsy, formal streets — in that quarter of the town, involving little risk of interruption.

His wife — what a hell was now in that word! and why? Another man would have found in it a fountain of power and consolation. His wife, his little boy, were now in France. He thought of them both sourly enough. He was glad they were so far off. Margaret would have perceived the misery of his mind. She would have been poking questions at him, and he would neither have divulged nor in anything have consulted her. In the motive of this reserve, which harmonised with his character, may have mingled a suspicion that *his* interest and hers might not, in this crisis, have required quite the same treatment.

It was about eleven o'clock as he entered Verney House again. In a quarter of an hour more that villanous attorney, to whose vulgar machinations he attributed his present complicated wretchedness, would be with him.

Without any plan, only hating that abominable Christian, and resolved to betray neither thought nor emotion which could lead him to suspect, ever so faintly, the truth, he at length heard him announced, as a man who has seen his death-warrant hears the approach of the executioner. Mr. Larkin entered, with his well-brushed hat in his hand, his bald head shining as with a glory, a meek smile on his lips, a rat-like shrinking observation in his eyes.

"Oh! Mr. Larkin," said Mr. Cleve Verney, with a smile. "My uncle said you would look in to-day. We have often talked the matter over together, you know, my uncle and I, and I'm not sure that you can tell me very much that I don't know already. Sit down, pray."

"Thanks. I think it was chiefly to let you know what he can do for *you*. I need not say to you, my dear Mr. Verney, how generous Lord Verney is, and what an uncle, Mr. Verney, he has been to *you*."

Here was a little glance of the pink eyes at the ceiling, and a momentary elevation of his large hand, and a gentle, admiring shake of the bald head.

"No; of course. It is entirely as his attorney, sir, acquainted with details which he has directed you to mention to me, that he speaks of your call here. I had a letter this morning."

"Quite so. It was to mention that although he could not, of course, in prudence, under the circumstances, think of *settling* anything — which amounts, in fact, to an alienation — a step which in justice to himself and the integrity of the family estates, he could not concede or contemplate; he yet — and he wishes it at the same time to be understood, strictly, as his present intention — means to make you an allowance of a thousand pounds a year."

"Rather a small allowance, don't you think, for a man with a seat in the House to marry on?" observed Cleve.

"Pardon me; but he does not contemplate your immediate marriage, Mr. Verney," answered Larkin.

"Rather a sudden change of plan, considering that he fixed Wednesday next, by his letter," said Cleve, with a faint sneer.

"Pardon me, again; but that referred to his own marriage — Lord Verney's contemplated marriage with the Honourable Miss Oldys."

"Oh!" said Cleve, looking steadily down on the table. "Oh! to be sure."

"That alliance will be celebrated on Wednesday, as proposed."

Mr. Larkin paused, and Cleve felt that his odious eyes were reading his countenance. Cleve could not help turning pale, but there was no other visible symptom of his dismay.

"Yes; the letter was a little confused. He has been urging me to marry, and I fancied he had made up his mind to expedite my affair; and it is rather a relief to me to be assured it is his own, for I'm in no particular hurry — quite the reverse. Is there anything more?"

"I meant to ask *you* that question, Mr. Verney. I fancied you might possibly wish to put some questions to me. I have been commissioned, within certain limits, to give you any information you may desire." Mr. Larkin paused again.

Cleve's blood boiled. "Within certain limits, more in my uncle's confidence than I am, that vulgar, hypocritical attorney!" He fancied beside that Mr. Larkin saw what a shock the news was, and that he liked, with a mean sense of superiority, making him feel that he penetrated his affectation of indifference.

"It's very thoughtful of you; but if anything strikes me I shall talk to my uncle. There are subjects that would interest me more than those on which he would be at all likely to talk with you."

"Quite possibly," said Mr. Larkin. "And what shall I report to his lordship as the result of our conversation?"

"Simply the truth, sir."

"I don't, I fear, make myself clear. I meant to ask whether there was anything you wished me to add. You can always reckon upon me, Mr. Verney, to convey your views to Lord Verney, if there should ever happen to be anything you feel a delicacy about opening to his lordship yourself."

"Yes, I shall write to him," answered Cleve, drily.

And Cleve Verney rose, and the attorney, simpering and bowing grandly, took his departure.

CHAPTER XV.

CLAY RECTORY BY MOONLIGHT.

As the attorney made his astounding announcement, Cleve had felt as if his brain, in vulgar parlance, *turned*! In a moment the world in which he had walked and lived from his school-days passed away, and a chasm yawned at his feet. His whole future was subverted. A man who dies in delusion, and awakes not to celestial music and the light of paradise, but to the trumpet of judgment and the sight of the abyss, will quail as Cleve did.

How he so well maintained the appearance of self-possession while Mr. Larkin remained, I can't quite tell. Pride, however, which has carried so many quivering souls, with an appearance of defiance, through the pressroom to the drop, supported him.

But now that scoundrel was gone. The fury that fired him, the iron constraint that held him firm was also gone, and Cleve despaired.

Till this moment, when he was called on to part with it all, he did not suspect how entirely his ambition was the breath of his nostrils, or how mere a sham was the sort of talk to which he had often treated Margaret and others about an emigrant's life and the Arcadian liberty of the Antipodes.

The House-of-Commons life — the finest excitement on earth — the growing fame, the peerage, the premiership in the distance — the vulgar fingers of Jos. Larkin had just dropped the extinguisher upon the magic lamp that had showed him these dazzling illusions, and he was left to grope and stumble in the dark among his debts, with an obscure wife on his arm, and a child to plague him also. And this was to be the end! A precarious thousand a-year — dependent on the caprice of a narrow, tyrannical old man, with a young wife at his ear, and a load of debts upon Cleve's shoulders, as he walked over the quag!

It is not well to let any object, apart from heaven, get into your head and fill it. Cleve had not that vein of insanity which on occasion draws men to suicide. In the thread of his destiny that fine black strand was not spun. So blind and deep for a while was his plunge into despair, that I think had that atrabilious poison, which throws out its virus as suddenly as latent plague, and lays a *felo-de-se* to cool his heels and his head in God's prison, the grave — had a drop or two, I say, of that elixir of death been mingled in his blood, I don't think he would ever have seen another morrow.

But Cleve was not thinking of dying. He was sure — in rage, and blasphemy, and torture, it might be — but still he *was* sure to live on. Well, what was now to be done? Every power must be tasked to prevent the ridiculous catastrophe which threatened him with ruin; neither scruple, nor remorse, nor conscience, nor compunction should stand in the way. We are not to suppose that he is about to visit the Hon. Miss Caroline Oldys with a dagger in one hand and a cup of poison in the other, nor with gunpowder to blow up his uncle and Ware, as some one did Darnley and the house of Kirk of Field. Simply his mind was filled with the one idea, that one way or another the thing *must* be stopped.

It was long before his ideas arranged themselves, and for a long time after no plan of operations which had a promise of success suggested itself. When at length he did decide, you would have said no wilder or wickeder scheme could have entered his brain.

It was a moonlight night. The scene a flat country, with a monotonous row of poplars crossing it. This long file of formal trees marks the line of a canal, fronting which at a distance of about a hundred yards stands a lonely brick house, with a few sombre elms rising near it; a light mist hung upon this expansive flat. The soil must have been unproductive, so few farmsteads were visible for miles around. Here and there pools of water glimmered coldly in the moonlight; and patches of rushes and reeds made the fields look ragged and neglected.

Here and there, too, a stunted hedgerow showed dimly along the level, otherwise unbroken, and stretching away into the haze of the horizon. It is a raw and dismal landscape, where a murder might be done, and the scream lose itself in distance unheard — where the highwayman, secure from interruption, might stop and plunder the chance wayfarer at his leisure — a landscape which a fanciful painter would flank with a distant row of gibbets.

The front of this square brick house, with a little enclosure, hardly two yards in depth, and a wooden paling in front, and with a green moss growing damply on the piers and the doorsteps, and tinging the mortar between the bricks, looks out upon a narrow old road, along which just then were audible the clink and rattle of an approaching carriage and horses.

It was past one o'clock. No hospitable light shone from the windows, which on the contrary looked out black and dreary upon the vehicle and steaming horses which pulled up in front of the house.

Out got Cleve and reconnoitred.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Clay Parsonage — yes, sir," said the driver.

Cleve shook the little wooden gate, which was locked; so he climbed the paling, and knocked and rang loud and long at the hall-door.

The driver at last reported a light in an upper window.

Cleve went on knocking and ringing, and the head of the Rev. Isaac Dixie appeared high in the air over the window-stool.

"What do you want, pray?" challenged that suave clergyman from his sanctuary.

"It's I — Cleve Verney. Why do you go to bed at such hours? I must see you for a moment."

"Dear me! my dear, valued pupil! Who could have dreamed? — I shall be down in one moment."

"Thanks — I'll wait;" and then to the driver he said— "I shan't stay five minutes; mind, you're ready to start with me the moment I return."

Now the hall-door opened. The Rev. Isaac Dixie — for his dress was a compromise between modesty and extreme haste, and necessarily very imperfect — stood in greater part behind the hall-door; a bedroom candlestick in his fingers, smiling blandly on his "distinguished pupil," who entered without a smile, without a greeting — merely saying: —

"Where shall we sit down for a minute, old Dixie?"

Holding his hand with the candle in it across, so as to keep his flowing dressing-gown together; and with much wonder and some misgivings, yet contriving his usual rosy smile, he conducted his unexpected visitor into his "study."

"I've so many apologies to offer, my very honoured and dear friend; this is so miserable, and I fear you are cold. We must get something; we must, really, manage something — some little refreshment."

Dixie placed the candle on the chimneypiece, and looked inquiringly on Cleve.

"There's some sherry, I know, and I *think* there's some brandy."

"There's no one up and about?" inquired Cleve.

"Not a creature," said the Rector; "no one can hear a word, and these are good thick walls."

"I've only a minute; I know you'd like to be a bishop, Dixie?"

Cleve, with his muffler and his hat still on, was addressing the future prelate, with his elbow on the chimneypiece.

"*Nolo episcopari*, of course, but we *know* you would, and there's no time now for pretty speeches. Now, listen, you shall be *that*, and you shall reach it by two steps — the two best livings in our gift. I always keep my word; and when I set my heart on a thing I bring it about, and so sure as I do any good, I'll bend all my interest to that one object."

The Rev. Isaac Dixie stared hard at him, for Cleve looked strangely, and spoke as sternly as a villain demanding his purse. The Rector of Clay looked horribly perplexed. His countenance seemed to ask, "Does he mean to give me a mitre or to take my life, or is he quite right in his head?"

"You think I don't mean what I say, or that I'm talking nonsense, or that I'm mad. I'm not mad, it's no nonsense, and no man was ever more resolved to do what he says." And Cleve who was not given to swearing, did swear a fierce oath. "But all this is not for nothing; there's a condition; you must do me a service. It won't cost you much — less trouble, almost, than you've taken for me tonight, but you *must* do it."

"And may I, my dear and valued pupil, may I ask?" began the rev. gentleman.

"No, you need not ask, for I'll tell you. It's the same sort of service you did for me in France," said Cleve.

"Ah! ah!" ejaculated the clergyman, very uneasily. "For no one but *you*, my dear and admirable pupil, could I have brought myself to take that step, and I trust that you will on reconsideration — — "

"You *must* do what I say," said Cleve, looking and speaking with the same unconscious sternness, which frightened the Rector more than any amount of bluster. "I hardly suppose you want to break with me finally, and you don't quite know all the consequences of that step, I fancy."

"Break with *you*? my admirable patron! desert my dear and brilliant pupil in an emergency? *Certainly* not. Reckon upon me, my dear Mr. Verney, when*ever* you need my poor services, to the *uttermost*. To *you all* my loyalty is due, but unless you made a very special point of it, I should hesitate for any other person living, *but* yourself, to incur a second time — — “

“Don’t you think my dear, d — d old friend, I understand the length, and breadth, and depth, of your friendship; I know how strong it *is*, and I’ll make it *stronger*. It *is* for *me* — yes, in my own case you must repeat the service, as you call it, which you once did me, in another country.”

The Rev. Isaac Dixie’s rosy cheeks mottled all over blue and yellow; he withdrew his hand from his dressing-gown, with an unaffected gesture of fear; and he fixed a terrified gaze upon Cleve Verney’s eyes, which did not flinch, but encountered his, darkly and fixedly, with a desperate resolution.

“Why, you look as much frightened as if I asked you to commit a crime; you marvellous old fool, you hardly think me mad enough for *that*?”

“I hardly know, Mr. Verney, what I think,” said Dixie, looking with a horrible helplessness into his face.

“Good God! sir; it can’t be anything *wrong*?”

“Come, come, sir; you’re more than half asleep. Do you *dare* to think I’d commit myself to any man, by such an idiotic proposal? No one but a lunatic could think of *blasting* himself, as you — but you *can’t* suppose it. Do listen, and understand if you can; my wife, to whom you married me, is *dead*, six months ago she *died*; I tell you she’s *dead*.”

“Dear me! I’m very much pained, and I will say *shocked*; the deceased lady, I should not, my dear pupil, have alluded to, of course; but need I say, I never heard of that affliction?”

“How on earth could you? You don’t suppose, knowing all you do, I’d put it in the papers among the *deaths*?”

“No, dear me, of course,” said the Rev. Isaac Dixie, hastily bringing his dressing-gown again together. “No, certainly.”

“I don’t think that sort of publication would answer you or me. You forget it is two years ago and more, a *good deal* more. *I* don’t though, and whatever *you* may, *I* don’t want my uncle to know anything about it.”

“But, you know, I only meant, you hadn’t told me; my dear Mr. Verney, my honoured pupil, you will see — don’t you perceive how much is involved; but *this* — *could*n’t you put this upon some one else? Do — *do* think.”

"No, in *no* one's power, but *yours*, Dixie;" and Cleve took his hand, looking in his face, and wrung it so hard that the rev. gentleman almost winced under the pressure, of administering which I dare say Cleve was quite unconscious. "No one but *you*."

"The poor — the respected lady — being deceased, of course you'll give me a note to that effect under your hand; you'll have no objection, in this case, to my taking out a special licence?"

"Special devil! are you mad? Why, anyone could do it with that. No, it's just because it is a little *irregular*, nothing more, and exacts implicit mutual confidence, that I have chosen you for it."

Dixie looked as if the compliment was not an unmixed pleasure.

"I still think, that — that having performed the other, there is some awkwardness, and the penalties are awful," said he with increasing uneasiness, "and it does strike me, that if my dear Mr. Verney could place his hand upon some other humble friend, in this particular case, the advantages would be obvious."

"Come, Dixie," said Cleve, "I'm *going*; you must say yes or no, and so decide whether you have seen the last of me; I can't spend the night giving you my reasons, but they are conclusive. If you act like a man of sense, it's the last service I shall ever require at your hands, and I'll reward you *splendidly*; if you don't, I not only cease to be your friend, but I become your *enemy*. I can strike when I like it — you know *that*; and upon my soul I'll smash you. I shall see my uncle tomorrow morning at Ware, and I'll tell him distinctly the entire of that French transaction."

"But — but pray, my dear Mr. Verney, do say, *did* I refuse — *do* I *object*? you may command me, of course. I have incurred I may say a risk for you already, a risk in *form*."

"Exactly, *in form*; and you don't increase it by this kindness, and you secure my eternal gratitude. Now you speak like a man of sense. You must be in Cardyllian tomorrow evening. It is possible I may ask *nothing* of you; if I do, the utmost is a technical irregularity, and secrecy, which we are both equally interested in observing. You shall stay a week in Cardyllian mind, and I, of course, frank you there and back, and while you remain — it's my business. It has a political aspect, as I shall explain to you by-and-bye, and so soon as I shall have brought my uncle round, and can avow it, it will lead the way rapidly to *your* fortune. Shall I see you in Cardyllian tomorrow evening?"

"Agreed, sir! — agreed, my dear Mr. Verney. I shall be there, my dear and valued pupil — *yes*."

"Go to the Verney Arms; I shall probably be looking out for you there; at all events I shall see you before night."

Verney looked at his watch, and repeated "I shall see you tomorrow;" and without taking leave, or hearing as it seemed the Rev. Isaac Dixie's farewell compliments and benedictions, he walked out in gloomy haste, as if the conference was not closed, but only suspended by the approaching parenthesis of a night and a day.

From the hall-table the obsequious divine took the key of the little gate, to which, in slippers and dressing-gown, he stepped blandly forth, and having let out his despotic pupil, and waved his adieu, as the chaise drove away, he returned, and locked up his premises and house, with a great load at his heart.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ALARM.

Cleve reached the station, eight miles away from the dismal swamp I have described, in time to catch the mail train. From Llwynan he did not go direct to Ware, but drove instead to Cardyllian, and put up at the Verney Arms early next morning.

By ten o'clock he was seen, sauntering about the streets, talking with old friends, and popping into the shops and listening to the gossip of the town. Cleve had a sort of friendliness that answered all electioneering purposes perfectly, and *that* was the measure of its value.

Who should he light upon in Castle Street but Tom Sedley! They must have arrived by the same train at Llwynan. The sight of Tom jarred intensely upon Cleve Verney's nerves. There was something so strange in his looks and manner that Sedley thought him ill. He stopped for a while to talk with him at the corner of Church Street, but seemed so obviously disposed to escape from him, that Sedley did not press his society, but acquiesced with some disgust and wonder in their new relations.

Tom Sedley had been with Wynne Williams about poor Vane Etherage's affairs. Honest Wynne Williams was in no mood to flatter Lord Verney, the management of whose affairs he had, he said, "resigned." The fact was that he had been, little by little, so uncomfortably superseded in his functions by our good friend Jos. Larkin, and the fashion of Lord Verney's countenance was so manifestly changed, that honest Wynne Williams felt that he might as well do a proud thing, and resign, as wait a little longer for the inevitable humiliation of dismissal.

"I'm afraid my friend the admiral is in bad hands; worse hands than Larkin's he could hardly have fallen into. I could tell you things of that fellow, if we had time — of course strictly between ourselves, you know — that would open your eyes. And as to his lordship — well, I suppose most people know something of Lord Verney. I owe him nothing, you know; it's all ended between us, and I wash my hands of him and his concerns. You may talk to him, if you like; but you'll find you might as well argue with the tide in the estuary there. I'd be devilish glad if I could be of any use; but you see how it is; and to tell you the truth, I'm afraid it must come to a regular smash, unless Lord Verney drops that nasty litigation. There are some charges, you know, upon the property already; and with that litigation hanging over it, I don't see how he's to get money to pay those calls. It's a bad business, I'm afraid, and an awful pity. Poor old fellow! — a little bit rough, but devilish good-hearted."

Tom Sedley went up to Hazelden. The Etherage girls knew he was coming, and were watching for him at the top of the steep walk.

"I've been talking, as I said I would, to Wynne Williams this morning," he said, after greetings and inquiries made and answered, "and he had not anything important to advise; but he has promised to think over the whole matter."

"And Wynne Williams is *known* to be *the* cleverest lawyer *in the world*," exclaimed Miss Charity, exulting. "I was afraid, on account of his having been so lately Lord Verney's adviser, that he would not have been willing to consult with you. And *will* he use his influence, which must be very great, with Lord Verney?"

"He has none; and he thinks it would be quite useless my talking to him."

"Oh! Is it possible? Well, if he said *that*, I *never* heard *such* nonsense in the course of my life. I think old Lord Verney was one of the *very nicest* men I *ever* spoke to in the course of my life; and I'm certain it is all that horrid Mr. Larkin, and a great mistake; for Lord Verney is quite a gentleman, and would not do anything so *despicable* as to worry and injure papa by this horrid business, if only you would make him understand it; and I *do* think, Thomas Sedley, you *might* take that trouble for papa."

"I'll go over to Ware, and try to see Lord Verney, if you think my doing so can be of the least use," said Tom, who knew the vanity of arguing with Miss Charity.

"Oh, *do*," said pretty Agnes, and that entreaty was, of course, a command; so without going up to see old Etherage, who was very much broken and ill, his daughters said; and hoping possibly to have some cheering news on his return, Tom Sedley took his leave for the present, and from the pier of Cardyllian crossed in a boat to Ware.

On the spacious steps of that palatial mansion, as Mr. Larkin used to term it, stood Lord Verney, looking grandly seaward, with compressed eyes, like a near-sighted gentleman as he was.

“Oh! is she all right?” said Lord Verney.

“I — I don’t know, Lord Verney,” replied Tom Sedley. “I came to” —

“Oh — aw — Mr. — Mr. — how d’ye do, sir,” said Lord Verney, with marked frigidity, not this time giving him the accustomed finger.

“I came, Lord Verney, hoping you might possibly give me five minutes, and a very few words, about that unfortunate business of poor Mr. Vane Etherage.”

“I’m unfortunately just going out in a boat — about it; and I can’t just now afford time, Mr. — a — Mr.” —

“*Sedley* is my name,” suggested Sedley, who knew that Lord Verney remembered him perfectly.

“Sedley — Mr. Sedley; yes. As I mentioned, I’m going in a boat. I’m sorry I can’t possibly oblige you; and it is very natural you, who are so intimate, I believe, with Mr. Etherage, should take that side of the question — about it; but *I*’ve no reason to call those proceedings unfortunate; and — and I don’t anticipate — and, in fact, people usually look after their own concerns — about it.” Lord Verney, standing on the steps, was looking over Sedley’s head, as he spoke, at the estuary and the shipping there.

“I’m sure, Lord Verney, if you knew how utterly ruinous, how really *deplorable*, the consequences of pursuing this thing — I mean the lawsuit against him — may be — I am *sure* — you would stop it all.”

Honest Tom spoke in the belief that in the hesitation that had marked the close of the noble lord’s remarks there was a faltering of purpose, whereas there was simply a failure of ideas.

“I can’t help your forming opinions, sir, though I have not invited their expression upon my concerns and — and affairs. If you have anything to communicate about those proceedings, you had better see Mr. Larkin, my attorney; he’s the proper person. Mr. Etherage has taken a line in the county to wound and injure me, as, of course, he has a perfect right to do; he has taken that line, and I don’t see any reason why I should not have what I’m entitled to. There’s the principle of government by party, you’re aware; and we’re not to ask favours of those we seek to wound and injure — about it; and that’s my view, and idea, and fixed opinion. I must wish you good morning, Mr. Sedley. I’m going down to my boat, and I decline distinctly any conversation upon the subject of my law business; I decline it *distinctly*, Mr. Sedley — about it," repeated the peer peremptorily; and as he looked a good deal incensed, Tom Sedley wisely concluded it was time to retire; and so his embassage came to an end.

Lord Verney crossed the estuary in his yacht, consulting his watch from time to time, and reconnoitering the green and pier of Cardyllian through his telescope with considerable interest. A little group was assembled near the stair, among whose figures he saw Lady Wimbledon. "Why is not Caroline there?" he kept asking himself, and all the time searching that little platform for the absent idol of his heart.

Let us deal mercifully with this antiquated romance; and if Miss Caroline Oldys forebore to say, "Go up, thou baldhead," let us also spare the amorous incongruity. Does any young man love with the self-abandonment of an old one? Is any romance so romantic as the romance of an old man? When Sancho looked over his shoulder, and saw his master in his shirt, cutting capers and tumbling head-over-heels, and tearing his hair in his love-madness, that wise governor and man of proverbs forgot the grotesqueness of the exhibition in his awe of that vehement adoration. So let us. When does this noble frenzy exhibit itself in such maudlin transports, and with a self-sacrifice so idolatrously suicidal, as in the old? Seeing, then, that the spirit is so prodigiously willing, let us bear with the spectacle of their infirmities, and when one of these sighing, magnanimous, wrinkled Philanders goes by, let us not hiss, but rather say kindly, "*Vive la bagatelle!*" or, as we say in Ireland, "More power!"

He was disappointed. Miss Caroline Oldys had a very bad headache, Lady Wimbledon said, and was in her room, in care of her maid, *so* miserable at losing the charming sail to Malory.

Well, the lover was sorely disappointed, as we have said; but there was nothing for it but submission, and to comfort himself with the assurances of Lady Wimbledon that Caroline's headaches never lasted long, and that she was always better for a long time, when they were over. This latter piece of information seemed to puzzle Lord Verney.

"Miss Oldys is always better after an attack than before it," said Cleve, interpreting for his uncle.

"Why, of *course*. That's what Lady Wimbledon means, as I understand it," said Lord Verney, a little impatiently. "It's very sad; you must tell me all about it; but we may hope to find her, you say, quite recovered when we return?"

Cleve was not of the party to Malory. He returned to the Verney Arms. He went up to Lady Wimbledon's drawingroom with a book he had promised to lend her, and found Miss Caroline Oldys.

Yes, she was better. He was very earnest and tender in his solicitudes. He was looking ill, and was very melancholy.

Two hours after her maid came in to know whether she "pleased to want anything?" and she would have sworn that Miss Caroline had been crying. Mr. Cleve had got up from beside her, and was looking out of the window.

A little later in the day, old Lady Calthorpe, a cousin of Lady Wimbledon's, very feeble and fussy, and babbling in a querulous treble, was pushed out in her Bath-chair, Cleve and Miss Caroline Oldys accompanying, to the old castle of Cardyllian.

On the step of the door of the Verney Arms, as they emerged, whom should they meet, descending from the fly that had borne him from Llwynan, but the Rev. Isaac Dixie. That sleek and rosy gentleman, with flat feet, and large hands, and fascinating smile, was well pleased to join the party, and march blandly beside the chair of the viscountess, invigorating the fainting spirit of that great lady by the balm of his sympathy and the sunshine of his smile.

So into the castle they went, across the nearly obliterated moat, where once a drawbridge hung, now mantled with greenest grass, under the grim arches, where once the clanging portcullis rose and fell, and into the base court, and so under other arches into the inner court, surrounded by old ivy-mantled walls.

In this seclusion the old Lady Calthorpe stopped her chair to enjoy the sweet air and sunshine, and the agreeable conversation of the divine, and Cleve offered to guide Miss Caroline Oldys through the ruins, an exploration in which she seemed highly interested.

Cleve spoke low and eloquently, but I don't think it was about the architecture. Time passed rapidly, and at last Miss Oldys whispered —

"We've been too long away from Lady Calthorpe. I must go back. She'll think I have deserted her."

So they emerged from the roofless chambers and dim corridors, and Cleve wished from the bottom of his heart that some good or evil angel would put off his uncle's nuptials for another week, and all would be well — *well*!

Yes — what was "well," if one goes to moral ideals for a standard? We must run risks — we must set one side of the book against the other. What is the purpose and the justification of all morality but happiness? The course which involves least misery is alternatively the moral course. And take the best act that ever you did, and place it in that dreadful solvent, the light of God's eye, and how much of its motive will stand the test? Yes — another week, and all will be well; and has not a fertile mind like his, resource for any future complication, as for this, that may arise?

Captain Shrapnell was not sorry to meet this distinguished party as they emerged, and drew up on the grass at the side, and raised his hat with a reverential smile, as the old lady wheeled by, and throwing a deferential concern suddenly into his countenance, he walked a few paces beside Cleve, while he said —

"You've heard, of course, about your uncle, Lord Verney?"

"No?" answered Cleve, on chance.

"*No?* — Oh? — Why it's half an hour ago. I hope it's nothing serious; but his groom drove down from Malory for the doctor here. Something wrong with his head — suddenly, I understand, and Old Lyster took his box with him, and a bottle of leeches — that looks serious, eh? — along with him."

Shrapnell spoke low, and shook his head.

"I — I did not hear a word of it. I've been in the castle with old Lady Calthorpe. I'm very much surprised."

There was something odd, shrewd old Shrapnell fancied in the expression of Cleve's eye, which for a moment met his. But Cleve looked pale and excited, as he said a word in a very low tone to Miss Oldys, and walked across the street accompanied by Shrapnell, to the doctor's shop.

"Oh!" said Cleve, hastily stepping in, and accosting a lean, pale youth, with lank, black hair, who paused in the process of braying a prescription in a mortar as he approached. "My uncle's not well, I hear — Lord Verney — at Malory?"

The young man glanced at Captain Shrapnell.

"The doctor told me not to mention, sir; but if *you'd* come into the back-room" ——

"I'll be with you in a moment," said Cleve Verney to Shrapnell, at the same time stepping into the sanctum, and the glass door being shut, he asked, "What *is* it?"

"The doctor thought it must be apoplexy, sir," murmured the young man, gazing with wide open eyes, very solemnly, in Cleve's face.

"So I fancied," and Cleve paused, a little stunned; "and the doctor's there, at Malory, *now*?"

"Yes, sir; he'll be there a quarter of an hour or more by this time," answered the young man.

Again Cleve paused.

"It was not *fatal* — he was still living?" he asked very low.

"Yes, sir — sure."

Cleve, forgetting any form of valediction, passed into the shop.

"I must drive down to Malory," he said; and calling one of those pony carriages which ply in Cardyllian, he drove away, with a wave of his hand to the Captain, who was sorely puzzled to read the true meaning of that handsome mysterious face.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NEW LIGHT.

It was all over Cardyllian by this time that the viscount was very ill — dying perhaps — possibly dead. Under the transparent green shadow of the tall old trees, down the narrow road to Malory, which he had so often passed in other moods, more passionate, hardly perhaps less selfish, than his present, was Cleve now driving, with brain and heart troubled and busy — "walking, as before, in a vain shadow, and disquieting himself in vain." The daisies looked up innocently as the eyes of children, into his darkened gaze. Had fate after all taken pity on him, and was here by one clip of the inexorable shears a deliverance from the hell of his complication?

As Cleve entered the gate of Malory he saw the party from Cardyllian leaving in the yacht on their return. Lady Wimbledon, it turned out, had remained behind in charge of Lord Verney. On reaching the house, Cleve learned that Lord Verney was *alive* — was better in fact.

Combining Lady Wimbledon's and the doctor's narratives, what Cleve learned amounted to this. Lord Verney, who affected a mysterious urgency and haste in his correspondence, had given orders that his letters should follow him to Malory that day. One of these letters, with a black seal and black-bordered envelope, proved to be a communication of considerable interest. It was addressed to him by the clergyman who had charge of poor old Lady Verney's conscience, and announced that his care was ended, and the Dowager Lady, Lord Verney's mother, was dead.

As the doctor who had attended her was gone, and no one but servants in the house, he had felt it a duty to write to Lord Verney to apprise him of the melancholy event.

The melancholy event was no great shock to Lord Verney, her mature son of sixty-four, who had sometimes wondered dimly whether she would live as long as the old Countess of Desmond, and go on drawing her jointure for fifty years after his own demise. He had been a good son; he had nothing to reproach himself with. She was about ninety years of age; the estate was relieved of £1,500 per annum. She had been a religious woman too, and was, no doubt, happy. On the whole the affliction was quite supportable.

But no affliction ever came at a more awkward time. Here was his marriage on the eve of accomplishment — a secret so well kept up to yesterday that no one on earth, he fancied, but half a dozen people, knew that any such thing was dreamed of. Lord Verney, like other tragedians in this theatre of ours, was, perhaps, a little more nervous than he seemed, and did not like laughter in the wrong place. He did not want to be talked over, or, as he said, "any jokes or things about it." And therefore he wished the event to take mankind unawares, as the Flood did. But this morning, with a nice calculation as to time, he had posted four letters, bound, like Antonio's argosies, to different remote parts of the world — one to Pau, another to Lisbon, a third to Florence, and a fourth for Geneva, to friends who were likely to spread the news in all directions — which he cared nothing about, if only the event came off at the appointed time. With the genius of a diplomatist, he had planned his remaining dispatches, not very many, so as to reach their less distant destinations at the latest hour, previous to that of his union. But the others were actually on their way, and he supposed a month or more must now pass before it could take place with any decorum, and, in the meantime, all the world would be enjoying their laugh over his interesting situation.

Lord Verney was very much moved when he read this sad letter; he was pathetic and peevish, much moved and irritated, and shed some tears. He withdrew to write a note to the clergyman, who had announced the catastrophe, and was followed by Lady Wimbledon, who held herself privileged, and to her he poured forth his "ideas and feelings" about his "poor dear mother who was gone, about it;" and suddenly he was seized with a giddiness so violent that if a chair had not been behind him he must have fallen on the ground.

It was something like a fit; Lady Wimbledon was terrified; he looked so ghastly, and answered nothing, only sighed laboriously, and moved his white lips. In her distraction, she threw up the window, and screamed for the servants; and away went Lord Verney's open carriage, as we have seen, to Cardyllian, for the doctor.

By the time that Cleve arrived, the attack had declared itself gout — fixed, by a mustard bath "nicely" in the foot, leaving, however, its "leven mark" upon the head where it had flickered, in an angrily inflamed eye.

Here was another vexation. It might be over in a week, the doctor said; it might last a month. But for the present it was quite out of the question moving him. They must contrive, and make him as comfortable as they could. But at Malory he must be contented to remain for the present.

He saw Cleve for a few minutes.

"It's very unfortunate — your poor dear grandmother — and this gout; but we must bow to the will of Providence; we have every consolation in her case. She's, no doubt, gone to heaven, about it; but it's indescribably untoward the whole thing; you apprehend me — the marriage — you know — and things; we must pray to heaven to grant us patience under these cross-grained, unintelligible misfortunes that are always persecuting some people, and never come in the way of others, and I beg you'll represent to poor Caroline how it is. I'm not even to write for a day or two; and you must talk to her, Cleve, and try to keep her up, for I do believe she does like her old man, and does not wish to see the poor old fellow worse than he is; and, Cleve, I appreciate your attention and affection in coming so promptly;" and Lord Verney put out his thin hand and pressed Cleve's. "You're very kind, Cleve, and if they allow me I'll see you tomorrow, and you'll tell me what's in the papers, for they won't let me read; and there will be this funeral, you know — about it — your poor dear grandmother; she'll of course — she'll be buried; you'll have to see to that, you know; and Larkin, you know — he'll save you trouble, and — and — hey! ha, ha — hoo! Very pleasant! Good gracious, what torture! Ha! — Oh, dear! Well, I think I've made everything pretty clear, and you'll tell Caroline — its only a flying gout — about it — and — and things. So I must bid you goodbye, dear Cleve, and God bless you."

So Cleve did see Caroline Oldys at the Verney Arms, and talked a great deal with her, in a low tone, while old Lady Wimbledon dozed in her chair, and, no doubt, it was all about his uncle's "flying gout."

That night our friend Wynne Williams was sitting in his snuggery, a little bit of fire was in the grate, the air being sharp, his teathings on the table, and the cozy fellow actually reading a novel, with his slippered feet on the fender.

It was halfpast nine o'clock, a rather rakish hour in Cardyllian, when the absorbed attorney was aroused by a tap at his door.

I think I have already mentioned that in that town of the golden age, hall-doors stand open, in evidence of “ancient faith that knows no guile,” long after dark.

“Come in,” said Wynne Williams; and to his amazement who should enter, not with the conventional smile of greeting, but pale, dark, and wobegone, but the tall figure of Mrs. Rebecca Mervyn.

Honest Wynne Williams never troubled himself about ghosts, but he had read of spectral illusions, and old Mrs. Mervyn unconsciously encouraged a fancy that the thing he greatly feared had come upon him, and that he was about to become a victim to that sort of hallucination. She stood just a step within the door, looking at him, and he, with his novel, on his knee, stared at her as fixedly.

“She’s dead,” said the old lady.

“*Who?*” exclaimed the attorney.

“The Dowager Lady Verney,” she continued, rather than answered.

“I was so much astonished, ma’am, to see you here; you haven’t been down in the town these twelve years, I think. I could scarce believe my eyes. Won’t you come in, ma’am? Pray do.” The attorney by this time was on his legs, and doing the honours, much relieved, and he placed a chair for her. “If it’s any business, ma’am, I’ll be most happy, or any time you like.”

“Yes, she’s dead,” said she again.

“Oh, come in, ma’am — *do* — so is Queen Anne,” said the attorney, laughing kindly. “I heard *that* early to-day; we *all* heard it, and we’re sorry, of course. Sit down, ma’am. But then she was not very far from a hundred, and we’re all mortal. Can I do anything for you, ma’am?”

“She was good to me — a proud woman — hard, they used to say; but she was good to me — yes, sir — and so she’s gone, at last. She was frightened at them — there was something in them — my poor head — you know — *I* couldn’t see it, and I did not care — for the little child was gone; it was only two months old, and she was ninety years; it’s a long time, and now she’s in her shroud, poor thing! and I may speak to you.”

“Do, ma’am — pray; but it’s growing late, and hadn’t we better come to the point a bit?”

She was sitting in the chair he had placed for her, and she had something under her cloak, a thick book it might be, which she held close in her arms.

She placed it on the table and it turned out to be a small tin box with a padlock.

"Papers, ma'am?" he inquired.

"Will you read them, sir, and see what ought to be done — there's the key?"

"Certainly, ma'am;" and having unlocked it, he disclosed two little sheaves of papers, neatly folded and endorsed.

The attorney turned these over rapidly, merely reading at first the little note of its contents written upon each. "By Jove!" he exclaimed; he looked very serious now, with a frown, and the corners of his mouth drawn down, like a man who witnesses something horrible.

"And, ma'am, how long have you had these?"

"Since Mr. Sedley died."

"I know; that's more than twenty years, I think; did you show them to anyone?"

"Only to the poor old lady who's gone."

"Ay, I see."

There was a paper endorsed "Statement of Facts," and this the attorney was now reading.

"Now, ma'am, do you wish to place these papers in my hands, that I may act upon them as the interests of those who are nearest to you may require?"

She looked at him with a perplexed gaze, and said, "*Yes*, sir, certainly."

"Very well, ma'am; then I must go up to town at once. It's a very serious affair, ma'am, and I'll do my duty by you."

"Can you understand them, sir?"

"N — *no* — that is, I must see counsel in London; I'll be back again in a day or two. Leave it all to me, ma'am, and the moment I know anything for certain, you shall know all about it."

The old woman asked the question as one speaks in their sleep, without hearing the answer. Her finger was to her lip, and she was looking down with a knitted brow.

"Ay, she was proud — I *promised* — proud — she was — very high — it will be in Penruthyn, she told me she would be buried there — Dowager Lady Verney! I wish, sir, it had been I."

She drew her cloak about her and left the room, and he accompanied her with the candle to the hall-door, and saw her hurry up the street.

Now and then a passenger looked at the tall cloaked figure gliding swiftly by, but no one recognised her.

The attorney was gaping after her in deep abstraction, and when she was out of sight he repeated, with a resolute wag of his head —

“I *will* do my duty by you — and a serious affair, upon *my soul*! A *very* serious affair it is.”

And so he closed the door, and returned to his sitting-room in deep thought, and very strange excitement, and continued reading those papers till one o’clock in the morning.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. DINGWELL AND MRS. MERVYN CONVERSE.

Cleve was assiduous in consoling Miss Caroline Oldys, a duty specially imposed upon him by the voluntary absence of Lady Wimbledon, who spent four or five hours every day at Malory, with an equally charitable consideration for the spirits of Lord Verney, who sat complaining in pain and darkness.

Every day he saw more or less of the Rev. Isaac Dixie, but never alluded to his midnight interview with him at Clay Rectory. Only once, a little abruptly, he had said to him, as they walked together on the green ——

“I say, you must manage your duty for two Sundays more — you *must* stay here for the funeral — that will be on Tuesday week.”

Cleve said no more; but he looked at him with a fixed meaning in his eye, with which the clergyman somehow could not parley.

At the postoffice, to which Miss Oldys had begged his escort, a letter awaited him. His address was traced in the delicate and peculiar hand of that beautiful being who in those very scenes had once filled every hour of his life with dreams, and doubts, and hopes; and now how did he feel as those slender characters met his eye? Shall I say, as the murderer feels when some relic of his buried crime is accidentally turned up before his eyes — chilled with a pain that reaches on to doomsday — with a tremor of madness — with an insufferable disgust?

Smiling, he put it with his other letters in his pocket, and felt as if every eye looked on him with suspicion — with dislike; and as if little voices in the air were whispering, “It is from his wife — from his wife — from his wife.”

Tom Sedley was almost by his side, and had just got his letters — filling him, too, with dismay — posted not ten minutes before from Malory, and smiting his last hope to the centre.

“Look at it, Cleve,” he said, half an hour later. “I thought all these things might have softened him — his own illness and his mother’s death; and the Etherages — by Jove, I think he’ll ruin them; the poor old man is going to leave Hazelden in two or three weeks, and — and he's *utterly* ruined I think, and all by that d — d lawsuit, that Larkin knows perfectly well Lord Verney can never succeed in; but in the meantime it will be the ruin of that nice family, that were so happy there; and look — here it is — my own letter returned — so insulting — like a beggar's petition; and this note — not even signed by him."

"Lord Verney is indisposed; he has already expressed his fixed opinion upon the subject referred to in Mr. Sedley's statement, which he returns; he declines discussing it, and refers Mr. Sedley again to his solicitor."

So, disconsolate Sedley, having opened his griefs to Cleve, went on to Hazelden, where he was only too sure to meet with a thoroughly sympathetic audience.

A week passed, and more. And now came the day of old Lady Verney's funeral. It was a long procession — tenants on horseback, tenants on foot — the carriages of all the gentlemen round about.

On its way to Penruthyn Priory the procession passed by the road, ascending the steep by the little church of Llanderris, and full in view, through a vista in the trees, of the upper windows of the steward's house.

Our friend Mr. Dingwell, whose journey had cost him a cold, got his clothes on for this occasion, and was in the window, with a field-glass, which had amused him on the road from London.

He had called up Mrs. Mervyn's servant girl to help him to the names of such people as she might recognise.

As the hearse, with its grove of sable plumes, passed up the steep road, he was grave for a few minutes; and he said —

"That was a good woman. Well for *you*, ma'am, if you have ever one-twentieth part of her virtues. She did not know how to make her virtues pleasant, though; she liked to have people afraid of her; and if you have people afraid of you, my dear, the odds are they'll hate you. We can't have everything — virtue and softness, fear and love — in this queer world. An excellent — severe — most ladylike woman. What are they stopping for now? Oh! There they go again. The only ungenteel thing she ever did is what she has begun to do now — to rot; but she'll do it *alone*, in the *dark*, you see; and there *is* a right and a wrong, and she did some good in her day."

The end of his queer homily he spoke in a tone a little gloomy, and he followed the hearse awhile with his glass.

In two or three minutes more the girl thought she heard him sob; and looking up, with a shock, perceived that his face was gleaming with a sinister laugh.

"What a precious coxcomb that fellow Cleve is — chief mourner, egad — and he does it pretty well. 'My inky cloak, good mother.' He looks so sorry, I almost believe he's thinking of his uncle's wedding. 'Thrift, Horatio, thrift!' I say, miss — I always forget your name. My dear young lady, be so good, will you, as to say I feel better to-day, and should be very happy to see Mrs. Mervyn, if she could give me ten minutes?"

So she ran down upon her errand, and he drew back from the window, suffering the curtain to fall back as before, darkening the room; and Mr. Dingwell sat himself down, with his back to the little light that entered, drawing his robe-de-chambre about him and resting his chin on his hand.

"Come in, ma'am," said Mr. Dingwell, in answer to a tap at the door, and Mrs. Mervyn entered. She looked in the direction of the speaker, but could see only a shadowy outline, the room was so dark.

"Pray, madam, sit down on the chair I've set for you by the table. I'm at last well enough to see you. You'll have questions to put to me. I'll be happy to tell you all I know. I was with poor Arthur Verney, as you are aware, when he died."

"I have but one hope now, sir — to see him hereafter. Oh, sir! *did* he think of his unhappy soul — of heaven."

"Of the other place he did think, ma'am. I've heard him wish evil people, such as clumsy servants and his brother here, in it; but I suppose you mean to ask was he devout — eh?"

"Yes, sir; it has been my prayer, day and night, in my long solitude. What prayers, what prayers, what terrible prayers, God only knows."

"Your prayers were heard, ma'am; he was a saint."

"Thank God!"

"The most punctual, edifying, self-tormenting saint I ever had the pleasure of knowing in any quarter of the globe," said Mr. Dingwell.

"*Oh!* thank God."

"His reputation for sanctity in Constantinople was immense, and at both sides of the Bosphorus he was the admiration of the old women and the wonder of the little boys, and an excellent Dervish, a friend of his, who was obliged to leave after having been bastinadoed for a petty larceny, told me he has seen even the town dogs and the asses hold down their heads, upon my life, as he passed by, to receive his blessing!"

"Superstition — but still it shows, sir" ——

"To be sure it does, ma'am."

"It shows that his sufferings — my darling Arthur — had made a real change."

"Oh! a *complete* change, ma'am. Egad, a *very* complete change, *indeed*!"

"When he left this, sir, he was — oh! my darling! thoughtless, volatile" ——

"An infidel and a scamp — eh? So he told me, ma'am."

"And I have prayed that his sufferings might be sanctified to him," she continued, "and that he might be converted, even though I should never see him more."

"So he was, ma'am; *I* can vouch for that," said Mr. Dingwell.

Again poor Mrs. Mervyn broke into a rapture of thanksgiving.

"Vastly lucky you've been, ma'am; *all* your prayers about him, egad, seem to have been granted. Pity you did not pray for something he might have enjoyed more. But all's for the best — eh?"

"All things work together for good — all for good," said the old lady, looking upward, with her hands clasped.

"And you're as happy at his *conversion*, ma'am, as the Ulema who received him into the faith of Mahomet — *happier*, I really think. Lucky dog! what interest he inspires, what joy he diffuses, even now, in Mahomet's paradise, I dare say. It's worth while being a sinner for the sake of the conversion, ma'am."

"Sir — sir, I can't understand," gasped the old lady, after a pause.

"No difficulty, ma'am, none in the world."

"For God's sake, *don't*; I think I'm going *mad*" cried the poor woman.

"Mad, my good lady! Not a bit. What's the matter? Is it Mahomet? You're not afraid of *him*?"

"Oh, sir, for the *Lord's* sake tell me what you mean?" implored she, wildly.

"I mean *that*, to be sure; what I *say*," he replied. "I mean that the gentleman complied with the custom of the country — don't you see? —

and submitted to Kismet. It was his fate, ma'am; it's the invariable condition; and they'd have handed him over to his Christian compatriots to murder, according to Frank law, otherwise. So, ma'am, he shaved his head, put on a turban — they wore turbans then — and, with his Koran under his arm, walked into a mosque, and said his say about Allah and the rest, and has been safe ever since."

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried the poor old lady, trembling in a great agony.

"Ho! *no*, ma'am; 'twasn't much," said he, briskly.

"All, all; the last hope!" cried she, wildly.

"Don't run away with it, pray. It's a very easy and gentlemanlike faith, Mahometanism — except in the matter of wine; and even that you can have, under the rose, like other things here, ma'am, that aren't quite orthodox; eh?" said Mr. Dingwell.

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur!" moaned the poor lady distractedly, wringing her hands.

"Suppose, ma'am, we pray it may turn out to have been the right way. Very desirable, since Arthur died in it," said Mr. Dingwell.

"Oh, sir, oh! I couldn't have believed it. Oh, sir, this shock — this frightful shock!"

"Courage, madam! Console yourself. Let us hope he didn't believe this any more than the other," said Mr. Dingwell.

Mrs. Mervyn leaned her cheek on her thin clasped hands, and was rocking herself to and fro in her misery.

"I was with him, you know, in his last moments," said Mr. Dingwell, shrugging sympathetically, and crossing his leg. "It's always interesting, those last moments — eh? — and exquisitely affecting, even — *particularly* if it isn't very clear *where* the fellow's going."

A tremulous moan escaped the old lady.

"And he called for some wine. That's comforting, and has a flavour of Christianity, eh? A *relapse*, don't you think, very nearly? — at so unconvivial a moment. It must have been *principle*; eh? Let us hope."

The old lady's moans and sighs were her answers.

"And now that I think on it, he must have died a Christian," said Mr. Dingwell, briskly.

The old lady looked up, and listened breathlessly.

"Because, after we thought he was speechless, there was one of those what-d'ye-call-'ems — begging dervish fellows — came into the room, and kept saying one of their long yarns about the prophet Mahomet, and my dying friend made me a sign; so I put my ear to his lips, and he said distinctly, 'He be d — d!' — I beg your pardon; but last words are always precious."

Here came a pause.

Mr. Dingwell was quite bewildering this trembling old lady.

"And the day before," resumed Mr. Dingwell, "Poor Arthur said, 'They'll bury me here under a turban; but I should like a mural tablet in old Penruthyn church. They'd be ashamed of my name, I think; so they can put on it the date of my decease, and the simple inscription, Checkmate.' But whether he meant to himself or his creditors I'm not able to say."

Mrs. Mervyn groaned.

"It's very interesting. And he had a message for you, ma'am. He called you by a name of endearment. He made me stoop, lest I should miss a word, and he said, 'Tell my little linnet,' said he" —

But here Mr. Dingwell was interrupted. A wild cry, a wild laugh, and—
"Oh, Arthur, it's *you*!"

He felt, as he would have said, "oddly" for a moment — a sudden flood of remembrance, of youth. The worn form of that old outcast, who had not felt the touch of human kindness for nearly thirty years, was clasped in the strain of an inextinguishable and angelic love — in the thin arms of one likewise faded and old, and near the long sleep in which the heart is fluttered and pained no more.

There was a pause, a faint laugh, a kind of sigh, and he said —

"So you've found me out."

"Darling, darling! you're not changed?"

"Change!" he answered, in a low tone. "There's a change, little linnet, from summer to winter; where the flowers were the snow is. Draw the curtain, and let us look on one another."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GREEK MERCHANT SEES LORD VERNEY.

Our friend, Wynne Williams, made a much longer stay than he had expected in London. From him, too, Tom Sedley received about this time a mysterious summons to town, so urgent and so solemn that he felt there was something extraordinary in it; and on consultation with the Etherage girls, those competent advisers settled that he should at once obey it.

Tom wrote to Agnes on the evening of his arrival —

“I have been for an hour with Wynne Williams; you have no notion what a good fellow he is, and what a wonderfully clever fellow. There is something *very* good in prospect for me, but not yet certain, and I am bound not to tell a human being. But *you*, I will, of course, the moment I know it for certain. It may turn out nothing at all; but we are working very hard all the same.”

In the meantime, down at Malory, things were taking a course of which the good people of Cardyllian had not a suspicion.

With a little flush over his grim, brown face, with a little jaunty swagger, and a slight screwing of his lips, altogether as if he had sipped a little too much brandy-and-water — though he had nothing of the kind that day — giggling and chuckling over short sentences; with a very determined knitting of his eyebrows, and something in his eyes unusually sinister, which a sense of danger gives to a wicked face, Mr. Dingwell walked down the clumsy stairs of the steward’s house, and stood within the hatch.

There he meditated for a few moments, with compressed lips, and a wandering sweep of his eyes along the stone urns and rose bushes that stood in front of the dwarf wall, which is backed by the solemn old trees of Malory.

“In for a penny, in for a pound.”

And he muttered a Turkish sentence, I suppose equivalent; and thus fortified by the wisdom of nations, he stepped out upon the broad gravel walk, looked about him for a second or two, as if recalling recollections, in a sardonic mood, and then walked round the corner to the front of the house, and up the steps, and pulled at the door bell; the knocker had been removed in tenderness to Lord Verney's irritable nerves.

Two of his tall footmen in powder and livery were there, conveyed into this exile from Ware; for calls of inquiry were made here, and a glimpse of state was needed to overawe the bumpkins.

"His lordship was better; was sitting in the drawingroom; might possibly see the gentleman; and who should he say, please?"

"Say, Mr. Dingwell, the great Greek merchant, who has a most important communication to make."

His lordship would see Mr. Dingwell. Mr. Dingwell's name was called to a second footman, who opened a door, and announced him.

Lady Wimbledon, who had been sitting at the window reading aloud to Lord Verney at a little chink of light, abandoned her pamphlet, and rustled out by another door, as the Greek merchant entered.

Dim at best, and very unequal was the light. The gout had touched his lordship's right eyeball, which was still a little inflamed, and the doctor insisted on darkness.

There was something diabolically waggish in Mr. Dingwell's face, if the noble lord could only have seen it distinctly, as he entered the room. He was full of fun; he was enjoying a coming joke, with perhaps a little spice of danger in it, and could hardly repress a giggle.

The Viscount requested Mr. Dingwell to take a chair, and that gentleman waited till the servant had closed the door, and then thanked Lord Verney in a strange nasal tone, quite unlike Mr. Dingwell's usual voice.

"I come here, Lord Verney, with an important communication to make. I could have made it to some of the people about you — and you have able professional people — or to your nephew; but it is a pleasure, Lord Verney, to speak instead to the cleverest man in England."

The noble lord bowed a little affably, although he might have questioned Mr. Dingwell's right to pay him compliments in his own house; but Mr. Dingwell's fiddlestick had touched the right string, and the noble instrument made music accordingly. Mr. Dingwell, in the dark, looked very much amused.

"I can hardly style myself *that*, Mr. Dingwell."

"I speak of *business*, Lord Verney; and I adopt the language of the world in saying the cleverest man in England."

"I'm happy to say my physician allows me to listen to reading, and to talk a little, and there can be no objection to a little business either," said Lord Verney, passing by the compliment this time, but, on the whole, goodhumouredly disposed toward Mr. Dingwell.

"I've two or three things to mention, Lord Verney; and the first is money."

Lord Verney coughed drily. He was suddenly recalled to a consciousness of Mr. Dingwell's character.

"Money, my lord. The name makes you cough, as smoke does a man with an asthma. I've found it all my life as hard to keep, as you do to part with. If I had but possessed Lord Verney's instincts and abilities, I should have been at this moment one of the wealthiest men in England."

Mr. Dingwell rose as he said this, and bowed towards Lord Verney.

"I said I should name it first; but as your lordship coughs, we had, perhaps, best discuss it last. Or, indeed, if it makes your lordship cough very much, perhaps we had better postpone it, or leave it entirely to your lordship's discretion — as I wouldn't for the world send this little attack into your chest."

Lord Verney thought Mr. Dingwell less unreasonable, but also more flighty, than he had supposed.

"You are quite at liberty, sir, to treat your subjects in what order you please. I wish you to understand that I have no objection to hear you; and — and you may proceed."

"The next is a question on which I presume we shall find ourselves in perfect accord. I had the honour, as you are very well aware, of an intimate acquaintance with your late brother, the Honourable Arthur Verney, and beyond measure I admired his talents, which were second in brilliancy only to your own. I admired even his *principles* — but I see they make you cough also. They were, it is true, mephitic, sulphurous, such as might well take your breath, or that of any other moral man, quite away; but they had what I call the Verney stamp upon them; they were perfectly consistent, and quite harmonious. His, my lord, was the intense and unflinching rascality, if you permit me the phrase, of a man of genius, and I honoured it. Now, my lord, his adventures were curious, as you are aware, and I have them at my fingers' ends — his crimes, his escape, and, above all, his life in Constantinople — ha, ha, ha! It would make your hair stand on end. And to think he should have been *your brother*! Upon my *soul*! Though, as I said, the genius — the *genius*, Lord Verney — the inspiration was there. In *that* he *was* your brother."

"I'm aware, sir, that he had talent, Mr. Dingwell, and could speak — about it. At Oxford he was considered the most promising young man of his time — almost."

"Yes, except *you*; but you were two years later."

"Yes, exactly. I was precisely two years later about it."

"Yes, my lord, you were always about it; so he told me. No matter what it was — a book, or a boot-jack, or a bottle of port, you were always about it. It was a way you had, he said — about it."

"I wasn't aware that anyone remarked any such thing — about it," said Lord Verney, very loftily.

It dawned dimly upon him that Mr. Dingwell, who was a very irregular person, was possibly intoxicated. But Mr. Dingwell was speaking, though in a very nasal, odd voice, yet with a clear and sharp articulation, and in a cool way, not the least like a man in that sort of incapacity. Lord Verney concluded, therefore, that Mr. Dingwell was either a remarkably impertinent person, or most insupportably deficient in the commonest tact. I think he would have risen, even at the inconvenience of suddenly disturbing his flannelled foot, and intimated that he did not feel quite well enough to continue the conversation, had he not known something of Mr. Dingwell's dangerous temper, and equally dangerous knowledge and opportunities; for had they not subsidized Mr. Dingwell, in the most unguarded manner, and on the most monstrous scale, pending the investigation and proof before the Lords? "It was inevitable," Mr. Larkin said, "but also a little awkward; although *they* knew that the man had sworn nothing but truth." *Very* awkward, *Lord Verney* thought, and therefore he endured Mr. Dingwell.

But the "great Greek merchant," as, I suppose half jocularly, he termed himself, not only seemed odious at this moment, by reason of his impertinence, but also formidable to Lord Verney, who, having waked from his dream that Dingwell would fly beyond the Golden Horn when once his evidence was given, and the coronet well fixed on the brows of the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, found himself still haunted by this vampire bat, which hung by its hooked wing, sometimes in the shadows of Rosemary Court — sometimes in those of the old Steward's House — sometimes hovering noiselessly nearer — always with its eyes upon him, threatening to fasten on his breast, and drain him.

The question of money he would leave "to his discretion." But what did his impertinence mean? Was it not minatory? And to what exorbitant sums in a choice of evils might not "discretion" point?

"This d — d Mr. Dingwell," thought Lord Verney "will play the devil with my gout. I wish he was at the bottom of the Bosphorus."

"Yes. And your brother, Arthur — there were points in which he differed from you. Unless I'm misinformed, he was a first-rate cricketer, the crack bat of their team, and you were *nothing*; he was one of the best Grecians in the university, and you were plucked."

"I — I don't exactly see the drift of your rather inaccurate and extremely offensive observations, Mr. Dingwell," said Lord Verney, wincing and flushing in the dark.

"Offensive? Good heaven! But I'm talking to a Verney, to a man of genius; and I say, how the devil could I tell that *truth* could offend, either? With this reflection I forgive *myself*, and I go on to say what will interest you."

Lord Verney, who had recovered his presence of mind, here nodded, to intimate that he was ready to hear him.

"Well, there were a few other points, but I need not mention them, in which you differed. You were both alike in this — each was a genius — you were an opaque and obscure genius, he a brilliant one; but each being a genius, there must have been a sympathy, notwithstanding his being a publican and you a — not exactly a Pharisee, but a paragon of prudence."

"I really, Mr. Dingwell, must request — you see I'm far from well, about it — that you'll be so good as a little to abridge your remarks; and I don't want to hear — you can easily, I hope, understand — my poor brother talked of in any but such terms as a brother should listen to."

"That arises, Lord Verney, from your not having had the advantage of his society for so very many years. Now, I knew him intimately, and I can undertake to say he did not care twopence what any one on earth thought of him, and it rather amused him painting infernal caricatures of himself, as a fiend or a monkey, and he often made me laugh by the hour — ha, ha, ha! he amused himself with revealed religion, and with everything sacred, sometimes even with *you* — ha, ha, ha — he *had* certainly a wonderful sense of the ridiculous."

"May I repeat my request, if it does not appear to you *very* unreasonable?" again interrupted Lord Verney, "and may I entreat to know what it is you wish me to understand about it, in as few words as you can, sir?"

"Certainly, Lord Verney; it is just this. As I have got materials, perfectly authentic, from my deceased friend, both about himself — horribly racy, you may suppose — ha, ha, ha — about your granduncle Pendel — you've heard of him, of course — about your aunt Deborah, poor thing, who sold mutton pies in Chester, — I was thinking — suppose I write a memoir — Arthur alone deserves it; you pay the expenses; I take the profits, and I throw you in the copyright for a few thousand more, and call it, 'Snuffed-out lights of the Peerage,' or something of the kind? I think something is due to Arthur — don't you?"

"I think you can hardly be serious, Mr. — Mr. — — "

"Perfectly serious, upon my soul, my lord. Could anything be more curious? Eccentricity's the soul of genius, and you're proud of your genius, I *hope*."

"What strikes me, Mr. Dingwell, amounts, in short, to something like this. My poor brother, he has been unfortunate, about it, and — and *worse*, and he has done things, and I ask myself *why* there should be an effort to obtrude him, and I answer myself, there's no reason, about it, and therefore I vote to have everything as it is, and I shall neither contribute my countenance, about it, nor money to any such undertaking, or — or — undertaking."

"Then my book comes to the ground, egad."

Lord Verney simply raised his head with a little sniff, as if he were smelling at a snuff-box.

"Well, Arthur must have something, you know."

"My brother, the Honourable Arthur Kiffyn Verney, is past receiving anything at my hands, and I don't think he probably looked for anything, about it, at any time from *yours*."

"Well, but it's just the time for what I'm thinking of. You wouldn't give him a tombstone in his lifetime, I suppose, though you *are* a genius. Now, I happen to know he wished a tombstone. *You*'d like a tombstone, though not now — time enough in a year or two, when you're fermenting in your lead case."

"I'm not thinking of tombstones at present, sir, and it appears to me that you are giving yourself a very unusual latitude — about it."

"I don't mean in the mausoleum at Ware. Of course that's a place where people who have led a decorous life putrify together. I meant at the small church of Penruthyn, where the scamps await judgment."

"I — a — don't see that such a step is properly for the consideration of any persons — about it — outside the members of the Verney family, or more properly, of any but the representatives of that family," said Lord Verney, loftily, "and you'll excuse my not admitting, or — or, in fact, admitting any right in anyone else."

"He wished it immensely."

"I can't understand why, sir."

"Nor I; but I suppose you all get them — all ticketed — eh? and I'd write the epitaph, only putting in essentials, though, egad! in such a life it would be as long as a newspaper."

"I've already expressed my opinion, and — and things, and I have nothing to add."

"Then the tombstone comes to the ground also?"

"Anything *more*, sir?"

"But, my lord, he showed an immense consideration for you."

"I don't exactly recollect *how*."

"By *dying* — you've got hold of everything, don't you see, and you grudge him a tablet in the little church of Penruthyn, by gad! I told your nephew he wished it, and I tell you he wished it; it's not stinginess, it's your mean pride."

"You seem, Mr. Dingwell, to fancy that there's no limit to the impertinence I'll submit to."

"I'm sure there's none almost — you better not ring the bell — you better think twice — he gave me that message, and he also left me a mallet — quite a toy — but a single knock of it would bring Verney House, or Ware, or this place, about your ears."

The man was speaking in quite another voice now, and in the most awful tones Lord Verney had ever heard in his life, and to his alarmed and sickly eyes it seemed as if the dusky figure of his visitor were dilating in the dark like an evoked Genii.

“I — I think about it — it’s quite unaccountable — all this.” Lord Verney was looking at the stranger as he spoke, and groping with his left hand for the oldfashioned bell-rope which used to hang near him in the library in Verney House, forgetting that there was no bell of any sort within his reach at that moment.

“I’m not going to take poor dear Arthur’s mallet out of my pocket, for the least tap of it would make all England ring and *roar*, sir. No, I’ll make no noise; you and I, sir, *tête-à-tête*. I’ll have no go-between; no Larkin, no Levi, no Cleve; you and I’ll settle it alone. Your brother was a great Grecian, they used to call him Ÿ´ÅÃÃµÅÃ — Ulysses. Do you remember? I said I was the great Greek merchant? We have made an exchange together. You must pay. What shall I call myself, for Dingwell isn’t my name. I’ll take a new one — To ¼µ½ ÀÁÉÄ¿½ ŸÅÄ¹½ þµ±ÅÄ¿½ µÀ¹º±»µ¹ — µÀµ¹´±½´µ ´¹µÆµu³µ º±¹ µ¾É ·½ ²µ»¿ÅÂ Ÿ´ÅÃÃÅ½ ¿½¿¼±¶µÃ¸±¹ µÆ·. In English — at first he called himself Outis — *Nobody*; but so soon as he had escaped, and was out of the javelin’s reach, he said that he was named Odusseus — *Ulysses*, and here he is. This is the return of Ulysses!”

There had been a sudden change in Mr. Dingwell’s Yankee intonation. The nasal tones were heard no more. He approached the window, and said, with a laugh, pulling the shutter more open —

“Why, Kiffyn, you fool, don’t you know me?”

There was a silence.

“My great God! my great God of heaven!” came from the white lips of Lord Verney.

“Yes; God’s over all,” said Arthur Verney, with a strange confusion, between a sneer and something more genuine.

There was a long pause.

“Ha, ha, ha! don’t make a scene! Not such a muff?” said Dingwell.

Lord Verney was staring at him with a face white and peaked as that of a corpse, and whispering still— “My God! my great God!” so that Dingwell, as I still call him, began to grow uneasy.

“Come; don’t you make mountains of molehills. What the devil’s all this fuss about? Here, drink a little of this.” He poured out some water, and Lord

Verney did sip a little, and then gulped down a good deal, and then he looked at Arthur again fixedly, and groaned.

"That's right — never mind. I'll not hurt you. Don't fancy I mean to disturb you. I *can't*, you know, if I wished it *ever* so much. I daren't *show* — I *know* it. Don't suppose I want to *bully* you; the idea's *impracticable*. I looked in merely to tell you, in a friendly way, who I am. You must do something handsome for me, you know. Devil's in it if a fellow can't get a share of his own money, and, as I said before, we'll have no go-betweens, no Jews or attorneys. D — n them all — but settle it between ourselves, like brothers. Sip a little more water."

"Arthur, Arthur, I say, *yes*; good God, I feel I shall have a good deal to say; but — my head, and things — I'm a little perplexed still, and I must have a glass of wine, about it, and I can't do it now; no, I can't."

"I don't live far away, you know; and I'll look in tomorrow — we're not in a hurry."

"It was a strange idea, Arthur. Good Lord, have mercy on me!"

"Not a bad one; eh?"

"Very odd, Arthur! — God forgive you."

"Yes, my dear Kiffyn, and you, too."

"The coronet — about it? I'm placed in a dreadful position, but you shan't be compromised, Arthur. Tell them I'm not very well, and some *wine*, I think — a little chill."

"And tomorrow I can look in again, quietly," said the Greek merchant, "or whenever you like, and I shan't disclose our little confidence."

"It's going — everything, everything; I shall see it by-and-by," said Lord Verney, helplessly.

And thus the interview ended, and Mr. Dingwell in the hall gave the proper alarm about Lord Verney.

CHAPTER XX.

A BREAKDOWN.

About an hour after, a message came down from Malory for the doctor.

"How is his lordship?" asked the doctor, eagerly.

"No, it isn't *him*, sure; it is the old *lady* is taken very bad."

"Lady Wimbledon?"

"No, sure. Her ladyship's not there. Old Mrs. Mervyn."

"Oh!" said the doctor, tranquillized. "Old Rebecca Mervyn, is it? And what may be the matter with the poor old lady?"

"Fainting like; one fainting into another, sure; and her breath almost gone. She's very bad — as pale as a sheet."

"Is she talking at all?"

"No, not a word. Sittin' back in her chair, sure."

"Does she know you, or mind what you say to her?"

"Well, *no*. She's a-holdin' that old white-headed man's hand that's been so long bad there, and a-lookin' at him; but I don't think she hears nor sees nothin' myself."

"Apoplexy, or the heart, more likely," ruminated the doctor. "Will you call one of those pony things for me?"

And while the pony-carriage was coming to the door, he got a few phials together and his coat on, being in a hurry; for he was to play a rubber of billiards at the club for five shillings at seven o'clock.

In an hour's time after the interview with Arthur Verney, Lord Verney had wonderfully collected his wits. His effects in that department, it is true, were not very much, and perhaps the more easily brought together. He wrote two short letters — marvellously short for him — and sent down to the Verney Arms to request the attendance of Mr. Larkin.

Lord Verney was calm; he was even gentle; spoke, in his dry way, little, and in a low tone. He had the window-shutter opened quite, and the curtains drawn back, and seemed to have forgotten his invalided state, and everything but the revolution which in a moment had overtaken and engulfed him — to which great anguish with a dry resignation he submitted.

Over the chimney was a little oval portrait of his father, the late Lord Verney, taken when they wore the hair long, falling back upon their shoulders. A pretty portrait, refined, handsome, insolent. How dulled it was by time and neglect — how criss-crossed over with little cracks; the evening sun admitted now set it all aglow.

"A very good portrait. How has it been overlooked so long? It must be preserved; it shall go to Verney House. To Verney House? I forgot."

Mr. Jos. Larkin, in obedience to this sudden summons, was speedily with Lord Verney. With this call a misgiving came. The attorney smiled blandly, and talked in his meekest and happiest tones; but people who knew his face would have remarked that sinister contraction of the eye to which in moments of danger or treachery he was subject, and which, in spite of his soft tones and childlike smile, betrayed the fear or the fraud of that vigilant and dangerous Christian.

When he entered the room, and saw Lord Verney's face pale and stern, he had no longer a doubt.

Lord Verney requested Mr. Larkin to sit down, and prepare for something that would surprise him.

He then proceeded to tell Mr. Larkin that the supposed Mr. Dingwell was, in fact, his brother, the Hon. Arthur Verney, and that, therefore, he was not Lord Verney, but only as before, the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney.

Mr. Larkin saw that there was an up-hill game and a heavy task before him. It was certain now, and awful. This conceited and foolish old nobleman, and that devil incarnate, his brother, were to be managed, and those Jew people, who might grow impracticable; and doors were to be muffled, and voices lowered, and a stupendous secret kept. Still he did not despair — if people would only be true to themselves.

When Lord Verney came to that part of his brief narrative where, taking some credit dismally to himself for his penetration, he stated that "notwithstanding that the room was dark and his voice disguised, I recognized him; and you may conceive, Mr. Larkin, that when I made the discovery I was a good deal disturbed about it."

Mr. Larkin threw up his eyes and hands —

"*What* a world it is, my dear Lord Verney! for so I persist in styling you still, for this will prove virtually no interruption."

At the close of his sentence the attorney lowered his voice earnestly.

"I don't follow you, sir, about it," replied Lord Verney, disconsolately; "for a man who has had an illness, he looks wonderfully well, and in good spirits and things, and as likely to live as I am, about it."

"My remarks, my lord, were directed rather to what I may term the animus — the design — of this, shall I call it, *demonstration*, my lord, on the part of your lordship's brother."

"Yes, of course, the animus, about it. But it strikes me he's as likely to outlive me as not."

"My lord, may I venture, in confidence and with great respect, to submit, that your lordship was hardly judicious in affording him a personal interview?"

"Why, I should hope my personal direction of that conversation, and — and things, has been such as I should wish," said the peer, very loftily.

"My lord, I have failed to make myself clear. I never questioned the consummate ability with which, no doubt, your lordship's part in that conversation was sustained. What I meant to convey is, that considering the immense distance socially between you, the habitual and undeviating eminence of your lordship's position, and the melancholy circle in which it has been your brother's lot to move, your meeting him face to face for the purpose of a personal discussion of your relations, may lead him to the absurd conclusion that your lordship is, in fact, afraid of him."

"That, sir, would be a very impertinent conclusion."

"Quite so, my lord, and render him proportionably impracticable. Now, I'll undertake to bring him to reason." The attorney was speaking very low and sternly, with contracted eyes and a darkened face. "He has been married to the lady who lives in the house adjoining, under the name of Mrs. Mervyn, and to my certain knowledge inquiries have been set in motion to ascertain whether there has not been issue of that marriage."

"You may set your mind perfectly at rest with regard to that marriage, Mr. Larkin; the whole thing was thoroughly sifted — and things — my father undertook it, the late Lord Verney, about it; and so it went on, and was quite examined, and it turned out the poor woman had been miserably deceived by a mock ceremony, and this mock thing was the whole *thing*, and there's nothing more; the evidence was very deplorable, and — and quite satisfactory."

"Oh! that's a great weight off my mind," said Larkin, trying to smile, and looking very much disappointed, "a great weight, my lord."

"I knew it would — yes," acquiesced Lord Verney.

"And simplifies our dealings with the other side; for if there had been a good marriage, and concealed issue male of that marriage, they would have used that circumstance to *extort money*."

"Well, I don't see how they could, though; for if there had been a child, about it — he'd have been heir apparent, don't you see? to the title."

"Oh! — a — yes — *certainly*, that's very true, my lord; but then there's *none*, so *that's* at rest."

"I've just heard," interposed Lord Verney, "I may observe, that the poor old lady, Mrs. Mervyn, is suddenly and dangerously ill."

"Oh! *is* she?" said Mr. Larkin very uneasily, for she was, if not his queen, at least a very valuable pawn upon his chess-board.

"Yes; the doctor thinks she's actually dying, poor old soul!"

"What a world! What is life? What is man?" murmured the attorney with a devout feeling of the profoundest vexation. "It was for this most melancholy character," he continued; "you'll pardon me, my lord, for so designating a relative of your lordship's — the Honourable Arthur Verney, who has so *fraudulently*, I will say, presented himself again as a living claimant. Your lordship is aware of course — I shall be going up to town possibly by the mail train tonight — that the law, if it were permitted to act, would remove that obstacle under the old sentence of the Court."

"Good God! sir, you can't possibly mean that I should have my brother caught and executed?" exclaimed Lord Verney, turning quite white.

"Quite the reverse, my lord. I'm — I'm unspeakably shocked that I should have so misconveyed myself," said Larkin, his tall bald head tinged to its top with an ingenuous blush. "Oh no, my lord, I understand the Verney feeling too well, thank God, to suppose anything, I will say, so *entirely* objectionable. I said, my lord, if it were *permitted*, that is, allowed by simple non-*interference* — your lordship sees — and it is precisely *because* non-interference must bring about that catastrophe — for I must not conceal from your lordship the fact that there is a great deal of unpleasant talk in the town of Cardyllian already — that I purpose running up to town tonight. There is a Jew firm, your lordship is aware, who have a very heavy judgment against him, and the persons of that persuasion are so interlaced, as I may say, in matters of business, that I should apprehend a communication to them from Goldshed and Levi, who, by-the-by, to my certain knowledge — *what* a world it is! — have a person here actually watching Mr. Dingwell, or in other words, the unhappy but Honourable Arthur Verney, in *their* interest." (This was in effect true, but the name of this person, which he did not care to disclose, was Josiah Larkin.) "If I were on the spot, I think I know a way effectually to stop all action of that sort."

"You think they'd arrest him, about it?" said Lord Verney.

"Certainly, my lord."

"It is very much to be deprecated," said Lord Verney.

"And, my lord, if you will agree to place the matter quite in my hands, and peremptorily to decline on all future occasions, conceding a personal interview, I'll stake my professional character, I effect a satisfactory compromise."

"I — I don't know — I don't *see* a compromise — there's nothing that I see, to *settle*," said Lord Verney.

"*Every* thing, my lord. Pardon me — your lordship mentioned that, in point of fact, you are no longer Lord Verney; that being so — technically, of course — measures must be taken — in short, a — a quiet *arrangement* with your lordship's brother, to prevent any disturbance, and I undertake to effect it, my lord; the nature of which will be to prevent the return of the title to abeyance, and of the estates to the management of the trustees, whose claim for mesne *rates* and the liquidation of the mortgage, I need not tell your lordship, would be ruinous to you."

"Why, sir — Mr. Larkin — I can hardly believe, sir — you can't mean, or think it possible, sir, that I should lend myself to a deception, and — and sit in the House of Peers by a *fraud*, sir! I'd much rather *die* in the debtor's prison, about it; and I consider myself dishonoured by having involuntarily heard such an — an idea."

Poor, pompous, foolish Lord Verney stood up, so dignified and stern in the light of his honest horror, that Mr. Larkin, who despised him utterly, quailed before a phenomenon he could not understand.

Nothing confounded our friend Larkin, as a religious man, so much as discovering, after he had a little unmasked, that his client would not follow, and left him, as once or twice had happened, alone with his dead villanous suggestion, to account for it how he could.

"Oh dear! — *surely*, my lord, your lordship did not *imagine*," said Mr. Larkin, doing his best, "I was — I, in fact — I *supposed* a *case*. I only went the length of saying that I think — and with *sorrow* I think it — that your lordship's brother has in view an *adjustment* of his claim, and meant to *extract*, I fear, a sum of *money* when he disclosed himself, and conferred with your lordship. I meant, merely, of course, that as he thought this I would *let* him think it, and allow him to disclose his plans, with a view, of course, to deal with that information — first, of *course*, with a view to your lordship's *honour*, and next your lordship's safety; but if your lordship did not see your way *clearly* to it" ——

"No, I don't see — I think it most objectionable — about it. I know all that concerns me; and I have written to two official persons — one, I may say, the Minister himself — apprizing them of the actual position of the title, and asking some information as to how I should proceed in order to divest myself of it and the estates."

"Just what I should have expected from your lordship's exquisite sense of honour," said Mr. Larkin, with a deferential bow, and a countenance black as thunder.

That gigantic machine of torture which he had been building and dovetailing, with patient villany, at Lord Verney's word fell with a crash, like an enchanted castle at its appointed spell. Well was it for Lord Verney that the instinct of honour was strong in him, and that he would not suffer his vulgar tempter to beguile him into one indefensible concealment. Had he fallen, that tempter would have been his tyrant. He would have held everything in trust for Mr. Jos. Larkin. The effigy of Lord Verney would, indeed, have stood, on state occasions, robed and coronetted, with his order, driven down to the House, and sat there among hereditary senators; all around him, would have been brilliant and luxurious, and the tall bald head of the Christian attorney would have bowed down before the outgoing and the incoming of the phantom. But the real peer would have sat cold and dark enough, in Jos. Larkin's dungeon — his robe on the wall, a shirt of Nessus — his coronet on a nail, a Neapolitan "cap of silence" — quite tame under the rat-like eye of a terror from which he never could escape.

There was a silence here for some time. Lord Verney leaned back with closed eyes, exhausted. Mr. Larkin looked down on the carpet smiling faintly, and with the tip of one finger scratching his bald head gently. The attorney spoke— “Might I suggest, for the safety of your lordship’s unhappy brother, that the matter should be kept strictly quiet — just for a day or two, until I shall have made arrangements for his — may I term it — escape.”

“Certainly,” said Lord Verney, looking away a little. “Yes — *that* must, of course, be arranged; and — and this marriage — I shall leave that decision entirely in the hands of the young lady.” Lord Verney was a little agitated. “And I think, Mr. Larkin, I have said everything at present. Good evening.”

As Mr. Larkin traversed the hall of Malory, scratching the top of his bald head with one finger, in profound and black rumination, I am afraid his thoughts and feelings amounted to a great deal of cursing and swearing.

“Sweet evening,” he observed suddenly to the surprised servant who opened the door for him. He was now standing at the threshold, with his hands expanded as if he expected rain, and smiling villianously upward toward the stars.

“Sweet evening,” he repeated, and then biting his lip and looking down for a while on the gravel, he descended and walked round the corner to the Steward’s House.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. LARKIN'S TWO MOVES.

The hatch of the Steward's House stood open, and Mr. Larkin entered. There was a girl's voice crying in the room next the hall, and he opened the door.

The little girl was sobbing with her apron to her eyes, and hearing the noise she lowered it and looked at the door, when the lank form of the bald attorney and his sinister face peering in met her eyes, and arrested her lamentation with a new emotion.

"It's only I — Mr. Larkin," said he. He liked announcing himself wherever he went. "I want to know how Mrs. Mervyn is now."

"Gone dead, sir — about a quarter of an hour ago;" and the child's lamentation recommenced.

"Ha! very sad. The doctor here?"

"He's gone, sir."

"And you're *certain* she's dead?"

"Yes, sure, sir," and she sobbed on.

"Stop that," he said, sternly, "just a moment — thanks. I want to see Mr. Dingwell, the old gentleman who has been staying here — where is he?"

"In the drawingroom, sir, please," said the child, a good deal frightened. And to the drawingroom he mounted.

Light was streaming from a door a little open, and a fragrance also of a peculiar tobacco, which he recognised as that of Mr. Dingwell's chibouque. There was a sound of feet upon the floor of the room above, which Mr. Larkin's ear received as those of persons employed in arranging the dead body.

I would be perhaps wronging Mr. Dingwell, as I still call him, to say that he smoked like a man perfectly indifferent. On the contrary, his countenance looked lowering and furious — so much so that Mr. Larkin removed his hat, a courtesy which he had intended studiously to omit.

"Oh! Mr. Dingwell," said he, "I need not introduce myself."

“No, I prefer your withdrawing yourself and shutting the door,” said Dingwell.

“Yes, in a moment, sir. I merely wish to mention that Lord Verney — I mean your brother, sir — has fully apprized me of the conversation with which you thought it prudent to favour him.”

“You’d rather have been the medium yourself, I fancy. Something to be made of such a situation? Hey! but you *shan’t*.”

“I don’t know what you mean, sir, by something to be made. If I chose to mention your name and abode in the city, sir, you’d not enjoy the power of insulting others long.”

“Pooh, sir! I’ve got *your* letter and my brother’s *secret*. I know my strength. I’m steering the fire-ship that will blow you all up, if I please; and you talk of flinging a squib at me, you blockhead! I tell you, sir, you’ll make nothing of me; and now you may as well withdraw. There are two things in this house you don’t like, though you’ll have enough of them one day; there’s death up stairs, sir, and some thing very like the devil here.”

Mr. Larkin thought he saw signs of an approaching access of the Dingwell mania, so he made his most dignified bow, and at the door remarked, “I take my leave, sir, and when next we meet I trust I may find you in a very different state of mind, and one more favourable to business.”

He had meditated a less covert sneer and menace, but modified his speech prudently as he uttered it; but there was still quite enough that was sinister in his face, as he closed the door, to strike Mr. Dingwell’s suspicion.

“Only I’ve got that fellow in my pocket, I’d say he was bent on mischief; but he’s in my pocket; and suppose he did, no great matter, after all — only dying. I’m not gathering up my strength; no — I shall never be the same man again — and life so insipid — and that poor old doll up stairs. So many things going on under the stars, all ending *so*!”

Yes — so many things. There was Cleve, chief mourner to-day, chatting now wonderfully gaily, with a troubled heart, and a kind of growing terror, to that foolish victim who no more suspected him than he did the resurrection of his uncle Arthur, smoking his chibouque only a mile away.

There, too, far away, is a pale, beautiful young mother, sitting on the bedside of her sleeping boy, weeping silently, as she looks on his happy face, and — *thinks*.

Mr. Dingwell arrayed in travelling costume, suddenly appeared before Lord Verney again.

"I'm not going to plague you — only this. I've an idea I shall lose my life if I don't go to London tonight, and I must catch the mail train. Tell your people to put the horses to your brougham, and drop me at Llwynan."

Lord Verney chose to let his brother judge for himself in this matter, being only too glad to get rid of him.

Shrieking through tunnels, thundering through lonely valleys, gliding over wide, misty plains, spread abroad like lakes, the mail train bore Arthur Verney, and also — each unconscious of the other's vicinity — Mr. Jos. Larkin toward London.

Mr. Larkin had planned a checkmate in two moves. He had been brooding over it in his mufflers, sometimes with his eyes shut, sometimes with his eyes open — all night, in the corner of his carriage. When he stepped out in the morning, with his despatch-box in his hand, whom should he meet in the cold gray light upon the platform, full front, but Mr. Dingwell. He was awfully startled.

Dingwell had seen him, too; Larkin had felt, as it were, his quick glance touch him, and he was sure that Dingwell had observed his momentary but significant change of countenance. He, therefore, walked up to him, touched him on the arm, and said, with a smile —

"I thought, sir, I recognized you. I trust you have an attendant? Can I do anything for you? Cold, this morning. Hadn't you better draw your muffler up a little about your face?" There was a significance about this last suggestion which Mr. Dingwell could not mistake, and he complied. "Running down again to Malory in a few days, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Dingwell.

"So shall I, and if quite convenient to you, I should wish, sir, to talk that little matter over much more carefully, and — can I call a cab for you? I should look in upon you to-day only I must be at Brighton, not to return till tomorrow, and very busy then, too."

They parted. Dingwell did not like it.

"He's at mischief. I've thought of *every* thing, and I can't see *any* thing that would answer *his* game. I don't like his face."

Dingwell felt very oddly. It was all like a dream; an unaccountable horror overcame him. He sent out for a medicine that day, which the apothecary refused to give to Mrs. Rumble. But he wrote an explanatory note alleging that he was liable to fits, and so got back just a little, at which he pooh'd and psha'd, and wrote to some other apothecaries, and got together what he wanted, and told Mrs. Rumble he was better.

He had his dinner as usual in his snuggery in Rosemary Court, and sent two letters to the post by Mrs. Rumble. That to Lord Verney contained Larkin's *one* unguarded letter inviting him to visit England, and with all the caution compatible with being intelligible, but still not enough — suggesting the audacious game which had been so successfully played. A brief and pointed commentary in Mr. Dingwell's handwriting, accompanied this.

The other enclosed to Wynne Williams, to whose countenance he had taken a fancy; the certificate of his marriage to Rebecca Mervyn, and a reference to the Rev. Thomas Bartlett; and charged him to make use of it to quiet any unfavourable rumours about that poor lady, who was the only human being he believed who had ever cared much about him.

When Wynne Williams opened this letter he lifted up his hands in wonder.

"A miracle, by heaven!" he exclaimed. "The most providential and marvellous interposition — the *only* thing we wanted!"

"Perhaps I was wrong to break with that villain, Larkin," brooded Mr. Dingwell. "We must make it up when we meet. I don't like it. When he saw me this morning his face looked like the hangman's."

It was now evening, and having made a very advantageous bargain with the Hebrew gentleman who had that heavy judgment against the late Hon. Arthur Verney, an outlaw, &c. — Mr. Larkin played his first move, and amid the screams of Mrs. Rumble, old Dingwell was arrested on a warrant against the Hon. Arthur Verney, and went away, protesting it was a false arrest, to the Fleet.

Things now looked very awful, and he wrote to Mr. Larkin at his hotel, begging of him to come and satisfy "some fools" that he was Mr. Dingwell. But Jos. Larkin was not at his inn. He had not been there that day, and Dingwell began to think that Jos. Larkin had, perhaps, told the truth for once, and was actually at Brighton. Well, one night in the Fleet was not very much; Larkin would appear next morning, and Larkin could, of course, manage the question of identity, and settle everything easily, and they would shake hands, and make it up. Mr. Dingwell wondered why they had not brought him to a sponging-house, but direct to the prison. But as things were done under the advice of Mr. Jos. Larkin, in whom I have every confidence, I suppose there was a reason.

Mr. Dingwell was of a nature which danger excites rather than cows. The sense of adventure was uppermost. The situation by an odd reaction stimulated his spirits, and he grew frolicsome. He felt a recklessness that recalled his youth. He went down to the flagged yard, and made an acquaintance or two, one in slippers and dressing-gown, another in an evening coat buttoned across his breast, and without much show of shirt. "Very amusing and gentlemanlike men," he thought, "though out at elbows a little;" and not caring for solitude, he invited them to his room, to supper; and they sat up late; and the gentleman in the black evening coat — an actor in difficulties — turned out to be a clever mimic, an inimitable singer of comic songs, and an admirable *raconteur*— "a very much cleverer man than the Prime Minister, egad!" said Mr. Dingwell.

One does see very clever fellows in odd situations. The race is not always to the swift. The moral qualities have something to do with it, and industry everything; and thus very dull fellows are often in very high places. The curse implies a blessing to the man who accepts its condition. "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." Labour is the curse and the *qualification*, also; and so the dullard who toils shall beat the genius who idles.

Dingwell enjoyed it vastly, and *lent* the pleasant fellow a pound, and got to his bed at three o'clock in the morning, glad to have cheated so much of the night. But tired as he was by his journey of the night before, he could not sleep till near six o'clock, when he fell into a doze, and from it he was wakened oddly.

It was by Mr. Jos. Larkin's "second move." Mr. Larkin has great malice, but greater prudence. No one likes better to give the man who has disappointed him a knock, the condition being that he disturbs no interest of his own by so doing. Where there is a proper consideration, no man is more forgiving. Where interest and revenge point the same way, he hits very hard indeed.

Mr. Larkin had surveyed the position carefully. The judgment of the criminal court was still on record, *nullum tempus occurrit*, &c. It was a case in which a pardon was very unlikely. There was but one way of placing the head of the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney firmly in the vacant coronet, and of establishing him, Jos. Larkin Esq., of the Lodge, in the valuable management of the estates and affairs of that wealthy peerage. It was by dropping the extinguisher upon the flame of that solitary lamp, the Hon. Arthur Verney. Of course Jos. Larkin's hand must not appear. He himself communicated with no official person. That was managed easily and adroitly.

He wrote, too, from Brighton to Lord Verney at Malory, the day after his interview with that ex-nobleman, expressing the most serious uneasiness, in consequence of having learned from a London legal acquaintance at Brighton, that a report prevailed in certain quarters of the city, that the person styling himself Mr. Dingwell had proved to be the Hon. Arthur Verney, and that the Verney peerage was, in consequence, once more on the shelf. "I treated this report slightly, in very serious alarm notwithstanding for your brother's safety," wrote Mr. Larkin, "and your lordship will pardon my expressing my regret that you should have mentioned, until the Hon. Arthur Verney had secured an asylum outside England, the fact of his being still living, which has filled the town unfortunately with conjecture and speculation of a most startling nature. I was shocked to see him this morning on the public platform of the railway, where, very possibly, he was recognised. It is incredible how many years are needed to obliterate recollection by the hand of time. I quietly entreated him to conceal his face a little, a precaution which, I am happy to add, he adopted. I am quite clear that he should leave London as expeditiously and secretly as possible, for some sequestered spot in France, where he can, without danger, await your lordship's decision as to plans for his ultimate safety. May I entreat your lordship's instantaneous attention to this most urgent and alarming subject. I shall be in town tomorrow evening, where my usual address will reach me, and I shall, without a moment's delay, apply myself to carry out whatever your lordship's instructions may direct."

"Yes, he has an idea of my judgment — about it," said Lord Verney when he had read this letter, "and a feeling about the family — very loyal — yes, he's a very loyal person; I shall turn it over, I will — I'll write to him."

Mr. Dingwell, however, had been wakened by two officers with a warrant by which they were ordered to take his body and consign it to a gaoler. Mr.

Dingwell read it, and his instinct told him that Jos. Larkin was at the bottom of his misfortune, and his heart sank.

"Very well, gentlemen," said he, briskly, "very good; it is not for me; my name is Dingwell, and my solicitor is Mr. Jos. Larkin, and all will be right. I must get my clothes on, if you please."

And he sat up in the bed, and bit his lip, and raised his eyebrows, and shrugged his shoulders drearily.

"Poor linnet — ay, ay — she was not very wise, but the only one — I've been a great fool — let us try."

There came over his face a look of inexpressible fatigue and something like resignation — and he looked all at once ten years older.

"I'll be with you, I'll be with you, gentlemen," he said very gently.

There was a flask with some noyeau in it, relics of last night's merrymaking, to which these gentlemen took the liberty of helping themselves.

When they looked again at their prisoner he was lying nearly on his face, in a profound sleep, his chin on his chest.

"Choice stuff — smell o' nuts in it," said constable Ruddle, licking his lips. "Git up, sir; ye can take a nap when you git there."

There was a little phial in the old man's fingers; the smell of kernels was stronger about the pillow. "The old man of the mountains" was in a deep sleep, the deepest of all sleeps — death.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

And now all things with which, in these pages, we are concerned, are come to that point at which they are best settled in a very few words.

The *one* point required to establish Sedley’s claim to the peerage — the validity of the marriage — had been supplied by old Arthur Verney, as we have seen, the night before his death.

The late Lord Verney of unscrupulous memory, Arthur’s father, had, it was believed, induced Captain Sedley, in whose charge the infant had been placed, to pretend its death, and send the child in reality to France, where it had been nursed and brought up as his. He was dependent for his means of existence upon his employment as manager of his estates, under Lord Verney; and he dared not, it was thought, from some brief expressions in a troubled letter among the papers placed by old Mrs. Mervyn in Wynne Williams’s hands, notwithstanding many qualms of conscience, disobey Lord Verney. And he was quieted further by the solemn assurance that the question of the validity of the pretended marriage had been thoroughly sifted, and that it was proved to have been a nullity.

He carefully kept, however, such papers as were in his possession respecting the identity of the child, and added a short statement of his own. If that old Lord Verney had suspected the truth that the marriage was valid, as it afterwards proved, he was the only member of his family who did so. The rest had believed honestly the story that it was fraudulent and illusory. The apparent proof of the child’s death had put an end to all interest in further investigating the question, and so the matter rested, until time and events brought all to light.

The dream that made Malory beautiful in my eyes is over. The image of that young fair face — the beautiful lady of the chestnut hair and great hazel eyes haunts its dark woods less palpably, and the glowing shadow fades, year by year, away.

In sunny Italy, where her mother was born, those eyes having looked their last on Cleve and on “the boy,” and up, in clouded hope to heaven —

were closed, and the slender bones repose. “I think, Cleve, you’ll sometimes remember your poor Margaret. I know you’ll always be very kind to the little boy — *our* darling, and if you marry again, Cleve, *she’ll* not be a trouble to you, as I have been; and you said, you’ll sometimes think of me. You’ll forget all my jealousy, and temper, and folly, and you’ll say—‘Ah, she loved me.’”

And these last words return, though the lips that spoke them come no more; and he *is* very kind to that handsome boy — frank, generous, and fiery like her, with the great hazel eyes and beautiful tints, and the fine and true affections. At times comes something in the smile, in the tone as he talks, in the laugh that thrills his heart with a strange yearning and agony. Vain remorse! vain the yearnings; for the last words are spoken and heard; not one word *more* while the heavens remain, and mortals people the earth!

Sedley — Lord Verney we should style him — will never be a politician, but he has turned out a thoroughly useful businesslike and genial country gentleman. Agnes, now Lady Verney, is, I will not say how happy; I only hope not too happy.

Need I say that the cloud that lowered for a while over the house of Hazelden has quite melted into air, and that the sun never shone brighter on that sweet landscape? Miss Etherage is a great heiress now, for Sedley, as for sake of clearness I call him still, refused a *dot* with his wife, and that handsome inheritance will all belong to Charity, who is as emphatic, obstinate, and kind-hearted as ever. The admiral has never gone down the mill-road since his introduction to the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney at the foot of the hill. He rolls in his chair safely along the level uplands, and amuses himself with occasional inspections of Ware through his telescope; and tells little Agnes, when he sees her, what she was doing on a certain day, and asks who the party with the phaeton and grays, who called on Thursday at two o’clock, were, and similar questions; and likes to hear the news, and they say is growing more curious as years increase. He and Charity have revived their acquaintance with *écarté* and *piquet*, and play for an hour or so very snugly in the winter evenings. Miss Charity is a little cross when she loses, and won’t let old Etherage play more than his allotted number of games; and locks up the cards; and is growing wife-like with the admiral; but is quite devoted to him, and will make him live, I think, six years longer than any one else could.

Sedley wrote a very kind letter to the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, to set his mind at ease about *mesne rates*, and any other claims whatsoever, that might arise against him, in consequence of his temporary tenure of the title and estates, and received from Vichy a very affronted reply, begging him to take whatever course he might be advised, as he distinctly objected to being placed under any kind of personal obligation, and trusted that he would not seek to place such a construction upon a compulsory respect for the equities of the situation, and the decencies enforced by public opinion; and he declared his readiness to make any sacrifice to pay him whatever his strict legal rights entitled him to the moment he had made up his mind to exact them.

The Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney is, of course, quite removed from his sphere of usefulness and distinction — parliamentary life — and spends his time upon the Continent, and is remarkably reserved and impertinent, and regarded with very general respect and hatred.

Sedley has been very kind, for Cleve's sake, to old Sir Booth Fanshawe, with whom he is the only person on earth who has an influence.

He wrote to the baronet, who was then in Paris, disclosing the secret of Cleve's marriage. The old man burst into one of his frenzies, and wrote forthwith a frantic letter direct to his mortal enemy, the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, railing at Cleve, railing at *him*, and calling upon him, in a tone of preposterous menace, to punish his nephew! Had he been left to himself, I dare say he would have made Cleve feel his resentment. But thus bullied he said— "Upon my life I'll do no such thing. I'm in the habit of thinking before I take steps, about it — with Booth Fanshawe's permission, I'll act according to my own judgment, and I dare say the girl has got some money, and if it were not good for Cleve in some way, that old person would not be so angry." And so it ended for the present.

The new Lord Verney went over expressly to see him, and in the same conversation, in which he arranged some law business in the friendliest way, and entirely to Sir Booth Fanshawe's satisfaction, he discussed the question of Cleve's marriage. At first the baronet was incensed; but when the hurlyburly was done he came to see, with our friend Tom, whose peerage gave his opinion weight on the subject of marriages and family relations, that the alliance was not so bad — on the contrary, that it had some very strong points to recommend it.

The Rev. Isaac Dixie has not got on in the Church, and is somehow no favourite at Ware. The Hon. Miss Caroline Oldys is still unmarried, and very bitter on the Verneys, uncle and nephew; people don't understand why, though the reader may. Perhaps she thinks that the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney ought to have tried again, and was too ready to accept a first refusal. Her hatred of Cleve I need not explain.

With respect to Mr. Larkin, I cite an old Dutch proverb, which says, "Those who swim deep and climb high seldom die in their beds." In its fair figurative sense it applies satisfactorily to the case of that profound and aspiring gentleman who, as some of my readers are aware, fell at last from a high round of the ladder of his ambition, and was drowned in the sea beneath. No — not drowned; that were too painless, and implies extinction. He fell, rather, upon that black flooring of rock that rims the water, and was smashed, but not killed.

It was, as they will remember, after his introduction to the management of the affairs of the Wylder, Brandon, and Lake families, and on the eve, to all appearance, of the splendid consummation of his subtle and audacious schemes, that in a moment the whole scaffolding of his villany gave way, and he fell headlong — thenceforth, helpless, sprawling, backbroken, living on from year to year, and eating metaphoric dust, like the great old reptile who is as yet mangled but not killed.

Happy fly the years at Ware. Many fair children have blessed the union of pretty Agnes Etherage and the kindly heir of the Verneys. Cleve does not come himself; he goes little to any gay country houses. A kind of lassitude or melancholy is settling and deepening upon him. To one passage of his life he looks back with a quickly averted glance, and an unchanging horror — the time when he was saved from a great crime, as it were, by the turning of a die. "Those three dreadful weeks," he says within himself, "when I was *mad*!" But his handsome son is constantly at Ware, where he is beloved by its master and mistress like one of their own children. One day Lord Verney ran across to Malory in his yacht, this boy with him. It was an accidental *tête-à-tête*, and he talked to the boy a great deal of his "poor mama," as he sauntered through the sunny woods of Malory; and he brought him to the refectory, and pointed out to him from the window, the spot where he had seen her, with her trowel in her hand, as the morning sun threw the shadow of the spreading foliage over her, and he described her beauty to him; and he walked down with him to Cardyllian, the yacht was appointed to meet them at the pier, and brought him into the church, to the pew where he was placed, and showed him the seat where she and Anne Sheckleton sat on the Sunday when he saw her first, and looked for a while silently into that void shadow, for it is pleasant and yet sad to call up sometimes those old scenes and images that have made us feel, when we were younger; and somehow good Lady Verney did not care to hear her husband upon this theme.

So for the present the story of the Verneys of Malory is told. Years hence, when we shall not be here to read it, the same scenes and family may have a new story to tell; for time, with his shuttle and the threads of fate, is ever weaving new romance.

A LOST NAME

A Lost Name is another of Le Fanu’s sensation novels, published in three volumes by Richard Bentley in 1868. It had previously been serialised by Bentley in his magazine *Temple Bar* and is based on Le Fanu’s earlier novella ‘Some Account of the Latter Days of the Hon. Richard Marston of Dunoran’ (1848), itself better known as *The Evil Guest*, the title under which it was reprinted and anglicised in *Ghost Stories and Tales of Mystery* (1851). The plot also has affinities with the murder mystery element of *Uncle Silas* and the blackmail plot of *Wylder’s Hand*. The story revolves around the murder of Sir Roke Wycherly and the servant Carmel Sherlock, who is wrongly accused of the crime. As so often in Le Fanu’s oeuvre, a major theme is the degeneration of the aristocracy, personified here in the unsavoury character of Mark Shadwell. Although, the earlier novella is better known today, Le Fanu himself once wrote that he considered *A Lost Name* to be among his best work.

Title page of the first edition, signed by Le Fanu’s son Brinsley

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VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.

MARK SHADWELL OP RABY.

RABY HALL stands near the old London road, in an inland county. You see but the great door and a portion of its front as you look up the broad straight avenue, with its double row of gigantic old beech-trees at either side. Its brick is red and mellow; black beams of oak, well jointed, and with carved inscriptions, bar the old walls across, and broad windows, with more small square panes than I dare number at a venture, return the sunlight when it nears the horizon like a thousand wintry fires.

The ground slopes downward from the front of the house, clumped with grand old trees, and rises in the rear, so forming those unequal and wooded uplands which overhang the old road with a distant and sombre outline for many miles.

The ancient park wall flanks a long stretch of the road, and, leaving it, slopes upward with a snakelike winding, and loses its gray line, at last, among the distant woods. In this wall, upon the high road, are set the four great piers of the grand entrance, surmounted by the demi-griffins, with wings elevated (carved, in a style of true heraldic audacity), which the Shadwells of Raby have long borne as their crest.

This place has its ancient family traditions — its nooks and solitudes of transcendent beauty — its romantic story — and its famous gaze-lady, or as antiquaries will have it, ghaist-lady, whom, had Holbein illuminated the pages of that once magnificent family history — now forlorn and expiring, he would have introduced again and again, with her mysterious star and melancholy beauty, in a new Dance of Death.

The old house and place, as you pass by, strike you as being handsome and interesting, but a little *triste* also. There is something more than an air of quietude about them. It does not amount to decay, but over it all broods the melancholy of neglect.

It was sunset when Mark Shadwell's steps echoed across the solitude of the paved stableyard. The master of Raby had killed some weary hours and a few rabbits among the distant woods. His weather-beaten velveteen frock, his gaiters and wideawake, would have been discarded by many a dandy gamekeeper, but the bearing of the slight tall figure, and the pride and refinement of his still handsome features, were worthy of the old name he bore.

"Hallo there! any one! take these away to the cook," he called, as a boy emerged from the stable— "Here, you! and, have the letters come? That will do — don't know and Mark Shadwell, having thrown him his bag, with a sour look, and without a word more, strode from the yard, and so, thinking uncomfortably, with a knit brow and downcast look, to the hall door.

It was the sight of those winged demi-griffins, which are repeated in Caen stone, surmounting the low pedestals at the end of the balustrade at either side of the steps, that recalled him.

He raised his eyes, and came to a halt, and looked with a sour smile from one to the other. He scoffed at his heraldry now and then.

"Thank you, very fine fellows! A pair of vapouring rascals! Thank you both. It is very agreeable, I'm sure, to be received by two such distinguished personages at one's doorsteps every day, upon my life — *very!* What terrible fellows you are! I don't know, however, that between you you'd keep out a bailiff or a dun, by Jove! A good washing, too, would do you no harm. For such very fine gentlemen, don't you think you are rather dirty?"

All this time Mr. Shadwell of Raby, with his foot on the doorstep, was choosing a cigar; — not with the countenance of a man about to enjoy a comfort, but with the sharp and peevish look of a sick man selecting his anodyne.

His was a style of face that accorded with the gloom of a proud and vindictive spirit. Dark as a gipsy's was its tint; finely traced eyebrows, dark brown sullen eyes, the whites of which showed a little fiercely against the tint of his complexion, added to this gloom and beauty. His mouth, small and finely-shaped, showed likewise, in contrast with his dark tint, a very white and even set of teeth. These points of beauty made his smile of irony or anger, I think, more painful by reason of a latent discord.

When he had lighted a cigar, he strolled slowly toward the farther angle of the house, and stopped under a projecting turret, a window on the second story of which stood open.

"Hallo! Sherlock, are you there? Carmel, I say! Carmel Sherlock!"

He stood expecting, with his cigar between his fingers, and in a moment there appeared at the open window a pallid face, not young, with long lank black hair and large dark eyes. This figure in the *chiar' oscuro,* who placed his thin hand on the window-stone, and looked down with the tired and dreamy air of a man called away from a task which still occupies his brain.

"Yes, sir, here," he answered.

"Come down for a few minutes, can you?" asked Mark Shadwell.

The pale face looked down, rather dreamily, and then away over the distant landscape, and Carmel Sherlock put his hand to his temple, thinking, and answered nothing.

"I say! d'ye hear? *Will* you come down?" repeated Shadwell.

"Down? yes, sir; oh yes! certainly."

And Carmel Sherlock stood erect, and, passing his fingers through his lank black hair, he turned slowly from the window. With a little shrug and one of his dreary smiles, Mark Shadwell thought: "That fellow's growing madder every day, hang him! *He'll* go next, I suppose, just because he's some little use — of *course!"*

Mark Shadwell walked back, smoking, with his eyes on the gravel, and one hand in his pocket, slowly and rather circuitously, to the doorsteps, and, seating himself on the balustrade, he smoked on with a bitter countenance, till Carmel Sherlock appeared.

"Well, did you look into that?" he asked, uncomfortably.

"What? which, sir?"

"The — the — that thing of Roke Wycherly's — the mortgage," he answered.

"Oh yes! I've settled that."

"I wish you had," sneered Mark, "it's something — a great deal, I dare say, by this time— " and he paused anxiously, looking hard at his companion.

"Twenty-two thousand three hundred and twelve pounds," replied Carmel Sherlock, "besides silver, eleven — seven — yes, eighteen shillings."

"Ah — I see!" said Shadwell, growing pale, and throwing away his cigar, though it was only half smoked— "I see. Come along."

And he walked a little way under the beech-trees, the tops of which still caught the ruddy sunlight, toward the great entrance and the London road.

"But how, I say — how the devil *could* it have run up to anything like that in so short a time?"

"I wish it wasn't; but figures, you see, there's no avoiding them: they close in like fate," said Sherlock, with a shrug and a deep sigh. "They're odd things, figures, they'll never knock under — they're omnipotent — you can't squeeze 'em — they'll break your head or your heart — but they won't swerve." Carmel Sherlock rubbed his hands slowly together, and smiled oddly along the grass, as he said this, perhaps only in admiration of the little people, as he often called these selfsame figures.

"It's nothing to laugh at, d — you — what's there to laugh at? Suppose I'm ruined!" said Shadwell, savagely.

"Laugh! did I? I'm sorry, sir; I didn't mean — laugh, indeed! *I* don't laugh, never; I *never* laugh, sir; and I *am* sorry, I tell you, sir, I am."

"Well, you *ought,* I think, at all events. If I'm smashed, I don't see exactly what's to become of you — *I* don't, do you?"

"Ruin, I do see — ruin — *I* should be ruined, if you were smashed. I'd break my heart, sir, upon my honour;" so said Carmel Sherlock very earnestly, and stopping short in his promenade. "I should utterly break my heart, sir, unless — unless I could be of use and, having thus spoken, he heaved a sigh, so deep it was nearly a groan.

Mr. Shadwell looked at him. "You're a very odd fellow," he said. "You wouldn't be half so odd if you ate and drank like other people, instead of living on tea and tobacco. How old are you, Carmel?"

Carmel Sherlock looked dismally on the ground, and, instead of answering, kicked a bit of rotten wood that lay in his way before him.

"How old are you?" repeated Shadwell.

"Too old to marry, if that's what you mean — too old, sir — too old to think of it." And he pulled off his felt hat, and beat it slowly on the side of his leg as he walked on; and looking up towards the sky, he shook back his long lank locks. "I'm very well here — I don't want much — I'm very well."

"Very well — of course you are. While I can fight the battle, you shan't want — you shan't indeed, Carmel."

Mr. Shadwell looked rather kindly as he laid his hand on Sherlock's thin arm; and that *distrait* companion said in a low tone, looking straight before him: —

"He's very kind — very kind — he's half ruined. He ought to sell."

"Selling is out of the question," said Shadwell, sharply.

"Selling?" echoed Sherlock. "I was just thinking you might; it was in my head, sir, when you spoke — exactly."

"I told you before, I can't sell; you don't understand land; it's only a life estate, except that seven hundred a year that Roke Wycherly has three times over, d — me; and if it really is twenty-two thousand pounds, I can't pay it, nor get it, by heaven!"

"Sir Roke Wycherly, Baronet — I know — of Scarbroke. Twenty-two thousand three hundred and twelve pounds — and some shillings — not worth mentioning. I shall have all the balances finished tomorrow — all that's due; life's such a dream, sir."

"I wish it were: dreams, indeed! my neck's broke trying to pay interest and charges and everything — curse it! Better for a fellow to be dead, and out of it all!"

They had turned off the avenue into a wooded hollow. The sun had now set; there was still a red and golden glow in the sky, but the long shadows had spread into twilight, and the air was chilled.

CHAPTER II.

IT GROWS DARK.

"ROKE WYCHERLY, a nasty dog! the nastiest dog in England. I always thought him an odious fellow. He has let that money run up for a purpose, I know he has. He has never had a thing to trouble him — the beast! And look at me! why another fellow would put a pistol in his mouth, and blow his head off!" This was spoken with a bitter oath.

"That's it, there!" muttered Sherlock; "you mustn't. Oh no, no! It's a *mistake*; it's — it's like a bubble gone out; the same thin shell of water and the same little puff of air will never meet again. Body and soul — body and soul — better together! Oh yes! I've thought about that."

"Thank you," said sour Mark Shadwell.

"Dreamed! — ay, I dreamt about him two or three times lately; stiff in the comer, with a star of blood."

"Who?" said Shadwell.

"Eh?" answered Carmel.

"Your head's full of green tea and tobacco; of course you're always dreaming — it's the way fellows make themselves mad, by Jove!" said Shadwell, turning towards home.

"Mad! well — ha! that isn't likely to come, sir, to a quiet man like me, with plenty of work, and no great care — except *one* — except one," answered Carmel Sherlock, softly.

"Pooh! not mad; we're all mad, for that matter; I mean you fast and watch like a monk, or nun, and you live on tea and smoke, and you've put yourself in training to see visions; you've gone in for that sort of thing."

"Here they are, sir; I'll go," whispered Sherlock, with a quick side glance, at the same time drawing away from Mr. Shadwell's side.

"Who?"

"The two ladies — here, sir, here — *there!"* so said Sherlock, pointing with his finger stealthily across his breast.

They were not goblins; very much the reverse. Two young girls; in this twilight you could see but their slender outlines. There was a sneer on

Shadwell's features as he saw them. The sneer perhaps was for Sherlock. It did not brighten to a smile, however, as the young ladies, chatting musically, approached. His face grew gloomy and forbidding, on the contrary, and he looked as if he wished them fifty miles away.

These young ladies — Rachel Shadwell and Miss Agnes Marlyn — were talking as they drew near, and suddenly were silent on seeing Mr. Shadwell, and as they approached the point at which their path crossed his, they slackened their pace timidly, almost to a standstill, like people approaching a door within which they know is a dangerous dog.

"You shouldn't be out so late — damp and cold. Get on — get on — get home," snarled Mark Shadwell at his pretty daughter, and, with a make-belief of lifting his hat to Miss Marlyn, he waved them on towards the house.

Sherlock sighed profoundly, and he and his patron slowly followed in the steps of the young ladies, who viewed with so much awe the man of acres and of debts, of whose moods they know something.

Whenever the practical psychology of love becomes a subject of scientific inquiry — as barren metaphysics now are — and learned professors are told off to note, lecture, and, if they will, experiment on its unexplored wonders and universal power, it will come out that MYSTERY is at the bottom of it all. Nature teaches all manner of beautiful duplicities to girls — sinuous and subtle as the emblem of wisdom. It is strangely sweet, I think, to see a pretty girl, with downcast lashes and listening smile, communing enigmatically with her thoughts. With a slender wand she leads away the giant to her dungeon; man's imagination is her subject, and her wand is mystery. Wonderful girlish nature, in which the false and the true, the beautiful and the deadly, are always contending! The spell of thy power is mystery; we follow a voice in the air; a beautiful apparition that speaks not; the slaves of the unrevealed; and so we are thine till the hour comes of thy broken talisman and subjugation. The serpent, the serpent! The poison and the healing; the guile and yet the wisdom; the cruelty, sometimes, and the fascination! And when in the midst of this cold, proud, sanguine empire comes "the charmer," though his pipe please not me, all is in an hour changed and disarmed by his ungainly music; there is a gliding to his feet, a gazing, a winding about his arms, and the creature is poisonless, docile, captive.

“I did not think your news would be so bad as that,” said Shadwell, abruptly.

“I did not know, sir,” said Sherlock.

“It *is* bad, I can tell you, and *very* bad. Now, the next thing he’ll do, he’ll begin with an attorney. I know what he’s about; he knows I understand him, and by this time he’s chuckling over it. Now just think — the whole thing — the scoundrel!”

Carmel raised his lean pale face toward the stars that were beginning to blink in the deepening blue.

“You’re not an astrologer?” sneered Shadwell.

“Astrologer? no. Oh dear! certainly no — only what you call a fatalist,” said Carmel, still looking up.

“A Mahomedan?” suggested Mark. And Carmel sighed very deeply, as he said, “I wish I were.”

“The paradise, perhaps,” scoffed Shadwell, angrily; for Sherlock’s occasional inattention to his complaints, and even to his blasphemies, exasperated him. Some vices are indulgent to their like when repeated in others. But with egotism it is different. No one is so hard on the selfishness of another as a selfish man.

A quick shrinking glance Carmel shot on his companion. “Eh! eh!” he said, and then drew a long breath, and walked on in silence by his side, looking up at the stars as before.

“He doesn’t mean it — he didn’t — he doesn’t,” he murmured. “Mahomedans are too nearly Christian for me — nearer than the Church of Rome, I think.”

Shadwell laughed a short laugh under his breath; a bad and joyless laugh, it seemed.

“A fatalist — yes, yes — that I am — a fatalist, as you say,” said Carmel, answering nobody.

“I’m with you, so far. “We’ll not quarrel on religion, I think.

“Yes; it’s quite plain. I’ll show you the principle any day, sir, you choose to come to my room — I haven’t time to finish it now — with algebraic proof, the exact sciences. A creed should rest on numbers, you know, not on imagination; fancy is the decorative faculty, but number is demonstration — and demonstration is fact — the whole thing is necessity. According to the doctrine of Chance, there is *no* chance. The whole of the stars up there; it’s all *coercion,* and yet it's all chance, don't you see? Chance is only limited rotation, you know; and the combinations of rotation itself are limited — and — and — don't you see? — it ends in coercion."

Carmel had come to a standstill, and, with his white countenance smiling upward on the stars, and his hand on his patron's arm, was gabbling now with extreme volubility.

"Ay, ay, I dare say! capital algebra, capital science, I'm quite sure," answered Shadwell. "I don't trouble my head about that; my creed is, dust to dust — so there's an end of it. Come along."

"I suppose there's *some* way out of it," resumed Mark Shadwell, on a sudden — he was thinking of his money troubles, not of his creed — after an interval, "Without a bullet this time: — but what's a fellow's life worth? Look at that bat flitting there — zigzag — free as air — lots of flies — snug nest — everything — nothing to trouble him. Lords of the creation, indeed — such rot!"

Carmel's large eyes followed the wavering flight of the bat; and he murmured, "Oh! that I had wings— "

"Like a bat?" said Shadwell.

"Good poetry, sir, here and there, in the psalms," continued his companion. "Oh! that I had wings like a dove," he repeated with a strange sigh and a smile.

"Or a demi-griffin — hang them!" said the master of Raby, again snarling at the mystic brutes that seemed to mock him, with an elaborate burlesque, whenever ruin came as near as it stood at present. They were by this time at the hall-door, and, pushing it open, Shadwell paused and said:

"And, I say, you've done enough to-day, You must come down, you *must,* this evening, and read some Italian, or whatever it is; do you mind? They'll be very glad to see you."

"Shall I?" murmured Carmel, looking to the sky with a doubtful smile and one hand raised.

"Of *course* you shall; don't I tell you you must? You're tired; mind you come," he added with a nod, as he left him, and crossed the hall, thinking of something else; while Sherlock, with his peculiar pallid smile, stood at the foot of the stair, with the tips of his fingers to his lips, looking after him.

CHAPTER III.

THE BARONET SPEAKS.

“SHALL I?” repeated Carmel, with the same rapt smile and sigh, standing like a beautiful spirit at the gate of Paradise, with its light upon his face.

But as with sudden pain his features contracted and darkened. “Tut, tut, tut, Carmel! whither so fast? Not bad enough, eh? ha! ha! why I’m all *burnt* — burnt. Scrivener, fiddler, fool! No, no; up to my crib, and draw forth my pitying angel, and scrape her into screams and sobs of consolation.” And with this idea, evidently tickled, he laughed oddly to himself, running up the stairs three at a time.

The gallery was dark, and only the dim sky of a moonless night faintly defined the outline of his open window as he entered his room. He was groping for a match; but desisted.

“No,” he thought; “this is better — beautiful neutral tint, on which my eyes will paint images! while, let me see, let me see — *can* I find it? ay, here thou art! while thou dost wail and quiver in the dark — my spirit!” And, at the same time, he swept his bow across the strings of the violin, and in low, wild, tremulous notes, standing with his shoulder against the window-case, and gazing out upon the blank, he made a dirge - like and wandering voluntary, which proceeded unbroken, though he sometimes sighed, and sometimes talked to himself, and sometimes laughed a little.

In the meantime, as Mark Shadwell approached the door to which he was walking dejectedly, his eye was suddenly caught by the postbag on the oak table in the hall.

The letters! the hated letters. They never had a pleasant tale to tell. He emptied the bag on the table, and with a shock that suspended his breath, he saw at a glance a large square envelope, addressed in the hand of Sir Roke Wycherly.

Five years had passed since he saw that hand before — five years of mutability and death — through which they two had come alive, reserved for the events that were coming.

"R. Wycherly" at the left-hand corner of the envelope identified the writer. But Shadwell needed not the proof. Love has its instinct of recognition, but fear a still subtler one. Shadwell feared this baronet, who was his remote cousin, his creditor, and who had, moreover, a fancied claim to a portion of that estate, every acre of which was needed to keep him from ruin.

Mark Shadwell's features grew paler as this envelope looked him in the face. A crisis of some sort was coming. Roke Wycherly would not have taken up his pen to write to a man whom he despised — as he did every unsuccessful man — whom he had always rather disliked, and who, he knew, hated him — without some special business on hand. "He is going to demand his arrears of interest, and to open an attack upon my title, and perhaps to hint at a compromise. A compromise! what compromise could there be which would not ruin Shadwell?" All the time that he was thus trifling with his own suspense, he would have taken another man by the throat for retaining his secret. He looked at the large red seal, and back again at the front of the address. The letters were thick, and the lines ran up at one end with an ominous scowling squint.

"That letter means mischief," he thought, and thrust it unopened into the bottom of his pocket, pinched hard between his finger and thumb, and he stood irresolute: he was thinking of reading it elsewhere, but he could wait no longer; and, glancing over his shoulder and around, like a man on the verge of a crime, he broke the seal and read Roke Wycherly's letter. It ran thus:

"DEAR MARK, — Look on to the foot of this note, and then say, can you believe your eyes? Yet it is I indeed! I wish to see you, and am myself so much abroad, so little, therefore, likely to meet you in town, or elsewhere in England, *casually,* that I must ask you to permit me to make a *certainty* of it by looking in upon you at Raby. May I? I shall be running northward, in two or three days, to Scarbrook. My wish would be to pull up at your door as I pass. It is very impertinent, I know, to say so, particularly to ask admission at so short a notice, when fifty things may make it inconvenient or impracticable. See how I approach you! Pray stand on no ceremony with me. If you can't see me this time, I shall know you *really* can't. If you *can,* can you manage also a corner for my man? I have been a little of an invalid — though, understand, not a troublesome one — for now upwards of a year.

Drop me a line to this place, and pray remember me particularly to my kinswoman, Amy, and my best respects to my other kinswoman, your daughter, whose acquaintance I hope to make. Again, pray requite me as little ceremony as I use, and believe me, dear Mark, yours ever, “ROKE WYCHERLY.”

“— ‘s Hotel, London.

Shadwell’s hungry eye devoured all this with a rapid glance. He read it again. “There is absolutely nothing in it, but that he wants to come here. Does he? It’s not for *my* good, then, that’s clear; what can it be for? To see the place, to sneak, and pick up information about the property? It isn’t that — no, it isn’t that — what could he ask? what could he learn? No! it isn’t.”

Shadwell had read this letter with his broad felt hat overshadowing his still handsome face. It engaged him so thoroughly that he forgot the other letters lying on the table, and, crossing the hall in deep thought, or rather abstraction, he walked out into the darkness and solitude to ruminate undisturbed, for this enigma troubled him.

As he loitered with downcast looks under the broad front of the old house, he was startled from his reverie by the ugly wailings of Carmel’s fiddle from the turret-window.

“That’s you, Sherlock! Hollo! Stop your caterwauling, will you? Do you hear?”

“I do,” said the gentle voice of Carmel, from above.

“Well, he’s coming; I’m going to write for him. He’ll be here in a day or two; I’ll write to ask him — and — I don’t know what it’s for,” he added, a little inconsistently.

“Sir Roke Wycherly — aha — I thought,” said the oracle from above.

“Ay, Roke Wycherly, who else?” echoed Shadwell.

“Oh no! Oh dear, no! True — no one — ah! ha-ha!” said Carmel, with something between a shudder and a laugh. “Ho dear! can’t you keep him off?”

“Keep him off! why the devil should I? I’m not afraid of him, I suppose,” said Shadwell, fiercely.

“Oh no! oh no! of course; but I am; *I’m* afraid. I wish, sir, you could keep him off, you know.”

“Why, it’s I who am bringing him here! Keep him off? I) — n him!” snarled Shadwell’s voice, defiantly.

“Bringing him? Oh yes! Bringing him here — yes, sir. I’m *afraid.* It’s a very dark night. It’s the shadow. I wish I could keep him off — tut, tut! — is not there plague enough?”

And speaking these words, I suppose in a reverie, he drew his bow across the strings again, and produced a long-drawn discord.

“Will you stop that d — d noise?” cried Shadwell, sternly. “Light your candle, will you? I’m going up: and get out the paper about that cursed mortgage, do, and I’ll just look at it, as far as you’ve got.”

“Pardon — pardon — I wasn’t thinking; light, to be sure, sir! I beg your pardon — light, to be sure, sir. It *is* dark — awfully dark! If I were a fanciful man, I’d say this violin made it darker, and the news darkest of all. “Wings, wings, sir, and moral shadows!”

Shadwell, you may be sure, did not wait to hear these sage reflections out, and, as he ascended the doorsteps, the glimmer of a match from Carmel Sherlock’s window showed that he was lighting his candle.

CHAPTER IV.

MARK SHADWELL’S ANSWER.

So Mark Shadwell mounted the stairs of Raby Hall in the dark, and at the end of the lonely gallery entered the turret room, where Carmel Sherlock awaited him standing, with a solitary candle lighted.

“By Jove!” murmured the master of Raby with his accustomed sneer, when he stepped in and looked round him. He always forgot when he had been a few weeks without visiting it how odd the little room was — a segment of the wall circular, the rest polyhedric and crooked. “What a perverse little closet!” one would have exclaimed. And stranger still were the furniture and decorations. Near the window stood a high, slender, lock-up desk, on four slim legs, and with shelves beneath laden with a litter of papers and ledgers. Carmel. kept the accounts of the estate, and many cross accounts, and scores of interest, and other complicated debit and credit entries, and did his work standing before the tall desk. Over the tiny fireplace hung an ancient steel crossbow and four tobacco pipes of various fashions, long and short; an unframed small Madonna, antique and precious, in Carmel’s eyes, picked up in an old lumber-room of an out-of-the-way London tavern, for such a trifle as he could afford, and which he almost adored, in which he saw resemblances, and recognised, he fancied, a master hand. There were shelves of books, too, not half a dozen modem ones among them, and those of that “philosophic” school which bears no amity to revelation. Coverless folios, yellow vellum-backed quartos, and some diminutive black letter and others, dark and warped by time, and looking like great burnt squares of gingerbread. Against the wall, too, hung his beloved fiddle, and a variety of other queer decorations, so that one could understand Shadwell’s reflection, “It’s like nothing but a corner of a madman’s brain.”

“Light that other candle, will you? and give me all the light you can, and let me have a sheet of paper, and — ay, there are pens and ink.”

At the desk Shadwell wrote standing:

“DEAR ROKE, — Your friendly note charms me. I shall expect you. Any day you like best will equally answer us. We can’t make you as comfortable as we could wish; but roughing it in a poor man’s country house you will make excuse. I write so briefly lest I should lose a post. We have some pretty good trout-fishing here. Our shooting decidedly bad — unless you care for killing rabbits. On the whole, I can’t deny the place is rather slow; but you’ll forgive it, and believe me, “Ever yours sincerely, “M. SHADWELL.

“P.S. — What you say of your health distresses me. But, boasting little else, the air of Raby at least is excellent, and really does wonders for some people.”

“Oh! d — n the fiddle!” exclaimed Shadwell, interrupted by the renewed minstrelsy of Carmel, who, startled with bow suspended in his fingers, gazed with a pained alarm on his patron.

“Fiddle — fiddle! he said fiddle!” murmured Carmel, in sad and gentle accents; for it was a foible of his to fancy everything he possessed a *chef d’œuvre* or a miracle.

“So he did,” repeated Shadwell, with a sharp nod.

“A — yes; but, this is — a — yes, do but look at it — this is a Straduarius. I was lucky, sir — amazing — ha! yes. I paid only twenty-four shillings for it!”

Shadwell sealed his envelope, and offered no comment.

“And it is worth three hundred guineas, sir,” continued he, almost whispering the estimate to his beloved violin.

“I wish you’d sell it,” said Shadwell, drily, for he hated its music; “and if you can get half what you gave, I advise you. Come, let me see what you have done.”

“Sell it? So I will — ay, sir, when its term of servitude is done. I shan’t want it after a few weeks. There is a secret about those violins — Prometheus; the Statue of Memnon.

If the history of Saul and David be as true as that of George the Third, there was a Straduarius who made harps then — harps. Spirit is vibration, and vibration is music. I have thought upon that, sir. I can explain —

“Thank you, I’d rather have the balance of the mortgage account,” replied Shadwell.

"Oh! — ah! — to be sure, sir, I beg pardon — not quite made out, though. Roke Wycherly — Sir Roke. Coming! Tut! tut! tut! Ay — well, yes — such dreams! And potential letters, too. Would you like the window shut, sir?"

As he spoke he was selecting and getting together the notes required by Mark Shadwell.

"My father died of fever at Easterbroke; my poor mother at Rochester, and my dear sister at Wyden — all great losses — dreadful, sir, dreadful — one at Christmas, that's yule — the next on Easter Monday, and the last on the Royal Oak day, we used to call it — the anniversary, you know, and the villain who robbed me was Robert Eyre Yardley. Where I was knocked down by the cab, and my rib broken, was Regent Street, and there are no end — no end of them. So I have reason to hate those letters E, T, and B; and they are doubled in his name, and the rest — ay, here's the account deducted — Sandford's — and the rest are O, K, W, C, H, L — and they are *your* unlucky letters, sir. I'll show you."

"Much obliged — some other time," said Shadwell, drily, taking the papers. "Will you tell Jack Linton to run down to the town and post this letter?"

"Ha! this is it — ay, ay — my God! won't you think, sir?" said Carmel, throwing back his long black hair, and fixing his eyes with a stare of pain and fear on Shadwell.

"We'll post the letter, and think after," said he.

"R — Rachel, that's another — the worst, perhaps," whispered Carmel, clasping his hands as he left the room dejectedly.

"That fellow's cracked — he *is* mad," muttered Shadwell, looking after him. If he had been in better spirits he would have laughed; as it was he contented himself with a hope that Carmel's figures were right. And Carmel, much troubled, reentered the room.

He passed his hand through his hair, and groaned as he came behind Mark Shadwell's chair softly, and laid his hand on the back of it, saying:

"I think, sir, if you knew all — such dreams! He came into my room at dead of night, like a great cock — ha, ha! you will laugh, you will — with a bloody comb — head, eyes, neck, all bloody, sir, taller than the door, and crowed. I knew it was he — such a crow, it pierced my brains, sir. I knew it was he, though I never saw him."

"He's not a bit like a cock, though — a coxcomb, perhaps. So do shut up your poultry, and help me to understand this."

While Mark Shadwell in Carmel's room was busy over these accounts, in the drawingroom sat quite alone a very pretty woman — though no longer young, still girlish — with the transparent and delicate tints of an invalid in her oval face, large eyes and long lashes, and such a pretty mouth! Though the face was very sad just now, you could not help feeling how brightly it might smile. Pensively she lay back in her low-armed chair; her thin pretty hands lay extended beside her, and her head a little on one side, with that peculiar dejection which strikes us so plaintively in pictures of mediaeval martyrs. Her hair, brown and wavy, was seen under that pretty little lace coiffure, with a dark-blue ribbon running through it, which reminded one of the old mob cap.

Pearly-tinted, slender, pensive, there was still in that fragile creature an air of youth quite wonderful in the mother of a girl now just eighteen.

This girlish, fragile, pretty matron was Mark Shadwell's wife — the still young mother of that pretty Rachel, who was their only child. Well might she be sad, thinking of the hope and love she had given in vain. It was one of those mysterious passions exacted by fate, never to be requited. Nineteen years ago, just two and thirty, in the prime of manly beauty, he seemed to her in all things a hero. His love was a beautiful but false adoration — so eloquent, so passionate, so graceful. Where was it now? Long burnt out, cold ashes, years ago — gone before their first child was born. What so terrible as this fatal fidelity of a neglected love? Wrongs will not murder it, nor desertion starve it. Wildly it prays to be changed to loathing — entreats that it may die, and curses itself for loving still.

As Amy Shadwell leaned back in her chair, her look was lowered to the ground beyond her tiny feet, and on her face that strange look of pain along with that light or smile, I know not which it is, that we have seen so often on the faces of the youthful dead.

Her thoughts were now wandering to Rachel and her governess.

"My darling, it is well for her — a gentle and loving person — affectionate and playful — Agnes Marlyn. She would be good to her if I were gone. She loves me, I hope. But this t*riste* place! Will she stay — will she stay long?"

Just now the door silently opened, and Agnes Marlyn, like an evoked spirit, stood on the threshold with some flowers in her hand, doubtfully; and it seemed as if from within that old oak door-case, as from a stained window, a flood of wonderfully rich tints entered the room.

Pretty Mrs. Shadwell looked up and smiled. “Come, dear — come, you dear kind Agnes; and flowers, too! You always think of me, you good creature.”

Agnes heard this greeting with a beautiful dimpling smile, standing under the shadow of the doorway, and, as it seemed with a blush of gratification, and her long lashes were lowered over those dark, soft, clouded eyes, so impossible to describe. And closing the door, with the ends of her fingers, she approached the table with her flowers, gently.

CHAPTER V.

AGNES MARLYN.

“Pretty Flowers! All yes! and sweet!” said Amy Shadwell, with a smile. “Charming! a thousand thanks, kind creature!” and she touched Agnes Marlyn’s pretty hand caressingly as she placed them in the little glass that stood beside her.

Agnes answered only with the same smile, looking all the time down upon the flowers which she was adjusting.

“And where have you and Rachel been? Aren’t you a little late?” asked pale Mrs. Shadwell, but with her gentle smile.

“Late? oh! very late, Mrs. Shadwell. I am so sorry. My watch, I think, went quite wrong. I was so afraid you would have been anxious and vexed, only you are so good. We were at Hazelden, so far away in the park, and the son was nearly set when we came to that pretty ruin, Wynderfel — is not that the name? and so we came so fast — so fast — and were late, notwithstanding; and I am so sorry.”

Miss Agnes Marlyn spoke in a particularly sweet low voice, with a slight foreign accent, and a little slowly; altogether the singularity was very pretty. But although she had passed many years of her life at a French school, which she had left only a few months ago to come to Raby, she seldom spoke a French idiom, and then I think it sounded interesting.

“And where is my other truant? You’re not tired, I hope?” asked Mrs. Shadwell.

“Rachel? Oh! Rachel’s in her room, coming immediately. I don’t think she was; she said she wasn’t tired,” said Agnes.

“And you?”

“I? — oh! never tired of the beautiful country — never tired walking. To wander always among the trees, to feel the blowing air and the grass and flowers — so charming under the foot — is my paradise, I think,” said Miss Agnes Marlyn, in her low sweet tones, looking with a happy flush as if she could see her beloved woodlands, flowers and dingles, through and beyond the oak panels.

“But I’m so afraid you find it very dull, my poor Agnes — your pension, your companions, the pretty French town and gardens— “

“Ah, madame, never was I so happy! The lonely country to me is sweetest. I never have cared for noise and gaiety. I have lost my father and my dear mamma early, when I was still a little girl, as you know. I never was anywhere so happy since then, because I never was with one so kind — never with any one I so much loved as you; but — pardon, madame — I am, I have been, too audacious — I have for a moment forgotten myself.”

“Forgotten your foolish shyness, I hope,” replied Mrs. Shadwell, smiling on the affectionate and grateful girl. “Yes, Agnes, you must trust in me more than you have done. I think you like me; I know I like you. I should like to make you another dear child of mine.”

The beautiful girl rose up with a flush of subdued rapture, her arms extended in a glad surprise; and with a smile of welcome the pretty and fragile mistress of Raby also rose, and, in the effusion of the moment, gently folded her young dependent in her arms.

Beautiful Agnes Marlyn! Lithe, tall, ineffably graceful! With a kind of sigh she gave herself to that embrace, and lay in it a second or so longer than she need, perhaps.

In fairy lore we read of wondrous transmutations and disguises. How evil spirits have come in the fairest and saddest forms; how fell and shrewd-eyed witches have waited in forest glades by night, in shapes of the loveliest nymphs. So, for a dreamlike moment, one might see, under the wondrous beauty of the girl, in that spell of momentary joy, a face that was apathetic and wicked.

Amy Shadwell did not see it. As the girl drew gratefully back, with downcast look, there was nothing in that sensitive and splendid beauty but the light of a tremulous happiness.

“Oh! madame — Mrs. Shadwell — I cannot say — how can I? — half what gratitude I feel for all your goodness. I hope I may please you, and do my duty by your dear child, as I pray I may. My fate has been so solitary, even among many companions; no one to care for me — no one ever to love me. Contempt follows poverty like its shadow: amidst seeming equality, I was despised; amidst a crowd, I was alone.”

Miss Agnes Marlyn here hastily brushed her handkerchief to her beautiful eyes, and Mrs. Shadwell again spoke words of consolation; and again the young lady's gratitude was eloquent.

"Do I not hear the piano? I think Rachel is playing. Shall I go, Madame? it is her hour for practising."

So, kindly, Agnes Marlyn was dismissed.

As she passed through the hall, Agnes paused at the table where the letters lay, about a dozen, littered together, as Mark Shadwell left them. She glanced over her shoulder, and listened for a moment; many doors opened on the hall — and, all being still, she ran her fingertips rapidly among them, and turned them over and about. There was one addressed to her, written in a constrained, it might be a disguised, hand. Quickly, with a handsome smile — a smile a little cruel — she hid it away in her breast. Again she glanced and listened, and then with a rapid eye examined the others. There was not another that interested her. And in a moment more she entered the room where Rachel was at the piano.

Ten minutes later Mark Shadwell passed the same table, and suddenly recollected the letters. There were two for his wife, one for Rachel, and — wasn't there? — there certainly *was* one addressed to Miss Agnes Marlyn, in a peculiar hand, and with the London postmark. Where was that letter? It had, somehow, a little interested Mark Shadwell; although that interest had been instantaneously suspended by the sight of Roke Wycherley's note.

Mark Shadwell now, in his turn, looked sharply round. Who had been meddling? Well — time enough. Meanwhile he would see his wife, and let her have hers.

He had been a man of fashion in his day, and, though the vase was broken, "the scent of the roses" hung round it still. There were handsome features, though the light of youth was gone, and a distinguished air; and poor little Mrs. Shadwell still believed that his beauty and fascinations were unrivalled.

He had been a man of fashion, and something more — a rake, a gamester, a prodigal. There were much worse men, I dare say, but he was bad enough.

She smiled her timid welcome as he entered now. He did not choose to see it. Is any pleading sadder than an unanswered smile?

"Two letters," said he, drily. "If they're half as pleasant as mine, they'll help to make your evening agreeable."

"One is from old Mrs. Danvers, and the other from my cousin, Sophy Mordaunt," said Amy, as she glanced on the envelopes.

"Oh, indeed! then no doubt they'll turn out quite as amusing as I expected. I've had a very charming one, also — and from a particularly charming person."

And having sneered thus far, in his dreary way, he paused, and said: "Guess who — there, you may as well give it up — you never could — it is your old admirer, and my old creditor, Roke Wycherly. He tells me he has been suffering — no doubt miserably, with twenty thousand a year, and all Europe, and its pleasures, of which, poor devil, he avails himself in turn — suffering most cruelly — ha, ha! — and he's coming here; no doubt because we are so entertaining, and so fond of him — and the shooting so good — and he likes rabbits so excessively — and. — Upon my life, if these aren't his reasons, I can't guess at any other — only I'm quite sure he means me no good, and I think he can do me a mischief, which he probably intends; and, therefore, we must make him as welcome and as comfortable as we can, and, no doubt, he'll pass a charming week. And pray tell the people to get his room ready; and his man is coming."

"How soon, dear, does he come?" she asked, with a rather dismal look.

"I suppose in a week, or a fortnight — perhaps the day after tomorrow; I dare say he does not know himself — whenever he likes, in short — and that's *my* news."

And, with these words, he turned and left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

SOME MUSIC.

HE walked into the room in which Rachel was playing, her governess sitting by her in the attitude of one reading the music over her shoulder, but with a look that passed through the page far away, and was dark and dreamy. Hearing the step, they both looked round.

"Pray, go on — I've come to listen. I don't interrupt, Miss Marlyn, I hope?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Shadwell, certainly not!" said Miss Agnes Marlyn, smiling and embarrassed, and in her low tones.

"I'm very glad. I like music and young people, and should be sorry to be turned out. Go on, Rachel."

So the music proceeded; and Mark Shadwell, throwing himself carelessly on a sofa, looked on Miss Marlyn with a secret interest.

Though she seemed to be looking altogether on the music, and he could see but the up-curled edge of her long eyelash, she felt his gaze, and was secretly flattered, perhaps amused.

"That will do, Rachel, for a moment," said he, after a time. "The piano's very well, but, Miss Marlyn, don't you sing? I'm sure you do — I can't be mistaken — the formation of the throat — you need not look down, I assure you it's very beautiful; but I can't be mistaken. Do sing a little — sola, duet, anything you like — pray do."

"Very happy, sir," said she with a modest awe. "But I had only a very few lessons when I left Darmonville, and I — I hardly dare sing before you."

Sing, however, on a little encouragement, she did, very prettily, a little French song; and Mr. Shadwell applauded with both hands, and thanked her, and said:

"Quite a charming voice! I had no idea — or, rather, I *had* an idea, and a very correct one, as it turns out; but I never heard you sing a note before. How strange! such a voice! and yet, to say nothing of us, you can deny yourself, and live in silence! Candles under bushels — I've no patience with that cruel sort of modesty — cruel nightingale! And, by Jove, what a blessing music is! I don't mean, of course, that noisy, formal, heartless business, that young ladies sit down to at the piano, but *music* — be it art or nature — the thing that stirs our feelings. I do assure you, King Saul was never so much under the shadow of his demon as I was when I came in here; and David's harp was nothing to that song. I do assure you, quite seriously, I am very much obliged."

Now there really was some savour of truth in this — Mark Shadwell did feel more cheerful; but I don't know that it was all the music, or very much, although he liked dropping in there and listening.

"You came to us in April, wasn't it, Miss Marlyn?" he asked. "You've been our guest six months; and my wife says you'll be sure to grow tired of us before long. She hopes not, you know, and so do I; but I am afraid it is a slow place — isn't it, rather?" and he laughed in his sardonic way once more.

"I told Mrs. Shadwell tonight, what is really true," said Miss Marlyn, gravely, "how much I like the quiet of this place, sir; I do *indeed*."

"Well, I'm sure I'm very glad; it's more than I do," he replied, peevishly.

"Oh, dear, Rachel, that is nine o'clock!" exclaimed Agnes Marlyn, as the clock in the hall struck the hour, and glancing at her watch for confirmation. "Yes, indeed! Rachel, dear, we must go. Your mamma will expect us in her room; and the books are in the schoolroom. Good night, Mr. Shadwell."

"Good night — good night," said he. "Oh, by-the-bye, I forgot — there's a letter — just one word — Rachel, you can run and get those books; don't be a minute." And Rachel, accustomed to obey, did as she was bid. "You know, you *do* think this place nearly intolerable. It must be insufferably dull."

"I have told you the truth, sir," said Miss Marlyn, with just the least indication of being offended.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Shadwell, in an under key.

"It is very well, sir, for the great or the wealthy to enjoy the world; but for such as I, what can it give? The same routine — the same solitude — and a thousand mortifications. If I did not like this place very dearly, I need not stay. I have told you the truth." And saying this, those clouded eyes of hers dropped to the carpet, and Mark Shadwell thought her colour was a little heightened.

He looked on her for a moment with a sombre sort of puzzle.

"And," he said, resuming, "there was a letter addressed to you — it came by this evening's post; I laid it down in the hall with the rest, and, by Jove, I can't find it."

He was looking still very steadily at her as he said this.

"Oh, thanks! — I *took* it," said she, raising her eyes and looking full on him.

"Ho! I had no idea," he said, fibbing, with an air of innocent surprise. "I'm so glad it's safe."

"Yes, it was from a very kind old friend. As I came into the hall, it and two others were on the ground, and I picked them up, and saw one addressed to me; I hope it was not wrong, but I took it. I am very sorry — I ought to have asked first; but, indeed, Mr.

Shadwell, I intended to have told you the moment I saw you, and most stupidly, I forgot. I am very sorry; pray forgive me — won't you, sir?" She was fibbing, too; but wasn't it pleasant to be asked, in such low and sweet tones, to forgive so very beautiful a creature?

"Oh! to be sure — no harm — none in the world. You were quite right, perfectly; I only wished to — to *tell* you; but it was your own, and I hope it may turn out pleasanter than mine do. When I was as young as you, I used to get some very pleasant letters indeed. You know quite well the sort of thing I mean — you all do; and I think you *are* a bit of a rogue — you all are." He spoke in very low tones, and looking full upon her, and smiling, showed his set of small, even teeth, that looked a little wicked, and seemed to like prolonging this little talk.

"I never tell a lie, Mr. Shadwell," said Miss Agnes Marlyn, with a proud humility, and downcast eyes.

"More than *I* can say; more than any other girl can say, that is not a literal saint. Are *you?* I hope not, I'm sure; they're so disagreeable and censorious; but you must not be vexed, you know. We are good friends, Miss Marlyn, aren't we?"

And he laid his fingers on her arm, which hung by her side, and they glided down her wrist to her hand, which he took.

"You'll shake hands? — there, now — we're friends, aren't we?"

There was something almost tender in this friendliness, and Miss Marlyn, raising her beautiful eyes with a look of timid wonder, which seemed preparing for one of recoil, withdrew her hand, and said:

"There was no quarrel, I hope, sir. I hope I have said nothing of disrespect; I should be very sorry of it."

"No — nonsense! Disrespect, indeed! what do you look so surprised at?" said he.

"I — I thought — you never spoke to me so much before at a time, Mr. Shadwell, and — I thought — we are all a little afraid, sir, of you; I thought you were proud, sir, and severe — and — pray do not be offended."

There was a kind of reproof in this, Shadwell thought; he looked gloomily in her face, without quite understanding her, and then he laughed.

"Proud and severe!" he repeated, reflectively, with an odd smile, like a man looking on his own miniature; "that's not so bad. Well, perhaps I am; yes, I *am* — where I'm crossed, that is; ay, by Jove! proud and severe as the fiend himself. Come along, Rachel — what have you been about?" he called, raising his voice as he heard her step coming. "Good night, child; good night, Miss Marlyn," and he threw himself back on the sofa, with a gloomy countenance, and without a glance after either.

CHAPTER VII.

IN AMY SHADWELL’S ROOM.

When Rachel ran into her mamma’s room to bid her good night, she found her busy with old Dorothy Wyndle, the housekeeper. A guest of any importance at Raby was seldom heard of, and such an arrival produced a sensation. Here was a consultation as to where to place Sir Roke, which interested Rachel, whose curiosity was all alive.

“Hey! ma’am, it’s thirty-six years since he was here; my blue-eyed beauty I called him then. He was a very pretty boy, golden hair, dearie me! and them blue eyes, and his pretty pink cheeks; nice slim little figure, a tidy-made little fellow. His poor mamma came here that time; a nice creature she was, and I hear he grew up very tall at college. Him and Master Mark here, they used to ride out on their little rough ponies to see the hounds at cover, like yesterday, and sometimes they’d quarrel a bit; nothin’ very bad, though. Shall I fill you out a cup o’ tea, ma’am?”

“Thanks, Dolly,” said pretty Mrs. Shadwell, smiling. Old Dorothy’s prattle amused her, as she leaned back in her cushioned chair.

“They boxed one night, they did, poor little fellows, him and Master Mark, and I threatened I’d complain; but they made it up — ha, ha, ha! Oh! he was noways spiteful, was Master Roke; a nice little fellow!”

“How old was he then?” asked Miss Rachel.

“Well, dear, he wasn’t much; about eleven, or twelve, or thirteen, I’d say, but it’s a good bit agone; it’s thirty odd years — thirty-six, or thirty-seven, I think. Thirty-seven and thirteen. He’ll be past forty now! Aye, dear, dear!”

And she uttered these ejaculations in a prolonged note, which implied the wonder and regret of a discovery, and which a man might have conveyed by an equivalent whistle.

“Ay, ay! it will be — forty odd — you’re good at figures, Miss Rachel. Hey, dear! that’s too old for *you,* miss; ay, it would not do! I was thinkin’, when I heard of him comin’, and he so pretty, it was, maybe, after Miss Rachel he’d be lookin’; but she’s very young, and forty — I don’t know! What do *you* think, ma’am?”

“Why, Dolly, you foolish old thing! I believe he was in love with mamma!”

Her mamma laughing, shook her head, and old Dolly said generously:

“Well, Miss Rachel, you know, it’s as *you* like, not as *he*, and you may like him well enough when you see him, who knows? and forty-six or fifty’s nothing. Hoo! tut! nothing at all, if you knew.”

And thus encouraged, Rachel threw back her pretty locks, and laughed heartily as she dropped into a chair.

“And *was* he courting you, ma’am? — was he *really,* now?” inquired old Dolly.

“I don’t know, Dolly, I’m sure; they said he was,” answered she, laughing again.

“I shouldn’t wonder — no, I shouldn’t; for I mind the first time I saw you, and I think you were the prettiest lass I ever set eyes on in all my days ever.”

“Old Dolly is a partial witness, I’m afraid,” said the sickly lady, smiling prettily on her, and from her to her daughter.

“No, she isn’t, mamma; she’s an honest old thing, and if she said anything else it would be a wicked story, for at this moment you’re the very prettiest person I ever saw.”

“My foolish little Rachel!” said her mamma, smiling very fondly on her.

“No! I’m your wise little woman; you know I am; you always say I am, except when I praise you.” And with these words Rachel threw her arms about her mother’s neck, and kissed her again and again.

“He’s a bachelor, ain’t he, ma’am?” inquired Dolly Wyndle, recollecting on a sudden that she was imperfectly informed.

“Yes; an old bachelor,” said she.

“Not so old but he has lots o’ time to marry in,” said Dorothy, recurring, I suppose, to her original plan.

“It’s quite true, Dolly; they marry at all ages: never too old,” laughed her mistress.

“*Never! That’s* what I say, ma’am, isn’t it? and he’s awful rich, ain’t he?”

“There are much richer men; but he’s very well.”

“And will it all come to Master Mark if he dies without no children?” asked she.

“No, nothing; not a guinea.”

"Well, that's bad, it is. I wish he *would* take a fancy to Miss Rachel here: who knows?"

"Come, Dolly, we must not talk nonsense. He's an old bachelor, an invalid, and has been very wild — I believe, wicked — in his youth, and I don't believe would be likely to make a wife happy; and it would not do to talk that kind of folly: you mustn't."

"Well, it is a pity, and she so handsome, shut up in this place — it's awful lonesome, you know; and I was looking at her, I was, t'other day, dancin' so pretty, and the governess; and, quoth I to myself, 'Well, an' if a Lunnon lord was to see that he couldn't but fancy her.'"

And up jumped Rachel, laughing. And the girl threw her arms round the neck of her laughing mamma, and, bidding her a fond good night, ran away to her bedroom.

"A wild little creature, Dolly! Thank Heaven, she's so merry! What would this place be without her, I often think? Poor little thing! I sometimes pity her; and yet it is better, perhaps, she should never have known any but this melancholy place, seeing she must live in it," said Mrs. Shadwell.

"*Melancholy!* Well, now, I don't know. What's there so dull in it? It's a fine place, ma'am — beautiful trees; and Hazelden! — it's ten years, ye wouldn't believe, since I saw Hazelden, though 'tisn't a mile and half along the park — and Wynderfel! old walls they be, and them old graves there! I mind the last time I was there — ten years it is — ha! ha! ha! Dearie me! Wynderfel! I think it's the darkest wood anywhere on English ground, near Feltram, there, goin' down by the hollow, I'm sure on't. And them old walls with the ivy: that's the spot, nigh hand, where old John Gildford saw the Evil One, wi' horns on's head, sitting on the pixie's stone! Often I heard old John tell it when I was no longer than the leg o' the table there; and a steady man was John, and a godly; ye don't see men so gi'en to church and sermons now as John Gildford. Ye don't mind old John, do ye? No, no! He was gone — Oh! ay — long afore your time! Old master respected John Gildford very much, and gev him as good a coffin, a'most, as he got himself, when *Ms* turn came. Straight bed, ma'am, then, and narrow house, fits rich and poor — all's one; sleep sound, without no turn nor start, when work's done, till mornin', in sure and certain hope — ye know, ma'am, what they put on the gravestones; that’s what we’re to look to. Parson Temple preaches beautiful on that; he’s a good man, is Parson Temple. I like to see him comin’ to Raby, I do; and I wish, ma’am (lowering her voice), master liked him better. I wish master took more after his mother; she was a godly woman, she was, poor thing! I wish he would, and a thought less after the poor old master. God forgi’e me! not any wrong I mean; only neither on ‘em cared for such like, nor minded church nor sermons — nothing, a’most; but good men — mind ye! I don’t mean nothin’ wrong — and I’m talkin’ ower much,” she wound up briskly, “and work to be done, like an old talkin’ fool, as I be!”

And so the question of quarters and commissariat was trace more entered on with her accustomed vigour and clearness by energetic old Dolly.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS MARLYN INQUIRES.

AT the beginning of the present chapter it was very late. The old clock at the stairhead of Raby had struck twelve some time ago. Agnes Marlyn had been sitting up in Rachel's room, gossiping with her about many things, as young ladies will sit up together sometimes in a chatty mood; still she was there, narrating French adventures and experiences, describing rural scenes and school vexations, happy hours and regrets, tyrants, and friends, oh! so dear, and all the story tinged with that sentiment, so sad and pure, which she knew how, with tones and looks, almost without the help of words, to shed, like a sunset light, over her little gossipings.

She had now got up to bid her companion good night, for the twentieth time, yet she still hesitated for a moment.

"So there is some one coming here — have you heard?" asked Agnes, as she stood by the little dressing-table in Rachel's room.

"Yes, Sir Roke Wycherly," answered the girl. "Sir Roke Wycherly!" repeated Miss Marlyn, slowly; "what a very odd name!"

"Yes, an odd name," answered Rachel, who was brushing her rich fair hair before the glass, "and, I fancy, an odd person, too."

"Ha, ha! there are so many odd persons in England," said Agnes Marlyn. "Sir Roke Wycherley: — an old friend of your papa's, I dare say?"

"An old friend! yes, a cousin. They were at Eton together, mamma says, and he's an invalid."

"A cousin?"

"Yes; some kind of cousin. I suppose, having been schoolfellows, he and papa are very fond of one another."

"I am sorry he's coming," said Miss Marlyn. "Why? What are you afraid of?" said Rachel, gaily. "I think it a blessing — I really do: quite a mercy anyone coming; although, I dare say I shall be horribly afraid of him; but I'm very glad, for all that."

"I am sorry," repeated Agnes Marlyn.

"And why?" reiterated Rachel.

“Why? I don’t know: that is, I *do* know.”

“Well?” said Rachel, looking over her shoulder, and expecting an explanation.

Agnes laughed suddenly, paused, and then said, in her usual tone:

“I *am* sorry, and I’ll tell you why. I like quiet; I love this so quiet place; I love you; I love your mamma; there is no one coming can make it happier.”

“And do you like papa?” asked Miss Rachel, a little abruptly.

Agnes Marlyn looked at her rather oddly, and laughed again. The girl was looking at herself straight and frankly in the glass as she arranged her soft golden hair.

“Your papa! I am sure he is a good man, but I cannot say I like him, for I do not know him: and, to say truth, I think I am a little afraid of him — and so are you, are you not?”

“I *am* afraid of him. I always was; and yet he never was cruel — no, of course, not cruel! — I mean, he never was harsh; he was never unkind to me,” said Rachel.

“Nor ever kind,” said Agnes Marlyn, and laughed once more.

“He’s so clever!” said Rachel.

“How do you know? He never speaks to you,” said Miss Marlyn.

“Mamma says — that’s how I know — he was quite different when he was young: very gay.”

“Gay, was he?”

“Gay spirits, I mean — a witty man — and very much admired; but, you know, those creditors — who are always distracting him about money — they have made him so gloomy: things they call mortgages. Horrid cruelty, I call it, to torment a fellow creature the way mamma says they worry papa!” said Miss Rachel, with spirit.

“Nine men out of ten have debts, dear,” said Miss Marlyn. “He ought to be happy: he loves you and your mamma very much.” Miss Rachel looked round from the glass upon her handsome companion. She saw nothing in her countenance but a listless melancholy.

“Yes, of course, he loves mamma very much, and that, I dare say, makes him suffer more, because he knows she must suffer with him.”

“That is very generous,” said Agnes Marlyn. Again Rachel looked at her, but no sign of irony appearing, she turned again to her glass, and a little silence ensued.

"But, my dear Rachel," resumed Agnes Marlyn, "though he is so generous— "

"I did not say he's generous, though I dare say he is," said Rachel; "of course he is — too generous, or he would not be so much worried with debts as he is."

"Well, I mean so good, and all that; yet, I think he is a very stern man; and you must not be angry, but I am always afraid of him, and would rather not see him coming — would rather not meet him, and I never feel quite at ease while he is in the room."

Another pause followed.

"And *you* are afraid, also," added Miss Marlyn.

"I said so — yes — but afraid is hardly the right word; it is more a strangeness. When I was a little thing, I was always told to be silent when he was in the room; as long as I can remember, he was always melancholy and— "

"Cross," suggested Miss Marlyn.

"Cross. No," replied Rachel, whose pride was touched by this girl's daring to criticise her papa so boldly; "he has a great deal to vex him, and — and — let us talk of something else."

"Well, Rachel, we are very happy here: I love this old place, so grand and forlorn, for I, too, am a melancholy person like your papa, more perhaps, and I love this solitary Raby better, I dare say, than he does; I love you, Rachel, as I said, and I love your mamma; I wonder does she love — no, not love — *like* me!" There was inquiry in Miss Marlyn's plaintive tone, but it was like the inquiry of a soliloquy, in low and dreamy notes, with her fine eyes lowered to the table, and her pretty hand to her chin.

There came a little silence here. There were moments when Rachel felt oddly towards this young governess, a disposition to challenge and snub her suddenly. Why should there be loving and liking so soon? what, in seven months' time, had she done for them, or they for her, that could found a serious sentiment of that kind? Was it a suspicion of a sham, with the impatience that accompanies it? She could not tell; only, having finished the arrangement of her hair, she leaned back in her chair, with her chin a little raised and her eyes nearly closed, and answered nothing.

Miss Marlyn sighed softly, and looked full and sadly on her pupil, and said, as if she had divined what was in her mind:

"I am, perhaps, a fool to talk of loving and liking."

"I don't expect you to like me much, or love me at all, on so short an acquaintance, said Rachel.

"Yes, that is true; you are all so good to me, I forget how short it is: it is gratitude that makes attachment in a day. I owe it all to you; you can owe none to me — so it is."

Agnes Marlyn said this with a sad sort of sincerity, that touched the girl, who opened her blue eyes, and placed her hand kindly on that of her governess.

"What can put such things in your head? — you are not to talk so," said Rachel, repentant.

"And I shall leave you soon — yes — yes, dear, not voluntarily, but it must be; you cannot long need a governess, in effect — it is almost time I should go."

"But I must have some friend with me here always, mamma says, and she would prefer you to any other — she says so, and so should I, Pucelle," answered Rachel; "therefore you are not to fancy that, because I have no sentiment, I don't like people, for I like you — I do, indeed; I like you *very* much."

"No sentiment! I fancied the same of myself once," said Miss Marlyn, "but it needed only time and affliction to prove to me that I had — time will make a like discovery to you, dear Rachel."

"I hope not, Pucelle she called Agnes by that name, from a fancied resemblance to a pretty old print in her bedroom. "Mamma says that all romantic people are unhappy."

"That is true," said Miss Marlyn, with a sigh; "I am romantic; you are too young, dear Rachel, to understand the force of that word — I am unhappy — I care not for money — I care not for the world."

"I like you the better for that, Pucelle," said Rachel; "I hate to see people always making up sums, and counting their gains and losses; and, besides, the Bible says it's wicked to love money, and I don't know, really, why they do, or what they can want of all the money they are always wishing for."

And Rachel thought over these propositions; being very young and innocent of tradesmen's bills, and, I dare say, it was one of her axioms that one’s house, and one’s meals, and all that sort of commonplace, came by nature.

“Yes, I have been a fool; I have lived too much from my heart, too little from my head. It is very necessary to be a little selfish. I will try; but, *hélas!* I know I shall not be able — so impetuous! — so volatile! so foolish!” and, with these words, Miss Marlyn stamped her foot lightly on the ground, and pressed her shut hand to her brow.

“Agnes, I think I’m like you, I’m sure I am,” said Rachel. “I know, at all events, I like you for that kind of feeling, and I hope you may never succeed in changing your character. Don’t try; you’ll only injure it.”

“Ah! thank heaven, then, there is one person on earth who does understand me. Yes, Rachel, you do. Good night, dearest; it is very late.” And with a kiss, she hurried from the room.

CHAPTER IX.

MARK SHADWELL ENGAGES A SECRETARY.

BEAUTIFUL AGNES MARLYN, with her candle in her hand, as she trod lightly along the passage towards her chamber, looking with one stealthy glance over her shoulder toward the door of her young companion, which she had just softly closed, might have furnished a painter with an image for some spirit of a bygone and guilty beauty, haunting those old galleries, and visiting the curtains of midnight sleepers to shape their dreams; for there was in her large dark eyes, and in the curve of her eyebrows, an evil care — something wild and dismal — as she glided alone along the gallery in slippered feet.

Raby Hall is very old, as you know; the buttery and the spicery still bear their traditional names there. It was re-edified in Elizabeth’s time, and has been little altered since. It could hardly be said to be, now-a-days, inhabited at all. Mark Shadwell and his few retainers occupied their nook of warmth and life in this great and forlorn structure; but the light of habitation was lost in the waste of general darkness, like the gleam of a homestead on a moor. Miss Marlyn’s weaknesses were not, however, of the superstitious kind. She might be walking amidst those desert places where evil spirits inhabit, but she did not care about such things. The fears of that beautiful girl, such as they were, were all of the earth, earthy; therefore it was only with that kind of start which may occur at any time and anywhere that, on turning the corner of the gallery leading to her room, Miss Agnes Marlyn suddenly met Mr. Shadwell.

There were not two steps between them as they met. He, like her, had his bedroom candle in his hand, and in his other he carried a dispatch-box, charged with those weary papers — the multitudinous children of his early follies, the inexorable tyrants of his matured years. John Bunyan’s Christian did not walk under a heavier load than that little dispatch-box. It bent Shadwell with his face to the earth — it half broke his heart.

He stood before Miss Marlyn — now for a moment scarcely feeling it — with a surprised and haggard countenance, candle in hand, and stared at this timid beauty for some seconds before he spoke.

"By Jove, Miss Marlyn! I did not expect to see you again tonight. I'm afraid I startled you. It's very odd."

Of course it was very odd. It was one o'clock, and Miss Marlyn and her pupil were usually in bed at about ten. But he could not be very angry, for he laughed ever so little, and Miss Agnes Marlyn said, in a contrite way that was very pretty:

"I am so sorry, sir; I have been sitting up with Rachel much too late. We really quite forgot the time, and I am very sorry, Mr. Shadwell, and I hope you are not displeased."

"Displeased — *I?"* said Mark Shadwell; "quite the contrary. There, you need not look puzzled, I'm quite serious — I'm glad I met you. What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid, Mr. Shadwell."

"No, you're not such a fool." He laid his dispatch-box on the windowsill beside him. "I said it was odd my meeting you, because it happened I was at that moment thinking of you, and very selfishly, too. May I go on?"

"I'm so tired, sir; perhaps in the morning," Miss Marlyn began, with a very low curtsey.

He looked on her with a bold sort of admiration, as he might on a pretty picture.

"I like that," he said; "one of the old French curtsies, that our grandmothers used to make; a beautiful curtsey, by all the graces of Versailles. It ought to be made in brilliants, powder, and brocade; one of the curtsies that have lingered in quaint old comers of France, where the vulgar sweep of the Revolution never rushed."

"Good night, Mr. Shadwell," she said, dropping her eyes very gravely, and "addressing herself" to pass him.

"Pray not, for a moment. You need not reprove me; how do you know I deserve reproof?" said he, a little sharply.

"Reprove, sir? I merely wish to pass," said Miss Agnes Marlyn, holding her head high, and looking straight before her, beautifully sulky.

"So you shall; can't you wait a moment? You seem to fancy I'm a fool. I'm no such thing. I'm perfectly sober, perfectly serious; and what I have to say, I fancy, you'll think not of the slightest consequence, though you may think it a bore. I want to know — you'll really do me an essential kindness if you will — *will* you consent to be my secretary?"

"I don't know, Mr. Shadwell, what you mean," said the young lady, gravely.

"Literally what I say," he replied, a little drily. "You need not be in such haste. Really, in this house there's no sort of oddity in my venturing to say a few words on so dry a subject when we happen to meet just for a moment. I say in this house, because it's such a solitude that there is really no difference between one hour and another, no matter where one may be; and, therefore, I may as well say what I wish, here and now, as in precisely the same sort of solitude tomorrow morning." Miss Marlyn looked haughtily over her shoulder — one would have fancied for succour, but no one appeared.

"I have never practised the duties of secretary, sir," she said.

"But you can write a good hand, and you can write a clever letter, and — I never pay compliments — I'm quite past that happy time of life. You'll find I'm a mere man of business — though a very indifferent one — and I assure you, Miss Marlyn, I make my request, odd as you may fancy it, with the most respectful seriousness, and I shall be very really obliged if you will be so kind as to grant it. Pray, a moment. I've considered it. I'll tell you in a word how I am circumstanced. My daughter, as you see, though she's clever, I believe, knows nothing. My poor wife — her state of health, you know — can't be of the slightest assistance, and I'm literally overwhelmed with letters. Carmel Sherlock — the queer fellow you've seen here — he's a capital accountant, and knows how every tenant on the estate stands, and the park-book, and all that, but he could no more write a letter than he could make a watch; he has no brains, and there's an end; and upon my honour, if you won't give me a lift, Miss Marlyn, I don't know what's to become of me. I'm not jesting, very far from it, and I'll release you now, only begging of you not to refuse without at least considering; and if you've no objection, I should be so very much obliged if you could copy two or three letters for me — not very long; and, — but I see you'd rather put off saying till tomorrow; so I shan't venture to delay you longer. Goodnight, Miss Marlyn."

"Goodnight, sir."

He picked up his dispatch-box, and she glided away, light in hand, swiftly down the gallery, like the bleeding nun, whose figure must have been very pretty, and her action also, to have been mistaken by a lover for *his* Agnes.

Mark Shadwell looking after her, held his candle, as it were, to light her down the corridor, forgetting that it was unnecessary.

As she passed out of sight his handsome face gleamed into one of his satiric smiles, and his even row of teeth glittered strangely after her in the candle light.

He shrugged.

"How exactly they are, one and all, made after the same pattern! What pains they take to hook us first, and then they let us play ourselves! She mistakes me, though. A stoic — quite above that, d — n her!" This indefensible execration was pronounced, not angrily, but with a little laugh, and a shake of the head.

And late as it was, Mr. Mark Shadwell whistled low a few bars of an oldfashioned air as he walked to his bedroom, where he set down his box with an angry crash on the table, and weary, bitter, and sullen, got into bed with a yawn and a groan; there awaiting the uncertain visit of slumber, as the sick man at the pool of Bethesda might the descent of the Angel.

CHAPTER X.

MISS MARLYN LOCKS HER DOOR, AND UNLOCKS HER DESK.

THAT GIRL, AGNES MARLYN! It was like a dream his meeting and talking with her. Why had he stopped her there? He almost laughed as he lay thinking of his folly. He had done it without a thought. She looked so lovely he could not pass her by without a word. “I’m not quite sure that I understand that girl. She was not intended for a governess. If her mother had not died — if her father hadn’t, — unlucky for her, poor little devil! She’s sweetly pretty — If Jack Marlyn had lived — a clever fellow, and a staff appointment — that Indian war would have made him. I don’t quite understand her. Her mother — her mother was a demirep, wasn’t she? Mrs. Marlyn, some one told me — who was it? Some one *did.* And a French boarding-shod. Ha, ha, ha! I wonder what sort of school it is!”

He thought in this vein, perhaps truly, that he did not understand her quite. He fancied she had thrown herself very much in his way. “And what did the gipsy mean by her dignity and stuff tonight? She must have known he had no notion of carrying her off like a Sabine belle. I do believe their whole life is such a system of counterfeit and affectation, they don’t know themselves when they are in earnest and when they are acting.”

And so this brief glimpse of flowers and sunshine closed, and the thick folds and dun fog of his cares broke over and rolled in, and he lay among the shadows of his gigantic mortgages, planning far-off battles and new combinations.

Half-undressed by this time, Agnes Marlyn, having bolted her door, unlocked her little desk — an odd little desk — of some dark wood inlaid all round with small rings and leaves and flowers of brass — a pretty little desk, perhaps made after some old traditional pattern in vogue two hundred years ago, and still known to humdrum craftsmen about dreamy old provincial towns in France. I wonder whether it was a lover’s gift — the offering, perhaps, of an adoring worker in brass and rosewood — his *chef d’œuvre,* love-sick, and utterly Quixotic, and he was blest in thinking that so much of his labour was really bestowed on her, that, in very truth, her pretty fingers every day opened and closed that desk that he had worked at, and dreamed, and sighed over so long.

Miss Agnes Marlyn took the letter she had that evening received. It was open; she was not now about to read it for the first time. Standing by the table, with her bedroom candle raised in her left hand, she read it over again with a sort of smile, subtle, contemptuous, amused, yet anxious.

Twice she read it, and the same strange quiet smile again stole over her features. Then she thought profoundly, then for the third time read the letter through, and turned round the back of the envelope, and looked at that, and so at last locked it up again, and when she was nearly undressed, she fell into deep rumination, sitting on the side of her bed for nearly ten minutes, and did not recollect herself until the chill recalled her.

So with a little shudder up she stood, shook her beautiful dark tresses round her shoulders, and gathered them into a few great folds, and prayerless, got into her bed, extinguished her candle, and laid upon the pillow her small head, full of the vapours and chimeras of that letter.

Poor Mrs. Shadwell, that confirmed invalid, appeared not at breakfast. The party consisted of Miss Marlyn, Rachel, Mark Shadwell, and Carmel Sherlock. It was not always a cheerful meal.

Sometimes the master of Raby chose to talk, and then the room became animated a little. But the party stood in awe of him; he would sit in a lowering silence, dark as a thundercloud, and people asked for “butter,” or “more sugar,” in whispers. But this morning he spoke, placing beside him the last letter of the batch which had reached him by that morning’s post.

“No letter for yon, Miss Marlyn, this morning,” said he, suddenly raising his eyes.

“Mine are very few,” said Agnes, without raising hers.

“Much to be pitied, you are; you like, of course, to get lots of them. I remember when I liked them. By Jove, I do!” and being bitterly amused, he laughed; “Rachel there, never gets any. No friends, Rachel? So much the better, girl. I had lots of friends, I know, and some of them helped to pigeon me, and others are never done plaguing me, and I can’t recollect one that ever did me a kindness!”

“There is, there is, sir, a humble friend,” said Carmel Sherlock, looking full at him, rather sorrowfully, with his large eyes; “one friend that would gladly serve you, if he could — if he *could.”*

"Oh! pooh! Carmel, my good fellow, I know that, of course; I was thinking of the fellows who write letters and tease one. I reckon on you, of course," replied Mark Shadwell, impatiently; "but you see, Miss Marlyn, that letters and friends are not quite the blessings you young people take them for. Life is made up of illusions, devilish disagreeable ones — the breaking up, I mean, and discovery, when you come to see things as they are. 'Tis not the golden age, by any means, I can tell you that; nor Arcadia even, nor a pageant, nor even a holiday."

Agnes Marlyn did not breathe a sigh and look plaintive, as an indifferent *tragédienne* might at these words, but she raised her beautiful mysterious gaze gravely to his eyes, and looked like one who had heard a melancholy truth which was to her no revelation.

"Sometimes, of course, a friend does turn up; once, perhaps, in a life," said Mark Shadwell, returning Miss Marlyn's gaze steadily; and she lowered her eyes in a proud and pensive reverie.

"There's Sherlock, I think I may reckon on Sherlock; you need not say, I *know* it. But, by Jove! I don't know many more; I'm not certain I know *one* — ha, ha, ha!"

Mark Shadwell spoke of Carmel Sherlock as if he had bought him body and soul by some enormous service. This way of talking and thinking was generated by poor Sherlock's immense and simple gratitude for very small benefits. He had picked up that dreamy creature in distress, and brought him here to Raby, where for light wages he received from him very useful services, and a loyalty and gratitude that had the extravagance almost of insanity. It rather pleased Mark Shadwell to figure on these easy terms in the character of a benefactor. He could not for double the sum have procured from any other man half the work, yet I believe he honestly fancied that he was, on the whole, the saviour of Carmel Sherlock — that in a freak of disinterested goodnature he had rescued him from the miseries of a world for which he was unfit. Mark Shadwell, therefore, received his allegiance graciously, and applauded his gratitude.

He was beside in especial good humour with Carmel Sherlock this morning. He had relieved him immensely respecting his arrear to Sir Roke, which turned out to be an enormous mistake by reason of the rentcharge payable out of Queen's Hockley by the baronet, which Mark Shadwell, a lazy man of business, with ideas all at sixes and sevens about his affairs, had quite misapplied in his reckoning:

"Well, I thought it could hardly be; I told you I was surprised. It went out of my head, because, you see, I never got a farthing by it, and I fancied Lewis's agent got it."

"It ought to have been brought into the account — yes," said Carmel, "I never heard of it till to-day. The attorney's letter — the Demon of Socrates — you know, sir, a sudden thought — a thought, an impulse."

"Wherever there's an attorney, there's a demon, of course. There was no danger, for Dolby and Keane have it all up in those d — d tin boxes of theirs; but I'm glad it's off my mind; hang it, it's a mountain gone. And see, Carmel, will you ride down and try and make out what those fellows at the mill want, for I'm hanged if I can make anything of it; and take Will Byers along with you: he's sharper than you or I: and make a note of what they say."

Carmel, always pale, paler now than usual, stood by the door, which he held open for the young ladies as they left the breakfast-room.

"Yes, certainly — yes, sir," he answered, with a little start.

"And the sooner the better," said Shadwell briskly. Whereupon Carmel, with a sigh, turned, and shaking back his lank black hair, walked slowly to the hall.

"Miss Marlyn — I beg your pardon — one word — just a moment, please," said Mark Shadwell, following her with this summons from the door; "will you come, just for a moment, to the study?"

The young lady turned.

"Your papa wants to speak to me, Rachel dear. I shall follow in a moment."

Shadwell, with a swift step, reached his study, and by this time was leaning with his elbow on the chimneypiece. He felt a little oddly; a return, though very faint, of those boyish flutterings which he vividly remembered now, though he would as easily have suspected a relapse into kites and marbles. This sort of embarrassment somehow wounded his pride. He heard the rustling of her dress at the door, and a little tapping.

"Come in, please," said Mark Shadwell, with a look and tone a little more haughty than he was accustomed to address to her.

And the young lady entered, carrying her head a little high, and with eyes lowered to the floor, and a flush on her cheeks, and he fancied a faster heaving than usual under the folds of her dress that came up to her throat.

She stood very gravely near the door, expecting, with downcast eyes, and looking quite bewitching, he thought.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MASTER AND THE SECRETARY.

So BEWITCHING, indeed, he thought her, that he paused for some seconds, gazing on the beautiful picture.

She still looked down, standing at the study door. Whatever the cause, there certainly was a bright flush at her cheek, a short, slight, quick breathing he had observed, and her attitude somehow indicated suspense, and had, he fancied, an indescribable alarm and prettiness.

“Miss Marlyn,” he began, “you made me a kind of promise last night, didn’t you? — when I by good fortune met you for a moment and told you my distresses — that you would be so really good as to give me a little help, don’t you remember? so I want to know — I’m afraid it’s very unreasonable — whether you could now and then copy a paper or write a letter for me? You have no idea what a real kindness you’d confer upon a very tired and overworked poor devil.”

Miss Marlyn had grown a little pale, and drew a long breath — or sighed. I know not whether the deep and sudden respiration was due to a sentiment or only to a sense of relief.

With a faint tumult at his heart, that yet half-vexed him, the morose - recluse of Raby witnessed these evidences of a confusion, so flattering to the vanities of a man no longer young.

“Perhaps I am too unreasonable,” said Mark Shadwell, in a lower tone; “and, perhaps, you forget all about it?”

“No, indeed, I do not forget,” answered Miss Marlyn, in tones as low, and raising for a moment her eyes to his; “I ought to have said at once I should be most happy; it will be a great pleasure to me to undertake, always, any service where my duty is owed.”

“That’s very good of you, very kind, Miss Marlyn. I’m quite serious. I am really very much obliged. I’ve a paper here; I must send a copy of it to Dolby and Keane, and I’m afraid it is an awful bore, but really I don’t know how to find time, sometimes — you’ve no idea.”

“I’m only afraid I shan’t do it well, sir — I’ll try — I’ll do my best, and you won’t be vexed, please, if I fail.”

The young lady spoke so deprecatingly that Mark Shadwell felt obliged to encourage her.

“I promise you, whatever you do, I shan’t be angry, in fact, child, I *couldn’t.* I call you child because you are really a second daughter here, and I am bound to cake care of you, you know, and to make you as happy as I can; so, don’t fancy I’ll blow you up if you make a mistake; and I’ve a theory that mistakes are made by ugly people, and nearly all the mischief in the world is due to them; and, you know very well, you don’t belong to that order of beings. I dare say many a poor fellow will have reason to wish you did before all’s over.”

The lady still looked down. You could not have told from her face whether these speeches pleased or vexed her, only she looked embarrassed, and that look was very becoming.

“I think you’re impatient to go,” said he.

“Miss Shadwell is waiting, sir,” she answered.

“Call her Rachel, why don’t you? and pray don’t say *sir* quite so often. I wish you to feel at home here, quite at home — I really do, and shall feel myself very much complimented if you will consent to drop that odious term. You know your dear father was a very dear friend of mine (Mark improved this bygone intimacy for the occasion). One of my very dearest friends, and it really is quite ridiculous your calling me *sir* as you do. This is the paper, not very long, you see — thanks; and you know you are my secretary now; and you shan’t call me *sir* any more — and now goodbye — and I’m really very much obliged.”

And he took her hand before she saw it, and pressed it for a moment to indicate how much obliged he was.

And now she was gone, the door closed, and he was alone in the room, where it seemed to his dazzled eyes the tinted glow and outline of that beautiful girl still remained where she had been standing. How was it that she seemed so much more beautiful than ever? How was it that this soured and sullen man of the world, a *blasé* rake — a stoic — a sceptic, quite philosophically regenerate, as he boasted — past the age of illusion and impulse — felt on a sudden so strangely? Are we ever past the age of impulse and romance? Is not the insensibility of age in this respect but the resignation of despair? Once persuade a man, no matter whether he be fifty or sixty years old, that he is regarded for any reason, say his wit or his fame, by a young and beautiful woman with the sort of interest he has long despaired of inspiring, and what boy so romantically wild as that old fellow?

Here was Mark Shadwell, some nine-and-forty years a wonderfully preserved man, not without remains of his early beauty; a man, indeed, early hardened in the ways of pleasure; and yet a new and fresher interest had visited him; a sentiment long-forgotten, curious, absorbing now and then.

He leaned on the chimneypiece, looking towards the door, not thinking, hardly dreaming, the state was too still — as gods are painted reposing on rose-tinted and soft golden clouds, in self-satisfying contemplation. So, leaning on the cold and polished stone which he felt not, Mark Shadwell, in entire mental inaction, in the luxury of one vague idea, reposed in serene beatitude and elation.

But this state is transitory as the glow of sunset, and the chill and twilight of Mark Shadwell's customary depression stole over him.

The discovery of the real state of his account with Sir Roke Wycherly was an immense relief. His spirits had expanded for a time, but quickly the vague sense of danger with which Sir Roke's meditated visit had before been associated returned.

He had known Roke Wycherly well and long, better than he knew himself — always selfish, a cold, hard heart. What on earth did he care if the inhabitants of Raby were one and all dead and buried? Nothing. Why, then, did he propose this visit to Raby, forlorn and dull? This troubled him. There was some little question, he could not recollect what, he had never understood it, about his title. There had been a correspondence about it in his father's time, reserved, laconic, and defiant. It had subsided, and nothing came of it. But he remembered well how transformed his father was pending that unpleasant controversy, that he grew gloomy, fidgety, and silent; that he shut himself up a great deal in the library, and addicted himself to solitary walks, that his temper was short and dangerous, and that no one liked to go near him unnecessarily.

The whole thing had made an impression on his childish imagination as a picture of great suffering — a shadow of that outer darkness — an inkling of the worm and the fire — with which the bilious old Rector of Wynderfel, in his loud and hollow tones, used to threaten so awfully on Sundays.

The alarm had passed away; his father had emerged from the horror of great darkness; and he heard no more of the debate of title-deeds, fines, and recoveries. But he had once since then looked into the correspondence in the chambers of Messrs. Dolby and Keane. It left an unpleasant impression. There was that kind of dipping and drawing together which is seen between cloud and sea when a water-spout threatens. It did not actually form, but cloud and sea were there; and here again was a menace: what else could it mean?

"He'll come, and he'll go; he doesn't know what to do with himself — used up; so he runs down here, as fellows descend into a lead mine, or go to Norway, for want of something new — just for the chance of a new idea. Too much ease, too much money, too much pleasure — life grows tiresome — ha! ha! It's but a choice between life and death. Death, of the two, I should say, is the most tiresome. And they say he has been tapping at your chest."

Vaguely, but substantially, as this soliloquy runs, flowed the current of Mark Shadwell's reasonings, as he strove to shake off the unaccountable uneasiness that returned as often as he thought of Roke Wycherly's visit.

There was an old quarrel. Sir Roke, when they were both young, had outwitted his kinsman in an affair of the heart. It had nearly taken a tragic turn, but friends interposed, and an unnatural duel was prevented. So years had passed away. Mark Shadwell, proud and vindictive as he was, had, in his way, forgiven this and many other trespasses; and they had "buried the hatchet," which might yet be disinterred.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WALLS OF WYNDERFEL.

FAR away beyond Hazelden — beyond haunted Feltram — beyond the ruined manorhouse of Wynderfel — next evening, Mark Shadwell had wandered through the rabbit-peopled woodlands with his gun. The sun was setting, the birds whistling their vespers from a thousand boughs, as that gentleman, with the fatigue of dejection, sat down upon the rude stone seat — a relic of other times and their hospitable care for the wayfarer — which still stands in the now solitary region of the old park, under the roofless gables of Wynderfel.

He "was looking up at its grey walls, his eyes wandering listlessly from window to window, and from one tall, smokeless chimney to another, over which the jackdaws were wheeling. Dismally he looked upon the relics of the old manorial residence of generations of Shadwells, before the Raby estate had united itself with Wynderfel by marriage. He was thinking, as he looked, that the Shadwells of those days must have been very great people. It was the finest house of its time in the county. What lots of chimneys there were! and he thought how hospitable the place must have looked when they were all smoking; and how those empty windows were once pleasant with pretty faces — the Shadwells were a handsome race; — and the stables, and kennels, and offices, among whose silent buttresses the alder and hawthorn were growing now, were astir with horses, dogs, and hawks; and from his readings in Walter Scott's romances, he peopled the deserted courtyard with jesters, knights, falconers, and a masquerade of old-world splendour.

"And all this was ours! And what is left us now? What would they think of Mark Shadwell, of Raby, I wonder, in this costume, without a guinea — a seedy recluse — who never knows one year whether he's to have a house over his head the next?"

Mark Shadwell raised his eyes again, lighted a cigar, and grew serene and contemplative as he smoked it — less-bitter about himself — more wrapt up in the tranquil glories of the past.

The memory of pain is short-lived. Retrospect is sunny; the best days always in the past. The illusion runs beyond our own short lives, into other centuries, among buried generations; and we look on their relics as those of a golden age, when times were plentiful, and men all kind, and women beautiful, and heads and hearts never ached.

"Merry England it was then!" said Mark Shadwell, lowering his cigar: he had read an extract from an essay on the subject somewhere. "So it was! No gambling; none of those cursed places where you're robbed; no debts; plenty of fun; plenty of everything; and old families where they should be! Now it's all mortgages, and tradesmen, and upstarts, and money, and smash!"

He was obliged to stop, for, as his eloquence was kindling, his cigar was dying out, and he was fain to replace it between his lips and puff a little anxiously until it was aglow again.

There is a state of pleasant and active observation of passing things; a state also of dreaming, a state of thinking, and another state for which in due time metaphysicians will find a name quite distinct, in which there is a mental silence — thought and fancy nowhere — in which the eyes will rest unmoving on a tree, or distant hill; the mind a blank, in utter, yet strangely pleasurable, apathy.

In this state, smoking, with his eyes on the shield and Shadwell arms over the arch of the wide door, Mark Shadwell heard a voice close by him at the stile; a voice he did not like — quiet, low, and a little stern — a voice which was unlike his angry nature, for it was cold, and which always fired his pride, for it was, in its very tranquillity, commanding.

"Mr. Shadwell, I think? How d'ye do, Mr. Shadwell?" said the voice.

Shadwell had turned towards the speaker before the sentence ended, and saw the Reverend Richard Stour Temple, Vicar of Rydleston; a man of middle height and thin, with a pale face, closely shorn, and dark, steady grey eyes. The level light of the setting sun shone across his features with an odd abruptness of light and shadow; the smile of greeting on his thin lips was slight and cold: his dress, though natty, had seen work, and was fashioned rather after the High Church manner.

"Oh! Temple; how d'ye do? Charming evening for a ramble, isn't it?" said Shadwell, without rising. He did not like the vicar.

“Sweet evening, yes,” said the vicar, extending his hand. Shadwell gave him two fingers to shake.

Mr. Temple had generally a word to say when he met Mark Shadwell, and so he seemed to have now, for he paused, and leaning rather than sitting on the bank, close by the old stone seat, he looked down upon the squire as his master at Eton used, when he meditated a lecture.

“Very sweet evening,” he resumed: “a little tired though and the vicar with his walking-stick knocked his dusty gaiter slightly. “I find my walks tell upon me more than they used; it’s a good way to Pennelston: I’ve been to visit a tenant of yours, Abel Ford; poor man, he’s dying; you have not heard, perhaps? You ought to look more, I think, after your tenants, Mr. Shadwell; it’s not right.”

He spoke this very quietly, with a little nod, and with reproving eyes fixed on the representative of the Shadwells of Raby, and of this old Wynderfel, whose long shadows were stretching over the turf beyond them.

“You’ve told me that pretty often,” said Shadwell.

“No doubt; and you think me impertinent?” said the vicar, gravely.

“I do,” said Shadwell, the indulgence of whose morose temper had grown upon him in his solitude.

“And yet, Mr. Shadwell, it is but my duty. The man is dying; I’ve been praying with him — the office of the church;” and he touched the coat pocket in which lay the book. “I don’t think he’s properly attended to; he’s poor, and has no wife, and his daughter has not turned out well, you know.”

“No, I *don’t* know; and if he is not attended to, I can’t help it: I can’t attend him, can I?”

“If you told your steward to speak to his cousin, who lives near him, he would look a little after him; he had no one last night to give him a drink,” said the vicar.

“You churchmen are always for saddling men with duties. You don’t ask what are their privileges — estates, indeed — tenants!

You know perfectly well I’m a mere receiver over all this for others; you treat me so; you know devilish well, sir, you would not talk to me as you do if the estates were unencumbered, and I where I ought to be.”

Thus spoke Mark Shadwell, with an angry eye upon the vicar, and then laughed scornfully to himself, turning his head slowly away.

"I've many faults, I dare say, but I don't think cowardice is one," replied Mr. Temple. "I thought it right to mention the circumstance; you can do as seems good to you."

"I can *not* do as seems good to me. How can a fellow do anything without money? Such rot and nonsense!" These latter words were muttered contemptuously to the grass at his feet, but the vicar heard them, and Mark Shadwell did not care whether he did or not.

"When that old building was raised, Mr. Shadwell, our social relations were better understood," said the vicar, turning up his face toward the gables and gurgoils of Wynderfel, with a cold smile.

"I dare say," said Shadwell. "Gentlemen, for instance, did not give their advice in those days till it was asked for."

"Except churchmen," said the vicar, "whose thankless duty it is, uninvited, to instruct, to exhort, and to warn. Those who most need advice are the last to ask it. Were we to wait till erring mortals invited us to reprove them our calling were vain indeed."

"Well, Temple, I dare say you do fancy you are doing your duty — I'm *sure* you do; and I assure you, though you talk sometimes about things you don't quite understand, and give me all sorts of impracticable advice, I respect you all the time, so you'll forgive my gruff talk, I can't help it; but, upon my soul, if you expect a poor devil like me to look after all those tenants, and find nurses for them when they're sick, and fun for them when they're well, you're going rather too fast for me: I tell you once for all, I can't; I can do *nothing* for them; I never have a guinea to bless myself with; half of them are better off than I am; I wish you'd tell them to look after *me,* by Jove!"

"You know, Mr. Shadwell, as well as I," replied the vicar, gently and coldly, "that you might do a great deal more than you do: in the case I mentioned, for instance, but having mentioned it, I can do no more."

"Well, I don't care if I do what you say; I'll send down there tomorrow. If you'd just ask people quietly, and not mind lecturing, you'd often carry your point better, d'ye see? You're not vexed at my saying so?"

The vicar smiled and bowed with a serenity in which one might have suspected a little contempt.

"Thanks, at all events, for your compliance with my present request," he said. "There was one other, I have often urged it, you perhaps remember?"

"Upon my life, I can't say; there have been a good many," answered Shadwell, darkening again.

"It is not much; that is, not much trouble; it was only this, that you would read just six verses of the New Testament every day." Shadwell looked at him and laughed, as one might at a foolish saying of a child.

"I beg your pardon — you'll forgive me, but it sounds so odd; I know you mean it well, but it does, because I don't believe it; I think your New Testament is all a myth; Christianity is simply a philosophy which has survived other and better ones, just because it has condescended to ally itself with the principle of superstition, which is part of human nature."

The vicar, for the first time, looked sadly he shook his head, and for some seconds silently watched the now fading splendour that duskily flooded the wake of the sun that had gone down. There was in the sight something funereal that accorded with his thoughts.

"It's nothing new, you know; I've told you the same thing pretty often, and that's the foundation of our relations. I live in your parish, but I'm not your parishioner, though we are very good friends, don't you see? You're a Christian; I'm a philosopher," said Mark Shadwell, who was conceited of his smattering of Greek philosophies. "I don't say I'm a Platonist, an epicurean, or a stoic; *nullius addictus,* I don't deal all in one shop; every man who thinks frames a system for himself. I'm an eclectic philosopher, if you please, and I'm very well satisfied with my credo!"

"I have argued it with you pretty often, Mr. Shadwell. I had hoped that time and reflection might have opened your eyes; there's an hour coming for each when we shall need more than the speculations of men."

"We all need more than we're ever likely to get," replied Mr. Shadwell; "but what enabled Socrates to meet death as he did, is enough for me."

"I'm not arguing it, mind. It is not a question to be settled in a five minutes' talk over a cigar, but I should be very happy if you would discuss it fully with me, or even if you would read a few books which I'll be glad to lend you."

"Thanks, no. The death of Socrates and the morals of Hume; I don't think your calendar and martyrology can show much better. I'm content."

Mark Shadwell, if not exactly content, was self-complacent; he lighted another cigar, and puffed a little smoke into the air, fancying that he had floored his opponent, who rose as if to go upon his way.

"And as for me," resumed Shadwell, lowering his cigar, "I can't say, of course, what sort of death I may die, but my life, I venture to say, is as moral as any parson's in England. I don't drink, I don't play; I live like an anchorite, every way; I don't even curse or swear, to signify, and I could give that up, if I liked. I hardly run up to town twice in the year, and then, upon my honour, it's only for business; you say I've no experience of Christianity, I say *you've* none of philosophy. I haven't a passion left in me, by Jove! Of course, a fellow can't help getting riled a bit, sometimes, but every other way I'm as cold as a marble block. Take one of these, on your walk, won't you?" And Shadwell tendered his cigar-case.

"Thanks, no; I never smoke," said the vicar.

"If you were, as I am, looking at that old house, and remembering what *we* were there, once on a time, you'd know what it was to feel as I do," said Shadwell, pointing at the old walls with his cigar.

"No greater waste of time than regretting, except, perhaps, wishing," said the vicar; "I must get on. Your young people — Miss Shadwell, I mean, and her governess — are drinking tea with my sister. So I'll say good evening."

Shadwell stood up and waved his hand to the vicar's valediction, and the vicar smiled his cold smile and nodded, and his swift and wiry walk soon carried him under the whitethorns and scattered ash-trees through which the path descends. Mark Shadwell remained with his foot on the stone seat, smoking and looking after that disappearing figure.

"Good man — awfully conceited — curiously disagreeable; I wonder how he made love to Amy, long ago, when he was at her feet. I dare say he frightened that poor old fellow, Ford, to-day, half out of his wits, with his Beelzebub, and his hell, and his visitation of the sick. How these poor little prigs do delight in frightening people!"

It was a delightful, balmy twilight, and Mark Shadwell was in no mood to return to Raby for a little time, so he smoked on, and the bats came out from their ivied nooks in the walls of Wynderfel, and the stars began to glimmer in the deepening sky.

CHAPTER XIII.

BONNIE AND BABY.

As the Reverend Stour Temple said, the young ladies of Raby were that evening drinking tea at the vicar’s house.

In the pretty country about Wynderfel, there are few prettier things than the vicar’s house, which is old and lonely, standing among dark elm-trees, on a gentle eminence, built of timeworn white stone, with a flight of broad white steps leading up to the fluted doorway. In front, spreads a little carpet of short grass, pleasantly relieved by clusters of roses and sweetbriars, and several small beds of brilliant flowers. A tall double hedgerow marks the line of the narrow road in front, from which you can see, peeping among the old trees and underwood, the arched gateway of the farmyard, and the smaller arch of a little belfry, and the pigeons are often seen fluttering and wheeling in the air, above the dovecot, and the great dog, Drake, lying before the steps, on summer days, blinking and dozing, and snapping lazily at the flies.

Stour Temple, the vicar, is the master of this dwelling of rural quiet — that is to say, he pays the bills, but exercises little other lordship, leaving the government pretty nearly altogether in the hands of his dear maiden sister, Barbara, who takes into counsel her brother, the vicar’s junior, I think, by about a year, beloved of both, though seen with different eyes.

This brother is Roger S. Temple, and as unlike as may be to the slim dark vicar. I am going, young ladies, to describe a fellow, by no means handsome, who, nevertheless, from some celestial qualities, has always seemed to me almost beautiful. He violates all the canons of your heroic statuary, as you shall see, if you read on a little. But, on the whole, knowing that in age, ways, and form, he is likely to fall under your displeasure, I would advise your looking another way, and passing by what concerns him. Happy am I to be able to write of him in the present tense still, and yet to know that these lines will never meet his honest eye, or wound his innocent soul, for he reads no books but those half-dozen samples of the old sentimental novel, which his sister, Miss Barbara, keeps in her bookcase, and these so much at his leisure, that by the time he reads "finis" in the last, he is ready with a fresh interest for the title-page of the first. He is fat, and round, and high-shouldered — clumsy, I must allow — no longer an athlete, and when, for instance, he ran after his hat, on the stormy day in October last, suffered more, and was longer in recovering, than he ever divulged. His face is the kindliest, though homeliest, in the world. It is a fat and expansive countenance, somewhat brown; there is not an angle in it, anywhere. He has no moustache or beard. His lips and chin are shorn and bluish, with a fat kind dimple here and there. He is somewhat bald too; a baldness not glaring and complete, a little softened and downy, and those remnants of what was once crisp black hair at the sides and back are grizzled, and now very much dashed with white. Bound little light-blue eyes, as innocent as they were in the cradle, are his, with next to no eyebrows over them. At a cricket-match, thirty years ago, some of his upper teeth were smashed, and time has, somewhat prematurely, removed the rest, which, to his kindly smile, gives an infantine character, though some people, when he smiles, fancy rather that he looks like a fond old nurse, charmed with the prattle and gambols of the children toddling about her chair.

Every one likes Roger Temple. He never said an ill word, because he never harboured an ungentle thought of mortal. He is no more conscious than his sister Barbara, who actually thinks him still young, as well as beautiful, that the dew of his youth has quite evaporated, and that it is now drawing toward evening with him. He is soft-hearted and romantic, and, but for his shyness and certain panics that come over him, would have been, no doubt, married long ago.

As it was nearly sunset, and tea early, Miss Barbara was by this time standing at the drawingroom window, which commands a view of the hollow, now glittering its last in the golden evening sun, through which lies the path from Wynderfel.

"I don't see a sign of them, do you, Bonnie?" This was an ancient, pet name of my friend Roger. "Oh! he's gone," she said, looking round, "perhaps to meet them — but no, poor darling, he's so shy."

So she looked out again for a time, and then compared her watch with the old French clock over the chimneypiece. It was hardly time yet; but fatiguing as it is, few people can, especially in the rural solitudes, where an arrival is an event, and from a window with a distant view of the hoped-for approach, refrain from watching.

Miss Barbara, whose fingers were tired holding her golden glasses to her eyes, with a little sigh, put them down and turned from the pretty view, and sat down at the piano.

It is an instrument which has seen better days, like the good lady who loves it. It has an old-world air, and its ivory notes have got a mellow golden tint, and are hollowed with a wonderfully long course of Mozart and Handel, and variations interminable, garrulous, circumlocutory, and mazy enough to have unsettled its wits. The little oval landscape over the notes, has lost its youthful complexion, and acquired an antique melancholy tint; the varnish has cracked into all manner of tiny wrinkles, and if you strike a loud chord, and listen, you hear the whole instrument audibly wheeze after the effort.

But to her it is a peerless piano, beloved with the sad yearnings of irrevocable youth; on any other the old music would lose its life and charm; forms gather round it as she plays, and when she ceases, remembered tones murmur in her ear. Maiden sister Barbara had many offers, and might have been well married; but there was one that was not to be. The same music stool, the same little oval landscape, the same music, the same instrument and its reedy chords and faded harmonies, as her thin hand calls them forth in the summer evenings, sound sad and sweet in her ear, as choirs of far-off angels.

When she had played for a while, up got Miss Barbara again, and walked down the hall-door steps and to the little grass-mound, about a stone's throw to the left, on which she took her stand. The big dog, Drake, got up and shook his ears, and followed her lazily to the point of observation, whence, sitting with cocked ears and sniffing nostrils, he made his official survey also: and flanked on the other side by the splendid old lime-tree that overshadowed them, Miss Barbara, with her golden glasses to her eyes, looked out earnestly for her guests.

"Oh! you're there!" exclaimed Roger's kindly voice, approaching, and turning, she saw him with his smile drawing near at a little trot, which subsided to a walk. "I've been talking to Dolly in the poultry-yard," he resumed, as he arrived, a little out of breath, upon the eminence, where Miss Barbara received him with her most attentive look, for he had plainly something to tell, and Drake fidgeted in his place and looked on him kindly, and licked his lips with just the least little tip of his tongue, and brushed the grass back and forward with his tail as he sat, indicating his willingness to give up his place and kiss hands, and make himself generally agreeable, if it were thought desirable. Roger's countenance darkened with the sad and earnest expression which it always wore when business was approached, and he laid his hand gently on his sister's wrist— "I've just been looking at the two turkeys, Raby dear, and I really think it looks very like pip."

"Really?." echoed Miss Barbara.

"I do, indeed, upon my word!"

"Poor things!" exclaimed she; and they looked gravely into one another's eyes.

Roger shook his head, closed his eyes, and with a little sigh, said:

"It's a nasty thing, *pip."*

*"*Awful!" said Miss Barbara.

"I can find nothing wrong in their food; I really, Raby, can't account for it, and I've told Dolly what she ought to do, and she's very careful, you know, and as the food is all right, I hope the others mayn't take it."

"I trust not; and sufficient to the day, Bonnie dear," she replied, brightening up, for she remembered her guests, and she glanced over his wardrobe with approval.

"How handsome you look this evening, Bonnie!" exclaimed his sister, looking at him with a proud smile of affection.

"You must not say that, Raby dear; no, you mustn't, you make me too conceited; no, Raby, you mustn't," replied he, shaking his head and smiling violently.

"I *want* you to look well tonight, and you know why?" she said with a smile and a nod.

"You're always quizzing, Raby: there's nothing, I assure you," laughed Roger rather sheepishly; "now, really, upon my honour."

"You want but this, and you're perfect and she placed a rosebud in his buttonhole.

"Thank you, Raby dear," he said, with a smile, patting her cheek very gently, "you're always so pleasant and he kissed her cheek fondly. "But, really, and upon my honour — well, you won't believe me, you never will, Raby, you're such a rogue."

“By the bye, where’s Charlie?” inquired Miss Barbara, suddenly recollecting.

“Gone to fish, I think; he took my rod and flies; but he knows you expect friends, and he’s sure to be home in time.”

“Yes, I’m sure he will, he *wouldn’t* disappoint us; and I want him and Rachel to see one another; it’s more than three years since they met last,” said Barbara, who was addicted to that romantic school of matchmaking which makes no account of prudence, and had this evening two affairs on her hands — one, the little project she had just suggested; the other, a romance which she had imagined, in which Agnes Marlyn, all unconsciously, and honest Roger Temple, willingly enough, figured as partners.

“Sure never a hall such a galliard did grace!”

It was these romantic situations which quickened her hospitable instincts this evening, and her gentle soul yearned to see them all happy together.

“Here they are, at last!” exclaimed she, joyfully. “Run down, Bonnie, and meet them; fly, darling, and I will go in and ring for tea, and have everything ready by the time you arrive.”

With a throbbing heart honest Roger Temple, at that odd little jog-trot which constituted his mode of “flying,” set forth, and not caring to be unbecomingly blown at his arrival, he subsided, as usual, into a walk, and so smiling gloriously, he approached the two young ladies who were drawing near.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHARLIE MORDANT.

THEIR cheerful welcome over:

"My dear," said Miss Barbara to Rachel, "I'm so glad I've got you here; it was so good of you and Miss Marlyn to come! I told you in my note I had an old friend to meet you; it isn't Bonnie, of course you understood that. It's — *shall* I tell you? Who do you suppose? It's Charlie Mordant; yes, indeed, came on leave yesterday morning. He'd have gone up to pay his respects at Raby, but I wasn't quite sure that your papa would wish it. His uncle — I think there was some unpleasantness — was not a favourite of Mr. Shadwell's; and then Sir Roke Wycherly being his guardian, or patron, or whatever it is, I fancied would not be a recommendation, as I know there had been a coldness there too, and I thought it better we should wait a little and feel our way."

"I really don't know, I think, I'm sure papa would have been very happy, and I know mamma would. We had such a charming walk here, everything looking so beautiful, and we stopped for ever so long, did not we, Agnes, at the stile? We admire this pretty place; it looks so wonderfully, just in these tints, and in the sunset light! If we had brought our pencils and colours we should certainly have stopped there, and made sketches."

"And spoiled our tea, wicked creatures! But it *is* pretty, certainly, quite *beautiful* from some points of view," acquiesced Miss Barbara. "I'm very glad Miss Marlyn saw it to such advantage. Bonnie darling, show Miss Marlyn the photographs."

My fat friend skipped to get the book, and placed it before the object of his admiration, and forthwith the ladies began to discuss the "photos" with animation.

"Bonnie dear, you must find my microscopic photo, you know the one I mean," said Miss Barbara, eagerly. "Yes, thanks; now, here it is, Miss Marlyn; look at it. I'll give you the magnifier presently. Now, examine it closely; is it a human being, or is it a building, or is it the Ten Commandments, or is it a cow?"

If Miss Marlyn had seen how conscious my fat friend, Roger, looked, she would have had an inkling of the truth, but she was politely scrutinising the atom.

"Oh, no!" cried Miss Barbara, "don't turn the back; you shall read that afterwards: do you make out anything?"

"It is so wonderfully minute," said Miss Marlyn, with a pretty frown of puzzle.

"Well, do you give it up?" cried Miss Barbara, with a delighted little signal to Bonnie.

"It looks a little like — is it? — a lighthouse, with the lower part dark, in deep shade, and the upper lighted; is it a lighthouse?"

"Well, what shall I say? It answers some of the purposes of a lighthouse; *I've* found it so, at least; it guides people in uncertainty, and it's a very fine object, *I* think, and it is luminous, and looks bright, always; a lofty, symmetrical structure."

"It can't be a statue, then?" conjectured Agnes.

"Or a water-spout?" suggested Rachel, who was now peeping over Miss Marlyn's shoulder.

"No! it isn't a water-spout; it's nothing so uncertain, nor a statue, though it might make a very fine one, I think," answered Miss Barbara.

"It would make a statue! then it is a block of white marble, *I* guess, with the lower part in shade," said Rachel.

Roger moved a little, uneasily.

"Well, that's your guess; and what do *you* say, Miss Marlyn, you must fix on something — anything, just for a guess," said Miss Barbara.

"Give her the glass, Raby darling," murmured Roger, who was in a painful state of bashful excitement, and wished the ordeal over.

"I'll tell you what I think it is," said Miss Marlyn, in this sudden light, forgetting her data, "it's Kemble as Hamlet; the picture in' the National Gallery, with the skull. I fell in love with it!"

Here Roger changed colour a little, and cleared his voice, as if about to say something.

"Not a word, Bonnie, for your life," entreated his sister.

"Well that's *your* guess, an auspicious guess," said Miss Barbara, who had been rubbing the little lens in her handkerchief, and now placed it in Agnes Marlyn's taper fingers.

The young lady took it, applied it, and beheld honest Roger, looking more than commonly fat, in evening costume, with a white waistcoat, and smiling with all his might full in her face. An incredulous little shock for a moment expressed itself in Miss Marlyn's countenance, and then came an irrepressible fit of laughter.

"It's a horrid thing," said poor Bonnie, smiling plaintively. "I know you think it frightful."

"Tell me, dear Miss Marlyn, what amuses you so much?" inquired Miss Temple, a little anxiously.

"Thinking of our absurd guesses — a lighthouse, a water-spout, a skull in Hamlet's hand — how dreary and awful! and now it turns out to be something so cheerful and happy," replied Miss Marlyn; and then added in a sad tone, leaning back in her chair, so that Bonnie only could catch the murmured accents— "so very cheerful and happy, that sad people wonder how it *can* be so! Don't you think, Mr. Temple, that people who are always tolerably happy, are a sort of blessed monsters, who have reason to be thankful to heaven, above all others?"

"Yes, indeed!" said honest Roger, affecting a little sigh.

"Then you suffer — you — who seemed to me so lighthearted. You, also, have your secret griefs, like others?"

I am afraid that Miss Marlyn was quizzing him. And Roger, who was one of the serenest and cheeriest of mortals, was led into a silent prevarication, for the good fellow, for a moment, tried to look miserable, and sighed again. But what was he to do? Misery seemed to interest Miss Marlyn, and could he forfeit his chance?

"And what are these initials?" asked Miss Marlyn, changing the subject suddenly, and looking on the back of the photograph— "B. S. T.; they are yours, are they?"

"Yes, *Roger* — Roger Temple is my name!" said he, with an indescribable softness.

"*Roger?*" she repeated; "I thought it was *Bonaparte!* I've certainly heard your sister call you Bonaparte, haven't I?" said Miss Marlyn, cruelly, I am afraid.

"Oh! I think it must have been Bonnie," said honest Roger, with an ingenuous blush; "an old-pet — I mean *nick* — name that she is fond of. *I* call her Raby, still; I do, indeed!"

"Then you were children together!" said the young lady, much interested.

"Yes, indeed; playmates in the nursery," said Roger, with a sigh, and a smile of innocent sentiment, and his head a little on one side, as people sometimes incline their heads in such fond retrospects.

"Our maid, long ago, used to call Bonaparte, *Bony,* and I suppose it was that, but I really was quite sure I had heard your sister call you Bonaparte!"

"What about me?" inquired Miss Temple.

"Only a mistake of mine. I've been asking the meaning of these initials, and now I know the 'B' and the 'T,' of course; but what does the 'S' mean?" asked Miss Marlyn, innocently.

"*Segrave*," said Miss Raby, shortly, and looked very grave.

Roger dropped his eyes, and coughed, and flushed a little, uneasily; and a momentary silence overtook the party.

I only know that, in the baptismal registry, "E. S." is expounded to mean "Roger Sidebotham." The calling these names to a helpless infant was, in this case, no wanton cruelty. The old original Roger Sidebotham was a bachelor, a City personage, and East India director, who obtruded himself as poor Bonnie's godfather, and accompanied the proffer of his spiritual parentage with some mysterious intimations of an intoxicating character.

But he married; and compensated his godson with a cadetship in the Company's service.

The dream of a million was gone, but the brand of "Sidebotham" clave to him like the leprosy of Naaman the Syrian. It galled him. He hated it. It was one of the very few bitter drops in that pleasant sillabub which filled his cup of life. It certainly is not a pretty name. But he had brooded over it, and grown morbid, and had come to abhor and dread it as a spirit does the cabalistic word that has power to degrade and torture.

It was some relief to him when his sister Barbara, in her indignation, insisted that he should never sign himself "Sidebotham" more, but take instead the name of his admirable uncle, Segrave, who had left him a rentcharge of twenty pounds a year.

Still "Sidebotham" weighed upon him like an evil secret, which, sooner or later, time would bring to light: and thus it was he winced and coloured under Miss Marlyn's harmless but cruel question.

"Segrave is the second name," repeated Miss Barbara, who could not endure to leave her little speech, even for a moment, in the attitude of an untruth: “that is, *at present;* formerly, I mean originally, it was different.”

“Oh!” said Miss Marlyn, turning again with a gentle interest to Roger Temple.

“And what, then, does the initial ‘S’ really mean?”

Miss Marlyn’s question, I have sometimes thought, was pressed with a cruel knowledge of facts.

“Don’t ask, Miss Marlyn — pray don’t!” said honest Roger, very much flurried; and, dropping his voice to the tenderest murmur, he continued: “I must, if you desire it: I can refuse you nothing: but you won’t; I can’t describe how it would pain me, I hate the name so much; and I know the effect that names have in prejudicing people. I’ve felt it myself; I know it; I *have* felt it myself; and I know, if you were to hate it as much as I do, you would always associate me with it: it is such a shabby, odious name. Side—“

He was as near as possible letting it slip out, and looked at her now with his round, innocent eyes in such woeful terror that, in spite of her efforts, she did laugh a tremulous little laugh.

“I don’t understand you, Mr. Temple. What *can* you mean by that, and looking at me with such an expression? You have really excited my curiosity, and I *must* know what you mean — really.”

“Ah! no, Miss Marlyn — *pray,* don’t!”

Just at that moment, to his indescribable relief, an interruption occurred, by the entrance of a tall, handsome young man, of a frank and animated countenance.

Miss Barbara had announced his step in the hall, with a sudden smile, and —

“Here comes Charlie!” and, as he entered, At last! Charlie, at last!”

“I’m awfully late, I’m afraid; but it really isn’t my fault. The boy you sent with me, Roger, brought me such a round! We had never been there before. I really thought we never should have got home again. I don’t know which blundered most. Nobody could have told which of us was the guide.”

The end of his sentence he spoke a little slowly, for his eyes had wandered to Miss Marlyn, and from her to Rachel; and looking still at her, with eyes that lighted up suddenly, he asked, in a low tone:

“Is not that Rachel Shadwell?”

The young man was instantly at her side as she stood by the piano, that wonderful relic of Miss Barbara's youth, where she had been turning over a volume of quaint Arcadian songs, full of Daphne and Chloe, and flight and pursuit, and pipes and echo, such as were sung a generation before Barbara Temple, though, in her oldfashioned childhood, she had learned to trill them.

"I'm so delighted: I had not an ideal" said he, a swarthy glow on his handsome face answering the brilliant blush of the girl, who was smiling very merrily, and, holding her pretty hand, he continued looking in her beautiful blue eyes:

"You do look so — well, Rachel, and you've grown so tall; — I'm so glad you're here!"

"I *thought* it would be a surprise — ha, ha!" said Miss Barbara, gleefully, "and to *some* one" — with a very arch glance at Charlie— "a rather pleasant one! Has she not grown very much? — she's just the nicest height in the world — taller than *I,* I'm quite certain."

"Oh, no!" disclaimed Rachel, who, whatever she might think, was obliged to disavow that presumption.

"You have," said the young man, in very low tones. "I could hardly believe it; and I think just that height is so beautiful!"

"I should be more obliged," she said, laughing, "if Miss Temple had not just paid me that pretty compliment." Indeed, could anything have been prettier than the round and slender figure of the girl, as she leaned on the old piano, that had played in its day so much music for the young?

"How pretty they look together!" whispered Miss Barbara in the ear of her brother Roger. "But I know two who would make a still prettier couple — in *my* mind," she added, with a fond little laugh and a tiny tap on his sunburnt cheek. And honest Roger, smiling with bashful delight, kissed his sister's cheek stealthily, whispering in her ear, "Now, don't; you mustn't quiz me, Raby."

It was in my mind a delightful craze that kept these people young. I have seen conscientious people slyly trying to undeceive others into mortification, and to rob them logically of their blessed blunders, forgetting what a mysterious world it is, and how much of our enjoyments depend upon illusion. Let, then, that tenderest love that is a little blind linger still within the sacred walls of home; and cherish the absurd but beautiful mistakes that exercise the kindly admirations, and celestial affections, and unconscious gratitudes that make its spell remembered in distance, and after the flight of years, like an early gleam of Paradise.

Good, active housewife, kindly Barbara, of the wheezy piano and loving dreams, what a good mission is thine! What would thy brothers there be without thee — resenting everything for *them,* nothing for thyself? Though Stour Temple laughs, I think it pleases him that the person who places his slippers at the study fire, and pours out his tea, believes implicitly that he ought to be Archbishop of Canterbury — believes always what an unjust outer world it is, and shakes her head, and musters her powers of patience, when she remembers that her high-spirited, gifted, handsome brother Roger has returned from India without a fortune, or a title, or even a colonelcy.

He was a failure; but was he ever allowed to feel or even to perceive it? Stour Temple, also, with faculties, and reading, and energy, was here a castaway, upon a desolate strand, and growing old; but was not the sunshine of the same admiration making the air about him cheerful and warm? Oh! beautiful hallucinations of women's affections, utterly wild and unjust, sweet as angels' consolations, balm of our wounded self-complacency, still seeing a beauty and youth under the hollow mask of years, and still predicting good times to come, after the game is quite lost and over, and harbouring a delightful confidence in the talents that are — nowhere. How many a wounded wayfarer by the bleak paths of life would break his heart and die were it not for thy misplaced admiration, thine inextinguishable enthusiasm and cheerful mercy, pouring in ever the oil of an unconscious flattery, and the blessed wine of hope!

CHAPTER XV.

GOODNIGHT.

“I WAS going to say I should not have known you, Rachel,” said Charlie Mordant; “but I can’t say that, for I think I should know you anywhere and almost at any distance — ever so far away. But it is nearly two years since I saw you, and you have grown so tall, and yet you are little Rachel Shadwell still — the same, yet not the same, but always the same to me, and I know I’m talking nonsense; but I know what I mean, though I see you are laughing at me.” He smiled, and was speaking very low.

“*Was* I laughing?” said the pretty girl, who was leaning lightly on the ancient grand piano. “I always laugh when a sentence gets entangled — particularly a fine one. So perhaps I did laugh, though I really wasn’t conscious.”

“You never said — well, no matter,” he began, and she saw him glance quickly round, and, being satisfied that their little talk was not overheard, he resumed, “and you never said you were glad to see me. Very ill-natured of you, I think, considering what old friends we are, and that I’ve been halfway over the world since I saw you; isn’t it?”

“Why, yes, of course I’m glad to see you.”

“It’s very odd what a pleasure you take — I don’t mean you, in particular, but all of you — in bewildering and mocking us men. I never know when you’re in earnest. You’re so awfully insincere, and take such a delight in it. What can be the pleasure of it? It *is* so odd!”

“If one’s known to be insincere, one’s incapable of deceiving any longer, and nobody has any right to complain, don’t you see?” urged Rachel, ingeniously.

“Well, I’m not good at arguing, but I know this: I wish you’d honestly say you’re glad to see me, for I’m awfully glad to see you.”

“Yes, honestly, I am glad to see you.”

“Well, that would be very pleasant if you did not laugh while you say it; but no matter. I’m very glad to see *you.* I’ve been nearly two days here, and I assure you it has seemed like two months, for Miss Temple would not allow me to go to Raby to see you and Mrs. Shadwell. I don't pretend to say why, but you know if she wasn't a little fanciful and peremptory sometimes, she would be too perfect. She's the dearest old woman in the whole world, and I forgive her all she has made me suffer; but she would not allow me to pay my respects, either, and here I've been pining, and now comes this little compensation, and I'm so happy! And I could not have believed you could have grown so much; you are quite a tall girl, Rachel, and so — so very — but you were always pretty — lovely, I think, and as saucy as ever."

Rachel laughed again at this plain-spoken compliment.

"I've grown so awfully brown — like a gipsy, almost. I suppose you didn't know me when I came in?" said he.

"'Oh yes; I should have known you perfectly, but great arrivals are always proclaimed beforehand, and Miss Temple took care to tell us all who was coming, when we heard you knocking the hats and sticks about in the hall."

"You'll soon be a young lady of the world, Rachel; you'll be coming out and all that. I suppose you'll go to the hunt ball this year, won't you?" he asked.

"I don't suppose I shall; I don't know, really. Papa does not like our neighbours, I think; he lives so entirely to himself, quite shut up, but *you* know— "

"Yes, I know. What lots of people he does hate, to be sure! That is, I mean, you know, I don't think he likes any of the county people. I remember very well how he used to avoid them two years ago, before I went away, and I know some of them did not like him; and so, I suppose, he's as solitary as ever. How awfully slow you must find it at Raby!"

"My aunt Pleydel wrote to mamma offering to take me out next year, if she would let me go to her."

"Oh yes; she's in the centre of all that isn't she?"

"Yes, I believe so; but I don't think I should like it. I don't think I could endure that kind of life."

"A country miss, is that it? But you'll find you'll get into it wonderfully; you all do when you have the opportunity. I hear you are going to have a visitor at Raby."

"Oh yes! Sir Roke Wycherly."

"He's my guardian, you know."

"No, I didn't know."

"I dare say he forgets it himself; though, no, he can hardly do that, for he signs the cheques twice a year for my annuity. I sha'n't be of age, you know, till I'm five and twenty, and then I succeed to — nothing!" and Charles Mordant laughed as cheerfully as "if nothing" meant ten thousand a year. "When my second horse broke his leg in India, I assure you I really don't know what I should have done, if it hadn't been for that capital fellow over there," and he nodded very kindly towards Roger, who was talking some very soft nonsense to Miss Marlyn. "I met two or three fellows that knew him in India — by Jove, how they did speak of him! I never heard a fellow so praised; they all *loved* him. There was a poor fellow with a young wife who got into a scrape — put his name on bills or something for a fellow, and was let in for five hundred pounds, and would have had to sell out if Roger there had not pulled him through — he's an awfully nice fellow, though he's such a guy. I wish Sir Roke was half as nice, but they say he's an awful old scamp."

"Sir Roke Wycherly!"

"Oh yes; there are all sorts of stories about him. They say he killed an opera dancer in one of his tempers at Paris."

"Oh, come! you don't believe that?"

"Well, no, I don't, perhaps. But anyhow, it shows what a devil a fellow must be when things of that kind are seriously whispered about him. Do look at Roger — he's awfully gone about that girl — very pretty she is — Miss Marlyn — isn't that her name?"

"Yes; Agnes Marlyn. I think her perfectly lovely, and she is such a sweet girl — charming!" said Rachel.

"So Roger seems to think. What a muff he is! The best fellow in the world; but he *is* a muff, and I think I should not like him half so well, by Jove, if he *wasn't* a muff," said Charlie, who was watching with an amused interest the progress of his wooing, in which he smirked and blushed like a schoolboy.

"She looks attentive, doesn't she? and she makes play with her eyes. Very fine eyes she has got, by Jove! He's making an impression; I swear to you he is."

"I'm glad you think so," she laughed. "He couldn't do better, and if Agnes is to marry, I should be so glad she was settled so near us."

"Look at him — do look at him! He's so bashful and enamoured! it is quite delightful!" said Mordant. "What fun that girl's having! she's greening poor Roger so awfully — I mean, making such a fool of him."

"Oh, do you think so?" dissented Rachel.

"Think! To be sure she is."

"You don't know her; that's the reason you say so."

Charlie laughed.

So that evening his romance was prospering with honest Roger. The *purpureum lumen* of his youth glowed round about him in a Tyrian halo. The seven ages of man to him were a myth. He had stopped short at the third, where youth indites verses and sighs like a furnace. No man was ever more unconscious of his years. Like the good monk in the old legend, who followed the song of the celestial bird, from bush to brake, from hillock to running stream, over bosky uplands and through rocky glens — led on by its warblings from hour to hour, till the day was spent and sunset came, and, returning to the convent door, found that fifty years had flown, and his life was over — so our friend, beguiled by the music of a wonderfully happy and loving soul, went unsuspecting and sweetly cheated on and on, and the flight of his years seemed to him but as an hour. And old age, when it overtakes him, will lead him by a flowery path to the grave, still incredulous.

And, now the hour of leavetaking had come, gay and kindly voices, and kisses often exchanged in the hall with Miss Barbara, and a lawful consignment of the young wayfarers to the time-honoured escort of honest Roger Temple, and of his subaltern, Charlie Mordant, succeeded one another, and away went that pleasant party on their moonlighted way to Raby.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MEETING AT WYNDERFEL.

THREE stories high in the roofless walls of Wynderfel is the stone-shafted window from which hangs, like a beckoning arm, a long tendril of ivy. Over that window-stone a poor Lady Mildred ever so many years ago, threw herself, or was thrown — dreadful, whichever way. It is still pointed out, and called the Lady's Window. You can see the quiet stars through the stone-framing in which, once, like a ghost, she stood for a while, and vanished with a shriek. It is something of a Cumnor Hall story.

Mark Shadwell, the philosopher, was entering into the spirit of his bivouac on the limestone block, under the walls of Wynderfel. He swallowed the thimbleful of brandy that was left in the flask, and lighted a third cigar; and admired the thin film of silver that the moon was throwing over the singular landscape.

The philosopher was looking up at the Lady's Window, thinking idly of poor Lady Mildred. "A devilish fine girl, I dare say!" And conjecturing what her style might have been — dark or blonde, with blue eyes or brown. — and thinking what he would have done had he been the cavalier who used to bribe the porter, and enter the courtyard by night; and he lowered his eyes to the empty arch in which that ill-starred lover had stood so long ago, and he saw the figure of a horseman standing in it motionless and black against the moonlight.

Up rose Mark Shadwell, grasping the barrel of his gun hard in his hand, and called "Hallo!" rather fiercely.

"Ha!" cried the horseman; and there ensued a little silence.

"I say, who are you?" challenged the stoic.

"Ho! — Ah! — dear! Mr. Shadwell? So it is!" exclaimed the voice of Carmel Sherlock.

"And what the devil brings *you* here?" answered his patron.

"Returning from the mills, sir. All right — everything," answered Carmel, in his odd, gentle way.

"Why, this isn't your way — unless you mean to ride over the stile — is it?" replied Shadwell, tartly.

"Near — only near — not quite, sir; but I longed to see Wynderfel. I could not refrain. I hope it is no harm. I longed to see Wynderfel once more," replied Carmel Sherlock.

"Well, I suppose you've seen all you're likely to see, by this time — and there's no good in sitting there stock still, like a caricature of the sentry at the Horseguards," said Mark, who resented being startled.

"Under the archway — yes, sir. But this, sir, *this* — these are places of power — where a spell is left — or a spirit is held in prison — the stone hand with the key in it, over the gate of the Alhambra — this arch, sir — you know the inscription on the stone of this doorway — that was carved by a spirit in torment — a patient hand — the perseverance of passionate misery, looking backward on eternal remorse, and forward on eternal despair. It has the thought that came with Mildred here, and returns with the gaze-lady, and is mixed with my fate, sir, and yours — and has blighted your house — and I feel the presence of the spirit while I read it, and loiter under this arch." If Mark had not been smoking, he would probably have stopped Carmel very early in this meditation.

On a broad stone by this doorway, cut deep and rudely, like an inscription on an ancient prison wall, anyone may read these odd quotations: —

Longe fac ab eâ biam tuam. Ne des alienis honorem tuurn, et annos tuos crudeli. Dedes ejus descendunt in mortem, & ad inferos gressus illius penetrant.

The meaning of which Latin words we find thus expressed in our bibles: —

"Remove thy way far from her."
"Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel."
"Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell."

"Should you like to ride home? You'll find the horse quite fresh, sir. Will you take him?" said Carmel.

"No, thanks; you'd better get home yourself. You're always turning up in out-of-the-way places. By Jove! in the days of Wynderfel they'd have taken you for a warlock, and burnt you some fine morning. You never do anything like anyone else. What the devil's the good of being so queer?"

"Queer! am I, sir? Well, I dare say; but I only wanted to look at the old house. I've been dreaming such odd dreams about the Lady's Window, and all sorts of faces, so confused. I wished to look at the place again to try and understand them, and what it all may mean."

"Well, if I were you, I'd come down in the daylight, or get my bed down here, and sleep, if you like it better. Capital place for dreaming dreams and seeing visions; but just for tonight, I'd get home and have some supper." Carmel Sherlock had dismounted as Shadwell spoke these jeering words, and led his horse across the intervening space.

"I know Sir Roke Wycherly's face, sir. I saw him once when I was at Sidney, at Cambridge. I wish I did not dream at all, or could remember my dreams clearly. *His* face is always there, and there was something last night I saw about the Lady's Window up there," he pointed with his finger at it; "something, but I can't recollect it — I can't. Only he was there, and you, sir — you *were*, my God! climbing with a body like a black monkey's, and your own face."

"Ah! thank you," said Mark Shadwell, with a nod.

"I hate them. It was quite clear the whole thing as I dreamed it; but it all went to pieces as I awoke. I'd give an eye or a hand, sir, almost, I could gather it up again, for I know it's true, whatever it was, and I understood it — true and dreadful, sir. My face and forehead and hair were wet, and I cold as death when I wakened. It's worth knowing, if I could but recover it!"

His fingers were laid on Mark Shadwell's arm as he whispered this, and his pale countenance and large eyes gazed into his face with a near and frightened scrutiny, as if imploring a hint or a conjecture.

"What the devil are you afraid of?" asked Shadwell, with a laugh that sounded oddly in his own ears. "Dreams, indeed! Pretty staff! By Jove, I often wonder you don't set up for a fortuneteller, or a prophet, or a new

Evangelist. Pity to put your candle under a bushel when you might make such a good thing of it."

"I thought, perhaps, I might recover it if I looked at this place; but no, no, I can't find the clue; these voices in the air, sir, if you don't write down what they say while it's in your ear, you lose it. You may as well follow the wind or try to paint the clouds of last year, or seek for a smile of Cleopatra; it's all gone. But oh, sir, I wish he wasn't coming!"

"Yes, *Wycherly,* it's very alarming, isn't it?" acquiesced Shadwell, with one of his ironies, as he watched the smoke which he had just blown from his lips dispersing.

"Sir Roke Wycherly, baronet," resumed Sherlock. "Yes, it's bad — it *is* bad; there's something bad about it, sir, his coming here. I fear him — I misdoubt him, I do — I fear him," murmured Carmel Sherlock, looking up at Lady Mildred's window, and through it at a lonely planet shining clear in the sky; "I can't win it back, any way; it won't come: it's enough to make a man mad."

"Quite enough. I don't wonder you're so much afraid of Wycherley; he *is* such a formidable fellow, with his asthma, and his dyspepsia, and his drops, and his caudle — enough to frighten a giant, by Jove!" observed Mr. Shadwell, getting up. "You may as well get home, and I'll talk to you by and by."

"The horse?" said Carmel, again offering the bridle to his patron.

"No, I'll walk, I tell you — I'd rather," he said; and Carmel Sherlock, throwing first a dreamy look around him, and then looking down in thought upon the ground, led the horse away through the archway, and Shadwell soon heard the clink of his hoofs as he trotted briskly along the little by-road below the old walls of Wynderfel toward Raby Hall.

"That fellow will be stark mad some of these days; by Jove! he is mad! He'll be up in a madhouse so sure as I stand here. I wonder how long the poor devil will last before he breaks out!" muttered Shadwell, in that vein of soliloquy which was customary with him whenever he had just closed an interview with his eccentric assistant; and having settled this point with himself, as he did at least once every day, he watched the flight of a bat for a while, and had even a thought of shooting it, only he did not wish the trouble of loading. Then he reflected what a cross-grained world it was, and how he had been twice interrupted in that most unlikely spot, which three persons seldom passed in a week, and then he began to think of Roke Wycherly.

"It's an odd thing, devilish odd — that fellow's always maundering about here, and dreaming and fancying some mischief is brewing; and I can't get the same thing, by Jove! out of *my* head either. And hang me if I can think of any mischief he can do me. What can he do to injure me? If he were thinking of a lawsuit, it could do him no earthly good coming down here. Inquiries — evidence — stuff! He's no such ass as to think he could do it. That's the work of some fellow bred to attorney business. Devil a thing can he do to hurt me by coming down here; and yet, ever since I opened his note, it seems to me that I've been as mad, by Jove! as Carmel Sherlock, almost. I feel there's some d —— d mischief gathering, and I can neither shape nor prevent it."

With his gun over his shoulder, Mark Shadwell mounted the stile, intending to pursue the lonely walk to Raby. But at the summit of it he paused, looking over his shoulder, for he heard voices approaching from the other side of the smooth sward in front of Wynderfel.

Female voices sounded pleasantly in the dewy night air, and there were men's voices also. He guessed whose they were.

"Rachel, is that you?" he called. There was no answer. The talkers were absorbed in each other and themselves, and the merry voices and laughter still approached.

"Miss Agnes is there also," he commented, in an undertone. "Pretty Miss Marlyn! what are you saying, I wonder? That's young Mordant, of course; yes, seeing them home.

I wonder they didn't drive. Well, I'm not sorry; it will help to prevent me from thinking as I go."

So down he came from the stile, calling "Rachel" again as he went; and soon, with an answer, the party of four came round the distant corner of the old building, and Mark Shadwell greeted them and joined in the walk homeward.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MOONLIT WALK — ANOTHER STEP.

THERE was a momentary chill and shadow as Mark Shadwell joined the party. The garrulous merriment subsided, and a short silence came, during which nothing was heard but the tread of their feet on the pathway.

Mark Shadwell inquired for Miss Temple — asked Charlie Mordant when he had come, and how long he was to stay — asked honest Roger how the cob he had bought at Raby did his work.

And with these questions and answers, the conversation flagged again, and the party walked on in silence.

"Five abreast is a little too much for this path, isn't it?" said Shadwell. "You shall lead. Go on, Temple; you and Mordant take care of my daughter, and I'll take charge of Miss Marlyn."

And, in compliance with this order, his daughter and honest Roger, with a longing, lingering look and a great sigh, and young Mordant, walked on, while he and Miss Marlyn fell a little behind.

Mark Shadwell strode on beside Miss Marlyn. He did not speak; a topic somehow did not turn up at once. He saw from the comers of his eyes her elegant figure moving beside him, with a little space between; he saw her features, too, clearly enough in the moonlight, and that she was looking straight before her, rather downward as she walked, and very gravely.

"Rather a damper, I'm afraid, my appearance just now? You were talking very merrily, I think, as you came round the corner of the old house there," said Mark Shadwell, after a little silence.

"Yes — that is, I believe we were," said Miss Marlyn.

"And what was all the fun about?" he inquired.

"I really forget, sir— " she hesitated.

"Now, you're not to be swing me, do you mind," he urged, in a low key. "I told you before, that your poor father and I were very, very dear friends. If you want to vex me, of course I can't help it; but unless you do, you really mustn't treat me so very formally. I sometimes think, Miss Marlyn, that you are a very haughty young lady."

"Haughty! — really?" replied she.

"Yes, haughty," he repeated.

"We never know ourselves, I believe; but that does surprise me, Mr. Shadwell," she said, looking downward on the path before her; and Shadwell fancied he could, with his side glance, detect a trace of an enigmatic smile.

"They smile to themselves, when they think we're not looking; what are they dreaming of, I wonder, when they do it? It's very becoming," he thought.

"I tell you what, now — you know you're my secretary, and we are on confidential terms, and you must listen to me — and I do say, you are as haughty a little queen as ever swayed the sceptre of empire."

"You don't think so, sir?" said Miss Agnes Marlyn, very gravely.

"There! *sir* again! Well, no matter; I say I do. I'm quite serious. I'm a reader of faces and of character, and understand the psychology of gesture and motion also, and I say that pride is your strength, and — weakness."

Miss Marlyn threw upon him in the moonlight another earnest look of inquiry, which was he thought, wonderfully handsome. He looked at her a little more directly and smiled; whereupon her brief gaze was averted again, her dark clouded eyes were lowered to the path before them, and he could see her long eyelashes; and he looked a little while in silence, and then he said:

"The reason — one reason — why I say you are so haughty, is this: that you keep me so at arm's length. All very well, of course, if I were a young jackanape; but I'm not — I'm an old fellow."

There was no remark.

"Old enough, at all events, to have that daughter," and he nodded toward Rachel.

"And, besides, even if I had never known or cared for your poor father — who, I've told you very often, was my most intimate and dear friend — I am, and I feel it, and I wish to Heaven *you* could understand it too — I am, in virtue of your position under my roof, your guardian. I'm not jesting; I'm perfectly serious. I consider you as my ward; and you'll see, should you ever need it, there's no trouble I should shrink from, no exertion I'm not ready to make in your behalf. I know it's easy to say all this, and not very likely, you'll think, perhaps, that my services will ever be needed; but, by Jove! I mean what I say, and I wish they were, that I might prove it."

"You are too good, Mr. Shadwell," said she: and the low and very sweet notes in which these words were spoken, he fancied, touched him.

"Yes, you'll see it; I regard you as a second daughter — I do, I assure you."

Miss Marlyn made no answer.

"And, in some respects, you could fill a place in my confidence, which a daughter cannot," he said, in a very earnest, but a lower key.

Miss Marlyn looked at him for the first time quite direct, with a wondering and almost startled glance.

"I do not understand, sir," she said.

"No, of course — how should you?" said he. "But there are lots of things I can't talk to Rachel about, even if she had sense to make it worth the trouble, on account of her mother. Why, you look as if I was going to talk treason and blasphemy, whereas I was really only going to speak very sober good sense."

And saying this, Mr. Shadwell laughed a little, and paused for a reply: but Miss Agnes offered no remark, and looked down as before.

"What I mean is this — you see I'm talking quite frankly to you; as frankly, in fact, as I expect you always speak to me — I say, what I mean is just this: there are subjects on which I can't talk to Rachel, just because they involve a discussion of her mother's prejudices and unreasonableness — and she has more than one woman's share of both, *I* can tell you — you'll understand better the sort of thing I mean by and by. You see, I mean to be outspoken, and hide nothing from my secretary; other fellows would mince the matter, and take a roundabout way of conveying their meaning; but with you, I go straight to the point. She's delicate, she's peevish, she's exacting."

"She's very kind to me, sir," said Miss Marlyn, sadly.

"Of course she's kind — of course she is; I'd like to see any one in my house treat you otherwise than kindly. But I mean, and you'll find it, she's no more good in the house than a picture, and she's a sort of worry beside; and she can't, she never could, enter into my feelings. I was an ambitious fellow — I had plans for life — I wasn't duller than other fellows who have got to the top of the wheel since — but she was all against it; such a drag, a dead weight, I never could move — all for a quiet life, and, by Jove! she has got it — ha, ha! If it hadn't been for her, I'd have been member for Halford twelve years ago; but she was in the way — a woman can knock those things on the head, you know. Now Miss Agnes Marlyn, if you marry a fellow with any 'go' in him, and any brains, while you live, don't tether him down by the leg to a post at the back of a rabbit warren, as you see me here." This was a theme on which Mark Shadwell was more eloquent than exact. Perhaps his poor wife, in her ill-requited idolatry, had pleaded against his early maunderings about public life. But she bad not bad much of her own way in other matters; and I suspect that Mark's earnestness, or, at least, his opportunities, had not been quite so inviting or so strenuous as he chose to believe.

"I don't think, however, Miss Marlyn, that you are the kind of person who would want sympathy with a daring ambition."

For one moment Miss Marlyn glanced upon him a kindling look — something wild, fiery, admiring. It was like the last face seen in a dream as a man awakens, gone quite in a moment; for the young lady's look was again downcast, almost sad; but that wild, glad, momentary look haunted him — it was inspiring.

"She's wonderful!" he thought. "By Jove! a glance like the pythoness! She's a fine creature! There's no woman worth a fig that has not a vein of the tigress in her."

He walked beside her, quite silent again for a little way, and thought how handsome she looked. That look of strange admiration seemed burning in the darkening sky, on the grass, on the dark background of distant foliage — wherever he gazed.

"I say no one can get on alone — it is not meant; one's own applause won't carry you through — one must have sympathy. I might have been differently placed in the world now, if I had secured it," said Mark Shadwell, aloud; " and I can't tell you how much obliged I am for — well — for your consenting so goodhumouredly to be bored with my confidences. You understand now what I mean? I wish I could requite your kindness any way. You can hardly estimate the extent of it, because you have never known what it is to be in a solitude like this, without a human being to talk to upon the very subjects that most interest you — and I'm a fellow that can't talk to reeds and purling streams — and you have no idea how a secret preys on one, like that animal, by Jove! the Spartan fellow hid under his robe, and that devoured his flesh while he concealed it."

Mark Shadwell talked as if he was immensely grateful. He felt, on the contrary, that he was conferring an immeasurable obligation. He was thinking how flattered the young lady must be by this graceful condescension of his confidence. He wished to please her. The philosopher may have suspected some little sentiment mingling in his goodwill; and if there was, why should he not amuse himself a little? Heaven knew he meant no harm! he knew himself too, he hoped. Had he not outlived his follies? Of course it is pleasant to look at a beautiful girl, as you look at a flower or a picture. His statuesque admiration was very free from danger; he was not like the poor little woman who fell in love with the Apollo Belvidere.

They were now approaching the timber that groups high and dark about Raby Hall.

"And so," said he, "it is a bargain. In all your plans, and in all your troubles, whenever they come — and may Heaven avert them for many a day! — I'm to be your adviser and helper, to the extent of my poor power, do you see? and you, in return, are to listen to all my wretched secrets, and give me *your* advice — instinct is better than experience, it is always true — and we are to be true friends — real friends; and I shall keep no secrets from my secretary, and she's to make me her father-confessor: so that's agreed!"

And with these words, drawing nearer to her side, he took her hand and pressed it.

"It *is* agreed, isn't it?" he repeated in a lower key and more earnestly.

She laughed a little, and said "Yes and he thought she blushed as she laughed. Yes, she did blush: he was sure she blushed a little; and she did not draw away her hand, as Becky Sharp or Miss Jenny Bell might have done. "There were none of their false pruderies — no leaven of the shark in Miss Marlyn. She was genuine he thought.

That little blush was like the sparkle and flush of champagne in his veins and in his brain, as he went to his study that night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LETTER CONCERNING MISS MARLYN.

MARK SHADWELL knew that Sir Roke Wycherly had a sly taste for satire, and he had no fancy to figure more amusingly than he could help in the pleasant stories he was sure to tell of his visit to Raby. With therefore as much activity as a proud man might, and with some grumbling and some sneering, he pushed on preparations for the reception of this kinsman, whom, as we know, he neither loved in his heart nor spared in his talk.

The evening after his moonlit walk, a letter reached him from Sir Roke. It terminated suspense as to the reality of his intentions, by fixing a day for his arrival.

He had begun to think that something had happened to change Sir Roke's plans. He had been better pleased than his pride would allow him to confess to any one, that there was a chance of escaping this visit altogether; and had the letter been one to tell him that on a certain day an execution would be in his house, it could hardly have left, for some minutes after its perusal, a more disagreeable impression.

"That mad fellow, Carmel, has made me as nervous as a sick old woman, with his croaking. This comes of living in a solitude, with no one but rabbits and women and madmen to talk to. What the devil *can* it signify whether Roke Wycherly comes, or no? He's not a ghost, or an evil spirit, or even a conjurer; a commonplace fellow, with nothing in him but money and selfishness. Well, he says he'll come — and so he will, and he'll go — and there's an end."

And thus framing his mental protest against the auguries of Carmel Sherlock, he rose from his chair, and thrust Sir Roke's letter into his pocket, with contempt in his countenance, and an odd misgiving at his heart.

There was among the letters on this occasion a French one, addressed, in a little round hand, and with very florid capitals, to "Madame Shadwell," which Mark took the liberty, without hesitation, of opening.

It was from the principal of the French school, and concerned Miss Marlyn.

“My secretary, by Jove! Let us see.”

And thus saying, with an altered countenance, he read this official communication.

He now recollected that his wife’s application to the mistress of the boarding-school, for information respecting the young lady’s qualifications, had been only provisionally answered by a sort of deputy, who had spoken in the highest terms of her. Mark scanned this supplemental letter with a keen curiosity.

The principal of the establishment had been absent for some time, it seemed, in consequence of ill-health, at Vichy. She apologised for the long delay, and proceeded to answer Madame Shadwell’s inquiries one by one.

It struck him that this letter was much colder, and more guarded, than that which had come from Madame de la Perriere’s representative. With respect to intelligence and accomplishments, indeed, it spoke of her much in the same strain; but with regard to those moral qualities about which inquiry had been made, there was a kind of reserve that rather piqued than alarmed his curiosity. Madame de la Perriere had nothing to censure in the morals of Mademoiselle Agnes Marlyn, and, though she was still a very young person, she trusted that in her new situation she would be steady, and approve herself worthy of confidence.

As to whether Mademoiselle Agnes Marlyn was likely to grow weary of her present position in consequence of its solitude, she did not feel herself competent to pronounce. But for a person so young as mademoiselle, she thought a secluded place much more desirable than one of a different stamp, and would certainly advise no visiting or other relaxation of the rules of her residence in Madame Shadwell’s house. And she thought that madame would find that the accustomed quietude of her daily life would conduce to the young lady’s efficiency in her situation.

He read these passages several times over. He could detect, nothing positive in them. Their tone, however, persuaded him that Miss Agnes had required a stiff rein while under Madame de la Perriere’s authority.

“But then she says she has nothing to censure. The pretty rogue has been just wild enough to cause uneasiness, and there she was pulled up. I’ll go into the schoolroom and talk to her a bit.”

So resolved Mr. Shadwell, and, entering that room, found Miss Marlyn alone at her desk.

The young lady rose as he entered, and laid down her pen.

"Dear me! what a reverential courtesy!" said he, laughing. "What has become of Rachel?"

"Mrs. Shadwell sent for her. Shall I call her?" said the young lady, with another little reverence, and moving towards the door.

"On no account," he replied. "I don't require to look at that great girl to be reminded how old I am, and I am not so often favoured with a *tête-à-tête,* that I should wish to cut it short in a moment. Sir Roke Wycherly's coming. We are quite sure of him at last. He'll be here on Monday. That's my first bit of news; and the next is, I fear you were rather a wild little woman at school, for I've got a letter in my pocket that tells all sorts of fibs. It comes from Madame de la Perriere.

I'll only tell you it's by no means so good as the note we had, eight weeks ago, from Mademoiselle de Chatelet. I'm telling you the truth, upon my honour; and I'll leave you till tomorrow to guess what's in it."

As he spoke mademoiselle blushed, and for a few seconds her colour grew more and more intense, and then suddenly it waned. She became so pale that Mr. Shadwell half repented his jocular experiment. He could not tell whether she was nervous only, or angry, or very much frightened.

"Come, you pretty little scapegrace, you must tell me honestly the entire history of your school adventures. Mind; I am your confessor — tell the whole truth, and upon my honour I'll give you absolution."

She dropped her eyes, and looked much more like herself.

"I may have enemies, sir — it is possible; but my conduct has been always irreproachable. If there be malice, I defy its worst. Madame de la Perriere can testify of my conduct if she will. It is terrible to have to assert of one's self those things which are taken for granted of all ladies. I am a child of calamity situation here, and go elsewhere. May I say so to Mrs. Shadwell?" '

"Why, what on earth can you mean? Go away? By Jove! wouldn't that measure be rather sharp and short?" said Mr. Shadwell, rather aghast.

"I am sure you did not mean to insult me, Mr. Shadwell, but it seems to me that your confidence in me has been shaken by that letter of Madame de la Perriere," said Miss Marlyn. "I know well what pain it will cost me to leave Raby; but suffering is not new to me."

The young lady spoke with a decision that alarmed Mark Shadwell.

"You'd hardly use me so ill as that," remonstrated he. "If I conveyed anything like what you say, I'm very sorry, and do believe me, I never intended it. You must try me a little longer. It was very thoughtless of me to mention the letter. I remember when I used to care about what people said; I don't now. I've felt nervous myself when I thought stories were told of me — I mean lies, of course."

"Every one has enemies — very few have friends," said the young lady. "I lost my mother very young; when I lost my father, I was fourteen years old." Miss Agnes Marlyn was speaking as it were in a melancholy dream, and you would not have supposed that she was conscious of another person's presence. "Madame de la Perriere found herself in charge of an unfriended orphan. I have laboured to requite her kindness. I have much more than repaid her. It is not her fault — she cannot help it — that she can attach herself to none but people of rank or fortune. I have neither; of course she speaks coldly of me."

"But I told you, that letter is our little secret, yours and mine — not a soul else shall ever hear of it; and I give you my honour I never for a moment attached the slightest importance to it. And I beg your pardon for having named it to you."

Miss Marlyn looked at him for a moment with eyes very grateful and humble, and said:

"You are too good to me, Mr. Shadwell."

"Don't say that *now;* make trial of me first, and then pronounce whether I wish to serve you," he answered in a low tone, and accompanied his words with that fierce and handsome smile which showed his small white teeth. Then he left the room, and Miss Marlyn looked for a moment sternly on the oak door through which he had passed, listening, and quickly shut and locked up the desk at which she had been writing.

Then standing with her finger to her lip, she listened for a while, and, having thought a little, she hurriedly reopened her desk and tore up the letter she had only an hour ago elaborately written, and with a match set fire to the fragments on the hob, and saw the last spark out.

Notwithstanding the confidence she always professed in her Raby friends, this young lady's ways, I think, were cautious and secret.

CHAPTER XIX.

FIDDLE AND THUNDER.

A THUNDERSTORM that evening came down over the distant forest of Hazelden, and the glen of Feltram, over the old manor and woodlands of Wynderfel, and down the wild slopes and brakes of the neglected park of Raby. It was to the music of the distant thunder that Miss Marlyn, standing at the window of the schoolroom, read a very short note which had come with the other letters in the Raby postbag from the village.

Whatever indecision she may have experienced about her other correspondence, there was none about this. She glanced at the little clock over the mantlepiece; she had only time to trace a few hurried lines in reply, which accomplished, Miss Agnes, with a light and swift tread, and carrying her little desk which never left her bedroom but in her own company, put on her humble little dark grey cloak and black hat, and glided along the gallery without meeting anyone, and down the great staircase. She was just entering the vestibule when a side door opened, and she was encountered by the last person in the world whom she would have liked to meet.

"Going out!" exclaimed Mr. Shadwell, with a look of such honest astonishment as made her feel how necessary an explanation was. "Going out! Have you quite lost your little head? What do you think of *that?"* The question followed a brilliant flash of lightning. "And do you hear that?" he added, as the nearer thunder rolled over their heads.

"Is it very foolish?" she said, with a deprecatory little laugh. "I delight so in thunder and lightning; is anything so magnificent?"

"That's all very fine, but Farmer Dobbs down there had two cows killed by lightning last year; besides, don't you see the rain?"

He had opened the hall door a little, and some heavy drops had already fallen upon the steps.

"The rain! Oh yes, indeed!" she said.

"Rather a damper, I should say," suggested he.

She laughed again.

"Then I suppose I'm not to *go* out — absolutely?"

"Certainly not," he replied, lifting his finger; "I'm very angry at your having thought of such a folly" — he was speaking in a low tone, and with a smile— "but, naughty as you are, I can't bear to kill you quite. I won't allow you to kill yourself; I really can't make up my mind to lose my secretary so soon. You must only look from a window, high and dry," he insisted.

"With the fate of Farmer Dobbs's cow before my eyes," she laughed. "Oh, how grand!"

She paused, as indeed he did, while this new peal ran over their heads, and rattled and rebounded among the distant hills. "How awful and glorious!" she murmured, when it was over. "Can we wonder at its being taken for the voice of God?"

"And the moon for a green cheese, and the Pope for an oracle, and an electric crack for a verse in the Bible. I never wonder at anything. None of your heroics with me, little rogue and, with a laugh he drew back into his room, and closed the door.

On the stair Miss Marlyn paused, with a changed countenance. She was terribly in earnest about the short letter which was to travel by that night's post. It *must* go. She would have walked twenty miles through the thunderstorm to post it. She could have walked down now, and passed on her way through the other door to the town; but, coming or going, she was sure to be observed. She must lay her account, with Mr. Shadwell's hearing of it. What would he think? She could have easily confessed her folly, and pleaded her girlish Quixotism, had it not been for the unlucky rencontre at the hall door. He was shrewd and suspicious, she intuitively felt, where feminine motive was concerned. Henceforward, were she now to go, he would watch her with an eye of scrutiny and doubt. That would never do.

She looked at her little silver watch — a present from a prodigal English bagman, an adorer. It was still reliable, having hardly entered on its second year. Time pressed.

She dared not ask a servant. The antipathy of that race to the governess order was against it, and she had made no confidences among them yet. The old panelled oak clock, with hour-glasses and scythes, and bald Father Time, with his forelock, and the hours carved in bold relief, was ticking stolidly above her at the stairhead. Four minutes faster than her new silver watch was this grim old monitor. It was distracting.

Suddenly she remembered Carmel Sherlock.

During the months she had been living here, she had hardly spoken fifty words to that queer shy person; and yet she trusted him thoroughly, though, metaphysically, she treated him as an enigma not worth studying.

In another minute she was at his chamber door and knocked. There was a quavering and wailing of the precious Straduarius going on within, an odd accompaniment to the thunder without, which prevented her first and second summons from being heard. At the third, the fiddle suddenly was mute, and Carmel Sherlock, with the instrument under his arm, stood pale and amazed in the halfopen doorway, and gazed in the face of the handsome girl from under his lank black locks.

Without ceremony, Miss Agnes Marlyn entered, and shut the door.

“Can you get away down to the town, and nobody see you?” demanded the young lady, hurriedly.

“Ay, to the town? Pray sit down, Miss Marlyn; this is a great honour,” replied Carmel Sherlock.

“Thanks, no; I’ll stand, please. I’ve come to ask a great favour; and, if done at all, it must be done quickly. It’s just what I said, that you’ll go down to the town for me this minute; can you, Mr. Sherlock?”

“Surely — yes — who’s ill? — who?” said he, anxiously.

“No one; it’s to oblige *me* — a *great* obligation, Mr. Sherlock; you must promise to mention it to no one.”

“Ay? how? What am I to promise?”

“Secresy,” she answered, “only that. It’s the merest trifle — next to nothing — only to go down to the village. I would do it myself — I was going — but there’s a difficulty.”

“Afraid of that?” said Sherlock, pointing up with an odd smile, as the blue glare of the lightning, followed by the reverberations of the thunder, startled her again.

“*Not* afraid of that; I was going, but was prevented by an accident. I feel, Mr. Sherlock, that I can trust you. Will you accept my confidence, and do me that great service at a very trifling cost — the walk to the village? I’m sorry it’s raining.”

“I’ll go, yes — oh dear, yes!”

“And promise, upon your honour, never to say *what* you did, nor that you went at my request; do you promise?” As she spoke, Miss Marlyn laid her hand upon his arm, and looked with a dark entreaty into his eyes. The little chamber was obscured by the storm, and the successive flashes, as they talked, illuminated the stern features of the girl, and, in their livid light, bereft them of their colour.

“I do — oh yes — certainly — upon my honour. I thank you, Miss Marlyn, for your confidence; I do, and it is wise — truth lies at the bottom of a well. I’m very deep.”

“You are to put this in the post — that’s all;” and with these words she placed the letter in his hand.

Setting it down upon the table, “My God!” he exclaimed, staring at it with a horror that made her begin to fear he might know more than she had suspected.

“What’s the matter, sir?” said Miss Marlyn, a little fiercely, and turning very white.

“It’s very odd — we were playing a farewell he spoke this to his fiddle, looking it grimly in the face. “It came very freely — of itself, almost. It wasn’t for nothing; it’s all a system of echoes and reflections; no power ever lost, every force made to exhaust its utmost value. You call it omens, I call it economy. And the letter — good God, ma’am!” Saying this, he poked the Straduarius towards it, as if he expected to learn something of its spirit through that semi-intelligent medium.

“There’s the letter — you’ve promised to post it — you may, of course, play me false — *will you?* There’s not one minute to lose, if you mean to keep your word.”

“Look there, at that clock,” said he, nodding towards the dial of his Dutch clock; “it’s right to the twentieth part of a second. I may stay here six minutes longer, and yet be in time to post it — but I’ll never post it, unless you first answer me a question.”

“Then, sir, you’ve deceived me, and I shall take my letter away,” said she, loftily, extending her hand towards it. If she expected to change his purpose by this appeal, she was mistaken. As a lurking spider pounces on a fly, his lean hand seized the letter.

“Your letter’s become *mine”* he said, with a cunning laugh, which gave place to an expression of savage menace, as he added: “By Heaven! it’s mine, except on that condition.”

Miss Agnes Marlyn was now pretty well in a corner.

"I'm not going to put a pistol to my head for you, miss," he said, wagging that head grimly, as he searched her with a suspicious glance.

"What do you mean, sir?" said the lady, frightened into something like fury. "How *little* I knew you!" and as she spoke she stamped on the floor.

"What do I mean?" he repeated. "I mean that Rachel — Miss Rachel Shadwell — wrote that letter; and, by Heaven! it's mine."

"Miss Rachel Shadwell did *not* write a *line* of it. She does not know of its existence. I *swear* it!"

"Who wrote it?" demanded he.

"I —— upon my sacred honour, *I!* — there. I've placed myself in your hands; you can't, in generosity — in common manhood, you can't betray me."

"I won't betray you! I believe what you say — every face is glorified, by truth — I saw truth in yours as you spoke — I was half mad; no wonder."

Carmel Sherlock walked once or twice, with a kind of shudder, up and down his little chamber, and threw open his window and stood, at it for two or three seconds.

"If I thought," he said, returning suddenly to the table and eyeing her with a new access of suspicion, "that she was writing to that man to accept him for her husband — that is, without her father's knowledge and consent — I'd take my own course."

"Young ladies, sir, don't do such things — it's simply impossible. You said, sir, you believed my word of honour. It was I who wrote the letter; it concerns no member of this family but myself, and no other knows of its existence."

Carmel drew a deep breath of relief; he looked up and then down, and stroked the back of his friendly Straduarius, and "Oh dear!" said he gently, with a smile. "Miss Agnes Marlyn, you've wrung my heart. Only in a dream — only in a dream."

She looked uneasily at the clock.

"Two minutes still," said he, reading the dial. "I won't fail you. I'll prove it — only not yet, for I intend to put myself in *your* power. I'll be to you transparent; you shall have my pure but dreadful secret. I'm sure you are good — beauty is the surface of goodness, and nature never lies."

Tenderly and reverently he replaced his beloved fiddle in its berth, and whispered some words to it, she fancied, as he did so.

“And now,” said he, as he took his coat and hat, “not for this trifling service, and the secresy I promise, but for all I will yet do for you, and for the sake of humanity, you will share with me that lock of hair — I heard you tell her, on Thursday last, you wear it in your locket.”

“Rachel’s? yes; *here.* Take it all; I can get more.”

He took it to the window for a moment.

“Yes, it is — oh! it is — in my hand!” He gazed on it as it lay in the hollow of his palm, with an incredulous rapture. “Lie there — lie there — and oh! Miss Marlyn, you’ll speak to me of her sometimes? you’ll tell me about her when we meet? Now I must go.”

He was gone as he spoke; and Miss Marlyn found herself alone in this odd little room, and bethought her how awkward it would be if any one — say, worst of all, Mr. Shadwell — were to surprise her there. So, listening at the door, and hearing no step near, she made her escape to her own room by a different route, and there, for the first time, her agitations over, with the volatility that belongs to all clever people, broke into laughter, peal after peal, over the ingenuous confessions of Carmel Sherlock, and the conquest of her unconscious pupil who shared with his fiddle the mysterious devotions of Mr. Sherlock.

CHAPTER XX.

SIR ROKE AT RABY.

ON the night I am now going to speak about, there was a pleasant fire in the oldfashioned drawingroom of Raby Hall, for a change had come, within the last day or two, in the weather, and the evenings were cold.

The long suspense about the baronet’s visit was ended. Sir Roke Wycherly had arrived with his servants at twenty minutes past nine, and was now making his toilet. His host stood before the fire alone in the drawingroom, awaiting his appearance.

Mark Shadwell’s temper had not been pleasant all that day. He looked round on the faded upholstery of the room with a sulky acerbity. He was angry with the furniture, angrier with his guest. Few things could more have galled his pride than to administer the hospitality of Raby to his cousin, Roke Wycherly.

The door opened — Sir Roke entered. It was more than seven years since they last met. He saw a change in his host, who saw probably a greater one in him.

Sir Roke Wycherly entered smiling. He was tall; he was lean; he had an easy wig on — a wonderful deception — which, however, deceived few people; his eyes had that peculiar haggard character which I have seen in those of some profligate men, showing a great deal of white. He was a little rouged, and cautiously whitened, I think; and was there not something odd — a little line of black, was it — under his eyelashes? altogether, in that long, and when you saw it near, shrivelled face, an odious pink and white effeminacy prevailed. His dress was quite unexceptionable, with an air of quiet fashion. Paradoxically, the man of pleasure looked older, and the man of cares and discontent younger, than his years.

“Very glad to see you, Roke,” cried Shadwell, advancing with his best smile. “Very welcome; a great many years, Roke, since you’ve been here.”

“A thousand thanks — don’t remind me — a thousand thanks, dear Mark. I’ve heard of you very often in my wanderings, though we don’t write letters; and you, I dare say, have heard of me.”

"I never hear of any one; I never see a human face. I take in one newspaper, and that's all my society, except the interesting inhabitants of this house; so I confess I have *not* heard; but I *see,* Roke, which is much better, and I'll not allow you to take the airs of an invalid."

Sir Roke laughed, and bowed a little, and shrugged, and shook his head.

"I've had a shake or two, though, but never mind; and do tell me, how is Amy?"

"Wretchedly, always — miserably, poor thing! other *poor* fellows' wives can give them a lift in country quarters like these — play tunes, or talk, or make tea, or play a rubber of backgammon, now and then — how charming, you'll say — but those are gaieties for other houses; poor Amy is not equal to any such exertions."

"But, really? Do you mean — — "began Sir Roke, in a sympathetic key.

"I do, indeed; she's a perfect martyr to ill-health; can't come down this evening to see you."

"How very sad! and your daughter?"

"Oh, Rachel's as robust as you please; she'll give us our tea just now, I hope; she ought to be here."

"I've seen her, and she's sweetly pretty," said Sir Roke.

"Oh! met on the stairs," suggested Mark.

"No; in town, at a very old friend's, old Lady Mary Temple's," he replied archly.

Shadwell looked at him, thinking either he or Sir Roke must be mad.

Sir Roke laughed quietly.

"A carte de visite — a photo — my dear Mark; the prettiest thing I ever saw in my life almost; you know what a whimsical fool I. am when I take a fancy. I followed a cameo I saw at the Paris exhibition to Florence — where they told me the fellow was who bought it — I did, upon my honour, and from that to Rome, and back again to Paris, where I got it at last; and, by Jove! if that photograph had been taken from the cameo, or both from your daughter, my cousin Rachel, they could not have been more like; and I should be ashamed to tell you — the confession's so ungracious — how much that carte de visite, and my restless curiosity, have had to do with my visit to Raby."

They both laughed. There was a little vein of earnest in Roke Wycherly's jesting; there was also, as Shadwell knew, a whimsicality in his fancies, and a pertinacity in their [pursuit, of which he could himself have cited instances as eccentric as that of the cameo.

"I've reason to be obliged to her, however, though *you* mayn't, for having led you to this stupid old place, where there's next to no shooting but rabbits, and almost no fishing at all, and, in fact, nothing but air and landscape to offer."

"So much the better; I never was much of a shot, and I always hated fishing; and if you had no end of both, I'm in no condition to try either at present. What I really do enjoy and require, is the perfect quiet you seem to dislike, a saunter in your park (he was going to say a ride, but he hesitated, not knowing the state of Mark's stables), and the delightful bracing air of these uplands. It's devilish odd, Mark, but it's true, if you get a knock anywhere," and he touched his waistcoat with his fingers, "and begin to grow a bit hippish, you get a sort of liking for the old places, and for the old faces too, Mark; *I* find it so."

And he smiled and shook his host's hands, promptly.

I don't think he was quite lying when he said all this. There were bits of truth jumbled up in it; and Mark Shadwell, who knew him well, began to think a little better of him, and to remember vaguely how characters are sometimes mellowed by time: and not a romance, but a worldly castle-in-the-air associated with this Roke Wycherly, very agreeably began to build itself up in crimson and gold, as the clouds do in sunset.

"Do you remember that thing from Horace *Qui Jit, Macenas, it* begins — that I had to repeat at the end of the Christmas half, for old Beaks? I can't get further now, but it means that every man quarrels with his own place in life, and envies his neighbours," said Sir Roke.

"Suppose we exchange, then?" said Mark, with a pleasantry that had something of a sneer in it.

"More easily said than done, my dear Mark; we flies don't get free of our cobwebs so easily. There's some truth, *I* can tell you, at the bottom of the cant about money and its cares; there *is* trouble about it. By Jove, Mark, I often think I have too much of it!"

Mark thought he could help him off with a part of his burthen.

"Ha, ha! you're laughing Mark — I know you are; but it's true for all that. When my poor dear father put me on my allowance, and I made it do, I think I enjoyed things as I never did since, because I paid for them, and felt the price too, I can tell you. Now that I have everything *gratis,* as it were, the world has lost its flavour. I've often thought how much more enjoying a fellow would be with a smaller income; I don't say I'd have nerve to reduce mine by a guinea, but I *do* think it, Mark, just as fellows who drink too much, envy those who haven't the habit, though they can't give up a glass of their daily quantum, don't you see?"

And having concluded his little oration, Sir Roke yawned gently behind his hand, and closed his eyes languidly for a moment.

"And, I tell you what," he resumed quietly, "anyone who has been knocking about as much as I have, grows tired of it, d'ye see, and likes quiet."

"Well, that's a liking I can gratify, for devil a soul one sees here from one year's end to another," said Mark, with splenetic jocularity. "Oh! this is my daughter," he said, as she entered the room with Miss Marlyn. "Rachel, this is your cousin, Roke Wycherly."

The baronet approached, smiling, with something foreign, a little ceremonious, in his manner, and took her hand deferentially, and told her he had been wishing, a long time, to make her acquaintance, and asked her a number of trifling questions, and listened to her answers — it seemed to her with a degree of respect and pleasure that was to the young girl still new and very flattering.

The manner was indeed silken, the voice very low and sweet; she felt that she was treated like a person of importance, and worth pleasing. But there was nothing very engaging, she was conscious, in the sickly and somewhat long countenance that was inclined with an unchanging smile over her.

The matter of pigments and enamel and wig and teeth apart, she could not quite discover where lay the peculiarity in that countenance which generated a feeling of distrust, and something of the nature of antipathy; she felt only the general effect, which was contracted and deceitful. In those blue eyes was the peculiar, light of exhaustion, and about them a multiplicity of small complex lines of cunning and cruelty — a sickly cheek, a wasted look, and a smile that was artificial and unpleasant, and always there.

It was thus with a mixture of feelings that Rachel regarded him. There was also a sense of pity. The tall thin figure was narrow chested, and stooped a little, and Sir Roke coughed once or twice a slight cough, which Mark Shadwell, too, had observed.

"She *is* my cameo," murmured he to Mark, when he again took his stand beside him on the hearthrug. "She's perfectly charming!"

"Do you think so?" said her father, flattered in spite of himself.

"Oh! you *must* see it, yourself," he insisted; "she's perfectly lovely!" and his eyes rested on her again, as she sat talking to Miss Marlyn, at the tea-table. "And the young lady beside her?"

"Oh! that's Miss Marlyn; you remember poor Marlyn of the Guards?"

"*Henry* Marlyn?" suggested Sir Roke, looking still at her.

Yes, poor fellow! — his daughter."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Sir Roke, with more wonder than was quite called for. "He's — he's — sold out, didn't he?"

"Sold out, yes, and dead some years — poor Marlyn! My wife took an interest in her, and got her here. She knew his wife, you know — she died some time before him — and that poor girl was working for her bread in a French school, when Amy heard of her, and brought her here. She's a kind of — I can't call her governess — instructress and companion to Rachel."

"She's pretty, but at disadvantage where she sits; very few girls would bear that contrast," said Roke.

"You're fatigued, Miss Marlyn — you've been taking one of those horrid long walks," said Shadwell, approaching the table; "you ought not to allow her, Rachel; you see she's quite pale."

"No, indeed, sir," said Miss Marlyn, suddenly blushing, so that her cheeks and neck and temples were dyed in the same brilliant tint, which was again succeeded by an unusual pallor; and Mark Shadwell was pleased to see how an unexpected word from him could agitate her. He did not want his cousin, Roke, however, to observe it, and, turning to rejoin him, he found that he had accompanied him to the table.

"Will you introduce me?" he murmured in Shadwell's ear.

"Sir Roke Wycherly," said Shadwell, presenting him.

"I had the pleasure of knowing some of your family, Miss Marlyn, a great many years ago, before your time. I had no hope of meeting a daughter of my old friend in this part of the world. And so you're a great pedestrian, are you? A very dangerous accomplishment," he continued, transferring his address to Rachel, “in young ladies; you are such enthusiasts in whatever you take up; you always overdo it — you do — a little tea, please.”

“They do, indeed,” he continued, addressing Mark, as he stirred his tea beside him at the fireplace. “You must stop it, pray do; they kill themselves that way — I assure you they do. How very well your daughter looks just in that light; do look — quite lovely, doesn’t she? You must positively stop it.”

And so for a time they chatted, till the young ladies departed, and Sir Roke, being undisguisedly sleepy, took his departure also to take possession of the stately old bed in which he was about to pass his first night, since boyish days, at Raby Hall.

CHAPTER XXI.

SIR ROKE WYCHERLY IN HIS BEDROOM.

SIR ROKE WYCHERLY'S man, the grave and gentlemanlike Mr. Clewson, had spent nearly two hours in his master's bedroom, accompanied by Dick Willock and Mrs. Wyndle, in reversing and recasting the whole of that provident housekeeper's dispositions for the comfort of his gov'nor, as he called the baronet.

He moved about and inspected and countermanded and adjusted with a quiet but sublime sense of responsibility, which impressed the imaginations of the simple people of Raby. There was no question whether the thing was right or wrong *per se,* or easy to accomplish, or next to impossible. It was simply to be done, quite inevitable, and to be set about with silent and resolute resignation.

The dressing-table was too near the window.

The bed must be got four feet farther from the fire. Mr. Clewson had to place beside it, among other things, the lamp invented particularly, as he informed Mrs. Wyndle, for his master, by "Mussier Lumbell," of Paris, which there was but one other in all the world the same, and the empress had that, and by experiment he showed them how when it was thrown ever so little out of the perpendicular it extinguished itself with unerring precision, and there were little tinted glass globes, rose-coloured when the baronet was in the dumps, and green when he wished to read. He had been offered, himself, forty guineas by Mr. Budisman, of London, to take a model of it, but he couldn't allow it for no money; for we were put under obligation of honour in writing to Mussier Lumbell. So he showed the lamp and all its tricks with a grave pride and condescension, and the rustics admired with awe and curiosity.

There was a little thermometer which he hung at the farther side of the bed, away from the fireplace, and which it was his duty to maintain at a given point, at dressing hours and bed-time. He got Dick Willock to "obleege" him with a hammer and some tacks, and he actually went down upon his knees to tack some neat little strips of guttapercha to the door next the carpet, to protect the baronet from those draughts and eddies which he feared like the fanning of the wings of Azrael. Though so great a gentleman, Mr. Clewson was not a bit proud. “He put his hands to things quite ready!”

There was a most elaborate and splendid dressing-case, which he had only time to disclose generally. They were dazzled. The spirit of magnificent dandyism had been stronger upon the baronet when he purchased it some twelve years ago. In some respects he had sobered, and illusions of that kind had subsided since then. The lust of the eye and the pride of life had since been dimmed and cooled a little, in the first solitudes of the valley of the shadow of death. And the other box, very neat, but by no means gorgeous, polished oak, bound with brass clasps, a chest, with a thick brass ring at each end for handles. Yes, evidence of the panic and chimeras of the *dominus oegrotus.* The medicine chest which the wonderful Doctor Vandevelde of the Brunens of Nassau, physician, magician, impostor, who yet unquestionably wrought sanitary miracles, induced so many of his rich patients, to his advantage, at all events, to purchase. The medicines were mysteries from his own laboratory — extracted, compounded, procurable in no other sanctum or den in all the world. They saw there more tinctures and drops than *Lord Ogleby* ever dreamed of.

It was only a gaze of a few seconds. There were German words on the inside of the cover, and the bottles were queerly shaped, with eccentric stoppers, and might have held the famous Bottle imp, or even Asmodeus. “*Dear* me!” exclaimed Mrs. Wyndle, who had herself a housekeeper’s taste for quackery, and admired this exquisite chest accordingly.

The baronet’s dressing-gown and slippers were displayed before the fire, and were a little shabby — very shabby, in fact, for so great a gentleman. Very grand when new, no doubt. But they had got rubbed and old; and lessened with a sense of disappointment and relief the immense distance which Mrs. Wyndle had felt widening between her and the great man, and brought him down, in one point at least, to the level of mortals.

It was past eleven o’clock as Mark Shadwell wished goodnight to his cousin, Sir Roke, at the threshold of his door. The baronet smiled and waved his hand, and shutting his door, his face was all at once leaner and more haggard, and he yawned dismally; and his dreary eyes looked restless and fierce as he turned them from place to place in the chamber, and asked Clewson if the water was there and everything right, and screamed at him, with a curse, to know “where the d — l he had hid away those drops, and why on earth they were not on the table” and told him, with an oath, he was not “worth his bread and butter.”

Sir Roke had nerves and a liver, and had been twice or thrice, in a gouty panic, to Vichy. His charlatan at the Brunens had given him a habit of swallowing these drops and other physics. But although in this, as in his fastidious appreciation of feminine beauty, he resembled *Lord Ogleby,* he bore no other resemblance to that highbred type of invalided English chivalry.

He “cussed and swore hawfle, he did,” Mr.

Clewson said, and he well knew that fact before he entered his service. But such missiles break no bones. All things were taken into account in Mr. Clewson’s salary, which would have made many a hard-working vicar, to say nothing of curates, open his eyes.

So now Mr. Clewson, with a countenance as meek and reverential as if a bishop had just blessed him, pointed out with a bow the identical drops which Sir Roke had overlooked, close to his own hand.

“And, please, Sir Roke, your dressing-room is ready,” said the man, with the same reverential inclination indicating the door.

“No,” snarled Sir Roke; *“no,* just get me to bed, will you? I’m tired to death by my d — d journey in that rumble-tumble machine.” Sir Roke began to inspect his features in the glass which the man set before him.

“As tired as a ghost, by Heaven! I look as if I had pulled it all the way myself. By Jove! this d — d place will kill me.”

There was a pause and he muttered:

“How young he looks! I might be his father, almost — *tonight* — always grumbling — the most good-for-nothing fellow on earth.

Never thanked God for a mouthful — no more than *I;* and, by Jove! he looks a dozen years younger than he is; good-looking — a devilish deal better looking than I fancied he could be; and, I dare say, thinks himself an Adonis. We’ll see. I’m awfully cut up. Those cursed roads. I must have something. You’ve got that curaçoa, Clewson? Well — here — *here! will* you?” and he tapped angrily on the table beside him. “Yes, I do look awfully seedy. I don’t think I ever looked so seedy in my life. D — n you, do *you?* Just the sort of thing to happen to me. *Will* you give it, or *not?”*

He leaned back in his chair and sipped the cordial a little, — and ended by swallowing what remained at a gulp. His squire stood by his elbow with the high-shouldered foreign bottle; Sir Roke held the glass towards him and had some more.

“Take it *away* — *will* you?” said he, still leaning back. “Yes, I feel a little more naturally now and he stooped forward and again inspected himself in the mirror. “And look — see — yes, one would say now, there’s a little blood left in me.”

And he held up his head and almost simpered, he thought his pink cheeks so becoming; and this, and the glow consequent on his “nip,” as Clewson called it, made him feel wonderfully comfortable for a few minutes.

“*You* look a little tired also, Clewson; they gave you your supper, I hope?”

He was so busy about the rooms, he had not had time yet.

“That’s very bad management, Clewson; you did not get your dinner, either — those little commissions for me. You ought to be more alive, Clewson — old traveller, you know. Just get me to bed — we’ll not be very long — will you? and then just wait in the room there, till you see I’m asleep; and then, for goodness sake, do be off and get something. The merciful man, you know, takes care of his servant, the Scripture says,” said he, looking up at the cornice in a peevish reverie.

Sir Roke did not know very much about the Scriptures, no more did his man, and so the quotation passed muster. And as the impulse of the curaçoa subsided, Sir Roke’s benevolence abated, and before he got into bed, I’m sorry to say, he was snarling and swearing and never alluded to Clewson’s supper again.

Old Wyndle was a goodnatured woman, but I think no stimulus short of curiosity would have kept her up and awake in her room to give Mr. Clewson his supper, which was keeping hot before the fire.

She could see that Mr. Clewson, great a gentleman as he was, was something of a slave, and stood in awe of that bleak, savage, selfish temper; that he was afraid of Sir Roke, who yet seemed “such a nice gentleman,”

“and spoke to her in the gallery so friendly and as the clock chimed halfpast twelve, and at last struck one, and she grew uncomfortably sleepy, she wondered how great folk could be so hard on their servants “and that poor gentleman, Mr. Clewson, looking just like he was going to faint with hunger — nothing else ‘ — and he not daring to swallow a scrap o’ cold meat, afraid he should smell it. Smell it, indeed! How *could* he smell a san’wich? Lud ‘a mercy, sich noses! And he, poor gentleman! down on his knees, to make everything ready, and himself not able to stand! There’s usage for servants. And I remember the poor old master — how he’d look a’ter his horse, when he’d come in himself, many a time I mind it. That was for a horse — and here’s now for a man. Who’d a’ thought, wi’ his pretty blue eyes, he’d ever ‘a bin so hard, an’ a goodnatured little fellow he was?”

When Mr. Clewson did come to the housekeeper’s room, with his tap at the door, “Billie Winkie, the dustman,” had been with her, as she was wont to say to the children long ago, when blinking, and yawning, and nodding set in, and he thought the old woman looked, at least, ten years older, and he, *she* thought, “fairly worn off his feet.” But supper is the great restorative — sleep, we know, is “great nature’s second course” — the first being what we have mentioned; and Mr. Clewson, for whom and his gossip she had waited for so long, was now quite a new man, and, though grave and sedate, was yet energetic and wideawake for the ten minutes that followed, over his tea, which, late as it was, he preferred to any other beverage.

There was nothing cynical — no sort of animus in Mr. Clewson’s little sketch of his master — neither was there flattery. If it was not a prepossessing picture, it was not Mr. Clewson’s fault.

“Well, he’s none o’ that left — no — he ain’t soft nor goodnatured, mam, ain’t Sir Roke; but the situation’s good, mam, very good; if it wasn’t, no one would keep it. He allows a good deal o’ liberty in off times — so you gets through your work punctially he doesn’t care if the old boy had you. He pays liberal, and he passes on a deal o’ things— *‘ansom* things — to the person as fills my situation. It is a huncommon good situation, but it requires a very superior person to fill it; he would not keep no one helse, and no sich person would keep the place if the hemoluments was less than what they are. *Wild?* Well, I don’t know what you mean, quite; he’s very reg’lar, mam, and he has his pleasures, I do suppose, like other gentlemen — *more*, I dessay. His ‘ealth? It was bad two years ago, but I don’t think there’s very much amiss now, if he would give over them drops and physics. He can go through a deal of amusement and pleasuring when he likes, he can. That's private to himself, of course."

"Between him and his Maker, poor man!" interpolated Mrs. Wyndle.

"Quite so, mam; and I don't know nothink o' the matter," said Clewson, with a quiet decision, which seemed to shut that subject up.

"You've heard him, now and again, I dessay, talk o' the old place and people?" suggested Mrs. Wyndle.

"Which o' the old places do you mean in particular, mam?" inquired Mr. Clewson, who recollected several haunts, both in Paris and London, which had disappeared from time to time.

"I mean *here* — Raby — Wynderfel — and the old family, and old friends — simple folk, like myself — be used to like old Dolly Wyndle, pretty, little, soft fellow he was; running to my door every hand's turn, for a bit o' cord, or a handful o' saltpetre — you wouldn't suppose how they used to burn it — or an apple. I want this, Wyndle; and, Wyndle, give me that; and so 'twould be; wi' his pretty blue eyes — and I often wondered if he talked of old Wyndle ever?" and she paused.

"Well, as for places, mam, he never likes no place for long; and I don't think he cares for no one — not that cup o' tea," replied Clewson, not satirically, but gravely, as stating a metaphysical fact.

And with this and some more gossip, Mr. Clewson took his leave. And as he might easily miss his way, old Dolly Wyndle conducted him to his door by the back stairs and gallery; and he paused and listened at the door, and opened it as softly as a thief might; and whispered his adieux, and on tiptoe entered his room, and shut the door slowly and soundlessly, as if his life depended on Sir Roke's sleep, although the dressing-room interposed between his bed and his master's.

CHAPTER XXII.

CARMEL'S WALK TO WYNDERFEL.

SIR ROKE came down to breakfast in high, spirits.

There was always a place for Carmel Sherlock, who seldom contributed, except when a chance question invoked him, to the conversation. Unnoticed he came and departed, like that domestic apparition in the red coat, who harmlessly haunted the meals of the German forester's family in the story.

Sir Roke looked at him; perhaps he expected an introduction, the party was so very small. But Carmel Sherlock was apparently seen by none of the people there, except when Miss Marlyn, with ever so faint a smile and a nod, from time to time handed him, or received, his tea-cup.

Shadwell had again to apologise for his wife's absence. Miss Marlyn was as silent, nearly, as Carmel, except when, in an undertone, she spoke a word or two to Rachel. But Sir Roke chatted very gaily, and had no end of stories and anecdotes to tell, which were quite new, at all events, to Rachel, who — her shyness vanishing — listened and laughed, and questioned, and thought Sir Roke's conversation wonderfully charming.

Mark Shadwell, sometimes inactive during this discourse, was yet pleased. A very odd idea had got into his head. He knew how unstable Roke Wycherly was, but also how violent and imperious his fancies were. He was drawing towards that age at which men are ruled by sense rather than imagination — when they prefer the essential to the conventional — and, with an instinctive acquiescence in the conditions of contracting life, determine to live with the least degree of respect that is decent for fame and custom, and with the most rigorous attention to self. This is the age at which a man, defining with terrible precision what he wants, dispenses with all the frivolous, and even the respectable incompatibilities — not because his object is dearer, but his sacrifice is less. The value of this one residual idea is dominant, because all the rest have been tried and found wanting. It is the age at which roués project the domestic serenities, and marry milkmaids, and fancy that thatched simplicity and ancient faith, and plump innocence, with rosy cheeks and a white skin, are worth finally trying. He has had all that this fashionable, pharisaical, rascally world can give him. His iron safes are full of the counters which are its circulating medium. He has discovered, however, that they are not convertible at the great Bank of Happiness, and he is resolved this time to try his own way. Though all the Rules, aghast, throw up their hands and eyes, and the enraged Prejudices protest till they choke, he *will* have one chance for the *summum bonum* he has always missed. He will set about it, with a cynical enthusiasm, in earnest, before the appointed hour comes, and he must yawn and simper his last, and leave the lights and fiddles for ever, and go down and let the undertakers get on his last mufflers in the cloak-room, and the pale waiter at the door cry, "Lord Newgate's hearse stops the way!"

For so great a philosopher, Mark Shadwell was, I am afraid, unduly vain, and even conceited. He thought himself more of a genius than he was. Had he measured his powers more accurately, he might have perceived that his obscurity was not quite so purely an *unlucky* phenomenon. Had he known how many men, all round him, with twice his intellect, and ten times his knowledge, were working, without a single brilliant chance or a hope of distinction, for daily bread, with a manly resignation, he might have been a more contented and a less useless man; but his own mental superiority was an axiom of his system. Success was his birthright, and that he had it not was due to the perversity of a monstrous destiny.

Sir Roke Wycherly was no genius either: in some respects, a shallower man than Shadwell; in others — rather, perhaps, from temperament than intellect — decidedly the stronger. His host, however, no doubt, well knew how to measure his early companion's strength and weakness, and his character was bare before him.

He knew that Sir Roke's fancies were absorbing and violent; but he also knew that he was cautious and secret. These qualities were, at times, opposed, and here was a situation in which their action seemed directly so; yet he could not quite conceal the interest and admiration that were growing upon him.

Fortune owed Mark Shadwell a great compensation. Were the tables about, at last, to turn, and was this visit, the prospect of which had filled him with perturbation, to open a way to a strange but simple reparation?

"What's become of Carmel Sherlock?" asked Mark Shadwell of any one who might choose to answer.

"I did not see him go; but he *was* here," answered Agnes Marlyn.

"Oh! I know; though it might have been yesterday for anything he said; but he can't have been here ten minutes: he must have gone more than half an hour."

"He sat over there?" inquired Sir Roke, indicating his empty chair. "I was going to ask who he was. Fine eyes, hasn't he? — rather remarkable head?"

"He's a genius of a particular kind, if you like them," said Shadwell.

"No, Mark, I hate "em all. I suppose they're good for geniusing, but they're fit for nothing else. Does he paint pictures, or what?" —

"Upon my life, I don't know. He does a little at everything — he geniuses, as you say; but what I keep him here for is to keep my accounts, and, though he's a genius, he does it very well."

"He's going to put me in a poem, or a picture, or something," said the baronet. "I never was so scrutinised in my life — *quietly,* I mean — for I don't think he knew that I perceived it. But he has got a great pair of lamps for eyes. They don't do for peeping; it's always a stare or a glare, by Jove!"

"So, child," said Mark Shadwell, half an hour later, stopping his daughter, who was running downstairs in her walking things, and smiling on her, with a kind of approbation, "our guest amuses you! I don't wonder; very agreeable, isn't he? He always was very good company; and, I can tell you, he thinks you — — "Well, I won't tell you *all* he thinks of you; but he has been quite opening my eyes on the subject of your perfections and —

Where are you going? I told him you'd show him the old bridge of Raby. Can you tell me where Sir Roke is?" he added, addressing Clewson, whom he saw crossing towards the back stairs.

"Sir Roke is writing his letters in his room, sir."

"Oh! well, after luncheon, then," said he, tapping her cheek with his fingertip, and smiling. "You *are* looking *extremely* well."

So away she went for her walk with Miss Marlyn, who awaited her on the steps; and, as she went, she was pleased and wondering, for her father had never taken so much notice of her in her life before.

Carmel Sherlock was not among his accounts when his patron sought him that morning. He had gone away fasting, having swallowed only a little tea. A solitary walk over wild and sylvan slopes, and through many a forest hollow, of ivied rock and ash and thorn, with his broadleafed wideawake hat on, and his rugged walking-stick swinging in his hand — you'd have thought he was walking with an object. But that straight line of march and rapid stride had none. It carried him to the deeper solitudes of Hazelden. Beginning like a mountain gulley in the woodlands, it wound and deepened under crag and shadow until it became stem, precipitous, and dark as that glen in which the ill-starred marksman of the Hartz cast his enchanted bullets. Utterly solitary and solemn — the haunt of the wild cat, the owl, and the fox — it simulates, even at noonday, the silence and gloom of night. With a little plashing of unseen water far below, with rocks, sometimes broken, sometimes rising, sheer as the walls of Rhenish castles, their fronts stained with lichens or clasped and hooded with ivy, and their long chinks and crannies green with moss and hanging pellatory; — their steps and chasms are gripped with the roots of straggling trees, and their beetling summits overtopped with mighty boughs and brooding foliage.

Here, at last, he paused, in another world, as it were, and awoke from the dream of life, such as it had been.

There was the hustle of faded leaves high above him, and the indistinct plash and moan of waters far below. Seated on a step of rock, in a high nook of this great cathedral, he began his wild self-examination and confession and adoration.

"All the earth doth acknowledge Thee, the Father everlasting! *However, whatever, where*ever, I must, and *do!* Abandoned to general laws, or marvellously seen by Thee, and all my hairs numbered! The spirit sounding — motion — life! Were I to drop from this height, 'twere only into the lap of Nature, to beat my brains out down by the brook there — *there* — in a moment, if I chose" — he was looking down— "I should be alive again, deluded in the next; and here, and now, I still may see her, and hear her — there — and for ever my anguish would follow me. Rachel! Rachel!" He called her up and down the ravine, as if he thought a spirit would answer, with his hands clasped. Some large bird flew from below into deeper shadow down the glen. "Away — away! — fly — fly away, whatever you are! Everything flies from me! Rachel! Rachel! She's gone — she's *gone!* Rachel, you'll never hear me! I come in and out, and to and fro, like a shadow — no one turns, no one cares — and I, who have watched her from her childhood like a spirit, am to her — *nothing,* and never could be — never, never could be! — and now the thing I knew and feared so far off has come up suddenly, and I have seen Death face to face! No one ever dreamed it, nor ever will, except Miss Agnes. And so it is here — suddenly, but foreseen. The coming calamity repeats itself in thoughts and signs, dreams and other ways. My soul went out to meet it. I met it, and saw it on its journey far off a thousand times. She is glad, and my benefactor is happy — and *I*? — I can't complain. I can blame *no* one — not even *myself!* It *was* to be, like death, and no one could help it!"

And thus on and on, with a monotony that was yet various, like the solemn sounds of the solitude that surrounded him, Carmel Sherlock talked down through the sheer darkness to the rocks and trees, as the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance had once done, long before him, in another forest.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BARONET WRITES TO DEAR ADDERLEY.

SIR ROKE was in his room, writing to Pepys Adderley, Esq., a young fellow of forty and upwards, who had tried a little of many things and places, and broken down everywhere. An Eton man — always in a good set — full of the idle energy of adventure and pleasure. He had seen the last guinea of his little patrimony fifteen years ago. He spent two years in the Levant. He visited Australia, and wrote home flourishing accounts of his growing fortunes to his old mother, from whom he requested a sum of money a few months later. He has been seen at California. He has written three sketch books of travel; the longest is in two "sparse" volumes, as his publisher terms them, and he still owes something to his printer. I don't know that Adderley's pedigree would bear sifting; but be has always been among men of rank and fortune. He likes good entrées and good wines, and other people give them to him, though he's not pretty, not witty, and not goodnatured; but being a used-up man of fashion, with gay spirits, whose pride would stand a good deal of rough handling, with seasoned modesty and obliging morals, who thoroughly knew the town, and the world, he suited Sir Roke precisely, and had been, under the rose, his comptroller, master of the horse, and what you please, ever since his little visit to the baronet had commenced at his pretty house at Richmond, more than three years ago.

To this gentleman, whom he had despatched to Scarbrook to await his arrival and administer for him in the interim, he was now writing thus:

"My dear *A*dderley, — No one is more ready to admit than I the immense value of your time; and therefore I merely hint that, if you *could* waste a very few minutes in improving your valuable letters, they might be applied with advantage in *forming* the words of your sentences, which at present are only *indicated,* and in thus saving me an infinity of fruitless trouble. I would also suggest that if, instead of thinking *after,* you would take the trouble to think *before* you write, it would obviate the necessity of those frequent erasures and interlineations which further complicate the problem of speculating upon your meaning. I write at present to beg you won’t go to races or any other d — d thing, just for a week. By that time I shall be at Scarbrook; and pray don’t leave, as I may write by any post, and arrive the train after. Write to this place up to Saturday. I shall go to town on Sunday, and remain there till Tuesday, or perhaps Wednesday; you may expect me on either day. It is just possible a friend may precede me. Suppose we call her Mrs. — (any name you please, only tell me what), and you receive her as your married — any relation you please — a mere *lark* as you say — but the rustics must not be offended. Have you any objection? We sha’n’t remain many days at Scarbrook, and you shall never see that dull spot of earth again. She must be received with respect, observe, being, I assure you, a lady. Her maid will accompany her. Let me have a line, *legible*, by return of post. Let my people make everything, in a small way, as comfortable as possible. I don’t understand the object of what you call ‘roughing it.’

“Ever, dear Adderley, “Yours sincerely, R. W.”

Sir Roke came down and talked with Amy Shadwell, whom he found at last in the drawingroom. The pretty Amy of long ago, with the large hazel eyes — those eyes would always be pretty — and the slender figure, and white delicate hands, and her pretty even teeth, and the early pleasant smile; but how very delicate she looks! there can be no mistake here — poor little smiling thing! She’ll not be a trouble very long to Mark!

Mark, her first and only love, whom she still loves, and thinks the handsomest and the cleverest man on earth, whose looks she watches by stealth, for whom she hazards little hesitating smiles on the chance, just the *chance*, of wiling him back, even for a moment, to the illusions of bygone days, and luring him into one answering smile. Poor little smiling thing, with always the same load at her heart!

I wonder whether any woman, except a very coarse one, ever met a man who had admired and pursued her once, and not beheld her since, for an interval say of ten years, without a secret shrinking and a pang: she would rather remain unseen, leaving the early image in its place un-shivered.

Sir Roke Wycherly advanced and took her hand with a smile that admitted no shock and no decay. He sat beside her at the sofa with an air so tender and respectful as testified that the romantic gallantry of chivalric days was not over.

They talked a great deal of all sorts of things, and of old times, of course, and he said some pretty things, at which she laughed, but was pleased, and repeated them after to old Wyndle and pretty Rachel, and laughed more. She knew it was flattery, but spoken by the man who once felt it, there was still the ring of a romantic sincerity in it.

She talked to him of course a great deal about her demigod Mark, and he listened, I am bound to say, respectfully; and he thought within himself what an odd arrangement of nature it was that women do go on liking particular fellows. It answers some end, he supposed; but it did seem to him a mystery, worshipping fellows like Mark there, who has not cared a pin about her for ten years or more.

"What a pretty creature she was, sweetly pretty!" Sir Roke thought; "very gentle, and rather agreeable. She seemed to me positively clever when she was young. What fire and point a brilliant eye lends to a bon-mot! How their good looks tint and lighten up their conversation! Mark will be looking out for a wife — he'll try for money this time — I'll back him to get a woman with money. Wonderful fellow he is; his hair — what a mystery the hair is" — Sir Roke had a great deal of trouble with his whiskers; we know that the upper tresses grew, hair by hair, in the studio of the great M. Picardin of Paris, and had ceased to cost the baronet any anxiety— "a wonderfully preserved fellow, as good-looking almost as ever he was, and the estates and a very good name, the Shadwells; it's time he should make a push somehow — great advantage to my pretty little friend Rachel, pretty little girl, the Miranda of this solitude — I wonder where they are." He was by this time in his room, and rang his bell for Clewson. "Find out where the young ladies are, will you? and if they have gone out for a walk, in what direction, and get the people to show you, so that you can point it out to me, *will* you?"

In the interim Sir Roke made an inspection before the mirror, and some little repairs and embellishment, and then walked out, as unexceptionably got up as he would have done in Mayfair.

"I've no fancy for killing birds," he used to say, "or deer, or fish, or myself, by Jove! a little delicacy in boyhood saves one from all that, and I never could contract, thank Heaven, a taste for the drudgery and butchery of what they call their sports, fiddling with worms and taking fish in one's hands, or killing a great deer as big as a cow, or breaking my neck in pursuit of a stinking fox! I'm not ashamed to say I'm a bit of a cockney, and don't care to kill my own meat, and like to be clean; and I look on the country as a very decided bore, a place where we get our flour and beef from, and go when we're sick; but I'm altogether of Captain Morris's way of thinking about the grove of chimneys and the sweet shady side of Fall Mall."

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNDER LADY MILDRED’S WINDOW.

Miss MARLYN’S dress is very nun-like, made high up, with broad plates, quite simply. She makes them herself, I think — the material nothing remarkable; she affects greys — silver greys, I think we call them — which look as if they were shot with silk, but are not: grey, nun-like, I say, but with just a little bit of colour below her full white throat, generally a small knot of crimson velvet. I can’t be quite sure; just a few inches of soft and intense colour, harmonising, the French know how, with the shy elegant grey. It is the most humble, quiet, piquant thing in all the wardrobe of cruel Love. Everything is in keeping. The little bonnet she used to wear — nothing — *straw;* but there is a tournure in it, as in everything she wears; and the croquet gloves she pulls on so carelessly: is the prettiness theirs, or is it all in the slender hands they cover? Her dress might have been shorter without violence to the fashion — *mutabile semper* — of that particular season, but it would have lost its conventual quietude, and when some cruel chance for a moment shows her boot, you see the slenderest boot, the prettiest foot in all the world.

When this young lady took her walk today with Rachel, it seemed to her pupil that she was not in her usual spirits, or, truth to say, temper. She was silent, or stopped her companion’s overtures to conversation with short and dry answers, so much so, that Rachel asked her whether she had vexed her. Whereat Miss Agnes looked full at her on a sudden with her deep grey eyes, and laughed.

“No! what makes you think that?” she answered.

“Your silence and your manner,” replied Rachel.

“Well, I *have* been silent, I believe, and I really don’t know why; but my manner?” said Miss Marlyn.

They were by this time under the grey walls of the ruined Manor House of Wynderfel.

“Yes, Pucelle, your manner,” repeated Rachel.

"Well, Rachel, I did not intend — I did not even perceive it — *there,* won't you?"

And she drew her towards her and kissed her, and then held her from her and looked for a moment in her face with an expression which Rachel did not understand.

"Vexed with *you;* good God! what a notion!" she exclaimed, with a sharp disdain; "what in the whole earth *could* I be vexed with you about? Come, do pray let us talk of something else." There was a little silence here, and with a slightly changed manner she added— "You know, dear Rachel, I love you."

"Shall I tell you about Lady Mildred?" asked Rachel.

"Do," answered Miss Agnes; and Rachel related the story.

"It's a very pretty, sad story — love and jealousy — poor thing!" said Rachel, by way of epilogue to her tragedy.

"Lady Mildred, what a goose!" said Miss Marlyn.

"Ah! you don't think so, Pucelle," answered Rachel.

"From *that* window?" inquired Agnes, and she stood up and looked through her little glass at it. She did not smile, she looked without sympathy or interest, as she might at the "drop" of a prison at which a convict had been executed.

"A high window," she said at last. "If she did go about it, Lady Mildred was quite right to do it effectually, don't you think? An odd fancy to live in a garret, though! *I* did it once, because I could not help it. Old La Chouette we used to call old De la Perriere. De la Perriere, indeed! Her real name was Roque, and her father was porter in a dirty old house near Notre Dame. She put me into one; but I'll never sleep in a garret again."

There was something both cynical and dismal in Agnes Marlyn now, that was quite new to Rachel, and which somehow made her feel uncomfortable, and even nervous.

"It was not a garret, however, in *our* sense," she said. "It was, on the contrary, a very fine chamber; look to what a height the roof rose above it, and look inside with your glass, and you'll see a wonderfully carved mantelpiece. There is a great stone with the Shadwell arms, and I don't know how many quarterings over it. It was quite a splendid room."

"And if she was so comfortable, why did she kill herself?" asked Miss Marlyn.

"She was wild with grief, and love, and jealousy, poor thing!" answered Rachel. "She was cruelly illused, and has haunted us, you know, ever since."

"I don't pity her a bit," said Miss Marlyn.' "You don't!" exclaimed Rachel.

"Neither will you, when you know better," replied Agnes. "How can you interest yourself about a fool?"

"Why a fool?" asked Rachel.

"Because she was jealous, and a greater one for killing herself. If she *would* kill some one, she should have killed him. But he was not worth it."

"I think, Pucelle, you want to shock me," said Rachel, after a little pause; "why do you talk like that?"

In fact, it was something wicked in Pucelle's face rather than in her words, which were, like those of young people, often loosely spoken, that vaguely startled Rachel Shadwell; but people don't always take the trouble to analyse their impressions.

"Oh! every one talks what they don't half mean sometimes. I think all that business up there was miserable folly," said Agnes Marlyn. "She was an *imbecile,* that's all. It would have been murder, of course, to kill him, and murder's wicked; but it was worse to kill herself. It's a world of tyranny."

"What do you mean, Pucelle?" asked her companion.

"I was tyrannised over ever since I was a wee thing like that," and she laid her left arm across her breast, and locked it in her right, like a baby, with a laugh.

What a wonderfully pretty strange nurse she would have made!

"*You* like babies, dear little sweet things, you know," she continued, and laughed again, — not pleasantly, Rachel thought. "As long as I can remember papa used to box my ears for anything or nothing, every day almost, and lock me up in a dark room; and after my mother died, often half-starved me, when I knew he had money enough in his pocket 'for his pleasures."

"Agnes, dear, I thought you loved him!" said Rachel, with wide and sorrowful eyes.

"So I did, I believe, in spite of it; I don't know why — he did not deserve it. Perhaps because he was lively, and amused me sometimes, when he took the trouble; and he was a man, and we like to be illused by men. It seems to suit — nature designed it, I suppose — slave and tyrant. But the idea of being *jealous* of a man!"

And she smiled along the daisies at her feet, in a listless contempt.

"Madame du Barry was a very wise woman," she continued; "she did not know what that sort of jealousy meant; she never teazed the king."

"Was she a good woman?" inquired Rachel.

"*Yes,"* answered Miss Agnes, with decision.

I read her life in my garret, once; she wrote it herself. She had no Tartufferie about her, and was goodnatured — that's what I mean by good."

"But was she really good?" asked Rachel.

"Yes — well enough — good and wise in her way, I suppose; how should *I* know?" replied Miss Marlyn carelessly.

"And who was she?" inquired her pupil.

"She was one of Louis the Fifteenth's wives, when he died."

"One of his wives!" repeated Rachel, as not having heard her rightly.

"Yes; kings have as many as they choose," Agnes laughed. "Upon my honour they have. King David had, and every other king that was worth a rush, ever since; as many as ever they choose. Why do you stare, child? I'd tell you no end of things — all true — only you'd tell them again, and get poor Pucelle into trouble."

She had two or three pebbles in the palm of her hand, which she was throwing with tiny jerks into the air, and rolling them about, and looking intently on them all the time she spoke, so that Rachel saw nothing of her eyes but their long lashes.

"I should not like to hear anything I might not tell mamma," said little Rachel, spiritedly.

Her simplicity may amuse town-bred young ladies, but they will excuse her, remembering that she had not their advantages, and that her young mother had been her near and sisterly companion.

"No, of course not — what a little fool! Your mamma, of course; *I* tell everything to your mamma myself," said Agnes, quietly, still rolling the little pebbles in her hand. "All I say is, that no woman ought ever to make a fool of herself about any man; and no woman but an idiot, absolutely, could think of hurting herself for jealousy."

“They say that jealousy is a sign of love,” argued Rachel, in support of the sentiment of this legend of Wynderfel, which had seized on her imagination. “Wives always love their husbands best.” She thought she saw the light of a smile cross Agnes’s downcast face at these words. “And if they did not love them best, why should they marry them?” she added, arguing resentfully with that smile.

Agnes Marlyn looked full at her for a moment, with laughter in her deep dark-grey eyes that she did not understand; and with the end of the daisy she had plucked from the bank close by, between her fingers, she knocked the pretty tip of Rachel’s nose, as one of Titania’s fairies might have done, with the tiniest little tap in the world, and almost whispered:

“Mademoiselle Simplicity!”

They sat down for a time, in silence, on that old stone bench which I have already mentioned. It was the drowsy time of day, when the afternoon sun is warm, and the air hardly stirs. Rachel had a book with her, and turned over its leaves, and laid it down.

“Let us come to the ruin — the chapel, I mean, close by,” said Miss Marlyn, getting up listlessly. “We’ll sit under the window, in the shade of the ivy; it’s pleasanter than here.”

CHAPTER XXV.

SOME ONE LOOKS IN AT THE WINDOW.

THE ruined chapel of Wynderfel stands on the slope behind the Manor House, embowered among grand old trees. A broken stone fence, here and there half obliterated, surrounds it; and a few stooping thorn and elders have straggled within it; an ancient yew-tree — which has witnessed, no doubt, the old funereal splendours of the Shadwells, whose burial-place this chapel was ever so long ago — still maintains its sombre supremacy in the centre of the long disused churchyard.

Agnes Marlyn's conversation had somehow frightened Rachel. Up to this she had seemed always playful, girlish, like herself; a sort of malign revelation had taken place. She had mistaken her; her sympathies were not with the child. The young girl felt she was making a mock of her; knew that she was the stronger; that she was mistress of a knowledge that was not good, and whose nature she had not apprehended. She was not as high as she thought, but more dangerous. She could not define all this; it was such an overpowering impression as comes in a dream, and there was a sense of sorrow and degradation mingling with her fear.

In an evil world the evil is the more potent spirit, and overawes the good. We have not faith enough in Time, the vindicator; how few, even in Eternity, that will adjust all equities! The *present* is the inheritance of evil. We instinctively know this, and the knowledge clothes its fascinations and cruelty in terror and power.

The first imperfect manifestations with which Evil hints its presence, touch the eternal antipathies of human nature with a frightful thrill. The ideas of danger and pain foreshadow its approach. Neither is there any such thing as a long hypocrisy; sooner or later the features of Evil appear with unmitigated distinctness. It is self-revealing, like Good, but manifests itself sooner, because its power is of *time,* and the other of eternity.

Agnes could not help it — did not care. As in the dead body the blood will gravitate hither or thither, as the body lies, and in due time show itself on the discoloured skin, so it is with evil. Its law is, when the time and place arrive, to come to the surface. There was a pain at her heart, which she would not acknowledge, and the nature of which her proud spirit scorned. The mood was upon her, and the self-revelation the expression of her pain.

Rachel hoped that her companion would not renew her dismaying talk. They entered the old churchyard, and threaded their way among half-buried tombstones, upon a soft undulating sward, untufted and untangled with those rank weeds and dark high grass, that so painfully indicate the recent graveyard.

Rachel would have gladly seized some subject of conversation far removed from that which had just ended. The objects that now surrounded them might easily have suggested one. But somehow it would not come at call; and before she could find it, Agnes Marlyn began.

"Girls take fancies, of course," she said; "I could take a fancy to a man, but fall in *love* with him — no more than with a wolf or a shark!"

She sat down on the great stone of the eastern window, where, in old days, the altar had been; and just before her pretty feet, nearly buried in the unequal grass, stretched the tomb of Sir Hugh Shadwell, who *hie jacets,* with the customary patience and virtue. He was the hero of the Lady Mildred drama: "Eques AURATUS, VIR PRŒCLARUS," reposing in hope, and greatly mourned. The eidolon, carved in bas-relief, in white marble, once gilded and painted, now lies in the parish church of Raby, removed, two years ago, for better preservation, to that site, from Wynderfel chapel, which, however, still enjoys the distinction of Sir Hugh's personal presence, and the custody of his bones and epitaph.

"There's no man ever lived, or ever will, could make me, for jealousy, prick my fingertip with a needle, much less die for him.

Men come into the world to support women — women to please men with their beauty, and be supported; men to ill-use them, and they to deceive men. Whatever they marry for, they are sure to plague one another before the game is over. The Sabine women we read about in the Roman history yesterday — much love and romance there was there! And they made as good wives as any. Don't you see, *ma belle etoile?* The woman finds the pot, and the man the pullet; neither can get on without the other — and there's the secret of romance. The woman runs after an establishment, and the man after a pretty face. It's quite true; ask your papa."

Rachel looked with haughty surprise at Miss Marlyn.

"Or any other man," she continued, "they'll all tell you the same. Every girl should hold herself ready to marry the first good partie that offers — you, for instance, should marry Sir Roke Wycherly, if he asks you."

"*I* — Sir Roke Wycherly!" almost gasped amazed Rachel.

"Come, come, you can't pretend, dear, not to see that he has fallen in love at first sight, poor old gentleman!" laughed Agues, a little drily.

"I really think, Agnes, you are mad yourself, or trying to make me so; either *that,* or you have been mystifying me all the morning," said Rachel, vexed and bewildered. "I should be very glad to be assured of that."

"A drowsy day — a little sultry," said Miss Agnes, standing up, and with clasped hands extending her arms with a listless stretch. "Mystifying? perhaps mystifying myself too. Whenever you talk sense, quite in earnest, you are very likely to talk some nonsense along with it, at least *I* do; but, on the whole, you'll find I'm right. You'll find what I say true, and why not? What objection to Sir Roke? Marry him, if he asks you; I don't say he will, though. But he has waited a long time, poor gentleman! and he deserves a young wife. Yes, marry him, he deserves it; I like to see a rich, old, selfish bachelor suitably married to a young, spirited, clever wife, who is also beautiful; a very interesting game ensues."

Again she stretched her arms as before, and added: "All I pray is this, that if he does ask you, you'll do me the justice to say that I urged you, as strongly as I could, to marry him."

"I suppose this is all a joke," said Rachel; "but it is not a kind or even a good one, Agnes, and I beg you'll talk of something, else."

"I'm tired talking, suppose we read?" said Agnes.

"Yes, certainly; I should like it so much," answered Rachel, eagerly. But here arose a delay, for she had forgotten her book on the stone seat beyond the Manor House. "I'll run and get it!"

"Yes, I'm lazy — tired — I'll stay here," said Miss Marlyn, a little ungraciously.

So away went Rachel, through the arched doorway under the belfry, and across the little enclosure. The sound of her retreating steps died away, leaving Agnes Marlyn in silence and in deep meditation.

A voice, oddly connected with her thoughts, hard and snarling, quite close, on a sudden startled her. Sir Roke Wycherly was at the window, looking through upon her, with a very angry countenance.

“Charming retreat — did not expect to see *me* — nor desire, possibly. Where’s your companion, pray?”

“Gone down to the ruined house,” she answered, with a sudden change of colour.

“Coming back?”

“Oh, yes.”

“How soon.”

“In a moment, I think,” she answered.

“In a *moment!”* he repeated. “Yes, I thought I saw her run down there, and I’ve only a word to say. I’m not a boy — I’m not a fool — I’m, on the contrary, a pretty sharp old fellow, and no subject on earth for child’s play; I shall remain here till Tuesday — not a day longer — for I must be in town on Wednesday morning, d’ye see? I merely mention this, because I’ll decide within that time; there’s nothing unreasonable. ‘No,’ is very easily pronounced, and I merely object to being trifled with. Before your face I have evinced a very natural admiration for your pupil; of course, it is observed. What a *fool* you are! Pray excuse me. I say Tuesday, for of course *I* must make up *my* mind, whatever other people do, and I won’t endure any caprices, nor run myself into the smallest trouble, I assure you. I allow myself to that day, not an hour longer, to decide in. What’s that? Is she coming? Well, that’s enough for the present. If you want to tell me anything, I’ll find an opportunity — not altogether I — *you* must assist; but, of course, I shall be much obliged and flattered by a conference, and, I may as well say, frankly, I don’t quite understand you, Miss Marlyn.”

“Nor I you, Sir Roke Wycherley,” answered the young lady, coldly.

“Yes, you *do;* I beg pardon, but you *certainly* do — you can’t possibly misunderstand me — you can’t be such a *fool* — excuse me. You do understand me, and you understand *perfectly* every incident of my conduct.”

He paused.

“Is she coming? — eh? — I’ll go down and meet her and, for the first time, he smiled, though his smile was neither a warm nor a bright one, and he kissed the tips of his fingers, and waved them towards her, and disappeared.

Miss Marlyn looked after him, very stern and pale, with dilated and brilliant eyes. Then she drew a long breath, so that the folds at the neck of her grey dress rose and fell, and she looked down on the tomb of Sir Hugh Shadwell, at the foot of which she was standing; you would have fancied that she was reading the epitaph, and that her smile was tinged with the dark cynicism which such be pufferies of defunct bad men will raise.

And she murmured, “He’s very angry and with the point of her parasol was poking away the moss from the projecting edges of one of the black-letter words, on which she smiled. She had something of Mark Shadwell’s philosophy about the Sir Peter Teazles of this mad world.

*‘*He’s very angry!”

She smiled more, and looked closer at the moss, and worked more diligently. What a pretty “Old Mortality” Sir Hugh, the praeclarus had found!

“Candescent,” she murmured. But these attentions were not for him, or even for this tomb. She was using him merely, in a state of preoccupation, as young ladies will living men, I am told, on occasion, as softly as if love-passages were being whispered between her and the recumbent Sir Hugh; but she was only quoting her little quarto dictionary, playfully. “‘*Candescent — growing white — applied to metals at a white heat*.’ Ha! he does look very angry!”

She thought she heard voices, and listened.

“Yes, here they come!”

And with her pretty cruel feet she stepped lightly up the limbs and across the face of the helpless Sir Hugh, and sat down in her old place on the window-stone, and whisked her parasol to her side, where it lay between two fingers of her slim glove, and laid her other hand upon the carved stone of the window, looking out pensively upon the sad and solemn picture, and quite arranged for the coming surprise.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A PARTY OF THREE.

THEY were not quite so near as Miss Marlyn thought. Sir Roke hated brambles and stiles, and cursed stepping-stones, and always suspected grass of damp, even in the fiercest glare of July. He picked his way, therefore, and spared himself all the trouble he could. “What the devil pleasure can there be in sitting in that beastly churchyard? So *like* women! With a garden and flowers and everything at home, they come down here to sit in a dirty paddock, wetting their feet, and breaking their legs over tombstones!”

He had nearly reached the ruined house of Wynderfel before he espied Rachel returning with her book. He lifted his hat and smiled with all his fascination. “My long walk at last is rewarded,” said he, gallantly. “I surprised Miss — Miss — your friend, in the picturesque little chapel you have chosen for your shrine — pray, allow me.” He would have taken her book, but with a new sense of things, the fruit of Miss Marlyn’s exhortation, a shyness mingled with dislike, she declined his aid, and, a little disconcerted and annoyed, pursued her way accompanied by the polite baronet, who chatted agreeably and murmured his little flatteries by her side. She was relieved, however, of the apprehension that he would attach himself to them during the remainder of their ramble; he had no notion of doing so.

There was a change in Rachel’s manner, which, though decidedly the reverse of flattering, yet both pleased and amused him. Oddly enough it struck him as in the highest degree auspicious.

He stood in the little archway under the belfry chatting agreeably, holding his slender umbrella crook upward, and corresponding in his niche with the antique monumental bishop at the other side, in bas-relief, crosier in hand, and liliputian angel on his shoulder: possibly Sir Roke had his spiritual prompter at his ear also, if people’s eyes could see such things.

“When I was here — only ten or twelve years old,” said Roke, agreeably, looking about him, “I remember, with Mark, getting into the darkest glen I ever saw in my life — even in Switzerland — with a deep pool of water in it. I do assure you, the sides were so perpendicular, and the place so dark, it was like being at the bottom of an abyss; and there was a tombstone on the grass there — I remember it as if it were only yesterday — a female figure extended — do you remember? — cut in black marble, I think — with her hand so— “and he’ held up his open palm by his shoulder; “and there was a star on her left hand — that I can swear to.”

“Oh! to be sure, that’s the glen of Feltram; I’ve peeped into it often,” said Rachel, forgetting her reserve. “You know it too, Agnes. Yes, indeed! it’s an awful place, and the tomb of Lady Mildred — all alone, poor thing! — now, nearly four hundred years!”

“I remember Mark and I grew awfully frightened there, that day — the tombstone and the solitude and darkness,” said Sir Roke. “So we did,” repeated the baronet, amused. “I recollect our shouting to frighten the kites, or hawks, or whatever they were, up in the trees; certainly it was a wonderfully dismal spot — and the echo, high among the precipices every time we shouted, sounded not like a repetition of our own voices — we were boys, you know — but like a female voice imitating an echo; and, by Jove! we got it into our heads it was the dead Lady Mildred, who had got up among those awful trees. Mark saw that I was frightened, and I saw that Mark was frightened, and so we made a race of it, and ran for our lives.”

“And does she haunt the place?” asked Miss Marlyn, dreamily, feeling, or affecting an interest in the story.

“Oh! dear, yes!” interposed Rachel, eagerly. “She’s called the Gaze-Lady — I told you, I think, Agnes — and she bears an unrelenting hatred to our family.”

“Exactly,” acquiesced the baronet. “I recollect when we got home, there was an old woman — a superannuated housekeeper or something — I quite forget her name, but I remember her appearance perfectly — an old, lean, yellow woman, with a shake in her head — that used to sit in a great armchair by the fire, in the housekeeper’s room — and she lifted up her hands — I remember so well — in horror at our audacity in venturing into that haunted recess, and threatened us with being kidnapped by the evil spirit, and told us such a long story about the ghost, and its malignity, that we were frightened half out of our wits. The Lady Mildred — the gaze-lady, you know — is the evil genius of the Shadwells, and returns in the flesh, at long intervals, to compass their ruin. I give you my honour, Mark’s mother, your poor grandmamma, believed every word of it as religiously as she did her Church-catechism. She has told it to me fifty times. Did you never hear the story?"

This was to Rachel, who answered —

"The gaze-lady? Oh, dear! I've been hearing of her all my life. Old Wyndle has stories about her — and Mr. Sherlock, of course, believes in her — and the other evening Mr. Temple — the vicar — was talking to mamma, and he says the legend would make a fine subject for a poem. She has visited our family, he says, twice — old Wyndle says, a great deal oftener."

"I know it all at my fingers' ends, better than Temple," said Sir Roke, "because I heard it at the age when little fellows are easily frightened, and remember better than we do afterwards. Have you told your friend? Really, Miss Marlyn, it's worth your listening to. This Lady Mildred, owing the Shadwells an eternal debt of hatred, is the spiritual minister of their destruction."

"Oh! and how does she contrive it?" gently said Agnes, still looking as in an odd dream along the scattered daisies, beyond the marble armour of dead Sir Hugh; and Roke Wycherly, with a gallant smirk, replied —

"Well, they say she comes like a beautiful woman, and very plausibly — more as if a chance brought her, than by design — and so she grows into an influence which she uses, with a fiendish wisdom, to entangle and beguile, and draw them into those dangerous currents of life which are strewn with dead men and shipwreck. Now, to leave metaphor, the first visit of this lost soul in the flesh, was made in the shape of a young Italian widow, of noble birth and fortune, and marvellous loveliness; and this creature took possession, as it were, of the wife of the then Shadwell of Wynderfel, and a pretty dance she led them all — such feuds, and litigations, and forfeitures! — ain't I right, Miss Rachel? — that was more than two hundred years ago, and she shook off nearly half of the estate, and established enmities, and in fact, worked like the father of evil, till her hour came, and she departed, *she* said for Italy, but our wiser forefathers knew it was to a still more ardent climate."

"But really, there did come an Italian lady?" enquired Agnes Marlyn.

"Miss Marlyn won't allow the supernatural; but I think, Rachel, we can vouch for the fact of the Italian lady's visit?"

“Oh! mamma says she heard there was once a portrait of her,” said Rachel, enthusiastically.

“Heard!” laughed the baronet, “why I *saw* it — that old woman with the palsy, and a face as yellow as a gourd — used to shew it to us — what was her name? — Dinah Ponder — wasn’t it? — in one of the bedrooms — but it had grown so black by time, she could only see here and there a very brilliant complexion, and an intense carmine in the lips.”

“I wonder where it is!” exclaimed Rachel. “It was in the year 1640, a hundred and ten years after the death “of Lady Mildred — and then you know in 1750 she came again, that was exactly a hundred and ten years later, and that time my ancestor found her — a young English novice daring her probation in a convent near Vienna — and he took her away, married her, and brought her home; and she bewitched him — as that goblin always does — and involved him in all sorts of ruin, and that was the last visit of the gaze-lady; but the old prophecy says, you know, that she was to return for the last time in a hundred and ten years more. Wyndle knows it, and all the old people, Mr. Temple says, between Wynderfel and Applebury.”

“Yes, I’ve heard it often when I was a boy, can you repeat it?” said Sir Roke.

And Rachel repeated these rude verses: —

Though Shadwells be churlish of old,
And the maid lie stark and cold,
In five score years and ten
Ye’ll open, and I’ll come ben.
In a hundred years and ten
I’ll find the door again.

In ninety and a score
Again I’ll come at the door;
And then we’ll measure the ground
And the Shadwells no more be found.

“So you see it is at intervals of a hundred and ten years she returns; and the next time will be her last visit,” said Rachel with that eagerness to believe the marvellous which belongs to the young.

“Seventeen hundred and fifty — eighteen hundred and sixty — so she’s due now!” said the Baronet with a smile.

“You’re going to sleep, Agnes,” said Rachel reproachfully.

“Torpid and drowsy,” said Miss Marlyn shrugging with a smile and a little shudder. “I was falling into a trance, I think.”

Sir Roke has talked enough now to shew that he was quite on his usual footing, he had nothing particular to say, nothing whatever to Miss Marlyn, no reserves or embarrassments, quite frank and chatty.

The baronet did not remain more than five minutes longer, and walked home to luncheon in decidedly better temper than he had set out.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHAT DOES SIR ROKE MEAN?

MARK SHADWELL, like other solitary and discontented men, was given to building castles in the air. He had reared and tenanted many in his day; and once in occupation, he held to his tenancy, against all hints and even processes, with admirable tenacity, until the castle fell. He was not exacting in the matter of proof; very light material sufficed for their construction. Now, as we know, he had a theory in hand: like one of the old cagework houses, it stood in outline first, and Mark found brick and mortar as often as Sir Roke Wycherly talked, to build in the interstices.

Mark liked making a cumulative case of this kind. As he and his guest stood on the hall-doorsteps to-day, for instance, admiring the long files of lofty timber that darkened the avenue, the baronet's talk went off on other matters, and at last he made quite a little homily upon the dissipations of the gay world and their effects on the habits, characters, and worth of young ladies; and then he harangued on the graces of simplicity in such terms as satisfied him that he could only be thinking of Rachel.

After dinner, over their glass of wine, again, Sir Roke made a picture of domestic, not rural life, which he contrasted in his own way with the sort of life he had hitherto led. Perhaps he really felt what he said, for of late his qualms and panics about his health had very much spoiled for him the flavour of his old life. It was merely like a spoken reverie, but was enough to contribute to the masonry of Mark's chateau.

"You must not grumble, Mark," said Sir Roke again, "if you knew but all, you are better than I, with broken health, and no pursuit, and no tie, and placed on a d — d regimen, and forbidden nearly every enjoyment on earth! How would you like that?"

Sir Roke was grumbling, in his way, now, and exaggerating, as grumblers will.

"My money never did anything for me, to speak of. I never sat for any place; politically, I'm no more than you. I *could,* of course, if I had liked it, but I never cared."

“You might have put me in for Dowcastle, instead of that fellow Dingley. I might have done you some credit, and I would not have played you the trick *he* did, at all events,” said Mark, in whose heart that wrong had long been festering.

“Now, that’s very true, Mark, so I *might;* but you know you did not hint it till it was too late: however, that sort of thing can be made all straight by and by; our parliaments don’t last for ever.”

Here was another sign of an auspicious change, for Mark knew very well how sharp and short had been Sir Roke’s answer to the meditation he had employed in this matter of the borough of Dowcastle, and how he had pointedly said that “he wished Mark Shadwell were informed, once for all, that he did not think him in any respect suited to the House of Commons.”

That evening as they stood near the fire in the drawingroom, Sir Roke sipping the chocolate which the accomplished Clewson prepared, for he was a little afraid of tea, and coffee was interdicted, said Mark, very low, on a sadden — he had been looking in a long reverie at Miss Agnes Marlyn, who was at the piano —

“She *is* beautiful!”

Mark’s solitude had given him careless habits. As Sir Roke glanced at him with his shrewd, hard, mean eye, Shadwell would have given something to recall his words.

“Your daughter? Upon *that* question I shall certainly be found among the ayes.”

“I think Miss Marlyn beautiful, at least very pretty, don’t you?” said Mark drily, and trying to rally. He was aware that Sir Roke knew perfectly whom he meant, and it was less suspicious to be frank.

“Miss Marlyn?” repeated Sir Roke, “oh! I know; yes, very well, very pretty indeed, very, but her style is by no means so uncommon. My cousin Rachel’s beauty is more exquisite and more heavenly, I maintain.”

Sir Roke was a little near-sighted, and through his tiny Parisian glasses he covertly inspected the young lady at the piano for a moment, and then putting them down, he said to Mark: “So “you admire Miss Marlyn; and I’m not surprised, she *is* very pretty.”

There was nothing in this speech at all remarkable, nor anything tangible in the manner of its utterance; but Mark was stung by it. He knew what was passing in Sir Roke's mind, and he fancied that he was aware of that fact and amused at it.

Mark Shadwell did not quite understand the pain he felt, nor even in what particular nerves it was seated. He had no more pretensions to morality than other men who had lived, like him, an early life of dissipation. It was not worth his while to wear a mask before Roke, who knew him as well as he knew Roke; but a sentiment was combined with his mere admiration of Miss Agnes Marlyn; she was growing dear to him. If he had looked this secret in the face, I do not say that he would have had nerve to act as he ought; but he must have seen incidents in the situation enough to appal him. His pride was wounded on a sudden. He had unveiled to the lynx-eyed cynicism of Roke the secret which was almost a secret to his own soul. He was angry with him, angry also with himself — yes, very angry with himself — for was he not a philosopher? had he not long ago renounced the illusions of his youth? was he not a friar of the order of David Hume, as well as a theologian of the school of Voltaire?

Of the two men who stood side by side on the hearthrug, I am quite sure that Sir Roke was the worst. Both of the earth earthy, unennobled by the only influence that can improve our sorry moral plight — Mark's nature, with its great faults, perversities, and early stains, was yet the better.

He had never been the cruel epicurean that Roke was. Generous and even tender impulses had visited him sometimes, and occasionally disturbed his selfishness, and something of passion had mingled in his early profligacy. Even now he was living partly in a delusion, and he loved, in his sharp debates with the Reverend Stour Temple, to challenge that severe censor to pick a hole in his morality. He liked sarcastically to pit himself against the vicar's best parishioners. He would have liked to make Roke speak out what he knew was in his mind, for the sake of answering him according to his temper. But Roke would do no such thing. He would enjoy his suspicion discreetly with an insulting reserve.

Miss Marlyn was playing still. Sir Roke approached Rachel, who, I suppose, did not receive him encouragingly, for in a few minutes he glided to the piano, and stood by the side of the performer. He beat time with a little wave of his hand, and smiled and whispered something; a compliment on her music, Mark assumed.

What he really said was this: "So you've been doing me a kind office, with your pretty companion? she won't speak to me — she won't *look* at me. What sort of person must she think me? You must allow me to view this in my own way, and to regard it as of the best imaginable augury. Pray remember how very soon I shall be ordering my wings and be off to town. Was I very ill-tempered, to-day? I hope n'ot."

Here came a great roulade, and the bass grew very loud; so that he contented himself with smiling, and marking the time with a little oscillation of his hand.

Mark Shadwell, standing by the chimneypiece with his coffee-cup in his hand, looked at his invalid wife, to whose side by this time Sir Roke had transferred himself.

"That sneering beast thinks every fellow like himself. I *never* lived a life like his. I despise a man who does."

His glance wandered to Miss Agnes Marlyn, and then dropped to the ground; he leaned on the mantlepiece, and his reverie was of the afternoon, some time ago, when in that irregular apartment, hall, vestibule, all in one, of the Star and Garter, in the quaint High Street of Raby, waiting to see old Brent about his cob, the 'bus from the distant railway station set down a passenger at the open door, who entered in her cloak.

He knew nothing of her — he had forgotten all about Miss Marlyn's intended arrival. He saw a plain dress, but a wonderfully beautiful girl; and he made way for her as for a princess. There is an impulse, not of admiration simply, but of *respect* in our first sight of a beautiful woman; because we intuitively reverence power of every kind, and beauty in a woman is power. The momentary scene was fixed in his mind for ever. In the shadow of that homely hall, so queerly misshapen, doors and galleries opening on it, the clumsy stairs mounting through an arch on one side, the bow-window of the bar projecting at the other, had appeared this young figure, and face, and all was glorified by her beauty.

"I have been like a *father* to her — a guardian — the shabby fellow!"

Mark Shadwell mentally presented himself with the most unexceptionable certificate; and with that in his pocket, glanced a contemptuous defiance at his kinsman, who smiled and chatted on, quite unconscious of the lightning that forked and flickered so near him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CARMEL SHERLOCK KNOCKS AT AMY'S DOOR.

MRS. SHADWELL went early that evening to her dressing-room. Dolly Wyndle, their usual conference ended, had gone about her business. With solitude came dejection. The sick lady, supporting her head upon her thin hand, began to think of what would be when she was gone. "Agnes Marlyn will not desert my poor Rachel; wise above her years, and kind, I don't think Mark will disturb that. But then she is so young a creature; every way, difficulties. Perhaps Mark will go up to town and live there, as he always wished, leaving them here. He will marry very soon a pain thrilled her, though she smiled a forlorn little smile. "I wonder whether he will ever think of his poor little Amy! No one will ever love him so well again and her eyes filled slowly with tears.

Poor little wandering soul — troubled about many things! Then came the thought of death. Oh! was her failing health, or the coming of that ghastly change, a frightful dream? A horror of great darkness, and the fears of death had fallen upon her, and there came the shuddering and wailing of panic. To this, an awful calm succeeded, and she lifted up her clasped hands, and her eyes and her trembling heart to God in dumb supplication.

Many sensible people had long set down pretty little sick Mrs. Shadwell as a fool — yet she had accomplishments — could draw — was a musician — was, as the phrase is, "well-informed," — could tell a good book from a dull one — and talked when her spirits served, pleasantly and intelligently about most things. But though not a mental, I am afraid she was a *moral* fool. She had not courage to fight any one — to wound any one — to suspect any one — to hold her own, in short, in this world of cunning and ferocity; and when she lay down at night, she was troubled to think that anyone, on earth, was "out with her," and busy with little plans for reconciliation. And had she not given herself up to an idiotic idolatry of a husband who could no longer see any good in her priceless love, or, pleasantness in her unconscious adulation. Eyes had he and saw not, ears and heard not, and yet her worship never flagged, and she sat by a dead love in that wildest and saddest insanity which will not believe in death, but watches, and hopes, and waits for its awaking.

After a while, in the silence that followed, came a sudden knock at her door.

"Who's there?" she asked, starred, for she heard no step approach the door.

"I, ma'am, *I* — Carmel Sherlock — shall I come in?"

"Come in."

And Carmel entered, looking very pale-looking, indeed, like a man, faint from pain.

"Thank you, ma'am, you're very good. I've something on my mind — something to say;" he closed the door, jealously looking at her all the while, with a troubled face, and his large eyes dilated with fear. "Don't be frightened, but I must go, ma'am; I must leave Raby. The place where I've been so happy — dreaming — *dreaming,"* he groaned.

"What is it? What do you mean, Mr. Sherlock?" asked she, surprised.

"I'm come to say, I must go, ma'am — I *must,"* and he groaned again. "I must go, and I don't like to tell Mr. Shadwell — my benefactor — because it would cause a — a struggle; he would try to keep me; and if he were to succeed — oh! if! — I won't look at it; I must go *tonight."*

"Pray, Mr. Sherlock, be quite frank, and do let me know your reasons."

"Oh! ma'am — my dear, good lady, you mustn't ask — I can't. It isn't — it isn't to be told."

"But Mr. Shadwell will be so pained — you will be an irreparable loss. I really don't know what he's to do, if you leave him. Surely you'll consider him — I know you will."

"I will — I do — I always do — Oh! ma'am, I'm not ungrateful. I should have been cast away upon the wastes of life, but for him. I owe him all — my life — my life — but this would never do; it scares me; it won't be battled with or denied — just — just a whisper that has caught my ear."

"One word of all this I can't understand," said she: "I hardly think you intend I should."

"Better not," he said, and clasped his hands hard together. "So many years, and to *frighten* you at last! No, no! it could not be."

"If anything has happened to make you less happy than you were, I think you ought to tell me. It's very odd, and hardly kind to think of going away without assigning a reason; there's nothing that could possibly frighten me in any you are likely to give." She paused; but though she said this, she did feel nervous as well as curious; there was so much anguish in Carmel's dark stare.

"It *would* frighten you," he whispered; and looking round the cornice of the room, he laid his hand on his head, as if to control some pressure there. She remembered the sarcastic bulletins with which Mark Shadwell often favoured her, to the effect that Carmel was growing decidedly madder and madder every day.

"Now, I've made up my mind, Mr. Sherlock," said she, with something of her old spirit, and shocked to think of his leaving at such an hour; "you'll stay tonight, whatever the cause; you won't go — at my earnest request, and as a kindness to me — you'll remain!"

"She does not know," Carmel groaned, " she doesn't, what she's doing! Why will she ask it — *dis iratis?* Oh! madam, yon mustn't — oh *I* spare me that one command!"

"I will ask you — I do — you must not go tonight — I *insist* upon it — don't think of it: in the morning you will see things differently. I entreat you to grant me this one kindness." There was a pause of a few seconds.

"I *will,* madam," said he, shaking his head, nevertheless, as if he had said "no."

"The day after tomorrow — you must stay till then; there arc many things, you know, to arrange — you mustn't go till then. Promise this — you *shall* promise — I know you will!" And, with these words, poor Mrs. Shadwell, who in her energy had risen from her sofa, took his hand kindly, and repeated her entreaty.

"I will, madam, I obey you in this; I promise — take it — my hand — *cruentum!* There — Good God, madam, my hand!" He withdrew it, and looked into her eyes with a very odd stare, and muttered: "Well were it for that man that he had never been born! My hand — it looks all wrong to me! I wish, ma'am, you had ordered me rather to get it smashed in a mill-crank!"

"Till the day after tomorrow, you have promised to remain," she said, passing by this odd parenthesis. "I am satisfied now, and thank you, Mr. Sherlock, thank you very much — and goodnight."

"Goodnight, ma'am. I am constrained— "He paused, with his hand on the door-handle, and looked at her as if on the point of speaking; after a few doubtful seconds, however, to her relief, he changed his mind, and, with a great sigh, he said merely "Good - night, ma'am," and left the room, closing the door gently, leaving her a great deal more excited and agitated than she had fancied herself during the flighty interview he bad just given her. Odd he always was; but now his language, like the incipient mutterings of actual insanity, was wild and ominous. She was grieved and shocked, and felt on the point of bursting into tears.

"Poor, kind, gentle Carmel! — what can it be?" she wondered, as she stood very pale, where he had left her.

Very glad she was to hear a step approaching. This time it was her husband who entered.

"Oh, Mark, I'm so glad you have come. Poor Carmel Sherlock has been here, and seemed so excited and strange."

"I told you, Amy, he's odd — you don't see so much of him as I do — a little bit mad; you would not believe me," and Mark laughed. But his merriment in her ear was not reassuring. It sounded like laughter heard in a dismal dream.

"Oh, Mark, dear, you could not laugh if you knew how very strange he looked, and ill. I'm so afraid there's something very seriously wrong."

"Now, come," said Mark, a little inconsistently, "you must not be absurd. You fancy Carmel's mad — he's no more mad than you or I. He has very odd ways, I grant, and theories — it's merely solitude and reading, and this vile wilderness; but with that dreamy way of his, he's as wideawake and sharp as any lawyer in Westminster — you may take my word for it. I know him better than any man living — at accounts and business with him every day — as sound and clear a head as any in England — no more mad than the Lord Chancellor."

Mark was, in fact, arguing with himself, and blowing and brushing away the little suspicions that were, as his frightened wife spoke, gathering over his own mind.

"I promised to play a little piquet with Roke in his room tonight," he resumed; "he asked me. You remember what I said yesterday about him — you do, of course. Now, all I say is this — you'll leave it entirely to me; and, mind, there's to be none of that talking him over, you know, that women are so fond of; by Jove! I only wonder any girls ever married — they sit like a secret committee on every fellow that pays them the least attention, and pick him to pieces, and laugh at him, till I wonder how any of them can have the face to marry him, and I'm certain that's the sole reason why half the disappointments take place that do. Now, mind, you mustn't allow it, nor any tattle of old Wyndle's, and Miss Marlyn must not be laughing with her over Roke's wrinkles, and nonsense, if he has any. All I say is this — just leave the matter in my hands. Ill speak to Rachel myself, if she's disposed to be foolish — she sha'n't be allowed to sacrifice herself. There aren't six girls coming out in London, next season, who'd refuse Roke Wycherly. Pretty stuff! Of course she's to be quite free — but— 'that's all."

Mark was talking more this night to Mrs. Shadwell than he had done for five weeks before. His head was full of this grand scheme, and it must be admitted, not without some colour of evidence.

"I'm glad you think, Mark, dear, that our darling Rachel should be left to herself if it should— "

"Of course, that's precisely what I say — leave her to her own decision. I'm certain, if Roke isn't pulled to pieces and talked over, as I've said, she'll decide like a girl of sense. She's not an idiot, I suppose."

And so on and on Mark talked, every now and then, by way of parenthesis, admitting that he spoke on hypothesis. At last there came a pause, during which the thoughts of both, by one of those odd coincidences that we sometimes recognise, returned silently and suddenly again to Carmel Sherlock. The lady was first to speak.

"Carmel Sherlock seems to have made up his mind to go."

"To leave us, do you mean?" asked Mark, looking up sharply. He could not spare Carmel.

"He wanted to go tonight, but promised to remain till the day after tomorrow. He would not tell me his reason. Don't you think, Mark, you should see him tonight?"

Now Mark had already made up his mind to do so. He said, therefore: "I don't see much good in it; but if you wish it, I will. We've had a long talk, Amy," he added, with the air of a man who had done a gracious thing, and knows it.

“Oh, Mark, darling! it’s very happy — it’s like old times and as she spoke and smiled, her large eyes filled with tears.

He patted her cheek, and kissed her, not ardently, but kindly, and smiled on her encouragingly, and, said he: “You often mistake me, Amy. You think me cold and ungracious, when, Heaven knows, I’m only plagued to death with my worries and disappointments.”

“It’s kind of you, *darling,* to say so. I knew it — I was sure of it,” she said, putting her pretty hands on his shoulders, and looking up in his face, and smiling and crying at the same time; and, smoothing her hair with a caress, he looked down in return with a relenting commiseration that was strange to him. “I don’t know why I’m crying. I’m such a fool; I’m so happy, Mark. Don’t mind my crying — I can’t help it. I never was so happy, I think.”

Few acts, as we know, are done on a single motive, and the origin even of our emotions is not always absolutely explicable to ourselves. Something of compunction, a sudden recoil to self-upbraiding tonight in the drawingroom, as I mentioned, prompted a recognition like this; but I do not know that the impulse would have had strength at this hour to bring him to her room, had it not been for the necessity he was under of finding some one to listen to his confidences and speculations respecting the intentions of his kinsman.

He went away, pleased with his own great attributes and with that instinct of self-approbation which stood him instead of a conscience, altogether gratified and glowing.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A HAND ON ROKE WYCHERLY'S DOOR.

MARK, candle in band, walked down the sombre passage charmed with himself. He thought it a pity that the Reverend Stour Temple, that well-meaning, bigoted vicar, could not witness his triumph of philosophy. He had made a condescension to that poor wife who, with all her infirmities, was so infinitely his superior. He had patted her cheek, smoothed her hair, kissed her, and was in a manner reconciled. Yes, reconciled; for was she not always and unaccountably, as it were, in disgrace?

Gross are we, and measure our virtues and our gratitude, not by the motive of the service, but by its magnitude. Always reversing where it suits us the moral of the widow's mite — not even by the magnitude of the service, where that will not do, but by the wild gratitude of despair.

Our theatric virtues strut their hour, and the applause of the gallery roars above them. But God sees with an awful eye, and it is the whisper of self-suspicion that reverberates before His throne in thunder. He knows the dynamics of all morals, and measures the momentum of goodwill, not by visible results, but by the unseen obstructions it has overcome.

Mark Shadwell had observed a shyness in Rachel's manner towards the baronet which led him to think that Sir Roke must have talked in a strain of gallantry. All the better — proof upon proof. He was also in high good humour with himself, and confident in his philosophic self-control. Prospects were brightening. His debts could not plague him as they had done any longer; and was not the House of Commons opening to receive the coming man?

All a-glow with this moral tipsiness, who should he encounter at the turn of the gallery but his daughter and Miss Agnes Marlyn?

He paused for a moment, said a few words, and bid them goodnight. How was it that this Agnes grew more and more beautiful every day? The girl is gentler, shyer, different somehow. He had seen her eyes follow him in the drawing room when, at least, he *thought* she fancied he did not observe her. He had seen her blush, he could almost swear, twice on meeting him unexpectedly. There was something submissive, sad, strange in her manner of late. How she liked working for him, and tried to please him! and how beautifully gratified she looked when he thanked and praised her! Poor little thing! Just a fancy. Well for himself — for *all* — he was so cool-headed a fellow! Well that he had burned his fingers, and seared them so early that he could afford to play with fire!

"My secretary certainly is beautiful! How interesting — how sad! Who could withhold his compassion?"

And he sighed. Who sighed? A benevolent philosopher simply; in that sigh, exhaled only ardent pity. He walked on with the image of that beautiful secretary before him. He knocked at Carmel Sherlock's door, and opened it. That eccentric gentleman rose suddenly to his feet as he did so. He spoke not — only gazed with a pale frown across the table, as if on the entrance of a thief in the night. A book was open before him. Oddly enough, it was the Bible.

"Didn't expect me, Sherlock? Passing this way, so I just looked in."

"Thankful, sir, always when you do."

"Reading?"

"Yes, sir, reading — the Bible, sir."

"Hey? that's something new, isn't it?

"Oh dear me! No, sir. As good philosophy as you'll find anywhere, and more ancient. I like it. I always look into it. Why should the Bible be the only book we can take nothing out of? There is something in every book — every ancient book — written when it was troublesome to write, and no one read but the critical."

In the midst of his scepticism, Mark Shadwell had a lurking awe of this mysterious book. In the tremendous perspective which it opens, there was no pleasant place for him, and he shut it down with something between a curse and a scoff.

"Ho! That will be very agreeable news to the vicar," said Mark sarcastically.

"There's the Christian trinity, you know, and the Platonic. There's a fundamental triplet somewhere, sir, or the triplet would not rule as it does. If there is a noon, you see, there must be a forenoon and an afternoon. In limited life, which is the first progress, the acme will have its antecedent and its consequent. The order is, desire, fruition, satiety, or, in other words, incipiency, power, decay — that is, you know, childhood, manhood, age. I see, sir, you are listening.”

“Yes, certainly,” said Mark, who had been thinking of something else.

“And you follow me — quite?”

“The devil I do!”

“Don’t you, sir?”

“Pray lead on, my good fellow. I’m stuck in the mud; but never mind, I’m doing my best.”

“But the unlimited life triplicates also,” said Carmel, unconscious of Mark’s banter. “Self-evolution is exhausted in three. There is no mutation after the worm, the grub, and the fly. The act of death, you know, is the labour of the man in the flesh, and the bringing forth of the intermediate man, who in turn evolves the man immutable. It is the law of fermentation — saccharine, vinous, acetous. Two processes of life, leading up to finality. This present state in the flesh is the first subterranean germination of life, compared with the next, feeble, inapprehensive, and ugly.”

“And yet I’ve seen some rather pretty specimens,” said Mark. He was speaking in the glow of that beautiful phantom of Agnes Marlyn, which still stood before him, though laughing at Carmel.

“This self-evolution, in triplet, is a moral law, desert, judgment, execution; the moral life is self-evolving. It projects a second state from its first, and a third, which is final, from the second,” said Carmel Sherlock, looking vaguely downward, and tracing slow lines with his fingertip along his pallid forehead.

“People grow from indifference to like one another; eh? and so on?” said Mark — he was thinking of Agnes Marlyn still— “and fall sometimes into indifference again. That’s a great discovery — is it in the Bible?” Mark was quizzing him gravely.

“Just this now,” continued Sherlock, lifting his tattered, Bible and reading — “‘ When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth Death.’”

“In the Bible that, is it?” asked Mark, smiling.

“Yes, sir, here, in the Epistle of James. The Triplicate self-evolution, lust — sin — death!” answered Carmel; and read the awful passage again, aloud. “I’ll show you how that must be— “

"Well, I believe we'll not mind tonight. I told you before, my creed is dust to dust," said Mark.

"Don't you believe in a resurrection?" asked Carmel.

"Of the body?" inquired Mark, preparing to go.

"Yes — *I* do — of the body," said Carmel.

"Nous verrons," said Mark; "and for the present, I must remain in darkness; I mean, I can hear no more tonight."

It was clear that Carmel did not mean to open his plan of going away, and Mark was now satisfied that Sherlock's idea of leaving him was one of the many vapours that rose in his solitude, and, crossing his mind, dissolved and came no more.

"What a fellow that is!" he thought, sneeringly, as he retraced the gallery alone. Mark was not quite in the contemptuous mood he fancied. That text had an odd mystic sound in it that was uncomfortable. There had risen something dark, now, a little in the way of that glowing phantom of Agnes Marlyn. In the midst of Carmel's babble, a pale, pure face had looked in at the door and startled him. In the midst of his gentle maunderings, a stern diapason had broken in, and rang still in his ears.

So Mark shook his ears, and hummed a tune lightly, and went and paid his visit to Roke Wycherly in his dressing-room; they chatted pleasantly, and then they played piquet.

Mark won — what some people would think a considerable sum — it was only some twenty pounds. It was nothing in the scale of old exploits. But guineas were welcome as drops of water in the desert to needy Mark, and is it not always pleasant to win?

"You'll come tomorrow night again, won't you?" said Sir Roke as he smiled feebly in Mark's face from his easy chair.

It is not always the loss, but the mortification of defeat that tries temper. Roke did not care for this game, nor for any other, for its own sake. He rather wished that Mark should be pleased with his visit, and was glad that he had won. And Mark's feelings towards him got into a state of equilibrium. He fancied as he left him that he could even come almost to like Roke. On such small things do likings and antipathies depend; and is not this just considering how seldom the great things turn up, if ever, and how minute are the bits which make up the mosaic of a whole life?

Very late that night, Sir Roke, whose sleep was light, awoke. He fancied he heard a step on the gallery floor. He listened, with an ugly frown, on his pillow. And then — he could not be quite sure — he heard a hand laid softly on the panel of his door, and brushed gently along it. Sir Roke lifted his head. The hand seized the door-handle and began to turn it gently.

“Who the devil’s there?” cried Sir Roke on his elbow, and stretching his lean neck over the side of the bed.

There was no answer. He thought he heard breathing. He was sure he heard a soft retreating step. He was one of those persons who can’t endure any trifling with the sanctity of sleep; it made him furious. Spluttering some ejaculations which I don’t repeat, he had already got the bell-rope in his fingers, to ring up Clewson and take his revenge upon that harmless slumberer, when, on a sudden, his mood quite changed, the bell-rope dropped back upon the wall.

“By Jove, it’s possible — quite — what a fool!” And he jumped out of bed in his long nightshirt and silk nightcap — a figure something like that of the Knight of La Mancha, when he fought his nocturnal combat with the cats, if you can imagine that Christian gentleman with a very wicked smirk on — and wrapping his silk dressing-gown about him, and forgetting night air and all else, he opened his door softly, still smirking in the dark, and looking and whispering up and down the gallery, “I’m here, does anyone want me?” and so at last to bed again, rather cold and cross.

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. CLEWSON CONFERS WITH CARMEL SHERLOCK.

MR. CLEWSON had formed a slight acquaintance, in the housekeeper's room, with our friend Carmel Sherlock, and had often, to Mrs. Dolly Wyndle, expressed his high estimation of Mr. Sherlock's erudition and wisdom, for he had quoted languages which that gentleman had never heard before, and ventilated theories, the futile endeavour to comprehend which had a rather fatuising effect upon his practical intellect.

He met Sherlock next morning on the back stair, by the great window on the landing place, and respectfully wished him good-morning.

"Ho! sir, I hope you slept well," said Carmel, looking wofully in his face. "For my part, sir, I've had a bad night — no sleep — only a *thought* — the same — *one* thought — a load, as you lie, always increasing, like the 'peine fort et dur,' till it breaks your heart. Sir, it's like the drop of water — tick, tick, tick — on your brain — that the Inquisition invented; and you must go mad or submit, sir, eh?"

"Quite so, sir," assented Mr. Clewson, who apprehended but vaguely. "My gentleman, he always takes hopium, in little lozenges like; I can give you two or three — or try counting up a thousand or so."

"I don't want sleep, sir. It's only that, don't you see, if the idea would change; but all one thought, never pausing, like one fiddlestring in your brain, and a bow as long as for ever, drawn on, and on, and on — it's too much — you're sure to submit; it has you at last."

"Just so, sir, a want of variety; every one tires of sameness like. I do uncommon," said Mr. Clewson.

"“When does he go?" said Carmel.

"Sir Roke?"

"Ay, yes — Sir Roke — he should go to-day," said Carmel.

"I don't think Sir Roke has no notion of going so soon," answered Mr. Clewson.

"He's here for no good, sir," said Sherlock.

"You really *think*?" — inquired Mr. Clewson, and with a shrewd look, and something like the dawn of a smile.

"Can't you get him away? In God's name get him away!" urged Carmel, laying his hand upon his arm, and grasping it with a little shake.

Mr. Clewson smiled a little, and said he:

"It's not me takes him, but rather him that takes me, sir."

Carmel sighed, and said:

"Look, sir; every man has a side to the light, and a side to the dark; his shadow goes with him. I wish he had stayed away. Can't you do *any* thing?" said Carmel in great trouble, as it seemed.

Mr. Clewson shook his head, amused at the idea.

"My sleep, sir, while I had it, was all like a church window, with dreams glowing all over with allegories. I told my beloved master something of it; but I'm worn out, sir, I'm tired."

"And what may be running in your mind, sir?" inquired Mr. Clewson, being curious.

Carmel looked at him suddenly, with a contracted and suspicious gaze, and dropped his eyes.

"About what?" said Carmel, drily, looking up again.

"I mean about Sir Roke, sir," said Clewson.

"I know nothing about Sir Roke Wycherly; and so you're going to stay? Well, you know, you ought to go and see something of the scenery — Wynderfel and Hazelden — and other places worth seeing. Will he go away tomorrow?"

"Sir Roke?"

Carmel nodded.

"Well, I know no more than you, Mr. Sherlock; I never know, sir, except a haccident, where or when we're agoing, until he gives me the order to get things ready and pack up."

"Something came into the house with him."

"You *may* say that, Mr. Sherlock; all them portmanteaus and boxes — awful particlar — no one living, sir, has a hidea what it is, I tell you."

"Troublesome, sir," acquiesced Sherlock.

"Rayther, I should say, a few," answered Mr. Clewson, shaking his head with a pathetic comicality.

“And don’t you know what he came here for, Mr. Clewson?” asked Carmel, with a bitter smile.

“No, I don’t, sir,” answered Mr. Clewson.

Carmel looked at him.

“*No,* really, sir. It may be many things. I don’t know. I give you my honour,” he averred, and shook his head.

“Well, *I* know,” said Carmel, smiling darkly out of the window. “He’s come here for a wife.”

“Oh, oh! I see. I’m not a bit surprised. I *thought* so,” answered Clewson, who *was* very much surprised, and uneasy too; for he could not say how such an event as marriage might shake him in his place, and his place suited him; and, in fact, was on the whole a good deal better than any he was likely to get again. Therefore he was shocked, though he did not believe it.

“And who — who may he be a looking after?” inquired Mr. Clewson.

“Miss Rachel Shadwell,” answered Carmel, hastily, as if he were mentioning a dead friend, and still looking straight out of the window.

“I partly guessed it; there’s several things has led me to that opinion. Is she likely to turn out a hinterfering person, do you think?”

“Miss Rachel is perfection,” said Carmel.

“I didn’t mean nothing contrary,” said Clewson.

“Think of such a man as that coming to marry her!” said Sherlock.

“Well, it *is* a lift for her,” observed Mr. Clewson. “A very desirable halliance. He’s took a vilent fancy, I dessay; he’s that sort— “

Carmel repeated, rather to himself than to his companion:

“‘L’amour arrive en chantant, Et s’en retourne en pleurant.’

“You may have read that — why not? French. Yes, he knows French; it’s in the *Morte d’Arthur,* and it’s very true.”

And so Mr. Clewson went up and Mr. Sherlock down, and the little conference at the large window on the lobby came to an end.

The Reverend Stour Temple paid a visit early next day at Raby. The two young ladies, Sir Roke, and Mark Shadwell, were at luncheon very sociably; and at this irregular meal, the vicar joined them in the dining-room.

Mark did not like the vicar, but he welcomed him courteously.

“You remember Roke Wycherly? Roke, *you* recollect Temple, at Oxford?”

Sir Roke gave him two fingers, and one of his bleak smiles, as he looked up at him from his chair.

“Charmed to see you, Temple; it’s so many years. Pray don’t count them. And you’re at Ridleston, here, Mark tells me. You were good at most things; you pulled a very good oar, and I remember you were a capital wicketkeeper. No cricket now-a-days, I dare say?” Stour Temple smiled with a sad and supercilious complacency over these recollections of his prowess.

“Never played since I took orders. I suppose I could not stop a ball now. I’ve an objection to clergymen playing.”

“I don’t see why they shouldn’t,” said Sir Roke; “they want exercise as much as laymen, I fancy, and it would prevent their growing so fat as some of them do.”

“My duties afford me exercise enough,” he replied, with a smile; “by the time I get home, I shall have walked fourteen or fifteen miles.”

“I wish they were all as active as you, Temple, I’ve a fellow down at Scarbrook; he rides at a walk on a horrid cob, and he’s as fat as I don’t know what; never visits his people, nor does a bit of good, from one year’s end to another. I wish the brute would get his apoplexy, and make a vacancy for a useful man like you.”

The Reverend Stour Temple looked not flattered, but very grave, and even stem, and Mark thought, with some pleasure, that he was on the point of rebuking the baronet, whose temper might have exploded under that liberty. But it did not come, *then,* at least.

The Reverend Stour Temple had not been five minutes in the room, indeed, when Mark perceived that there was something upon his mind. He was silent and thoughtful, and being an abstemious man, luncheon was to him a ceremony quickly over.

“How pretty the old Tower of Raby and the village look from the summit of the wood!” said the vicar, awaking from a reverie, and speaking apropos of nothing. “There’s a market there to-day. I crossed the uplands, and you can’t think how pretty it looks, lying among the trees and enclosures beneath you. It would almost repay the walk, if you would venture so long a ramble,” he smiled, as he spoke to Rachel. “There are very fine clouds, too, to-day, for a background; such towering piles of vapour! I should have suspected thunder, but that it would be too soon. It's hardly ten days since we had that thunderstorm."

"More than a fortnight," said Mark Shadwell.

"Ha?" said the vicar. "Time cheats us, Sir Roke, in the country."

"Suppose we make that our walk?" said Rachel, addressing Miss Marlyn.

"Mr. Temple says it looks so well. I should like very much," she said, with a timid glance towards the clergyman.

He made, however, no sort of answer to this little overture, and said to Mark:

"I crossed from Pennelston; that poor man I spoke to you about died this morning."

"Oh, did he? — poor fellow!" said Mark, with a slight flush, and looking at the landscape through the window. He thought Stour Temple's cold eyes were upon him, and I rather think he had forgotten all about the farmer of Pennelstone and his wants. "Very sorry, poor fellow! You mustn't go, Temple, I'll be back in a moment, only to write a note in the study."

This Mark Shadwell said with the intention of seeing the vicar no more that day; for he was always uncomfortable in his presence, and so had made a step or two towards the door, when the vicar said:

"Will you excuse my asking just two or three minutes with you, in the study? only a word or two."

"Certainly," said Shadwell, as cheerfully as he could, "whenever you please."

He crossed the hall, vexed and in a petty suspense that irritated him, shut his study door rather sharply behind him, walked across it, pulled out an old quarto, and read with a sour countenance, on its back, the harmless inscription, "Histoire des Voyages, tom viii.," and having read this inscription several times over, he threw it on the table a little roughly.

"That fellow's a sort of irritant," he said. "I never met him yet that he hadn't something to pester about. I wonder what it is *now*?"

Intuitively Mark Shadwell felt that it was something more than usually annoying.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A WARNING WORD.

THE vicar, meanwhile, loitered away a few minutes beside Sir Roke in the dining-room window, to allow Shadwell time to write his imaginary note.

"I had heard, Sir Roke, that you were here."

"Oh!" said Sir Roke, with one of his smiles and faint bows.

"And I should have been over here to pay my respects before now, had my time been my own.

"Sir Roke smiled and bowed a little, and laid his hand upon the vicar's arm:

"My dear Temple, I should not have stood on ceremony with you," said he. "I meant to run over to the Vicarage — which, I am told, is quite a little Paradise — and see you before I left the country."

"Very good of you," answered the vicar. "I've been anxious to see you from the moment I heard you were here. I've been wishing very much to speak to you." He looked on Sir Roke for a moment as if he were on the point of opening his case, whatever it might be; but the young ladies were chatting in the room, and, after a moment's reflection, he continued: "I came to-day hardly hoping for an opportunity, and I thought it, on the whole, a better plan to write what was in my mind, and — I've put it in this letter."

Sir Roke nodded affably as he took it.

"And, I'm afraid, it's tedious; but will you kindly read it through?" said the vicar.

"Certainly — rely upon me — every syllable — and give it my best attention too," answered Sir Roke, graciously.

"That's all I ask, Sir Roke," replied Stour Temple.

"How grand that fellow looks! That letter's to ask me for the presentation to Scarbrook; and you'd fancy he was going to ask my leave to build a church or an hospital. Sanctimonious rogues!" So thought Sir Roke, and said aloud, “I’ll not open it *note,* dear Temple; I’ll wait for a quiet opportunity; isn’t it better?”

“Certainly!” acquiesced he; “and it’s time I were going.”

So the Reverend Stour Temple took his leave, and went direct to the well-known door of Shadwell’s study, and found that gentleman awaiting him impatiently.

“Well, Temple, what is it? I’ve been playing the devil somewhere, or you wouldn’t have something particular to tell me. Pray go on; I’m prepared for something uncomfortable,” and he laughed a little viciously.

“Sorry my mission is not generally pleasanter,” said the vicar; “but you mistake me now. I’m not going to blame any one. I’ve sought this opportunity only to say a word of warning.”

“Well, thank you — I’m all ear,” he replied, as gaily as he could.

“I have had a letter from a friend — a resident at Darmonville — and I think I’m bound to tell you that it concerns Miss Agnes Marlyn, now domesticated in your family, and that it conveys a rather — in my mind — a *very* unfavourable impression of that young lady.”

“That’s very odd!” said Mark, sharply, and looking rather aghast.

“Not so odd in a *French* boarding-school as it might in an English one,” said the Reverend Stour Temple. “Recollect, I say only *unfavourable.* What I have to report does not amount to criminality. God forbid I should seem to intend more than I have warrant for; but her conduct there was characterised by great deceit and unpardonable indiscretion.” Mark Shadwell looked full in the vicar’s eyes, rather pale, and he seemed altogether more shocked than a man of the world might have been expected to be, on learning that a young governess had been, in matters of mere decorum, a degree less discreet than seemed fit to the Reverend Stour Temple.

“It seems odd we should hear it in this roundabout way; and it strikes me as a little too vague and intangible to consist quite with the laws of fair-play — to say nothing of charity,” said he, with a rather dubious sneer, after a little pause.

“It reaches you in a circuitous way, because Miss Marlyn was recommended in the absence of the principal of the school, Madame de la Perriere, who, rightly or wrongly, was afterwards reluctant to disturb Miss

Marlyn’s position here, hoping that she would conduct herself with more discretion in your house.”

“And nothing could be more unexceptionable,” interposed Mark Shadwell.

“And so far from being vague, the statement is very precise indeed. The young lady is ascertained to have let herself out of the school at night, on no less than five several occasions, by means of a’ key improperly obtained. On three of these occasions she met the friend or agent of a gentleman, whom Madame de la Perriere says she believes, or hopes, to have been seeking her privately in marriage; and on the two last occasions she met the gentleman himself, in the house, however, of Madame DuBois a shoemaker. This woman used to meet her at the wicket of the school-garden, conduct her to and from her house — so they say — and remain in the room during the entire interview; and, with the exception of this piece of — what shall I term it? — this Madame DuBois was always accounted a person of unexceptionable good conduct. These are the facts, so far as they are known; and, to that extent, they seem to me positively reprehensible as well as *suspicious;* and it seemed to me right that you should be made aware of the particulars of the impropriety of which the young person now placed in an intimacy with Miss Shadwell is capable.”

“Well — ha! — yes — I still can hardly believe it. If Miss Marlyn is not a fit person to be here, what business had those people sending her? Of course, if we begin angling for stories and gossip, we’ll get enough of them. I think I did all that was right when I applied to the head of the school; and there has been a very good account of her, and she has been everything we could wish since she’s been here; and I do wish people would not wait until all the expense has been gone to of bringing her over to this delicious place, and then begin collecting — I mean sending over — the tattle of an idle French town, and expect me — who haven’t a guinea, by Jove! — to throw away money by handfuls, for no better reason.”

“The occurrences I have mentioned are perfectly ascertained,” said the vicar, whose cold self-possession was never ruffled by Mark Shadwell’s hard words. “If the statement consisted of mere gossip, as you suppose, I should not have troubled you with it — I should not have repeated it anywhere, and I should not have given it a moments consideration myself; but all I have related is *true;* and were I the head of a household in which

Miss Marlyn filled the delicate and important place which she occupies here, I should at once withdraw my confidence, and no consideration would induce me to retain her services."

"Yes, that's all very fine!" said Mark Shadwell; "nothing easier than managing imaginary families, and lecturing other people on their duties, and practising all the virtues of the decalogue by proxy."

Mark Shadwell was always irritated by the officious morality of the vicar, and by his unaffected serenity under his attacks. It was an assumption of superiority, and galled his pride.

"Of course, I'm a mere child," he went on, "I know, and quite below the serious notice of a divine of the Church of England; but I may be supposed to know something about my own affairs. Miss Marlyn is, so far as I can see, quite a lady. We have found her perfectly satisfactory, and she has been a companion to my poor wife in her solitude, and very kind, and I really don't know how *she* could get on without her."

The Reverend Stour Temple remained provokingly silent and attentive, and, as usual, Mark's choler rose.

"And I don't see, with you, that, making common allowance for exaggeration, there's any case for turning this young lady adrift on the world; I think, on the contrary, it would be monstrous. Of course, I'll consider it; I'll talk it over with my wife. You have not spoken to her, have you?" he asked, sharply.

"Certainly not," answered the vicar.

"No — *I'm* the proper person to do that, I fancy."

"Of course," said the clergyman.

"And, in fact, I shall leave the whole thing very much in her hands."

"I've done now, I hope, at least, my duty; and, I may add, a very painful one. I did not seek the information I have communicated; but, having received it, I could not in conscience reserve it from you."

"No — well, it's off your mind now, and *we* can best advise about it, don't you think — my wife and I?"

The vicar answered nothing, he only bowed; and said he:

"I sha'n't interrupt you further, I must go; how long, by-the-bye, does Sir Roke remain here?"

"Two or three days."

"Farewell."

Mark Shadwell walked with him to the steps, and standing above his demi-griffins, nodded and waved his hand, with a very sombre smile, to the retreating vicar.

Mark was indeed very much disturbed. He had not the slightest notion of telling this story, elaborately, to his wife. “Women do run away with things so.” Neither had he a thought of dismissing Miss Marlyn. But a responsibility was cast upon him which he hated; also a doubt troubled him to a degree which he could not have anticipated. How had the vicar learned this? He might know a great deal more; that is, detail — particulars, which, although they did not affect the moral of the story, yet interested him intensely.

“I say, Temple,” he called after the vicar, following him; “one word.”

The clergyman tamed about and paused.

“I forgot; you’ll be returning this way, sha’n’t you? — just about our dinner-hour — you must come and dine with us — you really *must.”*

*“*You’re very good, but I fear— “

“Pray do — it will be really a kindness. I make it a point; you *won’t* refuse.”

“You are very kind,” repeated Stour Temple, looking down for a moment on the grass by his feet, and thinking.

“Yes, you *will* come?”

“Very well — *yes* — many thanks,” said the vicar; and with a second farewell he took his departure, and Mark Shadwell stood for a while looking after his receding figure, not knowing, quite distinctly, why it was that so trifling a story had so utterly confounded him.

VOLUME II.

CHAPTER I.

THE VICAR TAKES HIS HAT.

Sir Roke Wycherly took a little desultory walk with the young ladies, and was very chatty and agreeable; directing, however, his conversation principally, as perhaps was natural, to Rachel, who was beginning to get over the little shock of her companion's absurd conversation of yesterday.

It was not until Sir Roke had ended, for that bout, his compliments and gaieties, and put off his smiles and his walking coat, in his dressing-room, and collapsed on a sudden into that bitter, peevish, and formidable man of snarls, scowls, and wrinkles, with whom Mr.

Clewson had to do, that he saw and remembered the letter which the Reverend Stour Temple had placed in his hand. He enjoyed a certain sort of psychology, and broke the seal with an anticipation of amusement.

Nothing akin to amusement awaited him, however. The supercilious radiance with which he had opened it vanished before he had read half-a-dozen lines, and gradually his face darkened and corrugated like that of an angry monkey.

Mr. Clewson, making arrangements at the dressing-table, heard distinctly the hissings and splutterings of the high pressure.

Sir Roke folded the letter but half read, and with a hand that trembled with anger, thrust it into his dressing-gown pocket.

The fact is, there was a shadow of disappointment, if not of dismay, in the rage that agitated Sir Roke's countenance.

"Upon my soul, Mr. Stour Temple, you've got on a bit since I had last the pleasure of meeting you! You are one of those saints whose religion is made up of fire and brimstone, and impertinence — you think you may insult any one in any way that pleases your vulgar arrogance, provided you do it in the name of the thirty-nine articles."

If at this moment Sir Roke had encountered the vicar, he would have given him a piece of his mind, together with some expletives better omitted. But the baronet, except when his virulent temper overcame him, was a particularly cool man: without natural affection, without impracticable resentments, with all his malignities under the supreme guidance and control of convenience.

By dinner-time he had cooled down perfectly. Disliking the vicar intensely, he was not in the slightest danger of meeting him with any evidences of irritation.

The Reverend Stour Temple was there, and sat beside Amy Shadwell, with whom he talked, and very little with the other guests: unusually grave, and, at times, abstracted; and was not Mark Shadwell more silent, too, than usual? Had it not been for Sir Roke, indeed, the tide of conversation would have ebbed utterly, and all lain flat, black, and dismal.

"I think you walk too much. Are not you overdoing it a little, Temple?" said his host, observing his look of fatigue. "Take some sherry — that light wine is nothing when one's tired."

"Thanks," said he, "I *am* a little knocked up. Two years since I shouldn't have found that walk too much; I'm afraid I must acknowledge the hand of Time, and shorten my walks."

"Charming walks — a temptation always to do too much. But the air here is quite an elixir; *I* feel it so," said Sir Roke, who ignored decay, and abhorred mortality, and was always disposed to be testy when those ideas were pressed into prominence.

"That death is a stranger here," said the vicar, "and the Bible so far justified, is I think in nothing more clear than in the difficulty we experience in presenting the event, as a fact, to our understandings; the great truth is written in awful characters in every churchyard; proclaimed in every hour's retrospect by the broken and disappearing ranks of early friends; printed day by day, among all the vulgarities of life in every newspaper; every black-craped hat or bonnet we see is a signal that the dread event has happened recently and near us; all nature speaks by signs and allegories, and all our social relations, with a tremendous distinctness, of *death*; and yet how hard it is, for five consecutive minutes, to accept it as a certain incident of our position! so that we have reason to thank God for those other intimations of its approach, which are furnished in the evidences of decaying vigour and subsiding life."

"Isn't it — surrounded as we are with blessings — an odd subject to select for thankfulness?" said Sir Roke, with a little shrug and a bitter smirk. "For. my part, I thank Heaven for quite other things."

"For other things, and for that, also, since die we must; well that we should have every help to keep it in mind, for judgment follows death, and here sit we three; and very trite it is, but true, that this time twelve months one of us may lie in the grave!"

As I have said, Sir Roke hated death worse, I am afraid, than worse things, and he thought the vicar detestably illbred in pressing the topic as he did. The baronet, therefore, could brook this no longer, and he took up his parable, and said:

"Quite on the cards, though *I'm* a great deal better than I was this time last year; and growing better, too, every week, thank God. I'm sorry *you* can't give so good an account of yourself. But whatever happens we must bear it, you know, and there's no good, that I can see, in plaguing one another about possible occurrences, which are certainly not meant to turn us from the business, and blessings, and — and duties of life, till they do come. Life's our business, and *meant* to be our business, here, in my opinion. It's no news, you'll pardon me for saying so, to tell us we're to *die.* Death's no *discovery:* I'm to die, and *you've* to die. *You're* to die as well as Mark there. I hope you think about it, if it does you good. Your death's your own affair, whenever it comes, and mine's mine; and I don't want to plague you and Mark about it, and I *won't."* And Sir Roke took the claret, filled his glass, and looked across the table a little defiantly at the vicar, who sat under fire like a veteran.

"When I want medical advice, I send for a doctor," said Sir Roke, softening a little, and descending, as he did so, to a hackneyed parallel— "and when I want religion I'll send for a clergyman, and for none would I more readily than for *you.* But I think for myself, you understand, upon these subjects. The genius of our Church is liberty, you know; that's my view."

Thus Sir Roke wrested the conversation forcibly into another channel. Mark dropped in, and the vicar dropped out, and so for a while rather uncomfortably and with a sort of effort, of which they all soon tired, the discourse dragged on over their wine. Each had matters connected with the other to think over, and the conversation was often on the verge of subsiding into silence.

As Sir Roke and the vicar walked into the drawingroom side by side, the baronet said in a low and friendly tone:

“I read your note, my dear Temple, and you must pardon me for saying, I’ve seldom been so much puzzled, and so much amused; you’ve fallen into a most diverting mistake. I could not think, at first, what you meant; somebody has been mystifying you.” The vicar looked in his face with a very grave surprise, but made no answer, only bowed.

“I’ll take an opportunity tomorrow; I’ll go over to see you, and I’ll make it as clear to you as daylight; there never *was,* you could not have *conceived,* anything more preposterous. I wished to say so much now; I don’t choose my friends to think worse of me than I deserve — even for an hour.”

Sir Roke laid his hand in a friendly way on the arm of the vicar, who, however, looked down still without returning his friendly glance, and with the expression of a man who is distressed, and wishes an irksome subject at rest.

“You won’t say you believe me, but I know you do, and I’ll make you confess it tomorrow, when I see you. In the meantime, although, upon my honour, you have been quite in the clouds upon this subject, I assure you, I respect and I like you, Temple, for having written as you did — I do indeed.”

The Reverend Stour Temple bowed very gravely again. Sir Roke might as well have spared his flatteries. There was no response.

CHAPTER II.

A KNOCK AT SIR ROKE’S DOOR.

MARK Shadwell talked a good deal with the vicar in the drawingroom. The ladies made music and sang at the piano. Sir Roke was smiling and agreeable, and flitted from Rachel to her mamma, and from her mamma to Rachel again. Mark Shadwell shaking himself now and then free of his perplexities, almost wondered why he was so disturbed, wondered with a feeling at once of ridicule and fear, half hated himself as he looked at Agnes Marlyn, who acquiesced with a cold unconscious pride in the neglect to which she seemed abandoned that night, half hated her, yet in his compassion, he was tempted to go over and tell her how sweet her music was, and rescue her from the prolonged insult of that neglect, but somehow his heart failed him. Mrs. Shadwell on a sudden perceived it, praised her music; and asked her the usual questions about it and its composer, and so forth; and shortly after, Miss Marlyn, with a few whispered words to Mrs. Shadwell, and a smile, glided from the room, happily unconscious, it seemed, of having been overlooked and forgotten.

Ten minutes later the vicar took his leave, and the little party broke up. Mark Shadwell walked with him to the gate. They strode along silently for a good way.

“Sir Roke seems to enjoy his visit very much,” said the vicar at last; but like a man rather asking a question than stating a fact. “Your quiet rational life must be a change to him.”

“And you wonder how he can endure its dulness?” said Mark, with a laugh; “so do I, but anything may be endured for a day or two, and Roke does not mean to stay longer.”

“Oh! has he said so?”

“Yes — why?” asked Mark, struck by something in his companion’s tone. “I think he said he meant to go on the day after tomorrow.”

“Have you any idea where he goes then?” asked the clergyman.

“To Scarbrook, I think; you seem to take an interest in him, Temple; do you think of sending him a tract on death and judgment, or some little reminder of the sort? I'm sure he'll read it."

"I sha'n't trouble him with tracts, because I know he would *not* read them, and *would* think me a fool, and so any little chance that our conversation of tonight, or of any other time, might have, would be lost."

Mark smiled to himself, thinking that Stour Temple had actually thought over the tract, and been busy about Sir Roke's spiritual concerns.

"I'm afraid you may as well leave that erring and straying sheep to walk his own way, a perverse disciple like me, only I don't think Roke has any philosophy, except the hand-to-mouth one of extracting from life, day by day, all the pleasure he can, a rule which, except indeed in coming to Raby, I don't think I ever knew him offend against. I've some reason, however, to think that he begins to find that way of life a little tiresome, and he's talking of a quieter one, but I don't know; have you often known a man of that kind settle down and marry?"

"Yes, I've known two or three; not that they all make good husbands," answered the vicar.

"I dare say not; so have I, some," said Mark.

"They don't always make good husbands," he might have said, "but they do make good settlements sometimes and that I am afraid is what he was principally thinking of.

"When will you be coming this way again, Temple?" asked Mark, who wished to ask him more closely about the story of Miss Marlyn's school-days, and yet somehow could not this night.

Temple smiled.

"I wish you would look in a little oftener," said Mark, who interpreted that smile aright, and felt the rebuke more than his pride would quite acknowledge.

"Thank you very much, but my walks are very uncertain; their direction is often controlled by that most capricious, humanly speaking, of all influences, sickness."

"I'd ride over tomorrow or next day, if I thought I should find you, but you're so uncertain, and I really want" — he lowered his voice unconsciously— "to hear anything more you may happen to know about that story you mentioned to-day."

"I don't think I have anything to add," said the vicar.

"Well, I ain't going to ask you tonight, but you'll look in when you can, won't you?" The vicar promised, and they shook hands and parted.

"The most officious fellow in England! Well-intentioned, no doubt; but he's always making me uncomfortable, and I suppose other people also. I wish Roke would present him to Scarbrook. I wish he could keep his scandals to himself. I don't think he'd come all that way to tell me anything pleasant — delight some fellows take in tormenting their neighbours!" Thinking of many things, he sauntered back towards the house, and was surprised to find himself so soon again on the steps.

The little game of piquet in his dressing-room amused Sir Roke, and soothed his nerves for bed.

"Well, what do you think of Temple?" inquired Mark, as he shuffled the cards.

A hard shrewd glance Roke shot at him, but Mark's countenance had nothing alarming in it, and his eyes were upon the cards.

"Oh! Temple's very well, if he wasn't always talking shop, you know. He's very well, but too much shop," replied Sir Roke, cutting the cards. "He used to be clever — sang very nicely, didn't he? And he wrote verses, I think, and was an accomplished fellow before he grew so dismal. Everything good in its place; let him preach in his pulpit, I've no objection, but I do object to — I lead, don't I? — I object to sermons, and d — d disagreeable sermons after dinner."

And with this remark Sir Roke entered on his game; they played as usual; the baronet lost, and, when he had played enough, he thanked Mark, paid his losses, and yawned gently behind his hand.

"Very good of you, Mark, to get my nerves in tone, and enable me to sleep, by this little game. You'll come tomorrow night? I'm afraid it must be my last — what the devil's *that?"*

Some one had pushed open Sir Roke's door a little bit, and closed it again softly.

It was near one o'clock by this time.

"Some one at the door," said Mark, getting up and opening it.

"No one there," said Mark; and he listened. "No, it was a mistake."

"No mistake," said Sir Roke, testily.

"I mean that some one mistook the door, and got away again on finding out his mistake," replied Mark Shadwell; "who on earth could it have been, though?” He bethought him, and again he looked out and listened. “Whoever it was, all’s quiet now!” and he closed the door on the gallery, bid Roke “goodnight,” and went out the other way.

Sir Roke Wycherly was not in a pleasant mood that night, as Mr. Clewson was made aware. It was a phase of exasperation that tried that gentleman’s politeness severely, a sort of dumb madness as to all utterances but revilings and curses — in which he indicated his orders by signs, and resented a misapprehension in such terms as would make a good curate’s hair stand on end, and suggested the prudence of some such fumigation as that potent one we read of in the Book of Tobit.

These tempers excited Mr. Clewson’s curiosity, for they were seldom wholly capricious, when they reached that pitch of intensity; but depended for the most part on some exterior cause.

He wrote a letter at last. A curious observer of the human countenance would have noted an unpleasant flickering; the ironical lights and dismal shadows of an angry and malicious face, as he penned it, and read it over. It ended, however, by his putting it into the fire. It did not satisfy him, and looking woefully tired, he at length got himself into his bed, toned and tranquillised by his tinctures or drops; and looking like the corpse of a man arrested by death in the moment of revenge, he lay worn out and bleak on his pillow.

This letter may have been to the Reverend Stour Temple, or to quite another person. I don’t know. It will never be known till all secrets, great and little, are proclaimed.

It was three o’clock and the house quite still, when on a sudden Sir Roke was wakened, he fancied, by a noise. His nerves were jarred upon, and his heart thumping at his ribs as he wakened, as will happen with irritable men under the imperfect action of laudanum. He had just collected his wits, and remembered where he was, when he heard the handle of his door tried again from the outside.

Up jumped Sir Roke with the nimbleness of anger, resolved to clear this matter up; stealthily he got into his dressing-gown, lighted his bedroom candle, and drew near the door, and exactly as he again heard the handle of it cautiously turned from without, he turned the key in it, and candlestick in hand, with his head a little stooped, and features peaked and corrugated with anger, he confronted Carmel Sherlock, who stood before him, very pale and haggard, in his ordinary careless costume.

Like a somnambulist wakened, he recoiled in a kind of horror a pace or two, and then stood with his great dark eyes gleaming back the light of Sir Roke's candle upon the baronet.

CHAPTER III.

MORITURUS.

Neither spoke for a while. At length, raising his candle a little, so as to disclose those odd confronting portraits more sharply, Sir Roke said, with a pallid grimace which sarcastically travestied a smile:

"I've been obliged to you, sir, I think, more than once for this kind of attention?"

"Very likely, very *certainly*," said Sherlock, just above his breath. "It must be that you lock your door."

"Pray, sir, do you want anything in my room?" repeated Sir Roke, in the same constrained tone, and with the same angry smirk.

"No, sir, no. I've no business, certainly. It's a happy thing, sir, you wakened me," said Sherlock, looking full at him as before, and with a sort of shudder he went back another step.

"Then you've been walking in your *sleep,* sir, I suppose?" said Sir Roke, intent on mentioning the case to his host, with whom he felt very angry for having such a person in his house.

"Walking in my sleep, sir? Oh, no! that's double life; no, never, sir. Lock your door. I hope you will — do, sir — double lock and bolt."

"Your advice, sir, is immensely obliging," said the baronet, with the same sneer, but somehow fascinated by the sublime impudence and unintelligibility of his visitor, and unable to break away at the moment.

"No, don't fail; every man changes his theories from time to time, and looking among the ancients, I think the Sadducees were wrong, and there is some place like hell— "

"And I should say a likely way to settle one's mind upon that question would be going about to people's bedrooms at this hour of night, and getting yourself mistaken for a robber. Pray, sir, don't come here any more. Good night." And so saying, with a burst of auger at himself for having played the fool for so long, he shut the door in Carmel's face, and locked it; and he cursed his audacious disturber with intensity, and rang up Clewson; and blew him up, not reasonably, for allowing every d — d fellow that had nothing better to do to hammer upon his door for half the night, and ruin his health; and he demanded of Mr. Clewson what the devil he was good for, and whether he fancied he would go on keeping him for nothing, and so forth.

So in his wrath he marched and countermarched Mr. Clewson, put him on fatigue duty, made him get on his clothes, and mount guard in the gallery outside his door. He made him share the bitterness of his own involuntary vigil, and strained his patience very nearly to the cracking point, and did not permit him to revisit his bed until sleep began to approach his own, and he wished him out of his way.

Sir Roke was one of those gentlemen who utterly pooh-pooh the idea of hell. He cultivated vague ideas of his Creator's beneficence, which had been unconsciously his epicurean comfort in many an incipient qualm about futurity.

"Hell, indeed! vastly good of him to call me out of my quiet sleep to tell me his ideas on that agreeable chimera; d — n the mad brute!"

Many fat goodhumoured fellows smile at hell, if they do not sneer. And many bad men class it with Styx and Tartarus — a bugbear and a fable. Eating, drinking, dozing, comfortable friend! Willing to take a luxurious view of your Creator, and to make the day of judgment a goodnatured sham. God is good, you say; it cannot fare so ill with us. He is the God of love and of mercy, and of every good and pleasant thing. Alas! most certainly He is also the God of every evil thing — the God of pain, of madness, and of death. Look around on the gloom of this transitory world. If here and there is a broken light of heaven, are there no glimmerings and shadows of hell? Are there not the hospitals, the madhouses, the prisons, the graveyards?

Is there no such word as incorrigible? Are there not criminals whom no punishment and no fear can cause to cease from troubling, whom nothing but final loss of liberty, or of life, the completest loss of liberty, can render harmless? Persons who have educated themselves into a systematic and irrevocable enmity to their race, to fair play, to God — persons to whom we award imprisonment for life, and leave them, at the end of it, morally where we found them — not to be trusted with liberty? There we leave them, and there we should find them, if life lasted twice or twenty times as long, or through eternity. We see this in our own economy, and can we not understand the possible necessity of "spirits in prison" for ever, by the committal of God? If a perverted man be here so immutable, and will, with his limited powers and opportunities, inflict so much upon his fellows, how would it be with the opportunities of an everlasting life, and the magnified faculties of a being raised in power?

But Sir Roke Wycherly felt himself better and stronger every day. Though still an invalid, therefore, there was no reason he should think of another world yet, or trouble himself with any unearthly speculations. Very much of the earth, earthy indeed were his thoughts just now. A young lady, he thought, was fooling him. With a preposterous ambition, playing fast and loose with him, he had grown more eager and incensed than perhaps he ever had been before in a similar pursuit. And worthy of admiration is it in such enterprises with what a devilish perseverance and energy obstacles will inspire the most supine and despicable of men.

Over the evil and the good, the hale and the sick, the jocund and the sad, the morning rose, and the slanting beams of sunrise blushed and glittered across the valley. The songs of happy birds greeted the dawn; rural labourers awoke, and the pleasant sounds of life were heard all round. A new page was opened in the Book of Life, on which all sorts and conditions of men were to write their indelible inscriptions — their falsehood or truth — their virtue or wickedness, to be folded back in its turn, and see the light no more until the seal shall be broken in the glare of doomsday!

"What sort of person is that Mr. Sherlock, who sometimes comes in to breakfast?" inquired Sir Roke, after that meal, of Rachel Shadwell, with whom he was now chatting by the window. "An odd being he seems to be."

"Oh! so odd, so simple and clever, and so really kind, and gentle, and affectionate," she answered, forgetting her reserve, in a kind of enthusiasm; "poor old Carmel; he taught me — let me think — ever so much. He taught me writing, and arithmetic, and French, and Italian, and some German, and some music too; I'm very fond of good old Carmel Sherlock." Sir Roke listened politely, and then with a shrug and a smile answered:

"An Admirable Crichton! but he keeps very late hours, and visits people's apartments very oddly."

Rachel stared, and Sir Roke laughed gently. "Yes, I assure you, he made me a call last night, and knocked me up, between three and four, to advise me to keep my door locked, and to instruct me in some of his admirable theology. I don’t know that I shall adopt his theology, but his advice about locking my door I certainly shall.”

“Yes, he is very odd,” she answered, joining slightly in Sir Roke’s laugh. “But he’s very grateful.”

“Odder still!” remarked the baronet.

“Papa has been very kind to him, and he is so devoted; I really think he would die for him.”

“Oh! He *must* be very much obliged, indeed, and very romantic also, because dying for a friend is a sort of politeness one can’t repeat. Life is a bird in the hand, which, if you let it fly, never returns. How charming the sun is to-day; how brilliant your flowers look!”

He pushed open the glass door which opened on the gravel walk, and paused. It was, however, so very genial a day that he was prepared to venture without his hat. He looked up, and waved his hand a little in the air, to be quite assured of its temperature.

“It is — yes — a charming day.”

And he invited her to redeem her promise, and tell him the names of half-a-dozen flowers which he particularly affected, and forth went Rachel, “herself the fairest flower;” and her father, looking through the window, observed with a reserved satisfaction the little scene, and fancied a tenderness in Roke’s manner, as he took the flowers from Rachel’s fingers, and a sentiment in his smirk that pleased him infinitely.

Why was Mark Shadwell’s head so full of the little comedy for whose opening scene he had rung the bell, and which he watched with an interest which perhaps no one but its cynical hero quite detected? He had never cared for Rachel; he had grown indolent and unsociable in his rural solitude, and he had no very active desire to return to the glare and excitement of his early life. But this great marriage would be a mortification to many on whom it would delight the proud and wounded recluse to retaliate the contempt with which he fancied they had treated him.

Rachel, besides, cost him money, which his discontent exaggerated; and she was, somehow, in his way. As for Miss Marlyn, she, he was sure, would not like to leave Raby — no, she should not go. Amy would require a companion, and Miss Marlyn would remain their guest. Poor Amy! their marriage had been a great mistake — such were his conceited ruminations.

A woman of mind and ambition would have been a wife to comprehend, and to promote the fortunes of such a man.

Sometimes Mark Shadwell's monstrous ambitions were relighted for an hour. He was, in his dreams, an M. P., high in office, the most brilliant reputation in England. His evening receptions crowded by personages and celebrities of all sorts, and certain personages peremptorily *excluded* — yes, that was a pleasant thought — sweetest drop in his mantling cup of nectar. These gorgeous dreams, however, it is but justice to say, were only occasional.

There were others worse, perhaps, but less fantastic, in which the scene was laid after the death of poor Amy — an event oftener in his mind than that pretty, fading, adoring little wife could have believed possible. That occurrence would be to him a liberation, and with it he connected a romance.

Miss Agnes Marlyn! Who so fit to be the wife of a man so gifted and aspiring as he? Clever, beautiful, energetic, how she would help to push his fortunes — how popular she would make him! What a little diplomatist she would be. How graceful, how elegant, how beautiful! Who could do the honours of his house when fortune should begin to shine, when he should sit for that borough which Roke had promised, so charmingly as she?

But these visions of active ambition, as I have said, depended on certain moods, and states of spirits, which were not always, nor indeed very often, his. And in his normal condition she was simply his future wife. Agnes Marlyn! without a guinea! Oh, Prudence! What a thought for a man not far from half a century old. Time was when proud, handsome, highly descended Mark Shadwell would not have admitted such a dream. But solitude makes us less worldly, and more self-indulgent.

CHAPTER IV.

LETTERS ON THE HEARTHSTONE.

Mark Shadwell was away that day among his woods and rabbits. During luncheon they heard the distant pop of his gun. His other shooting, thanks to the poachers, for Mark had long ceased to pay keepers, would not repay a trial. But his rabbits increased and multiplied; they swarmed in the burrowed woodlands, whose shades and solitudes accorded well with the indolent and dreamy habit of his discontented mind.

When he got among the knotted roots, the steeps and shadows of these sylvan uplands, he generally loitered away the whole day there. But on this occasion Mark had miscalculated his ammunition, and was out of powder early enough to make it worth his while to go back and replenish his oldfashioned powder-flask.

Things were brightening for Mark, and his head was full of pleasant chimeras. Had it been otherwise he would probably have loitered among the woods, powderless and morose, for the remainder of the day, with no occupation but his cigar.

Upstairs, in one of a suite of unfurnished rooms, Mark Shadwell kept his guns, fishing-rods, shot, and powder, and thither he went. Three rooms open en suite, and, contrary to his custom, and without any particular reason, he entered the first.

Standing near the window, with a shock, he saw Agnes Marlyn and Sir Roke Wycherly. The baronet was speaking in a low tone as he entered, and instantly was silent. If Mark had shot him with a pistol, he could not have eyed him for a moment with a stranger stare and gape. In another second the young lady had vanished through the distant door. Mark stood stock-still in the doorway, gaitered, in his rusty velveteen coat and wideawake hat, with his oldfashioned shot-belt across his breast, looking very pallid and foolish.

Miss Marlyn was gone, indeed, in a moment. But her face, with its strange look of *guilt,* was it? was caught and fixed in his brain.

If they had been allowed even one moment's preparation, I dare say the beautiful Miss Agnes Marlyn and the withered Sir Roke would have met Mark with countenances so serene, and an air so plausible, that he would have been puzzled, and prepared to accept, or at least entertain, any explanation they might have chosen to offer. But Mark Shadwell, whom they had reason to believe to be more than a mile away at that moment, was standing, even before they saw him, in the doorway, and gazing at them with a countenance in which they both saw consternation and menace.

Sir Roke — a man of the world, inured to such small reverses, disciplined in dissimulation, and blessed with presence of mind — was quite himself before Mark had half recovered his shock.

"I thought I heard your voice, and I wasn't wrong — just this moment, coming out of my room — and I fancied it came from here," said Sir Roke, gaily, with his withered, impenetrable smile: "and as I entered at one door, Miss — Miss — what's her name? came in at the other. Ha, ha, ha! I'm always in luck; I fancied she mistook *me* for *you,* and came in for instructions — your secretary, isn't she? A very good idea; very agreeable; I quite envy you. She made so many apologies, and looked ready to sink into the earth — ha, ha, ha! I think she said she writes your letters."

"Yes, my letters — that is, sometimes. You both thought, of course, that I was still away, shooting in the woods," said Mark, fixing his eyes, with a strange look, upon Roke, and speaking in a measured way.

"I really had not been making conjectures on the subject — I can't say, of course, how the young lady had been employed; for my part, I fancied, as I crossed the gallery, that I heard your voice *here,* and, the door being open, I walked in. I hope I have not done very wrong. I was making my excuses to the young lady when you came in; I must have heard your voice as you came up the stairs."

"No, that couldn't be; I did not speak — some mistake," said Shadwell. "I've come in to get some powder. Should you like to take a gun for once, and try the rabbits?"

"No, thanks; I was just going out for a walk. Have you any notion where I should find my cousin Rachel?"

"Not the slightest," said Mark, shortly.

"Well, I must only try. Pretty landscape that and Sir Roke, as he spoke, waved his hand towards the window, and smiled from the distance through it in such a way as ought to have made the flowers turn their innocent bells and cups towards him, and the birds sing more sweetly.

Thus smiling — with a little nod — Sir Roke was gone, leaving Mark Shadwell standing there, with his empty powder-flask rather tightly held in his hand.

Mark's look was cast down on the floor, and there was a very angry tumult of suspicion, and other dark passions, at his heart. He entered the other room, where his powder and shot and fishing-tackle lay locked up in a press. It was simply the impetus of his first intention that carried him on, for powder and rabbits were now quite out of his mind.

On the middle of the floor of this room he stood with downcast eyes, and darkened face, I cannot say thinking, but rather stunned, and with the elements of fury indistinctly rolling in his breast.

He walked to the dim windows, stained with the old patterings of rain, and looked out, without an object. A pleasant female laugh sounded from beneath, and he saw Miss Agnes Marlyn talking with Rachel, on the grass. She seemed gay and at her ease, and the sight — suffering as he was — stung his pride with a momentary agony.

As he entered the room just now, and surprised her and Sir Roke in conference, a truth, though undefined, quite incompatible with accident or honesty, shocked him in their faces, transitory as one gleam of lightning, but fastened, with a dazzling chemistry, for ever in his brain. All Sir Roke's rubbishy explanations — lies, lies, *lies!* How near he had been to tell him, at one moment, that he *lied!* He was glad now that he had not. To betray his rage would have been a humiliation. Was it possible, after all, that there was some truth in Roke's explanation? No, it *could* not be. That one look that met him was detection.

With a sudden resolution he turned and walked swiftly across the room, along the silent gallery, and direct to Miss Agnes Marlyn's room.

That room was simple, neat, nothing out of its place. Not a letter was lying about. He espied that little desk, inlaid with circles and fleur-de-lis of brass, quaint and rather pretty. He tried it, and found it locked. He tried his own keys, but they would not do. Mark Shadwell! Was it possible? in his governess's room, a shabby spy and detective!

There was only this extenuation: he would have done precisely the same had her eyes been upon him. No; he was no spy, but the grand inquisitor, in his power and fury. He was not to be baffled by that artful little lock; his anger found a rough and ready way, and he carried the reserved and pretty little desk to the hearth, and with force, measured by his fury rather than its strength, dashed it upon the stone.

Delicate and obstinate little lock, decorative brass clasps, neat dovetailing and glue, all burst into wreck in a moment, and away flew, with a tiny clatter, broken bits of sealing-wax, a pencil-case, a seal, and two or three keys, over the floor; the letters lay among the wreck, and them he gathered up into a little pack, and laid them, methodically enough, on the small table near the window. There were not twenty in all. There was his wife's gentle letter, which did not seem to hire, but to invite, Miss Agnes Marlyn — the beginning of all this!

The rest were in French; a few of two years since — adoring, fierce, sublime — from the constructor of the desk whose wreck lay on the hearthstone, violated. There were three in English, and they were from Sir Roke — the envelopes addressed in another, or a disguised, hand. The sneak! Mark gasped, and ground his teeth, unable to find a term of execration bitter enough for the man and the occasion. I don't know that Sir Roke would have thought *his* procedure deserving of a much better one.

He read them carefully. Their meaning reached his angry brain but slowly, so many images excited and interrupted him. One of these letters, he thought, said, without seeming to say, that Sir Roke could not marry. Good Heavens! The sublime audacity of that little gipsy adventuress.

Had it not been for Mark Shadwell's own dreams about the baronet, would he have regarded Miss Marlyn's castle in the air with a contempt so exasperated and virulent? He actually laughed, with a kind of rage, over the idea.

He could not quite make out their relations by means of these three letters, two of which were very short. Sir Roke called her "provoking,"

"cruel,"

"unintelligible." He talked of "encouragement" and "unreasonableness." He said he had hoped that he had made "his difficulties and his hopes better understood." He said, in another place, that he "honoured her motives" — hypocritical villain! — and that he knew, "so soon as she arranged that interview which she had promised," he could "entirely satisfy, not only her honourable scruples, but her *conscience"* That he meant "altogether honourably, and she *knew* it."

On the whole, thus much was clear: whatever the origin of their intimacy might be, that Sir Roke had come to Raby with no other object than to see Agnes Marlyn; that, as appeared from the tenor and date of one of his letters, she had evidently consulted him as to whether she should come to Raby. He fancied, from some faint allusion, too, that she had been describing him — Mark Shadwell — amusingly! What he would have given for a copy of the entire correspondence! It was enough, however. She should leave Raby peremptorily; and he would tell Roke, in plain terms, what he thought of him.

Thus resolved this proud, reserved, conceited man. His heart was wrung with a terrible mortification.

CHAPTER V.

ALONE, YET NOT ALONE.

When Mark Shadwell first picked up Sir Roke's letters, he was trembling with eagerness for a collision with the shabby author of them. He could hardly wait patiently to read them through. But his pride helped him now. He had been spelling over these letters for more than ten minutes, and by the time he had mastered their contents, he was cool enough to act more in accordance with his haughty character.

The letters were now in his hand. But he had changed his mind. It would be time enough to talk to Roke by and by. It would not do to make a fracas about a little governess. It would be *agony* to betray that other disappointment. To no one — even to his wife, hardly to himself — could he endure to define that fraudulent insult. If, indeed, Roke had meant it — for there might have been something of chance; but no, it was a premeditated deception, and intended to mask his real object — what name could adequately describe such a man?

Mark had the letters in his hand; but he knew all they contained, and there was no need to satisfy any one, but himself upon the matter. He looked down on the coy, little, murdered desk, dislocated, gaping on the hearthstone, bleeding a stream of ink from its broken bottle; and his impulse was to tear the vile letters across, and fling them upon it. But that would have been but accumulating evidence of his irritation; and, instead, he placed them on the other letters that stood like a pack of cards, ready to be shuffled or cut, on the table.

Down stairs went Mark again. A quarter of an hour had done a great deal for him. Powder, shooting, gun, he forgot. From habit, he took his stick in the hall, and sallied forth, with quick strides, to stun the sense of pain with exercise. The sun was gone down from his sky, and the future a chasm.

Away to the sylvan solitudes he had lately left, he strode. Along their slopes and sides, under the congenial darkness of the branches, he walked, and sat down at last, at the entrance of a glade, upon the trunk of a prostrate tree. The summits of the wood were touched by the level beams of the declining sun, which here and there broke ruddily through the hoary stems of the forest.

"To think of that d — d old satyr — old in health, in strength, and in brain — whatever he may be in years — coming down here upon such an errand! He always hated me, I think; and I'm sure I always hated him — with *reason.* He never had a kind thought in all his days, or a sympathy, or a human feeling; his heart — a cold lump of stone — *always* the same. A boy — *what* a d — d boy he was! I'm glad I gave him that licking at Scarbrook. I gave him one good licking — ha, ha! — thank God! I wish old Weals had not come between us; I think I'd have killed him then. It *was* a good one. Every one was glad. I hope to God he remembers every blow. The devil, they say, haunts Wynderfel. Does he? If there be one, I shouldn't wonder. I wish he'd pay Raby a visit, and take away what belongs to him."

He glanced through the distant opening in the wood, down which was visible a glimpse of the grey walls of Wynderfel, a grass-tufted chimney, and a mullioned window, through which the sky of sunset dimly glowed.

The rustle of withered leaves in the fitful air, and the evening song of the birds, accompanied incongruously the long and bitter denunciation with which Mark Shadwell amused or scared the wandering spirits of the wood.

And that girl — the idea! — can she possibly fancy that Roke Wycherly could seriously think of marrying her? Roke Wycherly marry her! Is the minx mad? Roke Wycherly, the hardest screw in England, sacrifice himself to the ambition of a little adventuress!"

This unjust man, Mark Shadwell, cruel to some, almost loving to others at times, on the great voyage, every knot of which is irrevocable, without helm or compass, in which a mistake is worse than running on the shore of the Cyclops, had no misgivings about his missing chart and empty binnacle, but drove on in the dark, before wind and sea, with the confidence of madness.

I have thought of Mark Shadwell as of one altogether worthless, because his name calls up always a rueful image of an adoring little wife — faded, neglected, despised. Perhaps, in some measure, I have wronged him, and condemned him too sweepingly. There remained a residuum of compassion; at moments the remembrance of his early feelings returned, and sometimes a qualm of compunction visited him. His daughter Rachel, I believe, he loved, although he usually spoke to her but little; and a stranger would have fancied, from his looks and taciturnity, that she was in perpetual disgrace. His sullen demeanour was, however, but the expression of his pain — of a profound and angry ulcer. Had he been in reality the character which he affected — a philosopher — and cheerfully made up his mind to seize the opportunities of happiness that lay neglected about his path, he might easily have been, not only a merrier, but a better man.

Sometimes, considering the sort of education he received, and how inflexibly species are formed by circumstances, I almost wonder that he was not a worse man than we find him. The more I marvel at his delusions, the more I admire his moderation. Considering how preposterous was his estimate of his powers, I am amazed at the modesty of his demeanour. Considering how much ruin he fancied his marriage had involved him in, I wonder, selfish as he was, at his toleration of his wife. Much that was odious there was in him, but vestiges and rudiments also of good.

If it had not been for his angry pride, always on the watch, and ingenious in imagining insult, he might have lived on terms with his neighbours. As it was, he had surrounded himself with quarrels and antipathies, and lived in a haughty isolation in which he yearly grew more morbid and embittered.

The sun by this time had gone down behind the crest of the distant wood, and Mark Shadwell, who had meditated a long and solitary ramble, and had not meant to see Roke Wycherly, or, if he could, any other human face again that night, sat rapt in his gloomy visions; in Swift's phrase, "rolling resentments and framing revenges."

The crows had glided from the burning west, across the yellow and sea-green sky of evening, home to their leafy roostings in the forest of Wynderfel, from whence their cawings sounded now faintly like the roar of a distant sea.

Mark Shadwell sat looking on the sod between his feet staring in a wicked dream. You would have said he was looking into an unseen grave, upon the face of the man whom he hated. "When he looked up, upon the saddened sky of evening, his thoughts for a while were toned with a corresponding melancholy, and then on a sudden came a ghastly despair.

"Why did that d — d girl's image take possession of me? Yes, she has — she has; while I was cheating myself with dreams of superiority and indifference, I was becoming the slave of a creature whom I understand and despise, *and hate,* and yet whom I love. My God! it is true; I could shoot her dead at my feet this moment, and then myself. To think of that d — d, sneaking, sickly, smirking villain! A plan — a scheme — in league, both, to use and cheat me. Away she goes! How she'll stare when I bid her begone! I'll do it coldly too — give her no reason."

Up he got, and paced down the slope of the wood in the direction of Wynderfel, and found himself at last, in the twilight, by the ruined chapel of the old manorhouse, among the halfobliterated graves and tombstones.

How beautiful the silvery glimmer of the moon shows in the grey twilight sky! How thin and airy looked the tall walls and gables of old Wynderfel in that deceptive light! Through the old graveyard Mark Shadwell sauntered, dim as an evil spirit, and entered the silent courtyard of the ruined manor, and looked about him in a dream.

Of the different forms of temptation, those ascribed distinctively to the world, the flesh, and the devil — the latter, which deal with the malignities of human nature, are awfully exaggerated by solitude. In many ways, it is not good that man should be alone. Human society is perhaps the ordained prophylactic against the horrors and cajoleries of that unseen society that broods and pines in desert places. Undisturbed in solitude, the corrosive action of these murderous passions bites deep. The evil spirits who lust for possession, there way-lay and overpower their prey; any companionship is better than that. Better that the mind should be ruffled and rippled by the breezes, and even lashed by the storms of life, than lie dead and smooth to reflect the starless sky.

As the twilight deepened, the angry thoughts in Mark's mind grew more vivid; so that at last he was almost scared at their intensity.

"Ten years ago I should have done it, had he so insulted me, but no one fights now; let that thought away, then — let it away. I like it too well — *do* I? He's not worth it; let it go, or let it *come,* if it will."

And with this invitation a figure appeared through the opposite archway, so opportunely as to make him start. It paused, and Carmel Sherlock spoke:

"Mr. Shadwell! Here, sir? and I thinking of you."

"I ought to have known you," answered Shadwell, gruffly; "you're always in out-of-the-way places. I've been here but once before this year, and you met me from under that very doorway."

"When I come to Wynderfel, I always pass under that same archway, sir; I feel that I should violate fate if I entered Wynderfel by any other way but that. Some day or other I shall see something there, or hear something, or meet it *there* — good or ill — essential to my destiny."

"But, I say, what the devil brings you here?" interrupted Shadwell, savagely; "if you want *me,* I'm in no mood for nonsense, and can't talk now."

"Nor I — tomorrow," moaned Carmel.

"Well, *do* speak, and have done."

"I'm glad, sir, for I wanted to say a word."

"Out with it, then, I say, and have done with it — or, keep it to yourself, if another time will do," said Shadwell, turning away impatiently.

"Where the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together," said Carmel, following by his side.

"Yes, I know that's in the Bible," sneered Mark; "but I don't exactly see the application."

"There's an idea that lies dead in the brain, sir, and round and over it bloody thoughts keep wheeling," said Carmel Sherlock.

"What the devil's that to you?" said Mark Shadwell, stopping short, with a furious turn.

"I did not say — I hope, *nothing,* sir, nothing; but eagles — vultures, rather. What a bird a vulture is! Prometheus chained, I think, and the vultures come; I can fancy him shake his head at them in his agony, and spit at them, and strive to fright them off with yells, but they keep circling lower and nearer — he's partly dead and partly in hell — did you never feel the death of hope and the hell of jealousy?"

Mark looked at him for a moment in the imperfect light. "Neither the one nor the other, thank you; had not you better get home, and eat your dinner?"

"I was going to say farewell," said Carmel.

"Farewell," said Shadwell.

"I shall leave Raby," said Carmel.

"Well, now, pray do, just go and eat your dinner, and you'll be ever so much better; and we can talk about your going tomorrow morning. *No,"* repeated Shadwell, silencing Carmel Sherlock's incipient speech, imperiously; "you sha'n't say another word on that subject till tomorrow morning; I say *no,* I *won't* hear it."

And so saying, Mark Shadwell turned from him suddenly, resolved to shake him off, and strode away through the ruins.

CHAPTER VI.

MISS MARLYN IN AN ODD MOOD.

“What does that d — d fellow mean by his talk about jealousy, and all that stuff?” thought Shadwell, in a rage. “What can he be poking about? he’s not a spy, nor a traitor, nor a *witch* neither; I venture to say he has not a notion what he means himself!” Still a suspicion was in his mind that Carmel had divined something of the truth, and he was angry with him, angry with himself, and his wounded pride lay writhing under a sense of exposure.

Mark Shadwell had no care in his present temper, for the decencies of hospitality, and had his solitary mood continued upon him, Sir Roke might have looked in vain at dinner for his host.

On a sudden, however, the image of Agnes Marlyn was before his imagination, and an impulse determined him irresistibly homeward. He would see her — in what mood, his passions and thoughts were too confused to resolve. So, skirting the now darkened forest, he walked sullenly towards the house of Raby.

About the same hour, Miss Marlyn and Rachel were walking under the rows of grand old timber that flank the avenue, towards the house. Agnes has been laughing and talking in unusual spirits. It was not gaiety, however; it was excitement.

“I wish, Agnes, dear, you were always so merry.”

“I wish I were,” answered Agnes, with a sudden change. “Though just now my laughter sounds in my ears like an idiot’s. Why should I laugh? life is simply terrible for me. What would have befallen the bird who found no rest for the sole of her foot, if there had remained no ark for her to return to? It is different for you — you have a home — but *I!* Come, we won’t think.”

“And you have a home, dear Agnes, while I have one; you know very well that we all like you, and I love” you, although I don’t know quite whether you like me.”

“That’s all romance, my dear little girl, and very pretty; but it’s not true — don’t start — I’m sure you think it’s true, but it isn’t. Sentiment and liking are all very fine, but they are subject to mutation, and are transitory. It’s very nasty, I know, but quite true; there is nothing solid but property — ha, ha! and *I* have little more than my thimble; and life is a rough, and a wide, and a cold sea to cross, and I’m no witch, and I can’t sail in a sieve — and — what do you advise me to do? Isn’t it a pity there are no Protestant nunneries, where girls who must become old maids, and perhaps tenants of the workhouse, as things are, might dedicate themselves to comfort and seclusion, and escape the mortification of public celibacy and penury?”

“I never know, Agnes, when you are jesting; but I am serious — I mean, indeed I do, every word I have said.”

“So do I, Rachel, dear, every word. I feel this evening — what shall I say? — enterprising. I think I should like to masquerade in male attire, as other girls have done, and enlist — or go to sea. You read the other day an Irish story, about a man sitting on a stone that was sinking in the middle of a bog, and who gratefully accepted the offer of an eagle to fly him out of his dilemma. Now, my dear, this Raby is all very well. It’s pretty, and pastoral, and romantic, and what not? I like staying here, but how is it to end? You will be marrying and running away; I shall be growing old, and finally, I shall be left alone to sink in the bog. Yes, this Raby is the stone, and I feel it already sinking under me, and I should be obliged, I think, to any fowl or monster, a pegasus or a goose, willing and strong enough, to fly me out of it.”

“You certainly speak plainly, dear Agnes, though I think you might speak a little more kindly,” said Rachel, who was hurt.

“Come, come, ma chère, we must take care of ourselves. There’s nothing unkind in being honest. There’s not a creature on earth who cares for me, and therefore I must the more particularly care for myself.”

Miss Agnes laughed, Rachel thought, a little more bitterly than she need, as she said this.

“I told you that *I* like you; Agnes.”

“But you *don’t,* dear.”

Rachel stared.

“No,” laughed Agnes, “you *can’t;* how can you like a person you don’t know, and me you can’t know. There are things about me I don’t know myself, and what I do know, you don’t. Come, be honest, Miss Rachel, don’t we mystify one another all we can? do I know you quite? and how can you know me?”

“Well, you know best,” said Rachel; “I suppose we are all hypocrites.”

“More or less,” said Agnes, quietly; “you talk of liking me! No one likes another, unless they love them through all their follies, tempers, and crimes. None of these have I shown. But how can we tell that your liking would stand that strain? Suppose I were to leave Raby tonight, and you never hear more of me, would you still like me? Mr. Sherlock, you know, you mentioned is going, no one knows why or whither; I don’t mean to elope with him, but I don’t think that sort of flitting a bad idea.”

“I hope he is not going; I don’t believe he is; I am so fond of poor old Carmel Sherlock,” said Rachel.

“Not so old,” interposed Agnes, disagreeably.

“You are determined to laugh at everything tonight,” said Rachel, “but the place would not be like itself if he were gone, and I can’t think he will go, he’s so kind and affectionate.”

“Not like me, who am odious enough to think sometimes of myself,” said Miss Marlyn, in her odd bitter mood. “Well, if he goes, we have still a resource in that charming vicar,” Miss Marlyn added, with an irony that was not playful.

“Mr. Temple, you mean?”

“The Reverend Sour, or Stour Temple; yes, what an agreeable man — what a gentleman — how pretty!” and she laughed.

“Mamma likes him very much.”

“He admired your mamma very much, I believe, once on a time.”

“I dare say — every one did who saw her when she was young, and I think her quite beautiful still — but I don’t see what that has to do with what I’m saying. Mamma thinks him a very good and useful clergyman, and so do I, and so does papa, although they sometimes disagree about things.”

“And oh! that funny old bald foozle, that fancies himself a lover,” said Miss Marlyn, with a sudden recollection and a laugh.

“Who?” asked Rachel.

“Bonnie — who but our charming friend, Bonnie? She should have called him Bauldie, if it must be Scotch, after the young man in the ‘Gentle Shepherd,’ that stupid book; I’m so glad we have done it.”

“Oh, Pucelle! you must not laugh at Roger Temple,” pleaded Rachel.

“I *must* laugh at Roger Temple! at everything! I should die in this place else, and why should not he be laughed at like the rest? Preposterous old fool!”

Somehow there was a desecration here in Rachel’s mind. She was shocked, and a little disgusted; but, after all, Roger Temple was a difficult case to fight, for she could not conceal it from herself that he *was* preposterous.

“Take care,” said she, “he is in love with you.”

“Well?” said Miss Marlyn, with an odd smile, that showed the glittering edge of her even teeth.

“You may marry him yet.”

“And suppose I do, does that make any difference? I shall love, honour, and laugh at him — *selon les règles* — still.”

By this time they were crossing the hall, now nearly dark, and entered the room where they were accustomed to read together, and here the faint glow still reflected from the western clouds afforded them an imperfect and melancholy light, through the still open window.

“There is this comfort in having no one to care for you, that you have no one to control you. There is not a person on earth who has a right to command or even to question me, and so, child, I’m perfectly free and — perfectly miserable. It *will* cost me a pang, many a pang, to leave Raby, as leave it I soon shall, but fate, and pride, and despair, ordain it. I hate myself for going — I’m different from you, Rachel; you can’t understand me, if you could *you* would hate me also. No, don’t kiss me, it is folly, you shall never kiss me more. I suppose you think me mad; for the last four hours I have been walking and talking in a dream, and yet I am not mad, and it is all a reality, only I have taken a resolution that has nearly broken my heart — don’t ask me, I’m talking because I must talk, but it is not confidence, and I’m no worse, not an atom, and no better than *you,* than all others, who act according to their circumstances, and opportunities, and necessities, and I’ll never talk of it to you more. A beautiful sunset it must have been! how it glows! There were sunsets like it two thousand years ago, and will be again two thousand years hence; and my story is an old one, and will turn up with a different heroine — generation after generation there is nothing new, and things are no better and no worse than they were, and than they will be always."

Agnes spoke wildly, though quietly; and Rachel was startled by her manner, which was resolute, and defiant, and excited. Curious as Rachel was, and even alarmed, she instinctively felt that, at least just then, it would have been vain to ask for an explanation. So, at the window, as Agnes gazed upon the dying flush that still glowed in the west, Rachel looked in her face. The lurid light fell across her great mysterious eyes like a glowing bar. Rachel long saw that beautiful face — touched with an upward light — looking sinister and blinded, and she said:

"Don't look that way, Pucelle, it's so odd."

"How, *ma chere?"*

"So changed, I mean."

"Perhaps I am changed."

"Turn away from that light."

"I'm looking at Wynderfel, and thinking of Wynderfel," said the beautiful girl apathetically.

"But that light is so unbecoming," persisted Rachel.

"Unbecoming — oh?" murmured the young lady with a smile, and a satire faintly returning to her face, and she did turn and looked with a tiny nod — arch and dismal, also — on Rachel, who took her hand, and in silence for a time, side by side, they looked out on the fading landscape. In Agnes Marlyn's face there was melancholy without softening. The far-off *gaze,* and those delicate features looked sad and stem — no sympathy — no yearning.

"Come, Pucelle, — I won't have you look so sad and cruel," said Rachel with a little laugh. "You shall look like yourself."

And with fingers interlaced, as they had been standing, she raised Agnes Marlyn's hand and leaned her head lightly on it — the attitude was fond and even caressing.

There was a short silence, the light was fading, Rachel raised her head, and in a minute more she said:

"An odd little scar you have got, Pucelle, in the middle of your hand."

She was looking at a little white scar on the palm of Agnes Marlyn's hand. Agnes still looking out, held her slender hand, palm-upward, wide open for Rachel's scrutiny.

“But it really is,” she continued, with growing curiosity, and with a little laugh she added, “why it has just five little rays, the star of Bethlehem, you know, and your left hand, that’s the mark of the gaze-lady.” Without changing her attitude, Agnes also laughed a little.

“I did not think of that,” she said. “I got that when I was a very little thing — I don’t remember — some one told me, getting over a fence, and I leaned on a sharp stake — yes, so it has — one, two, three, four, five,” and she smiled for a moment. “That star of Bethlehem burns sometimes, I can tell you — it pained me to-day for instance — all the time we were talking in that little chapel.”

She sighed, and with a little shiver, drew her hand away suddenly, and her cloak about her. Then Rachel, without an attempt to stay her, saw Agnes Marlyn leave the room.

“She is angry, I think; what can have happened? I have said nothing to vex her. She’ll tell me all by and by. She can’t seriously mean all that she says. Yes; she’ll tell me the cause, I dare say, and she will be like herself again.”

Rachel fancied she thought all this, but she did not, for the dark laugh of Agnes chilled her with a strange presage of evil.

CHAPTER VII.

VENUS ‘DUSESOS’ FAREWELL.

THE window was open; the rich odours of the flowers exhaled on the evening air, and the rose-tinted western lights, melting into the deep sky of the coming night, inspired that luxurious melancholy which is, for the young, the poetic foreshadowing of the sorrows of life. Rachel, leaning against the side of the window, looked out upon those fading piles of cloud that crowned the solemn landscape, and experienced the influence of the hour and the scene. From under the boughs of the ancient clump of trees that stands nearest to the house, emerged a figure, and slowly approached the window at which she sat.

“Only I, Miss Rachel; only I, your old tutor,” said the well-known voice of Carmel Sherlock.

“Oh! Mr. Sherlock?” she said, kindly.

“It is a long time, Miss Rachel, since we read French and German, and Italian.”

“Yes, very long; but you have been so busy.”

“A long interruption, Miss Rachel.”

“Too long — a great deal,” she said.

“All goes on and on, Miss Rachel; and that time sickened and died, and a new time is come; and that, too, will die, and be succeeded by another, and another; the first perishes, there is no unknitting the fruit, and expanding it into the flower again; there is no folding the flower, and shutting it up in the seed again. Nature makes no step back — never looks over the shoulder — never.”

“Well, sha’n’t we resume our Italian soon? we must begin again — soon — very soon,” said she.

“No; not soon — *never”* he said, very sadly.

“Never! Why?” asked Rachel.

“You see, Miss Rachel, they all believe, one way or another, in that palingenesis; for my part, I can’t believe but that, somehow, I shall see the light again, and see my love again.

Petrarch met, I think, his Laura when he died. How beautiful those lime-trees look, where I read 'Tasso,' long ago, to you, when you were a little thing. I love these solitudes, and when I die, I'll come — yes, I'll come again — not to be seen — only to wander here, by the old lime-trees where I read 'Tasso,' long ago. Or at Wynderfel, where sympathy grows among the brambles and ivy-tendrils, and the wind among the high gables has a pitying sound, where I may chance to meet that poor lady who died for her love; and I would tell her — my God! — all my misery. The sordid idol!"

She listened to this rhapsody, as she had to others from the lips of the same maundering prophet, not understanding, only in kindness. His lonely habits had taught him quite to dispense with dialogue, and his spoken meditation flowed on:

"That was her girlish thought — to die. Yes, once worshipped, always a divinity — *always.* Break the poor heart — *that* was the shrine. Shatter the brain, where the image always stands in light; it is so only that love can break the idol, and extinguish the tapers of a vain worship. I hear that scream — sometimes — so far away — at night! Yes, indeed, by Heaven! like one wild note of distant music — the past and future in it. I've stood a whole night, at the window listening. It hardly lasts while you could count a slow *ten* — swelling on and on, louder and louder, till it stops in silence. That one note is a concert from Paradise and Tartarus; it fills a whole night, to a man who will think; the hours fly after it, pursuing like waves to drown it. Nature hastens to hide it away; the morning comes before I am aware."

Carmel looked with a despairing eye over the wide landscape toward the disappearing glow of sunset, as you might fancy a shipwrecked man upon a lonely raft gazing towards that fading light in the space of ocean.

"What a pity! Love does not meet love in this world; follows a phantom and unreal voices, and, finding itself alone, dies. A hard case it is. Love crosses love, like ships at sea, each on a different errand, over the waste of life; the narrow horizon coming up and disappearing. Miss Rachel, it is terrible! the affections all so minute and intense, and nature and time so vast and vague — all love so individual; it may be never, in the revolution of time and the changes of worlds, never to meet again. You need not tell me; I tell myself. I *know* it; it is unreal. I have created it; but it is irrevocable — an irreparable mistake. I have found it out, but am none the better. Satan has come, and I have tasted of knowledge; and so — *forth* from Paradise for ever. The wide world; the dark night! Little Miss Rachel, with the golden hair, how long it seems since I taught you to write! I don't blame you; I never did. It is nature that is cruel — kind, but also *cruel.* The bird will fly — nature is vigorous — the bird will fly! All pain, and pleasure, and illusion, come to an end. Instinct, the inspiration of our birth, alone inflexible. God whispered to each creature when he made it, and God is immutable."

Carmel looked down, and up, and stamped upon the ground.

"The hoary Satan! — the old dragon! — with poisonous tongue and golden scales, lying under this moon awhile, basking and panting in a gluttonous dream. The reptile! — the murderer! There is a spear of light for him. His sun shall be darkened, and his moon turned into blood. When he moves, the skin of the earth quivers under him. The elements that gave him birth abhor him. But my hand I hold palm upward. My robe is white. The fossil reptiles are extinct. Leave the monstrous generations to the vindicator, Death. Out of the castle I go, and close the gate after me; into the night, the forest, the waste — never to look back — only hoping for some spot where a worn out man may die! The journey — the descent; and oh! at last, the fountain of forgetfulness, and the cold sleep of death. I hope, Miss Rachel, I have not been ungrateful — that is, quite unprofitable."

"Unprofitable! no one was ever kinder or more useful," she answered.

"That is all," he said, sadly.

"And if you were to leave us, I really don't know how papa could manage without you; and as for me, almost everything I know I have learned from you, my kind teacher."

"Ah! yes, the Italian — the French; these will go on, and she will remember, and sometimes say, I learned these from that poor Carmel Sherlock, who went away, and was heard of no more."

"No; I will say I learned them from that kind Mr. Sherlock who would not go away, because he knew it would make us all sorry; who stayed with us, and is with us still, and will never leave Raby."

Sherlock with both hands leaned on the window-stone, as a drowning man might hold by a rock, and she thought he looked steadfastly in her face. She could not see his features distinctly in the deep shadow, but it seemed to her that he was weeping.

Her heart bled with compassion for the kind creature who had been so gentle with her through all the inattention and waywardness of her childish years, and she wondered how one who never gave a moment's pain to others should inflict so much, and, as it seemed to her, so causelessly, upon himself.

"I'm going, Miss Rachel; I've come to say farewell. I'll leave Raby perhaps tonight, perhaps in the morning; but I'll see you no more."

"Really!" exclaimed she, in a kind of consternation.

"Really, Miss — if there should be such a word as real where all is visionary. So, Miss Rachel, goodbye."

"No, I'll *not* say goodbye," said she; "and you sha'n't go — good, kind Carmel. I don't think I should know Raby without you; so, goodbye, it shall not be."

"Well, Miss, what will you say?"

"I'll say goodnight, as usual."

"Very well, Miss," and he held out his hand timidly. She gave him hers. "It will do; yes, better. Goodnight, Miss Rachel; for *night* it will be."

He hurriedly kissed her hand, and repeated faintly, "Goodnight!" and he walked quickly away along that front of the old house, and was lost to her sight, before she had quite recovered from the surprise of the strange familiarity, if anything so sad and timid could be so called, of his parting salutation.

"Poor Carmel! is he really going? And so grieved; he seems quite heartbroken. Has he heard any very bad news from his people at home? Surely he ought to tell us; papa might be of use, and advise him; and he ought to know that we all feel for him, and with him, in all his troubles."

So she murmured to herself, as, leaning from the window, she looked after the disappearing figure of Carmel Sherlock.

He walked round the two sides of the house, and by the small projecting tower, I may call it, in which his quaint apartment lay.

"What an oddity — poor old Carmel!" said she, with a little shrug and a smile, as he disappeared.

"Spirit of light and beauty!" said he, with a moan. "Henceforward for me, the long, dark winter of the north! The hour of flowers and of light I shall see no more."

Up and around he looked; he was taking leave of everything that night.

The front of the house, with the hall-door, and the winged demi-griffins keeping guard, with fierce crooked beaks, and talons, and expanded wings, were all in deep shadow by this time. He stood upon the steps — the door partly opened.

"What is the meaning of these things?" pondered Carmel Sherlock, whose mind like all others too strongly infused with fancy, was easily and powerfully diverted by any object that invited for the moment his imagination.

"These griffins, which heraldry has found — not created; the eagle, the lion — a combination whose origin goes back into mystery: an Assyrian image, proceeding, perhaps, from visions. What is its meaning — what is its force? What latent power and action on the world of spirits? See *here!* this great family of Shadwell — the Shadwells of Wynderfel; all through the County History growing greater and greater till they came here, and passed in and out between these carved dreams. Not a breath — not a sound — enters the door but through them; and how have they dwindled ever since! wane and waste! — peak and pine! Ha! what's that?"

"Well! what is it?" said Shadwell, surlily, who had nearly reached the doorsteps unperceived, on his return. "Perhaps it's I; will you allow me to get by?"

"I *saw* it, sir!"

"What did you see?" demanded Mark.

"I swear I saw it pass and enter the house!"

"Suppose we follow it," said Mark. "I think it did right at this hour."

"Only a shadow — a degree darker than the rest; your evil genius or mine; an influence, about no good —

" — Things that love night.
Love not such nights as these.'"

"Do, pray, allow me to go in, or go yourself," said Mark Shadwell, looking much angrier than his words implied.

Carmel Sherlock drew back.

"One meets you everywhere, except where you are wanted. Don't you think you might sometimes look into the books upstairs; the accounts will be in a precious mess, if you do nothing but study the picturesque and see ghosts!" and so speaking, with an angry look at Carmel Sherlock — a look charged with violent and unspoken wrath — he entered the house.

"See, how angry he is; he can't help it. He does not see the cause; he only feels it — my benefactor!"

Carmel Sherlock hesitated at the threshold, and, with a shudder, entered, and went up alone to his room.

CHAPTER VIII.

AGNES IN HER BEDROOM.

Miss Marlyn took a candle and went upstairs to her room. In the hall she passed the open door of the drawingroom, and from within, a gaunt figure beckoned her, silently with a smile; affecting not to see Sir Roke, she passed on, but he overtook her at the foot of the staircase.

“You did not see me?” said he, with the same smile, and in a very low tone.

She stopped short, and looked full on him with rather fierce eyes, and flushed cheeks, and said: “Yes, sir, I did.”

“You did? Then you *cut* me! Cruel, isn’t it?”

As he spoke, the baronet glanced back into the hall and up the stairs vigilantly.

“You said, sir — you promised, upon your *honour,* that you would speak to me no more during your stay at Raby. I don’t much care — but if you will speak — speak aloud.”

“I should not have spoken at all, had you deigned to smile as you passed,” he said gallantly, and glanced again quickly, but no one approached; “why did you not come in for a moment to the drawingroom — I don’t frighten you, I hope.”

“You can have nothing to say, sir, you *know* you can’t; do leave me at peace while you stay here; let me collect my thoughts, if I can.”

“Well, you are a *very* odd— “

“Yery odd, perhaps,” she said, turning away to pass on.

“Yes, a most capricious and charming little witch,” said he.

“Very commonplace, perhaps. When I’ve made up my mind, though I suffer, I debate no more. If that is odd, it should not be so,” she continued, taking no note of his parenthesis.

At this moment a distant step was heard, and Agnes went her way, and Sir Roke glided quietly again into the drawingroom, where, standing on the hearthrug, he looked up at his own distorted shadow, dancing over the ceiling, and the reflected flicker of the fire, on the distant cornices, with an unpleasant smile.

At times, indeed, this evidence of satisfaction was heightened to a quiet laugh; he had not been in such spirits since his arrival at Raby. He was disposed to be charmed with everything. It was a little excursion into savage life, and he liked the notion of roughing it, as in this case, without any essential sacrifice of comfort. He smiled, he laughed, it was no habitual homage to the genialities; but in his solitude, the expansion of a genuine comfort and elation. He even spoke peaceably that evening to Mr. Clewson.

He looked at his watch — still a quarter of an hour to wait. He rather enjoyed his dinner at Raby — country fare, and no French cookery, very odd, but a new sensation, and he was hungry, as invalids are oftener than they will always allow.

He thought he heard Mark Shadwell's step crossing the passage outside the door; he placed himself so as to see. It was Mark, returning from his walk. The guest was but dimly visible as he stood within, in the uncertain light of the fire. Mark saw him.

"Ha!" exclaimed Mark Shadwell, stopping short.

It was involuntary. He had not expected to see Roke Wycherly, who seldom descended from his dressing-room so early.

This faint "ha!" had in it something of the gasp with which a man might discover an escaped cobra unexpectedly on his hearthstone.

I think each would have been equally well pleased to have escaped this recognition. But Mark's ejaculation had been too loud, and the recognition was inevitable.

"Charming evening — delicious sunsets you have in this part of the world," said Sir Roke; "you have just the right quantity of vapour; your colouring is perfectly splendid. I don't know whether it is always so at Raby, or only that I am very much in luck. I wonder our artists don't study sunsets more than they do."

Mark had come into the drawingroom. The last faint flush had nearly died out in the west, and the flicker from the fire chiefly lighted up the room. It showed how pale his face was, and glittered on his fierce eyes, as he looked in a kind of abstraction on his guest.

"Sunset — yes," he said; "I suppose so. I never understood art, or whatever it is. I dare say we have."

"It was particularly beautiful this evening," said Sir Roke.

"Oh, yes, I do recollect. I believe it *was.* *Y*ou're alone here? I hope I'm not very late." He looked at his watch, and compared it with the clock over the chimneypiece.

"I believe it is *I* who am unusually *early"* said Sir Roke. "We had rather a good game last night; but you pigeoned me, Mark. Suppose you look in on me tonight, and give me my revenge?"

"No, thanks, no," said Mark, drily, and even sternly.

Mark's attempt to talk and look as usual had broken down. In that sort of accomplishment the more artificial man beat him easily. But had Sir Roke known the adventure of the little French writing-desk, and what awful eyes had peeped into his foolish little letters, the acting would not have been so easy.

"No, and why not? haven't I an equity — a sort of right to my chance?" laughed Sir Roke, persuasively. The fact is, he reckoned upon the opportunity of the little game and conversation to remove the uncomfortable impression which he knew the surprise of that day had left upon the mind of Mark Shadwell.

"I'll *not* play tonight, thanks," he said, abruptly, and looked for a moment in Sir Roke's face, as if he meditated saying something unusual; but he checked himself, and added, only more in his accustomed way: "I've but a few minutes to dress — sorry to run away and leave you alone; but we shall all be here in two or three minutes."

And glancing again on the dial of the clock, as he might on the face of a man he hated, he disappeared.

Sir Roke leaned with his elbow upon the mantlepiece, and smiled into the oldfashioned looking-glass over it, and laughed a little.

"That fellow is perfectly wild, and ashamed to say what's the matter with him. He's great fun — delicious, isn't it? Trying to smile, pale with rage, he'd like to fire a bullet through my head; he's so jealous, and he dare not hint at the cause of his fury. Capital comedy! Inconvenient, perhaps; so we'll quiet him tonight — quiet him tonight — we must part peaceably."

Miss Agnes Marlyn meanwhile had gone up the stairs, and reached her own sequestered room. She shut the door, and candle in hand, surveyed her beautiful features in her modest looking-glass; a little flushed her cheeks were, unnaturally bright her eyes. She had never seen that expression in her face before — excited, defiant, a little wicked and handsome, with a peculiar beauty. The strange look of disdain and shame and triumph met her from the homely glass, and a feeling of admiration thrilled her, and she smiled with a baleful divination.

"Yes, you are beautiful," she whispered, looking sidelong on herself. "There's no one *so* beautiful, and beauty is power. Agnes! Agnes! *is it wise?* Yes, she stoops to conquer," she repeated with the same bitter smile, reciting the title of the play that lay open in the ragged little volume upon her dressing-table: "her little foot will yet rest upon the neck of the man who thinks he has subdued her. Yes, Agnes, what others have done without more cleverness, and with half your beauty, *you* shall do. There is a brilliant future."

A momentary trance and a sigh, and then she glanced at that homely little silver watch that recalled her present poverty, and it suddenly reminded her that it was now near the dinner hour, and then she made a rapid toilet; and crossing the floor with her candle in her hand, the light fell suddenly on the ruin of her little desk.

There were men and women, I dare say, on whose murdered bodies she could have looked with more composure than upon the fragments of that outraged desk.

Who had done that?

When Robinson Crusoe saw the footprint on the sand, and felt that his solitary dominion was invaded, and that perhaps the secrets on which his life depended were discovered, he was not, for the moment, chilled with so grim a horror.

"*Who* has done it?"

She stood erect, looking down on it motionless and pale, with a scowl of fear.

Could she have laid it on the mantlepiece, and the cat — that ubiquitous marauder — have knocked it down upon the hearthstone?

The hypothesis was a momentary relief — momentary only — for she remembered well having returned as she was leaving the room that day, and unlocked it to read a sentence in one of her secret letters, the exact phraseology of which she had forgotten. She distinctly remembered the very spot on the table where she had left it locked.

"Good God! who has been here?"

She kneeled down and rummaged among the debris of the rosewood, broken glass, pens, little seals, keys, and the rest, for a second or two.

‘‘Not a letter left. The villain!”

And up she started like a spectre, still staring on the ruin, and accidentally placed her hand upon the letters on the table.

“Oh! ho — ha; here they are,” she gasped; and I think if her training had been at all different she would have said “Thank God!” She felt as if she were on the point of fainting.

“I see it all now, that stupid maid. Yes, Mary dropped it, and here she has placed the letters together.”

As she murmured this comfort, smiling with pale lips, she raised the little packet of letters.

Alas! here was consternation anew. Miss Marlyn was one of those persons born with the genius of neatness, and no letter of hers ever returned to its berth in her desk unsheathed in its proper envelope. But here they were — all disarranged — a few in their envelopes. The greater part just doubled up as they had been laid down by the careless hand of the person who did not think it worth while, it seemed, to conceal the evidence of the outrage.

The three letters of Sir Roke Wycherly lay at the top of the little pile, all out of their envelopes, and one had plainly been crumpled together in a strong hand as if in anger.

Agnes Marlyn fenced with the conclusion no longer. The thing she had feared — the moment she saw the wreck upon the floor — was no longer disputable.

More accomplished sinners than she would perhaps have been little dismayed after a few minutes, and bethought them of a mode of darning their broken cobwebs. But Miss Agnes Marlyn had some attributes which rather marred her art. There was a fiery vein of passion in her nature; also there was an odd pride, which reared and shied at trifles, of which others would have made nothing. To deceive with her was easy. It was from the vulgarity and detail of clumsy mendacity that she recoiled. She would not construct a card castle of lies that might fall flat at any moment, and leave her stolen bijouterie exposed. Her lies were chiefly of reserve. She had not quite the evil humility for a system of positive falsehood; her arrogance recoiled from the risk of failure, and who was worth the degradation.

"Who is injured? *I!* He thinks it fine and tragic, this outrage of a brigand. Oh, *quel gentilhomme!* I will not go down this evening."

She sorted her letters — after all they were not very many — she tied them up, and placed the little parcel under her pillow —

"I will keep guard over them here."

The dinner-bell rang; she heard it, and flushed suddenly with a flashing glance towards the door.

"The idea! To think that *I,* after *this,* should sit down at the same table!"

She did not collect or disturb the fragments of her little desk; she looked down upon them with a bitter smile.

"Let them lie as he left them, to reproach a *robber!"* she said.

Then she sat down at the dressing-table. Storm is not a term to describe the state of her mind. The analogy was rather in the lurid glow, the rolling smoke, and the sudden glare of a crater.

"Whatever vacillation there may have been, whatever chance, he has ended all."

Then came a knock at her door: it was a servant, to tell Miss Marlyn that the little party were at dinner.

Miss Marlyn had a headache, and could not leave her room.

A few minutes later Rachel came into the room. I don't know in what channel Miss Marlyn's thoughts had been running at that moment; but she rose very pale, and turned her large eyes on her companion, with a feeling like a shudder.

"Oh, *you?"* she murmured.

"Yes, Agnes, dear; you do look very poorly — you should lie down — can I do anything for you, you poor little thing?"

"Nothing, dear; *no*."

"I'll stay a little with you, at all events."

"No, dear; don't stay!"

"But you do look so poorly — I *can't* leave you."

"You must leave me; yes, dear, you must," said Agnes Marlyn, in a cold, almost a repulsive tone.

"Is it really pain, dear Agnes; or have you heard anything that grieves you?"

"I've heard nothing — no news — pain is the shortest word."

"But are you vexed with me?" pleaded Rachel.

“Not the least, dear child — no — *pain* expresses it very well,” said Agnes Marlyn.

“If you really mean pain, poor little Pucelle— “

“Don’t call me that — nor any other pet name,” said Agnes, abruptly.

“Something has vexed you, dear Agnes, and I am sure you will tell me what it is; but if you are suffering — if it is pain — you must lie down.”

“No — no — no, child; you’re very good, but you bore me. I won’t lie down; I shall remain here — and I shall remain alone. They’ll wonder what detains you — pray go. By and bye, you’ll hear me talked over, I dare say; you look at me as if I had two heads,” — Agnes laughed coldly— “but you will; and I don’t care many pins what’s said of me! It’s well they can’t hurt me, or dash me to pieces like *that!”* and she pointed, with a fierce and bitter smile, at her desk.

“Why, it’s broken — your little desk — who did it?”

“Cowards!” said Agnes, with a quiet scorn.

“I can’t make it out; what has occurred? who dared to break it? do tell me. You *must* tell me what has happened,” exclaimed Rachel, shocked and excited.

“Pray go down, there’s a dear girl, for I’m not going to tell you anything about it; no, not a word. I may, though, for I’m sure it will be a pleasant story. I shall choose my own time, however; and now I’ve said all I mean to say for the present — whatever my pain may be, solitude is the best cure for it. Goodbye!”

“You won’t allow me to remain, then?”

“No!” said Agnes, decisively.

Rachel looked wounded.

“Very well, Agnes; will you allow me to send you some dinner here?”

““What a question! how it shocks the sentiment of the situation!” answered the young lady, mockingly. “No, Rachel, seriously, I have been startled, and made angry, made almost faint, and that kind of thing does not leave one much appetite — and pray do believe me, dear, once for all, I choose to be alone. I know you mean kindly, but I must insist on it, and so goodbye, or goodnight, or whatever you please to make it.”

“Well, then, as you will have it so, I will go; but you’ll allow me at least to send you candles, for you are very nearly in the dark?”

Agnes made no answer.

“And I’ll run up and see you just now again,” she said.

Still the same ungracious silence.

“Goodbye, dear Pucelle; I hope I shall find you a great deal better.”

And as Pucelle made no sign, after another little pause, Rachel Shadwell ran down the stairs again.

CHAPTER IX.

BICKERING.

THE dinner party at Raby that night was not quite so small as you may have supposed; Miss Marlyn’s place was unexpectedly filled by the vicar.

The Reverend Stour Temple had to call on his errands at out-of-the-way times, as his parish business and long circuits brought him to the doors where they were to be done, unseasonably. He did not enjoy his occasional dinners at Raby. The loving little party at home, with its quaint admirations and perfect harmony, contrasted sweetly with the gloom and comfortless severity of Raby. He had no hope, either, of being of any use to Mark. They never approached the one subject on which the vicar wished to talk with him without uncomfortable results. Mark was conceited and irritable, and, where his superiority was touched, insolent. The vicar was too unbending — shall I say proud? — for his meek and patient calling; and, provided he spoke the thing that was true, he did not perhaps care sufficiently how or when. This great embassage is addressed to creatures weak, volatile, and violent; and needs a diplomacy the wisest, the most sensitive, the most patient. Perhaps, though the vicar was not conscious of it, the fault was not altogether Mark’s, that, when they met, they parted no better friends, and with no progress made.

“Ho! Temple! I’m glad you’re here; I’m *very* glad!”

“Many thanks! I’ve just been making inquiries and leaving a note — here it is — from my sister, with a message to Mrs. Shadwell.”

“My wife sha’n’t have the message from any one but you; you shall deliver it yourself, and stay and help me to entertain Roke Wycherly.”

“You are too good; but they expect me at home.”

“The old excuse, but it sha’n’t do now,” said Mark, quickly.

“And another; I have not walked to-day, but ridden, so my poor pony stands, with his bridle fastened at the doorsteps; he has carried me twenty miles to-day, and awaits me, I dare say, impatiently enough.”

“We’ll make him comfortable here; we’ve room enough, I promise you, and though you mightn’t suppose it, there is some corn and hay, and I undertake a comfortable supper."

"I'm afraid— " said the vicar, smiling, and shaking his head.

"Don't refuse me this time," said Mark, with an odd entreaty in his manner, which the clergyman observed, and the more that Mark was not very hard to put off with an excuse on ordinary occasions. It struck him that Mark had some special reason for pressing him. There was a little hesitation, and Stour Temple's dark eyes looked for a moment with a grave inquiry in his face.

"Yes, I see you will, you're going to stay; you *won't* refuse," said Mark Shadwell, and prevailed.

So the after-dinner *tête-à-tête* with Sir Roke Wycherly was avoided, and no wonder Mark Shadwell disliked it.

There was something excited, Stour Temple thought, in his host's manner, which suggested a suspicion of a quarrel; but Sir Roke's ease and gaiety rebuked the idea, and the vicar, still fancying that there was something wrong, did not know exactly what to think.

He was not a man, however, to be a bit put out by the suspicion of a quarrel, and he chatted quite as usual during dinner, and was glad to perceive that whoever else the persons in disgrace might be, Mrs. Shadwell and Rachel were just as usual.

Miss Marlyn, the only absent person, had a headache. Had Mark Shadwell taken some decided step respecting her, and was she about to leave Raby? Yes, Mark must have had a scene with her, and her headache was a result of it. He looked at Rachel's innocent and pretty face, and he was glad. He had an ill opinion of that beautiful Miss Agnes, and she knew it.

When the ladies departed, these three gentlemen began to talk. They were not well assorted. The vicar was not a flexible man, and Mark Shadwell was in one of his moods. So the conversation ran not smoothly on, but jolted and dragged, and made sudden starts and stops.

The baronet seemed in high spirits. He was amused, he was affable, he was gay. The vicar might have observed that Mark talked little to him, and that his eye was surly, though he did his office, as Sir Roke's host, rather ceremoniously — a coldness, an elevation which amused Sir Roke, I dare say, and the suspicion that it did so made Mark angrier. But the vicar was not a man of observation, and took no trouble to theorise on what he saw. His account to his sister was:

“Sir Roke was very chatty, and seemed better than when I last saw him; he leaves tomorrow. Mr. Shadwell was a little out of spirits.”

“And Sir Roke goes away tomorrow?” said his sister.

“Yes, and I’m very glad he does.”

“Glad, dear! And why glad?” asked his good sister, a little curious.

“I don’t think that Raby is the kind of place that suits Sir Roke. I don’t think he cares for their society.”

“Dear me! and MR Shadwell so agreeable a man when he chooses.”

“Yery agreeable — as *I* am — in this out-of-the-way corner of the world; but not so agreeable, I am afraid, to a man who sees and hears clever men in the capitals of the world.”

“But why are you glad he is going? That, I’m sure, is not your reason — I mean, your only one.”

“You are right, dear, and I’ll tell you my other this day twelvemonth, if I remember it; sooner, perhaps, but not tonight.”

At present, however, he is one of the party of three, and the conversation which devolves chiefly upon him and Sir Roke has just taken this turn:

“He was one of those fellows,” said the baronet, “who are, by some people, emphatically styled gentlemen.”

“Don’t you think that’s rather a vague term, now-a-days at least? It had a meaning, no doubt. Would you undertake to define it *now*?” interposed Mark Shadwell, suddenly. The vicar fancied a suspicion of a sneer in the question, and was rather confirmed by the lines of Mark’s countenance as he asked it.

“It’s too complex an idea for me,” laughed Sir Roke, with a shake of his head. “Temple must give us his idea — do, pray.”

“Don’t you think old Chaucer has given us a fair outline of a gentleman? you remember:

“‘A knight there was, and that a worthy man,
That from the tymé that he ferst began
To ryden out, he lovede chyvalrye
Trouthe and honour, freedom and curtesie,

At mortal battles had he ben fiftene,
And foughten for our feith at Tramassene.
And though that he was worthy, he was wys,
And of his port as meke as is a mayde.
He never yit no vilonye ne sayde
In all his lyf, unto no maner wight,
He was a verray perfight gentil knight.'"

The vicar concluded his little recitation, and Mark Shadwell repeated:

"'Truth and honour.' Yes, there's the foundation; what do you think of Temple's definition?"

"Not mine — Geoffrey Chaucer's," said the vicar.

"Yes, truth and honour; yes, to be sure, the basis — truth and honour," repeated Sir Roke, with a pleased acquiescence which provoked Mark Shadwell, who intended a sarcasm. "A very good picture of a gentleman, indeed."

"Considering it's so old," said Mark. "Don't you think we have improved upon it, however?"

He meant this for Roke, but the vicar answered in good faith:

"I don't think we have. Christianity and chivalry were the standards; we have Christianity still as the great social rule, but chivalry is but the shadow of a tradition — the two elements entered into the character of a gentleman, and the decay of one has not improved the combination. Don Quixote is very near my idea of a gentleman."

Mark Shadwell laughed low and sarcastically, looking at his wine-glass. I don't know what was in his mind, but Sir Roke fancied that he intended a ludicrous allusion to certain points of resemblance between him and the tall lank knight of La Mancha. It did not sting him. He thought he understood the motive, and Mark's malice amused him therefore. So said he to the vicar:

"Yes, as well as I recollect him, Don Quixote *is* a gentleman — that is, a gentleman gone mad."

"But the more mad he is, the more severely are his high qualities tested. If they stand that strain, they would stand almost any," said the vicar. "A man whose diseased imagination surrounds him with trials and temptations

— imaginary though they be — and comes through the ordeal pure, is a thorough gentleman; a mean man would break down under the trial. You see so many men, not actually mad, but hypochondriac, moping in out-of-the-way nooks, who fancy themselves illused, and their neighbours in league against them."

"Really, that's very amusing; and I suppose grow quite unlike your ideal?" There was a malicious twinkle in Sir Roke's eye as he said this that made the vicar pause, and perceive that he described a character not unlike his host's.

"Yes," he continued, a little put out, "the character requires so much — such elevation — temper no less than honour — that walking in the light which needs no concealment or deceit." It was now Mark's turn to approve, and the vicar beginning to feel indistinctly that he was, in vulgar phrase, somehow "putting his foot in it," wound up by quoting Buckingham's fine lines on the death of Lord Fairfax:

"'Both sexes' virtues were in him combined,
He had the fierceness of the manliest mind,
And yet the meekness, too, of womankind:
His soul was filled with truth and honesty,
And with another thing quite out of date,
Called modesty.'"

And so the vicar's lecture ended; and Sir Roke observing that the clergyman suspected some uncomfortableness between him and his host, assumed at once a more frank and genial tone, and so ten or fifteen minutes more passed without any renewed symptom of disturbed relations between Mark Shadwell and the baronet.

CHAPTER X.

AN EXORCISM.

IN the drawingroom the Reverend Stour Temple found himself standing with his teacup in his hand beside Mark Shadwell.

Mark was looking down on the faded pattern of the carpet, lost as it seemed in a gloomy rumination; so that when the vicar, for want of something better to say, remarked: “Miss Marlyn has not made her appearance, I see,” Mark Shadwell looked up with a vague smile from his sombre reverie, evidently not knowing what the vicar had said, and he therefore repeated his trifling remark:

“Oh no! a headache, I think, or some young lady’s excuse.”

“I know — yes,” said the vicar.

“Oh, to be sure; she sent us word at dinner,” said Mark; “I’ve been thinking about *that,”* he added, after a pause, in a lower tone.

“About, do you mean, the— “ The Reverend Stour Temple hesitated, and Mark continued the sentence: “The letter you told me of, I — I’m thinking it over — I don’t say that anything ought to be done in a moment — but I am.”

The vicar inclined his head attentively as Mark spoke.

“I have,” said he, after a sufficient pause to ascertain that Shadwell was not going to add anything, “a great objection to volunteering advice.” The vicar had notwithstanding, I think, rather a weakness in favour of advising, and that, too, in a somewhat commanding tone. “It’s only in cases where my duty distinctly imposes that task upon me that I ever venture it, and when I did so in this particular case, it was simply because I saw how grave it was, and how very much more serious it might become.”

“Yes, I quite understand your view of it. I’ve been thinking over it; we’ll see, and — and as usual I have other things to trouble me. Did you see Carmel Sherlock this evening?”

“No, I have not seen him — not for some time. He’s quite well, I hope?”

“Oh yes. That is, as well as usual — always odd, you know. Either I am growing a greater fool than I used to be, or he’s madder, for he makes me sometimes, in a lonely place like this, with nothing ever to cheer, and a great deal perpetually to press upon one's spirits — he makes me sometimes quite nervous — upon my honour!" And Mark laughed a little uncomfortably. "Not that I think him a witch, you know; but he has a knack of saying exactly the most unpleasant thing that it is possible to say — just the thing to jump with your own hypochondriac fancies, and to help this depressing place to make you nervous and miserable. Did you ever feel as if the devil had got about you?" and he shrugged and laughed again.

"The devil, unhappily, is about us all," said the vicar.

"Yes, yes, to be sure; that's the doctrine," acquiesced Shadwell. "By-the-bye, Temple, do you want timber for that barn-roof? I've found some I can cut, to thin the wood. I've a right to that, you know, though those agreeable fellows, my creditors, say I've no right to cut one of my own trees."

"Thanks, you're very good. I'll ask my people when I get home; but I rather think they've got the timber. Very much obliged to you, all the same."

"It's there for you, if you do want it, remember," said Mark. "Do you recollect some — let me see — five or six years ago, when you used to read some verses of the Bible and say a prayer, when you were here in the evening, before you went away?"

"I make it a habit everywhere, except where I am distinctly forbidden by the master of the house," said the clergyman.

"Yes, of course, you know, where there is no sympathy; but it came into my head to ask you tonight — I can't tell why; I should like it, though I can't go quite with you myself; *wont* you, tonight?"

"As I told you already, I need but permission," said the vicar.

"Can you, Temple, throw any light upon it?" interrupted Sir Roke's voice from the other side of the room. "Was there ever really such a lady as Pope Joan?"

So the vicar was called off to that odd chapter in history, and delivered his little essay upon it for the amusement of Mrs. Shadwell.

What was it that made the room more than usually gaunt and gloomy that night? Was there less light than usual? It looked so much too large for the people assembled there, and so dismal.

Miss Marlyn's absence, and the uncertainties and surmises which her slight excuse suggested to several of the party, who knew something more than others of real relations, were depressing, and everyone knows how contagious dejection, or even embarrassment, is.

"I've asked Temple to revive an old custom," said Mark Shadwell, a little later. "He used to read a few verses of the Bible before he left us, and, thinking it over, I'm sure it can do none of us any harm, and you always wished it, Amy."

She smiled. She looked so happy and grateful, that Mark Shadwell, had his nature, or even the moment, been different, would have been touched. It was a point on which she had often timidly pleaded, and been always brusquely overruled by her husband, who cursed the vicar's twaddle summarily, and told his wife she must go to church for that sort of thing, as he was resolved to have no more of it in *his* house. So now this sudden change seemed to her a concession, and she was full of wonder and gratitude at his goodness. Mark Shadwell, I dare say, did not exactly himself know why he wished it. The violence of his agitations, and some thoughts that had crossed his mind that day, had shocked him. He was impelled, perhaps, to try what a sudden return to old associations might do for him. Perhaps, without his suspecting it, there was less of the metaphysical and more of the superstitious in it, and that he had a dim idea of his house requiring this sort of religious exorcism and fumigation.

Very small was the vicar's congregation — morally, however, in nowise more or less motley, I dare say, than any other assembled ostensibly to listen to the good words that fall from reading-desk and pulpit. In a different mood, Mark would have enjoyed what would have struck him as the ludicrous in the situation. Sir Roke submitted with an excellent grace. Like a polite man about to be bored by a well-meaning friend, he composed himself to the attitude of attention, and threw the reins, I suppose, on the neck of his fancy, and thought of what he pleased.

Mark, I think, really listened with a closer attention than his pride would have admitted.

The Reverend Stour Temple, with his Bible before him, delivered a brief lecture upon charity.

First, came Paul's beautiful and also terrible definition of charity, so hopelessly, as it seems, above human attainment, yet the ideal to which every man must, with all his strength, soul, and mind, aspire, or leave his heart open to the intrusion of those awful sojourners whose residence there is — death.

"Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts — murders and "whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." The *hater,* then, comes distinctly, in God's judgment, under the condemnation of the *murderer;* and what is the fate of the murderer?— "All murderers shall have their portion in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." Seeing, then, the awful capaciousness of this term "murderer," it behoves each of us to search, with a fearful eye, and the clear lamp of an honest conscience, every neglected nook of his heart, lest one such frightful guest should lurk there. How mad one day's negligence in this respect! How thin the partition between us and the tremendous phenomena of eternity! "Set thine house in order, for thou must die!" The messenger comes "as a thief in the night." We all expect warning. But the language of God promises none— "Thou fool! *this day* thy soul is required of thee."

"Son of man, I will take away from thee the desire of thine eyes — at a stroke." And so on, till having concluded his little discourse, he took his leave, and Mark Shadwell accompanied him to the hall door. If Mark had been in his usual mood, his sense of the ludicrous would have found food enough that night, for when they reached the steps, from the halfopen window of Carmel Sherlock's lonely "chamber came the long-drawn quaverings of his Straduarius.

"What sounds are those?" said the vicar, pausing, with his hand on his pony's mane.

"Nothing; only that queer fellow, Sherlock, making his horrible music," answered Mark, with a kind of dislike that had none of his usual briskness in it.

"Very weird, odd sounds! Has he a genius for music?" inquired Stour Temple.

"I don't know — I don't care, I mean; I suppose he has, but I hate the melancholy caterwauling he keeps up there; that is, when I'm in specially low spirits, as I don't mind saying I am just now. I wish, Temple, you weren't going away — I wish you could stay here tonight."

Temple laughed, and shook his head.

"I'm serious — I assure you I am, and I rather liked your little sermon tonight; how do you know you mightn't do me some good, if you would stay?” added Mark Shadwell, with a dreary half-jocular entreaty.

“A thousand thanks for your hospitality, but it’s quite out of the question; my poor sister, the most nervous being on earth when my hours are concerned, is sitting up for me, and I have tried her courage as much as I dare, in staying so long as I have; and I have got an early call to make in the morning, exactly in the opposite direction. So I must say goodnight, you see, and very many thanks for an evening which, for many reasons, I shall long remember with pleasure.”

“Goodnight, Temple, since so it must be; we did not quarrel once tonight, for a wonder, did we? and I am, I assure you, very sorry to lose you.”

And they shook hands much more cordially than they had for a long time, and Shadwell stood by his winged demi-griffin, looking after the receding shadow, that was losing itself in the deeper darkness of the trees that overarch the avenue, and listening to the faint clink of the horseshoe on the broad way. He waited till he heard the iron gate open and close, and the sound of the horse’s hoofs growing more and more distant, till he could distinguish them no longer.

About the same time Carmel Sherlock’s dismal minstrelsy quavered into silence, and looking up, Mark Shadwell saw him standing at the open window, leaning out, with his precious fiddle under his arm. He was looking towards the moon, which was beginning to rise, and towards it his other arm was extended and his fingers moved with an odd beckoning motion. Mark fancied that his face wore a fixed smile all this time.

In his then mood he beheld this greeting of his crazy steward with a strange sense of disgust. The last thing ‘he would have chosen would have been a talk with Carmel Sherlock just then. He drew back, therefore, into the hall, and swung the massive door to with a heavy crash. The picture of Carmel, as he saw him last, stretching, in fancied solitude, from his turret window, and just touched by the dawning moonlight, gathering, as it seemed, its rays with his finger tips, and smiling with a sinister idiotism, remained with a strange tenacity ever after on his brain.

He walked back towards the drawingroom, and paused. There burned in that great wainscoted hall but a solitary candle, at which people lighted their bedroom candles which stood there. He intended to go to his room, without again seeing Sir Roke. It was a small pleasure to him to inflict this rudeness of omission.

The smiling image of Carmel Sherlock was still before his retina as he pondered for a moment with his hand on the candlestick. “Every question,” thought he, “is a dilemma for a poor man — a relief, in one sense, that Sherlock should go; but how on earth am I to get on without him?” Even to himself he did not like to admit that Sherlock was so good a bargain, and that great benevolence of which Carmel’s simple gratitude made him a little proud, so commercially prudent, and, in fact, so selfish.

“Very good lecture Temple gave us tonight,” said Sir Roke’s voice near him.

“Yes, I believe so,” said Mark, looking toward him.

“Quite intelligible, at all events,” said Sir Roke, lighting his candle; “but they are very odd people — our clergymen, aren’t they? They talk always as if they had the direction of death and damnation, by special appointment, in their own hands, and seem to forget that they are subject to both like other mortals, and that their warnings and threats apply to themselves with at least as much force as to their auditors. By the bye, won’t you come in just now, and have our little game of piquet in my room?”

“I’m afraid I can’t manage it tonight,” said Mark, coldly.

“You’ve been carrying all before you, you know; you owe me a chance; though, you are so deep — I mean scientific — that I’m afraid a shallow poor devil like me has no chance with you.”

Mark fancied an under-meaning and an irony in this speech. There may not have been any, Sir Roke’s smile was never very genuine. Mark’s glance fixed for a moment obliquely and sternly on those insincere eyes of the baronet’s, and he said: “Well, as you seem to make a point of it, perhaps I shall.”

“That’s right — that’s friendly; I don’t think, really, I could sleep, now, without my little game first, I’ve so got into the way of it,” said Sir Roke, passing on, and up the stairs with a little nod, and a smirk over his shoulder.

CHAPTER XI.

VIOLINA.

MARK SHADWELL knocked at the door of his invalid wife's room; she was in her dressing gown, sitting up in her bed, as she held her accustomed consultation with old Wyndle, when he came in.

"Don't send her away — don't interrupt," said he, "I'm in no hurry; in fact, I have next to nothing to say."

Shadwell took up a little book with 1641 on the title-page — George Herbert's poems, which he knew not, and opening it at haphazard, he read:

"As I one evening sat before my cell,
Methought a starre did shoot into my lap,
I rose and shook my clothes, as knowing well,
That from small fires, comes oft no small mishap.

"When suddenly I heard one say,
Do, as thou usest, disobey,
Expel good motions from thy breast,
Which have the face of fire, but end in rest."

He had no sneer now for this, as he might a day or two before. He had been fooled by another, and might possibly, in this graver matter, have been fooling himself. His vanity was prostrate for a time, and his confidence in himself had received a shock. How many "good motions" had he "expelled from his breast!"

"Well, here, at last, was a good motion he was about to act on. He would not "disobey," as he was wont. But *was* the "motion" celestial, though its effect might be so? Did it not, on the contrary, proceed from jealous fury, revenge, and wounded pride? I believe, notwithstanding, that Shadwell thought he was about to act from cold, stem principle here, and rather respected himself therefore.

He turned over and read:

“Come away,
Make no delay.
Summon all the dust to rise,
Till it stirre and rub the eyes;
While this member jogs the other,
Each one whispering, ‘Live ye, brother?’”

“Ay, ay, the resurrection; grant us that, and doomsday, and a great deal follows,” muttered Shadwell, with a dejected scoff.

“Goodnight, Wyndle,” said Mrs. Shadwell.

Mark looked a sullen farewell, and nodded in reply to old Wyndle’s courtesy. He got up and shut the door, and said he, not sitting down, but leaning, with his elbow on the chimneypiece:

“I came intending to say — or rather to ask you — whether you think — that Miss Marlyn— “

He stopped — he had not shaped his sentence well — and was near saying more than he had quite made up his mind to say.

“Miss Marlyn! Is there anything unpleasant, Mark dear?” exclaimed she, in great consternation.

“Well, it is only this — I have been seriously turning it over in my mind whether we should have her here any longer; and, in fact, I have pretty nearly made up my mind to part with her.”

Mrs. Shadwell gazed at him in a sort of alarm.

“Yes,” he continued, “all these things cost money, and I really don’t see what good she is doing here; I’m sure she’s teaching Rachel nothing. I doubt whether so young a person has often learned enough to *have* anything to communicate, and certainly she can’t have the authority of an elder woman.”

Mark was already faltering in his purpose. An hour ago, he had made up his mind to dismiss the young lady peremptorily. He meant to tell his wife that he had reason to believe that Agnes Marlyn ought not to be harboured in their house, and to support this by relating Stour Temple’s story. He knew that this’ step would irrevocably commit him to dismiss her, and now was not quite equal to the task of plucking out the offending right eye, and casting it from him. At a distance, even a little one, he thought the effort would cost him nothing. But now that he had come up to it, he quailed.

“Well, Mark, darling, I hope you have very much underrated what Agnes Marlyn has actually done for her. She certainly has improved her playing wonderfully, and she speaks French quite fluently now. Have you tried her lately?”

Mark felt the inconsistency of his answer.

“No, not very lately; but generally, I mean, I am not satisfied. I think they spend their time dawdling about the place, and I dare say Miss Marlyn does just whatever best pleases Rachel, and you know there is no money to throw away, and I thought I’d tell you what I was thinking about — what I *am* thinking about — though I sha’n’t discuss it tonight.” He spoke this as brusquely as if she had combated his authority. “I’ll tell you more — tomorrow, perhaps. Good night, Amy,” he said, abruptly and calmly enough.

When he had reached the door, Mark Shadwell suddenly relented, and returned to his wife’s bedside.

“You haven’t been looking well tonight. Do you feel better, Amy?”

“A little tired; but it won’t be anything, thank you, dear Mark.”

“Better now, aren’t you?”

“Oh! much, since I lay down. And now tell me, Mark, darling, how *you* are. I’m so anxious. You have been looking miserably all this evening.”

“*I?* I did not know — not worse than usual, I suppose? But I shouldn’t wonder.”

“Yes, indeed, and very careworn, my poor Mark. I have been very unhappy about you.” Mark looked at her first with a dark sort of doubt, and then laughed faintly.

“I’m not going to die, or drown myself, Amy. After all, I take pretty good care of myself; nothing can happen me that will not reach us all pretty equally. I’m worried, of course — always that; but not ill — at least, that I know of.”

“I was so afraid there had been some ill news — something very bad threatening; but there’s nothing.”

"No, nothing particular — nothing. Sometimes one's spirits go down. Every one feels that. You can't control your spirits — they are sometimes worse than at others. Every one knows that sort of thing. I sometimes wish, Amy — that is, I'd give something I could believe all that." He tapped with his finger the Bible that lay on the little table by her bed. "But believing, unluckily, isn't a matter of choice any more than loving. No — I assure you there's nothing bad — nothing, in fact, whatever, but just a sort of foreboding that makes me fancy I should like to have something to go upon — I mean *belief,* idolatry — anything. But," he said, with another little laugh, which she fancied was intended to cover a more serious meaning, of which, perhaps, he was half ashamed, "I dare say *you* pray for me, Amy, and that is better. Good night, dear." And he kissed her, and departed.

With a solitary candle burning in his odd darksome room, the window opened wide, and a broad slanting moonbeam making a great diamond-shaped diagram of light on the floor, the still landscape lying broad and misty under the moon, visible through the open casement, and the chill night air floating softly in and out, and waving the candle-flame faintly, our friend Carmel Sherlock was passing the hour in a feverish listlessness.

That night his fiddle — I beg pardon, his Straduarius — would not play exactly what he wished, but seemed to take the control of the music, and by an irresistible influence to draw his bow and infuse odd vibrations into his elbow, which resulted -in such wild, shapeless, and lamentable melodies as half startled the crazy fiddler himself.

"Ha! ha! That was good!" he would say, with a start; holding his Straduarius up suddenly, and looking it in the face, so to speak, with a suspicious smile. "*I* could not do *that.* It wasn't I. No. Ha! ha! You think I don't know when it is *you* and when it is *I.* Bravo, Cremona! Bravo, Straduarius!" and with a scowling smile he shook the bow, which he held upright over his shoulder, at the fiddle. "You or I *master?* You're growing too much for me — a man who floats on passion — without a will; a notable victory, forsooth! 'I'd smash you sometimes, only you sha'n't think you can frighten me. I think you are panting a bit, are you? Well, hang there a little while, and recover from your epilepsy, poor little lost thing! Who knows — who knows?"

I don't know whether Carmel Sherlock ate opium. His face had that night the peculiar pallid sheen which De Quincy describes as the special symptom of the ecstasy so attained to. A homelier poison, for the nerves was on his table — potent green tea — cold, Chinese fashion; no milk, no sugar, the cup of madness!

A tiny cup of old cock-china, and a cracked and venerable little teapot of the same date: these old-world things he picked up where he could, and treasured and loved to live among them; they kept his fancy stirring, and tinted and shaped his dreams. Tiny as was the teacup, if you had sipped its measure, once filled with the awful elixir which was his habitual solace, it would have covered your darkness with gliding pictures, bereft you of sleep for a night or two, and introduced you to strange quakings. When I look at that old teapot replenished with its fatal infusion, standing on his table, I think I see, not a teapot, but Carmel Sherlock's magic-lantern.

"I think I've found out your secret," said he, with a laugh, and an odd cunning in his glance. "Dark, is it? There is illumination here. *Books."*

Standing before his bookshelves, he was gently tapping the backs of the tomes with the end of his fiddlestick. "What" — looking all the time askance at his Straduarius suspended from a nail like one of Bluebeard's beauties— "What says Virgil?

"'Nam, quæ prima solo ruptis radicibus arbor
Vellitur, huic atro liquuntur sanguine guttæ,
Et terram tabo maculant —
— gemitus lacrymabilis imo
Auditur tumulo, et vox reddita fertur ad aures.'"

Not Violino — Violina, are you? — *feminine,* wilful, hysterical. Ha! Traitresse — beloved, mysterious Violina — have I touched the secret of your birth? Wince and tremble — tremble and wince. Yes, it is in the old, old legend, as untraceable in the days of Augustus as now. Ah! Violina, my companion, beautiful fiend! You are *detected.* Listen, tremble. No one hears, only you and I. Again in Dryden's verses:

"'I pulled a plant; with horror I relate, A prodigy so strange and full of fate.'"

Hearken! How foolish you look and guilty! Ha, ha, ha! You would have lived with me, and had my ear, and passed for nothing but an undesigning frame of wood, would you?

Clever Violina! Listen! Ha, ha, ha! Ay, my mistress, to lead me on and on to Bedlam. Hearken:

"'The rooted fibres rose; and from the wound,
Black bloody drops distilled upon the ground,
Scarce dare I tell the sequel: from the womb
Of wounded earth, and caverns of the tomb,
A— '

A — a *what?* Oh, Violina, listen! For I know yon. Come — come, don't you? By heaven! you do look paler. Well, well, listen:

"'A groan, as of a troubled ghost, renew'd,
My fright, and then these dreadful words ensued!'

Now if you could speak, you'd say, 'Thank God! though he came *near* to finding it, he has not got the key of my mystery in his fingers yet!' Be not too sure of that, sweet wayward Violina! Come — come — rest, poor thing — rest awhile. But you would say, '*Nay, let me hear all now?* I know your face so well; did I not see you smile once? Ay! I was a novice then — I dropped you, in horror, on my bed — and was afraid of you for five weeks after. Heigho! it has been an odd life. But come — come — why this *shame!* Foolish Violina, don't yon see I am no more your dupe — the thing's impossible. I know you, shy Violina; say you see the eye of a corpse move, its face change into a fixed smile for two minutes time, with a meaning — a meaning suited to *your* thoughts; it is a corpse no more, but a devil. Ha, ha, ha! found out, eh? In the wood of the tree — in the wood of the tree. How deep the root goes — and I so tired.

“‘Non era ancor di la Nesgo arrivato.’

Hark! listen! I say — it’s coming.

“‘Qnando noi ci mettemmo per un bosco,
Che da nesBun aentiero era segnato;
Non frondi verdi, ma di color fosco;
Non rami schietti, ma nodosi e’nvolti
Non pomi v’eran, ma stecchi con tosco’ —

There it is — the forest — an infernal metamorphosis. The same thing only worse; not the tap roots only, but stems, boughs, foliage, all in hell. Dante’s forest of suicides — trees that bleed, and moan, and speak; damned spirits — and *for ever* is such a long time. Poor Violina! no such wood for a fiddle. Ha! rest now — rest. The ancient bidding — turn your face to the wall.”

With tender solicitude he turned the fiddle softly with its face to the wall, whispering, with a frown of dark compassion: “Rest — rest — rest.”

Then again to the open window he went, and looked out, long and in silence; kneeling with his elbows on the window-stool, and his chin resting on his hands. Oh! what a draught of moonlight, sweet, night air, sad and mysterious landscape, deserted of all living. Awful, lonely, beloved; darkness so soft, and lights so dim. In that imperfect light all vulgarities and unsightly things vanish, and the beloved scene presents the image of the dead — who are beautiful and purified by distance, and the dim medium of memory.

CHAPTER XII.

MYSTAGOGUS.

HALF AN HOUR passed, I dare say, in that sort of dream, and the moonlight seemed to grow insupportably pure, and the night air — like the water to the swimmer — met his breast with the thrill of a delicious shudder. So a solitary happiness stole over him, the most melancholy and serene — like that of a man who is about to make the last great venture, and die; and has already taken leave of all his miseries and complications.

"Henceforward you are my Ægeria — a phantom only; I shall see you in my solitude and darkness — a picture of light; I shall hear your voice, like notes of distant music, but no more conflict; the tumult of hope for ever over, and this wild heart is quiet; the first death has passed, and all now is remembrance —

"'There are brains though they moulder that dream in the tomb.'"

With this quotation Carmel Sherlock got to his feet again, took his pipe, and charged it with the biting tobacco he liked, and lighting it, and lighting his second candle also, read and smoked by the light of his candles. Bead what? It happened to be the Bible — the Old Testament, for its poetry, philosophy, and profound knowledge of human nature — to him it was no revelation — all *man s* work — but even so, it was tranquillising and elevating. The fruit of the tree of life, we know, is for believers, but its "leaves are for the healing of the nations."

He dipped into the Psalms; he turned over to Isaiah; and then passed away into the Cyclopean sublimities of Job.

He read, and smoked, and pondered; and came at last to a passage which lighted up his frowning face with a smile:

"This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors, which they shall receive of the Almighty."

"Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay; He may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver.”

“The rich man shall lie down, but he shall not be gathered: he openeth his eyes, and he is not. Terrors take hold on him as waters, a tempest stealeth him away in the night.”

These grandly sinister words applied themselves; as he read them, each sentence seemed to rise up and point a weird finger at the man he feared and hated — wicked and wealthy. Again and again, over and over, he read them, till they seemed to gain slowly a power over him, and, with a gasp, he started from a dream that frightened him, and hurriedly he turned over the pages, and looked slowly about him; round upon the strange furniture and decorations of his crooked and dimly-lighted room, through the open casement once more upon the wide dreamy landscape, and then upon the dial of his Dutch clock, whose diligent ticking, exaggerated by the silence, was the only sound audible. He raised the candle to it and looked. It was near one o’clock. His eye glanced on the Straduarius — Violina, with her face to the wall. He did not care, just then, to remember that she was there, and averted his glance quickly — was ever solitude so utter?

These ancient writings, which used to soothe him, like his narcotic weed, were failing him tonight. He turned back and read, after many others, this passage:

“Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: it stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice saying— “

As Carmel Sherlock read these words he raised his eyes, and they happened to rest upon the door, which now stood wide open, and a figure was there observing him.

It was Miss Agnes Marlyn, pale, with her candle in her hand, and gazing on him with large steady eyes. Carmel Sherlock rose to his feet, returning her gaze. I don’t think he was quite sure that he did not see a spirit. He raised the candle, and stared at her in a way that, at another time, would have made her laugh. But now she did not smile. She looked pale, like himself, and only said “Hush!” and raised her finger warningly.

“Miss Marlyn!” he whispered.

“Yes; may I come in? or will you come to the door for a moment? I dare not speak aloud.”

"Come in, yes. She's Miss Marlyn — these lights are flaring — you are not afraid."

He glanced at his fiddle, lying very quiet with its face to the wall. "Young ladies are afraid of ghosts sometimes — *I* used to be, but long habit, and," he looked along the floor, "never seeing them, don't encourage it — it's a fancy that might steal you out of your senses."

"I have come to you, Mr. Sherlock, to ask a kindness — a great favour — you did me one once."

"Yes — I know — in that thunderstorm, when I brought that letter for you to the post, and so, between us, we've brought not a man, but a vampire into the house."

"You were true to me *then,* Mr. Sherlock — in God's name, be true to me *novo!* It's only a trifle, and there is not a soul in the house I can trust but you; I have not a friend."

"You are talking to a dead man; I'm no one's friend."

"I know you are kind, I know you are true; you can be a friend where one is needed; what I ask is, I assure you, but a trifle; promise me this, at least, that if you refuse me — which I hardly think possible — you won't tell any one what my request was?"

Carmel Sherlock looked at her with a shrewd and shrinking glance, and walked across the room, looking down on the floor; and having stood for a minute at the open window, he returned, and said:

"If it has no relation whatever to Miss Rachel Shadwell — I — may."

"None; it's only a note, and I swear to you, it has no reference — not the slightest — to Miss Shadwell."

"Yes — yes — she says true; I remember — a note — go on."

"Just this — I'm making a great confidence, but I know you won't betray me; and even if I were not sure, I cannot choose, I must place myself in your hands— "

"Fear nothing; there was a heart there," and he knocked his clenched hand at his breast, "now there's a *stone.* I don't know why I asked that question — no — go on — *nil admirari."*

"I want this note delivered tonight."

Was she ashamed, or afraid? I don't know which, as thus speaking, in a lowered voice, she hastily placed a little note in Carmel Sherlock's open hand. He turned frowningly to the candle, and, having read its address, turned ashy pale.

"Who put this in your head?" he said, with a ferocious and horror-stricken stare. "Did you dream it — or *how?"*

"I don't know what you mean!" she answered very honestly.

"You are beautiful — yes; see how her colour comes and goes, with the beauty of a young Venus — warm, crimson blood — and beautiful shame. Listen to me: what put it in your head? I say there's foul play here. Everything pushing me on!"

It seemed to her that he trembled and looked faint. Her patience was on the verge of breaking down altogether, but she controlled her anger, for the case was urgent, and Carmel her last hope, although, as she said, the service was slight.

"Beautiful? — yes; the genii came in different shapes — a serpent, a boy, an old man, a girl. Is any man on earth so perplexed as I?"

"I implore of you," she whispered earnestly, "to give this tonight, without fail, into his own hand; and I trust all to your honour, no one on earth but you and he must know."

"Don't mind your dreams," he said, in a whisper. "Dreams are not sent from God, nor caused by him, but must be demoniacal, since nature is demoniacal, not divine. Come, come, don't *you* enter into the conspiracy."

"You can't suppose I understand one word of what you say," she said at last, a little fiercely; "I ask you, once for all, to deliver that note tonight. You must know *I* can't, and I have told you I shall be ruined if you don't."

"If you had said travel fifty miles before morning, I should have tried; but to Sir Roke Wycherly's door — until the sun has risen — I will *not* go. Why will you trouble me? I was serene."

"You won't give it tonight? Oh! won t you, Mr. Sherlock?"

"I won't give it tonight! What temptation is this, and whence do you come? I say *no!"*

"It ought to have reached him before nine o'clock tonight, I had promised it, and my silence he is to read as *no,* and he is odd and violent. He may never forgive it. Oh! Mr. Sherlock, think; I can't, I won't do it myself, and if it is not done, what is to become of me? An enemy has read my letters — *there!* I've told you — and has learned that which he may use to ruin me, and there is no one to help me but that one bad man, Sir Roke Wycherly;

don’t you see how madly I trust you? and you won’t help me, in a matter to me impossible, but for you as easy as to walk to that window. Oh, Mr. Carmel! Mr. Sherlock, *think* f.”

“Yes, *easy* — *facilis decensus* — evil has come to many, in many shapes — you are warped by some dream — you have had a dream tonight — I don’t believe in any exorcism — no, no, no! — they are too strong for us.”

“Oh, Mr. Sherlock! do, for God’s sake, do give him the note tonight!” She stamped, and wrung her hands in her anguish.

“How she persists! How cruel they all are! Take this with you then — the thing’s *impossible!* Short is the way, but a gulf between us! False sibyl! you say, step boldly. What of the abyss? Have not the spirits charge over thee, in their hands to bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone, and return bloodstained? Listen to your words, and say, are not they the song of a devil? No, no, you shall *not* prevail, beautiful Miss Agnes Marlyn! And you have lifted up the curtain, and showed me that other image. Oh, Rachel! Rachel! Rachel! See what a wreck she would make; this Ariel of the storm, flaming amazement, she knows not, or cares not, to what purpose.”

Without another word, her beautiful eyes flashing, she extended her hand.

“Patience!” he said, “only a moment, I’ll give it to you, if you like, but listen first; this is reason, this is business. He’s asleep now! he’s asleep! I — I *know* it! Look there, it’s past one o’clock! he’s asleep by this time, and I promise this, the edge of the sun shall not have appeared above that upland there in the morning one minute before I place it in his hand — don’t be so crazy, young lady! if you’re mad, I’m not.” And with these stem words he darted a lowering glance at Miss Marlyn.

“Well, [perhaps, *yes; do* so, we shall see.” With these words she turned, and was leaving the room with a light and quick tread, but she stopped, and said: “Mr. Sherlock, I was going without thanking you; I *do* thank you, pray forgive me; but I am agitated and miserable, farewell! — and oh! do not fail me!” She clasped her hands, and looked on him for a moment with such eyes as are raised in shipwreck, and then was gone quickly.

Sherlock followed to the door, and listened with a raised hand and wide-open eyes.

“Not a sound! not a step! not a breath!” Then he paused again for awhile, listening.

"Foiled? ha, ha, ha! Well that the thought came as it did — ah, spirit, you hear me now? — God! what have I seen? What is a mortal creature among them? If a good angel — *come*, oh quiet, quiet! If an evil one, lead away into the desert. Oh, that I had wings like a dove! then would I flee away and be at rest. Can any man escape his destiny?"

"So he closed the door.

"Ah, Menander! you say truth:

"Unicuique homini statim nascenti
Adest Dæmon vitæ mystagogus."

He looked round his strange room, stealthily, as if expecting to see the mystagogus of his life revealed; and then, sighing, he leaned his head upon his hand.

CHAPTER XIII.

SIR ROKE'S LAST NIGHT AT RABY.

MARK SHADWELL was in his study. It was all over between him and his secretary. It was all over, too, with his dream of a great alliance for his daughter. If he had been left to the dismal tenor of his life, if his vanities had not been excited, his ambition awakened, the hell of this reaction would have been spared him. Here he was deluded — insulted; alone with the worm and the fire — his despair and his fury.

Around him, on thin old oaken shelves, stood, tier above tier, the dusty tomes, some of which had furnished the now roofless library of Wynderfel — before the Shadwells had migrated, in an evil hour, to Raby — all old enough, and some no doubt curious; but Mark troubled them but little. The nimble spiders spread their nettings across the shelves, and the tiny book-worm was busy with their pages, and heavy drifts of dust lay thick over their buried wit and wisdom. Mark was not a reading man at any time, but just now reading, or even thinking, was quite out of the question. There was only the dull pain of an inexpiable insult and the feverish yearning for revenge.

It was a kind of pleasure to Mark Shadwell, collecting every sheet of Miss Marlyn's writing, copied law papers, copies of letters, and tearing them resolutely into the smallest fragments and throwing them into the grate; and when not a fragment remained unsacrificed, he continued pacing the floor. "Whatever his mind was revolving, he was as much startled when a knock came to the door as Carmel Sherlock was that night when Miss Marlyn appeared at his.

It proved to be his wife, wrapped in a dressing-gown.

"Ah! you? — why, what can have brought *you* here?" said Mark, recovering from his surprise.

"I couldn't sleep, Mark, till I came and told you that you are to do whatever you think best as to parting with Agnes. I shall be very sorry — but I know how harassed you are — and I think, Mark, you do her injustice."

Mark was inattentive as she spoke — preoccupied with his own agitating thoughts — but her last phrase rang [upon the very nerve that tortured him — like a sentence heard by a man half asleep, without its context, and applied to his dominant idea without thought of improbabilities. Her husband darted a glance of suspicion upon her face. But that face was frank, earnest, and noble.

He was disarmed. He was silent for a time, a transient but vivid pity touched him for a moment. He took her hand and kissed it.

"I'm glad you came, darling, very glad. We can talk of all that another time — but I *am* very glad you came — though you mustn't stay longer, the room is cold — you must get to your bed, you must indeed. God bless you, darling."

He accompanied her to the door, at which he remained standing for awhile. At the foot of the great staircase she smiled and kissed her hand. He bid her goodnight again, with a strange gloomy smile, and waited till that faded apparition and the light of her candle had quite disappeared.

"I am — *very* glad," he repeated, stepping back into the room. "It would not have done had I gone to Roke's room. I might have said more than I intended; his sneering coolness would have led me on, and now I'll secure myself."

He locked his door on the inside, and placed the key in his escritoire, which he locked also.

"And now, Master Roke," said he, "I must think twice before I visit you; whatever accident brought her down to see me, she has saved me that annoyance — saved me from, perhaps — from something *very* bad."

Mark began to feel the nervous reaction which follows upon the subsidence of the malignant emotions. He had been talking to himself in the solitude of this room, and in the silence his own words seemed still to haunt his ears, like a dialogue of other voices urging him on.

He sat down by the smouldering fire, and leaning back in his chair, he closed his eyes. But there was that about him which scared away sleep. Now and then he muttered with a kind of abhorrence, "No, *no,* let him go — *let* him go."

And sometimes he would open his eyes, and look for a moment at the door, and then at the escritoire, with the keys of which his fingers in his pocket were playing, and then back again at the door, and so once more at the escritoire; and then, with a sudden shrug, like a shiver, he would start up, and walk about the room, and read the names on the backs of the old books, and so wander about for awhile, and then sit down again, looking ruefully into the embers; and then he would look at his watch — half past twelve, only! — and wonder how slowly the time lagged. And then, after a time, the same sort of thing would occur over again, and Mark Shadwell once more was wandering restlessly about his room; and he looked at his watch. It was now a little past one.

*

Sir Roke Wycherly was in gay spirits that night. He amused himself, thinking of his cousin Mark.

"The beast!" he thought. "He's quite wild about this little romance of ours. He has been bullying that pretty little rogue; there has been a row. I suppose he has put her in a devil of a passion — he'll not find it easy to frighten her, though — and her little *billet* has not come; it will, though. Mark won't come, quite past his hour, now, and I shouldn't wonder if my little note reached me, somehow, after all's quiet." And he smiled slily and pleasantly towards the door. "I may as well wait a little — yes, and we'll get that fellow, Clewson, out of the way. Poor wretch! he does look awfully tired. I forgot him last night, and we are to be off tomorrow, and there's a great deal to do."

He was accounting to himself, goodnaturedly, for getting Clewson out of his way. The well-trained Clewson did look a little surprised at this considerate dismissal. Glad he was to receive it, however. He made two or three trifling arrangements very quietly, and withdrew, and got to his bed, where he quickly fell asleep.

"Yes, poor devil! we'll do without him tonight; and — hey? was that a step? No — no — fancy."

He listened, notwithstanding, for a minute; and he got up very quietly, opening his door softly, and smiling up and down the gallery, with the candle high above his head; but all seemed quiet, and, so far as the light reached, was deserted.

"Not yet — not yet — I wager my life, it will be, though; only a word — a little bit of paper no bigger than a card."

By this time he had again closed the door, and was standing in his dressing-gown, by the card table, where lay the pack with which he and Mark were to have fought their battle — not their great one.

"If he had only come — I wish he would — a fellow in that plight is always amusing, and a little bit of quiet comedy would not have been amiss tonight — and that charming little woman. She would not have popped in her note at the wrong moment — far too clever to put her pretty little foot in it — and, egad! no great harm if she did. "We shall be all far enough tomorrow, and the curtain goes down on a strong situation and a spirited tableau." Then Sir Roke listened again, and again there was nothing. And he bethought him of a letter to that Pepys, Adderly, to whom he had written before, to expect him at Scarbrook. He wrote:

"MY DEAR ADDERLY,

"I have next to nothing to add to my last letter, except that you may take as absolute, all that I then described as *probable,* respecting the little romance which has amused and piqued me for some time. I am going to town, as I said, tomorrow, and I sha'n't leave for Scarbrook till Wednesday; but your charming married niece, Mrs. Hyde, will reach Scarbrook, with her maid, on Thursday morning. You need not tell the people there that I'm coming down. I shall appear, simply by accident — you don't expect me — no one expects me. I think I have said quite enough. Make your niece, of course, as happy and comfortable as possible — but very quietly, please. I sha'n't stay there myself a week, and I shall be off before it becomes known; and now the whole plot is before you, and do pray be on the alert, and attend to these few plain directions.

"Ever, dear Adderly, yours sincerely,
"R. W."

Roke Wycherly shut up his letter and sealed it. "And now, I think all's ready," said he, lifting his hands with a little wave, like a man who has completed a piece of work and means to enjoy himself and rest. And then he listened again, but there was nothing — and he yawned.

"It will come before half an hour," said he. "What an affectation! The little gipsy fancies her hesitations impose upon me. Well, we must amuse them — why not a note, if she likes it? — only I'm growing uncomfortably sleepy. Hang their caprices, they *are* so selfish, one and all."

Sir Roke took up his French Review, but it made him yawn more; and then, with his handkerchief he touched his temples with eau-de-cologne, and then he looked at his watch that he had placed on his table, and muttered an execration upon the tortoise-pace of time — irrevocable time!

Too slow for you, its flight, Sir Roke! Is it?

And then growing peevish, he got up and opened his door again, and listened, and gaped dismally up and down the empty gallery.

You remember the passage in Faustus:

"*Mephistopheles.* I am not free; a little obstacle,
I did not see, confines me —
The druid foot upon the threshold traced.

Faustus. — The Pentagram?"

Sir Roke closed his door gently, but with a cross and dismal face. Again he looks at his watch. A quarter-past-one! And he sits down, and takes up his French Review again, and reads and nods, and reads a little more and nods again, and drops asleep in his easy-chair, with his back towards the door, and all became quite still and silent.

Pity, Sir Roke, no pentagram was traced upon your threshold.

Sir Roke's bedroom opens upon the great gallery, and in the same chamber, in the further wall, another door gives access to a dressing-room, beyond which, again, lies Mr.

Clewson's bedroom, which opens upon a lobby at the head of the back stairs.

Mr. Clewson was fast asleep. But the habit of attending his master's call at all hours throughout the night made his sleep light.

He was startled from it now by a sound from his master's room. It was a crash as if of something thrown with violence upon the floor, and broken to pieces. He sat up in his bed listening, and heard a furious gabbling, in which he fancied he distinguished the words “God” and “wretch.” The whole thing hardly lasted a minute, and suddenly subsided.

Mr. Clewson, not knowing what to make of it, glided out of his bed, and into the dressing-room. There was always a candle burning at night in the dressing-room, for if Sir Roke happened to want additional light, he was not a man to wait while his servant was groping for matches. Clewson took this candle in his hand, but there was light visible through the keyhole, and Sir Roke did not call him. He listened at the door, but he heard his master, shuffling about the room, he thought, in his slippers, and making his customary arrangements before getting into his bed.

So Mr. Clewson concluded that Sir Roke had accidentally knocked down one of the old china vases which the care and good taste of ancient Mrs. Windle had placed upon the mantlepiece. And he knew that Sir Roke, when an accident happened, could snarl and curse in soliloquy, with great spirit.

So Clewson went back to his bed, a little out of humour, and made a few cynical remarks upon the “governor’s” delight in disturbing people. But being weary, his temper did not keep him long awake, and he was soon again in a sound sleep.

Things had promised fairly that night for Mr. Clewson’s slumber, but his repose was destined to be broken.

After some time passed in dreamless sleep, without a summons, without a start, Mr. Clewson on a sudden opened his eyes. There was a large window in his room, without shutters, and through it the moon shone brightly.

In this light Mr. Clewson saw a man, with a wideawake hat on, standing a little way off, and the character of the face and figure were such that for some seconds he did not know whether he was waking or in a dream.

CHAPTER XIV.

SLEEP, AND HIS BROTHER DEATH.

HE beheld Carmel Sherlock standing, not far from his bed, in the moonlight, ghastly, his eyes fixed upon him with a cold glitter. His hands were clasped together, and there was a steel curb-chain about one of them, to which two or three large keys were attached.

The newly-awakened man sat up in his bed staring at him, and neither spoke. But Carmel drew near, and in the broad moonlight he could plainly see that one side of his face was covered with blood, and that his features wore an expression of horror and menace. Mr. Clewson's fear increased, as Carmel Sherlock came silently nearer and nearer to him, so that, with an effort, he found his tongue, and said, but in an undertone, for even then the training of Sir Roke's servant prevailed, —

"I say, Mr. Sherlock, what is it? I say, sir — please — what do you *want?"*

There was no answer, but, he fancied, a faint groan; and he now saw that in Carmel's clasped fingers there was something more than the chain I have mentioned. He saw that his hands, too, were covered with blood.

"Why, sir — Mr. Sherlock, I say — my God! sir, you're all over blood!" said Clewson, freezing with horror.

Carmel Sherlock, like a sleepwalker awakened, recoiled at the sound of his voice, and as he did so, he dropped something from his hand, which rolled to some little distance on the floor, and his gaze was still fixed on Clewson.

"Blood — blood — I dare say! Do you know me?" he whispered.

"Know you — to be sure; but you're hurt, Mr. Sherlock, sir. You've got a knock over the head, or something," said Clewson.

"Yes, sir — I'm very ill."

"I'll help you, sir, to wash your head, Mr. Sherlock; and I've some plaster, sir; and your hand — it's cut, isn't it?" said Mr. Clewson, putting his foot out of the bed.

"Eli? who told you my hand's cut — *cut? That* it is, to the bone — to the bone!"

"I'll give you a lift, Mr. Sherlock, sir, and get it all right, if you please."

"Hush! Was that a *call,* sir, from Sir Roke's room — Sir Roke Wycherly, Baronet?" said Carmel Sherlock.

"No, sir — nothink, Mr. Sherlock — no I" said the man, listening nevertheless.

"*A. jibe,* sir; an angel; shall we go and help him?" whispered Sherlock, wildly.

"But he *did* not call, sir! The smallest trifle wakens him — he was getting to bed, Mr. Sherlock, more than an hour ago. I'm sure I wouldn't wake him for somethink — he's quiet now."

"Lethali somno exporrectus," said Sherlock, and sighed. "Shall we come?"

"Where?" asked Clewson.

"To Sir Roke."

"I *tell* you, let him alone — can't you? He's *asleep*whispered Clewson, testily.

"Ay, ay; Homerus 'Thanton' et *'Ypnon'* Germanos finxit. In there, sir, frater, fratrem amplectitur — brother embraces brother. My hand!"

"Let me do it up for you, sir; pray do?" said Clewson, again essaying to rise.

"No, sir, I'll manage it — blood, to be sure — let Justice drink it; it is the milk she lives on, if a man catches the blade instead of the handle! an image of life — the way of death — a topsy-turvy world."

All this time he was groping on the floor; and looking for what he had dropped. He found it, and stood up.

Mr. Clewson could not see it distinctly, for he thrust the hand that held it quickly under the breast of his coat, but he did see a momentary metallic gleam. It was either a very small bright-barrelled pistol, or as he inclined to conclude, a knife.

"Ay, sir, the altar of Justice; between this and there a path of blood — the via lactea — and there you'll find her sacrifice — like herself — blind, and cold!"

Mr. Clewson seeing Carmel Sherlock, about whose growing eccentricities the servants had been talking, now again approaching his bedside, with the same dreadful expression of feature, and the unexplained blood-marks, and a knife, as he thought, in his hand, could stand his uncomfortable sensations no longer.

"Jest you get away with you, please; don't mind acoming to me, sir. What brings you here at this hour? It can't be far from daylight."

"Ay, ay," said Carmel Sherlock, and a strange craft and suspicion suddenly appeared in his face, and his eyes seemed to read Mr. Clewson's thoughts with a dangerous scrutiny. "Ay, very unseasonable; but when a man cuts his hand, you wouldn't have him go on bleeding — blood is life, you know — when a friend could stanch it; so I came up the back stair, and then hesitated to waken you."

"Well, I'll do it up for you, if you like," began Clewson.

"No, I remember I have got it — better plaster — in my own room — the best — and it's hardly bleeding now. Thanks, sir; thanks, good Samaritan."

"And what did you want of Sir Roke, sir?"

"Well, Mrs. Wyndle says, *you* told her he has a medicine-chest, with everything in it, and I thought you might bring me to his room quietly; but I remembered he keeps his door bolted, and we couldn't get in without disturbing him; and I don't care about it, sir, for it has turned out next to nothing; so I'll go to my bed — goodnight, sir, — I'm tired and sleepy."

Carmel, for a second or two after this little speech was closed, continued to fix a shrinking gaze on Clewson, and suddenly repeated his "goodnight!" and turned to depart.

"Goodnight, sir," said Clewson more civilly.

And the moment Carmel Sherlock had left the room and closed the door, cautious Mr. Clewson skipped noiselessly to it, from his bed, and bolted it, lest Mr. Sherlock should change his mind and return. That Mr. Sherlock was more than half-crazed was the opinion of the servants' hall. The plight he was in tonight was by no means reassuring, and Mr. Clewson was very well pleased, for the first time in his life, at the precaution of that oldfashioned falling bolt, which secured Sir Roke's door on the inside.

When he was about to step once more into his bed, his attention was arrested by a sound in the stableyard, of which his window commanded a full view. To the window therefore he returned, and thence he saw Carmel Sherlock cross the paved yard toward the stables.

It was a brilliant frosty moonlight; the walls, the ivy, the pavement, showed all in intense whiteness, and the figure of Carmel Sherlock, as he walked swiftly across the pavement, was sharply defined, and its shadow lay clear and black on the stones. A great stone trough stands in front of the huge old pump, and against its side lay a thick pronged pitchfork, a broom, and a shovel, and the sight of these homely implements seemed to arrest his attention, for he stopped suddenly, and took up the pitchfork and turned it over in his hands, and then placed it leaning against the pump; and he took from the breastpocket of his coat a knife — there was no mistake about it now — and turned haft and blade quickly about in his hands. Then suddenly he looked up at the house, at the same time thrusting the knife into his pocket again, searching window after window with his glance. Mr. Clewson stepped back quickly, forgetting that there was no light in his room.

His eyes having run quickly along the windows, Mr. Sherlock took the pitchfork again in his hands, and went direct to a little iron grating, which let off the drain near the stable-door, and having first tried to pass the knife through its bars in vain, he then, with the prong of the pitchfork, forced two of them a little apart, and so dropped the knife in, and then carefully readjusted the grating. Then he looked up again at the windows, and proceeded to wash his hands and face hurriedly at the stone tank before the pump.

Mr. Clewson watched him, with much curiosity, through these processes; hoping that he had been about no mischief, well knowing what an oddity he was, and willing to suppose the best, yet with a most uncomfortable misgiving.

When Carmel Sherlock had completed his ablutions he walked to the stable-door, unlocked it, and disappeared for a little, returning in a few minutes leading the horse he usually rode saddled and bridled. Mr. Clewson then remembered that he had heard that Mr. Sherlock, when he had to visit a distant part of the estate, sometimes set out as early as three o’clock in the morning. He watched him till he unlocked the outer door and led the horse out of the yard. Mr. Clewson looked at his watch, in the light which the moon afforded, and found that it was halfpast three; and then he return to his bed a good deal quieted.

“He’s a very quiet man, is Mr. Sherlock. I never heard of his quarrelling with no one. A nice man, and knows a deal o’ book-learning, he does. It’s just one of them early rides; and he's cut his finger, and he took his revenge o' the knife — he is sich a queer un. 'Well,' he's broke up my night's rest a bit, he has — the fool!"

And with this remark, rather cold, Mr. Clewson laid himself surlily down in his bed for the third time that night, and was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

APPLEBURY CHURCH.

AT the pleasant old town of Applebury there was a cattle-fair next morning. By daybreak the whole town was in a bustle; and the High Street, which expands near the old Town Hall into a great, irregular, paved square, was already thronged with men, women, and children, and stalls and booths of all sorts. Applebury is thirteen miles away from Raby, and only eleven from the Vicarage.

Two cows and a troop of sheep, belonging to my friend the Reverend Stour Temple, were there; and his brother, honest Roger, had, by earnest entreaty, supported by the eloquence of Miss Barbara, who had long thought he wanted a holiday, persuaded him to ride to Applebury next morning.

Down the narrow road overhung by noble ash-trees, which enters the antique town from the north, while the pleasant morning sun was glittering on the old gilt vane and clock of the church-tower, rode, on their trotting nags, a little cavalcade of three, — thin Stour Temple, fat Roger, and Charlie Mordant. Honest Roger, smiling cosily, and jogging breathlessly in his saddle, young Mordant in high spirits, and the vicar's thin brown features smiling also pleasantly, and all the better of that ride in the exhilarating air of early morning.

A little way down they had to slacken their pace, finding themselves involved among droves of cattle, farmers on horseback, and pedestrians, all tending into the town; and Bonnie came to a walk with a very red face and a great sigh of relief.

"I told you, Stour, — now didn't I? — you'd like it," said honest Roger, when they sat at breakfast in the Bull Inn parlour, with the broad fat backs of two farmers, busy over a bargain, against the window-stone, and a view of the steep roof and gilded clock of the Town Hall, the noble old tree that grows there, and the ever-moving panorama beneath it, touched with the pleasant morning sun. "I see you are enjoying it, my poor fellow and smiling inquiringly into his face, he pressed his brother's knee gently with his fat hand.

"So I do, Bonnie," said Stour, with a very sweet smile, and pressing his own hand over Bonnie's kindly paw. "Very much;. five years since I was in Applebury before. I never saw the old place look so pleasant; and I'm very much obliged to you and Barbara for making me come."

I think the kind blue eyes and fat smile of Bonnie, and the affectionate patting of his honest hand, had a great deal to do with the charm of the scene. "There's some good in you and Barbara, after all, though you *are a* pair of despots."

So said the vicar, still] smiling; and in his heart there welled up the strong and tender love that would have said: "Bonnie and Barbara — brother and sister — my treasures! What are long walks, and now and then a trouble, and an obscure threadbare life, if only in the bright warm sunshine of your love, my darlings! For whom I bless God every hour."

"We are very comfortable, aren't we?" said Roger, with a delighted little chuckle. "We are enjoying ourselves immensely; we are so cosy — ain't we?"

"Awfully!" acquiesced Mordant. "What a queer little town it is! Lucky to have such a fine day. *There's* an odd name, isn't it? On that red board with the gold frame over there. Don't you see? — on that square brick house."

"Yes — yes — there," said Roger, looking across, and as he did so blushing an ingenuous crimson. The name was Amos Martyr. Charles Mordant had made his little remark in all simplicity; and honest Roger, who was a little near-sighted, I believe, fancied, though with amazement, that he read a more interesting name.

"Where is she? By Jove! you have seen some one," said Charlie, gaily, and running to the window. "I must see her."

"I didn't; upon my honour! No, she is *not* there."

"Who?" demanded Mordant.

"Come, who is she, Roger?" urged Stour Temple, who enjoyed his good brother's flights into the land of romance.

"That fellow has been at his tricks," said Roger, with a smile of bashful reproach at Charlie.

"*I* have?" exclaimed Charlie.

"Ho — ho — yes; do ask him what he has been doing over *there?* said Roger, smiling and shaking his head.

"I never was over there in my life! Upon my honour, sir, I never was," exclaimed Charles Mordant, earnestly, observing the direction of honest Roger's short arm, and not knowing what accusation might be intended by his fat friend, smiling sheepishly.

"Not you — you rogue! I say, Stour, ask him whether he knows how to use a paintbrush. By Jove! though, there's Dick Larcom and his son, with the cows," exclaimed Roger, interrupting his own rude and mysterious allusions. "Let us come out for goodness sake, and hear what offers he has got."

So forth they sallied; and in the hall Roger said in Charlie Mordant's ear:

"Isn't it delightful we got poor Stour to come with us, glorious fellow! And killing himself with work — a perfect slave; but you must run over, like a dear fellow, and make them take that thing down; it oughtn't to have been there at all — do, *do* now; and here's Dick. Stour! here's Dick Larcom with the cows."

So forth they sallied, among stalls and booths, and piles of gingerbread, and baskets of apples, in pursuit of Dick Larcom who was making his way to the green with the vicar's cattle. But the vicar, being less interested than as a wise farmer he ought to have been, and haying an easy confidence that among his more skilled friends the cattle would be managed well enough, wandered away into devious lanes, and finally paid a visit to the old church, whose beautiful porch is so justly admired; and seeing that the door was open, the sexton being there employed in his vocation, the vicar stepped into the hallowed shade, taking off his hat.

This church of Applebury is, I think, about the darkest in England, the eastern window being of stained glass, and under the shadow of two enormous elm-trees. Coming out of the bright sun, this gloom strikes the visitor, so that one would fancy there was scarcely light in the building to read by. He stood for a little, just within the threshold of the door, looking up and around, as such visitors will; and, glancing at his left hand, some five or six yards away from the entrance, he saw a man, in a loose wrapper, with a hat in his hand, standing, and, as he felt, staring at him. The vicar could not see his features distinctly, only his white eyeballs, as in silence he watched him without motion.

One of the frequenters of this fair of Applebury the vicar took him to be, who had sauntered there, like himself, to see what the inside of the old church was like.

The man made a short, shuffling step or two backward, as if irresolute, and the vicar, fancying a recognition, instinctively made a step or two in advance, and saw Carmel Sherlock, just with that amount of surprise which in imperfect light induces a momentary uncertainty.

“You’ve come here for *me,* sir?” demanded Sherlock, in tones that were low and stem.

“Far from it,” answered the vicar, with a slight smile. “I was a little surprised, on the contrary, to see you here; and indeed, in this light it is not easy to know any one.”

“I’ve been here longer — *in tenebria* — and everything is clear. I saw you distinctly; there is some of your cattle at the fair, sir — and so we have found one another. You had no news, last night, from Raby?”

“No, none at all,” answered the vicar, looking at him attentively.

“Well, I’ve a message. There’s no one following you, no one outside — no one watching us?”

And Carmel Sherlock, who had been drawing near, peeped from the door, and through the quiet porch.

“No, I’m quite alone here — my brother and young Mr. Mordant are at the fair; but what is the message?”

“Only this, sir; they want you at Raby; there is great anxiety there, sir — an unexpected calamity, and it is your duty to be there. You may be of use — it is a house of affliction, today.”

“What has happened? — who is ill, or — who is it?” asked Stour Temple.

“I have nothing, sir, to tell more than — Ha! yes, I hear the horse.”

“Where are you going now, Mr. Sherlock?” inquired the vicar.

“*Home,* sir,” said he, with à start.

“Do pray let me know how I can be of use, and what has happened,” pleaded Stour Temple, who was alarmed.

“They’ll tell you when you get there — if they like. There’s no more for me to say than I *have* said. Receive me as a messenger, sir, who tells what is needful, and no more. This morning, sir, Raby is a house of trouble, and you will be expected there. Leave this town, and be where you are wanted; that is my message. You will do as pleases you best. Ha! here it is.”

And Carmel Sherlock stepped quickly through the porch, in front of which stood a horse saddled, a boy holding its bridle.

"I beg pardon, Mr. Sherlock," said the vicar, following and laying his hand upon his arm; "pray relieve me, if you can — pray tell me — if any one at Raby is dead?"

."I've told you all I have to tell," said Carmel Sherlock, with a dark stare, and stamping with wild impatience on the flags. "Just *that* — they want you." And in another moment he was in the saddle, and, riding at a swift pace down the solitary lane that runs in front of the old church, was immediately out of sight. Stour Temple fancied he had never seen any one, in full possession of his physical strength and activity, look so ill as Carmel Sherlock. There was also that in his countenance he had never seen before. Altogether, he did not well know what to make of him.

"Suppose the poor fellow's mad," thought the vicar. "I should have my ride to Raby for nothing; but no, it has not come to that — always eccentric, but quite sane — where he chooses to talk rationally. No, it is not a vision. Something has happened."

Now so it was, the vicar could no longer feel happy sauntering about the little town of Applebury, and back to the Bull Inn went he, and he called for the reckoning, and called for his nag, and he left a little note for Roger, who he knew was well furnished with money, accounting for his departure; and he mounted his beast, and trotted away by the old road that leads to Raby.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DARK CHAMBER OF WHITE DEATH.

IT was little past ten o’clock when the vicar, amid the sweet and solemn landscape that surrounds Raby, approached the lordly gateway of that mansion, with the defiant demi-griffins, with wings expanded, keeping guard upon its lofty piers. With an anxiety that increased as he approached, Stour Temple scrutinized the hall-door and the windows in search of some sign that might help his suspense to a conclusion. There was no one in the gatehouse, an occurrence not rare in those disorderly precincts. He dismounted under the aerial shadow of the huge trees that embower the gateway, and led his horse in upon the stately and melancholy avenue.

Silent and lifeless the great old mansion stood before him, and door or window gave no sign. Who could it be? What had happened? The image that constantly presented itself to his imagination was horrible and piteous enough. Had that gloomy, morbid, miserable man, Mark Shadwell, made away with himself in one of his paroxysms of malign despair? and if so, what a spectacle of agony awaited him!

That poor weak lady, adoring that unhappy and ungrateful man, could she survive so frightful a shock? As he approached the other pair of demi-griffins, with upturned wings and monstrous eyes and beaks, awaiting him by the steps, and looked at the closed hall-door, his heart sank within him, and he felt almost faint as he anticipated the scene that was coming.

He threw the bridle of his pony over the corner of the balustrade that flanks the steps at either side, and rang the bell. He had to repeat his summons more than once before the door was opened.

“How is Mrs. Shadwell?” inquired the vicar.

She was pretty well.

“And Miss Shadwell?”

The same answer. But the servant was looking at him with a stem countenance, which indicated something untold and dreadful.

“And your master — *he* s well, I hope?” said the vicar, trying to read the man’s answer in his face, as he put the question.

He was well, also. Stour Temple began to think that Carmel Sherlock's warning was but a symptom of his crazy state.

"Has Mr. Sherlock returned?" inquired the vicar.

"No, sir," said the man with a shake of his head, and a very odd look in the vicar's eyes.

"Can I see your master?" asked Stour Temple, who was willing to clear the matter up without more delay.

"I'll inquire, sir," said the man.

"Say it is *I* — perhaps he'll see me."

"Yes, sir."

And the man walked across the spacious hall to the library door. It was locked; and he returned, and said:

"He has locked the door, sir, please and he looked as if he would add, "I dare not disturb him."

"Well — thanks — don't mind; I'll try myself if he can see me."

The vicar knocked several times, and on a sudden the door half opened, and Mark Shadwell presented himself standing on the threshold.

"Ho! Temple? So you've come. I'm sorry — sent for — eh?"

"Well, yes; I got a kind of message, but very vague. I only heard you were in trouble," said Stour Temple, struck by something suspicious and stony in the countenance of Mark Shadwell, and looking into it with a dark and anxious inquiry.

"Trouble? — *I*! — well I can't say I am; come in." The vicar entered, and Mark shut the door. "Hardly trouble — but in a very painful situation. You did not hear about that — that — unfortunate fellow" — and saying this he averted his eyes— "Roke Wycherly?"

"No, nothing; he's — what is it?"

"He's — he's *dead;* and what makes it worse, he has been killed." Mark spoke nearly in a whisper, and looked very grim and pale.

"Good God!" exclaimed the vicar, while his face paled with horror, "do you mean he has been *murdered*?"

"Yes — there can't be a doubt. No one could have inflicted those wounds on himself; and he was not a man to hurt himself."

"Is he quite dead?"

"Yes; it must have happened as early as sunrise. At eight o'clock he was cold. It's shocking, isn't it? — quite well last night, you know; and *now!* I could scarcely go in myself. I never could bear the sight of a dead person since I saw my poor father — it's a hateful sight; but I told them to leave everything as it was exactly, and nothing has been disturbed. There must be an inquest, of course. I'll have the whole thing searched out, and all as light as day."

"Certainly," acquiesced Temple; "and, depend upon it, you'll succeed — these things always discover themselves. I'm very sorry to find you in so painful and horrible a situation. If I can be of any use I shall be only too happy."

"If it is not too painful, I should be so much obliged, Temple, if you would just go and look at what has happened, and examine the room, and make a note of anything that strikes you. I should much prefer that all evidence of that kind should come from some one not an inmate of the house, and some one both intelligent and unexceptionable; people are talking, I dare say, already. When did you hear?"

"Well, it was at Applebury, this morning; there's a fair there."

"Oh, yes — quite natural; they were talking about it, I dare say," said Mark, in a low tone.

"No; I met Carmel Sherlock, who gave me your message," said the vicar.

"Carmel Sherlock! At Applebury? Good heaven! Then he's perfectly *mad!"*

Looking at Mark Shadwell as he spoke, the vicar could see hardly anything but his flaming eyes, and a face pale as death.

"I hope to God you arrested him?"

"Arrested him? No — why?"

"Why? Because *he* it was who indubitably murdered Roke Wycherly last night. Did you leave him still at the fair?"

It was now the vicar's turn to look horror-struck.

"Is it credible? Mr. Sherlock — so gentle and harmless," said the vicar, after a pause of several seconds.

"The man has been growing mad this long-time — madder than any of us thought. Clewson's evidence — Clewson, Roke's servant, you know — is quite conclusive on that point, Was he arrested?"

"No. I tell you, no one, I'm certain, knew anything of it. It can't have been much past seven when I saw him. There did seem something very strange in his looks and manner; and he urged me to come here, as if he had a message from you; but he would not say what had happened. Would it not be well to give a hint to Cripps, the policeman in Raby, to look after the wretched man — I trust a lunatic — who has committed this dreadful crime?"

"So I was just thinking," said Mark, with a haggard start. "You saw him at about seven o'clock at Applebury fair?"

"Yes; he rode away from the church porch, where he seemed to have appointed a boy to meet him with his horse, in a westerly direction, along the quiet little road that passes there."

"How was he mounted?" asked Mark, ringing the bell.

"A strong bay horse."

"Ha! He rode the old black hunter from this — the horse you've often seen him on. He must have picked up the other at the fair, or hired it, perhaps. How was he dressed?"

"Very much as usual, I think; a loose outside coat, and one of those broadleafed felt hats, with a low round crown, and — yes — a pair of those leather things, like jack-boots; and he was looking very ill, indeed."

Mark shook his head, and smiled drearily.

"Ha! well he may," said he. "Tell Clewson to come here for a moment," he continued, addressing the servant who presented himself at the door, "and tell them to put the horse to the taxcart instantly; and do you come back here in five minutes. I'm so much obliged to you, Temple, for this call. I'll just make a note of what you tell me, and send it, and Clewson's information, which I took this morning, to Cripps; and I'll tell my fellow to drive him over to Applebury, and put the people there on the alert, and I think we *must* catch him — don't you?"

"I'm quite certain of it; no fugitive, as a rule, can escape — the telegraph nets them round. There are two or three police at Applebury, and the railway not far; give them the description, and they will take care to transmit it."

"I do hope they may catch him — there are so many enemies — the people are talking about it? Not yet, I suppose — but they'd stick at nothing, some of them; they'd say I favoured that wretched fellow's escape. I'm so delighted you came. I tell you the truth, I felt miserably till you came. I think they must find him, and then it will all be cleared up; at the same time, mad the poor wretch is. Roke heard him at his door — he told us all about it — one night before, trying to get in, very cautiously — it's a very odd business — and he opened the door suddenly, and there was Sherlock face to face with him; and he seemed put out and half frightened, and talked some nonsense. You may rely on it he intended that night getting in, and murdering the poor fellow, as he did at last. But, be it how it may, could anything be more unlucky for me, surrounded as I am with slanderers; the d — d hornets will be all up, in a cloud, about my ears. But let them say their say; provided it is within the limits of law, they can't hurt me — eh? I'll be vigorous and energetic as the hardest of them. I pity the wretched madman, of course; but I could not — I couldn't connive at his escape — eh?"

"Of course not, my dear Shadwell; no one could be weak enough to fancy any such thing. You take the plain view. There are very few cases, indeed, in which duty is anything but simple."

"This is the key; the room is locked. I have not been there since early this morning, for a few minutes, with Clewson. He will show you the way, and point out everything to you. I sha'n't visit it again until the coroner comes. So many enemies, God knows what they might say."

"Well, I hope you mistake them," said the clergyman.

"I'd rather not trust them; I'll leave nothing in their power. Here's Clewson," said Mark, as the man entered, very grave, very quiet, with air and looks beseeming the dismal occasion: and I am sure he would much have preferred that the accident had not happened, for his place was a good one. "You'll move nothing; do you mind: everything is to be left precisely as you find it," said Mark, addressing Clewson, who with, this charge accompanied the vicar, and led him by many rooms and passages to the backstairs, which, having mounted, they unlocked the door of the room which had been Clewson's.

Now Mr. Clewson pointed out the spot where Carmel had stood, and he showed bloody footprints leading to it, through the dressing-room, more distinctly marked the nearer it approached to the scene of the catastrophe, the room from which it started.

The vicar hesitated for a moment at the door of the room where Sir Roke had slept; a sensation of fear and repugnance chilled him as he was about to step into the scene of crime. He opened the door. One window-shutter and curtain was partly open. It was a sudden change from the clear light of the dressing-room to the shadow of this chamber, which contained the object he almost feared to see. A cross light from a far window, leaving the greater part of the room in darkness, just touched an odd-looking figure that reclined in the cushioned chair, some way off, by the table.

"There?" whispered the vicar, interrogatively, indicating the indistinct figure with his hand.

"Yes, sir, please; in his dressing gown and slippers, with the cap on as he always wore when he put off his wig, which he had 'ung it on the small block, by the looking-glass. Sir Roke's caps, sir, was made to cover his ears, that he shouldn't take cold, he 'aving 'ad a bad habcess in his left ear, last year, sir, in Florence, where we was for three months— "

"Is that door open?" whispered Temple, nodding towards the door that opens on the great gallery.

"We found it locked, sir, on the hinside; Sir Roke, being shy-like, or something, he usu'lly locked his door before he put his wig hoff."

"I'll go over and see," said the vicar, with a sigh that was nearly a groan: "we'll not open the shutter; we must move nothing. Hush! — yes!"

He was now standing about two steps away from the sitting, or rather reclining figure. There was Sir Roke, leaning back in the great cushioned chair. He had on a thick flowered silk dressing-gown, and a quilted white nightcap, that covered his ears, and was tied under his chin, giving a grotesque air to his costume. His chin was sunk upon his breast. Upon his thin lips was a faint piteous smirk; his eyes were fixed in a dim stare, as if upon something illimitably remote and awful. There was in this dead face a strange discord of fear and mockery. The narrow line of light from the partially opened shutter touched its features, and its odd white coiffure. The vicar had no notion that Sir Roke could have looked so old and worn; such a tracery of fine lines and wrinkles — lines of dissimulation and selfishness it seemed to him, as well as of exhaustion. In the thin high nose and almost transparent nostrils; in the thin lips and haggard face, was recognisable no one trait of manliness. You might have mistaken the face for that of a wicked old woman who had died whilst listening to an amusing scandal.

The right arm of the corpse was extended on the table, and the slender hand was cramped and drawn together as if in the effort to clutch something. The fingers of the other were closed on the arm of the chair.

The evidences of violence were only too apparent. Blood had flowed from the corner of the mouth, and stained the lip and chin with a black streak. There was a dreadful wound in the throat, nearly under the jaw, about an inch away from the ear — a stab with a broad-bladed knife or dagger. There was plainly another fearful wound on the breast, for the shirt, which the opening in the dressing-gown displayed, was cut, and immediately below this the white was stained with a broad red gush. There must have been other wounds, the vicar thought, for the carpet was saturated with a wide pool of blood.

With the frown of a horrible compassion, the vicar gazed in silence upon the image before him for some time.

“My God!” he exclaimed at last, with a great sigh, “who could have dreamed this of Sherlock? — so refined and gentle, and yet such a cruel villain! *Mad,* I hope, he may prove. What depths below depths in the heart of man. Lord, in Thee only is safety, Thou Bock of Ages!”

With clasped hands, the vicar, looking up, spoke thus, and then turned away, and treading lightly, and speaking low, from point to point they went together in the room.

Every now and again Stour Temple made a little note as he had promised Mark Shadwell. These little pencilled memoranda were after all but few, and were nearly as follows:

“Sir Roke Wycherly’s bedroom, examined by me, Stour Temple, Clk., in presence of Mr. T. Clewson, on — , the — , presented the following indications, &c.:

“The carpet, to the extent of about a yard in one direction and a little more in the other, is saturated with a pool of blood, partly in front, partly at the side of the chair in which the body reclines, and towards the right side of the body.

“This blood seems to have discharged itself from the body, partly through the trouser of the right leg, which is stained by it, and the slipper of the right foot shows marks of having been full of blood, which flowed over.

“The fragments of a large decanter of cut-glass, lie on the floor, at the same side, and partly under the table.

“The three shutters and curtains of the three windows are closed, with the exception of that which is farthest from the bed, a small portion of which is open.

"The door of the room which opens upon the great gallery, is locked, and the handle of the key and the brass of the door bear marks of what appears to me to be blood.

"There are footprints, indicated by blood, leading from the chair to the door already mentioned, and also to that of the dressing-room next Sir Roke's bedroom, across the floor of it, and upon the floor of Mr. T. Clewson's bedroom, the latter very faintly traceable.

"On the carpet is a sharp-pointed knife, with a broad, wavy blade; it is very much marked with blood. The cloth of this table is dragged to one side. On the table is one letter, addressed, 'Pepys Adderly, Esq.'

"There are pens, an ink-bottle, and a blotting-book on the floor.

"There is a small table with a cloth on it, and a pack of cards, standing near the wall with no indication of having been disturbed.

"There are four silver candlesticks on a small marble table at the left side of the body, the candles in which seem to have burned out in their sockets.

"STOUR TEMPLE, Clerk."

And then the date.

Having completed his survey of these rooms, Stour Temple hesitated for a moment, and then returned and looked once more at the dead man, reclining in the chair. There were the fixed attitude, the odd smile, the awful clouded gaze. It is these returning visits after an interval of absence, the strange literality of the impression reproduced, the mobile lines, and transient gleams of living emotion, fixed where the moment found them, the immutable smile, the unchanged compression of the lip, the stem brow and changeless eye, that strike one with a sense of that awful anomaly in a world of life — the inexorable and irrevocable character of the change.

"As à thief — in the night! The thing which I greatly feared is come upon me," repeated the vicar, almost unconsciously, as he looked woefully upon this spectacle. "Let us go, Mr. Clewson, if you please."

Accordingly the vicar and the servant *emeritus,* took their departure, carefully locking the doors, and these chambers and their tenant were abandoned to silence and solitude.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE EVE OF THE INQUEST.

"WELL, you've seen it?" said Shadwell, gloomily, when the. vicar had entered the study again.

"Yes," said Temple, very pale. "I'm almost sorry I *have* seen it. I sha'n't easily recover the impression. I wish I could forget it."

"I'm afraid I've been very unreasonable and thoughtless. I dare say I should have made my request to some other friend, although, except your brother Roger, I can hardly reckon another," said Mark, sourly.

"Pray, don't mistake me. I would willingly do a great deal more, and for people in whom I took a much less interest, in so deplorable an emergency. I only meant to say, how very awfully that scene has impressed me.

But I do assure you I'm only anxious to be of any use in my power." And so saying, he extended his hand to Mark, who took it, and held it for a moment, looking gloomily at him.

"I wrote to the coroner at eight o'clock this morning," said he, "to entreat that he would summon his jury without any loss of time, and I have just had a letter from him to say they will be here at eleven o'clock tomorrow. Would it be asking too much if I were to beg that you and your brother in this, as you say, emergency, would come here at that hour? Think as you may. I have enemies, and bitter enemies, some of whom will be no doubt upon this jury. I don't say avowed enemies — it may be even unconscious ones — but on this account the more unscrupulous. Of course such fellows as Mervyn and Desborough would be only too glad to reflect upon me."

"Reflect upon *you!* — I don't see how that can be, though," said the vicar.

"Why, they may say — that I ought to have dismissed that wretched Sherlock long ago — perhaps I ought. I don't pretend to say; the event at least seems to say so, but you know my motive in keeping him. You know how I trusted him with my own interests, and how impossible it was that any of us — crazy in some of his fancies as we might suppose him — could have believed that there was the smallest danger in harbouring him. He was, as you say, so gentle and patient, and with so much refinement and cultivation."

"Certainly; I never was so much shocked and astonished — the last man in the world I should have suspected," said Stour Temple.

"I can't go quite that length, however," said Shadwell. "He had his malignities, and I have heard some things since that induce me to think that he had conceived one of his intense antipathies against the man upstairs. He spoke in an odd menacing way about him to some of the servants, and I should not like the jury to tack a censure upon me, or any other insult to their verdict."

"And you wish me and Roger to attend? You may, with God's permission, reckon absolutely upon that."

"Thanks; one does not like to be totally without a friend to stand by one, you know, in the midst of such neighbours as I have about me."

"I've made some notes," said the vicar, holding his open pocketbook in his fingers.

"May I look?" asked Mark, extending his hand.

"Certainly," said the clergyman.

And Mark, taking it to the window, read these memoranda very carefully.

"You mention footprints marked with blood?" said Shadwell. "Clewson said something of them also. You mention here that they are traceable to the bedroom door which opens on the great gallery. Did you look out to see whether the marks were continued on the floor of the gallery?"

"No," said Stour Temple, "for there were marks of blood upon the key, and I thought you were so clear that nothing should ever be disturbed."

"Quite right! Thank you; exactly what I would have wished; but suppose we go now — it did not strike me before. We can take Clewson with us, and examine the floor."

They did go and made their scrutiny, but not the slightest trace appeared.

Shadwell and the vicar paused upon the lobby. "God sends nothing in vain," said the vicar, laying his hand on Mark's arm; "even crime and death. His warnings are whispered to some, and spoken in thunders to others. This tragedy,. does it not, my dear sir, speak trumpet-tongued to you? That wretched Mr. Sherlock had no religion, neither had that unhappy man who has perished by his hand. Is there not a double lesson in this? How near, even in its unlikeliest forms, death may be, and how vain are the securities afforded by unaided human nature against the access of even the most monstrous crimes! I have often talked on the subject of revealed religion to you; but what are the man's pleadings compared with the eloquence of these tremendous events? Lay the lesson, then, I implore of you, to your heart."

"I'm sure you mean well, Temple, I always thought so. But each man reads his own lessons for himself. I must read mine, as best I may. I don't suppose one man is better than another in the eye of God. It is all temperament and circumstance. I'll talk it over with you whenever you like, except *now.* I'm half distracted, that's the truth."

"I can well suppose it, Mr. Shadwell. Men of the world don't avow it, but there is too much real paganism — here in the light of the Gospel — to escape the most careless eye. Oh! Mr. Shadwell, think of this sudden death and sudden crime, and trust no more to the ever-shifting illusions of scepticism, and to the fancied virtues of human nature."

Mark Shadwell was holding the banister with a hard grasp, and looking, with a contracted face, darkly on the ground, like a man in sudden pain, whilst the vicar spoke; and when he ceased he continued motionless, and seemed to listen for more of this homily for some seconds; and then, with a sigh, he said: "Would you like to see my poor wife? She has been very low and nervous about this miserable affair, and I am certain would be the better of a few minutes' talk with you."

"If you think she would really wish it, I shall be most happy," assented the clergyman.

"I know it," said Shadwell, and led him along the gallery to the door of Mrs. Shadwell's sitting-room, where he found that lady, frightened, nervous, almost hysterical. Mark Shadwell had intended going in, but he stopped suddenly at the threshold, merely saying —

"Amy, I've asked Mr. Temple to pay you a few minutes' visit. He is here."

And angrily, you would have fancied, he walked swiftly away, down the gallery, and then to the left, and so down the stairs, and into his library once more; where, pale and exhausted, he threw himself into a chair, and with a deep groan he said:

"Black a thing as death is, I wish I were dead instead of him — I wish to God I were." Stour Temple took his departure; Mark heard him cross the hall. He did not care to see him again; and he heard the tramp of his horse, as he rode away, and did not wish to recall him.

Mark had received one of those shocks which, for a while, convert men into the ideal of an anchorite. To fast, to watch, with one idea always perched or fluttering, like an imprisoned bird, in his brain; and one choking emotion rising from his heart — was his present doom. Pale, *distrait,* nervous, furious at times when disturbed by message or question, or even a tap at his door, he occupied his library in utter solitude. Sunset came with its solemn glare; the cold moon rose, and sheeted the landscape in white. Mark lighted his candles and closed his shutters, and drew his curtains for himself. He hated the faces of his servants; they seemed to be reading him with prying eyes, and coming again and again on pretexts to his door for the purpose. After one or two such calls, met with unaccountable bursts of fury, he secured the door. He stirred the fire. He sat before it, looking sullenly among its embers, and then peeping slowly back, over his shoulder, he would get up, and stand with his back to the fire, looking drearily from corner to comer, and then he would pour out a glass of sherry and drink it in haste.

Slowly wore the night away. He was horribly nervous. All kinds of fancies beset and startled him. He thought he heard the handle of his door turned, and stood watching it, with a freezing gaze, for minutes. He opened the shutters and drew the curtains of the window next him; but there was a tall plant just before it, that in the white moonlight took the shape of a man, standing there nodding and swaying himself slowly backward and forward; and look where he would, he still saw obliquely this teasing object, and could not rest till he had closed shutters and curtains again. Later in the night came the distant howling of a dog — dismalest of sounds — and on a sudden he fancied he heard a sharp whisper at the window say *Wycherly.* It was the twitter, perhaps, of some passing night-bird, or a spray of the rose-tree brushing lightly on the glass. But he would have sworn that he had heard that ominous name so syllabled.

Chilled and fixed, he listened for its repetition, but it came not. He fancied then that it might have been uttered by Carmel Sherlock, whom he had begun to fear with a dreadful antipathy. He dared not open the shutter. He fancied he should see that strange face, with its eyes and lips to the window pane.

It was hard to move his mind from the hated subject under which it lay in a monotonous pain. An image was always before him. The only thought allied to life and action was that of the inquest that the day would bring; and there, too, among the sinister faces of unfriendly neighbours, was the same odious image.

To his sherry, for courage, Mark Shadwell often had recourse through that hateful night. At last, worn out, he fell into a slumber in his chair, from which he waked with a cry, he knew not why uttered. It was still in his ears, and the walls seemed ringing with it, as he looked about him. The candles were expiring in the sockets. He started up and drew the curtains, and was glad to see the grey light of morning through the chinks of the shutters.

"Oh! glad was the knight when he heard the cock crow,
His enemies trembled and left him!"

So now that first detested night was over, and the old house of Raby was dimly lighted by the dawning day that was to witness the inquest upon the body of the murdered baronet.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CORONER.

As the day wore on, strange faces began to appear. Men rode up to the door, and dismounted, sending their horses round to the stables. Broughams, dog-carts, all sorts of vehicles, drove to the open hall-door, and set down their masters. The coroner had come, and Doctor Lincott from Gilleston. The Reverend Stour Temple was there, and our honest friend Roger, his fat face charged with a supernatural solemnity.

Some stood on the steps talking of fairs and prices in a decent undertone, as people sometimes mention irrelative subjects at funerals. The hall-door stood wide open as that of an inn, and in the hall were various little groups, earnest and grave in their talk. Others were in the two drawingrooms. Mark Shadwell was among them, pale and grave. Very formal, too, with those guests, whose dispositions towards himself he suspected.

And now the hour having arrived, the coroner opened his court in the hall of Raby, and the jury were sworn. He then told them what they each knew already — the nature of the inquiry, and the general character of the tragedy they were to investigate.

Then at his own request Mr. Shadwell was sworn, and informed the jury of the circumstance under which Sir Roke Wycherly had made his brief sojourn at Raby; he described the particulars of his parting with him on the fatal night; also, generally, the state in which he found his room in the morning on visiting it with Clewson, who gave the alarm. He mentioned, also, that the Reverend Stour Temple had visited it later in the day, and made, at his request, a note of everything that struck him as at all bearing on the subject of their inquiry, and he, Mark Shadwell, had done this, and also retained possession of the key of the room; the door of which he had kept locked, lest there should be any uncertainty as to whether the indications so supplied had been ever so little disturbed, either by accident or design.

He then described Carmel Sherlock: he was eccentric, hypochondriac, in some points a little crazed almost; but he was habitually gentle. He should not have dreamed of suspecting him of violence had it not been for the distinct evidence of Clewson, supported by that of the vicar, whose strange interview with him at Applebury he mentioned. It was, however, certain that Carmel Sherlock had conceived an intense but unaccountable antipathy to Sir Roke Wycherly, and that he had made no secret of that feeling, as only too many witnesses were ready to prove.

The coroner and jury then went upstairs to view the body and inspect the room. Shadwell accompanied them, as did Clewson, at his suggestion.

The master of Raby, pale but collected, pointed out to them what was most striking in the disarrangements of the room.

Clewson was sworn here, and described Sir Roke's habits.

"You say," said one of the jurors, "that Sir Roke Wycherly always locked the door opening upon the great gallery before going to his bed; but he had not gone to bed, he was still seated at the tale when he was stabbed. What leads you to the conclusion, that the door in question had been locked before the murder took place?"

"He usu'lly locked his door before he removed his wig; he had a great objection any one should see him without it. And the wig being took off, it's in that 'ere box, sir, and his nightcap on, I'm certain sure his door *was* locked."

"How do you account for the blood on the handle of the key?" persisted this gentleman; "does not it look as if the murderer locked the door after he had committed the crime, and with his hand bloody?"

"Well, it might be; but I think Sir Roke had locked it. No, he wouldn't by no chance, leave it open for no one to come in and see him settling of his wig. No, no, never; it could not be, sir."

"The murderer, then, must have been thinking of going out by that door, and stained the key with blood, and you think Mr. Sherlock must have entered this room, as he went out of it, by the other door, and across the dressing-room, and so through your room. Now recollect yourself. Did you hear any sound? Were you, that you can remember, even partially wakened by any noise in your room?"

"No, sir, not *in* my room."

"Are we to understand, however, that you were awakened by a noise before Mr. Sherlock's visit to your room?" interposed Mr. Mervyn, a tall, gaunt gentleman, with a high grey head, and the dress of another generation

— blue coat and brass buttons, and a shirt frill, and gaiters buttoned up to his knee.

“Yes, sir.”

“What was it?”

Clewson described what has been mentioned already.

“You went to sleep after this?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And for how long did you sleep before you awoke again and saw Mr. Sherlock?”

“Well, it might have been an hour, and it might not have been so long.”

“Could it have been so short a time as a quarter of an hour?”

“It might, sir.”

Shadwell here whispered in the vicar’s ear, who nodded, and whispered something in the ear of his neighbour, Mr. Digges, who was upon the jury, and Digges asked the witness: “Might it have been less?”

“Well it might, sir.”

“Were you sleepy?”

“Very much so, sir.”

“And dropped off again as fast as you were waked?”

“Just so, sir.

“A bit of a snooze, and then called up, as you might sitting in a chair?”

“Well it was, sir, very much like that.”

As soon as they had thoroughly examined the room, the jury, led by the coroner, and accompanied by Mark Shadwell and the lookers-on, returned to the hall.

There was a good deal of evidence to show the ill-feeling which Sherlock seemed to cherish against the deceased.

Then came an odd part of the evidence. Clewson had found upon the carpet, on entering the room in the morning, a dagger, or creese, with a sinuous blade, both the blade and handle of which were stained with blood, and a mark which resembled the pressure of a closed hand was also indicated indistinctly by a blurred brown stain.

Now this creese was the property of Carmel Sherlock, and what was still more to the point, it was proved to have been in his hand at about two o’clock on the night of the murder. The evidence upon this point arose thus: Attached to Raby is a great old orchard, in the centre of which is a sort of small square tower of brick with a loft in it, which is known by the name of "The Watch." Some of the apples had been lately stolen, and some timber cut at night not far from the house; and to check these depredations two men had been stationed in "The Watch," who took it by turns to visit the woods that lie near it.

One of these — Will Hedgelong by name — was, according to this arrangement, sauntering near the house of Raby on the night in question between one and two o'clock. He saw a light in Carmel Sherlock's window, which, appearing through a piece of red curtain that hung at one side, looked like a fire in the room. Apprehending danger to the house, the man ran to the point from which the light came, and saw Carmel Sherlock leaning on the windowsill and looking out.

On seeing him Carmel Sherlock appeared to be startled, but after they had exchanged a few words, talked just as usual. He asked the man to wait for a moment, as he had something to give him. He saw Sherlock move about the room, and he came again to the window, and told him to go to the hall-door, where Sherlock met him. He came out upon the steps, having unlocked and unbarred the door. He had a wideawake hat and a loose coat on, and a pair of leather leggings — the dress he usually wore when he rode any distance. Carmel looked pale and flurried. Hedgelong thought there was something "queer about him, more than usual. It certainly was not drink." He gave him a note, with a request that he would give it to the servant to lay, in the morning, on the breakfast-table. This letter was produced, and read. It was addressed, "For the most honoured of the family of Shadwell, of Raby," and contained only these words:

"To that one, if any, who will be good enough to regret him, Carmel Sherlock, departing from Raby, worn out and disabused, with a heart full of gratitude and anguish, bids farewell."

As Carmel Sherlock placed this note in his hand, saying, "I have to ride to Wodely, early, and sha'n't be here, so don't fail," Hedgelong saw something shining in his left hand, which was the knife found on the bed in Sir Roke's room.

"What light had you to see it by?" asked Mr. Mervyn.

"It was full moon, and a clear sky, sir — very bright the knife was in his hand, careless-like. I saw it quite plain; the blade goes back and forward like a grig in the water, with a twist to and fro, and the handle's black, with two silver rings. I knew it, when I saw it in his hand."

"Had you seen it before?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Sherlock showed it to me about three weeks ago; it was hung over his fireplace."

"Is that the knife?"

"It is, sir."

"Had he the knife still in his hand when he left you on the night on which Sir Roke Wycherly lost his life?"

"No, sir. He saw me a-looking at it. I think he forgot it was in his hand, and he dropped it into his pocket, in haste. When he gave me the letter he stepped back, and shut the hall-door, soft like. I can't read. I did not know how odd the address on the letter was. It was about eight o'clock, it was; I gave it to the butler before it was known in the house Sir Roke was murdered. He looked on it, and shook his head, as much as to say there was summat queer in it, as *I* took it."

Now the oddity of the evidence respecting the instrument by which Sir Roke was deprived of life was this: the knife which Clewson had seen him secrete in the stableyard was also produced, and proved to be a dagger which Sir Roke had purchased in Spain. Sir Roke did not carry it about his person. It happened to he on his dressing-table. Clewson could point out the spot. He could swear that it was Sir Roke's dagger. It was as much stained with blood as the other. The drain was dry, and it had got no wet to wash the blood off.

"You heard voices, and a noise of something broken in Sir Roke Wycherly's room some time, you can't exactly say how long, before you saw Sherlock in your room?"

"I heard something broke, and I heard Sir Roke's voice, and I heard him walking about the room when I went into the dressing-room."

"How do you know it was he who was walking there?" asked Mr. Mervyn.

"Well, I thought it must be he— "

"You can only say you heard steps — is that it?" said old Mr. Mervyn, with half-closed eyes, and inclining his ear.

"Well — yes — that's all."

"Was it your master's step? — did you recognise his step?" asked the coroner.

"I took it, it must be his step; but I couldn't swear."

"Did you mention that circumstance to Mr. Shadwell in the morning?" asked Mr. Mervyn, in the same attitude of shrewd attention.

"Yes, sir."

Mark Shadwell confirmed this statement with a nod of assent, but he was looking pale and angry.

"Then you heard a crash of something thrown down — you heard a voice or voices, and recognised Sir Roke's, speaking in excitement, and afterwards heard steps, you can't say *whose* steps, passing to and fro in the room, in silence?"

"Yes, sir, that's about it," said Clewson.

Mark Shadwell, who sat close behind the vicar, leaning on the back of his chair, was now standing upright, and he said:

"You'll allow me, Mr. Coroner, to say a word. It seems to me that an imputation is indirectly thrown upon me, as if I had in my evidence suppressed what the witness Clewson told me in the morning. I need not tell you, sir, and others here, who know me better" — he glanced at the Reverend Stour Temple— "than ever Mr. Mervyn is likely to do, that I am incapable of suppressing anything in my evidence. I can't conceive a motive. If my attention had been called to that particular incident, I should, of course, have remembered all about it. What the man told me was simply that he heard a crash, followed, as he believed, by Roke Wycherly's voice, exerted in anger; he said it was his habit to talk by himself, and that a trifle like the breaking of that glass was enough to put him out of temper — he had a violent temper — that he went to the door and heard him — he did not then speak as if there was any doubt about it — walking about the room, that he returned to bed, and was wakened by the appearance of Carmel Sherlock, under the circumstances which he described, in his room; and that he could not tell how short might have been his interval of sleep when he was thus awakened. No sort of suspicion crossed my mind in consequence of this statement, and as to those knives, or whatever you call them, I've no clear conception what Mr. Mervyn imagines or surmises. I suppose he will let us know, and whatever it is, I venture to predict, it will turn out to be another mare's nest."

Mark Shadwell bent a sarcastic and agitated scowl upon the shrewd old gentleman, who said, with a cynical coolness:

"Pray, Mr. Coroner, allow me one remark, as a juror. I shall do my duty, and sift every thing. I rather think it's important to know whether more persons than one were engaged in this atrocious murder."

"*Oh,* I *see"* said Shadwell.

"I'm sorry, sir, I can't hear you, Mr. Shadwell," said the coroner.

"You see," continued Mr. Mervyn, addressing the coroner, "here are two deadly weapons, each stained with blood, each used in this murder. If people see nothing odd in this *I* can't give them eyes, or brains."

"Now, I really must request — all this is quite irregular," said the coroner, beseechingly.

"*Odd!"* repeated Mark, grimly, and neither regarding the coroner's appeal nor Stour Temple's distressed look, which might have acted on him like a pluck by the coat. "The whole thing's odd, and I can't see why one particular singularity is seized upon for the purpose of suggesting that there is an undetected murderer still hid among this family, except for the odd satisfaction of inflicting pain upon me, by casting a scandal on my household."

"Now, Mr. Shadwell, I beg you'll observe this kind of interruption I cannot tolerate," said the coroner, growing peremptory; "we have been interrupted, gentlemen, by an altercation, and I must say I have heard no imputation to warrant any feeling— "

"It is indifferent to me what motives may be imputed in some quarters. I shall do my duty all the same, to the best of my power," said old Mervyn, drily.

"The better you do it, the better we are pleased," retorted Shadwell. These two gentlemen, who loved not one another, were growing more bitter as the dialogue proceeded, constantly springing up in gleams of anger like an imperfectly-extinguished fire, and causing the presiding functionary more trouble than the venerable chief of the nursery suffers, when children forget Dr. Watts's exhortations about "little hands" and "one another's eyes." But this subsided for a time, and the sterner business of the day proceeded.

While the examination of Clewson was continued, in course of which the letter to Pepys Adderly, which it was thought might possibly throw a light on the motive of the murderer, was read, the surgeon was upstairs, and made a careful inspection of the body.

The result of this was that he discovered three deep wounds, one about an inch from the extremity of the ear, nearly under the left jaw, entering the throat, and passing almost through the neck; another, a little at the left side of the breast, which had pierced the heart; and a third, with the same effect, about an inch below it. It turned out oddly that it was impossible to determine by which of the weapons the wounds were inflicted, for the length of each blade was the same, and although the creese looked the narrower of the two, its wavy shape made up for this, and produced a gash as nearly as possible of exactly the same width. It was impossible then to determine which of these instruments had been employed, or whether only one or both, in accomplishing the murder.

In addition to these deep and fatal wounds, the palm and fingers of the right hand were deeply cut. There was also a severe contusion on the forehead and a cut there, but inflicted either by a blunt instrument, or by the fist of his assailant.

The jury returned to Sir Roke's room to view the body and the room again, and, after another minute scrutiny, they arrived substantially at this conclusion — that Sir Roke, having written his letter, and then read for a time, fell asleep in his chair; that, while he slept, Carmel Sherlock had entered the room to execute his guilty purpose; that, as he approached the chair, stealthily, the baronet awoke; that a brief struggle ensued, during which the decanter had been thrown to the ground, and the exclamations, imperfectly heard by Clewson, had been uttered, and Sir Roke almost instantaneously struck back in his chair by a blow on the forehead, had lain there stunned, while he was despatched by the three dagger-wounds which have been described, having clutched the blade of the knife in his hand during the struggle, and thus received those deep wounds in its palm and fingers which the surgeon had mentioned.

In this struggle, one or other of two things may have happened: either Sir Roke may have had his own dagger, for some reason, within reach — for he had already talked to several persons of a visit which had surprised him from Carmel Sherlock, who had attempted to enter his room on a former occasion at a very late hour at night, and whom, by suddenly opening the door, he had discovered and disconcerted; he might on this night have placed the weapon beside him, from a nervous fancy that Sherlock might repeat the visit which he had then attempted, and may have seized and lost it in the struggle — Sherlock wresting it from his hand, and in doing so dropping his own knife, and committing the murder with Sir Roke's, which he had secured. Or the murder may have been perpetrated with his own creese; whichever weapon fell upon the ground, at the side of Sir Roke's chair, would have been as effectually stained with blood as if it had been actually used in stabbing him. This seemed the only way of accounting for Sir Roke's dagger having been removed by Sherlock. He must have picked up Sir Roke's, in his confusion, instead of his own.

Again by which door had the murderer entered the room of the deceased? Clewson swore distinctly that he heard the bolt which secured the door that opened on the dressing-room fall into its place while he was arranging the candle and some other things in the dressing-room. If this were so, access from the dressing-room was impossible. The murderer must have entered from the gallery, and after committing the murder, locked the door upon the inside, as the blood marks on the handle of the key attested. One thing was certain, that he had not made his egress through the same door. He must have raised the falling bolt, and let himself out through the dressing room. Clewson, who was accustomed to be called up at all hours of the night by his master, slept very lightly; no one, he was confident, could pass through his room without awaking him. Carmel Sherlock could not, he thought, have been many seconds in his room at the time when he first saw him.

And now the jurors trooped down the stairs again, silently ruminating; and having retired and considered their finding for some ten minutes, they returned with a verdict of wilful murder against Carmel Sherlock, for whose apprehension the coroner accordingly forthwith issued his warrant.

CHAPTER XIX.

ROGER TEMPLE SEES HIS LADYLOVE.

WHEN at length the house was cleared of these intruders, and left to the consciousness of late occurrences, and the gloom of death, Mark Shadwell, standing with Stour Temple and honest Roger in the hall, had hardly seen the last vehicle drive away, and disappear through the perspective of towering trees, when, lifting his head, he said to the vicar:

"Did you hear and see that long-headed villain?" Mark looked fiercely on Stour Temple.

"Whom do you mean?" asked he, surprised at this abrupt appeal.

"Old Mervyn, of course — stingy as he is, I believe he'd give a hundred pounds to improve this occasion to aggravate the misfortune and blacken the gloom under which my house lies — *think* of the wretch! The whole day long, but one idea in his head — to try and make people fancy that there were two murderers in this house! Whom could he mean to indicate? It could not be that fellow, Clewson. There is no imaginable motive there, and he's a stranger — a mere sojourner — *that* would not disgrace me — whom could he be thinking of?"

"I'm quite clear,", answered the vicar, "that he did not think of any one in particular. I don't think even he fancies any such thing seriously, himself. He threw it out simply as a possible hypothesis on which to account for some puzzling circumstances, which must have struck you also. If I, or Roger here, had mooted the same inquiry, you would not have suspected an unfair motive. It is, pardon me, my dear Mr. Shadwell, your own prejudice that reflects itself in mistaken imputations of his motives."

"Ha, Temple, you *wont* see! — that fellow goes to your church, and listens to your sermons, and gives you a half-crown now and then out of his overgrown wealth to divide among your poor — so, of course, he's a saint! May God unmask, and punish him!"

"Pray, my dear sir, do consider; only this moment, as I may say, descended from so awful a scene, and the presence of that mute and terrible witness of the vanity of earth and the victory of death," said the vicar, in the low tones of earnest expostulation; "I do assure you you wrong Mr. Mervyn. He may be no friend of yours; you make no secret of your feelings towards him: but I'm very certain he bears you no enmity."

"I'll make him speak out; he shall tell his meaning. I'm much obliged for his forbearance, but this is a limited household, and to set such an imputation afloat among them! Surely you see the malignity and cowardice of it as clearly as I do? But — no matter — the 'cat will mew, the dog will have his day;' it may be my turn yet. I saw his nephew a short time since — Charles Mordant — is he still with you?"

"Yes; on leave. We are all so fond of him. I don't know whether he is going to visit his uncle this year! I fancy he has more liberty with us, and enjoys it more," answered the vicar.

"I dare say; I don't know much about him. Have you seen my wife to-day? I'm certain she'd like to talk to you a little. There's no good in my going; I'm as much put out by this odious business as she is, and I really don't know what to say to her. But you could — I have not seen her to-day, simply because I knew I should find her in distress, and should not know how to comfort her."

"Certainly, if you think she would wish it."

"Of course she would. I don't mean talking nothing but Bible; tell her the news, and anything to get up her spirits a little; I'll go upstairs to her room with you. I hope those fellows," he continued in a low tone, as they went upstairs side by side, "will come at once and take away poor Roke. You can't imagine what it is, having all that here, with so many nervous women in the house; and to be in charge of such a thing — I hate it. And then, I'm every way quite upset; and how I'm to get on without Carmel Sherlock God only knows. Here we are — I'm coming to see you, Amy, and I've brought a visitor with me; are you at home to us?"

"It is so good of you to come again to-day," she said to the vicar; "you must stay — *pray* don't go for a few minutes?"

He answered her little appeal and her beseeching look kindly, and Mark said:

"Having seen you, Amy, and asked you how you do, I take my leave; there are fifty things to be looked after, one more distressing than another — but it must be got through." And dismally he turned and left the room.

"That dreadful inquest is quite over?" she said, in a very low tone, and looking at him as if she would have asked another question.

"Yes; and I think very satisfactorily — that is, so far as perfect distinctness is concerned. That poor, wretched man, you know," and the vicar shook his head, "mad man, I must call him — they found that the act was his — as we all knew before — and so, except for him, it ends; and he, from all we can learn, appears to be unquestionably insane."

"That any one capable of this should have been living in this house, talking to us, passing us on the stairs, and smiling in our faces, seems so frightful; and that the crime should have happened in this quiet household — so near to one's doors, and by a hand we all so trusted — is like a dream — or a frightful story!"

"I am haunted by that kind of incredulity myself," said the vicar, with a little shrug. "I can fancy how men who are beginning to grow insane, and are frightened by their illusions, feel. It really is by an effort that I can fix the truth in my mind as a reality, and believe in it."

"And how did Mr. Shadwell go through that dreadful ordeal?"

"Oh, just as we did — very well."

"He is more sensitive than you would imagine; anything that touches the honour of his house is agony to him. It was very kind of you to come; he is not on happy terms, you know, with some of our neighbours, and he might have imagined affronts intended, where none were thought of; and a word from you would set it all right; and — *teas* there anything unpleasant — did anything occur?"

"No — nothing — there was just a word or two between him and old Mr. Mervyn."

"Oh! Mr. Mervyn? What did *he* say?" asked she, nervously.

"Merely a few words, such as I might have said, or any other friend, but the spirit of which Mr. Shadwell mistook quite; and, in fact, take it what way one might, there was absolutely nothing in it to cause the slightest pain."

"Tell me — *do* tell me — if there was anything? I am sure you'll tell me."

"Nothing — really — just an impatient word from Mr. Shadwell, and a word of defence, or excuse, from Mr. Mervyn; but only that; and everything went on quite smoothly; no hitch— 'nothing: and now — except, of course, the impression that remains upon one's nerves — your trouble, on this account, is quite over."

"God grant it!" said she, with a great sigh and a look of great anxiety.

"And now I must tell you how they are at home; and what is going on in our little world round the vicarage."

And so the good man endeavoured to lead away her thoughts from the occurrences that had so awfully occupied them.

The hall door was still open, and our friend, Roger Temple, stood in the hall alone, looking from that elevation down the avenue, with its broad grass borders and solemn perspective of gigantic trees.

His jerry was on his head, his dark grey "zephyr," as he called his outer garment, loosely encompassed his portly form, and with the ivory crook of his stick pressed upon his fat chin, he looked with an innocent melancholy upon the prospect before him.

He had not, it must be allowed, much variety to amuse him; but, like more busy and bustling, men, he had something to think of. That which from outward seeming we often assume to be the dominant idea, is not always present in our thoughts, any more than in our dreams. I do not think that honest Roger was absorbed wholly by the tragedy of Raby. There was another drama in which his interest was nearer and more active.

As his fancy painted its scenes, and listened to its dialogue, with an interest that took no account of the time that was flying while he stood there, and amid his dreams kept him continually on the alert for sign or sound that might indicate the coming of that enchantress whose approach thrilled him, even at a distance, with an indescribable emotion, he looked about him, now and then, with a fat and simple sadness, and stood suspended, the handle of his cane removed from his expansive chin as he listened, and then sighed, and resumed his tender contemplation of nature.

On a sudden a door, in its deep oak frame, one of many that surround the pannelled hall, opened. With an oblique glance, almost over his shoulder, this portly swain beheld it, turned, and with a sensation of delight and confusion, ready to sink rapturously into the earth, he saw his spirit.

In the shadow she stood. Did she ever before look so lovely, melancholy, beautiful? What clear and wonderful tints! Her rich, wavy hair, and deep, large eyes; and those lips, for which honest Roger could find no comparison but in the glow of the scarlet geranium petals in Barbara's garden, a discovery which, in a moment of romantic confidence, he had trusted, with a bashful sigh, to the ear of his sister — that admiring and sympathetic maiden — who assented thoughtfully and with energy, and then plucked a sprig of that flower, as they stood together in the sunset air, on the steps, and placed it in his buttonhole; whence the enamoured fellow disengaged it, and looked on it with a sigh and a smile, and kissed it with a gentle laugh and a blush, and replaced it, saying:

"Ah, Raby! if she thought of me as you do — but I think it is all a foolish dream."

And now, in the deep, oak frame, behind a film of shadow, he saw his dream, and did not very well know for a moment or two what he said.

With eyes lowered, she stood before him, and said in a low tone, such as people murmur in a church porch as they go out:

"Oh, Mr. Temple, I'm so glad it is you! have they all gone away?"

"All except Stour — my brother, you know — he's upstairs, and I've been waiting here for him."

"Oh! And is it quite over, Mr. Temple?"

"Yes, it is over, Miss Marlyn; I fear you have found it a very trying time — very agitating; you can't think how much I have pitied you all this time."

"Very kind, Mr. Temple. It has, indeed, been a very awful time. Would you mind — I've been so unspeakably anxious — telling me just what happened?"

"At the inquest?"

"Yes, if you will; perhaps you'd come into this room for a moment, and I can listen."

She stepped in — a melancholy, rather dark room — the schoolroom, with a shelf, and some lesson books, and two dingy globes, and a very old piano, to indicate its old character; one tall window, never sufficient to make it cheerful, was darkened by three or four elms, standing very near, in a dump, which threw their gloom upon it.

"The door is open, so you can hear when your brother is leaving," said the young lady, standing by the old grand piano, leaning on it with her slender hand. "You will kindly tell me what passed?"

"Only too happy — everything — as well as I can recollect it," said he, and he looked at her, and sighed, and then, in a very tender voice, he told the story of the inquest. He told it carefully. It happened that it had interested him intensely, and he remembered everything, and knew the people. Before he had got very fax she asked him —

“Mr. Shadwell was present, wasn’t he?”

“Oh, dear, yes. You see, you are so innocent of the ways of — of the world. I may say,” he murmured, tenderly, “you don’t know about these things; but he was a witness.” And so he went on with his detailed narrative, now and then sighing, and looking at that enigmatical young lady who was listening, as they say, with all her ears, while her slow glance darkly travelled over the floor.

When Roger came to the little altercation that had interrupted the quietude of the proceedings, she looked at him with a very odd expression. He saw it for a moment. It almost startled honest Roger, as, unexpectedly turning his eyes upon her, he met the glance. For so incontestable an angel, was it not the strangest look he could have imagined?

“A snake’s small eye blinks dull and shy,
And the lady’s eyes shrank in her head,
Each shrunk up to a serpent’s eye,
And with somewhat of malice and more of dread
She looked askance.”

Honest Roger had no turn for analysing phenomena or sensations; he simply saw that which dismayed him — felt there was something wrong, and stopped short, a little bewildered.

With electric speed Miss Marlyn saw in his honest face the shock which her look had given him; and that look had disappeared, and Miss Marlyn was looking down, softly and sadly, as before.

“Why do you stop?” she said, looking up sadly.

“I forgot, I think, what I was saying, for a moment; and I was afraid, perhaps, that the account of all this horrid business might have frightened you. Did it?”

“Frighten me! Yes, it does — that is, rather — it horrifies me, I should say, although it certainly shouldn’t. If there were anything new to hear, indeed; but, you know, we had heard it all — all about poor, miserable Mr.

Sherlock, who is mad, isn't he? and everything about that frightful occurrence; and — and who is Mr. Mervyn?"

"He is an old gentleman, with a very good estate. My brother likes him, and thinks him a useful man. I don't know much of him.

But you must have seen him at church two or three times, since you came here, though he usually goes to Maxton — a tall man, with a very white head."

"And — I don't quite understand what he meant — do you?"

"Mr. Shadwell thought he meant that two people might have been engaged in the murder."

"Oh? That is a very unpleasant idea; it makes one feel so unsafe. What do *you* think? what does the vicar say?"

"Oh, he does not think it — no one does; Mr. Mervyn doesn't, I'm sure; he seemed to have quite given up that idea before the inquiry ended. I should be sorry you were alarmed."

"But I'm not by any means; and I should be very much pained if you concealed the real state of the case through fear of frightening me. I hope you don't think me a coward, Mr. Temple, or a fool; I should be vexed at your thinking so meanly of me."

"But I don't — I couldn't; I wish you knew how I really think of you — half what I "Then — oh, Mr. Temple, don't deceive me! Do tell me, I entreat, what is really thought about it."

"Nothing more, I assure you, than that Carmel Sherlock was the assassin — in fact, there is no second opinion about it; and I am so delighted that I happened to be the person to relieve your mind of any apprehension that any dangerous person might be still in your neighbourhood."

"That is so kind of you."

"I wish — I only wish — I wish ever so much— " said Roger, growing very hot, and tender, and hurried, and making a faint attempt to approach his short fat hand to her taper fingers.

"Yes, you have been always very kind — and very kind taking the trouble of telling me all this; and do, pray, tell me all the rest, you tell it so interestingly."

Thus encouraged, he went on with his narrative. He saw no more that shrinking gaze that, for a moment, had scared him — only the beauty that he was so tenderly enamoured of.

She listened, looking down, with a sharp and close attention, now and then fiddling nervously with a little black cross she wore; and at the end she said:

"I'm so much obliged. One grows nervous and excited so near to so horrible a scene; sure of nothing, fancying everything. I was always accounted brave at school, and I'm sure I'm no coward — that is, in the foolish sense; but still, everyone has imagination — even you men feel its power sometimes, and can pity us whose nature it is to look up in danger, and in trouble, to your strength, and counsel, and compassion. I have two friends here, Mr. Temple," she continued, a little incoherently, "two only — my pupil and companion, Rachel, and my dear Mrs. Shadwell — they are so good — otherwise I have none; and Madame de la Perriere — cruel to me when I was a little thing, a child, at her school, is my persecutrix still. I have discovered lately a cruelty of hers; and I cannot, as my dear Mrs. Shadwell advises, quite despise it. No, no! it is not for me that happy talent of contempt; falsehood and insult I can defy, for I am brave, but my heart is bleeding all the time. I think I shall leave Raby very soon. Perhaps, on earth, is some place where a poor and very unhappy girl may toil and live in safety. There are some kind faces I shall miss, and long remember — perhaps always."

"But — but — you're *not* going — you *cant* be *thinking* of going; what should they *do* — what should *everyone* do?" said Roger tumultuously.

He had taken her hand, in a tremulous agitation; and, at the same time, the vicar's step and voice were heard on the stairs talking to some one as he approached.

Miss Marlyn withdrew her hand suddenly.

"I've been speaking very foolishly — I have forgotten myself; pray, Mr. Temple, forgive me. Go, pray go — farewell, Mr. Temple; and a thousand very grateful thanks."

She placed her fingers to the open door, and drew it a little more open, so that honest Roger, who was lingering still in a happy confusion, could not fail to understand that he was dismissed.

"Farewell, dear Miss Marlyn, but only for a day or two," said he, with a great sigh, and a look of prodigious tenderness.

"Do — do go, pray," whispered the young lady, a little earnestly; and hearing his brother very near, with one longing, lingering look over his fat shoulder, he passed the threshold, and was established in the centre of the hall, and looking quite innocently, by the time the vicar stepped into its dark panelled area.

CHAPTER XX.

A DISTINGUISHED VISITOR LEAVES RABY.

NEXT day Mr. Pepys Adderly arrived. The Master of Raby received him in his study, and saw a man of some five and forty years, with an air of fashion, and a kind of languor and puffiness that suggested the idea of self-indulgence, and what is called good living.

He was, of course, properly concerned about poor dear Wycherly, because, in fact, he did not quite see, now that his patron was going to that formal and protracted supper, after the manner of Polonius, where the chief guest is not active but passive, how he — Pepys Adderly — was any longer to fare sumptuously every day; and, in fact, unless the baronet had done something for him in his will — a not very likely thoughtfulness, even if there was a will, which Adderly could not make out, and Sir Roke's men of business in London bad not heard of — he might, before a year had passed, be very much puzzled to make out a dinner of any kind.

The vicar had come over to Raby, at Shadwell's request, to be present while inquisition was made for a will, in Sir Roke's room.

Mark Shadwell had placed seals upon the deceased baronet's desk, dressing-case, despatch-box, and every other possible depository of such a document which his room contained.

Mr. Pepys Adderly gave all the assistance in his power in this search; but it was totally unrewarded. There were not even letters. It was Sir Roke's habit, except when there was some very special necessity for preserving them, to destroy his letters on answering them.

Those which turned up were upon business accounts, memoranda of investments, an invoice of some pictures, bronze, and statuary — not a letter among them all but such as related strictly to business. Mark was relieved of an oppressive suspense when the search concluded without discovering one scrap of paper bearing the well-known handwriting of his secretary.

"And now," said Mark, who was looking very ill, so soon as they were again in his library, "what steps do you propose taking about the funeral?

Where is he to be taken to?"

"Drayton, who is to succeed him, you know, would be the natural person, but he's yachting — in the Mediterranean — Lord knows where, and there's no one to direct. We don't know whether there's a will, and there's no one with authority."

"Well, you know, something must be done, and you and his solicitors can act — *I* won't," said Mark, harshly.

"There may be directions — where he's to be buried, and all that; it had better be quite private, I suppose?" said Pepys Adderly, patting the leg of his trousers with his walking-cane, and looking inquiringly at Mark, who merely nodded. "And where he's laid for the present, poor fellow! isn't of much importance, I should think. They'll be removing him, I conjecture, to some place, don't you think?"

"I can't tell at all any more than you," said Shadwell.

"No, quite uncertain; and I'm told there's an old family burial-ground where some of his people, long ago, were buried — a place near this called Wynderfel, isn't it? and it struck me it might lie there, as it were, provisionally — until — eh?"

"No," said Mark, peremptorily.

"Oh! — I merely mentioned it; but you think it wouldn't do?"

"No. You don't know, but it has been shut up as a burial-place for ever so long, and it isn't to be thought of. The remains must be conveyed from this, and they can lie, as you say, provisionally, wherever you, or those people who have been acting for him, think best."

"There are cemeteries — yes — the undertakers will know?" suggested Mr. Adderly.

"I dare say. You can have no difficulty; I decline taking any part in those arrangements, however. You'll be good enough to arrange with Clewson, his servant, and about the things he has got in his room."

"Yes — yes — certainly; and there will be people here tomorrow — about the arrangements — undertaker-people, you know. I suppose they can get in when they arrive?"

"Certainly," said Mark. "I only wish I could offer you a bed here; but we are all in such confusion in consequence of this miserable occurrence, and you will be much more comfortable down at Raby."

Pepys Adderly, I dare say, mentally acquiesced in this conclusion. At the best, however, it was a dismal bore, and I think he would have had no hesitation in cutting his dead patron in this extremity if it had not been for some hopes of founding relations with young Drayton upon the melancholy duties he was now performing.

Mr. Adderly had no difficulty in presenting a very becoming melancholy upon this funereal occasion to the people of Raby; for, as we know, "nothing dies, but something mourns," and here in this out-of-the-way part of the world, Pepys Adderly's soft raiment and sumptuous fare had been suddenly abolished by a madman. The claret, hock, and Madeira of his serene perspective had been smashed. The haunch he loved had been pitched into Tartarus by Carmel Sherlock — that most selfish of murderers. Mr. Adderly devoutly hoped he would be caught, and grudged him so quick and easy an exit as that through the drop.

But his practical ruminations were chiefly concerned with the rising star. He knew little of Drayton — less he now felt than, considering his past opportunities, was at all justifiable. His passion for yachting he could make nothing of. Adderly could not abide that recreation. To him it was simply being in a floating hospital, and he knew nothing about luffing and larboard, and all their horrid lingo. He had nothing for it, then, but to be sharp about these funeral expenses; to take on himself to discharge all the servants who would go at his bidding; to see that the cellar-books were all right, and to get up exact inventories of everything, and constitute himself the conscientious guardian and incorruptible agent of the unconscious heir, and by mastering detail, and cultivating for him a Spartan frugality during his absence, to lay the best foundation he could for a continuance, under the new régime, of his privileges and his office.

The next day came, and something was smuggled into the house, and people treading softly and speaking low were busy in Sir Roke's room.

When next Mr. Clewson saw his old master his dress was changed to white, and a border of white was round his face, and he was extended in a deep coffin lined with white quilted satin — robed, and fringed, and cased in the emblematic purity of white.

Mr. Clewson looked down on the familiar face of the baronet — more sharp, more sunken, more of the earth, earthy it had grown — a little streak of the sightless eye showed white in the shadow. Mr. Clewson saw the lines about the nostril and mouth that used to express themselves so dangerously when he snarled and cursed at him pretty regularly every night and morning. He had often made the phlegmatic Clewson intensely angry, and driven him to the verge of his self-command; but, on the whole, Mr. Clewson had been very sufficiently afraid of him.

Now Mr. Clewson was looking upon that mechanism, the spring of which was taken away, with a stolid but decent curiosity. He had now decidedly the advantage of that great gentleman whom he had feared, and a good deal hated, and in some sort admired. Mr. Clewson could see, and hear, and stand, and, after his fashion, think. A latent sense of the value of life communicated, as he looked on this odd image, a serene self-satisfaction and a tranquil glow.

As he looked on the mask that lay in the shadow of the coffin, a good many indistinct thoughts and feelings were also moving to and fro within the not very refined or active mind of Mr. Clewson, whose parents had been religious people; and left there some shadowy ideas of hell, which occasionally came into view like things traced in sympathetic ink, which show themselves only in certain temperatures.

"That's a really *beautiful* suit, it is!" said the soft diapason of Mr. Clothey, the eminent undertaker, as he gently brushed away some dust from the edge of the coffin with his handkerchief. "*You* never saw nothink of the kind more tasteful nor luxurious nowhere? That satt'n, sir, has stood us in fifteen four the yard, and heider down stuffin' and pillow. The style is the same which the hobsequeies of the late Marquis of — . You've 'eard of that, no doubt, sir. We had that, you've 'eard — very beautiful thing it was. If he was the Dook of Wellington he couldn't 'av been got up more tasteful — the whole world 'card of that, sir; we were in the papers, and spoke very high of indeed, and there wasn't no other 'ouse in England could 'av turned him out with the same finish and hellegance. This 'ere is one of the sweetest bits of cedar you hever seed, and this un's lead." He scratched it a little with the nail with which he indicated the successive rinds, as it were, in which the kernel of Sir Roke was enclosed. "Then the meeogny — the shell being hoak — we've turned out nothink prettier, and the family has reason to be gratified, which I say, is our *principle;* we never put in nothink but the very best of every thing, and spares nothink to give satisfaction."

"It's 'ansom, sir, very," acquiesced Clewson, solemnly.

"'*Ansom!* why, there's not a dook but might be proud to lie in that, sir."

And so forth did they converse.

Two of Mr. Clothey's gentlemen remained at the inn at Raby, awaiting the orders of Mr. Pepys Adderly next morning. One of these gentlemen drank tea that evening obligingly with the servants at Raby, the other being entertained by old Mrs. Wyndle with the same beverage in the housekeeper's room, and with a great collection of anecdotes of the late Sir Roke Wycherly's boyhood, and two of the servants came over from the vicarage, and several neighbours also, who were brought up quietly by the back stairs, and had a peep at the handsome upholstery provided by the tasteful house of Clothey and Clamp, and also at the forlorn baronet simpering fixedly through the thick satin and eider-down in which he reposed.

The next morning Sir Roke was gone. He set out in the grey of the dawn for the railway station, more than ten miles away. He was to make the journey up to London attended by Clewson, who was in charge of the luggage, and under the special care of the two gentlemen from Messrs. Clothey and Clamp, at whose establishment he was to pass the night on tressles, and thence in the morning to proceed to his destination in the dry and quiet vault where his grandfather and some contemporary kinsmen had been awaiting him for fifty years.

Sir Roke being gone, and Mr. Clewson gone, the obliteration proceeds. Beds and bedding are removed, bedsteads are taken down and transported to other places. The curtains unhung, the carpets dragged off the floor. That one with the great black stain upon it goes I know not where, but the stain has gone through, and dyes the floor itself in a wide black blotch with a map-like outline, which will not wash out. Three different days has the charwoman been at work upon it with hot water, and sand, and soap; but when the floor dries the stain comes forth to witness, and won't be put away or got rid of. And now these rooms are locked up. Mrs. Wyndle has the keys, and I suppose in course of time they will be haunted.

No news of Carmel Sherlock. A reward for his apprehension had been offered. The newspapers reprinted the description of his person; the police were vigilant, the telegraph transmitted scraps of information, and sent people on vain quests. Twice already had wrong persons been arrested on suspicion, examined, remanded, and discharged.

The winter was already heralding its march with gusts and storms, that roared through the tossing boughs of the forest, and began to strip the yellow leaves from their holdings, and scatter them impatiently over the sward. More wild and sombre grew the scene. Sometimes came a still and sunny day — a saddened remembrance of summer — throwing a melancholy lustre over the thinning and discoloured foliage.

The chilled air, and red sunsets, and shortened days betokening the decline of autumn, seemed to deepen the gloom of Mark Shadwell. More than three weeks had passed since the inquest, and still nothing was heard of Carmel Sherlock.

Mark had taken no step to secure a successor. He was making no exertion to supply by his own diligence the loss of his strange, but, on the whole, efficient steward. He was much more silent than ever, and looking ill.

When his newspapers came, he used to take them into the recess of one of the windows, and there con them over, every column, every paragraph; and after he had made his search, he would call to his daughter, if she happened to be in the room, and say:

“Look through it carefully, child, and try if you can find a line — anywhere — about Carmel Sherlock and when there was nothing, I think he seemed better pleased and more at his ease for the rest of the day.

In one of those red sunsets, wild and stormy, that have a character at once sad and threatening, Shadwell stood at the window, looking along the undulating plain studded with noble timber, and shut in on the left by the wooded uplands, towards Wynderfel, hidden by an intervening undulation, but showing in the red west the tufted tops of the old trees that stand among its ruins. He had been making his fruitless search as usual, in the newspaper which had just reached him — among reports, and facetiae, and notices, and the other lumber that impeded him — for the missing and concealed Carmel Sherlock, and having failed, handed it to his daughter with the words:

“Run your eye carefully over this, and see if you can find anything about Sherlock.”

He had almost forgotten that she was in the room, when Rachel said: “Oh! here’s something!”

Shadwell turned sharply. “What is it? *Read* it.”

And she read:

"PLYMOUTH POLICE. — A man answering the description of the villain Carmel Sherlock was arrested at Plymouth yesterday, on board the William Ford, bound for New York. As the vessel was only waiting for the tide to weigh anchor, the arrest was made necessarily with great promptitude. On being brought before Mr. Truefit, the magistrate, his worship asked him— "

"Look on, *do,* and find — *was* it Sherlock? Here — *here,* child, give me the paper."

He spoke so harshly, and looked so pale and angry, that the girl was startled, and, as he snatched it from her hand, her eyes filled with tears.

"*Where*?" he said, with an impatient stamp. She pointed to the place.

He, as we say, devoured the news, and in a few seconds more, with a kind of sneer, exclaimed, pitching the paper aside: "Such rot!"

"It wasn't he?" she inquired.

"No; another blunder. I hope the fellow will bring his action, if he lost his passage: those fellows should be taught their business.

This is the third time, by — , they have pulled up a wrong person."

Though he spoke bitterly and with vehemence, there seemed a sort of satisfaction too in his air. Was there a lingering regard for Carmel Sherlock, which excited a concealed sympathy with his stratagems, and exulted in his escape?

Mark Shadwell continued in silence to look toward the distant prospect, to which the red clouds of an autumn sunset formed a background, His thoughts were no doubt running in the same channel, for he repeated the name of Carmel Sherlock once or twice to himself, and then he said in a low tone:

"Wynderfel — that was his favourite haunt;" and he looked vacantly at his daughter.

"I should not be surprised if he were to come here," said Rachel. Perhaps she would not have spoken had he not looked at her so steadfastly, that she grew nervous, and felt constrained to say something.

"Who?" he asked suddenly.

"I meant Carmel Sherlock," she answered, half-frightened at her own audacity in speaking on a subject which seemed so much to disturb her father, of whom she stood so much in awe.

"You talk like a fool," said he, and looked again from the window.

She was in hopes that the dialogue had ended with that sharp speech, but she was deceived; suddenly he asked her:

“What makes you fancy that — who said it?” and he looked at her with eyes angry and earnest.

“The last time I saw him — the evening before— “

“I know — before he left; go on!”

“He took a kind of leave of me, as I sat in the window, and he talked as if he had a wonderful love for this place.”

“Wonderful, indeed!” sneered Shadwell, dismally.

“And he spoke of a return, as if he would revisit it after death.”

“Ho? That he may safely do.”

“But it left an idea in my mind — I have been thinking ever since — that he would feel something like that home sickness that the Swiss are said to feel, and would be sure to return.”

“I see; you are a very romantic young lady. Men, however, with constables and the hue-and-cry in pursuit of them, don’t run into the lion’s mouth in search of the picturesque. Sherlock is mad, I dare say; but he has the shrewdness of a madman. Come back *here,* indeed!” he muttered, still with a sneer, and an impatient shrug.

And Mark Shadwell turned from the window, and walked moodily to the fireplace, where he leaned with his arm on the chimneypiece; and once or twice again he looked at her in dark meditation, and she fancied he was about to question her further, but he turned instead and left the room gloomily.

CHAPTER XXI.

A STRANGE MEETING.

THAT night, with a message from her mother, Rachel timidly entered the library, and found Mark Shadwell at an open cabinet. He turned suddenly towards her, and she saw that he had a pistol in his hand. He looked angry and embarrassed, but said only, with an odd smile on his pale face:

"You see, I've been thinking of what you said, and am looking up my pistols; prudent, eh?"

There was, I suppose, something between fear and perplexity in her countenance, for he added:

"You need not be afraid; they're not loaded. Don't you know what I mean? Suppose Sherlock *should* come back here, as you said — quite mad, and want to murder *me*? Don't be afraid, I tell you; I don't believe anything of the sort. But people are sometimes made nervous by dreams; and your dream about Sherlock — for such it is — has made me a little bit fidgetty — contrary to reason, contrary to belief; but this miserable month has unstrung me, and I'm growing like an old woman or a child."

And so saying, he fell into a dreary little laugh, and locking the pistol up again, resumed that sterner gravity that had grown habitual with him, and heard her message and answered it.

Mark Shadwell, alone in his library, was not reading, nor writing. He was darkly dreaming away his hours in vague schemes of change and self-banishment. A Canadian farm — a flock in Australia — a clearing in the back settlements. To sell Raby and the Wynderfel estates to some rich clothier, and thus scuttle the vessel that had been so long labouring and foundering in hopeless stress of weather, and let the rolling ocean of oblivion roar over the old name of the Shadwells of Wynderfel. Such was the staple of those vague thoughts which were always rising and revolving over the cauldron of his divination.

How was even his present painful position to be maintained? The huge, creaking, decayed machine — worked with a perpetual strain and increasing difficulty — had just sufficed to keep the deck of the used-up vessel above water; and who was to work it now that its engineer, Carmel Sherlock, whose screws and hammer and oil were needed every hour to prevent its coming to pieces, was gone?

Yes, there was one clever person — and diligent, too, when diligence was needed — who might do much, but of course not all to stay the threatened ruin: his secretary. But she was not to be thought of. Under sentence; with just a reprieve until more urgent distractions were allayed; and then, she, like Carmel Sherlock, should depart into darkness. Still he put it off, and off. And though his wounded vanity was sometimes stung almost to the pitch of hatred, and his arm lifted to strike, the blow was deferred and the sacrifice lived on.

This night, at the corner of the great gallery, unexpectedly, Mark Shadwell met Miss Marlyn. They had each their candles in their hands, and met face to face, with only two or three steps between.

Their eyes encountered for less than a moment, and Miss Marlyn's were lowered to the ground. Mark's gaze was fixed uncertainly upon her. His thoughts had been elsewhere. In such surprises a quarrel slips sometimes out of mind, like a loose page from a book; and it required an effort to recover the parenthesis. Mark did, in time to save him from the familiar sentence that was on his lips. He remembered all on a sudden the awful distance that was between them. Silently he drew a little aside to let her pass, and as silently, with eyes still lowered, but looking not abashed, but sad and proud — yes, very proud — she glided by and disappeared. Mark Shadwell felt oddly — a little chill, a regret, a pang; but, with a scornful smile and a frown, he turned and pursued his way.

He had not seen her; no, not since that dreadful night, which made the old house ghastly. No, not once. He had lived so entirely to himself, and his walks had been so remote.

He had forgotten how very beautiful she was, or rather how that beauty always impressed him. He shut his door sullenly, and as he set his candle down upon the table, he thought:

"So much beauty is *funeste* and ominous. It never was granted to the heroine of a common or a happy story. To me to look at her is pain. Ever again to suffer that d — d delusion to steal into my heart is impossible. That is the kind of person whom it is impossible not to love, or not to hate. Indifference is not imaginable. Well for me she chose to make me hate her.

Yes, I shall settle that matter. She shall go. Let her play out the tragedy or burlesque which fate allots her in another theatre. Raby has seen the first act. My God! If she had never entered these doors he would not have come.”

Mark Shadwell left the house next day alone at about noon. There are agitations of mind for which instinct seems to prescribe bodily labour and extreme fatigue. Mark walked rapidly. He chose the upland forest for his march. Its brakes, its steeps, and rocks enforced exertion, and its vast seclusion secured him against interruption.

The sun was near the horizon when, by a circuitous and lonely route, Mark found himself at last before the ruined walls and roofless gables of Wynderfel.

The level light glittered on grass and nettles, and on the ivy upon the walls with a tremulous splendour, flooding the sharp grey angles and nodding trees, now stript of half their foliage, with a sad and mellow glory that deepened by contrast the cold grey shadows stretching far over the slopes.

Not two months had passed since he had sat on the same stone bench, looking on the same lonely picture of bygone greatness and earthly mutability, under the same sunset glow and shadow, and he was no longer the same Mark Shadwell. He looked years older, and turned towards these ruins a thinner, paler, sterner face.

Rapid walking is not conducive to thought. In fact, it is next to impossible while walking quickly to think in train at all. One reason, no doubt, why nature points to that expedient for relief in high mental excitement.

Now Mark’s walk was over for a while; he was sitting on the old stone bench, looking upon the low-arched doorways, the mullioned windows, and those tall chimneys of Wynderfel, up which the ivy tendrils were creeping.

Quietude had hardly succeeded to his long and rapid walk when the image of that strangely beautiful girl, as she stood for a moment before him, like a lovely statue of shame and pride, suddenly, in the lonely gallery of Raby, rose before his memory, and furnished the theme of a long, passionate, and bitter meditation.

She haunted him, and yet he hated her — hated her for having used and deceived him. Was ever man so fooled and mortified? And yet there was that beautiful image, the fascination of which at times overpowered his vindictive rage. Wounded pride and passion mingling resulted in that malignant idolatry which we know as jealousy. Hardly conscious of the passions that entered into his agitation, he was, literally, wildly jealous. Jealous of whom? Of that bloodstained, cold, smirking shadow whom he hated to think of. Yes, a profitable conspiracy! Let them keep their tryst. If Carmel Sherlock were here, he would say, "Let *her* go to him, or let *him* come for her." A sort of chill stole over him with this mockery, and at the same moment, like an apparition summoned by his evil thoughts, Carmel Sherlock stepped through the arched doorway of the ruin, and stood before him.

Travelsoiled and wild was the figure. Famine-stricken he looked. He extended his emaciated fingers, and directed his woebegone eyes towards Mark Shadwell.

As a spirit rises, Mark Shadwell was standing upright, he knew not how, and freezing with a horror he had never known before.

"My good God!" repeated Mark, slowly, twice or thrice, in a tone scarcely above a whisper, gazing with wide eyes, and fixed as if he were cut out of stone.

Carmel Sherlock was equally motionless, and stood still with a countenance indescribably piteous; his lean hand extended towards him, palm upward, like a mendicant's. With a sudden gasp, Mark Shadwell stamped upon the ground, and cried:

"Murderer! miscreant!"

And at the same moment, with a step back, he lifted his hand from his pocket and discharged a pistol full at Carmel Sherlock. The explosion rang sharply among the echoing walls, and startled into a general flutter the sparrows in the ivy.

Carmel Sherlock staggered a step or two, as his arm dropped by his side.

Before the film of smoke projected from the pistol had ceased rolling in the air, almost simultaneously with the report, a cheery voice close by shouted, and steps were heard approaching on the narrow old road, which, just where it winds by the angle of the building, shows its pavement above the grass. It was plain from the tone that whoever cheered had no notion of the deadly intention, with which the shot had been discharged.

Mark’s hand was already in his pocket, on another pistol. But he did not raise it. The challenge that had just reached his ear arrested him. If he had seen the spectre of Roke Wycherly, he could not have turned on him a more horror-stricken scowl than he did on Carmel.

Sherlock’s face winced with pain; with his left hand he caught the angle of the doorway, and a cold moisture shone over his forehead.

“Do, through the head, and let me die,” said Carmel Sherlock, faintly. “I came, sir, for that, to be taken, to die — anything to end it.”

“Hallo!” panted Roger Temple, now within a step or two of Mark Shadwell, and amazed, as well he might:

“By Jove!” exclaimed Charles Mordant, his companion, equally astonished.

“Glad you came up,” said Shadwell, with a very pale face, and an attempt to laugh. “Rather a surprise, isn’t it? Here he is — *Sherlock.* I don’t believe a word he says.”

With this false and agitated smile he glanced from them to Sherlock, and from Sherlock to them again, and the smile quickly subsided, and darkened into a careworn scowl.

“What do you wish, Mr. Shadwell? Shall we take him?” said Charles Mordant, who had advanced within a step of Carmel Sherlock.

“The d — d fool!” said Shadwell, between his teeth.

“Yes, take me, shoot me; the grave is best. I travelled, sir, Mr. Temple, seven and thirty miles on foot since last night for this, and I came to Wynderfel to see it once more. I’ll go with you, Mr. Mordant, Mr. Temple, wherever my master says.”

“You shall come up to the house, then, and [from thence to Applebury, and as you seek justice, you’ll find it there,” said Mark, savagely.

“Have we a right to take him without a warrant?” whispered honest Roger at Mark Shadwell’s ear.

Shadwell made no answer. He merely said, “In a moment,” looking still at Carmel Sherlock.

But Charles Mordant, who had not heard Roger’s question, seized the wounded man by the collar.

Carmel started.

“Take your hand from my throat. Remove your hand, sir,” said he sternly, but with a trembling lip.

"Don't mind," said Shadwell, addressing Mordant.

"No, time enough when I get to the gaol for *that.* I give myself up. No one takes me. I've come for the purpose; but you sha'n't drag or throttle me — let me die; but no profanation."

"Well, then, come to the house, your hurt must be attended to. I'm sorry, *very* sorry, but I could not help it. I thought you had something in your hand when you raised it.

I wish I had known your real purpose," said Mark Shadwell, anxious, no doubt, that all should understand how he came to wound Carmel Sherlock. "Do you think you can walk so far?"

"In the arm," said Carmel. "I don't feel it now — it is not much — nothing, in fact." He looked pale, and spoke faintly, however.

"I'll fetch some water from the brook, shall I?" said Charles Mordant, and ran off, returning quickly with his flask filled.

"No," said Carmel Sherlock, "the bone is not broken — nothing. I wish it were through my brain, sir."

Some twenty minutes after this, the party consisting of Mark Shadwell, Roger Temple, Charles Mordant, and Carmel Sherlock, supporting his bleeding arm, entered the hall-door of Raby.

CHAPTER XXII.

MARK SHADWELL'S OFFER.

THERE were few words spoken till this odd party reached the house. Carmel Sherlock walked among them like a man going to execution. When he came to the door he looked up and about him, and entered the large hall with a great sigh.

Old Robson, the butler and factotum of the family, — who knew something about horses, a little of tailoring, and loved flowers and singing-birds, and, also, having seen service as an officer's servant at Quatrebras and Waterloo, pretended to surgery, — was, with this accomplishment, now put in requisition. He happened to be in the hall as they entered. His short white hair seemed to bristle up over his purple face, and his little eyes almost to start from their sockets, as he stared on Carmel Sherlock.

"Hey? — *Dear* me!" he ejaculated. "Mr. Sherlock?"

"Ay, Mr. Robson, the moth returns to the candle. You did not think to see me, sir?" said he, very pale and excited. "Shake hands! That was blood well spilt, sir — a devil cast out — Sir Roke Wycherly, body and soul!"

Robson, the fat old butler, with a shrewd face, drew back without touching the hand he tendered, and Roger Temple answered emphatically, with mild reproof:

"There, Mr. Sherlock, pray don't. You mustn't talk that way, and you may injure yourself besides."

"He has been wounded," said Mark, sharply. "Don't mind his talking, but look to his arm; do you hear, Robson? and dress it if you think you can. You're faint, Sherlock — you must take something. Give him a glass of wine first, and then see about his arm," said Mark. He touched Temple on the arm, and said in his ear: "You'll kindly stay with him, won't you, for a few minutes? I must make out his committal — but I sha'n't detain you long."

And with these words he entered the library, leaving Carmel Sherlock seated in the hall with three people about him, and soon in the surgical hands of old Robson.

When Mark Shadwell got into his library and shut the door, he felt suddenly faint and overcome. He bolted it and opened a window, standing before it for a time. He took from a drawer a printed form of committal to the jailer of Applebury jail. But his hand was tremulous. He did not want criticism, and this odd scrawl did not look like his signature. He tore it up, and threw it into the grate, and looked sadly on the extended hand in which was this treacherous tremor. He must wait a little, and let it subside.

Shadwell went out again to the hall. It was empty; but he heard voices from the room at the other side. There he found Carmel Sherlock, with his coat and waistcoat off. He was loaning with his shoulder to the wall, and looking down with a dark apathy upon the floor at his feet — the only man present, you would have said, quite unconcerned in the discussion of his wound. That wound, as it turned out, was trifling. The ball had passed between his left arm and his breast, leaving a severe abrasion, but little more. Two inches to the right would have directed it through his heart, and ended some of his speculations in certainty.

"I'm very glad — I'm very much relieved," said Mark. "I'm certain, now, he could not have meant me any harm. If I had only had time, Sherlock, to think, I should have *known* it. Had you not better sit down?"

Carmel Sherlock looked up at Shadwell, and his large eyes rested on his face with a melancholy stare. At this look of reproach, Mark Shadwell's eyes contracted and were lowered for a moment to the ground.

"Ah, sir, even for a moment that such a thought should have crossed my benefactor's mind, dishonours me," said Carmel Sherlock.

"It was not a thought, Sherlock, it was a craze."

"A craze!" echoed Sherlock. "It is hard to pick your steps among unrealities and substances — umbrâ pro corpore. This house of Raby, sir, is full of false lights and false shadows; there is no true life possible in it."

"It was an impulse — not even a craze," said Mark Shadwell, with a strange eagerness. "If I had hurt you seriously, I should never have forgiven myself."

Sherlock sighed deeply.

"It is nothing, sir — I said so."

"No, thank God!" said Mark.

"I should have liked, sir, to fall by a friendly hand — by an accident. Where are my things?" he added, turning hastily, and getting on his coat and waistcoat. “I’m ready to go — I’m ready to go, sir. It is not the place, but the *way,* I hate. Those who like death don’t like dying.”

“Poor fellow!” whispered Roger Temple, shaking his head with a significant glance at Mark Shadwell.

“Yes,” said Mark, with a nod, and beckoned Roger Temple into the hall. “You heard him talk — isn’t it strange?” said Mark, looking darkly into Roger’s honest eyes.

Roger lifted his hands, and shrugged his fat shoulders, saying:

“Poor fellow! isn’t it horrid? It accounts for everything, I think, almost — doesn’t it?”

Mark nodded, and said:

“I’ve known that a long time. He has no idea of deceiving; but, at the same time, you can’t believe a single word he says — half the things he relates are the merest fancies; and, no doubt, one of these delusions has been the cause of this crime — apparently so motiveless, and certainly so unlike him.”

“If he’s mad— “began Roger.

“Can we doubt it?” suggested Mark.

“And I do trust, in the mercy of heaven, that he is quite mad. They can’t think of hanging him,” said Roger.

“We English like hanging people — sane men, if we can get them — madmen, if we can’t. It’s clear, however, they mustn’t hang that wretched maniac.”

“It was a horrible freak. What do you suppose was in his mind?”

“A lunacy — an idea of a duty, or a mission — heaven knows what.”

“Poor, wretched fellow! Certainly he does look miserably,” said Roger, pathetically; “and, by-the-bye, how are we to get him to Applebury?”

“Well, I’ve been thinking, and I fancy the best plan is to swear in some of my men as special constables, and let them go there in Wason’s ‘bus from the town here.”

“You know you must not hesitate if you have not got messengers enough. I can go at a devil of a pace when I like it,” said my fat friend Roger; “and I’ll run down, if you wish it, to Raby about the ‘bus, and — and I hope this occurrence to-day has not alarmed your young ladies,” he added, lowering his voice tenderly.

"I'm sure I can't tell," said Mark, drily; "but I'm very much obliged for your offer. I don't know how I should have managed if you had not turned up. I think I'll talk a bit to that strange fellow — quietly by ourselves — he and I, and try and make out what fancy was in his brain when he did it."

"But you can't mean to be alone with him, he's not handcuffed or secured in any way; and, upon my honour, I think he looks quite mad!"

"I'm not afraid. I'll take care of myself — I'll try — he'll talk to me by ourselves; I'll try — yes, I think I'll try." Mark thus talking, they returned to the room where Sherlock and his two custodians were.

Shadwell despatched the servant for three men who were within call; and signing to Roger Temple and young Mordant, they, with some misgivings, left the room together, keeping, however, within easy hearing of any alarm.

"Carmel," said he, as soon as he had shut the door of this rather dark wainscoted room, "a pretty mess you have made of it! What devil possessed you to run yourself into this frightful fix?"

"I'm guilty," said Sherlock, with his hands clasped together, looking down with a scowl of agony.

"Of course you are guilty," said Mark.

"That is," continued Sherlock, "if guilt there be in seeking the life of a monster predestinated by infallible powers to a bloody death."

"Well, I sha'n't debate the question, call it how we may; that has passed which exposes you to death. It is all very fine speculating on death — like Pythagoras or Plato; but I'd like to know what we can make of it, but just the most dreadful thing we can imagine. If there is a futurity, it means judgment; and if there is not, it means annihilation. Now, why should you voluntarily run yourself into that iron trap?" said Shadwell, very pale.

"I think, sir, differently of death. Life is ghastlier. Nature points to a less dreadful life in death."

"Nature tells you plainly enough the value of life, by giving us the instinct to cling to and defend it, even in privation and torture. Every man has, of course, some theory about that event. I have mine — you have yours; but we need not test it by martyrdom. If we could open the door, and look, and draw back, of course it would be all very simple. But that's an iron door, Carmel, with a spring lock, of which we have not the key. Once in we are trapped for ever. "We have only a few minutes now to talk; as I said, I won't discuss it. Now *I* meant you to understand *me."*

“I do, sir — I *do* — *all* goodness,” broke out Sherlock.

“Well — well, but that’s not the point. I don’t seek your life. What occurred to-day — if there’s any good in swearing — I *swear* it was accident. I was more shocked than you when it happened. I don’t know even *how* it happened; but so far from wishing you any ill, I’ll prove to you that my first wish is to serve you.”

“Oh, sir! did I ever question it?” pleaded Sherlock.”

“I don’t know — I hope not — only listen. I wish to save you. The door here is bolted; raise that window, and a dozen steps will bring you to the edge of the oak-wood you know so well. Hide yourself there in that impenetrable thicket till twelve o’clock tonight. I shall direct pursuit upon a false scent, and visit you at that hour at the old well with provisions, and I’ll bring you money enough to carry you to America, or where you please. You must wait there for a little time, and I’ll bring you supplies every night until pursuit begins to slacken; then you cross to France. I’ll give you the means of disguising yourself; and you are not the shrewd fellow you have proved yourself up to to-day, if you don’t make your way to a place of security. There, raise the window, and go.”

Though Mark Shadwell spoke, or rather whispered all this, in slow, measured articulation, the signs of suppressed agitation were visible in his face, and his eyes were fixed on Sherlock more with the eagerness of a man begging his own life than the coolness of one merely offering an escape to another.

Carmel looked on Mark Shadwell earnestly, and raising his finger, he said:

“Eight days after I left this I was alone on the side of Penmon Maur, and a shadow of a cloud, shaped like a hand, pursued me upwards. I saw it on the low ground first, and my heart died, for it was shaped like the hand I dreamed of. It was gliding up the side of the mountain spread out, and I knew if it seized me it was a sign. All that man could do, to escape, I did; but it caught me near a wall of rock facing southward, and a darkness like night overcast me, and the thunder began — you remember. It was *then* that fate overtook me.”

“For God’s sake!” whispered Mark, “talk for once like a man of sense; tell your dreams tomorrow. Go now, and do as I’ve said, and leave me to tell my own story.”

Mark Shadwell, whose face was darkened by agitation, pushed him by the shoulder, as he spoke, toward the window.

"*Then*, sir," continued Sherlock, "I would have died of cold, or famine, or fatigue, rather than forfeit my liberty. After *that* happened, I sickened of life, and began to long to give myself up — and so the longing grew and grew — until I could bear it no longer — and I came — and here I am, a willing prisoner — and resolved to be either on or off with death."

"I say, Carmel Sherlock, you. had better do as I have told you," said Mark Shadwell, sternly, "I run a risk for your sake; you'll have no second chance."

"I have things to tell you about the death of Sir Roke Wycherly that will amaze you — but not now. If you come to me after I go to prison, I will tell you all."

"Don't be a d — d fool," said Shadwell, in a fierce undertone; "try the chance I give you."

"Forgive me, sir — I can't — I should come back tomorrow — I should go to the prison and give myself up — I can bear it no longer."

"Then you are a worse fool than I took you for," said Mark, with a ghastly laugh; and he looked for a moment as if he would have struck him, but he controlled himself; and he walked to the window which offered the means of escape, in vain — and he looked out for a time — and then turned and said:

"You won't let me be of use to you. I'm sorry, but it can't be helped, I suppose."

He paused, as if to allow Sherlock to reconsider his resolve, but there was no sign of change or hesitation; so he proceeded:

"You spoke of circumstances connected with Sir Roke's death that would surprise me. Well, you choose to go to prison, and to prison you go. But I'll see you there, and whatever these are; I ask but this — keep them for my ears."

"I shall seem to you in one sense a victim. I've had a partner, sir. I love this house, but I ought to hate it; sleep is haunted in it — whispers round the comers — ha! I know it."

"Well, if there is anything worth telling, tell *me*."

"Yes, sir."

"*Me,* mind."

"I know, sir."

There was in Mark's mind considerable curiosity respecting this, but also a stronger loathing; and so, whatever the revelation might be, he was glad to put it off to a more convenient season.

Mark went to the door as if to unbolt it, and with his hand to the brass, he paused. He looked at Carmel Sherlock for a moment, and returned a few steps quickly.

"Sherlock," said he, in a low tone, seizing his arm very hard, "you see how I have trusted you; how in my zeal to save you I have placed myself in your hands."

"Trusty hands — loving hands," murmured Carmel.

"Need I tell you that, of our conversation in this room, you must promise that not one syllable is repeated."

"No, sir, I'm deep and dark."

"And don't mistake me, Sherlock. In the presence of others I may seem harsh and unfeeling, but remember, under all disguises, I'm your *friend.* No, not a word; — only don't mistake me."

Again he approached the door, but turned in a kind of agony, and extending his hand with an imploring look toward the window, "Change your mind!" said he.

Carmel Sherlock shook his head, with a sigh that resembled a sob, but answered nothing.

"All's over then!"

And with these words Mark Shadwell stepped to the door and opened it.

Hobson had already got three of the workmen into the hall to be sworn as special constables. The preparations were soon completed, and in their custody Sherlock departed for the prison.

"Vain trying to get him to talk coherently," said Mark, as he stood upon the steps, and the distant gate closed upon Sherlock and the men in whose safe keeping he was. "It is impossible now to separate his dreams from his facts. Hanging such a creature would be a mere murder, and it is impossible to rely upon any statement he makes — no matter in what good faith."

CHAPTER XXIII.

JEST AND EARNEST.

As they stood upon the steps, about to depart, Roger, who in the excitement of their strange visit had no practicable opportunity of inquiring for the ladies, repaired the omission. And Charles Mordant mischievously supplemented his politeness by inquiring particularly for Miss Marlyn, which threw honest Roger into a cruel confusion.

“Oh! Miss Marlyn?” answered Mark, quickly, with a glance in the young man’s eyes. “I suppose she’s very well. I hav’n’t seen her for some days. I’ve had too much to think of. It’s very unfeeling, I suppose, but I’m afraid I half forgot her existence; why do you ask?” he inquired, rather oddly.

“Miss Temple’s sure to ask us. She admires Miss Marlyn immensely, doesn’t she, Roger? — and I assure you Temple would get into an awful scrape if he could not give an account of her. You have no idea, and the consequence is that Roger is generally sure to inquire.”

““What a goose you are!” retorted Roger, with a bashful little laugh and a shake of his head, and a jocular menace with his walking stick.

“Well,” said Shadwell, drily, “you may tell Miss Temple that whenever anything goes wrong, my people are sure to tell me; and I fancy if they had anything unpleasant to report — a cold or a headache — I’d have been certain to hear it; and— “ he continued, rather more sharply, “I don’t know that she’s going to stay with us very long. I suspect she’s rather too young to know much about her business.”

Roger tried to smile still, but the smile was by no means cheerful, and he was looking down on the steps, and running the point of his cane carefully along the joining on the stones. Mark glanced at him with an eye of scarcely concealed contempt.

“And I believe there’s nothing more to tell about Miss Marlyn. And the fact is, I’m thinking more about that wretched man who’s gone to prison; a useful fellow he was, and so gentle, and I can’t conceive how he possibly could — though it may be intelligible enough— “he corrected himself, leaving his sentence unfinished. And he walked a little with them on their way back, and took his leave, and smoked at his leisure returning. By the time he reached the hall-door his cigar was out, and he cast the stump away with somewhat more violence than was strictly necessary.

"What a disgusting old fool that fellow is; past fifty, and Agnes Marlyn! Upon my soul!"

I don't believe he was thinking of himself. I'm afraid he was kicking and tumbling in the gutter poor Roger Temple's little romance.

"Clever young lady! I shouldn't wonder if she had been making a fool — but that's tinting a rainbow, and throwing a perfume on a violet — making a fool of Roger Temple. What a fool that fellow *is!"*

The effect of this little meditation was to send Mark Shadwell directly to his wife's sitting-room upstairs, where he found her.

"I've come to say a word about Miss Marlyn. It's absurd our continuing to keep her here. She's doing no good. There's nothing to stare at. I don't mean she's doing any mischief. I simply mean, at a time when I can't afford a guinea, it won't do to go on adding all that young lady costs to our expenses. If she were worth the money, I might try to get on a little, but she's not, and you know she's not. It's simply, she's kept here to talk, and laugh, and amuse. There, now you're preparing to cry, but there's nothing to cry *about.* If it does amuse you, hang it, do you think it can be any pleasure to me to stop it? It's only one more vexation. But I have not money to spend on anything of the kind. I told you so before, and I tell you so now; and you must see her, Amy, and tell her so at once."

There was a pause here, and nothing was heard but the little tattoo that Mark was drumming with his fingertips on the table.

"If you want her in the neighbourhood, why don't you place her somewhere — I mean, find her a husband," he said. "There's that clever fellow, Roger Temple. It's a pity he has no ideas, and no teeth, and no hair; but I venture to say that won't prevent any girl marrying him, if she thinks he has a little money, and she can't find anyone with more, to oblige her. I think some one said — didn't they? — she and old Roger liked one another."

He said this with a sour carelessness. He hated Agnes, he was sure, and yet he was curious.

But Amy could only tell him that Roger was enamoured, without having excited any corresponding romance.

"Well," said he, returning to his point, "that's not my business. If she thinks she can do better, of course she won't have *him.* Only she must understand that, go where she may, she can't stay here. It ain't caprice,. Amy — I may as well tell you — I must get some one in Carmel Sherlock's place. It's quite impossible for me to get through more work than I do; and I must have *one,* at least, where there's ample work for *six,* to look after the never-ending business of this miserable property; unless, indeed, we are prepared to see the whole thing go to pieces before a year."

What could Amy do but acquiesce?

"Of course, you'll do it your own way. I don't mean a scene, or a rudeness; I only want her to understand that she must leave Raby. I believe they get a month's notice, or something; but do it to-day. I shall ask you this evening what is settled."

So saying he turned to leave the room, and recollected, just at the door, to ask her how she was, and awaited her little story, without, I am afraid, hearing much of it; and then, with a rather absent— "I hope I shall find you better, Amy, by-and-by," he went on his way alone.

He heard, as he crossed the hall, faintly through the doors, the chords of the piano, and the notes of a sweet, well-known voice. He stopped and listened with feelings bewildered, for a minute, and then, with a sigh and a sneer, passed on. Within were Rachel and Miss Marlyn, who had just stood up from the piano.

"Thanks, darling," said Rachel; "that is the saddest and prettiest little song in the world!"

"And the most appropriate," said Agnes, placing her hands on her companion's shoulders, and gazing with her large melancholy eyes into Rachel's face— "for it is a farewell."

"You are not to say that, Pucelle; think of me. What should I do; quite alone, in this great house and place — you cannot be so cruel."

"I am not cruel; and yet I am going to speak to your mamma about it to-day. I can't help it, Rachel. There are many reasons, and one is enough. I feel that I am *de trop* here."

"What?"

"Yes; I don't say in *your* way; but it seems to me that your papa has judged me unfavourably. He thinks that you and dear Mrs. Shadwell are too good to me; and he is jealous. He thinks me overrated; and so, I'm sure, I am. No; you need not protest. How can you or I know whether I am capable of teaching anything? and it seems to me that he has conceived a prejudice, not to be got over, against me, and so I am condemned in secret. I ask but for *light.* Who is my accuser; what the charge? I will not stay even to *fancy* that I am suspected. This is enough to determine me; but there are other reasons also. Heaven will not desert me!" Her eyes were raised as she spoke. There were anguish and indignation in her appealing gaze to Rachel; she looked the embodiment of defenceless innocence; a more practised eye might have fancied something of the cold art of the melodramatic actress in the beautiful young lady.

"That, however, is one reason; as I have said, there are many. I am sorry I sang that song. It has put me out of spirits. The soldiers march away to the wars to gay tunes. I am away to the great war, and I'll go with pleasant music in my ears."

Down she sat laughing, and played and sung an odd defiant little German song, with a wild, merry refrain, which Rachel did not understand, but the careless gaiety of which sounded heartless; the light of the old, cruel smile which she remembered, once or twice, when Agnes drifted away from her reckoning and knowledge into dark moods and associations which pained and half-frightened her, was there.

With a ringing chord or two, a wild *roulade,* and a silvery laugh, the music ended, and she stood up, still laughing.

The laugh passed into a weary "heigho!" and a rather dismal restless gaze from the window.

"It was very unfeeling, that little song, wasn't it?" said Agnes, looking at her with a sidelong glance, as she leaned with her slender fingers to her cheek.

This commonplace little speech puzzled Rachel rather. The smile had vanished, like wintry sunshine chased away; but the sadness that had preceded it had not returned. There was no softness there. The eyes that were turned upon her were dark and cold, and just a suspicion of scorn in the features.

"Why do you look at me as if you did not like me?" said Rachel. "I told you once or twice, when you did it before. If you don't like me, I'd rather you told me so."

Miss Marlyn's eyes neither lightened nor softened at this appeal, neither did her dark, cold eyes swerve.

"I was thinking," said she, "of our expedition on which old *La Chouette,* I mean, Madame de la Perriere, despatched me — not for love, you may be sure — with poor little dried-up Mademoiselle Descatel, in charge of four of the girls who were coughing and wheezing in consumption — such a noise they made all night! The doctor said they must change the air; and La Chouette had nothing for it but to submit. So she packed us off to a place called Dromonville, and I think it was the oddest climate in the world. It was always either dense fog or brilliant sunshine; the sun was very little, the fog a great deal. We were only there six weeks, and two of them died there; it was ridiculous — poor things! We were very sorry, of course; but one could not help laughing — and that climate of Dromonville, with its dense fog and glare of sun, now and then resembles me. I'm in a frank mood, now — too frank, whenever my glare of sunshine comes. One great, fiery gleam in fifty days, and then all again in a thick white mist. No eye in nature could pierce it. My natural reserve, forty-nine days of fog — ha, ha, ha!" she laughed suddenly. "Isn't it funny?"

"I don't think it a bit fanny. I think it was very sad about those poor girls," said Rachel.

"Very sad, to be sure! *and* very funny, if you had seen old La Chouette's face, and seen what a fright she was in when she found out that she had killed the two girls."

"I think it's shocking," said Rachel.

"So you should — I knew you would. It *was* shocking. And now with me, for the hour, the fog is rent a little, and that white, fierce sun of Dromonville shines through and hurts the eyes; you see, it is my candid mood."

"I don't think so," said Rachel. "I should call it your mood of — shall I say, affectation? I'm sure you are not like yourself when it is upon you. I like your real self; I don't like this."

Agnes was still looking on her with the same dark and not loving eyes; half, as it seemed, in abstraction, and drumming with her fingertips on the window-frame.

"There!" she said, with a sudden smile; "I find myself still playing that heartless little air; pretty, I think it; but, as I said, very unfeeling of me."

"If you think so," said Rachel, who was growing a little cross, "had you not better stop it? I don't know the meaning of the words, so I can't say."

"Ho! the words? They are merely a comical, little vulgar lamentation over the difficulty of finding a lover, and bringing him to speak his mind; and now that I think, it *was very* unfeeling, considering that you have lost two very interesting lovers so lately, — Sir Roke Wycherly, who has been killed, and Carmel Sherlock, who has just gone to be hanged."

This brutal jest did not seem quite meant as a jest by Miss Marlyn. She did not laugh; she seemed, and looked, both pale and angry.

Rachel retorted this sneer with a surprised and indignant stare. Miss Marlyn laughed; and Rachel, with heightened colour and haughty air, was walking out of the room when Agnes intercepted her, and stood facing her, with her pretty shoulders to the door. But, decided as was this procedure, her look and mien were quite changed.

"You won't go without forgiving me. It is just one of my odious tempers; the result simply of misery. I have offended you, Rachel, by my odious folly; I am going from Raby, and I cannot bear the idea of having wounded you. Oh, Rachel! may you never know half my sorrow!"

Thus began a little dialogue quite in a different tone, which ended in a reconciliation, and a little feminine effusion, in which these young ladies embraced; and then, after a very affectionate talk together, Miss Agnes remembered that they must run upstairs to see "dear Mrs. Shadwell."

They found that lady in trouble; she had this disclosure to make, which would quite satisfy Miss Marlyn, and save her the pain of announcing her own intention of leaving; provided that young lady knew her own mind. I don't think she did. However, if she fancied her mind was to go away, she changed colour notwithstanding a little, when she heard it; and she smiled, forgetting that a smile was hardly in keeping with her melancholy tone when treating the same subject downstairs.

"Do not, pray, dear Mrs. Shadwell; do not on my account suffer the slightest embarrassment or regret. I had told my dear Rachel that it must be, that I had quite resolved, and was about to leave Raby and my dear friends, because my going would be the best thing for all — was, in feet, as it seemed to me, a duty."

"How a duty? I don't see," said Mrs. Shadwell, looking direct at Agnes.

"Yes, she has been talking of going, but I hoped she would change her mind; and today she told me again she would go," said Rachel.

"Yes," said Agnes, gently, and still looking down, she laid her hand fondly on Rachel's arm; "and that *nothing* could alter me."

"But how a duty?" persisted Mrs. Shadwell.

Agnes raised her large, dark eyes sadly, and said: "Does not this command come direct from Mr. Shadwell?"

"Yes — certainly; but new expenses compel us to deny ourselves, for a time, every pleasure we can possibly dispense with," said she.

"Do not fancy, dear Mrs. Shadwell, that I am pleading against a resolution which I do entirely approve. I merely begged to know whether it had first moved from Mr. Shadwell."

At the same time she lowered her eyes again, and glanced along the floor, as if to hide a smile.

"Still you don't say *how* your going should ever have appeared to you in the light of a duty," said Mrs. Shadwell.

Agnes Marlyn continued to look down, and, as Mrs. Shadwell fancied, to smile as before. The lady looked at Rachel a pale, hurried glance, charged with a fear which she did not comprehend, and which was as quickly averted.

"I suppose," said Miss Marlyn, raising her eyes, "Mr. Shadwell would prefer seeming to send me away. You, madam, are *all* goodness, and Rachel I love; yet I had resolved, as I said, to go. He is offended with me, madam."

"Offended, child! no," said Mrs. Shadwell. "Why is he angry?"

"Perhaps, madam, I am too *good.* I mean, if I were more artful and less frank, I should please better. Mr. Temple, the vicar, said in his sermon last Sunday, that the world belongs for the present to the devil, and *his* children prosper best in it. May I now go to my room, madam? I shall have just one letter to write."

"Certainly, Miss Marlyn; but I hope you quite understand there is no idea of hurrying you?"

It was odd, but true, that in so short a time there had grown between Miss Marlyn and Mrs. Shadwell a distance and a formality.

"You have been always too good to me, madam," she said, pausing at the door for a moment, before she withdrew.

Mrs. Shadwell remained silent, nothing was heard but the little scribbling she made on the table with the tip of her crochet-needle on which she was looking sadly, as if she were tracing with it the epitaph of her lost child. Rachel was looking at her and thinking, with an instinctive feeling of alarm and uncertainty, of the ambiguous looks and language of her beautiful friend Agnes; and she was thinking, too, whether she any longer wished her to remain at Raby. As children see in dreams pale faces that impress them, they can’t explain how, with a sense of malice and deceit, that startle them from a happy sleep in horror, so she saw stealing over that lovely face an unearthly light that chilled her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MISS MARLYN’S RUMINATIONS.

Miss AGNES was not more consistent than, I suppose, other young ladies are. I think she smiled expressly for Mrs. Shadwell’s behoof, and she soon began to fancy that she might as well have spared her the pain of that enigmatic gleam of satire.

Was it pride, or irritation, or malice? for, notwithstanding previous appearances, I don’t think she liked Mrs. Shadwell a bit. At all events, she thought its effect had been a little more than was quite desirable. It was of course pleasant to sting that heart with the slender arrow of a new sudden pain. The woman was in her way — she owed her a debt of malevolence for the hypocrisies and flatteries to which she had humbled herself. She amused her satire in her scanty correspondence with her one confidential friend and schoolfellow, clever Mademoiselle Du Chatelet, a wonderfully pretty brunette, with such exquisitely even little rows of teeth, and such a charming animation, at present established in London, not as yet in so solid or splendid a position as her many perfections would fairly claim. She presides, in fact, at the counter of Dignum’s cigar saloons, and presents each gentleman who enters that resort of betting men, billiard-players, chess-players, &c., Hebrew and Christian, with a cigar and an ivory counter in exchange for his shilling.

I wish you could have seen those wicked sketches of Raby people and pursuits which amused the young lady who fills that dignified position at the cigar saloons.

These descriptions, were even they quite sincere? Did brilliant Miss Agnes go herself all lengths with her own satire? Were all her caricatures sure of her own comic sympathy? and did her “dearest Aurelie” know anything whatever of her real plans and feelings?

I rather think *nothing.* She had little sympathy with those people among whom her lot was cast. Fools they were in her eyes, each according to their folly, and some of them she disliked, not because they were odious, but because they were inconvenient.

Miss Marlyn, as she left Mrs. Shadwell’s room and ascended the stairs, wore that serene Madonna-like air and expression which were so touching. But so soon as she got into the security of her own room it was plain enough that this young lady was very angry.

She had not an idea that her departure could be accepted as a settled thing, with so much coolness. It needed, she fancied, but a hint of such a step to plunge this family into consternation, and Mark Shadwell, with all his airs of formality and neglect, into secret dismay. Was vanity ever more mortified?

Miss Marlyn bolted her door, and sat down to commune for a little with her own heart, calling her head also into counsel. It was against Mrs. Shadwell and Rachel that her anger was chiefly kindled. In Mark’s hostility there was something to flatter her. Did it not spring from passion — passion not dead, only disguised and perverted? For had he not, with the inconsistency of an undecided character, in the midst of vehement protest and ostensible change, in Bunyan’s phrase, “lingered after” his evil yearnings and the ways of death, and kept her secret well.

She could contemplate Mark’s condition with complacency. But it was otherwise in the case of the women. Of her own sex she was profoundly suspicious. Cowardice is our weakness, thought she, and our strength is treachery, these Shadwells are two fools; but with the usual duplicity, with all her caresses, that woman has been jealous for nearly two months, and the sneak dared not betray it to her husband or move me from Raby; and now he has talked, of course, of sending me away, and she submits — angelic submission! — and without consulting him tells me I’m to go, and so, she fancies, pins him to that resolve, “and Miss Rachel, of course, she knew perfectly what her mamma was thinking of. I’m not angry, dear, only amused,” murmured Miss Marlyn, with a pale smile, in which was something both of malice and victory, as she gently rose and got her paper and envelopes.

But when she sat down, with her pen in her fingers, she found that she was not in the vein of letter-writing, and she drew a crowd of profiles instead all over the sheet of paper, all the time in a deep reverie, finishing the noses and other features with a touch so careful and delicate that one might have fancied she was etching for her bread and fame.

Looking carefully at one of these, which she held up before her eyes, she murmured, with a bitter smile, not seeing it, I think:

"Bauldie! what an idea! Roger Temple, I may come back to you, Bauldie, if everything goes wrong, in ten years' time. You'll be nothing the worse of the wait. You'll not have a tooth or a hair less, but you would not do to begin with; no, Bauldie, I must try my fortune before I spoil it. One brilliant chance already spoiled by a *coup* of ill fortune! Lady Wycherly, I should have been." She set her teeth resolutely, and tapped her little knuckles fiercely on the dressing-table. "He could not have helped it — nothing could have prevented. Well, we must only try again. He's quite gone — quite, quite, quite. I hate thinking of him. I'm always fancying that old face," — she peeped over her shoulder,— "I have many years, and the game has many turns."

Here she hummed a little air, and a moment after she laughed. "Poor little Monsieur La Roque! with your *nez retrousse* and dolorous old face, what a lover you were, with your *chassée* and your *pas de sylphide*, and your little fiddle, my first lover, at fifty-nine years! You had your brilliant hopes all dashed in a moment by an impertinence of fortune. To be in the very act of winning two hundred thousand francs — the ball stopped — the croupier, with rouge on the tip of his tongue, and La Roque a made man, when down falls the house! and La Roque, croupier, roulette-table, company, candles, all, all — buried under fourteen feet of bricks, boards, plaster, tiles, and rubbish! Poor little La Roque! how you used, to relate the tragedy and your own extrication, after eight-and-twenty hours passed, between a hearthstone and a dead Jew, and yours and his discovery, reposing together like the 'Babes in the Wood,' only strewn over with a pack of cards, instead of leaves! Well, down fell *my* house also, at the moment of fortune, and — killed it, buried that stake; but I shall play again. I don't give it up, like you! What a wicked, insane, ridiculous creature I am! Is there another such on earth?"

And the young lady, who thus described herself, made a courtesy before the glass, and laughed gaily in her own beautiful face.

This young lady came down in a little while, saint-like and sad. But Mrs. Shadwell was changed, cold, formal, quite a different Mrs. Shadwell, on whose pained and averted face the sad, appealing glances of Agnes Marlyn were wasted.

I think the young lady had misgivings as to the good sense of her little experiment of that day.

"Your mamma is angry?" said Miss Agnes to Rachel.

"I never saw her angry; I have seen her offended, though," said Rachel.

"Well, offended; I did not mean that she is in a passion."

Rachel made no reply. They were now in the hall, going out for their walk.

"Rachel!" said Miss Agnes, in the tone of a person goodhumouredly calling up a child from a nap.

"Well?"

"Come; why need we quarrel at present?"

"I don't understand you, Agnes; I don't want to quarrel; and I don't care to talk." And Rachel was silent again.

"Unsociable little woman! Because I have shown a momentary wickedness, for which I am sorry, you would put me in Coventry — your mamma would forgive me, but you can't," said Agnes.

"I don't think you had any business talking to mamma as you did, and looking at her, and smiling at her; I never felt so angry in my life," said Rachel, with spirit.

"You are not so angry with me as I am with myself; but I am unhappy, and misery is one of the many roads to wickedness, and so I have been odious; and then comes remorse — I am sorry. When you said I looked, and smiled, and talked, as I ought not, I might have said, as other girls would, 'what can you mean?' and looked innocently surprised, and all that; but I disdain that, and instead, I say, I am *sorry!"*

Rachel looked at her, but there was inquiry and distrust in her eyes. Confidence dies, like love, from slight causes, and is sometimes as hard to give back.

"I see you don't like me; you will never like me again."

Rachel was silent.

"No — never — but you may forgive, and bear with me while I stay; and when you have experienced half the sorrow I have, you may understand how grief makes us bitter, and bitterness makes us impatient of all good restraints. You cannot like me, I see you cannot even forgive me, perhaps; but at least you may pity and indulge me for the few days that I shall still ‘remain at Raby, and when I am gone, and your task ended, perhaps you will remember me less unkindly.”

“Which way shall we walk, Agnes?” said Rachel, on whom this appeal of Agnes Marlyn’s did not act quite as usual.

“You shall choose, Rachel; and you shall forgive me by-and-by,” said Agnes. “*Do* choose?”

“I don’t care, really;” and Rachel looked half-disposed to turn back, and put off her walk to tomorrow.

“Well, suppose we go towards Wynderfel?” V said Agnes.

“I shan’t go to Wynderfel again for a long time; I have a horror of that place. Wretched Carmel Sherlock was taken there, and wounded, and we met Sir Roke Wycherly there also. I hate it; I think it a ghastly place,” said Rachel.

“And it is too far away,” said Agnes, looking towards the dim summits of the distant trees that surround those old walls. The sun would have set by the time we had reached it; but suppose we just ramble a little among those trees close by; they are so noble, and the sun shines up among the grass between them so softly.”

Rachel and Agnes walked on together.

“What a pity it is you don’t know some thing of the world, my poor little Rachel,” said Miss Agnes, looking toward the setting sun. “I don’t mean the great world, or the bad world, but simply men and women — what our vicar calls human nature, and preaches about, although he doesn’t know anything about it either; it is bad living in a solitude like this — living among affectations — it is not simplicity, it is not even ignorance, for every recluse knows all the time what she herself is.”

“I am not conscious of being anything I don’t seem,” said Rachel.

“No, perhaps not; I dare say you know yourself very moderately; but you can take short, hard views of the few persons you meet; you can thank them as little as you please for what they do; the flatteries of a few dozen old servants who know they would not be tolerated in other houses; and the idolatry of your mamma — don’t be vexed — make you fancy yourself a paragon. Living in a desert, in the midst of prejudiced admiration, *always* has that effect, it would upon me, it has upon you — and you think it is only natural and right that all the world should admire, and love, and pet you; but, my dear, the meaning of the *world* is simply equality — the human republic; don't you see égalité, liberté, fraternité! and with what measure you mete, it will be measured to you again."

"I think I saw papa this moment," said Rachel, drily.

"Oh!" murmured Miss Agnes.

"Yes, walking down there, among the chestnut trees, where we are going; hadn't we better tom? he might not like to be disturbed."

"Oh, yes — turn — to be sure!" said Miss Marlyn, a little peevishly. "Are we not curious people here, with all our simplicity, afraid of meeting one another; so many little rules and crotchets, formalities and distances, unconscious contempts, and absurd egotisms. Pray cry, *à bas* the whole thing! and *vive* the other true forms of common sense which I have named!"

She turned, and they walked in another direction.

"Yes, of *course*, if Mr. Shadwell was there."

Was Miss Marlyn beginning to sneer again? Rachel glanced at her quickly.

"Well! I look at you again; do I look *very* wicked, or very mad? I don't feel it. Here is the translation of my little speech," said Miss Marlyn. "Your papa is my enemy, I am sorry to say, and being so, I should rather never see him more, that is all. Is it unnatural?"

"It is possible not to like another, and yet not be their enemy," said Rachel, gravely.

Miss Agnes looked at her for a moment, and then, on a sudden, her sense of the ridiculous seemed irresistibly moved, for she laughed, long and merrily, not a sarcastic laugh, quite the contrary, a perfectly goodhumoured, and even goodnatured one, and the more grave Miss Rachel looked, the more heartily she laughed.

Rachel struggled to maintain her gravity for a time, but the contagion eventually overpowered her, and she was constrained to join in her companion's laughter; and they laughed in rivalry till they almost cried.

"At last," said Agnes, recovering, but still breathless, laying her hand lightly upon Rachel's arm: "I've been lecturing you and you have been freezing me — so much satire, and so much dignity — and all thrown away, for we *can't* quarrel; no, Rachel, we can't, it is not in us. When we try it, laughter comes in, and the whole thing breaks down, and leaves us just as we were before, and — here we are."

And with these words her arms were about Rachel's neck, and she kissed her; and Rachel returned the caress, saying:

"I do believe, Pucelle, you are right, and it is no use trying to quarrel — but you have been very disagreeable."

"And odious; and you have been just as bad. And now, see, the sun is within half an inch of Feltram hill, and you know, as the vicar says, we must not let him go down on our wrath."

So she kissed her, and was kissed again, and very amicably the two girls returned from their walk.

VOLUME III.

CHAPTER I.

SUSPENDED CHANGE.

AFTER this little escapade Miss Agnes Marlyn seemed very penitent. Loving and pleasant with Rachel, and very contrite in presence of Mrs. Shadwell she was not content with this distant and imperfect expression of her regrets in presence of her offended "benefactress," as she used to call her, but made long lamentations in her walks with Rachel, reproached herself, and was so *désolé,* and so engaged her companion to undertake her cause that Mrs. Shadwell forgave, and tried to forget the little scene which had seemed to suggest a suspicion of that kind of impertinence which no woman can tolerate.

She had indeed lost the place she once had in Mrs. Shadwell's affection. But she seemed content with the portion of regard that remained to her, and grateful for it.

"I'm going away so soon, going so *very* soon, we must not have a clouded hour till that which is clouded by parting."

There seemed to have grown upon her, with her penitential and loving mood, an increased dislike of Mr. Shadwell, a systematic avoidance of him, which might result chiefly from wounded pride, but which might also have a more malignant antipathy for its basis. The distant apparition of this gloomy man, the wideawake-hat, the short weather-beaten velveteen coat and the gun, approaching among the trees startled her, as the sight of the distant ranger might the wary deer, or turned her course as it might the flight of a bird. Often, as she or Rachel walked together, Agnes would, on a sudden, change the direction of their route, and, perhaps, a minute later, Rachel would see the cause of this deviation in the distant figure of her father. In the house, too, the sound of his step would suffice to hush her music or her voice, and to arrest her step or withdraw it from the threshold of her door.

This avoidance, too, was not unobserved by the object of it, and, I think, it made him secretly angry. He was suffering now, and things that would once have amused, or at most piqued him, now filled him with fury.

A day or two had restored Agnes Marlyn very nearly to her former footing with Rachel. After all, there was nothing tangible to lay to her charge, and how could she keep up a quarrel upon a mere caprice of temper? In fact they were as good friends as ever; Agnes, when she pleased, could make herself very amusing and winning to her young companion, and now she did choose. So Rachel often insinuated a good word for Agnes in her occasional conversations with her mother. But Mrs. Shadwell made no answer on these occasions. She neither seemed pleased, nor the least disposed to discuss Miss Marlyn with her daughter, who wondered that her mamma, usually the most placable of mortals, could so resent a mere impertinence, already repented of with so much contrition.

By one of those instinctive processes, which are accomplished in a moment of time, Miss Marlyn had undergone a transformation in the eyes of Mrs. Shadwell. Not all the logic of the subtlest sophist, not all the oratory of angels, could restore her to her former shape.

Agnes talked plaintively to Rachel of her approaching departure.

"I have written this morning," she used to say, "to my only friend in London, Mademoiselle Du Chatelet, whom I knew two years ago at Madame de la Perriere's school — too good, much too good, for that place. She gave up her situation there, being shy and grave, and is now housekeeper in an institution in London." The reader will remember that the "Institution" was the famous "Dignum's Cigar Saloons," and that her "housekeeping" consisted in presenting cigars and counters, with the prettiest taper fingers and dimpling smiles, with the prettiest little lace *coiffure,* and a perfectly Parisian get-up, across a table at the foot of the great stairs there, to the gentlemen who, from ten o'clock P.M., began to pass up that splendidly illuminated ascent. "I have entreated her to look out for me some little convenient nook, where I may very quietly hide my foolish head, until some situation, quiet, and perhaps more humble than my present one, turns up."

I don't believe, however, that her friend, Mademoiselle Du Chatelet, was conscious of any such intimation or request contained in any one of the letters with which her old friend, from time to time, enlightened and amused her.

Agnes Marlyn had herself, in a low musical minor, alluded hastily once or twice, in Mrs. Shadwell's presence, to her approaching departure. But Mrs. Shadwell evinced no intention whatever of interrupting her preparations, or of discussing the subject with her.

Miss Marlyn's heart swelled, but not with any tender regrets, under this insensibility.

As in the solitude of her room she undressed that night, she smiled:

"The stupid little woman! with her airs and *hauteurs*. How I laugh at her! Is there, madame, never more than one way of reaching a point? It may not be so easy a matter to put me out of Raby. There are none of you here so holy that you frighten me. This kind goeth not forth so easily."

"Why does not that woman go about her business?" demanded Mark of his wife, rather savagely, next day.

"She says she's going immediately," answered she. "I have said nothing to delay her departure — I can't hasten it, you know, Mark, for even if I were to try to do so, I could not. She has a right to remain here nearly a fortnight longer."

"The devil she has!"

"I wrote down the date on which I gave her notice, as you wished."

"I hate that charming young woman," said Mark.

"Hate her?"

"Well, that's too strong — but I don't like her."

"I did not know that, Mark, you only said you thought her useless."

"I dare say. If she were useful, of course, — but then, she is not, so without fear of removing a valuable person, I may say that I dislike her."

"But why dislike her, Mark?" asked his wife, who had grown curious in some things, of late.

"Because I think she laughs at us; I don't care a farthing, of course. Do you like her?"

"I think she is a little odd — but I think Rachel likes her very much."

"You don't," said he.

"Why should I not?"

"Oh! come, you know you don't; and why do you look at me as if I had two heads, when I say I feel as you do?"

"I — I really did not intend, Mark— "

"Ho! but you did it," said Mark, with a short laugh of scorn, who did not choose to be looked at either in that way or in curiosity. "You looked as if you intended to see through me, and read my soul."

Amy's usually pale face actually flushed a little.

"I had no such idea, I assure you, Mark."

"Yes, you had, I don't know what for, though, and I can't say I much care."

He walked over to the window, and stood there for a while looking out, and suddenly turned about, saying:

"I think you have all got a way of peering at me — I don't know what you want, it is the most offensive thing on earth. If there's anything you want to know, you've got the use of your tongues, I suppose. Why the devil can't you put your questions? I wish I could assure you, Amy," he added, with a change of tone, perceiving how frightened his poor little wife looked, "that there is nothing, neither ill luck nor good, concealed from you. I hide nothing, absolutely, and you can't imagine, when one is harassed by never-ending real vexations, a» I am, about which, heaven knows! I have never made a secret; how it pesters one to be watched and wondered at as if I were a witch, or the man in the 'Iron Mask!' I hate Agnes Marlyn, if you want to know, simply because I think she laughs at us."

"Laughs at us, Mark?"

"Yes, at our poverty and shabbiness, and all our miserable ways; this great gaunt wilderness of a house, with a handful of poor people living in a corner of it; and this desolate place, a dozen miles round, the picturesque and solemn principality of starvation. I quite understand her; you don't. Do you fancy I believe one word of her talk about rural repose, and sylvan seclusion, and all that stuff? A French girl! For *that* she is, in all her thoughts, and ways, and tastes. The idea is too absurd! It was quite evident to me from the first, that she alighted here, like a foreign bird, to fly elsewhere. Settle down at Raby, indeed! But it doesn't matter. In fact, I'm poorer than ever, and she can't remain here."

"I've been thinking, Mark, it is very bad for you living so entirely shut up as you do,"- said his poor little wife, prescribing, as good wives do.

"I'm going down to Raby to-day; there's a market there; rather a dissipation, isn't it? and I want to see three of my Feltram tenants — mine, I call them; I don't know why, I'm sure; very little of their rent comes to my share. I'm utterly sick of the whole thing. I must have rest; and so soon as I can get a clever fellow to help me, I'll ascertain exactly how I stand, make the best terms I can, and renounce Raby, Wynderfel, and all the rest, for ever; and whoever gets them I hope they may burn their fingers, and break their hearts, like me."

The handsome figure and face of the Squire of Raby, when he showed in public, never failed in his own county to excite a curious, and for the most part a respectful wonder; and many eyes and whispered comments followed that haughty and solitary man, as he walked slowly through the main street of Raby. Silently people made way for him, and many country farmers who owned no territorial relations with him, knowing vaguely what great people the Shadwells had been, the oldest blood in that region, touched their hats as he passed, and eyed him with interest.

Having talked with his farmers, he was now strolling homeward from the village, when he was overtaken by Doctor Stalton, trotting leisurely on his tour of professional visits. The doctor checked his pace to a walk on recognising Mark Shadwell. He was one of the few residents in that wide region whom the Squire could talk to.

"Well, doctor! we don't often meet on the roads here; I don't trouble them much," said Mark, with a gloomy smile.

"I'm very glad to see you about, however; it's a great pity we don't see more of you: I hope you'll excuse me! It is, indeed, Mr. Shadwell."

"They don't seem to like me particularly, when they do," said Shadwell, with an unpleasant laugh.

"Well, now, you know, Mr. Shadwell, you must be reasonable," answered the physician, with a smile, and a reproachful shake of the head.

"Reasonable! I should like to know when I was anything else," he replied, with a sour look at his outspoken companion.

"Well, it isn't reasonable, I think, for you to expect them, don't 'you see, to be neighbourly with you, while you hold aloof from them. You won't forget old scores and let old wounds heal. You avoid them, and refuse to take your place among them as a country gentleman, and — you mustn't be vexed with me — you shirk even your duty as a magistrate, and take a pleasure in letting them feel that you don't avoid them from indolence or shyness, but distinct from personal hostility; and then you wonder why they don't like you, and that, I say, is not reasonable."

"But I don't wonder. I don't expect them to like me; and, which is just as much to the purpose, it was they, not I, who chose those relations, and insulted me with a thousand petty, vulgar insults, just because they knew Raby owed money; left out of everything, never once in my right place. Why, there isn't a family in this county but ours, and just two or three others — you could count them, by heaven! on the fingers of one hand — that is not perfectly new. It is the most upstart county in England; I'm talking of the fellows who hold up their heads, now-a-days, as county families. Take old Mervyn, for instance, what is he? Every one knows what the Mervyns were; Welsh gardeners at Raby; and a very good thing they must have made of our gardens, by Jove! I have the old lease of The Oaks, in George the Second's time, and he is called Thomas Merven — *v-e-n,* not v-y-n: that was a refinement," he sneered, "Thomas Merven, Gardener to Sir Soame Shadwell, of Raby, Knight; and old Mervyn pays me to this hour thirty pounds a year under that very lease: didn't you know that?" And Shadwell laughed viciously.

And there are the Jessons, and the Drakes — *that's* even more recent: city tradesmen — nothing the worse for that, of course, if they did not affect to lead the county. And you think I'm to bear affronts from people like that, and trot about the country from one court-house to another, to admire their liveries, and try to propitiate them. Upon my soul,' sir, I'll do no such thing! I think they were ten times as deserving of respect when they were in their proper places, looking after grapes and asparagus beds, or standing behind their counters weighing figs — d — them!"

"Well, of course, an old family has an advantage," begun the doctor.

"Very little; it's just something — not much: I'm not going upon that. All I say is, that people who get up among us, like mushrooms, ought not to affect airs of superiority, or to be surprised, if they insist on their money, at our remembering their origin. When did you visit Applebury jail last — no fever there?"

"No; very healthy just now. My last call was the day before yesterday."

"And did you see Sherlock?"

"No; he's not ailing."

"I shouldn't wonder if it burst out, all at once, in downright, furious madness. See what a time it has been smouldering, and no one suspected danger in it, till a life was lost. Have you formed any opinion respecting Sherlock's case — professional opinion, of course, I mean?"

"Well, I can't say I have; one has lots of things to consider. I need not tell you, that a fellow may be very eccentric indeed, and yet be perfectly free from madness."

"Is it one of the subjects you are well up upon — I mean, have you studied it particularly?"

"I can't say I have; I know it generally though, of course. If it turned out that there was madness in Sherlock's family, I should have very little doubt; but it is possible that his motive may have had nothing illusory about it and I doubt if there's a case strong enough to relieve him of the consequences of his act."

"Would there be anything odd, do you think, in my going over to the prison to see him?" asked Shadwell, walking beside the doctor's horse, and looking down on the road, in his rumination.

"Odd? I don't see how there could, if their rules allow it," said the doctor.

"No, of course — if their rules allow it — as you say."

"But," said the doctor, with a shrewd smile, "I don't say, mind, that were *I* concerned, I should like to see him."

"I don't understand," said Shadwell.

"I mean, you know, upon the subject of the Raby tragedy, as the newspapers call it," said the doctor, with a maladroit jocularity, under which the Squire of Raby secretly winced.

"I didn't know that the papers called it so," said Shadwell, a little drily.

"Because," said the doctor, not minding, "he might — such a queer fellow, you know! — let out something that might make a very hanging witness of you, don't you see? and I'd rather give him his chance, than have a hand in the fluke that hanged him. Eh?"

"Oh! as to that, I should not allow him to open his lips on the subject. Of course it was just that, having lived so long and served so faithfully, people might think it unfeeling, especially knowing that the crime was committed probably under the direct influence of disease, that I should never have looked in upon him during his imprisonment. I don't see that it can do him the least good, and I should much rather escape the pain of seeing him; but I may as well tell you plainly, that I should not like to be thought insensible or -cruel in the case of this poor devil. It is simply a question — not of feeling, but opinion, what will people think?"

"Well, there are things for and against, you know," said the doctor, drawing his bridle and coming to a halt, for they had reached the gate of Raby. "People talk over everything, you know and as the doctor sat turned in his saddle, with his hand on his knee, he whistled low a thoughtful bar of a tune which ended in silence, and lowering his eyes from the yellow leaves of the trees at the roadside, he said: —

"There are situations in which it is not easy to say what's right and what's wrong, or how people will take anything we do; and I think for the present I would let Carmel Sherlock quite alone, and not go near him."

And so he took his leave, and trotted briskly away. Mark nodded and smiled his adieux, and then walked slowly up to the house, ruminating moodily.

CHAPTER II.

PURSUER AND FUGITIVE.

As he approached his house the low evening sun shone up from the western horizon, and flooded the air with splendour. From glittering ivy, from thickets, from the discoloured foliage of lofty boughs, the birds sang out their vesper lays and glorified the coming hour of rest and the Great Creator who cares for all His creatures. All nature far and wide glowed and saddened in this melancholy smile. The crows, high in air, glided in wide procession, with busy cawings, faint and airy, towards the distant woods of Wynderfel. The peculiar pleasant chill of autumn evenings sharpened the air, and the faint white mists came up over distant plain and hill.

A man with a sense of the beautiful is thrilled by such scenes and hours, but in certain states of mind it is with the pain of a discord. Shadwell stopped, and saw and heard the spectacle and sounds around him. The rapture of silent worship and profound enjoyment, which other men experience in such contemplation, in him was displaced by a dreadful impatience, a fatigue amounting almost to despair, and he groaned.

The old question was floating and tumbling in his mind to and fro, like a dead body rolled hither and thither in the sea. What was the purpose of all this? What was the meaning of this parade of joy, so insincere — of glory in the midst of pain and death? To what purpose, for himself or others, had *he* been brought into the world? or how could the Creator scandalize his benevolence by the production of such a complication of misery as Mark Shadwell and his surroundings?

Mark was one of those men who do not stick at a contradiction. Whatever good came to him, he thanked himself for; whatever evil befel him, he laid at the door of heaven.

As he leaned with folded arms wearily against a tree, an object met the eye of that volatile man which suddenly changed the tenor of his thoughts. He saw Miss Marlyn alone, for a slight cold kept Rachel at home that day, approaching by the path which led close by the very tree at which he stood, towards the house.

A sudden wish to meet her stirred within him.

The old dangerous interest was, for a moment, rekindled and mingling strangely with his resentment. In such situations and alone men are determined by impulse. There is no time for debate. Had she come up to the spot where he stood, he would at that moment have accosted and joined her, most likely, in her homeward walk.

But this one flagrant inconsistency — and blessed are those sages whose lives are not full of inconsistencies — was prevented by Miss Marlyn's suddenly diverging from the path, at right angles, and passing quickly out of sight.

"Ha! she saw me," thought Mark, "and she fancies I don't know that she saw me; or, perhaps, she wishes me to see that she avoids me. A heartless young devil she is. She's right to avoid me, though: she's wise. The guilty don't care to confront the judge. She does honestly wish to avoid me, and she sha'n't. She is walking now by the stile-path, and will reach the hall-door, she fancies, uninterrupted; but she is wrong. I will meet her at the two trees."

For the first time, for many days, with a petty object that really interested him for the moment, Mark Shadwell, with a faint smile of scorn, marched swiftly at the near side of the sylvan screen, bent upon intercepting the enemy.

When he came within sight of the two slender birch-trees that stoop together as if they had something to whisper, he slackened his pace to that dilatory and gloomy saunter in which he was wont to prosecute those objectless rambles which served to consume the time which he hated.

He was now again upon her line of march, and very soon she emerged, and the same graceful though muffled figure was again approaching him.

Once more, however, and earlier than before, he was detected. Nothing could be more natural than Miss Marlyn's divergence, more easy, more unconscious, and yet he knew perfectly that this *détour*, like the last, was made with the express purpose of avoiding him.

Is there such a thing as spontaneous drunkenness-? This little occurrence suddenly sobered Mark. What had he been doing? He felt ashamed of himself; and the suspicion that Agnes Marlyn saw his pursuit, and deliberately mortified him with the humiliation of avoidance, made him angry, with that sort of anger, which, being mixed with self-disgust, is one of the most galling passions to which we are subject.

There are some men — not perhaps more conceited than others, but more proud and sensitive — whom it is not safe to pique, who grow haughty, repellant, and contemptuous under the arts which excite and allure other men. Mark Shadwell's self-love was wounded. He fancied that she would think him her captive, and secretly glory in his baffled pursuit. He was angry, too, with himself: for had he not found out that his indifference was not so absolute as he had begun to believe?

Later that evening he accidentally met and passed Miss Marlyn at the foot of the great staircase. He had presence of mind to regulate his looks and demeanour to that precise tone which would indicate a genuine and hopeless indifference. A very slight recognition, with just the shadow of a bow, a faint cold smile, and that slight air of abstraction which indicates thoughts remote.

Miss Marlyn was grave, reverential, penitent, he thought; and with downcast eyes she slipped by the transit was quite mute. Mark thought he had decidedly the best of it. Could by-play be better than his, and *was* Miss Marlyn's really indifferent? — or, considering how clever an actress she must be to have practised so successfully so dangerous and protracted a deception, was it even *intended* to express indifference? Some wild thoughts were beginning again to haunt him. But was he not a philosopher? Did he not believe in enlightened reason, and the omnipotence of will? What had he to fear?

As that night Mark Shadwell sat alone in his library, smoking slowly cigar after cigar, with one foot upon his fender, and his elbow on his knee, he took this spectre to task, and analysed himself, finding, if some clay, which he passed over lightly, also much good iron, and store of refined gold in the image which he worshipped; and he reasoned also with the phantom which troubled him, and finally resolved to invite it no more, but to banish it with an irrevocable exorcism and never more be under the spell of its cruel eye.

And then suddenly came the image of Carmel Sherlock on his lonely pallet in his cell, with his bandaged arm, and crazy thoughts, talking with himself, forlorn, moaning the praises of his "benefactor," and pining under a curse.

Then suddenly peeped a face, yellow, sharp with its hateful smirk, and immortal fixedness; and at that look he was again where he had been, sitting alone in outer darkness with his thoughts.

Mark Shadwell thought he heard a light step cross the hall toward his door. He held his breath and listened, looking over his shoulder, half expecting to see some one enter. But nothing of the kind happened.

He looked at his watch: it had grown late. The hour of rest had arrived for all but himself and there was no eccentric, desultory spirit now in his house, such as poor Carmel Sherlock had been.

Mark was not now so nervous a man as he had been when last I described him in this same room on the eve of the inquest. He listened until he had satisfied himself that nostep was in motion in the hall, and then he resumed his cigar and his ruminations. Mark preferred sitting up: he would have preferred going out, and passing the hours in a solitary march about the place to going to his bed, where his thoughts and imaginings were always the most troubled. In the night-time, in the attitude of seeking sleep, if sleep will not come, the afflicted man lies at the mercy of his thoughts, which hover over him, as vultures over the dead, and perch, and probe, and ransack where they will.

To smoke, and sip from time to time brandy and water, and resolve that he had done with Raby, that he had known too much of solitude, and drunk deep and long enough of its horrors, and must change all; go to some colony, and rough it there — but mix with men, it might be as moody and short-tempered as himself — still human beings, who would talk to him, exercise his thoughts, and — all the better — his temper, and prevent his growing morbid and atrabilarious, as any man shut up in Raby must do.

And so he would turn over a new leaf, or begin a new book in his history, and bury the volume of his Raby existence, its isolation, visions, and horrors, certain fathoms in the earth.

If he could once shake himself free of this accursed old sprawling properly, with its inextricable complications and awful debt in which he was immeshed, and under which he groaned and stumbled hopelessly, and set his foot on Canadian or Australian earth with a purse in his hand, and that hand free, there would be a career before him at last. Centuries ago his ancestor had left his Norman land and dwelling, and come here to Wynderfel. Centuries before that, again, *his* ancestor had left his old northern home and found a new one in France. There were periods of decay and renovation. The serpent must change his skin, a great collapse, a great resuscitation, and then a long new brilliant life for the Shadwells of another hemisphere. So, full of his resolution, with perhaps a real flash of the old sea-king spirit — enfeebled by circumstance and by habit — he stood up with his back to the fire, chucked the end of his cigar into the grate, and frowned defiance in the front of imaginary obstacles.

In this silence, with the distinctness that belongs to small sounds at night, he heard the same light step cross the oak floor of the hall quickly, and stop at his door.

He did not move; he listened and watched the door frowning. Not the slightest sound or motion followed. Who on earth could it be? Conjecture failed him. Who could be up and about now? It was not the tread of Old Mother Wyndle; nor of his invalid wife. It was a quick, light, young step. The sharp faint click of the shoe was still in his ear. Agnes Marlyn was out of the question. Rachel not possible either. D — n it, whoever it was, why could not they open the door? He could not get it out of his head that his stealthy visitor was Carmel Sherlock. He had a strange idea of Sherlock's ingenuity and resource. He had managed his escape and concealment without accomplice or assistant, with a success, the completeness of which savoured of natural magic. Pursuit was defeated; the police baffled. He never would have been taken, Mark was certain, had he not chosen to give himself up, and then he had himself selected the place and agents of his capture. "That fellow could make his way out of the jail, and into this house if he liked, and no one suspect him. He'd venture it for a fancy. He'd come back for his fiddle." In Mark's mind this crazy creature, whom he generally despised, yet in a vague way considered a wizard, excited his admiration and his fear, and' the associations connected with him were horrible.

A sharp, light knock sounded on the study door. Mark felt oddly, chilled with the sense of a coming crisis. His instinct whispered truly. A crisis was at hand. Its angel stood at the other side of the door.

"Come in," said Mark, gazing with the frown of suspense at the door.

And in obedience to his invitation, the handle was turned, and the door gently opened.

CHAPTER III.

A SHRIFT.

"GOOD God! is it you?" said Mark, in a wild whisper, quite forgetting his indifference and disdain, after an interval of utter silence.

He was amazed, as well he might, to see Miss Agnes Marlyn before him. Never did painted martyr, on oriel window, with arms crossed over girlish bosom, and head inclined, in the melancholy glory of her beauty and her fate, look lovelier or sadder than this vision.

There was no palm nor glory, indeed. This beauty was in truth more voluptuous than saintly. But Rafael could not have painted a sadder face.

It is said that the thoughts of the bravest man, suddenly wounded by gunshot, are seldom very clear. Perhaps that sort of shock and hurry most nearly resembled Mark Shadwell's.

"I couldn't think who it was," said Mark, after another pause.

"No, sir, of course, I have been quite out of your thoughts, you have had so much to think of, and you may have supposed that I had already left Raby," said Miss Marlyn, in tones of low sweet melancholy, which well accorded with the sadness of her looks; and as she spoke her eyes rested on the floor, and her delicate fingers still touched the handle of the door, as if she were uncertain whether her timid intrusion, hardly beyond the threshold, would be permitted, and ready, as it seemed, at a look, to vanish and come no more.

"Left Raby? No, I didn't fancy *that.* You don't go till the 30th, unless you prefer it. My wife tells me, however, that you wish to go on the 19th," said Mark Shadwell.

, "Very good of Mrs. Shadwell; so good! yes, I told her so."

"Oh, yes!" said Mark, recovering his ordinary tone rapidly. "I know pretty well what is going on in my house; and this I must say» Miss Marlyn," he resumed, after a few seconds, "that you are about the last person, I should have fancied, who could, have desired an interview with me."

As he said, this, Mark suddenly remembered, his little game of hide-and-seek that evening, and he bethought him, with a qualm of shame, what secret ridicule the dignity of his air was possibly provoking at this moment, ‘ and he subsided suddenly.

One momentary glance, however, from the corner of his eye told him that there was no gleam, not the faintest, of any such feeling in her sad features.

“Putting other things aside, Miss Marlyn, doesn’t it strike you as a very odd time at which to seek an interview with me?” he said, a little sarcastically.

“In some respects very odd, as you say, Mr. Shadwell,” she replied. “In others, in that one of probable freedom from interruption, the best possible time. The world — and stupid people who have but one rule and measure for all our acts, who take no account of character and never discriminate motive — would, of course, censure me, and charge me with an audacity which my nature utterly abhors. I see that smile, sir, but I don’t fear it; before I leave this room, Mr. Shadwell, I will show you that if I come here at an odd hour, to secure an uninterrupted, interview, I do so from the purest sense of duty. I owe it, I will not say to you only, but to your family. There is something which I must divulge, and I accept the risk, and, if you will, the sacrifice.”

Mark Shadwell stared hard at Miss Marlyn, but her eyes were lowered as before.

“I can’t form the faintest conjecture as to what you mean, Miss Marlyn. I don’t pretend to read riddles; but I venture to say that were any accident to bring a third person to the room, don’t you see how unaccountable it would appear?”

“I’m not afraid, if you are not, sir. With me it weighs as nothing in comparison.”

Did she sneer? There was nothing but gentleness and sadness in her tone. He glanced again at her. No, it was not mockery — it was almost pathetic. It was a scene of audacious humility.

“Well, Miss Marlyn, do, pray, say what you mean!”

“Ah! Mr. Shadwell, have you not sent me a cruel message?” said she.

“I *have* sent you a message — that is, I have requested my wife to say that you must go,” said he, grimly enough.

“Yes, a cruel message! And I ask why?”

"Why! Miss Marlyn. Do you seriously ask me why?" he answered, with fierce contempt.

"Ah! Mr. Shadwell, you are one of those who judge and punish your friends unheard," she murmured.

"Now you must excuse me, Miss Marlyn, but this is really too cool," said Shadwell, with a bitter scoff.

"Well, I will put two cases. Suppose I have been as foolish and wrong as you choose to think, — are people who do wrong never forgiven?"

"Go on," said Shadwell, smiling angrily. "And suppose the alternative — oh! you must suppose it! — that, placing your own perverted construction upon letters which you took from my desk and read, you have understood neither the feelings, nor the purposes, nor the situation of the person whom yon stigmatize. Nothing — nothing — nothing!"

"Upon my honour, Miss Marlyn, all things considered, I am tempted to think you have come here to indulge an odd vein of pleasantry," said Mark Shadwell, growing more severe.

"Pleasantry, sir? you *know,* while you say it, that I speak in agony!" murmured Agnes Marlyn. "Were your worst conjecture true, and I the wretch you suppose, still, in -this murder, have I not sustained the loss of all a wicked woman's ambition? Pleasantry, indeed! you don't think it: you can't think it: you don't believe in that any more than you do in the rest. The whole thing is a monstrous affectation!"

"Pray, what have I charged you with?" said Shadwell, turning sharply on her.

There was a silence. He laughed and went on:

"Come, come, Miss Marlyn! you are not the first clever young lady I have met. I know something of the world, though I do live at Raby. No, no — it won't do."

And he laughed again.

She frowned a little suddenly, and said:

"I can prove my innocence; I can prove more."

Shadwell shrugged, and, with a sneer, repeated the hacknied distich:

"He that's convinced against his will, Is of the same opinion still."

"Then it's vain pleading with you?" she said, imploringly.

"Quite," answered he, drily.

“You don’t, and you won’t believe one word I say?” she repeated, in agonized tones.

“Just so; I don’t and I won’t believe one word you say,” he repeated, with insulting slowness, “and pray let that suffice.”

He turned to the chimneypiece, to choose a cigar among those he had laid there: a signal to Miss Marlyn that he would be left to himself.

She raised her head and her eyes, and for a moment there gleamed on him a baleful light; her hand was raised from the door-handle; she was on the point of speaking, but refrained. The pale lips were silent; the gleam and the frown died away. Her eyes were lowered again, and her fingers once more hesitatingly touched the brass handle of the door.

“I’m going to light this cigar, Miss Marlyn, but not till you have quite done and gone away. I don’t mean to hurry you, if you have got anything more to say.”

He paused, with the cigar in his fingers.

“I must make, then, before I go,” she said, in a tone of melancholy, and with a deep sigh, “one confidence — one last confidence; and, even here it must be *whispered.* Judge me by it.”

As she spoke the colour receded from her face, and her tones became so strange, that Shadwell returned her gaze with something of excitement, while, quitting her place by the door, with quick, light steps, she crossed suddenly to the hearth, and stood nearly before him, looking in his face.

Shadwell returned her gaze with an involuntary frown, but lowered his eyes.

She drew nearer — a little nearer still, laid her hand upon his shoulder, and whispered for a few moments in his ear.

With a sound like a short laugh, he raised his face suddenly. But there was no smile there. It was distorted, and like a face of grey stone looking at her from the shadow. For a few seconds his hand was stretched towards her, and without a word, Mark Shadwell staggered backward, and would have fallen upon the floor, but that, luckily for him, the chair in which he had been sitting received him.

When he saw again, Miss Marlyn was still there. She was standing near, and looked pale and frightened. He got up with a shudder, and stood looking at her, unable for a time to get together the antecedents of this odd situation.

He did soon recover them, and sat down in silence, like a broken-hearted man.

The colour had now returned to her cheeks with a more brilliant glow, and she stood before him, with downcast eyes, like a beautiful penitent who has just made a shrift of shame.

Mark Shadwell drew a long breath, and groaned.

“Why should it trouble you so? I have made my confession, and now you understand me: you will suspect your secretary no more. Poor Agnes Marlyn has told her sorrowful secret to none but one living creature. Now you know me — my courage, my constancy. Deal how you may — severely or compassionately — with me, you now at least know me, and will think of me, more lowly perhaps, but more highly too. I am reckless, but also true.”

And, with one sad, fiery look of reproach, she left him.

As the door closed, Mark followed, and stood irresolutely, with the handle in his fingers. Perhaps he was on the point of recalling her. He hesitated for a moment, and then slowly turned away.

His ideas of the situation — his ideas of Miss Marlyn’s character — had undergone a change.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS BARBARA VISITS RABY.

NEXT day no one could have told from the air or looks of these two persons that anything unusual had occurred. Neither was there any outward sign of renewed confidence or amity between them.

The only event which happened was the arrival of Miss Barbara Temple, driven over in a curious little ancient gig, by Charles Mordant, from the Vicarage, to pay a visit to Mrs. Shadwell, and to persuade her to pass a few days with them, by way of interrupting a monotony which recent events had rendered unusually gloomy.

The indolence, or that which seems so, that accompanies ill-health, and habitual depression of spirits, however, prevented her accepting the invitation. The world — her little world — did not perceive it, but the apathy was that of a chronic despair — the sense of an insurmountable unfitness.

"I'm so sorry I can't persuade you; a few days' change of scene and air would do wonders for you. I don't know, my dear, how you have lived through the last terrible month," said Miss Barbara. "We have been, I assure you, all wonder, and pity, and I may say, admiration."

"Oh, my dear Barbara!" answered Mrs. Shadwell, "I wish I could take credit for the courage you impute to me. I'm afraid I have been, on the contrary, a great coward."

"Quite the reverse — a heroine, Amy; but you must not over-do it. As I often say to dear Stour, exertion must be recruited by repose, and the nerves must not be kept always on the stretch. It is not in nature to bear it, and — I hope you won't think it rude — for this, you know, is a magnificent place and park — quite a regal thing — and the house is so grand; but, just for that reason — now you won't be offended — it is, I always thought, a little gloomy; and, just now, after all that has so recently happened, you must find it quite awful staying here; at least, my dear, it is quite out of the question, your spirits getting up. Well, now, won't you think of it? *Do* come."

But no; it was vain pressing the point.

"Well, now, I don't know what I am to do or say; I shall appear so selfish, I'm afraid. But, I was so sure of you, that when I met Miss Marlyn in the hall — what a charming young person she is! — I ventured to invite her, intending that you, Rachel, and she should come all together, and stay a day, or a week, or a month, as you found it pleasant; and she seemed so pleased, and said so prettily, if you would permit her; and then — what shall I say about Rachel? I haven't seen her yet; but I should feel such a brute, asking them both to come away, just when you can least spare them."

"My dear Barbara, I should be so delighted; - just for a day or two. Young people require a little change, and, of course, this place is very dull for poor little Rachel; and, as you say, particularly now. I should not miss her for that time, and I know it would do her so much good."

"Well, a thousand thanks! I know I am detestably selfish, but I can't help it, and I am so much obliged. Can you let them come tomorrow? I should have asked leave to take them away with me to-day, but our dear Bonnie — Roger, you know — who is the life and soul of our little party, does not return till tomorrow, and you have no idea how *he* would feel it," she added, archly.

"Well, dear, arrange it exactly as you like; only you'll allow them to return in a day or two, for, I confess, I shall miss Rachel, though I am delighted that she should go to you. It will make her so happy, poor little thing, and do her so much good."

And, this point settled, the two ladies entered into a very interesting conversation about Sir Roke Wycherly and the miserable Carmel Sherlock, with their heads very near together, as they sat by the fire in Mrs. Shadwell's room upstairs.

In the meantime Charles Mordant was very happy, for in the hall he had met Rachel. I cannot say what they talked about, but I am sure it was as interesting as the conversation between the two elder ladies upstairs, for they talked rather low, — and a great deal pleasanter, for they laughed now and then.

The cob stood under the gig, in view, before the steps, without evincing impatience, which was fortunate, as there was no one to stop him if he had chosen to run away, and I doubt whether Mr. Mordant would have perceived the occurrence, if he had done so. Rachel, who had just returned from a solitary little ramble, had on her coat and such a very becoming little hat! She was to have come in to practise an overture with Agnes Marlyn, who by this time was waiting for her; but neither of the young people in the hall appeared to remember their business, until, on a sudden, Miss Marlyn entered the hall from a side-door.

As she exchanged greetings with Mordant, Miss Marlyn looked oddly and steadily at him for a moment.

"I saw Miss Temple as she went upstairs," she said, "and she was so kind as to ask me to the Vicarage. She intends having us all together — your mamma, and you, and me too. It is so very kind," said Miss Marlyn.

"Oh, yes," said Rachel. "I am certain it would do her ever so much good. I do hope she'll come."

"Oh, she must," said Charles. "She could not think of disappointing all her friends at the Vicarage so miserably."

Just at this period Miss Barbara came down the stairs, and spoke to Rachel, and told her what was settled, and that they were to come next day: and this little leavetaking over, she and Mordant got into their queer little vehicle, and drove away.

Miss Barbara Temple's head was still full of the awful details which she had just been discussing with Mrs. Shadwell, and, as often happens in this sort of preoccupation, there was a certain gloom and constraint in her manner, as she nodded again to Miss Marlyn, which impressed the young lady very unpleasantly.

Full of the anticipated visit the young ladies lay down that night to sleep. Very differently framed, however, were these anticipations. Miss Agnes Marlyn expected neither amusement nor pleasure, but she did expect in the little drama which she had nearly resolved on producing, to make my friend Roger Temple fill a *role* which might turn out to be a rather important one.

That evening, after dusk, Miss Marlyn knocked at the study door, and being told to enter, found Mark Shadwell there, as usual, moping in solitude.

Mark darted a glance, in which was a good deal of suspicion and alarm, at the young lady.

"I have called, sir," she said, very timidly, "to know whether I can be of any use in copying and writing letters, that is if, during the remainder of my stay at Raby, you will permit me still the duties of my old office of secretary?"

"It is very good of you, Miss Marlyn," said he, breaking into a doubtful smile. "I'll think of it; that is, if you really wish it."

"You don't doubt my sincerity, Mr. Shadwell?"

"You are an enthusiast," he almost whispered, but with a pained and averted look. "I say I'll think of it, but at present there is nothing."

He extended his hand; she advanced with a beautiful but strange confusion, and timidly placed her fingers in it. He held them for some moments, looking at her half-averted features, as if he was on the point of speaking. But he did not. He opened his hand, and hers was liberated, and she instantly left the room.

About the same time at the Vicarage, leaning back in his chair, with the slight pallor and listlessness in his face that betokens fatigue, the Rev. Stour Temple, his feet on the fender, was sipping that second glass of sherry which was the measure of his after-dinner wine.

Miss Barbara had come in to chat with him, as she always did when he came in late and tired to his dinner.

"I paid poor Amy a little visit to-day," she said.

"And found her pretty well, I hope?" he asked.

"Not very well; and she could talk of almost nothing but that dreadful business, you know. You must take another glass of sherry, Stour, darling; you look so tired — you sha'n't refuse."

"Hadn't I better take this first?" he said with a smile. "Impetuous darling — my ministering spirit," he said, patting the back of her thin hand with a very caressing gentleness.

"You don't take care of yourself, Stour, and you know if you overwork yourself, and won't take nourishment, you must simply be worn out."

"Well, darling, we'll see when I have done this; and tell me, has anything more been heard of the wretched man who is in prison — Carmel Sherlock?"

"Nothing; and you remember our little plan, two months ago, before all these horrors were dreamed of?"

"What was it?" asked Stour.

"To ask Mrs. Shadwell, and Rachel, and Miss Marlyn here for a week," said she.

"Oh!" said the vicar; "and have you?"

"Yes," she said, and paused, a little surprised at his manner, and at the grave look which he was directing, over his knees, into the fire.

"And have they refused?"

"Amy can't come, but Rachel and Agnes Marlyn are coming tomorrow."

She saw as she said this, in the vicar's dark face, the slight contraction which marks a sudden annoyance. Still looking into the grate, the vicar swallowed the wine that remained in his glass, and held it out towards his sister, who, glad to be relieved of debate upon this point by his momentary abstraction, replenished it instantly, and that with so honest a bumper that her brother, still ruminating deeply, was obliged to sip a little cautiously before setting it down.

"You are sure they said they were coming, Barbara?"

"Oh, yes; quite certain! Amy said they should; but what is the difficulty, dear?"

"It is very unpleasant; but I could not possibly have Miss Marlyn here," said he.

"Why, my dear Stour, you surprise me!" said Miss Babie, with eyes wide open, and ears also, for she was not deficient in curiosity.

"No, indeed, Barbara, she must not come," he said, very gently, but in that firm tone which experience had taught her there was no gainsaying.

"Not come here, Miss Marlyn, my dear Stour? Why, she has been here fifty times."

"I know all that, dear Babie."

He got up uneasily, and stood with his back to the fire, looking towards the window-curtains, and thinking uncomfortably.

"No, darling, it would not do," he repeated, nodding twice or thrice.

"Do you seriously mean, my dear Stour, that we can't have Miss Agnes Marlyn at the Vicarage?"

"Quite seriously."

"And what on earth, Stour, can be the reason?" said Babie, also standing up, and expanding her hands in remonstrance.

"You must not mention it to any one. I don't want to prejudice her — you promise, Babie?"

"Yes, certainly," she answered, with the air of one about to hear a secret. But nothing followed.

'What is it I'm not to tell?" she inquired at last, a little impatiently.

"You are not to tell any one, except those who must know, that I said we could not have her here. I have written to make inquiry, and I may hear more favourably than I at present hope; but in the meantime we must not run a risk of injuring a person whom I only suspect."

"I thought you were going to tell me all about it, Stour?" she complained.

"If I can I will, dear, by-and-bye; but don't ask me at present."

"I really think you ought to tell me — I do. What on earth am I to say to her, or to Mrs. Shadwell?"

"It is very awkward, I know, dear Babie; but it is not my fault, and I don't see that my telling you more, just now, would mend the matter."

"And what am I to *say?* I don't want to know, except for that. I should not like to seem rude, you know, and it certainly would seem worse, quite brutal, my giving no reason."

"Yes, indeed, darling, the whole thing is very awkward. I ought to have told, you before, not to mind asking Miss Marlyn here, but I forgot. I think I will tell you all about it tomorrow or next day. You may not think it so serious; but I mentioned it to Mark Shadwell, with very strong advice as to how he should act, and our asking her here, and making her an inmate, would be at best an inconsistency, and a very glaring one he would think it."

Miss Barbara looked up at the drapery of the window-curtain, and then down on the carpet near her foot, a little anxiously. She thought that Stour had penetrated Roger's little romance, and did not approve. So she raised her kind grey eyes, and looking in his face earnestly, said, —

"You must tell me one thing."

"What is it, Babie?"

"You must tell me, dear Stour, has your reason anything to do with Bonnie?"

"With Bonnie? No, certainly," said the vicar, in unaffected surprise, followed by an involuntary little laugh. "No, darling, upon my honour! Roger has neither act nor part in the mystery."

Barbara was relieved.

"I wish I knew all about it" — here was a little pause— "I might very possibly be of use in clearing it up if I did" — here was another;— "but, as you tell me, I shall by-and-bye" — she concluded, having failed to elicit anything more from the vicar, "I only want your help for the present, dear Stour, to tell me, what *am* I to say?"

"The simple truth, darling; as, I think, you always do. I don't think you need write to Miss Marlyn, if you don't wish to do so; but just say — put it all upon me — that *I* see an insurmountable difficulty in the way of Miss Marlyn's coming here at present. Mrs. Shadwell may either say so in so many words, or she may keep Miss Marlyn at home on her own authority, without explanation. Of course, you tell Mrs. Shadwell that I, the most impracticable and secret of curmudgeons, refuse you a single gleam of light into the mystery." In consequence of this little conversation, there went a note that evening, in Barbara Temple's hand, to Raby, which startled Amy Shadwell. There had been afloat in her mind just enough of that unpleasant misgiving which does not amount to suspicion, to give to this enigmatical note a force and augury which made poor Amy's heart sink, and kept it in a dismal flutter all night.

It was not much to have to say to Miss Marlyn that, on second thoughts, she would ask her to stay at Raby. There were fifty natural reasons to account for such a change of plan.

She had a vague terror, however, of its leading to a scene, and she felt that she had neither ability nor spirits for an encounter with that clever young lady, whom she did not quite understand — whom she had liked so much at first, and began now to fear, like one of those persons in a dream who undergo in its progress a gradual transformation, and end by holding us in the spell of a nightmare.

CHAPTER V.

MISS MARLYN TALKS WITH HER BLACK CAT.

MRS. SHADWELL would gladly have got out of this unpleasant task; but one way or other it must be got through; and it was better to despatch it, than to let it continue to hang over her till next morning.

So she did see Miss Marlyn — who stood, though invited to sit, and listened submissively, in silence, during the few minutes occupied by the little conference. A brighter glow for a moment flushed her cheeks, on hearing that, for some reason which Mrs. Shadwell could not explain, which she approached and went away from, without touching, Miss Agnes Marlyn was not to accompany Rachel to the Vicarage next day.

At this point Agnes looked with a keen, steady glance for a moment at the lady, who instinctively averted her eyes. Miss Marlyn, however, evinced absolutely no emotion, except in those very trifling evidences.

“Is there anything more?” asked Miss Marlyn, in her lowest tone, and with the faintest light of a sad smile.

“No — nothing,” said Mrs. Shadwell, who was embarrassed in the presence of the young lady who stood before her, smiling, patient, and so gracefully submissive, that her heart smote her, and she almost wished that Agnes Marlyn had been angry and violent.

It was a relief, however, that this little unpleasantness was over, and without giving pain, or exciting an angry thought.

But was this so?

Miss Marlyn ran downstairs lightly to the drawingroom, where she had left Rachel in the middle of a duet.

“Well, Pucelle, what was it?” she asked.

“Nothing, dear, only that I’m not to go with you tomorrow to the Vicarage,” said Miss Marlyn, quietly sitting down beside her, and striking a chord.

“And why arn’t you coming?”

“I don’t know, and I don’t care — I forget where we stopped; here, I think.”

"Wait, Pucelle — don't mind that tiresome duet — and tell me, are you really not coming r "Oh, my dear, don't you know I'm not coming?" said Miss Marlyn, with a smile a little sarcastic and incredulous.

"No — I had not an idea that anything could happen to prevent it; and you mustn't suppose anything so treacherous as my hiding it, if I had known."

"Did I fancy any such thing? — Why should I, dear? What an odd, fanciful, huffy little creature it is! But, really, it is not worth talking about. I should not care to sojourn in that wearisome little place, and be so be-Bonnied as I was when we last drank tea there; nothing but its comicality makes it endurable, and the fun of the best joke wears out, you know, by repetition; and, in fact, nothing but the hope of being of some little use as a daisy-picker, could have prevented its being absolutely insufferable. I can't admire even the scenery there. I think it the only uninteresting spot in the country. To be sure, there is an object that does make the landscape interesting — I mean Mr. Charles Mordant, doesn't he?" and she laughed, and played half-a-dozen bars, and added: "What a beautiful blush, my dear. I wish he were here to see it."

"Pucelle, you talk like a fool!"

"And I such a rogue?"

"No — but I mean to say, that I can't conceive any girl caring the least for any man who has not first shown that he likes her better than any one else."

"And doesn't he show it? Come, I never ask anyone to confess anything in this hypocritical world, but you know he does; and you know you like him — and now let us play this other overture."

And she began to play so brilliantly, and loud, all the time saying: "No — no — I won't hear; I'll listen to nothing but music that Rachel, half provoked, though she could not help laughing, did sit down and play the treble.

"You're not vexed, Pucelle; but I am — very much disappointed — and I sha n't half enjoy my visit without you. *Are* you vexed, Pucelle?"

"I'm never vexed, dear — I'm not even curious — for I know perfectly how this little change of plan came about," said Agnes Marlyn, leaning back in her chair, and looking listlessly upward.

"No, dear, it is too long a story; I'll tell it tonight to my little black cat, who sits on the end of my pillow, and hears my complaint whenever I have one to make, and sometimes gives me a tiny bit of advice."

This black cat of Miss Marlyn's — allusion to which, in moods of sinister playfulness, was not unfrequent — it is right to observe, had no material existence, and was altogether an imaginary confidant.

"I hate that black cat, Pucelle; I wish you'd make it jump out of the window; I can't think it likes us, and I'm afraid of it."

Miss Marlyn laughed gently, with a sidelong glance along the carpet, and the glittering edges of her even teeth appeared with a pretty suggestion of malice, that made her for a moment appear like a stranger to Rachel.

"Part with my dear little black cat, with the yellow eyes, and sage counsel, and patient ears! Ah! no. It is such a little wiseacre, and so sharp, and has heard all my secrets, and is so very old a friend, and only the size of my hand, and never comes except when people use me ill; and then it comes crouching and clawing along my pillow to my ear, rubbing its little whiskers to the sheet, and tumbling so playfully, growling like a dear little tiger, or hissing like a tiny pet snake. You can't imagine such a darling; when I was at school, where old La Chouette used to knock me about as she pleased, even before that, when I was beaten and half-starved at home, from that time it was my solitary confidant — my own dear, little, black rogue — who listened to my poor little whimperings, and — taught me tricks." Except in this little enigmatical speech, Miss Agnes Marlyn evinced no sense of wrong: and when the hour of rest arrived, she kissed Rachel at her door, and went to her room. She had not to pass Sir Roke's door, but she could see it as she went round the corner of the gallery swiftly, and glanced hastily at it over her shoulder as she quickened her pace. She was not afraid of ghosts, as most young people are. I suppose on occasion, however, she was capable of that kind of fear; but whatever may have been the tricks or menaces of her imagination when she saw that door after dark, I am sure she hated the sight of it.

Hurriedly she shut and locked her door. Her heart was full of bitterness; but she did not burst into tears, as young ladies under a sense of wrong usually do in the seclusion of their rooms. Perhaps the tenderness of early parental love, and the habit of being pitied, are needed to induce that relief, and Agnes Marlyn had no home affections to look back to, and had never enjoyed the luxury of being pitied. And so her training had steeled her against the necessities of sympathy, and the habit even of pitying herself.

Miss Marlyn sat for a moment before her glass, thinking and looking all the time at her reflected features. She liked looking at herself in the glass; and she knew she was beautiful; and she could do that and think also. Her beauty was her power, and the vivid consciousness of this inspired her thoughts, and quickened her sense of insult.

She had sat longer than she thought, and was a little chilly when she stood up to undress. Having gathered up her magnificent hair, her graceful limbs were quickly laid in her bed. She did not put out her candle; she liked thinking in this kind of light, with her small hand under her cheek. Her heart was full. An intense, cold anger was struggling in it, and yearned for some expression in act. She was turning over all sorts of things in her mind — talking, as her phrase was, with her little black cat. They had a long confidence, and it was late when she put out her candle.

Miss Marlyn was a clever person, and made theories, and often saw further into millstones than other people. She fancied a change of manner towards her when Miss Barbara had come down that day from her talk with Mrs. Shadwell. Who had brought about that change? and now she was in consequence forbidden to go to the Vicarage. Insult upon insult! Cowardly outrage! Very well. She was not a person to be stricken down with a blow of a fan, and walked, over. She would talk for a time with her little black cat, and gee what was to be done.

Next morning Miss Marlyn came down serene and beautiful, in good spirits even, for she had quite made up her mind, and saw her way a little in advance, distinctly. Up to last night, whatever she might say or write, she had been in a great indecision. A grain of passion had determined the equilibrium, and Miss Marlyn’s future, for some chapters to come, was now distinctly written in those tablets of her little brain that retained inscriptions like adamant.

At the appointed hour away went Rachel, Agnes Marlyn standing on the steps, and smiling her farewell. When the sound of the wheels grew faint in the distance, she was still smiling, though looking down musingly, at her little foot, which, on the smooth Caen stone, was beating time, as it were, to the gentle measure of her pleasant thoughts. Then, awakening from them, she looked up at the clear autumnal sky, and abroad over the fair landscape.

It was the sun of Austerlitz, the augury of conquest, and she ran in and amused herself with jubilant music, and some spirited marches, on the old piano.

Miss Marlyn read her novel, and took her walk, and sang songs to the jingle of the old instrument, which was abandoned to the wear and tear of practising; and, at the usual hour she repaired to Mrs. Shadwell's room, and was particularly gentle and submissive, and, somehow, engaging. She offered to read to Mrs. Shadwell, who was beginning to relent; won, insensibly, by her melancholy, little attentions. Mrs. Shadwell, however, had a long interview pending with old Wyndle, but, fearing that a mere refusal would appear ungracious, she asked Miss Marlyn to come to her for half an hour, by-and-bye, and read a little then, if she still felt disposed. Miss Marlyn pathetically thanked her, and entreated that Mrs. Shadwell would think of some way of making her useful, during the very brief stay that remained to her at Raby.

The evening closed over that gloomy household, and darkness succeeded; and Mrs. Shadwell, looking to the little clock over her chimneypiece, saw that it was halfpast seven, and remembered Miss Marlyn's promise.

Just then, the door opened roughly, and her husband entered. He looked pale and angry, and came over, silently, to the little table, which was placed beside her, and sat down at it. Then, suddenly, he said:

"What has become of Rachel?"

"She went to-day — I thought you knew — to the Temples, to pay a little visit," she replied.

"Well, she has returned by this time, I suppose?"

"No; she was not to return till tomorrow, or, perhaps, next day."

"Upon my soul, that's being rather cool!"

Mrs. Shadwell looked rather frightened at his angry face.

"I hope I haven't done wrong, Mark," she began.

"You have sent Miss Marlyn with her, of course?"

".No; Miss Marlyn is here."

"Oh! and wasn't she asked?"

"Yes, dear Mark, at first, but that was changed afterwards."

"Changed, was it? So she has gone off without her governess," he said.

"But her governess couldn't be of the least use to her there, and you know you said you thought Miss Marlyn was unnecessary; and she's going away," pleaded she.

He stared, at her very angrily, the more so, that he was a little puzzled by her very obvious rejoinder.

"Upon my honour! you're growing quite a debater, that's a vastly clever answer, only it don't quite demonstrate the wisdom of sending Rachel off alone, among such a set of muffs, to 'meet that fellow, Mordant; and I don't see what business you had to send my daughter away on such a visit without acquainting me with it."

"But, Mark, dear, don't you remember that you told me that I might always send Rachel there without troubling you about it?"

"I say, having asked Miss Marlyn, as the proper person, to accompany her, it was insufferingly impertinent withdrawing that invitation; it strikes me, if she is good enough company for you and Rachel, that Mr. Roger Temple, and Charles Mordant, and old Miss Barbara might venture to sit in the same room with her. Have you heard anything against her? I should be glad to know the pretext on which we are to be treated with that kind of insult. And recollect the effect such a snub, from such a quarter, must have upon the position of that young lady, in whom you professed to take an interest, and whom, I think, we are bound to protect, not only from common wants and dangers, while she stays here, but from damned impertinence and slander."

He thundered the last words, actually pale with anger.

"But, Mark, dear," she faltered, "there has not been a word said."

"Yes, that's the odious cowardice of the thing, don't you see; there's always a risk of being exposed and punished if one does say lies of people; and don't you perceive that the work is just as effectually done, and far more safely, by letting the world know that the vicar and his family won't let a given young lady into their house, and decline to sit in the same room with her? Do you think it fair to Miss Marlyn that we should allow that? I don't, I can tell you, and I'll write to give them my opinion of it, and Rachel shall come home tonight." And with these ominous words he rose, lowering, and stalked from the room, shutting the door, with more emphasis than beseemed the chamber of an invalid.

There are two doors to Mrs. Shadwell's morning-room: one through which Mark had come and gone, opening on the great gallery; the other from a small anteroom, which communicates with a back gallery.

As Mrs. Shadwell sat there stunned and frightened, this latter door opened, and Miss Marlyn, with a book in her hand, entered. Mrs. Shadwell was in tears. Miss Marlyn's smile vanished — she stood still.

"Pray, come here, Miss Marlyn, and sit down," sobbed Mrs. Shadwell, vehemently, forgetting the coldness and reserve of the last week, in her agitation. "Now, I ask you, Miss Marlyn, have I slandered you — have I? Have I ever slandered you, or permitted any one to slander you?"

"Oh, dear Mrs. Shadwell! I could not imagine such a thing!" exclaimed that beautiful young lady, much shocked, apparently. "Slander me — slander any one! Utterly impossible!"

"Mr. Shadwell has been here, so amazed about that little visit to the Temples, and your not having gone with Rachel."

"Oh, dear Mrs. Shadwell! How very provoking. You have no idea how much I prefer being here, and you know I should have only been in the way there, and I should not have liked it at all; and I know they have not much room, for Mr. Mordant is staying there."

"And Mr. Shadwell is so vexed, and he is going to write, and to send for Rachel tonight; and so, I suppose, we shall lose the only friends that are left to us."

"But if you were to ask Mr. Shadwell not to write, surely he would not."

"Mr. Shadwell is very kind, so kind, you have no idea; but he is very firm, and when he thinks a thing right to be done, nothing ever moves him, he always does it, and I am very sorry— "

And Mrs. Shadwell broke down again, and when she looked up Miss Marlyn was gone.

In less than ten minutes more Agnes Marlyn returned, flushed, radiant, and so beautiful! She had prevailed with Mr. Shadwell, the letter would not be written, nor Rachel sent for, nor the arrangement with the Temples disturbed.

It was running so rapidly up the stairs that made the rise and fall of her dress show her quickened breathing, and that called that brilliant colour to her cheeks, which seemed to give a fiery softness to her eyes. Her words and tones were very humble; those eyes were cast down. There was the modest gratification of having done her benefactress a little service: a very timid pleasure and an indescribable pleasing sadness in her tones and attitude. And along with all this — imperceptible by all but that marvellous organ, the eye of a wife — was there not the baleful light of an insufferable triumph?

Ten-million-fold rather at that moment would poor Amy have accepted all the vexation that threatened than been so rescued. She recognised the extraordinary beauty of that girl. She felt, with a deep-seated agony, how facile had been her influence where she, even in better days, had failed to persuade. Like other foolish wives she worshipped the beauty and fascinations of a husband whom other people saw as he was, and she thought him irresistible.

“In black mourn I,
All fears scorn I.
Lore hath forlorn me,
Living in thrall.
Heart is bleeding,
All help needing,
Oh, cruel speeding!
Fraughted with gall.”

With a heart wounded and resentful, she yet contrived to smile and thank her. She praised her reading, the meaning of which never reached her wandering thoughts, and heard the cadences of that sweet voice that stirred her heart with the anguish of jealousy.

When Agnes Marlyn had bade her goodnight, and departed, she looked in the glass with a pang, her retina still glowing with the radiant beauty that had just left the room. There met her the plaintive, faded little face, whose glory was over, and the large eyes, still beautiful, and to which, as she looked, the tears sprang. “Amy! Amy!” she murmured, slowly and sadly, with a mournful little shake of her head. All at once the change of years came up before her — the sense of the flight of her power — and the wild uncertainty of future times.

CHAPTER VI.

CARMEL SHERLOCK IN HIS NEW ABODE.

THAT evening, so unhappy at Raby, was passing very pleasantly for Rachel at the Vicarage.

Barbara Temple had made, as she supposed, two people very happy. But, alas! — there were two others. Poor Roger was now, six o'clock P.M., expected momentarily, and disappointment awaited him.

Miss Barbara grew silent and nervous as the hour approached, and when Roger's fly drew up at the door, she actually grew pale, as she ran out to the hall to meet him.

"Oh! Bonnie, darling, I'm so glad, and you're looking so beautiful — such a colour!"

"Now, Babie, you rogue, you're at your old tricks — trying to make me conceited," panted Bonnie, with a laugh of fond gratification.

"But I do say, Bonnie, your colour is just what it was when you were nine years old — quite beautiful!" repeated Babie, in a rapture, and still out of breath from the hug she had bestowed on him.

"I'm glad I'm looking so young — or — so well, I mean," said Roger, in an undertone, smiling delighted. "It's just the little breeze — the air; and — and, hadn't I better run up and get off these things?" he added; and she knew, by the wandering of his honest little blue eyes towards the drawingroom door, whom he was thinking of, and with a pang she suddenly recollected.

"Oh! Bonnie, dear! I forgot — how shall I tell you?" she exclaimed, suddenly looking in his face quite woebegone.

"Good gracious! She isn't ill — is she?" he exclaimed.

"Oh! no — not ill; but she's not here," said Babie, looking in his face as if she expected him to burst into tears.

"Oh! — and they haven't come, after all?" murmured Bonnie, in a dismal tone of disappointment.

"Only Rachel, dear: Mrs. Shadwell couldn't come, and Miss Marlyn remained with her at Raby," said Babie with a little indirectness.

She saw that Bonnie was in despair, though his faded smile still lingered.

“Well, Babie; another time,” he said, with a dismal hopefulness.

“Oh! yes — let us hope — let us hope!” exclaimed kind Barbara, evasively.

Honest Roger made a tedious toilet, and sat long over his fire. When he entered the pleasant, oldfashioned, little drawingroom, his brother Stour had come in, and Doctor Sprigge, who was of their little dinner-party; and he and the vicar were chatting with Miss Barbara quite cozily by the fire.

With that affinity which acts so irresistibly, Roger’s eye instantly found Rachel, associated as she was with the absent Agnes Marlyn, and he drew near and greeted pretty Miss Shadwell, and turned away, with a melancholy yearning, to shake hands with the doctor and the vicar; and then to take Barbara’s hand and pat it, and look sadly into her eyes; and, with a little sigh, he told her how very cold the wind was over Higmore Heath this evening.

“Ay, that’s the place to catch it,” said the doctor, overhearing him. “That moor’s worth fifty pounds a year to me, in bronchitis and cases of that kind. Anything of an east wind comes down through the break in the mountains, — like a funnel — and sweeps Higmore. I never felt anything like it. You’re all right here?”

And the doctor touched Roger’s ample chest with a privileged poke with the top of his finger.

“All right there?” repeated Roger, whose attention had been wandering. “Ah! ha! — you rogue!” he murmured, with a sad smile and a shake of the head which the doctor did not understand.

“Roger,” said Miss Barbara, getting up hastily, “I forgot to show you — come to the window — you must do something to the poor Persian lilac; the best branch was broken last night in the storm. See, Bonnie — isn’t it a pity?”

Bonnie gazed.

“Yes, indeed; so it is,” he answered, and a sigh followed.

“Why do ‘ you look so sad, Bonnie, darling?” she whispered.

“Sad? No; I was only thinking what a lucky fellow Charlie Mordant is!”

“Yes, Bonnie, dear, but other people will be lucky too — and happy; all that’s wanted is just a little patience.”

"Do you think — do you think she'll come tomorrow?" whispered Roger, holding Barbara's hand.

"I can't say, dear. I'm afraid not."

"She wasn't ill — you're sure?"

"Oh, no! quite well; and she seemed delighted at the idea of coming — I assure you she did. She looked so — so beautiful, and pleased."

"Did she — did she, really? Babie, you're a darling; you always see everything."

"And, I'm sure, she was much more disappointed than you are. I'm certain she's looking out from the window over Wynderfel Wood, in this direction, at this moment. I can picture her to myself — looking and sighing," said romantic Barbara.

"Ah! I'm afraid not, Babie, dear. No — no! I dare say she does not care — she doesn't care much, at least. Do you really think she does?" sighed Roger, and pressed her hand again.

And Babie patted the back of his sunburnt paw with tender compassion, and a great misgiving at her heart, which she dared not tell him. And Babie would have gone on romancing, and Roger listening to her delightful dreams, heaven knows for how long, had not the maid just at that moment popped in at the door, to tell them that dinner was ready; so, with another great sigh, and a grateful pressure of Babie's hand, Roger in haste took his place and followed in the wake of more important people, besides Charles Mordant, whom, as they went, he patted gently on the shoulder, saying—

"Glad to see you again, old fellow!"

For all but my good friend Roger, that quiet evening glided very pleasantly into the past. There was talking — old recollections and new stories. There was the merry, and sometimes plaintive jingle of the old piano. There were songs, and one duet, which Miss Barbara encored — remarking, in a pleased aside to Stour, how charmingly their voices went together; so Rachel and Mordant sang it over again, and were much applauded, even by Roger, who remembered Miss Marlyn's voice in that duet, beside the same piano, and who for her sake sighed also an encore.

"Poor Stour!" exclaimed Miss Barbara, next morning at breakfast. "Not content with his own work, which, I do assure you, is nearly killing him, he has promised Mr. Clarke, who is in such affliction, you know, to visit for him, two days in the week, at Applebury prison; and so he's gone off, with an early breakfast, and we sha’n’t see him now, I suppose, till dinner-time, or perhaps later.”

And so it was. Stour was by this time visiting the “spirits in prison,” so few of whom care to be preached to — in a prison not of common locks and masonry only — spirits imprisoned in the iron cage of evil education and habits, and screwed down, as Andersen says, each “under the coffin-lid of his connections.”

“The prisoner named Carmel Sherlock,” said Stour to the prison officer, when he had made the round of the wards, “not a convict — only committed for trial — who, you tell me, has refused to see the chaplain, would, I think, see me. I’ve known him for a long time, and take a deep interest in the unhappy man; and I would be so glad to see him, if he would admit my visit. Will you ask him?”

The man returned — Sherlock would be glad to see him. So the vicar walked down the flagged corridor and entered the small square room, where the thin figure of Carmel Sherlock met him.

Sherlock looked thinner, and his black hair was longer, but his pale face showed no change in expression, and no altered lines of suffering.

“I am glad, Mr. Sherlock, you have admitted me; I could not leave this place without asking whether you would see me,” said the vicar.

“Thanks, yes; and how are the family at Raby?” said Sherlock, fixing his earnest eyes on him.

“All quite well,” answered the vicar.

“Mr. Shadwell?” the prisoner inquired.

“Yes.”

“And Mrs. Shadwell?”

“Always an invalid, you know; but not worse than she has been for some time.”

“And Miss Rachel?”

“Quite well.”

“Quite well,” he echoed, mournfully; “and happy — ay, happy?”

“I am here, you know,” said the vicar, after a pause, “as a clergyman — doing duty for the chaplain.”

“Ah! yes, as a clergyman — and no doubt making many people happier — but that is not for me. You see God in your printed Bible, Mr. Temple, and I, in the pictured pages of His Creation; and my ideas and yours are different.”

“My dear Mr. Sherlock, all this trouble has not, I hope, befallen you in vain. Surely you reflect on your present situation.”

“That, sir, is all fair — yes, sir: the bitter for the sweet; the darkness for the light; a balanced account, with small profit or loss to any, when it is closed. When you come into a family you must accept their rules; and being born in the world, you are the ‘oikstes’ of the great house, and taste of its good cheer and also of its *horribile flagellum.* So it is, sir, I am here. You think it just; and if killing be always murder, it is just. And there is the weakness of the Bible. It makes you, don’t you see, the slave of a few generalities; but I discriminate. Which is more spiritual? You call all the immortal sights and voices that are about us, fancies proceeding from our own perishable brains; but I perceive, and consider them, as belonging to God’s outer household of immortal spirits.”

The vicar answered nothing. He was looking down, disappointed. He ought to have remembered, he thought, how mad this wretched man was. He was but throwing good seed into the deep and barren sea.

“Sir Roke Wycherly, what was he? Ay, he came at the behest of others. Why should that hoary old goat haunt the house when there was so short an exorcism? Your evangelists and apostles were wiser than you, Mr. Temple. They knew the unclean spirits by the sense that was given them. They believed in demons, because ‘they knew the signs of their tenancy, and saw that they fought murderously against expulsion — yes — with some of them, anything for a body — the tenement of clay, the mechanism of sense. They did it with a spell: ‘Thou unclean spirit, come out of him.’ I was told to cast him out another way.”

“Pray,” said the vicar, peremptorily, “say nothing to me that may commit you upon the question of your innocence. I must not be made partaker in any secret which I ought not to keep.”

Carmel Sherlock’s dark eyes glared askance on him a look of suspicion, and then dropped to the floor. In silence he ruminated, and with a sigh, he looked up and said:

“To a man who has always liked solitude, this kind of thing,” and he waved his fingers slightly toward the wall, “has nothing formidable; and to one who has lost all but life, death looks friendly. I miss the picture, now and then, once in an hour; once in a day, once in a night. Sometimes I would look from my window — I miss "Wynderfel — enchanted ground — and the black tarn, in Feltram Glen — Lake Avemus. The spirits! Haunted ground — friendly spirits. They came to know the solitary man who did not fear them — who trusted them; and they sometimes told him thoughts. A star like that the wise men saw, I followed; but mine went out. I miss the Straduarius. It followed my memory in all its windings, with its own storm and lamentation. You have showed me kindness, now and always, sir, in the same way. Your religion is comfortable to you, and you have wished to make me a partaker in it. No small kindness; and, I never forget a kindness, so I have left you the Straduarius. Mr. Shadwell will have all the rest — the books, the creese, and the other things. But to you, for you have music," — he was looking dreamily at Stour Temple's head, as he might on a phrenologic cast— "that wonderful creation, the Straduarius!"

The vicar, remembering the strange sounds emitted by this same violin, as he stood with Mark Shadwell on the steps at Raby one melancholy night, was very near smiling.

The impulse was but transitory, and with decent gravity he thanked Carmel Sherlock, and hoped that it would be very long before his bequest took effect.

"You are kind, sir, but I sha'n't leave this new home of mine — this home of stone and iron — alive. This lamp will not be broken — it will go out."

The vicar already regretted his visit. In Carmel Sherlock's enigmatical speeches were hinted revelations which he ought not hear without divulging.

"I don't quite see your meaning," said Stour Temple, and hesitated. He suspected a covert threat of suicide.

"No, sir," said Sherlock, reading his suspicion with a strange penetration. "I mean that I shall die — die, as you would say, a natural death."

"You are not ill, I hope?"

"Ill? Oh, no! There's no man in England better: an elastic life that adapts itself to all forms of pain, which will bear sudden transition from the hermitage to the camp, and from the camp to the prison, and never feel it. If a man could sell such things, sir, there are men who would give a sack of gold for it. But money has its hour like every other thing; and for me it would come too late. Life in one hand, gold in the other, I would drop both into the abyss for one moment's certainty of a thing which never was — never can be — sir; and might have been a curse if it came. Haven't you seen celestial faces that changed when you came near? Every one knows what horror is — these transformations. Therefore, sir, it is better to wait for the spiritual world, when the essence of things will appear, and into that world I go smiling, bidding my eternal farewell to the illusions of mortality. I go, sir, as I say, serene; at peace, Mr. Temple, with all the world and with myself; reconciled to the wonderful conditions of life, and expecting confidently those which are sublime!"

The vicar listened to what in his ears sounded like audacious impieties, with eyes cast down and a look of pain; and, shaking his head, he replied:

"Ah! Mr. Sherlock, your faith must repose on something more solid than your own wild theories, and you must have some more satisfactory convictions than the dark retrospect of a life and mind so fancifully preoccupied can offer to justify] the confidence on which you may reasonably rest."

"Confidence and — curiosity, sir," said Sherlock.

"Well, Mr. Sherlock, you have said things to-day which have made me very anxious. You will not, from curiosity, make a jump, like Empedocles, into the crater?" And the vicar looked on Sherlock as he spoke.

Sherlock smiled, and repeated —

"'Relictâ non bene parmulâ;'

No, sir. If I know myself, I sha'n't do that."

"If I had found you in a mood, Mr. Sherlock, as you say, from curiosity, if from no other motive, to talk on the one subject which can never lose its interest — I mean the lamp of truth, which is the Bible, which alone can light us through the valley of the shadow of death, to safety — it would have been a great happiness to me."

He paused; but Carmel Sherlock, listening respectfully, with downcast eyes, said nothing.

"You are very good, sir, you are wonderfully good, to care for such a man as I. I can't understand it; I can only thank you from my heart. I was on the point to-day of telling you some things which, as yet, no one knows but myself, and when you checked me, I resolved to postpone. I shall perhaps tell my benefactor, Mr. Shadwell, instead, when he comes. I'm sure he'll come to see me, sir! He'll surely come! and for the rest, sir, — time — time. I have got some old books; you would think them of no value, but they have many deep meanings hidden one under the other, like the wisdom of Brutus or of Hamlet under a mad exterior."

"Then another time, perhaps, you will talk with me more as I could wish?" said Temple.

"Not now — not to-day, sir; perhaps never. But I am very grateful; and, will you show me another great kindness — knowing not in what shape, nor how soon, death may arrive — for I hear his steps in the air — if it should be with short notice — will you come and see me? There is something which I want to tell Mr. Shadwell — *he* will be glad to hear it — about the death of Sir Roke Wycherly, and if I can't write, and that you hear I am dying, will you come?"

"Certainly; you may rely upon me," answered Temple.

"That is all, sir. I hear the man at the door," said Carmel Sherlock.

Not without extracting a promise, in return, that Sherlock would read a little book which he would send him, 'did the good vicar take his leave.

"Solitude!" said Sherlock, with a smile, when he found himself alone, casting his Latin folio on the table. "With living comrades like you, with memory, with dreams that come through the golden gate, listeners are never alone. It is your talkers who are lonely. This romance is ended — so let us go and begin another."

CHAPTER VII.

ROGER TEMPLE LOOKS IN.

WHILE Miss Barbara, with Rachel and Charles Mordant, drove to visit the ruins of Elverston. Castle, my forlorn friend, Roger Temple, sauntered towards Wynderfel. From the heights beyond the ruined hall, he gazed sadly at the woods and chimneys of Raby, till, unable to resist the yearnings of his love, he trudged slowly on towards the sombre scene of his own romance.

As he approached the house, he began to regret that he had not asked Barbara to give him a message to excuse his visit. He would not go in, however; he would merely inquire at the door, and try his chance. Barbara would, of course, wish to know how Mrs. Shadwell was; and so he would inquire in her name; ay, and if he encountered Mark, he would say that she sent him. Very slowly he walked by the windows of the house, but no sign of life met his eye. Round the comer, along the side of the mansion, he proceeded quite solitarily, and so to the front. The hall-door was half open. He hesitated. He heard the well-known sound of the piano accompanying a rich clear voice.

Honest Roger was on the point of walking into the schoolroom, whence the music proceeded, unannounced. He recollected himself, however, and rang the bell, while his heart throbbed faster than was comfortable.

The old butler arrived at his leisure, and Roger greeted him in a very friendly way, and told him he had come to give a very particular message for Mrs. Shadwell, which his sister had specially directed him to give to no one but Miss Marlyn.

Roger was now fibbing away quite unscrupulously, which shows how dangerous, even in intention, is the slightest departure from the narrow path of truth. “I think I hear Miss Marlyn at her music?” he said. “Will you try and let me know whether she can see me for a moment?”

“Yes, that she would,” said the servant; and without asking Miss Marlyn’s leave introduced Roger Temple, nothing loath, to her presence.

Miss Marlyn stood up from her music very much surprised, it seemed. Five minutes before, she had not been playing or singing. She was in one of her reveries, talking perhaps with her little black cat, when she saw the top of honest Roger's wideawake glide by, and, peeping, saw the worthy fellow himself. Thus it happened that the schoolroom door was opened a very little, and thus it came that the ring of music escaped from the schoolroom, and was quite audible on the steps of the hall-door.

"My sister sent me — a little message — and I am so sorry to have interrupted that really heavenly music — quite heavenly!" (a pause and an expressive look occurred here), "and I am so fortunate — so very fortunate, Miss Marlyn, in having found you at home — so very happy."

"I think you said there was a message?" suggested Miss Marlyn, for another pause had occurred, and Roger seemed to have forgotten everything but those happy sensations which he described.

"Oh! oh, yes — to ask you particularly how Mrs. Shadwell is this morning?"

"Mrs. Shadwell is just as usual. Shall I run up to give her your message?"

"Oh, dear, no! pray, don't think of it — pray, don't — merely when you do see her, to "be so good as to mention that I called. I heard the delightful music from the steps; I knew very well who the musician must be. No other music affects me, Miss Marlyn, like yours — none, upon my honour!"

"It is very good of you to say so, Mr. Temple. You kind people in this part of the world are all so very good to me. I don't know how I shall bear to leave Raby."

"Oh, Miss Marlyn, you must not leave us."

"I think I shall leave Raby about this day week. I like Raby. I had grown so fond of it. I think I was formed for a country life," said Miss Marlyn, with a sad little smile that moved honest Roger extremely.

"I am sure, Miss Marlyn, you have not an idea how some of us will miss you — how awfully — how really awfully!"

Miss Marlyn laughed prettily.

"There's one, at least, Miss Marlyn — there's some one — one I could name; there is, indeed, and I don't know what he should do — what would become of him— "

Here there was a pause, and poor Roger looked unspeakable things. He ought to have considered that he was making a rather awkward silence for Miss Marlyn.

"You left Miss "Temple quite well, I hope, and Rachel?" she said.

"Yes, quite, thanks — quite well. They went to see Elverston Castle; but I couldn't — I couldn't, indeed. I couldn't come anywhere but in this direction — I was so low — so very unhappy. It was such a disappointment your not coming yesterday, — and my sister admires and likes you so much — you have no idea — we all do, and — and — oh! I wish I could tell you half what I feel. I wish, Miss Marlyn, I dare. I — I think you so beautiful, and — and so glorious — an angel of beauty and of goodness!" he rhapsodized, quoting a phrase unconsciously from one of the old novels in Miss Barbara's bookcase. "I can't tell you half — only, I can think of no one else — of nothing else. I quite worship you. There's nothing on earth I would not give just to hear you say you could ever like me. I — I have talked it all over a hundred times with dear Babie, and — and she would be so delighted, and we could live with them so pleasantly. I have four hundred a year of my own; and — and — you like the country so; and oh, dear! how happy we should be, and — and — for God's sake, don't say, 'No!'"

Perhaps it struck Miss Marlyn at the moment, that, all things considered, the thing was worth weighing. If for a clever, friendless, beautiful girl like her, there were some brilliant prizes, there were also dismal blanks. But she was ambitious and enterprising, and for such a spirit mere safety has no very distinct attractions.

While some vague calculations were rolling in her mind, my friend Roger, in his rapture of entreaty, had seized her hand in both his, and was pressing it, and pressed it, even, tremblingly, two or three times to his lips. I suppose there was some little decent show of withdrawal! Miss Marlyn was standing with her back toward the door, and toward it also and toward her, honest Roger's bald head was presented as he made his harried adorations. It was a very marked change in the expression of his face as he raised it, that caused her to look round as she withdrew her hand quickly.

They both saw Mark Shadwell standing there. There was an awkward pause for a moment, during which Miss Marlyn glided from the room.

"I just came in," he said, "Miss Marlyn, to say that my wife, I think, wishes to say a word to you, — how do you do, Temple? — but I suppose there's no great hurry. — You've had a walk across by Wynderfel, I suppose, or did you ride?"

"Oh! I — I walked," said Roger, not quite clear for a moment how he had come there. "I — yes; I walked. It is so beautiful; so — so very pretty."

"Yes, very pretty," acquiesced Mark, with a slight sarcasm.

"It is, indeed — sometimes, I think, quite irresistible," floundered poor Roger.

Mark smiled cynically.

"All your people quite well at the Vicarage, I hope?" said Mark.

"Oh! perfectly; thanks — thanks."

"Won't you come to the drawingroom, you'll be more comfortable?"

"No — well, *no* — I believe not," said Roger. There was a short silence and Mark inquired abruptly:— "Can I do anything for you?"

"Anything for me — anything? Oh, no! many thanks. There's nothing — only, merely — nothing, in fact, but my sister, who wished me to inquire how Mrs. Shadwell is to-day."

"Very kind of her. She's pretty much as usual," said Mark.

"Oh! yes, thanks — I've heard; and now they'll be looking for me back again. What splendid timber you have got here, to be sure! and the walk over Wynderfel — one's led on."

"Yes, one's led on," repeated Mark.

"One never perceives the distance," and Roger coughed a little. " I'm detaining you."

"Only too glad to see you," said Mark, affecting his ordinary manner on a sudden, though he felt very odd and very sore. "Any news of that poor fellow, Sherlock?"

"No, nothing since, except that he is quite well," said Roger, trying to recover himself; "that little hurt was not of any consequence; and — and — that's all; and I think I must be off, they'll wonder what has become of me," and flushed and nervous, Roger took his leave on the doorsteps, and whistled for his dog, and remembered he had not brought him with him, and took leave again.

With a sour and rather malicious smile, Mark stood for a time on the steps, and turned briskly and walked into the house, whistling. He stopped in the hall —

"Where's Miss Marlyn?" he inquired, rather sharply of the old butler.

"Haven't seen her, sir."

"Well, have her made out, and tell her I'd thank her very much to bring me to the library Mr. Smithwick's letter which she said she would be so good as to copy the other day."

And Mark walked into his room, and shut the door with a sharp emphasis.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS MARLYN EXPLAINS.

A TAP came to that door speedily, and in obedience to his call, Miss Marlyn entered. She had some papers in her hand.

“Oh! thanks. This is the letter — Mr. Smithwick’s — that you were so good as to say you’d copy?”

“Yes, sir.”

“A thousand thanks!”

He took the papers to the window, pretending to read them. Miss Marlyn’s glance read his countenance, and she was pleased.

“So very nicely copied, I ought to be very grateful, indeed,” he said, laying the papers down. “By-the-bye, I ought to apologize, shouldn’t I, for having disturbed you just now, at a very interesting moment?”

Miss Marlyn made no reply.

“My handsome friend, Roger Temple, has withdrawn. I almost pitied him, not for his agitation; but getting over that hill at Wynderfel will blow him so; poor fellow, he was so hot! and this is anything but a hot day. He ought to make his excursions in a palanquin — don’t you think?”

“Is there anything more for me to copy?” asked Miss Marlyn.

“Oh! you are very good — too good — but is it quite fair to Temple, to ask you to take all this trouble for me? He may think it a great impertinence; and it is rather dangerous, doctors say, putting a fat fellow of a certain age in a passion.”

Miss Marlyn here appeared a little offended. “If there is anything more, Mr. Shadwell, perhaps you will send it to the schoolroom?”

“Oh! I’m not going to let you off so — don’t go just for a moment; no, pray don’t.” Miss Marlyn stopped.

“You know how I am placed here. I think I ought to know what passes,” said Mark Shadwell, with a cold sort of decision, and at the same time, perhaps, a little embarrassed. He closed the door, and then added; “What was that fellow saying?”

Miss Marlyn looked down upon the ground in a beautiful confusion, embarrassed for words to begin. She seemed on the point of speaking, but failed.

"Does he want to marry you? there's nothing to hide. It may be ridiculous, but *you'll* not be laughed at," persisted Mark. "Come, you know I ought to hear. Did he ask you to marry him?"

"Yes," said Miss Marlyn, faintly, "he did." There was a short silence. Mark Shadwell felt very oddly; but he did not show it in his looks.

"And, I suppose, he has had an answer?"

"No, sir."

"Indeed — I'm afraid I came in, as I said, at an unlucky moment; but there's pen and ink, and you may write your answer now, if you like," said Shadwell. "Don't you think it's a sort of question that requires an answer?" He paused with his open hand indicating the table on which lay paper, pens, and envelopes.

"Oh! Mr. Shadwell, what shall I say?"

"Really, Miss Marlyn, you are the best judge of that," said he, drily.

"I mean how shall I express it."

"I don't think young ladies usually have much difficulty in finding words," he said, with a sour smile. "Of course you have made up your mind?"

"How?" said the young lady, raising her deep dark eyes suddenly to his and dropping them again.

"How can I tell? I can't say the least. Only it's a case for 'yes' or 'no and, I suppose, you know which you mean to say."

"I shall never marry," she said, still looking down.

"Come, come, you don't mean that," said he. "Yes, Mr. Shadwell, I shall never marry," she repeated, very low.

"Well," said he, oddly relieved, "I'm not surprised at your being a little *difficile;* if you were not, considering all you are, you would be the most foolish girl in the world."

"I shall never marry, sir. I've quite made up my mind."

"Made up your mind, have you? And for how long, you wise little woman, have you been of that way of thinking?"

"Sir, it is not worth talking about."

“Madam, it is very well worth talking about. Seriously, I take an interest in you — I should be a brute if I did not — a deep interest. I am too deeply obliged — too deeply grateful.”

He paused suddenly; he had taken her hand in both his.

The histrionic element was strong in Miss Marlyn. When she played a part, she entered, as the phrase is, thoroughly into it. Miss Bateman grows pale in *Leah;* Miss O’Neil used to shed real tears in *Jane Shore.* It is not easy for a looker-on to define the point of insincerity, or to say exactly where mere imitation kindles into veritable emotion. This I know, that as Mark Shadwell gazed he saw the soft carmine mount to her cheeks; but she did not raise her eyes, and he saw only their long, soft, black lashes.

“Don’t you intend consulting any one?” said Mark, hardly understanding why he said this.

“Oh, no, sir!”

“Well, I have no right to ask why, and, certainly, about Roger Temple, he *is* such a fool, and so ridiculous — such a figure.”

“He’s very good, and very kind, and I am very grateful,” she began.

“I never heard that he was particularly good, or kind, or anything but fat, which is often taken, I remark, for those qualities; but if you think him all that, perhaps you will reconsider the question.”

Mark Shadwell spoke a little bitterly, which pleased Agnes Marlyn, as she looked down with an unchanged blush on the carpet.

He had dropped her hand for a moment, but he took it again, and said in a lower tone:

“Do you mean to think over that question?”

“No,” she said, very low again.

“And why, ‘*no’?”* he said.

“.Because — because I shall never marry any one whom I cannot love; that is to say, I shall never marry.”

“How can you tell,” he said, after a pause, “that you might not come to like him very well?”

“I never could love him,” she said, with kindling audacity, “you know, Mr. Shadwell, I never could. Nor should I ever marry any one to whom I dared not, and could not trust the dearest and most awful secret of my life, for whom I would not incur danger, disgrace, and death itself, and think it martyrdom and glory!”

He felt her hand tremble, and she drew it towards her; but he held it still between his own. She turned away. He thought she was weeping. Was he imposed upon by coarse theatricals, or had he just witnessed a genuine burst of those passions which stir most men so deeply. Was he the possible man, after all? Was all the wild worship of this adoring and terrible soul for him?

"*You* are capable of loving; you are a heroine, Agnes," he almost whispered.

"I have been talking wildly; do, pray, release my hand, Mr. Shadwell. It was your strange advice that made me say all that — do, pray, forget it."

"I'll *never* forget it!" he said, still holding her fast. "I now understand you! I have been conjecturing, and guessing, and mistaking for months, but one moment of excited feeling has revealed you — generous, impulsive, daring, true."

"Pray speak of me no more — think of me no more. I shall soon have gone, leaving behind me no trace, but carrying with me my ineffaceable recollections and my sorrow."

"If it had been my fate, Agnes, to meet with sympathies like yours, that fate would have been different, and *I* a better man."

"I think I have now told you all, Mr. Shadwell, that you said I was bound to tell," she said, a little proudly and coldly; "and although you have spoken so kindly, sir, I yet feel that I have said a great deal that was very foolish, and, from my heart, I wish it all unspoken!"

"Never wish it unsaid; you know — none so well — how miserable a man I have been; you would not deny me that one gleam of a better light? Fate has forced us into a mutual confidence; you have told me that which binds us together in a secrecy that keeps your image always present to my mind."

"Listen!" said she, withdrawing her hand decisively from his grasp, while her fine eyes were directed with an expression of alarm upon the door.

He heard a step approach, and a knock at his door. He waved his hand backward, in warning to the young lady, as he advanced to see who was there.

But she passed him quickly, saying aloud:

"As you are interrupted, sir, another time perhaps will answer. I may go now, I suppose?"

Mark Shadwell looked both agitated and annoyed, and he said, also aloud:

“Certainly, Miss Marlyn and at the same time he opened the door wide and suddenly.

“Well?” said he, looking straight in old Wyndle’s face, rather sternly, for it was she who had knocked. “What do you want of me?”

“Oh!” said old Wyndle, prolonging her note of wonder as Miss Marlyn passed slowly from the door.

. Miss Marlyn and the housekeeper did not like one another.

The young lady, I think, was pleased, and from her fine eyes just glided across the old retainer’s face a glance of hardly disguised disdain and triumph. Mrs. Wyndle drew back, a little pallid, with her nose turned up, and her mouth pursed, and a sharp frown.

A What do you want, Wyndle? I’m not going to stand here all day,” said Mark, sharply, cutting short this little bit of by-play.

“Only my mistress wanted to know if *she* could see you here, sir?” said the old servant, following, with a disdainful sweep of her little grey eyes, the leisurely retreat of Agnes Marlyn.

“Of course she can; what the devil’s to prevent her? Everyone can see me here — provided I’m not busy; and I’m always glad to see her — as she knows. Such rot! Just tell her, I’ll go to her room if she likes it, or she can come here, if she likes it better.”

And, angrily, Mark shut the door in the face of this privileged domestic.

““What factionists they are, with their d — d jealousies and little rivalries, and spites!” he muttered. “There is that stupid old Wyndle — she’ll be off with a story, I suppose, to Amy, and she’ll be crying and grimacing, like a martyr, for a week. I sometimes wish this cursed old house would fall and bury us all under its rubbish; I’m tired to death of it, I know!”

Mark Shadwell hated a scene. He hated being talked over by his servants; his neighbours be did not care about, for be did not see them. He had never been a vulgar profligate. He thought that vice and all its ways should be kept dark; and Roke Wycherly had thought him, even at his worst, a rather cold and straight-laced fellow. And now, too, being like many men a medley of inconsistencies, he had his ideas of morality — his philosophy and self-control — and at the bottom of his soul was a dastardly hope — which he would not avow even to himself. Amy Shadwell had been very ill; more than once, lately, the doctor had been called in, and had gone away. In the life of a confirmed invalid, people take little note of these occasional shocks, and things are assumed to return to their old channel. But Mark saw — with sometimes a compunction, sometimes a glow of resignation — that this sad incumbrance could not trouble him very much longer.

"Well, Wyndle?" inquired Mrs. Shadwell, as she entered.

"*Well,* ma'am, yes, and might be better, may be. It's an ill world, ma'am, and the worse the folk the better they thrive. The impittence of that Frenchwoman!" said Mrs. Wyndle, grimly.

"Whom do you mean, Wyndle?"

"Agnes Marlyn, ma'am. She's always a peepin' and pokin' — I *will* say it — after the master."

"Oh, Wyndle, what do you mean?" said her mistress, haughtily.

"Just that, ma'am; and I'd pack her off, if I had my way, without no more delays, ma'am. What business had she shut up in the library wi' the master this minute, when I went down o' your message?"

"Of course, Wyndle, he had sent to give her a direction; you are not to talk so," said the lady, haughtily still, and also uneasily. "I suppose she was leaving the room as you came?"

"Not till after I knocked, ma'am. Then her and the master came to the door together, and out sails my lady, and gives me a look as if I wasn't fit to wipe the dust off her shoes," said the housekeeper.

"Well, you know, you need not quarrel, Wyndle, for she is going to leave us. She wishes to leave us, and she's going."

"And joy go wi' her," she continued, with her privilege. "We all thinks she was just getting her word in about everything, and tryin' to turn master round her little finger."

This little parenthetic talk left a pain at Amy Shadwell's heart.

Shadwell waited now in his room, but no message came.

"Cool — isn't it? keeping a fellow waiting here to know her pleasure! That old fool, Wyndle, I suppose, has been telling her a story. What a mystery the love of mischief is! and my meek wife has found a temper at last. She had better not try it on me, though."

I can't say how far his conjecture was right. He took his hat and stick, however, and loitered into the orchard, and spoke to the men who were removing the great pyramids of apples piled upon the grass, and thus trying to cheat himself into the fancy that he was busy and useful, and so into the farmyard, and then away among his distant woodlands.

On the whole, it had been a day of strange triumphs. Could Agnes Marlyn's half-confessions bear any other meaning than that which his vanity read in them? Could he ever forget her deep eyes, her colour, and the sudden breaking out of her fiery spirit? Talk of Swift and Vanessa! Was ever romance more desperately genuine than this? Had he not terrible proof of her devotion? Was not this wild, gentle, fierce girl, the most beautiful he had ever seen? Could he escape from her spell? Was not that Hebe always standing by him, filling for him to the brim the cup of madness? But no, she should not wreck herself. Were not these relations of mystery, of subjugation, of half-divulged passion, the most luxurious imaginable? The more she trusted him, the more would he reverence her. A supernatural being, knit to him by mysterious ties. Her devotion should be honoured, her defencelessness sacred.

CHAPTER IX.

NEWS OF CARMEL SHERLOCK.

UNNROMANTICALLY in this walk was Mark Shadwell's path crossed by the village attorney, who, in local litigations, was wont to act for him. With a qualm of anticipated annoyance he saw him, for he was pursuing the footpath that leads towards the house; and, with the sure presage of a man in difficulties, Mark knew that a visit from a man of law meant trouble, perhaps danger.

"How d'ye do, Twinley?" said he, stopping short. "Looking for me? Anything unpleasant?"

"Hope I see you well, Mr. Shadwell. Well, I hope not, sir, only Mr. Mervyn is going to file a bill to compel execution of the leases for Headlam."

"He sha'n't get them? I'll — I'll see you tomorrow about it — to-day I can't — if you look in about twelve. We'll talk, if you please, tomorrow," he repeated, a little peremptorily, repressing the attorney's incipient discussion. "I suppose it will do tomorrow. One must sometimes take a little exercise, you know; one can't be always over law and accounts — shall we say tomorrow?"

Mr. Shadwell spoke as tartly as if it was Twinley and not Mr. Mervyn, who wanted these renewals.

"Very good, sir. I'll look up at twelve o'clock, Mr. Shadwell, as you say, tomorrow. Nice day, sir."

' "Charming," he assented; and so they took leave, and went their several ways.

Mark Shadwell, being a haughty man, did not open his wounds to every one, and never cursed Mr. Mervyn to his attorney. He relieved his feelings now, however, and he talked in soliloquy, in a strain by no means charitable, of the long head and the long purse that had spoiled his morning's walk, and dashed the luxury of his indolent dream with bitterness.

This little reminder of his relations with Mr. Mervyn had its effect by-and-bye. On his return, he found that his daughter had just arrived. He had written in the morning, rather stiffly, to request that she should come home, charging that request upon her mother's state of health, and her very lonely condition in Rachel's absence.

He had not been ten minutes at home, when Rachel arrived. She came into the library to see him. She was looking more than usually pretty, he thought, with a particularly beautiful colour, and an indescribable depth and fulness in her eyes, and something of confusion that was new to him. Her good looks, however, did not interest him now. There was no great chance that her beauty, buried where it was, should ever contribute to extricate her family from the quag in which it was sinking. For one dreamy moment, as he gazed with a sort of speculative admiration upon her beauty, he thought, "Were I to make her heiress of Raby — a thousand a year, at least — might not something come of it?" But Mark had no notion of fettering himself or his miserable property, by adding to her dot of four thousand pounds charged by his settlement.

Was he to divest himself of power to raise a thousand pounds if he wanted it? or to marry hereafter, should he recover his melancholy liberty? a step by which, he chose to think, even his daughter might benefit.

Dryly enough, he said:

"You had better run up and see your mother; she has been very lonely."

"Miss Temple came with me, and I think she is still in the hall," hesitated Rachel.

"Oh, is she? Has anything been heard about Carmel Sherlock since?"

"I think not," began Rachel.

"Well, just ask; and, if there has, come back to me," said he.

'He had not waited five minutes, when a visit from Charles Mordant, in his room, gave a new turn to his thoughts. The sight of old Mervyn's nephew was not pleasant, and his countenance and manner showed it. He received him coldly, and without a smile.

It was plainly no common visit, for he was pale and preoccupied and nervous. It was plain, too, that there was something on his mind which he must speak, — and speak it he did.

A proud and fiery man is a bad custodian of his own interests. Had Mark been in a reasonable mood, he would have thought twice before dismissing any chance of relieving himself of the care and embarrassment of his daughter's guardianship. But the immediate temptation to snub Mervyn's nephew was too much for him, especially as that nephew had nothing but his commission and three hundred a year to offer.

"You are a very young man, Mr. Mordant, or you could not suppose that I could seriously entertain such a thing; and I can hardly suppose that your uncle, Mr. Mervyn, who has seen fit to challenge me to a lawsuit only the other day, can possibly have advised your making me this proposal, and, in any case, I must say it is one which I can't think of; and, without meaning anything unkind, I do say that I beg there may be no more about it. Has not Miss Temple called? I must go and see her. Shall we come?"

And, with his unpleasant smile and a peremptoriness of tone not to be mistaken, he uttered this little sentence, and preceded poor Mordant, who was in a state of dreadful bewilderment, from the room.

I cannot say that, in point of prudence, there was much to recommend this marriage. Perhaps a wise and kind father would have given it as decided a negative as Mark Shadwell did. But wild lamentations, in which romantic old Barbara joined, and profound dejection followed. Mark, however, was clear and peremptory, and in a very short time an idea entered his mind, which quite sealed his determination upon this point.

Weeks passed, and Miss Marlyn still lingered on. It was not her doing, neither was it owing to any indecision on the part of Mrs. Shadwell. When the day appointed for Miss Marlyn's departure had nearly come, Mark told his wife that he had been disappointed in money, and that the simple, vulgar truth was that he could not pay Miss Marlyn, and she must wait a week or two longer. "You must tell her when she's to go, Amy," he said. But Amy entreated him to undertake that task himself; and as he secretly wished to take it out of his wife's hands, he did consent to do so.

Miss Agnes Marlyn consented to remain a little longer at Raby, to old Wyndle's loud discontent, and poor Mrs. Shadwell's secret anxiety.

In old Raby church, when Rachel and Miss Marlyn attended morning service there on the Sunday following, they saw a young gentleman in solitary occupation of the square pew next theirs. His get-up was unexceptionable, and he was undoubtedly good looking, with something of the interesting air and languor of an invalid.

Very soft, large eyes, a delicately-formed nose, rather high, pale, gentle, handsome face; rich, silken, wavy, brown hair, and a decidedly elegant exterior, could not fail to excite a gentle curiosity in young ladies so near, — even in church.

Rachel had rallied since the occurrence I have last described. The cheerful support of Miss Barbara, most generous of matchmakers, and the romantic sympathies of Mrs. Shadwell, were all in favour of Charles Mordant, and Rachel was persuaded by these ministering spirits that the opposition of her father was simply one of those jolts and hitches in the path of true love which uniformly turn up and uniformly disappear. She was by no means, therefore, in that state of interesting apathy, begotten of despair, which refuses to take note of the outer world, And she did speculate a little like Miss Marlyn, when she ought to have been better employed, about this stranger.

There is in Raby, as everybody knows who has ever dipped into a book on the mineral waters of England, a well, known as the Raby Spa, whose peculiar virtues attract generally some four or five visitors at a time, during the summer months, to the inn, or, as we now term it, the hotel, of that quiet and quaint little town. Whenever a stranger, above the level of a religious missionary or a prosperous farmer, appears in the church of Raby, he is assumed to be, and pretty uniformly rightly, a flying visitor to “the Spa.”

The stranger stole a few of those very quiet and cautious glances, which a well-bred man, leaning over the side of a pew and at his devotions, will permit himself in such a case.

The young ladies were delayed some ten minutes at old Mrs. Ford’s cottage, and, having visited the sick, they drove home.

As they drove up the avenue, whom should they pass but the interesting stranger.

“There he is again, Rachel!” said Miss Marlyn. “I suppose he has got leave to walk over the place.”

“Yes — I dare say,” said Rachel, both young ladies seeing, without appearing to look at the object of their curiosity. This conjecture turned out, however, to be erroneous.

They had not been in the house many minutes, when the stranger walked boldly up the steps, knocked and rang, and asked for Mr. Shadwell, telling the servant to say Captain Clayton, of the — (mentioning a distinguished cavalry regiment), and then, on second thoughts, he wrote on his card "On sick leave," and gave it to the servant.

Forth came Shadwell, and was rather pleased to see him. He made him come in and take a biscuit and a glass of sherry, and then brought him for a walk through his wild and beautiful park.

This gleam of hospitality was not a mere caprice. A dull docile man is sometimes better company than a brilliant one, with his eyes about him and a vein of satire.

Clayton looked about four-and-thirty, but was in reality a good deal more. Shadwell had known him, very intimately, some sixteen years ago, when they used to play a great deal of billiards together, at his club, and Mark always beat him, and he thought Mark a wit and a philosopher. There was not much in Clayton; but this kind of admiration was the most agreeable quality imaginable, and healed the wounded vanity of the recluse.

Clayton could narrate things accurately enough, and answer his questions about the Crimea, and could not help knowing a great deal that was interesting. But his chief excellence was that he admired easily, and was absolutely without the faculty of satirical observation.

Clayton had been sent to Raby by his doctor, merely to try the Spa for a week; and, if it promised to do him good, he was to return after his visit to Scotland, and complete his recovery.

He was just the man, also, to answer the style of Raby hospitalities. He affected simple fare, and was under rule not to exceed two glasses of sherry. Mark could, therefore, have no fears about having him to dine, and, next day, accordingly he came. It is inexpressible the relief which Mark found in this humdrum companionship, which, nevertheless, in so many essential points, so exactly suited him. It was human society and associations recovered suddenly, in a solitude which had but one capricious charm, and, except when that intervened, had become almost insupportably horrible.

With this Captain Clayton, who could tell so much about those memorable battle-fields and incidents of siege-life which were then so fresh in people's minds, and a great deal of other gossip also, and who was so communicative, and so disposed to be pleased, something like the glow of social life and interest returned to those sombre rooms.

Every evening during his stay he passed at Raby, and now at last Mark Shadwell did observe unquestionable evidences of something more than a fancy — a very decided penchant — for his daughter in this very eligible person; and although a recent deception had made him wary, still there was a very marked difference between this dull and comparatively simple man, and the unscrupulous and active intriguer who had now done troubling, and tempting, and lay white and simpering, with his dark heart pierced through, under his triple coffin-lid.

"How you must all have suffered," said Captain Clayton, one day after dinner, as in his *tête-à-tête* with Mark he sipped his cup of coffee, "while that miserable business was going on here. I. was at Malta when it happened. There's a fellow in prison for it, isn't there?"

"Yes."

"And do you think he'll be hanged?"

"I hope not, poor devil, for he's perfectly mad."

"Oh, really? The man at the hotel here says he was a wonderfully clever fellow."

"Yes, wonderfully clever, but very odd, and actually mad," said Mark Shadwell.

"Have you seen him in prison?"

"No. We shall hear all about it, however, early in spring, when the judges come down to Applebury."

And Mark grew suddenly silent,' and his face looked old and] sombre, and after two or three minutes lost in profound abstraction, he suddenly roused himself, saying: "As you won't take any wine, if you have finished your coffee, suppose we come into the drawing room."

Clayton looked very well pleased at the proposal.

"I shall miss my pleasant quarters awfully when I leave," he said.

"But that is not for some time, and you mustn't talk of it," said Mark, with something of anxiety as well as of politeness, for Clayton was in a measure to him what the friendly watcher in the nursery is to the nervous child, and he dreaded the hour when his long solitary evenings were to return.

Was not his secretary an occasional resource? Yes; she interested him perhaps more than ever. But Mark felt that old Wyndle and the other servants — all intense partisans of his wife — watched him, and compared notes, hating Miss Marlyn. He had, he assured himself, nothing to conceal.

He defied them. But this sort of prying not only exasperated, but embarrassed him, and sorely abridged his opportunities.

Besides, Clayton had certainly begun to like Rachel, and with this fancy, which seeing that she was an only child, did not appear by any means imprudent, had visited him visions of Arcadian life very like those which false Sir Roke had affected. To be half frozen, wounded, rendered incapable, by a shot in the ankle, of ever dancing again, to have passed three months in pain in an hospital, and more than a year in a very precarious invalided state, is not a bad sedative.

“When they went to the drawingroom he saw Clayton as usual address himself to Rachel, and he was glad. Clayton, though not rich in the exalted sense, was yet very well. He had more than two thousand a-year, “and possibilities.” And that night, in his farewell talk with Mark — for he was to start for Scotland next morning — he admitted his admiration a little, and then a little more, and so on, till he made a full confession of his liking. He had not spoken to Rachel. He had heard something about an engagement, in fact, though he did not mention her name, it was Miss Marlyn who had told him that Rachel liked Charles Mordant, and was to be married to him.

Mark made short work of this suspicion, and they parted with a kind of understanding that Clayton after his visit to Scotland, to which he was committed for at least seven months, was to return to Raby, and make him a less hurried visit.

Next day Clayton was gone, and Mark left alone with his cares.

In his sudden allusion, on the night before, to the death of Roke Wycherly and to his murderer, Clayton had unwittingly disturbed an anxious question in Mark Shadwell’s mind. Should he go forthwith, and visit Carmel Sherlock in Applebury prison. There were *pros* and *cons.* His judgment told him very distinctly that he ought to go, and without anymore procrastination; but a reluctance he could not surmount, restrained him day after day and week after week. And as the interval grew, so did the care that loaded his heart. Clayton’s unexpected question had startled him more than his own occasional thoughts.

On this morning Mark had been in his library among his books and papers, when this note reached him from the vicar.

"MY DEAR SHADWELL,

"I have just returned, very late, from Applebury, where, I am sorry to say, poor Carmel Sherlock is extremely ill, and the doctor says, in imminent danger. His illness is gastric fever, which he must have had for a considerable time. For several days he had been eating absolutely nothing, but declined to report himself ill; and it was supposed to be one of those obstinate cases of temper which I am told sometimes occur in prison, and are always subdued in the natural course — by hunger. But suddenly he began to sink, and is rapidly losing ground; and on a visit made yesterday by the doctor, is ascertained to be too probably dying. I saw him to-day. He is very weak, and seems to speak with difficulty, but expressed twice so *very* earnest a wish to see you — in feet, conjured me so to persuade you to see him — that I trouble you with this note, which has grown into a letter. I shall be at Applebury again tomorrow at ten, to see the poor man, and I shall tell him that I gave you his message.

"Believe me,
"My dear Shadwell,
"Yours truly,
"S. TEMPLE.

" P.S. — It is, I find, too late to send tonight."

"That man will die, something tells me; I don't mind doctors or clergymen — but he's going to die!"

So spoke Mark Shadwell, flushing suddenly and fiercely. Mark stood up, and read the note again, and then looked at his watch. "I ought to have had that at seven this morning."

He rang the bell furiously, and not waiting for an answer, he strode across the hall, and shouted down the passage to command some one to order the fellow in the stable to get his horse instantly. He got on his hat and coat in the hall, waited for a few minutes in a deep reverie at the doorsteps, then walked round hurriedly to the stables, and in a few minutes more was riding at a rapid trot in the direction of Applebury.

CHAPTER X.

SHERLOCK'S STORY.

MARK SHADWELL dismounted at the inn-door, in the market-place of Applebury, and inquired whether the vicar had been there. He learned that he had been in the town before nine o'clock, having an appointment to keep with Thomas Foukes, of the Mills, and he had shortly afterwards visited the prison, and returned by ten o'clock.

"Is Mr. Temple still here?"

"No, sir, he went up the town a bit. He said he'd be leaving, maybe, in twenty minutes, and his horse is at his feed."

"Did he say anything of a prisoner who was ill?" asked Shadwell, anxious to lighten his suspense.

"No, sir."

Throwing the bridle to the man, he walked quickly towards the narrow street in which stands the jail of Applebury. At the corner he met Stour Temple returning.

"Oh!" said he, stopping. "Thanks for your note — I'm here in consequence. How is he?"

"He'll never speak more, the doctor says," answered Stour Temple, with a shake of his head; "he has sunk into a lethargy, and is dying."

Shadwell sighed like a man who puts a load off, and looked down on the pavement for a little.

"Have you seen him more than once? — I hope he did speak."

Shadwell looked pale and anxious as he raised his eyes to ask this question.

"Yes, he did; and I was anxious to see you," answered the vicar, in a low tone. "Shall we get into the room at the inn? There is no use in your going on to the prison. He can neither hear nor speak — poor, unhappy man!"

They turned and walked down the steep little street toward the market-place. Mark, in a very low tone, said: —

"I suppose he confessed everything?"

“He told me a very odd story,” said the vicar; “you shall hear all when we get in — it’s only a minute?”

“Certainly, — very true.”

Mark felt very oddly; and in his suppressed agony of suspense, as they walked toward the inn, he looked with what carelessness he could assume up toward the sky, and across from one gable-point to another among the quaint houses, as if in a sudden anxiety to read the weather.

They had now reached the inn-door. There was no one in the small room with the bow-window looking across the unequally-paved square.

“We can have this quietly — to ourselves?” asked the vicar. The waiter acquiesced; and Stour Temple, shutting the door, drew near the window, where they sat down.

“The wretched man was quite aware that he is dying — in fact, it was only because he thought death so near that he despaired of your coming in time, and told me the circumstances.”

“He confessed the murder, did he?” asked Shadwell.

“No — that is, he did confess the moral guilt,” began the vicar.

“I don’t understand,” said Shadwell, growing paler.

““Well, I’ll explain; I’ll tell from the beginning — you know it was not always easy to follow poor Sherlock’s meaning.”

“No — there I agree — one must be a cabalist, or a rosicrucian, to guess at it — quite mad,” acquiesced Mark Shadwell.

“Well, my translation of his meaning is just this: from the moment he heard of Sir Roke Wycherly’s visit, he had a foreboding of evil he could not account for.”

“Yes — I know — his dreams and demons,” said Mark. “He told me — go on, pray.”

“Well, I know it is your wish that I should be quite frank. Of course there were foolish, or, as you say, mad things mixed up in what he said; and you’ll forgive me for telling you one of them, because it evidently accounts for part of what has happened.”

“Pray, tell me everything. I know — better than ever lately — that he was quite out of his mind; I sha’n’t be surprised at anything.”

“Well, then, he did not say so distinctly, but there is no other way of accounting for his language; in fact, he conveyed the admission that he had cherished a secret and absurd, but most passionate, attachment to Miss Shadwell."

"Oh! — Indeed! — Very flattering."

"No one, of course, suspected anything so preposterous, for he described it as a secret, as well as I could make out, between him and his violin, or his demon, and kept it close within his own heart. Then came a suspicion that Sir Roke Wycherly had come to Raby to pay his addresses to your daughter."

"That is strange!" said Mark, quickly, "for poor Roke had actually taken a violent fancy; and had, in fact, made up his mind to ask my daughter to marry him. I can't say, of course, that so young a girl, and one so entirely out of the reach of all merely worldly influences would have dreamed of it; but, I may tell you now, he talked to me in a way that could not admit of a doubt as to his intentions. All that was laid in the dust with poor Roke himself, and what you say throws quite a new light on the motive."

"Yes, there was jealousy; but he says that, quite apart from that, there was another influence prompting him to that crime."

"That's pretty plain," said Mark, with a grim shrug.

"He told me it was an impulse which he found it eventually impossible to resist. He was so persuaded that he was drifting towards that dreadful crime, that he told you and Mrs. Shadwell that he must leave Raby, but not until after he had actually attempted to enter Sir Roke's room at night, with the distinct purpose of taking away his life."

"Lamentable that he should not have told his reason for urging his departure. It was my detaining him, then, that caused this miserable affair — but who could have fancied anything so perverted and dreadful?" said Mark, who was looking more and more miserable as their conversation proceeded.

"On the night of the murder he had resolved to confine himself strictly to his room, until the early morning, when he meant to leave Raby. But his temptation assailed and overcame him. He stole through the passages, and came to Sir Roke's door, which he found open. He had in his hand that Malayan dagger which was found in Sir Roke's room. He entered noiselessly; — there was light. Sir Roke was not in his bed; he saw him, as he fancied, dozing in his chair. He said as he approached, the resolution to put him to death grew more inflexible. He described himself as all the time freezing with horror at his own meditated act. On reaching the chair he found that Sir Roke was already dead, and weltering in his blood, as we found him."

Shadwell, as this narration proceeded, had risen; and, standing with his shoulder to the window-frame, was staring down on Stour Temple almost as one might have fancied Carmel Sherlock looking down on the dead face of the baronet.

When Stour Temple looked up, he was shocked. Was it Mark Shadwell or a ghost? That old face — frowning, trying to smile, with the eyes of a detective. His doubtful glance awakened something in Temple's startled countenance that recalled Mark Shadwell, and he laughed suddenly.

"A cock-and-bull story, eh? — rather?" he said. "The fellow's madder than I had an idea, and, also, more cunning. You don't quite believe all that — do you?"

"I — I hardly know what to believe," said Temple; "I have not had time to think it over yet. I only know that odd as his language was, and odder still his mystic ramblings, the story itself was perfectly consistent. He said that he remembered dropping the knife from his hand, and concluded that he must have picked up the dagger, with which the murder had actually been committed, by mistake. He fancied it was his own, and thought he had effectually concealed it afterwards in the stableyard."

"Yes, it's all a muddle; I wonder you had patience to listen to him. The man's dreaming; always mad, and now in a fever," said Mark.

"Very weak, it is true; but he appeared to me as collected as I remember him at any time."

"Not saying very much, though."

"This, however, is no matter of theory or imagination. There, I grant you, he was always wild enough; but one simply of recollection, as you shall hear. He said that. as he approached the door, through the gallery, some one went hurriedly out. He saw the shadow on the wall, after the figure quickly turned the corner of the gallery. He fancied, I can't say why, that it might be Sir Roke himself, in his dressing-gown, and followed quickly; and he distinctly saw that it was Miss Marlyn. He knew that she was awake and up. She had been, he says, at his own door not very long before. He thinks she had some quarrel with Sir Roke Wycherly— "

"Why, she did not know Sir Roke," interrupted Mark.

"Oh! pardon me, I thought I had mentioned *that.* She did know him — he admired her when she was at that school, in France. I thought, in fact, I had mentioned — but, on second thoughts, I believe I did not — the unpleasant rumours affecting him, which I did mention to Sir Roke himself."

Mark looked down; the contents of Miss Marlyn's desk had apprized him of this discreditable acquaintance — a scandal now condoned. He had not been aware, before, however, that it was known to Stour Temple, and this discovery was embarrassing.

"What can I know of Miss Marlyn's-acquaintances before she came to Raby, except what you told me, of which you seemed not to be very certain yourself, and what the principal of the school herself disclosed? There was nothing about Roke Wycherly there. There was absolutely nothing but what might be said, by a spiteful old woman, of any good-looking girl who had the misfortune to reside under her authority. Nothing but malice could account for Sherlock's talking such stuff, if we did not both know that he is crazy."

"Well, I can't quite agree with you. An acquaintance there certainly was; and, it would seem, an understanding, at one time at least; and Carmel Sherlock is quite distinct upon one point, and that is that she was the person who, he believes, came out of Sir Roke's room. He has not the slightest doubt that she was the person whom he saw in the gallery. She was walking very quickly, and he could not hear her tread."

"All very fine if poor Sherlock had been in his senses," said Mark.

"I always thought Carmel Sherlock a man of very acute observation and accurate memory," said Stour.

"Yes, and one who saw visions, in a matter where his imagination was excited. I would not hang a dog on his evidence."

"I'm merely submitting what Sherlock very positively stated; I don't offer any remarks of my own; but he said, in distinct terms, that he had no doubt the murder was committed by that person — Miss Agnes Marlyn."

"Why, my good God, sir! you can't seriously mean anything so hideous and absurd?" said Mark Shadwell, with a pale sneer.

"The meaning is not mine. I simply repeat what the dying man told me," remarked the clergyman.

"Simply," sneered Mark again.

"And, you know, it would be quite out of the question my presuming to suppress it," said the vicar.

"True churchman, Temple," muttered Shadwell, bitterly. "Your true Christian loves punishment — sacrifice, you know — and as one victim slips through our fingers, we try to lay hold on another. I don't think you ever liked that poor young woman much?"

Stour Temple looked with an unconscious sternness for a moment, and Mark lowered his eyes before his surprised and searching gaze.

"One would naturally feel an interest in her," began the vicar, who made it a rule never to be offended with Mark.

"Well, I think so: an orphan girl, cast on the world so very young, without kindred or friends, I do think it rather appeals to — I don't say our Christianity — though I have read something somewhere, like 'thinketh no evil' — but to our manliness and decency. I say, I think it appals one, even whispering such a charge, upon the evidence of a lunatic, against a creature so defenceless and inexperienced." White and angry looked Mark as he spoke, and as if he hated the vicar, who, in his cold way, simply added:

"You see, I tell you all this as a magistrate. It does appear quite incredible; but is there anything so mysterious and paradoxical as crime? What new and terrible ideas of human nature it gives us."

"Oh! yes — philosophy and psychology — all very fine; but you will not get twelve men, in a Christian country, to believe on the evidence of a mad assassin, that a poor, little goodnatured governess overpowered and slew a baronet of six feet high, and without any assignable motive. Come, what do you seriously advise me to do with this notable piece of evidence? Had I better ask you to swear an information, and invite the crown to take it up? Do you think the country would ever allow such a joke to die against you and me?"

"I care very little," said the vicar, "who laughs, provided I have acquitted myself of my duty. Different men will value that dying declaration differently. I have a full note of it with me, and am ready to make affidavit to its accuracy, whenever I may be called on.

"Yes — yes — of course; I am quite sure that Carmel Sherlock said every word you repeat; but surely you must see that to pretend we had a case for indicting Miss Marlyn — my good God I as much a lady, in all respects, as you and I are gentlemen — would be simply to utter a frantic libel. We don't believe it; — we can't believe it — you no more than I."

"What steps do you mean to take?" asked the vicar.

, A silence followed.

"Well, it is not easy, at a moment," said Mark, with a change of manner, and he walked to the window and looked out over the red blinds into the drowsy old market-place, across the jolty pavement, and to the picturesque gables, the tinted fronts and latticed windows, that looked to him like an odd dream. And he added, returning, "You would not mind giving me that copy of Sherlock's story?"

"I'll make a fair copy, and you shall have it," said the vicar.

"Yes, that's what I mean — thanks. I'll — I'll take an opinion upon it — an able opinion — and we'll put our heads together. And, I suppose, we both consider it right to be perfectly silent on this subject until I shall have got professional advice to guide me?" said Mark, looking hard at him.

"*Certainly*," said the vicar, with a reassuring emphasis.

"I knew you'd agree with me," said Mark. There was a pause, and then he said: "I wonder how Sherlock is now? Let us go and see."

Sherlock was worse, and could not live through the night. He lay in an uneasy lethargy, moaning, mumbling half sentences, turning feverishly, and nowhere and nohow finding ease — like a man dying in the fever of over-fatigue, — too exhausted for sleep, too exhausted for consciousness.

The doctor had looked in for the last time, while Mark and the vicar were talking in the inn "parlour," and Carmel Sherlock, in a few hours more, was to die. In the night he would go — in the darkness which he had peopled with shapes and voices, and pass through the throes and shades of chaos into the wonderful life of spirits.

So, drowning now in Lethe, the struggle, growing faint and fainter, would end surely in a few hours more, and he have sunk.

Farewell the queer old room at Raby, the battered quartos, the desultory life, the enchanted Straduarius, the moonlit vigils, and that wild despairing [love, that mingled with its music like a distant song and cry — all is hopeless jumble now, colours mingling, sounds confused, floating, and moving away toward the final darkness and silence.

Mark loitered on, from hour to hour, in the little town of Applebury. I think so long as Carmel Sherlock lived, there was a feeling of suspense. It were something, if that were -ended before he mounted his horse. A few hours saw the short day out. The vicar's business in the neighbourhood was ended. They mounted their horses at the little inn-door together.

A melancholy sunset, a wild red glare faded into darkness, and a frosty starlight followed. The vicar and Mark rode away, side by side, in silence. I don't think a word was exchanged until they reached that point where the road to Raby diverges; and there they bid one another good night, and pursued their solitary routes homeward.

It was growing cold. Mark buttoned his wrapper closely across. One look over his shoulder he took toward the distant town of Applebury, and with a heavy heart thought of the matchless fidelity of poor Carmel Sherlock dying there in prison. Then he spurred homeward; and as he looked before him into the darkness, trees and hedges dimly gliding by, a different feeling succeeded; for was there not a beautiful face at the end of this night-ride that interested him, and made the darkness romantic?

CHAPTER XI.

A CRISIS.

NEXT morning came news from Applebury. Carmel Sherlock was dead, and Mark Shadwell was both glad and sorry. The sense of relief was disturbed, however, by the consciousness that Stour Temple had heard Sherlock's confession, and was watching him.

It was some weeks before Shadwell saw the vicar again. He met him under the old trees, now stark and leafless in the clear wintry air, as they both rode into the little town of Raby. They had not yet reached the houses, and with one accord they both drew bridle, and came to a walk.

"I sent that case up to my attorney in town," said Shadwell, almost the first thing after their greeting, "and had it submitted to Skelton, the Queen's Counsel, for general advice, and he says that, taking into account the facts that are proved as to poor Sherlock's state of mind, and unsupported as his statement is by a single particle of circumstantial evidence — considering how long it was delayed, and that the attempt to criminate another came from a person about himself to stand his trial for the crime on strong and clear evidence, there was no excuse for moving in it; in feet, he scouts it. I did not, of course, name the person whom the miserable man indicated."

"Quite right," said Temple.

"I knew you would think so. The fact is, we all know now the state of the poor fellow's mind; and to act on his dreams as if they were facts, would be a most monstrous cruelty."

"Can the servants throw any light upon it?" asked the vicar.

"None in the world, except negatively," said Mark. "They saw or heard nothing, no commotion, not the slightest sound. There was only that fellow Clewson, you remember, who heard or saw anything. "What do you think of him?"

"Well, I thought he gave his evidence in a very distinct, unembarrassed way. I don't think any one suspected him," said the vicar, slowly, thinking as he spoke.

“Yes, I know, and *I* don’t suspect him now, but that’s because I don’t believe one word of poor Sherlock’s story,” said Mark. “I’m quite certain the whole thing was one of his visions; but if I fancied — which, mind you, I do not — that Sherlock’s narrative was a reality, my first suspicion would lighten upon Clewson.”

“Why on Clewson?” said Temple.

“Roke had a fancy for expensive seals and rings, and all that sort of jeweller’s finery; he had banknotes, for he told me so — he hated letters of credit, and all that sort of thing that gave him the least trouble. I think somewhere about seventy pounds was all that came to light on the inquest; but Heaven only knows! what it might have been. Don’t you see a possible motive? Remember, not a creature on earth knew, but he, what, money or valuables Roke may have had with him, or what his trinkets were like; a lot of them he may never have worn in England, don’t you see?”

“Yes, of course, to rob him; but I remember, it appeared in evidence that Roke used to secure the door between himself and his servant,” began the vicar.

“Very true,” interposed Mark; “but so he used the door opening on the gallery. Now, it is clear that on the fatal night he must have neglected one or the other; and why not that? If Clewson were the man, he would naturally, being no fool, I suppose, open the other door, and leave it so, to suggest the idea that the murderer had entered from the gallery.”

“But how about the person whom he saw leave the door?” said the vicar.

“Assuming, for the sake of testing the hypothesis, that this was so, I fancy it easier to believe that a young, harmless person like that passing near, and hearing perhaps some strange ejaculations and sounds, on reaching the door and seeing it partly open, should have listened there a moment, and possibly, even peeped, and gone away quickly on hearing Sherlock’s step approaching.”

“There may be something in that about Clewson pondered the vicar gravely. “Do you believe it?”

“Not a word of it; and so I should swear as a witness, because Sherlock has told me — and, in fact, whenever his imagination was in the slightest degree moved, he never failed to tell me — of marvels he saw. He saw Roke Wycherly come in at his door in the shape of a cock flattering his wings, with his comb bleeding. He has had conversations at the tarn at

Feltram with the lady who threw herself out of the window at Wynderfel, four hundred years ago, and saw her walk over the water with the most perfect distinctness, and several hundred equally wonderful revelations. In fact, in such a situation, with nerves admittedly excited to the highest pitch, and believing himself at the moment in actual communication with demons, I could not place the smallest reliance upon any evidence of his, or the reality of anything he fancied he had seen or heard; no human being who knew anything whatever of him could."

Here ensued a considerable interval of silence.

"The next time you are passing our way, Temple, you must look in. I'll give you my case and Skelton's opinion to read, and you'll see it all in a moment; and in the meantime, I need not say how imperatively every consideration of honour, pity, and decency imposes silence upon us respecting the poor girl whose name Sherlock has mingled in his tale."

"I quite agree with you," said the vicar.

"Yes," said Mark, "I knew you would."

"A tragedy — full of instruction," said the vicar, awaking, as it were, from a little reverie. "Had Sir Roke married early some one whom he loved and respected, how different his life, and his fate too, would have been!"

"You speak out of the fulness of your heart, Temple. You went right from your college to a curacy. If you had seen something of the world, or even married, yourself, you'd hardly have made so innocent a speech. Why, a vicious fellow becomes ten times more vicious if he marries; it's a snare simply, and an aggravation of our miserable, hampered, sickly existence."

The vicar sighed, and said:

"We are not agreed upon many points, I'm afraid."

"Not upon that, certainly. It is part of priestcraft — I mean superstition — making everything irrevocable and irremediable. Vows and dedications! What can be more ridiculous and damnable than joining an unsuitable man and woman together in that irrevocable association.

"And so our discussion leaves us, as usual, pretty much where it found us," said the vicar, with a faint smile and a shake of his head, and a short silence followed.

"Miss Marlyn is still at Raby?" said the vicar.

"Yes; it depends on my wife how soon she goes. I suppose she will take her leave whenever it is quite my wife's convenience. Commend me to women for taking good care of themselves."

So Miss Marlyn lingered on at Raby. I don't think, notwithstanding this satirical speech of Mark Shadwell's, that his wife had even a voice in the matter. He would have liked people to think that the poor little nonentity who pined out her remaining days, with some complainings and little usefulness, gently in her sick room at Raby bullied him in this, and thwarted him in other things, and had been, negatively at least, the fatal incompatibility to whom he owed his failure, and all the mortifications attendant on it.

"Mark, dear," she said to him hesitatingly one day, "has anything been settled about Miss Marlyn since?"

"Unsettled, I suppose you mean," said Mark, sharply. "About sending her away, eh?" and he laughed a little angrily. "There's just this difficulty. When that miserable fellow Sherlock died, I locked up his room, and should have given myself simply up to ruin, if she had not been here to undertake — as she has done, very cheerfully — a portion of the drudgery which must be got through, day by day, to save my affairs from falling into inextricable confusion. I don't happen to know any one else in this house who would take the trouble of copying papers and writing letters — sixteen letters only yesterday — do you?"

"I wish I could, but the doctor won't let me write; I'm such a wretched creature, Mark — such a burden — so useless."

"I did not say you could help it; I only venture to think it's but reasonable I should have a little help provisionally wherever I can find it."

"Of course, dear Mark; certainly."

"You can do just as you please, whenever I have found any one to take Sherlock's place — the sooner that is, of course, the better for me. In the meantime I sha'n't undertake impossibilities, nor kill myself in the attempt, nor let myself drift into utter insolvency, merely to get rid of Miss Marlyn."

And, muttering to himself, he left the room angrily and suddenly.

Careless and contemptuous Mark's treatment of his wife had long been. But of late there was something of impatience and acrimony, and a perpetual harping on the folly of unsuitable marriages, and the indolence or uselessness of wives. These allusions were general, but the insult was particular, and she writhed under these cold barbarities.

There was a terrible change here. Indifference was assuming the sneer of intolerance. “He hates me — oh! he hates me — he hates me!” she used to sob, in her solitary agonies. “I made an idol of him — I adored him — and now I’m punished. Oh, Mark — Mark, darling; how have I deserved it from *you?* I could not help change and sickness — a weary life — useless, as you say. I know how it must try your patience, with all your cares, my poor, harassed darling! You are not yourself — you are not yourself: your life is one long trouble, and I know it is my fault — so helpless and wretched” — and so on, neither very logically nor coherently, but in great bitterness of spirit.

Then Rachel would come in, and her mother would smile piteously from her tears, drying them hastily; for these griefs were not for her ear, nor for any other’s.

There was also another change — a very decided one — in Miss Marlyn. Perfectly quiet, perfectly submissive, there was an irony in her docility and an exaggeration in her submissiveness that were intangibly insulting. Even had Amy Shadwell been shrewd, hard, and irascible, instead of the most timid and gentle of women, it would not have been easy for her to fasten upon a particular ground of quarrel. For this premeditated impertinence was always arranged with a view to evasion.

Sometimes the young lady, as her spirits varied, approached Mrs. Shadwell in a different vein. She would affect quite her old manner, and talk volubly, and as if in the consciousness that her conversation was exactly the thing which Mrs. Shadwell most enjoyed, though she must have seen that these interviews gave her more pain than others, and were met with very decided discouragement.

This was not wonderful, for in these communicative moods Miss Marlyn never failed, before her talk was ended, to suggest or insinuate something mysterious and untold to the prejudice of Mr. Shadwell. These vague and intangible hints, whose meaning, for one moment legible and terrific, seemed in the next to dissolve and disappear, affrighted Mrs. Shadwell, like the intrusions of a half-seen spectre.

Were these ambiguities accidental? Were they produced by chance looks and phrases? Did Miss Marlyn herself see their odd significance? They helped the effect of other changes in Miss Marlyn’s conduct, and invested that beautiful lady in the eyes of the invalid lady, with an indefinable character that was formidable.

Mrs. Shadwell in her room was sitting by the fire, listening to a little narrative of Rachel's, when Miss Marlyn looked in, paused, and retreated.

I don't know whether Rachel was talking about Miss Marlyn at the moment, but that young lady, during her few moments' hesitation at the threshold, looked from one to the other with an amused smile — a scarcely perceptible sneer — which seemed to say: "I've surprised you in-high chat upon me; shouldn't I be rather *de trop* here?"

She acted provokingly well. Her air was that of a person trying to seem unconscious of her discovery, and suppressing every evidence of her amusement.

"Call her back; tell her to come in," said Mrs. Shadwell. Rachel did so, and in came Miss Agnes Marlyn.

"Pray sit down; you had better sit near the fire, hadn't you? It's so very cold — isn't it, Miss Marlyn?" said Mrs. Shadwell.

"Very cold," acquiesced Miss Marlyn, with a gentle emphasis which conveyed a covert meaning.

Miss Marlyn sat down timidly — ceremoniously a little — and remained silent, after the manner of one admitted into a superior presence.

"I hope you keep a good fire downstairs?" said Mrs. Shadwell.

"You take a great deal too much trouble about me," she answered, with a faint, unpleasant smile; "you do, indeed, Mrs. Shadwell."

"I should be very sorry, so long as you stay with us, that you were anything, by any accident, but perfectly comfortable, Miss Marlyn," answered Amy.

"I should be very happy to abridge that so kind anxiety," said Agnes Marlyn, sadly, "if I could."

Mrs. Shadwell was silent — perhaps a little embarrassed — for assuredly she also, perhaps with more sincerity, wished Agnes Marlyn's stay at Raby shortened; and yet she had no distinct ground of quarrel to allege.

Miss Marlyn, looking down, smiled again. Rachel leaned back in her chair, with nearly closed eyes, as if in a reverie; she, too, was embarrassed — that kind of feeling is so contagious.

Then followed a silence of some minutes, during which you might hear the hum of the little jet of flame that spurted from between the bars.

“Don’t you think we are all going to sleep?” said Rachel, after some minutes had passed in this way, turning to Agnes.

“I am not sleepy; my thoughts always amuse me,” said Agnes Marlyn, in her ambiguous way.

Rachel looked at her a little vexed.

“I suppose you were thinking of some of the amusing people you knew in France; at least, I hope you were not thinking of us; for it is not pleasant to be laughed at, or even smiled at, as you sometimes smile,” she said.

Miss Marlyn did actually laugh very faintly here, turning away her head.

“Rachel, dear!” said Mrs. Shadwell, in a tone of gentle reproof.

“I’ve remarked lately that you laugh, Agnes, when I am serious, and are grave when I am merry. It is not pleasant,” said Rachel.

“People such as I are not pleasant company. It is not my fault that I am here. You and your mamma, I hope, know how unwillingly I find myself detained; but as you are so frank, I will be candid also. Your papa is not able to pay me the small arrear of my salary. If I had other means I should go away to-day, and willingly forgive that little debt; but I have no money, and without money there is nothing to be done.”

“Oh! Miss Marlyn! I had hoped you were not so anxious to leave us; and I assure you I would have spoken to Mr. Shadwell, had I known you were made uncomfortable by his delay.”

Miss Marlyn, turning away slowly, smiled again, faintly and bitterly.

“Many thanks; but I should not hesitate to speak myself to Mr. Shadwell, if I thought that speaking on the subject could be of any use; as it is, he asks me to await his convenience, and I suppose I must. You can’t be more anxious to dismiss me, than I am to resign; the difficulty is, perhaps, a little ridiculous, but we can’t help it, can we?”

“You’re extremely impertinent,” said Rachel, with a fiery glance and a brilliant colour.

“Rachel, dear, you mustn’t!” entreated her mother.

“She has my leave to call me impertinent as often as she pleases,” said Miss Marlyn; “it only shows that I have reason in wishing to go, and when I please I can retaliate, for language is at everyone’s service, ain’t it? But I sha’n’t, though I need only pick up two or three unpleasant adjectives — insolent, beggarly, and so forth — and throw them back to you, but your caprices and insults shall not tempt me into such a meanness,” said Miss

Marlyn, with the same bitter smile, and growing very pale, with an angry glare in her eyes.

"Caprices and insults, Miss Marlyn!" echoed Mrs. Shadwell, in amazement.

"Caprices and insults, *yes.* I did not want to be petted. I came here as a governess: to take me up without a cause was caprice, to drop me without a cause, is insult; therefore I say caprice and insult. It is caprice, for instance, inviting me in here, when I know you dislike me; and insult from your daughter, calling me impertinent — I, who have authority here to direct your hours and instruction while I stay — and you'll come down now, if you please, Miss Shadwell, and practise your duet." Miss Marlyn spoke in a cold way, her beautiful face white with anger, and a steady fire gleaming from her eyes, as she rose from her seat, and with a slight motion, indicated the door to Rachel.

"Authority!" repeated Mrs. Shadwell. "You forget, Miss Marlyn, that my daughter is quite past that age, and that I have never given you any such right."

"Oh, dear! I did not mean you, madam. I received it, of course, from Mr. Shadwell," said Agnes, with the same insolent smile.

"Your authority, I think, can hardly overrule mine, Miss Marlyn. I wish my daughter to remain here," said Mrs. Shadwell, gently, but with a slight flush in her cheek.

"I think, however, I am doing my duty, madam, in desiring Miss Shadwell to come to her music. It would, of course, be much pleasanter for me to sit idle, reading my book."

"Do, pray mamma, tell her to leave your room," said Rachel, in her own way nearly as angry as Miss Marlyn.

"I shall be too happy to leave this room," said Miss Marlyn.

"Anything so ridiculous!" exclaimed Rachel.

"But it shall be to ascertain on exactly what footing I really am placed while I remain here," continued Agnes Marlyn, and with a courtesy, she left the room.

"Did you ever hear anything so impertinent in your life?" exclaimed Rachel. "I could not believe my ears. I wonder, mamma, you did not order her out of the room."

“She was angry, darling, and very rude; but I’m sure she will regret it when she reflects a little,” said Mrs. Shadwell.

“She’s so ungrateful and odious! I could not have believed it of her. I suppose she’s gone down straight to papa, to the library; he’ll soon bring her to her senses — impudent creature!” said Rachel. “Is it true, I wonder, that papa has not got money to pay her. — I don’t believe it, do you?”

“I don’t know, darling, I can’t say, I’m sure,” said Mrs. Shadwell. “She is so angry just now, that she would say almost anything; but it’s only too possible, there is nothing more miserable than worries about money, but I ought not to complain; they press so much more on your poor papa, they have quite worn out his spirits. It is so miserable, this fine place and house, and all the rents passing through his hands, merely to pay interest on mortgages and annuities to strangers, and so very little left to us to live upon.”

“Agnes Marlyn, talking in the odd rude way she sometimes used — I don’t mean, of course, as she did just now — said that papa did not know anything about his own affairs; that he thought he had only twelve hundred a-year clear, and that he might easily have sixteen or seventeen hundred more, and that there is nearly five hundred a-year coming whenever an old man — I forget his name — dies; so that we might hold up our heads again, if only we had sense to look after our own business.”

“Did she, really?” said Mrs. Shadwell, and, for a moment, looking down in a pained meditation. She seemed to reflect on something different from an accession of wealth.

“Yes,” said Rachel; “but it is not always easy to know when Agnes Marlyn is joking, and when in earnest.”

Just as she reached this point the door opened, and Mr. Shadwell, followed closely by Miss Marlyn, entered the room.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS MARLYN'S TRIUMPH.

Miss MARLYN had been weeping, and her handkerchief just touched her eyes, and was removed as she entered. Mark Shadwell looked pale and sternly on his wife and daughter, and said sharply, but slowly, "I've merely looked in to say, that Miss Marlyn, being here as your instructress, Rachel, is by you, while she remains, to be obeyed."

At the last emphatic word he paused.

"Do you mind? *Obeyed"* he repeated. "I have no notion of anything else, or of being plagued by your tempers and contradiction. I think, Miss Marlyn, you required her to go down to her music, didn't you?"

"I asked Miss Shadwell to come to her usual practice," said Agnes Marlyn, with a suffering air, in a very subdued tone. "I do not wish to have power, I hate it; I only wish to know what is required of me, if what I say is to be done, then I am accountable; but I should so much prefer to have none, to have no authority, no power, no right. You do not know, sir, how unhappy it makes me; I am so miserable, so hated, so helpless."

A few tears fell here on Miss Marlyn's soft cheek, and her little speech suddenly broke down.

"Pray, don't distress yourself, Miss Marlyn. I insist that you shall be treated with proper respect while you remain here. You'll remember, if you please— "he continued, addressing his daughter, "that you are to obey Miss Marlyn as your instructress, and to treat her as my guest, and in all respects as your own equal where she is not your superior — your equal in birth, your superior in attainments. Do you think it can be any pleasure to her listening to your discords and blunders at the piano, and performing the thankless task of teaching you? What do you mean? What are you dreaming of? Go down this moment; and while Miss Marlyn remains, you shall obey her implicitly."

"But mamma was here," said Rachel, frightened, but also excited and angry; "and Miss Marlyn was extremely rude to her, and ordered me out of the room in the most insulting way, and wished to annoy mamma by doing so; and I always thought I should obey mamma, and not her, when mamma was by."

"Your mamma knows how to take care of herself, I hope— "began Mark Shadwell in a sterner tone.

"Oh, Mr. Shadwell, pray — pray do not consider me!" pleaded Miss Marlyn, pathetically. "I only wish to know what my duties are; it is so miserable any misunderstanding. I am always so unfortunate! Do, I implore, with me whatever Mrs. Shadwell likes best."

"You shall be respected here, Miss Marlyn," said Mark, in a high tone.

"And so, I'm 'sure you think should mamma," said Rachel. "And Miss Marlyn has been most impertinent to her, and overbearing to me."

"Oh! Rachel, darling! how can you say so?" exclaimed Miss Marlyn, with an appealing look.

But this little dialogue was peremptorily brought to a close by Mark Shadwell's commanding his daughter, with a stamp on the floor, to go instantly, as Miss Marlyn had already desired her, downstairs to her music.

As Miss Marlyn followed her pupil from the room, she stole a glance at Mrs. Shadwell strangely at variance with her recent tears — a look of lurking triumph and insult that stung her to the heart.

This sudden scene, more violent in action by force of its looks and tones than its mere dialogue thus set down would convey, was fruitful in feminine tears; not only were Agnes Marlyn's young cheeks wet, but Mrs. Shadwell wept and trembled.

She had been bullied, and mortified, and humbled before that insolent young lady, who had provoked that collision for the direct purpose of appealing to the partial judgment of her husband.

Oh! cruel, wicked girl, what had that poor sick lady done to provoke the torture of that triumph? Oh! Mark, Mark, she thought, how could you forsake the wife of your youth, and requite her unchanged adoration with that deep and ruthless perfidy?

"Oh, Mark!" she exclaimed; "Oh, Mark! you don't know how you have wounded me. If you knew all you would not have slighted me so before Rachel, and before that insulting, wicked girl."

And speaking this, for her, unparalleled invective, she threw her arms about her husband's neck, and wept passionately on that breast which her head had not lain upon for years. Mark was disconcerted for a moment, and placed his hand almost fondly on her head. But recollecting himself, he gently removed her, his hand still resting not unkindly on her shoulder. She was clinging to him, looking up with such an imploring agony, and her poor swollen eyelids and wet cheeks moved Mark for a moment with a feeling of compunction.

"Come, Amy!" he said, "don't let us have a scene all about nothing. You women are all made up of exaggerations; that *wicked* girl, as you call her, Miss Marlyn" — Mark's face as he looked down upon his wife was ghastly pale— "has, I think, simply done her duty, and so will you when you reflect. I can't, of course, say what you were all talking about before I came in. It's merely, so far as I can see, making mountains of molehills; but I'm quite certain — whether you had a scene or not before I came — that you will see the absurdity of treating this wretched little squabble as if it were something of — of importance."

"Oh! Mark, it *is* of importance! it is — it is — it is — you *know* it is; yes, darling, *very* important. Oh! Mark, do send her away, I implore of you; you don't know how miserable I am."

Mark was again disconcerted, perhaps agitated; but he affected to laugh.

"Come, come, Amy! you mustn't be foolish; you're not a child!"

"Oh, Mark, darling! this isn't foolish. Oh, darling! do as I ask you, and you'll say it was wise."

"Well, of course, if you make it important, it *is* important," said Mark, with a sudden and odd change of manner. "There's a crisis in everything. I *will* do as you say; — she shall go. She leaves Raby tomorrow morning.

Long threatening comes at last, as old Wyndle says. I am utterly sick of this state of things."

"Don't blame me, Mark, dear!"

"I blame no one; no, I know too well things come about of themselves, and — and I hate suspense. It was to be, I suppose, and it has come," said Mark.

"Thank you, Mark, dear! I'm so grateful."

"Don't thank me; you needn't. You're not to suppose, because I don't talk about what's passing, that I don't see it. I have observed — I could not help it — how from having petted and caressed Miss Marlyn — making, perhaps, too much of her — you have come to hate her, and to show her that you hate her — caprice and insult" — (how had he come to find these words?) “Of course, it’s another worry; but I have resolved to put an end to the whole thing.”

“I’m sorry you think I’m to blame; but, indeed, I’m not. And, Mark, there are some little jewels — I never wear them — and would it not be well to send them up to town and sell them, and that would make paying Miss Marlyn quite easy.”

“That’s my affair; no, keep them. You need not speak to Miss Marlyn. I don’t wish another scene. I’ll tell her to be ready to go by the two o’clock train tomorrow. She must leave this at eleven.”

And, so saying, Mark abruptly left the room. Amy Shadwell watched his departure with a strange alarm. There was more in the impression that remained upon her than the occasion seemed to warrant. What resolution had he taken? What was about to happen? A sinister presentiment terrified her.

The scene that had just agitated her, in her weak state, was followed by violent nervous palpitations, and intense hysterical excitement.

Very late that night Amy Shadwell, under the influence of a strong narcotic, lying in her husband’s room, with only a faint night-light burning, and the uncertain flame of the fire, awakened she knew not how, saw her husband standing by her bed. Her face was turned from the light, which flickered dimly on his face, as he looked down closely into hers. His countenance was sorrow-stricken and sullen, she could see; and standing erect, his gaze unrewarded, for her features were quite in darkness, he sighed heavily, and remained looking down with the same dismal aspect, for a time; then once more he stooped his face, and whispered very low:

“Amy! Amy!”

In the action of the opiate she had taken there was something that resembled a luxurious catalepsy. With a sufficient effort of will, no doubt she could have roused herself to reply, but the languor and serenity of her state held her in a drowsy spell. There was a dim sense of pleasure in protracting the unwonted scene. There was something of grief and tenderness in Mark Shadwell’s countenance that held her in a strange suspense, and she watched his movements, and heard his words, with the curiosity that accompanies an interesting dream.

“Have I done her justice — have I understood her quite? Too late now,” he said, faintly.

And again he stooped down and gazed into her darkened face, and seemed to listen for her breathing.

"She's asleep — so best. Her lot is happier than mine!"

So saying, he walked gently to the fireplace, and stood there, looking ruefully into the embers.

She watched him with increasing intensity — her heart beat fast in the suspense. She expected him to return to her bedside; she debated within her own mind whether she should speak to him, but a sort of spell restrained her. He looked on her again, long and steadily. And now she saw his shadow on the wall moving — was it towards her? No — the door opened, and he was gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARK SHADWELL LEAVES RABY.

MARK SHADWELL, when he closed the door of his wife's room, went direct to his own, where were candles burning. He opened his desk, and taking a letter from it, written by his own hand, and not yet folded, he read it through, and with the deep sigh and anxious look of a man still irresolute, he placed it in its envelope and sealed it.

The window of his room looked out upon the yard in which Clewson, from his own, had seen Carmel Sherlock, on the memorable night of the murder, make his preparations for departure. There Mark Shadwell now saw a man busily getting a horse between the shafts of his taxcart, while a portmanteau and bag lay on the ground beside the wheel.

Now Mark looked at his watch. He put on a loose coat and his hat, as he saw the vehicle get into motion to leave the yard. He put out the candles, and, with more caution than before, walked lightly through the gallery.

At the head of the great staircase stood the slender figure of Miss Agnes Marlyn. The moonlight entering through the great window on the landing showed her pretty form distinctly. She was dressed in her ordinary costume; there was no bonnet, no cloak, no sign of meditated flight. The lady in the grey, high-up dress, with the little bit of crimson ribbon showing like a wound at her breast, met his sudden and eager advance with a little sign of caution, her slender figure raised. He took the warning, and checked his hurried step, looking over his shoulder. She glided a little way towards him by the wall, against which leaning her shoulder lightly, and repeating her warning gesture, she awaited him.

The lowest and softest possible "hush!" she breathed rather than whispered. He would have taken her hand, but she withdrew it, with a gentle but decided gesture, and another "hush!" while the moonlight showed the faint knitting of her beautiful eyebrows, betokening caution.

"The letter?" she whispered, her fingers a little extended.

"Yes," said he, and placed in them the letter he had just taken from his desk.

She turned it towards the light of the moon — that emblem of purity — and read the address; it was:

“MRS. SHADWELL,

“RABY.”

and in the left-hand corner the sternly marked initials “M. S.”

“I’ll put it in the Raby postoffice as I go,” said she, as she softly dropped it within the breast of her dress.

“Just so — yourself?” he answered.

“Myself? — yes,” she repeated.

“Don’t give it to any servant, mind — old Wyndle would get it, and know all about it; and just do as you said.”

She nodded.

“And, so, goodbye,” he whispered, hesitating. Had he ever seen that strange girl look so beautiful before?

She merely nodded again, raising her head a little, in the moonlight delicately beautiful — a tinted statue.

“Not a word — nothing?” he whispered, lingering still in that fascination.

He extended his hand gently towards hers. She withdrew it again, merely whispering —

“Go!”

But, changing her mind before he turned, she took his hand, and pressed it tremblingly — vehemently — whispering:

“Goodbye! God bless you!”

Yes, “God bless you!” A benediction, an appeal to God; what a chaos in that mind! And she glided swiftly away into the dark. With a strange pang of shame, rapture, agony, he gazed for a moment back through the familiar oak-carved arch into the darkness which shrouded from him a shattered home — an anarchy of past and future, and the shapes of a dream wild and wicked.

Drawing his coat about him now, he ran lightly down the stairs. The hall-door was open, and the taxcart stood there, and lean, wiry old Jem Truelock, who had served the Squire’s father before him, was standing by the horse’s head, whip in hand.

“The things there?” said Mark, not thinking of his luggage, hut reminded of it by seeing it there. “Shut the door — very gently.”

“All right, sir.”

"You see, Jem," said his master, as he took his seat and the reins beside him, "I'm forced to steal away for a bit. You are an old friend, so I don't mind telling you: I've got a hint — the beaks, you know. All settled in a week or a fortnight, though — running up to town to manage it. These d — d fellows will be down tomorrow, perhaps, and I shouldn't much mind if, among you, you managed to give them a devilish good licking. Get along!" Jem smiled shrewdly, and nodded with a fierce wink, and a touch of his finger to his hat; and away they went. Was there any truth in this story? Not a word. Mark was angry at having to practise this meanness — a shabby deception — upon his own servant; angry and ashamed, and he felt that he was lying badly, and doubted whether the man believed him.

He lighted a cigar as they drove out of the dark avenue of Raby. He felt relieved as the gate closed behind him, and they emerged from the solemn groining of the huge old trees, upon the road and into the clear moonlight. He felt better, and his cheroot helped him to serenity.

He did not look back at Raby. He looked toward the sky, and the stars, and the distant hills, and warmed and soothed his thoughts with tobacco; every now and then applying a reflection he had taught himself: "No woman ever loved a man whom she could not understand, and she never understood me."

At Raby all was quiet until the grey of the late wintry dawn. It was to be a day of change. Miss Marlyn was to leave Raby at eleven o'clock; and perhaps the consciousness of this approaching relief made Amy Shadwell's waking happier that morning than it had been for many days before.

Rachel ran into her mamma's room:

"Papa had to go away all on a sudden last night to London," said she. "Jem Truelock drove him to the station — sudden business. Did he tell you?"

"No. I hope nothing bad — no." She answered, looking as if she was going to faint.

But he was here last night, and I fancy intended to speak to me. But though I saw him, that laudanum made me drowsy — and I did not say a word — I'll get up. I must go into the next room, and see old Truelock. I'm certain he told him; he tells Truelock everything."

So Mrs. Shadwell got on her dressing-gown, and made a hasty toilet, and in her morning-room she saw old Truelock, and cross-examined him, she and Rachel, and he gave them a clear opinion upon the cause of his absence, founded on Mark's brief talk as they started, and he reminded her of another expedition on a similar occasion to London twelve years ago, which turned out all right in the end.

"Oh! yes, poor fellow! that must be it; that is certainly the cause. Old Truelock is so shrewd, he could not be mistaken, and Mark would not deceive him, he tells him everything."

With these and similar reflections she chased away the vague alarms that still returned. Later in the morning in came old Wyndle.

"Well, ma'am, that Frenchwoman — Agnes Marlyn — has her things on ready to start, and glad and gay she seems, and I thought first 'twas no more than swagger; but it's more than that, I'm thinkin'; and I tell you what it is, ma'am, if I was you, I'd keep her a bit longer at Raby."

Old Wyndle nodded, and looked darkly wise. "I don't know what you mean, Wyndle."

"Only just that, my lady," said Wyndle, grimly. "I'd keep her here, and let the master send her away himself."

"Really, Wyndle, I don't understand you," said the lady, looking very hard at her, and a little agitated.

"Whew! ma'am, she's a feather-pated wench, a wild daredevil lass wi' her brain half-turned wi' vanities; and she was so forward — always pokin' after the master here, wi' her secretary stuff and nonsense, as if that giddy lass had a head for business, like poor Mr. Sherlock — God forgive him — had, and figuring and the like — not she; and if she goes away now, mind — God knows where she'll be going to."

"What *do* you mean, Wyndle?" said Amy Shadwell, sitting up in her bed, with a bright hectic in her cheek, for after her little talk in the next room with old Jem Truelock, she had lain down again, being still very ill.

"I know what I mean," said blunt, old Wyndle, mysteriously. "I don't trust them furriners."

"Oh! Wyndle, it's very wrong to speak of Miss Marlyn as you are doing, and as for your master, he's the soul of honour."

"Oh, yes! — I'm only meanin' her, ma'am. To be sure, she may be all very good and nice, but I'm an old woman, ma'am, and has seen more in my time than you, and I tell you, she doesn't like a bone in your skin, nor none of us: she hates us all; me because I see through her, an’ you because ‘appen you’re a bit in her way.”

“Oh! Wyndle, I really think you are going mad!” said Mrs. Shadwell, affecting incredulity, but feeling as if she were going to faint.

“Well, ma’am, there it is. I may be wrong, and I may be right; but anyhow, if I was in your place, ma’am, I wouldn’t let her budge till master was here to write her discharge and pay her wi’ his own hand — not a foot,” said old Wyndle, resolutely.

“But he has paid her; he paid Miss Marlyn yesterday: I have got her acknowledgment, and there is no such thing as a discharge needed — a governess does not require one. If she chooses to refer people to us, of course we’ll say all we can for her, and I know nothing against her.”

“Well, ma’am, if ye will ye will; an’ what’ll ye have for your dinner?” And so old Wyndle, with a disconcerting transition, passed abruptly to other matters, leaving her mistress frightened and agitated, quite in the dark.

She sickened as she doubted whether the spirit of prudence might not have spoken in the coarse but kindly counsel of the privileged old servant. But what would Mark say or think if, on his return, he were to find Miss Marlyn still at Raby, under a countermand from its capricious mistress. So, as usually happens with irresolute people in a perplexity, it ended by her doing nothing.

It was between nine and ten o’clock, when a gentle tap came to Mrs. Shadwell’s door, and, in obedience to her call, Miss Agnes Marlyn e in.

‘I should not have thought of coming to bid farewell, Mr». Shadwell, until you had sent for me; but I saw Mr. Shadwell, for a few minutes before his departure, this morning very early.” Miss Marlyn spoke very slowly. She liked, I believe, protracting this communication. “And he requested me particularly to place this note in your hand — and, accordingly — here it is.”

So saying, she gave her Mark’s letter — which she was to have dropped, by his direction, in the Raby postoffice — with a dark steady look, all the time, turned on Mrs. Shadwell’s countenance. I am pretty certain that Miss Marlyn knew the contents of that letter perfectly, and that she had a fancy to witness its effect upon Mrs. Shadwell. In this, however, she was disappointed. Mrs. Shadwell glanced at the address, and felt very oddly. She laid it on the coverlet beside her, however, unopened, and she said gently —

"I suppose I am to say goodbye, now, Miss Marlyn— "

"You are very good," she said; "but I should not care to go till eleven — if you don't mind; the waiting at the station would be so very long."

"Oh! dear — of course — I only meant to say goodbye now. I am very sorry that you've seemed to misunderstand me — of late — and — and — we were not so happy — but I trust you may be very soon happier than you could ever have been in this triste place — and I wish you every good— "

She fancied she saw the smile of a disdainful incredulity faintly playing at the comers of Agnes Marlyn's lips, and hardly perceptibly dimpling her soft chin and cheek.

"Yes, indeed, Agnes Marlyn, I do wish you all good and happiness; and although we have not been so happy for some time — I am sure it was neither my wish, nor my fault — I shall never forget your kindness and attention — until the unhappy change came — and if you think of any way in which I can be of use, you may rely upon me."

So saying, she extended her open hand on the coverlet to Miss Marlyn; but the young lady did not take it.

"I don't think it would be fair to think of giving you any trouble, Mrs. Shadwell. In fact I rather think and hope I shan't need any help. I don't, of course, count good wishes and prayers, for they really hardly involve any trouble; but you, I assure you, Mrs. Shadwell,. on account of your health and everything, are one of the very last persons on whom I should venture to impose the slightest real trouble on my account. Oh! no — thank you all the same, Mrs. Shadwell, very much."

"Well, Agnes — Miss Marlyn — goodbye," said Mrs. Shadwell; and again she extended her hand to take that of the young lady.

"Adieu, Madame," said Miss Marlyn, in the sweetest, softest imaginable tone; and at the same time she made her the very prettiest, saddest little courtesy you could imagine; her beautiful eyes lowered to her tiny foot, not choosing, I think, to see Mrs. Shadwell's friendly gesture; and so she passed through the door that opened into Mrs. Shadwell's sitting-room, where she stopped — having closed the door — affecting to admire some early flowers, the bells of which she turned up caressingly with the tips of her fingers, while she was listening for what might be heard from the next room, expecting that Mrs. Shadwell would open her letter forthwith, and in this her anticipations were verified.

CHAPTER XIV.

BREAKING THE SEAL.

IN some goodnatures a farewell is a forgiveness; and Amy Shadwell had experienced this unrequited at the moment when she was to look her last on Miss Marlyn. The door, however, had hardly closed upon her, when she opened her husband's letter, and read as follows:

"AMY, — I have long made up my mind to take a step which, however painful at the outset to you and to me, will ultimately, I am convinced, conduce to the happiness of both. We have been living together without sympathy and without confidence. This state of things was painful to me. I saw that it was painful to you. It was not in my power, nor in yours, to improve our unhappy relations.

What imaginable good purpose, therefore, could have been consulted by continuing to practise what had ceased to be even an experiment, and had become a miserable hypocrisy? I am quite incapable of reproaching you with that for which you are in no way to blame. The entire incompatibility, not of tempers, but of sympathies and of tendencies, which had long separated us, had been seconded for years by the aggravations of ill health, and of incessant and harassing cares. Living under the same roof, we have for years been as effectually separated as if we had resided in separate cities; nay, worse, our occasional miserable meetings aggravated for each that sense of loneliness which was the root of our misery. I have left Raby, therefore, with the fixed and unalterable resolution of seeing it no more until the separation, which I am satisfied is essential to the happiness of each of us, shall have been legally and finally accomplished. Your own fortune shall return to you, together with such a portion of my wretched income as may be fairly awarded for your further support and that of Rachel. I have written on the subject to your former guardian and surviving trustee, General Hardwicke. You and Rachel must arrange to leave Raby. I should finally arrange to do so myself, but the state of the property compels my personal presence and care. Your arrangements shall be absolutely at your own disposal. I shall not of course, interfere. Hardwicke will no doubt advise with you on any subject connected with the measure I have adopted. The cavils of a censorious and pharisaical world I utterly despise. I have taken the course which is best for both, and no expostulation can alter me.

"MARK SHADWELL."

Holding the paper before her eyes with one hand, and with the other pressing her temple, with white lips she read the dreadful letter through. "My good God!" she exclaimed when she had read it through. And she attempted to begin it over again, but she was seized with such a trembling that she could not.

"Why — why — what does he mean? I can't make it out," she repeated, still pressing her hand to her temple, with that look of horrible incredulity which borders on idiotcy, and saying, "Where, where, call him," she got partly out of bed. But uttering a long, wild scream, she fell back in a violent convulsive fit.

Miss Marlyn, in the next room, heard the unearthly scream, and for a moment was scared. She would have returned and given an alarm, but she heard the bedroom door, at the other end of Mrs. Shadwell's room, open, and old Wyndle's voice — and then another voice and hurried steps entering.

From the distant door in the sitting-room, therefore, Miss Marlyn glided out upon the gallery, and down by the back stairs, and then round by the great staircase, to her own room, without passing again Mrs. Shadwell's door. There, pale and agitated, she sat down upon the side of her bed, with a beating heart, and listened, but could hear nothing. Then she opened her door, and stood at it listening again; but it was too far; and so she stole, on and on, till she could hear old Wyndle's voice, and that of the maid; and so, by little and little, she drew near enough to the door to hear what was passing.

"She's getting out of it, God be praised!" said old Wyndle.

"Oh! — oh! — oh!" groaned Amy Shadwell's voice. "What is it — what is it? Something dreadful has happened."

"No, no, sweetheart; nothin' — nothin' — all quite right again; there now — there now — don't mind disturbin' yourself; just lie quiet; don't let her get out o' bed at that side."

And then Mrs. Shadwell's voice said —

"Oh! this dreadful news! What is it? Poor Mark will be so shocked to hear it, when he comes in!"

"There — there now — there — my darling good lady!" said Wyndle's voice. "Don't let her sit up!" And so on, until, all on a sudden, the same appalling scream again thrilled Agnes Marlyn's ear, and she knew that the convulsions had returned.

She was frightened, and for a moment irresolute, but she turned to retrace her steps towards her bedroom, hearing, as she did so, the hurried talk of the frightened women, and the sounds of a terrible mute struggle.

Miss Marlyn sat down on the stairs very pale. She had not been there long, when Rachel, who had heard nothing of the scene now going on in her mother's room, came up. Quite disregarding the terms on which they had been, Agnes Marlyn stood up, and taking her by the arm, said —

"Rachel, I'm afraid Mrs. Shadwell's very ill. She's in her own room — you must send to Raby for the doctor."

Rachel ran to her mother's bedside, having entreated Agnes to send.

When the doctor came, he found the poor lady hurried from one epileptic fit into another, and in about an hour after his arrival, sudden symptoms of a fatal kind appeared; a vessel in the brain had given way, and the case was hopeless!

Miss Marlyn went into the room. The hour of her intended departure had long passed. She put a few questions to the doctor. She looked for a moment at the dying and unconscious lady, and then she said to Rachel —

"We must telegraph for your papa."

"He's gone to London, but we don't know where," said Rachel.

"No; he's in Birmingham, at Wycombe's Hotel. He told me he was going to stay there for some days," said Agnes Marlyn, reciting this solitary confidence with an evil pride, resulting from a strange mixture of feelings.

Old Wyndle looked at her savagely, and muttered to herself. But Agnes Marlyn, with a calm, pale face and collected manner, went downstairs and wrote a message for the Telegraph Office to Mark Shadwell.

"Mrs. Shadwell is dying: return to Raby instantly."

She hesitated; she would not be herself the sender of this message; it would associate her in his mind with a shock with which she would not be connected. The drawingroom door was open, and as she stood musing, with the paper in her fingers, she saw the doctor, and went into the hall, as he was getting his hat and coat.

"Don't you think, sir, that Mr. Shadwell should be sent for?" she said.

"Certainly; telegraph," he said.

"From what I am told, sir, I am afraid this message says no more than truth?"

And Miss Marlyn placed what she had written in his hands.

"Too true; but he'll not be in time — Birmingham 's a good way: he'll not find her living," said he, with a shake of his head.

"But he ought to be here," said Miss Marlyn, decisively; "will you sign this? — we'll find a messenger here."

So the doctor signed it, and filled in dates, and so forth.

"She'll be gone before an hour, poor little thing! — She was the nicest creature, I think, I ever met almost."

So the doctor went, and Miss Marlyn saw old Jem Truelock, and with the fresh horse that was to have brought her to the station, away he rode with his message.

Mark Shadwell's letter, which the maid had seen in Agnes Marlyn's hand as she entered Mrs. Shadwell's room, was found on the counterpane, and old Wyndle took it.

That night, the Rev. Stour Temple called. He had heard the sad news, and rode over, not knowing that Mark was away. Rachel had fallen into that deep sleep which succeeds grief and excitement, and is the closing compensation for that frightful suspense. Old "Wyndle had her voluble and bitter story to tell.

"She was better this morning than I saw her for two years or more, when in came that Agnes Marlyn, wi' this letter in her fist — Jane Cherry saw her, before ten o'clock — and I picked up the letter off the quilt. It's from the master — God forgive him! — telling her he blames her for everything, as I think — he left last night — but the two that God joined together, should be sundered by such villainy! and that letter was the death o' her; and here it is — I can't make much o't myself — but you must read it, and see how it is wi' poor Miss Rachel."

After a few more questions, therefore, he did read that shocking letter, and after a long silence, he said that he would call again next day — having considered the matter carefully meanwhile — and see and talk with Rachel.

Late that night Mark returned. He knew by the face of the servant who opened the door, that his wife was dead.

He heard the short tale in silence. There was a sense of recovered liberty; there was something of remorse; also an angry shame, which tortured his pride, and made him uneasy in the presence of his own servants.

Sullen as a wounded beast,. Mark Shadwell made his way to his bedroom, where, not in sleep nor in prayer, but in an agitated hurry of thought and emotion, he passed a long and troubled night.

When Stour Temple called next morning, and learned that Mark Shadwell had arrived, he contented himself with inquiries at the door, and did not ask to go in.

Wyndle in her own way had told him something of Miss Marlyn's movements. The more he heard of that young lady's doings, the less he liked or trusted her. It pained him that she should be at Raby. Still he hoped that it was the confusion of this sudden death that had postponed her departure. There were suspicions afloat in his mind which he would not have liked to tell to anybody., Rachel was past the strange curiosity of childhood. She could not bring herself to look at her dead mother and companion. She lay sobbing on her bed, now and then reading more serenely in her Bible, and then, as the truth — incredible for a moment — returned, bursting into a wild convulsion of weeping again.

Old Wyndle often looked in, and stood or sat by her bed, talking in her own rough, quaint way. But now she had gone, and, with Jane Cherry, the housemaid, was busy in poor Mrs. Shadwell's room.

And now their sad office was ended, and she lay, cold and sad, in the white robes of her purity.

The blinds were lowered, the room darkened, and old Wyndle, having sent Jane Cherry away, remained for a few minutes, looking with rueful and bitter thoughts upon the young, forlorn face, with the light of a wonderful smile upon it.

There came a low tap at the door, and, expecting to see Jane Cherry come in,' Wyndle walked a few cautious steps towards the door, and in a low tone, such as is heard in sick chambers, she bid the visitor come in.

It was not Jane Cherry who entered, but Agnes Marlyn. The old housekeeper, very erect, made one step backward, and a silence of some moments followed.

“And ye’ve actually come in!” exclaimed old Mrs. Wyndle, with a strange gasp, and her arms across, the fingers of one at the elbow of the other, and a gaze dark and stern, as if she had seen an evil spirit in the room.

“Mrs. Wyndle, you’ll please not to speak to me,” said the young lady, coldly. “Once for all, I come here at your master’s desire, to lock these drawers, and wardrobes, and boxes,” she said, with a stem deliberateness, “and to take charge of the keys for him. I shall do my duty, whatever other people may. Will you be good enough to move a little aside, and let me reach that wardrobe?”

“I don’t believe the master ever sent ye in here, nor desired ye no such thing,” said old Wyndle, pale and fierce.

“Come — come, Mrs. Wyndle; you must know it can’t be pleasant to any one coming in here.”

And, turning suddenly on the old woman, with eyes that flashed, she added:

“What can you propose to yourself, woman, by trying to quarrel with me?”

“No, bad as he’s bin, I can’t believe that of him,” said the old servant, sturdily.

“Bad as he has been!” repeated Miss Marlyn. “Why, you ungrateful old woman, of what use on earth are you? If he had not been a great deal too kind, you’d have been in the workhouse long ago. There — do, for goodness sake, just be decently quiet.”

That brilliant, beautiful girl, with a strangely heightened colour and flashing eyes, pushed by her, locked the wardrobe, locked the drawers, gathered up some rings, chains, and trinkets that were on the dressing-table.

“Look here, please,” she said, “I place them in this box.”

Old Wyndle only lifted up her hands and eyes, and said:

“Oh! my mistress! my poor, little, good mistress! Did I live to see this day?”

Carrying her head high, and angrier than she cared to show, Miss Marlyn proceeded to lock up everything that seemed of any value.

Then said Miss Marlyn, coldly:

“He said particularly, there’s the — a gold ring, and a diamond guard on her finger.”

“Her weddin’-ring! Oh! master! — the ring you put on her finger!” She was speaking almost in a scream. “Oh! Mr. Shadwell — oh, *man!* could ye let her fingers on it?”

“There’s a guardring, too, a brilliant hoop, that he says I must take.”

“Take them! Touch her? Touch her hand? My God! you would not dare to touch her!” shrieked old “Wyndle.

“Take them off yourself — why, that’s what I said,” exclaimed Miss Agnes Marlyn, with a very wicked look at the old woman, though in a calm voice.

“Oh! my poor mistress! my darling! angel bright!” cried old “Wyndle, standing at the foot of the bed, with her hands clasped, and tears trickling down her cheeks. “To think such things could be! No — no — I say! I’ll take ‘em off wi’ my own old fingers, and I’ll put them in the hand that gave them — the hand she loved — the hand that laid her there; but you sha’n’t touch them or her. Yes, my darling! — ye’ll give ‘em up — gentle — gentle — like your beautiful self. Look at her! Ye’ve killed her. Look at her there — the poor little thing! Arn’t ye afeard she’d stand up like an angel, and strike ye wi’ a look o’ her white face? Look — look, woman — look! Lyin’ there, wi’ the light o’ heaven on her face — murdered by ye! To think o’t! Why does God *stan’* such things? She — the blessed creature, simple and lovin’, that wouldn’t hurt a fly, as meek as a little child — a little child! May God judge them that did it — gone — ye poor, little thing! and you that done it — there, to see! standin’ on yer two feet, hale, and strong, and happy — my God! and full o’ life. But she’s the upper hand o’ ye still: she’s raised in power — better off than the best o’ you, with her crown incorruptible and robes of white, to tell her story before the throne. Oh! look at the poor, grieved, little face of her, you cruel, dreadful creature!”

“I never was anything in my life but kind to her, you stupid, wicked, old woman. Look at her! why shouldn’t I? I’ve done my duty by her better than ever you did, who never did anything of any earthly use. Of course I’ll look at her.”

And with a quick step she came by the bedpost at the foot of the bed, and with a bright flush and a strange defiance, did look on that saddest and most angelic sight vouchsafed to mortals.

“When Miss Marlyn left the room, old Wyndle grimly shut the door after her, and stood at the foot of the bed, thinking.

“I see how ‘twill be — I a’ seen it long-enough. I can see a bit still, though my old head’s little good now; but think I must — if I don’t, who will? — about the poor lassie, Rachel. I’ll set my wits to work on’t, and ‘appen counsel may come; and so it will, for God can’t mean to leave his creature, without help or care, to them that’ll grudge her-her bit and sup, and the clothes on her back!”

CHAPTER XV.

MARK SHADWELL TAKES A DECIDED STEP.

GOODNATURED as old Wyndle was, she had a proper regard for herself, and her thoughts naturally turned to her own future, a subject which the changes she saw at hand involved in utter uncertainty.

She was recalled, however, by fancying that she heard Agnes Marlyn's voice in the gallery. She looked on the face before her, and a gush of kindly recollections and bitter feelings found vent in a flood of tears.

Drying them hastily, and half-hoping to meet Miss Marlyn, she issued from the room, closing the door reverently. But she did not encounter that young lady on her way to Rachel's room, which, without ceremony, she entered.

Though not undressed, Rachel lay upon her bed with, her face to the pillow, you would have said in a deep sleep, had it not been for a convulsive sob every now and then.

"Get up, Miss," said old Wyndle, sternly, laying her hand on her shoulder; "this is no house for you."

The young lady sat up on the side of the bed, like a person called up from a swoon, and looked in old Wyndle's face, without speaking.

"Mind ye, Miss," said old Wyndle, inspired with sudden decision, "ye don't stay here; ye just come wi' me, and look your last on your poor mamma, and then go ye straight to Miss Barbara, down at the vicar's."

"Hold your tongue, Wyndle," said a stem voice, near the door. "Come, rouse yourself, Rachel, and listen to me."

. Old Wyndle, with half a glance, saw Mark Shadwell standing within the shadow of the door.

"Ah!" groaned old Wyndle, bitterly, shaking her head slowly.

"Do you hear me, Rachel? Collect your thoughts," he repeated.

"Oh! yes — papa — papa!" And she caught him in a wild embrace, and lay close to his breast, sobbing, and straining him in her girlish arms.

He had not expected any such thing. This sudden burst of affection disconcerted and pained him.

“Go, “Wyndle,” said he, sternly. “Miss Rachel will ring for you when she wants you. Shut the door.”

“Sit down, Rachel — do command your feelings — and attend to what I say, which shan’t be much,” he said, leading her to a chair.

“And first, you must not allow that ungrateful old woman, “Wyndle, to talk to you about my plans, as they affect you or myself; and, also, I request that you’ll not make a confidante of her. When you know as much of the world as I do, you’ll learn that old persons in her rank are pushing and prying, conceited, and officious, and must be kept in their proper places. Wyndle is a prejudiced, impudent old woman, and I don’t choose any confidences with such a person, d’ye mind. And, Rachel, as to yourself — ourselves, I mean. I must run up to town forthwith, to consult about business; my stay and visits here, in fact, must be uncertain, and may be interrupted by very long intervals. Miss Marlyn and you don’t get on pleasantly, and, even if she could remain in her late position, she is too young to take charge of you, and, the fact is, I must look about for another home for you — for the present, at least — for the idea of leaving you here at Raby, alone, is quite out of the question; and, at the same time, I wish, of course, to consult your feelings in making a choice. I am sure Miss Temple, so old a friend, would be glad to have you at the Vicarage, if you liked it, and I could arrange. And — think it over, and tell me tomorrow whether you would like it — or any other arrangement better; only, you see, staying here is not to be thought of, and whatever is to be done, must be arranged immediately.”

He got up gloomily, and stooping over her, touched her forehead with a cold kiss, and then left the room.

In a few days this arrangement was actually made. I need hardly say that Mark Shadwell had first ascertained that Charles Mordant had rejoined his regiment — and Rachel Shadwell found herself, to the great delight of kind Miss Barbara, domesticated at the Vicarage.

Miss Marlyn at the same time left Raby, and honest Roger Temple, like the captain in the song, “lost his spirits daily,” and moped about, and sighed, and grew to be a silent man; and one day, walking with Doctor Stalton towards Wynderfel, less because he affected the doctor’s company than because he loved a stroll in that particular direction, the doctor said:

"Miss Marlyn has left Raby some time — the-same day that Miss Shadwell came to the Vicarage."

"Oh?" said Roger, interrogatively; for though he knew the fact only too well, he wished to hear more on that tender theme, and so tried to lead the physician on.

"Devilish pretty, whatever else she may be," continued the doctor, knowing nothing of poor: Roger's little secret.

Roger sighed, and looked down, in soft and silent expectation, on the grass, as they walked along.

"Mark Shadwell is still at Raby," resumed the doctor; "but — between you and me — I'm afraid that d — d woman has got a fast hold of him."

"Oh?" said Roger Temple, quite quietly, but feeling all the time, as if he had got a hard box in the ear; he was stunned, tingling, but could not resent it. In secret he conned it over, and grew frightened and sadder.

Time, the healer, the destroyer, the constructor, had been working his potent changes.

The doctor's remark about Miss Agnes Marlyn and Mark Shadwell, expressed pretty distinctly the surmises of the little town of Raby and its neighbourhood. And soon the scandal darkened.

Mark had now been for many weeks absent from the country. No letter had reached Raby, or the vicar, or his attorney at the village, for all that time.

At length there arrived a letter from Mark Shadwell to the vicar, which surprised that rustic clergyman a good deal. It was a long letter, for a lazy man like Mark, and was written, it seemed, in dejection.

It began by assuming that Stour Temple would not be much surprised if he, Mark Shadwell, acted as most men do when, in middle life, placed in his sad and solitary circumstances. His ideas of right and wrong, and those of the vicar, though drawn from different sources, were very much alike, in fact, in most points identical; and the step he was going to take, after the most careful consideration of what was best and most proper, was one, he was confident, which the vicar would thoroughly approve. He was about, in fact, to marry. He was a man of few acquaintances, and he did not care to look up any of his old London friends. A wife educated in that atmosphere would never do at Raby. "What was needed there was a person who could content herself with plain clothes, plain fare, servants few and clumsy, and no society, and who, in addition to all this, could make herself positively useful to a man who had often more business to look after than two men could be reasonably expected to get through. “Would the vicar mention all this to his sister, and consult with her as to how best to open it to Rachel. Girls are so odd, and in these circumstances so seldom see what is really so much for their own advantage. But where there was a temper — and Rachel had one of her own — they run away with things, and required to be reasoned with; and so he would kindly use his discretion in communicating this news to Rachel. He would, for his daughter’s sake, advise her denying herself an indulgence in that anger and jealousy on this occasion, to which women are prone — which affect a higher inspiration, but are, in fact, so narrow, selfish, and vulgar.

Such was the tenor of the letter.

“Who can it be?” said Barbara, looking hard at the vicar, as they conferred, in his study, over the letter.

The vicar did not return her dark look of inquiry or conjecture, but looked on the letter which he held in his fingers.

“He does not say,” said the vicar; “we shall know, time enough. I hope he has made a wise choice.”

“Ah, poor Amy!” murmured Miss Barbara Temple. “Such idolatry! So soon forgotten!”

She did not know the story of the letter that was found upon poor Amy’s bed, nor did Rachel. Old Wyndle had spelled through a part of it without comprehending its exact meaning. Rachel had looked at it — no more, for her mind was distracted with another panic at the time when she saw it; and except that it was an unkind letter, she remembered nothing very distinctly of it. It lay in the vicar’s desk — one of those secrets of other people which he always kept religiously.

“Ah! ray poor Amy! Well — well, how such things can be, I don’t understand!” murmured Barbara.

The news was told to Rachel very kindly and briefly by the vicar that evening, Miss Barbara being present, who hugged and kissed Rachel vehemently when the story was over, and spared no sympathy, indignation, or consolation.

I sometimes think that the more despotic and selfish parents are, the more they are revered and admired by their children. It is one of those strange perversities and injustices which appear in the laws of human nature. Rachel cherished for her father an awe and veneration which a better man might have failed to inspire. She wept over this intelligence in the despair and tribulation of youth, which however are transitory.

Then came conjectures as to whom he had selected for his wife. Miss Barbara listened reservedly to these speculations, for she had a pretty decided opinion upon the point, aided by scandal, which of course had not reached Rachel's ear.

In a little while, however, it was established, and past the period of debate. The bride was Miss Agnes Marlyn, and she came down with her husband to Raby, and forthwith began with rapidity and decision to remodel the household. One by one the old servants were removed, and new ones came in their places. Mr. Twinley, the attorney, spoke of her reservedly as "a very clever woman," and "a lady who would, if any one could, make the estate pay."

The new Mrs. Shadwell was looking more beautiful than ever, and appeared in the Squire's pew in Raby Church, dressed very richly, but in excellent taste. But rumours had preceded her, and a great scandal had traced a circle round her, and she was isolated. She was not a person, however, to forego an object without an effort. As the wife of Shadwell of Raby, she was, in some respects, the first lady of her county. That she should be snubbed by such people was really too good!

But though she tried, patiently and many ways, by taking a graceful interest in the charities of the neighbourhood, by visiting the girls' school, by looking in upon the sick room of old Martha Cripps, and by fifty other expedients, she failed to make any way with the ladies whom she was disposed to know. They were shy — they did not visit her.

She did not acquiesce in these relations. But she saw that she must wait and proceed, circuitously. If only the clear income of Raby could be got up to three thousand a year — and that, she thought, was quite on the cards before four years were over — with Mark Shadwell's connections he should have a seat in the House, and make a fresh start in the great world. Then these mean little people of Raby and the vicinity would have their eyes opened, and be made to see things as they were. This would be beginning at the right end, and Agnes would pay those small people off when the proper time came.

The vicar painfully reconsidered the whole case. The recent rumours to which I have referred were unpleasant; but he found no proof of them. The stories about the French school were better supported; but, after all, they proved no more than extreme giddiness, and were, in some measure, attributable to the mad spirits and inexperience of a schoolgirl; and must he not assume that Mr. Shadwell — a proud and fiery man — had satisfied himself upon these points? and had he any right, upon mere conjecture, to go behind his mature decision? And if his clerical position obliged him to special reserves, did it not also exact special charities?

The result was, that Miss Barbara paid a visit; but Rachel did not come. The vicar had reasoned with her to make the effort, but she could not, and his sympathies were with her.

Mark Shadwell saw Miss Barbara after she had paid her cold and embarrassed visit, as she crossed the hall. He talked to her there for a few minutes, and then asked sharply where Rachel was. So Barbara, with a feminine dexterity, pleaded for her young friend, hiding altogether the fiery element which had mingled in her refusal to come to Raby, and urging only the pain of reviving so recent a grief and other similar apologies, in which Mart, unsatisfied, darkly acquiesced.

So the good old lady took her leave of him at the steps, and drove away, with an unpleasant conviction that Mark understood only too well the spirit in which his daughter had stayed away, and resented it fiercely.

It was about this time that Captain Clayton returned from Scotland. He put up at the comfortable little inn at Raby, and passed his days at “the great house” as before. Agnes Shadwell took up the idea of his marrying Rachel with energy. Clayton opened his rental and his plans to Mark Shadwell, who, in consequence, walked over in the afternoon to the Vicarage, and paid his respects to Miss Barbara. Honest Roger had made an agitated exit by the back-door as Mark arrived at the steps. Mark Shadwell saw and spoke to Rachel, who trembled a great deal, and for a long time could hardly control the hysterical gush of tears which were every moment at the point of bursting forth.

It was a short but a tedious visit. He had something more to say, however, and on taking his leave he made Rachel accompany him as far as the little brook on the way to Wynderfel.

CHAPTER XVI.

PLAIN LANGUAGE.

RACHEL was very much frightened as she walked beside her father, who maintained an unbroken and a stem silence till they reached the stile under the gentle hill of Wynderfel.

"I sha'n't trouble you to come further; just sit down there, or stand, if you like it better, and listen to what I have to say."

She did not sit on the broad plank of the stile, but stood looking at him with a face of awe and large and frightened eyes.

"As you don't like coming to Raby — your friends here at the Vicarage, I am sure, must admire your spirit vastly — I have asked you to accompany me here. Mind, I don't want you to come to Raby. I quite understand the petty malice which, under fine names, indulges itself in inflicting what it conceives to be mortifications; under such circumstances it is a great pleasure to women, and I hope it does them good. Not a word, please. I don't care a farthing, mind; it's nothing to me, absolutely, or to — to any one else. You have got your four thousand pounds, and you are independent of me; you can do what you like, what your friends here advise you; but my consent, by the settlement, is necessary."

He paused. She was looking at him half bewildered. "I say, by the terms of the instrument, the deed, which gives you that provision, you forfeit it the moment you marry without my consent; do you quite understand?"

"Yes, sir; yes, papa," whispered Rachel, with a gasp, and looking as frightened as her worst enemy, if she had any, could wish her.

"You need not look so stupid, then. Should any of the wiseacres about the Vicarage, there — the people whom you choose to consult and trust — persuade you to marry that very impudent and foolish young man, Charles Mordant, you will do precisely the thing which I forbid, and one guinea you sha'n't get. You'll find that by that spirited act you will have disappointed the religious, primitive people up there — left yourself without a shilling — improved my estate to the extent of four thousand pounds, and let that charming young man, who knows, I presume, the value of money, in for a very romantic and disinterested adventure."

In spite of her alarm, a flush of crimson dyed Rachel's cheeks as her father spoke. She remained standing, and perfectly silent.

"Well, so much for romance, and — and contempt of my wishes; and I have left a note for Stour Temple, telling him shortly those facts. So that any one who aids in accomplishing that folly will have done so, at all events, with their eyes open."

He paused, and there was a little silence, in which Rachel felt utterly confounded, and the croon and gurgling of the little brook close by filled her ears with a strange distinctness.

"And now, the other part. I don't mean to reason with you, observe. I'm simply putting facts before you; and if you decline to act according to common sense, it's all the better, in one sense, for me. Captain Clayton, whom you saw some time ago — every day for a month — likes you; he has returned to Raby for a time, and I see him, as before, every day. He has spoken to me, and satisfied me that there is nothing in point of prudence against it. Quite the reverse — very advantageous, indeed, and with extremely good prospects, that proposal is now before you; if you choose to accept it, you have my entire approval; but one word more, I won't talk about it at present. I won't take your answer now; you had better think it over, and all the consequences. He knows your friends, the Temples, and will very likely look in tomorrow afternoon, and speak to you himself — that is, if they choose to give him an opportunity, and that you like the idea; but I wished to tell you exactly all about it, and how I view the subject; not because I suppose my opinion of any weight — in fact I don't care a farthing whether it is or not — but because I wish you to understand the exact effect of acting under ill-advice in this matter, or indulging an idiotic and unworthy fancy, for which there is not even the miserable excuse that you see, or are ever likely to meet the object of it; for he is in India, and very well content to live there without troubling his head about you."

As soon as he had said that, Mark Shadwell went away. Whether her father kissed her at parting she could not remember, nor how he looked at her. For some time, with a dreadful sense of suffocation, she stood still, and at length her excitement and anguish found relief in a convulsive burst of tears.

An hour after she told, as well as she could, all that had passed to Barbara Temple. And they cried together in Rachel's room for more than an hour. Then Barbara, in the evening, communicated the matter to the vicar, who was pained and helpless. What could these good people do but speak, not even comfortably, but only kindly, to the poor girl.

The next morning a note was despatched by the vicar to Mark Shadwell, saying a great deal to the point, and with a very moderate expenditure of words. He knew that Mark Shadwell would excuse his writing, as Rachel was so distressed and agitated that she felt herself unequal to write as she would wish, and had begged of him to say that the proposal of Captain Clayton had come upon her by surprise — that she had never looked on him as a possible suitor, and could never consent to view him in that light, and a great deal more that was deprecatory and dutiful; but quite clear and decided on the point that she could not listen to Captain Clayton's suit.

Mark was intensely angry. Clayton was at the breakfast-table with him and his wife, exhibiting, his suspense considered, a wonderfully good appetite, when the vicar's note was handed to Mark, he took it to the window, exchanging a glance with his guest, and there read it.

Very angry under one of his bitter impulses, he said, with a kind of laugh: —

"I've had my answer, and there it is."

At the same time he presented the note open to Clayton, who said, as he took it, looking towards Agnes: —

"Am I to read this?"

"Certainly," said Mark. "They intend it, evidently."

Clayton did read it. He looked annoyed, but by no means so much moved as Mark.

His beautiful young wife was the only one of the party who talked much during the time they continued at the breakfast-table, and seemed quite as gay and happy as usual. About an hour later, however, alone with her husband, she said a little tartly: —

"What possessed you to show him that letter?"

"It won't make the least difference," said Mark. "Those Temple people have got fast hold of her; it's quite enough thinking I wish it."

"You give up things too easily. Clayton can be of immense use to us. You must be in parliament; you forget your own plans — everything — when you grow angry," his wife rejoined.

"My giving up or not has nothing to do with it; that rests with him, not me, and as to hiding it from him, that would be all very well if Stour Temple weren't sure to make him out before he goes, and tell him all about it," answered Mark Shadwell, moodily.

"Well, leave him to me; he must not be allowed to think her answer final; he must be kept on; he must come back to Raby. I dare say all will go right in a little while. I'll talk to him by-and-bye, and you need not say a word more about it."

Instead of his intended walk to the Vicarage, Clayton joined Mark Shadwell in a ramble to the woods, which was made short, however, by the early winter nightfall. In the drawingroom that evening, before he bid goodnight and went away to his inn in the village, Agnes had a long talk with him, Mark affecting to be busy in writing some letters. Next day, again, in the drawingroom, she had a very long farewell interview with Clayton.

The result of her persuasions was that he would return to Raby in the autumn. Mark was pleased. He knew that earlier he could not come. He had to join his sister, now at Naples, where she was to winter. Then northward for the summer, and to be joined by her mother in October, who was to relieve him, and having regained his liberty, to Raby he would return.

At Raby time moved slowly. Mark had his fits of gloom, more abrupt and more terrible perhaps than ever; but also more transient. His young wife watched him with an observant eye. She was always cheerful, and nearly always in an amiable temper. Her influence upon him was gradually developing itself. An artful, clever woman could have little difficulty in managing that vain, proud man.

"So you write to Clayton?" said he one day, as the autumn which was to bring him back again to Raby approached, tapping an envelope addressed in his handwriting to her, which lay upon her desk.

"Write to Clayton? I should think I do; how else could we know whether he is coming?"

Mark extended his fingers towards Clayton's envelope, but his wife, laughing, took it up, and popped it into her desk.

"Is he jealous? How delightful," said she, with a little laugh.

“Well, no! He’s not quite such a fool,” said Mark; “but what does Clayton say, for I really am curious?”

“He says he will certainly be at Raby in October,” she answered.

“In two months,” said Mark, ruminating. He was thinking whether it might not be well to prepare Rachel for his return. And something of this he hinted to Agnes.

She laughed.

“Don’t be vexed; but I understand her better, I’m afraid, than you do. I don’t think she really cares about Mordant, and I’m quite sure that if she did not think that you and I both wished her to marry Clayton, she would marry him; but she does think it, and the less time she has to think it over the better. She thinks of course that I’m at the bottom of it, and she hates me. I have never given her any cause, but one.”

Suddenly her tone changed from one almost of gaiety to one of sadness, and her fine eyes filled with tears; “and that for all the world I would not undo.”

As she said this, looking up fondly, she folded her hands about his arm, and he stooped and kissed her very tenderly.

“Never mind; I love you only the more, the more ungracious they all are. I know how dull this life is, but fortune will yet make us amends, and I shall see you where you ought to be and kissing her again, he walked down, in a sudden access of energy, to the little town of Raby, where he had an interview with his attorney, who pleaded in excuse for dilatoriness, that he had not got full instructions yet, and brought out a bundle of papers, and spread them before his client.

A few days afterward the attorney, happening to meet the vicar on the Applebury road, said, after some little talk:

“There was a matter I thought I might as well give you a hint of, but you must not let Mr. Shadwell know, I rely for that on your honour — you’ll promise?”

The vicar assented.

“Well. He made no settlement,” said the attorney, in an undertone, “on his recent marriage, but he’s going to deal with his property now, and, you know, there’s his daughter, poor Miss Shadwell, and she ought to be considered; he ought not to put everything out of his power for the advantage of the present Mrs. Shadwell, and he has powers which, under a well-considered settlement, he ought not to have had; and, as you take an interest in the poor young lady, I wished to give you a hint that you may put in a word for her, if you have an opportunity, naturally, you know, only you must not let him suspect that you got it from me."

Here was a new uneasiness, and what could the vicar do?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DAGGER HALF UNSHEATHED.

MARK SHADWELL was still enamoured of his young wife. He had reason to admire her cleverness. For the first time a gleam of hope pierced the darkness that overhung him. Mr. Twinley, the Raby attorney, has often said that he never met a professed accountant who could match that girl in disentangling complications, and reducing confusion to order. But her genius for figures was but one of her curiously-admirable faculties for business. Than the management of that large portion of the Raby estate which was in Mark's hands, nothing could have been more slobbering and wasteful; all this underwent a keen and wise revision, and the result was an immediate saving of several hundreds a year. The two mills of Drimsworth, that had been locked up for nearly three years and were falling to decay, within four months had tenants. All the leases were carefully overhauled. In several that had expired, and were held from year to year, it was found that the holdings were under-measured, and immediate accessions to the rental were the result. It would be tedious to enumerate the various operations of the new and active regime which began with the accession of the second Mrs. Shadwell.

Had no one at Raby eyes or brains till this young lady arrived among them? No doubt there was no lack of either. But the attorney only knew the state of things in glimpses and patches, as isolated cases came before him, and Carmel Sherlock, clever and rapid at accounts, had no turn for other business, and Mark Shadwell — though not deficient, perhaps, in talents of a different kind — was indolent and incapable in this.

The result was an immediate improvement in Mark Shadwell's income, and a prospect of a much larger one to be effected in the course of some half-dozen years. So Mark began to hold up his head, and it is not wonderful if he built castles in the air, or if his clever wife constructed several for his habitation. For she was resolved to get her husband on in the world, and was not a person to allow the grass to grow under her feet.

In his library, in the lower part of his escritoire, lay a square parcel of books, papered and corded, which Carmel Sherlock, a few days before his death, had himself made up and directed to him.

It was a heavy parcel, for some of Sherlock's few books were folios. Mark fancied that there were papers in it beside. He had often weighed it in his hand, and every time he opened the part of the escritoire where it lay, he read the address.

A faint curiosity each time prompted him to open it, and a reluctance, intuitive and superstitious, restrained him. Carmel Sherlock was such an odd fellow. There was probably one of his mystical letters there. They amused Mark, it is true, but in those follies there was a half-defined second meaning that teazed and depressed him. In his fun was a *gout de revers,* and his laughter and derision sounded with an echo like the mirth in old Red Gauntlet's spectral hall, and scared him secretly. He had come to look on this parcel with a sort of helpless dislike and suspicion.

This day it caught his eye, as usual. He was tired of its silent upbraidings. So, yielding to the momentary temptation to know the worst, he pulled it out of its hiding-place and put it on the table. Carmel Sherlock was about to speak. Mark Shadwell cut the string.

Some rubbishy old folios, as he had expected, emerged. He opened and shook them with their backs upward, but no letter dropped out.

A few papers remained. One contained some valuable hints as to how to make use of two ledgers in his room, so as to facilitate the keeping of the Raby estate accounts.

A smaller one was folded in blank paper, and contained a large closed envelope addressed to "Miss Agnes Marlyn, — Private."

Mark did not hesitate to open this, and he found this note addressed, in Carmel Sherlock's hand, to the lady who was now his wife:

"Miss AGNES MARLYN, — I return hereby the note you asked me to give to Sir Roke Wycherly on the night when he lost his life. That being impracticable, I now return it unopened, as you gave it to me. Your messenger was faithful — but the other messenger, Death, outstripped

"Yours, "CARMEL SHERLOCK."

"The d — d fool!" said Mark, between his set-teeth, but whether he meant Carmel or his wife, I can't say.

Enclosed was a tiny note, sealed and addressed "Sir Roke Wycherly," but the writing was so disguised, that Mark could not recognise a resemblance to that of his wife. It was rather a dark day, and Mark drew toward the window, and carefully opened and read this little note.

It contained but three or four lines. Here was his wife's handwriting without any disguise. It would not, probably, have done to leave Sir Roke at all in doubt as to its identity, and it had the initials "A. M." at its foot.

These lines were very significant. Mark looked pale with anger as he read them. He thrust the little note into his coatpocket, sneering. The servant crossing the hall saw his pale face over the banister, as he came down, and knew that something had gone wrong.

"Your mistress in the drawingroom?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, well, that will do," said Mark, as if he would have sent him anywhere else.

His beautiful young wife sat at her writing-table, deep in a letter, when Mark entered. In the isolation of that drawingroom, never now entered by a female visitor, she sat. She looked up at Mark with a rather bored expression, and turned her letter with its face downward.

"Oh, I've interrupted you!" he said, a little dryly.

"Not much — what is it?"

"It is only a letter like that, which was intended to turn its face downward when I came near," he answered.

"I don't care if you read it from beginning to end," said she, carelessly; "but what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing; — you'll think it nothing, of course — women have their own code of honour, it is not ours, that's all," said Mark.

Agnes made a hurried mental survey of liabilities and blots that might be hit, but felt pretty safe.

"I really don't know what you mean, Mark; I wish you would speak plainly."

He placed his hand on her shoulder, not caressingly, and looked down in her face.

"You remember that evening when you swore to me that my — my idea about that man — was false?"

"What man? — whom do you mean?"

"You know, very well."

"Roke Wycherly?" she said, and turned away a little contemptuously.

"Well, well, don't look away, look here — at *that!"* He laughed coldly, as he held the note before her eyes for a minute.

A brilliant scarlet coloured her cheeks as she said it, but she tossed her head a little, and said, looking askance on it, "Well?"

"Upon my soul, that's cool!" he said, bitterly, and with a very savage eye.

"My foolish little note to Roke Wycherly?" she said. "I see it — well?"

"Well!" he echoed, growing paler; "reconcile that with your oath, if you can."

Agnes had recovered her nerve.

"Reconcile that! I'm not going, if you can't. No harm ever came of that note; don't be a great old fool, Mark Shadwell! I think it's agreed to let bygones be bygones. Let us understand one another. What have I gained by marrying you? Simply a share in the solitude and mortifications of an excluded man. I never see a creature here. It would be insulting, but that I know it was so before, and is meant not for me, but for you. As your wife, however, I am simply avoided, as you are, and here I sit under the insult of that neglect and avoidance, merely to be a drudge over your accounts and letters, which you can't understand or write yourself — to try to save you, and to retrieve your ruined property. I don't care if that note were stuck up at Raby postoffice, for every squire, and boor, and woman — you have no ladies — in the county to read. I'm sick of this place already, and tired of its secrets, and I should not mind bidding you goodbye any morning, my good sir. Your note indeed! What a discovery!"

She shut her desk with a clap, down upon the letter she had half written.

"I sha'n't show you my letters. I shan't tell you anything; we know quite enough of one another. If you want to see my letters, I suppose you can break my desk, as usual. I'm afraid of no discovery. I have no atrocious secrets."

And thus speaking, she walked out of the room with an air of defiance, and even menace, in which was no trace of vulgarity; it was perfectly graceful.

Mark Shadwell stared after her, his ears tingling as if he had received a blow; the tremor of fury was in his hand. Upon a vain man, proud, full of the egotism of solitude, an insult which tears alike his vanity and his dignity, tells with a power of which men in a less morbid state know nothing.

He hardly breathed; he did not even curse — that relief vouchsafed to squires. His lips were closed, and he sighed once or twice, and going to the table, he turned over the leaves of a book of prints slowly, seeing dark pictures of quite another kind all the time.

Then, perhaps for the first time, his heart was wrung with a sudden and great remorse. Poor Amy, that adored him, in spite of the cold decay of his love, through all his dark and unreasonable moods, with an unchanging worship: who had never given him one ungentle look or word. The remembrance came with a vivid pang. He was not a man to confess himself wrong. Even in the solitude of that room he would not have spoken all he felt; but he missed her.

Mark, in his slow and lonely walk, met the messenger returning from Raby with the letters. There was one for him from Captain Clayton. It was not very long. He was coming to Raby to see him. He had been ailing, and his physician hinted that he must winter at Naples.

Not a word about Rachel! Was all that cooling? Mark would soon see. There was no absolute need, however, that he should say anything upon that subject in his letter, coming as he intended so soon.

The autumnal sun had set, and the sky clouded with faded gold and crimson, piled and floating in seas of faintest yellow and pale green, rose sad and solemn before him, and toned the lightest minds to melancholy, and others, sad already — with a profounder gloom. Mark was leaning by the window, and looking over the dimly glowing undulations of sward and woodland toward haunted Wynderfel. Dreams of the dead and lost; of Carmel Sherlock and his crazy visions and inalienable fidelity; of the predestinated decay of his family, and the legend of the angry spirit — the lady of Feltram hollow — with the star of Bethlehem on her left hand, —

when he felt the fingers of a little hand playfully pluck his ear, and a soft, sweet voice said:

"Come, Mark, we can't afford to quarrel; you remember the two companions in the Eddystone lighthouse? don't let us imitate them. I dare say I was very cross, and I beg your pardon" (she made him a little comic, plaintive curtsey). "But wasn't it you who began? — Mark, you know it was — and now we'll make it up, and we understand one another ever so much better, and we'll never quarrel again."

He looked at her, with the odd lights of Wynderfel upon her strangely beautiful face. Her words and manner were playful, but her face was cold and even cruel.

"I don't know, Agnes," said he, surprised by the suddenness of her speech, "in what mood you are talking, but I accept it as in earnest, and I agree. It is too late for me to think of making new friends, Agnes; and if I lose you, I lose my last."

She smiled. The odd, wild lights reflected from the sky distorted that smile. It looked arch and sinister. Her right hand was round his neck, and still in gentle play plucked at his ear. Her left he had taken in both his, and fondled it caressingly; its palm was up, with the little star-like scar, five-rayed, in its centre. She kissed his cheek, and whispered something in his ear, and he smiled in his turn.

So the little quarrel was made up, but each remembered it. It had scarred a deep line in Mark's heart; it had opened in their nuptial chamber, for a moment, a closet where he saw a whip of scorpions hissing on the wall. It had swelled the soft, clear tones of Agnes to a piercing yell of thunder, at sound of which the sky blackened, and the earth trembled under his feet.

Was that proud man to live henceforward under a threat?

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARK AT APPLEBURY.

So the apple leaf grew yellow, and the hawthorn tree was brown, at Raby. October had arrived, and at no season of the year does that melancholy old place, with its fine forest vistas, and its vast stretch of wooded hill, look so grand.

In this becoming costume did Captain Clayton, on his arrival at his inn in the pretty little town, find the ancient seat of Raby; and if he had been blessed with a sense of the picturesque, one might have supposed that he had made his arrangements — and it would have been well worth his while — so as to make his visit at that sad and glorious crisis in the forest world, when decay and maturity — its death and glory — are blended with a funereal splendour.

Clayton went up at once, and paid his respects at the great house. When Mark returned from the Mills, he found him established in the drawingroom.

"You've promised to come to us, mind, just as you did last time — every day to luncheon, and to stay dinner," urged Mark, hospitably; and only too happy was Clayton to accept the frank invitation.

He had a good deal to tell about people whom, or, at all events, their fathers or mothers or uncles or aunts, Mark had known long ago; and though his manner of relating was not particularly brilliant, yet the stories were more or less amusing, and afforded him glimpses into a world that had been closed for him for ever so many years. But Rachel's name he never once mentioned!

When a silence came, as they sat together by the spluttering wood-fire, Mark sometimes stole a glance at his handsome apathetic face, as his large azure eyes gazed indolently on the burning logs, and the lingering smile left by his last story still showed the edges of his even teeth. But the long expected re-introduction of the subject on which he desired to hear him, came not.

“He seems to think all quite at an end, and I can’t blame him,” said Mark peevishly.

“I’m certain,” answered his wife, cheerily, “that he does not think *we* think so.”

“I don’t see how that affects the case, except in making us appear excessively absurd.”

“So it would, if Captain Clayton were a different sort of person. But he would not wish us to think he has behaved ill; and, you may depend upon it, he will speak to you.”

“But I don’t say that he’s obliged to say any more about it. Why should he?”

“It was a great pity.”

“What?” said he.

“Poor Rachel sacrificing herself to vex you,” said Agnes, with a shrug. “You’re going to Applebury to-day, ain’t you?”

“Yes. I can’t be here for luncheon; tell Clayton so, when he comes. Rachel’s a fool — a greater fool than she thinks, as she will find, by-and-bye.”

“I don’t blame her for hating me,” said Mrs. Shadwell, “although I have never been anything but kind to her, according to my poor opportunities. But she ought not to speak of you — her father — as she does.”

“Oh! of course, she hates me! Every miss who fancies she is to rule her father’s house and himself, by Jove! hates him, as a matter of course, if he marries,” said Mark, affecting to think nothing of it.

“Yes, but I don’t think the Temples should encourage that kind of thing. Even before servants, she and they talk us over — you particularly.”

“Well, I’m going to Applebury now, and I sha’n’t be back till near dinner-time, and I don’t care a farthing what they say.”

And with this magnanimous speech, looking, nevertheless, very much annoyed, as she could see by every line of his face, he took his departure.

Applebury is a cheerful, quaint, little place, as I have said, with an antique coziness and a wonderful variety of aspect within so small a compass. But of all places on earth, except one, Applebury was to Mark Shadwell the most repulsive. What was he to do, however, when people, whom he wanted to see, fixed that spot — the most convenient halfway trysting place — for a meeting?

I sha’n’t trouble any one with the particulars of the business that brought Mark here. It was an anxious one. His attorney from Raby was here to aid him with advice and documents. Mark hated business as much as every rational man, who has nothing to gain by it, does. Besides, in his case, it too generally meant danger. He had sat up late the night before, over it, and had been wakeful and feverish by reason of it, almost till day broke.

It was past six o’clock that evening, when Agnes received a note from him in these terms:

“Applebury, 4 o’clock.

“MY OWN BEAUTIFUL LITTLE WITCH, — Pity your poor old fellow, shut up in this vile little town. A telegram says that the people from London won’t be here till next train, six o’clock. I can’t be home till eight or nine, at soonest; awkward, isn’t it? Make my apologies to Clayton. I had no notion such an awkward delay could happen; but I shall break away from my tormentors as early as possible. Already my life darkens — my star of Bethlehem shines too far away. I did not know how much every hour of my life depended on my enchantress. For the world I would not have left you alone; but here I am on compulsion. Looking for light, I remain here; in exile, still the captive of my beautiful witch.

“P.S. — I fear I shan’t be home till nine.”

This was a sufficiently ardent love-letter from a fellow of Mark Shadwell’s years; and what is more, in great measure genuine; which is more than can be said for all such performances. It might not have been quite so long, however, if Mark had not found his young wife a little exacting, as brides are, at least, while they continue to be in love with their husbands! and also there was this, that Agnes was a precisian in her ideas of what she owed to prudence. She worried him sometimes with scruples, and compelled him to go to places with her, where he thought she might perfectly well have gone alone. These little exactions vexed him sometimes; but, on the whole, it was a fault on the side of the virtues, and pleased him. So he wisely cultivated those nun-like ideas, and laid more stress on his regret for his absence from dinner than he thought the accident quite deserved.

Another disappointment awaited him. By the six o'clock train no one arrived for him; but, half an hour after, another telegram told of an unavoidable delay in London, and the postponement of the meeting until next day.

It was dark now. Across the market-square of Applebury you could not distinguish any longer, windows or doors, except where candle or firelight shone through them. You could only see the gables against the, as yet, moonless sky, like the shoulders of gigantic sentries. The sounds of the little town had died out; Mark was peevish, hungry, and tired. His attorney had taken his leave, and ridden home to Raby half an hour ago. While the good people of the inn were getting ready a beefsteak for the exhausted Squire, he, with his feet on the fender, fell into a nap, troubled, after a while, by a confused and ugly dream.

He fancied himself in a strange room; how he came there he could not remember; and, with the anticipation of danger which sometimes overpowers one in a dream, he was listening to a heavy tread, approaching on the lobby, and under which the floor on which he stood trembled. While he listened in suspense, from the further side of the room, on a sudden, the voice of Carmel Sherlock scared him, crying, "Beware, sir! it's the beak." At the same time the door seemed to open, and a huge gaunt figure, with a black crape over his face, and a parchment process in his hand, entered. At his elbow was Sir Roke Wycherly, with a white malignant face, peering by his side, and with a long hand, the fingers of which were grimed with old bloodstains, extended towards Mark — he continued crying, "Tonight's your time! you have the warrant, there's your man." The big-boned figure, in the black mask, was close to him, and Mark, in his agony, seized a knife; it was the dagger of Roke Wycherly — an image always present to his eye — which seemed to lie on the table before him. The room and its belongings were growing like the fatal room at Raby. But it seemed to him that his endeavours to defend himself were frustrated by his young wife, who from behind clung wildly about his arms, screaming with a terrifying laugh in his ear, "The knife, Mark, defend yourself! the knife — or he'll have you!" At the same time a dreadful roar of waters was drowning all the voices, and the room seemed to topple and roll like a sinking ship. And with a struggle, like strangulation, he suddenly awoke with a cry of "God!" repeated fearfully.

For a while he did not know where he was; he had sprung to his feet. The roar and darkness of the sinking room were still in his ears and eyes, and he distinguished nothing.

Even after all this had vanished, the sense of danger remained, and he listened breathlessly, wondering whether those accursed London fellows could have sent down a bailiff after all.

Mark, like other avowed sceptics, had a strong vein of superstition. One way or another, the instinct of belief in the unseen will assert itself. Out to the inn-door walked Mark, to shake off the lingering images of his evil dream, and to allow its influence to exhale in the free night air.

An undercurrent of his thought had been busy for half the day with his own possible arrest, and he still held, crumpled between his finger and thumb, one of those reminders printed on a little square of paper, which good men drop about, on the chance that one seed in a thousand may strike root. He had picked it up on the chimneypiece of the inn room, and in the act of reading the words, so early heard and so accustomed, that their very meaning seems, like an aroma too long exposed to the air, to have quite exhaled, and spent itself; and we have but a residuum of sound.

“But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.”

So his dream was accounted for; and Mark, somewhat better, returned, at the summons of the waiter, to partake of his good cheer. But as he rode home this dream, in spite of his reason, depressed his spirits with an ever-recurring sense of having witnessed, in reality, something dreadful; and his mind, every now and then, was busy with the fanciful problem — which he affected to despise — did this dream reflect, as it were, some approaching disaster.

When he reached the gate of Raby, he was glad. The sombre outlines of the great house, and the towering trees which surrounded it, as a rule, gladdened few people, and him least of all. But he called up the image of the fireside and the lighted drawingroom, and his beautiful wife, no doubt uncomfortable by reason of his protracted stay. “Yes, the pretty little fool, she’ll be glad to see me. She don’t know what to think; and Clayton — will Clayton be still here?” He rather wished he might. He shouldn’t mind a game of *écarté,* or even a homely rubber of backgammon. And as these cheerful fancies crossed his mind, a thought struck him. Should he play them a little trick, and knock at the drawingroom window? So letting his sober horse find his way to the stables as best he might, he dismounted and walked round the side of the house, and on the grass under the windows, at the back, till he reached those of the drawing room, through the blinds of which he could see the glow transmitted from the inner light.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STORM.

THIS drawingroom had three windows; a larger and drearier room beyond it was disused. The window-blind did not quite cover the lower end of the glass, and Mark stood and peeped in. His mood was instantly and sternly - changed.

Clayton and his wife were standing beside a cabinet, very near the window. He was talking, holding her hand in his, and she looking down, her cheeks dyed with a brilliant blush.

Could it be that they were talking of Rachel? No. It was the hope and agony of an instant. There is no mistaking the gaze of a lover who looks upon the object of his passion. With such eyes, Clayton, speaking low and earnestly, leaning over her, gazed; and, as if to preclude all doubt, stooping still nearer, he passionately kissed her unresisting lips.

If Mark's fury had been one degree under its acme, he would have dashed in the window, and, with his lacerated hands and ghastly face, have confronted his betrayers. He drew back, staring at the dull light of the blind that now interposed. But the picture was not in the room, but in his eyes. Backward he stepped and waited — and waited still — trying to understand and feel the whole of his appalling position. Freezing and stupefied, he saw the black image of the great old house stand up before and above him. All its hateful and dreadful associations were vaguely gathered in its shadow. He had dreamed of despair — talked of despair — fancied that he was intimate with despair for years. He had now, for the first time, met that tremendous stranger.

Some one approached the window; he saw the shadow on the blind and he glided away into the dark, like a ghost, and was hid. Clayton raised it and looked out for a few moments, dropped it, and returned.

For a long time Mark stood where he was; at last he was seized with a violent shivering. It was a crisis in his catalepsy. A doll dead light was breaking on his mind, and he began to walk swiftly away. It was a mild night, and yet he was pierced and shuddering with cold. Walking among the trees as fast as he could stride, he felt better, and the dreadful rigor subsided.

The one idea present to his mind was his revenge. Immense it must be, orderly and complete. His mind must clear. He must see, quite, how the land lay. He must do nothing hand-over-head. It must be a comprehensive and methodical revenge. But something he must be doing. To be quite inactive was to go mad.

He was now near the gate that opened on the silent highway, and the sight of the road to the little town of Raby suggested his first measure.

The distance was trifling. He was now in the street of the quiet little town he had so recently trotted briskly through. It was still early, not nine o'clock. Lights were shining from the drawingroom windows of his attorney, Mr. Twinley.

He knocked — sent up his message; and in a few moments more was seated in that gentleman's office. The attorney, as he set the candles on the table, eyed him with a shrewd and grim scrutiny. He suspected some disaster. He feared the bailiff in charge of his person might be, at that moment, keeping ward in the hall; for Mark's face looked as if he had stolen from his bed in the crisis of a fever.

"Nothing from London — since — sir?" hesitated the attorney, seeing that Mark did not accost him. He had left him only two hours ago at Applebury.

"No. You have that draft-deed, in favour of my wife, ready?"

"Yes, sir — and— "

"And engrossed?"

"Engrossed? Yes, sir, but— "

"Put it on the table, please," said Mark.

"Certainly, sir; but will you permit me only one word?"

"Do as I tell you, sir," said Mark, sternly; "we can talk afterwards."

"Certainly, sir," said the attorney, a little high and huffed; and, getting on a chair, he took down from shelves well stored with others like it, a mahogany-coloured tin-box, with "M. Shadwell, Esq., Raby," in large yellow letters on the front; and drawing forth the deed, placed it before Mark, who opened the milk-white parchment folds, and displayed that handsome piece of engrossing with its blue stamps and silver foil, ready at the touch of his pen to become fixed and inflexible as those chemical fluids which solidify at the turning of a stopper.

"You can get a couple of witnesses— "

"Well, I" The attorney looked at his watch.

"Oh! yes," interrupted Mark, fiercely. " Of course you can — and — I'm not going to sign this thing and he pushed the deed with the back of his hand a little from him. "I've changed my mind, and I want you to draw the shortest will you can, leaving everything I possess, without exception, to my daughter. I've made up my mind tonight, and she shall have it rather than a — a stranger."

By this time, Mark's mind was clear, and his hand steady, and he wrote across the deed without a tremor these words to which the date was prefixed: "Having changed my mind this evening, I do not intend to execute this deed, and have countermanded my instructions, with the intention of dealing differently with my property in my will. M. SHADWELL."

Beneath them, at Shadwell's request, the wondering and curious attorney wrote: "Present while Mr. Shadwell wrote and signed the above memorandum and at foot of this, the attorney himself signed his name.

Mark Shadwell walked up and down the room, sometimes stopping to look out of the window with the same unchanged and stony face, while the attorney copied a short form of a will, which Shadwell read, and perfected then and there, and, taking it and the deed with him, departed, leaving the attorney at the doorsteps, with his candle blown out in his courteous hand, bursting with wonder and surmise as he watched Mark's tall, slight figure receding homeward.

But Mark did not go home. A fitful melancholy wind had got up, and the moon was just showing its edges above the distant mountains and lighting the filmy streak of cloud that lay over them, as he entered the gate of Raby, and passing the great dark house, which no longer showed a gleam, but seemed to have closed its eyes, thinking of its secrets, he took the path to Wynderfel.

A man who walks with one idea in his head, and in a high state of excitement, gets over the ground quickly. The moon was now up, and a mournful wind piped, through the roofless gables and open windows of the old Manor House of Wynderfel, under whose walls he already was. From the lady's window an arm seemed wildly to wave him toward it. It was only that long ivy tendril, white in the moonlight, which had got a trick of beckoning when the wind was up.

He passed by these haunted walls, and down the lonely path to the Vicarage — a solitary figure — in that region deserted of life. Below him lay that happier land without the circle of Wynderfel, where were farmsteads and hedgerows, and the snug and kindly Vicarage, from which he could dimly see a lonely light.

The servant who opened the Vicarage door did not happen to know Mark Shadwell. So much the better for him. The cheery sounds of voices and laughter came through the little drawingroom door as the maid opened it to say that a gentleman, who would not give his name, was in the hall, and wanted to say a word to the vicar on particular business. The vicar's "Show ‘ him into the study" followed instantly, and the vicar himself, with the pleasant radiance of the beloved faces he had just left still on his own thin features, entered, and looked with an uncertain gaze upon the figure, buttoned up in a loose coat, and imperfectly lighted.

"It is I — *Shadwell,"* said Mark, in a low tone, as the vicar shut the door. "Just a word or two."

"Oh!" exclaimed the vicar, "I'm so glad. Won't you come into the drawingroom? Do."

"Two documents that I want to leave with you," continued Mark, whose speech went right on, like the chimes of a clock, "an odd hour; but I happened to be near this. You'll' take care of them — great care, I know; this is the deed I was thinking of executing; but that's past. You'll see what I have written across the face of it; and this is my will. You can read them — time enough when I've left you. You take an interest in Rachel. You'll be glad when you see what I have done; and — I thank you, Temple, for your kindness to her, and you'd have been a good friend to me if I had allowed you. I must *go,"*

"But it's a very nasty night. Did you drive?"

"I walked. Goodbye."

"You must take my cob; it's no night for a walk over those uplands."

Mark had reached the hall-door, and without waiting opened it. The wind was not on the front of the house, but it had increased to something like the gusty beginnings of a gale. The vicar held the door open, and the glass bell in the hall, with its modest candle, swung in the unruly air that it admitted, and threw its flaring light on Mark's pale face as, with the strangest smile the vicar ever saw, he nodded his farewell over his shoulder, while his loose coat flapped about him, and waving back his hand as if to forbid ceremony, he strode away.

The vicar shut his door with some little exertion, and locked it and drew the bolts, and having indorsed in pencil the date at which Shadwell had placed the documents in his hands, he locked them up also, intending, by-and-bye, to read them as Mark seemed to wish. And he crossed the hall, anticipating the attack which the curious women were sure to make, and think how best to fence pleasantly with his intending examiners.

The wind gradually increased in violence. It became a storm. Even in the sheltered Vicarage its fury was heard, on high, loud and awful, and Miss Barbara was up twice in the night in her dressing-gown and slippers patrolling the lobbies, and with great disgust and terror wondering at the apathy of the other human occupants of the house.

At midnight Mark had not returned to Raby. Agnes did not know what to think. His horse, without a rider, had found his way to his stable door. In such sinister conjunctures of doubt and alarm, what a magic mirror does, the imagination hold up! Happy those who, in a spirit of prayer, can lift the veil and look in. She could not look with pure eyes, and in its depths saw only phantoms that appalled her.

At halfpast twelve she sent down a frightened note to the attorney, who, she knew, had accompanied him to Applebury. Mr. Twinley scrawled a line in pencil from his bed to say he had seen him at nine o'clock, when he called, after his return from Applebury, for a few minutes, and here the note stopped.

What had he called about? Whither had he gone? Had bad news come from London? Was he a prisoner? Was he forced to fly? Or — or — and she dropped the veil over the spectres that were astir upon the speculum.

Mr. Twinley had turned upon his other side, and was deep in the peaceful sleep of a robust attorney, when he was again awakened by an energetic note from the lady of Raby. It called on him to come up to Raby and see her, otherwise she would come down to his office and see him.

Mr. Twinley might admire the new Mrs. Shadwell, but he did not like her. If he had been sure that the Squire would stick to his resolution of the evening before, he would have taken this message very coolly. But human passion is transitory — *amantium iræ* proverbially so, and wills are revocable. The queen might enjoy her own again, and the Raby connection was worth preserving.

So, though rather peevishly, the attorney did get up, and dress in haste, and walked down to Raby, where the lady received him awfully pale, and thoughtful, and inquisitive. He wisely kept the subject of his conference with Mark that evening strictly to himself, and wondered intensely what the secret could be. It plainly was not a quarrel. Mark had spoken to him in the morning about the deed, and had not seen his wife since.

"He must have heard news, however," said the pale lady, with decision, "or he is consulting with Mr. Temple at the Vicarage, and they don't know how late it is. He'll turn up immediately, or they have made him stay there, it is such an awful night."

"Yes, indeed — a frightful night it is, ma'am," said the attorney, with feeling.

"Won't you take a glass of sherry, Mr. Twinley," said the lady, thoughtfully.

"No, thank you, ma'am."

"You think he'll be here soon?" urged the eager wife, holding the candle at the dining room door, as the attorney entered the hall where the servant waited to let him out.

"Oh! yes, ma'am, I'm sure you're right about his waiting at the Vicarage. Slates were flying, I assure you, in the street of Raby as I came, and I should not be surprised if some of the trees here were blown down before morning." And the attorney's countenance darkened as, with this idea in his mind, he thought of his walk under the huge trees that line the avenue.

CHAPTER XX.

A KNOCKING AT THE DOOR.

NOT that night did Mark Shadwell return to Raby. Various were the moods that lightened or darkened the soul of Agnes Shadwell through these long hours as the flying scud above the wild and agitated landscape. Where was Mark? What had become of him? What was he meditating?

From the summit of the sylvan uplands that overlook Wynderfel there opens, gradually, descending toward that ruined mansion, a ravine which expands into a dark glen. This glen at one spot widens into an amphitheatre, walled darkly up at its southern side by a precipice, over whose stained front brambles hang and thick ivy grows; and over its upper edge the old trees stoop and gather, deepening the solemn shadow which makes the tarn that washes its base look black as ink. The tiny stream that feeds this sombre lake steals out from the rocks at its foot, and makes its way deviously through the glen, which narrows again at the other end of the tarn, leaving however a level carpet of grass.

Of all that lonely region this is the most entirely lonely spot. The overshadowed tarn looks smooth as ice, and black as ink, and there are fabulous stories of its depth at some points. On the green floor of soft sward that lies on the eastern side of the sheet of water stands the kyst-shaped black tomb of the suicide, Lady Mildred of Wynderfel. There is inscription neither of name nor of date. In rude bass-relief reposes a female figure, life-size, with the left hand raised above the shoulder, and in the centre of the palm a five-rayed star, such as heralds term a star of Bethlehem.

In this solitude of solitudes repose the outcast bones of the suicide. If she pined for quiet and oblivion, never did mortal drink deeper of both. From a silence like the grave, from an abyss into whose depths scarcely at highest summer noon does the sun ever peep, at night you may look up, through masses of wild trees and clambering underwood, to the glimmering face and moonlighted peaks of the precipice, and see the narrow disk of dark-blue sky and stars that roof in this solemn, hall of silence. Over it the scud was flying and the storm roaring, and now and then a huge gust broke in, whirling the withered leaves, and tossing the boughs frantically in the dark, and lashing the deep pool into sudden eddies.

Toward morning the gale subsided; a sullen calm succeeded, and the leaves that had danced in such mad circles, whirling up kin columns nearly to the summit of the precipitous glen, now slept without a stir, on the soft grass by the tomb of lonely Mildred, and by the margin of the tarn that looked up to the cold morning sky with a surface as dead and black as if it had never been agitated. A broken bough, floating with its sear leaves upward, alone gave token of the recent fury of the storm. Over it broke the cold wild dawn; the pale sun glittered across the landscape as it might over a field of battle; many a tall tree lay low, and great drifts of yellow leaves were huddled together in clefts and hollows, to dance on forest boughs, in air and sun, no more.

No tidings meanwhile at Raby were heard of Mark Shadwell.

Again the attorney was called up to see the perplexed lady at Raby. This time she sent the taxcart for him, and he came in better temper. He had asked the servant, and already learnt that Mark had not been heard of. She had sent to inquire at the Vicarage. He had left that last night at about ten o'clock, as the vicar supposed at the time, intending to return direct to Raby. But he could not say what direction he took.

There was an agent at Chester, with whom Mark often had business. He must be telegraphed to. It would not do to publish far and wide, however, that Mr. Shadwell of Raby had absconded without apprising his wife of his intention. The message therefore said: "If Mr. Shadwell should call, telegraph instantly to me, as a message awaits him here."

In the same terms messages were sent to the hotel at which, in his unfrequent visits to London, he was accustomed to put up; and also to the office of his London attorney.

Two hours passed — three hours — four hours — and brought no answer. At about twelve o'clock Captain Clayton arrived, as usual, having heard nothing of the alarm and perplexity that prevailed at Raby. He came straight into the drawingroom, where Agnes was talking to the attorney, and was struck by a certain pallor in her face, and by the intense coldness of her smile, and her manner to him as she greeted him.

The attorney, as he entered, was taking his leave, and Mrs. Shadwell, who stood on no forms that day, accompanied him into the hall to say a last word.

"That is Mr. Clayton, you know" (she preferred saying Mr to calling him Captain)— "my husband's particular friend — can we make any use of him. May I ask him to call on you just now? perhaps you can devise some employment for him: he would be horridly in the way here, you know."

And having seen him out of the house, she returned to the drawingroom, and, without waiting for question, she placed her hands on his shoulders, looking with her deep eyes into his handsome but apathetic face, at that moment full of stolid wonder, and said:

"Oh! Alfred! — he's gone. I have never seen Mark since: what can it be?"

And though she spoke interrogatively, her eyes suggested dreadful, positive suspicions.

"I — I assure you, I haven't heard from him; if you are apprehensive of anything of that kind. I haven't, darling, really — upon my honour!" he answered, in great bewilderment.

"You remember when I made you look out of the window last night, and you said you saw nothing?"

"Well — I swear there was nothing; I think so. In fact, I'm nearly certain," he hesitated.

"It must have been just about that time his horse came home. They found it in the yard, at the stable-door. I — I don't know what to think: he's probably with his London lawyers by this time. Alfred — Alfred! My God! Alfred, what has your madness involved me in!"

"No — now, my darling, you're talking the most arrant nonsense, I do assure you; now just you be quiet; you must not talk so, for fifty reasons. I'll just consider it a little: I'll think what's best to be done, and come back and talk it over with you. Isn't that the best way?"

And so he went; but he did not come back any more than Mark Shadwell. She drove down in her miniature brougham — an acquisition on which she had insisted some months before — to the attorney's office. Captain Clayton had been there. He had run up to London to make inquiries, and having scarcely time to catch the train, had requested the attorney to inform Mrs. Shadwell that he would exert himself to the uttermost to make the inquiry effectual, and let her know the result forthwith. Mrs. Shadwell concealed her anger.

Next evening's post, however, brought a letter from Clayton to the attorney, which said: "I was on the point of sending the enclosed note direct to Mrs. Shadwell, but reflected that if the uncertainty still continues, her agitation may have increased since yesterday, and knowing the very confidential position occupied by you in Mr. Shadwell's family, I thought I had better leave the note open, that you might use your discretion as to the best manner of apprising Mrs. Shadwell of its purport."

The open note enclosed in this, said:

"MY DEAR MRS. SHADWELL,

"I have ventured to make inquiry at all the places usually frequented by Mr. Shadwell in town, and have failed to learn anything. When his solicitors last heard from him, he had no intention of coming to town. Deeply regretting that I have not been fortunate enough to learn anything positive, I can only add, that anything that may strike you or Mr. Twinley as being in my power to aid further in this anxious affair, I shall be only too happy to undertake.

"Believe me,
"My Dear Mrs. Shadwell,
"Yours very truly,
"A. L. CLAYTON."

This cavalier treatment incensed Mrs. Shadwell, and one of her intense, sarcastic notes replied. But it did not reach him till next spring, for Captain Clayton had gone abroad; and it lay upon the hall-porter's table, with a row of similarly neglected letters, of all shapes and sizes, that awaited there the return of their careless owners.

Another idea now visited the anxious brain of Mrs. Shadwell. Could Mark have made away with himself? No; Mark was not mad. There was no aptitude for inflicting on himself any avoidable pain or privation. He was vindictive; he was violent; he was, from long isolation, careless what people might say or think. Heaven alone knew what he might be about.

She went down to Raby and saw Twinley, and cross-questioned him about the deed, and, on hearing that her husband had taken away the engrossed copy, as yet unexecuted — Twinley took care to tell no more about that than he was strictly obliged — she demanded the draft-deed, which, taking her receipt for it, he gave her.

Mrs. Shadwell was suffering. She did not know what to think. Ominous as everything looked, it was still possible that Mark was. merely complying with a necessity, and concealing himself till some special danger — which he had no time to communicate to others — had blown over.

Miss Barbara came over to see her, and found her rather silent, fierce and odd: but looking miserably. She told her brother, Stour, that if he had seen her he could not help pitying her. To which he replied, that: “Suspense is torture, and of course she is suffering; but I confess I pity our poor Rachel a great deal more, because there can be no doubt that her misery is unselfish.”

I don’t know what was passing in honest Roger’s mind during the period of Mark Shadwell’s disappearance. He originated no conjectures, but listened earnestly to those of others. His spirits recovered, not their gaiety — that would not have been decent — but their energy, and his attention to his toilet mysteriously revived. He was sorry on Rachel’s account. He was shocked even. Mark might be in Prance, or in the Fleet — who could tell where? But he might also have killed himself, or been killed; and, in that case, might it not be reserved for honest Roger to comfort his widow? He had heard of the course of true love, diverted similarly from its proper channel, and returning thus circuitously to reward patient fidelity, after an interval of despair. He knew, as many men do, cases precisely in point. The nature of his suspense, therefore, was somewhat affected by these secret considerations.

Four days had now passed, and brought no tidings of Mark Shadwell.

The night had closed: serene moonlight silvered the wooded landscape. The air was still and frosty. It was a night of utter silence, and now twelve o’clock. Agnes could not sleep: nervously listening, she lay, still with her dress on, awake upon her bed, the coverlet thrown over her. Her maid was sleeping in the same room: Agnes could not bear to be alone.

Leaning on her elbow, she had been for a minute listening, and fancying a distant sound. But she had listened in vain, and placed her sleepless head again upon the pillow, and fell into dismal speculations and reveries, that frightened her; and, in the midst of these silent communings, a loud and long doubleknock suddenly thundered at the hall-door, and the bell rang shrilly.

“Dorothy! — Dorothy!” shrieked Agnes, starting upright in the bed. “My God! It’s your master’s knock!”

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.’

*“*Get your things on as fast as you can — any way, no matter — you can throw a cloak over you.”

And as the half-awakened maid obeyed, Agnes hurried to the window; but she had forgotten that it did not command a view of the hall-door. Before the shutters were well opened, the knocking and ringing were repeated.

“Quick, Dorothy! I can’t go without you — do, for Heaven’s sake!”

Expecting to see Mark in a few moments — not knowing what story he might have to tell, or in what spirit or character he might appear — her heart, which all this while was beating as if it would choke her, suddenly, with a deadly faintness, felt as if it stopped still.

But Agnes was not a lady to swoon easily. There is some truth in the theory of effort. When she and her maid had reached the head of the great staircase, a servant had already opened the hall-door, and she heard a voice; it was not her husband’s, talking in-the hall with the old butler, who was still retained.

Agnes descended, stopping now and then, for a moment, to listen. When she came into the hall, the old servant, in slippers, and without a necktie, in *déshabille,* with a solitary candle on the table, was talking to a stranger who had not removed his hat. They were talking earnestly, it seemed, and in tones little above a whisper.

Disappointed, and also relieved, she came forward more boldly, and the men looked round. The stranger removed his hat, and advanced to meet her. He was the vicar. Strange was the countenance of Agnes — the light of her candle so close to her face, and that face so pale, and contracted with the peculiar frown of pain.

“Tell me quickly? you need not fear,” she said, very low, in a voice thin and cold, that thrilled Stour Temple.

She read instantly the dark look in the vicar’s earnest eyes — she knew there was news of Mark, bad news for her, at least, she saw it must be.

"Yes — I've learned something about Mr. Shadwell — there has been an accident — a very bad one — fatal — I'm grieved to say."

He was led on to say this by the gaze that was fixed on him. He felt that the least delay would not soften but protract her agony.

She made an attempt to speak, it was but a contortion, her voice did not come; but she was pulling at his hand quiveringly, and he knew she wanted to hear the whole story, be it what it might, and he told it.

I will not relate it in his words, but these were the facts.

Two cows of the vicar's were pastured in Wynderfel park. One of these that evening had strayed away, and a man was sent in quest of it, but in vain.

About eight o'clock, favoured by the moonlight, he resumed his search. Having failed in other quarters, he meant to try the woods near Hazelden, which are approached through a glen. He missed his way, however, and found himself, on a sudden, by the awful tarn of Feltram.

The moon being high, lighted the opposite side of the precipitous amphitheatre, and those peaked, grey rocks, projecting through the trees here and there, to which Doré, drawing such a scene, would have given the outlines of sheeted grotesques, with upraised arms, stooping from mid-air over the black oval of the pool.

The man looked round, and saw the black tomb of the unhappy Mildred — like a patch of shadow on the grass, and "winter's tales" which he had heard of the "gaze-lady" which, as I have said, local antiquaries tell us is truly "ghaist-ladye," came crowding horribly on his memory; and these scaring fancies were brought suddenly to their climax by his seeing, just emerging above the smooth surface of the tarn, a human figure, floating face upwards.

It was not till he looked hard at it for some seconds, that he became certain that the white object which he saw was a half-submerged human face, looking upwards against that streak of moonlight which, wavering and flickering in the shadow of nearly leafless branches, yet so sharply defined it, that there could remain no doubt in his mind — except that the appearance might be one of the delusions practised by the goblin of that haunted glen.

Forgetting the cow, and everything but the ghost of the Lady Mildred, the man got away as fast as he could, and by the time he got quite out of that haunted territory, he began to reflect that the figure he had seen floating in the tarn might have been not a ghost, but a corpse. He made haste to the Vicarage, and there saw Stour Temple, who, though it was by this time past ten, got men together, and with his brother Roger, and proper appliances for drawing the body, if such it should prove to be, from the water and carrying it away, set off for the Glen of Feltram.

The vicar was very silent during the march. He had a presentiment — so had others — which no one uttered. Through the narrow glen, bearing their ropes and poles for an extemporized bier, silent and awed, like men passing into a cathedral at a midnight funeral, they entered that dark hall where stands the solitary tomb, and the tarn reflects the stars.

Taking their stand upon that patch of sward on which fell a narrow strip of light from the moon, now high in the heavens, they got the rope in a long loop round the object which floated at the surface, and drew it slowly to the margin.

Slowly, with a sort of undulation, sometimes under, sometimes over the water, it glided to the bank. With hardly a word, spoken under breath, they drew it up, with a trail of water streaming after, and laid it, a few yards on, in the patch of moonshine. It was the tall, slender figure, and proud face of Mark Shadwell, on which the moonlight fell!

The vicar looked down upon the familiar features of the man with whom so much of the past of his secluded existence was associated, with a vague mingling of deep emotion and deep thought. Every face is sublime in death. The whole case is there; the weakness and the fate. It awes and it softens us. We see, for the first time, how much was excusable, how tremendous is the penalty. The tale is told, to which words can be added never more, and it lingers still in our ears. We remember things we might have said, but which can never now, be said. The writing is finished, and rolled up, and sealed, till the tremendous day breaks over all.

Having given his men orders to convey the body to Raby, and left that matter in charge of his brother, he himself walked on to Raby, whose inmates were startled, as I have said, by his late knocking.

“Very rash,” thought the vicar, struggling to get rid of a conviction that haunted him, as he rapidly trod the Wynderfel path to Raby, “very mad of him to take that devious and dangerous way on such a night!”

The truth is, there was no way of accounting reasonably for Mark Shadwell's having taken the Feltram path, if his object was to reach Raby either safely, in such a storm, or expeditiously. Stour Temple was trying to exclude the hypothesis, at which other people arrived, unanimously — I mean, that the Squire's death was not accidental. Knowing all I do of the circumstances, and of that impulsive, violent, and hypochondriac man, as well as of the intense agitation in which he took his leave of the vicar that night, and of the legal measures he had taken to secure the disposition of his property, I have myself no doubt whatever, that Mark Shadwell made away with himself, in his despair, deliberately.

In the mind of every man who wilfully ends his life, there are, I have no doubt, fluctuations, waverings, horrible recoils, and then relapses into suicidal frenzy, before the irrevocable plunge, or pistol-shot, or razor-gash. Human nature takes fright, and cries, No! with all its might; and morality pleads, and the whole man shudders and protests; and he thinks, and thanks God — the danger is over; but the mysterious temptation recurs — importunes, bewitches, transforms him, — and he is gone!

The body lay that night at Raby. A coroner's jury pronounced his death accidental, following strictly such evidence as was before them, though every man of them had his misgivings, and afterwards his convictions.

Time has passed — with many disturbances and adjustments, demolishing and repairing, obliterating and creating, and carrying on the great story of human passion, vanity, and sorrow, since then.

The beautiful Agnes — like a spirit in possession — was not easily to be feast out. She was active, truculent, unscrupulous; and seemed resolved to contest the rights of the heiress of Raby to the last. But Rachel had no intention of turning one who had been her father's wife — undeserving as she was — adrift upon the world with absolutely no provision. She knew nothing of that paroxysm of jealousy, and its cause, which had produced the catastrophe.

Perhaps Mark Shadwell's construction of what he saw was too nearly absolute and extreme, considering how strangely perfidious that woman was, and how capable of deception within deception, and of merely beguiling Clayton and befooling him for a purpose.

Clayton, however, kept her at arm's length ever after, and she hated him with a mysterious and intense acrimony.

So soon as the fury of this beautiful young woman, holding Raby against the siege of London attorneys, engineered by counsel learned in the law, a little cooled, and her cold, shrewd common sense asserted itself, she was more disposed to listen to reason, and so a treaty was concluded. Rachel charged the estate with an annuity to her, and she covenanted to trouble her and the estate no more. So this evil angel, so beautiful and fatal, her mission ended, vanished, and ceased to be seen and heard at Raby.

I have heard of her at different places — at Paris, at Florence, at Spa, at Vienna, at St. Petersburg, where occurred that fracas which I dare say you remember.

This ambiguous beauty is clever and admired, and carries with her a gentle gaiety, an angry heart, and many secrets. I am always expecting to hear more of her. Scarlet lip and pearly smile, and softest eddies of dimples; those brilliant blushes, and dark eyes, with liquid glances, shy and fiery, are still weaving spells, and turning heads, and setting new dramas in motion.

And so she is going up and down, and to and fro upon the earth. There are disappointments and revenges; deep works the "little billow" of that bosom. The fire is not quenched, and she is not happy.

Rachel is married, very happily, to Mr. Charles Mordant, of whom I know little, except that he is a very good fellow. Old Mervyn, his uncle, stopped the suit he had commenced, and the estate has benefited by that forbearance; but he paid off, besides, a smart mortgage. He has the young people to live with him at free quarters, and takes an interest in nursing the Raby estate, which is already emerging. Rachel will never live at Raby: it has too many melancholy and terrible associations.

One secret of that ill-omened house is, happily for her, hid alike from herself and the world. It concerns the murder of Sir Roke Wycherly, which happened thus.

Sir Roke, after a short nap in his chair, awoke. He got up and locked his door, which opened upon the lobby. The other room, which communicated with Clewson's room, being bolted, you would have said that the baronet was tolerably secure. There was a fatality here, however. Just as he had completed the mysterious ceremony of unwigging, described at the inquest by Mr. Clewson, and donned that quaint cap in which he was found next morning dead in his chair, he heard a step approaching from the end of the gallery. The baronet had been expecting a note from Miss Marlyn all the evening. It was awkward, his nightcap being on his head instead of that extremely clever wig in which he usually met his friends. Still, he could not risk missing that note. It struck him, however, that the step might be that of Carmel Sherlock, whose crazy visit at his door he remembered uncomfortably; and rather to quiet a nervous feeling, than with the slightest idea that it might actually be employed, he took up the dagger which, in an evil hour for him, he saw shining upon the dressing-table, and then went quickly to his door and peeped out upon the gallery.

The step was not that of Carmel Sherlock, nor yet that which he half expected. It was the figure of Mark Shadwell, now very near his door, that appeared. He had intended passing on to his own room, but Roke Wycherly stopped him, and invited him in, with what to Mark seemed an irritating insincerity — satirical, inquisitive — which, he felt like an insult.

In a spirit of latent defiance then, Mark did turn into the room. Those who mean to teaze others, and amuse themselves with their irritations, should be very sure of their own tempers. Roke Wycherly being, in some respects, a man of the world, though naturally, as Mr. Clewson knew, a gentleman easily exasperated, could affect good humour where it suited him. But under the strain of circumstances, all affectations are liable to break down.

The cards were there, but Shadwell did not care to play, and the baronet talked a little in his usual ironical vein. There are rules to be observed, of course, in this kind of game, as in others, and I have no doubt that had Mark respected them, Sir Roke would have managed to keep his temper. But Mark Shadwell's natural violence and isolated habits, were against all such regulated hostilities. He became utterly unparliamentary, and was quickly very much the more provoking of the two, and broke into insult so direct and galling, that the baronet, with a pallid smile, told him he lied, and at the same moment chucked the pen that lay on the table in his face.

The wizened malevolent smile, the retorted outrage, Mark's long pent hate and ungovernable pride and violence, transported him.

As a man starts from his bed in the crisis of a frightful dream, in a moment, Mark stood freezing before his victim. The convulsive smile continued, there was something like a sob, and another, and a gush of blood flowed from the simpering mouth. Mark's hands wildly pressed the wound, and the blood flowed warm and sluggishly through his fingers and over his wrists, and the changeless face of Roke Wycherly seemed to smile at efforts vain as the dream of rolling back time and undoing the past; and Mark felt, with a transport like madness, that the work of that blind moment was for him and for Roke to go on, and on, and on — through inexorable eternity.

It was the few furious words of the altercation and the crash of the decanter, overturned by Mark's arm, that had startled Mr. Clewson from his slumbers. Then followed the quiet, and those mutterings of Mark's solitary horror, which had deceived him.

As Mark left the room, pale as a spectre, with the dreadful evidences of bloodshed on his hands, he was observed by Agnes Marlyn, herself unseen. When he had gone, her curiosity drew her to Sir Roke's door. It lay partly open. She listened — she knocked, to ascertain whether any one was in the room, and, finally, she entered. She thought something bad must have happened, but had no idea how bad. Courage was the attribute, perhaps, most remarkably pronounced in the strange character of that young girl. But the horrible revelation nearly overcame her. Even in that sickening moment her habit of never acting except on second thoughts, prevailed. Rapidly recovering herself, she distinctly saw the whole truth, and comprehended the value of her secret, and stole silently, her brain teeming with horror, wonder, and Castles in the air, to her room.

The confession of Carmel Sherlock explains the rest.

I linger over, these scenes. When business or pleasure calls me northward, I sometimes make a halt at the quaint little town of Raby, and saunter through the grand old park of the bygone Shadwells, admiring with a renewed interest its picturesque nooks and hollows, its magnificent timber, its sombre uplands, and broad westward slopes.

My latest visit was made toward the end of last October. I looked in upon my dear old friends at the Vicarage. They are all well, and by a happy chance I found the vicar himself at home.

One bit of news in that part of the world I learned. An heir has been born to the Mordants, and, I suppose, Rachel is now as happy as mortal well can be. I should have walked over to pay my respects to the young gentleman, had time sufficed. But, alas! the Railway, though an educator, is also a tyrant, and makes us count our minutes and keep tryst, under very disagreeable penalties. So, consulting my watch, I took my leave of those loved and simple friends.

The vicar accompanied me in my walk toward the town of Raby, where he had a call to make. We pursued the well-known path by Wynderfel. And when we reached the ruins, with mutual consent we paused before the silent doorway through which Carmel Sherlock had emerged on the day when he was captured.

"You have read the old Latin inscription cut in the stone of that doorway. It refers, evidently, to the gaze-lady," said the vicar. "The more I think of that legend, the more curious it appears. I have, in my few leisure hours, been collecting materials. I shall find out something of the history of the two ladies who were supposed to have represented, in other centuries, that fatal spirit. Certainly, according to the old prophecy, she was due, as we say of ships, just at the time when Miss Marlyn appeared at Raby, and then, you know, it was to be for the disastrous extinction of the old family name; and see what accompanied it — I may say, what was brought about by it — a great scandal — murder, suicide, and the predicted utter obliteration of the ancient name of Shadwell; and she had the mark of a star in her left hand, also — it tempts one to superstition." The vicar smiled sadly. "And I hear, at intervals, of the wanderings of that mysterious young lady with a kind of interest — though I never liked her — and I should not wonder any day to learn that her clothes were found standing upright and empty, in her room, the form, that had filled them, vanished, like the lady in the German legend, you recollect, who had returned to her husband from the grave. But the sun is near the edge of the distant wood, and I've been delaying you, so let us be gone."

So we turned toward Raby, and for a time, in silence, pursued our way thinking, and then talked of the neighbours, and their haps and mishaps, and sayings and doings, till the moment came for a kind farewell.

Raby is untenanted. But its wild and noble scenery, the picturesque ruins of Wynderfel, and the awful glen of Feltram, draw many a tourist and wandering artist to visit its haunted grounds. These memorials of a once famous race remain, but Shadwell of Wynderfel, or of Raby, a title which we meet with often in old county chronicles, and which mingles historically with others in the lists of splendour and of war, will turn up no more. It is "A LOST NAME."

THE END

HAUNTED LIVES

Le Fanu’s tenth novel, *Haunted Lives* was serialised in the *Dublin University Magazine* between May and December 1868 and published by Tinsley in three volumes that same year.

The title page of the first edition

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TO

MRS. FITZGERALD,

OF FANE VALLEY,
THIS STORY IS INSCRIBED,
WITH KINDEST REGARDS,
AND MANY PLEASANT RECOLLECTIONS,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.

LAURA CHALLYS GRAY.

THE Old Brompton of my earlier recollections, with its silent lanes, its grass-plots, and flower-knots, its towering trees, and those sober old houses of dusky red brick faced with white stone, which, set round with tall flower-pots and flowering shrubs and roses, had a character of old-world comfort, and even grace, has faded and broken up like a sunset city of cloud.

When regretful memory names a place, as I name Old Brompton, I always find it call up a special picture, and always the same. Mine is no bigger than a cabinet picture. Through a short perspective, the rugged columns of half-a-dozen old trees, under shadow, with a patch of broken flickering light, I see little more than the lower half of the tall old drawingroom window — dusky brick, and a worn setting of old Caen stone. On the broad window-stone stand some flower-pots; I know not the names of the flowers, trembling stars and cups of blue and crimson; and from the chiar'oscuro of the room within leans over them the prettiest face, I almost think, this mortal world ever saw.

Beautiful cousin, Laura Challys Gray! A pretty music rings in your name, for me — with those sad notes that come from the distant past, and die in the far future.

I close my eyes, and I see you, your violet eyes, and rich brown tresses, with their golden folds, the delicate oval of your face, and your crimson lips. Oh! pretty Laura — odd, wayward, misunderstood, full of faults — with many perfections, I am sure, that others possessed not — I am going to jot down my recollections of you, and what I know of a story as odd as your character.

In this house, at the open drawingroom window, Charles Mannering — a tall young man, with a face kind, frank, and also sensitive — was standing, looking westward, where the sun was nearing the horizon, with the glow of a coming sunset. I think there is a pleasant sentiment in the artificial rurality of such a scene, and he could fancy, among the urns and roses under the distant groups of ruddy chimneys, melting in the misty light of evening, a pretty powdered Daphne ogling her piping Philander across her crook.

He liked being employed, too, by his pretty cousin. Here was a commission which had given him a world of trouble — to find her just such a house in the oldfashioned suburbs of London as he had lighted upon.

She ought to have arrived half an hour before. He was standing, as I have said, at the open drawingroom window. He was nervous about her decision upon the manner in which he had executed his commission. Her letter was in his pocket; and, while he was amusing himself with an imaginary dialogue with her, the carriage arrived at the gate, and was admitted. It was a chariot, prettiest of all carriages — why discarded now I cannot imagine — four posthorses, and two postillions. They had travelled up from Gray Forest in the oldfashioned way — by the road and posting stations — not then on that line, superseded by rail. Hot and dusty were the horses that were pulled up at the steps. He ran down, and handed his pretty cousin from the carriage, and then her elderly kinswoman and companion, fat and rather amiable, and not very active. The springs yielded to her weight, of which that sagacious lady was as conscious as the elephant, and she leaned upon his shoulder, and then upon his arm, with a cautious emphasis that made him stagger.

Good Mrs. Wardell — that was her name — came in, very red, talking and giggling, and wheezing a little, and sat down in the dining-room to divide her journey, and recruit before essaying the stairs, under care of her maid, much the more elegantly got up of the two. Charles ran upstairs to the drawingroom, where he had seen his cousin, light of foot, already looking from the window, as he lent Mrs. Wardell his arm up the steps.

Miss Laura Challys Gray was still standing between the voluminous silk curtains, looking out through one of the tall windows, as he entered the room. In shadow and reflected lights there is sometimes a transparent effect which heightens beauty; and I think he never saw her look so lovely as when she turned towards him from the light, as he entered. I pause for a moment to recall that pretty image.

She had removed her little bonnet, which dangled by its ribbon at one side from her slender fingers. Her rich brown hair, so wonderfully voluminous, in the shadow showed its golden glimmer where the dusky sunset touched it. Her large violet eyes, under the long curve of their lashes, were turned upon him. Nearly in shadow, her beautiful lips, with a light just touched in crimson, parted, and very grave. What a beautiful oval that little face was, and how richly her shadowy brown hair parted low above her brows. As she looked at him this pretty face was thoughtful and nun-like, and after a little silence she said, with a very imposing seriousness: —

"I think I shall like this out-of-the-way house, and the fifteen trees, and the half-acre of grass."

"Oh, I assure you, there's a good deal more than you see from this. I should say there are at least two acres altogether, and fifty trees, reckoning — — "

"Reckoning the roses?" she laughed.

"No; the lilacs and laburnums, which are enormous, and deserve to be counted in," said he.

"I think I shall like it," she repeated a little imperiously, as much as to say, "It is your place to listen at present, and mine to speak." "It looks old, and homely, and secluded. It has a monastic air; and has not the slightest pretension to elegance, and is perfectly dull — *thank* you. You have acquitted yourself, so far as I see, to admiration. I can't pronounce absolutely, however, until I look about me a little more."

She spoke with such perfect good faith, and such an air of gravity and wisdom, that he was on the point of laughing.

But that would not have done: for Challys Gray, as she liked to style herself, was an imperious little queen; and when she was serious, expected all the world to be grave also.

There was not a folding door between the front and back drawingrooms, but an ordinary door, with a very heavily carved casing, like the others in that house, which projected almost like a porch. Under this passed Miss Gray, and looked slowly round the other drawingroom.

"Yes, I like it; I'm sure I shall. It is a suitable house for old people. You need not laugh. Mrs. Wardell *is* actually old, and I am prematurely old, and no one that is not old, either in years, or, older still, in spirits, has any business here."

"Come, Miss Challys, that won't do. You and your spirits, as you say, are precisely of the same age — each two-and-twenty — and that is very young, and you'll not like isolation long, with the great world and the gay world so near; and you’ll find this house, and the monotony you propose, the dullest whim that ever you engaged in.”

“Well, that’s very much my own affair, I suppose,” said she. “Suppose my plan of life ever so absurd, it is worth a trial. I don’t love the human race. I have no opinion of my species; I have no cause; and if I am to be happy it must be independently of human society; and, after all, I’m not tied to this house. Should I tire of it, I can take my departure without asking any one’s leave — I shall travel. I have half a mind to buy a yacht, and live on the sea, a sea queen, and treat the world as a picture-book — look at its scenery, and cities, and depute my courier to talk with its people.”

“A misanthropist?” suggested he.

“No; I don’t say that quite,” she answered, “but a person who, from experience, has formed no very high or pleasant opinion of her fellow-creatures, and, being her own mistress, means in a harmless way to live as pleases her best, and die an old maid.”

“A passionless recluse?” he continued.

“Wrong, again. No, not passionless. With one passion very fixed-very wicked. What do you look at? Why do you laugh?” she demanded a little fiercely. “I say very wicked, not because it *is* wicked, but because the cant of the Pharisee and the cant of the world concur in calling it so. I don’t choose to reason; I suppose I could if I chose, but I have no taste for arguing. I leave that to philosophers like you, who always lose their tempers when they engage in it. I read my Bible, and that is my church. I have no notion of being bullied by clergymen. I have gone into various places of worship, both at home and abroad, and I’m not particular about forms. None of them please me exactly, and none of them displease me altogether.”

“Ah! Miss Challys,” said he, raising his finger, and shaking his head, with a smile, however, “you are the same wild girl — Undine, before she acquired her soul.”

“Thank you, Cousin Charles,” she answered; “I hope I have not said anything to call for an argument?”

“Because you should have to listen — is that it?”

“Listen! Well, I don’t promise that. But I should have to answer it I suppose.”

He laughed.

“And I don’t see why you need do battle for clergymen. You’re not one. There isn’t one present — I shouldn’t abuse them if there were — and if one can’t abuse people behind their backs, I’d like to know where’s the liberty of a British subject.”

“Very well argued, for a person who, abhors reason,” he said, applauding.

“I don’t argue. I do despise reason. Our moral nature, instinct, passion, are divine, but reason came by eating of the tree of knowledge, at the persuasion of Satan, and is part of the curse of our Fall, and therefore devilish, and, what is worse, dull. I like this view better still,” she said suddenly, as she looked from the back window. “There is so much green — trees and gardens, and I don’t object to the stables, and the roofs and chimneys through the leaves — the look-out is so like a country village. I shall make pets of all the birds — but none in cages. If liberty is so much to me, what must it be to them? — poor papa used to say. And I shall have a little King, Charles or two. And where do they sell cats? I must get one of those great foreign cats. I’ll have the most magnificent cat that ever was seen in Old Brompton. Every old maid sets up at the sign of the cat, and an old maid I’m going to be, and the sooner we set up the sign of my profession the better. You smile. Very well — you shall see.”

“But you talked of a passion just now. It can’t be *the* passion?” suggested he.

“Now, that’s so like your sex! You poor weak men, when you hear passion spoken of, can imagine nothing but the insipid sentiment you call love. Come, rouse your energies, and be a woman. I require a person of sense and energy, and you must please to get rid of your conventional ideas. You got my letter, of course?”

“Several,” he answered.

“I mean about that triumvirate — the attorney, the Jew, and the clergyman.”

“Yes, I told your solicitor,” said Charles.

“I have no objection to see them, and I preferred seeing them here. When do they come?”

“Tomorrow, at one o’clock, if that quite answers.”

“Yes, quite — very good.”

“And what do you mean to say to them?” he asked.

“How should I know? Come and hear. That is, I do know perfectly; but I shan’t discuss it. I’m sure I’m right, and I don’t want to be puzzled.”

“Something wicked, as you say, I am sure. I see the wild light of Undine’s eye again.”

And he wondered mentally what she was going to do in the painful matter in which she was called on to pronounce.

“Well, never was Undine in so dusty a plight. Dear old Mrs. Wardell and I almost quarrelled about the windows and such clouds of dust. So would you mind touching the bell for my maid? I suppose they have got my things upstairs by this time; you come back, do you mind? to tea, or dinner, or whatever it’s to be. I hear Cousin Julia coming; she’ll tell you.”

Cousin Julia Wardell was indeed very audible; for the stairs creaked, and she panted and wheezed, and a shrilly lapdog barked and scampered all the way up.

CHAPTER II.

BROTHERS OF MERCY.

"WELL," thought Charles, as he let himself out of the gate, "*this* freak wont last long; an heiress, well connected, and with her beauty! It would be the greatest pity in the world, but the comfort is she'll tire of it in a fortnight, and confess her mistake in a month, and next season she'll come out, and be presented, and have her head turned like the rest."

Charles chose to present this little prediction to himself as his hope — and I think it might more nearly have resembled his fear.

He glanced back with a little sigh, as he closed the gate, and saw a broken view of the fall windows, and glowing old brick, and the weather-worn Caen stone facings.

"Pretty creature she is, but there's some odd want about her; is it feeling or is it only sentiment? — *no* — yet she *is* like Undine without her soul. I always said so — playful, odd, harmless, I think — but also cold, vehement, and wild — a coldness that piques one. She talks so like a fool, too, and yet she has a provoking faculty of thinking."

He did not return that evening to Guildford House. Such, I forgot to mention, was the style of the oldfashioned house in which my young cousin had established herself; but in the morning his breakfast was interrupted by the arrival of a tall footman — inconsistency number one — with a note reminding him that he was to come to her at twelve o'clock, and saying that her solicitor was coming also. But it was plain she would wish to have a kinsman by, although, from an odd wayward pride of hers she would not say so in so many words.

As he walked up the short straight avenue, dark with the shadow of old elms, it was still a quarter of an hour to the appointed time. Already Miss Challys Gray had been busy, and under her beautifying influence tall flowers were nodding and quivering in the great stone pots along the balustrade that ran before the windows, and on the drawingroom windowsills were other tinier flowers, and there he saw her as *I* always see her — looking from the shadow of the open window.

"See, I keep tryst," said he, smiling up, as he held his watch toward her, standing on the steps.

"I can hardly tell at this distance," said she, "though I have pretty good eyes — for seeing with," she interpolated, observing his smile; "but my little clock tells me you are fifteen minutes before your time, so you are very good indeed."

"You've been doing wonders already — such flowers — like the Indian enchanters, who make them grow up in ten minutes," said he.

"You'll find pictures also, and hung with very good taste, I can tell you," she answered with a smile, well pleased that her energy was appreciated.

"Pictures!" said he; "where did you get them?"

"From Gray Forset, and they came last night. Go in, and see Mr. Gryston; you'll find him in the library — the room to the left — and I'll see you there, immediately;" and the pretty head drew back, and nothing but the nodding flowers remained. So in went Charles.

Guildford House was a rather stately old mansion, and really more spacious than from the outside one would have fancied. The hall was a square panelled chamber, with five doors, one facing the hall door, and two opening at either side under those heavy projecting cases, which went out, I believe, with the second George — but which have an air of solid pomp and comfort. Beyond under a broader arch, were visible the wide stairs with their heavy banisters.

When he entered the first room, on the left hand, he found Mr. Gryston reading his Times. He knew that shrewd and reliable attorney, who set down his paper, and seemed tolerably glad to see Charles.

"I thought it was those people about De Beaumirail, he said, glancing at his watch; it isn't quite time, though I think it would be desirable that I should see Miss Gray before they come, and on that account I came a little early. That fellow Levi is a most unscrupulous dog; and Larkin — I've met him once or twice in business, and he's sharp and not very straight; and the fact is, she ought to be cautious what she says — or rather she ought not to say anything, but just leave herself in my bands, d'ye see? and I thought I should have an opportunity of talking to her a little, for I don't know what view she takes, or what she means to do; do you?"

"I have not an idea," Charles answered, truly.

They want her to let him out — they have some object, of course — but I don't see anything we can gain by keeping him in prison. There's that little property in France, it must be trifling, for they say he has very little to live on, and is ready to hang himself, poor devil!"

Charles Mannering did not know much about De Beaumirail. He knew, however, that the Gray family had suffered in more ways than one by his misconduct, and that he was, in the opinion of that family, at least, a very unredeemed *mauvais sujet*. He had lain in prison now for more than three years, refusing to give up some small property which his creditors could not themselves reach. It was in some respects a pitiable case. A young man who had figured some years ago brilliantly in the great world of Paris; he was of old French blood allied by marriage to English; his mother was a Challys, and related distantly to the Grays of Gray Forest.

Born to a great fortune, he had wasted it, in gaming and fabulous extravagance, in seven or eight years, and now he was, at thirty, a despairing prisoner in the London Fleet, with the alternative of ending his days there, or giving up the pittance which alone saved him from the direst penury. Liberty of course was not to be desired at, that price. His creditors had begun to forget him, his relations with them were assuming the character of routine, and the prisoner was subsiding into despair, when a simple old clergyman, named Parker, took up the case, and had succeeded in getting the creditors to agree to his discharge upon very easy terms indeed, and all that was now needed was the consent of the girl, Laura Challys Gray, who represented a very heavy claim for mesne rates and law costs which had accumulated in her father's time.

"I take an interest, of course," said Charles, "but I am quite ignorant of details."

"Miss Gray will be for letting him out very offhand and generous, and I've thought it over, and I can't see any good in keeping him locked up any longer. Even if he did eventually give up that bit of property, I don't think we should be benefited to the extent of three hundred pounds, after all costs paid. But he'll *never* give it up, for he has nothing else to keep body and soul together, and he'll live and die where he is rather than take that step — d'ye see; so I don't see any good in our thwarting her, if she wishes to open the door for him."

Mr. Gryston was a shrewd man, and respected, who knew the city and the profession, and knew something of most persons whom he was at all likely to meet in business.

They had not talked long when the deputation, as they styled themselves, appeared.

Tall, bald Mr. Larkin entered first, with a very well-brushed hat in his large lavender. gloved hand. He had on a lavender-coloured poplin waistcoat and lavender-coloured trowsers, and a perfectly new black frock-coat, that shone with a sleek gloss, and he wore his meek simper, showing gaps at either side, and his pink dovelike eyes glanced this way and that, expecting to see Miss Laura Challys Gray. He liked making a good impression upon rich people, in whom he always saw possible clients.

Mr. Gryston received this gentleman dryly and gravely, with a slight bow; and also the small Jew, Mr. Levi, with the great lurid, vigilant eyes, and sullen dangerous countenance, and black hair, and many trinkets, who followed him closely. This gentleman walked about the room, picking up the books that lay in long rows on the floor, trying the strength of the binding by plucking the covers backward, breathing on the backs and rubbing the gilding with the sleeves of his coat, knocking and scratching the furniture, overhauling the construction of the bookcases, and staring sullenly in the faces of the two or three portraits with which Miss Gray had already hung the walls, with such an expression as one could fancy he might wear while beating down their price in a broker's shop. Charles longed to box his ears and send him about. his business, and was on the point of interrupting his scrutiny rather peremptorily, when he suddenly tired of it, and with his hands in his pockets strode over and placed himself beside the agreeable and pious Mr. Larkin, and contributed now and then, uninvited, a drawling sentence to the conversation.

And now entered that venerable and simple clergyman, Mr. Parker, with no trinkets like Mr. Levi, and whose clothes were by no means so new as the unexceptionable Mr. Larkin's.

With light blue eyes, guileless and kindly, he too looked round the room, as he entered with his white locks uncovered. He recognised Mr. Larkin gladly. Charles Mannering introduced himself, and then Mr. Gryston.

"Has Miss Gray arrived?" he inquired.

"Yesterday," answered Mr. Gryston, and looked again at his watch. "She'll be with us here, I expect, in five minutes." He signed to Charles Mannering, and walked to the window, and in a low tone said— "Run up to the drawingroom, please, and give her the caution I intended about Larkin and Levi, and tell her she needn't come down unless she likes; she has only to send me word what her wishes are."

"All right," said Charles, with a nod; but before he reached the door, it opened, and his pretty cousin, in her high-up morning dress, came in. I don't think she knew they were all assembled, for she drew back her foot a little surprised, but immediately advanced, greeted Charles with a smile, and Mr. Gryston, and more gravely and coldly her other three visitors.

Among this little assemblage, in which white heads, and bald heads, and long heads, and very hard heads, were represented, this young and beautiful girl was an incongruous intruder, and perhaps a latent sense of the contrast prompted Mr. Gryston to say —

"I've been here some time, Miss Gray. I thought you might wish a few words, as it is a matter of business, and Mr. Larkin is a professional man" — Mr. Larkin's smile was here one of preternatural innocence and urbanity — "and on the other side, you know — I mean, interested for Mr. Guy de Beaumirail."

"I can hardly, in strictness, claim that honour" — interposed Mr. Larkin, blandly shaking his tall head.

"And it might, perhaps, be as well, Miss Gray," continued Gryston, not minding, "that you should confer with me for a few minutes, before taking any step."

"Thanks — no; it's quite simple, I fancy — done in a word; but I think I had better first hear what these friends of Monsieur de Beaumirail wish to tell me, as they have taken the trouble to come here." She spoke to Mr. Gryston, and glanced graciously at these gentlemen. "Ask them to sit down."

CHAPTER III.

AD MISERICORDIAM.

THEY did not sit down, they remained standing, everyone did, Miss Gray included; and Mr. Larkin, in parliamentary phrase, laid upon the table a paper with a series of signatures attached, which he, in his most engaging manner, informed Miss Gray, who stood near the other end of the table, with Gryston at one side and Charles Mannering at the other, was a consent signed by the creditors, for the release of Monsieur de Beaumirail, on the sole condition that their rights were not to be prejudiced by that step.

"I act in this matter, and I believe I may speak for Mr. Levi and his eminent and influential Partner, entirely from motives of compassion, and I will say humanity."

"Humanity — that'sh it — and compassion," echoed. Mr. Levi, standing at his elbow, and eyeing the party with a sulky glare.

"Quite so, a Christian feeling, we hope; that is," said Mr. Larkin, suddenly recollecting Mr. Levi's faith— "a feeling of perfectly disinterested charity and commiseration."

"Commishera-a-tion," assented Mr. Levi, with emphasis.

"And we are actuated," continued Mr. Larkin, "in this, I will say, melancholy case, by no other motive."

"I'll take my oath of that," said Mr. Levi, to place the matter quite beyond doubt.

"And really, thrown professionally into contact with that unhappy though sadly misguided young man, I will say that it is impossible to contemplate his great, and I will add, his — a — a — eminent privations — without a sentiment of pity. 'Sick and in prison' — I take the liberty, Miss Gray, of quoting— 'and ye visited me.'"

"Vishits him twishe a week,"— "and always finds him at home," he mentally added. But of course this latter was but an unspoken jocularity of Mr. Levi, who looked especially hang-dog, as he always did when he affected the philanthropic vein.

"Occasionally — just occasionally," said Mr. Larkin, blandly. "We don't make a boast, Mr. Levi, of any humble attentions, or unaffected — a — mitigations it may have been in our power to bestow."

"That'sh as true as the table-book, she help me," said Mr. Levi, with more solemnity than was needed.

Pretty Laura Challys Gray looked at the window with an expression of pain and weariness, as if she would have liked to escape; and as there was a slight pause she said gently —

"Is there anything more?"

And Mr. Gryston ventured to suggest that it would be desirable if Mr. Larkin came to the point.

Whereupon Mr. Larkin "agreed — quite agreed — that feelings, however strong and however unexceptionable," ought not to mix in business, and mentioned the nature of the application he had to make, and also the fact that without exception the other creditors had consented, as their names at the foot of the agreement now on the table attested.

Old Mr. Parker then asked to say a very few words; and he had something to add about the health of the unhappy prisoner, and was solemn, earnest, and pathetic. A little silence followed, during which Mr. Larkin clipped the pen in the ink, and tendered it with a saddened smile and a graceful inclination to Miss Gray.

"I have heard everything now, haven't I?" she asked.

"We have nothing more to add," said Mr. Larkin, engagingly; and with the ends of his long lank fingers he slid the paper gracefully toward the young lady.

Mr. Gryston raised it and read it through, and turned it round and read it a second time; it was very short.

"You quite understand, Miss Gray? The effect of this is to give Mr. Guy de Beaumirail his liberty, but without prejudice to any rights of yours as to any property of his which may hereafter turn up."

He placed the paper before Miss Gray, who looked not at him, but at it, in what is called a "brown study."

"We make a great sacrifice, gentlemen — our detainer amounts to more than half the other creditors' claims put together; but I suppose, — as the others have done it" — and with this pause he presented the pen, which he had taken from Mr. Larkin's fingers, to his young and beautiful client, adding in a lower tone —

"I don't see any objection, Miss Gray, to your putting your name to this."

"But I do," said Miss Gray, in a faint icy voice that had a slight tremor in it, raising her head suddenly. "I wont sign it. I have quite made up my mind, Monsieur de Beaumirail shall remain where he is."

And with two or three little impatient waves of her fingers she put away the pen. There was a silence. Mr. Larkin, staring at her, went on smiling inconsistently. Mr. Levi gaped luridly as if he was going to swear at her. Mr. Gryston glanced shrewdly at her, as if he doubted his ears for a moment, and then looked down demurely on the table, and played the devil's tattoo softly on it; and the clergyman, with his gentle eyes wide open, gazed on her with an alarmed uncertainty. The silence that followed was for a few seconds, but for Mr. Gryston's drumming, intense.

"Bega-a-ad!" boomed at last in the Jew's metallic tones.

Miss Laura placed her hand in her cousin's arm, and said, looking very pale, "Will you take me to the drawingroom? Goodbye," she added, in a low tone; and making a very grave and haughty inclination to the strangers, she drew near the door, which Charles opened for her.

The old clergyman followed quickly in a kind of consternation.

"But, my dear madam — my dear young lady — pardon me — you cannot possibly understand."

"I do, indeed, sir — I understand perfectly; and I wish you and everyone to understand that I have quite made up my mind — that I know the effect of what I do, and that I am — resolved that Monsieur de Beaumirail shall be punished, and my resolution is not to be altered by anything you can possibly say or urge; I am sorry if I give you pain; goodbye."

And with a more gracious farewell to the old clergyman, Miss Laura Challys Gray was gone, and standing at the back drawingroom window, before her audience down stairs had well recovered their surprise.

"You must ask that foolish old clergyman to luncheon, and Mr. Gryston, but on no account either of those dreadful men, the two people with that paper to sign," said Miss Gray to her cousin.

"Don't, pray, call him foolish, Laura," said Charles.

"And why not, pray? He was foolish, and he *is* foolish. No sensible person talks so dogmatically as he did upon things he knows nothing about."

"I thought he spoke with good sense, and good feeling," said her cousin.

"You ought to *know* that he did neither — that is to say, that *I* have acted rightly in utterly despising his advice. I saw you were shocked, and I don't care; and do just go and give my message to that foolish clergyman and Mr. Gryston."

Charles smiled upbraidingly, shook his head and left the room very gravely, thoughtfully even. Laura looked after him over her shoulder a little vexed.

"There goes another fool," she soliloquized. "What does it signify what they think? Nothing, while I'm sure I'm right — and one must be right, morally, at least, when one does from a superior motive that which is perhaps disagreeable to them; though it ought to be pleasant, very pleasant, and even *is* pleasant in a certain way.

Down stairs, the gentlemen passing through the hall, on their way out, heard brilliant and joyous music from the piano in the drawingroom. Mr. Larkin's heart was not very deep in this matter, but the Jew heard this music very sourly. As he walked away, said he to Mr. Larkin —

"Who'd think that young woman, Miss Gray, was such a precious screw? When a woman likes money, doesn't she like it, oh, no! They'll go all the way to the devil and back, for a tizzy. Look there — that young man; where's the good of his four bonesh locked up, to Miss Gray? What devils they are! And she knows he's dying by inches there. What's her income — you know something of it?"

"There's Gray Forest, and the Yorkshire property, and they say a great investment in the funds. It's certainly not less than eleven thousand a year, and people who should know, say it's nearer thirteen," said Larkin.

"And all for that one girl's board, and clothing, living in Old Brompton. Bah! She's a miser, and she'll let that fellow die in quod for the chance of a ha'penny in the pound."

"Very young, as you say, Mr. Levi, for so much severity. I hope it is not covetousness — covetousness, which is idolatry, Mr. Levi."

"You have a nishe bit of money yourself, Larkin," said Mr. Levi; "and they do shay you're fond of it too; you take precious good care of it, and turns in a devilish nishe per-shentage."

“There are plenty of ‘buses when we get down to the corner here,” said Mr. Larkin, mildly, and with his head rather high. He wished this little Jew snob to understand that there was some distance between him and a gentleman of Mr. Larkin’s position.

It was not pleasant having such a fellow hanging on him; it could not be helped though. They had promised to see M. de Beaumirail in his den, with the result of their suit, the success of which they had never doubted. But Mr. Larkin would sit back in the ‘bus, and take out some letters and read them diligently, and so guard himself against the disconcerting familiarities of that questionable gentleman with the pretty trinkets and somewhat villanous countenance.

Miss Laura Challys Gray laughed to herself pleasantly, as she played a brilliant air in the oldfashioned drawingroom of Guildford House. The slight pallor which had chilled her beauty at the moment of her passing sentence, as it were, of imprisonment for life on that ill-starred Monsieur de Beaumirail, had been succeeded by the brilliant colour of excitement; and gaily, as a girl going to her first ball, she glided round the room, smiled on her beautiful face in the mirror, glanced at the pictures, then stood at the window looking over the brilliant flowers that trembled in the air, and she saw the old clergyman in the seedy black, with the silken white hair, and thin, sad face, with his cotton umbrella in his hand trudging lonely down the short avenue.

She knocked at the window — he turned — she beckoned, and threw it up — she leaned out and beckoned again, smiling, and when he had reached the step, looking up with his sad wintry face beside the flowers that rose high from the great stone flower-pot on the balustrade, imaging side-by-side the fragile beauty of young life and the bleak melancholy of age, she said —

“Pray excuse me, Mr. Parker, I was so much obliged for your letter. Wont you come in and let me thank you, just for a moment?”

He had raised his hat, and the light breeze blew over his thin white locks, as with his patient smile, looking up, he listened to that beautiful young lady with life before her, and with a gentle bow to her he reentered the house.

“That stupid old man! He has walked all the way, I’m certain, he is so covered with dust, and he’s going away without any luncheon!”

When he came up, she again pressed her hospitalities upon him; but he declined. He made an oldfashioned early dinner in his lodgings, and intended the luxury of a seat in a ‘bus to the Bank; and after a few words, and a silence, during which the old man fidgeted a little with his hat and umbrella, as if about to take leave, the young lady very gravely opened the following conversation.

CHAPTER IV.

M. DE BEAUMIRAIL.

“I’M so Sorry you wont take even a glass of wine — but — I did not wish you to go away without telling you why I refuse to let that wicked man, Monsieur de Beaumirail, out of prison.”

The old man was standing; at these words he bowed his head, leaning his hand upon the table. It might be simply an attitude of attention, or it might be that the subject was painful, and that he did not care to look in her face while discussing it.

“I ought to mention,” he said, “that the unfortunate young man is a distant relation of my own — so distant as almost to count for nothing. I mention it only lest your ignorance of the circumstance Should affect the spirit of what you are going to say; not that it need be so, for, as I say, the relationship is very remote.”

“I have lost my father; I have lost my sister; I stand alone in the world, sir. My father suffered from a complaint under which he might have lived for very many years to come, but his life was cut short by the excitement and anxiety of a wanton attack upon his property. My sister died when I was very young, seven years ago. They called it consumption — it was a broken heart. The lawsuit which hurried my father’s death was instituted by a man who snatched at that desperate chance to redeem his fortunes from the ruin in which his selfish prodigality had plunged him. My sister’s heart was broken by the same unscrupulous man, who first won her love, and then deserted her, and that cold, frivolous villain was Guy de Beaumirail. You did not know all that, sir, when you wrote and spoke to me as you did.”

The clergyman shook his head.

“Certainly not; I knew there had been some litigation. But, whoever may have first moved it, let us remember it was De Beaumirail who suffered, and I must add, that even had I known every circumstance you have mentioned, I should have applied to you in his behalf all the same.”

“Then, Sir, you would have taken a great liberty,” said Miss Gray, flushing brilliantly.

"I don't mean to argue a case that does not exist, ma'am, but I avail myself of this opportunity to re-open the suit which I ventured to prefer on his behalf."

Miss Laura Challys Gray had taken nothing by her motion, neither did old Mr. Parker by his.

"Really, Sir," she said, "this is too provoking."

"Admitting that you have had provocation, my dear young lady, remember that you are bound to love them that hate you, to do good to them that despitefully use you and persecute you, to bless them that curse you."

"Twaddle, sir — as you misapply and pervert the words — twaddle and nauseous cant. How *can* you talk so?" said the young lady, changing colour rapidly.

"Oh, my dear Miss Gray, oh, pray, you don't seem to reflect how very shocking such language is," said the old clergyman.

"You don't seem to reflect, sir, how very shocking yours is! what a perversion of the Bible! We are told to discriminate between the wicked and the good; we are told to have natural affections; we are told to have common sense, and common fairness, and common decency; to honour our parents, and not, that I remember, to honour their murderers."

"My dear ma'am, the obligations of charity are immense; read Saint Paul — read his first epistle to the Corinthians, the thirteenth chapter; read the sermon on the Mount, the sixth chapter of Saint Matthew."

"I know it all, Sir; I know the Bible as well as anyone need; but it is not to be read all at one side; reconcile your blind charity with Saint Paul's command, that he that will not work, neither shall he eat; and if any man, being a professed Christian, be also a sinner, we are commanded to let him be accursed, and to avoid him as if he had the plague. Sir, your distortion of our reasonable faith is a blunder; it is imbecile, and not only imbecile, but wicked; and if I thought you represented Christianity truly, I should cease to be a Christian. I am sorry I have detained you; I expected to find you accessible to reason, and I have found you a clergyman — exactly — exactly a clergyman, and I feel very like a fool, sir, and — and I've only to say, goodbye."

So, for his sound doctrine this old gentleman received a sound jobation, and the beautiful young lady, the spoilt child, looked wonderfully brilliant, and handsome, as she blew him up. With a bow, and a faint sad smile of patience — not put on, quite unconscious — he drew towards the door, and without more parley, disappeared.

"We are both fools, but he's the oldest," she said, in soliloquy, with the same carmine tint in her cheeks. "And now he's gone to shake off the dust from his feet, and plenty of dust he has got there — for a testimony against me." She looked at her watch. It was later than she thought. She touched the bell, and ordered up her cousin, Charles Mannering, from the library. She complained of the clergyman, and commanded Charles, as it were, to agree with her. But Charles, on the contrary, took the other side — very quietly, at first, but more spiritedly, as she urged him. She was very much vexed — more than she quite cared to show.

"When you have quite finished your lecture, tell me, and I shall tell you its effect."

"I hope I have not been very impertinent," said he, a little awkwardly, as he stood by the window and plucked a little blossom from one of the flowers that stood there. "I should not have mentioned the subject — I should not have ventured, only that you asked my opinion."

"I did not give you leave to pluck my flowers though, and that's of more consequence than anything you have said," she observed, a little angrily.

"Oh! I really wasn't thinking. I'm so sorry;" and be placed the little sprig gently on the table.

"And you two gentlemen might as well have spared your eloquence. It is pleasant, though one knows one is right, to have people to agree with us. But *we* disagree about everything, I think; not that it matters much, for it has not the slightest effect; that vain, worthless man shall be punished, with God's help, while I am spared to punish him; and your tiresome sophistries and platitudes have no effect but to heighten the disgust with which I have been always accustomed to hear you men support one another, through thick and thin, in all your enormities and oppressions, provided they have been directed against my miserable sex. I'm going out for a drive with Mrs. Wardell; and I shan't much mind if I don't see you again till this day week."

With which rude speech she left the room. Charles picked up the little flower he had laid on the table, and smelled at it once, and twice, absently, although it had no perfume; and twiddled it in his finger and thumb for a little, feeling indistinctly very much annoyed with his pretty cousin; much more vexed, in fact, than I think he would have been had she not been so pretty; and away went he under censure, like the clergyman.

“This day week — well, perhaps so, though this day fortnight may answer me as well; better, by Jove,” said he, as he drove sulkily along Piccadilly towards his club.

In a dingy room in the Fleet, about the same time, a young man in slippers and dressing-gown, without a necktie, pale, utterly *ennuié*, with a long beard that added a premature gravity to the dejection of his face, nipped his lip with his teeth, with a frown of sudden pain as he listened to the close of Mr. Larkin’s polished statement, heard his gentlemanlike condolences on their failure, and the metallic drawl of Mr. Levi as he contributed his share to the dolorous and vengeful duo.

The old clergyman was looking out upon the listless yard through a window which wanted cleaning. A silence followed the close of the dismal narrative. The Jew sat down and made half-a-dozen notes in his pocketbook, and totted a sum or two, and pulled out some letters.

Mr. Larkin being a polite person, and, as he liked reminding people, a gentleman, awaited with considerate attention the remarks which such a narrative might not unnaturally draw from a person in Mr. Guy de Beaumirail’s situation.

That gentleman looked down on the agreement which lay upon the table, with the same sharp frown, drawing the paper toward him, and he drew his finger slowly down from signature to signature in a dreamy despair — there were so many; he had come so near his liberty — within one name. A pencil line was drawn where that talismanic name was to have been written, and with the same pencil thoughtful Mr. Larkin had traced the words “Miss Gray will have the goodness to sign *here*.” De Beaumirail sighed heavily as his finger traced the descending file of names till it reached Mr. Larkin’s inscription, and there it stopped, and gradually a strange smile, weary, patient, bitter, lighted up his pale face.

Mr. Larkin “hem’d” slightly to remind him that he was at hand and attentive. But notwithstanding this inducement, silence continued until that painful smile had slowly waned, and De Beaumirail, with his hands in his pockets, shuffled lazily to the clumsy old sofa, covered with faded red stuff, laid down with tarnished brass-headed nails, that stood at the far end of the room, and he took the arm of this in his hand, as if he was trying its strength with a tug or two; and, said he, in a low tone —

"The wretch! I hope to God she may cry for mercy yet, and die without it."

And De Beaumirail, with this brief soliloquy, threw himself down on the sofa, with his face to the wall, and lay there at his listless length.

Tall Mr. Larkin looked with his pink eyes at the clergyman, and slowly shook his tall, bald head, and red whiskers, and raised his large hand in religious pain.

Then Mr. Levi and he talked a little in murmurs by the window, about another matter, and the attorney and he appointed a meeting for next day; and soon, the good old clergyman finding himself alone with Monsieur de Beaumirail, accosted him mildly, as he lay on the sofa —

"You must allow me to say, my dear young friend, that I heard what you said, with pain; your words were not Christian."

"They were as Christian as I meant them to be," said De Beaumirail without moving.

"It is a sad disappointment," said the clergyman.

Silence followed this remark.

"It is, indeed, a great blow."

De Beaumirail made no comment,

"So young and so wealthy, yet insisting upon extreme rights with so much severity, and in a very vengeful spirit. I have been deeply disappointed," said the old man.

Still no answer came.

"Sir, I deplore it — I feel for you deeply — it is, indeed, a blow!" and after a pause added, a little hesitatingly —

"If I thought you would wish me, in this trying hour, to pray, or even to read with you— "

"I thank you, no — I'll try a cigar instead, and a saunter round the court."

CHAPTER V.

BEYOND THE PRECINCTS OF GUILDFORD HOUSE.

GUILDFORD HOUSE missed a visitor next day. Its sober red brick and Caen stone, and its short dark files of rugged elms, saw not the passing shadow of Charles.

He had "sulked." He was quite high with his pretty cousin. He was lonely and short-tempered, but he didn't wish to go near her, and mightn't for many a day. But the day after, a little note reached him, asking, "Where *have* you been, or what have you been doing? Have you forgotten us quite, or why should I have the trouble of writing? Don't you remember there are fifty things to be done, and what are you good for if not to consult with? Pray do come immediately. I do want a little advice about tradesmen and other things, and especially about hanging the other pictures. When we are a little settled, and have entered on the regular humdrum life we propose, you shall have leave of absence — a long one, if you insist; so comfort yourself with that hope, and in the meantime help us poor women in our loneliness."

"Capricious, disingenuous, impudent — what a sex they are! If I did right, I shouldn't go, I suppose — but is it worth a quarrel?" said Charles, very much pleased, I think; and he arrived in the 'bus at the corner next Guildford House more promptly than was, perhaps, strictly dignified, under the circumstances of his sudden recall.

So his friendly relations were restored, and their conversation was untroubled by an allusion to Guy de Beaumirail. The fuss of settling was nearly over, and as things began to subside into that humdrum in which Miss Laura Challys Gray chose to discover, for the present, the secret of human happiness, she began, he fancied, to grow already ever so little weary of the half-conventual and (according to the "arcadian" portrayed in Dresden china) half-arcadian simplicity of life in which she had embarked.

"Well, Miss Challys, a little slow, isn't it?"

"Slow! Life's always slow, if you mean dull; but this is nothing like so stupid as living in a round of balls, concerts, and kettledrums. I saw *that* for half a season; an interval of quiet has saved me, and nothing on earth shall ever tempt me back again into that enervating and headaching intoxication.

"You'll not endure it long," insisted Charles, with a smile.

"You don't, however, fancy that I'm quite a fool," she said, "and no one but a fool could think of living without either occupation or amusement. I shall, soon find both for myself; there are many things to be seen."

"And some people," suggested Charles. "I suppose you'll see your relations?"

"Well, yes, some of them, I must, I suppose. But there's no need to be in any great hurry. I sometimes think I might very well wait till they find me out; and in this wilderness of London, I might be hidden for a long time."

I know you are a misanthrope, you told me so; but are the Ardenbrokes and the Mayfields on your black list; wont they think it very odd your avoiding them?"

"I shan't avoid them. I like them, on the contrary; but there are times when one prefers postponing even what they like, and I think I should wish to dream away a few months of my life in this place first; just to try my experiment fairly."

Here was a silence. She had set Charles down to a little task of copying a song. She had laid down her work, and, leaning back in her chair, looked out of the window through the flowers. It was a listless hour.

"I call it an experiment, my good friend Charles, because you are pleased to be satirical upon the subject, and I was in a cowardly mood, I suppose. But it isn't an experiment. I mayn't like this life very much; but every day I feel a greater reluctance to enter upon the other — that gay world, the season, and all that. I saw quite enough of it to know that it is insincere, cold, unmeaning, and does not suit me; my idea of life is quite different. It must not be all simper, glare, and headache. Let the groundwork be a good, broad, neutral tint, like this sober existence, on which such sober lights as I may care to throw shall tell with the brilliancy of contrast; above all, let me be free — the liberty to do as I please — live how I like, and go where I list — my birthright — my liberty — to think of selling it for such a mess as that insipid and reckless world can offer!"

Charles looked up from his music and smiled.

"I'm quite in earnest — why do you smile?"

"Exactly *because* you are in earnest," he replied.

"A little oracular, arn't you? — but I see you are amused at the profundity of my self-delusion; you shall see; wait a little; you don't know half."

Charles was very much pleased, I think, at those sober resolves, and I fancy that it was his secret apprehension that they would never bear the strain of surrounding temptation that made him affect to treat her professions so slightly.

"I forget — let me see — where am I to take you to-day? Oh, yes, the ancient armour — the exhibition of water-colours; — and you said you'd look in again at West-Minster Abbey, and there was something else; but don't you think you are pretty sure to light on some of your people in some of these expeditions?"

"'Sufficient to the day.' I dare say I shall — so much the worse — well, and what follows?"

"Nothing particular; only it might be as well that you should call or report yourself, as be found out."

"Now, do pray be quiet — you're growing such a teaze — you have no idea — and it is so stupid. Let them find me out, if they must — I'll not go to their parties, and if they grow seriously troublesome it is very easy to go somewhere else — just as easy as it was to come here; besides, you fancy my plans are all whims and caprices. When the truth is, I have no spirits — no energy — and a positive dislike of nearly everyone — and a genuine horror of all that sort of thing you fancy I secretly like. I can't prevent your thinking — if so, it must be — that I am telling stories; but, remember this, I never told a lie in my life, and anyone who tells me an untruth, I *never* forgive; and that sort of thing would, you know, of itself disqualify me for all the amenities of human society."

"Here's the carriage, I think;" he interrupted, as I heard the iron gate swing back, and the roll of the wheels.

"So it is; and where is Julia Wardell? Oh! there — walking up and down before the steps."

So they went out, and had their drive, and saw their sights, and did their shopping, Charles dutifully accompanying them; and he came back again with them, and dined at Guildford Hall, and drank tea there.

"What are we to do tonight, Cousin Julia — how are we to pass the evening?" inquired Miss Gray, who delegated the prerogative of thinking to her fat chaperon.

"Well, dear, anything. What do you say? You don't like cards."

"I don't know how to play — I think I shall learn some time or other. I do know how to play 'beggar-my-neighbour' — but that's all. What do you say, Charles?"

"I say this — and I'm sure Mrs. Wardell will support me — that enjoying good music and the opera, as you do, you ought to take a box for the remainder of the Season, and go there whenever you feel inclined — it will do you good."

"*Immense* good," acquiesced fat Mrs. Wardell, who, though she liked her sly nap in the evening in her cushioned chair, had also a liking for what she called a little "refined amusement" now and then. "Immense good! and I'll tell, you why," she exclaimed, with an enthusiasm which cost her a fit of coughing, by which the remaining argument or exhortation was lost to the world.

"I don't see why I shouldn't — I think the opera is quite within my conventual vow; there is just the objection that friends may see me, and fancy they are obliged to make me out-but I can reconnoitre carefully before coming to the front, and I need not be much in evidence."

"Then, you authorize me?"

"Yes. Shall I?"

"Certainly," answered Charles.

"You'll say I'm inconsistent — I know you will — and it will be very treacherous if you do," said she.

"But I'll do nothing of the kind; on the contrary, I shall be very glad."

"Because," she continued, "you advised it, remember; and, after all, it is merely transporting our little party to a smaller room, where we can listen to good music, and may be as much to ourselves as here."

"Then I am commanded by you to do the best I can tomorrow? We can get a box for tomorrow, and see how you like it."

"Well, yes — you may; and I'm glad you advise it. I think, after my vows of solitude, I should have been half ashamed to hint at it, so soon at least; but I've begun to have an uncomfortable kind of presentiment — I don't know what it is — an anticipation, an omen."

As she spoke she got up and sat by the window, looking out on the short, dark double row of trees, through whose rugged stems the moonbeams crossed.

"I know that kind of thing," said fat Mrs. Wardell plaintively; " I have experienced it, my dear — and in my case it was always followed by some affliction, particularly once," and she touched her handkerchief to her eyes.

"But I wont believe in omens," said Laura Gray; "and after all, I don't see that there is any form in which grief can well reach me now; of course I may die like anyone else, but this is not the sort of apprehension."

Mrs. Wardell touched the cushion beside her, and her little dog obeyed the signal, and she, in murmurs, and the dog in snarls, carried on a dialogue ; while Charles followed his pretty kinswoman to the window, and in a tone accordant with the moonlight hour, asked with a smile —

"And what *is* your terrible presentiment?"

"I begin to think it *is* better having something of that kind to occupy one — to look forward to," said Miss Gray, half thinking, half answering him. "I have felt so oddly — I'm sure its nervous — a kind of fancy that I am — how shall I describe it? — watched — well, not exactly watched — a kind of feeling that I am going to meet somebody — I don't know whom — whom I have never seen, perhaps, except in a dream, or somehow," she laughed, "in a preexistent state, a kind of expectation mixed very largely with fear. And, of course, you and I know that the whole thing is purely nervous."

"But how do you mean *watched* — have you any reason to suspect any such thing? I'd like to see anyone presuming — — "

"No; there's no cat looking at the king or queen, that I know of," said Miss Gray; "and *apropos* of cats, you have not brought me the cat you promised — and an old maid without her cat is a witch without her familiar — and pray do choose me one of those huge creatures. I should so like one of those splendid northern tigresses."

"My darling Laura, you're not really going to bother Mr. Mannering about a cat. You haven't an idea what odious animals they are!" exclaimed Mrs. Wardell, who thought it might not contribute to the comfort of her lapdog.

"I had not an idea you heard me, Julia, darling. But there's no contending with instinct; unlike you, I'm going to be, as I said, an old maid — and so the invincible affinity between me and those demure and comfortable animals — so reserved, so querulous, and with such nice little claws, on occasion."

“I’m sure you’re not serious,” said Mrs. Wardell, with a lurch towards her lapdog on the cushion. “No; she would not, she couldn’t be so cruel as to bring in a great big beast to the housey-wousey — to eat up poor little darling, precious Scampsicums, that its old mother doats upon!”

And the dog, with a sympathetic wriggle, playfully snapped at her nose, which, with an adoring smile, she had approached perhaps incautiously near. A squeak of alarm from Julia Wardell, and a shrill bark from the charming animal, and then a torrent of endearments from its fat and indulgent “mother,” as she termed herself, closed the little episode.

And now their early evening drew to a close, and Charles Mannering took his leave; and he had hardly gone when the postman knocked. He left a letter, from which seemed gradually to germinate, as from a bulb, a living stem of romance that bore its sombre boughs, its blossoms, and its strange fruit, and gradually cast an inexplicable gloom upon her life.

CHAPTER VI.

A DIAMOND LOCKET.

"HOW very late for a letter!" said Miss Gray, who was thinking of going to her room. "I have only had four since we came here. A letter is quite an event — and this comes so late! Oh, here it is."

And the servant brought her a square letter, addressed with a broadnibbed pen, and a firm hand, which she did not know, to "Miss Gray, Guildford House, Old Brompton."

She turned this letter round curiously. She had not six correspondents in the world. All her letters of business went direct to Mr. Gryston. This autograph she had certainly never seen before. It was a bold, rather large hand.

The letter contained a small enclosure — a coin, perhaps — and was sealed in black wax, with a very odd device. The motto said, in French, "Choose which dart," and represented Cupid with his arrow drawn to the bead at one side, and, at the other, Death with his javelin brandished — a small, but very distinct and beautifully cut seal. Solitude and monotony form the discipline which prepares the nerves for odd impressions, and Laura Challys Gray was predisposed toward that vague superstition which has more to do with the nerves than reason.

It was a London letter, dropped in a West-end office; and this also troubled her. Her retreat had been discovered — and so soon! With a growing anticipation of something disagreeable, and a wish that it had never come, she glanced again at the bold, distinct character of the address, and at the hurried, blotted monogram — now undecipherable — which was traced in the corner. Was it a monogram or only an accidental mark? She could not make it out, but she thought it was a blotted monogram.

Her intuitive misgiving postponed the moment of certainty, and when Mrs. Wardell asked —

"Well, Laura, dear, what does it say?"

She answered —

"Don't ask me now, dear. I should hate to open it. Some stupid thing, I dare say, that should have gone to Mr. Gryston. We can read it at breakfast. It's from no one that we know."

When she got to her room she laid it, still unopened, on her table; and it was not until her maid had gone that, unable to resist longer, she opened it.

It contained an enamelled gold locket, very prettily set in brilliants. It was not new; it had lain long in the piece of tissue paper that was wrapped round it, and was a little tarnished. It contained some very silken, dark brown hair, a little like her own; and on the other side some interlaced initials were engraved, which she did not stop to decipher.

The writing in the letter was in the same hand, but much smaller and more elegant than that upon the envelope.

It spoke thus: —

"MISS LAURA CHALLYS GRAY, — You will never know more of me than I chose to disclose. That, for certain reasons, shall be little. I observe, with admiration and respect, how, with firmness and justice beyond your years, you have answered the application of De Beaumirail. You remember your father; you remember your sister — I know not for what purpose, if not to subserve the ends of justice, our affections were made strong enough to outlive the frail beings to whom they were dedicated. The retribution is virtuous — persist! This locket, which I once had thoughts of giving to a degraded kinsman, De Beaumirail, contains your dead sister's hair. Deserve my goodwill. Go where you will, my eye is upon you. Do what you will, my hand can reach you. Those who know it not are not to learn from you, that De Beaumirail is a prisoner. He is *almost*, and shall be utterly forgotten. What am I — man or woman — young or old — kind or malignant — whence come I — whither go I? With respect to you, the writer is a *shadow* — a shadow, however, that if your path be crooked will cross it."

"A weak invention of the enemy," said Miss Laura Challys Gray, making her quotation with an uncomfortable smile. "The enemy! But what enemy have I, except, I suppose, that wicked De Beaumirail? and this, certainly, is no friend of his."

She read the letter through again.

"What a piece of melodrama! The idea of trying to frighten a sane person with such rubbish!"

She examined the seal again and again, tried to make something of the little scribble in the corner, and, standing in her slippers and dressing-gown, read the whole thing through once more.

“It’s a mere hoax! Who can it be? It certainly is not Charles Mannering. There is no one but Ardenbroke,” she thought. “It must be he — but, oh no. I forgot the allusion to my sister and father. And this little locket — no; that’s quite out of the question.”

What a contemptible thing,” she murmured, sitting down in a great chair by the fireplace. “How ridiculous! What an idea the writer must have of me, to fancy I should be frightened or influenced by such a device.”

She looked down at, the slipper in which her tiny foot was tapping the floor; and then looking up, smiling, she said —

“And what a fool I am to think for a moment about it. I would tear it into little bits but that I may chance to trace the author by the writing, and I half doubt whether it is worth sparing till tomorrow morning.”

She was more interested by it, however, than she was quite aware, and more alarmed. It seemed, little by little, to her exaggerated fears, that the privacy of her life was gone, a secret eye watching her intensely, and an undetected and possibly potent influence interfering with her daily life. “Kind or malignant” — here, at all events, were evidences of an unaccountable interest in her doings, of the accuracy with which the writer was informed, and the malignant pretensions with which he or she affected to control her conduct. She was growing more uncomfortable.

When she lay down she could not sleep, but lay awake in excited conjecture. Every theory she framed broke down. Sometimes it seemed that her own servants were spies upon her; sometimes that the simple old clergyman had unwittingly made a confidant of some masked enemy of De Beaumirail’s.

But these conjectures gave place, and failed one after the other, and left her with the uneasy sense of being watched by an unseen eye — a vague suspicion and constraint that gathered strength as the minutes passed, and assured her that her solitude was false.

On the table by the fireplace lay the letter, and on it the locket, which, amid the dark thoughts that gathered about her, glimmered with a sinister brilliancy in the distant light which she had left burning on her dressing-table. In the obscure light, that little glimmering circle simulated to her fancy the steady eye that observed her, and associated with the relic of her dead sister, helped to wring her girlish imagination with a strange pain.

She was glad she had preserved the letter. She was resolved to find out who wrote it. She would consult her friends; she would charge Gryston with it; she would place it in the hands of the London detectives; she would lose her life but she would discover the author of the letter — and, what then?

> “Well, it can’t be legal, for it is certainly cowardly and wicked to try and frighten poor creatures like me with anonymous letters. If the laws permit *that* sort of thing, pretty laws we live under!”

CHAPTER VII.

ROBERT LE DIABLE.

BEHOLD our little party installed in the box which had been promptly secured in the name of Miss Gray, Guildford House, Old Brompton.

"Something a little triste. I always thought, in the aspect of this great house — I mean, compared with a theatre; these little curtained pigeon-holes, real boxes, partitioned, and dim — very splendid, the *coup d'úil*, a sort of oriental richness — superb and luxurious, but also a little gloomy," said Miss Gray.

She was leaning back in her chair, and making a cautious survey of the long sweep of boxes, which were beginning to be inhabited.

"I wish one could see without being seen. Have the Ardenbrokes a box?"

"Yes, over there; no one in it," said Charles. "You have found out some one you know — haven't you?"

"Have I? Where?" said Miss Gray, lowering her glasses, and looking at him.

"Somewhere over there; haven't you?" said he.

"0h! Perhaps so," she answered, with a smile and a little shrug. "I had better look again."

And she did turn her glasses in the direction he indicated, and he saw them again linger, he fancied, at the same point in their circuit. It was at a box where sat two gentlemen, whose appearance had already struck him.

One was an elderly man, with a long, close-cropped, gray head, gray whiskers, and well-waxed moustache of the same colour, whose white-gloved hands, folded together, rested on the edge of the box, as, with a grave face, rather apathetic, and with features commonplace, insignificant, but on the whole grim, he looked steadily towards the stage. The other was a singularly handsome and elegant-looking young man, with dark hair moustache, and small peaked beard in the Italian style, an oval face, and large soft eyes, and delicately pencilled eyebrows. This face was very feminine. There was colour in the cheeks, and a soft lustre in those large eyes, with their long lashes, and a soft carmine touched the lips. The waving hair lay low upon a very white forehead. Altogether, the tints and formation of the face were feminine and delicate, and there was something of fire and animation, too, that gave it that kind of beauty that belonged to the great Italian tenor in his young days.

When Charles Mannering's glasses rested on this face, it was with an unpleasant feeling — a little pang of scarcely conscious jealousy — an intuition of antagonism. He was standing behind Miss Gray, and, stooping as he lowered his glasses, he said with an unreasonably bitter feeling —

"There are two fellows over there. Did you observe them? An old gray man who seems to have come to hear the opera, and a young, man — such a specimen of a man-milliner! He seems to have painted under his eyelashes, and put on some rouge. He certainly has, and he has done nothing since he came in but stare at all the women in the house. He'll get himself a precious good kicking if he doesn't take care." So spoke Charles, and affected a little laugh.

"I don't think I've seen anyone answering that description," said she, indifferently.

"0h! you *must* have observed him. You wont deny it, you who hate anything that resembles — what shall I say? — a concealment."

"I know whom you mean, perfectly, but you don't describe him," she laughed.

"How do you know, then?" he asked drily.

"A caricature is not a description, and yet it may indicate a person, and you forget that you have helped me by mentioning that old man with the long gray head. Well, tell me — what is it?"

"What is *what?*" inquired Charles.

"Weren't you going to tell me something about them?"

"I? Story, Lord bless you, I have none to tell. Interesting subject, no doubt; but I was merely thinking how like a girl in masquerade he is."

"I don't agree with you. I think his figure so manly — manly and elegant."

"Oh! I spoke of his face."

"I think him very handsome — he is handsome — I don't say exactly in the style I admire, but you must see that he is. Hush! We are going to have that divine tenor again. Oh! isn't that voice angelic?"

This night there were selections from two operas. The scenes from "La Sonnambula" had closed. In the interval between it and those that followed from "Robert le Diable," the people in Miss Gray's box, who had talked now and then during the singing, grew perversely silent. Most persons whose spirits are, at all capricious have at times experienced in a theatre something like the sensation which that young lady on a sudden felt just now. A sudden air of desolateness seemed to overspread the stage; an idea of cavernous solitudes beyond, half-lighted and silent, made the scene joyless and unreal; the illusion failed; imagination and the spirits collapsed together; the music sounded jaded and forlorn; the lights grew less light, and fancy and enjoyment chilled.

The descent of the curtain did not dissipate this odd depression; she leaned back; the whole scene had lost its interest. "It comes from over there — this influence comes from that singular looking person. Such strange beauty, such brilliant intelligence, and yet such a gleam of malevolence as sometimes looks half fiendish — *he* is the writer of that letter enclosing the locket with poor, darling Maude's hair; and that horrid old man beside him, so stiff and apathetic, who has never turned his head once, or changed a muscle of his gray face, and whose arm moves as if it was made of wood, he looks as if he were dead, and just animated for this occasion. I wish so much I had not come."

This young lady, looking apathetically forward over the heads of the distant people in the stalls, over the footlights, to the line where the gray boards and the curtain meet, is conscious of those images which disturbed her, reflected obliquely on her eye — that brilliant, malignant young man; that cadaverous old one. Had these two figures and faces in reality all that sinister character with which they seemed to present themselves to her? Not one particle, possibly. I can't tell. Miss Laura Challys Gray had a fancy highly excitable, and sometimes sombre. An intuition, fancied or real, told her that the young man in the box at the other side was the author of that letter, which, in spite of every effort, troubled her more and more. And from this one speck, gradually rose and spread that darkness through which she saw all things changed.

This Robert le Diable did not find in that house a spectator so predisposed to receive in good faith the whole melodramatic impression of that great churchyard scene. The peaks and shafts of the ruined abbey, glimmering in moonlight, the terrible necromantic basso, and the sheeted phantoms, all but a moving picture — had yet a relation to real emotions which circumstances and fancy had already set in motion within her; and Miss Gray, to whom accident made the opera and all such scenic glamour still new, gazed on in the sort of eerie rapture with which she might have read, for the first time, in the solitude of her room, the ghostly scene in the "Lay of the last Minstrel" in the aisle of Melrose Abbey.

Had Charles suspected how rapt and thrilled she was, he would, no doubt, have smiled, notwithstanding his preoccupation. She was absorbed-music, scene, and figures, all blended in one solemn, supernatural impression that was for her quite genuine. Leaning back again, with a sigh, as if something drew her, without thinking, she turned her glasses unconsciously on the box where these people sat. The effect was startling.

Through her glasses she saw, it seemed but four feet removed, straight before her, the person of whom she had been thinking so disagreeably. That young man held his glasses on the edge of the box in both hands, as if he had but that moment lowered them. The sensation was as if their eyes at that short distance had met. His were directed on her with a steady, stern, and penetrating gaze, that seemed to hold her fixed for a moment — his face lighted with a faint smile of recognition.

With a kind of start she turned her glasses away, and carried them slowly on a feminine effort to conceal the effect of that accidental encounter over a space so wide. She felt her cheeks, her very throat and forehead flush intensely, and then a chill and pallor came. There seemed to her a character of menace in that smile, and she felt that she was detected, and probably her thoughtless look misinterpreted.

She could have cried with vexation and terror. She had not time to reflect what a fool she was. A vague suspicion, however, of the light in which others might view her uneasiness about the whole occurrence, and some other feelings, had made her lock the letter and the locket up, and evade good Mrs. Wardell's inquiries in the morning. That was her first secret.

At this moment she felt so uncomfortable and disconcerted that she would gladly have got up and left her place. She did not wish to talk over her folly with other people; her reluctance to divulge to old Mrs. Wardell, and to Charles, the odd occurrence of yesterday evening, had grown upon her, and was now insurmountable; and Challys Gray had a scornful hatred of even the smallest and most harmless untruths, which unfitted her, a good deal, as she felt for the benevolences of the world.

In the meantime Charles, whom the handsome unknown had also impressed as disagreeably, though quite in a different way, again looked at him from his less prominent post of observation.

The young man who had excited the contempt of Charles still occupied more of his attention than the opera. He fixed his glasses on him for a moment, with a stern countenance. He was, indisputably, in a certain style, the handsomest fellow he had ever seen; the outline was, as he said himself, almost feminine. The tints were those of a rich enamel; and, to crown all, not only had Challys Gray observed him, but he had detected the glasses of the unknown in her direction more than once. It was very provoking. The thought that he had been the person to persuade his fair kinswoman to come here also soured him.

“I don’t know how it is,” he thought, “that fellow has the air of an adventurer — a charlatan.”

As he opened this vein of suspicion, however, he saw Lord Ardenbroke enter the box of the unknown, place his hand with a kind smile gently on the young man’s arm, and shake him by the hand, as he turned about smiling, also. So that suspicion was exploded.

It certainly was Lord Ardenbroke, there could be no mistake about that, and they were chatting together, as it seemed, in a very friendly way.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALFRED DACRE.

"YOU are *now* pretty sure to be found out," said Charles.

"Has any one come in?" asked Miss Gray.

"Over there," said Charles, with a glance and a little nod, indicating the box at the opposite side.

"Why — what do you mean?" asked Miss Gray, with a slight change of colour.

"Your cousin, Lord Ardenbroke, has just made his appearance, and he's talking to that ladylike young gentleman about whom we so nearly quarrelled just now."

"I don't remember the quarrel, but is Ardenbroke really there?"

She was resolved not to look again in that direction.

"He is really in high chat, and they seemed very glad to see one another."

"If I am to be discovered, there's no one I should rather be found out by; he's so goodnatured, and so pleasant."

She almost hoped he might see her and come across, so intensely curious had she become to learn something about that young man. If she could only be certain that he was not the writer of the anonymous letter which made her so restless, she would never think of him more. It was that fanciful association that connected him with that disguised communication, that made him so interesting.

In the meantime what had passed between Lord Ardenbroke and the charlatan of Charles's dream, and the avenger of Miss Challys Gray's?

"It's an age since we met," said Lord Ardenbroke.

"Five years — *six* years, so it is. I did not think you could have known me. I hadn't this" — he touched his small peaked beard as he spoke— "and wore my hair long — do you remember — like young France, and I fancied I was so changed."

"I never forget a face," said Lord Ardenbroke. "And how long have you been in this part of the world, and what have you been doing these hundred years?"

"I've been all over the world, and doing everything, and I'm here in London upon a very secret affair — diplomatic, shall I say? I can't tell you yet, I'll call it a — what? — a secret mission" — he laughed a little— "and I know you'll not be vexed, but I must ask you to do me this kindness, not to mention that I've been here, I mean in this town of yours, to any living creature. I might, I'm quite serious, get into a very awkward scrape, if it were known, and you'll promise."

"Certainly; no one shall hear a word of it from me," said Lord Ardenbroke.

"I see, you don't know what to make of me," said this young man, with a smile, perhaps the least degree in the world embarrassed, "but you shall, no one before you; I only wish I could tell you all about it now, you could give me counsel well worth having, but the truth is, the secret isn't mine — it is quite other people's."

"I shan't say I saw you," said Lord Ardenbroke, with a grave and quiet decision, "but would there be the least use in asking you to come to us tomorrow?"

"No," said the young man, with a smile and a shake of the head, "nothing would give me greater pleasure, but I can't go anywhere."

"Well, I was afraid you couldn't, from what you said; but you'll be coming back, I hope, soon, more your own master, and then I'll not let you off."

The young man smiled and thanked him.

"I've given up music, except my own miserable singing, for my private entertainment (he laughed), for years. I used to live in the opera, but one changes."

"You draw, and paint still, of course?"

"No, I've given that up also; one tires of everything at last, except — there's one pursuit I still do enjoy. I studied Lavater, you remember, or you forget, but I did, and I think it an inexhaustible science, and I've been exercising my craft on a face this evening, and it has rather interested me."

"Oh! and where is this face?"

"Over there."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Lord Ardenbroke, looking in the direction of Miss Gray's box, I'm so glad! why that's — — "

“Don’t tell me who, pray, just for a moment; she’s good-looking, as we all see.”

“Very.”

“She’s agreeable.”

“Yes.”

“And altogether, you’d say of her, She’s — — “

“Charming.”

“Ha! she’s worth punishing,”

“How? What do you mean?”

“Am I to speak quite plainly, in my character as philosopher, physiognomist, psychologist?”

“By all means.”

“Well, that girl’s a devil.”

“Isn’t that very strong?” and Lord Ardenbroke laughed a little.

“I mean it; I could show you the lines and proportions in that, I may say, lovely face that quite settle the point; she is a fiend if you place her in certain relations.”

“What sort of fiend?”

“Cruel.”

“You are quite wrong,” said Lord Ardenbroke.

The physiognomist laughed.

“You are, I assure you.”

“That’s because you fancy that cruelty and malice are inseparable. She has no malice, and yet she is diabolically cruel. Recollect, I know absolutely nothing of her past life, and nothing of her character except what my art reveals. But that art is infallible, you’ll find I’m right.”

“I shall be very sorry,” said Lord Ardenbroke with a smile, “and till then I must venture to question your mode of divination.”

“You don’t fancy that the people who burnt heretics in Smithfield, were more ill-natured than others; they were simply stupid on a certain point — now *there’s* a face quite beautiful, but it shows a capability, not a habit, of intense narrowness, intense obstinacy, and intense violence — she has imagination also. She might be in certain situations a character bigoted and terrible. There are fine qualities also — very, but I shan’t trouble you with them. But, because she has so many fine attributes, I repeat, she is worth punishing. Who is she?”

There was a slight tension of features, as if a screw tightened. While putting the question he fixed his dark eyes on Lord Ardenbroke.

That nobleman looked a little put out, and said, as carelessly as he could —

"That young lady is a cousin of mine, Miss Gray of Gray Forest."

"Really, how odd! The moment I looked at her, the thought struck me, that she was one of that family. It is a name that always strikes me with pain when I hear it. I sometimes think they had reason to complain, but that's an old story now, and I shan't disturb it. She's very pretty, and unless I mistake, she will take very good care of herself. I have fifty things to ask you, but not here. I know where to find you, and you'll allow me to look in on you?"

"Only too happy, and remember, you really must. I'm going now to that box over the way — I have not seen her for such a time."

"Shall I introduce you?" whispered the young man to his elderly companion, with an arch and bitter smile. The man of the long white head replied by slightly hitching his shoulder and turning a degree more away, his eyes still fixed on the remote prompter's box, while a shadow of displeasure gathered on his face, and he muttered some inaudible monologue to himself.

It was a mere whisper, and having uttered it the young man, still smiling, gave his hand again to Lord Ardenbroke, who bid him goodbye, and vanished.

"You knew verra well I did not want to be introduced, what for should I?" said the old man, with traces of a Scotch accent, grimly, and without turning. "What for should I?"

"How should I know? He might be of use to you."

The young man seemed to enjoy his friend's uneasiness.

"And the way you talk — the questions you ask at him, and the things you do, I'd say ye were daft, and I tell ye plainly, sir, I don't understand it," said the old man, turning and looking full at him for a moment.

"Understand it — of course you don't."

"No; you young men, if ye were a bit more steady and less conceited, ye'd be nothing the worse o't," said the gray man sternly.

"Cautious, cautious, but don't you know that rashness is often the highest caution?"

“I know nothing o’ the kind.”

“I have my own ideas about it,” said the young man. “I say with Monsieur Danton — l’audace, encore l’audace, toujours Faudace!”

“And if I wanted to speak with Lord Ardenbroke,” continued his elderly companion, “what for shouldn’t I, without cereemony, for I ha’ spoken with him sayveral times, it will be eight years since, and upon business of his own, confidential business, but I’ve no desire to renew the acquaintance, and if I had, ye’ll understand, I should consider the present, sir, a vera inopportune time for ony such purpose.”

“Don’t call me sir, pray call me by my name,” said the young man.

“Well, well, Mr. Dacre, there, and as I am acting. with you. Mr. Dacre, I take the liberty of reminding you, sir, that business is business, and I see no room for trifling here.”

“None in the world — quite the contrary, by Jove. I quite agree with you,” answered Dacre.

“I came here to inform ye, with precision, on one or two points.”

“And so you have — admirably.”

“And I tauld ye somebody would recognise ye; ye should a sat more back, and held a bit o’ playbill or something before your face.”

“Or worn a paper nose and a pair of spectacles. But seriously, I had not an idea he could have known me after so long a time, for I *am* very *much* altered.”

“And ye needn’t have talked so long with him; he’s vera well known, and I saw other folk with spyglasses turned this way, while he was here.”

“Well, they didn’t hurt us, and what for shouldn’t I hae a crack wi’ the Lord after sae mony years?” said Dacre, with a mimicry of the Scottish dialect.

“It needn’t have been so long,” said the gray man, accepting the phrase in good faith.

“And now, to change the subject. In a quarter of an hour this opera will be over, and then comes the ballet, and I mean to leave this in exactly five minutes,” said Dacre, and he looked at his watch.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ADVENTURE.

IN the meantime, in Miss Laura Challys Gray ‘s box, another greeting had taken place, and after some talk, unnecessary to set down here, Lord Ardenbroke said —

“And so you think my friend very distinguished-looking, and — what else — I forget?”

“Yes, I think he is — and I said, fierce, sinister sometimes; and you are to answer me two questions,” she said.

“You are curious, then?”

“Yes, a little; that is — very, and you *must* tell me.”

“Well, I’ll, tell you,” said Lord Ardenbroke. “He’s goodnatured — he s agreeable — he’s always in good spirits — he’s very good company, and — I really think that is everything.”

“Does he live in London?”

“He lives all over the world, I believe.”

“Is he an artist?”

“Oh dear, no — except for his amusement.”

“And what has he come here about?”

“He has come here, he says, upon political business; that’s his own account of it; but there may be some other mixed in it; in fact, I should be very much surprised if there was any public business in it whatever.”

“Well, you must answer one question. Isn’t he a very revengeful person?”

Miss Challys Gray was trying to spell out some clue to the author of her anonymous letter.

Lord Ardenbroke laughed.

“That’s a thing which might be very easily hidden. He was an intimate acquaintance, not an intimate friend, do you see? — very different thing. I have had no experience of him in any other way; he has had quarrels like other people — a good many; but one does not often know who is in the right, and who altogether in the wrong; and the truth is, except of his lighter qualities, I have had little or no experience of him.”

“And now you are to tell me: is he a relation of De Beaumirail’s?”

“Let me consider. Isn’t this a very severe cross-examination? Well, yes, this much I am sure of — he *is* related to *relations* of De Beaumirail, and” — he laughed merrily— “I should be very much flattered if any young lady were to make such particular inquiries about me.”

“Has he an antipathy to Guy de Beaumirail?”

“I know hardly anything of him, I told you, except what I’ve said; but I never heard of anything of the kind.”

“And what’s his name?”

“You’re not to ask me.”

“Not ask his name?”

“No,” said, Lord Ardenbroke, laughing, as he shook his head.

“0h, this is quite too absurd. You promised to answer two questions.”

“I didn’t, though — no, indeed.”

“Oh! yes, you did, and you must. What is his name?”

“I can only say the same thing; I can’t tell it; I mustn’t.”

He looked at her, laughing.

“Why not?”

There’s no particular reason, except that I promised, only five minutes ago. He doesn’t choose anyone to know that he’s here, and he *made* me promise — I’m quite serious.”

“Well, will you do me a kindness?”

“Only name it.”

“You must go and get his leave just to tell *one* person who will not repeat it to any other creature living.”

“But wont that be putting you in a very interesting light? What is he to think?”

“I didn’t think of that. But Charles, here — he can tell you.”

“But he’ll be bound to secrecy, just as I am, and you, still in the dark, and — just look there — there’s no use in debating it further, for they have left their box, and, perhaps, I shan’t see him again during his stay in town.”

Yes, the box was empty, and Miss Laura Challys Gray was vexed. She had been so near, she fancied, obtaining a key to the puzzle that excited her curiosity and her fears, and now, perhaps, she should never know.

Lord Ardenbroke took his leave. Then followed a listless interval — nearly a quarter of an hour — before the curtain went down.

“Shall we stay for the ballet?” asked Miss Gray of her chaperon.

“Well, I’m a little tired,” said Mrs. Wardell.

“And I’m very tired,” answered Miss Gray.

“Then, I’m afraid it has disappointed you?” said Charles.

“It’s very good — and the tenor quite angelic, and that basso wonderful — but somehow I haven’t enjoyed it. I don’t know; I haven’t been in spirits.”

“You were talking to Ardenbroke about that man with the get-up, after Mario. Had he much to say about him?”

“No — next to nothing.”

He fancied that a faint tinge of crimson stole to her cheeks as she answered his question.

“Nor even about the old man?” asked Charles, who was a little surly.

“I did not think of that, it is very true; if we knew all about *him* it might throw a light — — “

How ridiculous, and even coarse, this eagerness about a total stranger! thought Charles Mannering — throw a light indeed; what stuff!

A few minutes later, having seen the ladies into their carriage, and bid good night — it the window, Charles lighted his cigar, not in a cheerful temper, and walked away towards his lodging, through streets already very nearly deserted, while Miss Gray’s brougham drove at a rapid pace towards Guildford House.

The adventures of that night, however, were not yet over.

Turning the corner of a street, at a rapid pace, the of horse, young and fresh, swerved a little, the wheel struck one of those iron posts that guard the flagway, and in an instant one of the horses was lying on the pavement, and the other plunging furiously; Mrs. Wardell screaming, while the carriage rocked most uncomfortably.

The door was, however, opened almost instantly, and not by her footman, whose descent from the box was delayed by the plunging of the horses. It was the handsome unknown of the opera who opened the door. By the light of the carriage lamps she had seen this tall slender figure approaching from the front, and recognised him in his loose coat. The fine eyes and oval face, also, were not to be mistaken.

It *was* he who held the door open and assisted Miss Gray to alight. He led her to the pathway with as ceremonious a respect as heroes in fairy tales lead their princesses, leaving Mrs. Wardell to the care of the servant, who had, by this time, got to the ground.

“You’re not hurt, I hope?”

“No — she wasn’t hurt.”

“You can’t stay here till your carriage and horses are ready; it may be a very long wait; my carriage,” he said, “is quite at your disposal; shall I tell your servant that he is to attend you home, and your friend? I wish it was more comfortable.”

As the coachman reported something amiss with the harness, and a possible delay, the stranger’s offer was accepted, the two ladies got in, and he shut the door; Miss Gray’s servant got up beside the driver, and away they went.

CHAPTER X.

A FEW WORDS IN THE HALL.

AS they drove homeward Miss Gray was silent, but her thoughts were happier. There was even a little excitement that was pleasant. Did this heroic looking young man interest her independently of all theories about the nameless letter or the diamond locket, about which her conjectures grew more and more confused?

Here she was, sitting, in his carriage, a very nice one — pretty, elegant even — and utterly in the dark as to who or what he was — longing to know — with nothing but a moveable sheet of glass between her and the coachman, who could relate everything about him, and, yet, still in the dark, without a conjecture as to how she was ever to learn more than the generalities she had collected from Ardenbroke.

At last she said to Mrs. Wardell —

"Did you remark the young man who was so kind about lending us his carriage; I mean, did you recognise him as the same who sat with an ugly old man at the opera, nearly opposite to us?"

"Yes, to be sure; I could not recollect it was the very person."

"I've been wondering who he is; he's a friend of Ardenbroke's; but Ardenbroke would not tell me who he is, and we must make it all out; you are to manage that, mind, when we get home; you can see the servant and ask him whether our horse was much hurt, or anything you please, only you must learn the name of his master."

"Very good, my dear.; suppose you tell Mrs. Rumble to get him some supper, and to make out everything while he is eating it; and I can call him into the dining-room first, so that you shall have time to give Rumble her instructions."

This little plot was hardly completed when they reached the gate of Guildford House. It was thrown open. The carriage lamps flashed on the knotted trunks of the old elms, as they flew by, and with a sudden sweep they drew up at the steps.

The plan, so artfully contrived, however, broke down before it was so much as set in motion; for the door was again opened by the handsome young man who owned the carriage. He assisted the ladies, in turn, to alight, and Miss Gray with only a little bow, and "We are very much obliged," ran up the steps, and disappeared, leaving Mrs. Wardell to deal with the stranger.

"Wont you come in? pray do," said the old lady.

This handsome cavalier might have assumed this invitation to mean precisely so much as similar hospitalities so offered, do mean, and no more. Even Mrs. Wardell, curious as she had become — and what passion is more unscrupulous than curiosity? — was at her wit's end to find a decent pretext for urging him to come into the house at such an hour, had he hesitated.

But this difficulty did not occur, for he instantly availed himself of her invitation.

He followed her into the hall, and said, "I could not deny myself the honour of coming in, just to receive from your own lips the assurance that you and your young friend were not hurt."

"Hurt! well I do hope not injured, but shaken — shaken a good deal, and — and our nerves — you can understand — but no serious injury."

"I'm so happy to hear you say so; and would it be very impertinent to ask leave to call to inquire tomorrow? My name is Dacre; your servant mentioned that the young lady is Miss Gray, of Gray Forest. I knew, at one time, some of her relations, and I shall do myself the honour to call."

And thus speaking, with a bow that was graceful, as well as stately and grave, he took his leave; and in another minute was driving rapidly in the direction from which he had come.

"He's coming tomorrow," said Mrs. Wardell, who repaired forthwith to Laura Gray's room, very purple, and very much out of breath, "and his name is Dacre; and I think him one of the very most agreeable and elegant young men I ever saw; and he knew some of your people long ago, and he was so kind, and anxious, and attentive."

"Oh! coming here? How odd! And why is he coming here?" asked Laura, very gravely.

"To inquire — to ask how we are; he couldn't well do less, he's *so* polite!"

"Dacre — I *think* I recollect the name, but I'm not sure. Well, he'll call; do you intend seeing him?"

"I see no reason why I shouldn't, merely to tell him how we are," answered Mrs. Wardell.

"No, there's no reason," acquiesced Laura Gray, slowly; "did he come into the house?"

"Yes; just to the hall, but merely to inquire, and ask leave to call tomorrow, which, of course, I could not refuse; but it may be merely a call at the hall door, you know."

"Very likely. *Dacre?* Do you remember the name among friends or acquaintance of ours?"

"He only said that he once knew relations of yours. No; I can't say I do," answered Mrs. Wardell.

Laura Gray was sitting before her glass, in her dressing-gown, with her line hair loose about her shoulders. She leaned back in her chair.

"You'll take a little tea, wont you? I should like some. Get tea, Noel."

And her maid glided away.

"Dacre?" repeated Laura, thinking. "I saw him, I told you, at the opera; but distance, you know — and — I don't know how it is, but people do look different in such places. Did he look like a singer, or an actor, when you saw him near — in the house?"

"Not at all; he looked just like anyone else, only very handsome, and distinguished," answered the old lady.

"And what of his manners?"

"Perfect," said Mrs. Wardell, decisively.

"He seems to have made a very agreeable impression," said Laura, smiling, and relapsed into thought. "Dacre, I cannot recall it; yet I feel as if I ought to remember it. And what hour is he to call?"

"He did not say; and if he asks to come in I don't see why I shouldn't see him," said Mrs. Wardell.

"Ardenbroke will be here tomorrow, I'm certain. What fun if he and Mr. Dacre happened to meet here after all their mystery tonight," said Miss Gray.

So they continued to chat together till it was time to say good night, and old Mrs. Wardell went away.

Then Laura Gray, having also despatched her maid, unlocked her desk, and took out the mysterious letter and the diamond locket.

Just as that glimmering circle flashed suddenly and steadily on her eye, had the conviction gleamed on her mind that the person whom she saw that night in the box with that long-headed old man, was the author of the letter which she now scanned with an excited interest. As she read, the image of the young man, as he appeared for a moment before her, when her glass had lighted upon him unawares — was before her handsome, sinister, watching. As she read, still she saw that faint, stern smile, that seemed to imply a mutual understanding — shadowed unpleasantly before her.

And now, what did her evidence amount to? Simply to this smile and this intuition. A case of shadows. And yet this intuition continued, and the smile abated not. A painful impression — a persistent phantom — that followed her to her bed — and showed still through the filmy curtain of her eyelid.

CHAPTER XI.

DE BEAUMIRAIL'S AMBASSADOR.

EARLY next day, about eleven o'clock, Miss Gray was among her flowers with hoe and rake, and a pair of those rough, gauntlet shaped gloves, with which ladies protect their hands in such operations, and a small boy assisting, and to-ing and fro-ing on errands, and often on his knees grubbing in the mould.

The sun shone out pleasantly, the tufted foliage of the old trees cast soft shadows on the grass; and. yielding to indolence, and inspired by the quietude of the miniature scene, she dropped her trowel, and seated herself on her garden chair, at first watching the labours of the boy, who was working away among the weeds and flowers. But her thoughts soon carried her elsewhere. One subject had begun to engross her mind. It engaged it last at, night, and first in the morning, and haunted her incessantly.

The little diamond locket she wore about her neck, bidden inside her dress, she now drew forth, and looked at the rich brown hair it contained with a, pang of bitter remembrance. She brooded over that sad history with a commiseration that deepened into rage. "Thank God," she murmured, "I never faltered — it is my duty to be firm."

She replaced the locket so mysteriously acquired, and raised her eyes.

The shorn grass under the windows was cut into flowerbeds, glowing and glaring all over with masses of blossom.

The double row of elms leading down to the gate was at her left, some equally tall and spreading trees stood at intervals by the lane side, lilacs and laburnums made an underwood, and the wall had a thick mantle of ivy.

Gliding with slow, long paces from under the deep shadow, in which the noble elms at her left enveloped the short avenue, emerged from between their trunks, upon the grass, the old clergyman whom she had dismissed so summarily on the clay after her arrival at Guildford House.

It was on the whole with a compunctious feeling that she saw the old man whom she had dismissed so rudely, approaching her again. She rose, and with a few quick steps hastened to meet him, looking grave, sorrowful, with a few quick steps extended.

He bowed — he timidly extended his hand.

"I'm so much obliged to you for coming to me again. It is very good of you, sir, and I'm ashamed of my rudeness, and beg your pardon. I hope you forgive me, sir." She looked with sad and earnest eyes in his.

"Oh, dear me, I never thought it more than a momentary vexation — pray think of it no more. I took the liberty of calling to beg two or three minutes."

"Oh, sir! not, I hope, on the same subject; but whatever it may be, I shall listen with great respect, for I know very well how pure and kind your motive must be, and I am quite ashamed when I think of my ungracious and flippant words. Wont you come into the house?"

"Thank you, ma'am, very much, but a friend who dropped me at the corner will call for me in a very few minutes, and so I had better say what I came to tell you here."

"But, oh! pray do come in. Do, Mr. Parker. I can't think you have quite forgiven me, unless you do. Oh! do, Sir, please."

It was one of her fancies, and when an idea took possession of her she was irresistible. The old clergyman found himself, quite against his first intention, in the drawingroom of Guildford House, making his little speech in the cause of humanity, while the listening flowers on the window-stone trembled and nodded. But what effect did he produce where to mould the will would be to unlock the gates of despair?

"It is indeed, ma'am, as you rightly suppose, upon the same subject that I come to speak only a few words, very few, but, I trust, moving words. Yesterday evening Mr. de Beaumirail sent for me. I found him very ill; I found him in despair. In that miserable place, among the other prisoners, is a clever but unfortunate physician, who has been there for more than ten years. As I left Mr. de Beaumirail I met this gentleman, Dr. Wiley, on the stairs, and he turned and walked down with me, and said he, 'I observe that you visit Mr. de Beaumirail. I went into his room to pay my respects this morning, as I do pretty often, and found him ill.' He used some technical terms which I did not understand, but he made it clear to me that he thought him in a bad way."

"Very ill?" said the young lady, growing pale.

“I mean,” answered the clergyman, “in a precarious state of health. Protracted confinement,” he said, “in his present state, might in a short time prove fatal — I mean, reduce him to such a condition as would render his recovery impossible.”

“Oh! Sir, isn’t this cruel? isn’t it *distracting?*” said Laura Gray, piteously wringing her hands. “Why do you urge me on this point? I have not told you half my reasons. I can hardly explain them to myself. You would think me mad. You argue with me as if you thought I acted from simple malice. There is what I told you mingling in it, but there is another feeling, quite different. Sit down for a moment, and let me tell you.”

“Dear, dear!” murmured the old man, throwing a weary weight of disappointment into the homely ejaculation.

“Yes, I know by your looks — your tones declare it — you think me, on this point, immovable, and so I am. But listen, it is *not* malice that makes me so. It is this: a feeling, right or wrong, that he is undergoing punishment that a righteous power has awarded — a punishment that satisfies some equities that I don’t fully comprehend. God knows I would set him free if I could. Is it religion — is it superstition — this awe of an unseen power that terrifies me?”

“You remember my excellent friend, Mr. Larkin, who quoted the blessed words. ‘Sick and in prison and ye visited me,’” said the clergyman.

“Oh, yes, I know. I tried, sir, to persuade myself to consent to his liberation. I tell you, Mr. Parker, I *wished* it, but I can’t. Those texts don’t apply. The Redeemer speaks of those who are his — so entirely his, that in visiting them we visit *him*. Is it not impiety to apply that to a man who never thought of his Redeemer, of heaven, of anything — but himself, and whose prodigality and wickedness, and not his Christian heroism, have placed him where he is? Yet, even so, through mere good nature, or weakness, or what you will, I should have set him free, but that the idea terrifies me. How can I tell how those who are gone would regard it; how God would view it; and whether I am not, if I give way, yielding not to mercy, but to an evil influence, and sacrificing the claims of affection, and the justice of God, to a base temptation? I can’t define it: my poor sister! I feel it. A horror I can’t describe bars my interfering with the course of that hateful tragedy. If I did so I think I should go mad. Oh! sir, don’t press me. Spare me, for God’s sake, and never mention it again.”

The old man looked down, pained, perplexed. He did not know how to argue with a difficulty so unlike the simple vulgarities of revenge and hatred.

The old clergyman sighed deeply, and looked up as if to resume his plea. But she said, anticipating —

“No, sir. Faith may move mountains, but you cannot shake the barrier that rises before my will. I could as easily persuade you to deny your Lord, as you could me to violate that awful conviction.”

He bowed, and in a minute more took his leave. She walked down the stairs with him in — silence, and from the hall door upon the grass, and, walking a few steps beside him, she said —

“I wonder whether M. de Beaumirail has an enemy called Dacre? Can you make out? — a young man called Dacre? and I will, if you think he wants money — I would tell Mr. Gryston to place a sum in your hands for his use. But more than that is impossible.”

CHAPTER XII.

DE PROFUNDIS.

THAT same morning Lord Ardenbroke had, among his other letters, one that served to amuse him. It was from the handsome young man who had so much engaged the curiosity of the party in Miss Gray's box.

It was very short: only a few lines.

"Alfred Dacre — you are a very odd fellow, Alfred Dacre," was all his commentary; and with a smile, and a little shrug, he proceeded to read his other letters.

Later in the day he paid a visit at Guildford House, and saw the ladies there; and when he was going away, Miss Laura Gray said to him: —

"I forgot to tell you I've made out your friend's name — I mean the mysterious person in the peaked beard at the opera."

"Oh! really?"

"Yes."

"I'm not sure that you don't mean to lead me into betraying it — you young ladies are so deep," said he laughing.

"No, really; I do know it."

"Well, what is it?"

"Dacre," she said triumphantly.

"How did you make it out?"

"You shan't hear."

"Do tell me — pray do?

"That's my secret," she replied, shaking her pretty head with a smile.

"But I have a reason, really," said Lord Ardenbroke, a little earnestness mixing in his manner.

"You shan't hear — positively no. You refused me that harmless little confidence, and now you demand to learn my secrets; not a word."

He laughed again, and there ensued a silence, and he was very grave for a minute. Then said he, looking up with a faint smile:

"Well, since you wont tell, I can't help it. But — but you must remember, you did not hear it from *me* — that's all."

"Certainly not from you," acquiesced Laura.

This little dialogue was spoken standing, and after he had taken his leave — a ceremony which he now repeated, and ran down the stairs.

By this time the good old clergyman had reached the melancholy room of De Beaumirail, within the precincts of the Fleet.

In his dressing-gown, the prisoner leaned back upon his faded red sofa, having pitched the novel with which he had been striving to kill the weary hour, on the floor, on which it lay open. Pale and weary he looked; and the hand that lay on the arm of the sofa was slowly fumbling over the brass heads of the nails, as a friar tells his beads in a vigil.

He nodded, without rising, without smiling, as the old man entered.

"I hope, my young friend," said he, "I have not taken a liberty. I have availed myself of a seat in a friend's brougham to go out to Old Brompton. I've been, unsuccessfully, again at Guildford House. I have seen Miss Gray; but with respect to the object of terminating this miserable confinement, as I say, unsuccessfully."

De Beaumirail's face lighted up with a sudden interest: he sat erect: and his finger's-tip ceased its monotonous course along the clingy nail-heads, as the old man spoke.

"Yes, Nemesis, very good," he said, with a faint sour smile. "I am sorry, Mr. Parker, you gave yourself the trouble to come all this way to tell me that — I can't call it news. Very kind of you, though," he added, recollecting himself.

"But though she wont do that," resumed the clergyman, "she is very willing — to — assist — in fact, if you required money — if you were at all distressed — — "

"Give me money," interrupted Beaumirail with a very angry laugh. "Do you mean to say she seriously offered to give me money? That is pretty near the climax, I should hope, of her insolence. I've been here three years and seven weeks. She has only to write her name, as she does to every note she sends to her heartless acquaintances — to every order she writes to her jeweller or her milliner — and without costing her a shilling — and I should be free, and the malignant little fool wont do it. Offer me money indeed. Dying here by inches! As if it were not slow and miserable enough, she'd eke out my agony a little longer, and buy the gratifying spectacle of my protracted torture by a few judicious doles. I wish I had heard her make that offer; I'd have answered — insult for insult, by heaven! But I can hardly believe it. It is not credible. Look at me here, sir; I'm not a man who can associate with the swindlers and charlatans and bankrupts, the scum of society, who are here. To me it is literal isolation — what in your convict prisons they call solitary confinement — and no brain could stand it long. If that merciless girl could keep me living until I went mad — what a complete revenge?"

"Pardon me, sir; it is not revenge — — "

"Not revenge! And what the devil is it?"

"It is a feeling — a kind of — — "

"A kind of hypocrisy, sir — throwing dust in your eyes. If it reached you as it does me — your person, your health, your brain — you'd not be the dupe of a few fine phrases. The stupid little fiend does not know the danger she is drifting into. This morning I thought the whole thing over. I don't despair yet. I shall have my chance. She likes revenge — she'll pursue it; let her. I've been passive too long. I hope and believe I may never die until I see her pride humbled and her heart broken by my skill and resolution."

"Wild words, sir," said the clergyman, sadly shaking his head.

"Wild words — wild thoughts — wild *works!* Sir, you shall see. I have thought over a possible revenge, sir, which would outdo hers. I have not put it in motion — a foolish compunction worried me to-day. I dare say I should never have tried my game if she had acted with common humanity. She has driven me to despair, and let her take the consequences."

"There, there, pray, Mr. de Beaumirail. You know I ought not to hear all that without reproof; but there are excuses. You are excited — you are suffering; reflection will come, and the storm will subside of itself."

De Beaumirail laughed impatiently and harshly. He was no longer sitting, but walking in his slippers about the room; and without arresting his march he said —

"Ho! I'm carried away by a sudden gust. I'm to subside, and sit down as heretofore. By Jove, Sir, you mistake me. Cold and hard as a block of ice, Sir. You came just in the nick of time to decide a vacillating man. Your benevolent message, Sir, has settled a very critical question for Miss Laura Challys Gray."

"Sir, may I ask you do you know a Mr. Dacre?" inquired the clergyman.

"Dacre — Alfred Dacre? I do, or rather I did," said De Beaumirail, stopping short and looking hard at the old man; "I don't know whether he is living still — do you?"

"No, sir, no; but may I ask whether he was an enemy of yours."

"Yes; about the worst enemy I ever had, and that's saying a good deal. And now tell me where you heard him mentioned."

"Miss Gray asked me to put the question I have asked to you."

"Miss Gray! Did she? Come, come, that looks oddly. Surely she said something that indicated whether he was alive or dead?"

"No; she did not say."

"Will you be so kind," said De Beaumirail, with a sudden change of manner, and an air of great interest, sitting down again in his former place, "to repeat, as nearly as you can recollect it, exactly what she did say?"

The clergyman complied — as it was very easy to do.

"And that was all?"

"Yes."

"You're sure?"

"I think so."

De Beaumirail fell into a reverie, and seemed pleased. He looked up with an odd smile.

"In that quarter," he said, "I don't think he'll do me much mischief. I suppose he is alive; wretches like him never die. Can you tell me this — did she evince any interest in that person!"

"I can't say she did — not the least. She seemed to fancy that he was an enemy of yours. She asked the question gravely, and seemed curious."

"H'm. All I say is, I think she's cleverer than I gave her credit for; I should like to know what her mind's working upon."

With these latter words he fixed his eyes rather cunningly upon the old man. If he fancied, however, that he had any secret to reveal, the simplicity and good faith that looked out of his grave, old blue eyes laid that suspicion at rest.

"Clever, cruel, vindictive; she'd pierce me with her bodkin. I carry as good a dagger — it is combat to the outrance; recollect I never sought it. It is her doing. I hate it, and it will be her misfortune, *perhaps* — I can't help it."

"I make excuses, as I said, Mr. de Beaumirail, for the angry language you employ. When next I see you, I shall find you, I trust, in a happier, at least a more resigned temper. You must excuse me also, when I say that you seem to forget, when you utter menaces like those, how powerless you are to accomplish them."

"That's hitting me where you shouldn't, Mr. Parker. It ain't fair, or generous. Quite true I'm locked up here — I don't need to be reminded — but have you never heard or read of magicians who sat in their infernal laboratories, among their elixirs, and their books, as dark and sequestered as this place, and plagued the people they hated, ever so far away, by their art? Beautiful they say she is, as other witches have been. She has drawn her circle round me here, and here I commence, at last, my incantations, and by heaven she shall feel them. It is a contest in which the time is past for relenting. I wish — I wish I knew whether Dacre is living, and in England. If he be, it is hardly a fair fight."

"There was a time, Mr. Beaumirail, when I had reason to hope that you had gathered the fruits of a good experience from your affliction — but — but your present tone and conversation disappoint me."

"I wont argue it any more than your friend Miss Gray will. I accept her version of charity, and her laws of war. I hesitate no longer, and I leave you, sir, a year to guess, and her to feel. Now from this den I shall weave my spells about her."

CHAPTER XIII.

TEA.

THERE was disappointment at Guildford House, for the day had closed without bringing the expected visit of Mr. Dacre. Of that gentleman Miss Gray knew nothing, and yet there was an odd feeling or mortification in her mind, by reason of this unimportant neglect. Mrs. Wardell's disappointment was now outspoken.

"If he had not proposed it, I should not have thought so much of it, although it would have been no more than a decent civility to have called and inquired for us to-day, under all the circumstances. But really, after his making such a flourish of trumpets about it, there's no excuse; and I can view it in no other light than as a most illbred omission!"

It was dark now, but Miss Laura Gray chose the shutters and the curtains open, and liked, in twilight and moonlight, the look-out upon the circumscribed but singular little landscape, and, looking listlessly from the window, she said, "A lonely pair of women, we are this evening. Even Charles Mannering has failed us."

"Yes, my dear Laura, don't you see? this way of living is so intolerably dull that — — "

"Hush, a moment. The gate has opened, and, yes, here is a carriage," said Miss Gray.

There were lights in the drawingroom, and she drew back as a brougham with a pair of horses approached at a rapid pace.

"Dear me, who can it be?" said old Mrs. Wardell, getting up and hesitating. "It can't be Ardenbroke back again, nor Charles Mannering in a carriage, and it is such a very odd hour — can it be possible — there's the knock; can it be Mr. Dacre, at such an hour?"

"It must be some one, and one visitor is nearly as odd as another," said Miss Gray.

"I — I don't know — should I go down at such an hour?" faltered Mrs. Wardell.

"Go down, certainly, you'll see him, and do precisely as you and I planned. You are to do just as you would if it were three o'clock in the afternoon — there's the hall-door open."

"Oh, dear, so it is! but the idea of bringing him up here."

"I don't say you are to take him by the collar and bring him up here, whether he will or no, but if you find him so disposed let him come up, and take some tea."

"But, my dear, it's nine o'clock."

"I don't care; curiosity must be satisfied first, decorum afterwards; don't dispute."

The door opened — the servant entered.

"Mr. Dacre's compliments, ma'am, and wishes to know particularly how you and Miss Gray are this evening."

This was addressed to Mrs. Wardell.

"Is it a messenger?" inquired Miss Laura Gray.

It was Mr. Dacre himself.

The young lady glanced at Mrs. Wardell, and found Mrs. Wardell glancing at her. Their eyes met, and Miss Laura Gray smiled in spite of herself.

"I think, dear, you had better see Mr. Dacre for a moment," said she to Mrs. Wardell.

Preternaturally grave, Mrs. Wardell arose, and told the servant to show Mr. Dacre into the library, and, after a glance in the mirror, she followed him downstairs.

Now, Miss Laura Challys Gray listened harshly, biting her under lip with a tiny edge of her pearly teeth, and smiling. "He'll come, of course he'll come — that face is full of the spirit of adventure, and I must say that old Wardell and I are behaving very indiscreetly, but it's only for once, and I really could not allow him to escape — ha, is he coming or going? No. What is old Wardell saying, I wonder?" and she laughed quietly in spite of all she could do.

"I suppose we are behaving very oddly. What, I wonder, would my sober cousin, Charles Mannering, say of us, if he happened to drop in, and — here — here — yes; here they come."

So it was, and, with a sudden reaction, her spirits sank, and she would gladly have been anywhere else. She had just time to place herself in her easy chair again, when the half-closed door opened, and good old Mrs. Wardell entered in high chat with the stranger.

There was no mistaking him. The handsome hero of the opera was before her; the oval face and small peaked beard; the delicate mouth and moustache, and the great singular eyes, which lighted upon her with a sudden and gloomy splendour that startled her.

A stately, very low bow he made her, as Mrs. Wardell said —

"This is Mr. Dacre, my dear, you remember, who was so kind as to lend us his carriage; he has been so good as to call to inquire, and I asked him to come up."

"I asked Mrs. Wardell's leave, yesterday, which she was good enough to give me. I have to make my apologies, however, for calling at so awkward an hour; but I was detained by business, from which I could not escape, in the country, and returning this way I could not deny myself, late as it is, the honour of calling to learn how you were."

"We are so much obliged; quite well. We have quite got over our little fright, and we had no idea what a service you had done us till this morning. We should have been delayed more than an hour."

Mr. Dacre seemed very much pleased. He was very handsome: it was pleasant to see him pleased. But there was, or Miss Gray fancied it something ever so slight that was bitter and cynical in the stealthy gaze with which he watched her as she spoke. But there was the smile, and there were those splendid eyes, dark and fiery. Where was this sinister light? Where were those lines and curves of cruelty which gave, in her eyes, to his beauty an anguine and dangerous character — subtle, sinuous, baleful?

His bow had been ceremonious and very grave; but there remained not the least trace of stateliness in his air, or countenance; he was chatting now very easily and gaily. He addressed Mrs. Wardell for the most part, but Laura Gray thought his conversation was intended for her. He was going now. He had set down his tea-cup. He had just told them a very odd story, which turned on an anonymous letter, the author of which, by a curious combination of evidence, he had discovered.

"Had fortune placed me in the detective service, I dare say I should have risen to be an eminent catch-thief; I should almost embrace the profession for the pleasure of tracing up that sort of villainy to its source."

The story was well told and very curious. Miss Laura Challys Gray listened to it with that kind of attention which is observant, if not suspicious, of the relator himself, as well as curious about the narrative. Her fancy, that he might be the author of the letter with the locket enclosed, had fast melted away. That Mr. Dacre was an early intimate of Ardenbroke's and that Ardenbroke should have spoken of him as he did, were reassuring circumstances. But Mr. Dacre's manners were winning, respectful, and quite charming, and now, by one of those chances that establish or overthrow a theory in a moment, he had lighted upon the very subject, and had spoken of that kind of treachery with a point and bitterness which ended all controversy.

His visit was not altogether a quarter of an hour, and in those agreeable minutes they had grown to feel so curiously intimate, as if they had known him for years.

"We are very lonely here, Mr. Dacre but if you would sometimes look in upon a very dull house it, would be goodnatured of you," said Mrs. Wardell, at parting.

"I am only too much honoured; nothing would give me so much pleasure; but I'm so unfortunate, my stay in this part of the world is so very uncertain, and I'm obliged to go twelve miles out of town every morning, to meet people on business, and there my whole day is unavoidably passed, and I never get away, in fact, earlier than I did this evening.

There was a little pause here; Miss Gray fancied it seemed to invite a repetition of the same hospitality, so did Mrs. Wardell, who stole a little glance at Laura, and seeing in her face nothing to discourage she said —

"If you happened to be passing again tomorrow evening, and would come in and take some tea, it is probable that our cousin, Mr. Mannering — do you know him? — may be here."

"You are very kind; I shall be most happy, but, may I venture to tell you the business which detains me for some little time in London is, as I explained to Lord Ardenbroke, of a nature that makes it desirable, and almost necessary, that I should not be known to be here; such are my instructions, as I may call them; and in fact it might defeat the object of my visit, which is of some importance, if I were seen, or if my name were so much as mentioned as having been seen in London, I should, therefore, as a matter of conscience and honour to others deeply interested in my mission, avoid meeting any one who might disclose the fact of my being here. I am telling you quite frankly how I am circumstanced. I also confess that I can't resist the temptation of coming, and throw myself on your mercy to spare me the risk, I may say, the serious injury of being recognised."

"Certainly, Mr. Dacre, you may depend upon it, I shan't endanger your incognito," said Mrs. Wardell.

Had her curiosity been a degree less, Miss Gray would have interposed, I think, and suggested that, considering the circumstances, it would hardly be fair to ask Mr. Dacre to run a risk, and so have withdrawn the slight invitation.

But a new theory had shaped itself in her mind, and till this new conjecture was either established or overthrown she could find no rest.

That old, ugly, harsh face, the long gray head, that had appeared beside Dacre in the box at the opera. Was its owner a kinsman of his? Could he be the writer of the anonymous letter that troubled her with an hourly increasing fever? Might not he be that connecting link, the relation of Dacre, also a relation of De Beaumirail's — and Ardenbroke had described that degree of connexion between Dacre and Beaumirail; and could she rest till that guess at least were answered?

That hard, white head, might hold no end of ugly schemes. And was there not in the letter something of the pedantry of old age lecturing youth.

She would sift this speculation to its conclusion if possible, and therefore the acquaintance of Mr. Dacre must be cultivated, and from him, ultimately, she might secure its solution.

Mr. Dacre took his leave, and his carriage drove away, and, said Miss Gray, suddenly, to her companion —

"My dear Julia Wardell, what have we — done? I assure you we are getting on at such a pace. I am quite stunned and hardly know myself."

"I don't know what you mean," said Mrs. Wardell, with perfect simplicity.

"Here, we have invited a young man — without an introduction — without, in fact, knowing anything about him, except that he is an acquaintance of Ardenbroke's, and given him a, sort of promise that he is not to find my cousin, Charles Mannering, here, when he comes to tea. I am annoyed at myself; what will Ardenbroke think of us — what must Mr. Dacre think of us?"

“I’m not the least uncomfortable about it. We have every reason to conclude that he is an unexceptionable acquaintance, and I really can’t see, considering that I am here to take care of you, the slightest oddity in asking him to take a cup of tea here.”

“It *is* odd — I *know* it’s odd — so do you; and what a ridiculous termination to those plans of seclusion I had formed. How Charles Mannering and Ardenbroke will laugh! And I really think, with your experience, you ought to guard me against such absurd mistakes.”

This was certainly unreasonable, considered as an attack upon Mrs. Wardell, who had simply done what Miss Gray, could she have been secretly consulted, would have insisted upon. But is it not always pleasant to lay a part of our burdens upon other shoulders, and the entire pack, even, if it be practicable?

Mrs. Wardell was huffed, and she said —

“There has been no mistake, and nothing odd; but as you fancy there is, we can easily arrange to go to tea tomorrow evening to poor old Lady Ardenbroke; you promised Ardenbroke that you would some evening, and it would be a cheer; and I’ll leave our apologies with the servant to say to Mr. Dacre where we were obliged to go, and so we shall get rid of all trouble about him.”

“Yes; perhaps that will do. It is a little awkward, you know,” said Laura.

But Mrs. Wardell did not help her by a single word; thinking, I dare say, that she would not on any account miss Mr. Dacre’s visit.

“Yes,” resumed Laura, “I believe that is the best thing we can do.”

Another silence followed, but no step was taken, I am bound to confess, to carry out this little evasion, either that evening or next morning.

CHAPTER XIV.

ANOTHER VISIT.

NEXT day, at about three o’clock, Charles Mannering looked in. The ladies received him, he thought, a little oddly. Had his cousin heard, he speculated, of the conversation, so urgent and dolorous, with which, yesterday evening, the good clergyman, Mr. Parker, whom he had accidentally met, had favoured him upon the inexhaustible subject of the prisoner De Beaumirail.

True, he was resolved not to open this unwelcome theme again to his cousin, uninvited. But how else was he to account for the perceptible constraint of her manner — the apparent embarrassment, indeed of both ladies, and those long silences that were so unusual in that easy society?

They were not offended with him. There was no affront, and their looks and manner implied nothing of the kind. But Laura Gray said nothing of “to-day,” and invited him instead “tomorrow,” to dinner, and seemed put out, and a little vexed, though not with him. And Mrs. Wardell, who was less scrupulous about her yea being strictly yea, and her nay nay, then Miss Gray murmured something about their intending to pass that evening with old Lady Ardenbroke, at which Miss Laura Gray, under her breath, uttered an impatient “oh!” tossing her head with a little glance at Julia Wardell, who returned it with a “h’m!” blushing a little, as her pretty cousin rose and walked to the window.

Altogether, Charles Mannering did not know what to make of them, and went away a great deal sooner than he had intended, more vexed and puzzled than he would have had any other living creature know.

That day moved slowly away. How was this agreeable Mr. Dacre acquiring the sombre influence which he had begun to exercise?

Partly it was due to this, that Miss Gray had resolved that, even at the risk of adding a new item to the eccentricities of their dealing with this stranger, she would, if possible, test his complicity with the author of the letter — if, in truth, he knew anything about it, and. should he prove quite innocent, then she would, if need be, cease to trouble him, and drop that singular acquaintance.

Upon this oldfashioned suburb, and throng of tufted trees and old brick houses, the sun went down, and threw his dusky red over the landscape, transforming the steep roofs and chimneys in the distance into fiery domes and minarets, that faded at last in the dark gray twilight.

Tedious were the hours as those which separate the young heir from the glories of his succession, and never did day die so slowly as that one for Laura Gray.

Night came; candles or lamps were lighted in the drawingroom, and the ladies sat there, rather silently, expecting their visitor.

Miss Gray was vexing herself with doubts and scruples. Was the step she was taking dignified, or even decorous? She could not deceive herself. If it were not for the fancy that he could throw an important light upon the question of the authorship of the letter, she would not have dreamed of inviting Mr. Dacre to tea, and actually getting her kinsman, Charles Mannering, out of the way for the occasion.

“I really am growing quite ashamed again, Julia, as the time approaches, and I almost wish we had not permitted this visit. There’s no use thinking now of it; but we could have got Ardenbroke to bring him here and introduce him, and the thing would then have been quite different.”

“You forget, my dear, that my presence, having been a married woman, and he knows that I am *Mrs.* Wardell — he has called me so — and your kinswoman, is quite sufficient protection; there really is nothing at all odd; and, as you said yourself this morning, he might not choose to come here with Ardenbroke. If Ardenbroke saw him here, and heard us call him by his name, he would conclude that there was no longer any secret — it was you who thought of that, and of course, Mr. Dacre has thought of it also; and, I don’t see any harm, and there really is no harm, and there really is no oddity, in giving that young man a cup of tea, knowing that Ardenbroke knows him so intimately.”

“I will suppose you are right,” said Laura, listlessly, taking a seat by the open window, through which the soft air was gently stealing.

A carriage drove by, upon that quiet road, and, after a momentary silence, Miss Gray said —

“I don’t think he’s coming. I dare say he’s tired, and gone home; or gone to the opera, perhaps, or anywhere but here; it must be so tiresome, and, somehow, so unmeaning; and, to tell you the truth, I think we should look very like three fools sitting in a circle."

"I don't think any such thing. I think, on the contrary, he's very much taken with you, my dear; and I saw him stealing a look now and then, when he thought neither you nor I observed him. I think his visit interests him very much, and I never saw anyone more pleased to be invited."

Laura Gray, as she leaned back in her chair, smiled faintly at the carpet before he at these words; and then, raising her head, looked through the open window and the darkened air towards the gate, now invisible.

A carriage had stopped there. And now — yes — the clang of the gate was audible, and two carriage lamps came sailing up the short avenue, under the trees.

Tranquilly Miss Laura Gray leaned back in her low chair, and in a few moments more Mr. Dacre was announced, and came into the drawingroom.

Mrs. Wardell received him very cordially; and Miss Gray, she scarcely knew why, rather coldly.

He sat down and took his cup of tea, and chatted agreeably about all sorts of things. But caparicious Laura Gray was still silently insensible to those secret glances of entreaty and rebuke which good Mrs. Wardell, floundering in the deep, threw upon her.

Perhaps Mr. Dacre fancied that the ladies had been quarrelling. I don't know. But he could hardly fail to perceive the embarrassment that reigned in the drawingroom.

"One is allowed to admire China, when it is so beautiful as this, and so old," said Alfred Dacre, trying a new subject, as he turned his tea-cup round upon its saucer with the tip of his finger; "and I am sure it has a history."

"I dare say," said Mrs. Wardell, catching at the chance, "you know all about it, Laura."

"Yes, it is very old, I believe," said she; "but I am a very bad chronicler, and, I am ashamed to say, I forget all about it."

Here ensued another silence. Mrs. Wardell looked at her again with wild entreaty.

There was rather a difficulty in finding a subject. Miss Gray, notwithstanding, afforded not the slightest assistance. Mrs. Wardell, whose invention was slow, looked at her now, almost angrily, in vain; and Mr.

Dacre perceiving the embarrassment, wondered when the mouse would come forth and the mountain cease to labour.

He talked a little more. But his remarks did not germinate. They were thrown on a barren surface. An inspiration reminded Mrs. Wardell, however, of a letter from her nephew, and she said, "I think I told you, Laura, didn't I? that I had a letter from poor Philip Darwin, my nephew, Mr. Dacre, and he is so miserably in love, I think he'll break his heart, poor fellow. What shall I advise him, Mr. Dacre?"

"I'm a poor authority," said Alfred Dacre, "but love is said to be the business of those who have no business — suppose you find him something to do?"

"Oh! he has plenty to do — he's in a cavalry regiment, and he's breaking his heart, for they think they are going to India."

"Oh! don't be uneasy, he'll cool there rapidly, notwithstanding the climate," said Dacre, smiling.

"Heaven grant it, poor fellow," said Mrs. Wardell.

"Heaven has nothing to do with it, I assure you," said Dacre.

"Why, that sounds very odd — you're not an Atheist" said Mrs. Wardell, a little brusquely.

"A very complete Atheist. I hardly believe even in Cupid," he replied.

"Oh! I see you are joking, but there is an old saying, my nurse used to quote it," said Mrs. Wardell, "that marriages are made in heaven."

"Over tea-tables, and in drawingrooms, and by very odd angels, I believe. You see what a sceptic I am. Except as a spectator, however, I know nothing of marriage, and nothing, I may say, of love." He laughed. "As a rule, however, marriage seldom seems quite to restore the human race to Paradise."

"Some people are very happy in that state, Mr. Dacre," said Mrs. Wardell, in a tone and with a look straight before her, meant to convey a sense of the felicity she, at least, had conferred, when in that state.

"Good heaven!" thought Miss Gray. "What can Julia Wardell mean by harping on love and marriage in this absurd way. He will certainly think that she and I have laid a plan to marry him. It is enough to make one cry."

"Some people — yes, of course," said he, "but our education, I mean that of men, is very much against making love our first much less our only passion, or marriage our chief source of happiness. We have so many pursuits and ambitions, and amusements, and all so engrossing, I can't pretend to say which mode of making life's journey is the easier — celibacy or wedlock, each has its drawbacks like the two chaises that Miss Edgeworth mentions at the Irish inn, the top's out of one, and the bottom's out of the other," and he laughed again.

"I can quite understand young men laughing at marriage," said the persistent Julia Wardell, "but not believing in *love*, that does amaze me."

"Oh, but I do believe in it. I'd describe it as an inebriation followed by headache."

"I don't understand you," said Mrs. Wardell.

"That is, in the case of most men. *I* should be afraid of love, because, with me, it would be a first and only love, and therefore violent enough to kill." He spoke with a sadness almost enthusiastic, was silent for a moment, and then laughed. "But I have seen lovers, men who belonged to the profession, I may call it, and practised nothing else. I have watched the decline of passion and the veering of fancy. The vision fades, the charm expires, and love goes out. Now I fear the passion, because, with me, it might prove the reverse — a live-long madness. In a case like mine I could suppose something prodigious, I could suppose a man in love with his wife!"

"What do you mean, Mr. Dacre?" exclaimed Mrs. Wardell.

"Yes, that may happen," he said, "because I believe there is nothing that may not happen, although, I allow, it is not likely."

At this point of the dialogue, Miss Laura Gray got up as if she were looking for a book, or a letter, and, having slowly moved to the piano, she consummated the rudeness of the evening, in Mrs. Wardell's opinion, by playing a piece of grand and melancholy music by Beethoven.

Up got Mr. Dacre, as that terrified lady thought, to leave the room. But, of course, it was with no such intent; on the contrary, he placed himself gently by the piano and listened, it seemed, in a kind of rapture.

CHAPTER XV.

BEETHOVEN.

WHEN the music ceased Dacre sighed, and, said he, "That music always agitates one — it moves one's better nature, but it jars also — the spirit of anguish breathes through it — the pathetic and the victorious are soaring there, but all through is felt the vibration of a more than human pain."

Miss Laura Gray laid her hands on her lap and sighed also. A short silence followed, and she in turn spoke.

"Did you ever happen to meet a gentleman named Guy de Beaumirail?"

To this sudden and distinct question he answered as distinctly.

"How very odd! I was at that very moment, by an association hardly definable, thinking of him. Yes, I do know a good deal of him, and more than I care to know."

"Ardenbroke — you know him? — said it was not improbable," said Miss Gray.

"Oh! did he?"

He looked steadily at her, as if expecting her to say more.

"And Ardenbroke said so?" he resumed. "Well, he was quite right in one sense, although he knows very well how I feel about it."

"He is a very distant relation of ours — of mine, I believe, that is, or a connexion. I am a miserable genealogist; but I am curious to learn something about him, not the least from any interest in him, but for a different reason — something quite different."

"Yes, I saw him once," said Dacre, "very lately, and he's an undeserving fellow. I could not avoid it, but I don't talk about him — that is, as little as I can help."

"But why?" asked Miss Gray.

He smiled and shook his head a little.

"He's an awkward subject," said he.

"Are you ashamed of him?"

"Not exactly; but — but he's an awkward subject. He might have been very well, a great deal better than I am; and he chose to throw everything away, and he's in a position which I consider disgraceful, and I — *don't* — *mention* him.

He uttered this very gravely, and with a slow and deliberate emphasis.

Miss Gray was silent for a little, and then she said, "But I must ask another question — I saw you — I'm certain it was you — speaking to Ardenbroke at the opera on the night on which you were so good as to assist us on the occasion of our breakdown."

Mr. Dacre acquiesced.

"And there was an old man in the same box with gray hair, and with a long face — a severe-looking old man."

Dacre smiled a little, and nodded.

"Now, I have a reason for asking, *is* that old man an enemy of Mr. de Beaumirail's?"

"An enemy?"

"I mean — does he know Mr. de Beaumirail, and does he bear him an enmity?"

"I should say he does bear him ill-will. I know next to nothing of him, but this — that he is rich, and loves his money as people who have too much only can, and that he has lost a great deal by De Beaumirail's break-up, and I fancy hates him accordingly."

"Yes, and would like to pursue him?"

"I dare say," said Dacre.

"Do you think he would go the length of writing an anonymous letter to determine a vacillating person in a hostile course against Mr. de Beaumirail?"

"It seems odd, but I really know very little about him — nothing, I may say, not even his name, for I forget it — a formal acquaintance of an hour — very slight indeed. He had a part of a box to dispose of and I took it; that is all I know personally of him, and that he is one of De Beaumirail's creditors."

"Do you think he would be a likely person to write an anonymous letter with the purpose I have mentioned?"

"I was told he is a man of business, and I don't think it likely that he would take that trouble. Was the letter to Ardenbroke?"

"No, to another person, a creditor, who could have given De Beaumirail his liberty, by simply signing an agreement for his discharge, and declined to do so, and the anonymous writer urged a persistence in that refusal."

"Oh! that settles it. It could not have been he, for he, being creditor himself, to a large amount, could prevent his discharge until he paid him his uttermost farthing?"

"I see — yes, I suppose so," said Miss Gray, thoughtfully.

"And how did this creditor act under the pressure of his anonymous adviser?" asked Dacre.

"It was no pressure to her. She had already determined on leaving him in prison."

"*She?* — Good heavens! then it was a woman! What beasts those tradespeople are where money is concerned," exclaimed Alfred Dacre.

"Worse — not a tradeswoman, but a lady," said Miss Laura Gray.

"A lady — a lady no longer. She's self-degraded," said Dacre; "don't you think a woman so unsexed and so divested of all good, deserves to be made an example of?"

"Then you are one of those chivalrous lawgivers who would punish women, whom you term the weaker sex, as severely as men?" said Laura Gray.

"*More* severely, in certain cases," he replied. "Where they *are* wicked they are more fiendish than men. Nature has made them softer and purer, most of what is generous in life, all of what is generous in love, belongs to women, and where they commit cold and malignant cruelties they sin against nature, and become very paragons of monsters?"

"And what would you have done to this lady?" inquired Miss Gray. "Burn her alive?"

"No, on second thoughts I should leave her to the chances of reprisal and to the equities of eternity. May I ask, do you really know anything of this person?"

"I do — yes."

"Is she a Jewess, or is she a Christian?"

"A Christian!" answered Laura Gray, "by profession at least."

"Well, I *know* more of De Beaumirail than I have *seen*. He has injured me probably as much as any other man living. I don't admire Guy de Beaumirail. I divide his character, so far as it is known to me, into three parts — one part I despise, another I hate, and in the third I see rudiments of good. I have no particular wish to say one word in excuse or defence of him, but I don't envy the lady who, being a Christian, as you say, believes her Bible, and reads there the parable of the debtor whom his Lord forgave, and who afterwards took his fellow-servant by the throat, saying 'pay me that thou owest.'"

Mr. Dacre did not speak with enthusiasm. He seemed cool enough about the scamp De Beaumirail, and the menacing words uttered so coldly, acquired a strong force by reason of a latent contrast.

"There are cases in which reason will not direct us. Our coachman, I remember, one night, put out the carriage lamps — I think it was snowing, he said he could see better without them, by the very faint light in the heavens. That light for me is instinct, and my carriage lamps are reason, and in this puzzle I put it out, and rely upon the faint light from above. *I* am that wicked Christian you condemn, and I'll play that music of Beethoven' s again. When I was a very little thing, my poor sister, a good many years older than I, used to play it, and I used to see tears fill her eyes, and flow down her cheeks. It inspires me."

She began to play again that strange music, without leaving Mr. Dacre time for answer, apology, or explanation.

"I never cry, I hate tears; but that air half breaks my heart," she said, "and when I grow irresolute and perplexed, I play it, and light rises up for me in darkness, and courage returns to my heart."

"I had not an idea, Miss Gray, — I owe you a thousand apologies;" pleaded Mr. Dacre, with great humility.

"Not one, no indeed. It is only that you don't understand this distracting case; you don't know the facts, you don't know my motives. And now I must tell you something, and also ask your assistance."

As she uttered this last sentence she glanced again at good Mrs. Wardell, whom she had already observed nodding in her chair. Billy Winkie, the Dustman, as in the mythology of the nursery, the angel of sleep was termed in my nonage, had visited her, and just at that moment Miss Gray did not choose to observe, or to disturb her nap.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONSULTATION.

"NOW, I am going to ask you two, or three questions, and you must not think them very odd, until you have heard my reasons," said Miss Laura Gray, looking thoughtfully at a little ring on her finger.

"I shall be only too happy, if I can answer them," said he.

"Has it ever happened to you to receive an anonymous letter?" she asked.

"No, never, unless you so called such things as boys used to send about on St. Valentine's day."

"No, oh no. I mean a letter assuming a grave tone, affecting to criticise conduct, to exhort, and perhaps to menace," said she.

"No, never."

"Then you can hardly understand the way in which such a letter haunts one, the feeling of conjecture, suspicion, and insecurity."

"Pardon me, I can, very well. I once knew a person almost at his wits' ends, from no other cause — an anonymous letter. I think I mentioned that I was fortunate enough to hunt down the writer of it. I assure you it cost a great deal of thought, and some resolution, but I succeeded."

Miss Laura Challys Gray, still looking at her ring, knit her pretty eyebrows slightly in momentary thought.

"I may as well tell you, this letter was written to me, and the fact is, though I did not mind it at first, I have grown perfectly miserable about it, and I can't rest till I find out who wrote it."

"In *my* researches I was very lucky. It is once in a hundred times one would have a chance of detecting such a thing; but do you really care?" said he.

"I do, indeed, more than I can describe," she answered.

"I wish so much I could be of the least use. Do you suspect any particular person?"

"No one."

"And why should you care, then?"

"I can't help it, it has made me quite nervous. It is so very strange."

"I wish I had more time at your disposal; but command me, pray, in any way you think may be useful," said he.

"Well, thanks; you are very kind. Ardenbroke, my cousin, you know him, told me that you are acquainted with Mr. de Beaumirail's relations; in fact, that some of them are connected with you, and so I thought you would perhaps be able to form a probable conjecture as to who his enemy might be, for he admits himself in the letter to be a relation."

"He may have a great many whom I have never even heard of," said Dacre; "but my best consideration and exertions are at your service."

"The letter is in the room, would you mind just looking at it?"

And she unlocked her desk and produced the mysterious letter.

"Am I to read it?" said he, as he took it in his fingers.

"Certainly," she replied. "It is an odd, letter, and contained that locket, which is a very pretty thing, a toy of some little value," she said, turning the brilliants in the light, so as to make them flash.

"That came from some person who could afford to part with a little money, and the tone of the letter is earnest. I am, however, totally without even a guess. The fact is I know very little about his relations — and what an odd seal — gallant and ghastly; do you read anything of menace in it?"

"Well, no, that did not strike me," and she smiled, but not like a person amused.

"I have now, I think, fixed the whole thing pretty well in my memory; nothing very remarkable about the paper, thick note paper, red wax, posted at Charing Cross — I shall bear everything in my mind."

"It is so kind of you, Mr. Dacre; I'm sure I am a great fool, but I can't help it; I can't get it for a moment out of my mind; even my dreams are troubled with it."

"I don't wonder," said he gravely. "I can quite understand it. I think I should be miserable myself, in such a state of conjecture and uncertainty."

"Your business, I'm afraid, will prevent your recollecting it," pleaded Miss Laura Gray.

"It is much more likely that your commission, Miss Gray, should make me forget my business; I suspect I shall think of very little else."

"It is very kind — you need not mention it before Mrs. Wardell, who has not been attending, unless you happen to discover something about it; that is, if you should call here again."

“I shall certainly call, if you allow me, tomorrow evening. I have already formed a theory; I shall test it very soon; possibly I may have something to tell. If my guess proves a right one, your intuition warned you well, for that letter indicates a danger, which, if it cost me my life, I will defeat.”

Whether Mr. Alfred Dacre spoke these words with more emphasis than he had used before, or that some sense of discomfort had brought it about, at this point in their conversation, Mrs. Wardell wakened with a snort, and said, “Yes, dear, I — I — where’s the dog?”

So Mr. Alfred Dacre, with apologies for having stayed too late, took his leave.

Had he ever looked so handsome before? He now filled in relation to her a double office; he was the sole depository of a secret which she felt a strange reluctance to communicate to anyone, and he had devoted himself, as solemnly as words could pledge him, to the task of quieting the anxiety which had fastened upon her.

He was beginning to have her confidence, to be her knight. He was stealing into the rôle of hero to her romance.

When she returned next day from her gardening to the house, she found a letter, the address of which startled her, for it was written in the same bold, broadnibbed penmansbip which had grown so disagreeably familiar with her thoughts. She felt a little chill as turning it about she saw the same seal impressed upon the wax.

Cupid, there, as before, drew his arrow to the head; death held his javelin poised in air; the same simper, the same grin: the same invitation in the motto to “Choose which dart.”

She took the letter hastily, and ran up to her room. She did not want talking old Mrs. Wardell to ask any questions.

As, even at that moment, she glanced into the glass, she was struck by the paleness of the pretty face it presented to her.

“Why can’t they leave me at peace? I am attacking no one’s rights; I ask for no assistance or encouragement from unknown people. Why should I be tortured by these odious letters?”

She sat down, looked over her shoulder, and getting up, secured the door, then returned and opened the letter with a sick anticipation.

“More incentives to punish Mr. de Beaumirail; more advice, I suppose; more threats.”

She read —

“So, you form a plot to discover me; your path crookens. Beware of the shadow. Mr. Alfred Dacre thinks himself clever. He needs to be so. Dead men who come to life had best be modest. He challenges conflict. He will find me the more potent spirit. The world is open to him. There is beauty in France, in Italy, in Spain; let him open his breast to the dart of Cupid, and not to that other. If you will have him search me out — so be it. If he be wise, he will pass me by with eyes averted. I wait him with my spear poised. Your plot against me has drawn me nearer. Pray that you see me not. De Beaumirail defied me, and I have laid him where he is. I am willing to spare Alfred Dacre; but if need be —— . His blood be on your head.”

A sharp frown marked her face as she read and re-read this odd composition. She then replaced it in its envelope, looking at it askance as if on an evil talisman. She hid it away in her dressing-case, and locked it up, and then, in an agony, she said— “Why can’t they let me be at peace? What can be the meaning of this cruel espionage and dictation? How could any mortal have discovered the subject of our conversation of last night? I am bewildered — frightened. God help me!”

She had murmured words like these aloud, and now looked around lest the spy, who seemed to glide through her rooms like a thief in the night, should have heard them.

“Your plot against me has drawn me nearer,” she read again; “the language of the letter is so much more insolent, and angry, and enigmatical, and I, who was so brave, am growing such a coward!”

She bit her lip. She was pale, and felt on the point of bursting into tears.

CHAPTER XVII.

LORD ARDENBROKE'S ADVICE.

"I WISH I had never come here. I wish I were away," were the natural aspirations that rose to her lips, as she went down to the drawingroom, feeling all the time as if she were in a dream.

"You're not ill, I hope, Laura, dear," said Julia Wardell, who was at her crochet, with her dog beside her. Some minutes had passed, and now she had looked up, and saw how pale and dejected Laura looked.

"No. Oh, no! only a very little headache; nothing at all."

Julia Wardell looked at her inquisitively for a moment, from under her spectacles, but could make nothing of the inspection, and resumed her work with a few words to her dog, who evidently did not thank her for disturbing him.

A few hours later on the same day Lord Ardenbroke called.

"We like your friend so much," said Mrs. Wardell.

"A friend! Who?"

"Mr. Alfred Dacre," she added.

"Oh! Mr. Alfred Dacre? And do you mean to say he has been here to see you?"

"Yes, he has," answered Mrs. Wardell, with a little triumph. "Is there any reason why he should not?"

"Reason? No, I can't say there is; but it surprises me a little. How soon is he going? I've lost sight of him for so long. Did he say when he goes — when he leaves London?"

"No."

"I wonder where he's staying now; have you any idea?"

"No," again answered Mrs. Wardell.

"I should like to make him out — and — and have a little talk with him; but I must be in Scotland the day after tomorrow, and by the time I return he will have made his exit."

Lord Ardenbroke was silent for a time, and looked down, and Miss Laura Gray, who glanced covertly at him, saw that there was in his face a look of something more than annoyance — something of suspicion amounting almost to alarm. He stood up, and walked to the window, and looked out.

"Laura, you promised to show me over your grounds, and, from all I see, I fancy you can do so without risk of fatiguing yourself." He laughed. "Will you?"

Laura got her hat, and out they went.

After he had seen the sights, and admired and quizzed, he said, standing with her under the shade of the great old trees —

"And so you have really had a visit from this Mr. Dacre?" he said on a sudden, returning to this subject.

"Yes; is there any reason against it?"

"It is a feeling rather than a reason. I had rather he had not minded coming here."

"You gave us a very good account of him at the opera, you remember. Is there really anything to object to?"

"No; I can't say there is. I never thought — I never blamed him."

"Blamed him! For what?"

"For — anything. I say I liked him, and should have been very glad to see him at Ardenbroke, if he could have come. But there was — there is; in fact, I can't tell you; but I don't think you'd like him."

"You are determined to make him the centre figure of a mystery," said Laura Gray, and laughed.

He smiled, looked down, and became thoughtful.

"Well, you see, it is some years since saw him, till I met him that night at the opera. There were reports about him saying he was dead; but he turned up there, as you saw. And you used to like a ghost story; just suppose him a ghost, and treat him accordingly."

"What can you mean?" said Miss Gray.

Lord Ardenbroke was laughing, but he looked uncomfortable.

"Place a pentagram at the door, as Dr. Faustus did — a pentagram which Mephistopheles could not pass, you remember."

"I remember; but I should like to know what you mean," said Miss Laura Gray.

"I mean this — simply shut your door against him," he answered.

"Why?" persisted Laura.

"I can't define my reason; but he is a 'double' — a Döppelganger — he is, I assure you. He is an unreality. I mean what I say. You'll do as you please, of course; but, upon my honour, seriously, I think, you'll be sorry if you don't act as I tell you."

She looked at him with a faint smile of incredulity; but, if he observed it, the challenge was not accepted, and he did not add a word in support of what he had already said.

"I shan't see you now for a good many days. I shall stay for some weeks, at least, in Scotland; but my mother will come and see you as soon as she is able to go out for a drive. So, goodbye, Laura, and bid Mrs. Wardell goodbye for me — goodbye. God bless you."

And he was gone, leaving Miss Gray buried in thought.

"I don't mind an oracle like Ardenbroke," she thought. "I'm not to be ordered about like a child, without knowing why I'm to do one thing and avoid another. If Ardenbroke knew what has happened, and saw those letters, and that I could communicate to him the hopes which, rightly or wrongly, I entertain of gaining some information respecting the writer of them from Mr. Dacre's cleverness and opportunities, he would probably speak quite differently; and, indeed, I need not care, for the account he gives of Mr. Dacre is quite inconsistent with his advice to exclude him; and if he chooses to be unintelligible, I'm not to blame if nothing comes of his advice."

Then she began to wonder at the odd coincidence of Lord Ardenbroke's advice, jesting as it was, to regard Dacre as a döppelganger and a ghost, and to exclude him from the house with that kind of horror, and the language of the letter— "dead men who come to life had best be modest." Altogether there was in the tone in which Lord Ardenbroke had spoken of him to-day, a change which chilled her.

Still she never faltered in her resolution to see Mr. Alfred Dacre, to consult him further upon the subject which now engrossed her, and to show him the more truculent letter of to-day.

And now the evening twilight made all things dim, and darkness followed, and that sense of uncertainty which precedes an event however sure to happen, which is intensely looked forward to, began to act upon this excitable young lady's nerves.

This suspense ended, however, as before. At about the same hour the carriage, with lamps burning, drove up to the door. The doubleknock resounded, and in a moment or two more Mr. Dacre was announced. Miss Laura Gray was agitated as he entered, and he, too, looked paler than usual.

Mr. Dacre chatted with an animation and gaiety which, for a time, belied the fatigue and anxiety of his looks. He took tea, and talked in a gay satiric vein of fifty things.

Once or twice Miss Laura Challys Gray detected his stolen gaze fixed upon her with an air of anxious conjecture, and as stealthily averted.

He seemed instinctively aware that Miss Gray did not choose the subject of the letter to be discussed with Mrs. Wardell. At all events, he awaited some allusion to it from the young lady before mentioning the subject, which occupied the foremost place in her mind, and, perhaps, in his.

Mrs. Wardell was one of those convenient old people who, when left to themselves, in the evening, are sure to enjoy a nap — who can sleep in perpendicular positions, and maintain, with a wonderful simulation, the attitudes of waking people, while far away on the wings of slumber.

Laura Gray sat down at the piano.

"Will you play that wonderful *poem,* shall I call it, of Beethoven's, Miss Gray? I had not heard it for ever so many years, when you played it last night."

"No, I think not. I don't care to play it tonight. There are moods in which I can, and others in which I hate it — no, *not* hate, but *fear* it."

"I know. I can understand. Nothing so capricious, or, rather, so sensitive, as those terrible nerves of music. I quite understand the feeling, having, though not so finely, I am sure, experienced the same charm and the same anguish."

"But I'll play something else. Shall it be gay — shall it be melancholy?"

"Not gay, no, not gay," said he, and sat down at the corner of the instrument. "It is so good of you to consent. One seldom hears these things played by a hand that can awaken their inner life."

"I'll play you an odd, melancholy Irish air, with an Irish name, which I can't pronounce — wild, minor, and to my ear so unspeakably plaintive," she said as her fingers rambled over the notes, making a few preliminary chords and passages.

He listened, leaning on his elbow, his fingers in his soft dark hair. She was looking through the distant window at the old trees, and thinking sadly, and, as he marked the plaintive melancholy of her beautiful features, and fancied he saw a brimming of tears in her large, blue eyes, gazing steadily at her from the shade of his hand, a smile, cold and crafty, glimmered on his face.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A TRUE KNIGHT.

THE air was played out and over. He sighed and thanked Miss Laura Gray.

They both knew that Mrs. Wardell was lost, for the moment, in one of her little evening naps. A restraint was removed, and Miss Gray, now and then touching a note or a chord on the keys to which her eyes were lowered, approached, at last, the subject which troubled her mind.

"You were so good as to say, Mr. Dacre that you would try to make out something about that letter?"

"You may be quite sure, Miss Gray, that I have not forgotten or neglected — I have been at work about it since I saw you, but I am sorry to say with an unsatisfactory result. The person whom I suspected is certainly *not* the writer of the letter."

"Oh!" murmured Miss Gray, in a tone of great disappointment. And a short silence followed.

"I don't despair, however. If I were only sure that you really made a point of discovering, there's *nothing* I would not do to accomplish it."

"That is very kind of you, Mr. Dacre. I don't know anything I am so interested in — in fact so anxious about. I've had another to-day, will you read it?"

"Only too much obliged," said he, as he took the letter from her hand. "Yes! The same seal. 'Choose which dart.' Very obliging of him. Cupid — an odd ally of such a writer. He offers you there — I'm interpreting the emblems and inscription — amity, if not something more tender still — on the one hand, or death on the other. Cajolery and terror would be a suitable motto for such a seal, writer, and despatch: and now for the contents."

So Mr. Dacre read, and carefully re-read the letter.

"I can't tell you, Miss Gray," he said, for the first time with an expression of real sympathy and concern in his handsome face —

"With how much sympathy and compassion for you — with how much indignation against the cowardly wretch who tries to alarm you — and, I fear, has succeeded in causing you a great deal of anxiety — I say, I can't express the feelings with which I have read this dastardly thing. I wish, Miss Gray, I could, or rather dare. But this I may venture to say, that I accept this miscreant's challenge, that I will even prolong my stay in England, at all risks, and leave nothing untried to unearth and punish him."

"Oh, no, pray no — I'm so much obliged; but I merely wish him discovered, and an end put effectually to these annoyances," said Miss Gray.

He smiled — he was still holding the letter by one corner, and he shook his head slowly as he answered —

"You must allow me a discretion in dealing with the writer of this, should I be fortunate enough to discover him. Only, this you may be sure of, that your name shall not be publicly mixed in the matter, unless with your distinct permission."

"Thanks — a thousand thanks," said she; "but, Mr. Dacre, there must be no violence. If I thought there was danger of that kind it would greatly increase my anxiety; and, in fact, I should prefer going away, and leaving my persecutor in possession of the field."

He shook his head, and laughed a little again, still looking at the letter.

"I don't think going away would save you from that annoyance," he said.

"Really? Mr. Dacre, do you think he would follow us? I have not mentioned a word of this to Mrs. Wardell. I know she would be frightened. But do you really think so? or what exactly do you suppose?"

"Judging by this letter, I should say that the person who wrote it — whether man or woman — has an ulterior object, distinct from any revenge upon that miserable person De Beaumirail, who is, perhaps, as well where he is as anywhere else. I can't, of course, guess, in the least, what that object may be; but I am sure very few people would take so much trouble in following up a grudge owed to so insignificant a person as De Beaumirail now is. Of course there can be no goodwill, but there must be a more powerful motive — this is an organized affair, that last letter shows, and is *intended* to show that they have secured the services of, at least, one spy in your house."

Laura changed colour as he said this, fixing his dark eyes inquiringly upon her.

"I hope not. I can't think of any one who would be so base."

"It is a painful discovery, but the world is full of base people; and the worst of it is that the baser they are — within the limits of caution — the better they get on," said Alfred Dacre, in that sarcastic tone which he sometimes used. "Is there any person in the house who may be the writer of those letters — *think.*"

"No one — no, not a creature. No servant could write a letter so correctly; it is certainly no one in the house," she answered eagerly.

"Well, then, they are written by some one, as I said, who commands the services, of, at least, one spy in your house. It may take time to detect that agent; but accident, vigilance, a momentary indiscretion, may lead to detection. If we had that end of the thread in our fingers, it would, perhaps, answer as well. I think I should reach the other. But, for the present, we must be secret — not a creature in your house must suspect that these letters affect your conduct, or even your spirits — and as Mrs. Wardell does not know anything of them — — "

Here good Mrs. Wardell snorted, covering this evidence of her condition by a little cough. Miss Gray struck gently a few chords, and the old lady resumed her nap.

"You were saying — — "

"I may say that Mrs. Wardell had better, for the present, continue in total ignorance of their existence."

"Perhaps so."

"*Certainly;* because Mrs. Wardell would talk to her maid, and she in the housekeeper's room; and the person who acts as spy would report that the letters had produced an agitation, and *that* would induce caution on the part of the machinators, and increase the difficulty of our pursuit."

Miss Gray thoughtfully assented.

"And now I'll tell you why I think things apparently so slight as these letters deserve your prompt and serious attention. I am quite clear that your intuition has not deceived you. There is an object in these practices deeper than any hatred of De Beaumirail. They want to frighten you into some concession not yet so much as hinted at. The fact that a trinket of value has been sent with the letters, convinces me that something serious is intended. For it was no gentleman who wrote that villanous letter. That locket can't be worth much less than a hundred guineas. It is sunk, you may be quite certain, upon a commercial calculation of ultimate profits. Your leaving the country would not extricate you from their machinations. The same annoyances will probably follow you, go where you may. It is a terrorism, with an object, and there is but one way of relieving you from it, and, that is, by tracking the beast to his lair; and, with God's help, I'll reach him."

"But, Mr. Dacre, there is no need to run into danger," began Miss Gray.

"Danger disappears before a resolute will. There shall be no danger — nothing but victory. Let me tell you why I speak in so sanguine and confident a spirit: if, as I suspect, this odious persecution originates from some one point in the circle of debt and villainy that surrounds that miserable fellow, De Beaumirail, I have opportunities which no other person possesses, of placing my hand upon its spring. I will see De Beaumirail again tomorrow. I don't much enjoy an interview with him." He laughed. "I have had one already, and thought it quite enough; but I must see him, and from him I will learn who are his enemies among the people at present in London. I shall have all the light that he can indirectly throw upon it; and there is a great deal that I cannot yet tell you. But I hope I may soon have something very decisive and very satisfactory to say."

"I wish, Mr. Dacre, I could tell you how much obliged — — "

"No — no — you are not to use that phrase to me."

"But I can't help saying how very kind I think it; and I think it is very selfish, allowing a friend to engage in so irksome and, perhaps, dangerous an enterprise."

"You don't know all I feel about it. You have called me your friend, pray do not recall that distinction — it is my dearest hope to deserve it. You shall soon see how terribly in earnest I can be, and with how enthusiastic a devotion I consecrate myself to such a cause as yours. I abandon every other occupation and pursuit, and, till I have succeeded, shall think of nothing else. And — no — you are *not* to thank me. Perhaps when I have succeeded I may hear, without a sense of utter unworthiness, that delightful assurance."

Mrs. Wardell had been conversing with her dog while Mr. Dacre finished his sentence; and under cover of this tender babble and its snarling accompaniment he added —

"Have I permission to call again tomorrow evening? I may have nothing to tell you; but possibly I may hear news that will interest you."

"Pray do; but — but you will be engaged about business of your own — that business that so much occupies your time."

"I have told you, Miss Gray, I forswear it in favour of yours; not one moment of my time shall it engage tomorrow."

"Then you *can* come to us earlier, can't you?"

Mr. Dacre's countenance darkened, and then he smiled, oddly: —

"I thought I mentioned to you, Miss Gray — or — no. I beg pardon, it was to Ardenbroke, that it was not my business only, but a condition imposed upon me altogether in the interest of other people, not to let myself be known to be in London — at least for some little time. I am, therefore, obliged to observe a sort of mystery, or to make my excursions — as that UNKNOWN CORRESPONDENT says — like a man who has returned from the dead — is not that his phrase? — in the dark."

"In the dark?"

"Yes — certainly in the dark."

His even white teeth glimmered as he laughed gently and coldly, and she fancied he looked paler.

Did he anticipate more danger than he chose to avow?

"Those who invoke the dead must abide the consequences. I look upon their mention of me, and in those menacing terms, as of good augury. If they understood me better they would not have resorted to threats. As it is, their doing so betrays their apprehensions — they are conscious of my opportunities."

Mr. Dacre was looking sternly on the ground beside his boot as he spoke, and he fell into a grim reverie of a few seconds.

"Suppose," he said suddenly, raising his eyes with a look inquisitive, and it seemed also cruel— "A thought has struck me. Suppose the motive of this experiment upon your nerves should prove to be hatred of you rather than of De Beaumirail?"

"Hatred of *me?*"

"Yes, Miss Gray; because you are yourself incapable of hatred, malice, and revenge, you fancy such things do not exist, or if you do, you do not, and cannot, understand their infernal psychology."

Miss Gray dropped her eyes.

"Nothing so hard for the young and gentle who have seen nothing of the world — nothing of human nature — except within the paradise of home, as to believe in the existence of those reptile natures, cold-blooded, full of poison, patient, and more subtle than any beast of the field."

"The confines of revenge and justice are so hard to define," said Miss Gray in a very low tone, still looking down.

"Oh! oh!" he laughed very softly in a kind of derision, "much they think of justice. No; the strange thing is this — such people will hate you *without* a cause — will hate you for your prosperity — for your position; or, if in your walk through life, ever so accidentally, you, tread on a fibre or touch their skins, they'll sting you to death if they can."

Miss Gray sighed.

"You, Miss Gray, are young; you have as yet neither had adulation nor misery to harden your heart. You are forgiving and compassionate, and can conceive no other nature. Because you are conscious of never having intentionally inflicted one moment's pain on any living creature — are incapable of revenge — — "

"No, *not* incapable of revenge; but my revenges are peculiar, and not from a malignant motive," said she, interrupting suddenly.

"Revenge, and Miss Laura Challys Gray! Oh! no. That were a discord of which nature is incapable. Revenge! Perhaps you avenged a scratch by striking your kitten with a glove, or committing some other such cruelty!"

"No," she again interrupted; "I have been what many good and stupid people would call revengeful, but not from malice. I have requited injury by punishment, and I mean to persevere in so doing."

Mr. Dacre smiled and shook his head.

"I suspect, Miss Gray, you are taking a tragic view of yourself, There are some things too hard for my belief, and one is, the possibility of your cherishing a harsh thought or feeling."

"But I can't bear to be thought better than I am," said Miss Gray; "and it may be that it will help you to conclusions."

"Yes," he said, with a faint laugh, "so it might, if you think you really have enemies."

"I don't know. You saw Mr. de Beaumirail?"

"I saw him, yes, for ten minutes only; it was a very dry and hurried interview. My wish was to make it as short as possible, and I had to crowd a great deal into it."

"Did he mention me or my family?"

"No, not a word."

He paused inquiringly.

"Well, then," she said, "there's no need that I should mention him more."

There was a little silence here.

"From what you have told me this evening, Miss Gray, I may conjecture a great deal, and for the present I must return to my proper element — darkness."

"Oh?" she said, with that look of imperfect apprehension and inquiry, which seemed to ask for explanation.

But Mrs. Wardell now broke in with —

"Charming music! Do you sing, Mr. Dacre?"

"I can't say I do. I once did, a little; but among musicians I could not venture; and, at all events, my happy minutes have run out, and I must say good night."

CHAPTER XIX.

WHO ARE THE DACRES?

NOW he was gone, and with the moment of departure came that revulsion which always followed her interviews with him.

How was it that he had stolen into those strangely confidential terms with her? So soon as he went she felt like a somnambulist awakened, who opens her eyes in the confusion of an interrupted dream, and in an unintelligible situation. Something for a moment like the panic of such an awaking, agitated Miss Gray.

Next day, at about five o'clock, came the old Countess of Ardenbroke. The invalid either could not or would not get out of her carriage, so Laura Gray came down and got into it, and was very affably received by the thin old lady in an ermine tippet, propped with cushions, and with her feet upon a heated stool. It was hard to say which was paying this visit. She made Laura sit opposite to her, and told her all about her health and her sufferings, and her wants and sorrows with her maid, and various little bits of news about fifty people of whom Laura had never heard before. And now the visit being over, before Laura bid her goodbye, she said —

"You know something, Lady Ardenbroke, of the De Beaumirails, who were related to us?"

"Yes; not a great deal, but something."

"Can you tell me anything about relations or connexions of theirs named Dacre?"

"Yes, there were Dacres."

"Are they related to *us?*"

"No. De Beaumirail's uncle married a Dacre, that's all. Why?"

"Nothing, only that; I know that a Mr. Dacre has turned up in London who claims to be a relative of the De Beaumirails."

"Don't believe it, my dear. The last of those Dacres was Alfred Dacre, who died, let me see fully ten years ago."

"Alfred! Are you sure?"

"Yes. Alfred."

"Oh, then, it must be a brother of his."

"No, it can't be that. There was no, brother. The property has gone to the Davenants," said the old lady.

"Alfred Dacre, a friend of Ardenbroke's," repeated Miss Gray; "then you have seen him, I dare say?"

"Oh, dear, yes, a hundred times."

"Then it must be a mistake. Was he agreeable?"

"Yes; agreeable, amusing, and odd. I think he was clever."

"And young?"

"Yes, young — quite a young man."

"And good-looking?"

"Oh, very good-looking. The Dacres were all that. I'll tell you what will give you an idea. If you suppose Mario, the Tenore at the Opera, in some of his most becoming parts, you have a very good idea of him."

"Oh!" said Laura Gray in a very low tone, dropping her eyes for a moment. She had seen the great Tenore, and the general likeness had struck her on seeing her mysterious visitor.

"Yes, it must be a mistake," she repeated.

"I think so," said the old lady. "There is not one of that family left, and it is ten years since that handsome creature died. There may be cousins. I don't say positively; but if there are I never heard. And why do you ask me all these questions?"

"I haven't asked many, have I? But it was only that when we heard him mentioned, Julia Wardell remembered the name, and was puzzling over it."

"Well, if there is one of that handsome family left, pray don't think of making him master of Gray Forest. Dear me, how the little creature blushes!"

She had blushed very brilliantly.

"I — I didn't know; but if I have," said Laura, "it is because I blush more capriciously than any other person I ever heard of, and totally without a cause."

And hereupon she blushed still more intensely.

"Well, dear, don't mind; it's very becoming."

And she kissed her. And Miss Gray said, with a laugh —

"It is very provoking; but I assure you my blushes bear false witness, and there is not the slightest excuse for them. And now your horses are impatient, and I have delayed you a great deal too long."

So in turn she kissed the old lady, who forthwith departed for her drive in the park.

"It must be a cousin, then," thought the young lady as old Lady Ardenbroke's carriage drove away, "and when we come to know him a little better, of course he will tell us everything."

That evening the two ladies sat as usual in the drawingroom of Guildford Hall, and the hour of tea was approaching when Charles Mannering joined the little party.

Laura Challys Gray was very frank and true; but was she quite so glad to see him as she seemed? Perhaps she was; but if so, she quickly recollected something that qualified that sentiment.

Mr. Dacre would probably look in as usual, and would he quite like an introduction to a stranger under his present circumstances?

I don't know whether he imagined some little constraint or coldness in his reception, for he said —

"I'm afraid it's very cool my coming this way. I should have waited, I dare say, until I was sent for?"

Though he laughed; Miss Gray thought he was piqued.

"If you stay away, Charlie, until I send for you, it will be a long wait. Not," she added kindly, "that I should not wish to see you back, but being just as proud as you are — if you choose to stand aloof and grow ceremonious — I shall draw back a step too, and then, little by little, we shall stand so far that the tips of our fingers can't touch, and shaking hands any more will be quite out of the question. Therefore, Charlie Mannering, you must never be high or cold with me; but if you are angry scold me, and if you think I have affronted you, say so, and we may quarrel for ten minutes very spiritedly, but at the end of that time we'll be sure to shake hands, and then we'll be better friends than ever."

He smiled on her, very much pleased. He looked on her as if he would have given her the Kohinoor at that moment, had he possessed it. But he only said, after a little silence —

"I don't know, Challys, that you are not preaching a very good philosophy — what shall we call it? the sect of the plain-speakers — of which it would hereafter be written: This school of philosophers was founded by Laura Challys Gray, the first of the wise women of Brompton, who practised her philosophy with such a charm and success, that she speedily drew about her a school of disciples of the other sex. But it needed so much beauty as well as so much natural goodness to make the things they said go down with the unlearned, that her followers were ultimately beaten and dispersed; and the doctrine and practice of the plain-speakers being discovered, in a short time, to amount simply to speaking the truth, fell speedily into contempt, and in deference to the devil, whom it was intended to shame, and who is always paramount in London and the suburbs, it was peremptorily put down by the respectable inhabitants, and so fell into absolute neglect."

"Many thanks for that page of history, which will also recount," said Miss Gray, "that, in the same remarkable age, one Charles Mannering, of the same city, set up as a prophet, in which profession he had some moderate success, up to the period of fulfilment, when nothing ever came of his prophecies; and when he and the wise woman of Brompton met of an evening, they had so much to say to one another, and were so very wise, that they invariably forgot that it was time to take their tea, the more especially as in that dull age their audience usually fell asleep, and there was no one consequently to remind them. So as Julia Wardell is taking her nap, would you mind touching the bell? for I think a little tea would do us all good."

They had tea, and talked on pleasantly, and Mrs. Wardell, waking, said —

"By-the-bye, Charles Mannering, you know Mr. Dacre, don't you?"

"Haven't that pleasure. Who is he?"

"Oh, dear! a most agreeable and handsome young man, whose acquaintance we have made. He'll probably be here to tea. Did not Laura mention him?"

"No, I think not."

"Did you?" said Mrs. Wardell.

"No," said Charles, "but I'm really glad to hear you have made an agreeable acquaintance. I told you you would find your solitude here insupportable, didn't I?"

He spoke with a smile; but I don't think that he was a bit pleased, nevertheless, to find that solitude invaded. I suspect he would have liked very much to ask some questions about this charming Mr. Dacre, of whom he had already an uncomfortable perception, as an insupportable puppy whom these ladies were, no doubt, bent upon making him still more conceited. But what need he care, or how could it possibly interest him? So, with the hand next it, he gently touched a few notes of the piano, and hummed an air.

While he was thus engaged, the door opened, and Mr. Dacre was announced.

CHAPTER XX.

THEY DRINK TEA.

MR. DACRE, entered, and, as he did so, his quick eye detected the presence of the stranger, leaning upon the piano. Miss Gray observed the shrewd, hard glance which he directed on him — it was hardly momentary, it seemed but to touch its object, but it was stern and suspicious.

"I ventured, you see, to look in on my way into town," said he, advancing quite like himself in a moment.

"We are charmed to see you," said Mrs. Wardell.

"Rather cool at this hour, and not quite, usual," thought Charles Mannering sarcastically, as he looked at Miss Gray, whose hand the stranger's was just now touching. "By Jove! a fellow, learns as he gets on — nothing like impudence, I do believe, plenty of conceit, and a little impertinence. I dare say I'm rather in the way here."

Charles Mannering's sneer, however, was not inconsistent, it seemed, with his staying where he was. He had no notion of going — he went on fiddling at the piano, and a stranger might have fancied that his whole soul was absorbed in the attempt to stumble through the treble of an air.

Mr. Dacre put down his cup of tea on the table, and seating himself beside Miss Gray, he said, with a glance toward the pianist, which seemed to say, "There's no risk, I see, of being overheard."

"I have made a discovery since I saw you."

He paused with an odd smile, looking in her eyes. She was silent.

"Can't you guess what it is?"

"About those letters," she said, very low.

"Of course — yes — about those letters; can't you guess?"

She looked at him, and down for a moment, but she could not, nor at all fancy why he looked at her with a kind of significance.

"No, I can't — not the least," she said, at last, with a little shake of her head. She fancied he looked a little disappointed.

"Ah! then you really have formed no conjecture?"

"No — none. Do pray tell me if there is anything worse than I fancied," she said.

"No. In one sense not at all — that is, my suspicions point at no one in whom you place confidence, or with whom you need have any relations, but recollect they are as yet suspicions only, and I thought that you, perhaps, might throw some light to confirm or dispel them."

She shook her head.

"Well, I shan't say a word more, until I can speak with a little more confidence. If my conjecture is right, a plan both curious and atrocious has been formed. I give myself three days to find it out. I shall withdraw myself, for that time, from every other occupation. The villain De Beaumirail is, I believe, implicated in it, and its centre is another person of whom you know nothing."

"Mr. de Beaumirail! How can that possibly be? The letters come evidently from an enemy of his."

"Say a *pretended* enemy — a real enemy of *yours.* I do not say the letters are written by him: they are written by a still worse and more dangerous man, and they are, as I thought, but the prelude to other steps. You had an idea, do you remember, that you were watched — *I* certainly am, and with no friendly purpose. Don't, pray, Miss Gray, don't suppose that I regret any little trouble that may fall to my share in this affair. You little know my feelings; you little understand, if there were a real danger to be encountered, with what devotion, and happiness, and pride, I would meet it." This was spoken low and rapidly, while his great dark eyes were fixed on her with the enthusiasm and admiration, which for a moment held her in their wild fascination, and before she could chill it by look or word that gaze was lowered, and turning quickly, he said to Mrs. Wardell, who bored him so wonderfully little, by either talking or listening during these strange little visits. "Have you heard, Mrs. Wardell, of the wonderful man who is coming to London — a Malayan magician, who has turned the heads of all Paris, and sees futurity — and describes it — in a crystal circle which he holds in the hollow of his hand?"

"Futurity! Tell us our fortunes, I suppose! Why that will be extremely amusing, and even curious, I dare say."

"Quite amazing, if all they say, or even half they swear, is to be believed. Everything turns out exactly as he says, and he can tell everyone everything that ever happened to them in their lives."

"A rather inconvenient faculty," said Charles Mannering, who had seen the little confidential *tête-à-tête* which had just occurred, and had observed, he fancied, a tinge in Laura Gray's cheek which was not there before, and had felt the sting of a new mortification. "Of course, with people who have no fault to find with themselves it is different, but I should not like to find a Malayan savage in possession of all my poor secrets, and ready to hand them over for half-a-crown to my civilized neighbours."

This was to Mrs. Wardell.

"Well, of course, there are things one would tell to friends, you know," began Mrs. Wardell.

"I don't know," answered Dacre, "that friends are not the very last people one ought to tell anything to; they are so reserved and odd in this age of iron, or brass, or whatever it is; and my belief is that people who don't trust, are not to be trusted."

Laura Gray laughed, and said —

"You are very hard upon friends tonight; I hope, Mr. Dacre, *you* don't think all that."

Mr. Dacre smiled, without glancing even momentarily at Charles Mannering, or seeming at all conscious of his presence. Perhaps he viewed that young gentleman's presence here as much in the light of an impertinence, as Charles had his.

"I don't exactly know what the question is."

"I mean," she said, "that people are worse friends — more reserved, and less trustworthy, than they used to be; in fact, that friendship is degenerating."

"I believe that the cant of perpetual degeneracy, which has been fashionable in all ages, is simply the register of the discontent that characterizes our unreasonable human nature in every age alike. Every man who is treated according to his deserts fancies himself illused because he is not treated according to his egotism. When I hear general invectives I know that the declaimer is wincing under some secret ulceration of vanity! Friendship degenerating! Human nature losing its characteristics! The Ethiopian changing his skin, and the leopard his spots! How could you think me such a muff?"

"But that is very much — is not it? — what Mr. Mannering said," interposed plain-spoken Mrs. Wardell. "What was it — what *did* you say?" she asked that young gentleman.

"I talked, I believe, some such folly as young men usually do when they attempt to, philosophize. I no more think of remembering it when I do it, than I dream of listening when others commit the same folly."

Mr. Dacre looked at Miss Gray and laughed gently. It was ineffably provoking, it seemed to say, "How amusingly the fellow winces. Were they making a butt of him?"

It did not mend the matter that he was nearly certain that this Mr. Dacre, who had grown in a day or two into an intimacy, was the same handsome young man whom he had seen in his box at the opera.

"I know I'm not so pretty as that doll of a fellow, but I'm worth fifty of him," was Charles Mannering's modest thought; "I'm a man; he's a puppy. He talks like a coxcomb.

He's a selfish, conceited, pushing fool, and I could throw him out of that window as easily as the sofa-pillow."

Charles was very much vexed, but he had no notion of carrying on this covert sparring with him, a game in which he might possibly suffer; in which, at all events, it was not easy to keep one's temper.

"Suppose we have a little more light?" suggested Mrs. Wardell. The room was very imperfectly lighted; it was a fancy of Laura's when there was moonlight.

"Isn't it almost a pity?" said Laura, approaching the window, and looking out. "It seems so inhospitable — shutting out the moon, so gentle and beautiful and benignant. I think I'll put it to the vote; what do you say, Charles?"

"Very much honoured; but I can't agree with you. I have no sympathy with your hospitality, in this case, and I think the world's large enough for the moon; it has room enough to shine in without troubling your drawingroom; and I'm not so sure of its benignity, and I have no sympathy with the man in it; and altogether I'm for shutting the whole affair out, and having the drawingroom to ourselves, and the blessing of candlelight."

Miss Gray nodded, a little vexed, perhaps; very childish, but so it was; and Charles's speech was not the pleasanter for this.

"And what do you say, Mr. Dacre?" she inquired.

“I? Of course I vote for the moon and against the candles. I quite agree in the spirit of your remarks; and now, Miss Gray, we stand divided, two and two, and, as the lawyers say, there is no rule, and things remain as they are.”

“Really! Well, that’s very nice, and I think that lamp is quite light enough to read and work by; and, Julia dear, I’ll only ask a few minutes longer; the light is really so beautiful.”

And she leaned on the side of the window looking out. Under the dark elm trees, near the gate, she saw the carriage faintly; over their tops, above a filmy cloud, the moon shone resplendent.

Charles Mannering saw her, and would have liked to go to her side, and look out also. But he was vexed and high with her, and would not go till he was very clearly wanted.

But Alfred Dacre was, in a moment, at her side.

“I must go in two or three minutes,” said he. “I have a call to make tonight; you think, perhaps, I am making too much of this affair; you will think otherwise by-and-bye; but you have nothing to fear, being, as you are, forewarned.” He spoke dejectedly, although his words were cheering. “Remember, though evil spirits compass us about, they cannot hurt us but by our own fault. I say this to prevent your allowing yourself to be agitated if a new scene in this conspiracy should suddenly unfold itself. I do believe this place is watched. I know that I am suspected, and I regret this only because it makes my success the more uncertain. I have said all this to assure you that no matter what unlooked-for occurrence may take place, you have no personal danger to apprehend.”

“I don’t understand you. I grow only more and more bewildered,” said Miss Gray.

“I don’t wish you to understand more than that. Simply that you are not to let your fears overpower you. The real struggle will be at a distance. Actual danger shall not touch you, and now — (I was going to say goodnight, but, oh! not yet!) I shan’t see you, Miss Gray, for three days, and then something decisive. Three days seem a long time now — what an egotist I am, and you hate egotism. Absorbed by my one dominant feeling, I would subordinate all people and considerations to my special revenge — and you hate vengeance — upon the troublers of this tranquil little place. Pray mention it no more tonight; my minutes here are counted. Is it possible to describe that moonlight? How it spiritualizes all vulgar things. I am sure that is the secret of its charm for lovers and for poets; it so resembles — I mean in that respect — both love and poetry. How love, for instance, exalts and beautifies the homeliest objects in the surroundings of the beloved. Do you remember, Miss Gray, you mentioned a moonlight sketch of the ruins of Gray Forest, and promised to let me see it when next I came?"

"So I did," she said, a little flattered by his recollection. "But it really is not worth looking at."

"I've heard of your drawing, Miss Gray. Ardenbroke, who is a very good judge, admires it so immensely, and I've been told it is not the least like the drawing of an amateur — so much poetry, so much force."

"If you really thought all that, I should be very foolish to lose your good opinion by showing what my poor drawings really are."

"Is the one I speak of in the room?"

"No."

"Could you send and get it?"

"Well, no; but I never make a fuss about anything I've made up my mind to; and you shall see the sketch, as you make a point of it, although it is perfectly true that I am ashamed of it."

"Pray not *now,* though," said he; "I had no idea you could think of going yourself."

But it would not do; she was gone.

CHAPTER XXI.

A STRANGE FACE.

OLDFASHIONED lamps, swinging from chains lighted the lobby, and the stairs, and the hall. She knew the spot in the library where she could lay her hand upon the drawing. For a moment she had forgotten the anxious subject of her thoughts. But the transition from the glow of the lighted hall, to the spacious and dark room, with its narrow scenery standing in moonlight and shadows, white and black, before the window, with a sudden chill recalled the hated ambiguities of the conspiracy, which day and night fevered her curiosity, and alarmed her imagination.

With an instinctive wish to escape from the room and accomplish her errand as quickly as might be, she hastened to the table near the window, and as if her approach had evoked it, suddenly the figure of a small, rather long-limbed man, appeared at the same large window, and laying his arm above his eyes, to shade them from the reflected light, he looked for some seconds into the room.

The light coming from behind touched his face oddly. The outlines of the figure were apish, and there was, as well as she could see, something sinister, which stared into the room with great eyeballs and a gaping mouth.

She stood quite motionless, and chill, as if she saw a ghost. She could not tell whether this man, with his face close to the glass, and his features distorted by the faint odd light and deep shadow, saw her or not. One thing she felt — that he might be one of those persecuting agents who were spying out all her ways, and weaving about her a net, with what object or how much malignity she could not guess. For a moment she fancied that this person, who seemed, by an intuition, aware that she was coming, had placed himself there with the intention of injuring her.

As quickly almost as he came, however, he disappeared. Very pale, Laura Gray found herself on the stairs, close to the drawingroom door. Charles Mannering she heard singing to his own accompaniment for the entertainment of Mrs. Wardell, who seldom failed to ask him. The sounds reassured the girl, though she still felt frightened, and she was about to venture into the room under cover of the music, when, looking stealthily over the banister, she saw the hall-door partly open, and the little sinister figure she had seen at the window, step in, peering jealously round him as he did.

The idea that he was in search of her took possession of Miss Gray. With renewed terror she got into the drawingroom.

Charles was singing, and Mrs. Wardell whispering to her lapdog, as she tenderly folded him in her arms, the question, “Is not that charming, you little angel? but we mustn’t bark — no, no,”

Charles Mannering’s performance was nothing to boast of, and he knew it. He chose to oblige the old lady tonight, however; partly, I think, to show that he was perfectly at his ease, and happy; and being engrossed with his own music, as singers are, Miss Gray passed across the room lightly, without exciting observation, except that of Mr. Dacre. Her face was so pale, that he exclaimed in a whisper, and with a gaze of alarm,

“Has anything happened?”

In a whisper she replied,

“A very wicked-looking, little man, with a pale face — I could hardly see it, stared in through the library window at me, and, as I reached the top of the stairs, he came in at the hall-door. I think he must be one of those dreadful people; for God’s sake, Mr. Dacre, will you run down and try and get the servants to help?”

Mr. Dacre got quietly out of the room, and ran down the stairs. There was no sign of anyone in the hall, or in the rooms opening from it. The servants had seen no one.

“A mistake, no doubt!” said Mr. Dacre, and ran up the stairs again, and, as he did so, he thought,

“De Beaumirail and a Jew, a not unnatural association!” and he laughed gently, and shrugged, as he said it.

Softly, lightly, he entered the room.

“But that you are so confident,” he whispered, “I should fancy it must be a dream — not a creature except the servants downstairs, and everything perfectly quiet. They have gone to search the upper part of the house, but I think you may be quite at ease about it.”

“No dream — quite a certainty,” she said.

"Oh! no — not that; I mean only that the fellow just peeped in at the window, and afterwards at the door. I wish to heaven I had seen him, so that I should have known him afterwards, if I met him. I quite agree with you as to the object of his visit."

As they talked a postman's knock sounded through the hall, and Miss Gray was instantly silent; she expected one of those odious letters.

Fortunately, for the safety of the secret, which she still hated to divulge, Mrs. Wardell had asked Charles Mannering for another song — a quiet little pastoral ditty, which she loved, and which he sang with very angry feelings, for he did not lose the little scene — the lowtoned confidences — in short, the insufferable rudeness of Miss Laura Gray and that conceited young man, who did not know how to behave himself, and talked incessantly all the time he was singing.

No letter came up — no parcel — nothing; five minutes more passed, and Mr. Alfred Dacre lingeringly took his leave; and he whispered, as he was about to go, "May I write a line if anything should happen?"

"Well, I suppose so; that is, if anything of any consequence should happen — thanks."

So he bid her goodbye. He took Mrs. Wardell's hand, and bid her also a farewell — and took no notice of Charles Mannering, who took none of him; and then this little drum broke up, leaving Charles very sulky and bitter, and Laura distrait and excited.

I can't wonder at Charles Mannering's mistake, all things considered; and, perhaps, his odd state of temper is also intelligible.

"I see, I *was* very much in the way this evening," said Charles, not able to contain longer.

"You! in the way; not in the least; no one is ever in my way; if they are disposed to be so, I dismiss them."

"Then, they must be greater fools than I if they ever come back."

"But you were not *de trop,* and I did not send you away; on the contrary, you made yourself very much the reverse. I wanted to say a few words to Mr. Dacre, and I thought you very considerate, if you meant it."

"I really did not happen to be thinking about it at the time; and what you have just said quite satisfies me, and I need not reproach myself any more."

He was thinking of going; but he wanted resolution. He took up a book, and turned over its leaves, and tried to think of something careless to say to

Mrs. Wardell, but could not; and, at all events, that lady was at that moment in one of her gentle naps. He looked toward the window where Laura Gray was sitting, but she was not looking toward him, on the contrary, through the window, “following, no doubt,” thought Charles, “in spirit, the departed Don Whiskerandos, who has passed beneath those files of elms.”

This sensitive Charles Mannering — sensitive at least in all that concerned her — saw that there was no suspicion of affectation or pique, but that her inattention was perfectly genuine.

“Polite, certainly,” said he, with a bitter smile, glancing from nodding Mrs. Wardell to Laura Gray, who was looking out of the window.

He was thinking of going unperceived out of the room, and adding some life to the landscape which Miss Gray was contemplating, by walking away before her eyes. But again his heart failed him, and he sat down on the corner of a chair beside the unfailing piano, and began again to touch its notes.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHARLES OBJECTS TO THE NEW WORSHIP.

AT length he could stand it no longer, and, said he, sitting erect and addressing the window in a clear tone, and with a rather bitter jocularity —

"Nothing ever arrests the progress of mind and the march of discovery."

Laura looked at him with her large eyes, a little puzzled, and after a little pause, she said —

"Your allusions, I am sure, are wise, if one could only understand them."

"I did not intend to be the least mysterious, I assure you. I've been away just forty-eight hours. It is very amusing — and I find a new worship established."

"A new worship! I don't know what you mean. What worship, pray, have you found here? Worship is a very comprehensive term — isn't it?" said the young lady, with a colour suddenly heightened, and looking at him with brilliant eyes.

Perhaps, if she had not blushed so ambiguously, he might have kept his temper better; but the feeling that, in the very act of snubbing him, she was exhibiting this beautiful evidence of so different a feeling with respect to that miserable coxcomb! Unaided human nature could hardly be expected to stand that.

"Worship — yes, quite true — a very comprehensive term. There are all sorts of worship. The Egyptians worshipped reptiles, and some people worship monkeys, I believe; and others, perhaps more degraded still, worship themselves."

"Still enigmatical; but I think there can be no doubt that you intend to be — I'll only say — *disagreeable;* and suppose there is a worship established here. I think I may do and say pretty much, here, what I like, without being considered intrusive. And, suppose Julia Wardell — oh! I see, she's asleep — has committed the impiety of removing Mr. Charles Mannering from her altar, and the profanity of setting up Mr. Alfred Dacre instead, is not this a land of liberty? Hasn't she a right to practice her idolatries according to her taste? I don't see why the good old soul should not have her plurality of

Josses, or whatever she calls her idols, or why the deposed divinity should thunder his displeasure in my small habitation, and the fact is, I don't choose it."

"You quite mistake me."

"So much the better."

"I don't, at all, affect rivalry with the new divinity. I never had the distinction of standing upon an altar and receiving incense. It must be very pleasant, and judging from the enthusiasm, and the looks of the priestesses, there must be no small happiness, too, in the mere act of devotion."

"Come now, do speak plainly — what do you mean?" said Miss Laura Gray peremptorily.

"In the practice of idolatry everything is allegory and myth. Isn't it rather unreasonable to ask me to speak literally?" said Charles Mannering, pleased, perhaps, to see evidence of irritation on the other side.

"I suppose you are joking," said the young lady. "If you have no meaning it is a bad joke, and if you have a meaning it is a worse one. I wish to know, once for all, what you do mean, if meaning you have any.

"Well, I don't mind telling you that it does strike me that an intimacy, which I suppose seems to other people quite natural, and *selon les règles* appears to have grown up, almost in an hour. I recognise the young gentleman as the same whom you thought so good-looking at the opera, the other night, and I suppose he has been properly introduced and all that, and that Ardenbroke, who is, I think, the only friend you have — of course I don't include myself — with the slightest claim to offer advice on such a subject unasked, has told you all that is necessary to know — I assume that — but still, the very distinguished confidence, and, in fact, the intimacy with which I find that fortunate young gentleman received and entertained, at whatever hours it may suit him to drop in, does strike a person accustomed to see such relations grow up with a less tropical suddenness, as in the highest degree marvellous."

"Well, thank you for some plain speaking at last, and considering you have no right, as you say, to offer advice unasked, you contrive to exercise the privilege of saying and insinuating more rude things than any other modest young gentleman I have had the good fortune to hear of."

"You may resent it. I can't help that," said he, "but I think it would be neither kind nor right, if in a place like this city, I were to abandon you, with no more experience than a child, and no one but Mrs. Wardell to take care of you — Mrs. Wardell, who really knows very little more of the world than you do yourself — to the risk of being imposed on, or even compromised by your confidence in the professions of people who happen to turn up in a Babel so handsomely provided with sharks and sharpers, as London is.”

“We happen to know, not from himself, but from people who are perfectly informed, and whose authority even you would not dispute, that Mr. Dacre is a person whom there could be no possible objection to knowing. I say this, neither as admitting your right to demand explanations, nor to make offensive remarks, but simply as a matter of fact, and as showing that we do not commit such extravagances as, in your phrase, should compromise us.”

“That which we desire to believe, we do believe often upon very slender evidence,” said Charles Mannering.

“I don’t think you perceive how very offensive, I may say insulting, your little speeches have become. You can’t help making them, I dare say. I suppose people, in the main, act according to their natures, and yours is to say such pleasant things as you have entertained me with this evening. I take it for granted you must go on saying them, so I mean to go up to my room, not having Julia Wardell’s faculty of retiring into dreams and slumber; but, of course, you can waken her with one of those pretty speeches, as they wakened King Lear with music, and she has the advantage of a much better temper than I have.” And with these words the young lady left the room.

She had not blown up Charles Mannering with half the spirit she might, at another time. A sense of fear and anxiety had in some measure tamed that wayward creature, and her manner was not so fierce as her words.

When she got to her room — at every step fancying she saw the peeping face of the odious little man whom she had seen at the window, that night, and in the hall — she sat down and asked her maid all about the search that had been made.

Every nook and corner had been searched, not a sign of the slightest disturbance anywhere detected, and it was plain that the person who had entered the hall could have only stepped in, looked about him, and withdrawn.

In a minute more Miss Laura Gray heard the hall-door shut, and a step pass away upon the dry court. She knew that step. It was Charles Mannering taking his departure. She smiled faintly as she fancied his feelings, his dignity, and his huff; and then she thought uneasily whether there might not be reason at the bottom of his reclamations.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LAURA GRAY'S FORTUNE TOLD.

A SMALL letter was laid upon her dressing-table next morning, as she entered; Mrs. Wardell had, placed it there. She was relieved at the first glance. It was not from her unknown correspondent. It was addressed in an extremely pretty hand, and at the foot of the page was "A. Dacre."

"My Dear Miss Gray," it said, "you see how impatient I am to use my privilege. Lest your servants should omit to mention the circumstance, I have to relate, that on going downstairs, I learned from the servant that I had been honoured by an inquiry, as I conclude, from the same person who alarmed you by showing himself at the window, and who I have no doubt is implicated in the cowardly annoyance to which you have been exposed. I instantly pursued, but not a trace of him was discoverable. Any direction you may be so good as to honour me with, I shall be only too happy to obey, if you will be so good as to send, during my three days' absence, to my address, Minivers Hotel, &c.

"Believe me, my dear Miss Gray,

"Ever Yours, &c., &c.

"P.S. — I think the bravado of last night will materially aid discovery. The one talent I really do possess, that of the detective, I devote to this enterprise. I had twice in my life to employ it before, and very quickly succeeded. Pray burn this letter. There are those whom I would not wish to know that I wrote. I entreat of you therefore to be secret for three days."

When Miss Gray came down she questioned the servant who had opened the door to the unknown visitor of last night. When did he come? A few minutes before Mr. Dacre left. Did he knock or ring at the door; or how was it? He came with a postman's knock. Would the servant know him again? Yes, he was a low-sized, vicious-looking little wasp of a Jew — pale and surly. And what did he say? Only to, ask if Mr. Dacre was here, and he asked the servant if he was quite sure, and seemed irresolute what to do, like a man making up his mind to mischief, but away he went again, so quick he could not tell which way he took. That was the narrative.

Now, Miss Laura Challys Gray was beginning to grow dissatisfied, and to quarrel with herself about several things. In the first place, had she done wisely in snubbing her honest cousin, Charles Mannering, whom she really wished to consult — whom, however, she found herself, by an understood obligation of secrecy, unable to consult — in whose eyes, her reason told her, she must inevitably appear so strange — possibly her conduct so equivocal, and to whom she yet could give no explanation? Had she done wisely in admitting this stranger — Mr. Dacre — to such strangely confidential relations? Had she not acted in panic — without thinking — without consulting even the instincts of caution. The intimacy which had grown in a day or two between her and this Mr. Dacre, which seemed to her like a dream, did it not affright her at times? And, then, was she quite sure that the handsome hero of this little mystery, who had taken up her quarrel so goodnaturedly, or rather so enthusiastically, of whom she thought through every hour of the day almost, for his words and looks were inseparably associated with the subject which so rivetted her thoughts — was she quite certain that she cared as little for him as in prudence she ought? Altogether, would it not have been wiser, to open this matter, the importance of which she had possibly exaggerated immensely, to Lord Ardenbroke or Charles Mannering? It was now, however, too late; she could hardly remember how these relations with Mr. Dacre had come about. But, now, she felt she could not recede. There was really nothing against him. He had been zealous, but very respectful. He was a friend of Ardenbroke's. Whom better could she have employed? And so on, inconsistently.

She was low. Her novel did not please her, nor music, nor work; she had a headache; she did not care for a drive or a walk; her gardening wearied her; she was in a state of unavowed suspense; expecting news; none came.

In the afternoon, near the hedgerow that bounded the lawn of Guildford House, came a big drum and pandean pipes resounding shrilly, and the grave brown-faced showman set up the stage of "Punch and Judy," and the time-honoured play began.

Here was a diversion. Miss Gray, who happened at the moment to be in the library, sent for her opera glasses, threw open the window, and amused herself with the Hogarthian picture of the motley crowd and the showman, seen pleasantly in the dappled sunlight under the trees.

When this pleasure, like all others, came to its end, she sat with her glasses in her lap at the open window. In a little while, the crowd having marched off with the show-box and big-drum, there came to the gate a slender girl whom the person in the lodge would not allow to pass.

"She's a gipsy," thought Miss Gray, raising her glasses, and thus distinctly confirming her first impression. She touched the bell, and told the servant to tell the people at the gate to allow the girl to come up to the house.

Up came the girl — lithe, dark, handsome, smiling, with all the servile wildness of her race, with fine eyes, and brilliant little teeth.

"Send my maid here," said the young lady, not caring to be quite alone, though the window-stood interposed between her, and this wild child of fortune. "You can tell all that's going to happen us, can't you?" said the young lady, smiling with an odd mixture of curiosity, antipathy, and admiration upon her vagabond sister.

"Oh, yes, she would tell the pretty young lady her fortune, if my lady wished; she would look at her hand, and she hoped the pretty young lady would have everything she wished in the world, for, indeed, she was pretty enough to be a princess, and dress in gold and diamonds, and pearls, and marry a king," and so forth.

"Have you told many fortunes to-day?"

"A deal of fortunes to-day, my lady. Yes, a great many pretty young ladies, but not one so pretty as you; no, no, my lady, indeed."

"Would you like to have your fortune told? I'm going to have mine," said Miss Gray turning to her maid, who had that moment come in. What maid could refuse such an offer. And, so, with a giggle, and a little toss of her head, she submitted.

So, Miss Mary Anne Mersey's hand told its secrets, and promised that amiable person her heart's content, and a rich tailor for her husband, and, finally, the sibyl added —

"And you will find, very soon, something that will make the young lady, your mistress, wonder!"

"Oh! something! Of what kind?" inquired Miss Gray.

"I can't know that, my lady. She will find something that will give you a start; yes, indeed, my pretty lady."

"You mean that will frighten me, do you?"

"Yes, my lady, — that will frighten you."

"La! what can she mean?" exclaimed Miss Mary Anne.

"I suppose we shall both be frightened, Mersey; but it can't be helped, and you have certainly got a great deal to console you, for I don't think a single thing has gone wrong in your fortune."

"Very nice hand, yes, very lucky," acquiesced the smiling prophetess.

"But she's to find, something — how soon — that is to frighten me?" persisted the young lady.

"How soon is not fixed, but very soon, my lady. That will be by the stars."

"We shall learn time enough, Mersey, I dare say," and putting more money in her hand, with a smile, she extended her own for the chiromancer's examination.

"You will travel about a great deal," began the gipsy; "you will not settle at home for a long time."

"Hush! Mersey. You are not to say a word," said her mistress, warningly.

"And there's a handsome young gentleman in love with you, my lady, though you don't know it, and he will, maybe, be wounded shortly for your sake, maybe killed, and he'll leave you some money, for he's very rich, though you don't know it. He's young, and he's very handsome, and he loves you ever so much more than his life, and you'll marry some one, but I don't know whether him or no, and you saw him in a fair, or in a playhouse, maybe; some place where there was a show going on, and music, and that is all I'm sure about, my lady."

"And how soon is this unfortunate young gentleman to be killed or wounded in my service?" she asked, laughing.

"Ah! you would not laugh, pretty lady, if you saw the poor young gentleman bleeding."

"Oh! but you know there's a hope, isn't there, that he may not be hurt at all, and what I want to know is, how soon the time of danger is to come."

"Soon, my lady, it can't be more than a year, but it might be tomorrow morning, a letter might come; it is some time very shortly."

"Well, thanks. Now, I think, we know everything," said Miss Gray.

"Is there any more young ladies would like their fortunes told, in the house, pretty young lady?"

“No, no, thanks, no one, and I think we’ll say goodbye now?” said Miss Laura Gray, with a smile and a little nod.

The handsome young prophetess smiled and showed all her little white teeth and curtsied, and crossed the windows here and there, and up and down with her restless glance, and so, smiling and curtseying again, with many “thankies, my ladies,” and “good lucks,” away she went.

“A very good fortune you have got, Mersey, and much good may it do you. I’m not so lucky quite. My young gentleman is to be shot; whoever he is, on very short notice too; and I’m to be frightened by something you are to be good enough to find for me. I shan’t want you any more just now, Mersey.”

Though the young lady knew that the gipsy was an impostor, and that, probably, the same prediction was repeated at every second window where she got a piece of money and an audience, yet, in her present mood, she would rather that the man at the lodge had taken his own way, and this little folly been omitted.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT MARY ANNE MERSEY FOUND.

THAT evening was unrelieved by a single incident worthy of being recorded, and Miss Gray was early weary — no note had reached her; all was silent. She went early to her room.

"I'll leave this tiresome place, Mersey," she said; "I'll leave it in two or three weeks, I think; do you like it?"

"Like it — hates it — rayther, you mean, miss. I can't think whatever bewitched you, Miss Challys, to come to such a dismal hole of a place. I've sat up an hour at a time, in my window, crying my eyes out. I told you the day after we came, miss, you could not bear to live here no time. 'Tisn't a place where there's nothing to recommend it. 'Taint country, miss, and it aint town, no more; and when I look out of the window, them old trees, so like the churchyard at Gray Forest, and not a soul stirring, I do really, miss, I cries my eyes red again for downright lowness of spirits."

"I'm coming to the same way of thinking myself, Mersey; I believe I made a mistake when I came here. It's quite true, I hate what they call society, that is, balls and drums, and all that wear and tear, and racket, and fever; but then this is unnecessarily dull; and the fact is, it is so unnaturally quiet that I am growing quite nervous, and I believe a year of it would go very near making me mad."

"La, miss," rejoined Miss Mary Anne Mersey, who had been Laura's maid from Miss Gray's nursery days, and could consequently speak her mind fearlessly, "Of course it will make you mad. It is not natural, nor right, for young people to shut themselves up like that, and you so handsome, miss; a pretty thing with your fortune and all, you should go off into an old maid, with your fancies and vagaries."

Laura laughed, looking at her own pretty face in the glass before which she had seated herself. It seems to me a harmless satisfaction which young ladies seek in that sort of reflection.

"When you see me an old maid, as you shall, you need not trouble yourself about the causes of it, because I have weighed the matter well, and an old maid I’m resolved to be.”

“Well, if I could? But, no, Miss Challys; I don’t believe nothink of the sort. Why should you allow such an ungodly notion into your head?”

“Ungodly — is it? How?” inquired Miss Gray.

“Ungrateful to God, miss, for your wealth, and health, and beauty. Why, miss, it’s only natural you should choose a fine, handsome young gentleman that will love you with all his heart and soul, and be a good husband, and make you a happy wife and a good mother of a family.”

“Oh, Mersey! you suffocate me.”

“There, now, already there’s an uncommon nice young gentleman as ever you need wish to look at — that lovely young man, Mr. Dacres, and he’s rolling in money besides.”

Laura blushed brilliantly, and with flashing eyes said angrily —

“You could not have said a more absurd thing, Mersey, or a more awkward one. I almost think you are possessed. I’m obliged to see Mr. Dacre when he calls for half an hour in the evening. He has most particular business to speak of, and nothing could be more inconvenient than my being obliged to decline the information he is so good as to give me, and that, at any inconvenience, I should unquestionably do, if I thought any such monstrous folly could be talked by anyone upon the subject.”

“And why should you feel like that, Miss Challys? How can you or me stop people talking if they likes it? And where could you see a handsomer or a nicer gentleman? And he has no end of money — and so generous he is. La, Miss Challys, dear. Old maid, indeed! What notions do come in your head, miss!”

“Well, Mersey, if you will talk like a fool I can’t help it. Only I’d rather you talked of anyone but me. We’ll go abroad, and see the world. You shall see such beautiful places — Paris and Rome, and Venice and Switzerland — and if there must be marrying you shall marry, for I wont. What do you say to a French restaurateur or an Italian artist?”

“Many thanks, miss; but I’m no more thinking of taking a husband than other people; and as for them foreigners, I can’t abide the sight of them.”

And as she whisked her handkerchief from her pocket at these hoitytoity words, a letter flew out on the floor. Taking it up she found the address to “Miss Gray, Guildford House.”

“Letter to you, miss, please.”

As she leaned back indolently in her low chair, the young lady received it, almost without looking, in her fingers; and it was not until she held it just under her eyes that she gave herself the trouble of looking at it. Turning pale, she exclaimed —

"My God! where did you get this?"

And, staring at it, she held it tightly pinched in her hand. Mary Anne Mersey was seared by the looks and exclamations of her young mistress.

"It fell out, miss. I think it must have been in my handkerchief — and — I don't know. In my pocket, leastways — and I don't know how in the world it ever has got there."

Miss Laura Gray might well be a little startled, for there, at a glance, she had recognised the broad, firm hand which had grown to her so horrible.

Miss Gray stood up straight. She recognised the evil face of this letter, and her heart sank.

Her maid, with a frown and her lips pursed, was peering curiously in her frightened face.

There was something beside the letter enclosed in the envelope — a small, hard substance. The odd emblem was on the seal as before, and the legend, "Choose which Dart."

She broke the seal, and impatiently plucked out the contents. The enclosure was a ring.

"This is so like my pearl ring!" she said, touching it with her finger, and looking, in her maid's face inquiringly. "When did I wear it last?"

"I thought you had it on now, miss."

"No, no; look there, on the ring-stand."

"It ain't there, miss, and 'tain't on your finger, and that's it, returned in the note. You must have dropped it when you were out, or forgot it on the counter, maybe, in some shop."

Miss Gray took it up and scrutinized it near the candle's flame.

"It *is* my ring — it *certainly* is. How *can* this have happened?"

"Wont the note tell you, miss?"

Miss Gray read it in silence.

"You have sent a fool on his last errand. I enclose you proof that I have been in your house, where for half an hour the sword hung over his head. In and out, up and down your house, like tame cats, we know pretty well what passes there, as you perceive. I have had the pleasure of sending you in succession two little reminders — a locket set with brilliants — and a pearl-hoop ring. On the day after tomorrow I shall have the honour to present you with a larger and more precious packet, containing a suitable memento of a meddler, viz., the right hand of Mr. Alfred Dacre packed in lint.”

“What is the matter with you, miss; you look very bad,” said her maid.

“Nothing, nothing, too late to send a message. What o’clock is it, Mersey?”

“Past ten, miss. Halfpast and three minutes, please.”

“How much? Is it too late? I suppose we had better send tomorrow,” said the young lady, with a puzzled air.

“Too late for what, miss, please?”

“Too late to send for Lord Ardenbroke, or — or for whom? Mr. Mannering — yes — yes — it must wait till morning.”

“What is it, miss, nothing gone wrong, sure?”

“You had better run down and ask Mrs. Wardell, with my love, whether she can come up to me for a moment, or — no — don’t mind. Stay here, please,” she continued, in a suddenly altered voice. “I have, — let me think. Yes — Mary Anne Mersey, you must answer me honestly the questions I shall ask you. I’ll begin at the beginning — let me think! I’m stunned, I believe — — “

Miss Mersey stood bridling a little, and looked from the corners of her eyes, in the young lady’s face, expecting what might come.

CHAPTER XXV.

MARY ANNE MERSEY EXAMINED.

"WHERE did you get this letter, Mary Anne?"

"Where did I get it, Miss? La! It tumbled out of my pocket, when I pulled out my handkerchief."

"Oh, Mersey! How can you fancy I am to be put off so? How did you get possession of that letter? I must know. You know everything about it, and you *shall* tell me the truth."

"But I *don't* know, miss, as I hope to be *saved,* miss, I don't!"

"It's a conspiracy — it's a conspiracy; those that ought to love me best are my betrayers. Oh, Mersey! how could you? Why are you so changed; what have I done; how can you league yourself with such wretches?"

"But, miss, I've done nothing; may I choke if I tell you a lie."

"I'll know what you have done. Yes; you shall tell me everything. Come, Mersey, you had better tell me the truth, or I'll find those who will make you," said the young lady, with a sudden and fierce change of manner.

"I've nothing to tell, so help me!"

"Come, come, speak truth. Who gave you that letter?"

"No one, miss," she replied, with sturdy vehemence.

"Shame! Why you took it from your pocket!"

"No I didn't, miss. I didn't, please. No such thing. When I drew out my handkerchief, the letter was in it, and fell on the carpet, please, which you saw it yourself, miss."

"Then, by fair means, you'll tell me nothing?"

"Fair or foul, miss, I've nothing to tell. I haved sawed nothing but what you have sawed yourself, miss, and I don't care who says it. I know no more about it than you do, miss."

Laura Gray paused, gazing in her face.

"I don't know what to think. I'm half distracted. Mersey, you look honest; you have been always a good girl. I conjure you, don't deceive me; now, tell me all you know about it."

“I do tell you, miss, and it’s nothing. You, have made me ready to cry, you have; you misdoubt me so. It is very hard, it is.”

And Miss Mary Anne Mersey began to whimper into her handkerchief.

“You need not cry, Mersey. It is I who should cry, if anyone cries. But here it’s the fact. Some one in the house has been telling to people outside all that passes among us; our secret conversations, our visitors and their names, our plans; in short, everything. Who can it be? What am I to think? How can you have got this letter into your possession?”

“It must have stuck in my handkerchief, miss, by chance. No one gave it me. I never knew I had it till it fell on the floor, and I’ll make oath to that anywhere you like, miss.”

“It was not in the Postoffice. It has no mark. It must have come by a messengers hand. Some of the servants, then, must have put it into your pocket when you weren’t looking. No, Mersey, it was only for a moment the doubt took possession of me, in this great perplexity. I am sure you would not aid in this cruel annoyance. But there are persons in this house who do, and who betray us to dangerous people outside, and repeat everything that passes among us.”

“I wonder could it have been that fortuneteller; I was just thinking, miss. But she was standing outside, and we looking. I don’t think she could.”

“That did not strike me. They are such thieves, and do such things with so much sleight of hand. I should not wonder if it *were* she. I dare say it was.”

Miss Laura Gray paused, thinking.

“But I think I had seen her, or felt her; I’m sharp enough that way,” said Mary Anne.

“Not so sharp as she though. Those people live by roguery and sleight of hand. The more I think of it, the more likely it seems. Don’t you remember she said that you would find something that would frighten me? Yes; and that some one would be in danger within a short time? It is only a guess though.”

“Yes, your sweetheart, miss,” said Mary Anne Mersey, thoughtfully.

Laura Gray blushed, and turned her eyes angrily on her maid, but there was not a suspicion of slyness; a grave and perfect good faith, on the contrary.

"Well, there *is* a gentleman in danger, though he is nothing whatever of the kind, and if not in danger, actually, at all events, threatened with injury; and as I don't fancy that gipsies are inspired, I believe she must have been told to say those things, and the only persons who could have told her are those who employ themselves in writing these letters — I mean this letter that fell from your handkerchief — don't you see? Well, then, if that is so, all the rest is plain; for the same people who gave her her instructions wrote the letter, perhaps, but it is only conjecture; and is there any use in telling you to keep it secret? Will you promise to tell no one a word of what has passed, for two or three days, until, at least, I give you leave?"

"Not to Mrs. Wardell, miss?"

"Certainly not; but I meant particularly to the servants," said the young lady.

"Oh, no, miss, sure!" said Miss Mersey, so loftily that Laura felt almost moved to beg her pardon for having admitted a suspicion so vulgar.

"Mersey, you must sleep in this room tonight; I am so nervous. I dare say I'm a great fool, but I can't help it; and in the morning, with God's blessing, I shall have advice, and take steps to prevent all this. You know this ring — my pearl-hoop — I did not wear it yesterday?"

"I can't say, Miss; I'm not quite sure."

"Did I the day before?"

"I'm sure you wore it within the last three or four days, but I could not be sure which was the last, miss."

"Very well, Mersey, but you must not say a word of it; it will put people in this house on their guard if you do. That ring was taken out of this house, and has been returned; and it is not the first proof I have had that we are watched, and betrayed."

CHAPTER XXVI.

CHARLES MANNERING'S MISSION.

AT about eleven o'clock next morning, Charles Mannering knocked at the door of Guildford House. He had received an earnest little note, saying,—"If I was cross the other night, pray forgive me. I seriously want your help now. Don't say so to Mr. Gryston, or to any other person. No one is to know that you suspect that anything has gone wrong, or that I want advice but come, and listen to the very odd story I have to tell, and, by doing so, you will help to relieve me of a real anxiety, and possibly save me from a real danger."

He was full of curiosity, and a masculine belief in the trivial nature of this feminine complication. Wondering, too, why he had been directed in a postscript to say nothing about the matter to her cousin, Julia Wardell. Now and then an unpleasant fancy that she might have glided into a romance, and begun to lose her way in its mazes, startled him with a momentary pang.

"A shark — a fortune-hunter, very likely — how could she be so mad? But, after the vows she is fond of repeating, it is hardly credible that she should dream of throwing herself away upon that fellow, of whom she knows absolutely nothing."

In came Charles. He had not seen Laura Gray in the drawingroom window — but as he put off his coat in the hall, she opened the library door, and called him in.

"First of all — we are good friends, you know?" said the young lady.

You may quarrel with me, but I'll not quarrel with you, Challys," said he, looking at her very kindly and gently.

So she put out her hand to him, and there was another greeting, silent, but very friendly — and he said with a smile —

"Well, now, Challys, as we used to say at school, what's the row?"

"Shut the door — sit down there, and I'll tell you. It's a long story, Charles, and I'll begin at the beginning."

And so she did, and Charles listened, and gravely read the documents as she placed them in his hands, but when he came to the last he laughed. She looked with something of surprise and reproof at him — and he laughed the more.

"Well, really this is too good," he exclaimed.

"Too bad, I should have thought."

"You don't mean to say you believe it?" said Charles Mannering.

"Believe what?" she demanded.

"This rubbish."

"What rubbish, sir? Do, pray, Charles Mannering, speak intelligibly, if you mean me — but perhaps you don't — to understand you."

"Can you really believe that you are to receive Mr. Dacre's hand — might it not be better to send his foot, the member he has put in it — made up in paper, and directed to Miss Gray, tomorrow evening? Can you really have brought yourself to believe such a piece of incredible burlesque?"

"The whole thing, up to that, is incredible, and yet it has happened. Here, this locket for one thing. I asked Fleurise and Boyd what it is worth, and they say sixty guineas, and that it must have cost more than a hundred. Is it credible that any one should give away — to a total stranger — sixty guineas? You know it is monstrous. Is it credible, that the names of our visitors, and all my plans — though I scarcely speak them above my breath — should be known to people totally unknown to me — who yet seem resolved, by a kind of torture, to influence my conduct, and are animated by a hatred of that miserable Mr. Guy de Beaumirail, and who have discovered Mr. Dacre's pursuit of them, and threaten to put him out of the way. It is like a dream."

Charles Mannering listened patiently.

"And the night before last, while you were here, there came to the window of this room a wicked-looking little man — and the same little demon I saw just as I reached the drawingroom door, stepping into the hall; I felt, for a moment, as if I should have fainted, and I had the house searched, but there was no one; and only ten minutes later he came to the hall-door, and inquired whether Mr. Dacre was in the house. You see they have a system of spies and messengers — and my pearl ring was taken away, and returned — merely to show that somehow they have access to the house, and that nothing is secure from them. Most unscrupulous they have proved themselves — cunning and savage — and their language is ferocious — and I can’t in the least comprehend their schemes. And now I ask you, in the midst of this odious labyrinth, what am I to think or do?”

She paused, and as he did not tell her, she continued— “What am I to believe? I saw only the other day, in the newspaper, the discovery of a dead body described — supposed, it said, to be that of a French gentleman, who left his lodging about ten days before. See how easy it is to murder without detection, in this great, wicked city — and, this morning, there is an account of some pieces of a human body, part of a foot and ankle — you will see it in the newspaper — tied up in a basket under the seat of a railway carriage, where it was left by some unknown person. And now, with all this, and things like it, continually happening in this vicious city, you say it is incredible that a stranger like Mr. Dacre should be murdered and cut in pieces. I wont argue more about it, it is disgusting, and frightful, and has haunted me all night.”

“Relieve your mind upon that point, however; it was simply said to terrify you. I assure you such a hoax would not have been attempted upon any one but an inexperienced girl like you — the idea of giving you notice! Do you fancy that a murderer meditating such a thing would apprize you beforehand, when you would merely have to send a friend to mention the matter to the police, to have detectives placed all about to secure the examination, and the person, if need be, of every messenger who came to your door.”

“You want to comfort me, Charles; it is very kind; but your argument wont do. I thought of all that. But, suppose a very nice carriage, with servants and all proper appointments, were to drive up to the door, in the afternoon, and a nice old lady to inquire particularly how I was, and leave a card, and also a parcel, would not that pass muster? or, suppose the public carrier should deliver the parcel; or one of my tradespeople, to whose shop it might be brought, should innocently send it here — there are so many ways of doing such a thing, with almost no risk of detection, and people who can deliver a letter like that here, and nobody be able to say how it came, could certainly do what they threaten. The best way, as it strikes me, to prevent their sending, is to apprize Mr. Dacre, who is primarily interested, of their designs.”

"Have you the least idea or suspicion who these people may be?" asked he.

"None; but Mr. Dacre, who knows Mr. de Beaumirail, suspects, notwithstanding the ostentation of hatred assumed by these people, that he may really be implicated in the conspiracy — you men understand one another better than I can — but I don't very clearly see how that is possible."

"Nor I, either. I have been making inquiries about De Beaumirail, and I believe he is very ill indeed. I don't say, from all I hear, that he would have very many scruples about taking a part in a disreputable enterprize, although I don't quite know that he might not; but he is very ill. Gryston told me yesterday that he should not be surprised if he were dead, and buried, in a month."

"Well, well, well, what of that?" said the young lady, impatiently.

"Not much; only this, that being so, I don't see how, in any imaginable way, he could be of the slightest use to these conspirators, as you will give them that lofty title; a parcel of cowardly blackguards, London thieves, and swindlers, I suppose — the first letter written in the character of an Aristides, and the last in the language of an assassin."

"That is not a reassuring view of the matter, Charlie; but something, you know, must be done."

"In any way you please to employ me, you have only to command me," said he.

"Thanks, Charlie; I know that," said she, gravely.

"Well, what shall I do? Shall I go to the police office?" he asked.

"No, pray; that would be a very public step," she said.

"We must take care to secure your house against the impertinences of these people, and I think the best way would be simply to tell the police; and I'll do that, if you'll allow me."

"Well, no; I say I should not like yet, at least. But do you know Miniver's Hotel?"

"Oh, yes; everyone knows that. Do you wish me to go there?"

Yes; you'll go there, and see Mr. Dacre."

"But I haven't the pleasure of Mr. Dacre's acquaintance," he said, a little dryly, as if he did not desire it; "and I don't believe he's in a bit more danger than I am; and — you'll think me a great brute; but it is as well to be frank — I really don't very much care. I don't think I ever saw a fellow in whom I felt less interest."

"Well, you will, I am sure, for my — — " and she paused.

"For your sake! Oh, that's a different thing! for your sake, of course;" he laughed oddly. "You fancy an unseen circle of assassins round him, and I'm to break it for the purpose of warning him of his danger, and so diverting their fire upon me. But what of my unworthy life or person? For your sake, Challys — of course, I should go with pleasure."

"But I didn't say for my sake — you know I didn't," said she.

"You were going to say it, and you know you were," said he. "Come, Challys, you used to love truth, and I wont believe, till you tell me so yourself, that change of place will ever change frank Challys Gray."

"I did not say it, Charlie," she answered; "but it is true I was on the point of saying it; and now I do say it — for my sake you will go there and see him, for he must be communicated with; and as he undertook the search after those people, for my sake, I do ask you, for my sake, to relieve my mind, by apprising him of that which, right or wrong, I cannot help believing may be a real danger."

"Yes, Challys, that form of invocation is, for me, irresistible. I will go; although I could hardly have imposed a more disagreeable duty — not, of course, that I bear him any ill-will, for I don't even know him, but that he is evidently such a — what can I say without giving offence? I was going to say such a prig, but I wont; but he is just the kind of conceited fellow who would meet one with those airs which I confess I can't endure."

"You mistake him very much, I assure you; when you know him a little you will like him extremely," said Miss Laura Challys Gray, with that grave and gentle reserve, which, in jealous minds, excites suspicion.

"Well, what am I to tell him?"

"Tell him all I have related to you, that is, all that has happened since you and he were here to tea, the evening before last; he knows everything up to that."

"Does he? Oh!"

"Yes. I'll tell you some other time how that came about." She blushed. "You need not smile — there is nothing whatever to smile at."

"Nor to blush at?" said he.

“Nor to blush at,” she repeated, with a flash from her fine eyes— “neither to smile nor to blush at. It may strike you as very ridiculous, to me it is a serious anxiety.”

“Now, now, Challys, you must not quarrel with me so soon again.”

“Quarrel? No. You’ll understand it all perfectly, some day — that is, when there are five minutes to tell it in, but now there ain’t. Just tell him you come from me — tell him everything — learn all you can, and return here — Charlie, you are a very a kind fellow,” and she gave him her hand.

So away went Charles Mannering upon his mission.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HE RETURNS.

I DON'T care to analyze the feelings with which he undertook this service for handsome Mr. Dacre. If they were of an unfriendly kind, he was not fool enough to allow his churlish feelings to show themselves in his demeanour. With his usual frank bearing and cheery tones he inquired for Mr. Dacre at Miniver's Hotel.

The hall-porter told him that he had orders to receive letters addressed to Mr. Alfred Dacre, if that was the name, but he did not know whether the gentleman was staying in the house. If he was, it must have been since this morning; and, on inquiry, it turned out that no gentleman of that name was at Miniver's.

"Does he call for his letters, himself?"

"No one has called yet, sir."

"Was it he himself who ordered his letters to be taken in here?"

The hall-porter here inquired of the waiter.

"No, sir, a gentleman known in the house ordered it."

Into the coffee-room went Charles, and wrote this note —

"Miniver's Hotel.

"MY DEAR MR. DACRE,

"Our friends at Guildford House requested me this morning to call, and, if possible, see you, in order to mention some circumstances which I find it impossible to detail in a note; but if you will be good enough to send me a line, to my rooms, at the Temple, No — , —— court, naming any hour this afternoon, after three, I shall be happy to meet you at Miniver's.

"&c. &c."

With the hall-porter he left his letter.

"Have you any idea where Mr. Dacre is at present staying in London?"

"No, sir."

Well, he had honestly done his best, and could return to Laura Gray with a clear conscience. He would have a talk with her, and after luncheon return to town and see whether a note had arrived for him at his chambers, and if this failed, there was nothing for him to reproach himself with — nothing that Miss Gray could censure.

When he reached Guildford House, and walked up under the shadow of the elm boughs, Laura Gray was not among her flowerbeds, nor in the library window — her yesterday's looking out from that window had not been lucky. But, from the drawingroom window, she was already looking out for him. On its pane he heard a tapping, as he approached; on looking up he saw her raising the sash.

He smiled and nodded, but she looked very grave, and beckoning him to quicken his pace, she leaned over the window-stone, and asked— "Any news?"

"No, nothing at present; but, by-and-bye, I shall hear."

"Nothing bad?"

"Nothing; nothing whatever. I'll run up and tell you everything — which, in fact, is just nothing."

As he traversed the hall and mounted the stairs his heart was sore and angry.

"She did not even say, thank you, and she has known me from the time she was beginning to walk and talk, and her head is full of that d —— d fellow, just because he is a little handsome — though, hang me, if I can see it. How capricious and cruel and worthless they are!"

"Well, here I am," he said, cheerfully, as he entered the drawingroom, "about as wise as I went away," and with this preface he told her what had passed. "And now I have told my pointless story. Suppose we come out, the day is so delightful, among your flowers, and sit in that rustic seat there under the shade, and I promise to answer all your questions, if you still have any to put?"

"Come, then; I'll show you how I get; on at my gardening, and you shall admire the flowers; and shall I make a confession? I have grown such a fool, I have been shut up here all day; I have been afraid almost to look out of the window to-day, lest I should see one of those horrible gipsies. I am quite sure that girl brought the letter that came yesterday, and slipt it into Mersey's pocket while she was pretending to tell her fortune, and then she said things that showed a knowledge of what those wicked people intended. I sometimes feel as if she was a witch, and sometimes as if she was a cheat;

and I really am so nervous and ridiculous that you would pity me. But, under your protection, I think I may venture.”

So, without waiting to get her hat, down she ran, and led the way to the steps, and together they descended to the shorn grass, and the brilliant flowers.

With a childish eagerness and volatility she talked over the perfections of her flowers, her plans and operations, and, for a time, her whole soul was wrapped up in these themes.

“I’m a good listener, Laura, don’t you allow?”

“Yes, very good.”

“A man, as a rule, I think, is a better listener than a woman,” said he.

“Does not that depend on the subject a good deal?” said she.

“Well, I grant you, the fashions, the scandals — — “

“Don’t be impertinent.”

“I believe I was very near being impertinent, for I was thinking of speaking the truth.”

“Now, come, do be civil; it is a charming day, and here are we among the flowers, and I disposed to be perfectly polite, and what on earth happiness can there be in simply spoiling a tolerable half-hour by wanton incivility, I can’t understand.”

“But it is not wanton incivility — it has a purpose — I’m coming to my point.”

“0h! Then it is in cold blood?”

“Quite — and very harmless, as you’ll see. I have observed, that on a tolerably interesting subject a man will listen a great deal better than a woman, as a *rule*; but when a woman listens to such yarns, it is because, though the talk can’t interest her, the talker does.”

“Well, I’m interested by the talk at present; pray go on.”

“I’m quite sure it is not by the talker,” he said with a laugh, which didn’t quite conceal his pique; “but I was going to say, the other night, when I drank tea here, when that interesting young gentleman, Mr. Dacre, whose hands are expected here this evening, made up, I believe, in parcels, was entertaining you near the drawingroom window, although I could swear there was not a word of sense in all he said — I never saw a human being so engrossed by language as Miss Challys Gray was by his.”

"Oh, really! It is so good of you, I'm sure, to interest yourself in these things; but, somehow, I can't feel at all obliged, as I suppose I ought, and if you fancy that I'm going to account to you for everything I say or do, you'll find yourself very much mistaken." She had blushed brilliantly and was vexed. "And if you wish that we should continue friends, you'll not repeat the attempt," Miss Challys continued, spiritedly.

"I do wish that we should continue friends, Challys — real friends, and that can only be on a footing of perfect frankness. You resent my assuming the airs of an adviser — I don't dream of taking that character upon myself, except as you invite, or at least, permit it; but you are very young, and Mrs. Wardell is, in some respects, as easily duped as a child, and cannot, therefore, be relied upon to warn you of the kind of danger to which an heiress, so young and charming as you, is exposed, when left so much to herself."

"You seem to fancy me a fool — you always talk in that tone," complained Laura.

"If I ever talk in that tone, it is when I am vexed, and I myself foolish. It is because I honestly think you so clever, that I think it is a pity you should not be reminded of those facts and omissions, on which you are so capable of forming a sound judgment. Now, I only ask, and that

"Do you understand the signs of those clouds? I wonder what kind of weather we are going to have."

"Not, weatherwise, Challys — no," he answered, with a sigh, and a smile, and a little shake of the head, as they walked towards the steps; "not weatherwise — in *any* way."

VOLUME II.

CHAPTER I.

A KNOCKING AT THE DOOR.

WHEN Charles Mannering reached his rooms at the Temple, it was nearly three o'clock. In his letter-box was a note in that pretty, but not unmanly hand which Miss Laura Gray had seen and admired also. "A. D." in the corner of the envelope indicated the writer, who said –

"DEAR MR MANNERING, — Thank you so much, for your note, which has just reached me. I am at this moment so engaged — I fancy upon the subject of your message — that it is out of my power to name an hour for a meeting. Sometime to-day, however, I certainly shall call at your rooms, in the Temple, on the chance of finding you there.

Believe me, yours very truly,

"ALFRED DACRE."

"If he thinks I'm going to wait here all day for him, he flatters himself," said Charles, throwing the note on the table. "That sort of fellow gets so spoiled by women — they are such fools — that they think they may do as they please with us."

And he laughed scornfully, and took his hat and umbrella and walked down the stairs again, and went off to his club.

It was all done in a spirit of defiance to this admirable Mr. Dacre, who assumed that Charles Mannering would wait for him, and was to learn that he was to wait on Charles Mannering.

He did not go again to his rooms till eight o'clock, although, if the truth were confessed, he was a little curious, and would have liked very well to hear what Dacre had to say, if only he could have managed to snub him a little at the same time.

Up the silent stairs, and into his lonely room, by his latchkey, went he. The papers he expected were on his table, some letters also, but no note in the hand with which he was now acquainted, with "A. D." in the corner of the envelope.

So he had called, and tried to get in, and was, no doubt, surprised to discover that Charles Mannering had taken such a liberty as to go out, without having made provision for his reception.

Charles smiled faintly with a grim satisfaction as he pictured to himself the incredulous mortification of this conceited young gentleman, when he found himself obliged to turn about on the lobby, and go downstairs as he came up.

So he sat down in his easy-chair, with his candles, and not till an hour later was startled from the study of his papers, in which he was now deep, by a knocking at his door.

On opening it he saw, standing in the moonlight admitted by the lobby window, a gentleman in a loose coat and a felt hat, whom he had no difficulty in recognising as Mr. Dacre.

Oh, Mr. Mannering!" he said, raising his hat, and his handsome features smiling in the moonlight, looked as if they were fashioned of ivory.

"Pray come in. I hope you did not call while I was out? I should have waited here, but business compelled me to go out for a time," said Charles Mannering, surprised into politeness and I fear a momentary disregard of truth.

"Thank you. No, I did not call — in fact I could not — until now. So fortunate to have met you."

As he now stood, in the light of the room, face to face, Charles Mannering confessed to himself, with a twinge of chagrin, what a very handsome fellow Dacre unquestionably was.

"You were so good as to say you would give me some information when we met," said Dacre after they had talked a little. "The subject of course is — — "

"The anonymous correspondence with which Miss Gray has been so shamefully annoyed. It's a mere burlesque, but it is not less an annoyance." And he went on to recount all that Miss Gray had related, and particularly the threat of sending her Mr. Dacre's hand, at which Charles laughed heartily, and the handsome Mr. Dacre laughed also, but not so comfortably, looking at his slender hand and wrist, which he moved under his eye, as if measuring in his mind whereabouts the line of amputation would be traced.

"Very laughable, but very curious; I'll tell you how just now," said he. "But I hope, so much Miss Gray does not mind it."

"The whole thing worries and frightens her. I don't think she believes all that; but she is nervous and uncomfortable."

"It can't be otherwise," said Dacre; "and I'm afraid she suffers even more than she need."

"I'm thinking of applying to the police about it," said Charles Mannering.

Dacre shrugged —

"I can't help it if you do; but the whole thing falls through-mind, I tell you that, and I know more about it than I did yesterday. It would be the greatest pity in life to let those miscreants off."

"You seem to think rather seriously of it," said Charles.

"I have reason," said Dacre, with a faint smile. "You are advising Miss Gray in this miserable business?" he asked gently but suddenly.

"I can hardly say advising, because it seems to me that for the present she has made up her mind to do nothing. I undertook her little message to you, in Lord Ardenbroke's absence — as a friend of yours he would have naturally undertaken it."

"He is out of town, then?"

"Yes — likely to remain away for some weeks," said Charles Mannering.

"Yes; Ardenbroke and I were very intimate long ago. He knows everything about, me. We Dacres are a scattered family. You are aware that this little visit of mine to London is made under peculiar circumstances. I'm under a condition which embarrasses me extremely. I undertook it entirely to oblige other people; but it prevents my putting myself in the way of recognition. My little mission — a labour of love — would be spoiled entirely if I declared myself, As it has turned out, I am sorry I accepted the condition. If I were in a position to avow myself, I would act with infinitely more decision — infinitely; but without what would now amount to cruelty to, others — a terrible disappointment in fact, and something amounting, after all the trouble I've submitted to, and the condition of reserve, to *ridicule,* as respects myself — I hope in a week, certainly in a fortnight, it will be at an end, and then you will quite understand; you will see clearly how I was circumstanced. No one was ever by nature so little qualified to maintain a mystery, and I assure you it is the most irksome thing I ever undertook. I did not think it would have lasted a week altogether, and I find myself already a fortnight under my incognito, and likely to continue so for as much longer. If I were relieved of it, I could be of very great and immediate use."

"It's a great pity you can't," said Charles.

"Yes," said Dacre, "but apart from cruelty, to declare myself at this moment would make me ridiculous, and of course I could not think of doing it — Honour — yes, honour — God bless it — we all respect and wish it well; but honour, as you'll see in a few days, has nothing to do with this question of 'reserve or no reserve;' to declare myself has nothing to do with honour, but it would have a very distinct connexion with absurdity, and that fantastic spirit, ridicule, is the scourge of mankind. There are degrees, you know. Honour stands high; we sacrifice our lives to honour, but honour sometimes to fortune, and fortune itself at times to ridicule. Ridicule, therefore, sits supreme: no thunder so stunning as its titter, no tropical lightning like the half-hidden gleam of its eye, no crashing hurricane like its whisper. You've found it so, and so did I, and so does all the world. Pray forgive my interruption — talking nonsense while weighty matters call you away — — " he glanced at the papers on the table, "so, with many apologies, I'll say goodnight."

With a smile he was about to turn to the door, but Charles Mannering interposed —

"Pray, one word more. You used the phrase curious; you said that this affair was very curious, you recollect, and you were good enough to say you would tell me how by-and-by."

"Oh? a little curious naturally yourself."

Mr. Dacre smiled, and returned a step or two to the table.

CHAPTER II.

ONE — TWO — THREE.

"YES," continued Mr. Dacre, "I'll tell you why I said it was curious. It was *apropos* of that part of your story which recounted the threat in the letter, which promised to send, as a present to Miss Gray, my poor hand, made up in lint. It is highly melodramatic, and even comical; but it is also curious, because I was fired at last night."

"Fired at? Really! Are you serious?"

"Quite serious, although, perhaps, the subject is a little ridiculous; because I do believe if they had shot me, from what I have reason to know of them, if they are the villains I suspect, this hand of mine would have been left at the door of Guildford House, precisely as they promised, this evening."

Surely you have taken some steps — I should certainly acquaint the police," said Charles, incredulous, but still a good deal shocked.

"Very kind of you, but it is already done — there is no objection to that. They don't know that I connect them with the attempt. What I must conceal is the fact that I have got a clue by which I may yet reach them with certainty."

"How was this attempt made, Mr. Dacre — where did it happen?"

"I'll tell you. Do you know a road near Islington, where they are building a church or a meeting-house — a large place of worship, with three great trees growing in a clump beside it? There is a dead wall opposite, and a portion of the building has hardly risen above the foundations. I had driven to a place called Duckley-row, close to that, to see an accountant on business for a few minutes. As I got out of my cab, I saw some one get out of another, on the other side of the street, and he walked slowly up and down as if looking for a particular house. That is all I recollect of him. He was so employed when I went into Mr. Edgecombe's house."

"You did not see him fire at you?"

"I could not say whether it was he. I have only that unreasoning, intuitive belief, on which all my life I have so much relied, that it was the same man, that he was there watching me, and that he waited for, followed, and fired at me when I came out."

"How did it happen, exactly?"

"The road in front of the building I've mentioned is very much cut up, with very deep ruts, so I told the driver to take his cab down and wait for me about fifty yards beyond it, where the trees are. As I reached the front of the building I was fired at, and a bullet struck the road a few yards before me. I turned about and saw the flash of a second shot which passed over my shoulder, close by my head."

"How far away?"

"I should say about five-and-thirty yards. The shot came from the field close by the road, and over the fence, and that part of the road was in deep shadow. I was going on at a good pace, and picking my steps, zig-zag, and this it was, I think, that saved me."

"It could not have been a pistol at that distance," said Charles.

"Quite too far, too much force, too loud a report, and a devilish stinging whistle by my ear. No one but a mug would have tried a pistol at that distance. I had one then, I have one now" — he lifted a revolver from his coat pocket— "but I did not think of using it at thirty yards. I ran back to have my chance at close quarters, but he had run for it, and so I returned with my hand in my pocket, and not in that of Miss Gray's correspondent. Will you kindly tell Miss Gray that I have better hopes than ever of bringing those villains to justice, or at least to submission; and I really must say good night at last; good night."

Charles Mannering accompanied him to the door, holding a candle.

"Don't mind, pray don't, " said he.

But Charles was determined to be polite, and he saw, leaning with his back to the wall, a small man with a loose black wrapper about him, and a low-crowned felt hat. He seemed to have been waiting for Mr. Dacre, and he had taken up a position on the lobby between his door and the descending flight of stairs.

"More than fifteen minutes waiting; you said 'twouldn't be five," said this figure, snarling with something of the peculiar intonation of the Jewish race.

Charles thought he saw Mr. Dacre make a slight gesture of caution, but his back was turned and he was moving towards this discontented person, while at the same time Mr. Dacre said quietly, “That’s right — a cab waiting? Do you get on and see.”

The little man in the black wrapper, Charles felt, looked at him from under the leaf of his broad hat, before running downstairs, which he did without saying another word. He thought this person was affecting to be a servant, a character which Dacre seemed to put upon him, and so, he first and Dacre following, they went down the stairs. Charles Mannering stept to the window on the lobby, and looking out saw these two persons walking side by side, as it seemed in confidential talk, toward the Temple-bar entrance of this series of quadrangles. He made up his mind to join them, got his hat in a moment, and shutting the door, ran downstairs. Here was, perhaps, some light to be had upon the right reading of Mr. Dacre’s mystery. He would go boldly up and join him, he did not care a farthing what he thought. He owed a duty to his cousin — second or third we must allow, but still his kinswoman — Miss Laura Gray, and every material for conjecture was valuable.

They must have quickened their pace very much, however, for they had already got out of sight. Following the direction they had taken, on entering the next square, he saw *three* persons walking rapidly into that which lay beyond it. In two of these he thought he recognised Dacre and the little man in the loose black coat; but they had got round the corner too quickly, and were too far away for certainty.

Charles had got into the spirit of the chase, and — shall I tell it? — he actually ran a part of the diagonal distance in hopes of overtaking them. He was saved from an awkward success, however, by the speed with which the shorter distance was traversed by these three persons, and he got in time to the lamp near Temple-bar to see a cab door shut, and Dacre, from the window, smiling a farewell to him, and his hand waving as it drove away. He would have liked to pursue, but there was no cab at hand, and a moment after he bethought him how unwarrantable and even outrageous his pursuit would have been, and returned to his rooms, recovered from his momentary intoxication, and very well pleased that he had failed.

CHAPTER III.

AN INVALID.

DACRE sat back in the cab, the sole of one foot on the, edge of the opposite cushion. The little man in the black wrapper sat beside him, and opposite that unknown person sat a burly gentleman, with broad shoulders and a florid face, and an expression of sly self-confidence.

It was the pleasure of Mr. Dacre to be silent, and these gentlemen, as in the presence of one of superior rank, when they spoke together, did so in an under tone, advancing their heads.

At last Mr. Dacre, no doubt amused by his ruminations, burst into a sarcastic laugh, which having indulged without vouchsafing any explanation to his companions, who seemed to count for next to nothing, he relapsed into silence.

This silence lasted till they had nearly reached St. Paul’s Churchyard, when Mr. Dacre produced a cigarette, and with a laconic “Light, please,” procured from the little person beside him that necessary appliance.

The cigarette did not last long, and when it was expended he looked, for the first time, out of the window.

“Is it far to this house?” he asked of anyone who might please to answer.

“Quite near,” said the little man at his elbow.

He continued to look listlessly from the window, humming an air. They had turned up, to the left, a street near Cheapside.

“If it’s much further, you may go on, gentlemen, if you like, but I shall leave you and go home.”

The cab drew up, however, almost as he spoke.

“This is it — here’s the house,” which he pronounced *oushe*.

“You’d better go and try whether he can see us,” said Dacre, in the same careless, haughty way.

Out got the little man; the door was already open, and he asked the dowdy maid who stood by it —

“How is Mr. Gillespie tonight?”

“Poorly, sir.”

"Well enough to see us, do you think — two gentlemen with me — expecting us — eh?"

"Didn't hear, sir."

"You know me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'll go up and ask him how he does."

He went to the cab window first.

"She says he's ailing," said the little man at the window. "Shall I run up and see?"

"Are you sure it's only gout?"

"That's the ticket — gout it is."

"Well, tell him he'd better see me *now,* for I'm hanged if I come here again."

And Mr. Dacre leaned back again in his cab, and waited silently for the return of the little gentleman in the black wrapper.

"He'll do himself that honour," said the little man, in a tone of ceremonious banter, himself opening the cab-door for Mr. Dacre, who jumped out and ran up the steps, followed by the gentleman in black, and the athletic gentleman with the florid face and broad shoulders.

"He says two of us is as much as he can stand," said the little man to the sly philanthropist, who thereupon nodded, and disengaging a short pipe from his pocket, enjoyed a smoke before the steps.

The little gentleman in black being more at home than his companion, led Mr. Dacre upstairs, and knocking at the drawingroom door, introduced him.

Mr. Gillespie was seated in an easy-chair, with his hand in flannel, and a table with several phials and a tablespoon, with a drop of some undesirable fluid drying in its hollow.

The invalid was that gentleman with a long, square head and white hair whom we saw before in the same box with Mr. Dacre at the opera.

"Can't get up, sir, to receive ye — laid here, sir — in tether — gout — nae respecter o' persons — ye'll excuse me."

"I'd rather you didn't under any circumstances. I hate a fuss," said Dacre, taking a chair. "I shouldn't think of treating you with any ceremony."

"Ye'r right, sir, ye'r verra right — we'll go straight to the point, sir — each wi' other — and what for no?" said the old gentleman drily, with a little wag of his head. “Ye might a fetched lawyer Larkin here, too, for ’twas after his pipe the jig began. I’d a liked verra well to see him here.”

“I think there are quite enough here as it is,” said Mr. Dacre, “unless, as Mr. Larkin is so religious, you might have enjoyed his conversation in your present invalided state.”

“Never you fash your beard a-bout that,” said Mr. Gillespie, who, in his sick-room and gouty collapse, was talking in the broad Scotch of his early days. “I’ll do weel enough. I had enough and mair o’ that sort o’ clavering in my young days, in Glasgow, to last me the leave o’ my years — d — them! I tell ye, sir, there’s mair hypocrisy and downright wickedness comes o’ their cant and rant, and Sabbath rules, than is to be found in the same compass in a’ the world beside. But there’s not much amiss wi’ me. Ye’r not to suppose I’m coming out o’ this feet foremost. I’ll be all right again, mon, in nae time, — only a touch o’ the gout — deil gae wi’t.”

“Now, Mr. Gillespie, you give me the paper,” said Dacre. “It’s growing late.”

“H’m! Well, I’ve been thinking o’ that,” said the invalid.

“So have I,” said Mr. Dacre.

“And it’s all settled,” interposed the little gentleman in black, with a surly and pallid face, and prominent dark eyes.

“An’ what for no? Why deil flee awa’ wi’ ye, mon, d’ye think, loss or no loss, I’d think o’ backing out o’ my bargain; na, na, Mr. L. But this I say, sir, it’s a very great confidence and a trust I would na’ think o’ placing if ‘twere na’ for the undoubted respectabeelity o’ the party; ye ha’ known me a long time, sir, and I think yell say I’ve been of use to you on occasion.”

“You let me and Ardenbroke — I wonder he didn’t recognise you the other evening — into two or three very profitable speculations.”

The invalid chuckled cynically at these words, looking at the label of his medicine bottle, which he turned slowly about in his fingers.

“Ye’ll be meaning that Hotel thing, and that silver mine; well, that’s a gude wheen years bygane,” said he, turning on a sudden a little angrily on the young gentleman, and fixing his shrewd and grim eyes from under their white penthouse upon the young man, while he still held the phial up between his finger and thumb.

Mr. Gillespie had a temper which he was now rich enough, on occasion, to indulge.

“Why, if ye play at bowls, you’ll meet with rubbers,” interposed the little man hastily. “My governor was in that himself and got out of it bad enough, and it’s more than ten ago.”

“Ten years or twa, it don’t matter, we’ve heard o’er much o’ that; folk must creep before they gang; every man must win his ain experience, sir; wise men could not pick up money if there were no fules to throw it about. I always said, a mon must use his brains, and what’s their proper object but the fules that Providence throws in his way? Dang me, sir, life’s a game like ony ither; if I leave a blot, and the dice serve, ye’ll hit it, and what for no? And if ye do the same — I’m talking too much; this ‘ill not serve my hand.”

“No, nor your head. Can’t you let a thing pass?” urged Mr. Levi.

“It’s all right enough,” said Mr. Gillespie, looking at his large gold watch which lay upon the table. “It’s time I should have them drops; I’ll ask you for them, Mr. L.; will ye measure two o’ they spoonfuls into that glass? — and — we’ll let byganes be byganes, sir, and I drink to ye,” he added, facetiously, with a nod to Mr. Dacre.

“And now that you are at leisure, Mr. Gillespie, we’ll exchange papers, please, and I shall go.”

The old gentleman signed to Levi, who seemed familiar with the arrangements of his room, to bring him his desk.

“Tis not one man in a thousand I’d do it for,” muttered Gillespie, as he handed it to Mr. Dacre, who placed it beside a counterpart which he took from his coat pocket. The writing was very short; the comparison hardly lasted two minutes, and be signed one which he handed to Mr. Gillespie, and placed in his pocket the other bearing that gentleman’s signature, and some other signatures beside.

“Good night, sir,” said Mr. Dacre, walking out of the room, followed by Mr. Levi.

When they reached the landing Mr. Dacre paused. The hall-door was half open, and they could see the companion they had left outside, walking to and fro beside the cab, smoking.

“I’ve a mind to drive out to Brompton. We don’t want that great, hulking fellow any more; we’ll send him off — eh?”

He glanced at his watch.

“Hallo! later than I thought — no, I shan’t mind,” and Dacre jumped into the cab.

CHAPTER IV.

A CONFERENCE.

WHILE Dacre was resolving, for reasons of his own, against visiting Guildford House for some time longer, Charles Mannering was making his way there in a cab.

It was ten o'clock when he ran up the stairs to the drawingroom. The ladies had already gone to their rooms, and he found the servant on the point of putting out the candles.

Will you tell Miss Gray's maid, please, that I have come, and that I should be glad to know whether Miss Gray would prefer seeing me now, or would rather wait to hear my news till I come in the morning?"

Before another minute had passed Miss Gray was in the drawingroom, and, after a hasty greeting, he related his interview with Dacre. The incident which involved an attack upon his life, however, he postponed telling. Perhaps he thought it might alarm her; perhaps he did not care, without sifting evidence a little more, unduly to elevate her hero.

Your friend, Mr. Dacre, puzzles me," said Charles. "I don't exactly know what to make of him."

"I don't understand your difficulty," answered she.

"I don't quite understand it myself," he replied. "The fact is, it has been culminating. All along there has seemed to me something more enigmatical about him than is accountable by a mere temporary secrecy."

"Yes, of course there is, because we don't know the causes and conditions of his concealment."

"It is something more — it is something quite indefinable in his manner, but which at times strikes one with a chill of suspicion. I felt it the very first time I saw him, as I looked at him through my glass while he talked with Ardenbroke, and afterwards to that old gray-headed man at the opera, and I felt it again tonight."

His eyes met Laura's as he said this pale, with an odd smile, her eyes were fixed upon him with a painful inquiry; had she experienced the same repulsion mingling with as mysterious a fascination?

"One always does connect the idea of insecurity with secrecy," she said, averting her eyes. "But is not that very unjust — obviously unfair? It must be so, if secrecy can ever be justifiable."

"Yes, so it would appear; yet there seem to be certain ambiguities with which nature or providence, call the power how we may, has associated in our imaginations the idea of what is deadly and perfidious."

"Yes, in our imaginations; but we must not be governed altogether by that faculty," said the young lady.

"I fancied it your favourite faculty!"

"How so?"

"Why, you profess yourself a creature, not of reason, but of instinct, and the imagination is the seat of instinct."

You are growing too metaphysical for me — a great deal. Justice is one of our instincts, and justice says very plainly that it would be wrong to condemn any one simply because he chose to be private and unobserved."

Charles Mannering laughed, but there was some little tinge of reproach in the tone in which he said —

"I wonder, Challys, whether, under any circumstances, you would take the trouble to plead my cause as well?"

"Come, Charley, I wont have this. You have been very sensible up to this; why should you on a sudden break down so lamentably, and insinuate that I, the most honest friend in the world, am not reliable? If you say another word of the kind, I have done with you. But have you no better reason for your misgivings about Mr. Dacre? It seems almost a perfidy to ask it, but you and I have known one another so long, and so well."

"He laughed again a little sadly, and said he —

It appears odd to me that he should give as his address a place where he does not live; that he should defer his visit to me until the hour at which he usually calls here, although his excuse for coming here so late is, that his business keeps him in the country to that hour; and he told you, you say, that he had abandoned that business for the present, in order to devote himself to the prosecution of this affair. Then, when I came to the door of my chambers, to let him out, there was a companion — a very odd-looking person — waiting on the lobby for him, and I detected a sort of signalling from Dacre, I fancied, to warn that person that he was overheard, and in fact it struck me so oddly that I followed him downstairs, and I found that in the next court they were joined by a third person, and they walked on abreast so rapidly that I could not overtake them, but as I reached the street Dacre from a cab window nodded and smiled to me, and they drove away together."

"I can see nothing in all that at all inconsistent with his representations."

"There is no such conflict of course as would hang him — no actual conflict; but I could not doubt that the persons who joined him were not gentlemen, and there is, I think, a kind of shock in discovering that sort of association; and all I know is, that the whole thing has left on my mind a most uncomfortable uncertainly."

It is not pleasant, in such an anxiety as I am, to have one's uncertainties aggravated, and I do think wantonly," said Miss Laura Gray, very unreasonably. "And Mr. Dacre is just the kind of person — we can't be blind to the fact that he is unusually elegant and graceful — to make others who happen to be placed beside him look very much more the reverse than they really are; and I don't think there is anything worth a thought in all this; and it does not even make me feel the least uncomfortable, which perhaps is disappointing."

Miss Challys Gray was very near kindling into one of her indignations.

Charles smiled and shook his head a little looking almost sad on her pretty face.

"You smile; you're very odd, certainly," mused Miss Gray, passionately; "just because you see me very much in earnest, I wonder what pleasure you can find in trying to make me believe you, think me a fool?"

"No, I've told you a thousand times, I think you very clever, on the contrary; if you repeat the accusation I'll say you do so only to make me repeat my poor testimony. If I smile, Challys, it is partly at your character, which also I admire, and partly at my own folly, which I deplore, but cannot cure; and so, having detained you too long, I'll say good night."

"You'll come again in the morning — wont you?"

"Yes, certainly; I'm always quite at your command; it is one of my happiest hours that is spent in executing your commissions — so never spare me."

"A thousand thanks, Charlie, you're so goodnatured. Then I will say goodnight now; and you'll not forget us in the morning?"

So they parted. She heard him get into his cab, and drive away. She raised the window and looked out, and round and down the once more silent avenue.

She sighed as she drew back her pretty head.

“Poor Charlie! he’s sometimes so high-flown; he talks of his folly, and thinks himself so wise, and he’s such a good creature.”

She looked up at the stars and smiled and looked somehow oddly pleased, and then, with a little sigh, she turned away and ran up the stairs.

CHAPTER V.

A DRAWINGROOM CONTROVERSY.

"I DON'T think there is anything worth a thought in all this, and it does not even make me the least uncomfortable," Miss Challys Gray had said; but she had spoken in her haste; it did make her uncomfortable, and *that* it was, perhaps, which had vexed her.

In the morning, however, came a pleasant note from Mr. Dacre. It was expressed in these terms: —

"MY DEAR MISS GRAY, — I have every hope that I shall have very important news to tell you when I have next the pleasure of seeing you. I don't yet comprehend the plot, but I can already identify, I think, at least some of the plotters. Such a gang of wretches! I have been compelled to make some extremely odd acquaintances, and to revive a not very desirable old one, in the course of my inquisition. From one I have just extracted a note, which I shall ultimately use as an instrument to compel a complete confession, and thus bring the conspiracy to its knees. I saw your friend Mr. Mannering, yesterday evening, at his chambers, but had nothing very particular to tell, except my ugly little adventure at Islington, which, perhaps, he related to you. After I had obtained my first success yesterday evening, with the paper in my pocket by which I hope to carry my point, I had just made up my mind — but changed it on good grounds — to run out to Guildford House, and, late as it was, to implore a few minutes; but it was too late, and there were other reasons, as I have said, for delay.

"Believe me, my dear Miss Gray,
Ever yours very truly,
"ALFRED DACRE."

When Charles came that day as he had promised, she did not care to show him this note. She simply told him that she had received a line which explained everything, and related how.

"But," she said "he mentions an adventure which happened to him at Islington. What was it?"

Charles Mannering was a little put out; but he rallied, and told the story.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed with a gasp when he had done. "And how did you come not to tell me all that before?"

"I can't exactly say; but two reasons, I am sure contributed. In the first place, I suspect there is exaggeration or mistake; and, in the next, I see no possible good in frightening you by such a story, whether true or false. Of course, it tends to make Mr. Dacre, more interesting, and that is motive enough for him; but I am certain that any one who cares for you will say I acted kindly, as I think Mr. Dacre would have done, in allowing that story to continue untold for a little longer.

"I don't agree with you," she said; "I ought to have heard it. There is no room for mistake about such a thing, nor for exaggeration, that I can see; either it happened or it didn't; of course, it is easy for any one to tell wilful untruths; and I don't suspect him of that, any more than you do, I know; but you don't like him."

"I don't like people I know nothing about — that's very true," acquiesced Charles.

"You know quite well what I mean: I mean, you hate him," she said.

"No," he laughed. "No, I assure you, I don't hate him; but I think he's made too much of. I think he has been allowed to thrust or to insinuate himself into a position to which, I think, he has no earthly claim."

Miss Laura Gray smiled a little disdainfully, and turned away to her flowers in the window.

Charles, of course, saw that smile, understood its meaning perfectly, and winced under it.

"I don't think any unworthy motive has helped me to my opinion of Mr. Dacre. I don't hate him, and I don't like him. I think, I may say, I *dis*like him."

Hereupon Miss Gray raised her pretty eyebrows a little, turning towards him with a smile, and made him the faintest little courtesy in the world, and then smiled diligently at her flowers; and he could only see her long eyelash as she looked down at them, rearranging them with her delicate fingers in the tall, old china vases in which we see them painted in dark Dutch pictures.

"Yes, I think I may say, I dislike him," continued Charles, defiantly, but coolly. "I am certain he is conceited; his countenance inspires no confidence. I fancy him giddy, selfish, and violent — you like instinct, and I am giving it to you — I fancy him all that; and I think him quite capable of telling fibs, or selling a friend a bad horse at a good price, or anything else of the kind."

"But is not that merely supposing him a man?" suggested Miss Gray.

Without noticing, however, this query, Charles Mannering went on with his confession.

"I don't say it's charitable; but there are a great many opinions that are neither charitable nor *un*charitable — that are, in fact, simply just. Ardenbroke knows him, I dare say, and even likes him in a kind of way, as he must do a great many agreeable fellows of the same kind; but that means, as a clever girl like you must suppose, and as every man knows, very little indeed. I say there is something in him that inspires distrust. I don't like him; on the contrary, I dislike him, and I am quite determined I'll make out everything about him."

"That will task your ingenuity, wont it?" she said gently. "I am rather curious myself; but I don't expect to hear till he chooses."

"Which may be never," said Charles. "I shan't wait."

"I don't object," said Miss Gray; "only let us be quite distinct on this point. Remember, I have nothing whatever to do with it. I am quite satisfied; in fact, I should think myself extremely impertinent, to say nothing worse, if I were to engage in any such inquiry respecting a person who has been so kind, and who is, after all, a mere acquaintance, and whom I know to be a friend of Ardenbroke's."

"I'm glad you have no objection."

"I can have no objection to your doing anything you please, on your own account, provided it does not affect me," said Miss Gray.

"He says he has a taste for being a detective. I don't say I have quite that, but, I dare say, when occasion requires, I can be just as sharp as he. My inquiries shall be made in a direct and fearless way. I shan't act like a detective — that is not usual — but I'll learn something about him, and if no one knows such a person I shall make my own inferences."

"Take care, Charlie, for he has been living abroad, and people are duellists there still."

"You laugh at me as if you thought I wasn't in earnest. I promise you I'll bring you news of him."

“Very good — only again remember I did not send you. In fact, I don’t see any reasonable ground for pursuing him with inquiries, and there are many obvious reasons against doing so; and I still think it was very odd your not telling me a word of that really frightful adventure at Islington.”

“I am sorry my reasons didn’t satisfy you — a cracker or a sixpenny cannon very likely — but we can’t, in the present state of evidence, agree on a single point about this interesting person. When a little more light comes perhaps we shall.”

“Perhaps so,” said Miss Gray.

He fancied, I think, that he had alarmed her by threatening inquiry, but she was really amused, for I think she suspected a motive.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SYNAGOGUE.

MR. DACRE did not come that night, nor his “hand,” as Charles Mannering learned on making polite inquiry about the promised parcel, nor any word or sign to show people at Guildford House that he was living. No note reached Charles Mannering’s chambers — no call was made there by the object of his suspicions.

But on the day following an odd little note reached Challys Gray from her persistent correspondent, Mr. Dacre. It said: —

“MY DEAR MISS GRAY, — Don’t be alarmed, neither suppose that you shall have any trouble whatever in consequence, but you must aid me in identifying a malefactor! an opportunity occurs tomorrow (Friday). You, who enjoy good music, have you never heard the Jewish service performed at the synagogue in Mortlake-street, in the City? On that evening, pray attend at a quarter-past eight o’clock. I enclose a note, which will secure a good place for you and Mrs. Wardell. You will be placed in the gallery near the stair at the great entrance. At the opposite end of the building will be, in a railed enclosure, in what I shall call the aisle, five singers, who will walk after an officer of the synagogue to the eastern end during the course of the service, and back again. Of these, two will be tenors. You will have an opportunity of observing their faces. Do so, and kindly tell me if anything very particular strikes you in either. Unless something quite unforeseen should happen I shall be there myself, and hope for a word at your carriage window before you leave. Pray do not fail. Your going there will decide a point which at present perplexes me. Everything waits upon it. Pray do not refuse. The worst that can befall you is to hear some fine music without effecting anything more important. On the other hand, you may throw a flood of light upon the darkness that baffles me.

“Confiding in your good sense and spirit, I am sure you will make the effort. I have the honour of knowing those attributes too well to doubt it. If I write too boldly pray attribute my rashness to my zeal, and forgive me. Believe me, my dear Miss Gray, ever yours most truly,

"ALFRED DACRE.

"P.S. — I forgot to say the gallery is exclusively for ladies."

Here, then, was an adventure. Her drive she had daily. Shopping and all that. Intolerably dull the routine had become. But this excursion was something quite new. To penetrate the City; to sit in a Jewish synagogue and hear their worship and their chanting; and all with a purpose so strange, and even interesting, was quite charming; so thought Miss Gray, and perhaps the thought of that word at the carriage window, and the great eyes of her *preux chevalier* looking in, contributed something to the interest of the anticipation. She ran into the drawingroom where Mrs. Wardell sat, and, said she —

"Julia, I am going, to introduce you to a, new religion."

"What on earth does the mad-cap mean?" exclaimed the old lady, laying down her crochet, and raising her spectacles.

"Yes, you and I shall be Jewesses, and I've made up my mind we shall be received in the synagogue tomorrow."

There was a silence, during which Julia Wardell gazed in her grave, handsome face.

"Oh! come, come, my dear! religion's no subject for joking."

She remembered some flighty ideas which Laura had picked up out of books, and for which she bad been taken to task by the curate at Gray Forest. She had been present at one of their controversial encounters in the drawingroom, and had been lost in the clouds, and was edified by Laura's audacity and learning, and thought her capable of anything.

"No, Julia," she said, laughing, "you shall have liberty of conscience. What I really intend is to take you with me tomorrow to a Jewish synagogue in the City, where we shall hear some good music."

"Well, you need not frighten one by talking as if you were out of your wits. I shouldn't object — in fact , I should like it very well," said Julia Wardell.

"You mustn't tell any one — it's a secret expedition, mind," Challys Gray enjoined.

Mrs. Wardell agreed, appending the reflection, "but who *is* there to tell?"

"There's Charles Mannering, and I'm sure he'd find out some excellent reason why we should not go."

"Not if he came with us himself."

"Well, I don't want that either — we're not obliged to tell Charles Mannering everything we do, and I shouldn't like to take him with us."

"Very good, dear; there's no very particular reason why we should, and I suppose we mustn't talk — any more than we do in church — so I don't see any good in taking him with us."

"And don't ask him to tea," said Laura.

"Why not to tea?" inquired she.

"Because we are to go in the evening. Don't be alarmed, we shall have a gallery to ourselves, and the carriage shall wait close to the door — and I think it is a charming adventure."

So on Friday morning she sent a note to Charles to say —

"We are going out this evening, so don't come" — and having written thus far, she fancied she had meant him to think they were going out to tea — so she resolutely added, "It is not to tea, and. I'm not going to tell you more than that we are going to a place of worship, and I hope that way of spending an evening is approved of by your gravity."

Charles did not appear. In due time the carriage was at the door; the ladies got in, and away they drove.

They arrived at their destination a little late. They should have been there before sunset. It was now twilight, and the street lamps lighted.

When the carriage drew up, Laura looked from the window and saw a large building resembling, she thought with some disappointment, a meeting-house. She saw a large door in the centre, and two smaller doors, one at each side. But no one appeared at the steps to whom they could put a question.

The footman stood at the carriage door for his orders. In her perplexity she saw a female beckon to her from one of the side doors — and was determined.

"Come, Julia — come, dear;" and she got out, followed by Mrs. Wardell, and they found themselves in a small chamber, from which a staircase ascended.

“How did you know, dear, that we wished to come up to the gallery?” asked Laura of the handsome little Jewish girl with raven hair and great dark eyes, and the rich transparent tints of her race.

“The liveries, please, miss, and — and I was told the colour of your eyes, and that you were very handsome, please.”

Laura smiled, and was disposed to like the little girl, and to admire the place. But there was not, as yet, at least, much to admire. It was very much such a vestibule and staircase, lighted by a hanging lamp, as conduct to the gallery of a commonplace church, except that they did not communicate by any side door with the great central passage leading on to the floor of the building.

She was, however, already interested, for, faint and muffled, she heard the solemn swell of voices chanting. She could distinguish at times the soaring notes of a falsetto mingling with tenors and bassoes; and as she softly ascended, those strange and beautiful harmonies, exceeding, she thought, any she had ever heard in cathedral music, grew grander and more thrilling, until, on reaching the back of the gallery, the music was perfectly distinct. But here she was disappointed for although she found herself in an assembly of Jewish women (as was clear enough from the peculiarities of outline and complexion), a close lattice-work covered the front of the, gallery, and she feared would effectually interrupt her view of the interior of the building.

The little girl silently indicated two vacant seats in front, to which accordingly they made their way. Here it was easy to see through the lattice, now close to their eyes, all that was passing below.

CHAPTER VII.

A RECOGNITION.

LOOKING beneath and before her she saw a large chamber, the general effect of which resembled that of a church, with, however, few considerable distinctions.

There was at each side a row of tall windows, which, however, the deepening twilight failed to penetrate, and the lamplight from large hanging candelabra filled the building. Some way up the centre passage, was a railed enclosure containing a table, on a sort of dais, ascended by several steps. At each side of this table stood a man; one the reader, the other an officer of the synagogue, and behind them at a desk were six others, who were, at the moment, chanting the service, led by the reader. Beyond this, at the far extremity, was something resembling a wardrobe, covered before with a red velvet curtain embroidered with gold, and with Hebrew letters embroidered on the valance at its top; and in bas relief an angel, as large as a living human figure, was carved at each side of it. Over this hung a solitary lamp, and at its right extremity stood a figure, very singular. He was dressed in a white satin cassock, that nearly reached the ground; his shoes were fastened with large silver buckles, and on his head a tall, white conical hat, with a dark roll of fur instead of a brim, surrounding his head. The curtained piece of furniture was the ark, and the strangely-costumed man was the Rabbi.

The officiating people, as well as the congregation, all males, stood facing the East, their backs toward the gallery, and wearing their hats, and each with a white woollen drapery, with a broad stripe of blue, hanging about his shoulders.

The scene was so odd, almost grotesque, for these white draperies were worn shawl fashion, and had long slender white tassels from their corners — and the voices were so splendid, the entire service proceeding in the Hebrew language, and the Oriental seclusion of the lattice so new and strange, that Laura was too much interested in the novelty of the spectacle and situation for a minute or two, to recollect the particular object of her visit. Soon, however, it recurred. She fixed her attention on the singers.

There were two tenors, one a smaller man than the other. But standing as they all did with their backs to the gallery, she almost despaired of any accident's affording her a glimpse of their faces.

Such a chance, however, did at last occur. The chanting subsided. There was a silence, and the reader called in a few words in a low tone to a person, one of the officers of the synagogue, who proceeded to a distant seat, from which arose a hatted man with his copious white shawl, who proceeded to the ark, drew the curtain, opened a double door, and produced two rolls, which he drew reverently forth from their embroidered velvet cases.

These were the manuscript copies of the law written on vellum. The reading of the law was to begin, and now, too, began the opportunity for which Laura Gray had been waiting.

From one of the openings in the side of the railed enclosure the reader proceeded, followed by the six singers, his assistants, who proceeded singly in slow procession behind him up the building, and as they filed round the corner of the railing she had a glimpse of each in the series of those dark Jewish faces — and one, that of the smaller tenor, who was walking like the rest with downcast eyes startled her. She had but a momentary and very imperfect view of the blackhaired pallid face which looked to her like the malignant countenance which she had seen at the window and in the hall of Guildford House! She drew back instinctively —— she felt uncertain but frightened. Very much frightened for a few seconds, and then very angry with Mr. Dacre for exposing her to that kind of shock without a warning. Then she began to grow very restless and uncomfortable, and her first impulse was to make her escape quietly and quickly from the place.

But was she quite certain — was there no mistake? when she looked again these figures stood, like the rest, with their backs turned toward her. The reader was standing a little to the left of the Rabbi, and the singers in a semicircle behind him. The chanting proceeded, and she remained in uncertainty.

Henceforward the vocal music, rich in harmony, finer still in the quality of the voices that mingled in it, had ceased to enchant her. Like sweet and solemn music heard through a terrible dream, it confused her sensations, but her spirit no longer took part in it. She could think of nothing but the chance of again seeing, and with more certain observation, that odious, face which she was so nearly certain she recognised.

Now, again, the chanting was suspended. The reader and his choir returned in the same order to their former places, and as they marched slowly down this face turned fully to the gallery, she did see the face that had looked in at the study window and peered into the hall, and that pale, black-browed man, with the large sullen mouth, and the great lurid eyes, chanting the time-honoured Jewish liturgy, was actually one — perhaps the chief — of those miscreant conspirators who were persecuting her with so satanic a persistency, and had actually attempted to murder Alfred Dacre.

A sense of danger and of horror overpowered her — she felt faint, and whispered in Mrs. Wardell's ear —

"Let us come away, dear."

"But may we?" answered the chaperon.

"I'll try — I wont stay," whispered Laura, and rose quickly. No interruption was offered. Their withdrawal seemed hardly observed. How glad she was of that lattice screen that covered the front of the gallery, for the sullen malignant eye of the little tenor had for a moment swept the place from which she was looking down and held her there.

On reaching the street door Alfred Dacre stepped swiftly to her side. He looked in her face and saw how pale she was as he offered her his arm. She was seated in the carriage, she scarcely knew how, and he leaning on the window looking in.

"You are fatigued?" he whispered, taking her hand with an anxious look.

"Nothing," she said, not removing it.

"It was so good of you to come."

"I suspected it was all about my own business, and so it was," she said, looking for a moment darkly into his eyes with a very little nod.

"I understand. You recognised some one?"

"Yes."

"Then my course is clear."

"You are not to take any step without first consulting me," said Challys Gray, with a sudden access of her imperious manner, "Nothing — I'll never speak again to you if you do, Mr. Dacre. Nothing shall be done without my permission."

He smiled, and said —

“May I call tomorrow at Guildford House?”

Yes, certainly. Who is Mrs. Wardell talking to?” she said, glancing at the other window. “Is that Charles Mannering?” she said addressing the speaker at the other side.

“Yes, here I am,” said Charles, with a laugh; “you did not expect me. I ran down to Brompton on the chance of your having changed your mind and stayed at home, to beg a cup of tea, and I learned from the servant that you had come to this place, and I was impertinent enough to follow.”

Though Charles laughed, she fancied he looked vexed, and was speaking in a tone that was not really so gay as he assumed to be. And though, perhaps, she would not have confessed this to any one, I think it made her uncomfortable.

“Don’t go for a moment,” she whispered to him; and, resuming her little talk with Mr. Dacre, she said— “I am so nervous while I stay here. I am longing to leave this place. I was a little vexed with you, for a moment, when I saw that face; but I dare say it was necessary, at least important, that I should.”

“The important and the ridiculous, trick and reality, deceit and enthusiasm, as you, may one day learn, Miss Gray, are strangely mixed up at times. It shall be my office to discriminate. I admire your energy. I wish I could tell you all I owe you. You have showed me the game, and I will run it down.”

“But you remember, you are not to do anything without my consent,” she said.

“Don’t be the least uneasy; there shall be no *fracas,* do you but be half as wise as I believe you.”

“Well, I’ll try. And, now, I really am growing uncomfortable; those dreadful people will be coming out; and I think the horses are growing impatient; so I’ll say good night,” and she gave him her hand and continued — “Julia, dear, Mr. Dacre is going, you must bid him good night.” And thus, transferring him to Mrs. Wardell, she herself turned to Charles, and said— “You must come back to tea with us; you’ll come in here and drive home with us.”

“Do you really wish it?” said he. “Wish it? Of course I wish it, or I shouldn’t tell you to do it,” said the young lady.

“Well, I’ve got a cab here. I can’t take a seat with you, I’m very sorry to say, having a call to make; but it is only a minute or two at my solicitor’s chambers, and I shall be at Guildford House in less than ten minutes after you get there; and I wont say good bye.”

“What a very charming person he is exclaimed Julia Wardell, turning towards the speaker.

“Who?” asked Laura.

“Oh! Mr. Dacre, of course,” said Charles. “I don’t know of anyone else, at present, answering to the description.”

“Well, he’s gone and we must go also, so I shall expect you, remember,”
and away they drove toward home.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FLEET.

AS they drove away Charles saw Mr. Dacre. step into a cab, in which he saw, he fancied, some other persons seated. It drove away just as he got into his hansom. He was in no particular good humour with Mr. Dacre; and, at sight of his companions, his suspicions and his curiosity revived.

"Drive after that cab and be sure you keep it in sight," said he; himself watching it with a shrewd and steady gaze as they pursued.

From time to time as they clattered along the pavement, Mannering told the driver to pull in a little, so as to regulate the distance between them; and, with this caution, he followed through several streets, and turning into one, deserted and oldfashioned, Dacre's cab drew up at the steps of a dingy hall-door. Dacre and one of his companions got out, and, after a very few words his friend ran up the steps, and Dacre jumping into the cab, it drove away at a rapid pace. Charles Mannering had his misgivings about Dacre. What or who was he? That was an odd-looking street — a curious habitation for the intimate of a very fine man as, he fancied, Dacre assumed to be.

Some qualms visited him as he pursued the chase. Was this sort of thing within the limits which circumscribe a gentleman's morality?

"Yes;" he insisted

bullying himself— "it is not merely allowable, but my duty. I will find out who this Mr. Dacre is. I'll learn, at all events, what are his haunts, and who his friends. It is worse than ridiculous, the confidence with which Challys treats him; that the poor little thing should be made such a fool of; and certainly, I'll not spare myself, nor spare him either, and — where are we getting to now?"

By this time they were approaching a famous place. That grand *chemin de fer,* the road to ruin, had then, as we know, like other great highways, that daily and nightly pour into a common centre their inexhaustible streams of life — its handsome and convenient terminus, I mean the Fleet Prison; and, at the entrance of this Mr. Dacre's cab drew up, and he and his remaining companion jumped down to the flags — beside a lamp-post, which then stood close to the door.

With Dacre there entered at this door his companion, a fat, round-shouldered Jew, some sixty years of age, with the characteristic heavy nose; a great moist smiling mouth, and eyes half closed; his hands in his pockets, and his wrinkled and somewhat, dusty black velvet waistcoat crossed and lapped with several gold chains.

"How ish Mr. Blunt this hevening?" he inquired politely of Mr. Blunt the officer at the hatch, a low door, well barred and bolted, which communicated with the interior passage, a view of which it permitted breast high.

"Well, thank you, sir. Can I do anything for you, Mr. Goldshed?" said this gentleman, touching his hat as he lowered his newspaper.

"We want to pay a vishit, me and my friend, to Mr. de Beaumirail, if he'sh at home," drawled the Jew, facetiously.

"Well," said Mr. Blunt unbending, in the same pleasant vein, and opening the enchanted gate to let these privileged spirits pass in; "it's only to knock at his hall-door, sir, and ask the footman." In the passage lounging about the hatch were several nondescript persons, who might be bailifs or wardens, a reserve force in case of any one's being disposed to be troublesome.

"Any more detainers against Foljambe?" drawled the Jew in Mr. Blunt's ear, as he passed.

"Just a little thing o' fifteen pun, sir."

"Nothing else, you're sure?" said Mr. Goldshed, stopping short.

"Not a penny, sir."

Mr. Goldshed whistled some bars of a quiet tune, which was interrupted by a little hiccough, as he shook off his momentary meditation, and swayed and swaggered after his companion. Charles Mannering jumped down to the flagway, hesitated, and got in again, and then made up his mind, got out once more, told the man to wait where he was, and walked on to the door which Dacre had entered only a minute before.

Our friend, Charles Mannering, felt as a proud man does who has detected himself doing a shabby thing. His pride upbraided him, and he was inwardly ashamed. He could not acknowledge it though, and he was determined to brazen it out.

The fact is, he was jealous of this handsome Alfred Dacre, and jealousy is a madness, subject, as we know, to capricious and violent paroxysms. He had seen Dacre talking at the window of the carriage to Challys Gray, and conclusions had instantly possessed his mind. Dacre had, of course, arranged this visit to the synagogue, had accompanied them, and had in fact as much of their society as he pleased; while he had been not only uninvited to be of the expedition, but written to and forbidden to go to Guildford House; but he would have been in the way.

And who was this Mr. Dacre whom Challys Gray had taken up in so unaccountable a way, and appointed to be her standing counsel, and her knight errant, her prime minister, and even her master of the revels?

He, Charles Mannering, would find out all about him. He had no idea of mere masks and disguises, *mimœ, balatrones,* winning their way by sheer impudence and insinuation, with their disguises still on, into such houses as Challys Gray's. He was huffed and wounded, and in no mood to mince matters with Mr. Dacre. The sooner, in his present temper, he thought, they went to the heart of the question, and understood one another, the better. And he was quite sure if Ardenbroke were here, he would thoroughly approve the resolution he had taken.

He stepped in, expecting to see Dacre, but he had gone in as we have seen, and Charles walked up to Mr. Blunt, and he said — not knowing well what question to put —

"The gentleman who came in here this minute, can you tell me where he is?"

"Mr. Goldshed?"

No, Mr. Dacre; two gentlemen came in here together?"

"Oh! yes, I know *him* — gone in to see Mr. de Beaumirail — well, sir?"

Well, what was to be his next step? He had cooled by this time.

"Do you want him, sir?"

"Well, as he's gone in to see a friend, you say, it will answer me another time. I'll — yes — I shall see him elsewhere, tomorrow, or — that will do. Will you allow me to light my cigar?"

And with this disjointed address, and his cigar glowing, he turned his back upon Mr. Blunt, and full of conjecture, as to what Mr. Dacre could possibly want of De Beaumirail, whom he professed to detest, he returned to his cab.

“Not too late to follow them to Brompton,” he thought, as he looked at his watch under the lamp.

After all this devious excursion had been accomplished at such a pace that less time than one would have supposed had been wasted upon it. So away he went, having bribed the cabman with a handsome promise, through the still bustling town to the then comparatively rural and sequestered suburb of Old Brompton.

CHAPTER IX.

A WORD IN HASTE.

“OH, Charlie, you’re a good creature, after all,” said Challys Gray. “I’m so glad you have come.”

So gay and kindly was her voice, that half his jealousy and all his gloom vanished as he spoke.

“Glad — really glad — well! I’m rewarded. Did you like the singing — was it worth so long a drive, and so unprotected a — what shall I call it?”

“A frolic,” said Challys Gray— “quite worth it; and I advise you to look in and listen, and Julia Wardell will lend you her white Cashmere shawl, and you’ll not have the trouble even of taking off your hat. But what do you mean by unprotected? I’ll tell you — you mean a question. You men are always accusing us poor women of practising small duplicities and indirections, and, alas, what an example do you set us? For instance, by introducing that one little word, you contrive to ask me, without seeming to do so — did you and Julia Wardell go by yourselves?”

He laughed.

“It is so well reasoned, I can’t find it in my heart to deny it.”

“Well, I’ll meet that confession by telling you as frankly, we did go by ourselves, and witnessed the whole thing without a protector — not among the gentlemen in shawls, but among the ladies in great coats.”

He fancied that she said all this to acquit herself of having been accompanied by Mr. Dacre. There was something unspeakably gratifying in this. Charles’s spirit effervesced.

“Yes, indeed,” said Mrs. Wardell, lowering her book of fashions — in which she had been studying a lady in gigot sleeves, smiling over her left shoulder, with pink gloves on, and a lilac pelisse— “all we ladies were shut up together in the gallery, with a little grille before us, so that no one could see us from the lower part of the chamber, or whatever it is, and very comfortably we saw and heard it all. I was rather amused — I mean, of course, it’s wrong to say exactly that of a place of — of — is it exactly worship — now that the Jews, you know, are under a curse?”

"We did not act on that though. We sat there as discreetly as the most orthodox Jewess; and very delightful, really, the singing was."

"I saw Dacre there," said Charles, who by a glance had ascertained that Mrs. Wardell was deep in her fashions again.

"Yes," said Laura, a little dryly.

"Had he anything to tell worth hearing?"

"No; nothing yet but good hopes."

"In what direction do his hopes point?" said Charles.

"He expects a discovery very soon."

"I think I have made a little discovery myself in the meantime," said Charles.

"About whom?" she asked, raising her eyes suddenly.

"About Mr. Dacre," he said, with a faint smile, returning her gaze as steadily.

"Oh," said Laura, also with a smile, growing a little pale, and then suddenly blushing and looking away.

She looked back again at him a little fiercely, quite straight. He was still smiling, but his face was sad and pale.

"Now, Charlie, here we are, a pair of fools," she said, with a gay laugh. "You look at me as if you suspected me of high treason, or worse, if worse can be; and I, like an idiot as I am, blush, as usual, without a reason. Was ever so provoking a trick? I always do it. It is quite enough if I particularly wish not to blush. I am always sure to blush at the wrong moment. One day when we were all together in the drawingroom at Gray Forest, and dear papa reading his newspaper by the window, in came old Medlicot, the housekeeper, in consternation, to report that one of three West Indian fruits — they were like ripe figs — I remember them very well, and a great curiosity, to have been pronounced upon that day after dinner by the collective wisdom — one of them was missing. Dear papa laid down his paper; you were talking to my poor sister, and you were silent. She looked up from her drawing at old Medlicot; and I, what did I do? — I blushed, neck, forehead, all scarlet. I held up my head as long as I could; but I felt the brand of guilt glowing on my cheeks. My eyes dropped to the carpet, and, in an agony of conscious innocence, I burst into tears. My father told old Medlicot it did not matter. I know he thought I had taken it, and was sparing my feelings. I think you all thought I had eaten it — and there never was a time when I could have done so mean a thing — or hid it, if I had, but I didn't; and dear Maud understood me when I told her, and laughed and kissed me, and pitied me ever so much. Poor Maud, she understood me, and always judged me charitably, through all my furies and follies, and made much of the little good that was in me, and made the best of all the bad."

As she spoke, Challys Gray got up and went to the window, which was open, and looked out.

A very different scene it was from the lordly timber, the broad river, and high wooded banks which one saw from the great window of Gray Forest. Very different, too, from the still, sultry sea, under the brilliant moon of Naples, with which, for two winters, her eye had grown familiar. Still there was something she liked — something even of poetry, in the dim night view of the tufted trees, and homely and irregular buildings.

"I'll bid you goodnight, I believe," said Julia Wardell, waking gently, and putting her worsteds into her work-basket. "Would you mind touching the bell, Charles? Thanks;" and, giving her dog in charge of the servant, he conveyed the brute upstairs, where, at Mrs. Wardell's door, her maid received the dog and his mistress.

A *tête-à-tête* with Charlie Mannering was nothing — very like uncle and niece, brother and sister — what less romantic?

"Yes, Challys," he said, when he had closed the door after Julia Wardell, "one other person does understand you perfectly. You are a very odd person, very inconvenient, very like an angel — for I do believe nothing on earth would tempt you to tell a fib. No, from the time you were a tiny little thing, no higher than that, when I was a great clumsy fellow of seventeen, and you a little girl of nine — always quite true. How did it happen? I wonder whether anyone else ever so walked in the light as you, Challys?"

Come, Charlie, this is quite new. I hardly know you. I expected a lecture instead — wholesome bitters, and here is a shower of bonbons."

"Well, I used, I believe, to lecture you a great deal more than I had any business to do, but I don't think I have ventured for a long time; that conceited custom has fallen into disuse, hasn't it?"

"Too long, Charlie, I like old customs, and I think it would do me good."

"Really, Challys?"

"Really, for at the worst, I should laugh at it, and laughter is about the pleasantest exercise we have. But what is your discovery, pray, about Mr.

Dacre? for since I have employed him in this odd business, I should like to know."

"He told you, didn't he, that he did not know De Beaumirail, and I've discovered that he does know him, and visits him frequently in the debtors' prison."

"No, on the contrary, he said very distinctly he did know him: he never said anything else; but he did say that he didn't like him."

"Oh!" said Charles Mannering, in a disappointed tone, "I'm very glad! Then my discovery amounts to nothing, but I suppose he'll have something to say about his interview?"

"I don't think you like him much, Charlie."

"Why?"

"Because you can't afford him a good word."

"I know next to nothing about him," answered Charles, "and the little I do know, I confess I don't like. People have a good deal to say of him that is not quite pleasant. I have heard some odd things. I'm not quite certain, that is, I don't quite rely upon them yet, but I'll make out, and you shall hear."

"I don't expect any marvels, Charlie, at least about him. By the time Ardenbroke comes back all reasons for secrecy will have disappeared, and we shall hear all about him. In the meantime it doesn't matter. I'm much more anxious to learn something about those people — shut the window, I grow nervous whenever I think of them — the people who have been writing those letters, and I did not thank you half enough for all the trouble you have been taking."

"I only wish, Challys, I could deserve your thanks in any way."

"Yes, indeed, Charlie, I am very much obliged; and suppose we talk of Gray Forest again, and old times. I think they were very happy times. I shall never be so happy again."

"Yes, you may — you will — happier than ever. It is I who have reason to despond, to despair."

"Indeed!" laughed Challys. "Why, what's the matter?"

"No, thanks, I shan't tell my story — you'd be sure to laugh at it; you've begun already."

"I told you before, I should like that extremely."

"Yes; but I shouldn't — no, I could not bear that."

Challys looked wonderingly at him for a moment. For that moment she was a little puzzled.

"Is he going," she thought, "to make me his confidante?"

"I could tell you a great deal, Challys, but it is better not — you'd think me a fool; and as you say you like laughing, you'd be sure to laugh at me."

She looked at him again. He was not more embarrassed, she thought, than a shy man might be, who was on the point of disclosing to a third person the secret of a romance.

"Surely, Charles, you are not going to have such a secret and hide it from me?"

It was Charles's turn now to glance at his companion's face — beautiful, kind; was it more than kind? Grave. What was he to make of that look? But might not there be a great deal — everything in that invitation — so appealing and quite irresistible. And if her looks betrayed no more — was she not a girl, and what spirit so cautious?

"Well, Challys, I have a story to tell."

She listened only. How beautiful she looked, as she leaned on the side of the window, listening! He could have kissed the clumsy old window-frame for her sake.

"May I tell it?"

"I'm waiting to hear, Charles."

"Well, Challys, perhaps, you have guessed it. I've tried to hide it even from myself, but it would not do — I can't. I tell you Challys, I have loved you without knowing it for years; I know it now, perhaps, too late. I adore you; if you can ever like me, darling — *ever* — don't answer now — ever so little; let me hope and wait, for years — any time you please, only don't decide in a moment against me. If you *could ever* — any time — ever so long — and if not — you'll laugh at me, Challys, for an hour, and then forget me for ever."

"Forget you!" She looked very angry; there was a brilliant flush in her cheeks. "Never, while a sense of the ridiculous remains to me. We shall never shake hands again."

There was silence for some seconds, and his ear tingled with these words.

"It is very hard I can't have a friend!" exclaimed Challys Gray vehemently. "Is there no such relation on earth as a friend and a kinsman? Why will you form your ideas of us girls from bad plays, and even farces?

Nothing but lovers! You can't have meant that folly. You shall forget it, Charlie, and so will I, and I'll forgive you."

There was another silence. Charles was pushing the window as if he meant to raise it, he did not know why, but he turned to Challys, and looked at her —

"I think you might have spoken a little more kindly," said he at last, with the gentleness of utter disappointment.

"And if I had, you'd have thought I did not mean what I say, and it would have gone for nothing."

"I think you may be quite distinct, Challys, and yet kind."

"No, the unkindness is in *being* distinct, and if I were less distinct you would not have understood me. Now come, old Charlie, you usen't to be so foolish, and you must give up all this to please me. If I did not like you very much, in the way I choose, I should not ask you. Yes, you must, now and here, make a solemn vow — you must I swear an unalterable indifference, and let us be a pair of steadfast friends, for I do like you; and I should hate to lose you, and I will give you my hand again. *There,* kind old Charlie, you have made me sorry." And she hastily shook him by the hand, and ran away.

He was stung, he was mortified, he was grieved; his heart was very full, for he liked her still, better than ever, I think.

He continued looking at the door for some time, as if he could see her still in the air, and then he turned and leaned on the window-sash, looking out on the starlight, and the blurred and silent landscape, and he wept in silence some very bitter tears.

CHAPTER X.

NEW PLANS.

NOW, here was an heiress; and what was Charles Mannering, that he should aspire to her hand? There was nothing very monstrous in it, however, even in temporal matters, for Charles Mannering had some very good certainties, and much better possibilities; and, I must do him the justice to say, that he would have acted precisely as he did, if she had not fifty pounds to her dowry.

To a man such as he, with a somewhat rough exterior, yet sensitive, simple, and, in some respects, very reserved, the fear of vulgar misapprehension renders such advantages as those enjoyed by Miss Laura Challys Gray a real impediment in the way of free avowal in such romantic situations.

It was a long walk to his lodgings that night, for it was too late to find a cab, and in truth he preferred the walk to reaching home more easily and swiftly.

Until this Mr. Dacre had appeared, he had not suspected the actual state of his heart. Then the alarm of jealousy rang out. Then the danger of losing her was real. But the crisis of this evening had stolen upon him, and a great revolution befallen him unawares.

Now that he had got home to his lodgings, what was there for him to think about? Still one problem of intense interest. If he could be sure that she did not care for Alfred Dacre, the light of hope would spring up again.

After all, was it not natural, owing to very special circumstances, that Dacre should be employed, and, being employed, that he should be admitted to confer confidentially in this odd and unpleasant affair; and except in these circumstances, which might just as well exist if Dacre were an old fellow of five-and-fifty, was there anything to alarm, much less to sink him in despair? No, he must not be too much cast down.

But how would Challys receive him? On second thoughts, would she banish him? In the morning he had resumed that catechism of a hundred questions, with which in like circumstances an ingenious man can always torment himself.

A very welcome light came — a little lamp in the shape of a note, in the hand of Challys Gray, lay on his table in the morning. It said —

"You are to come to us to tea, Charlie. I shall have ever so many things to consult you about. I intend to set you down to study maps and handbooks, and make a comprehensive plan of travel for us, for I begin to grow tired of Guildford House; and for this and other reasons I think — but sage as you are, you must not vaunt your superior prescience — I think, I say, sir, I shall lead a wandering life, for a time, and peep at all places worth looking at. And now I must tell you *my* part of the plan. Your business in London is a make-belief — you don't want it, and it doesn't want you; you shall take your leave of that sham, and enlarge your mind, and. improve your tastes, like us, by seeing the world; every nunnery admits a lay-brother, a porter, or something, and our sisterhood (you remember I am a nun of that strict order who lead apes in the Elysian fields) can't travel so conveniently alone; so you really must make up your mind, old Charlie, and help to take care of us. I should not half enjoy it if you were not of the party. Julia Wardell and an inflexible old maid, may not be the most interesting companions in the world; but we are cheerful, and quite free from that dismal ingredient of human nature called romance. So once for all, Charlie, come you must. Do come, or I shan't believe that you forgive as easily as I forget, and I shall write a great deal more formally in future."

Now here were two very consolatory sheets of notepaper, for not only did they restore him quite to his old place, but they seemed to say very clearly that Challys Gray, although she would brook no lovemaking, was yet fancy-free, and quite as resolute a spinster as ever. The sense of relief was immense. He could almost have found it in his heart, at the moment, to forgive Dacre.

So the edifice overthrown but the night before, rose up again from the rubbish of its ruin at that pleasant spell. Happy compensation, that the hopes of lovers are as easily excited as their fears!

Notwithstanding what had passed, it was therefore with a lighter heart than he had carried for some time before, that he walked up the double line of old trees to the hall-door of Guildford House.

A little sad as he drew near, but relieved at least of one terrible uncertainty — a little nervous about meeting Challys, but still happy that the way was not closed against him — he heard on a sudden a pleasant voice in the air calling —

“Welcome, welcome!”

“Thanks, Challys, a thousand thanks!” said he, looking up to the flowers and the pretty face in the drawingroom window.

“We are busy over the map of Europe, and at Murray’s Handbooks. Come up and help us.”

No one could have told by Charles’s looks or manner that his heart was beating so fast, and that he hardly knew for a minute, or two what he was saying; neither would a shrewder observer than Julia Wardell have suspected from Challys Gray’s greeting that so decisive and odd an interview had occurred so lately.

“I was thinking of Italy,” said Miss Gray, pointing with a laugh to the open atlas, and the litter of handbooks about it.

“But I have just read a few such awful words of Mr. Murray’s, about mosquitos, and the summer sun, that I shall certainly take Italy rather late; and I find myself so tired of geography, and so very ignorant of latitudes and longitudes, that I must ask you to help us at our next lesson; and you know we have time enough to decide in, for Mr. Gryston says there are things for me to sign before I go, that wont be ready till the end of June.”

“Oh! I fancied you were going more suddenly.”

“What a pity we can’t!” Julia Wardell threw in; “and I don’t think the hot weather, if it weren’t for the flies, would matter at all. I like warm weather; I’ve known people say they could not sleep in hot weather, but I never found it disagree, with me.”

“Well, Julia dear, we’ll consult again tomorrow, and Charles shall look in and help, us — wont you? — and we’ll settle something; but I think we have puzzled over maps so long this evening, that I should like to see that great book shut up and not opened for a week again. Do, pray, shut it, Charles.”

And as she spoke she went to the window, and sat down on the stool there, looking out; and Charles joined her — the window at which only last night they had stood in that strange colloquy; and the page on which that dialogue was inscribed Challys had taken out of the record of their lives — and that history was going on, just as if that passage had never been written.

"What was that you mentioned yesterday about Mr. Dacre's going to see that wretched man, De Beaumirail?" asked Miss Gray, after a moment's silence.

Charles recounted the circumstance.

"I suppose he speaks ill of me to every one," said Challys Gray, after a brief silence; "I can't help it. I wish to Heaven some one less superstitious, or nervous, or whatever it is, had the responsibility of his fate cast upon them. I can't get over my horror of interposing to disturb. I don't argue it; it, is not a matter of reason, I've told you, but one of instinct — superstition overpowering conviction. I can't change myself — nothing can alter me; and all the time he is describing me in such colours; and it does seem so cruel and I *can't* help it."

"If Mr. Dacre allows him to speak ill of you in his presence, I don't think it matters one farthing what he thinks of anybody," said Charles.

"I had another teazing note this morning from that poor old clergyman, Mr. Parker; he's so good, and so foolish. So far from sympathising., he can't even understand what I mean."

Charles Mannering smiled, but he forbore the old dispute.

"Another reason why I don't care to go immediately," she said, suddenly recurring to a former part of their conversation, "is that I don't choose those people, whoever they are, who want to frighten me, to fancy that they have driven me away. Everything, I expect, will be quiet in a very little time; the people who gave me all that annoyance will be found out, and stand disarmed and at my mercy. Then I shall go. But they shan't bully me; and here comes tea. Shall I give you some?"

CHAPTER XI.

DE BEAUMIRAIL.

"WHAT kind of tea do you think this is?" asked Miss Gray of her guest.

Charles raised his cup to his lips.

While they are sipping their early tea, and talking with the volatility of youth, by this time, on quite other subjects, the reader of these pages is reminded, by the little dialogue at the close of the last chapter, that he has not visited De Beaumirail since his despairing and bitter conference with the worthy old clergyman.

How, meanwhile, did it fare with the prisoner? He was not better — worse. He lay on his bed. He had sent for his friend, perhaps his only friend, Mr. Parker.

He entered the dismal bedroom of the prodigal; very tired he seemed at the end of his breathless journey down the road to ruin. He lay in that ample dressing-gown which his few visitors knew so well. His arm was on the pillow; his forehead pillowed on his arm.

When the old clergyman stept to the bedside, there lay Monsieur de Beaumirail, prone and motionless, his face buried in his arm, little to be seen of him but his long locks lying over that arm, those long folds of shawl drapery, and, lower down, one foot slippered, the other from which the slipper had fallen.

Have you seen tired or drunken men. He so unstrung and still that they seem to have sunk into the surface that sustains them? Here was a fellow, neither drunk nor yet tired, Heaven knows, by physical exercise, but pressed down by a load immeasurable, who lay like a dead man, sunk down together and into himself, but not by the hand of death — perhaps by a heavier sorrow.

"Mr. de Beaumirail," murmured the clergyman, placing just his fingertips timidly on the coverlet. "Mr. de Beaumirail — pray, sir, are you worse?"

"No, sir. I don't know — I don't care."

"Has your doctor been with you, sir?"

"I — upon my honour, I forget. Does it matter to anyone?"

"I thought you might not have been so well. I fancied he might not have been as well satisfied."

"Visitation of the sick — I know — thank you — nothing of the kind," said the prisoner gruffly.

"Would there be any use in my again calling upon Miss Gray? I ventured to write a line to her this morning."

"I'm sorry you did. None in the world. It has come to this, that even were you to succeed with her now, it could not do me the slightest good," said he. "The wand, one touch of which, in her hand, would have transformed the reptile you see here into a free man, has passed from her cruel fingers into a stronger grasp, and is broken; that chance is gone, and I am a very slave. I'm talking allegories."

"Well, sir?" said the clergyman.

"And very hackneyed ones," said De Beaumirail. "It is well to masquerade our degradations in any sort of disguise."

"But what, pray, has happened, sir, in plain terms?" asked the old man.

"I have fallen into the hands of villains."

"Villains! Very strong language. I hope *not,* sir," said Mr. Parker dissuasively.

"Here I lie, sir, with the fangs of one — two — three — four wolves holding me fast."

"Well, now, your interpretation?"

"A gang of sharpers — a gang of sharpers?" cried De Beaumirail.

"What have they done?"

"They have bought up all my debts, except hers. A bargain, sir, I suspect — don't you? I don't think you'd back me to pay a shilling in the pound. Eh?"

"I never make wagers, sir," said the old clergyman.

"So much the better, unless you have the talent of making a book."

"I don't quite follow you, sir."

"Well, Mr. Parker, they have bought up all the debts, except Miss Gray's. There's an attorney, there's a Scotchman — — "

"Some of my best friends — some of the best people on earth — are Scotchmen, sir," expostulated the clergyman with some ardour, and a little indignation.

"Yes, very good fellows among them, no doubt; but they're a d —— d sensible people, sir; their heads are a great deal harder and longer than yours or mine, and I pay a compliment to the nationality when I say I'd rather deal with any rogue than a Scotch one. Yes, there's an attorney, and a Scotchman, and two Jews, sir. You see what a vice I have got into; and if Miss Laura Challys Gray, whose cruelty has brought me to this pass, wished ever so much now to undo the crime against all human feeling she has committed — she no longer could; so bend the knee no more at her shrine — that divinity is deposed. And what news of Alfred Dacre? — have you heard anything of him lately? — is he still in London? — curse him! I beg your pardon — I'll say bless him, if that will do."

"I don't know — I'm not aware — I'm not in the way of hearing," he replied.

"Then you haven't been to see Miss Gray; for I'm told he's in her house like a tame cat. She has got me into a bad fix, and herself into worse," he laughed.

"No, I've not heard of him since," replied the clergyman.

"Well, last night, one of those wretches who haunt me, brought me his card. You'll see it on the chimneypiece. I would not see him; and since I've been thinking that possibly he was not here at all. I'm encircled by a bell of deception."

"I can throw no light upon it."

"I should like to know one thing," returned De Beaumirail, sitting up— "what motive he can possibly have for pursuing a poor devil like me as he does. You did not mention my rash language about Miss Gray, and my resolution to punish her, to any one?"

"I regarded that, Sir, exactly as you described it — as so many mad and reckless words. I knew very well that reflection would come to your aid, and that you could not mean it."

De Beaumirail looked down with a musing smile on his ring, and, still smiling, his angry eyes looked suddenly in the old man's face, and said he —

"I *did* mean every word I said, and I did not speak without having measured my strength and my weakness. Challys Gray shall suffer the most exemplary punishment that ever befell a vindictive woman; and if she employs Mr. Dacre any longer as a detective, he shall be suddenly relieved of his office, and she frightened half out of her wits; and you have my permission to tell her what I say."

"You threaten that young lady in cold blood!" exclaimed the old man, in indignant horror.

"Threaten her! Oh, fie! My worthy friend, be charitable. I don't threaten. Observe the distinction — the miscreant De Beaumirail threatens, say you. The prophet De Beaumirail predicts, say I."

But we must return from our excursion to Guildford House, and the little party whom we left there over their teacups.

"Well," answered Charles Mannering, setting down his cup. "It is not gunpowder, is it?"

You observe that Charles has just answered the question with which this chapter opened, so that the little episode involved really no interruption, not even of a second.

CHAPTER XII.

SONGS.

GRADUALLY twilight came and moonlight, and the lamp at which Mrs. Wardell, worked, and it was night.

Quite friendly, quite in the old vein, and to all outward seeming, quite unembarrassed, was the conversation, and on it flowed — not very profound, but careless, gay, and various.

Charles sat in that statuesque pose, which we may describe as riding upon his chair, with his elbows on the back of it, recounting one of those comic school adventures which are remembered with such a sense of their fun, at a much longer distance. He was looking at pretty Challys Gray, who sat listening and amused by the window as his recital proceeded in low tones.

His back was turned toward the door, so that he could not see, why on a sudden, Challys blushed so deeply, and looked so prettily embarrassed.

He looked round, and saw Mr. Dacre smiling in the doorway.

"I'm very audacious," laughed Dacre. "I know I should have waited for an invitation; but having an hour I could not resist, so I ventured, and I hope I'm forgiven."

"We are always very happy to see you, Mr. Dacre," interposed Mrs. Wardell. "It is very good of you, knowing how very lonely we are here."

"The odious puppy!" thought Charles, "with his airs of acceptance, and affectation of modesty!"

"Mr. Mannering, our cousin," she said, introducing that gentleman. The dignity of his rising was embarrassed a good deal by his attitude, but Mr. Dacre went upon his former introduction, and smiled, and spoke a word or two, as to an acquaintance.

"How encouraging!" thought Charles. "It is really too good; I'm the stranger — he's quite at home. I suppose he does the honours here, and lectures the servants."

Charles was resolved, however, that he should not lead the conversation, so he instantly began —

"By-the-bye, I met that woman you both like so much, Mrs. Mauley," said Charles Mannering, with a playful irony.

"Oh! Really!" moaned Laura.

"Dear me, how horrid!" exclaimed Mrs. Wardell, more energetically.

"And I think she meditates a visit. She said she heard you were in town, and asked me where you were," continued Charles.

"You did not tell her, I hope?" said Julia Wardell, looking straight in his face, with round eyes of horror.

"I shall leave, London at once," said Laura.

"But did you tell her?" demanded the elder lady.

"Well, you know she asked me quite straight if I knew where you were," said Charles.

"And you told her?" said Mrs. Wardell.

"Challys, you know, would be angry if I told an untruth," said he.

"Then you did tell her?" said the old lady.

"What *did* you say, Charles?" implored Laura.

"Well, Challys, I'll relieve you, I lied; I said I did not know."

"There's no harm on earth in a polite fib now and then when one can't help it," said good Mrs. Wardell.

"I don't like it, though; I feel very small after I have told one," said he.

"I don't in the least," said Mrs. Wardell. "What do you say, Mr. Dacre?"

"I? Oh, of course, I'm for simplicity — whatever is most convenient. If truth answers best, tell truth; if otherwise, fib. In nine cases out of ten, the fib is the more convenient. Human nature is too irascible, life is too short, for veracity. Why should I follow the phantom truth into quags and briars, with the straight path of mendacity before me? Wounded self-love never forgives; by all means let us spare it. For my part I lie quite frankly, whenever my duty to others or myself invites."

The young man laughed, and his eye glanced on Laura. There was in her look a pained hesitation, as if she doubted whether he was in jest or earnest; but she said nothing. She took up a book that lay on the table, and leaned back as if engrossed by it.

"I don't agree with you at all," said Charles Mannering. "Everyone, I suppose, tells an untruth now and then; but I hate it. I'm not a bit better than other fellows, but that's not my talent or taste. No, I don't agree with you."

"On that point?" asked Dacre.

“Yes,” said Charles; “I don’t.”

“I think you’ll find you do.”’

“Well, I hope I know myself, at least on that point.”

“And now, Miss Gray, I’m going to acquit myself,” said Dacre. “I not only agree with Mr. Mannering, but I go further. What I just now said is simply farce. I have suffered as much as any one from falsehood — too much not to hate it; no one on earth is more strict about truth than I. It is the solid foundation of all character, without it the most attractive is but sentiment, impulse, and illusion; it may be beautiful, but as baseless as the rainbow. Nothing so beautiful as truth.”

Challys Gray felt that his glowing eyes were fixed on her, and she said —

“Well, we are all pretty well agreed, except Julia. You’re the only sinner of the party.”

“Oh! don’t say that,” said Dacre. “I’m bad enough; I only venture to give myself a character for truth, and when I give up that, I give myself up; at the same time, I’m profoundly mysterious.”

“Now, Charles, it’s your turn to give an account of yourself,” said Mrs. Wardell.

“Thanks! If I had studied myself carefully enough, and, if I had a proper sense of my importance, perhaps I might expect you to listen; but I really can’t talk of myself, where I’m not quite sure of admiration, and I almost fancy there are other people who interest me more.”

Dacre laughed goodhumouredly.

“Modesty is one of the noble attributes; but what is a fellow to do who was born conceited — and that is my hard case? I’m not so bad as I was, though; one learns what one is, as years increase, and I hope I may yet come to be half as modest as I ought to have been at my best.”

“I think you’re quite modest enough, Mr. Dacre. I never could see the good of having too low an opinion of one’s self.”

“You are too goodnatured, Mrs. Wardell — too indulgent; but as I get on, I’m not so much my hero — I’m less in love with my follies; one tires of sugar — one tires even of the looking-glass; there are other things besides what is termed pleasure — other people besides one’s self. Will you, Miss Gray, do me a great kindness?” he said, suddenly transferring himself to her side, and lowering his voice as he reached it. “Would you mind playing that charming thing of Beethoven’s?”

"Don't ask me this evening — I feel that it would make me so sad. And — and have you heard anything more?" So said Miss Gray, looking inquiringly into his eyes for a moment. Charles was almost unconsciously watching them with a covert side glance, and he saw still on her cheek the tinge of that blush.

He turned away, stung and alarmed; his pride and jealousy were awake again, and he entered on a little careless conversation with Mrs. Wardell on a new book upon the treatment, education, and dietetics of lapdogs, which interested that good lady so earnestly that she set down her crochet and discussed the whole matter with a mind greedy of knowledge, if also a little dogmatic.

"I expected to ascertain something last night," said Dacre. "I went, after I had the pleasure of seeing you, to the prison, for the purpose of seeing De Beaumirail, but he would not admit me. I pressed it all I could, but a perverse demon had got possession of him, — and he resolutely refused to see me. I'm quite certain he will, though. I brought an influence with me; but next time I shall bring one still more powerful. Rely upon me. I never yet took a thing up that I did not carry through; so don't lose faith in me, because my discovery has been postponed from day to day."

Here was a little pause, and he said —

"So you wont play that Beethoven tonight?"

"I can't; but you admitted you could sing, and for us you never have sung," said Miss Gray.

"If you say I must sing, I will."

"That's very good of you."

"No, not a bit," he said in a lower tone, for I can't help obeying you; it is so delightful to be commanded by Miss Gray."

"That's very pretty, at all events; and now I shall test your sincerity. What do you sing? Do you know the tenors of any of the Italian operas?"

"Some."

"Don Pasquale?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, the serenade, 'Come gentil.' Julia, Mr. Dacre is going to sing a song for us."

"Oh! that's very good of you, Mr. Dacre."

Challys Gray played the accompaniment, and Dacre sang; yes, Alfred Dacre sang, so exquisitely, with a voice so ringing and plaintive, that one might have fancied the great tenor of those days in the room.

Dacre was surely a great musician; but we all know it is one thing to fill a drawingroom, and quite another to fill Her Majesty's theatre. Perhaps this chamber-tenor was better here than the great tenor would have been. Other things he sang, making no difficulty, pleased at the delight and wonder of at least some of his little audience. Then there were songs in which Challys, not knowing them, gave up the piano to him, and listened in a rapture; and then he said —

"Do you know, Miss Gray, I long ago took the subject of that piece of Beethoven's, and made a song of it."

He touched the accompaniment lightly, hummed the air for a moment, and then sang. The words were odd, mysterious, melancholy. Sitting by the window, leaning on her hand, looking out, Laura listened in a rapture that was almost agony, and the fountains of her heart were opened, and tears flowed down her cheeks.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Dacre; it is quite a gift. What a resource you must find your music. It is a most charming talent," said Mrs. Wardell. "Isn't it?" she appealed to Charles.

"My praise is very little worth," said he; "I'm no musician. But," he added, for this sounded rather grudgingly, "I can venture to say what gives me pleasure, and I have seldom listened to music with more."

"I shall be more conceited than ever," said Dacre, giving Charles a smile.

That young gentleman's quick glance searched the smile in vain for a latent mockery. Nothing like an irony was there. It was goodhumoured, and seemed to say —

"I understand your feeling; but why should we quarrel? I'm disposed to like you."

The person whom Dacre most wished to please sat still at the window, looking out, and said nothing. He looked towards her, and then back again at Mrs. Wardell.

"You have inspired us all with romance and sentiment by that delicious music. There's Laura looking out at the moonlight, and I have tangled my worsteds."

"That, certainly, is most gratifying evidence. I wish my poor music could move me ever so little."

"Why, it must. You could not sing with so much feeling if it didn't," said Julia Wardell.

"I don't know. Nothing moves me much now — not even dinner, or money."

"Money!" exclaimed Mrs. Wardell.

"Yes, of course. Riches represent everything we respect on earth," said Mr. Dacre.

"Not everything, I hope, Mr. Dacre," said the old lady, gravely.

"You're quite right — except rank, and, as I said, dinner."

"Oh! fie, Mr. Dacre; you're really too bad."

"As a rule, men have but one determined principle, which is their interest," he continued; "their Passions may cross and perplex it, but it is there. If we affect to despise money, we must change our manners."

"Oh! you're a — what is it? — a cynic, Mr. Dacre. It's quite shocking to hear such sentiments from anyone who can sing like you!" exclaimed Mrs. Wardell.

Dacre laughed. He went over to the window and said very low —

"My hour has flown — come like shadows, so depart — and I return to darkness. May I come again, Miss Gray?"

"Do — yes — we shall be so glad to see you; thank you so much for singing — so, very much."

He held her hand ever so little longer than usual, pressed it a little more, and without another word he returned, and took his leave of Mrs. Wardell.

To Charles he held out his hand with the same kindly smile. "I shan't forget your approbation; a musician is never without vanity, and — — " Whatever he was going to say he forgot it, or, perhaps, put it off. At all events he shook hands, smiled, and, with another "good night" to the ladies, he disappeared. Laura, at the window, saw a carriage glide swiftly under the branches of the old spreading trees, and away.

"I'm afraid Mr. Dacre thought you were offended with him," said the elder lady, reprovingly. "It seemed so odd you never said one word about his music, and he was so obliging."

"I dare say; I forgot," answered Challys, rising dreamily. "But that piece of Beethoven's — dear Mary used to play it, and it always makes me sad —

and very sad I felt tonight."

"But was not his singing quite magnificent?" exclaimed Julia Wardell.

"I dare say — I suppose so. Was it?" exclaimed Laura Gray.

"Was it, indeed? You're enough to put one out of patience," said Mrs. Wardell.

"What did *you* think of it?" she appealed to Charles.

"As I said, I'm no judge; but it seemed to me more like that of a public singer than an amateur. I should not be surprised if he turned out to be an artist, as they call themselves."

"Oh, no — that's not conceivable!" exclaimed the old lady. "Why, Challys, he says that Mr. Dacre is a public singer!"

"I don't think there is anything theatrical in his manner; but I don't know, I'm sure. I only know that I wish he had not sung that thing from Beethoven. It made me sad, and nothing's so sleepy as sadness. So I think I shall say good night."

Charles came out to the lobby to light her candle for her, and to say "good night" once more.

"Good night, Charlie," she said, with a smile a little sad, but very kind, "and I'm so much obliged to you for coming; it was very good of you."

Up the broad stair she went. He remained looking until she disappeared; then, with a sigh, he returned to the drawingroom, and what more passed between him and Mrs. Wardell, was not, I believe, particularly interesting.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SILVER DRAGON.

AS Alfred Dacre placed himself in his brougham he smiled. As they turned the corner at the gate, he looked back at Guildford House — at the drawingroom window, from which the light was gleaming — smiling still, but with a shrewd, odd smile.

The carriage whirled on, and he laughed merrily — *Vive la bagatelle!* Then he grew grave, very grave — sinking down from level to level, till he had reached that point which is deep thought. As we know, his hands were pretty full, and his brain teeming with all kinds of little plans.

When Charles Mannering reached his chambers that night, he found, among more serious letters, a little note in his letter-box, which could not have been dropped there many minutes. It was signed "Alfred Dacre," and said: —

"MY DEAR MR. MANNERING, — I should so much wish that we knew one another better. There are things on which your advice, by-and-by, would be more useful to me than you can imagine. See what selfish creatures we are! It is this instinct that prompts me to violate forms, and venture to ask you to dine with me tomorrow. Pray do come. You mentioned accidentally this evening that you had no particular engagement for tomorrow except to see the billiard match played. That wont be till eleven. I enclose a note for your friend — Captain Transom, I think — who, you mentioned, is to accompany you. Pray persuade him to come with you first to me. I have written to order dinner at such a quaint comfortable old inn, called the Silver Dragon, just three miles out of town, on the old road to —— . All the livery-stable people know it. It is quite an adventure dining there, it is so quaint and pretty. You will be charmed with it. I have told the people to expect us at six, but don't hesitate to change the hour if another suits you better. A line to Miniver's will always find me. Should I not hear, I will conclude that all is settled.

"Ever yours, very truly,

"ALFRED DACRE."

Charles Mannering, as we know, did not like him; but somehow he was flattered. In spite of himself, he smiled as he read it.

"It's a bore, but one can't be absolutely churlish, and he's so very pressing," thought Charles, and the result was that he took his friend, Captain Transom, down with him to the Silver Dragon, where that handsome fellow Dacre received them with a hospitality that was a little ceremonious and foreign, but also very cordial and fascinating.

The Silver Dragon reminds one of the May-Pole in "Barnaby Rudge" — a miniature May-Pole — antique, quaint, and gabled, with stone chimneys, some spiral, some octagonal at the base and cylindrical upwards, like the barrels of oldfashioned pocket-pistols. There is an old pigeon-house, and half a dozen trees at each side flank the space in front. There is a hedged garden at one side, and tall old pear and cherry trees show themselves in the air. Hollyhocks and roses grow outside, and tint the old place pleasantly, and the great sign of the Silver Dragon swings between two posts at the roadside, with store of florid and gilded ironwork above. I speak of it in the present tense, forgetting the flight of years. I wonder whether the Silver Dragon holds his own still, or has gone, like St. George's, into the land of dreams.

This day there was a cricket match going on in the field in front of the old inn, and the Ticklepitchers were whacking and running with all their might in their second innings. The bright green field, with its clumps of ancient trees and its oldfashioned white paling, with the lively sounds and sights of the cricket match, gave a vivacity to a scene which might otherwise have been perhaps a little drowsy.

Before the door of the Silver Dragon, as they arrived, stood an elderly gentleman in tweed trousers, white hat, and white waistcoat, and a black frock coat — a somewhat clumsy figure with an unprepossessing countenance, and whiskers, moustache and hair all white. He was smoking a cigar, and from the elevation of the steps he surveyed the landscape.

"Mr. Dacre here?" inquired Charles Mannering of the waiter.

"He's just walked round that way to the oaks, — or, as he pronounced it, *hoax,* — not five minutes ago, to meet two town gentlemen who is for dinner here, ordered at six, sir."

It was plain, from a covert glance, that the waiter suspected the new arrivals to be the two gentlemen who, in his undignified phrase, were "for dinner."

"Well, what shall we do?" said Charles, turning to Transom.

"We may miss if we follow him."

"He'll be here again, sir, in five minutes. He thought you might come that way."

"Ho! that will be Mr. Dacre, then," said the old fellow in the white hat, interposing unceremoniously— "the young, man that's walked round there." He was indicating the direction with the end of his cigar. "I thought I knew his face — I know all about him — is he stopping here?"

"No, sir — only come down for dinner."

"Well, I vote we stay where we are," said Charles, looking at Transom, who agreeing, walked down the steps, and looked about him a little.

Charles, who remembered the white-hatted smoker's remarks about Dacre, addressed a few polite observations to him, which the old fellow received with a shrewd civility. Perhaps he had no objection to talk a little with the young man.

"We've just run down to meet a friend of *yours,* I think you said — Mr. Dacre."

"Well, I can't say a friend, though, by my faith, he should be my friend, for I helped him to one or two *deseerable* things in the way of business; but I have met him only in that way, sir; and that not over frequently; he's a fine young man, sir; and I know everything about him; and I wish I had his money, sir — by my troth, sir, it wouldn't hurt either of us."

At this moment the waiter apprized the old gentleman that his dinner awaited him.

"Who is that gentleman?" inquired Charles, as soon as he was gone.

"That's Mr. Gillespie, sir. He's a banker, sir, or something, in London, sir."

"Ho! Scotchman, too," reflected Charles, "good men of business — likely to know — I wish his dinner had not been ready so soon — but a man may have money and be a *mauvais sujet* — a banker — that Scotch fellow — it's a convenient title — banker — a usurer — I dare say."

In another moment Dacre had arrived, and they were chatting gaily together.

"I'll run down, if you let me, after dinner, and have a look at those fellows; there's a jolly good hit to leg," said Transom, from the steps at the inn door. It was his farewell speech, as they went into the comfortable long, low dining-room, wainscoted in oak, and with a glass door at the other end affording a view of the flowers and fruit trees

of the garden.

Very friendly was the host; gay, too, and agreeable. An excellent dinner the Silver Dragon afforded, and wine so good that a learned Judge — noted in his day for a shrewd perception of vintages and flavours — used to make a point of dining at that out-of-the-way little hostelry half-a-dozen times in the year.

When they had dined, and had some wine, and chatted pleasantly for a time, Transom remembered the cricket, and, with permission, ran away to see. Now it was a *tête-à-tête,* and Charles Mannering fancied that Dacre was about perhaps to approach some subjects that specially interested him. But he did not. He chatted on very pleasantly, but somehow he was not making himself at all better known to Mr. Mannering, in the sense in which he had expected, nor was he even growing more intimate in any way. He was disclosing nothing of his life and adventures, nor even of his character, for his reflections on life were seasoned with a spirit of mockery which left Charles in doubt as to whether they represented anything but the whim of the hour.

Over the chimneypiece clicked an old Louis Quatorze clock, and as he looked into the garden, Charles Mannering fancied he saw his host now and then glance at its dial.

“The fellow thinks I may be in his way at Guildford House, and that I am to be managed by a little flattery and attention, and everything made easy, and a troublesome cousin cajoled. Hi is counting the minutes till it is time to get away, and laughing at my simplicity.”

Charles was nettled. If this dinner was meant to propitiate him, it had no such pleasant effect, but a good deal the reverse.

“I think, Mr. Dacre,” said Charles, “I once knew a friend of yours, a Mr. Vanhomrigh?”

“Where did he live?” inquired Dacre.

He had a very pretty house at Richmond.”

“Ha! the very man; then you’ve heard that story?”

Charles had not expected this, and he felt a little awkward. But Mr. Dacre was perfectly himself, and unusually grave, and he continued serenely —

“I did know him — I’ve known all sorts of people in my life — I used to consult him about pictures. Otherwise, I think we’ll agree, your friend was not a desirable acquaintance; but being a man of some learning and great brutality, he was looked upon as a philosopher, and I did not care what he was, he was not pretty; and there was a peculiarity, you recollect, about his head?”

“Ah, perhaps there was, I don’t quite remember.”

“It was this, his head had no brains in it, and so he was always guided by his own strong common *non*-sense. He did me the honour to be jealous of me, although his wife was, upon my honour, as indifferent to me as if she had been my own. He insisted on a duel. I shot him only through both legs — a little higher and I should have rid the world, and particularly Mrs. Vanhomrigh, of a bore. But while I — if there be any force in the ordeal — was inscribing the proofs of my innocence upon his legs, his wife was testifying to the same fact, in an equally satisfactory manner, by going away with a Mr. Tromperant. We parted — Mr. Vanhomrigh and I — affectionately, and I don’t believe he called Mr. Tromperant out.”

“0h!” said Charles, a little dryly: “people used, I’ve heard, to tell that a little differently.”

“Ah! did they? You heard she ran away with quite a different person — with me, in fact.”

“Well, I confess it was something a little like that — and — and — but it was very absurd,” hesitated Charles Mannering.

“Tell me, I entreat, what it was. Don’t think me a fool; such things never vex me — nothing offends me in a friend but reserve.”

Charles looked at him for a moment shrewdly, and then down, and smiled a little awkwardly. The inquisitor was suffering more than the person undergoing the question. In fact, the examination was beginning to be inverted, and the éclaircissement approached at an inconveniently rapid pace. Mr. Dacre smiled very good naturedly.

“So many things one hears are — are— “ hesitated Charles.

“I know — utterly absurd,” said Dacre; “but if my friends do hear them, and that they affect me, I protest against being kept in the dark, be it what it may — pray tell me all about it.” “Well the story is that you ran away with her; her husband divorced her, and *you* then married her,” said Mannering, with a little shrug and a laugh, making nothing of it.

“Ho! There’s the whole epic in a nutshell, and simply a lie from first to last. She went away not with me, but a Mr. Tromperant. I don’t know whether Vanhomrigh divorced his wife or not, but I’m ready to swear I never married her.”

Here was a short silence.

“Is the woman alive still?” he resumed, perfectly carelessly. “If she is, pray do me the kindness to sift the story to the bottom. I never was married; but it is very clever of you to have collected so many of the apocryphal gospels that profess to record my life, and very good of you, I’m sure, to tell me what they say.”

“One can’t help hearing things, you know; and as you wished me to tell you all about these stories, I could not well refuse.”

“I can never thank you enough. Fame has, however, done me too much honour. I did not marry Vanhomrigh’s wife; and as to divorce, in this shameless and cold-blooded age, I don’t know why people ever think of it, seeing that marriage is itself a standing divorce, without the inconvenience or the scandal, and with this advantage, that husband and wife can resume one another whenever they choose. I’m not speaking my sentiments, mind, but those of a great many people of my acquaintance.”

“I quite understand,” said Mannering, and sipped a little claret.

“And quite to put an end to that part of the rumour, which, you see, is not pleasant. The next time you and I meet Ardenbroke together, I will ask him the question in your presence. When does he return, by-the-by?”

“I believe his stay in Scotland is likely to be longer than he expected. But, pray, don’t mind asking him, or, if you should, I have no right in the world to be present, and I should not like it.”

“Ah, Mr. Mannering, do you think that quite fair?” said Dacre, with a smile, and a little shake of his head. “I find you’re possessed of a variety of disagreeable stories about me — utterly untrue — and one of them such as no man ought to leave unanswered. Now, as I find you in a position to circulate that report, I put it to your honour — *reflect* — have I not a right to ask permission to arm you with its contradiction?”

“No man can help hearing reports as they circulate. You have contradicted that one in my presence,” said Charles, “and, of course, I can have no difficulty in saying I’ve heard you do so.”

"No; you're very good — that's quite true," said Dacre, "and my denial will be accepted for precisely what it is worth — you are good enough to set as high a value almost as I do upon it — but it will be rated at the value the world places on all such currency. It is the denial simply of the person interested in denying it, don't you see? and although you and I know it is true, the world wont, and in that bank it wont be accepted."

"Unlucky for you, Mr. Dacre; but still I can't see that I am called on to ask for, or publish Ardenbroke's testimony in the, matter, and I must, once for all, decline the kind of prominence you are good enough to propose for me."

"I wish, dear Mannering, I could agree with you;" and suddenly changing his subject with a change of tone, he said, "the sun is already down; and that beautiful moon — it will become more brilliant as the glow in the west fades away — delicious evening! What do you say to a walk across the fields?"

"Yes, quite charming," said Charles, recovering.

"A glass of sherry before we start?" said Dacre— "Delicious evening, certainly! That sort of sky sets a fellow ruminating. What a background for a reverie — pleasant, of course, *couleur de rose,* old echoes mix in our music — we are always looking over our shoulders as we march on — retrospective creatures — we are. I was popular, I have been so consistently; of course, one can't be popular, unless one is a great deal more amusing than I can ever hope or attempt to be, without money, for poverty is universally disgusting. I have good Spirits. I have a sort of commiseration for fools. I enjoy the ridiculous without exposing it; and I am under no constraint with knaves; in short, I am conscious of some ingredients of a man of the world."

"That's a character I don't aspire to — I feel my incompetence. — I have not the moral talents," said Charles.

"How tiresome," added Mannering, inwardly — that fellow s incessant talk about himself!"

And recovering from this incoherent little digression, Dacre returned to his projected ramble over the sheepwalk.

"We can get through that little garden to the path, I know it perfectly. The walk is quite Arcadian; just at the other side of that foreground, you get into an undulating sheepwalk, wooded with old timber, and utterly solitary; the loneliest place you ever saw in your life; a very singular scene. I undertake to say you'll never forget it while you live. But take some more wine, wont you?"

"Not any, thanks."

"Some coffee."

"No, thanks. Where does the path come out upon the old London road?"

"Not a mile from this."

Charles pushed open the glass-door, and walked a few steps into the quaint little garden, and looked westward, where the quickly fading tints of a splendid sunset still flushed and gilded the sky.

Dacre touched the bell —

"This is all right, is it?"

"Yes, sir, to be paid by the old gentleman — Scotch, I think he is, sir, upstairs, we know him here, sir."

"Yes, and there's a message. Where is Captain Transom?"

"Talking outside with the gentleman as played in the match, sir."

"Well, tell him that Mr. Mannering has gone across the fields, and will meet him about a mile on the road to London. Tell the driver to pull up at the Seven Oaks, stile; he knows it; and say to Captain Transom that Mr. Mannering will probably be there before he arrives, and don't let him delay here."

Then Dacre walked out and joined Charles Mannering among the trees and flowers in the deepening twilight.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MOONLIT WALK.

THROUGH a little wicket in the hedge Mr. Dacre led him, and at the other side of the narrow bye-road on which it opened was a stile, by which they mounted to the path he had indicated.

"How rapidly that sunset glow is fading," said Dacre, "the transition from sunset to moonlight, how beautiful it is! There is a brief struggle of the two — the dark crisis of the process. To me, it always seemed like the passing of a life, from this beautiful world to the more beautiful world of spirits, through the momentary darkness of death."

"But what of Transom?" said Charles, who was not much of a poet, "we can't leave him behind."

"It's all right, he's gone on in your carriage to meet you at the stile, a little way on. Let us get up this little steep, and from the top you'll see that pretty Arcadia. How balmy and delicious the air is this evening?"

"Yes, certainly, it is," said Charles, stopping for a moment, and looking upward to the stars.

"This is about the most puzzling light," said Dacre; "by the time we reach that little eminence the struggle will have ended, and the moonlight will prevail."

They sauntered slowly up the slope in silence, and by the time they reached its crest, a brilliant moonlight silvered the landscape below them.

"Now, look there; is not it charming — that wavy slope, studded with straggling clumps of trees? You can't see the road; the sward looks as if it passed unbroken into those misty low grounds, miles away. I think it quite beautiful. It is so parklike, neglected, and solitary."

"Yes, it does look like a place where an ambuscade would have you at a disadvantage," said Charles Mannering. "A sheepwalk, you say?"

"Well, you may be a painter — I know you're a musician — but there's no tempting you to be a poet," said Dacre, with a faint laugh. "You are determined to be an Englishman. You can see objects now pretty well — the trunk of that tree, for instance. I can see all the knots and wrinkles in it, and it's twenty yards away." He looked at his watch. "Yes, I can see it perfectly," and he looked shrewdly down the slope as if in search of some distant object. "Let us get on; how sharp our shadows look upon the grass."

"Yes, the mist has nearly melted; it is like a frosty moonlight," said Charles, as they marched lightly along, side by side, "and yet the air is so soft."

"Yes, a frosty moonlight," agreed Dacre, "and before we reach that group of birch trees — how wonderfully light and graceful they are, and those silvery stems — before we get there it will be more intense still. I never saw such moonlight on an English landscape; just as if it came for us. It *is,* really, come on purpose."

He stopped on a little eminence again as it seemed searching in the distance for some expected object.

"Looking for anything?" inquired Mannering.

"Yes — a — nothing very particular — we'll see it time enough — my carriage, and a friend waiting in it. I expect it — that's all. It certainly is a delicious night, and, as you say, a miraculously brilliant moonlight. *There* yes, that's it, I think."

"Where?" asked Mannering, who stopped at his side.

"Do you see that little, broken eminence at your right, with an ash tree growing by it?"

"Yes," said Charles, pointing towards it.

"That's what I mean. Well, a good deal further on is a clump of several trees — oaks they are — and a little to the right of them is a carriage, I think," said Dacre, in a slow conjectural way.

"Yes, I see — it is, I think," said Mannering.

"It *certainly* is," said Dacre in a tone of relief. "Well, it has been a very charming walk. So sweet a night tempts one to linger.

There had been growing in Dacre's manner, Charles thought, something *distrait* and odd that was oppressive. He paused, and placed his hand gently on Charles's arm, and smiling faintly, he said —

"And now, dear Mannering, to resume — I was going to say, a little more at length, what I venture to hope, and even to expect from your kindness."

"Resume, you say?"

"Yes, if you allow me."

"All right," said Charles, "I'll hear you with pleasure."

"I hope — in fact I am sure — I have only to throw myself on your good feeling to ensure the few and reasonable concessions which on reflection appear to me, under the circumstances I shall describe, quite indispensable."

These words sounded very unpleasantly in Charles Mannering's ears, and he felt for a moment as if he had misheard him.

"And, on consideration, I have every hope they will strike yon in the same light," continued Dacre. "Suppose we go on slowly toward those trees; the stile is there, and both carriages now — don't you see two?"

"Yes, I believe there are," said Charles, who began to feel as if he were walking in a dream.

"I mentioned, you recollect, what I thought myself warranted in expecting from your own sense of justice, with respect to the absurd, and, in some of its consequences, cruel rumour, which I have too much reason to believe you have been the instrument, of course with the most honourable intentions, of reviving."

"I thought, Mr. Dacre, I had made myself sufficiently clear upon that matter."

"Quite — perfectly clear; but with your intelligence and good feeling, I don't at all despair of bringing you to see it a little differently — in fact, to take precisely my view of what is fair in this case, before we reach that clump of trees, which it wont take us five minutes to do."

"Very well," said Charles.

"Yes, both carriages *are* there," said Dacre, who had been continuing his scrutiny while he talked.

"Yes, I do see them now," acquiesced Charles.

"And about what I was saying — we none of us like, my dear Mr. Mannering, the idea of constraint — the consciousness that we are watched, and the feeling that behind our backs all sorts of stories are being collected, and, perhaps, being retailed. Would you mind not walking quite so fast? Thanks; and it is not merely disagreeable; positive inconvenience, and even injury may result from it."

"I don't care a farthing who watches *me"* said Charles.

"That is because you are so frank and manly, and have in reality nothing to conceal. Now, it is not quite so with me — at this moment I can't be frank — in the interest altogether of others. I can't be, in that sense, manly.

Serious mischief to others might result from my making my presence in London known, except to a very few; and, my dear Mannering, I am going to represent to you how hard you have been upon me — to make my little complaint and appeal; and I shan't tire you — you shall know all that is in my mind in three minutes' time."

CHAPTER XV.

THE ULTIMATUM.

"AN appeal *ad misericordiam,"* thought Charles, with a secret satisfaction. "He'll be disappointed in me; I'm not, I rather think, a person to he flattered or cajoled. He thinks I have an influence at Guildford House, and he intends to use it. Yery good, Mr. Dacre, we shall see."

"I have persuaded you to come and dine with me in this out-of-the-way place," continued Dacre, "shall I confess it? — with an object. With you I can afford to be perfectly candid, and I shall speak with the confidence of a brother. Ah! Mr. Mannering, Mr. Mannering, you have been treating me very oddly; haven't you?" He smiled archly, and shook his head as he placed his hand gently on Charles Mannering's arm. "You followed me when I took my leave, on the night of my visit to your chambers; you followed me, on another night, all the way to the Fleet, when I went to see that miserable fellow, Guy de Beaumirail; and you have been busy among your Mends, at the clubs, collecting all the old women's tales affecting me that your gossiping friends could bring to mind — scandals, falsehoods, I do assure you, if you but knew the circumstances, the most incredible, and the blackest; and with this evidence, you array a case for the ear of that very tribunal by which we all desire to be favourably heard, and at least fairly judged — private friendship. Ah! my good friend, is that generous, or just, or at all the measure by which you would have it measured to you again?"

"You admit, Mr. Dacre," said Charles, "that you are practising, necessarily just now, a strict reserve. That, of course, is a matter entirely for yourself, and which, I'm quite aware, it would be most impertinent of me to remark on; in fact, I can have no interest in it so long as it does not involve - anyone who has a natural claim upon my care, and — and that sort of thing. But those circumstances of concealment, you know, don't do so well to found new acquaintances and intimacies upon, especially in families where there is so little experience and knowledge of the world, as in that at Guildford House; and as they know absolutely nothing, except a word or two, of no real importance, from Ardenbroke, whom you have put under conditions of reserve — I, as one of Miss Gray's few relations, and the only one at present near her, think myself obliged to inquire a little, and, in fact, take some little trouble, such as a brother, if she had one, ought to take in such a case; and I can't see that in doing so I commit the slightest impertinence."

"How provoking, dear Mannering, that we should so entirely differ in opinion in a thing so nearly affecting both of us — I may say personally affecting us. Would you mind stopping here for a moment? We have got so near the road, and I want ever so little talk with you quietly. Thanks." He looked upward for a moment with a meditative smile. The transparent azure of heaven opened above him with hardly a filmy cloud in its great concave; and the brightness of the moon was almost dazzling. Etherealized in that wonderful light, his handsome features for a moment moved the admiration even of Charles Mannering. For a few seconds the faint, fixed smile was seen in that light, and then Mr. Dacre looked, still smiling, in Charles Mannering's face.

"I wish so much, my dear Mannering, I could persuade you to take a different view of your duty."

A pause occurred here, but Mannering made no sign.

"Because otherwise the situation becomes so painful."

There was another pause, but Charles only looked down, and switched the grass slightly with his cane; he was not going to recede.

"For I can't allow that kind of thing to go on, do you see; I can't, really, for one hour more."

Charles looked up in his face, with an inquisitive sternness; he did not quite see his drift. Dacre's handsome features still wore that faint smile, and he shook his head gently.

"No, indeed, Mr. Mannering: I'm sorry it has come to this, but I can't. We must understand one another; I shall be perfectly explicit; and I still venture to hope that, on reflection, you will see the reasonableness of what I have to propose."

Here was a wait of a second or more.

"Pray go on. I don't see — I confess I don't understand at present," said Charles Mannering a little stiffly.

"Well, as I say, I still speak in hope. I have one or two very simple and, I think, fair conditions to propose. If you agree with me in so thinking, and consequently accept them, we continue good friends; if not, why then it is very unlucky, and I'm very sorry."

"And what are your conditions, as you call them?" asked Charles.

"Yes, my conditions; well, they are just these — you have followed me about on two occasions, to my knowledge; well, it is only fair that I should ask that all that sort of thing, whether done by yourself, or your friend, or your servant, should totally cease; you have been making inquiries about me, the places I frequent, and so on. I have to entreat of you to make no more inquiries about me. That's also quite clear."

Here was a silence while you could count two, but Charles Mannering made no sign.

"You have been collecting foolish stories about me, and possibly retailing them; I quite excuse you, but I must stipulate also that all *that* shall absolutely cease; and lastly, dear Mannering, not at all seeing in your remote cousinship your obligation to charge yourself with the duties of a brother to Miss Gray, and not choosing while myself employed by that lady upon a difficult and not unimportant affair, to be watched and misapprehended, I have one more earnest and friendly request to submit, and that is, that for the present your visits at Guildford House shall be discontinued."

At this last demand Charles Mannering flushed up to his temples.

"By Jove!" said he, with an angry laugh, "that's cool, isn't it? I don't think I ever heard anything so impertinent in all my life, by heaven!"

"I was half afraid you'd think so," said Mr. Dacre, "still while a hope was possible I ventured to try; and since my little proposal has fallen through, there only remains the unpleasant alternative. It can all be arranged in a few minutes."

"I don't understand you; but if you mean that we should fight, I'll meet you when and where you like; and the sooner the better," said Charles Mannering sharply, with gleaming eyes, and a face now pale and contracted.

He had been on the point of striking Dacre with the little walking-stick he clutched tightly in his fingers.

Dacre smiled and nodded slightly.

"No need to wait a moment; your friend, Captain Transom, can speak to mine, who's here, also; and he'll find everything that is necessary. This light will answer perfectly.”

“I dare say; I don’t care; as bad for one as the other.”

Incensed, agitated, Charles Mannering strode onward and under the old oaks, over the stile.

“By Jove, I thought you’d never come down from your moonlight and poetry,” said Transom, whose head was sticking out of the window, “the Ticklepitchers won, I suppose you heard, with five wickets to go down. Anything wrong? what’s the matter?” he added, observing the expression of his friend’s face.

“Nothing — just a word — get out for a moment, and walk a bit up here,” answered Charles.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONE — TWO.

“TRANSOM, *I’ve got into a scrape — a row with that fellow, and I suppose we must fight,” said Charles, in a low tone, looking very grim and pale.*

“What fellow? What the deuce? What’s the row?” inquired Transom, very much astonished.

“That fellow Dacre — I don’t know what he is — I suppose he’s gentleman enough to be shot at, and upon my soul he’s the most impertinent snob, besides, that I could have imagined.”

“But what’s the quarrel, and what do you want, and what are you going to do?” demanded Transom.

“Going to fight, I suppose,” said Charles.

“Well, but that’s quite gone out now, you know, and by Jove they make it a very serious business — you know all about that,” said Captain Transom, uneasily.

“I’m very sorry, Transom, to give you any trouble, but you were always such a good fellow, and I know you wont see your old schoolfellow floored for want of someone to stand by him.”

“No — *certainly* — of course — but what *is*— ““Oh, it’s just impertinence — he wants me to consent to things — in fact, to do what I *wont* do, and to let him bully me.”

“I’d like to settle it, though. Who’s, that fellow coming up the field towards us. — can’t it be arranged, hang it?”

“I think not — I’m sure it can’t — there’s, no way except by my submitting to be bullied by that cur, and, whatever his reason, it must go on.”

“That’s Dacre’s man, I suppose — why I haven’t had time to think — it’s very odd if nothing can be done,” said Captain Transom, “surely there can be nothing to make a shot so inevitable.”

The tall, slim gentleman was approaching, having raised his hat from his head in courteous salutation, and was now only little more than a dozen steps away.

“Yes,” said Mannering, lifting his hat in return— “very likely — and if it is, mind, no compromise. Dacre wants me to make submissions such as no gentleman could dream of. I have nothing whatever to say — if he chooses to recede he may, but otherwise this thing must go on — for I’ll *not* give way, not an inch.”

The Frenchman, for so he turned out to be, now presented himself with a very grave and ceremonious courtesy to Charles Mannering, and begged, in rather laborious and grotesque English, an introduction to his friend.

There was something in the serene and businesslike manner of this gentleman amounting, in Mannering’s opinion, to evidence of his having been brougt down to this place for the express service in which he was now busy — a very cold-blooded procedure — and the sense of this made Charles a little haughty, and even surly.

He presented his friend Captain Transom and walked away some score steps.

Was it a dream? With intense excitement conies a sort of quietude which answers the purposes of coolness quite the reverse of that insensibility which phlegmatic natures exhibit. This is not akin to dullness and relaxation — it is the highest tension to which human nerves can be drawn, and awakes to its keenest perception every sense.

In this state, so unlike the normal life, he turned about and saw the tall, slight figure of the Frenchman, standing close to the stouter figure of his friend Transom. The colloquy did not last five minutes. Charles was walking to and fro with measured tread, like a sentinel. Transom turned and approached him.

Charles Mannering advanced a step or two to meet him. He knew by Transom’s face before he spoke that there was nothing cheerful to report.

“Well, that old French fellow, very gentlemanlike he is, but he says Mr. Dacre can’t withdraw or qualify any one of the conditions he proposes — that he conceives your looking after him, and inquiring, to be a perpetual insult, and that you would use opportunities, were he to permit a continuation of your visits in a certain quarter, for purposes of your own, and with the effect of frustrating his exertions to be of use where he has promised his services.”

“He lies, then,” exclaimed Charles.

"Of course he does — Dacre I mean; and have you perfectly made up your mind, is it really worth having this thing go on?"

"I can't help it; I wont be bullied by that fellow; it must go on."

"Well, it's devilish odd they want to fight now," said Transom.

"Certainly, I'd much rather now, this, moment; but where can we get pistols? It's a long way into town," said Charles.

"They have brought two cases and everything quite fair; I'm to have choice, but the time, the hour, you know, although there's light, it's so unusual; there was, to be sure, that duel about two months ago in the Bois de Boulogne; but on that ground we may, of course, put it off till morning. What do you say?"

"Don't put it off a moment; I hate delay; let us have it at once and have done with it," said Charles.

"Well, you know, for my part, I agree with you; I'd rather have it now and over, a great deal; have you ever been in a thing of this kind before?"

"Never; but I've fired pistols, of course, often."

"I see, they're bringing in those things — I must be off in a minute — but never you mind — you'll be all right if you do as I tell you."

Charles, looking down the slope saw the tall, slight figure of the Frenchman carrying a flat box in his hand, and followed closely by a man bearing a second like it. Of course he knew very well what these things were.

"I was going to say, I think that fellow Dacre is vicious — you must hit him if you can the first shot. Do you know anything of shooting? you'll have to fire at the word, you know — ready, fire, and a goodnatured fellow will always say it as quick as he can to prevent mischief."

"Thanks, I see; no, I know nothing of pistols — nothing since I was a boy shooting at a board."

"I know; well, I shall have to go in a moment, so listen. I wont set the hair-trigger, if it has one; I'll give you the pistol at full-cock; when you take it you must keep your arm loose, on no account stiffen it as you raise it, just trace with your eye an imaginary line along the grass between the muzzle of your pistol and your adversary's body. There, that fellow's bowing. In a moment, monsieur, I shall do myself the honour to attend you," he called aloud, and added in the low key in which he had "been speaking, "Let your arm swing slightly in the direction of that line, so that when the word comes you can carry it right up to the level, keep it extended all the time, swing it from the shoulder, you are not to bend it for the world, you understand; now I must go."

Down the slope he went, apologizing to monsieur as he approached. Charles Mannering continued his march backward and forward and saw them, not thirty yards away, arranging what are called the preliminaries, dividing the weapons, and then proceeding to load them.

Charles Mannering was no coward, but the minutes so passed were anything but comfortable. "However long the time may seem," he thought, "ten minutes, in reality, must see this sickening business over and all settled, one way or other," and this thought constantly recurring helped him through the interval.

And now the adversaries were placed. It was to be a duel after the English fashion. The two men, each stationary in his place, to fire together — "one, two," the word being *two.*

Charles saw the French gentleman place his pistol in Dacre's hand, and add a confidential word or two, with 'extended palms and a little shrug.

"Now, think nothing about him but that you're sure to hit him," said Transom, quite steady, but looking pale and excited, "and mind, old fellow, don't touch the trigger a moment too soon, and measure a line from your foot to his, and keep your arm straight, and swinging from the *shoulder,* mind, and when all's ready look hard and Steady at your man till you can see nothing else. You'll wing him the first shot; and I'll bet you what you like he doesn't go near you."

With these encouraging words he withdrew. The cold intense moonlight showed him the slender figure of Dacre as sharply defined as if it had been in daylight, and struck brightly on the barrel of the pistol.

Transom, it had been agreed, was to give the word. "Gentlemen," said he, addressing them from his safe point of observation, "you don't move until I've done speaking; when all's ready I shall say, 'One, two,' and at the word *two,* you fire; and now, gentlemen, if you are not ready, say so."

They were both silent, and perfectly motionless.

"One, two," cried Transom.

Instantaneously a sharp report followed, and the thin film of smoke blew across the air between the combatants. Charles Mannering staggered a short step or two backward, and fell to the ground.

In a moment Captain Transom had run up, and was kneeling at his side. It was a comfort to see that Charles was still living.

"Not much, I hope; how is it?"

"Hit somewhere — I don't know — will you try to get me out of this like a good fellow?" — said Mannering, speaking very low, and with difficulty.

"Hurt, not badly, I hope?" — said Dacre, now standing close by Transom.

The French gentleman was already at the other side, and stooping over the patient — looked by no means so much put out as the other gentlemen.

Transom liked Charles Mannering very well; Charles was a very good fellow; he would take some trouble for Charles, and even ran a risk, as he had just now shown. But he had no aptitudes for nursetending — and so rigidly does every man refer things to himself, and measure them by their relations to that interesting person that Captain Transom — although half a minute had hardly passed — was already discussing with himself the best way of getting rid of so intolerable a bore without being positively ill-natured.

CHAPTER XVII.

DRIVE TO TOWN.

AN unexpected fourth person was added at this moment to the group.

"Canny, now, lads — canny, now," cried a harsh voice, with a broad, Scottish intonation; and Mr. Gillespie, who had bee» nearer than they supposed, came up to the little group; looking grim and dismayed,- and a good deal blown from his run down a bit of the hill.

"Hallo! what the deil's all this — who's' hurt? Mister Mannering, by the law! Guide us! who's been settin' ye by the lugs, ye pair of fuies!" He resumed.

Alfred Dacre, still unconsciously holding his smoking pistol in his hand, was looking with a frown of pain into the face of Charles Mannering. There were a great many unpleasant feelings mingled in his suspense. He knew that of men hit in duels, hardly one in twenty lost his life; and he was willing to back the chances, and stand the hazard of the die. It would be too bad if the one throw he dreaded should turn up.

"Are ye deleerit, mon?" exclaimed the Scot, very much out of breath, with a very black look in the face of Mr. Dacre— "I thocht ye'd hae keepit your word, sir."

"I thought ye'd hae keepit your place, sir," retorted Dacre, with a bitter imitation of his broad Scotch, and so dangerous a glare in his dark eyes as showed that the insult was not meant in a spirit of fun;— "what the devil brings you here?" And he glanced up the moonlight slopes, thinking, perhaps, that some one had accompanied him, and spoke very sternly.

"Weel, I don't know," said the elder man, more quietly, "I don't know why I'm here, I'm sure, except that I'm such a gude-natured guse; and I think it's *a* bad business this, for I doubt ye've killed him."

"No sign of death there," muttered Dacre.

"I wish I was sure o' it; but get ye doun to the carriage, and away to the toon — will ye?"

Without minding what he was saying, Dacre had addressed himself to the tall Frenchman, who was conversing affably, though nobody was listening to him. He had seen friends on the fields of battle with all sorts of gunshot wounds, and having, as a patient, once had, himself, a considerable hospital experience, was politely ‘illuminating the party in voluble French, upon the case before him; and, kneeling on the turf, he felt his pulse, and pronounced that Charles Mannering would do very well, and looked, nevertheless, uneasily about, and was clearly of Mr. Gillespie’s way of thinking, about the expediency of betaking themselves to the carriage which awaited them on the road hard by.

“We had better get him down to the inn — had not we?” said Dacre.

“Hout — never fash your beard about that, mon — come away, will ye — come wi’ me — come I say, or ye’ll sup sorrow for it.”

“D — n you, be quiet, sir; I’ll not go till I know how the case is.”

“And d — n you for a daft loon,” retorted Mr. Grillespie, savagely, muttering it, however, between his teeth, by way of soliloquy, as he turned away to another of the party.

“You’ll be Mr. Thransom, I take it, sir,” he said, taking that gentleman with rather a hard grip above the elbow, “I don’t know, sir, how this thing fell — a quarrel may be, about a lassie — a limmer, I warrant; and I don’t mean to speer any questions about it; but it wont do, sir, letting that fule Dacre stay here till some o’ they constable folk clap a grip on his shouther — it wont do, sir: and there is a doctor — Doctor Browning, they caud him, down there in the Silver Dragon. Just take your friend gently round by the road back again to the inn, de ye see, in his carriage, and ye’ll tell ‘em it was a mischance shootin’ at a mark, or such like, wi’ a pistol; and ye’ll be sae gude as to drap me a line — here’s my card — just to say how the fulish lad’s doin’, so soon as the doctor has made his examination and deeagnosis, ye comprehend; and don’t keep him here, mind, on the ground a minute longer, ye may lose the doctor else, or lose the lad’s life. I’m a gude-hairted fule, sir, and I don’t like to see young blude spilt, or mair mischief come o’ it than need be; and get him awa’, now, and he’ll do weel, and there’ll be no more fass about it, and it will all be forgot, they’ll mak’ it up; the dirt will rub out when its dry, and I and that French chap will try and tak’ the chield Dacre away with us to toon.”

There was reason in all this, though the old Scotchman spoke it in no small agitation and ire; and with their united persuasions he and the Frenchman at length induced Dacre, but not till they had got Mannering into his carriage with Transom, and seen it start for the Silver Dragon, to get into theirs and accompany them in a very rapid drive toward London.

Dacre rolled his cloak about him, and seemed disposed to take a nap in the corner, while the Frenchman was garrulous, and Mr. Gillespie sat by way of listening, glowering very surlily in his place, which was nearly opposite the dozing form of Mr. Dacre, who on a sudden laughed at some amusing recollections, it might be, and looked gaily out on the moonlighted hedgerows.

“What for do you laugh, sir?” demanded Mr. Gillespie, rather harshly.

“Never you fash your beard about that,” rejoined Mr. Dacre; “isn’t that the proper phrase? though what fashing a beard is, is a mystery known only to Scotchmen,” he added reflectively.

“I doubt ye’ve killed the chield Mannering; I see naething to laugh at — *naething*,” Mr. Gillespie replied with the emphasis of an oath.

“I don’t want you to laugh; I don’t think either the sight or sound would be agreeable. I laugh, when I’m disposed, and I don’t think the chield Mannering is more likely to die of his little hurt than any one of us in this carriage. What do you think, monsieur?”

“I should not wonder,” said monsieur in his own tongue, “if that young gentleman were quickly to reestablish himself. The wounds of young people in good estate cure themselves so quickly, one may see him possibly to walk himself of street in street in your so beautiful city of London before many days pass themselves.”

“I don’t hope it, monsieur; perhaps because I don’t wish it,”, said Mr. Dacre. “Try one of these cigarettes. I object to his dying — I object also to his recovering more rapidly than is quite convenient.”

Here Mr. Gillespie pressed his foot significantly on that of the speaker.

“One of these?” said Mr. Dacre, tendering his cigarettes.

“No, no, I thank ye, I like one o’ they fellows better,” and he produced a huge cigar which he prepared to smoke.

The Frenchman having a store of cigarettes in his own case kept up the fire steadily, enlivening the process by short but animated spurts of conversation.

Dacre tired first of smoking.

“The Scotch are a metaphysical people, and your brilliant nation, monsieur, are more ingenious and philosophical than we English. I was on the point of talking psychology, but I'm half afraid in such a presence."

"Monsieur may have fear of Monsieur Gillespie, perhaps, but of me it is impossible; I should listen, I assure monsieur, with more of pleasure and instruction than I can express to his charming discourses."

"You do me too much honour, monsieur, you tempt me to try; and as you are a man of *politesse auprès des dames*, like my friend Monsieur Gillespie — — "

Here was an impatient grunt from the Scotchman.

"Suppose we talk of that inexhaustible mystery, the *beau sexe,* monsieur — that most charming of Nature's enigmas."

"I wonder whether that chap's dead yet," interrupted Mr. Gillespie, with savage impatience.

"What chap?" inquired Dacre.

"The chap ye've maist murdered," answered the Scot.

"Now, come, we advised one another not to fash our beards, didn't we? and that's a disagreeable subject," said Dacre. "He's not dead — he's not going to die; we have my excellent friend, Monsieur Droqueville's word for that; haven't we, monsieur?"

"Yes, monsieur, I am well assured; I have had some experience, and I am extremely happy that I dare to pronounce an opinion favourable to the young gentleman who suffers under a stroke of pistol — (how you say?) — an accident so unfortunate; the lead is placed in the most desirable way for that young gentleman. I have taken the liberty to look under his waistcoat, and I know precisely, for I have seen at different times three persons wounded in the same place, which, if you permit, I will explain."

"On no account, monsieur," replied Dacre with prompt politeness. "I quite assent to the conclusion, and the reasons might only unsettle our convictions. You now hear, Monsieur Gillespie, what my gallant friend Colonel Droqueville says upon that subject, and I hope you don't mean to contradict him."

"I don't suppose the colonel is a doctor," said Mr. Gillespie sourly, "they're two very different trades, sir, asking your pardon, colonel; the colonel has a gude opinion how best to drive a bullet into your body, but it's not his business to get it out again, nor to tell you what it's like to do for you while it is there."

“Well, I’ll not be bored any more about him,” said Dacre sharply; “I really thought I was rid of that subject for tonight at least, and I’d be glad to know how one is to get rid of a bore if shooting him wont do?”

“I doubt it may do for him and you both,” said Mr. Gillespie angrily.

“I’ve told you before I don’t mean to talk about him,” said Dacre with an odd laugh, “and you shan’t; I don’t care a farthing who I quarrel with tonight — I’m quite in that vein.”

“It’s well, mayhap, for some folk I’m never in that vein,” retorted Mr. Gillespie, with an angry sneer. “It’s a game that two must play at, if it’s played at all; and ye ken verra weel, sir, ye hae nae such fule to deal wi’ in me, Mr. Dacre.”

“Fool? Certainly, in some respects he’s no fool,” said Dacre, contemplatively. “I’ll tell you, however, if you intend croaking any more, that I shall take it as meaning that it is better you should be quite free to turn back and see the patient, and I shall set you down. I mean to return to town, and you can walk back to the Silver Dragon and help to nurse Mr. Mannering. It will be very goodnatured, but I’m hanged if I endure any more talk about him in this carriage.”

Mr. Dacre was talking with an excitement that was very like the menacing jocularity of a quarrelsome man who has been drinking; wine, however, had nothing to do with it, and the odd state of his temper and spirits arose, I suppose, from the transactions of the evening and his nervous suspense about Mannering.”

“Daft,” muttered Gillespie; “he’s lost his wits,” and turning away with an angry sniff he assumed that he had asserted himself, at least as much as was expedient.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PISTOLS AND GENTLEMEN COME HOME.

“I was going to say, monsieur, when Mr.. Gillespie was so good as to amuse us with another subject, that I should like very much to know exactly why I ever did anything in all my life — even this little affair in which you were so good as to lend me, as you once did before in another part of the world, your counsel and support, and become my right arm. I feel like a man who has waked from a dream. I wonder why I cared to take any step in the matter, and I am disposed to ask your pardon, monsieur, for having given you so much trouble.” Monsieur assured his friend Mr. Dacre, that there was no trouble, and that he was infinitely charmed of having been able to render his service.

“Monsieur is a philanthropist, and says so to satisfy my self-reproach. Was ever known moonlight so fortunate! how brilliant! no image fresh from the chisel ever showed sharper than the young gentleman who is comfortably in his bed, I hope, by this time; but you observed, no doubt, the distance seemed greater than it was; the illusion, however, did not avail. May I try one of your cigarettes, monsieur, they perfume so deliciously.”

So, for a time they all three smoked together in silence, and the atmosphere of the interior grew hazy. One cigarette satisfied Mr. Dacre this time, and that light quickly burns out. He leaned back for a little, then out of the window. “London! What a hell London really is, and how I like it,” mused Mr. Dacre, who was feverish and fidgety, and could endure nothing long that evening.

“We devils, Mr. Gillespie, have our affinities — our paradise is in the infernal,” continued Dacre.

“I don’t believe in devils nor paradise neither, except a fule’s paradise, and very densely populated, I warrant you,” sneered Mr. Gillespie.

“Very densely, sir, and I take the Fleet prison to be one of its suburbs, where a lot of fools are locked up for spending the money of other fools, who grin and swear at them through the bars.”

“And who do you allude to, sir?” demanded Mr. Gillespie, angrily.

“Well, one of the inhabitants of that paradise is a friend of ours; I visit him now and then, perhaps you’re aware, and so do you; but he owes me no money, and, therefore, I don’t look foolish when I see him.”

Mr. Gillespie did not like that joke at all, and muttering so as not to be audible, however— “Ye’ll look foolish enough one day, my fine fellow, if ye let your tongue wag as ye’re doing.”

He turned away, and settled in his corner and resumed his cheroot vigorously.

“Green — green — green,” murmured Mr. Dacre enigmatically, as he looked out of the carriage window; “tiresome thing green is; paradise — simplicity — verdure — moonshine; yes, I like the other world better; yellow stucco — red brick — gas light — and d — d clever fellows — devils. The angelic life is insupportable insipidity.”

And with a sigh and a shrug he threw himself back in his seat, and his discourse went rambling on.

“I wish I were altogether a devil; I’m perplexed and made inefficient by stupid yearnings after Eden; a divided being is self-torture, not a grain of conscience or *all* conscience, — anything between is loss of force and deep-seated incurable pain.”

Mr. Dacre was so obviously rhodomontading in soliloquy, and the noise of the carriage broke the continuity of hearing so effectually that the politeness of Monsieur Droqueville suffered no violence in his quiet attention to the flavour of his cigarette, which precluded any attempt to convert his comrade’s reverie into a colloquy.

Mr. Dacre repeated to himself some well-known verses thus: —

“That proud dame, for whom his soul
Was burnt within him to a coal,
Used him so like a base rascallion,
That old *Pyg* (what d’ye call him) *Malion,*
That cut his mistress out of stone,
Had not so hard a hearted one.”

Mr. Dacre smiled in his meditation.

"Yes," continued he, "they are very odd cats. It is a great pity that philosophy has not weighed, measured, and analysed them. We talk of human nature, and we mean *men's* nature; feminine human nature — a thing by itself — has never been analysed by grave psychologists; we leave it to be dogmatized on by the frivolous and the libertine, a study on which a metaphysician might easily go mad. Mad!" he repeated, "I sometimes think I am."

And then this volatile young gentleman began to hum an air from an opera.

"It is the nature of the lioness," he suddenly resumed, returning from music to metaphysics; "an instinct for picking out the grandest mate, whether they like him or not, and so with a vainglory strangely humble, to make him their boast, and their sex's envy their happiness. Yes, mesdemoiselles, if the lioness is not satisfied with her suitor, when they take their moonlight walk together in the jungle, she roars and roars, despite the uneasiness of her lover, till from a distant jungle comes an answering roar, and nearer, and nearer, and nearer, and so a battle — and she secures the benefit of competition and the finer animal for a mate; and what, young ladies, is your courtesy at St. James's — your coming out and all that? Is it not your way of roaring and inviting from all circumjacent jungles those lions whom it may concern?"

Now came another silence, during which Mr. Dacre amused himself by gazing, with his head out at the window, upon the landscape, all shrouded in the snowy moonlight. It did not induce serenity, however, so he thought he would try tobacco again.

"May I light this at yours? a thousand thanks, monsieur."

And so, another cigarette, and then Dacre returned to his reverie.

"Of course, there are conditions. You must not be corpulent and bald, and covered with snuff; you must not be aged, white-headed and cross; you must not be fifty things that are obvious, but these excepted, you may almost anything provided you are distinguished and run after; women like fame; they worship masculine renown more than men do. Then what is a poor devil to do who can't declare his fame, such as it is?"

Mr. Dacre spoke this in a disjointed way; blowing out films of perfumed smoke in the intervals, and with the last sentence he threw the end of his cigarette out of the window and laughed sarcastically.

"And, yet, the moonlight is very pretty," he said, as he looked out again, once more passing to a new theme. "As good, very nearly, as anything they make in her Majesty's Theatre, for those happy fellows Don Giovanni or Don anything else. It sometimes makes a fellow almost spoony."

"Ah! yes; the moon — the moon — the lamp of the lovers, I never see it without to feel some sentiment what you call romantic — eh!" said monsieur, leaning forward and smiling, and shrugging upward plaintively, and then a sigh. "Ah!"

"Come, monsieur, our emotions musn't overcome us."

"N' atteste point sa lumière infidèle!" Monsieur shrugged, smiled, and sighed again.

"AH! Monsieur," replied Droqueville, "there are so many tender recollections and ideas. This is so beautiful moon, and — what you call? — *paysage — ces bois* — all these things recall so many circumstances of tender regret. These pistols, they do not to incommode your feet, I hope?" inquired Monsieur, as Dacre's foot knocked on the case which they had so lately used.

"Many thanks no, Monsieur, I can quite understand you —

"Dans ces bois, Lise en vain me jure
Qu'elle m'aimera constamment;
O Bonheur! ta douce imposture
N'est que le rêve d'un moment;

Et, comme aux loix du changement
Tout est soumis dans la nature,
Ces bois changeront de verdure,
Et Lise changera d'amant."

"EH! Monsieur, is not that very like it? however, let us dry our eyes and try another cigar."

So saying he offered his case, and monsieur with suitable acknowledgments accepted one, and offered his in return with a very animated description of its peculiarities and flavor, and so politely Mr.

Dacre relieved himself of dialogue, and that cigar ended, broke again into rambling soliloquy.

"A very good plan is to make yourself a little bit mysterious, to pique curiosity — mother Eve fell by it; to make a confidence — a secret known only to you two — an excuse for whispers — a germ of sympathy — to undertake a service — danger, if by any means it can be had; and so always in her thoughts — always there; very dangerous, young ladies, is not it? Danger, ay, action and reaction; take care, Mr. Gillespie, 'when you try that experiment, you don't run into some little danger yourself."

Mr. Gillespie uttered a grunt of contempt, shook the ashes from his cigar and smoked on.

"Excite their curiosity, their romance, penetrate feelings akin to gratitude, and inspire admiration by self-devotion. Is not that a gas lamp?"

Mr. Gillespie nodded gruffly.

"Old London town again, Monsieur Droqueville, how can I thank you?" said Dacre.

"By not to say one word of an obligation which is altogether mine; I have to thank Monsieur very much for the distinction of having been selected for a post so confidential."

"Where shall we set you down, sir?" asked Mr. Gillespie of the Frenchman.

He named his hotel.

"I wish, dear Droqueville, I could offer you any hospitality; but I am, as you know, a mere bird of passage here; and— "

"A thousand thanks; say not one word; I am going for half-an-hour to look into the theatre near this, where my compatriots play of vaudevilles; and Monsieur Gillespie, how shall we know how Monsieur Mannering recovers?"

"What for, do you want to know, sir?" answered Mr. Gillespie.

"It affects in some measure, sir, my safety, because I have taken part in the affair of this evening, and I should be compromised were Monsieur Mannering's indisposition, by misfortune, to end unhappily."

"A pretty hot kettle-o'-fish for us all, sir; I wish he may be spared, sir. I thought ye were confident on that head, sir — ye spoke as if ye were. I don't understand, sir. I don't know why ye should say all ye did if ye thought he was like to die, sir."

“But Monsieur is not a prophet, nor even a doctor,” said Dacre.

“Well, I call ye both to witness I had neither act nor part in it; it is yer ain affair, gentlemen, I wash my hands o’t.”

“I hope they wont hang you by mistake, Mr. Gillespie, it would be a very melancholy end for so cautions a gentleman,’” said Dacre.

“I’ll take care they shan’t, sir; deevelish gude care, sir,” replied Mr. Gillespie.

“AND in the interval you must make out how he is doing?” said Dacre.

“I’ll hear that; I tauld them to let me know, though, except for gude-nature’s sake, there’s nae need I should care the snap *or* my finger whether the fule lives or dees.”

“Well, monsieur, Mr. Gillespie will do himself the honour to let you know punctually how Mr. Mannering does, and I’ll let you know also,” said Dacre.

Monsieur Droqueville was profuse in his acknowledgments.

A little out of their way they had to go, to knock up the honest gunsmith of whom Mr. Dacre had hired the pistols for a shooting match, for a wager of twenty pounds, as that circumstantial teller of a story informed him. Then they dropped Monsieur Droqueville at his hotel.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. DACRE TAKES THE COMMAND.

THE driver came to the window.

“Where do you want to go?” asked Mr. Gillespie of his companion, with a surly and threatening countenance.

“To hell,” said that gentleman, whose gayer levity seemed to have broken down altogether on the departure of their companion.

“Time enough, sir, for that; I’ll tell him to drive to my door.”

“The nearest entrance to the place I spoke of,” said the young man with a dreary scoff.

Mr. Gillespie gave the man his order, and as soon as they were in motion, being himself in no pleasant temper, he said —

“Mr. — a — a — Dacre, yer no’ that deevil the night, sir.”

“As *ceevil* as I wish to be,” said Dacre. “Verra unceevil, sir, and what’s more, deevelish imprudent, sir; where’s the gude in talkin’ in that violent, daft fashion before people? Why, any fule would see ye were in a commotion o’ mind, sir; that fellow that’s driving us, he’ll never believe it was an accident; he’ll smell a rat, Mr. Dacre; he’ll be conjecturing and talking, sir.”

“And suspect you,” said Dacre.

“Nothing o’ the kind, sir; but I tell ye, Mr. Dacre, you had no business engaging in a thing o’ that sort, no business in life, sir; ye tauld me ye wanted to conceeliate the young blockhead, when, in point o’ fact, sir, ye only wanted to shoot him.”

“We’ve had a charming day,” said Dacre. “And a bludey evening,” added Gillespie. “Yes, a bloody evening. Now, see, Mr. Gillespie, you are a clever man in your way, a clever usurer — don’t mind the phrase — and you’ve made a fortune; but you’ll leave the management of this affair to me; you don’t comprehend such mechanism; nothing is done without a reason, not the least perfect move has been the occurrence of this evening, which seems to have frightened you half out of your wits.”

“Well, if he dies, I conjecture ye’ll be probably hanged, and a verra perfect move — out o’ the world — it will prove; and I’d like to know, in that case’ what’s been gained by it; or even if ‘twere no more than two years’ imprisonment, I think it will be quite enough to knock your chances pretty well on the head. I didn’t think ye capable, Mr. Dacre, of anything so eediotic.”

Dacre smiled.

“Ye may laugh as ye will, Mr. Dacre; ye may laugh now, but ye’ll think shame o’ yourself, when ye come to reflect, how ye’ve put everything in jeopardy, and other people besides yourself — and — and a’maist ruined all, sir, by this one night’s wark.”

Again the young gentleman smiled. It was not a pleasant smile; his face was pale, and he looked as tired as if he had walked fifty miles fasting; and the smile was but momentary — nothing enjoying in the light that darkened so instantaneously into apathy.

“I did not think ye were one o’ those ranting fellows. What for should ye go to put yerself on a footing with these bleezing braggarts? Why, sir, if ye chanced to shoot him dead on the spot, it would ha’ been worse, a’maist, than if he had killed you.”

“You take a great interest in my safety, Mr. Gillespie,” said the young man, and smiled again.

“Tak’ an interest in your life, sir, and an interest in your prospects; ye’re a clever young man, sir — ye’re a clever young man, Mr. Dacre, but this night’s work — I’m clean bombazed wi’ it. Gad, sir, not a soul of us can tell how it will end; and I begin to think if you’re a madman, I’m a fule, the greater madman o’ the two, for trusting you; and I don’t know why we shouldn’t, t’ane and t’other, be locked up in Bedlam, instead o’ being treated like sane men.”

Dacre yawned.

“I see ye’re cast down about it yourself,” said Mr. Gillespie.

“By Jove, I’m no such thing — very much the contrary; I brought it about with great tact and patience, and I would not have it undone for a thousand pounds. If there is any annoyance, it is something entirely different, and I mean to keep it to myself.”

“If you like what you’ve done, you’re easily pleased, sir,” sneered Mr. Gillespie.

"I'm not easily pleased, and I do like it. Of course there's one blot — if he dies — but that wont happen, and I thank God, I shot him."

"I'm glad ye're so releegious, sir, and I wish I could be as easy about it as you are; and think o't how ye will, I consider it a breach o' faith wi' me, sir, and a d — d piece of nonsense beside."

Mr. Dacre yawned again.

"And a fine business it will be, sir, if all goes to the wall for this mad, lawless freak of yours," added Mr. Gillespie, with increasing energy.

"Do mind your own business," said Mr. Dacre, dryly; "if you choose to back my game, sir, you take me as I am — skill, judgment, everything; and rather than be bored any more with your stupid grumbling, I'd throw my cards in your face."

Mr. Dacre spoke with a sudden exasperation that had its evident effect upon Mr. Gillespie.

"See, there: what a pother about nothing; why — a — Mr. — Mr. — a — Dacre, sir, it's more for your own sake than for mine, sir; of course we should both be injured, but you, Mr. Dacre, preencipally, 'twould touch you, may be, verra nearly, sir; and a' things conseedered, I think I may venture to put in a word now and again when I see a necessity; but ye'll understand, I'm verra far, sir, from meaning any offence, or wishing ye to suppose that I'm deesatisfied generally with the line ye have adopted, on the contrary, I'm verra weel pleased with it, and we'll hope all may end well."

Dacre had lighted a new cigarette on finishing his own speech, and was looking out of window, and smoking, as it seemed, without hearing one word of Mr. Gillespie's complimentary address.

So silence succeeded until the carriage drew up at Mr. Gillespie's hall-door steps.

"It's four minutes past eleven, sir; ye'll do weel, Mr. Dacre, to come in; Mr. Larkin and Mr. Levi will be within, sir. I can't offer you any refreshment, but we can talk a bit, and conseeder what's best to be done in the emergency."

"No refreshments! how can you say so, with two such men as Mr. Larkin and Mr. Levi to charm us; d — n you, sir, do you take me for a fool, in right earnest, to suppose that I should go in here, to spend what remains of the night with two such arrant villains."

"Arrant villains! guide us! that's a very pointed expression, Mr. Dacre. Well, sir, they may be clever men, I'll no deny they're clever men, but as to villains, sir, they lead most regular lives, enough, sir; none o' yer ranting fules, wasting their substance on nonsense; they don't drink, sir, nor any o' them vices, to signify; and they don't play, sir — none o' them follies, Mr. Dacre. No; they never play, except Mr. Levi, and that only when he stands sure to win. Oh, no sir, I can't allow THAT, unless all morality is confounded, sir, and that I'm to say I'm a villain myself. There's a line to be drawn somewhere, Mr. Dacre, and ye'll find those gentlemen at the right side o' it; they're clever, sir, but such language as that ye've applied to them, Mr. Dacre, is verra loose."

Mr. Dacre made no answer; he leaned back in the carriage as if he meant to pass the night in it.

"Open the door," said Mr. Gillespie to the driver, which order was obeyed, and he waited some seconds, but Mr. Dacre made no sign, and evidently was not getting out.

"We'll get down now, Mr. Dacre, if ye please; the hall door's open," said Gillespie, with cautious civility.

"I shan't get out, thanks."

"Wont ye come in and talk with the gentlemen, sir?" urged Mr. Gillespie.

"No," answered Dacre.

"Why — why — Mr. Dacre, sir? they're here at your desire," insisted the grim old gentleman, who was a great deal angrier than he cared to make known.

"They may go away at their own desire, sir," said Dacre, carelessly.

"Well, sir, ye'll do as ye think fit; but they'll hardly think it a usual way o' doing business," said Mr. Gillespie.

"A man's real business in life is to do what he likes best," said Dacre.

"Do let me persuade you, Mr. Dacre?"

"No."

"Well, and what will ye have them do?" demanded the old gentleman, commanding his temper with difficulty, in deference to Dacre's odd mood.

"Nothing," answered that impracticable young gentleman.

"Then I'm to tell them ye'll have them do nothing?"

"Yes, I'll let them wait; yes, Mr. Gillespie, there are limits to goodnature; I'm willing to be of use to you, but I'll not worry myself a bit more than, is necessary; and now, listen. You shall let me know; at least twice a day exactly, how that pompous fellow, Mannering, is getting on; if you fail, you'll find me unmanageable. You'll go down there yourself in the morning. I need not tell you that you're not to mention a word about me, nor to pretend that you know where I am. All the better if you give him a hint that I've gone to France with Droqueville; but I leave that to your own invention."

"I'm scarce out o' the doctor's hands, Mr. Dacre; the gout's not well out o' my knuckles yet. I'll be none the better o' this piece o' nonsense, and I'll hardly undertake to be jogging out to that d — d Silver Dragon again tomorrow morning."

"Mr. Gillespie, you MUST do as I say; you'll find I'm in earnest."

"I'd better send up word to the gentlemen," said Mr. Gillespie, beckoning to the maid, who stood at the door.

"Drive away," shouted Dacre.

"Where, sir?" inquired the driver.

"Anywhere — toward the West-end," cried Dacre.

"Give my compliments to the gentlemen upstairs," shouted Gillespie, from the other window, to the servant at the doorsteps; "and mind, ye tell them— "

But before he got further, distance made him inaudible; it was very trying to a gouty man.

CHAPTER XX.

NEWS FROM THE SILVER DRAGON.

“HERE *comes Mr. Dacre. Come in; don’t stand in the door, smiling, like an apparition,” cried Mrs. Wardell, next evening, very glad to see that familiar face again at Guildford House.*

“Like an apparition, I waited to be spoken to.”

“Well, come in — do come in,” said Mrs. Wardell.

“Yes, that completes it. I enter like that apparition. Who was he — I forget — who stood at the door, and was told to enter?”

“Mephistopheles,” said a voice.

“Oh, thanks, Miss Gray. I’m flattered, though you may not have meant a compliment. I rather like that fiend; better, I’m afraid, than you do.”

Miss Gray laughed a little as they shook hands.

“I had not an idea, Miss Gray, that you were in the room; that vase and those flowers hid you so completely. Yes, I think I do recollect Mephistopheles at Faust’s study door, waiting at the threshold; but — but I hope you don’t think me VERY like that unseasonable visitor?”

“Mysterious — satirical; yes, what more? “Well, really I can’t say.”

“You laugh very unkindly.”

“That’s very true; for if you knew what has occurred, you would think it very unkind of me to laugh.”

“Yes,’ indeed,” supplemented Mrs. Wardell; “we have been so sorry and uneasy; you can’t think— “

“Really? What can it be — what is it?” said Dacre.

“News — very unpleasant — of my cousin, Charles Mannering. He has been hurt — rather seriously from all I can learn — and we are very uncomfortable about him.”

“Yery sorry, indeed. Wasn’t that Mr.

Mannering whom I met here the other evening?”

“Yes, the evening before last,” said Laura.

“And what’s the matter?”

“Bather a bad fall from his horse, I’m afraid,” said Challys Gray.

“I once saw such a frightful accident,” said good Mrs. Wardell, placing her fat hand before her eyes with a shudder; “a poor young man (a Captain Paulet) actually killed, so horribly, at a steeplechase. I never went to see one again, and I never shall.”

“But, it’s nothing so serious as to alarm, is it?” inquired Mr. Dacre.

“There was a note written at his dictation, by a Captain Transom, and signed with very tremulous initials by poor Charles; he made nothing of it, but it somehow frightened us. Didn’t it, Julia?”

“Very much,” said Mrs. Wardell; “there are always such concealments about such things; they are afraid, to tell.”

“And how do you know,” asked Mr.

Dacre, “how it occurred? Biding you say?”

“Yes, he says so himself. Have you got the note about you, Julia?”

“Yes, here it is.”

“Head what he says, like a darling.”

She obeyed, and read as follows: —

“I am in a quiet little roadside inn, very comfortable. Biding here yesterday I had an ugly fall, and must keep quiet for a few days. My friend, Captain Transom, kindly acts as my amanuensis. I drop a line by post lest you should think me remiss. Pray keep a note of any commissions that can wait for a, week or so, and when I am fit for duty once more, I will discharge the arrear. If you should see Ardenbroke, though that is not likely in so short a time, or any other friend, pray don’t mention this. It is really nothing — only a little uncomfortable; and some of my friends might come down here bothering me.”

“Where IS he?” asked Dacre.

“He writes at the top ‘The Silver Dragon,’ and the post town,” said Laura:

“Oh, the Silver Dragon; really?” and Mr. Dacre smiled a little oddly.

“Not a gambling house, I hope,” exclaimed Mrs. Wardell.

“Well, they have what they call skittles there, and quoits, and bowling, and that kind of low gaming. No one goes there, or if one did, it would be for a lark; and I suppose our sober friend went there. He did not ride down at all; he drove. A friend of mine saw him going down with a Captain Transom. Depend upon it he got into a row, and some one gave him a very hard hit. A quiet little roadside inn! You have no idea how amusing that is. But, after all, what is a poor fellow to do who gets into a ridiculous scrape?

I never tell an untruth myself, because I happen to hate it, having suffered from other people's contempt of truth; but poor Mr. Mannering" — here he laughed pleasantly— "of course he has coloured the affair a little."

"Charles used to tell the truth," said Laura.

"I dare say; I'm sure Mr. Mannering is quite a champion of truth in Miss Laura Gray's presence. But we young fellows are sadly given to lying. I should lie myself were it not that other people's mendacity has disgusted me with the practice for my life. But I'm not hard upon poor fellows who have not contracted the same antipathy, and who speak the language of their kind."

"That's very good of you," said Mrs. Wardell; "you are a very goodnatured moralist.

"Is not secrecy something of the nature of falsehood?" asked Miss Gray; perhaps she meant to show Mr. Dacre that he had something to excuse in himself.

"Silence is not falsehood, Miss Gray, and, on the contrary, is sometimes the very highest loyalty," said Mr. Dacre, sadly. "Concealment is not disguise."

"But to return to poor Charles Mannering; you heard of him to-day?" asked Miss Gray.

"Yes; a friend mentioned him to-day, and had been down to the Silver Dragon this morning to make inquiries, and it is quite true that he is hurt."

"Not seriously, I hope," inquired she, alarmed.

"Nothing of any consequence?" cried Mrs. Wardell at the same moment.

"Very trifling. My friend is slightly acquainted with him, and having heard that he was hurt, went down this morning to ask after him. He may have to stay there for a fortnight; but he said there is nothing to make one the least uneasy."

"But what is it?"

"You really must tell us," urged both. ladies at once.

"Why do you suppose that I know anything more?" inquired Mr. Dacre.

"Because you do?" answered Mrs. Wardell, relying on intuition.

"I can't answer that, so I had better confess, particularly as Miss Gray condemns reserve so decidedly. You are quite right, Mrs. Wardell; I am informed of the entire affair. Mr. Mannering had been behaving a little oddly — very unlike himself; had been listening to stories and circulating them, it seems, about another young man, who met him there, and gave him rather a rough lesson; and the fall from his horse — horse he had none — turns out to have been a very hard knock of quite another kind."

"But not dangerous?" inquired Miss Gray, after a moment's pause.

"Not the least, my friend says, if he'll only keep quiet — nothing — and the whole affair is supremely ridiculous."

"Well, it is very provoking, poor fellow!" exclaimed Mrs. Wardell; "and how soon shall we see him?"

"In a fortnight," said Dacre.

"That's a long time. Dear me, it must have been a very severe hurt," said Mrs. Wardell.

"The doctors regard it as a mere nothing, my informant tells me."

"Was he stabbed, or how was it?" inquired Julia Wardell, very uneasy.

"Yes; do say how it was," urged Miss Gray.

"I believe I ought not to tell," he answered.

"I'm sure you'll tell us," she said.

"I'm sure I ought not to tell, Miss Gray; but the truth is I find it quite impossible to disobey you. See what a responsibility you charge yourself with in taking the command of a fellow-creature. Well, I ask but one condition; it is a secret. People might be seriously compromised if by any accident it got abroad."

"We'll not tell; we wont tell, Julia? Certainly not."

"No, not for the world," echoed the old lady.

"I don't think I ought," he said, coming over to Miss Gray; "I'm sure I oughtn't; but," and he lowered his voice, "you command, and you are absolute."

"You must not lower your voice, Mr. Dacre," said Mrs. Wardell; "I'm to hear it, all about it, as well as Laura. You must tell us how it was, and what he was hurt with."

"With a pistol bullet," replied Dacre.

"Oh, dear! how horrid!" exclaimed Miss Gray, very pale in a moment.

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Wardell, "a pistol! then there has been a duel?"

"You are quite right — a duel; and from all I can learn," said Dacre, who did not quite like the signs of alarm, transient as they were, that showed themselves in Laura's face. "I hope Miss Gray will excuse my saying anything not quite in her kinsman’s favour — I’m afraid it was very much Mr. Mannering’s fault — altogether, indeed.”

“I thought people never fought duels now,” said Miss Gray.

“In extreme cases, extreme fools do still,’” said Dacre; “and from all I can hear, Mr. Mannering had left himself very open. There is a man against whom, it appears, he cherishes an unfriendly feeling, and he is said to have been hunting up gossip and old stories to his prejudice; watching his movements, and talking about him in a way that no one pretending to be a gentleman could bear. I’m telling you now what I have heard. His hurt, I’m told, has turned Out to be nothing, and so he lies by for a fortnight and meditates, and his little experience may be the means of keeping him out - of a much: worse scrape.”

“And -who is the person he quarrelled with,” inquired Miss Gray.

‘ “Well, that I really can’t tell,” said Mr. Dacre. “I don’t mean to say I don’t know; but I should break faith with two or three people if I were to whisper it anywhere.”

Laura Challys Gray looked in his eyes inquiringly, and then down, with a little frown, in deep meditation.

“Are you sure it’s nothing very bad?” inquired Mrs. Wardell, with new anxiety.

“Perfectly certain; I happened, as I told you, this afternoon, to meet a man who had just returned from a visit to his quarters in the country; he had seen him, and saw his doctor and Mr. Transom, also; and I went into particulars, thinking that if you had heard anything of the affair, it would be pleasant to you to hear also that the consequences were really so trifling.”

“Very kind of you,” said Mrs. Wardell.

“The only thing the doctor is really peremptory about, is that he shall see nobody; he was quite angry with my friend when he found him there. So I would venture to recommend that you should send no one there; he would be sure to have your messenger up to his room and talk; but simply let him have a line by the post, and he can employ his secretary.”

“Yes, so he can, without tiring himself,” acquiesced the old lady.

“And, I’m afraid my news has been rather a damper, I’m so sorry. But you may rely entirely upon my bulletin; and if you wish it, I’ll make a point of seeing the same person every day, for he told me he meant to send or go down to that place every afternoon, and you shall hear exactly what he tells me."

"That's very kind of you," said Mrs. Wardell, "though I think the undertaking was addressed to Laura Gray."

"And, Miss Gray, may I sing a song for you, and try to steal you away from your anxieties?"

Laura laughed.

"I'm not anxious now, although I should be if poor Charlie were in any danger. Of course I was a little shocked when I heard he had been actually engaged in a duel, but as it has ended so harmlessly, I should like very much indeed to hear a song."

Dacre smiled darkly on this beautiful girl for a moment, as if he was grateful for being permitted to obey her.

"What shall it be?"

"Anything."

He went to the piano, humming softly to himself, as singers will do, in aid of memory — sat down, and sang more divinely than ever.

CHAPTER XXI.

GOOD NIGHT.

Young ladies, is there anything so dangerous as such a tenor, when the singer, especially, is so marvellously handsome as Alfred Dacre was? to such a voice it is given to awake those wild and tender feelings which mingle in all romance, in love, in sorrow, and in the yearnings of hope, and by a process so mysterious to steal into the heart, and open the fountain of our tears. Laura Gray sat near the window, looking out, and the enchantment of the music remained after it ceased, and she listened still, as it were, to the remembrance of it.

"I'm afraid! sang to inattentive ears," said he, very low; he had come to the window, and, leaning on the sash, spoke, looking down upon her, she thought, with a sad smile.

"Mr. Dacre," she said, "I am so much obliged; it was beautiful!"

She looked up smiling, with a dilated eye and pale cheek. What so delightfully flatters the vanity of man as seeing such evidences of emotion elicited by himself in a face so young and lovely.

Dacre smiled, he even laughed, and his small even teeth glimmered, and his dark eyes seemed to burn with a triumph almost insulting.

"The pride of this moment, Miss Gray, I shall never forget," he almost whispered; and in the fervour of his words a deep soft crimson dyed her cheeks, her eyes dropped for a moment, but she quickly recovered herself.

"Pride? Why should there be such a feeling? all good music affects all people who have ears to hear, in like manner."

"You wont understand me," he said smiling, with a little shake of the head, and in a sad tone.

"I do; your words are quite clear, and that is my commentary."

"Do you believe in possession, Miss Gray?"

"A very cheerful question, Mr. Dacre."

"But do you?" he urged.

"Of course I believe it, and so must you, for it's in the Bible."

I don’t know that Mr. Dacre quite admitted that logic. He was too well-bred, however, to dispute the authority to which Miss Gray bowed.

“Double identities, and all that,” he resumed. “When you mean and don’t mean — when you are quite in earnest, yet ridicule your own earnestness — when you admire and yet despise yourself — and perhaps love and also hate some other person.”

“I have never been in that delightful state of confusion,” says Miss Gray, with a laugh.

“I wish we were all as single-minded,” he said. “As for me, I am sometimes legion — ever so many spirits in the same person! Don’t you think it a very dangerous state: a mutinous crew — the captain deposed — who can tell which among them will prove the more potent spirit, and what course the ship will steer; which reminds me that my course lies homeward now — two men on business that may interest you, to meet me; my hour has come.” All this was nearly in a whisper, and just at this moment a servant came in to announce to Mrs. Wardell the alarming intelligence respecting her dog who had been an invalid for two days — that Mrs. Medlicot thought there was something queer about his head and his left paw, and a sort of a shaking she did not understand.

“My dear, do you hear that?” she exclaimed, fussing up from her chair. “I knew, and no one would believe me, that it was serious. I knew it from the first,” and Mrs. Wardell got out of the room faster than she had moved for a week.

“Mr. Dacre, I have to ask one thing,” said Laura. “Do you think what has happened to Charles Mannering is in any way connected with our pursuit of the odious people who wrote those letters?”

Mr. Dacre smiled.

“That question is an inspiration,” he said. “Yes, I not only think, but I know, with absolute certainty, that what has occurred to Mr. Mannering is directly connected with those villanous machinations — how, I shall explain hereafter — I cannot do so now; but there is a mutual dependence between them of the most intimate kind, and, having said so much, I must there stop short for the present. Good night, Miss Gray.”

“No, don’t go, pray, for one moment. Do tell me how it is connected.”

“That affair is the most intricate in the world. Ask me nothing for the present. You shall know everything by-and-by. I may tell you this, however, Mr. Mannering has been unconsciously committing the most serious stupidities. He was entangling himself in influences which he no more sees, and cannot, than those operations of nature, which, work, like the electric fluid, in secret, but which it is dangerous, and may be death itself, to encounter."

"Now — yes — that is precisely what I have been thinking. I shall leave this place tomorrow. I am involving others by remaining here, and I have no right, no claim, Mr. Dacre, to expose you any longer to the dangers which your kindness and generosity prompt you to incur for my sake."

Miss Laura Gray had risen with a look so high and spirited, that she might have represented a more beautiful Charlotte Corday in the moment of inspiration.

He looked at her with a smile of undisguised admiration.

"It is now my turn to entreat," said he. "If you withdraw before the crisis of the odious conspiracy which is directed against you, annoyance will pursue you wherever you go. I pledge myself within a week to place these villains on their knees and to extort a distinct confession of their guilt if only you remain where you are. If you, on the contrary, leave this place, you will by so doing involve me in very serious danger, and yourself in protracted anxieties and alarms. If you think I have any claim on your consideration, I implore of you to prove it as I say."

"You say within a week, Mr. Dacre. You must in that case act with precipitation, and I don't know what danger such haste may involve. Your life has been in danger; Charles has also been in danger. I don't know what to think. I should much prefer incurring such annoyances as you apprehend for me, to risking the safety of kind friends who have been exerting themselves so generously, and I wont. I have quite made up my mind I will not; and Mr. Gryston can find a messenger to bring those papers I have to sign, or come himself, for here I will stay no longer."

"But, I assure you— "

"No; I've made up my mind. I should never forgive myself if I were to allow this to continue. I don't understand such people — they are so desperately wicked; but it's plain that if I remain here others may suffer.

There has been too much anxiety and danger already."

Mr. Dacre smiled, and his dark eyes seemed to gleam almost fiercely on her.

“Miss Gray, you overrate the danger — I despise it; but as that argument wont prevail, let me urge another. I implore of you to believe this; — if you go just now you will involve me and perhaps others in very serious and urgent danger, and you will place me besides in a position the most painful that can be imagined. Only remain a very little longer and you will have ceased to have any disagreeable motive for going. Have I prevailed?”

“You, Mr. Dacre, are better entitled than any other person to advise me in this miserable business — you have taken more trouble. I will try a little longer as you think so, and we will see what a week may bring.”

“I am very grateful,” said Dacre.

“No; it is I who should thank you, but I wont go on saying that. We should only have to repeat our pretty sayings over and over, and mine is true.”

“Your commands I obey, and now, more than ever grateful, I say goodnight.”

“Goodnight,” said she.

In another minute he was driving away under the old trees. His odd, half-bitter smile had subsided. He looked back at the drawingroom window in which the light was shining. He wished to see her there, even her shadow; but a bough of a great tree hid the window, and he leaned back and said —

“Yes; it is a deep game, or — a VERY shallow one. This mechanism then is wound up — springs, wheels, levers — rather a nice piece of work. It must run on and down, and play its figures and strike the hours. By Heaven, I haven’t thought for days; I never think now — my head swims and whirls so pleasantly. I hear, I see, I enjoy, but I never think. What a pretty creature she is — the prettiest creature in the world. It is a great pity.”

CHAPTER XXII.

IN PRISON.

In his dingy room, de Beaumirail looked ill and peevish. He had jerked away his novel, which lay sprawling, open leaved, upon the floor. The novelist had ventured, with a pompous emphasis, some moral platitudes which grated on the nerves of the recluse. “Conceited little Pharisee! And his book is as stupid as— “ there was, of course, a simile. “what’s this?”

Good old Mr. Parker, the clergyman, had forgotten, on making his last visit, that oldfashioned duodecimo, arrayed in clerical black, now somewhat rubbed and rusty, which made the tour of his parish, and was often opened in his daily visits, and lay ready always for duty in his ample coat pocket.

“That’s old Parker’s book,” he said with a soar smile, as he plucked it towards him. “Comes here, I believe, to look after my soul! What a wild goose chase my wandering soul has led him! The Offices of the Church — isn’t that what they call them? ‘The Baptism of Infants’” — he was turning over the leaves listlessly.

“And I was baptized; and my godfathers and godmothers did promise and vow in my name that I should be an exemplary Christian and an ornament to society. Promise and vow! Good gossips, easier to promise and vow than to perform. I wonder how it fared with their own CONUSORS (capital lawyer my affairs have made me — CONUSORS, yes) and whether THEY did themselves what they promised for me. I’ll answer for one of them — my distinguished godfather, old Brimmelstone. I’m afraid he left his own godfathers and godmothers to settle liabilities in his own case, and estreated his recognizances.”

De Beaumirail shrugged and smiled coldly.

“A great sinner, and what’s worse a screw, and might have been of use to me, and never was; but that’s nothing remarkable.”

He turned over some more leaves, and went on— “‘Visitation of the Sick.’ Poor old Parker — every time he comes he has his book out, and fumbles with it and looks at me. It goes to my heart to refuse him the pleasure of reading it. Why don’t I allow him? I know I ought; but the flesh is weak. If smoking was allowed, I think I should. Poor old fellow, he has not an idea where it is. ‘The Burial of the Dead.’ ‘The Solemnization of Matrimony.’” De Beaumirail laughed.

“‘The Solemnization of Matrimony.’ And a very solemn affair — for some of us, at least — whenever it comes.”

There was a knock at his door just at this moment. De Beaumirail turned toward it, irresolute what answer to give. Probably old Mr. Parker come to reclaim his book. But no, it was too brisk a knock for that aged and timid hand.

“Which are worst,” he thought— “my blue devils, or my devils incarnate? Sometimes one, sometimes the other. Enter, Satan in the flesh,” he cried.

But the door was secured — he had forgotten that; and with the indolence of dejection hated being disturbed, and opened it rather bitterly.

There was the doctor, in a very rusty velveteen shooting coat, dingy tweed trousers, and battered slippers; a nightshirt buttoned at his throat, and a fez, whose tawdriness time and dust had long subdued, upon his head.

“Come in! I had no idea it was you. I thought it might have been my confessor — we’ll shut the door, please — but you are the better MEDICUS by so much as I am surer I have a body than a soul.”

The doctor smiled drearily and looked about him slowly, as if he expected to find new pictures on the walls, or a gilded cornice; but it was only a way he had.

“Going upstairs to see that unfortunate fellow, Captain Prude. You know him?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Don’t you? Why, he’s only right over your head.”

“There’s a floor between, however,” said De Beaumirail.

“Drinking himself to death, poor devil; and what’s worse, his poor young wife,” said the doctor. “Nothing, but fluids in that room, sir. I don’t think there’s a pound of meat in a week.”

The doctor was looking out of the window by this time with his hands in his pockets.

“And how are you getting on yourself,” he said, turning about; “you look more lively to-day, don’t you — how is the appetite?”

“Can’t eat, sir, anything to signify.”

"Let me see your tongue?"

"No, please; we'll not mind to-day," said De Beaumirail.

"Sleep?" said the doctor, after a yawn, shuffling back again to the table—"how is your sleep?"

'I don't sleep — I never was great at that," said De Beaumirail.

"You ought to look to your, sleep, however — I don't like that," said the doctor.

"Nor I. I have palpitations, sir, that shake me up, and nasty dreams when I do snatch a doze."

"And that sort of sinking you describe, we give it a technical name, sir. It is well known to us, sir; it comes from monotony; and the air being always identical, the system grows low and languid."

"They have something to answer for who keep me here," said De Beaumirail.

"Did you look at your TIMES this morning. Some capital observations of that clever fellow, Flam, the member for — what's it's name — about imprisonment for debt; and, egad, sir, for a free country it's a burning stigma and a disgrace. Look at me, here ten years the fifth of last August. The APPLEBURY HERALD, sir, had an article on my treatment of an old man there; a case of asphyxia. I have it in my drawer. I'll read it for you, it might interest you, this evening — I'm in a hurry now to see the poor fellow upstairs."

"You read it for me last week — thanks."

"Sooner or later, sir, that remnant of barbarism must be blotted from the statute book," declared the doctor, "Here am I, sir — did you ever see my paper on the diseases of glass-blowers? I'll read it for you the next time you allow me. I was complimented on that by two of the most eminent men in the profession to whom I sent copies. THE PROBANG AND FORCEPS was the only medical paper that did not speak well of it, and that was a personal feeling. I'd have been making my two or three thousand a year, and every farthing paid off by this time. It's all very well saying I should give up my £50 a year — that's all I have to subsist on — and come out; but that sort of sophistry wont hold water. Who's that new fellow crossing the court with the goldheaded cane and the imperial? Don't know, I suppose. This is his third day. Well, at all events — what was I saying? — I don't suppose, sir, this remnant of barbarism can last much longer; unless we are to fall back and lose our place in the race of nations. You have influential friends, Mr de Beaumirail; why don't you poke them up. 'A long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether,' you know, might take us out of this."

"I don't take a part in the discussion, because people are so stupid that they would suspect me of a prejudice, and any attempt to swell the chorus of eloquence, from this place, might make unfeeling people laugh."

"I shouldn't wonder," said the doctor. "Did you see two women, very odd looking dressed, black lace and yellow satin, they're in about a fortnight, they have only the one dress each, Spanish, or Portuguese, or something, they keep to themselves a good deal, expect to get out, I suppose. Old Jinks, the composer, thinks they're from the opera. They sing a lot in their room — devilish loud when the window's open. The eldest is a very fine woman, a little bit pale, you know."

And the doctor yawned, and sighed "heigh-ho!"

"Take some of that ether bottle when you find yourself getting down, you know," said the doctor. "There was a fellow from the music shop in Pall Mall with old Jenks this morning — that fellow makes a nice thing of his music, setting airs, and scores, and all that — and he expected to hear all about them. I'd have looked in on him only I was in a hurry to see how the Captain is getting on."

And the doctor, notwithstanding his haste, shuffled slowly about the room, and picked the novel off the floor and read the title, and looked round the walls again, and finally whistled for two or three minutes, looking out of the window, for in such cities of the dead, there is no hurry, and they seem to have an eternity at their disposal.

He was interrupted by a sound overhead, as of something falling, which, perhaps, recalled the Captain, for he turned about and said, —

"Well — anything more to say to me?" and being satisfied on this point, he took his leave with an exhortation to De Beaumirail to keep his spirits up, and never say die, and then with another yawn, and the long-drawn "heigh-ho!" that had become habitual, he began to ascend the stairs at his leisure to the Captain.

When he was gone, De Beaumirail got up listlessly, and took for a while the doctor's place at the window, and looked out with his hands in the pockets of his dressing gown, and then after some time he saw, as he ruminated, Mr. Levi, the Jew, and Mr. Larkin, the Christian, crossing the court in conversation, as they approached his quarters.

Looking down upon them, with that kind of dislike, which the face betrays while looking upon an ugly reptile, Mr de Beaumirail, in cold blood, I am sorry to say, cursed them both, very particularly, and then admitted them to his room, and heard all they had to say with the intense but odious interest with which an unscrupulous candidate may listen to the talk and suggestions of a pair of electioneering villains in his pay.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. DACRE SEES A LETTER.

WHEN Mr. Dacre entered the drawing room at Guildford House this evening, Mrs. Wardell was alone, and greeted him with her accustomed kindness.

"Laura will be down, I expect, in a minute or two. She was in her room writing a line to poor Charles Mannering."

"Not telling him, is she, that he was hit with a pistol-bullet?" inquired Dacre, with an odd smile.

"No, we agreed that it would only vex him our knowing the nature of his accident, and, although nothing could be more reprehensible, yet it is not just yet the time to find fault."

"Besides, you know, it would not do to let him know that I told you. He might have another duel on his hands before he had well recovered the first," Dacre laughed; "and I fancy he has had quite enough of that kind of thing for the present."

"Oh, dear! no," said Mrs. Wardell; "that would be treating you very ill."

"Running my head into the lion's mouth," and Dacre smiled; "a formidable lion, no doubt, though a wounded one. The bulletin to-day, I'm glad to tell you, is quite satisfactory; no fever to signify, and no prescription but to keep quiet; in fact, he is a most fortunate patient. The luxurious importance of an invalid; the interest of a hero, and ample leisure to read his TIMES, and his novels, and to repent."

"The last I do hope," said Mrs. Wardell, accepting Dacre's speech in perfect good faith: "and we have had a very satisfactory communication also. We were thinking of driving down in a few days to that place, just to inquire. I think it would be kind, don't you? and show that we took an interest."

"Well, of course it would be kind; but there's such a thing as killing people with kindness, and my friend tells me that none of his friends must call even at the door; so says the doctor."

“Why he can’t mean that talking to the waiter at the door would kill Charles Mannering upstairs in his bedroom?” exclaimed Julia Wardell.

“That doesn’t exactly describe the process,” said Dacre, laughing. “What he says is this — for the same paradox struck me also — that it would be less likely to put him in a fever for people to go direct into his room, and talk to him half the day, than to excite and tantalize him by such calls; he’d be sure to hear of them, and he’d insist on seeing the people, and if the waiters disobeyed him, he’d blow them up, and get himself into such a nervous excitement, that mischief would inevitably follow.”

“Well, we only thought of it; but, perhaps, the doctor knows best,” said Mrs. Wardell, placing her fat, short fingers on some letters that lay on the table beside her, and picking out one, which she presented to him, saying— “Just read that.”

“Thank you,” said Dacre, preparing to be bored with a long epistle from the Silver Dragon. It turned out, however, to be a totally different thing. Mrs. Wardell had addressed herself to converse with her dog, now happily recovering and occupying his cushion on the sofa beside her. The letter which Dacre had been invited to read, and which soon interested him intensely and disagreeably, was certainly not that which Mrs. Wardell had intended to give him.

It was in these terms, after a few lines of inquiry —

“You can’t think how beautiful the scenery is here. As I write, I command a view so like some of the glimpses down the glens of the Apennines. I think if you were in this part of the world for a summer it would end in your building a castle, and becoming a lady of the Lake (by-the-by, such lakes! and I think those cold mists which stupid people complain of, so fine, so singular, and so effective a contrast, when they rise and dissipate themselves — contrast, you understand, by way of preparation, to the noble colouring of these grand Caledonian landscapes). My parenthesis has run to such a length that you will let me off finishing the sentence. I like the people here so much. The peasantry so unaffectedly republican in tone and demeanour, and so feudal in their attachment. My host, you know, is YOUR kinsman as well as mine. You would, I think, like him and his wife so much. She is not a beauty, and in so far does not resemble you. But in many ways she reminds me so of you, and this being so, I can’t, of course, describe her, only, I know you would like her, and she would be charmed with you; and, therefore, if she asks you to Lochlinnir, I counsel you by all means to go. I wish I could say COME.

But I shall be in — shire a week before you could make up your mind. Therefore, I'm not selfish when I say DO accept when she invites you, which, I know, she meditates. She means, also, to ask Mrs. Wardell to accompany you. She consulted me on the subject, and asked whether you would come. I said, 'Yes.' Pray, don't disappoint and make me tell a fib. But my dear Challys, it strikes me, an excursion of this kind would be the very thing you would probably wish, for quite other reasons. Will you think me very impertinent? I am sure you wont — you have always listened to my advice so kindly. Recollect it shall be only advice; for, even if I had a right to blame, you are not the least to blame in this matter. I only venture a caution — shall I say a warning? There is an acquaintance I want you to drop. You must not allow Mr. Dacre to call at Guildford House any more; quietly say — not at home. It is only to repeat the exorcism half-a-dozen times, and that spirit is laid. I can't say more. My reasons are quite sufficient. When I am at liberty to state them you will THANK me. I feel happier now that I have got that off my mind; and pray, dear Challys, don't contemn my warning."

Then came some gossip, and then this passage —

"I have had a letter from Charles Mannering, who has had an adventure, and got himself hurt somehow; but, he tells me, it will be nothing."

It ended with a word or two more, and the signature, "Ardenbroke;" and, smiling, Alfred Dacre returned it gently to its envelope, and while the old lady continued her talk with her dog, he slipped it among the two or three other letters on the table — still smiling.

He was smiling, while his heart swelled with wrath and bitterness.

"Well, that's very satisfactory, isn't it?" said good Mrs. Wardell, who had plainly mistaken the latter.

"He's sure to do well, as I said, if only he does as his doctor bids him."

"And I hope YOU have been quite well?" she said, suddenly observing how very pale he looked.

"I? Oh, I've been — yes, perfectly well, thank you," he said, in a rather bewildered way; "very well, thanks — a little — a little tired, I think — that's all — where is Miss Gray?"

"I told you she's writing a note; I think it must be finished by this time."

"Oh, I beg pardon; to be sure you did, and I have no business asking — I think I'm half asleep; I sat up nearly all last night over papers and accounts, and I really am little better than a somnambulist; a cup of your tea will, however, set me up again, and I shall be wide awake in a minute."

"I know the sensation so well; yes, indeed. Would you mind touching the bell? we shall have tea in a moment, and — here's Laura."

Laura received him very graciously this evening. She smiled more; her manner seemed also sadder and more subdued. Had she been crying? No; there were none of the unbecoming evidences of that feminine occupation. But did not her fine dark eyes look tearful? Could it be about that letter; and was she weak enough to adopt its advice?

She sat down at the piano, and, with one hand, ran lightly over the notes. With a dark and piercing gaze he looked unobserved in her face. There was another feeling mingling in his anger, but he would not acknowledge it; it surprised, and almost alarmed him.

He drew near, and sat beside her at the piano.

"Miss Gray, I think — will you forgive me? — I think something has vexed you.

She was looking down at the notes which she was touching lightly with one hand, and she said, without raising her eyes —

"Yes, I am vexed; very much vexed."

"Not with me, I hope, Miss Gray," he nearly whispered, but he looked very sad and uncertain.

"Certainly not; oh, Mr. Dacre! my true and brave friend, how could you think so?"

She spoke with a kind of enthusiasm that thrilled him, and, at the same time, extended her hand, which he took. His was very cold; he looked as pale as a dying man, and he gazed in her face with his eyes full of a strange fire. Was it confusion — was it love — was it remorse? It was so intense she could not endure it. She felt a shudder in his hand; and, with a short sigh, like a gasp, he raised her hand to his lips, and passionately kissed it.

"What have I done? Forgive me, Miss Gray, I am very unhappy; I fancied you were — offended with me, and in the rapture of your acquittal, I forgot myself, and the immeasurable fate that separates us."

She drew her hand back from him. He did not attempt to retain it. She had blushed intensely, but treated this stage act as the wildness of a moment. So estimating, it was, perhaps, more dignified to ignore it as she did.

“Not with you, but very much vexed with Ardenbroke and with Charles Mannering.

“I’m sure you’ll forgive them,” said he.

“Well, I don’t know; I suppose I shall; but why do you say so?” she said.

“Because some people are so fortunate,” lie said, dejectedly.

“And others are so unfortunate?” she added.

“Yes, others are so unfortunate.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

"OH, COME TO ME WHEN DAYLIGHT SETS."

A little silence followed these enigmatical speeches. She went on fiddling with the treble of an air, looking on her fingers. He stood beside her looking down upon her.

"I see, Miss Gray," he said at last, "that you are a very good friend; I can be that — I could, at least, once. But I have found that people who are so, are also very steadfast enemies; I mean, I have found it so in myself. I have met many traitors; the world is full of simulated friendships and dissembled hatreds. I prefer a frank enemy to a flatterer. You never cherished an enmity; I have."

"People have accused me of being vindictive; that is, not generally, but in one particular case, and I never was; but no one person quite understands another in this world."

"I was on the point of being very impertinent; I was near asking a question," said he.

"Well?" she said, still looking down on the notes.

"I was going to ask in what particular case that was; but I have no right, and I shan't venture."

He had chosen to interpret that "well?" as an invitation to put his question.

"No, you are right; we shan't mind; we'll not talk about it," answered she.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"And why sorry?" asked she.

"Because it interests me so much," said he.

"Well, it makes me sad, that is my only reason. I'm not afraid; I'm never afraid of anything I do, but I am sorry whenever I think of that," she said.

"May I guess?" said he.

"Why?" she asked.

"I want to know; I long to know."

"You are curious, then?"

“Very,” said he.

“I thought that curiosity was a feminine grace, and that you men boasted of never being curious.”

“Well, I shall ask but one question.”

“I don’t much mind, then, if I answer it. Go on, I’m listening.”

“Is it, then, De Beaumirail?” he asked.

“Yes; how did you guess it?”

“Because you hinted the same thing once before, though not so distinctly; and you really, then, regret your not having liberated that odious fellow?” exclaimed Dacre. “I beg your pardon, but is not that a very misplaced remorse, Miss Gray?”

“It is well that we don’t judge as harshly, always, as you men.”

“Equally well, Miss Gray, that we don’t always judge as mercifully as you — earth is no place for the angelic attributes — in this game that we call life; the diabolic carries all before it, the angels are nowhere. I don’t speak in particular of De Beaumirail, though I don’t take the indulgent view of his character that Ardenbroke does. But that, you will say, has something’ of malice in it; for no man living ever injured me so deeply as De Beaumirail. All I say is the general rule, you can’t govern, the world by kindness. Hell must be ruled with a strong hand, and so must the earth; the devils would swarm up, otherwise, and scale heaven.”

“Didn’t I hear you mention Mr de Beaumirail?” inquired Mrs. Wardell, who had overheard the name.

“Yes; so I did,” answered Dacre.

“And what do you think of him?” asked Mrs. Wardell; “of his appearance — his looks, I mean?”

“I never venture any such criticism in presence of ladies; they see with a truer eye. What is your opinion, Miss Gray?”

“I never saw him.”

“Never say De Beaumirail? I thought you told me you had seen him; perhaps it was he who said he had seen you, and of course, in that case, the boast is not very likely to be true. I can only say, Mrs. Wardell, that I shall defer to your judgment in that matter, for I don’t like him, and could not judge him fairly.”

“But I can’t tell any more than Laura.”

"Why you must have seen him at Gray Forest, have not you? He told me he has been there."

"So I think he was," said Julia Wardell, "but never while I was there."

"No, he was not very often there," said Laura; "I believe about three times, and not for very long. I was in France, and never saw him there, nor anywhere else that I remember, and I don't care to hear about him; I mean, of course, what he is like. The whole subject is bitter to me, and I would give a year of my life that I dared set him free; but I can't, and my real helplessness, where I seem to have the sole power, is the most miserable reflection of my life."

"What! really sorry you can't let that scamp loose upon the world?" said Dacre, with a little shrug and a smile. "I admire the charity of your angelic sex, Miss Gray, but I do believe there is no way to its heart, like being a bit of a MAUVAIS SUJET. I envy De Beaumirail; it is so pleasant, exciting a compassion on such easy terms. But our leaning is quite the other way. We don't take an interest in scamps; their lives and motives are no mystery to us. Nothing awful or romantic about them; simple selfishness, I mean a life of folly, and champagne, the dice-box, and the pistol, ending in broken fortunes and reputation, and liberty and light itself, LOST."

"And how can you think that is not pitiable, Mr. Dacre? The most pitiable of all miseries are those which overtake us from want of prudence, which seems to me so much the virtue of selfishness and hypocrisy."

I think Dacre rather liked this doctrine, at least it did not shock him, for he smiled darkly with pleasure, one would have said, as she enunciated it, while Mrs. Wardell, more orthodox, exclaimed —

"Laura, my dear, how can you?"

"I believe it is quite true," said Dacre, laughing; "prudence is active fear, and active fear is cowardice; at the same time, I am happy to say that I have learned that kind of cowardice myself. De Beaumirail has taught me a lesson or two in it, so valuable, although he exacted a very high price for them, that I almost forgive him."

"Is he as good-looking as people say?" asked Mrs. Wardell, recurring to her point.

The window was open, and the rich perfume of flowers exhaling in the sultry night, hung in the air. Laura Gray changed her place, and sat by the window, while Dacre, answering Mrs. Wardell, said —

"I could not describe him conscientiously; but I want very much to see him, and will, although he refused me that honour a few nights ago. Suppose I ask him for his CARTE DE VISILE when he favours me with an interview? The fact really is, at least, in my case, that if I don't like a man I can't admire him, and De Beaumirail has hit me too often and too hard to allow me to like him; and, altogether, I am ashamed of him."

Looking out in that luxurious atmosphere of fragrance, it was Laura's turn to smile now — what was her thought? Might it not be something like this? —

"Poor Charles Mannering can't say a good word of Mr. Dacre, and Mr. Dacre can't see anything good in Mr de Beaumirail. How jealous they are, one of another; praise a man, and his sex are ready to tear him to pieces. They hate one to think, or fancy, any other man even good-looking." Laura was smiling silently from the window — not a satirical smile — a smile with that indefinable air of gratification and victory in it, which, in a beautiful and gracious face, has such a charm.

"Well, you must not mention me, Mr. Dacre; but I really am curious," said Julia Wardell, "I have heard so much about him. There's an old clergyman, a Mr. Parker, who came here constantly to lecture Laura for not letting him out; and Mr. Gryston talks of him, and Ardenbroke, and Charles Mannering; and I've always heard him talked about in the Gray family; so, naturally, I wish to see him. Shall we get his photo', Laura?"

"I'll manage it, if you tell me?" said Dacre, looking at Miss Gray.

"No, I should not wish it. Pray don't think of it," said Laura, her curiosity overcome by a kind of disgust.

"Are you serious?"

"Perfectly; I shouldn't like it."

"I'm sure you are curious?"

"So she is — very curious," interposed Julia Wardell.

"I should not look at it — nothing would pain me more. I don't like talking of him. I don't like thinking of him. He is suffering, and I am the passive instrument of his suffering. I pity him — I know how odious I must seem to others — and yet, from a feeling which I wont explain — I suppose you would laugh at me — a feeling that I can't explain — I am powerless. But I won't endure any jesting on the subject; it is so heartless, and it is cruel, besides, to me."

“What an empress she is!” exclaimed Julia Wardell.

“Empress, indeed,” echoed Dacre, with a different meaning it seemed.

“Yes, about that very imperious,” she continued. “I wish he would let me be of use to him — such use as I can — but he is so impracticable, and so angry with me, and can I wonder at his hating me? I assure you, Mr. Dacre, I could kneel at his feet to ask his forgiveness; and I know I am governed by a kind of madness, but I can’t overcome it; and even talking of him makes me so miserably nervous. Julia Wardell, you ought to know it; and, Mr. Dacre, I implore of you to mention him no more.” Dacre looked at her with a strange curiosity.

“You can always command ME, Miss Gray. I shall always do, or leave undone, precisely as you desire me.”

“That’s very kind of you, Mr. Dacre; but I should be very sorry to accept such a prerogative except in two or three things; and one” — she continued, with a little laugh— “unquestionably is your beautiful music.”

“Certainly,” said he, with alacrity unusual in singers, rising and approaching the piano; “only tell me what I shall sing.

‘Something about the moon, I think,’” he glanced through the open window, through which he could see the broad moonlight spread like a hoarfrost over grass and leaves — and instantly touching the chords, with a little laugh he sang a few bars of Byron’s early song:

“Oh, come to me when daylight sets,
Sweet, then come to mo,
When smoothly glide our gondolets
O’er the moonlit sea.”

He stopped, and laughed again.

“You must forgive me — very impudent of me to sing such hackneyed music for Miss Gray, even in jest. But, seriously, order any song I can sing — I’m only too much honoured.”

“And, seriously, I like that little Venetian song best of any. I feel the motion of the gondola as you sing. Of course, if it is not well sung, silence were better, but you sing it with the true feeling. I know you have been in Venice, as I listen.”

“I had no idea my little jest would end in such a success. I shall always think better of the song, and with a kind of gratitude.”

CHAPTER XXV.

AN EVIL EYE.

So, without more fuss about it, he sang it through, and being encored by both ladies, he commenced it again. He was still singing, when Laura, who was sitting at the window, looking out, as she leaned on her hand and listened, rose suddenly, drawing back, with a shuddering “Oh!” as if she had seen something frightful.

“Shut the window — shut the door — downstairs, I mean.”

Mr. Dacre had risen and approached, and even Mrs. Wardell had stood up, gazing with an alarmed curiosity on the young lady.

“What is it, Miss Gray?” he said, looking earnestly in her pale face.

“What’s the matter, Laura dear? for heaven’s sake don’t be foolish!” exclaimed Mrs. Wardell, with the peremptoriness of panic.

Dacre looked from the window, but saw nothing unusual.

“There’s nothing there, I assure you,” he said. “Pray tell me what I can do — I’ve shut the window as you desired.”

“That dreadful little man — that horrible Jew,” said Miss Gray.

“Where — where was he?” asked Dacre, eagerly looking again from the window.

“He came out suddenly from under one of the trees — from the shadow — and looked up at the window. I could not be mistaken.”

Before she could interpose a word, Dacre had left the room. She saw him run down the steps, and, with a hasty glance round him, continue his course, bareheaded, down the avenue.

His carriage stood about halfway down. He passed it, and opened the gate, and made a survey up and down the narrow road. Then he returned slowly, looking under and about the trees. They saw him stop and speak, it seemed, with the driver, and then slowly, and often looking about him, resume his way to the house.

“I’m very glad he did not overtake him,” exclaimed Laura.

“But, my dear, what did you mean by saying a Jew? You don’t know any Jews. Jews, indeed! What could you mean?” exclaimed Mrs. Wardell, who had been too much engrossed in watching Mr. Dacre's proceedings from the window, to put her question before.

"Yes, there is a Jewish face — one of the wickedest I could have imagined," said Laura, vehemently. "We saw it, at least I did, at the synagogue. I saw it here another night, looking in at the library window, and I now remember, what I could not recollect before, that I first saw that odious face among the people who came here the day after we arrived, to urge me to give that miserable Mr de Beaumirail his liberty."

At this moment Mr. Dacre entered the room.

"Not a trace of him. I looked in all directions, the moment I got down. I asked at the gate. I inquired of the driver whether anyone had passed him, and there has been no one. Could it possibly have been fancy?"

"Quite impossible, I assure you. No, I saw him as distinctly as ever I saw anything in my life," said Laura Gray, very much troubled.

"But is he a dangerous person?" demanded Mrs. Wardell, proceeding to ring the bell vehemently.

"I cant tell, I'm sure," said Laura; "I can't describe the fear and loathing with which I see that man's face. Mr. Dacre, forgot to ask, did you shut the hall-door?"

"Yes. Oh, yes; I'm quite sure."

"Don't you think, Mr. Dacre," said Laura Gray, "that it would be well to tell Mr. Gryston all about that man's prowling about this place, now that I remember him accurately; of course, we know who he is; his name, and everything about him; and Mr. Gryston would know what steps to take."

"Don't think of such a thing — pray don't," urged Mr. Dacre; "if you do, you defeat all my plans, and nothing could be more provoking; for I am on the point, as I told you, of success."

"Well, I don't know; I have a misgiving," said Laura Gray. "Why should we contend with those wicked people? I have a foreboding that something bad will come of it, if I don't give way; and after all, whatever you may think, I am persuaded it is only to leave this place, and I should never be pursued."

"Miss Gray,! KNOW the reverse."

"Know it? How can you know it?" asked Challys Gray.

"Have you never read in that tiny romance, Lewis's 'Bravo of Venice,' how Flodoardo — I beg pardon for naming myself with so perfect a hero —

associates, under the name of Abelino, with the assassins who hold the city in awe and enlists in the conspiracy against its government, for the purpose of delivering them all to the executioner? Now, my little counter-plot is near its crisis, only don’t disturb my operations, and do give me a few days more.”

“What is all this about Venice and its conspirators?” asked Mrs. Wardell, a little perplexed. “I don’t understand what on earth you mean.”

Dacre laughed. He had been speaking a little inadvertently, and did not care to be more explicit to Mrs. Wardell.

“It is all taken from an old novel,” said he. “But it is too long a story to ask you to listen to; besides, I don’t remember it well enough, and, Miss Gray, I’m afraid you have been made very nervous. I only wish I could have secured that little wretch, but I’ll find a way to reach him tomorrow morning.”

“No, Mr. Dacre, I said before, you are not to be running into danger — you must not.”

“You must give me a few days more — very few — if I fail, I fail, and so — good night.”

And with these words Dacre took his departure. He raised his hat as he looked up, and then swiftly disappeared under the shadow of the trees.

Dacre that night was in an odd mood. He felt as he fancied he never should have felt. In addition to that strange feeling, there were a dreadful agitation and gloom. He looked round him for a moment. The light from the drawingroom — the moonlight, and the trees — the very road under his feet, its dust mottled with patches of white moonlight and shadow, seemed unreal, like things seen in a vision. He stept into his carriage, which began to drive away toward town.

When Dacre turned from the window, he saw in the opposite corner of the carriage a little figure in black HUDDLED up in a cloak.

“Got in here, Mr. Dacre; changed my mind, sir,” said this person from his corner, in reply to a rough poke with Dacre’s foot.

“Ha! so I see, sir,” answered Dacre, “I had not expected this pleasure; you asked me to set you down at the gate, and you said you had business in some pot-house, the Bell and Horns, or something like that, and that you meant to walk home, and walk home you shall.”

He pulled the check-string, and brought the brougham to a standstill—"And what the devil did you mean by going to the front of the house, and staring up at the windows? Well for you I did not find you, I'd have beaten you to pieces, you little blackguard."

"Grood at the fists?" (fishts he called them) said the Jew, serenely.

"Open that door," called Mr. Dacre, and opened accordingly it was.

""Now you get out and walk, or I'll make you," said he.

The Jew was a pugilist. Notwithstanding Mr. Dacre's stature, the little man at a glance knew that if he were uninitiated in "the science of self defence," he could, as he expressed it, "lick him into fits;" but there were very strong reasons for keeping the peace; and although the Jew flushed, and his great mouth looked ferocious, and his prominent black eyes glared like fire, he controlled himself, and said —

"You might give a fellow a lift as far as Lees's, in the Strand?"

The inquiring tone elicited no encouraging answer. Mr. Dacre said, more menacingly, "Get down, sir, or I'll make you; and mind, if you and your friends expect help from me, you must come to my rooms at eleven tomorrow morning, and do what I tell you; and now, get out of this carriage, if you please."

In this peremptory way was Mr. Levi set down, and the carriage drove away, leaving the Jew in a virulent temper, and a long walk to accomplish between the Bell and Horns, and Bees's divan in the Strand.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE COUNTESS OF ARDENBROKE HAS A WORD TO SAT.

Next day old Lady Ardenbroke called at Guildford House. She was better, and came in, but did not venture to mount the stairs. She sat down in the library, and Laura Gray ran down and was really glad to see her.

The old lady kissed her, and mentally approved her looks. She thought she was looking even lovelier than when she saw her last. She was pleased with these brilliant looks, and drew nearer to her in spirit, and chatted kindly and smilingly, and looked in her face with pleased eyes as she answered —

"And, my dear, I have come partly to tell you that I mean to worry you out of this horrid old house. I can't understand what you mean by shutting yourself up here."

"I like it — I really do."

"Now you shan't tell stories. You don't like it. What you mean is, that you came here thinking you should like it, just as foolish girls take the veil in a dream, with this difference, that your awaking has come earlier, and your folly is not irrevocable. I've come, however, with a resolution to make you act like a sane person, and take your proper place in the world."

"I'm not ambitious, auntie."

"And more shame for you. The idea of a creature like you shutting yourself up in this region of slumber, and milkmen, and humdrum, and vulgarity! If you ain't crazed already you soon will be, if you remain here. I'm an old woman, and I assure you I could not live here. Such gloom! — those frightful trees, and this clumsy house, and that road before your door, where nothing seems ever to pass except my carriage, when my doctor allows: me to make you a visit. It's fit, my dear Laura, for nothing but a madhouse or a nunnery."

"But it suits me. I'm half a lunatic, perhaps, and a half nun. I don't know," said Challys Gray, "I only know that I should dislike extremely the other kind of life into which one would be sure to be drawn, unless one were to dwell in this other unseen world, and hating that world so intensely, with me it is only a choice between Guildford House and a wandering life — as lonely, among towns and scenery of Spain and Italy, and perhaps of Palestine; and I think I'm out of spirits."

"You are brooding over that business of De Beaumirail?"

"Not so much as I ought, I dare say."

"Well, you know, if it troubles you keeping him locked up there, you can let HIM out whenever you please; and I think it would be much wiser, I confess, than making atonement by shutting yourself up in a prison."

Laura laughed.

"No, indeed, I'm not doing penance. If I were, I should be going to all manner of parties, kettledrums, and other tumultuous assemblies; but this quiet life is really the thing I like best."

"Well, it's contrary to nature, and there is only one way of accounting for it," said the old lady, fixing her still fine black eyes upon Laura with a kind of penetration that called, as it were, a dawning blush to her cheek. The old Countess shook her head significantly as she looked with a meaning smile, and was silent.

"There's no accounting for tastes, however," said Laura, rallying; "and all I can say is, that I have a decided taste for moping."

"I suspect, my dear, there is more in your contented solitude than you choose to say."

"I don't understand— "

"I mean, dear, in this seclusion, in your maiden meditation, you are not quite so fancy-free as a nun should be."

The blush that faintly showed itself just now, at these words, spread in a moment in a beautiful crimson flood, and conscious of the apparent self-betrayal, she felt very much vexed and disconcerted.

"Of course I blush just when I should not," she said, "and when there is absolutely no excuse on earth for blushing, except your looking so archly, and leaving me at the same time without the slightest clue to your meaning. There now, it's so provoking. You smile again and nod. Do tell me, darling, what it is you mean?"

"Why, my dear, I mean what I say. I mean there is nothing like a little romance for inducing a taste for solitude," said Lady Ardenbroke.

"And who ever fancied that I, of all people, was romantic, and who could one find in such a situation to play the part of hero?" pleaded Laura Gray, a little disdainfully.

"I'm sure it is not for me to say," said the old lady. "But why not your cousin, Charles Mannering?"

"Charles Mannering!" exclaimed Miss Gray.

"Yes, Charles Mannering, with his wounds and knight-errantry; you know as well as I do that he is madly in love with you." Relieved by the direction of Lady Ardenbroke's attack, it yet embarrassed her extremely; for the occurrence of only a week or so before instantly presented itself to her mind, and she gazed for some seconds into her old relative's face confounded and without a word to say.

"Upon my word, for a young lady so entirely proof against such weaknesses, you do blush wonderfully like a guilty person." And at those words the old lady smiled again provokingly.

"You are quite mistaken, dear auntie; never were more mistaken in your life. I assure you there is nothing of the kind, and I don't know anything that would vex me more than its being supposed, except, indeed, there being any — the slightest — foundation for it."

"Well, I see nothing to be ashamed of, if it were so," said Lady Ardenbroke. "He's very amiable, and Ardenbroke says he's clever; and you know he's not by any means a lackland, he'll have three or four thousand a year."

"Now you MUST believe me; there is nothing of that kind. We are very good friends, but any idea of that sort would quite put an end to our pleasant relations, and leave me, for the present at least, very destitute of friends. Do you believe me?"

"I'm sure, at least, you always intend to tell truths, and I'll not dispute it now, Laura; and I do think you ought to do a great deal better than Charles Mannering. There's Ardenbroke. No, dear, you need not laugh. I know you are first cousins, and that ends it; but I should be very glad indeed, if Ardenbroke were to marry half as well, and the moral what of I say is just this — if you had only one twentieth the ambition that you have got beauty, cleverness, and fortune, you might do anything."

"And when does Ardenbroke come back," asked Laura Gray, after a little laugh.

"He doesn't say; but he sends all kinds of messages to you, and I've forgotten his letter, but he told me particularly to call and see you, and, in short, he speaks of your convent life just as I do, and, indeed, as every person of sense, except yourself, must do."

Laura recollected a passage in the letter she had received only a few days before from Lord Ardenbroke, the same which blundering Mrs. Wardell had placed instead of quite another in Alfred Dacre's hands. Of this mistake, indeed, the young lady knew nothing. If she had, she would, I dare say, have been very uncomfortable indeed.

"I had a note from him — a letter," said Laura. "He seems to like his Scotch friends so much."

Laura felt a little uncomfortably. That sentence or two about Alfred Dacre weighed upon her like a secret, and for the world she would not have mentioned it to Lady Ardenbroke. Had the absent peer written to his mother in the same sense, and had she paid her visit at Guildford House expressly for the purpose of giving her some advice?

Laura Gray was preparing herself for debate, not of a pleasant kind for a person as true as she was. In her nervous state of expectation, she had got up and stood settling some flowers in a vase that stood upon the table. I think she was glad that she had thought of that occupation, when the old countess said —

"And Ardenbroke has made me so curious; he says an old acquaintance of mine, as well as his, has turned up in London. He speaks of him as if in some kind of alarm, and says he hopes his visit may not be attended with trouble to any of our relations. I have written to him asking him all kinds of questions, and I have been puzzling my old head over his sentences ever since his letter came. Didn't you mention something about a Mr.

Dacre — I've been thinking he may be the person — didn't you?"

"I — I asked you about that family, but I'm not sure that I mentioned any one in particular — did I?" said Laura Gray, quite honestly, still settling the flowers, and looking more narrowly into them.

"I thought you did, but I'm not sure. Do you know any one of that name?"

Had Ardenbroke sent her to learn how matters really stood?

"Yes, I do know a Mr. Dacre," she said, standing upright and preparing to be offended.

But old Lady Ardenbroke's face betrayed no symptom of that sort of craft or suspicion which Laura had for a moment apprehended.

"I was not quite certain; but possibly some Mr. Dacre is the person; they are connected with us, and it was floating in my mind. A very pretty young man Alfred Dacre was, but not a safe companion, I thought, for Ardenbroke, and I was very glad when he went away. What is the name of your acquaintance?"

"Alfred — ALFRED Dacre," said Laura Gray, with an effort.

"Oh! really? I suppose it is the same. He is n kind of cousin of Ardenbroke's. I think he was quarrelsome. I heard of his fighting two duels in France, and when he and Ardenbroke, who is, you know, the most goodnatured creature on earth, were together in Paris, he contrived to get him into a scrape of the same kind; it certainly was he, and it was simply the mercy of God that saved him, for the man he fought with was a professed duellist — a Count Droqueville — who ruined himself afterwards, I heard, at play; and I have been quite uneasy ever since Ardenbroke's letter reached me lest that VAUT-RIEN, Mr. Dacre, should have turned up again; for I need not say how objectionable a companion I thought him, and, to say truth, it was one reason of my calling here to-day. I wonder whether it is the same. What is he like?"

This was a difficult question for Miss Gray, and, after a momentary puzzle, she said —

"It is so hard to give a general description. Wouldn't it be better if you were to ask me any questions that strike you?"

"I think Alfred Dacre, if he is alive, but I'm nearly certain I heard he was dead, would be about five-and-thirty now. Does he look that?" inquired the old lady.

"No; certainly not; not, I think, quite thirty," said Laura.

"Thirty — and five — and three," said Lady Ardenbroke, reflectively, touching the tips of her fingers. "I really think he must be at least thirty-eight."

"Then that point is quite settled, for I don't think he can possibly be more than I said," Laura answered, with a kind of relief. But recollecting that old Lady Ardenbroke was not always infallible in the matter of figures, on reflection, she added, "Perhaps when you write it would be as well to ask Ardenbroke directly whether he does mean Mr. Alfred Dacre, and, if so, where Mr. Dacre is at present in London, and what he is doing. That is, I mean if your anxiety is caused by your apprehension that he does mean that particular Mr. Dacre?”

“I think I will, dear, for it does make me VERY uncomfortable.”

And with these words the old lady took her leave, and Laura Gray, standing at the library window, ruminated and unpleasantly connected the jumbled recollections of the old countess with the warning conveyed in such decided terms in the letter she had so lately received from Lord Ardenbroke.

“I wonder why he stays so long away, or why he does not speak more plainly. As to offending people who have been so kind to me, simply because others don’t like them, and wont say why, I’ll never do that — he has been so goodnatured in this unpleasant business, and so zealous without making the least fuss about it, and then really a little music is such a pleasure in our lonely life — and such music — and what monsters we should appear, what stupidity, and caprice, and positive ingratitude. If people want to make me do such things, at least they must condescend to give me a reason for it.”

“I met Lady Ardenbroke on the steps,” said fat Mrs. Wardell, entering; “how miserably thin she looks! Any news of Ardenbroke, or anything? Poor old soul, I did not like to delay her a moment, she did look so tired.”

And so, Julia Wardell untied her bonnet-strings, and sat down to hear the news which, as we know, was not much.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DESULTORY.

IN the evening, I should say the early night, that much suspected, wayward, handsome Alfred Dacre was, as usual, approaching Guildford House in his carriage.

In certain states of fancy and feeling how interesting a scene the most commonplace and homely will grow. Where is the old fellow of fifty for whom some bit of woodland, some quiet road, some drowsy landscape, which other eyes scarcely look at, much less read, has not an inner meaning, sad and sweet. The sun shines tenderly there, the air breathes over it like a sigh; the wallflower and woodbine are fragrant with a perfume they know nowhere else. It is dreamland, an early romance lived and died there, and all is beautiful and sweet, and musical, in its melancholy haunt.

This kind of interest to endure as long as memory itself, was Dacre half unconsciously founding for himself. These trees and houses which night after night he had passed on the same route, had gradually acquired a friendly and romantic air, and he was growing to love them.

These visits to Guildford House — would not his life be dull without them? Could he quite define the feelings with which he returned there night after night? Not easily. They were so complex — odd — yet on the whole exciting — delightful.

There was one very unpleasant image, however, which every now and then recurred. It was that of Ardenbroke. Sometimes at his desk writing a letter, sometimes suddenly recalled to town, and talking earnestly with Laura Gray, in the drawingroom of Guildford House.

“There’s no use on earth in writing to him,” thought he. “But when my friend Ardenbroke comes to town he and I shall talk a little.”

He thought he could understand Miss Gray’s marked welcome. He had read Ardenbroke’s letter, and felt that the kindness of her greeting was a recoil against something like dictation.

It was generous. It might last for a time, but it was not to be relied on.

“When does Ardenbroke come to town?” he asked.

“From all I can learn I fancy not sooner than a month,” she answered.

“Oh,” said he; and he thought a good deal might be done in a month.

“We were speaking of Mr de Beaumirail the other night — do you recollect?” said she.

“Dear me! Has he been giving you any more trouble?” asked Dacre, eagerly.

“Not directly, but through that good old man, Mr. Parker, whom I can’t refuse to listen to,” she answered.

“Not refuse? — why, to be sure you can. Pray forgive me,” said he, “but it does seem to me a pity, I think, that you should be so easily moved by such appeals. What business has that old man, when once you have acquainted him with your decision, to go on teazing you? I believe he’s a good old man, but he has no right on earth to annoy you with his importunities. Isn’t he growing positively impertinent?”

“I think you took his part a little time ago, when I was impatient,” said Laura.

“Did I? Well, that was before you honoured me with a commission which it was impossible to hold, and not to feel a very absorbing interest in your tranquillity,” he replied. “That old man is — I have not seen him for years, I think, but I know a good deal of him — he’s officious, he’s extremely troublesome, he’s the worst kind of bore — a bore on the highest principles, who thinks it his duty to bore you, and consequently is quite above the laws of either compassion or fatigue.”

“He is, I think, very good and simple,” said Laura, with a grave decision.

“I should almost fancy, Miss Gray, from your liking for his ambassador, that you had begun to feel an interest in De Beaumirail,” said Alfred Dacre.

“An interest — I don’t quite see.”

“Well, that is not quite what I mean. What I do conjecture is, that your feelings have become mitigated, and that you are, in secret, more favourably disposed— “

“No; there is nothing of the kind,” interrupted Miss Gray.

“No relenting?” he continued.

“I can’t make myself clear. There is a personal feeling — but not revenge — there are circumstances which have fixed in my mind respecting him an insurmountable disgust.”

“With respect to a person you never saw?” exclaimed Mr. Dacre.

"Whom I never saw — but whom I know to be the incarnation of cruelty and perfidy," she said, with an almost whispered vehemence.

"Oh! One learns as one gets on. There is a great deal I have reason to resent in De Beaumirail, and which I do resent, as I think he knows. But you say perfidy and cruelty; well, that is a new light upon his character — so far as I fancied I knew it. I think it will rather surprise Ardenbroke also."

"Yes; Ardenbroke, and Charles Mannering, and you. Men have a way of estimating character which is peculiar to themselves; but it is not mine, nor at all like it," said Miss Gray.

"From which I conjecture that Ardenbroke does NOT think him cruel or perfidious?" said Dacre.

"I don't blame you, because you don't know the facts," answered she.

"I don't see, quite, those things in his character, that is, in a greater degree than we find them in the odious average of human nature; but I do see no end of bad traits there, at least what we men consider bad."

"I should really be glad to know what you do consider bad," said Laura. "No ill-usage of us poor women ever comes under that category, and even murder, as in the recent case of the Knight of the Silver Dragon — is excepted — pray then what is a bad action?"

"It is not easily defined; but I think I should describe a morally bad action to be any action of another person's which is attended with serious inconvenience to myself," said Dacre.

"Now that is so like you, Mr. Dacre; you can never be serious for a moment, remarked Laura Gray.

"On the contrary, there is no creature in this great religious and wicked city more serious than I. Don't you know that levity is a sign of suffering, and that laughter is one of the attendants of madness? Besides, what I said was in no merely frivolous mood. You will find its spirit in the moral code of all men. I have, at least." He accompanied this defence with one of his dubious smiles, and then, darkening, he sighed profoundly.

"THAT," he resumed, "has been very like my code. That which right or wrong has borne hard upon my interests, I have resented. But, perhaps, we are all a little too hard upon De Beaumirail. If Ardenbroke says so, you may be pretty certain of it, for his infirmity is to form harsh judgments upon slender grounds; and he once said to me, 'for all I'm worth I would not see you married to a woman in whose happiness I felt an interest.'

‘Why?’ I asked, you may suppose, a little surprised, for we were at that time very intimate friends indeed. ‘Because,’ he answered, ‘you are too severe a judge and, to this hour, he holds the same opinion. I can’t help it, and I believe it does not hurt me very much, for I am not likely ever to find a human being care enough for me to make me her willing slave. A slave, indeed, I might be — that is possible, only too possible.

‘O she is dearer to my soul than rest.’

Labour, danger, death, for the sake of one enchantress, would be welcome — and I such a martyr — such a fool!”

With a smile a little bitter and very melancholy, he rose and walked a few steps to a vase of flowers, which stood on the window-stone, and looked at the blossoms, as if be were reading their meaning in his reverie.

How was it that, as she leaned pensively on her hand in silence, scarcely breathing, those odd words, like music in a dream, trembled in her ears with a strange delight.

VOLUME III

CHAPTER I.

A GUEST APPROACHES.

"How soon, Mr. Dacre, will your tiresome business end, and you become a little more your own master?" asked Mrs. Wardell.

"Is not that a cruel question," he replied, "seeing that its conclusion will be the signal for my departure?"

"Oh! It cannot be that," she said. "On the contrary, I fancy you would be the more likely to prolong your stay, having time to enjoy yourself, instead of being all day wearied over other people's business, and obliged to maintain your incognito. It must be so very tiresome."

"It is very tiresome. Nothing fatigues so much as disguise; as for me, the constraint under which I hourly find myself grows intolerable. I must, for the occasion, surround myself with as many precautions and artifices as if I were an escaped convict."

"You are not to make such horrid comparisons," said good Mrs. Wardell, "it certainly must be very distressing; but we have been very secret, haven't we, Laura, dear?"

"I can't take much merit to myself," said Laura, "for keeping a secret of which I really know nothing."

"Why Mr Dacre's name, we have not told that to anyone?" said Mrs. Wardell.

"I don't think Mr. Dacre will insist on that as a confidence. Ardenbroke knows it, and Charles Mannering, and that is pretty nearly all our gentlemen acquaintance in this part of the world, and of course he has not been more reserved with respect to other friends."

Dacre laughed, shook his head, and said, "I have been very reserved. There was no confidence with Ardenbroke, for he knows me, and recognized me at the opera; and though that was awkward, I can't think of that night except as the most fortunate of my life. And then as to Mr. Mannering, that I could not help — he was there, and what was I to do?"

"Does old Mr. Parker know you?" asked Laura.

"Old Mr. Parker, if he isn't too old by this time to recall the past, does know me, and will recollect my name with a start."

Dacre said this looking down on the carpet as he spoke with a smile that continued faintly to light up his face as he looked down, still in a reverie, long after his words had ceased.

"I can't say, however, that he's aware that I am in England; possibly De Beaumirail has told him. If he has he ought not, for he knows of my arrival only in the strictest confidence; but it matters very little. Poor old Parker, I fancy, if he is at all like what he used to be, knows probably no one except De Beaumirail, who is acquainted even with my name."

"And you don't very much like that old man?" said Laura Gray.

"Why do you say so?" asked Dacre, amused. To which question Laura instantly made this answer —

"If I said, Mr. Dacre, that it seems to me you don't like anyone very much, would not that be a reason for what I say?"

"Yes, logically; but is the fact so? So far from liking too little, there are people whom I like too well," said Mr. Dacre.

"See there — self-condemned!" exclaimed Miss Gray. "When you say you like too well, you mean better than they deserve; so that even these favourites are thrown into the general pit of depreciation."

"How ingenious you are, Miss Gray, and how cruel in exposing my weaknesses. Perhaps there was that little flaw — perhaps I do think too well of myself and too meanly of others, except in one case, which is my insanity."

"But to return to my old clergyman, whom you called a bore just now, you certainly don't like him," said Miss Gray.

"I never disliked him; but it is such a time ago that I can't exactly say what I thought of him, only I think I never cared about him, and I know that he disliked me extremely."

"Mr. Parker! why he seems to me one of the gentlest of human beings. What made you think so?"

"Because he has always been a most determined partisan of De Beaumirail's — a true narrow churchman, bigoted in all his ways, in his likings, in his antipathies, and utterly irrational. I never dreamed of anything in the case of De Beaumirail; but the more marked was my fairness and De Beaumirail's injustice — the brighter angel, he and I the blacker devil, according to good Mr. Parker, otherwise he is, I allow, a very good man. Not the less so, perhaps, in your opinion that he fears or rather hates me."

"I should so like to manage a little meeting between you!" said Laura Gray.

"Thanks," said he, "that is being very kind; but seriously the good old gentleman would be very good fun in such a situation, and I hope I need not assure you that I really do not bear him a particle of ill will."

"Well, that is fortunate,"' said Miss Gray.

"How comes it to deserve that character?" he replied.

"I say it is fortunate," she answered, "because I expect Mr. Parker here every minute."

"O really! Well I'm sure he'll not be annoyed. I can only say for myself I shall be most happy to meet him. I dare say he'll have forgotten me totally; but I'll undertake to amuse you by the process of recalling myself to his recollection. I'll remind him of things that will surprise him. At what hour was he to come?"

"At a quarter past nine; and it will be that, wont it, in a few minutes?" answered Laura Gray.

"In two minutes," he said, looking at his watch. "I hope he'll turn out to be the man, I recollect; but, indeed, as he's De Beaumirail's friend there can't be a doubt of that."

"He wrote a long letter to Laura; he says De Beaumirail is dying," said Mrs. Wardell.

"Dying, is he? I heard he was rather seedy; but dying — I had no idea of that," said Dacre.

"Oh, yes! so he says," continued Mrs. Wardell, "and he proposed looking in some day to have a talk with Laura."

"Yes," interposed Laura; "so, respecting the good old man, and liking him, although he does bore me, as you say, on one point, I asked him to come and dine with us to-day; but he could not, he said, having already promised to dine near this with a relation, so I told him to come to tea to us if he could, and he said we might expect him at a quarter past nine."

"He'll walk here, I suppose?" said Dacre, looking out of the window. "It is quite charming. It will be such a surprise and I venture to say you will see comedy and even farce when he comes."

Dacre seemed immensely amused by his thoughts and anticipations, and as he looked out into the darkness visible of a moonless night, the pane of glass reflected the lines of his strange smile.

Miss Gray was also looking from the window down that short broad avenue, at one side of which the lamps of Dacre's carriage shot their red rays under the branches.

"It is not easy to see out there tonight, Miss Gray. If the glass reflects the light in the room, you can see nothing," said Alfred Dacre.

"Yes, thanks. I have shut out the light very well with my hand," said the young lady. "I think I see — yes — there is some one walking up a little beyond your carriage. Yes, there is the shutting of the gate."

"Yes, I do see something tall — either Parker or a ghost — gliding up toward the lamps. Capital — bravo — we shall soon have him here, and — but, by Jove, I quite forgot that! What's to be done? It's awfully stupid of me. I should have remembered. It has just flashed on me, there is a way in which his seeing me may be highly injurious to the friend whom I have come to England to serve. I must say good night. Pray, don't for the world mention my name. I'll try to get away; but I am half afraid it is too late. Good night."

And Dacre, who had reached the door by this time, smiled and waved his adieux, and was gone.

"He'll meet him on the stairs, I think?" said Laura.

"Then he might as well have stayed a little longer, and helped us to entertain this old man you have brought here," said Julia Wardell. "For to tell you the truth, I don't know how we are to amuse him."

"Oh, my dear, it is his business to amuse us. He is coming up, and so, I daresay, is Mr. Dacre, for he must have met him."

CHAPTER II.

NEWS OF DACRE.

The moment Dacre got outside the drawingroom door, and closed it behind him, the smile died from his face. He ran down the broad stairs, looking at the hall-door, so soon as he had turned the corner of the second flight. In the hall he threw on his hat and cloak, and there hesitated, for he heard a step at the door, followed by a knock and a ring.

The door from the hall to the back stairs was open. The second door was closed; and into this short lobby, about eight feet deep, Alfred Dacre stepped, for he heard the approach of the servant to let in the visitor, whom he had resolved not to accost.

He had on that broadleafed felt hat (much more picturesque than the Jerries which have superseded them), and his cloak folded about him, and would have done very well for a serenading Spaniard in a melodrame. He was not much afraid that the old man, who was now admitted, would recognise him. Whether the consequence of that might be small or great, he stood back two or three steps, and looked out straight toward the hall.

Mr. Parker, walking slowly by, cast his eyes into this retreat, and saw Dacre, who confronted him with a stern carelessness. The old clergyman hesitated, looked hard and doubtfully at him, and then saying —

"I — I beg your pardon, sir," he drew back, and walked upstairs.

Dacre laughed quietly to himself. Then again his mood changed, and he sighed deeply. At the foot of the stairs he paused with his hand on the banister, and he thought perhaps it would be as well to go up and have a talk with them all. But he shrugged and whispered, looking wistfully upward toward the drawingroom— "No, no — time enough. It is time I should change my tactique. I have always acted hand over head, and my impetuosity has driven me on a chevaux de frise often enough. Is any other man so torn and scarred as I? Let us, then, wait and think it over."

Alfred Dacre was in the painful position of a man whose motive has failed him, and who finds, consequently, his hopes gliding into confusion, and his plans dissolving.

He walked out into the cool night air, and from under the boughs of the old trees he looked back on the drawingroom window. He leaned against the trunk of a tree — neither thinking, nor trying to think — simply undergoing as odd a vicissitude of feeling as ever agitated human breast.

"To one thing constant — never," he said. "I wish I were a great deal better, or a little worse. If that old fellow recognised me, he is a wonder. Who knows what mischief he may do? Heaven knows what they are talking about up there by this time. I am strangely tempted to return to the drawingroom, and see it out. That simple old man — it would be comedy. I wonder what Miss Gray would think of it? "Would she laugh? She is so odd."

He got into the carriage that was awaiting him.

"Yes," he said with a sigh, "to be unapproachably beautiful — to be so eccentric — so resolute — so grave — and to be all this, and clever also, is to be very odd indeed! I have seen a good deal of life. Have I not lived in fairyland, and seen the Sirens? In all my experience of young-lady life, I have never met with any creature exactly like her. No, pretty Laura — no, Laura Challys Gray. How pretty her name is! Laura Challys Gray!"

He liked repeating it.. Softly he said it again and again as they drove away. He sitting with his back to the horses, and looking with his head from the window toward the point from which he was receding; and when they passed the gate, and the glow of the windows was hidden from his eyes, he threw himself back with another great sigh, and was again in chaos.

"'Mug in and mug out,' as our Lancashire groom used to say," thought Dacre.

"Shilly-shally" trumpets with uncertain sounds. Alfred Dacre detested the whole thing — oscillating characters, mixed motives, and divided duties, and closed his eyes impatiently on the present, not knowing in what mood an hour or two hence might find him.

It needs a shrewd man to know another. But did that man ever live who thoroughly knew a woman?

"If I allowed my fancy to run away with me, I might be in love with that girl before I could tell how it came to pass. As it is, that pretty phantom haunts me more than consists with my cold and scientific ideas. In some respects all the worse, in others all the better. The adventure interests me more pleasantly as I proceed."

And this volatile person looked out gaily from the carriage window, and seemed already to have taken quite another view of his case.

About an hour after he had taken his departure, old Mr. Parker bid goodnight to the ladies, and departed also.

They had hardly enjoyed a five minutes' talk, preliminary to going to their rooms, when the old clergyman returned — suddenly appearing at the drawingroom door. He looked very pale, and in a flurried way said —

"I beg pardon, Miss Gray; but some one is said to be in danger, I fear?"

"Who is it, sir — not me?" exclaimed Miss Gray, in whose apprehensions Dacre was present.

"A gentleman drank tea with you tonight?" asked Mr. Parker.

"Yes; he was going away exactly as you were coming up stairs. Do you mean him?"

"It can be no other."

Laura grew pale.

"Pray tell me what it is," she urged.

"As I went out at your gate, a tall gentleman, with a white waistcoat, smoking a cigar, walked up to me, and said, 'You are Mr. Parker?' and then added— 'be so kind as to go back and inform Miss Gray that the gentleman who drank tea there, and left, I suppose, some little time ago, will be waylaid, and perhaps murdered, on his way into town. He had better be followed, and warned quickly. She will know what to do.' And having said this, he began to smoke again, and walked away. I was sorry I did not stop him; but at the time I was so much surprised, and did not recollect myself for a little — and so I came back to tell you."

"But he has been gone an hour or more," said Miss Gray, distractedly ringing the bell.

"Can I be of any use, Miss Gray?" said the old gentleman.

"None, thanks — unless, perhaps, you would call at the police office, wherever it is, and tell them there."

"I'll inquire — I'll make it out," said Mr. Parker, and with a hurried goodnight, which Laura Gray scarcely heard, he took his departure.

She despatched two servants instantly; and after a considerable interval, they returned with no tidings. They had spoken with all the policemen they met upon the line of their route. But nothing had occurred, so far as they knew, to justify the warning. A visit to Miniver's hotel resulted only in informing them that Mr. Dacre had not been there that day.

There was nothing farther to be done; and Laura Gray was very anxious.

CHAPTER III.

TWO LETTERS.

NEXT morning brought no tidings of Dacre.

"Of course we should have heard if anything had gone wrong," said Mrs. Wardell.

"Oh, yes — certainly. Don't you really think so?" answered Laura.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Wardell. "I think it was simply a hoax."

"I wish I could be sure of that," said she; "but I'm afraid it is all about that odious persecution that he will try to prevent. He is quite overmatched by their unscrupulous wickedness and craft, and I'm afraid it must end badly."

"Well, dear, you know I don't understand that affair at all, and I've given up trying to understand it; but if they are fools enough to write anonymous letters, I really think we are still greater fools to give ourselves trouble and run risks in trying to stop them."

"But there is more than that, dear Julia. I always act from impressions. I don't pretend to reason, but these people have acted in the most extraordinary way, and have gone to expense, and have been in this house, and minutely informed about all our sayings and doings, and they did make an attempt upon Mr. Dacre's life near Islington; and they have written with such malignity and even fury, I am sometimes half sorry I did not act on my own judgment entirely on ascertaining the identity of that frightful little Jew, but Mr. Dacre would have it otherwise, and Heaven only knows how it will all end."

"Nonsense, my dear, there's no one on earth would give twopence to hurt a hair of my old head, and I'm very sure they would be still less disposed to hurt you. I don't say I understand it, mind, for I confess I do not; but now that the Jew you mention as the ringleader of the whole thing has been found out, and probably knows that he is so, they are welcome to fire at Mr. Dacre or any other person if they dare."

"Whether we invite them, or not, they will make themselves welcome whenever it suits their purpose, unless the police be directed upon them;

and why Mr. Dacre is so much against it I can't imagine. It seems to me so much more dangerous obviously to delay action, than it could possibly be to pursue and crush those wicked people. I suppose he will explain his reasons some time or other, but at present I confess his conduct seems to me perfectly inexplicable, and so absurdly rash; but I certainly will not allow it to go on any longer. I have had too much agitation and alarm, and if, with the evidence we can give, the law and police are not strong enough to reach them, this is plainly no country for honest people to live in."

Laura Gray was in miserable spirits. Julia Wardell could see how nervous and wretched she was, though she did not talk, perhaps, as much as other girls under the same pressure would have done.

Noon came and passed, and no message had yet come to relieve the suspense of friends at Guildford House. Miss Gray was growing more and more miserable as the day wore on. One o'clock came; two o'clock, and still no tidings. Luncheon was for Miss Gray a mere make-belief, though Mrs. Wardell did not fail to show her a good example. The elder lady proposed a drive, but Laura excused herself.

The servant returned for a second time that day from Miniver's hotel with the same barren answer to inquiries respecting Mr. Dacre. No one had called there to inquire for his letters since yesterday morning, and no news of him had reached them. This seemed to Miss Gray a dismaying circumstance.

At three o'clock the postman brought two letters, or more properly notes — one from the Silver Dragon, written rather tremulously by Charles Mannering.

He did not seem to be doing so well, and complained that his doctor had placed him under stricter rule, and that he was practising a fraud upon him in writing this little note of his health. It was certainly on the whole an unsatisfactory bulletin.

The other note was from Alfred Dacre, and was as follows: —

"Mr *dear* Miss *Gray,* — I write lest any accident should prevent my paying my respects in person this evening, to tell you that there occurred a kind of crisis of a very bold and unexpected kind in the machinations of our tormentors, that by favour of an accident — a rather hairbreadth one — the

-affair totally broke down, and that I hope to lay at your feet the fruits of our victory. My old friend Mr. Parker I observed looked very hard at me last night, with the eye of a man who fancied he had seen me before, but he failed to recognise me, which I was rather glad of, as his talking, ever so little, in a certain quarter, might, in a roundabout way, injure some people in whom I am a great deal interested. I shall say more when I have the honour of seeing you. Believe me, my dear Miss Gray, ever yours sincerely,—“ALFRED DACRE.”

That was all, but so far as it went it tallied unpleasantly with the message of that smoking man last night in the white waistcoat, who had confided his alarm to Mr. Parker.

In Challys Gray’s mind there lurked a dreadful suspicion that the attempt of which the person at the gate had apprized the old clergyman, had in part succeeded. Was Alfred Dacre hurt in his Quixotic enterprise on her behalf?

The cynic viewing Miss Challys Gray’s conventual project in the light of cold experience and hard results, might in that case enjoy his bleak smile over the ruins of — not a castle — but a convent, in the air.

Peace had she sought. Well, here were her only two visitors, she might say — each laid in bloodstained bandages, on a bed of pain, if not of danger, and each in consequence of being associated by these visiting relations with her. So much for monastic peace. What of her conventual platonics? Had not a stranger stolen into her heart? Was there not a phantom in her pretty head — a fancy hardly suspected till now, and now almost detected as — a passion? Alas for that gray ivy-mantled monastery. The mirage is mist, and she in the desert. Nothing of all her dream remains but — solitude.

She is restless, she is silent — from the window she goes to the piano — but the music sounds wild, and pains her heart with the thrill of a reproach. To the flowers she goes, turning them over in the vase with her pretty finger tips. But the blossoms and the odour were melancholy.

“Julia,” she said.

Julia Wardell was working at her crochet-needles as usual, and the invalid dog had been removed from her bedroom to a cushion on the sofa, by her side, for change of air.

“Well, dear?” replied the old lady, pushing up her spectacles.

“Do you take any interest in Mr. Dacre?” resumed Laura.

“How, my dear — what do you mean?” inquired good Mrs. Wardell.

“Do you care whether he is dead or alive?” asked Laura, with suppressed impetuosity.

“Dead or alive! — what can you mean by asking such a question? — why of course I do.”

“Well, then, hadn’t you better send to inquire?” demanded Miss Gray.

“Where! darling?”

“To Miniver’s hotel — I’m not going to send again. Indeed, I think you might have thought of it this morning,” answered Miss Gray.

“Well, so I should, I dare say, only you thought of it first — but shall I send?” replied the old lady.

“If you wish,” persisted Challys. “I’m not going to send every time, and the house is full of useless men, with nothing to do.”

“Well, I think, yes, it would be kind; but I have no doubt he is quite well.”

“If you don’t like,” said Challys, with a brighter colour and a flash in her eyes, “you need not do it. It is only to ring the bell, and tell them to go.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Mrs. Wardell, glancing through the window to the sky, and getting up, “and a walk will do them nothing but good.”

So she marched over to the bell, and touched it, as Miss Gray sat down at the piano, and once more struck its chords, and played away so spiritedly, that when the man entered, in reply to the bell, Mrs. Wardell had to signal to him to approach more nearly, to enable her, without inconvenience, to give him her commission.

CHAPTER IV.

SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED.

THIS messenger returned, however, like the other, without tidings. Mr. Dacre had not yet, that day, sent for his letters. No one had called from him, and they could tell nothing whatever about him.

So then, patience, the great palliative, and "time the consoler," were all that remained to the friends of Mr. Dacre at Guildford House.

I cannot tell how Laura Gray felt — she was silent. Lamps by this time were lighted in the drawingroom. There was a book open before her; but the window was also open, and her eyes were often raised to it, and she silently listening. I think she had opened the volume at page 159, and after half an hoar's quiet reading the book was still open at page 159.

"You'll be glad to hear he's better, my dear," said Julia Wardell, entering the room suddenly.

"How do you know?" inquired Laura, turning quickly.

"By his eating some chicken, my dear. I only hope he hasn't eaten too much," answered Mrs. Wardell.

"Oh, that's very nice," said Laura Gray, blushing intensely, and glad that she was not suspected.

"Yes; I always know when the darling little soul is really feeling better, by his eating chicken," said Julia, seating herself again at her work. "I think it was wise my sending him to his little bed in my room. It would have been very bad — he takes his medicine at nine — disturbing him so late as halfpast ten, till he's quite well, of course: and now he's only come here — wasn't he? — to his own little sofa, in his drawingroom, for half an hour."

"Hush! — the gate! — listen!" said Laura Gray, looking toward the window, breathless, with her lips parted.

"Yes, it is the gate, and now — yes, here it is," and a carriage, with lamps burning, drove up to the hall-door.

Laura drew a long breath, and began to read her book, and turn over the leaves diligently, and now there were steps on the stairs, and she felt herself growing pale. The door opened, and the servant announced "Mr. Dacre."

In the momentary interval her heart seemed to cease beating, and as the name was pronounced it fluttered up with a sudden bound, as if it would suffocate her. She felt quite wild with the sense of relief.

What did Alfred Dacre see? He saw Miss Gray pale and cold, looking down on her book as if too much interested to look up.

"Laura, dear, — Mr. Dacre," said Mrs. Wardell.

"Oh, Mr. Dacre?" and Laura looked up smiling, and gave him a very cold hand.

"I was half afraid I shouldn't have been able to come tonight; and I'm so happy; but I hope you are quite well."

She was looking very pale — paler than he had thought when he first came in, and there was a little brilliant hectic in each cheek.

"Quite well, thanks. I've been looking into this book, and it is so dull, and it is very good of you coming. I don't know how we should have got through this evening."

"And we have been in such a fright about you," interposed Mrs. Wardell.

"Really," said he, and glanced at Laura's face, to which came the prettiest blush in the world.

"Well, I don't know hardly that," she said, trying to assent herself; "we heard some foolish story, and it would have been too provoking, you know, if your so goodnaturedly looking in upon us should have exposed you to any annoyance from those ill-disposed people who, I am afraid, are watching you. What was it, Julia? Tell Mr. Dacre exactly what we heard."

Mrs. Wardell with eager volubility recounted the odd little alarm of last evening, told the story of their exertions in his behalf, and described the young man who gave the warning, and then declared their thanks and obligations.

For the first time a frown darkened Dacre's face; he seemed to wince at some recollection, and impatiently and even harshly said —

"I disdain thanks. I do what I like for my own sake. I like every one to treat me as an enemy. I mean as to my motives, to assume that T am selfish."

He paused suddenly, as if startled at his own words.

"You are very peremptory with me, Mr. Dacre," replied Julia Wardell, with a surprised look; "but you know it would be very unusual not to thank people who are really kind to us."

“Oh, yes. I did not mean to address what I said to — to, in fact, to any one in particular. I meant merely to express my belief about people’s motives, and to say I’m no better than others, and no worse either,” he added, almost fiercely.

He saw Miss Gray’s fine eyes looking upon him with a gaze of surprise, almost of alarm. His own eyes dropped to the floor, and after a moment or two he raised them again with an odd smile.

“I’m sure there is something oriental in my blood,” he said. “I’m so prone to exaggeration, my friends will mitigate my hyperboles, and even understand the feelings that impel me into them.”

“Well, if you wont allow us to thank you,” said Mrs. Wardell, a little huffed, “or at least receive our thanks so oddly— “

“Pray excuse me; it is not ingratitude,” he said; “but I’m not very happy, and my vehemence is rather the expression of pain than of thought; thinking is an exercise that never was my forte.”

“Why thinking? You must think, Mr. Dacre; is not that the attribute of the human race?” said Julia Wardell, who did not know what to make of him.

“One grows sometimes impatient and disgusted with one’s own folly, and incensed at one’s malignant luck, and what a man says who is stung with anger and delirious with his wounds is all chance, and of course counts for nothing. I am sure I owe an apology; but how is one to make it if one does not remember what one has said? All I can say, Mrs. Wardell, is, that if I talked nonsense I know you’ll forgive me, and if worse I beg your pardon a thousand times.”

“Well, what you said was — what was it? It has really gone out of my head, but it does not in the least matter; and this I am quite sure of, that you said nothing that needed an apology.”

“That’s very kind of you, Mrs. Wardell.”

“And I’m so glad you are come,” she continued. “You can’t have a notion how dull we are, and how we miss your music when you don’t come; and you’ll be glad to hear, for you like dogs, that my poor little creature is ever so much better to-day.” Dacre, I’m afraid, did not hear all this. As the old lady was speaking he came to Laura’s side, and while Mrs. Wardell entered into conversation with her dog, he stooped over the young lady. At a little distance you would have fancied he was looking into the book that lay open before her, and he said very low —

“I hope I did not speak ungraciously, Miss Gray; there is nothing so sweet as being thanked by you; but you are not to thank me. When, if ever, I do a service worthy of such a reward, and the only one I can ever do will tear my heart asunder, then I may claim it, but not now.”

“As usual, Mr. Dacre, you speak enigmas,” said Laura; “but notwithstanding all you say I am obliged to you for coming tonight. We had heard what made us very uncomfortable, and I am sure you have something to tell me.”

“Why do you think so?” he asked, as if he shrank from it.

“Don’t you think one might guess from the things you have said that you have something unusual to tell?” said she.

“Yes, I dare say. I’m sure I have been talking like a fool.” He laughed more in his old way. “I was going to say a very vain thing — I was going to say I had been talking very unlike myself; but, Miss Gray, I don’t regret anything. If all this meanness and villainy had not been practised, I should not now have been here. I don’t regret the price that buys that privilege for me’; and cost what more it may, I’ll retain it as long as I can endure the melancholy agony of that happiness.”

A look of surprised uncertainty in Miss Gray’s large eyes suddenly met his own.

“I see I’ve been talking more enigmas; half our riddles have really no answers to them. I should be very much puzzled I know to explain my own dark sayings. It is much easier to speak in an unknown tongue than to interpret.” And as he concluded this little speech his old manner returned; he laughed, and Miss Gray felt reassured.

“Well, you are to tell me,” she said, “whether anything has happened.”

“A great deal,” he said.

“Wont you tell me what it is?”

“People have repented.”

“Incorrigibly oracular this evening,” said Miss Laura Gray.

“Bitterly — bitterly — life-long repentance. Before I tell you anything I must exact a distinct promise,” he said.

They were still talking in an undertone, and Julia Wardell, conversing affectionately still with her lap-dog, was not in their way. “Say what it is,” asked Miss Gray.

“It is that you wont thank me.”

“Not thank you? Then I am sure you have done me some great kindness,” said Miss Gray.

“Something has happened, but there is — nothing — not the least kindness — so pray allow me to insist on my condition,” persisted Alfred Dacre.

“It is delightful to thank people, and very hard to be denied, and very difficult, too, to keep such a promise.”

“You don’t know, Miss Gray, how much you torture me. I thought my request an humble one enough, and ‘yet you wont grant it.”

“I’m so curious that I must grant it; and, if I appear very rude and unkind, remember who compelled me to be so.”

“Only promise that you’ll never thank me.

“Never! Why, you’re becoming more and more exacting!” exclaimed Miss Laura Gray.

“Never thank me,” he repeated.

“Well, you know I’m in a corner, and I can’t escape, and I’m too curious to wait; so I believe there is nothing for it but to promise,” said Miss Gray.

“Well, Miss Gray, you are’ not to say thank you,” repeated Dacre.

“Then, as it must be so, I wont say thank you; and now you are to tell me what it is.”

“I had some doubts,” he answered, “as to whether I should bring it myself; in fact,” he continued, with a momentary look of pain and dejection, “it was a struggle; it is a vile swindle, but I can’t help it, and here it is — and I’ll never touch it more.” With these words he placed in her hand a large sealed envelope addressed to her in his own hand. A melancholy look he fixed on her for a moment; she gazed upward in his eyes, expecting him to speak, and I think he was on the point of doing so, but changed his mind, and went instead to the piano and sat down, and there played snatches of old, wild, and melancholy airs; so Miss Gray broke the seal of the envelope and examined its contents.

CHAPTER V.

LAURA READS.

The letter instantly rivetted her attention, for the hand was the same bold and peculiar one which had written the villainous letters which had so perplexed and affrighted her. She gasped a sudden exclamation of amazement, and began to read.

"Can you sing us that charming little song again tonight, Mr. Dacre?" asked Mrs. Wardell, whom the tones of the piano recalled from a reverie. "'Come to me,' you know, 'when daylight sets;' is not that it?"

"I'm afraid, — thank you very much for wishing it, — but I'm afraid I've got a little cold, and I would not for the world be à failure, having had so very kind a reception," said he, not caring just then to sing.

"A cold! dear me, I'm so sorry. Let me advise you to try one of these lozenges. I find them very good when my voice is affected."

Very gratefully he declined, and she continued —

"Indeed, I think there is some kind of influenza attacking every one just now. I've had it slightly, like you; and here is my poor little miserable creature here suffering from his chest, so oppressed at times you could hear him breathing where you're sitting now. I'm not half satisfied with the advice I've got — no, indeed, we are not, my poor little darling soul — and I was going to ask you, Mr, Dacre, if you understand anything of the treatment of dogs; I should be so much obliged if you'd allow me to consult you."

"I should be only too happy, if you really wish it; but, I ought to tell you that I have not very much experience, and have not been fortunate. In fact, I never treated more than one dog, and he died, and it was thought, poor fellow, I accidentally poisoned him."

"Oh, indeed! Oh, I see; but you must have been awfully pained."

"Yes, so we were, the dog and I; but he, poor fellow, got out of his pain first: and I'm only too happy to obey you, and at least I can promise that if I should be so unhappy as to poison another dog, it shan't be with the same thing."

"Well, thanks, there's time enough; we can see how he is tomorrow," said good Mrs. Wardell, a little frightened.

All this time, as he played lightly or talked, he was looking over the piano, and watching Miss Gray, who was reading this paper, It said —

"I write to acknowledge the offence we have committed, and that still worse which we meditated. I have placed in Mr. Alfred Dacre's hands a signed confession, on the condition that no one sees it, unless we violate our undertaking, hereby entered into, that we shall give you no more trouble. It is understood, on the other hand, that you give us none, unless we break this engagement.

"The locket set with brilliants which we sent at first you will please to purchase at 70l, which sum we have agreed you may distribute among such public charities as you select; and the acknowledgment of the same, by advertisement in the Times, we accept as payment of said sum. This being accepted as a settlement of all complaints, claims, or possible litigations on account of past occurrences, we withdraw, and unless recalled by a departure from those stipulations, we shall appear no more."

"Oh, what a relief! That gallant friend. What do I not owe him?"

Her eyes spoke all this as she raised them in silent delight from the paper, and fixed them for a moment on that handsome musician, who lowered his at the same moment to the notes, and seemed absorbed in the tangled maze of a half-forgotten air.

He saw that her eyes stole again toward him, and he said —

"I think, Mrs. Wardell, I could sing a little, if you still command me. I fancy my voice is better. May I try, Miss Gray?"

"Certainly. We are always so much obliged," she answered with alacrity.

Mrs. Wardell seconded the proposal, and Alfred Dacre sang more exquisitely than ever.

Thanked and -approved by his goodnatured little audience, Alfred Dacre got up and crossed the room to Laura Gray's side.

She knew that his song had been sung for a purpose. She felt that he was quite in earnest when he told her not to thank him; and this song he had interposed like a dream, that the grateful impulse might have time to cool, and she to remember and observe her promise.

She held up the envelope in her fingers, with the light of triumph and gratitude in her eyes.

"You are to keep that," he said, "and name it no more. If there's anything in it you don't understand you have only to ask me. Otherwise pray never mention it to me."

"I'm so delighted!" she looked in his face, smiling.

He smiled — but it was with an effort — and the wintry light quickly faded away, and left behind a look of pain and annoyance.

"I'm very glad — that is, that you are pleased," said Dacre.

"And aren't you?"

"I say I'm glad that you are glad," said he, a little impatiently.

"But aren't you pleased to see this?" She held up the envelope again.

"No," said he.

"No? I'm sure you do like to look at it."

Miss Laura Gray teased him, but I am sure it was her curiosity that prompted.

"Miss Gray, pray believe me. I look at it with a disgust and horror which you can't conceive. Of which it would give you but a faint idea to suppose yourself compelled to look in the face of a corpse, or anything else which most repulses you.

Pray, lock it up, and try to put it out of your mind — for you'll never have trouble from that quarter more."

Laura looked at him, and saw that he was profoundly pained. So after a little silence, she mentioned another subject, though not a very remote one.

"I dare say you have seen Mr. De Beaumirail since?"

"That is a subject, Miss Gray, that I thought you objected to," said Alfred Dacre.

"I don't like speaking of him — that is very true — but I have a vague idea that he knew something of this."

And she glanced at the envelope still in her fingers.

"You are perfectly right," said he; "I'm sure of it."

"And how was it?" she asked.

"I can't tell. You'll kindly not ask me to discuss it — but I hate and despise him more than ever."

"I have no reason to like him," she said. "Few people, I fancy, had," said Dacre, "though, as I have often said, I am the person he injured most; perhaps the only one whom he injured seriously."

"Do you know his history?"

“Yes; very well.”

“You know he treated my family very ill,” she said.

“I think I know what you allude to, Miss Gray,” he said, in a tone of melancholy respect. “But I believe upon that one point you are entirely mistaken. Ardenbroke and I have talked that painful matter over more than once.”

“Ah!” said she bitterly, “the fickle, odious, cruel coward, can the other world send up a viler soul than the man who trifles with that sacred feeling, and kills a poor creature by that slow torture?”

Alfred Dacre, with downcast eyes, was listening respectfully.

Miss Gray went on with sudden excitement —

“I’ve often wished that I were a man, that I might have let him go free, and fought him — to strike down that cold villain with a pistol shot, or die by his — and let him lay death upon death, and go to judgment with a double murder. Ardenbroke and you — and you and Ardenbroke — with your metaphysics, and your partisanship, and your cruelty! To break a girl’s heart is but the breaking of a china tea-cup. What’s a woman? The plaything of your insolence. What her love? A song to laugh over. The feather of your vanity. But I say, the noblest treasure that ever God poured out on earth! Oh, manhood! Oh for the time when men were men, and honoured the creatures whom nature committed to their protection. But, oh, that’s all oldfashioned now — entirely mistaken — and men are wiser; and women must be patient — yes, patient — till God’s justice comes to rule the world.”

Alfred Dacre was taken aback, as the phrase is, by the sudden vehemence of Challys Gray. Still looking down, he waited —

“Entirely mistaken, say you and Ardenbroke? You put your heads together, and wonder why such a fuss about a girl’s fancies, and pity De Beaumirail; and then, with a shrug or two, turn over to some other folly. But I tell you, show me the man who in such a matter practises the least duplicity, or even thinks deceit, and I see a villain.”

Was there anything in these generalities that Dacre applied for himself? There was a vengeful light for the moment in Challys Gray’s eyes; and his, with a dilated gaze, met hers — he looked white as a ghost — stem and resigned, and after a brief gaze, he lowered his eyes to the ground.

"I don't understand people's motives, or much, I'm afraid, about right and wrong," said he at last. "I don't understand human nature, because I can't, to begin with, understand myself. But, dear Miss Gray, don't we walk in such a mist? I mean with ideas frequently so clouded, when we are ourselves concerned — in a region so haunted by illusions, and with a vision so feeble, that even when we most wish to be fair, we follow shadows and lose our way?"

Miss Gray was silent, looking sadly out on the darkness.

"And although I have quite misconveyed my real feelings about that particular circumstance, and although I was unfortunate enough to incur a portion of your censure, I yet am glad that I was present — very glad, for many reasons. Your feelings I can understand, and respect and admire them, more than I can describe, and I shan't make the least attempt at present to talk in extenuation of myself and Ardenbroke; but we have been misapprehended, and any time you command me to explain, I shall only be too grateful."

A little pause followed, and he came beside Miss Gray, and very low he said— "Yes; I am very glad, although some of what you said pained me acutely — very glad that I was here, because I feel, Miss Gray, that I know you better, and that, in spite of all, you trust me more."

And so there came another little silence.

CHAPTER VI.

A STORY.

HAPPY Julia Wardell! Happy in your invincible placidity. What nerves! How charmingly organized for the uses of a chaperon. Not quite "hard of hearing," but slightly muffled and indistinct, and so luxuriously prone to slumber! And happy Challys Gray in a companion so habitually floating away into dreamland, and so cheerfully ready at call to return. Lord Ardenbroke used to laugh at a chaperon so admirably chosen. Challis Gray and Mr. Dacre had both forgotten her existence for some minutes, and, in fact, her existence was not just then for them. In tranquil visions she at that moment nodded, making superb double chins, among the clouds; her worsteds on her lap, and one crochet-needle on the floor.

Alfred Dacre perceived the state of things, and was secretly happy. Challis Gray, too, knew it somehow, and did not care to disturb it. Then Alfred Dacre said, more like himself —

"In an old garden, that I loved when I was a boy — the picturesque may have had something to do with it — but it had the best gooseberries I ever eat; there were two time-honoured sun-dials, with fluted urnshaped stems, stained gray and green with mosses. They had inscriptions: one said 'we must — the thing itself supplying the hiatus, die-all, thus telling of the sleep that brings an end of pain; and his brother answered tempus fugit — time flies — telling us to make all we can of the hour that is upon the wing. These solemn old dials preached. They could do little else, for the ancient standard fruit-trees had grown into a forest, and the sun seldom touched them; and so, as my mood varies, as hope comes or despair, I find myself again in the twinkling shadow, and read the old lesson 'we must,' or else tempus fugit, and life's again a comedy."

One or more of those precious minutes sped away in silence.

"One thing puzzles me," said Miss Gray, looking up from a little reverie, "and that is, what the pleasure of concealing one's antecedents, as the Americans say, one's surroundings, history, and individuality, can possibly be."

Dacre laughed.

"Why do you laugh?"

"Because I'm pleased. I think you are doing me a great honour. I venture to think that when you say all that, you are so good as to mean me."

"I do mean you. But I don't think it was fair to make me say so in direct terms; discussion is embarrassed by it."

"But this must not," said Dacre, with one of his gay laughs.

"I was not going to say anything very severe, however," said she.

"I ought to be very grateful, for I must allow on this point no man is more open to attack," said Dacre.

"I was only going to say, in a general way, I wonder why people are so secret. We ought to be very well acquainted by this time, and yet you are a total stranger to me."

"How do you know? I may have been watching over you ever since you were a child, in quite another shape," said he.

She looked at him, and he at her, and after his wont he laughed.

"If people choose to be secret, let them be secret, there is always a reason — but it is not always a wrong one. Suppose their mystery the talisman, not only of their happiness, but of their safety."

"But why should innocent people require to pass themselves off for other persons?"

"Innocent people are liable to be injured by people who are not innocent; and it is sometimes very desirable to mystify them; but that is not my case. I have been acting strictly in the interest of others."

"But then that kind of mystery defeats itself," said she.

Dacre looked sharply at her.

"How?" said he.

"Why, it makes people so curious."

"And our first mother fell by her curiosity," said Dacre, with a faint smile and a shrug.

"Well, yes, so she did, but it was acted on by the serpent, and ended by her prying and —

"Perishing," said Dacre.

"Very well — yes — that shows how dangerous it is to trifle with."

"And why do I trifle with it — isn't that the question?"

“Yes, because once it is thoroughly aroused, it is sure to carry all before it,” answered Miss Gray.

“Not always, and when it does — better it hadn’t, often,” said he, with a laugh. “I’ll tell you a story. I wish I could think where I read it.” He began again, “May I try to tell it?”

“Pray do.”

“Once on a time a young Irish earl — I forget his title, but we’ll look in Debrett — lived very solitary in a great old castle among the cliffs by the seaside. One night as he sat reading all alone a little white rat appeared on his table, and looked up in his face very winningly. He rather took a fancy to it — it looked so gentle — and next night just in the same way it appeared again. Lonely creatures easily become friends, and the earl and the little white rat grew fonder and fonder each of the other, and he tied a little ribbon of blue, the colour of true love, about its neck, and it slept on his pillow, and never left him day or night. Do I tire you?”

“No, pray go on.”

“This faithful little rat was always with him, till some friends came to pay him a visit at his castle. To them this mutual attachment was capital fun; and the Irish earl, who was a sensitive man, felt their ridicule acutely, and fiercely frightened away the little white rat as often as it appeared, which was a sad thing for both, for the earl sometimes reproached himself nearly as much as the little white rat seemed to suffer. But for the present it ended as I am about to tell you. I am afraid it is very long— “

“I assure you I like it extremely. Pray go on,” said Miss Gray.

“He and these visitors had to depart together for England, and as the earl crossed the plank into the ship the little white rat ran before his feet. His friends laughed, of course, and the thin-skinned earl, in a frenzy of cowardice, kicked it into the sea, in which with a splash and a squeak it disappeared. So ends Fytte the first. May I go on?”

“Pray do,” said she. “Though your sensitive earl, now bereft of the odd society which suited him best, is not an interesting person, I should still like to know how he fared.”

“He returned to his castle, melancholy and solitary, and missed the little white rat, but it did not come. Months passed away? and at last came the long nights, winds, and wintry weather. One night it was blowing hard and very dark as he satiate in his library, when on a sudden he heard a gun at sea, and another, and another. It was plain there was a ship in distress. With all his faults this earl had courage and goodnature, and with a few stout rowers he was soon pulling seaward, guided now and then by the glare of the gun over sky and sea, in the most heroic danger. He could now see dimly the outline of a great oldfashioned ship labouring in the sea, lighted up now and then in the blaze of its own cannon. Before they could reach it, however, the ship went down. But something was left floating where she sank, which with an effort they got into the boat, and found a lady in a white dress, and, as it seemed, lifeless. Not till they reached the castle she recovered slowly. She spoke a foreign language which nobody knew, but picked up English very soon, and the end of it was that he fell in love, and could think only of her. He asked her often about the ship she came in — her family, her home, and country, and also why she always wore a broad velvet band about her throat. But upon all this she was silent, and grew so melancholy whenever he asked that at length he ceased to inquire, and ventured but one question more; he asked her — to marry him. The lady consented, but exacted a promise in return. He was never more to inquire into those mysteries on which she had implored his forbearance. So the promise was given, they were married, and they lived in perfect love, and the glory of their enchanted beatitude was darkened only by this one reserve. I think I've put Mrs. Wardell to sleep — have I?"

"Never mind — she nods and wakens like Homer — she will be all the brighter for this momentary eclipse. Pray go on," said Miss Gray.

"Well, it is nearly ended — all was serenity and sunshine. But still the earl had his own trouble — the unsatisfied curiosity on which his lips were sealed. When one morning early, standing by his wife's bedside, as she lay asleep, with her throat uncovered, his eye rested on the broad band of black velvet. The temptation was irresistible, for her scissors hung on her chatelaine at the bed's side, so he clipped the black velvet across, and he saw around her throat beneath it a blue ribbon, as with a wild cry his wife started up in the bed. At the same moment something jumped on the floor, and, looking down, he saw the little white rat with the blue ribbon round its neck run across the room, and again looking back he saw the bed untreasured of its mistress, and neither she nor the little white rat was ever again beheld in that lonely lord's castle. So ends the story. It is Bluebeard's moral, you see, a little more tenderly conveyed."

"I'm too much obliged to you, Mr. Dacre, to quarrel with your moral at present."

"No, Miss Gray, as I said before, you are not obliged to me. I think you made me a promise?"

"Yes, so I did. Well, I'm not a bit obliged to you — if so it must be — but recollect I've not promised to aid in mystifying myself."

"How do you mean, Miss Gray?"

"I mean," she laughed, "that if I can, I'll find it all out."

"No; I'm sure you'll not try."

"And, pray, why should I not?"

"Because you said you wished to thank me."

"So I do," said she.

"Well, Miss Gray, let your silence thank me. Spare me all inquiry. In a very little time, I may tell you everything. I know you are jesting, but I am grave enough, and mean what I say. In the meantime, think no more of it. Sufficient unto the day, you know — and the day will come."

"Not an evil day, I hope?" she said merrily.

"Good or evil," said he; "who can look into futurity? For me, it grows darker than ever — a darkness in which, as they say, I cannot see my own hand."

"But there are some things one can foresee?" pleaded Laura, gaily.

"One's breakfast; yes — but there's a haze even over that; more over dinner; and so you find yourself in dense fog before you have well set out on your excursion into next week."

"Yes; of course there are all the uncertainties that depend upon sickness and death?" she said.

"And change?" he added sadly.

"Oh, yes; but change comes slowly," said she.

He shook his head.

"Suddenly sometimes," he said.

"Well, yes — material changes; houses may fall flat in a moment; ships blow up; old gentlemen drop down in apoplexys," began Laura.

"No, no; I mean quite honestly," said he.

"How do you mean?" asked Miss Gray.

"I mean it quite fairly, that minds change in a moment."

“Oh, you mean a whim? I don’t think a whimsical person has a mind at all,” said Miss Gray, and looked for a moment a little hard at him; and she added, “I think, Mr. Dacre, somehow, there is always *a* suspicion of a conundrum in what you say?’

“And myself the subject of the riddle?” he laughed. “Well no, I was not, for *a* moment, thinking of myself, but quite another person’s case, in which the mind, as you say, changed like a trick in a pantomime; all happened in *a* moment; a great affection, struck with the lightning of *a* single word, was killed. I saw it — it was quite irrevocable — and often recurs wamingly to my recollection.”

“Your recollections seem generally very happy, Mr. Dacre,” said she; “a great deal happier, I fancy, than mine.”

“If my memory is always in high spirits, it is the worst sign of my life. The more celestial the life, the sadder the memory. I can quite understand why your retrospect is toned with melancholy.”

Laura Gray was looking out vaguely on a landscape painted with black on the darkest gray, with a few small stars glimmering intensely in the little piece of sky straight above them. He thought, as he looked, that he saw a clear blush steal over her cheek, and a listening smile just traceable on her lip; but of her eyes he could see only the long silken fringes.

How pretty that stolen smile — that pleased blush — how beautiful he thought her!

CHAPTER VII.

STRANGE MUSIC.

“DOES she like me?” he thought, with a strange struggle at his heart, as he looked on that beautiful vision; “oh, does she like me — is it possible?”

Was it possible? What is impossible in the land of love — that world of illusions, recklessness, and miracles; and was he not conscious of his romantic beauty, and of that sad celestial tenor in which trembled the spirit of regret and passion; and had he not other fascinations also?

Mr. Dacre was one of those conceited persons who never in ordinary cases question their powers of conquest. He had but to obtain access to Guildford House, and where he chose to direct those subtle and romantic influences, imagination must be dazzled, and hearts enslaved.

But this confidence belonged to the man who was himself indifferent. As an interest quite new to him began insensibly to steal into his heart, a scepticism, also new, began to affright him. The serpent who, we suppose, approaches to charm its prey with the peculiar spell of its eye, is encountered by a more potent charm, and becomes itself enthralled under the superior fascination of a basilisk.

Let us beg Mr. Dacre’s pardon for so sinister a mythologic parallel. We who watch his operations are at liberty to form what conjecture we please. Of one thing only we are certain in the situation — if he has lost any part of his confidence or his liberty, he has succumbed not to design, but to a power, and he has been made acquainted with some of those sincerities which he had overlooked in his own character.

This man, hitherto so confident of success, was now elated, or trembled at every look of hers, and wondered at his own secret agitations. He was angry with himself for abdicating his superiority, and often disdainfully vowed to reassert it. Dacre had grown out of some of the conceit of very early days. Still he had enough left to feel at times his pride wounded by his situation, and still more so by his entire uncertainty as to whether he had made the slightest impression even upon her fancy.

He took a chair close by her, and he said— "How you like looking through that window into the dark. I have observed you do so, Miss Gray, so often — and yet you complain of mystery."

"As if everything was not a mystery," she said, still looking out with the same smile and a little sigh— "yes, everything."

"Everything beautiful, Miss Gray, I've felt it so; and there are mysteries which to me, I am sure, are better *still* mysterious — I mean, I should rather bear uncertainty than incur a danger of despair."

"Despair is a very grand word, Mr. Dacre, and belongs to tragedy, and epic poems, and theology."

"Yes; and is not one's own life and experience the vital fountain from which we draw the life of every epic? Theology; yes, every man, even the sceptic, has a theology of his own — and oh, Miss Gray, why smile at tragedy, *whose* life is all a comedy? Mine has long had nothing in it but — the sort of dolorous ingredient you laugh at."

"I think you are very ungrateful to talk so," said Miss Gray.

"Ungrateful! To whom?" asked Dacre. "To Heaven," she answered. "It is so much a habit with people to talk in that discontented way, all in the wantonness of luxury and ingratitude. I dare say, Mr. Dacre, girl as I am, I have had more to grieve me than ever you have; but I believe it is only we who suffer from that kind of grief: your nobler sex is, people say, quite above that kind of folly — grieving, I mean, for other people."

"I wish, Miss Gray, you did not think quite so meanly of me," he said sadly, with something imploring in his great eyes.

"Not you; no, I ought not to have included you. It was very ungrateful of me — I don't indeed," she said quickly.

She was looking eagerly in his face, blushing very much. Her lips were parted, and he could just see the little glimmering edge of her tiny teeth, as for a moment she gazed on him with this beautiful glow of earnestness: and then she looked from the window again, and her eyes dropped, but the blush continued.

"Miss Gray," he said very low, "some time or other I shall be able, and you will permit me, to tell you something of my life — now, I *can't.* But you'll see then, you will, indeed, how full of grief and pride and folly it has been. You will see the bad, and you will see, also, the good. You'll think me wicked — but you'll see I can be noble; and you'll see how I have — adored you."

He was very pale, with the light of intense excitement in his eyes. He took her hand and held it in both his.

The colour fled from her cheeks, and she returned his passionate gaze with a strange look, one that was very melancholy, but which also had fear in it. She looked on the point of bursting into tears.

A moment more, and still it was a pale, steadfast gaze that she fixed on him. He fancied he read in it an agony of doubt. This white stare of wonder and fear continued for some seconds, but her hand remained unresistingly locked in his.

"I did not dream of saying this when I came here. If it seems insane and audacious, at least it was not premeditated; it was just that I have grown to adore you, and — it was irrepressible."

Still not a word from Challys Gray, but her hand lay quite passively in his.

"Oh, Challys, darling, will you say nothing?"

Challys only pressed her other hand to her temple, and with a great sigh she whispered —

"It seems all a dream — what shall I say? — is he to go?"

She was looking with a melancholy gaze in his eyes as he spoke.

"Oh! no, I ought, I am sure I ought, and yet I can't — no, no, no, I can't say that!" she said.

"God for ever bless you, darling, for that hope."

"I think, Mr. Dacre," she said in a kind of wild dejection, "you know what kind of person I am, and all my faults; and this too I must tell you — I'm ambitious, not in the way the world esteems ambition, but if I were ever to like anyone, it must be one whom in secret my heart could be proud of. I thought I should never meet one, and I know not how it may be, and no one knows the height and depth of their own madness; but I think if I told you now never to come again, and sent you from me untried, I should have parted with my one wild hope. So you'll come again, and again, and again, till I know you better; and oh! what have I said!"

And she was silent. He too, was silent, radiant with happiness and pride. His heart fluttered up in the rekindled flame of hope, and his brain — the *camera obscura* within that handsome head — was already alight and astir with the scenery and figures of a hundred Quixotic plans and visions.

"And now my life is devoted, Challys, you'll see what I'll become."

Another little pause followed. Her hand was in her own possession now, her face was no longer pale and wild — the beautiful blush had returned.

"And now," said odd Challys Gray, with A sudden awaking to her old, grave, imperious manner, "you are to do exactly what I tell you; you resume exactly your old ways — and — no romance — *remember* — and — so go to the piano and sing me a song, for Julia Wardell is nodding, and we must awake her."

With a flush on his cheek also, and eyes unusually brilliant, he crossed the floor and obeyed.

It was but a verse or two of a little French song, and when it ended, good Mrs.

Wardell, who did not care that her nap should be suspected, said vivaciously —

"A thousand thanks! I think, Laura, he never sang so well as this evening; and he has kept it up so. I am sure we are extremely obliged. Ain't we, Laura?"

"It is very pretty. I like those gay little French things, with just a suspicion of sadness," said she.

"Something theatric, too — a pretty affectation," said Dacre. "The volatility and light enthusiasm of the people is in their music. Is there, I wonder, anywhere, a collection of the music of the Revolution? We know only two or three things — the *Marseillaise* and *Caira*, and no doubt there was character in them all — a romantic vein of ruffianism."

"That, I think, and refinement, are oftener found associated in France than anywhere else," said Laura Gray, talking, though with an effort, as usual.

"The French revolution was a very awful time. I've heard my dear mother talk about it as a thing she could remember," said Mrs.

Wardell. "The time when the poor King and Queen were so near getting over the frontier. It was so interesting, poor things, and so horribly provoking. What's that noise out there?"

"It must be my brougham," said Dacre, walking to the open window. "Yes, indeed, driving up to the door, as a hint to me that I am boring the horses to death by singing so much here."

At the same time the silvery ring of the little clock over the chimney told twelve.

"Twelve o'clock!" exclaimed Julia Wardell, who had counted carefully. I hadn't an idea. It is very rude of me; but you're so friendly, Mr. Dacre, you don't mind — and, Laura, my dear, you know you are never so late as this. How time glides away, especially when one listens to such music as Mr. Dacre makes."

"Yes," said Dacre, with a sigh, "I have quite exceeded my privilege."

He looked hesitatingly at Miss Gray; but she made no sign, and he dare not propose to outstay Mrs. Wardell's outspoken advice.

So "goodnights "were exchanged, and Dacre, with a wild elation at his heart, drove in a dream into town.

CHAPTER VIII.

VISITORS IN DE BEAUMIRAIL'S SITTING-BOOM.

IN the Fleet Prison, now happily no more, Mr de Beaumirail had two apartments, — as good, I dare say, as were to be had in that melancholy barrack of the broken-down soldiers of fortune. There was that gentleman's sitting-room, where he entertained his visitors — few and far between; and beyond it, his bedroom; melancholy apartments, where the day limped tediously away as Richard's night; and their solitary tenant, in his long silk dressing-gown, fluttered slowly back and forward, or moped sourly with his hands in his pockets at the windows.

Outside his own windows stood — two on each stone — four sooty scarlet geraniums, an anonymous souvenir of a damsel in temporary distress, who had occupied a room on the other side, and who had fallen silently in love with him, while he, such is destiny, did not know her from Adam.

The windows were stained and mottled, as if, in that dingy climate, it rained always thin mud in summer, and snowed nothing but dust and soot-flakes in Christmas weather.

A neighbour — a Crown debtor, I believe, who was to emerge no more, and liked the songs of birds — had a blind canary which seemed to be always moulting, but sang very cheerfully, notwithstanding, from its cage, which hung outside the window, and gave De Beaumirail a share of its monotonous minstrelsy.

Good old Mr. Parker dropped in at about eleven o'clock in the morning, and found three gentlemen in Mr de Beaumirail's sitting-room. He knew the suave Mr. Larkin. Mr. Levi, of the fierce black eyes, and sullen mouth, was also there; and the square white head and hard features of Mr. Gillespie also.

Mr. Larkin was delivering his ideas in his own engaging manner over a great old book like a ledger. There were sheets of papers there also tied up in pink tape and labelled, and a japanned tin box stood open on a chair close by, with a padlock dangling from it precariously.

Whatever they were talking about, they stopped abruptly on the entrance of the old man. The little Jew glared savagely at him, as if he was on the point of pulling him out by the ear; and Mr. Gillespie inquired surlily— “What’s your will, sir?”

But Mr. Larkin recognised him, and greeting him with his large red hand, and his gracious smile, inquired sweetly whether he, Mr. Larkin, could do anything for Mr. Parker; observing with a slight elevation of his eyes, and a shake of his tall bald head, and a faint plaintive smile, that showed the sinister gaps which time had made at either side in his teeth —

“You find us, Mr. Parker, engaged, sir, in labours very unlike those happier ones in which it is your privilege, if I may so say, to soar — the temporal concerns, sir, the unhappy complications which attend the affairs of a young man who lives as too many young men, it is to be feared, do live. A sad spectacle, sir, this we have before us; a melancholy history of a splendid inheritance, sold, as one may say, for a mess of pottage. Ah, sir, is not it melancholy — isn’t it shocking, my dear Mr. Parker?”

Up went the big hands and the pink eyes as he spoke this sentence, and the tall bald head shook in solemn unison with the sentiment.

“But haven’t you bought up his debts?” asked the old man, with a look of such simple and kindly inquiry, that Mr. Levi, who was glowering in his face, could not resist a sudden laugh— ‘‘boo-hoo, ha-ha!” — still looking straight in the face of the old gentleman, who returned his laugh with an offended look.

Mr. Larkin, had the grace of blushing, but it was an odd kind of blush, and tinged chiefly the narrow dome of his bald head.

“Perhaps that phrase does not quite accurately describe the risk which some friends of Mr de Beaumirail have incurred very distinctly for his own advantage, Mr. Parker, which circumstance, perhaps, you would be so good as to mention to your informant, in the event of his again talking inaccurately with respect to the business of a gentleman whom — though in his sad circumstances he has long ceased to maintain professional relations anywhere — I am still happy, from motives which *you* will, perhaps, appreciate, to advise; and I hope I do so as zealously, whenever as a friend he happens to call upon me, as if his position were, in a worldly point of view, very different indeed.”

"I know you very well, Mr. Larkin, better by reputation even than personally. I wish there were many such persons," said good Mr. Parker, in simple sincerity.

"Unprofitable servants, Mr. Parker," said the attorney, softly, dropping his red eyelids for a moment, and with his large hand waving away what his modesty received as a compliment— "we do but our duty, when all's done; what more can we boast? *but* our duty, sir."

"And so lay up treasure, Mr. Larkin, where treasure is abiding," added good Mr. Parker, with eyes that smiled on the angelic man.

"And something nishe in conshols," drawled Mr. Levi, with a leer at the good attorney.

"But this is a little out of our way at present, Mr. Parker," said Larkin, hastily; "I am trying to look through these miserable intricacies — a tangled skein — how different a task from a few minutes' refreshing talk on happier themes with a gentleman and a Mentor — such as Mr. Parker; but business, upon this earth, sir, is, in fact, business; and can I do anything for you, Mr. Parker?"

"No, sir, I thank you; only I hoped to see Mr de Beaumirail; he is not ill, I hope?"

"Oh dear, no; you'll find him in the next room; and I will say, my dear sir," he concluded, in an under tone, laying his big hand carelessly on the clergyman's arm, "I am truly happy that you have looked in, for our poor friend is really in need of a word in season; his temper — his *temper* occasionally is — unpleasant, and he'll be all the better — you understand — a man in spiritual authority; things will be taken from you, you know," and so he bowed him to the threshold of the chamber, opening the door and closing it after him.

"That old muff's always up and down here, blesh him! I don't think I was twishe in this room, but I met him; and you and him gets into such a precious yarn always about your d — d shouls, and such rot!"

"Why the deil didn't you say he was walking down there in the court?" suggested Gillespie also, angrily.

"My *dear* sir! The thing that was not! Besides," he added, recollecting his company, "we'd have had him back in five minutes, Mr. Gillespie."

"Gad I'd a turned the key in the door, and when he'd a cooled his heels a bit on the stairs, he'd a gone home to where he came from, sir," said

Gillespie.

Mr. Larkin glanced reflectively, with his under lip, after his habit in such moods, gently held between his finger and thumb, and for a moment, perhaps, the good man thought it might not have been a bad plan.

"But even *you*, Mr. Gillespie, will consider that we should have been sure to meet Mr. Parker again — and no — it would *not* have been right — for it would have excited suspicion — and — and not a word, sir, we say on business here, can possibly be heard in the next room. I've observed that, sir; so, ahem! as I was saying, you *may* lock the door, however — as I was saying, Mr. Gillespie, with respect to that promissory note, Mr. Jellicott's. I'm not, by any means, so sure, sir, that the statute protects him; and if he did pay it, sir, no doubt, Mr. Gillespie, he can show that he did so. Heaven forbid that any opportunity were denied him. I should despise myself if I were capable of anything in such a matter that was not perfectly straight and simple; but people should pay their debts."

"I'm not objecting to make him pay twishe over, no more than you," said Mr. Levi; "but it was by cheque to order, and there's a note acknowledging receipt of cheque. I *know* — for his sholishitor's conducting man, Splinks, and me is as thick as — as you pleashe, and we'll make nothing of it."

And so these worthies debated and disagreed, and agreed again, over the schedule of old debts, which, according to their compact, Mr de Beaumirail had made over to them, and of which they still hoped to make something.

CHAPTER IX.

DE BEAUMIRAIL VIEWS HIS SITUATION.

WHEN the old clergyman entered, De Beaumirail was sitting with his feet on the fender of a fire that had expired in ashes. The room was dim with cigar-smoke, and its dismal tenant, in his well-known dressing-gown, was puffing at his weed.

"I'm glad you've come, Mr. Parker, I'm miserable," said De Beaumirail, rising, as he threw his cigar into the ashes, and extending his hand to his visitor.

"I hope, my young friend, you are not suffering?" said Mr. Parker, looking with a kindly concern in his face, as he shook him by the hand.

"Miserably, sir," answered the prisoner.

"Ill?" said the clergyman.

"Ill? — yes; the time is out of joint. I'm ill every way — all the nobler organs — heart, head, and — pocket. Who was ever well in despair? Ay, sir, I'm in hell. I hope, by-the-bye, you don't find the smoke unpleasant. I am in hell, Mr. Parker. You saw my Cerberus sitting outside — the beast that guards my door, with three monstrous *heads* — the white head, the bald head, and the black head — the Scot, the lawyer, and the Jew. I'm sold to that triple-headed monster. They have bought up my debts, sir. I'm a slave — Dickon is bought, and is sold."

"I have just heard, sir, that they have taken that step chiefly for your advantage."

"That is charming. Who said so?"

"Mr. Larkin, sir," said the clergyman.

"Mr. Larkin be d — d," said De Beaumirail. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Parker, I know I ought to have spoken in a more — roundabout way. Pray what do you think of Mr. Larkin?"

"Mr. Larkin appears to me to be a truly exemplary and Christian man."

"So he appears to me; but he isn't. Mr.

Larkin is of this little epitome of hell in which I am a prisoner — the Satan-in-chief."

"Oh, Mr de Beaumirail, my dear sir, *don't* you see how very shocking that way of speaking is? I do assure you, Mr. Larkin is one of the most entirely Christian men I ever met, that is, so far as I am yet acquainted with him; and I have had the pleasure of conversing with him a great deal more than "with others whom I have known four or five times as long; and no man, in my opinion, can fail to make his true character known by his conversation after a time; it is impossible."

"When next he is coming the godly man over you, my dear sir," said De Beaumirail, "I'll give you a recipe to bring him to — himself."

"My dear Mr de Beaumirail, I do assure you, reflections upon Mr. Larkin pain me extremely, you have no conception how much."

"Well, I don't want to pain you, Heaven knows; but I hate that fellow, because he's the most odious of that direful set. I know everything about him; he does not fancy I do; and when next he performs his righteousness before you, just ask him from me whether he has any relations with Mr. Alfred Dacre."

"I should not like, sir, to pain Mr. Larkin, and I don't understand the subject."

"Pray do," said De Beaumirail.

"You can hardly be serious, sir; I could not talk to him *so.* I know him very slightly, and I don't know the meaning of your message."

"It means, sir, that he's capable of the most Satanic conspiracy that ever employed human malice and avarice for its instruments."

"Oh, my dear Mr de Beaumirail!" exclaimed the good clergyman, reprovingly.

"Ay, sir, *my* malice and *other people's* avarice. But I'll not be used further, Mr. Larkin. In the dome of their pandemonium I'll break a hole, and let the light in."

"I don't understand, sir, how you can speak so bitterly," said Mr. Parker.

"Nor I, sometimes," said De Beaumirail, with a short strange laugh. "I sometimes think there is nothing on earth worth being bitter or sweet about."

"I am sure, Mr de Beaumirail, if you knew the interest with which Mr. Larkin invariably speaks of you; he's at this moment working in the next room over your accounts. No paid agent, I am certain, could do it with a more praiseworthy diligence."

"Why, sir, the debts are his own; any rights I had are theirs, and they hold me here under a load of debt as big as Pelion, and I can't see the light nor stir my hand! And here, sir, I was to be their familiar spirit, and aid them in their atrocious enchantments!"

"Now, now, *pray"* remonstrated the clergyman.

"You're a theologian, and have read about Asmodeus. Of course you have all the devils at your fingers' ends, and the devil-on-two-sticks among them. If you were like me, sir, a spirit sealed down in a bottle by three such shabby and villanous conjurors, you'd feel, and perhaps talk even, very like me."

"I came in to pay you a little visit, Mr de Beaumirail— "

"You did very kindly, sir. The sight of a friendly face here is like a window opened in heaven. This place — you don't know what it is, sir — you don't know what it is. Some fellows seem to get accustomed to it, others never. A look forward of a year is like a perspective of seven; and the prospect of a whole life, it is eternity — despair."

"Sir, I still live in hope," began the clergyman.

"Ah, my dear sir," interrupted De Beaumirail, with a chilly laugh, "it is a strange flighty world, full of phantoms, hard to seize upon anything. I don't blame people — I don't blame myself — we are no better and no worse than others; but the whole thing is insane and miserable, and I believe if you could collect into one great funnel the groan and pant of all its sufferings, it would drown the music of the spheres."

"Man is born— " began Mr. Parker.

"I know, to trouble, as the sparks fly upward. Forgive me, sir, but I'm growing, I believe, unfit for human companionship, and more morose than a wounded bear."

"I'm always glad, sir, to hear a friend take a text of Scripture out of my mouth and finish it. I should be a very odd fellow to have charge of a parish — in an age when so few look into their Bibles — if I were offended by anyone's giving me proof that he knew the Scriptures."

"Have you been looking after my interests still? — you are always so good. Have you seen the people at Guildford House?"

"I didn't tell you, did I, about my last visit? I went to tea there a night or two ago," asked old Mr. Parker.

"No — nothing — how was it?"

"Nothing, but merely that I did no good, sir. No, no; it was, in fact, imposed upon me that I should not open the subject."

"And my friend Dacre goes there, doesn't he? He has not softened Miss Gray in my behalf, I dare say?"

"I fear not, Mr de Beaumirail; no, I think not."

"You don't suppose I expected any such thing?" said the captive.

"I don't know, sir; but Mr. Dacre, I believe, is intimate there. I wish very much he were more your friend than you suppose him."

"You think he has an influence, then?" said De Beaumirail.

"I — I rather *do,"* answered the clergyman, simply.

"And why?"

"The elder lady, a Mrs. Wardell, who, I assume, from her age and superior experience, is naturally looked up to by Miss Gray, talked a great deal of him. He had been there to tea that night, and she spoke very favourably of him indeed, and as if he was there very often, and on a sudden she seemed to recollect herself as if she ought not to have mentioned him. I think I saw the young lady look at her; perhaps she said something; I don't know."

"Well, the upshot is that only the old lady mentioned him?"

"Yes, only Mrs. Wardell."

"Well, you know she could do nothing."

"Except by her authority with Miss Gray," suggested Mr. Parker.

"I don't believe, sir, that young ladies now-a-days are troubled with much awe of their elders. Besides, I explained before, Miss Gray has no longer the power to release me. So now, sir, I'll try another way — I'll turn the wheel — try a new course, and strike a smashing blow at the villains who are dissecting me in the next room." De Beaumirail, with his clenched hands in his dressing-gown pockets, shook his head as he thus spoke, and smiled with so resolute a frown, that good Mr. Parker was almost frightened.

"My good friend," said he, "I have often told you that patience is a prayer in itself, and implored of you also, if you cannot control either such feelings or the expression of them, at least, in kindness, to spare me the pain of witnessing such ungoverned bursts of feeling."

De Beaumirail made no answer, but looked for a time gloomily out of the window.

"Suppose you come and have a cup of tea with me tomorrow evening? I have a book to give you," said he.

"I'm afraid I can't, my dear friend," said Mr. Parker.

"But why not?" pleaded De Beaumirail.

"It is my night for preparing my sermon. I can't leave it to Saturday, which is one of my fatiguing days, and the evening finds me tired and very little good for."

"Ah! your sermon? I daren't interfere with that, sir. For where a sermon's in the case, all other things, of course, give place," said De Beaumirail, slightly modifying the quotation. "But if not tomorrow, come tonight."

"I promised to dine at Guildford House," said Mr. Parker.

"Oh — that's very well — at Guildford House. Well, then you may meet Mr. Dacre there?"

"He was not mentioned — no one, in fact. I think it was to be quite to ourselves. But why should you suppose Mr. *Dacre*?"

"Because one of my people tells me he is perpetually in and out there," said De Beaumirail. "I hope you may light upon him."

"I don't see, sir, exactly why. I don't know him. I knew but one of that family.

If he is one of the Dacres of Chezledon— "

"Yes, so he is."

"Well, I knew but one of that family, and he's dead — poor young man. I saw him often in his last illness, and attended his funeral."

"He was the son of Harry Dacre of Chezledon, wasn't he? His name was Alfred Dacre?"

"So it was, sir," acquiesced Mr. Parker. "And he is the person who visits at Guildford House," said De Beaumirail.

The clergyman smiled and shook his head. "Ah, sir, impossible, for the reason I told you. Poor Mr. Alfred Dacre, I should be happy that he were still among us."

"Well, sir," continued De Beaumirail, without in the least minding Mr. Parker's little difficulty, "I am very anxious you should see him there. I should so like to know on what terms he is received, for I think I might possibly make him useful to me still. When were you last at Guildford House?"

"I drank tea, I mentioned, a few days ago."

“And going to dine to-day? They have taken quite a fancy to you. You’ll soon have an influence as powerful as Dacre’s in that house. I’ve an idea of a way in which some good may yet be done for me, if you two were only to put your heads together over my lamentable case.”

The clergyman smiled faintly, and nodded; and De Beaumirail understood that there was passing in his mind the thought how obstinately that crazy prisoner will adhere to his fixed idea, and insist that Alfred Dacre is still living.

“Sooner or later, you know, you must meet, and then you’ll mention me, and find out how he’s disposed,” said De Beaumirail.

“Sooner or later, perhaps, but not in this world, sir,” replied the clergyman.

“We shall see, sir. Well, then, you are going?”

“Yes, a very hurried visit.”

“I wish you believed in holy water, and that I had some to offer you; you need some prophylactic against the powers of evil as you pass through that room; will you excuse my going with you to the door? I shiver at sight of those villains, and can hardly answer for myself.”

“Farewell, sir, good-by.”

And the old clergyman took his leave, again entering the anteroom, and disturbing the little parliament of pandemonium, — two of whose members, at least, looked sourly enough at the gentle intruder, who quickly made his exit.

CHAPTER X.

TWO OLD FRIENDS MEET.

THIS evening, at Guildford House, Alfred Dacre turned up as usual.

When he entered the drawingroom, Julia Wardell had not yet appeared, and Laura was seated in her usual place near the window.

Old Mr. Parker was sipping his coffee in the library in the agreeable company of Mrs. Wardell.

"I thought you'd come upstairs," said Miss Gray. "So I left my cousin Julia for a few minutes to take care of our good old friend, Mr. Parker. I wrote to tell you — I suppose you got my note — that he was coming."

"Oh, yes, thank you very much."

"And that we should give him his tea in the library, as you did not care to meet him," she continued.

"I am so sorry you should have put yourself at all out of your way, but it *is* better I should not meet him just now."

The fact is, Miss Gray's warning had not reached him; and if it had, I don't think he would have gone to Guildford House that evening.

"And he was talking of going away when I came here, a few minutes ago, so I'm sure he's not going to stay very much longer," said she.

There was somehow a little consciousness, and a constraint also, in their meeting. They were talking as yet very much as they used to do, before the scene of last night; he could not discover in her reception of him any marked change. He fancied that if there was any alteration, it was that there had occurred just that slight but appreciable change of temperature which is perceived within the half-hour after sunset on an autumn evening — a faint chill.

A little graver — her wise little head perhaps a little more cogitative than usual — still there was nothing to alarm him, for there was the soft blush, and in her eyes was that liquid fire which poets describe.

He sat beside her, and he said in a very low tone, "You are not vexed, I hope, at my having come?"

"No, indeed — no, Mr. Dacre — I should have been very much vexed if you had not come. I should have thought it quite unaccountable, and very unkind."

"I was so afraid, I thought I had done something to give you pain."

"No; I should have told you so."

"Then, you regret — oh *do* you regret having allowed me to speak even the few words I said yesterday?"

"I have been, since then, more unhappy. I am in a labyrinth; I have lost my way, and I have been silent. I have been troubling myself with the thought that you might have fancied I had said that which I never meant to say, for I do not know whether I shall ever like anyone on earth more than as a very good friend. I hope you are not vexed with me, Mr. Dacre; but I could not bear to appear to mislead you, or to have said more than I meant."

"No one, Miss Gray, could ever misunderstand you. But, oh! do not mistake me, and add to your warning, words that mean despair."

"I have said nothing — I want you to understand that I have said nothing; and you will stay here until Julia and I can come up; you are not to go away, you know — I came up to prevent that. I'll think you are vexed with us if you do. Poor old Mr. Parker — he's so good. He has been so kind and patient with me; and I know he can't understand me — I hardly do myself — about that miserable affair, that we must be kind to him — that is all, not very much — that is in my power; I like him so much; I like him so *very* much. He says he is writing some work, and he was looking at the French folio engravings of eastern cities, and scenery with so much interest, that I told him to come as often as he likes, and I intend to make him go to Gray Forest next month, when his little holidays begin. But till then don't be uncomfortable, or fancy that you are likely to meet him here, for he shall have the library to himself; and you know you can't meet; and he goes home so early — in fact just about the time you usually come. I half blame myself, I was so afraid, after I had done it, that you might think there was danger of his meeting you here."

So spoke Miss Gray, and paused, looking at him.

"I have to make a call, very near this, merely a word or two, and I shall be back again. I looked in to say so, and it turns out luckily, for old Mr. Parker will have gone away by that time. In a day or two it wont matter whether I meet him or not, but just at this moment it would not do; so, for half an hour, I say goodbye."

As Dacre walked down the steps he said to himself, with a dissatisfied laugh —

"How oddly things turn out — this good old simpleton is about to become a fixture here, and I must sooner or later meet him face to face. I hope he wont lose his wits. He'll precipitate things a little, I dare say, and whether for good or evil I can't conjecture. What a world! To think of *me,* of all men, gliding off my path into this desperate romance!"

He glanced toward the library window and sighed.

"If something like this had come earlier; but what vainer than regrets? Might there have been a happy life? — but as it is I scarcely dare look at it, for what good remains except the melancholy glory of a self-sacrifice?"

In this there was, of course, something of that self-conceit in which, like other young men, he was principled. But in his heart the ruling idolatry is declining— "the great god Pan is dead" — and a truer and holier worship is superseding that selfish superstition which had burnt a perpetual incense, and offered up so many sacrifices before his own handsome image.

Along with the opening of a nobler nature, there opens a deeper melancholy — a loftier heaven, a profounder hell. This young man, yet old in the world's ways, bright, cold, and trenchant, as a beautiful steel weapon, was at first shocked and then perplexed by the discovery that he had a heart — that in a barren field he had found a treasure, for which no imaginable price was too great. Dacre's carriage stood scarcely thirty yards down the short avenue; as he loitered on the steps in his dream, he fancied that he heard the library door open, and with a sudden recollection he ran down the steps, got into his carriage, and drove away.

In the meantime, in the library Mr. Parker had reestablished himself in his chair, and was entertaining the ladies with a plan he had conceived of exploring the upper extremity of the Red Sea by means of diving-bells, and a competent troop of navvies, for the purpose of bringing to light such relics of Pharaoh's host, as he was prepared to show, chemically and geologically, must still lie, very nearly uninjured, under the deposit.

Half an hour, nearly, had passed pretty much in this kind of discourse, when the servant, to Miss Gray's secret relief, came in to inform Mr. Parker that a man living in his parish had called to beg he would return to visit a dying person, and saying that he had got a cab outside the gate, and would wait there for Mr. Parker.

"Hadn't he better tell him to bring his cab to the door?" said Miss Gray.

But Mr. Parker said no. He preferred walking down, and would bid his friends good night now — and so at last was quite gone.

On the steps where Dacre but a short time before had stood in his soliloquy, the old clergyman also paused, and from that platform for a moment looked up in silent adoration upon the myriad shining stars that gleamed through the dark blue space above him, the manifestation of the Creator's glory and power illimitable; and in the sublime and tender rapture of that expansion the good old man walked down the short but shadowy avenue, and having emerged from the gate, he looked to the right and to the left — but saw only one figure — that of a gentleman with a short cloak on, who was walking toward him, but with the air of a man bent on a more distant route, walking at a firmer and more rapid pace than a mere lounger waiting for an arrival. He approached and passed him by without a symptom of observation or recognition. So there was no one awaiting him, and no sign of a cab. Mr. Parker walked slowly down toward the main Brompton road, looking out as keenly as he could for the person who had summoned him to return to his duties.

He had not walked forty steps when he was overtaken, and a hand from behind was gently laid upon his shoulder.

"Running away from me, Mr. Parker?" said the voice in an undertone.

Mr. Parker halted and was silent, peering with wrinkled brows earnestly in his face, but that face was somewhat muffled as well as shaded by his broadleafed hat, and the night was dark.

"You — did *you* call for me?" inquired the clergyman.

"Yes, this moment, a sick call — a sick parishioner; let's come on to that lamp at the corner, where we can see one another." The clergyman paused, still looking at him, and he said, hesitating —

"It is *very* odd — but certainly, sir — let us go."

And as they walked, he involuntarily peeped more than once at his companion.

CHAPTER XI.

COLLOQUY.

“I beg your pardon,” said Mr. Parker, whose curiosity was excited; “but may I ask, am I acquainted with you, or have I ever been?”

“Yes, sir, you once were, and I hope to restore myself to your recollection when we reach that lamp; but I have one stipulation to make.”

“Very good, sir,” said the clergyman.

“And that is, that you don’t utter my name,” said the person who walked by his side.

“Not to mention your name?” repeated Mr. Parker.

The stranger stopped short.

“No, not to *utter* it, now or after. If you promise this as a Christian man, I’ll go on; but if you hesitate, I turn about and you see me no more.”

“Sir, I do make you the promise; I think you have a perfect right to exact it; and pray what *is* your name?”

“I don’t mean to mention it.”

“Are you, sir — are you a Mr. Dacre?” asked Mr. Parker, again hesitating, and speaking in a very low tone, but with a species of excitement.

“I’ll first try whether you recognise me, please; I don’t want to say my name, if it is to be avoided, for stone walls have ears; and observe, I hold you strictly to your promise.”

“Of course. I only meant to ask, are you related to Mr. Alfred Dacre, son of Mr. Dacre, of Chezledon?”

“We shall have light enough, in one minute more, to answer your question without speaking, if you will only have the goodness to walk on.”

“If you were to raise your voice ever so little I think I should guess,” said Mr. Parker, still hesitating. “It isn’t curiosity, sir, it is that there were some unpleasant things; and, in fact, I should prefer, if any meeting is to take place between any member of that family and me, that it should not occur in this way. It should be, sir, for very many reasons, a little more formally.”

“At the lamp at that angle, sir, we can see in both directions and all around. I have only a few words to say, but I should like to see that no one else is near; and as to meeting more formally, as you say, I don’t think I shall mind it.”

“I said, sir, what was in my mind. I think, if there is anything to talk over, it had better be in my house, or anywhere else, where a quiet interview may take place. But I am speaking hypothetically, and in any case, rather than part with you as you alternatively propose, you can of course talk to me here, or where you please.”

He had by this time come close to the lamp which he had already indicated as their halting place. It stood where the dead wall, overtopped by trees, under the foliage of which they had been walking, made a slight bend, affording a clear view up and down the narrow road, and shedding light enough to prevent a surprise by either approach.

“Don’t mind naming me, Mr. Parker; but it does seem odd you don’t know me. Now, sir, look — here I am.”

He let his cloak fall backward a little upon his shoulders, and raised his hat. It was Alfred Dacre who stood before him, smiling. He even laughed gently, as Mr. Parker stepped a little tremulously back with a stare and gape of dumb astonishment.

He drew nearer to the amazed old gentleman, and laying his hand softly to his breast, he said, still smiling, but in a very low tone —

“Don’t say my name — pray don’t — remember you promised; and now I’ll tell you something of my plans, if you allow me.”

“My gracious! — Good heavens! — I can scarcely believe my eyes — I am bewildered, sir,” said the old man.

“We need not stand here, you know,” said Dacre. “It was only for the discovery, and let us walk on. I’ve learned this, that people are sometimes watched when they don’t suspect it.”

“Then it was you, sir,” began Mr. Parker deliberately, “was it, who sent in — “

“Just now, to tell you that a sick parishioner wanted you. Yes; and sick enough, just now, in head and heart I am, Mr. Parker, and actually lodging in your parish. Could I have more exactly said the truth?” said Dacre.

“Well, sir, I certainly never in all my life was half so much amazed,” repeated Mr. Parker, taking breath.

"Don't — don't, pray, allude to *anything*," said Dacre, glancing quickly over his shoulder. "I may be led into trouble if you talk. Let us turn back and walk a little the other way. Thanks."

"I'm afraid, sir, I ought to be on my way home. Could not I see you early tomorrow?" asked the old clergyman.

"You ought? Why you *are* on your way home. You'll lose twenty minutes, perhaps, waiting for a 'bus, and not be set down after all near your own house. Now, I'm going to set you down at your own door in my brougham, and all that will save twice as much time as I shall detain you."

"Well, sir, yes — if it doesn't put you out of your way. I shall be very much obliged."

Dacre smiled as he told him how happy he should be, for in the old man's face was still the wild and amazed look of a man just startled by an alarm from his sleep.

"You were at Guildford House, Mr. Parker? I had an antipathy to some people there — not unnatural — but I've changed my mind. Miss Gray, in whom you take an interest, I have saved from the greatest danger she ever was, or ever will be, in. No matter what or how. I'll explain another time — perhaps. A circle of fraud has been drawn round that young lady; but I am master of the charm — it shan't prevail; it can't unless I choose. But I go my own way about it, and you must keep faith with me; nothing must be known of me at Guildford House, except what they already know. There I am Mr. Alfred Dacre, and as to all the rest they are, and must remain, in utter darkness till I enlighten them. Do you return there tonight? No, I forgot."

"No, sir, no. I've rather outstaid my time," said he.

"Yes, it can't happen tonight; but it may in a day or two. Remember, I've a hard card to play. I have three of the most suspicious villains in London watching me; and when you meet me at Guildford House, if it should happen, remember I am its guardian angel, and you betray me to my worst enemies if you divulge one syllable of my story."

"But, sir, I can't be accessory to anything at all of the nature of a deception," said Mr. Parker, a little shocked.

"I ask only silence," said his companion. "That is always understood where one honourable man places another in possession of his secret. I don’t think that either honour or religion imposes upon the confidant the perfidy of divulging it.”

“Sir, I only say — *peremptorily* — that anything indirect, though never so little, I will have neither act nor part in,” said Mr. Parker, resolutely.

“Well, then, this you may promise — they know perfectly that you know me, for I told them so; they are aware that Ardenbroke — Lord Ardenbroke, you know — knows me also. He gave me a promise not to mention anything more than I had told them myself, -and he has kept his word. I don’t think it too much to expect from you, who are not, as he is, a relation, to observe the same reticence about that which in no respect concerns you?” said Mr. Dacre, petulantly.

“I shall volunteer no information, sir,” said Mr. Parker. “But I think I ought not to have been placed in this situation.”

“And if questions should be put to you, you will say, as Ardenbroke did, that you are under promise to mention *nothing* about me — that’s fair,” insisted Mr. Dacre.

“Yes, sir — *that* I may say, and I will,” said the clergyman.

“Very well, sir. And now, Mr. Parker, one other kindness. I shall go back to Guildford House tonight, as I find you are positively not returning; but I should not care to meet you there, and simply for this reason, that I should not like to trust too much to anyone’s presence of mind; people, you know, can’t be always thinking of one thing, and always on their guard; and it would be very unpleasant to me, and I fancy not very pleasant to you. So, as I never go there till about this hour, could you manage to make your visits earlier; and if they want you to dine or drink tea there, you can say, ‘I have no objection in the world,’ but that there would be an awkwardness in your meeting me — only don’t, of course, put it in a way that would make them fancy me a person whom you would not associate with; it is very easy to say that there is a circumstance — reflecting no discredit — which yet would make our meeting embarrassing,” said Dacre. “Can’t you say that?”

“Yes, I may; I’m sure I can say that,” answered Mr. Parker.

“And I’m going to tell you more: I have no one to speak to but you, and I must tell it. Let us turn again here, and walk towards my trap — I mean, my brougham. I promise it shan’t keep you longer than five minutes; and I should die if I had no one to talk to.”

“Five minutes, sir: but it really mustn’t exceed that,” said Mr. Parker.

So, walking side by side, his companion in a low tone addressed him.

CHAPTER XII.

AGAIN AT GUILDFORD HOUSE.

"WHEN I contemplate my position," said Mr. Dacre, "I am as much amazed as you are. I have got myself into a strange situation — another time I'll tell you how. It is too long a story for our five minutes' walk. For the present I shall content myself with asking a favour."

"Say what it is you wish, sir," replied the clergyman.

"Your voice is that of a man who is willing to help his friend," said Alfred Dacre, turning toward him with a dark and sudden smile.

"I make no promises, sir, until I shall have heard the nature of the assistance you require," said he.

"Well, that's reasonable; only speak a little lower," said Mr. Dacre, looking around him with a sharp glance. "You have a brother holding high rank in the Austrian army; you must write to him about me."

"So I shall, with pleasure, sir; provided you can show me how my doing so can be of any use to you," said Mr. Parker.

"That is something off my mind, sir," said he. "I'll show you how tomorrow."

"Then you may reckon upon me, sir."

"And — and one thing more; but don't exclaim when I tell it to you."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"I mean whatever you decide," said Alfred Dacre, almost in a whisper, having first glanced furtively about him again. "Pray don't raise your voice or express the least surprise. I tell you I don't know who may be near."

"Very well, sir."

"I want you to do me a great kindness."

"What is it, sir?"

"And you must not mention it anywhere. It is a secret, mind."

"Well, sir, whether I do your commission or not, I'll not betray your secret," said Mr. Parker.

"Let us turn the other way, for a moment," said Alfred Dacre. "Listen — I've made up my mind to go abroad immediately. Now don't — *don't*, pray, say a word; and you must get my passport. Pray, oblige me. I'll see you in the morning, and tell you fifty things that will surprise you; and you wont refuse me. Now, I know you are surprised; so you need not tell me. But only say you will do me this last and vital kindness?"

"Sir, I really— " began the clergyman.

"Must think about it, and I know that will end in your doing it," interrupted Dacre. "You have always been so kind."

He pressed his arm with his hand as he said this, and looked very earnestly in his face, like a man who has a great stake trembling upon another's decision.

"Yes, you know sufficiently well," said Mr. Parker, "that you may always reckon upon me, within the limit of duty, to the full extent of my opportunities. But I should prefer, as you say, thinking it over; in fact, I could not consent to take any step in the matter without knowing more about it, and being quite clear that I should be doing right; and — I'll sleep upon it, if you please," and with a sigh he looked in his face for a moment, and looking up again he said —

"It seems to me so incredible — a dream — quite a dream!"

"My whole life seems to me one long dream. No wonder one of its oddest passages should seem so to you. There is my brougham, however — one of its few realities, you'll find it, if you trust it to leave you at home. So, goodnight, and you'll see me in the morning, and then I'll unroll a bit of the future, as odd — as odd as the strange cartoon of the past, in which, in every change of scenery, amid a throng of admirers or oppressors, crowned or bleeding, the athlete contends with fortune."

"I hope, sir, it may all end well. Heaven grant it!" said Mr. Parker, as he stepped into the carriage, the door of which Dacre had opened.

"Better end any way than go on *wrong"* said Dacre as he shut the door; "and when the hour comes, and it is time to part, I'll take off my hat, and say goodnight."

And as he spoke he smiled and raised his hat, and the servant, previously instructed, drove rapidly away to leave Mr. Parker at home.

Away went the carriage, leaving Dacre alone at the broad confluence of the lane down which they had walked, and the great Brompton highway. It was very quiet that night; scarcely a footstep heard up or down the dry pathway; the rumble of a distant 'bus, the bark of a few lonely dogs, and the whistling of a fellow who stood outside the Bull and Horns, were the only sounds then audible. Mr. Dacre looked up and down the pathway shrewdly, then climbed the low wall that fenced the lane. There was no sign of a listener near. In high spirits he jumped down again to the road, and smiling in the dark as he passed under the trees, which in that place overarched the lane, he walked swiftly back again to Guildford House.

He saw the lights in the drawingroom as he approached, and he ran up the stairs wild with the spirits of excitement.

"I've returned, Miss Gray, and have transacted my little business, and feel happier than ever schoolboy did when dismissed for the holidays," he said.

"That's very good of you," said Mrs. Wardell, taking some of this speech to herself, with a gracious smile; "and we are very glad to see you, also. We are, indeed, always, Mr. Dacre."

"How can I thank you?" said he, gaily, and with a glance toward Miss Gray. "It is delightful to find a welcome, especially so far from home, and where one's merits are so few and small, and the privilege — so immense."

"And I hope, from what you say, your teazing business is now quite over," said Mrs. Wardell, "and that your time will be more at your disposal."

"Yes; my business is nearly ended!" said he. "I hope tomorrow will conclude it, and emancipate a slave."

As he thus spoke, Miss Laura Gray fancied there was in his face an exultation beyond the gay sense of relief which he implied.

"Are you going to sing for us? do, pray," said Mrs. Wardell.

"No, pray, no; you wont ask me tonight."

"And why not, Mr. Dacre?" asked Mrs. Wardell.

"Because I'm too happy," he answered.

"Now that is no reason," said Julia Wardell. "Laura, why don't you join me? You know, Mr. Dacre, that is no reason; tell him so, Laura."

"But I think it is a reason," said Laura.

"A thousand thanks, Miss Gray," said he; "I feared no one could understand it but myself, and yet it is true."

"Well, that is highly metaphysical, I suppose," said Mrs. Wardell, "and I don't pretend to understand it. Do we, my darling little old precious Mousey? No, we don't, not a bit of it."

The latter question was to her little dog. “But haven’t you come unusually late, Mr. Dacre, this evening?” inquired Mrs. Wardell.

“So I have, but inevitably, need I say? and earlier, too, than usual I must go, but all to regain my liberty the sooner,” said Mr. Dacre. “I promised to meet some people tonight upon business. I’m tired of business — I hate it; but when you have counted the last milestone, you almost forgive the journey its tediousness.”

“Yes, indeed, country milestones, very true, and a very tiresome occupation it is, we know, Laura, don’t we? Nearly seventy miles we drove up here; such a journey from Gray Forest, dust and everything; would you believe it, I actually fell asleep on the way?” said Julia Wardell.

“I’ve had a more tedious journey still, Mrs. Wardell; not a journey, however, to make one sleep, by any means; and, oh dear! how glad I shall be to set my foot on the ground once more, and, escaping from the dust and rumble, to see the sky and green leaves, far from the deafening highroad of life. There was a time, Miss Gray, when I liked noise and glare, and not very long since. I think I’m changed; I hardly know myself.”

“I forgot to tell you,” said Mrs. Wardell, “you’ll be glad to hear that poor Charles Mannering is ever so much better, and likely very soon to be out and about again.”

“Oh! I haven’t heard, as you know, for a day or two: my friend has not been looking after him since he began to get all right so rapidly.”

“Did I give you his letter, Laura?” inquired Julia Wardell.

“No; you read it aloud when you were in the library.”

“So I did. Dear me, I’ve forgot it there.” And Mrs. Wardell waddled off in a fuss, and lighted her candle on the lobby, and went down to the library, for there were things in that letter which she did not care to have seen by curious eyes, and while she was away Alfred Dacre sat down near Laura Gray, and, said, he —

“You have commanded me to be very formal, Miss Gray, and I must obey; but there are times when silence is torture, and I have so many things to say, and time is so short.”

“Time so short, Mr. Dacre, do you mean tonight?”

“I mean altogether. I mean that before a week, probably, I shall have to leave England.”

"Oh, I did not understand; but only for a short time; it wont be for long, surely?"

"No, no, that is, I hope not; I may remain longer there, however; delays may occur, but — but it seems to me inevitable that I should go for a time, and, if my hours *are* measured, to lose one of them is anguish."

"Now? is this fair? Aren't you talking heroics? and if you do, I can't follow you, and your soliloquy is quite contrary to your promise, and you must not — no, *no*, you *shan't,* and I wont excuse you if you do."

Miss Gray stood up quite in earnest, with eyes that flashed, and a brilliant colour, as she said these words, and Alfred Dacre heard them with a pang and a chill.

Perhaps he ought to have read all this quite differently, and known that this peremptoriness indicated only her distrust of herself.

"Of course, I obey," he said sadly; "and now the hour has arrived which I cannot outstay. I appointed to meet some people whom it is essential to see — whom I must see, in fact, or things will be so complicated that I shall be unable to act; I can't explain it, bit by bit. You must have the entire case before you, and all together; and, as I said, you soon shall — you shall — and in that true story, beautiful Challys Gray, you will understand how I have — adored. you."

She was looking down at her little foot, with the same beautiful flush in her cheeks, very gravely. She did not raise her eyes. He hesitated for a moment, and then with a sigh, and without another word, he left the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH MR. DACRE VISITS THREE CONVIVIAL GENTLEMEN.

“SHALL I ever know myself again?” said Dacre, with a kind of shudder, as he drove away. “I can’t give her up. I’m enchanted, and yet my plain course is to bid her goodbye, and go to my room, and — cut my throat.”

He had fallen into a habit of watching the light in the window as long as it remained in sight. As the carriage turned the corner at the gate, he kissed his hand toward that disappearing light, and a mist was in his eyes, and he whispered, “Darling, darling, good night.” And then he threw himself back in the carriage with a great sigh.

“I believe it is impossible to think alone, either that, or I’m going mad. I can arrange nothing, there’s not one clear idea in my mind. I believe in such utter solitude of mind, and agitation of heart, connected thought is unattainable. One hour, one thing, the next, another, the eddies and undulations of chaos. Now for my scoundrels. I had no idea what a wretch I was until my impetus failed, and my scheme stood lifeless before me.”

He looked out of the carriage window— “Where are we now? Ho! Trafalgar-square. We shall soon see them — instruments, masters, accomplices. What! How slowly this beastly thing gets along.”

Nevertheless, it was getting on at a very good pace. But Mr. Dacre was impatient, and his fever heightened as he drew near the trysting-place, and often popped his head out of the window, and throwing himself back, kicked his heel against the opposite cushion in irrepressible restlessness.

At length the carriage stopped at Mr. Gillespie’s door, and Dacre jumped out as it opened.

“Mr. Gillespie upstairs?” he asked of the maid.

Yes, he was; and two gentlemen were with him at supper; and he expected a gentleman, Mr. Dacre, to come, and ordered that he should be shown up on his arrival.

As Dacre ran up the stairs, he laughed low to himself, and delivered a double knock on Mr. Gillespie’s drawingroom door with the head of his cane.

Alfred Dacre was approaching these gentlemen in an unwonted mood, not quite hilarious, nor yet familiar, for there were latent in it the cynicism and banter of suppressed scorn.

Three persons were in Mr. Gillespie's drawingroom when Mr. Dacre opened the door. They sat in the fragrance of whisky-punch, which he had brewed, after the old fashion, in a bowl, and under a canopy of tobacco-smoke.

Mr. Levi sat near the fire, with his heels on a chair, smoking a great cigar, and blowing his clouds in thin streams toward the ceiling. The Scottish intonation of Mr. Gillespie was heard in loud and genial harshness, as he recited his repertory of lying old stories for the amusement of his guests. Opposite to him sat Mr. Larkin, with a celestial smile, which went far to sanctify that equivocal gathering. He and his host were alike tinted with that agreeable rosiness with which punch suffuses cheeks, chins, noses, and even heads, when they are bald.

"Come in, sir, ye'r welcome, mon, and sit ye doun," said the host, who, as getting fou and unco' happy, had expanded as on all occasions of excitement, pleasurable or otherwise, was his wont, into his broad Scotch. "And what the deil's gane wi' that idle limmer, that should 'a brought us up the broiled bones half an hour ago? Pull the bell, Mr. Levi, if it's not inconvenient, and we'll have them up in no time; and sit ye doun; nane but friends here, sir, and there's a plate for ye, and a knife and fork, and the hizzie's coming with a bit broil, for it's ill speakin' between a fou man and a fasting; no need of introduction to the company, sir. I think ye'll a spoken wi' my friend Mr. Larkin, and Mr. Levi, over the way, before now," he added, with a sly jocularity.

"Making merry, sir," said Mr. Larkin with a heavenly smile, and his nose and other features in an unusual glow. "In an innocent way, my friend Mr. Gillespie — he'll allow me to call him so — would insist on his hospitable privileges; and we have all heard the Caledonian proverb, it's good, sir, to be merry and wise — merry *and* wise, sir. You see the force, Mr. Mr.— "

"Dacre" said that gentleman. "Yes, Mr. Larkin, merry and wise; or as we south of the Tweed would say, tipsy and sober."

"I trust not the former, sir," said Mr. Larkin, with a momentary grandeur. "I humbly trust not, sir. We are nowhere forbidden— "

"Oh, no," interrupted Dacre, "nowhere but in the streets, and then they fine you five shillings, which leaves an attorney but one and eightpence from his last fee."

"Ah, ha, Mr., Mr. Dacre, you are amusing; I'm always diverted when you please to be so. I can't say, however, that I do much in legal practice. I've been much more connected with land; my friends lie chiefly in that direction. I have the honour to know a good many persons — old friends, attached more or less to my family — persons of distinction, in fact, and I have been drawn very much into the direction of their estates, and — liking me, and knowing all about me, so that— "

"That's all so interesting, Mr. Larkin," said Mr. Dacre, "and — no, thanks, I'll not take any," he said, waving away the glass of punch which Mr. Gillespie had ladled from the bowl, and now presented. "But though I shan't drink any myself, you must all fill bumpers, for I've come to tell you this, we are on the point of — victory!"

"Victory! — Hout, mon, do you mean— "exclaimed Gillespie.

Mr. Larkin, with his small rat-like eyes, looked on him intently, and Mr. Levi lowered his cigar, and with his great mouth agape, glared on him with his lurid black eyes.

"Mean? Of course I mean immediate and certain, gentlemen. Jews, Christians, Scotchmen, fill your glasses, and drink to our success," cried Mr. Dacre, giving the table a blow with his hand, that made plates and glasses jump and jingle, and caused the liquor in the punch-bowl to dance in concentric rings. "And if you don't fill your glasses, this moment, to the brim, I'll smash that bowl with a blow of my stick, and cut the heads off your candles at a stroke. Come, gentlemen, we are all friends, as you say."

"All friends," they acquiesced in various tones of alacrity. "For as the great Roman martyr and moralist, Cataline, said— '*Idem velle atque idem nolle*, *id demum firma amicitia est'* D — n you, drink your odious mixtures when I command you."

"Here, Larkin, ye deevil's buckie, drink this. I tauld ye amang us, we'd mak a spune, or spoil a horn," cried Gillespie, in high elation, forcing the tumbler of punch which Dacre had declined into Larkin's hand, not minding though the nectar trickled over that good man's knuckles.

"Hollandsh and water for me," said Mr. Levi, preparing accordingly.

“And what for no — Leeberty Hall gentlemen, and here’s the hizzie wi’ the broiled banes, sir. Set it down here, lassie, and awa’ wi’ ye. That will do, shut to the door. And noo, sirs, we’ll drink to our success, sirs, and three times three.”

Laughing gently at the absurdity of the ceremonial, Mr. Larkin, whose heart was beating fast with the ardour of avarice, and finding that he was in for it, joining with a childlike, smiling simplicity that was very delightful to witness.

“Drink it all, sir. I’ve another toast to give you,” cried Mr. Dacre.

So, with three times three, hip-hip, hurrah, and so forth, in their boyish mirth these innocent souls honoured Mr. Dacre’s toast, and Mr. Larkin playfully finished his honest bumper.

“And how soon, sir, by what day, Mr., Mr. *Dacre*, when is the rent-day, sir? Ye ken what I mean; is it fixed yet? ‘twill come betimes, I warrant, hey?” said Mr. Gillespie, with a greedy chuckle, rubbing his hands.

“In a week or ten days,” said Mr. Dacre.

Mr. Gillespie made a great gasp, and an oath, and his hard-featured countenance puckered up with delight, like the face of a hoary old chimpanzee, while Mr. Levi bounced up with a loud “hooray!” and added with an oath of his own— “Then that stock’s looking up; newshe for the governor,” and another “hooray.”

“And if it were permitted me,” said the bland voice of Mr. Larkin, “as in a friendly way, we are this evening indulging in a little goodhumoured badinage (he pronounced the word as it is spelt), I may be permitted to return Mr. — , my esteemed friend’s toast, by proposing the health of a person of very first-class merit indeed, whom we all here present desire to see happily united — a lady residing not a hundred miles from Old Brompton, and whom I may name “Name any lady of my acquaintance — *dare* to name her, and by heaven, I’ll fling you out of that window.”

The accent of frenzy with which Dacre almost shrieked this threat was so sudden, his face was so bloodless, his eyes gleamed such livid hatred, and the clenched hand that was advanced toward the dumb-stricken attorney quivered with such extremity of passion, that the spectacle resembled rather the starting of an apparition from the floor than a transformation wrought by sudden anger.

"Hey — guide us, Mr. Dacre," cried Gillespie, extending his arm and hand with a soothing gesture; "ye wouldn't, sure. Why, — douce Mr. Larkin — ye would na be for gieing douce Jos. Larkin, a craiga-thraw. Hout, mon, he never meant the least offence, sir, tisn't in him. What don't ye speak for yoursel, Mr. Larkin? Tell him, Levi, will ye?"

Mr. Levi, so far from taking any trouble to smooth matters, seemed to think it a very pretty quarrel as it stood, and evidently enjoyed it more than a dog or cock fight, and was grinning and glowering at the group with undisguised interest and entertainment, from the mist of his tobacco smoke.

"Allow me one moment," said Mr. Larkin, persuasively. "I'm most unfortunate; and I beg to assure you— "

"That will do — that's enough," interrupted Mr. Dacre; "only don't do it again; you had *better* not."

Mr. Larkin threw himself back, with his arm over the back of his chair and his head thrown back, so that he looked mildly on the ceiling, and closed his eyes; for being a proud man, Mr. Larkin did not choose to admit himself frightened, and chose rather to appear patient and as much amused as a religious attorney ought to be.

"And now we are all comfortable again, Mr. Dacre. Ye'll drink a dram in friendship wi' Mr. Larkin?" suggested Gillespie.

"No," said Dacre, recovering; "no; I'll drink no drams, but I'll give you, gentlemen, another toast. I give you Mr. Larkin. Mr. Larkin in the management of my estates — I don't know a rogue in England I'd prefer. You shall have the management of them, Mr. Larkin; and you shall drink your own health, sir, or it's all off. Gillespie, put a glass of brandy in his tumbler, and fill it up with punch."

"But, sir," remonstrated Mr. Larkin, "I should be ill."

"Drunk, sir — drunk, you mean — and who the devil cares whether you are drunk or sober?"

"I don't say drunk, Mr. Dacre — there — there — pray don't, pray don't, Mr. Dacre — but if I were knocked up tomorrow. I have business, sir, as well as a position, I hope," he said grandly.

"All I say is this," interrupted Dacre, "if you don't drink my toast — a bumper, sir — you don't manage my estate; one guinea richer for me you never shall be, if I can prevent it."

“Hout, Mr. Larkin, what for do you fash yourself, and make such a fuss about your drap punch, and anger our gude friend, Mr. Dacre, for naething?” exclaimed Mr.

“Gillespie, thrusting the tumbler into Mr. Larkin’s very reluctant hand.

Mr. Levi, who, I’m afraid, was a little malicious, enjoyed his friend Mr. Larkin’s perplexity.

“Well, sir, if I do this, I really must not be expected— “

“You’ll not be expected to walk. Oh, no, we’ll drive you home in a hansham,” interposed Mr. Levi.

“I say, I mean, it must end here — it really must,” expostulated Mr. Larkin, with as much dignity as he could rally.

So that toast, also, was drunk with all the honours.

“And ye say in a week, maybe, or ten days at maist?” said Mr. Gillespie, grinning, while his harsh red face looked redder in contrast with his white bristles.

“Yes, in a week, maybe, or ten days at maist,” repeated Dacre, with a very angry glance. “I — you — didn’t I tell you so before?”

“Troth, sirs, this affair we must all admit is no that ill managed,” said Gillespie; “a delicate matter, sirs, and deevilish weel managed. Mr. Goldshed will say so and what say you, Mr. Levi — the best cast ye’ve made this mony a day. Eh?”

“A long way, shirs, by a long chalk, Mr. Gillespie,” said Mr. Levi, gravely shaking his black ringlets; “and I think it’s only due to Mr. Dacre, we should drink his health, shir, like the rest, with all the honours, Mr. Gillespie.”

“What for no,” thundered Gillespie, “I gi’ ye the health of our esteemed friend, Mr. Dacre. Mix yer brandy and water, will ye, ye neer-do-weel, Levi, and come, Mr. Larkin, where’s yer tumbler? ay, we have it; come now, lad, we’ll fit ye in a minute.”

Mr. Larkin rosier than he was, perhaps, ever seen before, shook his head solemnly, and raised his large hands, also, in silence.

“And double-shotted,” added Levi.

“Double-shotted,” echoed the white-headed Scot. “What for no,” and he halffilled Mr. Larkin’s tumbler with whisky, and completed the bumper with punch.

But Mr. Larkin waved it back with a dignified abhorrence; in his present state he seemed to draw more upon gesture than language, and certainly was very red and pompous.

"Hout, fie, hout, fie, Mr. Larkin, ye'll not refuse, mon," cried Gillespie.

"Disagree, sir," murmured Larkin, loftily and thickly.

"Nonsense, mon, are ye daft?" whispered Gillespie, energetically, "drink your drap punch, sir, and don't anger the gentleman; ye'll no refuse, sir; why, mon, 'twad be the ruin 'o ye."

"And shleep here," said Levi, "theresh a nishe four-poshter in the front parlour; there he goesh all right."

"Vey unfair, sir, no' right, very wrong, I say," murmured Mr. Larkin, reproachfully.

"Now for it," cried Gillespie.

"Mind, gentlemen, I protest, and I'll — I'll shleep here, I think," said Mr. Larkin with a melancholy shake of his head, and he drank his tumbler of punch slowly, while Gillespie was making his speech, and he looked still redder and more solemn, and nothing would induce him to utter another word.

"He's afraid — lest he should forget himself and say a something true, the beast!"

So shouted Dacre, and with a savage laugh he ran downstairs and got into his brougham, and when the door was shut he buried his face in his hands.

"This is the last profanation. Oh, Laura, darling, forgive, forgive, forgive."

That night was a great scandal, I'm sorry to say, at the hotel of the unexceptionable Josiah Howard Larkin, Esq., of the Lodge, Brandon Park, Gylingdon, who was dropped at its door by a little Jew calling himself "the Rev. Tobiashe Philpott," who stated that he had stumbled upon him while lying in a state of insensibility, near the Black Jack tavern, in Milk Lane, in company with a Roman Catholic clergyman, and a billiard-marker, all suffering from overpowering indisposition. When the admirable gentleman was carried in by "boots" and the cabman, and placed upon a bench in the hall, his chin upon his breast, he smiled, murmuring indistinctly, "blesh ye, my friendsh, and r'memb'r I'm poorle — poorly, shir, vey poorle — wheresh th' pillow?"

This kind of babble, and a powerful fragrance of punch, aided the diagnosis of “boots,” who, with the waiter, got him, faintly resisting, to his bed; and Mr. Larkin in the morning was more formal and reserved with the people of the inn than usual, and received a Wesleyan deputation on the subject of a chapel at Gylingdon, with a severe headache.

CHAPTER XIV.

DE BEAUMIRAIL SEES VISITORS.

DE Beaumirail the prisoner was ill next morning, but the malady of this scamp was, as beseemed it, very different from that of the serious attorney, who was bullied into an indiscretion, and received a Methodist deputation about the same hour, with a stupid punch headache throbbing in his temples.

De Beaumirail was moping about his room pale, dejected, and with a hectic in his cheek that made his eyes look strangely bright.

He saw his insolvent doctor dawdling about the court, and tapped a summons on the pane of glass with his pencil-case, and beckoned him to come up. With a lazy smile the doctor waved a salutation, and sauntered upstairs.

"You wont believe me," said the doctor, "but you're as full of hysteria as a schoolgirl, and you have a touch of that nasty sinking that so many poor devils get from being shut up too long in one place."

"I don't know how it is, doctor, but I do think there is something quite wrong here in my heart I think."

"Pooh," said' the doctor, "your heart, indeed."

And he popped his ear to De Beaumirail's waistcoat, and listened for a while.

"No, sir, sound as a bell," said he, "but you oughtn't to be drinking that cursed tea in the morning, lowering the action of the heart, and working your nerves into hysteria. I can't get you' to see that a regimen that would do you no harm if you were knocking about the world, wont, answer here, sir, especially after five or six years' incarceration. By Jove, sir, I've had to come under rule myself, a little gin-and-water, sir, I take, and I assure you the effect a glass or two produces is quite ridiculous, sir; there's no one feels for us, what's everybody's business, sir, is nobody's business, and so, sir, we are left here to rot under this murderous system and put to a slow — that's her, the new woman, is it? in the window — third from the corner —

old: woman, the Dowager Lady Flammock, poor old devil! — put to a slow torture, sir, and killed by inches, for the crime of being poor!"

"A disgusting crime it is, doctor, we must admit," said De Beaumirail, with a shrug.

"It's an ill bird that fouls its own nest, sir," said the doctor; "rich people enough, sir, to speak ill of us, without *our* joining.

"Doctor," said he, "you're a goodnatured fellow, but I think there's something wrong; you fellows were never known yet to tell a man when there was anything amiss with his heart."

"Well, it's a nervous heart, and a weak heart, sir, that's all — and that's the reason, I'm always telling you to give up tea and cigars."

"You are a goodnatured fellow, very goodnatured, doctor. But upon my honour, you need not fancy you'd frighten me; there's nothing now within the circle of possibilities so welcome as death."

"There again, that's the way, sir, you depress your spirits, and if your spirits go down, the system goes down; it's only one thing of course, but still it's something," said the doctor.

"May I live a year?" asked De Beaumirail.

"Nonsense," said the doctor.

"Two?"

"Yes, three; you may live *thirty* years, sir, if you'll only be advised; you have just a nervous heart, don't you see; and if you persist in ill-treating it, why it may resent it, and organic disease, *might* result."

"Three years. Well, doctor, three years is a long day."

"And thirty is longer," said the doctor; "will you come out and take a little stroll up and down? There's sun on the other side of the court — summer, sir, beautiful."

"Thanks, no; I expect a friend here every moment."

"Well, my dear sir, you're not to let your spirits down, mind; and there's Mark Wagget looking for me. I'll run down, and you know where to find me, not a hundred miles from Farringdon-street, if you should happen to want me."

And with this joke, which did service pretty often, the doctor went downstairs whistling, and stumbled into the court, where he hailed his friend; and they strolled and shuffled about together, and seemed to have no lack of lazy banter, till Mark growing serious, pulled a coffee-stained *Times* out of his greatcoat pocket. A greatcoat with a hole in the elbow, was oddly enough, a garment which Mark had worn all that unusually hot summer — and the two luminaries under a bushel, put their heads together over an essay which affected them in their public capacity as prisoners in the Fleet, and nodded and talked over it earnestly.

De Beaumirail, in a blank state of mind, watching the consultation of these worthies, as he leaned against his window-shutter, was recalled to other things, by a knock at his door, and his gentle friend, good Mr. Parker, came in.

"My kind and good friend," said De Beaumirail, taking the old man's hand in both his own. "I can only say how infinitely obliged I am. Your letter reached me half an hour ago; you have done all I wished; you will understand hereafter how good a work you've aided. But, for *me* nothing good can ever come. Some few vain agitations, sir; I've always been sanguine, hope has been my intoxication, and I have drunk deep enough of the cup of madness. I shall taste it no more: a crisis with me is at hand, sir; the somnambulist you have known so long, is waked at last, and finds himself on the angle of a precipice from which there is no descent but to be dashed to pieces. Fancy three vultures, sir, and an eagle in the air employed to strike down quarry for them — it is a monstrous dream — all false but their cadaverous appetites. I'll write to you by-and-by; you'll understand our Christian friend, Larkin, better when I do; and, sir, I believe I shan't live very long; there's something fatal, something has begun, the seed is sown, and the harvest will soon be white for the reaper; perhaps I shan't see you again, sir, till you come to read your good books to me, which then, you know, I shan't have strength to escape from" — he smiled— "but meanwhile you'll write to me; I'll tell you what about — time enough."

He sighed deeply.

"I must have seemed often monstrously ungrateful, Mr. Parker, but it was not I; it was the bitterness and fury of my fate; thrust any man with energies and feelings into the solitude of prison for life, and what do you leave of him but his fiendish nature, with every good that ever qualified it corrupted to poison, or extinguished; but I believe, even devils can be grateful; grateful to you I know I was; but, then, you were my one friend. The last gleam of heaven that kept human sympathy alive within me, entered my door when you opened it, and I ding to your affection, as to a spar in shipwreck; and for the present — perhaps, sir, for ever — farewell.”

And so saying, De Beaumirail, in the foreign fashion, embraced his visitor.

CHAPTER XV.

TWICE GOODNIGHT.

THAT night, at his usual hour, Dacre arrived in the highest imaginable spirits at Guildford House.

"What a charming old house this is, there is something in it so *riant* and genial. Spirits of hope and gaiety haunt its passages, one runs up its stairs without touching them, as a lark flutters upwards to heaven, one crosses the floor to the measure of a dance, and its very walls seem humming to the vibrations of old music; and pray, forgive me, I'm talking such nonsense, trying to keep pace with my happiness, which quite outstrips my reason."

"Better to fall in love with our clumsy old house than to quarrel with the poor old thing, as some people do," said Laura Gray, "there's Lady Ardenbroke, who can't afford it a civil word."

"She's not content with calling it a nunnery, I assure you," interposed Mrs. Wardell; "she says it's a madhouse."

"Not quite a misnomer, while I am in it," laughed Dacre. "Sometimes, at least — to night, for instance — I am very mad; but very happy."

"And if one is to go mad there is no cause preferable, but it is not common; one does not meet many people who are suffering from too much happiness," said Mrs. Wardell.

"Madness is sometimes, I believe, hilarious enough, but is not brought on by overmuch joy; there is a reaction from misery, and even *in* misery that simulates gaiety. Heaven help us," said he, "a gaiety of nature in her irony — cynical as it subsides, insane as it rises. I think if I could have gaiety no otherwise, I should thank anyone for a flagon of laughing gas; dying wretches in the hospitals are heard to laugh in their dreams; but Mrs. Wardell's voice has waked me from mine." He sighed, and laughed, and sighed again.

"Sorry to hear it if it makes you less happy. If I thought I were making you dull here," said Mrs. Wardell, with an influx of dignity, "I should keep my remarks a good deal more to myself."

"How stupid of me to convey myself so ill," said Dacre, "I spoke only of those mad dreams which lead sleepwalkers to death. There are dreams of paradise — the most unreal, perhaps, of all; and from them no voice but one can recall us."

"Ain't we getting into the clouds, Mr. Dacre?" said Laura Gray. "I sometimes suspect you of having picked up some of Don Quixote's library in your travels."

"And read them to the same purpose?"

"No, for you seem a little conscious of your craze," said Challys.

"That's my misfortune; — than want of faith in one's insanity — what is there more miserable?" answered he.

"That depends, of course, on the nature of one's delusion," said she, "and now I'll talk no more nonsense, and by-and-by you'll sing us a song."

"Always command me," said he, lowering his voice as he came near her; "have I ever yet disobeyed you?"

"You have not always kept your promise," she answered.

"In what have I ever broken it to you?"

"In this very matter of music," she answered. "There have been evenings here, when I asked you to sing, when you promised to sing, and yet when you went away without singing."

"And if I did, you know, Miss Gray, it was some mischance, never from want of ardour in your service. You won't say that, Miss Gray, but believe, although I've never done you any service, yet I'd lay down my life for you — as, for you, I am laying down my last hope."

Laura Gray answered only by a steadfast and melancholy look, in which her beautiful eyes met his, and after a moment were lowered to the ground.

"And in whatever I promise to you, Miss Gray, or in your behalf, I will die rather than fail, and you will see how hard a trial I will yet endure for you. And now to begin, I'll sing, and *redeem* my promise."

The last words he spoke with a strange ardour full of a wild reproach.

A pretty Italian song. I don't know whether it has a place in any opera; I only know that it is one of my earliest acquaintances in that sort of melody — full of passion, melancholy and self-devotion. He sang —

"Giuro che ad altra mai

La destra io porgero —
Che a quei vezzosi rai
Sempre fidel saro.
Se del averso fato
Vittima al fin' cadro.
Col suo bell' nome amato
Fra i labri io morero."

Well did Challys Gray, as she sat by the window listening, know to what divinity the thrilling adoration of that passionate tenor was addressed. Never had she heard that voice so divinely melancholy and rapturous before — never perhaps before had it so moved her.

It ceased — there was silence — ever so little more, and she could not have restrained her tears — and then reserve and prudence farewell — where might she not have found herself? — the reserves and liberty of proud Challys Gray — all lost in a moment. On what hysterical uncertainties sometimes hang life-long destinies, and even the courses of eternity.

In her silence was that trembling, when the breath is held, and the heart swells, and the eyes are filling. For worlds she would not have let him see how she was moved. Could she trust that half-deposed caution which her impulsive heart almost despised, and what pledges might not such a moment have given and taken, and so imperious, haughty Challys Gray would have promised herself away, without one of her difficulties answered, or a single mystery cleared up.

"Shall I sing it again?" he asked in alow tone, after an interval.

"No," said Challys Gray.

"You don't like it?"

"No, that is, I don't care about it."

"Really, Challys, you might be a little less, I had almost said *rude,* but certainly you are not very grateful, considering how beautifully it was sung," interposed Mrs. Wardell.

"No, I don't like it," repeated Challys impetuously. "I don't mean, of course, that Mr. Dacre did not sing it well; but I don't like the song, and that's the reason I say so when I'm asked. Will you sing something else, Mr. Dacre?"

"What shall it be?" asked he.

"Nothing sentimental — I mean in that strain. You sang some very pretty English ballads for us one night," she replied.

So he sang one of those which had pleased her.

"I may be wrong, Mr. Dacre, but I don't think, somehow, our music is *quite* so good as usual," said Challys Gray; "you wont mind my saying so; I don't know how it is — perhaps it is my fault — people are sometimes out of voice, and as often out of ear, I think. But it is not *that,"* she said cruelly, "you are not singing well tonight, and I don't care to hear it. It is a vulgar taste I am sure, but I think I should like a foolish comic song this evening better than all the lovelorn ditties we could pick out of the whole circle of the Italian operas. I know you have not any, I'm only saying what a Vandal I am, but I daresay the Vandals had very good sense."

I don't know what thought may have prompted this sudden petulance. But Laura Gray's mind was in an odd state; all this time there was a great pain at her heart; she was angry, she did not well know at what, or with whom.

Dacre walked slowly over to the window. "I'm very sorry — I'm mortified — that I should, have acquitted myself so indifferently."

She made him no answer.

"But my singing, for a while, is over."

"How do you mean?"

"I can't come tomorrow, nor the next day, nor the day after. I can't see you again for some time — a short time, I hope — but I must deny myself — and — may I write? — I'll write, if you allow me, a very full letter."

Challys Gray looked very pale.

"And, pray, who imposes this absence upon you?" she asked a little haughtily, "and how can it interest us more than your other friends?"

They were talking low, and she glanced towards Julia Wardell, but that lady was deep in her novel.

"It is imposed upon me, Miss Gray, and it pains me to think I shan't be missed here, for except you, I have scarcely on earth another friend."

"You had no business, sir," said imperious little Challys Gray, "to decide on any such thing without first consulting your friends."

This, it must be allowed, was a very inconsistent speech.

"My friends, as a rule, seem to care so little what becomes of me, that my consulting them would have been a very great presumption," said Alfred Dacre a little bitterly.

"Perhaps it would, or very likely you *have* consulted them. It is very impertinent of me to talk about it; your time and plans are, of course, your own, and I don't *desire* to be one of those people who engage in the thankless office of advising others, and I shan't, though, indeed, I have not been asked; and if it is not very rude, is it not very near your usual hour of leaving us?"

Dacre smiled reproachfully.

"The hour to which you usually permitted my stay has not not quite arrived," he said, gently, "but even were it less clear that the time when I *ought* to go has come, I should have had to take my leave. I *must* go earlier than usual this evening. I need not say how much more painful than I expected my departure has become."

"You seem to wish to go, Mr. Dacre, and there is no reason why you should not be gone this moment. Pray do go."

"You are displeased with me, Miss Gray."

"Displeased, sir! you talk to me as if I had a right to be pleased or displeased with you in matters that concern yourself only. I don't know what you mean."

"May I write to you, Miss Gray?"

"No, Mr. Dacre; there's no occasion to write."

"Do you really refuse me that very humble privilege?"

"It is better not, Mr. Dacre. I mean, it would only be a trouble, and I don't wish it," she said, imperiously.

He looked at her beautiful and spirited face, darkly and sadly.

"From this hour, Challys, my sorrow dates."

"You can't blame us," said Challys Gray, haughtily; "and — and — Mr. Dacre, pray don't run a risk of being late for your business."

"May I write?" he pleaded.

"I've said already, I prefer your not writing — I don't choose it — it shan't be, Mr. Dacre."

"I think you are very cruel. I ought to have known it; but I have quite made up my mind."

He stood leaning at the window, and looked out; a shadow of care had overcast him, and it seemed to her, under that gloom, that his face was growing like that of Leonora's phantom trooper, paler, and thinner, and sterner, from minute to minute.

"Made up your mind, Mr. Dacre! To what?"

"To disobey you."

"To write, you mean?"

"Yes — for one thing, I'll write."

"Does not it strike you, sir, that nothing can be more insolent? And I'll tell you what I shall do — for I've made up my mind, also — if you should presume to do so, the moment I see from whom it comes I'll burn it unread."

With these words she rose, and walked quickly out of the room.

Julia Wardell had dropped into one of her naps. Dacre had forgot her presence. His face was pale and resolute, and his eyes gleamed with the light of excitement, as he took a last look down the avenue in which stood his carriage. There was a little moonlight this night. He looked at his watch, and then he drew a paper from the pocket in the breast of his coat. He opened it, and, having read a few words, replaced it.

Then he suddenly recollected worthy Julia Wardell.

Seeing that she was asleep, he stole lightly across the floor, and let himself softly out of the room.

He had hardly entered the lobby when Laura Gray ran down the stairs. She looked sad and gentle.

"Mr. Dacre, I'm so glad — you wont remember what I said tonight — and you'll write to me — wont you? — and I was very cross — but I was vexed — and I could not part without saying this — and we are quite good friends again? — ain't we?"

"And I'm forgiven? — and I'll write and — explain everything; and then you'll see how inevitable was the reserve of which you complained — and I think — you'll pity me."

"Good night," she said.

He pressed the hand she gave him to his lips, and, hastily drawing it away, she repeated, "Good night," and ran up the stairs. He looked after her, in silence; and then he turned, and went down to the hall.

Challys Gray had placed herself at the lobby window above that near which their parting had been. She was waiting to see him come down the steps, and to see the last of him, as he passed down the avenue.

She waited there minute after minute, for a long time, in this expectation. But Mr. Dacre did not emerge from the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH MR. DACRE FAINTS.

ON arriving at the foot of the stairs at Guildford House, you find yourself looking toward the hall-door, at the entrance of a spacious hall. There is a back hall, considerably smaller than this, visible under an arch, and with a second door, opening upon a terrace, which exactly faces the hall-door.

When Dacre had reached the foot of the stairs there was no one in the hall. He walked a few steps cautiously into it. From the pocket of his great coat he took one of those instruments which were then known as “night-protectors,” formed of a strong piece of whalebone, with a nob of lead at each end, and all whipped over with catgut, like the handle of a riding-whip. The great coat he left where it hung, and took merely his wideawake hat. Then he stood still for a moment, and looked toward the terrace-entrance with a sharp glance, listening intently. There was neither sight nor sound to alarm him.

In a moment more he had opened and closed the door, and jumping from the terrace to the lower level of the grass, he listened again, under shelter of the overhanging balustrade.

It was a pause only of a second. With swift steps he reached the stable-door. It opened with a latch.

“Anyone here?” he asked, as he entered.

There was no answer. He passed through and found himself in a paved stableyard. Here he repeated his question again without an answer.

The door opening upon the stable lane was fast, but the key was in the lock. Again Dacre looked at his watch. The momentous hour had just arrived. There was exactly time to reach the point of safety, if all went smoothly.

Stern and sharp were the features of the young man as he looked up and down the carriageway leading from the stables.

This was a much wider road than Brompton lanes, especially stable-lanes, were wont to be, and had been laid out probably at first for a line of dwelling-houses, and a lordly row of old elm trees rose dimly into the moonlight from the other side, and the buildings that abutted on it at the side on which he stood were oldfashioned gateways or gables of stable-buildings, some of which were overgrown with ivy.

Not a human being was moving on this pretty and melancholy old road, and not a sound audible but the baying of a watchdog, and the faint clink of his own steps.

He knew the geography of this road perfectly; in fact, he had studied it as a general does the scene of his operations. About two hundred steps higher up, it opened upon a road parallel to the great Brompton highway.

If he could reach that corner unobserved, five minutes more would bring him to a cabstand, and then one long straight pull of half an hoar or less, and if money could make "the mare go," the cab and its freightage would be at the right minute at its destination.

Under the shadow of the buildings, with a light and quick tread, he walked. He had not gone fifty yards, however, when a whistle from the road behind him, and answered from the point to which he was tending, pierced him with a chill misgiving.

In a situation so intensely critical, the bravest man is liable to unacknowledged tremors, such as in ascertained and open danger on the field would never approach him. He might as well be shot as delayed. All depended on two hundred steps.

Looking over his shoulder he saw two figures approaching from the lower end of the road, and before him were also two — one some little way in advance of the other.

His heart swelled and fluttered for an instant, and then came the cold intense resolution of an adventurous man who is in for a crisis of danger. He saw that these persons were approaching at a rapid pace from either end, and would surround him by the time they had reached the centre.

This manœuvre, at all events, should not succeed. He seized the Napoleonic plan of taking the enemy in detail, and with his loaded whalebone in his grasp dashed onward to meet the foremost of his adversaries. He ran at the top of his speed; the enemy hesitated; with his left hand he flourished a ribbon of paper, in the other he grasped a thick bludgeon, and cried —

"You know me well, sir, there's no use — you're had."

But Mr. Dacre’s onset was not to be so stayed. There was not a moment to spare, for the other fellow was running up, and Alfred Dacre had closed and struck before he was on the field. It was well, perhaps, for both parties that the man ducked at the moment that his blow descended. It struck off his hat, with no further damage, and our young friend, who, with all his foreign refinement, showed the skill of an English boxer, before the man had quite recovered his equilibrium, struck him a tremendous blow with his fist between the eyes, and down went his foremost foe with a stunning pound upon the road.

The “reserve,” who witnessed this disaster, now not three yards in his van, pulled down his hat, halted, and whirled his stick in the air. At him sprang our hero, but before he reached came a sound like a bat on the cricket-ball, and our handsome friend, stricken from behind, fell upon his shoulder, and rolled round upon his back, white and ghastly in the moonlight, and with a gush of blood trickling in a divided rivulet over his forehead and face.

Our handsome tenor lay there, in dreamland, or, for aught they knew, dead. No trace of sternness in his face; sad and gentle as a sick child’s sleep were the features on which the moon now shone, and his long silken lashes showed very prettily on the deathlike cheek below his closed eyes.

Laura Challys Gray was in her drawingroom, hardly two hundred steps away. What would she have thought of this tableau?

“Well, ’twas him took to that work first,” said the man with whom he had been on the point of closing. “He’d spar — that ere chap; that *was* a teazer he lent Jim. All right again, Jim?”

This polite inquiry from his brother beak did not elicit a reply from Jim, whose temper seemed to be a little soured.

“I shay, Jim, run you round and fetch the brougham. This here gent’s got it rather ‘eavy, and we’ll want to give him a hairing to-*wards* the city; or if you’d rayther, Tom can go — a bit queerish, I desshay?” said Mr. Levi.

“What’s this? *I shay!* develish well he didn’t give you a fillip with this ere feather,” continued the Jew, taking up the weapon that lay on the ground beside Dacre’s head, and jerking it lightly in the air. “Mind, Tom, where we found it. If anything goesh wrong with this queer fellow it will show the people what a lamb he vas.”

Then stooping over Mr. Dacre, the Jew insinuated his long fingers into his breastpocket, and drew out thence a paper, which, touching the blood on his cheek and forehead, as Mr. Levi plucked it forth, required to be shaken in the air, and opened gingerly to save that nice gentleman from dabbling his fingers.

Over this paper the Jew sneered, and grinned, and snorted. It was the passport of Guy De Beaumirail to Paris.

"I wish you a very pleasant trip, Mr. De Beaumirail; but you'll want a bit of bazhilicon for your poor head first; a very pleasant journey; you do look a deal too lively for London. Paris is the ground for you; but it's hard to tear yourshelf away from the sheenes of sho many agreeable years, and you'll put it off for a day or two, wont you, and jusht shleep another night or two in the jolly old Fleet?"

Just at this moment the young man sat up and looked before him with a dazed wild stare, and said hurriedly —

"Where is he?"

"Who'sh he?" inquired Mr. Levi.

"The stick! — the — why — oh! it's all right — where — that's you Levi — am I hit? By Jove — ha! ha! ha! I'm bleeding a bit. I — I say it's all fair; have you a little water?"

"Well get it on the way *home"* sneered the Jew, with a long-drawn drawl on the emphatic word. "Buckets o' wa-ter. Great pity you're not on your way to Paris *viâ* Havre — ain't it?"

"All fair, sir; I don't complain — the fortune of war," said the wounded knight, with a feeble laugh. "A little trick — mine and countermine. Was it you who shot me, Mr. Levi?"

"The bullet that shot you is made of oak — a tap of Tom Burster's switch."

"Well — I don't grumble; and — and here's the carriage — quite fair; but — I'm a little thirsty. A fellow might have a glass of water, don't you think? Very quickly done, sir — ha! ha! ha!" and the laugh trembled into a groan, and the young gentleman fainted — I suppose from loss of blood.

Levi was beginning to grow a little uncomfortable. It would have been decidedly awkward if the prisoner had died of his wound, in their hands.

After a little time he recovered consciousness, and this time got some water to drink, and said —

"Well, as I can't go to Paris this time, I suppose I had better return to my castle. Tell them, in heaven's name, to drive quick, and get it over soon."

So they got him in, and escorting him in a body, drove rapidly toward the famous prison in Farringdon-street.

De Beaumirail said nothing till he reached the well-known door.

"Well, here's the cage, and my wings pretty well clipt."

So, he got out, and wiped his face with his handkerchief, and a faint groan escaped him. But his spirit was not subdued. He held himself erect and smiling, and staggered through the hatch and the corridor, and even whistled an air as he went up stairs; and on getting into his room, he fainted again.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON AGAIN.

No news, of course, of Dacre next day at Guildford House. None was to have been looked for; and yet Laura Gray was restless, and looking out from the windows, and could not be still for a moment.

To Mrs. Wardell she had never disclosed her secret. That kind old soul thought her, indeed, often rather hard upon Dacre, and took up the cudgels for him, never suspecting.

“Where is he? — what can it be? — could not he have written just a line? — I told him to write; — I think, whatever it is, he might have managed one line.”

All that time De Beaumirail, whom we know better as Alfred Dacre, was feverish Still, the perspective was not quite void. There was one last object — and something to interest — at least for a time. A day or two after, De Beaumirail, still very pale, had thrown himself on his sofa, and was expecting, by his own appointment, a visit from the persons who had foiled his escape, and were, probably, in no pleasant temper, as respected him.

These three gentlemen entered his room in silence, and with countenances, after their varieties, more or less threatening. Mr. Gillespie and Mr. Levi, uninvited, pulled chairs to the table, and grimly sat down. Mr. Larkin, who, whatever he might think of M; de Beaumirail, could never forget that he was himself a Christian gentleman, was the only one of the three visitors who saluted him — and a very dignified and withering bow it was.

“AU in the dumps, gentlemen — myself included. Let’s see if we can’t make ourselves a little more cheerful before we separate.”

“Gammon,” said Mr. Levi, under his breath, with a rather furious gleam in his sullen eyes.

“We’re not likely to be over cheerful, I thank ye, Mr. Beaumirail; I never was mair disgusted, sir, in a’ my life.”

“We conceived, sir,” said Mr. Larkin, “that dealing as gentlemen, there was a confidence on which we might mutually rely. Every gentleman is aware of the kind of feeling — of course there's something higher, I hope, than any mere wordly code — but that is not for every one. I did, however, implicitly rely upon that delicacy — that — a — a — delicacy— "

"Well, you see it was not one of the delicacies of the season, as the Lord Mayor says," interposed De Beaumirail.

"A delicacy which is implied in the term honour, Mr de Beaumirail — *honour* — sir," repeated Mr. Larkin, with a melancholy severity.

"Honour among thieves — I know — and I don't dispute it — I've behaved very ill, but I'll make amends."

The gentlemen all looked at him fixedly.

"I've come off second best — I don't complain; we were playing a sharp and hard game. It wasn't ill played at either side, and I lost, that's all," said De Beaumirail.

Mr. Levi sneered sullenly.

"Yes, I've got a rap over the head, and I forgive you."

"We advanshed you money, Mr. Beaumirail," said Levi, reproachfully.

"I'm willing to return you everything you gave me, punctually, even that knock over the head, if you like it," said De Beaumirail.

"Chaff, d — chaff, when business is on," said Mr. Levi. "And we bought up them debts with *thoushands* of capital, sir, shpeculating on that marriage, and only I got a hint of your minewvers you'd'a carried your pint and mizzled!" and Mr. Levi clenched this energetic speech with an oath.

"Why this business is worth to you gentlemen, how much? and to me, at least, the same, and *liberty.* I think *there's* some guarantee for sincerity. Come, gentlemen, I'm your most obedient humble servant once again."

"And what did you mean by that deevil's trick, sir?" demanded Mr. Gillespie.

"Suppose I meant to try whether I couldn't have it all to myself. Wolves, sir — all wolves — we're a greedy little pack, gentlemen; but I've got a lesson."

"You'd like to be on again, is that it?" asked Mr. Levi.

"On again! Of course I would — in fact, I must — and so must you. You can't afford to lose all that money. I can't afford to lose all I'm to gain, along with my liberty and my life — I'm talking coarsely to you, gentlemen, to make myself intelligible — you wish it as much as I. I hate the routine affectation of indifference — it always delays, and sometimes loses a bargain."

"If it's ever on again — which I'm -doubtful — for myself and guv'nor — we'll want to be sharp and wideawake," said Mr. Levi.

"I confess, gentlemen, I have a very unpleasant feeling about this business. I shall, if you wish it, consider the subject; — but I don't conceal from myself the extremely painful character of the recent occurrence, and I am bound, in frankness to all parties, to say, that my present feeling is to consider the matter as at an end, to act upon my detainers strictly, and to direct my attention to bringing to light, and, of course, into court, the foreign property of the gentleman with whom I have had the honour, for a time, to act, and which, I have some reason to think, is, by no means so inaccessible or inconsiderable as it was represented to us."

"You'll not object, Mr. Larkin, to come into the next room, and talk a bit wi' me and Mr. Levi."

So spoke Mr. Gillespie; and, taking Mr. Larkin's assent pretty much for granted, he led the way into M. de Beaumirail's bedroom; and, without ceremony, his companions followed him, leaving De Beaumirail, perfectly indifferent about that impertinence, and lost in a profound reverie.

"I won't allow myself to hope; — no, there's no hope; and poor old Parker will have nothing to tell me — nothing."

He sighed profoundly, and walked to the window, for he expected a visit from his old friend, and stood gazing anxiously into the yard.

While he thus waited a knock came to his door, and a letter. It was from old Mr. Parker, and said —

"As I shall be unable to call at your rooms to-day, and. knowing that you will naturally be impatient to learn the result of my visit to Guildford House, I write to say that I saw Miss Gray to-day, and strictly regulated what I said upon your wishes, but quite unsuccessfully — the absolute secrecy as to your identity, which you imposed upon me, I, of course, observed. I confined myself to ascertaining whether her feelings with respect to Mr de Beaumirail had undergone any favourable change, whether she would enter on a discussion of his character and conduct, and whether any persuasion would induce her to tolerate an interview, however short, with him. I was not left many minutes in doubt upon any one of these points. No good can possibly come of any attempt to lead her into an interview. In her present temper nothing could be more painful and fruitless. I humbly pray the Almighty that He will be pleased to dispose her heart more charitably, and so in His own good time He may — at present it would be vain and even mischievous to press it.”

And so with regrets and condolences the kind old man closed his letter.

“I am not disappointed — blessed are they who expect nothing — not the least.” But his face looked paler and sharper, and he sighed again from his troubled heart.

“All’s over, *quite.”*

And he walked to the chimneypiece, as if in search of something there, and a pale, patient smile, gleamed on his face, and he repeated “quite;” and he wandered away to his mahogany bookcase, and there he read the backs of the books without remembering what he read, every now and then repeating gently, “quite;” and he heard the voices of his three visitors, whom he had forgotten, babbling inside, and waking up, he cursed them intensely under his breath.

“Three long heads in there; it will be some comfort to knock them together, as *I* shall; yes, *you* may *lay* them together, gentlemen, but I’ll knock them together, with a clink that will leave a headache behind it for sometime to come. That little Jew that looks as if he’d poison his mother for three half-crowns; and that conceited, stony-hearted, Scotch skinflint, Gillespie — and Larkin! I hold my peace at Larkin; no one but Satan could describe Mr. Larkin.

“To think of me here! And the mean dogs that are everywhere prosperous, and I, punished so inexorably for a few boyish follies! — fortune — health — liberty — the only good hope that ever approached me — all taken in cold blood; and I without a friend I may say, compelled to associate with such indescribable beasts!”

De Beaumirail ground his teeth with actual fury, and with one enraged spurn of his heel dashed in the door with a noise that made them jump.

“On or off — are you tongue-tied — delay twenty seconds longer, and *I* declare off, and, by Heaven, *nothing* shall move me after.”

Mr. Levi, who was of an excitable temperament, had jumped from his seat, and was standing with his fists clenched as the door flew open. Mr. Larkin cowering in his chair, was staring at the same object, with a flushed frown on his forehead, in the sudden conviction that De Beaumirail had shot himself with a pistol.

"Canny, there lad, canny," bawled Mr. Gillespie, whose nerves were also ajar.

"Come, gentlemen, these are my rooms, if you please, and I choose to be alone," said De Beaumirail, who was growing palpably dangerous.

Mr. Larkin rose with a lofty carelessness, and with a slight waive of his large hand towards Mr. Gillespie, he said grandly —

"You can state my views, Mr. Gillespie. I leave myself as to our joint answer to Mr de Beaumirail, unhesitatingly in your hands, sir;" and so Mr. Larkin, who had an objection to a *fracas* (which he called a fraycass), got out of the room with rather a brighter colour, and as grandly as he could.

"Well, Mr. Beaumirail," said Gillespie, putting on his white felt hat, and taking his worsted gloves and stick, "we're amost decided, for once more, to trust you, sir — that is," he added cautiously, "about as far as I'd throw a bull by the tail, Mr. Beaumirail, ha, ha, ha. I mean, sir, we'll tak more care, sir, we'll tak more care, sir, and sleep with one eye open, ye ken; we must bring down half a dozen of our people, mind ye, every time you go down to that place at Brompton; you oblige us, ye see, to be sharp, sir, and that will cost us a handsome penny, but we'll mak trial o't for a couple of times more, jest — and — that's all."

"*Once* more is enough," said De Beaumirail sharply.

"Well, well, Mr. Beaumirail, that's bringin' matters to a point," said Mr. Gillespie, in a more conciliatory tone, "ye'r talking sense noo, sir, if ye can stick to it— "

"Time we should wind up, and get shomething out of the fire — a d — d long up-hill game it hash been to me and the guv'nor," said Mr. Levi, who never allowed that anything paid him; and took what fortune gave him, and, as Mr. Gillespie would have said, "kept aye grumblin'."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE KNIGHT OF THE SILVER DRAGON APPEARS.

THIS day an unexpected visitor was seen at Guildford House. Charles Mannering, thin and pale, alighted at the door, and Laura, at the window, could scarcely believe her eyes. She flew down stairs and met him in the hall.

"I'm so delighted you've come back from the wars, you poor wounded soldier! we must nurse you, and drive you about wherever you like, and take such care of you. Julia Wardell is the best nurse in the world. Don't come upstairs, it will tire you — you shall come into the library. She'll be back again soon. She went out about an hour ago for a drive, and I'm so glad to see you here again — honest old Charlie."

"Are you really?" he said, smiling in great felicity, as he held her hands in both his; "I'm so much obliged, and so happy, you can't think."

So in he went to the library, and there was a great deal, you may be sure, to be asked and answered, and at last he said —

"By-the-bye, is Mr. Dacre in town?"

To which, looking down for a moment as she did so, she answered, after her wont, quite truly —

"I really don't know."

And looking up suddenly, with flaming cheeks, she asked in turn, with a grave defiance —

"Why do you inquire? Have you heard anything new about him?"

"Well, no," said he, "that is, more properly, yes and no."

"No man ever comes into this house," said Challys Gray impetuously, "but he instantly begins to talk in riddles — riddles ascending through all degrees of perplexity, until they reach the climax, like this of simple absurdity. How *can* any honest question be truly answered by 'yes and no?'"

"Well, it's plain you give it up," he said, laughing. "So what I mean is this — I have learned nothing more about him distinctly, but I have received a very distinct caution."

“Oh, I know; that was, of course, from Ardenbroke,” she said, looking at him with eyes not to be evaded.

“Why should you suppose Ardenbroke?” demanded he.

“Because Ardenbroke wrote a very unaccountable letter about him before,” she replied, “in fact, I think a most inexcusable letter — I mean from a person who had described himself as Mr. Dacre’s friend. *You,* of course, have your own ideas of friendship; they don’t quite agree with ours. We women never run down unoffending people as you do. You may say what you like, but we are not only more generous, but infinitely more just. And what did Ardenbroke say? or is the caution intended for us or for Mr. Dacre’s tailor? I think you’ll allow the whole thing does very nearly approach impertinence, not to say outrage.”

“Well, recollect I don’t say who it is,” began Charles Mannering.

“But there’s no good in denying; I know it was Ardenbroke; and what did lie say?” insisted Challys Gray.

“Well, whoever gave me this warning,” he began —

“I’ll promise you not to mention the subject to him, if you’ll only tell me plainly that it was Ardenbroke. I know it was; and I’ll attack him very fiercely, I can tell you, when he comes back, unless you tell me,” interrupted Laura.

“If I tell you who it was,” said Charles, giving way, “will you promise, quite seriously, not to betray your knowledge to the person who wrote?”

“Yes — I don’t mind — certainly — I promise,” said Laura.

“Well, on that condition, it *was* Ardenbroke,” he answered.

“I knew it was. Didn’t I say so half a dozen times?” said Laura; “and now tell me what he says. Have you got his letter here?”

“No; but I remember everything exactly.”

“Well, pray go on.”

“He told me to take an opportunity of talking to you. Perhaps if he had known,” said Charles, looking down, with a little embarrassment— “I mean if he had thought how very little right I have to speak to you, Challys, on any such subject, he would have chosen some one else; but he has put it upon me so much in the way of a duty that I could hardly evade it.”

“If solemnity is a recommendation I think he could hardly have chosen his ambassador better,” said Miss Gray.

"Even that is something," said Charles, smiling sadly, "when one's chance of being of use depends on being known to be in earnest."

There was a latent sarcasm in the look which Challys Gray turned upon him, which was cruel.

"In that, perhaps, though in no other respect, such a messenger as he might have chosen," said Charles, tranquilly.

"If sage advice could make one wise, I should be the wisest girl in England," said Challys Gray.

"I venture no advice, pray remember; it comes all from Ardenbroke. I do not know even the facts on which he seems to found it. I only know the conclusion he presses, and that he is extremely anxious as well as earnest."

"Well, and where is this earnest and anxious gentleman? If he is in London I think he might have saved you the trouble of remembering his lecture, and come here to speak for himself. I don't mean, Charlie," she said, observing something like a pained smile as he looked down, "that you could not say it just as well as he — perhaps better, but a lecture is a lecture, and a bore at best; and I think it is hardly fair to arrange that I should have this one twice over — first from his ambassador, and afterwards from himself — and — I really don't know what to think. There never was a poor creature, I believe, so worried as I am."

Challys Gray was curious, and yet reluctant — she complained of being so addressed, and yet wished intensely to hear the message.

"My dear Laura, don't fancy that I urge you. I thought it was quite the other way; and, unless you command me, one word on the subject I shan't say. In fact, as I said before, I have not the least right, except on these terms, to mention it again."

"Now, you want to provoke me," said Challys Gray; "pray, let there be no more about it, but tell me — I'm sure it is disagreeable — what *has* got into Ardenbroke's head?"

"Well, it is just this — I can only tell you in a very general way, for I am quite in the dark as to his reasons: — He says that he would give a great deal to come up to London, and will, the very moment he has his second consultation about that Scotch property; and he says, in these words, as nearly as I can remember, 'If Challys Gray has any friend near her — and I think you are one — he will not fail to entreat her to drop the person who calls himself Alfred Dacre. I made a foolish promise which embarrasses me though only a little; but, if I were assured that he was availing himself of my silence to insinuate himself into an intimacy in that house, I should not hesitate a moment about letting Challys know all about him. I hinted a good deal before. It is quite true what I said in his favour. But that is *all* that *can* be said in his favour, and when I said it I had no idea that he dreamed of introducing himself on a footing of intimate acquaintance in my cousin's house.'"

"Upon my word, you seem to remember his periods wonderfully," said Miss Gray, who was vexed and embarrassed. "What a capital actor you would have made."

"A slower study, I'm afraid, than you think, Challys. From the moment his letter reached me, yesterday afternoon, I don't think one of my waking hours has passed without my conning over these sentences."

"Is there any more?" asked Challys.

"Yes; just an earnest request that as he could not well ask his mother, old Lady Ardenbroke— "

"Did he say *why?"*

"He seemed to hint that old ladies talk, and that it would be everywhere."

"Yes, I know; and what more?"

"An earnest entreaty that I would see you; and his expression was to implore of you to quite give up Mr. Dacre's acquaintance, and on no account to permit him to — to write to you."

"Oh! nonsense — *write.* Mr Dacre used, as you saw, just to drop in for an hour or so, and sing a little. What a fuss! and besides, Mr. Dacre has not been here for — I forget how long — and did not Ardenbroke say that all he said of him — in his favour, I mean — was quite true? you said so."

"Yes, he does," said Charles.

"Well, so far as my acquaintance is likely to go, that is quite enough. If he is a gentleman — accomplished — well-connected. But, perhaps it is assumed that I am in love with him," said Miss Gray, with a laugh, but very pale; "and that he is one of those charming gentlemen who go about in romances and melodrames, if nowhere else, making irresistible pretty speeches to adoring young ladies, and having all the time a wife or a skeleton locked up in a closet."

"Oh, no; it ain't that," said he.

“How do you know? what could be worse?” she answered again with a little laugh.

“I — the fact is — I had heard a story, but it was of a Mr. Dacre — Alfred Dacre. But Ardenbroke speaks of him as calling himself Alfred Dacre, from which it is plain that whether he be a Dacre at all, with some *other* Christian name, he certainly is not *Alfred* Dacre; and so my story is worthless. And when I wrote to Ardenbroke, I asked him” — Charles looked aside a little bashfully as he made this confession— “whether this gentleman calling himself Alfred Dacre was married, and he said positively not; and he had very lately heard every particular about him.”

“Well, you may tell him, we’re in no danger here, and that so far from having to deny ourselves to Mr. Dacre, he seems to have quite other people to look after, for we have not seen him here, as I told you, for some time.”

And then, at Laura’s instance, the patient had a glass of sherry and a biscuit, and described to her his present quarters near Highgate, and told her all the little news about himself. And though he made nothing of it, he looked pale and thin, and little more than half way on the road to recovery.

So Challys said that she and Julia Wardell would drive out some day soon, to see old Mr. Plumtree’s wonderful garden, in which Charles was wont to lounge with his tweed plaid about him, on a rustic seat, reading his novel in the luxury of a listless invalid.

CHAPTER XIX.

A HAPPY HOUR.

A WEEK and more had passed, and no news of Alfred Dacre. Guildford House was sad, and never did time move in that dull mansion more slowly before.

Now and then Julia Wardell wondered whether he would ever write again, spoke dryly of his politeness, and expressed her impetuous wonder at the want alike of indignation and of kindness manifested, as she complained, by Challys Gray.

“It certainly is,” she would say sarcastically to Challys Gray, “a very enviable state to be in. No affront has the slightest effect upon you! Could anything be ruder than Mr. Dacre’s walking off as he has done, after all the — the— “

“*Tea* — ?” said Challys Gray.

“Well, the tea was not much to talk about; but the attention, and the agreeable evenings; and, in fact, his making quite a resource of this house, and coming here to chat and sing whenever he pleased; and I do say that going off as he has done, without explanation or even farewell — why he did not say so much as good night. I was just thinking for a minute or two about something, and when I raised my eyes he had slipped out of the room; and not a line since — not a word., I do assure you, whatever you may think, I look on it as one of the rudest, coolest proceedings I ever remember hearing of.”

“I daresay; but that’s very much his own business. It certainly does not matter much to us whether he is the flower of courtesy — isn’t that what Sancho Panza calls his master — or the most illbred —

“He ain’t that,” interposed Mrs. Wardell. “The most illbred person in London, if we are never to see him again,” continued Miss Gray. “So I shan’t trouble my head about it.”

“You certainly do take it very coolly, considering that the poor young man may have met with some accident, or even lost his life; for I am quite sure that something must have prevented his calling here, or writing — and something very unusual, or he would have been certain to let us hear; and I'm quite uncomfortable about him; and I envy you the charming apathy with which you consign our friends to the chances of this reckless town, in which I am told, there are nine hundred accidents a week."

"Perhaps, dear Julia, I am a stock or a stone; but how can I help that. I did not make myself, and I really can't get either into a passion or a misery about nothing. He'll come back if he wishes, and if he doesn't he won't; and if you *will* have him dead, I humbly *hope* he won't. A little time will bring all to light."

"Well, I suppose it will. I wish you weren't looking so pale, my dear. I have been telling you, you can't be quite well, looking so poorly."

"I am, notwithstanding, quite well, I assure you," she protested. "You'll put me quite out of conceit with myself if you go on telling me that I'm losing my looks."

"Come with me to Lady Ardenbroke's tonight — there's a good child. She'll be so disappointed; and I don't think there will be six people there."

"No, dear, I shan't go."

"What an obstinate little thing it is?"

"At what hour do you go?" asked Miss Gray.

"Nine — very early. She's an invalid still, you know."

"I shall see you before twelve, then. Give her my love, and tell her that when it came to the hour I found I could not change my mind, I really can't, you know. She's very goodnatured; but she has made a little plan to steal me into society, and she would succeed before I knew where I was; and then, farewell all comfort in existence. No, I'll remain here; and if we change this drowsy life it shall be to travel — a state in which you can see everything and yet be solitary, and quite enjoy your liberty."

"I suppose, then, there's no good in my saying any more?" Mrs. Wardell looked at her, still in hope.

"None in the world, dear; and I see the carriage, and it is nearly dark; and you had better get your cloak on. Aunt Winnie is sometimes cross, you know, when people keep her waiting."

So, in a few minutes more good Mrs. Wardell was gone, and Laura Gray stood quite alone at the drawingroom window.

The shades of night stole gradually over the homely old house. The mist hung on the grass, and floated among the stems of the ancient elms, and the darkness deepened under their boughs.

The pretty lane in front was by this time quite silent. Leaning lightly against the side of the window, she was looking quite sadly and subdued, down that dark vista where midway his carriage-lamps used to shine on nights like this.

"He'll never come again — never."

And still she listened and watched; and I know not what fancies chased one another through her pretty head, and what yearnings were at her heart. In this lonely musing nearly half an hour passed, and she turned away with a deep sigh, and sitting down in a low chair took a book. I don't think she read a great deal — and more than once she sighed, and again fell into her reverie.

I wish I could say that she was interrupted in some more romantic way. The fact is the door opened, and the servant announced Mr. Dacre.

She raised her head, and saw him standing at the open door with his accustomed smile.

There was silence for a little while —

"I havn't written — I preferred coming; and beside I couldn't write," said he. "It is so much pleasanter and wiser to talk. A letter, you know, is blind and deaf, and neither sees when you look weary, nor hears when you say 'enough', but bores on with inflexible stupidity till it has quite said out its say; and for this, and a thousand better reasons, I'm glad I did not write."

- "Oh yes, I always think so," said Challys Gray, scarcely knowing what she said. "I never write a note when I can help it. It is so much better — one can *say* everything so much more easily."

"This drawingroom, this room— "he was looking round it in a wild reverie— "what a dream it all is! and, oh, Miss Gray, this hour. I'm to sing for you, mind, as usual, and to talk — all just in the old way it shall be; and it has been to me a year since I saw you."

"It is, you know, a good many days," said Challys Gray; "and — we are not to talk in a melancholy way; and now have I any news to tell — nothing, I think, except, indeed, this, that my cousin Julia has gone to drink tea with Lady Ardenbroke this evening; but she'll not be very long away; and her dog is quite recovered; and the old cracked china vase you used to admire is broken, and gone to some wonderful woman in Long-acre, who puts all the bits together again, and makes annihilation harmless."

"You'll tell me where to find her?"

"Are you going to put her skill in requisition?"

"Yes."

"What have you broken?"

"A trifle called a heart — my own — and so I had a right to break it."

"It must have been very ill constructed; Those ornaments should be made quite solid, and they would be less liable to accidents," said Laura.

"Yes, made of stone, I daresay. And now, for my little time, I'm going to be quite happy, that is to say, quite mad."

"That sounds very wild, Mr. Dacre; yet, I daresay, there is some truth in it," and she laughed. "People, I suppose, can only be happy by imagining something, and forgetting a great deal?"

"Yes, Miss Gray," said he, "one can forget a great deal, but never everything; like others we long for the lotus; but who would quite forget? It is to its saddest records that memory clings most fondly. I suppose by the time life turns into a retrospect every memory has some one melancholy treasure, the secret of all its pain, from which it would not part for all its other stores. But I'm not going to be sad. I'll wear my fool's-cap, if you allow me, this evening, and you wont despise me if my music is mingled with its bells. And — and you have been quite well ever since?"

"Yes, thanks; very well."

"And the invalid of the Silver Dragon— "

"Recovering very fast," she replied; but he perceived that she was embarrassed as she answered, and his eye rested with a quiet curiosity upon her for a moment or two, before he spoke.

"Recovering, recovering; yes, its time he should; he has been out, has he, and here?"

"Yes, only once, for twenty minutes or so, and he has established himself somewhere at Highgate," said Miss Gray.

"And talked of me?" said the gay man, with a smile.

"Very little; and I don't mean to discuss his poor little visit any more. He staid hardly any time, and he looks very far from well," said Laura Gray, "and he must have been a great deal more ill, and his hurt a great deal worse than I had any idea of."

"Yes," said her visitor, abstractedly. "And — and what about Ardenbroke?"

“Still in Scotland.”

“Enjoying himself, I daresay, and now and then writing letters. I should not be surprised, if he sometimes asked after me.” The young gentleman was smiling.

“Now come, Mr. Dacre, you’ll take nothing by your cleverness,” she answered; “for I made up my mind long ago that I never would talk of one acquaintance to another; and therefore, one of your insinuated questions I wont answer.”

“A misfortune it is to be gifted with a curious temperament, and I’m awfully curious, where sympathy is withheld, and illumination denied.”

“I pity you immensely, but I can’t assist you — no indeed.”

“Can a poor curious devil prevail nothing by entreaty?”

“I renounce curious devils, and hold no parley with them.”

“Quite obdurate?”

“Quite.”

“Do you think a song might possibly prevail?”

“I don’t say it will, but you shall try.”

“Instantly.”

And so he did.

CHAPTER XX.

UNMASKED.

HE did sing, and then they chatted about fifty things, he in the same gay spirits.

Swiftly and gaily flew the hour. Had he ever been so merry before? She felt his eyes upon her now and then as if he were meditating a talk perhaps of another kind. But if it was coming it was still deferred, and his wild spirits carried on their dialogue in its old channel.

As he talked on with a gaiety almost excited, there lay before him open on the piano, a pretty song which was then not old. Its words are taken from the fine lyrics of Rokeby, and it begins —

“Oh Brignall banks are wild and fair,
And Greta woods are green,
I’d rather roam with Edmund there
Than reign our English queen.”

It is said that when a spirit enters the room, a chill is felt, and the lights at the moment faint, the powers of life suddenly subside, and with the shadow comes a sense of fear.

A change came suddenly over this young man’s face; it grew pale, and the ghost only of its smile still lingered there. He was looking down upon the open song, and his slender finger pointed to the bar on which his eye was fixed, and with a thrilling voice to the minor melody he sang the mysterious words of the outlaw —

“Maiden, a nameless life I lead,
A nameless death I’ll die:

The fiend whose lantern lights the mead, Were better mate than I.”

The ghostly minor of the melody rang for a moment in the air; there was a silence, and then she heard his voice, very faintly, with a faint laugh, say —

“That’s pretty well for a tenor dying of consumption, so my doctors tell me, but I don’t believe them. And — *there* I stop.

The last of my voice you have heard — in this room it will never sound again.”

There was a silence for a little time, and he rambled on —

“When a prodigal like *me* reappears, he may hear not a welcome but a scream; let him return to the darkness whence he came. Call for his ring — of iron, and the best robe — web and woof — a winding sheet. Miss Gray, I wonder as I stand before you, how I ever dared to profane your presence. How is it no instinct told you when I stole into your house that something evil had come; how did you look at me without a shudder? Good God! — how I pawned my very soul to reach you, and then, villain though I was, threw down my last stake to save you. I’ll not describe myself, my immeasurable treason and — adoration. But oh, Challys, remember I went away penitent, and with a heart quite broken, to expiate all I can of my crime, in uncomplaining misery. Good-by, and for God’s sake forgive me.”

His hands were clasped in agony, and his imploring eyes fixed on her, and he saw before him, not Challys Gray but her ghost. For a time he waited, but no answer came, and slowly he turned away to leave the room, with such a look of agony as a soul departing may turn for one moment, toward the eternal bar.

It is not easy to remember, far less to describe, the stun of a dreadful discovery. Challys Gray has had her warnings — she can’t complain — some vague misgivings too. But, alas! as the love is — so is the faith.

And now on a sudden, at her feet, the earth has opened, and the pale prophet is there, and she stands before him — hearing, yet not hearing — seeing, yet not seeing. There is just the dim consciousness that Alfred Dacre is going away for ever.

With a sudden cry, awaking as it were, Challys Gray said —

"Come back — come back — come back; I was always very frank — it does not matter now how I speak, and that is well, for I will hide nothing. Oh, Alfred, I love you more than you'll ever be loved again, and I'll never more care for any one on earth, and I wanted just to say that, and to bid you good-by for ever — and ever, and ever — good-by."

She was looking up in his face, her hands were laid on his shoulders, and her face looked white and wild with misery.

He stooped and kissed her lips, in a dream, and when he raised his head again, those eyes of unutterable misery, that seemed looking into eternity, were still gazing up in his face, as if they had never moved.

"Shall I tell you all, Challys?" he said, almost in a whisper.

"Oh, no — no — no; you shall always be the same Alfred Dacre, my hero — no, nothing shall sully him, my one dream. Oh, Alfred, if you had died, and I had died, an hour after, and this had never been, and God had taken us to his mercy, and we had met— "

"Challys, if I could only show my unspeakable love — if I had but a chance to redeem my hopes — or to lay down my life for you — but God has denied me everything."

"No, Alfred, there is one hope for us yet," cried Challys, wildly; "if you remember poor Challys Gray, or care for her, you will travel a long pilgrimage, so will I patiently. A good man told me once that those that try, with all their hearts, to go to Heaven, will go there. There has been something very bad, — God help us all! who dare go before his judgment? — but *I'll never* hear it; and if we try, it may be a long, and sorrowful journey, but at last we'll reach it. And oh, Alfred, *Alfred"* she almost screamed, "we'll *meet* — promise, promise, oh, don't you promise — it is not good-by for *ever,* darling. I'll see you there."

He clasped her for one wild moment close in his arms. She felt the throbbing of his heart, and heard him say — but there was no voice in the words, a sob, a whisper— "Challys, Challys, my treasure — my darling," and he went.

He hurried down the stairs, and through the hall. She heard the hall-door shut and the sound of the receding steps outside. With a bursting heart, she listened, and the roll of wheels, and the clash of the iron gate followed, and the last vestige of her dream was gone.

CHAPTER XXI.

ECLAIRCISSEMENT.

NEXT day in Mr de Beaumirail's rooms in the Fleet there was a stormy scene.

Mr. Levi had accompanied Mr de Beaumirail the night before in his carriage, attending on behalf of the triumvirate in command of the bodyguard who were posted secretly at the points of egress from the house, to secure that adventurer, should he a second time attempt to effect his escape.

The Jew's suspicions had been vaguely, but powerfully, aroused by the obstinate silence, and finally by the savage fury of the young man, on their way back. That did not look like the temper of a man on the eve of liberation and fortune. From De Beaumirail, however, he could, for that night, extract nothing, and he drove off to old Gillespie, and together they shrewdly and uncomfortably compared their surmises.

Next day, in consequence, in an uncomfortable state of doubt, looking grim and gloomy, after their several fashions, Messrs. Larkin, Gillespie, and Levi, assembled early in Mr de Beaumirail's sitting-room.

That gentleman lay obstinately on the sofa in his bedroom. Mr. Gillespie, however, at length came to be of opinion, that "these sort o' tricks could not be suffered longer," and accordingly he knocked and clamoured imperiously at his door, whereupon Mr de Beaumirail sprang to his feet, and confronted Gillespie, demanding, with a savage malediction, and a look of fury, what the devil he meant by making that noise in his rooms?

Whereupon Mr. Gillespie sturdily explained the object of their presence there, and declared that they expected Mr de Beaumirail to report progress, "and we require to know defeenitively how the matter stands?"

"It *stands*, sir," answered De Beaumirail, with a savage stamp on the floor.

"How the deil do you mean, sir?"

"Stock still," answered he; "your conspiracy has broken down, you three d — d scoundrels, and your money is buried under it; and if you ever dare to allude to it again in my presence, I'll brain you with the poker."

When his three visitors clearly saw how matters were, their fury boiled over.

Gillespie raved and cursed like an old bedlamite, and swore that one way or another he would "*have* him."

Levi more pointedly swore that he would leave no stone unturned to bring his French property into the court, and that he would never die till he saw him starving in prison.

And Mr. Larkin, black as thunder, swore not at all, but hinted his belief that the young gentleman had exposed himself to criminal proceedings, on what precise charge, however, he did not care to disclose.

But De Beaumirail brought all this yelling and thunder to an end by turning his enraged visitors out of his room. Some months ago he would have laughed in cynical gaiety over such a scene, but that spirit was dead and gone. Even the little excitement died away before the sound of their steps.

A bright eye — a bright hectic — and the clear pallor which doctors read so easily, showed this day in the handsome young face of the prisoner.

De Beaumirail was very ill. A nervous temperament — so highly strung and impulsive — cannot long withstand the agitations which try all people sorely in incipient disease. In his system the nerves and brain prevailed. The light and fire — passion and impulse of a fierce and volatile nature — dominated him; and now had come the reaction of apathy and despair.

It was toward sunset, as a man might know by the ruddy light upon the old brick chimney-tops visible from his window, when his old friend, Doctor Wiley, who generally amused a drowsy hour or so daily with De Beaumirail's case, dropped in to make his usual visit.

He asked him questions; listened at his waistcoat; and retailed, I am afraid unheard, between these professional exercises the dreary news and gossip of the place.

The doctor was in no hurry to go away. There was no fashionable brougham waiting at the door to whirl him at a showy pace away to sick lords' and great ladies' doors; he was rich, if in nothing else, in that invaluable treasure, time; and bestowed it liberally upon the fallen star of fashion, whose light was soon to be quenched for ever.

As usual, he read the backs of De Beaumirail's books, and tumbled over the leaves abstractedly, and whistled gently in his reverie — as he did when his talk was pretty well exhausted.

De Beaumirail seldom wished the harmless loiterer away; was often not conscious of his presence; and, as on this occasion, he stood in his dishabille at the window, with his lank thin hair, very gray, hanging over his ruddy forehead and somewhat dissipated nose, with a lackadaisical patient smile, and his dusty and faded clothes in the reflected light, he might have been sketched, De Beaumirail thought, with a shovel in his hand, for a boosy old village sexton.

"Well," said De Beaumirail, with a sudden sigh, and looking at him as if he had just awaked, "when am I to make my little excursion to the country?"

"Steal a march on the warden, hey? Is that what you're thinking of? No, no, we'll not give you a chance that way. You're too potent a spirit, sir, to be laid so easily."

"Spirit — spirits in wood — as the distillers say in the newspapers — they export some that way from this store sometimes," said De Beaumirail, listlessly.

"Ha, ha — spirits in wood — by Jove, sir, that's not so bad. Ha, ha, ha! But egad, sir, you're the sort of spirit that will keep a long time in the stone-jug, hey? and be nothing the worse."

"You're a goodnatured fellow; but I should be very glad to die."

"Come, none of your bosh and nonsense!" said the doctor, with a jolly air.

"I'm tired, sir."

"Tut, sir. Hang it — life's sweet," said the doctor, with a wave of his hand towards the court, as if the gaieties and glories of the world were there at his command.

"I suppose so, doctor; but it's a sweet one tires of sometimes. I've had enough," he sighed, "and I want sleep."

"You'll not be so tomorrow, sir," said the doctor, kindly. "I've been that way myself now and then, sir; it clears up after a while, and who knows but a good time's coming."

And so, after a little more, the doctor withdrew; and shortly after the withdrawal of that luminary, twilight came, and a dismal attendant came in and lighted De Beaumirail’s candles.

“Many a rich fellow dying at this moment, who would give his soul to live ten years longer. How gladly I’d take his hours, and leave him my years, were they sixty.”

And to this bitter reflection, common to those who wish for death, we leave him.

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. DE BEAUMIRAIL AND HIS FATHER CONFESSOR.

"IT was very good of you to come, Mr. Parker," he said, more than an hour after, when the good old clergyman entered his door, "your trouble with me, I hope, will soon be ended, and I wanted to have a talk with you. I wanted to explain what has been going on; it will make you stare. I'll tell it shortly and intelligibly. You'll think me what I am when I have related my little story."

"Think you what you *are* — what do you mean?" asked Mr. Parker.

"The vilest miscreant on earth, except three — my three accomplices — Larkin, Levi, and Gillespie — but no, they are not so bad; they have excuses that I have not — I suppose — at least, they are three vulgar villains, and I — I ought to have recoiled from the cowardice of fraud."

"I'm totally in the dark, sir," said the old clergyman, "your language, I hope, is very exaggerated; I'm very sure it is, judging from all I know of you."

"My dear sir, you know *nothing* of me, no more than you do of that heinous Christian, Mr. Larkin."

"Oh! my dear sir, pray don't."

"I'll tell you my story, and then judge us all round, sir. Sit down, pray. How rude of me to have left you standing for so long."

The old man sat down, and De Beaumirail said —

"One promise only I exact before I make my disclosure — one word I tell you, you must never repeat to any living being — secresy can no longer compromise anyone, and the only person who had a right to hear it, if she pleased, refused — and — she spared me that."

There was a silence for a little, and De Beaumirail, who had walked to the window and looked out for a time, to hide some violent emotion, returned and said —

"Well, sir, you promise?"

"Yes, I do sir, I see no difficulty."

"No, I conceal nothing. You must know then that when Miss Gray refused to subscribe the list of creditors consenting to give me my liberty, I conceived an intense hatred of her, and I would have gone great lengths for revenge. Levi, Larkin, and Gillespie, wanted to get me out; they fancied I could have been of immense use in introducing a project, by which they expected to make money, to some people of rank in Paris with whom I once was intimate — perhaps I could, perhaps I could not — it happened, however, that they were of that opinion, and resolved to make that use of me."

"I — I suppose they meant honourably, sir. You certainly did once know many influential people there," said Mr. Parker.

"All honourable men, sir; and being for a purpose anxious to get me out, they were as angry as I at our failure. And now, sir, the devil who was always at my side possessed me, and in my fury I threw out the spark that smouldered and kindled, and was not far from accomplishing an infernal sacrifice."

"I don't understand, sir; but you did abandon yourself to a vindictive and violent feeling," said Mr. Parker, reprovingly.

"I knew nothing of Miss Gray's real character then. I thought it was just that cruel womanish malice that runs away with things, and thinks the world well lost for a sharp revenge. Good heavens! how I mistook her — and the recoil; well I deserve it. And now, sir, I'll tell you what my plan was — the plan of a miscreant — but I'm not the least ashamed of it; by Heaven, under the same persuasion I'd go into it again. I'm no slave of hypocrisies, and if I set about punishing an enemy, I do it effectually."

"I don't think, Mr. De Beaumirail, that I am a fitting repository for any such confidences," said the clergyman.

"Don't misunderstand me, sir; I do not tell it from the mere wish to talk about myself, but with a very serious purpose; pray permit me."

"Well, sir, on that ground."

"Thank you, Mr. Parker. Now, sir, here it was in effect. I said to those scoundrels, suppose you try a new enterprise; you can buy up my debts for a song, for three thousand pounds you can buy up thirty thousand; all but that young lady's. Then get me out of this place altogether, or at least every day — you know how to manage the warden — and I'll marry Miss Gray without a settlement; and you may pay yourselves out of Gray Forest —

turn your three thousand into thirty — and I'll have my own share, and lead her a life. That was my retort on the young lady's imagined malice."

"Now, sir, again I say, this shocking disclosure ought not to have been for my ears," said the old gentleman, aghast.

"Sir, there's nothing in it; you may take it up in your hands and examine it. That infernal machine can never explode, thank Heaven, and you *promised* to hear me. Now, Mr. Parker, I was naturally a conceited fellow, having had some success in a brilliant world. I was young and all that, and I had some music and drawing and all the kind of thing that interests girls; and I thought the devil was in it, — I beg your pardon, I mean that it would be very strange indeed if, with certain conditions, an impression were not made. Nothing could be more favourable. Here was a young lady who knew *nothing* of the world, who had passed the few years that might otherwise have been given to seeing something of that great and noisy place, in attendance upon an invalided father, and who was at the time living a life of entire seclusion, with no one to take care of her but a very foolish old woman."

"Merciful Heaven, sir! How could you engage in such a cruel imposture?"

"You can't comprehend it, but *I* can tell you; put a fellow in here for three or four of the best years of his life, with a moral certainty of ending his days in his prison, and give him a chance to recover liberty and fortune by the same *coup* that punishes his worst enemy, and you'll not find him troubled with many scruples about it. You have no idea of what a man who is good for anything becomes in a place like this; when he sees his years and his chances gliding from him, and no chance of going out but in his coffin."

The clergyman made no answer, but remained with ear inclined, looking downward with a look of pain.

"Well, sir, Mr. Gillespie learned that Miss Gray was coming to the opera, and, after nearly four years passed within these walls, I emerged. We sat in a box nearly opposite, for it was as well that I should see the young lady; and a harmless accident to her carriage as she returned home had been arranged with her coachman, to enable me, under the name of Dacre, to introduce myself by a little service, and to found on it an excuse for a visit of inquiry; and so the acquaintance was made. That night at the opera, as luck would have it, Ardenbroke saw and knew me; and — in the dark, like the rest of the world, as to where I had been for years — I told him such lies as answered my purpose, and tied him by a promise not to mention my name or visit, as I called it, to London. I'm afraid, sir, you think I have taken a liberty with your text, and let my yea be nay, and my nay yea; and so it was from first to last, almost — not *quite* — last of this villany."

"I'm filled, I confess, sir, with astonishment and horror."

"So you ought — so ought I — I suppose. But my theory is, that if you practise a deception, it ought to be thoroughly practised. It is illogical to stick at subsidiary lies. The fraud seems now to me odious, mean, and truculent, because I have ceased to think of its contemplated victim as I did. Nothing draws man and woman together like a secret to be kept between them; nothing gratifies the pride and elicits the love of woman like a man's devoting himself to danger for her sake; nothing cherishes that tenderness like being, by any means always present to her thought; nothing heightens the romantic feeling like a little mystery — all this was provided for by some real reserves; for I dared not tell her who I was, and for plain reasons I was obliged to conduct my stolen exits from this place with caution; for had I been seen and recognised, it might have cleared matters up with a clap of thunder. But it was provided for elaborately by a cruel imposture, which amused me, the drama of a pretended conspiracy conducted by anonymous letters.

"All *that* I hate to think of now. When I conceived it I was mad with malice and misery; it was delight to me to torture my enemy in the process of subjugation."

Mr. Parker sighed deeply.

"I see, sir, all this pains you. I don't mind telling you, now that it wrings my own heart with anguish and fury to think of my stupidity — how long it was before my eyes were opened. Good heavens, sir! that I should have seen a fiend in that angel! Oh, sir — oh, Mr. Parker, I don't believe that any human soul ever suffered before what I am enduring now: not remorse — no. I despise that feeling, — but an eternal leavetaking, the separation of the damned. I should lose my reason or cut my throat if it were not for one hope."

"The Christian has always — if he will only look for it — in his darkest hour, and wildest wanderings, a hope eternal as the love and truth of God," said Mr. Parker.

“To that hope, sir, my eyes are blind. The hope I mean is death.”

“Let every man labour while it is called day, that death may prove repose for him. He thinks of the poor body on its pillow of clay, and of death as no more than a cold slumber; but no, sir, the body is but the cenotaph he leaves behind him. The man himself is awake, and far away, receiving the recompense of his life.”

“We’ll not dispute about that now, sir,” answered De Beaumirail, gently enough. “I’m willing to take it as a sleep, and I think it is not far off. I’m sure it isn’t. I could not feel as I do if it were; and now, sir, you’ll never tell her while I live who was that Alfred Dacre who grew from hating to love her so.”

After a short silence the old clergyman said thoughtfully —

“Why, Mr. De Beaumirail, should, you not write to the young lady and tell her this whole truth?”

“Write to her! I’d die a thousand deaths first. While I live she shall never know more; no, if she had commanded it I should have confessed all, but she was merciful; that dreadful ordeal she remitted; and now, if you, my one true friend, from a mistaken kindness, betray me, by Heaven I’ll put a pistol to my head, and end my life the hour I hear it. Oh, sir, I rely on you — your promise — you wont betray me.”

“Sir, I’ll keep my promise. Without your leave I never dreamed of speaking to Miss Gray on the subject; only it seemed to me a natural thing to do,” said the old man.

“Ah! sir, you don’t know. But when I’m dead you may — you will; and say that, adoring her as I did, I honoured her too much to shock her with the revelation of my name. Tell her she could never have thought more vilely of me than I do of myself; and that what I dared not have sued for while living, she will, perhaps, grant to the dead — forgiveness. And, oh! sir — you’ll not forsake me.”

“You shall see me, sir, at least as often as ever; and — about your health — pray tell me who is your medical man,” asked Mr. Parker.

De Beaumirail smiled.

“You’ve seen him here once or twice, and might have taken him for what he metaphorically is — a grave-digger. He is a fellow-lodger in this retired wing of the palace of justice, and his name is Wiley.”

“A skilful man, I hope?”

“Really, sir, I don’t know; but I have what is termed entire confidence in him. Never refuse to see him, drunk or sober. Allow him to feel my pulse, and listen to the secrets of my heart. Let him call my complaints by what hard names he pleases, and I never interrupt him; and in so far may be said to take his advice, but not his medicine; and I believe he is a jolly, half-mad, miserable prisoner like myself.”

“Well, I must say good night. I think you seem a little better,” said Mr. Parker, “and I hope you’ll find yourself a great deal better tomorrow.”

“Thanks, sir. Fellows like me, who live in this odd place, are always *going* to be better tomorrow. It is the easiest way of improving, and leads a man cheerfully on his journey like the bell that tinkles between the donkey’s ears, and always an inch or two in advance, amuses the Alpine march.”

And having said these words, he bid his old friend good night.

“Good night, sir,” said Mr. Parker, “and I will look in very soon again,” and away he went; and De Beaumirail stood looking down the dark void of the staircase, in deeper misery than anyone who had listened to his cynical trifling, a moment before, could have imagined. It was about the hour when, well muffled to escape recognition at the door, he used to walk out, accompanied by old Gillespie, or it might be by Mr. Levi, well known and influential people in that locality, and get into his brougham and go off in a dream to Guildford House.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MUTAT TERRA VICES.

IN a little time Lord Ardenbroke returned to London. A note awaited him which quite relieved him on the uneasy subject of Guildford House and its masquerading visitor.

It was written by De Beaumirail, and reminded him that he was under promise of secrecy, and upon the sole condition of his continuing to observe it, now promised that no communication, by letter or message, should ever again be opened with the tenants of that mansion. It said— "When you heard that the pretended Alfred Dacre was admitted at Guildford House, I can understand your surprise and anxiety only too well. You will not inflict upon a very miserable man the additional anguish of a useless disclosure. I appeal to your magnanimity and your justice. I enclose the address of a friend who will see you, should you wish it, and answer in confidence any questions you may care to ask. But I submit I have a right to your silence, and I insist on your promise to respect my secret."

Lord Ardenbroke did hold his tongue very scrupulously on the subject, seeing that no duty any longer conflicted with, this claim of secrecy.

And now the House was up, the season quite over, and London emptied of its great people, and even in large measure of its small. The dowager Lady Ardenbroke was at Brighton, and her son on the Scotch moors. But Guildford House had not closed its shutters, nor locked its doors. Challys Gray lingered on, and Julia Wardell dozed contentedly over her crochet and her novel, and walked her dog up and down the avenue twice a day, and noted his appetite and spirits with more than maternal solicitude, and I daresay the servants' hall and housekeeper's room had their ideas respecting the humdrum life to which they were condemned.

Challys Gray had found a new pursuit. Was she changed? There was not change enough for Julia Wardell, who was with her day by day, to take note of. She chatted very much as usual; she went out as usual in her carriage; there was the customary shopping; and sometimes she recurred to her old plan of foreign travel, and made ideal tours, and seemed interested with maps and guide-books for an hour at a time.

But for all that there was a change. It had come in a moment. An eternal farewell to the untold hope. The feeling that grew, day by day, duller and darker — that time was doing nothing

"To lift that longing from her heart."

She had taken old Mr. Parker very much into counsel, and also a curate who had the care of the district round her. She had made herself, after the manner of young ladies grieved at heart, who have no nunneries to go into, a Dorcas, a volunteer Sister of Mercy. I merely mention this very commonplace fact, having no intention of following her little rambles or visitations among the sick and needy.

Of course she talked to these poor people, and gave them good little books and other things. But when young ladies visit so, it is, as a rule, their money that is welcome, and not their tracts, nor, I am afraid, even their pretty faces.

It was, however, occupation, and of that grave, melancholy, and yet comforting sort which accords with a mind wounded, and in danger of subsiding into utter apathy.

Charles Mannering was now a great deal better, and every day at Guildford House; and with a sure instinct, conscious, though he never hinted that sad knowledge to anyone, that Challys Gray had known her first love — blighted it might be — yet, still, there would always remain that preoccupation. Challys Gray, *he* could see, though good Mrs. Wardell did not, was quite changed.

She laughed and talked pretty much as usual; but often she fell into reveries, in which she looked, so sad and hopeless, that he wondered that anyone on earth, could be worth so much of Challys Gray's sorrow.

Very devoted he was. He walked with her on her little daily circuits, carried her little basket, for she was in a mood that yearned for all kinds of humilities, and no servant attended her, and Challys thought she was doing "good works," and that she had never known what "charity" was before. But Challys had always been kind and open-handed. In the matter of liberality there was nothing to change. The change was in the mode and practice of distribution, and was, on the whole, harmless, and to herself useful. It afforded her occupation, and introduced her to scenes that accorded with her melancholy mood, and gave her sterner, and also tenderer notions of God's dealings with His creatures than inexperienced people in her rank of life entertain; it startled her also with a nearer sense of the responsibilities of wealth, and filled her with a juster awe of futurity.

This kind of thing, thought Charles Mannering, can't last for ever, and when she gives it up it will be a sign that she has come to herself, also, in other matters. "It may take some time," and he sighed, "but one day or another it will be so."

So we reason — the head against the heart — logic against the presentiment. The steel passes through the phantom and it stands there still. The shadowy augury is not of reason, and will not be killed by its weapon.

Charles Mannering knew that she was changed, and felt, as other men have felt, that the heart over which a sorrowful first-love has passed, will never be quite the same again. With this melancholy, however, there was now a quietude. The agitation and the burning gall of rivalry he had done with, and he was always near beautiful Challys Gray.

It was late in October now. The leaves were rustling on the avenue, or skipping and whirling over the grass, in the rough autumnal gusts, and still pretty Challys Gray remained at Guildford House, and the nun-like life went on.

One day she said to old Mr. Parker, who had come, as was his wont, with a list of "cases of distress," to Challys Gray, whose purse was always open —

"I have been thinking, Mr. Parker, about that poor prisoner— "

She paused at these words reflectively. "What poor prisoner, Miss Gray?" the old man asked, a little inquisitively.

"I mean Mr de Beaumirail;" she answered.

"Oh, Mr de Beaumirail! Yes — yes — to be sure," repeated he.

And he looked steadily on her, with a kind of apprehension, expecting something.

But Challys Gray looked quite frank, and her face indicated neither doubt nor reserve, as she continued —

"You told me once, Mr. Parker, that my feeling about that matter was a superstition, and that no such auguries should stand in the way of an act of simple mercy. I could not listen to you then; but I have been thinking, and I have made up my mind to oppose his release no longer."

"But, my dear Miss Gray, it is no longer in your power; the other creditors have withdrawn their consent, and nothing can now persuade them to renew it."

"I'm very sorry; but I'm glad I spoke before I knew this new difficulty. Well, if this cannot be, at least you must persuade him to allow me, through you, to be of some use."

"You mean, Miss Gray, to furnish him with money. I dare not hint at such a thing. I know very well how such a proposal would be received. Besides you need have no uneasiness upon that point. He has some property in France which his creditors cannot touch, and which is ample for all his present wants; and he is not, I fear, likely very long to enjoy any rights that remain to him, for the physician that attends him seems to think that his life now hangs upon a thread."

"Ill, is he? — Fever, or what is his complaint?" she asked, evidently shocked.

"No, nothing of that kind. One of those complaints of the heart, his doctor says, which may kill him at any moment," answered Mr. Parker.

"I have behaved very cruelly," she said, with a contraction of her brow, as she looked down, very pale, "but not with a cruel motive — no — no — *not* with a cruel motive — I never was cruel; I was often angry, but never cruel or unforgiving — *say* that of me — you know it, Mr. Parker."

"I *do* know it, Miss Gray. I never charged you with anything worse than an entirely erroneous idea of your duty; there is no use in discussing it now, because no practical effect can now result from it, and you have shown that you cease to hold that opinion by offering to sign his release."

"Sir, I'm glad you understand. It is very unhappy — what a world this is!"

"I have been out of town for some days, and mean to see him tomorrow, when I am making my visits, between three and four, and if you desire it I can mention the wishes, you have expressed."

"And tell him, sir, that I ask his forgiveness, and would receive the news that he had accepted my offer with gratitude as a token of that forgiveness."

And thus charged, Mr. Parker took his departure.

CHAPTER XXIV.

REQUIESCAT.

Three days later old Mr. Parker was at Guildford House, very grave, with something to tell.

He did not go up to the drawingroom, where the ladies were. He asked to see Miss Gray in the library, only for a few minutes.

The young lady came down, and when she looked on his face there came a foreboding of ill.

Pretty much as usual he greeted her; but there was a little constraint, and a hesitation about opening his business, that made her ask, with a rather alarmed look fixed on him —

"Is there any news — anything about any friend of mine?"

"No, nothing; I can't say anything about your *friends*, Miss Gray, but about Mr de Beaumirail; I have to tell you first that you need think of him or his troubles no more."

There was a silence, and after two or three seconds Miss Gray said, very low —

"Oh, really!" as she looked in a kind of sorrowful consternation in the old man's eyes.

"Yes; he died very suddenly on Monday evening. He had been as usual. The doctor says, he talked with him in the course of the day, and saw no change. He might, he says, humanly speaking, have possibly lived for a year or more."

"Were you with him?" she asked.

"Yes; I changed my plans after seeing you, and went there, and I found him at his desk reading some old letters. He was very much dejected. He asked all about you, so I gave him your message, and he seemed affected; and he said, '*I* forgive *her!* Ah, sir, you know that is folly. I only hope the time will come when she will forgive me; I know it will; her forgiveness will follow me to the grave, for death is the seal of repentance, and she will know me better when I die.' So I told him I had met the doctor in the court, and that he had not apparently any unusual apprehensions about him, and he smiled and said, ‘The blind leading the blind. I don’t mind doctors; but there’s an understanding between the dying man and death, and signs as slight as lovers’ exchange, of which *they* see nothing; therefore don’t mind him.’ And then he made me tell him over again all about you, and he said, after a silence, ‘Have you ever heard her sing?’”

“How came he to know that I sang? But I have not for some time — and I think I never shall again,” she said.

“And when he had talked a little more,” continued Mr. Parker, “seemingly all the time very sad, and in a gentle mood, he said at last, ‘Would you mind opening that window? I should like a little more air.’ It was just at sunset, and he said, smiling, “Look at those old brick chimneys; isn’t it odd, everything in this light looks picturesque, and even sad? I watch them every evening till the twilight hides them. People learn ways of making time pass, sir, in places like this and then he told me over again his message to you, and he said with a little gasp, ‘Is there air?’ and with one slight gasp more he suddenly fell back. I thought he had fainted; I could not believe it was all over. I called the doctor, whom I saw walking in the court, and when he came he saw how it was. He was gone.”

“Oh, dear, sir, it’s very sad and dreadful, and yet what could I do?”

“I gave him your message, and told him of your offer; and although it was as I thought, and he could not accept it, he was very grateful, and very much moved.”

“I’m glad you told him — it was kind. I am very much obliged — and pray tell me all he said.”

“He spoke of your forgiveness in the terms I mentioned, and he said, pointing to his desk, ‘As you came in, I was reading a note of hers.’”

“Reading a note of mine! A note written by *me,* do you mean?”

“I have been charged by him, Miss Gray, to make an explanation which pains me; I wish the task had devolved on any other person.”

Mr. Parker was speaking with averted eyes, and with the profound embarrassment of one who expects to awaken very painful emotions.

“Pray do; I am quite in the dark, and can’t think how Mr de Beaumirail could have obtained possession of any note of mine; though, perhaps, indeed it does not very much matter, for I have never written a note in which I need wish anything changed, or need in the least regret.”

Mr. Parker sighed and shook his head, and seemed at a loss how to proceed. But it was to be got through somehow, so he said —

"He did not say what they were; he did not speak of them as being on any subject of the least importance; he merely spoke of them as relics which he prized very dearly j. and when he spoke of your music, it was in reference to a time, not many months ago, when he, under a feigned name, used to come here and contribute to it in the evenings, — indeed, for a time, nearly every evening."

As he thus spoke Mr. Parker raised his eyes, and was startled. Challys Gray was standing before him with a face so wild and pale, her hand pressed to her temple, that he expected to see her drop to the ground.

With a wild cry came the words, "Oh, it was Alfred Dacre, and you hid it! Oh, wicked old man! how *could* you? And it was this — and in prison. Oh, Alfred, Alfred; oh, God, he's *gone!*"

She had caught him by the arm, and was clasping it with trembling hands, as she gazed with her large affrighted eyes in his face.

"You'll see, Miss Gray, by-and-by," he pleaded, "you will indeed, that I am not the least to blame in this matter. I could not divulge, without violating a solemn promise, the little he had chosen to disclose."

"You let him die, you cruel old man, and never told me; and I — I — oh, my God, I have killed him!"

"Miss Gray, listen to me, I entreat," said the old man, gently. "From all I can learn, no power on earth could have saved him. He died of some affection of the heart. I forget the name, but the doctor tells me it must have been established more than a year ago; certainly before you saw him, and probably at least a full year before that time; therefore, as to the event, his remaining in prison, or coming out, was quite immaterial."

"And where is he? Oh, take me to him — I must see him."

"Poor child, that can't be; he was laid in his last resting-place this morning. I attended and read the service," said he.

For some time she was silent, gazing in his face, and then, with a long, low, and bitter cry, the storm broke — wild words, better forgotten.

He was glad when she burst into tears, and wept for some time in silence.

The old man, experienced in grief, did not interrupt, and the silence was broken her only by moaning and convulsive sobs.

“Oh, tell me everything,” at last she said; “tell me from the beginning, that I may try to understand; you saw it all.” And he told his sad story from first to last, and then again — and then again — and then they talked, she still weeping, for a long time; and at last he went, and she ran up to her room, and locked the door, and kneeled with her head on the side of her bed, weeping wildly, and that evening she did not go down.

Next day the old clergyman called again, and Miss Gray went down, cloaked and veiled, to the library, and they drove away in a cab which he had brought there. It was to the cemetery where De Beaumirail is laid.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

NEARLY a year after, Challys Gray at length put her long-deferred plan of foreign travel in execution, and about a year later she and Julia Wardell were joined at Naples by old Lady Ardenbroke and her son.

Two years had passed, therefore, since the occurrences mentioned in the preceding chapters. That faithful fellow, Charles Mannering, with now and then a month's absence in England, was always in attendance, only to be employed reading to them in the evenings, and supplying, on all occasions, his convenient escort. Lord Ardenbroke's pretty yacht was in the bay. There was just breeze enough for a lazy sail, and Lord Ardenbroke, beside Miss Gray, no one overhearing, as the fleet schooner glided through the smooth water, said —

"Why don't you, Challys, follow a good example?"

"Whose example?"

"Charles Mannering's."

Lord Ardenbroke looked very arch as he said this, and Laura, a little perplexed and curious, looked at him expectingly.

He only laughed.

"Well," she said, "I don't see anything particularly to imitate in him, except that he is the best creature in the world."

"And if there can be two best, you are one of them Challys; but that isn't it; he's going home, you know, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Challys, looking hard at her companion; "but he'll be coming back, I suppose, in four or five weeks?"

"Don't be too sure of that," said he, with a laugh.

"Well, he has not told me; I suppose he'll do as he likes about that; but what do you mean?"

"Can you keep a secret, Challys?"

"A secret? yes — I hope I can."

"Well you must promise quite seriously that you'll not let Charles know that you have heard a word about it, for he'd know instantly that it was I who had told."

"Yes, I'll promise; now tell me."

"You are not to mention it even to my mother."

"No, no one. I wish he was here, and I'm certain that he'd tell without any fuss. Has anyone left him money?"

"Oh, he has lots of that already. No, it ain't anything like that. Now, you're not to tell Charles, and you're not to tell anyone else; isn't that quite understood?"

"Yes; do pray, tell me.

"Well, I think Charles is going to be married."

"Oh!" she said, coldly enough. "Not at all an unlikely thing — I always thought he *would* marry — but why should he make such a secret of it?"

"Because he's not quite sure that the young lady will say 'yes;' but *I* am, and hell be married in four or five weeks."

"I'm sure he'll be very happy, and he has kept his secret very well. Dear me, isn't there more smoke than usual from the mountain?"

"No, it's only the light."

"And, I forget, did you say who the young lady is?" said Miss Challys, carelessly, still looking toward the distant Vesuvius.

"No, I daren't tell her name, but she is as nice a girl as ever you saw. They were in the same hotel with you two months ago; in Rome you never saw a prettier creature. Do you remember, when we were passing through Rome, you told me that Charles was absent two or three hours every day on pretence of sketching, and that you saw very little to show for the time — how I laughed! I knew the thing was going on then."

"I suppose so; he has been very secret."

"Very sly," laughed Lord Ardenbroke.

"Although, of course, there was no reason why he should be in any particular hurry to tell; and I'm sure we had no right to look for disclosures earlier than other people. I'm sure, I hope he'll be very happy, but I think he's making rather a fool of himself."

Ardenbroke laughed— "Really?"

"Yes; why should you laugh? He need not have been in any hurry, that I can see. He had time enough, goodness knows; and I think anyone who is so entirely his own master, and leading so happy a life, *is* rather a fool to change everything, and put his happiness in another person's keeping."

"I see here the spirit of the 'virgin Queen' ascendant. No courtier permitted to marry."

Ardenbroke laughed as he said this, but Miss Gray, so far from laughing, or even smiling, looked rather bored, and then talked about something else.

And so they chatted through this slow, luxurious sail; and when they landed in the punt, Charles Mannering was waiting to take her cloak and book, and contrived to look so innocent that Ardenbroke could not forbear smiling as he caught her eye. But she either did not see, or did not choose to see, and gave her parasol and book to Lord Ardenbroke; and when she was obliged to see Charles Mannering, she gave him a rather chilly smile, and said, "Writing letters at home, I suppose?"

"Writing letters, yes; how did you find that out?"

But she did not answer; and looking seaward, made some remarks, instead, to Lord Ardenbroke, upon the peculiar green tint of the water, which Charles did not very well hear; and she passed him by, and walked upstairs, when they got home, in rather a stately way.

When she reached her room, she locked the door, and threw herself into a chair, and — wept.

"I thought I had one friend — one friend — and I've lost him — good old Charlie; — I have no one now."

And on this theme she wept for a time. Then recollecting, she dried her tears, and bathed her eyes and cheeks, to remove the appearance of recent weeping, and came down more cheerfully than she had for a long time, and was very gay and chatty at tea. But, somehow, Charles fancied himself a little in disgrace.

The gentlemen went out after tea for a stroll and a cigar. Julia Wardell sat at an open window looking affably at the distant sea, and babbling to her dog; and Challys Gray found herself sitting beside the old dowager Lady Ardenbroke, who said— "It was quite delightful, my dear, to listen to you this evening."

"Why, what did I say?"

"Nothing very particular; but you seem to have found your spirits again."

"Found them, have I? I was not aware that I had lost them," said Challys.

"Come, come, my dear, I'm a shrewd old woman; I have heard more than you think," and she laughed and shook her head.

"I really don't know what you mean," said Challys, first blushing very brilliantly, and then growing very pale.

"You ought to tell me that kind of nonsense, my dear, instead of allowing it to prey upon your spirits; every foolish little fancy, if one broods over it in solitude, grows into the dimensions of a tragedy. You ought to talk with me; you can't, you know, to Mrs. Wardell, because — though she's a good old soul — she's stupid, and she could not understand you."

"But who, dear Lady Ardenbroke, has been telling you all these stories about me "My dear, I've heard quite enough from that good, dull creature who is talking to her dog in the window, to understand — though she doesn't — that there was a very foolish little fancy that ought to have been quite forgotten in as many weeks as it has taken years— "

"You mean— " began Challys, with her eyes fixed on the carpet.

"I *do,"* said the old lady, "and I can tell you that anything so wild and silly as your allowing yourself to *think* of such a person as Mr de Beaumirail, even at the best — so vain, selfish, violent, and unprincipled— "

"Oh, no, no, *no I* you *mustn't* — I can't bear it! You never knew him. He sacrificed himself for me."

"Well, dear, if you will have it so, and that it pains you my talking so plainly, I'll only say, that if you had consulted me, I should have warned you instantly; and I now tell you that if he had not owed a guinea, and been just as when he came of age, no one who took the least interest in you would have allowed you to dream of him as a husband; he never could have made anyone happy, and there is no good in our affecting to think differently from everyone who knew him. Ardenbroke knew him at one time very well, and, though he thought him amusing, he knew perfectly well that he was everything I describe him; and although he had lost sight of him for years, and knew nothing of the *utter* ruin that had befallen him, I do assure you he was in an agony to get back from Scotland all that time, and I could not make out for what and only that he was kept there in spite of himself, and not able to put off people, he would have come up to town about it; and Heaven only knows what might have happened, for he, in his own way, is just as fiery as De Beaumirail was, and the idea of putting such a person in comparison with that nice, honest, gentle creature, Charles Mannering — I think you must have been bereft of your senses! Charles

Mannering is such a gentleman, and such a charming companion, and so goodnatured — I could really almost beat you."

"Well, darling, I'll not talk any more, for it's all a retrospect now, and you know I've settled that I'm to be an old maid." And with a smile, and a very deep sigh, she pointed Lady Ardenbroke's attention away from such things, to the brilliant moonlight that was quivering on the waters beneath them.

That night Lord Ardenbroke found himself at the window beside Challys Gray, just before his good night, and he whispered, laughing, "Well, have you made out anything more about Charles?"

"Oh, no; I shouldn't think of asking; of course we'll have it all in good time."

"Well, I do think, though, he might have told you; he doesn't know, I assure you, that I gave you the least hint, but you are such old friends."

"Oh, really, there's no hurry," said the young lady; "why should there? Besides, the young lady, whoever she is, might like to choose who's to hear it all first."

"Well, I'm going home now, and he'll have time to cool by morning, so I don't care if he's a little angry; and I give you leave to tell him, after I've gone, if you like it. I suppose he's a little shy. Good night!"

And away he went, and said a word or two to Charles at the door. She fancied he was advising a confidence to her; she did not quite know how she felt; her pride was wounded; but, also, she was resolved that he should not think she cared; and, therefore, when he came near the window, with a remark about the sea and the moonlight, she managed to receive him very nearly in her usual way. So they talked on and compared notes on the picturesque; and finally she said carelessley —

"What day, I forget, do you set out for home?"

"Not till this day week, I think."

"Oh! Isn't that a mistake?"

"How? I don't see," he said.

"I always think, when one has to make a journey, it is better to start as soon as possible, particularly when it is going to be a pleasant journey."

"Pleasant? I did not say it was to be pleasant."

"Oh! but I heard all about it," said Challys. "Dear me! what a noise that little dog makes."

"But do you mean you really heard anything? What *did* you hear?"

"Of course you know what I heard; you told it all to Ardenbroke, and Ardenbroke told it to me."

"Ardenbroke! I told him nothing," answered Charles.

"Oh, nonsense, you did," said Challys, lighting up suddenly with a little flush and brilliant eyes; "you told him you were going to England to marry, or rather to try to marry some one; and I'm sure there's no need to make such a fuss about nothing, or next to nothing."

"And you believe all that nonsense?" he said, after a moment's silence, looking straight at her with kind and sad eyes. "I did not think, Challys, you thought me so — I can't find exactly a word; but I thought you were the last person in the world who could have believed such a story."

"I don't know; I don't see anything so incredible in it."

"Yes, Challys, you do — that is, if you know and understand me ever so little — you must see that it is *quite* incredible — you must see that I hate going away, even for two or three weeks, and that my only happiness is to be near you."

She looked at him with still that blush, and with the half-quenched fire in her eyes, timidly almost, and lowered her eyes again.

"You are very kind, Charlie, to say so, for I'm sure I've been often very cross and very ungrateful."

At this point I hear nothing but the snarling of the dog and the nonsensical caresses of good Julia Wardell. I don't approach the two young people, who carry on their colloquy in the same low tone, I verily believe, without so much as being: conscious of the noise that Mrs. Wardell and her dog are kicking up.

Half an hour goes by, and half an hour more, during which Julia Wardell, at her window, has been taking a nap. The dog is lying on his cushion, coiled round with his head to his tail, and one eye vigilantly watching Charles Mannering's back, with an air of covert suspicion. The young people are still talking very low, and can I believe my eyes! — Charles Mannering has stolen his hand slily round Challys Gray's slender waist — and there seems no resistance; and they whisper on and on — and he actually kisses her — once, twice, thrice; and I know not how often the indiscretion might have been repeated, had not Mrs. Wardell, waking suddenly, said —

"Were you speaking to me, dear?"

“I? No, darling,” answered Challys’s voice from the other window; and in obedience to some imperious signal, I suppose, Charles Mannering’s hand stole slily to his own side, and he said, quite innocently, “Can I do anything, Mrs. Wardell?”

“No, thanks,” answered that lady; “but, dear me, how the candles have burnt down — how the time goes while one’s thinking, and that exquisite view — and — is it really? — upon my life, it is nearly one o’clock! My *dear* Challys, what have we been thinking of? we can’t live without sleep. Mr. Mannering, don’t you think — it’s very rude of me — but isn’t it very late?”

So Charles apologized, and looked at his watch and laughed, and bid good night, and had another little whisper with Challys at the window, and bid good night again, and then another whispering word, and so good night once more, and now really departed-

But he might have been seen, as the old novels say, for ever so long after, walking slowly to and fro under the trees, and looking up at the windows of the house, in a rapture, in a dream, with a heart tumultuous with pride.

Next morning at breakfast Charles Mannering mentioned that he had put off his visit to England, and as the ladies did not care for the yacht that day, Charles went off with Ardenbroke, and during their sail, I fancy, had a good deal to tell him.

Challys Gray had also something to tell, and surprised Mrs. Wardell, and afterwards drove out with old Lady Ardenbroke, who returned in very genial spirits.

I need not, I think, lead the reader on to a sequel which so palpably announces itself.

That kind person who has listened to my story for so long, would hardly find patience were I to hold him for five minutes more by the button while filling his ear with details which he is quite willing to take for granted, and which I must confess have nothing unusual in them. Happy the people whose annals are dull — married folks especially. The uncertainties, agitations, suspenses, and catastrophes, which are the life of romance, and the natural fare of lovers, are by no means compatible with the possibility of domestic happiness and decorum.

To say, then, that in their married state the lives of Challys Gray and Charles Mannering were as happy as mortal could desire, is simply to say that no reader would care to look into those comfortable chapters of biography.

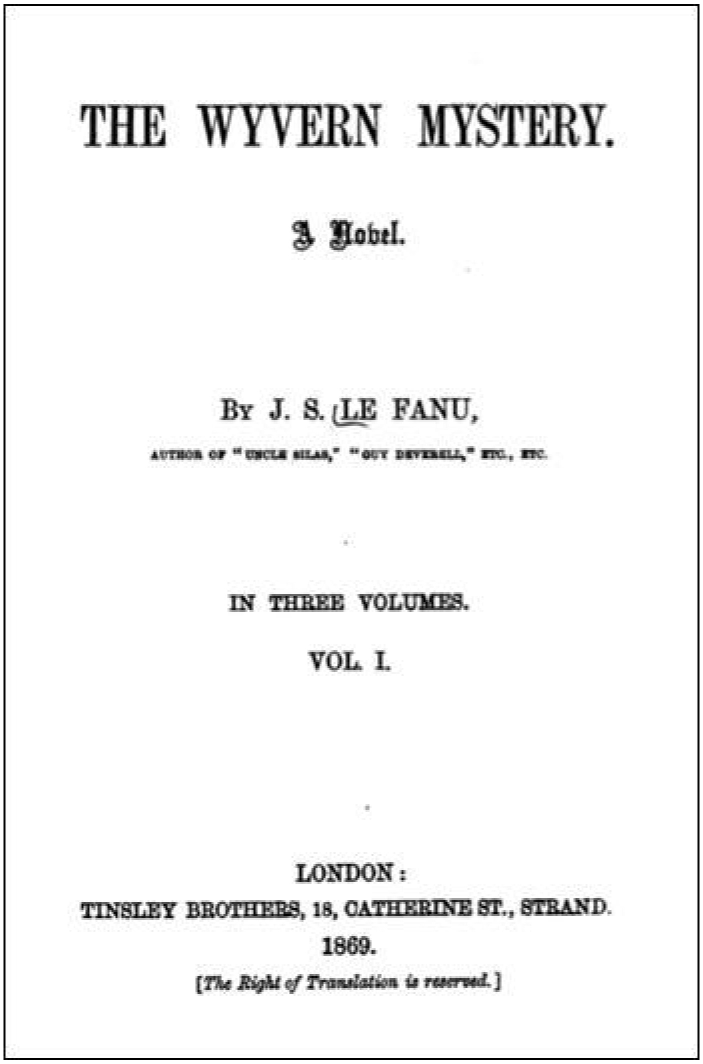
I may mention, however, as particular contributions to that happiness, that their union has been blessed with five fair children, and it will be a comfort to those good souls who love Debrett, and cognate studies, to learn that Charles Mannering is within one of a Peerage by one of those sudden, oblique descents which demonstrate that *Death*, that utterly democratic officer, knocks as sharply at great houses as at small, and arrests an heir apparent and an heir presumptive with as little ceremony as he would two tailors. Charles Mannering's old bachelor uncle has now the title. Some people say he is going to marry. Others as positively say no. But Charles as resolutely keeps the matter out of his mind; and I should not be surprised any day at hearing that he was now Lord Weybroke.

THE END

THE WYVERN MYSTERY

This novel was published in three volumes by Tinsley in 1869. It had previously been serialised in *Dublin University Magazine* from February to November 1869 and is a much-expanded version of ‘A Chapter in the History of a Tyrone Family’ (1839), an earlier story of Le Fanu’s for that magazine. It makes use of the common Gothic trope of a helpless heroine who finds herself gradually in danger of succumbing to the machinations of a sinister conspiracy, as well as hints of the supernatural in the reputedly haunted Carwell Grange.

The story concerns Alice Maybell, a beautiful young woman who, after her father’s death, is taken in by Squire Fairfield, becoming an object of desire for his two sons Harry and Charles. But all is not as it seems. A terrible secret from the family’s past is about to reassert itself and Alice soon finds herself in mortal and terrible danger.



THE WYVERN MYSTERY.

A Novel.

By J. S. LE FANU,

AUTHOR OF "UNCLE SILAS," "GUY DEVERELL," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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CONCLUSION.

A BBC TV adaptation from 2000 starring Naomi Watts and Derek Jacobi

DEDICATION.

MY DEAR JUDGE KEOGH,

You, who take an interest in all Literature, will not disdain the dedication of these trifling Volumes, in testimony of an early friendship, never interrupted, and of an admiration everywhere inspired by your brilliant talents.

Ever yours most faithfully, J. S. LE FANU

VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.

ALICE MAYBELL.

In the small breakfast parlour of Oulton, a pretty girl, Miss Alice Maybell, with her furs and wrappers about her, and a journey of forty miles before her — not by rail — to Wyvern, had stood up to hug and kiss her old aunt, and bid her goodbye.

"Now, do sit down again; you need not be in such a hurry — you're not to go for ten minutes or more," said the old lady; "do, there's a darling."

"If I'm not home before the sun goes down, aunt, Mr. Fairfield will be so angry," said the girl, laying a hand on each shoulder of kind old Lady Wyndale, and looking fondly, but also sadly, into her face.

"Which Mr. Fairfield, dear — the old or the young one?"

"Old Mr. Fairfield, the Squire, as we call him at Wyvern. He'll really be angry, and I'm a little bit afraid of him, and I would not vex him for the world — he has always been so kind."

As she answered, the young lady blushed a beautiful crimson, and the old lady, not observing it, said —

"Indeed, I don't know why I said young — young Mr. Fairfield is old enough, I think, to be your father; but I want to know how you liked Lord Tremaine. I told you how much he liked you. I'm a great believer in first impressions. He was so charmed with you, when he saw you in Wyvern Church. Of course he ought to have been thinking of something better; but no matter — the fact was so, and now he is, I really think, in love — very much — and who knows? He's such a charming person, and there is everything to make it — I don't know what word to use — but you know Tremaine is quite a beautiful place, and he does not owe a guinea."

"You dear old auntie," said the girl, kissing her again on the cheek, "wicked old darling — always making great matches for me. If you had remained in India, you'd have married me, I'm sure, to a native prince."

"Native fiddlestick; of course I could if I had liked, but you never should have married a Mahomedan with my consent. Never mind though; you're sure to do well; marriages are made in heaven, and I really believe there is no use in plotting and planning. There was your darling mamma, when we were both girls together, I said I should never consent to marry a soldier or live out of England, and I did marry a soldier, and lived twelve years of my life in India; and she, poor darling, said again and again, she did not care who her husband might be, provided he was not a clergyman, nor a person living all the year round in the country — *that* no power could induce her to consent to, and yet she did consent, and to both one and the other, and married a clergyman, and a poor one, and lived and died in the country. So, after all, there's not much use in planning beforehand."

"Very true, auntie; none in the world, I believe."

The girl was looking partly over her shoulder, out of the window, upward towards the clouds, and she sighed heavily; and recollecting herself, looked again in her aunt's face and smiled.

"I wish you could have stayed a little longer here," said her aunt.

"I wish I could," she answered slowly, "I was thinking of talking over a great many things with you — that is, of telling you all my long stories; but while those people were staying here I could not, and now there is not time."

"What long stories, my dear?"

"Stupid stories, I should have said," answered Alice.

"Well come, is there anything to tell?" demanded the old lady, looking in her large, dark eyes.

"Nothing worth telling — nothing that is— " and she paused for the continuation of her sentence.

"That is what?" asked her aunt.

"I was going to talk to you, darling," answered the girl, "but I could not in so short a time — so short a time as remains now," and she looked at her watch — a gift of old Squire Fairfield's. "I should not know how to make myself understood, I have so many hundred things, and all jumbled up in my head, and should not know how to begin."

"Well, I'll begin for you. Come — have any visitors looked in at Wyvern lately?" said her aunt.

"Not one," she answered.

"No new faces?"

"No, indeed."

"Are there any new neighbours?" persisted the old lady.

"Not one. No, aunt, it isn't that."

"And where are these elderly young gentlemen, the two Mr. Fairfields?" asked the old lady.

The girl laughed, and shook her head.

"Wandering at present. Captain Fairfield is in London."

"And his charming younger brother — where is he?" asked Lady Wyndale.

"At some fair, I suppose, or horse-race; or, goodness knows where," answered the girl.

"I was going to ask you whether there was an affair of the heart," said her aunt. "But there does not seem much material; and what was the subject? Though I can't hear it all, you may tell me what it was to be about."

"About fifty things, or nothings. There's no one on earth, auntie, darling, but you I can talk anything over with; and I'll write, or, if you let me, come again for a day or two, very soon — may I?"

"Of course, *no*," said her aunt gaily. "But we are not to be quite alone, all the time, mind. There are people who would not forgive me if I were to do anything so selfish, but I promise you ample time to talk — you and I to ourselves; and now that I think, I should like to hear by the post, if you will write and say anything you like. You may be quite sure nobody shall hear a word about it."

By this time they had got to the hall-door.

"I'm sure of that, darling," and she kissed the kind old lady.

"And are you *quite* sure you would not like a servant to travel with you; he could sit beside the driver?"

"No, dear auntie, my trusty old Dulcibella sits inside to take care of me."

"Well, dear, are you quite sure? I should not miss him the least."

"Quite, dear aunt, I assure you."

"And you know you told me you were quite happy at Wyvern," said Lady Wyndale, returning her farewell caress, and speaking low, for a servant stood at the chaise-door.

"Did I? Well, I shouldn't have said that, for — I'm *not* happy," whispered Alice Maybell, and the tears sprang to her eyes as she kissed her old kinswoman; and then, with her arms still about her neck, there was a brief look from her large, brimming eyes, while her lip trembled; and suddenly she turned, and before Lady Wyndale had recovered from that little shock, her pretty guest was seated in the chaise, the door shut, and she drove away.

“What can it be, poor little thing?” thought Lady Wyndale, as her eyes anxiously followed the carriage in its flight down the avenue.

“They have shot her pet-pigeon, or the dog has killed her guinea-pig, or old Fairfield won’t allow her to sit up till twelve o’clock at night, reading her novel. Some childish misery, I dare say, poor little soul!”

But for all that she was not satisfied, and her poor, pale, troubled look haunted her.

CHAPTER II.

THE VALE OF CARWELL.

In about an hour and a half this chaise reached the Pied Horse, on Elverstone Moor. Having changed horses at this inn, they resumed their journey, and Miss Alice Maybell, who had been sad and abstracted, now lowered the window beside her, and looked out upon the broad, shaggy heath, rising in low hillocks, and breaking here and there into pools — a wild, and on the whole a monotonous and rather dismal expanse.

"How fresh and pleasant the air is here, and how beautiful the purple of the heath!" exclaimed the young lady with animation.

"There now — that's right — beautiful it is, my darling; that's how I like to see my child — pleasant-like and 'appy, and not mopin' and dull, like a sick bird. Be that way always; *do*, dear."

"You're a kind old thing," said the young lady, placing her slender hand fondly on her old nurse's arm, "good old Dulcibella: you're always to come with me wherever I go."

"That's just what Dulcibella'd like," answered the old woman, who was fat, and liked her comforts, and loved Miss Alice more than many mothers love their own children, and had answered the same reminders, in the same terms, a good many thousand times in her life.

Again the young lady was looking out of the window — not like one enjoying a landscape as it comes, but with something of anxiety in her countenance, with her head through the open window, and gazing forward as if in search of some expected object.

"Do you remember some old trees standing together at the end of this moor, and a ruined windmill, on a hillock?" she asked suddenly.

"Well," answered Dulcibella, who was not of an observant turn, "I suppose I do, Miss Alice; perhaps there is."

"I remember it very well, but not *where* it is; and when last we passed, it was dark," murmured the young lady to herself, rather than to Dulcibella, whom upon such points she did not much mind. "Suppose we ask the driver?"

She tapped at the window behind the box, and signed to the man, who looked over his shoulder. When he had pulled up she opened the front window and said —

“There’s a village a little way on — isn’t there?”

“Shuldon — yes’m, two mile and a bit,” he answered.

“Well, before we come to it, on the left there is a grove of tall trees and an old windmill,” continued the pretty young lady, looking pale.

“Gryce’s mill we call it, but it don’t go this many a day.”

“Yes, I dare say; and there is a road that turns off to the left, just under that old mill?”

“That’ll be the road to Church Carwell.”

“You must drive about three miles along that road.”

“That’ll be out o’ the way, ma’am — three, and three back — six miles — I don’t know about the hosses.”

“You must try, I’ll pay you — listen,” and she lowered her voice. “There’s one house — an old house — on the way, in the Vale of Carwell; it is called Carwell Grange — do you know it?”

“Yes’m; but there’s no one livin’ there.”

“No matter — there is; there is an old woman whom I want to see; that’s where I want to go, and you must manage it, I shan’t delay you many minutes, and you’re to tell no one, either on the way or when you get home, and I’ll give you two pounds for yourself.”

“All right,” he answered, looking hard in the pale face and large dark eyes that gazed on him eagerly from the window. “Thank’ye, Miss, all right, we’ll wet their mouths at the Grange, or you wouldn’t mind waiting till they get a mouthful of oats, I dessay?”

“No, certainly; anything that is necessary, only I have a good way still to go before evening, and you won’t delay more than you can help?”

“Get along, then,” said the man, briskly to his horses, and forthwith they were again in motion.

The young lady pulled up the window, and leaned back for some minutes in her place.

“And where are we going to, dear Miss Alice?” inquired Dulcibella, who dimly apprehended that they were about to deviate from the straight way home, and feared the old Squire, as other Wyvern folk did.

“A very little way, nothing of any consequence; and Dulcibella, if you really love me as you say, one word about it, to living being at Wyvern or anywhere else, you’ll never say — you promise?”

“You know me well, Miss Alice — I don’t talk to no one; but I’m sorry-like to hear there’s anything like a secret. I dread secrets.”

“You need not fear this — it is nothing, no secret, if people were not unreasonable, and it shan’t be a secret long, perhaps, only be true to me.”

“True to you! Well, who should I be true to if not to you, darling, and never a word about it will pass old Dulcibella’s lips, talk who will; and are we pretty near it?”

“Very near, I think; it’s only to see an old woman, and get some information from her, nothing, only I don’t wish it to be talked about, and I know you won’t.”

“Not a word, dear. I never talk to any one, not I, for all the world.”

In a few minutes more they crossed a little bridge spanning a brawling stream, and the chaise turned the corner of a by-road to the left, under the shadow of a group of tall and sombre elms, overtopped by the roofless tower of the old windmill. Utterly lonely was the road, but at first with only a solitariness that partook of the wildness and melancholy of the moor which they had been traversing. Soon, however, the uplands at either side drew nearer, grew steeper, and the scattered bushes gathered into groups, and rose into trees, thickening as the road proceeded. Steeper grew the banks, higher and gloomier. Precipitous rocks showed their fronts, overtopped by trees and copse. The hollow which they had entered by the old windmill had deepened into a valley and was now contracted to a dark glen, overgrown by forest, and relieved from utter silence only by the moan and tinkle of the brook that wound its way through stones and brambles, in its unseen depths. Along the side of this melancholy glen about half way down, ran the narrow road, near the point where they now were, it makes an ascent, and as they were slowly mounting this an open carriage — a shabby, hired, nondescript vehicle — appeared in the deep shadow, at some distance, descending towards them. The road is so narrow that two carriages could not pass one another without risk. Here and there the inconvenience is provided against by a recess in the bank, and into one of these the distant carriage drew aside. A tall female figure, with feet extended on the opposite cushion, sat or rather reclined in the back seat. There was no one else in the carriage. She was wrapped in gray tweed, and the driver had now turned his face towards her, and was plainly receiving some orders.

Miss Maybell, as the carriage entered this melancholy pass, had grown more and more anxious; and pale and silent, was looking forward through the window, as they advanced. At sight of this vehicle, drawn up before them, a sudden fear chilled the young lady with, perhaps, a remote prescience.

CHAPTER III.

THE GRANGE.

The excited nerves of children people the darkness of the nursery with phantoms. The moral and mental darkness of suspense provokes, after its sort, a similar phantasmagoria. Alice Maybell's heart grew still, and her cheeks paled as she looked with most unreasonable alarm upon the carriage, which had come to a standstill.

There was, however, the sense of a great stake, of great helplessness, of great but undefined possible mischiefs, such as to the "look-out" of a rich galleon in the old piratical days, would have made a strange sail, on the high seas, always an anxious object on the horizon.

And now Miss Alice Maybell was not reassured by observing the enemy's driver get down, and taking the horses by the head, back the carriage far enough across the road, to obstruct their passage, and this had clearly been done by the direction of the lady in the carriage.

They had now reached the point of obstruction, the driver pulled up, Miss Maybell had lowered the chaise window and was peeping. She saw a tall woman, wrapped up and reclining, as I have said. Her face she could not see, for it was thickly veiled, but she held her hand, from which she had pulled her glove, to her ear, and it was not a young hand nor very refined, — lean and masculine, on the contrary, and its veins and sinews rather strongly marked. The woman was listening, evidently, with attention, and her face, veiled as it was, was turned away so as to bring her ear towards the speakers in the expected colloquy.

Miss Alice Maybell saw the driver exchange a look with hers that seemed to betoken old acquaintance.

"I say, give us room to pass, will ye?" said Miss Maybell's man.

"Where will you be going to?" inquired the other, and followed the question with a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder, toward the lady in the tweed wrappers, putting out his tongue and winking at the same time.

"To Church Carwell," answered the man.

"To Church Carwell, ma'am," repeated the driver over his shoulder to the reclining figure.

"What to do there?" said she, in a sharp, under tone, and with a decided foreign accent.

"What to do there?" repeated the man.

"Change hosses, and go on."

"On *where*?" repeated the lady to her driver.

"On where?" repeated he.

"Doughton," fibbed Miss Maybell's man, and the same repetition ensued.

"Not going to the Grange?" prompted the lady, in the same undertone and foreign accent, and the question was transmitted as before —

"What Grange?" demanded the driver.

"Carwell Grange."

"No."

Miss Alice Maybell was very much frightened as she heard this home-question put, and, relieved by the audacity of her friend on the box, who continued —

"Now then, you move out of that."

The tall woman in the wrappers nodded, and her driver accordingly pulled the horses aside, with another grin and a wink to his friend, and Miss Maybell drove by to her own great relief.

The reclining figure did not care to turn her face enough to catch a passing sight of the people whom she had thus arbitrarily detained.

She went her way toward Gryce's mill, and Miss Maybell pursuing hers toward Carwell Grange, was quickly out of sight.

A few minutes more and the glen expanded gently, so as to leave a long oval pasture of two or three acres visible beneath, with the little stream winding its way through the soft sward among scattered trees. Two or three cows were peacefully grazing there, and at the same point a converging hollow made its way into the glen at their right, and through this also spread the forest, under whose shadow they had already been driving for more than two miles.

Into this, from the main road, diverged a ruder track, with a rather steep ascent. This by-road leads up to the Grange, rather a stiff pull. The driver had to dismount and lead his horses, and once or twice expressed doubts as to whether they could pull their burden up the hill.

Alice Maybell, however, offered not to get out. She was nervous, and like a frightened child who gets its bedclothes about its head, the instinct of concealment prevailed, and she trembled lest some other inquirer should cross her way less easily satisfied than the first.

They soon reached a level platform, under the deep shadow of huge old trees, nearly meeting over head. The hoarse cawing of a rookery came mellowed by short distance on the air. For all else, the place was silence itself.

The man came to the door of the carriage to tell his "fare" that they had reached the Grange.

"Stay where you are, Dulcibella, I shan't be away many minutes," said the young lady, looking pale, as if she was going to execution.

"I will, Miss Alice; but you must get a bit to eat, dear, you're hungry, I know by your looks; get a bit of bread and butter."

"Yes, yes, Dulcie," said the young lady, not having heard a syllable of this little speech, as looking curiously at the old place, under whose walls they had arrived, she descended from the chaise.

Under the leafy darkness stood two time-stained piers of stone, with a wicket open in the gate. Through this she peeped into a paved yard, all grass-grown, and surrounded by a high wall, with a fine mantle of ivy, through which showed dimly the neglected doors and windows of out-offices and stables. At the right rose, three stories high, with melancholy gables and tall chimneys, the old stone house.

So this was Carwell Grange. Nettles grew in the corners of the yard, and tufts of grass in the chinks of the stone steps, and the worn masonry was tinted with moss and lichens, and all around rose the solemn melancholy screen of darksome foliage, high over the surrounding walls, and outtopping the gray roof of the house.

She hesitated at the door, and then raised the latch; but a bolt secured it. Another hesitation, and she ventured to knock with a stone, that was probably placed there for the purpose.

A lean old woman, whose countenance did not indicate a pleasant temper, put out her head from a window, and asked:

"Well, an' what brings *you* here?"

"I expected — to see a friend here," she answered timidly; "and — and you are Mrs. Tarnley — I *think*?"

“I’m the person,” answered the woman.

“And I was told to show you this — and that you would admit me.”

And she handed her, through the iron bars of the window, a little oval picture in a shagreen case, hardly bigger than a pennypiece.

The old lady turned it to the light and looked hard at it, saying, “Ay — ay — my old eyes — they won’t see as they used to — but it is so — the old missus — yes — it’s all right, Miss,” and she viewed the young lady with some curiosity, but her tones were much more respectful as she handed her back the miniature.

“I’ll open the door, please ‘m.”

And almost instantly Miss Maybell heard the bolts withdrawn.

“Would you please to walk in — my lady? I can only bring ye into the kitchen. The apples is in the parlour, and the big room’s full o’ straw — and the rest o’ them is locked up. It’ll be Master I know who ye’ll be looking arter?”

The young lady blushed deeply — the question was hardly shaped in the most delicate way.

“There was a woman in a *barooche*, I think they call it, asking was any one here, and asking very sharp after Master, and I told her he wasn’t here this many a day, nor like to be — and ’twas that made me a bit shy o’ you; you’ll understand, just for a bit.”

“And is he — is your master?” — and she looked round the interior of the house.

“No, he b’aint come; but here’s a letter — what’s your name?” she added abruptly, with a sudden access of suspicion.

“Miss Maybell,” answered she.

“Yes — well — you’ll excuse me, Miss, but I was told to be sharp, and wideawake, you see. Will you come into the kitchen?”

And without awaiting her answer the old woman led the way into the kitchen — a melancholy chamber, with two narrow windows, darkened by the trees not far off, that overshadowed the house.

A crooked little cur dog, with protruding ribs, and an air of starvation, flew furiously at Miss Maybell, as she entered, and was rolled over on his back by a lusty kick from the old woman’s shoe; and a cat sitting before the fire, bounced under the table to escape the chances of battle.

A little bit of fire smouldered in a corner of the grate. An oak stool, a deal chair, and a battered balloon-backed one, imported from better company, in a crazed and faded state, had grown weaker in the joints, and more ragged and dirty in its antique finery in its present fallen fortunes. There was some cracked delf on the dresser, and something was stewing in a tall saucepan, covered with a broken plate, and to this the old woman directed her attention first, stirring its contents, and peering into it for a while; and when she had replaced it carefully, she took the letter from her pocket, and gave it to Miss Maybell, who read it standing near the window.

As she read this letter, which was a short one, the young lady looked angry, with bright eyes and a brilliant flush, then pale, and then the tears started to her eyes, and turning quite away from the old woman, and still holding up the letter as if reading it, she wept in silence.

The old woman, if she saw this, evinced no sympathy, but continued to fidget about, muttering to herself, shoving her miserable furniture this way or that, arranging her crockery on the dresser, visiting the saucepan that sat patiently on the embers, and sometimes kicking the dog, with an unwomanly curse, when he growled. Drying her eyes, the young lady took her departure, and with a heavy heart left this dismal abode; but with the instinct of propitiation, strong in the unhappy, and with the melancholy hope of even buying a momentary sympathy, she placed some money in the dark hard hand of the crone, who made her a courtesy and a thankless "thankee, Miss," on the step, as her eye counted over the silver with a greedy ogle, that lay on her lean palm.

"Nothing for nothing." On the whole a somewhat mercenary type of creation is the human. The postboy reminded the young lady, as she came to the chaise-door, that she might as well gratify him, there and then, with the two pounds which she had promised. And this done, she took her place beside old Dulcibella, who had dropped into a reverie near akin to a doze, and so, without adventure they retraced their way, and once more passing under the shadow of Gryce's mill, entered on their direct journey to Wyvern.

The sun was near the western horizon, and threw the melancholy tints of sunset over a landscape, undulating and wooded, that spread before them, as they entered the short, broad avenue that leads through two files of noble old trees, to the gray front of many-chimneyed Wyvern.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD SQUIRE AND ALICE MAYBELL.

Wyvern is a very pretty old house. It is built of a light gray stone, in the later Tudor style. A portion of it is overgrown with thick ivy. It stands not far away from the high road, among grand old trees, and is one of the most interesting features in a richly wooded landscape, that rises into little hills, and, breaking into rocky and forest-darkened glens, and sometimes into dimpling hollows, where the cattle pasture beside pleasant brooks, presents one of the prettiest countries to be found in England.

The old squire, Henry Fairfield, has seen his summer and his autumn days out. It is winter with him now.

He is not a pleasant picture of an English squire, but such, nevertheless, as the old portraits on the walls of Wyvern here and there testify, the family of Fairfield have occasionally turned out.

He is not cheery nor kindly. Bleak, dark, and austere as a northern winter, is the age of that gaunt old man.

He is too proud to grumble, and never asked any one for sympathy. But it is plain that he parts with his strength and his pleasures bitterly. Of course, seeing the old churchyard, down in the hollow at the left, as he stands of an evening on the steps, thoughts will strike him. He does not acquiesce in death. He resents the order of things. But he keeps his repinings to himself, and retaliates his mortification on the people about him.

Though his hair is snowy, and his shoulders stooped, there is that in his length of bone and his stature that accords with the tradition of his early prowess and activity.

He has long been a widower — fully thirty years. He has two sons, and no daughter. Two sons whom he does not much trust — neither of them young — Charles and Henry.

By no means young are they. The elder, now forty-three, the younger only a year or two less. Charles has led a wandering life, and tried a good many things. He had been fond of play, and other expensive follies. He had sobered, however, people thought, and it might be his mission, notwithstanding his wild and wasteful young days, to pay off the debts of the estate.

Henry, the younger son, a shrewd dealer in horses, liked being king of his company, condescended to strong ale, made love to the barmaid at the "George," in the little town of Wyvern, and affected the conversation of dog-fanciers, horse-jockeys, wrestlers, and similar celebrities.

The old Squire was not much considered, and less beloved, by his sons. The gaunt old man was, however, more feared by these matured scions than their pride would have easily allowed. The fears of childhood survive its pleasures. Something of the ghostly terrors of the nursery haunt us through life, and the tyrant of early days maintains a strange and unavowed ascendancy over the imagination, long after his real power to inflict pain or privation has quite come to an end.

As this tall, grim, handsome old man moves about the room, as he stands, or sits down, or turns eastward at the Creed in church — as he marches slowly toppling along the terrace, with his goldheaded cane in his hand, surveying the long familiar scenes which will soon bloom and brown no more for him — with sullen eyes, thinking his solitary thoughts — as in the long summer evenings he dozes in the great chair by the fire, which even in the dog-days smoulders in the drawingroom grate — looking like a gigantic effigy of winter — a pair of large and soft gray eyes follow, or steal towards him — removed when observed — but ever and anon returning. People have remarked this, and talked it over, and laughed and shook their heads, and built odd speculations upon it.

Alice Maybell had grown up from orphan childhood under the roof of Wyvern. The old squire had been, after a fashion, kind to that pretty waif of humanity, which a chance wave of fortune had thrown at his door. She was the child of a distant cousin, who had happened, being a clergyman, to die in occupation of the vicarage of Wyvern. Her young mother lay, under the branches of the two great trees, in the lonely corner of the village churchyard; and not two years later the Vicar died, and was buried beside her.

Melancholy, gentle Vicar! Some good judges, I believe, pronounced his sermons admirable. Seedily clothed, with kindly patience visiting his poor; very frugal — his pretty young wife and he were yet happy in the light and glow of the true love that is eternal. He was to her the nonpareil of vicars —

the loveliest, wisest, wittiest, and best of men. She to him — what shall I say? The *same* beautiful first love. Never a day older. Every summer threw new gold on her rich hair, and a softer and brighter bloom on her cheeks, and made her dearer and dearer than he could speak. He could only look and feel his heart swelling with a vain yearning to tell the love that lighted his face with its glory and called a mist to his kind eye.

And then came a time when she had a secret to tell her Willie. Full of a wild fear and delight, in their tiny drawingroom, clasped in each other's arms, they wept for joy, and a kind of wonder and some dim unspoken tremblings of fear, and loved one another, it seemed, as it were more desperately than ever.

And then, as he read aloud to her in the evenings, her pretty fingers were busy with a new sort of work, full of wonderful and delightful interest. A little guest was coming, a little creature with an immortal soul, that was to be as clever and handsome as Willie.

"And, oh, Willie, darling, don't you hope I may live to see it? Ah, Willie, would not it be sad?"

And then the Vicar, smiling through tears, would put his arms round her, and comfort her, breaking into a rapturous castle-building and a painting of pictures of this great new happiness and treasure that was coming.

And so in due time the little caps and frocks and all the tiny wardrobe were finished; and the day came when the long-pictured treasure was to come. It was there; but its young mother's eyes were dim, and the pretty hands that had made its little dress and longed to clasp it were laid beside her, never to stir again.

"The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away — blessed be the name of the Lord." Yes, blessed be the name of the Lord for that love that outlives the separation of death — that saddens and glorifies memory with its melancholy light, and illuminates far futurity with a lamp whose trembling ray is the thread that draws us toward heaven. Blessed in giving and in taking — blessed for the yearning remembrances, and for the agony of hope.

The little baby — the relic — the treasure — was there. Poor little forlorn baby! And with this little mute companion to look at and sit by, his sorrow was stealing away into a wonderful love; and in this love a consolation and a living fountain of sympathy with his darling who was gone.

A trouble of a new kind had come. Squire Fairfield, who wanted money, raised a claim for rent for the vicarage and its little garden. The Vicar hated law and feared it, and would no doubt have submitted; but this was a battle in which the Bishop took command, and insisted on fighting it out. It was a tedious business.

It had lasted two years nearly, and was still alive and angry, when the Reverend William Maybell took a cold, which no one thought would signify. A brother clergyman from Willowford kindly undertook his duty for one Sunday, and on the next he had died.

The Wyvern doctor said the vis-vitæ was wanting — he had lived quite too low, and had not stamina, and so sank like a child.

But there was more. When on Sundays, as the sweet bell of Wyvern trembled in the air, the Vicar had walked alone up to the old gray porch, and saw the two trees near the ivied nook of the churchyard-wall, a home sickness yearned at his heart, and when the hour came his spirit acquiesced in death.

Old Squire Fairfield knew that it was the Bishop who really, and, as I believe, rightly opposed him, for to this day the vicarage pays no rent; but the proud and violent man chose to make the Vicar feel his resentment. He beheld him with a gloomy and thunderous aspect, never a word more would he exchange with him; he turned his back upon him; he forbid him the footpath across the fields of Wyvern, that made the way to church shorter. He walked out of church grimly when his sermon began. He turned the Vicar's cow off the common, and made him every way feel the weight of his displeasure.

Well, now the Vicar was dead. He had borne it all very gently and sadly, and it was over, a page in the past, no line erasable, no line addible for ever.

"So, Parson's dead and buried; serve him right," said the Squire of Wyvern. "Thankless rascal. You go down and tell them I must have the house up on the 24th, and if they don't go, you bundle 'em out, Thomas Rooke."

"There'll be the Vicar's little child there; who's to take it in, Squire?" asked Tom Rooke, after a hesitation.

"You may, or the Bishop, d —— him."

"I'm a poor man, and, for the Bishop, he's not like to — — "

"Let 'em try the workhouse," said the Squire, "where many a better man's brat is."

And he gave Tom Rooke a look that might have knocked him down, and turned his back on him and walked away.

A week or so after he went down himself to the vicarage with Tom Rooke. Old Dulcibella Crane went over the lower part of the house with Tom, and the Squire strode up the stairs, and stooping his tall head as he entered the door, walked into the first room he met with, in a surly mood.

The clatter of his boots prevented his hearing, till he had got well into the room, the low crying of a little child in a cradle. He stayed his step for a moment. He had quite forgotten that unimportant being, and he half turned to go out again, but changed his mind. He stooped over the cradle, and the little child's crying ceased. It was a very pretty face and large eyes, still wet with tears, that looked up with an earnest wondering gaze at him from out the tiny blankets.

Old Dulcibella Crane had gone down, and the solitude, no doubt, affrighted it, and there was consolation even in the presence of the grim Squire, into whose face those large eyes looked with innocent trust.

Who would have thought it? Below lay the little image of utter human weakness; above stooped a statue of inflexibility and power, a strong statue with a grim contracted eye. There was a heart, steeled against man's remonstrance, and a pride that would have burst into fury at a hint of reproof. Below lay the mere wonder and vagueness of dumb infancy. Could contest be imagined more hopeless! But "the faithful Creator," who loved the poor Vicar, had brought those eyes to meet.

The little child's crying was hushed; big tears hung in its great wondering eyes, and the little face looked up pale and forlorn. It was a gaze that lasted while you might count four or five. But its mysterious work of love was done. "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made."

Squire Fairfield walked round this room, and went out and examined the others, and went downstairs in silence, and when he was going out at the hall-door he stopped and looked at old Dulcibella Crane, who stood courtesying at it in great fear, and said he, —

"The child'll be better at home wi' me, up at Wyvern, and I'll send down for it and you in the afternoon, till — something's settled."

And on this invitation little Alice Maybell and her nurse, Dulcibella Crane, came to Wyvern Manor, and had remained there now for twenty years.

CHAPTER V.

THE TERRACE GARDEN.

Alice Maybell grew up very pretty; not a riant beauty, without much colour, rather pale, indeed, and a little sad. What struck one at first sight was a slender figure, with a prettiness in every motion. A clear-tinted oval face, with very large dark gray eyes, such as Chaucer describes in his beauties as "ey-es gray as glass," with very long lashes; her lips of a very brilliant red, with even little teeth, and when she smiled a great many tiny soft dimples.

This pretty creature led a lonely life at Wyvern. Between her and the young squires, Charles and Henry, there intervened the great gulf of twenty years, and she was left very much to herself.

Sometimes she rode into the village with the old Squire; she sat in the Wyvern pew every Sunday; but except on those and like occasions, the townsfolk saw little of her.

"'Taint after her father or mother she takes with them airs of hers; there was no pride in the Vicar or poor Mrs. Maybell, and she'll never be like her mother, a nice little thing she was."

So said Mrs. Ford of the George Inn at Wyvern — but what she called pride was in reality shyness.

About Miss Maybell there was a very odd rumour afloat in the town. It had got about that this beautiful young lady was in love with old Squire Fairfield — or at least with his estate of Wyvern.

The village doctor was standing with his back to his drawingroom fire, and the newspaper in his left hand lowered to his knee — as he held forth to his wife, and romantic old Mrs. Diaper — at the tea-table.

"If she is in love with that old man, as they say, take my word for it, she'll not be long out of a madhouse."

"How do you mean, my dear?" asked his wife.

"I mean it is not love at all, but incipient mania. Her lonely life up there at Wyvern, would make any girl odd, and it's setting her mad — that's how I mean."

"My dear sir," remonstrated fat Mrs. Diaper, who was learned as well as romantic, "romance takes very whimsical shape at times; Vanessa was in love with Dean Swift, and very young men were passionately in love with Ninon de l'Enclos."

"Tut — stuff — did I ever hear!" exclaimed Mrs. Buttle, derisively, "who ever thought of love or romance in the matter? The young lady thinks it would be very well to be mistress of Wyvern, and secure a comfortable jointure, and so it would; and if she can make that unfortunate old man fancy her in love with him, she'll bring him to that, I have very little doubt. I never knew a quiet minx that wasn't sly — smooth water."

In fact, through the little town of Wyvern, shut out for the most part from the forest grounds, and old gray manorhouse of the same name, it came to be buzzed abroad and about that, whether for love, or from a motive more sane, though less refined, pretty Miss Alice Maybell had set her heart on marrying her surly old benefactor, whose years were enough for her grandfather.

It was an odd idea to get into people's heads; but why were her large soft gray eyes always following the Squire by stealth?

And, after all, what is incredible of the insanities of ambition? or the subtilty of women?

In the stableyard of Wyvern Master Charles had his foot in the stirrup, and the old fellow with a mulberry-coloured face, and little gray eyes, who held the stirrup-leather at the other side, said, grinning —

"I wish ye may get it."

"Get what?" said Charles Fairfield, arresting his spring for a moment and turning his dark and still handsome face, with a hard look at the man, for there was something dry and sly in his face and voice.

"What we was talking of — the old house and the land," said the man.

"Hey, is that all?" said the young squire as he was still called at four-and-forty, throwing himself lightly into the saddle. "I'm pretty easy about that, why, what's the matter?"

"What if the old fellow took it in his head to marry?"

"Marry — eh? well, if he did, I don't care; but what the devil makes you talk like that? why, man, there's black and white, seal and parchment for that, the house and acres are settled, Tom; and who do you think would marry him?"

"You're the last to hear it; any child in the town could tell you, Miss Alice Maybell."

"Oh! do they really? I did not think of that," said the young squire, first looking in old Tom's hard gray eyes. Then for a moment at his own boot thoughtfully, and then he swung himself into the saddle, and struck his spur in his horse's side, and away he plunged, without another word.

"He don't like it, not a bit," said Tom, following him with askance look as he rode down the avenue. "No more do I, she's always a-watching of the Squire, and old Harry does throw a sheep's eye at her, and she's a likely lass; what though he be old, it's an old rat that won't eat cheese."

As Tom stood thus, he received a poke on the shoulder with the end of a stick, and looking round saw old Squire Harry.

The Squire's face was threatening. "Turn about, d — n ye, what were you saying to that boy o' mine?"

"Nothin' as I remember," lied Tom, bluntly.

"Come, what was it?" said the hard old voice, sternly.

"I said Blackie'd be the better of a brushin-boot, that's all, I mind."

"You lie, I saw you look over your shoulder before you said it, and while he was talkin' he saw me acomin', and he looked away — I caught ye at it, ye pair of false, pratin' scoundrels; ye were talkin' o' me — come, what did he say, sirrah?"

"Narra word about ye."

"You lie; out wi' it, sir, or I'll make your head sing like the church bell."

And he shook his stick in his great tremulous fist, with a look that Tom well knew.

"Narra word about you from first to last," said Tom; and he cursed and swore in support of his statement, for a violent master makes liars of his servants, and the servile vices crop up fast and rank under the shadow of tyranny.

"I don't believe you," said the Squire irresolutely, "you're a liar, Tom, a black liar; ye'll choke wi' lies some day — you — fool!"

But the Squire seemed partly appeased, and stood with the point of his stick now upon the ground, looking down on little Tom, with a somewhat grim and dubious visage, and after a few moment's silence he asked —

"Where's Miss Alice?"

"Takin' a walk, sir."

"*Where*, I say?"

"She went towards the terrace-garden," answered Tom.

And toward the terrace-garden walked with a stately, tottering step the old Squire, with his great mastiff at his heels. Under the shadow of tall trees, one side of their rugged stems lighted with the yellow sunset, the other in soft gray, while the small birds were singing pleasantly high over his head among quivering leaves.

He entered the garden, ascending five worn steps of stone, between two weather-worn stone-urns. It is a pretty garden, all the prettier though sadder for its neglected state. Tall trees overtop its walls from without, and those gray walls are here and there overgrown with a luxuriant mantle of ivy; within are yew-trees and wonderfully tall old myrtles; laurels not headed down for fifty years, and grown from shrubs into straggling, melancholy trees. Its broad walls are now overgrown with grass, and it has the air and solitude of a ruin.

In this conventual seclusion, seated under the shade of a great old tree, he saw her. The oldfashioned rustic seat on which she sat is confronted by another, with what was once a gravel walk between.

More erect, shaking himself up as it were, he strode slowly toward her. Her head was supported by her hand — her book on her lap — she seemed lost in a reverie, as he approached unawares over the thick carpet of grass and weeds.

"Well, lass, what brings you here? You'll be sneezing and coughing for this; won't you — sneezing and coughing — a moist, dark nook ye've chosen," said Squire Harry, placing himself, nevertheless, on the seat opposite.

She started at the sound of his voice, and as she looked up in his face, he saw that she had been crying.

The Squire said nothing, but stiffly scuffled and poked the weeds and grass at his feet, for a while, with the end of his stick, and whistled low, some dreary old bars to himself.

At length he said abruptly, but in a kind tone —

"You're no child, now; you've grown up; you're a well-thriven, handsome young woman, little Alice. There's not one to compare wi' ye; of all the lasses that comes to Wyvern Church ye bear the bell, ye do, ye bear the bell; ye know it. Don't ye? Come, say lass; don't ye know there's none to compare wi' ye?"

"Thank you, sir. It's very good of you to think so — you're always so kind," said pretty Alice, looking very earnestly up in his face, her large tearful eyes wider than usual, and wondering, and, perhaps, hoping for what might come next.

"I'll be kinder, maybe; never ye mind; ye like Wyvern, lass — the old house; well, it's snug, it is. It's a good old English house; none o' your thin brick walls and Greek pillars, and scrape o' rotten plaster, like my Lord Wrybroke's sprawling house, they think so fine — but they don't think it, only they say so, and they lie, just to flatter the peer; d —— them. They go to London and learn courtiers' ways there; that wasn't so when I was a boy; a good old gentleman that kept house and hounds here was more, by a long score, than half a dozen fine Lunnon lords; and you're handsomer, Alice, and a deal better, and a better lady, too, than the best o' them painted, fine ladies, that's too nice to eat good beef or mutton, and can't call a cabbage a cabbage, I'm told, and would turn up their eyes, like a duck in thunder, if a body told 'em to put on their pattens, and walk out, as my mother used, to look over the poultry. But what was that you were saying — I forget?"

"I don't think, sir — I don't remember — was I saying anything? I — I don't recollect," said Alice, who knew that she had contributed nothing to the talk.

"And you like Wyvern," pursued the old man, with a gruff sort of kindness, "well, you're right; it's not bin a bad home for ye, and ye'd grieve to leave it. Ay — you're right, there's no place like it — there's no air like it, and ye love Wyvern, and ye shan't leave it, Alice."

Alice Maybell looked hard at him; she was frightened, and also agitated. She grew suddenly pale, but the Squire not observing this, continued —

"That is, unless ye be the greatest fool in the country's side. You'd miss Wyvern, and the old woods, and glens, and spinnies, and, mayhap, ye'd miss the old man a bit too — not so old as they give out though, and 'tisn't always the old dog gives in first — mind ye — nor the young un that's the best dog, neither. I don't care that stick for my sons — no more than they for me — that's reason. They're no comfort to me, nor never was. They'd be devilish glad I was carried out o' Wyvern Hall feet foremost."

"Oh, sir, you can't think— "

“Hold your little fool’s tongue; I’m wiser than you. If it warn’t for you, child, I don’t see much my life would be good for. You don’t wish me dead, like those cubs. Hold your tongue, lass. I see some one’s bin frightenin’ you; but I’m not going to die for a bit. Don’t you take on; gie us your hand.”

And he took it, and held it fast in his massive grasp.

“Ye’ve been cryin’, ye fool. Them fellows bin sayin’ I’m breakin’ up. It’s a d — d lie. I’ve a mind to send them about their business. I’d do it as ready as put a horse over a three-foot wall; but I’ve twelve years’ life in me yet. I’m good for fourteen years, if I live as long as my father did. He took his time about it, and no one heard me grumble, and I’ll take mine. Don’t ye be a fool; I tell you there’s no one goin’ to die here, that I know of. There’s gentle blood in your veins, and you’re a kind lass, and I’ll take care o’ you — mind, I’ll do it, and I’ll talk to you again.”

And so saying, he gave her hand a parting shake, and let it drop, and rising, he turned away, and strode stiffly from the garden. He was not often so voluble; and now the whole of this talk seemed to Alice Maybell a riddle. He could not be thinking of marrying; but was he thinking of leaving her the house and a provision for her life!

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD SQUIRE UNLIKE HIMSELF.

He talked very little that night in the oldfashioned drawingroom, where Alice played his favourite old airs for him on the piano, which he still called the "harpsichord." He sat sometimes dozing, sometimes listening to her music, in the great chair by the fire. He ruminated, perhaps, but he did not open the subject, whatever it might be, which he had hinted at.

But before ten o'clock came, he got up and stood with his back to the fire. Is there any age at which folly has quite done with us, and we cease from building castles in the air?

"My wife was a tartar," said he rather abruptly, "and she was always telling me I'd marry again before she was cold in her grave, and I made answer, 'I've had enough of that market, I thank you; one wife in a life is one too many.' But she wasn't like you — no more than chalk to cheese — a head devil she was. Play me the 'Week before Easter' again, lass."

And the young lady thrice over played that pretty but vulgar old air; and when she paused the gaunt old Squire chanted the refrain from the hearthrug, somewhat quaveringly and discordantly.

"You should have heard Tom Snedly sing that round a bowl of punch. My sons, a pair o' dull dogs — we were pleasanter fellows then — I don't care if they was at the bottom of the Lunnon canal. Gi'e us the 'Lincolnshire Poacher,' lass. Pippin-squeezing rascals — and never loved me. I sometimes think I don't know what the world's a comin' to. I'd be a younger lad by a score o' years, if neighbours were as I remember 'em."

At that moment entered old Tom Ward, who, like his master, had seen younger, if not better days, bearing something hot in a silver tankard on a little tray. Tom looked at the Squire. The Squire pointed to the little table by the hearthrug, and pulled out his great gold watch, and found it was time for his "nightcap."

Tom was skilled in the brew that pleased his master, and stood with his shrewd gray eye on him, till he had swallowed his first glass, then the

Squire nodded gruffly, and he knew all was right, and was relieved, for every one stood in awe of old Fairfield.

Tom was gone, and the Squire drank a second glass, slowly, and then a third, and stood up again with his back to the fire and filled his glass with the last precious drops of his cordial, and placed it on the chimneypiece, and looked steadfastly on the girl, whose eyes looked sad on the notes, while her slender fingers played those hilarious airs which Squire Fairfield delighted to listen to.

"Down in the mouth, lass — hey?" said the Squire with a suddenness that made the unconscious girl start.

When she looked up he was standing grinning upon her, from the hearthrug, with his glass in his fingers, and his face flushed.

"You girls, when you like a lad, you're always in the dumps — ain't ye? — mopin' and moultin' like a sick bird, till the fellow comes out wi' his mind, and then all's right, flutter and song and new feathers, and — come, what do you think o' me, lass?"

She looked at him dumbly, with a colourless and frightened face. She saw no object in the room but the tall figure of the old man, flushed with punch, and leering with a horrid jollity, straight before her like a vivid magic-lantern figure in the dark. He was grinning and wagging his head with exulting encouragement.

Had Squire Fairfield, as men have done, all on a sudden grown insane; and was that leering mask, the furrows and contortions of which, and its glittering eyes, were fixing themselves horribly on her brain, a familiar face transformed by madness?

"Come, lass, do ye like me?" demanded the phantom.

"Well, you're tongue-tied, ye little fool — shamefaced, and all that, I see," he resumed after a little pause. "But you *shall* answer — ye must; you do — you like old Wyvern, the old Squire. You'd feel strange in another place — ye would, and a younger fellow would not be a tithe so kind as me — and I like ye well, chick-a-biddy, chick-a-biddy — ye'll be my little queen, and I'll keep ye brave satins and ribbons, and laces, and lawn; and I'll gi'e ye the jewellery — d'ye hear? — necklaces, and earrings, and bodkins, and all the rest, for your own, mind; for the Captain nor Jack shall never hang them on wife o' theirs, mind ye — and ye'll be the grandest lady has ever bin in Wyvern this hundred years — and ye'll have nothing to do but sit all day in the window, or ride in the coach, and order your maids about; and I'll leave you every acre and stick and stone, and silver spoon, that's in or round about Wyvern — for you're a good lass, and I'll make a woman of you; and I'd like to break them young rascals' necks — they never deserved a shilling o' mine; so gie's your hand, lass, and the bargain's made."

So the Squire strode a step or two nearer, extending his huge bony hand, and Alice, aghast, stared with wide open eyes fixed on him, and exclaiming faintly, "Oh, sir! — oh, Mr. Fairfield!"

"Oh! *to be sure, and* oh, Squire Fairfield!" chuckled he, mimicking the young lady, as he drew near; "ye need not be shy, nor scared by me, little Alice; I like you too well to hurt the tip o' your little finger, look ye — and you'll sleep on't, and tell me all tomorrow morning."

And he laid his mighty hands, that had lifted wrestlers from the earth, and hurled boxers headlong in his day, tremulously on her two little shoulders. "And ye'll say goodnight, and gi'e me a buss; goodnight to ye, lass, and we'll talk again in the morning, and ye'll say naught, mind, to the boys, d —— n 'em, till all's settled — ye smooth-cheeked, bright-eyed, cherry-lipped little" ——

And here the ancient Squire boisterously "bussed" the young lady, as he had threatened, and two or three times again, till scrubbed by the white stubble of his chin, she broke away, with her cheeks flaming, and still more alarmed, reached the door.

"Say goodnight, won't ye, hey?" bawled the Squire, still in a chuckle and shoving the chairs out of his way as he stumbled after her.

"Goodnight, sir," cried she, and made her escape through the door, and under the arch that opened from the hall, and up the stairs toward her room, calling as unconcernedly as she could, but with tremulous eagerness to her old servant, "Dulcibella, are you there?" and immensely relieved when she heard her kindly old voice, and saw the light of her candle.

"I say — hallo — why wench, what the devil's come over ye?" halloed the voice of the old man from the foot of the stairs. "That's the trick of you rogues all — ye run away to draw us after; well, it won't do — another time. I say, goodnight, ye wild bird."

"Thank you, sir — good night, sir — good night, sir," repeated the voice of Alice, higher and higher up the stairs, and he heard her door shut.

He stood with a flushed face, and a sardonic grin for a while, looking up the stairs, with his big bony hand on the banister, and wondering how young he was; and he laughed and muttered pleasantly, and resolved it should all be settled between them next evening; and so again he looked at his watch, and found that she had not gone, after all, earlier than usual, and went back to his fire, and rang the bell, and got a second ‘nightcap,’ as he called his flagon of punch.

Tom remarked how straight the Squire stood that night, with his back to the fire, eyeing him as he entered from the corners of his eyes, with a grin, and a wicked wag of his head.

“A dull dog, Tom. Who’s a-goin’ to hang ye? D — n ye, look brighter, or I’ll stir ye up with the poker. Never shake your head, man; ye may brew yourself a tankard o’ this, and ye’ll find you’re younger than ye think for, and some of the wenches will be throwing a sheep’s eye at you — who knows?”

Tom did not quite know what to make of this fierce lighting up of gaiety and benevolence. An inquisitive glance he fixed stealthily on his master, and thanked him dubiously — for he was habitually afraid of him; and as he walked away through the passages, he sometimes thought the letter that came that afternoon might have told of the death of old Lady Drayton, or some other relief of the estate; and sometimes his suspicions were nearer to the truth, for in drowsy houses like Wyvern, where events are few, all theses of conversation are valuable and speculation is active, and you may be sure that what was talked of in the town, was no mystery in the servants’ hall, though more gossipped over than believed.

Men who are kings in very small dominions are whimsical, as well as imperious — eccentricity is the companion of seclusion — and the Squire had a jealous custom, in his house, which was among the oddities of his despotism; it was simply this: the staircase up which Alice Maybell flew, that night, to old Dulcibella and her room, is that which ascends the northern wing of the house. A strong door in the short passage leading to it from the hall, shuts it off from the rest of the building on that level.

For this young lady then, while she was still a child, Squire Fairfield had easily made an Oriental seclusion in his household, by locking, with his own hand, that door every night, and securing more permanently the doors which, on other levels, afforded access to the same wing.

He had a slight opinion of the other sex, and an evil one of his own, and would have no Romeo and Juliet tragedies. As he locked this door after Miss Alice Maybell's "goodnight," he would sometimes wag his head shrewdly and wink to himself in the lonely oak hall, as he dropped the key into his deep coat pocket— "safe bind, safe find," "better sure than sorry," and other wise saws seconding the precaution.

So this night he recollected the key, as usual, which in the early morning, when he drank his glass of beer at his room-door, he handed to old Mrs. Durdin, who turned it in the lock, and restored access for the day.

This custom was too ancient — reaching back beyond her earliest memory — to suggest the idea of an affront, and so it was acquiesced in and never troubled Miss Maybell; the lock was not tampered with, the door was never passed, although the Squire, versed in old saws, was simple to rely on that security against a power that laughs at locksmiths.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SQUIRE’S ELDEST SON COMES HOME.

Thus was old Squire Fairfield unexpectedly transformed, and much to the horror of pretty Alice Maybell, appeared in the character of a lover, grim, ungainly, and without the least chance of that brighter transformation which ultimately more than reconciles “beauty” to her conjugal relations with the “beast.”

Grotesque and even ghastly it would have seemed at any time. But now it was positively dismaying, and poor troubled little Alice Maybell, on reaching her room, sat down on the side of her bed, and to the horror and bewilderment of old Dulcibella, wept bitterly and long.

The harmless gabble of the old nurse, who placed herself by her side, patting her all the time upon the shoulder, was as the sound of a humming in the woods in summer time, or the crooning of a brook. Though her ear was hardly conscious of it, perhaps it soothed her.

Next day there was a little stir at Wyvern, for Charles — or as he was oftener called, Captain Fairfield — arrived. This “elderly young gentleman,” as Lady Wyndale called him, led a listless life there. He did not much affect rustic amusements; he fished now and then, but cared little for shooting, and less for hunting. His time hung heavy on his hands, and he did not well know what to do with himself. He smoked and strolled about a good deal, and rode into Wyvern and talked with the townspeople. But the country plainly bored him, and not the less that his sojourn had been in London, and the contrast made matters worse. Alice Maybell had a headache that morning, and not caring to meet the Squire earlier than was inevitable, chose to say so.

The Captain, who, travelling by the mail, had arrived at eight o’clock, took his place at the breakfast-table at nine, and received for welcome a gruff nod from the Squire, and the tacit permission to grasp the knuckles which he grudgingly extended to him to shake.

In that little drama in which the old Squire chose now to figure, his son Charles was confoundedly in the way.

“Well, and what were you doin’ in Lunnon all this time?” grumbled Squire Harry when he had finished his rasher and his cup of coffee, after a long, hard look at Charles, who, in happy unconsciousness, crunched his toast, and read the county paper.

“I beg your pardon, sir, I didn’t hear — you were saying?” said Charles, looking up and lowering the paper.

“Hoo — yes — I was saying, I don’t think you went all the way to Lunnon to say your prayers in St. Paul’s; you’ve bin losing money in those hells and places; when your pocket’s full away you go and leave it wi’ them town blackguards, and back you come as empty as a broken sack to live on me, and so on. Come, now, how much rent do you take by the year from that place your fool of a mother left ye — the tartar! — hey?”

“I think, sir, about three hundred a year,” answered Charles.

“Three hundred *and eighty*,” said the old man, with a grin and a wag of his head. “I’m not so old that I can’t remember *that* — three hundred and eighty; and ye flung that away in Lunnon taverns and operas, on dancers and dicers, and ye come back here without a shillin’ left to bless yourself, to ride my horses and drink my wine; and ye call that fair play. Come along, here.”

And, followed by his mastiff, he marched stiffly out of the room.

Charles was surprised at this explosion, and sat looking after the grim old man, not knowing well what to make of it, for Squire Harry was openhearted enough, and never counted the cost of his hospitalities, and had never grudged him his home at Wyvern before.

“Much he knows about it,” thought Charles; “time enough, though. If I’m *de trop* here I can take my portmanteau and umbrella, and make my bow and go cheerfully.”

The tall Captain, however, did not look cheerful, but pale and angry, as he stood up and kicked the newspaper, which fell across his foot, fiercely. He looked out of the window, with one hand in his pocket, in sour rumination. Then he took his rod and flies and cigar-case, and strolled down to the river, where, in that engrossing and monotonous delight, celebrated of old by Venables and Walton, he dreamed away the dull hours.

Blessed resource for those mysterious mortals to whom nature accords it — stealing away, as they wander solitary along the devious river-bank, the memory, the remorse, and the miseries of life, like the flow and music of the shadowy Lethe.

This Captain did not look like the man his father had described him — an anxious man, rather than a man of pleasure — a man who was no sooner alone than he seemed to brood over some intolerable care, and, except during the exercise of his “gentle craft,” his looks were seldom happy or serene.

The hour of dinner came. A party of three, by no means well assorted. The old Squire in no genial mood and awfully silent. Charles silent and abstracted too; his body sitting there eating its dinner, and his soul wandering with black care and other phantoms by far-off Styx. The young lady had her own thoughts to herself, uncomfortable thoughts.

At last the Squire spoke to the intruder, with a look that might have laid him in the Red Sea.

“In my time young fellows were more alive, and had something to say for themselves. I don’t want your talk myself over my victuals, but you should ‘a spoke to *her*’tisn’t civil— ‘tweren’t the way in my day. I don’t think ye asked her ‘How are ye?’ since ye came back. Lunnon manners, may be.”

“Oh, but I assure you I did. I could not have made such an omission. Alice will tell you I was not quite so stupid,” said Charles, raising his eyes, and looking at her.

“Not that it signifies, mind ye, the crack of a whip, whether ye did or no,” continued the Squire; “but ye may as well remember that ye’re not brother and sister exactly, and ye’ll call her Miss Maybell, and not Alice no longer.”

The Captain stared. The old Squire looked resolutely at the brandy-flask from which he was pouring into his tumbler. Alice Maybell’s eyes were lowered to the edge of her plate, and with the tip of her finger she fiddled with the crumbs on the tablecloth. She did not know what to say, or what might be coming.

So soon as the Squire had quite compounded his brandy-and-water he lifted his surly eyes to his son with a flush on his aged cheek, and wagged his head with oracular grimness, and silence descended again for a time upon the three kinsfolk.

This uncomfortable party, I suppose, were off again, each on their own thoughts, in another minute. But no one said a word for some time.

"By-the-bye, Alice — Miss Maybell, I mean — I saw in London a little picture that would have interested you," said the Captain, "an enamelled miniature of Marie Antoinette, a pretty little thing, only the size of your watch; you can't think how spirited and beautiful it was."

"And why the dickens didn't ye buy it, and make her a compliment of it? Much good tellin' her how pretty it was," said the Squire, sulkily; "'twasn't for want o' money. D —— it, in my day a young fellow 'd be ashamed to talk o' such a thing without he had it in his pocket to make an offer of;" and the old Squire muttered sardonically to his brandy-and-water, and neither Miss Alice nor Captain Fairfield knew well what to say. The old man seemed bent on extinguishing every little symptom of a lighting up of the gloom which his presence induced.

They came at last into the drawingroom. The Squire took his accustomed place by the fire. In due time came his "nightcap." Miss Alice played his airs over and over on the piano. The Captain yawned stealthily into his hand at intervals, and at last stole away.

"Well, Ally, here we are at last, girl. That moping rascal's gone to his bed; I thought he'd never 'a gone. And now come here, ye little fool, I want to talk to ye. Come, I say, what the devil be ye afeared on? I'd like to see the fellow 'd be uncivil to you. My wife, as soon as the lawyers can write out the parchments, the best settlements has ever bin made on a Fairfield's wife since my great uncle's time. Why, ye look as frightened, ye pretty little fool, as if I was a-going to rob ye, instead of making ye lady o' Wyvern, and giving ye every blessed thing I have on earth. That's right!"

He had taken her timid little hand in his bony and tremulous grasp.

"I'll have ye grander than any that ever has been" — he was looking in her face with an exulting glare of admiration— "and I'll give ye the diamonds for your own, mind, and I'll have your picture took by a painter. There was never a lady o' Wyvern fit to hold a candle to ye, and I'm a better man than half the young fellows that's going; and ye'll do as ye like — wi' servants, and house, and horses and all — I'll deny ye in nothing. And why, sweetheart, didn't you come down this morning? Was you ailing, child — was pretty Ally sick in earnest?"

"A headache, sir. I — I have it still — if — if you would not mind, I'll be better, sir, in my room. I've had a very bad headache. It will be quite well, I dare say, by tomorrow. You are very kind, sir; you have always been very kind, sir; I never can thank you — never, never, sir, as I feel."

"Tut, folly, nonsense, child; wait till all's done, and thank me then, if ye will. I'll make ye as fine as the queen, and finer." Every now and then he emphasized his harangue by kissing her cheeks and lips, which added to her perplexity and terror, and made her skin flame with the boisterous rasp of his stubbled chin. "And ye'll be my little duchess, my beauty; ye will, my queen o' diamonds, you roguey-poguey-woguey, as cunning as a dog-fox;" and in the midst of these tumultuous endearments she managed to break away from the amorous ogre, and was out of the door, and up the stairs to her room, and old Dulcibella, before his tardy pursuit had reached the cross-door.

An hour has passed, and the young lady stood up, and placing her arms about her neck, kissed old Dulcibella.

"Will you take a candle, darling," she said, "and go down and see whether the cross-door is shut?"

Down went Dulcibella, the stairs creaking under her, and the young lady, drying her eyes, looked at her watch, drew the curtain at the window, placed the candle on the table near it, and then, shading her eyes with her hand, looked out earnestly.

The window did not command the avenue, it was placed in the side of the house. A moonlighted view she looked out upon; a soft declivity, from whose grassy slopes rose grand old trees, some in isolation, some in groups of twos and threes, all slumbering in the hazy light and still air, and beyond rose, softer in the distance, gentle undulating uplands, studded with trees, and near their summits, more thickly clothed in forest.

She opened the window softly, and looking out, sighed in the fresh air of night, and heard from the hollow the distant rush and moan of running waters, and her eye searched the foreground of this landscape. The trunk of one of the great trees near the house seemed to become animated, and projected a human figure, nothing awful or ghastly — a man in a short cloak, with a wideawake hat on. Seeing the figure in the window, he lifted his hand, looking towards her, and approaching the side of the house with caution, glanced this way and that till he reached the house.

The old servant at the same time returned and told her that the door *was* locked as usual.

“You remain here, Dulcibella — no — I shan’t take a candle,” and with a heavy sigh she left the room, and treading lightly descended the stairs, and entered a wainscoted room, on the ground floor — with two windows, through which came a faint reflected light. Standing close to the nearer of these was the man with whom she had exchanged from the upper room the signals I have mentioned.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEVER DID RUN SMOOTH.

Swiftly she went to the window and raised it without noise, and in a moment they were locked in each other's arms.

"Darling, darling," was audible; and

"Oh, Ry! do you love me still?"

"Adore you, darling! adore you, my little violet, that grew in the shade — my only, only darling."

"And I have been so miserable. Oh, Ry — that heart-breaking disappointment — that dreadful moment — you'll never know half I felt; as I knocked at that door, expecting to see my own darling's face — and then — I could have thrown myself from the rock over that glen. But you're here, and I have you after all — and now I must never lose you again — never, never."

"Lose me, darling; you never did, and never shall; but I could not go — I dare not. Every fellow, you know, owes money, and I'm in that sorry plight like the rest, and just what I told you would have happened, and that you know would have been worse; but I think that's all settled, and lose me! not for one moment *ever* can you lose me, my beautiful idol."

"Oh, yes — that's so delightful, and Ry and his poor violet will be so happy, and he'll never love anyone but her."

"Never, darling, never."

And he never did.

"*Never* — of *course*, never."

"And I'm sure it could not be helped your not being at Carwell."

"Of course it couldn't — how could it! Don't you know everything? You're my own reasonable, wise little girl, and you would not like to bore and worry your poor Ry. I wish to God I were my own master, and you'd soon see then who loves you best in all the world."

"Oh, yes, I'm sure of it."

"Yes, darling, you are; if we are to be happy, you must be sure of it. If there's force in language, or proof in act, you can't doubt me — you must know how I adore you — what motive on earth could I have in saying so, but one?”

“None, none, darling, darling Ry — it’s only my folly, and you’ll forgive your poor foolish little bird; and oh, Ry, is not this dreadful — but better, I suppose, that is, when a few miserable hours are over, and I gone — and we happy — your poor little violet and Ry happy together for the rest of our lives.”

“I think so, I do, all our days; and you understand everything I told you?”

“Everything — yes — about tomorrow morning — quite.”

“The walk isn’t too much?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“And old Dulcibella shall follow you early in the day to Draunton — you remember the name of the house?”

“Yes, the Tanzy Well.”

“Quite right, wise little woman, and you know, darling, you must not stir out — quiet as it is, you might be seen; it is only a few hours’ caution, and then we need not care; but I don’t want pursuit, and a scene, and to agitate my poor little fluttered bird more than is avoidable. Even when you look out of the window keep your veil down; and — and just reach the Tanzy House, and do as I say, and you may leave all the rest to me. Wait a moment — who’s here? No — no — nothing. But I had better leave you now — yes, darling — it is wiser — some of the people may be peeping, and I’ll go.”

And so a tumultuous goodnight, wild tears, and hopes, and panic, and blessings, and that brief interview was over.

The window was shut, and Alice Maybell in her room — the lovers not to meet again till forty miles away; and with a throbbing heart she lay down, to think and cry, and long for the morning she dreaded.

Morning came, and the breakfast hour, and the old Squire over his cup of coffee and rasher, called for Mrs. Durdin, the housekeeper, and said he —

“Miss Alice, I hear, is ailing this morning; ye can see old Dulcibella, and make out would she like the doctor should look in, and would she like anything nice for breakfast — a slice of the goose-pie, or *what*? and send down to the town for the doctor if she or old Dulcibella thinks well of it, and if it should be in church time, call him out of his pew, and find out what she’d like to eat or drink;” and with his usual gruff nod he dismissed her.

“I should be very happy to go to the town if you wish, sir,” said Charles Fairfield, desiring, it would seem, to reestablish his character for politeness, “and I’m extremely sorry, I’m sure, that poor Ally — I mean, that Miss Maybell — is so ill.”

“You won’t cry though, I warrant; and there’s people enough in Wyvern to send of her messages without troubling you,” said the Squire.

The Captain, however fiercely, had let this unpleasant speech pass unchallenged.

The old Squire was two or three times at the foot of the stairs before church-time, bawling inquiries after Miss Alice’s health, and messages for her private ear, to old Dulcibella.

The Squire never missed church. He was as punctual as his ancestor, old Sir Thomas Fairfield, who was there every Sunday and feast-day, lying on his back praying, in tarnished red, blue, and gold habiliments of the reign of James I., in which he died, and took form of painted stone, and has looked straight up, with his side to the wall, and his hands joined in supplication ever since. If the old Squire did not trouble himself with reading, nor much with prayer, and thought over such topics as suited him, during divine service — he at least went through the drill of the rubrics decorously, and stood erect, sat down, or kneeled, as if he were the ordained fugleman of his tenantry assembled in the old church.

Captain Fairfield, a handsome fellow, notwithstanding his years, with the keen blue eye of his race — a lazy man, and reserved, but with the hot blood of the Fairfields in his veins, which showed itself dangerously on occasion, occupied a corner of this great oak enclosure, at the remote end from his father. Like him he pursued his private ruminations with little interruption from the liturgy in which he ostensibly joined. These ruminations were, to judge from his countenance, of a saturnine and sulky sort. He was thinking over his father’s inhospitable language, and making up his mind, for though indolent, he was proud and fiery, to take steps upon it, and to turn his back, perhaps for many a day, on Wyvern.

The sweet old organ of Wyvern pealed, and young voices swelled the chorus of love and praise, and still father and son were confronted in dark antipathy. The Vicar read his text from Holy Writ, and preached on the same awful themes; the transitoriness of our days; love, truth, purity, eternal life, death eternal; and still this same unnatural chill and darkness was between them. Moloch sat unseen by the old man's side, and in the diapason of the organ moaned his thirst for his sacrifices. Evil spirits amused the young man's brain with pictures of his slights and wrongs, and with their breath heated his vengeful heart. The dreams of both were interrupted by the Vicar's sonorous blessing, and they shook their ears, and kneeled down, and their dreams came back again.

So it was Sunday— "better day, better deed" — when a smouldering quarrel broke suddenly into fire and thunder in the manorhouse of Wyvern.

There is, we know, an estate of £6,000 a year, in a ring fence, round this old house. It owes something alarming, but the parish, village, and manor of Wyvern have belonged, time out of mind, to the Fairfield family.

A very red sunset, ominous of storm, floods the western sky with its wild and sullen glory. The leaves of the great trees from whose recesses the small birds are singing their cheery serenade, flash and glimmer in it, as if a dew of fire had sprinkled them, and a blood-red flush lights up the brown feathers of the little birds.

These Fairfields are a handsome race — showing handsome, proud English faces. Brown haired, sometimes light, sometimes dark, with generally blue eyes, not mild, but fierce and keen.

They are a race of athletes; tall men, famous all that country round, generation after generation, for prowess in the wrestling ring, at cudgels, and other games of strength. Famous, too, for worse matters. Strong-willed, selfish, cruel, on occasion, but with a generosity and courage that make them in a manner popular. The character of the Fairfields has the vices, and some of the better traits of feudalism.

Charles Fairfield had been making up his mind to talk to his father. He had resolved to do so on his way home from church. With the cool air and clearer light, outside the porch, came a subsidence of his haste, and nodding here and there to friend or old acquaintance, as he strode through the churchyard, he went a solitary way home, instead of opening his wounds and purposes then to his father.

"Better at home; better at Wyvern; in an hour or so I'll make all ready, and see him then."

So home, if home it was, by a lonely path, looking gloomily down on the daisies, strode Charles Fairfield.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH THE SQUIRE LOSES HIS GOLDHEADED CANE.

The sun, as I have said, was sinking among the western clouds with a melancholy glare; Captain Fairfield was pacing slowly to and fro upon the broad terrace that extends, with a carved balustrade, and many a stone flower-pot, along the rear of the old house. The crows were winging their way home, and the air was vocal with their faint cawings high above the gray roof, and the summits of the mighty trees, now glowing in that transitory light. His horse was ready saddled, and his portmanteau and other trifling effects had been despatched some hours before.

“Is there any good in bidding him goodbye?” hesitated the Captain.

He was thinking of descending the terrace steps at the further end, and as he mounted his horse, leaving his valedictory message with the man who held it. But the spell of childhood is not easily broken when it has been respected for so many after-years. The Captain had never got rid of the childish awe which began before he could remember. The virtues are respected; but such vices as pride, violence, and hardheartedness in a father, are more respected still.

Charles could approach a quarrel with that old despot; he could stand at the very brink, and with a resentful and defiant eye scan the abyss; but he could not quite make up his mind to the plunge. The old beast was so utterly violent and incalculable in his anger that no one could say to what weapons and extremities he might be driven in a combat with him, and where was the good in avowed hostilities? Must not a very few years, now, bring humiliation and oppression to an end?

Charles Fairfield was saved the trouble of deciding for himself, however, by the appearance of old Squire Harry, who walked forth from the handsome stone door-case upon the terrace, where his son stood ready for departure.

The old man was walking with a measured tread, holding his head very high, with an odd flush on his face, and a sardonic smile, and he was talking inaudibly to himself. Charles saw in all this the signs of storm. In the old man's hand was a letter firmly clutched. If he saw his son, who expected to be accosted by him, he passed him by with as little notice as he bestowed on the tall rose-tree that grew in the stone pot by his side.

The Squire walked down the terrace, southward, towards the steps, the wild sunset sky to his right, the flaming windows of the house to his left. When he had gone on a few steps, his tall son followed him. Perhaps he thought it better that Squire Harry should be informed of his intended departure from his lips than that he should learn it from the groom who held the bridle of his horse.

The Squire did not descend the steps, however; he stopped short of them, and sat down in one of the seats that are placed at intervals under the windows. He leaned with both hands on his cane, the point of which he ground angrily into the gravel; in his fingers was still crumpled the letter. He was looking down with a very angry face, illuminated by the wild western sky, shaking his head and muttering.

The tall, brown Captain stalked towards him, and touched his hat, according to his father's reverential rule.

"May I say a word, sir?" he asked.

The old man stared in his face and nodded fiercely, and with this ominous invitation he complied.

"You were pleased, sir," said he, "yesterday to express an opinion that, with the income I have, I ought to support myself, and no longer to trouble Wyvern. It was stupid of me not to think of that myself — very stupid — and all I can do is to lose no time about it; and so I have sent my traps away, and am going to follow now, sir; and I couldn't go, of course, sir, without saying farewell to you and — — " He was on the point of adding— "thanking you for all your kindness;" but he recollected himself. *Thank* him, indeed! No, he could not bring himself to that. "And I am leaving now, sir, and goodbye."

"Ho, turning your back on Wyvern, like all the rest! Well, sir, the world's wide, you can choose your road. I don't ask none o' ye to stay and see me off — not I. I'll not be without some one when I die to shut down my eyes, I dare say. Get ye gone."

"I thought, sir — in fact I was quite convinced," said Charles Fairfield, a little disconcerted, "that you had quite made up your mind, as I have mine, sir."

"So I had, sir — so I had. Don't suppose I care a rush, sir, who goes — not a d — d rush — not I. Better an empty house than a bad tenant."

Up rose the old man as he spoke, "Away with them, say I; bundle 'em out — off wi' them, bag and baggage; there's more like ye — read *that*," and he thrust the letter at him like a pistol, and leaving it in his hand, turned and stalked slowly up the terrace, while the Captain read the following note: —

"SIR, — I hardly venture to hope that you will ever again think of me with that kindness which circumstances compel me so ungratefully to requite. I owe you more than I can ever tell. I began to experience your kindness in my infancy, and it has never failed me since. Oh, sir, do not, I entreat, deny me one last proof of your generosity — your *forgiveness*. I leave Wyvern, and before these lines are in your hand, I shall have found another home. Soon, I trust, I shall be able to tell my benefactor *where*. In the meantime may God recompense you, as I never can, for all your goodness to me. I leave the place where all my life has passed amid continual and unmerited kindness with the keenest anguish. Aggravated by my utter inability at present to repay your goodness by the poor acknowledgment of my confidence. Pray, sir, pardon me; pray restore me to your good opinion, or, at least if you cannot forgive and receive me again into your favour, spare me the dreadful affliction of your detestation, and in mercy try to forget

"Your unhappy, but ever grateful "ALICE MAYBELL."

When Charles Fairfield, having read this through, raised his eyes, they lighted on the old man, returning, and now within a few steps of him.

"Well, there's a lass for ye! I reared her like a child o' my own — better, kinder than ever child was reared, and she's hardly come to her full growth when she serves me like that. D — n ye, are ye tongue-tied? *what* do you think of her?"

"It would not be easy, sir, on that letter, to pronounce," said Charles Fairfield, disconcerted. "There's nothing there to show what her reasons are."

"Ye'r no Fairfield — ye'r not, ye'r none. If ye were, ye'd know when ye'r house was insulted; but ye'r none; ye'r a cold-blooded sneak, and no Fairfield."

"I don't see that anything I could say, sir, would mend the matter," said the Captain.

"Like enough; but I'll tell ye what I think of her," thundered the old man, half beside himself. And his language became so opprobrious and frantic, that his son said, with a proud glare and a swarthy flush on his face,

"I take my leave, sir; for language like that I'll not stay to hear."

"But ye'll not take ye'r leave, sir, till I choose, and ye shall stay," yelled the old Squire, placing himself between the Captain and the steps. "And I'd like to know why ye shouldn't hear her called what she is — a —— and a —— ."

"Because she's *my* wife, sir," retorted Charles Fairfield, whitening with fury.

"She is, is she?" said the old man, after a long gaping pause. "Then ye'r a worse scoundrel, ye black-hearted swindler, than I took you for — and ye'll take that— "

And trembling with fury, he whirled his heavy cane in the air. But before it could descend, Charles Fairfield caught the hand that held it.

"None o' that — none o' that, sir," he said with grim menace, as the old man with both hands and furious purpose sought to wrest the cane free.

"Do you *want* me to do it?"

The gripe of old Squire Harry was still powerful, and it required an exertion of the younger man's entire strength to wring the walking-stick from his grasp.

Over the terrace balustrade it flew whirling, and old Squire Harry in the struggle lost his feet, and fell heavily on the flags.

There was blood already on his temple and white furrowed cheek, and he looked stunned. The young man's blood was up — the wicked blood of the Fairfields — but he hesitated, stopped, and turned.

The old Squire had got to his feet again, and was holding giddily by the balustrade. His hat still lay on the ground, his cane was gone. The proud old Squire was a tower dismantled. To be met and foiled so easily in a feat of strength — to have gone down at the first tussle with the "youngster," whom he despised as a "milksop" and a "Miss Molly," was to the old Hercules, who still bragged of his early prowess, and was once the lord of the wrestling ring for five and twenty miles round, perhaps for the moment the maddest drop in the cup of his humiliation.

Squire Harry with his trembling hand clutched on the stone balustrade, his tall figure swaying a little, had drawn himself up and held his head high and defiantly. There was a little quiver in his white old features, a wild smile in his eyes, and on his thin, hard lips, showing the teeth that time had left him; and the blood that patched his white hair trickled down over his temple.

Charles Fairfield was agitated, and felt that he could have burst into tears — that it would have been a relief to fall on his knees before him for pardon. But the iron pride of the Fairfields repulsed this better emotion. He did, however, approach hurriedly, with an excited and troubled countenance, and he said hastily —

"I'm awfully sorry, but it wasn't my fault; you know it wasn't. No Fairfield ever stood to be struck yet; I only took the stick, sir. D — n it, if it had been my mother I could not have done it more gently. I could not help your tripping. I couldn't; and I'm awfully sorry, by —— , and you won't remember it against me? Say you won't. It's the last time you'll ever see me in life, and there's no use in parting at worse odds than we need; and — and — won't you shake hands, sir?"

"I say, son Charlie, ye've spilled my blood," said the old man. "May God damn ye for it; and if ever ye come into Wyvern after this, while there's breath in my body I'll shoot ye like a poacher."

And with this paternal speech, Squire Harry turned his back and tottered stately and grimly into the house.

CHAPTER X.

THE DRIVE OVER CRESSLEY COMMON BY MOONLIGHT.

The old Squire of Wyvern wandered from room to room, and stood in this window and that. An hour after the scene on the terrace, he was trembling still and flushed, with his teeth grimly set, sniffing, and with a stifling weight at his heart.

Night came, and the drawingroom was lighted up, and the Squire rang the bell, and sent for old Mrs. Durdin.

That dapper old woman, with a neat little cap on, stood prim in the doorway and curtsied. She knew, of course, pretty well what the Squire was going to tell her, and waited in some alarm to learn in what tone he would make his communication.

"Well," said the Squire, sternly, holding his head very high, "Miss Alice is gone. I sent for you to tell ye, as y're housekeeper here. She's gone; she's left Wyvern."

"She'll be coming again, sir, soon?" said the old woman after a pause.

"No, not she — no," said the Squire.

"Not returnin' to Wyvern, sir?"

"While there's breath in my body she'll never darken these doors."

"Sorry she should a' displeased you, sir," said the goodnatured little woman with a curtsey.

"*Displease* ye! Who said she displeased me? It ain't the turning of a pennypiece to me — *me*, by —— . Ha, ha! that's funny."

"And — what do you wish done with the bed and the furniture, sir? Shall I leave it still in the room, please?"

"Out o' window wi't — pitch it after her; let the work'us people send up and cart it off for the poorhouse, where she should 'a bin, if I hadn't a bin the biggest fool in the parish."

"I'll have it took down and moved, sir," said the old woman, interpreting more moderately; "and the same with Mrs. Crane's room; Dulcibella, she's gone too?"

“Ha, ha! well for her — plotting old witch. I’ll have her ducked in the pond if she’s found here; and never you name them, one or t’other more, unless you want to go yourself. I’m fifty pounds better. I didn’t know how to manage or look after her — they’re all alike. If I chose it I could send a warrant after her for the clothes on her back; but let her be. Away wi’ her — a good riddance; and get her who may, I give him joy o’ her.”

The Squire was glad to see Tom Ward that night, and had a second tankard of punch.

“Old servant, Tom; I believe the old folk’s the best after all,” said he. “It’s a d — d changed world, Tom. Things were otherwise in our time; no matter, I’ll pay ‘em off yet.”

And old Harry Fairfield fell asleep in his chair, and after an hour wakened up with a dream of little Ally’s music still in his ears.

“Play it again, child, play it again,” he said, and listened — to silence and looked about the empty room, and the sudden pain came again, with a dreadful yearning mixed with his anger.

The Squire cursed her for a devil, a wildcat, a viper, and he walked round the room with his hands clenched in his coat pockets, and the proud old man was crying. With straining and squeezing the tears oozed and trickled from his wrinkled eyelids down his rugged cheeks.

“I don’t care a d — n, I hate her; I don’t know what it’s for, I be such a fool; I’m *glad* she’s gone, and I pray God the sneak she’s gone wi’ may break her heart, and break his own d — d neck after, over Carwell scaurs.”

The old man took his candle and from old habit, in the hall, was closing the door of the staircase that led up to her room.

“Ay, ay,” said he, bitterly, recollecting himself, “the stable-door when the nag’s stole. I don’t care if the old house was blown down tonight — I wish it was. She was a kind little thing before that d — d fellow — what could she see in him — good for nothing — old as I am, I’d pitch him over my head like a stook o’ barley. Here was a plot, she was a good little thing, but see how she was drew into it, d — n her, they’re all so false. I’ll find out who was in it, I will; I’ll find it all out. There’s Tom Sherwood, he’s one. I’ll pitch ‘em all out, neck and crop, out o’ Wyvern doors. I’d rather fill my house wi’ rats than the two-legged vermin. Let ‘em pack away to Carwell and starve with that big pippin-squeezing ninny. I hope in God’s justice he’ll never live to put his foot in Wyvern. I could shoot myself, I think, but for that. She might a waited till the old man died, at any rate; I was kind to her — a fool — a fool."

And the tall figure of the old man, candle in hand, stalked slowly from the dim hall and vanished up the other staircase.

While this was going on at Wyvern, nearly forty miles away, under the bright moonlight, a chaise, in which were seated the young lady whose departure had excited so strange a sensation there, and her faithful old servant, Dulcibella Crane, was driving rapidly through a melancholy but not unpleasing country.

A wide undulating plain, with here and there patches of picturesque natural wood, oak, and whitethorn, and groups of silver-stemmed birch-trees spread around them. Those were the sheepwalks of Cressley Common. The soil is little better than peat, over which grows a short velvet verdure, altogether more prized by lovers of the picturesque than by graziers of Southdowns. Could any such scene look prettier than it did in the moonlight? The solitudes, so sad and solemn, the lonely clumps and straggling trees, the gentle hollows and hills, and the misty distance in that cold illusive light acquire the interest and melancholy of mystery.

The young lady's head was continually out of the window, sometimes looking forward, sometimes back, upon the road they had traversed. With an anxious look and a heavy sigh she threw herself back in her seat.

"You're not asleep, Dulcibella?" she said, a little peevishly.

"No Miss, no dear."

"You don't seem to have much to trouble you?" continued the young lady.

"I? Law bless you, dear, nothing, thank God."

"None of your own, and my troubles don't vex you, that's plain," said her young mistress, reproachfully.

"I did not think, dear, you was troubled about anything — law! I hope nothing's gone wrong, darling," said the old woman with more energy and a simple stare in her mistress's face.

"Well, you know he said he'd be with us as we crossed Cressley Common, and this is it, and he's not here, and I see no sign of him."

And the young lady again popped her head out of the window, and, her survey ended, threw herself back once more with another melancholy moan.

“Why, Miss Alice, dear, you’re not frettin’ for that?” said Dulcibella. “Don’t you know, dear, if he isn’t here he’s somewhere else? We’re not to be troubling ourselves about every little thing like, and who knows, poor gentleman, what’s happened to delay him?”

“That’s just what I say, Dulcibella; you’ll set me mad! Something has certainly happened. You know he owes money. Do you think they have arrested him? If they have, what’s to become of us? Oh! Dulcibella, *do* tell me what you really think.”

“No, no, no — there now — there’s a darling, don’t you be worrying yourself about nothing; look out again, and who knows but he’s coming?”

So said old Dulcibella, who was constitutionally hopeful and contented, and very easy about Master Charles, as she still called Charles Fairfield.

She was not remarkable for prescience, but here the worthy creature fluked prophetically; for Alice Maybell, taking her advice, did look out again, and she thought she saw the distant figure of a horseman in pursuit.

She rattled at the window calling to the driver, and the man who sat beside him, and succeeded in making them hear her, and pull the horses up.

“Look back and see if that is not your master coming,” she cried eagerly.

He was still too distant for recognition, but the rider was approaching fast. The gentlemen of the road, once a substantial terror, were now but a picturesque tradition; the appearance of the pursuing horseman over the solitudes of Cressley Common would else have been anything but a source of pleasant anticipation. On he came, and now the clink of the horseshoes sounded sharp on the clear night air. And now the rider passed the straggling trees they had just left behind them, and now his voice was raised and recognised, and in a few moments more, pale and sad in the white moonlight as Leonora’s phantom trooper, her stalwart lover pulled up his powerful hunter at the chaise window.

A smile lighted up his gloomy face as he looked in.

“Well, darling, I *have* overtaken you at Cressley Common; and is my little woman quite well, and happy to see her Ry once more?”

His hand had grasped hers as he murmured these words through the window.

“Oh, Ry, darling — I’m so happy — you must let Tom ride the horse on, and do you come in and sit here, and Dulcibella can take my cloaks and sit by the driver. Come, darling, I want to hear everything.”

And so this little arrangement was completed, as she said, and Charles Fairfield sat himself beside his beautiful young wife, and as they drove on through the moonlit scene, he pressed her hand and kissed her lovingly.

CHAPTER XI.

HOME.

"Oh, darling, I can scarcely believe it," she murmured, smiling, and gazing up with her large soft eyes into his, "it seems to me like heaven that I can look, and speak, and say everything without danger, or any more concealment, and always have my Ry with me — never to be separated again, you know, darling, while we live."

"Poor little woman," said he, fondly, looking down with an answering smile, "she does love me a little bit, I think."

"And Ry loves his poor little bird, doesn't he?"

"Adores her — idolatry — *idolatry*."

"And we'll be so happy!"

"I hope so, darling."

"Hope?" echoed she, chilled, and a little piteously.

"I'm *sure* of it, darling — quite certain," he repeated, laughing tenderly; "she's such a foolish little bird, one must watch their phrases; but I was only thinking — I'm afraid you hardly know what a place this Carwell is."

"Oh, darling, you forget I've seen it — the most picturesque spot I ever saw — the very place I should have chosen — and any place you know, with you! But that's an old story."

His answer was a kiss, and —

"Darling, I can never deserve half your love."

"All I desire on earth is to live alone with my Ry."

"Yes, darling, we'll make out life very well here, I'm sure — my only fear is for you. I'll go out with my rod, and bring you home my basket full of trout, or sometimes take my gun, and kill a hare or a rabbit, and we'll live like the old Baron and his daughters in the fairy-tale — on the produce of the streams, and solitudes about us — quite to ourselves; and I'll read to you in the evenings, or we'll play chess, or we'll chat while you work, and I'll tell you stories of my travels, and you'll sing me a song, won't you?"

"Too delighted — singing for joy," said little Alice, in a rapture at his story of the life that was opening to them, "oh, tell more."

"Well — yes — and you'll have such pretty flowers."

"Oh, yes — flowers — I love them — not expensive ones — for we are poor, you know; and you'll see how prudent I'll be — but annuals, they are so cheap — and I'll sow them myself, and I'll have the most beautiful you ever saw. Don't you love them, Ry?"

"Nothing so pretty, darling, on earth, except yourself."

"What is my Ry looking out for?"

Charles Fairfield had more than once put his head out of the window, looking as well as he could along the road in advance of the horses.

"Oh, nothing of any consequence, I only wanted to see that our man had got on with the horse, he might as well knock up the old woman, and see that things were, I was going to say, comfortable, but less miserable than they might be."

He laughed faintly as he said this, and he looked at his watch, as if he did not want her to see him consult it, and then he said —

"Well, and you were saying — oh — about the flowers — annuals — Yes."

And so they resumed. But somehow it seemed to Alice that his ardour and his gaiety were subsiding, that his thoughts were away, and pale care stealing over him like the chill of death. Again she might have remembered the ghostly Wilhelm, who grew more ominous and spectral as he and his bride neared the goal of their nocturnal journey.

"I don't think you hear me, Ry, and something has gone wrong," she said at last in a tone of disappointment, that rose even to alarm.

"Oh! tell me, Charlie, if there is anything you have not told me yet? you're afraid of frightening me."

"Nothing, nothing, I assure you, darling; what nonsense you do talk, you poor foolish little bird. No, I mean nothing, but I've had a sort of quarrel with the old man; you need not have written that letter, or at least it would have been better if you had told me about it."

"But, darling, I couldn't, I had no opportunity, and I could not leave Wyvern, where he had been so good to me all my life, without a few words to thank him, and to entreat his pardon; you're not angry, darling, with your poor little bird?"

"Angry, my foolish little wife, you little know your Ry; he loves his bird too well to be ever angry with her for anything, but it was unlucky, at least his getting it just when he did, for, you may suppose, it did not improve his temper."

"Very angry, I'm afraid, was he? But though he's so fiery, he's generous; I'm sure he'll forgive us, in a little time, and it will all be made up; don't you think so?"

"No, darling, I don't. Take this hill quietly, will you?" he called from the window to the driver; "you may walk them a bit, there's near two miles to go still."

Here was another anxious look out, and he drew his head in, muttering, and then he laid his hand on hers, and looked in her face and smiled, and he said —

"They are such fools, aren't they? and — about the old man at Wyvern — oh, no, you mistake him, he's not a man to forgive; we can reckon on nothing but mischief from that quarter, and, in fact, he knows all about it, for he chose to talk about you as if he had a right to scold, and that I couldn't allow, and I told him so, and that you were my wife, and that no man living should say a word against you."

"My own brave Ry; but oh! what a grief that I should have made this quarrel; but I love you a thousand times more; oh, my darling, we are everything now to one another."

"Ho! never mind," he exclaimed with a sudden alacrity, "there he is. All right, Tom, is it?"

"All right, sir," answered the man whom he had despatched before them on the horse, and who was now at the roadside still mounted.

"He has ridden back to tell us she'll have all ready for our arrival — oh, no, darling," he continued gaily, "don't think for a moment I care a farthing whether he's pleased or angry. He never liked me, and he cannot do us any harm, none in the world, and sooner or later Wyvern *must* be mine;" and he kissed her and smiled with the ardour of a man whose spirits are, on a sudden, quite at ease.

And as they sat, hand pressed in hand, she sidled closer to him, with the nestling instinct of the bird, as he called her, and dreamed that if there were a heaven on earth, it would be found in such a life as that on which she was entering, where she would have him "all to herself." And she felt now, as they diverged into the steeper road and more sinuous, that ascended for a mile the gentle wooded uplands to the grange of Carwell, that every step brought her nearer to Paradise.

Here is something paradoxical; is it? that this young creature should be so in love with a man double her own age. I have heard of cases like it, however, and I have read, in some old French writer — I have forgot who he is — the rule laid down with solemn audacity, that there is no such through-fire-and-water, desperate love as that of a girl for a man past forty. Till the hero has reached that period of autumnal glory, youth and beauty can but half love him. This encouraging truth is amplified and emphasized in the original. I extract its marrow for the comfort of all whom it may concern.

On the other hand, however, I can't forget that Charles Fairfield had many unusual aids to success. In the first place, by his looks, you would have honestly guessed him at from four or five years under his real age. He was handsome, dark, with white even teeth, and fine dark blue eyes, that could glow ardently. He was the only person at Wyvern with whom she could converse. He had seen something of the world, something of foreign travel; had seen pictures, and knew at least the names of some authors; and in the barbarous isolation of Wyvern, where squires talked of little but the last new plough, fat oxen, and kindred subjects, often with a very perceptible infusion of the country *patois* — he was to a young lady with any taste either for books or art, a resource, and a companion.

And now the chaise was drawing near to Carwell Grange. With a childish delight she watched the changing scene from the window. The clumps of wild trees drew nearer to the roadside. Winding always upward, and steeper and steeper, was the narrow road. The wood gathered closer around them. The trees were loftier and more solemn, and cast sharp shadows of foliage and branches on the white roadway. All the way her ear and heart were filled with the now gay music of her lover's talk. At last through the receding trees that crowned the platform of the rising grounds they had been ascending, gables, chimneys, and glimmering windows showed themselves in the broken moonlight; and now rose before them, under a great ash tree, a gatehouse that resembled a small square tower of stone, with a steep roof, and partly clothed in ivy. No light gleamed from its windows. Tom dismounted, and pushed open the old iron gate that swung over the grass-grown court with a long melancholy screak.

It was a square court with a tolerably high wall, overtopped by the sombre trees, whose summits, like the old roofs and chimneys, were silvered by the moonlight.

This was the front of the building, which Alice had not seen before, the great entrance and hall-door of Carwell Grange.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OMEN OF CARWELL GRANGE.

The high wall that surrounded the courtyard, and the towering foliage of the old trees, were gloomy. Still if the quaint stone front of the house had shown through its many windows the glow of life and welcome, I dare say the effect of those sombre accessories would have been lost in pleasanter associations, and the house might have showed cheerily and cozily enough. As it was, with no relief but the cold moonlight that mottled the pavement and tipped the chimney tops, the silence and deep shadow were chilling, and it needed the deep enthusiasm of true love to see in that dismal frontage the delightful picture that Alice Maybell's eyes beheld.

"Welcome, darling, to our poor retreat, made bright and beautiful by your presence," said he, with a gush of tenderness; "but how unworthy to receive you none knows better than your poor Ry. Still for a short time — and it will be but short — you will endure it. Delightful your presence will make it to me; and to you, darling, my love will perhaps render it tolerable. Take my hand, and get down; and welcome to Carwell Grange."

Lightly she touched the ground, with her hand on his strong arm, for love rather than for assistance.

"I know how I shall like this quaint, quiet place," said she, "love it, and grow perhaps fit for no other, if only my darling is always with me. You'll show it all to me in daylight tomorrow — won't you?"

Their little talk was murmured, and unheard by others, under friendly cover of the snorting horses, and the talk of the men about the luggage.

"But I must get our door opened," said he with a little laugh; and with the heavy old knocker he hammered a long echoing summons at the door.

In a minute more lights flickered in the hall. The door was opened, and the old woman smiling her best, though that was far from being very pleasant. Her eye was dark and lifeless and never smiled, and there were lines of ill-temper, or worse, near them which never relaxed. Still she was doing her best, dropping little courtesies all the time, and holding her flaring tallow candle in its brass candlestick, and thus illuminating the furrows and minuter wrinkles of her forbidding face with a yellow light that suited its boxwood complexion.

Behind her, with another mutton-fat, for this was a state occasion, stood a square-shouldered little girl, some twelve years old, with a brown, somewhat flat face, and no good feature but her dark eyes and white teeth. This was Lilly Dogger, who had been called in to help the crone who stood in the foreground. With a grave, observing stare, she was watching the young lady, who, smiling, stepped into the hall.

“Welcome, my lady — very welcome to Carwell,” said the old woman. “Welcome, Squire, very welcome to Carwell.”

“Thank you very much. I’m sure I shall like it,” said the young lady, smiling happily; “it is such a fine old place; and it’s so quiet — I like quiet.”

“Old enough and quiet enough, anyhow,” answered the old woman. “You’ll not see many new faces to trouble you here, Miss — Ma’am, my lady, I mean.”

“But we’ll all try to make her as pleasant and as comfortable as we can!” said Charles Fairfield, clapping the old woman on the shoulder a little impatiently.

“There don’t lay much in *my* way to make her time pass pleasant, Master Charles; but I suppose we’ll all do what we can?”

“And more we can’t,” said Charles Fairfield. “Come, darling. I suppose there’s a bit of fire somewhere; it’s a little cold, isn’t it?”

“A fire burning all day, sir, in the cedar-room; and the kettle’s a-boiling on the hob, if the lady ‘d like a cup o’ tea?”

“Yes, of course,” said Charles; “and a fire in the room upstairs?”

“Yes, so there is, sir, a great fire all day long, and everything well aired.”

“Well, darling, shall we look first at the cedar-room?” he asked, and smiling, hand in hand, they walked through the hall, and by a staircase, and through a second and smaller hall, with a back stair off it, and so into a comfortable panelled-room, with a great cheery fire of mingled coal and wood, and oldfashioned furniture, which though faded, was scrupulously neat.

Old and homely as was the room, it agreeably surprised Alice, who was prepared to be delighted with everything, and at sight of this, exclaimed quite in a rapture — so honest a rapture that Charles Fairfield could not forbear laughing, though he felt also very grateful.

"Well, I admit," he said, looking round, "it does look wonderfully comfortable, all things considered; but here, I am afraid, is the beginning and the end of our magnificence — for the present, of course, and by-and-by, little by little, we may improve and extend; but I don't think in the whole house there's a habitable room — sitting-room I mean — but this," he laughed.

"It is the pleasantest room I ever was in, Charlie — a delightful room — I'm more than content," said she.

"You are a good little creature," said he, "at all events, the best little wife in the world, determined to make the best of everything, and as I said, we certainly shall be better very soon, and in the mean time, good humour and cheerfulness will make our quarters, poor as they are, brighter and better than luxury and ill-temper could find in a palace. Here are teathings, and a kettle boiling — very primitive, very cosy — we'll be more like civilised people tomorrow or next day, when we have had time to look about us, and in the mean time, suppose I make tea while you run upstairs and put off your things — what do you say?"

"Yes, certainly," and she looked at the old woman, who stood with her ominous smile at the door.

"I ought to have told you her name, Mildred Tarnley — the *genius loci*. Mildred, you'll show your mistress to her room."

And he and his young wife smiled a mutual farewell. A little curious she was to see something more of the old house, and she peeped about her as she went up, and asked a few questions as they went along. "And this room," she asked, peeping into a door that opened from the back stairs which they were ascending, "it has such a large fireplace and little ovens, or what are they?"

"It was the still-room once, my lady, my mother remembered the time, but it was always shut up in my day."

"Oh, and can you tell me — I forget — where is my servant?"

"Upstairs, please, with your things, ma'am, when the man brought up your boxes."

Still looking about her and delaying, she went on. There was nothing stately about this house; but there was that about it which, if Alice had been in less cheerful and happy spirits, would have quelled and awed her. Thick walls, windows deep sunk, double doors now and then, wainscoting, and oak floors, warped with age.

On the landing there was an archway admitting to a gallery. In this archway was no door, and, on the landing, Alice Fairfield, as I may now call her, stood for a moment and looked round.

Happy as she was, I cannot tell what effect these faintly lighted glimpses of old and desolate rooms, aided by the repulsive companionship of her ancient guide, may have insensibly wrought upon her imagination, or what a trick that faculty may have just then played upon her senses, but turning round to enter the gallery under the open arch, the old woman standing by her, with the candle raised a little, Alice Fairfield stepped back, startled, with a little exclamation of surprise.

The ugly face of old Mildred Tarnley peeped curiously over the young lady's shoulder. She stepped before her, and peered, right and left, into the gallery; and then, with ominous inquiry into the young lady's eyes, "I thought it might be a bat, my lady; there was one last night got in," she said; "but there's no such a thing now — was you afeard of anything, my lady?"

"I — didn't you see it?" said the young lady, both frightened and disconcerted.

"I saw'd nothing, ma'am."

"It's very odd. I *did* see it; I *swear* I saw it, and felt the air all stirred about my face and dress by it."

"On here, miss — my lady; was it?"

"Yes; *here*, before us. I — weren't you looking?"

"Not that way, miss — I don't know," she said.

"Well, something fell down before us — all the way — from the top to the bottom of this place."

And with a slight movement of her hand and eyes, she indicated the open archway before which they stood.

"Oh, lawk! Well, I dare to say it may a bin a fancy, just."

"Yes; but it's very odd — a great heavy curtain of black fell down in folds from the top to the floor just as I was going to step through. It seemed to make a little cloud of dust about our feet; and I felt a wind from it quite distinctly."

"Hey, then it was a *black* curtain, I suppose," said the old woman, looking hard at her.

"Yes — but why do you suppose so?"

"Sich nonsense is always black, ye know. I see'd nothing — nothing — no more there was nothing. Didn't ye see me walk through?"

And she stepped back and forward, candle in hand, with an uncomfortable laugh.

"Oh, I know perfectly well there is nothing; but I saw it. I — I wish I hadn't," said the young lady.

"I wish ye hadn't, too," said Mildred Tarnley, pale and lowering. "Them as says their prayers, they needn't be afeard 'o sich things; and, for my part, I never see'd anything in the Grange, and I'm an old woman, and lived here girl, and woman, good sixty years and more."

"Let us go on, please," said Alice.

"At your service, my lady," said the crone, with a courtesy, and conducted her to her room.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN INSPECTION OF CARWELL GRANGE.

Through an open door, at the end of this short gallery, the pleasant firelight gleamed, sufficiently indicating the room that had been prepared for her reception. She felt a little oddly and frightened, and the sight of old Dulcibella Crane in the cheerful light, busily unpacking her boxes, reassured her.

The grim old woman, Mildred Tarnley, stopped at the door.

“It’s very well aired, ma’am,” she said, making a little courtesy.

“It looks very comfortable; thank you — everything so neat; and such a bright nice fire,” said Alice, smiling on her as well as she could.

“There’s the tapestry room, and the leather room; but they’re not so dry as this, though it’s wainscot.”

“Oak, I think — isn’t it?” said the young lady, looking round.

“Yes, ma’am; and there’s the pink paper chamber and dressing room; but they’re gone very poor — and the bed and all that being in here, I thought ’twas the best ‘o the lot; an’ there’s lots o’ presses and cupboards in the wall, and the keys in them, and the locks all right; and I do think it’s the most comfortablest room, my lady. That is the dressing-room in there, please; and do you like some more wood or coal on the fire, ma’am?”

“Not any; it is very nice — thanks.”

And Alice sat down before the fire, and the smile seemed to evaporate in its glow, and she looked very grave — and even anxious. Mildred Tarnley made her courtesy, looked round the room, and withdrew.

“Well, Dulcibella, when are you going to have your tea?” asked Alice, kindly.

“I’ll make a cup here, dear, if you think I may, after I’ve got your things in their places, in a few minutes’ time.”

“Would you like that better than taking it downstairs with the servant?”

“Yes, dear, I would.”

“I don’t think you like her, Dulcibella?”

"I can't say I mislike her, dear; I han't spoke ten words wi' her — she may be very nice — I don't know."

"There's something not very pleasant about her face, don't you think?" said Alice.

"Well, dear, but you *are* sharp; there's no hiding my thoughts from you; but there's many a face we gets used to that doesn't seem so agreeable-like at first. I think this rack'll do very nice for hanging your cloak on," she said, taking it from the young lady's hands. "You're tired a bit, I'm afeard; ye look a bit tired — ye do."

"No, nothing," said her young mistress, "only I can't help feeling sorry for poor old Wyvern and the Squire, old Mr. Fairfield — it seems so unkind; and there was a good deal to think about; and, I don't know how, I feel a little uncomfortable, in spite of so much that should cheer me; and now I must run down and take a cup of tea — come with me to the top of the stairs, and just hold the candle till I have got down."

When she reached the head of the stairs she was cheered by the sound of Charles Fairfield's voice, singing, in his exuberant jollity, the appropriate ditty, "Jenny, put the kettle on, — Barney, blow the bellows strong," &c.

And, hurrying downstairs, she found him ready to make tea, with his hand on the handle of the tea-pot, and the fire brighter than ever.

"Well, you didn't stay very long, good little woman. I was keeping up my spirits with a song; and, in spite of my music, beginning to miss you."

And, meeting her as she entered the room, he led her, with his arm about her waist, to a chair, in which, with a kiss, he placed her.

"All this seems to me like a dream. I can't believe it; but, if it be, woe to the fool who wakes me! No, darling, it's no dream, is it?" he said, smiling, and kissed her again. "The happiest day of *my* life," he said, and through his eyes smiled upon her a flood of the tenderest love.

A little more such talk, and then they sat down to that memorable cup of tea— "the first in our own house."

The delightful independence — the excitement, the importance — *all* our own — cups, spoons, room, servants — and the treasure secured, and the haven of all our hopes no longer doubtful or distant. Glorious, beautiful dream! from which death, wrinkles, duns, are quite obliterated. Sip while you may, your pleasant cup of — madness, from that fragile, pretty china, and may the silver spoon wherewith you stir it, prove to have come into the world at the moment of your birth, where fortune is said to place it sometimes. Next morning the sun shone clear over Carwell Grange, bringing into sharp relief the joints and wrinkles of the old gray masonry, the leaves and tendrils of the ivy, and the tufts of grass which here and there sprout fast in the chinks of the parapet, and casting, with angular distinctness upon the shingled roof, the shadows of the jackdaws that circled about the old chimney. A twittering of small birds fills the air, and the solemn cawing comes mellowed on the ear from the dark rookery at the other side of the ravine, that, crossing at the side of the Grange, debouches on the wider and deeper glen that is known as the Vale of Carwell.

Youth enjoys a change of abode, and with the instinct of change and adventure proper to its energies, delights in a new scene.

Charles Fairfield accompanied his young wife, who was full of curiosity, and her head busy with a hundred plans, as in gay and eager spirits she surveyed her little empire.

“This is the garden — I tell you, lest you should mistake it for the forest where the enchanted princess slept, surrounded by great trees and thickets — it excels even the old garden at Wyvern. There are pear-trees, and plum, and cherry, and apple. Upon my word, I forgot they were so huge, and the jungles are raspberries and gooseberries and currants. Did you ever see such thickets, and nettles between. I’m afraid you’ll not make much of this. When I was a boy those great trees looked as big and mossgrown as they do now, and bore such odd crabbed little fruit, and not much even of that.”

“It will be quite beautiful when it is weeded, and flowers growing in the shade, and climbing plants trained up the stems of the trees, and it shan’t cost us anything; but you’ll see how wonderfully pretty it will be.”

“But what is to become of all your pretty plans, if flowers won’t grow without sun. I defy any fairy — even my own bright little one — to make them grow here; but, if you won’t be persuaded, by all means let us try. I think there’s sunshine wherever you go, and I should not wonder, after all, if nature relented, and beautiful miracles were accomplished under your influence.”

“I know you are laughing at me,” she said.

“No, darling — I’ll never laugh at you — you can make me believe whatever you choose; and now that we have looked over all the wild beauties of our neglected paradise, in which, you good little creature, you are resolved to see all kinds of capabilities and perfections — suppose we go now to the grand review of our goods and chattels, that you planned at breakfast — cups, saucers, plates, knives, forks, spoons, and all such varieties.”

“Oh, yes, let us come, Ry, it will be such fun, and so useful, and old Mrs. Tarnley said she would have a list made out,” said Alice, to whom the new responsibilities and dignities of her married state were full of interest and importance.

So in they came together, and called for old Mildred, with a list of their worldly goods; and they read the catalogue together, with every now and then a peal of irrepressible laughter.

“I had not an idea how near we were to our last cup and saucer,” said Charles, “and the dinner-service is limited to seven plates, two of which are cracked.”

The comic aspect of their poverty was heightened, perhaps, by Mrs. Tarnley’s peculiar spelling. The old woman stood in the doorway of the sitting-room while the revision was proceeding, mightily displeased at this levity, looking more than usually wrinkled and bilious, and rolling her eyes upon them, from time to time, with a malignant ogle.

“I was never good at the pen — I know that — but your young lady desired me, and I did my best, and very des*pick*able it be, no doubt,” said Mildred, with grizzly scorn.

“Oh, my! I am so sorry — I assure you, Mrs. Tarnley — pray tell her, Charlie — we were laughing only at there being so few things left.”

“Left! I don’t know what ye mean by *left*, ma’am — there’s not another woman as ever I saw would keep his bit o’ delf and chaney half as long as me; I never was counted a smasher o’ things — no more I was.”

“But we didn’t think you broke them; did we, Charlie?” appealed poor little Alice, who, being new to authority, was easily bullied.

“Nonsense, old Mildred — don’t be a fool,” said Charles Fairfield, not in so conciliatory a tone as Alice would have wished.

“Well, fool’s easily said, and there’s no lack o’ fools, high or low, Master Charles, and I don’t pretend to be no scholar; but I’ve read that o’er much laughing ends, oft times, in o’er much crying — the Lord keep us all from grief.”

“Hold your tongue — what a bore you are,” exclaimed he, sharply.

Mrs. Tarnley raised her chin, and looked askance, but made no answer, she was bitter.

"Why the devil, old Mildred, can't you try to look pleasant for once?" he persisted. "I believe there's not a laugh *in* you, nor even a smile, is there?"

"I'm not much given to laughin', thankee, sir, and there's people, mayhap, should be less so, if they'd only take warnin', and mind what they seed over night; and if the young lady don't want me no longer, I'd be better back in the kitchen before the chicken burns, for Lilly's out in the garden rootin' out the potatoes for dinner."

And after a moment's silence she dropped a little courtesy, and assuming permission, took her departure.

CHAPTER XIV.

A LETTER.

Alice looked a little paler, her husband a little discontented. Each had a different way of reading her unpleasant speech.

"Don't mind that old woman, darling, don't let her bore you. I do believe she has some as odious faults as are to be found on earth."

"I don't know what she means by a warning," said Alice.

"Nor I, darling, I am sure; perhaps she has had a winding-sheet on her candle, or a coffin flew out of the fire, or a death-watch ticked in the wainscot," he answered.

"A warning, what could she mean?" repeated Alice, slowly, with an anxious gaze in his eyes.

"My darling, how can you? A stupid old woman!" said he a little impatiently, "and thoroughly ill-conditioned. She's in one of her tempers, just because we laughed, and fancied it was at her; and there's nothing she'd like better than to frighten you, if she could. I'll pack her off, if I find her playing any tricks."

"Oh, the poor old thing, not for the world; she'll make it up with me, you'll find; I don't blame her the least, if she thought that, and I'll tell her we never thought of such a thing."

"Don't mind her, she's not worth it — we'll just make out a list of the things that we want; I'm afraid we want a great deal more than we can get, for you have married a fellow, in all things but love, as poor as a church mouse."

He laughed, and kissed her, and patted her smiling cheek.

"Yes, it will be such fun buying these things; such a funny little dinner service, and breakfast things, and how far away is Naunton?"

"I'm not so sure we can get them at Naunton. Things come from London so easily now," said he.

"Oh, but there is such a nice little shop, I remarked it in Naunton," said she, eagerly.

"Oh, is there?" said he, "I forgot, I believe you drove through it."

"I did," she answered, "and the whole pleasure of getting them, would be buying them with you."

"You kind little darling," he said, with a faint smile, "so it would to me, I know, choosing them with you; but are you sure there is a place there?"

"Such a nice little shop, with a great red and blue jug, hanging over the door for a sign," she insisted, cheerily, "and there is something pleasant, isn't there, in the sort of queer rustic things one would meet in such an out-of-the-way place?"

"Yes, so there is, but, however, we'll think about it, and, in fact, it doesn't matter a farthing where we get them."

Our friend Charles seemed put out a little, and his slight unaccountable embarrassment piqued her curiosity, and made her ever so little uncomfortable. She was still, however, a very young wife, and in awe of her husband. It was, therefore, rather timidly that she said, —

"And why, darling Ry, can't we decide now, and go tomorrow, and choose our plates, and cups, and saucers? it would be such a pleasant little adventure to look forward to."

"So it might, but we'll have to make up our minds to have many days go by, and weeks too, here, with nothing pleasant to look forward to. You knew very well," he continued, not so sharply, "when you married me, that I owed money, and was a poor miserable devil, and not my own master, and you really must allow me to decide what is to be done, when a trifle might any day run us into mischief. There now, your eyes are full of tears, how can you be so foolish?"

"But, indeed, Ry, I'm not," she pleaded, smiling through them. "I was only sorry, I was afraid I had vexed you."

"Vexed me! you darling; not the least, I am only teased to think I am obliged to deny you anything, much less to hesitate about gratifying so trifling a wish as this; but so it is, and such my hard fate; and though I seem to be vexed, it is not with you, you must not mistake, *never*, darling, with you; but in proportion as I love you, the sort of embarrassment into which you have ventured with your poor Ry, grieves and even enrages him, and the thought, too, that so small a thing would set it all to rights. But we are not the only people, of course, there are others as badly off, and a great deal worse; there now, darling, you must not cry, you really mustn't; you must never fancy for a moment when anything happens to vex me, that I could be such a brute as to be angry with you; what's to become of me, if you ever suffer such a chimera to enter your pretty little head? I do assure you, darling, I'd rather blow my brains out, than inflict a single unhappy hour upon you; there now, won't you kiss me, and look quite happy again? and come, we'll go out again; you did not see the kennel, and the brewhouse, and fifty other interesting ruins; we must be twice as happy as ever for the rest of the day."

And so this little cloud, light and swift, but still a cloud, blew over, and the sun shone out warm and brilliant again.

The buildings, which enclosed three sides of the quadrangle which they were now examining, were, with the exception of the stables, in such a state of dilapidation as very nearly to justify in sober earnest the term "ruins," which he had half jocularly applied to them.

"You may laugh as you will," said Alice, "but I think this might be easily made quite a beautiful place — prettier even than Wyvern."

"Yes, very easily," he laughed, "if a fellow had two or three thousand pounds to throw away upon it. Whenever I have — and I may yet, — you may restore, and transform, and do what you like, I'll give you *carte blanche*, and in better hands I believe neither house nor money could be placed. No one has such taste — though it is hardly for *me* to say that."

Just at that moment the clank of a horseshoe was heard on the pavement, and, turning his head, Charles saw his man, Tom Sherwood, ride into the yard. Tom touched his hat and dismounted.

"A letter, sir."

"Oh!" said Charles, letting go his wife's arm, and walking quickly towards him.

The man handed him a letter. Alice was standing, forgotten for the time, on the middle of the pavement, while her husband opened and read his letter.

When he had done he turned about and walked a few steps towards her, but still thinking anxiously and plainly not seeing her, and he stopped and read it through again.

"Oh, darling, I beg your pardon, I'm so stupid. What were we talking about? Oh! yes, the house, this old place. If I live to succeed to Wyvern you shall do what you like with this place, and we'll live here if you like it best."

"Well, I don't think I should like to live here always," she said, and paused.

She was thinking of the odd incident of the night before, and there lurked in one dark corner of her mind just the faintest image of horror, very faint, but still genuine, and which, the longer she looked at it grew the darker; "and I was going to ask you if we could change our room."

"I think, darling," said he, looking at her steadily, "the one we have got is almost the only habitable bedroom in the house, and certainly the most comfortable, but if you like any other room better — have you been looking?"

"No, darling, only I'm such a coward, and so foolish; I fancied I saw something when I was going into it last night — old Mrs. Tarnley was quite close to me."

"If you saw *her* it was quite enough to frighten any one. But what was it — robber, or only a ghost?" he asked.

"Neither, only a kind of surprise and a fright. I did not care to talk about it last night, and I thought it would have quite passed away by to-day; but I can't quite get rid of it — and, shall I tell it all to you now?" answered Alice.

"You must tell me all, by-and-by," he laughed; "you shall have any room you like better, only remember they're all equally old; and now, *I* have a secret to tell you. Harry is coming to dine with us; he'll be here at six — and — look here, how oddly my letters come to me."

And he held the envelope he had just now opened by the corner before her eyes. It was thus: —

"Mr. Thomas Sherwood, Post Office, Naunton, To be called for."

"There's evidence of the caution I'm obliged to practise in that part of the world. The world will never be without sin, poverty, and attorneys; and there is a cursed fellow there with eyes wide open and ears erect, and all sorts of poisoned arrows of the law to shoot at poor wayfarers like me; and that's the reason why I'd rather buy our modest teacups in London, and not be so much as heard of in Naunton. Don't look so frightened, little woman, every fellow has a dangerous dun or two, and I'm not half so much in peril as fifty I could name. Only my father's angry, you know, and when that quarrel gets to be known it mayn't help my credit, or make duns more patient. So I must keep well earthed here till the dogs are quiet again; and now, my wise little housekeeper will devise dinner enough for our hungry brother, who will arrive, in two hours' time, with the appetite that Cressley Common gives every fellow with as little to trouble him as Harry has."

CHAPTER XV.

HARRY ARRIVES.

Six o'clock came, and seven, and not until halfpast seven, when they had nearly given him up, did Henry Fairfield arrive at the Grange.

"How does Madam Fairfield?" bawled Master Harry, as he strode across the floor, and kissed Alice's pretty cheek. "Odds bobbins! — as the man says in the playhouse — I believe I bussed ye, did I? But don't let him be angry; I wasn't thinkin', Charlie, no more than the fellow that put farmer Gleeson's fippun-note in his pocket last Trutbury fair. And how's all wi' ye, Charlie, hey? I'm glad to see the old house is standing still with a roof on since last gale. And how do ye like it, Alice? Rayther slow I used to think it; but you two wise heads are so in love wi' one another ye'd put up in the pound, or the cowhouse, or the horse-pond, for sake o' each other's company. 'I loved her sweet company better than meat,' as the song says; and that reminds me — can the house afford a hungry man a cut o' beef or mutton and a mug of ale? I asked myself to dinner, ye know, and that's a bargain there's two words to, sometimes."

Master Harry was a wag, after a clumsy rustic fashion — an habitual jester, and never joked more genially than when he was letting his companion in for what he called a "soft thing," in the shape of an unsound horse or a foolish wager.

His jocularity was supposed to cover a great deal of shrewdness, and some dangerous qualities also.

While their homely dinner was being got upon the table, honest Harry quizzed the lord and lady of Carwell Grange in the same vein of delicate banter, upon all their domestic arrangements, and when he found that there was but one sitting-room in a condition to receive them, his merriment knew no bounds.

"Upon my soul, you beat the cobbler in the song that 'lived in a stall, that served him for parlour, and kitchen, and hall,' for there's no mention of the cobbler's wife, and he, being a single man, you know, you and your lady double the wonder, don't ye, Alice, two faces under a hood, and a devilish pinched little hood, too, heh? ha, ha, ha!"

"When did you get to Wyvern?" asked Charles Fairfield, after a considerable pause.

"Last night," answered his brother.

"You saw the old man?"

"Not till morning," answered Henry, with a waggish leer, and a sly glance at Alice.

It was lost, however, for the young lady was looking dreamily and sadly away, thinking, perhaps, of the old Squire, not without self-upbraidings, and hearing nothing, I am sure, of all they said.

"Did you breakfast with him?"

"By Jove, I did, sir."

"Well?"

"Well? Nothing particular, only let me see how long his stick is — his stick and his arm, together — say five feet six. Well, I counsel you, brother, not to go within five foot six inches of the old gentleman till he cools down a bit, anyhow."

"No, we'll not try that," said Charles, "and he may cool down, as you say, or nurse his wrath, as he pleases, it doesn't much matter to me; he *was* very angry, but sometimes the thunder and flame blow off, you know, and the storm hurts no one."

"I hope so," said Henry, with a sort of laugh. "When I tell you to keep out of the way, mind, I'm advising you against myself. The more you and the old boy wool each other the better for Hal."

"He can't unsettle the place, Harry — not that I want to see him — I never owed him much love, and I think *now* he'd be glad to see me a beggar."

Harry laughed again.

"Did you ever hear of a bear with a sore head?" said Harry. "Well, that's him, at present, and I give you fair notice, I think he'll leave all he can away from you."

"So let him; if it's to you, Harry, I don't grudge it," said the elder son.

"That's a handsome speech, bless the speaker. Can you give me a glass of brandy? This claret I never could abide," said Harry, with another laugh; "besides it will break you."

"I've but two bottles, and they have been three years here. Yes, you can have brandy, it's here."

"I'll get it," said Alice, brightening up in the sense of her housekeeping importance. "It's — I *think* it's in this, ain't it?" she said, opening one of the presses inserted in the wainscot.

"Let me, darling, it's there, I ought to know, I put it there myself," said Charles, getting up, and taking the keys from her and opening another cupboard.

"I'm so stupid!" said Alice, blushing, as she surrendered them, "and so useless; but you're always right, Charlie."

"He's a wonderful fellow, ain't he?" said Harry, winking agreeably at Charles; "I never knew a bran new husband that wasn't. Wait a bit and the gold rubs off the gingerbread — Didn't old Dulcibella — how's she? — never buy you a gingerbread husband down at Wyvern Fair? and they all went, I warrant, the same road; the gilding rubs away, and then off with his head, and eat him up slops! That's not bad cognac — where do you get it? — don't know, of course; well, it *is* good."

"Glad you like it, Harry," said his brother. "It was very kind of you coming over here so soon; you must come often — won't you?"

"Well, you know, I thought I might as well, just to tell you how things was — but, mind, is anyone here?"

He looked over his shoulder to be sure that the old servant was not near.

"Mind you're not to tell the folk over at Wyvern that I came here, because you know it wouldn't serve me, noways, with the old chap up there, and there's no use."

"You may be very easy about that, Harry. I'm a banished man, you know. I shall never see the old man's face again; and rely on it, I shan't write."

"I don't mean him alone," said Harry, replenishing his glass; "but don't tell any of them Wyvern people, nor you, Alice. Mind — I'm going back tonight, as far as Barnsley, and from there I'll go to Dawling, and round, d'ye mind, south, by Leigh Watton, up to Wyvern, and I'll tell him a thumpin' lie if he asks questions."

"Don't fear any such thing, Harry," said Charles.

"Fear! I'm not afeard on him, nor never was."

"Fancy, then," said Charles.

"Only," continued Harry, "I'm not like you — I han't a house and a bit o' land to fall back on; d'ye see? He'd have me on the ropes if I vexed him. He'd slap Wyvern door in my face, and stop my allowance, and sell my horses, and leave me to the 'sizes and the lawyers for my rights; and I couldn't be comin' here spongin' on you, you know."

"You'd always be welcome, Harry," said Charles.

"Always," echoed his wife, in whom everyone who belonged to Charlie had a welcome claim.

But Harry went right on with his speech without diverging to thank them.

"And you'll be snug enough here, you see, and I might go whistle, and dickins a chance I'll ha' left but to go list or break horses, or break stones, by jingo; and I ha' run risks enough in this thing o' yours — not but I'm willin' to run more, if need be; but there's no good in getting myself into pound, you know."

"By me, Harry. You don't imagine I could be such a fool," exclaimed Charles.

"Well, I think ye'll allow I stood to ye like a brick, and didn't funk nothin' that was needful — and I'd do it over again — I would."

Charles took one hand of the generous fellow, and Alice took the other, and the modest benefactor smiled gruffly and flushed a little, and looked down as they poured forth in concert their acknowledgments.

"Why, see how you two thanks me. I always says to fellows, 'keep your thanks to yourselves, and do me a good turn when it lies in your ways.' There's the sort o' thanks that butters a fellow's parsnips — and so — say no more."

CHAPTER XVI.

A PARTY OF THREE.

"I'd tip you a stave, only I've got a hoarseness since yesterday, and I'd ask Alice to play a bit, only there's no piano here to kick up a gingle with, and Charlie never sang a note in his life, and" — standing before the fire, he yawned long and loud— "by Jove, that wasn't over civil of me, but old friends need not be stiff, and I vote we yawn all round for company; and I'll forgive ye, for my hour's come, and I'll be taking the road."

"I wish so much I had a bed to offer you, Harry; but you know all about it — there hasn't been time to arrange anything," said Charles.

"Won't you stay and take some tea?" urged Alice.

"I never could abide it, child; thank ye all the same," said he, "I'd as soon drink a mug o' whey."

"And what about the gray hunter — you did not sell him yet?" asked Charles.

"I don't well know what to do about him," answered his brother. "I'd a sold him for fifty, only old Clinker wouldn't pass him for sound. Clinker and me, we had words about that."

"I want fifty pounds very much, if I could get it," said Charles.

"I never knew a fellow that didn't want fifty very bad, if he could get it," laughed Harry; "but you'll not be doin' that bad, I'm afeard, if ye get half the money."

"The devil! — do you really — why I thought, with luck, I might get seventy. I'm hard up, Harry, and I know you'll do your best for me," said Charles, to whom this was really a serious question.

"And with luck so you might; but chaps isn't easy done these times; and though I swear it's only his mouth, he steps short at the off side, and a fellow with an eye in his head won't mistake his action."

"You will do the best you can for me, Harry, I know," said Charles, who knew nothing about horses, and was lazy in discussion. "But it's rather a blow just now, when a poor devil wants every shilling he can get together, to find himself fifty pounds nearly out of pocket."

Was it fancy, or did Alice's pretty ear hear truly? It seemed to her that the tone in which Charlie spoke was a little more sour than need be, that it seemed to blame her as the cause of altered circumstances, and to hint, though very faintly, an unkind repentance. His eye met hers; full and sad it looked, and his heart smote him, for the intangible reproof was deserved.

"And here's the best little wife in the world," he said, "who would save a lazy man like me a little fortune in a year, and make that unlucky fifty pounds, if I could but get it, do as much as a hundred."

And his hand was fondly placed on her shoulder, as he looked in her loving eyes.

"A good housewife is she, that's something," said Harry, who was inspecting his spur. "Though by Jove it was hardly at Wyvern she learned thrift."

"All the more merit," said Charles, "it's all her wise, good little self."

"No, no; I can't take all that praise; it's your great kindness, Charlie. But I'll try. I'll learn all I can, and I'm sure the real secret is to be very anxious to do it well."

"Ay, to be sure," interrupted Harry, who, having completed his little arrangement, placed his foot again on the ground. "The more you like it the better you'll do it — pare the cheeses, skin the flints, kill the fleas for the hide and tallow, pot the potato-skins, sweat the shillin's and all that, and now I'll be going. Good night, Alice. Will you let Charlie see me down to the end o' the lane, and I'll send him safe back to you? Come along, Charlie. God bless you, girl, and I'll look in again whenever I have a bit o' news to tell ye."

And with that elegant farewell, he shook Alice by the hand and clapped her on the shoulder, and "chucked" her under the chin.

"And don't ye be faint-hearted, mind, 'twill all come right, and I didn't think this place was so comfortable as it is. It is a snug old house with a bit o' coal and a faggot o' wood, and a pair o' bright eyes, and a glass o' that, a man might make shift for a while. I'd do it myself. I didn't think it was so snug by half, and I'd rayther stay here tonight by a long chalk than ride to Barnsley, I can tell ye. Come, Charlie, it's time I should be on the road; and she says, don't you, Alice, you may see me a bit o' the way."

And so the leavetaking came to an end, and Charlie and Harry went out together; and Alice wondered what had induced Harry to come all that way for so short a visit, with so very little to tell. Perhaps, however, his own business, for he was always looking after horses, and thought nothing of five-and-thirty miles, had brought him to the verge of Cressley Common, and if so, he would have come on the few additional miles, if only to bait his horse and get his dinner.

Perhaps the old Squire at Wyvern had broken out more angrily, and was threatening something in which there was real danger to Charlie, which the brothers did not choose to tell her. A kindly secrecy and considerate, but seldom unsuspected, and being so often fifty-fold more torturing than downright ghastly frankness.

There had been a little chill and shadow over the party of three, she thought. Charlie thought his brother Harry the most thorough partisan that ever man had, and the most entirely sympathetic. If that were so, and should not he know best? Harry had certainly laughed and joked after his fashion, and enjoyed himself, and there could not be much wrong. But Charlie — was not there something more upon his mind than she quite knew? She stood too much in awe of her husband to follow them, as she would have wished, and implore of them if there was any new danger to let her hear it all. In her ear was the dismal iteration, as it were, of this little "death-watch," and sighing, she got up and opened the window-shutter and looked out upon the moonlighted scene.

A little platform of grass stood between the wall of the house and the precipitous edge of the vale of Marlow. Tall trees stood lonely and silent sentinels without the old gray walls, and a low ivied parapet guarded the sudden descent of the riven and wooded cliff. The broken screen of the solemn forest foreground showed in the distance the thicker masses of the wood that topped the summit of the further side of that sombre glen. Stiller, sadder scene fancy never painted.

She had opened the shutter, uncertain whether the window commanded the point from which her husband and his brother might be expected to emerge, for the geography of this complicated house was still new to her, and disappointed, she lingered in contemplation of a view which so well accorded with the melancholy of her lonely misgivings.

How soon in the possession of our heart's desire comes the sense of disappointment, and the presence of the worm, and promise of the blight among the flowers of our vernal days. Pitch the tent or drop the anchor where we may, always a new campaign opening, always a new voyage beginning — quiet nowhere.

"I dare say it is only my folly — that nothing has gone wrong, and that they have no secrets to hide from me. I have no one else; he would not shut me out from his confidence, and leave me quite alone. No, Ry, you could not."

With a full heart she turned again from the window.

"He'll come again in a minute; he'll not walk far with Harry."

She went to the door, and opening it, listened. She heard a step enter the passage from the stableyard, and called to ask who was there. It was only Tom, who had let out Master Harry's horse, and opened the gate for him. He led it out, and they walked together — Master Harry with the bridle in his hand, and Master Charles walking beside him. They took the narrow way along the little glen towards Cressley Common.

She knew that he would return probably in a few minutes; and more and more she wondered what those minutes might contain, she partly wondered at her own anxiety. So she returned to the room and waited there for him. But he remained longer away than she expected. The teathings were on the table deserted. The fire flickered its genial invitation in vain, and she, growing more uncomfortable and lonely, and perhaps a little high at being thus forsaken, went upstairs to pay old Dulcibella Crane a visit.

CHAPTER XVII.

MILDRED TARNLEY'S WARNING STORY.

As she reached the top of the stairs she called to the old servant, not, I think, caring to traverse the haunted flooring that intervened alone. She heard Dulcibella talking, and a moment after her old nurse appeared, and standing by her shoulder Mildred Tarnley.

"Oh, Mrs. Tarnley! I'm so glad to see you — you've been paying Dulcibella a visit. Pray, come back, and tell me some stories about this old house; you've been so long here, and know it so well, that you must have a great deal to tell."

The old woman, with the unpleasant face, made a stiff courtesy.

"At your service, ma'am," she said, ungraciously.

"That is if it don't inconvenience you," pleaded Alice, who was still a little afraid of her.

"'Tis as you please, ma'am," said the old servant, with another dry courtesy.

"Well, I'm so glad you can come. Dulcibella, have we a little bit of fire? Oh, yes, I see — it looks so cheerful."

So they entered the oldfashioned bedroom.

"I hope, Mrs. Tarnley, I'm not keeping you from your tea?"

"No, I thank ye, ma'am. I've 'ad my tea an hour agone," answered the old woman.

"And you must sit down, Mrs. Tarnley," urged Alice.

"I'll stand, if ye please, ma'am," said the withered figure perversely.

"I should be so much happier if you would sit down, Mildred," urged her young mistress; "but if you prefer it — I only mean that whatever is most comfortable to you you should do. I wanted so much to hear something about this old house. You remember what happened when I was coming upstairs with you — when I was so startled."

"I didn't see it, miss — ma'am. I only heard you say summat," answered Mildred Tarnley.

“Oh, yes, I know; but you spoke to-day of a warning, and you looked when it happened as if you had heard of it before.”

The old woman raised her chin, and with her hands folded together made another courtesy, which mutually seemed to say, —

“If you have anything to ask, ask it.”

“Do you remember,” inquired Alice, “having ever heard of anything strange being seen at that passage near the head of the stairs?”

“I ought, ma’am,” answered the old woman discreetly.

“And what was it?” inquired Alice.

“I don’t know, ma’am, would the master be pleased if he was to hear I was talkin’ o’ such things to you,” suggested Mildred.

“He’d only laugh as I should, I assure you. I’m not the least a coward; so you need not be afraid of my making a fool of myself. Now, do tell me what it was!”

“Well, ma’am, you’ll be pleased to remember ’tis you orders me, in case Master Charles should turn on me about it; but, as you say, ma’am, there’s many thinks ’tis all nothin’ but old ‘oman’s tales and fribble-frabble; and ’tisn’t for me to say — — “

“I’ll take all the blame to myself,” said Alice.

“There’s no blame in’t as I’m aware on; and if there was I wouldn’t ask no one to take it on themselves more than their right share; and that I’d take leave to lay on them myself, without stoppin’ to ask whether they likes it or no; but only I told you, ma’am, that I should have your orders, and wi’ them I’ll comply.”

“Yes, certainly, Mrs. Tarnley — and now do kindly go on,” said Alice.

“Well, please, ma’am, you’ll tell me what you saw?”

“A heavy black drapery fell from the top of the arch through which we pass to the gallery outside the door, and for some seconds closed up the entire entrance,” answered the young lady.

“Ay, ay, no doubt that’s it; but there was no drapery there, ma’am, sich as this world’s loom ever wove. Them as weaves that web is light o’ hand and heavy o’ heart, and the de’el himself speeds the shuttle,” and as she said this the old woman smiled sourly. “I was talking o’ that very thing to Mrs. Crane here when you came up, ma’am.”

“Yes,” said old Dulcibella, quietly; “it was very strange, surely.”

“And there came quite a cloud of dust from it rolling along the floor,” continued Alice.

“Yes, so there would — so there does; ’tis always so,” said Mrs. Tarnley, with the same faint ugly smile; “not that there’s a grain o’ dust in all the gallery, for the child Lily Dogger and me washed it out and swept it clean. Dust ye saw; but that’s no real dust, like what the minister means when he says, ‘Dust to dust.’ No, no, a finer dust by far — the dust o’ death. No more clay in that than in yon smoke, or the mist in Carwell Glen below; no dust at all, but sich dust as a ghost might shake from its windin’ sheet — an appearance, ye understand; that’s all, ma’am — like the rest.”

Alice smiled, but old Mildred’s answering smile chilled her, and she turned to Dulcibella; but good Mrs. Crane looked in her face with round eyes of consternation and a very solemn countenance.

“I see, Dulcibella, if my courage fails I’m not to look to you for support. Well, Mrs. Tarnley, don’t mind — I shan’t need her help; and I’m not a bit afraid, so pray go on.”

“Well, ye see, ma’am, this place and the house came into the family, my grandmother used to say, more than a hundred years ago; and I was a little thing when I used to hear her say so, and there’s many a year added to the tale since then; but it was in the days o’ Sir Harry Fairfield. They called him Harry Boots in his day, for he was never seen except in his boots, and for the matter o’ that seldom out o’ the saddle; for there was troubles in them days, and militia and yeomanry, and dear knows what all — and the Fairfields was ever a bold, daredevil stock, and them dangerous times answered them well — and what with dragooning, and what with the hunting-field, I do suppose his foot was seldom out o’ the stirrup. So my grandmother told me some called him Booted Fairfield and more called him Harry Boots — that was Sir Harry Fairfield o’ them days.”

“I think I’ve seen his picture, haven’t I? — at Wyvern. It’s in the hall, at the far end from the door, near the window, with a long wig and lace cravat, and a great steel breast-plate?” inquired Alice.

“Like enough, miss — ma’am, I mean — I don’t know, I’m sure — but he was a great man in his time, and would have his picture took, no doubt. His wife was a Carwell — an heiress — there’s not a Carwell in this country now, nor for many a day has been. ’Twas she brought Carwell Grange and the Vale o’ Carwell to the Fairfields — poor thing — pretty she was. Her picture was never took to Wyvern, and much good her land, and houses, and good looks done her. The Fairfields was wild folk. I don't say there wasn't good among 'em, but whoever else they was good to, they was seldom kind to their wives. Hard, bad husbands they was — that's sure."

Alice smiled, and stirred the fire quietly, but did not interrupt, and as the story went on, she sighed.

"They said she was very lonesome here. Well, it is a lonesome place, you know — awful lonesome, and always the same. For old folk like me it doesn't matter, but young blood's different, you know, and they likes to see the world a bit, and talk and hear what's a-foot, be it fun or change, or what not; and she was very lonesome, mopin' about the old garden, plantin' flowers, or pluckin' roses — all to herself — or cryin' in the window — while Harry Boots was away wi' his excuses — now wi' his sogerin', and now wi' the hounds, and truly wi' worse matters, if all were out. So, not twice in a year was his face — handsome Harry Boots, they ca'd him — seen down here, and his pretty lady was sick and sore and forsaken, down in her own lonesome house, by the Vale of Carwell, where I'm telling you this."

Alice smiled, and nodded in sign of attention, and the old woman went on.

"I often wonder they try to hide these things— 'twould be better sometimes they were more outspoken, for sooner or later all will out, and then there's wild work, and mayhap it's past ever makin' up between them. So stories travel a'most without legs to carry 'em, and there's no gainsaying the word o' God that said, 'let there be light,' for, sooner or later, light 'twill be, and all will be cleared up, and the wicked doin's of Harry Boots, far away, and cunning, as all was done, come clear to light, so as she could no longer have hope or doubt in the matter. Poor thing — she loved him better than life — better than her soul, mayhap, and that's all she got by't — a bad villain that was."

"He was untrue to her?" said Alice.

"Lawk! to be sure he was," replied Mrs. Tarnley, with a cynical scorn.

"And so she had that to think of all alone, along with the rest — for she might have had a greater match than Sir Harry — a lord he was. I forget his name, but he'd a given his eyes a'most to a got her. But a' wouldn't do, for she loved Booted Harry Fairfield, and him she'd have, and wouldn't hear o' no other, and so she had enough to think on here, in Carwell Grange. The house she had brought the Fairfields — poor bird alone, as we used to say — but the rest of her time wasn't very long — it wasn't to be — she used to walk out sometimes, but she talked to no one, and she cared for nothin' after that; and there's the long sheet o' water, in the thick o' the trees, with the black yew-hedge round it."

"I know," said Alice, "a very high hedge, and trees behind it — it is the darkest place I ever saw — beyond the garden. Isn't that the place?"

"Yes, that's it; she used to walk round it — sometimes cryin' — sometimes not; and there she was found drowned, poor thing. Some said 'twas by mischance, for the bank was very steep and slippery — it had been rainy weather — where she was found, and more said she made away wi' herself, and that's what was thought among the Carwell folk, as my grandmother heared; for what's a young creature to do wi' nothing more to look to, and all alone, wi' no one ever to talk to, and the heart quite broke?"

"You said, I think, that there was a picture here?" inquired Alice.

"I said 'twasn't took to Wyvern, ma'am; there was a picture here they said 'twas hers — my grandmother said so, and she should know. 'Twas the only picture I remember in the Grange."

"And where is it?" inquired Alice.

"Dropped to pieces long ago. 'Twas in the room they called the gunroom, in my day. The wall was damp; 'twas gone very poor and rotten in my time, and so black you could scarce make it out. Many a time when I was a bit of a girl, some thirteen or fourteen years old, I stood on the table, for a long time together a-looking at it. But it was dropping away that time in flakes, and the canvas as rotten as tinder, and every time it got a stir it lost something, till ye couldn't make nothing of it. It's all gone long ago, and the frame broke up I do suppose."

"What a pity!" said Alice. "Oh, what a pity! Can you, do you think, remember anything of it?"

"She was standin' — you could see the point o' the shoe — white satin it looked like, wi' a buckle that might be diamonds; there was a nosegay, I mind, in her fingers, wi' small blue flowers, and a rose, but the face was all faded and dark, except just a bit o' the mouth, red, and smilin' at the corner — very pretty. But 'twas all gone very dark, you know, and a deal o' the paintin' gone; and that's all I ever seen o' the picture."

“Well, and did anything more happen?” asked Alice.

“Hoo! yes, lots. Down comes Booted Fairfield, now there was no one left to care whether he came or went. The Carwell people didn’t love him, but ’twas best to keep a civil tongue, for the Fairfields were dangerous folk always, ’twas a word and a blow wi’ them, and no one cared to cross them, and he made a pother about it to be sure, and had the rooms hung wi’ black, and the staircase and the drapery hung over the arch in the gallery, outside, down to the floor, for she, poor thing, lay up here.”

“Not in this room!” said Alice, who even at that distance of time did not care to invade the sinister sanctity of the lady’s room.

“No, not this, the room at t’other end o’ the gallery; ‘t would require a deal o’ doing up, and plaster, and paper, before you could lie in’t. But Harry Boots made a woundy fuss about his dead wife. They was cunning after a sort, them Fairfields, and I suppose he thought ’twas best to make folk think he loved his wife, at least to give ‘em something good to say o’ him if they liked, and he gave alms to the poor, and left a good lump o’ money they say for the parish, both at Cressley Church and at Carwell Priory — they call the vicarage so — and he had a grand funeral as ever was seen from the Grange, and she was buried down at the priory, which the Carwells used to be, in a new vault, where she was laid the first, and has been the last, for Booted Fairfield married again, and was buried with his second wife away at Wyvern. So the poor thing, living and dying, has been to herself.”

“But is there any story to account for what I saw as I came into the gallery with you?” asked Alice.

“I told you, miss, it was hung with black, as I heard my grandmother say, and thereupon the story came, for there was three ladies of the Fairfield family at different times before you, ma’am, as saw the same thing. Well, ma’am, at the funeral, as I’ve heard say, the young lord that liked her well, if she’d a had him — and liked her still in spite of all — gave Sir Harry a lick or two wi’ the rough side o’ his tongue, and a duel came out o’ them words more than a year afterwards, and Harry Boots was killed, and he’s buried away down at Wyvern.”

“Well, see there! Ain’t it a wonder how gentlemen that has all this world can give, will throw away their lives at a word, like that,” moralized Dulcibella Crane— “and not knowing what’s to become o’ them, when they’ve lost all here — all in the snap of a pistol. If it was a poor body, ‘twould be another matter, but — well it does make a body stare.”

“You mentioned, Mrs. Tarnley, that something had occurred about some ladies of the Fairfield family; what was it?” inquired Alice.

“Well, they say Sir Harry — that’s Booted Fairfield, you know — brought his second wife down here, only twelve months after the first one died, and she saw, at the very same place, when she was setting her first step on the gallery, the same thing ye seen yourself; and two months after he was in his grave, and she in a madhouse.”

“Well, I think, Mrs. Tarnley, ye needn’t be tellin’ all that to frighten the young lady.”

“Frighten the young lady? And why not, if she’s frighted wi’ truth. She has asked for the truth, and she’s got it. Better to fright the young lady than fool her,” answered Mildred Tarnley coldly and sternly.

“I don’t say you should fool her, by no chance,” answered honest Dulcibella; “but there’s no need to be filling her head wi’ them frightful fancies. Ye ha’ scared her, and ye saw her turn pale.”

“Ay, and so well she ought. There was three other women o’ the Fairfields seen the same thing, in the selfsame place, and everyone to her sorrow. One fell over the pixie’s cliff; another died in fits, poor thing, wi’ her first baby; and the last was flung beside the quarry in Cressley Common, ridin’ out to see the hunt, and was never the better o’t in brain or bone after. Don’t tell me, woman. I know rightly what I’m doin’.”

“Pray, Dulcibella, don’t. I assure you, Mrs. Tarnley, I’m very much obliged,” interposed Alice Fairfield, frighted at the malignant vehemence of the old woman.

“Obliged! Not you; why should you?” retorted Mildred Tarnley. “Ye’re not obliged; ye’re frightened, I dare say. But ’tis all true; and no Fairfield has any business bringing his wife to Carwell Grange; and Master Charles knows that as well as me; and, now, the long and the short o’t ‘s this, ma’am — ye’ve got your warning, and ye had better quit this without letting grass grow under your feet. You’ve seen your warnin’, ma’am, and I a’ told you, stark enough, the meanin’ o’t. My conscience is clear, and ye’ll do as ye like; and if, after this, ye expect me to spy for you, and fetch and carry stories, and run myself into trouble with other people, to keep you out of it, ye’re clean out o’ your reckoning. Ye’ll have no more warnings, mayhap — none from me — and so ye may take it, ma'am, or leave it, as ye see fit; and now Mildred Tarnley's said her say. Ye have my story, and ye have my counsel; and if ye despise both one and t'other, and your own eyesight beside, ye'll even take what's coming."

"Ye shouldn't be frightening Miss Alice like that, I tell you, you should not. Don't grow frightened at any such a story, dear. I say it's a shame. Don't you see how ye have her as white as a handkercher, in a reg'lar state."

"No, Dulcibella, indeed," said Alice, smiling, very pale, and her eyes filled up with tears.

"I'll frighten her no more; and that you may be sure on; and if what I told her be frightful, 'tisn't me as made it so. Thankless work it be; but 'tisn't her nor you I sought to please, but just to take it off my shoulders, and leave her none to blame but herself if she turns a deaf ear. It's ill offering counsel to a wilful lass. Ye'll excuse me, ma'am, for speaking so plain, but better now than too late," she added, recollecting herself a little. "And can I do anything, please, ma'am, below stairs? I should be going, for who knows what that child may be a-doing all this time?"

"Thanks, very much; no, not anything," said Alice.

And Mildred Tarnley, with a hard, dark glance at her, dropped another stiff little courtesy, and withdrew.

"Well, I never see such a one as that," said old Dulcibella, gazing after her, as it were through the panel of the door. "You must not let her talk that way to you, my darling. She's no business to talk up to her mistress that way. I don't know what sort o' manners people has in these here out o' the way places, I'm sure; but I think ye'll do well, my dear, to keep that one at arm's length, and make her know her place. Nothing else but encroaching and impudence, and domineering from such as her, and no thanks for any condescension, only the more affable you'll be, the more saucy and conceited she'll grow, and I don't think she likes you, Miss Alice, no more I do."

It pains young people, and some persons always, to hear from an impartial observer such a conclusion. There is much mortification, and often some alarm.

"Well, it doesn't much matter," said Alice. "I don't think she can harm me much. I don't suppose she would if she could, and I don't mind such stories.”

“Why should you, my dear? No one minds the like now-a-days.”

“But I wish she liked me; there are so few of us here. It is such a little world, and I have never done anything to vex her. I can’t think what good it can do her hating me.”

“No good, dear; but she’s bin here so long — the only hen in the house, and she doesn’t like to be drove off the roost, I suppose; and I don’t know why she told you all that, if it wasn’t to make your mind uneasy; and, dear knows, there’s enough to trouble it in this moping place without her riggamarolin’ sich a yarn.”

“Hush, Dulcibella; isn’t that a horse? Perhaps Charles is coming home.”

She opened the window, which commanded a view of the stableyard.

“And is he gone ariding?” asked old Dulcibella.

“No; there’s nothing,” said Alice, gently. “Besides, you remind me he did not take a horse; he only walked a little way with Mr. Henry; and he’ll soon be back. Nothing is going wrong, I hope.”

And, with a weary sigh, she threw herself into a great chair by the fire; and thought, and listened, and dreamed away a long time, before Charlie’s step and voice were heard again in the old house.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BROTHERS' WALK.

When the host and his guest had gone out together, to the paved yard, it was already night, and the moon was shining brilliantly.

Tom had saddled the horse, and at the first summons led him out; and Harry, with a nod and a grin, for he was more prodigal of his smiles than of his shillings, took the bridle from his fingers, and with Charlie by his side, walked forth silently from the yard gate, upon that dark and rude track which followed for some distance the precipitous edge of the ravine which opens upon the deeper glen of Carwell.

Very dark was this narrow road, overhung and crossed by towering trees, through whose boughs only here and there an angular gleam, or minute mottling of moonlight hovered and floated on the white and stony road, with the uneasy motion of the branches, like little flights of quivering wings.

There was a silence corresponding with this darkness. The clank of the horse's hoof, and their own more muffled tread were the only sounds that mingled with the sigh and rustle of the boughs above them. The one was expecting, the other meditating, no very pleasant topic, and it was not the business of either to begin, for a little.

They were not walking fast. The horse seemed to feel that the human wayfarers were in a sauntering mood, and fell accommodatingly into a lounging gait like theirs.

If there were eyes there constructed to see in the dark, they would have seen two countenances, one sincere, the other adjusted to that sort of sham sympathy and regret, which Hogarth, with all his delicacy and power, portrays in the paternal alderman who figures in the last picture of "Marriage à la Mode."

There was much anxiety in Charles' face, and a certain brooding shame and constraint which would have accounted for his silence. In that jolly dog, Harry, was discoverable, as I have said, quite another light and form of countenance. There was a face that seemed to have discharged a smile, that still would not quite go. The eyelids drooped, the eyebrows raised, a simulated condolence, such as we all have seen.

In our moral reviews of ourselves we practise optical delusions even upon our own self-scrutiny, and paint and mask our motives, and fill our ears with excuses and with downright lies. So inveterate is the habit of deceiving, and even in the dark we form our features by hypocrisy, and scarcely know all this.

“Here’s the turn at last to Cressley Common; there’s no talking comfortably among these trees; it’s so dark, anyone might be at your elbow and you know nothing about it — and so the old man is very angry.”

“Never saw a fellow so riled,” answered Harry; “you know what he is when he is riled, and I never saw him so angry before. If he knew I was here — but you’ll take care of me?”

“It’s very kind of you, old fellow; I won’t forget it, indeed I won’t, but I ought to have, thought twice: I ought not to have brought poor Alice into this fix; for d —— me, if I know how we are to get on.”

“Well, you know, it’s only just a pinch, an ugly corner, and you are all right — it can’t last.”

“It may last ten years, or twenty for that matter,” said Charlie. “I was a fool to sell out. I don’t know what we are to do; do you?”

“You’re too down in the mouth; can’t ye wait and see? there’s nothing yet, and it won’t cost ye much carrying on down here.”

“Do you think, Harry, it would be well to take up John Wauling’s farm, and try whether I could not make something of it in my own hands?” asked Charles.

Harry shook his head.

“You don’t?” said Charlie.

“Well, no, I don’t; you’d never make the rent of it,” answered Harry; “besides, if you begin upsetting things here, the people will begin to talk, and that would not answer; you’ll need to be d —— d quiet.”

There was here a pause, and they walked on in silence until the thick shadows of the trees began to break a little before them, and the woods grew more scattered; whole trees were shadowed in distinct outline, and the wide common of Cressley, with its furze and fern, and broad undulations, stretched mistily before them.

"About money — you know, Charlie, there's money enough at present and no debts to signify; I mean, if you don't make them you needn't. You and Alice, with the house and garden, can get along on a trifle. The tenants give you three hundred a year, and you can manage with two."

"Two hundred a year!" exclaimed Charlie, opening his eyes.

"Ay, two hundred a year! — that girl don't eat sixpenn'orth in a day," said Harry.

"Alice is the best little thing in the world, and will look after everything, I know; but there are other things beside dinner and breakfast," said Charles, who did not care to hear his wife called "that girl."

"Needs must when the Devil drives, my boy; you'll want a hundred every year for contingencies," said Harry.

"Well, I suppose so," Charles winced, "and all the more need for a few more hundreds; for I don't see how anyone could manage to exist on such a pittance."

"You'll have to contrive though, my lad, unless they'll manage a *post obit* for you," said Harry.

"There is some trouble about that, and people are such d —— d screws," said Charles, with a darkening face.

"Al'ays was and ever will be," said Harry, with a laugh.

"And it's all very fine talking of a 'hundred a year,' but *you* know and *I* know that won't do, and never did," exclaimed Charles, breaking forth bitterly, and then looking hurriedly over his shoulder.

"Upon my soul, Charlie, I don't know a curse about it," answered Harry, goodhumouredly; "but if it won't do, it won't, that's certain."

"Quite certain," said Charles, and sighed very heavily; and again there was a little silence.

"I wish I was as sharp a fellow as you are, Harry," said Charles, regretfully.

"Do you really think I'm a sharp chap — do you though? I al'ays took myself for a bit of a muff, except about cattle — I did, upon my soul," said Harry, with an innocent laugh.

"You are a long way a cleverer fellow than I am, and you are not half so lazy; and tell me what you'd do if you were in my situation?"

"What would I do if I was in your place?" said Harry, looking up at the stars, and whistling low for a minute.

"Well, I couldn't tell you offhand; 'twould puzzle a better man's head for a bit to answer that question — only I can tell you one thing, I'd never agone into that situation, as ye call it, at no price; 'twouldn't 'av answered me by no chance. But don't you be putting your finger in your eye yet a bit; there's nothing to cry about now that I knows of; time enough to hang your mouth yet, only I thought I might as well come over and tell you."

"I knew, Harry, there was something to tell," said Charles.

"Not over much — only a trifle when all's told," answered Harry; "but you are right, for it was that brought me over here. I was in Lon'on last week, and I looked in at the place at Hoxton, and found just the usual thing, and came away pretty much as wise as I went in."

"Not more reasonable?" asked Charles.

"Not a bit," said Harry.

"Tell me what you said," asked Charles.

"Just what we agreed," he answered.

"Well, there was nothing in that that was not kind and conciliatory, and common sense — was there?" pleaded Charles.

"It did not so seem to strike the plenipotentiary," said Harry.

"You seem to think it very pleasant," said Charles.

"I wish it was pleasanter," said Harry; "but pleasant or no, I must tell my story straight. I ran in in a hurry, you know, as if I only wanted to pay over the twenty pounds — you mind."

"Ay," said Charles, "I wish to heaven I had it back again."

"Well, I don't think it made much difference in the matter of love and liking, I'll not deny; but I looked round, and I swore I wondered anyone would live in such a place when there were so many nice places where money would go three times as far in foreign countries; and I wondered you did not think of it, and take more interest yourself, and upon that I could see the old soger was thinking of fifty things, suspecting poor me of foul play among the number; and I was afraid for a minute I was going to have half a dozen claws in my smeller; but I turned it off, and I coaxed and wheedled a bit. You'd a laughed yourself black, till I had us both a purring like a pair of old maid's cats."

"I tell you what, Harry, there's madness there — literal madness," said Charles, grasping his arm as he stopped and turned towards him, so that

Harry had to come also to a standstill. “Don’t you know it — as mad as Bedlam? Just think!”

Harry laughed.

“Mad enough, by jingo,” said he.

“But don’t you think so — actually mad?” repeated Charles.

“Well, it is near the word, maybe, but I would not say quite mad — worse than mad, I dare say, by chalks; but I wouldn’t place the old soger there,” said Harry.

“Where?” said Charles.

“I mean exactly among the mad ‘uns. No, I wouldn’t say mad, but as vicious — and worse, mayhap.”

“It does not matter much what we think, either of us; but I know what another fellow would have done long ago, but I could not bring myself to do that. I have thought it over often, but I couldn’t — I couldn’t.”

“Well, then, it ain’t no great consequence,” said Harry, and he tightened his saddle-girth a hole or two— “no great consequence; but I couldn’t a’ put a finger to that — mind; for I think the upperworks is as sound as any, only there’s many a devil beside mad ‘uns. I give it in to you there.”

“And what do you advise me to do? — this sort of thing is dreadful,” said Charles.

“I was going to say, I think the best thing to be done is just to leave all that business, d’ye mind, to me.”

Harry mounted, and leaning on his knee, he said, —

“I think I have a knack, if you leave it to me. Old Pipeclay doesn’t think I have any reason to play false.”

“Rather the contrary,” said Charles, who was attentively listening.

“No interest at all,” pursued Harry, turning his eyes towards the distant knoll of Torston, and going on without minding Charles’ suggestion, —

“Look, now, that beast’ll follow my hand as sweet as sugary-candy, when you’d have nothing but bolting and baulking, and rearin’, or worse. There’s plenty o’ them little French towns or German — and don’t you be botherin’ your head about it; only do just as I tell ye, and I’ll take all in hands.”

“You’re an awfully good fellow, Harry; for, upon my soul, I was at my wit’s end almost; having no one to talk to, and not knowing what anyone might be thinking of; and I feel safe in your hands, Harry, for I think you understand that sort of work so much better than I do — you understand people so much better — and I never was good at managing anyone, or anything for that matter; and — and when will business bring you to town again?"

"Three weeks or so, I wouldn't wonder," said Harry.

"And I know, Harry, you won't forget me. I'm afraid to write to you almost; but if you'd think of any place we could meet and have a talk, I'd be ever so glad. You have no idea how fidgety and miserable a fellow grows that doesn't know what's going on."

"Ay, to be sure; well, I've no objection. My book's made for ten days or so — a lot of places to go to — but I'll be coming round again, and I'll tip you a stave."

"That's a good fellow; I know you won't forget me," said Charles, placing his hand on his brother's arm.

"No — of course. Goodnight, and take care of yourself, and give my love to Ally."

"And — and Harry?"

"Well?" answered Harry, backing his restless horse a little bit.

"I believe that's all."

"Goodnight, then."

"Goodnight," echoed Charles.

Harry touched his hat with a smile, and was away the next moment, flying at a ringing trot over the narrow unfenced road that traverses the common, and dwindling in the distant moonlight.

"There he goes — light of heart; nothing to trouble him — life a holiday — the world a toy."

He walked a little bit slowly in the direction of the disappearing horseman, and paused again, and watched him moodily till he was fairly out of sight.

"I hope he won't forget; he's always so busy about those stupid horses — a lot of money he makes, I dare say. I wish I knew something about them. I must beat about for some way of turning a penny. Poor little Alice! I hope I have not made a mull of it? I'll save every way I can — of course that's due to her; but when you come to think of it, and go over it all, there's very little you *can* give up. You can lay down your horses, if you have them, except one. You must have *one* in a place like this — you'd run a risk of starving, or never getting your letters, or dying for want of the doctor. And — I won't drink wine; brandy, or Old Tom does just as well, and I'll give up smoking *totally*. A fellow must make sacrifices. I'll just work through this one box slowly, and order no more; it's all a habit, and I'll give it up."

So he took a cigar from his case, and lighted it.

"I'll not spend another pound on them, and the sooner these are out the better."

He sauntered slowly away with his hands in his pockets to a little eminence about a hundred yards to the right, and mounted it, and looked all around, smoking. I don't think he saw much of that extensive view; but you would have fancied him an artist in search of the picturesque.

His head was full of ideas of selling Carwell Grange; but he was not quite sure that he had power, and did not half like asking his attorney, to whom he already owed something. He thought how snug and pleasant they might be comparatively in one of those quaint little toy towns in Germany, where dull human nature bursts its cerements, and floats and flutters away into a butterfly life of gold and colour — where the punter and the croupier assist at the worship of the brilliant and fickle goddess, and bands play sweetly, and people ain't buried alive in deserts and forests among dogs and "chaw-bacons" — where little Alice would be all wonder and delight. Was it quite fair to bring her down here, to immure her in the mouldering cloister of Carwell Grange?

He had begun now to reenter the wooded ascent toward that melancholy mansion; his cigar was burnt out, and he said, looking toward his home through the darkness, —

"Poor little Alice! she does love me, I think — and that's something."

CHAPTER XIX.

COMING IN.

When at last her husband entered the room where she awaited him that night, —

"Oh! Charlie, it is very late," said Alice, a little reproachfully.

"Not very, is it, darling?" said he, glancing at his watch. "By Jove! it is. My poor little woman, I had not an idea."

"I suppose I am very foolish, but I love you so much, Charlie, that I grow quite miserable when I am out of your sight."

"I'm sorry, my darling, but I fancied he had a great deal more to tell me than he really had. I don't think I'm likely, at least for a little time, to be pressed by my duns — and — I wanted to make out exactly what money he's likely to get me for a horse he is going to sell, and I'm afraid, from what he says, it won't be very much; really, twenty pounds, one way or other, seems ridiculous, but it does make a very serious difference just now, and if I hadn't such a clever, careful little woman as you, I don't really know what I should do."

He added this little complimentary qualification with an instinctive commiseration for the pain he thought he saw in her pretty face.

"These troubles won't last very long, Charlie, *perhaps*. Something, I'm sure, will turn up, and you'll see how careful I will be. I'll learn everything old Mildred can teach me, ever so much, and you'll see what a manager I will be."

"You are my own little treasure. You always talk as if you were in the way, somehow, I don't know how. A wife like you is a greater help to me than one with two thousand a year and the reckless habits of a fine lady. Your wise little head and loving heart, my darling, are worth whole fortunes to me without them, and I do believe you are the first really good wife that ever a Fairfield married. You are the only creature I have on earth, that I'm quite sure of — the only creature."

And so saying he kissed her, folding her in his arms, and, with a big tear filling each eye, she looked up, smiling unutterable affection, in his face. As they stood together in that embrace his eyes also filled with tears and his smile met hers, and they seemed wrapt for a moment in one angelic glory, and she felt the strain of his arm draw her closer.

Such moments come suddenly and are gone; but, remaining in memory, they are the lights that illuminate a dark and troublous retrospect for ever.

"We'll make ourselves happy here, little Ally, and I — in spite of everything, my darling! — and I don't know how it happened that I staid away so long; but I walked with Harry further than I intended, and when he left me I loitered on Cressley Common for a time with my head full of business; and so, without knowing it, I was filling my poor little wife's head with alarms and condemning her to solitude. Well, all I can do is to promise to be a good boy and to keep better hours for the future."

"That's so like you, you are so good to your poor, foolish little wife," said Alice.

"I wish I could be, darling," said he; "I wish I could prove one-half my love; but the time will come yet. I shan't be so poor or powerless always."

"But you're not to speak so — you're not to think that. It is while we are poor that I can be of any use," she said, eagerly; "very little, very miserable my poor attempts, but nothing makes me so happy as trying to deserve ever so little of all the kind things my Ry says of me; and I'm sure, Charlie, although there may be cares and troubles, we will make our time pass here very happily, and perhaps we shall always look back on our days at Carwell as the happiest of our lives."

"Yes, darling, I am determined we shall be very happy," said he.

"And Ry will tell me everything that troubles him?"

Her full eyes were gazing sadly up in his face. He averted his eyes, and said, —

"Of course I will, darling."

"Oh! Ry, if you knew how happy that makes me!" she exclaimed. But there was that in the exclamation which seemed to say, "if only I could be sure that you meant it."

"Of course I will — that is, everything that could possibly interest you, for there are very small worries as well as great ones; and you know I really can't undertake to remember everything."

"Of course, darling," she answered; "I only meant that if anything were really — any great anxiety — upon your mind, you would not be afraid to tell me. I'm not such a coward as I seem. You must not think me so foolish; and really, Ry, it pains me more to think that there is any anxiety weighing upon you, and concealed from me, than any disclosure could; and so I *know* — won't you?"

"Haven't I told you, darling, I really will," he said, a little pettishly. "What an odd way you women have of making a fellow say the same thing over and over again. I wonder it does not tire you, I know it does *us* awfully. Now, there, see, I really do believe you are going to cry."

"Oh, no, indeed!" she said, brightening up, and smiling with a sad, little effort.

"And now, kiss me, my poor, good little woman, — you're not vexed with me? — no, I'm sure you're not," said he.

She smiled a very affectionate assurance.

"And really, you poor little thing, it is awfully late, and you must be tired, and I've been — no, *not* lecturing, I'll never lecture, I hate it — but boring or teasing; I'm an odious dog, and I hate myself."

So this little dialogue ended happily, and for a time Charles Fairfield forgot his anxieties, and a hundred pleasanter cares filled his young wife's head.

In such monastic solitudes as Carwell Grange the days pass slowly, but the retrospect of a month or a year is marvellously short. Twelve hours without an event is very slow to get over. But that very monotony, which is the soul of tediousness, robs the background of all the irregularities and objects which arrest the eye and measure distance in review, and thus it cheats the eye.

An active woman may be well content with an existence of monotony which would all but stifle even an indolent man. So long as there is a household — ever so frugal — to be managed, and the more frugal the more difficult and harassing — the female energies are tasked, and healthily because usefully exercised. But in this indoor administration the man is incompetent and in the way. His ordained activities are out of doors; and if these are denied him, he mopes away his days and feels that he cumbers the ground.

With little resource but his fishing-rod, and sometimes, when a fit of unwonted energy inspired him, his walking-stick, and a lonely march over the breezy expanse of Cressley Common, days, weeks, and months, loitered their drowsy way into the past.

There were reasons why he did not care to court observation. Under other circumstances he would have ridden into the neighbouring towns and heard the news, and lunched with a friend here or there. But he did not want anyone to know that he was at the Grange; and if it should come out that he had been seen there, he would have had it thought that it was but a desultory visit.

A man less indolent, and perhaps not much more unscrupulous, would have depended upon a few offhand lies to account for his appearance, and would not have denied himself an occasional excursion into human society in those rustic haunts within his reach. But Charles Fairfield had not decision to try it, nor resource for a system of fibbing, and the easiest and dullest course he took.

In Paradise the man had his business— “to dress and to keep” the garden — and, no doubt, the woman hers, suitable to her sex. It is a mistake to fancy that it is either a sign of love or conducive to its longevity that the happy pair should always pass the entire four-and-twenty hours in each other’s company or get over them in anywise without variety or usefulness.

Charles Fairfield loved his pretty wife. She made his inactive solitude more endurable than any man could have imagined. Still it was a dull existence, and being also darkened with an ever-present anxiety, was a morbid one.

Small matters harassed him now. He brooded over trifles, and the one care, which was really serious, grew and grew in his perpetual contemplation until it became tremendous, and darkened his entire sky.

I can’t say that Charles grew morose. It was not his temper, but his spirits that failed — careworn and gloomy — his habitual melancholy depressed and even alarmed his poor little wife, who yet concealed her anxieties, and exerted her music and her invention — sang songs — told him old stories of the Wyvern folk, touched with such tragedy and comedy as may be found in such miniature centres of rural life, and played backgammon with him, and sometimes écarté, and, in fact, nursed his sick spirits, as such angelic natures will.

Now and then came Harry Fairfield, but his visits were short and seldom, and what was worse, Charles always seemed more harassed or gloomy after one of his calls. There was something going on, and by no means prosperously, she was sure, from all knowledge of which, however it might ultimately concern her, and did immediately concern her husband, she was jealously excluded.

Sometimes she felt angry — oftener pained — always troubled with untold fears and surmises. Poor little Alice! It was in the midst of these secret misgivings that a new care and hope visited her — a trembling, delightful hope, that hovers between life and death — sometimes in sad and mortal fear — sometimes in delightful anticipation of a new and already beloved life, coming so helplessly into this great world — unknown, to be her little comrade, all dependent on that beautiful love with which her young heart was already overflowing.

So almost trembling — hesitating — she told her little story with smiles and tears, in a pleading, beseeching, almost apologetic way, that melted the better nature of Charles, who told her how welcome to him, and how beloved for her dear sake the coming treasure should be, and held her beating heart to his in a long, loving embrace, and more than all, the old love revived, and he felt how lonely he would be if his adoring little wife were gone, and how gladly he would have given his life for hers.

And now came all the little cares and preparations that so mercifully and delightfully beguile the period of suspense.

What is there so helpless as a new-born babe entering this great, rude, cruel world? Yet we see how the beautiful and tender instincts which are radiated from the sublime love of God, provide everything for the unconscious comer. Let us then take heart of grace when, the sad journey ended, we, children of dust, who have entered so, are about to make the dread exit, and remembering what we have seen, and knowing that we go in the keeping of the same “faithful Creator,” be sure that his love and tender forecast have provided with equal care for our entrance into another life.

CHAPTER XX.

HARRY APPEARS AT THE GRANGE.

It was about four o'clock one afternoon, while Charles was smoking a cigar — for notwithstanding his self-denying resolutions, his case was always replenished still — that his brother Harry rode into the yard, where he was puffing away contemplatively at an open stable door.

"Delighted to see you, Harry, I was thinking of you this moment, by Jove, and I can't tell you how glad I am," said Charles, smiling as he advanced, yet with an anxious inquiry in his eyes.

Harry took his extended hand, having dismounted, but he was looking at his horse, and not at Charles, as he said —

"The last mile or so I noticed something in the off fore-foot; do you? Look now — t'aint brushing, nor he's not gone lame, but tender-like; do you notice?" and he led him round a little bit.

"No," said Charles, "I don't see anything, but I am an ignoramus, you know — no — I think, nothing."

"'Taint a great deal, anyhow," said Harry, leading him toward the open stable-door. "I got your note, you know, and how are you all, and how is Ally?"

"Very well, poor little thing, we are all very well. Did you come from Wyvern?" said Charles.

"Yes."

"And the old man just as usual, I suppose?"

"Just the same, only not growing no younger, you'll suppose."

Charles nodded.

"And a d — d deal crosser, too. There's times, I can tell you, he won't stand no one nigh him — not even old Drake, d — d vicious."

Harry laughed.

"They say he liked Ally — they do upon my soul, and I wouldn't wonder, 'tis an old rat won't eat cheese — only you took the bit out o' his mouth, when you did, and that's enough to rile a fellow, you know."

"Who says so?" asked Charles, with a flush on his face.

"The servants — yes — and the town's people — it's pretty well about, and I think if it came to the old boy's ears there would be black eyes and bloody noses about it, I do."

"Well, it's a lie," said Charles; "and don't, like a good fellow, tell poor little Alice there's any such nonsense talked about her at home, it would only vex her."

"Well, I won't, if I think of it. Where's Tom? But 'twouldn't vex her — not a bit — quite 'tother way — there's never a girl in England wouldn't be pleased if old Parr himself wor in love wi' her, so she hadn't to marry him. But the governor, by Jove, I don't know a girl twelve miles round Wyvern, as big an old brute as he is, would turn up her nose at him, wi' all he has to grease her hand. But where's Tom? the nag must have a feed."

So they bawled for Tom, and Tom appeared, and took charge of the horse, receiving a few directions about his treatment from Master Harry, and then Charles led his brother in.

"I'm always glad to see you, Harry, but always, at the same time, a little anxious when you come," said Charles, in a low tone, as they traversed the passage toward the kitchen.

"'T'aint much — I have to tell you something, but first gi' me a mouthful, for I'm as hungry as a hawk, and a mug o' beer wouldn't hurt me while I'm waitin'. It's good hungry air this; you eat a lot I dessay; the air alone stands you in fifty pounds a year, I reckon; that's paying pretty smart for what we're supposed to have for the takin'."

And Harry laughed at his joke as they entered the dark old dining-room.

"Ally not here?" said Harry, looking round.

"She can't be very far off, but I'll manage something if she's not to be found."

So Charles left Harry smiling out of the window at the tops of the trees, and drumming a devil's tattoo on the pane.

"Ho! Dulcibella. Is your mistress upstairs?"

"I think she is gone out to the garden, sir; she took her trowel and garden gloves, and the little basket wi' her," answered the old woman.

"Well, don't disturb her, we'll not mind, I'll see old Mildred."

So to old Mildred he betook himself.

"Here's Master Harry come very hungry, so send him anything you can make out, and in the mean time some beer, for he's thirsty too, and like a good old soul, make all the haste you can."

And with this conciliatory exhortation he returned to the room where he had left his brother.

"Ally has gone out to visit her flowers, but Mildred is doing the best she can for you, and we can go out and join Alice by-and-by, but we are as well to ourselves for a little. I — I want to talk to you."

"Well, fire away, my boy, with your big oak stick, as the Irishman says, though I'd rather have a mouthful first. Oh, here's the beer — thank ye, Chick-a-biddy. Where the devil did you get that queer-looking fair one?" he asked, when the Hebe, Lilly Dogger, disappeared; "I'll lay you fifty it was Ally chose that one."

And he laughed obstreperously.

And he poured out a tumbler of beer and drank it, and then another and drank it, and poured out a third to keep at hand while he conversed.

"There used to be some old pewter goblets here in the kitchen — I wonder what's gone wi' them — they were grand things for drinking beer out of — the pewter, while ye live — there's nothing like it for beer — or porter, by Jove. Have you got any porter?"

"No, not any; but do, like a good old fellow, tell me anything you have picked up that concerns me — there's nothing pleasant, I know — there can be nothing pleasant, but if there's anything, I should rather have it now, than wait, be it ever so bad."

"I wish you'd put some other fellow on this business, I know — for you'll come to hate the sight of me if I'm always bringing you bad news; but it is *not* good, that's a fact; that beast is getting unmanageable. By the law, here comes something for a hungry fellow; thank ye, my lass, God bless ye, feeding the hungry. How can I pay ye back, my dear? I don't know, unless by taking ye in — ha, ha, ha! — whenever ye want shelter, mind; but you're too sharp, I warrant, to let any fellow take you in, with them roguish eyes you've got. See how she blushes, the brown little rogue!" he giggled after her with a leer, as Lilly Dogger, having placed his extemporized luncheon on the table, edged hurriedly out of the room. "Devilish fine eyes she's got, and a nice little set of ivories, sir. By Jove, I didn't half see her; pity she's not a bit taller; and them square shoulders. But hair — she has nice hair, and teeth and eyes goes a long way."

He had stuck his fork in a rasher while making his pretty speech, and was champing away greedily by the time he had come to the end of his sentence.

"But what has turned up in that quarter? You were going to tell me something when this came in," asked Charles.

"About the old soger? Well, if you don't mind a fellow's talkin' with his mouth full, I'll try when I can think of it; but the noise of eating clears a fellow's head of everything, I think."

"Do, like a dear fellow. I can hear you perfectly," urged Charles.

"I'm afraid," said Harry, with his mouth full, as he had promised, "she'll make herself devilish troublesome."

"Tell us all about it," said Charles, uneasily.

"I told you I was running up to London — we haven't potatoes like these up at Wyvern — and so I did go, and as I promised, I saw the old beast at Hoxton; and hang me but I think some one has been putting her up to mischief."

"How do you mean? — what sort of mischief?" asked Charles.

"I think she's got uneasy about you. She was asking all sorts of questions."

"Yes — well?"

"And I wouldn't wonder if some one was telling her — I was going to say lies — but I mean something like the truth — ha, ha, ha! By the law, I've been telling such a hatful of lies about it myself, that I hardly know which is which, or one end from t'other."

"Do you mean to say she was abusing me, or *what*?" urged Charles, very uncomfortably.

"I don't suppose you care very much what the old soger says of you. It ain't pretty, you may be sure, and it don't much signify. But it ain't all talk, you know. She's always grumblin', and I don't mind *that* — her tic-dooleroo, and her nerves, and her nonsense. She wants carriage exercise, she says, and the court doctor — I forget his name — ha, ha, ha! and she says you allow her next to nothing, and keeps her always on the starving line, and she won't stand it no longer, she swears; and you'll have to come down with the dust, my boy."

And florid, stalwart Harry laughed again as if the affair was a good joke.

"I can't help it, Harry, she has always had more than her share. I've been too generous, I've been a d —— d fool always."

Charles spoke with extreme bitterness, but quietly, and there was a silence of two or three minutes, during which Harry's eyes were on his plate, and the noise of his knife and fork and the crunching of his repast under his fine teeth, were the only sounds heard.

Seeing that Harry seemed disposed to confine his attention for the present to his luncheon, Charles Fairfield, who apprehended something worse, said —

"If that's all it is nothing very new. I've been hearing that sort of thing for fully ten years. She's ungrateful, and artful, and violent. There's no use in wishing or regretting now; but God knows, it was an evil day for me when first I saw that woman's face."

Charlie was looking down on the table as he spoke, and tapping on it feverishly with the tips of his fingers. Harry's countenance showed that unpleasant expression which sometimes overcame its rustic freshness. The attempt to discharge an unsuitable smile or a dubious expression from the face — the attempt, shall we bluntly say, of a rogue to look simple.

It is a loose way of talking and thinking which limits the vice of hypocrisy to the matter of religion. It counterfeits all good, and dissimulates all evil, every day and hour; and among the men who frankly admit themselves to be publicans and sinners, whose ways are notoriously worldly, and who never affected religion, are some of the worst and meanest hypocrites on earth.

Harry Fairfield having ended his luncheon, had laid his knife and fork on his plate, and leaning back in his chair was ogling them with an unmeaning stare, and mouth a little open, affecting a brown study; but no effort can quite hide the meaning and twinkle of cunning, and nothing is more repulsive than this semi-transparent mask of simplicity.

Thus the two brothers sat, neither observing the other much, with an outward seeming of sympathy, but with very divergent thoughts.

Charles, as we know, was a lazy man, with little suspicion, and rather an admiration of his brother's worldly wisdom and activity — with a wavering belief in Harry's devotion to his cause, sometimes a little disturbed when Harry seemed for a short time hard and selfish, or careless, but generally returning with a quiet self-assertion, like the tide on a summer day.

For my part I don't exactly know how much or how little Harry cared for Charles. The Fairfields were not always what is termed a "united" family, and its individual members, in prosecuting their several objects, sometimes knocked together, and occasionally, in the family history, more violently and literally than was altogether seemly.

CHAPTER XXI.

HARRY'S BEER AND CONVERSATION.

At last Harry, looking out of the window as he leaned back in his chair, said, in a careless sort of way, but in a low tone —

"Did you ever tell Alice anything about it before you came here?"

"Alice?" said Charles, wincing and looking very pale. "Well, you know, why should I?"

"You know best of course, but I thought you might, maybe," answered Harry, stretching himself with an imperfect yawn.

"No," said Charles, looking down with a flush.

"She never heard anything about it at any time, then? — and mind, my dear fellow, I'm only asking. You know much better than me what's best to be done; but the old brute will give you trouble, I'm afeard. She'll be writing letters, and maybe printing things; but you don't take in the papers here, so it won't come so much by surprise like."

"Alice knows nothing of it. She never heard of her," said Charles.

"I wish she may have heard as little of Alice," said Harry.

"Why, you don't mean to say" — began Charles, and stopped.

"I think the woman has got some sort of a maggot in her head. I think she has, more than common, and you'll find I'm right."

Charles got up and stood at the window for a little.

"I can't guess what you mean, Harry. I don't know what you think. Do tell me, if you have any clear idea, what is she thinking of?"

"I don't know what to think, and upon my soul that one's so deep," said Harry. "But I'd bet something she's heard more than we'd just like about this, and if so, there'll be wigs on the green."

"There has been nothing — I mean no letter; I have not heard from her for months — not since you saw her before. I think if there had been anything unusual in her mind she would have written. Don't you? I dare say what you saw was only one of those ungoverned outbreaks of temper that mean nothing."

"I hope so," said Harry.

"I blame myself, I'm no villain, I didn't mean badly, but I'm a cursed fool. It's all quite straight though, and it doesn't matter a farthing what she does — not a farthing," broke out Charles Fairfield. "But I would not have poor little Alice frightened and made miserable, and what had I best do, and where do you think we had best go?" He lowered his voice, and glanced toward the door as he said this, suddenly remembering that Alice might come in the midst of their consultation.

"Go? For the present arn't you well enough where you are? Wait a bit anyhow. But I wonder you didn't tell Alice; she ought to 'a known something about it — oughtn't she, before you married her, or whatever you call it."

"Before I married her? of course," said Charles sternly; "married her! — you don't mean, I fancy, to question my marriage?"

Charles was looking at him with a very grim steady gaze.

"Why, what the devil should I know, or care about lawyer's nonsense and pleadings, my dear fellow; I never could make head or tail of them, only as we are talking here so confidential, you and me, whatever came uppermost — I forget what — I just rapped out — has that Hoxton lady any family?"

"Don't you know she has not?" replied Charles.

"I know it now, but she might have a sieve full for anything I knew," answered Harry.

"I think, Harry, if you really thought she and I were married, that was too important a question for you, wasn't it, to be forgotten so easily?" said Charles.

"Important, how so?" asked Harry.

"How so, my dear Harry? Why, you can't be serious — you haven't forgot that the succession to Wyvern depends on it," exclaimed Charles Fairfield.

"Bah! Wyvern, indeed! why, man, the thought never came near me — me Wyvern! Sich pure rot! We Fairfields lives good long lives mostly, and marries late sometimes; there's forty good years before ye. Gad, Charlie, you must think o' summat more likely if you want folk to believe ye. Ye'll not hang me on that count, no, no."

And he laughed.

"Well, I think so; I'm glad of it, for you know I wrote to tell you about what is, I hope, likely to be, it has made poor little Alice so happy, and if there should come an heir, you know he'd be another squire of Wyvern in a long line of Fairfields, and it wouldn't do, Harry, to have a doubt thrown on him, and I'm glad to hear you say the pretence of that d —— d woman's marriage is a lie."

"Well, you know best," said Harry. "I'm very sorry for Alice, poor little thing, if there's ever any trouble at all about it."

And he looked through the windows along the tops of the tufted trees that caught the sunlight softly, with his last expression of condolence.

"You *have* said more than once, I don't say to-day, that you were sure — that you knew as well as I did there was nothing in that woman's story."

"Isn't that some one coming?" said Harry, turning his head toward the door.

"No, no one," said Charles after a moment's silence. "But you *did* say so, Harry — you *know* you did."

"Well, if I did I did, that's all, but I don't remember," said Harry, "and I'm sure you make a mistake."

"A mistake — what do you mean?" asked Charles.

"I mean marriage or no marriage, I never meant to say as you suppose — I know nothing about it, whatever I may think," said Harry, sturdily.

"You know everything that I know, I've told you everything," answered Charles Fairfield.

"And what o' that? How can you or me tell whether it makes a marriage or not, and I won't be quoted by you or anyone else, as having made such a mouth of myself as to lay down the law in a case that might puzzle a judge," said Harry, darkening.

"You believe the facts I've told you, I fancy," said Charles sternly.

"You meant truth, I'm sure o' that, and beyond that I believe nothing but what I have said myself, and more I won't say for the king," said Harry, putting his hands in his pockets, and looking sulkily at Charles, with his mouth a little open.

Charles looked awfully angry.

"You know very well, Harry, you have fifty times told me there was nothing in it, and you have even said that the person herself thinks so too," he said at last, restraining himself.

"That I never said, by —— ," said Harry, coolly, who was now standing with his back against the window-shutters, and his hands in his pockets. As he so spoke he crossed one sinewy leg over the other, and continued to direct from the corner of his eye a sullen gaze upon his brother.

With the same oath that brother told him he lied.

Here followed a pause, as when a train is fired and men are doubtful whether the mine will spring. The leaves rustled and the flies hummed happily outside as if those seconds were charged with nothing, and the big feeble bee, who had spent the morning in walking up a pane of glass and slipping down again, continued his stumbling exercise as if there was nothing else worth attending to for a mile round Carwell Grange.

Harry had set both heels on the ground at this talismanic word; one hand clenched had come from his pocket to his thigh, and from his eyes "leaped" the old Fairfield fury.

It was merely, as Harry would have said, the turn of a shilling, whether a Fairfield battle, short, sharp, and decisive, had not tried the issue at that instant.

"I don't vally a hot word spoke in haste; it's ill raising hands between brothers — let it pass. I'm about the last friend ye've left just now, and I don't see why ye should seek to put a quarrel on me. It's little to me, you know — no thanks, loss o' time, and like to be more kicks than ha'pence."

Harry spoke these words after a considerable pause.

"I was wrong, Harry, I mean, to use such a word, and I beg your pardon," said Charles, extending his hand to his brother, who took his fingers and dropped them with a rather short and cold shake.

"Ye shouldn't talk that way to a fellow that's taken some trouble about ye, and ye know I'm short tempered — we all are, and 'tisn't the way to handle me," said Harry.

"I was wrong, I know I was, and I'm sorry — I can't say more," answered Charles. "But there it is! If there's trouble about this little child that's coming, what am I to do? Wouldn't it be better for me to be in Wyvern churchyard?"

Harry lowered his eyes with his mouth still open, to the threadbare carpet. His hands were again both reposing quietly in his pockets.

After a silence he said —

"If you had told me anything about what was in your head concerning Alice Maybell, I'd a told you my mind quite straight; and if you ask it now, I can only tell you one thing, and that is, I think you're married to t'other woman — I hate her like poison, but that's nothing to do wi' it, and I'd a been for making a clear breast of it, and telling Ally everything, and let her judge for herself. But you wouldn't look before you, and you're got into a nice pound, I'm afraid."

"I'm not a bit afraid about it," said Charles, very pale. "Only for the world, I would not have her frightened and vexed just now — and, Harry, there's nothing like speaking out, as you say, and I can't help thinking that your opinion [and at another time, perhaps, he would have added, your memory] is biased by the estate."

Charles spoke bitterly or petulantly, which you will. But Harry seemed to have made up his mind to take this matter coolly, and so he did.

"Upon my soul I wouldn't wonder," he said, with a kind of laugh. "Though if it does I give you my oath I am not aware of it. But take it so if you like; it's only saying a fellow loves his shirt very well, but his skin better, and I suppose so we do, you and me, both of us; only this I'll say, 'twill be all straight and above board 'twixt you and me, and I'll do the best I can for ye — you don't doubt that?"

"No, Harry, you'll not deceive me."

"No, of course; and as I say, I think that brute — the Hoxton one — she's took a notion in her head — — "

"To give me trouble?"

"A notion," continued Harry, "that there's another woman in the case; and, if you ask me, I think she'll not rest quiet for long. She says she's your wife; and one way or another she'll pitch into any girl that says the same for herself. She's like a mad horse, you know, when she's riled; and she'd kick through a wall and knock herself to pieces to get at you. I wish she was sunk in the sea."

"Tell me, what do you think she is going to do?" asked Charles, uneasily.

"Upon my soul, I can't guess; but 'twouldn't hurt you, I think, if you kept fifty pounds or so in your pocket to give her the slip, if she should begin manoeuvring with any sort o' dodges that looked serious; and if I hear any more I'll let you know; and I've staid here longer than I meant; and I ha'n't seen Ally; but you'll make my compliments, and tell her I was too hurried; and my nag's had his feed by this time; and I've staid too long."

"Well, Harry, thank you very much. It's a mere form asking you to remain longer; there's nothing to offer you worth staying for; and this is such a place, and I so heartbroken — and — we part good friends — don't we?"

"The best," said Harry, carelessly. "Have you a cigar or two? Thanks; you may as well make it three — thank ye — jolly good 'uns. I've a smart ride before me; but I think I'll make something of it, *rayther*. My hands are pretty full always. I'd give ye more time if they wasn't; but keep your powder dry, and a sharp look out, and so will I, and gi' my love to Ally, and tell her to keep up her heart, and all will go right, I dare say."

By this time they had threaded the passage, and were in the stableyard again; and mounting his horse, Harry turned, and with a wag of his head and a farewell grin, rode slowly over the pavement, and disappeared through the gate.

Charles was glad that he had gone without seeing Alice. She would certainly have perceived that something was wrong. He thought for a moment of going to the garden to look for her, but the same consideration prevented his doing so, and he took his fishing-rod instead, and went off the other way, to look for a trout in the brook that flows through Carwell Glen.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TROUT.

Down the glen, all the way to the ruined windmill, sauntered Charles Fairfield, before he put his rod together and adjusted his casting line. Very nervous he was, almost miserable. But he was not a man instinctively to strike out a course on an emergency, or to reduce his resolves promptly to action; neither was he able yet to think very clearly on his situation. Somehow his brother Harry was constantly before him in a new and dismal light. Had there not peeped out to-day, instead of the boot of that horsey, jolly fellow, the tip of a cloven hoof that cannot be mistaken? Oh, Harry, brother! Was he meditating treason and going to take arms in the cause of the murderer of his peace? He was so cunning and so energetic, that Charles stood in awe of him, and thought if his sword were pointed at his breast, that he might as well surrender and think no more of safety. Harry had been too much in his confidence, and had been too often in conference with that evil person whom he called “the old soger,” to be otherwise than formidable as an enemy. An enemy he trusted he never would see him. An unscrupulous one in his position could work fearful mischief to him by a little colouring and perversion of things that had occurred. He would not assume such a transformation possible.

But always stood before him Harry in his altered mien and estranged looks, as he had seen him, sullen and threatening, that day.

What would he not have given to be sure that the wicked person whom he now dreaded more than he feared all other powers, had formed no actual design against him? If she had, what was the agency that had kindled her evil passions and excited her activity? He could not fancy Harry such a monster.

What were her plans? Did she mean legal proceedings? He would have given a good deal for light, no matter what it may disclose, anything but suspense, and the phantasmal horrors with which imagination peoples darkness.

Never did harassed brain so need the febrifuge, of the angler's solace, and quickly his cares and agitations subsided in that serene absorption.

One thing only occurred for a moment to divert his attention from his tranquillising occupation. Standing on a flat stone near midway in the stream, he was throwing his flies over a nook where he had seen a trout rise, when he heard the ring of carriage wheels on the road that passes round the base of the old windmill, and pierces the dense wood that darkened the glen of Carwell.

Raising his eyes he did see a carriage following that unfrequented track. A thin screen of scattered trees prevented his seeing this carriage very distinctly. But the road is so little a thoroughfare that except an occasional cart, few wheeled vehicles ever traversed it. A little anxiously he watched this carriage till it disappeared totally in the wood. He felt uncomfortably that its destination was Carwell Grange, and at that point conjecture failed him.

This little incident was, I think, the only one that for a moment disturbed the serene abstraction of his trout-fishing.

And now the sun beginning to approach the distant hills warned him that it was time to return. So listlessly he walked homeward, and as he ascended the narrow and melancholy track that threads the glen of Carwell, his evil companions, the fears and cares that tortured him, returned.

Near Carwell Grange the road makes a short but steep ascent, and a slight opening in the trees displays on the eminence a little platform on the verge of the declivity, from which a romantic view down the glen and over a portion of the lower side unfolds itself.

Here for a time he paused, looking westward on the sky already glowing in the saddened splendours of sunset. From this miserable rumination he carried away one resolution, hard and clear. It was painful to come to it — but the torture of concealment was more dreadful. He had made up his mind to tell Alice exactly how the facts were. One ingredient, and he fancied just then, the worst in his cup of madness, was the torture of secrecy, and the vigilance and the uncertainties of concealment. Poor little Alice, he felt, ought to know. It was her right. And the attempt longer to conceal it would make her much more miserable, for he could not disguise his sufferings, and she would observe them, and be abandoned to the solitary anguish of suspense.

As he entered the Grange he was reminded of the carriage which he had observed turning up the narrow Carwell road, by actually seeing it standing at the summit of the short and steep ascent to the Grange.

Coming suddenly upon this object, with its natty well-appointed air, contrasting with the old-world neglect and homeliness of all that surrounded, he stopped short with an odd Robinson Crusoe shyness and surveyed the intruding vehicle.

This survey told him nothing. He turned sharply into the back entrance of the Grange, disturbed, and a good deal vexed.

It could not be an invasion of the enemy. Carriage, harness, and servants were much too smart for that. But if the neighbours had found them out, and that this was the beginning of a series of visits, could anything in a small way be more annoying, and even dangerous? Here was a very necessary privacy violated, with what ulterior consequences who could calculate.

This was certainly Alice’s doing. Women *are* such headstrong, silly creatures!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE VISITOR.

The carriage which Charles Fairfield had seen rounding the picturesque ruin of Gryce's Mill, was that of Lady Wyndale. Mrs. Tarnley opened the door to her summons, and acting on her general instructions said "not at home."

But good Lady Wyndale was not so to be put off. She had old Mildred to the side of the carriage.

"I know my niece will be glad to see me," she said. "I'm Lady Wyndale, and you are to take this card in, and tell my niece, Mrs. Fairfield, I have come to see her."

Mrs. Tarnley looked with a dubious scrutiny at Lady Wyndale, for she had no idea that Alice could have an aunt with a title and a carriage. On the whole, however, she thought it best to take the card in, and almost immediately it was answered by Alice, who ran out to meet her aunt and throw her arms about her neck, and led her into Carwell Grange.

"Oh! darling, darling! I'm so delighted to see you! It was so good of you to come. But how did you find me out?" said Alice, kissing her again and again.

"There's no use, you see, in being secret with me. I made out where you were, though you meant to keep me quite in the dark, and I really don't think I ought to have come near you, and I am very much affronted," said kind old Lady Wyndale, a little high.

"But auntie, darling, didn't you get my letter, telling you that we were married?" pleaded Alice.

"Yes, and that you had left Wyvern; but you took good care not to tell me where you were going, and in fact if it had not been for the good housekeeper at Wyvern, to whom I wrote, I suppose I should have lived and died within fifteen miles of you, thinking all the time that you had gone to France."

"We were thinking of that, I told you," pleaded Alice, eagerly.

"Well, here you have been for three months, and I've been living within a two hours' drive of you, and dreading all the time that you were four hundred miles away. I have never once seen your face. I don't think that was goodnatured."

"Oh, dear aunt, forgive me," entreated Alice. "You will when you know all. If you knew how miserable I have often been, thinking how ungrateful and odious I must have appeared, how meanly reserved and basely suspicious, all the time longing for nothing on earth so much as a sight of your beloved face, and a good talk over everything with you, my best and truest friend."

"There, kiss me, child; I'm not angry, only sorry, darling, that I should have lost so much of your society, which I might have enjoyed often very much," said the placable old lady.

"But, darling aunt, I *must* tell you how it was — you must hear me. You know how I idolize you, and you can't know, but you may imagine, what, in this solitary place, and with cares and fears so often troubling me, your kind and delightful society would have been to me; but my husband made it a point, that just for the present I should divulge our retreat to no one on earth. I pleaded for you, and in fact there is not another person living to whom I should have dreamed of disclosing it; but the idea made him so miserable and he urged it with so much entreaty and earnestness that I could not without a quarrel have told you, and he promised that my silence should be enforced only for a very short time."

"Dear me! I'm so sorry," said Lady Wyndale, very much concerned. "It must be that the poor man is very much dipped and is literally hiding himself here. You poor little thing! Is he in debt?"

"I am afraid he is. I can't tell you how miserable it sometimes makes me; not that he allows me ever to feel it, except in these precautions, for we are, though in a very homely way, perfectly comfortable — you would not believe how comfortable — but we really are," said poor, loyal little Alice, making the best of their frugal and self-denying life.

"Your room is very snug. I like an oldfashioned room," said the goodnatured old lady, looking round; "and you make it so pretty with your flowers. Is there any ornament like them? And you have such an exquisite way of arranging them. It is an art; no one can do it like you. You know I always got you to undertake ours at Oulton, and you remember Tremaine standing beside you, trying, as he said, to learn the art, though I fancy he was studying something prettier."

Alice laughed; Lord Tremaine was a distant figure now, and this little triumph a dream of the past. But is not the spirit of woman conquest? Is not homage the air in which she lives and blooms? So Alice's dark, soft eyes dropped for a moment sidelong with something like the faintest blush, and a little dimpling smile.

"But all that's over, you know," said Lady Wyndale; "you would insist on putting a very effectual extinguisher upon it, so there's an end of my matchmaking, and I hope you may be very happy your own way, and I'm sure you will, and you know any little money trouble can't last long; for old Mr. Fairfield you know can't possibly live very long, and then I'm told Wyvern *must* be his; and the Fairfields were always thought to have some four or five thousand a year, and although the estate, they say, owes something, yet a prudent little woman like you, will get all that to rights in time."

"You are always so kind and cheery, you darling," said Alice, looking fondly and smiling in her face, as she placed a hand on each shoulder. "It is delightful seeing you at last. But you are tired, ain't you? You must take something."

"Thanks, dear. I'll have a little tea — nothing else. I lunched before we set out."

So Alice touched the bell, and the order was taken by Mildred Tarnley.

"And how is that nice, goodnatured old creature, Dulcibella Crane? I like her so much. She seems so attached. I hope you have her still with you?"

"Oh, yes. I could not exist without her — dear old Dulcibella, of course."

There was here a short silence.

"I was thinking of asking you if you could all come over to Oulton for a month or so. I'm told your husband is such an agreeable man, and very unlike Mr. Harry Fairfield, his brother — a mere bear, they tell me; and do you think your husband would venture? We should be quite to ourselves if you preferred it, and we could make it almost as quiet as here."

"It is so like you, you darling, and to me would be so delightful; but no, no, it is quite out of the question; he is really — this is a great secret, and you won't say a word to anyone — I am afraid very much harassed. He is very miserable about his affairs. There has been a quarrel with old Mr. Fairfield which makes the matter worse. His brother Harry has been trying to arrange with his creditors, but I don't know how that will be; and Charlie has told me that we must be ready on very short notice to go to France or somewhere else abroad; and I'm afraid he owes a great deal — he's so reserved and nervous about it; and you may suppose how I must feel, how miserable sometimes, knowing that I am, in great measure, the cause of his being so miserably harassed. Poor Charlie! I often think how much happier it would have been for him never to have seen me."

"Did I ever hear such stuff! But I won't say half what I was going to say, for I can't think you such a fool, and I must only suppose you want me to say ever so many pretty things of you, which, in this case, I am bound to say would be, unlike common flatteries, quite true. But if there really is any trouble of that kind — of the least consequence I mean — I think it quite a scandal, not only shabby but wicked, that old Mr. Fairfield, with one foot in the grave, should do nothing. I always knew he was a mere bruin; but people said he was generous in the matter of money, and he ought to think that, in the course of nature, Wyvern should have been his son's years ago, and it is really quite abominable his not coming forward."

"There's no chance of that; there has been a quarrel," said Alice, looking down on the threadbare carpet.

"Well, darling, remember, if it should come to that — I mean if he should be advised to go away for a little, remember that your home is at Oulton. He'll not stay away very long, but if you accept my offer, the longer the happier for me. You are to come over to Oulton, you understand, and to bring old Dulcibella; and I only wish that you had been a few years married that we might set up a little nursery in that dull house. I think I should live ten years longer if I had the prattle and laughing, and pleasant noise of children in the old nursery, the same nursery where my poor dear George ran about, sixty years ago nearly, when he was a child. We should have delightful times, you and I, and I'd be your head nurse."

"My darling, I think you are an angel," said Alice, with a little laugh, and throwing her arms about her she wept on her thin old neck, and the old lady, weeping also happy and tender tears, patted her shoulder gently in that little silence.

"Well, Alice, you'll remember, and I'll write to your husband as well as to you, for this kind of invitation is never attended to, and you would think nothing of going away and leaving your old auntie to shift for herself; and if you will come it will be the kindest thing you ever did, for I'm growing old and strangers don't amuse me quite as much as they did, and I really want a little home society to exercise my affections and prevent my turning into a selfish old cat."

So the tea came in and they sipped it to the accompaniment of their little dialogue, and time glided away unperceived, and the door opened and Charles Fairfield, in his careless fishing costume, entered the room.

He glanced at Alice a look which she understood; her visitor also perceived it; but Charles had not become a mere Orson in this wilderness, so he assumed an air of welcome.

"We are so glad to see you here, Lady Wyndale, though, indeed, it ain't easy to see anyone, the room is so dark. It was so very good of you to come this long drive to see Alice."

"I hardly hoped to have seen you," replied the old lady, "for I must go in a minute or two more, and — I'm very frank, and you won't think me rude, but I have learned everything, and I know that I ought not to have come without a little more circumspection."

He laughed a little, and Alice thought, as well as the failing light enabled her to see, that he looked very pale, as, laughing, he fixed for a moment a hard look on her.

"All is not a great deal," he said, not knowing very well what to say.

"No, no," said the old lady, "there's no one on earth, almost, who has not suffered at one time or other that kind of passing annoyance. You know that Alice and I are such friends, so very intimate that I feel as if I knew her husband almost as intimately, although you were little more than a boy when I last saw you, and I'm afraid it must seem very impertinent my mentioning Alice's little anxieties, but I could not well avoid doing so without omitting an explanation which I ought to make, because this secret little creature your wife, with whom I was very near being offended, was perfectly guiltless of my visit, and I learned where she was from your old housekeeper at Wyvern, and from no one else on earth did I receive the slightest hint, and I thought it very ill-natured, being so near a relation and friend, and when you know me a little better, Mr. Fairfield, you'll not teach Alice to distrust me."

Then the kind old lady diverged into her plans about Alice and Oulton, and promised a diplomatic correspondence, and at length she took her leave for the last time, and Charles saw her into her carriage, and bid her a polite farewell.

Away drove the carriage, and Charles stood listlessly at the summit of the embowered and gloomy road that descends in one direction into the Vale of Carwell, and passes in the other, with some windings, to the wide heath of Cressley Common.

This visit, untoward as it was, was, nevertheless, a little stimulus. He felt his spirits brightening, his pulse less sluggish, and something more of confidence in his future.

"There's time enough in which to tell her my trouble," thought he, as he turned toward the house; "and by Jove! we haven't had our dinner. I must choose the time. Tonight it shall be. We will both be, I think, less miserable when it is told," and he sighed heavily.

He entered the house through the back gate, and as he passed the kitchen door, called to Mildred Tarnley the emphatic word "dinner!"

VOLUME II.

CHAPTER I.

THE SUMMONS.

When Charles Fairfield came into the wainscoted dining-room a few minutes later it looked very cosy. The sun had broken the pile of western clouds, and sent low and level a red light flecked with trembling leaves on the dark panels that faced the windows.

Outside in that farewell glory of the day the cawing crows were heard returning to the sombre woods of Carwell, and the small birds whistled and warbled pleasantly in the clear air, and chatty sparrows in the ivy round gossiped and fluttered merrily before the little community betook themselves to their leafy nooks and couched their busy little heads for the night under their brown wings.

He looked through the window towards the gloriously-stained sky and darkening trees, and he thought, —

“A fellow like me, who has seen out his foolish days and got to value better things, who likes a pretty view, and a cigar, and a stroll by a trout-brook, and a song now and then, and a book, and a friendly guest, and a quiet glass of wine, and who has a creature like Alice to love and be loved by, might be devilish happy in this queer lonely corner, if only the load were off his heart.”

He sighed; but something of that load was for the moment removed; and as pretty Alice came in at the open door, he went to meet her, and drew her fondly to his heart.

“We must be very happy this evening, Alice. Somehow I feel that everything will go well with us yet. If just a few little hitches and annoyances were got over, I should be the happiest fellow, I think, that ever bore the name of Fairfield; and you, darling creature, are the light of that happiness. My crown and my life — my beautiful Alice, my joy and my glory — I wish you knew half how I love you, and how proud I am of you.”

“Oh, Charlie, Charlie, this is delightful. Oh, Ry, my darling! I’m too happy.”

And with these words, in the strain of her slender embrace, she clung to him as he held her locked to his heart.

The affection was there; the love was true. In the indolent nature of Charles Fairfield capabilities of good were not wanting. That dreadful interval in the soul's history, between the weak and comparatively noble state of childhood and that later period when experience saddens and illuminates and begins to turn our looks regretfully backward, was long past with him. The period when women "come out" and see the world, and men in the oldfashioned phrase "sow their wild oats" — that glorious summer-time of self-love, sin, and folly — that bleak and bitter winter of the soul, through which the mercy of God alone preserves for us alive the dormant germs of good, was past for him, without killing, as it sometimes does, all the tenderness and truth of the nursery. In this man, Charles Fairfield, were the trodden-down but still living affections which now, in this season, unfolded themselves anew — simplicity unkilled, and the purity not of Eden, not of childhood, but of *recoil*. Altogether a man who had not lost himself — capable of being happy — capable of being regenerated.

I know not exactly what had evoked this sudden glow and effervescence. Perhaps it needs some manifold confluence of internal and external conditions, trifling and unnoticed, except for such unexplained results, to evolve these tremblings and lightings up that surprise us like the fiercer analogies of volcanic chemistry.

It is sad to see what appear capabilities and opportunities of a great happiness so nearly secured, and yet by reason of some inflexible caprice of circumstance quite unattainable.

It was not for some hours, and until after his wife had gone to her room, that the darkness and chill that portended the return of his worst care crept over him as he sat and turned over the leaves of his book.

He got up and loitered discontentedly about the room. Stopping now before the little bookshelves between the windows and adjusting unconsciously their contents; now at the little oak table, and fiddling with the flowers which Alice had arranged in a tall old glass, one of the relics of other days of Carwell; and so on, listless, irresolute.

"So here I am once more — back again among my enemies! Happiness for me, a momentary illusion — hope a cheat. My *reality* is the blackness of the abyss. God help me!"

He turned up his eyes, and he groaned this prayer, unconscious that it was a prayer.

"I will," he thought, "extract the sting from this miserable mystery. Between me and Alice it shall be a secret no longer. I'll tell her tomorrow. I'll look out an opportunity; I will by — — "

And to nail himself to his promise this irresolute man repeated the same passionate oath, and he struck his hand on the table.

Next day, therefore, when Alice was again among the flowers in the garden he entered that antique and solemn shade with a strange sensation at his heart of fear and grief. How would Alice look on him after it was over? How would she bear it?

Pale as the man who walks after the coffin of his darling, between the tall gray piers he entered that wild and umbrageous enclosure.

His heart seemed to stop still as he saw little Alice, all unsuspicious of his dreadful message, working with her tiny trowel at the one sunny spot of the garden.

She stood up — how pretty she was! — looking on her work; and as she stood with one tiny foot advanced, and her arms folded, with her garden-gloves on, and the little diamond-shaped trowel glittering in her hand, she sang low to herself an air which he remembered her singing when she was quite a little thing long ago at Wyvern — when he never dreamed she would be anything to him — just a picture of a little brown-haired girl and nothing dearer.

Then she saw him, and —

"Oh, Ry, darling!" she cried, as making a diagonal from the distant point, she ran towards him through tall trees and old raspberries, and under the boughs of overgrown fruit trees, which now-a-days bore more moss and lichen than pears or cherries upon them.

"Ry, how delightful! You so seldom come here, and now I have you, you shall see all I'm doing, and how industrious I have been; and we are going to have such a happy little ramble. Has anything happened, darling?" she said, suddenly stopping and looking in his face.

Here was an opportunity; but if his resolution was still there, presence of mind failed him, and forcing a smile, he instantly answered —

"Nothing, darling — nothing whatever. Come, let us look at your work; you are so industrious, and you have such wonderful taste."

And as, reassured, and holding his hand, she prattled and laughed, leading him round by the grass-grown walks to her garden, as she called that favoured bit of ground on which the sun shone, he hardly saw the old currant bushes or gray trunks of the rugged trees; his sight seemed dazzled; his hearing seemed confused; and he thought to himself —

"Where am I — what is this — and can it be true that I am so weak or so mad as to be turned from the purpose over which I have been brooding for a day and a night, and to which I had screwed my courage so resolutely, by a smile and a question — What is this? Black currant; and this is groundsel; and little Alice, your glove wants a stitch or two," he added aloud; "and oh! here we are. Now you must enlighten me; and what a grove of little sticks, and little inscriptions. These are your annuals, I suppose?"

And so they talked, and she laughed and chatted very merrily, and he had not the heart — perhaps the courage — to deliver his detested message; and again it was postponed.

The next day Charles Fairfield fell into his old gloom and anxieties; the temporary relief was felt no more, and the usual reaction followed.

It is something to have adopted a resolution. The anguish of suspense, at least, is ended, and even if it be to undergo an operation, and to blow one's own brains out, men will become composed, and sometimes even cheerful, as the coroner's inquest discovers, when once the way and the end are known.

But this melancholy serenity now failed Charles Fairfield, for without acknowledging it, he began a little to recede from his resolution. Then was the dreadful question, how will she bear it, and even worse, how will she view the position? Is she not just the person to leave forthwith a husband thus ambiguously placed, and to insist that this frightful claim, however shadowy, should be met and determined in the light of day?

"I know very well what an idol she makes of me, poor little thing; but she would not stay here an hour after she heard it; she would go straight to Lady Wyndale. It would break her heart, but she would do it."

It was this fear that restrained him. Impelling him, however, was the thought that, sooner or later, if Harry's story were true, his enemy would find him out, and his last state be worse than his first.

Again and again he cursed his own folly for not having consulted his shrewd brother before his marriage. How horribly were his words justified.

How easy it would have been comparatively to disclose all to Alice before leading her into such a position. He did not believe that there was actual danger in this claim. He could swear that he meant no villainy. Weak and irresolute, in a trying situation, he had been — that was all. But could he be sure that the world would not stigmatize him as a villain?

Another day passed, and he could not tell what a day might bring — a day of feverish melancholy, of abstraction, of agitation.

She had gone to her room. It was twelve o'clock at night, when, having made up his mind to make his agitating shrift, he mounted the old oak stairs, with his candle in his hand.

"Who's there?" said his wife's voice from the room.

"I, darling."

And at the door she met him in her dressing-gown. Her face was pale and miserable, and her eyes swollen with crying.

"Oh, Ry, darling, I'm so miserable; I think I shall go mad."

And she hugged him fast in trembling arms, and sobbed convulsively on his breast.

Charles Fairfield froze with a kind of terror. He thought, "she has found out the whole story." She looked up in his face, and that was the face of a ghost.

"Oh, Ry, darling, for God's sake tell me — is there anything very bad — is it debt only that makes you so wretched; I am in such dreadful uncertainty. Have mercy on your poor little miserable wife, and tell me whatever it is — tell me all!"

Here you would have said was something more urgent than the opportunity which he coveted; but the sight of that gaze of wildest misery smote and terrified him, it looked in reality so near despair, so near insanity.

"To tell her will be to kill her," something seemed to whisper, and he drew her closer to him, and kissed her and laughed.

"Nothing on earth but money — the want of money — debt. Upon my soul you frightened me, Alice, you looked so, so piteous. I thought you had something dreadful to tell me; but, thank God, you are quite well, and haven't even seen a ghost. You must not always be such a foolish little creature. I'm afraid this place will turn our heads. Here we are safe and sound, and nothing wrong but my abominable debts. You would not wonder at my moping if you knew what debt is; but I won't look, if I can help it, quite so miserable for the future; for, after all, we must have money soon, and you know they can't hang me for owing them a few hundreds; and I'm quite angry with myself for having annoyed you so, you poor little thing."

"My noble Ry, it is so good of you, you make me so happy, I did not know what to think, but you have made me quite cheerful again, and I really do think it is being so much alone, I watch your looks so much, and everything prays on me so, and that seems so odious when I have my darling along with me; but Ry will forgive his foolish little wife, I know he will, he's always so good and kind."

Then followed more reassuring speeches from Charles, and more raptures from poor Alice. And the end was that for a time Charles was quite turned away from his purpose. I don't know, however, that he was able to keep his promise about more cheerful looks, certainly not beyond a day or two.

A few days later he heard a tragic bit of news. Tom related to him that the miller's young wife, down at Raxleigh, hearing on a sudden that her husband was drowned in the mill-stream, though 'twas nothing after all but a ducking, was "took wi' fits, and died in three days time."

So much for surprising young wives with alarming stories! Charles Fairfield listened, and made the application for himself.

A few days later a letter was brought into the room, where rather silently Charles and his wife were at breakfast. It came when he had almost given up the idea of receiving one for some days, perhaps weeks, and he had begun to please himself with the idea that the delay augured well, and Harry's silence was a sign that the alarm was subsiding.

Here, however, was a letter addressed to him in Harry's bold hand. His poor little wife sitting next the tea things, eyed her husband as he opened it, with breathless alarm; she saw him grow pale as he glanced at it; he lowered it to the table cloth, and bit his lip, his eye still fixed on it.

As he did not turn over the leaf, she saw it could not be a long one, and must all be comprised within one page.

"Ry, darling," she asked, also very pale, in a timid voice, "it's nothing very bad. Oh, darling, what is it?"

He got up and walked to the window silently.

"What do you say, darling?" he asked, suddenly, after a little pause.

She repeated her question.

"No, darling, nothing, but — but possibly we may have to leave this. You can read it, darling."

He laid the letter gently on the tablecloth beside her, and she picked it up, and read —

"MY DEAR CHARLIE,

"The old soldier means business. I think you must go up to London, but be sure to meet me tomorrow at Hatherton, say the Commercial Hotel, at four o'clock, P.M.

"Your affectionate brother,

"HARRY FAIRFIELD."

"Who does he mean by the old soldier?" asked Alice, very much frightened, after a silence.

"One of those d —— d people who are plaguing me," said Charles, who had returned to the window, and answered, still looking out.

"And what is his real name, darling?"

"I'm ashamed to say that Harry knows ten times as well as I all about my affairs. I pay interest through his hands, and he watches those people's movements; he's a rough diamond, but he has been very kind, and you see his note — where is it? Oh, thanks. I must be off in half an hour, to meet the coach at the 'Pied Horse.'"

"Let me go up, darling, and help you to pack, I know where all your things are," said poor little Alice, who looked as if she was going to faint.

"Thank you, darling, you are such a good little creature, and never think of yourself — never, never — *half enough*."

His hands were on her shoulders, and he was looking in her face, with sad strange eyes, as he said this, slowly, like a man spelling out an inscription.

"I wish — I wish a thousand things. God knows how heavy my heart is. If you cared for yourself Alice, like other women, or that I weren't a fool — but — but you, poor little thing, it was such a venture, such a sea, such a crazy boat to sail in."

"I would not give up my Ry, my darling, my husband, my handsome, clever, noble Ry — I'd lose a thousand lives if I had them, one by one, for you, Charlie; and oh, if you left me, I should die."

"Poor little thing," he said, drawing her to him with a trembling strain, and in his eyes, unseen by her, tears were standing.

"If you leave this, won't you take me, Charlie? won't you let me go wherever you go? and oh, if they take my man — I'm to go with you, Charlie, promise that, and oh, my darling, you're not sorry you married your poor little Alley."

"Come, darling, come up; you shall hear from me in a day or two, or see me. This will blow over, as so many other troubles have done," he said, kissing her fondly.

And now began the short fuss and confusion of a packing on brief notice, while Tom harnessed the horse, and put him to the dog-cart.

And the moment having arrived, down came Charles Fairfield, and Tom swung his portmanteau into its place, and poor little Alice was there with, as Old Dulcibella said, "her poor little face all cried," to have a last look, and a last word, her tiny feet on the big unequal paving stones, and her eyes following Charlie's face, as he stepped up and arranged his rug and coat on the seat, and then jumped down for the last hug; and the wild, close, hurried whisperings, last words of love and cheer from laden hearts, and pale smiles, and the last, *really* the last look, and the dog-cart and Tom, and the portmanteau and Charlie, and the sun's blessed light, disappear together through the old gateway under the wide stone arch, with tufted ivy and careless sparrows, and little Alice stands alone on the pavement for a moment, and runs out to have one last wild look at the disappearing "trap," under the old trees, as it rattled swiftly down to the narrow road of Carwell Valley.

It vanished — it was gone — the tinkling of the wheels was heard no more. The parting, for the present, was quite over, and poor little Alice turned at last, and threw her arms about the neck of kind old Dulcibella, who had held her when a baby in her arms in the little room at Wyvern Vicarage, and saw her now a young wife, "wooed and married, and a'," in the beauty and the sorrows of life; and the light air of autumn rustled in the foliage above her, and a withered leaf or two fell from the sunlit summits to the shadow at her feet; and the old woman's kind eyes filled with tears, and she whispered homely comfort, and told her she would have him back again in a day or two, and not to take on so; and with her gentle hand, as she embraced her, patted her on the shoulder, as she used in other years — that seemed like yesterday — to comfort her in nursery troubles. But our sorrows outgrow their simple consolations, and turn us in their gigantic maturity to the sympathy and wisdom that is sublime and eternal.

Days passed away, and a precious note from Charlie came. It told her where to write to him in London, and very little more.

The hasty scrawl added, indeed emphatically, that she was to tell his address to no one. So she shut it up in the drawer of the oldfashioned dressing-table, the key of which she always kept with her.

Other days passed. The hour was dull at Carwell Grange for Alice. But things moved on in their dull routine without event or alarm.

Old Mildred Tarnley was sour and hard as of old, and up to a certain time neither darker nor brighter than customary. Upon a day, however, there came a shadow and a fear upon her.

Two or three times on that day and the next, was Mrs. Tarnley gliding, when old Dulcibella with her mistress was in the garden, about Alice's bedroom, noiselessly as a shadow. The little girl downstairs did not know where she was. It was known but to herself — and what she was about. Coming down those dark stairs, and going up, she went on tiptoe, and looked black and stern as if she was "laying out" a corpse upstairs.

Accidentally old Dulcibella, coming into the room on a message from the garden, surprised lean, straight Mrs. Tarnley, feloniously trying to turn a key, from a bunch in her hand, in the lock of the dressing-table drawer.

"Oh, la! Mrs. Tarnley," cried old Dulcibella, very much startled.

The two women stood perfectly still, staring at one another. Each looked scared. Stiff Mildred Tarnley, without, I think, being the least aware of it, dropped a stiff short courtesy, and for some seconds more the silence continued.

"What *be* you a-doing here, Mrs. Tarnley?" at length demanded Dulcibella Crane.

"No occasion to tell *you*," replied Mildred, intrepidly. "Another one, that owed her as little as I'm like ever to do, would tell your young mistress. But I don't want to break her heart — what for should I? There's dark stories enough about the Grange without no one hangin' theirself in their garters. What I want is where to direct a letter to Master Charles — that's all."

"I can't say, I'm sure," said old Dulcibella.

"She got a letter from him o' Thursday last; 'twill be in it no doubt, and that I take it, ma'am, is in this drawer, for she used not to lock it; and I expect you, if ye love your young mistress, to help me to get at it," said Mrs. Tarnley, firmly.

"Lor, Mrs. Tarnley, ma'am! *me* to pick a lock, ma'am! I'd die first. Ye can't mean it?"

"I knowd ye was a fool. I shouldn't 'a said nothing to ye about it," said Mildred, with sharp disdain.

"Lawk! I never was so frightened in my life!" responded Dulcibella.

"Ye'll be more so, mayhap. I wash my hands o' ye," said Mrs. Tarnley, with a furious look, and a sharp little stamp on the floor. "I thought o' nothing but your mistress's good, and if ye tell her I was here, I'll explain all, for I won't lie under no surmises, and I think 'twill be the death of her."

"Oh, this place, this hawful place! I never was so frightened in my days," said Dulcibella, looking very white.

"She's in the garden now, I do suppose," said Mildred, "and if ye mean to tell her what I was about, 'taint a pin's head to me, but I'll go out and tell her myself, and even if she lives through it, she'll never hold up her head more, and that's all you'll hear from Mildred Tarnley."

"Oh, dear! dear! dear! my heart, how it goes!"

"Come, come, woman, you're nothin' so squeamish, I dare say."

"Well," said Dulcibella; "it may be all as you say, ma'am, and I'll say ye this justice, I ha'n't missed to the value of a pennypiece since we come here, but if ye promise me, only ye won't come up here no more while we're out, Mrs. Tarnley, I won't say nothing about it."

"That settles it, keep your word, Mrs. Crane, and I'll keep mine; I'll burn my fingers no more in other people's messes;" and she shook the key with a considerable jingle of the whole bunch from the keyhole, and popped it grimly into her pocket.

"Your sarvant, Mrs. Crane."

"Yours, Mrs. Tarnley, ma'am," replied Dulcibella.

And the interview which had commenced so brusquely, ended with ceremony, as Mildred Tarnley withdrew.

That old woman was in a sort of fever that afternoon and the next day, and her temper, Lilly Dogger thought, grew more and more savage as night approached. She had in her pocket a friendly fulsome little letter, which had reached her through the post, announcing an arrival for the night that was now approaching. The coach that changed horses at the "Pied Horse," was due there at halfpast eleven, P.M., but might not be there till twelve, and then there was a long drive to Carwell Grange.

"I'm wore out wi' them, I'm tired to death; I'm wore off my feet wi' them; I'm worked like a hoss. 'Twould be well for Mildred Tarnley, I'm thinkin', she was under the mould wi' a stone at her head, and shut o' them all."

CHAPTER II.

LILLY DOGGER IS SENT TO BED.

That night the broad-shouldered child, Lilly Dogger, was up later than usual. An arrear of pots and saucepans to scour, along with customary knives and forks to clean, detained her.

“Bustle, you huzzy, will ye?” cried the harsh voice of old Mildred, who was adjusting the kettle on the kitchen fire, while in the scullery the brown-eyed little girl worked away at the knife-board. A mutton-fat, fixed in a tin sconce on the wall, so as to command both the kitchen and the scullery, economically lighted each, the old woman and her drudge, at her work.

“Yes’m, please,” she said, interrogatively, for the noise of her task prevented her hearing distinctly.

“Be alive, I say. It’s gone eleven, you slut; ye should a bin in your bed an hour,” screeched Mildred, and then relapsed into her customary grumble.

“Yes, Mrs. Tarnley, please’m,” answered the little girl, resuming with improved energy.

Drowsy enough was the girl. If there had been a minute’s respite from her task, I think she would have nodded.

“Be them things rubbed up or no, or do you mean to ‘a done tonight, huzzy?” cried Mrs. Tarnley, this time so near as to startle her, for she had unawares put her wrinkled head into the scullery. “Stop that for tonight, I say. Leave ‘em lay, ye’ll finish in the morning.”

“Shall I take down the fire, Mrs. Tarnley, ma’am, please?” asked Lilly Dogger, after a little pause.

“No, ye shan’t. What’s that ye see on the fire; have ye eyes in your head? Don’t ye see the kettle there? How do I know but your master’ll be home tonight, and want a cup o’ tea, or — law knows what?”

Mrs. Tarnley looked put about, as she phrased it, and in one of those special tempers which accompanied that state. So Lilly Dogger, eyeing her with wide open eyes, made her a frightened little courtesy.

“Why don’t ye get up betimes in the morning, huzzy, and then ye needn’t be mopin’ about half the night? All the colour’s washed out o’ your big, ugly, platter face, wi' your laziness — as white as a turnip. When I was a girl, if I left my work over so, I'd ‘a the broomstick across my back, I promise ye, and bread and water next day too good for my victuals; but now ye thinks ye can do as ye like, and all's changed! An' every upstart brat is as good as her betters. But don't ye think ye'll come it over me, lass, don't ye. Look up there at the clock, will ye, or do ye want me to pull ye up by the ear — ten minutes past eleven — wi' your dawdling, ye limb!"

The old woman whisked about, and putting her hand on a cupboard door, she turned round again before opening it, and said —

"Come on, will ye, and take your bread if you want it, and don't ye stand gaping there, ye slut, as if I had nothing to do but attend upon you, with your impittence. I shouldn't give ye *that*."

She thumped a great lump of bread down on the kitchen table by which the girl was now standing.

"Not a bit, if I did right, and ye'll not be sittin' up to eat that, mind ye; ye'll take it wi' ye to yer bed, young lady, and tumble in without delay, d'ye mind? For if I find ye out o' bed when I go in to see all's right, I'll just gi'e ye that bowl o' cold water over yer head. In wi' ye, an' get ye twixt the blankets before two minutes — get along."

The girl knew that Mrs. Tarnley could strike as well as "jaw," and seldom threatened in vain, so with eyes still fixed upon her, she took up her fragment of loaf, with a hasty courtesy, of which the old woman took no notice, and vanished frightened through a door that opened off the kitchen.

The old woman holding the candle over her head, soon peeped in as she had threatened.

Lilly Dogger lay close affecting to be asleep, though that feat in the time was impossible, and was afraid that the thump, thump of her heart, for she greatly feared Mrs. Tarnley, might be audible to that severe listener.

Out she went, however, without anything more, to the great relief of the girl.

Lilly Dogger lay awake, for fear is vigilant, and Mrs. Tarnley's temper she knew was capricious as well as violent.

Through the door she heard the incessant croak of the old woman's voice, as she grumbled and scolded in soliloquy, poking here and there about the kitchen. The girl lay awake, listening vaguely in the dark, and watching the one bright spot on the whitewashed wall at the foot of her bed, which Mrs.

Tarnley's candle in the kitchen transmitted through the keyhole. It flitted and glided, now hither, now thither, now up, now down, like a white butterfly in a garden, silently indicating the movements of the old woman, and illustrating the clatter of her clumsy old shoes.

In a little while the door opened again, and the old woman entered, having left her candle on the dresser outside.

Mrs. Tarnley listened for a while, and you may be sure Lilly Dogger lay still. Then the old woman in a hard whisper asked, "Are you awake?" and listened.

"Are ye awake, lass?" she repeated, and receiving no answer she came close to the bed, by way of tucking in the coverlet, in reality to listen.

So she stood in silence by the bed for a minute, and then very quickly withdrew and closed the door.

Then Lilly Dogger heard her make some arrangements in the kitchen, and move, as she rightly concluded, a table which she placed against her door.

Then the white butterfly having made a sudden sweep round the side wall, hovered no longer on Lilly Dogger's darkened walls, and old Mildred Tarnley and her candle glided out of the kitchen.

The girl had grown curious, and she got up and peeped, and found that a clumsy little kitchen table had been placed against her door, which opened outward.

Through the keyhole she also saw that Mildred had not taken down the fire. On the contrary, she had trimmed and poked it, and a kettle was simmering on the bar.

She did not believe that Mrs. Tarnley expected the arrival of her master, for she had said early in the day that she thought he would come next evening. Lilly Dogger was persuaded that Mrs. Tarnley was on the look out for some one else, and guarding that fact with a very jealous secrecy.

She went again to her bed; wondering she listened for the sounds of her return, and looked for the little patch of light on the whitewashed wall; but that fluttering evidence of Mrs. Tarnley's candle did not reappear before the tired little girl fell asleep.

She was wakened in a little time by Mrs. Tarnley's somewhat noisy return. She was grumbling bitterly to herself, poking the fire, and pitching the fire-irons and other hardware about with angry recklessness.

The girl turned over, and notwithstanding all Mildred's noisy soliloquy was soon asleep again.

Again she awoke — I suppose recalled to consciousness by some noise in the kitchen. The little white light was in full play on the wall at the foot of her bed, and Mrs. Tarnley was talking fluently in an undertone. Then came a silence, during which the old Dutch clock struck one.

Lilly Dogger's eyes were wide open now, and her ears erect. She heard no one answer the old woman, who resumed her talk in a minute; and now she seemed careful to make no avoidable noise — speaking low, and when she moved about the kitchen treading softly, and moving anything she had to stir gently. Altogether she was now taking as much care not to disturb as she had shown carelessness upon the subject before.

Lilly Dogger again slipped out of bed, and peeped through the keyhole. But she could not see Mrs. Tarnley nor her companion, if she had one.

Old Mildred was talking on, not in her grumbling interrupted soliloquy, but in the equable style of one spinning a long narrative. This hum was relieved now and then by the gentle clink of a teacup, or the jingle of a spoon.

If Mrs. Tarnley was drinking her tea alone at this hour of night and talking so to herself, she was doing that she had never done before, thought the curious little girl; and she must be a-going mad. From this latter apprehension, however, she was relieved by hearing some one cough. It was not Mrs. Tarnley, who suspended her story, however. But there was an unmistakable difference of tone in this cough, and old Mildred said more distinctly something about a cure for a cough which she recommended.

Then came an answer in an odd drawling voice. The words she could not hear, but there could no longer be any doubt as to the presence of a stranger in the kitchen.

Lilly Dogger was rather frightened, she did not quite know why, and listened without power to form a conjecture. It was plain that the person who enjoyed old Mildred's hospitality was not her master, nor her mistress, nor old Dulcibella Crane.

As she listened, and wondered, and speculated sleep overtook her once more, and she quite forgot the dialogue, and the kitchen, and Mildred Tarnley's tea, and went off upon her own adventures in the wild land of dreams.

CHAPTER III.

THE LADY HAS HER TEA.

"You suffers dreadful, ma'am," said Mildred Tarnley. "Do you have them toothaches still."

"'Twas not toothache — a worse thing," said the stranger, demurely, who, with closed eyes, and her hand propping her head, seemed to have composed herself for a doze in the great chair.

"Wuss than toothache! That's bad. Earache mayhap?" inquired Mrs. Tarnley with pathetic concern, though I don't think it would have troubled her much if her guest had tumbled over the precipice of Carwell Valley and broken her neck among the stones in the brook.

"Pain in my face — it is called tic," said the lady, with closed eyes in a languid drawl.

"Tic? lawk! Well, I never heard o' the like, unless it be the field-bug as sticks in the cattle — that's a bad ailment, I do suppose," conjectured Mrs. Tarnley.

"You may have it yourself some day," said this lady, who spoke quietly and deliberately, but with fluency, although her accent was foreign. "When we are growing a little old our bones and nerves they will not be young still. You have your rheumatism, I have my tic — the pain in my cheek and mouth — a great deal worse, as you will find, whenever you taste of it, as it may happen. Your tea is good — after a journey tea is so refreshing. I cannot live without my cup of tea, though it is not good for my tic. So, ha, ha, he-ha! There is the tea already in my cheek — oh! Well, you will be so good to give me my bag."

Mildred looked about, and found a small baize bag with an umbrella and a bandbox.

"There's a green bag I have here, ma'am."

"A baize bag?"

"Yes,'m."

"Give it to me. Ha, yes, my bibe — my bibe — and my box."

So this lady rummaged and extricated a pipe very like a meerschaum, and a small square box.

"Tibbacca!" exclaimed Mrs. Tarnley. The stranger interpreted the exclamation, without interrupting her preparations.

"Dobacco? no, better thing — some opium. You are afraid Mrs. Harry Fairfield, she would smell id. No — I do not wish to disturb her sleeb. I am quite private here, and do not wish to discover myself. Ya, ya, ya, hoo!"

It was another twinge.

"Sad thing, ma'am," said Mildred. "Better now, perhaps?"

"Put a stool under my feed. Zere, zere, sat will do. Now you light that match and hold to the end of ze bibe, and I will zen be bedder."

Accordingly Mildred Tarnley, strongly tempted to mutter a criticism, but possibly secretly in awe of the tall and "big-made" woman who issued these orders, proceeded to obey them.

"No great odds of a smell arter all," said Mrs. Tarnley approvingly, after a little pause.

"And how long since Harry married?" inquired the smoker after another silence.

"I can't know that nohow; but 'tis since Master Charles gave 'em the lend o' the house."

"Deeb people these Vairvields are," laughed the big woman drowsily.

"When will he come here?"

"Tomorrow or next day, I wouldn't wonder; but he never stays long, and he comes and goes as secret-like as a man about a murder a'most."

"Ha, I dare say. Old Vairvield would cut him over the big shoulders with his horsewhip, I think. And when will your master come?"

"Master comes very seldom. Oh! ve-ry. Just when he thinks to find Master Henry here, maybe once in a season."

"And where does he live — at home or where?" asked the tall visitor.

"Well, I can't say, I'm sure, if it baint at Wyvern. At Wyvern, I do suppose, mostly. But I daresay he travels a bit now and again. I don't know I'm sure."

"Because I wrote to him to Wyvern to meet me here. Is he at Wyvern?"

"Well, faith, I can't tell. I know no more than you, ma'am, where Master Charles is," said Mildred, with energy, relieved in the midst of her rosary of lies to find herself free to utter one undoubted truth.

"You have been a long time in the family, Mrs. Tarnley?" drawled the visitor, listlessly.

"Since I was the height o' that — before I can remember. I was born in Carwell gatehouse here. My mother was here in old Squire's time, meanin' the father o' the present Harry Fairfield o' Wyvern that is, and grandfather o' the two young gentlemen, Master Charles and Master Harry. Why, bless you, my grandfather, that is my mother's father, was in charge o' the house and farm, and the woods, and the tenants, and all; there wasn't a tree felled, nor a cow sold, nor an acre o' ground took up but jest as he said. They called him honest Tom Pennecuick; he was thought a great deal of, my grandfather was, and Carwell never turned in as good a penny to the Fairfields as in his time; not since, and not before — never, and never will, that's sure."

"And which do you like best, Squire Charles or Squire Harry?" inquired the languid lady.

"I likes Charles," said Mrs. Tarnley, with decision.

"And why so?"

"Well, Harry's a screw; ye see he'd as lief gie a joint o' his thumb as a sixpence. He'll take his turn out of every one goodhumoured enough, and pay for trouble wi' a joke and a laugh; a very pleasant gentleman for such as has nothing to do but exchange work for his banter and live without wages; all very fine. I never seed a shillin' of hisn since he had one to spend."

"Mr. Charles can be close-fisted too, when he likes it?" suggested the lady.

"No, no, no, he's not that sort if he had it. Open-handed enough, and more the gentleman every way than Master Harry — more the gentleman," answered Mildred.

"Yes, Harry Fairfield is a shrewd, hard man, I believe; he ought to have helped his brother a bit; he has saved a nice bit o' money, I dare say," said the visitor.

"If he hasn't a good handful in his kist corner 't'aint that he wastes what he gets."

"I do suppose he'll pay his brother a fair rent for the house?" said the visitor.

"Master Harry'll pay for no more than he can help," observed Mildred.

"It's a comfortable house," pursues the stranger; "'twas so when I was here."

"Warm and roomy," acquiesced Mrs. Tarnley— "chimbley, roof, and wall — staunch and stout; 'twill stand a hundred year to come, wi' a new shingle and a daub o' mortar now and again. There's a few jackdaws up in the chimbleys that ought to be drew out o' that wi' their sticks and dirt," she reflected, respectfully.

"And do you mean to tell me he pays no rent for the Grange, and keeps his wife here?" demanded the lady, peremptorily.

"I know nothing about their dealings," answered Mrs. Tarnley, as tartly.

"And 't'aint clear to me I should care much neither; they'll settle that, like other matters, without stoppin' to ask Mildred what she thinks o't; and I dare say Master Harry will be glad enough to take it for nothing, if Master Charles will be fool enough to let him."

"Well, he shan't do that, I'll take care," said the lady, maintaining her immovable pose, which, with a certain peculiarity in the tone of her voice, gave to her an indescribable and unpleasant languor.

"I never have two pounds to lay on top o' one another. Jarity begins at home. I'll not starve for Master Harry," and she laughed softly and unpleasantly.

"His wife, you say, is a starved curate's daughter!"

"Parson Maybell — poor he was, down at Wyvern Vicarage — meat only twice or thrice a week, as I have heard say, and treated old Squire Harry bad, I hear, about his rent; and old Squire Fairfield was kind — to *her* anyhow, and took her up to the hall, and so when she grew up she took her opportunity and married Master Harry."

"She was clever to catch such a shrewd chap — clever. Light again; I shall have three four other puff before I go to my bed — very clever. How did she take so well, and hold so fast, that wise fellow, Harry Fairfield?"

"Hoo! fancy, I do suppose, and liken'. She's a pretty lass. All them Fairfields married for beauty mostly. Some o' them got land and money, and the like, but a pretty face allays along with the fortune."

The blind stranger, for blind she was, smiled downward, faintly and slily, while she was again preparing the pipe.

"When will Harry come again?" she asked.

“I never knows, he’s so wary; do you want to talk to him, ma’am?” said Mildred.

“Yes, I do,” said she; “hold the match now, Mrs. Tarnley, please.”

So she did, and — puff, puff, puff — about a dozen times, went the smoke, and the smoker was satisfied.

“Well, I never knows the minute, but it mightn’t be for a fortnight,” said Mrs. Tarnley.

“And when Mr. Charles Fairfield come?” asked the visitor.

“If he’s got your letter he’ll be here quick enough. If it’s missed him he mayn’t set foot in it for three months’ time. That’s how it is wi’ him,” answered Mildred.

“What news of old Harry at Wyvern?” asked the stranger.

“No news in partic’lar,” answered Mildred, “only he’s well and hearty — but that’s no news; the Fairfields is a long-lived stock, as everyone knows; he’ll not lie in oak and wool for many a day yet, I’m thinkin’.”

Perhaps she had rightly guessed the object of the lady’s solicitude, for a silence followed.

“There’s a saying in my country— ‘God’s children die young,’” said the tall lady.

“And here about they do say, the Devil takes care of his own,” said Mildred Tarnley. “But see how my score o’ years be runnin’ up, I take it sinners’ lives be lengthened out a bit by the Judge of all, to gi’e us time to stay our thoughts a little, and repent our misdeeds, while yet we may.”

“You have made a little fire in my room, Mrs. Tarnley?” inquired the stranger, who had probably no liking for theology.

“Yes’m; everything snug.”

“Would you mind running up and looking? I detest a chill,” said this selfish person.

At that hour no doubt Mrs. Tarnley resented this tax on her rheumatics; but though she was not a woman to curb her resentments she made shift on this occasion; that did not prevent her, however, from giving the stranger a furious look, while she muttered inaudibly a few words.

“I’ll go with pleasure, ma’am, but I’m sure it’s all right,” she said aloud, very civilly, and paused, thinking perhaps that the lady would let her off the long walk upstairs to the front of the house.

“Very good; I’ll wait here” said the guest, unfeelingly.

"As you please'm," said Mildred, and with a parting look round the kitchen, she took the candle, and left the lady to the light of the fire.

The lady was almost reclining in her chair, as if she were dozing; but in a few moments up she stood, and placing her hand by her ear, listened; then, with her hands advanced, she crept slowly, and as noiselessly as a cat, across the floor. She jostled a little against the table at Lilly Dogger's door; then she stopped perfectly still, withdrew the table without a sound; the door swung a little open, and the gaunt figure in grey stood at it, listening. A very faint flicker from the fire lighted this dim woman, who seemed for the moment to have no more life in her than the tall, gray stone of the Druid's hoe on Cressley Common.

Lilly Dogger was fast asleep; but broken were her slumbers destined to be that night. She felt a hand on her neck, and looking up, could not for a while see anything, so dark was the room.

She jumped up in a sitting posture, with a short cry of fear, thinking that she was in the hands of a robber.

"*Be* quiet, fool," said the tall woman, slipping her hand over the girl's mouth. "I'm a lady, a friend of Mrs. Mildred Tarnley, and I'm gome to stay in the house. Who is the lady that sleeps upstairs in the room that used to be Mr. Harry's? You must answer true, or I'll pull your ear very hard."

"It is the mistress, please'm," answered the frightened girl.

"Married lady?"

"Yes'm."

"Who is her husband?"

With this question the big fingers of her visitor closed upon Lilly Dogger's ear with a monitory pinch.

"The master, ma'am."

"And what's the master's name, you dirdy liddle brevarigator?"

And with these words her ear was wrung sharply.

She would have cried, very likely, if she had been less frightened, but she only winced, with her shoulders up to her ears, and answered in tremulous haste —

"Mr. Fairfield, sure."

"There's three Mr. Vairvields: there's old Mr. Vairvield, there's Mr. Charles Vairvield, and there's Mr. Harry Vairvield — you *shall* speak plain."

And at each name in her catalogue she twisted the child's ear with a sharp separate wring.

"Oh, law, ma'am. Please'm, I mean Mr. Charles Fairfield. I didn't mean to tell you no story, indeed, my lady."

"Ho, ho — yes — Charles, Charles — very goot. Now, you tell me how you know Mr. Harry from Mr. Charles?"

"Oh, law, ma'am! oh, law! oh, ma'am, dear! sure, you won't pull it no more, good lady, pleas — my ear's most broke," gasped the girl, who felt the torture beginning again.

"You tell truth. How do you know Mr. Charles from Mr. Harry?"

"Mr. Charles has bigger eyes, ma'am, and Mr. Harry has lighter hair, and a red face, please'm, and Mr. Charles's face is brown, and he talks very quiet-like, and Mr. Harry talks very loud, and he's always travellin' about a-horseback, and Mr. Charles is the eldest son, and the little child they're lookin' for is to be the Squire o' Wyvern."

The interrogator here gave her a hard pinch by the ear, perhaps without thinking of it, for she said nothing for a minute nearly, and the girl remained with her head buried between her shoulders, and her eyes wide open, staring straight up where she conjectured her examiner's face might be.

"Is the man that talks loud — Mr. Harry — here often?" asked the voice at her bedside.

"But seldom, ma'am — too busy at fairs and races, I hear them say."

"And Mr. Charles — is he often here?"

"Yes'm; master be always here, exceptin' this time only; he's gone about a week."

"About a week, Mr. Charles?"

"Oh la, ma'am — yes, indeed, ma'am, dear, it's just a week to-day since master went."

Here was a silence.

"That will do. If I find you've been telling me lies I'll take ye by the back of the neck and squeeze your face against the kitchen bars till it's burnt through and through — do you see; and I give you this one chance, if you have been telling lies to say so, and I'll forgive you."

"Nothing but truth, indeed and indeed, ma'am."

"Old Tarnley will beat you if she hears you have told me anything. So keep your own secret, and I'll not tell of you."

She saw the brawny outline of the woman faintly like a black shadow as she made her way through the door, into the kitchen, and she heard the door close, and the table shoved cautiously back into its place, and then, with a beating heart, she lay still and awfully wideawake in the dark.

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH THE HOUSE.

This stalwart lady stumbled and groped her way back to her chair, and sat down again in the kitchen. The chair in which she sat was an oldfashioned armchair of plain wood, uncoloured and clumsy.

When Mildred Tarnley returned the changed appearance of her guest struck her.

“Be ye sick, ma’am?” she asked, standing, candle in hand, by the chair.

The visitor was sitting bolt upright, with a large hand clutched on each arm of the chair, with a face deadly pale and distorted by a frown or a spasm that frightened old Mildred, who fancied, as she made no sign, not the slightest stir, that she was in a fit, or possibly dead.

“For God’s sake, ma’am,” conjured old Mildred, fiercely, “*will* ye speak?”

The lady in the chair started, shrugged, and gasped. It was like shaking off a fit.

“Ho! oh, Mildred Tarnley, I was thinking — I was thinking — did you speak?”

Mildred looked at her, not knowing what to make of it. Too much laudanum — was it? or that nervous pain in her head.

“I only asked you how you were, ma’am — you looked so bad. I thought you was just going to work in a fit.”

“What an old fool! I never was better in my life — *fit*! I never had a fit — not I.”

“You used to have ‘em sometimes, long ago, ma’am, and they came in the snap of a finger, like,” said Mildred, sturdily.

“Clear your head of those fits, for they have left me long ago. I’m well, I tell you — never was better. You’re old — you’re old, woman, and that which has made you so pious is also making you blind.”

“Well, you look a deal better now — you *do*,” said Mildred, who did not want to have a corpse or an epileptic suddenly on her hands, and was much relieved by the signs of returning vivacity and colour.

"Tarnley, you've been a faithful creature and true to me; I hope I may live to reward you," said the lady, extending her hand vaguely towards the old servant.

"I'm true to them as gives me bread, and ever was, and that's old Mildred Tarnley's truth. If she eats their bread, she'll maintain their right, and that's only honest — that's reason, ma'am."

"I have no right to cry no; I cry excellent, good, good, very good, for as you are my husband's servant, I have all the benefit of your admirable fidelity. Boo! I am so grateful, and one day or other, old girl, I'll reward you — and very good tea, and every care of me. I will tell Mr. Vairvield when he comes how good you have been — and, tell me, how is the fire, and the bed, and the bedroom — all quite comfortable?"

"Comfortable, quite, I hope, ma'am."

"Do I look quite well now?"

"Yes'm, pure and hearty. It was only just a turn."

"Yes, just so, perhaps, although I never felt it, and I could dance now only for — fifty things, so I won't mind." She laughed. "I'm sleepy, and I'm *not* sleepy; and I love you, old Mildred Tarnley, and you'll tell me some more about Master Harry and his wife when we get upstairs. Who'd have thought that wild fellow would ever tie himself to a wife? Who'd have fancied that clever young man that loves making money so well, would have chosen out a wife without a florin to her fortune? Everything is so surprising. Come, let's have a laugh, you and me together."

"My laughing days is over, ma'am — not that I see much to laugh at for any one, and many a thing I thought a laughing matter when I was young seems o'erlike a crying matter now I'm grown old," said old Mildred, and snuffed the kitchen candle with her fingers.

"Well, give me your arm, Mildred; there's a good old thing — yes."

And up she got her long length. Mildred took the candle and took the tall lady gently by the wrist. The guest, however, placed her great hand upon Mildred's shoulder, and thus they proceeded through the passages. Leaving the back stair that led to Alice's room, at the right, they mounted the great staircase and reached a comfortably warm room with a fire flickering on the hearth, for the air was sharp. In other respects the apartment had not very much to boast.

"There's fire here, I feel it; place my chair near it. The bed in the old place?" said the tall woman, coming to a halt.

"Yes'm. Little change here, ever, I warrant ye, only the room's bin new papered," answered Mildred.

"New papered, has it? Well, I'll sit down — thanks — and I'll get to my bed, just now."

"Shall I assist ye, ma'am?"

"By-and-by, thanks; but not till I have eaten a bit. I have grown hungry, what your master calls peckish. What do you advise?"

"I would advise your eating something," replied Mildred.

"But what?"

"There's very little; there's eggs quite new, there's a bit o' bacon, and there's about half a cold chicken — roast, and there's a corner o' Chedder cheese, and there's butter, and there's bread— 'taint much," answered Mrs. Tarnley, glibly.

"The chicken will do very nicely, and don't forget bread and salt, Mrs. Tarnley, and a glass of beer."

"Yes'm."

Mrs. Tarnley poked the fire and looked about her, and then took the only candle, marched boldly off with it, shutting the door.

Toward the door the lady turned her face and listened. She heard old Mildred's step receding.

This tall woman was not pleasant to look at. Her large features were pitted with the smallpox and deadly pale with the pallor of anger, and an unpleasant smile lighted up the whiteness of her face.

"Patience, patience," she repeated, "what a d —— d trick! no matter, wait a little."

She did wait a little in silence, screwing her lips and knitting her brows, and then a new resource struck her, and she groped in her bag and drew forth a bottle, which she applied to her lips more than once, and seemed better. It was no febrifuge nor opiate; but though the flicker of the fire showed no flush on her pallid features, the odour declared it brandy.

CHAPTER V.

THE BELL RINGS.

"Will that beast never go to bed — even there, I mind, she used to sleep with an eye open and an ear cocked — and nowhere safe from her never — here and there, up and down, without a stir or a breath, like a ghost or a devil?" — thought Mrs. Tarnley. "Thank God, she's blind now, that will quiet her."

Mildred was afraid of that woman. It was not only that she was cold and hard, but she was so awfully violent and wicked.

"Satan's her name. Lord help us, in what hell did he pick her up?" Mildred would say to herself, in old times, as with the important fury of fear, she used to knock about the kitchen utensils, and deal violently with every chair, table, spoon, or "cannikin" that came in her way.

The woman had fits, and bad fits too, in old times, when she knew her well.

"And she drank like a fish cogniac neat — and she was alive still, and millions of people, younger and better, that never had a fit, and kept their bodies in soberness and temperance, was gone dead and buried since; and that drunken, shattered, battered creature, wi' her fallin' sickness and her sins and her years, was here alive and strong to plague and frighten better folk. Well, she's 'ad smallpox, thank God, and well mauled she is, and them spyin', glarin' eyes o' hers, the wild beast."

By this time Mrs. Tarnley was again in the kitchen. She did not take down the fire yet. She did not know, for certain, whether Charles Fairfield might not arrive. The London mail that passed by the town of Darwynd, beyond Cressley Common, came later than that divergent stage coach that changed on the line of road that passes the Pied Horse.

What a situation it would have been if Charles Fairfield and the Vrau had found themselves vis-à-vis as inside passengers in the coach that night. Would the matter have been much mended if the Dutch woman had loitered long enough in the kitchen for Charles to step in and surprise her? It was a thought that occurred more than once to Mildred with a qualm of panic. But she was afraid to hasten the stranger's departure to her room, for that lady's mind swarmed with suspicion which a stir would set in motion.

"The Lord gave us dominion over the beast o' the field, Parson Winyard said in his sermon last Sunday; but we ain't allowed to kill nor hurt, but for food or for defence; and good old Parson Buckles, that was as good as two of he, said, I mind, the very same words. I often thought o' them of late — merciful to them brutes, for they was made by the one Creator as made ourselves. So the merciful man is merciful to his beast — will ye?"

Mrs. Tarnley interrupted herself sharply, dealing on the lean ribs of the cat, who had got its head into a saucepan, a thump with a wooden spoon, which emitted a hollow sound and doubled the thief into a curve.

"Merciful, of course, except when they're arter mischief; but them that's noxious, and hurtful, and dangerous, we're free to kill; and where's the beast so dangerous as a real bad man or woman? God forbid I should do wrong. I'm an old woman, nigh-hand the grave, and murder's murder! — I do suppose and allow that's it. Thou shalt do no murder. No more I would — no, not if an angel said do it; no, I wouldn't for untold goold. But I often wondered why if ye may, wi' a good conscience, knock a snake on the head wi' a stone, and chop a shovel down smack on a toad, ye should stay your hand, and let a devil incarnate go her murdering way through the world, blastin' that one wi' lies, robbin' this one wi' craft, and murderin' t'other, if it make for her interest, wi' poison or perjury. Lord help my poor head, and forgive me if it be sin, but I can find neither right nor reason in that, nor see, nohow, why she shouldn't be killed offhand like a rat or a sarpent."

At this point the bell rang loud and sudden, and Mrs. Tarnley bounced and blessed herself. There was no great difficulty in settling from what quarter the summons came, for, except the hall door bell, which was a deep-toned sonorous one, there was but one in the house in ringing order, and that was of the bedroom where her young mistress lay.

"Well, here's a go! Who'd a' thought o' her awake at these hours, and out o' her bed, and a pluckin' at her bell. I doubt it *is* her. The like was never before. 'Tis enough to frighten a body. The Lord help us."

Mrs. Tarnley stood straight as a grenadier on drill with her back to the fire, the poker with which, during her homily, she had been raking the bars, still in her hand.

"This night'll be the death o' me. Everything's gone cross and contrary. Here's that young silly lass awake and out o' her bed, that never had an eye open at these hours, since she came to the Grange, before; and there's that other one in the state-room, not that far from her, as wide awake as she; and here's Master Charles a comin', mayhap, this minute wi' his drummin' and bellin' at the hall door. 'Tis enough to make a body swear; 't has given me the narves and the tremblins, and I don't know how it's to end."

And Mrs. Tarnley unconsciously shouldered her poker as if awaiting the assault of burglars, and vaguely thought if Charles arrived as she had described, what power on earth could keep the peace?

Again the bell rang.

"Well, there's patience for ye!"

She halted at the kitchen door, with the candle in her hand, listening, with a stern, frightened face. She was thinking whether Alice might not have been frightened by some fantastic terror in her room.

"She has that old fat fool, Dulcibella Crane, only a room off — why don't she call up her?"

But Mrs. Tarnley at length did go on, and up the stairs, and heard Alice's voice call along the passage, in a loud tone, —

"Mrs. Tarnley! is that *you*, Mrs. Tarnley?"

"Me, ma'am? Yes'm. I thought I heard your bell ring, and I had scant time to hustle my clothes on. Is there anything uncommon a-happenin', ma'am, or what's expected just now from an old woman like me?"

"Oh, Mrs. Tarnley, I beg your pardon, I'm so sorry, and I would not disturb you, only that I heard a noise, and I thought Mr. Charles might have arrived."

"No, ma'am, he's not come, nor no sign o' him. You told me, ma'am, his letter said there was but small chance o't."

"So I did, Mildred — so it did. Still a chance — just a chance — and I thought, perhaps — — "

"There's no perhaps in it, ma'am; he baint come."

"Dulcibella tells me she thought some time ago she heard some one arrive."

"So she did, mayhap, for there did come a message for Master Harry from the farmer beyond Gryce's mill; but he went his way again."

Mildred was fibbing with a fluency that almost surprised herself.

"I dessay you've done wi' me now, ma'am?" said Mildred. "Lugged out o' my bed, ma'am, at these hours — my achin' old bones— 'taint what I'm used to, asking your pardon for making so free."

"I'm really very sorry — you won't be vexed with me. Good night, Mildred."

"Your servant, ma'am."

And Mrs. Tarnley withdrew from the door where Alice stood before her with her dressing-gown about her shoulders, looking so pale and deprecatory and anxious, that I wonder even Mildred Tarnley did not pity her.

"I'm tellin' lies enough to break a bridge, and me that's vowed against lying so stiff and strong over again only Monday last."

She shook her head slowly, and with a sudden qualm of conscience.

"Well, in for a penny in for a pound. It's only for tonight; mayhap, and I can't help it, and if that old witch was once over the door-stone I'd speak truth the rest o' my days, as I ha' done, by the grace o' God, for more than a month, and here's a nice merry-go-round for my poor old head. Who's to keep all straight and smooth wi' them that's in the house, and, mayhap comin'? And that ghost upstairs, — she'll be gropin' and screechin' through the house, and then there'll be the devil to pay wi' her and the poor lass up there — if I don't gi'e her her supper quick. Come, bustle, bustle, be alive," she muttered, as this thought struck her with new force; and so to the little "safe" which served that miniature household for larder she repaired. Plates clattered, and knives and forks, and the dishes in the safe slid forth, and how near she was forgetting the salt! and "the bread, all right," so here was a tray very comfortably furnished, and setting the candlestick upon it also, she contemplated the supper, with a fierce sneer, and a wag of her head.

"How sick and weak we be! Tea and toast and eggs down here, and this little bit in her bedroom — heaven bless her — la' love it, poor little darling, don't I hope it may do her good? — I wish the first mouthful may choke her — keeping me on the trot to these hours, old beast."

Passing the stairs, Mrs. Tarnley crept softly, and took pains to prevent her burden from rattling on the tray, while there rose in her brain the furious reflection, —

"Pretty rubbish that I should be this way among 'em!"

And she would have liked to dash the tray on the floor at the foot of the stairs, and to leave the startled inhabitants to their own courses.

This, of course, was but an emotion. The old woman completed her long march cautiously, and knocked at the Vrau's door.

"Come in, dear,' said the inmate, and Mildred Tarnley, with her tray in her hands, marched into the room, and looked round peevishly for a table to set it down on.

"You'll find all as you said, 'm," said old Tarnley. "Shall I set it before you, or will you move this way, please 'm?"

"Before me, dear."

So Mildred carried the table and supper over, and placed it before the lady, who sat up and said, —

"Good Mildred, how good you are; give me now the knife and fork, in my fingers, and put some salt just there. Very good. How good of you to take so much trouble for poor me, you kind old Mildred?"

How wondrous sweet she had grown in a minute. The old servant, who knew her, was not conciliated, but disgusted, and looked hard at the benevolent lady, wondering what could be in her mind.

"If everything's right, I'll wish you good night, 'm, and I'll go down to my bed, ma'am, please."

"Wait a while with me. Do, there's a good soul. I'll not detain you long, you dear old lass."

"Well, ma'am, I must go down and take down the fire, and shut-to the door, or the rats will be in from the scullery; and I'll come up again, ma'am, in a few minutes."

And not waiting for permission, Mildred Tarnley, who had an anxiety of another sort in her head, took the candle in her hand and left the guest at her supper by the light of the fire.

She shut the door quickly lest her departure should be countermanded, and trotted away and downstairs, but not to the kitchen.

CHAPTER VI.

TOM IS ORDERED UP.

When she reached the foot of the stairs that leads to the gallery on which the room occupied by Alice opens, instead of pursuing her way to the kitchen she turned into a narrow and dark passage that is hemmed in on the side opposite to the wall by the ascending staircase.

The shadows of the banisters on the panelled oak flew after one another in sudden chase as the old woman glided by, and looking up and back she stopped at the door of a small room, constructed as we see in similar old houses, under the stairs. On the panel of this she struck a muffled summons with her fist, and on the third or fourth the startled voice of Tom demanded roughly from within, —

“What’s that?”

“Hish!” said the old woman, through a bit of the open door.

“’Tis Mrs. Tarnley — only me.”

“Lauk, woman, ye did take a rise out o’ me. I thought ye was — I don’t know what — I was a dreaming, I think.”

“Never mind, you must be awake for an hour or so,” said Mrs. Tarnley, entering the den without more ceremony.

Tom didn’t mind Mrs. Tarnley, nor Mrs. Tarnley Tom, a rush. She set the candle on the tiled floor. Tom was sitting in his shirt on the side of his “settlebed,” with his hands on his knees.

“Ye must get on your things, Tom, and if ever you stirred yourself, be alive now. The master’s a comin’, and may be here, across Cressley Common in half an hour, or might be in five minutes, and ye must go out a bit and meet him, and — are ye awake?”

“Starin’. Go on.”

“Ye’ll tell him just this, the big woman as lives at Hoxton — — “

“Hoxton! Well?”

“That Master Harry has all the trouble wi’, has come here, angry, in search of Master Harry, mind, and is in the bedroom over the hall-door. Will ye mind all that now?”

"Ay," said Tom, and repeated it.

"Well, he'll know better whether it's best for him to come on or turn back. But if come on he will, let him come in at the kitchen door, mind, and you go that way, too, and he'll find neither bolt nor bar, but open doors, and nothing but the latch between him and the kitchen, and me sitting by the fire; but don't you clap a door, nor tread heavy, but remember there's a sharp pair of ears that 'id hear a cricket through the three walls o' Carwell Grange."

She took up the candle, and herself listened for a moment at the door, and again turned her earnest and sinister face on Tom.

"And again, I say, Tom, if ever ye was quick, be quick now," and she clapped her lean hand down on his shoulder with a sort of fierce shake; "and if ever ye trod soft, go softly now, *mind*."

Tom, who was scratching his head, and staring in her face, nodded.

"And mind you, the kitchen way, and afraid o' slips, say ye the message over again to me".

This he did, glibly enough.

"Here, light your candle from this, and if ye fail your master now, never call yourself man again."

Having thus charged him, she went softly from this nook with its slanting roof, and thinking of the thankless world, and all the trouble her old bones and brain were put to, she lost her temper, at the foot of the great staircase, and was near turning back again to the kitchen, or perhaps whisking out of the door herself, and marching off to Cressley Common to meet her master, and shock and scare him all she could, and place her resignation, as more distinguished functionaries sometimes do theirs, in the hands of her employer, to prove his helplessness and her own importance, and so assert herself for time past and to come.

Her interview with Tom had not occupied much time. She knocked at the Vrau's door, and entering, found that person at the close of a greedy repast.

Emotions of fear, I suppose, disturb the appetite, much more than others. Not caring one farthing about Charles, she did not grieve at his infidelity; taking profligacy for granted as the rule of life, it did not even shock her. But she was stung with a furious pang of jealousy, for that needs no love, being in its essence the sense of property invaded, supremacy insulted, and self despised. In this sort of jealousy there is neither the sublimity of despair nor the pathos of sorrow, but simply the malice, fury, and revenge of outraged egotism.

There she sat, unconscious of the glimmer of the firelight, feeding as a beast will bleeding after a blow. Beast she was, with the bestial faculty of cherishing a long revenge, with bestial treachery and seeming unconcern.

"Ho oh! you've come back," she cried, with playful reproach, "cruel old girl! you leave your poor vrau alone, alone among the ghosts — now, sit down, are you sitting? and tell me everything, and all the news — did you bring a little brandy or what?"

Her open hand was extended, and gently moving over the tray at about the level of the top of a bottle.

"No, ma'am, I haven't none in my charge, but there's a smell o' brandy about," said Mildred, who liked saying a disagreeable thing.

"So there ought," said the gaunt woman placidly, and lifted a big black bottle that lay in her lap, like a baby, folded in a grey shawl. "But I'll want this, don't you see, when I'm on my rambles again — get a little, there's a good girl, or if you can't get that, there's rum or gin, there never was a country-house without something in it; you know very well where Harry Vairvield is there will be liquor — I know him well."

"But he baint here now, as is well known to you, ma'am," said Mildred, dryly.

"I'm not going to waste my drink, while I think there's drink in the house. Who has a right before me, old girl?" said the stranger, grimly.

"Tut, ma'am, 'tis childish talkin' so, there's none in my charge, never a drop. Master Harry, I dare say, has summat under lock and key, but not me, and why should I tell you a lie about the like?"

"You never tell lies, old Mildred, I forgot that — but young as she is, I lay my life the woman, Mrs. Harry Vairvield, upstairs, likes a nip now and then, hey? and she has a boddle, I'll be bound, in her wardrobe, or if she's shy, 'twixt her bed and her mattress, ole rogue! you know very well, I think, does she? and if she likes it she sleeps sound, and go you, and while she snores, borrow you the bottle."

"She's nothing of the sort, she drinks nothing nowhere, much less in her bedroom, she's a perfect lady," said Mrs. Tarnley, in no mood to flatter her companion.

"Oh ho! that's so like old Mildred Tarnley! Dear old cat, I'm so amused, I could stroke her thin ribs, and pet her for making me laugh so by her frisks and capers instead of throwing you by the neck out of the window for scratching and spitting — I'm so goodnatured. Do you tell lies, Mildred?"

"I 'a told a shameful lot in my day, ma'am, but not more mayhap than many a one that hasn't grace to say so."

"You read your Bible, Mildred," said the lady, who with a knife and fork was securing on her plate the morsels to which old Mildred helped her.

"Ay, ma'am, a bit now, and a bit again, never too late to repent, ma'am."

"Repentance and grace, you'll do, Mrs. Tarnley. It's a pleasure to hear you," said the lady, with her mouth rather full; "and you never see my husband?"

"Now and again, now and again, once and away he looks in."

"Never stays a week or a month at a time?"

"Week or a month!" echoed Mrs. Tarnley, looking quickly in the serene face of the lady, and then laughing off the suggestion scornfully. "You're thinking of old times, ma'am."

"Thinking, thinking, I don't think I was thinking at all," said the lady, answering Mildred's laugh with one more careless; "old times when he had a wife here, eh? old times! How old are they? Eh — that's eighteen years ago — you hardly knew me when I called here?"

"There was a change surely. I'd like to know who wouldn't in eighteen years, there's a change in me since then."

"I shouldn't wonder," said the lady, quietly. "Did he ever tell you how we quarreled?"

"Not he," answered Mildred.

"He's very close," said the stranger.

"A deal closer than Mr. Harry," acquiesced Mildred.

"Not like you and me, Mrs. Tarnley, that can't keep a secret — *never*. That tell truth, and shame the devil. I, because I don't care a snap of my fingers for you, or him, or the Archbishop of Canterbury; and you, because you're all for grace and repentance. How am I looking tonight — tired?"

"Tired, to be sure; you ought to be in your bed, ma'am, an hour ago; you're as white as that plate, ma'am."

"White are they? — so they used to be long ago," said the visitor.

“The same set, ma’am. ’Twas a long set in my mother’s time, though ’tis little better than a short set now; but I don’t think there’s more than three plates, and the cracked butter-boat, that had a stitch in it. You’ll mind, although ye may ‘a forgot, for I usen’t to send it up to table — only them three, and the butter-boat broke since; and that butter-boat, ‘twouldn’t a brought three ha’pence by auction, and ’twas that little slut downstairs, that doesn’t never do nothing right, that knocked it off the shelf, with her smashing.”

“And I’m not looking well tonight?” said this pallid woman.

“You’d be the better of a little blood to your cheeks; you’re as white as paper, ma’am,” answered Mildred.

“I never *have* any colour now, they tell me — always pale, pale, pale; but it isn’t muddy; ‘taint what you call *putty*?”

“Well, no.”

“Ha! no; I knew that — *no*, and I’d rather be a little pale. I don’t like your great, coarse peony-faced women; it’s seven years in May last since I lost my sight. Some people are persecuted; one curse after another — rank injustice! Why should *I* lose my sight, that never did anything to signify — not half what others have, who enjoy health, wealth, rank — everything. Things are topsy-turvey a bit just now, but we’ll see them righted yet.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE OLD SOLDIER GROWS MORE FRIENDLY, AND FRIGHTENS MRS. TARNLEY.

The “Dutchwoman” resumed in a minute, and observed, —

“Well, old Tarnley, there’s no good in talking where you can’t right yourself, and where you can revenge, there’s no good in talk either; but gone it is, and the doctors say no cutting, nothing safe in my case; no cure, so let it be. I liked dress once; I dressed pretty well.”

“Beautiful!” exclaimed old Mildred, kindling for a moment into her earlier admiration of the French and London finery, with which once this tall and faded beauty had amazed the solitudes of Carwell.

The bleached, big woman smiled — almost laughed with gratified vanity.

“Yes, I was well dressed — something better than the young dowdies and old fromps, in this part of the world. How I used to laugh at them! I went to church, and to the races, to see them. Well, we’ll have better times yet at Wyvern; the old man there can’t live for ever; he’s not the Wandering Jew, and he can’t be far from a hundred; and so sure as Charles is my husband, I’ll have you there, if you like it, or give you a snug house, and a bit of ground, and a garden, and a snug allowance monthly, if you like this place best. I love my own, and you’ve been true to me, and I never failed a friend.”

“I’m growing old and silly, ma’am — never so strong as I was took for. The will was ever stronger with Mildred than the body, bless ye — no, no; two or three quiet years to live as I should a lived always, wi’ an eye on my Bible and an eye on my ways — not that I ever did aught I need be one bit ashamed on — no, not I; honest and sober, and most respectable, thank God, as the family will testify, and the neighbours; but I’ll not deny, ‘twould be something not that bad, if my old bones could rest a bit,” said old Mildred.

“Ha, girl, they *shall*; your old bones shall rest, my child,” said the lady.

“They’ll rest some day in the old churchyard o’ Carwell, but not much sooner, I’m thinking,” said Mrs. Tarnley.

"Folly, folly! ole girl; you've many a year to go before that journey; you'll live to see me, Mrs. Vairvield of Wyvern, and it won't be a bad day for you, old Mildred."

The "Dutchwoman," or the old soldier, as they used to call her long ago in this sequestered nook, drawled this languidly, and yawned a long, listless yawn.

"Well, ma'am, if you're tired, so am I," said Mildred, a little tartly; "and as for dreamin' o' quiet in this world, I ha' cleared my head o' that nonsense many a year ago. There's little good can happen old Mildred now, and less I look for, and none I'll seek, ma'am; and as for a roof over my head for nothing, and that bit o' ground ye spoke of, and wages to live on without no work, I don't believe there's no such luck going for no one."

"Listen to me, Mildred," said the stranger, more sternly than before; "is it because I don't swear you won't believe? Hear, now, once for all, and understand: I'll make *that* a good day for you that makes me the lady of Wyvern. Sharp and hard I've been with those I owed a knock to, but I never yet forgot a friend; you may do me a service tomorrow or next day, *mind*, and if you stand by me, I'll stand by you; you need but ask and have, ask what you *will*."

"Well, now, ma'am — bah! what talk it is! Lawk, ma'am; don't I know the world, ma'am, and what sort o' place it is? I a' bin promised many a fine thing in my day, and here I am still — old and weary — among the pots and pans every night and mornin', and up to my elbows in suds every Saturday; that's all that ever came o' fine promises to Mildred Tarnley."

"Well, you used to say, it's a long lane that has no turn. You'll have a glass of this?" and she popped the brandy-bottle on the table beside her, with her hand fast on its neck.

"No brandy — no nothing, ma'am, I thank ye."

"What! no brandy? Pish, girl, nonsense."

"No, ma'am, I thank ye, I never drinks nothing o' the sort — a mug o' beer after washing or the like — but my headache never would abear brandy."

"Once and away — come," solicited the old soldier.

"No, I thank ye, ma'am; I'll swallow nothing o' the kind, please."

"What a mule! You won't have a nip with an old friend, after so long an absence — come, Mildred, come; where's the glass?"

“Here’s the glass,’m, but not a drop for me, ma’am; I won’t drink nothing o’ the sort, please.”

“Not from me, I suppose; but if you mean to say you never do, I don’t believe you,” said the Dutchwoman, more nettled, it seemed, than such a failure of good fellowship in Mrs. Tarnley would naturally have warranted. Perhaps she had particularly strong reasons for making old Mildred frank, genial, and intimate that night.

“I don’t tell lies,” said Mildred.

“Don’t you?” said the “old soldier,” and elevated the brows of her sightless eyes, and screwed her lips with ugly ridicule.

Mrs. Tarnley looked with a dark shrewdness upon this meaning mask, trying to discover the exact force of its significance. She felt very uncomfortable.

The blind woman’s face expanded into a broad smile. She shrugged, shook her head, and laughed. How odiously wide her face looked as she laughed! Mildred did not know exactly what to make of her.

“But if you did tell lies,” drawled the lady, “even to me, what does it matter, if you promised to tell no more? So let us shake hands — where’s your hand?”

And she kept shuffling her big hand upon the table, palm upward, with its fingers groping in the air like the claws of a crab upon its back.

“Give me — give me — give me your hand, I say,” said she.

“‘Tain’t for the like o’ me,” replied Mildred, with grim formality.

“You’d better be friendly. Come, give me your hand.”

“Well, ma’am, ‘tain’t for me to dispute your pleasure,” answered the old servant, and she slipped her hard fingers upon the upturned palm of the Dutchwoman, who clutched them with a strenuous friendship, and held them fast.

“I like you, Tarnley; we’ve had rough words, sometimes, but no ill blood, and I’ll do what I said. I never failed a friend, as you will see, if only you *be* my friend; and why or for whom should you *not*? Tut, we’re not fools!”

“The time is past for me to quarrel, being to the wrong side o’ sixty more than you’d suppose, and quiet all I wants — quiet, ma’am.”

“Yes, quiet and comfort, too, and both you shall have, Mildred Tarnley, if you don’t choose to quarrel with those who *would* be kind to you, if you’d let them. Yes, indeed, who *would* be kind, and *very* kind, if you’d only let them. No, leave your hand where it is, I can't see you, and it's sometimes dull work talking only to a voice. If I can't see you I'll feel you, and hold you, old girl — hold you fast till I know what terms we're on."

All this time she had Mildred Tarnley's hand between hers, and was fondling and kneading it as a rustic lover in the agonies of the momentous question might have done fifty years ago.

"I don't know what you want me to say, ma'am, no more than the plate there. Little good left in Mildred Tarnley now, and small power to help or hurt anyone, great or small, at these years."

"I want you to be friendly with me, that's all; I ask no more, and it ain't a great deal, all things considered. Friendly talk, of course, ain't all I mean, that's civility, and civility's very well, very pleasant, like a lady's fan, or her lap-dog, but nothing at a real pinch, nothing to fight a wolf with. Come, old Mildred, Mildred Tarnley, good Mildred, can I be sure of you, *quite* sure?"

"Sure and certain, ma'am, in all honest service."

"Honest service! Yes, of course; what else could we think of? You used to like, I remember, Mildred, a nice ribbon in your bonnet. I have two pieces quite new. I brought them from London. Satin ribbon — purple one is — I know you'll like it, and you'll drink a glass of this to please me."

"Thanks for the ribbons, ma'am, I'll not refuse 'em; but I won't drink nothing, ma'am, I thank you."

"Well, please yourself in that. Pour out a little for me, there's a glass, ain't there?"

"Yes,'m. How much will you have, ma'am?"

"Half a glass. There's a dear. Stingy half glass," she continued, putting her finger in to gauge the quantity. "Go on, go on, remember my long journey to-day. Do you smoke, Mildred?"

"Smoke, 'm? No, 'm! Dear me, there's no smell o' tobacco, is there?" said Mildred, who was always suspecting Tom of smoking slily in his crib under the stairs.

"Smell, no; but I smoke a pinch of tobacco now and again myself, the doctor says I must, and a breath just of opium when I want it. You can have a pipe of tobacco if you like, child, and you needn't be shy. Well?"

"Ho, Fau! No, ma'am, I thank ye."

"Fau!" echoed the Dutchwoman, with a derisive, chilling laugh, which apprized old Mildred of her solecism. But the lady did not mean to quarrel.

"What sort of dress have you for Sundays, going to church, and all that?"

"An old dress it is now. I had the material, ye'll mind, when ye was here, long ago; but it wasn't made up till long after. It's very genteel, the folk all says. Chocolate colour — British cashmere— 'twas old Mrs. Hartlepool, the parson's widow, made me a compliment o't when she was goin', and I kept it all the time, wi' whole pepper and camphor, in my box, by my bed, and it looked as fresh when I took it out to give it to Miss Maddox to make up as if 'twas just put new on the counter. She did open her eyes, that's nigh seven years gone, when I told her how old it was."

"Heyday! Hi! I think I do remember that old chocolate thing. Why, it can't be that, that's twenty years old. Well, look in my box, here's the key. You'll see two books with green leather backs and gold. Can ye read? I'm going to make you a present."

"I *can* read, ma'am; but I scarce have time to read my Bible."

"The Bible's a good book, but that's a better," said the lady, with one of her titters. "But it ain't a book I'm going to give you. Look it out, green and gold, there are only two in the box. It is the one that has an I and a V on the back, *four*, the fourth volume. I have little else to amuse me. I have the news of the neighbours, but I don't like 'em, who could? A bad lot, they hate one another; 'twouldn't be a worse world if they were all hanged. They hate me because I'm a lady, so I don't cry when baby takes the croup, nor break my heart when papa gets into the 'Gazette.' Have you found it? Why, it's under your hand, there. They would not cry their eyes out for me, so I can see the funny side of their adventures, bless them!"

"Is this it, ma'am?"

"There are but two books in the box. Has it an I and a V on the back?"

"V, O, L, I, V," spelled out old Mildred, who was listening in a fever for the sounds of Charles Fairfield's arrival.

"That's it. That's the book you should read. I take it in, and I hire all the others, and a French one, from the Hoxton library. I make Molly Jinks, the little, dirty, starving maid, read to me two hours a day. She's got rather to like it. How are your eyes?"

"I can make out twelve or fourteen verses wi' the glasses, but not more, at one bout."

"Well, get on your glasses. This is the 'Magazine of the Beau-Monde, and Court and Vashionable Gazette,' and full of pictures. Turn over."

"La, ma'am, 'tis beautiful, but what have I to do with the like?"

"Well, look out for the *puce gros de Naples* walking dress, about page twenty-nine, and I'll show you the picture afterwards. Do be quick. I have had it four years, it's quite good though, only I'm grown a little fuller since, and it don't fit now. So read it, and you'll see how I'll dress you."

And bending her head forward and knitting her brows, she listened absorbed, while old Mildred helped, or corrected, at every second word, by her blind patroness, babbled and stuttered on with her in duet recitation.

"Walking dress," said Mildred —

"Go on," said the lady, who, having this like other descriptions in that cherished work pretty well by heart, led off energetically with her lean old companion, and together they read —

"A *pelisse* of puce-coloured *gros de Naples*, the corsage made to sit close to the shape, with a large round pelerine which wraps across in front. The sleeve is excessively large at the upper part of the arm. The fulness of the lower is more moderate. It is confined in three places by bands and terminated by a broad wrist-band. The pelerine and bands of the sleeves are cased with satin to correspond, and three satin *rouleaus* are arranged *en tablier* on the front of the skirt. The bonnet is of rice straw of the cottage shape, trimmed under the brim on the right side, with a band and *noeud* of gold-coloured ribbon. The crown being also ornamented with gold-coloured ribbon, and a sprig of lilac, placed perpendicularly. Half-boots of black *gros de Naples*, tipped with black kid."

Here they drew breath, and Mildred Tarnley was silent for a minute, thinking how much more like a lady her mother used to dress than *she* was able, and what fine presents of old clothes old Mrs. Fairfield used to send her now and then from Wyvern. For a moment an air of dignity, a sense of feminine vanity, showed itself in the face and mien of Mrs. Tarnley.

"That rice straw bonnet, with the gold-coloured *noeud*, of course I haven't got, nor the *gros de Naples* boots — they're gone, of course, long ago; but it reads best, altogether, and I hadn't the heart to stop you, nor you to stop reading till we got to the end. And look at the pictures, you'll easily find it; and I'll write and have the pelisse sent here by the day-coach. It will be here on Sunday. Do you like it?"

"It is a bit too fine for me, I'm afraid," said Mildred, smiling in spite of herself, with a grim elation; "my poor mother used to dress herself grand enough, in her day, and keep me handsome also when I was a young thing. But since the ladies come no more to Carwell the Grange has been a dull place, and gives a body enough to do to live, and little thought o' fine dresses, and few to see them, except o' Sundays, if 'twas here; not but 'twould be more for the credit o' the family if old Mildred Tarnley, that's known down here for housekeeper at the Grange of Carwell, wasn't turned out quite so poor and dowdy, and seeing them taking the wall o' me, which their mothers used to courtesy to mine, at church and market, and come up here to the Grange as humble as you please, when money was stirring at Carwell, and I, young as I was, thought more on, a deal more, than the best o' them."

"I drink your health, Mildred; as you won't pledge me, I do it alone."

"I thank ye, ma'am."

"Ha, yes, that does me good; I'm tired to death, Mildred."

"There's two on us so, ma'am; shall I get you to bed, please?"

"In a minute; give me your hand again, girl; come, come, come, — yes, I have it. I think you are more friendly, eh? I *think* so; but the little goodwill I ever show you now is *nothing* to what I mean for you when I come to Wyvern — nothing."

And she strengthened the present assurance with an oath, and grasped Mildred's hard brown hand very tight.

"And you'll be kind to me, Mildred, when I want it; and I *shall* want it, mind, and I'll never forget it to you; 'twill be the making of you. I'll show you how much I trust you, for I'll put myself in your power."

And, hereupon, she shook her hand harder. Her face and manner were changed, and she looked horribly frightened for some minutes.

"I don't blame you, Mildred, but, this thing must not go on — it must not be."

Mildred in her own way looked disconcerted and even agitated at this odd speech. She screwed her mouth sharply to one side, and with her brow knit had turned a frightened gaze on her visitor.

"There's things as can't be undone, and things as can," said she, after a pause oracularly; "best not meddle or make — worms that is, and dust that will be, and God over all."

"God over all, why not?" repeated the old soldier vaguely, and stood up suddenly with a kind of terrified shudder, "take me, hold me, quick."

“A fit? La bless us,” cried Tarnley, seizing her in her lean arms.

The lady answered nothing, but grasped her fast by the wrist and shoulder, and so she stood for a time shuddering and swaying. “Better at last,” she said, “a little — put me in the chair.”

And she made a great shuddering sigh or two, and called for water and “hartshorn” and the hysteria subsided. And now she seemed overpowered with languor, and answered faintly and in monosyllables to old Mrs. Tarnley’s uncomfortable inquiries.

“Now I shall get a sleep,” she said at last, in low drowsy tones, interrupted with heavy sighs, and she looked so ill that old Mildred more than ever wished her back again at Hoxton Old Town.

“Help me to my bed — support me — get off my things,” she moaned and mumbled, and at last lay down with a great groaning sigh.

“What am I to do with her now?” thought Mrs. Tarnley, who was doubtful whether in this state she could be safely left to herself.

But the patient set her at ease upon the point.

“Get your ear down,” she whispered, “near, *near* — you need not stay any longer — only — one thing — the closet with the long row of pegs and the three presses in it, that lies between *her* room and mine, I remember it well — it isn’t open — I shouldn’t like her to find me here.”

“No, ma’am, it ain’t open, the doors were papered over, this room and hers, as I told you, when the rooms was done up.”

The old soldier sighed and whispered —

“My head is very bad, make no noise, dear, don’t move the tray, don’t touch anything — leave me to myself, and I’ll sleep till eleven o’clock tomorrow morning; but go out softly, and then, no noise, for my sleep,” groaned this huge woman, “is a bird’s sleep — a bird’s sleep, and a pin dropping wakes me, a mouse stirring wakes me — oh — oh — oh. That’s all.” Glad to be dismissed on these easy terms, Mildred Tarnley bid her softly good night, having left her basket with her sal volatile, and all other comforts, on the table at her bedside.

And so, softly she stole on tiptoe out of the room, and closed her door, waiting for a moment to clear her head, and be quite sure that the “Dutchwoman,” whom they very much hated and feared, was actually established in her bedroom at Carwell Grange.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEWS FROM CRESSLEY COMMON.

A pretty medley was revolving in old Mildred’s brain as she stood outside this door, on the gallery. The epileptic old soldier, the puce *gros de Naples*, Tom on outpost duty on Cressley Common — had he come back? Charles Fairfield, perhaps, in the house, and that foolish poor young wife in her room, in the centre, and herself the object of all this maoeuvring and conspiring; quite unconscious. Mildred had a good many wires to her fingers just now; could she possibly work them all and keep the show going?

She was listening now, wondering whether Master Charles had arrived, wondering whether the young lady was asleep, and wondering, most of all, why she had been fool enough to meddle in other people’s affairs. “What the dickens was it to her if they was all in kingdom come? If Mildred was a roastin’ they wouldn’t, not one of ‘em, walk across the yard there, to take her off the spit — la, bless you, not a foot.”

Mildred was troubled about many things. Among others, what was the meaning of those oracular appeals of the Dutchwoman in which she had seemed to know something of the real state of things.

Down went Mildred Tarnley, softly still, for she would not risk waking Alice, and at the foot of the second staircase she paused again.

All was quiet, she peeped into Tom’s little room, under the staircase. It was still empty. Into the kitchen she went, nothing had been stirred there.

From habit she trotted about, and settled and unsettled some of the scanty ironmongery and earthenware, and peeped, with her candle aloft, into this corner and that, and she removed the smoothing-iron that stood on the window-stool, holding the shutters close, and peeped into the paved yard, tufted with grass, high over which the solemn trees were drooping.

Then, candle in hand, the fidgety old woman visited the back door, the latch was in its place, and she turned about and visited the panelled sitting-room. The smell of flowers was there, and on the little spider-table was Alice’s work-box, and some little muslin clippings and bits of thread and tape, the relics of that evening's solitary work over the little toilet on which her pretty fingers and sad eyes were now always employed.

Well, there was no sign of Master Charles here; so with a little more pottering and sniffing, out she went, and again to the back door, which softly she opened, and she toddled across the uneven pavement to the back-door and looked out, and walked forth upon the narrow road, that, darkened with thick trees, overhangs the edge of the ravine.

Here she listened, and listened in vain. There was nothing but the soft rush of the leaves overhead in the faint visitings of the night air, and across the glen at intervals came that ghastliest of sounds, between a long-drawn hiss and shiver, from a lonely owl.

Interrupted at intervals by this freezing sound, the old woman listened and muttered now and again a testy word or two. What was to be done, if by any mischance or blunder of Tom's the master should thunder his summons at the hall-door? Down of course would fly his young wife to let him in, and be clasped in his arms, while from the low window of the Dutchwoman that evil tenant might overhear every word that passed, and almost touch their heads with her down-stretched hand.

A pretty scene it would lead to, and agreeable consequences to Mildred herself.

"The woman's insane; she's an evil spirit; many a time she would have brained me in a start of anger if I hadn't been sharp. The mark of the cut glass decanter she flung at my head is in the door-case at the foot of the stairs this minute like the scar of a bill-hook, the mad beast. I thank God she's blind, though there's an end o' them pranks, anyhow. But she's a limb o' the evil one, and where there's a will there's a way, and blind though she be, I would not trust her."

She walked two or three steps slowly, toward Cressley Common, from which direction she expected the approach of Charles Fairfield.

No wonder Mildred was fidgeted, there were so many disasters on the cards. If she could but see Charles Fairfield something at least might be guarded against. This wiry old woman was by no means hard of hearing — rather sharp, on the contrary, was her ear. But she listened long in vain.

Fearful lest something might go wrong within doors during her absence, she was turning to go back, when she thought she heard the distant clink of a horseshoe on the road.

Her old heart throbbed suddenly, and frowning as she listened, with eyes directed towards the point of approach, softly she said “hush,” as if to quiet the faint rustle of the trees.

Stooping forward, she listened, with her lean arm extended, every wrinkled knuckle of her brown hand, and every black-rimmed nail distinct in the moonlight.

Yes, it was the clink of trotting horseshoes. She prayed heaven the blind woman might not hear it. There was a time when her more energetic misanthropy would possibly have enjoyed a *fracas* such as was now to be apprehended. But years teach us the value of quiet, the providential instincts of growing helplessness disarm our pugnacity, and all but quite reprobate spirits grow gentler and kinder as the hour of parting with earth approaches. Thus had old Mildred taken her part in this game, and as her stake became deeper and more dangerous her zeal burnt intensely.

Nearer and sharper came the clink, and old Mildred in her anxiety walked on, sometimes five steps, sometimes twenty, to meet the rider.

It was Tom who appeared, mounted on the mule. I think he took Mildred for a ghost, for he pulled up violently more than twenty yards away, and said, “Lord! who’s that?”

“It’s me, Tom, Mrs. Tarnley; and is he comin’?”

“I hardly knowed you, Mrs. Tarnley. No, I met him up near the stone.”

“Not a coming?” urged Mildred.

“No.”

“Thank God. Well, and what did you tell him?”

“I told him your message. He first asked all about the young lady, and then I told him how she was, and then I told him your message — — “

“Ay?”

“Word for word, and he drew bridle and stood a while, thinkin’, and he wished to know whether the mistress had spoke with her — Mr. Harry’s friend, I mean — and I said I didn’t know; and he asked was the house quiet, and no high words going, nor the new comer giving any trouble, and I said *no*, so far as I knowed. Then, says he, I think, Tom, I had best let Master Harry settle it his own way, so I’ll ride back again to Darwynd, and you can come over to the old place for the horse tomorrow; and tell Mildred I thank her for her care of us, and she shall hear from me in a day or two, and tell no one else, mind, that you have seen me. Well, I asked was there anything more, and he paused a bit, and says he, no, not at present. And then again, says he, tell Mildred Tarnley I'll write to her, and let her know where I am, and mind, Tom, you go yourself to the Post Office, and be sure the letters go only to the persons they are directed to, your mistress's to her, and Mildred's to *her*, and don't you talk with that person that I hear has come to the Grange, and if by any chance she should get into talk with you, you must be wide awake and tell her *nothing*, and get away from her as quick as you can. It's easy to escape her, for she's blind."

"So she is," affirmed Mildred, "as that wall. Go on."

"'Then,' says he, 'good night, Tom, get ye home again.' So I wished him God speed, and I rode away, and when I was on a bit I threw a look back again over my shoulder, and I saw him still in the same spot, no more stirring than the stone at the roadside, thinking, I do suppose."

"And that's all?" said Mildred.

"That's all."

"Bring in the beast very quiet, Tom, unless you leave him in the field for the night, and don't be clappin' o' doors or jinglin' o' bridle bits. That one has an ear like a hare, and she'll be askin' questions; and when you've done in the stable come you in this way, and I'll let you in softly, and don't you be talkin' within doors above a whisper. Your voice is rough, and her ear is as sharp as a needle's point."

Tom gave her a little nod and a great wink, and got off the mule, and led him on the grass toward the stableyard, and old Mildred at the same time got in softly by the other entrance, and in the kitchen awaited the return of Tom.

She sat by the fire, troubled in mind, with her eyes turned askance on the windows. What a small thing is a human body, and what a gigantic moral sphere surrounds that little centre! That blind woman lay still as death, on a six foot long bedstead, in a remote chamber. But the direful circuit of that sphere which radiated thence enveloped old Mildred Tarnley go where she would, and outspread even the bourn of the road which Charles Fairfield was to travel that night. For Mildred Tarnley, something of molestation and horror was in it, which forbid her to rest.

Tom came into the yard, and Mildred was at the door, and opened it before he could place his hand on the latch.

“Put off them big shoes, and not a word above your breath, and not a stir, but get ye in again to your bed as still as a mouse,” said Mrs. Tarnley, in a hard whisper, giving him a shake of the shoulder.

“Ye’ll gi’e me a mug o’ beer, Mrs. Tarnley, and a lump o’ bread, and a cut o’ cheese wouldn’t hurt me; I’m a bit hungry. If you won’t I must even take a smoke, for I can’t sleep as I am.”

“Well, I will give ye a drink and a bit o’ bread and cheese. Did ye lock the yard-door?”

“No,” said Tom.

“Well, no, never you mind; I’ll do it,” said Mildred, stopping him, “and go you straight to your room, and here’s the lantern for you; and now get ye in, and not a sound, mind, you gi’e me your pipe here, for you shan’t be stinkin’ the house wi’ your nasty tobaccy.”

So Tom was got quick to his bed.

And Mildred sat down again by the kitchen fire, to rest for a little, feeling too tired to undress.

“Well, I *do* thank God of his mercy he’s *not* a comin’; I do. Who can tell what would be if he *was*? And now, if only Master Harry was sure to keep away all might go right — yes, all — all might go right. Oh, ho, ho! I wish it was, and my old head at rest, for I’m worked worse than a horse, and wore off my feet altogether.”

And all this time she was looking through the kitchen-window, with dismal eyes, from her clumsy oak chair by the fire, with her feet on the fender, and her lean shanks as close to the bars as was safe, shaking her head from time to time as she looked out on the black outlines of the trees which stood high and gloomy above the wall at the other side, against the liquid moonlit sky.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR RETURN.

In spite of her troubles, as she sat by the fire, looking out through the window, fatigue overcame Mildred, and she nodded. But her brain being troubled, and her attitude uneasy, she awoke suddenly from a sinister dream, and as still unconscious where she was, her eyes opened upon the same melancholy foliage and moonlit sky and the dim enclosure of the yard, the scenery on which they had closed. She saw a pale face staring in upon her through the window. The fingers were tapping gently on the glass.

Old Mildred blinked and shook her head to get rid of what seemed to her a painful illusion.

It was Charles Fairfield who stood at the window, looking wild and miserably ill.

Mildred stood up, and he beckoned. She signed toward the door, which she went forthwith and opened.

“Come in, sir,” she said.

His saddle, by the stirrup-leather, and his bridle were in his hand. Thus he entered the kitchen, and dropped them on the tiled floor. She looked in his face, he looked in hers. There was a silence. It was not Mildred’s business to open the disagreeable subject.

“Would you please like anything?”

“No, no supper, thanks. Give me a drink of water, I’m thirsty. I’m tired, and — we’re quite to ourselves?”

“Yes, sir; but wouldn’t ye better have beer?” answered she.

“No — water — thanks.”

And he drank a deep draught.

“Where’s the horse, sir?” she asked after a glance at the saddle which lay on its side on the floor.

“In the field, the poplar field, all right — *well*?”

“Tom told you my message, sir,” she asked, averting her eyes a little.

“Yes — where is she — *asleep*?”

“The mistress is in her bed, asleep I do suppose.”

"Yes, yes, and quite well, Tom says. And where is the — the — you sent me word there was some one here. I know whom you mean. Where is she?"

"In the front bedroom — the old room — it will be over the hall-door, you know — she's in bed, and asleep, I'm thinkin'; but best not make any stir — some folks sleep so light, ye know."

"It's late," he said, taking out his watch, but forgetting to consult it, "and I dare say she *is* — she came tonight, yes — and she's tired, or ought to be — a long way."

He walked to the window, and was looking, with the instinct which leads us always, in dark places, to look toward the light, above the dusky trees to the thin luminous cloud that streaked the sky.

"Pretty well tired myself, Mr. Charles; you may guess the night I've put in; I was a'most sleepin' myself when ye came to the window. Tom said ye wern't a comin'; 'tis a mercy the yard door wasn't locked; five minutes more and I'd have locked it."

"It would not have mattered much, Mildred."

"Ye'd a climbed, and pushed up the window, mayhap."

"No; I'd have walked on; a feather would have turned me from the door as it was."

He turned about and looked at her dreamily.

"On *where*?" she inquired.

"On, anywhere; on into the glen. If you are tired, Mildred, so am I."

"You need a good sleep, Master Charles."

"A long sleep, Mildred. I'm tired. I had a mind as it was to walk on and trouble you here no more."

"Walk on — hoot! nonsense, Mr. Charles; 'tisn't come to that; giving up your house to a one like her."

"I wish I was dead, Mildred. I don't know whether it was a good or an evil angel that turned me in here. I'd have been easier by this time if I had gone on, and had my leap from the scaur to the bottom of the glen."

"None o' that nonsense, man!" said Mildred, sternly; "ye ha' brought that poor young lady into a doubtful pass, and ye must stand by her, Charles. You're come of no cowardly stock, and ye shan't gi'e her up, and your babe that's comin', poor little thing to shame and want for lack of a man's heart under your ribs. I say, I know nout o' the rights of it; but God will judge ye if ye leave her now."

High was Mrs. Tarnley's head, and very grim she looked as with her hand on his shoulder she shook up "Master Charles" from the drowse of death.

"I won't, old Tarnley," he said at last. "You're right — poor little Alice, the loving little thing!"

He turned suddenly again to the window and wept in silence strange tears of agony.

Old Tarnley looked at him sternly askance. I don't think she had much pity for him; she was in nowise given to the melting mood, and hardly knew what that sort of whimpering meant.

"I say," she broke out, "I don't know the rights of it, how should I? but this I believe, if you thought you were truly married to that woman that's come tonight, you'd never a found it in your heart to act such a villain's part by the poor, young, foolish creature up stairs, and make a sham wife o' her."

"Never, never, by heaven. I'm no more that wretched woman's husband than I'm married to you."

"Mildred knew better than marry anyone; there's little I see but tears and wrinkles, and oftentimes rags and hunger comes of it; but 'twill be done, marryin' and givin' in marriage, says the Scriptures, 'tis so now, 'twas so when Noah went into the ark, and 'twill be so when the day of judgment breaks over us."

"Yes," said Charles Fairfield, abstractedly; "of course that miserable woman sticks at no assertion; her idea is simply to bully her way to her object. It doesn't matter what she says, and it never surprised me. I always knew if she lived she'd give me trouble one day; but that's all; just trouble, but no more; not the slightest chance of succeeding — not the smallest; she knows it; I know it. The only thing that vexes me is that people who know all about it as well as I do, and people who, of all others, should feel for me, and feel with me, should talk as if they had doubts upon the subject now."

"I didn't say so, Master Charles," said Mildred.

"I didn't mean you, I meant others, quite a different person; I'm utterly miserable; at a more unlucky moment all this could not have happened by any possibility."

"Well, I'm sure I never said it; I never thought but one thing of her; the foul-tongued wicked beast."

"Don't you talk that way of her," said Charles, savagely. "Whatever she is she has suffered, she has been cruelly used, and I am to blame for all. I did not mean it, but it is all my fault."

Mrs. Tarnley sneered, but said nothing, and a silence followed.

"I know," he said, in a changed way, "you mean kindly to me."

"Be kind to yourself. I hold it's the best way in this bleak world, Mr. Charles. I never was thanked for kindness yet."

"You have always been true to me, Mildred, in your own way — in your own way, mind, but always true, and I'll show you yet, if I'm spared, that I can be grateful. You know how I am now — no power to serve anyone — no power to show my regard."

"I don't complain o' nothing," said Mildred.

"Has my brother been here, Mildred?" he asked.

"Not he."

"No letters for me?" asked he.

"Nothing, sir."

"You never get a lift when you want it — never," said Charles, with a bitter groan; "never was a fellow driven harder to the wall — never a fellow nearer his wits' ends. I'm very glad, Mildred, I have some one to talk to — one old friend. I don't know what to do — I can't make up my mind to anything, and if I hadn't you just now, I think I should go distracted. I have a great deal to ask you. That lady, you say, has been in her room some time — did she talk loud — was she angry — was there any noise?"

"No, sir."

"Who saw her?"

"No one but myself, and the man as drove her."

"Thank God for that. Does she know about my — did she hear that your mistress is in the house?"

"I said she was Master Harry's wife, and told her, Lord forgive me, that he was here continually, and you hardly ever, and then only for a few hours at a time."

"That's very good — she believed it?"

"Every word, so far as I could see. I a' told a deal o' lies."

"Well, well, and what more?"

"And the beginning of sin is like the coming in of waters, and 'twill soon make an o'er wide gap for itself, and lay all under."

"Yes — and — and — you really think she believed all you said?"

"Ay, I do," answered she.

"Thank God, again!" said he, with a deep sigh. "Oh, Mildred, I wish I could think what's best to be done. There are ever so many things in my head."

She felt a trembling she thought in the hand he laid upon her arm.

"Take a drink o' beer, you're tired, sir," said she.

"No, no — not much — never mind, I'm better as I am. How has your mistress been?"

"Well, midlin' — pretty well."

"I wish she was quite well, Mildred — it's very unlucky. If the poor little thing were only quite well, it would make everything easy; but I daren't frighten her — I daren't tell her — it might be her death. Oh, Mildred, isn't all this terrible?"

"Bad enough — I can't deny."

"Would it be better to run that risk and tell her everything?" he said.

"Well, it *is* a risk, an' a great one, and it might be the same as puttin' a pistol to her head and killin' her; 'tis a tryin' time with her, poor child, and a dangerous bed, and mind ye this, if there's any talk like that, and the crying and laughing fits mayhap that comes with it, don't ye think but the old cat will hear it, and then in the wild talk a's out in no time, and the fat in the fire; no, if she's to hear it, it can't be helped, and the will o' God be done; but if I was her husband, I'd sooner die than tell her, being as she is."

"No, of course, no — she must not be told; I'm sure you're right, Mildred. I wish Harry was here, he thinks of things sometimes, that don't strike me. I wish Harry would come, he might think of something — he would, I dare say — he would, I'm certain."

"I wish that woman was back again where she came from," said Mildred, from whose mind the puce *gros de Naples* was fading, for she had a profound distrust of her veracity, and the pelisse looked very like a puce-coloured lie.

"Don't Mildred — don't, like a good creature — you won't for my sake, speak harshly of that unhappy person," he said gently this time, and laying his hand on her shoulder. "I'm glad you are here, Mildred — I'm very glad; I remember you as long as I can remember anything — you were always kind to me, Mildred — always the same — true as steel."

He was speaking with the friendliness of distress. It is in pain that sympathy grows precious, and with the yearning for it, returns something of the gentleness and affection of childhood.

"She's come for no good," said Mildred, "she's sly, and she's savage, and if you don't mind me saying so, I often thought she was a bit mad — folk as has them fits, ye know, they does get sometimes queerish."

"We can talk of her by-and-by," said he; "what was in my mind was about a different thing. For a thousand reasons I should hate a *fracas* — I mean a row with that person at present; you know yourself how it might affect the poor little thing up stairs. Oh, my darling, my darling, what have I brought you into?"

"Well, well, no help for spilled milk," said Mildred. "What was you a-thinking of?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, Mildred — I was thinking — yes — if your mistress was well enough for a journey, I'd take her away from this — I'd take her away immediately — I'd take her quite out of the reach of that — that restless person. I ought to have done so at once, but I was so miserably poor, and this place here to receive us, and who could have fancied she'd have dreamed, in her state of health, and with her affliction — her sight, you know — of coming down here again; but I'm the unluckiest fellow on earth; I never, by any chance, leave a blot that isn't hit. Don't you think, Mildred, I had better not wake your mistress tonight to talk over plans?"

"Don't you go near her; a sight of your face would tell her all wasn't right."

"I had better not see her, you think?"

"Don't see her. So soon as you know yourself what you're going to do with her, and if you make up your mind tonight so much the better — write you to tell her what she's to do, and give me the letter and I'll give it to her as if it came by a messenger; and take you my counsel — don't you stop here a minute longer than you can. Leave before daybreak, you're no use here, and if she finds you 'twill but make bad worse. When will ye lie down — you'll not be good for nothin' tomorrow if ye don't sleep a bit — lie down on the sofa in the parlour, and your cloak is hangin' in the passage, and be you out o' the house by daybreak, and I'll have a bit o' breakfast ready before ye go."

"And there's Lady Wyndale, I didn't tell you, offered to take care of Alice, your mistress, and she need only go there for the present; but that might be too near, and I was thinking it might not do."

“Best out o’ reach altogether when ye go about it,” said Mildred. “Sit here if you like it, or lie down, as I said, in the parlour, and if you settle your mind on any plan just knock at my door, and I’ll have my clothes about me and be ready at call, and Tom’s in his old crib under the stair, if you want him to get the saddle on the horse, and I won’t take down the fire, I’ll have it handy for your breakfast, and now I can’t stop talkin’ no longer, for Mildreds wore off her feet — will ye take a candle, or will ye stop here?”

“Yes, give me a candle, Mildred — thanks — and don’t mind the cloak, I’ll get it myself, I will lie down a little, and try to sleep — I wish I could — and if you waken shake me up in an hour or two, something must be settled before I leave this, something *shall* be settled, and that poor little creature out of reach of trouble and insult. Don’t forget. Good night, Mildred, and God bless you, Mildred, God for ever bless you.”

CHAPTER X.

CHARLES FAIRFIELD ALONE.

Charles Fairfield talked of sleeping. There was little chance of that. He placed the candle on one of the two old oak cupboards, as they were still called, which occupied corresponding niches in the wainscoted wall, opposite the fireplace, and he threw himself at his length on the sofa.

Tired enough for sleep he was; but who can stop the mill of anxious thought into which imagination pours continually its proper grist? In his tired head its wheels went turning, and its hammers beat with monotonous pulsation and whirl — weariest and most wasting of fevers!

He turned his face, like the men of old, in his anguish, to the wall. Then he tried the other side, wide awake, and literally staring, from point to point, in the fear and fatigue of his vain ruminations. Then up he sat, and flung his cloak on the floor, and then to the window he went, and, opening the shutter, looked out on the moonlight, and the peaceful trees that seemed bowed in slumber, and stood, hardly seeing it — hardly thinking in his confused misery.

One hand in his pocket, the other against the window-case, to which the stalworth good fellow, Harry, had leaned his shoulder in their unpleasant dialogue and altercation. Harry, his chief stay, his confidant and brother — dare he trust him now? If he might, where could he find him? Better do his own work — better do it indifferently than run a risk of treason. He did not quite know what to make of Harry.

So with desultory resolution he said to himself, “Now I’ll think in earnest, for I’ve got but two hours to decide in.” There was a pretty little German village, quite out of the ordinary route of tourists. He remembered its rocks and hills, its ruined castle and forest scenery, as if he had seen them but yesterday — the very place for Alice, with her simple tastes and real enjoyment of nature. On that point, though under present circumstances by short journeys, they should effect their retreat.

In three hours’ time he would himself leave the Grange. In the meantime he must define his plans exactly. He must write to Harry — he must write to

Alice, for he was quite clear he would not see her; and, after all, he might have been making a great deal too much of this odious affair, which, rightly managed, might easily end in smoke.

Pen, ink, and paper he found, and now to clear his head and fix his attention. Luckily he had a hundred pounds in his pocketbook. Too hard that out of his miserable pittance, scarcely five hundred pounds a year, he should have to pay two hundred pounds to that woman, who never gave him an easy week, and who seemed bent on ruining him if she could. By the dull light of the mutton-fat with which Mildred had furnished him he wrote this note —

“MY DARLING LITTLE WOMAN, —

“You must make Dulcibella pack up your things. Tom will have a chaise here at eleven o’clock. Drive to Wykeford and change horses there, and go on to Lonsdale, where I will meet you *at last*. Then and there your own, poor, loving Ry will tell you all his plans and reasons for this sudden move. We must get away by easy stages, and baffle possible pursuit, and then a quiet and comparatively happy interval for my poor little fluttered bird. I live upon the hope of our meeting. Out of reach of all trouble we shall soon be, and your poor Ry happy, where only he can be happy, in your dear presence. I enclose ten pounds. Pay *nothing and nobody* at the Grange. Say I told you so. You will reach Lonsdale, if you leave Carwell not later than eleven, before five. Don’t delay to pack up any more than you actually want. Leave all in charge of old Mildred, and we can easily write in a day or two for anything we may want.

“Ever, my own idolized little woman, “Your own poor adoring “RY.”

So this was finished, and now for Harry:

“MY DEAR HARRY, —

“How you must hate the sight of my hand. I never write but to trouble you. But, as you will perceive, I am myself in trouble more than enough to warrant my asking you again to aid me if it should lie in your way. You will best judge if you can, and how you can. The fact is that what you apprehended turns out to be too true. That person who, however I may have been at one time to blame, has certainly no right to charge me with want of generosity or consideration, seems to have made up her mind to give me all the annoyance in her power. She is at this moment *here* at Carwell Grange. I was absent when she arrived, and received timely notice, and perhaps ought to have turned about, but I could not do that without ascertaining first exactly how matters stood at Carwell. So I am here, without any one's being aware of it except old Mildred, who tells me that the person in question is under the impression that it is *you* — and not I — who are married, and that it is your wife who is residing in the house. As you have been no party to this deception, pray let her continue to think so. I shall leave this before daybreak, my visit not having exceeded four hours. I leave a note for poor little Alice, telling her to follow me tomorrow — I should say *this* morning — to Lonsdale, where I shall meet her; and thence we get on to London, and from London, my present idea is, to make our way to some quiet little place on the Continent, where I mean to stay quite concealed until circumstances alter for the better. What I want you, and *beg* of you to do for me at present, is just this — to sell *everything* at Carwell that is saleable — the horse, the mule, the two donkeys, the carts, plough, &c., &c., in fact everything out of doors; and let the farm to Mildred's nephew, who wanted to take it last year. It is, including the garden, nineteen acres. I wish him to have it, provided he pays a fair rent, because I think he would be kind to his aunt, old Mildred. He must stipulate to give her her usual allowances of vegetables, milk, and all the rest from the farm; and she shall have her room, and the kitchen, and her 8l. a year as usual. Do like a good old fellow see to this, and try to turn all you can into money for me. I shall have miserably little to begin with, and anything you can get together will be a lift to me. If you write under cover to J. Dylke at the old place in Westminster, it will be sure to reach me. I don't know whether all this is intelligible. You may guess how distracted I am and miserable. But there is no use in describing. I ought to beg your pardon a thousand times for asking you to take all the trouble involved in this request. But, dear Harry, you will ask yourself who else on earth has the poor devil to look to in an emergency but his brother? I know my good Harry will remember how urgent the case is. Any advice you can spare me in my solitary trouble will be most welcome. I think I have said everything — at least all I can think of in this miserable hurry — I feel so helpless. But you are a clever fellow, and always were — so much cleverer than I, and know how to manage things. God bless you, dear Harry, I know you won't forget how pressed I am. You were always prompt in my behalf, and I never so needed a friend like you — for delay here might lead to the worst annoyances.

“Ever, dear Harry, your affectionate brother,

“CHARLES FAIRFIELD. “Carwell Grange.”

It was a relief to his mind when these letters were off it, and something like the rude outline of a plan formed.

Very tired was Charles Fairfield when he had folded and addressed his letters. No physical exertion exhausts like the monotonous pain of anxiety. For many nights he had had no sleep, but those wearying snatches of half-consciousness in which the same troublous current is still running through the brain, and the wasted nerves of endurance are still tasked. He sat now in his chair, the dim red light of the candle at his elbow, the window shutter open before him, and the cold serene light of the moon over the outer earth and sky.

Gazing on this, a weary sleep stole over his senses, and for a full hour the worn-out man slept profoundly.

Into this slumber slowly wound a dream, of which he could afterwards remember only that it was somehow horrible.

Dark and direful grew his slumber thus visited; and in a way that accorded well with its terrors, he was awakened.

CHAPTER XI.

AWAKE.

In his dream, a pale frightened face approached him slowly, and recoiling uttered a cry. The scream was horribly prolonged as the figure receded. He thought he recognised some one — dead or living he could not say — in the strange, Grecian face, fixed as marble, that with enormous eyes, had looked into his.

With this sound ringing in his ears he awoke. As is the case with other over-fatigued men, on whom, at length, slumber has seized, he was for a time in the attitude of wakefulness before his senses and his recollection were thoroughly aroused, and his dream quite dissipated. Another long shriek, and another, and another, he heard. Charles recognised, he fancied, his wife's voice. Scared, and wide awake, he ran from the room — to the foot of the stairs — up the stairs. A tread of feet he heard in the room, and the door violently shaken, and another long, agonized scream.

Over this roof and around it is the serenest and happiest night. The brilliant moon, the dark azure and wide field of stars make it a night for holy thoughts, and lovers' vigils, so tender and beautiful. There is no moaning night-wind, not even a rustle in the thick ivy. The window gives no sound, except when the gray moth floating in its shadow taps softly on the pane. You can hear the leaf that drops of itself from the treetop, and flits its way from bough to spray to the ground.

Even in that gentle night there move, however, symbols of guilt and danger. While the small birds, with head under wing, nestle in their leafy nooks, the white owl glides with noiseless wing, a murderous phantom, cutting the air. The demure cat creeps on and on softly as a gray shadow till its green eyes glare close on its prey. Nature, with her gentleness and cruelty, her sublimity and meanness, resembles that microcosm, the human heart, in which lodge so many contrarieties, and the shabby contends with the heroic, the diabolic with the angelic.

In this still night Alice's heart was heavy. Who can account for those sudden, silent, but terrible changes in the spiritual vision which interpose as it were a thin coloured medium between ourselves and the realities that surround us — how all objects, retaining their outlines, lose their rosy glow and golden lights, and on a sudden fade into dismallest gray and green?

“Dulcibella, do you think he’s coming? Oh! Dulcibella, do you think he’ll come tonight?”

“He may, dear. Why shouldn’t he? Lie down, my child, and don’t be sitting up in your bed so. You’ll never go asleep while you’re listening and watching. Nothing but fidgets, and only the wider awake the longer you watch. *Well* I know it, and many a long hour I laid awake myself expectin’ and listenin’ for poor Crane a comin’ home with the cart from market, long ago. He had his failin’s — as who has not? poor Crane — but an honest man, and goodnatured, and would not hurt a fly, and never a wry word out of his mouth, exceptin’, maybe, one or two, which he never meant them, when he was in liquor, as who is there, Miss Ally, will not be sometimes? But he was a kind, handsome fellow, and sore was my heart when he was taken,” and Dulcibella wiped her eyes. “Seven-and-twenty years agone last Stephen’s Day I buried him in Wyvern Churchyard, and I tried to keep the little business a-goin’, but I couldn’t make it pay no how, and when it pleased God to take my little girl six years after, I gave all up and went to live at the vicarage. But as I was sayin’, miss, many a long hour I sat up a watchin’ for my poor Crane on his way home. He would sometimes stop a bit on the way, wi’ a friend or two, at the Cat and Fiddle— ’twas the only thing I could ever say wasn’t quite as I could a’ liked in my poor Crane. And that’s how I came to serve your good mother, miss, and your poor father, the good vicar o’ Wyvern — there’s not been none like him since, not one — no, indeed.”

“You remember mamma very well?”

“Like yesterday, miss,” said old Dulcibella, who often answered that question. “Like yesterday, the pretty lady. She always looked so pleasant, too — a smiling face, like the light of the sun coming into a room.”

“I wonder, Dulcibella, there was no picture.”

“No picture. No miss. Well, ye see, Miss Ally, dear, them pictures, I’m told, costs a deal o’ money, and they were only beginnin’ you know, and many a little expense — and Wyvern Vicarage is a small livelihood at best, and ye must be managin’ if ye’d keep it — and good to the poor they was with all that, and gave what many a richer one wouldn’t, and never spared trouble for them; they counted nothin' trouble for no one. They loved all, and lived to one another, not a wry word ever; what one liked t'other loved, and all in the light o' God's blessin'. I never seen such a couple, never; they doated on one another, and loved all, and they two was like one angel."

"Lady Wyndale has a picture of poor mamma — very small — what they call a miniature. I think it quite beautiful. It was taken when she was not more than seventeen. Lady Wyndale, you know, was ever so much elder than mamma."

"Ay, so she was, ten year and more, I dare say," answered Dulcibella.

"She is very fond of it — too fond to give it to me now; but she says, kind aunt, she has left it to me in her will. And oh! Dulcibella, I feel so lonely."

"Lonely! why should you, darling, wi' a fine handsome gentleman to your husband, that will be squire o' Wyvern — think o' that — squire o' Wyvern, and that's a greater man than many a lord in Parliament; and he's goodnatured, never a hard word or a skew look, always the same quiet way wi' him. Hoot, miss! ye mustn't be talkin' that way. Think o' the little baby that's a comin'. Ye won't know yourself for joy when ye see his face, please God, and I'm a longin' to show him to ye."

"You good old Dulcibella," said the young lady, and her eyes filled with tears as she smiled. "But poor mamma died when I was born, and oh, Dulcibella, do you think I shall ever see the face of the poor little thing? Oh! wouldn't it be sad! wouldn't it be sad!"

"Ye're not to be talkin' that nonsense, darling; 'tis sinful, wi' all that God has given you, a comfortable house over your head, and enough to eat, and good friends, and a fine, handsome husband that's kind to you, and a blessed little child a comin' to make every minute pleasant to all that's in the house. Why, 'tis a sin to be frettin' like that, and as for this thing or that thing, or being afeard, why, everyone's afeard, if they'd let themselves, and not one in a thousand comes by any harm; and 'tis sinful, I tell ye, for ye know well ye're in the hands o' the good God that's took care o' ye till now, and took ye out o' the little nursery o' Wyvern Vicarage, when ye weren't the length o' my arm, and not a friend near but poor, foolish, old Dulcibella, that did not know where to turn. And your aunt, that only went out as poor as your darling mamma, brought home well again from t'other end of the world, and well to do, your own loving kith and kin, and good friends raised up on every side, and the old squire, Harry o' Wyvern, although he be a bit angered for a while he's another good friend, that will be sure to make it up, whatever it is came between him and Master Charles. Hot blood's not the worst blood; better a blow in haste and a shake hands after than a smile at the lips and no goodwill wi' it. I tell you, they're not the worst, they hotheaded, hard-fisted, outspoken folk; and I'll never forget that day to him, when he brought you home that had no home, and me that was thinkin' o' nout but the workhouse. So do or say what he will, God bless him for that day, say I, for 'twas an angel's part he did," said old Dulcibella.

"So I feel, God knows; so I feel," said Alice, "and I hope it may all be made up; I'm sure it will; and, oh! Dulcibella, I have been the cause of so much sorrow and bitterness!"

She stopped suddenly, her eyes full of tears; but she restrained them.

"That's the way ye'll always be talking. I'd like to know where they'd be without you. Every man that marries will have care, more or less; 'tis the will o' God; and if he hadn't he'd never think o' Him; and 'tis a short life at the longest, and a sore pilgrimage at the best. So what He pleases to lay on us we must even bear wi' a patient heart, if we can't wi' a cheerful; for wi' his blessin' 'twill all end well."

"Amen," said Alice, with a cheerier smile but a load still at her heart; "I hope so, my good old Dulcibella. What should I do without you? Wait! hush! Is that a noise outside? No; I thought I heard a horse's tread, but there's nothing. It's too late now; there's no chance of him tonight. Do you think, Dulcibella, there is any chance?"

"Well, no, my dear; it's gettin' on too late — a deal too late; no, no, we must even put that clean out of our heads. Ye'll not get a wink o' sleep if you be listening for him. Well I know them fidgets, and many a time I lay on my hot ear — now this side, now that, listening, till I could count the veins o' my head beating like a watch, and myself only wider and wider awake every hour, and more fool I; and well and hearty home wi' him, time enough, and not a minute sooner for all my watching. And mind ye, what I often told ye when ye were a wee thing, and ye'll find it true to the end o' your days — a watch-pot never boils."

Alice laughed gently.

"I believe you are right, Dulcibella. No, he won't come tonight. It was only a chance, and I might have known. But, perhaps, tomorrow? Don't you think tomorrow?"

"Very like, like enough, tomorrow — daylight, mayhap to breakfast — why not?" she answered.

"Well, I do think he may; he said, perhaps tonight, and I know, I'm sure he'll think how his poor wife is watching and longing to see him; and, as you advise, I'll put that quite out of my head; he has so many things to look after, and he only said *perhaps*; and you think in the morning. Well, I won't let myself think so, it would be too delightful; I won't think it. But it can't be many days, I'm sure — and — I won't keep you up any longer, dear old Dulcibella. I've been very selfish. So, goodnight."

And they kissed, as from little Allie's infancy they had always done, before settling for the night.

"Goodnight, and God love it; it mustn't be frettin', and God bless you, my darling Miss Allie; and you must get to sleep, or you'll be looking so pale and poor in the morning, he won't know you when he comes."

So, with another hug and a kiss they parted, and old Dulcibella leaving her young mistress's candle burning on the table, as was her wont, being nervous when she was alone, and screened from her eyes by the curtain, with a final goodnight and another blessing she closed the door.

Is there ever an unreserved and complete confidence after marriage? Even to kind old Dulcibella she could not tell all. As she smiled a little farewell on the faithful old soul her heart was ready to burst. She was longing for a good cry all to herself, and now, poor little thing, she had it.

She cried herself, as children do, to sleep.

An hour later the old grange was silent as the neighbouring churchyard of Carwell. But there was not a household in the parish, or in the county, I suppose, many of whose tenants, at that late hour, were so oddly placed.

In his chair in the oak-panelled room, down stairs, sat Charles Fairfield, in that slumber of a tormented and exhausted brain, which in its first profound submersion, resembles the torpor of apoplexy.

In his forsaken room lay on the pillow the pale face of his young wife, her eyelashes not yet dry, fallen asleep in the sad illusion of his absence — better, perhaps, than his presence would have been, if she had known but all.

In her crib down stairs, at last asleep, lay the frightened Lilly Dogger, her head still under the coverlet, under which she had popped it in panic, as she thought on the possible return of the tall unknown, and the lobe of her ear still flaming from the discipline of her vice-like pinch.

Under his slanting roof, in the recess of the staircase, with only his coat off, stretched on the broad of his back, with one great horny hand half shut under his bullet head, and the other by his side, snored honest Tom, nothing the less soundly for his big mug of beer and his excursion to Cressly Common.

For a moment now we visit the bedside of good old Dulcibella. An easy conscience, a good digestion, and an easy place in this troublesome world, are favourable to sound slumbers, and very tranquilly she slept, with a large handkerchief pinned closely about her innocent bald head, and a nightcap of many borders outside it. Her thick, well-thumbed Bible, in which she read some half-dozen verses every night, lay, with her spectacles upon its cover, on the table by the brass candlestick.

Mildred Tarnley, a thin figure with many corners, lay her length in her clothes, her old brown stuff gown her cap and broad faded ribbons binding her busy head, and her darned black worsted stockings still on her weary feet, ready at call to jump up, pop her feet again into her misshapen shoes, and resume her duties.

In her own solitary chamber, at the deserted side of the house, the tall stranger, arrayed in a white woollen nightdress, lay her length, not stirring.

After Mildred Tarnley had got herself stiffly under her quilt, she was visited with certain qualms about this person, recollections of her abhorred activity and energy in old times, and fears that the “grim white woman” was not resting in her bed. This apprehension grew so intense that, tired as she was, she could not sleep. The suspicion that, barefooted, listening, that dreadful woman was possibly groping her way through the house made her heart beat faster and faster.

At last she could bear it no longer, and up she got, lighted her candle with a match, and in her stockings glided softly through the passage, and by the room where Charles Fairfield was at that time at his letters.

He recognised the step to which his ear was accustomed, and did not trouble himself to inquire what she was about.

So, softly, softly, softly — Mildred Tarnley found herself at the door of the unwelcome guest and listened. You would not have supposed old Mildred capable of a nervous tremble, but she was profoundly afraid of this awful woman, before whose superior malignity and unearthly energy her own temper and activity quailed. She listened, but could hear no evidence of her presence. Was the woman there at all? Lightly, lightly, with her nail, she tapped at the door. No answer. Then very softly she tried the door. It was secured.

But was the old soldier in the room still, or wandering about the house with who could fathom what evil purpose in her head?

The figure in white woollen was there still; she had been lying on her side, with her pale features turned toward the door as Mildred approached. Her blind eyes were moving in their sockets — there was a listening smile on her lips — and she had turned her neck awry to get her ear in the direction of the door. She was just as wide awake as Mildred herself.

Mildred watched for a time at the door, irresolute. Excuse enough, she bethought her, in the feeble state in which she had left her, had she for making her a visit. Why should she not open the door boldly and enter? But Mildred, in something worse than solitude, was growing more and more nervous. What if that tall, insane miscreant were waiting at the door, in a fit of revenge for her suspected perfidy, ready to clutch her by the throat as she opened it, and to strangle her on the bed? And when there came from the interior of the room a weary bleating "heigh-ho!" she absolutely bounced backward, and for a moment froze with terror.

She took a precaution as she softly withdrew. The passage, which is terminated by the "old soldier's" room, passes a dressing-room on the left, and then opens, on the other side, upon a lobby. This door is furnished with a key, and having secured it, Mrs. Tarnley, with that key in her pocket, felt that she had pretty well imprisoned that evil spirit, and returned to her own bed more serenely, and was soon lost in slumber.

CHAPTER XII.

RESTLESS.

Some lean, nervous temperaments, once fairly excited, and in presence of a substantial cause of uneasiness, are very hard to reduce to composure. After she had got back again, Mildred Tarnley fidgeted and turned in her bed, and lay in the dark, with her tired eyes wide open, and imagining, one after another, all sorts of horrors.

She was still in her clothes; so she got up again, and lighted a candle, and stole away, angry with herself and all the world on account of her fussy and feverish condition, and crept up the great stairs, and stealthily reached again the door of the "old soldier's" room.

Not a sound, not a breath, could she hear from within. Gently she opened the door which no longer resisted. The fire was low in the grate; and, half afraid to look at the bed, she raised the candle and did look.

There lay the "Dutchwoman," so still that Mrs. Tarnley felt a sickening doubt as she stared at her.

"Lord bless us! she's never quite well. I wish she was somewhere else," said Mrs. Tarnley, frowning sharply at her from the door.

Then, with a little effort of resolution, she walked to the bedside, and fancied, doubtfully, that she saw a faint motion as of breathing in the great resting figure, and she placed her fingers upon her arm, and then passed them down to her big hand, which to her relief was warm.

At the touch the woman moaned and turned a little.

"Faugh! what makes her sleep so like dead? She'd a frightened me a'most, if I did not know better. Some folks can't do nout like no one else." And Mildred would have liked to shake her up and bid her "snore like other people, and give over her unnatural ways."

But she did look so pale and fixed, and altogether so unnatural, that Mrs. Tarnley's wrath was overawed, and, rather uneasily, she retired, and sat for a while at the kitchen fire, ruminating and grumbling.

"If she's a-goin' to die, what for should she come all the way to Carwell? Wasn't Lonnon good enough to die in?"

Mrs. Tarnley only meant to warm her feet on the fender for a few minutes. But she fell asleep, and wakened, it might be, a quarter of an hour later, and got up and listened.

What was it that overcame old Mildred on this night with so unusual a sense of danger and panic at the presence of this woman? She could not exactly define the cause. But she was miserably afraid of her, and full of unexplainable surmises.

"I can't go to bed till I try again; I can't. I don't know what's come over me. It seems to me, Lor' be wi' us! as if the Evil One was in the house, and I don't know what I should do — and there's nout o' any avail I can do; but quiet I can't bide, and sleep won't stay wi' me while she's here, and I'll just go up again to her room, and if all's right then, I will lie down, and take it easy for the rest o' the night, come what, come may; for my old bones is fairly wore out, and I can't hold my head up no longer."

Thus resolved, and sorely troubled, the old woman took the candle again and sallied forth once more upon her grizzly expedition.

From the panelled sitting-room, where by this time Charles Fairfield sat in his chair locked in dismal sleep, came the faint red mist of his candle's light, and here she paused to listen for a moment. Well, all was quiet there, and so on and into the passage, and so into the great hall, as it was called, which seemed to her to have grown chill and cheerless since she was last there, and so again cautiously up the great stair, with its clumsy banister of oak, relieved at every turn by a square oak block terminating in a ball, like the head of a gigantic ninepin. Black looked the passage through this archway, at the summit of this ascent; and for the first time Mildred was stayed by the sinking of a superstitious horror.

It was by putting a kind of force upon herself that she entered this dark and silent gallery, so far away from every living being in the house, except that one of whom secretly she stood in awe, as of something not altogether of this earth.

This gallery is pretty large, and about midway is placed another arch, with a door-case, and a door that is held open by a hook, and, as often happens in old houses, a descent of a couple of steps here brings you to a different level of the floor.

There may have been a reason of some other sort for the uncomfortable introduction of so many gratuitous steps in doorways and passages, but certainly it must have exercised the wits of the comparatively slow persons who flourished at the period of this sort of architecture, and prevented the drowsiest from falling asleep on the way to their bedrooms.

It happened that as she reached this doorway her eye was caught by a cobweb hanging from the ceiling. For a sharp old servant like Mrs. Tarnley, such festoonery has an attraction of antipathy that is irresistible; she tried to knock it with her hand, but it did not reach high enough, so she applied her fingers to loosen her apron, and sweep it down with a swoop of that weapon.

She was still looking up at the dusty cord that waved in the air, and as she did so she received a long pull by the dress, from an unseen hand below — a determined tweak — tightening and relaxing as she drew a step back, and held the candle backward to enable her to see.

It was not her kitten, which might have playfully followed her up stairs — it was not a prowling rat making a hungry attack. A low titter accompanied this pluck at her dress, and she saw the wide pale face of the Dutchwoman turned up towards her with an odious smile. She was seated on the step, with her shoulder leaning upon the frame of the door.

"You thought I was asleep under the coverlet," she drawled: "or awake, perhaps, in the other world — dead. I never sleep long, and I don't die easily — *see*!"

"And what for are ye out o' your bed at all, ma'am? Ye'll break your neck in this house, if ye go walking about, wi' its cranky steps and stairs, and you blind."

"When you go blind, old Mildred, you'll find your memory sharper than you think, and steps, and corners, and doors, and chimneypieces will come to mind like a picture. What was I about?"

"Well, what *was* ye about? Sure I am I don't know, ma'am."

"No, I'm sure you don't," said she.

"But you should be in your bed — that I know, ma'am."

Still holding her dress, and with a lazy laugh, the lady made answer —

"So should you, old lass — a pair of us gadders; but I had a reason — I wanted you, old Mildred."

"Well, ma'am, I don't know how you'd 'a found me, for I sleep in the five-cornered room, two doors away from the spicery — you'd never 'a found me."

"I'd have tried — hit or miss — I would not have stayed where I was," answered the "old soldier."

"What, not in the state room, ma'am — the finest room in the house, so 'twas always supposed!"

"So be it; I don't like it," she answered.

"Ye didn't hear no noises in't, sure?" demanded Mildred.

"Not I," said the Dutchwoman. "Another reason quite, girl."

"And what the de'il is it? It must be summat grand, I take it, that makes ye better here, sittin' on a hard stair, than lying your length on a good bed."

"Right well said, clever Mildred. What is the state-room without a quiet mind?" replied the old soldier, with an oracular smile.

"What's the matter wi' your mind, ma'am?" said Mildred testily.

"I'm not safe there from intrusion," answered the lady, with little pauses between her words to lend an emphasis to them.

"I don't know what you're afeard on, ma'am," repeated Mrs. Tarnley, whose acquaintance with fine words was limited, and who was too proud to risk a mistake.

"Well, it's just this — I won't be pried upon by that young lady."

"What young lady, ma'am?" asked Mrs. Tarnley, who fancied she might ironically mean Miss Lilly Dogger.

"Harry Fairfield's wife, of course, what other? I choose to be private here," said the Dutch dame imperiously.

"She'll not pry — she don't pry on no one, and if she wished it, she couldn't."

"Why, there's nothing between us, woman, but the long closet where you used to keep the linen, and the broken furniture and rattletraps" (raddle-drabs she pronounced the word), "and she'll come and peep — every woman peeps and pries" (beebs and bries she called the words)— "*I* peep and pry. She'll just pretend she never knew any one was there, and she'll walk in through the closet door, and start, and beg my pardon, and say how sorry she is, and then go off, and tell you next morning how many buttons are on my pelisse, and how many pins in my pincushion, and let all the world know everything about me."

"But she can't come in."

"Why?"

"Why? Because, ma'am, the door is papered over."

"Fine protection — paper!" sneered the lady.

"I saw her door locked myself before 'twas papered over," said Mildred.

"Did you, though?" said the lady.

"With my own eyes," insisted Mildred.

"I'd rather see it with mine," joked the blind lady. "Well, see, we'll make a long story short. If I consent to stay in that room, I'll lock the door that opens into it. I'll have a room, and not a passage, if you please. I won't be peeped on, or listened to. If I can't choose my company I'll be alone, please."

"And what do you want, ma'am?" asked Mildred, whose troubles were multiplying.

"Another room," said the lady, doggedly.

Mildred paused.

"Well, did I ever!" pondered Mrs. Tarnley, reading the lady's features sharply as she spoke; but they were sullen, and, for aught she could make out, meaningless. "Well, it will do if ye can have the key, I take it, and lock your door yourself?"

"Not so well as another room, if you'll give me one, but better than nothing."

"Come along then, ma'am, for another room's not to be had at no price, and I'll gi' ye the key."

"And then, when you lock it fast, I may sleep easy. What's that your parson used to say— 'the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.' Plenty of wicked people going, Mrs. Tarnley, and weary enough am I," sighed the great pale Dutchwoman.

"There's two on us so, ma'am," said Mildred, as she led the lady back to her room, and having placed her in her armchair by the fire, Mildred Tarnley took the key from a brass-headed tack, on which it hung behind the bedpost.

"Here it is, ma'am," she said, placing the key in her groping fingers.

"What key is it?" asked the old soldier.

"The key of the long linen closet that was."

"And how do I know that?" she inquired, twirling it round in her large fingers, and smiling in such a way as to nettle Mrs. Tarnley, who began —

"Ye may know, I take it, because Mildred Tarnley says so, and I never yet played a trick. I never tells lies," she concluded, pulling up on a sudden.

“Well, I know that. I know you’re truth itself, so far as human nature goes; but that has its limits, and can’t fly very high off the ground. Come, get me up — we’ll try the key. I’ll lock it myself — I’ll lock it with my own fingers. Seeing is believing, and I can’t see; but feeling has no fellow, and, not doubting you, Mrs. Tarnley, I’ll feel for myself.”

She placed her hand on Mrs. Tarnley’s shoulder, and when she had reached the corner at the further side of the bed, where the covered door, as she knew, was situated, with her scissors’ point, where the crevice of the door was covered over with the paper, she ripped it asunder (notwithstanding the remonstrances of Mildred, who told her she was “leavin’ it not worth a rag off the road”) all round the door, which thus freed, and discovering by her finger tips the point at which the keyhole was placed, she broke the paper through, introduced the key, turned it, and with very little resistance pulled the door partly open, with an ugly grimace and a chuckle at Mildred. Then, locking it fast, she said, —

“And now I defy madam, do all she can — and you’ll clap the table against it, to make more sure; and so I think I may sleep — don’t you?”

Mildred scratched above her eyebrow with one finger for a moment, and she said —

“Yes, ye might a’ slept, I’m thinkin’, as sound before if ye had a mind, ma’am.”

“What the dickens does the lass mean?” said the blind woman, with a sleepy laugh. “As if people could sleep when they like. Why, woman, if that was so there would be no such thing as fidgets.”

“Well, I suppose, no more there wouldn’t — no more there wouldn’t. I may take away the tray, ma’am?”

“Let it be till morning — I want rest. Good night. Are you going? — good night.”

“Good night, ma’am,” said Mildred, making her stiff little curtsey, although it was lost upon the lady, and a little thoughtfully she left the room.

The “Old Soldier” listened, sitting up, for she had lain down on her bed, and as she heard the click-clack of Mildred’s shoe grow fainter —

“Yes, goodnight really, Mildred; I think you need visit no more tonight.”

And she got up, and secured the door that opened on the gallery.

“Goodnight, old Tarnley,” she said, with a nod and an unpleasant smirk, and then a deep and dismal sigh. Then she threw herself again upon her bed and lay still.

Old Mildred seemed also to have come to a like conclusion as to the matter of further visiting for the night, for at the door, on the step of which the Dutchwoman sitting a few minutes before had startled her, she looked back suspiciously over her shoulder, and then shutting the door noiselessly, she locked it — leaving that restless spirit a prisoner till morning.

CHAPTER XIII.

THROUGH THE WALL.

Alice had slept quietly for some time. The old clock at the foot of the stairs had purred and struck twice since she had ceased listening and thinking. It was for all that time an unbroken sleep, and then she wakened. She had been half conscious for some time of a noise in the room, a fidgeting little noise, that teased her sleep for a time, and finally awoke her completely. She sat up in her bed, and heard, she thought, a sigh in the room. Exactly from what point she could not be certain, nor whether it was near or far.

She drew back the curtain and looked. The familiar furniture only met her view. In like manner all round the room. Encouraged by which evidence she took heart of grace, and got up, and quite to satisfy herself, made a search — as timid people will, because already morally certain that there is no need of a search.

Happily she was spared the terror of any discovery to account for the sound that had excited her uneasiness.

She turned again the key in her door, and thus secured, listened there. Everything was perfectly still. Then into bed she got, and listened to silence, and in low tones talking to herself, for the sound of her own voice was reassuring, she reasoned with her tremors, she trimmed her light and made some little clatter on the table, and bethought her that this sigh that had so much affrighted her might be no more than the slipping of one fold of her bed-curtain over another — an occurrence which she remembered to have startled her once before.

So after a time she persuaded herself that her alarm was fanciful, and she composed herself again to sleep. Soon, however, her evil genius began to worry her in another shape, and something like the gnawing and nibbling of a mouse grated on her half-sleeping ear from the woodwork of the room. So she sat up again, and said —

“Hish!”

Now toward the window, now toward the fireplace, now toward the door, and all again was quite still.

Alice got up, and throwing her dressing-gown about her shoulders, opened the window-shutter and looked out upon the serene and melancholy landscape, which this oldfashioned window with its clumsy sashes and small panes commanded. Sweet and sad these moonlit views that so well accord with certain moods. But the cares at Alice's heart were real, and returned as she quite awoke with a renewed pang — and the cold and mournful glory of the sky and silvered woodlands neither cheered nor soothed her. With a deep sigh she closed the shutter again, and by the dusky candlelight returned to her bed. There at last she did fall into a quiet sleep.

From this she awoke suddenly and quite. Her heart was throbbing fast, but she could not tell whether she awoke of herself or had been aroused by some external cause.

"Who's there?" she cried, in a fright, as she started up and looked about the room.

Exactly as she called she thought she heard something fall — a heavy and muffled sound. It might have been a room or two away, it might have been nearer, but her own voice made the sound uncertain. She waited in alarm and listened, but for the present all was again quiet.

Poor little Alice knew very well that she was not herself, and her reason took comfort from her consciousness of the excited state of her nerves.

"What a fool I am!" she whispered, with a sigh. "What a fool! Everything frightens me now, I've grown such a coward. Oh! Charlie, Charlie — oh, Ry, darling! — when will you come back to your poor wife — when shall this dreadful suspense be over and quiet come again?"

Then poor little Alice cried, after the manner of women, bitterly for a time, and then, as she used in all trouble, she prayed, and essayed to settle again to sleep. But hardly had she begun the attempt when it was terminated strangely.

Again she heard the same stealthy sound, as of something cutting or ripping. Again she cried "Hish, hish!" but with no effect. She fancied at the far corner of the room, about as high as she could easily reach, that she saw some glittering object. It might be a little bit of looking-glass pass slowly and tremulously along the wall, horizontally, and then with the same motion, in a straight line down the wall, glimmering faintly in the candle light. At the same time was a slight trembling of that part of the wall, a slight, wavy motion, and — could she believe her eyes? — a portion of the wall seemed to yield silently, an unsuspected door slowly opened, and a tall figure wrapt in a flannel dress came in.

This figure crouched a little with its hand to its ear, and moved its head slowly round as if listening in all directions in turn. Then softly, with a large hand, it pushed back the door, which shut with a little snap, as if with a spring-lock.

Alice all this time was gazing upon the visitor, actually freezing with terror, and not knowing whether the apparition was that of a living person or not. The woollen-clothed figure, with large feet in stockings, and no shoes on, advanced, the fingers of one hand sliding gently along the wall. With an aspect fixed on the opposite end of the room, and the other hand a little raised in advance, it was such a fixed, listening look, and groping caution of motion as one might fancy in a person getting along a familiar room in the dark.

The feeling that she was not seen made Alice instinctively silent. She was almost breathless. The intruder passed on thus until she had reached the corner of the room, when she felt about for the door-case, and having got her hand upon it she quickly transferred it to the handle, which she turned, and tried the door two or three times.

Oh! what Alice would have given at this moment that she had not locked it, believing, as she now did, that the stranger would have passed out quietly from the room if this obstruction had not presented itself.

As if her life was concentrated in her eyes, Alice gazed still at this person, who paused for a few seconds, and lowering her head listened fixedly. Then very cautiously she with the tips of her fingers tried — was it to turn the key in the lock or to extricate it? At all events, she failed. She removed her hand, turned a little, stood still, and listened.

To Alice’s horror her business in the room was plainly not over yet. The woman stood erect, drawing a long breath, holding her underlip slightly in her teeth, with just a little nip. She turned her face toward the bed, and for the first time Alice now quite distinctly saw it — pale, seamed with smallpox, blind. This large face was now turned toward her, and the light of the candle, screened by the curtain from Alice’s eyes, fell full upon its exaggerated and evil features. The woman had drawn in a long, full breath, as if coming to a resolution that needed some nerve.

Whatever this woman had come into the room for, Alice thought, with hope, that she at all events, as she stood pallid and lowering before her, with eyes white with cataract, and brows contracted in malignant calculation, knew nothing, as she undoubtedly saw nothing, of her.

Still as death sat Alice in her terror gazing into the sightless face of this woman, little more than two yards removed from her.

Suddenly this short space disappeared, and with two swift steps and an outstretched hand she stood at the bedside and caught Alice's nightdress and drew her forcibly towards her. Alice as violently resisted. With a loud scream she drew back and the nightdress tore. But the tall woman instantly grasped her nearer the shoulder, and scrambling on the bed on her knees she dragged her down upon it, and almost instantly struck at her throat with a knife.

To make this blow she was compelled to withdraw one hand, and with a desperate spring, Alice evaded the stroke.

The whole thing was like a dream. The room seemed all a cloud. She could see nothing but the white figure that was still close, climbing swiftly over the bed, with one hand extended now and the knife in the other.

Not knowing how she got there, she was now standing with her back to the wall, in the further corner of the room, staring at the dreadful figure in a catalepsy of terror.

There was hardly a momentary pause. She was afraid to stir lest the slightest motion should betray her to the search of this woman. Had she, as she stood and listened sharply, heard her breathing?

With sudden decision, long light steps, and her hand laid to the wall, she glided swiftly toward her. With a gasp Alice awoke, as it were, from her nightmare, and, almost wild with terror, fled round the bed to the door. Hastening, jostling by the furniture, gliding, on the whole, very adroitly after her, her face strained with a horrible eagerness and fear, came the blind woman.

Alice tried to pull open the door. She had locked it herself, but in her agitation forgot.

Now she seized the key and tried to turn it, but the strong hand of the stranger in forcing it round a second time had twisted it so that it was caught in the lock and would not turn.

Alice felt as people feel in dreams, when pursuit is urgent and some little obstruction entangles flight and threatens to deliver the fugitive into the hands of an implacable pursuer. A frantic pull and a twist or two of the key in vain, and the hand of the pursuer was all but upon her. Again she sprang and scrambled across the bed, and it seemed enraged by the delay and with a face sharpening and darkening with insanity, the murderess, guided by the sound, flung herself after her; and now, through the room and lobbies pealed shrieks of murder, as Alice flew before the outstretched hand of the beldame, who, balked of her prey, followed with reckless fury, careless now against what she struck or rushed, and clawing the air, as it seemed, within an inch of Alice's shoulder.

Unequal as it appeared, in this small pen, the struggle to escape could not have lasted very long. The old closet door, thinly covered with paper, through which the sharp knife had glided almost without noise, was locked, and escape through it as hopeless as through the other door. Through the window she would have thrown herself, but it was fastened, and one moment's delay would have been death. Had a weapon been in her hand, had she thought of it in this extremity of terror, her softer instincts might have been reversed, and she might have turned on her pursuer and fought, as timid creatures have done, with the ferocity of despair, for her life. But the chance that might have so transformed her did not come. Flight was her one thought, and that ended suddenly, for tripping in the upturned carpet she fell helplessly to the floor. In a moment, with a gasp, her pursuer was kneeling by her side, with her hand in her dishevelled hair, and drawing herself close for those sure strokes of the knife with which she meant to mangle her.

As the eyes of the white owl glare through the leaves on the awaking bird, and its brain swims, and its little heart bounces into a gallop, seeing its most dreadful dream accomplished, escape impossible, its last hour come — then the talons of the spectre clutch its throat, and its short harmless life is out, — so might it have been with pretty Alice.

In that dreadful second of time all things that her eyes beheld looked strange, in a new reality — the room contracted, and familiar things were unlike themselves, and the certainty and nearness of that which she now knew — all her life before was but a dream to her — what an infidel, what a fool she had been, — *here* it was, and *now* — death.

The helpless yell that burst from her lips, as this dreadful woman shuffled nearer on her knees, was answered by a crash from the door burst in, and a cry from a manly voice — the door flew wide, and Alice saw her husband pale as death; with a single savage blow he stretched her assailant on the floor, — in another moment Alice, wild with terror, half-fainting, was in his arms.

And — did he *strike* her? Good God! — had he struck her! How did she lie there bleeding? For a moment a dreadful remorse was bursting at his heart — he would have kneeled — he could have killed himself. Oh, manhood! Gratitude! Charity! Could he, even in a moment of frenzy, have struck down any creature so — that had ever stood to him in the relation of that love? What a rush of remembrances, and hell of compunction was there! — and for a rival! She the reckless, forlorn, guilty old love cast off, blasted with deformity and privation, and now this last fell atrocity! Alice was clinging to him, the words "darling, darling, my Ry, my saviour, my Ry," were in his ears, and he felt as if he hated Alice — hated her worse even than himself. He froze with horror and agony as he beheld the ineffaceable image of that white, bloodstained twitching face, with sightless eyes, and on the floor those straggling locks of changed, grizzled hair, that once were as black as a raven's wing to which he used to compare them. Oh maddening picture of degradation and cruelty! To what had they both come at last?

But an iron necessity was upon him, and with an energy of hypocrisy, he said— "Alice, my treasure, my darling, you're safe, aren't you?"

"Oh, darling, yes," she gasped.

"Not here — you mustn't stay here — run down — she's mad — she's a mad woman — not here a moment."

Half stunned and dreamy with horror, Alice glided down the stairs, passing honest Tom who was stumbling up, half awake, but quite dressed excepting his coat.

"Run, Tom, help your master, for God's sake, — there's something dreadful," she said as she passed him with her trembling hands raised.

"Where, ma'am, may't be?" said Tom, pausing with a coolness that was dreadful, she thought.

"There, there, in his room, my room; go, for heaven's sake!"

Up ran Tom, making a glorious clatter with his hob-nails, and down ran Alice, and just at the foot of the stair she met Mildred Tarnley's tall slim figure. The old woman drew to the banister, and stood still, looking darkly and shrewdly at her.

"Oh! good Mildred — oh, Mrs. Tarnley, for God's sake don't leave me."

"And what's the row, ma'am, what is it?" asked Mrs. Tarnley, with her lean arm supporting the poor trembling young lady who clung to her.

"Oh, Mrs. Tarnley, take me with you — take me out — I can't stay in the house; take me away — into the woods — anywhere out of the house."

"Well, well, come down, come along," she said, more tenderly than was her wont, and watching her face hard from the corners of her eyes. She was convinced that the "old soldier" was the cause of these horrors.

"Put your arm over my shouther, ma'am; there — that's it — an' I'll put mine round you, if you don't think I'm making too bold. There now, you're more easy, I think."

And as they got on through the passage she asked —

"'Twas you that skritched, hey?"

"I? I dare say — did I?"

"Ay did ye, with a will, whoever skritched. Ye seen summat. What may ye have seen that frightened ye like that?"

"We'll talk by-and-by. I'm ill — I'm horribly ill. Come away."

"Come, then, if ye like best, ma'am," said Mildred Tarnley, leading her through the kitchen, and by the outer door into the open air, but she had hardly got a step into the yard when the young lady, holding her fast, stopped short in renewed terrors.

"Oh, Mildred, if she follows us, if she overtook us out here?"

"Hoot, ma'am, who are ye afeard on? Is it that crazy blind woman, or who?"

"Oh, Mildred, yes, it is she. Oh, Mildred, where shall we go, where can I hide myself? there's nowhere safe."

"Now you're just drivin' yourself distracted, you be. What for need ye fear her? She's crazy, I'll not deny, but she's blind too, and she can't follow ye here, if she was so minded. Why she couldn't cross the stile, nor follow ye through a spinnie. But see, ye've nout but yer dressin' gown over yer night clothes, and yer bare feet. Odd's I'll not go wi' ye — ye'll come back, and if ye must come abroad, ye'll get yer cloaks and your shoon."

“No, no, no, Mildred, I’ll go as I am,” cried the terrified lady, at the same time hurrying onward to the yard door.

“Well,” said the old woman following, “wilful lass will ha’ her way, but ye’ll clap this ower your shouthers.”

And she placed her own shawl on them, and together they passed into the lonely woodlands that, spreading upward from the glen of Carwell, embower the deep ravine that flanks the side of the Grange, and widening and deepening, enter the kindred shadows of the glen.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MESSENGER.

Alice had not gone far when she was seized with a great shivering — the mediate process by which from high hysterical tension, nature brings down the nerves again to their accustomed tone.

The air was soft and still, and the faint gray of morning was already changing the darkness into its peculiar twilight.

“Ye’ll be better presently, dear,” said the old woman, with unaccustomed kindness. “There, there, ye’ll be nothing the worse when a’s done, and ye’ll have a cup o’ tea when ye come back.”

Under the great old trees near the ivied wall which screens the court is a stone bench, and on this old Mildred was constrained to place her.

“There, there, there, rest a bit — rest a little bit. Hih! cryin’ — well, cry if ye will; but ye’ll ha’ more to thank God than to cry for, if all be as I guess.”

Alice cried on with convulsive sobs, starting every now and then, with a wild glance towards the yard gate, and grasping the old woman’s arm. In a very few minutes this paroxysm subsided, and she wept quietly.

“’Twas you, ma’am, that cried out, I take it — hey? Frightened mayhap?”

“I was — yes — I — I’ll wait a little, and tell you by-and-by — horribly — horribly.”

“Ye needn’t be afeerd here, and me beside ye, ma’am, and daylight a-comin’, and I think I could gi’e a sharp guess at the matter. Ye saw her ladyship, I do suppose? The old soger, ma’am — ay, that’s a sight might frighten a body — like a spirit a’most — a great white-faced, blind devil.”

“Who is she? how did she come? She tried to kill me. Oh! Mrs. Tarnley, I’m so terrified!”

And with these words Alice began to cry and tremble afresh.

“Hey! try to kill ye, did she? I’m glad o’ that — right glad o’t; ‘twill rid us o’ trouble, ma’am. But la! think o’ that! And did she actually raise her hand to you!”

“Oh yes, Mrs. Tarnley — frightful. I’m saved by a miracle — I don’t know how — the mercy of God only.”

She was clinging to Mrs. Tarnley with a fast and trembling grasp.

"Zooks! the lass *is* frightened. Ye ha' seen sights tonight, young lady, ye'll remember. Young folk loves pleasure, and the world, and themselves ower well to trouble their heads about death or judgment, if the Lord in His mercy didn't shake 'em up from their dreams and their sins. 'Awake thou that sleepest,' says the Word, callin' loud in a drunken ear, at dead o' night, wi' the house all round a-fire, as the parson says. He's a good man, though I may ha' seen better, in old days in Carwell pulpit. So, 'tis all for good, and in place o' crying ye should be praisin' God for startlin' ye out o' your carnal sleep, and makin' ye think o' him, and see yourself as ye are, and not according to the flatteries o' your husband and your own vanity. Ye'll pardon me, but truth is truth, and God's truth first of all; and who'll tell it ye if them as is within hearin' won't open their lips, and I don't see that Mr. Charles troubles his head much about the matter."

"He is so noble, and always my guardian angel. Oh, Mrs. Tarnley, tonight I must have perished if it had not been for him; he is always my best friend, and so unselfish and noble."

"Well that's good," said Mildred Tarnley, coldly. "But I'm thinkin' something ought to be done wi' that catamountain in there, and strike while the iron's hot, and they'll never drive home that nail ye'll find — more like to go off when all's done wi' her pocket full o' money. 'Tis a sin, while so many an honest soul wants, and I'll take that just into my own old hands, I'm thinkin', and sarve her out as she would better women."

"Isn't she mad, Mrs. Tarnley?" asked Alice.

"And if she's mad, to the madhouse wi' her, an' if she's not, where's the gallows high enough for her, the dangerous harridan? For, one way or t'other, the fiend's in her, and the sooner judgment overtakes her, and she's in her coffin, the sooner the devil's laid, and the better for honest folk."

"If she is mad, it accounts for everything; but I feel as if I never could enter that house again; and oh! Mrs. Tarnley, you mustn't leave me. Oh, heavens! what's that?"

It was no great matter — Mrs. Tarnley had got up, for the yard-door had opened and some one passed out and looked round.

It was the girl, Lilly Dogger, who stood there looking about her under the canopy of tall trees.

"Hoot, ma'm, 'tis only the child Lilly Dogger — and well pleased I am, for I was thinkin' this minute how I could get her to me quietly. Here, Lilly — come here, ye goosecap — d'ye see me?"

So, closing the door behind her, the girl approached with eyes very wide, and a wonderfully solemn countenance. She had been roused and scared by the sounds which had alarmed the house, huddled on her clothes, and seeing Mrs. Tarnley's figure cross the window, had followed in a tremor.

Mrs. Tarnley walked a few steps towards her, and beckoning with her lean finger, the girl drew near.

"Ye'll have to go over Cressley Common, girl, to Wykeford. Ye know Wykeford?"

"Yes, please 'm."

"Well, ye must go through the village, and call up Mark Topham. Ye know Mark Topham's house with the green door, by the bridge-end?"

"Yes please, Mrs. Tarnley, ma'am."

"And say he'll be wanted down here at the Grange — for *murder* mind — and go ye on to Mr. Rodney at t'other side o' the river. Squire Rodney of Wrydell. Ye know that house, too?"

"Yes, 'em," said the girl, with eyes momentarily distending, and face of blanker consternation.

"And ye'll tell Mr. Rodney there's been bad work down here, and murder all but done, and say ye've told Mark Topham, the constable, and that it is hoped he'll come over himself to make out the writin's and send away the prisoner as should go. We being chiefly women here, and having to keep Tom Clinton at home to mind the prisoner — ye understand — and keep all safe, having little other protection. Now run in, lass, and clap your bonnet on, and away wi' ye; and get ye there as fast as your legs will carry ye, and take your time comin' back; and ye may get a lift, for they'll not be walkin', and you're like to get your bit o' breakfast down at Wrydell; but if ye shouln't, here's tuppence, and buy yourself a good bit o' bread in the town. Now, ye understand?"

"Yes, 'm, please."

"And ye'll not be makin' mistakes, mind?"

"No, ma'am."

"Then do as I bid ye, and off ye go," said Mrs. Tarnley, despatching her with a peremptory gesture.

So with a quaking heart, not knowing what dangers might still be lurking there, Lilly Dogger ran into the yard on her way to her bonnet, and peeped through the kitchen window, but saw nothing there in the pale gray light but "still life."

With a timid finger she lifted the latch, and stole into the familiar passage as if she were exploring a haunted house. She had quaked in her bed as thin and far away the shrill sounds of terror had penetrated through walls and passages to her bedroom. She had murmured "Lord bless us!" at intervals, and listened, chilled with a sense of danger — associated in her imagination with the stranger who had visited her room and frighted away her slumbers. And she had jumped out of bed, and thrown on her clothes in panic, blessed herself, and pinned and tied strings, and listened, and blessed herself again; and seeing Mrs. Tarnley cross the window accompanied by some one else whom she did not then recognise, and fearing to remain thus deserted in the house more than the risk of being blown up by Mrs. Tarnley, she had followed that grim protectress.

Now, as on tiptoe she recrossed the kitchen with her straw bonnet in her hand she heard on a sudden cries of fury, and words, as doors opened and shut, reached her that excited her horror and piqued her curiosity.

She hastened, however, to leave the house, and again approached and passed by the lady and Mildred Tarnley, having tied her bonnet under her chin, and obeying Mildred's impatient beckon, and —

"Run, lass, run. Stir your stumps, will ye?"

She started at a pace that promised soon to see her across Cressley Common.

Old Mildred saw this with comfort. She knew that broad-shouldered, brown-eyed lass for a shrewd and accurate messenger, and seeing how dangerous and complicated things were growing, she was glad that fortune had opened so short and sharp a way of getting rid of the troubler of their peace.

"Come in, ma'am, ye'll catch your death o' cold here. All's quiet by this time, and I'll make the kitchen safe against the world; and Mr. Charles is in the house, and Tom Clinton up, and all safe — and who cares a rush for that blind old cat? Not I for one. She'll come no nonsense over Mildred Tarnley in her own kitchen, while there's a poker to rap her ower the pate. Hoot! one old blind limmer; I'd tackle six o' her sort, old as I am, and tumble 'em one after t'other into the Brawl. Never ye trouble your head about that, ma'am, and I'll bolt the door on the passage, and the scullery door likewise, and lock 'em if ye like; and we'll get down old Dulcibella to sit wi' ye, and ye'll be a deal less like to see that beast in the kitchen than here. There's Miss Crane," by which title she indicated old Dulcibella, "a lookin' out o' her window. Ho! Miss Crane — will ye please, Miss Crane, come down and stay a bit wi' your mistress?"

"Thank God! — is she down there?" exclaimed she.

"Come down, ma'am, please; she's quite well, and she'll be glad to see ye."

Old Dulcibella's head disappeared from the window promptly.

"Now, ma'am, she'll be down, and when she comes — for ye'd like to ha' some one by ye — I'll go in and make the kitchen door fast."

"And won't you search it well, Mrs. Tarnley, and the inner room, that we may be certain no one is hid there? Pray do — may I rely on you — won't you promise?"

"There's nothin' there, that I promise ye."

"But, oh! pray do," urged Alice.

"I will, ma'am, just to quiet ye. Ye need not fear, I'll leave her no chance, and she'll soon be safe enough, she shall — safe enough when she gets on her doublet of stone; and don't ye be frightenin' yourself for nothin' — just keep yourself quiet, for there is nothing to fear, and if ye will keep yourself in a fever for nothin' ye'll be just making food for worms, mark my words."

As she spoke old Dulcibella appeared, and with a face of deep concern waddled as fast as she could toward her young mistress, raising her hands and eyes from time to time as she approached.

As she drew nearer she made a solemn thanksgiving, and —

"Oh! my child, my child, thank God you're well. I was a'most ready to drop in a swound when I came into your room, just now, everything knocked topsy-turvey, and a door cut in the wall, and all in a litter, I couldn't know where I was, and some one a bleedin' all across the floor, and one of the big, green-handled knives on the floor — Lord a' mercy on us — with the blade bent and blood about it. I never was so frightened. I thought my senses was a leavin' me, and I couldn't tell what I might see next, and I ready to drop down on the floor wi' fright. My darling child —

my precious — Lord love it, and here it was, barefooted, and but half clad, and — come in ye must, dear, ’tis enough to kill ye.”

“I can scarcely remember anything, Dulcibella, only one thing — oh! I’m so terrified.”

“Come in, darling, you’ll lose your life if you stay here as you are, and what was it, dear, and who did you see?”

“A woman — that dreadful blind woman, who came in at the new door; I never saw her before.”

“Well, *dear*! Oh, Miss Alice, darling, I couldn’t a’ believed, and thank God you’re safe after all; that’s she I heard a screechin’ as strong as a dozen — and frightful words, as well as I could hear, to come from any woman’s lips. Lord help us.”

“Where is she now?”

“Somewhere in the front of the house, darlin’, screechin’ and laughin’ I thought, but heaven only knows.”

“She’s mad, Mrs. Tarnley says, and Mr. Fairfield said so too. Master Charles is come — my darling Ry. Oh! Dulcibella, how grateful I should be. What could I have done if he hadn’t?”

So Dulcibella persuaded her to come into the yard, and so, through the scullery door, at which Mildred stood, having secured all other access to the kitchen. So in she came, awfully frightened to find herself again in the house, but was not her husband there, and help at hand, and the doors secured?

CHAPTER XV.

UNREASONABLE BERTHA.

Her husband was at hand — that is to say, under the same roof, and at that moment in the room in which the blind woman was now sitting, bleeding from her head and hand, and smiling as she talked, with the false light of a malignant irony.

"So, husband and wife are met again! And what have you to say after so long a time?"

"I've nothing to say. Let my deeds speak. I've given you year by year fully half my income."

She laughed scornfully, and exclaimed merely —

"Magnificent man!"

"Miserable pittance it is, but the more miserable, the harder the sacrifice for me. I don't say I have been able to do much; but I have done more than my means warrant, and I don't understand what you propose to yourself by laying yourself out to torment and embarrass me. What the devil do you follow me about for? Do you think I'm fool enough to be bullied?"

"A fine question from Charles Vairfield of Wyvern to his wife!" she observed with a pallid simper.

"Wife and husband are terms very easily pronounced," said he.

"And relations very easily made," she rejoined.

He was leaning with his shoulder against the high mantelpiece, and looking upon her with a countenance in which you might have seen disdain and fear mingling with something of compunction.

"Relations very easily made, and still more easily affected," he replied. "Come, Bertha, there is no use in quarrelling over points of law. Past is past, as Leonora says. If I have wronged you in anything I am sorry. I've tried to make amends; and though many a fellow would have been tired out long ago, I continue to give you proofs that I am not."

"That is a sort of benevolence," she said, in her own language, "which may as well be voluntary, for, if it be not, the magistrates will compel it."

"The magistrates are neither fools nor tyrants. You'll make nothing of the magistrates. You have no rights, and you know it."

"An odd country where a wife has no rights."

"Come, Bertha, there is no use in picking a quarrel. While you take me quietly you have your share, and a good deal more. You used to be reasonable."

"A reasonable wife, I suppose, gives up her position, her character, her prospects, whenever it answers her husband to sacrifice these trifles for his villainous pleasures. Your English wives must be meek souls indeed if they like it. I don't hear they are such lambs though."

"I'm not going to argue law points, as I said before. Lawyers are the proper persons to do that. You used to be reasonable, Bertha — where's the good in pushing things to extremes?"

"What a gentle creature you are," she laughed, "and how persuasive!"

"I'm a quiet fellow enough, I believe, as men go, but I'm not persuasive, and I know it. I wish I were."

"Those whom you have persuaded once are not likely to be persuaded again. Your persuasions are not always lucky. Are they?"

"You want to quarrel about everything. You want to leave no possible point of agreement."

"Things are at a bad pass when husband and wife are so."

Charles looked at her angrily for a moment, and then down to the floor, and he whistled a few bars of a tune.

"What do you whistle for?" she demanded.

"Come, Bertha, don't be foolish."

"You were once a gentleman. It is a blackguard who whistles in reply to a lady's words," she said, on a sudden stretching out her hand tremulously, as if in search of some one to grasp.

"Well, don't mind. Stick to one thing at a time. For God's sake say what you want, and have done with it."

"You must acknowledge me before the world for your wife," she answered with resolute serenity, and raising her face, and shutting her mouth she sniffed defiantly through her distended nostrils.

"Come, come, Bertha, what good on earth could come of that?"

"Little to you, perhaps."

"And none to you."

She laughed savagely. “That lie won’t do.”

“Bertha, Bertha, we may hate one another if you will. But is it not as well to try whether we can agree upon anything. Let us just for the present talk intelligibly.”

“You tried to murder me, you arch-villain.”

“Nonsense,” said he, turning pale, “how can you talk so — how can you? Could I help interposing? You may well be thankful that I did.”

“You tried to murder me,” she screamed.

“You know that’s false. I took the knife from your hand, and by doing so I saved two lives. It was you — not I — who hurt your hand.”

“You villain, you damned villain, I wish I could kill you dead.”

“All the worse for you, Bertha.”

“I wish you were dead and cold in your bed, and my hand on your face to be sure of it.”

“Now you’re growing angry again. I thought we had done with storm and hysterics for a little, and could talk, and perhaps agree upon something, or at all events not waste our few minutes in violence.”

“Violence! — you wretch, who began it?”

“What can you mean, Bertha?”

“You’ve married that woman. O I know it all — I your lawful wife living. I’ll have you transported, double-dyed villain.”

“Where’s the good of screaming all this at the top of your voice?” he said, at last growing angry. “You wish you could kill me? I almost wish you could. I’ve been only too good to you, and allowed you to trouble me too long.”

“Ha, ha! — you’d like to put me out of the way?”

“You’ll do that for yourself. Can’t you wait, can’t you listen, can’t you have common reason, just for one moment? What do you want, what do you wish? Do you want every farthing I possess on earth, and to leave me nothing?”

“I’m your wife, and I’ll have my rights.”

“Now listen to me, that’s a question I need not discuss, because you already know what I believe on the subject.”

“You know what your brother Harry thinks.”

“I know what it is his interest to think.”

“You daren’t say that if he were here, you coward.”

"And I don't care a farthing what he thinks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But if it had been fifty times over, what it never was, a marriage, your own conduct, long ago, would have dissolved it."

"And you allow you have married that woman?"

"I shan't talk to you about it; how I shall act, or may act, or *have* acted is my own affair, and rely upon it I'll do nothing on the assumption that I ever was married to you."

Up stood the tall woman, with hands extended toward him, wide open, with a slightly groping motion as if opening a curtain; not a word did she say, but her sightless eyes, which stared full at him, were quivering with that nervous tremor which is so unpleasant to see.

She drew breath two or three times at intervals, long and deep, almost a sob, and then without speaking or moving more she sat down, looking awfully white and wicked.

For a time the old soldier had lost the thread of her discourse. Charles heard a step not very far off. He thought his unreasonable Bertha was about to have a fit, and opening the door he called lustily to Mildred.

It *was* Mrs. Tarnley.

"Will you get her some water, or whatever she ought to have, I think she is ill, and pray be quick."

With a dark prying look Mildred glanced from one to the other.

"It's in a madhouse and not here the like of her should be, wi' them fits and frenzies," she muttered as she applied herself to the resuscitation of the Dutchwoman.

On her toilet was a little group of bottles labelled "Sal-volatile," "Asafoetida," "Valerian."

"I don't know which is the right one, but this can't be far wrong," she remarked, selecting the sal-volatile, and dropping some into the water.

"La! so it was a sort o' fit. See how stiff she was. Lor' bless us, I do wish she was under a mad doctor. See how her feet's stuck out, and her thumbs tight shut in her fists, and her teeth set," and old Mildred applied the sal-volatile phial to the patient's nostrils, and gradually got her into a drowsy, yawning state, in which she seemed to care and comprehend little or nothing of where she was or what had befallen her.

“Tell her I stayed till I saw her better, if she asks, and that I’m coming back again. She says she is hurt.”

“So much the better,” said Mildred; “that will keep her from prowling about the house like a cat or a ghost, as she did, all night, and no good came of it.”

“And will you look to her wrist: she cut it last night, and it is very clumsily tied up, and I’ll come again, tell her.”

So, with a bewildered brain and a direful load at his heart, he left the room.

Where was Alice, he thought. He went downstairs and up again by the back staircase to their room, and there found the wreck and disorder of the odious scene he had witnessed, still undisturbed, and looking somehow more shocking in the sober light of morning.

From this sickening record of the occurrences of last night he turned for a moment to the window, and looked out on the tranquil and sylvan solitudes, and then back again upon the disorder which had so nearly marked a scene of murder.

“How do I keep my reason?” thought he; “is there in England so miserable a man? Why should not I end it?”

Between the room where he stood and the angle of that bedroom in which at that moment was the wretch who agitated every hour of his existence with dismay, there intervened but eight-and-twenty feet, in that polyhedric and irregular old house. If he had but one tithe of her wickedness he had but to take up that poker, strike through, and brain her as she sat there.

Why was he not a little more or a little less wicked? If the latter, he might never have been in his present fix. If the other, he might find a short way out of the thicket— “hew his way out with a bloody axe” — and none but those whose secrecy he might rely on be the wiser!

Avaunt, horrible shadows! Such beckoning phantoms from the abyss were not tempters, but simply terrors. No, he was far more likely to load a pistol, put the muzzle in his mouth, and blow his harrassed brains out.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ABDUCTION.

So far as a man not very resolute can be said to have made up his mind to anything, Charles Fairfield had quite made up his, driven thus fairly into a corner, to fight his battle now, and decisively. He would hold no terms and offer no compromise. Let her do her worst. She had found out his secret. Oh! brother Harry, had *you* played him false? And she had quoted *your* opinion against him. Had you been inflaming this insane enemy with an impracticable confidence?

Well, no matter, now; all the better, perhaps. There was already an end of concealment between that enemy and himself, and soon would be of suspense.

"God help me! at the eve of what an abyss I stand. That wretched woman, poor as she is, and nearly mad, in a place like London she'll be certain to find lawyers only too glad to take up her case, and force me to a trial — first, a trial to prove a marriage and make costs of me, and then, Heaven knows what more; and the publicity, and the miserable uncertainty; and Alice, poor little Alice. Merciful Heaven! what had she done to merit this long agony and possible ruin?"

He peeped into the dining-room as he passed, but all was there as he had left it. Alice had not been in it. So at the kitchen door he knocked.

"Who's there? Is anyone there?"

Encouraged by his voice old Dulcibella answered from within. The door was opened, and he entered.

A few moments' silence, except for Alice's murmured and sobbing welcome, a trembling, close embrace, and he said, with a gentle look, in a faint tone —

"Alice, darling, I have no good news to tell. Everything has gone wrong with me, and we must leave this. Let Dulcibella go up and get such things as are necessary to take with you; but, Dulcibella, mind you tell nobody your mistress is leaving this. And, Alice, you'll come with me. We'll go where they can neither follow nor trace us; and let fate do its worst. We may be happier yet in our exile than ever we were at home. And when they have banished me they have done their worst."

His tenderness for Alice, frozen for a time, had returned. As she clung to him, her large, soft gray eyes looking up in his face so piteously moved him. He had intended a different sort of speech — colder, dryer — and under the spell of that look had come this sudden gush of a better feeling — the fond clasp of his arm, and the hurried kiss he pressed upon her cheek.

"I said, Alice, happier, *happier*, darling, a thousandfold. For the present I speak in riddles. You have seen how miserable I am. I'll tell you everything by-and-by. A conspiracy, I do believe, an unnatural conspiracy, that has worn out my miserable brain and spirits, and harassed me to death. I'll tell you all time enough, and you'll say it is a miracle I have borne it as I do. Don't look so frightened, you poor little thing. We are perfectly safe; I'm in no real danger, but harassed incessantly — only harassed, and that, thank God, shall end."

He kissed her again very tenderly, and again; and he said —

"You and Dulcibella shall go on. Clinton will drive you to Hatherton, and there you'll get horses and post on to Cranswell, and I will overtake you there. I must go now and give him his directions, and I may as well leave you this note. I wrote it yesterday. You must have some money — there is some in it, and the names of the places, and we'll be there tonight. And what is it, darling? You look as if you wished to ask me something."

"I — I was going to ask — but I thought perhaps I ought not until you can tell me everything — but you spoke of a conspiracy, and I was going to ask whether that dreadful woman who got into my room has anything to do with it."

"Nonsense, child, that is a miserable mad woman;" he laughed dismally. "Just wait a little, and you shall know all I know myself."

"She's not to stay here, I mean, of course, if anything should prevent our leaving this to-day."

"Why should you fancy that?" he asked, a little enigmatically.

"Mrs. Tarnley said she was going to the madhouse."

"We'll see time enough, you shall see her no more," he said, and away he went, and she saw him pass by the window and out of the yard. And now she had leisure to think how ill he was looking, or rather to remember how it had struck her when he had appeared at the door. Yes, indeed, worn out and harassed to death. Thank God, he was now to escape from that misery, and to secure the repose which it was only too obvious he needed.

Dulcibella returned with such things as she thought indispensable, and she and her mistress were soon in more animated discussion than they had engaged in since the scenes of the past night.

Charles Fairfield had to make a call at farmer Chubbs to persuade him to lend his horse, about which he made a difficulty. It was not far up the glen towards Church Carwell, but when he came back he found the Grange again in a new confusion.

When Charles Fairfield, ascending the steep and narrow road which under tall trees darkly mounts from the Glen of Carwell to the plateau under the grey walls of the Grange, had reached that sylvan platform, he saw there, looking in the direction of Cressley Common, in that dim, religious light, Tom Clinton, in his fustian jacket, scratching his head and looking, it seemed, with interest, after some receding object. A little behind him, similarly engrossed, stood old Mildred Tarnley, with her hand above her eyes, though there was little need of artificial shade in that solemn grove, and again, a little to her rear, peeped broad-shouldered Lilly Dogger, standing close to the threshold of the yard door.

Tom Clinton was first to turn about, and sauntering slowly toward the house, he spoke something to Mrs. Tarnley, who, waiting till he reached her, turned about in the same direction, and talking gravely, and looking over their shoulders, as people sometimes do in the direction in which a runaway horse has disappeared, they came to a standstill at the door, under the great ash-tree, whose columnar stem is mantled with thick ivy, and there again looking back, the little girl leaning and listening, unheeded, against the doorpost, the group remained in conference.

Had Charles Fairfield been in his usual state of mind his curiosity would have been piqued by an appearance of activity so unusual in his drowsy household. As it was, he cared not, but approached, looking down upon the road with his hands in his pockets listlessly.

Mrs. Tarnley whispered something to Tom and jogged him in the ribs, looking all the time at the approaching figure of Charles Fairfield.

The master of the Grange approached, looked up, and saw Tom standing near, with the air of one who had something to say. Mrs. Tarnley had drawn back, a little doubtful possibly, of the effect on his nerves.

“Well, Tom Chubbs will lend the horse,” said Charles. “We’ll go round to the stable, I’ve a word to say.”

Tom touched his hat, still looking in his face with an inquiring and ominous expression.

“Do you want to say anything particular, Tom?” asked his master, with a sudden foreboding of some new ill.

“Nothing, sir, but Squire Rodney of Wrydell, has come over from Wykeford.”

“He’s here — is he?” asked Charles, paler on a sudden.

“He’s gone, sir, please.”

“Gone, is he? Well, well, there’s not much in that.”

“’Twas only, sir, that he brought two men wi’ him.”

“Do you mean? — you don’t mean — what men did he bring?”

“Well, they was constable folk, I believe, they must a’ bin, for they made an arrest.”

“A *what*, do you mean?”

“He made out a writin’, and he ‘ad me in, and questioned me, but I’d nout to tell, sir, and he asked where you was, and I told him, as you ordered I was to say, you was gone, and he took the mistress’s her story, and made her make oath on’t, and the same wi’ the others — Mrs. Tarnley, and the little girl, and the blind woman, she be took up for murder, or I don’t know for what, only he said he could not take no bail for her, so they made her sure, and has took her off, I do suppose, to Wykeford pris’n.”

“Of course, that’s right, I suppose, all right, eh?” Charles looked as if he was going to drop to the earth, so leaden was his hue, and so meaningless the stare with which he looked in Tom’s face.

“But — but — who sent for him? I didn’t. D —— you, who sent for him? ’Twasn’t I. And — and who’s master here? Who the devil sent for that meddling rascal from Wykeford?”

Charles’s voice had risen to a roar as he shook Tom furiously by the collar.

Springing back a bit, Tom answered, with his hand grasping his collar where the squire had just clutched him.

“I don’t know, I didn’t, and I don’t believe no one did. It’s a smart run from here across the common. I don’t believe no one sent from the Grange

— I'm sure no one went from this — not a bit, not a toe, not a soul, I'm sure and certain."

"What's this, what's this, what the devil's all this, Tom?" said the squire, stamping, and shaking his fist in the air, like a man distracted.

"Why did you let her go — why did you let them take her — d —— you? I've a mind to pitch you over that cliff and smash you."

"Well, sir," said Tom, making another step or two back, and himself pale and stern now, with his open hand raised, partly in deprecation, "where's the good o' blamin' me? what could I do wi' the law again me, and how could I tell what you'd think, and 'twarn't no one from this sent for him, not one, but news travels a-pace, and who's he can stop it? — not me, nor *you*," said Tom, sturdily, "and he just come over of his own head, and nabbed her."

"My God! It's done. I thought you would not have allowed me to be trampled on, and the place insulted; I took ye for a man, Tom. Where's my horse — by heaven, I'll have him. I'll make it a day's work he'll remember. That d —— Rodney, coming down to my house with his catchpoles, to pay off old scores, and insult me."

With his fist clenched and raised, Charles Fairfield ran furiously round to the stable yard, followed cautiously by Tom Clinton.

CHAPTER XVII.

PURSUIT.

Having her own misgivings as to the temper in which her master would take this *coup* of the arrest, Mildred Tarnley prudently kept her own counsel, and retreated nearly to the kitchen door, while the *éclaircissement* took place outside. Popping in and out to see what would come of it, old Mildred affected to be busy about her mops and tubs. After a time, in came Tom, looking sulky and hot.

"Is he comin' this way?" asked Mildred.

"Not him," answered Tom.

"Where is he?"

"'Twixt this and Wykeford," he answered, "across the common he's ridin'."

"To Wykeford, hey?"

"To Wykeford, every foot, if he don't run him down on the way; and when they meet — him and Squire Rodney— 'twill be hot and shrewd work between them, I tell ye. I'd a rid wi' him myself if there was a beast to carry me, for three agin one is too long odds."

"Ye don't mean to tell *me*!" exclaimed Mildred, planting her mop perpendicularly on the ground, and leaning immovably on this sceptre.

"Tell ye what?"

"There's goin' to be rough work like that on the head o't?"

"Hot blood, ma'am. Ye know the Fairfields. They folk don't stand long jawin'. It's like when the blood's up the hand's up too."

"And what's he to fight for — not that blind beldame, sure?"

"I want my mug o' beer," said Tom, turning the conversation.

"Yes, sure," she said, "yes, ye shall have it. But what for should master Charles go to wry words wi' Squire Rodney, and what for should there be blows and blood spillin' between 'em? Nonsense!"

"I can't help 'em. I'd lend master a hand if I could. Squire Rodney's no fool neither— 'twill e'en be fight dog, fight bear — and there's two stout lads wi' him will make short work o't."

“Ye don’t think he’s like to be hurt, do ye?”

“Well, ye know, they say fightin’ dogs comes haltin’ home. He’s as strong as two, that’s all, and has a good nag under him. Now gi’e me my beer.”

“‘Twon’t be nothin’, Tom, don’t you think, Tom? It won’t come to nothin’?”

“If he comes up wi’ them ‘twill be an up-and-down fight, I take it. ’Twas an unlucky maggot bit him.”

“Bit who?”

“What but the Divil brought Squire Rodney over here?”

“Who knows?” answered the dame, fumbling in her pocket for the key of the beer-cellar— “I’m goin’ to fetch your beer, Tom.”

And away she went, and in a minute returned with his draught of beer.

“And I think,” she said, setting it down before him, “’twas well done, taking that beast to her right place, do it who might. She’s just a bedlam Bess — clean out o’ her wits wi’ wickedness — mad wi’ drink and them fits she has. We knows here what she is, and bloody work she’d a made last night wi’ that poor young lady, that’ll never be the same again — the old limb — and master himself, though he’s angered a bit because Justice Rodney did not ask his leave to catch a murderer, if ye please, down here at the Grange!”

“There’s more in it, mayhap, than just that,” said Tom, blowing the froth off his beer.

“To come down here without with your leave or by your leave, to squat in the Grange here like gipsey would on Cressley Common, as tho’ she was lady of all — to hurt who she pleased, and live as she liked. More in’t than that, ye say, what more?”

“Hoot, how should I know? Mayhap she thinks she’s as good a right as another to a bit and a welcome down here.”

“She was here before — years enough gone now, and long enough she stayed, and cost a pretty penny, too, I warrant you. Them was more tired of her than me — guest ever, welcome never, they say. She was a play-actor, or something, long ago — a great idle huzzy, never would earn a honest penny, nor do nothing useful, all her days.”

“Ay, Joan reels ill and winds worse, and de’il a stomach she has to spin — that’ll be the way wi’ her, I swear — ha, ha, ha. She’ll not be growin’ richer, I warrant — left in the mud and found in the mire — they folk knows nout o' thrift, and small luck and less good about 'em."

"If ye heard her talk, Tom, ye'd soon know what sort she is, always cravin' — she would not leave a body a shillin' if she could help it."

"Ay, I warrant, women, priests, and poultry have never enough," said Tom. "I know nout about her, nor who she's a lookin' after here, but she's safe enough now I take it; and bloody folks, they say, digs their own graves. But as I said, I knows nout about her, and I say nout, and he that judges as he runs may owertake repentance."

"'Tis easy judgin' here, I'm thinkin'. Killin' and murder's near akin, and when Mr. Charles cools a bit, he'll thank Squire Rodney for riddin' his house of that blind serpent. 'Tis somethin' to be so near losing his wife. So sure as your hand's on that mug it would a' bin done while the cat's lickin' her ear if he had not bounced in on the minute, and once dead, dead as Adam."

"Who loseth his wife and sixpence hath lost a tester, they do say," answered Tom, with a laugh.

"None but a born beast would say so!" said Mildred Tarnley, with a swarthy flush, and striking her hand sternly on the table.

"Well, 'tis only a sayin', ye know, and no new one neither," said Tom, wiping his mouth with his sleeve, and standing up. "But the mistress is a pretty lady, and a kind — and a gentle-born as all may see, and I'd give or take a shrewd blow or two, or harm should happen her."

"Ye'd be no man else, Tom, and I don't doubt ye. Little thought I last night what was in her head, the sly villain, when I left her back again in her bed, and the cross door shut and locked. Lord a' mercy on us! To think how the fiend works wi' his own — smooth and sly sometimes, as if butter would not melt in her mouth."

"'Tis an old sayin' —

"'When the cat winketh, Little wots mouse what the cat thinketh.'"

said Tom, with a grin and a wag of his head.

"She was neither sleek, nor soft, nor sly for that matter, when I saw her. I thought she'd a' had her claws in my chops; such a catamaran I never did see."

"And how's the young lady?" asked Tom, clapping his greasy hat on his head.

"Hey! dear! I'm glad ye asked," exclaimed the old woman— "easier she'll be, no doubt, now *that* devil's gone. But, dearie me! all's in a jumble till Master Charles comes back, for she'll not know, poor thing, what she's to do till he talks wi' her — now all's changed."

And Mildred trotted off to see for herself, and to hear what the young lady might have to say.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DAY — TWILIGHT — DARKNESS.

In their homely sitting-room, with old Dulcibella in friendly attendance, Mildred Tarnley found Alice. It is not always that a dreadful impression makes itself immediately manifest. Nature rallies all her forces at first to meet the danger. A certain excitement of resistance sustains the system through a crisis of horror, and often for a long time after; and it is not until this extraordinary muster of the vital forces begins to dissolve and subside that the shattered condition of the normal powers begins to declare itself.

The scene which had just occurred was a dreadful ordeal for Alice. To recount, and with effort and minuteness, to gather into order the terrific incidents of the night preceding, relate them bit by bit to the magistrate as he wrote them down, make oath to their truth as the basis of a public prosecution, and most dreadful — the having to see and identify the spectre who had murderously assailed her on the night before.

Every step affrighted her, the shadow of a moving branch upon the wall chilled her with terror; the voices of people who spoke seemed to pierce the naked nerve of her ear, and to sing through her head; even for a moment faces, kind and familiar, seemed to flicker or darken with direful meanings alien from their natures.

In this nervous condition old Mildred found her.

“I come, ma’am, to know what you’d wish to be done,” said she, standing at the door with her usual grim little courtesy.

“I don’t quite understand — done about what?” inquired she.

“I mean, ma’am, Tom said you asked him to be ready to drive you from here; but as master ha’n’t come back, and things is changed a bit here, I thought ye might wish to make a change, mayhap.”

“Oh, oh! thank you, Mrs. Tarnley; I forgot, I’ve been so frightened. Oh, Mrs. Tarnley, I wish I could cry — I’d be so much better, I’m sure, if I could cry — I feel my throat so odd and my head so confused — it seems so many days. If I could think of anything to make me cry.”

Mildred looked at her from the corners of her eyes darkly, as if with a hard heart, but I think she pitied her.

"That blind woman's gone, the beast — I'm glad she's away; and you'll be the better o' that, ma'am, I'm thinkin'. I was afeard o' her a'most myself ever since last night; and Master Charles is gone, too, but he'll be back soon."

"He'll come to-day?" she asked, in consternation.

"To-day, of course, ma'am — in an hour or less, I do suppose; and it would not be well done, I'm thinkin', ma'am, for you to leave the Grange, till you see him again, for it's like enough he'll a' changed his plans."

"I was thinking so myself. I'd rather wait here to see him — he had so much to distract him that he may easily think differently by this time. I'm glad, Mrs. Tarnley, you think so, for now I feel confident I may wait for his return — I think I ought to wait — and thank you, Mrs. Tarnley, for advising me in the midst of my distractions."

"I just speak my mind, ma'am, and counsel's no command, as they say; and I never liked meddlers; and don't love to burn my fingers in other people's brewes: so ye'll please to mind, ma'am, 'tis for your own ear I speak, and your own wit will judge; and I wouldn't have Master Charles looking askew, nor like to be shent by him for what's kindly meant to you — not that I owe much kindness nowhere, for since I could scour a platter I ever gave work for wage. So ye'll please not tell Master Charles I counselled ye aught in the matter."

"Certainly, Mrs. Tarnley, just as you wish."

"Would you please wish anything to eat, ma'am?" inquired Mildred, relapsing into her dry, official manner.

"Nothing, Mildred — no, thanks."

"Ye'll lose heart, miss, if ye don't eat — ye must eat."

"Thanks, Mildred, by-and-by, perhaps."

Mrs. Tarnley, like many worthy people, regarded eating as a simply mechanical process, and wondered why people affected a difficulty about it under any circumstances. Somewhat hard of heart, and with nerves of wire, she had no idea that a sufficient shock might rob one not only of appetite, but positively of the power of eating for days.

Alone, for one moment, Alice could not endure to be — haunted unintermittingly by the vague but intense dread of a return of the woman who had so nearly succeeded in murdering her, and with nerves shattered in that indescribable degree which even a strong man experiences for a long time after a murder has been attempted upon him perfidiously and by a surprise. The worst panic comes after an interval of many hours.

As the day waned, more miserably nervous she became, and more defined her terror of the Dutchwoman's return. That straggling old house, with no less than four doors of entrance, favoured the alarms of her imagination. Often she thought of her kind old kinswoman, Lady Wyndale, and her proffered asylum at her snug house at Oulton.

But that was a momentary picture — no more. Miserable as she was at the Grange, until she had seen her husband, learned his plans, and knew what his wishes were, that loyal little wife could not dream of going to Oulton.

She remained there as the shades of evening darkened over the steep roof and solemn trees of Carwell Grange, and more and more grew the horror that deepened with darkness, and was aggravated and distracted by the continued absence of her husband.

In the sitting-room she stood, listening, with a beating heart. Every sound, which at another time would have been unheard, now thrilled her with hope or terror.

Old Dulcibella in the room was also frightened — more a great deal than she could account for. And even Mildred Tarnley — that hard and grim old lady — was touched by the influence of that contagious fear, and barred and locked the doors with jealous care, and even looked to the fastenings of the windows, and caught some faint shadows of that supernatural fear with which Alice Fairfield had come to regard the wicked woman out of whose hands she had escaped.

Now and then, when appealed to, she said a short word or two of reassurance respecting Charles Fairfield's unaccountably prolonged absence. But the panic of the young lady in like manner on this point began to invade her in uncomfortable misgivings.

So uneasy had she grown that at last she dispatched Tom, when sunset had come without a sign of Charles Fairfield's return, riding to Wykeford. Tom had now returned. A bootless errand it had proved. At Wykeford he learned that Charles Fairfield had been there — had been at Squire Rodney's house and about the town, and made inquiries. His pursuit had been misdirected. At Wykeford is a House of Correction and Reformatory, which institution acts as a prison of ease to the county jail. But that jail is in the town of Hatherton, as Charles would have easily recollected if his rage had allowed him a moment to think. Tom, however, made no attempt further to pursue him, on conjecture, and had returned to Carwell Grange, no wiser than he went.

CHAPTER XIX.

HATHERTON.

Charles Fairfield, in true Fairfield wrath, had ridden at a hard pace, which helped to keep his blood up, all the way to the bridge of Wykeford. He had expected to overtake the magistrate easily before he reached that point, and if he had, who knows what might have happened next.

Baulked at Wykeford, and learning there how long a ride interposed before he could hope to reach him, he turned and followed in a somewhat changed mood.

He would himself bail that woman. The question, felony or no felony — bailable offence or not bailable — entered not his uninstructed head. Be she what she might, assassin — devil, he could not and would not permit her to lie in jail. Arrested in his own house, with many sufferings and one great wrong to upbraid him with — with rights, imaginary he insisted, but honestly believed in, perhaps, by her — with other rights, which his tortured heart could not deny, the melancholy rights which are founded on outlawry and disgrace, eleemosynary, but quite irresistible when pleaded with natures not lost to all good, and which proclaim the dreadful equity — that vice has its duties no less than virtue.

Baulked in his first violent impulse, Charles rode his hot horse quietly along the by-road that leads to Hatherton, over many a steep and through many a rut.

Yes, pleasant it would have been to "lick" that rascal Rodney, and upset his dog-cart into the ditch, and liberate the distressed damsel. But even Charles Fairfield began to perceive consequences, and to approve a more moderate course.

At Hatherton was there not Peregrine Hincks, the attorney who carried his brother, Harry Fairfield, whose course, any more than that of true love, did not always run smooth, through the short turns and breaks that disturbed it?

He would go straight to this artist in all manner of quips and cranks in parchment, and tell him what he wanted — the most foolish thing perhaps in the world, to undo that which his good fortune had done for him, and let loose again his trouble.

Scandal! What did the defiant soul of a Fairfield care for scandal? Impulsive, reckless, affectionate, not ungenerous — all considerations were lost in the one compunctious feeling.

Two hours later he was in the office of Mr. Peregrine Hincks, who listened to his statement with a shrewd inflexibility of face. He knew as much as Harry Fairfield did of the person who was now under the turnkey's tutelage. But Charles fancied him quite in the dark, and treated the subject accordingly.

"We'll send down to the jail, and learn what she's committed for, but *two* will be necessary. Who will execute the recognizance with you?"

"I'm certain Harry will do it in a moment," said Charles.

The attorney was very sure that Harry would do no such thing. But it was not necessary to discuss that particular point, nor to insinuate officiously his ideas about the county scandal which would follow his interposition in favour of a prisoner committed upon a charge involving an attempt upon the life of his wife, for the information brought back from the prison was such as to convince the attorney that bail could not be accepted in the case.

On learning this, Charles' wrath returned. He stood for a time at the chimneypiece, examining in silence a candlestick that stood there, and then to the window he went, with a haggard, angry face, and looked out for a while with his hands in his pockets.

"Very well. So much the worse for Rodney," said he suddenly. "I told you my sole motive was to snub that fellow. He chose to make an arrest in my house — his d —— d impertinence! — without the slightest reference to me, and I made up my mind, if I could, to let his prisoner go. That fellow wants to be kicked — I don't care twopence about anything else, but it's all one — I'll find some other way."

"You'd better have a glass of sherry, sir; you're a little tired, and a biscuit."

"I'll have nothing, thanks, till I — till I — what was I going to say? Time enough; I have lots to do at home — a great deal, Mr. Hincks — and my head aches. I *am* tired, but I won't mind the wine, thank you, my head is too bad. If I could just clear it of two or three things I'd be all right, and rest a little. I've been overworked, and I'll ride over here tomorrow — that will do — and we'll talk it over; and I don't choose the wretched, crazy woman to be shut up in prison, because that stupid prig, Rodney, pleases to say she's sane, and would like to hang her, just because she was arrested at Carwell; and — and as you say, of course, if she is insane she is best out of the way; but there are ways of doing things, and I won't be bullied by that vulgar snob. By —— if I had caught him to-day I'd have broken his neck, I believe."

"Glad you did *not* meet him, sir — a row at any time brings one into mischief, but an interference with the course of law — don't you see — a very serious affair, indeed!"

"Well, see — yes, I suppose so, and there was just another thing. Believing, as I do, that wretched person quite mad — don't you see? — it would be very hard to let her — to let her half starve there where they've put her — don't you think? — and I don't care to go down to the place there, and all that; and if you'd just manage to let her have this — it's all I can do just now — but — but its happening at my house — although I'm not a bit to blame, puts it on me in a way, and I think I can't do less than this."

He handed a banknote to the attorney, and was looking all the time on a brief that lay on the table.

Mr. Hincks, the respectable attorney, was a little shy, also, as he took it.

"I'm to say you send it to — what's her name, by-the-by?" he asked.

"Bertha Velderkaust, but you need not mention me — only say it was sent to her — that's all. I'm so vexed, because as you may suppose, I had particular reasons for wishing to keep quiet, and I was staying there at the Grange, you know — Carwell — and thought I might keep quiet for a few weeks; and that wretched maniac comes down there while I was for a few days absent, and in one of her fits makes an attack on a member of my family; and so my little hiding place is disclosed, for of course such a fracas will be heard of, — it is awfully provoking — I'm rather puzzled to know where to go."

Charles ceased, with a faint, dreary laugh, and the attorney looked at his banknote, which he held by the corners, as the mate, in Mudford's fine story, might at the letter which Vanderdecken wished to send to his long-lost wife in Amsterdam.

It was not, however, clear to him that he had any very good excuse for refusing to do this trifling kindness for the brother of his quarrelsome and litigious client, Harry Fairfield, who, although he eschewed costs himself, laid them pretty heavily upon others, and was a valuable feeder for Mr. Hincks' office.

This little commission, therefore, accepted, the attorney saw his visitor downstairs. He had already lighted a candle, and in its light he thought he never saw a man upon his legs look so ill as Charles, and the hand which he gave Mr. Hincks at the steps was dry and burning.

"It's a long ride, sir, to Carwell," the attorney hesitated.

"The horse has had some oats, thanks, down here," and he nodded toward the Plume of Feathers at which he had put up his beast, "and I shan't be long getting over the ground."

And without turning about, or a look over his shoulder, he sauntered away, in the rising moonlight, toward the little inn.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WELCOME.

Charles rode his horse slowly homeward. The moon got up before he reached the wild expanse of Cressley Common, a wide sea of undulating heath, with here and there a grey stone peeping above its surface in the moonlight like a distant sail.

Charles was feverish — worn out in body and mind — literally. Some men more than others are framed to endure misery, and live on, and on, and on in despair. Is this melancholy strength better, or the weakness that faints under the first strain of the rack? Happy that at the longest it cannot be for very long — happy that "man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live," seeing that he is "full of misery."

Charles was conscious only of extreme fatigue; that for days he had eaten little and rested little, and that his short snatches of sleep, harassed by the repetition of his waking calculations and horrors, tired rather than refreshed him.

When fever is brewing, just as electric lights glimmer from the sullen mask of cloud on the eve of a storm, there come sometimes odd flickerings that seem to mock and warn.

Every overworked man, who has been overtaken by fever in the midst of his toil and complications, knows well the kind of tricks his brain has played him on the verge of that chaos.

Charles put his hand to his breast, and felt in his pocket for a letter, the appearance of which was sharp and clear on his retina as if he had seen it but a moment before.

"What have I done with it?" he asked himself— "the letter Hincks gave me?"

He searched his pockets for it, a letter of which this picture was so bright — purely imaginary! He was going to turn about and search the track he had traversed for it; but he bethought him, "To whom was the letter written?" No answer could he find. "To whom?" To no one — nothing — an imagination. Conscious on a sudden, he was scared.

"I want a good rest — I want some sleep — waking dreams. This is the way fellows go mad. What the devil can have put it into my head?"

Now rose before him the tall trees that gather as you approach the vale of Carwell, and soon the steep gables and chimneys of the Grange glimmered white among their boughs.

There in his mind, as unaccountably, was the fancy that he had met and spoken with his father, old Squire Harry, at the Catstone, as he crossed the moor.

"I'll give his message — yes, I'll give your message."

And he thought what possessed him to come out without his hat, and he looked whiter than ever.

And then he thought, "What brought him there?"

And then, "What *was* his message?"

Again a shock, a chasm — his brain had mocked him.

Dreadful when that potent servant begins to mutiny, and instead of honest work for its master finds pastime for itself in fearful sport.

"My God! what am I thinking of?" he said, with a kind of chill, looking back over his shoulder.

His tired horse was plucking a mouthful of grass that grew at the foot of a tree.

"We are both used up," he said, letting his horse, at a quicker pace, pursue its homeward path. "Poor fellow, you are tired as well as I. I'll be all right, I dare say, in the morning if I could only sleep. Something wrong — something a little wrong — that sleep will cure — all right tomorrow."

He looked up as he passed toward the windows of his and Alice's room. When he was out a piece of the shutter was always open. But if so tonight there was no light in the room, and with a shock and a dreadful imperfection of recollection, the scene which occurred on the night past returned.

"Yes, my God! so it was," he said, as he stopped at the yard gate. "Alice — I forget — did I see Alice after that, did I — did they tell me — what is it?"

He dismounted, and felt as if he were going to faint. His finger was on the latch, but he had not courage to raise it. Vain was his effort to remember. Painted in hues of light was that dreadful crisis before his eyes, but how had it ended? Was he going quite mad?

“My God help me,” he muttered again and again. “Is there anything bad? I can’t recall it. Is there anything very bad?”

“Open the door, it is he, I’m sure, I heard the horse,” cried the clear voice of Alice from within.

“Yes, I, it’s I,” he cried in a strange rapture.

And in another moment the door was open, and Charles had clasped his wife to his heart.

“Darling, darling, I’m so glad. You’re quite well?” he almost sobbed.

“Oh, Ry, my own, my own husband, my Ry, he’s safe, he’s quite well. Come in. Thank God, he’s back again with his poor little wife, and oh, darling, we’ll never part again. Come in, come in, my darling.”

Old Mildred secured the door, and Tom took the horse round to the stable, and as she held her husband clasped in her arms, tears, long denied to her, came to her relief, and she wept long and convulsingly.

“Oh, Ry, it has been such a dreadful time; but you’re safe, aren’t you?”

“Quite. Oh! yes, quite darling — very well.”

“But, oh, Ry, you look so tired. You’re not ill, are you, darling?”

“Not ill, only tired. Nothing, not much, tired and stupid, want of rest.”

“You must have some wine, you look so very ill.”

“Well, yes, I’m tired. Thanks, Mildred, that will do,” and he drank the glass of sherry she gave him.

“A drop more?” inquired old Mildred, holding the decanter stooped over his glass.

“No, thanks, no, I — it tastes oddly — or perhaps I’m not quite well after all.”

Charles now felt his mind clear again, and his retrospect was uncrossed by those spectral illusions of the memory that seem to threaten the brain with subjugation.

Better the finger of death than of madness should touch his brain, perhaps. His love for his wife, not dethroned, only in abeyance, was restored. Such dialogues as theirs are little interesting to any but the interlocutors.

With their fear and pain, agitated, troubled, there is love in their words. Those words, then, though in him, troubled with inward upbraidings, in her with secret fears and cares, are precious. There may not be many more between them.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WYKEFORD DOCTOR.

A few days had passed and a great change had come. Charles Fairfield, the master of the Grange, lay in his bed, and the Wykeford doctor admitted to Alice that he could not say what might happen. It was a very grave case — fever — and the patient could not have been worse handled in those early days of the attack, on which sometimes so much depends.

People went to and fro’ on tiptoe, and talked in whispers, and the patient moaned, and prattled, unconscious generally of all that was passing. Awful hours and days of suspense! The Doctor said, and perhaps he was right, to kind Lady Wyndale, who came over to see Alice, and learned with consternation the state of things, that, under the special circumstances, her nerves having been so violently acted upon by terror, this diversion of pain and thought into quite another channel might be the best thing, on the whole, that could have happened to her.

It was now the sixth day of this undetermined ordeal.

Alice watched the Doctor’s countenance with her very soul in her eyes, as he made his inspection, standing at the bedside, and now and then putting a question to Dulcibella or to Alice, or to the nurse whom he had sent to do duty in the sick-room from Wykeford.

“Well?” whispered poor Alice, who had accompanied him downstairs, and pale as death, drew him into the sitting-room, and asked her question.

“Well, Doctor, what do you think to-day?”

“Not much to report. Very little change. We must have patience, you know, for a day or two; and you need not to be told, my dear ma’am, that good nursing is half the battle, and in better hands he need not be; I’m only afraid that you are undertaking too much yourself. That woman, Marks, you may rely upon, implicitly; a most respectable and intelligent person; I never knew her to make a mistake yet, and she has been more than ten years at this work.”

“Yes, I’m sure she is. I like her very much. And don’t you think him a little better?” she pleaded.

"Well, you know, as long as he holds his own and don't lose ground, he *is* better; that's all we can say; not to be worse, as time elapses, is in effect, to be better; that you *may* say."

She was looking earnestly into the clear blue eyes of the old man, who turned them kindly upon her, from under his shaggy white eyebrows.

"Oh! thank God, then you do think him better?"

"In that sense, yes," he answered cautiously, "but, of course, we must have patience, and we shall soon know more, a great deal more, and I do sincerely hope it may all turn out quite right; but the brain has been a good deal overpowered; there's a tendency to a sort of state we call comatose; it indicates too much pressure there, d'ye see. I'd rather have him talking more nonsense, with less of that sleep, as you suppose it, but it isn't sleep, — a very different sort of thing. I've been trying to salivate him, but he's plaguy obstinate. We'll try tonight what dividing the pills into four each, and shortening the intervals a little will do; it sometimes does wonders — we'll see — and a great deal depends on our succeeding in salivating. If we succeeded in effecting that, I think all the rest would proceed satisfactorily, that's one of our difficulties just at this moment. If you send over your little messenger, the sooner the better, she shall have the pills, and let him take one the moment they come — pretty flower that is," he interpolated, touching the petal of one that stood neglected, in its pot, on a little table at the window. "That's not a geranium: it's a pelargonium. I did not know there were such things down here — and you'll continue, I told her everything else, and go on just as before."

"And you think he's better — I mean just a little?" she pleaded again.

"Well, well, you know, I said all I could, and we must hope — we must hope, you know, that everything may go on satisfactorily, and I'll go further. I'll say I don't see at all why we should despair of such a result. Keep up your spirits, ma'am, and be cheery. We'll do our duty all, and leave the rest in the hands of God."

"And I suppose, Dr. Willett, we shall see you tomorrow at the usual hour?"

"Certainly, ma'am, and I don't think there will be any change to speak of till, probably, Thursday."

And her heart sank down with one dreadful dive at mention of that day of trial that might so easily be a day of doom.

And she answered his farewell, and smiled faintly, and followed his steps through the passage, freezing with that fear, it seemed, that she did not breathe, and that her heart ceased beating, and that she glided like a spirit. She stopped, and he passed into the yard to his horse, turning his shrewd, pale face, with a smile and a nod, as he stepped across the door-stone, and he said —

"Goodbye, ma'am, and look out for me tomorrow as usual, and be cheery, mind. Look at the bright side, you know; there's no reason you shouldn't."

She answered his smile as best she could, but her heart was full; an immense sorrow was there. She was frightened. She hurried into the homely sitting-room, and wept in an agony unspeakable.

The doctor, she saw, pitied and wished to cheer her; but how dreadful was his guarded language. She thought that he would speak to others in a different vein, and so, in fact, he did. His opinion was clear against Charles Fairfield's chance of ever being on his feet again. "It was a great pity — a young fellow." The doctor thought everyone young whose years were ten less than his own. "A tall, handsome fellow like that, and Squire of Wyvern in a year or two, and a goodnatured sort of fellow he heard. It was a pity, and that poor little wife of his — and likely to be a mother soon — God help her."

VOLUME III.

CHAPTER I.

SPEECH RETURNS.

The dreaded day came and passed, and Charles Fairfield was not dead, but better. The fever was abating, but never did the vital spark burn lower in living man. Seeing that life was so low in his patient, that there was nothing between it and death, the doctor ordered certain measures to be taken.

"The fever is going, you see, but his strength is not coming, nor won't for a while. It's a very nice thing, I can tell you, to bring him to land with such fine tackle. I've brought a salmon ten pound weight into my net with a bit of a trout rod as light as a rush almost. But this is nicer play — not, mind you, that I'd have you in the dumps, ma'am, but it will be necessary to watch him as a cat would a mouse. Now, you'll have on the table by his bed three bottles — decanted all, and ready for use instantaneously. Beside that claret you'll have a bottle of port, and you must also have a bottle of brandy. He'll be always at his tricks, going to faint, and you mustn't let him. Because, ma'am, it might not be easy to get him out of such a faint, and a faint is death, ma'am, if it lasts long enough. Now, you're not to be frightened."

"Oh, no, Doctor Willett."

"No, *that* would not do neither; but I want you clearly to see the importance of it. Let him have the claret to his lips constantly — in a tumbler, mind — you can't give him too much; and whenever you see him look faint, you must reinforce that with port; and no mincing of matters — none of your half measures. I'd rather you made him drunk three times a day than run the least risk once of the other thing; and if the port doesn't get him up quick enough, you must fire away with the brandy; and don't spare it — don't be afraid — we'll get him round, in time, with jellies and other good things; but life must be maintained in the meanwhile any way — every way — whatever way we can. So mind, *three* — claret, port, brandy."

He held up three fingers as he named them, touching them in succession.

"That's a fire it's better should burn a bit too fiercely for an hour than sink too low for a second; once out, out for ever."

"Thanks, Doctor Willett, I understand quite; and you'll be here tomorrow, won't you, at the usual hour?"

"Certainly, ma'am, and it's high time you should begin to take a little care of yourself; you must, indeed, or you'll rue it; you're too much on your feet, and you have had no rest night or day, and it's quite necessary you should, unless you mean to put yourself out of the world, which would not do at all. We can't spare you, ma'am, we can't indeed — a deal too valuable."

For some time Charles Fairfield continued in very much the same state. At the end of three or four days he signed faintly to Alice, who was in the room, with her large soft eyes gazing on the invalid, whenever she could look unperceived. She got up gently and came close to him.

"Yes, darling," and she lowered her head that he might speak more easily.

Charles whispered —

"Quite well?"

"You feel quite well? Thank God," she answered, her large eyes filling with tears.

"Not I — you," he whispered, with querulous impatience; "ain't you?"

"Quite, darling."

His fine blue Fairfield eyes were raised to her face.

With a short sigh, he whispered, —

"I'm glad."

She stooped gently and kissed his thin cheek.

"I've been dreaming so much," he whispered. "Will you tell me exactly what happened — just before my illness — something happened here?"

In a low murmur she told him.

When she stopped he waited as if expecting more, and then he whispered —

"I thought so — yes."

And he sighed heavily.

"You're tired, darling," she said; "you must take a little wine."

"I hate it," he whispered— "tired of it."

"But, darling, the doctor says you must — and — for my sake won't you?"

The faintest possible smile lighted his pale face.

"Kind," he whispered.

And when she placed the glass of claret to his lips he sipped a little and turned away his head languidly.

"Enough. Bring me my dressing-case," he whispered.

She did so.

"The key was in my purse, I think. Open it, Ally."

She found the key and unlocked that inlaid box.

"Underneath there are two or three letters in a big envelope. Keep them for me; don't part with them," he whispered.

She lifted a long envelope containing some papers, and the faintest nod indicated that they were what he sought.

"Keep it safe. Put the case away."

When she came back, looking at her, he raised his eyebrows ever so little, and moved his head. She understood his sign and stooped again to listen.

"She mustn't be prosecuted, she's mad — Ally, mind."

"Darling, whatever you wish."

"Good, Ally; that's enough."

There was a little pause.

"You did not take enough claret, darling Ry. Won't you take a little more for your poor little Ally?" whispered she anxiously.

"I'm very well, darling; by-and-by sleep; is better."

So he laid his cheek closer to the pillow and closed his eyes, and Alice Fairfield stole on tiptoe to her chair, and with another look at him and a deep sigh, she sat down and took her work.

Silent was the room, except for the low breathing of the invalid. Half an hour passed, and Alice stole softly to the bedside. He was awake, and said faintly, —

"Was it your mother?"

"Who, darling?"

"Talking."

"No one was talking, darling."

"I saw her; I thought I heard — *not* her — someone talking."

"No, darling Ry, nothing."

"Dreams; yes," he murmured, and was quiet again.

Sad and ominous seemed those little wanderings. But such things are common in sickness. It was simply weakness.

In a little time she came over softly, and sat down by his pillow.

“I was looking down, Ally,” he whispered.

“I’ll get it, darling. Something on the floor, is it?” she asked, looking down.

“No, down to my feet; it’s very long — stretched.”

“Are your feet warm, darling?”

“Quite,” and he sighed and closed his eyes.

She continued sitting by his pillow.

“When Willie died, my brother, I was just fifteen.”

Then came a pause.

“Willie was the handsomest,” he murmured on.

“Willie was elder — nineteen, very tall. Handsome Willie, he liked me the best. I cried a deal that day. I used to cry alone, every day in the orchard, or by the river. He’s in the churchyard at Wyvern. I wonder shall I see it any more. There was rain the day of the funeral, they say it is lucky. It was a long coffin, the Fairfields you know — — “

“Darling Ry, you are talking too much, it will tire you; take ever so little claret, to please your poor little Ally.”

This time he did quite quietly, and then closed his eyes, and dozed.

CHAPTER II.

HARRY DRINKS A GLASS AND SPILLS A GLASS.

About an hour after, old Dulcibella came to the door and knocked. Charles Fairfield had slept a little, and was again awake. Into that still darkened room she came to whisper her message.

"Mr. Harry's come, and he's downstairs, and he'd like to see you, and he wanted to know whether he could see the master."

"I'll go down and see him; say I'll see him with pleasure," said Alice. "Harry is here, darling," she said gently, drawing near to the patient, "but you can't see him, of course."

"I must," whispered the invalid peremptorily.

"Darling, are you well enough? I'm sure you ought not. If the doctor were here he would not allow it. Don't think of it, darling Ry, and he'll come again in a few days, when you are stronger."

"It will do me good," whispered Charles. "Bring him — you tire me; *wait, she* can tell him. I'll see him alone; go, go, Ally, go."

She would have remonstrated, but she saw that in his flushed and irritated looks, which warned her against opposing him further.

"You are to go down, Dulcibella, and bring Mr. Harry to the room to see your master; and Dulcibella, like a dear good creature, won't you tell him how weak Master Charles is?" she urged, following her to the lobby, "and beg of him not to stay long."

In a minute or two more the clank of Harry Fairfield's boot was heard on the stair. He pushed open the door, and stepped in.

"Hullo! Charlie — dark enough to blind a horse here — all right, now. I hear you'll be on your legs again — I can't see you, upon my soul, not a stim a'most — before you see three Sundays — you mustn't be tiring yourself. I'm not talking too loud, eh? Would you mind an inch or two more of the shutter open?"

"No," said Charles, faintly. "A little."

"There, that isn't much. I'm beginning to see a bit now. You've had a stiff bout this time, Charlie, 'twasn't typhus, nothing infectious, chiefly the upper story; but you had a squeak for it, my lad. I'd 'a came over to look after you but my hands was too full."

"No good, Harry; could not have spoken, or seen you. Better now."

"A bit shaky still," said Harry, lowering his voice. "You'll get o'er that, though, fast enough. Keeping your spirits up, I see," and Harry winked at the decanters. "Summat better than that rot-gut claret, too. This is the stuff to put life in you. Port, yes." He filled his brother's glass, smelled to it, and drank it off. "So it is, and right good port. I'll drink your health, Charlie," he added, playfully filling his glass again.

"I'm glad you came, Harry, I feel better," said the invalid, and he extended his thin hand upon the bed to his brother.

"Hoot! of course you do," said Harry, looking hard at him, for he was growing accustomed to the imperfect light. "You'll do very well, and Alice, I hear, is quite well also. And so you've had a visit from the old soldier, and a bit of a row, eh?"

"Very bad, Harry. Oh! God help me," moaned Charles.

"She ain't pretty, and she ain't pleasant — bad without and worse within, like a collier's sack," said Harry, with a disgusted grimace, lifting his eyebrows and shaking his head.

"She's headlong and headstrong, and so there has been bad work. I don't know what's to be done."

"The best thing to be done's to let her alone," said Harry. "They've put her up at Hatherton, I hear."

"That's one thing," murmured Charles, with a great sigh. "I'm a heartbroken man, Harry."

"That's easy mended. Don't prosecute, that's all. Get out o' the country when you're well enough, and they must let her go, and maybe the lesson won't do her no great harm."

"I'm glad I have you to talk to," murmured Charles, with another great sigh. "I can't get it out of my head. You'll help me, Harry?"

"All I can— 'taint much."

"And, Harry, there's a thing that troubles me." He paused, it seemed, exhausted.

"Don't mind it now, you're tirin' yourself. Drink a glass o' this."

And he filled the glass from which he had been drinking his port.

"No, I hate wine," he answered. "No, no, by-and-by, perhaps."

"You know best," he acquiesced. "I suppose I must drink it myself," which necessity he complied with accordingly. "I heard the news, you know, and I'd a come sooner but I'm taking an action next 'sizes on a warranty about the grey filly against that d —— d rogue, Farmer Lundy, and had to be off t'other side o' Wyvern wi' the lawyer. 'Taint easy to hold your own wi' the cheatin' chaps that's going now, I can tell ye."

"I'm no good to talk now, Harry. You'll find me better next time, only, Harry, mind, remember, I mayn't be long for this world, and — I give you my honour — I swear, in the presence of God, who'll judge me, I never was married to Bertha. It's a lie. I knew she'd give me trouble some day; but it's a lie. Alice is my wife. I never had a wife but Alice, by G — Almighty! That other's a lie. Don't you know it's a lie, Harry?"

"Don't be botherin' yourself about that now," said Harry, coldly, with rather a sullen countenance, looking askance through the open space in the window shutter to the distant horizon. "Long heads, my lad, and lawyers lear for the quips and cranks o' law. What should I know?"

"Harry, I know you love me; you won't let wrong be believed," said Charles Fairfield, in a voice suddenly stronger than he had spoken in before.

"I won't let wrong be believed," he answered coolly, perhaps sulkily; and he looked at him steadily for a little with his mouth sullenly open.

"You know, Harry," he pleaded, "there's a little child coming: it would not do to wrong it. Oh! Harry, don't you love your poor, only brother."

Harry looked as if he was going to say something saucy, but instead of that, he broke into a short laugh.

"Upon my soul, Charlie, a fellow'd think you took me for an affidavit-man. When did I ever tell now't but the truth? Sich rot! A chap like me, that's faulted always for bein' too blunt and plain-spoken, and as for likin', I'd like to know what else brings me here. Of course I don't say I love anyone, all out, as well as Harry Fairfield. You're my brother, and I stand by you according; but as I said before, I love my shirt very well, but I like my skin better. Hey! And that's all fair."

"All fair, Harry — I'll — I'll talk no more now, Harry. I'll lie down for a little, and we'll meet again."

Harry was again looking through the space of the open shutter, and he yawned. He was thinking of taking his leave.

In this “brown study” he was interrupted by a sound. It was like the beginning of a little laugh. He looked at Charlie, who had uttered it; his thin hand was extended toward the little table at the bedside, and his long arm in its shirtsleeve. His eyes were open, but his face was changed. Harry had seen death often enough to recognise it. With a dreadful start, he was on his feet, and had seized his brother by the shoulder.

“Charlie, man, — Charlie! look at me — my God!” and he seized the brandy bottle and poured ever so much into the open lips. It flowed over from the corners of the mouth, over cheek and chin; the throat swallowed not; the eyes stared their earnest stare, unchanging into immeasurable distance. Charles Fairfield was among the Fairfields of other times; hope and fear, the troubles and the dream, ended.

CHAPTER III.

HOME TO WYVERN.

When a sick man dies he leaves his bed and his physic. His best friend asks him not to stay, and sweetheart and kindred concur in putting him out of doors, to lie in a bed of clay, under the sky, come frost, or storm, or rain; a dumb outcast from fireside, tankard, and even the talk of others.

Tall Charles Fairfield, of the blue eyes, was, in due course, robed in his strange white suit, boxed up and screwed down, with a plated inscription over his cold breast, recounting his Christian and surnames, and the tale of his years.

If from that serene slumber, he could have been called again, the loud and exceeding bitter cry, the wild farewell of his poor little Ally, would have wakened him; but her loving Ry, her hero, slept on, with the unearthly light on his face till the coffin-lid hid it, and in the morning the athlete passed downstairs on men's shoulders, and was slid reverently into a hearse, and went away to old Wyvern churchyard.

At ten o'clock in the morning, Charlie Fairfield was on the ground. Was old Squire Harry there to meet his son, and follow his coffin to the aisle of the ancient little church, and thence to his place in the churchyard?

Not he.

"Serve him right," said the Squire, when he heard it. "I'm d —— d if he'll lie in our vault; let him go to Parson Maybell, yonder, under the trees; *I*'ll not have him."

So Charles Fairfield is buried there under the drip of those melancholy old trees, close by the gentle vicar and his good and pretty wife, over whom the grass has grown long, and the leaves of twenty summers have bloomed and fallen, and whose forlorn and beautiful little child was to be his bride, and is now his widow.

Harry Fairfield was there, with the undertaker's black cloak over his well-knit Fairfield shoulders. He nodded to this friend and that in the crowd, gruffly. His face was lowering with thought, his eyes cast down, and sometimes raised in an abstracted glare to the face of some unobserved bystander for a few moments. Conspicuous above other uncovered heads was his. The tall stature, and statuesque proportions of his race would have marked him without the black mantle for the kinsman of the dead Fairfield.

Up to Wyvern House, after the funeral was over, went Harry. The old man, his hat in his hand, was bareheaded, on the steps; as he approached he nodded to his last remaining son. Three were gone now. A faint sunlight glinted on his old features; a chill northern air stirred his white locks. A gloomy, but noble image of winter the gaunt old man presented.

"Well, that's over; there's the lad buried?"

"Just where you wished, sir, near Vicar Maybell's grave, under the trees."

The old Squire grunted an assent.

"The neighbours was there, I dare say?"

"Yes, sir, *all* — I think."

"I shouldn't wonder — they liked Charlie — they did. He's buried up there alone — well, he deserved it. Was Dobbs there, from Craybourne? He was good to Dobbs. He gave that fellow twenty pun' once, like a big fool, when Dobbs was druv to the wall, the time he lost his cattle; *he* was there?"

"Yes, I saw Dobbs there, sir, he was crying."

"More fool Dobbs — more fool he," said the Squire, and then came a short pause; "cryin' was he?"

"Yes, sir."

"He's a big fool — Dobbs is a fool."

"A man cryin' always looks a fool, the rum faces they makes when they're blubbin'," observed Harry. "Some o' the Wykeford folk was there — Rodney was at his funeral."

"Rodney? He didn't like a bone in his skin. Rodney's a bad dog. What brought Rodney to *my* son's funeral?"

"He's took up wi' them preachin' folk at Wykeford, I'm told, and he came down, I 'spose, to show the swaddlers what a forgivin', charitable chap he is. Before he put on his hat, he come over and put out his hand to me."

"And ye took it! ye know ye took it."

"Well, the folk was lookin' on, and he took me so short," said Harry.

"Charlie wouldn't 'a done that; he wouldn't 'a took his hand over your grave; but you're not like us — never was; you were cut out for a lawyer, I think."

"Well, the folk would 'a talked, ye know, sir."

“Talked, sir, would they?” retorted the Squire, with an angry leer, “I never cared the crack o’ a cart-whip what the folk talked — let ‘em talk, d — ‘em. And ye had no gloves, Dickon says, nor nothin’, buried like a dog ‘a most, up in a corner there.”

“Ye told me not to lay out a shillin’ sir,” said Harry.

“If I did I did, but angry folk don’t always mean all they says; no matter, we’re done wi’ it now — it’s over. He was worth ye all,” broke out the Squire passionately; “I could ‘a liked him, if he had ‘a liked me — if he had ‘a let me, but he didn’t, and — there it is.”

So the Squire walked on a little hastily, which was his way when he chose to be alone, down the steps with gaunt, stumbling gait, and slowly away into the tall woods close by, and in that ancestral shadow disappeared.

Future — present — past. The future — mist, a tint, and shadow. The cloud on which fear and hope project their airy phantoms, living in imagination, and peopled by romance — a dream of dreams. The present only we possess man’s momentary dominion, plastic under his hand as the clay under the potter’s — always a moment of the present in our absolute power — always that fleeting, plastic moment speeding into the past — immutable, eternal. The metal flows molten by, and then chills and fixes for ever. So with the life of man — so with the spirit of man. Work while it is called day. The moment fixes the retrospect, and death the character, for ever. The heart knoweth its own bitterness. The proud man looks on the past he has made. The hammer of Thor can’t break it; the fire that is not quenched can’t melt it. His thoughtless handiwork will be the same for ever.

Old Squire Harry did not talk any more about Charlie. About a month after this he sent to Craybourne to say that Dobbs must come up to Wyvern. Dobbs’ heart failed him when he heard it. Everyone was afraid of old Squire Harry, for in his anger he regarded neither his own interest nor other men’s safety.

“Ho, Dobbs! you’re not fit for Craybourne, the farm’s too much for you, and I’ve nothing else to gi’e ye.” Dobbs’ heart quailed at these words. “You’re a fool, Dobbs — you’re a fool — you’re not equal to it, man. I wonder you didn’t complain o’ your rent. It’s too much — too high by half. I told Cresswell to let you off every rent day a good penn’orth, for future, and don’t you talk about it to no one, ‘twould stop that.” He laid his hand on Dobbs’ shoulder, and looked not unkindly in his face.

And then he turned and walked away, and Dobbs knew that his audience was over.

And the old Squire was growing older, and grass and weeds were growing apace over handsome Charlie Fairfield's grave in Wyvern. But the old man never sent to Carwell Grange, nor asked questions about Alice. That wound was not healed, as death heals some.

Harry came, but Alice was ill, and could not see him. Lady Wyndale came, and her she saw, and that goodnatured kinswoman made her promise that she would come and live with her so soon as she was well enough to leave the Grange.

And Alice lay still in her bed, as the doctor commanded, and her heart seemed breaking. The summer would return, but Ry would never come again. The years would come and pass — how were they to be got over? And, oh! the poor little thing that was coming! — what a sad welcome! It would break her heart to look at it. "Oh, Ry, Ry, Ry, my darling!"

So the morning broke and evening closed, and her great eyes were wet with tears— "the rain it raineth every day."

CHAPTER IV.

A TWILIGHT VISIT.

In the evening Tom had looked in at his usual hour, and was recruiting himself with his big mug of beer and lump of bread and cheese at the kitchen table, and now the keen edge of appetite removed, he was talking agreeably. This was what he called his supper. The flush of sunset on the sky was fading into twilight, and Tom was chatting with old Mildred Tarnley.

"Who'd think it was only three weeks since the funeral?" said Tom—"three weeks tomorrow."

"Ay, tomorrow. 'Twas a Thursday, I mind, by the little boy comin' from Gryce's mill, for the laundress's money, by noon. Two months ago, to look at him, you'd a' said there was forty years' life in him; but death keeps no calendar, they say. I wonder Harry Fairfield isn't here oftener. Though she might not talk wi' him nor see him, the sound o' his voice in the house would do her good — his own brother, you know."

"Dead men, 'tis an old sayin', is kin to none," said Tom. "They goes their own gate, and so does the livin'."

"There's that woman in jail. What's to be done wi' her, and who's to talk wi' the lawyer folk?" said Mildred.

"Ill luck came wi' her to Carwell," said Tom. "Pity he ever set eyes on her; but chances will be, and how can cat help it if maid be a fool? I don't know nothin o' that business, but in this world nout for nout is the most of our wages, and I take it folks knows what they are about, more or less."

Mildred Tarnley sniffed at this oracular speech, and turned up her nose, and went over to the dresser and arranged some matters there.

"The days is shortening apace. My old eyes can scarce see over here without a candle," she said, returning. "But there's a many a thing to be settled in this house, I'm thinkin'."

Tom nodded an acquiescence, and stood up and stretched himself, and looked up to the darkening sky.

"The crows is home in Carwell Wood; 'twill be time to be turning keys and drawing of bolts," said Tom. "Ay, many a thing'll want settlin', I doubt, down here, and who's to do it?"

"Ay, who's to do it?" repeated Mildred. "I tell ye, Tom, there's many a thing — *too* many a thing — more than ye wot of — enough to bring him out o' his grave, Tom — as I've heered stories, many a one, wi' less reason."

As she ceased, a clink of a horseshoe was heard in the little yard without, and a tall figure leading a horse, as Charles Fairfield used often to do, on his late returns to his home, looked in at the window — in that uncertain twilight, in stature, attitude, and, as well as she could see, in face, so much resembling the deceased master of Carwell Grange, that Mrs. Tarnley gasped, —

"My good Lord! Who's that?"

Something of the same momentary alarm puzzled Tom, who frowned wildly at it, with his fists clenched beside him.

It was Harry Fairfield, who exhibited, as sometimes happens in certain lights and moments, a family resemblance, which had never struck those most familiar with his appearance.

"Lawk, it's Mr. Harry; run out, Tom, and take his nag, will ye?"

Out went Tom, and in came Harry Fairfield. He looked about him. He did not smile facetiously and nod, and take old Mildred's dubious hand, as he was wont, and crack a joke, not always very welcome or very pleasant, to the tune of

"Nobody coming to marry me — Nobody coming to woo."

On the contrary, he looked as if he saw nothing there but walls and twilight, and as heavy laden with gloomy thoughts as the troubled ghost she had imagined.

"How is Miss Ally? how is your mistress?" at last he inquired abruptly. "Only middling?"

"Ailing, sir," answered Mildred, dryly.

"Tell her I'm here, will ye? and has something to tell her and talk over, and will make it as short as I can. Tell her I'd a come earlier, but couldn't, for the sessions at Wykeford, and dined wi' a neighbour in the town; and say I mayn't be able to come for a good while again. Is she up?"

"No, sir, the doctor keeps her still to her bed."

"Well, old Dulcey Crane's there; ain't she?"

"Ay, sir, and Lilly Dogger, too. Little good the slut's to me these days."

Harry was trying to read his watch at the darkened window.

"Tell her all that — quick, for time flies," said Harry.

Harry Fairfield remained in the kitchen while old Mildred did his message, and she speedily returned to say that Alice was sitting up by the fire, and would see him.

Up the dim stairs went Harry. He had not been up there since the day he saw the undertakers at Charlie's coffin, and had his last peep at his darkening face. Up he strode with his hand on the banister, and old Mildred gliding before him like a shadow. She knocked at the door. It was not that of the room which they had occupied, where poor Charles Fairfield had died, but the adjoining one, hurriedly arranged, with such extemporized comforts as the primitive people of the household could manage — homely enough, but not desolate, it looked.

Opening the door, she said— "Here's Master Harry, ma'am, a-comin' to see you."

Harry was already in the room. There were candles lighted on a little table near the bed, although the shutters were still open, and the faint twilight mingling with the light of the candles made a sort of purple halo. Alice was sitting in a great chair by the fire in her dressing-gown, pale, and looking very ill. She did not speak; she extended her hand.

"Came to see you, Ally. Troublesome world; but you must look up a bit, you know. Troubles are but trials, they say, and can't last for ever; so don't you be frettin' yourself out o' the world, lass, and makin' more food for worms."

And with this consolation he shook her hand.

"I would have seen you, Harry, when you called before — it was very kind of you — but I could not. I am better now, thank God. I can't believe it still, sometimes," and her eyes filled with tears —

"Well, well, well," said Harry, "where's the good o' cryin'; cryin' won't bring him back, you know. There, there. And I want to say a word to you about that woman that's in jail, you know. 'Tis right you should know everything. He should a told you more about that, don't you see, else ye might put your foot in it."

Paler still turned Alice at these words.

"Tell them to go in there," said he in a lower tone, indicating with his thumb over his shoulder, a sort of recess at the far end of the room, in which stood a table with some work on it.

At a word from Alice old Dulcibella called Lilly Dogger into that distant "alcove," as Mildred termed it.

"It's about that woman," he continued, in a very low tone, "about that one — Bertha. That woman, you know, that's in Hatherton Jail, you remember. There's no good prosecuting that one. Poor Charles wouldn't have allowed it at no price."

"He said so. I wouldn't for the world," she answered very faintly.

"No, of course; he wished it, and we'd like to see his wishes complied with, poor fellow, now he's gone," acquiesced Harry with alacrity. "And you know about her?" he added, in a *very* low tone.

"Oh no, no, Harry; no, please," she answered imploringly.

"Well, it wouldn't do for you, you know, to be gettin' up in the witness-box at the 'sizes to hang her, ye know."

"Oh dear, Harry; no, I never could have thought of it."

"Well, you are not bound, luckily; nor no one. I saw Rodney to-day about it; there's no recognizances — he only took the informations — and I said you wouldn't prosecute; nor *I* won't, I'm sure; and the crown won't take it up, and so it will fall through, and end quietly — the best way for you; for, as I told him, you're not in health to go down there to be battlin' wi' lawyers, and all sorts; 'twould never answer *you*, ye know. So here's a slip o' paper I wrote, and I told him I knew you'd sign it — only sayin' you have no notion of prosecutin' that woman, nor moving more in the matter."

He placed it in her hand.

"I'm sure it's quite right; it's just what I mean. Thank you, Harry; you're very good."

"Get the ink and pen," said Harry aloud to Dulcibella.

"'Tis downstairs," answered she. "I'll fetch it."

And Dulcibella withdrew. Harry was poking about the shelves and the chimneypiece.

"This is ink," said he, "ain't it?" So it was, and a pen. "I think it will write — try it, Ally."

So it was signed; and he had fairly described its tenor and effect to his widowed sister-in-law.

"I'll see Rodney this evening and show him this, to prevent his bothering you here about it. And," he almost whispered, "you know about that woman? or you don't — do you?"

Her lips moved, but he could hear no words.

"She was once a fine woman — ye wouldn't think — a devilish fine woman, I can tell you; and she says — ye know 'twas more than likin' — she says she has the whip hand o' ye — first come, first served. She's talkin o' law, and all that. She says — but it won't make no odds now, you know, what she says — well, she says she was his wife."

"Oh, God! — it's a lie," whispered the poor lady, with white lips, and staring at him with darkening eyes.

"Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain't," he answered. "But it don't much matter now; and I daresay we'll hear nothing about it, and dead men's past fooling, ye know. Good night, Ally, and God bless you; and take care o' yourself, and don't be crying your eyes out like that. And I'll come again as soon as I can; and any business, you know, or anything, I'll be always ready to do for you — and good night, Ally, and mind all I said."

Since those terrible words of his were spoken she had not heard a syllable. He took her icy hand. He looked for a puzzled moment in her clouded eyes, and nodded, and he called to the little girl in the adjoining room.

"I'm going now, child, and do you look after your mistress."

By a coincidence or association — something suggested by Harry Fairfield's looks, was it? — old Mildred Tarnley's head was full of the Dutchwoman when Dulcibella came into the kitchen.

"You took out the ink, Tom, when you was weighin' them oats to-day," said she, and out went Tom in search of that always errant and mitching article.

"I was sayin' to Tom as ye came in, Mrs. Crane, how I hoped to see that one in her place. I think I'd walk to Hatherton and back to see her hanged, the false jade, wi' her knife, and her puce pelisse, and her divilry. Old witch!"

"Lawk, Mrs. Tarnley, how can ye?"

"Well, now Master Charles is under the mould, I wouldn't spare her. What for shouldn't Mrs. Fairfield make her pay for the pipe she danced to. It's her turn now —

‘When you are anvil, hold you still, When you are hammer, strike your fill.’

And if I was Mrs. Fairfield, *maybe* I wouldn’t make her smoke for all.”

“I think my lady will do just what poor Master Charles wished, and I know nothing about the woman,” said Dulcibella, “only they all say she’s not right in her head, Mrs. Tarnley, and I don’t think she’ll slight his last word, and punish the woman; ‘twould be the same as sacrilege a’most; and what of her? Much matter about a wooden platter! and its ill burning the house to frighten the mice.”

Harry Fairfield here sauntered into the kitchen, rolling unspoken thoughts in his mind. The conversation subsided at his approach; Dulcibella made her courtesy and withdrew, and said he to Tom, who was entering with the ink-bottle, —

“Tom, run out, will ye, and get my nag ready for the road; I’ll be off this minute.”

Tom departed promptly.

“Well, Mildred,” said he, eyeing her darkly from the corners of his eyes, “sorrow comes unsent for.”

“Ay, sure, she’s breakin’ her heart, poor thing.”

“‘Twon’t break, I warrant, for all that,” he answered; “sorrow for a husband they say is a pain in the elbow, sharp and short.”

“All along o’ that ugly Dutch beast. ’Twas an ill wind carried her to Carwell,” said Mildred.

He shut his eyes and shook his head.

“That couldn’t do nowhere,” said he, —

“‘Two cats and one mouse, Two wives in one house.’”

“Master Charles was no such fool. What for should he ever a’ married such as that? I couldn’t believe no such thing,” said Mrs. Tarnley, sharply.

“‘Two dogs at one bone, Can never agree in one,’”

repeated Harry, oracularly. “There’s no need, mind, to set folks’ tongues a ringin’, nor much good in tryin’ to hide the matter, for her people won’t never let it rest, I lay ye what ye please, — never. ‘Twill be strange news up at Wyvern, but I’m afeard she’ll prove it only too ready; ‘twill shame us finely.”

“Well, let them talk— ‘As the bell clinks, so the fool thinks’ — and who the worse. I don’t believe it no how. He never would ha’ brought down the

Fairfields to that, and if he had, he could not ha' brought the poor young creature upstairs into such trouble and shame. I won't believe it of him till it's proved."

"I hope they may never prove it. But what can we do? You and I know how they lived here, and I have heard her call him husband as often as I have fingers and toes, but, bless ye, we'll hold our tongues — you will, eh? won't ye, Mildred? ye musn't be talkin'."

"Talkin'! I ha' nout to talk about. Fudge! man, I don't believe it— 'tis a d —— d lie, from top to bottom."

"I hope so," said he.

"A shameless liar she was, the blackest I ever heard talk."

"Best let sleepin' dogs be," said he.

There was some silver loose in his trousers' pocket, and he was fumbling with it, and looking hard at Mildred as he spoke to her. Sometimes, between his finger and thumb, he held the shilling — sometimes the half-crown. He was mentally deciding which to part with, and it ended by his presenting Mildred with the shilling, and recommending her to apply this splendid "tip" to the purchase of tea.

Some people experience a glow after they have done a great benevolence; as he walked into the stableyard, Harry experienced a sensation, but it wasn't a glow, a chill rather. Remembering the oblique look with which she eyed the silver coin in her dark palm, and her scant thanks, he was thinking what a beast he was to part with his money so lightly.

Mildred Tarnley cynically muttered to herself in the kitchen, —

"'Farewell frost, Nothing got nor nothing lost.'

Here's a gift! Bless him! I mind the time a Fairfield would a' been ashamed to give an old servant such a vails. Hoot! what's the world a comin' to? 'Tis time we was a goin'. But Master Harry was ever the same — a thrifty lad he was, that looked after his pennies sharply," said old Mildred Tarnley, scornfully; and she dropped the coin disdainfully into a little tin porringer that stood on the dresser.

And Tom came in, and the doors were made sure, and Mildred Tarnley made her modest cup of tea, and all was subsiding for the night.

But Harry's words had stricken Alice Fairfield. Perhaps those viewless arrows oftener kill than people think of. Up in her homely room Alice now lay very ill indeed.

CHAPTER V.

THE HEIR OF THE FAIRFIELDS.

At dead of night Alice was very ill, and Tom was called up to ride across Cressley Common for the Wykeford doctor. Worse and worse she grew. In this unknown danger — without the support of a husband's love or consolation— "the pains of hell gat hold of her," the fear of death was upon her. Glad was she in her lonely terrors to hear the friendly voice of Doctor Willett as he came up the stairs, with a heavy, booted step, in hurried conversation with old Dulcibella Crane, who had gone down to meet him on hearing the sound of his arrival.

In lower tones the doctor put his questions when he had arrived in his patient's room, and his manner became stern, and his measures prompt, and it was plain that he was very much alarmed.

Alice Fairfield was in danger — in so great danger that he would have called in the Hatherton doctor, or any other, to share his responsibility, if the horse which Tom drove had not had as much as he could do that night in the long trot — and partly canter — to Wykeford and back again to the Grange.

Alice's danger increased, and her state became so alarming that the doctor was afraid to leave his patient, and stayed that night at the Grange.

In the morning he sent Tom to Hatherton with a summons for his brother physician, and now this quaint household grew thoroughly alarmed.

The lady was past the effort of speaking, almost of thinking, and lay like a white image in her bed. Old Dulcibella happily had charge of the money, not much, which Alice had for present use; so the doctors had their fees, and were gone, and Doctor Willett, of Wykeford, was to come again in the evening, leaving his patient, as he said, quieter, but still in a very precarious state.

When the Wykeford doctor returned he found her again too ill to think of leaving her. At midnight Tom was obliged to mount, and ride away to Hatherton for the other doctor.

Before the Hatherton doctor had reached the Grange, however, a tiny voice was crying there — a little spirit had come, a scion of the Fairfield race.

Mrs. Tarnley wrote to Harry Fairfield to Wyvern to announce the event, which she did thus: —

“SIR,

“Master Harey, it has came a sirprise. Missis is this mornin’ gev burth to a boy and air; babe is well, but Missis Fairfield low and dangerous.

“Your servant, “MILDRED TARNLEY.”

Dulcibella, without consulting Mildred, any more than Mildred did her, wrote also a letter, gentler and more gracious, but certainly no better spelled. When these reached Wyvern, Harry was from home.

It was not till four days had passed that Harry Fairfield arrived in the afternoon.

He had thrown his horse’s bridle to Tom in the stable yard, and appeared suddenly before Mildred Tarnley in the kitchen door.

“Well, how’s the lady in the straw?” inquired Harry, looking uncomfortable, but smiling his best. “How is Miss Alice?”

“Mrs. Fairfield’s very bad, and the doctor han’t much hopes of her. She lies at God’s mercy, sir.”

“She’ll be better, you’ll find. She’ll be all right soon. And when was it — you put no date to your note?”

“On Friday, I think. We’re so put about here I scarce know one day from t’other.”

“She’ll be better. Is anyone here with her?”

“A nurse from Hatherton.”

“No one else? I thought Lady Wyndale might a’ come.”

“I was goin’ to send over there, but Doctor Willett said no.”

“Did he? Why?”

“Not yet a bit; he says she’d be in his way and no use, and maybe worrit her into a fever.”

“Very like,” said Harry; “and how’s the boy — isn’t it a boy?”

“Boy — yes, sir, a fine thumpin’ baby — and like to do well, and will prove, belike, a true, open-handed Fairfield, and a brave Squire o’ Wyvern.”

“Well, that’s as it may be. I’ll not trouble him. I have more than enough to my share as it is — and there’s some things that’s better never than late, and I’ll live and die a bachelor. I’ve more years than my teeth shows.”

And Harry smiled and showed his fine teeth.

"There's Fairfields has took a wife later than you," said she, eyeing him darkly.

"Too wise, old girl. You'll not catch me at that work. Wives is like Flanders' mares, as the Squire says, fairest afar off."

"Hey?" snarled old Mildred, with a prolonged note.

"No, lass, I don't want, nohow, to be Squire o' Wyvern — there's more pains than gains in it; always one thing or t'other wrong — one begs and t'other robs, and ten cusses to one blessin'. I don't want folks to say o' me as they does of some — Harry's a hog, and does no good till he dies."

"Folk do like an estate, though," said Mildred, with another shrewd look.

"Ay, if all's straight and clear, but I don't like debts and bother, and I a' seen how the old boy's worried that way till he's fit to drown himself in the pond. I can do something, buyin' or sellin'; and little and often, you know, fills the purse."

Mildred was silent.

"They do say — I mean, I knows it for certain, there is a screw loose — and you know where, I think — but how can I help that? The Dutchwoman, I know, can prove her marriage to poor Charlie, but never you blab — no more will I. There was no child o' that marriage — neither chick nor child, so, bein' as she is, 'tis little to her how that sow's handled. 'Twould be a pity poor Charlie's son should lose his own; and ye may tell Alice I'm glad there's a boy, and that she'll ha' no trouble from me, but all the help I can, and that's a fact, and that's God's truth."

"Well, well, that *is* queer! — I never heard man speak as you speak."

There was a cynical incredulity in Mildred Tarnley's tone.

"Listen, now — here we be alone, eh?" said he, looking round.

"Ye may say so," she said, with a discontented emphasis.

"I'd tell you a thing in a minute, old Tarnley, only they say old vessels must leak. Will you be staunch? Will ye hold your tongue on't if I tell you a thing?"

"Ay," said Mildred.

"Because one barking dog sets all the street a barking, ye know," he added.

"Ye know me well, Master Harry. I could hold my tongue always when there was need."

"And that's the reason I'm going to talk to you," said Harry, "and no one knows it, mind, but yourself, and if it gets out I'll know who to blame."

"'Twon't get out for me," said Mildred, looking hard at him.

"One devil drubs another, they say, and if the young Squire upstairs has a foot in the mud I've one in the mire," said Harry. "If his hat has a hole, my shoe has another. And 'tis a bad bargain where both are losers."

"Well, I can't see it nohow. I don't know what you're drivin' at; but I think you're no fool, Master Harry; ye never was that, and it's a cunning part, I've heered, to play the fool well."

And Harry did look very cunning as she cited this saw, and for a moment also a little put out. But he quickly resumed, and staring in her face surlily, said he, —

"Well, I *am* cunnin'; I hope I am; and you're a little bit that way yourself, old Mildred; no fool, anyhow, that ever I could see."

"Crafty I may be, I ha' lived years and seen folk enough to make me, but my heart weren't set never on pelf.

'A thousand pounds and a bottle of hay Is all one at doom's-day.'"

"So it is," said he, "but there's a good many days 'twixt this and doom's-day yet and money'll do more than my lord's letter, any place, and I'll not deny I'd like Wyvern well enough if my hand was free to lay on it. But I a' thought it well over, and it wouldn't fit me nohow. I can't."

"Ye're the first Fairfield I ever heered say that Wyvern wouldn't fit him," said she.

"Is that beer in the jug?" he asked, nodding toward a brown jug that stood on the dresser.

"Yes, sir. Would ye like a drink?"

"Ay, if it baint stale."

"Fresh drew, just as you was coming in, sir," said she, setting it down on the table. "I'll fetch ye a glass."

"Never mind a glass, a rantin' dog like me can drink out of a well-bucket, much less a brown jug," and clutching it carelessly by the handle he quaffed as long and deep a draught as his ancestor and namesake might after his exhausting flight from Worcester a couple of hundred years before.

"You are puzzled, old girl, and don't know whether I be in jest or earnest. But, good or bad, wives must be had — you know, and you never heard of a Fairfield yet that was lucky in a wife, or hadn't a screw loose sometime about they sort o' cattle; and ye're an old servant, Mildred, and though you be a bit testy, you're true, and I may tell ye things I wouldn't tell no one, not the Governor, not my little finger; I'd burn my shirt if it knew; and ye won't tell no one, upon your soul, and as ye hope to be saved?"

"I can keep counsel, I'm good at that," said Mildred.

"Well, I need not say no more than this: there's them that's quiet enough now, and will be, that if they thought I was Squire o' Wyvern I'd make the world too hot to hold me. I'd rather be Harry Fairfield at fair and market than archbishop of hell, I can tell ye, havin' no likin' for fine titles and honour, and glory, wi' a tethered leg and a sore heart; better to go your own gait, and eat your mouthful where ye find it, than go in gold wi' a broken back, that's all, and that's truth. If 'twas otherwise I'd be down in the mouth, I can tell you, about the young gen-man upstairs, and I'd a' liked his birthday no better than a shepherd loves a bright Candlemas; but as it is — no matter, 'tis better to me than a pot o' gold, and I drink the little chap's health, and I wish she had a sieve full o' them, and that's God's truth, as I stand here," and Harry backed the declaration with an oath.

"Well, I believe you, Harry," said Mildred.

"And I'm glad o't," she added after a pause.

"I'm very glad — there has been ill blood o'er much in the family," she resumed; "it's time there should be peace and brotherhood, God knows — and — I'm glad to hear you speak like that, sir."

And, so saying, she extended her dark, hard palm to him, and he took it, and laughed.

"Every man knows where his own shoe pinches," said he; "'tis a shrewish world, old girl, and there's warts and chilblains where no one guesses, but things won't be for ever; 'tis a long lane, ye know, that has no turning, and the burr won't stick always."

"Ay, ay, Master Harry, as I've heard the old folks say, 'Be the day never so long, at last cometh even-song.'"

"And how is the lady herself?" said he.

"As bad as can be, a'most," answered Mildred.

"Who says so?" he asked.

"The doctor; he has no opinion of her, I'm afeared, poor little thing."

"The doctor — does he? — but is he any good?"

"It's Doctor Willett of Wykeford. He's thought a deal of by most folk down here. I don't know, I'm sure, but he seems very nice about her, I think, and kind, and looks after the baby too."

"That's right; I'm glad o' that. I'd pay something myself rather than it should be neglected; and what does he say o' the boy?"

"Doin' very well — nothin' against him; but, you know, 'tis only a few days, and o'er soon to judge yet a bit."

"I wonder could she see me for a minute?"

"Hoot, man! How came that in your head? Why, the room's dark, and she never speaks above a whisper, and not five words then, and only, may be, thrice in a day. Ye don't know what way she is; 'tis just the turn o' a halfpenny whether she'll live till mornin'."

"That's bad. I didn't think she could be that bad," said he.

"She is, then."

"'Twould do her no harm to know that there's some rent — about thirty pounds — due from Riddleswake. I'll give Tom a bit of a note to Farmer Wycraft, and he'll pay it. It's settled to her for her life — I know that — and she'll be wantin' money; and see you that the child wants nothing. I have lots o' reasons why that child should do well. This ain't bad beer, I can tell you. Another mug of it wouldn't hurt me, and if you can make me out a mouthful of anything; I'm beastly hungry."

A bit of cold corned beef, some cheese, and a loaf Mildred Tarnley produced, and Harry made a hearty meal in the kitchen, not disturbing that engrossing business by conversation, while old Mildred went to and fro, into the scullery and back again, and busied herself about her saucepans and dishes.

"Now get me a pen and ink and a bit o' paper. There's no one in the house will be the worse of a little money, and I'll write that note." And so he did, and handed it to Mildred with the air of a prince who was bestowing a gift.

"There! That will make the mare go for a while longer; and, look ye, where's old Dulcibella Crane? I'd like to shake hands wi' her before I go."

"Upstairs, wi' her mistress."

"Tell her to come down and see me for a minute; and mind, old Tarnley, ye must write to me often — tomorrow and next day — and — where's my hat? — on my head, by Jove — and so on; for if anything should happen — if little Alice should founder, you know — there should be some one, when she's off the hooks, to look after things a bit; and the Governor won't do nothing — put that out o' yer head — and 'twill all fall on my shoulders; and send her down to me — old Dulcibella Crane, I mean — for I'm going, and unless I'm wanted I mayn't see ye here for many a day."

Thus charged, Mildred Tarnley went away, and in a few minutes old Dulcibella appeared.

From her, after he had examined her as to the state of the lady upstairs, and of her baby, he exacted the same promise as that which Mildred had made him — a promise to write often to Wyvern.

He did not mind making her the same odd confidence which he had made to Mildred. There was no need, he thought, for Dulcibella was soft-hearted, and somewhat soft-headed, too, and by no means given to suspicion; and as she had not the evil that attends shrewdness, neither had she the reliability, and she was too much given to talking, and his secret would then become more public than he cared to make it.

"And tell the mistress I wish her joy, do you mind, and I'd like to stand godfather to the boy whenever the christenin' is, and to put me to any work she thinks I'm fit for; and tell her I wrote about a handful o' rent that's coming to her; and goodbye, and take care o' yourself; and who's nursin' the baby?"

"We feeds it wi' goat's milk and sich like, by direction of the doctor. Wouldn't ye like to see it?"

"Not this time — I'm off — but — who's taking charge of him?"

"Among us the poor little darling is, but mostly me."

"Well, that's right, and look after it well, and I'll give ye a bit o' money when — when it's on a little, and don't forget to write; and ye needn't say nout to old Mildred, for she's goin' to write too, and might take huff if she knew that you was writin' also, do you see?"

"Yes, Master Harry, surely none shall know, and I'm thinkin' ye *would* like to see it, and it won't be nothin' the worse, ye'll find, and it *is* such a darlin'."

"And so like its poor papa that's gone, eh? But I haven't no time, dear, this bout, and you may give his worship my kind regards, and tell him the more he thrives the better I'm pleased, and old chimnies won't stand for ever, and he won't be long kept out of his own, and I'll keep them aloof that would make or meddle or mar, and goodbye, old Dulcie Crane, and mind what I said."

And clapping her on the shoulder with his strong hand, he smiled after his fashion, and wagged his head and strode into the yard, mounted his horse, and was soon far away on the road from Carwell Grange.

CHAPTER VI.

BERTHA VELDERKAUST.

Harry Fairfield, when, crossing Cressley Common, he reached the road that diverges eastward, took that turn, and rode towards Hatherton.

Surly enough he looked when he slackened his pace to a walk at the foot of the long low hill that interposes between the common and that town.

He had a short pipe in his pocket, with a big bowl, and a metal cover to it, into which he stuffed some pinches of tobacco — a shilling went a good way in that sort of smoking, and Harry was economical — and soon his pipe was in full play.

This narcotic helped his cogitative powers, and he had a good deal to think about. He was going to see his old friend Bertha Velderkaust, in her new situation, and he was considering how best to approach her.

From such ruminations — too vague and irregular to be reduced to logical sequence and arrangement — there arise, nevertheless, conclusions by no means unimportant, and quite distinct enough. By this time he had smoked his pipe out, and looked down from the summit of this rising ground upon the pretty town spreading among the trees, with its old tower and steeple, its court-house, its parsonage, and that high-walled stronghold on the right, in which the object of his visit was at present secluded.

When, having complied with all formalities, he obtained an entrance, and obtained permission to visit that person, it was her pleasure to keep him waiting for some time for his audience. Harry grew cross and impatient, the more so as he heard that she had a friend with her, drinking tea, and reading the newspaper to her.

As Harry Fairfield was one of those persons who are averse to sacrificing themselves without a good consideration, the reader will conclude that his object was not altogether to serve the “old soldier.” If it had been only that, I think he would have left the town of Hatherton *re infecta*. As it was, he waited, and at last was admitted.

This lady, Bertha Velderkaust, chose to be known among her neighbours in misfortune as Madame Bertha Fairfield of Wyvern, which style and title she preferred to that by which she had been committed to the safe keeping of the gaoler.

When Harry Fairfield stepped into her small apartment he found her dressed and bedizened in a way that a little surprised him.

She had on a sky-blue satin dress, caught up at one side with a bunch of artificial flowers. She had a lace scarf and a lace coiffure lying flat across her head, with a miniature coronet of Roman pearl in the centre, and lappets depending at each side. She had a double necklace of enormous Roman pearls about her throat, and a pair of pink velvet slippers, embroidered with beads and bugles, and this tawdry figure sat on the side of her truckle bed to receive him, with the air of a princess in a pantomime. She accumulated her finery in this way, I think, for the purpose of impressing the people about the prison with a due sense of her position and importance. It may not have been quite without its effect.

"Hullo! madame, I came to tell you some news," said he, as soon as the door was closed. "But, by the makins! you 'most took my breath away at first sight o' ye."

"Pity to have so nice a man breathless — deplorable pity!" — or *biddy*, as she pronounced it. "Suppose you go away. I did not ask you to come and get your breath again in the air of my place."

"What place may that be — not Hoxton Old Town, hey?"

"Not at all — Wyvern, dear child?" she said, with a quiet sneer.

"Oh, thank ye — yes — well I will, I think, take a mouthful there as you are so good."

As he concluded this speech Master Harry put out his tongue at the blind lady with a grimace that was outrageous.

"I'll hide my name no longer," she said, "I'm Mrs. Fairfield of Wyvern."

"That's as it may be," he answered, serenely.

"I say, I'm Mrs. Fairfield of Wyvern," repeated she.

"Boo!" answered Harry.

"Beast! By that noise what do you mean?"

"I'll tell ye, by-and-by. Come, you mustn't be cross, it wastes time."

"More time than we know what to do with in this house," she sneered.

"Well, that's true for some, I'll not deny; but there's some as is pretty well worked I hear — eh? — and so long as we baint, we may endure the leisure, for as bad as that is, business here, I'm told, is a deal worse," and Harry laughed.

"Pleasant was my Harry always," again sneered the lady.

"And ye heard of poor Charlie, of course?" he asked.

"Yes, of course. Everyone is not like you. I did hear. I don't thank you," she answered, tartly, and turned her pale, malignant face toward him.

"But, dear girl, I could not. There was difficulties, eyes a-watchin' on all hands, and ears cocked, and I knew you could not be long without knowing. So you heard; but mayhap you haven't heard this — there's a child born o' that marriage."

"Marriage!" and with an oath the big Dutchwoman burst into a discordant laugh.

For a moment Harry was alarmed, but the laugh was not hysterical — purely emotional, and an escape for pent-up scorn and fury.

"Well, any how there's a child — a boy — and a fine hale little chap, wi' a big bald head and a bawlin' mouth as ever a mother hugged — the darlin'."

"Well, let the brat lie on the dung heap, you'll not lift him," said the lady.

"I'll not meddle or make. I'm not over-hot about Wyvern. I'd rather have a pocket full o' money than a house full o' debts any day; and anyhow there he is, the four bones that's to walk off with my share o't."

"I should have got mourning," said Bertha Velderkaust, speaking from some hidden train of thought.

"Bah! No one to see you here," said Harry.

"If I had money or credit, I'd have got it," she said.

"That's very affectionate of you," said Harry; "but why do you dress like that — why do you dress like the lady wi' the glass slipper, Cinderella, at the king's ball, in the story book?"

"I should dress, you think, like Cinderella over the coalscuttle?"

"Well, I wouldn't set the folk a laughing when I was in no laughing humour myself — not that it makes much odds, and I do suppose it don't matter — not it."

"It does matter something, perhaps, and perhaps nothing; but I know who I am, and I won't let myself down," said she. "I don't want to lose myself among these people; I'll keep myself distinct. I'm too high to put my foot in the mud."

"Too high to put your foot in the mud — too high to put your foot on the pavement," said Harry, mischievously, with his eyes on this impulsive lady, and hitching his chair off a little to secure a fair start. "You'll be too high, I'm thinkin', to get your foot to ground at all, one o' these days, if you don't look sharp. It's too high a flight, I'm told, to touch *terra firma* wi' the top o' your toe — the gallows, I mean — and that's what you're coming to quick. I'm afeard."

As Harry concluded, he stood up, intending to get out, if possible, without the indignity of coming to hand-grips with a woman.

The Herculean lady, in sky-blue satin and Roman pearls, leaned forward with sharpened features, but neither extended her arm nor attempted to rise. Then she sighed deeply, and leaned with her shoulders to the wall.

"Off in a coach for this bout," thought Harry.

"Thank you, kind lad, always the same," she sneered, quietly. "You wish it, no doubt, but, no, you don't think it. I know better."

"Why the devil should I wish you hanged, Bertha? Don't be a fool; you're not in my way, and never can be. There's that boy, and, for reasons of my own, I'm glad he is — I'm *glad* he's where he is — and Wyvern will be for him and not for me — never!"

"Harry, dear, you know quite well," she drawled, softly, with a titter, "you'll poison that boy if you can."

"You lie!" said Harry, turning scarlet, and then as suddenly pale. "You *lie*! — and so that's answered."

Here followed a silence. The woman was not angry, but she tittered again and nodded her head.

"Wyvern's out o' my head. I never cared about it. I had my own reasons. I never did," he swore, furiously, striking his hand on the table. "And I won't see that boy ruined — my flesh and blood — my own nephew. No, no, Bertha, that would never do; the boy must have his own. I'll see you made comfortable, but that lay won't do — you'll find it won't pay nohow."

"Speak out, man — what do you mean?" said Bertha.

"Come, come, come, Bertha, you're no fool," wheedled he; "there isn't a sounder head from this to London; and though you be a bit hotheaded, you're not as bad as you'd have us believe— 'taint the worst, always, that has an o'er-hasty hand. Why, bless ye, girl, I'd be sorry ye were hurt, and I'll help to get ye out o' this, without scathe or scorn, if you'll let me."

"Well, come; what's in your mind, Harry Vairfield?" she asked.

"I tell ye what it is, it can do you no good, no how, bein' hard on that boy, and I know, and you know, you never were married to poor Charlie."

"You lie!" cried the lady, bitterly. So they were quits on the point of honour.

"Now, Bertha, lass, come now — reason, reason; don't you be in a hurry, and just listen to reason, and I'll make it better to you than fifty marriages."

"Don't you think I have no advice — I've engaged Mr. Wynell, the best attorney in Hatherton; I know what I'm about."

"The better you know it, the better I'm pleased; but the lawyerfolk likes always a bit of a row — they seldom cries kiss and be friends until their hands be well greased, and their clients has a bellyful o' law; therefore it's better that friends should put their heads together and agree before it comes to that sort o' milling, and I tell ye, ye shall be cared for; *I*'ll see to it, if you don't be kickin' up no rows about nothing."

She laughed a quiet, scornful laugh.

"Oh ho! Master Harry, poor little fellow! he's frightened, is he?"

"You're damnably mistaken," said he. "Frightened, indeed! I'll see whose frightened: I know there was no marriage — I *know* it, and it won't do tryin' it on me, you'll just get yourself into the wrong box; where's the use of runnin' your head into a cotton bag?"

"Cotton bag your own head. Who's to do it?"

"They'll be clumsy fingers that can't tie that knot, lass. Come, you're a clever girl, you're not to be talking — not like a fool. I know everything about it. If you try that on, it will turn out bad. 'Taint easy to green Harry Fairfield; I don't think he was ever yet fooled by a lass but where he chose to be fooled, and it's pretty well allowed there's no use trying to bully him."

"I ought to like you, if all that be so," said she, "for you are very like my own self."

"I'm not tryin' to bully you, girl, nor to sell ye neither; ye were always a bit rash, and too ready wi' your hand; but them's not the worst folk goin'. We Fairfields has a touch o' it, and we shouldn't be o'er hard on quick-tempered folk like that. There was no lass that ever I met, gentle or simple, that could match ye for good looks and pleasant talk, and ye dress so beautiful, and if ye had but your eyes this minute, you'd have who ye liked at your feet."

And Harry Fairfield repeated this view of her charms with an oath.

“If ifs and ans were pots and pans,” repeated the lady with a sigh of gratification, and with that foreign accent and peculiar drawl which made the homely proverb sound particularly odd; “I forget the end — there would be no use in tinkers, I think.”

“Well said, Bertha! but there’s none like ye, not one, this minute, so handsome,” exclaims he.

“Not that chit down at Carwell Grange, I dare say — eh?”

“Alice! Not fit to stand behind your chair. If ye could but see her, and just look in the glass, ye’d answer that question yourself,” he replied.

“There it is again — *if* I could look in the glass — it is fourteen years since I did that — *if* I could see that fool of a girl — if — if — *if*!” she said with an irrepressible simper— “the old proverb again — ifs and ans were pots and pans— ’twas old Mistress Tarnley used to say that — a d —— d old witch she always was,” she broke out, parenthetically, “and should be broke alive on the wheel.”

“Bang away wi’ the devil’s broomstick, and break her to smash for me,” said Harry. “But I’d sooner talk o’ yourself. Hang me, if you ever looked better — there’s no such figure; and, by the law, it’s looking up — it *is* — better and better every day. I like a tall lass, but ye beat them all, by the law, and ye shows off a dress so grandly.”

“Now don’t think, foolish thing, I like compliments — in at one ear and out of the other,” she said, with the same smirk, shaking her great head.

“Hoot, lass! Compliments, indeed! Why should I? Only this, that knowing you so long I just blurts out everything that comes uppermost, and it’s a pity ye shouldn’t have money to dress as ye should.”

“I never had that,” said the lady.

“Never — I know that well — and if ye won’t be said by me, ye’ll have less,” said Harry.

“I don’t think you know much about it,” said Bertha, serenely.

“Now, Bertha, child, you mustn’t keep contradictin’ me. I do know a deal about it — *everything*. There was no marriage, *never*.”

“As long as Charlie lived, ye never said that — you always backed me.”

“I’m not going to tell lies for no one,” said he, sulkily.

“Not going! Why you have been lying all your life — you’d lie for a shilling any day — all lies, you mean, miserly liar.”

"Come, Bertha, draw it mild, won't ye? Did you never hear say o' the Fairfields that they were a quick-tempered folk? and it's an old saying, don't knock a mad horse over the head."

"It's true all I said," she laughed; "and that's why it stings."

"And did ye never hear that true jests breed bad blood?" he laughed. "But no matter, I'm not a bit riled, and I won't. I like ye better for speaking out; I hate that meally-mouthed talk that fine-spoken folk goes on wi'. I likes a bit of a rub now and then; if ye were too civil I couldn't speak my own mind neither, and that would never do."

"Get along with ye. Have you any more to say?"

"Shall I say it out, plain and short, and will ye hear it through?" he asked.

"Ay."

"Well, here it is; if ye don't sign that I think ye'll be hanged."

"No, you don't," she said, more quietly.

"I do, by —— ," he swore.

"No, you don't," she repeated, in the same tone, "who is to do it? Charlie's gone, and vilely as he used me, he never would have done that; and Alice won't, she told you so. I'm better informed, I believe, than you fancied. So don't you suppose I am at all anxious."

"I wanted to take you off in a coach, and you won't let me," said he.

"Thanks, simple Harry," she sneered.

"And I'm coming this day week, and then it will be within ten days o' the 'sizes."

"And I'll be discharged; and I'll bring separate actions against every soul that had a hand in putting me here. Ask my attorney," said the lady, with a pale angry simper.

"And Judge Risk is coming down, and you'd better ask your attorney, as you talk of him, whether he's a hangin' judge or no."

"Cunning beast! all won't do," she said, sarcastically.

"Well, Bertha, this day week I'll be here, and this day week will be your last chance, for things will begin that day, and no one can stop them."

"Lord have mercy upon us!" she whined, with an ugly mockery and an upturning of her sightless eyes.

"You may be saying something like that in the pressroom yet, if you won't take the trouble to think in earnest before it's too late. Now, listen, once for all, for it's the last words I'll say. That's all true you say: Charlie's gone, and if he was here, instead of in kingdom come, ‘twould ‘a been all one, for he wouldn’t never a moved a hand in the matter, nor ‘a suffered it; and as for Alice, she won’t neither. But if you don’t sign that paper by this day week, and make no bones about it,” — here he swore a hard oath,— “blind as you be, I’ll open your eyes — and I’ll prosecute the indictment myself. Goodbye, ma’am, and *think* between this and then.”

Harry Fairfield strode from the room, and was still full of the grim emotion which had animated the close of his interview, when he reached the little inn at which but a few weeks before his brother Charles had stabled his horse, when making his last visit to Hatherton.

CHAPTER VII.

SERGEANT-MAJOR ARCHDALE.

Harry Fairfield was a captain in his county militia. It was right that the House of Fairfield should be represented in that corps. Charlie, who was of an easy compliant temper, would have taken the commission and the light duties, if that dignity had been put upon him. But Harry chose it. It extended his acquaintance, added to his opportunities of selling his horses, and opened some houses, small and great, to him, in a neighbourly fashion, when making his circuits to fair and market. He knew something of games, too, and was shrewd at whist and draughts, and held a sure cue at billiards. On the whole, his commission turned him in something in the course of a year.

It was upon some regimental business that Sergeant-Major Archdale was awaiting his return at Wyvern.

Harry Fairfield, as it happened, was thinking of the Sergeant as he rode into the yard in gloomy rumination.

"Well, Archdale, what's the news?" said he, as he dismounted.

The news was not a great deal. After he had heard it Harry paused for a time, and said he, —

"Quite well, Archdale, I hope?"

"Well, sir, I thank you."

Again Harry paused.

"How did you come, Archdale."

"Walked, sir."

"Walked, oh! very well."

Here was another pause.

"Archdale, you must go in. Here, Clinton, get some luncheon for Sergeant-Major Archdale. A drink of beer and a mouthful won't do you no harm; and, Archdale, before you go let me know; I may have a word, and I'll say it walking down the avenue. Get Mr. Archdale some luncheon, Clinton, and some sherry."

"I thank you, sir," said the Sergeant-Major. "'Tis more like a supper for me; I've had my dinner, sir, some time."

And with a stiff military step the Sergeant followed Clinton into the house.

The Sergeant-Major was above the middle size, and stout of body, which made him look shorter. His hair was closely cut, and of a pale blue iron gray. His face was rather pale, and smooth as marble; full and long, with a blue chin, and a sort of light upon his fixed lineaments, not exactly a smile, but a light that was treacherous and cruel. For the rest his military coat, which was of the oldfashioned cut, and his shako, with all the brasses belonging to them, and his Wellington boots, were natty and brilliant, and altogether unexceptionable, and a more perfectly respectable looking man you could not have found in his rank of life in the country.

Without a word, with a creak in his boots, he marched slowly in, with inflexible countenance, after Clinton.

The Squire met Harry in the hall.

"Hollo! it's a week a most since I set eyes on ye — ye'll look out some other place for that mad filly ye bought of Jim Hardress: she's broke a boy's arm this morning in the stable; *I*'ll not look after him, I promise ye; 'tis your affair, mind, and you better look sharp, and delay may cost ye money. Ye're over clever. The devil owes ye a cake this many a day, and he's a busy bishop, and he'll pay ye a loaf yet, I promise you. She shan't be kicking my men — and she bites the manger besides. Get her away, mind, or, by my soul, I'll sell her for the damage."

So old Squire Harry stalked on, and the last scion of his stock grinned after him, sulkily, and snarled something between his teeth, so soon as he was quite out of hearing.

"Who's arm's broke, Dick, or is it all a d —— d lie o' the Governor's?" inquired Harry of a servant who happened to be passing at that moment.

"Well, yes, sir, Jim Slade's arm was broke in the stable. 'Twas a kick, sir."

"What kicked him?"

"The new horse that came in on Thursday, sir."

"*Mare*, ye mean. Why that thing's a reg'lar lamb; she never kicked no one. A child might play wi' her. More like 'twas the Governor kicked him. And what did he do wi' his arm?"

"The doctor, down in the town, set it, and bound it up wi' splints, sir."

"Well, *I* didn't tell him, mind that — I wasn't here, ye know — goodnatured of the doctor, I'll not deny, but he shan't be sending in no bills to me. And how's Jim since — gettin' on nicely, I'll swear."

"I don't know, sir; I didn't see him since."

"Hoot! then, it's all right, I warrant ye, and ye can tell old Slade, if he likes it, I'll get him a bit of a writin' to the hospital for Jim; but it won't be nothin' — not a bit."

And with this economical arrangement, Harry dismissed the subject for the present, and took his stand upon the hall-door steps, and smoked his pipe, awaiting the close of Sergeant-Major Archdale's repast.

The long shadows and lights of golden sunset faded before the guest appeared, and twilight and the moths were abroad.

Almost as the servant informed Harry Fairfield that Mr. Archdale was coming round to the hall-door to receive his commands, the Sergeant-Major appeared in front of the house, and Harry Fairfield stepped down to the court and was received by the militia-man with a military salute.

"I'll walk a bit wi' you, Archdale; I want a word about another matter — not regimental business. We'll walk down towards the gate."

Stiffly and silently the Sergeant-Major marched beside the smoking gentleman, who having got a little way from the house, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and dropped it into his pocket.

"That militia sogerin' is beggarly pay for a man like you, Archdale; and I'll want a clever fellow, by-and-by — for when the Squire goes off the hooks, and that can't be a long way off — I'll have a deal o' trouble lookin' after things; for there's a young chap to succeed, and a plaguy long minority 'twill be, and one way or another the trouble will fall to my share, bein' uncle, ye see, to the little fellow. Am I making it plain what I mean?"

"Quite plain, sir," said the cold voice of the Sergeant-Major.

"Well, there's the property down at Warhampton, a devilish wide stretch o' land for the rental. There's good shootin' there, and two keepers, but I doubt they makes away wi' the game, and *they* want lookin' after; and there's the old park o' Warhampton — ye know that part o' the country?"

"Yes, sir, well."

"I know you do. Well, it should turn in a good penny more than the Governor gets. I can't bring it home to them, but I know what I think.

Where the horse lies down, the hair will be foun', and I doubt the park-book's doctored. There'll be a sort o' steward wanted there, d'ye see. D'ye know Noulton farm?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it's a nice thing, a snug house, and as many acres as you'd want to begin wi'; the tenant's going after harvest — you'd be the very man for't, and I'll tell them I'll do all I can to serve my nephew, but I must live myself too. I've nout but my time and my wits to turn a penny by, and if I try to manage for him I'll want the best help I can get, d'ye see? and you're the man I want; I've got no end o' a character o' ye, for honesty and steadiness and the like; and ye're a fellow can use his eyes, and hold his tongue; and ye'd have the farm and the house — ye know them — rent free; and the grazing of three cows on the common, and it's none o' your overstocked, bare commons, but as sweet a bit o' grass as ye'd find in the kingdom; and ye shall a' fifty pounds a year beside; and the farm's nigh forty acres, and it's worth close on a hundred more. And — if ye do all we want well, and I'm sure you will — I'll never lose sight o' ye while grass grows and you and me lives."

"I thank you, sir," said the cold, clear voice of Archdale.

"And there's a little bit of a secret — I wouldn't tell another — about myself, Archdale. I'll tell *you*, though," said Harry, lowering his voice.

"Yes, sir," said Archdale, in the same cold stern way, which irritated Harry.

"Well, I'm not talking, mind, to Sergeant-Major Archdale, if you like the other thing, at Noulton, best."

"Noulton best, sir, certainly; thank you."

"But to Mr. Archdale of Noulton, and steward of Warhampton, mind ye, and 'twill be settled next harvest."

"I thank you, sir."

"Don't walk so quick, we're gettin' over the ground too fast. Well, there's a thing you'll have to keep dark for me."

"You'll find me confidential, sir; my superior officers did."

"I know that well — I know you, Archdale, and that is why I chose you out o' a thousand, and it's a confidential fellow — d —— d confidential — I want, for the country's all one as the town for talk, and tongues will keep goin' like the bells on a sheepwalk, and there's many a bit o' nonsense, that's no great odds when all's told, that a chap wouldn't like to have made the laugh or the talk o' the country side."

"Yes, sir," said the inflexible Sergeant-Major.

"You held the same rank in the line, Sergeant-Major, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir," said the Sergeant-Major, and saluted from habit.

"I thought so, and that says a deal for you, Mr. Archdale; and I remember one of your papers says you were the youngest sergeant ever made in your regiment?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that says a lot too, and a very responsible office that is. Egad, from all I 'a seen, I'd say the sergeants has more to do with the state of a regiment than all the other officers, commissioned or non-commissioned, put together."

"There's a good deal depends on 'em, sir."

"You keep to yourself, Archdale; that's the way to rise."

"I was a man of few acquaintances, sir, and confidential with my superior officers, and few words, but I meant 'em, sir, and made the men do their duty."

"That's the man for my money," said Harry. "Will ye be ready for Noulton Farm by the middle o' next month?"

"Yes, sir, I expect."

"I'll settle that for ye, then, and the pay and the commonage. I'll settle that wi' my father tomorrow, and we'll get the writings drawn."

"I thank you, sir."

"And, wait a bit. I told you," said Harry, perhaps a very little embarrassed, "there's another little thing you must manage for me."

"Yes, sir."

He almost wished Mr. Archdale to ask questions and raise difficulties. This icy surface, beneath which he saw nothing, began to embarrass him.

"Every fellow's a fool once or twice in his life, you know, Archdale; and that's the way rogues makes money, and honest chaps is sold —

'No fools at the fair, No sale for bad ware,'

you know?"

He looked for sympathy in the face of the Sergeant-Major, but he found there neither sympathy nor ridicule, but a serene, dignified, supercilious composure.

"Well, I'm not married, and more's the pity," he said, affecting a kind of jocularity, uneasily; "but among 'em they've made me a present of a brat they calls my son, and I must just put him to nurse and provide for him, I do suppose; and keep all quiet, and ye'll look out some decent poor body that lives lonely and won't ask no questions nor give no trouble, but be content wi' a trifle, and I'll gi'e't to you every quarter for her, and she'll never hear my name, mind, nor be the wiser who owns it or where it came from. I'd rayther she thought 'twas a poor body's — if they think a fellow's well-to-do it makes 'em unreasonable, and that's the reason I pitched on you, Archdale, because ye're a man o' sense, and won't be talkin' like the pratin' fools that's goin' — and is it settled? is it a bargain?"

"Yes, sir, I thank you, quite," said Archdale.

"Well, then, ye shall hear from me by the end o' the week, and not a word, mind — till all's signed and sealed — about Noulton Farm, and about t'other thing — *never*. The stars is comin' out bright, and the sunset did ye mind; we'll 'a frost tonight; it's come dark very sudden; sharp air."

He paused, but the non-commissioned officer did not venture a kindred remark, even an acquiescence in these meteorological speculations.

"And I heard the other day you made an organ for Mr. Arden. Is it true?" said Harry, suddenly.

"Just a small thing, three stops, sir — diapason, principal, and dulciana."

"Well, I don't know nothing myself about such gear, except to hear the old organ o' Wyvern o' Sundays. But it's clever o' you. How did ye learn?"

"'Prenticed, sir, two years to an organ builder in Westminster — Mr. Lomas — and he died, and I was put to the army," said Archdale.

"Well, I may give ye a lift that way too. They were talkin' of an organ for Warhampton Church. We'll see. I'll not forget."

"I thank you, sir," repeated Archdale. "Any more commands for me, sir?"

Mr. Archdale stood stiffly at the gate, drawn up, as it were, at right angles to Harry Fairfield.

"No, nothing, Archdale. I'm glad the thing suits you, and it may lie in my way yet to make them better than you think for. Good night, Archdale; good night, Sergeant-Major."

"Good night, sir."

And Archdale wheeled to his left, and with his back toward the village of Wyvern, marched away at so stiff and regular a quick march that you could have fancied the accompaniment of the drums and fifes.

Harry stood at the iron gate, one half of which was open, and he kicked a stone listlessly into the road, and leaning on the old iron arabesques, he looked long after that portly figure receding in distance and melting in twilight.

“Night’s the mother o’ thought, I’ve heard say,” said Harry, rousing himself, and swinging the great valve into its place with a clang. “But thought won’t do to dine on. Hollo! Gate! gate! Jorrocks, anyone,” he shouted. “Lock the gate, some of you, and make all sure for the night.”

And with these orders to Jorrocks, he marched back under the ancestral trees to the old hall of Wyvern. Who was to keep the hearth of the Fairfields aglow? The light of the old Squire’s life was flaring low in the socket, a tiny taper was just lighted in darksome Carwell, and Harry Fairfield — was he ever to take his turn and illuminate the Wyvern world?

CHAPTER VIII.

A TALK WITH THE SQUIRE.

Harry proved how hungry he was by eating a huge dinner. He had the old dining-room to himself, and sipped his brandy and water there by a pleasant fire of coal and spluttering wood. With a button or two undone, he gazed drowsily into the fire, with his head thrown back and his eyes nearly closed; and the warmth of the fire and the glow of the alcohol flushed his cheeks and his nose and his forehead to a brilliant crimson.

Harry had had a hard day's riding. Some agitations, great variety of air, and now, as we have seen, a hearty dinner and many glasses of brandy and water, and a hot fire before him. Naturally he fell asleep.

He dreamed that the old Squire was dead and buried. He forgot all about the little boy at Carwell, and fancied that he, Harry Fairfield, draped in the black mantle with which the demure undertaker hangs the mourners in chief, had returned from the funeral, and was seated in the old "oak parlour," just in all other respects as he actually was. As he sat there, Master of Wyvern at last, and listening, he thought, to the rough tick of the old clock in the hall, old Tom Ward seemed to him to bounce in, his mulberry-coloured face turned the colour of custard, his mouth agape, and his eyes starting out of their sockets. "Get up, Master Harry," the old servant seemed to say, in a woundy tremor, "for may the devil fetch me if here baint the old master back again, and he's in the blue room callin' for ye."

"Ye lie!" gasped Harry, waking up in a horror.

"Come, ye, quick, Master Harry, for when the Squire calls it's ill tarrying," said now the real voice of Tom Ward.

"Where?"

"In the blue chamber."

"Where — where am I?" said Harry, now on his feet and looking at Tom Ward. "By jingo, Tom, I believe I was dreaming. You gave me a hell of a fright, and is he there really? Very well."

And Harry walked in and found the old Squire of Wyvern standing with his back to the fire, tall, gaunt, and flushed, and his eyes looking large with the glassy sheen of age.

“Well, why didn’t ye tell me the news, ye fool?” said the Squire, as he entered. “D — n ye, if it hadn’t a bin for Tom Ward I shouldn’t a heerd nout o’ the matter. So there’s a brat down in Carwell Grange — ha, ha, — marriage is honourable, I’ve heerd tell, but housekeepin’s costly. ’Tis the old tune on the bagpipe. That’s the way to beggar’s bush. When marriage gets into the saddle repentance gets up at the crupper. Why the devil didn’t ye tell me the news? Why didn’t ye tell me, ye d — d wether-head?”

“So I would ‘a told ye tonight, but I fell asleep after dinner. It’s true enough, though, and there’s doctors, and nurses, and caudles, and all sorts.”

“Well for Charlie he’s out of the way — dead mice feels no cold, you know, and she’s a bad un — Alice Maybell’s a bad un. The vicar was a thankless loon, and she’s took after him. She went her own gait, and much good it did her. Sweetheart and honey bird keeps no house, and the devil’s bread is half bran. She’ll learn a lesson now. I was too good to that huzzy. Put another man’s child in your bosom, they say, and he’ll creep out at your sleeves. She’s never a friend now. She’s lost Charlie and she’s lost me. Well might the cat wink when both her eyes were out. She’d like well enough to be back here again in Wyvern — d — n her. She knows who was her best friend by this time. Right well pleased wi’ herself, I’ll be bound, the day she gi’ed us the slip and ran off with the fool Charlie — down in the mouth, I warrant her now, the jade. I dare say the parson’s down at the Grange every day to pray wi’ my lady and talk o’ resignation. When all their rogueries breaks down they take to cantin’ and psalm singin’, and turns up their eyes, the limmers, and cries the Lord’s will be done. Welcome death, quoth the rat, when the trap fell. Much thanks to ‘em for takin’ what they can’t help. Well, she’s a bad un — a black-hearted, treacherous lass she proved, and Charlie was a soft fellow and a mad fellow, and so his day’s over, and I was just a daft old fool, and treated accordin’. But time and thought tames all, and we shall all lie alike in our graves.”

“And what’s the boy like?” the old man resumed. “Is he like Charlie?”

“He was asleep, and the room dark, so there was no good trying to see him,” said Harry, inventing an excuse.

“Not a bit, dark or light, not a bit; he’s Ally’s son, and good won’t grow from that stock — never. As the old bird crows, so crows the young, and that foreign madam, I hear, swears she was married first to poor Charlie, and what's that to me? — not that spoonful of punch. She's up in limbo, and if her story be true, why then that boy of Ally's ain't in the runnin', and his mother, bless her heart, needn't trouble her head about Wyvern, nor be wishin' the old Squire, that was good to her, under the sod, to make way for her son, and then there's you to step in and claim my shoes, and my chair, and cellar key, and then Madam — what's her name — Van Trump, or something, will out wi' a bantling, I take it, and you'll all fight it out, up and down — kick, throttle and bite — in the Court of Chancery, or where ye can, and what is't to me who wins or who loses? Not that bit o' lemon-peel, and if you think I'm a going to spend a handful o' money in law to clear up a matter that don't concern me, no more than the cat's whisker, you're a long way out in your reckonin' — be me soul ye are, for I'll not back none o' ye, and I won't sport a shillin' — and I don't care a d — n. Ye'll fight the battle o'er my grave, and ye'll take Wyvern who can, and 'twill cost ye all round a pretty penny. Ye'll be sellin' your shirts and your smocks, and ye're pretty well in for it, and ye can't draw back. Well lathered is half shaved, and it won't break my heart, I promise you."

And the old man chuckled and hooted, and wagged his head fiercely as he declaimed, in his own way, upon the row that was coming.

"Don't ye spare one another for my sake. Take Wyvern who can. I'll keep my hands in my pockets, I promise ye. What have I to do wi' other folk's windmills?"

So the old Squire stormed on more serenely than he had done for a long time.

"Make another tankard o' that thing, Tom; make a big one and brew it well, and fetch a rummer for yourself, lad."

"Beggar's breed for rich men to feed," resumed the Squire. "A son at the Grange o' Carwell, no less! Well, I 'a taken enough, and too much, on my shoulders in my day, and 'tis often the least boy carries the biggest fiddle. She's a sly lass — Alice. She'll find fools enough to help her. I 'a done wi' her — she's a bad un. Look at that harpsichord thing there she used to play on," he pointed to the piano. "I got that down from Lunnon for her to jingle tunes at as long as she liked, and I'd a had it smashed up and pitched in the river, only 'twould a made her think I cared enough about her to take that trouble about her lumber. She turned her back on me when she liked, and I'll not turn my face on her when she lists. A graceless huzzy she was and is, and grace lasts but beauty blasts, and so let it be for me. That’s enough. I take it there’s no more to tell. So take ye a candle if ye’re sleepy, man, no use dawdlin’ sluggard’s guise, loath to bed, and loath to rise,” and so, with a gruff nod he dismissed him, and in came Tom Ward with the punch, before very long.

“That’s good, Tom; that’ll warm yer ribs. How long a’ you been here? Wyvern always, but a long time in the house, Tom, a long time wi’ the family. ’Tis sixty years ago, Tom. I remember you in our livery, Isabel and Blue — them’s the old colours. They don’t know the name now — *salmon*, they calls it. We ‘a seen Christmas pretty often in the old house. We’ll not see many more, I’m thinking. The tale’s nigh done. ’Twasn’t bad times wi’ ye here, Tom; we can’t complain; we ‘a had our share, and after cheese comes nothing, as the old folks used to say. Take the rummer and sit ye down by the door, Tom. There’s Master Harry. I’d rather ha’ a glass wi’ you, Tom, than a dozen wi’ him, a d — d pippin’-squeezing rascal. Tom, ain’t he a sneak, and no Fairfield, Tom, ain’t he, ain’t he, d — ye?”

“I won’t say that all out, sir. He’s a tall, handsome lad, and Master Harry can sit down and drink his share like a man.”

“Like a beast, ye mean. He never tells ye a pleasant story, nor laughs like a man, and what liquor he swallows, it goes into a bad skin, Tom. He’s not hot and hearty in his cups, like a Fairfield; he has no good nature, Tom; he’s so close-fisted and cunnin’. I hate them fellows that can’t buy at the market and sell at the fair, and drink when he’s drinkin’; d — him, he’s always a watching to *do* ye, just like his mother; a screw she was, and her son’s like her, crooked to sell, and crooked to buy. I hate him sober, Tom, and I hate him drunk. Bring your glass here, old lad; a choice mug-full ye’ve brewed tonight. Hold it straight, you fool!

“What was I sayin’? The old things is out o’ date, Tom; the world’s changin’, and ‘tain’t in nature, Tom, to teach old dogs tricks. I do suppose there’s fun goin’, though I don’t see it, and the old folks beginning to be in the way, as they were always, and things won’t change for us. We were brave lads, we Fairfields, but there’s no one to come now. There won’t be no one after me in Wyvern house. To the wrestlin’ on Wyvern Fair Green, when I was a boy, I mind the time when lords and ladies id come ridin’ down for twenty miles round, and all the old stock o’ the country, some on horseback, and some in coaches, and silks and satins, to see the belt played for and single-stick and quarter-staves. They were manly times, Tom, and a Fairfield ever first in the field, and — what year is this? ay, I was twenty the week before that day— 'tis sixty-four years ago — when I threw Dick Dutton over my shoulder and broke his collarbone, and Dutton was counted the best man they ever brought down here, and Meg Weeks — ye'll mind Meg Weeks wi' the hazel eyes — was lookin' on; and the wrestlin's gone, and not a man left in the country round that could tell a quarter-staff from a flail; and when I'm gone to my place in the churchyard, there's not a Fairfield in Wyvern no longer, for I don't count Harry one, he's not a Fairfield, by no chance, and never was. Charlie had it in him, handsome Charlie. I seen many a turn in him like me, I did; and that Captain Jolliffe's died only t'other day that he shot in the arm at Tewkesbury only twenty years ago, for sayin' a wry word o' me; old Morton read it yesterday, he says, in the Lun'on paper. But it's all over wi' Charlie, and — stand up, Tom, and fill yer glass, and we'll drink to him."

Old Tom Ward was the first to speak after.

"Hot blood and proud, sir, and a bit wild, when he was young; more than that, there's nout to be said by any. A brave lad, sir, and the good naturedest I ever see. He shouldn't be buried where he is, alone. I don't like that nohow. He wouldn't a done so by you, Squire; he liked ye well; he liked everyone that was ever kind to him. I mind how he cried after poor Master Willie. They two was very like and loving. Master Willie was tall, like him, and handsome."

"Don't ye be talkin' o' them at all, ye fool," broke in the Squire, violently, "stop that and hold your tongue, Tom. D — you, do you think I'm foolish? Light my candle, and get ye to bed, the tankard's out; get ye to bed, ye d — d old fool," and he shook the old servant hard by the hand as he spoke.

CHAPTER IX.

HARRY FAIRFIELD GROWS UNEASY.

A few days later Harry Fairfield rode from Wyvern into the picturesque little town of Wykeford, and passing the steep, narrow bridge, pulled up near the church, at the door of Dr. Willett. Harry had something to say to the doctor, but, like a good diplomatist, that shrewd dealer in horses preferred letting the doctor talk a bit on his own account first.

He found him in slippers and dressing-gown, clipping the evergreens that grew in front of his house, the hour of his forenoon excursion not having yet arrived.

"Woodman, spare that tree," said Harry, quoting a popular song, facetiously.

The doctor looked up.

"And how is Doctor Willett this morning?" said Harry.

"Oh! oh! Is that you?" said the doctor, straightening his back with a little effort, for he had been stooping to his task, and old backs don't unbend in a moment.

"Quite well, thank you — so are you, I see."

"Can't complain."

"And how's the old Squire?" said the doctor.

"How's the old house?" answered Harry: "staunch and straight, and like to stand for ever. I see no change in him. And all well over at Carwell?"

"Far from it," said the doctor.

"And who's sick?"

"The poor young mother — very ill indeed," said he— "nervous, low, and feverish, she has been, and yesterday, when I saw her, it was plainly fever — quite declared."

"What sort of fever?" asked Harry.

"Well, the nerves are very much engaged," began the doctor —

"Take care it ain't typhus," said Harry. "The baby ha'n't got it, I hope?"

"No, the child's all safe."

“There’s typhus down at Gryce’s mill, and a child in scarlatina in the glen, I hear.”

“Is there? ha! It has been going a good deal at that side, I’m told,” said Dr. Willett. “There’s Lady Wyndale at Oulton — very goodnatured she seems to be — wouldn’t she take the child and nurse it for a while? It’s a nice place, well enclosed, and lies high — nothing likely to get in there. I attended a patient there in dropsy, once, when it was let, and the Wyndales away in India.”

“Ay, she’s goodnatured; she’d have the mother and child together, with a welcome, but she says she won’t take no one’s babby to nurse away from its people, and she’s right, I think, so the young chap must stand his ground, and bide the fortune o’ war, you know. What time shall you be there to-day?” he inquired.

“Three o’clock.”

“Very well, then, I’ll be passin’ at the mill end o’ the glen about that time, and I’ll ride up, and look in, just to hear what you have to say, and I’ll get home by Cressley Common. It will do me as well as t’other way. I turned aside a bit to reach you, and hear the news, and I must be joggin’ again. Goodbye, doctor. Is your church clock right?” said Harry, looking up at the old tower and pulling out his watch to compare.

“‘The clock goes as it pleaseth the clerk,’ the old saw tells us, but we all go by the clock here, and it does keep right good time,” said old Dr. Willett, with his hand over his eyes, reading its golden hands and figures, as Harry was.

“Well, then, doctor, goodbye, and God bless ye,” said Harry, and away he rode, without hearing the doctor’s farewell.

At Carwell Grange, at three o’clock, there was the gloom and silence of a sick house.

The tiptoe tread of old Dulcibella, and her whisperings at the door, were scarcely audible, and now and then a weary moan was heard in the darkened room, and the wail and squall of a little child from another room not far off.

Old Mildred Tarnley had undertaken the charge of the child, while Dulcibella, with the aid of a neighbour brought in for the occasion, took charge of the sick lady.

Before three o'clock came, to the surprise of this sad household, Harry Fairfield arrived. He did not come riding; he arrived in a taxcart. He had got through more real work that day than many men who were earning their bread by their labour.

"Give this one a feed, Tom, and how's all here?" said he, throwing the apron off and jumping down.

"Bad enough, I'm afraid, sir."

"Worse?"

"I don't know, sir, till the doctor comes; but can't be no better, for I heard Mrs. Crane say she didn't close an eye all night."

"I hope they're not forgetting the child in the hurry?" said Harry.

"Mrs. Tarnley and Lilly Dogger looks after it, turn about."

"That wouldn't do nohow, you know," said Harry— "and give her a good feed, Tom, good dog, good bone. She came at a good lick, I can tell you, up the glen. The doctor will be here soon."

"Ay, sir."

"Well, I'll stay till I hear what he says; and there's sickness in Carwell Glen here, I'm told."

"I dessay, sir, there's a good deal going, I hear."

"Ye needn't take her out of the shafts, Tom. Fix her head in a halter by the gate — in the ring there, if ye have a nosebag at hand — and come in here. She's as quiet as a lamb; I want to talk to you a bit. I'm goin' to buy two or three fillies, and think of any you may have seen down about here. Old Tarnley's in the kitchen now, is she?"

"I think she is, sir."

"Well, think of them fillies if you can; there's business to be done if I can get 'em to suit."

So in marched Harry, and tapped at the kitchen window, and nodded and smiled to Mrs. Tarnley.

"So you're all sick down here, I'm told; but sickness is better than sadness. That's all I can say, lass," said Harry, pacing, much in his usual way, into the kitchen, and clapping his big hand down on Mildred's shoulder.

"Sick, sore, and *sorry* we be, sir. Your brother's not that long buried that there should be no sadness in the Grange, his own house that was, and his widow's that is — sickness may well be better than sadness, but 'taint turn about wi' them here, but one and 'tother, both together. And that slut upstairs, Miss Dogger, if you please, out of the scullery into the bedchamber, she's no more use to me than the cock at the top o' Carwell steeple. I never knew such times in Carwell Grange; I'm wore off my old feet — I can't stan' it long, and I wish twenty times in a day I was quiet at last in my grave."

"A gruntin' horse and a grumblin' wife, they say, lasts long. Never you fear, you won't die this time, old girl, and I wouldn't know the Grange if *you* wasn't here. 'Twill all be right again soon, I warrant — no wind blows long at the highest, ye know, and we'll hear what the doctor says just now."

"Hoot! what can the doctor say but just the old thing. The leech to the physic and God to the cure, and death will do as God allows, and sickness shows us what we are, and all fears the grave as the child does the dark. I don't know much good he's doin', or much he did for Master Charles — not but he's as good as another, and better than many a one, maybe — but he costs a deal o' money, and only Lady Wyndale came over here yesterday — poorly though she is, and not able to get out o' her coach — and saw Mrs. Crane, and lent a fifty-pun note to keep all straight till the young lady, please God, may be able to look about her, and see after 'em herself, we'd a bin at a sore pinch before the week was out. Pity's good, but help's better. 'Tis well in this miserly world there's a kind one left here and there, that wouldn't let kindred want in the midst of plenty. There's Squire Harry o' Wyvern, and his own little grandson lyin' up in the cradle there, and look at you, Master Harry. I wonder you hadn't the thought."

Harry laughed, perhaps, the least degree awkwardly.

"Why, chick-a-biddy— " began Harry.

"I'm none o' yer chick-a-biddies. I'm old Mildred Tarnley, o' the Grange o' Carwell, that's in the service o' the family — her and hers — many a long year, and I speaks my mind, and I shouldn't like the family to be talked of as it will for meanness. If there's a want o' money here in times of sickness, 'tis a shame!"

"Well, ye know there's no want, but the Governor's riled just now, and he'll come round again; and as for me, I'm as poor a dog as is in the parish. Take me and turn me round and round, and what more am I than just a poor devil that lives by horses, and not always the price of a pot o' stout in my pocket —

‘Four farthings and a thimble, Makes the tailor’s pocket jingle.’

Your tongue’s a bit too hard, Mildred; but ye mean well, and there’s kindness at the bottom o’ the mug, though the brew be bitter.”

“I think I hear the doctor,” said Mildred, placing her palm behind her ear and listening.

“Ay,” said Harry; “I hear him talkin’.”

And forth he strode to meet him.

Before he went up Harry and the doctor talked together for a little in the panelled sitting-room, with which we are familiar.

“I’m sure to see you here, eh?”

“Before I go? Yes. I shall look in here.”

“All right,” said Harry, and the doctor walked up the stairs on his exploration.

CHAPTER X.

A DRIVE TO TWYFORD.

In less than ten minutes the doctor came down.

"Well?" said Harry, over his shoulder, turning briskly from the window.

"No material change," replied the doctor. "It's not a case in which medicine can do much. The most cheering thing about it is that her strength has not given way, but you know it is an anxious case — a *very* anxious case."

"I hope they are taking care of the child. Old Dulcibella Crane would be a deal better for that sort of thing than that dry old cake, Mildred Tarnley. But then Ally would half break her heart if ye took old Dulcibella from her, always used to her, you know. And what's best to be done? It would be bad enough to lose poor Ally, but it would be worse to lose the boy, for though I'm willing to take my share of work for the family, there's one thing I won't do, and that's to marry. I'm past the time, and d — me if I'd take half England and do it. I'd like to manage and nurse the estate for him, and be paid of course, like other fellows, and that's what would fit my knuckle. But, by Jove, if they kill that boy among them there will be no one to maintain the old name of Wyvern; and kill him they will, if they leave him in the hard hands of that wiry old girl, Mildred Tarnley. She's a cast-iron old maid, with the devil's temper, and she has a dozen other things to mind beside, and I know the child will die, and I don't know anything to advise, d — me if I do."

"The house is in confusion, and very little attention for the child, certainly," said Doctor Willett.

"And that d — d scarlatina, beyond a doubt, is in the glen there."

The old doctor shrugged and shook his head.

"I talked to the Governor a bit," said Harry, "thinking he might have the child over to Wyvern, where it would be safe and well looked after, but he hates the whole lot. You know it was a stolen match, and it's no use trying in that quarter. You're going now, and I'll walk a little bit beside you; maybe you'll think of something, and I haven't no money, ye may guess, to throw away; but rather than the child shouldn’t thrive I’d make out what would answer.”

“That’s very kind of you, sir,” said Doctor Willett, looking at him, admiringly. “They certainly have their hands pretty full here, and a little neglect sometimes goes a long way with a child.”

So they walked out together, talking, and when the doctor got on his horse Harry walked beside him part of the way towards Cressley Common.

When he came back to the Grange Harry asked to see old Dulcibella, and he told her, standing on the lobby and talking in whispers,

“The doctor says she’s not able to understand anything as she is at present.”

“Well, ye know she’s wanderin’ just now, but she may clear up a bit for a while, by-and-by.”

“Well, the doctor says she’s not to be told a word that can fret her, and particularly about the child, for he says this is no place for it, and he won’t be answerable for its life if it’s left longer here, and there’s scarlatina and fever all round, and ye have as much as ye can well manage here already, so few as there is, without nursing children; and Doctor Willett says he’ll have it well attended to by a person near Wykeford, and I’ll bring old Mildred over with it to the place this evening, and we’ll get it out o’ reach o’ the sickness that’s goin’.”

“Please God!” said Dulcibella, after a pause.

“Amen,” added Harry, and walked down whistling low, with his hands in his pockets, to tell the same story to old Mildred Tarnley.

“’Tis a pity,” she said, darkly, “the child should be sent away from its home.”

“Especially with scarlet fever and typhus all round,” said Harry.

“And away from its mother,” she continued.

“Much good its mother is to it.”

“Just now she mayn’t be able to do much.”

“Oh! but she can though,” interrupted Harry, “she may give it the fever she’s got, whatever that is.”

“Well, I can’t say nothin’ else but it’s a pity the child should be took away from its natural home, and its own mother,” repeated Mrs. Tarnley.

“And who’s takin’ care o’t *now*?” demanded Harry.

“Lilly Dogger,” answered she.

"Lilly Dogger! just so; the slut! you said yourself, to-day, you wouldn't trust a kitten with!"

Mrs. Tarnley couldn't deny it. She sniffed and tossed up her chin a little.

"Ye forget, lass, 'twas never a Wyvern fashion nursin' the babbies at home. *I* wasn't, nor Charlie, poor fellow! nor Willie, nor none of us. 'Twas a sayin' with the old folk, and often ye heered it, 'one year a nurse, and seven year the worse;' and we all was tall, well-thriven lads, and lives long, without fever or broken bones or the like, floors us untimely; and, anyhow, the doctor says, so it must be. There's no one here, wi' all this sickness in the house, has time to look after it, and the child will just come to grief unless his orders be followed. So stick on your bonnet and roll up the young chap in blankets, and I'll drive ye over to the place he says. It brings me a bit out o' my way, but kith and kin, ye know; and I told the doctor if he went to any expense, I'd be answerable to him myself, and I'll gi'e ye a pound for good luck. So ye see I'm not sich a screw all out as ye took me for."

"I thank you, Master Harry, and I'll not deny but 'twas always the way wi' the family to send out the children to nurse."

"And what Mr. Charles would 'a done himself if he was alive, as every one of us knows; and for that reason what the lady upstairs would 'a done if she had 'a bin able to talk about anything. I'm sorry I have to drive ye over, but I'll bring ye back tonight, and ye know I couldn't drive and manage the babby, and the folk would be wonderin' when the child set up the pipes in the taxcart, and I'd soon have the hue-and-cry behind me."

"Hoot! I wouldn't allow no such thing as let the poor little thing be druv so, all alone, like a parcel o' shop goods. No, no. The family's not come to that yet a bit, I hope," cried Mrs. Tarnley.

"Gi'e me a lump o' bread and cheese and a mug o' beer. I don't think I ever was here before without a bit and a sup, and it wouldn't be lucky, ye know, to go without enough to swear by, anyhow; but there's no hurry, mind — ye needn't be ready for a good hour to come, for Willett won't have no nurse there sooner."

Harry went out and had a talk with Tom Clinton, and smoked his pipe for half an hour; and Tom thought that the young Squire was dull and queerish, and perhaps he was not very well, for he did not eat his bread and cheese, but drank a deal more beer than usual instead.

"Bring a lot o' lollypops and milk, or whatever it likes best, wi' ye, to keep it quiet. I can't abide the bawlin' o' children."

Lilly Dogger, with red eyes and an inflamed nose, blubbered heartbroken, and murmured to the baby — lest old Mildred should overhear and blow her up — her leavetakings and endearments, as she held it close in her arms.

Beautiful though to us men, utterly mysterious is the feminine love of babies. Lilly Dogger had led a serene, if not a very cheerful life, at Carwell Grange up to this. But now came this parting, and her peace was shivered.

Old Mildred had now got up, with her threadbare brown cloak, and her grizzly old bonnet, and had arranged the child on her lap; so, at last, all being ready, the taxcart was in motion.

It was late in the autumn now. The long days were over. They had dawdled away a longer time than they supposed before starting. It turned out a long drive, much longer than Mildred Tarnley had expected. The moon rose, and they had got into a part of the country with which she was not familiar.

They had driven fourteen miles or upward through a lonely and somewhat melancholy country. It was, I suppose, little better than moor, but detached groups of trees, possibly the broken and disappearing fragments of what had once been a forest, gave it a sad sort of picturesqueness.

Mildred Tarnley was not a garrulous person, and had not spent her life at Carwell Grange without learning the accomplishment of taciturnity, but she remarked and resented the gloomy silence of Master Harry, who had never once addressed a word to her since they started.

Toward the close of their journey she observed that Harry Fairfield looked frequently at his watch, and hurried the pace of the mare, and altogether seemed to grow more and more anxious. They had been obliged to pull up twice to enable her to feed the baby, who was now fast asleep.

"'Tis right," she thought, "he should look ahead and mind his driving, while we're getting on, though a word now and then would not have troubled him much. But when we stopped to feed the child there was no excuse. He got down and settled the buckle at the horse's head. He got up again, and drew the rug over his knees, and he leaned on his elbow back upon the cushion, and he never so much as asked was me or the baby alive!"

They now reached a gentle hollow, in which a shallow brook crossed the road, and some four or five habitations of an humble sort stood at either side; one under the shade of two gigantic ash trees, had a sign depending in front, being a wayside inn of the humblest dimensions.

A village this could hardly be termed; and at the near end Harry pulled up before a building a little above the rank of a cottage, old and quaint, with a large-leafed plant that, in the moonlight, looked like a vine, growing over the prop of a sort of porch that opened under the gable.

If the mare was quiet at the Grange, you may be sure that her run to Twyford had not made her less so.

Harry helped old Tarnley down, with her little charge in her arms, and led her silently into the neat little room, with tiers of delf ornaments, in brilliant colours, on the cupboard, and a Dutch clock ticking in the nook by the fire where some faggots crackled, and a candle was burning on the table in a bright brass candlestick.

Mrs. Tarnley's experienced eye surveyed the room and its belongings. She descried, moreover, a ladder stair which mounted to a loft, from whose dormant window, as she looked from her seat in the taxcart, she had observed the light of a candle.

Very humble it undoubtedly was, but nothing could be more scrupulously clean. It had an air of decency, too, that was reassuring. There was a woman there in a cloak and bonnet, who rose as they entered and courtesied.

Harry set a lumbering armchair by the fire, and beckoned Tarnley to occupy it. Then he asked:

"How soon is the Warhampton 'bus expected?"

"Twenty-five minutes, please, sir," answered the woman, with another courtesy and a glance at the clock.

"That woman from Willett's is coming by the 'bus," he said gruffly, to Mildred. "'Tis a snug little place this, and as clean as a bone after a hungry dog. Would you mind," he continued, addressing the stranger or hostess, whichsoever she might be, "tellin' Archdale, if he's here, I want a word wi' him at the door?"

"He's over the way I think, sir, with the horse. I'll call him, please, sir."

So off she went.

"This is where poor Charles said he'd like to have his child nursed — Twyford; 'tis sweet air about here, considered. He was expectin' a babby, poor fellow, and he talked a deal wi' me about it the day he was took. Wouldn't ye like a bit to eat and a glass of beer, or somethin'? They have lots over the way, for as poor as it looks; and here's the pound I promised ye, lass, for luck, ye know, when we was leaving the Grange."

He drew forth the hand with which he had been fumbling in his pocket and placed the piece of gold in hers.

"Thank you, Master Harry," she said, making a little instinctive effort to rise for the purpose of executing a courtesy. But Harry, with his hand on her shoulder, repressed it.

"Sit ye quiet, and rest yourself, after joggin' all this way; and what's that bundle?"

"The baby's things, sir."

"All right. Well, and what will ye have?"

"I feel a bit queerish, Master Harry, I thank ye. I'd rather not eat nothin' till I gets home, and I'll get my cup o' tea then."

"Not eat!"

"Nothin', sir, I thank ye, Master Harry."

"Well," said Harry, so far forth relieved, but resolved, cost what it might, to make Mildred happy on this particular occasion, "if ye won't eat, I'm hanged but ye shall drink some. I tell ye what it shall be, a jug of sherry negus. Come, ye must."

"Well, Master Harry, as so ye will have it, I'll not say ye nay," consented Mildred graciously.

Harry went himself to the little pot-house over the way, and saw this nectar brewed, and brought it over in his own hand — the tankard in one hand and the glass in the other.

"Devilish good stuff it is, Mildred, and I'm glad, old lass, I thought of it. I remember you liked that brew long ago, and much good may it do you, girl."

He was trying to be kind.

He had set it down on the table, and now, as he spoke, he laid his hand on her shoulder, and she thought she might have wronged Master Harry with his rough jests, and shrewd ways, and that he had more of the Fairfield in his nature than she had always given him credit for.

Out he went again, and talked with Archdale, who was in plain clothes, and a round hat, with a great coat buttoned up to his smooth blue chin, and a gig-whip in his hand. Archdale, as usual, was severely placid and brief, and as Harry talked with him outside, Mildred Tarnley thought she heard a step in the loft over her head, and another sound that excited her curiosity. She listened, but all was quiet again.

Harry returned in comparatively high spirits.

“Well, Mrs. Tarnley,” said he, “the ‘bus is a bit late, I’m thinkin’, but anyhow, he can’t wait,” and he pointed over his shoulder at Mr. Archdale who stood at the door; “he’ll drive you back again, and he knows the road as far as Cressley Common, and you can show him the rest, — and you’ll want to be back again with poor Alice, — and the doctor will look in here, often in the week — almost every day — and tell you how the little chap’s going on. And, see, here’s a very respectable woman — what’s her name? — she was here this minute, and she won’t be leaving till after the ‘bus comes in, and you leave her the baby, and I’ll wait here till I see it in charge of the nurse that’s coming from Wykeford. Come in, will ye? — not *you* — the woman, I mean. Now, Mildred, give her the baby.”

The woman had a gentle, cheerful, and honest face; and looked down with the angelic light of a woman’s tenderness on the sleeping face of the little baby.

“Lord, love it,” she murmured, smiling. “What a darling little face!”

Mildred Tarnley looked down on it, too. She said nothing. She bit her lips hard, and her old eyes filled up with tears that welled over as she surrendered the baby, without a word, and then hastily she went out, mounted to her seat in the taxcart, and was driven swiftly away by a companion as silent as he who had conveyed her there.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW FARES THE CHILD?

Dr. Willett called regularly at the Grange, and kind Lady Wyndale was daily there, taking the doctor's directions about jellies, wines, and such other good things as the depressed state of the patient called for, notwithstanding her fever.

In a few days more he changed this treatment. The patient, in fact, could not be got to swallow these things. Dr. Willett became more perplexed. It was not exactly gastric fever, but he thought it more resembled that flickering treacherous fire than any other fever with which he was acquainted.

There are sicknesses that will not be cured through the body. The mind diseased, which, is the parent of these impracticable maladies, of which, when people die, they are said to have died of a broken heart — disdains the apothecary's boxes and bottles — knows nothing of them. The heartache, of which it is no more than an unusually protracted fit, has its seat in that which no apothecary can hear, see, feel, or understand. When the immortal, and in this life, inscrutable, spirit, which is the unseen lodger, the master, of the body, sickens, all sickens. In its pain all below it writhe and wither, and the body, its ultimate expression, reflects but cannot mitigate its torment.

Dr. Willett, too, complained that the child was ill, and that it must have been ill before it left the Grange.

On this point he and Mildred Tarnley had a sharp battle.

When both parties had cooled a little he admitted that possibly the symptoms might not have been sufficiently developed to have excited the attention of an uninstructed observer.

The Grange was growing all this time more awful. Death seemed to have made his abode there, and the shadow of the hearse plumes seemed to rest upon the windows. Courage flagged, despair supervened, and Mrs. Tarnley's temper grew all but insupportable. A day in such situations seems very long, and many had passed since the baby had made his journey to

Twyford. The doctor seemed desponding, and stood longer silent by his patient's bed this day than usual. His questions were briefer, and he was less communicative than usual when he was going.

Mildred Tarnley was making up her mind that the blow was inevitable, and was secretly wishing it might come soon, since come it must.

The father buried but two months since, the mother sinking into an untimely grave, and the poor little baby also dying! Was this family accursed? What a blight was this!

The doctor had said that he would return by Gryce's mill. It had been dark some time, and was now about seven o'clock. Tom was down at the forge, Dulcibella and Lilly Dogger both upstairs, and she quite alone in the kitchen. She was more uncomfortable than she had ever been before about Alice that night.

She had seen in the doctor's countenance that day, as he told her he would look in again on his return up the glen, that which had profoundly alarmed her, and now, sitting alone in this dark kitchen, she was infested by gloomy forebodings and terrible fancies.

She went upstairs to the sick lady's door. At that hour no amendment was probable, and there certainly was none. Down again she went. The idea had got into her head that the patient would die that night, and she grew nervous, and tired of listening for death-watches, and picking incipient winding-sheets off the candle. "I wonder Master Harry doesn't come here, if 'twas only to ask whether his sister was dead or alive, and why old Willett don't come. Smelt out a good supper somewhere, and he's stuffin' his gut, I'll warrant, while the poor lady's takin' the rattles."

Mildred Tarnley could stand this no longer, and she went out and down the dark road that leads to the Glen of Carwell, close by, down which, with the uselessness of impatience, she went to look for a sight of the absent doctor, and listen for the tread of his horse.

Nothing cheered by that darksome walk, and the solemn and solitary view down the Carwell road, she stood gazing down toward distant Gryce's mill, until she tired of that too, and in dismay and bitterness retraced her steps toward the Grange.

On entering the yard, she saw a man's figure approaching her from the kitchen door. She thought it was the doctor's, for a moment, but it was not, and with a "Lord! who's that?" gasped in fear that sounded like fury, she stood fixed as the old pump.

"Bah! don't you know me, woman?" said Harry Fairfield, surlily; "I have only a few minutes. Ye'll have to come wi' me in the morning over to Twyford."

"To Twyford?"

"Ay, to Twyford; and why the devil do ye leave the yard-door open; I walked into the kitchen and right up the stairs, lookin' for ye, and knocked at Ally's door. I think ye're cracked."

"And what's to fear here, down in the Grange? Hoot! If 'tweren't for form's sake we need never draw bolt from one Christmas to another."

"There was a woman found with her throat cut by the Three Pollards, between this and Hatherton, on Tuesday. If you likes it, down here, 'tis little to me. I'll come here at eight o'clock in the morning to fetch ye."

"Is the child sick?"

"Not it. It was, but it's gettin' all right; that is, if it *be* the child."

"What the de'il d'ye mean, Master Harry?"

"I was lookin' at the child this mornin', and d — me, if I think it's the same child we left there!" said Harry.

"Why, sir — Mr. Harry, what's this?"

"I say I misdoubt it's not the same child, and ye must come over and look at it. Don't ye say a word o' the matter to no one; no more did I; if you do we'll never come to the bottom of it."

"My good Lord!" exclaimed old Mildred, turning paler, and frowning very hard.

"I won't stop. I won't eat anything. I can't delay tonight; my nag's by the bridle, there, beside the scales, and — any message to Wykeford? I'll be passing Willett's house."

"Well! well!" repeated Mildred, gaping at him still, with scarcely a breath left her, "sin is sin, be it seen or no; judgment follows. God has feet o' wool and hands o' iron."

"Sweep before your own door, lass; ye're a bit daft, bain't ye?" said Harry, with a sudden glare in his face.

"God forgive us all!"

"Amen," said Harry.

And there came a pause.

"Women and fools will be meddlin'," he resumed. "Lord love ye! For mad words, deaf ears, they say. 'Pon my soul! 'twould make a cow laugh, and if ye don't mind ye may run yer head against the wall."

"I *will* go tomorrow and look at the child," said Mildred, with sullen emphasis, clapping one lean hand down on the other.

"That's all I want ye. Come, what mischief can ye make o' that? Clear yer head!"

"There's two things shouldn't anger ye: what ye can help and what ye can't," said Mildred. "I'll go wi' ye in the mornin', Master Harry."

"That's the least we can do and the most. How's Ally?"

"Dyin', I think; she'll be gone before daybreak, I'm thinkin'."

"That's bad," said Harry.

"Good hap or ill hap, as God awards. I know nout against her."

"Poor little thing!" said Harry.

"I blame myself; but what could I do? If aught's gone wrong wi' the child, poor lady! 'tis well she were gone too."

"There's many a fellow'd knock ye on the head for less," replied Harry, with a very black look; "you women has a hintin' funkin' way wi' ye. Ye like to ladle the drippin' over a fellow's legs, and say ye meant the mutton. Can't ye speak out and say what ye mean, and get it off yer stomach, and let me know, and I'll answer it straight, like a man and a Fairfield, d — me!"

"I'll go wi' ye tomorrow; and I take it that's what ye want."

"Well, this I'll say. If ye suppose I'd hurt that poor baby to the value of a pin's point, you're a stupider and a wickeder witch than I took ye for, and I wish poor Ally could hear me, and I'd swear to her on my knees, at her dying bed, by the Creator that made me, that I'll work for that boy as if he was my own, till I make him safe in Wyvern. And can't ye see, woman, d — ye, that I can have but the boy's good in my mind when I ask ye to come over on such an errand to Twyford?"

"Well, I do suppose — I do suppose. Eight o'clock, and there's two feet will be cold ere then, I'm afeard."

"Don't be a fool no more, and I forgive ye, Mildred," said he, extending his hand; "and don't ye mind a lick wi' the rough side o' my tongue— 'tis a way wi' us Fairfields — and there wasn't many on 'em would 'a stood to let ye rile them as ye did me. And bolt yer doors, mind; and, poor Ally! I hope she may do yet, and mind ye — eight o'clock sharp."

So Harry departed.

Mildred stood and looked after him for a time.

"There's nothin' ever goes right at the Grange," she said with a short hard sigh; "nor never did, nor never will."

And after a pause, with another sigh, she said —

"No, no; I won't think it — I couldn't think it— 'taint in one o' them. They might be fickle wi' a lass, or hot tempered wi' a man, and a bit too hard wi' tongue or hand, but the like o' that — I can't believe it — never, and I wish I hadn't a' heard that. I'm most sure I heard the child cry in the loft there; I'm sorry I didn't say so then. I don't know why, and I don't know now, what it should be no more than another, but I didn't like it. It looked like summat *hid* — I can't say. But my heart misgave me."

Old Mildred walked into the house. She had other thoughts now than the poor lady upstairs. They were remorseful, though she could hardly say for what she could blame herself. Perhaps she overrated her authority, and fancied she could have prevented the baby's being taken away.

But it might be all quite right — men were so stupid about babies. A pretty hand a Fairfield man would make of a nursery! At all events the morrow would clear a great deal up.

The morning came. The doctor had looked in, and, as often happened, had surprised the lookers-on by pronouncing positively that the patient was *not* worse.

With a qualm at her heart, Mildred asked him when he had seen the child: and watched his face hard while he answered quite frankly that he had seen it the day before — that it was decidedly better, and might possibly do well.

When should he see it again?

There was nothing alarming, probably tomorrow; certainly not later than the next day. There was nothing urgent — the chances were rather in favour of its recovery, but, of course, there were the risks, and we weren't to hollo till we were out of the wood.

With this cheer Mildred was much comforted, so much reassured that when eight o'clock came next morning and brought no Harry Fairfield, she felt rather relieved of a bore than disappointed.

Two days later Dr. Willett reported more favourably than he had yet done on Alice. His account of the boy, however, was by no means so cheery.

Harry looked in still later, and talked the matter over with Mildred.

"I thought, ye see, I might just be makin' a fool o' myself — and another o' you, so I went over there quietly next day, and I'm sure it *was* a mistake. The child's thinner a deal, and its colour gone, and it was dark a'most when I saw it, and she held the candle too low and cast a shadow from its nose, by Jove, across its face. You never see so queer a monkey as it looked, and so I held my tongue, but made over here to put our heads together and make sure o' the matter. But when I went next day and saw it in the daylight, by Jove it was all right — the child and no mistake. But it is grown awful thin and wry-faced, only you couldn't take it for any other, and the doctor sees it every second day, and I'm glad to hear that poor little Alice is getting on so well. She'll be on her legs again, in no time, I'm thinking."

After Harry had gone, Dr. Willett arrived with a very ill account of the baby.

"Dying, poor little thing. Its heart wrong, and all the organs; but you musn't tell poor Mrs. Fairfield. It may cost her her life, if she begins to fret about it, and just tell her it's quite well, for it's true, you know — it's nearer heaven, and best of all when it gets there. So tell her, when she asks, that it was sent in charge of careful people to get it out of the reach of the infection that is in the neighbourhood, and keep her mind quiet."

A few days later the news of its death arrived in the kitchen, and Lilly Dogger, who was afraid to give way to her emotions before Mrs. Tarnley, abruptly rose, and ran out, and throwing her apron over her head, broke into absolute screams of crying under the great old trees that stand by the scales.

Here there was a sad secret to disclose when the time came, and poor Alice was strong enough to bear the story.

In the meantime Harry Fairfield came and had a stormy interview with old Mildred. The doctor, he swore, didn't know his business. The women at Twyford had neglected the child. He'd see to it. He'd be a devil among the tailors. He'd open their eyes for them. He had often got fifty pounds for a less neglect of a filly. They should smoke all round for it. And there now was Wyvern without an heir, for, d — n him if he'd ever marry; he wouldn't for Saint Peter. It wouldn't do — it couldn't be, at no price; and there was old Wyvern, and never a Fairfield to see tankard filled or faggot fired in the old house.

Harry was not married, although he had insinuated some matrimonial ambiguities in his talk with old Mildred. But I believe he swore truly when he vowed that he never would marry. He had quite made up his mind on that point for some time.

For the rest, his threatenings ended in the noise they began in. In truth there was no ground for complaint, and both nurse and doctor had done their duty.

Alice recovered. I do not attempt to describe the long mourning that followed, the sweet, the bitter, and the terrible recollections that ever after tinted the image of Carwell Grange in her memory.

As soon as she could bear removal to her kind kinswoman, Lady Wyndale insisted on taking her to Oulton. After a time they travelled, and finally returned to Oulton, where they lived on together in the happiness of great and tried affection.

A difference of five-and-thirty years did not separate them any more than the interval of a generation did Naomi and Ruth. Lady Wyndale, being one of those gifted women in whom the girlish spirit burns high and bright so long as life itself continues, full of sympathy and gaiety, with a strong vein of romance, and a pleasant sense of the ridiculous, and also fine immovable affections, was to one who had suffered calamities so dire as had befallen Alice Fairfield, a more delightful companion than any of her own age could have been. For when it was needed, there was the graver charm of a long and sad experience, and there were also the grander teachings of religion, and these were not obtruded or vaunted in anywise, but, rather toned her thoughts and feelings, with their peculiar sublime and melancholy lights, in which all things are subdued and also glorified.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OLD SQUIRE LEAVES WYVERN.

The old folk can’t go on living always. The King’s messenger had called at Wyvern, and the old Squire must needs get up and go.

Sickness was a cross he had never been used to bear, and now that it was laid on his old shoulders he knew that he could not keep his feet very long.

He had the Wyvern lawyer, who did the business of the estate, up to his room, and the parson and his own son, Harry Fairfield. He made the attorney read the will, which he had told him to bring up with him, and the Squire listened as it was read slowly.

After the clergyman had gone —

“Have ye ought to say to that, son Harry?” said the old Squire.

“’Tis an old will, father,” said Harry.

“It ain’t,” said the Squire.

“Eight years less two months,” said the lawyer.

“About the age rum’s fit to drink,” said the old Squire. “What say ye to it — now’s your time, son?”

“Priests, women, and poultry, they say, has never enough. There’s bin changes since, and I don’t see why Wyvern should be charged so heavy.”

“There’s three hundred a year to Alice, that’s what ye mean!” said the old Squire.

His son was silent.

“Well, I don’t owe her nothin’, that’s true, but I’ll let it stand, mind. And Harry, lad, the day ye do a good thing there will be seven new moons.”

“What was parson a whisperin’ about in the window wi’ ye?” he asked of the attorney after a time.

“Some claim upon the vicarage which he thought you said you meant to remit by will.”

“I ‘a thought upon it, and I won’t. *Paternoster* built churches, and Our Father pulled ‘em down. There’s o’er many parsons for the churches, and o’er many churches for the people — tell him I won’t.”

“What the devil made you talk about that to him?” said Harry, with a dark look, when he and the attorney had got out of the room.

“My dear sir,” said the lawyer, “we must be true to our clients, and beside, don’t you remember the clergyman said he’d be here tomorrow at one to administer the Lord’s Supper, and he’ll be certain to speak of it then to our client.”

At nightfall the Squire grew worse, and his head wandered.

“Tell that white-faced Vicar Maybell, there’s never a one but the thankless in hell — I’ll not sit under none o’ his sermons — Ay, he frowns at that.”

“Hey, dear!” whispered the housekeeper, gazing at him from the hearth where they were sitting.

“And who does he mean, ma’am?” asked the nurse.

“God knows — old times, I suppose,” she answered.

“There’s a glass broke, Tom, who’s kicking up the row?” mumbled the Squire,— “Play, women, and wine undoes men, laughin’ — Ay, light it, I’m very dark — Who’s he, ye fool? — Joan and my lady’s all one in the dark.”

“That’s Tom Ward he’s thinkin’ on?” said the nurse.

“Ay, he liked Tom ever. He wouldn’t think ’twas Wyvern without Tom,” answered the housekeeper.

In a little time he said more distinctly and sternly —

“The dead should do nothing. — So that’s the bishop. — Ay — ay — The devil, mind ye, isn’t always at one door. — If there was a good man here he’d put a clout over that face — Ye’ll never do it.”

Then it would sink into mumbling, and then again grow more distinct.

At last the morning came, and the Squire so many hours nearer death, was, nevertheless, now like himself.

In due course the clergyman arrived, and the housekeeper, and serious Jim Hopper of the mill, close by, attended to make up a little congregation with whom the dying Squire was to receive that most “comfortable” Sacrament, before setting out on his long journey.

“You’re distinctly a Church of England man?” inquired the clergyman gently.

“Ay, what do you take me for?”

“I make it a rule, dear sir, to inquire. I have once or twice found Presbyterians and other Dissenters among the attendants at my church at

Nottingham before I came here, and I am happy to hear so clear an answer to my inquiry," said the clergyman with a gracious solemnity.

"The crow thinks her own bird fairest — go on," said Squire Harry.

After these rites were over, the Squire needed rest.

Then, after an hour or so, he called for Tom Ward.

"Well, Tom, we a' lived a long while together — here in Wyvern — you and me, and 'be the day never so long, at last cometh even' song,' as they say, and now the doctor thinks my time be come, and I sent for ye to shake hands, Tom, and bid ye goodbye."

Tom was drying his eyes hastily, and his old face was more puckered than ever.

"Yer honour was always kind to me — — "

"Come, Tom, ye musn't be cryin', man. Penny in pocket's a merry companion, and I wrote ye down for somethin' in my will, and ye a' brewed me many a tankard, Tom — ye'll never brew me another — and I wouldn't go without a word and a shake by the hand."

When this was over, the nurse signed to Tom to go.

I wonder how the grim old man, with near a week's white stubble on his chin, felt as he saw Tom Ward glide away softly, with tears on his rugged cheeks. For Tom, it was the breaking up and foundering of old Wyvern in the deep. He was too old to live in the new Wyvern that was coming, mayhap.

"I'll never get the old days out o' my head, nor ever like the new, and 'twon't be long, I'm thinkin', before I follow him down the ash-tree road to Wyvern churchyard."

And so for the old Squire it came, the last day of light, and the first of death.

It was a stately funeral in the oldfashioned way. All the good old houses of the county were represented there. The neighbours, great and small, mustered; the shops in the town were all shut, and the tenants attended in masses.

This solemn feast and pageant over, the fuss subsided, and Harry entered upon his reign with a gravity becoming his new prerogative and responsibilities.

Sergeant-Major Archdale was an influential, and prosperous, and reserved minister under the new *régime*. He had a snug berth at

Warhampton, as Harry Fairfield had promised, and from that distant legation he was summoned every now and then to Wyvern, and there conferred with the Squire. I have called him Sergeant-Major, but he was so no longer. He had retired some time before from the militia and was now plain Mr. Archdale.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARJORY TREVELLIAN.

In order to throwing a light upon the nature of some of the duties of Mr. Archdale, we must convey the reader in spirit, to some little distance.

In the sequestered country, about twelve miles south of Twyford, in a pretty nook formed by a wooded hollow close by the old by-road to Warhampton, stands an antique cottage, with a loft and two little windows peeping through the very steep thatched roof and a high narrow gable — gable and wall alike streaked and crossed with those black oak beams which formed the cage into whose interstices our ancestors built their brick and plaster. The steep roof runs out over a little porch which has a bench in one side of it. Another stone bench stands under the lattice window, the woodwork of which casement, as well as the black spars crossed and morticed in the walls, and even the curved brick chimney, look shrunk and warped by time, by which, too, the hatch at the door is rounded and furrowed, and the stone seat and window stones worn into curves and hollows, and such and so venerable is the air of the structure, with its ivy-bound porch, that one might fancy it the very farm house in which Anne Hathaway passed her girlhood.

Here dwelt good Mrs. Marjory Trevellian, some fifty years old and upward, with, I think, the kindest face and pleasantest laugh in that part of the country; a widow of many years; not very happy in her marriage, and quite content with her experience of the wedded state; quiet, cheerful, very industrious; with a little farm of three acres, and a cow; spinning sometimes, knitting at others, and when she could, taking in washing, and in all things approving herself diligent, cheerful, and honest.

With this kind, cheery, honest dame lived a little boy, the son of a Mr. Henry — that was all she knew distinctly about his people. She called him her Fairy, and her Prince, and when curious people questioned her closely, she said that his father was a merchant, “unfortunate in business,” as the phrase is; that he was living perhaps in concealment, and in distressed circumstances, or possibly was dead. All she could say for certain was, that she received a very small allowance for maintaining him, which was paid punctually every three months in advance, and that as to the name of the boy, his Christian name was William and his surname Henry, and that she called him her “Prince” or her “Fairy,” and he called her “Granny.”

She idolised this pretty boy, and he loved her with the tenderness which a child bestows upon a loving nurse, something more than filial.

The boy remembers no other home but this, and no other friend but “Granny.” He was now a little past eleven. His life had been solitary, but cheerful. Was there not the pond only thirty yards away from their doorstep, in which he sailed his fleet of ships, made of corks, which old Peter Durdon gave him? He was a cousin of Marjory Trevellian’s, and lived in the village two miles away. He used to call every Sunday and to bring these corks in his pocket, and a bit of such lead as tea is wrapped in to make the keels of their navy. He was dressed in a blue “swallow-tailed” coat with brass buttons; his drab trousers were very short; his stockings faded sky-blue; and his shoes clumsy and clouted, and highly polished. He wore a chestnut wig of a long and lank cut, and his forehead slanted back very much, and his nose came forward, and a perpetual smile expanded his cheeks, which were as red and smooth as a ripe apple. His countenance was not wise, though very goodnatured — rather silly, I’m afraid — and I think he took more interest in this sort of shipping than was quite compatible with strength of mind.

As these ships glided with thin paper sails across the pond, while Master Henry watched them in grave absorption, Peter’s raptures expressed themselves in continuous peals of laughter.

These were great occasions in the solitary life of Fairy.

There were a set of big boxwood ninepins — skittles, I suppose, with balls — battered and discoloured — I never knew how they got into the cottage, but they looked a hundred years old if a day. Many a game with these on the smooth patch of sward at the other side of the pond had pleasant old Marjory with her darling.

In its seclusion this life was monastic, but not in its liberty. The boy was, on the whole, very happy.

Looking on honest Marjory as mistress of all she surveyed, it never struck him, that in the points in which her dietary differed from his she was practising a compulsory economy. The article of meat was not often found in her bill of fare. But conscientiously she placed the little fellow's bit of broiled meat before him every day, and told him when he inquired why she had none for herself that she did not like it, and that it did not agree with her, which he accepted as undoubted truths, and wondered and regretted secretly.

On winter evenings their tea was very cosy. A wheaten cake baked on the griddle, a new-laid egg each, and a cup of tea from the many-coloured delf teapot — a good deal burnt on the side next the fire. With the door barred and the window carefully closed, the fire burning cheerfully, and their candle lighting the party — who so happy? And was there not the old Robinson Crusoe, with binding black with age, and a frontispiece showing the hero with his grave countenance and beard, his tall cap and goat-skin dress, his musket over one shoulder and his umbrella over the other, and recounting his marvellous life in the quaint old type of Queen Anne? And was there not that other literary treasure, the old folio volume of Captain Cook's, Commodore Anson's, and other seafaring worthies' voyages round or up and down the world, with no end of careful old copperplates, showing Pacific islands, curious volcanoes, flotillas of armed canoes, thick-lipped miscreants with rings in their noses and birds' tails enlivening their foreheads, and long processions of official people, priests, &c., with a small white pockethandkerchief each by way of dress? But better far than these, which together with her Bible and Prayer-Book, constituted Marjory's library, was that good creature's inexhaustible collection of fairy tales, received traditionally and recounted *vivá voce*, and prefaced with the rhyme which even at this distance recals me to the nursery fireside with the far-off tones of a kindly voice that I shall hear no more.

"Once upon a time there was a king and a queen, As many have been, But few I have seen, Except in pictures!"

And starting with this little trumpeting and summons to attention — the "oyes-oyes-oyes" and immutable prelude of an ever-varying sequel, good Marjory, the herald of ever new wonders, would tell her tale of dwarfs and castles, of godmother fairies, and malignant enchantresses, broken-hearted princes and persecuted princesses, and enchanted palaces and awful forests, till the hour came for the little fellow to get to his bed and enter the no less wonderful land of dreams.

Another person who contributed to the regular entertainment of the boy was Tom Orange.

Tom Orange called at the cottage sometimes at intervals of three months, sometimes, for perhaps half a year, on the first of every month, and was always made welcome by Marjory Trevellian, and feasted with rashers and whatever else her humble larder afforded, and on going had established a mysterious right to a shilling "tip," which he always made it a point should be an honourable secret among them.

What might be the nature of his business the little boy neither knew nor cared, but Tom Orange was in the boy's eyes the ideal and epitome of all that was enchanting, brilliant, and exhilarating.

Tom was somewhat long and lean, with a face also long and always smiling, except when it was making a grimace, an art in which he excelled almost every other blackguard I have heard of. His clothes and hat were seedy, and, for so merry a person, he was wonderfully poor.

Tom Orange's accomplishments were infinite, he could dance a hornpipe with all the well-known airs and graces of a sailor; he could protrude his mouth till it assumed a shape quite unknown to physiognomists, and with a delicate finger, turning his eyelids inside out, make the pupils of those organs quiver strangely, while he uttered a sound like the call of a jackdaw. He could sing a variety of comic songs, with refrains delivered with a volubility which distanced admiration, and made his very audience breathless, and some of these were relieved with occasional dialogue of matchless character and humour. He could swallow any number of pennies you pleased, and take them all out at different angles of his body; he could put several potatoes under his hat, and withdraw them all without touching either the hat or the potatoes. He could keep three balls always in the air together, and he could balance two chairs upon his chin.

In short, as I have said, his accomplishments were innumerable and extraordinary, and the only wonder was how so universal a genius could possibly possess so few shillings and so many seedy articles of dress.

Tom Orange, too, was great at skittles, and gave his pupil wonderful new lights.

He taught him also how to guard, stop, and strike according to the principles of "the noble art of self-defence." In fact, it would have been difficult to discover a more fascinating companion and instructor of youth.

Possibly it was as well, however, that his visits were so far between, and as brief as fortune ordained them to be. It was no wonder, however, that these visits were looked for by the boy, as the return of the life and excitement of an annual fair might have been by the ingenuous youth of some other rural district.

There was but one point on which Marjory was obliged to impose a prohibition upon the child. It seemed a trifle, but in reality was a gigantic privation.

"No, darling, you mustn't talk to any other boys, nor play with them, nor go near them; if you do you'll be took away by your friends, and I'll never see you again; and what will poor Granny do then without her darling?"

And Granny's eyes filled with tears, and the boy cried and hugged her passionately, and this little agony gave place to wild affection and a glow of unspeakable delight and happiness, and was celebrated by a hot cake that evening, and new-laid eggs and a great tea, and stories to no end.

And she found her darling that night crying in his sleep, and was sure he was dreaming of leaving the old cottage, and she wakened him with kisses, herself crying.

So these two persons, notwithstanding some disparity of years, were wonderfully happy in one another's society, and if they had each their will, would have fixed things as they were, and neither grown older nor younger, but just gone on living so for ever.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ENCHANTED GARDEN.

Marjory Trevellian was what is accounted among her class “a good scholar,” and she had taught the little boy to read and write, to “say his tables,” and to “cypher,” as she termed the initiatory arithmetical exercises.

It was plain, however, that the boy was not abandoned to chance, but that an eye was upon him, and some friendly, if not conscientious direction, controlling his destiny.

In one of his visits Tom Orange handed her a letter, written in the same neat clerk’s hand in which the short memorandum that accompanied each remittance was penned. Having read the letter she was thoughtful.

When Tom had gone away, she said —

“You are to be taught like a gentleman, as you are, my darling, and you’re not to be sent to school for three or four years, and in the meantime Mr. Wharton — he’s a kind, good gentleman — is to teach you for two hours every evening after the school is over. You know his house. It is about a mile away from this; just halfway on the road to the grammar school.”

“But I’m to live at home, Granny, all the same?” inquired the boy in great trepidation.

“Lord love it, to be sure he is,” she answered, beaming on him with great affection. “Only two hours, and every one likes Mr. Wharton, and I’m desired to go to his house to take his orders, tomorrow.”

So she did, and the new order of things was established with very little disturbance of the old.

The narrow road which the boy every afternoon passed to and from Doctor Wharton’s house makes, about halfway, a sudden curve. It is a wooded road, not without little ups and downs, and formidable ruts, and blocks of worn old stone, so large as to shock all the rules of modern road-making.

Upon this curve, so as nearly to front the boy’s line of march, is a very old fruit garden, with a discoloured ivy-grown wall, on which are growing moss and house-leek, and here and there tufts of grass and wallflower. Over the wall are seen ancient standard plum and cherry and pear-trees, and beyond them the upper windows, and the steep, grey roof, and slender chimneys of a house as much out of date as the garden.

In the garden-wall is a tall door with worn fluted pilasters corresponding in antiquity with the rest of the building and its belongings. This stone framework has an iron door, oldfashioned and fancifully wrought into arabesques of spikes, leaves, and stars, facing the quiet road, and within this a strong wooden door.

Fruit-trees are, of course, always interesting to boys, but quite another interest mingled in the feeling with which little Willie viewed such glimpses of the old grey house and its background of dark and towering timber as his approach afforded, and he often wished, as he passed, that a hole in the wall might afford him a peep into the old garden and a glimpse of its owners. He sometimes heard their voices.

A clear, childish laugh he had heard more than once, from among the tall fruit-trees and climbing roses that overtopped the wall, and a sweet female voice also faintly prattling with the child.

One evening, as he returned from Doctor Wharton's, with his books buckled in his strap swinging from his hand, having slackened his pace as usual when he found himself under the garden wall, to his infinite delight the inner wooden door, which had always obstructed his curiosity, was open. The outer gate of iron rails and foliage was locked, but through its bars he could see at last the garden. Its trees were old and overgrown. It was wonderfully dark, with roses and other flowers glowing here and there, and one straight walk leading up to the house, and continuing the line of the narrow bridge which, at the iron door, crossed what seemed a sort of moat, whose banks were overgrown with docks and nettles. He could see part of the steps leading up to the door of the house, and a portion of one of its windows. The rest was concealed by the thick foliage, and the effect of this little glimpse was increased by the deep shadow of the foreground.

It was not very far from sunset, and the small birds were already singing among the boughs, and the deep shadow — the antique and neglected air and the silence of the place — gave it in his romantic eyes, a character of monastic mystery and enchantment.

As he gazed straight up the dark walk towards the house, suddenly a man turned the corner of the yew hedge that met the bridge's parapet close to him, and walking straight up to the door, with a gruff look at the little boy, shut and locked the wooden door in his face.

So all was gone for the present. He knew there was no good in looking through the keyhole, for envious fortune had hung a spray of sweetbriar so as effectually to intercept the view, and nothing remained but the dingy chocolate-coloured planks before him, and the foliage and roses trembling over the old wall.

Many a time again he passed and repassed the door without a like good hap.

At length, however, one evening he found the envious wooden door once more open, and the view again disclosed through the iron bars.

A very pretty little girl, with golden hair, was standing on tiptoe near, and with all her soul was striving to reach an apple with a stick which she held in her tiny fingers.

Seeing him she fixed her large eyes on him, and said, with an air of command —

“Come, and climb up the tree and get me that apple.”

His heart beat quick — there was nothing he liked better.

“But I can’t get in,” he said, blushing; “the door is locked.”

“Oh! I’ll call mamma — she’ll let you in. Don’t you know mamma?”

“No, I never saw her,” answered the boy.

“Wait there, and I’ll fetch her.”

And so she was gone.

The first flutter of his excitement was hardly over when he heard steps and voices near, and the little girl returned, holding the hand of a slight, pale lady, with a very pretty face, dressed all in black. She had the key in her hand, and smiled gently on the little boy as she approached. Her face was kind, and at once he trusted her.

“Oh! he has left the inner door open again,” she said, and with a little nod and smile of welcome she opened the door, and the boy entered the garden.

Both doors were now shut.

“Look up, little boy,” said the lady in black, with a very sweet voice.

She liked his face. He was a very handsome little fellow, and with an expression earnest, shy, and bright, and the indescribable character of refinement too in his face. She smiled more kindly still, and placing just the tip of her finger under his chin she said —

“You are a gentleman’s son, and you are nicely dressed. What is your name?”

“My papa’s name is Mr. Henry,” he answered.

“And where do you go to school?”

“I don’t go to school. I say lessons to Mr. Wharton — about half a mile from this.”

“It is great fun, I suppose, playing with the little boys — cricket, and all that?”

“I’m not allowed to play with the little boys.”

“Who forbids you?”

“My friends won’t allow me.”

“Who are your friends?”

“I never saw them.”

“Really! and don’t you live with your papa?”

“No, I live with Marjory.”

“Do you mean with your mamma?”

“Oh, no. She died a long time ago.”

“And is your papa rich — why aren’t you with him?”

“He was rich, granny says, but he grew poor.”

“And where is he now?”

“I don’t know. I’m to go to school,” he said, acquiring confidence the more he looked in that sweet face. “My friends will send me, in three years, granny says.”

“You are a very nice little boy, and I’m sure a good little fellow. We’ll have tea in a few minutes — you must stay and drink tea with us.”

The little fellow held his straw hat in his hand, and was looking up in the face of the lady, whose slender fingers were laid almost caressingly on his rich brown hair as she looked down smiling, with eyes in which “the water stood.” Perhaps these forlorn childhoods had a peculiar interest for her.

“And it is very polite of you taking off your hat to a lady, but put it on again, for I’m not a bit better than you; and I’ll go and tell them to get tea now. Dulcibella,” she called. “Dulcibella, this little friend is coming to drink tea with us, and Amy and he will play here till it comes, and don’t mind getting up, sit quiet and rest yourself.”

And she signed with her hand, smiling, to repress her attempt to rise.

“Well, darling, play in sight o’ me, till your mamma comes back,” said the rheumatic old woman, addressing the little girl; “and ye mustn’t be pulling at that great rolling-stone; ye can’t move it, and ye may break your pretty back trying.”

With these and similar injunctions the children were abandoned to their play.

He found this pretty young lady imperious, but it was pleasant to be so commanded, and the little boy climbed trees to gather her favourite apples, and climbed the garden wall to pluck a bit of wallflower, and at last she said —

“Now, we’ll play ninepins. There’s the box, set them up on the walk. Yes, that’s right; you *have* played; who taught you?”

“Granny.”

“Has Granny ninepins?”

“Yes, ever so much bigger than these.”

“Really! So Granny is rich, then?”

“I think so.”

“As rich as mamma?”

“Her garden isn’t so big.”

“Begin, do *you*; ah, ha! you’ve hit one, and who plays best?”

“Tom Orange does; does your mamma know Tom Orange?”

“I dare say she does. Dulcibella, does mamma know Tom Orange?”

“No, my dear.”

“No, she doesn’t,” echoed the little girl, “who is he?”

What, not know Tom Orange! How could that be? So he narrated on that brilliant theme.

“Tom Orange must come to tea with mamma, I’ll tell her to ask him,” decided the young lady.

So these little wiseacres pursued their game, and then had their tea, and in about an hour the little boy found himself trudging home, with a sudden misgiving, for the first time, as to the propriety of his having made these acquaintances without Granny’s leave.

The kind voice, the beloved smile of Granny received him before the cottage door.

“Welcome, darlin’, and where was my darlin’, and what kept him from his old Granny?”

So they hugged and kissed, and then he related all that had happened, and asked “was it any harm, Granny?”

“Not a bit, darlin’, that’s a good lady, and a grand lady, and a fit companion for ye, and see how she knew the gentle blood in your pretty face; and ye *may* go, as she has asked you, tomorrow evening again, and as often as she asks ye; for it was only the little fellows that’s going about without edication or manners, that your friends, and who can blame them, doesn’t like ye to keep company with — and who’d blame them, seeing they’re seldom out of mischief, and that’s the beginning o’ wickedness, and you’re going, but oh! darlin’, not for three long years, thank God, to a grand school where there’s none but the best.”

So this chance acquaintance grew, and the lady seemed to take every week a deeper interest in the fine little boy, so sensitive, generous, and intelligent, and he very often drank tea with his new friends.

CHAPTER XV.

AN OLD FRIEND.

I am going now to describe the occurrences of a particular evening on which my young friend drank tea at Stanlake Farm, which was the name of the house with the old garden to which I have introduced the reader.

A light shower had driven the party in from the garden, and so the boy and Amy were at their ninepins in the great hall, when, the door being open, a gentleman rode up and dismounted, placing the bridle in the hand of a groom who accompanied him.

A tall man he was, with whiskers and hair dashed with white, and a slight stoop. He strode into the hall, his hat on, and a whip still in his hand.

“Hollo! So there you are — and how is your ladyship?” said he. “Skittles, by the law! Brayvo! Two down, by Jove! I’d rather that young man took you in hand than I. And tell me — where’s Ally?”

“Mamma’s in the drawingroom,” said the young lady, scarcely regarding his presence. “Now play, it’s your turn,” she said, addressing her companion.

The new arrival looked at the boy and paused till he threw the ball.

“That’s devilish good too,” said the stranger— “very near the nine. Eh? But a miss is as good as a mile; and I don’t think he’s quite as good as you — and she’s in the drawingroom; which is the drawingroom?”

“Don’t you know the drawingroom! Well, *there* it is,” and the young lady indicated it with her finger. “My turn now.”

And while the game was pursued in the hall, the visitor pushed open the drawingroom door and entered.

“And how is Miss Ally?”

“Oh, Harry! Really!”

“Myself as large as life. You don’t look half pleased, Ally. But I have nout but good news for you to-day. You’re something richer this week than you were last.”

“What is it, Harry? Tell me what you mean?”

"So I will. You know that charge on Carwell — a hundred and forty pounds a year — well, that's dropped in. That old witch is dead — ye might 'a seen it in the newspaper, if you take in one — Bertha Velderkaust. No love lost between ye. Eh?"

"Oh, Harry! Harry! don't," said poor Alice, pale, and looking intensely pained.

"Well, I won't then; I didn't think 'twould vex you. Only you know what a head devil that was — and she's dead in the old place, Hoxton. I read the inquest in the *Times*. She was always drinkin'. I think she was a bit mad. She and the people in the back room were always quarrelling; and the father's up for that and forgery. But 'twasn't clear how it came about. Some swore she was out of her mind with drink, and pitched herself out 'o the window; and some thought it might 'a bin that chap as went in to rob her, thinkin' she was stupid; and so there was a tussle for't — she was main strong, ye know — and he chucked her out. Anyhow she got it awful, for she fell across the spikes of the area-rails, and she hung on them with three lodged in her side — the mad dog-fox, she was!"

"Oh, Harry! How shocking! Oh! pray don't!" exclaimed Alice, who looked as if she was going to faint.

"Well, she lay there, without breath enough to screech, twistin' like a worm — for three hours, it's thought."

"Oh! Harry — pray don't describe it; don't, I implore. I feel so ill."

"Well, I won't, if you say so, only she's smashed, and cold in her wooden surtout; and her charge is reverted to you, now; and I thought I'd tell ye."

"Thank you, Harry," she said very faintly.

"And when did you come here? I only heard this morning," asked Harry.

"Five weeks ago."

"Do you like it; ain't it plaguy lonesome?"

"I like the quiet — at least for a time," she answered.

"And I'm thinkin' o' gettin' married — upon my soul I am. What do you think o' that?"

"Really!"

"Sure as you're there, but it won't be none o' your love-matches.

'Bring something, lass, along wi' thee, If thou intend to live with me.'

That's my motto. Sweetheart and honey-bird keeps no house, I've heard say. I like a body that can look after things, and that would rather fund fifty pounds than spend a hundred.

‘A nice wife and a back door Hath made many a rich, man poor,’

as they say; and besides, I’m not a young fellow no longer. I’m pushin’ sixty, and I should be wise. And who’s the little chap that’s playin’ skittles wi’ Amy in the hall?”

“Oh, that’s such a nice little boy. His father’s name is Henry, and his mother has been dead a long time. He lives with a good old woman named Marjory Trevellian. What’s the matter, Harry?”

“Nothing. I beg your pardon. I was thinkin’ o’ something else, and I didn’t hear. Tell me now, and I’ll listen.”

So she repeated her information, and Harry yawned and stretched his arms.

“‘For want o’ company, Welcome trumpery,’

and I must be goin’ now. I wouldn’t mind drinkin’ a glass o’ sherry, as you’re so pressing, for I’ve had a stiff ride, and dust’s drouthy.”

So Harry, having completed his visit characteristically, took his leave, and mounted his nag and rode away.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOM ORANGE.

Little Miss Amy had a slight cold, and the next tea-party was put off for a day. On the evening following Harry's visit at Stanlake Farm, Marjory Trevellian being at that time absent in the village to make some frugal purchases, who should suddenly appear before the little boy's eyes, as he lifted them from his fleet upon the pond, but his friend, Tom Orange, as usual in high and delightful spirits.

Need I say how welcome Tom was? He asked in a minute or two for Marjory, and took her temporary absence with great goodhumour. Tom affected chilliness, and indeed the evening was a little sharp, and proposed that they should retire to the cottage, and sit down there.

"How soon do you suppose, youngster, the old hen will come home."

"Who?"

"Marjory Daw, down the chimney."

"Oh, Granny?"

This nickname was the only pleasantry of Mr. Orange which did not quite please the boy.

Tom Orange here interpolated his performance of the jackdaw, with his eyelids turned inside out and the pupils quivering, which, although it may possibly have resembled the jackdaw of heraldry, was not an exact portraiture of the bird familiar to us in natural history; and when this was over he asked again— "How soon will she be home?"

"She walked down to the town, and I think she can't be more than about halfway back again."

"That's a mile, and three miles an hour is the best of her paces if she was runnin' for a pound o' sausages and a new cap. Heigh ho! and alas and alack-a-day. No one at home but the maid, and the maid's gone to church! I wrote her a letter the day before yesterday, and I must read it again before she comes back. Where does she keep her letters?"

"In her work-box on the shelf."

"This will be it, the wery identical fiddle!" said Tom Orange, playfully, setting it down upon the little deal table, and, opening it, he took out the little sheaf of letters from the end, and took them one by one to the window, where he took the liberty of reading them.

I think he was disappointed, for he pitched them back again into their nook in the little trunk-shaped box contemptuously.

The boy regarded Tom Orange as a friend of the family so confidential, and as a man in all respects so admirable and virtuous, that nothing appeared more desirable and natural than that excellent person's giving his attention to the domestic correspondence.

He popped the box back again in its berth. Then he treated the young gentleman to Lingo's song with the rag-tag-merry-derry perrywig and hatband, &c., and at the conclusion of the performance admitted that he was "dry," and with a pleasant wink, and the tip of his finger pushing the end of his nose a good deal to the left, he asked him whether he could tell him where Mrs. Trevellian, who would be deeply grieved if she thought that Tom was detained for a drink till her return, kept her liquor.

"Yes, I can show you," said the boy.

"Wait a minute, my guide, my comforter, and friend," said Tom Orange; and he ascertained from the door-stone that no one was inconveniently near.

The boy was getting a tea-cup off the shelf.

"Never mind sugar, my hero, I'll sweeten it with a thought of Marjory Daw."

The boy explained, and led him into the dark nook by the hall door. Tom Orange, well pleased, moved almost on tiptoe, and looked curiously and spoke under his breath, as he groped in this twilight.

"Here it is," said the boy, frankly.

"Where?"

"Here."

"This!" said Tom, for his friend had uncovered a crock of water.

Tom Orange glared at him and at the water with grotesque surprise, and the *bona fides* of the boy and the simplicity of the situation struck Tom comically, and, exploding goodhumouredly, he sat down in Marjory's chair and laughed hilariously.

Having satisfied himself by a confidential dialogue that Marjory Daw had no private bottle of comfort anywhere, this agreeable fellow so far forgot his thirst, that he did not mind drawing water from the crock, and talked on a variety of subjects to the young gentleman. In the course of this conversation he asked him two topographical questions. One was —

“Did you ever hear of a place called Carwell Grange?”

And the other resembled it.

“Did you ever hear of a place called Wyvern?”

“No.”

“Think, lad. Did you never hear Mrs. Trevellian speak of Wyvern? Or of Carwell Grange?”

“No.”

“Because there is the tallest mushroom you ever saw in your life growing there, and it is grown to that degree that it blocks the door so that the Squire can’t get into his own house, and the mushroom is counted one of the wonders of the world, upon my little word of honour as a gentleman! And

‘Since there’s neither drink nor victuals, Suppose, my lord, we play at skittles?’

And if she’s not back by the end of the game, tell her I had to go on to the bridge to see lame Bill Withershins, and I’ll be back again this evening, I think, or in the morning at latest.”

The game was played, but Marjory did not appear, and Tom Orange, entertaining his young friend with a ludicrous imitation of Bill Withershins’ knock-knees, took his departure, leaving his delighted companion in the state which Moore describes as being usual

“When the lamp that lighted The traveller at first goes out.”

So, having watched Tom till he was quite out of sight, he returned to his neglected navy on the pond, and delivered his admirable Crichton’s message to Marjory Daw on her return.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOUR AND THE MAN.

Supper-time came, and Tom Orange did not return. Darkness closed over the old cottage, the poplar trees and the town, and the little boy said his prayers under the superintendence of worthy Marjory, and went to his bed.

He was disturbed in his sleep by voices talking in the room. He could only keep his eyes open for a little time, and he saw Tom Orange talking with mammy. He was at one side of the little table and she at another, and his head was leaning forward so as to approach uncomfortably near to the mutton-fat with a long snuff in the middle. Mammy, as he indiscriminately called "Granny," was sobbing bitterly into her apron, and sometimes with streaming eyes, speaking so low that he could not hear, to Tom Orange.

Interesting as was the scene, slumber stole him away, and when he next wakened, Tom was gone, and mammy was sitting on the bed, crying as if her heart would break. When he opened his eyes, she said, —

"Oh, darlin'! darlin'! My man — my own, own blessed man — my darlin'!" and she hugged him to her heart.

He remembered transports similar when two years ago he was very ill of a fever.

"I'm not sick, mammy, indeed; I'm quite well," and with these assurances and many caresses, he again fell asleep.

In the morning his Sunday clothes, to his wonder, were prepared for him to put on. The little old faded crimson carpet-bag, which she had always told him, to the no small content of his self-importance, was his own, stood plump and locked on the little table under the clock. His chair was close beside mammy's. She had all the delicacies he liked best for his breakfast. There was a thin little slice of fried bacon, and a new-laid egg, and a hot cake, and tea — quite a grand breakfast.

Mammy sat beside him very close. Her arm was round him. She was very pale. She tried to smile at his prattle, and her eyes filled up as often as she looked at him, or heard him speak.

Now and then he looked wonderingly in her face, and she tried to smile her old smile and nodded, and swallowed down some tea from her cup.

She made belief of eating her breakfast, but she could not.

When the wondering little man had ended his breakfast, with her old kind hands she drew him towards her.

“Sit down on my lap, my precious — my own man — my beautiful boy — my own angel bright. Oh, darlin’ — darlin’ — darlin’!” and she hugged the boy to her heart, and sobbed over his shoulder as if her heart was bursting.

He remembered that she cried the same way when the doctor said he was safe and sure to recover.

“Mammy,” he said, kissing her, “Amy has birthdays — and I think this is my birthday — is it?”

“No, darlin’; no, no,” she sobbed, kissing him. “No, my darlin’, no. Oh, no, ‘taint that.”

She got up hastily, and brought him his little boots that she had cleaned. The boy put them on, wondering, and she laced them.

With eyes streaming she took up one of the little cork boats, which he kept on the window-stool floating in a wooden bowl.

“You’ll give me one of them, darlin’ — to old mammy — for a keepsake.”

“Oh! yes. Choose a good one — the one with the gold paper on the pin; that one sails the best of all.”

“And — and” — she cried bitterly before she could go on— “and this is the little box I’ll put them in,” and she picked them out of the bowl and laid them in a cardboard box, which she quickly tied round. “And this is the last day of poor mammy with her bright only darlin’ — for your friends are sending for you to-day, and Mr. Archdale will be here in ten minutes, and you’re to go with him. Oh, my precious — the light o’ the house — and to leave me alone.”

The boy stood up, and with a cry, ran and threw his arms round her, where she stood near the clock.

“Oh! no, no, no. Oh! mammy, you wouldn’t; you couldn’t, you couldn’t.”

“Oh, darlin’, you’re breaking my heart. What can I do?”

“Don’t let me go. Oh, mammy, don’t. Oh, you couldn’t, you couldn’t.”

“But what can I do, darlin’? Oh, darlin’, what can I do?”

"I'll run away, mammy, I'll run away; and I'll come back when they're gone, and stay with you."

"Oh, God Almighty!" she cried, "here he's coming. I see him coming down the hazel road."

"Hide me, mammy; hide me in the press. Oh, mammy, mammy, you wouldn't give me to him!"

The boy had got into this large old-painted press, and coiled himself up between two shelves. There was hardly a moment to think; and yielding to the instinct of her desperate affection, and to the child's wild appeal, she locked the door, and put the key in her pocket.

She sat down. She was half stunned by her own audacity. She scarcely knew what she had done. Before she could recover herself, the door darkened, a hand crossed the hatch and opened it, and ex-Sergeant-Major Archdale entered the cottage.

In curt military fashion he announced himself, and demanded the boy.

She was looking straight in this formidable man's face, and yet it seemed as if he were vanishing from before her eyes.

"Where's the boy?" inquired the chill stern voice of the Sergeant.

It seemed to her like lifting a mountain this effort to speak. She felt as if she were freezing as she uttered the denial.

"He ain't here."

"Where is he?" demanded the Sergeant's imperturbably clear cold voice.

"He's run away," she said with an effort, and the Sergeant seemed to vanish quite away, and she thought she was on the point of fainting.

The Sergeant glanced at the breakfast table, and saw that two had taken tea together; he saw the carpet bag packed.

"H'm?" intimated Archdale, with closed lips. He looked round the cottage room, and the Sergeant sat down wonderfully composed, considering the disconcerting nature of the announcement.

The ex-Sergeant-Major had in his time commanded parties in search of deserters, and he was not a bad slaught-hound of that sort.

"He breakfasted with you?" said he, with a cool nod toward the table.

There was a momentary hesitation, and she cleared her voice and said —

"Yes."

Archdale rose and placed his fingers on the teapot.

"That's hot," said the Sergeant with the same inflexible dignity.

Marjory was awfully uneasy.

“He can’t be far. Which way did he go?”

“Out by the door. I can’t tell.”

The ex-Sergeant-Major might have believed her the goddess of truth itself, or might have thought her the most impudent liar in England. You could not have gathered in the least from his countenance toward which view his conclusions tended.

The Sergeant’s light cold grey eye glided again round the room, and there was another silence awfully trying to our good friend Marjory.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MARCH TO NOULTON FARM.

“I think, ma’am, the boy’s in the house. You’d best give him up, for I’ll not go without him. How many rooms have you?”

“Three and a loft, sir.”

The Sergeant stood up.

“I’ll search the house first, ma’am, and if he’s not here I’ll inform the police and have him in the Hue-and-Cry; and if you have had anything to do with the boy’s deserting, or had a hand in making away with him anyhow, I’ll have you in gaol and punished. I must secure the door, and you can leave the house first, if you like best.”

“Very well, sir,” answered she.

But at this moment came a knocking and crying from within the press.

“Oh! no— ’twasn’t mammy; ’twas I that did it. Don’t take mammy.”

“You see, ma’am, you give useless trouble. Please open that door — I shall have to force it, otherwise,” he added, as very pale and trembling she hesitated.

Standing as he might before his commanding officer, stiff, with his heels together, with his inflexibly serene face, full before her, he extended his hand, and said simply, “The key, ma’am.”

In all human natures — the wildest and most stubborn — there is a point at which submission follows command, and there was that in the serenity of the ex-Sergeant-Major which went direct to the instinct of obedience.

It was quite idle any longer trying to conceal the boy. With a dreadful ache at her heart she put her hand in her pocket and handed him the key.

As the door opened the little boy shrank to the very back of the recess, from whence he saw the stout form of the Sergeant stooped low, as his blue, smooth fixed countenance peered narrowly into the dark. After a few seconds he seemed to discern the figure of the boy.

“Come, you sir, get out,” said the commanding voice of the visitor, as the cane which he carried in his hand, paid round with wax-end for some three inches at the extremity, began switching his little legs smartly.

"Oh, sir, for the love of God!" cried Marjory, clinging to his hand. "Oh, sir, he's the gentlest little creature, and he'll do whatever he's bid, and the lovingest child in the world."

The boy had got out by this time, and looking wonderingly in the man's face, was unconsciously, with the wincing of pain, lifting his leg slightly, for the sting of the cane was quite new to him.

"If I catch you at that work again I'll give you five dozen," said his new acquaintance.

"Is this his?" said he, touching the carpet bag with his cane.

"Yes, sir, please."

He took it in his hand, and glanced at the boy — I think it was in his mind to make him carry it. But the child was slender, and the bag, conscientiously packed with everything that had ever belonged to him, was a trifle too heavy.

"Anything else?" demanded the Sergeant-Major.

"This — this, God bless him."

It was the little box with the ships.

"And this;" and she thrust the griddle cake, broken across and rolled up in brown paper, into the boy's pocket.

"And these;" and three apples she had ready, she thrust after them.

"And oh! my blessed darlin', my darlin', darlin', darlin'."

He was lifted up against her heart, folded fast, and hugging her round the neck, they kissed and cried and cried and kissed, and at last she let him down; and the Sergeant-Major, with the cane under his arm, the carpet-bag in one hand, and the boy's wrist firmly held in the other, marched out of the door.

"That's enough — don't follow, woman," said he, after they had gone about twenty yards on the path; "and I'll report you," he added with a nod which, with these pleasant words, she might take as a farewell or not as she pleased.

She stood on the little rising ground by the hawthorn tree, kissing her hands wildly after him, with streaming eyes.

"I'll be sure to see you soon. I'd walk round the world barefoot to see my pretty man again," she kept crying after him; "and I'll bring the ninepins, I'll be sure. Mammy's comin', my darlin'."

And the receding figure of the little boy was turned toward her all it could. He was gazing over his shoulder, with cheeks streaming with tears, and his little hand waving yearningly back to her until he was out of sight. And after a while she turned back, and there was their ninepins' ground, and the tarn, and her sobs quickened almost to a scream; and she sat down on the stone bench under the window — for she could not bear to enter the dark cottage — and there, in Irish phrase, she cried her fill.

In the meantime Archdale and his companion, or prisoner — which you will — pursued their march. He still held the boy's wrist, and the boy cried and sobbed gently to himself all the way.

When they came down to the little hamlet called Maple Wickets he hired a boy to carry the carpet-bag to Wunning, four miles further on, where the Warhampton 'bus passes, as everybody knows, at halfpast twelve o'clock daily.

They resumed their march. The Sergeant was a serenely taciturn man. He no more thought of addressing the boy than he did of apostrophising the cane or the carpet-bag. He let him sob on, and neither snubbed nor consoled him, but carried his head serene and high, looking straight before him.

At length the novelty of the scene began to act upon the volatility of childhood.

As he walked by the Sergeant he began to prattle, at first timidly, and then more volubly.

The first instinct of the child is trust. It was a kind of consolation to the boy to talk a great deal of his home, and Tom Orange was of course mentioned with the usual inquiry, "Do you know Tom Orange?"

"Why so?"

Then followed the list of that facetious and brilliant person's accomplishments.

"And are we to go near a place called Wyvern or Carwell Grange?" asked the boy, whose memory, where his fancy was interested, was retentive.

"Why so?" again demanded the Sergeant, looking straight before him.

"Because Tom Orange told me there's the biggest mushroom in the world grown up there, and that the owner of the house can't get in, for it fills up the door."

"Tom Orange told you that?" demanded the Sergeant in the same way.

And the boy, supposing it incredulity on his part, assured him that Tom, who was truth itself, *had* told him so only yesterday.

The Sergeant said no more, and you could not have told in the least by his face that he had made a note of it and was going to "report" Tom Orange in the proper quarter. And in passing, I may mention that about three weeks later Tom Orange was peremptorily dismissed from his desultory employments under Mr. Archdale, and was sued for stealing apples from Warhampton orchard, and some minor peccadillos, and brought before the magistrates, among whom sat, as it so happened, on that occasion, Squire Fairfield of Wyvern, who was "precious hard on him," and got him in for more than a month with hard labour. The urchin hireling with the carpet-bag trudged on in front as the Sergeant-Major had commanded.

Our little friend, with many a sobbing sigh, and a great load at his heart, yet was looking about him.

They were crossing a moor with beautiful purple heather, such as he had never seen before. The Sergeant had let go his wrist. He felt more at his ease every way.

There were little pools of water here and there which attracted the boy's attention, and made him open his box of cork boats and peep at them. He wondered how they would sail in these dark little nooks, and at last, one lying very conveniently, he paused at its margin, and took out a ship and floated it, and another, and another. How quickly seconds fly and minutes.

He was roused by the distant voice of the Sergeant-Major shouting, "Hollo, you sir, come here."

He looked up. The Sergeant was consulting his big silver watch as he stood upon a little eminence of peat.

By the time he reached him the Sergeant had replaced it, and the two or three seals and watchkey he sported were dangling at the end of his chain upon his paunch. The Sergeant was standing with his heels together and the point of his cane close to the side of his boot.

"Come to the front," said the Sergeant.

"Give up that box," said he.

The boy placed it in his hand. He uncovered it, turned over the little navy with his fingers, and then jerked the box and its contents over the heath at his side.

"Don't pick one of 'em up," said he.

"Move half a pace to the right," was his next order.

His next command was —

"Hold out your hand."

The boy looked in his face, surprised.

The Sergeant's face looked not a bit angrier or a bit kinder than usual. Perfectly serene.

"Hold out your hand, sir."

He held it out, and the cane descended with a whistling cut across his fingers. Another. The boy's face flushed with pain, and his deadened hand sunk downward. An upward blow of the cane across his knuckles accompanied the command, "Hold it up, sir," and a third cut came down.

The Sergeant was strong, and could use his wrist dexterously.

"Hold out the other;" and the same discipline was repeated.

Mingled with and above the pain which called up the three great black weals across the slender fingers of each hand, was the sense of outrage and cruelty.

The tears sprang to his eyes, and for the first time in his life he cried passionately under that double anguish.

"Walk in front," said the Sergeant, serenely.

And squeezing and wringing his trembling hands together, the still writhing little fellow marched along the path, with a bitterer sense of desolation than ever.

The bus was late at Wunning; and a lady in it, struck by the beauty and sadness of the little boy's face, said some kind words, and seemed to take to him, he thought, with a tenderness that made his heart fuller; and it was a labour almost too great for him to keep down the rising sobs and the tears that were every moment on the point of flowing over. This good Samaritan bought a bag of what were called "Gingerbread nuts" — quite a little store; which Archdale declined leaving at the boy's discretion. But I am bound to say that they were served out to him, from day to day, with conscientious punctuality by the Sergeant-Major, who was strictly to be depended on in all matters of property; and would not have nibbled at one of those nuts though his thin lips had watered and not a soul had been near. He must have possessed a good many valuable military virtues, or he could not, I presume, have been where he was.

Noulton Farm is a melancholy but not an ugly place. There are a great many trees about it. They stand too near the windows. The house is small and old, and there is a small garden with a thick high hedge round it.

The members of the family were few. Miss Mary Archdale was ill when they arrived. She was the only child of the ex-Sergeant, who was a widower; and the new inmate of the house heard of her with a terror founded on his awe of her silent father.

They entered a small parlour, and the boy sat down in the chair indicated by the Sergeant. That person hung his hat on a peg in the hall, and placed his cane along the chimneypiece. Then he rang the bell.

The elderly woman who was the female staff of the kitchen entered. She looked frightened, as all that household did, in their master's presence, and watched him with an alarmed eye.

"Where's Miss Mary?"

"A-spitting blood, sir, please."

"Bring in supper," said the Sergeant.

The boy sat in fear at the very corner of the table. His grief would not let him eat, and he sipped a cup of tea that was too hot, and had neither milk nor sugar enough. The Sergeant snuffed his candle, and put on a pair of plated spectacles, and looked through his weekly paper.

While he was so employed there glided into the room a very slight girl, with large eyes and a very pale face. Her hair was brown and rich.

The hand with which she held her shawl across was very thin; and in her pale face and large eyes was a timid and imploring look that struck the little boy. She looked at him and he at her silently; her sad eyes lingered on his face for a moment, and he felt that he liked her.

She took a chair very softly and sat down without saying a word.

In a little while the Sergeant laid down his paper and looked at her. Her large eyes were raised toward him with timid expectation, but she did not speak.

"Not well just now?"

"No, sir."

"You take the bottle regularly?"

"Yes, sir."

"You'll be better in the morning belike."

"I'm sure I shall, sir."

He lighted a candle that stood on a side-table, and his dog Bion got up to attend him. It was a large pug-dog, gambouge-coloured, with a black nose. The boy often afterwards wished to play with Bion, and make his acquaintance. But he did not know how the attempt would be taken either by the dog or his master, and so he did not venture.

No caresses passed between the dog and the Sergeant. Each did his duty by the other, and they understood one another, I suppose, but no further signs of love appeared.

The Sergeant went out and shut the door, and the girl smiled very sweetly on the little guest, and put out her hand to welcome him.

“I’m very glad you are come here. I was very lonely. My father is gone to the workroom; he’s making an organ there, and he won’t come back till a quarter to nine. That’s an hour and three-quarters. Do you hear — listen.”

She raised her finger and looked toward the partition as she spoke, and he heard a booming of an organ through the wall.

“Tony blows the organ for him.”

Tony was a little boy from the workhouse, who cleaned knives, forks, shoes, and made himself generally useful, being the second servant, the only male one in their modest establishment.

“I wish I was better, I’m so out of breath talking. We’ll be very happy now. That’s tuning the pipes — that one’s wolving. I used to blow the bellows for him, but the doctor says I must not, and indeed I couldn’t now. You must eat something and drink more tea, and we’ll be great friends, shan’t we?”

So they talked a great deal, she being obliged to stop often for breath, and he could see that she was very weak, and also that she stood in indescribable awe of her father. But she said, “He’s a very good man, and he works very hard to earn his money, but he does not talk, and that makes people afraid of him. He won’t be back here until he comes here to read the Bible and prayers at a quarter to nine.”

So she talked on, but all the time in an undertone, and listening every now and then for the boom of the pipes, and the little boy opened his heart to her and wept bitterly, and she cried too, silently, as he went on, and they became very near friends. She looked as if she understood his griefs. Perhaps her own resembled them.

The old woman came in and took away the tea things, and shortly after the Sergeant entered and read the chapter and the prayers.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SILENT FAREWELL.

At Noulton Farm each day was like its brother. Inflexible hours, inflexible duties, all proceeded with a regimental punctuality. At meals not a word was spoken, and while the master of the house was in it, all conversation was carried on, even in remote rooms, in an undertone.

Our little friend used to see the workhouse boy at prayers, morning and evening, and occasionally to pass his pale disquieted face on the stairs or lobbies when his duties brought him there. They eyed one another wistfully, but dared not speak. Mr. Archdale had so ordained it.

That workhouse boy — perhaps he was inefficient, perhaps too much was expected from him — but he had the misfortune perpetually to incur — I can hardly say his master's displeasure, for the word implies something emotional, whereas nothing could be at all times more tranquil and cold than that master — but his correction.

These awful proceedings occurred almost daily, and were conducted with the absolute uniformity which characterised the system of Noulton Farm. At eleven o'clock the cold voice of the Sergeant-Major called "Tony!" and Tony appeared, writhing and whimpering by anticipation.

"My cane," said the master, stepping into the room which he called the workshop, where the organ, half finished, stood, stop-diapason, dulciana, and the rest in deal rows, with white chips, chisels, lead, saws, and glue-pots, in industrious disorder, round. Then Tony's pale, miserable face was seen in the "parlour," and Miss Mary would look down on the floor in pale silence, and our little friend's heart would flutter over his lesson book as he saw the lank boy steal over to the chimneypiece, and take down the cane, and lingeringly disappear.

Then was heard the door of the workshop close, and then very faint the cold clear voice of the master. Then faint and slow the measured cut of the cane, and the whine of the boy rising to a long hideous yell, and "Oh, sir, dear — oh, sir, dear; oh, Mr. Archdale, oh, master, dear, oh, master, dear!" And this sometimes so protracted that Mary used to get up and walk round the room in a kind of agony whispering— “Oh, poor boy. Oh, poor Tony. Oh mercy — oh goodness. Oh! my good Lord, when will it be over!” And, sitting apart, the little boy’s eyes as they followed her would fill with tears of horror.

The little fellow said lessons to Mr. Archdale. There was nothing unreasonable in their length, and his friend Mary helped him. It was well for him, however, that he was a bright little fellow, with a good memory, for the Sergeant was not a teacher to discriminate between idleness and dulness.

No one ever heard Mr. Archdale use a violent expression, or utter a curse. He was a silent, cold, orderly person, and I think the most cruel man I ever saw in my life.

He had a small active horse, and a gig, in which he drove upon his outdoor business. He had fixed days and hours for everything, except where he meditated a surprise.

One day the Sergeant-Major entered the room where the boy was reading at his lessons, and, tapping him on the shoulder, put the county newspaper into his hand; and, pointing to a paragraph, desired him to read it, and left the room.

It was a report of the proceedings against Tom Orange, and gave a rather disreputable character of that amusing person. There was a great pain at the boy’s affectionate heart as he read the hard words dealt to his old friend, and worse still, the sentence. He was crying silently when the Sergeant returned. That stern man took the paper, and said in his cold terrible tones —

“You’ve read that?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And understand it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“If I find you speaking to Thomas Orange I’ll tie you up in the workshop, and give you five dozen.” And with this promise he serenely left him.

Children are unsuspicious of death, and our little friend, who every night used to cry in his bed silently, with a bursting heart, thinking of his mammy and old happy times, till he fell asleep in the dark, never dreamed that his poor friend Mary was dying — she, perhaps, herself did not think so any more than he, but every one else said it.

They two grew to be great friends. Each had a secret, and she trusted hers to the little friend whom God had sent her.

It was the old story — the troubled course of true love. Willie Fairlace was the hero. The Sergeant-Major had found it all out, and locked up his daughter, and treated her, it was darkly rumoured, with cruel severity.

He was proud of his daughter's beauty, and had ambitious plans, I dare say; and he got up Willie's farm, and Willie was ruined, and had enlisted and was gone.

The Sergeant-Major knew the postoffice people in the village, and the lovers dared not correspond directly. But Willie's cousin, Mrs. Page, heard from him regularly, and there were long messages to Mary. His letters were little else. And *now at last* had come a friend to bear her messages to trusty Mrs. Page, and to carry his back again to Noulton Farm.

After her father had gone out, or in the evening when he was at the organ in the "workshop," and sometimes as, wrapped in her cloak, on a genial evening, she sat on the rustic seat under the great ash tree, and the solemn and plaintive tones of the distant organ floated in old church music from the open window through the trees and down the fragrant field toward the sunset sky, filling the air with grand and melancholy harmony, she would listen to that whispered message of the boy's, looking far away, and weeping, and holding the little fellow's hand, and asking him to say it over again, and telling him she felt better, and thanking him, and smiling and crying bitterly.

One evening the Sergeant was at his organ-pipes as usual. The boy as he stood in the garden at his task, watering the parched beds, heard a familiar laugh at the hedge, and the well-known refrain —

"Tag-rag-merry-derry-perrywig and hatband-hic-hoc-horum-genetivo!"

It was Tom Orange himself!

In spite of his danger the boy was delighted. He ran to the hedge, and he and Tom, in a moment more, were actually talking.

It became soon a very serious conversation. The distant booming of the organ-pipes assured him that the light grey eye and sharp ear of the Sergeant were occupied still elsewhere.

Tom Orange was broaching a dreadful conspiracy.

It was no less than that the boy should meet him at the foot of the field where the two oziers grow, at eleven o'clock, on the night following, and run away with him, and see mammy again, and come to a nice place where he should be as happy as the day is long, and mammy live with him always, and Tom look in as often as his own more important business would permit.

"I will, Tom," said the boy, wildly and very pale.

"And oh! Tom, I was so sorry about the trial, and what lies they told," said the boy, after they had talked a little longer; "and saying that you had been with gipsies, and were a poacher; and oh! Tom, is mammy quite well?"

"Yes."

"And all my ships were lost on the moor; and how is little Toozie the cat?"

"Very well; blooming — blushing."

"And, Tom, *you* are quite well?"

"Never better, as I lately told Squire Harry Fairfield; and mind ye, I'll be even yet with the old boy in there," and he indicated the house with a jerk of his thumb.

"I don't hear the organ, Tom. Goodbye."

And Tom was off in a moment, and the boy had resumed his watering-pot. And that evening he sat down with, for the first time, a tremendous secret at his heart.

There was one grief even in the hope of his liberation. When he looked at poor Mary, and thought how lonely she would be. Oh! if poor Mary could come with him! But some time or other he and Tom would come and take her away, and she would live with him and mammy, and be one of that happy family.

She did not know what thoughts were in the boy's mind as his sad earnest eyes were fixed on her, and she smiled with a little languid nod.

But he need not have grieved his gentle heart on this account. There was not to be a seeming desertion of his friend; nor anything she could mistake for a treacherous slight.

That morning, at two o'clock, Mary died.

About ten minutes before an alarm from the old servant who slept in the room called up her father.

Her faithful little friend was on his knees sobbing beside the bed, with her wasted hand in his, as the Sergeant-Major, hastily dressed, walked in, and stood by the curtain looking down into those large deep eyes. She was conscious, though she could not speak. She saw, as she looked up her last look, a few sullen drops gather in those proud eyes, and roll down his cheeks. Perhaps the sad, wondering look with which she returned these signs of tenderness, smote him, and haunted him afterwards. There was a little motion in her right hand as if she would have liked him to take it — in sign of reconciliation — and with those faint tokens of the love that might have been, the change of death came, and the troubled little heart was still, and the image of Willie Fairlace was lost in the great darkness.

Then the little boy cried aloud wildly —

“Oh! Mary, pretty Mary. Oh! Mary, are you dead? Oh! isn’t it a pity; isn’t it a pity! Oh! is she dead?”

The Sergeant dried his eyes hastily. He hoped, I dare say, that no one had seen his momentary weakness. He drew a long breath. With a stern face he closed the pretty eyes that Willie Fairlace, far away now, will never forget; and closed the little mouth that never will complain, or sigh, or confess its sad tale more.

“You had better get to your room, boy. Get to your bed,” said the Sergeant, not ungently laying his hand on the boy’s shoulder. “You’ll take cold. Give him a candle.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE MARCH BY NIGHT.

The next day the Sergeant was away in his gig to Wyvern, a long journey, to report to the Squire, and obtain leave of absence from his duties for a day or two. He was to spend that night at Hatherton, there to make arrangements about the funeral.

It was a relief to all at Noulton Farm, I need hardly say, when the master of the house was away.

A very sad day it was for the boy; a day whose gloom was every now and then crossed by the thrill and fear of a great excitement.

As evening darkened he went out again to the garden in the hope of seeing Tom Orange. He would have liked that cheer at the eve of his great venture. But Tom was not there. Neither counsel nor encouragement to be heard; nothing but the song of the small birds among the leaves, and the late flowers, soon to close, peeping from among the garden plants, and the long quiet shadows of the poplars that stood so tall and still against the western sky.

The boy came in and had his lonely cup of tea in the "parlour," and a little talk with the somewhat sour and sad old servant. He was longing for the night. Yearning to see Tom's friendly face and to end his suspense.

At last the twilight was gone. The night had indeed come, and the moon shone serenely over the old gray roof and the solemn trees; over the dead and the living.

The boy lay down in his bed at the accustomed early hour. The old woman had taken away his candle and shut the door. He lay with his eyes wide open listening with a palpitating heart for every sound.

The inflexible regularity which the absent master had established in his household was in the boy's favour. He heard the servant shut and bar the outer door at the wonted hour. He saw the boy's candle in his window for a while and then put out. Tony was in his bed, and for tired Tony to lie down was generally to be asleep.

Peeping stealthily from his lattice he saw the old servant's candle glimmering redly through the window on the juniper that stood near the wall in the shadow; and soon that light also disappeared, and he knew that the old woman had gone into her room. It was halfpast ten. She would be asleep in a quarter of an hour, and in another fifteen minutes his critical adventure would have commenced.

Stealthily, breathlessly, he dressed. His window looked toward the ozier trees, where Tom was to await him. It opened, lattice fashion, with a hinge.

Happily the night was still, and the process of preparing to descend perfectly noiseless. The piece of old rope that lay in the corner he had early fixed on as his instrument of escape. He made it fast to the bedpost, and began to let himself down the wall. The rope was too short, and he dangled in air from the end of it for a second or two, and then dropped to the ground. The distance of the fall, though not much, was enough to throw him from his feet, and the dog in the lock-up yard at the other side of the house began to bark angrily. For a minute the boy gave himself up.

He lay, however, perfectly still, and the barking subsided. There was no other alarm, and he stole very softly away under cover of the trees, and then faster down the slope toward the appointed oziers.

There indeed was Tom Orange in that faint light, more solemn than he ever remembered to have seen him before. Tom was thinking that the stealing away this boy might possibly turn out the most serious enterprise he had yet engaged in.

He had no notion, however, of receding, and merely telling the boy to follow him, he got into a swinging trot that tried the little fellow's endurance rather severely. I think they ran full three miles before Tom came to a halt.

Then, more like himself, he inquired how he was, and whether he thought he could go on fifteen miles more that night.

"Oh, yes, he could do anything that night. Quite well."

"Well, walk a bit that you may get breath, and then we'll run again," said Tom, and so they set forward once more.

They had now accomplished about four miles more. The little fellow was not so fresh as at starting. A drizzling rain, too, had commenced, with a cold change of wind, and altogether the mere adventure of running away was not quite so pleasant, nor even Tom's society quite so agreeable on the occasion, as he had fancied.

"You have done four out of the fifteen; you have only eleven of the fifteen before you now. You have got over seven altogether up to this. Not so bad. You're not tired, youngster?"

"Not the least."

"That's right. You're a good soldier. Now come, we'll stand close under this hedge and eat a bit."

They supped very heartily on great slices of bread and corned beef, which bore ample traces of the greens in which it had been served when hot.

"And now, boy, you must get on to Hatherton by yourself, for I'm known about here, and there's a fair there in the morning, and there will be people on the way before light. You must go a mile beyond the town, to the George public. Mrs. Gumford keeps it, and there I'll meet you." Then he detailed the route and the landmarks for the boy's guidance. "Take a drink of this," said he, pulling a soda-water bottle full of milk out of his coat pocket.

And when he had done —

"Take a mouthful of this, my hero, it will keep you warm."

And he placed a flask of brandy to the boy's lips, and made him swallow a little.

"And here's a bit more bread, if you should be hungry. Good night, and remember."

After about an hour's solitary walking, the boy began to grow alarmed. Tom's landmarks failed him, and he began to fear that he had lost his way. In half an hour more he was sure that he was quite out of his reckoning, and as his spirits sank he began to feel the cold wind and drenching rain more and more.

And now he found himself entering a town not at all answering Tom's description of Hatherton.

The little town was silent, its doors and windows shut, and all except a few oldfashioned oil-lamps dark.

After walking listlessly about — afraid to knock and ask anywhere for shelter — worn out, he sat down on a doorstep. He leaned back and soon fell fast asleep.

A shake by the shoulder roused him. A policeman was stooping over him.

"I say, get up out o' that," said the imperious voice of the policeman.

The boy was not half awake; he stared at him, his big face and leather-bound chimney-pot looked like a dream.

"I say," he continued, shaking him, but not violently, "you must get up out o' that. You're not to be making yourself comfortable there all night. Come, be lively."

Comfortable! Lively! — all comparative — all a question of degrees.

The boy got up as quickly as the cold and stiffness of his joints would let him.

Very dutifully he got up, and stood drenched, pale, and shivering in the moonlight.

The policeman looked down not unkindly now, at the little wayfarer. There was something piteous, I dare say. He looked a grave, thoughtful man, of more than fifty, and he put his hand on the child's shoulder.

"Ye see, boy, that was no place to sleep in."

"No, sir, I'll never do it again, sir, please."

"You're cold; you'd get pains in your bones."

"I'll not any more, sir, please."

"Come with me, my boy, it's only a step."

He brought the boy into his house down the lane close by.

"There's a fire. You warm yourself. There's my little one in fever, so you can't stop long. Sit down, child, and warm yourself."

He gave him a drink of hot milk and a piece of bread.

"You don't get up, you know; there's no need," he added.

I think he was afraid of his pewter spoons. He kept the little fellow nearly half an hour, and he lent him an old bottomless sack to wrap about his shoulders, and charged him to bring it back in the morning. I think the man thought he might be a thief. He was a kind man — there was a balancing of great pity and suspicion.

The boy returned the sack with many thanks, in the first faint twilight of morning, and set forth again for Hatherton. It was, the fellow who directed him said, still five miles on.

At about a mile from Hatherton, cold and wet, and fearing to be too early at the George Inn, the rendezvous agreed on, the tired little fellow crept in, cold and wet, to a roadside pot-house.

At the fire of the ale-house three fellows were drinking beer. Says one who had now and then had his eye on the boy —

“That boy there has run away from school.”

I cannot describe the terror with which the little fellow heard those words. The other two looked at him. One was a fat fellow in breeches and top boots, and a red cloth waistcoat, and a ruddy goodhumoured face; and after a look they returned to their talk; and in a little while the lean man, who seemed to find it hard to take his eyes off him, said, “That’s a runaway, that chap; we ought to tell the police and send him back to school.”

“Well, that’s no business of ours; can’t you let him be?” said the red waistcoat.

“Come here,” said the lean man, beckoning him over with his hard eye on him.

He rose and slowly approached under that dreadful command.

I can’t say that there was anything malevolent in that man’s face. Somewhat sharp and stern, with a lean inflexibility of duty. To the boy at this moment no face could have been imagined more terrific; his only hope was in his fat companion. He turned, I am sure, an imploring look upon him.

“Come, Irons, let the boy alone, unless ye mean to quarrel wi’ me; d — me ye *shall* let him alone! And get him his breakfast of something hot, and be lively,” he called to the people; “and score it up to me.”

So, thanks to that good Samaritan in top boots and red waistcoat, the dejected little man pursued his way comforted.

As he walked through Hatherton he was looking into a shop window listlessly, when he distinctly saw, reflected in the plate glass, that which appalled him so that he thought he should have fainted.

It was the marble, blue-chinned face of the Sergeant-Major looking over his shoulder, with his icy gray eyes, into the same window.

He was utterly powerless to move. His great eyes were fixed on that dreadful shadow. He was actually touching his shoulder as he leaned over. Happily the Sergeant did not examine the reflection, which he would have been sure to recognise. The bird fascinated by the cold eye of a snake, and expecting momentarily, with palpitating heart, the spring of the reptile, may feel, when, withdrawing the spell, it glides harmlessly away, as the boy did when he saw that dreaded man turn away and walk with measured tread up the street. For a moment his terror was renewed, for Bion, that yellow namesake of the philosopher, recognising him, stood against the boy’s leg, and scratched repeatedly, and gave him a shove with his nose, and whimpered. The boy turned quickly, and walking away the dog left him, and ran after his master, and took his place at his side.

CONCLUSION.

At the George Inn, a little way out of Hatherton, the boy, to his inexpressible delight, at last found Tom Orange.

He told Tom at once of his adventure at the shop window, and the occurrence darkened Tom’s countenance. He peeped out and took a long look toward Hatherton.

“Put the horse to the fly and bring it round at once,” said Tom, who put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a rather showy handful of silver.

I don’t pretend to say, when Tom was out of regular employment, from what pursuits exactly he drew his revenue. They had rather improved than otherwise; but I dare say there were anxious compensations.

The boy had eaten his breakfast before he reached Hatherton. So much the better; for the apparition of the Sergeant-Major would have left him totally without appetite. As it was, he was in an agony to be gone, every moment expecting to see him approach the little inn to arrest him and Tom.

Tom Orange was uneasy, I am sure, and very fidgety till the fly came round.

“You know Squire Fairfield of Wyvern?” said the hostess, while they were waiting.

“Ay,” said Tom.

“Did you hear the news?”

“What is it?”

“Shot the night before last in a row with poachers. Gentlemen should leave that sort o’ work to their keepers; but they was always a fightin’ wild lot, them Fairfields; and he’s lyin’ now a dead man — all the same — gave over by Doctor Willett and another — wi’ a whole charge o’ duck-shot lodged under his shoulder.”

“And that’s the news?” said Tom, raising his eyes and looking through the door. He had been looking down on the ground as Mrs. Gumford of the George told her story.

“There’s sharp fellows poachers round there, I’m told,” he said, “next time he’d a’ been out himself with the keepers to take ‘em dead or alive. I suppose that wouldn’t answer *them*.”

“’Tis a wicked world, said the lady.

"D — d wicked," said Tom. "Here's the fly."

In they got and drove off.

Tom was gloomy, and very silent.

"Tom, where are we going to?" asked the boy at last.

"All right," said Tom. "All right, my young master. You'll find it's to none but good friends. And, say now — Haven't I been a good friend to you, Master Harry, all your days, sir? Many a mile that you know nothing about has Tom Orange walked on your business, and down to the cottage and back again; and where would you or her have been if it wasn't for poor Tom Orange?"

"Yes, indeed, Tom, and I love you, Tom."

"And now, I've took you away from that fellow, and I'm told I'm likely to be hanged for it. Well, no matter."

"Oh, Tom; poor Tom! Oh! no, no, no!" and he threw his arms round Tom's neck in a paroxysm of agonised affection, and, in spite of the jolting, kissed Tom; sometimes on the cheek, on the eyebrow, on the chin, and in a great jolt violently on the rim of his hat, and it rolled over his shoulder under their feet.

"Well, that is gratifyin'," said Tom, drying his eyes. "There is some reward for *principle* after all, and if you come to be a great man some o' these days, you'll not forget poor Tom Orange, that would have spent his last bob and spilt his heart's blood, without fee or reward, in your service."

Another explosion of friendship from the boy assured Tom of his eternal gratitude.

"Do you know this place, sir?" asked Tom, with a return of his old manner, as making a sudden turn the little carriage drove through an open gate, and up to a large oldfashioned house. A carriage was waiting at the door.

There could be no mistake. How delightful! and who was that? Mammy! at the hall door, and in an instant they were locked in one another's arms, and "Oh! the darlin'," and "Mammy, mammy, mammy!" were the only words audible, half stifled in sobs and kisses.

In a minute more there came into the hall — smiling, weeping, and with hands extended toward him, the pretty lady dressed in black, and her weeping grew into a wild cry, as coming quickly she caught him to her heart. “My darling, my child, my blessed boy, you’re the image — Oh! darling, I loved you the moment I saw you, and now I know it all.”

The boy was worn out. His march, including his divergence from his intended route, had not been much less than thirty miles, and all in chill and wet.

They got him to his bed and made him thoroughly comfortable, and with mammy at his bedside, and her hand, to make quite sure of her, fast in his, he fell into a deep sleep.

Alice had already heard enough to convince her of the boy’s identity, but an urgent message from Harry, who was dying, determined her to go at once to Wyvern to see him, as he desired. So, leaving the boy in charge of “mammy,” she was soon on her way to the old seat of the Fairfields.

If Harry had not known that he was dying, no power could ever have made him confess the story he had to tell.

There were two points on which he greatly insisted.

The first was, that believing that his brother was really married to Bertha Velderkaust, he was justified in holding that his nephew had no legal right to succeed.

The second was, that he had resolved, although he might have wavered lately a little, never to marry, and to educate the boy better than ever he was educated himself, and finally to make him heir to Wyvern, pretending him to be an illegitimate son of his own.

Whether the Sergeant-Major knew more than he was ordered or undertook to know, he never gave the smallest ground to conjecture. He stated exactly what had passed between him and Harry Fairfield. By him he was told that the child which was conveyed to Marjory Trevellian’s care was his own unacknowledged son.

On the very same evening, and when old Mildred Tarnley was in the house at Twyford, was a child taken, with the seeds of consumption already active in it, from a workhouse in another part of England and placed there as the son of Charles Fairfield and Alice. It was when, contrary to all assurances, this child appeared for a few days to rally, and the situation consequent on its growing up the reputed heir to Wyvern alarmed Harry, that he went over, in his panic, to the Grange, and there opened his case, that the child at Twyford was a changeling, and not his brother’s son.

When, however, the child began to sink, and its approaching death could no longer be doubtful, he became, as we have seen, once more quite clear that the baby was the same which he had taken away from Carwell Grange.

Dr. Willett's seeing the child so often at Twyford, also prevented suspicion, though illogically enough, for had they reflected they might easily have remembered that the doctor had hardly seen the child twice after its birth while at the Grange, and that, like every one else, he took its identity for granted when he saw it at Twyford.

Alice returned greatly agitated late that evening. No difficulty any longer remained, and the boy, with ample proof to sustain his claim, was accepted as the undoubted heir to Wyvern, and the representative of the ancient family of Fairfield.

The boy, Henry Fairfield, was as happy as mortal can be, henceforward. His little playmate, the pretty little girl whom Alice had adopted, who called her "mamma," and yet was the daughter of a distant cousin only, has now grown up, and is as a girl even more beautiful than she was as a child. Henry will be of age in a few months, and they are then to be married. They now reside at Wyvern. The estate, which has long been at nurse, is now clear, and has funded money beside.

Everything promises a happy and a prosperous reign for the young Fairfield.

Mildred Tarnley, very old, is made comfortable at Carwell Grange.

Good old Dulcibella is still living, very happy, and very kind, but grown a little huffy, being perhaps a little over petted. In all other respects, the effect of years being allowed for, she is just what she always was.

Tom Orange, with a very handsome sum presented by those whom he had served, preferred Australia to the old country.

Harry Fairfield had asserted, in his vehement way, while lying in his last hours at Wyvern, that the fellow with the handkerchief over his face who shot him was, he could all but swear, his old friend Tom Orange.

Tom swore that had he lived he would have prosecuted him for slander. As it is, that eccentric genius has prospered as the proprietor of a monster tavern at Melbourne, where there is comic and sentimental singing, and some dramatic buffooneries, and excellent devilled kidneys and brandy.

Marjory Trevellian lives with the family at Wyvern, and I think if kind old Lady Wyndale were still living the consolations of Alice would be nearly full.

THE END

CHECKMATE

First published in three volumes by Hurst and Blackett in 1871, *Checkmate* is Le Fanu's attempt to rewrite the basic plot of his first novel, *The Cock and Anchor*, in the style of the sensation thriller, so fashionable during the mid-Victorian period. The plot once more surrounds the tribulations of a young lady who finds herself pressured into marrying against her wishes, this time to the unsavoury Walter Longcluse – the disfigured villain at the heart of the novel's central mystery.

The original frontispiece image

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CHAPTER I.

MORTLAKE HALL.

There stands about a mile and a half beyond Islington, unless it has come down within the last two years, a singular and grand old house. It belonged to the family of Arden, once distinguished in the Northumbrian counties. About fifty acres of ground, rich with noble clumps and masses of old timber, surround it; old-world fish-ponds, with swans sailing upon them, tall yew hedges, quincunxes, leaden fauns and goddesses, and other obsolete splendours surround it. It rises, tall, florid, built of Caen stone, with a palatial flight of steps, and something of the grace and dignity of the genius of Inigo Jones, to whom it is ascribed, with the shadows of ancestral trees and the stains of two centuries upon it, and a vague character of gloom and melancholy, not improved by some indications not actually of decay, but of something too like neglect.

It is now evening, and a dusky glow envelopes the scene. The setting sun throws its level beams, through tall drawingroom windows, ruddily upon the Dutch tapestry on the opposite walls, and not unbecomingly lights up the little party assembled there.

Goodnatured, fat Lady May Penrose, in her bonnet, sips her tea and chats agreeably. Her carriage waits outside. You will ask who is that extremely beautiful girl who sits opposite, her large soft grey eyes gazing towards the western sky with a look of abstraction, too forgetful for a time of her company, leaning upon the slender hand she has placed under her cheek. How silken and golden-tinted the dark brown hair that grows so near her brows, making her forehead low, and marking with its broad line the beautiful oval of her face! Is there carmine anywhere to match her brilliant lips? And when, recollecting something to tell Lady May, she turns on a sudden, smiling, how soft and pretty the dimples, and how even the little row of pearls she discloses!

This is Alice Arden, whose singularly handsome brother Richard, with some of her tints and outlines translated into masculine beauty, stands leaning on the back of a prie-dieu chair, and chatting gaily.

But who is the thin, tall man — the only sinister figure in the group — with one hand in his breast, the other on a cabinet, as he leans against the wall? Who is that pale, thin-lipped man, “with cadaverous aspect and broken beak,” whose eyes never seem to light up, but maintain their dismal darkness while his pale lips smile? Those eyes are fixed on the pretty face of Alice Arden, as she talks to Lady May, with a strangely intense gaze. His eyebrows rise a little, like those of Mephistopheles, towards his temples, with an expression that is inflexibly sarcastic, and sometimes menacing. His jaw is slightly underhung, a formation which heightens the satirical effect of his smile, and, by contrast, marks the depression of his nose.

There was at this time in London a Mr. Longcluse, an agreeable man, a convenient man, who had got a sort of footing in many houses, nobody exactly knew how. He had a knack of obliging people when they really wanted a trifling kindness, and another of holding fast his advantage, and, without seeming to push, or ever appearing to flatter, of maintaining the acquaintance he had once founded. He looked about eight-and-thirty: he was really older. He was gentlemanlike, clever, and rich; but not a soul of all the men who knew him had ever heard of him at school or college. About his birth, parentage, and education, about his “life and adventures,” he was dark.

How were his smart acquaintance made? Oddly, as we shall learn when we know him a little better. It was a great pity that there were some odd things said about this very agreeable, obliging, and gentlemanlike person. It was a pity that more was not known about him. The man had enemies, no doubt, and from the sort of reserve that enveloped him their opportunity arose. But were there not about town hundreds of men, well enough accepted, about whose early days no one cared a pin, and everything was just as dark?

Now Mr. Longcluse, with his pallid face, his flat nose, his sarcastic eyebrows, and thin-lipped smile, was overlooking this little company, his shoulder leaning against the frame that separated two pieces of the pretty Dutch tapestry which covered the walls.

“By-the-bye, Mr. Longcluse — you can tell me, for you always know everything,” said Lady May— “is there still any hope of that poor child’s recovering — I mean the one in that dreadful murder in Thames Street, where the six poor little children were stabbed?”

Mr. Longcluse smiled.

"I'm so glad, Lady May, I can answer you upon good authority! I stopped to-day to ask Sir Edwin Dudley that very question through his carriage window, and he said that he had just been to the hospital to see the poor little thing, and that it was likely to do well."

"I'm so glad! And what do they say can have been the motive of the murder?"

"Jealousy, they say; or else the man is mad."

"I should not wonder. I'm sure I hope he is. But they should take care to put him under lock and key."

"So they will, rely on it; that's a matter of course."

"I don't know how it is," continued Lady May, who was garrulous, "that murders interest people so much, who ought to be simply shocked at them."

"We have a murder in our family, you know," said Richard Arden.

"That was poor Henry Arden — I know," she answered, lowering her voice and dropping her eyes, with a side glance at Alice, for she did not know how she might like to hear it talked of.

"Oh, that happened when Alice was only five months old, I think," said Richard; and slipping into the chair beside Lady May, he laid his hand upon hers with a smile, and whispered, leaning towards her —

"You are always so thoughtful; it is *so* nice of you!"

And this short speech ended, his eyes remained fixed for some seconds, with a glow of tender admiration, on those of fat Lady May, who simpered with effusion, and did not draw her hand away until she thought she saw Mr. Longcluse glance their way.

It was quite true, all he said of Lady May. It would not be easy to find a simpler or more goodnatured person. She was very rich also, and, it was said by people who love news and satire, had long been willing to share her gold and other chattels with handsome Richard Arden, who being but five-and-twenty, might very nearly have been her son.

"I remember that horrible affair," said Mr. Longcluse, with a little shrug and a shake of his head. "Where was I then — Paris or Vienna? Paris it was. I recollect it all now, for my purse was stolen by the very man who made his escape — Mace was his name; he was a sort of low man on the turf, I believe. I was very young then — somewhere about seventeen, I think."

"You can't have been more, of course," said goodnatured Lady May.

"I should like very much some time to hear all about it," continued Mr. Longcluse.

"So you shall," said Richard, "whenever you like."

"Every old family has a murder, and a ghost, and a beauty also, though she does not always live and breathe, except in the canvas of Lely, or Kneller, or Reynolds: and they, you know, had roses and lilies to give away at discretion, in their paint-boxes, and were courtiers," remarked Mr. Longcluse, "who dealt sometimes in the oldfashioned business of making compliments. *I* say happy the man who lives in those summers when the loveliness of some beautiful family culminates, and who may, at ever such a distance, gaze and worship."

This ugly man spoke in a low tone, and his voice was rather sweet. He looked as he spoke at Miss Arden, from whom, indeed, his eyes did not often wander.

"Very prettily said!" applauded Lady May affably.

"I forgot to ask you, Lady May," inquired Alice, cruelly, at this moment, "how the pretty little Italian greyhound is that was so ill — better, I hope."

"Ever so much — quite well almost. I'd have taken him out for a drive to-day, poor dear little Pepsie! but that I thought the sun just a little overpowering. Didn't you?"

"Perhaps a little."

Mr. Longcluse lowered his eyes as he leaned against the wall and sighed, with a pained smile, that even upon his plain, pallid face, was pathetic.

Did proud Richard Arden perceive the devotion of the dubious Longcluse — undefined in position, in history, in origin, in character, in all things but in wealth? Of course he did, perfectly. But that wealth was said to be enormous. There were Jews, who ought to know, who said he was worth one million eight hundred thousand pounds, and that his annual income was considerably more than a hundred thousand pounds a year.

Was a man like that to be dismissed without inquiry? Had he not found him goodnatured and gentlemanlike? What about those stories circulated among Jews and croupiers? Enemies might affect to believe them, and quote the old saw, "There is never smoke without fire;" but dare one of them utter a word of the kind aloud? Did they stand the test of five minutes' inquiry, such even as he had given them? Had he found a particle of proof, of evidence, of suspicion? Not a spark. What man had ever escaped stories who was worth forging a lie about?

Here was a man worth more than a million. Why, if *he* let him slip through his fingers, some duchess would pounce on him for her daughter.

It was well that Longcluse was really in love — well, perhaps, that he did not appreciate the social omnipotence of money.

"Where is Sir Reginald at present?" asked Lady May.

"Not here, you may be sure," answered Richard. "My father does not admit my visits, you know."

"Really! And is that miserable quarrel kept up still?"

"Only too true. He is in France at present; at Vichy — ain't it Vichy?" he said to Alice.

But she, not choosing to talk, said simply, "Yes — Vichy."

"I'm going to take Alice into town again; she has promised to stay with me a little longer. And I think you neglect her a little, don't you? You ought to come and see her a little oftener," pleaded Lady May, in an undertone.

"I only feared I was boring you all. Nothing, *you* know, would give me half so much pleasure," he answered.

"Well, then, she'll expect your visits, mind."

A little silence followed. Richard was vexed with his sister; she was, he thought, snubbing his friend Longcluse.

Well, when once he had spoken his mind and disclosed his treasures, Richard flattered himself he had some influence; and did not Lady May swear by Mr. Longcluse? And was his father, the most despotic and violent of baronets, and very much dipt, likely to listen to sentimental twaddle pleading against a hundred thousand a year? So, Miss Alice, if you were disposed to talk nonsense, it was not very likely to be listened to, and sharp and short logic might ensue.

How utterly unconscious of all this she sits there, thinking, I daresay, of quite another person!

Mr. Longcluse was also for a moment in profound reverie; so was Richard Arden. The secrecy of thought is a pleasant privilege to the thinker — perhaps hardly less a boon to the person pondered upon.

If each man's forehead could project its shadows and the light of his spirit shine through, and the confluence of figures and phantoms that cross and march behind it become visible, how that magic-lantern might appal good easy people!

And now the ladies fell to talking and comparing notes about their guipure lacework.

"How charming yours looks, my dear, round that little table!" exclaimed Lady May in a rapture. "I'm sure I hope mine may turn out half as pretty. I wanted to compare; I'm not quite sure whether it is exactly the same pattern."

And so on, until it was time for them to order their wings for town.

The gentlemen have business of their own to transact, or pleasures to pursue. Mr. Longcluse has his trap there, to carry them into town when their hour comes. They can only put the ladies into their places, and bid them goodbye, and exchange parting reminders and goodnatured speeches.

Pale Mr. Longcluse, as he stands on the steps, looks with his dark eyes after the disappearing carriage, and sighs deeply. He has forgotten all for the moment but one dream. Richard Arden wakens him, by laying his hand on his shoulder.

"Come, Longcluse, let us have a cigar in the billiard-room, and a talk. I have a box of Manillas that I think you will say are delicious — that is, if you like them full-flavoured."

CHAPTER II.

MARTHA TANSEY.

"By-the-bye, Longcluse," said Richard, as they entered together the long tiled passage that leads to the billiard-room, "you like pictures. There is one here, banished to the housekeeper's room, that they say is a Vandyck; we must have it cleaned and backed, and restored to its old place — but would you care to look at it?"

"Certainly, I should like extremely," said Mr. Longcluse.

They were now at the door of the housekeeper's room, and Richard Arden knocked.

"Come in," said the quavering voice of the old woman from within.

Richard Arden opened the door wide. The misty rose-coloured light of the setting sun filled the room. From the wall right opposite, the pale portrait of Sir Thomas Arden, who fought for the king during the great Civil War, looked forth from his deep dingy frame full upon them, stern and melancholy; the misty beams touching the softer lights of his long hair and the gleam of his armour so happily, that the figure came out from its dark background, and seemed ready to step forth to meet them. As it happened, there was no one in the room but old Mrs. Tansey, the housekeeper, who received Richard Arden standing.

From the threshold, Mr. Longcluse, lost in wonder at the noble picture, gazed on it, with the exclamation, almost a cry, "Good heaven! what a noble work! I had no idea there could be such a thing in existence and so little known." And he stood for awhile in a rapture, gazing from the threshold on the portrait.

At sound of that voice, with a vague and terrible recognition, the housekeeper turned with a start towards the door, expecting, you'd have fancied from her face, the entrance of a ghost. There was a tremble in the voice with which she cried, "Lord! what's that?" a tremble in the hand extended towards the door, and a shake also in the pale frowning face, from which shone her glassy eyes.

Mr. Longcluse stepped in, and the old woman's gaze became, as he did so, more shrinking and intense. When he saw her he recoiled, as a man might who had all but trod upon a snake; and these two people gazed at one another with a strange, uncertain scowl.

In Mr. Longcluse's case, this dismal caprice of countenance did not last beyond a second or two. Richard Arden, as he turned his eyes from the picture to say a word to his companion, saw it for a moment, and it faded from his features — saw it, and the darkened countenance of the old housekeeper, with a momentary shock. He glanced from one to the other quickly, with a look of unconscious surprise. That look instantly recalled Mr. Longcluse, who, laying his hand on Richard Arden's arm, said, with a laugh— "I do believe I'm the most nervous man in the world."

"You don't find the room too hot?" said Richard, inwardly ruminating upon the strange looks he had just seen exchanged. "Mrs. Tansey keeps a fire all the year round — don't you, Martha?"

Martha did not answer, nor seem to hear; she pressed her lean hand, instead, to her heart, and drew back to a sofa and sat down, muttering, "My God, lighten our darkness, we beseech thee!" and she looked as if she were on the point of fainting.

"That is a true Vandyck," said Mr. Longcluse, who was now again looking stedfastly at the picture. "It deserves to rank among his finest portraits. I have never seen anything of his more forcible. You really ought not to leave it here, and in this state." He walked over and raised the lower end of the frame gently from the wall. "Yes, just as you said, it wants to be backed. That portrait would not stand a shake, I can tell you. The canvas is perfectly rotten, and the paint — if you stand here you'll see — is ready to flake off. It is an awful pity. You shouldn't leave it in such danger."

"No," said Richard, who was looking at the old woman. "I don't think Martha's well — will you excuse me for a moment?" And he was at the housekeeper's side. "What's the matter, Martha?" he said kindly. "Are you ill?"

"Very bad, Sir. I beg your pardon for sitting, but I could not help; and the gentleman will excuse me."

"Of course — but what's the matter?" said Richard.

"A sudden fright like, Sir. I'm all over on a tremble," she quavered.

“See how exquisitely that hand is painted,” continued Mr. Longcluse, pursuing his criticism, “and the art with which the lights are managed. It is a wonderful picture. It makes one positively angry to see it in that state, and anywhere but in the most conspicuous and honourable place. If I owned that picture, I should never be tired showing it. I should have it where everyone who came into my house should see it; and I should watch every crack and blur on its surface, as I should the symptoms of a dying child, or the looks of the mistress of my heart. Now just look at this. Where is he? Oh!”

“I beg your pardon, a thousand times, but I find my old friend Martha feels a little faint and ill,” said Richard.

“Dear me! I hope she’s better,” said Mr. Longcluse, approaching with solicitude. “Can I be of any use? Shall I touch the bell?”

“I’m better, Sir, I thank you; I’m much better,” said the old woman. “It won’t signify nothing, only— “ She was looking hard again at Mr. Longcluse, who now seemed perfectly at his ease, and showed in his countenance nothing but the commiseration befitting the occasion. “A sort of a weakness — a fright like — and I can’t think, quite, what came over me.”

“Don’t you think a glass of wine might do her good?” asked Mr. Longcluse.

“Thanks, Sir, I don’t drink it. Oh, lighten our darkness, we beseech thee! Good Lord, a’ mercy on us! I take them drops, hartshorn and valerian, on a little water, when I feel nervous like. I don’t know when I was took wi’ t’ creepins before.”

“You look better,” said Richard.

“I’m quite right again, Sir,” she said, with a sigh. She had taken her “drops,” and seemed restored.

“Hadn’t you better have one of the maids with you? I’m going now; I’ll send some one,” he said. “You must get all right, Martha. It pains me to see you ill. You’re a very old friend, remember. You must be all right again; and, if you like, we’ll have the doctor out, from town.”

He said this, holding her thin old hand very kindly, for he was by no means without goodnature. So sending the promised attendant, he and Longcluse proceeded to the billiard-room, where, having got the lamps lighted, they began to enjoy their smoke. Each, I fancy, was thinking of the little incident in the housekeeper’s room. There was a long silence.

“Poor old Tansey! She looked awfully ill,” said Richard Arden at last.

“By Jove! she did. Is that her name? She rather frightened me,” said Mr. Longcluse. “I thought we had stumbled on a mad woman — she stared so. Has she ever had any kind of fit, poor thing?”

“No. She grumbles a good deal, but I really think she’s a healthy old woman enough. She says she was frightened.”

“We came in too suddenly, perhaps?”

“No, that wasn’t it, for I knocked first,” said Arden.

“Ah, yes, so you did. I only know she frightened me. I really thought she was out of her mind, and that she was going to stick me with a knife, perhaps,” said Mr. Longcluse, with a little laugh and a shrug.

Arden laughed, and puffed away at his cigar till he had it in a glow again. Was this explanation of what he had seen in Longcluse’s countenance — a picture presented but for a fraction of a second, but thenceforward ineffaceable — quite satisfactory?

In a short time Mr. Longcluse asked whether he could have a little brandy and water, which accordingly was furnished. In his first glass there was a great deal of brandy, and very little water indeed; and his second, sipped more at his leisure, was but little more diluted. A very faint flush tinged his pallid cheeks.

Richard Arden was, by this time, thinking of his own debts and ill-luck, and at last he said, “I wonder what the art of getting on in the world is. Is it communicable? or is it no art at all, but a simple run of luck?”

Mr. Longcluse smiled scornfully. “There are men who have immense faith in themselves,” said he, “who have indomitable will, and who are provided with craft and pliancy for any situation. Those men are giants from the first to the last hour of action, unless, as happened to Napoleon, success enervates them. In the cradle, they strangle serpents; blind, they pull down palaces; old as Dandolo, they burn fleets and capture cities. It is only when they have taken to bragging that the *lues Napoleonica* has set in. Now I have been, in a sense, a successful man — I am worth some money. If I were the sort of man I describe, I should be worth, if I cared for it, ten times what I have in as many years. But I don’t care to confess I made my money by flukes. If, having no tenderness, you have two attributes — profound cunning and perfect audacity — nothing can keep you back. I’m a commonplace man, I say; but I know what constitutes power. Life is a battle, and the general's qualities win."

"I have not got the general's qualities, I think; and I know I haven't luck," said Arden; "so for my part I may as well drift, with as little trouble as may be, wherever the current drives. Happiness is not for all men."

"Happiness is for *no* man," said Mr. Longcluse. And a little silence followed. "Now suppose a fellow has got more money than ever he dreamed of," he resumed, "and finds money, after all, not quite what he fancied, and that he has come to long for a prize quite distinct and infinitely more precious; so that he finds, at last, that he never can be happy for an hour without it, and yet, for all his longing and his pains, sees it is unattainable as that star." (He pointed to a planet that shone down through the skylight.) "Is that man happy? He carries with him, go where he may, an aching heart, the pangs of jealousy and despair, and the longing of the damned for Paradise. That is *my* miserable case."

Richard Arden laughed, as he lighted his second cigar.

"Well, if that's your case, you can't be one of those giants you described just now. Women are not the obdurate and cruel creatures you fancy. They are proud, and vain, and unforgiving; but the misery and the perseverance of a lover constitute a worship that first flatters and then wins them. Remember this, a woman finds it very hard to give up a worshipper, except for another. Now why should you despair? You are a gentleman, you are a clever fellow, an agreeable fellow; you are what is accounted a young man still, and you can make your wife rich. They all like that. It is not avarice, but pride. I don't know the young lady, but I see no good reason why you should fail."

"I wish, Arden, I dare tell you all; but some day I'll tell you more."

"The only thing is —— You'll not mind my telling you, as you have been so frank with me?"

"Pray say whatever you think. I shall be ever so much obliged. I forget so many things about English manners and ways of thinking — I have lived so very much abroad. Should I be put up for a club?"

"Well, I should not mind a club just yet, till you know more people — quite time enough. But you must manage better. Why should those Jew fellows, and other people, who don't hold, and never can, a position the least like yours, be among your acquaintance? You must make it a rule to drop all objectionable persons, and know none but good people. Of course, when you are strong enough it doesn't so much matter, provided you keep them at arm's length. But you passed your younger days abroad, as you say, and not being yet so well known here, you will have to be particular — don't you see? A man is so much judged by his acquaintance; and, in fact, it is essential."

"A thousand thanks for any hints that strike you," said Longcluse goodhumouredly.

"They sound frivolous; but these trifles have immense weight with women," said Arden. "By Jove!" he added, glancing at his watch, "we shall be late. Your trap is at the door — suppose we go?"

CHAPTER III.

MR. LONGCLUSE OPENS HIS HEART.

The old housekeeper had drawn near her window, and stood close to the pane, through which she looked out upon the starlit night. The stars shine down over the foliage of huge old trees. Dim as shadows stand the horse and taxcart that await Mr. Longcluse and Richard Arden, who now at length appear. The groom fixes the lamps, one of which shines full on Mr. Longcluse's peculiar face.

"Ay — the voice; I could a' sworn to that," she muttered. "It went through me like a scythe. But that's a strange face; and yet there's summat in it, just a hint like, to call my thoughts out a-seeking up and down, and to and fro; and 'twill not let me rest until I come to find the truth. Mace? No, no. Langly? Not he. Yet 'twas summat *that night*, I think — summat awful. And who *was* there? No one. Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord! for my heart is sore troubled."

Up jumped the groom. Mr. Longcluse had the reins in his hand, and he and his companion passed swiftly by the window, and the flash of the lamps crossed the panelled walls of the housekeeper's room. The light danced wildly from corner to corner of the wainscot, accompanied by the shadows of two geraniums in bow-pots on the window-stool. The lamps flew by, and she still stood there, with the palsied shake of her head and hand, looking out into the darkness, in rumination.

Arden and Longcluse glided through the night air in silence, under the mighty old trees that had witnessed generations of Ardens, down the darker, narrow road, and by the faded old inn, once famous in those regions as the "Guy of Warwick," representing still on its board, in tarnished gold and colours, that redoubted champion, with a boar's head on the point of his sword, and a grotesque lion winding itself fawningly about his horse's legs.

As they passed swiftly along this smooth and deserted road, Longcluse spoke. Aperit præcordia vinum. In his brandy and water he had not spared alcohol, and the quantity was considerable.

"I have lots of money, Arden, and I can talk to people, as you say," he suddenly said, as if Richard Arden had spoken but a moment before; "but, on the whole, is there on earth a more miserable dog than I? There are things that trouble me that would make you laugh; there are others that would, if I dare tell them, make you sigh. Soon I shall be able; soon you shall know all. I'm not a bad fellow. I know how to give away money, and, what is harder to bestow on others, my time and labour. But who to look at me would believe it? I'm not a worse fellow than Penruddock. I can cry for pity and do a kind act like him; but I look in my glass, and I also feel like him, 'the mark of Cain' is on me — cruelty in my face. Why should Nature write on some men's faces such libels on their characters? Then here's another thing to make you laugh — you, a handsome fellow, to whom beauty belongs, I say, by right of birth — it would make me laugh also if I were not, as I am, forced every hour I live to count up, in agonies of hope and terror, my chances in that enterprise in which all my happiness for life is staked so wildly. Common ugliness does not matter, it is got over. But such a face as mine! Come, come! you are too goodnatured to say. I'm not asking for consolation; I am only summing up my curses."

"You make too much of these. Lady May thinks your face, she says, very interesting — upon my honour, she does."

"Oh, heaven!" exclaimed Mr. Longcluse, with a shrug and a laugh.

"And what is more to the purpose (will you forgive my reporting all this — you won't mind?), some young lady friends of hers who were by said, I assure you, that you had so much expression, and that your features were extremely refined."

"It won't do, Arden; you are too goodnatured," said he, laughing more bitterly.

"I should much rather be as I am, if I were you, than be gifted with vulgar beauty — plump, pink and white, with black beady eyes, and all that," said Arden.

"But the heaviest curse upon me is that which, perhaps, you do not suspect — the curse of — secrecy."

"Oh, really!" said Arden, laughing, as if he had thought up to then that Mr. Longcluse's history was as well known as that of the ex-Emperor Napoleon.

"I don't say that I shall come out like the enchanted hero in a fairy tale, and change in a moment from a beast into a prince; but I am something better than I seem. In a short time, if you cared to be bored with it, I shall have a great deal to tell you."

There followed here a silence of two or three minutes, and then, on a sudden, pathetically, Mr. Longcluse broke forth —

"What has a fellow like me to do with love? and less than beloved, can I ever be happy? I know something of the world — not of this London world, where I live less than I seem to do, and into which I came too late ever to understand it thoroughly — I know something of a greater world, and human nature is the same everywhere. You talk of a girl's pride inducing her to marry a man for the sake of his riches. Could I possess my beloved on those terms? I would rather place a pistol in my mouth, and blow my skull off. Arden, I'm unhappy; I'm the most miserable dog alive."

"Come, Longcluse, that's all nonsense. Beauty is no advantage to a man. The being agreeable is an immense one. But success is what women worship, and if, in addition to that, you possess wealth — not, as I said, that they are sordid, but only vainglorious — you become very nearly irresistible. Now *you* are agreeable, successful and wealthy — you must see what follows."

"I'm out of spirits," said Longcluse, and relapsed into silence, with a great sigh.

By this time they had got within the lamps, and were threading streets, and rapidly approaching their destination. Five minutes more, and these gentlemen had entered a vast room, in the centre of which stood a billiard-table, with benches rising tier above tier to the walls, and a gallery running round the building above them, brilliantly lighted, as such places are, and already crowded with all kinds of people. There is going to be a great match of a "thousand up" played between Bill Hood and Bob Markham. The betting has been unusually high; it is still going on. The play won't begin for nearly half an hour. The "admirers of the game" have mustered in great force and variety. There are young peers, with sixty thousand a year, and there are gentlemen who live by their billiards. There are, for once in a way, grave persons, bankers, and counsel learned in the law; there are Jews and a sprinkling of foreigners; and there are members of Parliament and members of the swell mob.

Mr. Longcluse has a good deal to think about this night. He *is* out of spirits. Richard Arden is no longer with him, having picked up a friend or two in the room. Longcluse, with folded arms, and his shoulders against the wall, is in a profound reverie, his dark eyes for the time lowered to the floor, beside the point of his French boot. *There* unfold themselves beneath him picture after picture, the scenes of many a year ago. Looking down, there creeps over him an old horror, a supernatural disgust, and he sees in the dark a pair of wide, white eyes, staring up at him in an agony of terror, and a shrill yell, piercing a distance of many years, makes him shake his ears with a sudden chill. Is this the witches' Sabbath of our pale Mephistopheles — his night of goblins? He raised his eyes, and they met those of a person whom he had not seen for a very long time — a third part of his whole life. The two pairs of eyes, at nearly half across the room, have met, and for a moment fixed. The stranger smiles and nods. Mr. Longcluse does neither. He affects now to be looking over the stranger's shoulder at some more distant object. There is a strange chill and commotion at his heart.

CHAPTER IV.

MONSIEUR LEBAS.

Mr. Longcluse leaned still with folded arms, and his shoulder to the wall. The stranger, smiling and fussy, was making his way to him. There is nothing in this man's appearance to associate him with tragic incident or emotion of any kind. He is plainly a foreigner. He is short, fat, middle-aged, with a round fat face, radiant with good humour and goodnatured enjoyment. His dress is cut in the somewhat grotesque style of a low French tailor. It is not very new, and has some spots of grease upon it. Mr. Longcluse perceives that he is now making his way towards him. Longcluse for a moment thought of making his escape by the door, which was close to him; but he reflected, "He is about the most innocent and goodnatured soul on earth, and why should I seem to avoid him? Better, if he's looking for me, to let him find me, and say his say." So Longcluse looked another way, his arms still folded, and his shoulders against the wall as before.

"Ah, ha! Monsieur is thinking profoundly," said a gay voice in French. "Ah, ha, ha, ha! you are surprised, Sir, to see me here. So am I, my faith! I saw you. I never forget a face."

"Nor a friend, Lebas. Who could have imagined anything to bring you to London?" answered Longcluse, in the same language, shaking him warmly by the hand, and smiling down on the little man. "I shall never forget your kindness. I think I should have died in that *illness* but for you. How can I ever thank you half enough?"

"And the grand secret — the political difficulty — Monsieur found it well evaded," he said, mysteriously touching his upper lip with two fingers.

"Not all quiet yet. I suppose you thought I was in Vienna?"

"Eh? well, yes — so I did," answered Lebas, with a shrug. "But perhaps you think this place safer."

"Hush! You'll come to me tomorrow. I'll tell you where to find me before we part, and you'll bring your portmanteau and stay with me while you remain in London, and the longer the better."

“Monsieur is too kind, a great deal; but I am staying for my visit to London with my brother-in-law, Gabriel Laroque, the watchmaker. He lives on the Hill of Ludgate, and he would be offended if I were to reside anywhere but in his house while I stay. But if Monsieur would be so good as to permit me to call — — “

“You must come and dine with me tomorrow; I have a box for the opera. You love music, or you are not the Pierre Lebas whom I remember sitting with his violin at an open window. So come early, come before six; I have ever so much to ask you. And what has brought you to London?”

“A very little business and a great deal of pleasure; but all in a week,” said the little man, with a shrug and a hearty laugh. “I have come over here about some little things like that.” He smiled archly as he produced from his waistcoat pocket a little flat box with a glass top, and shook something in it. “Commerce, you see. I have to see two or three more of the London people, and then my business will have terminated, and nothing remain for the rest of the week but pleasure — ha, ha!”

“You left all at home well, I hope — children?” He was going to say “Madame,” but a good many years had passed.

“I have seven children. Monsieur will remember two. Three are by my first marriage, four by my second, and all enjoy the very best health. Three are very young — three, two, one year old; and they say a fourth is not impossible very soon,” he added archly.

Longcluse laughed kindly, and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

“You must take charge of a little present for each from me, and one for Madame. And the old business still flourishes?”

“A thousand thanks! yes, the business is the same — the file, the chisel, and knife.” And he made a corresponding movement of his hand as he mentioned each instrument.

“Hush!” said Longcluse, smiling, so that no one who did not hear him would have supposed there was so much cautious emphasis in the word. “My good friend, remember there are details we talk of, you and I together, that are not to be mentioned so suitably in a place like this,” and he pressed his hand on his wrist, and shook it gently.

“A thousand pardons! I am, I know, too careless, and let my tongue too often run before my caution. My wife, she says, ‘You can’t wash your shirt but you must tell the world.’ It is my weakness truly. She is a woman of extraordinary penetration.”

Mr. Longcluse glanced from the corners of his eyes about the room. Perhaps he wished to ascertain whether his talk with this man, whom you would have taken to be little above the level of a French mechanic, had excited anyone’s attention. But there was nothing to make him think so.

“Now, Pierre, my friend, you must win some money upon this match — do you see? And you won’t deny me the pleasure of putting down your stake for you; and, if you win, you shall buy something pretty for Madame — and, win or lose, I shall think it friendly of you after so many years, and like you the better.”

“Monsieur is too good,” he said with effusion.

“Now look. Do you see that fat Jew over there on the front bench — you can’t mistake him — with the velvet waistcoat all in wrinkles, and the enormous lips, who talks to every second person who passes?”

“I see perfectly, Monsieur.”

“He is betting three to one upon Markham. You must take his offer, and back Hood. I’m told he’ll win. Here are ten pounds, you may as well make them thirty. Don’t say a word. Our English custom is to *tip*, as we say, our friend’s sons at school, and to make presents to everybody, as often as we like. Now there — not a word.” He quietly slipped into his hand a little rouleau of ten pounds in gold. “If you say one word you wound me,” he continued. “But, good Heaven! my dear friend, haven’t you a breastpocket?”

“No, Monsieur; but this is quite safe. I was paid, only five minutes before I came here, fifteen pounds in gold, a cheque of forty-four pounds, and —— “

“Be silent. You may be overheard. Speak here in a very low tone, as I do. And do you mean to tell me that you carry all that money in your coat pocket?”

“But in a pocketbook, Monsieur.”

“All the more convenient for the chevalier d’industrie,” said Longcluse. “Stop. Pray don’t produce it; your fate is, perhaps, sealed if you do. There are gentlemen in this room who would hustle and rob you in the crowd as you get out; or, failing that, who, seeing that you are a stranger, would follow and murder you in the streets, for the sake of a twentieth part of that sum."

"Gabriel thought there would be none here but men distinguished," said Lebas, in some consternation.

"Distinguished by the special attention of the police, some of them," said Longcluse.

"Hé! that is very true," said Monsieur Lebas— "very true, I am sure of it. See you that man there, Monsieur? Regard him for a moment. The tall man, who leans with his shoulder to the metal pillar of the gallery. My faith! he has observed my steps and followed me. I thought he was a spy. But my friend he says 'No, that is a man of bad character, dismissed for bad practices from the police.' Aha! he has watched me sideways, with the corner of his eye. I will watch him with the corner of mine — ha, ha!"

"It proves, at all events, Lebas, that there are people here other than gentlemen and men of honest lives," said Longcluse.

"But," said Lebas, brightening a little, "I have this weapon," producing a dagger from the same pocket.

"Put it back this instant. Worse and worse, my good friend. Don't you know that just now there is a police activity respecting foreigners, and that two have been arrested only yesterday on no charge but that of having weapons about their persons? I don't know what the devil you had best do."

"I can return to the Hill of Ludgate — eh?"

"Pity to lose the game; they won't let you back again," said Longcluse.

"What shall I do?" said Lebas, keeping his hand now in his pocket on his treasure.

Longcluse rubbed the tip of his finger a little over his eyebrow, thinking.

"Listen to me," said Longcluse, suddenly. "Is your brother-in-law here?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Well, you have some London friend in the room, haven't you?"

"One — yes."

"Only be sure he is one whom you can trust, and who has a safe pocket."

"Oh, yes, Monsieur, entirely! and I saw him place his purse so," he said, touching his coat, over his heart, with his fingers.

"Well, now, you can't manage it here, under the gaze of the people; but — *where* is best? Yes — you see those two doors at opposite sides in the wall, at the far end of the room? They open into two parallel corridors leading to the hall, and a little way down there is a cross passage, in the middle of which is a door opening into a smoking-room. That room will be deserted now, and there, unseen, you can place your money and dagger in his charge."

"Ah, thank you a hundred thousand times, Monsieur!" answered Lebas. "I shall be writing to the Baron van Boeren tomorrow, and I will tell him I have met Monsieur."

"Don't mind; how is the baron?" asked Longcluse.

"Very well. Beginning to be not so young, you know, and thinking of retiring. I will tell him his work has succeeded. If he demolishes, he also secures. If he sometimes sheds blood — — "

"Hush!" whispered Longcluse, sternly.

"There is no one," murmured little Lebas, looking round, but dropping his voice to a whisper. "He also saves a neck sometimes from the blade of the guillotine."

Longcluse frowned, a little embarrassed. Lebas smiled archly. In a moment Longcluse's impatient frown broke into a mysterious smile that responded.

"May I say one word more, and make one request of Monsieur, which I hope he will not think very impertinent?" asked Monsieur Lebas, who had just been on the point of taking his leave.

"It mayn't be in my power to grant it; but you can't be what you say — I am too much obliged to you — so speak quite freely," said Longcluse.

So they talked a little more and parted, and Monsieur Lebas went on his way.

CHAPTER V.

A CATASTROPHE.

The play has commenced. Longcluse, who likes and understands the game, sitting beside Richard Arden, is all eye. He is intensely eager and delighted. He joins modestly in the clapping that now and then follows a stroke of extraordinary brilliancy. Now and then he whispers a criticism in Arden's ear. There are many vicissitudes in the game. The players have entered on the third hundred, and still "doubtful it stood." The excitement is extraordinary. The assembly is as hushed as if it were listening to a sermon, and, I am afraid, more attentive. Now, on a sudden, Hood scores a hundred and sixty-eight points in a single break. A burst of prolonged applause follows, and, during the clapping, in which he had at first joined, Longcluse says to Arden, —

"I can't tell you how that run of Hood's delights me. I saw a poor little friend of mine here before the play began — I had not seen him since I was little more than a boy — a Frenchman, a goodnatured little soul, and I advised him to back Hood, and I have been trembling up to this moment. But I think he's safe now to win. Markham can't score this time. If he's in 'Queer Street,' as they whisper round the room, you'll find he'll either give a simple miss, or put himself into the pocket."

"Well, I'm sure I hope your friend will win, because it will put three hundred and eighty pounds into my pocket," said Richard Arden.

And now silence was called, and the building became, in a moment, hushed as a cathedral before the anthem; and Markham knocked his own ball into the pocket as Longcluse had predicted.

On sped the game, and at last Hood scored a thousand, and won the match, greeted by an uproar of applause that, now being no longer restrained, lasted for nearly five minutes. The assemblage had, by this time, descended from the benches, and crowded the floor in clusters, discussing the play or settling bets. The people in the gallery were pouring down by the four staircases, and adding to the crowd and buzz.

Suddenly there is a sort of excitement perceptible of a new kind — a gathering and pressure of men about one of the doors at the far corner of the room. Men are looking back and beckoning to their companions; others are shouldering forward as strenuously as they can. What is it — any dispute about the score? — a pair of men boxing in the passage?

"No suspicion of fire?" the men at this near end exclaim, and sniff over their shoulders, and look about them, and move toward the point where the crowd is thickening, not knowing what to make of the matter. But soon there runs a rumour about the room— "a man has just been found murdered in a room outside," and the crowd now press forward more energetically to the point of attraction.

In the cross-passage which connects the two corridors, as Mr. Longcluse described, there is an awful crush, and next to no light. A single jet of gas burns in the smoking room, where the pressure of the crowd is not quite so much felt. There are two policemen in that chamber, in the ordinary uniform of the force, and three detectives in plain clothes, one supporting a corpse already stiffening, in a sitting posture, as it was found, in a far angle of the room, on the bench to your left as you look in. All the people are looking up the room. You can see nothing but hats, and backs of heads, and shoulders. There is a ceaseless buzz and clack of talk and conjecture. Even the policemen are looking, as the rest do, at the body. The man who has mounted on the chair near the door, with the other beside him, who has one foot on the rung and another on the seat, and an arm round the first gentleman's neck, although he has not the honour of his acquaintance, to support himself, can see, over the others' heads, the one silent face which looks back towards the door, upon so many gaping, and staring, and gabbling ones. The light is faint. It has occurred to no one to light the gas lamps in the centre. But that forlorn face is distinct enough. Fixed and leaden it is, with the chin a little raised. The eyes are wide open, with a deep and awful gaze; the mouth slightly distorted with what the doctors call "a convulsive smile," which shows the teeth a little, and has an odd, wincing look.

As I live, it is the little Frenchman, Pierre Lebas, who was talking so gaily tonight with Mr. Longcluse!

The ebony haft of a dagger, sticking straight out, shows where the hand of the assassin planted the last stab of four, through his black satin waistcoat, embroidered with green leaves, red strawberries, and yellow flowers, which, I suppose, was one of the finest articles in the little wardrobe that Madame Lebas packed up for his holiday. It is not worth much now. It has four distinct cuts, as I have said, on the left side, right through it, and is soaked in blood.

His pockets have been rifled. The police have found nothing in them but a red pockethandkerchief and a papier-maché snuff-box. If that dumb mouth could speak but fifty words, what a world of conjecture it would end, and poor Lebas's story would be listened to as never was story of his before!

A policeman now takes his place at the door to prevent further pressure. No newcomers will be admitted, except as others go out. Those outside are asking questions of those within, and transmitting, over their shoulders, particulars, eagerly repeated. On a sudden there is a subsidence of the buzz and gabble within, and one voice, speaking almost at the pitch of a shriek, is heard declaiming. White as a sheet, Mr. Longcluse, in high excitement, is haranguing in the smoking-room, mounted on a table.

"I say," he cried, "gentlemen, excuse me. There are so many together here, so many known to be wealthy, it is an opportunity for a word. Things are coming to a pretty pass — garotters in our streets and assassins in our houses of entertainment! Here is a poor little fellow — look at him — here tonight to see the game, perfectly well and happy, murdered by some miscreant for the sake of the money he had about him. It might have been the fate of anyone of us. I spoke to him tonight. I had not seen him since I was a boy almost. Seven children and a wife, he told me, dependent on him. I say there are two things wanted — first, a reward of such magnitude as will induce exertion. I promise, for my own share, to put down double the amount promised by the highest subscriber. Secondly, something should be done for the family he has left, in proportion to the loss they have sustained. Upon this point I shall make inquiry myself. But this is plain, the danger and scandal have attained a pitch at which none of us who cares to walk the streets at night, or at any time to look in upon amusements like that we attended this evening, can permit them longer to stand. There is a fatal defect somewhere. Are our police awake and active? Very possibly; but if so the force is not adequate. I say this frightful scandal must be abated if, as citizens of London, we desire to maintain our reputation for common sense and energy."

There was a tall thin fellow, shabbily dressed, standing nearly behind the door, with a long neck, and a flat mean face, slightly pitted with smallpox, rather pallid, who was smiling lazily, with half-closed eyes, as Mr. Longcluse declaimed; and when he alluded pointedly to the inadequacy of the police, this man's amusement improved, and he winked pleasantly at the clock which he was consulting at the moment with the corner of his eye.

And now a doctor arrived, and Gabriel Laroque the watchmaker, and more police, with an inspector. Laroque faints when he sees his murdered friend. Recovered after a time, he identifies the body, identifies the dagger also as the property of poor Lebas.

The police take the matter now quite into their hands, and clear the room.

CHAPTER VI.

TO BED.

Mr. Longcluse jumped into a cab, and told the man to drive to his house in Bolton Street, Piccadilly. He rolled his coat about him with a kind of violence, and threw himself into a corner. Then, as it were, *in furore*, and with a stamp on the floor, he pitched himself into the other corner.

"I've seen tonight what I never thought I should see. What devil possessed me to tell him to go into that black little smoking-room?" he muttered. "What a room it is! It has seized my brain somehow. Am I in a fever, or going mad, or what? That cursed smoking-room! I can't get out of it. It is in the centre of the earth. I'm built round and round in it. The moment I begin to think, I'm in it. The moment I close my eyes, its four stifling walls are round me. There is no way out. It is like hell."

The wind had come round to the south, and a soft rain was pattering on the windows. He stopped the cab somewhere near St. James's Street, and got out. It was late — it was just past two o'clock, and the streets were quiet. Wonderfully still was the great city at this hour, and the descent of the rain went on with a sound like a prolonged "hush" all round. He paid the man, and stood for a while on the kerbstone, looking up and down the street, under the downpour of the rain. You might have taken this millionaire for a man who knew not where to lay his head that night. He took off his hat, and let the refreshing rain saturate his hair, and stream down his forehead and temples.

"Your cab's stuffy and hot, ain't it? Standing half the day with the glass in the sun, I daresay," said he to the man, who was fumbling in his pockets, and pretending a difficulty about finding change.

"See, never mind, if you haven't got change; I'll go on. Heavier rain than I fancied; very pleasant though. When did the rain begin?" asked Mr. Longcluse, who seemed in no hurry to get back again.

"A trifle past ten, Sir."

"I say, your horse's knees are a bit broken, ain't they? Never mind, I don't care. He can pull you and me to Bolton Street, I daresay."

“Will you please to get in, Sir?” inquired the cabman.

Mr. Longcluse nodded, frowning and thinking of something else; the rain still descending on his bare head, his hat in his hand.

The cabman thought this “cove” had been drinking and must be a trifle “tight.” He would not mind if he stood so for a couple of hours; it would run his fare up to something pretty. So cabby had thoughts of clapping a nosebag to his horse’s jaws, and was making up his mind to a bivouac. But Mr. Longcluse on a sudden got in, repeating his direction to the driver in a gay and brisk tone, that did not represent his real sensations.

“Why should I be so disturbed at that little French fellow? Have I been ill, that my nerve is gone and I such a fool? One would think I had never seen a dead fellow till now. Better for him to be quiet than at his wit’s ends, devising ways and means to keep his seven cubs in bread and butter. I should have gone away when the game was over. What earthly reason led me into that d —— d room, when I heard the fuss there? I’ve a mind to go and play hazard, or see a doctor. Arden said he’d look in, in the morning. I should like that; I’ll talk to Arden. I sha’n’t sleep, I know; I can’t, all night; I’ve got imprisoned in that suffocating room. Shall I ever close my eyes again?”

They had now reached the door of the small, unpretending house of this wealthy man. The servant who opened the door, though he knew his business, stared a little, for he had never seen his master return in such a plight before, and looking so haggard.

“Where’s Franklin?”

“Arranging things in your room, Sir.”

“Give me a candle. The cab is paid. Mr. Arden, mind, may call in the morning; if I should not be down, show him to my room. You are not to let him go without seeing me.”

Upstairs went the pale master of the house. “Franklin!” he called, as he mounted the last flight of stairs, next his bedroom.

“Yes, Sir.”

“I sha’n’t want you tonight, I think — that is, I shall manage what I want for myself; but I mean to ring for you by-and-by.” He was in his dressing-room by this time, and looked round to see that his comforts were provided for as usual — his foot-bath and hot water.

“Shall I fetch your tea, Sir?”

"I'll drink no tea tonight; I've been disgusted. I've seen a dead man, quite unexpectedly; and I sha'n't get over it for some hours, I daresay. I feel ill. And what you must do is this: when I ring my bell, you come back, and you must sit up here till eight in the morning. I shall leave the door between this and the next room open; and should you hear me sleeping uneasily, moaning, or anything like nightmare, you must come in and waken me. And you are not to go to sleep, mind; the moment I call, I expect you in my room. Keep yourself awake how you can; you may sleep all tomorrow, if you like."

With this charge Franklin departed.

But Mr. Longcluse's preparations for bed occupied a longer time than he had anticipated. When nearly an hour had passed, Mr. Franklin ventured upstairs, and quietly approached the dressing-room door; but there he heard his master still busy with his preparations, and withdrew. It was not until nearly half-an-hour more had passed that his bell gave the promised signal, and Mr. Franklin established himself for the night, in the easy-chair in the dressing-room, with the connecting door between the two rooms open.

Mr. Longcluse was right. The shock which his nerves had received did not permit him to sleep very soon. Two hours later he called for the Eau-de-Cologne that stood on his dressing-table; and although he made belief to wet his temples with it, and kept it at his bedside with that professed design, it was Mr. Franklin's belief that he drank the greater part of what remained in the capacious cut-glass bottle. It was not until people were beginning to "turn out" for their daily labour that sleep at length visited the wearied eyeballs of the Crœsus.

Three hours of deathlike sleep, and Mr. Longcluse, with a little start, was wide awake.

"Franklin!"

"Yes, Sir." And Mr. Franklin stood at his bedside.

"What o'clock is it?"

"Just struck ten, Sir."

"Hand me the *Times*." This was done.

"Tell them to get breakfast as usual. I'm coming down. Open the shutters, and draw the curtains, quite."

When Franklin had done this and gone down, Mr. Longcluse read the *Times* with a stern eagerness, still in bed. The great billiard match between

Hood and Markham was given in spirited detail; but he was looking for something else. Just under this piece of news, he found it— "Murder and Robbery, in the Saloon Tavern." He read this twice over, and then searched the paper in vain for any further news respecting it. After this search, he again read the short account he had seen before, very carefully, and more than once. Then he jumped out of bed, and looked at himself in the glass in his dressing-room.

"How awfully seedy I am looking!" he muttered, after a careful inspection. "Better by-and-by."

His hand was shaking like that of a man who had made a debauch, or was worn out with ague. He looked ten years older.

"I should hardly know myself," muttered he. "What a confounded, sinful old fogey I look, and I so young and innocent!"

The sneer was for himself and at himself. The delivery of such is an odd luxury which, at one time or other, most men indulge in. Perhaps it should teach us to take them more kindly when other people crack such cynical jokes on our heads, or, at least, to perceive that they don't always argue personal antipathy.

The sour smile which had, for a moment, flickered with a wintry light on his face, gave place suddenly to a dark fatigue; his features sank, and he heaved a long, deep, and almost shuddering sigh.

There are moments, happily very rare, when the idea of suicide is distinct enough to be dangerous, and having passed which, a man feels that Death has looked him very nearly in the face. Nothing more trite and true than the omnipresence of suffering. The possession of wealth exempts the unfortunate owner from, say, two-thirds of the curse that lies heavy on the human race. Two thirds is a great deal; but so is the other third, and it may have in it, at times, something as terrible as human nature can support.

Mr. Longcluse, the millionaire, had, of course, many poor enviers. Had any one of all these uttered such a sigh that morning? Or did any one among them feel wearier of life?

"When I have had my tub, I shall be quite another man," said he.

But it did not give him the usual fillip; on the contrary, he felt rather chilled.

"What can the matter be? I'm a changed man," said he, wondering, as people do at the days growing shorter in autumn, that time had produced some changes. “I remember when a scene or an excitement produced no more effect upon me, after the moment, than a glass of champagne; and now I feel as if I had swallowed poison, or drunk the cup of madness. Shaking! — hand, heart, every joint. I have grown such a muff!”

Mr. Longcluse had at length completed his very careless toilet, and looking ill, went downstairs in his dressing-gown and slippers.

CHAPTER VII.

FAST FRIENDS.

In little more than half-an-hour, as Mr. Longcluse was sitting at his breakfast in his dining-room, Richard Arden was shown in.

"Dressing-gown and slippers — what a lazy dog I am compared with you!" said Longcluse gaily as he entered.

"Don't say another word on that subject, I beg. I should have been later myself, had I dared; but my Uncle David had appointed to meet me at ten."

"Won't you take something?"

"Well, as I have had no breakfast, I don't mind if I do," said Arden, laughing.

Longcluse rang the bell.

"When did you leave that place last night?" asked Longcluse.

"I fancy about the same time that you went — about five or ten minutes after the match ended. You heard there was a man murdered in a passage there? I tried to get down and see it but the crowd was awful."

"I was more lucky — I came earlier," said Longcluse. "It was perfectly sickening, and I have been seedy ever since. You may guess what a shock it was to me. The murdered man was that poor little Frenchman I told you of, who had been talking to me, in high spirits, just before the play began — and there he was, poor fellow! You'll see it all there; it makes me sick."

He handed him the *Times*.

"Yes, I see. I daresay the police will make him out," said Arden, as he glanced hastily over it. "Did you remark some awfully ill-looking fellows there?"

"I never saw so many together in a place of the kind before," said Longcluse.

"That's a capital account of the match," said Arden, whom it interested more than the tragedy of poor little Lebas did. He read snatches of it aloud as he ate his breakfast: and then, laying the paper down, he said, "By-the-bye, I need not bother you by asking your advice, as I intended. My uncle David has been blowing me up, and I think he'll make everything straight.

When he sends for me and gives me an awful lecture, he always makes it up to me afterwards."

"I wish, Arden, I stood as little in need of your advice as you do, it seems, of mine," said Longcluse suddenly, after a short silence. His dark eyes were fixed on Richard Arden's. "I have been fifty times on the point of making a confession to you, and my heart has failed me. The hour is coming. These things won't wait. I must speak, Arden, soon or never — *very* soon, or never. *Never*, perhaps, would be wisest."

"Speak *now*, on the contrary," said Arden, laying down his knife and fork, and leaning back. "Now is the best time always. If it's a bad thing, why, it's over; and if it's a good one, the sooner we have it the better."

Longcluse rose, looking down in meditation, and in silence walked slowly to the window, where, for a time, without speaking he stood in a reverie. Then, looking up, he said, "No man likes a crisis. 'No good general ever fights a pitched battle if he can help it.' Wasn't that Napoleon's saying? No man who has not lost his head likes to get together all he has on earth, and make one stake of it. I have been on the point of speaking to you often. I have always recoiled."

"Here I am, my dear Longcluse," said Richard Arden, rising and following him to the window, "ready to hear you. I ought to say, only too happy if I can be of the least use."

"Immense! everything?" said Longcluse vehemently. "And yet I don't know how to ask you — how to begin — so much depends. Don't you conjecture the subject?"

"Well, perhaps I do — perhaps I don't. Give me some clue."

"Have you formed no conjecture?" asked Longcluse.

"Perhaps."

"Is it anything in any way connected with your sister, Miss Arden?"

"It may be, possibly."

"Say what you think, Arden, I beseech you."

"Well, I think, perhaps, you admire her."

"Do I? Do I? Is that all? Would to God I could say that is all! Admiration, what is it? — Nothing. Love? — Nothing. Mine is adoration and utter madness. I have told my secret. What do you say? Do you hate me for it?"

"Hate you, my dear fellow! Why on earth should I hate you? On the contrary, I ought, I think, to like you better. I'm only a little surprised that your feelings should so much exceed anything I could have supposed."

"Yesterday, Arden, you spoke as if you liked me. As we drove into that place, I fancied you half understood me; and cheered by what you then said, I have spoken that which might have died with me, but for that."

"Well, what's the matter? My dear Longcluse, you talk as if I had shown signs of wavering friendship. Have I? Quite the contrary."

"Quite the contrary, that is true," said Longcluse eagerly. "Yes, you *should* like me better for it — that is true also. Yours is no wavering friendship, I'm sure of it. Let us shake hands upon it. A treaty, Arden, a treaty!"

With a fierce smile upon his pale face, and a sudden fire in his eyes, he extended his hand energetically, and took that of Arden, who answered the invitation with a look in which gleamed faintly something of amusement.

"Now, Richard Arden," he continued excitedly, "you have more influence with Miss Arden than falls commonly to the lot of a brother. I have observed it. It results from her having had during her earlier years little society but yours, and from your being some years her senior. It results from her strong affection for you, from her admiration of your talents, and from her having neither brother nor sister to divide those feelings. I never yet saw brother possessed of so evident and powerful an influence with a sister. You must use it all for me."

He continued to hold Arden's hand in his as he spoke.

"You can withdraw your hand if you decline," said he. "I sha'n't complain. But your hand remains — you don't. It is a treaty, then. Henceforward we live *fœdere icto*. I'm an exacting friend, but a good one."

"My dear fellow, you do me but justice. I am your friend, altogether. But you must not mistake me for a guardian or a father in the matter. I wish I could make my sister think exactly as I do upon every subject, and *that* above all others. All I can say is, in me you have a fast friend."

Longcluse pressed his hand, which he had not relinquished, at these words, with a firm grasp and a quick shake.

"Now listen. I must speak on this point, the one that is in my mind, my chief difficulty. Personally, there is not, I think, a living being in England who knows my history. I am glad of it, for reasons which you will approve by-and-by. But this is an enormous disadvantage, though only temporary, and the friends of the young lady must weigh my wealth against it for the present. But when the time comes, which can't now be distant, upon my honour! upon my soul! — by Heaven, I'll show you I'm of as good and old a family as any in England! We have been gentlemen up to the time of the Conqueror, here in England, and as far before him as record can be traced in Normandy. If I fail to show you this when the hour comes, stigmatise me as you will."

"I have not a doubt, dear Longcluse. But you are urging a point that really has no weight with us people in England. We have taken off our hats to the gentlemen in casques and tabards, and feudal glories are at a discount everywhere but in Debrett, where they are taken with allowance. Your ideas upon these matters are more Austrian than ours. We expect, perhaps, a little more from the man, but certainly less from his ancestors than our forefathers did. So till a title turns up, and the heralds want them, make your mind easy on matters of pedigree, and then you can furnish them with effect. All I can tell you is this — there are hardly fifty men in England who dare tell all the truth about their families."

"We are friends, then; and in that relation, Arden, if there are privileges, there are also liabilities, remember, and both extend into a possibly distant future."

Longcluse spoke with a gloomy excitement that his companion did not quite understand.

"That is quite true, of course," said Arden.

Each was looking in the other's face for a moment, and each face grew suddenly dark, darker — and the whole room darkened as the air was overshadowed by a mass of cloud that eclipsed the sun, threatening thunder.

"By Jove! How awfully dark in a moment!" said Arden, looking from the face thus suddenly overcast through the window towards the sky.

"Dark as the future we were speaking of," said Longcluse, with a sad smile.

"Dark in one sense, I mean unseen, but not darkened in the ill-omened sense," said Richard Arden. "I have great confidence in the future. I suppose I am sanguine."

"I ought to be sanguine, if having been lucky hitherto should make one so, and yet I'm not. *My* happiness depends on that which I cannot, in the least, control. Thought, action, energy, contribute nothing, and so I but drift, and — my heart fails me. Tell me, Arden, for Heaven's sake, truth — spare me nothing, conceal nothing. Let me but know it, however bitter. First tell me, does Miss Arden dislike me — has she an antipathy to me?"

"Dislike you! Nonsense. How could that be? She evidently enjoys your society, when you are in spirits and choose to be amusing. Dislike you? Oh, my dear Longcluse, you can't have fancied such a thing!" said Arden.

"A man placed as I am may fancy anything — things infinitely more unlikely. I sometimes hope she has never perceived my admiration. It seems strange and cruel, but I believe where a man cannot be beloved, nothing is so likely to make him *hated* as his presuming to love. *There* is the secret of half the tragedies we read of. The man cannot cease to love, and the idol of his passion not only disregards but insults it. It is their cruel nature; and thus the pangs of jealousy and the agitations of despair are heightened by a peculiar torture, the hardest of all hell's torture to endure."

"Well, I have seen you pretty often together, and you must see there is nothing of that kind," said Arden.

"You speak quite frankly, do you? For Heaven's sake don't spare me!" urged Longcluse.

"I say exactly what I think. There can't be any such feeling," said Arden.

Longcluse sighed, looked down thoughtfully, and then, raising his eyes again, he said —

"You must answer me another question, dear Arden, and I shall, for the present, task your kindness no more. If you think it a fair question, will you promise to answer me with unsparing frankness? Let me hear the worst."

"Certainly," answered his companion.

"Does your sister like anyone in particular — is she attached to anyone — are her affections quite disengaged?"

"So far as I am aware, certainly. She never cared for any one among all the people who admired her, and I am quite certain such a thing could not be without my observing it," answered Richard Arden.

"I don't know; perhaps not," said Longcluse. "But there is a young friend of yours, who I thought was an admirer of Miss Arden's, and possibly a favoured one. You guess, I daresay, who it is I mean?"

"I give you my honour I have not the least idea."

"I mean an early friend of yours — a man about your own age — who has often been staying in Yorkshire and at Mortlake with you, and who was almost like a brother in your house — very intimate."

“Surely you can’t mean Vivian Darnley?” exclaimed Richard Arden.

“I do. I mean no other.”

“Vivian Darnley? Why, he has hardly enough to live on, much less to marry on. He has not an idea of any such thing. If my father fancied such an absurdity possible, he would take measures to prevent his ever seeing her more. You could not have hit upon a more impossible man,” he resumed, after a moment’s examination of a theory which, notwithstanding, made him a little more uneasy than he would have cared to confess. “Darnley is no fool either, and I think he is a honourable fellow; and altogether, knowing him as I do, the thing is utterly incredible. And as for Alice, the idea of his imagining any such folly, I can undertake to say, positively never entered her mind.”

Here was another pause. Longcluse was again thoughtful.

“May I ask one other question, which I think you will have no difficulty in answering?” said he.

“What you please, dear Longcluse; you may command me.”

“Only this, how do you think Sir Reginald would receive me?”

“A great deal better than he will ever receive me; with his best bow — no, not that, but with open arms and his brightest smile. I tell you, and you’ll find it true, my father is a man of the world. Money won’t, of course, do everything; but it can do a great deal. It can’t make a vulgar man a gentleman, but it may make a gentleman anything. I really think you would find him a very fast friend. And now I must leave you, dear Longcluse. I have just time, and no more, to keep my appointment with old Mr. Blount, to whom my uncle commands me to go at twelve.”

“Heaven keep us both, dear Arden, in this cheating world! Heaven keep us true in this false London world! And God punish the first who breaks faith with the other!”

So spoke Longcluse, taking his hand again, and holding it hard for a moment, with his unfathomable dark eyes on Arden. Was there a faint and unconscious menace in his pale face, as he uttered these words, which a little stirred Arden’s pride?

“That’s a comfortable litany to part with — a form of blessing elevated so neatly, at the close, into a malediction. However, I don’t object. Amen, by all means,” laughed Arden.

Longcluse smiled.

"A malediction? I really believe it was. Something very like it, and one that includes myself, doesn't it? But we are not likely to earn it. An arrow shot into the sea, it can hurt no one. But oh, dear Arden, what does such language mean but suffering? What is all bitterness but pain? Is any mind that deserves the name ever cruel, except from misery? We are good friends, Arden: and if ever I seem to you for a moment other than friendly, just say, 'It is his heartache and not he that speaks.' Goodbye! God bless you!"

At the door there was another parting.

"There's a long dull day before me — say, rather, *night*; weary eyes, sleepless brain," murmured Longcluse, in a rather dismal soliloquy, standing in his slippers and dressing-gown again at the window. "Suspense! What a hell is in that word! Chain a man across a rail, in a tunnel — pleasant situation! let him listen for the faint fifing and drumming of the engine, miles away, not knowing whether deliverance or death may come first. Bad enough, that suspense. What is it to mine! I shall see her tonight. I shall see her, and how will it all be? Richard Arden wishes it — yes, he does. 'Away, slight man!' It is Brutus who says that, I think. Good Heaven! Think of my life — the giddy steps I go by. That dizzy walk by moonlight, when I lost my way in Switzerland — beautiful nightmare! — the two mile ledge of rock before me, narrow as a plank; up from my left, the sheer wall of rock; at my right so close that my glove might have dropped over it, the precipice; and curling vapour on the cliffs above, that seem about to break, and envelope all below in blinding mist. There is my life translated into landscape. It has been one long adventure — danger — fatigue. Nature is full of beauty — many a quiet nook in life, where peace resides; many a man whose path is broad and smooth. Woe to the man who loses his way on Alpine tracks, and is benighted!"

Now Mr. Longcluse recollected himself. He had letters to read and note. He did this rapidly. He had business in town. He had fifty things on his hands; and, the day over, he would see Alice Arden again.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCERNING A BOOT.

Several pairs of boots were placed in Mr. Longcluse's dressing-room.

"Where are the boots that I wore yesterday?" asked he.

"If you please, Sir," said Mr. Franklin, "the man called this morning for the right boot of that pair."

"What man?" asked Mr. Longcluse, rather grimly.

"Mr. Armagnac's man, Sir."

"Did you desire him to call for it?" asked Mr. Longcluse.

"No, Sir. I thought you must have told some one else to order him to send for it," said Franklin.

"I? *You ought to know I leave those things to* you," said Mr. Longcluse, staring at him more aghast and fierce than the possible mislaying of a boot would seem to warrant. "Did you see Armagnac's man?"

"No, Sir. It was Charles who came up, at eight o'clock, when you were still asleep, and said the shoemaker had called for the right boot of the pair you wore yesterday. I had placed them outside the door, and I gave it him, Sir, supposing it all right."

"Perhaps it *was* all right; but you know Charles has not been a week here. Call him up. I'll come to the bottom of this."

Franklin disappeared, and Mr. Longcluse, with a stern frown, was staring vaguely at the varnished boot, as if it could tell something about its missing companion. His brain was already at work. What the plague was the meaning of this manœuvre about his boot? And why on earth, think I, should he make such a fuss and a tragedy about it? Charles followed Mr. Franklin up the stairs.

"What's all this about my boot?" demanded Mr. Longcluse, peremptorily. "*Who* has got it?"

"A man called for it this morning, Sir."

"What man?"

"I think he said he came from Mr. Armagnac's, Sir."

“You *think*. Say what you *know*, Sir. What *did* he say?” said Mr. Longcluse, looking dangerous.

“Well, Sir,” said the man, mending his case, “he did say, Sir, he came from Mr. Armagnac’s, and wanted the right boot.”

“What right boot? — *any* right boot?”

“No, Sir, please; the right boot of the pair you wore last night,” answered the servant.

“And *you* gave it to him?”

“Yes, Sir, ’twas me,” answered Charles.

“Well, you mayn’t be quite such a fool as you look. I’ll sift all this to the bottom. You go, if you please, this moment, to Monsieur Armagnac, and say I should be obliged to him for a line to say whether he this morning sent for my boot, and got it — and I must have it back, mind; *you* shall bring it back, you understand? And you had better make haste.”

“I made bold, Sir,” said Mr. Franklin, “to send for it myself, when you sent me down for Charles; and the boy will be back, Sir, in two or three minutes.”

“Well, come you and Charles here again when the boy comes back, and bring him here also. I’ll make out who has been playing tricks.”

Mr. Longcluse shut his dressing-room door sharply; he walked to the window, and looked out with a vicious scowl; he turned about, and lifted up his clenched hand, and stamped on the floor. A sudden thought now struck him.

“The right foot? By Jove! it may not be the one.”

The boot that was left was already in his hand. He was examining it curiously.

“Ay, by heaven! The right *was* the boot! What’s the meaning of this? Conspiracy? I should not wonder.”

He examined it carefully again, and flung it into its corner with violence.

“If it’s an accident, it is a very odd one. It is a suspicious accident. It may be, of course, all right. I daresay it *is* all right. The odds are ten, twenty, a thousand to one that Armagnac has got it. I should have had a warm bath last night, and taken a ten miles’ ride into the country this morning. It must be all right, and I am plaguing myself without a cause.”

Yet he took up the boot, and examined it once more; then, dropping it, went to the window and looked into the street — came back, opened his door, and listened for the messenger's return.

It was not long deferred. As he heard them approach, Mr. Longcluse flung open his door and confronted them, in white waistcoat and shirtsleeves, and with a very white and stern face — face and figure all white.

"Well, what about it? Where's the boot?" he demanded, sharply.

"The boy inquired, Sir," said Mr. Franklin, indicating the messenger with his open hand, and undertaking the office of spokesman; "and Mr. Armagnac did not send for the boot, Sir, and has not got it."

"Oh, oh! very good. And now, Sir," he said, in rising fury, turning upon Charles, "what have *you* got to say for yourself?"

"The man said he came from Mr. Armagnac, please, Sir," said Charles, "and wanted the boot, which Mr. Franklin should have back as early as he could return it."

"Then you gave it to a common thief with that cock-and-a-bull story, and you wish me to believe that you took it all for gospel. There are men who would pitch you over the bannisters for a less thing. If I could be certain of it, I'd put you beside him in the dock. But, by heavens! I'll come to the bottom of the whole thing yet."

He shut the door with a crash, in the faces of the three men, who stood on the lobby.

Mr. Franklin was a little puzzled at these transports, all about a boot. The servants looked at one another without a word. But just as they were going down, the dressing-room door opened, and the following dialogue ensued: —

"See, Charles, it was you who saw and spoke with that man?" said Longcluse.

"Yes, Sir."

"Should you know him again?"

"Yes, Sir, I think I should."

"What kind of man was he?"

"A very common person, Sir."

"Was he tall or short? What sort of figure?"

"Tall, Sir."

"Go on; what more? Describe him."

"Tall, Sir, with a long neck, and held himself straight; very flat feet, I noticed; a thin man, broad in the shoulders — pretty well that."

"Describe his face," said Longcluse.

"Nothing very particular, Sir; a shabby sort of face — a bad colour."

"How?"

"A bad white, Sir, and pock-marked something; a broad face and flat, and a very little bit of a nose; his eyes almost shut, and a sort of smile about his mouth, and stingy bits of red whiskers, in a curl, down each cheek."

"How old?"

"He might be nigh fifty, Sir."

"Ha, ha! very good. How was he dressed?"

"Black frock coat, Sir, a good deal worn; an old flowered satin waistcoat, worn and dirty, Sir; and a pair of raither dirty tweed trousers. Nothing fitted him, and his hat was brown and greasy, begging your parding, Sir; and he had a stick in his hand, and cotton gloves — atrying to look genteel."

"And he asked for the right boot?" asked Mr. Longcluse.

"Yes, Sir."

"You are quite sure of that? Did he take the boot without looking at it, or did he examine it before he took it away?"

"He looked at it sharp enough, Sir, and turned up the sole, and he said 'It's all right,' and he went away, taking it along with him."

"He asked for the boot I wore yesterday, or last night — which did he say?" asked Mr. Longcluse.

"I think it was last night he said, Sir," answered Charles.

"Try to recollect yourself. Can't you be certain? Which was it?"

"I think it was *last night*, Sir, he said."

"It doesn't signify," said Mr. Longcluse; "I wanted to see that your memory was pretty clear on the subject. You seem to remember all that passed pretty accurately."

"I recollect it perfectly well, Sir."

"H'm! That will do. Franklin, you'll remember that description — let every one of you remember it. It is the description of a thief; and when you see that fellow again, hold him fast till you put him in the hands of a policeman. And, Charles, you must be prepared, d'ye see, to swear to that description; for I am going to the detective office, and I shall give it to the police."

“Yes, Sir,” answered Charles.

“I sha’n’t want you, Franklin; let some one call a cab.”

So he returned to his dressing-room, and shut the door, and thought—“That’s the fellow whom that miserable little fool, Lebas, pointed out to me at the saloon last night. He watched him, he said, wherever he went. *I* saw him. There may be other circumstances. That is the fellow — that is the very man. Here’s matter to think over! By heaven! that fellow must be denounced, and discovered, and brought to justice. It is a strong case — a pretty hanging case against him. We shall see.”

Full of surmises about his lost boot, *Atra Cura* walking unheard behind him, with her cold hand on his shoulder, and with the image of the ex-detective always gliding before or beside him, and peering with an odious familiarity over his shoulder into his face, Mr. Longcluse marched eastward with a firm tread and a cheerful countenance. Friends who nodded to him, as he walked along Piccadilly, down Saint James’s Street, and by Pall Mall, citywards, thought he had just been listening to an amusing story. Others, who, more deferentially, saluted the great man as he walked lightly by Temple Bar, towards Ludgate Hill, for a moment perplexed themselves with the thought, “What stock is up, and what down, on a sudden, to-day, that Longcluse looks so radiant?”

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN WITHOUT A NAME.

Mr. Longcluse had made up his mind to a certain course — a sharp and bold one. At the police office he made inquiry. “He understood a man had been lately dismissed from the force, answering to a certain description, which he gave them; and he wished to know whether he was rightly informed, because a theft had been that morning committed at his house by a man whose appearance corresponded, and against whom he hoped to have sufficient evidence.”

“Yes, a man like that had been dismissed from the detective department within the last fortnight.”

“What was his name?” Mr. Longcluse asked.

“Paul Davies, Sir.”

“If it should turn out to be the same, I may have a more serious charge to bring against him,” said Mr. Longcluse.

“Do you wish to go before his worship, and give an information, Sir?” urged the officer, invitingly.

“Not quite ripe for that yet,” said Mr. Longcluse, “but it is likely very soon.”

“And what might be the nature of the more serious charge, Sir?” inquired the officer, insinuatingly.

“I mean to give my evidence at the coroner’s inquest that will be held to-day, on the Frenchman who was murdered last night at the Saloon Tavern. It is not conclusive — it does not fix anything upon him; it is merely inferential.”

“Connecting him with the murder?” whispered the man, something like reverence mingling with his curiosity, as he discovered the interesting character of his interrogator.

“I can only say possibly connecting him in some way with it. Where does the man live?”

“He did live in Rosemary Court, but he left that, I think. I’ll ask, if you please, Sir. Tompkins — hi! You know where Paul Davies puts up. Left

Rosemary Court?"

"Yes, five weeks. He went to Gold Ring Alley, but he's left that a week ago, and I don't know where he is now, but will easy find him. Will it answer at eight this evening, Sir?"

"Quite. I want a servant of mine to have a sight of him," said Longcluse.

"If you like, Sir, to leave your address and a stamp, we'll send you the information by post, and save you calling here."

"Thanks, yes, I'll do that."

So Mr. Longcluse took his leave, and proceeded to the place where the coroner was sitting. Mr. Longcluse was received in that place with distinction. The moneyed man was honoured — eyes were gravely fixed on him, and respectful whispers went about. A seat was procured for him; and his evidence, when he came to give it, was heard with marked attention, and a general hush of expectation.

*

The reader, with his permission, must now pass away, seaward, from this smoky London, for a few minutes, into a clear air, among the rustling foliage of ancient trees, and the fragrance of hay-fields, and the song of small birds.

On the London and Dover road stands, as you know, the "Royal Oak," still displaying its ancient signboard, where you behold King Charles II sitting with laudable composure, and a crown of Dutch gold on his head, and displaying his finery through an embrasure in the foliage, with an ostentation somewhat inconsiderate, considering the proximity of the halberts of the military emissaries in search of him to the royal features. As you drive towards London, it shows at the left side of the road, a good old substantial inn and posting-house. Its business has dwindled to something very small indeed, for the traffic prefers the rail, and the once bustling line of road is now quiet. The sun had set, but a reflected glow from the sky was still over everything; and by this somewhat lurid light Mr. Truelock, the innkeeper, was observing from the steps the progress of a chaise, with four horses and two postilions, which was driving at a furious pace down the gentle declivity about a quarter of a mile away, from the Dover direction towards the "Royal Oak" and London.

"It's a runaway. Them horses has took head. What do you think, Thomas?" he asked of the old waiter who stood beside him.

"No. See, the postboys is whipping the hosses. No, Sir, it's a gallop, but no runaway."

"There's luggage a' top?" said the innkeeper.

"Yes, Sir, there's something," answered Tom.

"I don't see nothing a-followin' them," said Mr. Truelock, shading his eyes with his hand as he gazed.

"No — there *is* nothing," said Tom.

"They're in fear o' summat, or they'd never go at that lick," observed Mr. Truelock, who was inwardly conjecturing the likelihood of their pulling up at his door.

"Lawk! *there* was a jerk. They *was* nigh over at the finger-post turn," said Tom, with a grin.

And now the vehicle and the reeking horses were near. The postboys held up their whips by way of signal to the "Royal Oak" people on the steps, and pulled up the horses with all their force before the door. Trembling, snorting, rolling up wreaths of steam, the exhausted horses stood.

"See to the gentleman, will ye?" cried one of the postilions.

Mr. Truelock, with the oldfashioned politeness of the English innkeeper, had run down in person to the carriage door, which Tom had opened. Master and man were a little shocked to behold inside an old gentleman, with a very brown, or rather a very bilious visage, thin, and with a high nose, who looked, as he lay stiffly back in the corner of the carriage, enveloped in shawls, with a velvet cap on, as if he were either dead or in a fit. His eyes were half open, and nothing but the white balls partly visible. There was a little froth at his lips. His mouth and delicately-formed hands were clenched, and all the furrows and lines of a selfish face fixed, as it seemed, in the lock of death. John Truelock said not a word, but peered at this visitor with a horrible curiosity.

"If he's dead," whispered Tom in his ear, "we don't take in no dead men here. Ye'll have the coroner and his jury in the house, and the place knocked up-side down; and if ye make five pounds one way ye'll lose ten the tother."

"Ye'll have to take him on, I'm thinkin'," said Mr. Truelock, rousing himself, stepping back a little, and addressing the postboys sturdily.

"You've no business bringin' a deceased party to my house. You must go somewhere else, if so be he *is* deceased."

"He's not gone dead so quick as that," said the postilion, dismounting from the near leader, and throwing the bridle to a boy who stood by, as he strutted round bandily to have a peep into the chaise. The postilion on the "wheeler" had turned himself about in the saddle in order to have a peep through the front window of the carriage. The innkeeper returned to the door.

If the old London and Dover road had been what it once was, there would have been a crowd about the carriage by this time. Except, however, two or three servants of the "Royal Oak," who had come out to see, no one had yet joined the little group but the boy who was detained, bridle in hand, at the horse's head.

"He'll not be dead yet," repeated the postilion dogmatically.

"What happened him?" asked Mr. Truelock.

"I don't know," answered the postboy.

"Then how can you say whether he be dead or no?" demanded the innkeeper.

"Fetch me a pint of half-and-half," said the dismounted postboy, aside, to one of the "Royal Oak" people at his elbow.

"We was just at this side of High Hixton," said his brother in the saddle, "when he knocked at the window with his stick, and I got a cove to hold the bridle, and I came round to the window to him. He had scarce any voice in him, and looked awful bad, and he said he thought he was a-dying. 'And how far on is the next inn?' he asked; and I told him the 'Royal Oak' was two miles; and he said, 'Drive like lightning, and I'll give you half a guinea a-piece' — I hope he's not gone dead— 'if you get there in time.'"

By this time their heads were in the carriage again.

"Do you notice a sort of a little jerk in his foot, just the least thing in the world?" inquired the landlord, who had sent for the doctor. "It will be a fit, after all. If he's living, we'll fetch him into the 'ouse."

The doctor's house was just round the corner of the road, where the clump of elms stands, little more than a hundred yards from the sign of the "Royal Oak."

"Who is he?" inquired Mr. Truelock.

"I don't know," answered the postilion.

"What's his name?"

"Don't know that, neither."

"Why, it'll be on that box, won't it?" urged the innkeeper, pointing to the roof, where a portmanteau with a glazed cover was secured.

"Nothing on that but 'R. A.,'" answered the man, who had examined it half an hour before, with the same object.

"Royal Artillery, eh?"

While they were thus conjecturing, the doctor arrived. He stepped into the chaise, felt the old man's hand, tried his pulse, and finally applied the stethoscope.

"It is a nervous seizure. He is in a very exhausted state," said the doctor, stepping out again, and addressing Truelock. "You must get him into bed, and don't let his head down; take off his handkerchief, and open his shirt-collar — do you mind? I had best arrange him myself."

So the forlorn old man, without a servant, without a name, is carried from the chaise, possibly to die in an inn.

The Rev. Peter Sprott, the rector, passing that way a few minutes later, and hearing what had befallen, went up to the bedroom, where the old gentleman lay in a four-poster, still unconscious.

"Here's a case," said the doctor to his clerical friend. "A nervous attack. He'd be all right in no time, but he's so low. I daresay he crossed the herring-pond to-day, and was ill; he's in such an exhausted state. I should not wonder if he sank; and here we are, without a clue to his name or people. No servant, no name on his trunk; and, certainly, it would be awkward if he died unrecognised, and without a word to apprise his relations."

"Is there no letter in his pockets?"

"Not one," Truelock says.

The rector happened to take up the greatcoat of the old gentleman, in which he found a small breast pocket, that had been undiscovered till now, and in this a letter. The envelope was gone, but the letter, in a lady's hand began: "My dearest papa."

"We are all right, by Jove, we're in luck!"

"How does she sign herself?" said the doctor.

"'Alice Arden,' and she dates from 8, Chester Terrace," answered the clergyman.

“We’ll telegraph forthwith,” said the doctor. “It had best be in your name — the clergyman, you know — to a young lady.”

So together they composed the telegram.

“Shall it be *ill* simply, or *dangerously* ill?” inquired the clergyman.

“Dangerously,” said the doctor.

“But *dangerously* may terrify her.”

“And if we say only *ill*, she mayn’t come at all,” said the doctor.

So the telegram was placed in Truelock’s hands, who went himself with it to the office; and we shall follow it to its destination.

CHAPTER X.

THE ROYAL OAK.

Three people were sitting in Lady May Penrose's drawingroom, in Chester Terrace, the windows of which, as all her ladyship's friends are aware, command one of the parks. They were looking westward, where the sky was all a-glow with the fantastic gold and crimson of sunset. It is quite a mistake to fancy that sunset, even in the heart of London — which this hardly could be termed — has no rural melancholy and poetic fascination in it. Should that hour by any accident overtake you, in the very centre of the city, looking, say, from an upper window, or any other elevation toward the western sky beyond stacks of chimneys, roofs, and steeples, even through the smoke of London, you will feel the melancholy and poetry of sunset, in spite of your surroundings.

A little silence had stolen over the party; and young Vivian Darnley, who stole a glance now and then at beautiful Alice Arden, whose large, dark, grey eyes were gazing listlessly towards the splendid mists, that were piled in the west, broke the silence by a remark that, without being very wise, or very new, was yet, he hoped, quite in accord with the looks of the girl, who seemed for a moment saddened.

"I wonder why it is that sunset, which is so beautiful, makes us all sad!"

"It never made me sad," said good Lady May Penrose, comfortably. "There is, I think, something very pleasant in a good sunset; there *must* be, for all the little birds begin to sing in it — it must be cheerful. Don't you think so, Alice?"

Alice was, perhaps, thinking of something quite different, for rather listlessly, and without a change of features, she said, "Oh, yes, very."

"So, Mr. Darnley, you may sing, 'Oh, leave me to my sorrow!' for we won't mope with you about the sky. It is a very odd taste, that for being dolorous and miserable. I don't understand it — I never could."

Thus rebuked by Lady Penrose, and deserted by Alice, Darnley laughed and said —

“Well, I do seem rather to have put my foot in it — but I did not mean miserable, you know; I meant only that kind of thing that one feels when reading a bit of really good poetry — and most people do not think it a rather pleasant feeling.”

“Don’t mind that moping creature, Alice; let us talk about something we can all understand. I heard a bit of news to-day — perhaps, Mr. Darnley, you can throw a light upon it. You are a distant relation, I think, of Mr. David Arden.”

“Some very remote cousinship, of which I am very proud,” answered the young man gaily, with a glance at Alice.

“And what is that — what about uncle David?” inquired the young lady, with animation.

“I heard it from my banker to-day. Your uncle, you know, dear, despises us and our doings, and lives, I understand, very quietly; I mean, he has chosen to live quite out of the world, so we have no chance of hearing anything except by accident, from people we are likely to know. Do you see much of your uncle, my dear?”

“Not a great deal; but I am very fond of him — he is such a good man, or at least, what is better,” she laughed, “he has always been so very kind to me.”

“You know him, Mr. Darnley?” inquired Lady May.

“By Jove, I do!”

“And like him?”

“No one on earth has better reason to like him,” answered the young man warmly— “he has been my best friend on earth.”

“It is pleasant to know two people who are not ashamed to be grateful,” said fat Lady May, with a smile.

The young lady returned her smile very kindly. I don’t think you ever beheld a prettier creature than Alice Arden. Vivian Darnley had wasted many a secret hour in sketching that oval face. Those large, soft, grey eyes, and long dark lashes, how difficult they are to express! And the brilliant lips! Could art itself paint anything quite like her? Who could paint those beautiful dimples that made her smiles so soft, or express the little circlet of pearly teeth whose tips were just disclosed? Stealthily he was now, for the thousandth time, studying that bewitching smile again.

“And what is the story about Uncle David?” asked Alice again.

“Well, what will you say — and you, Mr. Darnley, if it should be a story about a young lady?”

“Do you mean that Uncle David is going to marry? I think it would be an awful pity!” exclaimed Alice.

“Well, dear, to put you out of pain, I’ll tell you at once; I only know this — that he is going to provide for her somehow, but whether by adopting her as a child, or taking her for a wife, I can’t tell. Only I never saw any one looking archer than Mr. Brounker did to-day when he told me; and I fancied from that it could not be so dull a business as merely making her his daughter.”

“And who is the young lady?” asked Alice.

“Did you ever happen to meet anywhere a Miss Grace Maubray?”

“Oh, yes,” answered Alice quickly. “She was staying, and her father, Colonel Maubray, at the Wymerings’ last autumn. She’s quite lovely, I think, and very clever — but I don’t know — I think she’s a little ill-natured, but very amusing. She seems to have a talent for cutting people up — and a little of that kind of thing, you know, is very well, but one does not care for it *always*. And is she really the young lady?”

“Yes, and —— Dear me! Mr. Darnley, I’m afraid my story has alarmed you.”

“Why should it?” laughed Vivian Darnley, partly to cover, perhaps, a little confusion.

“I can’t tell, I’m sure, but you blushed as much as a man can; and you know you did. I wonder, Alice, what this under-plot can be, where all is so romantic. Perhaps, after all, Mr. David Arden is to adopt the young lady, and some one else, to whom he is also kind, is to marry her. Don’t you think that would be a very natural arrangement?”

Alice laughed, and Darnley laughed; but he was embarrassed.

“And Colonel Maubray, is he still living?” asked Alice.

“Oh, no, dear; he died ten or eleven months ago. A very foolish man, you know; he wasted a very good property. He was some distant relation, also; Mr. Brounker said your uncle, Mr. David Arden, was very much attached to him — they were schoolfellows, and great friends all their lives.”

“I should not wonder,” said Alice smiling — and then became silent.

“Do you know the young lady, this fortunate Miss Maubray?” said Lady May, turning to Vivian Darnley again.

"I? Yes — that is, I can't say more than a mere acquaintance — and not an old one. I made her acquaintance at Mr. Arden's house. He is her guardian. I don't know about any other arrangements. I daresay there may be."

"Well, I know her a little, also," said Lady May. "I thought her pretty — and she sings a little, and she's clever."

"She's all that," said Alice. "Oh, here comes Dick! What do you say, Richard — is not Miss Maubray very pretty? We are making a plot to marry her to Vivian Darnley, and get Uncle David to contribute her *dot*."

"What benevolent people! *You* don't object, I dare say, Vivian."

"I have not been consulted," said he; "and, of course, Uncle David need not be consulted, as he has simply to transfer the proper quantity of stock."

Richard Arden had drawn near Lady May, and said a few words in a low tone, which seemed not unwelcome to her.

"I saw Longcluse this morning. He has not been here, has he?" he added, as a little silence threatened the conversation.

"No, he has not turned up. And what a charming person he is!" exclaimed Lady May.

"I quite agree with you, Lady May," said Arden. "He is, take him on every subject, I think, about the cleverest fellow I ever met — art, literature, games, *chess*, which I take to be a subject by itself. He is very great at chess — for an amateur, I mean — and when I was chess-mad, nearly a year ago and beginning to grow conceited, he opened my eyes, I can tell you; and Airly says he is the best musical critic in England, and can tell you at any hour who is who in the opera, all over Europe; and he really understands, what so few of us here know anything about, foreign politics, and all the people and their stories and scandals he has at his fingers' ends. And he is such good company, when he chooses, and such a gentleman always!"

"He is very agreeable and amusing when he takes the trouble; I always like to listen when Mr. Longcluse talks," said Alice Arden, to the secret satisfaction of her brother, whose enthusiasm was, I think, directed a good deal to her — and to, perhaps, the vexation of other people, whom she did not care at that moment to please.

"An Admirable Crichton!" murmured Vivian Darnley, with a rather hackneyed sneer. "Do you like his style of — *beauty*, I suppose I should call it? It has the merit of being very uncommon, at least, don't you think?"

"Beauty, I think, matters very little. He has no beauty, but his face has what, in a man, I think a great deal better — I mean refinement, and cleverness, and a kind of satire that rather interests one," said Miss Arden, with animation.

Sir Walter Scott, in his "Rob Roy" — thinking, no doubt, of the Diana Vernon of his early days, the then beautiful lady, long afterwards celebrated by Basil Hall as the old Countess Purgstorf (if I rightly remember the title), and recurring to some cherished incident, and the thrill of a pride that had ceased to agitate, but was at once pleasant and melancholy to remember — wrote these words: "She proceeded to read the first stanza, which was nearly to the following purpose. [Then follow the verses.] 'There is a great deal of it,' said she, glancing along the paper, and interrupting the sweetest sounds that mortal ears can drink in — those of a youthful poet's verses, namely, read by the lips which are dearest to them." So writes Walter Scott. On the other hand, in certain states, is there a pain intenser than that of listening to the praises of another man from the lips we love?

"Well," said Darnley, "as you say so, I suppose there is all that, though I can't see it. Of course, if he tries to make himself agreeable (which he never does to me), it makes a difference, it affects everything — it affects even his looks. But I should not have thought him good-looking. On the contrary, he appears to me about as ugly a fellow as one could see in a day."

"He's not that," said Alice. "No one could be ugly with so much animation and so much expression."

"You take up the cudgels very prettily, my dear, for Mr. Longcluse," said Lady May. "I'm sure he ought to be extremely obliged to you."

"So he would be," said Richard Arden. "It would upset him for a week, I have no doubt."

There are few things harder to interpret than a blush. At these words the beautiful face of Alice Arden flushed, first with a faint, and then, as will happen, with a brighter crimson. If Lady May had seen it, she would have laughed, probably, and told her how much it became her. But she was, at that moment, going to her chair in the window, and Richard Arden would, of course, accompany her. He did see it, as distinctly as he saw the glow in the sky over the park trees. But, knowing what a slight matter will sometimes make a recoil, and even found an antipathy, he wisely chose to see it not — and chatting gaily, followed Lady May to the window.

But Vivian Darnley, though he said nothing, saw that blush, of which Alice, with a sort of haughty defiance, was conscious. It did not make him like or admire Mr. Longcluse more.

"Well, I suppose he is very charming — I don't know him well enough myself to give an opinion. But he makes his acquaintances rather oddly, doesn't he? I don't think any one will dispute that."

"I don't know really. Lady May introduced him to me, and she seems to like him very much. So far as I can see, people are very well pleased at knowing him, and don't trouble their heads as to how it came about," said Miss Arden.

"No, of course; but people not fortunate enough to come within the influence of his fascination, can't help observing. How did he come to know your brother, for instance? Did any one introduce him? Nothing of the kind. Richard's horse was hurt or lame at one of the hunts in Warwickshire, and he lent him a horse, and introduced himself, and they dined together that evening on the way back, and so the thing was done."

"Can there be a better introduction than a kindness?" asked Alice.

"Yes, where it *is* a kindness, I agree; but no one has a right to push his services upon a stranger who does not ask for them."

"I really can't see. Richard need not have taken his horse if he had not liked," she answered.

"And Lady May, who thinks him such a paragon, knows no more about him than any one else. She had her footman behind her — didn't she tell you all about it?"

"I really don't recollect; but does it very much matter?"

"I think it does — that is, it has been a sort of system. He just gave her his arm over a crossing, where she had taken fright, and then pretended to think her a great deal more frightened than she really can have been, and made her sit down to recover in a confectioner's shop, and so saw her home, and *that* affair was concluded. I don't say, of course, that he is never introduced in the regular way; but a year or two ago, when he was beginning, he always made his approaches by means of that kind of stratagem; and the fact is, no one knows anything on earth about him; he has emerged, like a figure in a phantasmagoria, from total darkness, and may lose himself in darkness again at any moment."

"I am interested in that man, whoever he is; his entrance, and his probable exit, so nearly resemble mine," said a clear, deep-toned voice close to them; and looking up, Miss Arden saw the pale face and peculiar smile of Mr. Longcluse in the fading twilight.

Mr. Longcluse was greeted by Lady May and by Richard Arden, and then again he drew near Alice, and said, "Do you recollect, Miss Arden, about ten days ago I told you a story that seemed to interest you — the story of a young and eloquent friar, who died of love in his cell in an abbey in the Tyrol, and whose ghost used to be seen pensively leaning on the pulpit from which he used to preach, too much thinking of the one beautiful face among his audience, which had enthralled him. I had left the enamel portrait I told you of at an artist's in Paris, and I wrote for it, thinking you might wish to see it — hoping you might care to see it," he added, in a lower tone, observing that Vivian Darnley, who was not in a happy temper, had, with a sudden impulse of disdain, removed himself to another window, there to contemplate the muster of the stars in the darkening sky, at his leisure.

"That was so kind of you, Mr. Longcluse! You have had a great deal of trouble. It *is* such an interesting story!" said Alice.

In his reception, Mr. Longcluse found something that pleased, almost elated him. Had Richard Arden been speaking to her on the subject of their morning's conversation? He thought not, Lady May had mentioned that he had not been with them till just twenty minutes ago, and Arden had told him that he had dined with his uncle David and Mr. Blount, upon the same business on which he had been occupied with both nearly all day. No, he could not have spoken to her. The slight change which made him so tumultuously proud and happy, was entirely spontaneous.

"So it seemed to me — an eccentric and interesting story — but pray do not wound me by speaking of trouble. I only wish you knew half the pleasure it has been to me to get it to show you. May I hold the lamp near for a moment while you look at it?" he said, indicating a tiny lamp which stood on a pier-table, showing a solitary gleam, like a lighthouse, through the gloom; "you could not possibly see it in this faint twilight."

The lady assented. Had Mr. Longcluse ever felt happier?

CHAPTER XI.

THE TELEGRAM ARRIVES.

Mr. Longcluse placed the little oval enamel, set in gold, in Miss Arden's fingers, and held the lamp beside her while she looked.

"How beautiful! — how very interesting!" she exclaimed. "What suffering in those thin, handsome features! What a strange enthusiasm in those large hazel eyes! I could fancy that monk the maddest of lovers, the most chivalric of saints. And did he really suffer that incredible fate? Did he really die of love?"

"So they say. But why incredible? I can quite imagine that wild shipwreck, seeing what a raging sea love is, and how frail even the strongest life."

"Well, I can't say, I am sure. But your own novelists laugh at the idea of any but women — whose business it is, of course, to pay that tribute to their superiors — dying of love. But if any man could die such a death, he must be such as this picture represents. What a wild, agonised picture of passion and asceticism! What suicidal devotion and melancholy rapture! I confess I could almost fall in love with that picture myself."

"And I think, were I he, I could altogether die to earn one such sentence, so spoken," said Mr. Longcluse.

"Could you lend it to me for a very few days?" asked the young lady.

"As many — as long as you please. I am only too happy."

"I should so like to make a large drawing of this in chalks!" said Alice, still gazing on the miniature.

"You draw so beautifully in chalks! Your style is not often found here — your colouring is so fine."

"Do you really think so?"

"You must know it, Miss Arden. You are too good an artist not to suspect what everyone else must see, the real excellence of your drawings. Your colouring is better understood in France. Your master, I fancy, was a Frenchman?" said Mr. Longcluse.

"Yes, he was, and we got on very well together. Some of his young lady pupils were very much afraid of him."

"Your poetry is fired by that picture, Miss Arden. Your copy will be a finer thing than the original," said he.

"I shall aim only at making it a faithful copy; and if I can accomplish anything like that, I shall be only too glad."

"I hope you will allow me to see it?" pleaded Longcluse.

"Oh, certainly," she laughed. "Only I'm a little afraid of you, Mr. Longcluse."

"What can you mean, Miss Arden?"

"I mean, you are so good a critic in art, every one says, that I really *am* afraid of you," answered the young lady, laughing.

"I should be very glad to forfeit any little knowledge I have, if it were attended with such a misfortune," said Longcluse. "But I don't flatter; I tell you truly, a critic has only to admire, when he looks at your drawings; they are quite above the level of an amateur's work."

"Well, whether you mean it or not, I *am* very much flattered," she laughed. "And though wise people say that flattery spoils one, I can't help thinking it very agreeable to be flattered."

At this point of the dialogue Mr. Vivian Darnley — who wished that it should be plain to all, and to one in particular, that he did not care the least what was going on in other parts of the room — began to stumble through the treble of a tune at the piano with his right hand. And whatever other people may have thought of his performance, to Miss Alice Arden it seemed very good music indeed, and inspired her with fresh animation. Such as it was, Mr. Darnley's solo also turned the course of Miss Arden's thoughts from drawing to another art, and she said —

"You, Mr. Longcluse, who know everything about the opera, can you tell me — of course you can — anything about the great basso who is coming?"

"Stentoroni?"

"Yes; the newspapers and critics promise wonders."

"It is nearly two years since I heard him. He was very great, and deserves all they say in 'Robert le Diable.' But there his greatness began and ended. The voice, of course, you had, but everything else was defective. It is plain, however, that the man who could make so fine a study of one opera, could with equal labour make as great a success in others. He has not sung in any opera for more than a year and a half, and has been working diligently; and so everyone is in the dark very much, and I am curious to hear the result — and nobody knows more than I have told you. You are sure of a good ‘Robert le Diable,’ but all the rest is speculation.”

“And now, Mr. Longcluse, I shall try your goodnature.”

“How?”

“I am going to make Lady May ask you to sing a song.”

“Pray don’t.”

“Why not?”

“I should so much rather you asked me yourself.”

“That’s very good of you; then I certainly shall. I *do* ask you.”

“And I instantly obey. And what shall the song be?” asked he, approaching the piano, to which she also walked.

“Oh, that ghostly one that I liked so much when you sang it here about a week ago,” she answered.

“I know it — yes, with pleasure.” And he sat down at the piano, and in a clear, rich baritone, sang the following odd song: —

“The autumn leaf was falling At midnight from the tree, When at her casement calling, ‘I’m here, my love,’ says he. ‘Come down and mount behind me, And rest your little head, And in your white arms wind me, Before that I be dead.

“‘You’ve stolen my heart by magic, I’ve kissed your lips in dreams: Our wooing wild and tragic Has been in ghostly scenes. The wondrous love I bear you Has made one life of twain, And it will bless or scare you, In deathless peace or pain.

“‘Our dreamland shall be glowing, If you my bride will be; To darkness both are going, Unless you come with me. Come now, and mount behind me, And rest your little head, And in your white arms wind me, Before that I be dead.’”

“Why, dear Alice, will you choose that dismal song, when you know that Mr. Longcluse has so many others that are not only charming, but cheery and natural?”

“It is because it is *un*natural that I like that song so much; the air is so ominous and spectral, and yet so passionate. I think the idea is Icelandic — those ghostly lovers that came in the dark to win their beloved maidens, who as yet knew nothing of their having died, to ride with them over the snowy fields and frozen rivers, to join their friends at a merrymaking which they were never to see; but there is something more mysterious even in this lover, for his passion has unearthly beginnings that lose themselves in utter darkness. Thank you very much, Mr. Longcluse. It is so very kind of you! And now, Lady May, isn't it your turn to choose? May she choose, Mr. Longcluse?"

"Any one, if you desire it, may choose anything I possess, and have it," said he, in a low impassioned murmur.

How the young lady would have taken this, I know not, but all were suddenly interrupted. For at this moment a servant entered with a note, which he presented, upon a salver, to Mr. Longcluse.

"Your servant is waiting, Sir, please, for orders in the awl," murmured the man.

"Oh, yes — thanks," said Mr. Longcluse, who saw a shabby letter, with the words "Private" and "Immediate" written in a round, vulgar hand over the address.

"Pray read your note, Mr. Longcluse, and don't mind us," said Lady May.

"Thank you very much. I think I know what this is. I gave some evidence to-day at an inquest," began Mr. Longcluse.

"That wretched Frenchman," interposed Lady May, "Monsieur Lebrun or — — "

"Lebas," said Vivian Darnley.

"Yes, so it was, Lebas; what a frightful thing that was!" continued Lady May, who was always well up in the day's horrors.

"Very melancholy, and very alarming also. It is a selfish way of looking at it, but one can't help thinking it might just as well have happened to any one else who was there. It brings it home to one a little uncomfortably," said Mr. Longcluse, with an uneasy smile and a shrug.

"And you actually gave evidence, Mr. Longcluse?" said Lady May.

"Yes, a little," he answered. "It may lead to something. I hope so. As yet it only indicates a line of inquiry. It will be in the papers, I suppose, in the morning. There will be, I daresay, a pretty full report of that inquest."

"Then you saw something occur that excited your suspicions?" said Lady May.

Mr. Longcluse recounted all he had to tell, and mentioned having made inquiries as to the present abode of the man, Paul Davies, at the police office.

“And this note, I daresay, is the one they promised to send me, telling the result of their inquiries,” he added.

“Pray open it and see,” said Lady May.

He did so. He read it in silence. From his foot to the crown of his head there crept a cold influence as he read. Stream after stream, this *aura* of fear spread upwards to his brain. Pale Mr. Longcluse shrugged and smiled, and smiled and shrugged, as his dark eye ran down the lines, and with a careless finger he turned the page over. He smiled, as prizefighters smile for the spectators, while every nerve quivered with pain. He looked up, smiling still, and thrust the note into his breastpocket.

“Well, Mr. Longcluse, a long note it seems to have been,” said Lady May, curiously.

“Not very long, but what is as bad, very illegible,” said Mr. Longcluse gaily.

“And what about the man — the person the police were to have inquired after?” she persisted.

“I find it is no police information, nothing of the kind,” answered Longcluse with the same smile. “It comes by no means from one of that long-headed race of men; on the contrary, poor fellow, I believe he is literally a little mad. I make him a trifling present every Christmas, and that is a very good excuse for his plaguing me all the year round. I was in hopes this letter might turn out an amusing one, but it is not; it is a failure. It is rather sensible, and disgusting.”

“Well, then, I must have my song, Mr. Longcluse,” said Lady May, who, under cover of music, sometimes talked a little, in gentle murmurs, to that person with whom talk was particularly interesting.

But that song was not to be heard in Lady May’s drawingroom that night, for a kindred interruption, though much more serious in its effects upon Mr. Longcluse’s companions, occurred. A footman entered, and presented on a salver a large brown envelope to Miss Alice Arden.

“Oh, dear! It is a telegram,” exclaimed Miss Arden, who had taken it to the window. Lady May Penrose was beside her by this time. Alice looked on the point of fainting.

“I’m afraid papa is very ill,” she whispered, handing the paper, which trembled very much in her hand, to Lady May.

"H'm! Yes — but you may be sure it's exaggerated. Bring some sherry and water, please. You look a little frightened, my dear. Sit down, darling. There now! These messages are always written in a panic. What do you mean to do?"

"I'll go, of course," said Alice.

"Well, yes — I think you must go. What is the place? Twyford, the 'Royal Oak?' Look out Twyford, please Mr. Darnley — there's a book there. It must be a post-town. It was thoughtful saying it is on the Dover coach road."

Vivian Darnley was gazing in deep concern at Alice. Instantly he began turning over the book, and announced in a few moments more— "It is a post-town — only thirty-six miles from London," said Mr. Darnley.

"Thanks," said Lady May. "Oh, here's the wine — I'm so glad! You must have a little, dear; and you'll take Louisa Diaper with you, of course; and you shall have one of my carriages, and I'll send a servant with you, and he'll arrange everything; and how soon do you wish to go?"

"Immediately, instantly — thanks, darling. I'm *so* much obliged!"

"Will your brother go with you?"

"No, dear. Papa, you know, has not forgiven him, and it is, I think, two years since they met. It would only agitate him."

And with these words she hurried to her room, and in another moment, with the aid of her maid, was completing her hasty preparations.

In wonderfully little time the carriage was at the door. Mr. Longcluse had taken his leave. So had Richard Arden, with the one direction to the servant, "If anything should go *very* wrong, be sure to telegraph for me. Here is my address."

"Put this in your purse, dear," said Lady May. "Your father is so thoughtless, he may not have brought money enough with him; and you will find it is as I say — he'll be a great deal better by the time you get there; and God bless you, my dear."

And she kissed her as heartily as she dared, without communicating the rouge and white powder which aided her complexion.

As Alice ran down, Vivian Darnley awaited her outside the drawingroom door, and ran down with her, and put her into the carriage. He leaned for a moment on the window, and said —

“I hope you didn’t mind that nonsense Lady May was talking just now about Miss Grace Maubray. I assure you it is utter folly. I was awfully vexed; but you didn’t believe it?”

“I didn’t hear her say anything, at least seriously. Wasn’t she laughing? I’m in such trouble about that message! I am so longing to be at my journey’s end!”

He took her hand and pressed it, and the carriage drove away. And standing on the steps, and quite forgetting the footman close behind him, he watched it as it drove rapidly southward, until it was quite out of sight, and then with a great sigh and “God for ever bless you!” — uttered not above his breath — he turned about, and saw those powdered and liveried effigies, and walked up with his head rather high to the drawingroom, where he found Lady May.

“I sha’n’t go to the opera tonight; it is out of the question,” said she. “But *you* shall. You go to my box, you know; Jephson will put you in there.”

It was plain that the goodnatured soul was unhappy about Alice, and, Richard Arden having departed, wished to be alone. So Vivian took his leave, and went away — but not to the opera — and sauntered for an hour, instead, in a melancholy romance up and down the terrace, till the moon rose and silvered the trees in the park.

CHAPTER XII.

SIR REGINALD ARDEN.

The human mind being, in this respect, of the nature of a kaleidoscope, that the slightest hitch, or jolt, or tremor is enough to change the entire picture that occupies it, it is not to be supposed that the illness of her father, alarming as it was, could occupy Alice Arden's thoughts to the exclusion of every other subject, during every moment of her journey. One picture, a very pretty one, frequently presented itself, and always her heart felt a strange little pain as this pretty phantom appeared. It was the portrait of a young girl, with fair golden hair, a brilliant complexion, and large blue eyes, with something *riant*, triumphant, and arch to the verge of mischief, in her animated and handsome face.

The careless words of good Lady May, this evening, and the very obvious confusion of Vivian Darnley at mention of the name of Grace Maubray, troubled her. What was more likely than that Uncle David, interested in both, should have seriously projected the union which Lady May had gaily suggested? If she — Alice Arden — liked Vivian Darnley, it was not very much, her pride insisted. In her childhood they had been thrown together. He had seemed to like her; but had he ever spoken? Why was he silent? Was she fool enough to like him? — that cautious, selfish young man, who was thinking, she was quite certain now, of a marriage of prudence or ambition with Grace Maubray? It was a cold, cruel, sordid world!

But, after all, why should he have spoken? or why should he have hoped to be heard with favour? She had been to him, thank Heaven, just as any other pleasant, early friend. There was nothing to regret — nothing fairly to blame. It was just that a person whom she had come to regard as a property was about to go, and belong quite, to another. It was the foolish little jealousy that everyone feels, and that means nothing. So she told herself; but constantly recurred the same pretty image, and with it the same sudden little pain at her heart.

But now came the other care. As time and space shorten, and the moment of decision draws near, the pain of suspense increases. They were within six miles of Twyford. Her heart was in a wild flutter — now throbbing madly, now it seemed standing still. The carriage window was down. She was looking out on the scenery — strange to her — all bright and serene under a brilliant moon. What message awaited her at the inn to which they were travelling at this swift pace? How frightful it might be!

"Oh, Louisa!" she every now and then imploringly cried to her maid, "how do you think it will be? Oh! how will it be? Do you think he'll be better? Oh! do you think he'll be better? Tell me again about his other illness, and how he recovered? Don't you think he will this time? Oh, Louisa, darling! don't you think so? Tell me — *tell* me you do!"

Thus, in her panic, the poor girl wildly called for help and comfort, until at last the carriage turned a curve in the road at which stood a shadowy clump of elms, and in another moment the driver pulled up under the sign of the "Royal Oak."

"Oh, Louisa! Here it is," cried the young lady, holding her maid's wrist with a trembling grasp.

The inn-door was shut, but there was light in the hall, and light in an upper room.

"Don't knock — only ring the bell. He may be asleep, God grant!" said the young lady.

The door was quickly opened, and a waiter ran down to the carriage window, where he saw a pair of large wild eyes, and a very pale face, and heard the question— "An old gentlemen has been ill here, and a telegram was sent; is he — how is he?"

"He's better, Ma'am," said the man.

With a low, long "O — Oh!" and clasped hands and upturned eyes, she leaned back in the carriage, and a sudden flood of tears relieved her. Yes; he was a great deal better. The attack was quite over; but he had not spoken. He seemed much exhausted; and having swallowed some claret, which the doctor prescribed, he had sunk into a sound and healthy sleep, in which he still lay. A message by telegraph had been sent to announce the good news, but Alice was some way on her journey before it had reached.

Now the young lady got down, and entered the homely old inn, followed by her maid. She could have dropped on her knees in gratitude to her Maker; but true religion, like true affection, is shy of demonstrating its fervours where sympathy is doubtful.

Gently, hardly breathing, guided by the “chambermaid,” she entered her father’s room, and stood at his bedside. There he lay, yellow, lean, the lines of his face in repose still forbidding, the thin lips and thin nose looking almost transparent, and breathing deeply and regularly, as a child in his slumbers. In that face Alice could not discover what any stranger would have seen. She only saw the face of her father. Selfish and capricious as he was, and violent too — a wicked old man, if one could see him justly — he was yet proud of her, and had many schemes and projects afloat in his jaded old brain, of which her beauty was the talisman, of which she suspected nothing, and with which his head was never more busy than at the very moment when he was surprised by the *aura* of his coming fit.

The doctor’s conjecture was right. He had crossed the Channel that morning. In his French *coupée*, he had for companion the very man he had most wished and contrived to travel homeward with. This was Lord Wynderbroke.

Lord Wynderbroke was fifty years old and upwards. He was very much taken with Alice, whom he had met pretty often. He was a man who was thought likely to marry. His estate was in the nattiest order. He had always been prudent, and cultivated a character. He had, moreover, mortgages over Sir Reginald Arden’s estate, the interest of which the baronet was beginning to find it next to impossible to pay. They had been making a little gouty visit to Vichy, and Sir Reginald had taken good care to make the journey homeward with Lord Wynderbroke, who knew that when he pleased he could be an amusing companion, and who also felt that kind of interest in him which everyone experiences in the kindred of the young lady of whom he is enamoured.

The baronet, who tore up or burnt his letters for the most part, had kept this particular one by which his daughter had been traced and summoned to the “Royal Oak.” It was, he thought, clever. It was amusing, and had some London gossip. He had read bits of it to Lord Wynderbroke in the *coupée*. Lord Wynderbroke was delighted. When they parted, he had asked leave to pay him a visit at Mortlake.

“Only too happy, if you are not afraid of the old house falling in upon us. Everything *there*, you know, is very much as my grandfather left it. I only use it as a caravanserai, and alight there for a little, on a journey. Everything there is tumbling to pieces. But you won’t mind — no more than I do.”

So the little visit was settled. The passage was rough. Peer and baronet were ill. They did not care to reunite their fortunes after they touched English ground. As the baronet drew near London, for certain reasons he grew timid. He got out with a portmanteau and dressing-case, and an umbrella, at Drowark station, sent his servant on with the rest of the luggage by rail, and himself took a chaise; and, after one change of horses, had reached the "Royal Oak" in the state in which we first saw him.

The doctor had told the people at that inn that he would look in, in the course of the night, some time after one o'clock, being a little uneasy about a possible return of the old man's malady. There was that in the aristocratic looks and belongings of his patient, and in the very fashionable address to which the message to his daughter was transmitted, which induced in the mind of the learned man a suspicion that a "swell" might have accidentally fallen into his hands.

By this time, thanks to the diligence of Louisa Diaper, every one in the house had been made acquainted with the fact that the sick man was no other than Sir Reginald Arden, Bart., and with many other circumstances of splendour, which would not, perhaps, have so well stood the test of inquiry. The doctor and his crony, the rector — simplest of parsons — who had agreed to accompany him in this nocturnal call, being a curious man, as gentlemen inhabiting quiet villages will be — these two gentlemen now heard all this lore in the hall at a quarter past one, and entered the patient's chamber (where they found Miss Arden and her maid) accordingly. In whispers, the doctor made to Miss Arden a most satisfactory report. He made his cautious inspection of the patient, and again had nothing but what was cheery to say.

If the rector had not prided himself upon his manners, and had been content with one bow on withdrawing from the lady's presence, they would not that night have heard the patient's voice — and perhaps, all things considered, so much the better.

"I trust, Madam, in the morning Sir Reginald may be quite himself again. It is pleasant, Madam, to witness slumber so quiet," murmured the clergyman kindly, and in perfect good faith. "It is the slumber of a tranquil mind — a spirit at peace with itself."

Smiling kindly in making the last stiff bow which accompanied these happy words, the good man tilted over a little table behind him, on which stood a decanter of claret, a water caraffe, and two glasses, all of which came to the ground with a crash that wakened the baronet. He sat up straight in his bed and stared round, while the clergyman, in consternation, exclaimed— "Good gracious!"

"Hollo! what is it?" cried the fierce, thin voice of the baronet. "What the devil's all this? Where's Crozier? Where's my servant? Will you, will you, some of you, say where the devil I am?" He was screaming all this, and groping and clutching at either side of the bed's head for a bell-rope, intending to rouse the house. "Where's Crozier, I say? Where the devil's my servant? eh? He's gone by rail, ain't he? No one came with me. And where's this? What is it? Are you all tongue-tied? — haven't you a word among you?"

The clergyman had lifted his hands in terror at the harangue of the old man of the "tranquil mind." Alice had taken his thin hand, standing beside him, and was speaking softly in his ear. But his prominent brown eyes were fiercely scanning the strangers, and the hand which clutched hers was trembling with eager fury. "Will some of you say what you mean, or what you are doing, or where I am?" and he screeched another sentence or two, that made the old clergyman very uncomfortable.

"You arrived here, Sir Reginald, about six hours ago — extremely ill, Sir," said the doctor, who had placed himself close to his patient, and spoke with official authority; "but we have got you all right again, we hope; and this is the 'Royal Oak,' the principal hotel of Twyford, on the Dover and London road; and my name is Proby."

"And what's all this?" cried the baronet, snatching up one of the medicine-bottles from the little table by his bed, and plucking out the cork and smelling at the fluid. "By heaven?" he screamed, "this is the very thing. I could not tell what d —— d taste was in my mouth, and here it is. Why, my doctor tells me — and he knows his business — it is as much as my life's worth to give me anything like — like that, pah! assafœtida! If my stomach is upset with this filthy stuff, I give myself up! I'm gone. I shall sink, Sir. Was there no one here, in the name of Heaven, with a grain of sense or a particle of pity, to prevent that beast from literally poisoning me? Egad! I'll make my son punish him! I'll make my family hang him if I die!" There was a quaver of misery in his shriek of fury, as if he was on the point of bursting into tears. "Doctor, indeed! who sent for him? I didn't. Who gave him leave to drug me? Upon my soul, I've been poisoned. To think of a creature in my state, dependent on nourishment every hour, having his digestion destroyed! Doctor, indeed! Pay him? Not I, begad," and he clenched his sentence with an ugly expletive.

But all this concluding eloquence was lost upon the doctor, who had mentioned, in a lofty "aside" to Miss Arden, that "unless sent for he should not call again;" and with a marked politeness to her, and no recognition whatever of the baronet, he had taken his departure.

"I'm not the doctor, Sir Reginald; I'm the clergyman," said the Reverend Peter Sprott, gravely and timidly, for the prominent brown eyes were threatening him.

"Oh, the clergyman! Oh, I see. Will you be so good as to ring the bell, please, and excuse a sick man giving you that trouble. And is there a postoffice near this?"

"Yes, Sir — close by."

"This is you, Alice? I'm glad you're here. You must write a letter this moment — a note to your brother. Don't be afraid — I'm better, a good deal — and tell the people, when they come, to get me some strong soup this moment, and — good evening, Sir, or goodnight, or morning, or whatever it is," he added, to the clergyman, who was taking his leave. "What o'clock is it?" he asked Alice. "Well, you'll write to your brother to meet me at Mortlake. I have not seen him, now, for how many years? I forget. He's in town, is he? Very good. And tell him it is perhaps the last time, and I expect him. I suppose he'll come. Say at a quarter past nine in the evening. The sooner it's over the better. I expect no good of it; it is only just to try. And I shall leave this early — immediately after breakfast — as quickly as we can. I hate it!"

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE ROAD.

Next morning the baronet was in high goodhumour. He has written a little reminder to Lord Wynderbroke. He will expect him at Mortlake the day he named, to dinner. He remembers he promised to stay the night. He can offer him, still, as good a game of piquet as he is likely to find in his club; and he almost feels that he has no excuse but a selfish one, for exacting the performance of a promise which gave him a great deal of pleasure. His daughter, who takes care of her old father, will make their tea and — voilà tout!

Sir Reginald was in particularly good spirits as he sent the waiter to the postoffice with this little note. He thinks within himself that he never saw Alice in such good looks. His selfish elation waxes quite affectionate, and Alice never remembered him so goodnatured. She doesn't know what to make of it exactly; but it pleases her, and she looks all the more brilliant.

And now these foreign birds, whom a chance storm has thrown upon the hospitality of the "Royal Oak," are up and away again. The old baronet and his pretty daughter, Louisa Diaper sitting behind, in cloaks and rugs, and the footman in front, to watch the old man's signals, are whirling dustily along with a team of four horses; for Sir Reginald's arrangements are never economical, and a pair would have brought them over these short stages and home very nearly as fast. Lady May's carriage pleases the old man, and helps his transitory goodhumour: it is so much more luxurious than the jolty hired vehicle in which he had arrived.

Alice is permitted her thoughts to herself. The baronet has taken his into companionship, and is leaning back in his corner, with his eyes closed; and his pursed mouth, with its wonderful involution of wrinkles round it, is working unconsciously; and his still dark eyebrows, now elevating, now knitting themselves, indicate the same activity of brain.

With a silent look now and then at his face — for she need not ask whether Sir Reginald wants anything, or would like anything changed, for the baronet needs no inquiries of this kind, and makes people speedily acquainted with his wants and fancies — she occupies her place beside him, for the most part looking out listlessly from the window, and thinks of many things. The baronet opens his eyes at last, and says abruptly,

"Charming prospect! Charming day! You'll be glad to hear, Alice, I'm not tired; I'm making my journey wonderfully! It is so pretty, and the sun so cheery. You are looking so well, it is quite a pleasure to look at you — charming! You'll come to me at Mortlake for a few days, to take care of me, you know. I shall go on to Buxton in a week or so, and you can return to Lady May tonight, and come to Mortlake shortly; and your brother, graceless creature! I suppose, will come tonight. I expect nothing from his visit, absolutely. He has been nothing to me but a curse all his life. I suppose, if there's justice anywhere, he'll have his deserts some day. But for the present I put him aside — I sha'n't speak of him. He disturbs me."

They drove through London over Westminster Bridge, the servant thinking that they were to go to Lady May Penrose's in Chester Terrace. It was the first time that day, since he had talked of his son, that a black shadow crossed Sir Reginald's face. He shrunk back. He drew up his Chinese silk muffler over his chin. He was fearful lest some prowling beak or eagle-eyed Jew should see his face, for Sir Reginald was just then in danger. Glancing askance under the peak of his travelling cap, he saw Talkington, with Wynderbroke on his arm, walking to their club. How free and fearless those happy mortals looked! How the old man yearned for his chat and his glass of wine at B — — 's, and his afternoon whist at W — — 's! How he chafed and blasphemed inwardly at the invisible obstacle that insurmountably interposed, and with what a fiery sting of malice he connected the idea of his son with the fetters that bound him!

"You know that man?" said Sir Reginald sharply, as he saw Mr. Longcluse raise his hat to her as they passed.

"Yes, I've met him pretty often at Lady May's."

"H'm! I had not an idea that anyone knew him. He's a man who might be of use to one."

Here followed a silence.

"I thought, papa, you wished to go direct to Mortlake, and I don't think this is the way," suggested Alice.

"Eh? heigho! You're right, child; upon my life, I was not thinking," said Sir Reginald, at the same time signalling vehemently to the servant, who, having brought the carriage to a standstill, came round to the window.

"We don't stop anywhere in town, we go straight to Mortlake Hall. It is beyond Islington. Have you ever been there? Well, you can tell them how to reach it."

And Sir Reginald placed himself again in his corner. They had not started early, and he had frequently interrupted their journey on various whimsical pretexts. He remembered one house, for instance, where there was a stock of the very best port he had ever tasted, and then he stopped and went in, and after a personal interview with the proprietor, had a bottle opened, and took two glasses, and so paid at the rate of half a guinea each for them. It had been an interrupted journey, late begun, and the sun was near its setting by the time they had got a mile beyond the outskirts of Islington, and were drawing near the singular old house where their journey was to end.

Always with a melancholy presentiment, Alice approached Mortlake Hall. But never had she felt it more painfully than now. If there be in such misgivings a prophetic force, was it to be justified by the coming events of Miss Arden's life, which were awfully connected with that scene?

They passed a quaint little village of tall stone houses, among great old trees, with a rural and old-world air, and an ancient inn, with the sign of "Guy of Warwick" — an inn of which we shall see more by-and-by — faded, and like the rest of this little town, standing under the shadow of old trees. They entered the road, dark with double hedgerows, and with a mossgrown park-wall on the right, in which, in a little time, they reached a great iron gate with fluted pillars. They drove up a broad avenue, flanked with files of gigantic trees, and showing grand old timber also upon the parklike grounds beyond. The dusky light of evening fell upon these objects, and the many windows, the cornices, and the smokeless chimneys of a great old house. You might have fancied yourself two hundred miles away from London.

"You don't stay here tonight, Alice. I wish you to return to Lady May, and give her the note I am going to write. You and she come out to dine here on Friday. If she makes a difficulty, I rely on you to persuade her. I must have someone to meet Mr. Longcluse. I have reasons. Also, I shall ask my brother David, and his ward Miss Maubray. I knew her father: he was a fool, with his head full of romance, and he married a very pretty woman who was a devil, without a shilling on earth. The girl is an orphan, and

David is her guardian, and he would like any little attention we can show her. And we shall ask Vivian Darnley also. And that will make a very suitable party."

Sir Reginald wrote his note, talking at intervals.

"You see, I want Lady May to come here again in a day or two, to stay only for two or three days. She can go into town and remain there all day, if she likes it. But Wynderbroke will be coming, and I should not like him to find us quite deserted; and she said she'd come, and she may as well do it now as another time. David lives so quietly, we are sure of him; and I commit May Penrose to you. You must persuade her to come. It will be cruel to disappoint. Here is her note — I will send the others myself. And now, God bless you, dear Alice!"

"I am so uncomfortable at the idea of leaving you, papa." Her hand was on his arm, and she was looking anxiously into his face.

"So of course you should be; only that I am so perfectly recovered, that I must have a quiet evening with Richard; and I prefer your being in town tonight, and you and May Penrose can come out tomorrow. Goodbye, child, God bless you!"

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. LONGCLUSE'S BOOT FINDS A TEMPORARY ASYLUM.

In the papers of that morning had appeared a voluminous report of the proceedings of the coroner's inquest which sat upon the body of the deceased Pierre Lebas. I shall notice but one passage referring to the evidence which, it seems, Mr. Longcluse volunteered. It was given in these terms: —

"At this point of the proceedings, Mr. R. D. Longcluse, who had arrived about half an hour before, expressed a wish to be examined. Mr. Longcluse was accordingly sworn, and deposed that he had known the deceased, Pierre Lebas, when he (Mr. Longcluse) was little more than a boy, in Paris. Lebas at that time let lodgings, which were neat and comfortable, in the Rue Victoire. He was a respectable and obliging man. He had some other occupation besides that of letting lodgings, but he (Mr. Longcluse) could not say what it might be." Then followed particulars with which we are already acquainted; and the report went on to say: "He seemed surprised when witness told him that there might be in the room persons of the worst character; and he then, in considerable alarm, pointed out to him (witness) a man who was and had been following him from place to place, he fancied with a purpose. Witness observed the man and saw him watch deceased, turning his eyes repeatedly upon him. The man had no companions, so far as he could see, and affected to be looking in a different direction. It was sideways and stealthily that he was watching deceased, who had incautiously taken out and counted some of his money in the room. Deceased did not conceal from the witness his apprehensions from this man, and witness advised him again to place his money in the hands of some friend who had a secure pocket, and recommended, in case his friend should object to take so much money into his care — Lebas having said he had a large sum about him — under the gaze of the public, that he should make the transfer in the smoking-room, the situation of which he described to him. Mr. Longcluse then proceeded to give an exact description of the man who had been dogging the deceased; the particulars were as follows:—“

Here I arrest my quotation, for I need not recapitulate the details of the tall man’s features, dress, and figure, which are already familiar to the reader.

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In a court off High Holborn there was, and perhaps is, a sort of coffee-shop, in the small drawingrooms of which, thrown into one room, are many small and homely tables, with penny and halfpenny papers, and literature with startling woodcuts. Here working mechanics and others snatch a very early breakfast, and take their dinners, and such as can afford time loiter their half-hour or so over this agreeable literature. One penny morning paper visited that place of refection, for three hours daily, and then flitted away to keep an appointment elsewhere. It was this dull time in that peculiar establishment — namely, about nine o’clock in the morning — and there was but one listless guest in the room. It was the identical tall man in question. His flat feet were planted on the bare floor, and he leaned a shoulder against the window-case, with a plug of tobacco in his jaw, as, at his leisure, he was getting through the coroner’s inquest on Pierre Lebas. He was smiling with half-closed eyes and considerable enjoyment, up to the point where Mr. Longcluse’s evidence was suddenly directed upon him. There was a twitching scowl, as if from a sudden pain; but his smile continued from habit, although his face grew paler. This man, whose name was Paul Davies, winked hard with his left eye, as he got on, and read fiercely with his right. His face was whiter now, and his smile less easy. It was a queerish situation, he thought, and might lead to consequences.

There was a little bit of a looking-glass, picked up at some rubbishy auction, as old as the hills, with some tarnished gilding about it, in the narrow bit of wall between the windows. Paul Davies could look at nothing quite straight. He looked now at himself in this glass, but it was from the corners of his eyes, askance, and with his sly, sleepy depression of the eyelids, as if he had not overmuch confidence even in his own shadow. He folded the morning paper, and laid it, with formal precision, on the table, as if no one had disturbed it; and taking up the *Halfpenny Illustrated*

Broadsheet of Fiction, and with it flourishing in his hand by the corner, he called the waiter over the bannister, and paid his reckoning, and went off swiftly to his garret in another court, a quarter of a mile nearer to Saint Paul's — taking an obscure and devious course through back-lanes and sequestered courts.

When he got up to his garret, Mr. Davies locked his door and sat down on the side of his creaking settlebed, and, in his playful phrase, "put on his considering cap."

"That's a dangerous cove, that Mr. Longcluse. He's done a bold stroke. And now it's him or me, I do suppose — him or me; me or him. Come, Paul, shake up your knowledge-box; I'll not lose this cast simple. He's gave a description of me. The force will know it. And them feet o' mine, they *are* a bit flat: but any chap can make a pair of insteps with a penn'orth o' rags. I wouldn't care tuppence if it wasn't for them pock-marks. There's no managing them. A scar or a wart you may touch over with paint and sollible guttapercha, or pink wafers and gelatine, but pock-marks is too many for any man."

He was looking with some anxiety in the triangular fragment of looking-glass — balanced on a nail in the window-case — at his features.

"I can take off them whiskers; and the long neck he makes so much of, if it was as long as an oystrich, with fourpenn'orth of cotton waste and a cabbage-net, I'd make a bull of it, and run my shoulders up to my ears. I'll take the whiskers off, anyhow. That's no treason; and he mayn't identify me. If I'm not had up for a fortnight my hair would be grew a bit, and that would be a lift. But a fellow must think twice before he begins disguisin'. Juries smells a rat. Howsomever, a cove may shave, and no harm done; or his hair may grow a bit, and how can he help it? Longcluse knows what he's about. He's a sharp lad, but for all that Paul Davies 'ill sweat him yet."

Mr. Davies turned the button of his oldfashioned window, and let it down. He shut out his two scarlet geraniums, which accompanied him in all his changes from one lodging to another.

"Suppose he tries the larceny — that's another thing he may do, seeing what my lay is. It wouldn't do to lose that thing; no more would it answer to let them find it."

This last idea seemed to cause Paul Davies a good deal of serious uneasiness. He began looking about at the walls, low down near the skirting, and up near the ceiling, tapping now and then with his knuckles, and sounding the plaster as a doctor would the chest of a wheezy patient. He was not satisfied. He scratched his head, and fiddled with his ear, and plucked his short nose dubiously, and winked hard at his geraniums through the window.

Paul Davies knew that the front garret was not let. He opened his door and listened. Then he entered that room. I think he had a notion of changing his lodgings, if only he could find what he wanted. That was such a hiding-place as professional seekers were not likely to discover. But he could not satisfy himself.

A thought struck him, however, and he went into the lobby again; he got on a chair and pushed open the skylight, and out went Mr. Davies on the roof. He looked and poked about here. He looked to the neighbouring roofs, lest any eye should be upon him; but there was no one. A maid hanging clothes upon a line, on a sort of balcony, midway down the next house, was singing, "The Ratcatcher's Daughter," he thought rather sweetly — so well, indeed, that he listened for two whole verses — but that did not signify.

Paul Davies kneeled down, and loosed and removed, one after the other, several slates near the lead gutter, between the gables; and, having made a sufficient opening in the roof for his purpose, he returned, let himself down lightly through the skylight, entered his room, and locked himself up. He then unlocked his trunk and took from under his clothes, where it lay, a French boot — the veritable boot of Mr. Longcluse — which, for greater security, he popped under the coarse coverlet of his bed. He next took from his trunk a large piece of paper which, being unfolded at the window, disclosed a rude drawing with a sentence or two underneath, and three signatures, with a date preceding.

Having read this document over twice or thrice, with a rather menacing smile, he rolled it up in brown paper and thrust it into the foot of the boot, which he popped under the coverlet and bolster. He then opened his door wide. Too long a silence might possibly have seemed mysterious, and called up prying eyes, so, while he filled his pipe with tobacco, he whistled, "Villikins and his Dinah" lustily. He was very cautious about this boot and paper. He got on his greatcoat and felt hat, and took his pipe and some matches — the enjoying a quiet smoke without troubling others with the perfume was a natural way of accounting for his visit to the roof. He listened. He slipped his boot and its contents into his capacious greatcoat pocket, with a rag of old carpet tied round it; and then, whistling still cheerily, he mounted the roof again, and placed the precious parcel within the roof, which he, having some skill as a slater, proceeded carefully and quickly to restore.

Down came Mr. Davies now, and shaved off his whiskers. Then he walked out, with a bundle consisting of the coat, waistcoat, and blue necktie he had worn on the evening of Lebas's murder. He was going to pay a visit to his mother, a venerable greengrocer, who lived near the Tower of London; and on his way he pledged these articles at two distinct and very remote pawnbrokers', intending on his return to release, with the proceeds, certain corresponding articles of his wardrobe, now in ward in another establishment. These measures of obliteration he was taking quietly. His visit to his mother, a very honest old woman, who believed him to be the most virtuous, agreeable, and beautiful young man extant, was made with a very particular purpose.

"Well, Ma'am," he said, in reply to the old lady's hospitable greeting, "I won't refuse a pot of half-and-half and a couple of eggs, and I'll go so far as a cut or two of bacon, bein' 'ungry; and I'm a-goin' to write a paper of some consequence, if you'll obleege me with a sheet of foolscap and a pen and ink; and I may as well write it while the things is a-gettin' ready, accordin' to your kind intentions."

And accordingly Mr. Paul Davies sat in silence, looking very important — as he always did when stationery was before him — at a small table, in a dark back room, and slowly penned a couple of pages of foolscap.

"And now," said he, producing the document after his repast, "will you be so good, Ma'am, as to ask Mr. Sildyke and Mrs. Rumble to come down and witness my signing of this, which I mean to leave it in your hands and safe keepin', under lock and key, until I take it away, or otherwise tells you what you must do with it. It is a police paper, Ma'am, and may be wanted any time. But you keep it dark till I tells you."

This settled, Mr. Sildyke and Mrs. Rumble arrived obligingly; and Paul Davies, with an adroit wink at his mother — who was a little shocked and much embarrassed by the ruse, being a truth-loving woman — told them that here was his last will and testament, and he wanted only that they should witness his signature; which, with the date, was duly accomplished.

Paul Davies was, indeed, a man of that genius which requires to proceed by stratagem, cherishing an abhorrence of straight lines, and a picturesque love of the curved and angular. So, if Mr. Longcluse was doing his duty at one end of the town, Mr. Davies, at the other, was by no means wanting in activity, or, according to the level of his intellect and experience, in wisdom.

We have recurred to these scenes in which Mr. Paul Davies figures, because it was indispensable to the reader's right understanding of some events that follow. Be so good, then, as to find Sir Reginald exactly where I left him, standing on the steps of Mortlake Hall. His daughter would have stayed, but he would not hear of it. He stood on the steps, and smirked a yellow and hollow farewell, waving his hand as the carriage drove away. Then he turned and entered the lofty hall, in which the light was already failing.

Sir Reginald did not like the trouble of mounting the stairs. His bedroom and sitting-room were on a level with the hall. As soon as he came in, the gloom of his old prison-house began to overshadow him, and his momentary cheer and goodhumour disappeared.

"Where is Tansey? I suppose she's in her bed, or grumbling in toothache," he snarled to the footman. "And where the devil's Crozier? I have the fewest and the worst servants, I believe, of any man in England."

He poked open the door of his sitting-room with the point of his walking-stick.

"Nothing ready, I dare swear," he quavered, and shot a peevish and fiery glance round it.

Things were not looking quite so badly as he expected. There was just the little bit of expiring fire in the grate which he liked, even in summer. His sealskin slippers were on the hearthrug, and his easy-chair was pushed into its proper place.

"Ha! Crozier, at last! Here, get off this coat, and these mufflers, and —— I was d —— d near dying in that vile chaise. I don't remember how they got me into the inn. There, don't mind condoling. You're privileged, but don't do that. As near dying as possible — rather an awkward business for useless old servants here, if I had. I'll dress in the next room. My son's coming this evening. Admit him, mind. I'll see him. How long is it since we met last? Two years, egad! And Lord Wynderbroke has his dinner here — I don’t know what day, but some day very soon — Friday, I think; and don’t let the people here go to sleep. Remember!”

And so on, with his old servant, he talked, and sneered, and snarled, and established himself in his sitting-room, with his reviews, and his wine, and his newspapers.

Night fell over dark Mortlake Hall, and over the blazing city of London. Sir Reginald listened, every now and then, for the approach of his son. Talk as he might, he did expect something — and a great deal — from the coming interview. Two years without a home, without an allowance, with no provision except a hundred and fifty pounds a year, might well have tamed that wilful beast!

With the tremor of acute suspense, the old man watched and listened. Was it a good or an ill sign, his being so late?

The city of London, with its still roaring traffic and blaze of gas-lamps, did not contrast more powerfully with the silent shadows of the forest-grounds of Mortlake, than did the drawingroom of Lady May Penrose, brilliant with a profusion of light, and resonant with the gay conversation of inmates, all disposed to enjoy themselves, with the dim and vast room in which Sir Reginald sat silently communing with his own dismal thoughts.

Nothing so contagious as gaiety. Alice Arden, laughingly, was “making her book” rather prematurely in dozens of pairs of gloves, for the Derby. Lord Wynderbroke was deep in it. So was Vivian Darnley.

“Your brother and I are to take the reins, turn about, Lady May says. He’s a crack whip. He’s better than I, I think,” said Vivian to Alice Arden.

“You mustn’t upset us, though. I am so afraid of you crack whips!” said Alice. “Nor let your horses run away with us; I’ve been twice run away with already.”

“I don’t the least wonder at Miss Arden’s being run away with very often,” said Lord Wynderbroke, with all the archness of a polite man of fifty.

“Very prettily said, Wynderbroke,” smiled Lady May. “And where is your brother? I thought he’d have turned up tonight,” asked she of Alice.

“I quite forgot. He was to see papa this evening. They wanted to talk over something together.”

“Oh, I see!” said Lady May, and she became thoughtful.

What was the exact nature of the interest which good Lady May undoubtedly took in Richard Arden? Was it quite so motherly as years might warrant? At that time people laughed over it, and were curious to see the progress of the comedy. Here was light and gaiety — light within, lamps without; spirited talk in young anticipation of coming days of pleasure; and outside the roll of carriage-wheels making a humming bass to this merry treble.

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Over the melancholy precincts of Mortlake the voiceless darkness of night descends with unmitigated gloom. The centre — the brain of this dark place — is the house: and in a large dim room, near the smouldering fire, sits the image that haunts rather than inhabits it.

CHAPTER XV.

FATHER AND SON.

Sir Reginald Arden had fallen into a doze, as he sat by the fire with his *Revue des Deux Mondes*, slipping between his finger and thumb, on his knees. He was recalled by Crozier's voice, and looking up, he saw, standing near the door, as if in some slight hesitation, a figure not seen for two years before.

For a moment Sir Reginald doubted his only half-awakened senses. Was that handsome oval face, with large, soft eyes, with such brilliant lips, and the dark-brown moustache, so fine, and silken, that had never known a razor, an unsubstantial portrait hung in the dim air, or his living son? There were perplexity and surprise in the old man's stare.

"I should have been here before, Sir, but your letter did not reach me until an hour ago," said Richard Arden.

"By heaven! Dick? And so you came! I believe I was asleep. Give me your hand. I hope, Dick, we may yet end this miserable quarrel happily. Father and son can have no real interests apart."

Sir Reginald Arden extended his thin hand, and smiled invitingly but rather darkly on his son. Graceful and easy this young man was, and yet embarrassed, as he placed his hand within his father's.

"You will take something, Dick, won't you?"

"Nothing, Sir, thanks."

Sir Reginald was stealthily reading his face. At last he began circuitously —

"I've a little bit of news to tell you about Alice. How long shall I allow you to guess what it is?"

"I'm the worst guesser in the world — pray don't wait for me, Sir."

"Well, I have in my desk there — would you mind putting it on the table here? — a letter from Wynderbroke. You know him?"

"Yes, a little."

"Well, Wynderbroke writes — the letter arrived only an hour ago — to ask my leave to marry your sister, if she will consent; and he says all he will do, which is very handsome — very generous indeed. Wait a moment. Yes, here it is. Read that.”

Richard Arden did read the letter, with open eyes and breathless interest. The old man’s eyes were upon him as he did so.

“Well, Richard, what do you think?”

“There can be but one opinion about it. Nothing can be more handsome. Everything suitable. I only hope that Alice will not be foolish.”

“She sha’n’t be that, I’ll take care,” said the old man, locking down his desk again upon the letter.

“It might possibly be as well, Sir, to prepare her a little at first. I may possibly be of some little use, and so may Lady May. I only mean that it might hardly be expedient to make it from the first a matter of authority, because she has romantic ideas, and she is spirited.”

“I’ll sleep upon it. I sha’n’t see her again till tomorrow evening. She does not care about anyone in particular, I suppose?”

“Not that I know of,” said Richard.

“You’ll find it will all be right — it *will* — all right. It *shall* be right,” said Sir Reginald. And then there was a silence. He was meditating the other business he had in hand, and again circuitously he proceeded.

“What’s going on at the opera? Who is your great danseuse at present?” inquired the baronet, with a glimmer of a leer. “I haven’t seen a ballet for more than six years. And why? I needn’t tell you. You know the miserable life I lead. Egad! there are fellows placed everywhere to watch me. There would be an execution in this house this night, if the miserable tables and chairs were not my brother David’s property. Upon my life, Craven, my attorney, had to serve two notices on the sheriff in one term, to caution him not to sell your uncle’s furniture for my debts. I shouldn’t have had a joint-stool to sit down on, if it hadn’t been for that. And I had to get out of the railway-carriage, by heaven! for fear of arrest, and come home — if home I can call this ruin — by posting all the way, except a few miles. I did not dare to tell Craven I was coming back. I wrote from Twyford, where I — I — took a fancy to sleep last night, to no human being but yourself. My comfort is that they and all the world believe that I’m still in France. It is a pleasant state of things!”

“I am grieved, Sir, to think you suffer so much.”

"I know it. I knew it. I know you are, Dick," said the old man eagerly. "And my life is a perfect hell. I can nowhere in England find rest for the sole of my foot. I am suffering perpetually the most miserable mortifications, and the tortures of the damned. I know you are sorry. It can't be pleasant to you to see your father the miserable outcast, and fugitive, and victim he so often is. And I'll say distinctly — I'll say at once — for it was with this one purpose I sent for you — that no son with a particle of human feeling, with a grain of conscience, or an atom of principle, could endure to see it, when he knew that by a stroke of his pen he could undo it all, and restore a miserable parent to life and liberty! Now, Richard, you have my mind. I have concealed nothing, and I'm sure, Dick, I know, I *know* you won't see your father perish by inches, rather than sign the warrant for his liberation. For God's sake, Dick, my boy speak out! Have you the heart to reject your miserable father's petition? Do you wish me to kneel to you? I love you, Dick, although you don't admit it. I'll kneel to you, Dick — I'll kneel to you. I'll go on my knees to you."

His hands were clasped; he made a movement. His great prominent eyes were fixed on Richard Arden's face, which he was reading with a great deal of eagerness, it is true, but also with a dark and narrow shrewdness.

"Good heaven, Sir, don't stir, I implore! If you do, I must leave the room," said Richard, embarrassed to a degree that amounted to agitation. "And I must tell you, Sir — it is very painful, but, I could not help it, necessity drove me to it — if I were ever so desirous, it is out of my power now. I have dealt with my reversion. I have executed a deed."

"You have been with the Jews!" cried the old man, jumping to his feet. "You have been dealing, by way of *post obit*, with my estate!"

Richard Arden looked down. Sir Reginald was as nearly white as his yellow tint would allow; his large eyes were gleaming fire — he looked as if he would have snatched the poker, and brained his son.

"But what could I do, Sir? I had no other resource. I was forbidden your house; I had no money."

"You lie, Sir!" yelled the old man, with a sudden flash, and a hammer of his thin trembling fist on the table. "You had a hundred and fifty pounds a year of your mother's."

"But that, Sir, could not possibly support any one. I was compelled to act as I did. You really, Sir, left me no choice."

"Now, now, now, now, now! you're not to run away with the thing, you're not to run away with it; you sha'n't run away with it, Sir. You could have made a submission, you know you could. I was open to be reconciled at any time — always too ready. You had only to do as you ought to have done, and I'd have received you with open arms; you know I would — I *would* — you had only to unite our interests in the estates, and I'd have done everything to make you happy, and you know it. But you have taken the step — you have done it, and it is irrevocable. You have done it, and you've ruined me; and I pray to God you have ruined yourself!"

With every sinew quivering, the old man was pulling the bell-rope violently with his left hand. Over his shoulder, on his son, he glanced almost maniacally. "Turn him out!" he screamed to Crozier, stamping; "put him out by the collar. Shut the door upon him, and lock it; and if he ever dares to call here again, slam it in his face. I have done with him for ever!"

Richard Arden had already left the room, and this closing passage was lost on him. But he heard the old man's voice as he walked along the corridor, and it was still in his ears as he passed the hall-door; and, running down the steps, he jumped into his cab. Crozier held the cab-door open, and wished Mr. Richard a kind goodnight. He stood on the steps to see the last of the cab as it drove down the shadowy avenue and was lost in gloom. He sighed heavily. What a broken family it was! He was an old servant, born on their northern estate — loyal, and somewhat rustic — and, certainly, had the baronet been less in want of money, not exactly the servant he would have chosen.

"The old gentleman cannot last long," he said, as he followed the sound of the retreating wheels with his gaze, "and then Master Richard will take his turn, and what one began the other will finish. It is all up with the Ardens. Sir Reginald ruined, Master Harry murdered, and Master David turned tradesman! There's a curse on the old house."

He heard the baronet's tread faintly, pacing the floor in agitation, as he passed his door; and when he reached the housekeeper's room, that old lady, Mrs. Tansey, was alone and all of a tremble, standing at the door. Before her dim staring eyes had risen an oft-remembered scene: the ivy-covered gatehouse at Mortlake Hall; the cold moon glittering down through the leafless branches; the grey horse on its side across the gig-shaft, and the two villains — one rifling and the other murdering poor Henry Arden, the baronet's gay and reckless brother.

"Lord, Mr. Crozier! what's crossed Sir Reginald?" she said huskily, grasping the servant's wrist with her lean hand. "Master Dick, I do suppose. I thought he was to come no more. They quarrel always. I'm like to faint, Mr. Crozier."

"Sit ye down, Mrs. Tansey, Ma'am; you should take just a thimbleful of something. What has frightened you?"

"There's a scritch in Sir Reginald's voice — mercy on us! — when he raises it so; it is the very cry of poor Master Harry — his last cry, when the knife pierced him. I'll never forget it!"

The old woman clasped her fingers over her eyes, and shook her head slowly.

"Well, that's over and ended this many a day, and past cure. We need not fret ourselves no more about it— 'tis thirty years since."

"Two-and-twenty the day o' the Longden steeplechase. I've a right to remember it." She closed her eyes again. "Why can't they keep apart?" she resumed. "If father and son can't look one another in the face without quarrelling, better they should turn their backs on one another for life. Why need they come under one roof? The world's wide enough."

"So it is — and no good meeting and argufying; for Mr. Dick will never open the estate," remarked Mr. Crozier.

"And more shame for him!" said Mrs. Tansey. "He's breaking his father's heart. It troubles him more," she added in a changed tone, "I'm thinking, than ever poor Master Harry's death did. There's none living of his kith or kin cares about it now but Master David. He'll never let it rest while he lives."

"He *may* let it rest, for he'll never make no hand of it," said Crozier. "Would you object, Ma'am, to my making a glass of something hot? — you're gone very pale."

Mrs. Tansey assented, and the conversation grew more comfortable. And so the night closed over the passions and the melancholy of Mortlake Hall.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MIDNIGHT MEETING.

A couple of days passed; and now I must ask you to suppose yourself placed, at night, in the centre of a vast heath, undulating here and there like a sea arrested in a ground-swell, lost in a horizon of monotonous darkness all round. Here and there rises a scrubby hillock of furze, black and rough as the head of a monster. The eye aches as it strains to discover objects or measure distances over the blurred and black expanse. Here stand two trees pretty close together — one in thick foliage, a black elm, with a funereal and plume-like stillness, and blotting out many stars with its gigantic canopy; the other, about fifty paces off, a withered and half barkless fir, with one white branch left, stretching forth like the arm of a gibbet. Nearly under this is a flat rock, with one end slanting downwards, and half buried in the ferns and the grass that grow about that spot. One other fir stands a little way off, smaller than these two trees, which in daylight are conspicuous far away as landmarks on a trackless waste. Overhead the stars are blinking, but the desolate landscape lies beneath in shapeless obscurity, like drifts of black mist melting together into one wide vague sea of darkness that forms the horizon. Over this comes, in fitful moanings, a melancholy wind. The eye stretches vainly to define the objects that fancy sometimes suggests, and the ear is strained to discriminate the sounds, real or unreal, that seem to mingle in the uncertain distance.

If you can conjure up all this, and the superstitious freaks that in such a situation imagination will play in even the hardest and coarsest natures, you have a pretty distinct idea of the feelings and surroundings of a tall man who lay that night his length under the blighted tree I have mentioned, stretched on its roots, with his chin supported on his hands, and looking vaguely into the darkness. He had been smoking, but his pipe was out now, and he had no occupation but that of forming pictures on the dark background, and listening to the moan and rush of the distant wind, and imagining sometimes a voice shouting, sometimes the drumming of a horse’s hoofs approaching over the plain. There was a chill in the air that made this man now and then shiver a little, and get up and take a turn back and forward, and stamp sharply as he did so, to keep the blood stirring in his legs and feet. Then down he would lay again, with his elbows on the ground, and his hands propping his chin. Perhaps he brought his head near the ground, thinking that thus he could hear distant sounds more sharply. He was growing impatient, and well he might.

The moon now began to break through the mist in fierce red over the far horizon. A streak of crimson, that glowed without illuminating anything, showed through the distant cloud close along the level of the heath. Even this was a cheer, like a red ember or two in a pitch-dark room. Very far away he thought now he heard the tread of a horse. One can hear miles away over that level expanse of deathlike silence. He pricked his ears, he raised himself on his hands, and listened with open mouth. He lost the sound, but on leaning his head again to the ground, that vast sounding-board carried its vibration once more to his ear. It was the canter of a horse upon the heath. He was doubtful whether it was approaching, for the sound subsided sometimes; but afterwards it was renewed, and gradually he became certain that it was coming nearer. And now, like a huge, red-hot dome of copper, the moon rose above the level strips of cloud that lay upon the horizon of the heath, and objects began to reveal themselves. The stunted fir, that had looked to the fancy of the solitary watcher like a ghostly policeman, with arm and truncheon raised, just starting in pursuit, now showed some lesser branches, and was more satisfactorily a tree; distances became measurable, though not yet accurately, by the eye; and ridges and hillocks caught faintly the dusky light, and threw blurred but deep shadows backward.

The tread of the horse approaching had become a gallop as the light improved, and horse and horseman were soon visible. Paul Davies stood erect, and took up a position a few steps in advance of the blighted tree at whose foot he had been stretched. The figure, seen against the dusky glare of the moon, would have answered well enough for one of those highwaymen who in old times made the heath famous. His low-crowned felt hat, his short coat with a cape to it, and the leather casings, which looked like jack-boots, gave this horseman, seen in dark outline against the glow, a character not unpicturesque. With a sudden strain of the bridle, the gaunt rider pulled up before the man who awaited him.

"What are you doing there?" said the horseman roughly.

"Counting the stars," answered he.

Thus the signs and countersigns were exchanged, and the stranger said —

"You're alone, Paul Davies, I take it."

"No company but ourselves, mate," answered Davies.

"You're up to half a dozen dodges, Paul, and knows how to lime a twig; that's your little game, you know. This here tree is clean enough, but that 'ere has a hatful o' leaves on it."

"I didn't put them there," said Paul, a little sulkily.

"Well, no. I do suppose a sight o' you wouldn't exactly put a tree in leaf, or a rose-bush in blossom; nor even make wegitables grow. More like to blast 'em, like that rum un over your head."

"What's up?" asked the ex-detective.

"Jest this — there's leaves enough for a bird to roost there, so this won't do. Now, then, move on you with me."

As the gaunt rider thus spoke, his long red beard was blowing this way and that in the breeze; and he turned his horse, and walked him towards that lonely tree in which, as he lay gazing on its black outline, Paul had fancied the shape of a phantom policeman.

"I don't care a cuss," said Davies. "I'm half sorry I came a leg to meet yer."

"Growlin', eh?" said the horseman.

"I wish you was as cold as me, and you'd growl a bit, maybe, yourself," said Paul. "I'm jolly cold."

"Cold, are ye?"

"Cold as a lock-up."

"Why didn't ye fetch a line o' the old author with you?" asked the rider — meaning brandy.

"I had a pipe or two."

"Who'd a-guessed we was to have a night like this in summer-time?"

"I do believe it freezes all the year round in this queer place."

"Would ye like a drop of the South-Sea mountain (gin)?" said the stranger, producing a flask from his pocket, which Paul Davies took with a great deal of goodwill, much to the donor's content, for he wished to find that gentleman in goodhumour in the conversation that was to follow.

"Drink what's there, mate. D'ye like it?"

"It ain't to be by no means sneezed at," said Paul Davies.

The horseman looked back over his shoulder. Paul Davies remarked that his shoulders were round enough to amount almost to a deformity. He and his companion were now a long way from the tree whose foliage he feared might afford cover to some eavesdropper.

"This tree will answer. I suppose you like a post to clap your back to while we are palaverin'," said the rider. "Make a finish of it, Mr. Davies," he continued, as that person presented the half-emptied flask to his hand. "I'm as hot as steam, myself, and I'd rather have a smoke by-and-by."

He touched the bridle here, and the horse stood still, and the rider patted his reeking neck, as he stooped with a shake of his ears and a snort, and began to sniff the scant herbage at his feet.

"I don't mind if I have another pull," said Paul, replenishing the goblet that fitted over the bottom of the flask.

"Fill it again, and no heel-taps," said his companion.

Mr. Davies sat down, with his mug in his hand, on the ground, and his back against the tree. Had there been a donkey near, to personate the immortal Dapple, you might have fancied, in that uncertain gloom, the Knight and Squire of La Mancha overtaken by darkness, and making one of their adventurous bivouacs under the boughs of the tree.

"What you saw in the papers three days ago did give you a twist, I take it?" observed the gentleman on horseback, with a grin that made the red bristles on his upper lip curl upwards and twist like worms.

"I can't tumble to a right guess what you means," said Mr. Davies.

"Come, Paul, that won't never do. You read every line of that there inquest on the French cove at the Saloon, and you have by rote every word Mr. Longcluse said. It must be a queer turning of the tables, for a clever chap like you to have to look slippy, for fear other dogs should lag you."

"'Tain't me that 'ill be looking slippy, as you and me well knows; and it's jest because you knows it well you're here. I suppose it ain't for love of *me* quite?" sneered Paul Davies.

"I don't care a rush for Mr. Longcluse, no more nor I care for you; and I see he's goin' where he pleases. He made a speech in yesterday's paper, at the meetin' at the Surrey Gardens. He was canvassin' for Parliament down in Derbyshire a week ago; and he printed a letter to the electors only yesterday. He don't care two pins for you."

"A good many rows o' pins, I'm thinkin'," sneered Mr. Davies.

"Thinkin' won't make a loaf, Mr. Davies. Many a man has bin too clever, and *thought* himself into the block-house. You're making too fine a game, Mr. Davies; a playin' a bit too much with edged tools, and fiddlin' a bit too freely with fire. You'll burn your fingers, and cut 'em too, do ye mind? unless you be advised, and close the game where you stand to win, as I rather think you do now."

"So do I, mate," said Paul Davies, who could play at brag as well as his neighbour.

"I'm on another lay, a safer one by a long sight. My maxim is the same as yours, 'Grab all you can;' but *I* do it safe, d'ye see? You are in a fair way to end your days on the twister."

"Not if I knows it," said Paul Davies. "I'm afeared o' no man livin'. Who can say black's the white o' my eye? Do ye take me for a child? What do ye take me for?"

"I take you for the man that robbed and done for the French cove in the Saloon. That's the child I take ye for," answered the horseman cynically.

"You lie! You don't! You know I han't a pig of his money, and never hurt a hair of his head. You say that to rile me, jest."

"Why should I care a cuss whether you're riled or no? Do you think I want to get anything out o' yer? I knows everything as well as you do yourself. You take me for a queer gill, I'm thinking; that's not my lay. I wouldn't wait here while you'd walk round my hoss to have every secret you ever know'd."

"A queer gill, mayhap. I think I know you," said Mr. Davies, archly.

"You do, do ye? Well, come, who do you take me for?" said the stranger, turning towards him, and sitting erect in the saddle, with his hand on his thigh, to afford him the amplest view of his face and figure.

"Then I take you for Mr. Longcluse," said Paul Davies, with a wag of his head.

"For Mr. Longcluse!" echoed the horseman, with a boisterous laugh. "Well, there's a guess to tumble to! The worst guess I ever heer'd made. Did you ever see him? Why, there's not two bones in our two bodies the same length, and not two inches of our two faces alike. There's a guess for a detective! Be my soul, it's well for you it ain't him, for I think he'd a shot ye!"

The rider lifted his hand from his coatpocket as he said this, but there was no weapon in it. Mistaking his intention, however, Paul Davies skipped behind the tree, and levelled a revolver at him.

"Down with that, you fool!" cried the horseman. "There's nothing here." And he gave his horse the spur, and made him plunge to a little distance, as he held up his right hand. "But I'm not such a fool as to meet a cove like you without the lead towels, too, in case you should try that dodge." And dipping his hand swiftly into his pocket again, he also showed in the air the glimmering barrels of a pistol. "If you must be pullin' out your barkers every minute, and can't talk like a man, where's the good of coming all this way to palaver with a cove. It ain't not tuppence to me. Crack away if you likes it, and see who shoots best; or, if you likes it better, I don't mind if I get down and try who can hit hardest t'other way, and you'll find my fist tastes very strong of the hammer."

"I thought you were up for mischief," said Davies, "and I won't be polished off simple, that's all. It's best to keep as we are, and no nearer; we can hear one another well enough where we stand."

"It's a bargain," said the stranger, "and I don't care a cuss who you take me for. I'm not Mr. Longcluse; but you're welcome, if it pleases you, to give me his name, and I wish I could have the old bloke's tin as easy. Now here's my little game, and I don't find it a bad one. When two gentlemen — we'll say, for instance, you and Mr. Longcluse — differs in opinion (you says he did a certain thing, and he says he didn't, or goes the whole hog and says *you* did it, and not him), it's plain, if the matter is to be settled amigable, it's best to have a man as knows what he's about, and can find out the cove as threatens the rich fellow, and deal with him handsome, according to circumstances. My terms is moderate. I takes five shillins in the pound, and not a pig under; and that puts you and I in the same boat, d'ye see? Well, I gets all I can out of him, and no harm can happen me, for I'm but a cove a-carryin' of messages betwixt you, and the more I gets for you the better for me. I settled many a business amigable the last five years that would never have bin settled without me. I'm well knowing to some of the swellest lawyers in town, and whenever they has a dilikite case, like a gentleman threatened with informations or the like, they sends for me, and I arranges it amigable, to the satisfacshing of both parties. It's the only way to settle sich affairs with good profit and no risk. I have spoke to Mr.

Longcluse. He was all for having your four bones in the block-house, and yourself on the twister; and he's not a cove to be bilked out of his tin. But he would not like the bother of your cross-charge, either, and I think I could make all square between ye. What do you say?"

"How can I tell that you ever set eyes on Mr. Longcluse?" said Davies, more satisfied as the conference proceeded that he had misdirected his first guess at the identity of the horseman. "How can I tell you're not just a-gettin' all you can out o' me, to make what you can of it on your own account in that market?"

"That's true, you can't tell, mate."

"And what do I know about you? What's your name?" pursued Paul Davies.

"I forgot my name, I left it at home in the cupboard; and you know nothing about me, that's true, excepting what I told you, and you'll hear no more."

"I'm too old a bird for that; you're a born genius, only spoilt in the baking. I'm thinking, mate, I may as well paddle my own canoe, and sell my own secret on my own account. What can you do for me that I can't do as well for myself?"

"You don't think that, Paul. You dare not show to Mr. Longcluse, and you know he's in a wax; and who can you send to him? You'll make nothing o' that brag. Where's the good of talking like a blast to a chap like me? Don't you suppose I take all that at its vally? I tell you what, if it ain't settled now, you'll see me no more, for I'll not undertake it." He pulled up his horse's head, preparatory to starting.

"Well, what's up now? — what's the hurry?" demanded Mr. Davies.

"Why, if this here meetin' won't lead to business, the sooner we two parts and gets home again, the less time wasted," answered the cavalier, with his hand on the crupper of the saddle, as he turned to speak.

Each seemed to wait for the other to add something.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. LONGCLUSE AT MORTLAKE HALL.

"If you let me go this time, Mr. Wheeler, you'll not catch me a-walking out here again," said Mr. Davies sourly. "If there's business to be done, now's the time."

"Well, I can't make it no plainer— 'tis as clear as mud in a wine-glass," said the mounted man gaily, and again he shook the bridle and hitched himself in the saddle, and the horse stirred uneasily, as he added, "Have you any more to say?"

"Well, supposin' I say ay, how soon will it be settled?" said Paul Davies, beginning to think better of it.

"These things doesn't take long with a rich cove like Mr. Longcluse. It's where they has to scrape it up, by beggin' here and borrowin' there, and sellin' this and spoutin' that — there's a wait always. But a chap with no end o' tin — that has only to wish and have — that's your sort. He swears a bit, and threatens, and stamps, and loses his temper summat, ye see; and if I was the prencipal, like you are in this 'ere case, and the police convenient, or a poker in his fist, he might make a row. But seein' I'm only a messenger like, it don't come to nothin'. He claps his hand in his pocket, and outs with the rino, and there's all; and jest a bit of paper to sign. But I won't stay here no longer. I'm getting a bit cold myself; so it's on or off *now*. Go yourself to Longcluse, if you like, and see if you don't catch it. The least you get will be seven-penn'orth, for extortin' money by threatenin' a prosecution, if he don't hang you for the murder of the Saloon cove. How would you like that?"

"It ain't the physic that suits my complaint, guvnor. But I have him there. I have the statement wrote, in sure hands, and other hevidence, as he may suppose, and dated, and signed by respectable people; and I know his dodge. He thinks he came out first with his charge against me, but he's out there; and if he *will* have it, and I split, he'd best look slippy."

"And how much do you want? Mind, I'll funk him all I can, though he's a wideawake chap; for it's my game to get every pig I can out of him."

“I’ll take two thousand pounds, and go to Canada or to New York, my passage and expenses being paid, and sign anything in reason he wants; and that’s the shortest chalk I’ll offer.”

“Don’t you wish you may get it? *I* do, I know, but I’m thinking you might jest as well look for the naytional debt.”

“What’s your name?” again asked Davies, a little abruptly.

“My name fell out o’ window and was broke, last Tuesday mornin’. But call me Tom Wheeler, if you can’t talk without calling me something.”

“Well, Tom, that’s the figure,” said Davies.

“If you want to deal, speak now,” said Wheeler. “If I’m to stand between you, I must have a power to close on the best offer I’m like to get. I won’t do nothing in the matter else-ways.”

With this fresh exhortation, the conference on details proceeded; and when at last it closed, with something like a definite understanding, Tom Wheeler said,— “Mind, Paul Davies, I comes from no one, and I goes to no one; and I never seed you in all my days.”

“And where are you going?”

“A bit nearer the moon,” said the mysterious Mr. Wheeler, lifting his hand and pointing towards the red disk, with one of his bearded grins. And wheeling his horse suddenly, away he rode at a canter, right toward the red moon, against which for a few moments the figure of the retreating horse and man showed black and sharp, as if cut out of cardboard.

Paul Davies looked after him with his left eye screwed close, as was his custom, in shrewd rumination. Before the horseman had got very far, the moon passed under the edge of a thick cloud, and the waste was once more enveloped in total darkness. In this absolute obscurity the retreating figure was instantaneously swallowed, so that the shrewd ex-detective, who had learned by rote every article of his dress, and every button on it, and could have sworn to every mark on his horse at York Fair, had no chance of discovering in the ultimate line of his retreat, any clue to his destination. He had simply emerged from darkness, and darkness had swallowed him again.

*

We must now see how Sir Reginald’s little dinner-party, not a score of miles away, went off only two days later. He was fortunate, seeing he had bidden his guests upon very short notice, not one disappointed.

I daresay that Lady May — whose toilet, considering how quiet everything was, had been made elaborately — missed a face that would have brightened all the rooms for her. But the interview between Richard Arden and his father had not, as we know, ended in reconciliation, and Lady May's hopes were disappointed, and her toilet labour in vain.

When Lady May entered the room with Alice, she saw standing on the hearthrug, at the far end of the handsome room, a tall and very good-looking man of sixty or upwards, chatting with Sir Reginald, one of whose feet was in a slipper, and who was sitting in an easy-chair. A little bit of fire burned in the grate, for the day had been chill and showery. This tall man, with white silken hair, and a countenance kind, frank, and thoughtful, with a little sadness in it, was, she had no doubt, David Arden, whom she had last seen with silken brown locks, and the cheerful aspect of early manhood.

Sir Reginald stood up, with an uncomfortable effort, and, smiling, pointed to his slippers in excuse for his limping gait, as he shuffled forth across the carpet to meet her, with a goodhumoured shrug.

"Wasn't it good of her to come?" said Alice.

"She's better than good," said Sir Reginald, with his thin, yellow smile, extending his hand, and leading her to a chair; "it is visiting the sick and the halt, and doing real good, for it is a pleasure to see her — a pleasure bestowed on a miserable soul who has very few pleasures left;" and with his other thin hand he patted gently the fingers of her fat hand. "Here is my brother David," continued the baronet. "He says you will hardly know him."

"She'll hardly believe it. She was very young when she last saw me, and the last ten years have made some changes," said Uncle David, laughing gently.

At the baronet's allusion to that most difficult subject, the lapse of time, Lady May winced and simpered uneasily; but she expanded gratefully as David Arden disposed of it so adroitly.

"We'll not speak of years of change. I knew you instantly," said Lady May happily. "And you have been to Vichy, Reginald. What stay do you make here?"

"None, almost; my crippled foot keeps me always on a journey. It seems a paradox, but so it is. I'm ordered to visit Buxton for a week or so, and then I go, for change of air, to Yorkshire."

As Alice entered, she saw the pretty face, the original of the brilliant portrait which had haunted her on her night journey to Twyford, and she heard a very silvery voice chatting gaily. Mr. Longcluse was leaning on the end of the sofa on which Grace Maubray sat; and Vivian Darnley, it seemed in high spirits, was standing and laughing nearly before her. Alice Arden walked quickly over to welcome her handsome guest. With a misgiving and a strange pain at her heart, she saw how much more beautiful this young lady had grown. Smiling radiantly, with her hand extended, she greeted and kissed her fair kinswoman; and, after a few words, sat down for a little beside her; and asked Mr. Longcluse how he did; and finally spoke to Vivian Darnley, and then returned to her conventional dialogue of welcome and politeness with her cousin — *how* cousin, she could not easily have explained.

The young ladies seemed so completely taken up with one another that, after a little waiting, the gentlemen fell into a desultory talk, and grew gradually nearer to the window. They were talking now of dogs and horses, and Mr. Longcluse was stealing rapidly into the good graces of the young man.

"When we come up after dinner, you must tell me who these people are," said Grace Maubray, who did not care very much what she said. "That young man is a Mr. Vivian, ain't he?"

"No — Darnley," whispered Alice; "Vivian is his Christian name."

"Very romantic names; and, if he really means half he says, he is a very romantic person." She laughed.

"What has he been saying?" Alice wondered. But, after all, it was possible to be romantic on almost any subject.

"And the other?"

"He's a Mr. Longcluse," answered Alice.

"He's rather clever," said the young lady, with a grave decision that amused Alice.

"Do you think so? Well, so do I; that is, I know he can interest one. He has been almost everywhere, and he tells things rather pleasantly."

Before they could go any further, Vivian Darnley, turning from the window toward the two young ladies, said— "I've just been saying that we must try to persuade Lady May to get up that party to the Derby."

"I can place a drag at her disposal," said Mr. Longcluse.

"And a splendid team — I saw them," threw in Darnley.

"There's nothing I should like so much," said Alice. "I've never been to the Derby. What do you say, Grace? Can you manage Uncle David?"

"I'll try," said the young lady gaily.

"We must all set upon Lady May," said Alice. "She is so goodnatured, she can't resist us."

"Suppose we begin now?" suggested Darnley.

"Hadn't we better wait till we have her quite to ourselves? Who knows what your papa and your uncle might say?" said Grace Maubray, turning to Alice. "I vote for saying nothing to them until Lady May has settled, and then they must only submit."

"I agree with you quite," said Alice laughing.

"Sage advice!" said Mr. Longcluse, with a smile; "and there's time enough to choose a favourable moment. It comes off exactly ten days from this."

"Oh, anything might be done in ten days," said Grace. "I'm sorry it is so far away."

"Yes, a great deal might be done in ten days; and a great deal might happen in ten days," said Longcluse, listlessly looking down at the floor— "a great deal might happen."

He thought he saw Miss Arden's eye turned upon him, curiously and quickly, as he uttered this commonplace speech, which was yet a little odd.

"In this busy world, Miss Arden, there is no such thing as quiet, and no one acts without imposing on other people the necessity for action," said Mr. Longcluse; "and I believe that often the greatest changes in life are the least anticipated by those who seem to bring them about spontaneously."

At this moment, dinner being announced, the little party transferred itself to the dining-room, and Miss Arden found herself between Mr. Longcluse and Uncle David.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PARTY IN THE DINING-ROOM.

And now, all being seated, began the talk and business of dinner.

"I believe," said Mr. Longcluse, with a laugh, "I am growing metaphysical."

"Well, shall I confess, Mr. Longcluse, you do sometimes say things that are, I fear, a little too wise for my poor comprehension?"

"I don't express them; it is my fault," he answered, in a very low tone. "You have *mind*, Miss Arden, for anything. There is no one it is so delightful to converse with, owing in part to that very faculty — I mean quick apprehension. But I know my own defects. I know how imperfectly I often express myself. By-the-way, you seemed to wish to have that curious little wild Bohemian air I sang the other night, 'The Wanderer's Bride' — the song about the white lily, you know. I ventured to get a friend, who really is a very good musician, to make a setting of it, which I so very much hope you will like. I brought it with me. You will think me very presumptuous, but I hoped so much you might be tempted to try it."

When Mr. Longcluse spoke to Alice, it was always in a tone so very deferential, that it was next to impossible that a very young girl should not be flattered by it — considering, especially, that the man was reputed clever, had seen the world, and had met with a certain success, and that by no means of a kind often obtained, or ever quite despised. There was also a directness in his eulogy which was unusual, and which spoken with a different manner would have been embarrassing, if not offensive. But in Mr. Longcluse's manner, when he spoke such phrases, there appeared a real humility, and even sadness, that the boldness of the sentiment was lost in the sincerity and dejection of the speaker, which seemed to place him on a sudden at the immeasurable distance of a melancholy worship.

"I am so much obliged!" said Alice. "I did wish so much to have it when you sang it. It may not do for my voice at all, but I longed to try it. When a song is sung so as to move one, it is sure to be looked out and learned, without any thought wasted on voice, or skill, or natural fitness. It is, I suppose, like the vanity that makes one person dress after another. Still, I do wish to sing that song, and I am so much obliged!”

From the other side her uncle said very softly— “What do you think of my ward, Grace Maubray?”

“Oughtn’t I to ask, rather, what you think of her?” she laughed archly.

“Oh! I see,” he answered, with a pleasant and honest smile; “you have the gift of seeing as far as other clever people into a millstone. But, no — though perhaps I ought to thank you for giving me credit for so much romance and good taste — I don’t think I shall ever introduce you to an aunt. You must guess again, if you will have a matrimonial explanation; though I don’t say there is any such design. And perhaps, if there were, the best way to promote it would be to leave the intended hero and heroine very much to themselves. They are both very good-looking.”

“Who?” asked Alice, although she knew very well whom he meant.

“I mean that pretty creature over there, Grace Maubray, and Vivian Darnley,” said he quietly.

She smiled, looking very much pleased and very arch.

With how Spartan a completeness women can hide the shootings and quiverings of mental pain, and of bodily pain too, when the motive is sufficient! Under this latter they are often clamorous, to be sure; but the demonstration expresses not want of patience, but the feminine yearning for compassion.

“I fancy nothing would please the young rogue Vivian better. I wish I were half so sure of her. You girls are so unaccountable, so fanciful, and — don’t be angry — so uncertain.”

“Well, I suppose, as you say, we must only have patience, and leave the matter in the hands of Time, who settles most things pretty well.”

She raised her eyes, and fancied she saw Grace Maubray at the same moment withdraw hers from her face. Lady May was talking from the end of the table with Mr. Longcluse.

“Your neighbour who is talking to Lady May is a Mr. Longcluse?”

“Yes.”

“He is a City notability; but oddly, I never happened to see him till this evening. Do you think there is something curious in his appearance?”

“Yes, a little, perhaps. Don’t you?”

“So odd that he makes my blood run cold,” said Uncle David, with a shrug and a little laugh. “Seriously, I mean unpleasantly odd. What is Lady May talking about? Yes — I thought so — that horrid murder at the ‘Saloon Tavern.’ For so goodnatured a person, she has the most bloodthirsty tastes I know of; she’s always deep in some horror.”

“My brother Dick told me that Mr. Longcluse made a speech there.”

“Yes, so I heard; and I think he said what is true enough. London is growing more and more insecure; and that certainly was a most audacious murder. People make money a little faster, that is true; but what is the good of money, if their lives are not their own? It is quite true that there are streets in London, which I remember as safe as this room, through which no one suspected of having five pounds in his pocket could now walk without a likelihood of being garotted.”

“How dreadful!” said Alice, and Uncle David laughed a little at her horror.

“It is too true, my dear. But, to pass to pleasanter subjects, when do you mean to choose among the young fellows, and present me to a new nephew?” said Uncle David.

“Do you fancy I would tell anyone if I knew?” she answered, laughing. “How is it that you men, who are always accusing us weak women of thinking of nothing else, can never get the subject of matrimony out of your heads? Now, uncle, as you and I may talk confidentially, and at our ease, I’ll tell you two things. I like my present spinster life very well — I should like it better, I think, if it were in the country; but town or country, I don’t think I should ever like a married life. I don’t think I’m fit for command.”

“Command! I thought the prayer-book said something about obeying, on the contrary,” said Uncle David.

“You know what I mean. I’m not fit to rule a household; and I am afraid I am a little idle, and I should not like to have it to do — and so I could never do it well.”

“Nevertheless, when the right man comes, he need but beckon with his finger, and away you go, Miss Alice, and undertake it all.”

“So we are whistled away, like poodles for a walk, and that kind of thing! Well, I suppose, uncle, you are right, though I can’t see that I’m quite so docile a creature. But if my poor sex is so willing to be won, I don’t know how you are to excuse your solitary state, considering how very little trouble it would have taken to make some poor creature happy."

"A very fair retort!" laughed Uncle David. And he added, in a changed tone, for a sudden recollection of his own early fortunes crossed him—"But even when the right man does come, it does not always follow, Miss Alice, that he dares make the sign; fate often interposes years, and in them death may come, and so the whole card-castle falls."

"I've had a long talk," he resumed, "with Richard; he has made me promises, and I hope he will be a better boy for the future. He has been getting himself into money troubles, and acquiring — I'm afraid I should say cultivating — a taste for play. I know you have heard something of this before; I told you myself. But he has made me promises, and I hope, for your sake, he'll keep them; because, you know, I and your father can't last for ever, and he ought to take care of you; and how can he do that, if he's not fit to take care of himself? But I believe there is no use in thinking too much about what is to come. One has enough to do in the present. I think poor Lady May has been disappointed," he said, with a very cautious smile, his eye having glanced for a moment on her; "she looks a little forlorn, I think."

"Does she? And why?"

"Well, they say she would not object to be a little more nearly related to you than she is."

"You can't mean papa — or *yourself*!"

"Oh, dear, no!" he answered, laughing. "I mean that she misses Dick a good deal."

"Oh, dear! uncle, you can't be serious!"

"It might be a very serious affair for her; but I don't know that he could do a wiser thing. The old quarrel is still raging, he tells me, and that he can't appear in this house."

"It is a great pity," said she.

"Pity! Not at all. They never could agree; and it is much better for Dick they should not — on the terms Reginald proposes, at least. I see Lady May trying to induce you to make her the sign at which ladies rise, and leave us poor fellows to shift for ourselves."

"Ungallant old man! I really believe she is."

And in a moment more the ladies were floating from the room, Vivian Darnley standing at the door. Somehow he could not catch Alice's eye as they passed; she was smiling an answer to some gabble of Lady May's. Grace gave him a very kind look with her fine eyes as she went by; and so the young man, who had followed them up the massive stairs with his gaze, closed the door and sat down again, before his claret glass, and his little broken cluster of grapes, and half-dozen distracted bits of candied fruit, and sighed deeply.

"That murder in the City that you were speaking of just now to Lady May is a serious business for men who walk the streets, as I do sometimes, with money in their pockets," said David Arden, addressing Mr. Longcluse.

"So it struck me — one feels that instinctively. When I saw that poor little goodnatured fellow dead, and thought how easily I might have walked in there myself, with the assassin behind me, it seemed to me simply the turn of a die that the lot had not fallen upon me," said Longcluse.

"He was robbed, too, wasn't he?" croaked Sir Reginald, who was growing tired; and with his fatigue came evidences of his temper.

"Oh, yes," said David; "nothing left in his pockets."

"And Laroque, a watchmaker, a relation of his, said he had cheques about him, and foreign money," said Longcluse; "but, of course, the cheques were not presented, and foreign money is not easily traced in a big town like London. I made him a present of ten pounds to stake on the game; I could not learn that he did stake it, and I suppose the poor fellow intended applying it in some more prudent way. But my present was in gold, and that, of course, the robber applied without apprehension."

"Now, you fellows who have a stake in the City, it is a scandal your permitting such a state of things to continue," said Sir Reginald; "because, though your philanthropy may not be very diffuse, each of you cares most tenderly for one individual at least in the human race — I mean *self* — and whatever you may think of personal morality, and even life — for you don't seem to me to think a great deal of grinding operatives in the cranks of your mills, or blowing them up by bursting steam-boilers, to say nothing of all the people you poison with adulterated food, or with strychnine in beer, or with arsenic in candles, or pretty green papers for bedrooms — or smash or burn alive on railways — yet you should, on selfish grounds, set your faces against a system of assassination for pocketbooks and purses, the sort of things precisely you have always about you. Don't you see? And it's inconsistent besides, because, as I said, although you care little for life — other people's, I mean — in the abstract, yet you care a great deal for property. I think it's your idol, by Jove! and worshipping money — positively *worshipping* it, as you do, it seems a scandalous inconsistency that you should — of course, I don't mean you two individually," he said, perhaps recollecting that he might be going a little too fast; "you never, of course, fancied *that*. I mean, of course, the class of men we have all heard of, or seen — but I do say, with that sort of adoration for money and property, I can't understand their allowing their pockets to be profaned and their purses made away with."

Sir Reginald, having thus delivered himself with considerable asperity, poured some claret into his glass, and pushed the jugs on to his brother, and then, closing his eyes, composed himself either to listen or to sleep.

"City or country, East End or West End, I fancy we are all equally anxious to keep other people's hands out of our pockets," said David Arden; "and I quite agree with Mr. Longcluse in all he is reported to have said with respect to our police system."

"But is it so certain that the man was robbed?" said Vivian Darnley.

"Everything he had about him was taken," said Mr. Longcluse.

"But they pretend to rob men sometimes, when they murder them, only to conceal the real motive," persisted Vivian Darnley.

"Yes, that's quite true; but then there must be *some* motive," said Mr. Longcluse, with something a little supercilious in his smile: "and it isn't easy to conceive a motive for murdering a poor little goodnatured letter of lodgings, a person past the time of life when jealousy could have anything to do with it, and a most inoffensive and civil creature. I confess, if I were obliged to seek a motive other than the obvious one, for the crime, I should be utterly puzzled."

"When I was travelling in Prussia," said Vivian Darnley, "I saw two people in different prisons — one a woman, the other a middle-aged man — both for murder. They had been found guilty, and had been kept there only to get a confession from them before execution. They won't put culprits to death there, you know, unless they have first admitted their guilt; and one of these had actually confessed. Well, each had borne an unexceptionable character up to the time when suspicion was accidentally aroused, and then it turned out that they had been poisoning and otherwise making away with people, at the rate of two or three a year, for half their lives. Now, don't you see, these masked assassins, having, as it appeared, absolutely no intelligible motive, either of passion or of interest, to commit these murders, could have had no inducement, as the woman had actually confessed, except a sort of lust of murder. I suppose it is a sort of madness, but these people were not otherwise mad; and it is quite possible that the same sort of thing may be going on in other places. People say that the police would have got a clue to the mystery by means of the foreign coin and the banknotes, if they had not been destroyed."

"But there are traces of organisation," said Mr. Longcluse. "In a crowded place like that, such things could hardly be managed without it, and insanity such as you describe is very rare; and you'll hardly get people to believe in a swell-mob of madmen, committing murder in concert simply for the pleasure of homicide. They will all lean to a belief in the coarse but intelligible motive of the highwayman."

"I saw in the newspapers," said David Arden, "some evidence of yours, Mr. Longcluse, which seemed rather to indicate a particular man as the murderer."

"I have my eye upon him," said Longcluse. "There are suspicious circumstances. The case in a little time may begin to clear; at present the police are only groping."

"That's satisfactory; and those fellows are paid so handsomely for groping," said Sir Reginald, opening his eyes suddenly. "I believe that we are the worst-governed and the worst-managed people on earth, and that our merchants and tradespeople are rich simply by flukes — simply by a concurrence of lucky circumstances, with which they have no more to do than Prester John or the Man in the Moon. Take a little claret, Mr. Longcluse, and send it on."

"No more, thanks."

And all the guests being of the same mind, they marched up the broad stairs to the ladies.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN MRS. TANSEY'S ROOM.

There were sounds of music and laughter faintly audible through the drawingroom door. The music ceased as the door opened, and the gentlemen entered an atmosphere of brilliant light, and fragrant with the pleasant aroma of tea.

"Pray, Miss Arden, don't let us interrupt you," said Mr. Longcluse. "I thought I heard singing as we came up the stairs." He had come to the piano, and was now at her side.

She did not sing or play, but Vivian Darnley thought that her conversation with Longcluse, as, with one knee on his chair, he leaned over the back of it and talked, seemed more interesting than usual.

"I say, Reginald," said David Arden softly to his brother, "I must run down and pay Martha Tansey my usual visit. She's in her room, I suppose. I'll steal away and return quietly."

And so he was gone. He closed the door softly behind him, and slowly descended the wide staircase, with many vague conjectures and images revolving in his mind. He paused at the great window on the landing, and looked out upon the solemn and familiar landscape. A brilliant moon was high in the sky, and the stars glimmered brightly. His hand was on the window as he looked out, thinking.

Uncle David was a man impulsive, prompt, sanguine — a temperament, in short, which, directed by an able intellect, would have made a good general. When an idea had got into his head, he could not rest until he had worked it out. On the whole, throughout his life these fits of sudden and feverish concentration had been effective, and aided his fortunes. It is, perhaps, an unbusinesslike temperament; but commercial habits and example had failed to control that natural ardour, and, when once inflamed, it governed his actions implicitly.

An idea, very vague, very little the product of reason, had now taken possession of his brain, and he relied upon it as an intuition. He had been thinking over it. It first warmed, then simmered, then, as it were, boiled.

The process had been one of an hour and more, as he sat at his brother's table and took his share in the conversation. When the steam got up and the pressure rose to the point of action, forth went Uncle David to have his talk with his early friend Tansey. He stopped, as I have said, at the great window on the staircase, and looked out and up. The moon was splendid; the stars were glimmering brightly; they looked down like a thousand eyes set upon him, to watch the prowess and perseverance of the man on whom fate had imposed a mission.

Some idea like this seized him, for, like many men of a similar temperament, he had an odd and unconfessed vein of poetry in his nature. He had looked out and up in a listless abstraction, and the dark heaven above him, brilliant with its eternal lights, had for a moment withdrawn and elevated his thoughts as if he had entered a cathedral.

"What specks and shadows we are, and how eternal is duty! And if we are in another place to last like those unfailing lights — to become happy or wretched, and, in either state, indestructible for ever — what signify the labour and troubles of life, compared with that by which our everlasting fate is fixed? God help us! Am I consulting revenge or conscience in pursuing this barren inquiry? Do I mistake for the sublime impulse of conscience a vulgar thirst for blood? I think not. I never harboured malice; I hate punishing people. But murder is a crime against God himself, respecting which he imposes duties upon man, and seconds them by all the instincts of affection. Dare I neglect them, then, in the case of poor loving Harry, my brother?"

The drawingroom door had been opened a little, the night being sultry, and through it now came the clear tones of a well-taught baritone. It was singing a slow and impassioned air, and its tones, though sweet, chilled him with a strange pain. It seemed like instinct that told him it was the stranger's voice. One moment's thought would have proved it equally. There was no one else present to suspect but Vivian Darnley, and he was no musician; but to David Arden it seemed that if a hundred people were there he should have felt it all the same, and intuitively recognised it as Longcluse's voice.

"What is it in that voice which is so hateful? What is it in that passion which sounds insincere? What gives to those sweet tones a latent discord, that creeps so coldly through my nerves?"

So thought David Arden, as, with one hand still upon the window-sash, he listened and turned toward the open door, with a frown akin to one of pain.

Spellbound, he listened till the song was over, and sighed and shook his ears with a sort of shudder when the music ceased.

"I don't know why I stayed to listen. Face — voice — what is the agency about that fellow? I daresay I'm a fool, but I can't help it, and I must bring the idea to the test."

He descended the stairs slowly, crossed the hall, and walked thoughtfully down the passage leading to the housekeeper's room. At this hour the old woman had it usually to herself. He knocked at the housekeeper's door, and recognised the familiar voice that answered.

"How do you do, Martha?" said he, striding cheerily into the room.

"Ah! Master David? So it is, sure!"

"Ay, sure and sure, Martha," said he, taking the old woman's hand, with his kind smile. "And how are you, Martha? Tell me how you are."

"I won't say much. I'm not so canty as you'll mind me. I'm an old wife now, Master David, and not much for this world, I'm thinking," she answered dolorously.

"You may outlive much younger people, Martha; we are all in the hands of God," said David, smiling. "It seems to me but yesterday that I and poor Harry used to run in here to you from our play in the grounds, and you had always a bit of something for us hungry fellows to eat, come when we might."

"Ah, ha! Yes, ye were hungry fellows then — spirin' up, fine tall lads. Reginald was never like ye; he was seven years older than you. And hungry? Yes! The cold turkey and ham, ye mind — by Jen! I *have* seen ye eat hearty; and pancakes — ye liked them best of all. And it went a' into a good skin. I will say — you and Master Harry (God be wi' him!) a fine, handsome pair o' lads ye were. And you're a handsome fellow still, Master David, and might have married well, no doubt; but man proposes and God disposes, and time and tide 'll wait for no man, and what's one man's meat's another man's poison. Who knows and all may be for the best? And that Mr. Longcluse is dining here to-day?" she added, not very coherently, and with a sudden gloom.

“Yes, Martha, that Mr. Longcluse is dining here to-day; and Master Dick tells me you did not fall in love with him at first sight, when they paid you a visit here. Is that true?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know what. The sight of him — or the sound of his voice, I don’t know which — gave me a turn,” said the old woman.

“Well, Martha, I don’t like his face, either. He gave me, also, what you call a turn. He’s very pale, and I felt as if I had been frightened by him when I was a child; and yet he must be some five and twenty years younger than I am, and I’m almost certain I never saw him before. So I say it must be something that’s no’ canny as you used to say. What do you think, Martha?”

“Ye may be funnin’, Master David. Ye were always a canty lad. But it’s o’er true. I can’t bring to mind what it is — I can’t tell — but something in that man’s face gev me a sten. I conceited I was just goin’ to swound; and he looked sa straight at me, like a ghost.”

“Master Richard says you looked very hard at Mr. Longcluse; you had both a good stare at each other,” said Uncle David. “He thought there was going to be a recognition.”

“Did I? Well, no: I don’t know him, I *think*. ’Tis all a jummlement, like. I couldn’t bring nout to mind.”

“I know, Martha, you liked poor Harry well,” said David Arden, not with a smile, but with a very sad countenance.

“That I did,” said Mrs. Tansey.

“And I think you like me, Martha?”

“Ye’re not far wrong there, Master David.”

“And for both our sakes — for mine and his, for the dead no less than the living — I am sure you won’t allow any thought of trouble, or nervousness, or fear of lawyers’ browbeating, or that sort of thing, to deter you from saying, wherever and whenever justice may require it, everything you know or suspect respecting that dreadful occurrence.”

“The death o’ Master Harry, ye mean!” exclaimed Mrs. Tansey sternly, drawing herself up on a sudden, with a pale frown, and looking full at him. “*Me* to hide or hold back aught that could bring the truth to light! Oh! Master David, do you know what ye’re sayin’?”

“Perfectly,” said he, with a melancholy smile; “and I am glad it vexes you, Martha, because I need no answer on that point more than your honest voice and face."

"Keep back aught, man!" she repeated, striking her hand on the table. "Why, lad, I'd lose that old hand under the chopper for one gliff o' the truth into that damned story. Why, lawk! where's yer head, boy? Wasn't I maist killed myself, for sake o' him that night?"

"Ay, Martha, brave girl, I'm satisfied; and I ask your pardon for the question. But years bring alteration, you know; and I'm changed in mind myself in many ways I never could have believed. And everyone doesn't see with me that it is our duty to explore a crime like that, to track the villain, if we can, and bring him to justice. *You* do, Martha; but there are many in whose veins poor Harry's blood is running, who don't feel like you. Master Richard said that the gentleman looked as if he did not know what to make of you; 'and, by Jove!' said he, '*I* didn't either — Martha stared so.'"

"I couldn't help. 'Twas scarce civil; but truly I couldn't, Sir," said Martha Tansey, who had by this time recovered her equanimity. "He did remind me of summat."

"We will talk of that by-and-by, Martha; we will try to recall it. What I want you first to tell me is exactly your recollection of the lamentable occurrence of that night. I have a full note of it at home; but I have not looked at it for years, and I want my recollection confirmed tonight, that you and I may talk over some possibilities which I should like to examine with your help."

"I can talk of it now," said the old woman; "but for many a year after it happened I dare not. I could not sleep for many a night after I told it to anyone. But now I can bear it. So, Master David, you may ask what you please."

"First let me hear your recollection of what happened," said David Arden.

"Ay, Master David, that I will. Sit ye down, for my old bones won't carry me standing no time now, and sit I must. Right well ye're lookin', and right glad am I to see it, Master David; and ye were always a handsome laddie. God bless ye, and God be wi' the old times! And poor Master Harry — poor laddie! — I liked him well. You two looked beautiful, walkin' up to t' house together — two conny, handsome boys ye were."

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. TANSEY’S STORY.

“The sun don’t touch these windows till nigh nightfall. In the short days o’ winter, the last sunbeam at the settin’ just glints along the wall, and touches a sprig or two o’ them scarlet geraniums on the windastone. ’Tis a cold room, Master David. In summer evenins, like this, ye have just a chilly flush o’ the sun settin’, and, before it’s well on the windas, the bats and beetles is abroad, and the moth is flittin’, and the gloamin’ fa’s,” said the old woman. “The windas looks to the west, but also a bit to the north, ye’ll mind, and that’s the cause o’t. I don’t complain. I ha’ suffered it these thirty years and more, and ‘tain’t worth while, for the few years that’s left, makin’ a blub and a blither about it. I’m an old wife now, Master David, and there can’t be many more years for me left aboon the grass, sa I e’en let be and taks the world easy, ye see; and that’s the reason I aye keep a bit o’ wood burnin’ on the hearth — it keeps the life in my old bones — and I hope it ain’t too warm for you, Master David?”

“Not a bit, Martha. This side of the house is cool. I remember that our room, when we were boys, looked out from it, high up, you recollect, and it never was hot.”

“That’s it, ye were in the top o’ the house; and poor Harry, wi’ his picturs o’ horses and dogs hangin’ up on the wa’s. Lawk! it seems but last week. How the years flits! I often thinks of him. See what a moon there is tonight. ’Twas just such a moon that night, only frostier, ye see — the same clear sky and bright moon; ‘twould make ye wink to look at. Ye’re not too hot wi’ that bit o’ wood lightin’ in the grate?”

“I like the fire, Martha, and I like the moon, and I like your company best of all.”

The truth was, he did like the flicker of the wood fire. The flame was cheery, and took off something of the dismal shadow that stole over everything whenever he applied his affectionate mind to the horrors of the dreadful night on which he was now ruminating. One of the window-shutters was open, and the chill brilliancy of the moon, and the deep blue sky, were serenely visible over the black foreground of trees. The wavering of the redder light of the fire, as its reflection spread and faded upon the wainscot, was warm and pleasant; and, had their talk been of less ghastly things, would have brightened their thoughts with a sense of comfort.

"I have not very long to stay, Martha," said David Arden, looking at his watch, "so tell me your recollection as accurately as you can. Let me hear *that* first; and then I want to ask you for some particular information, which I am sure you can give me."

"Why not? Who should I give it sooner to? Will ye take a cup o' coffee? No. Well, a glass o' curaçoa? No. And what will ye take?"

"You forget that I have taken everything, and come to you with all my wants supplied. So now, dear Martha, let me hear it all."

"I'll tell ye all about it. I was younger and stronger, mind, than I am now, by twenty years and more. 'Tis a short time to look back on, but a good while passing, and leaves many a gap and change, and many a scar and wrinkle."

There was a palpable tremble always in Mrs. Tansey's voice, in the thin hand she extended towards him, and in the head from which her old eyes glittered glassily on him.

"The road is very lonely by night — the loneliest road in all England. When it passes ten o'clock, you might listen till cockcrow for a footfall. Well, I, and Thomas Ridley, and Anne Haslett, was all the people at Mortlake just then, the family being in the North, except Master Harry. He went to a race across country, that was run that day; and he told me, laughing, he would not ask me to throw an old shoe after him, as he stood sure to win two thousand pounds. And away he went, little thinking, him and me, how our next meetin' would be. At that time old Tom Clinton — ye'll mind Clinton?"

"To be sure I do," acquiesced David Arden.

"Well, Tom was in the gatehouse then; after he died, his daughter's husband got it, ye know. And when he had outstayed his time by two hours — for he was going northwards in the morning, and told me he'd be surely back before ten — I began to grow frightened, and I put on my bonnet and cloak, and down I runs to the gatehouse, and knocks up Tom Clinton. It was nigh twelve o'clock then. When Tom came to the door, having dressed in haste, I said, 'Tom, which way will Master Harry return? he's not been since.' And says Tom, 'If he's comin' straight from the course, he'll come down from the country; but if he's dinin' instead in London, he'll come up the Islington way.' 'Well,' said I, 'go you, Tom, to the turn o' the road, and look and listen for sight or sound, and bring me word.' I don't know what was frightenin' me. He was often later, and I never minded; but something that night was on my mind, like a warning, for I couldn't get the fear out o' my heart. Well, who comes ridin' back but Dick Wallock, the groom, that had drove away with him in the gig in the mornin'; and glad I was to see his face at the gate. It was bright moonlight, and says I, 'Dick, how is Master Harry? Is all well with him?' So he tells me, ay, all was well, and he goin' to drive the gig out himself from town. He was at a place — you'll mind the name of it — where it turned out they played cards and dice, and won and lost like — like fools, or worse, as some o' them no doubt was. 'Well,' says I, 'go you up, as he told you, with the horse, and I'll stay here till he comes back, if it wasn't till daybreak.' For all the time, ye see, my heart misgave me that there was summat bad to happen; and when Tom Clinton came back, says I, 'Tom, you go in, and get to your room, and let me sit down in your kitchen; and I'll let him in when he comes, for I can't go up to the house, nor close an eye, till he comes.' Well, it was a full hour after, and I was sittin' in the kitchen window that looks out on the road, starin' wide awake, and lookin', now one way and now another, up and down, when I hears the clink of a footfall on the stones, and a tall, ill-favoured man walks slowly by, and turns his face toward the window as he passed."

"You saw him distinctly, then?" said David.

"As plain as ever I saw you. An ill-favoured fellow in a light drab great coat wi' a cape to it. He looked white wi' fear, and wild big eyes, and a high hooked nose — a tall chap wi' his hands in his pockets, and a low-crowned hat on. He went on slow, till a whistle sounded, and then he ran down the road a bit toward the signal."

"That was toward the Islington side?"

"Ay, Sir, and I grew more uneasy. I was scared wi' the sight o' such a man at that time o' night, in that lonesome place, and the whistlin' and runnin'."

"Did you see the same man again that night?" asked David.

"Yes, 'twas the same I saw afterwards — Lord ha' mercy on us! I saw him again, at his murderin' work. Oh, Master David! it makes my brain wild, and my skin creep, to think o' that sight."

“I did wrong to interrupt you; tell it your own way, Martha, and I can afterwards ask you the questions that lie near my heart,” said Mr. Arden.

“’Tis easy told, Sir; the candle was burnt down almost in the socket, and I went to look out another — but before I could find one, it went out. ’Twas but a stump I found and lighted, after I saw that fellow in the light drab surtout go by. I wished to let them know, if they had any ill design, there was folks awake in the lodge. But he was gone by before I found the matches, and now that he was comin’ again, the candle went out — things goes so cross. It was to be, ye see. Well, while I was rummagin’ about, looking for a candle, I heard the sound of a horse trotting hard, and wheels rollin’ along; so says I, ‘Thank God!’ for then I was sure it must be Harry, poor lad. So I claps on my bonnet, and out wi’ me, wi’ t’ key. I thought I heard voices, as the hoofs and wheels came clinkin’ up to the gate; but I could not be quite sure. I was huffed wi’ Master Harry for the long wait he gev me, and the fright, and I took my time comin’ round the corner of the gatehouse. And thinks I to myself, he’ll be offerin’ me a seat in the gig up to the house, but I won’t take it. God forgi’e me for them angry thoughts to the poor laddie that I was never to have a word wi’ more! When I came to the gate there was never a call, and nothing but voices talking and gaspin’ like, under their breath a’most, and a queer scufflin’ sound, that I could not make head nor tail on. So I unlocked the wicket, and out wi’ me, and, Lord ha’ mercy on us, what a sight for me! The gig was there, with its shafts on the ground, and its back cocked up, and the iron-grey flat on his side, lashin’ and scramblin’, poor brute, and two villains in the gig, both pullin’ at poor Master Harry, one robbin’, and t’other murderin’ him. I took one o’ them — a short, thick fellow — by the skirt o’ his coat, to drag him out, and I screamed for Tom Clinton to come out. The short fellow turned, and struck at me wi’ somethin’; but, lucky for me, ‘appen, the lashin’ horse that minute took me on the foot, and brought me down. But up I scrambles wi’ a stone in my hand, and I shied it, the best I could, at the head o’ the villain that was killin’ Master Harry. But what can a woman do? It did not go nigh him, I’m thinkin’. I was, all the time, calling on Tom to come, and cryin’ ‘Murder!’ that you’d think my throat’d split. That bloody wretch in the gig had got poor Master Harry’s head back over the edge of it, and his knee to his chest, a-strivin’ to break his neck across the back-rails; and poor dear lad, Master Harry, he just scritched, ‘Yelland Mace! for God’s sake!’ They were the last words I ever heard from him, and I'll never forget that horrid scritch, nor the face of the villain that was over him, like a beast over its prey. He was tuggin' at his throat, like you'd be tryin' to tear up a tree by the roots — you never see such a face. His teeth was set, and the froth comin' through, and his black eyebrows screwed together, you'd think they'd crack the thin hooked nose of him between them, and he pantin' like a wild beast. He looked like a madman, I tell you; 'twas bright moonlight, and the trees bare, and the shadows of the branches was switchin' across his face."

"You saw that face distinctly?" asked David Arden.

"As clear as yours this minute."

"Now tell me — and think first — was he a bit like that Mr. Longcluse whose appearance startled you the other evening?" asked Mr. Arden, in a very low tone, with his eyes fixed on her intensely.

"No, no, no! not a bit. He had a small mouth and white teeth, and a great beak of a nose. No, no, no! not he. I saw him strike somethin' that shone — a knife or a dagger — into the poor lad's throat, and he struck it down at my head, as you know, and I mind nothin' after that. I'll carry the scar o' that murderer's blow to my grave. There's the whole story, and God forgi'e ye for asking me, for it gi'es me t' creepins for a week after; and I didn't conceit 'twould 'a' made me sa excited, Sir, or I would not 'a' bargained to tell it tonight — not that I blame ye, Master David, for I thought, myself, that I could bear it better — and I do believe, as I have gone so far in it, 'tis better to make one job of it, and a finish. So ye'll ask me any question ye like, and I'll make the best answer I can; only, Master David, ye'll not be o'er long about it?"

"You are a good creature, Martha. I am sorry to pain you, but I pain myself, and you know why I ask these questions."

"Ay, Sir, and I'd rather hear ye ask them than see you sit as easy under all that as some does, that owed the poor fellow as much love as ever you did, and were as near akin."

"I am puzzled, Martha, and hitherto I have been baffled, but I won't give it up yet. You say that the wretch who struck you was a singular-looking man, at least as you describe him. I know, Martha, I can rely upon your caution — you will not repeat to any one what passes in our interview." He lowered his voice. "You do not think that this Mr. Longcluse — a rich gentleman, you know and a person who thinks he's of some consequence, a person whom we must not look at, you know, as if he had two heads — you really don’t think that this Mr. Longcluse has any resemblance to the villain whom you saw stab my brother, and who struck you?”

“Not he — no more than I have. No, no, Mr. Longcluse is quite another sort of face; but for all that, when he came in here, and I saw him before me, his face and his speech reminded me of that night.”

“How was that, Martha? Did he resemble the other man — the man who was aiding?”

“That fellow was hanged, ye’ll mind, Master David.”

“Yes, but a likeness might have struck and startled you.”

“No, Sir — no, Master David, not him; surely not him. I can’t bring it to mind, but it frightens me. It *is* queer, Sir. All I can say for certain is this, Master David. The minute I heard his voice, and got sight of his face, like that,” and she dropped her hand on the table, “the thought of that awful night came back, bright and cold, Sir, and them black shadows— ’twas all about me, I can’t tell how, and I hope I may never see him again.”

“Do you think there was another man by, besides the two villains in the gig?” suggested David Arden.

“Not a living soul except them and myself. Poor Master Harry said to Tom Clinton, ye’ll mind, for he lived half-an-hour after, and spoke a little, though faint and with great labour, and says he, ‘There were two: Yelland Mace killed me, and Tom Todry took the money.’ Tom Clinton heard him say that, and swore to it before the justice o’ peace, and after, on the trial. No, no, there wasn’t a soul there but they two villains, and the poor dear lad they murdered, and me and Tom Clinton, that might as well ‘a’ bin in York for any good we did. Oh, no, Heaven forbid I should be so unmannerly as to compare a gentleman like Mr. Longcluse to such folk as that! Oh, lawk, no, Sir! But there’s something, there’s a look — or a sound in his voice — I can’t get round it quite — but it reminds me of something about that night, with a start like, I can’t tell how — something unlucky and awful — and I would not see him again for a deal.”

“Well, Martha, a thousand thanks. I’m puzzled, as I said. Perhaps it is only something strange in his face that caused that odd misgiving. For *I* who saw but one of the wretches engaged in the crime, the man who was convicted, who certainly did not in the slightest degree resemble Mr. Longcluse, experienced the same unpleasant sensation on first seeing him. I don’t know how it is, Martha, but the idea clings to me, as it does to you. Some light may come. Something may turn up. I can’t get it out of my mind that somehow — it may be circuitously — he has, at least, got the thread in his fingers that may lead us right. Goodnight, Martha. I have got the Bible with large print you wished for; I hope you will like the binding. And now, God bless you! It is time I should bid them goodnight upstairs. Farewell, my good old friend.” And, so saying, he shook her hard and shrivelled hand.

His steps echoed along the long tiled passage, with its one dim light, and his mind was still haunted by its one obscure idea.

“It is strange,” he thought, “that Martha and I — the only two living persons, I believe, who care still for poor Harry, and feel alike respecting the expiation that is due to his memory — should both have been struck with the same odd feeling on seeing Longcluse. From that white sinister face, it seems to me, I know not why, will shine the light that will yet clear all up.”

CHAPTER XXI.

A WALK BY MOONLIGHT.

While Martha Tansey was telling her grisly story in the housekeeper's room, and David Arden listening to the oft-told tale, for the sake of the possible new lights which the narration might throw upon his present theory, the little party in the drawingroom had their music and their talk. Mr. Longcluse sang the song which, standing beside Uncle David on the landing, near the great window on the staircase, we have faintly heard; and then he sang that other song, of the goblin wooer, at Alice's desire.

"Was the poor girl fool enough to accept his invitation?" inquired Miss Maubray.

"That I really can't say," laughed Mr. Longcluse.

"Yes, indeed, poor thing! I so hope she didn't," said Lady May.

"It's very likely she did," interposed Sir Reginald, opening his eyes — every one thought he was dozing— "nothing more foolish, and therefore, nothing more likely. Besides, if she didn't, she probably did worse. Better to go straight to the — — "

"Oh, dear Reginald!" exclaimed Lady May.

"Than by a tedious circumbendibus. I suppose her parents highly disapproved of the goblin; wasn't that alone an excellent reason for going away with him?"

And Sir Reginald closed his eyes again.

"Perhaps," said Miss Maubray aside to Vivian Darnley, "that romantic young lady may have had a cross papa, and thought that she could not change very much for the worse."

"Shall I tell that to Sir Reginald? — it would amuse him," inquired Darnley.

"Not as my remark; but I make you a present of it."

"Thanks; but that, even with your permission, would be a plagiarism, and robbing you of his applause."

Vivian Darnley was very inattentive to his own nonsense. He was talking very much at random, for his mind, and occasionally his eyes, were otherwise occupied.

Alice Arden was sitting near the piano, and talking to Mr. Longcluse.

"Is that meant to be a ghost, I wonder, in our sense, like the ghost of Wilhelm in the ballad of Leonora? or is the lover a demon?"

"A demon, surely," answered Longcluse, "a spirit appointed to her destruction. In an old ghostly writer there is a Latin sentence, *Unicuique nascenti, adest dæmon vitæ mystagogus*, which I will translate, 'There is present at the birth of every human being a demon, who is the conductor of his life.' Be it fortunate, or be it direful, to this supernatural influence he owes it all. So they thought; and to families such a demon is allotted also, and they prosper or wane as his function is ordained. I wonder whether such demons ever enter into human beings, and, in the shape of living men, haunt, plague, and ruin their predestinated victims."

This sort of mysticism for a time they talked, and then wandered away to other themes, and the talk grew general; and Mr. Longcluse, with a pang, discovered that it was late. He had something on his mind that night. He had an undivulged use, also, to which to apply David Arden. As the hour drew near it weighed more and more heavily at his heart. That hour must be observed; he wished to be away before it arrived. There was still ample time; but Lady May was now talking of going, and he made up his mind to say farewell.

Lingeringly Mr. Longcluse took his leave. But go he must; and so, a last touch of the hand, a last look, and the parting is over. Downstairs he runs; his groom and his brougham are at the door. What a glorious moon! The white light upon all things around is absolutely dazzling. How sharp and black the shadows! How light and filmy rises the old house! How black the nooks of the thick ivy! Every drop of dew that hangs upon its leaves, or on the drooping stalks of the neglected grass, is transmuted into a diamond. As he stands for an instant upon the broad platform of the steps, he looks round him with a deep sigh, and with a strange smile of rapture. The man standing with the open door of the brougham in his hand caught his eye.

"Go you down as far as the little church, before you reach the 'Guy of Warwick,' in the village, quite close to this — you know it — and wait there for me. I shall walk."

The man touched his hat, shut the door, and mounted the box beside the driver, and away went the brougham. Mr. Longcluse lit a cigarette, and slowly walked down the broad avenue after the vehicle. By the time he had got about halfway, he heard the iron gates swing together, the sound of the wheels was lost in distance, and the feeling of seclusion returned. In the same vague intoxication of poetry and romance, he paused and looked round again, and sighed. The trunk of a great tree overthrown in the last year's autumnal gales, with some of its boughs lopped off, lay on the grass at the edge of the avenue. There remained a little of his cigarette to smoke, and the temptation of this natural seat was irresistible; so he took it, and smoked, and gazed, and dreamed, and sometimes, as he took the cigarette from his lips, he sighed — never was man in a more romantic vein. He looked back on the noble front of the picturesque old house. The cold moonlight gleamed on most of the window-panes: but from a few tall windows glowed faintly the warmer light of candles. If anyone had ever felt the piercing storms of life, the treachery of his species, and the mendacity of the illusions that surround us, Longcluse was that man. He had accepted the conditions of life, and was a man of the world; but no boy of eighteen was ever more in love than he at this moment.

Gazing back at the dim glow that flushed through the tall window-blinds of the distant drawingroom, his fancy weaving all those airy dreams that passion lives in, this pale, solitary man — whom no one quite knew, who trusted no one, who had his peculiar passions, his sorrows, his fears, and strange remembrances; everything connected with his origin, vicissitudes, and character, except this one wild hope, locked up, as it were, in an iron casket, and buried in a grave fathoms deep — was now floated back, he knew not how, to that time of sweet perturbation and agonising hope at which the youth of Shakespeare's time were wont to sigh like a furnace, and indite woeful ballads to their mistress's eyebrows. Now he saw lights in an upper room. Imagination and conjecture were in a moment at work. No servant's apartment, its dimensions were too handsome; and had not Sir Reginald mentioned that his room was upon a level with the hall? Just at this moment Lady May's carriage drove down the avenue and past him. Yes, she had run up direct to her room on bidding Lady May goodnight. How he drank in these rosy lights through his dark eyes! and how their tremble seemed to quicken the pulsations of his heart! Gradually his thoughts saddened, and his face grew dark.

"Two doors in life — only in this life, if all bishops and curates speak truth — one or other shut for ever in the next. The gate to heaven, the gate to hell. Heaven! Facilis decensus. Life is such a sophism. Yet even those canting dogs in the pulpit can't bark away the truth. God sees not with our eyes! Revealed religion — Mahomet, Moses, Mormon, Borgia! What is the first lesson inscribed by his Maker on every man's heart, instinct, intellect? I read the mandate thus: 'Take the best care you can of number one.' Bah! 'It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves.'"

Uncle David's carriage now drove by.

"There goes that sharp girl — pretty, vain — and they're all vain; they ought to be vain; they could not please if they were not. Vain she is — devoured, mind, soul, passion, by vanity. Yes, and power — the lust of power, conquest, acquisition. She's greedy and crafty, I daresay. Oh! Alice, who was ever quite like you? The most beautiful, the best, my darling! Oh! enchantress, work the miracle, and make this forlorn man what he might be!"

It passed like a magic-lantern picture, and was gone. The distant clang of the iron gate was heard again, the avenue was deserted and silent, and Longcluse once more alone in his dream. He was looking towards the house, sometimes breaking into a few murmured words, sometimes smoking, and just as his cigarette was out he saw a figure approaching. It was Uncle David, who was walking down the avenue. It so happened that his mind was at that moment busy with Mr. Longcluse, and it was with an odd little shock, therefore, that he saw the very man — whom he fancied by that time to be at least two miles away — rise up in his path, and stand before him, smiling, in the moonlight.

"Oh! — Mr. Longcluse?" exclaimed David Arden, coming suddenly to a halt.

"So it is," said Longcluse, with a little laugh. "You are surprised to find me here, and I fancied I had seen your carriage go on."

"So you did; it is waiting near the gate for me. Can I give you a seat into town?"

"Thanks," said Longcluse, smiling; "mine is waiting for me a little further on."

Longcluse walked slowly on toward the gate, with David Arden at his side.

“My ward, Miss Maubray, has gone on with Lady May, and Darnley went with them. So I’m not such a brute as I should be if I were making a young lady wait while I was enjoying the moonlight.”

“It was this wonderful moon that led me, also, into this night-ramble on foot,” said Mr. Longcluse; “I found the temptation absolutely irresistible.”

As they thus talked, Mr. Longcluse had formed the resolution of choosing that moment for a confidence which, considering how slender was his acquaintance with Mr. David Arden, was, to say the least, a little bold and odd. They had not very far to walk before reaching the gate, so, a little abruptly turning the course of their talk, Mr. Longcluse said, with a chilly little laugh, and a smile more pallid than ever in the moonlight —

“By-the-bye, we were talking of that shocking occurrence in the Saloon Tavern; and connected with it, I have had two threatening letters.”

“Indeed!” said David Arden.

“Fact, I assure you,” said Mr. Longcluse, with a shrug and another cold little laugh.

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. LONGCLUSE MAKES AN ODD CONFIDENCE.

David Arden looked at Mr. Longcluse with a sudden glance, that was, for a moment, shrinking and sharp. This confidence connected with such a scene chimed in, with a harmony that was full of pain, with the utterly vague suspicions that had somehow got into his imagination.

“Yes, and I have been a little puzzled,” continued Longcluse. “They say the man who is his own lawyer has a fool for his client; but there are other things besides law to which the spirit of the canon more strongly still applies. I think you could give me just the kind of advice I need, if you were not to think my asking it too great a liberty. I should not dream of doing so if the matter were simply a private one, and began and ended in myself; but you will see in a moment that public interests of some value are involved, and I am a little doubtful whether the course I am taking is in all respects the right one. I have had two threatening letters; would you mind glancing at them? The moon is so brilliant, one has no difficulty in reading. This is the first. And may I ask you, kindly, until I shall have determined, I hope, with your aid, upon a course, to treat the matter as quite between ourselves? I have mentioned it to but one other person.”

“Certainly,” said David, “you have a right to your own terms.”

He took the letter and stopped short where he was, unfolding it. The light was quite sufficient, and he read the odd and menacing letter which Mr. Longcluse had received a few evenings before, as we know, at Lady May’s. It was to the following effect:

“SIR, — The unfortunate situation in which you stand, the proof being so, as you must suppose, makes it necessary for you to act considerately, and no nonsense can be permitted by your well wishers. The poor man has his conscience all one as as the rich, and must be cautious as well as him. I can not put myself in no dainger for you, Sir, nor won’t hold back the truth, so welp me. I have heerd tell of your boote bin took away. I would be happy to lend an and, Sir, to recover that property. How all will end otherwise I regrett. Knowing well who it will be that takes so mutch consern for your safety, you cannot doubt who I am, and if you wishes to meat me quiet to consult, you need only to name the place and time in the times newspaper, which I sees it every day. It must be put part in one days times, for the daite, saying a friend will show on sich a night, and in next days times for the place, saying the dogs will meet at sich and sich a place, and it shall hev the attenshen of your

FAST FREND."

"That's a cool letter, upon my word," said David Arden. "Have you an idea who wrote it?"

"Yes, a very good guess. I'll tell you all that if you allow me, just now. I should say, indeed, an absolute certainty, for I have had another this afternoon with the name of the writer signed, and he turns out to be the very man whom I suspected. Here it is."

David Arden's curiosity was piqued. He took the last note and read as follows: —

"SIR, — My last Letter must have came to Hand, and you been in reseet of it since the 11th instant, has took no Notice thereoff, I have No wish for justice, as you may Suppose, and has no Fealing against you Mr. Longcluse Persanelly and to shew you plainly that Such is the case, I will meet you for an intervue if such is your Wishes in your Own house, if you should Raything than name another place. I do not objeck To one frend been Present providing such Be not a lawyer. The subjek been Dellicat, I will Attend any hour and Place you appoint. If you should faile I must put my Proofs in the hands of the police, for I will take it for a sure sine of guilt if you fail after this to appoint for a meating.

"I remain, Sir, Your obedient servent, "PAUL DAVIES.

"No. 2 Rosemary Court."

"Well, that's pretty frank," said Longcluse, observing that he had read to the end.

"Extremely. What do you suppose his object to be — to extort money?"

"Possibly; but he may have another object. In any case, he wants to make money by this move."

"Very audacious, then. He must know, if he is fit for his trade, how much risk there is in it; and his signing his name and address to his letter, and seeking an interview with a witness by seems to me utterly infatuated," said David Arden, with his eye upon Mr. Longcluse.

“So it does, except upon one supposition; I mean that the man believes his story,” said Mr. Longcluse, walking beside him, for they had resumed their march towards the gate.

“Really! believes that you committed the murder?” said Uncle David, again coming to a halt and looking full at him.

“I can’t quite account for it otherwise,” said Longcluse; “and I think the right course is for me to meet him. But I have no intimacies in London, and that is my difficulty.”

“How? Why don’t you arrest him?” said David Arden.

David Arden had seldom felt so oddly. A quarter-of-an-hour since, he expected to have been seated in his carriage with his ward and Vivian Darnley, driving into town in quiet humdrum fashion, by this time. How like a dream was the actual scene! Here he was, standing on the grass among the noble timber, under the moonlight, with the pale face beside him which had begun to haunt him so oddly. The strange smile of his mysterious companion, the cold tone that jarred sweetly, somehow, on his ear, lending a sinister eccentricity to the extraordinary confession he was making.

In this situation, which had come about almost unaccountably, there was a strange feeling of unreality. Was this man, from whom he had felt an indescribable repulsion, now by his side, and drawing him, in this solitude, into a mysterious confidence? and had not this confidence an unaccountable though distant relation to the vague suspicions that had touched his mind? With a little effort he resumed, —

“I beg pardon, but if the case were mine I should put the letters at once into the hands of the police and prosecute him.”

“Precisely my own first impulse. But the letters are more cautiously framed than you might at first sight suppose. I should be placed in an awkward position were my prosecution to fail. *I* am obliged to think of this because, although I am nothing to the public, I am a good deal to myself. But I’ve resolved to take a course not less bold, though less public. I am determined to meet him face to face with an unexceptionable witness present, and to discover distinctly whether he acts from fraud or delusion, and then to proceed accordingly. I have communicated with him.”

“Oh, really!”

“Yes, I was clear I ought to meet him, but I would consent to nothing with an air of concealment.”

“I think you were right, Sir.”

“He wanted our meeting by night on board a Thames boat; then in a dilapidated house in Southwark; then in a deserted house that is to be let in Thames Street; but I named my own house, in Bolton Street, at halfpast twelve tonight.”

“Then you really wish to see him. I suppose you have thought it well over; but I am always for taking such miscreants promptly by the throat. However, as you say, cases differ, and I daresay you are well advised.”

“And now may I venture a request, which, were it not for two facts within my knowledge, I should not presume to make? But I venture it to you, who take so special an interest in this case, because you have already taken trouble and, like myself, contributed money to aid the chances of discovery; and because only this evening you said you would bestow more labour, more time, and more money with pleasure to procure the least chance of an additional light upon it: now it strikes me as just possible that the writer of those letters may be, to some extent, honest. Though utterly mistaken about me, still he may have evidence to give, be it worth much or little; and so, Mr. Arden, having the pleasure of being known to some members of your family, although till tonight by name only to you, I beg as a great kindness to a man in a difficulty, and possibly in the interests of the public, that you will be so good as to accompany me, and be present at the interview, that cannot be so well conducted before any other witness whom I can take with me.”

David Arden paused for a moment, but independently quite of his interest in this case: he felt a strange curiosity about this pale man, whose eyes from under their oblique brows gleamed back the cold moonlight; while a smile, the character of which a little puzzled him, curled his nostril and his thin lip, and showed the glittering edge of his teeth. Did it look like treachery? or was it defiance, or derision? It was a face, thus seen, so cadaverous and Mephistophelian, that an artist would have given something for a minute to fix a note of it in white and black.

David Arden was not to be disturbed in a practical matter by a pictorial effect, however, and in another moment he said —

“Yes, Mr. Longcluse, as you desire it I will accompany you, and see this fellow, and hear what he has to say. Certainly.”

“That’s very kind — only what I should have expected, also, from your public spirit. I’m extremely obliged.”

They resumed their walk towards the gate.

“I shall get into my brougham and call at home, to tell them not to expect me for an hour or so. And what is the number of your house?”

He told him; and David Arden having offered to take him, in his carriage, to the place where his own awaited him, which however he declined, they parted for a little time, and Mr. Arden’s brougham quickly disappeared under the shadow of the tall trees that lined the curving road.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MEETING.

As David Arden drove towards town, his confusion rather increased. Why should Mr. Longcluse select him for this confidence? There were men in the City whom he must know, if not intimately, at least much better than he knew him. It was a very strange occurrence; and was not Mr. Longcluse's manner, also, strange? Was he not, somehow, very oddly cool under a charge of murder? There was something, it seemed, indefinably incongruous in the nature of his story, his request, and his manner.

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It was five or ten minutes before the appointed time when David Arden and Longcluse met in the latter gentleman's "study" in Bolton Street. There was a slight, odd flutter at Longcluse's heart, although his pale face betrayed no sign of agitation, as the shuffling tread of a heavy foot was heard on the doorsteps, followed by a faint knock, like that of a tremulous postman. It was the preconcerted summons of Mr. Paul Davies.

Longcluse smiled at David Arden and raised his finger, as he lightly drew near the room door, with an air of warning. He wished to remind his companion that he was to receive their visitor alone. Mr. Arden nodded, and Mr. Longcluse withdrew. In a minute more the servant opened the study-door, and said— "Mr. Davies, Sir."

And the tall ex-detective entered, and looked with a silky simper stealthily to the right and to the left from the corners of his eyes, and glided in, shutting the door behind him.

Uncle David received this man without even a nod. He eyed him sternly, from his chair at the end of the table.

"Sit in that chair, please," said he, pointing to a seat at the other end.

The ex-policeman made his best bow, and turning out his toes very much, he shuffled with his habitual sly smirk on, to the chair, in which he seated himself, and with his big red hands on the table began turning, and twisting, and twiddling a short pencil, which was a good deal bitten at the uncut end, between his fingers and thumbs.

"You came here to see Mr. Longcluse?" asked David Arden.

"A few words of business at his desire. Sir, I ask your parding, I came, Sir, by his wishes, not mine, which has brought me here at his request."

"And who am I, do you suppose?"

The man, still smiling, looked at him shrewdly. "Well, I don't know, I'm sure; I may 'a' seen you."

"Did you ever see that gentleman?" said David Arden, as Mr. Longcluse entered the room.

The ex-detective looked also shrewdly at Longcluse, but without any light of recognition. "I may have seen him, Sir. Yes, I saw him in Saint George's, Hanover Square, the day Lord Charles Dillingsworth married Miss Wygram, the *hairess*. I saw him at Sydenham the second week in February last when the Freemasons' dinner was there; and I saw him on the night of the match between Hood and Markham, at the Saloon Tavern."

"Do you know my name?" said David Arden.

"Well, no, I don't at present remember."

"Do you know that gentleman's name?"

"His name?"

"Ay, his name."

"Well, no; I may have heard it, and I may bring it to mind, by-and-by."

Longcluse smiled and shrugged, looking at Mr. Arden, and he said to the man —

"So you don't know *that* gentleman's name, nor mine?"

The man looked at each, hard and a little anxiously, like a person who feels that he may be making a very serious mistake; but after a pause he said decisively— "No, I don't at present. I say I don't know your names, either of you gentlemen, and I don't."

The two gentlemen exchanged glances.

"Is either of us as tall as Mr. Longcluse?" asked David Arden, standing up.

The man stood up also, to make his inspection.

"You're both," he said, after a pause, "much about his height."

"Is either of us like him?"

"No," answered Davies, after a pause.

"Did you write these letters?" asked Mr. Longcluse laughing.

"Well, I did, or I didn't, and what's that to you?"

"Something, as you shall know presently."

"I think you're trying it on. I reckon this is a bit of a plant. I don't care a scratch o' that pencil if it be. I wrote them letters, and I said nothin' but what's true, and I'll go with you now to the station if you like, and tell all I knows."

The fellow seemed nettled, and laughed viciously a little, and swaggered at the close of his speech. The faintest flush imaginable tinged Longcluse's forehead, as he shot a searching glance at him.

"No, we don't want that," said he; "but you may be of more use in another way, although just now you are in the wrong box, and have mistaken your man, for *I* am Mr. Longcluse. You have been misinformed, you see, as to the identity of the person you suspect; but some person you have, no doubt, in your mind, and possibly a case worth sifting, although you have been deceived as to his name. Describe the appearance of the man you supposed to be Mr. Longcluse. You may be frank with me; I mean you no harm."

"I defy any man to harm me, Sir, if you please, so long as I do my dooty," said Paul Davies. "Mr. Longcluse, if that be his name, the man I mean, he's about your height, with round shoulders and red hair, and talks with a north-country twang on his tongue; he's a bit rougher, and a swaggerin' cove, and a yard o' red beard over his waistcoat, and bigger hands a deal than you, and broader feet."

"And have you a case against him?"

"Partly, but it ain't, Sir, if you please, by no means so complete as would answer as yet. If I was sure you were really Mr. Longcluse, I could say more, for I partly guess who this other gent is — a most respectable party. I think I do know you, Sir, by appearance; if you had your 'at on, Sir, I could say to a certainty. But I think, Sir, if you please, I'm not very far wrong when I say that I would identify you for Mr. David Arden."

"So I am; that is quite true."

"Thank you, Sir, I am obleeged; that's very quietin' to my mind, Sir, having full confidence in your character; and if you, Sir, please to tell me *that* gentleman is undoubtingly Mr. Longcluse, the propperieter of this house, I must ‘a’ been let into a mistake; I don’t think they was agreenin’ of me, but it was a mistake, if you please, Sir, if you say so.”

“This is Mr. Longcluse — I know of no other — and he resides in this house,” said David Arden. “But if you have information to give respecting that red-bearded fellow, there is no reason why you should not give it forthwith to the police.”

“Parding me, Sir, if you please, Mr. Arden. There is, I would say, strong reasons for a poor man in rayther anxious circumstances, like myself, Sir, ‘aving an affectionate mother to, in a measure, support, and been himself unfortunately rayther hard up, he can’t answer it nohow to his conscience if he lets a hoppertunity like the present pass him and his aged mother by unimproved. There been a reward offered, Sir, I naturally wish, Sir, if you please, to earn it myself by valuable evidence leading to the conviction of the guilty cove; and if I was to tell all I knows and ‘av’ made out by my own hindustry to the force, Sir, other persons would, don’t you conceive, Sir, draw the reward, and me and my mother should go without. If I could get a hinterview with the man I ‘av’ bin a-gettin’ things together for, I’d lead him, I ‘av’ no doubt, to make such hadmissions as would clench the prosecution, and vendicate justice.”

“I see what you mean,” said David Arden.

“And fair enough, I think,” added Longcluse.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. LONGCLUSE FOLLOWS A SHADOW.

The ex-detective cleared his voice, shook his head, and smirked.

"A hinterview, gentlemen," said he, "is worth much in the hands of a persuasive party. I have hanged several obnoxious characters, and let others in for penal for life, by means of a hinterview. You remember Spikes, gentlemen, as got into difficulties for breaking Mr. Winterbotham's desk? Spikes would have frusterated justice, if it wasn't for me. It was done in one hinterview. Says I, 'Mr. Spikes, you have a wife and five children.'"

The recollection of Mr. Paul Davies' diplomacy was so gratifying to that smiling gentleman, that he could not forbear winking at his auditors as he proceeded.

"'And my belief is, Mr. Spikes, Sir,'" he continued, "'that it was all the hinfluence of Tom Sprowles. It was Sprowles persuaded yer — it was him as got the whole thing up. That's my belief; and you did not want to do it, no-wise, and only consented to force the henges in the belief that Sprowles wanted to read the papers, and no more. I have a bad opinion of Sprowles,' says I, 'for deceiving you, I may say innocently;' and talking this way, you conceive, I got it all out of him, and he's under penal for life. Whenever you want to get round a man, and to turn him inside out, your way is to sympath*ise* with him. If I had but an hinterview with that man, I know enough to draw it out of him, every bit. It's all done by sympath*ising*."

"But do you think you can discover the man?" asked Mr. Arden.

"I'm sure to make him out, if you please, Sir; I'll find out all about him. I'd a found out the facks long ago, but for the mistake, which it occurred most unlucky. I saw him twice sence, and I know well where to look for him; and I'll have it all right before long, I'm thinkin'."

"That will do, then, for the present," said Mr. Longcluse. "You have said all you have to say, and you see into what a serious mistake you have blundered; but I sha'n't give you any trouble about it — it is too ridiculous. Goodnight, Mr. Davies."

"No mistake of mine, Sir, please. Misinformed, Sir, you will kindly remark — misinformed, if you please — misinformed, as may occur to the sharpest party going. Goodnight, gentlemen; I takes my leave without no unpleasant feelin', and good wishes for your 'ealth and 'appiness, both, gentlemen." And blandly, and with a sly sleepy smile, this insinuating person withdrew.

"It is the reward he is thinking of," said Longcluse.

"Yes, he won't spare himself; you mentioned that your own suspicions respecting him were but vague," said David Arden.

"I merely stated what I saw to the coroner, and it was answered that he was watching the Frenchman Lebas, because the detective police, before Paul Davies' dismissal, had received orders to keep an eye on all foreigners; and he hoped to conciliate the authorities, and get a pension, by collecting and furnishing information. The police did not seem to think his dogging and watching the unfortunate little fellow really meant more than this."

"Very likely. It is a very odd affair. I wonder who that fellow is whom he described. He did not give a hint as to the circumstances which excited his suspicions."

"It *is* strange. But that man, Paul Davies, kept his eye upon Lebas from the motive I mentioned, and this circumstance may have led to his seeing more of the matter than, with the reward in his mind, he cares to make known at present. I think I did right in meeting him face to face."

"Quite right, Sir."

"It has been always a rule with me to go straight at everything. I think the best diplomacy is directness, and that the truest caution lies in courage."

"Precisely my opinion, Mr. Longcluse," said Uncle David, looking on him with eyes of approbation. He was near adding something hearty in the spirit of our ancestors' saying, "I hope you and I, Sir, may be better acquainted;" but something in the look and peculiar face of this unknown Mr. Longcluse chilled him, and he only said —

"As you say, Mr. Longcluse, courage is safety, and honesty the best policy. Goodnight, Sir."

"A thousand thanks, Mr. Arden. Might I ask one more favour, that you will endorse on each of these threatening letters a memorandum of the facts of this strange interview? — I mean a sentence or two, which may at any time confound this fellow, should he turn out to be a villain."

“Certainly,” said Mr. Arden thoughtfully, and he sat down again, and wrote a few lines on the back of each, which, having signed, he handed them to Mr. Longcluse, with the question, “Will that answer?”

“Perfectly, thank you very much; it is indeed impossible for me to thank you as I ought and wish to,” said Mr. Longcluse with effusion, extending his hand at the same time; but Mr. Arden took it without much warmth, and said, in comparison a little drily —

“No need to thank me, Mr. Longcluse; as you said at first, there are motives quite sufficient, of a kind for which you can owe me, personally, no thanks whatever, to induce the very slight trouble of coming here.”

“Well, Mr. Arden, I *am* very *much* obliged to you, notwithstanding;” and so he gratefully saw him to the door, and smiled and bowed him off, and stood for a moment as his carriage whirled down the short street.

“He does not like me — nor I, perhaps, him. Ha! ha! ha!” he laughed, very softly and reservedly, looking down on the flags. “What an odd thing it is! Those instincts and antipathies, they are very odd.” All this, except the faint laughter, was in thought.

Mr. Longcluse stepped back. He was negatively happy — he was rid of an anxiety. He was positively happy — he had been better received by Miss Arden, this evening, than he had ever been before. So he went to his bed with a light heart, and a head full of dreams.

All the next day, one beautiful image haunted Longcluse’s imagination. He was delayed in town; he had to consult about operations in foreign stocks; he had many words to say, directions to modify, and calls to make on this man and that. He had hoped to be at Mortlake Hall at three o’clock. But it was past six before he could disentangle himself from the tenacious meshes of his business. Never had he thought it so irksome. Was he not rich enough — too rich? Why should he longer submit to a servitude so wearisome? It was high time he should begin to enjoy his days in the sunshine of his gold and the companionship of his beautiful idol. But “man proposes,” says the ancient saw, “and God disposes.”

It was just seven o’clock when Mr. Longcluse descended at the steps of old Mortlake Hall.

Sir Reginald, who is writhing under a letter from the attorney of the millionaire mortgagee of his Yorkshire estate, making an alternative offer, either to call in the principal sum or to allow it to stand out on larger interest, had begged of Mr. Longcluse, last night, to give him a few words of counsel some day. He had, in a quiet talk the evening before, taken the man of huge investments rather into his confidence.

"I don't know, Mr. — a — Mr. Longcluse, whether you are aware how cruelly my property is tied up," he said, as he talked in a low tone with him, in a corner of the drawingroom. "A life estate, and my son, who declines bearing any part of the burden of his own extravagance, will do nothing to facilitate my efforts to pay his debts for him; and I declare solemnly, if they raise the interest on this very oppressive mortgage, I don't know how on earth I can pay my insurances. I don't see how I am to do it. I should be so extremely obliged to you, Mr. Longcluse, if you would, with your vast experience and knowledge in all — all financial matters, give me any advice that strikes you — if you could, with perfect convenience, afford so much time. I don't really know what rate of interest is usual. I only know this, that interest, as a rule, has been steadily declining ever since I can remember — perpetually declining; I mean, of course, upon perfect security like this; and now this confounded harpy wants, after ten years, to *raise* it! I believe they want to drive me out of the world, among them! and they well know the cruelty of it, for I have never been able to pay them a single half-year punctually. Will you take some tea?"

So Longcluse had promised his advice very gladly next day; and now he asked for Sir Reginald. Sir Reginald was very particularly engaged at this moment on business; Mr. Arden was with him at present; but if Mr. Longcluse would wait for a few minutes, Sir Reginald would be most happy to see him. So there was to be a little wait. How could he better pass the interval than in Miss Arden's company?

CHAPTER XXV.

A TETE-A-TETE.

Up to the drawingroom went Mr. Longcluse, and there he found Miss Arden finishing a drawing. He fancied a very slight flush on her cheek as he entered. Was there really a heightening of that beautiful tint as she smiled? How lovely her long lashes, and her even little teeth, and the lustrous darkness of her eyes, in that subdued light!

"I so wanted advice, Mr. Longcluse, and you have come in so fortunately! I am not satisfied with my sky and mountains, and the foreground where the light touches that withered branch is a horrible failure. In nature, it looked quite beautiful. I remember it so well. It looked on fire, almost. This is Saxteen Castle, near Golden Friars, and that is a bit of the lake and those are the fells. I sketched it in pencil, and trusted to memory for colouring. It was just at the most picturesque moment, when the sun was going down between the two mountains that overhang the little town on the west."

"Sunset is very well expressed. You indicated all those long shadows, Miss Arden, in pencil, and I envy your perspective, and I think your colouring so extremely good! The distances are admirably marked. Try a little cadmium, burnt sienna, and lake for the intense touches of light in the foreground, on that barkless branch. Your own eye will best regulate the proportions. I am one of those vandals who prefer colour a little too bold and overdone to any timidity in that respect. Exuberance in a beginner is always, in my mind, an augury of excellence. It is so easy to moderate afterwards."

"Yes, I daresay; I'm very glad you advise that, because I always thought so myself; but I was half afraid to act on it. I think that is about the tint — a little more yellow, perhaps. Yes; how does it look now? — what do you think?"

"Now judge yourself, Miss Arden. Do not those three sharp little touches of reflected fire light up the whole drawing? I say it is admirable. It is really quite a beautiful little drawing."

"I'm growing so vain! you will quite spoil me, Mr. Longcluse."

"Truth will never spoil any one. Praise is very delightful. I have not had much of it in my day, but I think it makes one better as well as happier; and to speak simple truth of you, Miss Arden, is inevitably to praise you."

"Those are compliments, Mr. Longcluse, and they bewilder me — anything one does not know how to answer; so I would rather you pointed me out four or five faults in my drawing, and I should be very well content if you said no more. I believe you know the scenery of Golden Friars."

"I do. Beautiful, and so romantic, and full of legends! the whole place with its belongings is a poem."

"So I think. And the hotel — the inn I prefer calling it — the 'George and Dragon,' is so picturesque and delightfully old, and so comfortable! Our headquarters were there for two or three weeks. And did you see Childe Waylin's Leap?"

"Yes, an awful scene; what a terrible precipice! I saw it to great advantage from a boat, while a thunderstorm was glaring and pealing over its summit. You know the legend, of course?"

"No, I did not hear it."

"Oh, it is a very striking one, and won't take many words to tell. Shall I tell it?"

"Pray do," said Alice, with her bright look of expectation.

He smiled sadly. Perhaps the story returned with an allegoric melancholy to his mind. With a sigh and a smile he continued —

"Childe Waylin fell in love with a phantom lady, and walked day and night along the fells — people thought in solitude, really lured on by the beautiful apparition, which, as his love increased, grew less frequent, more distant and fainter, until at last, in the despair of his wild pursuit, he threw himself over that terrible precipice, and so perished. I have faith in instinct — faith in passion, which is but a form of instinct. I am sure he did wisely."

"I sha'n't dispute it; it is not a case likely to happen often. These phantom ladies seem to have given up practice of late years, or else people have become proof against their wiles, and neither follow, nor adore, nor lament them."

"I don't think these phantom ladies are at all out of date," said Mr. Longcluse.

"Well, men have grown wiser, at all events."

"No wiser, no happier; in such a case there is no room for what the world calls wisdom. Passion is absolute, and as for happiness, that or despair hangs on the turn of a die."

"I have made that shadow a little more purple — do you think it an improvement?"

"Yes, certainly. How well it throws out that bit of the ruin that catches the sunlight! You have made a very poetical sketch; you have given not merely the outlines, but the character of that singular place — the *genus loci* is there."

Just as Mr. Longcluse had finished this complimentary criticism, the door opened, and rather unexpectedly Richard Arden entered the room. Very decidedly *de trop* at that moment, his friend thought Mr. Arden. Longcluse meant again to have turned the current of their talk into the channel he liked best, and here was interruption. But was not Richard Arden his sworn brother, and was he not sure to make an excuse of some sort, and take his leave, and thus restore him to his tête-à-tête.

But was there — or was it fancy — a change scarcely perceptible, but unpleasant, in the manner of this sworn brother? Was it not very provoking, and a little odd, that he did not go away, but stayed on and on, till at length a servant came in with a message from Sir Reginald to Mr. Longcluse, to say that he would be very happy to see him whenever he chose to come to his room? Mr. Longcluse was profoundly vexed. Richard Arden, however, had resumed his old manner pretty nearly. Was the interruption he had persisted in designed, or only accidental? Could he suppose Richard Arden so stupid? He took his leave smiling, but with an uncomfortable misgiving at his heart.

Richard Arden now proceeded in his own way, with some colouring and enormous suppression at discretion, to give his sister such an account as he thought would best answer of the interview he had just had with his father. Honestly related, what occurred between them was as follows: —

Richard Arden had come on summons from his father. Without a special call, he never appeared at Mortlake while his father was there, and never in his absence but with an understanding that Sir Reginald was to hear nothing of it. He sat for a considerable time in the apartment that opened from his father's dressing-room. He heard the baronet's peevish voice ordering Crozier about. Something was dropped and broken, and the same voice was heard in angrier alto. Richard Arden looked out of the window and waited uncomfortably. He hated his father's pleadings with him, and he did not know for what purpose he had appointed this interview.

The door opened, and Sir Reginald entered, limping a little, for his gout had returned slightly. He was leaning on a stick. His thin, dark face and prominent eyes looked angry, and he turned about and poked his dressing-room door shut with the point of his stick, before taking any notice of his son.

"Sit down, if you please, in that chair," he said, pointing to the particular seat he meant him to occupy with two vicious little pokes, as if he were running a small-sword through it. "I wrote to ask you to come, Sir, merely to say a word respecting your sister, for whom, if not for other members of your family, you still retain, I suppose, some consideration and natural affection."

Here was a pause which Richard Arden did not very well know what to do with. However, as his father's fierce eyes were interrogating him, he murmured —

"Certainly, Sir."

"Yes, and under that impression I showed you Lord Wynderbroke's letter. He is to dine here tomorrow at a quarter to eight — please to recollect — precisely. Do you hear?"

"I do, Sir, everything."

"You must meet him. Let us not appear more divided than we are. You know Wynderbroke — he's peculiar. Why the devil shouldn't we appear united? I don't say *be* united, for you won't. But there is something owed to decency. I suppose you admit that? And before people, confound you, Sir, can't we appear affectionate? He's a quiet man, Wynderbroke, and makes a great deal of these domestic sentiments. So you'll please to show some respect and affection while he's present, and I mean to show some affection for you; and after that, Sir, you may go to the devil for me! I hope you understand?"

"Perfectly, Sir."

"As to Wynderbroke, the thing is settled — it is *there*." He pointed to his desk. "What I told you before, I tell you now — you must see that your sister doesn't make a fool of herself. I have nothing more to say to you at present — unless you have something to say to me?"

This latter part of the sentence had something sharp and interrogative in it. There was just a chance, it seemed to imply, that his son might have something to say upon the one point that lay near the old man's heart.

"Nothing, Sir," said Richard, rising.

"No, no; so I supposed. You may go, Sir — nothing."

Of this interview, one word of the real purport of which he could not tell to his sister, he gave her an account very slight indeed, but rather pleasant.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GARDEN AT MORTLAKE.

Alice leaned back in her chair, smiling, and very much pleased.

"So my father seems disposed to relent ever so little — and ever so little, you know, is better than nothing," said Richard Arden.

"I'm so glad, Dick, that he wishes you to take your dinner with us tomorrow; it is a very good sign. It would be so delightful if you could be at home with us, as you used to be."

"You are a good little soul, Alice — a dear little thing! This is very pretty," he said, looking at her drawing. "What is it?"

"The ruined castle near the northern end of the lake at Golden Friars. Mr. Longcluse says it is pretty good. Is he to dine here, do you know?"

"No — I don't know — I hope not," said Richard shortly.

"Hope not! why?" said she. "I thought you liked him extremely."

"I thought he was very well for a sort of outdoor acquaintance for *men*; but I don't even know *that*, now. There's no use in speaking to Lady May, but I warn you — you had better drop him. There is very little known about him, but there is a great deal that is not pleasant *said*."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"But you used to speak so highly of him. I'm so surprised!"

"I did not know half what people said of him. I've heard a great deal since."

"But is it true?" asked Alice.

"It is nothing to me whether it is true or not. It is enough if a man is talked about uncomfortably, to make it unpleasant to know him. We owe nothing to Mr. Longcluse; there is no reason why you should have an acquaintance that is not desirable. *I* mean to drop him quietly, and you can't *know him, really you* mustn't, Alice."

"I don't know. It seems to me very hard," said Miss Alice spiritedly. "It is not many days since you spoke of him so highly; and I was quite pained when you came in just now. I don't know whether he perceived it, but I think he must. I only know that I thought you were so cold and strange to him, your manner so unlike what it always was before. I thought you had been quarrelling. I fancied he was vexed, and I felt quite sorry; and I don't think what you say, Richard, is manly, or like yourself. You used to praise him so, and fight his battles; and he is, though very distinguished in some ways, rather a stranger in London; and people, you told me, envy him, and try in a cowardly way to injure him; and what more easy than to hint discreditable things of people? and you did not believe a word of those reports when last you spoke of him; and considering that he had no people to stand by him in London, or to take his part, and that he may never even hear the things that are said by low people about him, don't you think it would be cowardly of us, and positively base to treat him so?"

"Upon my word, Miss Alice, that is very good oratory indeed! I don't think I ever heard you so eloquent before, at least upon the wrongs of one of my sex."

"Now, Dick, that sneer won't do. There may possibly be reasons why it would have been wiser never to have made Mr. Longcluse's acquaintance; I can't say. Those reasons, however, you treated very lightly indeed a little time ago — you know you did — and now, upon no better, you say you are going to cut him. *I* can't bring myself to do any such thing. He is always looking in at Lady May's, and I can't help meeting him unless I am to cut her also. Now don't you see how odious I should appear, and how impossible it is?"

"I won't argue it now, dear Alice; there is quite time enough. I shall come an hour before dinner, tomorrow, and we can have a quiet talk; and I am quite sure I shall convince you. Mind, I don't say we should insult him," he laughed. "I only say this, and I'll maintain it — and I'll show you why — that he is not a desirable acquaintance. We have taken him up very foolishly, and we *must* drop him. And now, darling, goodbye."

He kissed her — she kissed him. She looked grave for a moment after, after he had run down the stairs. He has quarrelled with Mr. Longcluse about something, she thought, as she stood at the window with the tip of her finger to her lip, looking at her brother as he mounted the showy horse which had cantered with him up and down Rotten Row for two hours or more, before he had ridden out to Mortlake. She saw him now ride away.

It was near eight o'clock, and all this time Mr. Longcluse had been in confidence with Sir Reginald about his miserable mortgage. Mr. Longcluse was cautious; but there floated in his mind certain possible contingencies, under which he might perhaps make the financial adjustment, which Sir Reginald desired, very easy indeed to the worthy baronet.

It was the tempting hour of evening when the birds begin to sing, and the level beams from the west glorify all objects. Alice put on her hat and ran out to the old gardens of Mortlake. They are enclosed in a grey wall, and lie one above the other in three terraces, with tall standard fruit trees, so old that their fruit was now dwarfed in size to half its earlier bearings, standing high with a dark and sylvan luxuriance, and at this moment, sheltering among their sunlit leaves, nestle and flutter the small birds whose whistlings cheer and sadden the evening air. Every tree and bush that bore fruit, in this old garden, had grown quite beyond the common stature of its kind, and a good gardener would have cut them all down fifty years ago. But there was a kind of sylvan and stately beauty in those wonderful lofty pear-trees, with their dense dark foliage, and in the standard cherries so tall and prim, and something homely and comfortable in the great straggling apples and plums, dappled with grey lichens and tufted with moss. There were flowers as well as fruits, of all sorts, in this garden. All its arrangements were out of date. There was an air, not actually of neglect — for it was weeded, and the walks were trim and gravelled — but of carelessness and rusticity, not unpleasant, in the place. Trees were allowed to straggle and spread, and rise aloft in the air, just as they pleased. Tall roses climbed the walls about the door, and clustered in nodding masses overhead; and no end of pretty annuals and other flowers, quite out of fashion, crowded the dishevelled currant bushes, and the forest of raspberries. Here and there were very tall myrtles, and the quince, and obsolete medlars, were discoverable among the other fruit-trees. The summits of the walls were in some places crowned, to the scandal of all decent gardening, with ivy, and a carved shaft in the centre of each garden supported a sun-dial as old as the Hall itself.

There are fancies, as well as likings and lovings. Where there is a real worship, however cautiously masked — and Mr. Longcluse was by no means so — it is never a mystery to a clever girl. And such adoration, although it be not at all reciprocated, is sometimes hard to part with. There is something of the nature of compassion, with a little gratitude, perhaps, mingling in the pang which a gentle lady feels at having to discharge for ever an honest love and a true servant, and send him away to solitary suffering for her sake. Some little pang of reproach of this sensitive kind had, perhaps, armed her against her brother's sudden sentence of exclusion pronounced against Mr. Longcluse.

The evening sunlight travelled over the ivy on the discoloured wall, and glittered on the leaves of the tall fruit-trees, in whose thick foliage the birds were still singing their vespers. Walking down the broad walk towards the garden-door, she felt the saddening influence of the hour returning; and as she reached the door, overclustered with roses, it opened, and Mr. Longcluse stood in the shadow before her.

Miss Arden, thus surprised in the midst of thoughts which at that moment happened to be employed about him, showed for a second, as she suddenly stopped, something in her beautiful face almost amounting to embarrassment.

"I was called away so suddenly to see Sir Reginald, that I went without saying goodbye; so I ran up to the drawingroom, and the servant told me I should probably find you here; and, really without reflecting — I act, I'm afraid, so much from impulse that I might appear very impertinent — I ventured to follow. What a beautiful evening! How charming the light! You, who are such an artist, and understand the poetry of colour so, must admire this cloister-like garden, so beautifully illuminated."

Was Mr. Longcluse also a very little embarrassed as he descanted thus on light and colour?

"It is a very old garden and does very little credit, I'm afraid, to our care; but I greatly prefer it to our formal gardens and all their finery, in Yorkshire."

She moved her hand as if she expected Mr. Longcluse to take it and his leave, for it was high time her visitor should "order his wings and be off the west," in which quarter, as we know, lay Mr. Longcluse's habitation. He had stepped in, however, and the door closed softly before the light evening breeze that swung it gently. She was standing under the wild canopy of roses, and he under the sterner arch of grooved and fluted stone that overhung the doorway.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WINGED WORDS.

“I was afraid I had vexed your brother somehow,” said Mr. Longcluse— “I thought he seemed to meet me a little formally. I should be so sorry if I had annoyed him by any accident!”

He paused, and Miss Arden said, half laughing— “Oh, don’t you know, Mr. Longcluse, that people are out of spirits sometimes, and now and then a little offended with all the world? It is nothing, of course.”

“What a fib!” whispered conscience in the young lady’s pretty ear, while she smiled and blushed.

Again she raised her hand a little, expecting Mr. Longcluse’s farewell. But she looked a great deal too beautiful for a farewell. Mr. Longcluse could not deny himself a minute more, and he said, “It is a year, Miss Arden, since I first saw you.”

“Is it really? I daresay.”

“Yes, at Lady May Penrose’s. Yes, I remember it distinctly — so distinctly that I shall never forget any circumstance connected with it. It is exactly a year and four days. You smile, Miss Arden, because for you the event can have had no interest; for me it is different — how different I will not say.”

Miss Arden coloured and then grew pale. She was very much embarrassed. She was about to say a word to end the interview, and go. Perhaps Mr. Longcluse was, as he said, impulsive — too precipitate and impetuous. He raised his hand entreatingly, —

“Oh, Miss Arden, pray, only a word! — I must speak it. Ever since then — ever since that hour — I have been the slave of a single thought; I have worshipped before one beautiful image, with an impious adoration, for there is nothing — no sacrifice, no crime — I would shrink from for your sake. You can make of me what you will; all I possess, all my future, every thought and feeling and dream — all are yours. No, no; don’t interrupt the few half desperate words I have to speak, they may move you to pity. Never before, in a life of terrible vicissitude, of much suffering, of many dangers, have I seen the human being who could move me as you have done. I did not believe my seared heart capable of passion. And I stand now aghast at what I have spoken. I stand at the brink of a worse death, by the word that trembles on your lips, than the cannon's mouth could give me. I see I have spoken rashly — I see it in your face — oh, Heaven! I see what you would say."

His hands were clasped in desperate supplication, as he continued; and the fitful breeze shook the roses above them, and the fading leaves fell softly in a shower about his feet.

"No, don't speak — your silence is sacred. I sha'n't misinterpret — I conjure you, don't answer! Forget that I have spoken. Oh! let it, in mercy, be all forgotten, and let us meet again as if there never had been this moment of madness, and in pity — as you look for mercy — forget it and forgive it!"

He waited for no answer: he was gone: the door closed as it was before. Another breath of wind ruffled the roses, and a few more sere leaves fell where he had just been standing. She drew a long breath, like one awaking from a vision. She was trembling slightly. Never before had she seen such agony in a human face! All had happened so suddenly. It was an effort to believe it real. It seemed as if she could see nothing while he spoke, but that intense, pale face. She heard nothing but his deep and thrilling words. Now it seemed as if flowers, and trees, and wall, and roses, all emerged suddenly again from mist, and as if all the birds had resumed their singing after a silence.

"Forget it — forgive it! Let it, as you look for mercy, be all forgotten. Let us meet again as if it never was." This strange petition still rang in the ears of the astonished girl.

She was still too much flurried by the shock of this wild and sudden outbreak of passion, and appeal to mercy, quite to see her true course in the odd combination that had arisen. She was a little angry, and a little flattered. There was a confusion of resentment and compassion. What business had this Mr. Longcluse to treat her to those heroics! What right had he to presume that he would be listened to? How dared he ask her to treat all that had happened as if it had never been? How dared he seek to found on this unwarrantable liberty relations of mystery between them? How dared he fancy that she would consent to play at this game of deception with him?

Mingled with these angry thoughts, however, were the recollections of his homage, his tone of melancholy deference ever since she had known him, and his admiration.

Underlying all his trifling talk, there had always been toward her a respect which flattered her, which could not have been exceeded had she been an empress in her own right. No, if he had said more than he had any right to suppose would be listened to, the extravagance was due to no want of respect for her, but to the vehemence of passion.

He was driving now into town, at a great pace. His cogitations were still more perturbed. Had he, by one frantic precipitation, murdered his best hopes?

One consolation at least he had. Being a man, not without reason, prone to suspicion, he had a deep conviction that, for some reason, Richard Arden was opposed to his suit, and had already begun to work upon Miss Arden's mind to his prejudice. His best chance, then, he still thought, was to anticipate that danger by a declaration. If that declaration could only be forgiven, and the little scene at old Mortlake garden door sponged out, might not his chances stand better far than before? Would not the past, though never spoken of, give meaning, fire, and melancholy to things else insignificant, and keep him always before her, and her alone, be his demeanour and language ever so reserved and cold, as an impassioned lover? Did not his knowledge of human nature assure him that these relations of mystery would, more than any other, favour his fortunes?

"That she should consign what has passed, in a few impetuous moments, to oblivion and silence, is no unreasonable prayer, and one as easy to grant as to will it. She will think it over, and, for my part, I will meet her as if nothing had ever happened to change our trifling but friendly relations. I wish I knew what Richard Arden was about. I soon shall. Yes, I shall — I soon shall."

An opportunity seemed to offer sooner even than he had hoped; for as he drove towards St. James's Street, passing one of Richard Arden's clubs, he saw that young gentleman ascending the steps with Lord Wynderbroke.

Longcluse stopped his brougham, jumped out, and overtook Richard Arden in the hall, where he stood, taking his letters from the hall-porter.

"How d'ye do, again? I sha'n't detain you a minute. I have had a long talk with your father about business," said Longcluse, seizing the topic most likely to secure a few minutes, and speaking very low. "You can bring me into a room here, and I'll tell you all that is necessary in two minutes."

"Certainly," said Richard, yielding to his curiosity. "I have only two or three minutes. I dine here with a friend, who is at this moment ordering dinner; so, you see, I am rather hurried."

He opened a door, and looking in said —

"Yes, we shall be quite to ourselves here."

Longcluse shut the door. There was no one to overhear them.

Richard Arden sat down on a sofa, and Mr. Longcluse threw himself into a chair.

"And what did he say?" asked Richard.

"They want to raise his interest on the Yorkshire estate; and he says you won't help him; but that of course is your affair, and I declined, point-blank, to intervene in it. And before I go further, it strikes me, as it did to-day at Mortlake, that your manner to me has undergone a slight change."

"Has it? I did not mean it, I assure you," said Richard Arden, with a little laugh.

"Oh! yes, Arden, it *has*, and you must know it, and — pardon me — you must *intend* it also; and now I want to know what I have done, or how I have hurt you, or who has been telling lies of me?"

"Nothing of all these, that I know of," said Richard, with a cold little laugh.

"Well, of course, if you prefer it, you may decline an explanation. I must however, remind you, because it concerns my happiness, and possibly other interests dearer to me than my life, too nearly to be trifled with, that you heard all I said respecting your sister with the friendliest approbation and encouragement. You knew as much and as little about me then as you do now. I am not conscious of having said or done anything to warrant the slightest change in your feelings or opinion; and in your manner there *is* a change, and a very decided change, and I tell you frankly I can't understand it."

Thus directly challenged, Richard Arden looked at him hard for a moment. He was balancing in his mind whether he should evade or accept the crisis. He preferred the latter.

"Well, I can only say I did not intend to convey anything by my manner; but, as you know, when there is anything in one's mind it is not always easy to prevent its affecting, as you say, one’s manner. I am not sorry you have asked me, because I spoke without reflection the other day. No one should answer, I really think, for any one else, in ever so small a matter, in this world.”

“But you didn’t — you spoke only for yourself. You simply promised me your friendship, your kind offices — you said, in fact, all I could have hoped for.”

“Yes, perhaps — yes, I may, I suppose I did. But don’t you see, dear Longcluse, things may come to mind, on thinking over.”

“*What* things?” demanded Longcluse quickly, with a sudden energy that called a flush to his temples; and fire gleamed for a moment from his deep-set, gloomy eyes.

“What things? Why, young ladies are not always the most intelligible problems on earth. I think you ought to know that; and really I do think, in such matters, it is far better that they should be left to themselves as much as possible; and I think, besides, that there are some difficulties that did not strike us. I mean, that I now see that there really are great difficulties — insuperable difficulties.”

“Can you define them?” said Longcluse coldly.

“I don’t want to vex you, Longcluse, and I don’t want to quarrel.”

“That’s extremely kind of you.”

“I don’t know whether you are serious, but it is quite true. I don’t wish any unpleasantness between us. I don’t think I need say more than that; having thought it over, I don’t see how it could ever be.”

“Will you give me your reasons?”

“I really don’t see that I can add anything in particular to what I have said.”

“I think, Mr. Arden, considering all that has passed between us on this subject, that you are *bound* to let me know your reasons for so marked a change of opinion.”

“I can’t agree with you, Mr. Longcluse. I don’t see in the least why I need tell you my particular reasons for the opinion I have expressed. My sister can act for herself, and I certainly shall not account to you for my reasons or opinions in the matter.”

Mr. Longcluse’s pale face grew whiter, and his brows knit, as he fixed a momentary stare on the young man; but he mastered his anger, and said in a cold tone —

“We disagree totally upon that point, and I rather think the time will come when you *must* explain.”

“I have no more to say upon the subject, Sir, except this,” said Arden, very tartly, “that it is certain your hopes can never lead to anything, and that I object to your continuing your visits at Mortlake.”

“Why, the house does not belong to you — it belongs to Sir Reginald Arden, who objects to your visits and receives mine. Your ideas seem a little confused,” and he laughed gently and coldly.

“Very much the reverse, Sir. I object to my sister being exposed to the least chance of annoyance from your visits. I protest against it, and you will be so good as to understand that I distinctly forbid them.”

“The young lady’s father, I presume, will hardly ask your advice in the matter, and *I* certainly shall not ask your leave. I shall call when I please, so long as I am received at Mortlake, and shall direct my own conduct, without troubling you for counsel in my affairs.” Mr. Longcluse laughed again icily.

“And so shall I, mine,” said Arden sharply.

“You have no right to treat anyone so,” said Longcluse angrily— “as if one had broken his honour, or committed a crime.”

“A crime!” repeated Richard Arden. “Oh! *That*, indeed, would pretty well end all relations.”

“Yes, as, perhaps, you shall find,” answered Longcluse, with sudden and oracular ferocity.

Each gentleman had gone a little farther than he had at first intended. Richard Arden had a proud and fierce temper when it was roused. He was near saying what would have amounted to insult. It was a chance opening of the door that prevented it. Both gentlemen had stood up.

“Please, Sir, have you done with the room, Sir?” asked the man.

“Yes,” said Longcluse, and laughed again as he turned on his heel.

“Because three gentlemen want the room, if it’s not engaged, Sir. And Lord Wynderbroke is waiting for you, please, Mr. Arden.”

So with a little toss of his head, which he held unusually high, and a flushed and “glooming” countenance, Richard Arden marched a little swaggeringly forth, to his dinner tête-à-tête with Lord Wynderbroke.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

STORIES ABOUT MR. LONGCLUSE.

The irritation of this unpleasant interview soon subsided, but Mr. Longcluse's anxiety rather increased.

Next day early in the afternoon he drove to Lady May's and she received him just as usual. He learned from her, without appearing to seek the information, that Alice Arden was still at Mortlake. His visit was one of but two or three minutes. He jumped into a hansom and drove out to Mortlake. He knocked. Man of the world as he was, his heart beat faster.

"Is Miss Arden at home?"

"No, Sir."

"Not at home?"

"Miss Arden is gone out, Sir."

"Oh! perhaps in the garden?"

"No, Sir; she has gone out, and won't be back for some time."

The man spoke with the promptitude and decision of a servant instructed to deny his mistress to the visitor. He had not a card; he would call again another day.

He heard the piano faintly, and, he thought, Alice's voice also; and certainly he saw Vivian Darnley in the drawingroom window, as his cab turned away from the door. With a swelling heart he drove into town. The portcullis, then, had fallen; access was denied him; and he should see her no more!

Good Heaven! what had he done? He walked distractedly, for a while, up and down his study. Should he employ Lady May's intervention, and tell her the whole story? Goodnatured Lady May! Perhaps she would undertake his cause, and plead for his re-admission. But was even that so certain? How could he tell what view she might take of the matter? And were she to intercede for him ever so vehemently, how could he tell that she had any chance of prevailing?

No; on the whole it was better to be his own advocate. He would sit down then and there, and write to the offended or alarmed lady, and lay his piteous case before her in his own words and rely on her compassion, without an intervenient.

How many letters he began, how many he even finished, and rejected, I need not tire you by telling. Some were composed in the first, others in the third person. Not one satisfied him. Here was the man of a million and more, who would dash off a note to his stockbroker, to buy or sell a hundred thousand pounds' worth of stock — who would draft a resolution of the bank of which he was the chairman, directing an operation which would make men open their eyes, without the tremor of a nerve or the hesitation of a moment — unmanned, helpless, distracted in the endeavour to write a note to a young and inexperienced girl!

O beautiful sex! what a triumph is here! O Love! what fools will you not make of us poor masculine wiseacres! The letter he dispatched was in these terms. I daresay he had torn better ones to pieces: —

"DEAR MISS ARDEN, — I had hoped that my profound contrition might have atoned for a momentary indiscretion — the declaration, though in terms the most respectful, of feelings which I had not self-command sufficient to suppress, and which had for nearly a year remained concealed in my own breast. I am sure, Miss Arden, that you are incapable of a gratuitous cruelty. Have I not sworn that one word to recall the remembrance of that, to me, all but fatal madness shall never escape my lips, in your presence? May I not entreat that you will forget it, that you will forbear to pass upon me the agonising sentence of exclusion? You shall never again have to complain of my uttering one word that the merest acquaintance, who is permitted the happiness of conversing with you, might not employ. You shall never regret your forbearance. I shall never cease to bless you for it; and whatever decision you arrive at, it shall be respected by me as sacred law. I shall never cease to reverence and bless the hand that spares or — afflicts me. May I be permitted this one melancholy hope, may I be allowed to interpret your omitting to answer this miserable letter as a concession of its prayer? Unless forbidden, I will endeavour to construe your silence as oblivion.

"I have the honour to remain, dear Miss Arden, with deep compunction and respect, but not altogether without hope in your mercy,

"Yours the most unhappy and distracted man in England,

"WALTER LONGCLUSE."

Mr. Longcluse sealed this letter in its envelope, and addressed it. He would have liked to send it that moment, by his servant, but an odd shyness prevented. He did not wish his servants to conjure and put their heads together over it; he could not endure the idea; so with his own hand he dropped it in the post. Somewhat in the style of the old novel was this composition of Mr. Longcluse's — a little theatrical, and, one would have fancied, even affected; yet never was man more desperately sincere.

Night came, and brought no reply. Was no news good news, or would the morning bring, perhaps from Richard Arden, a withering answer? Morning came, and no answer: what was he to conjecture?

That day, in Grosvenor Square, he passed Richard Arden, who looked steadily and sternly a little to his right, and *cut* him.

It was a marked and decided cut. His ears tingled as if he had received a slap in the face. So things had assumed a very decided attitude indeed! Longcluse felt very oddly enraged, at first; then anxious. It was insulting that Richard Arden should have taken the initiative in dissolving relations. But had he not been himself studiously impertinent to Arden, in that brief colloquy of yesterday? He ought to have been prepared for this. Without explanation, and the shaking of hands, it was impossible that relations of amity should have been resumed between them. But Longcluse had been entirely absorbed by a threatened alienation that affected him much more nearly. There was a thesis for conjecture in the situation, which made him still more anxious. A very little time would probably clear all up.

He was walking homeward, saying to himself as he went, "No, I shall find no answer; I should be a fool to fancy anything else;" and yet walking all the more quickly, as he approached his house, in the hope of the very letter which he affected, to himself, to have quite rejected as an impossibility. Some letters had come, but none from Mortlake. His letter to Alice was still unanswered. He was now in the agony of suspense and distraction.

The same evening Richard Arden was talking about him, as he leaned with his elbow on the mantelpiece at Mortlake. He and Alice were alone in the drawingroom, awaiting the arrival of the little dinner-party. This, as you know, was to include Lord Wynderbroke, before whose advances, in Richard Arden's vision, Mr. Longcluse had waned, and even become an embarrassment and a nuisance.

“It is easier to cut him than to explain,” thought Richard Arden. “It bores one so inexpressibly, giving reasons for what one does, and I’m so glad he has saved me the trouble by his vulgar impertinence.”

They had talked for some time, Alice chiefly a listener. How was she affected toward Mr. Longcluse? He was agreeable; he flattered her; he was passionately in love with her. All but this latter condition she liked very well; but this was embarrassing, and quite impracticable. Who knows what that tiny spark we term a fancy, a whim, a *penchant* might have grown to, had it not been blown away by this untimely gust? But, for my part, I don’t think it ever would have grown to a matter of the heart. There was something in the way. A fancy is one thing, and passion quite another. Pique is a common state of mind, and comes and goes, and comes again, in many a courtship. But a liking that has once entered the heart cannot be torn out in a hasty moment, and takes a long time, and many a struggle, to kill.

She was a little sorry, just then, to lose him so inevitably. Perhaps his letter, to which he had trusted to move her, had rendered the return of old relations impossible. In this letter she felt herself the owner of a secret — a secret which she could not keep without a sort of understanding growing up between them — which therefore she had no idea of keeping.

She was resolved to tell it. The letter she had locked, in marked isolation, as if no property of hers, but simply a document that was in her keeping, in the pretty ormolu casket that stood on the drawingroom chimneypiece. She had intended showing it, and telling the story of the scene in the garden, to Richard. But he was speaking with a mysterious asperity of Mr. Longcluse, which made her hesitate. A very little thing, it seemed to her, might suffice to make a very violent quarrel out of a coldness. Instinctively, therefore, she refrained, and listened to Richard while, with his arm touching the casket on the chimneypiece, he descanted on the writer of the unknown letter.

She experienced an odd feeling of insecurity as, in the course of his talk, his fingers began to trifle with the pretty fingers that stood out in relief upon the casket; for she knew that the ordeal of the pistol, discountenanced in England, was still in force on the Continent, and Mr. Longcluse’s ideas were all Continental; and how near were those fingers to the letter which might suffice to explode the dangerous element that had already accumulated!

"He has talked of us to his low companions; he chooses to associate with usurers and worse people; and he has been speaking of us in the most insolent terms."

"Really!" said Alice. Her large eyes looked larger as they fixed on him.

"Yes, and I'll tell you how I heard it. You must know, dear Alice, that I happened to want a little money; and when one does, the usual course is to borrow it. So I paid a visit to my harpy — and a harpy in need is a harpy indeed. Being hard up, he fleeced me; and the gentleman, I suppose, thinking he might be familiar, told me he was on confidential terms with Mr. Longcluse and wished me a good deal of joy. 'Of what?' I ventured to ask, for he had just hit me rather hard. 'Of your chance,' or, as he called it *chanshe*, he said, with a delightfully arch leer. I thought he meant I had backed the right horse for the Derby, but it turned out he meant our chance of inducing Mr. Longcluse to make up his mind to marry you. I was very near knocking him down; but a man who has one's bill for three hundred pounds must be respected. So I merely ventured to ask on whose authority he congratulated me, when it appeared it was on Mr. Longcluse's own, who, it seems, had said a great deal more, equally intolerable. In plain, coarse terms, he says that, being poor, we have conspired with you to secure him, Mr. Longcluse, for your husband. As to the fact of his having actually conveyed that, and to more people than one, there is and can be no doubt whatever. I can imagine, considering all things, nothing more vulgar, audacious, and cowardly."

A blush of anger glowed in Alice's face. Richard Arden liked the proud fire that gleamed from her dark grey eyes. It satisfied him that his words were not lost.

"I lighted on a man who knew more about him than I had learned before," resumed Richard Arden. "He was suspected at Berlin of having been engaged in a conspiracy to pigeon Dacre and Wilmot, who were travelling. He did not appear, but he is said to have supplied the money, and had a lion's share of the spoil. There is no good in repeating these things generally, you know, because they are so hard to prove; and a fellow like that is dangerous. They say he is very litigious."

"Upon my word, if your information is at all to be relied on, it is plain we *have* made a great mistake. It is a disappointing world, but I could not have fancied him doing anything so low; and I must say for him that he was gentlemanlike and quiet, and very unlike the person he appears to be. I think I never heard of anything so outrageous! Vivian Darnley told me that he was a great duellist, and thought to be a very quarrelsome, dangerous companion abroad. But he had only heard this, and what you tell me is so much worse, so mean, so utterly intolerable!"

"Oh! There's worse than that," said Richard, with a faint sinister smile.

"What?" said she, returning it with an almost frightened gaze.

"There was a very beautiful girl at the opera in Vienna; her name was Piccardi, a daughter of a good old Roman family. You can't imagine how admired she was! And she was thought to be on the point of marrying Count Baddenoff; Mr. Longcluse, it seems, chose to be in love with her; he was not then anything like so rich as he became afterwards — and this poor girl was killed."

"Good heavens! Richard — what can you mean?"

"I mean that she was assassinated, and that from that day Mr. Longcluse was never received in society in Vienna, and had to leave it."

"You ought to tell May Penrose," said she, after a silence of dismay.

"Not for the world," said Richard; "she talks enough for six — and where's the good? She'll only take up the cudgels for him, and we shall be in the centre of a pretty row."

"Well, if you think it best — — " she began.

"Certainly," said he. And a silence followed.

"Here is a carriage at the door," said Richard Arden. "Let us dismiss Longcluse, and look a little more like ourselves."

That evening there came letters as usual to Mr. Longcluse, and among others a note from Lady May Penrose, reminding him of her little garden-party at Richmond next day.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, starting up and reading the cards on his chimney, "I thought it was the day after. It was very goodnatured, poor old thing, her reminding me. I shall see Alice Arden there. Not one line does she vouchsafe. But is not she right? I think the more highly of her for not writing. I don't think she ought to write. Oh, Heaven grant she may meet me as usual? Does she mean it? If she did not, would she not have got her brother to write, or have written herself a cold line, to end our acquaintance?"

So he tried to comfort himself, and to keep alive his dying hope by these artificial stimulants.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE GARDEN PARTY.

Next morning Mr. Longcluse rose with a sense of something before him.

"So I shall see her to-day! If she's the girl I've thought her, she will meet me as usual. That frantic scene, in which I risked all on the turn of a die, will be forgotten. Hasty words, or precipitate letters, are passed over every day; the man who commits such follies, under a transitory insanity, is allowed the privilege of recalling them. There were no witnesses present to make forgiveness difficult. It all lies with her own good sense, and a heart proud but gentle. Let but those mad words be sponged out, and I am happy. Alice, if you forgive me, I forgive your brother, and take his name from where it is, and write it in my heart. Oh, beautiful Alice! will you belie your looks? Oh, clear bright mind! will you be clouded and perverted? Oh, gentle heart! can you be merciless?"

Mr. Longcluse made his simple morning toilet very carefully. A very plain man, extremely ugly some pronounce him; yet his figure is good, his get-up unexceptionable, and altogether he is a most gentlemanlike man to look upon, and in his movements and attitudes, quite unstudied, there is an undefinable grace. His accent is a little foreign — the slightest thing in the world, and Lady May Penrose declares it is so very pretty. Then he is so agreeable, when he pleases; and he is so very rich!

Some people wonder why he does not withdraw from all speculations, retire upon his enormous wealth, and with his elegant tastes, and the art of being magnificent without glare, even gorgeous without vulgarity — for has he not shown this refined talent in the service of others, who have taken him into council? — he could eclipse all the world in splendid elegance, and make his way, force d'argent, to the pinnacle of half the world's ambition. Were those stories true that Richard Arden told his sister on the night before?

I don't think that Richard Arden stuck at trifles, where he had an object to gain, and I don't believe a word of his story of Mr. Longcluse's insulting talk. It was not his way to boast and vapour; and he had a secret contempt for many of the Jewish and other agents whom he chose to employ. But undoubtedly Mr. Longcluse had the reputation among his discounting admirers of being a dangerous man to quarrel with; and also it was true that he had fought three or four savage duels in the course of his Continental life. There were other stories, unauthenticated, unpleasant. These were whispered with sneers by Mr. Longcluse's enemies. But there's a divinity doth hedge a King Crœsus, and his character bore a charmed life, among the missiles that would have laid that of many a punier man in the dust.

With an agitated heart, Mr. Longcluse approached the pretty little place known as Raleigh Court, to which he had been invited. Through the quaint, oldfashioned gateway, under the embowering branches of tall trees, he drove up a short, broad avenue, clumped at each side with old timber, to the open hall-door of the pretty Elizabethan house. Carriages of all sorts were discernible under the branches, assembled at the further side to the right of the hall-door, over the wide steps of which was spread a scarlet cloth. Croquet parties were already visible on the shorn grass, under boughs that spread high in the air, and cast a pleasant shadow on the sward. Groups were strolling among the flowerbeds — some walking in, some emerging from the open door — and the scene presented the usual variety of dress, and somewhat listless to-ing and fro-ing.

Did anyone, of all the guests of Lady May, mask so profound an agitation, under the conventional smile, as that which beat at Walter Longcluse's heart? Two or three people whom he knew, he met and talked to — some for a minute, others for a longer time — as he drew near the steps. His eye all the time was busy in the search after one pretty figure, the least glimpse of which he would have recognised with the thrill of a sure intuition, far or near. He would have liked to ask the friends he met whether the Ardens were here. But what would have been easy to him a week before, was now an effort for which he could not find courage.

He entered the hall, quaint and lofty, rising to the entire height of the house, with two galleries, one above the other, surrounding it on three sides. Ancestors of the late Mr. Penrose, who had left all this and a great deal more to his sorrowing relict, stood on the panelled walls at full length — some in ruffs and trunk-hose, others in perukes and cut-velvet, one with a bâton in his hand, and three with falcon on fist — all stately and gentlemanlike, according to their several periods; with corresponding ladies, some stiff and pallid, who figured in the days of the virgin queen, and others in the graceful *déshabille* of Sir Peter Lely. This quaint oak hall was now resonant with the buzz and clack of modern gossip, prose, and flirtation, and a great deal crowded, notwithstanding its commodious proportions. Lady May was still receiving her company near the doorway of the first drawingroom, and her kindly voice was audible from within as the visitor approached. Mr. Longcluse was very graciously received.

"I want you so particularly, to introduce you to Lady Hummington. She is such a charming person. She is so thoroughly up in German literature. She's a great deal too learned for me, but you and she will understand one another so perfectly, and you will be quite charmed with her. Mr. Addlings, did you happen to see Lady Hummington, or have you any idea where she's gone?"

"I shall go and look for her, with pleasure. Is not she the tall lady with grey hair? Shall I tell her you want to say a word to her?"

"You're very kind, but I'll not mind, thank you very much. It is so provoking, Mr. Longcluse! you would have been perfectly charmed with her."

"I shall be more fortunate, by-and-by, perhaps," said Mr. Longcluse. "Are any of our friends from Mortlake here?" he added, looking a little fixedly in her eyes, for he was thinking whether Alice had betrayed his secret, and was trying to read an answer there.

Lady May answered quite promptly —

"Oh, yes, Alice is here, and her brother. He went out that way with some friends," she said, indicating with a little nod a door which, from a second hall, opened on a terrace. "I asked him to show them the three fountains. You must see them also; they are in the Dutch garden; they were put up in the reign of George the First. — How d'ye do, Mrs. Frumply? How d'ye do, Miss Frumply?"

"What a charming house!" exclaims Mrs. Frumply, "and what a day! We were saying, Arabella and I, as we drove out, that you must really have an influence with the clerk of the weather, ha, ha, ha! didn't we, Arabella? So charming!"

Lady May laughed affably, and said— "Won't you and your daughter go in and take some tea? Mr. (she was going to call on Longcluse, but he had glided away) — Oh, Mr. Darnley!"

And the introduction was made, and Vivian Darnley, with Mrs. Frumply on his arm, attended by her daughter Arabella, did as he was commanded and got tea for that simpering lady, and fruit and Naples biscuits, and plumcake, and was rewarded with the original joke about the clerk of the weather.

Mr. Longcluse, in the meantime, had passed the door indicated by Lady May, and stood upon the short terrace that overlooked the pretty flower-garden cut out in grotesque patterns, so that looking down upon its masses of crimson, blue, and yellow, as he leaned on the balustrade, it showed beneath his eye like a wide deep-piled carpet, on the green ground of which were walking groups of people, the brilliant hues of the ladies' dresses rivalling the splendour of the verbenas, and making altogether a very gay picture.

The usual paucity of male attendance made Mr. Longcluse's task of observation easy. He was looking for Richard Arden's well-known figure among the groups, thinking that probably Alice was not far off. But he was not there, nor was Alice; and Walter Longcluse, gloomy and lonely in this gay crowd, descended the steps at the end of this terrace, and sauntered round again to the front of the house, now and then passing some one he knew, with an exchange of a smile or a bow, and then lost again in the Vanity Fair of strange faces and voices.

Now he is at the hall door — he mounts the steps. Suddenly, as he stands upon the level platform at top, he finds himself within four feet of Richard Arden. He looks on him as he might on the carved pilaster, at the side of the hall door; no one could have guessed, by his inflexible but unaffected glance, that he and Mr. Arden had ever been acquainted. The younger man showed something in his countenance, a sudden hauteur, a little elevation of the chin, a certain sternness, more melodramatic, though less effective, than the simple blank of Mr. Longcluse's glance.

That gentleman looked about coolly. He was in search of Miss Arden, but he did not see her. He entered the hall again, and Richard Arden a little awkwardly resumed his conversation, which had suddenly subsided into silence on Longcluse's appearance.

By this time Lady May was more at ease, having received all her company that were reasonably punctual, and in the hall Longcluse now encountered her.

“Have you seen Mr. Arden?” she inquired of him.

“Yes, he’s at the door, at the steps.”

“Would you mind telling him kindly that I want to say a word to him?”

“Certainly, most happy,” said Longcluse, without any distinct plan as to how he was to execute her awkward commission.

“Thank you very much. But, oh! dear, here is Lady Hummington, and she wishes so much to know you; I’ll send some one else. I must introduce you, come with me — Lady Hummington, I want to introduce my friend, Mr. Longcluse.” So Mr. Longcluse was presented to Lady Hummington, who was very lean, and a “blue,” and most fatiguingly well up in archæology, and all new books on dry and difficult subjects. So that Mr. Longcluse felt that he was, in Joe Willett’s phrase, “tackled” by a giant, and was driven to hideous exertions of attention and memory to hold his own. When Lady Hummington, to whom it was plain kind Lady May, with an unconscious cruelty, had been describing Mr. Longcluse’s accomplishments and acquirements, had taken some tea and other refection, and when Mr. Longcluse’s kindness “had her wants supplied,” and she, like Scott’s “old man” in the “Lay of the Last Minstrel,” “was gratified,” she proposed visiting the music-room, where she had heard a clever organist play, on a harmonium, three distinct tunes at the same time, which being composed on certain principles, that she explained with much animation and precision, harmonised very prettily.

So this clever woman directed, and Mr. Longcluse led, the way to the music-room.

CHAPTER XXX.

HE SEES HER.

Mr. Longcluse's attention was beginning to wander a little, and his eyes were now busy in search of some one whom he had not found; and knowing that the duration of people's stay at a garden-party is always uncertain, and that some of those gaily-plumed birds who make the flutter, and chirping, and brilliancy of the scene, hardly alight before they take wing again, he began to fear that Alice Arden had gone.

"Just like my luck!" he thought bitterly; "and if she is gone, when shall I have an opportunity of seeing her again?"

Lady Hummington's well-informed conversation had been, unheeded, accompanying the ruminations and distractions of this "passionate pilgrim;" and as they approached the door of the music-room, the little crush there brought the learned lady's lips so near to his ear, that with a little start he heard the words— "All strictly arithmetical, you know, and adjusted by the relative frequency of vibrations. That theory, I am sure, you approve, Mr. Longcluse."

To which the distracted lover made answer, "I quite agree with you, Lady Hummington."

The music-room at Raleigh Court is an apartment of no great size, and therefore when, with Lady Hummington on his arm, he entered, it was at no great distance that he saw Miss Arden standing near the window, and talking with an elderly gentleman, whose appearance he did not know, but who seemed to be extremely interested in her conversation. She saw him, he had not a doubt, for she turned a little quickly, and looked ever so little more directly out at the window, and a very slight tinge flushed her cheek. It was quite plain, he thought, and a dreadful pang stole through his breast, that she did not choose to see him — quite plain that she did see him — and he thought, from a subtle scrutiny of her beautiful features, quite plain also that it gave her pain to meet without acknowledging him.

Lady Hummington was conversing with volubility; but the air felt icy, and there was a strange trembling at his heart, and this, in many respects, hard man of the world, felt that the tears were on the point of welling from his eyes. The struggle was but for a few moments, and he seemed quite himself again. Lady Hummington wished to go to the end of the room where the piano was, and the harmonium on which the organist had performed his feat of the three tunes. That artist was taking his departure, having a musical assignation of some kind to keep. But to oblige Lady Hummington, who had heard of Thalberg's doing something of the kind, he sat down and played an elaborate piece of music on the piano with his thumbs only. This charming effort over, and applauded, the performer took his departure. And Lady Hummington said —

"I am told, Mr. Longcluse, that you are a very good musician."

"A very indifferent performer, Lady Hummington."

"Lady May Penrose tells a very different tale."

"Lady May Penrose is too kind to be critical," said Longcluse; and as he maintained this dialogue, his eye was observing every movement of Alice Arden. She seemed, however, to have quite made up her mind to stand her ground. There was a strange interest, to him, even in being in the same room with her. Perhaps Miss Arden saw that Mr. Longcluse's movements were dependent upon those of the lady whom he accompanied, and might have thought that, the musician having departed, their stay in that room would not be very long.

"I should be so glad to hear you sing, Mr. Longcluse," pursued Lady Hummington. "You have been in the East, I think; have you any of the Hindostanee songs? There are some, I have read, that embody the theories of the Brahmin philosophy."

"Long-winded songs, I fancy," said Mr. Longcluse, laughing; "it is a very voluminous philosophy, but the truth is, I've got a little cold, and I should not like to make a bad impression so early."

"But surely there are some simple little things, without very much compass, that would not distress you. How pretty those old English songs are that they are collecting and publishing now! I mean songs of Shakespeare's time — Ben Jonson's, Beaumont and Fletcher's, and Massinger's, you know. Some of them are so extremely pretty!"

"Oh! yes, I'll sing you one of those with pleasure," said he with a strange alacrity, quite forgetting his cold, sitting down at the instrument, and striking two or three fierce chords.

I am sure that most of my readers are acquainted with that pretty old English song, of the time of James the First, entitled, “Once I Loved a Maiden Fair.” That was the song he chose.

Never, perhaps, did he sing so well before, with a fluctuation of pathos and scorn, tenderness and hatred, expressed with real dramatic fire, and with more power of voice than at moments of less excitement he possessed. He sang it with real passion, and produced, exactly where he wished, a strange but unavowed sensation. He omitted one verse, and the song as he delivered it was thus: —

“Once I loved a maiden fair, But she did deceive me: She with Venus could compare, In my mind, believe me. She was young, and among All our maids the sweetest: Now I say, Ah, well-a-day! Brightest hopes are fleetest.

Maidens wavering and untrue Many a heart have broken; Sweetest lips the world e’er knew Falsest words have spoken. Fare thee well, faithless girl, I’ll not sorrow for thee: Once I held thee dear as pearl, Now I do abhor thee.”

When he had finished the song, he said coldly, but very distinctly, as he rose —

“I like that song, there is a melancholy psychology in it. It is a song worthy of Shakespeare himself.”

Lady Hummington urged him with an encore, but he was proof against her entreaties. And so, after a little, she took Mr. Longcluse’s arm; and Alice felt relieved when the room was rid of them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ABOUT THE GROUNDS.

Lady Hummington, well pleased at having found in Mr. Longcluse what she termed a kindred mind, was warned by the hour that she must depart. She took her leave of Mr. Longcluse with regret, and made him promise to come to luncheon with her on the Thursday following. Mr. Longcluse called her carriage for her, and put in, besides herself, her maiden sister and two daughters, who all exhibited the family leanness, with noses more or less red and aquiline, and small black eyes, set rather close together.

As he ascended the steps he was accosted by a damsel in distress.

“Mr. Longcluse, I’m so glad to see you! You must do a very goodnatured thing,” said handsome Miss Maubray, smiling on him. “I came here with old Sir Arthur and Lady Tramway, and I’ve lost them; and I’ve been bored to death by a Mr. Bagshot, and I’ve sent him to look for my pockethandkerchief in the tea-room; and I want you, as you hope for mercy, to show it now, and rescue me from my troubles.”

“I’m too much honoured. I’m only too happy, Miss Maubray. I shall put Mr. Bagshot to death, if you wish it, and Sir Arthur and Lady Tramway shall appear the moment you command.”

Mr. Longcluse was talking his nonsense with the high spirits which sometimes attend a painful excitement.

“I told them I should get to that tree if I were lost in the crowd, and that they would be sure to find me under it after six o’clock. Do take me there; I am so afraid of Mr. Bagshot’s returning!”

So over the short grass that handsome girl walked, with Mr. Longcluse at her side.

“I’ll sit at this side, thank you; I don’t want to be seen by Mr. Bagshot.”

So she sat down, placing herself at the further side of the great trunk of the old chestnut-tree. Mr. Longcluse stood nearly opposite, but so placed as to command a view of the hall-door steps. He was still watching the groups that emerged, with as much interest as if his life depended on the order of their to-ing and fro-ing. But, in spite of this, very soon Miss Maubray's talk began to interest him.

"Whom did Alice Arden come with?" asked Miss Maubray. "I should like to know; because, if I should lose my people, I must find some one to take me home."

"With her brother, I fancy."

"Oh! yes, to be sure — I saw him here. I forgot. But Alice is very independent, just now, of his protection," and she laughed.

"How do you mean?"

"Oh! Lord Wynderbroke, of course, takes care of her while she's here. I saw them walking about together, so happy! I suppose it is all settled."

"About Lord Wynderbroke?" suggested Longcluse, with a gentle carelessness, as if he did not care a farthing — as if a dreadful pain had not at that moment pierced his heart.

"Yes, Lord Wynderbroke. Why, haven't you heard of that?"

"Yes, I believe — I think so. I am sure I have heard something of it; but one hears so many things, one forgets, and I don't know him. What kind of man is he?"

"He's hard to describe; he's not disagreeable, and he's not dull; he has a great deal to say for himself about pictures, and the East, and the Crimea, and the opera, and all the people at all the courts in Europe, and he ought to be amusing; but I think he is the driest person I ever talked to. And he is really goodnatured; but I think him much more teasing than the most ill-natured man alive, he's so insufferably punctual and precise."

"You know him very well, then?" said Longcluse, with an effort to contribute his share to the talk.

"Pretty well," said the young lady, with just a slight tinge flushing her haughty cheek. "But no one, who has been a week in the same house with him, could fail to see all that."

Miss Maubray herself, I am told, had hopes of Lord Wynderbroke about a year before, and was not amiably disposed towards him now, and looked on the triumph of Alice a little sourly; although something like the beginning of a real love had since stolen into her heart — not, perhaps, destined to be much more happy.

"Lord Wynderbroke — I don't know him. Is that gentleman he whom I saw talking to Miss Arden in the music-room, I wonder? He's not actually thin, and he is not at all stout; he's a little above the middle height, and he stoops just a little. He appears past fifty, and his hair looks like an oldfashioned brown wig, brushed up into a sort of cone over his forehead. He seems a little formal, and very polite and smiling, with a flower in his buttonhole; a blue coat; and he has a pair of those little gold Paris glasses, and was looking out through the window with them."

"Had he a high nose?"

"Yes, rather a thin, high nose, and his face is very brown."

"Well, if he was all that, and had a brown face and a high nose, and was pretty near fifty-three, and very near Alice Arden, he was positively Lord Wynderbroke."

"And has this been going on for some time, or is it a sudden thing?"

"Both, I believe. It has been going on a long time, I believe, in old Sir Reginald's head; but it has come about, after all, rather suddenly; and my guardian says — Mr. David Arden, you know — that he has written a proposal in a letter to Sir Reginald, and you see how happy the young lady looks. So I think we may assume that the course of true love, for once, runs smooth — don't you?"

"And I suppose there is no objection anywhere?" said Longcluse, smiling. "It is a pity he is not a little younger, perhaps."

"I don't hear any complaints; let us rather rejoice he is not ten or twenty years older. I am sure it would not prevent his happiness, but it would heighten the ridicule. Are you one of Lady May Penrose's party to the Derby tomorrow?" inquired the young lady.

"No; I haven't been asked."

"Lord Wynderbroke is going."

"Oh! of course he is."

"I don't think Mr. David Arden likes it; but, of course, it is no business of his if other people are pleased. I wonder you did not hear all this from Richard Arden, you and he are so intimate."

So said the young lady, looking very innocent. But I think she suspected more than she said.

"No, I did not hear it," he said carelessly; "or, if I did, I forgot it. But do you blame the young lady?"

"Blame her! not at all. Besides, I am not so sure that she knows."

"How can you think so?"

"Because I think she likes quite another person."

"Really! And who is he?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Upon my honour, I can't."

There was something so earnest, and even vehement, in this sudden asseveration, that Miss Maubray looked for a moment in his face; and seeing her curious expression, he said more quietly, "I assure you I don't think I ever heard; I'm rather curious to know."

"I mean Mr. Vivian Darnley."

"Oh! Well, I've suspected that a long time. I told Richard Arden, one day — I forget how it came about — but he said no."

"Well, I say yes," laughed the young lady, "and we shall see who's right."

"Oh! Recollect I'm only giving you his opinion. I rather lean to yours, but he said there was positively nothing in it, and that Mr. Darnley is too poor to marry."

"If Alice Arden resembles me," said the young lady, "she thinks there are just two things to marry for — either love or ambition."

"You place love first, I'm glad to hear," said Mr. Longcluse, with a smile.

"So I do, because it is most likely to prevail with a pig-headed girl; but what I mean is this: that social pre-eminence — I mean rank, and not trumpery rank; but such as, being accompanied with wealth and precedence, is also attended with power — is worth an immense sacrifice of all other objects; my reason tells me, worth the sacrifice of love. But that is a sacrifice which impatient, impetuous people can't always so easily make — which I daresay I could not make if I were tried; but I don't think I shall ever be fool enough to become so insane, for the state of a person in love is a state of simple idiotism. It is pitiable, I allow, but also contemptible; but, judging by what I see, it appears to me a more irresistible delusion than ambition. But I don't understand Alice well. I think, if I knew a little more of her brother — certain qualities so run in families — I should be able to make a better guess. What do you think of him?"

"He's very agreeable, isn't he? and, for the rest, really, until men are tried as events only can try them, it is neither wise nor safe to pronounce."

"Is he affectionate?"

"His sister seems to worship him," he answered; "but young ladies are so angelic, that where they like they resent nothing, and respect selfishness itself as a manly virtue."

"But you know him intimately; surely you must know something of him."

Under different circumstances, this audacious young lady's cross-examination would have amused Mr. Longcluse; but in his present relations, and spirits, it was otherwise.

"I should but mislead you if I were to answer more distinctly. I answer for no man, hardly for myself. Besides, I question your theory. I don't think, except by accident, that a brother's character throws any light upon a sister's; and I hope — I think, I mean — that Miss Arden has qualities illimitably superior to those of her brother. Are these your friends, Miss Maubray?" he continued.

"So they are," she answered. "I'm so much obliged to you, Mr. Longcluse! I think they are leaving."

Mr. Longcluse, having delivered her into the hands of her chaperon, took his leave, and walked into the broad alleys among the trees, and in solitude under their shade, sat himself down by a pond, on which two swans were sailing majestically. Looking down upon the water with a pallid frown, he struck the bank beneath him viciously with his heel, peeling off little bits of the sward, which dropped into the water.

"It is all plain enough now. Richard Arden has been playing me false. It ought not to surprise me, perhaps. The girl, I still believe, has neither act nor part in the conspiracy. She has been duped by her brother. I have thrown myself upon her mercy; I will now appeal to her *justice*. As for him — what vermin mankind are! He must return to his allegiance; he will. After all, he may not like to lose me. He will act in the way that most interests his selfishness. Come, come! it is no impracticable problem. I'm not cruel? Not I! No, I'm not cruel; but I am utterly just. I would not hang a mouse up by the tail to die, as they do in France, head downwards, of hunger, for eating my cheese; but should the vermin nibble at my heart, in that case, what says justice? Alice, beautiful Alice, you shall have every chance before I tear you from my heart — oh, for ever! Ambition! That coarse girl, Miss Maubray, can't understand you. Ambition, in her sense, you have none; there is nothing venal in your nature. Vivian Darnley, is there anything in that either? I think nothing. I observed them closely, that night, at Mortlake. No, there was nothing. My conversation and music interested her, and when I was by, he was nothing.

"They are going to the Derby tomorrow. I think Lady May has treated me rather oddly, considering that she had all but borrowed my drag. She might have put me off civilly; but I don't blame her. She is goodnatured, and if she has any idea that I and the Ardens are not quite on pleasant terms, it quite excuses it. Her asking me here, and her little note to remind, were meant to show that she did not take up the quarrel against me. Never mind; I shall know all about it, time enough. They are going to the Derby tomorrow. Very well, I shall go also. It will all be right yet. When did I fail? When did I renounce an object? By Heaven, one way or other, I'll accomplish this!"

Tall Mr. Longcluse rose, and looked round him, and in deep thought, marched with a resolute step towards the house.

CHAPTER XXXII.

UNDER THE LIME-TREES.

At this garden-party, marvellous as it may appear, Lord Wynderbroke has an aunt. How old she is I know not, nor yet with what conscience her respectable relations can permit her to haunt such places, and run a risk of being suffocated in doorways, or knocked down the steps by an enamoured couple hurrying off to more romantic quarters, or of having her maundering old head knocked with a croquet mallet, as she totters drearily among the hoops.

This old lady is worth conciliating, for she has plate and jewels, and three thousand a-year to leave; and Lord Wynderbroke is a prudent man. He can bear a great deal of money, and has no objection to jewels, and thinks that the plate of his bachelor and old-maid kindred should gravitate to the centre and head of the house. Lord Wynderbroke was indulgent, and did not object to her living a little longer, for this aunt conduced to his air of juvenility more than the flower in his buttonhole. However, she was occasionally troublesome, and on this occasion made an unwise mixture of fruit and other things; and a servant glided into the music-room, and with a proper inclination of his person, in a very soft tone said, —

"My lord, Lady Witherspoons is in her carriage at the door, my lord, and says her ladyship is indisposed, and begs, my lord, that your lordship will be so good as to hacompany her 'ome in her carriage, my lord."

"Oh! tell her ladyship I am so *very* sorry, and will be with her in a moment." And he turned with a very serious countenance to Alice. "How extremely unfortunate! When I saw those miserable cherries, I knew how it would be; and now I am torn away from this charming place; and I'm sure I hope she may be better soon, it *is* so (disgusting, he thought, but he said) melancholy! With whom shall I leave you, Miss Arden?"

"Thanks, I came with my brother, and here is my cousin, Mr. Darnley, who can tell me where he is."

"With a croquet party, near the little bridge. I'll be your guide, if you'll allow me," said Vivian Darnley eagerly.

"Pray, Lord Wynderbroke, don't let me delay you longer. I shall find my brother quite easily now. I so hope Lady Witherspoons may soon be better!"

"Oh, yes, she always *is* better soon; but in the meantime one is carried away, you see, and everything upset; and all because, poor woman, she won't exercise the smallest restraint. And she has, of course, a right to command me, being my aunt, you know, and — and — the whole thing is ineffably provoking."

And thus he took his reluctant departure, not without a brief but grave scrutiny of Mr. Vivian Darnley. When he was gone, Vivian Darnley proffered his arm, and that little hand was placed on it, the touch of which made his heart beat faster. Though people were beginning to go, there was still a crush about the steps. This little resistance and mimic difficulty were pleasant to him for her sake. Down the steps they went together, and now he had her all to himself; and silently for a while he led her over the closely-shorn grass, and into the green walk between the lime-trees, that leads down to the little bridge.

"Alice," at last he said— "Miss Arden, what have I done that you are so changed?"

"Changed! I don't think I am changed. What is there to change me?" she said carelessly, but in a low tone, as she looked along towards the flowers.

"It won't do, Alice, repeating my question, for that is all you have done. I like you too well to be put off with mere words. You are changed, and without a cause — no, I could not say that — not without a cause. Circumstances are altered; you are in the great world now, and admired; you have wealth and titles at your feet — Mr. Longcluse with his millions, Lord Wynderbroke with his coronet."

"And who told you that these gentlemen were at my feet?" she exclaimed, with a flash from her fine eyes, that reminded him of moments of pretty childish anger, long ago. "If I am changed — and perhaps I am — such speeches as that would quite account for it. You accuse me of caprice — has any one ever accused you of impertinence?"

"It is quite true, I deserve your rebuke. I have been speaking as freely as if we were back again at Arden Court, or Ryndelmere, and ten years of our lives were as a mist that rolls away."

"That's a quotation from a song of Tennyson's."

"I don't know what it is from. Being melancholy myself, I say the words because they are melancholy."

"Surely you can find some friend to console you in your affliction."

"It is not easy to find a friend at any time, much less when things go wrong with us."

"It is very hard if there is really no one to comfort you. Certainly *I* sha'n't try anything so hopeless as comforting a person who is resolved to be miserable. 'There's such a charm in melancholy, I would not if I could, be gay.' There's a quotation for you, as you like verses — particularly what I call moping verses."

"Come, Alice! this is not like you; you are not so unkind as your words would seem; you are not cruel, Alice — you are cruel to no one else, only to me, your old friend."

"I have said nothing cruel," said Miss Alice, looking on the grass before her; "cruelty is too sublime a phrase. I don't think I have ever experienced cruelty in my life; and I don't think it likely that you have; I certainly have never been cruel to any one. I'm a very goodnatured person, as my birds and squirrel would testify if they could."

She laughed.

"I suppose people call that cruel which makes them suffer very much; it may be but a light look, or a cold word, but still it may be more than years of suffering to another. But I don't think, Alice, you ought to be so with me. I think you might remember old times a little more kindly."

"I remember them very kindly — as kindly as you do. We were always very good friends, and always, I daresay, shall be. *I* sha'n't quarrel. But I don't like heroics, I think they are so unmeaning. There may be people who like them very well and —— There is Richard, I think, and he has thrown away his mallet. If his game is over, he will come now, and Lady May doesn't want the people to stay late; she is going into town, and I stay with her tonight. We are going to the Derby tomorrow."

"I am going also — it was so kind of her! — she asked me to be of her party," said Vivian Darnley.

"Richard is coming also; I have never been to the Derby, and I daresay we shall be a very pleasant party; I know I like it of all things. Here comes Richard — he sees me. Was my uncle David here?"

"No."

“I hardly thought he was, but I saw Grace Maubray, and I fancied he might have come with her,” she said carelessly.

“Yes, she was here; she came with Lady Tramway. They went away about half-an-hour ago.”

So Richard joined her, and they walked to the house together, Vivian Darnley accompanying them.

“I think I saw you a little spooney to-day, Vivian, didn’t I?” said Richard Arden, laughing. He remembered what Longcluse once said to him, about Vivian’s *tendre* for his sister, and did not choose that Alice should suspect it. “Grace Maubray is a very pretty girl.”

“She may be that, though it doesn’t strike me,” began Darnley.

“Oh! come, I’m too old for that sort of disclaimer; and I don’t see why you should be so modest about it. She is clever and pretty.”

“Yes, she is very pretty,” said Alice.

“I suppose she is, but you’re quite mistaken if you really fancy I admire Miss Maubray. I don’t, *I give you my* honour, I don’t,” said Vivian vehemently.

Richard Arden laughed again, but prudently urged the point no more, intending to tell the story that evening as he and Alice drove together into town, in the way that best answered his purpose.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DERBY.

The morning of the Derby day dawned auspiciously. The weather-cocks, the sky, and every other prognostic portended a fine cloudless day, and many an eye peeped early from bedroom window to read these signs, rejoicing.

"Ascot would have been more in *our* way," said Lady May, glancing at Alice, when the time arrived for taking their places in the carriage. "But the time answered, and we shall see a great many people we know there. So you must not think I have led you into a very fast expedition."

Richard Arden took the reins. The footmen were behind, in charge of hampers from Fortnum and Mason's, and inside, opposite to Alice, sat Lord Wynderbroke; and Lady May's vis-à-vis was Vivian Darnley. Soon they had got into the double stream of carriages of all sorts. There are closed carriages with pairs or fours, gigs, hansom cabs fitted with gauze curtains, dog-carts, open carriages with hampers lashed to the foot-boards, dandy drags, bright and polished, with crests; vans, cabs, and indescribable contrivances. There are horses worth a hundred and fifty guineas a-piece, and there are others that look as if the knacker should have them. There are all sorts of raws, and sand-cracks, and broken knees. There are kickers and roarers, and bolters and jibbers, such a crush and medley in that densely packed double line, that jogs and crushes along you can hardly tell how.

Sometimes one line passes the other, and then sustains a momentary check, while the other darts forward; and now and then a panel is smashed, with the usual altercation, and dust unspeakable eddying and floating everywhere in the sun; all sorts of chaff exchanged, mail-coach horns blowing, and general impudence and hilarity; gentlemen with veils on, and ladies with light hoods over their bonnets, and all sorts of gauzy defences against the dust. The utter novelty of all these sights and sounds highly amuses Alice, to whom they are absolutely strange.

"I am so amused," she said, "at the gravity you all seem to take these wonderful doings with. I could not have fancied anything like it. Isn't that Borrowdale?"

“So it is,” said Lady May. “I thought he was in France. He doesn’t see us, I think.”

He did see them, but it was just as he was cracking a personal joke with a busman, in which the latter had decidedly the best of it, and he did not care to recognise his lady acquaintances at disadvantage.

“What a fright that man is!” said Lord Wynderbroke.

“But his team is the prettiest in England, except Longcluse’s,” said Darnley; “and, by Jove, there’s Longcluse’s drag!”

“Those are very nice horses,” said Lord Wynderbroke looking at Longcluse’s team, as if he had not heard Darnley’s observation. “They are worth looking at, Miss Arden.”

Longcluse was seated on the box, with a veil on, through which his white smile was indistinctly visible.

“And what a fright *he* is, also! He looks like a picture of Death I once saw, with a cloth half over his face; or the Veiled Prophet. By Jove, a curious thing that the two most hideous men in England should have between them the two prettiest teams on earth!”

Lord Wynderbroke looks at Darnley with raised brows, vaguely. He has been talking more than his lordship perhaps thinks he has any business to talk, especially to Alice.

“You will be more diverted still when we have got upon the course,” interposes Lord Wynderbroke. “The variety of strange people there — gipsies, you know, and all that — mountebanks, and thimble-riggers, and beggars, and musicians — you’ll wonder how such hordes could be collected in all England, or where they come from.”

“And although they make something of a day like this, how on earth they contrive to exist all the other days of the year, when people are sober, and minding their own business,” added Darnley.

“To me the pleasantest thing about the drive is our finding ourselves in the open country. Look out of the window there — trees and farmsteads — it is so rural, and such an odd change!” said Lady May.

“And the young corn, I’m glad to see, is looking very well,” said Lord Wynderbroke, who claimed to be something of an agriculturist.

“And the oddest thing about it is our being surrounded, in the midst of all this rural simplicity, with the population of London,” threw in Vivian Darnley.

“Remember, Miss Arden, our wager,” said Lord Wynderbroke; “you have backed May Queen.”

“May! she should be a cousin of mine,” said good Lady May, firing off her little pun, which was received very kindly by her audience.

“Ha, ha! I did not think of that; she should certainly be the most popular name on the card,” said Lord Wynderbroke. “I hope I have not made a great mistake, Miss Arden, in betting against so — so auspicious a name.”

“I sha’n’t let you off, though. I’m told I’m very likely to win — isn’t it so?” she asked Vivian.

“Yes, the odds are in favour of May Queen now; you might make a capital hedge.”

“You don’t know what a hedge is, I daresay, Miss Arden; ladies don’t always quite understand our turf language,” said Lord Wynderbroke, with a consideration which he hoped that very forward young man, on whom he fancied Miss Arden looked goodnaturedly, felt as he ought. “It is called a hedge, by betting men, when — — “ and he expounded the meaning of the term.

The road had now become more free, as they approached the course, and Dick Arden took advantage of the circumstance to pass the omnibuses, and other lumbering vehicles, which he soon left far behind. The grand stand now rose in view — and now they were on the course. The first race had not yet come off, and young Arden found a good place among the triple line of carriages. Off go the horses! Miss Arden is assisted to a cushion on the roof; Lord Wynderbroke and Vivian take places beside her. The sun is growing rather hot, and the parasol is up. Goodnatured Lady May is a little too stout for climbing, but won’t hear of anyone’s staying to keep her company. Perhaps when Richard Arden, who is taking a walk by the ropes, and wants to see the horses which are showing, returns, she may have a little talk with him at the window. In the meantime, all the curious groups of figures, and a hundred more, which Lord Wynderbroke promised — the monotonous challenges of the fellows with games of all sorts, the whine of the beggar for a little penny, the guitarring, singing, barrel-organing, and the gipsy inviting Miss Arden to try her lucky sixpence — all make a curious and merry Babel about her.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SHARP COLLOQUY.

On foot, near the weighing stand, is a tall, powerful, and clumsy fellow, got up gaudily — a fellow with a lowering red face, in loud goodhumour, very ill-looking. He is now grinning and chuckling with his hands in his pockets, and talking with a little Hebrew, young, sable-haired, with the sallow tint, great black eyes, and fleshy nose that characterise his race. A singularly sullen mouth aids the effect of his vivid eyes, in making this young Jew's face ominous.

"Young Dick Harden's 'ere," said Mr. Levi.

"Eh? is he?" said the big man with the red face and pimples, the green cutaway coat, gilt buttons, purple necktie, yellow waistcoat, white cord tights, and top boots.

"Walking down there," said Levi, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder. "I shaw him shpeak to a fellow in chocolate and gold livery."

"And an eagle on the button, I know. That's Lady May Penrose's livery," said his companion. "He came down with her, I lay you fifty. And he has a nice sister as ever you set eyes on — pretty gal, Mr. Levi — a reg'lar little angel," and he giggled after his wont. "If there's a dragful of hangels anyvere, she's one of them. I saw her yesterday in one of Lady May Penrose's carriages in St. James' Street. Mr. Longcluse is engaged to get married to her; you may see them linked arm-in-arm, any day you please, walkin' hup and down Hoxford Street. And her brother, Richard Harden, is to marry Lady May Penrose. That will be a warm family yet, them Hardens, arter all."

"A family with a title, Mr. Ballard, be it never so humble, Sir, like 'ome shweet 'ome, hash nine livesh in it; they'll be down to the last pig, and not the thickness of an old tizzy between them and the glue-pot; and while you'd write your name across the back of a cheque, all's right again. The title doesh it. You never shaw a title in the workus yet, Mr. Ballard, and you'll wait awhile before you 'av a hoppertunity of shayin', 'My lord Dooke, I hope your grashe's water-gruel is salted to your noble tasht thish morning,’ or, ‘My noble marquishe, I humbly hope you are pleashed with the fit of them pepper-and-salts;’ and, ‘My lord earl, I’m glad to see by the register you took a right honourable twisht at the crank thish morning.’ No, Mishter Ballard, you nor me won’t shee that, Shir.”

While these gentlemen enjoyed their agreeable banter, and settled the fortunes of Richard Arden and Mr. Longcluse, the latter person was walking down the course in the direction in which Mr. Levi had seen Arden go, in the hope of discovering Lady May’s carriage. Longcluse was in an odd state of excitement. He had entered into the spirit of the carnival. Voices all around were shouting, “Twenty to five on Dotheboys;” or, “A hundred to five against Parachute.”

“In what?” called Mr. Longcluse to the latter challenge.

“In assassins!” cried a voice from the crowd.

Mr. Longcluse hustled his way into the thick of it.

“Who said that?” he thundered.

No one could say. No one else had heard it. Who cared? He recovered his coolness quickly, and made no further fuss about it. People were too busy with other things to bother themselves about his questions, or his temper. He hurried forward after young Arden, whom he saw at the turn of the course a little way on.

“The first race no one cares much about; compared with the great event of the day, it is as the farce before the pantomime, or the oyster before the feast.”

The bells had not yet rung out their warning, and Alice said to Vivian, —

“How beautifully that girl with the tambourine danced and sang! I do so hope she’ll come again; and she is, I think, so perfectly lovely. She is so like the picture of La Esmeralda; didn’t you think so?”

“Do you really wish to see her again?” said Vivian. “Then if she’s to be found on earth you shall see her.”

He was smiling, but he spoke in the low tone that love is said to employ and understand, and his eyes looked softly on her. He was pleased that she enjoyed everything so. In a moment he had jumped to the ground, and with one smile back at the eager girl he disappeared.

And now the bells were ringing, and the police clearing the course. And now the cry, “They’re off, they’re off!” came rolling down the crowd like a hedge-fire. Lord Wynderbroke offered Alice his race-glass, but ladies are not good at optical aids, and she prefers her eyes; and the Earl constitutes himself her sentinel, and will report all he sees, and stands on the roof beside her place, with the glasses to his eyes. And now the excitement grows. Beggar-boys, butcher-boys, stable-helps, jump up on carriage-wheels unnoticed, and cling to the roof with filthy fingers. And now they are in sight, and a wild clamour arises. “Red’s first!” “No, Blue!” “White leads!” “Pink’s first!”

And here they are! White, crimson, pink, black, yellow — the silk jackets quivering like pennons in a storm — the jockeys tossing their arms madly about, the horses seeming actually to fly; swaying, reeling, whirring, the whole thing passes in a beautiful drift of a moment, and is gone!

Lord Wynderbroke is standing on tip-toe, trying to catch a glimpse of the caps as they show at the opening nearer the winning-post. Vivian Darnley is away in search of La Esmeralda. Miss Arden has seen the first race of the day, the first she has ever seen, and is amazed and delighted. The intruders who had been clinging to the carriage now jump down, and join the crowd that crush on towards the winning-post, or break in on the course. But there rises at the point next her a figure she little expected to see so near that day. Mr. Longcluse has swung himself up, and stands upon the wheel. He is bareheaded, his hat is in the hand he clings by. In the other hand he holds up a small glove — a lady’s glove. His face is very pale. He is not smiling; he looks with an expression of pain, on the contrary, and very great respect.

“Miss Arden, will you forgive my venturing to restore this glove, which I happened to see you drop as the horses passed?”

She looked at him with something of surprise and fear, and drew back a little instead of taking the proffered glove.

“I find I have been too presumptuous,” he said gently. “I place it there. I see, Miss Arden, I have been maligned. Some one has wronged me cruelly. I plead only for a fair chance — for God’s sake, give me a chance. I don’t say hear me now, only say you won’t condemn me utterly unheard.”

He spoke vehemently, but so low that, amid the hubbub of other voices, no one but Miss Arden, on whom his eyes were fixed, could hear him.

“I take my leave, Miss Arden, and may God bless you. But I rest in the hope that your noble nature will refuse to treat any creature as my enemies would have you treat me.”

His looks were so sad and even reverential, and his voice, though low, so full of agony, that no one could suppose the speaker had the least idea of forcing his presence upon the lady a moment longer than sufficed to ascertain that it was not welcome. He was about to step to the ground, when he saw Richard Arden striding rapidly up with a very angry countenance. Then and there seemed likely to occur what the newspapers term an ungentlemanlike fracas. Richard Arden caught him, and pulled him roughly to the ground. Mr. Longcluse staggered back a step or two, and recovered himself. His pale face glared wickedly, for a moment or two, on the flushed and haughty young man; his arm was a little raised, and his fist clenched. I daresay it was just the turn of a die, at that moment, whether he struck him or not.

These two bosom friends, and sworn brothers, of a week or two ago, were confronted now with strange looks, and in threatening attitude. How frail a thing is the worldly man's friendship, hanging on flatteries and community of interest! A word or two of truth, and a conflict or even a divergence of interest, and where is the liking, the friendship, the intimacy?

A sudden change marked the face of Mr. Longcluse. The vivid fires that gleamed for a moment from his eyes sunk in their dark sockets, the intense look changed to one of sullen gloom. He beckoned, and said coldly, "Please follow me;" and then turned and walked, at a leisurely pace, a little way inward from the course.

Richard Arden, perhaps, felt that had he hesitated it would have reflected on his courage. He therefore disregarded the pride that would have scorned even a seeming compliance with that rather haughty summons, and he followed him with something of the odd dreamy feeling which men experience when they are stepping, consciously, into a risk of life. He thought that Mr. Longcluse was inviting the interview for the purpose of arranging the preliminaries of who were to act as their "friends," and where each gentleman was to be heard of that evening. He followed, with oddly conflicting feelings, to a place in the rear of some tents. Here was a sort of booth. Two doors admitted to it — one to the longer room, where was whirling that roulette round which men who, like Richard Arden, could not deny themselves, even on the meanest scale, the excitement of chance gain and loss, were betting and bawling. Into the smaller room of plank, which was now empty, they stepped.

“Now, Sir, you’ll be so good as to observe that you have taken upon you a rather serious responsibility in laying your hand on me,” said Longcluse, in a very low tone, coldly and gently. “In France, such a profanation would be followed by an exchange of shots, and here, under other circumstances, I should exact the same chance of retaliation. I mean to deal differently — quite differently. I have fought too many duels, as you know, to be the least apprehensive of being misunderstood or my courage questioned. For your sister’s sake, not yours, I take a peculiar course with you. I offer you an alternative; you may have reconciliation — here is my hand” (he extended it)— “or you may abide the other consequence, at which I sha’n’t hint, in pretty near futurity. You don’t accept my hand?”

“No, Sir,” said Arden haughtily — more than haughtily, insolently. “I can have no desire to renew an acquaintance with you. I sha’n’t do that. I’ll fight you, if you like it. I’ll go to Boulogne, or wherever you like, and we can have our shot, Sir, whenever you please.”

“No, if you please — not so fast. You decline my friendship — that offer is over,” said Longcluse, lowering his hand resolutely. “I am not going to shoot you — I have not the least notion of that. I shall take, let me see, a different course with you, and I shall obtain on reflection your entire concurrence with the hopes I have no idea of relinquishing. You will probably understand me pretty clearly by-and-by.”

Richard Arden was angry; he was puzzled; he wished to speak, but could not light quickly on a suitable answer. Longcluse stood for some seconds, smiling his pale sinister smile upon him, and then turned on his heel, and walked quietly out upon the grass, and disappeared in the crowd.

Richard Arden was irresolute. He threw open the door, and entered the roulette-room — looked round on all the strange faces, that did not mind him, or seem to see that he was there — then, with a sudden change of mind, he retraced his steps more quickly, and followed Longcluse through the other door. But there he could not trace him. He had quite vanished. Perhaps, next morning, he was glad that he had missed him, and had been compelled to “sleep upon it.”

Now and then, with a sense of disagreeable uncertainty, recurred to his mind the mysterious intimation, or rather menace, with which he had taken his departure. It was not, however, his business to look up Longcluse. He had himself seemed to intimate that the balance of insult was the other way.

If “satisfaction,” in the slang of the duellist, was to be looked for, the initiative devolved undoubtedly upon Longcluse.

Alice was so placed on the carriage, that she did not see what passed immediately beside it, between Longcluse and her brother. Still, the appearance of this man, and his having accosted her, had agitated her a good deal, and for some hours the unpleasant effect of the little scene spoiled her enjoyment of this day of wonders.

Very gaily, notwithstanding, the party returned — except, perhaps, one person who had reason to remember that day.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DINNER AT MORTLAKE.

Lady May's party from the Derby dined together late, that evening, at Mortlake. Lord Wynderbroke, of course, was included. He was very happy, and extremely agreeable. When Alice, and Lady May, who was to stay that night at Mortlake, and Miss Maubray, who had come with Uncle David, took their departure for the drawingroom, the four gentlemen who remained over their claret drew more together, and chatted at their ease.

Lord Wynderbroke was in high spirits. He admired Alice more than ever. He admired everything. A faint rumour had got about that something was not very unlikely to be. It did not displease him. He had been looking at diamonds the day before; he was not vexed when that amusing wag, Pokely, who had surprised him in the act, asked him that day, on the Downs, some sly questions on the subject, with an arch glance at beautiful Miss Arden. Lord Wynderbroke pooh-pooh'd this impertinence very radiantly. And now this happy peer, pleased with himself, pleased with everybody, with the flush of a complacent elation on his thin cheeks, was simpering and chatting most agreeably, and commending everything to which his attention was drawn.

In very marked contrast with this happy man was Richard Arden, who talked but little, was absent, utterly out of spirits, and smiled with a palpable effort when he did smile. His conversation with Lady May showed the same uncomfortable peculiarities. It was intermittent and bewildered. It saddened the good lady. Was he ill? or in some difficulty?

Now that she had withdrawn, Richard Arden seemed less attentive to Lord Wynderbroke than to his uncle. In so far as a wight in his melancholy mood could do so, he seemed to have laid himself out to please his uncle in those small ways where, in such situations, an anxiety to please can show itself. Once his father's voice had roused him with the intimation, "Richard, Lord Wynderbroke is speaking to you;" and he saw a very urbane smile on his thin lips, and encountered a very formidable glare from his dark eyes.

The only subject on which Richard Arden at all brightened up was the defeat of the favourite. Lord Wynderbroke remarked, —

“It seems to have caused a good deal of observation. I saw Hounsley and Crackham, and they shake their heads at it a good deal, and — — “

He paused, thinking that Richard Arden was going to interpose something, but nothing followed, and he continued, —

“And Lord Shillingsworth, he’s very well up in all these things, and he seems to think it is a very suspicious affair; and old Sir Thomas Fetlock, who should have known better, has been hit very hard, and says he’ll have it before the Jockey Club.”

“I don’t mind Sir Thomas, he blusters and makes a noise about everything,” said Richard Arden; “but it was quite palpable, when the horse showed, he wasn’t fit to run. I don’t suppose Sir Thomas will do it, but it certainly will be done. I know a dozen men who will sell their horses, if it isn’t done. I don’t see how any man can take payment of the odds on Dotheboys — I don’t, I assure you — till the affair is cleared up: *gentlemen*, of course, I mean; the other people would like the money all the better if it came to them by a swindle. But it certainly can’t rest where it is.”

No one disputing this, and none of the other gentlemen being authorities of any value upon turf matters, the subject dropped, and others came on, and Richard Arden was silent again. Lord Wynderbroke, who was to pass two or three days at Mortlake, and who had made up his mind that he was to leave that interesting place a *promesso sposo*, was restless, and longed to escape to the drawingroom. So the sitting over the wine was not very long.

Richard Arden made an effort, in the drawingroom, to retrieve his character with Lady May and Miss Maubray, who had been rather puzzled by his hang-dog looks and flagging conversation.

“There are times, Lady May,” said he, placing himself on the sofa beside her, “when one loses all faith in the future — when everything goes wrong, and happiness becomes incredible. Then one’s wisest course seems to be, to take off one’s hat to the good people in this planet, and go off to another.”

“Only that I know you so well,” said Lady May, “I should tell Reginald — I mean your father — what you say; and I think your uncle, there, is a magistrate for the county of Middlesex, and could commit you, couldn’t he? for any such foolish speech. Did you observe to-day — you saw him, of course — how miserably ill poor Pindledykes is looking? I don't think, really, he'll be alive in six months."

"Don't throw away your compassion, dear Lady May. Pindledykes has always looked dying as long as I can remember, and on his last legs; but those last legs carry some fellows a long way, and I'm very sure he'll outlive me."

"And what pleasure can a person so very ill as he looks take in going to places like that?"

"The pleasure of winning other people's money," laughed Arden sourly. "Pindledykes knows very well what he's about. He turns his time to very good account, and wastes very little of it, I assure you, in pitying other people's misfortunes."

"I'm glad to see that you and Richard are on pleasanter terms," said David Arden to his brother, as he sipped his tea beside him.

"Egad! we are *not*, though. I hate him worse than ever. Would you oblige me by putting a bit of wood on the fire? I told you how he has treated me. I wonder, David, how the devil you could suppose we were on pleasanter terms!"

Sir Reginald was seated with his crutch-handled stick beside him, and an easy fur slipper on his gouty foot, which rested on a stool, and was a great deal better. He leaned back in a cushioned armchair, and his fierce prominent eyes glanced across the room, in the direction of his son, with a flash like a scimitar's.

"There's no good, you know, David, in exposing one's ulcers to strangers — there's no use in plaguing one's guests with family quarrels."

"Upon my word, you disguised this one admirably, for I mistook you for two people on tolerably friendly terms."

"I don't want to plague Wynderbroke about the puppy; there is no need to mention that he has made so much unhappiness. *You* won't, neither will I."

David nodded.

"Something has gone wrong with him," said David Arden, "and I thought you might possibly know."

"Not I."

"I think he has lost money on the races to-day," said David.

"I hope to Heaven he has! I'm glad of it. It will do me good; let him settle it out of his blackguard post-obit," snarled Sir Reginald, and ground his teeth.

"If he has been gambling, he has disappointed me. He can, however, disappoint me but once. I had better thoughts of him."

So said David Arden, with displeasure in his frank and manly face.

"Playing? Of course he plays, and of course he's been making a blundering book for the Derby. He likes the hazard-table and the turf, he likes play, and he likes making books; and what he likes he does. He always did. I'm rather pleased you have been trying to manage him. You'll find him a charming person, and you'll understand what I have had to combat with. He'll never do any good; he is so utterly graceless."

"I see my father looking at me, and I know what he means," said Richard Arden, with a smile, to Lady May; "I'm to go and talk to Miss Maubray. He wishes to please Uncle David, and Miss Maubray must be talked to; and I see that Uncle David envies me my little momentary happiness, and meditates taking that empty chair beside you. You'll see whether I am right. By Jove! here he comes; I sha'n't be turned away so — — "

"Oh, but, really, Miss Maubray has been quite alone," urged poor Lady May, very much pleased; "and you *must*, to please *me*; I'm sure you will."

Instantly he arose.

"I don't know whether that speech is most kind or *un*-kind; you banish me, but in language so flattering to my loyalty, that I don't know whether to be pleased or pained. Of course I obey." He said these parting words in a very low tone, and had hardly ended them, when David Arden took the vacant chair beside the good lady, and began to talk with her.

Once or twice his eyes wandered to Richard Arden, who was by this time talking with returning animation to Grace Maubray, and the look was not cheerful. The young lady, however, was soon interested, and her goodhumour was clever and exhilarating. I think that she a little admired this handsome and rather clever young man, and who can tell what such a fancy may grow to?

That night, as Richard Arden bid him goodbye, his uncle said, coldly enough, —

"By-the-bye, Richard, would you mind looking in upon me tomorrow, at five in the afternoon? I shall have a word to say to you."

So the appointment was made, and Richard entered his cab, and drove into town dismally.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MR. LONGCLUSE SEES A LADY'S NOTE.

Next day Mr. Longcluse paid an early visit at Uncle David's house, and saw Miss Maubray in the drawingroom. The transition from that young lady's former, to her new life, was not less dazzling than that of the heroine of an Arabian tale, who is transported by friendly genii, while she sleeps, from a prison to the palace of a sultan. Uncle David did not care for finery; no man's tastes could be simpler and more camp-like. But these drawingrooms were so splendid, so elegant and refined, and yet so gorgeous in effect, that you would have fancied that he had thought of nothing else all his life but china, marqueterie, buhl, Louis Quatorze clocks, mirrors, pale-green and gold cabriole chairs, bronzes, pictures, and all the textile splendours, the names of which I know not, that make floors and windows magnificent.

The feminine nature, facile and self-adapting, had at once accommodated itself to the dominion over all this, and all that attended it. And Miss Maubray being a lady, a girl who had, in her troubled life, been much among highbred people — her father a gentle, fashionable, broken-down man, and her mother a very elegant and charming woman — there was no contrast, in look, air, or conversation, to mark that all this was new to her: on the contrary, she became it extremely.

The young lady was sitting at the piano when Longcluse came in, and to the expiring vibration of the chord at which she was interrupted she rose, with that light, floating ascent which is so pretty, and gave him her hand, and welcomed him with a very bright smile. She thought he was a likely person to be able to throw some light upon two rumours which interested her.

"How do you contrive to keep your rooms so deliciously cool? The blinds are down and the windows open, but that alone won't do, for I have just left a drawingroom that is very nearly insupportable; yours must be the work of some of those pretty sylphs that poets place in attendance upon their heroines. How fearfully hot yesterday was! You did not go to the Derby with Lady May's party, I believe."

He watched her clever face, to discover whether she had heard of the scene between him and Richard Arden— "I don't think she has."

"No," she said, "my guardian, Mr. Arden, took me there instead. On second thoughts, I feared I should very likely be in the way. One is always *de trop* where there is so much lovemaking; and I am a very bad gooseberry."

"A very dangerous one, I should fancy. And who are all these lovers?"

"Oh, really, they are so many, it is not easy to reckon them up. Alice Arden, for instance, had *two* lovers — Lord Wynderbroke and Vivian Darnley."

"What, two lovers charged upon one lady? Is not that false heraldry? And does she really care for that young fellow, Darnley?"

"I'm told she really is deeply attached to him. But that does not prevent her accepting Lord Wynderbroke. He has spoken, and been accepted. Old Sir Reginald told my guardian his brother, last night, and *he* told me in the carriage, as we drove home. I wonder how soon it will be. I should rather like to be one of her bridesmaids. Perhaps she will ask me."

Mr. Longcluse felt giddy and stunned; but he said, quite gaily —

"If she wishes to be suitably attended, she certainly will. But young ladies generally prefer a foil to a rival, even when so very beautiful as she is."

"And there was Vivian Darnley at one side, I'm told, whispering all kinds of sweet things, and poor old Wynderbroke at the other, with his glasses to his eyes, reporting all he saw. Only think! What a goose the old creature must have looked!" And the young lady laughed merrily. "But can you tell me about the other affair?" she asked.

"What is it?"

"Oh! you know, of course — Lady May and Richard Arden; is it true that it was all settled the day before yesterday, at that kettledrum?"

"There again my information is quite behind yours. I did not hear a word of it."

"But you must have seen how very much in love they both are. Poor young man! I really think it would have broken his heart if she had been cruel, particularly if it is true that he lost so much as they say at the Derby yesterday. I suppose he did. Do you know?"

"I'm sorry to say," said Mr. Longcluse, "I'm afraid it's only too true. I don't know exactly how much it is, but I believe it is more than he can, at present, very well bear. A mad thing for him to do. I'm really sorry, although he has chosen to quarrel with me most unreasonably."

"Oh? I wasn't aware. I fancied you would have heard all from him."

"No, not a word — no."

"Lady May was talking to me at Raleigh Court, the day we were there — she can talk of no one else, poor old thing! — and she said something had happened to make him and his sister very angry. She would not say what. She only said, 'You know how very proud they are, and I really think,' she said, 'they ought to have been very much pleased, for everything, I think, was most advantageous.' And from this I conclude there must have been a proposal for Alice; I shall ask her when I see her."

"Yes, I daresay they are proud. Richard Arden told me so. He said that his family were always considered proud. He was laughing, of course, but he meant it."

"He's proud of being proud, I daresay. I thought you would be likely to know whether all they say is true. It would be a great pity he should be ruined; but, you know, if all the rest is true, there are resources."

Longcluse laughed.

"He has always been very particular and a little tender in that quarter; very sweet upon Lady May, I thought," said he.

"Oh, very much gone, poor thing!" said Grace Maubray. "I think my guardian will have heard all about it. He was very angry, once or twice, with Richard Arden about his losing so much money at play. I believe he has lost a great deal at different times."

"A great many people do lose money so. For the sake of excitement, they incur losses, and risk even their utter ruin."

"How foolish!" exclaimed Miss Maubray. "Have you heard anything more about that affair of Lady Mary Playfair and Captain Mayfair? He is now, by the death of his cousin, quite sure of the title, they say."

"Yes it must come to him. His uncle has got something wrong with his leg, a fracture that never united quite; it is an old hurt, and I'm told he is quite breaking up now. He is at Buxton, and going on to Vichy, if he lives, poor man."

"Oh, then, there can be no difficulty now."

“No, I heard yesterday it is all settled.”

“And what does Caroline Chambray say to that?”

And so on they chatted, till his call was ended, and Mr. Longcluse walked down the steps with his head pretty busy.

At the corner of a street he took a cab; and as he drove to Lady May’s, those fragments of his short talk with Grace Maubray that most interested him were tumbling over and over in his mind. “So they are angry, very angry; and very proud and haughty people. I had no business dreaming of an alliance with Mr. Richard Arden. Angry, he may be — he may affect to be — but I don’t believe she is. And proud, is he? Proud of her he might be, but what else has he to boast of? Proud and angry — ha, ha! Angry and proud. We shall see. Such people sometimes grow suddenly mild and meek. And she has accepted Lord Wynderbroke. I doubt it. Miss Maubray, you are such a goodnatured girl that, if you suspected the torture your story inflicted, you would invent it, rather than spare a fellow-mortal that pang.”

In this we know he was a little unjust.

“Well, Miss Arden, I understand your brother; I shall soon understand *you*. At present I hesitate. Alas! must I place you, too, in the schedule of my lost friends? Is it come to this? —

‘Once I held thee dear as pearl, Now I do abhor thee.’”

Mr. Longcluse’s chin rests on his breast as, with a faint smile, he thus ruminates.

The cab stops. The light frown that had contracted his eyebrows disappears, he glances quickly up at the drawingroom windows, mounts the steps, and knocks at the hall door.

“Is Lady May Penrose at home?” he asked.

“I’ll inquire, Sir.”

Was it fancy, or was there in his reception something a little unusual, and ominous of exclusion?

He was, notwithstanding, shown upstairs. Mr. Longcluse enters the drawingroom: Lady May will see him in a few minutes. He is alone. At the further end of this room is a smaller one, furnished like the drawingroom, the same curtains, carpet, and style, but much more minute and elaborate in ornamentation — an extremely pretty boudoir. He just peeps in. No, no one there. Then slowly he saunters into the other drawingroom, picks up a book, lays it down, and looks round. Quite solitary is this room also. His countenance changes a little. With a swift, noiseless step, he returns to the room he first entered. There is a little marqueterie table, to which he directs his steps, just behind the door from the staircase, under the pretty old buhl clock that ticks so merrily with its old wheels and lever, exciting the reverential curiosity of Monsieur Racine, who keeps it in order, and comments on its antique works with a mysterious smile every time he comes, to any one who will listen to him. The door is a little bit open. All the better, Mr. Longcluse will hear any step that approaches. On this little table lies an open note, hastily thrown there, and the pretty handwriting he has recognised. He knows it is Alice Arden's. Without the slightest scruple, this odd gentleman takes it up and reads a bit, and looks toward the door; reads a little more, and looks again, and so on to the end.

On the principle that listeners seldom hear good of themselves, Mr. Longcluse's cautious perusal of another person's letter did not tell him a pleasant tale.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHAT ALICE COULD SAY.

The letter which Mr. Longcluse held before his eyes was destined to throw a strong light upon the character of Alice Arden's feelings respecting himself. After a few lines, it went on to say:— "And, darling, about going to you this evening, I hardly know what to say, or, I mean, I hardly know how to say it. Mr. Longcluse, you know, may come in at any moment, and I have quite made up my mind that I cannot know him. I told you all about the incredible scene in the garden at Mortlake, and I showed you the very cool letter with which he saw fit to follow it — and yesterday the scene at the races, by which he contrived to make everything so uncomfortable — so, my dear creature, I mean to be cruel, and cut him. I am quite serious. He has not an idea how to behave himself; and the only way to repair the folly of having made the acquaintance of such an illbred person is, as I said, to cut him — you must not be angry — and Richard thinks exactly as I do. So, as I long to see you, and, in fact, can't live away from you very long, we must contrive some way of meeting now and then, without the risk of being disturbed by him. In the meantime, you must come more to Mortlake. It is too bad that an impertinent, conceited man should have caused me all this very real vexation."

There was but little more, and it did not refer to the only subject that interested Longcluse just then. He would have liked to read it through once more, but he thought he heard a step. He let it fall where he had found it, and walked to the window. Perhaps, if he had read it again, it would have lost some of the force which a first impression gives to sentences so terrible; as it was, they glared upon his retina, through the same exaggerating medium through which his excited imagination and feelings had scanned them at first.

Lady May entered, and Mr. Longcluse paid his respects, just as usual. You would not have supposed that anything had occurred to ruffle him. Lady May was just as affable as usual, but very much graver. She seemed to have something on her mind, and not to know how to begin.

At length, after some little conversation, which flagged once or twice —

“I have been thinking, Mr. Longcluse, I must have appeared very stupid,” says Lady May. “I did not ask you to be one of our party to the Derby: and I think it is always best to be quite frank, and I know you like it best. I’m afraid there has been some little misunderstanding. I hope in a short time it will be all got over, and everything quite pleasant again. But some of our friends — you, no doubt, know more about it than I do, for I must confess, I don’t very well understand it — are vexed at something that has occurred, and — — “

Poor Lady May was obviously struggling with the difficulties of her explanation, and Mr. Longcluse relieved her.

“Pray, dear Lady May, not a word more; you have always been so kind to me. Miss Arden and her brother choose to visit me with displeasure. I have nothing to reproach myself with, except with having misapprehended the terms on which Miss Arden is pleased to place me. She may however, be very sure that I sha’n’t disturb her happy evenings here, or anywhere assume my former friendly privileges.”

“But Mr. Longcluse, I’m not to lose your acquaintance,” said kindly Lady May, who was disposed to take an indulgent and even a romantic view of Mr. Longcluse’s extravagances. “Perhaps it may be better to avoid a risk of meeting, under present circumstances; and, therefore, when I’m quite sure that no such awkwardness can occur, I can easily send you a line, and you will come if you can. You will do just as it happens to answer you best at the time.”

“It is extremely kind of you, Lady May. My evenings here have been so very happy that the idea of losing them altogether would make me more melancholy than I can tell.”

“Oh, no, I could not consent to lose you, Mr. Longcluse, and I’m sure this little quarrel can’t last very long. Where people are amiable and friendly, there may be a misunderstanding, but there can’t be a real quarrel, I maintain.”

With this little speech the interview closed, and the gentleman took a very friendly leave.

Mr. Longcluse was in trouble. Blows had fallen rapidly upon him of late. But, as light is polarised by encountering certain incidents of reflection and refraction, grief entering his mind changed its character.

The only articles of expense in which Mr. Longcluse indulged — and even in those his indulgence was very moderate — were horses. He was something of a judge of horses, and had that tendency to form friendships and intimacies with them which is proper to some minds. One of these he mounted, and rode away into the country, unattended. He took a long ride, at first at a tolerably hard pace. He chose the loneliest roads he could find. His exercise brought him no appetite; the interesting hour of dinner passed unimproved. The horse was tired now. Longcluse was slowly returning, and looking listlessly to his right, he thus soliloquised: —

"Alone again. Not a soul in human shape to disclose my wounds to, not a soul. This is the way men go mad. He knows too well the torture he consigns me to. How often has my hand helped him out of the penalties of the dice-box and betting-book! How wildly have I committed myself to him! — how madly have I trusted him! How plausibly has he promised. The confounded miscreant! Has he goodnature, gratitude, justice, honour? Not a particle. He has betrayed me, slandered me fatally, where only on earth I dreaded slander, and he knew it; and he has ruined the only good hope I had on earth. He has launched it: sharp and heavy is the curse. Wait: it shall find him out. And *she*! I did not think Alice Arden could have written that letter. My eyes are opened. Well, she has refused to hear my good angel; the other may speak differently."

He was riding along a narrow old road, with palings, and quaint old hedgerows, and now and then an oldfashioned brick house, staid and comfortable, with a cluster of lofty timber embowering it, and chimney smoke curling cosily over the foliage; and as he rode along, sometimes a window, with very thick white sashes, and a multitude of very small panes, sometimes the summit of a gable appeared. The lowing of unseen cows was heard over the fields, and the whistle of the birds in the hedges; and behind spread the cloudy sky of sunset, showing a peaceful old-world scene, in which Izaak Walton's milkmaid might have set down her pail, and sung her pretty song.

Not another footfall was heard but the clink of his own horse's hoofs along the narrow road; and, as he looked westward, the flush of the sky threw an odd sort of firelight over his death-pale features.

"Time will unroll his book," said Longcluse, dreamily, as he rode onward, with a loose bridle on his horse's neck, "and my fingers will trace a name or two on the pages that are passing. That sunset, that sky — how grand, and glorious, and serene — the same always. Charlemagne saw it, and the Cæsars saw it, and the Pharaohs saw it, and we see it to-day. Is it worth while troubling ourselves here? How grand and quiet nature is, and how beautifully imperturbable! Why not we, who last so short a time — why not drift on with it, and take the blows that come, and suffer and enjoy the facts of life, and leave its dreadful dreams untried? Of all the follies we engage in, what more hollow than revenge — vainer than wealth?"

Mr. Longcluse was preaching to himself, with the usual success of preachers. He knew himself what his harangue was driving at, although it borrowed the vagueness of the sky he was looking on. He fancied that he was discussing something with himself, which, nevertheless, was settled — so fixed, indeed, that nothing had power to alter it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

GENTLEMEN IN TROUBLE.

Mr. Longcluse had now reached a turn in the road, at which stands an old house that recedes a little way and has four poplars growing in front of it, two at each side of the door. There are mouldy walls, and gardens, fruit and vegetables, in the rear, and in one wing of the house the proprietor is licenced to sell beer and other refreshing drinks. This quaint greengrocery and pot-house was not flourishing, I conjecture, for a cab was at the door, and Mr. Goldshed, the eminent Hebrew, on the steps, apparently on the point of leaving.

He is a short, square man, a little round shouldered. He is very bald, with coarse, black hair, that might not unsuitably stuff a chair. His nose is big and drooping, his lips large and moist. He wears a black satin waistcoat, thrust up into wrinkles by his habit of stuffing his short hands, bedizened with rings, into his trousers pockets. He has on a peculiar low-crowned hat. He is smoking a cigar, and talking over his shoulder, at intervals, in brief sentences that have a harsh, brazen ring, and are charged with scoff and menace. No game is too small for Mr. Goldshed's pursuit. He ought to have made two hundred pounds of this little venture. He has not lost, it is true; but, when all is squared, he'll not have made a shilling, and that for a Jew, you know, is very hard to bear.

In the midst of this intermittent snarl, the large, dark eyes of this man lighted on Mr. Longcluse, and he arrested the sentence that was about to fly over his shoulder, in the disconsolate faces of the broken little family in the passage. A smile suddenly beamed all over his dusky features, his airs of lordship quite forsook him, and he lifted his hat to the great man with a cringing salutation. The weaker spirit was overawed by the more potent. It was the catape doing homage to Mephistopheles, in the witch's chamber.

He shuffled out upon the road, with a lazy smile, lifting his hat again, and very deferentially greeted "Mishter Longclooshe." He had thrown away his exhausted cigar, and the red sun glittered in sparkles on the chains and jewelry that were looped across his wrinkled black satin waistcoat.

“How d’ye do, Mr. Goldshed? Anything particular to say to me?”

“Nothing, no, Mr. Longclooshe. I sposhe you heard of that dip in the Honduras?”

“They’ll get over it, but we sha’n’t see them so high again soon. Have you that cab all to yourself, Mr. Goldshed?”

“No, Shir, my partner’sh with me. He’ll be out in a minute; he’sh only puttin’ a chap on to make out an inventory.”

“Well, I don’t want him. Would you mind walking down the road here, a couple of hundred steps or so? I have a word for you. Your partner can overtake you in the cab.”

“Shertainly, Mr. Longclooshe, shertainly, Shir.”

And he halloed to the cabman to tell the “zhentleman” who was coming out to overtake him in the cab on the road to town.

This settled, Mr. Longcluse, walking his horse along the road, and his City acquaintance by his side, slowly made their way towards the City, casting long shadows over the low fence into the field at their left; and Mr. Goldshed’s stumpy legs were projected across the road in such slender proportions that he felt for a moment rather slight and elegant, and was unusually disgusted, when he glanced down upon the substance of those shadows, at the unnecessarily clumsy style in which Messrs. Shears and Goslin had cut out his brown trousers.

Mr. Longcluse had a good deal to say when they got on a little. Being earnest, he stopped his horse; and Mr. Goldshed, forgetting his reverence in his absorption, placed his broad hand on the horse’s shoulder, as he looked up into Mr. Longcluse’s face, and now and then nodded, or grunted a “Surely.” It was not until the shadows had grown perceptibly longer, until Mr. Longcluse’s hat had stolen away to the gilded stem of the old ash-tree that was in perspective to their left, and until Mr. Goldshed’s legs had grown so taper and elegant as to amount to the spindle, that the talk ended, and Mr. Longcluse, who was a little shy of being seen in such company, bid him good evening, and rode away townward at a brisk trot.

That morning Richard Arden looked as if he had got up after a month’s fever. His dinner had been a pretence, and his breakfast was a sham. His luck, as he termed it, had got him at last pretty well into a corner. The placing of the horses was a dreadful record of moral impossibilities accomplished against him. Five minutes before the start he could have sold his book for three thousand pounds; five minutes after it no one would have accepted fifteen thousand to take it off his hands. The shock, at first a confusion, had grown in the night into ghastly order. It was all, in the terms of the good old simile, "as plain as a pikestaff." He simply could not pay. He might sell everything he possessed, and pay about ten shillings in the pound, and then work his passage to another country, and become an Australian drayman, or a New Orleans billiard-marker.

But not pay his bets! And how could he? Ten shillings in the pound? Not five. He forgot how far he was already involved. What *was* to become of him. Breakfast he could eat none. He drank a cup of tea, but his tremors grew worse. He tried claret, but that, too, was chilly comfort. He was driven to an experiment he had never ventured before. He had a "nip," and another, and with this Dutch courage rallied a little, and was able to talk to his friend and admirer, Vandeleur, who had made a miniature book after the pattern of Dick Arden's and had lost some hundreds, which he did not know how to pay; and who was, in his degree, as miserable as his chief; for is it not established that —

"The poor beetle, that we tread upon, In corporal sufferance feels a pang as great As when a giant dies"?

Young Vandeleur, with light silken hair, and innocent blue eyes, found his paragon the picture of "grim-visaged, comfortless despair," drumming a tattoo on the window, in slippers and dressing-gown, without a collar to his shirt.

"You lost, of course," said Richard savagely; "you followed my lead. Any fellow that does is sure to lose."

"Yes," answered Vandeleur, "I did, heavily; and, I give you my honour, I believe I'm ruined."

"How much?"

"Two hundred and forty pounds!"

"Ruined! What nonsense! Who are you? or what the devil are you making such a row about? Two hundred and forty! How can you be such an ass? Don't you know it's nothing?"

"Nothing! By Jove! I wish I could see it," said poor Van; "everything's something to any one, when there's nothing to pay it with. I'm not like you, you know; I'm awfully poor. I have just a hundred and twenty pounds from my office, and forty my aunt gives me, and ninety I get from home, and, upon my honour, that's all; and I owed just a hundred pounds to some fellows that were growing impertinent. My tailor is sixty-four, and the rest are trifling, but they were the most impertinent, and I was so sure of this unfortunate thing that I told them I — really did — to call next week; and now I suppose it's all up with me, I may as well make a bolt of it. Instead of having any money to pay them, I'm two hundred and forty pounds worse than ever. I don't know what on earth to do. Upon my honour, I haven't an idea."

"I wish we could exchange our accounts," said Richard grimly: "I wish you owed my sixteen thousand. I think you'd sink through the earth. I think you'd call for a pistol, and blow" — (he was going to say, "your brains out," but he would not pay him that compliment)— "blow your head off."

So it was the old case— "Enter Tilburina, mad, in white satin; enter her maid, mad, in white linen."

And Richard Arden continued —

"What's your aunt good for? You *know* she will pay that; don't let me hear a word more about it."

"And your uncle will pay yours, won't he?" said Van, with an innocent gaze of his azure eyes.

"My uncle has paid some trifles before, but this is too big a thing. He's tired of me and my cursed misfortunes, and he's not likely to apply any of his overgrown wealth in relieving a poor tortured beggar like me. I'm simply ruined."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BETWEEN FRIENDS.

Van was looking ruefully out of the window, down upon the deserted pavement opposite. At length he said, —

"And why don't you give your luck a chance?"

"Whenever I give it a chance it hits me so devilish hard," replied Richard Arden.

"But I mean at play to retrieve," said Van.

"So do I. So I did, last night, and lost another thousand. It is utterly monstrous."

"By Jove! that is really very extraordinary," exclaimed little Van. "I tried it, too, last night. Tom Franklyn had some fellows to sup with him, and I went in, and they were playing loo; and I lost thirty-seven pounds more!"

"Thirty-seven confounded flea-bites! Why, don't you see how you torture me with your nonsense? If you can't talk like a man of sense, for Heaven's sake, shut up, and don't distract me in my misery."

He emphasised the word with a Lilliputian thump with the side of his fist — that which presents the edge of the doubled-up little finger and palm — a sort of buffer, which I suppose he thought he might safely apply to the pane of glass on which he had been drumming. But he hit a little too hard, or there was a flaw in the glass, for the pane flew out, touching the windowsill, and alighted in the area with a musical jingle.

"There! see what you made me do. My luck! Now we can't talk without those brutes at that open window, over the way, hearing every word we say. By Jove, it is later than I thought! I did not sleep last night."

"Nor I, a moment," said Van.

"It seems like a week since that accursed race, and I don't know whether it is morning or evening, or day or night. It is past four, and I must dress and go to my uncle — he said five. Don't leave me, Van, old fellow! I think I should cut my throat if I were alone."

"Oh, no, I'll stay with pleasure, although I don't see what comfort there is in me, for I am about the most miserable dog in London."

"Now don't make a fool of yourself any more," said Richard Arden. "You have only to tell your aunt, and say that you are a prodigal son, and that sort of thing, and it will be paid in a week. I look as if I was going to be hanged — or is it the colour of that glass? I hate it. I'll leave these cursed lodgings. Did you ever see such a ghost?"

"Well, you do look a trifle seedy: you'll look better when you're dressed. It's an awful world to live in," said poor Van.

"I'll not be five minutes; you must walk with me a bit of the way. I wish I had some fellow at my other side who had lost a hundred thousand. I daresay he'd think me a fool. They say Chiffington lost a hundred and forty thousand. Perhaps he'd think me as great an ass as I think you — who knows? I may be making too much of it — and my uncle is so very rich, and neither wife nor child; and, I give you my honour, I am sick of the whole thing. I'd never take a card or a dice-box in my hand, or back a horse, while I live, if I was once fairly out of it. He *might* try me, don't you think? I'm the only near relation he has on earth — I don't count my father, for he's — it's a different thing, you know — I and my sister, just. And, really, it would be nothing to him. And I think he suspected something about it last night; perhaps he heard a little of it. And he's rather hot, but he's a goodnatured fellow, and he has commercial ideas about a man's going into the insolvent court; and, by Jove, you know, I'm ruined, and I don't think he'd like to see our name disgraced — eh, do you?"

"No, I'm quite sure," said Van. "I thought so all along."

"Peers and peeresses are very fine in their way, and people, whenever the peers do anything foolish, and throw out a bill, exclaim 'Thank Heaven we have still a House of Lords!' but you and I, Van, may thank Heaven for a better estate, the order of aunts and uncles. Do you remember the man you and I saw in the vaudeville, who exclaims every now and then, 'Vive mon oncle! Vive ma tante!'?"

So, in better spirits, Arden prepared to visit his uncle.

"Let us get into a cab; people are staring at you," said Richard Arden, when they had walked a little way towards his uncle's house. "You look so utterly ruined, one would think you had swallowed poison, and were dying by inches, and expected to be in the other world before you reached your doctor's door. Here's a cab."

They got in, and sitting side by side, said Vandeleur to him, after a minute's silence, —

"I've been thinking of a thing — why did not you take Mr. Longcluse into council? He gave you a lift before, don't you remember? and he lost nothing by it, and made everything smooth. Why don't you look him up?"

"I've been an awful fool, Van."

"How so?"

"I've had a sort of row with Longcluse, and there are reasons — I could not, at all events, have asked him. It would have been next to impossible, and now it is *quite* impossible."

"Why should it be? He seemed to like you; and I venture to say he'd be very glad to shake hands."

"So he might, but *I* shouldn't," said Richard imperiously. "No, no, there's nothing in that. It would take too long to tell; but I should rather go over the precipice than hold by that stay. I don't know how long my uncle may keep me. Would you mind waiting for me at my lodgings? Thompson will give you cigars and brandy and water; and I'll come back and tell you what my uncle intends."

This appointment made, they parted, and he knocked at his uncle's door. The sound seemed to echo threateningly at his heart, which sank with a sudden misgiving.

CHAPTER XL.

AN INTERVIEW IN THE STUDY.

"Is my uncle at home?"

"No, Sir; I expect him at five. It wants about five minutes; but he desired me to show you, Sir, into the study."

He was now alone in that large square room. The books, each in its place, in a vellum uniform, with a military precision and nattiness — seldom disturbed, I fancy, for Uncle David was not much of a book-worm — chilled him with an aspect of inflexible formality; and the busts, in cold white marble, standing at intervals on their pedestals, seemed to have called up looks, like Mrs. Pentweezle, for the occasion. Demosthenes, with his wrenched neck and square brow, had evidently heard of his dealings with Lord Pindledykes, and made up his mind, when the proper time came, to denounce him with a tempest of appropriate eloquence. There was in Cicero's face, he thought, something satirical and conceited which was new and odious; and under Plato's external solemnity he detected a pleasurable and roguish anticipation of the coming scene.

His uncle was very punctual. A few minutes would see him in the room, and then two or three sentences would disclose the purpose he meditated. In the midst of the trepidation which had thus returned, he heard his uncle's knock at the hall-door, and in another moment he entered the study.

"How d'ye do, Richard? You're punctual. I wish our meeting was a pleasanter one. Sit down. You haven't kept faith with me. It is scarcely a year since, with a large sum of money, such as at your age I should have thought a fortune, I rescued you from bad hands and a great danger. Now, Sir, do you remember a promise you then made me? and have you kept your word?"

"I confess, uncle, I know I can't excuse myself; but I was tempted, and I am weak — I am a fool, worse than a fool — whatever you please to call me, and I'm sorry. Can I say more?" pleaded the young man.

"That is saying nothing. It simply means that you do the thing that pleases you, and break your word where your inclination prompts; and you are sorry because it has turned out unluckily. I have heard that you are again in danger. I am not going to help you." His blue eyes looked cold and hard, and the oblique light showed severe lines at his brows and mouth. It was a face which, generally kindly, could yet look, on occasion, stern enough. "Now, observe, I'm not going to help you; I'm not even going to reason with you — you can do that for yourself, if you please — I will simply help you with *light*. Thus forewarned, you need not, of course, answer any one of the questions I am about to put, and to ask which, I have no other claim than that which rests upon having put you on your feet, and paid five thousand pounds for you, only a year ago."

"But I entreat that you do put them. I'm ashamed of myself, dear Uncle David; I implore of you to ask me whatever you please: I'll answer everything."

"Well, I think I know everything; Lord Pindledykes makes no secret of it. He's the man, isn't he?"

"Yes, Sir."

"That's the sallow, dissipated-looking fellow, with the eye that squints outward. I know his appearance very well; I knew his good-for-nothing father. No one likes to have transactions with that fellow — he's shunned — and you chose him, of all people; and he has pigeoned you. I've heard all about it. Everybody knows by this time. And you have really lost fifteen thousand pounds to him?"

"I am afraid, uncle, it is very near that."

"This, you know," resumed Uncle David, "is not debt: it is ruin. You chose to mortgage your reversion to some Jews, for fifteen hundred a year, during your father's lifetime. Three hundred would have been ample, with the hundred a year you had before — ample; but you chose to do it, and the estates, whenever you succeed to them, will come to you with a very heavy debt charged, for those Jews, upon them. I don't suppose the estates are destined to continue long in our family; but this is a vexation which don't touch you, nephew. *I* am, I confess, sorry. They were in our family, some of them, before the Conquest. No matter. What you have to consider is your present position. They will come to you, if ever, saddled with a heavy debt; and, in the meantime, you have fifteen hundred a year for your father's life; and I don't think it will sell for anything like the fifteen thousand pounds you have just lost. You are therefore insolvent; there is the story told. I see nothing for it but your becoming formally an insolvent. It is the *bourgeoisie* who shrink from that sort of thing; titled men, and men of pleasure and fashion, don’t seem to mind it. There are Lord Harry Newgate, and the Honourable Alfred Pentonville, and Sir Aymerick Pigeon, one of the oldest baronets in England, have been in the *Gazette* within the last twelve months. The money I paid, on the faith of your promise, is worse than wasted. I’ll pay no more into the pockets of rooks and scoundrels; I’ll divide no more of my money among blackguard jockeys and villanous peers, simply to defer for a few months the consequences of a fool’s incorrigible folly.”

“But, you know, uncle, I was not quite so mad. The thing was a swindle; it can’t stand. The horse was not fairly treated.”

“I daresay: I suppose it was doctored. I don’t care; I only think that unless you meant to go in for drugging horses and bribing jockeys, you had no business among such people, and at that sort of game. All I want is that you clearly understand that in this matter — though I would gladly see you safely out of it — I’ll waste no more money in paying gambling debts.”

“This might have happened to anyone, Sir; it might indeed, uncle. Every second man you meet is more or less on the turf, and they never come to grief by it. No one, of course, can stand against a barefaced swindle, like this thing.”

“I don’t care a farthing about other people; I’ve seen how it tells upon you. I don’t affect to value your promises, Dick; I don’t think that they are worth a shilling. How many have you made me, and broken? To me it seems the vice is incurable, like drunkenness. Tattersall’s, or whatever is your place of business, is no better than the gin-palace; and when once a fellow is fairly on the turf, the sooner he is under it, the better for himself and all who like him. And you have lost money at play besides. I heard that quite accidentally; and I daresay that is a ruinous item in what I may call your schedule.”

“I know what people are saying; but it isn’t so immense a sum, by any means.”

“I’m sorry to hear it. I wish it was enormous; I wish it was a million. I wish your failure could ruin every blackguard in England: the more heavily you have hit them all round, the better I am pleased. They hit you and me, Dick, pretty hard last time; it is our turn now. It is not my fault now, Dick, if you don’t understand me perfectly. If at any future time I should do anything for you — by my *will*, mind — I shall take care so to tie it up that you can’t make away with a guinea. My advice is not worth much to you, but I venture to give it, and I think the best thing you can do is to submit to your misfortune, and file your schedule; and when you are your own master again, I shall see if I can manage some small thing for you. You will have to work for your bread, you know, and you can’t expect very much at first; but there are things — of course, I mean in commercial establishments, and railways, and that kind of thing — where I have an influence, of from a hundred and twenty to two hundred pounds a year, and for some of them you would answer pretty well, and you can tide over the time till you succeed to the title: and after a little while I may be able to get you raised a step; and when once you get accustomed to work, you can’t think how you will come to like it. So that, on the whole, the knock you have got may do you some good, and make you prize your position more when you come to it. Will you go upstairs, and take a cup of tea with Miss Maubray?”

He used to call her Grace, when speaking to Richard. Perhaps, in the concussion of this earthquake, the fabric of a matrimonial scheme may have fallen to the ground.

Richard Arden was too dejected and too agitated to accept this invitation, I need hardly tell you. He took his leave, chapfallen.

CHAPTER XLI.

VAN APPOINTS HIMSELF TO A DIPLOMATIC POST.

Mr. Vandeleur had availed himself very freely of Richard Arden's invitation, to amuse himself during his absence with his cheroots and manillas, as the clouded state of the atmosphere of his drawingroom testified to that luckless gentleman — if indeed he was in a condition to observe anything, on returning from his dreadful interview with his uncle.

Richard's countenance was full of thunder and disaster. Vandeleur looked in his face, with his cigar in his fingers, and said in a faint and hollow tone —

"Well?"

To which inappropriate form of inquiry, Richard Arden deigned no reply; but in silence stalked to the box of cigars on the table, threw himself into a chair, and smoked violently for awhile.

Some minutes passed. Vandeleur's eyes were fixed, through the smoke, on Richard's, who had fixed his on the chimneypiece. Van respected his ruminations. With a delicate and noiseless attention, indeed, he ventured to slide gently to his side the water carafe, and the brandy, and a tumbler.

Still silence prevailed. After a time, Richard Arden poured brandy and water suddenly into his glass.

"Think of that fellow, that uncle of mine — pretty uncle! Kind relation — rolling in money! He sends for me simply to tell me that he won't give me a guinea. He might have waited till he was asked. If he had nothing better to say, he need not have given me the trouble of going to his odious, bleak study, to hear all his vulgar advice and arithmetic, ending in — what do you think? He says that I'm to be had up in the bankrupt court, and when all that is over he'll get me appointed a ticket-taker on a railway, or a clerk in a pawn-office, or something. By Heaven! when I think of it, I wonder how I kept my temper. I'm not quite driven to those curious expedients, that he seems to think so natural. I've some cards still left in my hand, and I'll play them first, if it is the same to him; and, hang it! my luck can't always run the same way. I'll give it another chance before I give up, and tomorrow morning things may be very different with me."

"It's an awful pity you quarrelled with Longcluse!" exclaimed Vandeleur.

"That's done, and can't be undone," said Richard Arden, resuming his cigar.

"I wonder why you quarrelled with him. Why, good heavens! that man is made of money, and he got you safe out of that fellow's clutches — I forget his name — about that bet with Mr. Slanter, don't you remember — and he was so very kind about it; and I'm sure he'd shake hands if you'd only ask him, and one way or another he'd pull you through."

"I can't ask him, and I won't; he may ask *me* if he likes. I'm very sure there is nothing he would like better, for fifty reasons, than to be on good terms with me again, and I have no wish to quarrel any more than he has. But if there is to be a reconciliation, I can't begin it. He must make the overtures, and that's all."

"He seemed such an awfully jolly fellow that time. And it is such a frightful state we are both in. I never came such a mucker before in my life. I know him pretty well. I met him at Lady May Penrose's, and at the Playfairs', and one night I walked home with him from the opera. It is an awful pity you are not on terms with him, and — by Jove! I must go and have something to eat; it is near eight o'clock."

Away went Van, and out of the wreck of his fortune contrived a modest dinner at Verey's; and pondering, after dinner, upon the awful plight of himself and his comrade, he came at last to the heroic resolution of braving the dangers of a visit to Mr. Longcluse, on behalf of his friend; and as it was now past nine, he hastily paid the waiter, took his hat, and set out upon his adventure. It was a mere chance, he knew, and a very unlikely one, his finding Mr. Longcluse at home at that hour. He knew that he was doing a very odd thing in calling at past nine o'clock; but the occasion was anomalous, and Mr. Longcluse would understand. He knocked at the door, and learned from the servant that his master was engaged with a gentleman in the study, on business. From this room he heard a voice, faintly discoursing in a deep metallic drawl.

"Who shall I say, Sir?" asked the servant.

If his mission had been less monotonous, and he less excited and sanguine as to his diplomatic success, he would have, as he said, "funked it altogether," and gone away. He hesitated for a moment, and determined upon the form most likely to procure an interview.

"Say Mr. Vandeleur — a friend of Mr. Richard Arden's; you'll remember, please — a friend of Mr. Richard Arden's."

In a moment the man returned.

"Will you please to walk upstairs?" and he showed him into the drawingroom.

In little more than a minute, Mr. Longcluse himself entered. His eyes were fixed on the visitor with a rather stern curiosity. Perhaps he had interpreted the term "friend" a little too technically. He made him a ceremonious bow, in French fashion, and placed a chair for him.

"I had the pleasure of being introduced to you, Mr. Longcluse, at Lady May Penrose's. My name is Vandeleur."

"I have had that honour, Mr. Vandeleur, I remember perfectly. The servant mentioned that you announced yourself as Mr. Arden's friend, if I don't mistake."

CHAPTER XLII.

DIPLOMACY.

Mr. Vandeleur and Mr. Longcluse were now seated, and the former gentleman said —

"Yes, I am a friend of Mr. Arden's — so much so, that I have ventured what I hope you won't think a very impertinent liberty. I was so very sorry to hear that a misunderstanding had occurred — I did not ask him about what — and he has been so unlucky about the Derby, you know — I ought to say that I am, upon my honour, a mere volunteer, so perhaps you will think I have no right to ask you to listen to me."

"I shall be happy to continue this conversation, Mr. Vandeleur, upon one condition."

"Pray name it."

"That you report it fully to the gentleman for whom you are so kind as to interest yourself."

"Yes, I'll certainly do that."

Mr. Longcluse looked by no means so jolly as Van remembered him, and he thought he detected, at mention of Richard Arden's name, for a moment, a look of positive malevolence — I can't say absolutely, it may have been fancy — as he turned quickly, and the light played suddenly on his face.

Mr. Longcluse could, perhaps, dissemble as well as other men; but there were cases in which he would not be at the trouble to dissemble. And here his expression was so unpleasant, upon features so strangely marked and so white, that Van thought the effect ugly, and even ghastly.

"I shall be happy, then, to hear anything you have to say," said Longcluse gently.

"You are very kind. I was just going to say that he has been so unlucky — he has lost so much money — — "

"I had better say, I think, at once, Mr. Vandeleur, that nothing shall tempt me to take any part in Mr. Arden's affairs."

Van's mild blue eyes looked on him wonderingly.

"You could be of so much use, Mr. Longcluse!"

"I don't desire to be of any."

"But — but that may be, I think it must, in consequence of the unhappy estrangement."

He had been conning over phrases on his way, and thought that a pretty one.

"A very happy estrangement, on the contrary, for the man who is straight and true, and who is by it relieved of a great — mistake."

"I should be so extremely happy," said Van lingeringly, "if I were instrumental in inducing both parties to shake hands."

"I don't desire it."

"But, surely, if Richard Arden were the first to offer — — "

"I should decline."

Van rose; he fiddled with his hat a little; he hesitated. He had staked too much on this — for had he not promised to report the whole thing to Richard Arden, who was not likely to be pleased? — to give up without one last effort.

"I hope I am not very impertinent," he said, "but I can hardly think, Mr. Longcluse, that you are quite indifferent to a reconciliation."

"I'm not indifferent — I'm averse to it."

"I don't understand."

"Will you take some tea?"

"No, thanks; I do so hope that I don't quite understand."

"That's hardly my fault; I have spoken very distinctly."

"Then what you wish to convey is — — " said Van, with his hand now at the door.

"Is this," said Longcluse, "that I decline Mr. Arden's acquaintance, that I won't consider his affairs, and that I peremptorily refuse to be of the slightest use to him in his difficulties. I hope I am now sufficiently distinct."

"Oh, perfectly — I — — "

"Pray take some tea."

"And my visit is a failure. I'm awfully sorry I can't be of any use!"

"None here, Sir, to Mr. Arden — none, no more than I."

"Then I have only to beg of you to accept my apologies for having given you a great deal of trouble, and to beg pardon for having disturbed you, and to say goodnight."

"No trouble — none. I am glad everything is clear now. Goodnight."

And Mr. Longcluse saw him politely to the door, and said again, in a clear, stern tone, but with a smile and another bow, “Goodnight,” as he parted at the door.

About an hour later a servant arrived with a letter for Mr. Longcluse. That gentleman recognised the hand, and suspended his business to read it. He did so with a smile. It was thus expressed: —

“SIR,

“I beg to inform you, in the distinctest terms, that neither Mr. Vandeleur, nor any other gentleman, had any authority from me to enter into any discussion with you, or to make the slightest allusion to subjects upon which Mr. Vandeleur, at your desire, tells me he, this evening, thought fit to converse with you. And I beg, in the most pointed manner, to disavow all connection with, or previous knowledge of, that gentleman’s visit and conversation. And I do so lest Mr. Vandeleur’s assertion to the same effect should appear imperfect without mine. — I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

“RICHARD ARDEN.

“To Walter Longcluse, Esq.”

“Does any one wait for an answer?” he asked, still smiling.

“Yes, Sir: Mr. Thompson, please, Sir.”

“Very well; ask him to wait a moment,” said he, and he wrote as follows: —

“Mr. Longcluse takes the liberty of returning Mr. Arden’s letter, and begs to decline any correspondence with him.”

And this note, with Richard Arden’s letter, he enclosed in an envelope, and addressed to that gentleman.

While this correspondence, by no means friendly, was proceeding, other letters were interesting, very profoundly, other persons in this drama.

Old David Arden had returned early from a ponderous dinner of the magnates of that world which interested him more than the world of fashion, or even of politics, and he was sitting in his study at halfpast ten, about a quarter of a mile westward of Mr. Longcluse’s house in Bolton Street.

Not many letters had come for him by the late post. There were two which he chose to read forthwith. The rest would, in Swift’s phrase, keep cool, and he could read them before his breakfast in the morning. The first was a note posted at Islington. He knew his niece’s pretty hand. This was an “advice” from Mortlake. The second which he picked up from the little pack was a foreign letter, of more than usual bulk.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A LETTER AND A SUMMONS.

Paris? Yes, he knew the hand well. His face darkened a little with a peculiar anxiety. This he will read first. He draws the candles all together, near the corner of the table at which he sits. He can't have too much light on these formal lines, legible and tall as the letters are. He opens the thin envelope, and reads what follows: —

"DEAR AND HONOURED SIR,

"I am in receipt of yours of the 13th instant. You judge me rightly in supposing that I have entered on my mission with a willing mind, and no thought of sparing myself. On the 11th instant I presented the letter you were so good as to provide me with to M. de la Perriere. He received me with much consideration in consequence. You have not been misinformed with regard to his position. His influence is, and so long as the present Cabinet remain in power will continue to be, more than sufficient to procure for me the information and opportunities you so much desire. He explained to me very fully the limits of that assistance which official people here have it in their power to afford. Their prerogative is more extensive than with us, but at the same time it has its points of circumscription. Every private citizen has his well-defined rights, which they can in no case invade. He says that had I come armed with affidavits criminating any individual, or even justifying a strong and distinct suspicion, their powers would be much larger. As it is, he cautions me against taking any steps that might alarm Vanboeren. The baron is a suspicious man, it seems, and has, moreover, once or twice been under official surveillance, which has made him crafty. He is not likely to be caught napping. He ostensibly practises the professions of a surgeon and dentist. In the latter capacity he has a very considerable business. But his principal income is derived, I am informed, from sources of a different kind."

"H'm! what can he mean? I suppose he explains a little further on," mused Mr. Arden.

"He is, in short, a practitioner about whom suspicions of an infamous kind have prevailed. One branch of his business, a rather strange one, has connected him with persons, more considerable in number than you would readily believe, who were, or are, political refugees."

"Can this noble baron be a distiller of poisons?" David Arden ruminated.

"In all his other equivocal doings, he found, on the few occasions that seemed to threaten danger, mysterious protectors, sufficiently powerful to bring him off scot-free. His relations of a political character were those which chiefly brought him under the secret notice of the police. It is believed that he has amassed a fortune, and it is certain that he is about to retire from business. I can much better explain to you, when I see you, the remarkable circumstances to which I have but alluded. I hope to be in town again, and to have the honour of waiting upon you, on Thursday, the 29th instant."

"Ay, that's the day he named at parting. What a punctual fellow that is!"

"They appear to me to have a very distinct bearing upon some possible views of the case in which you are so justly interested. The Baron Vanboeren is reputed very wealthy, but he is by no means liberal in his dealings, and is said to be insatiably avaricious. This last quality may make him practicable — — "

"Yes, so it may," acquiesced Uncle David.

"so that disclosures of importance may be obtained, if he be approached in the proper manner. Lebas was connected, as a mechanic, with the dentistry department of his business. Mr. L —— has been extremely kind to Lebas' widow and children, and has settled a small annuity upon her, and fifteen hundred francs each upon his children."

"Eh? Upon my life, that is very handsome — extremely handsome. It gives me rather new ideas of this man — that is, if there's nothing odd in it," said Mr. Arden.

"The deed by which he has done all this is, in its reciting part, an eccentric one. I waited, as I advised you in mine of the 12th, upon M. Arnaud, who is the legal man employed by Madame Lebas, for the purpose of handing him the ten napoleons which you were so good as to transmit for the use of his family; which sum he has, with many thanks on the part of Madame Lebas, declined, and which, therefore, I hold still to your credit. When explaining to me that lady's reasons for declining your remittance, he requested me to read a deed of gift from Mr. Longcluse, making the provisions I have before referred to, and reciting, as nearly in these words as I can remember:— 'Whereas I entertained for the deceased Pierre Lebas, in whose house in Paris I lodged when very young, for more than a year and a half, a very great respect and regard: and whereas I hold myself to have been the innocent cause of his having gone to the room, as appears from my evidence, in which, unhappily, he lost his life: and whereas I look upon it as a disgrace to our City of London that such a crime could have been committed in a place of public resort, frequented as that was at the time, without either interruption or detection; and whereas, so regarding it, I think that such citizens as could well afford to subscribe money, adequately to compensate the family of the deceased for the pecuniary loss which both his widow and children have sustained by reason of his death, were bound to do so; his visit to London having been strictly a commercial one; and all persons connected with the trade of London being more or less interested in the safety of the commercial intercourse between the two countries: and whereas the citizens of London have failed, although applied to for the purpose, to make any such compensation; now this deed witnesseth,' etc."

"Well, in all that, I certainly go with him. We Londoners ought to be ashamed of ourselves."

"The widow has taken her children to Avranches, her native place, where she means to live. Please direct me whether I shall proceed thither, and also upon what particular points you would wish me to interrogate her. I have learned, this moment, that the Baron Vanboeren retires in October next. It is thought that he will fix his residence after that at Berlin. My informant undertakes to advise me of his address, whenever it is absolutely settled. In approaching this baron, it is thought you will have to exercise caution and dexterity, as he has the reputation of being cunning and unscrupulous."

"I'm not good at dealing with such people — I never was. I must engage some long-headed fellow who understands them," said he.

"I debit myself with two thousand five hundred francs, the amount of your remittance on the 15th inst., for which I will account at sight. — I remain, dear and honoured Sir, your attached and most obedient servant,

"CHRISTOPHER BLOUNT."

"I shall learn all he knows in a few days. What is it that deprives me of quiet till a clue be found to the discovery of Yelland Mace? And why is it that the fancy has seized me that Mr. Longcluse knows where that villain may be found? He admitted, in talking to Alice, she says, that he had seen him in his young days. I will pick up all the facts, and then consider well all that they may point to. Let us but get the letters together, and in time we may find out what they spell. Here am I, a rich but sad old bachelor, having missed for ever the best hope of my life. Poor Harry long dead, and but one branch of the old tree with fruit upon it — Reginald, with his two children: Richard, my nephew — Richard Arden, in a few years the sole representative of the whole family of Arden, and he such a scamp and fool! If a childless old fellow could care for such things, it would be enough to break my heart. And poor little Alice! So affectionate and so beautiful, left, as she will be, alone, with such a protector as that fellow! I pity her."

At that moment her unopened note caught his eye, as it lay on the table. He opened it, and read these words: —

"MY DEAREST UNCLE DAVID,

"I am so miserable and perplexed, and so utterly without any one to befriend or advise me in my present unexpected trouble, that I must implore of you to come to Mortlake, if you can, the moment this note reaches you. I know how unreasonable and selfish this urgent request will appear. But when I shall have told you all that has happened, you will say, I know, that I could not have avoided imploring your aid. Therefore, I entreat, distracted creature as I am, that you, my beloved uncle, will come to aid and counsel me; and believe me when I assure you that I am in extreme distress, and without, at this moment, any other friend to help me. — Your very unhappy niece,

"ALICE."

He read this short note over again.

"No; it is not a sick lap-dog, or a saucy maid: there is some real trouble. Alice has, I think, more sense — I'll go at once. Reginald is always late, and I shall find them" (he looked at his watch)— "yes, I shall find them still up at Mortlake."

So instantly he sent for a cab, and pulled on again a pair of boots, instead of the slippers he had donned, and before five minutes was driving at a rapid pace towards Mortlake.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE REASON OF ALICE'S NOTE.

The long drive to Mortlake was expedited by promises to the cabman; for, in this acquisitive world, nothing for nothing is the ruling law of reciprocity. It was about halfpast eleven o'clock when they reached the gate of the avenue; it was a still night, and a segment of the moon was high in the sky, faintly silvering the old fluted piers and urns, and the edges of the gigantic trees that overhung them. They were now driving up the avenue. How odd was the transition from the glare and hurlyburly of the town to the shadowy and silent woodlands on which this imperfect light fell so picturesquely.

There were associations enough to induce melancholy as he drove through those neglected scenes, his playground in boyish days, where he, and Harry whom he loved, had passed so many of the happy days that precede school. He could hear his laugh floating still among the boughs of the familiar trees, he could see his handsome face smiling down through the leaves of the lordly chestnut that stood, at that moment, by the point of the avenue they were passing, like a forsaken old friend overlooking the way without a stir.

"I'll follow this clue to the end," said David Arden. "I sha'n't make much of it, I fear; but if it ends, as others in the same inquiry have, in smoke, I shall, at least, have done my utmost, and may abandon the task with a good grace, and conclude that Heaven declines to favour the pursuit. Taken for all-in-all, he was the best of his generation, and the fittest to head the house. Something, I thought, was due, in mere respect to his memory. The coldness of Reginald insulted me. If a favourite dog had been poisoned, he would have made more exertion to commit the culprit. And once in pursuit of this dark shadow, how intense and direful grew the interest of the chase, and —— Here we are at the hall-door. Don't mind knocking, ring the bell," he said to the driver.

He was himself at the threshold before the door was opened.

"Can I see my brother?" he asked.

"Sir Reginald is in the drawingroom — a small dinner-party to-day, Sir — Lady May Penrose, and Lady Mary Maypol, they returned to town in Lady May Penrose's carriage, Lord Wynderbroke remains, Sir, and two gentlemen; they are at present with Sir Reginald in the smoking-room."

He learned that Miss Arden was alone in the small sitting-room, called the card-room. David Arden had walked through the vestibule, and into the capacious hall. The lights were all out, but one.

"Well, I sha'n't disturb him. Is Miss Alice — — "

"Yes, Alice is here. It is so kind of you to come!" said a voice he well knew. "Here I am! Won't you come up to the drawingroom, Uncle David?"

"So you want to consult Uncle David," he said, entering the room, and looking round. "In my father's time the other drawingrooms used to be open; it is a handsome suite — very pretty rooms. But I think you have been crying, my poor little Alice. What on earth is all this about, my dear! Here I am, and it is past eleven; so we must come to the point, if I am to hear it tonight. What is the matter?"

"My dear uncle, I have been so miserable!"

"Well, what is it?" he said, taking a chair; "you have refused some fellow you like, or accepted some fellow you don't like. I am sure you are at the bottom of your own misery, foolish little creature! Girls generally are, I think, the architects of their own penitentiaries. Sit there, my dear, and if it is anything I can be of the least use in, you may count on my doing my utmost. Only you must tell me the whole case, and you mustn't colour it a bit."

So they sat down on a sofa, and Miss Alice told him in her own way that, to her amazement, that day Lord Wynderbroke had made something very like a confession of his passion, and an offer of his hand, which this unsophisticated young lady was on the point of repelling, when Lady May entered the room, accompanied by her friend, Lady Mary Maypol; and, of course, the interesting situation, for that time, dissolved. About an hour after, Alice, who was shocked at the sudden distinction of which she had become the object, and extremely vexed at the interruption which had compelled her to suspend her reply, and very anxious for an opportunity to answer with decision, found that opportunity in a little saunter which she and the two ladies took in the grounds, accompanied by Lord Wynderbroke and Sir Reginald.

When the opportunity came, with a common inconsistency, she rather shrank from the crisis; and a slight uncertainty as to the actual meaning of the noble lord, rendered her perplexity still more disagreeable. It occurred thus: the party had walked some little distance, and when Alice was addressed by her father —

"Here is Wynderbroke, who says he has never seen my Roman inscription! You, Alice, must do the honours, for I daren't yet venture on the grass," — he shrugged and shook his head over his foot— "and I will take charge of Lady Mary and Lady May, who want to see the Derbyshire thistles — they have grown so enormous under my gardener's care. You said, May, the other evening, that you would like to see them."

Lady May acquiesced with true feminine sympathy with the baronet's stratagem, notwithstanding an imploring glance from Alice! and Lady Mary Maypol, exchanging a glance with Lady May, expressed equal interest in the Derbyshire thistles.

"You will find the inscription at the door of the grotto, only twenty steps from this; it was dug up when my grandfather made the round pond, with the fountain in it. You'll find us in the garden."

Lord Wynderbroke beamed an insufferable smile on Alice, and said something pretty that she did not hear. She knew perfectly what was coming, and although resolved, she was yet in a state of extreme confusion.

Lord Wynderbroke was talking all the way as they approached the grotto; but not one word of his harmonious periods did she clearly hear. By the time they reached the little rocky arch under the evergreens, through the leaves of which the marble tablet and Roman inscription were visible, they had each totally forgotten the antiquarian object with which they had set out.

Lord Wynderbroke came to a standstill, and then with a smiling precision and distinctness, and in accents that seemed, somehow, to ring through her head, he made a very explicit declaration and proposal; and during the entire delivery of this performance, which was neat and lucid rather than impassioned, she remained tongue-tied, listening as if to a tale told in a dream.

She withdrew her hand hastily from Lord Wynderbroke's tender pressure, and the young lady with a sudden effort, replied collectedly enough, in a way greatly to amaze Lord Wynderbroke.

When she had done, that nobleman was silent for some time, and stood in the same attitude of attention with which he had heard her. With a heightened colour he cleared his voice, and his answer, when it came, was dry and pettish. He thought with great deference, that he was, perhaps entitled to a little consideration, and it appeared to him that he had quite unaccountably misunderstood what had seemed the very distinct language of Sir Reginald. For the present he had no more to say. He hoped to explain more satisfactorily to Miss Arden, after he had himself had a few words of explanation, to which he thought he had a claim, from Sir Reginald; and he must confess that, after the lengths to which he had been induced to proceed, he was quite taken by surprise, and inexpressibly wounded by the tone which Miss Arden had adopted.

Side by side, at a somewhat quick pace, Miss Arden with a heightened colour, and Lord Wynderbroke with his ears tingling, rejoined their friends.

“Well, my dear child,” said Uncle David, with a laugh, “if you have nothing worse to complain of, though I am very glad to see you, I think we might have put off our meeting till daylight.”

“Oh! but you have not heard half what has happened. He has behaved in the most cowardly, treacherous, ungentlemanlike way,” she continued vehemently. “Papa sent for me, and I never saw him so angry in my life. Lord Wynderbroke has been making his unmanly complaints to him, and papa spoke so violently. And *he*, instead of going away, having had from me the answer which nothing on earth shall ever induce me to change, *he* remains here; and actually had the audacity to tell me, very nearly in so many words, that my decision went for nothing. I spoke to him quite frankly, but said nothing that was at all rude — nothing that could have made him the least angry. I implored of him to believe me that I never could change my mind; and I could not help crying, I was so agitated and wretched. But he seemed very much vexed, and simply said that he placed himself entirely in papa’s hands. In fact, I’ve been utterly miserable and terrified, and I do not know how I can endure those terrible scenes with papa. The whole thing has come upon me so suddenly. Could you have imagined any gentleman capable of acting like Lord Wynderbroke — so selfish, cruel, and dastardly?” and with these words she burst into tears.

“Do you mean to say that he won’t take your refusal?” said her uncle, looking very angry.

"That is what he says," she sobbed. "He had an opportunity only for a few words, and that was the purport of them; and I was so astounded, I could not reply; and, instead of going away, he remains here. Papa and he have arranged to prolong his visit; so I shall be teased and frightened, and I am so nervous and agitated; and it is such an outrage!"

"Now, we must not lose our heads, my dear child; we must consult calmly. It seems you don't think it possible that you may come to like Lord Wynderbroke sufficiently to marry him."

"I would rather *die*! If this goes on, I sha'n't stay here. I'd go and be a governess rather."

"I think you might give my house a trial first," said Uncle David merrily; "but it is time to talk about that by-and-by. What does May Penrose think of it? She sometimes, I believe, on an emergency, lights on a sensible suggestion."

"She had to return to town with Lady Mary, who dined here also; I did not know she was going until a few minutes before they left. I've been so *miserably* unlucky! and I could not make an opportunity without its seeming so rude to Lady Mary, and I don't know her well enough to tell her; and, you have no idea, papa is so incensed, and so peremptory; and what *am* I to do? Oh! dear uncle, think of something. I know you'll help me."

"That I will," said the old gentleman. "But allowances are to be made for a poor old devil so much in love as Lord Wynderbroke."

"I don't think he likes me now — he can't like me," said Alice. "But he is angry. It is simply pride and vanity. From something papa said, I am sure of it, Lord Wynderbroke has been telling his friends, and speaking, I fancy, as if everything was arranged, and he never anticipated that I could have any mind of my own; and I suppose he thinks he would be laughed at, and so I am to undergo a persecution, and he won't hear of anything but what he pleases; and papa is determined to accomplish it. And, oh! what *am* I to do?"

"I'll tell you, but you must do exactly as I bid you. Who's there?" he said suddenly, as Alice's maid opened the door.

"Oh! I beg pardon — Miss Alice, please," she said, dropping a curtsey and drawing back.

"Don't go," said Uncle David, "we shall want you. What's the matter?"

"Sir Reginald has been took bad with his foot again, please, Miss."

"Nothing serious?" said Uncle David.

"Only pain, please, Sir, in the same place."

"All the better it should fix itself well in his foot. You need not be uneasy about it, Alice. You and your maid must be in my cab, which is at the hall door, in five minutes. Take leave of no one, and don't waste time over finery; just put a few things up, and take your dressing-case; and you and your maid are coming to town with me. Is my brother in the drawingroom?"

"No, Sir, please; he is in his own room."

"Are the gentlemen who dined still here?"

"Two left, Sir, when Sir Reginald took ill; but Lord Wynderbroke remains."

"Oh! and where is he?"

"Sir Reginald sent for him, please, Sir — just as I came up — to his room."

"Very good, then I shall find them both together. Now, Alice, I must find you and your maid in the cab in five minutes. I shall get your leave from Reginald, and you order the fellow to drive down to the little church gate in the village close by, and I'll walk after and join you there in a few minutes. Lose no time."

With this parting charge, Uncle David ran down the stairs, and met Lord Wynderbroke at the foot of them, returning from his visit of charity to Sir Reginald's room.

CHAPTER XLV.

COLLISION.

“Lord Wynderbroke!” said Uncle David, and bowed rather ceremoniously.

Lord Wynderbroke, a little surprised, extended two fingers and said, “How d’ye do, Mr. Arden?” and smiled drily, and then seemed disposed to pass on.

“I beg your pardon, Lord Wynderbroke,” said David Arden, “but would you mind giving me a few minutes? I have something you may think a little important to say, and if you will allow me, I’ll say it in this room” — he indicated the halfopen door of the dining-room, in which there was still some light— “I shall not detain you long.”

The urbane and smiling peer looked on him for a moment — rather darkly — with a shrewd eye; and he said, still smiling, —

“Certainly, Mr. Arden; but at this hour, and being about to write a note, you will see that I have very little time indeed — I’m very sorry.”

He was speaking stiffly, and any one might have seen that he suspected nothing very agreeable as the result of Mr. Arden’s communication.

When they had got into the dining-room, and the door was closed, Lord Wynderbroke, with his head a little high, invited Mr. Arden to proceed.

“Then, as you are in a hurry, you’ll excuse my going direct to the point. I’ve come here in consequence of a note that reached me about an hour ago, informing me that my niece, Alice Arden, has suffered a great deal of annoyance. You know, of course, to what I refer?”

“I should extremely regret that the young lady, your niece, should suffer the least vexation, from any cause; but I should have fancied that her happiness might be more naturally confided to the keeping of her father, than of a relation residing in a different house, and by no means so nearly interested in consulting it.”

“I see, Lord Wynderbroke, that I must address you very plainly, and even coarsely. My brother Reginald does not consult her happiness in this matter, but merely his own ideas of a desirable family connection. She is really quite miserable; she has unalterably made up her mind. You’ll not induce her to change it. There is no chance of that. But by permitting my brother to exercise a pressure in favour of your suit — — "

"You'll excuse my interrupting for a moment, to say that there is, and can be, nothing but the perfectly legitimate influence of a parent. *Pressure*, there is none — none in the world, Sir; although I am not, like you, Mr. Arden, a relation — and a very near one — of Sir Reginald Arden's, I think I can undertake to say that he is quite incapable of exercising what you call a pressure upon the young lady his daughter; and I have to beg that you will be so good as to spare me the pain of hearing that term employed, as you have just now employed it — or *at all*, Sir, in connection with me. I take the liberty of insisting upon that, *peremptorily*."

Mr. Arden bowed, and went on:

"And when the young lady distinctly declines the honour you propose, you persist in paying your addresses, as though her answer meant just nothing."

"I don't quite know, Sir, why I've listened so long to this kind of thing from you; you have no right on earth, Sir, to address that sort of thing to me. How dare you talk to me, Sir, in that — a — a — audacious tone upon my private affairs and conduct?"

Uncle David was a little fiery, and answered, holding his head high, —

"What I have to say is short and clear. I don't care twopence about your affairs, or your conduct, but I do very much care about my niece's happiness; and if you any longer decline to take the answer she has given you, and continue to cause her the slightest trouble, I'll make it a personal matter with you. Good-*night*!" he added, with an inflamed visage, and a stamp on the floor, thundering his valediction. And forth he went to pay his brief visit to his brother — not caring twopence, as he said, what Lord Wynderbroke thought of him.

Sir Reginald had got into his dressing-gown. He was not now in any pain to speak of, and expressed great surprise at the sudden appearance of his brother.

"You'll take something, won't you?"

"Nothing, thanks," answered David. "I came to beg a favour."

"Oh! did you? You find me very poorly," said the baronet, in a tone that seemed to imply, "You might easily kill me, by imposing the least trouble just now."

"You'll be all the better, Reginald, for this little attack; it is so comfortably established in your foot."

"Comfortably! I wish you felt it," said Sir Reginald, sharply; "and it's confoundedly late. Why didn't you come to dinner?"

David laughed goodhumouredly.

"You forgot, I think, to ask me," said he.

"Well, well, you know there is always a chair and a glass for you; but won't it do to talk about any cursed thing you wish tomorrow? I — I never, by any chance, hear anything agreeable. I have been tortured out of my wits and senses all day long by a tissue of pig-headed, indescribable frenzy. I vow to Heaven there's a conspiracy to drive me into a madhouse, or into my grave; and I declare to my Maker, I wish the first time I'm asleep, some fellow would come in and blow my brains out on the pillow."

"I don't know an easier death," said David; and his brother, who meant it to be terrific, did not pretend to hear him. "I have only a word to say," he continued, "a request you have never refused to other friends, and, in fact, dear Reginald, I ventured to take it for granted you would not refuse me; so I have taken Alice into town, to make me a little visit of a day or two."

"You haven't taken Alice — you don't mean — she's not gone?" exclaimed the baronet, sitting up with a sudden perpendicularity, and staring at his brother as if his eyes were about to leap from their sockets.

"I'll take the best care of her. Yes, she *is* gone," said David.

"But my dear, excellent, worthy — why, curse you, David, you can't possibly have done anything so clumsy! Why, you forgot that Wynderbroke is here; how on earth am I to entertain Wynderbroke without her?"

"Why, it is exactly because Lord Wynderbroke is here, that I thought it the best time for her to make me a visit."

"I protest to Heaven, David, I believe you're deranged! Do you the least know what you are saying?"

"Perfectly. Now, my dear Reginald, let us look at the matter quietly. The girl does not like him; she would not marry him, and never will; she has grown to hate him; his own conduct has made her despise and detest him; and she's not the kind of girl who would marry for a mere title. She has unalterably made up her mind; and these are not times when you can lock a young lady into her room, and starve her into compliance; and Alice is a spirited girl — all the women of our family were. You're no goose like

Wynderbroke — you only need to know that the girl has quite made up her mind, or her heart, or her hatred, or whatever it is, and she won't marry him. It is as well he should know it at first, as at last; and I don't think, if he were a gentleman, peer though he be, he would have been in this house tonight. He counted on his title: he was too sure. I am very proud of Alice. And now he can't bear the mortification — having, like a fool, disclosed his suit to others before it had succeeded — of letting the world know he has been refused; and to this petty vanity he would sacrifice Alice, and prevail on you, if he could, to bully her into accepting him, a plan in which, if he perseveres, I have told him he shall, besides failing ridiculously, give me a meeting; for I will make it a personal quarrel with him."

Sir Reginald sat in his chair, looking very white and wicked, with his eyes gleaming fire on his brother. He opened his mouth once or twice, to speak, but only drew a short breath at each attempt.

David Arden rather wondered that his brother took all this so quietly. If he had observed him a little more closely, he would have seen that his hands were trembling, and perceived also that he had tried repeatedly to speak, and that either voice or articulation failed him. On a sudden he recovered, and regardless of his gout started to his feet, and limped along the floor, exclaiming, —

"Help us — help us — God help us! What's this? My — my — oh, my God! It's very bad!" He was stumping round and round the table, near which he had sat, and restlessly shoving the pamphlets and books hither and thither as he went. "What have I done to earn this curse? — was ever mortal so pursued? The last thing, this was; now all's gone — quite gone — it's over, quite. They've done it — they've done it. Bravo! bravi tutti! brava! All — all, and everything gone! To think of her — only to think of her! She was my pet." (And in his bleak, trembling voice, he cried a horrid curse at her.) "I tell you," he screamed, dashing his hand on the table, at the other end of which he had arrested his monotonous shuffle round it, when his brother caught suddenly his vacant eye, "you think, because I'm down in the world, and you are prosperous, that you can do as you like. If I was where I should be, you daren't. I'll have her back, Sir. I'll have the police with you. I'll — I'll indict you — it's a police-office affair. They'll take her through the streets. Where's the wretch like her? I charge her — let them take her by the shoulder. And my son, Richard — to think of him! — the cursed puppy! — his *post obit*! One foot in the grave, have I? No, I'm not so near smoked out as you take me — I've a long time for it — I've a long life. I'll live to see him broken — without a coat to his back — you villanous, swindling dandy, and I'll — — "

His voice got husky, and he struck his thin fist on the table, and clung to it, and the room was suddenly silent.

David Arden rang the bell violently, and got his arm round his brother, who shook himself feebly, and shrugged, as if he disdained and hated that support.

In came Crozier, who looked aghast, but wheeled his easy-chair close to where he stood, and between them they got him into it, trembling from head to foot.

Martha Tansey came in and lent her aid, and beckoning her to the door, David Arden asked her if she thought him very ill.

"I 'a' seen him just so a dozen times over. He'll be well enough, soon, and if ye knew him as weel in they takins, ye'd ho'd wi' me, there's nothing more than common in't; he's a bit teathy and short-waisted, and always was, and that's how he works himself into them fits."

So spoke Tansey, into whose talk, in moments of excitement, returned something of her old north-country dialect.

"Well, so he was, vexed with me, as with other people, and he has over-excited himself; but as he has this little gout about him, I may as well send out his doctor as I return."

This little conversation took place outside Sir Reginald's room-door, which David did not care to reenter, as his brother might have again become furious on seeing him. So he took his leave of Martha Tansey, and their whispered dialogue ended. One or two sighs and groans showed that Sir Reginald's energies were returning. David Arden walked quickly across the vast hall, in which now burned duskily but a single candle, and let himself out into the clear, cold night; and as he walked down the broad avenue he congratulated himself on having cut the Gordian knot, and liberated his niece.

It was a pleasant walk by the narrow road, with its lofty groining of foliage, down to the village outpost of Islington, where, under the shadow of the old church-spire, he found his cab waiting, with Alice and her maid in it.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AN UNKNOWN FRIEND.

As they drove into town, Uncle David was thinking how awkward it would be if Sir Reginald should have recovered his activity, and dispatched a messenger to recall Alice, and await their arrival at his door. Well, he did not want a quarrel; he hated a fracas; but he would not send Alice back till next morning, come what might; and then he would return with her, and see Lord Wynderbroke again, and take measures to compel an immediate renunciation of his suit. As for Reginald, he would find arguments to reconcile him to the disappointment. At all events, Alice had thrown herself upon his protection, and he would not surrender her except on terms.

Uncle David was silent, having all this matter to ruminate upon. He left a pencilled line for Sir Henry Margate, his brother's physician, and then drove on towards home.

Turning into Saint James's Street, Alice saw her brother standing at the side of a crossing, with a greatcoat and a white muffler on, the air being sharp. A couple of carriages drawn up near the pavement, and the passing of two or three others on the outside, for a moment checked their progress, and Alice, had not the window been up, could have spoken to him as they passed. He did not see them, but the light of a lamp was on his face, and she was shocked to see how ill he looked.

"There is Dick," she said, touching her uncle's arm, "looking so miserable! Shall we speak to him!"

"No, dear, never mind him — he's well enough." David Arden peeped at his nephew as they passed. "He is beginning to take an interest in what really concerns him."

She looked at her uncle, not understanding his meaning.

"We can talk of it another time, dear," he added with a cautionary glance at the maid, who sat in the corner at the other side.

Richard Arden was on his way to the place where he meant to recover his losses. He had been playing deep at Colonel Marston's lodgings, but not yet luckily. He thought he had used his credit there as far as he could successfully press it.

The polite young men who had their supper there that night, and played after he left till nearly five o'clock in the morning, knew perfectly what he had lost at the Derby; but they did not know how perilously, on the whole, he was already involved. Was Richard Arden, who had lost nearly seven hundred pounds at Colonel Marston's little gathering, though he had not paid them yet, now quite desperate? By no means. It is true he had, while Vandeleur was out, made an excursion to the City, and, on rather hard terms, secured a loan of three hundred pounds — a trifle which, if luck favoured, might grow to a fortune; but which, if it proved contrary, half an hour would see out.

He had locked this up in his desk, as a reserve for a theatre quite different from Marston's little party; and on his way to that more public and also more secret haunt, he had called at his lodgings for it. It was not that small deposit that cheered him, but a curious and unexpected little note which he found there. It presented by no means a gentlemanlike exterior. The hand was a round clerk's-hand, with flourishing capitals, on an oblong blue envelope, with a vulgar little device. A dun, he took it to be; and he was not immediately relieved when he read at the foot of it, "Levi." Then he glanced to the top, and read, "DEAR SIR."

This easy form of address he read with proper disdain.

"I am instructed by a most respectable party who is desirous to assist you, to the figure of £1,000 or upwards, at nominal discounts, to meet you and ascertain your wishes thereupon, if possible tonight, lest you should suffer inconvenience.

"Yours truly, "ISRAEL LEVI.

"P.S. — In furtherance of the above, I shall be at Dignum's Divan, Strand, from 11 P.M. tonight to 1 A.M."

Here then, at last, was a sail in sight!

With this note in his pocket, he walked direct to the place of rendezvous, in the Strand. It was on his way that, unseen by him, his sister and his uncle had observed him, on their drive to David Arden's house.

There were two friends only whom he strongly suspected of this very well-timed interposition — there was Lady May Penrose, and there was Uncle David. Lady May was rich, and quite capable of a generous sacrifice for him. Uncle David, also rich, would like to show an intimidating front, as he had done, but would hardly like to see him go to the wall. There was, I must confess, a trifling bill due to Mr. Longcluse, who had kindly got or given him cash for it. It was something less than a hundred pounds — a mere nothing; but in their altered relations, it would not do to permit any miscarriage of this particular bill. He might have risked it in the frenzy of play. But to stoop to ask quarter from Longcluse was more than his pride could endure. No; nor would the humiliation avail to arrest the consequences of his neglect. In the general uneasiness and horror of his situation, this little point was itself a centre of torture, and now his unknown friend had come to the rescue, and in the golden sunshine of his promise it, like a hundred minor troubles, was dissolving.

In Pall Mall he jumped into a cab, feeling strangely like himself again. The lights, the clubs, the well-known perspectives, the stars above him, and the gliding vehicles and figures that still peopled the streets, had recovered their old cheery look; he was again in the upper world, and his dream of misery had broken up and melted. Under the great coloured lamp, yellow, crimson, and blue, that overhung the pavement, emblazoned on every side with transparent arabesques, and in gorgeous capitals proclaiming to all whom it might concern "DIGNUM'S DIVAN," he dismissed his cab, took his counter in the cigar shop, and entered the great rooms beyond. The first of these, as many of my readers remember, was as large as a good-sized Methodist Chapel; and five billiard-tables, under a blaze of gas, kept the many-coloured balls rolling, and the marker busy, calling "Blue on brown, and pink your player," and so forth; and gentlemen young and old, Christians and Hebrews, in their shirtsleeves, picked up shillings when they took "lives," or knocked the butts of their cues fiercely on the floor when they unexpectedly lost them.

Among a very motley crowd, Richard Arden slowly sauntering through the room found Mr. Levi, whose appearance he already knew, having once or twice had occasion to consult him financially. His play was over for the night. The slim little Jew, with black curly head, large fierce black eyes, and sullen mouth, stood with his hands in his pockets, gaping luridly over the table where he had just, he observed to his friend Isaac Blumer, who did not care if he was hanged, "losht sheven pound sheventeen, ash I'm a shinner!"

Mr. Levi saw Richard Arden approaching, and smiled on him with his wide show of white fangs. Richard Arden approached Mr. Levi with a grave and haughty face. Here, to be sure, was nothing but what Horace Walpole used to call "the mob." Not a human being whom he knew was in the room; still he would have preferred seeing Mr. Levi at his office; and the audacity of his presuming to grin in that familiar fashion! He would have liked to fling one of the billiard-balls in his teeth. In a freezing tone, and with his head high, he said, —

"I think you are Mr. Levi."

"The shame," responded Levi, still smiling; "and 'ow ish Mr. Harden thish evening?"

"I had a note from you," said Arden, passing by Mr. Levi's polite inquiry, "and I should like to know if any of that money you spoke of may be made available tonight."

"Every shtiver," replied the Jew cheerfully.

"I can have it all? Well, this is rather a noisy place," hesitated Richard Arden, looking around him.

"I can get into Mishter Dignum's book-offish here, Mr. Harden, and it won't take a moment. I haven't notes, but I'll give you our cheques, and there'sh no place in town they won't go down as slick as gold. I'll fetch you to where there's pen and ink."

"Do so," said he.

In a very small room, where burned a single jet of gas, Mr. Arden signed a promissory note for, £1,012 10s., for which Mr. Levi handed him cheques of his firm for £1,000.

Having exchanged these securities, Richard Arden said —

"I wish to put one or two questions to you, Mr. Levi." He glanced at a clerk who was making "tots" from a huge folio before him, on a slip of paper, and transferring them to a small book, with great industry.

Levi understood him and beckoned in silence, and when they both stood in the passage he said —

"If you want a word private with me, Mr. Harden, where there'sh no one can shee us, you'll be as private as the deshert of Harabia if you walk round the corner of the shtreet."

Arden nodded, and walked out into the Strand, accompanied by Mr. Levi. They turned to the left, and a few steps brought them to the corner of Cecil

Street. The street widens a little after you pass its narrow entrance. It was still enough to justify Mr. Levi's sublime comparison. The moon shone mistily on the river, which was dotted and streaked, at its further edge with occasional red lights from windows, relieved by the black reflected outline of the building which made their background. At the foot of the street, at that time, stood a clumsy rail, and Richard Arden leaned his arm on this, as he talked to the Jew, who had pulled his short cloak about him; and in the faint light he could not discern his features, near as he stood, except, now and then, his white eyeballs, faintly, as he turned, or his teeth when he smiled.

CHAPTER XLVII.

BY THE RIVER.

“You mentioned, Mr. Levi, in your note, that you were instructed, by some person who takes an interest in me, to open this business,” said Richard Arden, in a more conciliatory tone. “Will your instructions permit you to tell me who that person is?”

“No, no,” drawled Mr. Levi, with a slow shake of his head; “I declare to you sholemnly, Mr. Harden, I couldn’t. I’m employed by a third party, and though I may make a tolerable near guess who’s firsht fiddle in the bishness, I can’t shay nothin’.”

“Surely you can say this — it is hardly a question, I am so sure of it — is the friend who lends this money a gentleman?”

“I think the pershon as makesh the advanshe is a bit of a shwell. There, now, that’sh enough.”

“But I said a *gentleman*,” persisted Arden.

“You mean to ask, hashn’t a lady got nothing to do with it?”

“Well, suppose I do?”

Mr. Levi shook his head slowly, and all his white teeth showed dimly, as he answered with an unctuous significance that tempted Arden strongly to pitch him into the river.

“We puts the ladiesh first; ladiesh and shentlemen, that’s the way it goes at the theaytre; if a good-looking chap’s a bit in a fix, there’sh no one like a lady to pull him through.”

“I really want to know,” said Richard Arden, with difficulty restraining his fury. “I have some relations who are likely enough to give me a lift of this kind; some *are* ladies, and some gentlemen, and I have a right to know to whom I owe this money.”

“To our firm; who elshe? We have took your paper, and you have our cheques on Childs’.”

“*Your* firm lend money at five per cent.!” said Arden with contempt. “You forget, Mr. Levi, you mentioned in your note, distinctly, that you act for another person. Who *is* that principal for whom you act?”

"I don't know."

"Come, Mr. Levi! you are no simpleton; you may as well tell me — no one shall be a bit the wiser — for I *will* know."

"Azh I'm a shinner — as I hope to be shaved — — " began Mr. Levi.

"It won't do — you may just as well tell me — out with it!"

"Well, here now; I don't know, but if I did, upon my shoul, I wouldn't tell you."

"It is pleasant to meet with so much sensitive honour, Mr. Levi," said Richard Arden very scornfully. "I have nothing particular to say, only that your firm were mistaken, a little time ago, when they thought that I was without resources; I've friends, you now perceive, who only need to learn that I want money, to volunteer assistance. Have you anything more to say?"

Richard Arden saw the little Jew's fine fangs again displayed in the faint light, as he thus spoke; but it was only prudent to keep his temper with this lucky intervenient.

"I have nothing to shay, Mr. Harden, only there'sh more where that came from, and I may tell you sho, for that'sh no shecret. But don't you go too fasht, young gentleman — not that you won't get it — but don't you go too fasht."

"If I should ever ask your advice, it will be upon other things. I'm giving the lender as good security as I have given to any one else. I don't see any great wonder in the matter. Goodnight," he said haughtily, not taking the trouble to look over his shoulder as he walked away.

"Goodnight," responded Mr. Levi, taking one of Dignum's cigars from his waistcoat-pocket, and preparing to light it with a lazy grin, as he watched the retreating figure lessening in the perspective of the street, "and take care of yourshelf for my shake, *do*, and don't you be lettin' all them fine women be throwin' their fortunes like that into your 'at, and bringin' themshelves to the workus, for love of your pretty fashe — poor, dear, love-sick little fools! There you go, right off to Mallet and Turner's, I dareshay, and good luck attend you, for a reglar lady-killin', 'ansome, sweet-spoken, broken-down jackass!"

At this period of his valediction the vesuvian was applied to his cigar, and Richard Arden, turning the far corner of the street, escaped the remainder of his irony, as the Jew, with his hands in his pockets, sauntered up its quiet pavement, in the direction in which Richard Arden had just disappeared. It seemed to that young gentleman that his supplies, no less than thirteen hundred pounds, would all but command the luck of which, as his spirits rose, he began to feel confident. “Fellows,” he thought, “who have gone in with less than fifty, have come out, to my knowledge, with thousands; and if less than fifty could do that, what might not be expected from thirteen hundred?”

He picked up a cab. Never did lover fly more impatiently to the feet of his mistress than Richard Arden did, that night, to the shrine of the goddess whom he worshipped.

The muttered scoffs, the dark fiery gaze, the glimmering teeth of this mocking, malicious little Jew, represented an influence that followed Richard Arden that night.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

SUDDEN NEWS.

What is luck? Is there such an influence? What type of mind rejects altogether, and consistently, this law or power? Call it by what name you will, fate or fortune, did not Napoleon, the man of death and of action, and did not Swedenborg, the man of quietude and visions, acknowledge it? Where is the successful gamester who does not “back his luck,” when once it has declared itself, and bow before the storms of fortune when they in turn have set in? I take Napoleon and Swedenborg — the man of this visible world, and the man of the invisible world — as the representatives of extreme types of mind. People who have looked into Swedenborg’s works will remember curious passages on the subject, and find more dogmatical, and less metaphysical admissions in Napoleon’s conversations everywhere.

In corroboration of this theory, that luck is an element, with its floods and ebbs, against which it is fatuity to contend, was the result of Richard Arden’s play.

Before halfpast two, he had lost every guinea of his treasure. He had been drinking champagne. He was flushed, dismal, profoundly angry. Hot and headachy, he was ready to choke with gall. There was a big, red-headed, vulgar fellow beside him, with a broad-brimmed white hat, who was stuffing his pockets and piling the table before him, as though he had found the secret of an “open sesame,” and was helping himself from the sacks of the Forty Thieves.

When Richard had lost his last pound, he would have liked to smash the gas-lamps and windows, and the white hat and the red head in it, and roar the blasphemy that rose to his lips. But men can’t afford to make themselves ridiculous, and as he turned about to make his unnoticed exit, he saw the little Jew, munching a sandwich, with a glass of champagne beside him.

“I say,” said Richard Arden, walking up to the little man, whose big mouth was full of sandwich, and whose fierce black eyes encountered his instantaneously, “you don’t happen to have a little more, on the same terms, about you?”

Mr. Levi waited to bolt his sandwich, and then swallow down his champagne.

“Shave me!” exclaimed he, when this was done. “The thoushand gone! every rag! and” (glancing at his watch) “only two twenty-five! Won’t it be raytherr young, though, backin’ such a run o’ bad luck, and throwin’ good money after bad, Mr. Harden?”

“That’s my affair, I fancy; what I want to know is whether you have got a few hundreds more, on the same terms — I mean, from the same lender. Hang it, say yes or no — can’t you?”

“Well, Mr. Harden, there’s five hundred more — but ’twasn’t expected you’d a’ drew it so soon. How much do you say, Mr. Harden?”

“I’ll take it all,” said Richard Arden. “I wish I could have it without these blackguards seeing.”

“They don’t care, blesh ye! if you got it from the old boy himself. That *is* a rum un!” There were pen and ink on a small table beside the wall, at which Mr. Levi began rapidly to fill in the blanks of a bill of exchange. “Why, there’s not one o’ them, almost, but takes a hundred now and then from me, when they runs out a bit too fast. You’d better shay one month.”

“Say two, like the other, and don’t keep me waiting.”

“You’d better shay one — your friend will think you’re going a bit too quick to the devil. Remember, as your proverb shays, ‘taint the thing to kill the gooshe that laysh the golden eggs — shay one month.”

Levi’s large black eye was fixed on him, and he added, “If you want it pushed on a bit when it comes due, there won’t be no great trouble about it, I calculate.”

Richard Arden looked at the large fierce eyes that were silently fixed on him: one of those eyes winked solemnly and significantly.

“Well, what way you like, only be quick,” said Richard Arden.

His new sheaf of cheques were quickly turned into counters; and, after various fluctuations, these counters followed the rest, and in the grey morning he left that haunt jaded and savage, with just fifteen pounds in his pocket, the wreck of the large sum which he had borrowed to restore his fortunes.

It needs some little time to enable a man, who has sustained such a shock as Richard Arden had, to collect his thoughts and define the magnitude of his calamity. He let himself in by a latchkey: the grey light was streaming through the shutters, and turning the chintz pattern of his window-curtains here and there, in streaks, into transparencies. He went into his room and swallowed nearly a tumbler of brandy, then threw off his clothes, drank some more, and fell into a flushed stupor, rather than a sleep, and lay for hours as still as any dead man on the field of battle.

Some four hours of this lethargy, and he became conscious, at intervals, of a sound of footsteps in his room. The shutters were still closed. He thought he heard a voice say, "Master Richard!" but he was too drowsy, still, to rouse himself.

At length a hand was laid upon him, and a voice that was familiar to his ear repeated twice over, more urgently, "Master Richard! Master Richard!" He was now awake: very dimly, by his bedside, he saw a figure standing. Again he heard the same words, and wondered, for a few seconds, where he was.

"That's Crozier talking," said Richard.

"Yes, Sir," said Crozier, in a low tone; "I'm here half-an-hour, Sir, waiting till you should wake."

"Let in some light; I can't see you."

Crozier opened half the window-shutter, and drew the curtain.

"Are ye ailin', Master Richard — are ye bad, Sir?"

"Ailing — yes, I'm bad enough, as you say — I'm miserable. I don't know where to turn or what to do. Hold my coat while I count what's in the pocket. If my father, the old scoundrel — — "

"Master Richard, don't ye say the like o' that no more; all's over, this morning, wi' the old master — Sir Reginald's dead, Sir," said the old follower, sternly.

"Good God!" cried Richard, starting up in his bed and staring at old Crozier with a frightened look.

"Ay, Sir," said the old servant, in a low stern tone, "he's gone at last: he was took just a quarter past five this mornin', by the clock at Mortlake, about four minutes before St. Paul's chimed the quarter. The wind being southerly, we heard the chimes. We thought he was all right, and I did not leave him until halfpast twelve o'clock, having given him his drops, and waited till he went asleep. It was about three he rang his bell, and in I goes that minute, and finds him sitting up in his bed, talking quite silly-like about old Wainbridge, the groom, that's dead and buried, away in Skarkwynd Churchyard, these thirty year."

Crozier paused here. He had been crying hours ago, and his eyes and nose still showed evidences of that unbecoming weakness. Perhaps he expected Richard, now Sir Richard Arden, to say something, but nothing came.

"'Tis a change, Sir, and I feel a bit queer; and as I was sayin', when I went in, 'twas in his head he saw Tom Wainbridge leadin' a horse saddled and all into the room, and standin' by the side of his bed, with the bridle in his hand, and holdin' the stirrup for him to mount. 'And what the devil brings Wainbridge here, when he has his business to mind in Yorkshire? and where could he find a horse like that beast? He's waiting for me; I can hear the roarin' brute, and I see Tom's parchment face at the door — *there*,' he'd say, 'and *there* — where are your eyes, Crozier, can't you see, man? Don't be afraid — can't you look — and don't you hear him? Wainbridge's old nonsense.' And he'd laugh a bit to himself every now and again, and then he'd whimper to me, looking a bit frightened, 'Get him away, Crozier, will you? He's annoying me, he'll have me out,' and this sort o' talk he went on wi' for full twenty minutes. I rang the bell to Mrs. Tansey's room, and when she was come we agreed to send in the brougham for the doctor. I think he was a bit wrong i' the garrets, and we were both afraid to let it be no longer."

Crozier paused for a moment, and shook his head.

"We thought he was goin' asleep, but he wasn't. His eyes was half shut, and his shoulders against the pillows, and Mrs. Tansey was drawin' the eider-down coverlet over his feet, softly, when all on a sudden — I thought he was laughin' — a noise like a little flyrin' laugh, and then a long, frightful yellock, that would make your heart tremble, and awa' wi' him into one o' them fits, and so from one into another, until when the doctor came he said he was in an apoplexy; and so, at just a quarter past five the auld master departed. And I came in to tell you, Sir; and have you any orders to give me, Master Richard? and I'm going on, I take it you'd wish me, to your uncle, Mr. David, and little Miss Alice, that han't heard nout o' the matter yet."

“Yes, Crozier — go,” said Richard Arden, staring on him as if his soul was in his eyes; and, after a pause, with an effort, he added— “I’ll call there as I go on to Mortlake; tell them I’ll see them on my way.”

When Crozier was gone, Richard Arden got up, threw his dressing-gown about him, and sat on the side of his bed, feeling very faint. A sudden gush of tears relieved the strange paroxysm. Then come other emotions less unselfish. He dressed hastily. He was too much excited to make a breakfast. He drank a cup of coffee, and drove to Uncle David’s house.

CHAPTER XLIX.

VOWS FOR THE FUTURE.

As he drove to his uncle’s house, he was tumbling over facts and figures, in the endeavour to arrive at some conclusion as to how he stood in the balance-sheet that must now be worked out. What a thing that post-obit had turned out! Those cursed Jews who had dealt with him must have known ever so much more about his poor father’s health than he did. They are such fellows to worm out the secrets of a family — all through one’s own servants, and doctors, and apothecaries. The spies! They stick at nothing — such liars! How they pretended to wish to be off! What torture they kept him in! How they talked of the old man’s nervous fibre, and pretended to think he would live for twenty years to come!

“And the deed was not six weeks signed when I found out he had those epileptic fits, and they knew it, the wretches! — and so I’ve been hit for that huge sum of money. And there is interest, two years’ nearly, on that other charge, and that swindle that half ruined me on the Derby. And there are those bills that Levi has got, but that is only fifteen hundred, and I can manage that any time, and a few other trifles.”

And he thought what yeoman’s service Longcluse might and *would* have rendered him in this situation. How translucent the whole opaque complexity would have become in a hour or two, and at what easy interest he would have procured him funds to adjust these complications! But here, too, fortune had dealt maliciously. What a piece of cross-grained luck that Longcluse should have chosen to fall in love with Alice! And now they two had exchanged, not shots, but insults, harder to forgive. And that officious fool, Vandeleur, had laid him open to a more direct and humiliating affront than had before befallen him. Henceforward, between him and Longcluse no reconciliation was possible. Fiery and proud by nature was this Richard Arden, and resentful. In Yorkshire the family had been accounted a vindictive race. I don’t know. I have only to do with those inheritors of the name who figure in this story.

There remained an able accountant and influential man on ’Change, on whose services he might implicitly reckon — his uncle, David Arden. But he was separated from him by the undefinable chasm of years — the want of sympathy, the sense of authority. He would take not only the management of this financial adjustment, but the carriage of the future of this young, handsome, full-blooded fellow, who had certainly no wish to take unto himself a Mentor.

Here have been projected on this page, as in the disk of an oxy-hydrogen microscope, some of the small and active thoughts that swarmed almost unsuspected in Richard Arden’s mind. But it would be injustice to Sir Richard Arden (we may as well let him enjoy at once the title which stately Death has just presented him with — it seems to me a mocking obeisance) to pretend that higher and kinder feelings had no place in his heart.

Suddenly redeemed from ruin, suddenly shocked by an awful spectacle, a disturbance of old associations where there had once been kindness, where estrangements and enmity had succeeded: there was in all this something moving and agitating, that stirred his affections strangely when he saw his sister.

David Arden had left his house an hour before the news reached its inmates. Sir Richard was shown to the drawingroom, where there was no one to receive him; and in a minute Alice, looking very pale and miserable, entered, and running up to him, without saying a word threw her arms about his neck, and sobbed piteously.

Her brother was moved. He folded her to his heart. Broken and hurried words of tenderness and affection he spoke, as he kissed her again and again. Henceforward he would live a better and wiser life. He had tasted the dangers and miseries that attend on play. He swore he would give it up. He had done with the follies of his youth. But for years he had not had a home. He was thrown into the thick of temptation. A fellow who had no home was so likely to amuse himself with play; and he had suffered enough to make him hate it, and she should see what a brother he would be, henceforward, to her.

Alice’s heart was bursting with self-reproach; she told Richard the whole story of her trouble of the day before, and the circumstances of her departure from Mortlake, all in an agony of tears; and declared, as young ladies often have done before, that she never could be happy again.

He was disappointed, but generous and gentle feelings had been stirred within him.

"Don't reproach yourself, darling; that is mere folly. The entire responsibility of your leaving Mortlake belongs to my uncle; and about Wynderbroke, you must not torment yourself; you had a right to a voice in the matter, surely, and I daresay you would not be happier now if you had been less decided, and found yourself at this moment committed to marry him. I have more reason to upbraid myself, but I'm sure I was right, though I sometimes lost my temper; I know my Uncle David thinks I was right; but there is no use now in thinking more about it; right or wrong, it is all over, and I won't distract myself uselessly. I'll try to be a better brother to you than I ever *have* been; and I'll make Mortlake our headquarters: or we'll live, if you like it better, at Arden Manor, or I'll go abroad with you. I'll lay myself out to make you happy. One thing I'm resolved on, and that is to give up play, and find some manly and useful pursuit; and you'll see I'll do you some credit yet, or at least, as a country squire, do some little good, and be not quite useless in my generation; and I'll do my best, dear Alice, to make you a happy home, and to be all that I ought to be to you, my darling."

Very affectionately he both spoke and felt, and left Alice with some of her anxieties lightened, and already more interest in the future than she had thought possible an hour before.

Richard Arden had a good deal upon his hands that morning. He had money liabilities that were urgent. He had to catch his friend Mardykes at his lodgings, and get him to see the people in whose betting-books he stood for large figures, to represent to them what had happened, and assure them that a few days should see all settled. Then he had to go to the office of his father's attorney, and learn whether a will was forthcoming; then to consult with his own attorney, and finally to follow his uncle, David Arden, from place to place, and find him at last at home, and talk over details, and advise with him generally about many things, but particularly about the further dispositions respecting the funeral; for a little note from his Uncle David had offered to relieve him of the direction of those hateful details transacted with the undertaker, which every one is glad to depute.

CHAPTER L.

UNCLE DAVID’S SUSPICIONS.

Mr. David Arden, therefore, had made a call at the office of Paller, Crapely, Plumes, and Co., eminent undertakers in the most gentlemanlike, and, indeed, aristocratic line of business, with immense resources at command, and who would undertake to bury a duke, with all the necessary draperies, properties, and *dramatis personæ*, if required, before his grace was cold in his bed.

A little dialogue occurred here, which highly interested Uncle David. A stout gentleman, with a muddy and melancholy countenance, and a sad suavity of manner, and in the perennial mourning that belongs to gentlemen of his doleful profession, presents himself to David Arden, to receive his instructions respecting the deceased baronet’s obsequies. The top of his head is bald, his face is furrowed and baggy; he looks fully sixty-five, and he announces himself as the junior partner, Plumes by name.

Having made his suggestions and his notes, and taken his order for a strictly private funeral in the neighbourhood of London, Mr. Plumes thoughtfully observes that he remembers the name well, having been similarly employed for another member of the same family.

“Ah! How was that? How long ago?” asked Mr. Arden.

“About twenty years, Sir.”

“And where was that funeral?”

“The same place, Sir, Mortlake.”

“Yes, I know that was —— ?”

“It was Mr. ‘Enry, or raything ‘Arry Harden. We ‘ad to take back the plate, Sir, and change ‘Enry to ‘Arry— ‘Arry being the name he was baptised by. There was a hinquest connected with that horder.”

“So there was, Mr. Plumes,” said Uncle David with awakened interest, for that gentleman spoke as if he had something more to say on the subject.

“There was, Sir, — and it affected me very sensibly. My niece, Sir, had a wery narrow escape.”

“Your niece! Really? How could that be?”

“There was a Mister Yelland Mace, Sir, who paid his haddresses to her, and I do believe, Sir, she raything liked him. I don’t know, I’m sure, whether he was serious in ‘is haddresses, but it looked very like as if he meant to speak; though I do suppose he was looking ‘igher for a wife. Well, he was believed to ‘ave ‘ad an ‘and in that ‘orrible business.”

“I know — so he undoubtably had — and the poor young lady, I suppose, was greatly shocked and distressed.”

“Yes, Sir, and she died about a year after.”

David Arden expressed his regret, and then he asked —

“You have often seen that man, Yelland Mace?”

“Not often, Sir.”

“You remember his face pretty well, I daresay?”

“Well, no, Sir, not very well. It is a long time.”

“Do you recollect whether there was anything noticeable in his features? — had he, for instance, a remarkably prominent nose?”

“I don’t remember that he ‘ad, Sir. I rather think not, but I can’t by no means say for certain. It is a long time, and I ‘aven’t much of a memory for faces. There is a likeness of him among my poor niece’s letters.”

“Really? I should be so much obliged if you would allow me to see it.”

“It is at ‘ome, Sir, but I shall be ‘ome to dinner before I go out to Mortlake; and, if you please, I shall borrow it of my sister, and take it with me.”

This offer David Arden gladly accepted.

When the events were recent, he could have no difficulty in identifying Yelland Mace, by the evidence of fifty witnesses, if necessary. But it was another thing now. The lapse of time had made matters very different. It was recent impressions of a vague kind about Mr. Longcluse that had revived the idea, and prompted a renewal of the search. Martha Tansey was aged now, and he had misgivings about the accuracy of her recollection. Was it possible, after all, that he was about to see that which would corroborate his first vague suspicions?

Sir Richard had a busy and rather harassing day, the first of his succession to an old title and a new authority, and he was not sorry when it closed. He had stolen about from place to place in a hired cab, and leaned back to avoid a chance recognition, like an absconding debtor; and had talked with the people whom he was obliged to call on and see, in low and hurried colloquy, through the window of the cab. And now night had fallen, the lamps were glaring, and tired enough he returned to his lodgings, sent for his tailor, and arranged promptly about the

“ —— inky cloak, good mother, And customary suits of solemn black;”

and that done, he wrote two or three notes to kindred in Yorkshire, with whom it behoved him to stand on good terms; and then he determined to drive out to Mortlake Hall. An unpleasant mixture of feelings was in his mind as he thought of that visit, and the cold tenant of the ancestral house, whom in the grim dignity of death, it would not have been seemly to leave for a whole day and night unvisited. It was to him a repulsive visit, but how could he postpone it?

Behold him, then, leaning back in his cab, and driving through glaring lamps, and dingy shops, and narrow ill-thriven streets, eastward and northward; and now, through the little antique village, with trembling lights, and by the faded splendours of the “Guy of Warwick.” And he sat up and looked out of the windows, as they entered the narrow road that is darkened by the tall overhanging timber of Mortlake grounds.

Now they are driving up the broad avenue, with its noble old trees clumped at either side; and with a shudder Sir Richard Arden leans back and moves no more until the cab pulls up at the doorsteps, and the knock sounds through hall and passages, which he dared not so have disturbed, uninvited, a day or two before. Crozier ran down the steps to greet Master Richard.

“How are you, old Crozier?” he said, shaking hands from the cab-window, for somehow he liked to postpone entering the house as long as he could. “I could not come earlier. I have been detained in town all day by business, of various kinds, connected with this.” And he moved his hand toward the open hall-door, with a gloomy nod or two. “How is Martha?”

“Tolerable, Sir, thankye, considerin’. It’s a great upset to her.”

“Yes, poor thing, of course. And has Mr. Paller been here — the person who is to — to — — “

“The undertaker? Yes, Sir, he was here at two o’clock, and some of the people has been busy in the room, and his men has come out again with the coffin, Sir. I think they’ll soon be leaving; they’ve been here a quarter of an hour, and — if I may make bold to ask, Sir, — what day will the funeral be?”

"I don't know myself, Crozier; I must settle that with my uncle. He said he thought he would come here himself this evening, at about nine, and it must be very near that now. Where is Martha?"

"In her room, Sir, I think."

"I won't see her there. Ask her to come to the oak-room."

Richard got out and entered the house of which he was now the master, with an oppressive misgiving.

The oak-parlour was a fine old room, and into the panels were set four full-length portraits. Two of these were a lady and gentleman, in the costume of the beginning of Charles the Second's reign. The lady held an Italian greyhound by a blue ribbon, and the gentleman stood booted for the field, and falcon on fist. It struck Richard, for the first time, how wonderfully like Alice that portrait of the beautiful lady was. He raised the candle to examine it. There was a story about this lady. She had been compelled to marry the companion portrait, with the hawk on his hand, and those beautiful lips had dropped a curse, in her despair, when she was dying, childless, and wild with grief. She prayed that no daughter of the house of Arden might ever wed the man of her love, and it was said that a fatality had pursued the ladies of that family, which looked like the accomplishment of the malediction; and a great deal of curious family lore was connected with this legend and portrait.

As he held the candle up to this picture, still scanning its features, the door slowly opened, and Martha Tansey, arrayed in a black silk dress of a fashion some twenty years out of date, came in. He set down the candle, and took the old woman's hand, and greeted her very kindly.

"How's a' wi' you, Master Richard? A dowly house ye've come too. Ye didna look to see this sa soon?"

"Very sudden, Martha — awfully sudden. I could not let the day pass without coming out to see you."

"Not me, Master Richard, but to ha'e a last look at the face of the father that begot ye. He'll be shrouded and coffined by this time — the light 'ill not be lang on that face. The lid will be aboon it and screwed down tomorrow, I dar' say. Ay, there goes the undertaker's men; and there's a man from Mr. Paller — Mr. Plumes is his name — that says he'll stay till your Uncle David comes, for he told him he had something very particular to say to him; and I desired him to wait in my room after his business about the poor master was over; and the a'ad things is passin' awa' and it's time auld Martha was fittin' herself."

"Don't say that, Martha, unless you would have me think you expect to find me less kind than my father was."

"There's good and there's bad in every one, Master Richard. Ye can't take it in meal and take it in malt. A bit short-waisted he was, there's no denyin', and a sharp word now and again; but none so hard to live wi' as many a one that was cooler-tempered, and more mealy-mouthed; and I think ye were o'er hard wi' him, Master Richard. Ye should have opened the estate. It was that killed him," she continued considerately. "Ye broke his heart, Master Richard; he was never the same man after he fell out wi' you."

"Some day, Martha, you'll learn all about it," said he gently. "It was no fault of mine — ask my Uncle David. I'm not the person to persuade you; and, beside, I have not courage to talk over that cruel quarrel now."

"Come and see him," said the old woman grimly, taking up the candle.

"No, Martha, no; set it down again — I'll not go."

"And when will you see him?"

"Another time — not now — I can't."

"He's laid in his coffin now; they'll be out again in the mornin'. If you don't see him now, ye'll never see him; and what will the folk down in Yorkshire say, when it's told at Arden Court that Master Richard never looked on his dead father's face, nor saw more of him after his flittin' than the plate on his coffin. By Jen! 'twill stir the blood o' the old tenants and gar them clench their fists and swear, I warrant, at the very sound o' yer name; for there never was an Arden died yet, at Arden Court, but he was waked, and treated wi' every respect, and visited by every living soul of his kindred, for ten mile round."

"If you think so, Martha, say no more. I'll — go as well now as another time — and, as you say, sooner or later it must be done."

CHAPTER LI.

THE SILHOUETTE.

"He's lookin' very nice and like himself," mumbled the old woman, as she led the way.

At the open door of Sir Reginald's room stood Mr. Plumes, in professional black with a pensive and solemn countenance, intending politely to do the honours.

"Thank you, Sir," said the old woman graciously, taking the lead in the proceedings. "This is the young master, and he won't mind troublin' you, Mr. Plumes. If you please to go to my room, Sir, the third door on the right, you'll find tea made, Sir; and Mr. Crozier, I think, will be there."

And having thus disposed of the stranger, they entered the room, in which candles were burning.

Sir Reginald had, as it were, already made dispositions for his final journey. He had left his bed, and lay instead, in the handsomely upholstered coffin which stood on tressels beside it. Thin and fixed were the cold, earthly features that looked upward from their white trimmings. Sir Richard Arden checked his step and held his breath as he came in sight of these stern lineaments. The pale light that surrounds the dead face of the martyr was wanting here: in its stead, upon selfish lines and contracted features, a shadow stood.

Mrs. Tansey, with a feather-brush placed near, drove away a fly that was trying to alight on the still face.

"I mind him when he was a boy," she said, with a groan and a shake of the head. "There was but six years between us, and the life that's ended is but a dream, all like yesterday — nothing to look back on; and, I'm sure, if there's rest for them that has been troubled on earth, he's happy now: a blessed change 'twill be."

"Yes, Martha, we all have our troubles."

"Ay, it's well to know that in time: the young seldom does," she answered sardonically.

"I'll go, Martha. I'll return to the oak-room. I wish my uncle were come."

"Well, you have took your last look, and that's but decent, and —— Dear me, Master Richard, you do look bad!"

"I feel a little faint, Martha. I'll go there; and will you give me a glass of sherry?"

He waited at the room door, while Martha nimbly ran to her room, and returned with some sherry and a wine-glass. He had hardly taken a glass, and begun to feel himself better, when David Arden's step was heard approaching from the hall. He greeted his nephew and Martha in a hushed undertone, as he might in church; and then, as people will enter such rooms, he passed in and crossed with a very soft tread, and said a word or two in whispers. You would have thought that Sir Reginald was tasting the sweet slumber of precarious convalescence, so tremendously does death simulate sleep.

When Uncle David followed his nephew to the oak-room, where the servants had now placed candles, he appeared a little paler, as a man might who had just witnessed an operation. He looked through the unclosed shutters on the dark scene; then he turned, and placed his hand kindly on his nephew's arm, and said he, with a sigh —

"Well, Dick, you're the head of the house now; don't run the old ship on the rocks. Remember, it is an old name, and, above all, remember, that Alice is thrown upon your protection. Be a good brother, Dick. She is a true-hearted, affectionate creature: be you the same to her. You can't do your duty by her unless you do it also by yourself. For the first time in your life, a momentous responsibility devolves upon you. In God's name, Dick, give up play and do your duty!"

"I have learned a lesson, uncle; I have not suffered in vain. I'll never take a dice-box in my hand again; I'd as soon take a burning coal. I shall never back a horse again while I live. I am quite cured, thank God, of that madness. I sha'n't talk about it; let time declare how I am changed."

"I am glad to hear you speak so. You are right, that is the true test. Spoken like a man!" said Uncle David, and he took his hand very kindly.

The entrance of Martha Tansey at this moment gave the talk a new turn.

"By-the-bye, Martha," said he, "has Mr. Plumes come? He said he would be here at eight o'clock."

"He's waitin', Sir; and 'twas to tell you so I came in. Shall I tell him to come here?"

"I asked him to come, Dick; I knew you would allow me. He has some information to give me respecting the wretch who murdered your poor Uncle Harry."

"May I remain?" asked Richard.

"Do; certainly."

"Then, Martha, will you tell him to come here?" said Richard, and in another minute the sable garments and melancholy visage of Mr. Plumes entered the room slowly.

When Mr. Plumes was seated, he said, with much deliberation, in reply to Uncle David's question —

"Yes, Sir, I have brought it with me. You said, I think, you wished me to fetch it, and as my sister was at home, she hobleeged me with a loan of it. It belonged, you may remember, to her deceased daughter — my niece. I have got it in my breastpocket; perhaps you would wish me now to take it hout?"

"I'm most anxious to look at it," said Uncle David, approaching with extended hand. "You said you had seen him; was this a good likeness?"

These questions and the answers to them occupied the time during which Mr. Plumes, whose proceedings were slow as a funeral, disengaged the square parcel in question from his pocket, and then went on to loosen the knots in the tape which tied it up, and afterwards to unfold the wrappings of paper which enveloped it.

"I don't remember him well enough, only that he was good-looking. And this was took by machinery, and it *must* be like. The ball and socket they called it. It must be hexact, Sir."

So saying, he produced a square black leather case, which being opened displayed a black profile, the hair and whiskers being indicated by a sort of gilding which, laid upon sable, reminded one of the decorations of a coffin, and harmonised cheerfully with Mr. Plumes' profession.

"Oh!" exclaimed Uncle David with considerable disappointment, "I thought it was a miniature; this is only a silhouette; but you are sure it *is* the profile of Yelland Mace?"

"That is certain, Sir. His name is on the back of it, and she kept it, poor young woman! with a lock of his 'air and some hother relics in her work-box."

By this time Uncle David was examining it with deep interest. The outline demolished all his fancies about Mr. Longcluse. The nose, though delicately formed, was decidedly the ruling feature of the face. It was rather a parrot face, but with a good forehead. David Arden was disappointed. He handed it to his nephew.

"That is a kind of face one would easily remember," he observed to Richard as he looked. "It is not like any one that I know, or *ever* knew."

"No," said Richard; "I don't recollect any one the least like it." And he replaced it in his uncle's hand.

"We are very much obliged to you, Mr. Plumes; it was your mention of it this morning, and my great anxiety to discover all I can respecting that man, Yelland Mace, that induced me to make the request. Thank you very much," said old Mr. Arden, placing the profile in the fat fingers of Mr. Plumes. "You must take a glass of sherry before you leave. And have you got a cab to return in?"

"The men are waiting for me, I thank you, and I have just 'ad my tea, Sir, much obleeged, and I think I had best return to town, gentlemen, as I have some few words to say tonight to our Mr. Trimmer; so, with your leave, gentlemen, I'll wish you goodnight."

And with a solemn bow, first to Mr. Arden, then to the young scion of the house, and lastly a general bow to both, that grave gentleman withdrew.

"I could see no likeness in that thing to any one," repeated old Mr. Arden. "Mr. Longcluse is a friend of yours?" he added a little abruptly.

"I can't say he was a friend; he was an acquaintance, but even that is quite ended."

"What! you don't know him any longer?"

"No."

"You're quite sure!"

"Perfectly."

"Then I may say I'm very glad. I don't like him, and I can't say why; but I can't help connecting him with your poor uncle's death. I must have dreamed about him and forgot the dream, while the impression continues; for I cannot discover in any fact within my knowledge the slightest justification for the unpleasant persuasion that constantly returns to my mind. I could not trace a likeness to him in that silhouette."

He looked at his nephew, who returned his steady look with one of utter surprise.

“Oh, dear! no. There is not a vestige of a resemblance,” said Richard. “I know his features very well.”

“No,” said Uncle David, lowering his eyes to the table, on which he was tapping gently with his fingers; “no, there certainly is not — not any. But I can’t dismiss the suspicion. I can’t get it out of my head, Richard, and yet I can’t account for it,” he said, raising his eyes to his nephew’s. “There is something in it; I could not else be so haunted.”

CHAPTER LII.

MR. LONGCLUSE EMPLOYED.

The funeral was not to be for some days, and then to be conducted in the quietest manner possible. Sir Reginald was to be buried in a small vault under the little church, whose steeple cast its shadow every sunny evening across the garden-hedges of the "Guy of Warwick," and could be seen to the left from the door of Mortlake Hall, among distant trees. Further it was settled by Richard Arden and his uncle, on putting their heads together, that the funeral was to take place after dark in the evening; and even the undertaker's people were kept in ignorance of the exact day and hour.

In the meantime, Mr. Longcluse did not trouble any member of the family with his condolences or inquiries. As a raven perched on a solitary bough surveys the country round, and observes many things — very little noticed himself — so Mr. Longcluse made his observations from his own perch and in his own way. Perhaps he was a little surprised on receiving from Lady May Penrose a note, in the following terms: —

"DEAR MR. LONGCLUSE,

"I have just heard something that troubles me; and as I know of no one who would more readily do me a kindness, I hope you won't think me very troublesome if I beg of you to make me a call tomorrow morning, at any time before twelve.

"Ever yours sincerely, "MAY PENROSE."

Mr. Longcluse smiled darkly, as he read this note again. "It is better to be sought after than to offer one's self."

Accordingly, next morning, Mr. Longcluse presented himself in Lady May's drawingroom; and after a little waiting, that goodnatured lady entered the room. She liked to make herself miserable about the troubles of her friends, and on this occasion, on entering the door, she lifted her hands and eyes, and quickened her step towards Mr. Longcluse, who advanced a step or two to meet her.

"Oh! Mr. Longcluse, it is so kind of you to come," she exclaimed; "I am in such a sea of troubles! and you are such a friend, I know I may tell you.

You have heard, of course, of poor Reginald's death. How horribly sudden! — shocking! and dear Alice is so broken by it! He had been, the day before, so cross — poor Reginald, everybody knows he had a temper, poor old soul! — and had made himself so disagreeable to her, and now she is quite miserable, as if it had been her fault. But no matter; it's not about that. Only do you happen to know of people — bankers or something — called Childers and Ballard?"

"Oh! dear, yes; Childers and Ballard; they are City people, on 'Change — stockbrokers. They are people you can quite rely on, so far as their solvency is concerned."

"Oh! it isn't that. They have not been doing any business for me. It is a very unpleasant thing to speak about, even to a kind friend like you; but I want you to advise what is best to be done; and to ask you, if it is not very unreasonable, to use any influence you can — without trouble, of course, I mean — to prevent anything so distressing as may possibly happen."

"You have only to say, dear Lady May, what I can do. I am too happy to place my poor services at your disposal."

"I knew you would say so," said Lady May, again shaking hands in a very friendly way; "and I know what I say won't go any further. I mean, of course, that you will receive it entirely as a confidence."

Mr. Longcluse was earnest in his assurances of secresy and good faith.

"Well," said Lady May, lowering her voice, "poor Reginald, he was my cousin, you know, so it pains me to say it; but he was a good deal embarrassed; his estates were very much in debt. He owed money to a great many people, I believe."

"Oh! Really?" Mr. Longcluse expressed his well-bred surprise very creditably.

"Yes, indeed; and these people, Childers and Ballard, have something they call a judgment, I think. It is a kind of debt, for about twelve hundred pounds, which they say must be paid at once; and they vow that if it is not they will seize the coffin, and — and — all that, at the funeral. And David Arden is so angry, you can't think! and he says that the money is not owed to them, and that they have no right by law to do any such thing; and that from beginning to end it is a mere piece of extortion. And he won't hear of Richard's paying a farthing of it; and he says that Richard must bring a lawsuit against them, for ever so much money, if they attempt anything of the kind, and that he's sure to win. But that is not what I am thinking of — it is about poor Alice, she is so miserable about the mere chance of its happening. The profanation — the fracas — all so shocking and so public — the funeral, you know."

"You are quite sure of that, Lady May?" said Longcluse.

"I heard it all as I tell you. My man of business told me; and I saw David Arden," she answered.

"Oh! yes; but I mean, with respect to Miss Arden. Does *she*, in particular, so very earnestly desire intervention in this awkward business?"

"Certainly; *only* she — only Miss Arden — only Alice."

He looked down in thought, and then again in her face, paler than usual. He had made up his mind.

"I shall take measures," he said quietly. "I shall do everything — anything in my power. I shall even expose myself to the risk of insult, for her sake; only let it soften her. After I have done it, ask her, not before, to think mercifully of me."

He was going.

"Stay, Mr. Longcluse, just a moment. I don't know what I am to say to you; I am so much obliged. And yet how can I undertake that anything you do may affect other people as you wish?"

"Yes, of course you are right; I am willing to take my chance of that. Only, dear Lady May, will you *write* to her? All I plead for — and it is the *last* time I shall sue to her for anything — is that my folly may be forgotten, and I restored to the humble privileges of an acquaintance."

"But do you really wish me to write? I'll take an opportunity of speaking to her. Would not that be less formal?"

"Perhaps so; but, forgive me, it would not answer. I beg of you to write."

"But why do you prefer my writing?"

"Because I shall then read her answer."

"Then I must tell her that you are to read her reply."

"Certainly, dear Lady May; I meant nothing else."

"Well, Mr. Longcluse, there is no great difficulty."

"I only make it a request, not a condition. I shall do my utmost in any case. Pray tell her that."

"Yes, I'll write to her, as you wish it; or, at least, I'll ask her to put on paper what she desires me to say, and I'll read it to you."

“That will answer as well. How can I thank you?”

“There is no need of thanks. It is I who should thank you for taking, I am afraid, a great deal of trouble so promptly and kindly.”

“I know those people; they are cunning and violent, difficult to deal with, harder to trust,” said Longcluse, looking down in thought. “I should be most happy to settle with them, and afterwards the executor might settle with me at his convenience; but, from what you say, Mr. David Arden and his nephew won’t admit their claim. I don’t believe such a seizure would be legal; but they are people who frequently venture illegal measures, upon the calculation that it would embarrass those against whom they adopt them more than themselves to bring them into court. It is not an easy card to play, you see, and they are people I hate; but I’ll try.”

In another minute Mr. Longcluse had taken his leave, and was gone.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE NIGHT OF THE FUNERAL.

Mr. Longcluse smiled as he sat in his cab, driving Cityward to the office of Messrs. Childers and Ballard.

"How easily, now, one might get up a scene! Let Ballard, the monster — he would look the part well — with his bailiffs, seize the coffin and its precious burden in the church; and I, like Sir Edward Maulay, step forth from behind a pillar to stay the catastrophe. We could make a very fine situation, and I the hero; but the girl is too clever for that, and Richard as sharp — that is, as base — as I; knowing my objects, he would at once see a *plant*, and all would be spoiled. I shall do it in the least picturesque and most probable way. I should like to know the old housekeeper, Mrs. Tansey, better; I should like to be on good terms with her. An awkward meeting with Arden. What the devil do I care? besides, it is but one chance in a hundred. Yes, that is the best way. Can I see Mr. Ballard in his private room for a minute?" he added aloud, to the clerk, Mr. Blotter, behind the mahogany counter, who turned from his desk deferentially, let himself down from his stool, and stood attentive before the great man, with his pen behind his ear.

"Certainly, Mr. Longcluse — certainly, Sir. Will you allow me, Sir, to conduct you?"

Most men would have been peremptorily denied; the more fortunate would have had to await the result of an application to Mr. Ballard; but to Mr. Longcluse all doors flew open, and wherever he went, like Mephistopheles, the witches received him gaily, and the catapes did him homage.

Without waiting for the assistance of Mr. Blotter, he ran up the backstairs familiarly to see Mr. Ballard; and when Mr. Longcluse came down, looking very grave, Mr. Ballard, with the red face and lowering countenance which he could not put off, accompanied him downstairs deferentially, and held open the office-door for him; and could not suppress his grins for some time in the consciousness of the honour he had received. Mr. Ballard hoped that the people over the way had seen Mr. Longcluse step from his door; and mentioned to everyone he talked to for a week, that he had Mr. Longcluse in his private office in consultation — first it was "for a quarter of an hour by the clock over the chimney," speedily it grew to "half-an-hour," and finally to "upwards of an hour, by —— ," with a stare in the face of the wondering, or curious, listener. And when clients looked in, in the course of the day, to consult him, he would say, with a wag of his head and a little looseness about minutes, "There was a man sitting here a minute ago, Mr. Longcluse — you may have met him as you came up the stairs — that could have given us a wrinkle about that;" or, "Longcluse, who was here consulting with me this morning, is clearly of opinion that Italian bonds will be down a quarter by settling day;" or, "Take my advice, and don't burn your fingers with those things, for it is possible something queer may happen any day after Wednesday. I had Longcluse — I daresay you may have heard of him," he parenthesised jocularly— "sitting in that chair to-day for very nearly an hour and a half, and that's a fellow one doesn't sit long with without hearing something worth remembering."

From the attorney of Sir Richard Arden was served upon Messrs. Childers and Ballard, that day, a cautionary notice in very stern terms respecting their threatened attack upon Sir Reginald's funeral appointments and body; to which they replied in terms as sharp, and fixed three o'clock for payment of the bond.

It was a very short mile from Mortlake to that small old church near the "Guy of Warwick," the bit of whose grey spire and the pinnacle of whose weather-cock you could see between the two great clumps of elms to the left. Sir Reginald, feet foremost, was to make this little journey that evening under a grove of black plumes, to the small, quiet room, which he was henceforward to share with his ancestor Sir Hugh Arden, of Mortlake Hall, Baronet, whose pillard monument decorated the little church.

He lies now, soldered up and screwed down, in his strait bed, triply secured in lead, mahogany, and oak, and as safe as "the old woman of Berkeley" hoped to be from the grip of marauders. Once there, and the stone door replaced and mortared in, the irritable old gentleman might sleep the quietest sleep his body had ever enjoyed, to the crack of doom. The space was short, too, which separated that from the bedroom he was leaving; but the interval was "Jew's ground," trespassing on which, it was thought, he ran a great risk of being clutched by frantic creditors. A whisper of the danger had got into the housekeeper's room; and Crozier, whose north-country blood was hot, and temper warlike, had loaded the horse-pistols, and swore that he would shoot the first man who laid a hand unfriendly on the old master's coffin.

There was an agitation simmering under the grim formalities and tip-toe treadings of the house of death. Martha Tansey grew frightened, angry as she was, and told Richard Arden that Crozier was "neither to hold nor to bind, and meant to walk by the hearse, and stand by the coffin till it was shut into the vault, with loaded pistols in his coatpockets, and would make food for worms so sure as they villains dar'd to interrupt the funeral."

Whereupon Richard saw Crozier, took the pistols from him, shook him very hard by the hand, for he liked him all the more, and told him that he would desire nothing better than their attempting to accomplish their threats, as he was well advised the law would make examples of them. Then he went upstairs, and saw Alice, and he could not help thinking how her black crapes became her. He kissed her, and, sitting down beside her, said, —

"Martha Tansey says, darling, that you are unhappy about something she has been telling you concerning this miserable funeral. She ought not to have alarmed you about it. If I had known that you were frightened, or, in fact, knew anything about it, I should have made a point of coming out here yesterday, although I had fifty things to do."

"I had a very goodnatured note to-day, Dick, from Lady May," she said— "only a word, but very kindly intended." And she placed the open note in his fingers. When he had read it, Richard dropped the note on the table with a sneer.

"That man, I suspect, is himself the secret promoter of this outrage — a very inexpensive way, this, of making character with Lady May, and placing you under an obligation — the scoundrel!"

Looks and language of hatred are not very pretty at any time, but in the atmosphere of death they acquire a character of horror. Some momentary disturbance of this kind Richard may have seen in his sister's pale face, for he said, —

"Don't mind what I say about that fellow, for I have no patience with myself for having ever known him."

"I am so glad, Dick, you have dropped *that* acquaintance!" said the young lady.

"You have come at last to think as I do," said Richard.

"It is not so much thinking as something different; the uncertainty about him — the appalling stories you have heard — and, oh! Richard, I had such a dream last night! I dreamt that Mr. Longcluse murdered you. You smile, but I could not have imagined anything that was not real, so vivid, and it was in this room, and — I don't know how, for I forget the beginning of it — the candles went out, and you were standing near the door talking to me, and bright moonlight was at the window, and showed you quite distinctly, and the open door; and Mr. Longcluse came from behind it with a pistol, and I tried to scream, but I couldn't. But you turned about and stabbed at him with a knife or something; it shone in the moonlight, and instantly there was a line of blood across his face; he fired, and I saw you fall back on the floor; I knew you were dead, and I awoke in terror. I thought I still saw his wicked face in the dark, quite white as it was in my dream. I screamed, and thought I was going mad."

"It is only, darling, that all that has happened has made you nervous, and no wonder. Don't mind your dreams. Longcluse and I will never exchange a word more. We have turned our backs on one another, and our paths lie in very different directions."

This was a melancholy and grizzly evening at Mortlake Hall. The undertakers were making some final and mysterious arrangements about the coffin, and stole in and out of the dead baronet's room, of which they had taken possession.

Martha Tansey was alone in her room. It was a lurid sunset. Immense masses of black cloud were piled in the west, and from a long opening in that sombre screen, near the horizon, the expiring light glared like the red fire at night, through the clink of a smithy. Mrs. Tansey, dressed in deepest mourning, awaited the hour when she was to accompany the funeral of her old master.

Without succumbing to the threat of Messrs. Childers and Ballard, David Arden and his nephew would have been glad to evade the risk of the fracas, which would no doubt have been a dismal scandal. Martha Tansey herself was not quite sure at what hour the funeral was to leave Mortlake. Opposite the window from which she looked, stand groups of gigantic elms that darken that side of the house, and underwood forms a thick screen among their trunks. Upon the edges of this foliage glinted that fierce farewell gleam, and among the glimmering leaves behind she thought she saw the sinister face of Mr. Longcluse looking toward her. Her fear and horror of Longcluse had increased, and if the very remembrance of him visited her with a sudden qualm, you may be sure that the sight of him, on this melancholy evening, was a shock. Alice's wild dream, which she had recounted to her, did not serve to dissociate him from the vague misgivings that his image called up. She stared aghast at the apparition — itself uncertain — while in the deep shadow, with a foreground of fiercely flashing leaves, had on a sudden looked at her, and before she could utter an exclamation it was gone.

"I think it is my old eyes that plays me tricks, and my weary head that's 'wildered wi' all this dowly jummlement! What sud bring him there? It was never him I sid, only a fancy, and it's past and gone; and so, in the name of God, be it now, and ever, amen! For an evil sight it is, and bodes us no good. Who's there?"

"It's me, Mrs. Tansey," said Crozier, who had just come in. "Master Richard desired me to tell you it is to be at ten o'clock tonight. He and Mr. David thinks that best, and you're to please not to mention it to no one."

"Ten o'clock! That's very late, ain't it? No, surely, I'll not blab to no one; let him tell them when he sees fit. Martha Tansey's na that sort; she has had mony a secret to keep, and always the confidence o' the family, and 'twould be queer if she did not know to ho'd her tongue by this time. Sit ye down, Mr. Crozier — ye're wore off yer feet, man, like myself, ever since this happened — and rest a bit; the kettle's boilin', and ye'll tak' a cup o' tea. It's hours yet to ten o'clock."

So Mr. Crozier, who was in truth a tired man, complied, and took his seat by the fire, and talked over Sir Reginald's money matters, his fits, and his death; and, finally, he fell asleep in his chair, having taken three cups of tea.

The twilight had melted into darkness by this time, and the clear, cold moonlight was frosting all the landscape, and falling white and bright on the carriageway outside, and casting on the floor the sharp shadows of the window-sashes, and giving the brilliant representations of the windows and the very veining of the panes of glass upon the white boards.

As Martha sat by the table, with her eyes fixed, in a reverie, on one of these reflections upon the floor, the shadow of a man was suddenly presented upon it, and raising her eyes she saw a figure, black against the moonlight, beckoning gently to her to approach.

Martha Tansey was an old lass of the Northumbrian counties, and had in her veins the fiery blood of the Border. The man wore a greatcoat, and she could not discern his features; but he was tall and slight, and she was sure he was Mr. Longcluse. But "what dar' Longcluse say or do that she need fear?" And was not Crozier dozing there in the chair, "ready at call?"

Up she got, and stalked boldly to the window, and, drawing near, she plainly saw, as the stranger drew himself up from the window-pane through which he had been looking, and the moonlight glanced on his features, that the face was indeed that of Mr. Longcluse. He looked very pale, and was smiling. He nodded to her in a friendly way once or twice as she approached. She stood stock-still about two yards away, and though she knew him well, she deigned no sign of recognition, for she had learned vaguely something of the feud that had sprung up between him and the young head of the family, and no daughter of the marches was ever a fiercer partisan than lean old Martha. He tapped at the window, still smiling, and beckoned her nearer. She did come a step nearer, and asked sternly —

"What's your will wi' me?"

"I'm Mr. Longcluse," he said, in a low tone, but with sharp and measured articulation. "I have something important to say. Open the window a little; I must not raise my voice, and I have this to give you." He held a note by the corner, and tapped it on the glass.

Martha Tansey thought for a moment. It could not be a law-writ he had to serve; a rich man like him would never do that. Why should she not take his note, and hear what he had to say? She removed the bolt from the sash, and raised the window. There was not a breath stirring.

CHAPTER LIV.

AMONG THE TREES.

When the old woman had raised the window, “Thanks,” said Mr. Longcluse, almost in a whisper. “There are people, Lady May Penrose told me this morning, threatening to interrupt the funeral tonight. Of course you know — you must know.”

“I have heard o’ some such matter, but ’tis nout to no one here. We don’t care a snap for them, and if they try any sich lids, by my sang, we’ll fit them. And I think, Sir, if ye’ve any thing o’ consequence to tell to the family, ye’ll not mind my saying ‘twould be better ye sud go, like ither folk, to the hall-door, and leave your message there.”

“Your reproof would be better deserved, Mrs. Tansey,” he answers goodhumouredly, “if there had not been a difficulty. Mr. Richard Arden is not on pleasant terms with me, and my business will not afford to wait. I understand that Miss Arden has suffered much anxiety. It is entirely on her account that I have interested myself so much in it; and I don’t see, Mrs. Tansey, why you and I should not be better friends,” he adds, extending his long slender hand gently towards her.

She does not take it, but makes a stiff little curtsey instead, and draws back about six inches.

Perhaps Mr. Longcluse had meditated making her a present, but her severe looks daunted him, and he thought that he might as well be a little better acquainted before he made that venture. He went on —

“You have spoken very wisely, Mrs. Tansey; I am sure if these people do as they threaten, it will be contrary to law, and so, as you say, you may snap your fingers at them at last. But in the meantime they may enter the house and seize the coffin, or possibly cause some disgraceful interruption on the way. Lady May tells me that Miss Alice has suffered a great deal in consequence. Will you tell her to set her mind at ease? Pray assure her that I have seen the people, that I have threatened them into submission, that I am confident no such attempt will be made, and that should the slightest annoyance be attempted, Crozier has only to present the notice enclosed in this to the person offering it, and it will instantly be discontinued. I have done all this *entirely* on her account, and pray lose no time in quieting her alarms. I am sure, Mrs. Tansey, you and I shall be better friends some day."

Mrs. Tansey curtseyed again.

"Pray take this note."

She took it.

"Give it to Crozier; and pray tell Miss Alice Arden, immediately, that she need have no fears. Goodnight."

And pale Mr. Longcluse, with his smile and his dismally dark gaze, and the strange suggestion of something undefined in look or tone, or air, that gradually overcame her more and more till she almost felt faint, as he smiled and murmured at the open window, in the moonlight, was gone. Then she stood with the note in her thin fingers, without moving, and called to Crozier with a shrill and earnest summons as one who has just had a frightful dream will call up a sleeper in the same room.

Mr. Longcluse walks boldly and listlessly through this forbidden ground. He does not care who may meet him. Near the house, indeed, he would not like an encounter with Sir Richard Arden, because he knows that his being involved in a quarrel at such a moment, so near, especially with her brother, would not subserve his interests with Alice Arden.

For hours he strode or loitered alone through the solitary woodlands. The moonlight was beautiful; the old trees stand mournful and black against the luminous sky; there is for him a fascination in the solitude, as his noiseless steps lead him alternately into the black shadow cast on the sward by the towering foliage, and into the clear moonlight, on dewy grass that shows grey in that cold brightness. He was in the excitement of hope and suspense. Things had looked very black, but a door had opened and light came out. Was it a dream?

He leans with folded arms against the trunk of one of the trees that stand there, and from the slight elevation of the ground he can see the avenue under the boughs of the trees that flank it, and the chimneys of Mortlake Hall through the summits of the opening clumps. How melancholy and still the whole scene looks under that light!

"When I succeed to all this, who will be mistress of it?" he says, with his strange smile, looking toward the summits of the chimneys, that indicate the site of the Hall. "No one knows who I am; who can tell my history? What about that opera-girl? What about my money? — money is alway exaggerated. How many humbugs! how many collapses! stealing into society by evasions, on false pretences, in disguise! The man in the mask, ha! ha! Really perhaps *two* masks; not a bad fluke, that. The villain! You would not take a thousand pounds and know me — that is speaking boldly. A thousand pounds is still something in your book. You would not take it. The time will come, perhaps, when you'd *give* a thousand — *ten* thousand, if you had them — that I were your friend. Slanderous villain! To think of his talking so of me! The man in the mask trying to excite suspicion. My two masks are broken, and I all the better. By — ! you shall meet me yet without a mask. Alice! will you be my idol? There is no neutrality with one like me in such a case. If I don't worship, I must *break* the image. What a speck we stand on between the illimitable — the eternal past and the eternal future — always looking for a present that shall be something tangible; always finding it a mathematical point, *cujus nulla est pars* — the mere stand-point of a retrospect and a conjecture. Ha! There are the wheels: there goes the funeral!"

He holds his breath, and watches. How interesting is everything connected with Alice! Slowly it passes along. Through one opening made by the havoc of a storm in the line of trees that form the avenue, he sees it plainly enough. A very scanty procession — the plumed hearse and three carriages, and a few persons walking beside. It passes. The great iron gate shrieks its long and dolorous note as it opened, and Longcluse heard it clang after the last carriage had passed, and with this farewell the old gate sent forth the dead master of Mortlake.

"Farewell to Mortlake," murmured Longcluse, as he heard these sounds, with a shrug and his peculiar smile; "farewell, the lights, the claret-jug, the whist, and all the rest. You 'fear neither justices nor bailiffs,' as the song says, any longer. Very easy about your interest and your premiums; very careless who arrests you in your leaden vesture; and having paid, if nothing else, at least your beloved son's *post obit*. Courage, Sir Reginald! your earthly troubles are over. Here am I, erect as this tree, and as like to live my term out, with all that money, and no will made, and yet as tired as ever you were, and very willing, if the transaction were feasible, to die, and be bothered no more, instead of you."

He sighs, and looks toward the house, and sighs again.

“Does she relent? Was it not she who told Lady May to ask this service of me? If I could only be sure of that, I should stand here, this moment, the proudest man in England. I think I know myself — a very simple character; just two principles — love and malice; for the rest, unscrupulous. Mere cruelty gives me no pleasure: well for some people it don’t. Revenge does make me happy: well for some people if it didn’t. Except for those I love or those I hate, I live for none. The rest live for me. I owe them no more than I do this rotten stick. Let them rot and fatten my land; let them burn and bake my bread.”

With these words he kicked the fragments of a decayed branch that lay at his foot, and glided over the short grass, like a ghost, toward the gate.

CHAPTER LV.

MR. LONGCLUSE SEES A FRIEND.

Sir Reginald Arden, then, is actually dead and buried, and is quite done with the pomps and vanities, the business and the miseries of life — dead as King Duncan, and cannot come out of his grave to trouble any one with protest or interference; and his son, Sir Richard, is in possession of the title, and seized of the acres, and uses them, without caring to trouble himself with conjectures as to what his father would have liked or abhorred.

A week has passed since the funeral. Lady May has spent two days at Mortlake, and then gone down to Brighton. Alice does not leave Mortlake; her spirits do not rise. Kind Lady May has done her best to persuade her to come down with her to Brighton, but the perversity or the indolence of grief has prevailed, and Alice has grown more melancholy and self-upbraiding about her quarrel with her father, and will not be persuaded to leave Mortlake, the very worst place she could have chosen, as Lady May protests, for a residence during her mourning. Perhaps in a little while she may feel equal to the effort, but now she can't. She has quite lost her energy, and the idea of a place like Brighton, or even the chance of meeting people, is odious to her.

"So, my dear, do what I may, there she will remain, in that *triste* place," says Lady May Penrose; "and her brother, Sir Richard, has so much business just now on his hands, that he is often away two or three days at a time, and then she stays moping there quite alone; and only that she likes gardening and flowers, and that kind of thing, I really think she would go melancholy mad. But you know that kind of folly can't go on always, and I am determined to take her away in a month or so. People at first are so morbid, and make recluses of themselves."

Lady May stayed away at Brighton for about a week. On her return, Mr. Longcluse called to see her.

"It was so kind of you, Mr. Longcluse, to take all the trouble you did about that terrible business! and it was perfectly successful. There was not the slightest unpleasantness."

"Yes, I knew I had made anything of that kind all but impossible, but you are not to thank me. It made me only too happy to have an opportunity of being of any use — of relieving any anxiety."

Longcluse sighed.

"You have placed me, I know, under a great obligation, and if every one felt it as I do, you would have been thanked as you deserved before now."

A little silence followed.

"How is Miss Arden?" asked he in a low tone, and hardly raising his eyes.

"Pretty well," she answered, a little dryly. "She's not very wise, I think, in planning to shut herself up so entirely in that melancholy place, Mortlake. You have seen it?"

"Yes, more than once," he answered.

Lady May appeared more embarrassed as Mr. Longcluse grew less so. They became silent again. Mr. Longcluse was the first to speak, which he did a little hesitatingly.

"I was going to say that I hoped Miss Arden was not vexed at my having ventured to interfere as I did."

"Oh! about that, of course there ought to be, as I said, but one opinion; but you know she is not herself just now, and I shall have, perhaps, something to tell by-and-by; and, to say truth — you won't be vexed, but I'm sorry I undertook to speak to her, for on that point I really don't quite understand her; and I am a little vexed — and — I'll talk to you more another time. I'm obliged to keep an appointment just now, and the carriage," she added, glancing at the *pendule* on the bracket close by, "will be at the door in two or three minutes; so I must do a very ungracious thing, and say goodbye; and you must come again very soon — come to luncheon tomorrow — you must, really; I won't let you off, I assure you; there are two or three people coming to see me, whom I think you would like to meet."

And, looking very goodnatured, and a little flushed, and rather avoiding Mr. Longcluse's dark eyes, she departed.

He had been thinking of paying Miss Maubray a visit, but he had not avowed, even to himself, how high his hopes had mounted; and here was, in Lady May's ominous manner and determined evasion, matter to disturb and even shock him. Instead, therefore, of pursuing the route he had originally designed, he strolled into the park, and under the shade of green boughs he walked, amid the twitter of birds and the prattle of children and nursery-maids, with despair at his heart, and a brain in chaos.

As he sauntered, with downcast looks, under the trees, he came upon a humble Hebrew friend, Mr. Goldshed, a magnate in his own circle, but dwarfed into nothing beside the paragon of Mammon who walked on the grass, so unpretentiously, and with a face as anxious as that of the greengrocer who had just been supplicating the Jew for a renewal of his twenty-five pound bill.

Mr. Goldshed came to a full stop a little way in advance of Mr. Longcluse, anxious to attract his attention. Mr. Longcluse did see him, as he sauntered on; and the fat old Jew, with the seedy velvet waistcoat, crossed with gold chains, and with an oldfashioned gold eyeglass dangling at his breast, first smiled engagingly, then looked reverential and solemn, and then smiled again with his great moist lips, and raised his hat. Longcluse gave him a sharp, short nod, and intended to pass him.

"Will you shpare me one word, Mr. Lonclushe?"

"Not to-day, Sir."

"But I've been to your chambers, Sir, and to your houshe, Mr. Lonclushe."

"You've wasted time — waste no more."

"I do assure you, Shir, it'sh very urgent."

"I don't care."

"It'sh about that East Indian thing," and he lowered his voice as he concluded the sentence.

"I don't care a pin, Sir."

The amiable Mr. Goldshed hesitated; Mr. Longcluse passed him as if he had been a post. He turned, however, and walked a few steps by Mr. Longcluse's side.

"And everything elshe is going sho vell; and it would look fishy, don't you think, to let thish thing go that way?"

"Let them go — and go you with them. I wish the earth would swallow you all — scrip, bonds, children, and beldames." And if a stamp could have made the earth open at his bidding, it would have yawned wide enough at that instant. "If you follow me another step, by Heaven, I'll make it unpleasant to you."

Mr. Longcluse looked so angry, that the Jew made him an unctuous bow, and remained fixed for a while to the earth, gazing after his patron with his hands in his pockets; and, with a gloomy countenance, he took forth a big cigar from his case, lighted a vesuvian, and began to smoke, still looking after Mr. Longcluse.

That gentleman sauntered on, striking his stick now and then to the ground, or waving it over the grass in as many odd flourishes as a magician in a pantomime traces with his wand.

If men are prone to teaze themselves with imaginations, they are equally disposed to comfort themselves with the same shadowy influences.

"I'm so nervous about this thing, and so anxious, that I exaggerate everything that seems to tell against me. How did I ever come to love her so? And yet, would I kill that love if I could? Should I not kill myself first? I'll go and see Miss Maubray — I may hear something from her. Lady May *was* embarrassed: what then? Were I a simple observer of such a scene in the case of another, I should say there was nothing in it more than this — that she had quite forgotten all about her promise. She never mentioned my name, and when the moment came, and I had come to ask for an account, she did not know what to say. It was well done, to see old Mrs. Tansey as I did. Lady May is so goodnatured, and would feel her little neglect so much, and she will be sure to make it up. Fifty things may have prevented her. Yes, I'll go and hear what Miss Maubray has to say, and I'll lunch with Lady May tomorrow. I suspect that her visit to-day was to Mortlake."

With these reflections, Mr. Longcluse's pace became brisker, and his countenance brightened.

CHAPTER LVI.

A HOPE EXPIRES.

Mr. Longcluse knocked at Mr. David Arden's door. Yes, Miss Maubray was at home. He mounted the stairs, and was duly announced at the drawingroom door, and saw the brilliant young lady, who received him very graciously. She was alone.

Mr. Longcluse began by saying that the weather was cooler, and the sun much less intolerable.

"I wish we could say as much for the people, though, indeed, they are cool enough. There are some people called Tramways: he's a baronet — a very new one. Do you know anything of them? Are they people one can know?"

"I only know that Lady Tramway chaperoned a very charming young lady, whom everybody is very glad to know, to Lady May's garden-party the other day, at Richmond."

"Yes, very true; I'm that young lady, and that is the very reason I want to know. My uncle placed me in their hands."

"Oh, he knows everybody."

"Yes, and every one, which is quite another thing; and the woman has never given me an hour's quiet since. She presents me with bouquets, and fruit, and every imaginable thing I don't want, herself included, at least once a day; and I assure you I live in hourly terror of her getting into the drawingroom. You don't know anything about them?"

"I only know that her husband made a great deal of money by a contract."

"That sounds very badly, and she is such a vulgar woman?"

"I know no more of them; but Lady May had her to Raleigh Hall, and surely she can satisfy your scruples."

"No, it was my guardian who asked for their card, so that goes for nothing. It is really too bad."

"My heart bleeds for you."

"By-the-bye, talking of Lady May, I had a visit from her not a quarter-of-an-hour ago. What a fuss our friends at Mortlake do make about the death of that disagreeable old man! — Alice, I mean. Richard Arden bears it wonderfully. When did you see either?" she asked, innocently.

"You forget he has not been dead three weeks, and Alice Arden is not likely to see any one but very intimate friends for a long time; and — and I daresay you have heard that Sir Richard Arden and I are not on very pleasant terms."

"'Oh! Pity such difference should be —— .'"

"Thanks, and Tweedledum and Tweedledee are not likely to make it up. I'm afraid people aren't always reasonable, you know, and expect, often, things that are not quite fair."

"He ought to marry some one with money, and give up play."

"What! give up play, and commence husband? I'm afraid he'd think that a rather dull life."

"Well, I'm sure I'm no judge of that, although I give an opinion. Whatever he may be, you have a very staunch friend in Lady May."

"I'm glad of that; she's always so kind." And he looked rather oddly at the young lady.

Perhaps she seemed conscious of a knowledge more than she had yet divulged.

This young lady was, I need not tell you, a little coarse. She had, when she liked, the frankness that can come pretty boldly to the point; but I think she could be sly enough when she pleased; and was she just a little mischievous?

"Lady May has been talking to me a great deal about Alice Arden. She has been to see her very often since that poor old man died, and she says — she says, Mr. Longcluse — will you be upon honour not to repeat this?"

"Certainly, upon my honour."

"Well, she says — — "

Miss Maubray gets up quickly, and settles some flowers over the chimneypiece.

"She says that there is a coolness in that quarter also."

"I don't quite see," says Mr. Longcluse.

"Well, I must tell you she has taken me into council, and told me a great deal; and she spoke to Alice, and wrote to her. Did she say she would show you the answer? I have got it; she left it with me, and asked me — she's so goodnatured — to use my influence — she said *my* influence! She ought to know I've *no* influence."

Longcluse felt very oddly indeed during this speech; he had still presence of mind not to add anything to the knowledge the young lady might actually possess.

"You have not said a great deal, you know; but Lady May certainly did promise to show me an answer which she expected to a note she wrote about three weeks ago, or less, to Miss Arden."

"I really don't know of what use I can be in the matter. I have no excuse for speaking to Alice on the subject of her note — none in the world. I think I may as well let you see it; but you will promise — you *have* promised — not to tell any one?"

"I have — I do — I promise. Lady May herself said she would show me that letter."

"Well, I can't, I suppose, be very wrong. It is only a note: it does not say much, but quite enough, I'm afraid, to make it useless, and almost impertinent, for me, or any one else, to say a word more on the subject to Alice Arden."

All this time she is opening a very pretty marqueterie writing-desk, on spiral legs, which Longcluse has been listlessly admiring, little thinking what it contains. She now produced a little note, which, disengaging from its envelope, she places in the hand that Mr. Longcluse extended to receive it.

"I do so hope," she said, as she gave it to him, "that I am doing what Lady May would wish. I think she shrank a little from showing it to you herself, but I am certain she wished you to know what is in it."

He opened it quickly. It ran thus ("Merry," I must remark, was a pet name, originating, perhaps, in Shakespeare's song that speaks of "the merry month of May"): —

"DEAREST MERRY,

"I hope you will come to see me tomorrow. I cannot yet bear the idea of going into town. I feel as if I never should, and I think I grow more and more miserable every day. You are one of the very few friends whom I can see. You can't think what a pleasure a call from you is — if, indeed, in my miserable state, I can call anything a pleasure. I have read your letter about Mr. Longcluse, and parts of it a little puzzle me. I can't say that I have anything to forgive, and I am sure he has acted just as kindly as you say. But our acquaintance has ended, and nothing shall ever induce me to renew it. I can give you fifty reasons, when I see you, for my not choosing to know him. Darling Merry, I have quite made up my mind upon this point. I don't know Mr. Longcluse, and I won't know Mr. Longcluse; and I'll tell you *all* my reasons, if you wish to hear them, when we meet. Some of them, which seem to me *more* than sufficient, you do know. The only condition I make is that you don't discuss them with me. I have grown so stupid that *I* really cannot. I only know that I am right, and that *nothing* can change me. Come, darling, and see me very soon. You have no idea how very wretched I am. But I do not complain: it has drawn me, I hope, to higher and better thoughts. The world is not what it was to me, and I pray it never may be. Come and see me soon, darling; you cannot think how I long to see you. — Your affectionate,

"ALICE ARDEN."

"What mountains of molehills!" said Mr. Longcluse, very gently, smiling with a little shrug, as he placed the letter again in Miss Maubray's hand.

"Making such a fuss about that poor old man's death! It certainly does look a little like a pretty affectation. Isn't that what you mean? He *was* so *insupportable*!"

"No, I know nothing about that. I mean such a ridiculous fuss about nothing. Why, people cease to be acquainted every day for much less reason. Sir Reginald chose to talk over his money matters with me, and I think he expected me to do things which no stranger could be reasonably invited to do. And I suppose, now that he is gone, Miss Arden resents my insensibility to his hints; and I daresay Sir Richard, who, I may say, on precisely similar grounds, chooses to quarrel with me, does not spare invective, and has, of course, a friendly listener in his sister. But how absurdly provoking that Lady May should have made such a diplomacy, and given herself so much trouble! And — I'm afraid I appear so foolish — I merely assented to Lady May's kind proposal to mediate, and I could not, of course, appear to think it a less important mission than she did; and — where are you going — Scotland? Italy?"

"My guardian, Mr. Arden, has not yet settled anything," she answered; and upon this, Mr. Longcluse begins to recommend, and with much animation to describe, several Continental routes, and then he tells her all his gossip, and takes his leave, apparently in very happy spirits.

I doubt very much whether the face can ever be taught to lie as impudently as the tongue. Its muscles, of course, can be trained; but the young lady thought that Mr. Longcluse's pallor, as he smiled and returned the note, was more intense, and his dark eyes strangely fierce.

"He was more vexed than he cared to say," thought the young lady. "Lady May has not told me the whole story yet. There has been a great deal of fibbing, but I shall know it all."

Mr. Longcluse had to dine out. He drove home to dress. On arriving, he first sat down and wrote a note to Lady May.

"DEAR LADY MAY,

"I am so grateful. Miss Maubray told me to-day all the trouble you have been taking for me. Pray think no more of that little vexation. I never took so serious a view of so commonplace an unpleasantness, as to dream of tasking your kindness so severely. I am quite ashamed of having given you so much trouble. — Yours, dear Lady May, sincerely,

"WALTER LONGCLUSE."

"P.S. — I don't forget your kind invitation to lunch tomorrow."

Longcluse dispatched this note, and then wrote a few words of apology to the giver of the City dinner, to which he had intended to go. He could not go. He was very much agitated: he knew that he could not endure the long constraint of that banquet. He was unfit, for the present, to bear the company of any one. Gloomy and melancholy was the pale face of this man, as if he were going to the funeral of his beloved, when he stepped from his door in the dark. Was he going to walk out to Mortlake, and shoot himself on the steps?

As Mr. Longcluse walked into town, he caught a passing sight of a handsome young face that jarred upon him. It was that of Richard Arden, who was walking, also alone, not under any wild impulse, but to keep an appointment. This handsome face appeared for a moment gliding by, and was lost. Melancholy and thoughtful he looked, and quite unconscious of the near vicinity of his pale adversary. We shall follow him to his place of rendezvous.

He walked quickly by Pall Mall, and down Parliament Street, into the ancient quarter of Westminster, turned into a street near the Abbey, and from it into another that ran toward the river. Here were tall and dingy mansions, some of which were let out as chambers. In one of these, in a room over the front drawingroom, Mr. Levi received his West-end clients; and here, by appointment, he awaited Sir Richard Arden.

The young baronet, a little paler, and with the tired look of a man who was made acquainted with care, enters this room, hot with the dry atmosphere of gaslight. With his back towards the door, and his feet on the fender, smoking, sits Mr. Levi. Sir Richard does not remove his hat, and he stands by the table, which he slaps once or twice sharply with his stick. Mr. Levi turns about, looking, in his own phrase, unusually "down in the mouth," and his big black eyes are glowing angrily.

"Ho! Shir Richard Harden," he says, rising, "I did not think we was sho near the time. Izh it a bit too soon?"

"A little later than the time I named."

"Crikey! sho it izh."

CHAPTER LVII.

LEVI'S APOLOGUE.

The room had once been a stately one. Three tall windows looked toward the street. Its cornices and door-cases were ponderous, and its furniture was heterogeneous, and presented the contrasts that might be expected in a broker's store. A second-hand Turkey carpet, in a very dusty state, covered part of the floor; and a dirty canvas sack lay by the door for people coming in to rub their feet on. The table was a round one, that turned on a pivot; it was oak, massive and carved, with drawers; there were two huge gilt armchairs covered with Utrecht velvet, a battered office-stool, and two or three bedroom chairs that did not match. There were two great iron safes on tressels. On the top of one was some valuable old china, and on the other an electrifying machine; a French harp with only half-a-dozen strings stood in the corner near the fireplace, and several dusty pictures of various sizes leaned with their faces against the wall. A jet of gas burned right over the table, and had blackened the ceiling by long use, and a dip candle, from which Mr. Levi lighted his cigars, burned in a brass candlestick on the hob of the empty grate. Over everything lay a dark grey drift of dust. And the two figures, the elegant young man in deep mourning, and the fierce vulgar little Jew, shimmering all over with chains, rings, pins, and trinkets, stood in a narrow circle of light, in strong relief against the dim walls of the large room.

"So you *will* want that bit o' money in hand?" said Mr. Levi.

"I told you so."

"Don't you think they'll ever get tired helpin' you, if you keep pulling alwaysh the wrong way?"

"You said, this morning, I might reckon upon the help of that friend to any extent within reason," said Sir Richard, a little sourly.

"Ye're goin' fashter than yer friendsh li-likesh; ye're goin' al-ash — ye're goin' a terrible lick, you are!" said Mr. Levi, solemnly.

His usually pale face was a little flushed; he was speaking rather thickly, and there came at intervals a small hiccough, which indicated that he had been making merry.

"That's my own affair, I fancy," replied Sir Richard, as haughtily as prudence would permit. "You are simply an agent."

"Wish shome muff would take it off my hands; 'shan agenshy tha'll bring whoever takesh it more tr-tr-ouble than tin. By my shoul I'll not keepsh long! I'm blowsh if I'll be fool any longer!"

"I'm to suppose, then, that you have made up your mind to act no longer for my friend, whoever that friend may be?" said Sir Richard, who boded no good to himself from that step.

Mr. Levi nodded surlily.

"Have you drawn those bills?"

Mr. Levi gave the table a spin, unlocked a drawer, and threw two bills across to Sir Richard, who glancing at them said, —

"The date is ridiculously short!"

"How can I 'elp 't? and the interesht shlesh than nothin': sh-shunder the bank termsh f-or the besht paper going — I'm blesht if it ain't — it ain't f-fair interesh — the timesh short becaushe the partiesh, theysh — they shay they're 'ard hup, Shir, 'eavy sharge to pay hoff, and a big purchashe in Austriansh!"

"My uncle, David Arden, I happen to know, is buying Austrian stock this week; and Lady May Penrose is to pay off a charge on her property next month."

The Jew smiled mysteriously.

"You may as well be frank with me," added Sir Richard Arden, pleased at having detected the coincidence, which was strengthened by his having, the day before, surprised his uncle in conference with Lady May.

"If you don't like the time, why don't you try shomwhere else? why don't you try Lonclushe? There'sh a shwell! Two millionsh, if he's worth a pig! A year, or a month, 'twouldn't matter a tizhy to him, and you and him'sh ash thick ash two pickpockets!"

"You're mistaken; I don't choose to have any transactions with Mr. Longcluse."

There was a little pause.

"By-the-bye, I saw in some morning paper — I forget which — a day or two ago, a letter attacking Mr. Longcluse for an alleged share in the bank-breaking combination; and there was a short reply from him."

"I know, in the *Timesh*," interposed Levi.

"Yes," said Arden, who, in spite of himself, was always drawn into talk with this fellow more than he intended; such was the force of the ambiguously confidential relations in which he found himself. "What is thought of that in the City?"

"There'sh lotsh of opinionsh about it; not a shafe chap to quar'l with. If you rub Lonclushe this year, he'll tear you for itsh the next. He'sh a bish — a bish — a bit — bit of a bully, is Lonclushe, and don't alwaysh treat 'ish people fair. If you've quar'led with him, look oush — I shay, look oush!"

"Give me the cheque," said Sir Richard, extending his fingers.

"Pleashe, Shir Richard, accept them billsh," replied Levi, pushing an inkstand toward him, "and I'll get our cheque for you."

So Mr. Levi took the dip candle and opened one of the safes, displaying for a moment cases of oldfashioned jewellery, and a number of watches. I daresay Mr. Levi and his partner made advances on deposits.

"Why don't you cut them confounded rasesh, Shir Richard? I'm bleshed if I didn't lose five pounds on the Derby myself! There'sh lotsh of field sportsh," he continued, approaching the table with his cheque-book. "Didn't you never shee a ferret kill a rabbit? It'sh a beautiful thing; it takesh it shomeway down the back, and bit by bit it mendsh itsh grip, moving up to*wards* the head. It *is* really beautiful, and not a shound from either, only you'll see the rabbitsh big eyes lookin' sho wonderful! and the ferret hangsh on, swinging this way and that like a shna-ake— 'tish wery pretty! — till he worksh hish grip up to where the backbone joinish in with the brain; and then in with itsh teeth, through the shkull! and the rabbit givesh a screetch like a child in a fit. Ha, ha, ha! I'm blesht if it ain't done ash clever ash a doctor could do it. 'Twould make you laugh. That will do."

And he took the bills from Sir Richard, and handed him two cheques, and as he placed the bills in the safe, and locked them up, he continued, —

"It *ish* uncommon pretty! I'd rayther shee it than a terrier on fifty rats. The rabbit's sho shimple — there'sh the fun of it — and looksh sho foolish; and every rabbit had besht look sharp," he continued, turning about as he put the keys in his pocket, and looking with his burning black eyes full on Sir Richard, "and not let a ferret get a grip anywhere; for if he getsh a good purchase, he'll never let go till he hash his teeth in his brain, and then he'sh off with a shqueak, and there's an end of him."

“I can get notes for one of these cheques tonight?” said Sir Richard.

“The shmall one, yesh, eashy,” answered Mr. Levi. “I’m a bachelor,” he added jollily, in something like a soliloquy, “and whenever I marry I’ll be the better of it; and I’m no muff, and no cove can shay that I ever shplit on no one. And what do I care for Lonclushe? Not the snuff of this can’le!” And he snuffed the dip scornfully with his fingers, and flung the sparkling wick over the bannister, as he stood at the door, to light Sir Richard down the stairs.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE BARON COMES TO TOWN.

Weeks flew by. The season was in its last throes: the session was within a day or two of its death. Lady May drove out to Mortlake with a project in her head.

Alice Arden was glad to see her.

"I've travelled all this way," she said, "to make you come with me on Friday to the Abbey."

"On Friday? Why Friday, dear?" answered Alice.

"Because there is to be a grand oratorio of Handel's. It is for the benefit of the clergy's sons' school, and it is one that has not been performed in England for I forget how many years. It is *Saul*. You have heard the Dead March in Saul, of course; everyone has; but no one has ever heard the oratorio, and come you must. There shall be no one but ourselves — you and I, and your uncle and your brother to take care of us. They have promised to come; and Stentoroni is to take Saul, and they have the finest voices in Europe; and they say that Herr Von Waasen, the conductor, is the greatest musician in the world. There have been eight performances in that great room — oh! what do you call it? — while I was away; and now there is only to be this one, and I'm longing to hear it; but I won't go unless you come with me — and you need not dress. It begins at three o'clock, and ends at six, and you can come just as you are now; and an oratorio is really exactly the same as going to church, so you have no earthly excuse; and I'll send out my carriage at one for you; and you'll see, it will do you all the good in the world."

Alice had her difficulties, but Lady May's vigorous onset overpowered them, and at length she consented.

"Does your uncle come out here to see you?" asks Lady May.

"Often; he's very kind," she replies.

"And Grace Maubray?"

"Oh, yes; I see her pretty often — that is, she has been here twice, I think — quite often enough."

"Well, do you know, I never could admire Grace Maubray as I have heard other people do," says Lady May. "There is something harsh and bold, don't you think? — something a little cruel. She is a girl that I don't think could ever be in love."

"I don't know that," says Alice.

"Oh! really?" says Lady May, "and who is it?"

"It is merely a suspicion," says Alice.

"Yes — but you think she likes some one — do, like a darling, tell me who it is," urges Lady May, a little uneasily.

"You must not tell anyone, because they would say it was sisterly vanity, but I think she likes Dick."

"Sir Richard?" says Lady May, with as much indifference as she could.

"Yes, I think she likes my brother."

Lady May smiles painfully.

"I always thought so," she says; "and he admires her, of course?"

"No, I don't think he admires her at all. I'm certain he doesn't," said Alice.

"Well, certainly he always does speak of her as if she belonged to Vivian Darnley," remarks Lady May, more happily.

"So she does, and he to her, I hope," said Alice.

"Hope?" repeated Lady May, interrogatively.

"Yes — I think nothing could be more suitable."

"Perhaps so; you know them better than I do."

"Yes, and I still think Uncle David intends them for one another."

"I would have asked Mr. Longcluse," Lady May begins, after a little interval, "to use his influence to get us good hearing-places, but he is in such disgrace — is he still, or is there any chance of his being forgiven?"

"I told you, darling, I have really nothing to forgive — but I have a kind of fear of Mr. Longcluse — a fear I can't account for. It began, I think, with that affair that seemed to me like a piece of insanity, and made me angry and bewildered; and then there was a dream, in which I saw such a horrible scene, and fancied he had murdered Richard, and I could not get it out of my head. I suppose I am in a nervous state — and there were other things; and, altogether, I think of him with a kind of horror — and I find that Martha Tansey has an unaccountable dread of him exactly as I have; and even Uncle David says that he has a misgiving about him that he can't get rid of, or explain."

"I can't think, however, that he is a ghost or even a malefactor," said Lady May, "or anything worse than a very agreeable, goodnatured person. I never knew anything more zealous than his goodnature on the occasion I told you of; and he has always approached you with so much devotion and respect — he seemed to me so sensitive, and to watch your very looks; I really think that a frown from you would have almost killed him."

Alice sighs, and looked wearily through the window, as if the subject bored her; and she said listlessly, —

"Oh, yes, he was kind, and gentlemanlike, and sang nicely, I grant you everything; but — there is something ominous about him, and I hate to hear him mentioned, and with my consent I'll never meet him more."

Connected with the musical venture which the ladies were discussing, a remarkable person visited London. He had a considerable stake in its success. He was a penurious German, reputed wealthy, who ran over from Paris to complete arrangements about ticket-takers and treasurer, so as to ensure a system of check, such as would make it next to impossible for the gentlemen his partners to rob him. This person was the Baron Vanboeren.

Mr. Blount had an intimation of this visit from Paris, and Mr. David Arden invited him to dine, of which invitation he took absolutely no notice; and then Mr. Arden called upon him in his lodging in St. Martin's Lane. There he saw him, this man, possibly the keeper of the secret which he had for twenty years of his life been seeking for. If he had a feudal ideal of this baron, he was disappointed. He beheld a short, thick man, with an enormous head and grizzled hair, coarse pug features, very grimy skin, and a pair of fierce black eyes, that never rested for a moment, and swept the room from corner to corner with a rapid and unsettled glance that was full of fierce energy.

"The Baron Vanboeren?" inquires Uncle David courteously.

The baron, who is smoking, nods gruffly.

"My name is Arden — David Arden. I left my card two days ago, and having heard that your stay was but for a few days, I ventured to send you a very hurried invitation."

The baron grunts and nods again.

"I wrote a note to beg the pleasure of a very short interview, and you have been so good as to admit me."

The baron smokes on.

"I am told that you possibly are possessed of information which I have long been seeking in vain."

Another nod.

"Monsieur Lebas, the unfortunate little Frenchman who was murdered here in London, was, I believe, in your employment?"

The baron here had a little fit of coughing.

Uncle David accepted this as an admission.

"He was acquainted with Mr. Longcluse?"

"Was he?" says the baron, removing and replacing his pipe quickly.

"Will you, Baron Vanboeren, be so good as to give me any information you possess respecting Mr. Longcluse? It is not, I assure you, from mere curiosity I ask these questions, and I hope you will excuse the trouble I give you."

The baron took his pipe from his mouth, and blew out a thin stream of smoke.

"I have heard," said he, in short, harsh tones, "since I came to London, nosing but good of Mr. Longcluse. I have ze greadest respect for zat excellent gendleman. I will say nosing bud zat — ze greadest respect."

"You knew him in Paris, I believe?" urges Uncle David.

"Nosing but zat — ze greadest respect," repeats the baron. "I sink him a very worzy gendleman."

"No doubt, but I venture to ask whether you were acquainted with Mr. Longcluse in Paris?"

"Zere are a gread many beoble in Paris. I have nosing to say of Mr. Longcluse, nosing ad all, only he is a man of high rebudation."

And on completing this sentence the baron replaced his pipe, and delivered several rapid puffs.

"I took the liberty of enclosing a letter from a friend explaining who I am, and that the questions I should entreat you to answer are not prompted by any idle or impertinent curiosity; perhaps, then, you would be so good as to say whether you know anything of a person named Yelland Mace, who visited Paris some twenty years since?"

"I am in London, Sir, ubon my business, and no one else's. I am sinking of myself, and not about Mace or Longcluse, and I will not speak about eizer of zem. I am well baid for my dime. I will nod waste my dime on dalking — I will nod," he continues, warming as he proceeds; "nosing shall induce me do say one word aboud zoze gendlemen. I dake my oas I'll not, mein Gott! What do you mean by asking me aboud zem?"

He looks positively ferocious as he delivers this expostulation.

"My request must be more unreasonable than it appeared to me."

"Nosing can be more unreasonable!"

"And I am to understand that you positively object to giving me any information respecting the persons I have named?"

The baron appeared extremely uneasy. He trotted to the door on his short legs, and looked out. Returning, he shut the door carefully. His grimy countenance, under the action of fear, assumes an expression peculiarly forbidding; and he said, with angry volubility —

"Zis visit must end, Sir, zis moment. Donnerwesser! I will nod be combromised by you. But if you bromise as a Christian, ubon your honour, never to mention what I say — — "

"Never, upon my honour."

"Nor to say you have talked with me here in London — — "

"Never."

"I will tell you that I have no objection to sbeak wis you, *privately* in Paris, whenever you are zere — now, now! zat is all. I will not have one ozer word — you shall not stay one ozer minude."

He opens the door and wags his head peremptorily, and points with his pipe to the lobby.

"You'll not forget your promise, Baron, when I call? for visit you I will."

"I never forget nosing. Monsieur Arden, will you go or *nod*?"

"Farewell, Sir," says his visitor, too much excited by the promise opened to him, for the moment to apprehend what was ridiculous in the scene or in the brutality of the baron.

CHAPTER LIX.

TWO OLD FRIENDS MEET AND PART.

When he was gone the Baron Vanboeren sat down and panted; his pipe had gone out, and he clutched it in his hand like a weapon and continued for some minutes, in the good old phrase, very much disordered.

"That old fool," he mutters, in his native German, "won't come near me again while I remain in London."

This assurance was, I suppose, consolatory, for the baron repeated it several times; and then bounced to his feet, and made a few hurried preparations for an appearance in the streets. He put on a short cloak which had served him for the last thirty years, and a preposterous hat; and with a thick stick in his hand, and a cigar lighted, sallied forth, square and short, to make Mr. Longcluse a visit by appointment.

By this time the lamps were lighted. There had been a performance of *Saul*, a very brilliant success, although it pleased the baron to grumble over it that day. He had not returned from the great room where it had taken place more than an hour, when David Arden had paid his brief visit. He was now hastening to an interview which he thought much more momentous. Few persons who looked at that vulgar seedy figure, strutting through the mud, would have thought that the threadbare black cloak, over which a brown autumnal tint had spread, and the monstrous battered felt hat, in which a costermonger would scarcely have gone abroad, covered a man worth a hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

Man is mysteriously so constructed that he cannot abandon himself to selfishness, which is the very reverse of heavenly love, without in the end contracting some incurable insanity; and that insanity of the higher man constitutes, to a great extent, his mental death. The Baron Vanboeren's insanity was avarice; and his solitary expenses caused him all the sordid anxieties which haunt the unfortunate gentleman who must make both ends meet on five-and-thirty pounds a year.

Though not *sui profusus*, he was *alieni appetens* in a very high degree; and his visit to Mr. Longcluse was not one of mere affection.

Mr. Longcluse was at home in his study. The baron was instantly shown in. Mr. Longcluse, smiling, with both hands extended to grasp his, advances to meet him.

“My dear Baron, what an unexpected pleasure! I could scarcely believe my eyes when I read your note. So you have a stake in this musical speculation, and though it is very late, and, of course, everything at a disadvantage, I have to congratulate you on an immense success.”

The baron shrugs, shakes his head, and rolls his eyes dismally.

“Ah, my friend, ze exbenses are enormous.”

“And the receipts still more so,” says Longcluse cheerfully; “you must be making, among you, a mint of money.”

“Ah! Monsieur Longcluse, id is nod what it should be! zay are all such sieves and robbers! I will never escape under a loss of a sousand bounds.”

“You must be cheerful, my dear Baron. You shall dine with me to-day. I’ll take you with me to half a dozen places of amusement worth seeing after dinner. Tomorrow morning you shall run down with me to Brighton — my yacht is there — and when you have had enough of that, we shall run up again and have a whitebait dinner at Greenwich; and come into town and see those fellows, Markham and the other, that poor little Lebas saw play, the night he was murdered. You must see them play the return match, so long postponed. Next day we shall — — “

“Bardon, Monsieur, bardon! I am doo old. I have no spirits.”

“What, not enough to see a game of billiards between Markham and Hood! Why, Lebas was charmed so far as he saw it, poor fellow, with their play.”

“No, no, no, no, Monsieur; a sousand sanks, no, bardon, I cannod,” says the baron. “I do not like billiards, and your friends have not found it a lucky game.”

“Well, if you don’t care for billiards, we’ll find something else,” replies hospitable Mr. Longcluse.

“Nosing else, nosing else,” answers the baron hastily. “I hade all zese sings, ze seatres, ze bubbedshows, and all ze ozer amusements, I give you my oas. Did you read my liddle node?”

“I did indeed, and it amused me beyond measure,” says Longcluse joyously.

“Amuse!” repeats the baron, “how so?”

“Because it is so diverting; one might almost fancy it was meant to ask me for fifteen hundred pounds.”

“I have lost, by zis sing, a vast deal more zan zat.”

“And, my dear Baron, what on earth have I to do with that?”

“I am an old friend, a good friend, a true friend,” says the baron, while his fierce little eyes sweep the walls, from corner to corner, with quivering rapidity. “You would not like to see me quide in a corner. You’re the richest man in England, almost; what’s one sousand five hundred to you? I have not wridden to you, or come to England, dill now. You have done nosing for your old friend yet: what are you going to give him?”

“Not as much as I gave Lebas,” said Longcluse, eyeing him askance, with a smile.

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“Not a napoleon, not a franc, not a sou.”

“You are jesding; sink, sink, sink, Monsieur, what a friend I have been and *am* to you.”

“So I do, my dear Baron, and consider how I show my gratitude. Have I ever given a hint to the French police about the identity of the clever gentleman who managed the little tunnel through which a river of champagne flowed into Paris, under the barrier, duty free? Have I ever said a word about the confiscated jewels of the Marchioness de la Sarnierre? Have I ever asked how the Comte de Loubourg’s little boy is, or directed an unfriendly eye upon the conscientious physician who extricates ladies and gentlemen from the consequences of late hours, nervous depression, and fifty other things that war against good digestion and sound sleep? Come, come, my good Baron, whenever we come to square accounts, the balance will stand very heavily in my favour. I don’t want to press for a settlement, but if you urge it, by Heaven, I’ll make you pay the uttermost farthing!”

Longcluse laughs cynically. The baron looks very angry. His face darkens to a leaden hue. The fingers which he plunged into his snuff-box are trembling. He takes two or three great pinches of snuff before speaking.

Mr. Longcluse watches all these symptoms of his state of mind with a sardonic enjoyment, beneath which, perhaps, is the sort of suspense with which a beast-tamer watches the eye of the animal whose fury he excites only to exhibit the coercion which he exercises through its fears, and who is for a moment doubtful whether its terrors or its fury may prevail.

The baron’s restless eyes roll wickedly. He puts his hand into his pocket irresolutely, and crumbles some papers there. There was no knowing, for some seconds, what turn things might take. But if he had for a moment meditated a crisis, he thought better of it. He breaks into a fierce laugh, and extends his hand to Mr. Longcluse, who as frankly places his own in it, and the baron shakes it vehemently. And Mr. Longcluse and he laugh boisterously and oddly together. The baron takes another great pinch of snuff, and then he says, sponging out as it were, as an ignored parenthesis, the critical part of their conversation —

“No, no, I sink not; no, no, surely not. I am not fit for all zose amusements. I cannot knog aboud as I used; an old fellow, you know: beace and tranquilidy. No, I cannot dine with you. I dine with Stentoroni tomorrow; to-day I have dined with our *tenore*. How well you look! What nose, what tees, what chin! I am proud of you. We bart good friends, *bon soir*, Monsieur Longcluse, farewell. I am already a liddle lade.”

“Farewell, dear Baron. How can I thank you enough for this kind meeting? Try one of my cigars as you go home.”

The baron, not being a proud man, took half-a-dozen, and with a final shaking of hands these merry gentlemen parted, and Longcluse’s door closed for ever on the Baron Vanboeren.

“That bloated spider?” mused Mr. Longcluse. “How many flies has he sucked! It is another matter when spiders take to catching wasps.”

Every man of energetic passions has within him a principle of self-destruction. Longcluse had his. It had expressed itself in his passion for Alice Arden. That passion had undergone a wondrous change, but it was imperishable in its new as in its pristine state.

This gentleman was in the dumps so soon as he was left alone. Always uncertainty; always the sword of Damocles; always the little reminders of perdition, each one contemptible, but each one in succession touching the same set of nerves, and like the fall of the drop of water in the inquisition, *non vi, sed sæpe cadendo*, gradually heightening monotony into excitement, and excitement into frenzy. Living always with a sense of the unreality of life and the vicinity of death, with a certain stern tremor of the heart, like that of a man going into action, no wonder if he sometimes sickened of his bargain with Fate, and thought life purchased too dear on the terms of such a lease.

Longcluse bolted his door, unlocked his desk, and there what do we see? Six or seven miniatures — two enamels, the rest on ivory — all by different hands; some English, some Parisian; very exquisite, some of them. Every one was Alice Arden. Little did she dream that such a gallery existed. How were they taken? Photographs are the colourless phantoms from which these glowing lifelike beauties start. Tender-hearted Lady May has in confidence given him, from time to time, several of these from her album; he has induced foreign artists to visit London, and managed opportunities by which, at parties, in theatres, and I am sorry to say even in church, these clever persons succeeded in studying from the life, and learning all the tints which now glow before him. If I had mentioned what this little collection cost him, you would have opened your eyes. The Baron Vanboeren would have laughed and cursed him with hilarious derision, and a money-getting Christian would have been quite horror-struck, on reading the scandalous row of figures.

Each miniature he takes in turn, and looks at for a long time, holding it in both hands, his hands resting on the desk, his face inclined and sad, as if looking down into the coffin of his darling. One after the other he puts them by, and returns to his favourite one; and at last he shuts it up also, with a snap, and places it with the rest in the dark, under lock and key.

He leaned back and laid his thin hand across his eyes. Was he looking at an image that came out in the dark on the retina of memory? Or was he shedding tears?

CHAPTER LX.

“SAUL.”

The day arrived on which Alice Arden had agreed to go with Lady May to Westminster Abbey, to hear the masterly performance of *Saul*. When it came to the point, she would have preferred staying at home; but that was out of the question. Every one has experienced that ominous forboding which overcomes us sometimes with a shapeless forecasting of evil. It was with that vague misgiving that she had all the morning looked forward to her drive to town, and the long-promised oratorio. It was a dark day, and there was a thunderous weight in the air, and the melancholy atmosphere deepened her gloom.

Her Uncle David arrived in Lady May’s carriage, to take care of her. They were to call at Lady May’s house, where its mistress and Sir Richard Arden awaited them.

A few kind words followed Uncle David’s affectionate greeting, as they drove into town. He did not observe that Alice was unusually low. He seemed to have something not very pleasant himself to think upon, and he became silent for some time.

“I want,” said he at last, looking up suddenly, “to give you a little advice, and now mind what I say. Don’t sign any legal paper without consulting me, and don’t make any promise to Richard. It is just possible — I hope he may not, but it is just possible — that he may ask you to deal in his favour with your charge on the Yorkshire estate. Do you tell him if he should, that you have promised me faithfully not to do anything in the matter, except as I shall advise. He may, as I said, never say a word on the subject, but in any case my advice will do you no harm. I have had bitter experience, my dear, of which I begin to grow rather ashamed, of the futility of trying to assist Richard. I have thrown away a great deal of money upon him, utterly thrown it away. *I* can afford it, but *you* cannot, and you shall not lose your little provision.” And here he changed the subject of his talk, I suppose to avoid the possibility of discussion. “How very early the autumn has set in this year! It is the extraordinary heat of the summer. The elms in Mortlake are quite yellow already."

And so they talked on, and returned no more to the subject at which he had glanced. But the few words her uncle had spoken gave Alice ample matter to think on, and she concluded that Richard was in trouble again.

Lady May did not delay them a moment, and Sir Richard got into the carriage after her, with the tickets in his charge. Very devoted, Alice thought him, to Lady May, who appeared more than usually excited and happy.

We follow our party without comment into the choir, where they take possession of their seats. The chorus glide into their places like shadows, and the vast array of instrumental musicians as noiselessly occupy the seats before their desks. The great assembly is marshalled in a silence almost oppressive, but which is perhaps the finest preparation for the wondrous harmonies to come.

And now the grand and unearthly oratorio has commenced. Each person in our little group hears it with different ears. I wonder whether any two persons in that vast assembly heard it precisely alike. Sir Richard Arden, having many things to think about, hears it intermittently as he would have listened to a bore, and with a secret impatience. Lady May hears it not much better, but felt as if she could have sat there for ever. Old David Arden enjoyed music, and is profoundly delighted with this. But his thoughts also begin to wander, for as the mighty basso singing the part of Saul delivers the words,

"I would that, by thy art, thou bring me up The man whom I shall name,"

David Arden's eye lighted, with a little shock, upon the enormous head and repulsive features of the Baron Vanboeren. What a mask for a witch! The travesti lost its touch of the ludicrous, in Uncle David's eye, by virtue of the awful interest he felt in the possible revelations of that ugly magician, who could, he fancied, by a word, call up the image of Yelland Mace. The baron is sitting about the steps in front of him, face to face. He wonders he has not seen him till now. His head is a little thrown back, displaying his short bull neck. His restless eyes are fixed now in a sullen reverie. His calculation as to the exact money value of the audience is over; he is polling them no longer, and his unresting brain is projecting pictures into the darkness of the future.

His face in a state of apathy was ill-favoured and wicked, and now lighted with a cadaverous effect, by the dull purplish halo which marks the blending of the feeble daylight, with the glow of the lamp that is above him.

The baron had seen and recognised David Arden, and a train of thoughts horribly incongruous with the sacred place was moving through his brain. As he looks on, impassive, the great basso rings out —

“If heaven denies thee aid, seek it from hell.”

And the soprano sends forth the answering incantation, wild and piercing —

“Infernal spirits, by whose power Departed ghosts in living forms appear, Add horror to the midnight hour, And chill the boldest hearts with fear; To this stranger’s wondering eyes Let the man he calls for rise.”

If Mr. Longcluse had been near, he might have made his own sad application of the air so powerfully sung by the alto to whom was committed the part of David —

“Such haughty beauties rather move Aversion, than engage our love.”

He might with an undivulged anguish have heard the adoring strain —

“O lovely maid! thy form beheld Above all beauty charms our eyes, Yet still within that form concealed, Thy mind a greater beauty lies.”

In a rapture Alice listened on. The famous “Dead March” followed, interposing its melancholy instrumentation, and arresting the vocal action of the drama by the pomp of that magnificent dirge.

To her the whole thing seemed stupendous, unearthly, glorious beyond expression. She almost trembled with excitement. She was glad she had come. Tears of ecstasy were in her eyes.

And now, at length, the three parts are over, and the crowd begin to move outward. The organ peals as they shuffle slowly along, checked every minute, and then again resuming their slow progress, pushing on in those little shuffling steps of two or three inches by which well-packed crowds get along, every one wondering why they can’t all step out together, and what the people in front can be about.

In two several channels, through two distinct doors, this great human reservoir floods out. Sir Richard has undertaken the task of finding Lady May’s carriage, and bringing it to a point where they might escape the tedious waiting at the door; and David Arden, with Lady May on one arm and Alice on the other, is getting on slowly in the thick of this well-dressed and aristocratic mob.

"I think, Alice," said Uncle David, "you would be more out of the crush, and less likely to lose me, if you were to get quite close behind us — do you see? — between Lady May and me, and hold me fast."

The pressure of the stream was so unequal, and a front of three so wide, that Alice gladly adopted the new arrangement, and with her hand on her uncle's arm, felt safer and more comfortable than before.

This slow march, inch by inch, is strangely interrupted. A well-known voice, close to her ear, says —

"Miss Arden, a word with you."

A pale face, with flat nose and Mephistophelian eyebrows, was stooping near her. Mr. Longcluse's thin lips were close to her ear. She started a little aside, and tried to stop. Recovering, she stretched her hand to reach her uncle, and found that there were strangers between them.

CHAPTER LXI.

A WAKING DREAM.

There is something in that pale face and spectral smile that fascinates the terrified girl; she cannot take her eyes off him. His dark eyes are near hers; his lips are still close to her; his arm is touching her dress; he leans his face to her, and talks on, in an icy tone little above a whisper, and an articulation so sharply distinct that it seems to pain her ear.

"The oratorio!" he continued: "the music! The words, here and there are queer — a little sinister — eh? There are better words and wilder music — you shall hear them some day! Saul had his evil spirit, and a bad family have theirs — ay, they have a demon who is always near, and shapes their lives for them; they don't know it, but, sooner or later justice catches them. Suppose *I* am the demon of *your* family — it is very funny, isn't it? I tried to serve you both, but it wouldn't do. I'll set about the other thing now: the evil genius of a bad family; I'm appointed to that. It almost makes me laugh — such cross-purposes! You're frightened? That's a pity; you should have thought of that before. It requires some nerve to fight a man like me. I don't threaten you, mind, but you are frightened. There is such a thing as getting a dangerous fellow bound over to keep the peace. Try that. I should like to have a talk with you before his worship in the police-court, across the table, with a corps of clever newspaper reporters sitting there. What fun in the *Times* and all the rest next morning."

It is plain to Miss Arden that Mr. Longcluse is speaking all this time with suppressed fury, and his countenance expresses a sort of smiling hatred that horrifies her.

"I'm not bad at speaking my mind," he continues. "It is unfortunate that I am so well thought of and listened to in London. Yes, people mind what I say a good deal. I rather think they'll choose to believe *my* story. But there's another way, if you don't like that. Your brother's not afraid — *he*'ll protect you. Tell your brother what a miscreant I am, and send him to me — do, pray! Nothing on earth I should like better than to have a talk with that young gentleman. Do pray, send him, I entreat. He'd like satisfaction — ha!

ha! — and, by Heaven, I'll give it him! Tell him to get his pistols ready; he shall have his shop! Let him come to Boulogne, or where he likes — I'll stand it — and I don't think he'll need to pay his way back again. He'll stay in France; he'll not walk in at your hall-door, and call for luncheon, I promise you. Ha! ha! ha!"

This pale man enjoys her terror cruelly.

"I'm not worthy to speak to you, I believe — eh? That's odd, for the time isn't far off when you'll pray to God I may have mercy on you. You had no business to encourage me. I'm afraid the crowd is getting on very slowly, but I'll try to entertain you: you *are* such a good listener!"

Miss Arden often wondered afterwards at her own passiveness through all this. There were, no doubt, close by, many worthy citizens, fathers of families, who would have taken her for a few minutes under their protection with honest alacrity. But it was a fascination; her state was cataleptic: and she could no more escape than the bird that is throbbing in the gaze of a snake. The cold murmur went distinctly on and on:

"Your brother will probably think I should treat you more ceremoniously. Don't you agree with him? Pray, do complain to him. Pray, send him to me, and I'll thank him for his share in this matter. He wanted to make it a match between us — I'm speaking coarsely, for the sake of distinctness — till a title turned up. What has become of the title, by-the-bye? — I don't see him here. The peer wasn't in the running, after all: didn't even start! Ha! ha! ha! Remember me to your brother, pray, and tell him the day will come when he'll not need to be reminded of me: I'll take care of that. And so Sir Richard is doomed to disappointment! It is a world of disappointment. The earl is nowhere! And the proudest family on earth — what is left of it — looks a little foolish. And well it may: it has many follies to expiate. You had no business encouraging me, and you are foolish enough to be terribly afraid now — ha! ha! ha! Too late, eh? I daresay you think I'll punish you! Not I! Nothing of the sort! I'll never punish anyone. Why should I take that trouble about you. Not I: not even your brother. Fate does that. Fate has always been kind to me, and hit my enemies pretty hard. You had no business encouraging me. Remember this: the day is not far off when you will *both* rue the hour you threw me over!"

She is gazing helplessly into that dreadful face. There is a cruel elation in it. He looks on her, I think, with admiration. Mixed with his hatred, did there remain a fraction of love?

On a sudden the voice, which was the only sound she heard, was in her ear no longer. The face which had transfixed her gaze was gone. Longcluse had apparently pushed a way for her to her friends, for she found herself again next her Uncle David. Holding his arm fast, she looked round quickly for a moment: she saw Mr. Longcluse nowhere. She felt on the point of fainting. The scene must have lasted a shorter time than she supposed, for her uncle had not missed her.

"My dear, how pale you look! Are you tired?" exclaims Lady May, when they have come to a halt at the door.

"Yes, indeed, so she does. Are you ill, dear?" added her uncle.

"No, nothing, thanks, only the crowd. I shall be better immediately." And so waiting in the air, near the door, they were soon joined by Sir Richard, and in his carriage he and she drove home to Mortlake. Lady May, taking hers, went to a tea at old Lady Elverstone's; and David Arden, bidding them goodbye, walked homeward across the park.

Richard had promised to spend the evening at Mortlake with her, and side by side they were driving out to that sad and sombre scene. As they entered the shaded road upon which the great gate of Mortlake opens, the setting sun streamed through the huge trunks of the trees, and tinted the landscape with a subdued splendour.

"I can't imagine, dear Alice, why you *will* stay here. It is enough to kill you," says Sir Richard, looking out peevishly on the picturesque woodlands of Mortlake, and interrupting a long silence. "You never can recover your spirits while you stay here. There is Lady May going all over the world — I forget where, but she will be at Naples — and she absolutely longs to take you with her; and you won't go! I really sometimes think you want to make yourself melancholy mad."

"I don't know," said she, waking herself from a reverie in which, against the dark background of the empty arches she had left, she still saw the white, wicked face that had leaned over her, and heard the low murmured stream of insult and menace. "I'm not sure that I shall not be worse anywhere else. I don't feel energy to make a change. I can't bear the idea of meeting people. By-and-by, in a little time, it will be different. For the present, quiet is what I like best. But you, Dick, are not looking well, you seem so overworked and anxious. You really do want a little holiday. Why don’t you go to Scotland to shoot, or take a few weeks’ yachting? All your business must be pretty well settled now.”

“It will never be settled,” he said, a little sourly. “I assure you there never was property in such a mess — I mean leases and everything. Such drudgery, you have no idea; and I owe a good deal. It has not done me any good. I’d rather be as I was before that miserable Derby. I’d gladly exchange it all for a clear annuity of a thousand a year.”

“Oh! my dear Dick, you can’t mean that! All the northern property, and this, and Morley?”

“I hate to talk about it. I’m tired of it already. I have been so unlucky, so foolish, and if I had not found a very good friend, I should have been utterly ruined by that cursed race; and he has been aiding me very generously, on rather easy terms, in some difficulties that have followed; and you know I had to raise money on the estate before all this happened, and have had to make a very heavy mortgage, and I am getting into such a mess — a confusion, I mean — and really I should have sold the estates, if it had not been for my unknown friend, for I don’t know his name.”

“What friend?”

“The friend who has aided me through my troubles — the best friend I ever met, unless it be as I half suspect. Has anyone spoken to you lately, in a way to lead you to suppose that he, or anyone else among our friends, has been lending me a helping hand?”

“Yes, as we were driving into town to-day, Uncle David told me so distinctly; but I am not sure that I ought to have mentioned it. I fancy, indeed,” she added, as she remembered the reflection with which it was accompanied, “that he meant it as a secret, so you must not get me into disgrace with him by appearing to know more than he has told you himself.”

“No, certainly,” said Richard; “and he said it was he who lent it?”

“Yes, distinctly.”

“Well, I all but knew it before. Of course it is very kind of him. But then, you know he is very wealthy; he does not feel it; and he would not for the world that our house should lose its position. I think he would rather sell the coat off his back, than that our name should be slurred.”

Sir Richard was pleased that he had received this light in corroboration of his suspicions. He was glad to have ascertained that the powerful motives which he had conjectured were actually governing the conduct of David Arden, although for obvious reasons he did not choose that his nephew should be aware of his weakness.

The carriage drew up at the hall-door. The old house in the evening beams, looked warm and cheery, and from every window in its broad front flamed the reflection which showed like so many hospitable winter fires.

CHAPTER LXII.

LOVE AND PLAY.

"Here we are, Alice," says Sir Richard, as they entered the hall. "We'll have a good talk this evening. We'll make the best of everything; and I don't see if Uncle David chooses to prevent it, why the old ship should founder after all."

They are now in the house. It is hard to get rid of the sense of constraint that, in his father's time, he always experienced within those walls; to feel that the old influence is exorcised and utterly gone, and that he is himself absolute master where so lately he hardly ventured to move on tip-toe.

They did not talk so much as Sir Richard had anticipated. There were upon his mind some things that weighed heavily. He had got from Levi a list of the advances made by his luckily found friend, and the total was much heavier than he had expected. He began to fear that he might possibly exceed the limits which his uncle must certainly have placed somewhere. He might not, indeed, allow him to suffer the indignity of a bankruptcy; but he would take a very short and unpleasant course with him. He would seize his rents, and, with a friendly roughness, put his estates to nurse, and send the prodigal on a Childe Harold's pilgrimage of five or six years, with an allowance, perhaps, of some three hundred a year, which in his frugal estimate of a young man's expenditure, would be handsome.

While he was occupied in these ruminations, Alice cared not to break the silence. It was a very unsociable tête-à-tête. Alice had a secret of her own to brood over. If anything could have made Longcluse now more terrible to her imagination, it would have been a risk of her brother's knowing anything of the language he had dared to hold to her. She knew from her brother's own lips, that he was a duellist; and she was also persuaded that Mr. Longcluse was, in his own playful and sinister phrase, very literally a "miscreant." His face, ever since that interview, was always at her right side, with its cruel pallor, and the vindictive sarcasm of lip and tone. How she wished that she had never met that mysterious man! What she would have given to be exempted from his hatred, and blotted from his remembrance!

One object only was in her mind, distinctly, with respect to that person. She was, thank God, quite beyond his power. But men, she knew, live necessarily a life so public, and have so many points of contact, that better opportunities present themselves for the indulgence of a masculine grudge; and she trembled at the thought of a collision. Why, then, should not Dick seek a reconciliation with him, and, by any honourable means, abate that terrible enmity.

"I have been thinking, Dick, that, as Uncle David makes the interest he takes in your affairs a secret, and you can't consult him, it would be very well indeed if you could find some one else able to advise, who would consult with you when you wished."

"Of course, I should be only too glad," says Sir Richard, yawning and smiling as well as he could at the same time; "but an adviser one can depend on in such matters, my dear child, is not to be picked up every day."

"Poor papa, I think, was very wise in choosing people of that kind. Uncle David, I know, said that he made wonderfully good bargains about his mortgages, or whatever they are called."

"I daresay — I don't know — he was always complaining, and always changing them," says Sir Richard. "But if you can introduce me to a person who can disentangle all my complications, and take half my cares off my shoulders, I'll say you are a very wise little woman indeed."

"I only know this — that poor papa had the highest opinion of Mr. Longcluse, and thought he was the cleverest person, and the most able to assist, of any one he knew."

Sir Richard Arden hears this with a stare of surprise.

"My dear Alice, you seem to forget everything. Why, Longcluse and I are at deadly feud. He hates me implacably. There never could be anything but enmity between us. Not that I care enough about *him* to hate him, but I have the worst opinion of him. I have heard the most shocking stories about him lately. They insinuate that he committed a murder! I told you of that jealousy and disappointment, about a girl he was in love with and wanted to marry, and it ended in *murder*! I'm told he had the reputation of being a most unscrupulous villain. They say he was engaged in several conspiracies to pigeon young fellows. He was the utter ruin, they say, of young Thornley, the poor muff who shot himself some years ago; and he was thought to be a principal proprietor of that gaming-house in Vienna, where they found all the apparatus for cheating so cleverly contrived."

"But are any of these things proved?" urges Miss Arden.

"I don't suppose he would be at large if they were," says Sir Richard, with a smile. "I only know that I believe them."

"Well, Dick, you know I reminded you before — you used not to believe those stories till you quarrelled with him."

"Why, what do you want, Alice?" he exclaims, looking hard at her. "What on earth can you mean? And what can possibly make you take an interest in the character of such a ruffian?"

Alice's face grew pale under his gaze. She cleared her voice and looked down; and then she looked full at him, with burning eyes, and said —

"It is because I am afraid of him, and think he may do you some dreadful injury, unless you are again on terms with him. I can't get it out of my head; and I daresay I am wrong, but I am sure I am miserable."

She burst into tears.

"Why, you darling little fool, what harm can he do me?" said Richard fondly, throwing his arms about her neck and kissing her, as he laughed tenderly. "He exhausted his utmost malice when he angrily refused to lend me a shilling in my extremity, or to be of the smallest use to me, at a moment when he might have saved me, without risk to himself, by simply willing it. *I* didn't ask him, you may be sure. An officious, foolish little friend, doing all, of course, for the best, *did*, without once consulting me, or giving me a voice in the matter, until he had effectually put his foot in it, as I told you. I would not for anything on earth have applied to him, I need not tell you; but it was done, and it only shows with what delight he would have seen me ruined, as, in fact, I should have been, had not my own relations taken the matter up. I do believe, Alice, the best thing I could do for myself and for you would be to marry," he says, a little suddenly, after a considerable silence.

Alice looks at him, doubtful whether he is serious.

"I really mean it. It is the only honest way of making or mending a fortune now-a-days."

"Well, Dick, it is time enough to think of that by-and-by, don't you think?"

"Perhaps so; I hope so. At present it seems to me that, as far as I am concerned, it is just a race between the bishop and the bailiff which shall have me first. If any lady is good enough to hold out a hand to a poor drowning fellow, she had better — — "

"Take care, Dick, that the poor drowning fellow does not pull her in. Don't you think it would be well to consider first what you have got to live on?"

"I have plenty to live on; I know that exactly," said Dick.

"What is it?"

"My wife's fortune."

"You are never serious for a minute, Dick! Don't you think it would be better first to get matters a little into order, so as to know distinctly what you are worth?"

"Quite the contrary; she'd rather not know. She'd rather exercise her imagination than learn distinctly what I am worth. Any woman of sense would prefer marrying me so."

"I don't understand you."

"Why, if I succeed in making matters quite lucid, I don't think she would marry me at all. Isn't it better to say, 'My Angelina,' or whatever else it may be, 'you see before you Sir Richard Arden, who has estates in Yorkshire, in Middlesex, and in Devonshire, thus spanning all England from north to south. We had these estates at the Conquest. There is nothing modern about them but the mortgages. I have never been able to ascertain exactly what they bring in by way of rents, or pay out by way of interest. That I stand here, with flesh upon my bones, and pretty well-made clothes, I hope, upon both, is evidence in a confused way that an English gentleman — a baronet — can subsist upon them; and this magnificent muddle I lay at your feet with the devotion of a passionate admirer of your personal — property!' That, I say, is better than appearing with a balance-sheet in your hand, and saying, 'Madam, I propose marrying you, and I beg to present you with a balance-sheet of the incomings and outgoings of my estates, the intense clearness of which will, I hope, compensate for the nature of its disclosures. I am there shown in the most satisfactory detail to be worth exactly fifteen shillings per annum, and how unlimited is my credit will appear from the immense amount and variety of my debts. In pressing my suit I rely entirely upon your love of perspicuity and your passion for arithmetic, which will find in the ledgers of my steward an almost inexhaustible gratification and indulgence.' However, as you say, Alice, I have time to look about me, and I see you are tired. We'll talk it over tomorrow morning at breakfast. Don't think I have made up my mind; I'll do exactly whatever you like best. But get to your bed, you poor little soul; you do look so tired!"

With great affection they parted for the night. But Sir Richard did not meet her at breakfast.

After she had left the room some time, he changed his mind, left a message for his sister with old Crozier, ordered his servant and trap to the door, and drove into town. It was not his good angel who prompted him. He drove to a place where he was sure to find high play going on, and there luck did not favour him.

What had become of Sir Richard Arden's resolutions? The fascinations of his old vice were irresistible. The ring of the dice, the whirl of the roulette, the plodding pillage of whist — any rite acknowledged by Fortune, the goddess of his soul, was welcome to that keen worshipper. Luck was not always adverse; once or twice he might have retreated in comparative safety; but the temptation to "back his luck" and go on prevailed, and left him where he was.

About a week after the evening passed at Mortlake, a black and awful night of disaster befel him.

Every other extravagance and vice draws its victim on at a regulated pace, but this of gaming is an hourly trifling with life, and one infatuated moment may end him. How short had been the reign of the new baronet, and where were prince and princedom now?

Before five o'clock in the morning, he had twice spent a quarter of an hour tugging at Mr. Levi's office-bell, in the dismal old street in Westminster. Then he drove off toward his lodgings. The roulette was whirling under his eyes whenever for a moment he closed them. He thought he was going mad.

The cabman knew a place where, even at that unseasonable hour, he might have a warm bath; and thither Sir Richard ordered him to drive. After this, he again essayed the Jew's office. The cool early morning was over still quiet London — hardly a soul was stirring. On the steps he waited, pulling the office-bell at intervals. In the stillness of the morning, he could hear it distinctly in the remote room, ringing unheeded in that capacious house.

CHAPTER LXIII.

PLANS.

It was, of course, in vain looking for Mr. Levi there at such an hour. Sir Richard Arden fancied that he had, perhaps, a sleeping-room in the house, and on that chance tried what his protracted alarm might do.

Then he drove to his own house. He had a latchkey, and let himself in. Just as he is, he throws himself into a chair in his dressing-room. He knows there is no use in getting into his bed. In his fatigued state, sleep was quite out of the question. That proud young man was longing to open his heart to the mean, cruel little Jew.

Oh, madness! why had he broken with his masterly and powerful friend, Longcluse? Quite unavailing now, his repentance. They had spoken and passed like ships at sea, in this wide life, and now who could count the miles and billows between them! Never to cross or come in sight again!

Uncle David! Yes, he might go to him; he might spread out the broad evidences of his ruin before him, and adjure him, by the God of mercy, to save him from the great public disgrace that was now imminent; implore of him to give him any pittance he pleased, to subsist on in exile, and to deal with the estates as he himself thought best. But Uncle David was away, quite out of reach. After his whimsical and inflexible custom, lest business should track him in his holiday, he had left no address with his man of business, who only knew that his first destination was Scotland; none with Grace Maubray, who only knew that, attended by Vivian Darnley, she and Lady May were to meet him in about a fortnight on the Continent, where they were to plan together a little excursion in Switzerland or Italy.

Sir Richard quite forgot there was such a meal as breakfast. He ordered his horse to the door, took a furious two hours' ride beyond Brompton, and returned and saw Levi at his office, at his usual hour, eleven o'clock. The Jew was alone. His large lowering eyes were cast on Sir Richard as he entered and approached.

"Look, now; listen," says Sir Richard, who looks wofully wild and pale, and as he seats himself never takes his eyes off Mr. Levi. "I don't care very much who knows it — I think I'm totally *ruined*."

The Jew knows pretty well all about it, but he stares and gapes hypocritically in the face of his visitor as if he were thunderstruck, and he speaks never a word. I suppose he thought it as well, for the sake of brevity and clearness, to allow his client "to let off the shteam" first, a process which Sir Richard forthwith commenced, with both hands on the table — sometimes clenched, sometimes expanded, sometimes with a thump, by blowing off a cloud of oaths and curses, and incoherent expositions of the wrongs and perversities of fortune.

"I don't think I can tell you how much it is. I don't know," says Sir Richard bleakly, in reply to a pertinent question of the Jew's. "There was that rich fellow, what's his name, that makes candles — he's always winning. By Jove, what a thing luck is! He won — I know it is more than two thousand. I gave him I O U's for it. He'd be very glad, of course, to know me, curse him! I don't care, now, who does. And he'd let me owe him twice as much, for as long as I like. I daresay, only too glad — as smooth as one of his own filthy candles. And there were three fellows lending money there. I don't know how much I got — I was stupid. I signed whatever they put before me. Those things can't stand, by heavens; the Chancellor will set them all aside. The confounded villains! What's the Government doing? What's the Government about, I say? Why don't Parliament interfere, to smash those cursed nests of robbers and swindlers? Here I am, utterly robbed — I know I'm *robbed* — and all by that cursed temptation; and — and — and I don't know what cash I got, nor what I have put my name to!"

"I'll make out that in an hour's time. They'll tell me at the houshe who the shentleman wazh."

"And — upon my soul that's true — I owe the people there something too; it can't be much — it isn't much. And, Levi, like a good fellow — by Heaven, I'll *never* forget it to you, if you'll think of something. You've pulled me through so often; I am sure there's goodnature in you; you wouldn't see a fellow you've known so long driven to the wall and made a beggar of, without — without thinking of something."

Levi looked down, with his hands in his pockets, and whistled to himself, and Sir Richard gazed on his vulgar features as if his life or death depended upon every variation of their expression.

"You know," says Levi, looking up and swaying his shoulders a little, "the old chap can't do no more. He's taken a share in that Austrian contract, and he'll want his capital, every pig. I told you lasht time. Wouldn't Lonclushe give you a lift?"

"Not he. He'd rather give me a shove under."

"Well, they tell me you and him wazh very thick; and your uncle'sh man, Blount, knowshe him, and can just ashk him, from himself, mind, not from you."

"For money?" exclaimed Richard.

"Not at a — all," drawled the Jew impatiently. "Lishen — mind. The old fellow, your friend — — "

"He's out of town," interrupted Richard.

"No, he'sh not. I shaw him lasht night. You're a — all wrong. He'sh not Mr. David Harden, if that'sh what you mean. He'sh a better friend, and he'll leave you a lot of tin when he diesh — an old friend of the family — and if all goeshe shmooth he'll come and have a talk with you fashe to fashe, and tell you all his plansh about you, before a week'sh over. But he'll be at hish lasht pound for five or six weeksh to come, till the firsht half-million of the new shtock is in the market; and he shaid, 'I can't draw out a pound of my balanshe, but if he can get Lonclushe's na — me, I'll get him any shum he wantsh, and bear Lonclushe harmlesh.'"

"I don't think I can," said Sir Richard; "I can't be quite sure, though. It is just possible he might."

"Well, let Blount try," said he.

There was another idea also in Mr. Levi's head. He had been thinking whether the situation might not be turned to some more profitable account, for him, than the barren agency for the "friend of the family," who "lent out money gratis," like Antonio; and if he did not "bring down the rate of usance," at all events, deprived the Shylocks of London, in one instance at least, of their fair game.

"If he won't do that, there'sh but one chansh left."

"What is that?" asked Sir Richard, with a secret flutter at his heart. It was awful to think of himself reduced to his last chance, with his recent experience of what a chance is.

"Well," says Mr. Levi, scrawling florid capitals on the table with his office pen, and speaking with much deliberation, "I heard you were going to make a very rich match; and if the shettlementsh was agreed on, I don't know but we might shee our way to advancing all you want."

Sir Richard gets up, and walks slowly two or three times up and down the room.

"I'll see about Blount," said he; "I'll talk to him. I think those things are payable in six or eight days; and that tallow-chandler won't bother me tomorrow, I daresay. I'll go to-day and talk to Blount, and suppose you come to me tomorrow evening at Mortlake. Will nine o'clock do for you? I sha'n't keep you half-an-hour."

"A — all right, Shir — nine, at Mortlake. If you want any diamondsh, I have a beoo — ootiful collar and pendantsh, in that shaafe — brilliantsh. I can give you the lot three thoushand under cosht prishe. You'll wa — ant a preshent for the young la — ady."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Sir Richard, abstractedly. "Tomorrow night — tomorrow evening at nine o'clock."

He stopped at the door, looking silently down the stairs, and then without leavetaking or looking behind him, he ran down, and drove to Mr. Blount's house, close by, in Manchester Buildings.

For more than a year the young gentleman whom we are following this morning had cherished vague aspirations, of which good Lady May had been the object. There was nothing to prevent their union, for the lady was very well disposed to listen. But Richard Arden did not like ridicule, and there was no need to hurry; and besides, within the last half-year had arisen another flame, less mercenary; also, perhaps, reciprocated.

Grace Maubray was handsome, animated; she had that combination of air, tact, cleverness, which enter into the idea of *chic*. With him it had been a financial, but notwithstanding rather agreeable, speculation. Hitherto there seemed ample time before him, and there was no need to define or decide.

Now, you will understand, the crisis had arrived, which admitted of neither hesitation nor delay. He was now at Blount's hall-door. He was certain that he could trust Blount with anything, and he meant to learn from him what *dot* his Uncle David intended bestowing on the young lady.

Mr. Blount was at home. He smiled kindly, and took the young gentleman's hand, and placed a chair for him.

CHAPTER LXIV.

FROM FLOWER TO FLOWER.

Mr. Blount was intelligent: he was an effective though not an artful diplomatist. He promptly undertook to sound Mr. Longcluse without betraying Sir Richard.

Richard Arden did not allude to his losses. He took good care to appear pretty nearly as usual. When he confessed his *tendresse* for Miss Maubray, the grave gentleman smiled brightly, and took him by the hand.

"If *you* should marry the young lady, mark you, she will have sixty thousand pounds down, and sixty thousand more after Mr. David Arden's death. That is splendid, Sir, and I think it will please him *very* much."

"I have suffered a great deal, Mr. Blount, by neglecting his advice hitherto. It shall be my chief object, henceforward, to reform, and to live as he wishes. I believe people can't learn wisdom without suffering."

"Will you take a biscuit and a glass of sherry, Sir Richard?" asked Mr. Blount.

"Nothing, thanks," said Sir Richard. "You know, I'm not as rich as I might have been, and marriage is a very serious step; and you are one of the oldest and most sensible friends I have, and you'll understand that it is only right I should be very sure before taking such a step, involving not myself only, but another who ought to be dearer still, that there should be no mistake about the means on which we may reckon. Are you quite sure that my uncle's intentions are still exactly what you mentioned?"

"Perfectly; he authorised me to say so two months ago, and on the eve of his departure on Friday last he repeated his instructions."

Sir Richard, in silence, shook the old man very cordially by the hand, and was gone.

As he drove to his house in May Fair, Sir Richard's thoughts, among other things, turned again upon the question, "Who could his mysterious benefactor be?"

Once or twice had dimly visited his mind a theory which, ever since his recent conversation with Mr. Levi, had been growing more solid and vivid.

An illegitimate brother of his father’s, Edwin Raikes, had gone out to Australia early in life, with a purse to which three brothers, the late Sir Reginald, Harry, and David, had contributed. He had not maintained any correspondence with English friends and kindred; but rumours from time to time reached home that he had amassed a fortune. His feelings to the family of Arden had always been kindly. He was older than Uncle David, and had well earned a retirement from the life of exertion and exile which had consumed all the vigorous years of his manhood. Was this the “old party” for whom Mr. Levi was acting?

With this thought opened a new and splendid hope upon the mind of Sir Richard. Here was a fortune, if rumour spoke truly, which, combined with David Arden’s, would be amply sufficient to establish the old baronetage upon a basis of solid magnificence such as it had never rested on before.

It would not do, however, to wait for this. The urgency of the situation demanded immediate action. Sir Richard made an elaborate toilet, after which, in a hansom, he drove to Lady May Penrose’s.

If our hero had had fewer things to think about he would have gone first, I fancy, to Miss Grace Maubray. It could do no great harm, however, to feel his way a little with Lady May, he thought, as he chatted with that plump alternative of his tender dilemma. But in this wooing there was a difficulty of a whimsical kind. Poor Lady May was so easily won, and made so many openings for his advances, that he was at his wits’ end to find evasions by which to postpone the happy crisis which she palpably expected. He did succeed, however; and with a promise of calling again, with the lady’s permission, that evening, he took his leave.

Before making his call at his uncle’s house, in the hope of seeing Grace Maubray, he had to return to Mr. Blount, in Manchester Buildings, where he hoped to receive from that gentleman a report of his interview with Mr. Longcluse.

I shall tell you here what that report related. Mr. Longcluse was fortunately still at his house when Mr. Blount called, and immediately admitted him. Mr. Longcluse’s horse and groom were at the door; he was on the point of taking his ride. His gloves and whip were beside him on the table as Mr. Blount entered.

Mr. Blount made his apologies, and was graciously received. His visit was, in truth, by no means unwelcome.

"Mr. David Arden very well, I hope?"

"Quite well, thanks. He has left town."

"Indeed! And where has he gone — the moors?"

"To Scotland, but not to shoot, I think. And he's going abroad then — going to travel."

"On the Continent? How nice that is! What part?"

"Switzerland and Italy, I think," said Mr. Blount, omitting all mention of Paris, where Mr. Arden was going first to make a visit to the Baron Vanboeren.

"He's going over ground that I know very well," said Mr. Longcluse. "Happy man! He can't quite break away from his business, though, I daresay."

"He never tells us where a letter will find him, and the consequence is his holidays are never spoiled."

"Not a bad plan, Mr. Blount. Won't he visit the Paris Exhibition?"

"I rather think not."

"Can I do anything for you, Mr. Blount?"

"Well, Mr. Longcluse, I just called to ask you a question. I have been invited to take part in arranging a little matter which I take an interest in, because it affects the Arden estates."

"Is Sir Richard Arden interested in it?" inquired Mr. Longcluse, gently and coldly.

"Yes, I rather fancy he would be benefited."

"I have had a good deal of unpleasantness, and, I might add, a great deal of ingratitude from that quarter, and I have made up my mind never again to have anything to do with him or his affairs. I have no unpleasant *feeling*, you understand; no resentment; there is nothing, of course, he could say or do that could in the least affect me. It is simply that, having coolly reviewed his conduct, I have quite made up my mind to aid in nothing in which he has act, part, or interest."

"It was not *directly*, but simply as a surety — — "

"All the same, so far as I'm concerned," said Mr. Longcluse sharply.

"And only, I fancied, it might be, as Mr. David Arden is absent, and you should be protected by satisfactory joint security — — "

"I won't do it," said Mr. Longcluse, a little brusquely; and he took out his watch and glanced at it impatiently.

"Sir Richard, I think, will be in funds immediately," said Mr. Blount.

"How so?" asked Mr. Longcluse. "You'll excuse me, as you press the subject, for saying *that* will be something new."

"Well," said Mr. Blount, who saw that his last words had made an impression, "Sir Richard is likely to be married, very advantageously, immediately."

"Are settlements agreed on?" inquired Mr. Longcluse, with real interest.

"No, not yet; but I know all about them."

"He is accepted then?"

"He has not proposed yet; but there can be, I fancy, no doubt that the lady likes him, and all will go right."

"Oh! and who is the lady?"

"I'm not at liberty to tell."

"Quite right; I ought not to have asked," says Mr. Longcluse; and looks down, slapping at intervals the side of his trousers lightly with his whip. He raises his eyes to Mr. Blount's face, and looks on the point of asking another question, but he does not.

"It is my opinion," said Mr. Blount, "the kindness would involve absolutely no risk whatever."

There was a little pause. Mr. Longcluse looks rather dark and anxious; perhaps his mind has wandered quite from the business before them. But it returns, and he says, —

"Risk or no risk, Mr. Blount, I don't mean to do him that kindness; and for how long will Mr. David Arden be absent?"

"Unless he should take a sudden thought to return, he'll be away at least two months."

"Where is he? — in Scotland?"

"I *really* don't know."

"Couldn't one see him for a few minutes before he starts? Where does he take the steamer?"

"Southampton."

"And on what day?"

"You really want a word with him?" asked Blount, whose hopes revived.

"I may."

"Well, the only person who will know that is Mr. Humphries, of Pendle Castle, near that town; for he has to transact some trust-business with that gentleman as he passes through."

"Humphries, of Pendle Castle. Very good; thanks."

Mr. Longcluse looks again at his watch.

"And perhaps you will reconsider the matter I spoke of?"

"No use, Mr. Blount — not the least. I have quite made up my mind. Anything more? I am afraid I must be off."

"Nothing, thanks," said Mr. Blount.

And so the interview ended.

When he was gone, Mr. Longcluse thought darkly for a minute.

"That's a straightforward fellow, they say. I suppose the facts are so. It can't be, though, that Miss Maubray, that handsome creature with so much money, is thinking of marrying that insolent coxcomb. It may be Lady May, but the other is more likely. We must not allow *that*, Sir Richard. That would never do."

There was a fixed frown on his face, and he was smiling in his dream. Out he went. His pale face looked as if he meditated a wicked joke, and, frowning still in utter abstraction, he took the bridle from his groom, mounted, looked about him as if just wakened, and set off at a canter, followed by his servant, for David Arden's house.

Smiling, gay, as if no care had ever crossed him, Longcluse enters the drawingroom, where he finds the handsome young lady writing a note at that moment.

"Mr. Longcluse, I'm so glad you've come!" she says, with a brilliant smile. "I was writing to poor Lady Ethel, who is mourning, you know, in the country. The death of her father in the house was so awfully sudden, and I'm telling her all the news I can think of to amuse her. And is it really true that old Sir Thomas Giggles has grown so cross with his pretty young wife, and objects to her allowing Lord Knocknea to make love to her?"

"Quite true. It is a very bad quarrel, and I'm afraid it can't be made up," said Mr. Longcluse.

"It must be very bad, indeed, if Sir Thomas can't make it up; for he allowed his first wife, I am told, to do anything she pleased. Is it to be a separation?"

"At *least*. And you heard, I suppose, of poor old Lady Glare?"

"No!"

"She has been rolling ever so long, you know, in a sea of troubles, and now, at last, she has fairly foundered."

"How do you mean?"

"They have sold her diamonds," said Mr. Longcluse. "Didn't you hear?"

"No! Really? Sold her diamonds? Good Heaven! Then there's nothing left of her but her teeth. I hope they won't sell them."

"It is an awful misfortune," said Mr. Longcluse.

"Misfortune! She's utterly ruined. It was her diamonds that people asked. I am really sorry. She was such fun; she was so fat, and such a fool, and said such delicious things, and dressed herself so like a macaw. Alas! I shall never see her more; and people thought her only use on earth was to carry about her diamonds. No one seemed to perceive what a delightful creature she was. What about Lady May Penrose? I have not seen her since I came back from Cowes, the day before yesterday, and we leave London together on Tuesday."

"Lady May! Oh! she is to receive a very interesting communication, I believe. She is one name on a pretty long and very distinguished list, which Sir Richard Arden, I am told, has made out, and carries about with him in his pocketbook."

"You're talking riddles; pray speak plainly."

"Well, Lady May is one of several ladies who are to be honoured with a proposal."

"And would you have me believe that Sir Richard Arden has really made such a fool of himself as to make out a list of eligible ladies whom he is about to ask to marry him, and that he has had the excellent good sense and taste to read this list to his acquaintance?"

"I mean to say this — I'll tell the whole story — Sir Richard has ruined himself at play; take that as a fact to start with. He is literally ruined. His uncle is away; but I don't think any man in his senses would think of paying his losses for him. He turns, therefore, naturally, to the more amiable and less arithmetical sex, and means to invite, in turn, a series of fair and affluent admirers to undertake, by means of suitable settlements, that interesting office for him."

"I don't think you like him, Mr. Longcluse; is not that a story a little too like 'The Merry Wives of Windsor?'"

"It is quite certain I don't like him, and it is quite certain," added Mr. Longcluse, with one of his cold little laughs, "that if I did like him, I should not tell the story; but it is also certain that the story is, in all its parts, strictly fact. If you permit me the pleasure of a call in two or three days, you will tell me you no longer doubt it."

Mr. Longcluse was looking down as he said that with a gentle and smiling significance. The young lady blushed a little, and then more intensely, as he spoke, and looking through the window, asked with a laugh, —

"But how shall we know whether he really speaks to Lady May?"

"Possibly by his marrying her," laughed Mr. Longcluse. "He certainly will if he can, unless he is caught and married on the way to her house."

"He was a little unfortunate in showing you his list, wasn't he?" said Grace Maubray.

"I did not say that. If there had been any, the least, confidence, nothing on earth could have induced me to divulge it. We are not even, at present, on speaking terms. He had the coolness to send a Mr. Blount, who transacts all Mr. David Arden's affairs, to ask me to become his security, Mr. Arden being away; and by way of inducing me to do so, he disclosed, with the coarseness which is the essence of business, the matrimonial schemes which are to recoup, within a few days, the losses of the roulette, the whist-table, or the dice-box."

"Oh! Mr. Blount, I'm told, is a very honest man."

"Quite so; particularly accurate, and I don't think anything on earth would induce him to tell an untruth," testifies Mr. Longcluse.

After a little pause, Miss Maubray laughs.

"One certainly does learn," she said, "something new every day. Could any one have fancied a *gentleman* descending to so gross a meanness?"

"Everybody is a gentleman now-a-days," remarked Mr. Longcluse with a smile; "but every one is not a hero — they give way, more or less, under temptation. Those who stand the test of the crucible and the furnace are seldom met with."

At this moment the door opened, and Lord Wynderbroke was announced. A little start, a lighting of the eyes, as Grace rose, and a fluttered advance, with a very pretty little hand extended, to meet him, testified, perhaps, rather more surprise than one would have quite expected. For Mr.

Longcluse, who did not know him so well as Miss Maubray, recognised his voice, which was peculiar, and resembling the caw of a jay, as he put a question to the servant on his way up.

Mr. Longcluse took his leave. He was not sorry that Lord Wynderbroke had called. He wished no success to Sir Richard's wooing. He thought he had pretty well settled the question in Miss Maubray's mind, and smiling, he rode at a pleasant canter to Lady May's. It was as well, perhaps, that she should hear the same story. Lady May, however, unfortunately, had just gone out for a drive.

CHAPTER LXV.

BEHIND THE ARRAS.

It was quite true that Lady May was not at home. She was actually, with a little charming palpitation, driving to pay a very interesting visit to Grace Maubray. In affairs of the kind that now occupied her mind, she had no confidants but very young people.

Miss Maubray was at home — and instantly Lady May's plump instep was seen on the carriage step. She disdained assistance, and descended with a heavy skip upon the flags, where she executed an involuntary frisk that carried her a little out of the line of advance.

As she ascended the stairs, she met her friend Lord Wynderbroke coming down. They stopped for a moment on the landing, under a picture of Cupid and Venus; Lady May, smiling, remarked, a little out of breath, what a charming day it was, and expressed her amazement at seeing him in town — a surprise which he agreeably reciprocated. He had been at Glenkiltie in the Highlands, where he had accidentally met Mr. David Arden. "Miss Maubray is in the drawingroom," he said, observing that the eyes of the good lady glanced unconsciously upward at the door of that room. And then they parted affectionately, and turned their backs on each other with a sense of relief.

"Well, my dear," she said to Grace Maubray as soon as they had kissed, "longing to have a few minutes with you, with ever so much to say. You have no idea what it is to be stopped on the stairs by that tiresome man — I'll never quarrel with you again for calling him a bore. No matter, here I am; and really, my dear, it *is* such an odd affair — not quite that; such an odd scene, I don't know where or how to begin."

"I wish I could help you," said Miss Maubray laughing.

"Oh, my dear, you'd never guess in a hundred years."

"How do you know? Hasn't a certain baronet something to do with it?"

"Well, well — dear me! That is *very* extraordinary. Did he tell you he was going to — to — Good gracious! My dear, it *is* the most extraordinary thing. I believe you hear everything; but — a — but *listen*. Not an hour ago he came — Richard Arden, of course, we mean — and, my dear Grace, he spoke so very nicely of his troubles, poor fellow, you know — debts I mean, of course — not the least his fault, and all that kind of thing, and — he went on — I really don't know how to tell you. But he said — he said — he said he liked me, and no one else on earth; and he was on the very point of saying *everything*, when, just at that moment, who should come in but that gossiping old woman, Lady Botherton — and he whispered, as he was going, that he would return, after I had had my drive. The carriage was at the door, so, when I got rid of the old woman, I got into it, and came straight here to have a talk with you; and what do you think I ought to say? Do tell me, like a darling, do!"

"I wish you would tell *me* what one ought to say to that question," said Grace Maubray with a slight disdain (that young lady was in the most unreasonable way piqued), "for I'm told he's going to ask me precisely the same question."

"*You*, my dear?" said Lady May after a pause, during which she was staring at the smiling face of the young lady; "you can't be serious!"

"*He* can't be serious, you mean," answered the young lady, "and — who's this?" she broke off, as she saw a cab drive up to the hall-door. "Dear me! is it? No. Yes, indeed, it is Sir Richard Arden. We must not be seen together. He'll know you have been talking to me. Just go in here."

She opened the door of the boudoir adjoining the room.

"I'll send him away in a moment. You may hear every word I have to say. I should like it. I shall give him a lecture."

As she thus spoke she heard his step on the stair, and motioned Lady May into the inner room, into which she hurried and closed the door, leaving it only a little way open.

These arrangements are hardly completed when Sir Richard is announced. Grace is positively angry. But never had she looked so beautiful; her eyes so tenderly lustrous under their long lashes; her colour so brilliant — an expression so maidenly and sad. If it was acting, it was very well done. You would have sworn that the melancholy and agitation of her looks, and the slightly quickened movement of her breathing, were those of a person who felt that the hour of her fate had come.

With what elation Richard Arden saw these beautiful signs!

CHAPTER LXVI.

A BUBBLE BROKEN.

After a few words had been exchanged, Grace said in reply to a question of Sir Richard's, —

"Lady May and I are going together, you know: in a day or two we shall be at Brighton. I mean to bid Alice goodbye to-day. There — I mean at Brighton — we are to meet Vivian Darnley, and possibly another friend; and we go to meet your uncle at that pretty little town in Switzerland, where Lady May —— I wonder, by-the-bye, you did not arrange to come with us; Lady May travels with us the entire time. She says there are some very interesting ruins there."

"Why, dear old soul!" said Sir Richard, who felt called upon to say something to set himself right with respect to Lady May, "she's thinking of quite another place. She will be herself the only interesting ruin there."

"I think you wish to vex me," said pretty Grace, turning away with a smile, which showed, nevertheless, that this kind of joke was not an unmixed vexation to her. "I don't care for ruins myself."

"Nor do I," he said, archly.

"But you don't think so of Lady May. I know you don't. You are franker with her than with me, and you tell her a very different tale."

"I must be very frank, then, if I tell her more than I know myself. I never said a civil thing of Lady May, except once or twice, to the poor old thing herself, when I wanted her to do one or two little things, to please *you*."

"Oh! come, you can't deceive me; I've seen you place your hand to your heart, like a theatrical hero, when you little fancied any one but she saw it."

"Now, really, that is too bad. I may have put my hand to my side, when it ached from laughing."

"How can you talk so? You know very well I have heard you tell her how you admire her music and her landscapes."

"No, no — not landscapes — she paints faces. But her colouring is, as artists say, too chalky — and nothing but red and white, like — what is it like? — like a clown. Why did not she get the late Mr. Etty — she's always talking of him — to teach her something of his tints?"

"You are not to speak so of Lady May. You forget she is my particular friend," says the young lady; but her pretty face does not express so much severity as her words. "I do think you like her. You merely talk so to throw dust in people's eyes. Why should not you be frank with me?"

"I wish I dare be frank with you," said Sir Richard.

"And why not?"

"How can I tell how my disclosures might be punished? My frankness might extinguish the best hope I live for; a few rash words might make me a very unhappy man for life."

"Really? Then I can quite understand that reflection alarming you in the midst of a tête-à-tête with Lady May; and even interrupting an interesting conversation."

Sir Richard looked at her quickly, but her looks were perfectly artless.

"I really do wish you would spare me all further allusion to that good woman. I can bear that kind of fun from any one but you. Why will you? she is old enough to be my mother. She is fat, and painted, and ridiculous. You think me totally without romance? I wish to heaven I were. There is a reason, that makes your saying all that particularly cruel. I am not the sordid creature you take me for. I'm not insensible. I'm not a mere stock of stone. Never was human being more capable of the wildest passion. Oh, if I dare tell you all!"

Was all this acting? Certainly not. Never was shallow man, for the moment, more in earnest. Cool enough he was, although he had always admired this young lady, when he entered the room. He had made that entrance, nevertheless, in a spirit quite dramatic. But Miss Maubray never looked so brilliant, never half so tender. He took fire — the situation aiding quite unexpectedly — and the flame was real. It might have been over as quickly as a balloon on fire; but for the moment the conflagration was intense.

How was Miss Maubray affected? An immensely abler performer than the young gentleman who had entered the room with his part at his fingers' ends, and all his looks and emphasis arranged — only to break through all this, and begin extemporising wildly — she, on the contrary, maintained her *rôle* with admirable coolness. It was not, perhaps, so easy; for notwithstanding appearances, her histrionic powers were severely tasked; for never was she more angry. Her self-esteem was wounded; the fancy (it was no more), she had cherished for him was gone, and a great disgust was there instead.

"You shall ask me no questions till I have done asking mine," said the young lady, with decision; "and I will speak as much as I please of Lady May!"

This jealousy flattered Sir Richard.

"And I will say this," continued Grace Maubray, "you never address her except as a lover, in what you romantic people would call the language of love."

"Now, now, now! How can you say that? Is that fair?"

"You do."

"No, really, I swear — that's *too* bad!"

"Yes, the other day, when you spoke to her at the carriage window — you did not think I heard — you accused her so tenderly of having failed to go to Lady Harbroke's garden-party, and you couldn't say what you meant in plain terms, but you said, 'Why were you false?'"

"I didn't, I swear."

"Oh! you did; I heard every syllable; 'false' was the word."

"Well, if I said 'false,' I must have been thinking of her hair; for she is really a very honest old woman."

At this moment a female voice in distress is heard, and poor Lady May comes pushing out of the pretty little room, in which Grace Maubray had placed her, sobbing and shedding floods of tears.

"I can't stay there any longer, for I hear everything; I can't help hearing every word — honest old woman, and all — opprobrious. Oh! how *can* people be so? how *can* they? Oh! I'm very angry — I'm very angry — I'm very angry!"

If Miss Maubray were easily moved to pity she might have been at sight of the big innocent eyes turned up at her, from which rolled great tears, making visible channels through the paint down her cheeks. She sobbed and wept like a fat, goodnatured child, and pitifully she continued sobbing, "Oh, I'm a-a-ho — very angry; wha-at shall I do-o-o, my dear? I-I'm very angry — oh, oh — I'm very a-a-angry!"

"So am I," said Grace Maubray, with a fiery glance at the young baronet, who stood fixed where he was, like an image of death; "and I had intended, dear Lady May, telling you a thing which Sir Richard Arden may as well hear, as I mean to write to tell Alice to-day; it is that I am to be married — I have accepted Lord Wynderbroke — and — and that's all."

Sir Richard, I believe, said "Goodbye." Nobody heard him. I don't think he remembers how he got on his horse. I don't think the ladies saw him leave the room — only, he was gone.

Poor Lady May takes her incoherent leave. She has got her veil over her face, to baffle curiosity. Miss Maubray stands at the window, the tip of her finger to her brilliant lip, contemplating Lady May as she gets in with a great jerk and swing of the carriage, and she hears the footman say "Home," and sees a fat hand, in a lilac glove, pull up the window hurriedly. Then she sits down on a sofa, and laughs till she quivers again, and tears overflow her eyes; and she says in the intervals, almost breathlessly, —

"Oh, poor old thing! I really am sorry. Who could have thought she cared so much? Poor old soul! what a ridiculous old thing!"

Such broken sentences of a rather contemptuous pity rolled and floated along the even current of her laughter.

CHAPTER LXVII.

BOND AND DEED.

The summer span of days was gone; it was quite dark, and long troops of withered leaves drifted in rustling trains over the avenue, as Mr. Levi, observant of his appointment, drove up to the grand old front of Mortlake, which in the dark spread before him like a house of white mist.

“I shay,” exclaimed Mr. Levi, softly, arresting the progress of the cabman, who was about running up the steps, “I’ll knock myshelf — wait you there.”

Mr. Levi was smoking. Standing at the base of the steps, he looked up, and right and left with some curiosity. It was too dark; he could hardly see the cold glimmer of the windows that reflected the grey horizon. Vaguely, however, he could see that it was a grander place than he had supposed. He looked down the avenue, and between the great trees over the gate he saw the distant lights, and heard through the dim air the chimes, far off, from London steeples, succeeding one another, or mingling faintly, and telling all whom it might concern the solemn lesson of the flight of time.

Mr. Levi thought it might be worth while coming down in the daytime, and looking over the house and place to see what could be made of them; the thing was sure to go a dead bargain. At present he could see nothing but the wide, vague, grey front, and the faint glow through the hall windows, which showed their black outlines sharply enough.

“Well, *he*’sh come a mucker, anyhow,” murmured Mr. Levi, with one of his smiles that showed so wide his white sharp teeth.

He knocked at the door and rang the bell. It was not a footman, but Crozier who opened it. The old servant of the family did not like the greasy black curls, the fierce jet eyes, the sallow face and the large, moist, sullen mouth, that presented themselves under the brim of Mr. Levi’s hat, nor the tawdry glimmer of chains on his waistcoat, nor the cigar still burning in his fingers. Sir Richard had told Crozier, however, that a Mr. Levi, whom he described, was to call at a certain hour, on very particular business, and was to be instantly admitted.

Mr. Levi looks round him, and extinguishes his cigar before following Crozier, whose countenance betrays no small contempt and dislike, as he eyes the little man askance, as if he would like well to be uncivil to him.

Crozier leads him to the right, through a small apartment, to a vast square room, long disused, still called the library, though but few books remain on the shelves, and those in disorder. It is a chilly night, and a little fire burns in the grate, over which Sir Richard is cowering. Very haggard, the baronet starts up as the name of his visitor is announced.

“Come in,” cries Sir Richard, walking to meet him. “Here — here I am, Levi, utterly ruined. There isn’t a soul I dare tell how I am beset, or anything to, but you. Do, for God’s sake take pity on me, and think of something! my brain’s quite gone — you’re such a clever fellow” (he is dragging Levi by the arm all this time towards the candles): “do now, you’re sure to see some way out. It is a matter of *honour*; I only want time. If I could only find my Uncle David: think of his selfishness — good heaven! was there ever man so treated? and there’s the bank letter — *there* — on the table; you see it — dunning me, the ungrateful harpies, for the trifle — what is it? — three hundred and something, I overdrew; and that blackguard tallow-chandler has been three times to my house in town, for payment to-day, and it’s more than I thought — near four thousand, he says — the scoundrel! It’s just the same to him two months hence; he’s full of money, the beast — a fellow like that — it’s delight to him to get hold of a gentleman, and he won’t take a bill — the lying rascal! He is pressed for cash just now — a pug-faced villain with three hundred thousand pounds! Those scoundrels! I mean the people, whatever they are, that lent me the money; it turns out it was all but at sight, and they were with my attorney to-day, and they won’t wait. I wish I was shot; I envy the dead dogs rolling in the Thames! By heaven; Levi, I’ll say you’re the best friend man ever had on earth, I will, if you manage something! I’ll never forget it to you; I’ll have it in my power, yet! no one ever said I was ungrateful; I swear I’ll be the making of you! *Do*, Levi, think; you’re accustomed to — to emergency, and unless you will, I’m utterly ruined — ruined, by heaven, before I have time to think!”

The Jew listened to all this with his hands in his pockets, leaning back in his chair, with his big eyes staring on the wild face of the baronet, and his heavy mouth hanging. He was trying to reduce his countenance to vacancy.

"What about them shettlements, Sir Richard — a nishe young lady with a ha-a-tful o' money?" insinuated Levi.

"I've been thinking over that, but it wouldn't do, with my affairs in this state, it would not be honourable or straight. Put that quite aside."

Mr. Levi gaped at him for a moment solemnly, and turned suddenly, and, brute as he was, spit on the Turkey carpet. He was not, as you perceive, ceremonious; but he could not allow the baronet to see the laughter that without notice caught him for a moment, and could think of no better way to account for his turning away his head.

"That'sh wery honourable indeed," said the Jew, more solemn than ever; "and if you can't play in that direction, I'm afraid you're in queer shtreet."

The baronet was standing before Levi, and at these words from that dirty little oracle, a terrible chill stole up from his feet to the crown of his head. Like a frozen man he stood there, and the Jew saw that his very lips were white. Sir Richard feels, for the first time, actually, that he is ruined.

The young man tries to speak, twice. The big eyes of the Jew are staring up at the contortion. Sir Richard can see nothing but those two big fiery eyes; he turns quickly away and walks to the end of the room.

"There's just one fiddlestring left to play on," muses the Jew.

"For God's sake!" exclaims Sir Richard, turning about, in a voice you would not have known, and for fully a minute the room was so silent you could scarcely have believed that two men were breathing in it.

"Shir Richard, will you be so good as to come nearer a bit? There, that'sh the cheeshe. I brought thish 'ere thing."

It is a square parchment with a good deal of printed matter, and blanks, written in, and a law stamp fixed with an awful regularity, at the corner.

"Casht your eye over it," says Levi, coaxingly, as he pushes it over the table to the young gentleman, who is sitting now at the other side.

The young man looks at it, reads it, but just then, if it had been a page of "Robinson Crusoe," he could not have understood it.

"I'm not quite myself, I can't follow it; too much to think of. What is it?"

"A bond and warrant to confess judgment."

"What is it for?"

"Ten thoushand poundsh."

"Sign it, shall I? Can you do anything with it?"

"Don't raishe your voishe, but lishten. Your friend" — and at the phrase Mr. Levi winked mysteriously— "has enough to do it twishe over; and upon my shoul, I'll shwear on the book, azh I hope to be shaved, it will never shee the light; he'll never raishe a pig on it, sho' 'elp me, nor let it out of hish 'ands, till he givesh it back to you. He can't ma-ake no ushe of it; I knowshe him well, and he'll pay you the ten thoushand tomorrow morning, and he wantsh to shake handsh with you, and make himself known to you, and talk a bit."

"But — but my signature wouldn't satisfy him," began Sir Richard bewildered.

"Oh! *no* — no, no?" murmured Mr. Levi, fiddling with the corner of the bank's reminder which lay on the table.

"Mr. Longcluse won't sign it," said Sir Richard.

Mr. Levi threw himself back in his chair, and looked with a roguish expression still upon the table, and gave the corner of the note a little fillip.

"Well," said Levi, after both had been some time silent, "it ain't much, only to write his name on the penshil line, *there*, you see, and *there* — he shouldn't make no bonesh about it. Why, it's done every day. Do you think I'd help in a thing of the short if there was any danger? The Sheneral's come to town, is he? What are you afraid of? Don't you be a shild — ba-ah!"

All this Mr. Levi said so low that it was as if he were whispering to the table, and he kept looking down as he put the parchment over to Sir Richard, who took it in his hand, and the bond trembled so much that he set it down again.

"Leave it with me," he said faintly.

Levi got up with an unusual hectic in each cheek, and his eyes very brilliant.

"I'll meet you what time you shay tonight; you had besht take a little time. It'sh ten now. Three hoursh will do it. I'll go on to my offish by one o'clock, and you come any time from one to two."

Sir Richard was trembling.

"Between one and two, mind. Hang it! Shir Richard, don't you be a fool about nothing," whispers the Jew, as black as thunder.

He is fumbling in his breastpocket, and pulling out a sheaf of letters; he selects one, which he throws upon the parchment that lies open on the table.

“That’sh the note you forgot in my offish yeshterday, with hish name shined to it. There, now you have everything.”

Without any form of valediction, the Jew had left the room. Sir Richard sits with his teeth set, and a strange frown upon his face, scarcely breathing. He hears the cab drive away. Before him on the table lie the papers.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

SIR RICHARD'S RESOLUTION.

Two hours had passed, and more, of solitude. With a candle in his hand, and his hat and greatcoat on, Sir Richard Arden came out into the hall. His trap awaited him at the door.

In the interval of his solitude, something incredible has happened to him. It is over. A spectral secret accompanies him henceforward. A devil sits in his pocket, in that parchment. He dares not think of himself. Something sufficient to shake the world of London, and set all English Christian tongues throughout the earth wagging on one theme, has happened.

Does he repent? One thing is certain: he dares not falter. Something within him once or twice commanded him to throw his crime into the fire, while yet it is obliterable. But what then? what of tomorrow? Into that sheer black sea of ruin, that reels and yawns as deep as eye can fathom beneath him, he must dive and see the light no more. Better his chance.

He won't think of what he has done, of what he is going to do. He suspects his courage: he dares not tempt his cowardice. Braver, perhaps, it would have been to meet the worst at once. But surely, according to the theory of chances, we have played the true game. Is not a little time gained, everything? Are we not in friendly hands? Has not that little scoundrel committed himself, by an all but actual participation in the affair? It can never come to *that*. "I have only to confess, and throw myself at Uncle David's feet, and the one dangerous debt would instantly be brought up and cancelled."

These thoughts came vaguely, and on his heart lay an all but insupportable load. The sight of the staircase reminded him that Alice must long since have gone to her room. He yearned to see her and say goodnight. It was the last farewell that the brother she had known from her childhood till now should ever speak or look. That brother was to die tonight, and a spirit of guilt to come in his stead.

He taps lightly at her door. She is asleep. He opens it, and dimly sees her innocent head upon the pillow. If his shadow were cast upon her dream, what an image would she have seen looking in at the door! A sudden horror seizes him — he draws back and closes the door; on the lobby he pauses. It was a last moment of grace. He stole down the stairs, mounted his taxcart, took the reins from his servant in silence, and drove swiftly into town. In Parliament Street, near the corner of the street leading to Levi's office, they passed a policeman, lounging on the flagway. Richard Arden is in a strangely nervous state; he fancies he will stop and question him, and he touches the horse with the whip to get quickly by.

In his breastpocket he carried his ghastly secret. A pretty business if he happened to be thrown out, and a policeman should make an inventory of his papers, as he lay insensible in an hospital — a pleasant thing if he were robbed in these villanous streets, and the bond advertised, for a reward, by a pretended finder. A nice thing, good heaven! if it should wriggle and slip its way out of his pocket, in the jolting and tremble of the drive, and fall into London hands, either rascally or severe. He pulled up, and gave the reins to the servant, and felt, however gratefully, with his fingers, the crisp crumple of the parchment under the cloth! Did his servant look at him oddly as he gave him the reins? Not he; but Sir Richard began to suspect him and everything. He made him stop near the angle of the street, and there he got down, telling him rather savagely — for his fancied look was still in the baronet's brain — not to move an inch from that spot.

It was halfpast one as his steps echoed down the street in which Mr. Levi had his office. There was a figure leaning with its back in the recess of Levi's door, smoking. Sir Richard's temper was growing exasperated.

It was Levi himself. Upstairs they stumble in the dark. Mr. Levi has not said a word. He is not treating his visitor with much ceremony. He lets himself into his office, secured with a heavy iron bar, and a lock that makes a great clang, and proceeds to light a candle. The flame expands and the light shows well-barred shutters, and the familiar objects.

When Mr. Levi had lighted a second candle, he fixed his great black eyes on the young baronet, who glances over his shoulder at the door, but the Jew has secured it. Their eyes meet for a moment, and Sir Richard places his hand nervously in his breastpocket and takes out the parchment. Levi nods and extends his hand. Each now holds it by a corner, and as Sir Richard lets it go hesitatingly, he says faintly —

"Levi, you wouldn't — you could not run any risk with that?"

Levi stands by his great iron safe, with the big key in his hand. He nods in reply, and locking up the document, he knocks his knuckles on the iron door, with a long and solemn wink.

"Sha-afe! — that'sh the word," says he, and then he drops the keys into his pocket again.

There was a silence of a minute or more. A spell was stealing over them; an influence was in the room. Each eyed the other, shrinkingly, as a man might eye an assassin. The Jew knew that there was danger in that silence; and yet he could not break it. He could not disturb the influence acting on Richard Arden's mind. It was his good angel's last pleading, before the long farewell.

In a dreadful whisper Richard Arden speaks: —

"Give me that parchment back," says he.

Satan finds his tongue again.

"Give it back?" repeats Levi, and a pause ensues. "Of course I'll give it back; and I wash my hands of it and you, and you're throwing away ten thoushand poundsh for *nothing*."

Levi was taking out his keys as he spoke, and as he fumbled them over one by one, he said —

"You'll want a lawyer in the Insholwent Court, and you'd find Mishter Sholomonsh azh shatisfactory a shengleman azh any in London. He'sh an auctioneer, too; and there'sh no good in your meetin' that friendly cove here tomorrow, for he'sh one o' them honourable chaps, and he'll never look at you after your schedule's lodged, and the shooner that'sh done the better; and them women we was courting, won't they laugh!"

Hereupon, with great alacrity, Mr. Levi began to apply the key to the lock.

"Don't mind. Keep it; and mind, you d —— d little swindler, so sure as you stand there, if you play me a trick, I'll blow your brains out, if it were in the police-office!"

Mr. Levi looked hard at him, and nodded. He was accustomed to excited language in certain situations.

"Well," said he coolly, a second time returning the keys to his pocket, "your friend will be here at twelve tomorrow, and if you please him as well as he expects, who knows wha-at may be? If he leavesh you half hish money, you'll not 'ave many bill transhactionsh on your handsh."

"May God Almighty have mercy on me!" groans Sir Richard, hardly above his breath.

"You shall have the cheques then. He'll be here all right."

"I — I forget; did you say an hour?"

Levi repeats the hour. Sir Richard walks slowly to the stairs, down which Levi lights him. Neither speaks.

In a few minutes more the young gentleman is driving rapidly to his town house, where he means to end that long-remembered night.

When he had got to his room, and dismissed his valet, he sat down. He looked round, and wondered how collected he now was. The situation seemed like a dream, or his sense of danger had grown torpid. He could not account for the strange indifference that had come over him. He got quickly into bed. It was late, and he exhausted, and aided, I know not by what narcotic, he slept a constrained, odd sleep — black as Erebus — the thread of which snaps suddenly, and he is awake with a heart beating fast, as if from a sudden start. A hard bitter voice has said close by the pillow, "You are the first Arden that ever did that!" and with these words grating in his ears, he awoke, and had a confused remembrance of having been dreaming of his father.

Another dream, later on, startled him still more. He was in Levi's office, and while they were talking over the horrid document, in a moment it blew out of the window; and a lean, ill-looking man, in a black coat, like the famous person who, in old woodcuts, picked up the shadow of Peter Schlemel, caught the parchment from the pavement, and with his eyes fixed cornerwise upon him, and a dreadful smile, tapped his long finger on the bond, and with wide paces stepped swiftly away with it in his hand.

Richard Arden started up in his bed; the cold moisture of terror was upon his forehead, and for a moment he did not know where he was, or how much of his vision was real. The grey twilight of early morning was over the town. He welcomed the light; he opened the window-shutters wide. He looked from the window down upon the street. A lean man with tattered black, with a hammer in his hand, just as the man in his dream had held the roll of parchment, was slowly stepping with long strides away from his house, along the street.

As his thoughts cleared, his panic increased. Nothing had happened between the time of his lying down and his up-rising to alter his situation, and the same room sees him now half mad.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE MEETING.

Near the appointed hour, he walked across the park, and through the Horse Guards, and in a few minutes more was between the tall oldfashioned houses of the street in which Mr. Levi's office is to be found. He passes by a dingy hired coach, with a tarnished crest on the door, and sees two Jewish-looking men inside, both smiling over some sly joke. Whose door are they waiting at? He supposes another Jewish office seeks the shade of that pensive street.

Mr. Levi opened his office door for his handsome client. They were quite to themselves. Mr. Levi did not look well. He received him with a nod. He shut the door when Sir Richard was in the room.

"He'sh not come yet. We'll talk to him inshide." He indicates the door of the inner room, with a little side jerk of his head. "That'sh private. He hazh that — *thing* all right."

Sir Richard says nothing. He follows Levi into a small inner room, which had, perhaps, originally been a lady's boudoir, and had afterwards, one might have conjectured, served as the treasury of cash and jewels of a pawn-office; for its door was secured with iron bars, and two great locks, and the windows were well barred with iron. There were two huge iron safes in the room, built into the wall.

"I'll show you a beauty of a dresshing-ca-ashe," said Levi, rousing himself; "I'll shell it a dead bargain, and give time for half, if you knowsh any young shwell as wantsh such a harticle. Look here; it was made for the Duchess of Horleans — all in gold, hemerald, and brilliantsh."

And thus haranguing, he displayed its contents, and turned them over, staring on them with a livid admiration. Sir Richard is not thinking of the duchess's dressing-case, nor is he much more interested when Mr. Levi goes on to tell him, "There'sh three executions against peersh out thish week — two gone down to the country. Sholomonsh nobbled Lord Bylkington's carriage outshide Shyner's at two o'clock in the morning, and his lordship had to walk home in the rain;" and Levi laughs and wriggles pleasantly over the picture. “I think he’sh coming,” says Levi suddenly, inclining his ear toward the door. He looked back over his shoulder with an odd look, a little stern, at the young gentleman.

“Who?” asked the young man, a little uncertain, in consequence of the character of that look.

“Your — that — your friend, of course,” said Levi, with his eyes again averted, and his ear near the door.

It was a moment of trepidation and of hope to Richard Arden. He hears the steps of several persons in the next room. Levi opens a little bit of the door, and peeps through, and with a quick glance towards the baronet, he whispers, “Ay, it’s him.”

Oh, blessed hope! here comes, at last, a powerful friend to take him by the hand, and draw him, in his last struggle, from the whirlpool.

Sir Richard glances towards the door through which the Jew is still looking, and signing with his hand as, little by little, he opens it wider and wider; and a voice in the next room, at sound of which Sir Richard starts to his feet, says sharply, “Is all right?”

“All *right*,” replies Levi, getting aside; and Mr. Longcluse entered the room and shut the door.

His pale face looked paler than usual, his thin cruel lips were closed, his nostrils dilated with a terrible triumph, and his eyes were fixed upon Arden, as he held the fatal parchment in his hand.

Levi saw a scowl so dreadful contract Sir Richard Arden’s face — was it pain, or was it fury? — that, drawing back as far as the wall would let him, he almost screamed, “It ain’t me! — it ain’t my fault! — I can’t help it! — I couldn’t! — I can’t!” His right hand was in his pocket, and his left, trembling violently, extended toward him, as if to catch his arm.

But Richard Arden was not thinking of him — did not hear him. He was overpowered. He sat down in his chair. He leaned back with a gasp and a faint laugh, like a man just overtaken by a wave, and lifted half-drowned from the sea. Then, with a sudden cry, he threw his hands and head on the table.

There was no token of relenting in Longcluse’s cruel face. There was a contemptuous pleasure in it. He did not remove his eyes from that spectacle of abasement as he replaced the parchment in his pocket. There is a silence of about a minute, and Sir Richard sits up and says vaguely, —

“Thank God, it’s over! Take me away; I’m ready to go.”

“You shall go, time enough; I have a word to say first,” said Longcluse, and he signs to the Jew to leave them.

On being left to themselves, the first idea that struck Sir Richard was the wild one of escape. He glanced quickly at the window. It was barred with iron. There were men in the next room — he could not tell how many — and he was without arms. The hope lighted up, and almost at the same moment expired.

CHAPTER LXX.

MR. LONGCLUSE PROPOSES.

"Clear your head," says Mr. Longcluse, sternly, seating himself before Sir Richard, with the table between; "you must conceive a distinct idea of your situation, Sir, and I shall then tell you something that remains. You have committed a forgery under aggravated circumstances, for which I shall have you convicted and sentenced to penal servitude at the next sessions. I have been a good friend to you on many occasions; you have been a false one to me — who baser? — and while I was anonymously helping you with large sums of money, you forged my name to a legal instrument for ten thousand pounds, to swindle your unknown benefactor, little suspecting who he was."

Longcluse smiled.

"I have heard how you spoke of me. I'm an adventurer, a leg, an assassin, a person whom you were compelled to drop; rather a low person, I fear, if a felon can't afford to sit beside me! You were always too fine a man for me. Your get up was always peculiar; you were famous for that. It will soon be more singular still, when your hair and your clothes are cut after the fashion of the great world you are about to enter. How your friends will laugh!"

Sir Richard heard all this with a helpless stare.

"I have only to stamp on the ground, to call up the men who will accomplish your transformation. I can change your life by a touch, into convict dress, diet, labour, lodging, for the rest of your days. What plea have you to offer to my mercy?"

Sir Richard would have spoken, but his voice failed him. With a second effort, however, he said— "Would it not be more manly if you let me meet my fate, without this."

"And you are such an admirable judge of what is manly, or even gentlemanlike!" said Longcluse. "Now, mind, I shall arrest you in five minutes, on your three overdue bills. The men with the writ are in the next room. I sha'n't immediately arrest you for the forgery. That shall hang over you. I mean to make you, for a while, my instrument. Hear, and understand; I mean to marry your sister. She don't like me, but she suits me; I have chosen her, and I'll not be baulked. When that is accomplished, you are safe. No man likes to see his brother a spectacle of British justice, with cropped hair, and a log to his foot. I may hate and despise you, as you deserve, but that would not do. Failing that, however, you shall have justice, I promise you. The course I propose taking is this: you shall be arrested here, for *debt*. You will be good enough to allow the people who take you, to select your present place of confinement. It is arranged. I will then, by a note, appoint a place of meeting for this evening, where I shall instruct you as to the particulars of that course of conduct I prescribe for you. If you mean to attempt an escape, you had better try it *now*; I will give you fourteen hours' start, and undertake to catch and bring you back to London as a forger. If you make up your mind to submit to fate, and do precisely as you are ordered, you may emerge. But on the slightest evasion, prevarication, or default, the blow descends. In the meantime we treat each other civilly before these people. Levi is in my hands, and you, I presume, keep your own secret."

"That is all?" inquired Sir Richard, faintly, after a minute's silence.

"All for the *present*," was the reply; "you will see more clearly, by-and-by, that you are my property, and you will act accordingly."

The two Jewish-looking gentlemen, whom Richard had passed in a conference in their carriage which stood now at the steps of the house, were the sheriff's officers destined to take charge of the fallen gentleman, and convey him, by Levi's direction, to a "sponging house," which, I believe, belonged jointly to him and his partner, Mr. Goldshed.

It was on the principle, perhaps, on which hunters tame wild beasts, by a sojourn at the bottom of a pit-fall, that Mr. Longcluse doomed the young baronet to some ten hours' solitary contemplation of his hopeless immeshment in that castle of Giant Despair, before taking him out and setting him again before him, for the purpose of instructing him in the conditions and duties of the direful life on which he was about to enter.

Mr. Longcluse left the baronet suddenly, and returned to Levi's office no more.

Sir Richard's *rôle* was cast. He was to figure, at least first, as a captive in the drama for which fate had selected him. He had no wish to retard the progress of the piece. Nothing more odious than his present situation was likely to come.

“You have something to say to me?” said the baronet, making tender, as it were, of himself. The offer was, obligingly, accepted, and the sheriffs, by his lieutenants, made prisoner of Sir Richard Arden, who strode down the stairs between them, and entered the seedy coach, and sitting as far back as he could, drove rapidly toward the City.

Stunned and confused, there was but one image vividly present to his recollection, and that was the baleful face of Walter Longcluse.

CHAPTER LXXI.

NIGHT.

At about eight o’clock that evening, a hurried note reached Alice Arden, at Mortlake. It was from her brother, and said, —

“MY DARLING ALICE,

“I can’t get away from town tonight, I am overwhelmed with business; but tomorrow, before dinner, I hope to see you, and stay at Mortlake till next morning. — Your affectionate brother,

“DICK.”

The house was quiet earlier than in former times, when Sir Reginald, of rakish memory, was never in his bed till past three o’clock in the morning. Mortlake was an early house now, and all was still by a quarter past eleven. The last candle burning was usually that in Mrs. Tansey’s room. She had not yet gone to bed, and was still in “the housekeeper’s room,” when a tapping came at the window. It reminded her of Mr. Longcluse’s visit on the night of the funeral.

She was now the only person up in the house, except Alice, who was at the far side of the building, where, in the next room, her maid was in bed asleep. Alice, who sat at her dressing-table, reading, with her long rich hair dishevelled over her shoulders, was, of course, quite out of hearing.

Martha went to the window with a little frown of uncertainty. Opening a bit of the shutter, she saw Sir Richard’s face close to her. Was ever old housekeeper so pestered by nightly tappings at her window-pane?

“La! who’d a thought o’ seeing you, Master Richard! why, you told Miss Alice you’d not be here till tomorrow!” she says pettishly, holding the candle high above her head.

He makes a sign of caution to her, and placing his lips near the pane, says, —

“Open the window the least bit in life.”

With a dark stare in his face, she obeys. An odd approach, surely, for a master to make to his own house!

"No one up in the house but you?" he whispers, as soon as the window is open.

"Not one!"

"Don't say a word, only listen: come, softly, round to the hall-door, and let me in; and light those candles there, and bring them with you to the hall. Don't let a creature know I have been here, and make no noise for your life!"

The old woman nodded with the same little frown; and he, pointing toward the hall door, walks away silently in that direction.

"What makes you look so white and dowley?" mutters the old woman, as she secures the window, and bars the shutters again.

"Good creature!" whispers Sir Richard, as he enters the hall, and places his hand kindly on her shoulder, and with a very dark look; "you have always been true to me, Martha, and I depend on your good sense; not a word of my having been here to any one — not to Miss Alice! I have to search for papers. I shall be here but an hour or so. Don't lock or bar the door, mind, and get to your bed! Don't come up this way again — goodnight!"

"Won't you have some supper?"

"No, thanks."

"A glass of sherry and a bit o' something?"

"Nothing."

And he places his hand on her shoulder gently, and looks toward the corridor that led to her room; then taking up one of the candles she had left alight on the table in the hall, he says, —

"I'll give you a light," and he repeats, with a wondrous heavy sigh, "Goodnight, dear old Martha."

"God bless ye, Master Dick. Ye must chirp up a bit, mind," she says very kindly, with an earnest look in her face. "I'm getting to rest — ye needn't fear me walkin' about to trouble ye. But ye must be careful to shut the hall-door close. I agree, as it is a thing to be done; but ye must also knock at my bedroom window when ye've gane out, for I must get up, and lock the door, and make a' safe; and don't ye forget, Master Richard, what I tell ye."

He held the candle at the end of the corridor, down which the wiry old woman went quickly; and when he returned to the hall, and set the candle down again, he felt faint. In his ears are ever the terrible words: "Mind, *I* take command of the house, *I* dispose of and appoint the servants; I don't appear, you do all ostensibly — but from garret to cellar, I'm *master*. I'll look it over, and tell you what is to be done."

Sir Richard roused himself, and having listened at the staircase, he very softly opened the hall-door. The spire of the old church showed hoar in the moonlight. At the left, from under a deep shadow of elms, comes silently a tall figure, and softly ascends the hall-door steps. The door is closed gently.

Alice sitting at her dressing-table, half an hour later, thought she heard steps — lowered her book, and listened. But no sound followed. Again the same light footfalls disturbed her — and again, she was growing nervous. Once more she heard them, very stealthily, and now on the same floor on which her room was. She stands up breathless. There is no noise now. She was thinking of waking her maid, but she remembered that she and Louisa Diaper had in a like alarm, discovered old Martha, only two or three nights before, poking about the china-closet, dusting and counting, at one o'clock in the morning, and had then exacted a promise that she would visit that repository no more, except at seasonable hours. But old Martha was so pig-headed, and would take it for granted that she was fast asleep, and would rather fidget through the house and poke up everything at that hour than at any other.

Quite persuaded of this, Alice takes her candle, determined to scold that troublesome old thing, against whom she is fired with the irritation that attends on a causeless fright. She walks along the gallery quickly, in slippers, flowing dressing-gown and hair, with her candle in her hand, to the head of the stairs, through the great window of which the moonlight streams brightly. Through the keyhole of the door at the opposite side, a ray of candlelight is visible, and from this room opens the china-closet, which is no doubt the point of attraction for the troublesome visitant. Holding the candle high in her left hand, Alice opens the door.

What she sees is this — a pair of candles burning on a small table, on which, with a pencil, Mr. Longcluse is drawing, it seems, with care, a diagram; at the same moment he raises his eyes, and Richard Arden, who is standing with one hand placed on the table over which he is leaning a little, looks quickly round, and rising walks straight to the door, interposing between her and Longcluse.

“Oh, Alice? You didn’t expect me: I’m very busy, looking for — looking over papers. Don’t mind.”

He had placed his hands gently on her shoulders, and she receded as he advanced.

“Oh! it don’t matter. I thought — I thought — I did not know.”

She was smiling her best. She was horrified. He looked like a ghost. Alice was gazing piteously in his face, and with a little laugh, she began to cry convulsively.

“What is the matter with the little fool! There, there — don’t, don’t — nonsense!”

With an effort she recovered herself.

“Only a little startled, Dick; I did not think you were there — goodnight.”

And she hastened back to her chamber, and locked the door; and running into her maid’s room, sat down on the side of her bed, and wept hysterically. To the imploring inquiries of her maid, she repeated only the words, “I am frightened,” and left her in a startled perplexity.

She knew that Longcluse had seen her, and he, that she had seen him. Their eyes had met. He saw with a bleak rage the contracting look of horror, so nearly hatred, that she fixed on him for a breathless moment. There was a tremor of fury at his heart, as if it could have sprung at her, from his breast, at her throat, and murdered her; and — she looked so beautiful! He gazed with an idolatrous admiration. Tears were welling to his eyes, and yet he would have laughed to see her weltering on the floor. A madman for some tremendous seconds!

CHAPTER LXXII.

MEASURES.

About twelve o'clock next day Richard Arden showed himself at Mortlake. It was a beautiful autumnal day, and the mellow sun fell upon a foliage that was fading into russet and yellow. Alice was looking out from the open window, on the noble old timber whose wide-spread boughs and thinning leaves caught the sunbeams pleasantly. She had heard her brother and his companion go down the stairs, and saw them, from the window, walk quickly down the avenue, till the trees hid them from view. She thought that some of the servants were up, and that the door was secured on their departure; and the effect of the shock she had received gradually subsiding, she looked to her next interview with her brother for an explanation of the occurrence which had so startled her.

That interview was approaching; the cab drove up to the steps, and her brother got out. Anxiously she looked, but no one followed him, and the driver shut the cab-door. Sir Richard kissed his hand to her, as she stood in the window.

From the hall the house opens to the right and left, in two suites of rooms. The room in which Alice stood was called the sage-room, from its being hung in sage-green leather, stamped in gold. It is a small room to the left, and would answer very prettily for a card party or a tête-à-tête. Alice had her work, her books, and her music there; she liked it because the room was small and cheery.

The door opened, and her brother comes in.

"Good Dick, to come so early! welcome, darling," she said, putting her arms about his neck, as he stooped and kissed her, smiling.

He looked very ill, and his smile was painful.

"That was an odd little visit I paid last night," said he, with his dark eyes fixed on her, inquiringly she thought— "very late — quite unexpected. You are quite well to-day? — you look flourishing."

"I wish I could say as much for you, Dick; I'm afraid you are tiring yourself to death."

“I had some one with me last night,” said Sir Richard, with his eye still upon her; “I — I don’t know whether you perceived that.”

Alice looked away, and then said carelessly, but very gravely —

“I did — I saw Mr. Longcluse. I could not believe my eyes, Dick. You must promise me one thing.”

“What is that?”

“That he sha’n’t come into this house any more — while I am here, I mean.”

“That is easily promised,” said he.

“And what did he come about, Dick?”

“Oh! he came — he came — I thought I told you; he came about papers. I did not tell you; but he has, after all, turned out very friendly. He is going to do me a very important service.”

She looked very much surprised.

The young man glanced through the window, to which he walked; he seemed embarrassed, and then turning to her, he said peevishly —

“You seem to think, Alice, that one can never make a mistake, or change an opinion.”

“But I did not say so; only, Dick, I must tell you that I have such a horror of that man — a *terror* of him — as nothing can ever get over.”

“I’m to blame for that.”

“No, I can’t say you are. I don’t mind stories so much as — — “

“As what?”

“As looks.”

“Looks! Why, you used to think him a gentlemanly-looking fellow, and so he is.”

“Looks *and language*,” said Alice.

“I thought he was a very civil fellow.”

“I sha’n’t dispute anything. I suppose you have found him a good friend after all, as you say.”

“As good a friend as most men,” said Sir Richard, growing pale; “they all act from interest: where interests are the same, men are friends. But he has saved me from a great deal, and he may do more; and I believe I was too hasty about those stories, and I think you were right when you refused to believe them without proof.”

"I daresay — I don't know — I believe my senses — and all I say is this, if Mr. Longcluse is to come here any more, I must go. He is no gentleman, I think — that is, I can't describe how I dislike him — how I hate him! I'm afraid of him! Dick, you look ill and unhappy: what's the matter?"

"I'm well enough — I'm better; we shall be better — all better by-and-by. I wish the next five weeks were over! We must leave this, we must go to Arden Court; I will send some of the servants there first. I am going to tell them now, they must get the house ready. You shall keep your maid here with you; and when all is ready in Yorkshire, we shall be off — Alice, Alice, don't mind me — I'm miserable — mad!" he says suddenly, and covers his face with his hands, and, for the first time for years, he is crying bitter tears.

Alice was by his side, alarmed, curious, grieved; and with all these emotions mingling in her dark eyes and beautiful features, as she drew his hand gently away, with a rush of affectionate entreaties and inquiries.

"It is all very fine, Alice," he exclaims, with a sudden bitterness; "but I don't believe, to save me from destruction, you would sacrifice one of your least caprices, or reconcile one of your narrowest prejudices."

"What can you mean, dear Richard? only tell me how I can be of any use. You can't mean, of course — — "

She stops with a startled look at him. "You know, dear Dick, that was always out of the question: and surely you have heard that Lord Wynderbroke is to be married to Grace Maubray? It is all settled."

Quite another thought had been in Richard's mind, but he was glad to accept Alice's conjecture.

"Yes, so it is — so, at least, it is said to be — but I am so worried and distracted, I half forget things. Girls are such jolly fools; they throw good men away, and lose themselves. What is to become of you, Alice, if things go wrong with me! I think the old times were best, when the old people settled who was to marry whom, and there was no disputing their decision, and marriages were just as happy, and courtships a great deal simpler; and I am very sure there were fewer secret repinings, and broken hearts, and — threadbare old maids. Don't *you* be a fool, Alice; mind what I say."

He is leaving the room, but pauses at the door, and returns and places his hand on her arm, looking in her face, and says —

"Yes, mind what I say, for God's sake, and we may all be a great deal happier."

He kisses her, and is gone. Her eyes follow him, as she thinks with a sigh —

"How strange Dick is growing! I'm afraid he has been playing again, and losing. It must have been something very urgent that induced him to make it up again with that low malignant man; and this break-up, and journey to Arden Court! I think I should prefer being there. There is something ominous about this place, picturesque as it is, and much as I like it. But the journey to Yorkshire is only another of the imaginary excursions Dick has been proposing every fortnight; and next year, and the year after, will find us, I suppose, just where we are."

But this conjecture, for once, was mistaken. It was, this time, a veritable break-up and migration; for Martha Tansey came in, with the importance of a person who has a matter of moment to talk over.

"Here's something sudden, Miss Alice; I suppose you've heard. Off to Arden Court in the mornin'. Crozier and me; the footman discharged, and you to follow with Master Richard in a week."

"Oh, then, it *is* settled. Well, Martha, I am not sorry, and I daresay you and Crozier won't be sorry to see old Yorkshire faces again, and the Court, and the rookery, and the orchard."

"I don't mind; glad enough to see a'ad faces, but I'm a bit o'er a'ad myself for such sudden flittins, and Manx and Darwent, and the rest, is to go by night train tomorrow, and not a housemaid left in Mortlake. But Master Richard says a's provided, and 'twill be but a few days after a's done; and ye'll be down, then, at Arden by the middle o' next week, and I'm no sa sure the change mayn't serve ye; and as your uncle, Master David, and Lady May Penrose, and Miss Maubray — a strackle-brained lass she is, I doubt — and to think o' that a'ad fule, Lord Wynderbroke, takin' sich a young, bonny hizzy to wife! La bless ye, she'll play the hangment wi' that a'ad gowk of a lord, and all his goold guineas won't do. His kist o' money won't hod na time, I warrant ye, when once that lassie gets her pretty fingers under the lid. There'll be gaains on in that house, I warrant, not but he's a gude man, and a fine gentleman as need be," she added, remembering her own strenuous counsel in his favour, when he was supposed to be paying his court to Alice; "and if he was mated wi' a gude lassie, wi' gude blude in her veins, would doubtless keep as honourable a house, and hod his head as high as any lord o' them a'. But as I was saying, Miss Alice, now that Master David, and Lady May, and Miss Maubray, has left Lunnon, there's no one here to pay ye a visit, and ye'd be fairly buried alive here in Mortlake, and ye'll be better, and sa will we a', down at Arden, for a bit; and there's gentle folk down there as gude as ever rode in Lunnon streets, mayhap, and better; and mony a squire, that ony leddy in the land might be proud to marry, and not one but would be glad to match wi' an Arden."

"That is a happy thought," said Alice, laughing.

"And so it is, and no laughing matter," said Martha, a little offended, as she stalked out of the room, and closed the door, grandly, after her.

"And God bless you, dear old Martha," said the young lady, looking towards the door through which she had just passed; "the truest and kindest soul on earth."

Sir Richard did not come back. She saw him no more that evening.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

AT THE BAR OF THE "GUY OF WARWICK."

Next evening there came, not Richard, but a note saying that he would see Alice the moment he could get away from town. As the old servant departed northward, her solitude for the first time began to grow irksome, and as the night approached, worse even than gloomy.

Her extemporised household made her laugh. It was not even a skeleton establishment. The kitchen department had dwindled to a single person, who ordered her luncheon and dinner, only two or three *plats*, daily, from the "Guy of Warwick." The housemaid's department was undertaken by a single servant, a short, strong woman of some sixty years of age.

This person puzzled Alice a good deal. She came to her, like the others, with a note from her brother, stating her name, and that he had engaged her for the few days they meant to remain roughing it at Mortlake, and that he had received a very good account of her.

This woman has not a bad countenance. There is, indeed, no tenderness in it; but there is a sort of hard goodhumour. There are quickness and resolution. She talks fluently of herself and her qualifications, and now and then makes a short curtsey. But she takes no notice of any one of Alice's questions.

A silence sometimes follows, during which Alice repeats her interrogatory perhaps twice, with growing indignation, and then the new comer breaks into a totally independent talk, and leaves the young lady wondering at her disciplined impertinence. It was not till her second visit that she enlightened her.

"I did not send for you. You can go!" said Alice.

"I don't like a house that has children in it, they gives a deal o' trouble," said the woman.

"But I say you may go; you must go, please."

The woman looked round the room.

"When I was with Mrs. Montgomery, she had five, three girls and two boys; la! there never was five such — — "

“Go, this moment, please, I insist on your going; do you hear me, pray?”

But so far from answering, or obeying, this cool intruder continues her harangue before Miss Arden gets half way to the end of her little speech.

“That woman was the greatest fool alive — nothing but spoiling and petting — I could not stand it no longer, so I took Master Tommy by the lug, and pulled him out of the kitchen, the limb, along the passage to the stairs, every inch, and I gave him a slap in the face, the fat young rascal; you could hear all over the house! and didn’t he rise the roof! So missus and me, we quarrelled upon it.”

“If you don’t leave the room, *I* must; and I shall tell my brother, Sir Richard, how you have behaved yourself; and you may rely upon it — — “

But here again she is overpowered by the strong voice of her visitor.

“It was in my next place, at Mr. Crump’s, I took cold in my head, very bad, Miss, indeed, looking out of window to see two fellows fighting, in the lane — in both ears — and so I lost my hearing, and I’ve been deaf as a post ever since!”

Alice could not resist a laugh at her own indignant eloquence quite thrown away; and she hastily wrote with a pencil on a slip of paper: —

“Please don’t come to me except when I send for you.”

“La! Ma’am, I forgot!” exclaims the woman, when she had examined it; “my orders was not to read any of *your* writing.”

“Not to read any of my writing!” said Alice, amazed; “then, how am I to tell you what I wish about anything?” she inquires, for the moment forgetting that not one word of her question was heard. The woman makes a curtsey and retires. “What can Richard have meant by giving her such a direction? I’ll ask him when he comes.”

It was likely enough that the woman had misunderstood him, still she began to wish the little interval destined to be passed at Mortlake before her journey to Yorkshire, ended.

She told her maid, Louisa Diaper, to go down to the kitchen and find out all she could as to what people were in the house, and what duties they had undertaken, and when her brother was likely to arrive.

Louisa Diaper, slim, elegant, and demure, descended among these barbarous animals. She found in the kitchen, unexpectedly, a male stranger, a small, slight man, with great black eyes, a big sullen mouth, a sallow complexion, and a profusion of black ringlets. The deaf woman was conning over some writing of his on a torn-off blank leaf of a letter, and he was twiddling about the pencil, with which he had just traced it, in his fingers, and, in a singing drawl, holding forth to the other woman, who, with a long and high canvas apron on, and the handle of an empty saucepan in her right hand, stood gaping at him, with her arms hanging by her sides.

On the appearance of Miss Diaper, Mr. Levi, for he it was, directs his solemn conversation to that young lady.

"I was just telling them about the robberies in the City and Wesht Hend. La! there'sh bin nothin' like it for twenty year. They don't tell them in the papersh, blesh ye! The 'ome Shecretary takesh precious good care o' that; they don't want to frighten every livin' shoul out of London. But there'll be talk of it in Parliament, I promish you. I know three opposition membersh myshelf that will move the 'oushe upon it next session."

Mr. Levi wagged his head darkly as he made this political revelation.

"Thish day twel'month the number o' burglariesh in London and the West Hend, including Hizzlington, was no more than fifteen and a half a night; and two robberiesh attended with wiolensh. What wazh it lasht night? I have it in confidensh, from the polishe offish thish morning."

He pulled a pocketbook, rather greasy, from his breast, and from this depositary, it is to be presumed, of statistical secrets, he read the following official memorandum: —

"Number of 'oushes burglarioushly hentered lasht night, including private banksh, charitable hinshtitutions, shops, lodging-'oushes, female hacadamies, and private dwellings, and robbed with more or less wiolench, one thoushand sheven hundred and shixty-sheven. We regret to hadd," he continued, the official return stealing, as it proceeded, gradually into the style of "The Pictorial Calendar of British Crime," a halfpenny paper which he took in— "this hinundation of crime seems flowing, or rayther rushing northward, and hazh already enweloped Hizhlington, where a baldheaded clock and watch maker, named Halexander Goggles, wazh murdered with his sheven shmall children, with unigshampled ba-arba-arity."

Mr. Levi eyed the women horribly all round as he ended the sentence, and he added, —

"Hizhlington'sh only down there. It ain't five minutesh walk; only a pleasant shtep; just enough to give a fellow azh has polished off a family there a happetite for another up here. Azh I 'ope to be shaved, I shleep every night with a pair of horshe pishtols, a blunderbush, and a shabre by my bed; and Shir Richard wantsh every door in the ‘oushe fasht locked, and the keysh with him, before dark, thish evening, except only such doors as you want open; and he gave me a note to Miss Harden.” And he placed the note in Miss Diaper’s hand. “He wantsh the ‘oushe a bit more schecure,” he added, following her towards the hall. “He wishes to make you and she quite shafe, and out of harm’s way, if anything should occur. It will be only a few days, you know, till you’re both away.”

The effect of this little alarm, accompanied by Sir Richard’s note, was that Mr. Levi carried out a temporary arrangement, which assigned the suite of apartments in which Alice’s room was as those to which she would restrict herself during the few days she was to remain there, the rest of the house, except the kitchen and a servant’s room or two downstairs, being locked up.

By the time Mr. Levi had got the keys together, and all safe in Mortlake, the sun had set, and in the red twilight that followed he set off in his cab towards town. At the “Guy of Warwick” — from the bar of which already was flaring a good broad gaslight — he stopped and got out. There was a full view of the bar from where he stood; and, pretending to rummage his pockets for something, he was looking in to see whether “the coast was clear.”

“She’s just your sort — not too bad and not too good — not too nashty, and not too nishe; a goodhumoured lash, rough and ready, and knowsh a thing or two.”

“Ye’re there, are ye?” inquired Mr. Levi, playfully, as he crossed the door-stone, and placed his fists on the bar grinning.

“What will you take, Sir, please?” inquired the young woman, at one side of whom was the usual row of taps and pump-handles.

“Now, Miss Phœbe, give me a brandy and shoda, pleashe. When I talked to you in thish ‘ere place ‘tother night, you wished to engage for a lady’s maid. What would you shay to me, if I was to get you a firsht-chop tip-top pla-ashe of the kind? Well, don’t you shay a word — that brandy ain’t fair measure — and I’ll tell you. It’sh a la-ady of ra-ank! where wagesh ish no-o object; and two years’ savings, and a good match with a well-to-do ‘andsome young fellow, will set you hup in a better place than this ‘ere.”

"It comes very timely, Sir, for I'm to leave tomorrow, and I was thinking of going home to my uncle in a day or two, in Chester."

"Well it's all settled. Come you down to my offishe, you know where it is, tomorrow, at three, and I'll 'av all partickulars for you, and a note to the lady from her brother, the baronet; and if you be a good girl, and do as you're bid, you'll make a little fortune of it."

She curtsied, with her eyes very round, as he, with a wag of his head drank down what remained of his brandy and soda, and wiping his mouth with his glove, he said, "Three o'clock sha-arp, mind; goodbye, Phœbe, lass, and don't you forget all I said."

He stood ungallantly with his back towards her on the threshold lighting a cigar, and so soon as he had it in his own phrase, "working at high blast," he got into his cab, and jingled towards his office, with all his keys about him.

While Miss Arden remained all unconscious, and even a little amused at the strange shifts to which her brief stay and extemporised household at Mortlake exposed her, a wily and determined strategist was drawing his toils around her.

The process of isolation was nearly completed, without having once excited her suspicions; and, with the same perfidious skill, the house itself was virtually undergoing those modifications which best suited his designs.

Sir Richard appeared at his club as usual. He was compelled to do so. The all-seeing eye of his pale tyrant pursued him everywhere; he lived under terror. A dreadful agony all this time convulsed the man, within whose heart Longcluse suspected nothing but the serenity of death.

"What easier than to tell the story to the police. Meditated duresse. Compulsion. Infernal villain! And then: what then? A pistol to his head, a flash, and — darkness!"

CHAPTER LXXIV.

A LETTER.

Mr. Longcluse knocked at Sir Richard's house in May Fair, and sent upstairs for the baronet. It was about the same hour at which Mr. Levi was drinking his thirsty potation of brandy and soda at the "Guy of Warwick." The streets were darker than that comparatively open place, and the gas lamp threw its red outline of the sashes upon the dark ceiling, as Mr. Longcluse stood in the drawingroom between the windows, in his greatcoat, with his hat on, looking in the dark like an image made of fog.

Sir Richard Arden entered the room.

"You were not at Mortlake to-day," said he.

"No."

"There's a cab at the door that will take you there; your absence for a whole day would excite surmise. Don't stay more than five minutes, and don't mention Louisa Diaper's name, and account for the locking up of all the house, but one suite of rooms, I directed, and come to my house in Bolton Street, direct from Mortlake. That's all."

Without another word, Mr. Longcluse took his departure.

In this cavalier way, and in a cold tone that conveyed all the menace and insult involved in his ruined position, had this conceited young man been ordered about by his betrayer, on his cruel behests, ever since he had come under his dreadful rod. The iron trap that held him fast, locked him in a prison from which, except through the door of death, there seemed no escape.

Outraged pride, the terrors of suspense, the shame and remorse of his own enormous perfidy against his only sister, peopled it with spectres.

As he drove out to Mortlake, pale, frowning, with folded arms, his handsome face thinned and drawn by the cords of pain, he made up his mind. He knocked furiously at Mortlake Hall door. The woman in the canvas apron let him in. The strange face startled him; he had been thinking so intently of one thing. Going up, through the darkened house, with but one candle, and tapping at the door, on the floor above the drawingroom, within which Alice was sitting, with Louisa Diaper for company, and looking at her unsuspicious smile, he felt what a heinous conspirator he was.

He made an excuse for sending the maid to the next room after they had spoken a few words, and then he said, —

“Suppose, Alice, we were to change our plan, would you like to come abroad? Out of this you must come immediately.” He was speaking low. “I am in great danger; I must go abroad. For your life, don’t seem to suspect anything. Do exactly as I tell you, or else I am utterly ruined, and you, Alice, on your account, very miserable. Don’t ask a question, or look a look, that may make Louisa Diaper suspect that you have any doubt as to your going to Arden, or any suspicion of any danger. She is quite true, but not wise, and your left hand must not know what your right hand is doing. Don’t be frightened, only be steady and calm. Get together any jewels and money you have, and as little else as you can possibly manage with. Do this yourself; Louisa Diaper must know nothing of it. I will mature our plans, and tomorrow or next day I shall see you again; I can stay but a moment now, and have but time to bid you goodnight.”

Then he kissed her. How horribly agitated he looked! How cold was the pressure of his hand!

“Hush!” he whispered, and his dark eyes were fixed on the door through which he expected the return of the maid. And as he heard her step, “Not a word, remember!” he said; then bidding her goodnight aloud, he quitted the room almost as suddenly as he had appeared, leaving her, for the first time, in the horrors of a growing panic.

Sir Richard leaned back in the cab as he drove into town. He had as yet no plan formed. It was a more complicated exploit than he was at the moment equal to. In Mortlake were two fellows, by way of protectors, placed there for security of the house and people.

These men held possession of the keys of the house, and sat and regaled themselves with their hot punch, or cold brandy and water, and pipes; always one awake, and with ears erect, they kept watch and ward in the room to the right of the hall-door, in which Sir Richard and Uncle David had conversed with the sad Mr. Plumes, on the evening after the old baronet’s death. To effect Alice’s escape, and reserve for himself a chance of accomplishing his own, was a problem demanding skill, cunning, and audacity.

While he revolved these things an alarm had been sounded in another quarter, which unexpectedly opened a chance of extrication, sudden and startling.

Mr. Longcluse was destined to a surprise tonight. Mr. Longcluse, at his own house, was awaiting the return of Sir Richard. Overlooked in his usually accurate though rapid selection, a particularly shabby and vulgar-looking letter had been thrown aside among circulars, pamphlets, and begging letters, to await his leisure. It was a letter from Paris, and vulgar and unbusinesslike as it looked, there was yet, in its peculiar scrivenery that which, a little more attentively scanned, thrilled him with a terrible misgiving. The postmark showed it had been delivered four days before. When he saw from whom it came, and had gathered something of its meaning from a few phrases, his dark eyes gleamed and his face grew stern. Was this wretch's hoof to strike to pieces the plans he had so nearly matured? The letter was as follows: —

"SIR,

"Mr Longcluse, I have been unfortunate With your money which you have Gave me to remove from England, and Keep me in New York. My boxes, and other things, and Ballens of the money in Gold, except about a Hundred pounds, which has kep me from want ever sense, went Down in the Mary Jane, of London, and my cousin went down in her also, which I might as well av Went down myself in her, only for me Stopping in Paris, where I made a trifle of Money, intending to go Out in August. Now, Sir, don't you Seppose I am not in as good Possition as I was when I Harranged with sum difculty With you. The boot with The blood Mark on the Soul is not Lost nor Distroyed, but it is Safe in my Custody; so as Likewise in safe Keeping is The traising, in paper, of the foot Mark in blood on the Floar of the Smoaking Room in question, with the signatures of the witnesses attached; and, Moreover, my Staitment made in the Form of a Information, at the Time, and signed In witness of My signature by two Unekseptinible witnesses. And all Is ready to Produise whenevor his worshop shall Apoynt. i have wrote To mister david Arden on this Supget. i wrote to him just a week ago, he seaming To take a Intrast in this Heer case; and, moreover, the two ieyes that sawd a certain Person about the said smoaking Room, and in the saime, is Boath wide open at This presen Time. mister Longcluse i do not Want to have your Life, but gustice must Taike its coarse unless it is settled of hand Slik. i will harrange the Same as last time, And i must have two hundred And fifty pounds More on this Settlement than i Had last time, for Dellay and loss of Time in this town. I will sign any law paper in reason you may ask of me. My hadress is under cover to Monseer Letexier, air-dresser, and incloses his card, which you Will please send an Anser by return Of post, or else i Must sepose you chose The afare shall take Its coarse; and i am as ever,

"Your obeediant servant to command, "PAUL DAVIES."

Never did paper look so dazzlingly white, or letters so intensely black, before Mr. Longcluse's eyes, as those of this ominous letter. He crumpled it up, and thrust it in his trousers pocket, and gave to the position a few seconds of intense thought.

His first thought was, what a fool he was for not having driven Davies to the wall, and settled the matter with the high hand of the law at once. His next, what could bring him to Paris? He was there for something. To see possibly the family of Lebas, and collect and dovetail pieces of evidence, after his detective practice, a process which would be sure to conduct him to the Baron Vanboeren! Was this story of the boot and the tracing of the bloodstained footprint true? Had this scoundrel reserved the strongest part of his case for this new extortion? Was his trouble to be never ending? If this accursed ferret were once to get into his warren, what power could unearth him, till the mischief was done?

His eye caught again the words, on which, in the expressive phrase which Mr. Davies would have used, his "sight spred" as he held the letter before his eyes— "Mister Loncluse, i do not want to have your life." He ground his teeth, shook his fist in the air, and stamped on the floor with fury, at the thought that a brutal detective, not able to spell two words, and trained for such game as London thieves and burglars, should dare to hold such language to a man of thought and skill, altogether so masterly as he! That he should be outwitted by that clumsy scoundrel!

Well, it was now to begin all over again. It should all go right this time. He thought again for a moment, and then sat down and wrote, commencing with the date and address —

"PAUL DAVIES,

"I have just received your note, which states that you have succeeded in obtaining some additional information, which you think may lead to the conviction of the murderer of M. Lebas, in the Saloon Tavern. I shall be most happy to pay handsomely any expense of any kind you may be put to in that matter. It is, indeed, no more than I had already undertaken. I am glad to learn that you have also written on the subject to Mr. David Arden, who feels entirely with me. I shall take an early opportunity of seeing him. Persist in your laudable exertions, and I shall not shrink from rewarding you handsomely.

"Yours, "WALTER LONGCLUSE."

He addressed the letter carefully, and went himself and put it in the postoffice.

By this time Sir Richard Arden was awaiting him at home in his drawingroom, and as he walked homeward, under the lamps, in inward pain, one might have moralised with Peter Pindar —

"These fleas have other fleas to bite 'em And so on *ad infinitum*."

The secret tyrant had in his turn found a secret tyrant, not less cruel perhaps, but more ignoble.

"You made your visit?" asked Mr. Longcluse.

"Yes."

"Anything to report?"

"Absolutely nothing."

A silence followed.

"Where is Mr. Arden, your uncle?"

"In Scotland."

"How soon does he return?"

"He will not be in town till spring, I believe; he is going abroad, but he passes through Southampton on his way to the Continent, on Friday next."

"And makes some little stay there?"

"I think he stays one night."

"Then I'll go down and see him, and you shall come with me."

Sir Richard stared.

"Yes, and you had better not put your foot in it; and clear your head of all notion of running away," he said, fixing his fiery eyes on Sir Richard, with a sudden ferocity that made him fancy that his secret thoughts had revealed themselves under that piercing gaze. "It is not easy to levant now-a-days, unless one has swifter wings than the wires can carry news with; and if you are false, what more do I need than to blast you? and with your name in the Hue-and-Cry, and a thousand pounds reward for the apprehension of Sir Richard Arden, Baronet, for forgery, I don't see much more that infamy can do for you."

A dark flush crossed Arden's face as he rose.

"Not a word now," cried Longcluse harshly, extending his hand quickly towards him; "I may do that which can't be undone."

CHAPTER LXXV.

BLIGHT AND CHANGE.

Danger to herself, Alice suspected none. But she was full of dreadful conjectures about her brother. There was, she was persuaded, no good any longer in remonstrance or entreaty. She could not upbraid him; but she was sure that the terrible fascination of the gaming-table had caused the sudden ruin he vaguely confessed.

“Oh,” she often repeated, “that Uncle David were in town, or that I knew where to find him!”

“But no doubt,” she thought, “Richard will hide nothing from him, and perhaps my hinting his disclosures, even to him, would aggravate poor Richard’s difficulties and misery.”

It was not until the next evening that, about the same hour, she again saw her brother. His good resolutions in the interval had waxed faint. They were not reversed, but only in the spirit of indecision, and something of the apathy of despair, postponed to a more convenient season.

To her he seemed more tranquil. He said vaguely that the reasons for flight were less urgent and that she had better continue her preparations, as before, for her journey to Yorkshire.

Even under these circumstances the journey to Yorkshire was pleasant. There was comfort in the certainty that he would there be beyond the reach of that fatal temptation which had too plainly all but ruined him. From the harrassing distractions, also, which in London had of late beset him, almost without intermission, he might find in the seclusion of Arden a temporary calm. There, with Uncle David’s help, there would be time, at least, to ascertain the extent of his losses, and what the old family of Arden might still count upon as their own, and a plan of life might be arranged for the future.

Full of these more cheery thoughts, Alice took leave of her brother.

“I am going,” he said, looking at his watch, “direct to Brighton; I have just time to get to the station nicely; business, of course — a meeting tonight with Bexley, who is staying there, and in the morning a long and, I fear, angry discussion with Charrington, who is also at Brighton."

He kissed his sister, sighed deeply, and looking in her eyes for a little, fixedly, he said —

"Alice, darling, you must try to think what sacrifice you can make to save your wretched brother."

Their eyes met as she looked up, her hands about his neck, his on her shoulders; he drew his sister to him quickly, and with another kiss, turned, ran down stairs, got into his cab, and drove down the avenue. She stood looking after him with a heavy heart. How happy they two might have been, if it had not been for the one incorrigible insanity!

About an hour later, as the sun was near its setting, she put on her hat and short grey cloak, and stepped out into its level beams, and looked round smiling. The golden glow and transparent shadows made that beautiful face look more than ever lovely. All around the air was ringing with the farewell songs of the small birds, and, with a heart almost rejoicing in sympathy with that beautiful hour, she walked lightly to the old garden, which in that luminous air, looked, she thought, so sad and pretty.

The well-worn aphorism of the Frenchman, "History repeats itself," was about to assert itself. Sometimes it comes in literal sobriety, sometimes in derisive travesti, sometimes in tragic aggravation.

She is in the garden now. The associations of place recall her strange interview with Mr. Longcluse but a few months before. Since then a blight has fallen on the scenery, and what a change upon the persons! The fruit-leaves are yellow now, and drifts of them lie upon the walks. Mantling ivy, as before, canopies the door, interlaced with climbing roses; but they have long shed their honours. This thick mass of dark green foliage and thorny tendrils forms a deep arched porch, in the shadow of which, suddenly, as on her return she reached it, she sees Mr. Longcluse standing within a step or two of her.

He raises his hand, it might be in entreaty, it might be in menace; she could not, in the few alarmed moments in which she gazed at his dark eyes and pale equivocal face, determine anything.

"Miss Arden, you may hate me; you can't despise me. You *must* hear me, because you are in my power. I relent, mind you, thus far, that I give you one chance more of reconciliation; don't, for God's sake, throw it from you!" (he was extending his open hand to receive hers). "Why should you prefer an unequal war with me? I tell you frankly you are in my power — don't misunderstand me — in *my power* to this degree, that you shall *voluntarily*, as the more tolerable of two alternatives, submit with abject acquiescence to every one of my conditions. Here is my hand; think of the degradation I submit to in asking you to take it. You gave me no chance when I asked forgiveness. I tender you a full forgiveness; here is my hand, beware how you despise it."

Fearful as he appeared in her sight, her fear gave way before her kindling spirit. She had stood before him pale as death — anger now fired her eye and cheek.

"How dare you, Sir, hold such language to me! Do you suppose, if I had told my brother of your cowardice and insolence as I left the abbey the other day, you would have dared to speak to him, much less to me? Let me pass, and never while you live presume to address me more."

Mr. Longcluse, with a slow recoil, smiling fixedly, and bowing, drew back and opened the door for her to pass. He did not any longer look like a villain whose heart had failed him.

Her heart fluttered violently with fear as she saw that he stepped out after her, and walked by her side toward the house. She quickened her pace in great alarm.

"If you had liked me ever so little," said he in that faint and horrible tone she remembered— "one, the smallest particle, of disinterested liking — the grain of mustard-seed — I would have had you fast, and made you happy, made you *adore* me; *such* adoration that you could have heard from my own lips the confession of my crimes, and loved me still — loved me more desperately. Now that you hate me, and I hate *you*, and have you in my power, and while I hate still admire you — still choose you for my wife — you shall hear the same story, and think me all the more dreadful. You sought to degrade me, and I'll humble you in the dust. Suppose I tell you I'm a criminal — the kind of man you have read of in trials, and can't understand, and can scarcely even believe in — the kind of man that seems to you as unaccountable and monstrous as a ghost — your terrors and horror will make my triumph exquisite with an immense delight. I don't want to smooth the way for you; you do nothing for me. I disdain hypocrisy. Terror drives you on; fate coerces you; you can't help yourself, and my delight is to make the plunge terrible. I reveal myself that you may know the sort of person you are yoked to. Your sacrifice shall be the agony of agonies, the death of deaths, and yet you'll find yourself unable to resist. I'll make you submissive as ever patient was to a mad doctor. If it took years to do it, you shall never stir out of this house till it is done. Every spark of insolence in your nature shall be trampled out; I'll break you thoroughly. The sound of my step shall make your heart jump; a look from me shall make you dumb for an hour. You shall not be able to take your eyes off me while I'm in sight, or to forget me for a moment when I am gone. The smallest thing you do, the least word you speak, the very thoughts of your heart, shall all be shaped under one necessity and one fear." (She had reached the hall door). "Up the steps! Yes; you wish to enter? Certainly."

With flashing eyes and head erect, the beautiful girl stepped into the hall, without looking to the right or to the left, or uttering one word, and walked quickly to the foot of the great stair.

If she thought that Mr. Longcluse would respect the barrier of the threshold, she was mistaken. He entered but one step behind her, shut the heavy hall door with a crash, dropped the key into his coat pocket, and signing with his finger to the man in the room to the right, that person stood up briskly, and prepared for action. He closed the door again, saying simply, "I'll call."

The young lady, hearing his step, turned round and stood on the stair, confronting him fiercely.

"You must leave this house this moment," she cried, with a stamp, with gleaming eyes and very pale.

"By-and-by," he replied, standing before her.

Could this be the safe old house in which childish days had passed, in which all around were always friendly and familiar faces? The window stood reflected upon the wall beside her in dim sunset light, and the shadows of the flowers sharp and still that stood there.

"I have friends here who will turn you out, Sir!"

"You have *no* friends here," he replied, with the same fixed smile.

She hesitated; she stepped down, but stopped in the hall. She remembered instantly that, as she turned, she had seen him take the key from the hall door.

“My brother will protect me.”

“Is he here?”

“He’ll call you to account tomorrow, when he comes.”

“Will he say so?”

“Always — brave, true Richard!” she sobbed, with a strange cry in her words.

“He’ll do as I bid him: he’s a forger, in my power.”

To her wild stare he replied with a low, faint laugh. She clasped her fingers over her temples.

“Oh! no, no, no, no, no, no!” she screamed, and suddenly she rushed into the great room at her right. Her brother — was it a phantom? — stood before her. With one long, shrill scream, she threw herself into his arms, and cried, “It’s a lie, darling, it’s a lie!” and she had fainted.

He laid her in the great chair by the fireplace. With white lips, and with one fist shaking wildly in the air, he said, with a dreadful shiver in his voice, —

“You villain! you villain! you villain!”

“Don’t you be a fool,” said Longcluse. “Ring for the maid. There must have been a crisis some time. I’m giving you a fair chance — trying to save you; they all faint — it’s a trick with women.”

Longcluse looked into her lifeless face, with something of pity and horror mingling in the villany of his countenance.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

PHŒBE CHIFFINCH.

Mr. Longcluse passed into the inner room, as he heard a step approaching from the hall. It was Louisa Diaper, in whose care, with the simple remedy of cold water, the young lady recovered. She was conveyed to her room, and Richard Arden followed, at Longcluse's command, to "keep things quiet."

In an agony of remorse, he remained with his sister's hand in his, sitting by the bed on which she lay. Longcluse had spoken with the resolution that a few sharp and short words should accomplish the crisis, and show her plainly that her brother was, in the most literal and terrible sense, in his power, and thus, indirectly, she also. Perhaps, if she must know the fact, it was as well she should know it now.

Longcluse, I suppose, had reckoned upon Richard's throwing himself upon his sister's mercy. He thought he had done so before, and moved her as he would have wished. Longcluse, no doubt, had spoken to her, expecting to find her in a different mood. Had she yielded, what sort of husband would he have made her? Not cruel, I daresay. Proud of her, he would have been. She should have had the best diamonds in England. Jealous, violent when crossed, but with all his malice and severity, easily by Alice to have been won, had she cared to win him, to tenderness.

Was Sir Richard now seconding his scheme?

Sir Richard had no plan — none for escape, none for a catastrophe, none for acting upon Alice's feelings.

"I am so agitated — in such despair, so stunned! If I had but one clear hour! Oh, God! if I had but one clear hour to think in!"

He was now trying to persuade Alice that Longcluse had, in his rage, used exaggerated language — that it was true he was in his power, but it was for a large sum of money, for which he was his debtor.

"Yes, darling," he whispered, "only be firm. I shall get away, and take you with me — only be secret, and don't mind one word he says when he is angry — he is literally a madman; there is no limit to the violence and absurdity of what he says."

"Is he still in the house?" she whispered.

"Not he."

"Are you certain?"

"Perfectly; with all his rant, he dares not stay: it would be a police-office affair. He's gone long ago."

"Thank God!" she said, with a shudder.

Their agitated talk continued for some time longer. At last, darkly and suddenly, as usual, he took his leave.

When her brother had gone, she touched the bell for Louisa Diaper. A stranger appeared.

The stranger had a great deal of pink ribbon in her cap, she looked shrewd enough, and with a pair of rather good eyes; she looked curiously and steadily on the young lady.

"Who are you?" said Alice, sitting up. "I rang for my maid, Louisa Diaper."

"Please, my lady," she answers, with a short curtsey, "she went into town to fetch some things here from Sir Richard's house."

"How long ago?"

"Just when you was getting better, please, my lady."

"When she returns send her to me. What is your name?"

"Phœbe Chiffinch, please 'm."

"And you are here — — "

"In her place, please my lady."

"Well, when she comes back you can assist. We shall have a great deal to do, and I like your face, Phœbe, and I'm so lonely, I think I'll get you to sit here in the window near me."

And on a sudden the young lady burst into tears, and sobbed and wept bitterly.

The new maid was at her side, pouring all sorts of consolation into her ear, with odd phrases — quite intelligible, I daresay, over the bar of the "Guy of Warwick" — dropping h's in all directions, and bowling down grammatic rules like ninepins.

She was wonderfully taken by the kind looks and tones of the pretty lady whom she saw in this distress, and with the silk curtains drawn back in the fading flush of evening.

Hard work, hard fare, and harder words had been her portion from her orphaned childhood upward, at the old “Guy of Warwick,” with its dubious customers, failing business, and bitter and grumbling old hostess. Shrewd, hard, and not over-nice had Miss Phœbe grown up in that godless school.

But she had taken a fancy, as the phrase is, to the looks of the young lady, and still more to her voice and words, that in her ears sounded so new and strange. There was not an unpleasant sense, too, of the superiority of rank and refinement which inspires an admiring awe in her kind; and so, in a voice that was rather sweet and very cheery, she offered, when the young lady was better, to sit by the bed and tell her a story, or sing her a song.

Everyone knows how his view of his own case may vary within an hour. Alice was now of opinion that there was no reason to reject her brother’s version of the terrifying situation. A man who could act like Mr. Longcluse, could, of course, say anything. She had begun to grow more cheerful, and in a little while she accepted the offer of her companion, and heard, first a story, and then a song; and, after all, she talked with her for some time.

“Tell me, now, what servants there are in the house,” asked Alice.

“Only two women and myself, please, Miss.”

“Is there anyone else in the house, besides ourselves?”

The girl looked down, and up again, in Alice’s eyes, and then away to the floor at the other end of the room.

“I was told, Ma’am, not to talk of nothing here, Miss, except my own business, please, my lady.”

“My God! This girl mayn’t speak truth to me,” exclaimed Alice, clasping her hands aghast.

The girl looked up uneasily.

“I should be sent away, Ma’am, if I do.”

“Look — listen: in this strait you must be for or against me; you can’t be divided. For God’s sake be a friend to me now. I may yet be the best friend you ever had. Come, Phœbe, trust me, and I’ll never betray you.”

She took the girl’s hand. Phœbe did not speak. She looked in her face earnestly for some moments, and then down, and up again.

“I don’t mind. I’ll do what I can for you, Ma’am; I’ll tell you what I know. But if you tell them, Ma’am, it will be awful bad for me, my lady.”

She looked again, very much frightened, in her face, and was silent.

"No one shall ever know but I. Trust me entirely, and I'll never forget it to you."

"Well, Ma'am, there is two men."

"Who are they?"

"Two men, please 'm. I knows one on 'em — he was keeper on the 'Guy o' Warwick,' please, my lady, when there was a hexecution in the 'ouse. They're both sheriff's men."

"And what are they doing here?"

"A hexecution, my lady."

"That is, to sell the furniture and everything for a debt, isn't that it?" inquired the lady, bewildered.

"Well, that was it below at the 'Guy o' Warwick,' Miss; but Mr. Vargers, he was courting me down there at the 'Guy o' Warwick,' and offered marriage if I would 'av 'ad him, and he tells me heverything, and he says that there's a paper to take you, please, my lady."

"Take *me*?"

"Yes, my lady; he read it to me in the room by the hall-door. Halice Harden, spinster, and something about the old guv'nor's will, please; and his horder is to take you, please, Miss, if you should offer to go out of the door; and there's two on 'em, and they watches turn about, so you can't leave the 'ouse, please, my lady; and if you try they'll only lock you up a prisoner in one room a-top o' the 'ouse; and, for your life, my lady, don't tell no one I said a word."

"Oh! Phœbe. What can they mean? What's to become of me? Somehow or other you must get me out of this house. Help me, for God's sake! I'll throw myself from the window — I'll kill myself rather than remain in their power."

"Hush! My lady, please, I may think of something yet. But don't you do nothing 'and hover 'ead. You must have patience. They won't be so sharp, maybe, in a day or two. I'll get you out if I can; and, if I can't, then God's will be done. And I'll make out what I can from Mr. Vargers; and don't you let no one think you likes me, and I'll be sly enough, you may count on me, my lady."

Trembling all over, Alice kissed her.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

MORE NEWS OF PAUL DAVIES.

Louisa Diaper did not appear that night, nor next morning. She had been spirited away like the rest. Sir Richard had told her that his sister desired that she should go into town, and stay till next day, under the care of the housekeeper in town, and that he would bring her a list of commissions which she was to do for her mistress preparatory to starting for Yorkshire. I daresay this young lady liked her excursion to town well enough. It was not till the night after that she started for the North.

Alice Arden, for a time, lost heart altogether. It was no wonder she should.

That her only brother should be an accomplice against her, in a plot so appalling, was enough to overpower her; her horror of Longcluse, the effectual nature of her imprisonment, and the strange and, as she feared, unscrupulous people by whom she had been so artfully surrounded, heightened her terrors to the pitch of distraction.

At times she was almost wild; at others stupefied in despair; at others, again, soothed by the kindly intrepidity of Phœbe, she became more collected. Sometimes she would throw herself on her bed, and sob for an hour in helpless agony; and then, exhausted and overpowered, she would fall for a time into a deep sleep, from which she would start, for several minutes, without the power of collecting her thoughts, and with only the stifled cry, “What is it? — Where am I?” and a terrified look round.

One day, in a calmer mood, as she sat in her room after a long talk with Phœbe, the girl came beside her chair with an oddly made key, with a little strap of white leather to the handle, in her hands.

“Here’s a latchkey, Miss; maybe you know what it opens?”

“Where did you find it?”

“In the old china vase over the chimney, please ‘m.”

“Let me see — oh! dear, yes, this opens the door in the wall of the grounds, in that direction,” and she pointed. “Poor papa lent it to my drawing-master. He lived somewhere beyond that, and used to let himself in by it when he came to give me my lessons."

"I remember that door well, Miss," said Phœbe, looking earnestly on the key— "Mr. Crozier let me out that way, one day. Mr. Longcluse has put strangers, you know, in the gatehouse. That's shut against us. I'll tell you what, Miss — wait — well, I'll *think*. I'll keep this key safe, anyhow; and — the more the merrier," she added with a sudden alacrity, and lifting her finger, by way of signal, for everything now was done with caution here, she left the room, and passed through the suite to the landing, and quietly took out the door-keys, one by one, and returned with her spoil to Alice's room.

"You thought they might lock us up?" whispered Alice.

The girl nodded. "No harm to have 'em, Miss — it won't hurt us." She folded them tightly in a handkerchief, and thrust the parcel as far as her arm could reach between the mattress and the bed. "I'll rip the ticken a bit just now, and stitch them in," whispered the girl.

"Didn't I hear another key clink as you put your hand in?" asked Alice.

The girl smiled, and drew out a large key, and nodded, still smiling as she replaced it.

"What does that open?" whispered Alice eagerly.

"*Nothing*, Miss," said the girl gravely— "it's the key of the old back-door lock; but there's a new one there now, and this won't open nothing. But I have a use for it. I'll tell you all in time, Miss; and, please, you must keep up your heart, mind."

Sir Richard Arden was not the cold villain you may suppose. He was resolved to make an effort of some kind for the extrication of his sister. He could not bear to open his dreadful situation to his Uncle David, nor to kill himself, nor to defy the vengeance of Longcluse. He would effect her escape and his own simultaneously. In the meantime he must acquiesce, ostensibly at least, in every step determined on by Longcluse.

It was a bright autumnal day as Sir Richard and Mr. Longcluse took the rail to Southampton. Longcluse had his reasons for taking the young baronet with him.

It was near the hour, by the time they got there, when David Arden would arrive from his northern point of departure. Longcluse looked animated — smiling; but a stupendous load lay on his heart. A single clumsy phrase in the letter of that detective scoundrel might be enough to direct the formidable suspicions of that energetic old gentleman upon him. The next hour might throw him altogether upon the defensive, and paralyse his schemes.

Alice Arden, you little dream of the man and the route by which, possibly, deliverance is speeding to you.

Near the steps of the large hotel that looks seaward, Longcluse and Sir Richard lounge, expecting the arrival of David Arden almost momentarily. Up drives a fly, piled with portmanteaus, hat-case, dressing-case, and all the other travelling appurtenances of a comfortable wayfarer. Beside the driver sits a servant. The fly draws up at the door near them.

Mr. Longcluse's seasoned heart throbs once or twice oddly. Out gets Uncle David, looking brown and healthy after his northern excursion. On reaching the top of the steps, he halts, and turns round to look about him. Again Mr. Longcluse feels the same odd sensation.

Uncle David recognises Sir Richard, and smiling greets him. He runs down the steps to meet him. After they have shaken hands, and, a little more coldly, he and Mr. Longcluse, he says, —

"You are not looking yourself, Dick; you ought to have run down to the moors, and got up an appetite. How is Alice?"

"Alice? Oh! Alice is very well, thanks."

"I should like to run up to Mortlake to see her. She has been complaining, eh?"

"No, no — better," says Sir Richard.

"And you forget to tell your uncle what you told me," interposes Mr. Longcluse, "that Miss Arden left Mortlake for Yorkshire yesterday."

"Oh!" said Uncle David, turning to Richard again.

"And the servants went before — two or three days ago," said Sir Richard, looking down for a moment, and hastening, under that clear eye, to speak a little truth.

"Well, I wish she had come with us," said David Arden; "but as she could not be persuaded, I'm glad she is making a little change of air and scene, in any direction. By-the-bye, Mr. Longcluse, you had a letter, had not you, from our friend, Paul Davies?"

"Yes; he seemed to think he had found a clue — from Paris it was — and I wrote to tell him to spare no expense in pushing his inquiries and to draw upon me.”

“Well, I have some news to tell you. His exploring voyage will come to nothing; you did not hear?”

“No.”

“Why, the poor fellow’s dead. I got a letter — it reached me, forwarded from my house in town, yesterday, from the person who hires the lodgings — to say he had died of scarlatina very suddenly, and sending an inventory of the things he left. It is a pity, for he seemed a smart fellow, and sanguine about getting to the bottom of it.”

“An awful pity!” exclaimed Longcluse, who felt as if a mountain were lifted from his heart, and the entire firmament had lighted up; “an awful pity! Are you quite sure?”

“There can’t be a doubt, I’m sorry to say. Then, as Alice has taken wing, I’ll pursue my first plan, and cross by the next mail.”

“For Paris?” inquired Mr. Longcluse, carelessly.

“Yes, Sir, for Paris,” answered Uncle David deliberately, looking at him; “yes, for Paris.”

And then followed a little chat on indifferent subjects. Then Uncle David mentioned that he had an appointment, and must dine with the dull but honest fellow who had asked him to meet him here on a matter of business, which would have done just as well next year, but he wished it now. Uncle David nodded, and waved his hand, as on entering the door he gave them a farewell smile over his shoulder.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE CATACOMBS.

At his disappearance, for Sir Richard the air darkened as when, in the tropics, the sun sets without a twilight, and the silence of an awful night descended.

It seemed that safety had been so near. He had laid his hand upon it, and had let it glide ungrasped between his fingers; and now the sky was black above him, and an unfathomable sea beneath.

Mr. Longcluse was in great spirits. He had grown for a time like the Walter Longcluse of a year before.

They two dined together, and after dinner Mr. Longcluse grew happy, and as he sat with his glass by him, he sang, looking over the waves, a sweet little sentimental song, about ships that pass at sea, and smiles and tears, and "true, boys, true," and "heaven shows a glimpse of its blue." And he walks with Sir Richard to the station, and he says, low, as he leans and looks into the carriage window, of which young Arden was the only occupant —

"Be true to me now, and we may make it up yet."

And so saying, he gives his hand a single pressure as he looks hard in his eyes.

The bell had rung. He was remaining there, he said, for another train. The clapping of the doors had ceased. He stood back. The whistle blew its long piercing yell, and as the train began to glide towards London, the young man saw the white face of Walter Longcluse in deep shadow, as he stood with his back to the lamp, still turned towards him.

The train was now thundering on its course; the solitary lamp glimmered in the roof. He threw himself back, with his foot against the opposite seat.

"Good God! what is one to resolve! All men are cruel when they are exasperated. Might not good yet be made of Longcluse? What creatures women are! — what fools! How easy all might have been made, with the least temper and reflection! What d —— d selfishness!"

*

Uncle David was now in Paris. The moon was shining over that beautiful city. In a lonely street, in a quarter which fashion had long forsaken — over whose pavement, as yet unconscious of the Revolution, had passed, in the glare of torchlight, the carved and emblazoned carriages of an aristocracy, as shadowy now as the courts of the Cæsars — his footsteps are echoing.

A huge house presents its front. He stops and examines it carefully for a few seconds. It is the house of which he is in search.

At one time the Baron Vanboeren had received patients from the country, to reside in this house. For the last year, during which he had been gathering together his wealth, and detaching himself from business, he had discontinued this, and had gradually got rid of his establishment.

When David Arden rang the bell at the hall-door, which he had to do repeatedly, it was answered at last by an old woman, high-shouldered, skin and bone, with a great nose, and big jawbones, and a high-cauled cap. This lean creature looks at him with a vexed and hollow eye. Her bony arm rests on the lock of the hall-door, and she blocks the narrow aperture between its edge and the massive door-case. She inquires in very nasal French what Monsieur desires.

“I wish to see Monsieur the Baron, if he will permit me an interview,” answered Mr. Arden in very fair French.

“Monsieur the Baron is not visible; but if Monsieur will, notwithstanding, leave any message he pleases for Monsieur the Baron, I will take care he receives it punctually.”

“But Monsieur the Baron appointed me to call tonight at ten o’clock.”

“Is Monsieur sure of that?”

“Perfectly.”

“Eh, very well; but, if he pleases, I must first learn Monsieur’s name.”

“My name is Arden.”

“I believe Monsieur is right.” She took a bit of notepaper from her capacious pocket, and peering at it, spelled aloud, “D-a-v-i-d — — “

“A-r-d-e-n,” interrupted and continued the visitor, spelling his name, with a smile.

“A-r-d-e-n,” she followed, reading slowly from her paper; “yes, Monsieur is right. You see, this paper says, ‘Admit Monsieur David Arden to an interview.’ Enter, if you please Monsieur, and follow me.”

It was a decayed house of superb proportions, but of a fashion long passed away. The gaunt old woman, with a bunch of large keys clinking at her side, stalked up the broad stairs and into a gallery, and through several rooms opening *en suite*. The rooms were hung with cobwebs, dusty, empty, and the shutters closed, except here and there where the moonlight gleamed through chinks and seams.

David Arden, before he had seen the Baron Vanboeren in London, had pictured him in imagination a tall old man with classic features, and manners courteous and somewhat stately.

We do not fabricate such images; they rise like exhalations from a few scattered data, and present themselves spontaneously. It is this self-creation that invests them with so much reality in our imaginations, and subjects us to so odd a surprise when the original turns out quite unlike the portrait with which we have been amusing ourselves.

She now pushed open a door, and said, “Monsieur the Baron here is arrived Monsieur David d’Ardennes.”

The room in which he now stood was spacious, but very nearly dark. The shutters were closed outside, and the moonlight that entered came through the circular hole cut in each. A large candle on a bracket burned at the further end of the room. There the baron stood. A reflector which interposed between the candle and the door at which David Arden entered directed its light strongly upon something which the baron held, and laid upon the table, in his hand; and now that he turned toward his visitor, it was concentrated upon his large face, revealing, with the force of a Rembrandt, all its furrows and finer wrinkles. He stood out against a background of darkness with remarkable force.

The baron stood before him — a short man in a red waistcoat. He looked more broad-shouldered and short-necked than ever in his shirtsleeves. He had an instrument in his hand resembling a small bit and brace, and some chips and sawdust on his flannel waistcoat, which he brushed off with two or three sweeps of his short fat fingers. He looked now like a grim old mechanic. There was no vivacity in his putty-coloured features, but there were promptitude and decision in every abrupt gesture. It was his towering, bald forehead, and something of command and savage energy in his lowering face, that redeemed the *tout ensemble* from an almost brutal vulgarity.

The baron was not in the slightest degree "put out," as the phrase is, at being detected in his present occupation and *deshabille*.

He bowed twice to David Arden, and said, in English, with a little foreign accent —

"Here is a chair, Monsieur Arden; but you can hardly see it until your eyes have grown a little accustomed to our *crépuscula*."

This was true enough, for David Arden, though he saw him advance a step or two, could not have known what he held in the hand that was in shadow. The sound, indeed, of the legs of the chair, as he set it down upon the floor, he heard.

"I should make you an apology, Mr. Arden, if I were any longer in my own home, which I am not, although this is still my house; for I have dismissed my servants, sold my furniture, and sent what things I cared to retain over the frontier to my new habitation, whither I shall soon follow; and this house too, I shall sell. I have already two or three gudgeons nibbling, Monsieur."

"This house must have been the hotel of some distinguished family, Baron; it is nobly proportioned," said David Arden.

As his eye became accustomed to the gloom, David Arden saw traces of gilding on the walls. The shattered frames on which the tapestry was stretched in old times remained in the panels, with crops of small, rusty nails visible. The faint candlelight glimmered on a ponderous gilded cornice, which had also sustained violence. The floor was bare, with a great deal of litter, and some scanty furniture. There was a lathe near the spot where David Arden stood, and shavings and splinters under his feet. There was a great block with a vice attached. In a portion of the fireplace was built a furnace. There were pincers and other instruments lying about the room, which had more the appearance of an untidy workshop than of a study, and seemed a suitable enough abode for the uncouth figure that confronted him.

"Ha! Monsieur," growls the baron, "stone walls have ears, you say if only they had tongues; what tales *these* could tell! This house was one of Madame du Barry's, and was sacked in the great Revolution. The mirrors were let into the plaster in the walls. In some of the rooms there are large fragments still stuck in the wall so fast, you would need a hammer and chisel to dislodge and break them up. This room was an anteroom, and admitted to the lady's bedroom by two doors, this and that. The panels of that other, by which you entered from the stair, were of mirror. They were quite smashed. The furniture, I suppose, flew out of the window; everything was broken up in small bits, and torn to rags, or carried off to the broker after the first fury, and *sansculotte* families came in and took possession of the wrecked apartments. You will say then, what was left? The bricks, the stones, hardly the plaster on the walls. Yet, Monsieur Arden, I have discovered some of the best treasures the house contained, and they are at present in this room. Are you a collector, Monsieur Arden?"

Uncle David disclaimed the honourable imputation. He was thinking of cutting all this short, and bringing the baron to the point. The old man was at the period when the egotism of age asserts itself, and was garrulous, and being, perhaps, despotic and fierce (he looked both), he might easily take fire and become impracticable. Therefore, on second thoughts, he was cautious.

"You can now see more plainly," said the baron. "Will you approach? Concealed by a double covering of strong paper pasted over it, and painted and gilded, each of these two doors on its six panels contains six distinct masterpieces of Watteau's. I have known that for ten years, and have postponed removing them. Twelve Watteaus, as fine as any in the world! I would not trust their removal to any other hand, and so, the panel comes out without a shake. Come here, Monsieur, if you please. This candle affords a light sufficient to see, at least, some of the beauties of these incomparable works."

"Thanks, Baron, a glance will suffice, for I am nothing of an artist."

He approached. It was true that his sight had grown accustomed to the obscurity, for he could now see the baron's features much more distinctly. His large waxen face was shorn smooth, except on the upper lip, where a short moustache still bristled; short black eyebrows contrasted also with the bald massive forehead, and round the eyes was a complication of mean and cunning wrinkles. Some peculiar lines between these contracted brows gave a character of ferocity to this forbidding and sensual face.

"Now! See there! Those four pictures — I would not sell those four Watteaus for one hundred thousand francs. And the other door is worth the same. Ha!"

"You are lucky, Baron."

“I think so. I do not wish to part with them: I don’t think of selling them. See the folds of that brocade! See the ease and grace of the lady in the sacque, who sits on the bank there, under the myrtles, with the guitar on her lap! and see the animation and elegance of that dancing boy with the tambourine! This is a chef-d’œuvre. I ought not to part with that, on any terms — no, never! You no doubt know many collectors, wealthy men, in England. Look at that shot silk, green and purple; and whom do you take that to be a portrait of, that lady with the castanets?”

He was pointing out each object, on which he descanted, with his stumpy finger, his hands being, I am bound to admit, by no means clean.

“If you do happen to know such people, nevertheless, I should not object to your telling them where this treasure may be seen, I’ve no objection. I should not like to part with them, that is true. No, no, *no*; but every man may be tempted, it is possible — possible, just possible.”

“I shall certainly mention them to some friends.”

“Wealthy men, of course,” said the baron.

“It is an expensive taste, Baron, and none but wealthy people can indulge it.”

“True, and these would be *very* expensive. They are unique; that lady there is the *Du Barry* — a portrait worth, alone, six thousand francs. Ha! he! Yes, when I take zese out and place zem, as I mean before I go, to be seen, they will bring all Europe together. *Mit speck fangt man mause* — with bacon one catches mice!”

“No doubt they will excite attention, Baron. But I feel I am wasting your time and abusing your courtesy in permitting my visit, the immediate object of which was to earnestly beg from you some information which, I think, no one else can give me.”

“Information? Oh! ah! Pray resume your chair, Sir. Information? yes, it is quite possible I may have information such as you need, Heaven knows! But knowledge, they say, is power, and if I do you a service I expect as much from you. Eine hand wascht die and’re — one hand, Monsieur, washes ze ozer. No man parts wis zat which is valuable, to strangers, wisout a proper honorarium. I receive no more patients here; but you understand, I may be induced to attend a patient: I may be *tempted*, you understand.”

“But this is not a case of attending a patient, Baron,” said David Arden, a little haughtily.

"And what ze devil *is* it, then?" said the baron, turning on him suddenly. "Monsieur will pardon me, but we professional men must turn our time and knowledge to account, do you see? And we don't give eizer wizout being paid, and *well* paid for them, eh?"

"Of course. I meant nothing else," said David Arden.

"Then, Sir, we understand one another so far, and that saves time. Now, what information can the Baron Vanboeren give to Monsieur David Arden?"

"I think you would prefer my putting my questions quite straight."

"Straight as a sword-thrust, Sir."

"Then, Baron, I want to know whether you were acquainted with two persons, Yelland Mace and Walter Longcluse."

"Yes, I knew zem bos, slightly and yet intimately — intimately and yet but slightly. You wish, perhaps, to learn particulars about those gentlemen?"

"I do."

"Go on: interrogate."

"Do you perfectly recollect the features of these persons?"

"I ought."

"Can you give me an accurate description of Yelland Mace?"

"I can bring you face to face with both."

"By Jove! Sir, are you serious?"

"Mr. Longcluse is in London."

"But you talk of bringing me face to face with them; how soon?"

"In five minutes."

"Oh, you mean a photograph, or a picture?"

"No, in the solid. Here is the key of the catacombs." And he took a key that hung from a nail on the wall.

"Bah, ha, yah!" exploded the baron, in a ferocious sneer, rather than a laugh, and shrugging his great shoulders to his ears, he shook them in barbarous glee, crying— "What clever fellow you are, Monsieur Arden! you see so well srough ze millstone! *Ich bin klug und weise* — you sing zat song. I am intelligent and wise, eh, he! gra-a, ha, ha!"

He seized the candlestick in one hand, and shaking the key in the other by the side of his huge forehead, he nodded once or twice to David Arden.

"Not much life where we are going; but you shall see zem bose."

“You speak riddles, Baron; but by all means bring me, as you say, face to face with them.”

“Very good, Monsieur; you’ll follow me,” said the baron. And he opened a door that admitted to the gallery, and, with the candle and the keys, he led the way, by this corridor, to an iron door that had a singular appearance, being sunk two feet back in a deep wooden frame, that threw it into shadow. This he unlocked, and with an exertion of his weight and strength, swung slowly open.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

RESURRECTIONS.

David Arden entered this door, and found himself under a vaulted roof of brick. These were the chambers, for there was at least two, which the baron termed his catacombs. Along both walls of the narrow apartment were iron doors, in deep recesses, that looked like the huge ovens of an ogre, sunk deep in the wall, and the baron looked himself not an unworthy proprietor. The baron had the General's faculty of remembering faces and names.

"Monsieur Yelland Mace? Yes, I will show you him; he is among ze dead."

"Dead?"

"Ay, zis right side is *dead* — all zese."

"Do you mean," says David Arden, "*literally* that Yelland Mace is no longer living?"

"A, B, C, D, E, F, G," mutters the baron, slowly pointing his finger along the right wall.

"I beg your pardon, Baron, but I don't think you heard me," said David Arden.

"*Perfectly*, excuse me: H, I, J, K, L, M — M. I will show you *now*, if you desire it, Yelland Mace; you shall see him now, and never behold him more. Do you wish very much?"

"Intensely — *most* intensely!" said Uncle David earnestly.

The baron turned full upon him, and leaned his shoulders against the iron door of the recess. He had taken from his pocket a bunch of heavy keys, which he dangled from his clenched fingers, and they made a faint jingle in the silence that followed, for a few seconds.

"Permit me to ask," said the baron, "are your inquiries directed to a legal object?"

"I have no difficulty in saying yes," answered he; "a legal object, strictly."

"A legal object, by which you gain considerably?" he asked slowly.

"By which I gain the satisfaction of seeing justice done upon a villain."

“That is fine, Monsieur. Eternal justice! I have thought and said that very often: Vive la justice eternelle! especially when her sword shears off the head of my enemy, and her scale is laden with napoleons for my purse.”

“Monsieur le Baron mistakes, in my case; I have absolutely nothing to gain by the procedure I propose; it is strictly criminal,” said David Arden drily.

“Not an estate? not a slice of an estate? Come, come! Thorheit! That is foolish talk.”

“I have told you already, nothing,” repeated David Arden.

“Then you don’t care, in truth, a single napoleon, whether you win or lose. We have been wasting our time, Sir. I have no time to bestow for nothing; my minutes count by the crown, while I remain in Paris. I shall soon depart, and practise no more; and my time will become my own — still my own, by no means *yours*. I am candid, Sir, and I think you cannot misunderstand me; I must be paid for my time and opportunities.”

“I never meant anything else,” said Mr. Arden sturdily; “I shall pay you liberally for any service you render me.”

“That, Sir, is equally frank; we understand now the principle on which I assist you. You wish to see Yelland Mace, so you shall.”

He turned about, and struck the key sharply on the iron door.

“There he waits,” said the baron, “and — did you ever see him?”

“No.”

“Bah! what a wise man. Then I may show you whom I please, and you know nothing. Have you heard him described?”

“Accurately.”

“Well, there is some little sense in it, after all. You shall see.”

He unlocked the safe, opened the door, and displayed shelves, laden with rudely-made deal boxes, each of a little more than a foot square. On these were marks and characters in red, some, and some in black, and others in blue.

“Hé! you see,” said the baron, pointing with his key, “my mummies are cased in hieroglyphics. Come! *Here* is the number, the date, and the man.”

And lifting them carefully one off the other, he took out a deal box that had stood in the lowest stratum. The cover was loose, except for a string tied about it. He laid it upon the floor, and took out a plaster mask, and brushing and blowing off the sawdust, held it up.

David Arden saw a face with large eyes closed, a very high and thin nose, a good forehead, a delicately chiselled mouth; the upper lip, though well formed after the Greek model, projected a little, and gave to the chin the effect of receding in proportion. This slight defect showed itself in profile; but the face, looked at full front, was on the whole handsome, and in some degree even interesting.

"You are quite sure of the identity of this?" asked Uncle David earnestly.

There was a square bit of parchment, with two or three short lines, in a character which he did not know, glued to the concave reverse of the mask. The baron took it, and holding the light near, read, "Yelland Mace, suspect for his politics, May 2nd, 1844."

"Yes," said Mr. Arden, having renewed his examination, "it very exactly tallies with the description; the nose aquiline, but very delicately formed. Is that writing in cypher?"

"Yes, in cypher."

"And in what language?"

"German."

David Arden looked at it.

"You will make nothing of it. In these inscriptions, I have employed eight languages — five European, and three Asiatic — I am, you see, something of a linguist — and four distinct cyphers; so having that skill, I gave the benefit of it to my *friends*; this being secret."

"Secret? — oh!" said Uncle David.

"Yes, secret; and you will please to say nothing of it to any living creature until the twenty-first of October next, when I retire. You understand commerce, Mr. Arden. My practice is confidential, and I should lose perhaps eighty thousand francs in the short space that intervenes, if I were thought to have played a patient such a trick. It is but twenty days of reserve, and then I go and laugh at them, every one. Piff, puff, paff! ha! ha!"

"Yes, I promise that also," said Uncle David dryly, and to himself he thought, "What a consummate old scoundrel!"

"Very good, Sir; we shall want this of Yelland Mace again, just now; his face and coffin, ha! ha! can rest there for the present." He had replaced the mask in its box, and that lay on the floor. The door of the iron press he shut and locked. "Next, I will show you Mr. Longcluse: those are dead."

He waved his short hand toward the row of iron doors which he had just visited.

"Please, Sir, walk with me into this room. Ay, so. Here are the *resurrections*. Will you be good enough — L, Longcluse, M, one, two, three, four; *three*, yes, to hold this candlestick for a moment?"

The baron unlocked this door, and, after some rummaging, he took forth a box similar to that he had taken out before.

"Yes, right, Walter Longcluse. I tell you how you will see it best: there is brilliant moonlight, stand there."

Through a circular hole in the wall there streamed a beam of moonlight, that fell upon the plaster-wall opposite with the distinctness of the circle of a magic-lantern.

"You see it — you know it! Ha! ha! His pretty face!"

He held the mask up in the moonlight, and the lineaments, sinister enough, of Mr. Longcluse stood, sharply defined in every line and feature, in intense white and black, against the vacant shadow behind. There was the flat nose, the projecting underjaw, the oblique, sarcastic eyebrow, even the line of the slight but long scar, than ran nearly from his eye to his nostril. The same, but younger.

"There is no doubt about *that*. But when was it taken? Will you read what is written upon it?"

Uncle David had taken out the candle, and he held it beside the mask. The baron turned it round, and read, "Walter Longcluse, 15th October, 1844."

"The same year in which Mace's was taken?"

"So it is, 1844."

"But there is a great deal more than you have read, written upon the parchment in this one."

"It looks more."

"And *is* more. Why, count the words, one, two, four, six, eight. There must be thirty, or upwards."

"Well, suppose there are, Sir: I have read, nevertheless, all I mean to read for the present. Suppose we bring these three masks together. We can talk a little then, and I will perhaps tell you more, and disclose to you some secrets of nature and art, of which perhaps you suspect nothing. Come, come, Monsieur! kindly take the candle."

The baron shut the iron door with a clang, and locked it, and, taking up the box, marched into the next room, and placing the boxes one on top of the other, carried them in silence out upon the gallery, accompanied by David Arden.

How desolate seemed the silence of the vast house, in all which, by this time, perhaps, there did not burn another light!

They now reentered the large and strangely-littered chamber in which he had talked with the baron; they stop among the chips and sawdust with which his work has strewn the floor.

“Set the candle on this table,” says he. “I’ll light another for a time. See all the trouble and time you cost me!”

He placed the two boxes on the table.

“I am extremely sorry — — “

“Not on my account, you needn’t. You’ll pay me well for it.”

“So I will, Baron.”

“Sit you down on that, Monsieur.”

He placed a clumsy old chair, with a balloon-back, for his visitor, and, seating himself upon another, he struck his hand on the table, and said, arresting for a moment the restless movement of his eyes, and fixing on him a savage stare —

“You shall see wonders and hear marvels, if only you are willing to pay what they are worth.” The baron laughed when he had said this.

CHAPTER LXXX.

ANOTHER.

“You shall sit here, Mr. Arden,” said the baron, placing a chair for him. “You shall be comfortable. I grow in confidence with you. I feel inwardly an intuition when I speak wis a man of honour; my demon, as it were, whispers ‘Trust him, honour him, make much of him.’ Will you take a pipe, or a mug of beer?”

This abrupt invitation Mr. Arden civilly declined.

“Well, I shall have my pipe and beer. See, there is ze barrel — not far to go.” He raised the candle, and David Arden saw for the first time the outline of a veritable beer-barrel in the corner, on tressels, such as might have regaled a party of boors in the clear shadow of a Teniers.

“There is the comely beer-cask, not often seen in Paris, in the corner of our boudoir, resting against the only remaining rags of the sky-blue and gold silk — it is rotten now — with which the room was hung, and a gilded cornice — it is black now — over its head; and now, instead of beautiful women and graceful youths, in gold lace and cut velvets and perfumed powder, there are but one rheumatic and crooked old woman, and one old Prussian doctor, in his shirtsleeves, ha! ha! mutat terra vices! Come, we shall look at these again, and you shall hear more.”

He placed the two masks upon the chimneypiece, leaning against the wall.

“And we will illuminate them,” says he; and he takes, one after the other, half a dozen pieces of wax candle, and dripping the melting wax on the chimneypiece, he sticks each candle in turn in a little pool of its own wax.

“I spare nothing, you see, to make all plain. Those two faces present a marked contrast. Do you, Mr. Arden, know anything, ever so little, of the fate of Yelland Mace?”

“Nothing. Is he living?”

“Suppose he is dead, what then?”

“In that case, of course, I take my leave of the inquiry, and of you, asking you simply one question, whether there was any correspondence between

Yelland Mace and Walter Longcluse?"

"A very intimate correspondence," said the baron.

"Of what nature?"

"Ha! They have been combined in business, in pleasures, in crimes," said the baron. "Look at them. Can you believe it? So dissimilar! They are opposites in form and character, as if fashioned in expression and in feature each to contradict the other; yet so united!"

"And in crime, you say?"

"Ay, in crime — in all things."

"Is Yelland Mace still living?" urged David Arden.

"Those features, in life, you will never behold, Sir."

"He is dead. You said that you took that mask from among the dead. *Is* he dead?"

"No, Sir; not actually dead, but under a strange condition. Bah; Don't you see I have a secret? Do you prize very highly learning where he is?"

"Very highly, provided he may be secured and brought to trial; and you, Baron, must arrange to give your testimony to prove his identity."

"Yes; that would be indispensible," said the baron, whose eyes were sweeping the room from corner to corner, fiercely and swiftly. "Without me you can never lift the veil; without me you can never unearth your stiff and pale Yelland Mace, nor without me identify and hang him."

"I rely upon your aid, Baron," said Mr. Arden, who was becoming agitated. "Your trouble shall be recompensed; you may depend upon my honour."

"I am running a certain risk. I am not a fool, though, like little Lebas. I am not to be made away with like a kitten; and once I move in this matter, I burn my ships behind me, and return to my splendid practice, under no circumstances, ever again."

The baron's pallid face looked more bloodless, his accent was fiercer, and his countenance more ruffianly as he uttered all this.

"I understood, Baron, that you had quite made up your mind to retire within a very few weeks," said David Arden.

"Does any man who has lived as long as you or I quite trust his own resolution? No one likes to be nailed to a plan of action an hour before he need be. I find my practice more lucrative every day. I may be tempted to postpone my retirement, and for a while longer to continue to gather the golden harvest that ripens round me. But once I take this step, all is up with that. You see — you understand. Bah! you are no fool; it is plain, all I sacrifice."

"Of course, Baron, you shall take no trouble, and make no sacrifice, without ample compensation. But are you aware of the nature of the crime committed by that man?"

"I never trouble my head about details; it is enough, the man is a political refugee, and his object concealment."

"But he was no political refugee; he had nothing to do with politics — he was simply a murderer and a robber."

"What a little rogue! Will you excuse my smoking a pipe and drinking a little beer? Now, he never hinted that, although I knew him very intimately, for he was my patient for some months; never hinted it, he was so sly."

"And Mr. Longcluse, was *he* your patient also?"

"Ha! to be sure he was. You won't drink some beer? No; well, in a moment."

He drew a little jugful from the cask, and placed it, and a pewter goblet, on the table, and then filled, lighted, and smoked his pipe as he proceeded.

"I will tell you something concerning those gentlemen, Mr. Longcluse and Mr. Mace, which may amuse you. Listen."

CHAPTER LXXXI.

BROKEN.

"My hands were very full," said the baron, displaying his stumpy fingers. "I received patients in this house; I had what you call many irons in ze fire. I was making napoleons then, I don't mind telling you, as fast as a man could run bullets. My minutes counted by the crown. It was in the month of May, 1844, late at night, a man called here, wanting to consult me. He called himself Herr von Konigsmark. I went down and saw him in my audience room. He knew I was to be depended upon. Such people tell one another who may be trusted. He told me he was an Austrian proscribed: very good. He proposed to place himself in my hands: very well. I looked him in the face — you have *there* exactly what I saw."

He extended his hand toward the mask of Yelland Mace.

"'You are an Austrian,' I said, 'a native subject of the empire?'

"'Yes.'

"'Italian?'

"'No.'

"'Hungarian?'

"'No.'

"'Well, you are not *German* — ha, ha! — I can swear to that.'

"He was speaking to me in German.

"'Your accent is foreign. Come, confidence. You must be no impostor. I must make no mistake, and blunder into a national type of features, all wrong; if I make your mask, it must do us credit. I know many gentlemen's secrets, and as many ladies' secrets. A man of honour! What are you afraid of?'"

"You were not a statuary?" said Uncle David, astonished at his versatility.

"Oh, yes! A statuary, but only in grotesque, you understand. I will show you some of my work by-and-by."

"And I shall perhaps understand."

"You *shall*, *perfectly*. With some reluctance, then, he admitted that what I positively asserted was true; for I told him I knew from his accent he was an

Englishman. Then, with some little pressure, I invited him to tell his name. He did — it was Yelland Mace. *That* is Yelland Mace."

He had now finished his pipe: he went over to the chimneypiece, and having knocked out the ashes, and with his pipe pointing to the tip of the long thin plaster nose, he said, "Look well at him. Look till you know all his features by rote. Look till you fix them for the rest of your days well in memory, and then say what in the devil's name you could make of them. Look at that high nose, as thin as a fish-knife. Look at the line of the mouth and chin; see the mild gentlemanlike contour. If you find a fellow with a flat nose, and a pair of upper tusks sticking out an inch, and a squint that turns out one eye like the white of an egg, you pull out the tusks, you raise the skin of the nose, slice a bit out of the cheek, and make a false bridge, as high as you please; heal the cheek with a stitch or two, and operate with the lancet for the squint, and your bust is complete. Bravo! you understand?"

"I confess, Baron, I do not."

"You shall, however. Here is the case — a political refugee, like Monsieur Yelland Mace — — "

"But he was no such thing."

"Well, a criminal — any man in such a situation is, for me, a political refugee zat, for reasons, desires to revisit his country, and yet must be so thoroughly disguised zat by no surprise, and by no process, can he be satisfactorily recognised; he comes to me, tells me his case, and says, 'I desire, Baron, to become your patient,' and so he places himself in my hands, and so — ha, ha! You begin to perceive?"

"Yes, I do! I think I understand you clearly. But, Lord bless me! what a nefarious trade!" exclaimed Uncle David.

The baron was not offended; he laughed.

"Nevertheless," said he, "There's no harm in that. Not that I care much about the question of right or wrong in the matter; but there's none. Bah! who's the worse of his going back? or, if he did not, who's the better?"

Uncle David did not care to discuss this point in ethics, but simply said, —

"And Mr. Longcluse was also a patient of yours?"

"Yes, certainly," said the baron.

"We Londoners know nothing of his history," said Mr. Arden.

"A political refugee, like Mr. Mace," said the baron. "Now, look at Herr Yelland Mace. It was a severe operation, but a beautiful one! I opened the skin with a single straight cut from the lachrymal gland to the nostril, and one underneath meeting it, you see" (he was tracing the line of the scalpel with the stem of his pipe), "along the base of the nose from the point. Then I drew back the skin over the bridge, and then I operated on the bone and cartilage, cutting them and the muscle at the extremity down to a level with the line of the face, and drew the flap of skin back, cutting it to meet the line of the skin of the cheek; *there*, you see, so much for the nose. Now see the curved eyebrow. Instead of that very well marked arch, I resolved it should slant from the radix of the nose in a straight line obliquely upward; to effect which I removed at the upper edge of each eyebrow, at the corner next the temple, a portion of the skin and muscle, which, being reunited and healed, produced the requisite contraction, and thus drew that end of each brow upward. And now, having disposed of the nose and brows, I come to the mouth. Look at the profile of this mask."

He was holding that of Yelland Mace toward Mr. Arden, and with the bowl of the pipe in his right hand, pointed out the lines and features on which he descanted, with the amber point of the stem.

"Now, if you observe, the chin in this face, by reason of the marked prominence of the nose, has the effect of receding, but it does not. If you continue the perpendicular line of ze forehead, ze chin, you see, meets it. The upper lip, though short and well-formed, projects a good deal. Ze under lip rather retires, and this adds to the receding effect of the chin, you see. My coup-d'œil assured me that it was practicable to give to this feature the character of a projecting underjaw. The complete depression of the nose more than half accomplished it. The rest is done by cutting away two upper and four under-teeth, and substituting false ones at the desired angle. By that application of dentistry I obtained zis new line." (He indicated the altered outline of the features, as before, with his pipe). "It was a very pretty operation. The effect you could hardly believe. He was two months recovering, confined to his bed, ha! ha! We can't have an immovable mask of living flesh, blood, and bone for nothing. He was threatened with erysipelas, and there was a rather critical inflammation of the left eye. When he could sit up, and bear the light, and looked in the glass, instead of thanking me, he screamed like a girl, and cried and cursed for an hour, ha, ha, ha! He was glad of it afterward: it was so complete. Look at it" (he held up the mask of Yelland Mace): "a face, on the whole, good-looking, but a little of a parrot-face, you know. I took him into my hands with that face, and" (taking up the mask of Mr. Longcluse, and turning it with a slow oscillation so as to present it in every aspect), he added, "these are the features of Yelland Mace as I sent him into the world with the name of Herr Longcluse!"

"You mean to say that Yelland Mace and Walter Longcluse are the same person?" cried David Arden, starting to his feet.

"I swear that here is Yelland Mace *before*, and here *after* the operation, call him what you please. When I was in London, two months ago, I saw Monsieur Longcluse. *He* is Yelland Mace; and these two masks are both masks of the same Yelland Mace."

"Then the evidence is complete," said David Arden, with awe in his face, as he stood for a moment gazing on the masks which the Baron Vanboeren held up side by side before him.

"Ay, the masks and the witness to explain them," said the baron, sturdily.

"It is a perfect identification," murmured Mr. Arden, with his eyes still riveted on the plaster faces. "Good God! how wonderful that proof, so complete in all its parts, should remain!"

"Well, I don't love Longcluse, since so he is named; he disobliged me when I was in London," said the baron. "Let him hang, since so you ordain it. I'm ready to go to London, give my evidence, and produce these plaster casts. But my time and trouble must be considered."

"Certainly."

"Yes," said the baron; "and to avoid tedious arithmetic, and for the sake of convenience, I will agree to visit London, at what time you appoint, to bring with me these two masks, and to give my evidence against Yelland Mace, otherwise Walter Longcluse, my stay in London not to exceed a fortnight, for ten thousand pounds sterling."

"I don't think, Baron, you can be serious," said Mr. Arden, as soon as he had recovered breath.

"Donner-wetter! I will show you that I am!" bawled the baron. "Now or never, Sir. Do as you please. I sha'n't abate a franc. Do you like my offer?"

On the event of this bargain are depending issues of which David Arden knows nothing; the dangers, the agonies, the salvation of those who are nearest to him on earth. The villain Longcluse, and the whole fabric of his machinations, may be dashed in pieces by a word.

How, then, did David Arden, who hated a swindle, answer the old extortioner, who asked him, “Do you like my offer?”

“Certainly not, Sir,” said David Arden, sternly.

“Then *was* scheert’s mich! What do I care! No more, no more about it!” yelled the baron in a fury, and dashed the two masks to pieces on the hearthstone at his feet, and stamped the fragments into dust with his clumsy shoes.

With a cry, old Uncle David rushed forward to arrest the demolition, but too late. The baron, who was liable to such accesses of rage, was grinding his teeth, and rolling his eyes, and stamping in fury.

The masks, those priceless records, were gone, past all hope of restoration. Uncle David felt for a moment so transported with anger, that I think he was on the point of striking him. How it would have fared with him, if he had, I can’t tell.

“Now!” howled the baron, “ten times ten thousand pounds would not place you where you were, Sir. You fancied, perhaps, I would stand haggling with you all night, and yield at last to your obstinacy. What is my answer? The floor strewn with the fragments of your calculation. Where will you turn — what will you do now?”

“Suppose I do this,” said Uncle David fiercely— “report to the police what I have seen — your masks and all the rest, and accomplish, besides, all I require, by my own evidence as to what I myself saw?”

“And I will confront you, as a witness,” said the baron, with a cold sneer, “and deny it all — swear it is a dream, and aid your poor relatives in proving you unfit to manage your own money matters.”

Uncle David paused for a moment. The baron had no idea how near he was, at that moment, to a trial of strength with his English visitor. Uncle David thinks better of it, and he contents himself with saying, “I shall have advice, and you shall *most certainly* hear from me again.”

Forth from the room strides David Arden in high wrath. Fearing to lose his way, he bawls over the banister, and through the corridors, “Is any one there?” and after a time the old woman, who is awaiting him in the hall, replies, and he is once more in the open street.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

DOPPELGANGER.

It was late, he did not know or care how late. He was by no means familiar with this quarter of the city. He was agitated and angry, and did not wish to return to his hotel till he had a little walked off his excitement. Slowly he sauntered along, from street to street. These were oldfashioned, such as were in vogue in the days of the Regency. Tall houses, with gables facing the street; few of them showing any light from their windows, and their dark outlines discernible on high against the midnight sky. Now he heard the voices of people near, emerging from a low theatre in a street at the right. A number of men come along the trottoir, toward Uncle David. They were going to a gaming-house and restaurant at the end of the street, which he had nearly reached. This troop of idlers he accompanies. They turn into an open door, and enter a passage not very brilliantly lighted. At the left was the open door of a restaurant. The greater number of those who enter follow the passage, however, which leads to the roulette-room.

As Uncle David, with a caprice of curiosity, follows slowly in the wake of this accession to the company, a figure passes and goes before him into the room.

With a strange thrill he takes or mistakes this figure for Mr. Longcluse. He pauses, and sees the tall figure enter the roulette-room. He follows it as soon as he recollects himself a little, and goes into the room. The players are, as usual, engrossed by the game. But at the far side beyond these busy people, he sees this person, whom he recognises by a light greatcoat, stooping with his lips pretty near the ear of a man who was sitting at the table. He raises himself in a moment more, and stands before Uncle David, and at the first glance he is quite certain that Mr. Longcluse is before him. The tall man stands with folded arms, and looks carelessly round the room, and at Uncle David among the rest.

"Here," he thought, "is the man; and the evidence, clear and conclusive, and so near this very spot, now scattered in dust and fragments, and the witness who might have clenched the case impracticable!"

This tall man, however, he begins to perceive, has points, and strong ones, of dissimilarity, notwithstanding his general resemblance to Mr. Longcluse. His beard and hair are red; his shoulders are broader, and very round; much clumsier and more powerful he looks; and there is an air of vulgarity and swagger and boisterous good spirits about him, certainly in marked contrast with Mr. Longcluse's very quiet demeanour.

Uncle David now finds himself in that uncomfortable state of oscillation between two opposite convictions which, in a matter of supreme importance, amounts very nearly to torture.

This man does not appear at all put out by Mr. Arden's observant presence, nor even conscious of it. A place becomes vacant at the table, and he takes it, and stakes some money, and goes on, and wins and loses, and at last yawns and turns away, and walks slowly round to the door near which David Arden is standing. Is not this the very man whom he saw for a moment on board the steamer, as he crossed? As he passes a jet of gas, the light falls upon his face at an angle that brings out lines that seem familiar to the Englishman, and for the moment determines his doubts. David Arden, with his eyes fixed upon him, says, as he was about to pass him, —

"How d'ye do, Mr. Longcluse?"

The gentleman stops, smiles, and shrugs.

"Pardon, Monsieur," he says in French, "I do not speak English or German."

The quality of the voice that spoke these words was, he thought, different from Mr. Longcluse's — less tone, less depth, and more nasal.

The gentleman pauses and smiles with his head inclined, evidently expecting to be addressed in French.

"I believe I have made a mistake, Sir," hesitates Mr. Arden.

The gentleman inclines his head lower, smiles, and waits patiently for a second or two. Mr. Arden, a little embarrassed, says, —

"I thought, Monsieur, I had met you before in England."

"I have never been in England, Monsieur," says the patient and polite Frenchman, in his own language. "I cannot have had the honour, therefore, of meeting Monsieur *there*."

He pauses politely.

"Then I have only to make an apology. I beg your — I beg — but surely — I think — by Jove!" he breaks into English, "I can't be mistaken — you *are* Mr. Longcluse."

The tall gentleman looks so unaffectedly puzzled, and so politely goodnatured, as he resumes, in the tones which seem perfectly natural, and yet one note in which David Arden fails to recognise, and says, —

"Monsieur must not trouble himself of having made a mistake: my name is St. Ange."

"I believe I *have* made a mistake, Monsieur — pray excuse me."

The gentleman bows very ceremoniously, and Monsieur St. Ange walks slowly out, and takes a glass of curaçoa in the outer room. As he is paying the *garçon*, Mr. Arden again appears, once more in a state of uncertainty, and again leaning to the belief that this person is indeed the Mr. Longcluse who at present entirely possesses his imagination.

The tall stranger with the round shoulders in truth resembled the person who, in a midnight interview on Hampstead Heath, had discussed some momentous questions with Paul Davies, as we remember; but that person spoke in the peculiar accent of the northern border. *His* beard, too, was exorbitant in length, and flickered wide and red, in the wind. This beard, on the contrary, was short and trim, and hardly so red, I think, as that moss-trooper's. On the whole, the likeness in both cases was somewhat rude and general. Still the resemblance to Longcluse again struck Mr. Arden so powerfully, that he actually followed him into the street and overtook him only a dozen steps away from the door, on the now silent pavement.

Hearing his hurried step behind him, the object of his pursuit turns about and confronts him for the first time with an offended and haughty look.

"Monsieur!" says he a little grimly, drawing himself up as he comes to a sudden halt.

"The impression has forced itself upon me again that you *are* no other than Mr. Walter Longcluse," says Uncle David.

The tall gentleman recovered his goodhumour, and smiled as before, with a shrug.

"I have not the honour of that gentleman's acquaintance, Monsieur, and cannot tell, therefore, whether he in the least resembles me. But as this kind of thing is unusual, and grows wearisome, and may end in putting me out of temper — which is not easy, although quite possible — and as my assurance that I am really myself seems insufficient to convince Monsieur, I shall be happy to offer other evidence of the most unexceptionable kind.

My house is only two streets distant. There my wife and daughter await me, and our curé partakes of our little supper at twelve. I am a little late," says he, listening, for the clocks are tolling twelve; "however, it is a little more than two hundred metres, if you will accept my invitation, and I shall be very happy to introduce you to my wife, to my daughter Clotilde, and to our good curé, who is a most agreeable man. Pray come, share our little supper, see what sort of people we are, and in this way — more agreeable, I hope, than any other, and certainly less fallacious — you can ascertain whether I am Monsieur St. Ange, or that other gentleman with whom you are so obliging as to confound me. Pray come; it is not much — a fricasée, a few cutlets, an omelette, and a glass of wine. Madame St. Ange will be charmed to make your acquaintance, my daughter will sing us a song, and you will say that Monsieur le Curé is really a most entertaining companion."

There was something so simple and thoroughly goodnatured in this invitation, under all the circumstances, that Mr. Arden felt a little ashamed of his persistent annoyance of so hospitable a fellow, and for the moment he was convinced that he must have been in error.

"Sir," says David Arden, "I am now convinced that I must have been mistaken; but I cannot deny myself the honour of being presented to Madame St. Ange, and I assure you I am quite ashamed of the annoyance I must have caused you, and I offer a thousand apologies."

"Not one, pray," replies the Frenchman, with great goodhumour and gaiety. "I felicitate myself on a mistake which promises to result so happily."

So side by side, at a leisurely pace, they pursued their way through these silent streets, and unaccountably the conviction again gradually stole over Uncle David that he was actually walking by the side of Mr. Longcluse.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

A SHORT PARTING.

The fluctuations of Mr. Arden’s conviction continued. His new acquaintance chatted gaily. They passed a transverse street, and he saw him glance quickly right and left, with a shrewd eye that did not quite accord with his careless demeanour.

Here for a moment the moon fell full upon them, and the effect of this new light was, once more, to impair Mr. Arden’s confidence in his last conclusions about this person. Again he was at sea as to his identity.

There were the gabble and vociferation of two women quarrelling in the street to the left, and three tipsy fellows, marching home, were singing a trio some way up the street to the right.

They had encountered but one figure — a seedy scrivener, slipshod, shuffling his way to his garret, with a baize bag of law-papers to copy in his left hand, and a sheaf of quills in his right, and a pale, careworn face turned up towards the sky. The streets were growing more silent and deserted as they proceeded.

He was sauntering onward by the side of this urbane and garrulous stranger, when, like a whisper, the thought came, “Take care!”

David Arden stopped short.

“Eh, bien?” said his polite companion, stopping simultaneously, and staring in his face a little grimly.

“On reflection, Monsieur, it is so late, that I fear I should hardly reach my hotel in time if I were to accept your agreeable invitation, and letters probably await me, which I should, at least, *read* tonight.”

“Surely Monsieur will not disappoint me — surely Monsieur is not going to treat me so oddly?” expostulated Monsieur St. Ange.

“Goodnight, Sir. Farewell!” said David Arden, raising his hat as he turned to go.

There intervened not two yards between them, and the polite Monsieur St. Ange makes a stride after him, and extends his hand — whether there is a weapon in it, I know not; but he exclaims fiercely, —

"Ha! robber! my purse!"

Fortunately, perhaps, at that moment, from a lane only a few yards away, emerge two gendarmes, and Monsieur St. Ange exclaims, "Ah, Monsieur, mille pardons! Here it is! All safe, Monsieur. Pray excuse my mistake as frankly as I have excused yours. Adieu!"

Monsieur St. Ange raises his hat, shrugs, smiles, and withdrew.

Uncle David thought, on the whole, he was well rid of his ambiguous acquaintance, and strode along beside the gendarmes, who civilly directed him upon his way, which he had lost.

So, then, upon Mr. Longcluse's fortunes the sun shone; his star, it would seem, was in the ascendant. If the evil genius who ruled his destiny was contending, in a chess game, with the good angel of Alice Arden, her game seemed pretty well lost, and the last move near.

When David Arden reached his hotel a note awaited him, in the hand of the Baron Vanboeren. He read it under the gas in the hall. It said: —

"We must, in this world, forgive and reconsider many things. I therefore pardon you, you me. So soon as you have slept upon our conversation, you will accept an offer which I cannot modify. I always proportion the burden to the back. The rich pay me handsomely; for the poor I have prescribed and operated, sometimes, for nothing! You have the good fortune, like myself, to be childless, wifeless, and rich. When I take a fancy to a thing, nothing stops me; you, no doubt, in like manner. The trouble is something to me; the danger, which you count nothing, to me is *much*. The compensation I name, estimated without the circumstances, is large; compared with my wealth, trifling; compared with your wealth, nothing; as the condition of a transaction between you and me, therefore, not worth mentioning. The accident of last night I can repair. The original matrix of each mask remains safe in my hands: from this I can multiply casts *ad libitum*. Both these matrices I will hammer into powder at twelve o'clock tomorrow night, unless my liberal offer shall have been accepted before that hour. I write to a man of honour. We understand each other.

"EMMANUEL VANBOEREN."

The ruin, then, was not irretrievable; and there was time to take advice, and think it over. In the baron's brutal letter there was a coarse logic, not without its weight.

In better spirits David Arden betook himself to bed. It vexed him to think of submitting to the avarice of that wicked old extortioner; but to that submission, reluctant as he is, it seems probable he will come.

And now his thoughts turn upon the hospitable Monsieur St. Ange, and he begins, I must admit not altogether without reason, to reflect what a fool he has been. He wonders whether that hospitable and polite gentleman had intended to murder him, at the moment when the gendarmes so luckily appeared. And in the midst of his speculations, overpowered by fatigue, he fell asleep, and ate his breakfast next morning very happily.

Uncle David had none of that small diplomatic genius that helps to make a good attorney. That sort of knowledge of human nature would have prompted a careless reception of the baron’s note, and an entire absence of that promptitude which seems to imply an anxiety to seize an offer.

Accordingly, it was at about eleven o’clock in the morning that he presented himself at the house of the Baron Vanboeren.

He was not destined to conclude a reconciliation with that German noble, nor to listen to his abrupt loquacity, nor ever more to discuss or negotiate anything whatsoever with him, for the Baron Vanboeren had been found that morning close to his hall door on the floor, shot with no less than three bullets through his body, and his pipe in both hands clenched to his blood-soaked breast like a crucifix. The baron is not actually dead. He has been hours insensible. He cannot live; and the doctor says that neither speech nor recollection can return before he dies.

By whose hands, for what cause, in what manner the world had lost that excellent man, no one could say. A great variety of theories prevail on the subject. He had sent the old servant for Pierre la Roche, whom he employed as a messenger, and he had given him at about a quarter to eleven a note addressed to David Arden, Esquire, which was no doubt that which Mr. Arden had received.

Had Heaven decreed that this investigation should come to naught? This blow seemed irremediable.

David Arden, however, had, as I mentioned, official friends, and it struck him that he might through them obtain access to the rooms in which his interviews with the baron had taken place; and that an ingenious and patient artist in plaster might be found who would search out the matrices, or, at worst, piece the fragments of the mask together, and so, in part, perhaps, restore the demolished evidence. It turned out, however, that the destruction of these relics was too complete for any such experiments; and all that now remained was, upon the baron's letter of the evening before, to move in official quarters for a search for those "matrices" from which it was alleged the masks were taken.

This subject so engrossed his mind, that it was not until after his late dinner that he began once more to think of Monsieur St. Ange, and his resemblance to Mr. Longcluse; and a new suspicion began to envelope those gentlemen in his imagination. A thought struck him, and up got Uncle David, leaving his wine unfinished, and a few minutes more saw him in the telegraph office, writing the following message: —

"From Monsieur David Arden, etc., to Monsieur Blount, 5 Manchester Buildings, Westminster, London.

"Pray telegraph immediately to say whether Mr. Longcluse is at his house, Bolton Street, Piccadilly."

No answer reached him that night; but in the morning he found a telegram dated 11.30 of the previous night, which said —

"Mr. Longcluse is ill at his house at Richmond — better to-day."

To this promptly he replied —

"See him, if possible, immediately at Richmond, and say how he looks. The surrender of the lease in Crown Alley will be an excuse. See him if there. Ascertain with certainty where. Telegraph immediately."

No answer had reached Uncle David at three o'clock P.M.; he had despatched his message at nine. He was impatient, and walked to the telegraph office to make inquiries, and to grumble. He sent another message in querulous and peremptory laconics. But no answer came till near twelve o'clock, when the following was delivered to him: —

"Yours came while out. Received at 6 P.M. Saw Longcluse at Richmond. Looks seedy. Says he is all right now."

He read this twice or thrice, and lowered the hand whose fingers held it by the corner, and looked up, taking a turn or two about the room; and he thought what a precious fool he must have appeared to Monsieur St. Ange, and then again, with another view of that gentleman's character, what an escape he had possibly had.

So there was no distraction any longer; and he directed his mind now exclusively upon the distinct object of securing possession of the moulds from which the masks were taken; and for many reasons it is not likely that very much will come of his search.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

AT MORTLAKE.

Events do not stand still at Mortlake. It is now about four o'clock on a fine autumnal afternoon. Since we last saw her, Alice Arden has not once sought to pass the hall-door. It would not have been possible to do so. No one passed that barrier without a scrutiny, and the aid of the key of the man who kept guard at the door, as closely as ever did the office at the hatch of the debtor's prison. The suite of five rooms upstairs, to which Alice is now strictly confined, is not only comfortable, but luxurious. It had been fitted up for his own use by Sir Reginald years before he exchanged it for those rooms downstairs which, as he grew older, he preferred.

Levi every day visited the house, and took a report of all that was said and planned upstairs, in a tête-à-tête with Phœbe Chiffinch, in the great parlour among the portraits. The girl was true to her young and helpless mistress, and was in her confidence, outwitting the rascally Jew, who every time, by Longcluse's order, bribed her handsomely for the information that was misleading him.

From Phœbe the young lady concealed no pang of her agony. Well was it for her that in their craft they had exchanged the comparatively useless Miss Diaper for this poor girl, on whose apprenticeship to strange ways, and a not very fastidious life, they relied for a clever and unscrupulous instrument. Perhaps she had more than the cunning they reckoned upon. "But I 'av' took a liking to ye, Miss, and they'll not make nothing of Phœbe Chiffinch."

Alice was alone in her room, and Phœbe Chiffinch came running up the great staircase singing, and through the intervening suite of rooms, entered that in which her young mistress awaited her return. Her song falters, and dies into a strange ejaculation, as she passes the door.

"The Lord be thanked, that's over and done!" she exclaims, with a face pale from excitement.

"Sit down, Phœbe; you are trembling; you must drink a little water. Are you well?"

"La! quite well, Miss," said Phœbe, more cheerily, and then burst into tears. She gulped down some of the water which the frightened young lady held to her lips, and recovering quickly, she gets on her feet, and says impatiently— "I'm sure, Miss, I don't know what makes me such a fool; but I'm all right now, Ma'am; and you asked me, the other day, about the big key of the old back-door lock that I showed you, and I said, though it could not open no door, I would find a use for it, yet. So I 'av', Miss."

"Go on; I recollect perfectly."

"You remember the bit of parchment I asked you to write the words on yesterday evening, Miss? They was these: 'Passage on the left, from main passage to housekeeper's room,' *etc.* Well, I was with Mr. Vargers when he locked that passage up, and it leads to a door in the side of the 'ouse, which it opens into the grounds; and in that houter door he left a key, and only took with him the key of the door at the other end, which it opens from the 'ousekeeper's passage. So all seemed sure — sure it is, so long as you can't get into that side passage, which it is locked."

"I understand; go on, Phœbe."

"Well, Miss, the reason I vallied that key I showed you so much, was because it's as like the key of the side passage as one egg is to another, only it won't turn in the lock. So, as that key I must 'av', I tacked the bit of parchment you wrote to the 'andle of the other, which the two matches exactly, and I didn't tell you, Miss, thinking what a taking you'd be in, but I went down to try if I could not take it for the right one."

"It was kind of you not to tell me; go on," said the young lady.

"Well, Miss, I 'ad the key in my pocket, ready to change; and I knew well how 'twould be, if I was found out — I'd get the sack, or be locked up 'ere myself, more likely, and no more chances for you. Mr. Vargers was in the room — the porter's room they calls it now — and in I goes. I did not see no one there, but Vargers and he was lookin' sly, I thought, and him and Mr. Boult has been talking me over, I fancy, and they don't quite trust me. So I began to talk, wheedling him the best I could to let me go into town for an hour; 'twas only for talk, for well I knew I shouldn't get to go; but nothing but chaff did he answer. And then, says I, is Mr. Levice come yet, and he said, he is, but he has a second key of the back door and he may 'av' let himself hout. Well, I says, thinking to make Vargers jealous, he's a werry pleasant gentleman, a bit too pleasant for me, and I'm a-going to the kitchen, and I'd raything he wastnt there, smoking as he often does, and talking nonsense, when I'm in it. There's others that's nicer, to my fancy, than him — so, jest you go and see, and I'll take care of heverything 'ere till you come back — and don't you be a minute. There was the keys, lying along the chimneypiece, at my left, and the big table in front, and nothing to hinder me from changing mine for his, but Vargers' eye over me. Little I thought he'd 'av' bin so ready to do as I said. But he smiled to himself-like, and he said he'd go and see. So away he went; and I listens at the door till I heard his foot go on the tiles of the passage that goes down by the 'ousekeeper's room, and the billiard-room, to the kitchen; and then on tip-toe, as quick as light, I goes to the chimneypiece, and without a sound, I takes the very key I wanted in my fingers, and drops it into my pocket, but putting down the other in its place, I knocked down the big leaden hink-bottle, and didn't it make a bang on the floor — and a terrible hoarse voice roars out from the tother side of the table— 'What the devil are you doing there, huzzy?' Saving your presence, Miss; and up gets Mr. Boult, only half awake, looking as mad as Bedlam, and I thought I would have fainted away! Who'd 'av' fancied he was in the room? He had his 'ead on the table, and the cloak over it, and I think, when they 'eard me acoming downstairs, they agreed he should 'ide hisself so, to catch me, while Vargers would leave the room, to try if I would meddle with the keys, or the like — and while Mr. Boult was foxing, he fell asleep in right earnest. Warn't it a joke, Miss? So I brazent it hout, Miss, the best I could, and I threatened to complain to Mr. Levi, and said I'd stay no longer, to be talked to, that way, by sich as he. And Boult could not tell Vargers he was asleep, and so I saw him count over the keys, and up I ran, singing."

By this time the girl was on her knees, concealing the key between the beds, with the others.

"Thank God, Phœbe, you have got it! But, oh! all that is before us still!"

"Yes, there's work enough, Miss. I'll not be so frightened no more. Tom Chiffinch, that beat the Finchley pet, after ninety good rounds, was my brother, and I won't show nothing but pluck, Miss, from this out — you'll see."

Alice had proposed writing to summon her friends to her aid. But Phœbe protested against that extremely perilous measure. Her friends were away from London; who could say where? And she believed that the attempt to post the letters would miscarry, and that they were certain to fall into the hands of their jailors. She insisted that Alice should rely on the simple plan of escape from Mortlake.

Martha Tansey, it is true, was anxious. She wondered how it was that she had not once heard from her young mistress since her journey to Yorkshire. And a passage in a letter which had reached her, from the old servant, at David Arden's town house, who had been mystified by Sir Richard, perplexed and alarmed her further, by inquiring how Miss Alice looked, and whether she had been knocked up by the journey to Arden on Wednesday.

So matters stood.

Each evening Mr. Levi was in attendance, and this day, according to rule, she went down to the grand old dining-room.

"How'sh Miss Chiffinch?" said the little Jew, advancing to meet her; "how'sh her grashe the duchess, in the top o' the houshe? Ish my Lady Mount-garret ash proud ash ever?"

"Well, I do think, Mr. Levice, there's a great change; she's bin growing better the last two days, and she's got a letter last night that's seemed to please her."

"Wha'at letter?"

"The letter you gave me last night for her."

"O-oh! Ah! I wonder — eh? Do you happen to know what wa'azh in that ere letter?" he asked, in an insinuating whisper.

"Not I, Mr. Levice. She don't trust me not as far as you'd throw a bull by the tail. You might 'av' managed that better. You must 'a frightened her some way about me. I try to be agreeable all I can, but she won't a-look at me."

"Well, I don't want to know, I'm sure. Did she talk of going out of doors since?"

"No; there's a frost in the hair still, and she says till that's gone she won't stir out."

"That frost will last a bit, I guess. Any more newshe?"

"Nothing."

"Wait a minute 'ere," said Mr. Levi, and he went into the room beyond this, where she knew there were writing materials.

She waited some time, and at length took the liberty of sitting down. She was kept a good while longer. The sun went down; the drowsy crimson that heralds night overspread the sky. She coughed; several fits of coughing she tried at short intervals. Had Mr. Levice, as she called him, forgotten her? He came out at length in the twilight.

"Shtay you 'ere a few minutes more," said that gentleman, as he walked thoughtfully through the room and paused. "You wazh asking yesterday where izh Sir Richard Arden. Well, hezh took hishelf off to Harden in Yorkshire, and he'll not be 'ome again for a week."

Having delivered this piece of intelligence, he nodded, and slowly went to the hall, and closed the door carefully as he left the room. She followed to the door and listened. There was plainly a little fuss going on in the hall. She heard feet in motion, and low talking. She was curious and would have peeped, but the door was secured on the outside. The twilight had deepened, and for the first time she saw that a ray of candlelight came through the keyhole from the inner room. She opened the door softly, and saw a gentleman writing at the table. He was quite alone. He turned, and rose: a tall, slight gentleman, with a singular countenance that startled her.

"You are Phœbe Chiffinch," said a deep, clear voice, sternly, as the gentleman pointed towards her with the plume end of the pen he held in his fingers. "I am Mr. Longcluse. It is I who have sent you two pounds each day by Levi. I hear you have got it all right."

The girl curtseyed, and said "Yes, Sir," at the second effort, for she was startled. He had taken out and opened his pocketbook.

"Here are *ten* pounds," and he handed her a rustling new note by the corner. "I'll treat you liberally, but you must speak truth, and do exactly as you are ordered by Levi." She curtseyed again. There was something in that gentleman that frightened her awfully.

"If you do so, I mean to give you a hundred pounds when this business is over. I have paid you as my servant, and if you deceive me I'll punish you; and there are two or three little things they complain of at the 'Guy of Warwick,' and" (he swore a hard oath) "you shall hear of them if you do."

She curtseyed, and felt, not angry, as she would if any one else had said it, but frightened, for Mr. Longcluse's was a name of power at Mortlake.

"You gave Miss Arden a letter last night. You know what was in it?"

"Yes, Sir."

"What was it?"

"An offer of marriage from you, Sir."

“Yes: how do you know that?”

“She told me, please, Sir.”

“How did she take it? Come, don’t be afraid.”

“I’d say it pleased her well, Sir.”

He looked at her in much surprise, and was silent for a time.

He repeated his question, and receiving a similar answer, reflected on it.

“Yes; it *is* the best way out of her troubles; she begins to see that,” he said, with a strange smile.

He walked to the chimneypiece, and leaned on it; and forgot the presence of Phœbe. She was too much in awe to make any sign. Turning he saw her, suddenly.

“You will receive some directions from Mr. Levi; take care you understand and execute them.”

He touched the bell, and Levi opened the door; and she and that person walked together to the foot of the stair, where in a low tone they talked.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE CRISIS.

When Phœbe Chiffinch returned to Alice's room, it was about ten o'clock; a brilliant moon was shining on the old trees, and throwing their shadows on the misty grass. The landscape from these upper windows was sad and beautiful, and above the distant trees that were softened by the haze of night rose the silvery spire of the old church, in whose vault her father sleeps with a cold brain, thinking no more of mortgages and writs.

Alice had been wondering what had detained her so long, and by the time she arrived had become very much alarmed.

Relieved when she entered, she was again struck with fear when Phœbe Chiffinch had come near enough to enable her to see her face. She was pale, and with her eyes fixed on her, raised her finger in warning, and then glanced at the door which she had just closed.

Her young mistress got up and approached her, also growing pale, for she perceived that danger was at the door.

"I wish there was bolts to these doors. They've got other keys. Never mind; I know it all now," she whispered, as she walked softly up to the end of the room farthest from the door. "I said I'd stand by you, my lady; don't you lose heart. They're coming here in about a hour."

"For God's sake, what is it?" said Alice faintly, her eyes gazing wider and wider, and her very lips growing white.

"There's work before us, my lady, and there must be no fooling," said the girl, a little sternly. "Mr. Levi, please, has told me a deal, and all they expect from me, the villains. Are you strong enough to take your part in it, Miss? If not, best be quiet; best for both."

"Yes; quite strong, Phœbe. Are we to leave this?"

"I hope, Miss. We can but try."

"There's light, Phœbe," she said, glancing with a shiver from the window. "It's a bright night."

"I wish 'twas darker; but mind you what I say. Longcluse is to be here in a hour. Your brother's coming, God help you! and that little limb o' Satan, that blackeyed, black-nailed, dirty little Jew, Levice! They're not in town, they're out together near this, where a man is to meet them with writings. There's a licence got, Christie Vargers saw Mr. Longcluse showing it to your brother, Sir Richard; and I daren't tell Vargers that I'm for you. He'd never do nothing to vex Mr. Levice, he daren't. There's a parson here, a rum 'un, you may be sure. I think I know something about him; Vargers does. He's in the room now, only one away from this, next the stair head, and Vargers is put to keep the door in the same room. All the doors along, from one room to t'other, is open, from this to the stairs, except the last, which Vargers has the key of it; and all the doors opening from the rooms to the gallery is locked, so you can't get out o' this 'ere without passing through the one where parson is, and Mr. Vargers, please."

"I'll speak to the clergyman," whispered Alice, extending her hands towards the far door; "God be thanked, there's one good man here, and he'll save me!"

"La, bless you child! why that parson had his two pen'orth long ago, and spends half his nights in the lock-up."

"I don't understand, Phœbe."

"He had two years. He's bin in jail, Miss, Vargers says, as often as he has fingers and toes; and he's at his brandy and water as I came through, with his feet on the fender, and his pipe in his mouth. He's here to marry you, please 'm, to Mr. Longcluse, and there's *all the good* he'll do you; and your brother will give you away, Miss, and Levice and Vargers for witnesses, and me I dessay. It's every bit harranged, and they don't care the rinsing of a tumbler what you say or do; for through with it, slicks, they'll go, and say 'twas all right, in spite of all you can do; and who is there to make a row about it? Not you, after all's done."

"We must get away! I'll lose my life, or I'll escape!"

Phœbe looked at her in silence. I think she was measuring her strength, and her nerve, for the undertaking.

"Well, 'm, it's time it was begun. The time is come. Here's your cloak, Miss, I'll tie a handkerchief over my head, if we get out; and here's the three keys, betwixt the bed and the mattress."

After a moment's search on her knees, she produced them.

"The big one and this I'll keep, and you'll manage this other, please; take it in your right hand — you must use it first. It opens the far door of the room where Vargers is, and if you get through, you'll be at the stairhead then. Don't you come in after me, till you see I have Vargers engaged another way. Go through as light as a bird flies, and take the key out of the door, at the other end, when you unlock it; and close it softly, else he'll see it, and have the house about our ears; and you know the big window at the drawingroom lobby; wait in the hollow of that window till I come. Do you understand, please, Miss?"

Alice did perfectly.

"Hish-sh!" said the maid, with a prolonged caution.

A dead silence followed; for a minute — several minutes neither seemed to breathe.

Phœbe whispered at length —

"*Now*, Miss, are you ready?"

"Yes," she whispered, and her heart beat for a moment as if it would suffocate her, and then was still; an icy chill stole over her, and as on tip-toe she followed Phœbe, she felt as if she glided without weight or contact, like a spirit.

Through a dark room they passed, very softly, first, a little light under the door showed that there were candles in the next. They halted and listened. Phœbe opened the door and entered.

Standing back in the shadow, Alice saw the room and the people in it, distinctly. The parson was not the sort of contraband clergyman she had fancied, by any means, but a thin hectic man of some four-and-thirty years, only looking a little dazed by brandy and water, and far gone in consumption. Handsome thin features, and a suit of seedy black, and a white choker, indicated that lost gentleman, who was crying silently as he smoked his pipe, I daresay a little bit tipsy, gazing into the fire, with his fatal brandy and water at his elbow.

"Eh! Mr. Vargers, smoking after *all* I said to you!" murmured Miss Phœbe severely, advancing toward her round-shouldered sweetheart, with her finger raised.

Mr. Vargers replied pleasantly; and as this tender "chaff" flew lightly between the interlocutors, the parson looked still into the fire, hearing nothing of their play and banter, but sunk deep in the hell of his sorrowful memory.

As Phœbe talked on, Vargers grew agreeable and tender, and in about three minutes after her own entrance, she saw with a thrill, imperfectly, just with the "corner of her eye," something pass behind them swiftly toward the outer door. The crisis, then, had come. For a moment there seemed a sudden light before her eyes, and then a dark mist; in another she recovered herself.

Vargers stood up suddenly.

"Hullo! what's gone with the door there?" said he, sternly ending their banter.

If he had been looking on her with an eye of suspicion, he might have seen her colour change. But Phœbe was quick-witted and prompt, and saying, in hushed tones —

"Well, dear, ain't I a fool, leaving the lady's door open? Look ye, now, Mr. Vargers, she's lying fast asleep on her bed; and that's the reason I took courage to come here and ask a favour. But I'd raything you'd lock her door, for if she waked and missed me she'd be out here, and all the fat in the fire."

"I dessay you're right, Miss," said he, with a more businesslike gallantry; and as he shut the door and fumbled in his pocket for the key, she stole a look over her shoulder.

The prisoner had got through, and the door at the other end was closed.

With a secret shudder, she thanked God in her heart, while with a laugh she slapped Mr. Vargers' lusty shoulder, and said wheedlingly, "And now for the favour, Mr. Vargers: you must let me down to the kitchen for five minutes."

A little more banter and sparring followed, which ended in Vargers kissing her, in spite of the usual squall and protest; and on his essaying to let her out, and finding the door unlocked, he swore that it was well she asked, as he'd 'av' got it hot and heavy for forgetting to lock it, when the "swells" came up. The door closed upon her: so far the enterprise was successful.

She stood at the head of the stairs; she went down a few steps, and listened; then cautiously she descended. The moon shone resplendent through the great window at the landing below the drawingroom. It was that at which Uncle David had paused to listen to the minstrelsy of Mr. Longcluse.

Here in that flood of white light stands Alice Arden, like a statue of horror. The girl, without saying a word, takes her by the cold hand, and leads her quickly down to the arch that opens on the hall.

Just as they reached this point, the door of the room, at the right of the hall door, occupied by Mr. Boult, who did duty as porter, opens, and stepping out with a candle in his hand, he calls in a savage tone —

“What’s the row?”

Phœbe pushed Alice’s hand in the direction of the passage that leads to the housekeeper’s room. For a moment the young lady stands irresolute. Her presence of mind returns. She noiselessly takes the hint, and enters the corridor; Phœbe advances to answer his challenge.

“Well, Mr. Boult, and what *is* the row, pray?” she pertly inquires, walking up to that gentleman, who eyes her sulkily, raising his candle, and displaying as he does so a big patch of red on each cheekbone, indicative of the brandy, of which he smells potently.

“What’s the row? — you’re the row! What brings you down here, Miss Chivvige?”

“My legs! There’s your answer, you cross boy.” She laughed wheedlingly.

“Then walk you up again, and be d — d.”

“On! Mr. Boult.”

“P! Miss Phibbie.”

Mr. Boult was speaking thick, and plainly was in no mood to stand nonsense.

“Now Mr. Boult, where’s the good of making yourself disagreeable?”

“Look at this ‘ere,” he replied, grimly holding a mighty watch, of some white metal, under her eyes— “you know your clock as well as me, Miss Chavvinge. The gentlemen will be in this ‘ere awl in twenty minutes.”

“All the more need to be quick, Mr. Boult, Sir, and why will you keep me ‘ere talking?” she replies.

“You’ll go up them ‘ere stairs, young ‘oman; you’ll not put a foot in the kitchen tonight,” he says more doggedly.

“Well, we’ll see how it will be when they comes and I tells ‘em— ‘Please, gentlemen, the young lady, which you told me most particular to humour her in everything she might call for, wished a cup of tea, which I went down, having locked her door first, which here is the key of it,’” and she held it up for the admiration of Mr. Boult, "'which I consider it the most importantest key in the 'ouse; and though the young lady, she lay on her bed a-gasping, poor thing, for her cup of tea, Mr. Boult stopt me in the awl, and swore she shouldn't have a drop, which I could not get it, and went hup again, for he smelt all over of brandy, and spoke so wiolent, I daren't do as you desired.'"

"I don't smell of brandy; no, I don't; do I?" he says, appealing to an imaginary audience. "And I don't want to stop you, if so be the case is so. But you'll come to this door and report yourself in five minute's time, or I'll tell 'em there's no good keepin' me 'ere no longer. I don't want no quarrellin' nor disputin', only I'll do my dooty, and I'm not afraid of man, woman, or child!"

With which magnanimous sentiment he turned on his clumsy heel, and entered his apartment again.

In a moment more Phœbe and Alice were at the door which admits to a passage leading literally to the side of the house. This door Phœbe softly unlocks, and when they had entered, locks again on the inside. They stood now on the passage leading to a side door, to which a few paces brought them. She opens it. The cold night air enters, and they step out upon the grass. She locks the door behind them, and throws the key among the nettles that grew in a thick grove at her right.

"Hold my hand, my lady; it's near done now," she whispers almost fiercely; and having listened for a few seconds, and looked up to see if any light appeared in the windows, she ventures, with a beating heart, from under the deep shadow of the gables, into the bright broad moonlight, and with light steps together they speed across the grass, and reach the cover of a long grove of tall trees and underwood. All is silent here.

Soon a distant shouting brings them to a terrible standstill. Breathlessly Phœbe listens. No; it was not from the house. They resume their flight.

Now under the ivy-laden branches of a tall old tree an owl startles them with its shriek.

As Alice stares around her, when they stop in such momentary alarm, how strange the scene looks! How immense and gloomy the trees about them! How black their limbs stretch across the moonlit sky! How chill and wild the moonlight spreads over the undulating sward! What a spectral and exaggerated shape all things take in her scared and over-excited gaze!

Now they are approaching the long row of noble beeches that line the boundary of Mortlake. The ivy-bowered wall is near them, and the screen of gigantic hollies that guard the lonely postern through which Phœbe has shrewdly chosen to direct their escape.

Thank God! they are at it. In her hand she holds the key, which shines in the moonbeams.

Hush! what is this? Voices close to the door! Step back behind the holly clump, for your lives, quickly! A key grinds in the lock; the bolt works rustily; the door opens, and tall Mr. Longcluse enters, with every sinister line and shadow of his pale face marked with a deathlike sternness, in the moonlight. Mr. Levi enters almost beside him; how white his big eyeballs gleam, as he steps in under the same cold light! Who next?

Her *brother*! Oh, God! The mad impulse to throw her arms about his neck, and shriek her wild appeal to his manhood, courage, love, and stake all on that momentary frenzy!

As this group halts in silence, while Sir Richard locks the door, the Jew directs his big dark eyes, as she thinks, right upon Phœbe Chiffinch, who stands in the shadow, and is therefore, she faintly hopes, not visible behind the screen of glittering leaves. Her eyes, nevertheless, meet his. He advances his head a little, with more than his usual prying malignity, she thinks. Her heart flutters, and sinks. She is on the point of stepping from her shelter and surrendering. With his cane he strikes at the leaves, aiming, I daresay, at a moth, for nothing is quite below his notice, and he likes smashing even a fly. In this case, having hit or missed it, he turns his fiery eyes, to the infinite relief of the girl, another way.

The three men who have thus stept into the grounds of Mortlake don’t utter a word as they stand there. They now recommence their walk toward the house.

Phœbe Chiffinch, breathless, is holding Alice Arden’s wrist with a firm grasp. As they brush the holly-leaves, in passing, the very sprays that touch the dresses of the scared girls are stirring. The pale group drifts by in silence. They have each something to meditate on. They are not garrulous. On they walk, like three shadows. The distance widens, the shapes grow fainter.

“They’ll soon be at the house, Ma’am, and wild work then. You’ll do something for poor Vargers? Well, time enough! You must not lose heart now, my lady. You're all right, if you keep up for ten minutes longer. You don't feel faint-like! Good lawk, Ma'am! rouse up."

"I'm better, Phœbe; I'm quite well again. Come on — come on!"

Carefully, to make as little noise as possible she turned the key in the lock, and they found themselves in a narrow lane running by the wall, and under the trees of Mortlake.

"Which way?"

"Not toward the 'Guy of Warwick.' They'll soon be in chase of us, and that is the way they'll take. 'Twould never do. Come away, my lady; it won't be long till we meet a cab or something to fetch us where you please. Lean on me. I wish we were away from this wall. What way do you mean to go?"

"To my Uncle David's house."

And having exchanged these words, they pursued their way side by side, for a time, in silence.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

PURSUIT.

Arrived at Mortlake, when Mr. Longcluse had discovered with certainty the flight of Alice Arden, his first thought was that Sir Richard had betrayed him. There was a momentary paroxysm of insane violence, in which, if he could only have discovered that he was the accomplice of Alice's escape, I think he would have killed him.

It subsided. How could Alice Arden have possessed such an influence over this man, who seemed to hate her? He sat down, and placed his hand to his broad, pale forehead, his dark eyes glaring on the floor, in what seemed an intensity of thought and passion. He was seized with a violent trembling fit. It lasted only for a few minutes. I sometimes think he loved that girl desperately, and would have made her an idolatrous husband.

He walked twice or thrice up and down the great parlour in which they sat, and then with cold malignity said to Sir Richard —

"But for you she would have married me; but for you I should have secured her now. *Consider*, how shall I settle with you?"

"Settle how you will — do what you will. I swear (and he did swear hard enough, if an oath could do it, to satisfy any man) I've had *nothing* to do with it. I've never had a hint that she meditated leaving this place. I can't conceive how it was done, nor who managed it, and I know no more than you do where she is gone." And he clenched his vehement disclaimer with an imprecation.

Longcluse was silent for a minute.

"She has gone, I assume, to David Arden's house," he said, looking down. "There is no other house to receive her in town, and she does not know that he is away still. She knows that Lady May, and other friends, have gone. She's *there*. The will makes you, colourably, her guardian. You shall claim the custody of her person. We'll go there, and remove her."

Old Sir Reginald's will, I may remark, had been made years before, when Richard was not twenty-two, and Alice little more than a child, and the baronet and his son good friends.

He stalked out. At the steps was his trap, which was there to take Levi into town. That gentleman, I need not say, he did not treat with much ceremony. He mounted, and Sir Richard Arden beside him; and, leaving the Jew to shift for himself, he drove at a furious pace down the avenue. The porter placed there by Longcluse, of course, opened the gate instantaneously at his call. Outside stood a cab, with a trunk on it. An old woman at the lodge-window, knocking and clamouring, sought admission.

"Let no one in," said Longcluse sternly to the man, who locked the iron gate on their passing out.

"Hallo! What brings *her* here? That's the old housekeeper!" said Longcluse, pulling up suddenly.

It was quite true. Her growing uneasiness about Alice had recalled the old woman from the North. Martha Tansey, who had heard the clang of the gate and the sound of wheels and hoofs, turned about and came to the side of the taxcart, over which Longcluse was leaning. In the brilliant moonlight, on the white road, the branches cast a network of black shadow. A patch of light fell clear on the side of the trap, and on Longcluse's ungloved hand as he leaned on it.

"Here am I, Martha Tansey, has lived fifty year wi' the family, and what for am I shut out of Mortlake now?" she demanded, with stern audacity.

A sudden change, however, came over her countenance, which contracted in horror, and her old eyes opened wide and white as she gazed on the back of Longcluse's hand, on which was a peculiar star-shaped scar. She drew back with a low sound, like the growl of a wicked old cat; it rose gradually to such a yell and a cry to God as made Richard's blood run cold, and lifting her hand toward her temple, waveringly, the old woman staggered back, and fell in a faint on the road.

Longcluse jumped down and hammered at the window. "Hallo!" he cried to the man, "send one of your people with this old woman; she's ill. Let her go in that cab to Sir Richard Arden's house in town; you know it." And he cried to the cabman, "Lift her in, will you?"

And having done his devoir thus by the old woman, he springs again into his taxcart, snatches the reins from Sir Richard, and drives on at a savage pace for town.

Longcluse threw the reins to Sir Richard when they reached David Arden's house, and himself thundered at the door.

They had searched Mortlake House for Alice, and that vain quest had not wasted more than half-an-hour. He rightly conjectured that, if Alice had fled to David Arden's house, some of the servants who received her must be still on the alert. The door is opened promptly by an elderly servant woman.

"Sir Richard Arden is at the door, and he wants to know whether his sister, Miss Arden, has arrived here from Mortlake."

"Yes, Sir; she's upstairs; but not by no means well, Sir."

Longcluse stepped in, to secure a footing, and beckoning excitedly to Sir Richard, called, "Come in; all right. Don't mind the horse; it will take its chance." He walked impatiently to the foot of the stairs, and turned again toward the street door.

At this moment, and before Sir Richard had time to come in, there come swarming out of David Arden's study, most unexpectedly, nearly a dozen men, more than half of whom are in the garb of gentlemen, and some three of them police. Uncle David himself, in deep conversation with two gentlemen, one of whom is placing in his breastpocket a paper which he has just folded, leads the way into the hall.

As they there stand for a minute under the lamp, Mr. Longcluse, gazing at him sternly from the stair, caught his eye. Old David Arden stepped back a little, growing pale, with a sudden frown.

"Oh! Mr. Arden?" says Longcluse, advancing as if he had come in search of him.

"That's enough, Sir," cries Mr. Arden, extending his hand peremptorily toward him; and he adds, with a glance at the constables, "There's the man. That is Walter Longcluse."

Longcluse glances over his shoulder, and then grimly at the group before him, and gathered himself as if for a struggle; the next moment he walks forward frankly, and asks, "What is the meaning of all this?"

"A warrant, Sir," answers the foremost policeman, clutching him by the collar.

"No use, Sir, making a row," expostulates the next, also catching him by the collar and arm.

"Mr. Arden, can you explain this?" says Mr. Longcluse coolly.

"You may as well give in quiet," says the third policeman, producing the warrant. "A warrant for murder. Walter Longcluse, *alias* Yelland Mace, I arrest you in the Queen's name."

"There's a magistrate here? Oh! yes, I see. How d'ye do, Mr. Harman? My name is Longcluse, as you know. The name Mays, or any other *alias*, you'll not insult me by applying to me, if you please. Of course this is obvious and utter trumpery. Are there informations, or what the devil is it?"

"They have just been sworn before me, Sir," answered the magistrate, who was a little man, with a wave of his hand, and his head high.

"Well, really! don't you *see* the absurdity? Upon my soul! It *is* really *too* ridiculous! You won't inconvenience me, of course, unnecessarily. My own recognisance, I suppose, will do?"

"Can't entertain your application; quite out of the question," said his worship, with his hands in his pockets, rising slightly on his toes, and descending on his heels, as he delivered this sentence with a stoical shake of his head.

"You'll send for my attorney, of course? I'm not to be humbugged, you know."

"I must tell you, Mr. Longcluse, I can't listen to such language," observes Mr. Harman sublimely.

"If you have informations, they are the dreams of a madman. I don't blame any one here. I say, policeman, you need not hold me quite so hard. I only say, joke or earnest, I can't make head or tail of it; and there's not a man in London who won't be shocked to hear how I've been treated. Once more, Mr. Harman, I tender bail, any amount. It's too ridiculous. You can't really have a difficulty."

"The informations are very strong, Sir, and the offence, you know as well as I do, Mr. Longcluse, is not bailable."

Mr. Longcluse shrugged, and laughed gently.

"I may have a cab or something? My trap's at the door. It's not solemn enough, eh, Mr. Harman? Will you tell one of your fellows to pick up a cab? Perhaps, Mr. Arden, you'll allow me a chair to sit down upon?"

"You can sit in the study, if you please," says David Arden.

And Longcluse enters the room with the police about him, while the servant goes to look for a cab. Sir Richard Arden, you may be sure, was not there. He saw that something was wrong, and he had got away to his own house. On arriving there, he sent to make inquiry, cautiously, at his uncle's, and thus learned the truth.

Standing at the window, he saw his messenger return, let him in himself, and then considered, as well as a man in so critical and terrifying a situation can, the wisest course for him to adopt. The simple one of flight he ultimately resolved on. He knew that Longcluse had still two executions against him, on which, at any moment, he might arrest him. He knew that he might launch at him, at any moment, the thunderbolt which would blast him. He must wait, however, until the morning had confirmed the news; that certain, he dared not act.

With a cold and fearless bearing, Longcluse had by this time entered the dreadful door of a prison. His attorney was with him nearly the entire night.

David Arden, as he promised, had dictated to him in outline the awful case he had massed against his client.

"I don't want any man taken by surprise or at disadvantage; I simply wish for truth," said he.

A copy of the written statement of Paul Davies, whatever it was worth, duly witnessed, was already in his hands; the sworn depositions of the same person, made in his last illness, were also there. There were also the sworn depositions of Vanboeren, who *had*, after all, recovered speech and recollection; and a deposition, besides, very unexpected, of old Martha Tansey, who swore distinctly to the scar, a very peculiar mark indeed, on the back of his left hand. This the old woman had recognised with horror, at a moment so similar, as the scar, long forgotten, which she had for a terrible moment seen on the hand of Yelland Mace, as he clutched the rail of the gig while engaged in the murder.

The plaster masks, which figured in the affidavits of Vanboeren, and of David Arden, were re-cast from the moulds, and made an effectual identification, corroborated, in a measure, by Mr. Plumes' silhouette of Yelland Mace.

Other surviving witnesses had also turned up, who had deposed when the murder of Harry Arden was a recent event. The whole case was, in the eyes of the attorney, a very awful one. Mr. Longcluse's counsel was called up, like a physician whose patient is *in extremis*, at dead of night, and had a talk with the attorney, and kept his notes to ponder over.

As early as prison rules would permit, he was with Mr. Longcluse, where the attorney awaited him.

Mr. Blinkinsop looked very gloomy.

"Do you despair?" asked Mr. Longcluse sharply, after a long disquisition.

"Let me ask you one question, Mr. Longcluse. You have, before I ask it, I assume, implicit confidence in us; am I right?"

"Certainly — implicit."

"If you are innocent, we might venture on a line of defence which may possibly break down the case for the Crown. If you are guilty, that line would be fatal." He hesitated, and looked at Mr. Longcluse.

"I know such a question has been asked in like circumstances, and I have no hesitation in telling you that I am *not* innocent. Assume my guilt."

The attorney, who had been drumming a little tattoo on the table, watches Longcluse earnestly as he speaks, suspending his tune, now lowers his eyes to the table, and resumed his drumming slowly with a very dismal countenance. He had been talking over the chances with this eminent counsel, Mr. Blinkinsop, Q.C., and he knew what his opinion would now be.

"One effect of a judgment in this case is forfeiture?" inquired Mr. Longcluse.

"Yes," answered counsel.

"Everything goes to the Crown, eh?"

"Yes; clearly."

"Well, I have neither wife nor children. I need not care; but suppose I make my will now; that's a good will, ain't it, between this and judgment, if things should go wrong?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Blinkinsop. "No judgment no forfeiture."

"And now, Doctor, don't be afraid; tell me truly, shall I *do*?" said Mr. Longcluse, leaning back, and looking darkly and steadily in his face.

"It is a nasty case."

"Don't be afraid, I say. I should like to know, are the chances two to one against me?"

"I'm afraid they are."

"Ten to one? Pray say what you think."

"Well, I think so."

Mr. Longcluse grew paler. They were all three silent. After about a minute, he said, in a very low tone, —

"You don't think I have a chance? Don't mislead me."

"It is very gloomy."

Mr. Longcluse pressed his hand to his mouth. There was a silence. Perhaps he wished to hide some nervous movement there. He stood up, walked about a little, and then stood by Mr. Blinkinsop's chair, with his fingers on the back of it.

"We must make a great fight of this," said Mr. Longcluse suddenly. "We'll fight it hard; we must win it. We *shall* win it, by — — "

And after a short pause, he added gently, —

"That will do. I think I'll rest now; more, perhaps, another time. Goodbye."

As they left the room, he signed to the attorney to stay.

"I have something for you — a word or two."

The attorney turned back, and they remained closeted for a time.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

CONCLUSION.

Sir Richard Arden had learned how matters were with Mr. Longcluse. He hesitated. Flight might provoke action of the kind for which there seemed no longer a motive.

In an agony of dubitation, as the day wore on, he was interrupted. Mr. Rooke, Mr. Longcluse's attorney, had called. There was no good in shirking a meeting. He was shown in.

"This is for you, Sir Richard," said Mr. Rooke, presenting a large letter. "Mr. Longcluse wrote it about three hours ago, and requested me to place it in your own hand, as I now do."

"It is not any *legal* paper — — " began Sir Richard.

"I haven't an idea," answered he. "He gave it to me thus. I had some things to do for him afterwards, and a call to make, at his desire, at Mr. David Arden's. When I got home I was sent for again. I suppose you heard the news?"

"No; what is it?"

"Oh, dear, really! They have heard it some time at Mr. Arden's. You didn't hear about Mr. Longcluse?"

"No, nothing, excepting what we all know — his arrest."

The attorney's countenance darkened, and he said, dropping his voice as low as he would have given a message in church —

"Oh, poor gentleman! he died to-day. Some kind of fit, I believe; he's gone!"

Then Mr. Rooke went into particulars, so far as he knew them, and mentioned that the coroner's inquest would be held that afternoon; and so he departed.

Unmixed satisfaction accompanied the hearing of this news in Sir Richard's mind. But with reflection came the terrifying question, "Has Levi got hold of that instrument of torture and ruin — the forged signature?"

In this new horror he saw the envelope which Rooke had handed to him, upon the table. He opened it, and saw the forged deed. Written across it, in

Longcluse's hand, were the words —

"Paid by W. Longcluse before due.

"W. LONGCLUSE."

That day's date was added.

So the evidence of his guilt was no longer in the hands of a stranger, and Sir Richard Arden was saved.

David Arden had already received under like circumstances, and by the same hand, two papers of immense importance. The first written in Rooke's hand and duly witnessed, was a very short will, signed by the testator, Walter Longcluse, and leaving his enormous wealth absolutely to David Arden. The second was a letter which attached a trust to this bequest. The letter said —

"I am the son of Edwin Raikes, your cousin. He had cast me off for my vices, when I committed the crime, not intended to have amounted to murder. It was Harry Arden's determined resistance and my danger that cost him his life. I did kill Lebas. I could not help it. He was a fool, and might have ruined me; and that villain, Vanboeren, has spoken truth for once.

"I meant to set up the Arden family in my person. I should have taken the name. My father relented on his deathbed, and left me his money. I went to New York, and received it. I made a new start in life. On the Bourse in Paris, and in Vienna, I made a fortune by speculation; I improved it in London. You may take it all by my will. Do with half the interest as you please, during your lifetime. The other half pay to Miss Alice Arden, and the entire capital you are to secure to her on your death.

"I had taken assignments of all the mortgages affecting the Arden estates. They must go to Miss Arden, and be secured unalienably to her.

"My life has been arduous and direful. That miserable crime hung over me, and its dangers impeded me at every turn.

"You have played your game well, but with all the odds of the position in your favour. I am tired, beaten. The match is over, and you may rise now and say Checkmate.

"WALTER LONGCLUSE."

That Longcluse had committed suicide, of course I can have no doubt. It must have been effected by some unusually subtle poison. The post-mortem examination failed to discover its presence. But there was found in his desk a curious paper, in French, published about five months before, upon certain vegetable poisons, whose presence in the system no chemical test detects, and no external trace records. This paper was noted here and there on the margin, and had been obviously carefully read. Any of these tinctures he could without much trouble have procured from Paris. But no distinct light was ever thrown upon this inquiry.

In a small and lonely house, tenanted by Longcluse, in the then less crowded region of Richmond, were found proofs, no longer needed, of Longcluse's identity, both with the horseman who had met Paul Davies on Hampstead Heath, and the person who crossed the Channel from Southampton with David Arden, and afterwards met him in the streets of Paris, as we have seen. There he had been watching his movements, and traced him, with dreadful suspicion, to the house of Vanboeren. The turn of a die had determined the fate of David Arden that night. Longcluse had afterwards watched and seized an opportunity of entering Vanboeren's house. He knew that the baron expected the return of his messenger, rang the bell, and was admitted. The old servant had gone to her bed, and was far away in that vast house.

Longcluse would have stabbed him, but the baron recognised him, and sprang back with a yell. Instantly Longcluse had used his revolver; but before he could make assurance doubly sure, his quick ear detected a step outside. He then made his exit through a window into a deserted lane at the side of the house, and had not lost a moment in commencing his flight for London.

With respect to the murder of Lebas, the letter of Longcluse pretty nearly explains it. That unlucky Frenchman had attended him through his recovery under the hands of Vanboeren; and Longcluse feared to trust, as it now might turn out, his life, in his giddy keeping. Of course, Lebas had no idea of the nature of his crime, or that in England was the scene of its perpetration. Longcluse had made up his mind promptly on the night of the billiard-match played in the Saloon Tavern. When every eye was fixed upon the balls, he and Lebas met, as they had ultimately agreed, in the smoking-room. A momentary meeting it was to have been. The dagger which he placed in his keeping, Longcluse plunged into his heart. In the stream of blood that instantaneously flowed from the wound Longcluse stepped, and made one distinct impression of his boot-sole on the boards. A tracing of this Paul Davies had made, and had got the signatures of two or three respectable Londoners before the room filled, attesting its accuracy, he affecting, while he did so, to be a member of the detective police, from which body, for a piece of *over*-cleverness, he had been only a few weeks before dismissed. Having made his tracing, he obscured the blood-mark on the floor.

The opportunity of distinguishing himself at his old craft, to the prejudice of the force, whom he would have liked to mortify, while earning, perhaps, his own restoration, was his first object. The delicacy of the shape of the boot struck him next. He then remembered having seen Longcluse — and his was the only eye that observed him — pass swiftly from the passage leading to the smoking-room at the beginning of the game. His mind had now matter to work upon; and hence his visit to Bolton Street to secure possession of the boot, which he did by an audacious *ruse*.

His subsequent interview with Mr. Longcluse, in presence of David Arden, was simply a concerted piece of acting, on which Longcluse, when he had made his terms with Davies, insisted, as a security against the reopening of the extortion.

Nothing will induce Alice to accept one farthing of Longcluse's magnificent legacy. Secretly Uncle David is resolved to make it up to her from his own wealth, which is very great.

Richard Arden's story is not known to any living person but the Jew Levi, and vaguely to his sister, in whose mind it remains as something horrible, but never approached.

Levi keeps the secret for reasons more cogent than charitable. First he kept it to himself as a future instrument of profit. But on his insinuating something that promised such relations to Sir Richard, the young gentleman met it with so bold a front, with fury so unaffected, and with threats so alarming, founded upon a trifling matter of which the Jew had never suspected his knowledge, that Mr. Levi has not ventured either to "utilise" his knowledge, in a profitable way, or afterwards to circulate the story for the solace of his malice. They seem, in Mr. Rooke's phrase, to have turned their backs on one another; and as some years have passed, and lapse of time does not improve the case of a person in Mr. Levi's position, we may safely assume that he will never dare to circulate any definite stories to Sir Richard's prejudice. A sufficient motive, indeed, for doing so exists no longer, for Sir Richard, who had lived an unsettled life travelling on the

Continent, and still playing at foreign tables when he could afford it, died suddenly at Florence in the autumn of ‘69.

Vivian Darnley has been in “the House,” now, nearly four years. Uncle David is very proud of him; and more impartial people think that he will, at last, take an honourable place in that assembly. His last speech has been spoken of everywhere with applause. David Arden’s immensely increased wealth enables him to entertain very magnificent plans for this young man. He intends that he shall take the name of Arden, and earn the transmission of the title, or the distinction of a greater one.

A year ago Vivian Darnley married Alice Arden, and no two people can be happier.

Lady May, although her girlish ways have not forsaken her, has no present thoughts of making any man happy. She had a great cry all to herself when Sir Richard died, and she now persuades herself that he never meant one word he said of her, and that if the truth were known, although after that day she never spoke to him more, he had never really cared for more than one woman on earth. It was all spite of that odious Lady Wynderbroke!

Alice has never seen Mortlake since the night of her flight from its walls.

The two old servants, Crozier and Martha Tansey, whose acquaintance we made in that suburban seat of the Ardens, are both, I am glad to say, living still, and extremely comfortable.

Phœbe Chiffinch, I am glad to add, was jilted by her uninteresting lover, who little knew what a fortune he was slighting. His desertion does not seem to have broken her heart, or at all affected her spirits. The gratitude of Alice Arden has established her in the prosperous little Yorkshire town, the steep roof, chimneys, and church tower of which are visible, among the trees, from the windows of Arden Court. She is the energetic and popular proprietress of the “Cat and Fiddle,” to which thriving inn, at a nominal rent, a valuable farm is attached. A fortune of two thousand pounds from the same grateful friend awaits her marriage, which can’t be far off, with the handsome son of rich Farmer Shackleton.

THE END

THE ROSE AND THE KEY

This sensation novel was first published in three volumes by Chapman and Hall in 1871, following its serialisation in Charles Dickens's journal *All the Year Round*. It is a shocking examination of the horrors and misdemeanours of the private Victorian lunatic asylum, to which many inmates (especially women) were often feared to have been wrongly confined. Such a theme would have been familiar to contemporary readers from other sensation novels such as Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859). As well as a typical sensation novel it is also an example of the Victorian 'social problem' novel, in which fictional stories were used to highlight potential abuses in the social and legal system. The story builds up an atmosphere of dread gradually as the heroine, Maud, becomes increasingly aware of the terrible forces closing in upon her from within her own family (in the form of the machinations of her mother Lady Vernon) and from foreign intruders (notably the powerful mesmerist Doctor Antomarchi).

The first single volume edition of the novel

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A rare complete set of All the Year Round from 1871 – Charles Dickens's journal, in which the novel was initially serialised

CHAPTER I.

UNOCULUS.

The level light of a summer sunset, over a broad heath, is brightening its brown undulations with a melancholy flush, and turning all the stalks of heather in the foreground into twisted sticks of gold. Insect wings sparkle dimly in the air; the lagging bee drones homeward, and a wide drift of crows, cawing high and faint, show like shadows against the sea-green sky, flecked with soft crimson, as they sail away to the distant dormitories of Westwold Forest.

Toward the sunset end of this savage heath stand four gigantic fir-trees, casting long shadows. One, indeed, is little more than a rotten stump, some twelve feet high; all bend eastwards, shorn of their boughs nearly to the top, and stretching the arms that remain, some yellow and stripped of their bark, in the same direction, as if they all signalled to the same distant point. These slanting fir-trees look like the masts of a mighty wreck; and antiquaries say that they are the monumental relics of a forest that lies buried under the peat.

A young lady, her dress of dark serge, with a small black straw-hat, a little scarlet feather in it, and wearing a pair of boots, such as a country artist might produce, made of good strong leather, with thick soles, but, in spite of coarse work and clumsy material, showing a wonderfully pretty little foot, is leaning lightly against one of these great firs. Her companion, an elderly lady, slight and merry, sits on a little hillock of turf at her feet.

The dress of the elder lady corresponds with that of the younger. It is that of a person inured to the practice of a strict but not uncomfortable economy.

The young lady has dropped a little japanned colour-box and a block-book at her feet. Is she an artist? Possibly a governess? At all events, she is one of the loveliest creatures eyes ever lighted on. Is there any light more becoming than that low, richly tinted beam, that comes subdued through the mists of sunset?

With a pleased look — the listening look which such spiritual delight assumes — with parted lips, the light touching the edge of her little teeth, with eyes a-glow with rapture, drinking in the splendour and beauty of the transitory hour and scene, as if she could look on in silence and beatitude for ever, the girl leans her little shoulder to the ancient tree.

With a long sigh, she says at last:

"I was going to ask your forgiveness, dear old cousin Max."

"For what?" asked the old lady, turning up a face pleasantly illuminated with the golden light.

"For making you take so long a walk. I'm a little tired myself. But I don't beg your pardon, because I think this more than makes amends. Let us look for a minute more, before all fades."

The old lady stood up, with a little shrug and screw of her shoulders.

"So I am — quite stiff — my old bones do complain; but oh, really, it is quite beautiful! I see it so much better standing here; that bank was in my way. How splendid — gorgeous!"

The scene was indeed worth a detour in their homeward route. Two grand and distant ranges of mountain, approaching from right and left, stop short in precipitous terminations that resemble the confronting castles of two gigantic lines of fortification, leaving an undulating plane between, with the sunset sky, and piles of flaming cloud, for a horizon; and, in the comparatively near foreground, rises between these points an abrupt knoll crowned by the ruined castle of Cardyllion, and, with the village studded with grand old trees, looking like a town on fire.

In nearer foreground, in the hollow, in solemn purple shadow, are masses of forest; and against the faint green and yellow sky are spread streaks of purple vapour, and the crimson and scarlet fires of sunset.

"This should reconcile us to very humble ways; and more, I feel that through marble pillars, through great silk curtains, among mirrors, bronzes, china, and all the rest, looking out from a velvet sofa, I could not see, much less enjoy all this, as I do."

Cousin Max laughed.

"Very wise! very philosophical! very romantic!" exclaimed she. "But it is enough to be content with one's station in life, and not to grow too fond of any. To be content is, simply, not to wish for change. My poor father used to say that those who wished for change were like those who wished for death. They longed for a state of which they had no experience, and for which they might not be so fit as they fancied, for every situation has its liabilities as well as its privileges. That is what he used to say."

"Dear Max, I withdraw it, if I said anything sensible, for whenever I do you grow so wise that you bore me to death." She kissed her. "Do let us be foolish, darling, while we are together, and we shall understand one another perfectly. See how quickly the scene changes. It is very beautiful, but not quite so glorious now."

At this moment the sound of steps, close behind them upon the soft peat, made them both turn their heads.

A sleek, lean man, lantern-jawed, in a shabby, semi-clerical costume, passed them by in front, from right to left, in an oblique line. He was following a path, and was twirling a stick slowly in his hand by its crooked handle, and gazing up at the sky with one eye — the other was blind — with a smile that was meant to be saintly. In spite of his meek smile, and his seedy and mean exterior, the two ladies had come to connect ideas of the sinister and the dangerous with this man.

"Upon my life," said the elder lady, after a pause, "I do believe — I'm almost sure — that is the very man."

"I am perfectly certain," said the young lady, who had followed him with her eyes until he was hidden from view by a screen of furze and hawthorns, a little way to the left. "I can't imagine what that odious, ill-looking man can possibly mean by following us about as he does."

"Perhaps he is asking himself a question very like that about us?" said the old lady, with a laugh.

"Not he. He *is* following us."

"I saw him at Penmaen Mawr, but nowhere else," said Miss Max.

"But I saw him at Chester, and there could be no mistake about his watching us there. I saw him look at our luggage, and look for our names there, and I saw him stand on the step of his carriage at Conway, until he saw us get out with the evident intention of staying there; and then he got down with that little leather bag, that seems to be all that he possesses, and he came to our hotel, simply, I am certain, to watch us. You must recollect, when we returned from our little walk, that I told you I saw him sitting in the room near the stairs, don't you recollect, writing — don't you remember?"

"Yes, I remember your saying there was a man blind of an eye, the same we had observed at Penmaen Mawr, who had followed us, and was in the same place. But the people at the inn said he was a travelling secretary to some religious society, collecting money."

"Did not you say," persisted the young lady, "when you first saw him, that he was a very ill-looking man?"

"Yes; so I did. So he is. He looks sanctimonious and roguish, and that white eye makes his face — I hope it is not very uncharitable to say so — almost villanous. I think him a very ill-looking man, and if I thought he was following us, I should speak to the police, and then set out for my humble home without losing an hour."

"And you don't think he is following us?" said the young lady.

"If he is travelling to collect subscriptions he may very well have come here about his business, and to Penmaen Mawr, and to Chester. I don't see why he must necessarily be following us. And Conway, too, he would have stopped at naturally. It does not follow at all that he is in pursuit of us because he happens to come to the same place.

The king himself has followed her
When she has gone before.

We are not worth robbing, my dear, and we look it. You must not be so easily frightened."

"Frightened! I'm not the least frightened," said the young lady, spiritedly. "I'm not what is termed a nervous young lady. You have no right to think that. But I don't believe he has any other business but tracking us from place to place. What other business on earth could he have had — getting out at Abber, for instance? I forgot to mention Abber. It is very odd, you must allow. Let us walk on." She had picked up her colour-box and her block. "Very odd that he should get out of the train wherever we stop, always about business, we are to suppose, that has no connexion with us; that he should follow us, by the same odd accident, where there is no rail, and where we can only get by a fly; that he should get always into the same quiet little inns, though, of course, he would like much better to be in noisier places, where he would meet people like himself; and that he should turn up, this evening, so near our poor little lodgings, and go by that path which brings him there. What on earth can he want in that direction?"

"Yes, I do think it's odd, my dear; and, I say, I think he does look very villanous. But what can he possibly want?" said the old lady. "Why should he follow us? How are we to account for it?"

"I don't pretend to account for it," said the girl, as they trudged on side by side; "but it is just possible that he may be a detective, who mistakes us for some people he is in pursuit of. I only know that he is spoiling my poor little holiday, and I do wish I were a man, that I might give him a sound drubbing."

The old lady laughed, for the girl spoke threateningly, with a flash from her splendid eyes, and for a moment clenched the tiniest little fist you can fancy.

"And you think he's gone before us to Pritchard's farmhouse?" said the old lady, glancing over her shoulder in that direction, above which a mass of thundrous cloud was rising. "Dear me! how like thunder that is."

"Awfully!" said the young lady. "Stop a moment — I thought I heard distant thunder. Listen!"

They both paused, looking toward those ominous piles of cloud, black against the now fast-fading sky.

CHAPTER II.

A GUIDE.

“Hush!” said the young lady, laying her fingers on her companion’s arm.

They listened for a minute or more.

“There it is!” exclaimed the girl, as a faint rumble spread slowly along and among the mountains.

They remained silent for a minute after it had passed away.

“Yes, that certainly was thunder,” said the elder lady; “and it is growing so dark; it would not do to be caught in the storm, and to meet our one-eyed persecutor, perhaps, and we have fully a mile to go still. Come, we must walk a little faster.”

“I hope it will be a good thunderstorm,” said the young lady watching the sky, as they hurried on. “It frightens me more than it does you, but I think I like it better.”

“You may easily do that, dear; and like our farmhouse better than I do, also.”

“We are frightfully uncomfortable, I agree. Let us leave it tomorrow,” said the young lady.

“And where shall we go next?” inquired her companion.

“To Llanberris, if I’m to decide,” said the girl. “But first we must look over the castle at Cardyllion, and there are one or two old houses I should like to sketch — only roughly.”

“You are making too great a labour of your holiday: you sketch too much.”

“Well, we leave tomorrow, and the day after is Sunday, and then — on Monday — my holiday ends, and my slavery begins,” said the young lady, vehemently.

“You certainly do use strong language,” said the elder lady, a little testily. “Why don’t you try to be contented? Dear me! How much nearer the thunder is!”

“It will soon be darker, and then we shall see the lightning splendidly,” said the young lady.

“Don’t stop, darling, let us get on. I was going to say, you must study to be content — remember your catechism. The Queen, I dare say, has things to complain of; and Farmer Pritchard’s daughter, who has, as you fancy, a life of so much liberty, will tell you she is something of a slave, and can’t do, by any means, quite as she likes. I only hope, dear Maud, we have money enough to bring us home.”

“We can eke it out with my drawings. We shan’t starve. We can have the ruins of Carnarvon Castle for breakfast, and eat Snowdon for dinner, and turn the Menai into tea. It is a comfort to know I can live by my handiwork. I don’t think, cousin, I have a shilling I can call my own. If I could earn enough by my drawing to live on, I think I should prefer it to any other way of living I can imagine.”

“You used to think a farmer’s life the happiest on earth,” said the old lady, trudging along. “There’s Richard Pritchard, why not marry him?”

“I might do worse; but there are half a dozen conclusive reasons against it. In the first place, I don’t think Richard Pritchard would marry me; and, next, I know I wouldn’t marry Richard Pritchard; and, thirdly, and seriously, I shall never marry at all, never, and for the reasons I have told you often; and those reasons can never change.”

“We shall see,” said her companion, with a laugh and a little shake of her head. “Good Heavens!” exclaimed the old lady, as nearer thunder resounded over the landscape.

“Hush!” whispered the girl, as they both paused and listened, and when it had died away, “What a noble peal that was!” she exclaimed. And as they resumed their march she continued: “I shall never marry: and my resolution depends on my circumstances, and they, as you know, are never likely to alter — humanly speaking, they never can alter — and I have not courage enough to make myself happy; and, coward as I am, I shall break my own heart rather than break my chains. Where are we now?”

As she said this she came to a sudden halt at the edge of a deep channelled stream, whose banks just there stand steep and rugged as those of a ravine, crowned with straggling masses of thorn and briars. She gazed across, and up and down the stream, which was swollen just then by mountain rains of the night before.

“Can we have missed our way?” said the elder lady.

“What on earth has become of the wooden bridge?” exclaimed the younger one.

There was still quite light enough to discern objects; and Miss Max, catching her young companion by the hand, whispered:

“Good gracious, Maud! Is that the man?”

“What man?” she asked, startled.

“The blind man — the person who has been following us.”

Miss Maud — for such was the young lady’s name — said nothing in reply. The two ladies stood irresolute, side by side. Maud had seen the person who was approaching, once only in her life. It was two days before, as she and her cousin were getting out of their fly at the Verney Arms, in the pretty little town of Cardyllion. She was a proud young lady; it would have taken a good deal to make her avow, even to herself, the slightest interest in any such person. Nevertheless, she recognised him a good many seconds before good Miss Max had discovered her mistake.

She was standing beside that elderly lady. They were both looking across the stream; the young lady furthest from the stranger had turned a little away.

There is quite light enough to see faces still, but it will not last long. The young man is very handsome, and also tall. He has been fishing, and has on a pair of those gigantic jack-boots in which fishermen delight to walk the rivers. He wears a broadleafed hat, round which are wound his flies. A boy with his rod, net, and basket trudges behind.

The old lady speaks to him as he passes. He stops, lowers his cigar, and inclines to listen.

“I beg pardon,” she says. “Can you tell me? There was — I am sure it was on this very spot — a bridge of plank across this stream, and I can’t find it.”

“Oh! They were taking that away today, as I passed by. It had grown unsafe, and the — the —— Oh, yes; the new one is to be put up in the morning.”

The odd little hesitation I have recorded was caused by his seeing the young lady, on a sudden, in the midst of his sentence, and for the moment forgetting everything else. And well he might, for he had been dreaming of her for the last two days.

He dropped his cigar, became, all at once, much more deferential, and with his hat in his hand, said:

“Do you wish to cross the brook? Because if you do, I can show you to some stepping-stones about a quarter of a mile higher up, where you can get across very nicely.”

“Thanks. I should be so very much obliged,” said the old lady.

The gentleman was only too happy, and having sent the boy on to the Verney Arms, talked very agreeably as he accompanied and directed their march. He had come down there for a little fishing; he knew the Verneys a little, and old Lord Verney was such a very odd man! He told them stories of him, and very amusing some of them were, and his eye always glanced to see the effect of his anecdotes upon Miss Maud. Two or three times he ventured to speak to her. The young lady did not either encourage or discourage these little experiments, and answered very easily and carelessly, and, I am bound to say, very briefly too.

In the mean time, the thunder grew nearer and more frequent, and the wild reflection of the lightning flickered on trees and fields about them.

And now they had reached the thick clump of osiers, beneath which the stepping stones, of which they were in search, studded the stream. Only the summits of these stones were now above the water, and the light was nearly gone.

CHAPTER III.

PLAS YWLD.

"I have not courage for this," said the old lady, aghast, eyeing the swift current and the uncertain footing to which, in the most deceptive possible twilight, she was invited to commit herself.

"But you know, darling, we must get across somehow," urged the girl, cruelly. "It is quite easy; don't fancy anything else."

And she stepped lightly over.

"It is all very fine with your young feet and eyes," she replied; "but for an old woman like me it is little better than the tight rope; and it would be death to me to take a roll in that river. What on earth is to be done?"

"It *is* really a great deal easier than you suppose," said the obliging young gentleman, not sorry to find an opportunity of agreeing with Miss Maud, "and I think I can make it perfectly easy if you will just take my hand as you get across. I'll walk in the stream beside you. It is quite shallow here, and these things make me absolutely impervious to the water. Pray, try. I undertake to get you across perfectly safely."

So, supporting her across with his left hand, and walking beside her with his right, ready to assist her more effectually in case of a slip or stumble, he conducted her quite safely over.

When the lady had thanked him very earnestly, and he had laughingly disclaimed all right to her acknowledgments, another difficulty suddenly struck her.

"And now, how *are* we to find our farmhouse? I know the way to it perfectly from the wooden bridge; but from this, I really haven't an idea."

"I'll make it out," said the young lady, before their guide had time to speak. "I like exploring; and it can't be far — a little in this direction. Thank you very much."

The last words were to the young man, whose huge boots were pouring down rivulets on the dry dust of the little pathway on which they were standing.

“If I am not too disagreeable a guide, in this fisherman’s plight,” he said, glancing, with a laugh, at his boots, “nothing would please me so much as being allowed to point out the way to you. I happen to know it perfectly, and it is by no means so easy as you may suppose, particularly by this light — one can hardly tell distances, ever so near.”

“Pray, don’t think of it,” said the girl, “I can make it out quite easily.”

“Nonsense, my dear Maud. You could never make it out; and besides,” she added, in an under tone, “how can you tell where that blind man may turn up, that follows us, as you say? We are very much obliged to you,” she said, turning to him, “and you are doing us really a great kindness. I only hope it won’t be bringing you too far out of your way?”

Very pleasantly, therefore, they went on. It became darker, rapidly, and though the thunder grew louder and more frequent, and the lightning gleamed more vividly across the landscape, the storm was still distant enough to enable Maud to enjoy its sights and sounds, without a sense of danger.

The thunderclouds are stealthily but swiftly ascending. These battlements of pandemonium, “like an exhalation,” screen the sky and stars with black, and from their field of darkness leaps now and then the throbbing blue, that leaves the eye dazzled, and lights rock and forest, hill and ruin, for a moment in its pale glare. Then she listens for the rumble that swells into long and loud-echoing reverberations. He stays his narrative, and all stop and listen. He smiles, as from under his long lashes he covertly watches the ecstasy of the beautiful girl. And then they set out again; the old lady vowing that she can’t think why she’s such a fool as to stop at such an hour, and tired to death as she is, to listen to thunder.

Farmer Pritchard, happily for wandering Tintos in that part of the world, is not one of those scientific agriculturists who cut down their hedgerows and square their fields. Our little party has now reached the stile which, under the shadow of some grand old elms, admits the rustics, who frequent Richard Pritchard, to his farmyard.

It is an old and a melancholy remark, that the picturesque and the comfortable are hardly compatible. Here, however, these antagonistic principles are as nearly as possible reconciled. The farmyard is fenced round with hawthorns and lime-trees, and the farmhouse is a composite building, of which the quarter in which the ladies were lodged had formed a bit of the old Tudor manorhouse of Plas Ylwd, which gave its name to the place.

A thatched porch, with worn stone pillars and steps, fronts the hatch; and from beside this, through a wide window of small panes, a cheerful light was scattered along the rough pavement, and more faintly on the hanging foliage of the tree opposite. “What a pretty old house!” the young fisherman exclaimed, looking up at the gables, and the lattices, and the chimneys that rose from the deep thatch of the cobbled old house.

“It may be prettier in this light, or rather darkness, than at noon,” said the old lady, with a shrug, and a little laugh.

“But it really is, in any light, an extremely pretty old house,” said the girl, taking up the cudgels for their habitation, “and everything is so beautifully neat. I think them such nice people.”

A few heavy rain-drops had fallen sullenly as they came, and now with the suddenness of such visitations, the thunder shower, all at once, began to descend.

“Come in, come in,” said the old lady, imperiously.

Very willingly the young gentleman stepped under the porch.

They all three stood there for a moment, looking out towards the point from which, hitherto, the lightning had been chiefly visible.

“Oh! But you must come in and take a cup of tea,” said the old lady, suddenly recollecting. “You *must* come in, really.”

Their walk and little chat, and the climbing of stiles, and the rural simplicities that surrounded, had made her feel quite intimate. He glanced covertly at the young lady, but in her face he saw neither invitation nor prohibition; so he felt at liberty to choose, and he stepped, very gladly, into the house.

As you enter the old house you find yourself in a square vestibule, if I can call by so classic a name anything so rude. Straight before you yawns an arch that spans it from wall to wall, giving admission to the large kitchen of the farmhouse: at your right, under a corresponding moulded arch, opens the wide oak staircase of the manorhouse, with a broad banister, on the first huge stem of which, as on a vestal altar, is placed a burnished candlestick of brass, in which burns a candle to welcome the return of old Miss Max and young Miss Maud Guendoline.

The young lady steps in with the air, though she knows it not, of a princess into her palace.

As they enter, her ear is struck by an accent, not Welsh, and a voice the tones of which have something of a cold, bleating falsetto, which is intensely disagreeable, and looking quickly through the arched entrance to the kitchen, she sees there, taking his ease in an armchair by the fireplace, the long-visaged man with the white eye.

He is holding forth agreeably, with a smile on his skinny lips. He gesticulates with a long hand, the nails of which are black as ebony. The steam of the saintly man’s punch makes a halo round his head and his hard cheeks are flushed with the pink that tells of inward comfort. His one effective eye addresses itself, although he is haranguing Richard Pritchard’s wife, to Richard Pritchard’s daughter, who is very pretty, and leans, listening to the ugly stranger, with her bare arms rolled in her apron, on the high back of one of the oldfashioned oak chairs.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THEY ALL GOT ON.

Just for a moment the appearance of this Cocles, domesticated under the same roof, spy, thief, whatever he might be, made the young lady wince. Her impulse was to walk straight into the kitchen, cross-examine the visitor, and call on Richard Pritchard to turn him out forthwith. But that was only for one moment; the next, she was chatting just as usual. Mrs. Pritchard, with her pretty Welsh accent, another candle, and her smile of welcome, had run out to accompany the ladies upstairs to know their wishes, and to make any little adjustments in the room they might require.

"I lighted a bit o' fire, please 'm, the evenin' was gone rather cold, I thought."

"You did quite right, Mrs. Pritchard; you take such good care of us; it looks so comfortable," said the old lady.

"I'm very glad 'm, thank you, ma'am, will you please to have tea 'm?"

"Yes, as quickly as possible, thanks."

And Mrs. Pritchard vanished noiselessly. The old lady's guest was delighted with everything he saw.

It is not a large room; square, with blackest oak panels, burnished so that they actually flash in the flicker of the fire, that burns under the capacious arch of the fireplace. All the furniture, chairs, tables, and joint stools, are of the same black oak, waxed and polished, till it gleams and sparkles again. These clumsy pieces of ancient cabinet-making have probably descended, with this wing of the old house, to its present occupiers. The floor is also of polished oak, with a piece of thick old carpet laid down in the middle, and the window is covered with a rude curtain of baize. There are two sets of shelves against the wall on which stand thick the brightly coloured delft figures, cups, and candlesticks, interspersed with mutilated specimens of old china — a kind of ornament in which the Welsh delight, and which makes their rooms very bright and cheerful. The room is a picture of neatness. For a king's ransom you could not find dust enough in it to cover a silver penny. The young guest looks round delighted. Margaret's homely room did not seem to Faust more interesting, or more instinct with the spirit of neatness.

"Well, now you are in our farmhouse, Mr. —— ." The old lady had got thus far, when she found herself at fault, a little awkwardly.

"My name is Marston," he said, smiling a little, but very pleasantly.

"And I think, for my part, I have seen much more uncomfortable drawingrooms," she resumed. "I think it is a place one might grow fond of. Marston," she murmured in a reverie, and then she said to him, "I once met a Mr. Marston at — — "

But here a covert glance from Maud pulled her up again.

"I certainly did meet a Mr. Marston somewhere; but it is a long time ago," she said.

"We are to be found in three different counties," he said, laughing; "it is hard to say where we are at home."

"Aren't you afraid of those great wet boots?" the officious old lady began.

"Oh, dear! not the least," said he, "if you don't object to them in your drawingroom." He glanced at the young lady, so as to include her. "But the little walk up here has shaken off all the wet, and as for myself, they are a sort of diving-bells in which one can go anywhere and be as dry as on terra firma; it is the only use of them." He turned to the young lady. "Very tempting scenery about here. I dare say you have taken a long walk to-day. Some lady friends of mine, last year, over did itvery much, and were quite knocked up for some time after they left this."

"I'm a very good walker — better than my cousin," said the young lady; "and a good long walk is one of the most delightful things on earth. To see, as I have done, often, distant blue hills grow near, and reveal all their picturesque details, and a new landscape open before you, and finally to see the same hills fall into the rear, and grow as dim and blue as they were before, and to owe the transformation to your own feet, is there anything that gives one such a sense of independence? Those fine ladies who go everywhere in their carriages enjoy nothing of this, and yet, I think, it is half the pleasure of beautiful scenery. My cousin Max to-day was lecturing me on the duty of being content — I don't think that is the speech of a discontented person."

“It is a very wise speech, and perfectly true; I have experienced the same thing a thousand times myself,” said Mr. Marston.

Miss Max would have had a word to say, but she was busy hammering upon the floor with a cudgel provided for the purpose of signalling thus for attendance from below.

Mrs. Pritchard enters with the tea. Is there a cosier spectacle? If people are disposed to be happy, is there not an influence in the cups and saucers, and all the rest, that makes them cheery, and garrulous, and prone to intimacy?

It is an odd little adventure. Outside —

The speedy gleams the darkness swallows,
Loud, long, and deep the thunder bellows.

The pretty girl has drawn the curtain halfway back and opened a lattice in the stone-shafted window, the air being motionless, to see the lightning better. The rain is still rushing down perpendicularly, and whacking the pavement below all over. Inside, the candles glimmer on oaken walls three hundred years old, and a little party of three, so oddly made acquainted, are sitting over their homely tea, and talking as if they had known one another as long as they could remember.

Handsome Mr. Marston is chatting in the happiest excitement he has ever known. The girl can’t deny, in foro conscientiæ, that his brown features and large dark eyes, and thick soft hair, and a certain delicacy of outline almost feminine, accompanied with his manly and athletic figure, present an ensemble singularly handsome.

“His face is intelligent, there is fire in his face, he looks like a hero,” she admitted to herself. “But what do I know of him? He talks goodnaturedly. His manners are gentle; but mamma says that young faces are all deceptive, and that character does not write itself there, or tone the voice, or impress the manner, until beauty begins to wear itself out. I know nothing about him. He seems to know some great people, but he won’t talk of them to *us*. That is good-breeding, but nothing more. He seems to enjoy himself here in this homely place, and drinks his tea very happily from these odd delft cups. He brings the kettle, or hammers on the floor with that cudgel, as my cousin orders him. But what is it all? A masquerading adventure — the interest or fun of which consists in its incongruity with the spirit of his life, and its shock to his tastes. He may be cruel, selfish, disobliging, insolent, luxurious.”

In this alternative she wronged him. This Charles Marston, whose letters came to him addressed the “Honourable Charles Marston” was, despite his cleverness, something of a dreamer, very much of an enthusiast, and as capable of immensurable folly, in an affair of the grand passion, as any schoolboy, in the holidays, with his first novel under his pillow.

“He can’t suppose, seeing us here,” thought the girl, “that we are people such as he is accustomed to meet. Of course he despises us. Very good, sir. An eye for an eye,” and she turned her splendid dark eye for a moment covertly upon him, “and a tooth for a tooth. If you despise us, I despise you. We shall see. I shall be very direct. I shall bring that to the test, just now. We shall see.”

Charles Marston stole beside her, and looked out, with her, at the lightning. This is an occupation that helps to make young people acquainted. A pity it does not oftener occur in our climate. The little interjections. The “oh, oh, ohs!’” and “listens,” the “hushes,” and “wasn’t that glorious!” “you’re not afraid?” and fifty little useless but rather tender attentions, arise naturally from the situation. Thus an acquaintance, founded in thunder and lightning, may, like that of Macbeth and the witches, endure to the end of the gentleman’s days.

Not much attended to, I admit, good Miss Max talked on, about fifty things, and, now and then, threw in an interjection, when an unusually loud peal shook the walls of the old farmhouse, and was followed for a minute by a heavier cataract of rain.

But soon, to the secret grief of Mr. Marston, the thunder began perceptibly to grow more distant, and the lightning less vivid, and, still more terrible, the rain to abate.

The interest in the storm subsided, and Miss Maud Guendoline closed the lattice, and returned to the tea-table.

Had he ever seen in living face, in picture, in dream, anything so lovely? Such silken brown hair, such large eyes and long lashes, and beautifully red lips! Her dimples look so pretty in the oblique light and shadow, as her animated talk makes a pleasant music in his ears. He is growing more foolish than he suspects.

Miss Max, who knows nothing of him, who can't tell whether he is a nobleman or a strolling player, whether he is worth ten thousand a year, or only the clothes on his back and his enormous pair of boots, marks the symptoms of his weakness, and approves and assists with all the wise decision of a romantic old woman.

She makes an excuse of cold feet to turn about and place hers upon the fender. It is a lie, palpably, and Miss Maud is angry, and insists on talking to her, and keeping the retiring chaperon, much against her will, still in evidence.

The young man is not the least suspicious, has not an idea that good Miss Max is wittingly befriending him, but earnestly wishes that she may fall into a deep sleep over the fire.

The cruel girl, however, insists on her talking.

"I saw you talking to those American people who came into the carriage at Chester, didn't you?" said the girl.

"Yes, dear," said Miss Max, dryly; "nothing could be more uninteresting."

"I was in the waiting-room at Chester with that very party, I'm certain. There were two ladies, weren't there, and the man had a kind of varnished waterproof coat, and a white hat, and was very thin, and had a particularly long nose, a little crooked?"

"Yes, that is *my* friend," answered Maud. "That gentleman was good enough to take a great interest in me and my cousin. I had to inform him that my christian name is Maud and my surname Guendoline; that a friend had made me a present of my first-class ticket; that my papa has been dead for many years; and that mamma's business allows her hardly an hour to look after me; that I have not a shilling I can call my own; that I thought I could do something to earn a subsistence for myself; that I can draw a little — I can teach — — "

"Where have you ever taught, dear?" threw in Miss Max, apparently in great vexation at her companion's unseasonable frankness.

"I don't say I have yet taught for money, but I have learned something of it at the Sunday school, and I don't see why I shouldn't do it as well as mamma. Then there's my music — that ought to be worth something."

“You must be tired, I think,” interrupted the old lady, a little sharply; “you have had a very long walk to-day. I think you had better get to your room.”

“I have stayed, I’m afraid, a great deal too late,” said Mr. Marston, who could not mistake the purport of the old lady’s speech. “I’m afraid you are tired, Miss Guendoline. I’m afraid you have both been doing too much, and you’ll allow me, won’t you, just to call in the morning to inquire how you are?”

“It is very inhospitable,” said Miss Max, relenting a little; “but we are very early people in this part of the world, and I shall be very happy to see you tomorrow, if we should happen to be at home.”

He had taken his leave; he was gone. A beautiful moonlight was silvering the quaint old building and the graceful trees surrounding it. The mists of night hung on the landscape, and the stars, the fabled arbiters of men’s fortunes, burned brilliantly in the clear sky.

He crossed the stile, he walked along the white path, as if in a trance. He paused under a great ash-tree, snake-bound in twisted ivy, and leaned against its trunk, looking towards the thatched gable of the old stone building.

“Was there ever so beautiful a creature?” he said. “What dignity, what refinement, what prettiness, and what a sweet voice; what animation! Governess, farmer’s daughter, artist, be she what she may, she is the loveliest being that ever trod this earth!”

In this rapture — in which mingled that pain of doubt and yearning of separation which constitutes the anguish of such violent “fancies” — he walked slowly to the stepping-stones, and conning over every word she had spoken, and every look in her changing features, he arrived at last, rather late, at his inn, the Verney Arms, in Cardyllion.

CHAPTER V.

A SPECTRE.

The two ladies sat silent for some time after their guest had departed.

Miss Max spoke first.

"I don't think it is quite honest — you make me ashamed of you."

"I'm ashamed of myself. It's true; he'll think too well of me," said the girl, impetuously.

"He thinks very oddly of us both, I'm afraid," said Miss Max.

"I'm not afraid — I don't care — I dare say he does. I think you hinted that he should carry you across the stream on his back. I got out of hearing before you had done. You all but asked him for his name, and finally turned him out in the thunder at a moment's notice."

"It does not matter what an old woman says or does, but a girl is quite different," replied Miss Max. "You need not have said one word about our ways and means."

"I shall say the same to every one that cares to hear where I am not under constraint; and you shall keep your promise. Do let me enjoy my liberty while I may," answered the girl.

"Are you a gipsy? You are such a mixture of audacity and imposture!" said Miss Max.

"Gipsy? Yes. We are something like gipsies, you and I — our long marches and wandering lives. Imposture and audacity? I should not mind pleading guilty to that, although, when I think it over, I don't remember that I said a word that was not literally true, except my surname. I was not bound to tell that, and he would have been, I dare say, no wiser if I had. I was not bound to tell him anything. I think I have been very good."

"I dare say he is Lord Somebody," said Miss Max.

"Do you like him the better for that?" asked the girl.

"You are such a radical, Maud! Well, I don't say I do. But it just guarantees that if the man has any nice tastes, he has leisure and money to cultivate them; and if he has kind feelings he can indulge them, and is liberated from all those miserable limitations that accompany poverty."

"I have made a very frank confession with one reserve. On that point I have a right to be secret, and you have promised secrecy. Am I under the miserable obligation to tell my real condition to every one who pleases to be curious?"

"You blush, Maud."

"I dare say I do. It is because you look at me so steadily. I told him all I choose to tell. He shan't think me an adventuress; no one shall. I said enough to show I was, at least, willing to earn an honest livelihood. I said the same to that vulgar American, and you did not object. And why not to him? I don't care one farthing about him in particular. He will not pay us a visit tomorrow, you'll find. He has dropped us, being such as I suppose him, and we shall never see him more. I am glad of it. Let us cease to think of him. There's a more interesting man downstairs."

In her slender hand she took the stick that she called the cudgel, and hammered on the floor.

Up came pretty Anne Pritchard, looking sleepy, her cheeks a little pale, her large eyes a little drowsy.

"Can I see your father, Mr. Pritchard?" asked Maud.

"He's gone to his bed, please, ma'am, an hour ago."

"Is he asleep, can you tell?"

"He goes to sleep at once, if you please, miss."

"How provoking! What shall we do?" She turned to Miss Max, and then to the girl. She said: "I saw a man, a stranger — a man with a blind eye, here, when we came in. Is he here still?"

"Yes 'm, please."

"He has a bed here, has he, and stays tonight?" asked the young lady.

"Yes 'm, please," said the girl, with a curtsy.

"What do you think? Shall we turn him out?" said Maud, turning to Miss Max.

"Oh! no, dear, don't trouble your head about him. He'll go in the morning. He's not in our way, at all," answered Miss Max.

"Well, I suppose it is not worth making a fuss about. There is another advantage of the visit of our friend in the boots this evening. I could not find an opportunity to tell Mr. Pritchard to turn that person out of the house," said Miss Maud, with vexation.

"Please 'm, Mr. Lizard."

“Say it again, child, Mr. Who?” asked Miss Max.

“Mr. Lizard, please ‘m. Elihu Lizard is wrote in his Bible, and he expounded this evening before he went to his bed. He’s a very good man.”

“Was he ever here before?” asked Miss Maud.

“No, please ‘m.”

“And what is he?” demanded the young lady.

“I don’t know. Oh, yes, please ‘m, I forgot; he said he was gettin’ money, please ‘m, for the good of the Gospel, and he had papers and cards, ‘m.”

“The same story, you see,” she said, turning with a little nod, and a faint smile, to her companion.

“Do let the man rest in his bed, my dear, and let us go to ours; you forget how late it is growing,” said Miss Max, and yawned, and lighted her candle.

“That will do, thanks,” said Maud, thoughtfully, “and will you tell Mr. Pritchard, your father, in the morning, that we wish very much to see him before we go out?”

“And let us have breakfast a little before nine, please,” added Miss Max, looking at her watch, and holding it to her ear. “Come, darling,” she said, finding it was going, “it really is very late, and you have a good deal, you know, to do tomorrow.”

“It is the most unpleasant thing in the world,” said the pretty young lady, looking thoughtfully at her companion. “There can be no question he is following us, or one of us, you or me. Who on earth can have sent him? Who can it be? That odious creature! Did you ever see a more villanous face? He is watching us, picking up information about all our doings. What can he want? It is certainly for no good. Who can it be?”

“We can’t find out tonight, darling, and there is no good in losing your sleep. Perhaps we may make out something from old Pritchard in the morning,” said Miss Max.

“Yes, yes, perhaps so. All I know is, it is making me quite miserable,” said the girl, and she kissed the old lady, and went to her room. And Miss Max, having seen that the fire was nearly out, retired also to hers.

As neat and as quaint as their drawingroom, was Miss Max’s bedroom. But though everything invited to rest, and Miss Max rather stiff from her long walk, and a little drowsy and yawning, she was one of those fidgety old ladies who take a prodigious time to get into bed.

Nearly an hour had passed, during which she had stuck armies of pins in her pincushion, and shut and opened every drawer in her room, and walked from one table to another oftener, and made more small dispositions about her room and her bed, than I could possibly reckon, and, being now arrayed in slippers and dressing-gown, she bethought of something to be adjusted in the sitting-room, which might just as well have waited till the morning, and so she took her candle and descended the old oak stairs.

On the solid plank of that flooring, the slippered footfall of the thin old lady made no sound. The moon was high, and her cold blue light fell slanting through the window upon the floor of the little lobby. Within and without reigned utter silence; and if Miss Max had been a ghost-seeing old lady, no scene could have been better suited for the visitation of a phantom than this dissociated wing of a house more than three hundred years old.

Miss Max was now at the drawingroom door, which she opened softly and stepped in. It was neither without a tenant nor a light.

At the far corner of the table, with a candle in his hand, which he instantly blew out, she saw the slim figure and sly lean face of Elihu Lizard, his white eyeball turned towards her, and his other eye squinting with the scowl of alarm, fiercely across his nose, at her.

Mr. Lizard was, with the exception of his shoes and his coat, in full costume. His stockings and his shirtsleeves gave him a burglarious air, which rather heightened the shock of his ugly leer, thus unexpectedly encountered.

He stepped back into a recess beside the chimney almost as she entered!

For a moment she was not quite sure whether her frequent discussions with Maud respecting this repulsive person had not excited her fears and fancies, so as to call up an ugly vision. Mr. Lizard, however, seeing that the extinction of his candlelight was without effect, Miss Max's candle shining full upon him, stepped forward softly, and executed his guileless smile and lowly reverence.

Miss Max had recovered her intrepidity; and she said sharply:

"What do you mean, sir? what on earth brings you to our private sitting-room?"

"I have took the liberty," he said, in his quavering tones, inclining his long face aside with a plaintive simper, nearly closing his eyelids, and lifting one skinny hand — it was the tone and attitude in which the good Elihu Lizard was wont to expound, the same in which he might stand over a cradle, and pronounce a blessing on the little Christian in blankets, with whose purity the guileless heart of the good man sympathised— "being a-thirst and panting, so to speak, as the hart for the water-brooks, as I lay in my bed, I arose, and finding none where I looked for it, I thought it would not be grudged me even in the chambers of them that go delicately, and therefore am I found here seeking if peradventure I might find any."

Elihu Lizard, upon all occasions on which worldly men, of his rank in life, would affect the language of ceremony, glided from habit into that with which he had harangued from tables and other elevations at Greenwich Fair and similar assemblies, before he had engaged in his present peculiar occupation.

There was something celestial in the suavity of this person that positively exasperated Miss Max.

"That's all very fine. Water, indeed! There you were, over Miss Maud's and my letters and papers, in our private sitting-room, and you show, sir, that you well knew you were about something nefarious, for I saw you put out your candle — there it is, sir, in your hand. How disgusting! How dare you! And I suspect you, sir, and your impious cant; and I'll find out all about you, or I'll lose my life! How can Mr. Pritchard allow such persons into his house? I'll see him in the morning. I'll speak to the police in Cardyllion about you. I'll come to the bottom of all this. I'll consult a lawyer. I'll teach you, sir, be you who you may, you are not to follow people from place to place, and to haunt their drawingrooms at dead of night. I'll turn the tables upon you; I'll have you pursued."

The good man turned up his effective eye, till nothing but its white was seen, and it would have been as hard to say which of the two had a pupil to it, as under which of his thimbles, if thimble-rigger he be, the pea actually lies. He smiled patiently, and bowed lowly, and with his palm raised, uttered the words, "Charity thinketh no evil."

The measure of Miss Max's indignation was full. With her brown silk handkerchief swathed tightly about her head, and looking somewhat like a fez, in her red cloth slippers, and white flannel dressing-gown, that, I must allow, was rather "skimpy," showing a little more of her ankle than was quite dignified, she was a rather striking effigy of indignation. She felt that she could have hurled her candlestick at the saintly man's head, an experiment which it is as well she did not hazard, seeing that she and her adversary would have been reduced to instantaneous darkness, and might have, without intending it, encountered in the dark, while endeavouring to make their retreat. Instead, therefore, of proceeding to this extreme measure, with kindling eyes, and a stamp on the floor, she said:

"Leave this room, this moment, sir! How dare you? I shall call up Mr. Pritchard, if you presume to remain here another moment."

I dare say that Mr. Lizard had completed whatever observations he intended to make, and his reconnaisance accomplished, he did not care to remain a moment longer than was necessary under fire. He withdrew with the smiling meekness of a Christian enduring pagan vituperation and violence.

In the morning, when, at their early breakfast, the ladies made inquiry after him, they learned that he had taken his departure more than an hour before.

"More evidence, if it were needed, of a purpose, in tracking us as he does, which won't bear the light!" exclaimed Miss Max, who was now at least as strong upon the point as the handsome girl who accompanied her. "I don't understand it. It is some object connected with *you*, most positively. Who on earth can be his employer? I confess, Maud, I'm frightened, at last."

"Do you think it can be old Mr. Tintern?" asked the girl, after a silence, looking curiously in the face of her companion. "That old man may well wish me dead."

"It may interest possibly a good many people to watch you very closely," said the elder lady.

They both became thoughtful.

"You will now believe," said the young lady, with a sigh, "that the conditions of my life are not quite usual. I tell you, cousin, I have a presentiment that some misfortune impends. I suppose there is a crisis in every one's life; the astrologers used to say so. God send me safely through mine!"

“Amen, darling, if there be a crisis,” said Miss Max, more gravely than she usually spoke. “But we must not croak any more. I have great confidence, under God, in energy, my dear, and you were always a spirited girl. What, after all, can befal you?”

“Many things. But let us think of today and Cardyllion and Llanberris, and let tomorrow take care of itself. What a beautiful day!”

CHAPTER VI.

THEY MEET A FRIEND.

“Won’t you wait, and see Mr. Marston?” said Miss Max, a little later, when the young lady came down in her walking-dress.

“No, dear, I’m going to the castle. I have planned three drawings there, and two in the town, and then we set out on our drive to Llanberris, where I shall still have daylight, perhaps, to make one or two more.”

“Very industrious, upon my word! But don’t you think you might afford a little time to be civil?” said Miss Max.

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“Mr. Marston said most pointedly, I mean, particularly, that he would call this morning, and you allowed him to suppose we should be at home.”

“Did I? Well, that’s past mending now,” said the girl.

“And he’ll come and see *no* one,” said Miss Max, expanding her hands.

“He’ll see the Pritchards,” said Miss Maud.

“I think it extremely rude, going out so much before our usual time, as if it was just to avoid him.”

“It *is* to avoid him. Put on your things and come,” said the girl.

“And what reason on earth can there be?” insisted Miss Max.

“I’m not in a Marston mood this morning, that’s all. Do, like a darling, put on your things and come; everything is packed, and the people here know when the fly is coming to take our boxes, and I’ll walk slowly on, and you will overtake me.”

So saying, she ran downstairs, and took a very friendly leave of the Pritchard family.

She was not afraid of meeting Mr. Marston. For Anne Pritchard had told her that he had inquired at what hour the ladies usually went out to walk, and that hour was considerably later than it now was. Miss Max overtook her.

“It’s plain, we don’t agree,” said that lady, as if their talk had not been suspended for a moment. “I like that young man extremely, and I do think that it is rather marked, our leaving so unnecessarily early. I hate rudeness — *wanton* rudeness.”

The girl smiled pleasantly on her companion.

“Why do you like him?” she said.

“Because I think him so extremely nice. I thought him so polite, and there was so much deference and delicacy.”

“I’m afraid I’ve interrupted a very interesting acquaintance,” said Miss Maud, laughing.

“But tell me why you have changed your mind, for you did seem to like him?” said Miss Max.

“Well, don’t you think he appeared a little more assured of his good reception than he would have been if he had thought us persons of his own rank — I mean two great ladies such as he is in the habit of seeing; such as the people he knows? People like the Marstons — if he *is* one of them, as you suppose — make acquaintance with persons dressed in serge, like us, merely for amusement. Their affected deference seems to me insulting; it is an amusement I shan’t afford him. From this point of view we can study human nature, because we can feel its meanness.”

“You are a morbid creature,” said Miss Max.

“I am trying to discover truth. I am trying to comprehend character,” said the girl.

“And making yourself a cynic as fast as you can,” said the old lady.

“It matters little what I am. We shan’t see to-day a person so reckless of the future, a person with so little hope, a person who sees so little to live for, as I, and is so willing to die.”

“Look round, my dear, and open your eyes. You know nothing of life or of God’s providence,” said Miss Max. “I have no patience with you.”

“You were born free,” said the girl, more gently than before, “I, a slave. Yes, don’t smile; I call things by their names. You walk in the light, and I in darkness. The people who surround you, be they what they may, are at all events what they seem. When I look round, do I see images of candour? No; shadows dark and cold. I can trust no one — assassins in masquerade.”

“Every one,” said Miss Max, “has to encounter deceit and hypocrisy in this world.”

“It won’t do; no, it won’t do. You know very well that the cases are quite different,” said the girl. “I have no one to care for me, and many that wish me dead; and, except you, I can trust no one."

"Well, marry, and trust your husband."

"I've too often told you I never shall, *never.* I need say so no more. How well the castle looks! I suppose it is from the rain last night; how beautifully the tints of the stone have come out!"

It was a brilliant, sunny morning. The grey walls, with patches of dull red and yellow stones, and cumbrous folds of ivy, looked their best, and towers, and arch, and battlement looked, in the soft summer air, all that the heart of an artist could desire.

Going to and fro from point to point, sometimes beyond the dry castle moat, sometimes within its grass-grown court, Miss Maud sketched industriously for some hours, and from her little tin colour-box threw in her tints with a bold and delicate brush, while Miss Max, seated beside her, read her book — for she loved a novel — and, through her spectacles, with glowing eyes, accompanied the heroine through her flirtations and agonies, to her final meeting with the man of her choice, at the steps of the altar.

For a little time, now and then, pretty Miss Maud would lower her pencil, and rest her eye and hand, and think, looking vaguely on the ruins, in a sad reverie.

By this time Mr. Marston had, it was to be supposed, made his visit at the old farmhouse, had sustained his disappointment, and perhaps got over it, and was, possibly, consoling himself in his jack-boots, with his rod, in the channel of some distant trout-stream.

I can't say whether her thoughts ever wandered to this Mr. Marston, who was so agreeable and good-looking. But I fancy she did not think of him quite so hardly as she spoke. Whatever her thoughts were, her looks, at least, were sad.

"Whose epitaph are you writing, my dear?" inquired Miss Max, who had lowered her book, and, glancing over her spectacles, observed the absent and melancholy looks of the girl.

"My own," said she, with a little laugh. "But we have talked enough about that — I mean my life — and I suppose a good epitaph should sum that up. What do you think of these?" and she dropped her sketches on her cousin's lap. "If I finish them as well as I have begun, they will be worth three shillings each, I dare say."

“Yes; dear me! It *is* very good indeed. And this — how very pretty!” and so on, as she turned them over.

“But not one among them will ever be half so good as our dear old farmhouse, that was so comfortable and so uncomfortable — so nearly intolerable, and yet so delightful; such a pleasant adventure to remember. I am very glad to have it, for we shall never see its face again.”

At these words, unexpectedly, Miss Max rose, and showed by her countenance that she saw some one approaching whom she was glad to greet. Her young companion turned also, and saw Mr. Marston already very near.

He was so delighted to see them. He had been to the old house, and was so disappointed; and the people there could not tell where they had gone. He had hoped they had changed their minds about leaving Cardyllion so soon. He had intended going to Llanberris that day, but some of his people were coming to Cardyllion. He had received orders from home to engage rooms at the Verney Arms for them, and must stay that day. It was too bad. Of course he was very glad to see them; but he might just as well have seen them in a week. Were they (Miss Max and her companion) going to stay any time at Llanberris?

“No. They would leave it in the morning.”

“And continue their tour? Where?”

“Nowhere,” said Miss Max. “We go home then.”

He looked as if he would have given worlds to ask them where that home was.

“My cousin returns to *her* home, and I to mine,” said the girl, gravely. “We are very lucky in our last day; it would have been so provoking to lose it.”

“She has made ever so many drawings to-day,” said Miss Max; “and they are really so very good, I must show them to you.”

“There is not time,” said the girl to her cousin. “It is a long drive to Llanberris; it is time we were at the Verney Arms. We must ask after our boxes, and order a carriage. It is later than I fancied,” she said, turning to Mr. Marston; “how time runs away when one is really working.”

“Or really happy,” said the young man.

He walked with them down Castle-street to the Verney Arms, talking with them like an old friend all the way.

They all went together into the room to which the waiter showed them. And Miss Max, who had the little portfolio in her charge, said:

“Now, Maud, we must show Mr. Marston to-day’s drawings.”

And very glad he was of that privilege.

Then she showed him the sketch of the old farmhouse.

“Oh! How pretty! What a sweet thing that is! What a beautiful drawing it makes!”

And so he descanted on it in a rapture.

“There is a place here where they do photographs; and I am going to have that old house taken.” He said to the young lady, as Miss Max was giving some orders at the door: “I like it better than anything else about here. I feel so grateful to it.”

Miss Max was back again in a moment.

“Well, I do think they *are* very pretty indeed,” she said. “We’ll take the portfolio inside, dear. I’ll take charge of it,” she said to Maud. “And I hope none of our boxes were forgotten. I must count them. Five altogether.”

And she ran out again upon this errand; and Mr. Marston resumed:

“I shall never forget that thunderstorm, nor that pretty little room, nor my good fortune in being able to guide you home. I shall never forget yesterday evening, the most delightful evening I ever passed in my life.”

He was speaking in a very low tone.

Miss Maud looked embarrassed, almost vexed, and a beautiful colour flushed her cheeks, and gave a fire to her dark eyes.

Mr. Marston felt instinctively that he had been going a little too fast.

“Good Heavens!” he thought, “what a fool I am! She looked almost angry. What business had I to talk so?”

There was a little silence.

“It is a misfortune, I believe, being too honest,” he said at length.

“A great one, but there are others greater,” said the girl, with eyes still vexed and fiery.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean being ever so little dishonest, and ever so little insolent. I hope I’m not that, at least to people I suppose to be my inferiors, though I may plead guilty to the lesser fault; perhaps I *am* too honest.”

Very proud, at least, she looked at that moment, and very completely “floored” looked poor Mr. Marston.

I don’t know what he might have said, or how much worse he might have made matters in the passionate effort to extricate himself, if Miss Max had not happened at that moment to return.

That he could be suspected of presuming upon her supposed position, to treat her with less deference than the greatest lady in the land, was a danger he had never dreamed of; he, who felt, as he spoke, as if he could have fallen on his knees before her. How monstrous! what degradation, what torture!

“Everything is ready, and the carriage at the door, my dear; and all our boxes quite right,” said Miss Max, in a fuss.

Mr. Marston came down to put them into their carriage; and while Miss Max was saying a word from one carriage window, he leaned for a moment at the other, and said:

“I’m so shocked and pained to think I have been so mistaken. I implore of you to believe that I am incapable of a thought that could offend you, and that you leave me very miserable.”

The cheery voice of Miss Max, unconscious of her cruelty, interrupted him with a word or two of farewell, and the carriage drove off, leaving him not less melancholy than he had described himself.

CHAPTER VII.

FLIGHT.

The old lady looked from the window as they drove on, watching the changes of the landscape. The girl, on the contrary, leaned back in her place, and seemed disturbed and thoughtful.

After a silence of nearly ten minutes, Miss Max, having had, I suppose, for the time, enough of the picturesque, remarked suddenly:

“Mr. Marston is, as I suspected, Lord Warhampton’s son. His eldest, I believe his only living son. The people at the Verney Arms told me he had actually ordered horses for Llanberris, intending to go there to-day, when his plans were upset by his father’s letter. Of course we know perfectly why he wished to go there to-day. I mentioned last night that we intended visiting it this afternoon, and he really did look so miserable as we took our leave just now.”

“The fool! What right has he to follow us to Llanberris?” asked the girl.

“Why, of course, he has a right to go to Llanberris if he likes it, without asking either you or me,” said Miss Max.

“He has just the same right, I admit, that Mr. Elihu Lizard has.”

“Oh! come, you mustn’t compare them,” said Miss Max. “I should have been very glad to see Mr. Marston there, and so should you; he is very agreeable, and never could be the least in one’s way; he’s so goodnatured and considerate, and would see in a moment if he was de trop. And it is all very fine talking independence; but every one knows there are fifty things we can’t do so well for ourselves, and he might have been very useful in our walks.”

“Carrying us over rivers in his jack-boots?”

“He never did carry me over any river, if you mean that,” said Miss Max, “or anywhere else. But it is very well I had his arm to lean upon, over those stepping-stones, or I don’t think we should have got home last night.”

“I dare say he thinks his title irresistible, and that the untitled and poor are made for his amusement. It is a selfish, cruel world. You ought to know it better than I; you have been longer in it; and yet, by a kind of sad inspiration, I know it, I'm sure, ever so much better than you do."

"Wisehead!" said the old lady with a smile, and a little shake of her bonnet.

The young lady looked out, and in a little time took up a volume of Miss Max's nearly finished novel, and read listlessly. She was by no means in those high spirits that had hitherto accompanied every change of scene in their little excursion. Miss Max remarked this subsidence, thought even that she detected the evidence of positive fatigue and melancholy, but the wary lady made no remark. It was better to let this little cloud dissipate itself.

In a lonely part of the road a horse dropped a shoe, and brought them to a walk, till they had reached the next smithy. The delay made their arrival late. The sun was in the west when they gained their first view of that beautiful and melancholy lake lying in the lap of its lonely glen. They drew up near the ruined tower that caught the slanting light from the west, under the purple shadow of the hill.

As they stopped the carriage here and got out, they were just in time to see a man descend from the box beside the driver.

They were both so astounded that neither could find a word for some seconds. It was Mr. Elihu Lizard, who had enjoyed all the way a seat on their driver's box, and who now got down, put his bundle on the end of his stick, which he carried over his shoulder, and with a "Heaven bless you, friend," to the whip on the box, smiled defiantly over his shoulder at the ladies, and marched onward toward the little inn at the right of the glen.

"Well!" exclaimed Miss Max, when she had recovered breath. "Certainly! Did you ever hear or see anything like that? Where did you take up that person, pray?"

Miss Max looked indignantly up at the fat, dull cheeks of the Welshman on the box, and pointed with her parasol at the retreating expounder. That gentleman, glancing back from time to time, was taken with a fit of coughing, or of laughter, it was difficult to say which at that distance, as he pursued his march, with the intention of refreshing himself with a mug of beer in the picturesque little inn.

"Call that man! You had no business taking any one upon the carriage we had hired, without our leave," said Miss Max. "Call him — make him come back, or you shall drive us after him. I will speak to him."

The driver shouted. Mr. Lizard waved his hand.

"I'm certain he is laughing — insolent hypocrite!" exclaimed Miss Max, transported with indignation. "I'll drive after him, I will overtake him."

They got into the carriage, overtook Elihu Lizard, and stepped down about a dozen yards before him.

"So, sir, you persist in following us!" exclaimed the old lady.

"To me," he replied, in a long-drawn, bleating falsetto, as he stood in his accustomed pose, with his hand a little raised, his eyes nearly closed, and a celestial simper playing upon his conceited and sinister features, "to me it would appear, nevertheless, honourable lady, that it is you, asking your parding, that is a-following me; I am following, not you, nor any other poor, weak, sinful, erring mortal, but my humble calling, which I hope it is not sich as will be disdained from the hand of a poor weak, miserable creature, nor yet that I shall be esteemed altogether an unprofitable servant."

"I don't want to hear your cant, sir; if you had the least regard for truth, you would admit frankly that you have been following me and my friend the whole of the way from Chester, stopping wherever we stopped, and pursuing wherever we went. I have seen you everywhere, and if there was a policeman here, I should have you arrested; rely on it, I shall meet you somewhere, where I can have your conduct inquired into, and your cowardly persecution punished."

"I have come to this land of Wales, honourable lady, and even to this place, which it is called Llanberris, holding myself subject and obedient unto the powers that be, and fearing no one, insomuch as I am upon my lawful business, with your parding for so saying, not with a concealed character, nor yet with a forged name, nor in anywise under false pretences; but walking in my own humble way, and being that, and only that, which humbly and simply I pretend to be."

The good man, with eyes nearly closed, through the lids of which a glitter was just perceptible, betraying his vigilance, delivered these words in his accustomed sing-song, but with an impertinent significance that called a beautiful rush of crimson to the younger lady's cheeks.

"Your name is nothing to us, sir. We are not likely to know it," said the young lady, supporting Miss Max with a little effort. "We shall find that out in good time, perhaps. We shall make it out when we want it."

"You shall have it when you please, honourable lady; the humble and erring sinner who speaks to you is one who walks in the light, which he seeks not, as too many do, and have done, ay, and are doing at this present time, to walk as it were in a lie, and give themselves out for that which they are not. No, he is not one of those who loveth a lie, nor yet who is filled with guile, and he is not ashamed, neither afraid, to tell his name whithersoever he goeth, neither is he the heaviness of his mother; no, nor yet forsaketh he the law of his mother."

The same brilliant blush tinged the girl's cheeks; she looked hard and angrily at the man, and his simper waxed more than ever provoking as he saw these signs of confusion.

"I believe I did wrong to speak to you here, where there are no police," said Miss Max. "I ought to have known that it could only supply new opportunity to your impertinence. I shall find out, however, when I meet you next, as I have told you, whether we are to be longer exposed to this kind of cowardly annoyance."

Miss Max and her young companion turned away. The one-eyed Christian, apostle, detective, whatever he was, indulged silently in that meanest of all laughs, the laugh which, in cold blood, chuckles over insult, as with a little hitch of his shoulder, on which rested his stick and bundle, he got under way again toward the little inn, a couple of hundred yards on.

The driver took his horses up to the inn.

"Well," said Miss Max, a little disconcerted, "I could have told you that before. I thought him a very impertinent person, and just the kind of man who would be as insolent as he pleased to two ladies, alone as we are; but very civil if a gentleman were by with a stick in his hand."

"I don't mean to make any drawings here. I've changed my mind," said Maud. "I'm longing to be at Wybourne again. Suppose, instead of staying here, we go tonight?"

"Very good, dear. To say truth, I'm not comfortable with the idea of that man's being here to watch us. Come, Maud, you must not look so sad. We have all tomorrow at Wybourne, before we part, and let us enjoy, as you say, our holiday."

"Yes, on Monday we part. Don't mention it again. It is bad enough when it comes. Then the scene changes. I'll think of it no more to-day. I'll forget it. Let us walk a little further up the glen, and see all we can, in an hour."

So with altered plans the hour was passed; and at the approach of sunset they met the train at Bangor.

A fog was spreading up the Menai as the train started. To the girl it seemed prophetic of her own future of gloom and uncertainty.

Other people had changed their plans that evening. A letter had reached Mr. Marston, unluckiest of mortals, only two hours after the ladies had left Cardyllion for Llanberris, countermanding all his arrangements for his father, Lord Warhampton.

Instantly that impetuous young man had got horses, and pursued to Llanberris, but only to find that those whom he had followed had taken wing. As he looked from the uplands along the long level sweep that follows the base of the noble range of mountains, by which the line of rails stretches away until it rounds the foot of a mighty headland at the right, he saw, with distraction, the train gliding away along the level, submerging itself, at last, in the fog that flooded the valley like a golden sea.

His only clue was one of the papers, condemned as illegible, which Miss Max had hastily written for their boxes.

"Miss M. Guendoline," was written on it, with the name of some place, it was to be supposed — but, oh, torture! The clumsy hoof of the driver, thick with mud, had stamped this inestimable record into utter illegibility. Viâ Chester was still traceable, also England in the corner. The rest was undecipherable. The wretch seemed to have jumped upon it. The very paper was demolished. The gravel from the Vandal's heel was punched through it.

In the little inn where he had heard tidings of two ladies, with a carriage such as he described, he had picked up this precious, but torturing bit of paper.

CHAPTER VIII.

WYBOURNE CHURCHYARD

In a golden mist he lost her; but he does not despair. Mr. Marston pursues. Has he any very clear idea why?

If he had overtaken the ladies, as he expected, at Llanberris, would he have ventured, of his own mere notion, to accompany them on their after-journey? Certainly not. What, then, is the meaning of this pursuit? What does he mean to do or say?

He has no plan. He has no set speech or clear idea to deliver. He is in a state of utter confusion. He only knows that see her once more he must — that he can't endure the thought of letting her go, thus, for ever from his sight; she is never for a moment out of his head.

I don't know what his grave and experienced servant thought of their mysterious whirl to Chester by the night mail. He did not refer it, I dare say, to anything very wise or good. But the relation of man and master is, happily, military, and the servant's conscience is acquitted when he has obeyed his orders.

The fog has melted into clearest air, and the beautiful moon is shining.

What a world of romance, and love, and beauty he thinks it, as he looks out of the open window on the trees and mountains that sail by in that fairy light.

The distance is shortening. Everything near and far is good of its kind. Everything is interesting. It is like the ecstasy of the opium-eater. Never were such stars, and hedges, and ditches. What an exquisite little church, and tombstones! Requiescat in pace! What a beautiful ash-tree! Heaven bless it! How picturesque that horse's head, poking out through the hole in the wall with the ivy on it! And those pigs, lying flat on the manure-heap, jolly, odd creatures! How delightfully funny they are! And even when he draws his head in, and leans back for a moment in his place, he thinks there is something so kindly and jolly about that fat old fellow with the travelling-cap and the rugs, who snores with his chin on his chest — a stockbroker, perhaps. What heads and ledgers! — wonderful fellows! The valves and channels through which flows into its myriad receptacles the incredible and restless wealth of Britain. Or, perhaps, a merchant, princely, benevolent. Well that we have such a body, the glory of England.

The fat gentleman utters a snort, wakes up, looks at his watch, and produces a tin sandwich-box.

That thin elderly lady in black, that sits at the left of the fat gentleman, who is champing his sandwiches, does not see things, with her sunken eyes, as Mr. Marston sees them. She is gliding on to her only darling at school, who lies in the sick-house in scarlatina.

They are now but half an hour from Chester. Mr. Marston is again looking out of the window as they draw near.

“Maud Guendoline,” he is repeating again. “Guendoline — an odd surname, but so beautiful. Foreign, is it? I never heard it before. When we get into Chester I’ll have the Army List, and the London Directory, and every list of names they can make me out. It may help me. Who knows?”

They are in Chester. Oh, that it were not so big a place! His servant is looking after his luggage. He is in the ticket-office, making futile inquiries after “an old lady, Miss Max, who left Bangor for Chester that very evening, and forgot something of importance and I would gladly pay any one a reward who could give me a clue to find her by. I am sure only that she was to go viâ Chester.”

No; they could tell him nothing. But if it was viâ Chester, she was going on by one of the branches. The clerk who might have written the new labels for her luggage was not on duty till tomorrow afternoon, having leave till two. “He’s very sharp; if ’twas he did it — Max is a queer name — he’ll be like to remember it; that is, he may.”

Here was hope, but hope deferred. The people at Llanberris had told him that the label which he had picked up was the only one on which the name of the place was written, on which account it was removed, and all the rest were addressed simply “Chester.” He has nothing for it but patience.

There is a pretty little town called Wybourne, not very far from a hundred miles away. Next evening, the church-bell, ringing the rustics to evening service, has sounded its sweet note over the chimneys of the town, through hedgerows and bosky hollows, over slope and level, and Mr. Marston, with the gritty dust of the railway still on his hat, has tapped in the High-street at the postoffice wooden window-pane, and converses with grave and plaintive Mrs. Fisher.

"Can you tell me if a lady named Miss Guendoline lives anywhere near this?" he inquires.

"Guendoline? No, sir. But there's Mr. and Mrs. Gwyn, please, that lives down the street near the Good Woman."

"No, thanks; that's not it. Miss Maud Guendoline."

Mrs. Fisher put an unheard question to an invisible interlocutor in the interior, and made answer: "No, sir; please there's no such person."

"I beg pardon; but just one word more. Does a lady named Max — a Miss Max — live anywhere near this place?"

"Miss Max? I think not, sir."

"You're not quite sure, I think?" says he, brightening, as he leans on the little shelf outside the window; and if his head would have fitted through the open pane, he would, I think, in his eagerness, have popped it into Mrs. Fisher's front parlour.

Again Mrs. Fisher consulted the inaudible oracle.

"No, sir; we don't receive no letters here for no person of that name," she replied.

The disappointment in the young man's handsome face touched Mrs. Fisher's gentle heart.

"I'm very sorry, indeed, sir. I wish very much we could a' gave you any information," she says, through the official aperture.

"Thank you very much," he answers, desolately. "Is there any other postoffice near? Do the people send a good way to you — about what distance round?"

"Well, the furthest, I think, will be Mr. Wyke's, of Wykhampton, about four miles."

"Is there any name at all like Max, Miss Max, an old lady? I should be so extremely — I can't tell you — so very grateful." He pleads, in his extremity, "Do, do, pray ask."

She turned and consulted the unknown once more.

"There is no one — that is, no surname — here, sir, at all like Max. There's an old lady lives near here, but it can't be her. She's Miss Maximilla Medwyn."

"Maximilla? Is she an old lady?"

"Yes sir."

"Thin?"

"She is, sir." And Mrs. Fisher begins to wonder at the ardour of his inquiries, and to look at him very curiously.

"Has she been from home lately?"

"I think she was." (Here she again consults her unseen adviser.) "Yes, sir; she returned only last night."

"And where does she live, pray? In the town here — near this?" he pursues.

"In the Hermitage, please, sir; any one you meet will show it you. It is just at the end of the town. But she'll be in church at present."

"And how soon do you think it will be over — how soon will the people be coming out?"

"In about half an hour, sir."

And so, with many acknowledgments on his part, and no little surprise and conjecture on that of sedate Mrs. Fisher, who wondered what could have fired this young gentleman so about old Miss Medwyn, the conference ends, and in ten minutes more, in a somewhat less dusty state, he presents himself at the open gate of the churchyard, and reconnoitres.

Over the graves in faint gusts peals the muffled swell of the organ, and the sound of voices, sweetly and sadly, like psalmody from another world. He looks up to the gilded hand of the clock in the ivied tower, and conjectures that this must be the holy song that precedes the sermon. Devoutly he wishes the pulpit orator a quick deliverance.

He, on the whole, wisely resolves against going into the church, and, being provided with a seat, perhaps in some corner of difficult egress, whence, if he should see the objects of his pursuit, he might not be able to make his way out in time without a fuss.

At length, with a flutter at his heart, he sees the hats and bonnets begin to emerge from the porch. Taking his stand beside the gate, he watches. Not a single Christian in female garb escapes him. He sees the whole congregation pour itself out, and waits till the very dregs and sediment drop forth. Those who pray, in forma pauperis, and draw a weekly dividend out of the poors' box: old Mrs. Milders, with the enormous black straw bonnet, and the shaking head and hand; Bill Hopkins, lame of a leg, who skips slowly down on a crutch; and Tom Buzzard, blind of both eyes, a pock-marked object of benevolence, with his chin high in the air, and a long cudgel in his hand, with which he taps the curbstone, and now and then the leg of a passenger who walks the street forgetful of the blind.

The clerk comes forth demurely with a black bag, such as lawyers carry their briefs in. There is no good, Mr. Marston thinks, in waiting for the sexton.

He joins the clerk, compliments him on his church and organ, asks whether Miss Maximilla Medwyn was in church — (yes, she was) — and where the house called the Hermitage is to be found.

"You may go by the road, sir," said the clerk, "or by the path, which you'll find it shorter. Take the first stile to your right, when you turn the corner."

Alas! what is the meaning of this walk to the Hermitage? Miss Medwyn was in church; and could he not swear that, in the review just ended, he had seen distinctly every female face and figure in the congregation as it "marched past?" His Miss Max was assuredly not among them; and she and Miss Medwyn, therefore, were utterly distinct old women — ah, well-a-day!

He crosses the stile. The path traverses a narrow strip of meadow, the air is odorous with little dishevelled cocks of hay, mown only the day before; the spot cloistered in by very old and high hawthorn hedges, is silent with a monastic melancholy.

He sighs more pleasantly as he enters this fragrant solitude; beyond the stile at the other side, is the gloom of tall old trees. He is leaving the world behind him.

Butterflies are hovering up and down, along the hedge, at the sunny side of the field. A bee booms by as he stands on the second stile; it is the only sound he hears except the faint chirp of the grasshopper. He descends upon that pleasant dark-green grass that grows in shade.

Here is another field, long and narrow, silent and more gloomy than the first. Up the steep, a giant double row of lime-trees stretches, marking the line of the avenue, now carpeted over with thick grass, of the old manorhouse of Wybourne, some walls and stone-shafted windows of which, laden with ivy, and canopied by ancient trees, crown the summit. The western sun throws long dim shadows down the slope. A thick underwood straggles among the trunks of the lordly timber, and here and there a gap leaves space, in which these patriarchal trees shake their branches free, and spread a wider shadow.

In this conventual obscurity, scarcely fifty steps up the gentle slope, he sees Miss Maud, Maud Guendoline, or whatever else her name may be, standing in her homely dress. She is looking toward him, no doubt recognises him, although she makes no sign. His heart thumps wildly once or twice. He is all right again in a moment. He quickens his pace. He is near enough to see her features distinctly. She looks a little grave, he thinks, as he raises his hat.

Here is a tall fellow, great in a town-and-gown row, full of pluck, cool as marble in danger, very much unnerved at this moment, and awfully afraid of this beautiful and slender girl.

CHAPTER IX.

THE YOUNG LADY SPEAKS.

“I’m so glad, I’m so charmed — how extremely lucky I am! I had not the least hope of this. And you have made your journey quite safely?”

As he makes this little confession and inquiry, his brown handsome face and large eyes are radiant with happiness.

“Safely! oh, yes, my cousin and I are old travellers, and we never lose our way or our luggage. I am waiting here for her; she is paying a visit to — I really forget his name, farmer something or other, an old friend of hers, down there; you can see the smoke of his chimney over the hedge,” said the young lady, indicating the direction.

“And you’re not fatigued?”

“Oh, no! thanks.”

“And Miss Max quite well, I hope?” he adds, recollecting her right to an inquiry.

“Miss Max is very well, thanks,” said the young lady.

Had she blushed when she saw him? Was there not a gentle subsidence in the brilliant tint with which she met him? He thought her looking more beautiful than ever.

“I dare say you are glad to find yourself at home again?” says he, not knowing what exactly to say next.

She glanced at him as if she suspected a purpose in his question.

“Some people have no place they can call a home, and some who have are not glad to find themselves there. I’m not at home, and I’m not sorry,” she said, ever so little bitterly.

“There is a great deal of melancholy in that,” he said, in a lower tone, as if he would have been very glad to be permitted to sympathise. “Away from home, and yet no wish to return. Isn’t it a little cruel, too?”

“Melancholy or cruel, it happily concerns no one but myself,” she said, a little haughtily.

“Everything that can possibly concern your happiness concerns me,” said the young man, audaciously.

She looked for a moment offended and even angry, but “a change came o’er the spirit of her dream,” and she smiled as if a little amused.

“You seem, Mr. Marston, to give away your sympathy on very easy terms — you must have mistaken what I said. It was no confidence. It was spoken, as people in masks tell their secrets, and further because I don’t care if all the world knew it. How can you tell that I either desire or deserve pity; yours, or any other person’s? You know absolutely nothing of me.”

“I’m too impetuous; it is one of my many faults. Other fellows, wiser men, get on a thousand times better, and I have laid myself open to your reproof, and — and — disdain, by my presumption, by my daring to speak exactly as I feel. It is partly this, that the last three days — they say that happy days seem very short — I don’t know how it is, I suppose I’m different from every one else; but this day, yesterday, and today, seem to me like three weeks; I feel as if I had known you ever so long — — “

“And yet you know nothing about me, not even my name,” said the young lady, smiling on the grass near her pretty foot, and poking at a daisy with the tip of her parasol, and making its little head nod this way and that.

“I do know your name — I beg pardon, but I do; I heard Miss Max call you Maud, and I learned quite accidentally your second name yesterday.”

Miss Maud looks at him from under her dark lashes suddenly. Her smile has vanished now; she looks down again; and now it returns darkly.

“I do upon my honour, I learned it at Llanberris yesterday,” he repeated.

“Oh! then you *did* go to Llanberris; and you did not disdain to cross-examine the people about us, and to try to make out that which you supposed we did not wish to disclose?”

“You are very severe,” he began, a good deal abashed.

“I’m very merciful, on the contrary,” she said bitterly; “if I were not — but no matter. I think I can conjecture who was your informant. You made the acquaintance of a person blind of one eye, who is a detective, or a spy, or a villain of some sort, and you pumped him. Somehow, I did not think before that a gentleman was quite capable of that sort of thing.”

“But, I give you my honour, I did nothing of the kind.” He pleads earnestly. “I saw no such person, I do assure you.”

“You shall answer my questions, then,” she said as imperiously as a spoiled child; “and, first, will you speak candidly? Will you be upon honour, in no one particular, wilfully to deceive me?"

"You are the last person on earth I should deceive, upon any subject, Miss Guendoline — I hope you believe me."

"Well, why did you go to Llanberris?"

"I had hopes," he answered with a little embarrassment, "of overtaking you and Miss Max — and I — I hoped, also, that perhaps you would permit me to join in your walk — that was my only reason."

"Now, tell me my name?" said the young lady, suddenly changing her line of examination.

"Your name is, I believe — I think, you are, Miss Maud Guendoline," he answered.

She smiled again darkly at the daisy she was busy tapping on the head.

"Miss Maud Guendoline," she repeated very low; and she laughed a little to herself.

"Maud and Guendoline are two christian names," she said. "Do you really believe that I have no surname; or perhaps you believe that either of these is my surname? I need not have told you, but I do, that neither of these is the least like it. And now, why have you come here? Have you any real business here?"

"You are a very cruel inquisitor," he says, with a very real wince. "Is there any place where an idle man may *not* find himself, without well knowing why? Is your question quite fair?"

"Is your answer quite frank? Do you quite remember your promise? If we are not to part this moment, you must answer without evasion."

This young lady, in serge, spoke as haughtily as if she were a princess in a fairy-tale.

"Well, as you command me, I will, I will, indeed. I — I believe I came here, very much — entirely, indeed, from the same motive that led me to Llanberris. I could not help it, I couldn't, upon my honour! I hope you are not very angry."

It is not usual to be constrained to speak, in matters of this kind, the literal truth; and question if the young man was ever so much embarrassed in all his days.

"Mr. Marston," she said, very quietly, he fancied a little sadly, "you are, I happen to know, a person of some rank, and likely to succeed to estates, and a title — don't answer, I *know* this to be so, and I mention it only by way of preface. Now, suppose I pull off my glove, and show you a seamstress's finger, dotted all over with the needle's point; suppose I fill in what I call my holiday by hard work with my pencil and colour-box; suppose, beside all this, I have troubles enough to break the spirits of the three merriest people you know; and suppose that I have reasons for preventing any one, but Miss Max, from knowing where I am, or suspecting who I am, don't you think there is enough in my case to make you a little ashamed of having pried and followed as you are doing?"

"You wrong me — oh, *indeed*, you wrong me! You won't say that; I did, perhaps, wrong. I may have been impertinent; but the meanness of prying, you *won't* think it! All I wanted was to learn where you had gone: my crime is in following you. I did not intend that you should think I had followed. I hoped it might appear like accident. If you knew how I dread your contempt, and how I respect you, and how your reproof pains me, I am sure you would think differently, and forgive me."

I don't think there could have been more deference in his face and tones if he had been pleading before an empress.

The young lady's dark eyes for a moment looked full at him, and again down upon the little daisy at her foot; and she drew some odd little circles round it as she looked, and I think there was ever so slight a brightening of her colour while the end of her parasol made these tiny diagrams.

If a girl be only beautiful enough, and her beauty of the refined type, it is totally impossible, be her position, her dress, her associates what they may, to connect the idea of vulgarity with her. There is nothing she does or means that is not elegant. Be she what she may, and you the most conceited dog on earth, there is a superiority in her of which your inward nature is conscious, and if you see her winnowing barley, as honest Don Quixote said of his mistress, the grains are undoubtedly pearls.

Mr. Marston, in the influence of this beauty, was growing more and more wild and maudlin every moment.

"The world's all wrong," he said, vehemently; "it is always the best and the noblest that suffer most; and you say you have troubles, and you don't disdain to work, and are not ashamed of it; and I admired and respected you before, and I've learned to honour you to-day. You talk of rank: of course, there are things in its favour — some things; but there are ever so many more against it. I have little to boast even of that, and I never was so happy as when I knew nothing about it. People are always happy, I am sure, in proportion as the idea of it fades from their minds. There is but one thing worth living for — and, oh, Heaven, how I wish I were worthy of you!"

"Now, Mr. Marston, you are talking like a madman. There must be no more of that," she said, in earnest.

"I spoke the truth, straight from my heart. I believe that is always madness."

"I like truth pretty well. I speak it more boldly than most girls, I believe. But I quite agree with you, whenever one is noble one is inevitably foolish. I'm not very old, but I have heard a good deal of romantic talk in my time, as every girl does, and I despise it. It doesn't even embarrass me. If we are to talk till my cousin, Miss Max, comes back, do let it be reasonably; I shall tire of it instantly on any other terms."

"When you told me to speak truth, just now, you did not think so," says he, a little bitterly.

"Why can't you speak to me, for a few minutes, as you would to a friend? You talked just now about rank as if it should count for nothing. I don't agree with you. It is no illusion, but a cruelly hard fact. If I were the sort of girl who could like any one — I mean, make a fool of myself and fall in love — that person must be exactly of my own rank, neither above nor below it. The man who stoops is always sorry for it too late; and if he is like me, he would always think he was chosen, not for himself, but for his wealth or his title. Now, if *I* suspected that, it would make my house a jail, every hour of my life ghastly, my very self odious to me. It would make me utterly wicked; bad enough to be jealous of a human rival, though death may remove that. But to be jealous of your own circumstances, to know that you were nothing in the heart of your beloved, and they everything; that they had duped you; that your wooing was an imposture, and your partner a phantom. That anything like that should be my lot, Heaven forbid! It never shall. But were I a man, and found it so, I should load a pistol, and lie, soon enough, in my last straight bed."

"Only think how cruel and impossible this is," he said, gently, looking into her face. "I ask you to be reasonable, and consider the consequences of your pitiless theory. As to wealth, isn't there always some inequality — and do you mean that an artificial social distinction should throw asunder for ever two people — — "

"I mean to say this — I ought to beg your pardon for interrupting you, but I speak for myself — if I were a man, I could never trust the love of the woman who, being immensely poorer than I, and in an inferior place in life, consented to marry me. I never could; and the more I loved her the worse it would be."

"We are all lawgivers and law-breakers," says he.

"I'm not, for one; I observe, at least, my own precepts; and so resolved, I shall never either love or marry."

He looked at her sadly; he looked down. Even this was more tolerable than if she had said she could neither love nor marry *him.*

"I wish, God knows, that *I* could rule my heart so," he said, sadly.

"Every one who pleases can. There are good nuns and good monks. It is a matter of will and of situation. Man or girl, it is all the same; if they know they can't marry, and have a particle of reason, they see that liking and loving, except in the way of common goodwill, is not for them. They resist that demon Asmodeus, or Cupid, or call him how you please, and he troubles them no more."

"How can you talk so cruelly?" he says.

There is pain in every line of his handsome face, in the vexed light of the eyes that gaze so piercingly on her, in the uneasy grasp of his hand that leans upon the rough bark of the great tree which her shoulder touches lightly.

CHAPTER X.

FAREWELL.

As men who, in stories, have fallen in love with phantoms, Marston feels, alas! he is now in love with a beautiful image of apathy. Is the great gulf really between them, and he yearning for the impossible?

"If by any sacrifice I could ever make myself the least worthy of you; if you could even like me ever so little — — "

She laughed, but not unkindly.

"If I liked you, or were at all near liking you, you should know it by a certain sign," she says, with a smile, though a sad one.

"How? Do tell me how — how I should know it?" And he works off a great piece of the old bark with his sinewy hand as he talks.

"By my instantly leaving you," she answered. "And now we have talked sufficiently, haven't we, on this interesting theme? One day or other you'll say, if, by chance, you remember this talk under the ruins of Wybourne, 'That wise but threadbare young lady was right, and I was wrong, and it is very well there was some prudent person near to save me from an irreparable folly;' and having made this prediction, and said my say on what seems to me a very simple question, the subject is, for me, exhausted, and becomes a bore, and nothing shall tempt me to say or listen to another word upon it. What a sudden curious fog there was yesterday evening!"

Mr. Marston talked of the fog, as well as he was able, and of the old city of Chester, and whatever else this young lady pleased; he was hardly half thinking of these themes. His mind was employed, in an undercurrent, upon far more interesting matter.

"Suffering," he thinks, "is the parent of all that is fine in character. This girl thinks, resolves, and acts for herself. How different she is from the youthful daughters of luxury! What originality — what energy — what self-reliance!"

Perhaps he is right. This young lady has a will of her own; she is a little eccentric; she thinks, without much knowledge of the world, very resolutely for herself. I don’t know that she is more jealous than other women. But she is an imperious little princess.

While she is trifling in this cruel way, Miss Max comes through a little gate in the hedge at the foot of this sloping field. Urged apparently by the shortness of the time that remained, the young gentleman made one other venture.

“And do you mean to say, Miss Maud, that you, for instance, could never love a man whose rank you thought above your own?”

This was a rather abrupt transition from Carl Maria von Weber, about whose music the young lady was talking.

“You don’t keep treaties, it seems,” said the young lady; “but as only two or three minutes remain, and we may never meet again, I’ll answer you. Yes, perhaps I could. All the more readily for his superiority, all the more deeply for his sacrifices. But in some of my moods, vain or ambitious, I might marry him without caring a pin about him. There are the two cases, and I am never likely to be tempted by either, and — pray, let me say the rest — if I were, no one should ever suspect it, and I should, assuredly, accept neither.”

“You said we were never likely to meet again,” said the young man. “Is that kind? What have I done to deserve so much severity?”

He glanced down the slope. Miss Max was toiling up. She was stumbling over the twisted roots that spread under the great trees, and seeing a man conversing with her young cousin, she had put up her parasol to keep the slanting sunlight from her eyes, and aid her curious scrutiny.

She could not reach them well in less than four minutes more.

Four minutes still. Precious interval.

“You go to the ball at Wymering?” she asked in a tone that had something odd in it; a strange little sigh, and yet how much apathy.

“Anywhere — yes, certainly,” he replies, in hot haste. “Is there a chance — the least hope?”

He remembered that she was not a very likely person to figure at a ball, and so he ended, “I have often intended going there; any hope of your being in the neighbourhood of Wymering about that time?”

“You see, I don’t pretend to be a great person. No fairy has bedizened me for an occasion. I have no magnificence to dissolve at a fated hour,” she said, with a sad little laugh. “Those balls are not such ill-natured things after all. They help poor girls who work at their needles. Yes, I always go to that, at least as far as the cloak-room.”

“Wherever you go, Miss Maud, there will be no one like you; no one like you, anywhere, in all the world; and remember — though you can’t like me now — how I adore you.”

“Stop — don’t talk so to me,” she replied. “You are rich. I am, what I am; and language that might be only audacious if we were equals, is insult now.”

“Good Heavens! won’t you understand me? I only meant, I can’t help saying it, that I care to win no one else on earth, and never shall. If you but knew — — “

“What need I know more than I do? I believe, rather from your looks than from your words, that you talk your folly in good faith. But I have heard too much of that, for one day. One thing more I have to say, you must leave this immediately; and, if from Miss Max, or any other person, you try to make out anything more, ever so little, about me, about my story, name, business, than I have told you, you never speak to me one word more. That’s understood. Here now is my cousin.”

Miss Max, smiling pleasantly, said:

“Dear me, Mr. Marston, who could have fancied that you would have been here! I could not think who it could be, as I came up the hill. Were you at Wybourne Church?”

“Oh, no! I wai — — “ He was going to say, “waited outside,” but he corrected himself. “I arrived too late. A pretty little church it seems to be.”

“Oh! quite a beautiful little church, inside. Some one showed you the path here, I suppose; those up there are the ruins of old Wybourne Hall: what an awful fog we had last night! Do you know, it was really quite frightful going through it at the fearful speed we did. You must come and drink tea with us, Mr. Marston.”

“No, dear, we must not have any one to tea tonight; I have particular reasons, and besides, Mr. Marston has to leave this immediately,” said Miss Maud, inhospitably.

He looked at her ruefully.

“You told me you were going immediately?” said the young lady, gently, but with a slight emphasis.

"But I dare say you can manage to put it off for an hour or so, Mr. Marston — can't you?" asked Miss Max.

He glanced at the inexorable Miss Maud, and he read his doom in that pretty face.

"I'm afraid — it is so very kind of you — but I'm really afraid it is quite impossible," he answers.

"I don't like to bore you, Mr. Marston; but if you *can* stay to tea, just an hour or two — can't you manage that? I shall be *so* glad," urged the old lady.

"Mr. Marston, I believe, made a promise to be at another place this evening," said the girl; "and Mr. Marston says he prides himself on keeping his word."

Though she was looking down at the grass, and said this with something like a smile, and in a careless way, Mr. Marston dares not disobey the reminder it conveys.

"That is perfectly true, what Miss Maud says. I made that promise to a person whom I dare not disappoint, whom I respect more than I can describe," and he added in a low tone to Maud, "whom it is my pride to obey."

"Goodbye, Mr. Marston," she says, with a smile, extending her pretty hand very frankly.

How he felt as he touched it!

"Goodbye, Miss Max," he says, turning with a sigh and a smile to that lady.

"Goodbye, since so it must be, and I hope we may chance to meet again, Mr. Marston," said the old lady, kindly giving him her thin old hand.

"So do I — so do I — thank you, very much," says he, and he pauses, looking as if he was not sure that he had not something more to say.

"Goodbye, Miss Max," he repeats, "and goodbye," he says again to the girl, extending his hand.

Once more, for a second or two, he holds her hand in his, and then he finds himself walking quickly under the straggling hawthorns. The sprays are rattling on his hat as he crosses the stile. He is striding through the first narrow field over which his walk from the church had been. Lifeless and dimmed the hedges are, and the songs of the birds all round are but a noise which he scarcely hears. There is but one thought in his brain and heart, as he strides through this cloistered solitude, as swiftly as if his rate of travel could shorten the time between this and the ball at Wymering.

This Mr. Marston was not so much a fool as not to know that, being a man of honour, he had taken a very serious step. The young lady — for be her troubles and distresses what they might, a lady she surely was — whom he had pursued so far, and to whom he had spoken in language quite irrevocable, had now, in her small hand, his fate and fortunes.

There seemed to walk beside him, along his grassy path, an angry father, and the sneers and gabble of kindred, who had a right to talk, were barking and laughing at his heels. He knew very well what he had to count upon, and had known it all along. But it did not daunt him, either then or now.

Here was his first love, and an idol not created by his fancy, but, undoubtedly, the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. A first love devouring material so combustible; a generous fellow, impetuous, sanguine, dominated by imagination, and who had delivered eloquent lectures upon the folly of political economy, and the intrinsic tyranny of our social system.

These things troubled him, no doubt; but thus beset, he had no more notion of turning about than had honest Christian and Hopeful as they plodded through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. He felt, I dare say, pretty much as a knight when riding into the lists to mortal combat for the mistress of his heart.

He held himself now, so far as his own personal case went, irrevocably betrothed to his beautiful but cruel mistress; and so far from halting between two opinions, if what had passed this evening had been still unsaid, he would have gone round the world for a chance of speaking it.

Literally abiding by his promise, he left Wybourne as suddenly as he came.

Miss Max looked after him as the underwood hid him from view, with the somewhat blank and ruminating countenance which belongs to the lady about whose ears a favourite castle in the air has just tumbled.

"Well," said she, turning to her young companion, nodding, and looking wise, "that gentleman is gone on a fool's errand, I venture to say. Have you any idea where he's gone?"

"Not the least."

“I liked him very much. I hope he’s not going to make a fool of himself. I really thought he liked you. He is so full of romance. See how you blush!”

“I always do when I think I shall, and when I particularly wish not,” she said, with a smile, but a little vexed.

“Well, I suspect, from what he said, that he is going to ask some young lady an interesting question; or, perhaps, he is actually engaged; goodness knows.”

Miss Max was walking under the lordly trees towards home and tea, with her young cousin beside her.

“That’s a blackbird,” she says, listening for a moment. “What a delicious evening!”

“Has your mother set out again upon her usual mysterious journey?” inquired Miss Max.

“I fancy not — not yet, at least,” answered the girl, listlessly.

“Well, I may say to you, I can’t understand your mother the least, my dear.”

The girl made no answer: she was looking up, with a listless and sad face, toward the fleecy clouds that now glowed in the tint of sunset, and the rooks, that make no holiday of Sunday, winging homeward, high in air, with a softened cawing.

CHAPTER XI.

ROYDON.

Next day, about noon, the young lady, with an embrace, and a little shower of kisses, took a loving farewell of her cousin, stepped into a fly, with her boxes on the roof, and, with a sad heart, began her journey homeward.

It was a good way, some twenty miles and upwards. She had borrowed Miss Max's novel, grew tired of it a dozen times, and resumed it as often, and as she neared home, with the restlessness that accompanies the conclusion of a journey, she threw her book on the opposite cushion, and looked out of the window, greeting, as it were, the familiar objects that in succession presented themselves to view.

Now they are passing the windmill on the little hillock overlooking the road. The day is sultry. There is not a breath to stir its sails, and the great arms stand bare and motionless. Mill and hillock glide backward, and are gone.

The road descends a little. They are between files of old elms. It grows broader; there stands the old village tree, with a rude wooden bench encircling its trunk. The time-honoured tree sails back, and is lost, and quaint old diamond-latticed houses float into view, and pass. Here and there a familiar face is seen at door or window, or peeping from the shade over the hatch; and the girl, from the fly-window, nods and smiles. They are now midway in the quiet little street, but they have not yet reached the home that she loves not.

At the other side are the stained walls of an antique church; the gilded vane, the grey tombstones, spread over the thick emerald grass, and the yew-tree, go slanting off, hurry-scurry, as the fly-wheels whirl, by a wide circuit, through the piers of a great iron gate, which has just given egress to an oldfashioned family coach.

It is going the other way. It does not pass her. It and its liveried footmen are fast getting into perspective under the boughs of the trees that line the road. Through the window of the fly, as it turns, she has a momentary peep.

"Brown and gold," she says, as listlessly she leans back again in her humble conveyance. "The Tinterns. And so here I am, a black sheep, a scamp, and a reprobate, come home again, as curses do!"

There was not much remorse, but a good deal of bitterness in her tone, and the girl yawned, with her fingertips to her lips, and looked for a moment a little peevish.

There is what is termed technically an "approach" to the house up to which she is driving, a serpentine road, two miles long at least, through a wooded demesne. But, wisely, the old owner of Roydon, when consulting his new lights, and laying out, according to picturesque principles, the modern approach, would not allow them to obliterate or alter the old avenue of the mansion — broad and straight, something more than a quarter of a mile long, with a double line of trees at each side, wide enough apart to admit the entire front of the building.

It is up this broad, straight avenue she is driving now.

A lazy man, with a mind at ease, entering here for the first time, looking down the solemn lines of enormous boughs to the old-world glories that close the perspective, escaping from the vulgar world of dust and rattle into shorn grass and clear, silent air, and the luxurious and melancholy grandeur of all that surrounds him, might fancy himself in the "delicious land" once visited by the enchanted Sir Jeofry.

In the distance rises a grand Elizabethan structure — broad, florid, built of white stone, yellowed and many-tinted by time. A vague effect fills the eye of pinnacles and bell-mouthed chimneys, and curved and corniced gables, balustrades, a front variously indented and projecting; multitudes of stone-shafted windows, deep-curved scrolls, and heraldic shields and supporters; a broad flight of steps, and then another balustrade running at both sides the whole length of the base. All this rises before her, with its peculiar combination of richness, lightness, and solidity, basking drowsily in the summer sun.

As you approach, you discern a wide courtyard in front, with a second line of balustrade nearer to you.

On the summit of this, here and there, are peacocks sunning themselves, some white, others plumed in their proper gold and purple. They nod their crested heads as they prune their plumage, and hang their long tails to the grass, disturbing the slumbrous air, now and then, with a discordant scream.

As you draw nearer still, before you enter the court, two oblong ponds reveal their spacious waters, at the right and the left; you may hear the shower of the fountains playing in the middle, snowy coronals of water-lilies are floating near their banks, and swans are grandly gliding round and up and down.

Now the homely "fly" is in the courtyard. A great Russian dog lies sunning himself on the dazzling gravel, near the steps, and whacks the ground twice or thrice with his tail, in lazy recognition, as he sees the young lady look from the window of her homely vehicle.

"I suppose that is the way of the world, Bevis," she says; "you know whom to get up for."

Her attention is arrested by a carriage waiting a little way from the steps.

"That's the dean," comments the young lady as she sees that very neat equipage, at the window of which a tall footman, in light blue and gold livery, with flowered hair, is standing. He has just descended the broad flight of steps under the great shield which overhangs the door, and which displays in high relief all the heraldic insignia of that branch of the Vernons. He is delivering a message from Lady Vernon — Barbara Vernon — I give you the christian name of this famous widow at once, as it is mentioned often in the sequel — to an old lady sitting in the carriage.

Old Miss Wyvel, the dean's sister, as usual, with her feet on a pan of hot water, sits in the carriage reading her novel, and nursing her rheumatism, while her brother, the dean, makes his visit, with an apology from her for not coming in.

"We'll not mind Miss Wyvel this time. She'll be all the happier that I don't disturb her, and so shall I."

Another tall footman, seeing who is in the fly, descends the broad steps quickly, and opens the door.

"The Dean of Chartry is here?" inquires the young lady. "How long has he been here?"

"About ten minutes, please, miss."

"Any other visitor?"

"No one, miss, at present, please."

"Where is her ladyship?"

"In the library, please, miss."

“Will you tell somebody, please, to tell my maid that I want her in my room?” said the young lady.

And she ran up the steps lightly, and entered the great hall. It runs back into space, almost into darkness, with oak panelled walls and tall pictures. She turned to the right, where the broad oak staircase ascends.

Up she runs. There are more portraits in this house, one must suppose, than the owners well know what to do with, for you can hardly turn a corner without meeting a gentleman with rosettes in his shoes, a ruffround his neck, and a rapier by his side, or a lady in the toilet of Queen Elizabeth. All ages, indeed, of English costume, from the court of Harry the Eighth down to George the Second, are represented here; and, I suspect, there is now not a soul on earth who could tell you the names of all these magnificos and high dames, who are fain to lurk behind corners, or stand in their frames, with their backs against the walls of galleries, passed, back and forward, by gabbling moderns, who don’t care twopence about them or their finery.

Off one of these galleries the young lady enters her own room — stately, comfortable, luxurious — looks around with a goodnatured recognition, and has hardly begun to take off her dusty things, and prepare to make her toilet, when her maid passes in through the dressing-room door, smiling.

CHAPTER XII.

BARBARA VERNON.

By no means old is this maid. Some six-and-thirty years, perhaps. She has carried Maud in her arms when she was a little thing, and dressed her; sat by her bed and told her fairy-tales in the nursery.

"Welcome home, Miss Maud," smiles Jones.

"And how have you been?" says the young lady, taking her by the hand, and kissing her affectionately on one cheek and the other. "As for me, I've been flourishing. I almost think, old Jones, if I had only had you with me, I should never have come back again."

"La, miss, how you talk!"

"I've been leading a wild, free life. Did you ever see so much dust, Jones, on any human being?"

"Indeed, you are in a pickle, miss. Charles said you came in a fly with one horse. I wonder her ladyship did not send a carriage to Wybourne to meet you."

"Mamma has other things and people to think about," said the young lady, a little bitterly. "But I dare say if I had asked I should have had it; though, indeed, I shouldn't have liked it."

"Your hand's all sunburnt, miss."

"I've been sketching; and I never could sketch with a glove on."

"Well, dear me, it *was* a fancy going in these queer things! Why, I would not be seen in such things myself, miss, much less you. You'd best bundle off that dress, miss, as quick as you can. La! it is thick with dust. Phiew!"

"Help me, Jones, help me." And as she continued her toilet she asked: "Is mamma yet talking of making her usual journey?"

"Not a word, miss, of any one stirring yet. Norris would know. She has not heard nothing."

"The Tinterns' carriage was here today — I passed it at the gate. Do you know who called?"

"Mr. Tintern and Mrs. They was here nigh half an hour. Leave them alone for 'aving their eyes about 'em, miss. There ain't a tack druv in the house, or a slate loose, but it’s known down at the Grange before it’s noticed here.”

“I think, Jones, they reckon upon — don’t pull my hair.” By this time she was sitting in her dressing-gown before the glass, with her dark, golden-brown hair hanging over her shoulders in such profusion, that it seemed incredible how such masses could find growing room in one little head. Jones was brushing out its folds.

“I’m not pulling it, indeed, miss,” she protested.

“Yes, you were, Jones. Don’t ever contradict me. Has either of my special horrors — Mr. Smelt — he’s the clergyman or dissenter, something in black, the sleek fat man that comes so often — has he been here since?”

“He may ‘ave, miss; but — — “

“But you don’t know. Well, the other — Doctor Malkin?”

“Oh, dear yes, miss. He was here, please, on Friday last.”

“You’re sure?”

“Yes, miss, please. Her ladyship sent for me to the shield room. She only asked whether I could remember for certain, miss, what day you were to return ‘ome to Wybourne with Miss Medwyn.”

“Well?”

“Well, miss, she had it down in a book, and read it to me, and I said ’twas right. You said early — the seventeenth.”

“And did she say anything more?”

“No, please, miss, nothing more. Only she said, ‘That’s all, you need not wait.’”

“And what about Doctor Malkin?”

“He was showed in, miss, please, just as I was going out. And I heard her order Edward not to let any visitor in; and that was all, please.”

“Do you know the name of this place, parish, and county, Jones?” says the young lady, carelessly.

“Well, I ought to by this time, miss,” laughs Jones.

“I don’t think you do. The name of this place is Bœotia, and it is famous for its dulness, and Doctor Malkin is one of the six inhabitants who can think and talk a little. He is an agreeable man, and — put a pin there — an unpleasant-looking man. I like talking to him; but I think, on the whole, I should not be sorry if he were laid in the Red Sea, as poor nurse Barnwell used to say. What do you think of him?”

“That is a gentleman, Heaven forgive me, I can’t abide, miss,” answered Jones. “I hate his face. I always feel in low spirits after I see it.”

“Well, anything more?” continues Miss Maud. “When are the people coming to hear grandpapa’s will read?”

“Tomorrow, I believe, miss. But, as yet, Mr. Eccles has not got no orders about it. He said so after dinner in the ‘ousekeeper’s room yesterday.”

“And is there anything going to be — a tea and plumcake for the school-children, or a meeting of missionaries, or anything of any kind?”

“Nothing, miss, please, as I ‘ave heard of, but — — “

“You’ll knock down that china, Jones.”

“What, miss?”

“My ring — my Dresden dancers.”

“Oh! The little man and woman with one arm akimbo and the other up. I saw them all the time.”

“Well, take great care. I’m sure I shall kill you if you break them. You were going to tell me there is nothing going to be, except something — what is it?”

“Oh! I know; yes, miss, the conseckeration of the monument in the church. That will be tomorrow evening, miss.”

“Oh! Really? Well, that *was* a whim! Give me those earrings. No, *not* those — the others; not those either. Don’t you see the little ones. Thanks. Yes. I must run down and see mamma, I suppose, though I’m very sure she doesn’t care if she did not see my face for a year, or — for ever.”

“La, miss! you must not talk like that. Your mamma’s a very religious lady — the most so, as every one knows, in the county — I might say in all England — and it’s just her way; the same with every one, a little bit high and distant like; but it ain’t fit, miss, you should say that.”

“No, Jones, we can’t agree, mamma and I. Give me that small enamel brooch — the little one with the lady’s head set in gold. Thanks. She does not like me” — the young lady was standing before the glass, and I dare say was well pleased, for she looked splendidly handsome— “and the reason is just this, every one else flatters her. You and all the other sneaks. I never do, although I am sometimes a little afraid of her like the rest. I’m nervous, I don’t know why; but it’s not cowardice. I never flatter her.”

“No, miss, it ain’t that; it’s only you don’t try her. You won’t go the right way about it.”

“There’s no use, Jones — you only vex me. I’ve often felt that I would give the world to throw my arms about her neck and kiss her; but somehow I can’t; she won’t let me. Perhaps she tries; but she can’t love me; and so it always was, as far back as I can remember, and so it will always be, and I’ve made up my mind to it; it can’t be helped.”

So Miss Maud Vernon walked along the gallery, and went down the broad stairs, passing many ancestors who stood by, at the right and the left, against the wall, as she did so, and singing low to herself as she went, with a clear and rich voice, an Italian air quite new to the solemn people in the picture-frames, at whom she looked listlessly, thinking neither of them nor of her song as she passed by.

Mr. Tarpey, the groom of the chambers, was fussing with the decorations of the hall as she passed.

“Can you tell me where her ladyship is?” she inquired.

“Her ladyship, I think, is still in the library. Please, shall I see, miss?”

“Don’t mind. I’ll try myself. Is her ladyship alone?”

“I think so, miss.”

He crossed the hall, and opened the second door from the great entrance, which stood wide open, in this sultry weather, by Lady Vernon’s command, the two tall footmen, in their blue and gold liveries, keeping guard there.

Maud glanced through the open hall-door as she crossed the hall; she would have been rather pleased to see a carriage approaching; she did not care for a very long interview with her mother; but there was no sign of a visitor in sight.

“Thanks, I’ll go alone,” she said, dispensing with the escort of Mr. Tarpey; and passing through two spacious rooms, she reached the door of the library. Lady Vernon treated that apartment as her private cabinet, and from her childhood Maud had been accustomed to respect it.

Maud has no liking for the coming interview. She would, now, have liked to put it off, and as she crosses the Turkey carpet that muffles her tread, her step slackens. She stops at the door and raises her hand to knock, but she doesn’t knock; she hesitates; she has a great mind to turn back, and wait till her mother sends for her. But, perhaps, that would not do. She has been at home nearly an hour, and it is time she should ask Lady Vernon how she does.

She knocks at the door, and hears a clear voice call “Come in.”

She turns the handle accordingly, and steps into a spacious room, hung with gilded leather; the blinds are down, the sun by this time shining on this side of the house, and a mellow, cathedral-like dimness prevails. There are three or four antique bookcases, carved in ponderous relief, through the leaves and scrolls of which are grinning grotesque and ugly faces, rich with a cynical Gothic fancy, and overhung by fantastic cornices, crowned with the heraldic shield and supporters of the Vernons. They are stored with gilded volumes; portraits hang here, as in other parts of this rich old house, and cold marble busts gleam on pedestals from the corners.

Sitting at a table in the middle of this room is a very handsome woman of forty years or upwards, with skin smooth as ivory, and jet-black hair, divided in the middle, and brought down over her white temples and small pretty ears smoothly in the simple classic fashion, now out of date. Her finely pencilled black eyebrows, and her features with a classic elegance of outline, carry an expression of cold hauteur. Her slight embonpoint becomes her grave but rich dress, which is that of a woman of rank and wealth, by no means indifferent to the impression produced by externals.

This lady, with one handsome foot upon a stool, and a desk before her, is in a leisurely way writing a letter, over which she bends just the least thing in the world. Her pose is decidedly elegant.

The lady glances slightly toward the door. Her large grey eyes, under their long lashes, rest for a moment on her daughter. She does not smile; the pen is still in her fingers. She says, simply, in her clear and rather sweet tones, “Oh, Maud? I will speak to you in a few minutes, when I have put this into its envelope. Won’t you sit down?” And so she continues to write.

The young lady flashes back a rather fiery glance in return for this cool welcome, and does not sit down, but walks instead, with a quick step, to the window, pulls the blind aside, and looks out perseveringly.

CHAPTER XIII.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

Lady Vernon having enclosed and addressed her letter, added it to the little pack of about six others at her left. Then looking up, she said:

"So, you are quite well, Maud, and you arrived at a quarter past three?"

"Quite well, mamma, thanks. I suppose it was about that time; and I hope you are very well."

"I am well, thanks; and I wished to mention that when you, as you told me, fixed the seventeenth for your return to the Hermitage with Maximilla Medwyn, I was under a mistake, and did not see, till too late, that the seventeenth would be Sunday; and I should not have given my sanction to your travelling for pleasure on Sunday. I wished to mention that particularly. I told Maximilla I should be happy to receive her any day this week. Is she coming do you know?"

"She would have come with me this morning, but she had so much to say to her servants, and so many things to arrange, that she could not leave home till after dinner at soonest, so she hopes to be here at ten tonight; and if anything should happen to prevent her, you are to have a note, by post, in the morning."

"She will be in time, at all events, for the bishop's sermon tomorrow," says Lady Vernon. "The monument will be uncovered at five o'clock. The bishop arrives at six. He has to consecrate the new church at Eastover, before he comes here, and then he goes on, after his sermon, to Wardlake, for the evening meeting of the church missions."

Miss Vernon is hardly so much interested in all this as her mother is, although even she recites the programme a little dryly. But dry as is her recital, it is not often that she volunteers so much information to her daughter.

"And what can the bishop have to say about the monument, to lead him so much out of his way, poor old man?"

"The bishop seems to think that his having been the dearest friend that Mr. Howard had on earth, constitutes some little claim upon him," says

Lady Vernon, haughtily, in a cold tone, and with her fine grey eyes fixed on her daughter.

"Oh! I did not know," says Maud, a little apologetically.

"No, of course you did not; you seldom do know, or care to know anything that interests me," says the elder lady, with her fine brows a little higher.

Maud coloured suddenly, with an impatient movement of her head. She was not sitting down, only standing near the table, drumming on it with her finger-tops, and she felt for a moment as if she could have stamped.

She answered, however, without any show of excitement except in her brilliant colour and eyes.

"I did not know, mamma, that this monument to Mr. Howard interested you particularly."

"No, not particularly," said handsome Lady Vernon, sternly, for she was one of those persons who don't brook contradiction, and who interpret discussion as a contradiction. "Mr. Howard was the best vicar we ever had here, or ever shall have; and, in his way, a benefactor to this parish. The bishop, who admired and loved him, as much as one man could another, suggested that for such a man, in the field of his labours, having lain in his grave more than a score of years unrecorded by a single line, it was time that a monument should be raised. He wished a beautiful one, and so I believe it is. His name is first in the list of subscribers, and it is his idea, and it is he who has taken a lead in it; and, therefore, though interested, I am not particularly interested in the personal degree which your emphasis would imply."

"Well, all I can say is, I'm very unlucky, mamma."

"I think you are unlucky," replied her mother, coldly, turning her head slowly away, and looking at the pendule over the chimney.

"Have you anything to ask me, Maud?" inquired Lady Vernon, after a little interval.

"Nothing, thanks, mamma," said Maud, with her head a little high. "I'm afraid I have bored you coming in when you were busy. But having been away ten days, I thought it would have been wrong, or at least odd, if I had not come to see you to ask you how you were."

"So it would," said Lady Vernon. "Will you touch the bell?" She did so.

"Well, mamma, I suppose there's nothing more?"

"Nothing, Maud."

Maud's heart swelled with bitterness as she left the room, and shut the door gently.

"No father, no mother, no near relation!" she thought, impetuously. "I love Cousin Max better than fifty such mammas. There are girls who would hate her. But I can't. Why am I cursed with this cruel yearning for her love? And she can't love me — she won't have my love. I think she wishes me to hate her."

When Maud was a little thing, as far back as she could remember, her idea of a "mamma" was an embodiment of power, and something to be afraid of. Seldom seen except when the spirited little girl became unmanageable; then there would be a rustling of silk and a flutter of lace in the nursery, and the handsome figure, the proud still face and large grey eyes were before her. This phantom instantly cowed her. It always looked severe, and never smiled, and its sweet cold tones were dreadful. The child's instinct could see dislike, hidden from maturer observers, in those fine eyes, and never heard a tender note in that harmonious voice.

Miss Maud passed out through the suite of rooms, and encountered Lady Vernon's footman going in to take her letters.

In the hall, serious Mr. Eccles, the gentlemanlike butler, was passing upon his business with the quiet importance and gravity of office.

The young lady had a word to say.

"Is any one expected to dinner to-day?"

"Yes, miss — five; the vicar and Mrs. Foljambe; his curate, the Reverend Mr. Doody; and Mr. Puntle and Doctor Malkin. There was an invitation for Captain Bamme; but he is absent on militia business, and it is thought not probable, miss, he will return in time."

Anything was better than a tête-à-tête with Lady Vernon; a situation which Lady Vernon herself seemed to deprecate as strongly as her daughter, for it did not occur usually six times in a year.

CHAPTER XIV.

GUESTS AND NEIGHBOURS.

When, that evening, Miss Maud entered the vast drawingroom, it was some minutes past eight. The outer world was in twilight, but lamps glowed faintly here, upon the thick silken curtains, and lofty mirrors, and pictures, and treasures of china, and upon figures of people assembled for dinner. The little party was almost lost in the great void, as Miss Maud made her journey, over a comparatively gloomy desert of thick carpet, to the group illuminated by the soft light of the lamps.

Tall old Mr. Foljambe, the vicar, was entertaining Lady Vernon with his bland and dignified conversation. Doctor Malkin would have liked that post, but the vicar came first, and seized it.

The vicar is a well-connected old gentleman, related, in some remote cousinship, to the late Sir Amyrald Vernon, and knows very well what he is about. Has not Lady Vernon, the relict of that lamented kinsman, two extremely desirable livings in her gift, besides smaller things? And, old as the Reverend Mr. Foljambe is, are not the incumbents of these fat fields of usefulness older still? Is not the Reverend Mr. Cripry eighty-nine? And is not the venerable Doctor Shanks ninety-two, by the records of Trinity College, Cambridge? Compared with these mature ornaments of the Church, the vicar justly feels himself a stripling; and being a young fellow, not yet in his seventy-first year, he may well complain of a selfish longevity which is sacrificing the interests of two important parishes which require a vigorous ministration.

The vicar's shrewd old eye, from its wrinkled corners, observes Doctor Malkin's wistful look, and knows from experience that he likes to take possession of Lady Vernon's ear, and has suffered more than once from the tenacity with which he keeps it, when he can, to himself.

"Nothing of the kind shall happen tonight," thinks the vicar, who, having a handsome bit of money in consols, has sold out a hundred pounds to invest in a subscription to the monument of his predecessor, the Reverend

William Howard — a good work in which Lady Vernon takes a warm interest, as she always does in anything she takes up.

The vicar has her fast upon this, and the doctor thinks he can read sly triumph in his eye, as, once or twice, it glides over to him, and their glances meet for a moment.

"Well, doctor, and how's all wid you?" inquires the Reverend Michael Doody, with a grin that shows his fine white fangs, and a trifling clap of his enormous hand on the doctor's shoulder. "Elegant, I suppose?"

The doctor's slight frame quivers under the caress of the cleric, but he smiles politely; for who knows what influence this new importation may grow to in this part of the world?

"I'm very well, thanks — as well as a fellow, so much knocked about as a doctor, can be in this hot weather."

The doctor is a pale man, a little bald, with a high pale nose, a long upper lip, a receding chin, very blue, and a pair of fine dark eyes, set too close together, and with a slight obliquity which spoils them a great deal, and does not improve his countenance; his shirt-front is beautified with needlework, and his rather tall choker, for his neck is long, is made up by his exemplary laundress with a snowy smoothness worthy of the neatness and decision with which the doctor ties it.

"My governor, the vicar, has Lady Vernon fast by the button," continued Mr. Doody, with something like a wink. "She must be a very conscientious woman, to listen so well to her clergy. He was talking about Vicar Howard's monument when I was near them, just now."

The doctor laughed and shrugged, and Mr. Doody thought for a moment he squinted a little more than usual.

Our good vicar has but one subject at present," says the doctor, who gives Mr. Doody, as a stranger, credit for a good deal of waggish penetration; "You have heard of the clarionet-man who had but one tune, and played it always through the keyhole, till it answered its purpose, and extracted a gratuity; and he made it pay very well, I believe."

"And raything hard, doctor, that you can't get your turn at the keyhole, eh, my boy?"

And the reverend gentleman utters a stentorian giggle, and pokes his finger on the doctor's ribs.

"I don't quite see, Mr. Doody," says Doctor Malkin, with a very creditable smile, all things considered.

"Boo! docthor, my darlin' fellow, don't be comin' the simpleton over us. Don't we both know that every man in your profession likes to stand well with the women? And here you are, and if it was to make a man of ye, not a word can ye edge in. It's too hard, docthor, that the man of death should be blocked out by a tombstone. Be the powers, it ain't fair! He's takin' her all over the monument; up on the pedestal, down in the vault! It's an unfair advantage. But, never mind, my boy, ye'll be even with him yet; ye'll attind him in his next indisposition."

This pleasant banter was accompanied by a running explosion of giggles; and while the tall and rather handsome Irishman is enjoying his little bit of farce, with intense relish, the vicar and Lady Vernon are discoursing thus:

"I thought, Lady Vernon, you would like, of course, in the most private way in the world, to collect opinion upon the monument; so, as he draws very nicely, my wife says, I allowed my curate, Mr. Doody, just in the strictest privacy to ourselves, you understand, a peep at it, for about five minutes, this morning. He thinks it very fine indeed — very fine — as, indeed, every one who has seen it does. There is, I fancy, but one opinion. I wish so much, Lady Vernon, I might venture to invite you to pay my church — yours, indeed I might more properly call it — a visit-to-morrow, to look at what I may term your beautiful gift to the sacred edifice."

"No, thanks; I shall see it time enough."

"But, as it owes its existence, Lady Vernon, to your extremely munificent subscription — — "

"I thought it was due, as the bishop said, to a very good clergyman," says Lady Vernon, quietly cutting it short; "and I gave what I thought right. That is all. And so your curate draws?"

"I'm nothing of a draughtsman myself, but my wife understands it, and says he draws extremely nicely."

"That tall young man, is he?"

"I ought to have introduced him, Lady Vernon. It was an omission — an inexcusable omission — a very inexcusable omission." He was trying to catch his curate's eye all this time. "He has been with me only a week, and yesterday he did duty at Loxton. You remember, Lady Vernon, you thought an Irishman would answer best."

"The bishop says he has found them extremely energetic, and for very hard work unrivalled."

"He's a very rough diamond, I must admit. But he's a convert from Romanism, and a very laborious young man, and a good scholar."

He had beckoned Mr. Doody to approach, and accordingly that herculean labourer in the apostolic field drew near, a head and shoulders above all the other guests. The tall old vicar alone was sitting.

"Allow me, Lady Vernon, to present my curate, Mr. Doody," says the vicar, rising to do the honours.

Mr. Doody is not the least overcome by the honour. His fine eyes have examined the lady, of whom he has heard so much, but of whom he has not had so near a view before, with the grave curiosity with which he would have scrutinised an interesting piece of waxwork.

The florid young man, with black whiskers and glossy black head, makes his best bow gravely, and inquires unexpectedly:

"How are ye, ma'am? A good evening, Lady Vernon." A form of salutation with which it is his wont as it were, to clench an introduction.

Lady Vernon does not mind answering or reciprocating these rather oddly placed greetings, but talks a few sentences with him, and then turns again to the vicar, and the curate after a little wait, turns on his heel, and seeks employment for his active mind elsewhere.

Let me not be imagined to present an average Irish curate. Mr. Doody is almost as great a prodigy at home as anywhere else. His father, with his own hands, in his bare shins, with a dhuddeen stuck in his caubeen, cuts turf in the bog near the famous battle-field of Aghrim. He is not a bit ashamed of his father or his belongings. He holds him to be as good a gentleman as himself — being the lineal descendant of the O'Doody of Tyr Doody — and himself as good as the primate. He sends his mother a present every now and then, but the farm is well stocked; and his parents are, according to primitive ideas, wealthy people in their homely way. His lapse into Protestantism was, of course, a sore blow. And when Doctor Pollard's wife mentioned to the priest, with perhaps a little excusable triumph, that Michael Doody had embraced the principles of the Reformation, his reverence scratched his tonsure, and said:

"I'm not a bit surprised, ma'am, for he was always an impudent chap; but there was some good in the boy, also; and go where he may at present, so sure as I’m a Catholic, he’ll die one.”

CHAPTER XV.

DINNER.

Old Mr. Foljambe takes precedence, at dinner, in right of his cloth, connexions, and antiquity, and has taken lady Vernon into the dining-room, and converses assiduously with that great lady.

Maud finds herself between the curate and Doctor Malkin. Middle-aged and agreeable Captain Bamme resents an arrangement which isolates him, and eyes the curate with disgust.

Captain Bamme does not count age by years. He knows better. As long as a fellow looks young, and feels young, he *is* young. The captain smiles more than any two other men in the parish. He is short and square, but he skips and swaggers like an officer and a gentleman. Who can talk to a girl like Charley Bamme? Who understands that mixture of gaiety and gallantry — with now and then a dash of tenderness — like this officer? To be sure he's not a marrying man; every one knows that. It is out of the question. The captain laughs with a melancholy scorn over his scanty pittance. A fourth son, by Jove! and put to a poor profession. But is he not the life and soul of a picnic, and the darling of the ladies?

"I've been quartered in Ireland," says little Captain Bamme, under cover of the surrounding buzz, to his more fortunate neighbour, Doctor Malkin. "I've been in every part of it; I have talked to Irishmen of every rank and occupation, but such a brogue as that, I give you my honour, I never heard. Why, they wouldn't have him to preach to a congregation of carmen in Dublin. I never heard anything like it. How did old Foljambe light on him? I really think, when people bring fellows like that to a place like this, where people *must* know him, and, for anything you or I can tell, that fellow may spend the rest of his days down here — by Jove! it's pleasant — they ought to be prepared to give an account of him. I suppose Foljambe can say what he is? You never met such an insufferable creature. I never spoke to the fellow before in my life; and he came up to me in the hall here making some vulgar personal joke, I give you my honour."

“He seems to succeed very well,” says the doctor, “notwithstanding. I suppose there’s something interesting in it, though you and I can’t perceive it.”

“Upon my soul, I can’t.”

And with this declaration he turns to Mrs. Foljambe, who is at his right, determined to make her account for her intolerable curate.

Mrs. Foljambe is tall, deaf, and melancholy — a woman very nearly useless, and quite harmless.

“I was saying just now to Doctor Malkin,” begins the captain, “that I’ve been, at different times, quartered in Ireland — — “

A footman here presents at the captain’s right hand an entrée which he loves, and on which he pounces.

“A daughter in Ireland?” repeats the drowsy voice of Mrs. Foljambe, turning her dull and small grey eyes upon him, with a heavy sigh.

“No, ha, ha! not yet. No. Time enough for that, I hope. I’m not married, Mrs. Foljambe — thanks, that will do. I say, I have been a little puzzled by your curate’s accent.” He was speaking low, but with measured articulation; for although the Reverend Michael Doody’s voice is loud and busy at the other side of the table, and the buzz of conversation is general, that odious person’s ears, for aught the captain knew, may be preternaturally acute. “And although I know Ireland pretty well — Athlone, Limerick, Cork, Dublin, and all that — yet I never heard his accent before in my life.”

Mrs. Foljambe bowed her patient grey head, and did not seem aware that any answer was needed.

“Can you say what part of the country he comes from?” persists Captain Bamme.

“I rather think Ireland,” replies Mrs. Foljambe, with an effort and another sigh.

“I rather think so myself,” says the captain, in a disgusted aside, over his veal and truffles. “The woman knows no more about him than my hat does of snipe-shooting,” he says, in the doctor’s ear, and drowns his indignation in a glass of hock, which the butler at that moment charitably proffers.

The doctor has now got into talk with Miss Vernon. The captain has no wish to steal good Mrs. Foljambe’s bothered ear from old Mr. Puntles, who is labouring to entertain her. So Captain Bamme attends to his dinner with great concentration and energy for some time. It was not until he came to the iced-pudding that he thought of the Reverend Michael Doody again, and his joke upon the captain's stature— "a fellow I had never exchanged six words with before!" — and raising his eyes, he saw, with a qualm, those of the florid divine, fixed jocosely on him from the other side of the table.

"Upon my soul, it is very nearly intolerable!" the captain protests, mentally, as he leans back, with a flushed face. He resolves that this fellow must be snubbed, and laughed at, and sat upon, and taught to know his place, and held at arm's length.

As the captain has, however, nothing clever ready, he prefers not noticing the curate's expression; and throwing into his countenance all the dignity which a not very tragic face can carry, he avails himself of Mr. Eccles's murmur at his right elbow, and takes a glass of Madeira.

"I'll drink a glass of wine widgye, captain," insists the curate, recurring to a happily obsolete usage. "Get me some white wine."

The captain bows and stares, with a rather withering condescension and gravity, which, however, does not in the least tell upon the impervious curate, who, his glass replenished, observes with a hilarious smile, "An agreeable way of makin' acquaintance with my flock; better than a dhry domiciliary visit, captain, by a long chalk. I pledge you, my gallant parishioner — and here's to our better acquaintance."

The captain nods curtly, and gulps down his wine, without half tasting its flavour; but even on these terms he thinks it is well to have escaped that brute.

Miss Vernon is again talking to the curate. How disgusting! He turns, without thinking what he's doing, to his right, and his eyes meet the dull and innocent gaze of grey Mrs. Foljambe, who, recalled to the festive scene, makes an effort, and tells him her only story.

"We knew two very respectable poor women in this town. Anne Pluggs was one, and her sister, Julia Pluggs, was the other; there were two. They had both been servants, cooks, and they lived in the small house, last but one on your left, as you go towards the windmill." A deep sigh here. "You'll know it by wallflowers growing at the door; at least, there were, about a year or two ago; and they had saved a little money; and Mr. Foljambe had a very high opinion of them, and so had I." The captain bows. "And about sixteen years ago they gave up their house here, and went to Coventry; it is a good way off, you know."

The captain knits his brows and calculates rapidly.

"About forty-seven miles — by Jove, it *is* a good way."

"And when they arrived there, they set up a confectioner's shop, in a small way, of course."

"Oh?" says the captain, very much interested, "that was very spirited of them."

"It had a bow-window that was painted brown, it was at a corner of a street near one of the spires, and they did very well, and they are both alive still."

Another deep sigh followed.

"What a pity!" says the polite captain, who is looking across the table, and thinking, at the moment, of quite other things. The good lady does not hear his comment, and so its slight incongruity is harmless, and the captain inviting the conclusion of the tale, says, "and —— ?"

But the story is over. That is all. And good Mrs. Foljambe, contented with her contribution towards keeping the conversation alive, is looking, in a melancholy reverie, on the tablecloth.

As she has dropped off his hands in this gentle way, the captain resigns her with a good grace, and listens, undisturbed, to other talk.

Lady Vernon has now taken the curate into council, and is leading the little cabinet. Mr. Michael Doody is attentive, and seems impressed by what Lady Vernon is saying. She has the reputation of being a clever woman, with a special talent for government.

Mr. Puntles is listening, and sipping his wine; and being a polite old man, now and then plagues Mrs. Foljambe with a question or a remark.

Doctor Malkin is in animated conversation with Miss Vernon. He is, perhaps, a little of an esprit fort; but in a rural region, always more pharisaical, as well as more pure than the city, he is very cautious, the more particularly as his great patroness, Lady Vernon, is a sharp and ready Christian, not high-church, not low-church; people at both sides of the controversy complain in whispers of ambiguities and inconsistencies; she is broad-church. Yes, very broad-church. She would throw the church-gates wide — as open as her heart — as open as her hand. She has built plain, sober churches — she has built meeting-houses — she has built florid chapels and churches, gleaming with purple and gold, and with saints and martyrs glowing in brilliant colours from stained windows, such as rejoice the heart of that learned and Gothic Christian, Archdeacon Complines. Her flatterers speak in this vein: and they are legion. The promoters of the projects which she vivifies by her magnificent bounty may hate their equally successful rivals, but they like her money; and they are extremely careful not to offend her, for she has not the reputation of forgiving easily.

Doctor Malkin talks to Miss Vernon on her pet subjects, theories, and vagaries of all sorts, the abuses and corruptions begotten of an artificial system, bold social reforms, daring sentiments on all forms of civil government, treated romantically rather than very learnedly, or, indeed, very wisely.

And now Lady Vernon, having established an understanding with old Mrs. Foljambe, rises, and with that dejected lady, and Maud, takes her departure. Captain Bamme, gallantly standing as guard of honour, with the handle of the open door in his hand, smiles with supernatural sweetness, sees them off, and returns to complete the little party of five.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SKIRMISH.

Plump little Mr. Puntles is a cosey bachelor of two-and-sixty. Something of an antiquary, something of a herald, he is strong in county lore. He is the only man in Roydon who honestly likes books. He lives in the comfortable square brick house of Charles the First's date, at the northern end of the village. He usually takes a nap of five minutes after his dinner, and then is bright for all the evening after.

The Reverend Mr. Foljambe, who considers himself an aristocrat, talks with him upon genealogies, and such matters, with the condescending attention that befits his high descent and connexions.

"No family has a right to powdered-blue in their liveries, except this branch of the Vernons, one branch of the Lindseys, and two other families," said Mr. Puntles, with his eyes closed, and his finger tracing diagrams slowly on the tablecloth. "It is a very distinguished privilege, and I'll tell you how the Vernons came by it."

Foljambe smiled blandly, and also, nearly closing his eyes, inclined his ear; but a vociferation at another part of the table, where Captain Bamme and the curate were in hot debate, arrested the communication.

"Who consolidated your civil power in India?" urges the curate. "I'll tell you, captain. It was Mr. Richard Colley Wellesley of Dangan, in the county of Meath. The Marquis Wellesley, as you are good enough to call him. And who commanded the Indian army, at the same critical period, when something more was wanted than blundering and plundering, a teaste of genius and a teaste for thundering?"

Before answering his own question the Reverend Mr. Doody applied his glass to his lips, his disengaged hand being extended all the time toward his gallant adversary, with a movement of the fingers, intended to retain the ear of the company and the right of continuing his speech.

"So far as thundering is concerned, Mr. Doody," said the vicar, with stately jocularity, "it seems to me that your countrymen seldom want a Jupiter."

The captain with a rather inflamed visage, for more had passed between the curate and him, smirked angrily, and nodded at the vicar, and leaned back and tossed his head, and rolled a little in his chair, smiling scornfully along the cornice.

But the Reverend Mr. Doody could hear no one but himself, and think of no one but Captain Bamme and the Wellesley family at that moment, and he continued: “Who, I repeat, saved India by his genius for arms, as the other consolidated the same empire by his genius for organisation and rule? Who but that Irishman’s Irish brother, Arthur Wellesley, Jooke of Wellington? And I think I remember some trifling services that same county o’ Meath man did you on other ground. But I’m speaking of India just now, and I ask again, who saved it, again, when its existence was imperilled by the natives? Who but my countryman, Irish Lord Gough, from Tipperary? It’s easy for you, in quiet times when you’re enjoying the fruits of Irish gallantry and Irish genius, to make little of Ireland, but you know where to run for help when you’re in danger.”

“Haven’t you a rather uncomfortable way of putting it, Mr. Doody?” said the Reverend Mr. Foljambe, a little gravely.

“Why I can prove to you,” began Mr. Doody, not hearing the vicar, “if you take up the old chronicles, that the Irish were in the habit of continually invading England.”

“With what result?” inquired Mr. Foljambe, with a smile.

“Ship-loads of plundher and slaves,” answered Mr. Doody, promptly.

“We had better look sharp,” said cosey Mr. Puntles, who rather enjoyed the debate.

“If they had but a regiment of tall Irish clergymen, no doubt they’d march through the country,” said the captain, laughing stingingly.

“If they had nothing but a regiment of small English captains before them,” said the curate, “they’d do it easy enough. My dear friend,” continued the curate, “I don’t say, mind, that a mob can fight a trained army; but give us eighteen months to drill in, and see where you’ll be; give us what ye must give us, before long, federalism, and before ten years, we’ll conquer England!”[3]

Captain Bamme uttered a short laugh of scorn.

“I hope you’ll spare my little collection of curiosities,” said Mr. Puntles, merrily.

“If you’re strong be merciful,” broke in Captain Bamme.

“Don’t be frightened, captain; we’ll spare them, and all other little curiosities, too,” said Mr. Doody, hilariously, meaning, of course, the captain. “But, seriously, as sure as you’re sitting there, Ireland will conquer England, if she gets a fair chance.”

“That will be something new, won’t it?” says the Reverend Mr. Foljambe. “Shakespeare says something about a country

That never yet did lie
Under the proud foot of a conqueror.”

“Shakespeare said more than his prayers, sir; didn’t he know as well as we do, that there is no country in Christendom that has been so often and so completely conquered as England? ‘Did never lie!’ ha, ha, ha! ‘The proud foot of a conqueror?’ Mighty fine! Did ye never lie undher the Romans? or the Saxons? or the Danes? or the Normans? and didn’t they, one after the other, stay here and settle here, and take your houses and live in them, and your fields, and make ye dig, and sow, and reap, and stack for them? and didn’t they drive you hither and thither, and tax ye, and work ye, and put ye to bed at sunset, and make ye put out your candles and fires by sound of bell? And after all, England did never lie under the proud foot of a conqueror! Sure, my dear sir, ye oughtn’t to be talking like a madman. It’s enough to make a pig laugh. Can’t ye buy books, and read them?”

“But, sir, I’m very proud of those conquests,” interposed Mr. Puntles, smiling happily. “All these invaders are blended down into one composite mass, and that fusion is the stuff that makes the modern Englishman.”

“It won’t do, sir; a few thousands scattered among millions never changed the blood or nature of a nation yet — you’re Britons, still. You are Britons, the same as ever; by no means a warlike people, not gifted with any military aptitudes, pacific and thradesman-like, and the natural prey and possession of a nation with the spirit of conquest and a genius for arms. You’re sinking into your natural, hereditary state, that of Quakers and weavers, contented with your comforts and your opulence, knuckling down to the strong, and bullying the helpless, and leaving soldiering in earnest to nations that have the heart and the head for that sort of game, and just taking your chance, and hoarding your money."

"Chance has answered pretty well up to this," said Mr. Foljambe; "we have escaped a military occupation tolerably well I hope."

"So has Iceland, sir, so has Greenland; ye're out of the gangway, don't ye see, sir? I could show you in the middle ages — — "

"Don't mind the middle ages," said the captain, "pray don't — we won't undertake to follow you there."

"*You* won't follow me, captain, because ye're gone before me there, my dear fellow, ha, ha, ha! — ye're one of the middle ages of this place yourself, my dear captain; but never mind, age is honourable, and middle age is middling honourable, anyhow."

The captain stared hard at the decanter from which he filled his glass. He so obviously meditated a retort that the neutral powers interposed.

"Now, now, now — pray Captain Bamme take some wine, and send the decanters this way," said the vicar, who was in charge of the party: "and Mr. Doody, I think we have stood the Irish invasion very well, and I vote we declare an armistice and a — eh — what do you think?"

"We'll be better friends, captain, you and I," said Mr. Doody, generously, "when we come to understand one another; but don't ye be talking about things you don't understand. Stick to the cane and the pipeclay, my boy; and my blessing attend ye! and I pledge ye in a glass of clar't. Gentlemen, I give ye our gallant friend, Captain —— I give ye my word, I never heard your neeme. No matter; our gallant friend the captain; but I fill to ye all the same."

"I think he's gone," observed Doctor Malkin, rousing himself suddenly from a profound "brown study." So he was, although the Reverend Michael Doody who, during his concluding remarks, had been staring at a claret jug, in the direction of which his powerful arm was extended, while he twiddled his fingers toward the handle, in general invitation to the company to push it within reach of his generous clutch, had not perceived his disdainful retreat.

"So he is! There now! Ye see what it is to be thin-skinned," said the curate, filling his glass and drinking it off, without insisting on the presence of the object of the compliment, or the participation of the rest of the company.

"That's good clar't. I'll trouble ye, sir, for the white wine — the madeira — thank ye, and I drink to our departed friend, the captain, and, in solemn silence to the memory of his temper, the craiture!" Which ceremony, like the last, he had all to himself, and performed with a loud smack of his lips.

The Reverend Mr. Foljambe and Mr. Puntles had dropped into their quiet feudal talk again. Doctor Malkin would take no more wine, and the tall and courtly vicar, having collected the general suffrage in favour of joining the ladies, arose, and the little party retreated, talking listlessly, in the direction of the drawingroom.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE DRAWINGROOM.

The drawingroom is now in a blaze of waxlights, and every object in it brilliantly defined. Miss Maximilla Medwyn has arrived, and stands near the fireplace, in a dark silk dress, with a good deal of handsome lace; otherwise the same erect figure, and energetic and pleasant face, that we have seen.

Two gentlemen have arrived to tea — a tall man, quiet and gentlemanlike, of fifty years or upwards, who is talking to Lady Vernon, and a very short, vulgar man, fat and sleek-haired, with smooth chin and cheek, and ill-made, black, baggy clothes, and a general greasiness of hair, face, and habiliments. This is Mr. Zachary Smelt, alight in the firmament of Roydon dissent, who does not disdain to revolve, on occasions, round the munificent centre of so many religious charities, enterprises, and cliques.

Mr. Smelt has taught the muscles of his fat face to smile, with a perseverance that must have been immensely fatiguing when he first tried it; but every fold and pucker in his cheeks was, by this time, as fixed as those of the great window curtains opposite to him were by the tacks and hammer of the upholsterer. I am sure he sleeps in that smile, and that he will die with it on. When he is angry it still sits on his putty face, though his little black eyes look never so fell and wicked over it, and though it has become a grimace by no means pleasant.

"I'm less in the world, Mr. Smelt, than you are," Miss Maximilla is saying tartly enough to this good man, whom, instinctively, she loves not. "What do you mean by telling me I live too much in and for the world? You don't say that to Lady Vernon, I venture to say. You like her money too well to risk it. I venture to say you have fifty times as many spites, and a hundred times as many schemes, in your head as I. I have just as good a commission to speak plainly as you have. There's your great gun, the Honourable Bagge Muggridge, as you take care to advertise him whenever he attends a meeting, or makes a speech. He has gone out of the world, as you term it; that is, he shirks his duties as a public man and a country gentleman, surrounds himself with parasites and flatterers, and indulges his taste for notoriety by making dull speeches at canting meetings, and putting himself down for shabby contributions to all sorts of useless things. And this selfish creature, because he gratifies his indolence and his vanity, and rides his hobby, has, you tell us, retired from the world, and become an apostle, and is perfectly certain of an eternal crown of glory. Those were your words, and I have seldom read anything more shocking."

Perhaps Miss Medwyn had something more to say, and no doubt Mr. Z. Smelt had somewhat to rejoin, but the Reverend Mr. Foljambe walked slowly up with a gracious smile, his head inclined and his hand extended, and said, with dignified affection:

"And how is my very dear friend, Miss Medwyn?"

The vicar chose not to see Mr. Smelt, though the shoulder of his fashionably cut clerical coat almost touched the forehead of that fat thunderer against episcopacy, whose fixed smile acquired under this affront a character as nearly that of a sneer as anything so celestial could wear. So Zachary Smelt, folding his fat hands, turned on his heel with an expression of malignant compassion, and Mr. Foljambe inclined his long face and high nose over Maximilla Medwyn, smiling, in his way, as sweetly as his fellow-labourer, and as his "very dear friend" answered his affectionate inquiries, his shrewd eye was peering after Lady Vernon, and I am afraid he could not have given a very accurate account of what the good old spinster answered.

A cloud crossed the pure light of his brow as he saw the fat dissenter, who was always extracting money for the behoof of his sect from Lady Vernon, place himself before her exactly as the tall grave man with the iron-grey head was withdrawing.

Mr. Foljambe turned out of his way, and looked into a book of prints which Doctor Malkin was turning over.

"An unexpected pleasure that," murmured the doctor, with smiling irony, as he glanced toward the short fat figure of Mr. Smelt.

"Oh! That is —— ?" hesitated the vicar, compressing his eyelids a little as he glanced towards Mr. Smelt, whom he knew as well as the doctor did. "I stupidly forgot my glasses."

"Mr. Zachary Smelt, the Independent preacher. I venture to say there is not a drawingroom in the country, except this, into which that fellow would be admitted," said the doctor, who had no practice among that sect.

"Well, you know, Lady Vernon may do things that other people couldn't. Smelt? Yes, he is a troublesome person, and certainly, I don't pretend to say — I don't stand, at all, I hope, on that sort of thing; but I should not suppose he can feel quite at home among gentlemen."

Doctor Malkin smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"This is, you know, a very distinguished house," continues the vicar, loftily, "and not the place, as you say, where one would expect to meet people of a certain level in society; I don't object to it, though, of course, there are others who, I dare say, don't like it. But I do say it is a mistake, as respects the object of the distinction; it does not answer its purpose. I venture to say there is not a more uncomfortable man in this county tonight, than this Mr. — Mr. — a — Smelt."

"I'm not so sure; he is such an impudent fellow," said the doctor.

"I shouldn't wonder if he had a good deal of that kind of thing, as you say. You possibly have more opportunities than I can boast. You see, Doctor — a — Doctor — a — a — Malkin." The Reverend Mr. Foljambe had a habit of hesitating rather over the names of small men with whom he was good enough to converse. "Lady Vernon, though she is a churchwoman, and a very staunch one, in a certain sense, has yet very vague views respecting the special sympathy due to those who, in a more intimate way, are of the household of faith; but she'll come all right, ultimately, with her powerful mind, and the supremacy she assigns to conscience in everything. I have had, from my position, opportunities, and I can safely say I have rarely encountered a mind so entirely under the guidance and control of conscience."

The Reverend Richard Howard Foljambe looked with the affectionate interest of a good pastor and kinsman at that paragon of women.

"What a splendidly handsome woman she is!" observed the doctor. "By Jove, for her time of life, she's perfectly wonderful."

Every one flatters Lady Vernon, and these gentlemen like to pay her compliments in each other's ears, though she does not hear them. This frank testimony behind backs prevents the least suspicion of adulation in what they may say in her hearing, But in truth, Doctor Malkin's criticism is no flattery, though, perhaps, they hardly know that it is not, their critical faculties being a little confused, standing so much as they do in the relation of courtiers to her.

They are both covertly looking at her. They see a lady of some four or five-and-forty, still very handsome, according to the excellence of middle-aged beauty. How refined and elegant she looks, as she talks gravely with that little vulgar dissenter. She is the representative of an ancient family. She is peculiar in appearance, in habits, in character. A fine figure, a little fuller than girlhood, but only a little. A Greek face, pale, proud, and very still.

"What a talent for command that woman has!" says the doctor.

"She's very clever — she's very able, I may say, is Lady Vernon," says the clergyman, who being a kinsman, does not quite like Doctor Malkin's calling her a woman.

"Did it ever strike you, sir, making allowance for the difference of sex, that her eye has a very powerful resemblance to that of a remarkable historic genius?" asks Doctor Malkin.

"Ah — well, I can't quite say; a — do you mean — I don't quite see," says the vicar.

"A large wonderful grey eye that will be famous as long as history lasts — I mean Napoleon the first consul, Napoleon the Great. It is powerfully like some of the portraits."

"Well, do you know, I should not wonder. I believe there is — very likely," replies the vicar.

"Now, Miss Maud's, you see, although they are large and grey, they haven't got that peculiar character — a look of serene command, and what some people would call cold; it is very fine."

"Yes, and accompanied with that talent, she has so much administrative ability! She is a Dorcas, but a Dorcas on a very princely scale indeed," says Mr. Foljambe.

"More like my idea of Minerva-glaucopis, you know — just that marble brow and pencilled eyebrow, and cold, full, splendid grey eye. It is a study for Pallas; it would be worth a fortune to some of our artists," says the doctor.

The doctor's face looks a little sterner as he closes his little speech. It is not always easy to say what a man is looking at with an obliquity of vision like his; but I think of his two rather fine dark eyes, that one which he chiefly uses glanced at that moment on Miss Maud Vernon. Perhaps some association or train of thought, suddenly suggested, caused the change. The doctor’s face is well enough when he is talking and animated. In repose it is not prepossessing; disturbed by any unpleasant emotion it is still less so.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DRESSING-GOWNS AND SLIPPERS.

Captain Bamme, who has been entertaining the young lady, is taking his leave. The doctor says goodnight at the same time, and walks down the old avenue in the long streak of moonlight between the shadows of the trees in company with the captain, who is eloquent upon the treason against the peace and decency of the town perpetrated by old Foljambe in the importation of his Irish curate.

"I hope I have a proper respect for everything that's sacred; but, by Jove, if a fellow behaves like a rowdy, parson or no parson, sooner or later, he'll get what he wants — a good licking; and I'd chuck him out of the window as soon as look at him:" a feat not only morally but physically worthy of admiration, considering the relative proportions of the curate and the captain.

The curate meanwhile has taken his departure, and very amicably, side by side with Mr. Smelt, is trudging after the captain and the doctor to the village. These apostolic men are manifestly deep in conversation, if we may so call a talk in which the loud and hilarious voice of the curate, interspersed with his peals of laughter echoing among the branches of the ancient trees, does duty for both. The captain quickens his pace on hearing these ominous sounds. He was going to light his cigar, but does not care to loiter, and with a sniff and a muttered word or two between his teeth, postpones that indulgence till he shall have reached the gate, where, as he knows, the curate turns to the right, and he to the left. Mr. and Mrs. Foljambe, in their one-horse brougham, come rolling down the avenue, and oblige the fat dissenter to skip out of the way as their wheel grazes his elbow. He is, no doubt, grateful for his escape, but the fright does not abate his righteous abhorrence of prelatical pride; and the boisterous and unfeeling banter of the Reverend Michael Doody fails to soothe him as he stands gazing, for some seconds, after the equipage. The driver and the parson are of one mind no doubt. If he had been a bishop would they have made his "lordship" cut that terrified caper? His blood boils as he looks after the carriage. The mud of the wheel, he could swear, is upon his shoulder. He half regrets, for the sake of the moral and the scandal, that he was not knocked down. Perhaps if he had possessed presence of mind he would have gone down at that touch, as adroit pugilists sometimes do in the ring.

Notwithstanding this little incident, however, Mr. Smelt and the curate proceed, side by side, in very friendly march toward the town.

The churchman's jocularity has subsided, and he is now learning all he can about the religious state of the little town, and the statistics of its poverty, from the preacher at his side, who is puzzled a little by the unaffectedly secular demeanour of the curate, by his utter repudiation of the doctrine of apostolic succession, and by his earnest and simple desire to go to the heart of his work, and do some good in his generation.

From the cold moonlight, and still shadows of the foliage on the broad avenue, we return to the great drawingroom of Roydon and the glow of other lights, where the clear voice of Lady Vernon is saying to the tall, grey gentleman, with whom she has talked a good deal that evening, and who was on the point of going out to light his bedroom candle, and make his way to his room:

"I don't think I have introduced my daughter."

The tall gentleman's eyes follow the direction of Lady Vernon's expectantly, and she says:

"Maud, I want to introduce you to Mr. Coke, who has been so good as to come with the papers for the trustees, who are coming tomorrow, and it may be right that you should be present."

The elderly attorney looked at the young lady with interest as he made his bow, and he thought how high-spirited, how highbred, and beautiful she looked, and what a becoming representative of that great and ancient family she was.

"It is a good many years since I saw you, Miss Vernon, a long time in your life, that is — not in mine. You were only so high," he says, with the familiarity of an old retainer, measuring a standard in the air with his hand.

Ten minutes later they have broken up and gone to their rooms, and Maud, in her dressing-gown, with her long hair loose over her shoulders, taps at her Cousin Max's door, which is near her own.

"Who's there?"

“Maud. May I come in?”

“Come in, my dear child, to be sure.”

Maximilla Medwyn is in her dressing-gown and slippers, and smiles — rather an odd figure, her dressing-gown being “skimpy,” as her maid tells her often, and her head being bound up tightly in a long flannel band.

“What is the matter now?”

“Nothing. Only I could not rest till I had seen you again. Mamma received me to-day just as usual.”

“She can’t help it,” replies Miss Medwyn. “My maid is gone to her bed; there’s no one to hear us. She is the same to every one; it is her way; she was always cold. I tried to know her long ago — and I believe she liked me as well as she liked anyone else — but I never could know her, young as she was. It is her nature, and she can’t change it now.”

“I wish I could be cold and reasonable like other people. I wish I could care nothing about it, but — I’m such a fool.”

“You make too much of it.”

“I can’t help it, and whenever I do speak out, we quarrel. It is so miserable.”

“You must treat different people differently, my dear, according to their natures. I make it a point to meet her just as coolly as she meets me,” said Maximilla. “She was always an oddity. Why, nothing odder was ever heard of than her marriage with your poor father. To me she always seemed unfathomable. All I know about her is, that she has the strongest will I ever heard of, and that she looks, I think, like a haughty lady superioress of a convent. Very handsome, of course, we all see that; but with a countenance, it seems to me, incapable of sympathy, incapable of frankness, and dominated by pride, and dead to everything else.”

“You are frank enough, at all events,” says the young lady, a little dryly.

“Very frank always with you, Maud,” replies the old cousin, seating herself on the sofa at the foot of her bed.

“I see more good in her than that,” persists the girl.

“So do I; but not in her face. She has a great deal of good. She is generous; she is courageous; she has many very fine points. But she seems to me to hold every one on earth at arm’s length; that’s all I say. As for me, I gave up the idea of ever knowing her, twenty years ago. You must take her for what she is, and be content with so much love as she is capable of giving. She may give more than she shows, for anything we can tell, and I'm sure she'll do her duty. She has always been a pattern of all the virtues."

"Yes, conscience, a strong sense of duty, every one says that. I'm quite serious. But you said that she was odd. What was there about her marriage with papa?"

"Well, yes, that was extremely odd. I never was so surprised in my life. Your father had his baronetage, but that in your family was less than nothing; that title had been twice offered within the last hundred years to the Vernons of Roydon, and twice refused. He was a handsome man, and rather agreeable, and there ended his attractions. He had not a guinea. He was twenty years older than she. He liked nothing that she liked. He was a captain in the Guards, you know, and when he was ruined, had retired. He came down here, and tried to make love to her, without your grandfather's knowing anything about it; but she could not endure him, and treated him with utter contempt, and he grew to hate her. People thought, my dear, that he did not want anything but her money, and was furious at finding himself foiled. She certainly did hate him, then. He was of the same family — a Vernon — her third cousin."

"Was not grandmamma alive then?"

"Yes, but in miserable health — slowly dying, in fact. They went away for a little tour, somewhere — a fancy of the doctor's, I believe; when she returned, which was in less than a year, your father came here, uninvited and unwished for. I was here at the time. Barbara seemed to hate him more intensely than ever. She would not even see him. She spoke of him to me, when I asked her to come down and take her place as usual, with a degree of detestation I could not understand."

"Yet he was very gentle, I have always heard, and a great many people liked him," said Maud.

"I dare say. I only tell you what I saw," says Maximilla. "I need not tell you I did not want her to like him. I thought his courtship, all things considered, a most audacious thing; and I could not believe, after all that had passed, that he had any serious idea of renewing it."

"It was certainly very unequal in all things but birth," said Maud.

"Yes, you know, she might have married any one, and he had no pretensions. Your grandfather plainly did not like his being here, though he did not choose to turn him out. I don't think, indeed, he saw what Amyrald

Vernon was aiming at; but I could not help fancying that, for some reason, he was afraid of him. Your grandfather was a most upright, honourable man. If he had ever been a reckless young man, or among objectionable companions, I could have understood the possibility of his dreading some awkward disclosure. But his whole life had been transparent, and, in all respects, honourable; and this puzzled me, for I could not account for his seeming embarrassed and timid in his own house, and so uneasy while Amyrald Vernon continued there. I had given up asking your mamma to appear as usual in her place while he was there. One morning, however, she did come down, hating him just as much as ever, but thinking, I fancied, that it was making him too important, keeping out of the way on his account. I remember so well her standing for a few minutes in the window, before breakfast, and his joining her there, and talking to her. They were both looking out, so I could not see their faces. But the next thing that happened was their taking a long walk, up and down the terrace, together, after luncheon; after that, her demeanour changed entirely; he seemed to exercise an unaccountable fascination over her; and one morning, in the drawingroom, she told me, as coldly as if it was a matter of going to take a drive, that she had made up her mind to marry Sir Amyrald Vernon. I don’t think I was ever so astounded in all my life. I remonstrated and represented all I could, but it was in vain; whatever his fascination was, it had prevailed, and I might as well have tried to lift the house from its foundations by my eloquence. She must have fallen in love with him. Her father always made a pet of her; too much, indeed. She would, perhaps, under other management, have learned to be less wilful and less haughty. So, I suppose, he let her do as she pleased. But the end of it was that she did marry him; and, I think, her liking, if there was any, expired before two months were over, for when I saw them next, she seemed — begging your pardon, my dear — to hate him as much as ever. They did not quarrel; I don’t mean that. She was too cold and dignified for any such exhibitions. But I could not mistake her. There was fixed dislike. And when, two years later, he lost his life by the fall of his horse, I don’t think she cried a single tear, and I never heard her speak of him, except now and then, as coolly and curtly as you might mention a not very pleasant acquaintance who had gone to Van Diemen’s Land.”

These recollections of Maximilla Medwyn's revived in Maud's mind a scene, which often recurred of itself.

It was one of those short scenes, in the remembrance of which fear and disgust are mingled; to disclosing which there grows an invincible repugnance, and on which the mind silently dwells with a sense of odious curiosity.

When she was a little thing, some five or six years of age, she was fond of old Margaret Creswell, who had been her mother's nurse. She used to run to her as a redresser of grievances, and to pour out her complaints and petitions at her knees. But a time came when her protectress was to take her last leave of her and of all things.

The old woman was dying, and found dying a hard and tedious piece of work. The child had not been in her room for four months, and one day, in a state of rebellion against some new rule of her mamma's, she broke from the nursery, and ran into old Margaret Creswell's room.

She was sitting up, in flannels, by the fire. The room was darkened. A little table, with her medicine bottles, her tablespoon, and glasses, was beside her. With her one idea the child trotted into the room, prattled and sobbed through her story, and ended by saying, "And that wouldn't be done to me if papa was alive."

The figure in the flannels beckoned, and, for the first time, a little awe stole over the child; she drew near, trying to see her more distinctly in the obscurity. When she did, it was not the face she knew. There was no smile there. The face was hollow and yellow, a clammy blackness was about the lips, the eyes looked at her, large and earnest; the child came beside her, returning her strange gaze in silence. She was frightened that such a thing should be Maggie Creswell.

The old woman placed her bony hand on the child's arm, and clasped it feebly. She spoke in a hard whisper, with a little quick panting at every word.

"That's Anne Holt has been saying that; it's a shame to be putting things in your head against your good mamma. Well it is for you that you are under her, and not under him; no blacker villain ever lived on earth than your papa. Keep that to yourself; if you tell any one in the nursery, I'll come to you after I'm dead, and frighten you." She let go her arm, and said, "Go now to your toys, and do as mamma bids you, and be thankful."

Very much scared, and very quiet, the child stole back to the nursery, and kept the secret guarded by that menace.

That dark room; the old woman, stern and changed; the last words she was ever to hear from her; and the dreadful terms of hatred applied to her father, which she tried to put away as a blasphemy, returned often, and drew her into conjecture.

"Was there any reason," she asked her Cousin Max, after a little silence, "for mamma's want of affection for poor papa?"

"No particular reason — no good reason. As a husband, I don't think there was anything against him. He devoted himself very much to his duties, and did his best to become a popular and useful country gentleman. I suppose she repented too late, and had acted on an impulse, and was disgusted to find, as many of us are, that the past is irrevocable."

Old Miss Maximilla sighed. Perhaps she had a retrospect to regret, and Maud, with the world before her, looked for a moment on the carpet sadly.

"I don't know your mamma, my dear; she has been always a sealed book to me. I don't think she ever wanted either sympathy or advice. I don't think any one ever knew her. *I* never could, and I have long given up the riddle. But, dear me, it is almost one o'clock. Run away, my dear, and let your poor old cousin get to her bed. I shan't go for a day or two, and we shall have time enough; I have fifty things to talk to you about. Goodnight." And so they parted till next morning.

CHAPTER XIX.

BREAKFAST.

At halfpast nine in the morning, the roar of the gong spreads shivering and swelling through rooms and passages, up staircases, great and small, through lobbies and long galleries, calling all the inmates of Roydon Hall to prayers.

In a long room which projects, at the end, in a mass of stone-shafted window, they assemble. A hundred years ago, and more, the then Vernon of Roydon gave to this great chamber, as nearly as he could, the character of a chapel. The light streams in through stained glass, brought from Antwerp tradition says, flaming from the base up to the cornice with sacred story. The oak carving of this sombre room is admired by critics, who say that the spoils of some ancient church must have furnished it. Mr. Coke, the elderly attorney, with his head full of the strategy of the consulting-room and the rhetoric of the courts, is for a moment solemnised, as he enters and looks round him. He then falls to admiring, in detail, the stained glass. He and Miss Max are the only guests at present in the house. It is a very small party confronting so imposing an array of servants. There is hardly another house in England where so prodigious a household assembles. Mr. Coke, whose business brings him, about settlements and at other legal crises, to many noble houses, is struck by the unusual superfluity of servant-kind here, and while Mr. Penrhyn, Lady Vernon's secretary, who officiates, is reading a chapter from the Old Testament, he tries to count them, but his polling always breaks down in the middle, at the back rows; and then comes the thought, "Here are just one lady and her daughter, a girl, to be attended to, and this enormous piece of machinery is got up and maintained, for that simple end;" and the words of "the preacher" stand good to this hour: "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?"

These morning prayers of Lady Vernon's are unusually long. There are the psalms of the day, and the chapters, and, in fact, a "service," which lasts about half an hour.

Mr. Penrhyn, who officiates, has had his breakfast an hour ago, in his own little office, and having talked and smirked a little, remits himself, in a fuss, to his work.

The breakfast-room still bears the ancient title of the "parlour," and is a spacious and cheery apartment, hung with festive tapestry, and opening into the dining-room. Here the little party of four assembled.

"It is eleven years, Mr. Coke, I was counting up last night, since I last saw you; and I believe you are one of the very oldest friends I have," said Miss Max. "Why don't you pay me a visit at Wybourne, when your excursions carry you to points so near as Hammerton and Dake's Hall? I heard of you there. I don't think it was kind."

"It is all your fault," said Lady Vernon. "He went to Dake's Hall to arrange settlements. Why don't you give him a reason to visit you?"

"Thank you very much, Lady Vernon," put in Mr. Coke, merrily.

"I think it is rather hard that an old woman should be put into Coventry because she can't find any one to marry her," replied Miss Max.

"A lady who might have married any one of a score of suitors, every one eligible, has no case to make," Mr. Coke said.

"I think Cousin Max is right. I think one's liberty is a great deal," remarked Maud. "Doctor Malkin said last night what I quite agree in, that it is better to marry never, than once too often."

"He says that a woman who marries once is a fool," said Maximilla Medwyn, "but a woman who marries twice is a criminal."

"Is not that rather violent doctrine?" Mr. Coke inquired.

"I think he only said, who marries within a short time after the death of her husband," said Maud; "and you recollect the curious stories he told us? There was a woman who would not allow him to bleed her husband, whose life, he said, would certainly have been saved by it, pretending too great a tenderness for him to allow it, and, in a few weeks after his death, she married a person who lived in the house; and there was another story of a woman who married immediately after her husband's death, without the slightest suspicion, who, ten years later, was convicted of having murdered him, by hammering a nail into his head while he was asleep."

"But, seriously, I'm a mere slave, and can never command an hour, except when I get to the Continent, and letters can't find me any longer.

Doctor Malkin was here last night? I don't know the people — which was he?" said the attorney.

"He is a pale man, with a high nose, and dishevelled black whiskers, and good eyes," Miss Maud answered.

"My dear Maud, that doesn't describe him," interposed Miss Max. "In the first place he squints; next, he is bald, and he has a long upper-lip and a short chin, and an odious smile, that I think is both conceited and insincere, and you could fancy him just the doctor, if he did not like you, to bleed you to death, or poison you by mistake."

"My dear Maximilla, how can you?" said Lady Vernon, gravely, with a glow in both cheeks that comes when she is either angry or otherwise agitated. "My cousin, Mr. Coke, is not acquainted with Doctor Malkin. She does not know him; but I do; and I have the very highest opinion of him. I have great confidence in his skill, and still greater in his integrity. He is as conscientious a person as I ever met in my life. I know no one more entirely trustworthy than Doctor Malkin."

Lady Vernon spoke coldly after her wont, but she was evidently in earnest.

"Then his countenance does him great wrong," answered Miss Max, cheerfully, "that's all I say. It is quite true I don't know him, and I don't desire to know him."

And she sipped her tea.

"I assure you, Mr. Coke, I speak from knowledge; there is no one of whose good sense and truth I have a higher opinion. I wished you to understand that," said Lady Vernon. "And I have an almost equally high opinion of his skill. For the last fifteen years he has been attending, in every illness, in this house; and he has been so attentive and so successful, it would be impossible not to have the highest opinion of him as a physician."

Perhaps Mr. Coke thought it a little odd that Lady Vernon should make such a point of his believing this country doctor a paragon; and wondered why the peculiar flush by which she betrayed excitement should glow in her cheeks, and make her broad, cold eyes, fiery.

"Country doctors are often the ablest," he remarked, letting the subject drop softly; "they get to know the idiosyncrasies of their small circle of patients so thoroughly; and their dispensaries and the rustic population furnish an immense field of observation and experience. Does Lord Verney come to-day?"

"Yes; I'm sorry he does, he is such a bore, poor man; I should have preferred his staying away," replied Lady Vernon, with plaintive disgust. "Barroden comes, and so does Mr. Hildering."

"And each, I think, brings his solicitor with him?" asked Mr. Coke.

"I wrote to them, to do so, and I suppose they will," answered Lady Vernon. "Only Sir Harry Strafford doesn't come."

"I don't think we are likely to hit upon anything very new. I have gone over it so often, and I don't think anything has escaped us," ruminated Mr. Coke. "Is there a solicitor to represent Miss Maud Vernon?"

"No, I did not think it necessary. Does it strike you that this room is lighter than it was when you were last here?" inquired Lady Vernon, a little irrelevantly. "I'll show you how that happens."

And breakfast being by this time over, she rose and walked to the great window that looks towards the east. Mr. Coke, a little thoughtful, followed her mechanically.

"Two great lime-trees stood just there, where you see the grass a little yellow, and they were so shaken by the storm last year, that they were pronounced unsafe, and had to come down; they were beautiful trees, but the room is a great deal lighter."

"Yes," said Mr. Coke. "It is rather complicated, you see, and there might be a conflict of interests, and as the meeting is a little formal, it would have relieved me of a responsibility, but I'll do my best."

"I don't see that any conflict *can* arise, Mr. Coke," said Lady Vernon, coldly. "At all events, if she wishes to ascertain her rights and opportunities, or whatever they are, separately, there is nothing to prevent her. What we do to-day can't fetter her in any way, and I thought you were quite competent to protect us both. It would be rather early to anticipate her litigating with her mother. I should hope there won't be an opportunity."

"No," acquiesced Mr. Coke; "I should have preferred that arrangement; but I'll do my best. At what hour do you expect the trustees, Lady Vernon?"

"They will all be here by three o'clock, if they keep their appointments. I think Mr. Hildering will come at one; he said so."

Mr. Coke was thoughtful; and when Lady Vernon was gone, he looked over his notebook for a time, and raising his eyes a little after, he saw the slight figure of Miss Maximilla Medwyn walking up and down the long terrace before the house. He went out and joined her.

CHAPTER XX.

LADY VERNON'S EXCURSIONS.

When he overtook that cheerful sentry, he said: "Can you tell me where I should be likely to find Miss Vernon? I have a word to say to her."

"Lady Vernon sent for her a few minutes ago, but she said she would not keep her long," said Miss Max; "I told her I should walk up and down here till she came."

Mr. Coke walked beside her without saying a word, till they had completed a walk to the end, and back again.

"Lady Vernon is as handsome as ever," he remarked, on a sudden. "Since I last saw her there is really no change that I can see."

"But that is scarcely a year ago," answered Miss Max.

"More than four," replied Mr. Coke, smiling.

"You mean to say you have not seen Barbara for four years!" exclaimed Miss Max, stopping short and turning towards him.

"I come whenever I'm sent for," said Mr. Coke, with a laugh. "But though I don't see her very often, I very often hear from her, and very clear and clever letters she writes upon business, I can tell you."

"But didn't you know she is in town for some time, every year of her life?"

"I had not an idea. We hear from her generally about once a fortnight. But I should very often have liked a few minutes' talk with her. Those little points of vivâ voce explanation are very useful in a long correspondence. And so she is every year at Grosvenor-square?"

"I think you had better not say a word about it to Lady Vernon," said Miss Max.

"Oh! of course not. I leave that to her. But I think it is a mistake, not giving us half an hour when she comes." Thus Mr. Coke, swinging his stick a little, and looking over the top of the terrace balustrades, across the court, and ponds, and peacocks, and swans, and the close-shorn sward stained with the solemn shadows of the trees, down the perspective of foliage, to the mighty piers and great carved urns of the iron gates, and the gables and twisted chimneys of the gatehouse.

"Yes, that would be only natural, and her not doing so puzzles me more and more," replied Maximilla Medwyn; "you are such an old friend, and know everything about the affairs of this family so intimately, that I'll tell you; but you are not to let it go further, for it is plain she does not want it talked about; and it is simply that which makes me very curious."

"I've learned by this time to hold my tongue and to keep secrets, and I venture to say, this is a very harmless one," laughed Mr. Coke.

"Well, now, listen — what a time Maud is! Once a year — I think about July or August — my handsome cousin, Lady Vernon, is taken with what my maid terms a fit of the fidgets. She takes her maid, but never Maud with her, mind — never. Maud has never come out. I don't think she has been six times in London in her life. That is not right, you know; but that is a different matter. Lady Vernon and her maid go up to Grosvenor-square, where the house is all locked up and uncarpeted, all except a room or two, and where there is no one to receive them but an old housekeeper and housemaid. She tells old Mr. Foljambe, the vicar, that it is to consult a London physician. No great testimony, I think, to the surpassing skill of Doctor Malkin. But, I fancy, it is not about any such thing she goes to town, for her stay in Grosvenor-square never outlasts a day or two. Her fidgets continue. She leaves her maid there, and goes alone, I believe, from one watering-place to another."

"Without her maid, you say?"

"Yes, without her maid."

"And how do they know she goes to watering-places?"

"They never know where she is going. The only clue is, that now and then she sends a note of directions to her maid, in London, or to the house-steward, or the housekeeper, down here; and these indicate her capricious and feverish changes of place, which you'll allow contrast oddly with the stillness and monotony of her life, when she is at home. Then, after six weeks or so spent in this mysterious way, she appears again, suddenly, at her town house, tells her maid that she is better, and so they return here. It is very whimsical, isn't it? Can you understand it?"

"Restlessness, and perhaps a longing for a little holiday," he answered. "She has, I may say, a very peculiar position in what they call the religious world; and the correspondence she directs, and even conducts with her own hand, is very large. Altogether, I think, she makes her life too laborious."

"Well, as you and she, and you and I, are all old friends, I don't mind telling you that I don't think that's it. I don't believe a word of it. There is more in it than that; but *what* I can't divine; and, indeed, it does not trouble me much; if Barbara would only do what she ought about Maud, I should be very well satisfied. But she has never been presented, nor been to town for a single season, and Lady Vernon has never taken her out, and I don't think has any idea of doing so. Of course, you'll say that, with all her advantages, it can't matter much. But there can be no advantage in people's saying that she has lived all her life like a recluse; and I think there is always a disadvantage in despising what is usual. And really, Mr. Coke, as a confidential friend, I think you might very well say a word about it."

He smiled, and shook his head.

"All that sort of thing is quite out of my line. But I think with you, it doesn't much matter; for she's the greatest heiress in England; and she is so beautiful, and — here's Miss Vernon at last."

As Maud came down the steps she looked to the right and left, and seeing Miss Max, smiled and nodded, and quickened her approach.

Mr. Coke advanced a step or two to meet her, with his business looks on.

"I have been wishing to say a word if you will allow me. I think it would be advisable that you should be represented at the conference we are to hold to-day, to prevent any course being determined on that might embarrass your interests under the will; and if you authorise me to do so, I will watch them for you this afternoon; and, in any case, I'll mention that a solicitor should be retained for you, as the instrument is unusually complicated, and you will be of age in a very little time."

"I don't understand these things, Mr. Coke, but whatever mamma and you think right, I shall be very much obliged to you to do. What a charming day it is! I hope you are not to be shut up all day. When you were last here it was winter, and you will hardly know the place now; you ought to see Rymmel's Hoe to-day, it is looking quite beautiful," said Miss Maud Vernon.

"I'm off, I'm afraid, to town this evening," he answered; "a thousand thanks. I must now go in and see Lady Vernon, if she's at leisure."

So with a smile that quickly disappeared, he turned and walked up the steps.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CONFERENCE.

Of this muster of trustees, Miss Maud Vernon gave this account in one of her long letters to her friend, Miss Mary Mainard.

“On Tuesday we had a little parliament of trustees, opened with great solemnity by mamma. She was aided by an attorney, a Mr. Coke, who says that your humble servant ought also to have been furnished with an adviser of the same profession. Old Lord Verney came similarly attended; and Lord Barroden also brought his attorney; Mr. Hildering, a great man in ‘the City,’ I am told, dispensed with that assistance, and, I suppose, relied on his native roguery. Still there was an imposing court of attorneys, sitting as assessors with the more dignified members of the assembly. Sir Harry Strafford, who is also a trustee named in grandpapa’s will, did not attend. As all these were men of importance twenty years ago, when they were named in his will, you may suppose what a juvenile air the assembly presented.

“Mamma did not choose that I should attend, telling me that I should be sent for, if required; and I had begun to hope that my assistance had been unanimously dispensed with, when a servant came to tell me that mamma wished to see me in the library. Thither I repaired, and found her presiding at her cabinet.

“Lord Verney and Mr. Hildering were a little red, and I fancy had been snubbing one another, for Mr. Coke mentioned, afterwards, that they are members of the same boards in London, and fight like ‘cat and dog’ whenever they meet. Mamma looked, as usual, serene, and old Lord Barroden was, I am sure, asleep, for he was the only gentleman of the company who did not rise to receive me. There were printed copies of grandpapa’s will, one of which was given to me; so I took a chair beside mamma, and listened while they talked in a language which I did not the least understand, about what they called real and personal reversions, contingent remainders, and vested remainders, and fees and tails, and more unintelligible names and things than I could remember or reckon up in an hour.

"They all seemed to treat mamma with great deference; not complimentary, but real; and I remarked that they said very little across the table to one another; but whenever they had anything to ask or to say, they looked to her, and she seemed to understand everything about it, better than any one else in the room, and Mr. Coke told me, afterwards, she is one of the best lawyers he ever met, and he explained a great deal that I did not then understand.

"The conference lasted nearly three hours! You can't imagine anything so dull; and I came away just as wise as I went there, except, perhaps, that I had learned a little patience.

"The Rose and the Key, which, as you know, figure on our shield, were talked of a good deal, and are mentioned very often in the will, as indicating the families which are named particularly. Old Lord Barroden woke up at this part of the conversation, and talked a great deal of heraldry, whether good or bad I can't say; and then, as they were still very garrulous upon crests, supporters, shields, chevrons, and all the rest, mamma led the way to the state dining-room. I don't know why, we never dine there now; I think it about the prettiest room in the house — I don't think you saw it, when you were with us. It has great stone shields let into the wall all round, and ours, over the mantelpiece. They are all carved in relief, and painted and gilded, according to heraldry; and you can't think how stately and brilliant it looks. Old Mr. Puntles, who is our antiquary in this part of the world, says that it was an old English custom, when a house was being built, for the owner to place the arms of the principal families in the county, thus, round the state dining-room, by way of a compliment to them, and now I saw what I never observed before, that in every second one, or oftener, our device, the Rose and the Key, is quartered in the corner. The rose, red; and the key, gold; *gules* and *or*, they call them, on a field azure: you see how learned I have grown."

Then the writer ran away to subjects more likely to amuse her and her friend.

Mr. Coke did not stay to dinner. He took his leave nearly three hours before that solemn meal. As he came downstairs from his room he encountered Miss Vernon, who was going to dress.

"You are going to hear the bishop's sermon, and see the statue unveiled?" he inquired, stopping before her in the gallery.

"Yes, Miss Medwyn and I; mamma has a headache, and says she can't come," she replied.

"I'm afraid our long consultation tired her; I'm sure it tired you, and I don't think you can have understood half we said. If you have five minutes, I'll describe to you now, just in outline, the leading provisions of your grandfather's will."

"I have more than five minutes, I'm sure," she answered; but not so much interested as Mr. Coke thought she might have been.

Young ladies are so much in the habit of being taken care of by others, that they can without much magnanimity dispense with the drudgery of taking care of themselves. They like whole bones as well as we do, but the vicious habit of being taken care of prevails, and what woman is quite capable of taking care of herself over a crossing?

"You must have for life, if you outlive your mother, Lady Vernon, at least ten thousand pounds a year, and you may have ultimately one hundred and fifty thousand pounds a year, in land, and a great deal of money beside — I don't think there is any lady of your age, in England, with such magnificent prospects. If Lady Vernon should marry, and have a son, the estates will go to him charged with ten thousand a year for you. If she should not marry, then, on her death, they go to you. If you marry, then your mother's power over the whole property will be very limited indeed. If neither you nor she should marry, then on your death the estates will go to some one to be appointed among certain families who are connected with yours, and who have a right to quarter the family device of the Rose and the Key."

"I've heard that before. Mr. Tintern of the Grange, near this, represents one of those families, I've been told?"

"Yes, and in that event, you or Lady Vernon, whichever survives, would have the right to appoint."

"I'm afraid, Mr. Coke, I have not mamma's talent for business. I should very soon be lost in the labyrinth."

"But, so far, you do understand?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"Well, there are also specific provisions in the event of your marriage, Miss Vernon, and perhaps, until you are furnished with a legal adviser, the best thing I can do for you will be to send you as short and simple an abstract of the will and its codicils as I can make out. The plan of the will is, to keep the estates together, and to favour certain families, out of whom, in the event of your both dying unmarried, an heir is to be appointed. If your mother marries, which I rather conjecture is by no means unlikely — — "

He looked very archly as he said this, and some complication of feeling made the young lady, though she smiled, turn pale.

"Do you really mean —— ?" began Miss Maud.

"I only say conjecture, mind, but I am generally a tolerably good conjuror, and we shall see. But, if Lady Vernon should marry," he continued, "her power over the estates is increased very considerably, but your reversion — I mean, your right of succession — cannot be affected by any event but the birth of a son. The provisions respecting the personal property — that is money, jewels, pictures, everything but the estates — are very stringent also, and follow very nearly the dispositions respecting the real estate. There is an unusual provision, also, with respect to all savings and accumulations, which may be made either by your mother, Lady Vernon, or by you, and they are to be carried to the account of the personal estate under the trusts; and very searching powers for the discovery of any such are vested in the trustees, and they are obliged from time to time to exercise them: and any such sum or sums, no matter how invested, are to be carried to the credit of the trustees to the uses of the will. So you see, it is a very potent instrument."

"I'm sure it is," said the young lady, with a disappointing cheerfulness.

"Well, I'll do my best; I'll send you an abstract; and, is that the church-bell I hear?" he asked, glancing through the open window.

"Yes, we hear it very distinctly," said she.

"Oh, then you'll be going immediately."

And again he took his leave.

Chapter XXII.

IN ROYDON CHURCH.

The bell from the church tower sounds sweetly over town and field: and the sober-minded folk, who people the quaint streets of Roydon, answer that solemn invitation very kindly.

In this evening sun, as the parishioners troop slowly towards the church-gate, near the village tree, sad Mrs. Foljambe, hard of hearing, the gay Captain Bamme, and the new curate, the Reverend Michael Doody, accidentally encounter.

Mrs. Foljambe stops to receive their greetings. The level sunbeam shows all the tiny perplexity of wrinkles on her narrow forehead with a clear illumination.

"I'm going to the church to witness the ceremonial," shouts the captain, with his best smile.

She turns with a little start.

"No wonder she's a bit hard of hearing, captain, if that's the way ye've been talking at her this ten years," suggests Mr. Doody, in a tone to her inaudible.

"We have been sending up some china and cut-glass to the vestry-room, for the bishop's toilet-table," says Mrs. Foljambe, and her head droops, and her sad eyes look dreamily on the road, as if she were thinking of passing the rest of the evening there.

"The bell has only ten minutes more to ring, ma'am," says the curate, who is growing uneasy.

"It is a nice evening," observes Mrs. Foljambe, drearily.

"Quite so," says the captain, waving his hand agreeably towards the firmament. "Although we have sun, it's cool."

"Your son's at school?" repeats good Mrs. Foljambe, to let him know that she had heard him distinctly.

"Oh, oh, oh, that's rich!" ejaculates the curate, exploding.

The captain smiles, and darts a malignant glance at the Reverend Michael Doody, but does not choose to bawl a correction in the street.

So they resume their walk towards the church. The sun is drawing towards the horizon; it is six o'clock. The tombstones cast shadows eastward on the grass, and the people, as they troop upward toward the porch, throw their moving shadows likewise along the green mantle of the dead, and the grey churchyard wall catches them perpendicularly, by the heads and shoulders, and exhibits in that yellow light the silhouettes of worthy townsmen and their wives, and sharp outlines of hats and bonnets, gliding onward, to the music of the holy bell, to hear the good old bishop preach.

The good bishop is robing in the vestry-room. The vicar does the honours with profound suavity, and the curate assists with a military sense of subordination and immense gravity.

A note awaits the bishop, in charge of the clerk, from Lady Vernon, pleading her headache, and begging the good prelate to come to Roydon Hall, and if his arrangements about the Church Missions meeting will not permit that, at least that on his way back to the palace he will give her a day or two, or as much longer a time as he can. One of her grenadiers in blue and gold and cockades waits at the vestry-door for an answer, looking superciliously over the headstones. But the bishop cannot accept these hospitable proffers.

In due time the statue is unveiled. In white marble, the image of a slender man, of some forty years or upward, with a noble pensive face, and broad fine forehead, his head a little inclined, stands forth, one hand laid lightly on an open book, the other raised, in pleading or in blessing. It is what we don’t often see, a graceful, striking, and pathetic monumental image.

Dead two-and-twenty years, there were many present who remembered that energetic, charitable, and eloquent vicar well. And all who knew him adjusted themselves to listen, with earnest ears, to the words which were to fall from the lips of the good old prelate, who preached, after so long an interval, as it were the funeral sermon of his gifted friend.

The Vernon family have a grand, oldfashioned, square pew in the aisle; Maud Vernon and Miss Max Medwyn sit there now, and the bishop’s chaplain has been, by special invitation, elevated to its carpeted floor, and sits on its crimson cushion, and performs his religious exercises on a level at least twelve inches higher than the rest of the congregation in the aisle.

Under the angle of the organ-loft, at each side, is a narrow entrance. And above that, at the right, is a straight stone arch, separating the loft from the side gallery, and looking diagonally across the aisle. Behind this, going back deep into the shade, is a narrow seat, with a door opened by a latchkey from the winding tower-stairs. Here you may sit between stone walls that are panelled with oak, hearing and seeing, and yourself unobserved. In old times, perhaps, it was the private observatory of some ecclesiastical dignitary or visitor, who looked in when he pleased, secretly, to see that mass was sung, and all things done decently and in order.

To those who look up, the arch seems empty, and nothing but darkness in the cavity behind it. But a human being in perturbation and bitterness of soul is there. It is hard for her to follow the benedictions of the psalm, to which the congregation read the responses that echo through the old church walls. In the corner of the deep and dark cell she occupies, there stands, as it were, an evil spirit, and there ripples in and fills her ears, with ebb and flow, the vengeful swell, but too familiar to her soul, of another psalm — a psalm of curses. Ever and anon, as if she would shake something from her ears, she shakes her head, saying:

"Is he not dead and gone? 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.' Let him alone. Don't think of him."

But the gall returns to her heart, and fire and worm are working there, and the anathema goes on.

Why had she committed it, syllable by syllable, with a malignant meaning, to memory, and conned it over, with an evil delight?

Had she abused the word of God; and was the spirit she had evoked her master now?

Though her lips were closed, she seemed to herself to be always repeating, fiercely:

"Set thou a wicked man over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand."

"When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin."

"Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out."

"Because he remembered not mercy, so let it be far from him."

"As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him."

She raises her head suddenly.

"I'm nervous," she thinks, with her hands clasped over her dark eyes. "God have mercy on me, and let me hear!"

The voice of the good bishop, clear and old, is heard uttering the brief prayer before his sermon.

She throws herself on her knees, listening with clasped hands, passionately. A dull life rolls away, and warm and vivid youth returns, and the fountain of her tears is opened, and the stream of remembrance, sweet and bitter, rushes in. The scene is unchanged, there is the same old church, there are the rude, familiar oak carvings, the selfsame saints and martyrs in the vivid windows. The same organ-pipes breathe through the arches from time to time the same tones to which, in summer evenings just like this, long ago, she had listened, when a loved hand pressed the notes, and the melancholy sounds filled her ears as they do now. Oh! the pain, how nearly insupportable, of scenes recalled too vividly, wanting the love that has made them dear to memory for ever.

Over the heads of the earnest and the inattentive, of dull and worthy townsfolk there assembled, the tremulous silvery tones of the white-haired bishop reach the solitary listener in this dark nook.

The old bishop tenderly enters on his labour of love. He eloquently celebrates his early friend. He tells them how gentle that friend was, how learned, how noble an enthusiast, modest and simple as a child, yet a man of the finest genius. Many of those who heard him now remembered Mr. Howard in the prime of manhood. Two-and-twenty years were numbered since his beloved friend died. They, too, were once young students together — it seemed but yesterday; and he, the survivor, was now an old man, and if the companion whom he had deplored, with foolish sorrow, were now living, he would be but the shadow of the man they remembered, with hair bleached, and furrowed brows, and strength changing fast to weakness. But time could not have changed the fine affections and noble nature that God had given him, and would have only improved the graces that grow with the life of the Spirit. Then follow traits of the character he described, and some passages, perhaps unconsciously pathetic, on the vanity of human sorrows, and the transitoriness of all that is splendid and beautiful in mortal man.

The feeble voice of the bishop is heard no more.

The organ peals, and voices skilled in the mystery of that sublime music rise in a funeral anthem: voices called together from distant places, chant the sublime texts.

Then in one long chord the voices faint and die, like a choir of angels receding from the earth. A silence follows, the organ peals once more, and the people begin slowly to disperse.

Old Mrs. Clink, who opens and locks the pews, is waiting at the foot of the tower-stairs to receive Lady Vernon, whose brougham is to come to the church-door, when the people are gone, and there will be few to canvass the great lady's secret visit to the church.

The funereal swell of the organ still rolls and trembles along the roof, and fills the building, now nearly empty. The sun has just gone down; some fading tints of rose are still on the western sky. She ventures now to the front of the arch, in the shadow of which she has hitherto been hidden. The early twilight, dimmed by the stained windows, fills the church with a misleading and melancholy light; white shafts of marble rise faintly through the obscurity, and she, from her lonely place, unseen, looks down, crying silently as if her heart would break.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PARTY AT ROYDON HALL.

Coldly handsome, an hour later, looked Lady Vernon, at the head of her table, with old Lord Verney beside her. Lord Barroden and her other guests, who had assisted at the legal consultation, were also of the party. The Dean of East Copely was there, very natty in his silk stockings, and apron, and buckles, and Sir Thomas Grummelston, Lady Grummelston, and Miss Grummelston, with several others who had attended the unveiling of the statue and the bishop's sermon.

Lady Vernon was never very gay; but she was this evening more than usually conversable and animated.

"What an admirable sermon the bishop gave us to-day," remarked the Dean of East Copely. "He always preaches well, I need not say; but to-day there was so much feeling; it really was, even for him, an unusually fine sermon. Didn't it so strike you, Lord Verney?"

"I have had," said Lord Verney, looking across the table with his dull grey eyes solemnly upon the dean, "the advantage, Mr. Dean, of listening to the bishop of your diocese, in, as we say, another place. But I had been applying my mind to-day, I may say, to business a good deal, and although I have, people say, rather a facility of getting through business and things — — "

Lord Verney's dull eyes at this moment had wandered to the bald head, flushed pink with champagne, of his attorney, Mr. Larkin, who instantaneously closed his eyes and shook his tall head with a mysterious smile, and murmured to the dean at his side:

"I wish I had his lordship's faculty; it would be an easy thousand a year in my pocket!" Which graceful little aside Lord Verney heard, and dropped his eyelids, raising his eyebrows with a slight clearing of his voice, and turning his face more directly towards the dean, suppressed in his own countenance, with an unusual pomp, a tendency to smile at the testimony of the man of business.

"People will form opinions and things, you know; and I was a little tired about it, and so I didn't mind, and I took a walk, and other people, no doubt, heard the bishop preach, and he seems to have gone somewhere."

"I wanted him to take his dinner here," said Lady Vernon, interpreting Lord Verney's rather vague but probable conjecture, "but he could not manage it."

"You were a little tired, also, I fear, Lady Vernon," said Mr. Foljambe. "A great many people, as well as I, were disappointed on missing Lady Vernon from her place."

"I had intended going, but I did feel a little tired; but I made an effort afterwards, though very late, and I glided into our little nook in the gallery without disturbing any one, and I heard the sermon, which I thought very good, and the anthem, which was better than I expected. I like our bishop so much; he's not the least a prig, he's not worldly, he is thoroughly simple — simple as a child; his simplicity is kinglike; it is better, it is angelic. He is unconsciously the most dignified man one could imagine; and so kind. I have the greatest respect and affection for him."

"He was a good deal moved to-day," said Mr. Foljambe, leaning back a little grandly. "It is charming, so much sensibility; I saw him shed tears to-day while he spoke of the early years of Mr. Howard, my predecessor."

Mr. Foljambe blinked a little, as he said this, being always moved by the tears of people of any considerable rank, hereditary or otherwise.

Lord Verney being thus addressed by the stately vicar, whom he assumed to be a man of some mark, made answer a little elaborately.

"Sensibility and all that, I think, very well in its place; but in public speaking — and I hope I have had some little experience, I ought — sensibility, and that kind of very creditable feeling, ought to be managed; there's a way of putting up the pockethandkerchief about it — all our best speakers do it — to the face, because then, if there *are* tears, and things, the faces they make are so distressing, and, you see, by means of that, it is always managed; I can do it, you can do it, any one may do it, and that is the way it is prevented."

"Very true," said Mr. Foljambe, thoughtfully nodding, as he helped himself to a new entrée, a something aux truffes, which piqued his curiosity; "one learns something every day one lives."

“You don’t, of course, recollect Mr. Howard very distinctly, Lady Vernon?” inquired the Dean of East Copely.

“Perfectly — I was twenty when he died.”

“A plain man, I should say, judging from that statue?” inferred the dean.

“He was not that — no — he had a very agreeable countenance, and his features were well-formed — his forehead particularly fine,” she replied.

“His opinions were, I’ve been told, very unsettled indeed,” said the dean.

“It did not appear from his preaching, then. It was admired and approved, and the then bishop was not a man to permit any trifling with doctrine, any more than the present,” answered Lady Vernon. “Mr. Howard was very much beloved, and a most able teacher — his influence was extraordinary in this parish — I am speaking, of course, upon hearsay a good deal, for at that time I did not attend as much as I ought to such things, and my father was still living.”

“Mr. Howard was, I believe, very highly connected?” said the dean.

“Quite so,” answered Mr. Foljambe. “In fact, as far back as we can go, there was Chevenix, and then Craven, and Vernon, one of this house; and then Percy, one of the old Percys, and Dormer, and Stanley, and Bulkely, and Howard; and, in fact, it is really quite curious! — the people here do seem always to have liked to be taken care of by gentlemen,” said Mr. Foljambe, grandly.

“I can’t see that there is anything very curious in that,” said Lord Verney. “I can’t concede that. One naturally asks oneself the question, why should not a gentleman be preferred? And one answers, he should be preferred, because he is naturally superior to persons who are inferior to him; and we know he has certain principles and things that all gentlemen have, about it, and that, I conjecture, will always account for gentlemen, and things, being considered in that sort of light.”

“I entirely concur,” said Mr. Foljambe, who always concurred with peers. “I only meant that it is a little curious that the vicarage of Roydon should have been always filled by a person of that stamp.”

“That is what I have been, I hope, endeavouring to say, or, rather, what I have not said, because I have endeavoured to say something different; in fact, that it is *not* curious. I’ll take some sherry, about it.” The concluding remark was addressed to the butler.

And so the conversation proceeded very agreeably.

But —

Pleasures are like poppies spread,
You pluck the flower, its bloom is shed.

The most agreeable dinner-party, its cutlets and conversation, its wit and its château-yquem, are transitory, and the hour inevitably arrives when people prefer their nightcaps and the extinguisher.

Lord Verney has uttered his last wise and lucid exposition for the evening, and the stately vicar, who would not object to a visit to Lord Verney's hospitable house at Ware, has imbibed his latest draughts from that fountain of illumination. Lord Barroden has said his say to Lady Vernon, and enlivened by a nap, has made some agreeable sallies in conversation with Lady Grummelston, and to that happy lady, in the drawingroom, Mrs. Foljambe has told her story about the two young women in whom she took an interest, who left Roydon and set up a confectioner's shop in Coventry, and prospered.

The pleasures of that festive evening are over; and Miss Max and Miss Vernon are having their little chat together, in their dressing-gowns.

Miss Max has a little bit of fire in her grate, for this is, thanks to our variable climate, by no means like last night; not at all sultry, rather chilly, on the contrary.

"Well, we shall soon hear something, I fancy, about mamma's annual trip to town," says Maud, speaking from a very low-cushioned chair, in a corner of which she is nestled, with her feet on the fender.

The young lady's dressing-gown is of rose-coloured cashmere, some of the quilted silk lining of which, in her careless pose, appears. She is extremely pretty, looking up from her cushioned nook at the old lady, who sits, in her odd flannel garb, before the fire in a more formal armchair.

"And why do you think so? Have you heard anything?" asks the old lady.

"Only that Jones says that Latimer is making the usual preparations," answers Miss Maud.

"Latimer's her maid, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And why doesn't she ask Latimer directly?" demanded Miss Max.

"Because Latimer would be afraid to tell, and she would be afraid to ask. Mamma finds out everything she chooses to find out. You don't know mamma as well as I do in this house. Whatever she chooses to be secret is secret, and whatever she chooses to know she does know; and the servants are awfully afraid of her. You might as well ask that picture as Latimer; and Jones would not be such a fool as to ask her, for she does not know the moment mamma might say, 'Latimer, has any one been asking you anything about my going to London?' and so sure as she did, Latimer would tell her the truth, for there is no fault she is so summary upon as a falsehood; and the servants think that she somehow knows everything."

"Well, at all events, Jones thinks she is going in a week?" says Miss Max.

"Yes. Do you know what Mr. Coke said to me to-day?"

"No. What?" says Miss Max, looking drowsily into the fire.

"He said he thought, or had reason to think, or something of that kind, that mamma is going to marry."

Miss Max turned, with a start, and looked for a few silent moments at Maud.

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure."

"Well, that is very odd. Do you know, I've been thinking that, this long time. Did he say why he thought so?"

"No."

"Nor who the person is?"

"No; nothing. He only said that, and he looked very sly and mysterious."

"Mr. Coke is a very shrewd man. I don't think he had heard before of your mamma's excursions, and when I told him to-day I saw that his mind was working on what I said, and I suspect he has connected something he may have learned from a different source with what I told him, and has put the whole case together, and formed his conclusions. I wonder you did not make him tell you all he knew. I wish he had said so much to me. I should have made him say a great deal more, I promise you."

"He talks to me as if I were a child, and it came so much by surprise, and really I don't think I could have asked him one word about it; I felt so insulted somehow, and disgusted."

"Suppose she has fallen in love with some one of whom, for some reason or other, she is a little ashamed, and suppose there is an engagement? I don’t understand it. I have been suspecting something for some time, and I did not like to say so, but you see it has struck Mr. Coke the same way. If it is that, there is a disparity of some kind you may be sure.”

“I dare say. I don’t care,” says the young lady, who looks, nevertheless, as if she did care very much. “I shall have as much money as I want. Mr. Coke said I should have ten thousand a year, and I should go and live with you. You would take me in. Here nothing on earth should induce me to remain. People have told me she merely took a fancy to papa, soon grew tired of him, and ended by disliking him. But I shan’t stay here to see his place filled and his memory insulted, and to be hectored and ordered about by some low man.”

“I shall be only too glad to have you at any time as long as you will stay with me. But don’t be in too great a hurry. You are assuming a great deal; and even if she does marry, it may turn out very differently; and you know, my dear, widows will marry without intending any particular affront to the memory of their first husbands.”

“It is not a pleasant home to me as it is,” says the young lady, glancing fiercely along the hearth; “but if this takes place I shan’t stay here to see it; that I am resolved on.”

“In about a week she’ll go, Jones thinks?” asks Miss Max. “I have grown very curious. I should like to see what sort of swain she has chosen. You never know what fancy a woman may take. He may be a very third-rate man. I was thinking he may possibly be in the army. Mrs. Stonix swears she saw her alone in Chatham last year. But it is growing awfully late. Goodnight. We’ll get to our beds and dream it over.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

A GENTLEMAN IN BLACK.

They had both risen preparatory to Miss Maud's flitting and a parting kiss and goodnight, when Miss Max said, suddenly:

"And what about Mr. Marston?"

"Well, what about him?" answered Miss Vernon, a little crossly, for she had not recovered the conversation that had just occurred.

"Nothing very particular — nothing at all, in fact — only I had intended talking about him fifty times to-day, and something always prevented. He's coming to the ball at Wymering, isn't he?"

"I don't know; he said so. I don't care," said the handsome girl, drowsily. And she advanced her hand and her lips a little, as if for her final salutation.

But Miss Max had not quite done.

"I like him so much. I think him so clever, and so goodnatured, and so nice. I wish so much, Maud, that you and he were married," said Miss Max, with audacious directness.

"And I wish so much that you and he were married," retorted Maud, looking lazily at the flame of her bedroom candle, which she held in her hand. "That would be a more natural consequence, I think, of your liking and admiring."

"You can't deny that he is wildly in love with you," said Miss Max.

"I can't deny that he was perhaps wildly in love with a poor seamstress in a dark serge dress a few days ago, and may possibly be in love with another to-day. That is wildly in love, as you say. I don't think there is anything very flattering in being the object of that kind of folly."

"Well, he will be a good deal surprised, I venture to say, when he comes in quest of his seamstress to the Wymering cloak-room," remarked Miss Max, with a pleasant anticipation of the éclaircissement.

"That depends on two things: first, how his seamstress meets him; and, secondly, whether she meets him there at all. Goodnight. It is very late."

And with these words she kissed her genial old friend, and was gone.

Miss Max looked after her, and shook her head with a smile.

"There goes impracticability itself!" she says, and throws up her hands and eyes with a shrug. "I pity that poor young man; Heaven only knows what's in store for him. I shall engage in no more vagaries at all events. What an old fool I was to join in that madcap project of rambling over the country and concealing our names! What will Mr. Marston think of us?"

When she laid her busy, rheumatic little head, bound up in its queer nightcap, on her pillow, it began at once to construct all manner of situations and pictures.

Here was a romance in a delightful state of confusion! On this case her head may work all night long, for a year, without a chance of exhausting its fertile problems; for it presents what the doctors call a complication. Barbara Vernon, with her whole heart, hates the Warhamptons; and the Warhamptons, with all theirs, detest Barbara Vernon. It is too long a story to tell all the aggressions and reprisals which have carried the feud to the internecine point.

"I must certainly tell Maud. I'll tell her in the morning," thought Miss Max. "It's only fair."

Perhaps this incorrigible old matchmaker fancied that it might not prejudice Mr. Marston if Maud knew that her mother had placed him under anathema.

By noon next day Lord Verney and Lord Barroden, and their attorneys, had taken flight, and Miss Maximilla Medwyn had gone on to see friends at Naunton, with an uncertain promise of returning in a day or two to Roydon Hall.

There is no life in that grand house but the phantom life on its pictured walls. The hour is dull for Maud, who sits listlessly looking from one of the great drawingroom windows. Lady Vernon, who has seen, in succession, two deputations in the library, returns, and in stately silence sits down and resumes her examination of a series of letters from the late Bishop of Rotherham, and notes them for transmission to Mr. Coke.

Maud changes her posture, and glances at her mother. Why is there never any love in the cold elegance of that face? Why can't she make up her mind and be patient? The throb of life will as soon visit that marble statue of Joan of Arc, by the door; Psyche at the other side, in her chill beauty, will as easily glow and soften into flesh.

Miss Vernon leans on her hand, listless, gloomy — in a degree indignant.

The room is darkening. The darker the better, she thinks. It is no metaphoric, but a real darkness; for clouds portending thunder, or heavy rain or hail, have, on a sudden, overcast the sky, and are growing thicker.

The light is dying out, the shadow blackens on Lady Vernon's letters; she raises her eyes. One can hardly see to read.

Lady Vernon lays her letter on the table. She can no longer see the features of the Titian over the door, and the marble statues at either side have faded into vague white drifts. Some heavy, perpendicular drops fall, plashing on the smooth flags outside the window, and the melancholy rumble of distant thunder booms, followed by a momentarily aggravated downpour, and a sudden thickening of the darkness.

This was a rather sublime prelude to the footman's voice, announcing:

"Mr. Dawe."

Maud glanced toward the door, which was in obscurity, and then at Lady Vernon, who, sitting full in the light of the window, had turned, with a stare and a frown, as if she had heard something incredible and unwelcome, toward the person who was entering.

By no means an heroic figure, nor worthy of being heralded by thunder, has stepped in somewhat slowly and stiffly, and halts in the side-light of the window, relieved by the dark background. It is a small man, dark visaged, with a black wig, a grave, dull, mahogany face, furrowed with lines of reserve. Maud is certain that she never saw that small, insignificant-looking man before, who is staring with a very grave but not unfriendly countenance at her mother.

He is buttoned up in a black outside coat, with a cape to it; he holds a rather low-crowned hat in his hand, and wears those shining leather coverings for the legs, which are buckled up to the knees. Getting in and getting out of his posting carriage he has scrupulously avoided dust or mud. His boots are without a speck. His queer hat is nattily brushed, and, in stable phraseology, has not a hair turned. His black coat is the finest possible, but it has great pockets at either side, each of which seems laden with papers, mufflers, and other things, so that his hips seem to descend gradually, and culminate near his knees.

This man's brown face, smoothly shaved, is furrowed and solemn enough for five-and-sixty. In his dress and air there is nothing of the careless queerness of a country gentleman. His singularities suggest rather the eccentricity of a precise and rich old city humorist.

There is something characteristic and queer enough, in the buttoned-up and black-wigged little man, to interest Maud's curiosity.

He has not been ten seconds in the room, and stands poised on his leather-cased legs, looking gravely and quietly at Lady Vernon, and, like a ghost, says nothing till he is spoken to. One can reckon the tick, tick, tick of the Louis Quatorze clock on the bracket by the chimneypiece.

Lady Vernon stood up with an effort, still looking hard at him, and advancing a step, she said:

"Mr. Dawe? I'm so surprised. I could scarcely believe my ears. It is such an age since I have seen you here."

And she put out her hand hospitably, and he took it in his brown old fingers, with the stiffness of a mummy, and as he shook it slightly, he said in his wooden tones, quietly:

"Yes, it is sixteen years and eight months. I was looking into my notes yesterday — sixteen years on the eighteenth of November last. You look well, Barbara. Your looks are not much altered; no — considering."

"It is very good of you to come to see me; you mustn't stay away so long again," she replied in her silvery tones.

"This is your daughter?" he interrupted with a little wave of his dark, thin hand towards the young lady.

"Yes, that is she. Maud, shake hands with Mr. Dawe."

"Maud Guendoline she was baptised," he said, as he advanced two stiff steps toward her, with his small but prominent brown eyes fixed upon her. She rose and placed her pretty fingers on that hand of boxwood, which closed on them.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE COUNTY PAPER.

When he had inspected her features for a time, he turned to her mother and spoke.

"Not like her father," he said, still holding her hand.

"Don't you think so?" answered Lady Vernon, coldly. "I can see a look — very decidedly."

Maud was wondering all this time who this Mr. Dawe could be, who seemed to assert a sort of dry intimacy with Lady Vernon and her family, very unusual in the girl's experience.

"I think it is more than a look. I think her extremely like him," insisted Lady Vernon, resuming in the same cold tone, and without looking at Maud, as if she had that resemblance by heart, and did not like it.

"She has some of the family beauty, wherever she got it," said Mr. Dawe, deliberately, in his hard quiet tones, and he let go her hand and turned away his inflexible face and brown eyes, a good deal to the young lady's relief.

Lady Vernon was still standing. She did not usually receive such guests standing. There was a hectic red in each cheek, also unusual, except when she was angry, and she had not been angry.

"Her eyes resemble yours," said Mr. Dawe.

"Oh, no. Perhaps, indeed, the colour; but mere colour is not a resemblance," answered Lady Vernon, with a cold little laugh, that, in Maud's ear, rang with cruelty and disdain. "No, Maud's good looks are all her own. She doesn't, I think, resemble me in any one particular — not the least."

Maud was wounded. She felt that tears were rising to her eyes. But her pride suppressed them.

"H'm!" Mr. Dawe hummed with closed lips.

"Of course, Mr. Dawe, you are come to stay a little? It is so long since you have been here."

"I'm not so sure about staying. It is a long time — sixteen years and upwards. You have been well; you have been spared, and your daughter, and I. We have all reason to be grateful to the Almighty. Time is so important, and eternity so long!"

"Very true," she said, with a deep sigh, "and death so irremediable."

Mr. Dawe took his big silver snuff-box from his coatpocket, and tapped it. He nodded, in acquiescence in the sentiment, leaned a little forward, and took a large pinch, twiddling his fingers afterwards, to get rid of any snuff that might remain on their tips. Perhaps the little superfluous shower that fell to the carpet suggested unconsciously his funeral commentary.

"H'm! Dust to dust."

Whereupon he applied his Indian silk handkerchief, not to his eyes, but lightly to his nose.

"By-and-bye, I shall have a word to say to you," he said, with a solemn roll of his brown eyes.

She looked hard at him, though with a half flinching gaze, as if to read the character of his news. But the solemn reserve of his wooden face never changed.

"We shall be quite to ourselves in the library," she said.

"Then suppose we go there now."

"Very well; let us go," she said, and led the way.

At the door he made, with his stiff backbone, a little inclination to Miss Maud.

The door closes, and the young lady is left to herself, with matter for speculation to amuse her.

Quite alone in that vast and magnificent room, she looks wearily round. The care of Mr. Tarpey, on whom devolves the arrangement of flowers and of newspapers, has spread a table in a corner near the window with these latter luxuries.

Maud looks out; the rain is still tumbling continuously, and plashing heavily, though the sky looks lighter. She turns her eyes on the newspapers, and goes over to the table, and looks down upon them with listless eyes.

She carelessly plucks the county paper from among its companions, and in that garrulous and homely broad-sheet a paragraph catches her suddenly earnest eye. She reads it twice. The annual Wymering ball is to come off three weeks earlier than usual. She takes the paper to the window and reads it again. There is no mistake about it. "Three weeks earlier than the accustomed day!" There is an unusual colour in her cheeks, and a lustre in her eyes. She fancies, as she muses, that she hears a step in the passage, and she drops the paper. She is afraid of Lady Vernon's all-seeing gaze, and the dreadful question, "Have you seen anything unusual in the paper? Allow me to look at it." And she feels that her face would proclaim, to all who cared to look, that the Wymering ball was to take place three weeks earlier than usual.

No one is coming, however. She hastens to replace the paper on the table, and she sits down, with a beautiful flush, determined to think.

She does not think very logically, or very much in train, and the effort subsides in a reverie.

Well, what is to be done now? The crisis has taken her by surprise; then fancy leads her into the assembly-room at Wymering. There are lights, and fiddles, and — oh, such a strange meeting!

Cousin Max must be with her. With that spirited veteran by her side she would fear nothing.

Very glad she was when one of Lady Vernon's broughams drove up to the door a few minutes later.

In that great house you cannot get as quickly to the hall as, on occasions like this, you may wish. But Maud overtakes her at the foot of the stairs, as in her cloak and bonnet Maximilla Medwyn is about to ascend to her own room.

"Mamma is in the library; and there are three men, with ill-made clothes and lank hair, a deputation, as usual, waiting in the shield-room to talk to her about a meeting-house at Heppsborough; and two clergymen are waiting in the blue drawingroom, to see her afterwards about plate for the church of Saint Hilary. So you and I shall be very much to ourselves for a time; and do you know we have had a new arrival — a guest. I dare say you know him. Such an odd little figure, as solemn as a conjurer. His name is Dawe."

"Dawe? Why, for goodness sake, has Richard Dawe appeared again?" exclaims Miss Max, stopping on the stair, and leaning with her back against the massive banister in great surprise.

"His name is certainly Dawe, and I'll tell you what he's like."

And forthwith Maud describes him.

"Oh! there's no mistaking the picture," cries Miss Max; and then she is taken with a fit of laughing, very mysterious to Miss Maud.

Recovering a little, she continues:

"Mr. Dawe? We were very good friends. I like him — at least, all I could ever know of him in twenty years. He keeps his thoughts to himself a good deal. I don't think any one else in the world had half his influence with your poor grandpapa; but, certainly, I never expected to see him here during Barbara's reign. My dear! I thought she hated him. He was the only person who used to tell her, and in the simplest language, what he thought of her. Have they been fighting yet?"

"No, I think not — that is, they had not time. I don't know I'm sure what may be going on now."

"Where are they?"

"In the library," says Maud.

"I think he is the only person on earth she ever was the least afraid of. I wonder what he can have to say or do here. He has never been inside this door since — yes, he did come once, for a day or two, a few years after your poor papa's death, and that, I think, was simply because he had some direction of your grandfather's, about the Roydon vault, which he had promised to see carried out; but, except then, he has never once been here, till now, since your poor grandpapa's death."

"How did he come to have such an influence here?" asked Maud.

They had resumed their ascent, and were walking up the stairs, side by side.

"I believe he understands business very well, and he is, I fancy, the best keeper of a secret on earth. His influence with your grandpapa increased immensely toward the close of his life; and he knew he could talk to him safely about that wonderful will of his."

"I wonder he allowed him to make that troublesome will," said Maud.

Miss Max laughed.

"I said the very same thing to him once and he answered that he could not dissuade him, but that he had prevented a great deal. So, here we are."

The latter exclamation accompanied her entrance into her room.

Maud was more curious than ever.

"He's not the kind of person, then, who would have come here, under all the circumstances, without good reason," she said.

"Not he. He has a reason — a strong one, you may be very sure of that. It is very odd. I can't imagine what it can possibly be about. Well, leave him to me. I think he’s franker with me than with any one else; and I’ll get it from him, one way or other, before he goes. You’ll see.”

In this sanguine mood Miss Maximilla Medwyn put off her things, and prepared very happily for luncheon.

Mr. Dawe and Lady Vernon are, in the mean time, holding a rather singular conference.

CHAPTER XXVI.

COLLOQUY.

On reaching the library, Lady Vernon touched the bell.

“You know this room very well, Mr. Dawe? You see no change here?”

“This house has seen many generations,” said he, looking up to the cornice and round, “and will see out a good many generations more.”

He steps backward two or three steps, looks up at the Vandyck over the mantelpiece, nods to that very old acquaintance, and says “Yes.”

Then he rolls his prominent eyes again about the room, unusually shadowy on this dark day, and spying a marble bust between two windows, the little man walks solemnly towards it.

“That is Mr. Howard, who was our vicar, long ago,” says Lady Vernon.

The blue livery is standing, by this time, at the opened door.

“Poor papa placed that bust there,” she continues, “and it has remained ever since.”

“Indeed!” says Mr. Dawe, and peers at it, nose to nose, for some seconds.

“They took casts from it,” she continues, “for the statue that the bishop wished to place to his memory in the church.”

“Here?” says Mr. Dawe, turning his profile, and rolling his brown eyes suddenly on her.

“Yes, in the church of Roydon, of course, where, as vicar, he preached for so long.”

“I see,” says Mr. Dawe.

“I shall be engaged for some time particularly on business,” says Lady Vernon to her footman, “and you are to admit no one.”

“Yes, my lady.”

And the apparition of gold, azure, and powder steps backward, the door closes, and they are alone.

Lady Vernon is smiling, with bright hectic patches in her cheeks. There is something a little piteous and deprecatory in her smile.

“We are quite alone now. Tell me what it is,” she says, in a voice that could have been scarcely heard at the door.

Mr. Dawe turns on his heel, walks briskly up, and seats himself near her. He takes out his old silver box, with groups of Dutch figures embossed on it, and takes a pinch of snuff preparatory, with his solemn eyes fixed on her.

"Is it anything — alarming — what is it?" she almost gasps.

"There has been illness," he says, with his unsearchable brown eyes still fixed on her.

"Oh, my God! Is he gone?" she says, turning as white as the marble Mr. Dawe had just been looking at.

"Captain Vivian has been very ill, very dangerously ill," says the imperturbable little man in the black wig; "but he's out of danger now, quite — that's all over."

There was a silence, and Lady Vernon was trembling very much. She placed her fingertips hard against her forehead, and did not speak for a few minutes.

Mr. Dawe looked at her with stoical gravity, and taking his spectacles from a very shabby case, put them on, and occupied himself with a pocketbook, and seemed to be totting up some figures.

"You guessed, of course, that I must have something to say on that subject?" he said, raising his eyes from the page.

"I thought it possible," she answered, with an effort.

"I could not in the drawing room, you know."

"No, of course," she said, hastily, and the colour returned with two hot flushes to her cheeks.

There was in her bearing to this elderly gentleman an odd embarrassment, something of pain and shame; a wounded pride struggling through it.

She rose, and they walked together to the window.

"He has got his leave. His troop is still at Chatham. The doctor says he must go to some quiet country nook. He has been thinking of Beaumaris," said the old gentleman.

"Is he as beautiful as ever?" she asked. "Oh, why should I ask? What does it matter? Is there any gift that God gives his creatures that is not more or less a curse?"

"You should not talk in that wild way, Barbara. If people can't control their feelings, they can, at least, control their words. It is only an effort at first. It becomes a matter of habit. You shan't talk so to me."

She looked at him angrily for a moment of silence.

"You treat me with a contempt, sir, that you never could have felt if I had not trusted you so madly," she cried, passionately.

The tone, fierce and plaintive, was lost on the phlegmatic old man in the black wig.

He delivered a little lecture, with his thin brown finger raised, and his exhortation was dry, but stern.

"You have been rash and self-willed; you have been to blame. Your unjust imputation shan't prevent my saying that, and whatever else truth requires. Your difficulty is the creation of your own passions. I don't say look your difficulty in the face, for it will look you in the face; but take the lesson it teaches, and learn self-command."

"Don't blame me for this. I met him first in a railway carriage. Who can prevent such accidental acquaintances? He was so attentive, and so agreeable, and so gentlemanlike. I had chosen to travel alone, without even a maid. You'll say I had no business doing so. I say, at my years, there was nothing against it; it was more than four hours; there were other people in the carriage. I never meant to seek him out afterwards; it was the merest accident my learning even his name. I had not an idea that you knew him. When I met him next, it was in town, at Lady Stukely's. I recognised him instantly, but he did not know me, for my veil had been down all the time." This narrative Lady Vernon was pouring out with the rapid volubility of excitement. "I was introduced to him there. Perhaps I have been a fool; but there is no good, now, in telling me so. I have seen him since, more than once, and gone where I thought I was likely to see him, and I succeeded. If I have been a fool, God knows I suffer. My difficulty, you call it! My difficulty! My agony is the right word. To love as I love, without being loved, without being loved ever so little!"

"So much the better," said Mr. Dawe, phlegmatically. "What are you driving at? You ought to consider consequences. Don't you know the annoyance, and possibly litigation, to which your folly would lead? In a woman of your years, Barbara, this sort of thing is inexcusable."

"Why did you come at all? Why did you come in so suddenly, and — before people? Would not a letter have answered? Hast thou found me, oh!

mine enemy?" she suddenly almost cried, and clasped her fingers for a moment wildly upon his arm.

"A letter?" he repeated.

"Yes, a letter. You should think. It would have been more merciful," she answered, vehemently.

"Not when I had so many things to talk to you about," he retorted, quietly.

"I would have met you anywhere. You ought not to have come into the room so suddenly," she persisted. "You alone know my sad secret. You might have remembered that people are sometimes startled. You say I have no self-command. I think I have immense self-command. I think I am a stoic. I know how you tasked it, too. I knew you had something important to tell me, and that *he* was probably involved."

"H'm! Yes; I'm an old friend of yours, and I wish you well. And I'm Captain Vivian's friend, and was once his guardian, and I wish him well. And this kind of thing I don't approve of. And you'll get yourself spoken about; you *are* talked of. People saw you alone at Chatham last year; and if they come to connect your movements with his, think what it will be."

"He's the only person on earth I love, or ever shall love."

"Barbara, you forget your child, Maud Vernon," said the old man, with hard emphasis.

"I don't forget her," she answered fiercely.

The old man turned away his head. There was no change of countenance; that, I believe, never changed; but the movement indicated disgust.

"I say I love him, with all my love, with *all*," she repeated.

"Be it so. Still, common prudence will suggest your keeping that love locked up in your own heart, a dead secret."

"I am determined, somehow or other, to meet him, and talk to him, and know him well," she persisted; "and you shall assist me."

"I'm wholly opposed to it."

"You'd not have me see him again?"

"No."

"Why? What are you? Who are you? Have you human sympathy? Good Heavens! Am I a free woman?" she broke out again, wildly.

"Certainly, quite free," said Mr. Dawe, cutting her short with a little tap on his snuff-box. "You can do it, Barbara, when you please; however, whenever, wherever you like best: only you have a right to my judgment, and I'm quite against it."

"I know, Mr. Dawe, you are my friend," she said, after a brief pause. "I know how I can trust you. I am impetuous, perhaps. I dare say you are right. You certainly would speak wisely if your counsels were addressed to some colder and happier woman. Why is it that to be cold, and selfish, and timid, is the only way to be happy on earth? If I am sanguine, audacious, what you will, I can't help it. You cannot understand me — God knows all; for me to live any longer as I am is worse than death. I'll endure it no longer. Oh! if I could open my lips and tell him all!"

"There, that's it, you see! You are ready to die now to be on more intimate terms with him; and if you were you would be ready to die again, as you say, to open your heart to him. Don't you see? Don't you perceive what it is tending to? Are you prepared for all that? If not, why approach it? You would be in perpetual danger of saying more than you think you should."

Mr. Dawe had probably not spoken quite so long a sentence for more than a month.

"I may be a better listener, Mr. Dawe, in a little time. Let us sit down. I want to ask you about it. Tell me everything. What was his illness?"

"Fever."

"Fever! and he was in great danger. Oh! my darling, my darling, for how long?"

"For two days in great danger."

Her hands were clasped as she looked in his face, and she went on.

"And there is no danger now? It is quite over?"

"Quite," he repeated.

She looked up, her fingers raised a little, and a long shuddering sigh, like a sob, relieved her.

"I had the best advice — the two best men I could get from London. He's all right now; he's fairly under weigh, and nothing can go wrong; with common prudence, of course. I have the account here." He held his pocketbook by the corner, and shook it a little.

"He was near dying," she repeated. "Why didn't you tell me? I knew nothing of his danger."

"The doctors did not tell me the extent of it till it was over," he replied.

"Think what it would have been if he had died! I should have been in a madhouse. I should have killed myself."

"Don't, don't, don't. Nonsense. Come, you must not talk so. I admit it is a painful situation; but who has made it? You. Remember that, and control your — your vehemence."

"Has he been out? Is he recovering strength?"

"Yes. He has been out, and he has made way; but he is still an invalid."

"I want to know; I must know. Is there any danger still apprehended?"

"None; I give you my word," said Mr. Dawe, dryly.

"He is still very weak?" she urged.

"Still weak, but gaining strength daily."

"How soon do the doctors think he will be quite himself?"

"In five or six weeks."

"And his leave of absence, for how long is that?"

"It has been extended; about four weeks still to run."

"I think I know everything now?" she said, slowly.

Mr. Dawe nodded acquiescence.

"He's not rich, Mr. Dawe; and all this must cost a good deal of money. It is only through you I can be of any use."

"Yes; I was his guardian, and am his trustee. I had a regard for his father, and his grandfather was essentially kind to me. But I have learned to regret that I ever undertook to interest myself specially in his affairs; and you, Barbara, are the cause of that regret."

"You mustn't reproach me; you know what I am," she pleaded.

Mr. Dawe responded with his usual inarticulate "H'm!" and an oracular nod.

"I can't help it; I can't. Why are you so cruelly unreasonable? Do you think I can learn a new character, and unlearn the nature that God gave me, in a moment?"

"I say this. If you cultivate Captain Vivian's acquaintance further, it is against my opinion and protest. I don't expect either to have much weight. I think you incorrigible."

Lady Vernon coloured, and her eyes flashed. But she would not, and could not, quarrel with Mr. Dawe.

"Surely you can't pretend there is anything wrong in it?" she said, fiercely.

"I did not say there was. Extreme imprudence; reckless imprudence."

"You always said everything I did was reckless and imprudent."

"Not everything. Some things extremely. And what you propose, considering that you are no longer young, and know what the world is, appears to me a positively inexcusable folly."

"It is possible to prescribe limits and impose conditions upon oneself," she said, with an effort; "and if so, there need be no rashness in the matter, not the slightest."

"Possible? We know it's not possible with some people."

"You always hated me, sir."

"Tut, tut!"

"You never liked me."

"Pooh, pooh!"

"You have always thought ill of me."

"I have always wished you well, Barbara, and accident, I think, enabled me to understand you better than others. You have great faults, immense faults."

"All faults and no virtues, of course," she said, with a bitter little laugh.

"You are capable of strong and enduring attachments."

"Even that is something," she said, with an agitated smile, and burst into tears.

"This is very painful, Barbara," said the little man in the black wig, while a shadow of positive displeasure darkened his furrowed face. "I believe my first impression was right, and yours too. I begin to think I had no business coming to Roydon."

Lady Vernon got up, and walked toward the window, and then turned, and walked to the further end of the room, standing before a picture.

He could see that her handkerchief was busy drying her eyes.

With a womanly weakness she walked to the mirror close by, and looked into it, and perhaps was satisfied that the traces of this agitation were not very striking.

She returned to her place.

"I have been a fool. My saying so will perhaps save you the trouble. I want to put you in funds again."

"When you please," said the old man. "Any time will answer. I have the figures here." His pocketbook was still in his hand. "But he has money enough of his own. He must think me a fool, paying all these expenses for him. And I think, Barbara, your doing so is a mischievous infatuation."

"And you would deny me this one pleasure!" she said.

"Enough, enough," he answers. "It was not about that I came here; that we could have settled by a letter. But I knew you would have fifty questions to ask. He has made up his mind to try change of air. I'm ignorant in such matters, and he has not made up his mind where to go."

"I have quite made up my mind upon that point," she answered.

"Well; and where?"

"Here," said Lady Vernon, once more in her cold, quiet way. "I'll ask him here."

"H'm!" said Mr. Dawe.

"Here," she repeated, with her old calm peremptoriness. "Here, at Roydon Hall. I'll receive him here, and he can't be quieter or better anywhere else, and you shall come with him."

It was now Mr. Dawe's turn to get up, which he did with a kind of jerk, and, checking some impulse, walked slowly round his chair, looking down on the carpet, and with a pretty wide circuit he came behind it, and resting his hands on its high back, and leaning over, he said, with a little pause, and a wag of his head to each word:

"Is there the least use in my arguing the point?"

"None."

"H'm!"

Mr. Dawe looked to the far corner of the room, with eyes askance, ruminating, and took a pinch of snuff, some of which shed a brown snow upon the cut pattern of the Utrecht velvet on the back of the chair.

"I can't say it is anything to me; nothing. I should be officious were I to say any more to dissuade you from it. Only remember, I have no share in the responsibility of this, excuse me, most strange step. As I suppose he will be brought here, one way or other, in any case, I think I had better come with him, and stay a day or two. It will excite less observation, so — — "

"Thank you so very much, Mr. Dawe," said Lady Vernon, extending her hand, with an odd, eager gratitude in tone and countenance. "That is like yourself."

Mr. Dawe's usual "H'm!" responded to this little effusion, and with an ominous countenance he took her proffered hand in his dry grasp, and let it go almost in a moment.

Looking down on the carpet, he walked to the window, with his hands behind his back, and as, with furrowed jaws and pursed mouth, and a roll of his prominent eyes, he stood close to the pane of glass, down which the rain was no longer streaming, Lady Vernon opened her desk, and wrote a cheque for two hundred pounds, and coming to his side, she said:

"He does not suspect that he has a friend concealed?"

"Certainly not — certainly not," said Mr. Dawe, sharply.

"Will you apply this for me, and we can account another time? And you think me very ungrateful, Mr. Dawe, but indeed I am not. I only wish an opportunity may occur, if you could only point out some way. But you are so rich, and so happy. Well, some day, notwithstanding, I may be able to show you how I thank you. Let us return to the drawingroom."

As she passed the mirror, the lady surveyed her face again, and was satisfied.

"Yes," said Mr. Dawe, recurring to the matter of business, "I'll do that, and with respect to coming here, I say no more. Under protest, mind, I do it. Only let me have a line to say when you can receive us."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE NUN'S WELL.

Maud was found by her elders, on their return, nestled in a low chair, in one of those lazy moods in which one not only does nothing, but thinks of nothing.

They were talking as they entered, and Maud turned her eyes merely in their direction, being far enough away to feel herself very little observed.

"You will surely stay tonight, Mr. Dawe?" said Lady Vernon.

"No, certainly; thank you very much. I have made up my mind," replied Mr. Dawe, dryly.

Miss Maud was observing this little man in the wig with increased interest. There was in his manner, looks, and voice something of the familiarity of an old friend, she thought, without much of the liking.

Whatever the business which they discussed in the library, her mamma, she thought, was perfectly unruffled; but there were traces of displeasure in the old gentleman's demeanour.

"I ought to have told you that my cousin, Maximilla Medwyn, is staying here."

"She has returned, mamma; she will be down in a few minutes," said Maud.

"Oh! and we shall certainly have her here for some days. Will that tempt you to stay?"

"I like her well — very well, but I shall be off notwithstanding," said the old gentleman, with a rigid countenance.

The sound of the gong announced luncheon.

"We are a very small party," she said, smiling. "I'm glad you are here to luncheon, at all events."

"I've had a biscuit and a glass of sherry."

"But that is not luncheon, you know," said Lady Vernon.

Maud wondered more and more why her mamma should take such unusual pains to conciliate this odd, grim old man. For her part, she did not know what to make of him. Ungainly, preposterous, obsolete as he was, she could not assign him a place outside the line that encircles gentlemen. There was not a trace of vulgarity in the reserved and saturnine inflexibility of his face. There was something that commanded her respect, in the obvious contrast it presented to the vulgar simper and sycophancy of the people who generally sought "audiences" of her mother.

And Maud fancied when he looked at her, that there was something of kindly interest dimly visible through his dark and solemn lineaments.

"Luncheon and dinner," he said, "are with me incompatible; and I prefer my dinner. My train, I think, is due at six-twenty p.m. I suppose your servant can find a Bradshaw, and I'll consult it while you are at luncheon. Go, Barbara. Go, pray; you make me uncomfortable."

The little old man sat himself down in an armchair, took out his pocketbook, and seemed to forget everything but the figures over which he began to pore.

Miss Max joined the ladies at luncheon.

"Well, we shall find him in the drawingroom," she said, reconciling herself to her disappointment. "It is a long time since I saw him. But I dare say he's not much changed. Wigs wear wonderfully."

"So do ugly men," added Lady Vernon, carelessly.

So luncheon proceeded. And when it was over, the three ladies came to the drawingroom, and, looking round, discovered that Mr. Dawe was gone.

A minute after, Maud saw him walking under the trees of the avenue, with his broadleafed, low-crowned hat on, and a slow, stiff tread, and his silk umbrella in his hand doing the office of a walking-stick. It was pleasant sunshine now.

The blue sky was clear and brilliant, and only a few white clouds near the horizon accounted for the rain-drops that still glittered on the blades of grass. Stepping carefully in the centre of the path, little Mr. Dawe, now and then shouldering his umbrella, and turning and looking about him, like a man reviving old recollections and scanning alterations, disappeared slowly from view, over the stile, leaving Miss Maud very curious.

"I'll put on my things, and try to find him," said Miss Max, in a fuss, and was speedily seen emerging from the hall-door in pursuit.

His walk being slow and meditative, his active pursuer did succeed in overtaking him. She knew very well that he was glad to see her, though his rigid features gave no sign, and he shook hands very kindly.

When these greetings were over, he answered her question by saying briefly:

“No, I shan’t dine. I’m off.”

“Without bidding Barbara goodbye!” exclaimed Miss Medwyn, drawing herself up in amazement.

“I’ve left my farewell in the hall. The footman will find it.”

“A note, I suppose?”

“H’m,” acquiesced the little gentleman. “My carriage will take me up in the village;” and he nodded gravely to the distant tower of Roydon Church, which happily did not return that salutation, though he continued to stare solemnly at it for some seconds, as if he thought it might, and ended by a second slighter nod.

“That is not a pretty compliment to me,” she said. “I think you might have stayed till tomorrow.”

“H’m,” he remarked, and silence followed.

“Well, I see you won’t.”

Another pause, and a more impatient “H’m,” and a quick shake of the head.

“So as that can’t be,” she resumed, “and as all things are so uncertain in this life,that we may possibly never meet again, I’ll walk a little way with you towards the village.”

Mr. Dawe uttered his usual note of acquiescence.

“And now you must tell me,” she said,as they walked at a leisurely pace along the path which winds gently among the old timber, “what on earth brought you here? Has anything wonderful happened; is anything wonderful going to happen?”

“A word or two with Barbara,” he said.

“You don’t mean to tell me it is a secret?” said she.

“If it be, it is none of mine,” he replied.

“Well but you can tell me generally, what it is about,” she insisted.

“H’m! Ask Barbara,” he answered.

“You mean, it is a secret, and you won’t tell it?” she said.

Mr. Dawe left this inference unanswered.

“You found Barbara very little altered?” said Miss Max.

“As self-willed and unwise as ever,” he replied.

“Ho! Then she wants to do something foolish?”

“She can do that when she pleases,” he remarked. “Do you know the Tinterns, who live near?”

“Yes, pretty well,” she answered, rather curious to know why he should ask.

“What do you think of them?”

“I rather dislike Mr. Tintern, I neither like nor dislike his wife, and I like his daughter very much indeed. His son I don’t know; he is with his regiment in India,” she answered. “Why do you ask?”

“You are as inquisitive as ever, Maximilla,” he said.

“I’ve just satisfied your curiosity about the Tinterns, and you can’t complain fairly of my question. I think your business with Barbara had something to do with them.”

“You are sagacious,” he observed; but whether he spoke in good faith or in irony his countenance helped her nothing to discover.

“Come, you must tell me. Are the Tinterns involved in the foolish thing she is going to do?” the lady insisted.

“She is going to do a foolish thing, and you, probably, will never know what makes it so particularly foolish; that is, unless she carries out her folly to its climax.”

“I may possibly guess more than you suppose,” Miss Medwyn said.

But this remark led to nothing. “You don’t know young Tintern, you say, but you like his sister. Why?” asked Mr. Dawe.

“I like her because she is really nice — one of the very nicest girls I ever knew.”

“Ha! Then, I hope she doesn’t depend altogether on her father, for they say he has lost money?” said Mr. Dawe.

“She is not well provided for, although her mother was an heiress, you know; but there is something trifling settled on her.”

“Well for her she doesn’t depend altogether on Tintern. I’m told he is a distressed man, or likely soon to be so,” he said.

“But, to come back to Barbara,” resumed Maximilla: “I think you ought to exercise your influence to prevent her from taking any foolish step, particularly one which may affect others.”

“I have none.”

“If you haven’t, who has?

“No one ever had, for her good.”

“For my part, I never knew what to think of her,” said Miss Medwyn.

“I did,” said Mr. Dawe.

He stopped short, and looked straight at her, being about her own height, which, even for a woman, was nothing very remarkable. His dark face looked darker, and his prominent brown eyes were inflexibly fixed on her, as he spoke a rather longer harangue than usual.

“She is a great dissembler,” said Mr. Dawe. “She is proud. She has the appearance of coldness, and she is secretly passionate and violent. She is vindictive. All that is concealed. She has a strong will. People know that; but it is not inflexibility founded on fixed data. It is simply irresistible impulse. There is nothing fixed in her but a few likings and hatreds. Principles in the high sense, that is, involving the submission of a life to maxims of duty, she has none; and she thinks herself a paragon.”

Maximilla laughed, and they resumed their walk, when Mr. Dawe had ended his speech.

“That seems rather a severe delineation, Mr. Dawe,” said Maximilla Medwyn, with another little laugh and a shrug.

“It is true. I would repeat it to herself, if it could do her any good.”

They followed the path, Miss Medwyn chatting, after her manner, gaily, until they nearly reached the stile at the village road.

“So here we part, Mr. Dawe.”

Mr. Dawe gave her one of his oracular looks, and took her hand in his hard fingers.

“And it is very ill-natured of you not telling me what I asked you,” she called after him.

Bestriding the stile, he looked back with the same solemnity, raised his broadleafed hat, and disappeared on the other side, and Maximilla could not help laughing a little at the awful gravity and silence of the apparition which went down behind the wall.

The day was now brilliant, and Miss Medwyn was tempted to walk home by a path still prettier, though a little circuitous.

It was a favourite walk of hers long ago. Perhaps it was the visit of Mr. Dawe, with whom in old times she had often walked these out-of-the-way paths, that suggested this little ramble.

The lofty trees close about the path that she had now chosen, and gradually beset and overhang it in the densest shadow. Walking in the open air, on a sunny day, you could not fancy so deep a darkness anywhere. This is, of course, in the leafy days, when the tall elms, whose boughs cross and mix above, are laden with their thick dark foliage.

The darkness and silence of this narrow path are here so curiously deep, that it is worth going a mile or two out of one's way to visit it; and fancy will play a nervous wayfarer as many tricks in this strange solitude as in a lonely night walk.

At the side of this path, nearly in its darkest part, is a well, under an arch. It is more properly a spring, rising at this point, and overflowing its stone basin, and escapes, in a gush, through a groove cut in the flag that encloses it, in front. Two iron cups, hanging by chains, invite the passenger to drink of the icy water that with ceaseless plash and gurgle descends from the opening.

With a slow step on the light mossy turf she draws near this remembered point of interest. Her eyes have grown accustomed to the clear shadow. Two steps lead down to the level at which one can take the iron cup, and drink from this pleasant well.

If outside all is shadowy, you may suppose how obscure it is within this low arch.

As she looks, she sees something rise within it. It is the figure of a man, who has just been stooping for a draught from the spring. His back is turned toward her.

We do not know how habitually we rely upon the protection of the upright among our fellow-men, until accident isolates us, and we confront a possible villain in a lonely place. There was no reason to suspect this man above other strangers. But a sense of her helplessness frightened her.

She stepped back, as most old ladies, with presence of mind, would have done under the circumstances. And very still, from her place of comparative concealment, she sees this faint shadow emerge, in shade less deep, and she discerns the long neck, lank jaws, and white eyeball of Elihu Lizard.

The lady pursed her mouth and frowned, as she might at a paragraph in the newspaper describing a horror; and she drew a little further back, and as much behind the huge trunk of the tree at the edge of the path as she could with the power of still peeping at Mr. Lizard.

That lank wayfarer, in such a place, having, we must suppose, a quieter conscience than Miss Max, did not trouble himself to grope and peep about for spies, or other waylayers, among the trees, and having wiped his mouth on his sleeve, he sopped his lank face all over with his coloured handkerchief, which he rolled into a ball, and pitched into his hat. Next he replaced his hat on his head, and gave it a little adjusting jerk.

Then Mr. Lizard threw his head back, so as to look up to the groining of branches above him. She could not tell exactly, so dark it was, what expression his odious countenance wore. Her active fancy saw a frown one moment, a smile the next, and then a grimace. Though these uncertain distortions seemed to flicker over it, I dare say his lean face was quiet enough then, and having popped something, which I conjecture to have been a plug of tobacco, into his mouth, he shouldered his stick with a little preliminary flourish, and set out again upon his march in the direction from whence she had just come.

This apparition gave a new direction to her thoughts. She waited quietly till she could hear his steps no more. She wondered whether he had been up to the Hall; but she recollected that this particular path crossed the park; there was a right of way by it, and therefore he need not have diverged to the house, nor have asked anyone’s leave to cross the grounds by it.

There remained the question, why was he here? Were she and Maud never to get rid of that odious attendant? She quickened her step homeward, and was glad when she emerged into the open light.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

INQUIRY.

Turning into another walk, at her left, she approached the house, and saw Maud looking about her, as she stood in the midst of the scarlet and blue verbenas in the Dutch garden at the side of the Hall.

She signed to the old lady, smiling, as she emerged.

"I have been looking all round for you, and almost repenting I had not gone with you. I really began to think he had run away with you."

"Walked away, you mean; he does everything deliberately. He never ran in his life," replies the old lady.

"Well — well — and — — " The young lady stole a quick glance over her shoulder to be sure they were not observed, and lowering her voice very much as they got nearer, she continued eagerly, "and tell me what he said. Did he tell you anything?"

"Well, he thinks he told me nothing, and intended to tell me nothing, but he did tell me a great deal," answered Miss Max, smiling shrewdly, "and I don't know whether you will be glad or sorry, but the upshot is, putting everything together, I am nearly certain that your mamma intends marrying, and that he is strongly against it."

"Really!" exclaimed Maud, stopping short, for they were walking very slowly, side by side.

"He did not say so in so many words, mind, but I can't account for what he said on any other supposition," said Miss Max. "Has not she been very diplomatic? I don't know that any living creature but I suspected what those mysterious excursions could be about. You see Mr. Coke jumped to the same conclusion when I told him the facts. I can't understand that kind of thing. What can be the pleasure of going through life, without a human being to whom you ever tell anything you either feel or intend? But she was always the same. She never trusted any one, as long as I remember her."

Maud listened to all this very thoughtfully.

"Tell me, like a darling, what you collect it from; tell me everything he said," after a considerable silence, Maud asked.

So Maximilla Medwyn repeated her conversation with Mr. Dawe with praiseworthy minuteness.

“What do you think of it?” she asked, in conclusion.

“I think it looks extremely like what you say,” Maud replied, looking down thoughtfully.

“And do you like it?”

“I can’t say I do. It is not a thing I have much thought about — mamma’s marrying; but if she wishes — — “

She stopped suddenly, and Maximilla saw, to her surprise, that she was crying.

“Pooh, pooh! my dear child, take care,” said Miss Max. “Goodness knows who may see you. I had not an idea you cared so much. When I talked to you before about it you didn’t seem to mind.”

“I don’t know; it didn’t seem so likely or so near,” she said, making an effort, and drying her eyes hastily. “And really I don’t know, as you say, whether I ought to be glad or sorry.”

“Well, for the present, we’ll put that particular inquiry aside, for I want to tell you that horrid one-eyed man has pursued us, and I saw him at the old well, in the dark walk, just now. We must make out whether he was at the house. I dare say Jones can find out all about him.”

Full of this idea they returned together to the house; but no such person, so far as they could make out, had been there.

Jones, again charged to inquire, failed to discover anything.

“You see he has no business, or even pretence of business, at the house,” said Miss Max. “I think he’s watching you. It can be for no good purpose; and if I were you, I should tell your mamma.”

“Why mamma? I mean, why should I tell any one?” She looked uncomfortably at Miss Medwyn.

“I think your mamma ought to know it, and I think it is better that people should know that you observe it.”

Their eyes met for a moment, and were again averted.

“Yes, I think I will go to mamma, and tell her,” said the young lady. “Shall I find you here when I come back?”

They were in the hall at the time.

“Yes, I’ll wait here,” she answered.

Lady Vernon was alone in the library. Maud knocked at the door, and her mother's voice told her to come in.

She did so, and found Lady Vernon writing. She raised her eyes only for a moment, and said, with a cold glance at her daughter:

"Have you anything to say, Maud?"

"Only this. I wished to tell you, mamma, that a very ill-looking, elderly man, who has been following my cousin Max and me from place to place, during the whole of our little excursion, evidently tracking and watching us, for what purpose we can't guess, has turned up, to-day, in the grounds. Maximilla saw him at the Nun's Well, in the dark walk, to-day. He is blind of one eye, and pretends to be travelling for a religious society, and his name is Elihu Lizard."

She paused.

Lady Vernon had resumed her writing, and said, with her eyes on the line her pen was tracing,

"Well?"

"I only wanted to ask, mamma, whether you knew anything of any such person?" said Maud.

"A man blind of one eye, what was he doing?" said Lady Vernon, dropping each word slowly, as she continued her writing.

"Following us from place to place, everywhere we went, and we really grew at last quite frightened and miserable," said the young lady.

"I think, Maud, you should endeavour to be less governed by your imagination. There is no one admitted to Roydon who is not a proper person, and, in all respects, of unexceptionable character. You must know that," said Lady Vernon, looking in her face with a cold stare, "and I don't think, within the precincts of Roydon, that you or Max have anything to fear from the machinations of blind elderly men, and I really have no time to discuss such things just now." And Lady Vernon, with imperious displeasure, turned and wrote her letter diligently.

So Maud turned and left the stately seclusion of that apartment, and returned through the other rooms to the hall, where she found Miss Max.

"I don't think she knows anything about him," said Maud.

"If she does not, that only makes it the more unpleasant," answered the old lady.

And they went out again together for a walk.

The interrogation of Lady Vernon had not resulted, I think, in anything very satisfactory. Maud, however, did not venture to renew it; and in their after rambles in the grounds or the village of Roydon, neither she nor Miss Max encountered any more the ill-favoured apparition of Elihu Lizard.

The monotonous life of Roydon went drowsily on.

At the entreaty of Maud, Miss Medwyn prolonged her stay, which she interrupted only by a visit of a day or half a day, now and then, to a neighbouring house; and so a week or more had flown, when an incident occurred which, in the end, altered, very seriously, the relations of many people in and about Roydon Hall.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CAPTAIN VIVIAN.

One evening, Maximilla Medwyn and Maud returned from a drive, just in time to dress for dinner. The sun was setting as they descended from the open carriage and mounted the steps.

Compared with the flaming sky and ruddy sunlight outside, deep was the shadow of the hall as they entered. But Miss Max discerned in that shade the figure of a little man standing in the background.

She stopped for a moment, exclaiming:

"Good gracious! Is this you, Mr. Dawe?"

"How do you do, Miss Medwyn?" replied the small figure, advancing into the reflected glow that entered through the hall-door, and revealing the veritable black wig and mahogany face of that saturnine humorist.

"I hope you are not going already?" said she. "We have not been out two hours, have we, Maud?"

Thus brought into prominence, Maud greeted the old gentleman, who then made answer to Miss Medwyn.

"I stay till tomorrow or next day."

"Well, that's an improvement on your last visit, short as it is," she replied. "Do you know, I had quite made up my mind that we were never to meet in this world again."

"So much for prescience. We are no witches, Maximilla," observed the little gentleman, dryly.

"Though we should not look the part badly, you and I," she rejoined, with a laugh; "one thing I do predict: you'll meet Mr. Tintern at dinner to-day; you were asking about him, you remember."

"H'm!" he responded, with a roll of his eyes.

And with this brief greeting the ladies went up to their rooms, and Mr. Dawe, more slowly, followed to his.

When Miss Maud returned to the drawingroom, Mr. Tintern, having been at the Wymering Sessions to meet his brother magistrates, had not yet arrived. Lady Vernon had not returned, but a stranger was there.

There was no one in the room, except a young man, rather tall and slight. He had brown hair and a slight moustache, and was, if not actually handsome, certainly good-looking, and nothing could be more quiet and gentlemanlike than his air and dress.

He had the pallor and general air of languor of an invalid. He appeared about thirty. He was leaning on the chimneypiece, and, I think, was actually looking at himself in the great mirror over it, as Maud came into the room.

It was a little awkward, perhaps, there being no one to introduce him; but, notwithstanding, in a little while they were very cheerfully engaged in conversation, though not exactly of importance or novelty enough to very deeply interest my readers.

They had not been so employed very long, when Lady Vernon appeared.

"Captain Vivian, I must introduce you to my daughter."

Captain Vivian bowed.

"You have never been in this part of the world before?" said Lady Vernon. "I think you said so?"

"No. Coventry, I think, is about the nearest point of any interest I'm acquainted with."

"There is a good deal worth seeing near us; but we can plan all that tomorrow. I only hope our fine weather may continue," said Lady Vernon. "Oh, Mr. Dawe! you came in so quietly, I did not see you. I dare say you knew your old room again. You used to like it long ago, so I have put you into it."

"Thanks. Yes — h'm!" said Mr. Dawe, solemnly, with a mysterious ogle, as if it was a good room to conjure in. "I remember it."

Captain Vivian was talking to Miss Vernon.

"How pale he looks!" Lady Vernon almost whispered to Mr. Dawe, her eyes covertly following the young man's movements. "He is fatigued — he is doing too much. Make him sit down."

Mr. Dawe nodded. He approached the young man and said a few words to him.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Dawe; but I really am not the least fatigued. I have not felt so strong I don't know when."

"Yes; but you *are* fatigued, and you must sit down," said Mr. Dawe, raising his brown hand and laying it on the young man's shoulder with an imperious pressure.

But before he had accomplished his purpose, Mr. Tintern, who had arrived, claimed his attention by playfully taking his disengaged hand, and saying:

"You won't look at me, Mr. Dawe. You are not going to cut your old friend, I hope?"

Mr. Dawe looked round. Tall Mr. Tintern stood before him, with a sort of wintry sunshine in his smile, which was not warm; his false teeth and light eyes were shining coldly on him.

Since they last met, Mr. Tintern's hair has grown almost white, but, as it was always light, this does not alter the character of his countenance, which, however, has grown puffy and wrinkled, with an infinity of fine lines, which indicate nothing bolder or higher, perhaps, than cunning.

Mr. Tintern is one of those pleasant fellows who is always glad to see everybody, and whose hand is always open to shake that of his neighbour; who can smile on people he does not like, as easily as he laughs at jokes he does not understand. For the rest, he parts with his condolences more easily than with his shillings, and taking on himself the entire burden of sympathy, he leaves to others the coarser enjoyment of relieving suffering by sacrifices of money or trouble.

"I never cut my friends," says Mr. Dawe. "I don't think I have five in the world. That is a luxury for people who have money."

"You have some very good ones, out of the five, in this part of the world, at all events, and I only hope you remember them as well as they remember you," replies Mr. Tintern, with a playful effervescence.

Mr. Dawe makes one of his stiff bows; but they shake hands, and Mr. Tintern holds the hard brown fingers of his "friend" longer in his puffy white hand than Mr. Dawe seems to care for.

"Time flies, Mr. Dawe," says Mr. Tintern, with a little plaintive smile and a shake of the head.

"Yes, sir; and we alter very much," answers Mr. Dawe.

"Not all — not all," says Mr. Tintern, who does not acquiesce in the approaches of senility; "at least I can vouch for you."

And he lays his soft hand caressingly on Mr. Dawe's arm.

"H'm!" says Mr. Dawe.

And the interval that follows hears from him no return of the little flattery.

“We have been considering a good many things to-day after our session; putting our heads together. It will interest Lady Vernon,” says Mr. Tintern, cheerfully. “By-the-bye, Lady Vernon, a question is to be submitted to you for your decision, and we so hope you will say ‘Yes.’ We are thinking, if you approve, of moving for a presentment next assizes, for a short road, only three and a half miles, connecting the two roads from the northern end of Wymering, across by Linton Grange, to meet the Trafford road, about a quarter of a mile at this side of Stanbridge. But it is nearly all Roydon property, I need not tell you, and of course all depends upon you, and we were consulting as to how best to submit it, so as to obtain your sanction and assistance.”

“I think something ought to be done,” says Lady Vernon. “I said so before, and I shall be very happy to talk with my steward about it, and the surveyor can call here; but I’m not so sure that those are the best points. I shall look at the map tomorrow. I traced the line; I’m nearly certain I did what I thought best. You shall hear from me in time for the assizes.”

Miss Max had entered, and Mr. Dawe, in his grim, ungainly way, presented Captain Vivian. You might see that the old lady looked a little inquisitively at him, of course very cautiously, and that something was passing in her mind.

There was not much time, indeed, for speculation, and hardly any for a little talk with this young gentleman, for the whole party in a few minutes went away to the dining-room, where they were all presently much more agreeably employed.

Nothing very worthy of record occurred during dinner, nor after that meal, until the gentlemen had followed the ladies to the drawingroom, and then a little psychological discussion arose over the tea-table.

“I have been reading a novel, Barbara,” said Miss Max, “and the heroine is made to fall in love with the hero before he has made a sign, and, for anything she knows, he is quite indifferent. Now it strikes me that I don’t remember a case of that kind, and I am collecting opinions. Maud says it is impossible. Mr. Dawe, on the contrary, thinks it quite on the cards. Captain Vivian agrees with Maud that the thing could not be, and now I want to know what you and Mr. Tintern can add for the enlightenment of an old maid in her perplexity?”

Now this question interrupted a dialogue very earnest, and spoken very low, between Lady Vernon and Mr. Tintern, who were sitting quite far enough apart from the others to render their conversation inaudible to the rest of the party. That dialogue had been carried on thus:

"You may suppose what it has been to me," Lady Vernon said, "the suspense and torture of mind, although, possibly, of course, it may never be."

"You have my warmest and deepest sympathy, Lady Vernon; I need not tell you," answered Mr. Tintern, closing his eyes, with a look of proper concern, and a plaintive shake of his head, "and I feel very much honoured, I assure you, by your selecting me for this, I may say, very deplorable confidence; and I shall, I need hardly add, consider it a very sacred trust. But you have, of course, mentioned it to other friends?"

"Only to one, of whose good sense I have a very high opinion indeed," said she.

"Mr. Dawe?" suggested Mr. Tintern.

"Certainly not," said Lady Vernon, with a quick glance towards that solemn little figure. "He is about the last person on earth I should speak to on the subject."

"Oh, I see," murmured Mr. Tintern, deferentially, throwing at the same moment a vast deal of caution into his countenance; "it is a kind of thing, of course, that requires immense circumspection."

"Yes," replied the lady, "and I intended — — " It was at this word that Miss Max's inopportune inquiry broke in.

"I did not hear your question," says Lady Vernon, a little bored by the interruption.

Miss Max repeated it.

"Well, Mr. Tintern, what do you say?" she asked.

"Why, really," said Mr. Tintern, working hard to get up a neat reply, and smiling diligently, "where there is so much fascination of mind or of beauty, or of both, as we often see, in this part of the world, I can hardly fancy, eh? — the lady's being allowed time to be the first to fall in love — ha, ha, ha! — really — upon my honour — and that's my answer."

And he looked as if he thought it was not a bad one.

"And now, Barbara, what do you say?" persisted Miss Max.

"I? I've no opinion upon it," said Lady Vernon, with a little laugh; but a close observer could have discovered anger in her eye. "I will think it over, and, in a day or two, I shall be able to aid you with my valuable opinion."

And she turned again to Mr. Tintern, who asked, glancing at Captain Vivian:

"Mr. Dawe, does he make any stay in the country?"

"I don't know. I shall be very happy to make him stay here as long as I can. Captain Vivian, that young man, is his friend, and, it seems, was his ward, and as he could not leave him — he has been ill, and requires looking after — Mr. Dawe asked me if he might bring him here, and so I make him welcome also."

"A very gentlemanlike, nice young fellow he is," said Mr. Tintern.

And so that little talk ended.

Mr. Tintern went his way, and the little party broke up, and the bedroom candles glided along the galleries, and the guests had soon distributed themselves in their quarters.

But that night an odd little incident did occur.

Miss Max had, after her usual little talk with Maud, bid her goodnight, and her busy head was now laid on her pillow. The glimmer of a night-light cheered her solitude, and she had just addressed herself seriously to sleep, when an unexpected knock at her door announced a visitor.

She thought it was her maid, and said:

"Do come in, and take whatever you want, and let me be quiet."

But it was not her maid, but Lady Vernon, who came in, with her candle in her hand, and closed the door.

"Ho! Barbara? Well, what is it?" she said, wondering what she could want.

"Are you quite awake?" asked Lady Vernon.

"Perfectly; that is, I was going to settle; but it doesn't matter."

"Well, I shan't detain you long," said Lady Vernon, placing the candle on the table. "I could not sleep without asking you what you meant, for I'm sure you had a meaning, by asking me the question you did tonight."

She spoke a little hurriedly, and her eyes looked extremely angry, but her tones were cold.

"The only question I asked was about first love," began Miss Max.

“Yes; and I ask you what did you mean, for you did mean something, by putting so very odd a question to me?” she replied.

“Mean? What did I mean?” said Miss Max, sitting up straight in a moment, so that her face was at least as well lighted as her visitor’s. “I assure you I meant nothing on earth, and I don’t know what you mean by putting such a question to me.”

The handsome eyes of Lady Vernon were fixed on her doubtfully.

“You used to be frank, Maximilla. Why do you hesitate to speak what is in your mind?” said Lady Vernon, sharply.

“Used to be — I’m always frank. As I told you before, there was nothing in my mind; but I think there’s something in yours.”

“I only wanted to know if you intended any insinuation, however ridiculous. I fancied there was a significance in your manner, and as I could not comprehend it, I asked you to define, as one doesn’t care to have surmises affecting oneself afloat in the mind of a friend, without at least learning what they are.”

“I had no surmises of the kind; but you have certainly gone the very way to fill my head with them. What could you have fancied I meant?”

“Suppose I thought that you meant that I had made overtures of marriage to my husband before he had declared himself. That would have been untrue and offensive.”

“Such an idea never entered my head — never could have — because I knew all about it as well as you did. That’s mere nonsense, my dear child.”

“Well, then, there’s nothing else you could mean, and so I’m glad I came. I believe it is always best to be a little outspoken, at the risk of a few hot words, than to keep anything in reserve among friends, and you and I are very old friends, Max. Goodnight. I have not disturbed you much?”

And she kissed her.

“Not a bit, dear. Goodnight, Barbara.”

And Lady Vernon disappeared as swiftly as she came, leaving a new problem for Maximilla’s active mind to work on.

CHAPTER XXX.

A VISIT.

In the morning Lady Vernon was more than usually affectionate when she greeted Miss Max.

When the little party met in the small room that opens into the chapel, where, as we know, Mr. Penrhyn, the secretary, officiated at morning prayers, Lady Vernon actually drew her cousin Maximilla to her and kissed her.

“Making reparation I suppose,” thought Maximilla. “But there was no occasion, I was not the least hurt.”

And by the suggestion involved in this unusual demonstration, good Miss Max’s fancy was started on a wild tour of entertaining conjecture respecting her reserved cousin Barbara, and the possible bearing of that curious question upon the sensibilities of the handsome woman of three-and-forty, who had not yet contracted a single wrinkle or grey hair; and I am sorry to say that the measured intonation of Mr. Penrhyn, the secretary, as he duly read his chapter from the First Book of Chronicles, sounded in her ears faint and far away, as the distant cawing of the rooks.

This morning service was now over, and the little party gathered round the breakfast-table.

Seen in daylight, Captain Vivian looked ill and weak enough. He was not up to the walking, riding, and rough outdoor amusements of a country house. That was plain. He must lounge in easy-chairs, or lie his length on a sofa, and be content, for the present, to traverse the country with his handsome but haggard eyes only.

Those eyes are blue, his hair light brown and silken, his moustache soft and golden. It is a Saxon face, and good-looking.

There is no dragoonery or swaggering about this guest; he is simply a well-bred gentleman, and, in plain clothes, as completely divested of the conventional, soldierly manner, as if he had never stood before a drill-sergeant.

Whether it is a consequence of his illness, I can't say, but he looks a little sad.

In a house now and then so deserted and always so quiet as Roydon, the sojourn of a guest so unexceptionable, and also so agreeable, would have been at any time very welcome.

A little time ago, indeed, Maud might have thought this interruption of their humdrum life pleasanter. She had a good deal now to think of.

"What an inheritance of pictures you have," said Captain Vivian. There is a seat outside the window, and on this the invalid was taking his ease, while Miss Max and Maud Vernon, seated listlessly within, talked with him through the open window. "I think portraits are the most glorious and interesting of all possessions; I mean, of course, family portraits."

"If one could only tell whose portraits they are," said Maud, with a little laugh. "I know about twenty, I think, and, Max, you know nearly forty, don't you? And I don't know who knows the rest. There is a list somewhere; grandpapa made it out, I believe. But they are not all even in that."

"I look round on them with a vague awe." He said: "Artists and sitters, so long dead and gone; I wonder whether their ghosts come back to look at their work again, or to see what they once were like. I envy you all those portraits. Aren't you proud of them, Miss Vernon?"

"I suppose I ought to be," replied Miss Vernon. "I dare say I should be if they were treated with a little more respect. But when one meets one's ancestors peeping from behind doors, shouldering one another for want of room in galleries and in lobbies, hid away in corners or with their backs to the wall halfway up the staircase, they lose something of their dignity, and it becomes a little hard to be proud of them."

"Such long lines of ancestors running so far back into perspective!" said the invalid, languidly. "Think of those who look back without a single lamp to light the past! I knew a man who was well born, his parents both unquestionably of good family, first his mother, then his father died, when he was but two years old," Captain Vivian continued, looking down, as he talked, on the veining of the oak seat, along which he was idly running his pencil. "His fate was very odd. He found himself with money bequeathed to him by his father, and with a guardian who had hardly known that father, but who, I dare say half from charity, the father being on his deathbed, undertook the office. Of course if my friend's father had lived a little longer, the guardian would have learnt from his own lips all particulars respecting his charge. But his death came too swiftly. There was no mystery intended, of course; the money was in foreign stocks, and was collected and brought to England as the will directed, and neither he nor his guardian know as much as they would wish of the family of either parent. So there he is, quite isolated; a goodnatured fellow, I believe. It gives him something to think about; and I assure you it is perfectly true. I was thinking what that poor fellow would give for such a flood of light upon his ancestry as your portraits throw upon yours."

"Perhaps he has made it all out by this time," suggested Miss Max.

"I don't think he has," said Captain Vivian.

"And what is his name?" inquired the old lady.

"Well, I'm afraid I ought not to mention his name," he said, looking up. "It does not trouble him much now, I think, and I dare say it has caused him more pain than it is worth. Here comes a carriage," he said, raising his head. "Your avenue is longer than it appears, it is so wide. What magnificent trees!"

"Who are they, I wonder; the bishop or the dean?" said curious Miss Max.

"It may be the Manwarings. We called there a few days ago," said Maud.

"The liveries look like brown and gold, as well as I can see," said Captain Vivian, who had stood up and was looking down the avenue.

"Oh, it is the Tinterns, then," said Maud.

"Chocolate and gold, yes," assented Miss Max. "I hope so much that charming creature, Miss Tintern, is in the carriage. You'd be charmed with her, Captain Vivian."

"I dare say I should. But I am an awfully dull person at present, and I rather shrink from being presented. Mr. Tintern, from what I saw of him last night, appears to be a goodnatured, agreeable man?"

This was thrown out rather in the tone of an inquiry; but Captain Vivian did not wait for an answer; but, instead, slowly moved towards the hall-door, and before the Tinterns' carriage had reached the low balustrade of those ponds on which the swans and water-lilies float, he was in the drawingroom.

"I'm ashamed to say, I'm a little bit tired," said he to Miss Max; and pale and languid he did, indeed, look. "And I think till this little visit is over I'll get into the next room, and look over some of those books of prints. You must not think me very lazy; but if you knew what I was a week ago, you'd think me a Hercules now."

So, slowly, Captain Vivian withdrew to the quieter drawingroom beyond this room, and sat him down before a book in the window, and turned over the pages quietly.

In the mean time, agreeable Mr. Tintern has arrived, and his extremely pretty daughter has come with him.

She and Maud kiss, as young lady friends will, with more or less sincerity, after a long absence.

They make a very pretty contrast, the blonde and the dark beauty, Miss Tintern having golden hair and blue eyes, and Maud Vernon large dark grey eyes and brown hair.

So these young persons begin to talk together, while Lady Vernon and Mr. Tintern converse more gravely, a little way off, on themes that interest them more than flower-shows, fashions, and the coming ball at Wymering. Good Miss Max, who, in spite of her grave years, likes a little bit of frivolity, joins the young people, and has her laugh and gossip with them very cosily.

Having disposed of the Wymering ball, and talked over the statue of Mr. Howard in the church a little, and passed on to some county marriages likely to be, and said a word or two on guipure work, and the fashions, Miss Max said:

"I did not see your flowers at the Grange; I'm told they are perfectly lovely. The shower came on, you know; I was to have seen them."

"Oh, yes, it was so unlucky," says Miss Tintern. "Yes, I think they are very good. Don't you, Maud?"

"Yes, wonderful," answers Maud; "they throw us, I know, quite into shade."

"I think you are great florists in this part of the world," says Miss Max. "I thought I was very well myself; but I find I'm a mere nobody among you. You have got, of course, that new Dutch hyacinth. It is so beautiful, and so immense — white, I mean, and so waxen. What is its name, Maud?"

Maud gave the name of this beautiful monster.

“No; I’m sure we haven’t got it,” answers Ethel Tintern. “I should have liked so to see it.”

“We have one,” says Maud, “the last, I think, still in its best looks; they are very late. I saw it in the next room; come and see.”

In the histories of a thousand men, I suppose it has not happened six times, possibly in that of ten thousand, not half so often, that a young man should be surprised, in a deep sleep, over a book, by two young ladies so beautiful, and in whose eyes he wished, perhaps, to appear agreeable.

When the young ladies had pushed open the door, they stood for a moment beside it talking, and then, coming in, Maud Vernon pointed out the flower they had come to examine.

And, as they looked, admired, and talked, accidentally her eye lighted on the invalid, as he sat in the window, one hand on his book, his book slanting from his knee, and he with closed eyes and head sunk on his other hand, in a deep sleep. She exchanged a glance with her companion, and a faint smile and a nod.

The young ladies returned to the drawingroom; and when they had left the room a very few seconds, the slumbering invalid, without disturbing his attitude, looked after them curiously from the corner of his now halfopened eye, and listened. Then he turned his chair, so as better to avert his face, and, without stirring, continued to listen.

But they did not return. And as Mr. Tintern proposed lunching at Hartstonge Hall, he and his pretty daughter very soon took their leave, and Captain Vivian watched them quietly from the window, as they got into the open carriage and drove away.

“What a nice girl Ethel Tintern is. I like her so very much,” said Miss Max.

“Yes,” said Lady Vernon, “but I did not think her looking well, did you?”

“Very pretty, but perhaps a little pale,” acquiesced Miss Max.

“Very pale, indeed,” says Lady Vernon; “when she was going I was quite struck with it. Did you ever see her before, Mr. Dawe?”

“No,” answered that gentleman promptly from the recess of the window, where he was reading a note in his often consulted diary.

“I saw you look at her a good deal, Mr. Dawe,” said Maximilla, “and I know you thought her very pretty.”

“H’m!” said Mr. Dawe, oracularly.

“And I think she observed your admiration, also, for I saw her eyes follow you about the room whenever she fancied no one was looking, and I think there is more in it than you intend us to understand, and that you are a very profound person.”

“It is time I should be,” said Mr. Dawe, and the gong began to sound for luncheon as he spoke.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A LETTER.

The invalid came slowly in now, and the little party, roared for by the gong, as I said, went away together to luncheon very merrily.

When this sociable meal was ended, Maximilla said to Maud, as they were going through the door, side by side:

“Some letters have come here from the Hermitage, and one among them that concerns you. Come up to my room with me, and we can read it.”

“Who is it from?” asks Maud, with excusable impatience.

“You shall see when we get upstairs — come.”

“But what is it about?”

“You.”

And the agile old lady ran up the stairs before her, laughing.

“Come in and shut the door,” says Miss Max, as Maud reached the threshold; “bolt the door; it is no harm. Come here, to this window, and nobody can hear.”

She recollected the dressing-room door, and turning the key in it, rejoined Maud, whose curiosity was a good deal piqued by these precautions.

“Well, who is it from?” said Miss Max, with a provoking smile, as she raised it by the corner.

“If you don’t tell me this moment, I’ll push you into your chair, and take it by force.”

“Well, what do you say to Mr. Marston? I don’t know a more exemplary lover; the letter is from him. You shall hear,” answered Miss Max, as she opened it, and adjusted her glasses, smiling all the time a little mysteriously.

Maud looked grave, and a brilliant colour dyed her cheeks.

“Listen,” said Maximilla, very unnecessarily, and began.

“Dear Miss Medwyn, — You have been so extremely kind to me that I venture to write a very short note, which I can no longer forbear, although I scarcely know myself what it is going to be. Miss Maud Guendoline, as I still call her, although she told me that I still have to learn her surname, imposed a command upon me, when taking my leave on that happy and melancholy Sunday evening, which I can never forget, a command which I need hardly assure you I have implicitly obeyed. I am, therefore, as entirely in the dark as ever respecting all I most ardently long to hear. Every day that passes makes me long more intensely for the hour when I may again see that one human face which has enthralled me, which alone of all others has ever interested me — — "

"Mine, of course," suggested Miss Max, raising her eyes for a moment. "Well:"

" — Has ever interested me. Are you aware that the ball at Wymering is to come off nearly a fortnight earlier this year than usual? I have been so miserable lest the change of time should in any way endanger the certainty of Miss Maud Guendoline's attendance at it. Your nature is so entirely kind, that I know you will pardon my entreating you to write two or three words, only to reassure me, and tell me my misgivings are groundless. Till I shall have heard from you that your beautiful friend is to be at Wymering on the evening of the ball, I cannot know an hour's quiet."

"Poor thing! I can't bear to keep him in suspense another hour," said Miss Max.

Maud said nothing — neither "Yes" nor "No," not even "Read on." Miss Max, however, went on diligently, thus:

"I am going, if you allow me, to make a confidence, and implore a great kindness. If you think you can do what I ask, and will kindly undertake it, I cannot describe to you how grateful I shall be. I am tortured with the idea that your young friend has undertaken too much. From some things she said, I fear that her life is but a dull and troubled one, beset with anxieties and embittered by conditions, for which she is utterly unfitted. You are our friend — hers and mine — and do, I implore, permit me to place at your disposal what will suffice to prevent this. You must not think me very coarse. I am only very miserable as often as I think of her troubles and vexations, and entreat you to intervene to prevent them, acting as if entirely from yourself, and on no account for another. If I were only assured that you would undertake this, I could wait with a lighter heart for the moment when I hope to meet her again. You can understand what I suffer, and how entirely I rely upon your kind secrecy, in the little commission I so earnestly implore of you to undertake."

“And see how religiously I keep his secret!” said Miss Max. “But, poor fellow! doesn’t it do him honour? He thinks, at this moment, that you are living by the work of your fingers, and he not only lays his title and his title-deeds, with himself, at your feet, but he is miserable till he rescues you from the vexations of your supposed lot in life. I know very well that you think him an arrant fool. But I think him a hero — I know he’s a hero.”

“Did I say I thought him a fool?” said Maud. “I don’t know who is a fool and who is a sage in this world; and if he is a fool, I dare say I’m a greater one. I believe, Max, we are wise and foolish where we least suspect it. I think we are most foolish when we act entirely from our heads, and wisest when we act entirely from our feelings, provided they are good. I said so to Dr. Malkin, and he agreed; but, indeed, it is a dreadful life. I don’t know where there is happiness. I was thinking if I were really the poor girl he believes me, how wild with happiness all this would probably have made me.”

“It ought, as you are, to make you just as happy,” said Maximilla.

“It ought, perhaps, but it doesn’t. If I were that poor girl, gratitude and his rank would make me like him.”

“And you don’t like him?”

“No, I don’t like him.”

“Well. How inexpressibly pig-headed! How ungrateful!” exclaimed Miss Max, almost with a gasp. “There is everything! Such kindness, and devotion, and self-sacrifice. I never heard of such a lover — and no possible objection!”

“I don’t like him. I mean I don’t love him.”

“And I suppose you won’t go to the ball?” said Miss Max, aghast.

“I will go to the ball.”

“Do you know, Maud, I’m almost sorry I ever saw that poor young man. I’m sorry I ever beheld his face. One thing I am certain of, we must not go on mystifying him. I’ll write to him instantly, and tell him everything. I’ll not let him suppose I take a pleasure in fooling him; I like him too well for that. I don’t think, in this selfish world, I ever met any one like him. I shall wash my hands of the whole business; and I’m very sorry I ever took any part in practising this unlucky trick upon him. I must seem so heartless!”

“If you write any such letter I’ll not go.”

"Not go to the ball!" cried Maximilla. "Well, certainly, that will seem goodnatured — that is the climax!"

"I say to the ball I'll not go if you write him any such letter," said Maud.

"And you will go if I don't?" persisted goodnatured Miss Max.

"Certainly," said Maud, decisively.

"I don't see why he should be mystified," said Maximilla, after a considerable pause.

"He shall be mystified as long as I like. It is the only way by which we can ever know anything of him. What could you have known of him now, if it had not been that he was all in the dark about us? No; you shall write to him to-day, if to-day it must be, and tell him, in whatever way you like to put it, that you can't think of accepting his offer of money, as I and my mother have, one way or other, quite enough."

And at this point these two wise ladies, looking in one another's eyes, laughed a little, and then very heartily, and Miss Max said: "It is a great shame. I don't know how we can ever look him in the face again when he discovers how we have been deceiving him!"

"You have much too mean an opinion of your impudence, Max. At all events, if we can't we can't, and so the acquaintance ends."

"Well? What more? What about your going to the ball?" says Maximilla.

"Say that we shall certainly be there — you and I. You know you must stay for it."

"I suppose I must."

"And, let me see, it will be on Thursday week?"

"Yes; I'll tell him all that."

"But wait a moment. I haven't done yet. The ball begins at ten exactly. Yes, ten, and you and I shall be in the gallery at nine precisely."

"In the gallery!"

"Yes, in the gallery," repeated Miss Maud.

"Why, my dear Maud, no one sits in the gallery but townspeople, and musicians' wives and dressmakers. I don't know I'm sure what on earth you can mean."

"You shall know, of course, everything I mean."

"And, you know, I object to our having any more of that masquerading — remember that."

"Perfectly; I'll do nothing but exactly what you like. I promise to do nothing unless you agree to it. You shall know all my plans — isn't that fair?"

"Yes; but what are they?"

"I have only a vague idea now; but we can talk them over when you have written your letter; recollect, in little more than half an hour the servant takes the letters to the post. But write on your own paper with the Hermitage at the top of the sheet, and — yes — if you can be very quick, I'll send the letter to the postoffice at Dalworth; it will be better than the Roydon postmark."

"Yes, Roydon might set him thinking, if you don't want to tell him now."

"No, nothing, except what I have said. I'll never see him more if you do — you promise me that?"

"Certainly, you shall read the letter when it is written."

"There now, you are a good girl, Max; I'll stay here for it; and I'll get Lexton to send a man riding to Dalworth."

"Now you mustn't talk, or make the least noise," said Miss Max, as she opened her desk. "I must not make a mistake."

And soon the scraping of her industrious pen was the only sound audible in the room.

In the mean time, Maud took Mr. Marston's letter to the window, and leaning lightly with her shoulder to the angle of the wall, she looked it over, and thought what a gentlemanlike hand it was, and then she read and re-read it, and with a pretty glow in her cheeks, and her large eyes tired and saddened, she laid it on the table beside Maximilla, just as that romantic accomplice, having written the address on the envelope, turned round to place it in her hand.

"No, there isn't time to read it. Shut it up now, and let me have it. Lexton will put a stamp on it."

And with these words Maud kissed her with a fond little caress, and ran away with the note in her hand.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DRIFTING.

And now people begin to observe and whisper something strange. Now, in fact, begins an amazing infatuation. It shows itself in the cold, proud matron, Lady Vernon, at first covertly, afterwards with less disguise.

The young officer, Charles Vivian, is to make a stay of some weeks.

For a day or two Lady Vernon appears to take no particular interest in him. But gradually by the third day of his sojourn her manner, either disclosing a foregone liking, or indicating the growth of a new passion, changes.

It changes at first covertly; afterwards the signs that excite general comment show themselves with less disguise.

As Miss Max remarks to Maud, with a little pardonable exaggeration, “She can’t take her eyes off him, she can hear no one else speak, while he is talking in the same room to any one. She is quite rapt up in him.” As Miss Jones, Maud’s maid, phrases it in her confidential talk, she is “light on him,” meaning thereby, under the influence of a craze.

People who come in upon her solitude in her room, suddenly, say they find her agitated, and often in floods of tears. All agree that she has grown silent and absent, and seems never happy now but when she is near him.

It was one of those mysterious cases which honest Jack Falstaff would have accounted for by the hypothesis, “I’m bewitched with the rogue’s company. If the rascal have not given me medicines to make me love him, I’ll be hanged; it could not be else; I have drunk medicines.”

I suppose she guarded her language very carefully, and even her looks, in actual conversation with Captain Vivian, for that which appeared plain enough to other people seemed hidden from him. It was discussed in the servants’ hall and in the housekeeper’s room.

The unanimous opinion was that Captain Vivian had only to speak and that the new year would see him the chosen of the handsome widow and lord of Roydon Hall. People wondered, indeed, how he could be so stupid as not to see what was so plain to every one else. But they could not know how cautious Lady Vernon was in her actual conversation with him, not, by sign or word, to commit herself in the least degree.

It was clear enough, however, to the household of Roydon in what direction all this was tending, and a general agitation and uneasiness trembled through every region and articulation of that huge and, hitherto, comfortable body.

Such was the attitude of affairs when Maud Vernon, with her cousin Maximilla, drove over to the Grange to pay the Tinterns a visit.

Mr. Dawe had taken his departure after a day or two with a promise, made upon consideration, as one might conjecture, for undivulged reasons of his own, to return in less than a week.

The prominent brown eyes and furrowed, inflexible face removed, a sense of liberty seemed to visit Captain Vivian suddenly. His spirits improved, and he evidently began to enjoy Maud Vernon’s society more happily. They took walks together; they talked over books; they compared notes about places they had visited, and she began to think that the intellectual resources of Roydon were improved, since the time when she used to insist that Dr. Malkin alone redeemed that region of the earth from Bœotian darkness.

“Take care, my dear, that our plaintive invalid doesn’t turn out instead a very robust lover,” said Miss Max, in one of her nocturnal conferences with Maud. “*There* will be a pretty comedy!”

“How can you like to make me uncomfortable?” said Maud.

“Upon my word, if I don’t, I think Barbara will,” replied Maximilla. “Don’t you see how she is devoted to him?”

“I can’t understand her. Sometimes I think she is, and sometimes I doubt it,” said Miss Vernon.

“Well — yes. She is, perhaps, in a state of vacillation — a state of struggle; but she thinks of nothing else, and, it seems to me, can scarcely hear, or even see, any other human being.”

“You may be very sure I shan’t allow him to make love to me,” said Maud, with proper dignity.

“Unless you wish to come to pulling of caps with your mamma, for the entertainment of the rest of the world, you had better not, I think,” answered Miss Max, with a laugh.

"But, I tell you, I should not permit it, and he never has made the slightest attempt to make love to me," repeated Maud, blushing.

"Well, it is rather a good imitation. But Barbara does not seem to see it — I don't think, indeed, she has had an opportunity — and if she's happy why should I interfere?" said Miss Max.

And so that little talk ended.

Coming out of church on Sunday, the three ladies from Roydon and Captain Vivian, who felt strong enough for one of Mr. Foljambe's sermons, and sat in the corner of the great Vernon pew, stood for a moment on the step of the side porch, while the carriage drove up to receive them. The grenadier footmen in blue and gold opened the door and let down the steps, and Lady Vernon, following Miss Max, stepped, lightly as a girl, into her carriage. The Tinterns, Mr., Mrs., and Miss, at the same moment emerged from the holy shadow under the stained and grooved gothic arch with a similar intent. Lady Vernon from the carriage bowed to them with her cold, haughty smile, which Mr. Tintern answered with his hat in his hand, high above his head in the ceremonious old fashion, and with a countenance beaming all over with manly servility.

The chocolate and gold liveries, standing at the flank, awaited the departure of the blue and gold to do their devoir by the more ponderous carriage of the humbler Grange family.

While Mr. and Mrs. Tintern made their smiling salutations, and answered the remark which Maximilla Medwyn called out to the effect that it was a charming day, Maud thought she remarked from pretty Ethel Tintern a quick and odd glance at Captain Vivian, who, not having been presented to the Tintern ladies, was industriously digging a tiny stalk of groundsel from a chink in the old worn step, at the flank of which he stood.

It was very natural that the young lady should steal that quick glance at the unobservant stranger. It was the undefinable character of it that struck Maud.

There seemed neither curiosity nor recognition. It was momentary — a dark look, pained and shrunken. It was gone, quite, in a moment, and Ethel, as Maud with a hurried pressure of her hand was about to take her place in the carriage, said softly:

"You must come to see me tomorrow or next day. You owe us a visit, you know. *Do.*"

"I will, certainly," promised Maud, smiling. And in a moment more she was in her place, and, followed by Captain Vivian, the door closed upon her; and the smiling faces and stately liveries whirled away over the gritty gravel of the churchyard road.

"This has been your first Sunday at church since your illness. It was rather longer than usual. Mr. Foljambe's sermons don't often exceed twenty minutes. I hope you are not doing too much?"

This question of Lady Vernon's, and Captain Vivian's polite disclaimer, were the only contributions toward conversation which fell from the little party as they drove home.

"Mr. Mapleson told me that mamma said she would have the main street of the village watered every Sunday, and she hasn't given any order, I suppose, about it. See what a state we are in! Covered with dust. I must ask Mr. Mapleson why," said Maud to Miss Max in the hall.

"Well, it is a bore," she answered; "we can't sit down in these things. Come up. I want to tell you I've just found a note on the table. No, it's not from the person you think. I see you're blushing."

"Now, don't be a goose," said Maud.

"Although it's not so bad a guess, as you shall hear when you come to my room. I told you, you remember, that my gossiping maid said that Captain Vivian sent two letters to the Grange; Captain Vivian's man told her, but she could make out nothing more. She has not an idea to whom they were written. He does not know Miss Tintern nor Mrs. Tintern, and I don't see what he could write to old Tintern about; but the note I have got is from such a charming creature, younger than Barbara, and a widow — Lady Mardykes. She is a sister of Mr. Marston's, and she has, besides her place at Golden Friars, such a pretty place, about five-and-thirty or forty miles from this, and she is one of my very dearest friends. She asks me to go and see her immediately, and I must introduce you. You will be charmed with her, and she, I know, with you."

"Is there any chance of Mr. Marston's being there? If there is, I certainly shan't go," said Maud.

"None in the world. He is to be with his father till Thursday, don't you recollect, he tells us all about it in his letter, and on Friday he will be at the ball at Wymering. Suppose we go and see her tomorrow. Do you know I have been suspecting a little that Captain Vivian's letter was to her. But she could not be such a fool as to throw herself away upon him."

"Very well, then, let us take the carriage and go to the Grange tomorrow. So that's agreed."

In pursuance of this plan they did actually drive over to the Grange next day.

Artful Miss Max was rather anxious to induce Captain Vivian to accompany them. It would have amused her active mind to observe that gallant gentleman's proceedings. But as if he suspected her design, he very adroitly, but politely, evaded the suggestion. So she and Maud went alone.

The Grange was a pretty house, a little later than the Tudor style. Driving up through the rather handsome grounds, they had hardly got a peep at the comfortable steep-gabled house, when Maud exclaims:

"There is Ethel — who is that with her?"

"Dear me! That is Lady Mardykes, I'm sure. I'm so glad to see her! They are looking at the flowers; suppose we get out."

So down they got, and the ladies before the hall-door, among the flowers, looked up, and came towards them with smiles.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A WARNING.

A great kissing ensued upon the grass, and a shaking of hands, and Maud was introduced to Lady Mardykes, whom she liked instantaneously.

A face that must have been very pretty and was still interesting — gentle, gay, and frank — was before her. But she was much older than her brother: a daughter by an earlier marriage.

This lady evidently took a fancy to Maud, and when they had talked a little, and began to grow to know one another better, after a short conversation aside with Maximilla, during which Maud saw that goodnatured old maid look once or twice at her, Lady Mardykes, coming over to her, began to talk to her again.

“I should have gone to Roydon to see Lady Vernon,” she said, “only that I had doubts as to her liking it; and perhaps it is better to put it off to another time. There have been so many unlucky vexations, and I know she and papa don’t visit, so you will understand why I don’t go to see you at Roydon. But you must promise to come to me for a few weeks to Carsbrook. I shan’t be going to Mardykes till next year, perhaps; I should rather have had you there. All about Golden Friars is so very beautiful. But I think you will say that Carsbrook is a pretty place, and if I can persuade Maximilla Medwyn to come to meet you, I’m sure you will find it pleasant. I’ll consult with her as to how best to invite you.”

Maud was very well pleased with this little plan; and now old Mr. Tintern came forth upon the grass, with his agreeable greetings and chilly smiles, and Maximilla and he began to talk, and their talk grew gradually, it seemed, a little earnest. And when the gong summoned them to luncheon, he seemed still a little thoughtful now and then during that repast.

They walked out again through the glass door after luncheon, and Mr. Tintern, in the same mood, accompanied them, and once more fell into talk with Miss Max.

Ethel Tintern was now beside Maud, and the two young ladies sat down upon a rustic seat among the flowers.

"We are forlorn damsels here; our gentlemen have all gone off to fish at Dalworth. Papa wanted Lady Mardykes and me to go in the carriage, and I am so glad now we did not. We should have missed you. Do you know I think we girls have much more resource than men. They won't entertain themselves as we do, and it is so hard to amuse them. You have a guest at present at Roydon?"

"Yes, Captain Vivian."

"Yes; and Miss Medwyn thinks he is a little taken with you?"

"She divides him between me and Lady Mardykes at present, and when you are acquainted, I dare say she'll give you a share."

Ethel laughed, and said suddenly:

"By-the-bye, I was so near forgetting the pyracanth! It is beginning to look rather passé; it is the very last, but she can judge pretty well what it must be when it is in its best looks."

So she got Miss Max to look at the flower, which she held up for her inspection in its glass, and there ensued an animated bit of floral gossip, in which Mr. Tintern, who was skilled in flowers, and had won a few years since two or three prizes, one especially, which made a great noise, for his ranunculuses, took a leading part.

Then Mr. Tintern withdrew, and Miss Max, Lady Mardykes, and Mrs. Tintern talked together, and Ethel, alone once more with Maud Vernon, said, as if the long parenthesis counted for nothing:

"About that Captain Vivian — take my advice, and don't allow him to pay you the slightest attention."

"Really — — "

"Yes," says Miss Tintern, who is cruelly plucking a white rose, petal by petal, asunder, and watching the process intently.

"Yes, but I assure you he hasn't," said Maud.

"Miss Medwyn thinks differently," said Miss Tintern, with gentle diligence continuing the process of discerption.

"I don't perceive it, if he does," answered Maud. "But why do you warn me?" and she smiled a little curiously as she put her question.

"Because I know certain things about him, and he is aware that I do, that ought to prevent him. You mustn't repeat a word I say, mind. Does he seem to wish to avoid me?"

"Quite the contrary. He talks as if he should like so much to make your acquaintance."

"That I don't understand," said Ethel, plucking three or four leaves together from her dishevelled rose.

"I understood him to wish that I should take the first opportunity of introducing him."

"I should not like that at all," said Ethel, with a tone and look of marked annoyance, her eyes still watching the flower she was stripping leaf by leaf.

"Is it anything discreditable?" asked Maud.

"No, not that, certainly not, but it might easily become so. You see, I'm talking riddles, but, indeed, I can't help it. I can't say anything more at present than I have told you, and so much I had a right to say, and am very glad I have had an opportunity, and for the present, as I said, I can give you nothing but that, my earnest piece of advice. And take care of yourself, I counsel you, in this false, shabby, wicked world."

With these words, Ethel Tintern got up, and broke what remained of the rose between her fingers, and crumpled it up and threw it away. She saw Miss Max walking quickly toward them, with the air of a chaperon in search of her charge, and she guessed that the hour had come for saying goodbye.

"My dear Maud, I had no idea how late it was," said Maximilla, before she reached them. "I'm so afraid we shall be late for our appointment with your mamma. It is twenty minutes past three now. Had not we better go?"

Maud was a little alarmed, for with her to be late for an appointment with her mother was a very serious matter indeed, so she consulted her watch, which, for a lady's timepiece, was a very fair one, being seldom more than twenty minutes wrong, either way, and finding there signs corroborative of Miss Max's calculations, "there was parting in hot haste," and time for little more than a hurried inquiry whether Ethel was going to the Wymering ball.

"Yes, she thought so; that is, if her papa went; her mamma was not well enough."

And so, kissing and goodbyes, and a very friendly reminder from Lady Mardykes, who said she expected to be at home at Carsbrook in ten days, and that Maud would be sure to hear from her about that time.

And now they are whirling homeward, at the brilliant pace of the highbred horses of Roydon, and Maud says to her companion:

"Ethel has just been warning me, for reasons she won't tell, against permitting Captain Vivian to pay me attentions. Not a very likely thing, but I'm sure she means it kindly, and she was really quite earnest, but she charged me not to tell it to mortal, so you must promise not to mention it."

So you see how well the secret was guarded.

"Upon my life, this Captain Vivian, invalid though he be, is beginning to grow into a very formidable sort of hero. Mr. Tintern was talking about him, and I said, just to try what he would say, that I thought Barbara had taken rather a fancy to him, and he took it up not at all jestingly, but very seriously indeed, and he told me, confidentially, that he had heard the same thing from another quarter, and that he believed it. So, my dear Maud, I rather think," continued Miss Max, who saw as far into millstones as most old ladies, "that we may connect Miss Ethel's warning with her father's curious information. Don't you see?"

"Upon my word, the situation grows tragical!" said Maud, with a laugh.

"It would be an unlucky business for Mr. Tintern, of course, if Barbara took it into her head to marry, because it might extinguish any chance, and you may be sure he thinks it a better one than it is, of his succeeding to a share of the Vernon property. Dear me, who are those?"

The exclamation and question were suggested by the emergence of Lady Vernon and Captain Vivian from the church-door of Roydon, which the carriage was now almost passing.

"Rehearsing the ceremony, I suppose," laughed Miss Max.

A footman was waiting outside, and the sexton followed the lady and gentleman out, and locked the old church-door.

Lady Vernon had been showing Captain Vivian the monument which he had seen but imperfectly the day before. Lady Vernon saw them, and bowed and smiled to Miss Max as they passed.

"I sometimes think Barbara is not looking very well — pale and tired. I don't know why she fags herself so miserably, I'm sure. But if I told her so, I should only have my head in my hand. There are some people, my dear, who hate advice, and, on the whole, do you know, I rather think they are right."

They were driving up the avenue by this time, and were soon in the courtyard.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. TINTERN HAS SOMETHING TO SAY.

Mr. Tintern arrived next day, and was fortunate enough to find Lady Vernon alone in the drawingroom.

He had some county business to tell her of, and some gossip to report; but there was still something palpably on his mind which he did not very well know how to express.

He stood up, and she thought he was going to take his leave; it was time he should; but he went to the window instead, and talked of the two gigantic chestnut-trees that overshadow the balustrade of the court, in a sentimental and affectionate vein, as remembering them from the earliest time he could remember anything; and he spoke of her father with great regard, affection, and veneration. And then he spoke of the friendship that had always existed between the Grange and Roydon Hall, and then he mentioned that most interesting family memorial, the "shield-room," with the quarterings of the Rose and the Key; of his right to quarter which, proving the early connexion of his family with the Vernons, he was prouder than of any other incident in their history. And having ended all this, he seemed to have still something more to say.

The lady's large grey eyes lighted on him with a cold inquiry. She was growing impatient. If he had anything to say, why did he not say it? Her look disconcerted him, and his light eyes went down before her dark gaze, as with an effort he said:

"I'm going to take my leave, Lady Vernon, and I don't know whether you will, by-and-bye, be vexed with me for having gone without mentioning a circumstance, which, however, I believe to be of absolutely no importance. But, you see, you have so often told me that you like, on all occasions, to be put in possession of facts, and that you insist so much on candour and frankness as the primary conditions of all friendship, and you have honoured me, more than once, with so large a measure of confidence, which has extremely flattered me, that even at a risk of appearing very impertinent, I had almost made up my mind to tell you what I have ascertained to be a general — very general — topic of — of interest among neighbours and people down here; but, on the whole, I should rather not, unless, indeed, you would command me, which I rather hope you will not."

"I shan't command you, certainly. I have no right even to press you; but if it concerns me, I should be very much obliged if you would let me know what it is."

"I'm sure you will forgive me, but feeling how much, in a matter of so much more delicacy, you have already honoured me with your confidence, I felt myself, you will understand, in a little difficulty."

"You need have none, Mr. Tintern, in speaking perfectly frankly to me. Pray say what it is."

"As you say so, I shall, of course."

And then, with all the tact and delicacy, and polite and oblique refinement, on which he piqued himself, Mr. Tintern did at length distinctly inform Lady Vernon that it was said that she meant to honour Captain Vivian with her hand.

"If people had some useful occupation of their own they would have less time to spare in settling other people's affairs. I shan't take the slightest notice of any such rumours. They don't amount even to that. They are not rumours, but the mere speculations of two or three idle brains. I am forty-two" — she was really forty-three, but even for the force of her argument she would not forego that little inaccuracy— "and I have not married since my husband's death, twenty years ago nearly. It is a little odd, that one can't have a guest in one's house, without being made a topic for the coarse gossip of low people. I only wish I knew to whom I am obliged for taking this very gross liberty with my name. They should never enter the doors of Roydon again."

Mr. Tintern was a little frightened at the effect of his own temerity, for he had never seen Lady Vernon so angry before, and a quarrel with her was the last thing he would have provoked.

"I shall certainly contradict it," he hastened to say. "I shall take every occasion to do so."

"You may, or you may not. I shan't prevent you, and I shan't authorise you. I don't want it circulated or contradicted. I am totally indifferent about it."

"Of course — entirely; you must be — entirely indifferent. But you understand, although I didn't believe it, yet, as I was supposed to be a not unlikely person to hear anything so interesting, I thought you might not choose, as my sitting by and not being in a position to contradict it appeared to some people very like countenancing the — the gossip — — "

"Pray understand me, Mr. Tintern. I don't the least care whether it is countenanced or contradicted. It does not interest me. I shan't, either directly or indirectly, take the smallest notice of it. I look on it simply as an impertinence."

"I hope, Lady Vernon, you don't suppose for a moment that I viewed it otherwise than as an impertinence. That was my real difficulty, and I felt it so much that I really doubted whether I should mention it. But, on the other hand, I think you will say that I should have been wanting in loyalty to the house of Vernon, if I had not given you the option of hearing, or of not hearing, as you might determine."

"I think, Mr. Tintern, you did no more than was friendly in the matter," said Lady Vernon, extending her hand, "and I am extremely obliged to you. As to the thing itself, we shan't talk of it any more."

Lady Vernon took an unusually cordial leave of that near neighbour and distant kinsman, who departed in good spirits, and well pleased with himself.

As he rode homeward, however, and conned over the conversation, he began to perceive with more distinctness that upon the main question Lady Vernon had left him quite as much in the dark as ever.

"But she could not express all that contempt and indignation if there was anything in the report, and she certainly would not have been so much obliged to me for repeating it to her."

But this reasoning did not so entirely reassure him as he fancied it ought.

Six words would have denied it, and set the matter at rest, and that short sentence had not been spoken.

He began to grow very uncomfortable.

If he had known what was occurring at that moment in the library at Roydon Hall, it would not have allayed his uneasiness.

In that room there is a very pretty buhl cabinet, with ormolu Cupids gambolling and flitting over its rich cornice. You would not suppose that this elegant shell contained within it a grimy iron safe. But on unlocking and throwing open the florid and many-coloured doors, the homely front of the black safe appears, proof against fire and burglars.

Lady Vernon unlocks a small bronze casket over the chimneypiece, and from it takes the big many-warded key of the safe. She applies it, and the doors swing open.

A treasury of parchment deeds discloses itself. She knows exactly where to place her hand on the one she wants. The organ of neatness and order is strong in her. She selects it from a sheaf of exactly similar ones. No ancient deeds, yellow and rusty with years. This is a milk-white parchment. Its blue stamp and silver foil look quite pretty in the corner. A short square deed, with scrivenry that looks black and fresh as if the ink were hardly dry upon it, and there are blanks left for names and dates. It is a deed as yet unexecuted. She takes it out, and lays it with its face downward on her desk, locks the safe and the cabinet, and restores the key to its casket over the mantelpiece.

The angry colour is still in Lady Vernon's cheeks as she slowly reads this deed, filling in, with careful penmanship, all the dates, and writing, in no less than four blank places at full length, the words, "Alexander Wyke Tintern, of the Grange, in the county of —— , Esquire."

Was Lady Vernon rewarding friendly Mr. Tintern, then and there, by a deed of appointment — for these have been prepared, at her desire, by Mr. Coke — securing his succession, in certain contingencies, to a share in a princely reversion?

No. Alas! for the aspirations of the Grange, these little deeds, quite sufficient and irrevocable, are for the eternal cutting-off of the condemned.

All being ready now, Lady Vernon touches the bell, sends for her secretary, and having doubled back the deed so that the signing place only is disclosed, seals, signs, and delivers it in presence of her secretary, who little dreams that these few magical symbols are taking off the head of a neighbour, and laying his airy castle in the dust.

And now he has duly "witnessed" it, and Lady Vernon despatches it that evening, registered, with a letter enjoining the strictest secrecy, to Mr. Coke in London.

So good Mr. Tintern, if he knew but all, need trouble himself no further whether Lady Vernon or Maud marry, or pine and die singly; for go where it may, not one shilling of the great reversion can, by any chance or change, ever become his.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CINDERELLA.

Captain Vivian was now very much better; he has lost the languor of an invalid, and is rapidly recovering the strength and tints of health, and with them the air and looks of youth return.

The uneasiness of Mr. Tintern grew apace, for he heard authentic reports of the long walks which the handsome young captain used daily to take about the romantic grounds of Roydon with the beautiful lady of that ancient manor.

“The idea,” he said to Mrs. Tintern, “of that old woman — she’s forty-six, if she’s an hour — marrying that military adventurer, not five-and-twenty, by Jove! Such infatuation!”

Old Tintern saw the captain one day fishing his trout-stream diligently, and pretending not to know him at that distance, he shouted, in arrogant tones, to the keeper: “Holloa! I say, Drattles, go down there, will you, quick, and see who the devil that is fishing my brook!”

The gamekeeper touched his hat, and ran down, and Mr. Tintern, from his point of observation, strode at a more leisurely pace, in a converging line, towards the offender.

He found Captain Vivian in parley with the keeper.

“Oh, Captain Vivian!” he exclaimed very naturally, “I had not an idea. I’m so glad to see you able to take a rod in your hand.”

“Lady Vernon told me you were so good — — “

“My dear sir, don’t say a word. I begged of Lady Vernon to send you here, if you cared for trout fishing, and indeed all Roydon guests are welcome. I hope you have had some sport. You must come up and take luncheon with us. I ought not, indeed, to say I’m glad to see you so well, for I am afraid it is a sign we are to lose you very soon. You’ll be joining your regiment, I suppose. Those bigwigs are so churlish about holidays. They forget they ever were young fellows themselves. Do come and have some luncheon.”

This invitation, however, Captain Vivian very politely declined.

“You are going to the ball tonight — Wymering — eh?” inquired Mr. Tintern.

“Yes, I intend going; and your party are going, I suppose?” said the young man.

“Oh, yes, we always show there; and Lady Vernon, is she going?” pursued Mr. Tintern.

“No, Lady Vernon don’t feel quite up to it.”

“Sending him,” thought Mr. Tintern, “to put people off their guard. Perhaps she doesn’t wish them to criticise her looks and demeanour in presence of the aspiring captain.”

“Dear me, I’m so sorry: she complains sometimes of a headache,” said Mr. Tintern, affectionately. “By-the-bye, there’s about a mile of very good pike fishing at the other side. The men are busy cleaning the ponds just now; but if you are here in three weeks’ time — — “

“No, I’m afraid I shan’t, thank you very much.”

“Well, we must make an effort, and say a fortnight; will that do?”

“A thousand thanks, but I’m afraid I have little more than a week.”

“Oh! nonsense. I won’t believe it,” exclaimed Mr. Tintern very cheerfully.

“I’m awfully sorry,” said Captain Vivian; “it is such a beautiful country, and so charming in every way. I could live here all my life with pleasure.”

“I’m so glad to hear it has made so agreeable an impression. We may look to see you here again, I dare say, before long.”

“You are very kind. I don’t know anything yet with certainty about my movements; they depend upon so many things. I’ve a note, by-the-bye, which I promised to leave at the Grange.”

“As you won’t come to the house, I’ll take charge of it,” said Mr. Tintern. “I see it is for my wife. I dare say about the ball. She’s out; she’ll not be home for some hours. I think I may venture to open it.” He did, and glanced through it.

“Oh, yes, pray tell Miss Vernon, my wife will be only too delighted to meet her and Miss Medwyn in the cloak-room. We shall be there at exactly halfpast ten. I hope that will answer Miss Vernon. My wife would write, but she has gone to Dallerton; but you will be so kind as to say Miss Vernon may look on it as quite settled.”

So they parted very pleasantly; for Mr. Tintern, who was a shrewd man, had heard two or three things that cheered his heart in this little talk with Captain Vivian. He felt, indeed, in better spirits about Roydon and the probable continuance of Lady Vernon's widowhood than he had enjoyed for nearly a fortnight.

He had had losses lately. It would be too bad if everything were to go wrong.

If we could sum up the amount of the sins and sorrows of the human race, purely mental and unexpressed, for the most part, that result from contingent remainders, destructible reversions, and possible godsends and windfalls, the total would be possibly rather shocking.

The little oldfashioned town of Wymering is in a wonderful fuss this night. It is its great anniversary — its night of dissipation and glory. It is not only for the town a crisis and an event, but the country all round, with Wymering for a centre, feels the radiation and pulse of the excitement. For ten miles round almost every good county house sends in its carriage and horses and liveries, and for fifteen — ay, even twenty miles round — roll in occasional carriages with posthorses; and traps besides, of all sorts, come rattling into the High-street with young fellows in hilarious spirits, thinking of nothing but dances and flirtation; and sometimes of some one's pretty face, without which the ball would be dark, and the music lifeless.

The clock of the town-hall has struck nine, and the Roydon carriage and liveries stop at the door of the Old Hall Inn. Miss Max and Miss Vernon get down, and their two maids also.

Captain Vivian, with Captain Bamme, who has begged a seat to Wymering, are coming on later.

The ladies have run upstairs to their rooms; the maids and boxes follow.

Miss Max cowers over the little bit of fire, that smoulders in the grate of the large room. Miss Vernon is looking from the window to the lights of the town-hall over the way, and up and down the High-street, in a glow of excitement, which, to a town young lady, after a season or two, would have been incomprehensible and amusing.

"Max, will you touch that bell? We must see Mr. Lomax."

The host of the Old Hall appears forthwith, in answer to the summons of his Roydon guests.

"Mr. Lomax," says Maud, as soon as he appears at the stair head, "you must give me an order for Miss Medwyn and her maid to go to the gallery of the town-hall. She wishes to see how the room looks."

Mr. Lomax makes his bow, and in the lobby writes the order, and gives it to Miss Vernon's maid.

A few minutes later Jones was spreading, with light and careful fingers upon the wide coverlet of the bed, the dress which had arrived only that morning from London.

In very marked contrast with this, and the splendours which Jones was preparing, including the diamond stars which were to flash from her dark brown hair, and were now strewn on the dressing-table, was the present costume of pretty Miss Vernon.

Before the glass she stood in the identical dark serge dress and little black hat, and the very boots and gloves, which she wore at Cardyllion. The beautiful face that looks out of the glass, smiled darkly in hers.

"Come, dear Max, here is the order. It is only a step across the street."

Jones and Maximilla's maid were fussing over gloves and satin boots, and fifty things, in the dressing-room.

"Didn't you say a quarter past nine in the gallery of the town-hall?" said Maud, looking still at her own pretty face in the glass.

"Yes, dear, and mind, Maud, this is the very last piece of masquerading I'll ever be led into; I don't care how you coax and flatter me. What an old fool I have been!"

With this protest, Miss Max shook her head with a smile, and lifting her hands she said:

"With this act I take leave of my follies for ever, remember. I really don't know how it is you make such a fool of me, whenever you please; I don't understand how it is you have got such an unaccountable influence over me; I only know that there doesn't exist a person on earth for whom I would have perpetrated so many absurdities, and told so many fibs, and I say, once for all, that this is the very last time I'll ever be a Jack-pudding for any one, while I live."

Miss Maud was before the cheval-glass, so Maximilla had to betake herself to a mirror of more moderate dimensions, before which she made a few slight adjustments of her staid brown silk, and her bonnet, and her velvet cloak, and then turning to Maud, she exclaimed:

“Oh, my dear, are you really coming in that serge? You are such a figure.”

“Now come, you say this is to be the last appearance of Cinderella in her work-a-day costume, and you must not interfere. You shall change all with a touch of your wand when the hour comes. But, in the mean time, I’m to be as shabby and threadbare as I please. Come, it’s ten minutes past nine; I should like to be in the gallery before he comes. You told him not to be there a moment before the hour?”

“To be sure I did, poor fellow; and I don’t know which, he or I, is the greater fool.”

With these words Maximilla Medwyn led the way down the broad staircase, and the two ladies, side by side, tripped swiftly across the village street. Miss Max handed her order from Mr. Lomax to the woman who already kept guard at the door, through which they reached the flight of narrow stairs which communicated with the gallery.

They mounted quickly, and entered the gallery. At the opposite end of this really handsome room is a corresponding gallery allotted to the musicians, half a dozen of whom were already on the benches, in high chat, pulling about their music, and uncasing their instruments. A quart pot, from the Old Hall, and a frothy tumbler, stood in the ledge, showing that they were already disposed to make merry. The gas candelabra were but imperfectly lighted; workmen were walking up and down the long room, with light tread, in tenderness to the waxed floor, completing arrangements, while their employers bawled their orders from one end of the room to the other; one steward was already present, garrulous and fussy, whom Maud, with some alarm, recognised as young Mr. Hexton, of Hexton Hall. Devoutly she hoped he might not take it into his head to visit the galleries.

They were quite to themselves, she and Maximilla, except for a little knot of Wymering womankind, who were leaning over, at the other end of the gallery, far too much engrossed by their own conversation to take any notice of them.

As the moment approached, the question, “Will he come? will he come?” was repeating itself strangely at Maud’s heart. The noise in the lower part of the building had subsided, having moved away to the refreshment and cloak-rooms, from which its hum was but faintly heard, and the confidential murmur of the party at the other end of the gallery, who were discussing dresses, which they have, no doubt, been making for this great occasion, was rather reassuring.

"I think I'm fast," said Miss Max, holding her watch to her ear. "I wish we had not told him not to come before the time; we should have found him waiting."

At that moment the bells from the old church steeple, scarcely a hundred yards away, chimed the quarter, and, like a spirit evoked by the summons, Mr. Marston opened the door of the gallery and came in.

Smiling, to cover his real agitation, he came quickly to Miss Max, who rose with a very kind alacrity to greet him.

"Was ever mortal more punctual? It is quite a virtue, now-a-days, being in time to meet a friend," she said, approvingly, as she gave him her hand.

"It is only too easy not to be late," he said, extending his hand in turn to the young lady in the dark serge, with glowing eyes, and a smile. "The difficulty is not to be too soon."

He came next Miss Maud, and seating himself beside her, took her hand again very gently, and said, very low, looking in her eyes, "It is so like a dream!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN THE GALLERY.

"What a beautiful clear evening it is," said Miss Max, doing her best to find a topic. "The stars look almost as brilliant as they do in a frost. You have come a long way, Mr. Marston, I dare say."

"Coming here, it seemed nothing," he answered, with a look at the young lady.

"It was a very fine night, also, when we took leave after our little tea-party at Cardyllion, do you remember?"

"I do remember," he said very gently.

"You'll turn up at the ball, of course?" answered Miss Max.

"That depends on who are going," he answered. "Is there the least chance of your being there?"

"Who? I?" with a little laugh, said Miss Maud, to whom, nearly in a whisper, the question had been addressed.

"I think that was a cruel question," she continued, "that is, if you remembered what I said, when we last spoke about this ball."

"I remember every syllable you said, not only about this ball," he answered, "but about everything else we talked of. I ought not to have asked, perhaps, but changes, you know, are perpetually occurring, and you, I think, forget how very long it is since I last saw you."

"The interval has brought no change for me — no good change, I mean," she answered. "I shall be rather busy tonight, and tired enough in the morning, I dare say. My gay cousin, Maximilla, is going, or coming, shall I say, as we are here, to the ball with a young lady whose dress I have seen." And here Miss Maud laughed very merrily. "And I shall have, I think, to help her maid to put it on her."

"Maud, will you be quiet?" said the old lady, very much vexed. "I — I — well, it is very disagreeable."

"It vexes her my telling it; but it is quite true," whispered Maud. "I must see that young lady's maid in ten minutes."

"You don't mean to say you are going, so soon?" exclaimed Mr. Marston.

“I must leave this in about ten minutes,” said Maud.

“Well, I believe you must,” put in Miss Max; “and so must I, for that matter. And, Mr. Marston, your sister is to be at the ball; she is coming with the Tinterns; of course you will look in? And I really want to introduce you to a very particular friend, and you must look in; if you don’t, I give you my word, I’ll never answer a note of yours again as long as I live.”

“Under that threat I shall certainly turn up,” he said.

He glanced at Maud, and thought she looked a little sad.

“Where will you be when the ball commences?” he inquired, with a hope that he might have divined the cause of those looks. “Here?”

“Certainly not. Oh, no!”

“And, surely — I have so much to say. It is two months since I saw you, and you can’t think how I have longed for this little meeting, and lived, ever since, upon the hope of it. You can’t think of reducing it, after all, to a few minutes!”

Miss Max understood, though she did not hear the terms of it, this ardent murmur close to Maud’s pretty ear, and she said, goodnaturedly:

“I have not had time yet to read old Heyrick’s letter, and I really must finish it, Mr. Marston. I know you’ll excuse me for a moment.”

And this spacious document, which she luckily had about her, Miss Medwyn unfolded, and proceeded to peruse, with her glasses to her eyes, greatly to the relief of Mr. Marston.

“I have ever so much to say, and I’ve been looking forward to this chance of telling you a great deal — everything; and — may I say it? yes, I do say it — I thought you did not seem so friendly as our old acquaintance might have warranted. You were cold and indifferent — I am sure it is all right; but, oh! if you knew how it pained me — as if you did not care ever so little to see your old Cardyllion friend again. And I, who have never thought of any one but you all that time! And — oh, Heaven! — if you knew how it tortures me, thinking of the cruel injustice of fortune that condemns you to a life of so much trouble and anxiety, and how I have longed to tell you how I honour you, how, if I dare speak it, I adore you; how, every day, I long to lay myself and all my hopes at your feet. But you will never like me; you will never care for me. It never yet was the way to be loved to love too madly.”

"What am I to say to all this? Who am I? You may know something of Miss Medwyn, my cousin Maximilla, but of me you can know nothing. There are inequalities everywhere. I have often wished that fortune had placed me exactly where she is. But good people tell us that whatever is is best, and now you must promise me this — you must, if our acquaintance is to go on — that you will not talk to me so wildly any more. Why can't we be very good friends, and grow better acquainted, and come, at last, to know one another? Why should you try to force me to say begone, and to lose an acquaintance: I who have so few? I think that is utterly selfish."

Her cheeks were flushed with a beautiful colour, and there was an angry fire in her vexed eyes as she said this.

"I must go away in a few minutes, but I shall be back again somewhere about this room tonight, and you will have little difficulty in finding me again to say goodbye. As for me, I feel sad tonight, as if I were parting with an old friend and a quiet life. I am half sorry I came here."

She pressed Miss Max's arm lightly as she spoke, and that lady lowering her letter, looked rather sharply round on her, a little vexed.

"What is it, dear? I wish you would allow me to read my letter," said the old lady.

"It is time to go. I must go, at least," said Maud.

"Well, go you shall," replied the old lady, crumpling up her letter, and standing erect, with her head a little high. "There's nothing to delay me a moment."

And relenting a little, she added:

"Mr. Marston, would you mind seeing me across the street? We are going to the Old Hall Inn, exactly opposite."

You may suppose that Mr. Marston was very much at her service.

"Shall I be sure to find you?" he murmured, very earnestly, to Maud, as they turned to go.

"I think so," she said. "Now, you must take care of my cousin."

The young lady went down, and crossed the street at the other side of Miss Max, and seeing her maid about to mount the staircase of the inn, she joined her, passed her by with a word, and ran up the stairs, without once turning her pretty head to look back on her friends in the hall.

Maximilla was vexed for her friend, Mr. Marston.

"I did not say, in my answer, because it embarrasses me, sometimes, trying to write what I feel, how very nice I thought your letter — how particularly nice!"

"Oh, Miss Medwyn, do you think she will ever like me?"

"I only know she ought, Mr. Marston; but, as you see, she is an odd girl. One thing I assure you, you have a very fast friend in me, and, mind you don't fail me. You must come to the ball, for I want to introduce you to the only person living who, I think, has an influence with her. I shall expect you at about a quarter to eleven. I shall be sure to be there about then, and so shall my friend. Goodbye, till then."

And without giving him time to answer, and with a very kind smile, she nodded, ran up the broad stairs, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE BALL.

When Mr. Marston returned to the hall, he loitered a little in the cloak-room, he rambled through the building into the refreshment and waiting-rooms, wherever he thought it possible the beautiful girl who alone gave this trumpery scene its magical interest, might be.

He was a little late, and also a little dispirited. He began to fear that she might not appear again that night.

What a bore it was, his having, in such a mood, to look out Miss Max among the chaperons, and to be introduced to some insupportable person, girl or matron, he forgot which!

Here and there, as he made his way up the room, a friendly voice among the men recognised him, and cried:

“I say! Is that you, Marston?” or, “What brings you here, Marston, old fellow?”

At length he caught a glimpse of Miss Medwyn, in high chat with his sister; then she was hidden again, as he slowly moved through the people; the band was braying and thundering now obstreperously from the gallery, and the stewards were clearing a space for the dancers.

And now, again, he saw Miss Medwyn, much nearer, and she advanced a step or two with her cheery smile to greet him. She said something pleasant to him, smiling and nodding toward his sister, who was busy at that moment, talking to old Lord Fondlebury. Mr. Marston did not hear Miss Medwyn’s remark, for his attention was fixed by a figure standing near her, the outline of which bore a marked resemblance to the lady of whom he was thinking; her face was turned away; she was speaking to a tall, rather handsome young man, with good blue eyes, and light golden moustache.

Miss Medwyn tapped her gently, and the lady turned.

She was dressed, I am enabled to tell you, in “a pale blue tulle, with a very graceful panier, the whole dress looped and studded with pale maize roses.” It was the work of the great Madame Meyer. All these particulars were duly set forth in the county paper.

She had diamond stars in her rich brown hair, diamond earrings, and a diamond necklace. These were remarkably large diamonds, and the effect of the whole costume was dazzling, rich, and elegant.

Old Mr. Tintern was a little pleasurably flushed and excited in the consciousness of having, in that room, such unparalleled brilliants under his wing.

She had turned about, at the touch of Miss Max's hand, with a regal flash, and as the old lady introduced Mr. Marston to Miss Vernon, he grew pale, and hesitated:

"I am introducing only a name, you see. You have known the lady some time," said Miss Max, smiling very cheerfully.

Maud looked beautiful as a princess in a fairy-tale; but in all her splendour, more goodnatured, and somehow more simple, than ever.

She was smiling gently, and put out her hand a little, as it seemed, almost timidly.

He took it, and said something suitable, I suppose. Perhaps it seemed a little cold and constrained, contrasted, at least, with his talk at other times — happier times (were they?) — when he suspected nothing of her great name and fortunes.

Had he been trifled with? Had he been fooled? How did these ladies regard him?

These questions were quieted. Neither was capable of enjoying his strange mortification. Whatever had passed was in good faith. But however goodnatured the masquerading, still the truth, now revealed, broke up and dissipated, with an indescribable shock, his more Quixotic, but in many respects happier, estimate of their relations.

What had become of his unavowed confidence in his rank and reversions? Here was no longer the poor and beautiful idol of a half-compassionating love.

Here was in fortune absolutely, and in pure patrician blood nearly, the highest lady in England. Despair was stealing over his sunny prospects. He began, in an expressive phrase, to feel very small. Being proud and sensitive, he was not only a little stunned, but wounded.

Something, however, must be said and proposed. It would not do to stand there doing nothing.

Accordingly, Mr. Marston asked Miss Vernon to dance. She had number one. Had she kept it for him? There was not a moment to lose. It was a quadrille, as is the inflexible practice at public balls.

They took their places in a set just forming, with Lady Helen de Flambeaux and Captain Vivian vis-à-vis. Mr. Marston recognised the tall young man with azure eyes and yellow moustache, to whom Miss Vernon had been talking.

The music was roaring over their heads, so that people could not in the least overhear their neighbours' talk.

"I have been very much surprised this evening," he said.

"And shocked," she added.

"No, Miss Vernon; amazed a little — dazzled."

"It is so odd a sensation, being ceremoniously introduced to an old friend," she remarked.

"It is, somehow, so like losing an old friend and finding only an acquaintance in exchange," he answered, "when first impressions, very much cherished, are proved to be illusions, and circumstances change so entirely. Everything becomes uncertain, and one grows melancholy — it is enough to make one suspicious."

"That is very tragical," laughed the young lady.

"Happy are those, say I, for whom life is a holiday, and the world a toy — I mean the people who have a good deal of satire and very little compassion, who are not unkind, but very cold, who enjoy the comedy of life, and can even smile at its tragedy; they can afford to laugh when others suffer," said Mr. Marston. "It can be of no consequence to you, Miss Vernon, how the strange delusion I have — I don't deny it — in a measure practised on myself, affects me."

"Well, I hope it won't embitter you for ever, Mr. Marston; it is a comfort, at all events, it has not made you give up dancing."

At this interesting moment Mr. Marston was obliged to advance and retreat, cross over, and all the rest; and when he had set to his partner, and turned that splendid lady about, it devolved on her to execute the same manœuvres with handsome Captain Vivian for vis-à-vis.

The next subject was not so interesting.

"I don't think our Wymering friends have done all they might for the floor," she remarked.

To which he made suitable answer, and artfully endeavoured to lead back the conversation into more interesting channels.

But Miss Vernon held him fast during the remainder of the quadrille to the decorations, the music, the room, and the other details, and he began to think it was all over with him, and with his hopes, and that he had had his last serious talk with Miss Vernon.

“When this is over,” he thought, “she will ask me to take her back to the Tinterns, and leave her again with Miss Max, and so she will take a friendly leave, and I shall have a theme to think of for the rest of my life.”

But he was mistaken. Miss Vernon, when the dance was over, said:

“Would you mind, Mr. Marston, taking me to the tea-room? I have not had any yet.”

Very happy this little reprieve made him.

How the light touch of her hand upon his arm thrilled him as he led her in!

“What dances can you give me? Surely you can give me one?” he asked, imploringly, as they went along.

“I could give you a great many,” said the young lady, gently; “but I don’t mean to give you one more.”

Mr. Marston stared.

“You must not think me very unkind. I might have said I have not one to give — not one — earlier than number twelve, and long before that we shall be on our way home to Roydon. But I mean to be very honest tonight; and if we can find a quiet place at the table in the tea-room, we can talk a little there.”

“I half dread that little talk, Miss Vernon. Some people have more power of inflicting pain than they perhaps suspect. I scarcely think that can be your case; but — don’t — I think I may ask that; don’t, I entreat, say anything that may give me very great pain tonight. Give me an opportunity of speaking first. I hope that is not a very unreasonable petition.”

He spoke very low and gently, but very earnestly.

“What a crowd!” said Miss Vernon, as if she had not heard a word.

As they slowly made their way, many an admiring, and many an envious eye was directed on that princess, and many a curious one upon the handsome young gentleman on whose arm her hand was lightly placed. She continued: “This is the best ball we have had at Wymering for two years. It is my third. I begin to feel very old.”

“Eh? Hollo! Hi! How d’ye do, Miss Vernon?” bawled old Sir John Martingale, of Whistlewhips, short and square, pulling up and blocking half the passage, with his wife on one arm and his elderly daughter, Arabella, on the other, with both of whom Miss Vernon had to exchange greetings. “You’re not turning your back on the dancers so soon, eh?”

His shrewd little grey eyes that lighted up his mulberry-coloured features, were scrutinising Mr. Marston with very little disguise.

“Oh, tea is it? And right good tea it is, I can tell you. Old Mother Vaneil in the High-street here, the confectioner, is doing the refreshments this time. And I have just been telling Lady Martingale, I han’t got so good a cup o’ tea this twel’-month.”

“Don’t mind him, Miss Vernon. We treat him a great deal too well, and he’s always grumbling,” interposed Lady Martingale, “half joke, and whole earnest,” as the good old phrase is.

Here Miss Martingale, who had been secretly squeezing and plucking at his arm, having secured, half an hour before, an eligible old bachelor, Mr. Plimbey, of Cowslip Meads, for number two, prevailed, and Sir John, with a jocular “I won’t stand no more of your rubbish for breakfast, mind ye, my lady,” and a wink at Miss Vernon, in which Mr. Marston, though a stranger, was included, pulled his women through, as he phrases it, with a boisterous chuckle, interrupted, alas! soon by a fit of coughing.

By this time Mr. Marston had led Miss Vernon to the long tea-table, that, like a counter, traversed one end of the tea-room, and at an unfrequented part of this they took their stand, and he called for a cup of tea for the young lady.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A MAN WITH A SQUARE BLACK BEARD.

There are few loiterers left in the room; the distant roar of the band accounts for this desertion. The damsel who administers tea to them is stricken in years, thin, and anxious with the cares of boiling kettles behind the scenes, and many teapots, and sponge and plumcakes, and soup and ices, in immediate perspective. She has not a thought for other people's business, and is the most convenient possible attendant upon two people who have anything of the slightest interest to say to one another.

"Yes, it is very nice tea," says the young lady; "and, I forgot, I promised this dance to Mr. Dacre. I suppose I'm in disgrace, but I can't help it." She glances up at the cornice, and thinks for a moment. "I want you, Mr. Marston," she says, more gravely, and her diamonds make a great flash as she lowers her head, "to remember this: that if we are to continue to be good friends, you must never be offended at anything I do, or ever ask the meaning of it."

Marston laughs. It is a pained laugh she thinks.

"You can't suppose me so unreasonable," he says. "I know, perfectly, I have not the least right to ask a question, far less to be offended. In fact, you can hardly feel, more than I do, how very little claim an acquaintance, founded in so much ignorance and misapprehension, can give me to more than, perhaps, a very slight recognition."

"Well, I don't quite agree with you, Mr. Marston; I think, on the contrary, that I know you a great deal better than I possibly could have known you under ordinary circumstances in so short a time; and I think we ought to be better friends — I think we are better friends — for that very reason."

That was the sweetest music he ever heard in his life, and he could not answer immediately. It seemed to him, as she spoke, that her colour was a little heightened, and, for a moment, a strange, soft fire in her eyes. But was this real, or only one of those illusions which, before the gaze of devout enthusiasts, have, in a moment of ecstasy, lighted up sad portraits with smiles, or crossed their beauty with a shade of sorrow?

The next moment she looked just as usual.

"I saw my sister for a few minutes in the cloak-room," he says, suddenly, "and she told me that she had asked Miss Vernon to her house in Warwickshire. It did not interest me, for I little knew, then, who Miss Vernon really was. Do you think you will go to her?"

"I hope I shall — that is, if I can, I certainly will. Miss Medwyn is going, I believe, and I could go with her; but I don't know yet what mamma will say to it; and mamma is the only person living who can prevent my doing exactly what I please."

"But Lady Vernon, I hope, won't dream of preventing it?" he says, very anxiously.

"Mamma decides for herself in all things, and acts very strictly according to her ideas of duty, and sometimes thinks things that appear to me of no importance whatever, very important indeed; and you know that there has been some — something very like a quarrel — and Lord Warhampton doesn't like her, and I'm afraid mamma doesn't like him — and I really don't know whether that might not make a difficulty in her allowing me to go to Lady Mardykes; but a few days will decide."

"Heaven grant it may be favourably," murmurs the young man, vehemently.

"And you have asked me to say nothing tonight that could give you pain," says the young lady, referring to a speech that she had not before noticed, "and I, in return, exact the same promise from you. You must say nothing that may make us part worse friends than we were when we met."

"And I have so much to tell you, that is, ever so much to say; and, oh! how I hope you will not refuse my sister's invitation."

"I like her so very much," says the young lady. "And this dance will soon be over. You must take me now to Miss Medwyn — she is with the Tinterns — and remember, I have a reason for everything I do, although you may not understand it. You are not to speak to me again tonight, when you have taken me back to the Tinterns."

"Then," says Mr. Marston, with a look of sadness, almost reproach, "I am to take my leave in something worse than uncertainty?"

"Uncertainty?" with a half angry, half startled glance, the girl repeats, but in the moment that follows the haughty fire of her fine eyes is quenched, and she places her fingers lightly on his arm, and says: "Shall we come now? I'm afraid the passage will soon be crowded. Let us come before the dance is over."

As they pass together toward the great room where the dancers, gentle and simple, townsfolk and rural, skilled and clumsy, were all whisking and whirling their best, to the inspiring thunder of the band, she repeats:

"You understand? You are not to speak to me, or look at me, or come near where I am again tonight — not in the cloak-room, not anywhere — and you must leave me the moment you place me beside my cousin Maximilla. I should not like you to think me capricious or silly," she adds, a little sadly, he fancies. "So, as a proof of your friendship, I ask you to believe that I have good reasons for what I ask. No, not this door; let us come in by the other. Goodnight," she almost whispers, as they reach Miss Medwyn's side.

That lady was standing a little behind Mr. Tintern and Lady Mardykes, and the door by which they entered brought Miss Vernon beside her cousin, without passing before the other figures in this group.

"Goodnight," she repeated, a little hurriedly.

"God bless you," he said, very low, holding in his the hand she had given him, longer than he ever had held it before, "and come what may I will see you very soon again."

"Well, dear, you have been to the tea-room?" said Miss Max, greeting her young cousin with a smile; "and where is Mr. — wasn't it Mr. Marston who took you?"

"Yes; I think he's gone," said the young lady.

Miss Max was looking round to find him, but he had left by the door through which they had just entered.

"He has vanished," she continued, "but of course he'll turn up again."

"Who is that man with the black beard, and large eyes and solemn, pale face, who is talking to Lady Mardykes?" asked Maud, after a silence of a minute or two.

"I don't know; rather a remarkable face, clever, I think," answered Miss Max; "she knows every one that is worth knowing. Her house is quite delightful. Warhampton having held office so often, and only awaiting the next division, they say, to be in again. She knows all the clever people of her party, in both Houses, and the foreign ministers, and all the people distinguished for talent. I do so hope Barbara will let you go to her."

The grave man with the black beard now made his bow and smile, and turned away and disappeared in the crowd, and before Maud had time to ask Lady Mardykes who he was, Captain Vivian appeared to claim number three, promised to him.

Marston did not dance this, nor the next, and he saw Miss Vernon give both dances to the handsome young man with blue eyes and golden moustache, whom he had seen in conversation with her at the beginning of the evening.

"Fine girl, Miss Vernon, Miss Vernon of Roydon, you know; that's she with the diamonds, and devilish good diamonds they are," said Marston's schoolfellow, Tom Tewkesbury, who, after an absence of five years was just what he always was, only a little fonder of his bottle, "by Jove she is; positively lovely, by Jove! Don't you think so? I do. I wonder who that fellow is she's dancing with — not a bad-looking fellow. I say, Marston, I wonder whether a fellow would have any chance of getting a dance from her? By Jove! They are going it. Do you think it's a case? I've a great mind to go and try. She's with the Tinterns. Shall I? What do you say?"

"You had better be quick. She's not likely to remain long standing," said Marston, who was not sorry, in his present mood, to lose his friend's agreeable conversation.

Marston shifted his point of observation to see more distinctly how Mr. Tewkesbury fared.

That gentleman had made his way by this time to Mr. Tintern.

"Here I am — come to ask a favour," he said, taking a button of Mr. Tintern's coat, and looking persuasively in his face. "I want Miss Vernon to give me a dance, and you must introduce me. Do."

Tewkesbury has more than twelve thousand a year, represents an old county family, is a popular man, and not the kind of fellow to excite a romance. He is just the person whom Mr. Tintern would have chosen to dance with the heiress of Roydon. But he said, with a very amused chuckle:

"I'll introduce you with pleasure. Certainly, if you wish it; but I've just done the same thing for Lord Hawkshawe, and she had not a dance. I don't know. I'll introduce you with pleasure."

Perhaps Tom Tewkesbury thought that he could afford in this game to give Lord Hawkshawe, who was fifty, and had a couple of thousand a year less than he, some points, and was not very much daunted, by the report of the nobleman's failure.

Did he succeed? Alas! no. She was again carried off by the victorious Captain Vivian; and she and he beheld Mr. Marston, who had seen this early enough to secure Miss Chevron, figuring in the next set to theirs. There he was chasséeing, for it was a quadrille, and setting to that young lady, and turning her about, looking the while black as thunder.

His eyes stole, in spite of his resolution, now and then, in the direction of Miss Vernon. Once he thought their eyes met; but he could not be certain, for hers betrayed not the slightest sign of consciousness, and no more shrank or turned aside than the gleam of her brilliants.

And now, the dance ended, Miss Vernon returned to the Tinterns, and said a word to Miss Max, and Captain Vivian led her away to the refreshment-room where people were sipping soup or eating ices.

There they loiter. The next dance has begun. She does not intend to dance it. She has refused it to half a dozen distinguished competitors. Every one is inquiring who that fellow with the yellow moustache is, and no one seems to know exactly. He is by no means popular among the aspiring youth of Wymering.

The dance is nearly over by the time they return to Miss Medwyn, and the shadow of Mr. Tintern's protection.

The youth of the county, with here and there a sprinkling of middle age, are dancing number seven, and are pretty well on in it, when Miss Vernon resolves to take wing, and drive home to Roydon under the care of Maximilla Medwyn.

She has taken leave of the Tinterns and Lady Mardykes. The devoted Captain Vivian attends to put on her cloak and sees her into her carriage, with a last word, and a smile, and a goodnight to Miss Max.

Miss Max yawns, and leans back. Miss Vernon does not yawn, but she looks tired, and leans back also, no longer smiling listlessly in her corner.

"Home," says the young lady to the footman at the window.

With the high-blooded trotters of Roydon, the carriage rolls swiftly through the High-street, and in a few minutes more is gliding through old hedgerows in the soft moonlight, among misty meadows and silent farmsteads.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THOUGH SOME PEOPLE GO HOME, THE BALL GOES ON.

For a time neither lady seemed disposed to talk.

Maud's ruminations were exciting and unsatisfactory. She had acted a good deal from impulse, and, as she now, perhaps, secretly thought, neither very wisely nor very kindly. She expected a lecture from Maximilla. She would have preferred combat to her own solitary self-upbraidings. At all events, she quickly grew weary of her reflections, and, turning her eyes to her silent companion in the shadow of her own corner, she said:

"I quite forgot to ask Lady Mardykes who her solemn friend, with the black square beard, is. Did you?"

"Yes — if you mean did I forget; at least, I don't think I had an opportunity. But, to tell you the truth," here Miss Max yawned, "I don't much care. He looks like a foreigner."

"Yes. He has good eyes. There is something quiet and masterly in his air. I saw him afterwards talking to Doctor Malkin."

"Yes, so did I. I can't endure that man," exclaimed Miss Max. "What on earth brings him to a ball, of all places?"

"I don't know, unless he hopes some of the old squires may have an apoplexy at supper," answered Maud Vernon.

"It might have been wiser if he had stayed at home. I dare say Barbara would have had him to tea if he had looked in, and he would have had the advantage of a tête-à-tête," said Maximilla.

"The advantage — what do you mean?" asked Maud.

"Why, Mr. Foljambe told us yesterday — you must have been thinking of something else — that your mamma will have in the course of the year, I think it was four medical appointments, virtually in her gift; including the supply of medicines to the county jail, which will be given to whatever candidate she supports. And they are altogether worth between eleven and twelve hundred a year, I think he said, and that's the reason why Doctor Malkin is so frequent a visitor just now."

"I should be very glad," said Maud.

"I don't care twopence who gets them," said Maximilla, resignedly. "There is some Doctor Murchison — I think that was the name — who is a rather formidable competitor."

"Did Ethel Tintern dance much tonight?" asked the young lady.

"Not a great deal. I don't think she seemed to care for the ball."

Here came a silence. And after two or three minutes Miss Max said suddenly:

"It strikes me you have been sowing the wind tonight, my dear."

"Sowing the wind! How? What have I done?"

"Come, Maud, you know as well as I what you have been doing. You have treated Mr. Marston very ill; and you have prepared, you may be sure, an animated scene at home. I can tell you, Barbara will be extremely angry; and not without very good reason."

"You mean about Captain Vivian?" said Maud, a little sulkily.

"Of course I mean about Captain Vivian," replied Miss Max.

"Well there's no good in talking about it now. It's done, and I can't help it, and, indeed, I could not have prevented it; and I don't want to talk about it," said Maud, pettishly.

"And what is Mr. Marston to think?"

"What he pleases," Maud answered. "You know what mamma thinks of the Marstons. I think my chance of going to Lady Mardykes' would have been pretty well ended if she heard that I gave Mr. Marston a great many dances, and she will know everything about this ball. It was not my fault, Captain Vivian asking for all those dances. I'm very glad he did. I hope people remarked it. I hope mamma will hear of it. If she does she will think of nothing else, I dare say."

The young lady laughed, and then she sighed.

"Upon my word you are complicating the situation very prettily," said Miss Max.

"I suppose I am doing everything that is wrong and foolish; yet I believe it is best as it is," said the young lady. "I did not want to vex Mr. Marston; and if he has any sense he'll understand perfectly that I did not; and what need I care whether old Lord Hawkshawe, or Mr. Pindles, or Mr. Wylder, or any of the people who intended I should stay all night, dancing with them in that hot room, are pleased or not?"

“Captain Vivian was determined certainly to make the most of his opportunity,” observed Miss Max.

And again the conversation flagged, and Miss Medwyn’s active mind was employed upon the problem, and busy in conjecturing Captain Vivian’s motive.

“Either he wishes to pique Barbara,” she thought, “or he means to try his chances of success, in good faith, with Maud. I can quite understand that. But he is not the kind of person Maud would ever like, and I do think she likes Mr. Marston.”

Then again she recalled Captain Vivian’s sayings and doings that night at Wymering, to try to discover new lights and hidden meanings, to guide her to a right reading of that little episode.

While these two ladies are driving along the moonlit roads towards Roydon Hall, the festivities of Wymering have lost nothing of their energy.

I shall ask you, therefore, to peep into the ball-room for a few minutes more, where you will find that Captain Vivian has just begged of old Mr. Tintern to introduce him to Miss Tintern. That young lady says to Mr. Tintern, hastily:

“Oh, don’t, please!”

But her papa, not hearing, or, at least, not heeding, does present Captain Vivian, who carries off the young lady on his arm.

“If you don’t mind, I should prefer not dancing this time. It is so crowded,” says Miss Tintern.

“I’m so glad,” says he. “There is a quadrille after this. You must come where we shall be quiet for two or three minutes.” In the recess outside the ball-room, on the lobby at the head of the great staircase, an oldfashioned sofa is placed.

Skirting the dancers, to this he led her. When she had sat down,

“Ethel,” he said, “you are very angry — that is to say, very unjust. What have I done?”

“What have you done?” she repeats. “You have placed me in the most miserable situation. How am I to look Maud Vernon in the face again? What will papa think of me? Is not concealment enough? Why should you practise positive deception? I don’t like it. I’m entirely against it. You make me utterly miserable.”

“Now, Ethel, don’t be unreasonable. You must not blame me, for that which neither you nor I can prevent. When the time comes I’ll speak out frankly enough. I could not help coming to Roydon. I could not refuse, without a risk of vexing Mr. Dawe very much, and that, for fifty reasons, would never do. I can’t tell you all I’ve suffered, being so near, and unable to contrive a meeting, with scarcely an opportunity even of writing. Don’t suppose that the vexation has been all yours; I have been positively miserable, and I knew very well all the ridiculous things that were said; and how they must have pained you. A little patience, a little time.”

“I know all that very well, and I have suffered from those strange rumours, and I have suffered tonight. I feel so treacherous and deceitful. I won’t be made an accomplice in such things. I hate myself, for hesitating to tell Maud how it really is.”

“My dear Ethel, you must not be foolish. Living down here so much in the country, you make too much of trifles. What can it signify my dancing a few dances, more or less, with Miss Vernon? Do you fancy she cares about me, or that any one seriously thinks there can be anything more than that she likes my dancing, and that I admire her diamonds? Why, dancing two or three dances at a ball means absolutely nothing. Every one knows that. There is nothing in it but this — that people won’t guess anything of the real state of things. They won’t see anything, for instance, in our quiet little talk here.”

Miss Buffins here passing by, with her hand on Captain Bamme’s arm, stops, her cheeks flushed and radiant with her triumphs, and remarks what a jolly hall it is, and how hot the room is, and how every one seems to be enjoying it so much, and so she gabbles on. Captain Bamme, smiling, with his mouth open, and his face hot and shining, is not able to get in a word, facetious or complimentary, and Miss Buffins, as she entertains Miss Tintern, is scanning her dress, and estimating its value in detail, while more slyly still, she inspects Captain Vivian.

At length, the crowd setting in a stronger current towards the supper-room, Captain Bamme and his fair charge are hurried away, smiling, towards chickens, tongue, lobster-salad, and those other comforts which the gallant captain loves with a secret, middle-aged affection that quite supersedes the sentimental vanities of earlier years. I think, with all his ostentatious gallantry, just then, the gay deceiver, who is jostling among elbows and shoulders, and bawling to waiters for cold salmon or lobster for this lady with a chivalric self-sacrifice, wishes her all the time, if the truth were known, at the bottom of the Red Sea. But he will return, after he has restored her to her mother, in quiet moments, when people, who know less of life, are busy dancing, and, with a shrewd gourmandise, will task the energies of the waiters, and strip chickens of their liver-wings, crunch lobster-salad, plunge into Strasbourg patés, drink champagne, and, with shining forehead and reckless enthusiasm, leave tomorrow’s headache to take care of itself.

CHAPTER XL.

LADY VERNON GROWS ANXIOUS.

The morning after the ball Mr. Tintern was prodigiously uncomfortable. He was now, indeed, quite easy about Lady Vernon's fancied matrimonial designs; but relief at one point is too often accompanied by an acute pressure at another.

Captain Vivian had been audacious, nay, ostentatious, in his devotion to Miss Vernon at the Wymering ball. Whatever his reason, he seemed to wish that people should remark his attentions, and the young lady had certainly shown no unwillingness to permit them.

Next morning, before twelve o'clock, Mr. Tintern was at Roydon Hall, full of the occurrences of the night before.

Mr. Tintern has observed, with satisfaction, that for more than a year his relations with Lady Vernon have been growing in confidence, and even intimacy. Call when he may, Lady Vernon is never denied to him now.

"Her ladyship is in the library, sir."

"Oh!"

And Mr. Tintern follows the tall footman through the silent, stately rooms, to the door he knows so well.

He is announced, and very graciously received.

"You have come to consult about your projected road, I suppose? And, oddly enough, I had just been looking over the map with Mr. Penrhyn."

"Well, thanks. Yes, any time, you know, that suits you, Lady Vernon, would do for that; but I happened to be passing this way, and I thought I might as well look in and tell you one or two things that struck me last night at the ball. You'll not be surprised, perhaps, but I was, a good deal: it is so unaccountable, except, indeed, on one supposition. I know how you feel about it, but, certainly, it does confirm my very high ideas, Lady Vernon, of your penetration. Only think, I'm going to tell you what I heard from the man himself! Miss Vernon obtained from old Lomax, the keeper of the Old Hall Inn, you know, an order of admission to the gallery of the town-hall for Miss Medwyn and her maid. And with this order Miss Medwyn went; and who do you think with her? Not her maid; by no means; no. It was Miss Vernon, and dressed in some old stuff — such a dress, I'm told, I suppose a lady's-maid would not be seen in it; and Miss Medwyn, I'm assured, tried to dissuade her, and they had a little dispute about it. But it would not do, and so Miss Vernon of Roydon carried her point, and presented herself as Miss Medwyn's servant!"

"It is a continuation of the same vein — nothing new. It only shows how persistent it is," says Lady Vernon, closing her eyes with a little frown, and running one finger tip meditatively to and fro over her finely pencilled black eyebrow.

"Only think," repeats Mr. Tintern, with a little shrug, lowering his voice eagerly, and expanding his hands like a man making a painful exposition, "without the slightest temptation, nothing on earth to make it intelligible."

"I am afraid, Mr. Tintern, it is not very easy to account for all this; upon any pleasant theory I mean."

"I thought it my duty, Lady Vernon, considering the terms of, I may say, confidence to which you have been so good as to admit me, to mention this; and, also, perhaps another circumstance which excited, I may say, very general observation last night at the ball, and I fancy you would prefer my being quite straight and above board in giving you my opinion and the result of my observation."

"Certainly, I shall thank you very much," said the lady, raising her eyes suddenly, and fixing them upon him with a rather stern expectation.

"Well, I believe it is but right to tell you that your guest, Captain Vivian, devoted himself in, I may say, an extraordinary way to Miss Vernon, your daughter. Now, I don't know what that young man's position or expectations may be; but it is of course quite possible he may be in many respects an eligible parti for Miss Vernon. But if he be, perhaps considering all you have been so good as to tell me, don't you think, a — eh? he ought to be a — a — warned, don't you think?"

"Captain Vivian," she answered, with the fire that comes with excitement in each cheek, "Mr. Dawe tells me, has scarcely four hundred a year, and has no chance of succeeding to anything, unless, indeed, Mr. Dawe should leave him something, which, of course, may never happen. I need not tell you that nothing could be more amazing than any such pretensions. Pray let me know why you suppose them possible."

"The evidence," replied Mr. Tintern, "was patent to every one at Wymering last night. Nothing could be more marked, and I am bound to say, speaking to you, Lady Vernon, what I should hesitate to say to any one else, I say he was received as favourably as he could have hoped. In fact, if he were the greatest muff in England, and he is far from being anything of the kind, he could not have failed to see it, and see it he did."

Lady Vernon was looking down upon the table, following with her pencil's point the lines of her monogram engraved upon the gold plate on the side of her blotting-book, and continuing to do so, with a very black countenance, smiling sourly on the interlacing initials, she said:

"There has been a great deal of duplicity then; I fancied one evening I did see something, but it seemed quite to have died out by next day, and never was renewed — great duplicity; it is morbid, it is not an amiable trait, not attractive, but, of course, we must view it with charity."

"I hope I have done right in telling you, Lady Vernon?" said Mr. Tintern, who was in no haste to see Miss Vernon married, no more indeed than Lady Vernon was.

"Of course, you know, we should all be glad, the whole county I mean, to see her suitably married," he continued, "and suitably in her case would, of course, mean splendidly; and less than that would not, I think, satisfy expectation. But a creature — a — a whipper-snapper like that," he said, with his head on one side, and his hands expanded, and a little shrug in plaintive expostulation, "an adventurer, and I — really for the life of me, I can't see anything to make up for it."

"People see with different eyes, Mr. Tintern," she said, looking on the rings that covered the fingers of her finely formed hand; "and you saw this yourself?"

"I saw it, and you may trust my report. I say there is — I don't say a romance — but a great deal more than a romance, established in that quarter — and — you know, it would amount to this, that the young lady would be simply sacrificed!"

And Mr. Tintern threw back his arms with his hands open, and a look of wild stupefaction, which plainly conveyed the despair in which such a catastrophe would plunge this loyal county.

"But a ball is a kind of thing," said Lady Vernon, meditatively, "at which unreal flirtation is always carried on. You may be looking at this in much too serious a light, Mr. Tintern."

"Oh, pardon me, Lady Vernon. I make every allowance, but this was nothing of the kind. It would be misleading you most unjustifiably if I were to acquiesce in any such supposition."

"Well, you know, it would be, as you say, utterly untenable and monstrous," began Lady Vernon. "And, of course — — "

"One moment," he interrupted, lifting his finger suddenly, as something caught his eye outside the window. "I beg pardon a thousand times, but — but — yes — there they are!" exclaimed Mr. Tintern.

He had approached the window, and was pointing, with his extended hand, toward the terrace-walk before the house. "There, there, there, you see; it is, upon my life! Only look. You see, eh?"

He stepped backward a pace or two, a little into the shade.

Lady Vernon watched them darkly as they passed, and what Lady Vernon saw did not please her.

The young lady yielded a flower she had in her fingers to the young gentleman, who placed it in his buttonhole over his heart, to which he pressed its stem with an expressive glance at her.

Lady Vernon changed colour a little, and looked down again on the table.

Quite unconscious of being observed at that moment, the young people passed on.

"She has always been perverse and ungovernable, always," said Lady Vernon, with cold bitterness; "and a want of self-restraint induces the violent and hysterical state in which she often is. I leave to other persons the task of explaining her whims and extravagances, her excursion to Cardyllion, and such eccentricities as that of her visit to the gallery last night, dressed as a lady's-maid."

"And a very humble sort of maid too," said Mr. Tintern. "And — what is one to think? *I* entirely agree with you. What can one say?"

Lady Vernon's large dark eyes, hollow and strangely tired now, were lowered to the little cluster of seals upon the table, with which the tip of her taper finger played softly. There was the same brilliant flush in each cheek, and an odd slight drawing of her handsome lips — a look like that of a person who witnesses a cruel but inevitable operation.

Lady Vernon is too proud to betray to Mr. Tintern the least particle of what she really suffers by the smallest voluntary sign.

It is not the belief that forms the desire, but the desire that shapes the belief. Little originates in the head. Nearly all has its inception in the heart. The brain is its slave, and does task-work. That which it is your interest or your wish to believe, you do believe. The thing you desire is the thing you will think. Men not only speak, but actually think well of those with whom they have a community of interest and profit, and evil of those who stand in their way. Government, by party, proceeds upon this ascertained law of humanity. As a rule, the brain does not lead. It is the instrument and the slave of the desire.

There is another occult force, a mechanical power, as it were, always formidably at the service of the devil and the soul. The inclined plane by which the mind glides imperceptibly from perversion into perjury.

I once heard an attorney of great ability and experience remark: "You may take it as a rule that in every case, if your client says an untruth in support of his own case, when the time comes for filing his affidavit he will also swear it."

It is the desire that governs the will, and the will the intellect. Let every man keep his heart, then, as he would his house, and beware how he admits a villain to live in it.

Mr. Tintern is a gentleman of sensitive honour and unexceptionable morality. Forty years ago, when duels were still fought, he perforated the Honourable Whiffle Newgate's hat with a pistol-bullet, for daring to call his veracity in question. And did he not proceed criminally against the radical county paper, simply to gain the opportunity of filing his affidavit, and afterwards of undergoing examination and cross-examination in the witness-box, in vindication of his probity?

And does not Lady Vernon walk this world a pattern and a reproach to sinners, and a paragon among the godly?

And, alas! is not the heart of man deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked? Something we can do for ourselves. Not a great deal, but still indispensable. As much as his friends could do for Lazarus. "Take ye away the stone," and when that is done, into the sepulchre enters the miraculous influence — actual life and light, and the voice of power, where before was the silence of darkness.

"It is all very painful, Mr. Tintern, miserably painful," she says faintly, still looking down. And then with a sigh she picks up the pretty little cluster of seals, and drops them into their place in the desk, and shuts it down and locks it.

CHAPTER XLI.

LADY VERNON TAKES EVIDENCE.

When Mr. Tintern had taken his departure, with the comfortable feeling that he had done what was right, Lady Vernon sighed deeply.

"Mr. Tintern," she thought, "lives in castles of his own building. He is always thinking of poor papa's will, and the reversion of Roydon, and the money in the funds. If he knew all he would be easy enough respecting them. All the better he doesn't. I can't spare him yet. He is very sensitive about Maud's marrying. He exaggerates, I dare say. I'll see Maximilla; she tells truth. Poor Mr. Tintern can think of nothing but himself. How nervous he has made me! What business has Maud walking out alone with *him?* I think Maximilla might have prevented that. A selfish world. No, no, no! My God! it can't be. That would make me mad — quite mad. If I could go back to childhood and die!"

She went to the window, but she did not any longer see Maud and Captain Vivian.

Her clouded dark eyes swept so much of the landscape as was visible from the window in which she stood, in vain.

She touched the bell, and her footman appeared.

"Have you seen Miss Medwyn?"

"Miss Medwyn is in the first drawingroom, my lady."

"Tell Miss Medwyn, please, that I'm coming to her in a moment," said Lady Vernon.

She got up and sighed heavily, with her hand pressed to her heart.

"Barbara, Barbara, you must command yourself. Say what they will, you can do that."

She frowned and shook her head a little, and so seemed to shake off the bewildered look that had settled on her features; and she resumed her usual air and countenance, except that she was very pale; and she walked serenely into the great drawingroom.

"Well, Maximilla, I have just got rid of my tiresome neighbour, Mr. Tintern, who has been boring me about fifty things, and I want you to tell me all about the ball last night, and I was so afraid you might run away before I had locked up my letters."

Miss Max lowered her little gold glasses and the newspaper she had been reading, and looked up from her chair near the window into Lady Vernon's face.

"Well, my dear, it was, I should say — you know it is four years, or five, since I was last at one of your Wymering balls; but I think it was a very good ball, and seemed to go off very spiritedly. There were the Wycombes, and the Heybrokes, and the Forresters, and the Gystans; and Hawkshawe was there." And so she went on with an enumeration interesting to county people, but scarcely so much so to others; and then she went into the events, and the soup, and the ices, and the flirtations, and the gossip of the chaperons. Lady Vernon now and then reviving a recollection, or opening a subject by a question.

"And how did Maud look?" she asked at last, carelessly.

"Perfectly lovely," answered Miss Max, with decision.

"Did she dance?"

"Not a great deal."

"About how many dances do you suppose?"

"I think she said, coming home, two quadrilles and three round dances."

"That was very little."

"Oh, I need not tell you she could have danced everything if she had liked," said Miss Max, complacently.

"To whom did she give the fast dances?" asks Lady Vernon.

"To Captain Vivian."

"Well, but there were three."

"All to Captain Vivian."

"Really? She must have been very rude, then, to other people," said Lady Vernon.

"It can't have pleased them, I fancy. Lord Heyduke, a very good-looking young man, and clever they say, looked so angry. I really thought he'd have been rude afterwards to Captain Vivian and old Lord Hawkshawe."

"That is so foolish of Maud," said Lady Vernon. "She knows nothing, absolutely, about Captain Vivian, except that he is gentlemanlike and good-looking. But I happen to know that, over and above his commission, he has not three hundred a year in the world."

"But you know Maud, as well as I do, and that consideration is not likely to weigh with her for a moment," said Maximilla.

"She is so perverse," said Lady Vernon, darkening with great severity.

"Well, Barbara, it isn't all perversity. That kind of impetuosity runs very much in families, and you certainly did not marry for money."

"That is a kind reminder," said Lady Vernon, with a fierce smile. "I beg pardon for interrupting you, but some of my friends (you among them) know pretty well that I have never ceased to repent that one hasty step; and if I was a fool, as you remind me a little cruelly, I'd rather she regarded me in that great mistake of my life, not as an example, but as a warning; and certainly neither you nor I, at our years, should encourage her."

"She is the last person on earth to be either encouraged or discouraged by our opinions — mine, perhaps, I should say," answered Miss Max. "But don't let us quarrel about it, Barbara, for I rather think that upon this point we are both very nearly agreed."

Hereupon she very honestly related her reasons for thinking Captain Vivian very much in love with Maud, and added her opinion that, "unless she likes him, which I don't believe, and has made up her mind not to trifle with him, she ought not to encourage him."

Lady Vernon looked out of the window, and, still looking out, said carelessly:

"And you don't think there is anything in it?"

"I did not say that. I don't think it possible that a young man could be for so long in the same house without being impressed by her; she is so very beautiful. I should not be at all surprised if he were very much in love with her; and you know, my dear Barbara, if he has any ambition, and thinks himself an Adonis, what is likely to follow? As to Maud, my belief is she is not in love with him. I don't think she cares about him; but young ladies are so mysterious, I can only speak on conjecture, and she may — it is quite possible — she may like him. I should be sorry to take it on me to say positively she does not."

"It has set people talking, at all events," said Lady Vernon, carelessly, "and nothing could be more absurd. But, as you say, there may be nothing in it."

"I think, perhaps, it might not be amiss to let her go about a little to friends' houses, and make some visits, and she will soon forget him, if she ever cared about him. I should be delighted to have her, but I have promised so soon to go to Lady Mardykes', and I know she wishes ever so much to have Maud. She saw her at the Tinterns, and liked her so much, and I said I would ask you, and I think she I could not visit at a better house. I'm to be with her in a fortnight or less, and I would meet her there. What do you say? Will you let her go?"

"I don't see anything very particular against it at present," said Lady Vernon, thinking. "But you know I have not seen her since her marriage, and all that fraud, I may call it, and violence, on Warhampton's part, has occurred since. I certainly should not have her here, nor any member of that family. But Maud may choose her friends for herself. I need not know them. I have reasons for not caring to send or take her to the Wycombes, or old Lady Heyduke's, or the Frogworths, or the Gystans, and a great many more I could name. I should prefer Lady Mardykes, and your being there at the same time would make me feel quite comfortable about her. We can talk it over, you and I, Max, by-and-bye."

And with a more cheerful countenance she left the room.

Miss Max had a little goodnatured mischief in her, and was, if the truth were spoken, a little disappointed at the equanimity with which haughty, jealous Barbara took the news, the irritating nature of which she had been at no special pains to mitigate.

"She may smile as she pleases," she thought, looking after her as the door closed, "but I am certain she is nettled. I think she likes him, and I'm a little curious to see what she will do."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE SKY CLEARING.

Lady Vernon passed from the great drawingroom, smiling; but as she traversed the two rooms that lie between it and the hall, the light rapidly faded from her features, and her face grew dark. Across the hall she went, and entered first one lonely room, then another, until she found herself, at last, in the shield-room.

In deep abstraction, she walked slowly about this room, gazing, one after the other, at the armorial bearings, with their quarterings, “gules” and “or,” of the Rose and the Key. Looking on her face, you would have thought that she was reading malignant oracles on the wall. She did not see these things. The eyes of her spirit were opened, and she saw, in the abstraction of horror, far beyond them, the pictures of a tragedy.

Then she stood still at the window, looking out upon a cloistered square, hedged round with yew. Dark yew-trees, trimmed into odd shapes, stand in files along the sward, and many arches are cut in the quadrangle of yew hedge that forms the inner and narrower square, and white statues gleam faintly in the shadow.

Neither did she see this funereal cloister, rising as it recedes, and backed by the solemn foliage of masses of Roydon timber.

She sighed heavily again and again at long intervals. She was restless, and looked round the room, and then left it, going through a corridor, and passing up a narrower staircase, to her own room.

It was her custom to read in her morning room every day, for only five minutes, or fifteen, or sometimes for nearly an hour, between one and two.

Latimer, her dark, silent, active maid, by no means young, was in attendance, as was her wont, in the dressing-room, from which opens Lady Vernon’s smaller morning room.

Into this the lady passed; Latimer, stiff and angular, following her to the door, with soft tread, and there awaiting orders.

“Are you quite well, please, my lady?” she asked, with the privilege of an old servant, looking a little hard at her mistress.

"Quite, thanks — that is, very well — yes, I'm very well. I think, Latimer, I shan't want you," she said, seating herself at the table, and placing her hands on the large, noted Bible that lies there, and sighing again heavily.

She opened it, she turned over the leaves slowly; they lay open at the Gospel of St. John.

Latimer, with a tread soft as a cat's, withdrew.

"Have I lost the power to collect my ideas?" said Lady Vernon. "I'm excited. If my heart did not beat quite so fast! Ah, yes, I know how that must end."

She got up and walked restlessly to the rows of prettily bound books, and stood as if reading their backs for a time, and passed on in abstraction. The first thing that recalled her was the sight of her face in the porcelain-framed mirror.

"Yes, I do look a little ill," she said, as she saw the hectic fire in her cheeks. "My God! that such a thing should have befallen!" she almost cried suddenly, lifting her hand to her temple. "I have lost him — I have lost him — I have lost him! What has gone right with me? Oh, God! why am I pursued and tortured?"

She began to tremble like a person pierced with cold, and this trembling became more violent. It was a continued shudder. After a time it subsided. She felt faint and ill. But her agitation had, in a measure, quieted.

She knelt, but she could not "lift up her heart," or fix her mind.

She sat down again, and looked on the open Bible. Her eye rested on the text:

"Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come."

It glared on her from the page, like the sudden reality of her smouldering despair.

"Yes, God has hidden his face for ever from me. I seek him, and cannot find him, and where he is, thither I cannot come," she muttered, with clasped hands, and eyes raised. She sat for a time silently in a dull misery.

An idea had taken possession of her. It did not make her love Maud better. It was that she had heard, or guessed at, the suspicions which were conveyed in the rumour that officious Mr. Tintern had mentioned — the rumour that she, Lady Vernon, liked Captain Vivian — and this demonstration of Maud's, she thought, whether she cared or not about him, was meant to take him away from her. She would not yet be quite sure that Maud liked him. She had watched that closely. What insane malice that girl must have!

But a woman of her strong will, pride, and ability, could not be very long incapacitated, and in a little time she had resolved upon several things.

She shut the big Bible, that still lay open, with an angry clap.

"I have asked for help, and it has been denied me," she said, sourly and fiercely to herself, with an odd mixture of faith and profanation. "I shall see what I can do without it."

The first thing she resolved was to send instantly for Mr. Dawe. Once she decided upon a measure, she did not waste time over its execution.

She glanced at her image in the glass. She was looking a little more like herself. She felt better. Her confidence was returning.

Not a human being should trace in her features, manner, conversation, the least evidence of her sufferings and her resolution. She would meet them more easily and cheerfully than ever.

She paused at the door, till she had decided what would be the most rapid and potent mode of invoking Mr. Dawe. She stood in deep thought for a minute, with stern lips and brows knit, and her dark eyes wandering — the image of a beautiful Thracian witch.

This point at last determined, she opened the door quickly, and Mr. Dawe himself stood before her in the lobby. Mr. Dawe, in his black-caped coat, shiny leather leggings, and black wig, his low-crowned hat in his left hand. His right arm was extended, for he was on the point of knocking, if he had not been arrested by the unexpected opening of the door.

The figure stood with arm extended and knuckle bent, and its dark furrowed features lighted by the fixed eyeballs that were staring at her.

Very unusually for him, he was first to speak,

"Latimer said you were here. I was going to knock. You are pretty well?"

"Very well, thanks; I'm so glad to see you. You remember this room?"

He followed her in, and shut the door.

"Perfectly," he answered, rolling his eyes round the room.

“Sit down. The gong will soon sound for luncheon. Let us talk a little first, and tell me — it seems an inhospitable way of putting it, but it is so difficult to move you in the direction of Roydon — what has brought you here? Nothing that is not pleasant, I hope?”

She looked in his face.

“Something — I am not at liberty to tell what — that may affect Captain Vivian very seriously.”

“Nothing in his profession?” said the lady, in alarm.

“Nothing,” says Mr. Dawe.

“Surely you can tell me what it is?” she urged.

“Certainly I cannot,” he answered.

“Is it money?”

“I shall answer nothing at present. You ask in vain.”

“Surely you will say yes or no to that?”

“To nothing. No. If that guess were not right you would go on to another, and so my refusing at last to answer would imply that you were right.”

“Well, I shall learn by-and-bye whether you won’t yield a little.”

“You shall,” he answered.

“You mean you won’t. Tell me, then, generally, what you are going to do,” said the lady.

“To remain here two or three days with Captain Vivian,” he answered.

“No,” she said. “You have come to take him away.”

“H’m!” replied Mr. Dawe; and his prominent eyes stared in her dark ones. “How soon?”

“This afternoon,” she answered, decisively.

“That’s untoward,” he said, lowering his hand, and looking down.

“Why untoward?” she persisted.

“I can’t tell you yet.”

“It may be; if it be I’m sorry; but it is inevitable. He must go this afternoon.”

As she thus spoke, the old gentleman’s eyes fixed on her with a look of inquiry, and were then lowered again; and he nodded once or twice slightly, as if affirmatively to some thought of his own.

“He can return — he shall return,” she said, softly, laying her pretty hand on the old man’s arm.

"In the mean time, you begin to feel that you were precipitate?" he said, dryly.

"No," she answered, passionately. "He shall return in a few days. I will lose my life rather than lose him. I will write, and he shall come again."

"How soon?"

"Ten days — a fortnight perhaps; perhaps in a week. But at present he must go."

"So be it," he said. "I wanted to tell you that they have extended his leave four weeks."

"I thank Heaven," she said, gently and fervently. "I thought they would. I thought I knew how to accomplish that."

"I came to your door here to tell you. It is near your luncheon hour. Yes; eight minutes to two. Vivian will be at luncheon. I don't lunch, but I don't mind going in. I must not let him slip through my fingers."

"You're not offended with me?" she pleaded.

"Who? I? I never was offended in my life," said the dark little gentleman, in perfect good faith.

"It seems so unaccountable and unkind," she continued; "but I can't help it, and I can't explain yet, any more than you can; at least you won't ask me."

"No, certainly," he interposed.

"And you have been very kind in this matter," she added.

"Respecting Captain Vivian?"

"Yes, very kind," she repeated.

"No, not kind — savage. But I have done what, all things well considered, I thought wisest. That is all," he said, and took the pinch of snuff he held in his fingers.

"Well, I am grateful. I thank you from my heart, and I am going to beg another favour," she went on. "You will not tell him that it is I who wish him to leave Roydon at present, but give him some other reason."

"I'll give him no reason," said Mr. Dawe.

"Will you take it on yourself?"

"Certainly."

"You have not seen him since you came?" she asked.

"No."

"So much the better; and you must come as well as he: you promise?"

“Yes, I must come, and the sooner the better, for him at least.”

“You will find them now at luncheon. I’ll follow you when I have put up my books.”

She did not care to enter the room at the same moment with Mr. Dawe, or that people should suppose that they had been conferring.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ANTOMARCHI.

Doctor Malkin was the only guest present, except Mr. Dawe, for, by this time, we have come to regard Captain Vivian almost as one of the family.

Maud, looking quite lovely, but professing to be very much fatigued by her exertions at the Wymering ball, was chatting gaily with Miss Max and Captain Vivian as Lady Vernon came in.

That handsome lady was the only one of the party whom fatigue, to judge by her looks, had touched. Quite at her ease she seemed, and joined very gaily in the general talk.

Doctor Malkin at first was too busy to contribute much to the conversation, but he soon became less absorbed.

“I saw you, Doctor Malkin, at the ball last night,” said Maud; “but I don’t think you danced?”

“No, certainly,” said Doctor Malkin.

“Well, I think you were right,” put in Miss Max, who did not like him. “Would not a dance of doctors be rather like a dance of death?”

“Awfully grisly,” acquiesced the doctor, with a laugh. “No, I don’t go to frighten the people; I attend merely as a spectator, to evidence my loyalty. You know, it is a very loyal celebration; and, besides, one meets one’s friends; and then there is supper; and, after all, a nobody who doesn’t dance may slip away whenever he pleases, and no one misses him.”

“Yes, except his friends,” said Miss Vernon; “and I’m so glad you mentioned them, because I wanted so much to ask you about one in particular, whose appearance I thought very striking. You told me you remarked him also, Captain Vivian?”

“I know, yes; the man with the dark face, and very odd eyes, and black beard, cut as square as a book,” said the fair-haired captain. “If he had not been so very odd-looking, I should have thought him almost handsome.”

“I thought him quite handsome,” said Maud; “he had such a strange, energetic, commanding countenance. I felt that I could not quite decide whether he looked like a great man, or only a great charlatan, but still there was something so striking about him, and so interesting, that it was hard to take one’s eyes off him while he was in sight.”

“I was trying to remember, last night after we came home,” said Maximilla Medwyn, “where I had met him before, for I know I did meet him somewhere, and now I recollect perfectly, it was at Lady Mardykes’, whose house is, I think, one of the most charming and wonderful places in the world. She has every one that is worth seeing or knowing, I do believe, in the habitable world, and she is such good company herself, and so clever, and I have been trying to remember his name.”

“Would you remember it if you heard it?” asked the doctor, who had once or twice essayed to put in a word, with a smile.

“I’m certain I should — I think I should,” answered Miss Max.

“Was it Antomarchi?”

“The very thing,” said Miss Max, much relieved. “The same name, I think, as the physician’s at St. Helena — Napoleon’s, I mean. Then he is the very person I remember meeting at Lady Mardykes’. What is he?”

“A physician; a very accomplished one,” said Doctor Malkin. “He has written some of the ablest papers extant in our medical journals.”

“Is he any relation of Napoleon’s physician?” asked Miss Vernon.

“Very distant, if any,” answered the doctor.

“Have not we talked enough about doctors?” said Lady Vernon, a little impatiently.

“Only one word more,” pleaded Miss Max. “I do assure you, Barbara, if you had seen him you would have been just as curious as I.”

“I don’t know a great deal about him,” said Doctor Malkin, suddenly cooling upon the subject, in which, up to then, he had appeared very well up.

“Where does he practise?” asked Miss Max.

“He tried London, where his writings had made him a reputation, but it did not do,” Doctor Malkin answered, smiling a little uncomfortably, as if some awkward recollections were disturbing him, and the obliquity of his dark, close-set eyes looked, as whenever he was put out, a little more marked and sinister. “I can’t say he practises anywhere as a physician. He is consulted, and he writes. The profession have a very high opinion of him. I don’t know him, that is, I can’t say I am more than a — a — just a tolerated acquaintance and an admirer.”

"Where does he live?" asked Miss Max.

"Oh — a — it is very stupid, but I really totally forget the name of the place," said Doctor Malkin.

"How far away?" persisted Miss Medwyn.

"How far away? I am the worst guesser of a distance in the world," says the doctor, looking up to the cornice, as if in search of an inspiration.

"You must let me ask a question, Max, if you think for the present we have talked enough about this Mr. — whatever his name is. I want to trouble Doctor Malkin with an inquiry," said Lady Vernon, who seemed to grow more and more uncomfortable under the inscrutable stare of eccentric Mr. Dawe's prominent brown eyes from the other side of the table. He seemed suddenly to become conscious that he had been treating the handsome face of that great lady a little too like a picture, and he rolled his eyeballs in another direction. Lady Vernon continued, "And how did you find poor old Grimston to-day?"

"She's a shade better, but you know she is a very old woman. I suppose she was here sixty years ago?"

"I dare say; more, perhaps," said Lady Vernon. "You know poor Rebecca Grimston?" she asked Maximilla, who acknowledged the acquaintance. "Well, poor thing, she had a fainting fit, about ten o'clock to-day. She had one about three months ago, and recovered so slowly that this alarmed me a good deal."

"Dear me! I had not an idea. I must have seemed so unfeeling, delaying you so long about Doctor Antomarchi. But I am so glad to hear she is better."

Lady Vernon had ever so many questions still to put to Doctor Malkin, and the doctor seemed to take a very special interest in old Mrs. Grimston's case, and grew more and more animated and confidential.

Miss Max was now talking to Mr. Dawe, and now and then a little to Maud, and to Captain Vivian.

"I saw an old flame of yours at the ball last night," said Miss Max. "I'm sure you know who I mean."

"I don't," said Mr. Dawe, conclusively.

"You have had so many, I dare say. But this one you will remember when I tell you. It was Diana Rowley."

"Diana Rowley," repeated Mr. Dawe. "Is Miss Rowley still living?"

"What a gallant question! Do you know she made precisely the same inquiry, in the same tone of wonder, when I mentioned you. Lovers dissemble their feelings so."

"She must have been eight or nine-and-twenty then."

"When?" interposed Miss Max.

"In the year 'thirty-four; June. Let me see, she must be sixty-three or sixty-four now; this is the twenty-eighth of August."

"She was slight, very good figure, and fine eyes," said Miss Max.

"Yes, she was comely," assented Mr. Dawe, reflectively.

"You used to say she was a little too thin," said Miss Max, "but she has improved. She is the fattest woman in the county now."

"Really!" exclaimed Mr. Dawe.

"Yes, and she has given up the only thing you used to complain of — she has given up riding to the hounds."

"H'm!" said Mr. Dawe.

"Well; then she is still approachable," continued Miss Max, cheerily. "She might have been married, I'm told, twice; but — I don't know who she has been waiting for."

"She must have known very well that Richard Dawe was not a marrying man. Tut, tut, Maximilla; you were always fond of quizzing people," said the old bachelor.

"You'd have done very well to marry her, though," said Maximilla.

"I don't see any good it would have done me."

"An infinity. She'd have given you a good shaking," said Maximilla, as they got up.

Miss Medwyn and Maud went together into the drawingroom, and then out among the flowers. Mr. Dawe signed to Captain Vivian, as he was leaving the luncheon-room to follow the ladies, and he turned. Mr. Dawe led him to a window, where they had a quiet and earnest talk.

As Maud and Maximilla stood among the flowers, doubtful whether they would take a walk into the woods, or visit the conservatory first, Miss Max, who was looking in that direction, said suddenly:

"Oh, look there! Who can that be?"

Maud looked round, and saw a hired carriage, with luggage on the top, driving down the avenue.

"It can't be Mr. Dawe, for he told me, when he arrived, that he intended staying two or three days, and that Captain Vivian's leave was extended."

The ladies stood side by side looking after the carriage, until it was lost to sight.

"I should not be a bit surprised," said Miss Max, "if Barbara had ordered Captain Vivian to make a march to headquarters. Come in, and let us find out what it is."

There was no one in the hall as they passed. But in the drawingroom they found Lady Vernon.

"Who has gone away, Barbara?" inquired Miss Max.

Lady Vernon looked up, so as to see Maud's face as well as Maximilla's.

"One of Mr. Dawe's imperious whims. He has gone, and taken away Captain Vivian with him."

Maud felt that Lady Vernon's all-seeing eyes rested upon her for a moment as she said this, and her colour changed.

Lady Vernon did not seem to observe her embarrassment.

"Very sudden," said Max.

"And mysterious," added Lady Vernon. "He came with the intention of remaining a few days, but he had a long talk with Captain Vivian, and the end of it was a total change of plans, and they came in here and took leave. It was all so sudden. I dare say Mr. Dawe will write to say something more. In the mean time we must only command our curiosity."

She laughed carelessly.

"But aren't they coming back?" asked Miss Max.

"They have not obliged me with any information. I don't know, either, that I could have them very soon, because I shall be going for some weeks to town, and Maud, I suppose, will be going to Lady Mardykes'. I don't think, Maximilla, you care about drawings like these" (there was an open portfolio before her), "ecclesiastical architecture and decoration?"

"No, not the least," she answered; "but I suppose you are busy just now."

"I'm obliged to look at these to say what I think of them. I should rather have left it to the committee, but as I have subscribed a good deal, they choose that I should tell them what I think."

"Then we may as well take our little walk to the woods, Maud."

And away they went.

But Miss Max, instead of going out, stopped in the hall, and said, all radiant with satisfaction, to Maud:

“Well, that is settled very quietly, and I am glad of it. You *are* to go to Lady Mardykes’. I was afraid to say a word, Barbara is so odd and suspicious, sometimes, and if she saw how pleased I was, it might have put it into her head to recal her permission. I’ll write to Lady Mardykes this moment to tell her she may ask you, with every confidence that your mamma will interpose no difficulties.”

So instead of going to the woods, Miss Max ran up to her dressing-room, and wrote a note to that effect.

CHAPTER XLIV.

FACES SEEN BEFORE.

Lady Mardykes had left the Grange the morning after the Wymering ball, but Miss Medwyn’s note followed her; and a few days more brought to Roydon three envelopes, addressed, in her pretty hand, one to each of the three ladies at present at Roydon.

That to Lady Vernon was very polite, though a little formal, and not very long, asking leave for Maud. But that to Maud herself was playful and animated, and extremely goodnatured. She named an early day for her visit, and she insisted it should not be a flying one, as there were a great number of people coming to Carsbrook, who would interest and amuse her.

To Maximilla she mentioned some of these foreign ministers, authors, artists, parliamentary celebrities. “I know she would think it amusing, and you must not let her disappoint me. You have never failed me, so I put you down as certain. Don’t allow her to leave Carsbrook before she is really tired of it. You know that there are more bedrooms there than I can ever find guests to occupy. Don’t, therefore, let her fancy that I shall want her room, and you and she will be glad, I think, to meet where you can do exactly as you please, which, I conjecture, is scarcely the case at Roydon.”

“I think I shall be pretty sure to meet a very particular friend of mine at Carsbrook,” said Miss Max, after a little silence.

“Who is it?” inquired Maud, misled by her grave simplicity.

“Charles Marston, my dear,” she said, lighting up with a smile. “Of course you don’t care, but I do.”

“I don’t think that very likely. I should not wonder if I were never to see him again,” said the young lady.

“I should very much,” laughed Miss Max.

“I mean he was so vexed at that odious Wymering ball.”

“No wonder. But he has had time to cool since then, in one sense only. He will be there, as sure as I am here. You’ll see. Put on your things, and come out, and we’ll have a comfortable talk, quite to ourselves.”

So these two cronies went out together, busy with the future, and already, in imagination, at Carsbrook.

“It is a huge house,” said Miss Max. “One of those great black and white houses, with really an infinitude of bedrooms. When I was there last, we mustered sixty people every day to dinner — a noisier place, you see, than Roydon, and yet, I assure you, there were whole galleries perfectly deserted. She told me it would be much more crowded this year. I think, between ourselves, she takes a pride in collecting celebrities. It is her vanity, and certainly it is one of the very most amusing houses I ever was in. Of course one would grow tired of it after a time; at least, an old girl like me would. But for a little time it is quite delightful. She is very rich, you know.”

“Indeed!”

“I don’t say rich compared with you Roydon people, but she is what seems very rich to me; that is, her jointure is five thousand a year, and she has more than fifteen thousand a year that belonged to her mother, the first Lady Warhampton; so she has more than twenty thousand a year.”

“Well, tell me more about Carsbrook,” said Maud.

“We used to pass our time so agreeably, when we were not going out driving, or picnicking, or sight-seeing. There is a great, square flower-garden, with oldfashioned, trim hedges all round, and such quantities of pretty flowers, in the old Dutch style. As you look down on them from the terrace they seem like the pattern of a thick piled carpet. This is like a border all round, for the centre is kept in grass as smooth as velvet. And there is a very old mulberry-tree, with so many curious stories about it, in the centre. And ever so many parties used to play croquet or lawn billiards. It was such fun. And there were so many amusing affairs of the heart to interest old people like me. Such a comedy perpetually going on. You can’t think what a charming house it is to stay at.”

“I’m very glad we are going,” said Maud.

“But you don’t look very glad, my dear.”

“Well, I suppose I am discontented a little. I was just thinking what a pity it is mamma keeps such a dull house here.”

“So it is. I have often told her so,” said Miss Max. “She could do, you know, whatever she liked. I don’t think, indeed, she could get together so many remarkable people, but that kind of thing may be a little overdone, and, certainly, once or twice when I was there, there were some very absurd people at Carsbrook; but, taken for all in all, it is one of the most delightful houses in the world."

Full of these pleasant anticipations, which, to a girl who had never seen a London season, had something even exciting in them, and in the certainty of a very early meeting with Maximilla Medwyn, Maud bore the hour of separation much more cheerfully than she otherwise would.

That hour had now arrived, and Miss Max, having bid Lady Vernon goodbye, and taken many leaves of Maud, drove away at last, with maid and boxes, down the old avenue of Roydon.

It was three o'clock when she set out, having a ten miles' drive before reaching the train she was to catch.

It was about six o'clock, when the train in which she was now gliding toward her destination, stopped at the Drongwell station.

Here some of her fellow-passengers got out, and a gentleman with a small leather bag, a slender silk umbrella, and a rug, stepped nearly in, but arrested his foot at the door and would probably have receded had it not been that he was followed a little too closely by another person, who, with a despatch-box in his hand, had scaled the steps.

Miss Max saw his momentary hesitation, and a little maliciously said:

"How d'ye do?" with a nod and smile of recognition.

Doctor Malkin, for he it was, smiling his best, and squinting viciously with a surprised and glad recognition, returned her salutation, and took his place beside her. His companion took his seat at the opposite side, in the corner next the window, placed his despatch-box on the seat beside him, and unlocked it.

There was no mistaking the marble features, strange eyes, and coal-black square beard. The gentleman with the despatch-box, who now leaned across, and murmured low a word or two in Doctor Malkin's ear, was that Antomarchi, whose appearance had so strongly excited Miss Maximilla Medwyn's curiosity at the Wymering ball.

The clapping of the doors was over now, the whistle skirled its horrid blast, the engine communicated its first jerk through all the articulations of the snakelike train, and the carriages were again gliding forward.

Doctor Malkin for a few minutes was busy stowing away his bag and umbrella, and having rid his mind of these cares, he smiled again, turning to

Miss Max, and observed on the beauty of the weather and scenery.

"How soon we glide from summer into autumn," he observed. "The change of the leaf does not remind us so powerfully of our approach to winter, as the perceptible shortening of the days."

"It is so long since I glided into autumn myself, that these changes in nature don't trouble me much," answered Miss Max, gaily. "Certainly, the days are shortening, and so are mine, but that does not vex me either. There are younger people — for instance, Lady Vernon, I think her looking by no means well. I can't define what it is; she looks hectic, and odd, as if there were something decidedly wrong. She told me one day, when I remarked that she was not looking well, that she had a little palpitation, and she seemed almost vexed that she had mentioned it."

"Yes, there is a little; the action of the heart is a little eccentric," said Doctor Malkin. "Of course we must not mention it; people are so stupid, it would be sure to come back to her, and the fact of its being talked of would only make her worse."

"You know I'm a homœopathist, but that's of no importance. What I want to know is, does she suffer under any actual disease of the heart?"

"Why, as to the heart, it is very hard to say," observed the doctor a little evasively; "because a man might pass the severest examination of the ablest physicians in England, and having been pronounced perfectly sound, might drop down dead as he quitted the room where the consultation was held. But there is no evidence of organic complaint in Lady Vernon's case, and I'll tell you frankly, if there were, I should not admit it; I am a great stickler for keeping faith with a patient. No one likes their ailments or infirmities to be disclosed: but of course," he added, thinking he had been a little brusque, "to so very near a friend and relation as you, Miss Medwyn, it would be different. The truth is, however, just as I have told you."

Miss Max sat quite far enough away to mention Doctor Antomarchi, the noise of the train allowed for, without danger of his overhearing what she said.

"I was going to say, I think Doctor Antomarchi a rather interesting man, and I should, I think, like to make his acquaintance."

"Well, I don't know that you would like him. He thinks of nothing but his science, his art; and to a listener not éclairée, I fear it must be more dull than entertaining."

“He seemed to have a great deal to say for himself at Wymering, to Lady Mardykes, the other evening,” said Miss Max.

“I did not remark. But the truth is, I have scarcely made his acquaintance myself,” observed Doctor Malkin, smiling. “I found him on the platform, and he followed me in here.”

“How far does he go?”

“I don’t know. I’ve to get out at Wakesworth.”

“Wakesworth? That is not a great many miles away from Lady Mardykes’. You know Carsbrook, of course?” says Miss Max. “It is such a broken, roundabout journey by rail, however. From Roydon it is more comfortably reached by the high road. What a huge old house it is,” she continued, breaking again into the description of it she had given to Maud a few days before; “black and white, you know, and the great, old, square flower-garden, with the clipped hedges round it, and the croquet-ground in the centre, and the old mulberry-tree.”

As Miss Max concluded the description she thought she saw a listening smile of secret intelligence on the still face of Antomarchi, who was busy noting the papers he took from his box, and did not raise his eyes.

Her curiosity was piqued.

Did Doctor Malkin know more about this Antomarchi than he pretended? Were their routes really as disconnected as the Roydon doctor would have her believe? Had their journey anything to do with Lady Mardykes and Carsbrook?

These inquiries must rest unspoken for the present. She leaned back, and was silent for a time, with her eyes all but closed.

“I’m sure it is a fine place,” resumed Doctor Malkin; “but I’ve never seen it, and I don’t know Lady Mardykes. I hear she is perfectly charming.”

“So she is, and extremely clever. Her poor mother was; and her father is. You know Lord Warhampton?”

“Yes, by fame, of course. Very able man. I’ve had to come here all the way about a patient,” he added, as if to quiet further conjectures.

The sun was at the edge of the horizon. It would, after two or three golden glorious minutes, be grey twilight.

Miss Max opened her eyes, and those of Antomarchi met, or rather seemed to hold, hers with a sensation the most unpleasant and overpowering she had ever experienced.

His eyes almost immediately looked another way, and were bent again upon his papers.

Twilight came. He then locked up his despatch-box, and looked out of the window.

"Is not your friend, Mr. Antomarchi, something of a mesmerist?" inquired Miss Max.

"He is; a very potent one; at least, he is so reputed. I have never seen him exercise his faculty," answered Doctor Malkin.

A few minutes more passed, and the train, with a long whistle, came to a standstill at the platform of Wakesworth station.

Doctor Antomarchi stood up, with his despatch-box in his hand, and signed to the porter to open the door.

Miss Max was glad, somehow, that he was gone, and took leave of Doctor Malkin, who was also going, without much reluctance.

She watched their movements slyly from the window, close to which she had moved. But there was to-ing and fro-ing on the platform, and the steam from the engine had eddied in, and was confusing objects, and it was already nearly dark. She thought, however, that the two gentlemen went up the steep road from the station, side by side.

In another minute the train was moving away, and she had left Wakesworth and the two doctors far behind.

Those two doctors did walk up, side by side, into the little town, and entered the White Lion, and, while they were eating a hasty cold dinner, horses were put to a carriage, which stood ready at the door so soon as the gentlemen emerged.

Some of the people who were at the door looked darkly at Doctor Malkin, and whispered to one another, as, aided by the lamp over the inn-door, and by the faint silvery beams of the moon, which by this time was showing her light, they saw him get in and take his seat.

The doctors smiled amusedly on each other as the carriage rolled away through the quiet street of Wakesworth, and lighting their cigars, they smoked as they drove up the narrow road, over the hedges of which hung the dewy boughs and fruit of orchards in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE JOURNEY'S END.

For nearly three miles they drove in silence, each too comfortable to disturb the serenity of his ruminations.

There is a soothing influence in the subsidence of colour and the indistinctness of outline that surround one in a drive through a wooded country, when the thin mists arise by moonlight; and this seemed to prevail with the spirit of each gentleman, as he looked listlessly from his window.

Doctor Malkin broke the silence first.

"What asses young fellows are!" he declaimed. "I had an uncle the head of a great legal firm, and two first cousins solicitors, and they, one and all, wished me to go to the bar. I might have been making four thousand a year easily by this time. I might have been on the high road to the bench. Every one said I had a turn for it. But, like a fool, I took a fancy to be a doctor — and even so, I might have stayed in London. If I had — it was on the cards — I might have done some good. I know something about my business, I believe. And much good has it done me! What's the good of a fellow's making a slave of himself, if he doesn't put by something worth while. Better to enjoy what he has."

"Regretting is the greatest waste of time except wishing," said Antomarchi, in his cold, resonant bass tones.

"I have not much, very little: but liberty is something," said Doctor Malkin.

"Life without progress is death," insisted the same marble oracle, with something of scorn ringing in his deep voice.

"Think what Paris is, or Vienna, and think, then, of being stuck in such a cursed little hole as Roydon," said Doctor Malkin, with disgust.

"Your liberty and your vices are not resources enough for a life. A man of any mind must have a game of some sort to play at," observed Antomarchi.

"You may laugh. I don't say you are not a man of merit; I think you about the ablest man I ever met," said the Roydon doctor; "but you have found a short cut to fortune."

“You must count on a good deal of mud before you turn up a nugget,” said the man with the square beard, and yawned. “I was on my way to London this morning,” Doctor Antomarchi suddenly resumed; “I am not the first man who has so changed his purpose. A lady’s billet has brought me back. Try one of these.”

And so saying, he tendered his cigars.

“Thanks. I tell you, at a single jump you have reached a fortune,” said Doctor Malkin. “I wish I could woo the goddess as successfully.”

“Have you never tried the language of the eyes?” said Antomarchi.

“In ten years’ time you’ll be a baronet. You know how to rule men, and before fifteen more are passed you will have got a peerage. Of course, I assume that your energies will be directed to get it.”

“And I will take for my crest, what device?” said Antomarchi. “Let me see. Just that,” he said, nodding his head toward the resplendent moon. “A full moon argent, on a field azure, and three rasors proper.”

They were now approaching a village, with the tower of a country church shining silver white among dark trees and glimmering roofs.

Antomarchi’s resonant voice brought the driver to a halt.

“We get out here,” he cried, sternly. “Drive on to the gatehouse, and give the man these things, and he will pay you.”

“All right, sir,” replied the driver, and the carriage rolled away toward the village.

They were now standing on the white road, dappled by the intense shadow of a motionless tree, under the brilliant moon. Skirting the road at the left hand ran a high park wall, here and there clustered with ivy, and overtopped with high old trees.

A narrow, arched door in this opened to Antomarchi’s latchkey, and he and his companion entered, to find themselves on a narrow park road, from which, however, their path in a very little way diverged.

The grounds were studded with clumps of fine timber. The two doctors walked up a gentle, undulating slope, and when this was surmounted, close before them, on the low ground, stood a huge black and white house, its white showing, in the moonbeams, in dazzling contrast with the oak-beams that crossed it perpendicularly, horizontally, diagonally. They stood just overlooking a great, square, Dutch flower-garden, which interposed between them and the house, surrounded by tall, trim hedges, in the bygone Dutch taste. The flowers made a wide border in fantastic patterns all round, the centre was laid out in grass, and in the middle of this wide, green carpet stood a lonely old mulberry-tree.

In a long line of windows on the second story a ruddy light glowed out hospitably, as well as here and there from other windows above, and in the lower story.

They stopped for a minute without premeditation. The scene was so pretty, the contrast between the lights in the house and the cold, silver brightness of the moonbeams so striking, and the character of the whole so festive and hospitable, that each silently enjoyed the picture.

“There is a ball tonight,” said Antomarchi, “but we need not appear at it. Come.”

And he led the way toward the house. They soon reached a path, and under the wide shadow of tall trees, arrived at a door, like that which they had already passed, in the wall that begirt the garden.

The latchkey again opened this, and they entered the silent alleys of lofty clipped hedges, tall and straight as prison walls, making a profound shadow. They passed under the first arch of the many that pierced these thick curtains of foliage, and so found themselves, after passing the broad border of flowerbeds, upon the shorn grass, in the broad light of the moon, among the croquet hoops, that in this cloudless weather make their bivouac all night on the ground they have taken up by day.

It was, as I have said, a great black and white house, and, as they approached, its walls and windows seemed to expand, and the whole building to grow almost gigantic.

The latchkey of the privileged Doctor Antomarchi did here for Doctor Malkin the office which the feather from the cock’s tail did for Micyllus, and all doors opened before it.

Ascending two steps he opened a door in the wall, and led the way into the house.

They were in a long, dimly-lighted passage, that seemed to go right through the house, with doors on each side opening from it. Up this

Antomarchi walked quickly, his hat still on, as confidently as if he were master of all about him.

Another passage, longer still, crossed this at right-angles, dimly lighted, like the first. A footman in livery was walking along it quickly. Antomarchi signed to him, and he approached.

"Mr. Drummond in his room?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You won't mind coming a few steps this way?" he said, taking Doctor Malkin's acquiescence for granted.

He walked down the transverse passage to the left, where, more than halfway on, a folding screen blocked nearly half the width of the corridor, protecting a door at the left from the draughts that sometimes eddied up the passage. At this door Antomarchi knocked.

"Mr. Drummond?"

Mr. Drummond, a serious, quiet man, with rosy cheeks, a little stout, and dressed in black, who had just been reading his paper and drinking his tea, appeared, swallowing down a bit of bread-and-butter which he was munching at the moment.

"Her ladyship arrived this morning?" inquired Antomarchi.

"Yes, sir," said Drummond, waiting just a second, to be certain that he had quite swallowed his bit of bread-and-butter.

"She's at the ball, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"She was satisfied with the preparations in her rooms?"

"Quite, sir; and she placed some papers in my hands, by-the-bye, sir, which she said were the title-deeds of Mardykes Hall."

"Very good; place them under lock and key in the long press, under the proper letter. She may call for them; and if so, let her have them immediately. She must not be vexed. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, perfectly."

Antomarchi nodded, and, turning on his heel, led the way at a swift pace. They passed a staircase, and then reached another, the grand staircase, and a great hall, in which were many footmen in livery, and some female servants peeping in at an open door, from which issued the sounds of music and dancing, and laughter and talking.

"Peep in, if you like. They won't mind you."

He did, and —

Wow! Tam saw an unco sight.

The Wymering ball was dulness itself compared with this. There was such variety of character in the guests, and in their dancing. Some so stately, grave, and ceremonious; others so hilarious; some working with hearty, but rather grave, goodwill; others wild with glee — all so animated and amusing, that Doctor Malkin could have kept his post at the door I know not for how long.

"There is a tall, dark man, with long hair, rather handsome; he looks about forty. He smiles haughtily round, and stands with his arms folded — a remarkable-looking fellow."

"Does he wear steel buckles in his shoes?" asked Antomarchi.

"Yes, by Jove! and point-lace to his white necktie."

"That is his excellency the Spanish minister," continued Antomarchi.

"Oh!" said Doctor Malkin. "And there's a fellow, almost a dwarf, with straw-coloured hair, and a long, solemn face, with a sharp chin. He is close to the door here, and he has a set of ivory tablets in one hand and a pencil in the other. He must be a queer fellow."

"Queer fellow! You may well say so. He is the greatest mathematician, astronomer, and mechanic on earth. He has lately discovered, among other things, an instrument by which you may see the reverse side of the moon, and, oh, look there; do you see that lady, in purple satin, sitting on the sofa near the window?" said Antomarchi, peeping cautiously over Doctor Malkin's shoulder. "I don't think you'll recognise her, do you?"

"No, I don't think I do. Ought I to know who she is?"

"I think so. That's Lady Mardykes. But come, or they'll see me. I will conduct you to your room. Come," said Antomarchi.

They crossed the great hall, ascended a broad oak staircase, and then marched half the length of a long gallery. Their progress was arrested by a ponderous door which appeared to be sheathed with iron. This opened, they passed in. It closed with a spring lock.

"Here we are private. This is your room; only two doors from mine." Antomarchi pointed with his open hand towards his own. He opened the door, and led the way into a large and very comfortable room.

Doctor Malkin looked round on the curtained bed and windows, and the handsome furniture, with a feeling of rather angry envy.

"You are lucky," he said. "How well housed you are."

"Patience, and shuffle the cards," the other answered. "Lady Vernon, I'm told, has some pretty things in her gift. You will be rich yet, if you are not in too great haste to marry."

"Would you mind considering this case where we are, we are so quiet here?" said Doctor Malkin, again looking round.

"Here, there, where you please; all one to me, provided we are not interrupted," replied Antomarchi. "Will you have your supper before or after?"

"When we have done, please," he replied. "I should like it here, if it doesn't upset arrangements. A broiled bone and a glass of sherry."

They entered on their business, and talked for some time, Antomarchi being chiefly a listener, but now and then putting a short, sharp question, and keeping the more discursive man very rigidly to the point.

Under the control of such a conductor, the discussion did not last very long.

And now it was over, and the point settled, and both gentlemen stood up, and Doctor Malkin, while his broiled bones were coming, looked round the room again.

Over the chimney hung a rather remarkable portrait; it was that of a handsome, but forbidding woman, in a nun's dress. The face expressed resolution, contempt, and cruelty, with a strange power; but it was deathlike.

Under this picture hung a crooked Malayan dagger.

"That kreese was my father's," said Antomarchi. "He killed a renegade priest with it in a row in Egypt. So it has made its mark."

"Ha!" exclaimed Doctor Malkin, softly, as, smiling with increased interest, he handled its heft, and tried its point with his finger tip. "Very sharp, too."

"It has some magical characters engraved there," observed Antomarchi. "It is in keeping with the portrait; it looks as if it had slipped out of that sinister virago's pocket."

Doctor Malkin looked round, but there was nothing else by way of decoration in the room that interested him.

And now he had his supper, and Antomarchi, who wished to look in at the ball, took his leave, and went to make a rapid toilet.

His tray and sherry gone, Doctor Malkin prepared for bed.

The moon was high, but as yet her beams only entered the window obliquely. He drew the curtains, freely to admit the air. Partly in consequence of being in a strange house, and partly from other causes, he felt perhaps just a little nervous. He looked in the two presses, and other possible hiding-places in the room, to satisfy himself that there was no lurking intruder there. Then he secured his door, and, lastly, he made his prayerless preparations for bed, extinguished his candle, and was soon comfortably extended with his head on the pillow. He thought of the ball he had stolen a glimpse at tonight, and then of the Wymering ball, and the image of Lady Mardykes talking with so much pain and earnestness to Antomarchi, came before him. Lucky rascal, Antomarchi! And, finally, he was overcome by drowsiness, and slept soundly.

There are abnormal states in which the partners, the spirit and the animal, that jointly constitute man, are oddly divorced. The body will lie with eyes closed in deep slumber. The spirit will sit up with its interior vision and hearing opened, and see and hear things of which, in other states, it is not permitted a perception.

Here was Doctor Malkin, with his watch under his pillow and his head upon it, snoring, as was his wont, moderately but regularly.

But the doctor had eaten supper, which was not a habit of his, and seldom agreed with him; and the spirit, finding its tenement hot and uncomfortable, I suppose, slipped out of it, and sat up in the bed and looked about it.

It saw the “still life” of the room accurately. The bed-curtains drawn back to the posts, the window-curtains to the frame at either side. The moon by this time was full in front of the broad window, and shone with an intense lustre into the oldfashioned room, right before the foot of the bed.

Doctor Malkin supposed nothing but that he was wide awake. He was looking about him, as I said, and, turning his eyes toward the fireplace at his left, he wondered what had become of the long Malayan knife with its crooked blade, that had hung under the portrait over the chimneypiece. He raised his eyes to the repulsive monastic portrait; but he could not see it! Had it melted into shadow?

The canvas seemed to present one surface of black. Perhaps the moonlight had dazzled his newly awakened eyes a little. He shaded them with his hand, but still the frame presented nothing but a black canvas. All the odder his dulness of vision seemed, that the dress of this mother-abbess was in great measure white. While he was looking, a voice at his right whispered: “Ha! Tempter, my child!”

Looking round instantly, he saw standing close to the bedside the figure of the portrait, but not the features. The face was that of Lady Vernon, white, gleaming, and quivering with fury, and the knife was in her hand. He sprang on the floor at the other side of the bed, and the phantom was gone. Over the chimneypiece the kreese was glimmering undisturbed, and the lady abbess was scowling down from her frame with a grim smile.

Doctor Malkin went to the window and looked out. The flower-garden lay beneath. He could see the arabesque pattern of the beds, in which the flowers were now closed and drooping. He could see in the broad grass-plat in the midst, which looked bright silver-grey all over, the faint lines of the croquet hoops, and at the other side the sharp black shadows of the tall, trim hedge, and the bush-like mulberry-tree in the centre, with its blotch of shadow on the grass.

He had never had a fright of this kind since his nursery years; and he was very nervous.

The unaccustomed view failed to reassure him. He lighted his candles again, and then one of his cigars, and smoked diligently from the open window, thinking of Lady Vernon, and assuring himself that never was vision more preposterous. He smoked on, looking out of the window, doing his best to obliterate the uncomfortable impression of his visitation or his nightmare. But he could not.

It answered uncomfortably to a latent horror of his conscience, which yet he boldly seized, examined, and pronounced upon most satisfactorily whenever it tormented him sufficiently. He did nothing he was afraid of, he shrank from no scrutiny; not he.

At last he lay down again, with candles burning still on his table, and, after a long and uncomfortable waking interval, he fell asleep, and the moment he awoke again in the morning, his thoughts were once more five-and-forty miles away at Roydon Hall.

He felt nervous and ill, and, despise it as he might, his vision worried him.

CHAPTER XLVI.

GRIEF.

At Roydon Hall, whither Doctor Malkin’s thoughts had led him this morning, dulness reigned.

Maud was relieved of the embarrassment of a tête-à-tête with her mother at breakfast, by Lady Vernon’s remaining in her room, in consequence of a cold.

She missed her cheery and energetic cousin. How on earth could she dispose of the day? She could have a carriage, of course, if she pleased, and drive where she liked. Whom should she visit?

About one o’clock her doubts on this point were ended by the arrival of Miss Tintern, who came to see her, having a great deal to say, and looking unhappy. She had come alone. Her father had ridden over to the Wymering Sessions.

“Is Lady Vernon coming down?” she asked immediately after their salutation.

“I can’t say. But do you wish that we should be to ourselves?”

“Immensely. I have ever so much to tell you.”

The young lady was in great distress.

“I don’t know, Maud, whether I ought to tell you. It would, I fear, only embarrass you; but I have no one to speak to.”

“What would embarrass me?”

“Keeping my secret, dear Maud.”

“Never mind — not a bit. I’m not the least afraid,” said Miss Maud, eagerly; for what young lady objects to hearing a secret?

“It is a secret I would not have told to any living creature for the world.”

“Of course: I quite understand that. But I have no one to tell anything to, if I wished it. Mamma — — “

“Oh, not *that* for the world!”

“Not to mamma? No, of course. But why particularly must it be concealed from her?”

“Well, I’ll explain by-and-bye. Do you think she will come here? I should not like to be surprised. Would you mind walking out among the flowers? We could not be taken unawares there.”

“I was thinking of that myself,” said Maud, and the two young ladies walked into the garden.

As soon as they got to a quiet spot, under the three acacia trees, with the scarlet and blue verbena in front, Miss Tintern looked round softly, and being assured that they were not observed, she began to pour forth her sorrows.

She began by narrating how Mr. Plimby, of Cowslip Meads, that detestable old bachelor, had wanted to dance very often with her at the Wymering ball, and how, after her papa had at last made her give him a quadrille, he had hardly left her for ten minutes all the rest of the evening.

“Oh, my dear Ethel, is he in love with you? Is he in love? I know he is. Oh, how delightful!” cried Maud, in an ecstasy of laughter.

“There’s nothing to laugh at,” said Ethel Tintern, a good deal hurt. “Don’t you see how vexed I am, Maud?”

“He is such a figure! He is such a wonderful creature!” and again she broke into peals of laughter.

“Well, Maud, perhaps I had better come another day.”

“Oh, oh, oh!” almost sobbed Maud, recovering a little, with tears in her eyes. “I’m so sorry I’ve interrupted you so shamefully. But he always struck me as so delightfully ridiculous; do tell me the rest.”

“I suppose it is ridiculous, at least to every one who does not suffer from it; but for me it is the greatest vexation. I wish it was no worse, but it is a great deal worse — vexation is no name for it.”

“‘You must tell me all about it,” said Maud. “You look so tragical, Ethel. Why, after all, it can’t be so very awful. I don’t think Mr. Plimby will run away with you against your will.”

“Listen now, and judge; but, oh, Maud, remember what a confidence it is! I am going to tell you things, that but one other person in the world knows anything of.”

“I’ll not tell, I assure you, mamma never giving me an opportunity; and, besides, she is the last person on earth I should volunteer to tell anything to.”

“No; I was thinking more of Miss Medwyn.”

"Max shan't hear one word about it; no, upon my honour, not a living being shall ever hear a word about it till you give me leave."

And the young lady drew Miss Tintern towards her and kissed her.

"I know you won't tell. Where did I leave off? Oh yes, he has been, at one time or another, every day since the ball, to call at the Grange."

"And do you mean to tell me that all this mischief has been done by one quadrille at the Wymering ball?"

"No; it seems he has been paying me pretty little attentions, though I never perceived it, for more than a year, and I suppose he thinks he has made an impression, and that the time has come for being more explicit. And he has actually spoken to papa, who sent him to me."

"Well?"

"I refused him, of course. You could not suppose anything else."

"Well then, if you did, where's the distress? I can't see what there is to trouble you."

"Well, listen. After I had refused him, papa, who was waiting to see him before he went, persuaded him that it was all a mistake, and that I did not know my own mind. This occurred yesterday, and he fixed tomorrow for his return to the Grange, where he is to have another interview with me. Only think!"

"Well, there's no great danger from that, is there?" said Maud.

"Wait till I've told you all. Papa returned, having spoken to him, and sent for me. He seemed very ill and pale, and I soon perceived he was very much agitated. I can never forget his face. And then he told me, oh, Maud, Maud! what I had not a suspicion of. He has been making immense speculations in mines, and they have turned out badly, and he says he is ruined, and Mr. Plimby is his principal creditor, and that his being able still to live at the Grange, depends altogether on my saying 'yes,' and marrying him."

"Oh, darling! I'm so awfully sorry," said Maud, in consternation. "But it can't possibly be. Oh no! I believe every one exaggerates when they lose. You'll find it is nothing so bad as he thinks."

But Maud's consolation failed to comfort Miss Tintern — failed even to reassure herself.

"Well, Ethel, if things do go wrong, remember I shall be my own mistress very soon. I intend to go to my cousin Maximilla, and live with her, and you shall come — I'm quite serious — and live with us. We shall be the three happiest old maids in England. But, after all, Mr. Plimby, they say, is very rich, and no one, that I know of, ever said anything against him. I don't recommend him particularly, but he might be a better husband than a great many men who are thought very eligible indeed."

"No, no, *no*, Maud, dear. I know it is kindly said, but all that tortures me — it is totally impossible — and oh, Maud, darling, I am in such misery! Oh, Maud, you will think me so odious, and yet I could not help it. It was not my secret; but I have been concealing something ever so long, and I know you'll hate me."

"Hate you! Nonsense; what is it?"

And upon this invitation, with an effort, Miss Tintern told the story of her engagement to Captain Vivian.

"It was when I was at the Carisbrokes', last summer; and it has been ever since; and he has insisted on its being a secret; and I'm ashamed to look you in the face, Maud. And oh, what am I to do?"

And she threw her arms round Maud's neck and cried.

Maud, if the truth must be told, was a little affronted. The idea of having been duped and made use of by Captain Vivian to conceal his real attachment to another young lady, stung her pride.

"What am I to do, what am I to do?" sobbed poor Ethel's voice.

"What are you to do? By all means marry him, if you like him well enough. But I don't think he is the least worthy of you. I don't know a great deal of him. Very little, considering that he was so long here. He dances very nicely, that I do know, for I danced two or three dances with him at the ball. It may be that I don't know him as well as other people, but he seems nothing like good enough for you."

Miss Tintern met this with a protest, and a torrent of the sort of eulogy with which the enamoured astonish those who still enjoy their senses, and then she continued:

"Oh, Maud, it is such a lesson to me. I ought never to have consented to this miserable concealment, and the idea of giving up Evelyn is simply despair — I should die."

"Well, don't give him up."

"I could not if I wished."

“Some way or other it will all come right, you’ll find. How is Mr. Tintern; not ill, I hope?”

“He seems absent and anxious, but he bears up wonderfully; and he goes to sessions, and everything else, just as usual. I never was so astonished as when I learned the awful news from him.”

“I don’t think it is quite so bad as he would have you believe; that is, I’m sure he is making the worst of it.”

“Well, darling Maud, I feel better since I told you. I think I should have gone mad if I had not some one like you just now to talk to; and remember, Maud, not a word to Miss Medwyn.”

“Not one word, I promise, to a living creature.”

“I’ll not ask to see Lady Vernon. You can tell her I came in, but she was not down. I’ll get into the carriage, now. Goodbye.” And so she departed, and Maud returned to the house, wondering.

CHAPTER XLVII.

ROYDON PEAK.

In the evening of that very lonely day Maud took a ramble in the park of Roydon.

There is nothing very bold or striking in the park, but it is prettily varied, with many rising undulations and rocky, fern-clad knolls, and many winding hollows. Here the yellow gorse perfumes the air, and brambles straggle over the rocks; the hawthorn and birch-trees stretch from their clefts, and pretty wild flowers show their many hues in sheltered nooks, while, all around, in groups or singly, stand the nobler forest trees, casting their mighty shadows along the uneven sward.

Maud was passing through a gentle hollow, almost a little glen, when she heard the tramp of running feet near her. A little boy was scampering along the summit of the narrow hollow at the other side.

She called to him, and he halted. She observed that the boy had a note in his hand, and beckoned him to approach. After a moment's hesitation, he descended the bank at his leisure, and stood before her.

"What are you doing here, my little man?" she asked. "Aren't you afraid that the keepers will find you?"

"I was taking a message up to the Hall yonder, but the lady's not there. Happen you'll be her?"

"What is her name?"

"Miss Mack — Mack-something — Medwyn!"

"Oh! Miss Maximilla Medwyn?"

"Ay, that will be it," replied the boy.

"No, she's not there now. Miss Medwyn left the Hall yesterday," said the young lady, looking with an unconscious scrutiny at the note he held clutched in his dirty little fist.

"Ay," said the boy.

"And you can tell whoever wishes to send the letter, that any one by asking at the house can learn where Miss Medwyn is at present."

"Ay, sure," said the boy again, and started once more to find his employer.

Very curious was Maud; but she did not continue her walk in its former direction. She turned about, and at the same quiet pace began to saunter towards home.

She had not reached the end of this shallow glen when she was again overtaken, and this time it was Charles Marston who was beside her.

"I hope you are not vexed. I am sure you won't be when you hear."

Maud was more startled than she would have cared to betray, and there followed a very short silence. She had set down Captain Vivian as Maximilla's correspondent, and had never suspected such a move on Mr. Marston's part. It was unlike him. It was hardly consistent with his promise to her. Yet she was glad.

"I'm not vexed, I assure you," she said, smiling a little, and blushing very much, as she gave him her hand. "A little boy overtook me just now, when I was going in the opposite direction, and told me he had been looking for Miss Medwyn at the house, to give her a note. I dare say he was your messenger?"

"He was. I had sent to find her, that I might ask her fifty things, and, above all, whether she thought she could persuade you to see me for a very few minutes."

"Well, it has come about, you see, by accident."

"And that is better, and — don't, I entreat, walk so fast — you won't refuse me a few minutes?" She did walk slower.

"Our walk must not be very far," she said. "Why have you come here? You ought to consider me. It was unkind of you to come here, knowing all that Miss Medwyn told you."

"I'm not to blame for this chance meeting; but a letter would not have done, indeed it would not; no, nothing but a few — ever so few — spoken words. And if I had failed to see you, I think I should have despaired."

"I hate the word despair; you must not talk tragedy. Would you mind picking up my locket? It is there, at that tuft of dark grass."

"What a very pretty locket!" said he, presenting it to its owner. "And that little bit of work, the rose in rubies, and the key in yellow topaz, that is the device of a branch of the Vernons.”

“Yes,” said Maud; “a very dear friend gave it to me.”

“I was in hopes you wore it as your own,” he said; “it would have given me a right to claim a cousinship.”

“But have you really a right to bear the Rose and the Key?” asked Maud.

“It is quite true,” he answered, smiling. “One of our family, a lady named Rhoda Marston, married a Vernon five hundred years ago; at least the College of Heralds, while there was such a thing, used to tell the story; and we intermarried after, and that gave us a right to quarter the Rose and the Key. In our old shield it is often quartered. I think it such a pretty device. I wonder why our people gave it up.”

“I’m a very bad herald; I did not know there had ever been such a cousinship,” said Miss Maud.

“Oh, yes, I recollect hearing the paper read when I was a boy. It is more than a hundred years old, and it said that our name was originally Vernon, but that we took the name of Marston from the place granted to our ancestor by the Conqueror. And that a Marston, Sir Guy Marston, it said, I think, was in love with a lady called the Lady Rhoda Vernon.”

“Oh! Really?” said Maud.

“A long time ago, of course. The lady from her name, was called the Rose, the Rose of Wyke it is in the legend. In one of their raids the lady was carried off by the lances of the Earl of Northumberland, and imprisoned, and held to ransom, in one of his many castles; but in which, Sir Guy could not learn. But the lady contrived from her place of captivity to send him, by a sure messenger, a rose, which he took as the emblem of *his* Rose; and learning from what castle it was sent, he raised his hand to the wall, and taking down his battle-axe, he said, ‘Behold the key of Percy’s keep,’ and so the story says he undertook the adventure, and rescued the lady, and hence came the device of the Rose and the Key.”

“Then there were Vernons on both sides, and you are a Vernon,” said the young lady.

“My ancestors have borne the name of Marston for five hundred years, but our real name is Vernon.” With a saddened change of voice and look, he said: “I can’t understand you, Maud; I think you might be more frank with me. I think, knowing the torture of my suspense, you might tell me how you wished me to understand all that passed at the Wymering ball. Tell me frankly, and I shall trouble you no more; do you wish all over between us, or will you give me a chance?"

"What do you speak of as having occurred at the Wymering ball?" asked the young lady, evasively.

"Oh, you must know," replied Charles Marston, his jealousy overcoming all other considerations. "I mean your having given so many dances to Captain Vivian, when you refused me more than one; and you had thrown over other men for him."

"Suppose I tell you that I have a perfect right to do as I please, that I say that I will neither be questioned nor lectured by any one, there would be an end of all this."

"Certainly, Miss Vernon; and you make me feel that I have, for a moment, forgotten myself."

"But I won't say any such thing. I tell you, frankly, that I don't care if I never see Captain Vivian again. I had reasons of my own for all I did; I told you so beforehand; and it seems a little strange that you should assume that there can be none but unkind ones."

The reply that had opened with so much fire and spirit, grew gentle, reproachful almost, as it ended.

They had come now, from walking very slowly, quite to a standstill under a hawthorn-tree, that stretched a friendly shelter from the steep bank.

"Heaven bless you for that reproof, because there is hope in it. Oh! how I wish, Miss Vernon, you were what you seemed to me at first, poor and almost friendless. I think my devotion might have moved you, and the proudest hope I cherished was that some day you would permit me to lift you from your troubles. But now I feel it is all changed. When I saw who you were my heart sank. I saw my presumption, and that I ought to renounce my folly, but I could not; and now what dare I ask? — only, perhaps, that you will allow me still to be your friend." He took her hand. "No, Maud, that could not be. I could not live and be no more to you than friend." He spoke in great agitation, and kissed the hand he had taken. "Oh, don't withdraw it. Listen for one moment, in mercy. I am going to say what is quite desperate. You will tell me now, Maud, can you ever like me?"

"We have been on strange terms for a long time — I hardly understand them myself. We may meet again, and we may never see one another more in this uncertain world. If I were to answer you now, as you ask me, I should speak as recklessly as you say you have spoken. But I won’t answer. I don’t know you well enough to give you a promise, and I like you too well to take leave of you for ever. I like no one else. Perhaps I never shall; perhaps I shall never like any one. Let all remain as it has been a little longer. And now I have said everything, and I am very glad I met you. Will you agree to what I have said? Are you content?”

“I do agree; I am content,” he answered.

A mountain of doubt and fear was lifted from his heart in the assurance, “I like no one else.” And the words, “I like you too well to take leave of you for ever,” had made him tumultuously proud and happy.

“And now we must say goodbye. If you want to hear of me, write to Miss Medwyn, but not to me, and you must not come here again. I don’t act from caprice. I have good reasons for all I ask. Now I must go home; and you must not follow me one step more. Goodbye.”

He held her hand for a moment, and said, “Goodbye, darling, but only for a little time. Goodbye.”

And he kissed it passionately.

She turned and left him hurriedly, and with hasty steps walked homeward.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A SURPRISE.

So Maud had all but confessed her love. Filled with a strange and delightful agitation, she followed the path towards the Hall.

Crossing the stile she stopped for a minute and looked back. How infinitely fonder that vague love had grown! In that one hour her character was saddened and softened for ever. For the first time, on leaving him, she felt a great loneliness. She almost repented that she had not ended all doubt and hesitation in the matter. But there was an alarm when she thought of Lady Vernon. She did not know what powers she might have under that terrible will, in the shadow of which she had, for the last few weeks, begun to feel herself dismayed.

In the sweet reverie in which already the melancholy of a care quite new to her was mingling, how incredibly short the walk home proved!

She lifted up her eyes before the door, and saw the flight of white steps, and the noble doorway with its massive florid carving, friendly too, as all things seen unchanged since childhood are. Sad a little now, for the first time, it looks to her, with an altered face, in the slanting evening beams, and a smile of reproach seems to light it mournfully. She will take her flight, as others have done, from the old home, generation after generation, for two hundred and fifty years. It does not look like home, quite, any longer.

Great heiress as she was, if all went right, she knew generally that her position might be immensely modified by certain possible events. She knew that under certain circumstances her mother had what amounted very nearly to a veto on her marriage, and that she hated the Marstons. Was she likely to sacrifice her feud to please a daughter, of whom she scarcely concealed her disdain?

Who quite understood that complicated and teazing will of her grandfather's? He had spent half his life pulling it to pieces and putting it together again. It was his hobby. Wherever he went, or whatever he seemed to be doing, his mind was always working upon it. He left it, he confided, a few days before his death, to his attorney, in a very unfinished state. He left behind him, nevertheless, such a tesselation of puzzles, so many provisoes, exceptions, conditions, as no layman could disentangle; and his chief earthly regret, on his deathbed, was that he had not been spared some six years longer, to elaborate this masterpiece.

There was uncertainty enough in her actual position to make the future anxious.

On the shield over the hall-door stands forth the sculptured Rose and Key, sharply defined in the oblique sunlight. The interest of those symbols of heraldry, after a moment's contemplation, made her think of the "shield-room," as the peculiar chamber I have already described was called, and to it she turned her steps.

She passed through the smooth-floored, silent hall, and along a corridor, and opened the door of the shield-room. It is so spacious a room that she did not hear a sharp voice speaking at the further end, with great animation, until she had entered it.

Her eyes, on entering the room, were dazzled by the western sky glaring through the three great windows, and for a moment or two all the rest looked but shadow. But she soon saw better, and the picture, touched with light, came out of the darkness.

It was Mr. Tintern's voice that was exerting itself with so much spirit. He was leaning back, in an easy posture, with his leg crossed, his arm resting on the table, and his hat and walking-cane in his other hand, reposing on his knee.

Round the corner of the table, which was not a very large one, and fronting the door, sat Lady Vernon, with a pretty little pocketbook in her hand, in which she seemed to have been making notes with a pencil; near her sat Doctor Malkin. The angle of the room, which formed a background for him, was a good deal in shadow, but a sunbeam glanced on his bald head, which shone in that light as red as blood.

There was one figure standing, and that completed a rather odd party of four. It was the slim figure of a long-necked, lantern-jawed man, with long hands, folded one over the other, a saintly smile, a head a little plaintively inclined to one side, and something indefinably villanous in his one eye. He seemed to be undergoing an examination, and Mr. Tintern rose suddenly, gazing upon Maud, and suspended his question as she advanced.

The same light that flamed on Doctor Malkin's burnished head, also showed this lank, roguish face very distinctly, and Miss Maud instantaneously recognised Elihu Lizard.

Nearly all the party seemed put out by the interruption. Mr. Lizard made a soft step or two backwards, receding into shadow. Doctor Malkin stood up, staring at her, as if not quite sure whether he saw Miss Maud or a spectral illusion. Mr. Tintern, who, as I said, had started up, advanced, after a moment's hesitation, jauntily, with his hand extended gallantly.

But the young lady had stopped short, looking very much confounded.

Lady Vernon was the only one of the party who did not appear much disconcerted.

"Come in, dear, come in," she said, employing the very unusual term "dear." "There is nothing to prevent you, that is, if you have anything to say."

"Nothing, thanks; no, mamma. I had not an idea you were busy — how do you do, Mr. Tintern and Doctor Malkin?" she said, but without delaying her retreat beyond the brief space it took to utter these hasty salutations, and gave them each a little bow.

What could they be about? This vague wonder and misgiving filled her as she ran upstairs.

Mr. Tintern she knew to be a magistrate. That odious Elihu Lizard, the sight of whom chilled her, was plainly under the ordeal of examination, when she had surprised them all together.

Why had Doctor Malkin looked at her, with an expression she had never seen before, as if she were something horrible?

What was the meaning of Mr. Tintern's cringing smile, and deprecatory, almost agitated, air?

Maximilla Medwyn had always told her that Mr. Tintern had an interest under that will which was adverse to hers. She would spend that night over the printed copy of the will, which Mr. Coke had given her, and would try to understand it.

Her mother! Yes, she appeared just as usual, and not at all disconcerted. But she never was the least put out by anything. Never. Her mother! What was she thinking of? No, if there was anything under discussion which could injure her, her mother was surely unconscious of it.

She was in her own room, alone, standing at the window with her hands folded together, thinking, or rather, thunderstruck.

Except her mother’s, which was always negative, and therefore inflexible and inscrutable, every countenance she had seen, even the features of Elihu Lizard, wore a new and ominous expression which dismayed her.

“I wish I had my cousin Max to talk to,” she thought, “or any living creature to consult. How lonely I have always been! Is there any creature in the house who, under a risk of mamma’s displeasure, would tell me the plain truth?”

So, wishing in vain, she at last rang for her maid. It was time to dress for dinner.

“Jones, do you know why mamma saw Doctor Malkin and Mr. Tintern in the shield-room to-day? She does not usually sit there?”

No, Jones did not know.

“Did you see that ill-looking man, blind of one eye, who was also in the room?”

“No, miss, not I.”

“Well, Jones, I’m very curious, and you must try to make out all about it, mind, and tell me tonight when I come up to bed. Don’t forget.”

So Jones promised, and did her best; but nothing was to be learned, except that the blind man in question had had refreshments in the housekeeper’s room, and that the housekeeper was of opinion that he was one of those missionary folk, whom Lady Vernon was pleased to encourage.

There are some pictures which, we scarcely know why, seize the imagination, and retain their hold on the retina; and ever and anon, during a troubled night, the obscure background of that spacious room, and the figures touched by the horizontal glare of sunset, were before Maud.

Miss Vernon was one of those people who rely very much upon instincts and intuitions: felt uneasily that the spectacle of that strange quartette conveyed to her a warning; and that all that was needed was the faculty of reading it aright.

CHAPTER XLIX.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

Maud and her mother were tête-à-tête at dinner that day. Lady Vernon scarcely spoke; she seemed fatigued.

Such meetings seldom happened. They embarrassed both mother and daughter, between whom there was an undefined but incurable estrangement.

Under such circumstances a ladies' dinner does not last very long; and they were soon, each provided with a book, taking a very unsociable tea in the drawingroom.

A wood fire smouldered in the grate. The evening was a little chilly, and made it pleasant.

Maud sat by it in a low chair with her feet on a stool. She leaned back with her book before her. The silence was only broken by the rustle of the pages as she turned them over.

At length Maud lowered the book to her lap, and raised her eyes.

They met the large grey eyes of Lady Vernon fixed on her, and the flush that indicated some secret agitation was in her cheeks. The mutual gaze continued for some two or three seconds, and then Lady Vernon turned her eyes away, as it seemed to Maud, haughtily.

It had not lasted long; but it made Maud uncomfortable. She knew her mother's face so well, that she read danger in that glance.

She waited some time, expecting something to come. But as Lady Vernon remained silent Maud took up her book again, and read a page or two; but her mind did not follow the lines with her eyes.

In a little time she put down her book again, and looked up.

Her mother was again looking at her, and this time she spoke.

"Did you hear," she asked, in her coldest tones, "that Captain Vivian drove through the town of Roydon to-day?"

"Did he, really?"

"I should not have thought it necessary to ask you a second time," she said, with a sneer. "Don't you know he did?"

"No, I did not hear that he was in the town since he left this," Maud replied.

"It is so nice of you, answering me so honestly," said Lady Vernon.

Maud looked at her, not quite certain whether the irony she suspected in her tone was real or fancied.

"Did you see any one to-day?" Lady Vernon reopened her conversation, after an interval, more dangerously.

"Miss Tintern was here to-day. She came in, hoping to see you, and then I took her [for] a little walk."

"Oh! Then this has been a day of walking," said Lady Vernon, with something derisive in her tone, that terrified Maud for her secret, and Maud blushed.

Lady Vernon, deadly pale, held her with her steady grey eyes, and an insulting smile, for some seconds.

Then the elder lady turned slowly away, still smiling, and Maud felt that she could breathe.

How much hatred there seemed to Maud in that pale, cruel smile; how much hatred in those cold, strange tones, low and sweet as the faintest notes of a flute!

Maud was in momentary fear of a renewal of the torture. But a minute passed, five minutes, and there was no renewal of the attack. Her mother seemed to have forgotten her, and to have returned to her book, with no further intention of disturbing her studies.

Ten minutes passed. The room was still as death. Suddenly that soft, cold, sweet voice was again in her ear. If it had been a clap of thunder it could not have startled her more.

"Pray, Maud, did you meet any one to-day in your walk?"

There was in Lady Vernon's tone, air, and look that which fired the girl's indignation.

She returned her mother's look, undecided whether she would answer her at all.

Suddenly losing command of her temper, Lady Vernon exclaimed, sternly:

"How dare you look at me, your mother, so? Answer my question, and speak truth. Whom did you meet to-day?"

“I shan’t answer,” said Maud, flushing crimson. “What have I done that you should attack me with so much bitterness?”

“Come, Maud, recollect yourself,” said Lady Vernon, recovering her colder manner. “You seem to forget that, as your mother, I have a right to know, from your own lips, whom you met to-day. Who was it?”

“I question your right to catechise me,” returned Maud, now thoroughly roused. “If I am to remember your rights, you must remember mine. I shall be of age in a few weeks, and my own mistress. You are not to treat me any longer like a child.”

“While you remain in my house you shall be amenable to me. I can’t command affection, but I can command respect. You shall obey me. I’ll make you obey me.”

The flush had quite left her cheeks, her face was unnaturally white, and her lip, as white as her face, was trembling. Maud had never before seen her so terribly angry. But she was now past being daunted. She was herself very nearly as angry, and so the spark had started into flame, and the flame had gathered to a conflagration.

“That is not the way to make me obey you. That is not what you want. You wish to wound me, and to trample on me. You never loved me; you hate me; yes, you hate me — your own child, your only child. And what have I done? All my life trying to bring you to love me. That’s over. I’ll try no more — never. You’ll teach me at last to hate you, as you hate me. I wish it were God’s will to take me. Oh! this dreadful world!”

“Wicked people make it dreadful to themselves and to others,” said Lady Vernon.

But Maud went on with her wild tirade.

“That poor girl who drowned herself in the mere at Golden Friars — they said she was wicked — she looked like an angel. Oh! for courage like hers to take the leap out of this frightful world!”

“That’s a threat of suicide, as I understand it, unless I forego, not my rights, but my duty. You shan’t deter me from doing it,” said Lady Vernon. “You shall confess.”

“I will not answer you. I will not confess. I have nothing to confess. Why do you use that insulting word? There has been nothing in my life I need ever have been ashamed or afraid to disclose.”

Lady Vernon looked at her intently for a moment, and then laughed a cold little laugh of disdain.

But that counterfeit merriment did not last long. The false smile faded, and left a deeper shadow of menace on her face.

"Another person would answer a daughter who presumed to talk to them so, very differently. But I know only too well your lamentable weakness and violence; and I'll tell you, as you have not the grace or candour to admit it, that you cannot conceal the fact from me. You saw Captain Vivian to-day. You talked and walked with him, and returned to the house only a few minutes before you came into the shield-room this evening. You might as well have spoken frankly."

If it had not been for the anger provoked by Lady Vernon's language and manner, Maud would, I dare say, have undeceived her, now. But the devil of perverse pride had been evoked, and Maud answered:

"If you knew all this, why need you have asked me to tell you. I said I should answer nothing; and I shall not."

"You shall do more than answer," said Lady Vernon, rising to her feet, with a new access of passion, and confronting her daughter. "You shall now and here write me a letter renouncing Captain Vivian. Sit down at this desk and write it."

"No," answered Maud, also rising, "I'll do nothing of the kind. I'll place myself in no such ridiculous position."

Lady Vernon was astounded. Maud had never disputed a distinct command of hers before.

"Think again, Maud, you had better. I fear you are losing your head a little," she said, coldly.

"I need not think again; I won't write anything. I've said so, and I won't," answered Maud, with all the fiery blood of the Vernons careering in her veins.

"Then take the consequences of your insanity," said Lady Vernon, almost in a whisper, but with an audible stamp on the floor.

These two pairs of large grey eyes were encountering, all this time, in a burning gaze of mutual defiance.

So the unnatural alienation that had for so many years existed between mother and child had now at last found positive expression, and the angry passions of both were declared and active.

“I think I had better go to my own room,” said Maud, in tones which trembled a little.

“Do,” said Lady Vernon.

Maud walked straight to the door. She had opened it, and paused with the handle in her hand. It was only to say, hastily:

“Goodnight, mamma.”

“Goodnight,” returned Lady Vernon, in a tone that sounded like a curse.

And so Maud stepped out, with heightened colour, blazing eyes, and a countenance strangely proud, yet heartbroken.

She walked upstairs with a humming in her ears, as if she had received a blow. Her dry, hot lips were whispering:

“No, never again: we never can be again even what we were before. It is all over; there is nothing ever to reconcile us. No, never, it can never be again.”

When she got to her room, her maid Jones, advancing with her accustomed smile, exclaimed with a sudden halt and a change of countenance:

“La! Miss Maud, dear, what’s the matter? you do look pale and queer!”

“Do I?” said Maud, vaguely. “No, not much. But I’m sorry, Jones,” and she burst into a wild flood of tears.

“What is it, Miss Maud, my dear child; what’s the matter?”

“Oh, Jones! if all the world were like you!”

And she placed her arms round her trusty maid’s neck and kissed her.

“What is it, my dear? There, there, don’t! Tell me, like a good child, what’s the matter?”

“I’ll tell you all, Jones, by-and-bye. It has come at last; it’s as well it should. Mamma has been so unkind, and cruel, and insulting, and I was angry, and we’ve quarelled — desperately. It can never be made up again, Jones; never, never.”

“Nonsense, Miss Maud, what a fuss you make; it will all be nothing at all.”

“I was violent — I was wrong — I spoke as I ought not — I blame myself. But, no, Jones, it can never be made up — it is folly to think it. I know mamma too well. It is past that; she never forgives; and she never loved me; there is no use in trying to think it. She hates me now, and always will, and I’m sorry, but it can’t be helped.”

So she sobbed on, sitting in the great chair, with her face to the wall beside it, and honest Jones, who was disturbed and even shocked, said, with her hand on the big arm of the chair, leaning over her, and employing a powerful superlative of her own invention:

"Her ladyship's the very most religiousest lady in England, and the most charitablest, and you musn't to say or think *so.* She's strict, and will have her will obeyed, and you musn't gainsay her when she thinks she's right. But she's a just woman, and good. Now don't be crying so, darling, for you have only to say what you should say to her, and everything will be as it used, and you'll say so yourself in the morning. There, now, don't take on so."

Thus honest Jones poured consolation into an inattentive and incredulous ear, and the young lady, answering never a word, wept on for a long time. It was her leavetaking of a dream that could never come again, the hope that her mother might, at last, come to love her.

CHAPTER L.

LADY VERNON.

When Maud had closed the door, the bitter smile that had gleamed on her mother's face with a wintry light, departed, and left the bleakest darkness instead.

She remained sitting as in a dream where Maud had left her, with her hands clasped hard together in her lap; she looked down on the carpet, a yard or so before her feet, darkly, and drew her shoulders together, as if a chill air were about her, and shuddered.

How sudden had been the alarm! and now that the danger was upon her, how fast events were driving on!

The tiny ring of the clock over the mantelpiece recalled her. It was twelve o'clock. More than an hour had passed since Maud had left her. It had not appeared five minutes.

She lit her candle, and ascended the great stairs, still in her dream. Without effort, almost without consciousness of motion, she moved like a ghost along the galleries. The homely figure of lean Mrs. Latimer, in her plain black silk dress, startled her like the sight of a stranger.

Lady Vernon did not talk to Latimer that night; she had no questions to ask her. Her veteran maid had never known her so darkly absent before. She told her to leave the two candles on the dressing-table burning, and the maid departed, wondering what had gone wrong, or who had vexed my lady.

Left to herself, Lady Vernon lay still, in that grisly vigilance that in outward seeming simulates the quietude of slumber. Sometimes, for five minutes, her eyes were closed; sometimes wide open for as long. She heard the pulse of the artery in her temple drum on her pillow; and her heart beat harder than a heart at ease is wont to throb.

Lady Vernon had now lain awake in her bed for an hour. She grew hopeless of the rest she felt she wanted. At last she got up, unlocked her dressing-case, and took out one of its pretty cut-glass bottles, with a golden cap over its stopper. It contained that infusion of opium in water, which De

Quincey mentions as the fluid approved by those who use that drug on a large scale.

Lady Vernon had recourse to its potent magic only when sleep forsook her, as at present. This of late had happened often enough to cause her to apply to it with increasing doses.

It failed on this occasion; and produced, instead of quiet, exaggerated excitement, as it always does when it fails to soothe.

At length the lady rose, and in her dressing-gown and slippers sat down at her table, and wrote a passionate letter to Captain Vivian, summoning him to Roydon, and promising to open her heart to him if he would come.

This letter written, she again had recourse to the little cut-glass bottle, and this time with success. In a few minutes she lay in a deep, motionless sleep.

In the morning when she awoke the vengeful drug exacted its compensation. She felt almost stunned by the potent medicine.

She had locked the letter in her dressing-box. The first thing in the morning she took it out and read it.

No; it would not do. The glamour of the opium was upon it. She burnt it at the candle that was still flaring at her bedside, pale and smoky, in the early light of morning which she had admitted at the open shutter.

That letter must be very carefully written, she thought; and other measures must be taken first. It seemed doubtful, altogether, whether it might not be as effectual and wiser to write only to old Mr. Dawe.

She did not come down to breakfast that morning. Maud was infinitely relieved; she dreaded the idea of meeting Lady Vernon; and to her great delight there came a letter from Lady Mardykes, naming the day for receiving her at Carsbrook. It said:

“Your mamma has been so good as to tell Maximilla Medwyn that she will allow you to come to Carsbrook any day you please. If you can, do come on Monday next; Maximilla has promised to be here early, so if you arrive any time in the afternoon you will be sure to find her. I tried to get Ethel Tintern to come; but she can’t, she says, for some time. You will find my house very full, and there are some odd, and, I think, very amusing people here. Maximilla tells me that you and she were interested by the rather striking appearance of Doctor Antomarchi. I wrote to ask him for a day or two; so you shall meet him at Carsbrook. He is a wonderful mesmerist. Two young ladies are talking in my room as I write. I hope I am not quite unintelligible in consequence. I hope you like dancing. We dance a great deal here; but you will learn all our ways in a little time."

There was a note from Maximilla Medwyn also, seconding Lady Mardykes' invitation, and promising to be punctually at Carsbrook on the morning of Monday. She mentioned also that she had written to Lady Vernon, and was certain, from what had passed, that she would place no difficulty in the way of Maud's visit to Carsbrook. Of this, however, Maud was by no means so sure.

Lady Vernon did not meet her at luncheon. Maud had gone to the room in secret trepidation. The respite was very welcome; if she could only make her escape to Carsbrook, what a happy change!

She was glad to learn from Jones that Sir David and Lady Blunkett were to dine at Roydon, and stay till next day, and that Mr. and Mrs. Foljambe and Captain Bamme were to meet the worthy baronet and his wife.

She was in hopes of getting away to Carsbrook — if she were indeed to be allowed to visit Lady Mardykes, of which she had very uncomfortable doubts since the scene of the night before — without the agitation of another tête-à-tête with her mother.

She sent for Jones, and ran up to her own room, trembling lest she should meet Lady Vernon on the stairs.

I don't know whether Lady Vernon had any secret shrinkings of a similar kind. If she had she would have disdained them, and played out her game, whatever it was, stoically.

Jones found her young mistress standing at her own window, looking out in an anxious reverie.

"Jones, do you know where mamma is?" Maud asked.

"Her ladyship went down more than an hour ago to the library, and I think she is there still, for it is only about ten minutes since she sent for Mr. Penrhyn to go to her there."

"I'm so afraid of meeting her. I should rather put off seeing her as long as I can. Did Latimer say anything of her having been vexed with me last night?"

"Not a word, miss; I dare say you are making too much of it."

"Not a bit, Jones; but we'll not talk about that. I wish I were sure that she would allow me to go to Lady Mardykes'. You would have great fun there, Jones."

"Well, indeed, miss, a bit o' fun would not hurt neither of us. Her ladyship does keep things awful dull here."

At this moment came a knock at the door.

Miss Vernon looked at Jones, and Jones at Miss Vernon, and there was a rather alarmed silence, during which the knock was repeated.

"Who is there?" asked Maud, after another pause.

It was Latimer.

"Come in, Latimer. Are you looking for me?" said the young lady.

"Please, miss, her ladyship wishes to see you in the library," said Latimer, in her dry way.

"Immediately?" asked Maud, changing colour.

"So she desired me to say, miss."

"Oh, very well, Latimer. Tell mamma, please, that I'll follow you in a moment."

Latimer was gone, and the door shut.

"I wish it was over," said the young lady, very pale. "Stay here, Jones, till I come back."

"I will, miss," said Jones, whose heart misgave her now, respecting the visit to Carsbrook. "And you won't mind me saying, miss, 'twill be best you should not contradict her ladyship in nothing."

"I don't think she'll keep me very long. When I come back I'll tell you whether we are going or not."

And with these words Miss Vernon left the room, and proceeded along the gallery, and down the stairs, at a much more sedate pace than usual.

It was a very unpleasant excitement, and she felt for a moment almost a little faint as she approached the well-known door.

She hesitated before it. She wondered whether any one was with her mother, and with something nearly amounting to the sinking of panic, anticipated the coming scene.

With an effort of resolution she knocked.

"Come in," said the sweet, cold, commanding voice she knew so well.

Maud entered the room, and drew near with the embarrassment of one who knows not what reception may be awaiting her.

Her large eyes, fixed on Lady Vernon, saw nothing unusual in the serene and cold expression of her handsome face. She heard nothing unusual in her clear, harmonious tones. Her manner was perfectly unembarrassed. Judging by external signs, Maud might have concluded that no recollection of their fiery encounter of the night before remained in her mother's mind.

"There has come a note from Maximilla Medwyn, to-day, telling me that Lady Mardykes wishes you to go to Carsbrook on Monday next. There is nothing to prevent your telling her that you will go."

Maud was afraid to say how delighted and relieved she was. She could not say what untoward caprice too strong an expression of her feeling might excite; but a flush of pleasure glowed brilliantly in her cheeks.

"It is too late to-day for the Roydon post; you can write tomorrow. I have written to Maximilla to say what your answer will be," said Lady Vernon. "Some people are coming to dine here to-day, and I don't think we are likely to be alone while you remain at home. I only wished to mention that; and you had better tell Jones, as she is to go with you; there's nothing more."

"I hope that you are pretty well now, mamma?"

"Quite well, thanks," said Lady Vernon, cutting short any possible prolongation of these civilities. "You remember the story of — Talleyrand, was it? I forget — a Frenchman of the world, who, being bored at every posting-house, through half the journey to Paris, with messages from a gentleman who was travelling the same road, to inquire particularly how he was, requested the messenger at last to say to the gentleman who was so good as to make so many inquiries, that he was very well all the way to Paris. So we'll take that hint, I think, and save one another some trouble, and I'll say I'm very well all the way to Monday afternoon. And now, dear Maud, I'm busy, and I think I'll say goodbye."

And with this gracious speech, accompanied by a cold little laugh that was indescribably insulting, she turned to her papers once more, leaving Maud to make her exit with a very full and angry heart.

"Always sorry when I try to show her the least sign of affection. Well, while I remain here, I'll not be such a fool again."

So, with flashing eyes, Maud resolved, as she passed from the library through the suite of rooms beyond it.

CHAPTER LI.

DOCTOR MALKIN CONFERS.

About two hours later, Maud was walking beyond the avenue, in that part of the grounds in which, some weeks before, Miss Max and old Mr. Dawe had taken a little ramble together.

Suddenly she lighted on Doctor Malkin, who was walking up the wooded path from the village. Maud saw that the quick eye of the doctor had seen her at the same moment that she saw him. He happened to be in a part of the path which makes its way through a very shadowy bit of wood, and possibly the doctor thought that he might have been unobserved, for he hesitated for a second, and she fancied was about to evade the meeting by stepping quickly among the trees. But it was only a momentary thought, for he would not of course allow the young lady to suppose that he shrank from a recognition. So, pretending to look up for a moment among the boughs of the tree under which he stood, in search of a bird or a squirrel, or some other animated illustration of that natural history which was one of his studies, he resumed his walk toward her, affecting not to see her until he had approached more nearly; then raising his hat, with a surprised smile and a deferential inclination, he quickened his pace, and, as he reached her, observed on the weather and the beauty of the tints beginning to discolour the summer foliage, and then mentioned that he fancied he saw a kite, whose scientific name he also mentioned, among the boughs of a very dark tree, a little way off, but he was not quite sure. She was taking a rather solitary walk, he observed; how very much she must miss her companion in so many pleasant rambles — Miss Medwyn. What a charming old lady she is, so agreeable, and such exhilarating spirits!

There was a sort of effort and embarrassment in all this that was indefinable and unpleasant. If he had been half detected in a poaching expedition to snare the rabbits, or on any other lawless design, he could scarcely have looked more really disconcerted, and more anxious to appear at his ease.

The doctor appeared to be made up for a journey; he had a rug and a muffler for the night air, still five or six hours away, across his arm, and carried his thin umbrella, in its black shining case, in his hand, as well as a small black leather bag. A fly was to meet him at the back gate of Roydon, and wherever he was going he wished to have a word with Lady Vernon before setting out on his travels.

"Lady Vernon was a little uneasy," he said, "lest that attack of the young woman at the gatehouse should turn out to be diphtheria, and I promised to see her and report, and I'm glad to say it is nothing of the kind. So, as I shan't be home till tomorrow, I thought it best to look in to-day to set Lady Vernon's mind at ease. Goodbye, Miss Vernon."

The doctor took his leave, as I have said; and Maud saw the shower of dotted sunlight as he strode on the path toward the Hall flying through the interstices of the leaves across the glazed black bag he carried, or, more softly, mottling his rug and his hat. She could not account for the slight awkwardness that seemed to affect everything he said or did during those two or three minutes, and she observed that the pale gentleman with the long upper lip and short chin, smooth and blue, smiled more than was necessary, and that the obliquity that spoiled his really fine eyes was a good deal more marked than usual.

The doctor was soon quite beyond her ken, and pursued his way at a brisk pace to the house, where he was instantly admitted to the library.

He had thrown down his rugs and other property in the hall, and had merely his hat in his hand as he entered.

Lady Vernon got up and took his hand, and smiled faintly and wearily, and, with a little sigh, said:

"I did not think the time had arrived. I have had, as usual, some letters to write; but you are punctual."

She glanced at the old buhl French clock over the chimneypiece.

"Sit down, Doctor Malkin; I have been thinking over what I said, and I don't recollect that I have anything very particular to add. There are only two things that occur to me to say: the first is, that I have quite made up my mind upon the main point; and the second is, that it must take place immediately."

The doctor bowed, and his eyes remained fixed on the table for a minute. The lady did not speak. She was also looking down, but with a little frown, and affected to be diligently arranging her letters one over the other.

Doctor Malkin felt the obligation upon him to say something.

“It is as well often — generally — *I* don’t see any difficulty; in fact, I know there can’t be, unless it should exist *here*,” he said, in a low tone, speaking by fits and starts.

“There is none,” said Lady Vernon, with a little irritation in her look and tone. Perhaps she did not understand Doctor Malkin’s affectation of embarrassment. “I have made a note of the day I now wish to appoint, and of my reason for greater promptitude; I thought it would be more satisfactory to you to have it in that form.”

“Thanks; it is so considerate,” said Doctor Malkin, taking the note she dropped before him. “I’ll just, if you allow me, run my eye over it.”

He opened it. It was not a very long memorandum.

“Perfectly clear,” he said, when he had read it through; “and I must say, your reason appears to me a very powerful one — very.”

“Mr. Pembroke Damian is a very admirable man,” said the lady, after an interval of silence. “He was one of the most eloquent preachers I ever heard, and a man whose life was more eloquent still than his preaching, and he is so able, so wise. I look upon him, taken for all in all, as one of the worthies of England.”

Lady Vernon had raised her dark, cold eyes, and was looking, not indeed at the doctor, but straight before her, to the wall, as she spoke this high moral testimony.

“He certainly is a most remarkable man,” said Doctor Malkin.

“He is a benefactor to the human race,” said the lady. “When I think of all the suffering he has alleviated, and the despair to which he has been the instrument of admitting comfort and peace, I am justified in regarding him, as I do, as the minister and angel of heaven. I have boundless confidence in that good and able man.”

Doctor Malkin acquiesced.

“And I thank Heaven there is such a person living, and in his peculiar position,” continued Lady Vernon. “Will you be so good as to give him this note.”

Doctor Malkin deferentially took the letter she handed him.

“It is a very happy reflection that my confidence, inevitable as it is, should be placed in so sagacious and pious a man,” she added.

"He has certainly been a useful man," said the doctor, still looking down on the envelope, with the address, the "Rev. Pembroke Damian, M.A.," &c., in the clear and graceful hand of Lady Vernon, "and a most conscientious person — a truly religious man. You, Lady Vernon, can speak with much more authority than I upon that point; and, certainly, I will say, his ideas have been in advance of his time; his has been a most influential mind, and in some points has led the opinion of his age."

"I would trust my life, as I am ready to trust that which, you will say, ought to be dearer still to me, in his hands," said Lady Vernon.

"He does not quite take the leading part he did, you know," said Doctor Malkin. "For the last two or three years he has not done a very great deal."

"That is a rather unpleasant piece of information, you must suppose, for me," Lady Vernon said, with an angry flush. "If I did not suppose it a little exaggerated, I think I should almost hesitate."

Doctor Malkin knew that the lady wished him to understand that he had made a stupid speech. He had put his foot in it. He said hastily:

"You know he is most ably seconded. There is not a more brilliant man, perhaps, living, as I have explained to you, and — and, of course, I don't mean that Mr. Damian has abdicated, or anything of the kind. Of course he takes a very essential part, and is, in so far as your interests and feelings are personally concerned, everything he ever was."

"I have always assumed that to be so," said Lady Vernon, severely, "and I should be obliged to you, Doctor Malkin, if you would report to me any such dereliction of duty on the part of Mr. Damian, should you find anything the least like it, which, I must tell you frankly, I can't suppose. I can't credit it, because I know so much of him; his character is so perfectly upright, and he is in all respects so consistent a Christian. I relied upon this, and upon his principal and actual responsibility."

The lady's eyes still flashed, and she spoke sharply. Doctor Malkin was therefore still uncomfortable. He saw, too late, that she possibly construed his words as casting an undesirable responsibility upon her. He hastened, therefore, to reply.

"But I am afraid, Lady Vernon, I must have failed to convey myself. My meaning was, I assure you, very far from that. On the contrary, I believe Mr. Damian was never more vigorous in mind, or active in his habits. You may make your mind perfectly easy upon that point. He deputes nothing —

nothing, in fact, involving a responsibility. I'm afraid I must have expressed myself very clumsily indeed."

Lady Vernon did not care to discuss the point further.

"I need not tell you how much I have suffered," she said. "It may come, very soon, all right again. Let us hope the best. I hope, at least, it may not be very protracted. You will return tomorrow?"

"Yes, certainly; and if you please, Lady Vernon, I can call here at any hour that suits you best, after I come back, and tell you what I have done. And I don't anticipate the slightest trouble."

"It is better to come as early as you can, thank you. And there will be some trifling arrangements still to complete, which we can then talk over. You set out, I suppose, immediately on leaving this?"

"Immediately," said he. "I have a good way to go. I think I have very full instructions now. Do you recollect anything more?"

"No. The rest had better wait till tomorrow, and it is time, Doctor Malkin, I quite agree with you, that you were on your way. So I will say goodbye."

Lady Vernon gave her hand to Doctor Malkin, without a smile, and he was more than usually deferential and solemn as he took it.

At the room door, Doctor Malkin recollected his accidental meeting with Miss Vernon, and returned for a moment to mention the circumstance to Lady Vernon, as it had obliged him to allege a pretext for his visit to Roydon Hall.

"Well," said the lady, growing a little red, "I should have preferred saying nothing. But it can't be helped now. Where did you meet her?"

He told her.

She looked down in momentary misgiving — thoughtful. But she had learned that Captain Vivian, who had undoubtedly driven through the town of Roydon the evening before, had left again for the station, and had gone away by train, and she was sure to hear more particularly in the morning about his movements from Mr. Dawe, to whom she had written a very agitated letter of inquiry and alarm.

She would take her, if possible, to the Tinterns next day, and somewhere else the day following, and keep her, should any uncertainty arise, out of the way of any further meeting with that perverse gentleman.

So Lady Vernon, recollecting that the silence had been rather long, said suddenly:

“I was thinking, I may tell you, as I have taken you so unreservedly into council, whether, under all circumstances, the grounds here are quite a suitable place for Maud to take these solitary walks in.”

“Well, as you say Lady Mardykes’ invitation was for Monday, she will be leaving this so soon, it is scarcely — — “

“Well, *yes;* we can talk of that tomorrow, when we meet,” interrupted Lady Vernon. “For the present, goodbye, Doctor Malkin.”

So again giving him her hand, she and the doctor, who was not himself looking very well or very merry, made a second leavetaking, and he took his departure.

His allusion to Maud’s departure on the Monday following was in the tone of her own very decided feeling.

Lady Vernon was glad that Lady Mardykes had fixed so early a day for her daughter’s visit to Carsbrook.

CHAPTER LII.

MERCY CRESWELL.

Next day an humble but unlooked-for visitor appeared at Roydon Hall.

Miss Vernon, on returning in the afternoon from her short walk to inquire at the gatehouse for the sick girl, encountered the slim, dark figure of Latimer, her mother's maid, in the hall.

Latimer had evidently been looking for her, for the demure angular figure which had been crossing the hall toward the drawingroom as she entered, turned sharp to the left, and approached her with a quick step, and making a little inclination before Maud, Lady Vernon's maid said, in her low, dry tones:

"Please, miss, my lady desires me to say that Mercy Creswell, which you recollect her, perhaps, in the nursery long ago, being niece of old Mrs. Creswell, that died here when you was but a child, miss, has come here to see her ladyship and you, also, if you please."

"I do remember her very well. I must have been a very little thing, Latimer, when she went away."

"About six years old you was, miss, when she left. Where will you please to see her?" replied Latimer.

"Where is she now?"

"In my lady's morning room, please, miss. But you can see her, my lady says, anywhere you please," answered Latimer.

"Then I should like to see her quietly, if you would tell her to come to my dressing-room, and tell some one to send Jones there, please, and I will go myself in two or three minutes to see her."

Latimer disappeared; and Maud in a minute more was running up the stairs to her room.

We all lean a little fondly to the recollections of childhood, especially those images of very early memory, from which chance has long widely separated us.

But Maud could not get up any great interest in this particular woman, Mercy Creswell. She was, as Maud remembered her, a red-haired, stunted, freckled girl of perhaps some sixteen years; plump, and broad, and strong, with a cunning and false gaiety in her fat face, and who laughed a great deal, not pleasantly, but rather maliciously, and at untoward times.

Maud had a remembrance of an occasional slap or pinch, now and then, slyly bestowed by this short, freckled, laughing young lady, who rather liked getting her into a scrape now and then, and who used in playful moods, when they were running about the rooms together, and no one by, to run her into a corner, hold her to the wall, and make ugly faces, with her nose almost touching Maud's, till the child would scream with fright and anger; and then she would fall into shrieks of laughter, and hug and kiss her a little more roughly than was necessary, and after this somewhat sore and uncomfortable reconciliation, she would charge her — for the love she bore her own, own poor little Mercy Creswell, who would be sent away if she did, never more to dress her doll, or trundle her cart, or roll her ball for her — not to tell nurse, or nursery-maid, or Miss Latimer, that they had had "a falling out."

Her recollections of this early attendant and, under the rose, playmate, therefore, were not quite as sunny as they might be. Still they were connected with happier days, or what now seemed happier, than those which had come later; and perhaps if Mercy Creswell was sometimes a disagreeable companion, it was to be attributed, in great measure, to the boisterous, and sometimes mischievous, spirits of very early girlhood.

When she reached her dressing-room, Maud Vernon beheld, for the first time, for fourteen years, this same Mercy Creswell.

The interval had not improved her personal appearance. Short and square, with a very fat, and rather flat face, mottled with very large freckles, and her red hair showing under her bonnet, she might have passed for a woman of the age, at least, of Don Quixote's housekeeper. No one could have supposed that her age did not exceed thirty years. She smiled so ecstatically that she nearly shut up her cunning little eyes in rolls of fat wrinkles, while she blinked them very fast, as if tears were forcing their way from them; of which, I don't think, there was any other sign. She was not prepossessing; but Maud could not find it in her heart to repulse her when whisking aside her green veil she rose on tip-toe, put her short arms round Maud's neck, and kissing her energetically, said:

"Ye'll excuse the liberty, Miss Maud dear, but it is such a time since your own poor little Mercy has saw'd you. La! what a beautiful young lady you have growed up since then; well, to be sure, and me as small as ever. Well, la! it is a queer world, miss. I 'a bin in many a place since Roydon nursery. La, miss! do you mind the big ball o' red leather, and the black man with the cymbals, and all the toys and trumpets, dollies and donkeys. Well, dearie me! so there was, wasn't there? La! and we was great friends, you and me, ye'll excuse me saying so; and many a day's play together we two has had; and I thought I'd 'a heard o' you married long ago, miss, but there's time enough yet. 'Twill be a lord, nothing less, whenever he comes; bless him."

"And you, Mercy, you have not married yet?" said Maud.

"Me? La bless ye! not I, by no means, miss. Oh, la! what would I be doin' with a husband? Oh, la! no."

"Well, as you say, there is time enough, Mercy; and what have you been doing ever since?"

"La, miss! I could not answer that in a week. I was at service, after leaving here, first with Lady Mardykes."

"At Lady Mardykes'? I know her. I'm sure you had a pleasant time in her house?" said Maud, eagerly.

"That it was; no pleasanter, miss; no end of great folks there, and music, and fine clothes, and all sorts, and play-acting, and dancing by night; and croquet and lawn billiards, and the like o' that, all day; or driving off, with cold luncheons, to this place or that, nothing but grand people, and all sorts of fun; high jinks, the gentlemen used to call it."

"I'm going there, to Carsbrook, on Monday next," said Maud, who was full of this visit.

"Well to be you, miss," said Mercy Creswell, looking down and coughing a little; "and I would not wonder, miss, if I was to be there myself," she added, looking up again, and screwing her mouth together, and drawing in her breath through the circular orifice, while she raised her eyebrows with a lackadaisical ogle at the window.

"Oh? Really! Well, mind you must make me out if you should," said Maud, gaily.

"I'll be sure to," she answered, with one of her sly giggles.

"It is a great black-and-white house, very large, ain't it?" said Maud, smiling.

"La! How did ye find that out?" Mercy Creswell continued, with the same irrepressible giggle.

"You see I know more about it than you fancied," continued Maud. "It is three stories high, and close under the windows there is an oldfashioned flower-garden, with the croquet ground in the middle, and the lawn billiards and all that, and an old mulberry-tree growing in the middle of it; and it is surrounded on three sides by a tall hedge clipped like a wall, with here and there an arch cut through it, something like the yew cloisters behind the shield-room here, only very much larger."

"Why, you must 'a bin there, miss," her visitor cried, half stifled with laughter.

"No, never; and there are ever so many bedrooms, and more guests generally than you could number — all kinds of great, and wise, and clever, and famous people."

As Maud proceeded, her short, fat visitor in her shawl and big bonnet was actually obliged to get up and stump about the room, so extravagant her laughter by degrees became.

"You see I know something about it," continued Maud, laughing also. "As you used to say to me, long ago, a little bird told me. But I shall soon be there, I hope, to see for myself; and I believe every one is made to feel quite at home there immediately; and it is such a hospitable house, every one says. Your only difficulty is, how to get away; and, by-the-bye, do you know Doctor Antomarchi?"

"I 'a heard of him once or twice," screamed Mercy Creswell, almost suffocated with laughter.

"Now listen to me. We have laughed enough," said Maud. "You mustn't laugh. I can't get you to tell me anything; you do nothing but laugh; and I really wished so much to hear about him. I and Miss Medwyn saw him at the Wymering ball, and we were both so curious. Can you tell me anything about him?"

"Not I, miss."

"Well, if you like, Jones shall make you a wager that he will be there at the same time," continued the young lady, a little puzzled by her fat friend's irrepressible and continued screams of laughter, and beginning to feel the infection a little more herself; “and the Spanish ambassador; *he* will be there also.”

“Oh! Oh, la! Oh, miss, stop! Oh, oh, oh, you’re a killing of me. I’m — I’m — I’m not able to — to — oh, la! ha, ha, ha! catch my breath.” And fat Mercy Creswell, clinging to the corner of a wardrobe, actually shook with laughter till tears rolled plentifully down her big cheeks; and Maud, and her maid Jones, who was nevertheless disgusted by the vulgar familiarity and noise of the clumsy Miss Creswell, were drawn in spite of themselves, and joined at last vehemently and hilariously in the chorus.

“Well, don’t mind me,” at last sobbed Miss Creswell, recovering slowly, “I always was one, oh, ho, ho! that laughs at nothing. I do; I’m as tired now, my dear — oh, ho, ho! — as if I ran up to the top o’ the fells of Golden Friars, and la! but that’s high enough; but how did you hear all about it, so exact, Miss Maud dear; where in the world — — “

“I may as well tell you, then,” she answered, also recovering. “I heard everything about it from Miss Medwyn; you must remember her very well. She has been there very often, and she, I know, will be staying there at the same time that I am.”

But at this moment Miss Mercy experienced another relapse, nearly as long and violent, every now and then, half-articulately, blurting out, in sobs and gasps amidst the screaming roulades of her laughter: “Oh la! ha, ha! Miss Med — Med — oh, ho! ho! — Medwyn — la! ha, ha, ha! She’s so staid, she is — she’s so nice. La! ha, ha, ha!” and so on.

When at length a lull came, Miss Vernon, who was protected by its impertinence from any tendency to join in this last explosion of her old under-nursery-maid’s merriment, said gravely:

“Mamma has not been very well; she has been complaining of headache; and I think we are making a good deal of noise. I don’t know how far off it may be heard.”

“Well, dear Miss Maud, I hope you ain’t offended, miss; but, dearie me, I could not but laugh a bit, thinking of old Miss Medwyn among all them queer dancers, and fiddlers, and princes, and play-actors, and flute-players; I hope you’ll hexcuse the noise I ‘a made, seein’ I really could not help it, miss, by no chance. I know Lady Mardykes well; why shouldn’t I, having lived in her service for a many years? and a very great lady she is, and well liked, as I well know; and her papa, Lord Warhampton, a’most the greatest man in England; no wonder she should have all the highest in the land in her house, whenever she so pleases. But, la! ha, ha, ha! It's a queer world. Who'd 'a thought. There is sich queer things happens."

This time, her laughter was but an amused giggle, and she did not lose her command over it.

"Have you had luncheon?" inquired Maud.

"I thank you, miss, hearty, in the 'ousekeeper's room, before I came up to see her ladyship," answered short Miss Mercy, with a comfortable sigh, blowing her nose a little, and adjusting her big bonnet and old green veil, and smoothing her red tresses, while, still out of breath, she tried to recover the fatigues of her long fit of laughter. "Well, Miss Maud dear, and how are ye?" inquired Mercy, suddenly returning from gay to grave.

"Oh, very well, thanks; and so are you; and you haven't married, you tell me, so you have nothing on earth to trouble you. I wish we were all like the trees, Mercy; they live very long and very happily, I dare say, longer, certainly, and more quietly than we do a great deal, and I don't hear of any marrying or giving in marriage among them."

"Not they, not a bit; they're never married, and why should we, miss? That's a very wise saying," acquiesced Mercy Creswell, very gravely looking at her.

"If you really think so," said Maud, "you are a wise woman; I have been trying to convince my maid Jones, but I'm afraid she is still rather in favour of the vulgar way of thinking."

"Well, miss, you'll not find me so. I make my own clothes, miss, and I think my own thoughts," said Mercy, with a wise nod.

"You are a woman after my own heart then," said Maud, gaily.

"And how are you, miss?" repeats Mercy Creswell.

"I told you I am very well, thanks," says Maud.

"None o' them headaches you used to have when you was a little thing?"

"Oh, no! I sometimes have a little nervous pain from cold over my eye; neuralgia they call it; but that is nothing, it never continues very long."

"It never gets *into* your eye?" asked Mercy, staring steadily and gravely at the suspected organ, and screwing her lips together uneasily all the time. "Them pains, they say, sometimes begins in the eyes, miss."

Maud laughed.

"But Heaven only knows, as you say, miss. I dare say you are right, whatever you think; for every one knows best about their own pains. Sich is the will of Heaven — so we leave them things to wiser heads, miss, and I'm sure where you're going you'll be comfortable and amused."

"If I'm not, Mercy, I shall be the first visitor at that pleasant house who ever had such a complaint to make."

Mercy was suddenly very near exploding in a new fit of laughing, but she mastered it. "Well, miss, I'll be there, I think — not unlikely," said Mercy.

"As a servant?" asked Miss Maud.

"Well, as an attendant, I would say," answered she.

"Oh!"

"And if I am, I'll be sure, I hope, to see you, miss, if you gives permission; and I'm sure I desires nothing but your 'ealth and 'appiness, miss. Why should I? And I must be going now, Miss Maud. Goodbye to you, miss." And again, but more solemnly, the short woman extended her thick arms, and rising to her toes, kissed Miss Vernon, and with a more ceremonious politeness, took her leave of "Miss Jones," the lady's-maid, who regarded her with a refined and polite disgust.

So the squat figure of Miss Mercy Creswell disappeared, and Maud, for a time, lost sight of that uncouth reminder of old times and the Roydon nursery.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE DOCTOR RETURNS.

The laughter of this uncomfortable Mercy Creswell remained in Maud Vernon's ears. She would have fancied that there was something odd about Lady Mardykes's house, if she had not known, by inference, from her mother, and directly from Maximilla Medwyn, that it was in every way unexceptionable. The woman could hardly have been tipsy. So Maud referred her unexplained merriment to something ridiculous which might have befallen in her own social level, the recollection of which irresistibly tickled her.

Lady Vernon was happier that day. A letter had reached her from her true, but hardly loving, friend, old Richard Dawe. It told her that Captain Vivian had made an excursion, he knew not whither, on the day on which he had passed through the town of Roydon; but that he had returned the same evening, and that the doctor having pronounced that he had been doing too much, he, Mr. Dawe, had exacted a promise from him, not again to attempt a journey for ten days. He had named that time particularly, in consequence of Lady Vernon's letter.

"I am not qualified," he said, "to speak about such feelings; but I will say, cure yourself of your excessive fondness for that young man. You have placed yourself in an agonising position. Make the effort; see him no more. I spare you. Commiserate yourself."

Notwithstanding its severe tone and unpalatable advice, this letter had cheered her. Maud would have left Roydon before his possible return. Her soul may have acquiesced, in secret, in the wisdom of old Dawe's advice. But it was the recognition of one beholding himself in a glass, and straightway oblivion followed.

Lady Vernon had some charitable visits to pay, on two days in the week, in Roydon. Some fifty pensioners, more or less decayed, endured her occasional calls and lectures in consideration of the substantial comforts that attended a place on her list. On some days she would visit two, on others nearly a score.

Lady Vernon filled the rôle of the Christian matron with punctilious completeness. She had her great charities and her small; her tens of thousands to bestow, and her sixpences; her influential committees and powerful societies, and her grumbling and querulous old women in their garrets. She would make a flannel petticoat or build a church.

Lady Vernon bore herself to all her friends and acquaintances as an unexceptionable type of Christian life. She would tell herself, as she meditated in her solitude, that she could not remember having ever acted, in a single instance, contrary to her conscience.

Lady Vernon had violated authority a little once or twice. She and authority had differed, and she had taken her own course. But who was right, she or authority? Need I say?

Of course she had things to vex her. She had more; secret afflictions and dreadful recollections, of which but one person now living, except herself, knew anything.

For years she had been silently, though unconsciously, battling with remorse. She was battling with the same fiend now. But was not Satan writhing under her heel? Did she not stand, resting on her spear, unscathed in her panoply, like the angel of wisdom, purity, and courage? What were these internal questionings, doubtings, and upbraidings, but the malignant sophistries of the Evil One accusing the just?

Lady Vernon had made two or three of her domiciliary visits, and was emerging from between the poplars that stood one at each side of old Mr. Martin's door, when her eye lighted upon the figure of Doctor Malkin, in his black frock-coat, newly arrived from his journey, looking a little fagged, but smiling politely, and raising his hat.

The doctor had just made his toilet, and was on his way to Roydon Hall to pay his respects to his patroness.

Lady Vernon smiled, but looked suddenly a little paler, as she saw her family physician thus unexpectedly near her.

"How d'ye do, Doctor Malkin? I did not think you could have been home so early," said Lady Vernon. "You intend calling at Roydon Hall to-day?"

"I was actually on my way," said Doctor Malkin, smiling engagingly, with his hat still in his hand, and the sun glancing dazzlingly on his bald head. "At any hour that will best suit you, Lady Vernon, I shall be most happy to wait upon you."

"I shall be going home now; I have made my little round of visits."

"And left a great many afflicted hearts comforted," interpolated the appreciative doctor.

"And I mean to return by the path," she continued, not choosing to hear the doctor's little compliment. "Open that door, please," she said to the footman, who contrived with a struggle, without dropping the volumes he was charged with, to disengage a key from his pocket, and open a wicket in the park wall, which at this point runs only a few yards in the rear of the houses. "And, as you say, you were on your way to Roydon Hall, you may as well, if you don't mind, come by the path with me."

The doctor was only too happy.

The footman stood by the open door, which was only about a dozen steps away; and Lady Vernon stopped for a moment, and said to him:

"You must see old Grimwick, and tell him to send up to Mrs. Mordaunt at six o'clock this evening for the blankets that I said he should have."

"Yes, my lady."

So now she and Doctor Malkin were walking in the perfect quietude of a secluded path among the trees, and he began by saying:

"You will be glad to hear, Lady Vernon, that everything was satisfactory, and every particular is now arranged. I was detained a little longer than I expected, but I saw Mr. Damian. He read the copies of the papers, and said they are more than sufficient."

A silence followed. Lady Vernon was looking straight before her with an inflexible countenance. They walked on about twenty steps before either spoke.

"We had a visit from Mercy Creswell to-day," said Lady Vernon.

"Oh! Had you? But I don't think I quite recollect who Mercy Creswell is."

"She was once a servant here, and now she is in the employment of Mr. Damian."

"Oh! I understand; actually in his service at present?"

"Yes."

The doctor looked intelligently at Lady Vernon.

"I wished to see her. I knew she would have a good deal to tell me; and I had some ideas of making her particularly useful, which on seeing her, and ascertaining that she is clever, I have made up my mind to carry into effect."

"I have no doubt that anything resolved on by Lady Vernon will be most judicious and successful."

"It is five years since I saw Mr. Damian; how is he looking?" asked Lady Vernon.

"Very well. His hair has been white a long time. I think he stoops a little now; but in all other respects he is unchanged. His sight, his hearing, his mind are quite unimpaired. He is very active, too; everything, in short, you could wish. He is going for a few days, at the end of the week, to his place near Brighton. But it is a mere flying visit."

"I suppose you have had a conversation with Mr. Damian?"

"A very detailed and full one; a very satisfactory conversation, indeed. I explained every point of difficulty on which he required light, and he is quite clear as to his duty."

"And I as to mine," she said, abstractedly, looking with gloomy eyes on the grass; "I as to mine." She was walking, unconsciously, more slowly.

"You have had a great deal of anxiety and trouble, Doctor Malkin," she said, suddenly raising her eyes. "I think you have acted with great kindness, and tact, and energy, and secrecy."

"Certainly," he interposed; "religious secrecy. I should consider myself dishonoured, had I not."

"I'm sure of that; I'm quite sure of that, Doctor Malkin; and I am very much obliged to you. You have done me a great kindness, and I hope yet to make you understand how very much I feel it. I have still, I'm afraid, a great deal of trouble to give you."

"I should be a very ungrateful man, Lady Vernon, if, in a case of this painful kind, I were to grudge any trouble that could contribute to make your mind more happy. I should perhaps say less anxious."

"I know very well how I can rely upon you, Doctor Malkin," said Lady Vernon, abstractedly. "It will be quite necessary that you should go on Sunday. We can't avoid it. I don't like travelling on Sundays, when it can be helped. But in this particular case it is unavoidable."

"Quite; of course you can command me. I am entirely at your disposal."

"And no one knows where you go?"

“That of course. I — I manage that very easily. I do all I can by rail, and take the train at an unlikely station.”

“You know best,” she said with a heavy sigh. “I wish it were all over. Doctor Malkin, it comforts me that I am so well supported by advice. I know I am right; yet I do not think I could endure the responsibility alone.”

A little pink flush showed itself suddenly in Doctor Malkin’s pale cheeks; he looked down.

“I have relied a good deal on Mr. Tintern,” he said. “He has had a great deal of experience, and you know he is perfectly conversant with the mode of proceeding, and all responsibility rests ultimately, neither upon you nor upon any of those whom you have honoured with your more immediate confidence, but entirely with other people,” said Doctor Malkin.

“If you don’t mind, I should thank you to call on Sunday afternoon. I don’t care to part with the papers until then. Will six o’clock suit you?”

“Perfectly.”

“Well, I’m sure I ought to thank you very much, you have relieved my anxiety. Perhaps it is as well that we should part here. Goodbye, Doctor Malkin.”

“Entirely,” acquiesced Doctor Malkin. “I will call on Sunday, at the hour you name. Charming weather we have got, and what a delightful serenity pervades this place always,” he added, raising one hand gently, with a faint smile round, as if to imply that he need have no scruple in withdrawing his escort under conditions so assuring and delightful. “One thing only, I hope, perhaps, without being very impertinent, I may suggest.”

Doctor Malkin hesitated here, and Lady Vernon answered easily:

“I should be happy to hear anything you may think it well to say.”

“I was thinking, perhaps, that it might be desirable, Lady Vernon, not indeed to quiet any doubts; for I don’t see that any can anywhere exist; but merely by way of technical authority — I was going to say, that some communication, either with Mr. Coke, or some other London lawyer of eminence, would be perhaps desirable.”

“I don’t mind telling you, Doctor Malkin, that I have already taken that step,” said the lady. “You shall have the papers on Sunday, when you call, and for the present, I think I will say goodbye.”

And so they parted.

CHAPTER LIV.

MR. HOWARD'S GRAVESTONE.

Lady Vernon's correspondence with Mr. Dawe was at this time carried on daily.

One of the old gentleman's letters intensified her alarms. It said:

"I thought for a time I had discovered a different object of the young gentleman's devotions — Miss Tintern, of the Grange. I did not open my conjectures to him, nor did he speak on the subject to me. I think I was mistaken, and I can't now tell how it is. There is some powerful attraction, unquestionably, in the neighbourhood of Roydon."

Lady Vernon's panic continued, therefore, unabated.

On Saturday by the late post a letter reached Roydon, addressed to Miss Vernon, which took Maud a good deal by surprise. It was from Lady Mardykes, and was to this effect.

The Forest, Warhampton, Friday.

My dear Miss Vernon, — You will be surprised when you see that I write from the Forest. I was suddenly called here yesterday by a message from dear papa. I found him so much better, and so entirely out of danger, that I sent by telegraph to my aunt, at Carsbrook, to prevent my friends going away; and to beg of her to stay till Tuesday, where I am quite sure you will find her very happy to take charge of you when you arrive, as you promised, on Monday. Pray do not postpone your coming, or make any change in our plans, unless Lady Vernon should think differently. Your cousin Maximilla Medwyn will arrive early on Monday, and you will find her quite an old inhabitant by the time you reach Carsbrook in the evening. I will write to Maximilla to-day and tell her not to put off coming, and that I have written to you to rely upon her being at Carsbrook early on Monday. Pray write to me here by return, when you have ascertained what Lady Vernon decides.

So the note ended.

Maud was dismayed. Was this one of those slips between the cup and the lip, by which the nectar of life is spilled and lost? With an augury of ill, she repaired with the note to Lady Vernon.

"What is this, Maud?" inquired Lady Vernon, as Maud held Lady Mardykes's letter towards her.

Maud told her, and asked her to read it, and waited in trepidation till she had done so.

"I see no reason why you should not go on Monday, just as if nothing had happened. That will do."

She nodded, and Maud, immensely relieved, went to her room, and wrote her note to Lady Mardykes accordingly.

"So now," thought she, "we have reached Saturday evening; and if nothing happens between this and Monday, I shall be at Carsbrook on Monday night."

So that day passed in hope, Sunday dawned, and the sweet bell in Roydon tower sent its tremulous notes in spreading ripples far over fields, and chimneys, and lordly trees.

In church, Maud observed that Ethel Tintern was looking far from well. She reproached herself for not having driven over to the Grange to see her.

This Sunday the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered in Roydon Church, and among those who knelt round the cushioned steps of the communion-table, was Lady Vernon. Miss Tintern and Mrs. Tintern also were there, and Maud Vernon, who, once a month, from the time of her confirmation, had, according to the rule of Roydon Hall, been a regular attendant.

Lady Vernon has risen pale and stately, and is again in the great Vernon pew, kneeling in solitary supplication, while the murmured words of the great commemoration are heard faintly along the aisle, and reverent footfalls pass slowly up and down.

And now it is ended; the church seems darkened as she rises. It is overcast by a thundercloud. By the side-door they step out. Lady Vernon's handsome face does not look as if the light of peace was upon it. In the livid shadow of the sky, the grass upon the graves is changed to the sable tint of the yew. The grey church-tower and hoary tombstones are darkened to the hue of lead.

Mr. Foljambe joins them; Mrs. and Miss Tintern are standing by Lady Vernon and Maud. Mrs. Tintern is talking rather eagerly to Lady Vernon, who seems just then to have troubled thoughts of her own to employ her. She is talking about a particular tombstone; Lady Vernon does not want to look at it, but does not care to decline, as Mrs. Tintern is bent on it; and Mr. Foljambe only too anxious to act as guide.

They walk round the buttress at the corner of the old church, and they find themselves before the tombstone of the late vicar, Mr. Howard. It stands perpendicularly; the inscription is cut deep in the stone; and there is no decoration about it but the clustering roses, which straggle wide and high, and are now shedding their honours on the green mound.

As they walked toward this point, very slowly, over the churchyard grass, Ethel Tintern seized the opportunity to say a word or two to Maud.

"You go to Carsbrook tomorrow, don't you?"

"Yes," said Maud, "and I have been blaming myself for not having been to the Grange to see you; but I really could not help it — twice the carriage was at the door, and twice mamma put it off."

"A great many things have happened since I saw you — I dare not try to tell you now," she said, scarcely above a whisper. "It would not do; if we were alone, of course — — "

"Can you tell me, Ethel, whether the carriage is here?" said Mrs. Tintern, looking over her shoulder at her daughter.

"Oh, yes — I saw it — it is waiting at the church-porch."

And she continued to Maud, when her mother had resumed her talk with Lady Vernon and Mr. Foljambe:

"I have made up my mind, nearly, to take a decisive step. I daren't tell you; I daren't now, you understand why," she glanced at the group close before them; "but I think I will write to you at Carsbrook, if I do what I am thinking of, that is, what I am urged to, under a pressure that is almost cruel; a terrible pressure. Hush!"

The last word and a look were evoked by her observing, for her eye was upon them although she spoke to Maud, that the three elder people of the party had suddenly slackened their pace, and came to a standstill by the vicar's grave.

They had gone to the other side. Mr. Foljambe was leading the discussion; he was advising, I believe, some change in the arrangements of the vicar's grave, which he had persuaded Mrs. Tintern to admire; and which I'm afraid he would not have troubled his head about, had he not fancied they would have been received with special favour by Lady Vernon.

Maud and Miss Tintern were standing at this side of the gentle mound that covered the good man's bones, and neither thinking of the conversation that was proceeding at the other side.

On a sudden, with a malignant look, Lady Vernon's cold, sweet voice recalled Maud, with the words,

"Don't tread upon that grave, dear."

Maud withdrew her foot quickly.

"No foot looks pretty on a grave," she continued with the same look, and a momentary shudder.

"I don't think my foot was actually upon the grave, though it looked so to you," Maud pleaded, a little disconcerted.

"Many people have a feeling about treading on a grave. I think it so horrible an indignity to mortality — I was going to say. I hope, Mr. Foljambe, that you, who are obliged, pretty often, to walk among them, feel that peculiar recoil; but I need hardly ask — you are so humane."

Uttered in cold, gentle tones, this was irritating to spirited Maud Vernon.

"But I do assure you, mamma," she said, with a heightened colour, "my foot was *not* upon it. I am quite certain."

"There, there, there, there, dear," said Lady Vernon, "I shan't mention it any more. Pray don't allow yourself to be excited, Maud; that kind of thing can't be good for any one."

Maud's fine eyes and beautiful colour were brighter. But Lady Vernon went on talking fluently, in very low tones, to old Mr. Foljambe, and she turned as they walked away, and said to Mrs. Tintern, gently, "I scarcely like to ask poor dear Maud to do or to omit anything. She becomes so miserably excited."

Maud, I dare say, had a word of complaint to utter in Miss Tintern's ear as they returned to take leave, and get into their carriages at the church-door.

In a dark and sour mood Lady Vernon bid old Mr. Foljambe goodbye.

"What bores people are! To think of those two stupid persons taking me there to hear all that odious nonsense."

Lady Vernon did not come to luncheon, and hardly eat anything at dinner. She was by no means well that Sunday evening.

Doctor Malkin came and departed, the sun set, and Maud was glad, as her maid dropped the extinguisher on her candle, that the day was over, and that she would sleep next night at Carsbrook.

CHAPTER LV.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS.

Monday came; and it was now evening, and about the hour at which Lady Vernon had ordained that Maud was to set out upon her journey to Carsbrook.

The carriage was now at the door. The boxes were on top, and Jones, ready dressed for the journey, was in the hall.

Maud was also in travelling costume, the pleasant excitement of her excursion for a moment quelled by the pending interview with her mother.

Oh, that she could have gone without seeing her!

In the hall she told Jones to get into the carriage. The sight of her maid in her place, smirking through the carriage window on the familiar front of the old house, at which she peeped at intervals when she was not busy with the internal arrangements of the carriage, was satisfactory; it assured her that her journey to Carsbrook was a reality. The feeling of uncertainty, until she should be well out of reach of Roydon and the practicable range of a capricious recal, made her a little feverish.

Jones's fussy frown had left her quite, as she smirked through the open window at her young mistress. Maud smiled in return, in spite of her little alarm. Then she receded into the shadow of the hall, and peeped at the door opening into the suite of drawingrooms, trying to gather courage for the dreaded leavetaking.

She entered the first drawingroom, and passed from one to another in succession, with the nervous feeling of one who is taking possession of a hostile magazine, and does not know the moment when an unseen train may explode it and blow all into air.

She had now passed through all the drawingrooms, but her mother was not in any one of them. She must seek her in that room which was not cheered by a single pleasant association, a room of which Maud had the secret dread with which a suspected person eyes the council chamber.

She knocked at the door, but Lady Vernon was not there.

Maud was relieved by her failure; she returned to the drawingroom, and touched the bell. A footman entered.

The footman did not know whether her ladyship had gone out, or whether she might be upstairs; but she was not in the shield-room, or in any of the rooms at that side. The butler, having something particular to tell her, had looked there only a few minutes before.

“Could some one send mamma’s maid to me?”

In due time Latimer appeared in the drawingroom, and Maud said:

“Mamma told me, Latimer, that I was to go at four o’clock, and the horses are waiting, and I don’t know where to find her, to bid her goodbye. Can you tell me?”

“I think she is in her morning room, upstairs, miss. Do you wish me to see?”

“Yes, Latimer, please. Will you tell her what I have said, and find out what she wishes?” answered Maud.

Latimer returned in a few minutes, and said:

“Her ladyship says, miss, if you’ll please to wait a short time, she will send for you so soon as she is at leisure.”

“Very well; thanks, Latimer,” said Maud, and she went to the window and looked out upon the courtyard, very ill pleased at the delay. In a little time she saw the coachman drive the horses, at a walk, a short way up and down the avenue, and round the courtyard; she thought the delay would never end and wondered what her mother could intend by it, and went from window to window, and sat down, and stood up again.

More than half an hour passed, before a footman arrived to inform Maud that Lady Vernon awaited her in the shield-room.

Thither she took her way, and found Lady Vernon alone in that stately and spacious room. She was standing at the further end, looking from one of the windows, when Maud entered.

Hearing the door close, she turned.

“I am not sorry, Maud, that you don’t leave this quite so early as I at first intended. No, I am rather pleased.”

“I think,” said Maud, who was vexed profoundly at the delay, “that it is almost a pity. But of course, whatever you think best. They tell me it will take a little more than five hours to reach Lady Mardykes’s house; and it would be uncomfortable, I’m afraid, getting there very late.”

"Your arriving half an hour late, or an hour late, or two hours late, will cause Lady Mardykes no uneasiness," said her mother; "nor any other person. Pray allow me to direct the manner in which my own servants, carriages, and horses shall be employed, and you will find that I am quite competent to carry out any arrangements which, while you remain in my charge, may appear desirable."

Though Lady Vernon spoke, as usual, with a calm manner and in cold tones, her faint smile expressed something of positive antipathy, and there were, in her measured emphasis, evidences of strangely intense and bitter temper, to which Maud was not accustomed.

These signs irritated, but also awed Miss Vernon. There was something of the malignity of suffering in the gloom of her address, and Maud instinctively shrank from any betrayal of feeling which, in Lady Vernon's mood, might possibly lead to a sudden countermand of the entire expedition.

"From me you don't deserve confidence," she said, suddenly. "You have given me none. I should not accept it now. But I know all I need know; from whom you receive letters among the rest. Don't speak; don't answer. I will have no altercation. What I allude to I know. You have been no child to me. I have been, you'll say, no mother to you. It is false. I look into my heart and life, of which you know nothing, and I see that I have done, am doing, and, with Heaven's help, will do, my duty. I am sacrificing myself, my feelings, for you and for others. Yes, for you — for you, at this moment. I don't care, with that comfort, what may be said or fancied. What is it to me what the wicked and frivolous may say or think? I do my duty by you always, steadily, and I defy them. I and you, we are what we are. There; go. No goodbyes. Only remember, wherever you are, duty rules my life; my care shall follow you."

With these odd words she turned away, and left the room by the side-door, and Maud was alone. Glad she was that the interview was over, and she at liberty.

The shadow of this cloud did not rest long upon her, black as its transit had been.

She and her maid were presently driving at a swift trot away from Roydon. She had not driven a mile away, when that unnatural parting began to recede in her mind, before the free and sunny prospect opening before her at Carsbrook.

"You never were at Carsbrook, Jones?" said Miss Vernon to her maid, for the tenth time during the last week. "No. I forgot I asked you that before. I should not wonder, Jones, if I were to leave you there. Miss Medwyn is a great matchmaker, and three of her own maids have been married from her house."

"Marriages is made in heaven, miss, they say; but I don't see many wives that would not be maids again if they could. I might 'a been married a many a time if I would. And if I would change my mind there's many a one would take me, if they thought I'd have them, without going all the way to Carsbrook."

"Oh, yes; but I mean a very eligible match. No matter; my cousin Max will look about, and we'll be satisfied with nothing less."

"La, miss! do give over your nonsense!"

"We change horses five or six times on the way to Carsbrook. What o'clock is it now?" She looked at her watch. "About halfpast four. What a good pace he is driving at. We shall be there before ten, I think."

The evening tints were over the landscape by the time they reached the Green Dragon — a lonely posting-house near Dorminbury Common.

"We'll tell them to make us some tea. Here, Jones, what do you think? Should not you like it?"

"Thanks, miss, very much; I should like it very well, miss, please."

By this time the horses came to a standstill before the pretty little inn; the ostlers shuffled out to take the horses off; and Maud ran into the house under a fragrant bower of jessamine and honey-suckle.

They look out upon the quiet slopes and rather hungry sheepwalks that surround the Green Dragon, and make it solitary, through a little window that makes a frame of dark leaves and roses round.

Here they take their tea in high spirits. And this little repast over, they walk out upon the platform before the porch.

The horses are, by this time, put to; and from this elevated point of view Maud looks towards Roydon Hall, now seventeen miles away, exactly in the direction where the sun is now sinking from view.

It is a strange, wild, ominous sunset. Long floods of clear saffron flush into faint flame, and deep purple masses, like piles of battle-smoke, load the pale sea of green above. The sun dives into its abyss of fire. Black clouds, like girding rocks, with jagged edges heated dazzling as flame, encircle its descent with the yawn of a crater; and, high in air, scattered flecks of cloud, like the fragments of an explosion, hang splendouring the fading sky with tongues of fire. The sun is now quite down; all is gradually darkening. The smoke is slowly rolling and subsiding, and the crater stretches up its enormous mouth, and breathes out a blood-red vapour that overspreads the amber sky, and meets the sinking masses; and so the vaporous scenery fades and blackens, leaving on Maud's mind a vague sense of the menacing and portentous.

When she takes her place in the carriage she is silent; she is thinking of her mother's oracular and incoherent leavetaking, and she sees her pale, handsome face, and flitting smile, and does not know whether they indicate more suffering or dislike.

But is she not leaving Roydon and its troubles fast and far behind her, and is she not driving now with four good trotters, at an exhilarating pace, towards her dear old cousin Max, towards Carsbrook, and its pleasant excitements, towards her new and hospitable friend, its charming hostess, and towards a possible meeting still more interesting?

CHAPTER LVI.

THE PIG AND TINDER-BOX.

Soon the pleasant moon was shining, and silvered all the landscape.

In one of Swift's picturesque illustrations he describes the hilarity with which a party of friends ride out on a journey; in the morning how spruce they look, how they talk and laugh, and admire all they see, and enjoy everything, and how bespattered, silent, and spiritless, after some hours in the saddle, the same party arrive at their journey's end.

Something of this, in a modified way, our travellers experienced, as they approached the Pig and Tinder-box, the fourth posting-house, where they were to change horses.

It is a larger building than the Green Dragon, and older a great deal, with a porch of Charles the First's time, and a portion of the building as old as Queen Elizabeth's.

This inn, like the others along the posting line, depends in no sort upon its neighbourhood for support. A well-kept road across a melancholy moor, called Haxted Heath, passes its front. The Pig and Tinder-box is nine-and-twenty miles away from the chimneys of Roydon Hall, and about sixteen from Carsbrook.

Maud has ceased to enjoy the mere sense of locomotion, and has got into the state in which the end of a journey is looked forward to with satisfaction. She looks out of the carriage window, and sees the road stretching over the black moor, in the moonlight, like a strip of white tape.

Beside it show, at first dimly, the gables and chimneys of the Pig and Tinder-box, with the outlines of its stables and offices, and the poplars and chestnuts that grow near it.

Listlessly she looks on, and thinks she sees a carriage before its door.

"Look out, Jones, and tell me, is that a carriage before the door of the inn?"

Jones stretches her neck from the window twice as far as is necessary.

"A waggon, miss, I think," said she, without interrupting her scrutiny to pull her head in. "No — is it? Well, I do believe it does look like a carriage, rayther."

"Let *me* look, Jones," said Miss Maud, tapping her shoulder. "I hope they are not taking our horses."

Miss Vernon looked out, and now plainly saw a carriage standing upon the road, with the horses' heads turned towards them. A postboy in topboots was in front, at the horses' bridles. The moonlight showed all this distinctly, and his comrade, partly hid in the black shadow of the old building, and partly revealed by the lamplight that shone from the porch, was talking to some one inside.

It was plain that these people now heard the clink and rumble of the approaching coach-wheels, for the man at the porch, pointing along the road in their direction, turned towards his companion, who forthwith led his horses toward them a little, drawing up at the side of the road.

The Roydon carriage passed this swiftly by, and drew up before the porch of the Pig and Tinder-box.

The landlady waddled out swiftly in front of the threshold, to receive her distinguished guests.

"You had a letter from Lady Vernon, hadn't you?" inquired the young lady, eagerly, thinking what a mortification it would be to find no horses, and be obliged to put up till morning at this melancholy old roadside inn.

"Yes, miss, sure, everything is ready, as her ladyship ordered; and will your ladyship, miss, please take a cup of tea? I made it when we saw your ladyship's carriage acoming, jest two minutes ago."

Tea is always tempting on a journey, and although they had taken some scarcely two hours before, Maud agreed, and their hostess showed them into a comfortable panelled room, where teathings were on the table.

The fat landlady of the Pig and Tinder-box stood with her apron against the table, on which her knuckles leaned, and said:

"I hope, miss, you may find the carriage comfortable."

"Thanks, we are travelling in mamma's."

"But Lady Vernon said in her note, please, miss, that her own was not to go further than this, and I was to furnish a carriage, on — — "

"Oh, I did not know; I'm sure it is very nice; I have no doubt we shall find it very comfortable. Jones, you had better go and see that they make no mistake about our boxes and the things in the carriage that are coming on with us.”

Jones went off in a fuss. The room in which she left her young mistress is at the end of a passage, which runs to the left from the hall, with some doors opening from it toward the front of the building.

When Jones, in obedience to her young mistress’s orders, had got to the foot of the stairs in front of the open hall-door, she saw standing in the entrance of the corresponding passage, at the other side of the hall, a man, with a dark, determined face and fine forehead, about the sternest and gravest-looking man she had ever seen. Judging by his dress you would have supposed him a person in the rank of an upper servant, and he wore a black outside coat buttoned up to his throat. His hat was in his hand. But judging by his air and countenance you would have taken him for a Jesuit, on a secret service of danger. There was in his face the severity of habitual responsibility, and in the brown eye, that glanced from corner to corner, the penetration and cold courage of a man of action.

He stepped forward as gravely as an undertaker, and speaking low but rapidly, said: “Are you Miss Jones, please?”

“Yes, my name is Jones,” said that young lady, with ears erect.

“Miss Vernon’s maid?” continued the inquirer.

“Yes, sir,” she replied, with dignity and some disdain, for she was not accustomed to be questioned by strangers.

“You have just come, Miss Jones, with the young lady from Roydon?” he added, politely.

“Yes, sir,” she again answered, dryly.

“Then, Miss Jones, if you’ll be good enough to come this way for a moment, I’ll give you a message and a note from Lady Vernon,” he continued.

“Certainly, sir,” answered Miss Jones, with a little start, and her eyes very wide open. A slight sinking at her heart acknowledged the ominous character of the occurrence.

The dark stranger had a candle in his hand, and led Miss Jones down the passage, at the opposite side of the hall from which he had just emerged.

As she followed him into the room, the door of which stood open, she thought she saw a fat, unpleasant face, which she little expected to see there, smiling from the further end at her.

She stepped back from the door, and looked steadily down the passage; but, if it had really been there, it was gone.

There was a pair of candles in the small room to which he had conducted her, one upon the chimneypiece, the other he had himself placed on the table; and he now snuffed it.

"Lady Vernon desired me, Miss Jones, by letter received this morning, to look after Miss Vernon's luggage here, and to see it transferred all right to the carriage she is going on in. That is done, except your two boxes, which are not to go on."

"But I can't get on at Carsbrook without my two boxes, sir," exclaimed Miss Jones, alarmed for her get-up and decorations. "I shall want every single individial thing I took with me from Roydon!"

"Perhaps, Miss Jones, you would prefer sitting," said the imperturbable stranger, placing a chair, and sliding the candle along the table towards her. "This is the letter which Lady Vernon desires me to give you with my own hand."

At the same time he placed a note in the alarmed young lady's fingers.

She opened it, and read these words:

Roydon Hall, Monday.

Rebecca Jones, — I require your presence here. Therefore, immediately on receiving this note, you will return to Roydon Hall in the carriage in which you left it. Miss Vernon will continue her journey with, for the present, another maid.

Barbara Vernon.

Miss Jones sniffed once or twice, and felt an odd chill, as she laid this note on the table; and looking with flushed cheeks and undisguised scorn at the courier, she asked, with a little toss of her head:

"And who are you, sir, if I may make bold to inquire?"

"As regards you, Miss Jones, in this present matter, I am Lady Vernon's messenger, and nothing more," he answered, phlegmatically, and smiled, after a pause, showing a row of even, white teeth.

"I think it's a very odd way I'm treated," said Miss Jones, whisking the note, with a little jerk, by the corner. "I don't know no reason why I should be sent to and fro, between Roydon and this, and this and Roydon, back and forward, as if I was good for nothing but to be tossed here and there like a shuttlecock!"

"Very likely, miss," acquiesced the serene messenger.

"And I'll acquaint my young lady, and see what she will say to it," continued Jones, in her indignation, preparing to go direct to her young mistress.

"But we are forbidden to do that, Miss Jones," said this grave person, calmly. "You know Lady Vernon's handwriting?"

"I rayther suppose I ought to," answered Miss Jones, scornfully, with her head very high, and dismay at her heart.

"My directions are strictly to prevent any such thing. Will you be good enough to read this."

He doubled back a piece of the letter, and permitted her to read the following lines:

"I have ordered Rebecca Jones to return immediately to Roydon. She will, therefore, without speaking to Miss Vernon, take her place again in my carriage, into which you will be so good as to put her, and my servant will immediately drive the carriage back to Roydon, as you advise."

"I have given them their directions," said the man, putting up his letter, "and the carriage, with your two boxes, Miss Jones, waits at the door, to which I will, if you permit me, conduct you now."

"Well, as for me, I'm but a lady's-maid, and I suppose I ought to be thankful to stand anything. Having been Miss Maud's own maid, which no one can deny what I have been to her through many a troubled day and night, ever since she was old enough to have a maid, anything is good enough, and too good for me."

"I think, Miss Jones, Lady Vernon won't like it if you delay here any longer," remarked the quiet man, approaching the door.

"And who's to go with Miss Maud? I'd like to know that, if it's no treason; 'tain't every one that can dress a young lady like she is, and I don't suppose her ladyship could 'a meant I was to leave my young lady without knowing who was to take care of her, and be in charge of her things; and so I should like to know better, before I leave here, who's to go on with her to Carsbrook?"

"Lady Vernon is a very particular lady, I'm told, and she has arranged all that herself, and I have no directions to give you, Miss Jones, except what I have told you."

"Well, it is a queer way, I am sure! I suppose I must do as her ladyship desires. I hope Miss Maud mayn't be the sufferer; and it does seem a bit queer I mayn't so much as say goodbye to her."

There was here a little interrogative pause, as she looked in his face in the hope that he might relent.

"Lady Vernon's directions are plain upon that point," observed the dark-featured man; "and we have delayed too long, I'm afraid, Miss Jones."

"It ain't me, then," said Miss Jones, quickly. "I'm making no delays; I'm ready to go. I said so when I saw her ladyship's note, that instant minute."

"Be so good as to follow me, miss," said the stranger.

And he led the way down the passage, through the kitchen, into the stableyard, and through the gate, forth upon the road, where the Roydon carriage, with the tired horses, which had just brought them there, were waiting to take crestfallen Miss Jones back to the Green Dragon.

That young lady was quickly shut up, left to her angry reflections, and the prompt man in black said a word to the coachman, who was again on the box, and another to the footman, who handed his pewter pot, just drained, with some flakes of foam still on its side, to the ostler.

The footman took his seat, and Lady Vernon's carriage and servants, including Jones, much disgusted at her unexpected reverse, began to roll away toward Dorminbury Common and distant Roydon.

CHAPTER LVII.

A SURPRISE.

Miss Vernon rang her bell, and the landlady looked in.

"Where is my maid? Can you tell me?" she inquired.

"In the hall, please, miss, at present, talking with Mr. Darkdale about the luggage, please, my lady," she answered in good faith, not knowing which maid she inquired for.

"Well, as soon as she has seen after those things, I should like her to come here," continued Miss Vernon.

"Do you wish to see Mr. Darkdale, miss?"

"No. Who is Mr. Darkdale?"

"We all thinks a deal of Mr. Darkdale down here," said the woman, reservedly.

"And why do you think so much of him?" inquired the young lady.

"Well, he brings a deal of business to us, one way or other, going and coming, and he's a very responsible man, he is. And Mr. Darkdale, please, miss, has a note from Lady Vernon for you."

"A note from mamma? Why, I have come straight from Roydon."

"He says, please, miss, that a letter came by the late post about an hour after you left, and your mamma sent him partly by rail, and partly on horseback, to overtake you here. If you please, miss, I'll fetch the letter."

"Thank you, very much," said Maud, suddenly alarmed.

She stood up, and awaited the return of the landlady of the Pig and Tinder-box, almost without breathing.

In a minute she reappeared with a large envelope, which she placed in the young lady's fingers. It contained a note from Maximilla Medwyn to Maud, which consisted of a few lines only, rather hastily written, and said:

You have heard of Warhampton's illness. He is better; but I have not had a line from Lady Mardykes, and don't know whether she would yet like to have us at Carsbrook. I think we had better wait for a day or two. I will write to you the moment I hear from her. I am sure you agree with me.

At the corner of this letter Lady Vernon had written a few words in two oblique lines, thus:

Go on, notwithstanding. Don't think of turning back. I write to Maximilla by this evening's post.

B. E. V.

So she was to go on, and find neither Lady Mardykes nor her cousin at Carsbrook.

Well, Max would get Lady Vernon's letter at nine o'clock the next morning, and, we may be sure, would lose no time in joining Maud at Carsbrook, and before the day was over very likely Lady Mardykes herself would arrive. Max would make a point of coming forthwith, to relieve Maud from the oddity of her solitary state. She need not come down to breakfast, she determined; and on arriving she would go straight to her room. At all events, it was a mercy that her mamma, in the existing state of things, had not ordered her back to Roydon.

"Would you mind telling my maid to come here and take some tea?" said the young lady.

In a few minutes the shoes of the hostess were heard pattering along the tiles of the passage, and coming in with a curtsy, she said:

"She's very thankful, miss, but, if you'll allow, she'd raything sit in the carriage till your ladyship comes out."

"Very well. So she may," said the young lady. "How far is Carsbrook — Lady Mardykes's house — from this, do you happen to know?"

"We count it just twenty-two miles, miss. It might be half a mile less if the new bridge was open, but it ain't."

"Two-and-twenty. I thought it was only sixteen. Well, I'm not sorry, after all. The night is so very fine, and the moonlight so charming, it is quite a pleasure travelling tonight."

The young lady was really thinking that it would be better not to arrive until the guests had gone to their rooms. She did not hurry herself, therefore, over her cup of tea, which she drank from the state china of the Pig and Tinder-box.

She looked from the narrow window, and saw the carriage with four horses and two postilions at the door, and saw, also, the energetic figure of the grave man in the black greatcoat, pacing slowly, this way and that, in the neighbourhood of the carriage-door, and now and then turning towards the hall of the inn, and looking at his watch in the light that shone through the door.

It was plain that the people outside were growing impatient, and Miss Vernon made up her mind to delay them no longer.

She took her leave of her new acquaintance, the hostess, in the hall. The man in the black coat opened the carriage-door, and Miss Vernon, handing in first a roll of music she was taking with her to Carsbrook, said, “Take this for a moment, and don’t let it be crushed,” was received by a dumpy gloved hand from the dark interior, and took her place beside her attendant, to whom, assuming her to be her old maid, Rebecca Jones, she did not immediately speak, but looked out of window listlessly on the landscape, as the carriage rolled away toward its destination from the inn-door.

“I wonder, Jones, you preferred sitting alone to coming in and drinking tea. It was better than they gave us at the what’s-its-name? — the Green Dragon.”

The person accosted cleared her voice with a little hesitation.

Trifling as was the sound, Miss Vernon detected a difference, and looked round with an odd sensation.

The figure in the corner was broader and shorter than Jones’s, and wore a big obsolete bonnet, such as that refined lady’s-maid would not be seen in.

“You are not Jones?” said the young lady, after a pause.

A low giggle was the only answer.

“Who *are* you?” demanded the young lady, very uncomfortably.

“La! Miss Maud, don’t you know me, miss?”

“I — I’m not sure. Will you say, please, who you are?”

“Dear me, miss, you know me as well as I know you.”

She sat forward as she spoke, giggling.

"Yes, I see who you are. But where is Jones, my maid? She is not sitting outside?"

"Not she, miss; she's gone home to Roydon, please."

"Who sent her away? — I want her. It is quite impossible she can have gone home!"

"Please, miss," said the woman in a tone of much greater deference, for there was something dangerous in Maud's look and manner, "I got a written order from Lady Vernon yesterday, Miss Maud, directing me to be in attendance here to go on with you as your maid in place of Miss Jones."

The carriage in which they now were was something like the oldfashioned postchaise. Miss Vernon, without another word, let down the front window, and called to the postboys to stop.

They did accordingly pull up, and instantly the stern man in the black greatcoat was at the side window.

"Anything wrong?" he said, in an undertone, to Mercy Creswell.

"No, no," she whispered, with a nod, "nothing."

"Now, if you please, Creswell, you'll show me that note of mamma's. I must see it, or I shan't go on."

The man stood back a little, so that Maud could not see him at the open window; but with this precaution, he kept his ear as close to it as he could, and was plainly listening with the closest attention.

"Certainly, miss, you shall read it," said Mercy, fumbling in haste in her pocket. Indeed, she seemed, as she would have said, in a bit of a fluster.

She did produce it, and Maud had no difficulty in reading the bold writing in the moonlight.

It was a short, very clear, very peremptory note, to the effect she had stated.

"How did my maid go without my being so much as told of it?" demanded Miss Vernon, fiercely.

Half a step sideways brought the man in the black coat to the window.

"Please, Miss Vernon," said he, very quietly, but firmly, "I received instructions from Lady Vernon to send Miss Jones home to Roydon, precisely as she has gone, by the return horses, in her ladyship's carriage, as far as the Green Dragon, on Dorminbury Common, and so on, in charge of her ladyship's servants, and without any interview beforehand with you, all which I have accordingly done. If her ladyship did not acquaint you beforehand, or if any disappointment results to you in any way, I regret having had to disoblige you."

For some seconds Maud made no answer. Those who knew her would have seen in her fine eyes the evidence of her anger. I dare say she was on the point of ordering the drivers to turn the horses about, and of going back to Roydon.

But that impulse of her indignation did not last long. She looked at the man, whose intelligent, commanding, and somewhat stern face was new to her, and asked, with some hesitation:

"Are you a servant of Lady Vernon's?"

"Only for this journey, miss."

"But — but what are your duties?"

"I look after your luggage, miss, and pay the turnpikes, and settle for the horses, and take your orders, please, miss."

Although this man was perfectly civil, there was something in his manner by no means so deferential and ceremonious as she was accustomed to. He looked in her face with no awe whatever, and at her dress, and leaned his hand on the carriage window. And when she leaned back a little, to recollect what next she should ask him, he touched Mercy Creswell's arm with his finger, and whispered some words in the ear which she placed near the window.

"I've made up my mind. I shall go on. Tell them to go on," said the young lady, indignant at these free-and-easy ways.

Mercy Creswell gave the man a clandestine look from the window, which he returned with a stern smile, and instantly calling to the postboys "All right," he mounted the seat behind, and the journey proceeded.

CHAPTER LVIII.

LAMPS IN THE DARK.

The carriage drove on. Lady Vernon had certainly, Maud thought, treated her very oddly. It was not the first time, however, that she had snubbed or puzzled her daughter; and when Maud had a little got over her resentment, she resolved that she could not think of visiting her vexation upon the innocent Mercy Creswell.

She was leaving constraint and gloom behind her at Roydon. Nearer and nearer were the friendly voices, the music, and laughter of Carsbrook, and she could fancy the lights of that festive place already visible on the horizon.

"I dare say something has suddenly happened to make it unavoidable that mamma should have Jones back again with her at Roydon," said the young lady. "I wonder what it can be. I hope it is nothing that could vex poor Jones; have you any idea, Mercy?"

"Me! La! no, miss!" said Mercy. "I do suppose Miss Jones will come after you hot-foot. Like enough your mamma has heard of some grand doings she didn't know of before, and means to send some more jewels, or fans, or finery, or dresses, after you, and that is what I thinks."

"Well, that is possible; it can't be, after all, anything very wonderful, whatever it is. What is the name of that man who is acting as a sort of courier for this journey?"

"I don't know, miss," said Mercy Creswell, instantly.

"If he is a servant he certainly knows very little about his business," said the young lady. "However, that need not trouble us much, as we are to part with him at the end of our journey. You know the country, I suppose, between this and Carsbrook?"

"Oh?" she said with a prolonged and dubious interrogation in the tone. "Do I know the country betwixt this and there? Well, yes, I do. Oh, to be sure I do — hevery inch! We'll change next at Torvey's Cross, unless Mr. Darkdale have made other arrangements."

"Oh! Darkdale? Is that the name of the man?" asked Maud.

"Well, I won't be too sure, but I think I heard some one call him Darkdale. It may 'a bin down there at the Pig and Tinder-box; but I don't suppose his name is of no great consequence," answered Miss Mercy Creswell, endeavouring to brazen out a good deal of confusion.

"And what is Mr. Darkdale? Is he a servant; or what is he? He looks more like a poor schoolmaster," said Miss Vernon.

"La, miss! What could I know about him?" exclaimed Mercy Creswell, oracularly. "Next to nothing, sure. Did they say I knewed anything about him? La! Nonsense!"

"I want to know what he is, or what he was," said Miss Vernon, unable to account for her fat companion's fencing with her questions.

Miss Creswell plainly did not know the extent of Maud's information, and hesitated to say anything definite.

"The old woman down there at the Pig and Tinder-box — she doesn't know next to nothing about him, or me. I don't know what she was saying, I'm sure; not a pin's-worth."

There was a slight interrogative tone in this discrediting of the hostess, who, for aught she knew, had been talking in her gossiping fashion with Maud.

But Maud did not help her by saying anything.

"He was a postmaster, I'm told, somewhere in Cheshire, and kept a stationer's shop. I'm sure I don't know."

"But what is he now?" asked Maud, whose suspicions began to be roused by Mercy Creswell's unaccountable reluctance.

"What is he now? Well, I believe he is a sort of under-steward to a clergyman. That's what I think."

"You seem not to wish to tell me what you know about this man; and I can't conceive why you should make a mystery of it. But if there is any difficulty I am sure I don't care, provided he is a person of good character, which I suppose mamma took care to ascertain."

"That I do know, miss. He is a most respectable man is Daniel Darkdale; he is a man that has been trusted by many, miss, and never found wanting. La! He has had untold wealth in his keeping, has Mr. Darkdale, many times, and there is them as would trust him with all they has, and knows him well too."

"And you say our next change of horses will be at a place called Torvey's Cross?" said Miss Vernon, interrupting, for her interest in Mr. Darkdale had worn itself out. "This is a very wide moor. Have we a long way still to go before we reach Torvey's Cross?"

Mercy put her head out of the window, and the moonlight fell upon her flat, flabby face.

"Ay, there'll be near four miles still to go. When we come to the Seven Sallies — I can see them now — there will be still three miles betwixt us and it."

"How do you come to know this road so very well?" inquired Maud.

"Well, I do; and why shouldn't I, miss, as you say, seeing I was so long a time in Lady Mardykes's service, and many a time I drove the road to Carsbrook before now. Will you 'av a sangwige, miss?"

She had disentangled by this time, from a little basket in her lap, a roll of rather greasy newspaper, in which the proffered delicacies were wrapped up.

Maud declined politely, and Miss Mercy, with a word of apology for the liberty, stuffed them, one after another, into her own mouth.

Maud was a good deal disgusted at the vulgarity and greediness of her new waiting-maid, as well as upset, like every other lady in similar circumstances, by the loss of her old one. She was sustained, however, in this serious bereavement by agreeable and exciting anticipations of all that awaited her at Carsbrook.

"When were you last at Carsbrook?" asked the young lady, so soon as Miss Creswell had finished her sandwiches, and popped the paper out of the window, brushed away the crumbs from her lap, and wiped her mouth with her handkerchief, briskly.

"This morning, miss," she answered, with that odd preliminary hesitation that made Miss Vernon uncomfortable.

"Are you there as a servant, or how is it? I should like to know exactly whether you are my servant, or whose servant."

"Lady Vernon's at present, miss, to attend upon you, please," said Mercy Creswell, clearing her voice.

"Were you ever a lady's-maid?"

"Oh, la! yes, miss; I was, I may say, Lady Mardykes's maid all the time she was down, three years ago, at Mardykes Hall, near Golden Friars; you have heard of it, miss; it is such a beautiful place."

Maud could hardly believe that Lady Mardykes could have had such a person for her maid, as she looked at her square body and clumsy hands, in the dim light, and bethought her that she had never heard that Mercy Creswell had shown the smallest aptitude for such a post. Certainly if she was a tolerable lady's-maid she looked the part very badly. It was unspeakably provoking.

By this time they had passed the Seven Sallies, and changed horses again at Torvey's Cross; and now, a mile or two on, the road, which had hitherto traversed a particularly open and rather bare country, plunged suddenly into a close wood of lofty fir-trees.

The postboys very soon slackened the pace at which they had been driving. It became indeed so dark, that they could hardly proceed at all without danger.

It is a region of wood which might rival the pine forests of Norway. No ray of moonlight streaked the road. It is just wide enough for two carriages to pass, and the trunks of the great trees rear themselves at each side in a perspective, dim enough in daylight, and showing like a long and irregular colonnade, but now so little discernible, that the man in the back seat called to the drivers to pull up.

His voice was easily heard, for this road is carpeted with the perpetually falling showers of withered vegetation that serves for leaves upon the sprays and branches that overhang it, and hoofs and wheels pass on with dull and muffled sounds.

Now that they had come to a standstill, Maud lowered the window, and asked a question of Mr. Darkdale — a name not inappropriate to such a scene — who had got down, and stood, hardly discernible, outside, opening something he had just taken from his breastpocket.

"Can we get on?" inquired she, a good deal alarmed.

"Yes, miss," he answered.

"But we can't see."

"We'll see well enough, miss, when I light the lamps."

"I say, Daniel, there's lamps a-following of us," exclaimed Miss Creswell, who, hearing some odd sounds, had thrust her head and shoulders out of the window at her own side.

"There are lamps here," he answered.

“No, but listen, and look behind you,” said Mercy Creswell, with suppressed impatience.

The man turned and listened; Maud, whose curiosity and some slight sense of alarm were excited, partly by the profound darkness, and partly by the silence, looked from the window at her side, and saw two carriage-lamps gliding toward them, and faintly lighting the backs of four horses jogging on, with postilions duly mounted, just visible, and still pretty distant.

Mr. Darkdale bestirred himself, for these postilions were palpably quickening their pace, a rather reckless proceeding in a pass so profoundly dark.

He took down one of the carriage-lamps, and lighting it with a match, shouted:

“Hallo! Look ahead!”

The warning light that sprang thus suddenly out of darkness, and the voice seemed hardly to act as a damper on the ardour of the postilions; and Maud heard distinctly those sounds to which, probably, quick-eared Mercy Creswell had referred.

She mistook them first for the laughter and vociferation of a rollicking party on their way home from a supper-party. But she soon perceived, with alarm, that they indicated something very different.

They were sounds of fury and terror. She heard a voice exerting itself in short gasps and shrieks, and declaiming with frightful volubility:

“I say Vivian’s my name! Murder, murder — my God! — two to one — they’re murdering me!” yelled this voice, which, disguised as it was with rage and terror, she nevertheless fancied she knew, and exactly as the chaise drove by, at a suddenly stimulated pace, the window was broken, and the jingling glass showered on the road close beside the wheels; and, in the flash of the lamp, Miss Vernon had a momentary glimpse of the cantering horses and the postilions lashing them, and of the hands and faces of men struggling within, and, as the strange phantasmagoria flew by,

“Hallo! I’m here — Daniel Darkdale. Pull up; stop. Hallo!” yelled Mr. Darkdale, grimly.

And he ran on in the direction in which the carriage had passed, shouting, as he followed, “I’m Daniel Darkdale. Hallo!”

There was a magic in this name, which brought the chaise, a very little way further on, to a sudden stop.

CHAPTER LIX.

MR. DARKDALE'S GUEST.

"This will never do," said Mr. Darkdale, sharply, striding up to the carriage window, from which cries of "murder" were still proceeding. "What's going on here?"

"Two assassins trying to murder me, here in this carriage, sir. For God's sake, sir, see me safe out of this. They have pinioned me."

Mr. Darkdale put his hand through the broken window and let it down a little, and then withdrawing it, let the window down altogether, and popped his head in, holding the lamp, which he still carried, close to the window, so as to light up the interior with a rather fierce and sudden glare.

"Who are you, sir?" he asked of the young man who, with a torn shirt-front, disordered hair and necktie, and a very pale face, across which a smear of blood showed rather ghastlily, was staring with wild eyes.

There were two powerful-looking men, sitting one at each side, hot and blown after the struggle. With these Mr. Darkdale exchanged a significant glance, and said:

"You'll give me your names, you two. You know Mr. Darkdale, you know me — Daniel Darkdale?"

The two men exchanged a sheepish look, as if they would have winked at one another, and gave their names.

"I'm the constable of this county, sir," said Mr. Darkdale, in a loud voice. "I'm pretty well known. I'll set all this right. If they have injured you they shall be made examples of. They have secured your hands somehow?"

"Yes. I'm a cavalry officer. My name is Vivian — that is, it will do as well as another," cried the gentleman, in high excitement, gabbling at that gallop which recognises no stop longer than a comma, and hardly that. "I had been down in that part of the country behind us a good way, you know, and I wanted to get back to my quarters; and this man had a carriage, and I could not get another" — the injured man was talking at such a pace that the foam appeared at the corners of his lips— "and he undertook to give me a lift to Chatham; and this other fellow — d —— them, they are both murderers, I say, get my arms out." And he began to tug again.

"Wait a moment. I have a reason. You'll say I'm right in a moment," Mr. Darkdale, leaning in, sternly whispered in his ear.

He opened the door.

"I say, you come out, till I hear this gentleman's complaint," he said to the man next the door.

He obeyed, and walked a little to the rear of the chaise, and the officer sat close to the window next Mr. Darkdale.

"Don't you be listening," said Darkdale to the other. "Now, sir, we shan't be overheard; tell me the rest, pray."

"He asked for leave to take in that fellow, who said he wanted to go on to Chatham, and they wished to play 'blind-hooky' with me, and I like the game, and said yes, and they had cards, and I told them how I was used, very badly, I'll tell you by-and-bye, and they seemed very agreeable, and I had been kept awake all night, last night, by half a dozen scoundrels drilling in the room next mine, with a couple of sergeants and a drum, you can't conceive such an infernal noise, like so many ghosts out of hell, I knew very well why it was done, there's a fellow, Major Spooner, he has been doing everything imagination can devise, by Heaven, to make the army too hot for me, but I think I have a way of hitting him rather hard, ha! ha! and when I was asleep, as sound as if I had made three forced marches without a halt, those two robbers, agents they are of the same villain, gambling, rascally murderers, tied my arms behind my back, and only for you, sir, I should have been robbed and murdered by this time."

"I should not wonder, sir," said Darkdale. "I should not wonder. But I have them pretty fast, now. I have their names, and I know their faces; I have seen them long ago; and I'll have them up for it. Don't you be listening; allow me, sir, to whisper a word in your ear. You'll be at the next posting-house very soon, an hour or less. Those fellows are frightened, now, and they will try to make it up with you. Don't you be such a muff. They would be very glad, now, to loose your hands; don't you allow it. I'll get up behind, so soon as they are in, without their knowing it, and I'll have them arrested the moment we arrive, and I'll have witnesses to see how they have tied your hands, and I'll compel them to disclose their connexion with that blackguard, Major Spooner, and I'll lay you twenty pounds they'll split. Do you like my plan?"

"Uncommonly," whispered the young man close to his ear.

"Well, when he gets in, do you pretend to be asleep, and if they try to undo the pinion, don't you let them — hush! Mind what I say. We'll pay the whole lot off."

"Will you?" gasped the pinioned traveller. "By Heavens, then, I'll do it, I'll bear it, I say I will; anything to bring it home to Spooner, he's so cunning; the villain, he's as hard to catch as a ghost, never mind, I'll have him yet, the scoundrel, I wish this thing wasn't quite so tight, though, by Jove, it does hurt me, never mind, it is worth some trouble, we'll catch them, it's a serious thing, this outrage, and if you can show they aimed at my life, it will be a bad business for Spooner, ha! ha! and if I can't hang him, whenever I get a fair chance, I'll shoot him, by Heaven, I'll shoot him — I'll shoot him dead if it was in church!"

"Hush — don't mind. Here comes the fellow. We understand one another — you and I — eh?"

"All right." And the voluble gentleman, with his arms tied behind him, and extremely uncomfortable, would have run on again with a similar declamation, if Mr. Darkdale had not said, with a peremptory gesture of caution:

"They'll hear us; not another word."

He drew back, and walked toward the man whom he had just ejected from the carriage, and he said very low, and without turning his head, a few words in his ear, ending with:

"'Twill be all right now; get on at the best lick you can. You must be there in forty-five minutes sharp."

The man gave his orders to the postilions, and got into the carriage, and away they whirled at a great pace, flashing a fiery streak from their lamps along each brown trunk as they flew by on the close forest road.

Mr. Darkdale stood, lamp in hand, for a minute, watching the retreating equipage; and then turned and approached his own carriage, which he had left standing about a hundred paces in the rear.

CHAPTER LX.

ARRIVED.

“Well, what is it, Mr. Darkdale?” inquired Maud, eagerly, as soon as he had reached the side of the carriage.

“Two bailiffs, miss, in charge of an officer, arrested for debt, and something worse; they have had a bit of a row in the coach; he’s a troublesome fellow. I knew something about him; he has been up before, and I think there’s a criminal warrant this time.”

“Was he hurt?”

“A scratch, I fancy. It isn’t easy always keeping those dangerous cases from hurting themselves; he’s very strong, and always slipping away if he can. But they have him fast enough this time; and the road’s clear of them now; so I suppose I had best tell our postboys, miss, to get on?”

“Please do; it is growing late. How long will it take to reach Carsbrook?”

“About an hour, miss.”

Maud leaned back in the carriage, the unpleasant excitement of their recent adventure still tingling in her nerves.

Could it be that Captain Vivian had got into a scrape, and was really in the hands of bailiffs? A sad hearing for poor Ethel Tintern; rather a shock even to Maud.

“Do you know anything of that officer those people were taking away in the carriage?” inquired the young lady, suddenly, of her attendant, so soon as they were again in motion.

“I may, miss, or I mayn’t. I could not say for certain, unless I was to see him,” answered the servant.

“Have you ever seen an officer named Vivian, who is tall, and has light hair; a young man, rather good-looking?” persisted Maud.

“Well, I — I think I did,” she replied, watching Maud’s face. “I *have* seen some one like that. Veevian? Yes. He used to call hisself Veevian.”

“The person who passed us by, who said they were murdering him — how horrible his voice was! — said his name was Vivian. You heard him, of course?”

"Well, I made shift to hear; but there was a noise, you know," answered Mercy Creswell, evasively.

"Oh, you must have heard him call out that his name was Vivian; you are not at all deaf," said the young lady, irritated.

"I did hear something like it, for certain," she replied.

Miss Mercy would have been very glad to know, while under these examinations, what the extent of Miss Vernon's information actually was, for however willing she might be to tell stories, she was especially averse to being found out at this particular juncture. The sense of this inconvenience a good deal embarrassed her accustomed liberty of speech.

All this time Maud was possessed by the suspicion that, for some reason or other, Mercy Creswell was deliberately deceiving her, and that she knew just as much as Darkdale did about this Mr. Vivian. More than ever she disliked being assigned this particular attendant, and more and more puzzled she became in her search for her mother's motive.

For awhile she looked from the window. The wood had gradually thinned, and now but a few scattered and decayed firs stretched their bleached boughs under the moonbeams, and stooped over the peat.

"Why should you try to deceive me?" said Miss Vernon, suddenly turning to Mercy Creswell, who, with her mouth screwed together, and her cunning eyes looking from her window upon the moonlit prospect, was busy with her own thoughts.

"Me deceive you? La, Miss Maud! Why should I deceive you, above all? I would not, for no consideration, miss. I hope I have a conscience, miss. I'd be sorry, I assure you, Miss Maud."

"Why, then, did you not tell me, at once, that you knew something about that gentleman, Mr. Vivian? You know as much about him as Mr. Darkdale does."

"Well now, indeed, I do not, miss, no sich thing. I may 'a seen him, and I think I did at Lady Mardykes; he's a cousin, or something, to her."

"Oh, really? A relation of Lady Mardykes."

"Yes, miss. If it be the same I mean."

Maud mused for a minute or two.

"How far are we now from Carsbrook?" she asked.

"Well, miss, I'd say little more than three mile. Here's the finger-post, and down there, among the trees, is the Red Lion, and there we'll get into the right road, without another turn, right on to the house."

"I'm not sorry," said Maud, looking from the windows with more interest than before. "It has been a long journey. You were at Carsbrook this morning?"

"Yes, miss," said the maid, who had gradually grown to look careworn and pallid, as they neared their destination.

"Was Lady Mardykes there?"

"No, miss," answered Mercy.

"She was expected there, wasn't she?"

"Expected there?" repeated Miss Creswell. "Let me think. Oh, la! yes, to be sure, she was expected."

"How soon?"

"How soon? 'Twill be tomorrow morning. Oh, yes, tomorrow morning. Tomorrow's Tuesday? Yes, tomorrow morning, for certain."

They were now driving through a pretty wooded country. On the left was a great park wall, grey and moss-streaked, mantled here and there with ivy, and overlapped by grand old trees. On the right were hedgerows, and many a sloping field; and, a little in advance, the chimneys and gables of a village, and the slender spire of a rural church, white in the moonlight.

"We're near home now, miss," said Mercy.

"Oh," said Maud, looking out more curiously. "What wall is that?"

"The park wall, miss."

"It would not be easy to climb that; higher, I think, than Roydon wall."

"It is very high, miss."

"And how soon is Miss Max expected to arrive?"

"Miss Medwyn?" exclaimed the maid, laughing, all at once, in spite of herself.

"Why do you laugh? Miss Medwyn is coming here, and I thought she would have been here to-day," said Maud, a little haughtily.

"Like enough, miss," said Mercy, drying her eyes. "La, ha, ha, ha! it is funny — I beg your pardon, miss. I suppose she will — time enough. But she was not here when I left this morning."

"We'll hear all about it when we reach the house. I suppose there is nothing like a dance, or anything of that kind, while Lady Mardykes is away?"

"Oh, la! yes, miss. No end of dancing and music and everything that way," answered Mercy, with a great sigh, and a haggard look, after her brief merriment. "There's a — what do you call it? — of singing and music tonight."

"A concert?"

"Yes, that's it, miss, a concert. A concert of music. La! they does it so beautiful, you wouldn't believe. I wish Miss Medwyn was here to try her pipe at it. Hoo, hoo, hoo — la! I beg your pardon — she's so staid and wise, miss!"

Mercy was stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth to stifle her laughter. But this time it was over quickly.

At this moment the postilions wheeled their horses to the left, and pulled them up, calling lustily, "Gate, gate!"

"So we have arrived," said Maud, letting down the window, and looking out with the curiosity of long-deferred expectation.

The leaders' heads seemed almost touching the bars of a great iron gate, over which burned a solitary lamp, acting, lighthouse fashion, rather as a warning than as an effectual light.

They were under the shadow of gigantic elms, that threw their branches from side to side; the carriage-lamps dimly lighted a few clusters of their dark foliage, and the light over the gate showed, for a few feet round and above it, the same moveless leafage.

"We shan't be long reaching the house?" she inquired of Mr. Darkdale, who was walking by the window toward the gate, for she remembered "approaches" three miles long after you enter the gate, deceiving you with a second journey before you reach the hall-door.

"Not five minutes, miss," said the man, hardly turning his head as he passed.

Was he growing a little gruffer, she thought, as they approached their destination?

Darkdale was talking earnestly in a low tone with the man who had come to the gate at their summons; and then he called: "Be alive, now — open the gate." In a minute more they were driving up the approach at a rapid pace under rows of trees. Suddenly the shadowy road they followed turned to the right, and took a direction parallel to the high road; about a hundred yards on, they drove up to the front of the house, along which this road, expanding before it into a courtyard, passes. And now they pull up before the steps of the hall-door. And the horses stand drooping their heads, and snorting, and sending up each a thin white vapour, through which the metal buckles of their harness glimmer faintly in the moonlight.

Mr. Darkdale was already on the steps ringing the bell.

CHAPTER LXI.

IN THE HOUSE.

Maud was looking at the house — a huge structure of the cagework sort, which stood out in the light broad and high, its black V’s and X’s and I’s traced in black oak beams, contrasting like gigantic symbols with the smooth white plaster they spanned and intersected, and which showed dazzlingly in the moon’s intense splendour, under which also many broad windows were sparkling and glimmering.

A footman in livery stood before the open door, in the shadow of a deep porch, and Maud observed that Mr. Darkdale seemed to speak to him as one in authority, and by no means as one servant to another.

Maud was looking from the carriage window; and the hall was full of light, which came out with a pleasant glow, showing the gilt buttons and gold lace on the servant’s livery, flushing the white powder on his head, and making Mr. Darkdale look blacker against its warm light. Some figures, gentlemen in evening dress, and ladies in brilliant costume, passed and repassed a little in perspective. There came from the interior, as the hall-door stood partly open, the sounds of violins and other instruments, and the more powerful swell of human voices.

Mr. Darkdale turned and ran down the steps, and at the carriage window said:

“There’s a concert going on, and a great many of the people moving about in the hall. Perhaps you had better come in by a different way?”

“That is just what I wished,” said Miss Vernon.

But Darkdale did not seem to care very much for her sanction, and in fact had not waited for it. He was now talking to the drivers, and the hall-door had been shut. He returned, and said, at the window:

“Your boxes shall be taken up to your room, Miss Vernon, and as the night is so fine, you will have no objection, I dare say, to walk round to the entrance to which I will conduct you and Mercy Creswell.”

He opened the carriage-door, and the young lady got out and found herself in the courtyard. Looking along the face of the great house to the right, a mass of stables and other offices closed the view, behind a broken screen of fine old elms; and to the left it was blocked by dark and thicker masses of towering trees.

In this latter direction, along the front of the house, Mr. Darkdale led the way. In the still air his swift steps sounded sharp on the hard ground. He did not seem to care whether she liked his pace or not.

As she hurried after him, from the open windows, whose blinds, transparent with the lights within, were down, she heard, it seemed to her, very fine voices singing, as she thought, that brilliant staccato air, Quest un' Nodo, &c., from Cenerentola, and so unusually well that she was almost tempted to pause and listen.

But Mr. Darkdale did not consult her, but glided on to the extremity of the house, where a high wall confronted them, and with a latchkey opened a door, beside which he stood, holding it wide, for Miss Vernon and her attendant, and shutting it immediately on their passing in.

They were now in the great quadrangle which lies against the side of the house, with the quaint Dutch flowerbeds, like fanciful carpet pattern, surrounding it, and the tall yew hedges giving it a cloister-like seclusion. Miss Vernon easily recognised this by the description; the trim yew hedges were visible, overtopped by a dense screen of trees at the other side, every distance marked by the thin mist of night; and in the centre stretched the smooth carpet of grass, in the midst of which stood the old mulberry-tree.

“Oh! This is the croquet-ground?” said Miss Vernon to her attendant, as they passed on.

“Ay, that will be the croquet-ground,” answered her maid, a little absently, as if a gloom and suspicion had come over her. Her fat face had grown more than usually putty-coloured, and she was screwing her lips together, and frowning hard.

Mr. Darkdale spoke never a word until he had reached the door through which Antomarchi, some nights before, had admitted himself and Doctor Malkin to the selfsame house.

A servant, not in livery, stood by this door, which was ajar, and opened it wide at their approach.

Darkdale whispered a few words to him, the purport of which Maud did not catch, and was not meant to hear, and in this same tone the man replied a word or two.

It was rather a chill reception. But then her hostess was absent, and certainly was not accountable for the uncomfortable ways of the odd attendants whom it had pleased her mother to assign her.

The servant hied away into the door; it seemed to execute some behest of Darkdale's in haste; and Darkdale himself stood at it instead, to receive them.

"So, in Carsbrook at last," said Maud, with a smile, as she placed her foot on the oak flooring of the very long passage with which we are already acquainted.

Mercy Creswell screwed her lips harder, and raised her eyebrows, "pulling," as they say, in her abstraction, an old and dismal grimace.

"Now, miss? Oh, ay to be sure," said Mercy Creswell, as it were, half awaking, and looking vaguely about her.

Mr. Darkdale shut the heavy door, which closed by a spring bolt, with a clang that boomed through the long passage, and then, with an odd familiarity with internal arrangements, he drew the bolts with noisy rapidity, and turned the key which was in the lock, and drew it out.

"Now, miss, you'll not be long getting to your room," said Mercy Creswell, her eyes wandering along the wall, and something sunken and weary in her unwholesome face.

"Well, I should hope not," thought Maud, a little surprised.

Darkdale was walking along the passage with rapid strides, having merely beckoned to them to follow.

Miss Maud was a good deal disgusted at this procedure. She was obliged, in order to keep this man in view, to follow at a rapid pace, and as he turned a corner, which she had not yet reached, Maud saw a person emerge from a side-door in the perspective of the passage, the sight of whom very much surprised her.

It was Doctor Malkin who stepped forth under the lamp which overhung that door, his bald head flushed, and his disagreeable countenance smiling grimly.

With the smile still on his thin lips he turned his head and saw Miss Vernon.

He thought, I dare say, that she had not seen him, for he instantly drew back into the recess of the doorway.

Perhaps he had not recognised her, perhaps he did not choose to be recognised in this part of the house. But a few days ago he certainly was not even acquainted with Lady Mardykes. But he had a good many friends, and she an infinitude, and an introduction might, of course, have been very easily managed.

This all passed in her mind nearly momentarily, as she walked quickly into the side passage after Darkdale, Mercy Creswell keeping hardly a foot behind, and a little to the other side.

The impression this odd little incident left upon her mind was, notwithstanding, unpleasant.

Having turned to the left she saw the large screen I mentioned on a former occasion, that protected the door at which Darkdale was now tapping. It was hardly opened when Maud reached it.

"Can my room be on this floor?" she wondered.

No, it was no such thing. Mr. Drummond, short, serious, and benevolent, with rosy cheeks and brown eyes, and bald head, and a pen behind his ear, was standing in a short office coat at the threshold.

"This is Miss Maud Vernon, daughter of Lady Vernon, of Roydon Hall," said Darkdale, performing this odd office of introduction in a dry, rapid way.

"Half an hour later than we expected," said Mr. Drummond, pulling out a large oldfashioned silver watch by the chain, from which dangled a bunch of seals and keys on his comfortable paunch; and then glancing back, it was to be presumed at a clock, in the interior, "no, twenty-five, precisely five-and-twenty minutes late," and he turned from the corners of his eyes upon Miss Vernon a shrewd glance, and quickly made her a respectful bow.

"I'll tell you about that by-and-bye," said Darkdale.

"I hope the young lady will find everything to her liking, I'm sure."

"Miss Vernon's come for a short visit to *Lady Mardykes* here, a few weeks or so," interrupted Darkdale. "And there are two boxes, largest size, and two middle size, and a dressing-case, and a bonnet-box, and here's Lady Vernon's list of the jewels she's brought; and — come here Miss Creswell — she's to wait on Miss Vernon. Which is Miss Vernon's room?"

He dived into the room, and returned in a moment with a big book like a ledger.

"Miss Vernon? Yes. Here it is. This will be it — A A, Fourteen."

"A A, Fourteen," repeated Darkdale, musing. "That is at the west side of the cross-door, eh?"

"Yes, so it is."

"I — I didn't think that," said Darkdale, drawing nearer to him, with an inquiring glance and a dubious frown of thought.

"Yes, it's all right; and here's the voucher and 'question' wrote with his own hand across it."

Darkdale read the paper, and returned it to the plump fingers of the secretary.

"It is — that's it," he said.

"I'm a little tired. I should like to get to my room, please. I suppose my maid knows where it is?" said Miss Vernon, who was beginning to lose patience.

"In one moment, presently, please, Miss Vernon." Darkdale whispered a word in the ear of Mercy Creswell. "Now, Miss Vernon, please, we have only a moment to delay on the way, and then your maid shall show you to your room."

At the same quick pace he led her through a passage or two, and opened a door, which she entered after him.

"You shan't be detained a moment here, Miss Vernon," he repeated.

It is a spacious oval room, panelled massively up to the ceiling, and surrounded, as it seems, with doors all alike in very heavy casings. It is rather bare of furniture. A thick Turkey carpet covers the floor. There are four enormous armchairs on castors, and a square table, covered with stamped leather, and with legs as thick as cannons on castors, stands in the centre of the room. A ponderous oak desk lies upon the table, and is, in fact, attached to it, the whole heavy structure forming one massive piece. Except these articles of furniture, there is not a movable thing in the room.

The chamber is lighted from the ceiling, over the table, by a small oval line of gas-jets, which looks like a continuous ribbon of flame.

There is something queer, and almost dismaying, in the effect of this bare and massive room, with its four huge, modern, purple leather chairs.

The immense solidity of the mouldings and panelling that surround it, as well as its peculiar shape, would reflect back and muffle any sound uttered within it. And, somehow, it suggests vaguely the idea of surgery, the strap, the knife, and all that therapeutic torture.

The effect of the mild equable light is odd, and the monotony with which the doors, or the sham doors, match one another all round, has something bewildering and portentous in it.

While she looks round at all this, Mr. Darkdale has left the room; and turning about she finds that Mercy Creswell, perhaps, never entered it. At all events, she certainly is not there now, and Maud is quite alone.

One thing is obvious. It certainly is pretty evident that Lady Mardykes is not at home. So at least Maud thinks.

“There must, however, be some servant, I think, who can show me my room. I’ll try,” she resolves.

Maud accordingly tries the handle of the particular door through which she thinks she had entered, but it will not turn; then another, with the same result. It is rather a disconcerting situation, for by this time she cannot tell by what door she had come in, or by which of all these Mr. Darkdale had gone out, each door is so like its neighbour.

She looks about for a bell, but she could discover nothing of the kind.

Before another minute had passed, however, one of the doors at the other side of the room opened noiselessly, and a marble-featured man, with strange eyes, and black, square beard, stood before the panel, like a picture. It was Antomarchi.

“Oh, I’m afraid the servant has made a mistake,” said Miss Vernon, who was vexed at her absurd situation. “He showed me in here as a room where I was to wait for my maid, till she returned to show me the way to my room.”

“She will be here in a moment, Miss Vernon; there has been no mistake. I hope your head is better?”

“Thanks, a great deal better.”

She was surprised at his knowing that she had complained of a slight headache on her journey.

“I’m glad of that. My friend, Lady Mardykes, will be here in the morning. I am a doctor, and I am held accountable for the health and spirits of all the inmates of this big house.”

The pallor and stillness of his face, the blackness of his hair and beard, and the strange metallic vibration of his bass tones, produced in Maud a sensation akin to fear, and made even his pleasantries formidable.

"Your maid must, by this time, be at the door."

He opened a door, beckoned, and Mercy Creswell came into the room.

"If you permit me, Miss Vernon, I'll try your pulse." And he took the young lady's wrist before she could decline. "You don't often drive so far. You'll be quite well in the morning; but you must not think of coming down to breakfast."

"Is Miss Medwyn here?" inquired Maud, before committing herself to stay in her room all the morning.

"No, Miss Medwyn is not here."

"I wonder what can have happened. Lady Mardykes wrote to me to say she would certainly be here, to stay some time, this morning."

"An uncertain world!" he observed, with a hard smile. "But Lady Mardykes is seldom mistaken. Whatever she *said* one may be sure she *believed;* and what she thinks is generally very near the truth. You had an alarm on the way? But you did not mind it much?"

"It did startle me a good deal for the moment; but it was soon over. I think the whole party were startled."

"I dare say; but you don't feel it now? It won't interfere with your sleep, eh?"

"Oh, no," laughed the young lady; "I assure you I'm quite well — I'm not the least likely to be on your list of invalids, and so I think I'll say goodnight."

"Goodnight," said he, with his peculiar smile, and a very ceremonious bow, and he opened the door and stood beside it, with the handle in his fingers.

Mercy Creswell took the bedroom candle that stood, lighted, on a table outside the door. The young lady walked on. Antomarchi's smile was instantly gone, and the stern, waxen face was grave as before.

Antomarchi's eyes rested for a moment on Mercy Creswell as she passed. He nodded, and made her a slight sign.

You would have judged by her face that she stood in great awe of this man. She positively winced; and with a frightened ogle, and very round eyes, and mouth down at the corners, made him a little curtsy.

He shut the door without waiting for that parting reverence, and she saw no more of him or the oval room for that night.

CHAPTER LXII.

MAUD'S BEDROOM.

Mercy Creswell led the young lady by a back stair. She was interested; everything was so unlike Roydon. As they traversed the passage leading to the hall, the sounds of music again swelled faintly on her ear; and she saw servants going to and fro, in the corridor, in the fuss and jostle of trays, ices, and claret-cup and glasses, soup and teacups.

Up the stair went Maud and her femme de chambre, and the sounds died out. The stairs and passages were lighted, rather dingily, by small muffed lamps, which seemed to be fixed in the ceilings. Only at two points, on the level which they had now reached, a yard or two apart, did they encounter a living being. They were a pair of strong middle-aged housemaids, who, each in turn, stopped and looked at Maud with a transitory and grave curiosity as she passed.

"Isn't she pretty, poor little thing?" said the fatter of these two to her companion.

"Pretty and proud, I dare say; 'tis a good house she's come to; it won't do her no harm, I warrant you," answered the darker-visaged and leaner woman, following the young lady with a half-cynical smile.

They were now in the long passage through which, a few nights before, Doctor Malkin had approached his room. A man in a waistcoat with black calico sleeves to it, seemed to be awaiting them at the other end, leaning against the great door that closed the perspective, with his arms folded, and one leg crossed over the other, an attitude in which we have seen ostlers smoking in inn-yards at stable-doors.

Seeing them, the man stood erect, with the key in his fingers.

"This way, please, Miss Maud," said Mercy, pushing forward, as she observed the young lady hesitate, as if doubtful whether she was to pass that barrier.

"Miss Vernon, A A Fourteen," said Mercy, briskly, to this janitor, who forthwith opened the heavy door.

They saw now before them the continuation of the long gallery which is interrupted by this massive door.

The man held out his hand as she gave him a little printed check; he looked at it, and said:

"Yes, all right, A A Fourteen." And he opened the first door to the left.

On a little disk of ivory sunk in the doorpost, were the number and letters, but so small that you might not have observed them.

At home at last! There was Miss Vernon's luggage on the carpet. A muffed glass lamp, the same as those she had observed in the lobbies, only much more powerful, shed a clear light over every object in the room, from the ceiling.

It was the same room which had been assigned to Doctor Malkin, a short time before; but some alterations tending to improve the style and convenience of its arrangements had been made; and now it looked not only a spacious and comfortable, but even a handsome bedroom.

"Heaven defend us! What an awful picture that is!" exclaimed Maud, as she stood before the picture of the abbess, that was placed over the chimneypiece. "What a deathlike, dreadful countenance! Who is it? No relation of Lady Mardykes, I hope?"

"I don't know, indeed, miss," answered Mercy, thus appealed to. "I was never in this room before."

The kreese, no suitable decoration for a lady's apartment, had been removed.

Maud turned away.

"I wonder why Lady Mardykes lights her rooms and galleries so oddly," she pursues, talking half to herself, as she looked up at the lamp in the centre of the ceiling; "I fancy myself in an immense railway carriage."

A dressing-room opened from this apartment, to the right, and beyond that lay Mercy Creswell's room, accessible in turn by a door from the dressing-room. Each of these rooms was lighted in the same way.

"Are all the bedrooms in this house marked with numbers and letters like this?"

"Every one, miss."

"I can't say I admire that arrangement, nor the lighting. One thinks of an hotel. If Miss Medwyn were here," she added, more merrily. "I should certainly, late as it is, dress and go down to the concert. I should like to see the dresses and the people. I fancy the house is very full."

"It is always that, miss; I never knew it hotherwise."

"And a very gay house?"

"Too gay for me, miss. Always something going on. A too much of a racket. I don't think it's good for no one," said Mercy, half stifling a dreary little yawn. She had not been laughing since their approach to the house, even at mention of Miss Medwyn's name; but on the contrary, as she would have said herself, was "rather in the dismals."

"Lady Mardykes's aunt is here; Mrs. Pendel, of Pendel Woods? You have seen her often, of course?"

"The Honourable Mrs. Pendel? Oh, dear, yes, miss, hoftentimes."

"She was here a day or two ago, certainly. Can you tell me whether she is here now?"

"No; she's not here now, miss."

"That's very odd, for Lady Mardykes wrote to beg of her not to go away. You had better go down and ask."

"No use in life, miss; I know she's not here — she's gone. We was talking about her this morning, before I left here."

"Well, it doesn't so much matter. Lady Mardykes will be here in the morning. Don't mind those dresses tonight; you can do all that in the morning; just lay my dressing-case there, and give me my dressing-gown. Thanks; and I think I'll go to my bed."

"Would you, please, like a bit of supper or something first, miss?"

"Nothing, thanks; but perhaps you would, Mercy."

"I had my supper, miss, thanks, at the Pig and Tinder-box. Servants never sups so late here, miss; it is against the custom of the house."

The young lady, in her dressing-gown and slippers, sat before the glass, with her long, thick hair about her shoulders; and Mercy Creswell stood by, brush in hand, arranging it.

When all this was over the young lady, beginning to feel a little sleepy, was glad to get to her bed.

A double cord, with a ring like an oldfashioned handle of a bell-rope, hung by her bed, and the use of this Mercy Creswell explained. Drawing the cord in one direction had the effect of moving a shade under the lamp in the ceiling, and of thus reducing the room to darkness, and in the opposite direction of removing this shade again, and readmitting the light. Having tried this two or three times, and found that she could manage it perfectly, she dismissed her maid, lay down, and drew the shade; and the room being in total darkness, she addressed herself to sleep.

But there is a tide in the affairs of men other than that which Shakespeare wrote of at least, and which, taken at the flood, leads on to slumber, but which once passed may never come again for half a night; and Maud soon began to fear she had suffered it to escape her; for after lying for some time still, with eyes closed, she felt more wide awake than when she had first tried to sleep.

She turned on her other side, and lay still; but in vain she tried and exhausted all the common expedients for inducing sleep; they all failed.

An hour had passed, and sleep seemed further than ever.

Perhaps a question which mingled unbidden in all her speculations had something to do with the postponement of her sleep. Was she likely to see Mr. Marston next morning among the guests?

She was listening now with excited attention for far-off sounds of music; but the house was too vast, and if the concert was still going on, which was not indeed very probable, its harmonies were lost in distance long before they could reach her ear. The silence was intense, and more unfriendly to sleep than some little hum of distant life might have been.

Now and then came one of those odd creeks or cracks in the woodwork of the room, which spiritualists assign to mysterious causes, and more sceptical philosophers simply to a change of temperature; and ever and anon a moth would bob against the window-pane with a little tap. But these sounds were far enough between to be a little startling when they did come; and the silence of the long intervals was intense.

She listened; but not a footstep could she hear — not a distant barking of a dog, not a sound of life anywhere.

It was an oppressive and melancholy silence. At length she thought she heard a distant clock strike two, and the sound died away, leaving the silence deeper.

It continued. Some time passed. She lay in the dark with her eyes open, her head on the pillow, without a stir, but awake and excited.

But on a sudden her ears were startled by a loud and horrible sound.

Close to her door, in the gallery, there arose a howling and weeping, and a clang at the bolts of the massive cross door. This was followed by ironical laughter. Then came a silence, and then more of the same slow, jeering laughter, and then another silence.

Maud had started up in her bed, and sat with her heart throbbing violently, almost breathless, listening with the chill of terror.

To her relief this horrid sound next time was heard at a comparative distance. She heard other men's voices now in low and vehement dialogue, and sounds of shuffling feet, of gasping, tugging, and panting, as if a determined struggle was going on; once or twice, a low laugh was heard; and then came a yell loud and long, which seemed passing further and further away, and was soon lost quite in the distance; a door clapped, the place was silent.

For some minutes Maud was afraid to stir. But summoning courage she sprang from her bed, venturing to lock the door. But she could discover neither lock nor bolt; but, to her comfort, found that it was nevertheless secured. She made her way to the window; drew the curtain, opened the shutter a little, and looked out.

CHAPTER LXIII.

MORE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS.

The moon was low now; all was motionless and silent. Long shadows were thrown from the tall hedges and trees upon the misty grass; and the croquet-ground and flower-garden, with all the pleasant anticipations associated with them, lay full in view beneath.

Encouraging the cheerful train of thought to which this prospect gave rise, she sat in her dressing-gown and slippers for some time at the window, and then, intending to question Mercy Creswell on the subject of the uproar that had so scared her, and no doubt her maid also, she tried the dressing-room door; but the handle at this side was gone, and the door fast shut.

So she must be content to wait till morning, for an explanation of the noises that had startled the unusual quiet of the night.

I dare say she would soon have grown drowsy, for she really needed sleep, and the healthier associations that were by this time, again, uppermost in her mind, would have prepared the way for its approach, had she not again been disturbed, just as she was about to return to her bed, by noises which she could not account for.

This time they proceeded from the quadrangle under her window; men’s voices were talking low, and steps were audible on the gravel walk that runs along that side of the house.

She placed herself close to the glass and looked down.

The terrace that passes under the windows, the same along which she had that night approached the house, is very broad, affording a wide belt of grass between the gravel walk and the wall of the house. This distance enabled her without difficulty to observe the people who were now on the path.

The elevation of this terrace raised it above the level of the shadows, and in the vivid moonlight, she saw the figures that appeared, distinctly. The window from which she was looking was as nearly as possible over the door through which she had entered the house.

Some half-dozen men, with their hats on, were waiting on the broad walk before it. Two or three more in a short time came out from the house and joined them. Then three gentlemen dressed in those black cloaks, with which undertakers drape chief mourners, entered the terrace walk, from the point at her left, at which the door from the courtyard communicates with it. They were walking very slowly side by side, and he who was in the middle had a handkerchief in his hand, and appeared to be weeping.

They passed the window, and the group of men on the walk drew back toward the house as they did so; and the three gentlemen in black continued to walk slowly up and down that portion of the promenade that lay to her left.

The group of men who are standing before the door breaks up: some half-dozen go into the house, and only three remain where they were.

Maud is becoming more and more curious.

A man whose square build looks squarer, as she looks down upon him, steps out. He looks along the terrace after the three men who are walking down it. He looks up towards the moon. There is no mistaking that pale still face, with the jet-black beard. He is Antomarchi.

The three gentlemen turn about, and are now approaching him. He advances two or three steps toward them, and takes off his hat, and makes a particularly low and ceremonious bow. One of these gentlemen advances at a quick pace, makes him a bow in return, and they talk together. The other two continue to pace, as before, slowly up and down the walk.

Antomarchi approaches the door, and the gentleman who joined him a few minutes before is at his side. They stop. The three men who were lounging near the door are suddenly, as it were, called to attention. Antomarchi waves his hand slightly towards the door, and says something to his companion, who turns about, and at his quickest walk rejoins his two friends.

These gentlemen, hearing what he says, stop and turn about, and slowly walk towards the door. There is some little fuss there; first one and then another man emerges from it and returns, and now, with white scarfs and hatbands, bearing a long coffin on a bier, come forth the men who had gone in. A man steps out last, and shuts the door softly. Is it Darkdale? She can’t be quite sure.

It is not easy to distinguish colours, at any distance, by moonlight; but Maud thinks that this coffin is covered with red velvet, and that the large plate and big nails upon it are gilded.

Immediately behind this coffin the three gentlemen walk, and Antomarchi after them, till it disappears round the corner of the house, away to her left, at which the door she had passed that night gives access to the courtyard.

A strange feeling of disgust and fear now, for the first time, steals over her. What is she to think of a house in which, while an inmate lies dead and coffined, all the fiddling and singing, and vanities and feasting of a banquet, proceed unchecked? What is she to think of the right feeling and refinement of a hostess who can permit so extraordinary a profanation?

The sombre images summoned to her fancy by the scene she has just witnessed, gave for the time a sickly character to the moonlit prospect, and the now solitary walk so lately traversed by the scanty and mysterious funeral procession.

Maud left the window, and drew the shade from the lamp, and in a moment the warm light filled the room cheerily.

Closing the shutters, and drawing the curtains, she now bethought her seriously of the necessity of getting a little sleep, if she did not intend looking like a ghost next morning, which certainly was very far from her wish.

So into her bed she got again, and drawing the cord once more, the light vanished, and she lay down, determined at last to go to sleep.

All was profoundly silent again, and Maud was now, after the lapse of some eight or ten minutes, beginning at last to feel the approaches of sleep, when she fancied she heard something brushing very softly by the great armchair near the side of her bed.

Was she ever to get to sleep in this unlucky bed? Even the idea that a cat had got into her room was not pleasant; for nursery tales of the assassin-like propensities of the tribe (especially of black cats, and why should not this one be black?) when their tendency to throttle and murder sleepers in the dark was favoured by opportunity, crowded upon her recollection.

She listened intently. She heard in a little time a slight click, as if a trinket or coin was stirred on the table near. There was no other noise, and nothing very formidable in that. But still she could bear the uncertainty no longer. The darkness and silence were oppressive; she put her hand out and drew the cord, and in an instant the soft light from the lamp in the ceiling filled the room, and disclosed every object.

She was not alone. A figure, perfectly still, was standing about a yard from the side of the bed, toward the foot. She stared at it for some time, hardly believing that what she saw was real, before she recognised in the short squat person in a woollen night-gown, Mercy Creswell, her ugly femme de chambre.

"How on earth did you come in?" at length Maud exclaimed.

"La! miss, how?" repeated Mercy, who gained a little time for reflection by such repetitions. "How did I come in? I came as quiet as I could, through the dressing-room door, please, miss."

"What do you want here, please?" demanded Miss Maud, a little peremptorily, for she was losing patience. "I did not call for you, and I think I should have been asleep by this time, if you had remained quietly where you were. What *do* you want?"

"I? I came, miss — what I wanted was — I came to see was you sleeping comfortable, having been, as you was, complaining of your head."

"Well, don't mind trying to see in the dark any more please. I wonder you did not tumble over the furniture. You'd have frightened me out of my wits if you had; I have been made so awfully nervous. There were such horrible noises in the gallery, just outside my door; and I had hardly got over that, when, of all things in the world, a funeral passed out of this house."

"La! though *really*, miss?"

"Yes, *really*, such a grisly idea! Didn't you hear the people under the windows? What are you made of? But you *must* have heard the person who made such a hideous uproar in the gallery."

Maud paused with her eyes upon her.

"Well, I wouldn't wonder if it was, miss, that might easy be," said Mercy.

"But didn't you *hear* it; what can you mean by affecting to doubt it? You won't allow that you know, or see, or hear anything. You *must* have heard it."

"Yes, I did hear it," said Mercy, who resolved, at length, to be candid; "a man hollooing and crying, and laughing, and I think I should know pretty well what it was, miss."

"That's just what I want you to tell me."

"Well, I heard this morning there's a servant of one of the great people here that's got fits and raving, saving your presence, miss, from drink."

"My gracious! that horrible complaint that Doctor Malkin told me about! And why don't they send him to an hospital?"

"So they will, miss, I'm told, in the morning."

"But what about the funeral? You were here this morning, and know the servants. It was evidently some person of rank, and you must have heard of it. A person of that sort could not have been lying dead in the house, without your knowing something of it."

"Well, no — really, miss, I knew there was some one, I forget his name, a lord, I do believe, lying very bad, some days ago, and gave over — and most like it is the same — but Lady Mardykes, she'll be here in the morning, she can tell you all about it."

"But do you mean to say that such things happen, in the midst of balls and concerts, in Lady Mardykes's house? Do you mean to say that if I had a fever and died here, Lady Mardykes would not suspend her gaieties till I was buried?"

"Oh! miss, la! you know, miss, Lady Mardykes does things her own way. She's not that sort, neither; but there's a part of the house down at that end farthest from the hall-door, there is sometimes people in she does not know from Adam, saving your presence, miss."

"I don't in the least comprehend you," said the young lady, in unaffected amazement.

"I mean this, when people is ordered the waters here for a week, miss, there being no hotel, miss, nor inn, nor nothing of no sort, near Lady Mardykes's, if it should 'appen to be a lady or gentleman of consequence, a lord or a countess, or sich like, she would give them the use of a room or two in the house, you see, and so, now and then, of course, it can't be helped. There will be a lady or gentleman die, seeing all as comes to drink the waters is more or less sick and ailing always; and I have known a many a one die here."

"And without any interruption of the amusements — the music and dancing?" persisted Miss Vernon.

"La! none in life, miss, why should there? Let them go out as they come in, private. When you have seen as many corpses as I have, here, laid out in their caps and sheets, you'll think no more of them than you would of so many yellow wax statutes — what's a coffin but a box of cloth? If there's no one I don't care for in it, why should I fret my eyes out? Not I. I wouldn't look over my shoulder to see corpse or coffin; I wouldn't think twice about it; 'tis all fancy, miss."

"Well, as you say, I shall probably know all about it from Lady Mardykes tomorrow, and now, really, you must go; and pray don't return till it is time to call me in the morning. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, miss."

And the maid withdrew.

"Well," thought Maud as she lay down, "I have heard that Lady Mardykes keeps an odd house; but anything like this, could any one have conjectured?"

And very soon after this reflection Maud Vernon was fast asleep.

CHAPTER LXIV.

AT THE TERRACE DOOR.

Next morning, when Maud awoke, she saw Mercy Creswell sitting near the window, playing a "devil's tattoo" on the window-stool, and staring out with all her eyes, and a strained neck, on the scene below.

"Oh! Mercy, you are there?" said the young lady, drowsily, with her head still upon her pillow.

"Yes, miss, please," said Mercy, standing up promptly with a grave countenance.

"What o'clock is it, do you know?" inquired Miss Vernon.

Miss Mercy consulted the big silver watch which she wore at her belt, and which, if not quite so pretty as some little gold ones we may have seen, had the advantage of keeping time a good deal better.

"Halfpast ten, miss."

"Halfpast ten! And why did not you call me before? Breakfast over, I suppose, and — and Lady Mardykes, has she come?" she added, recollecting that if her hostess were still absent, she would not after all have cared to go down to the breakfast-room.

"Yes, ma'am — yes, miss, half an hour ago, Lady Mardykes harrived."

"Oh? I'm so glad, that is quite charming; now if Miss Medwyn were here, I think I should have nothing left to wish for."

And in high spirits, notwithstanding the alarms of the night before, Miss Vernon addressed herself to her toilet, while her breakfast came up on a pretty china tray to the adjoining dressing-room, which was a large and comfortable apartment, commanding precisely the same view of the croquet-ground as she saw from her bedroom window.

As Miss Vernon entered the dressing-room, a dark-featured, low-browed housemaid, standing by the gallery-door, with a pale frown, and in low tones was saying to Mercy Creswell, who was listening with a dark gaze, and compressed lips, with the corners of her mouth drawn grimly down:

"An oak stool all in *that*," and she clapped her hands. "You never seen sich another smash in the dead-house. Tom Rose was nothing to it. Lauk! it was a turn! I couldn't eat not that big o' breakfast!"

Mercy saw the young lady coming in, and shifting her place, she said in a quick aside, "Here's Miss Vernon."

And with a glance at her, the broad-shouldered lass in housemaid's uniform withdrew and closed the door.

"What was she talking of?" asked the young lady, when she had gone.

"An old story, miss; a man that was killed here years ago; poachers I dessay, or the like."

"Oh, a keeper?"

"Well, yes; something that way, miss. Shall I pour you out tea or coffee, please, miss?"

Her breakfast equipage Maud thought a great deal handsomer than was required for the careless service of a bedroom. The china was old and quite exquisite; and the silver, an antique Dutch miniature service, was covered with grotesque figures, trees, windmills, cocks and hens. Every detail in the little breakfast service was pretty and even elegant, a great deal prettier, certainly, than her mamma would have allowed her at Roydon.

Looking down she saw from the window a very animated scene, people in gay dresses were walking on the terrace, and upon the gravel walks that surround the croquet-ground, on which were already assembled some lounging groups, who were knocking the balls about in a desultory way. The cheerful sounds of talking and laughing filled the air. Some of these people, foreigners she supposed, were very demonstrative in their talk and gestures. And a dozen or so of the heterogeneous company who were making the large square, with the background of old Dutch hedges, and lofty timber, as amusing for her to look at as a fair-green, or a racecourse, were dressed extremely oddly, not to say grotesquely. There were at least ninety or a hundred people in that pretty enclosure. Some might possibly be merely visitors for the hour, but still the number assembled testified to a very splendid hospitality.

As Maud was looking out, she saw Lady Mardykes enter the terrace from the door in the side of the house, almost directly under her window.

This, you may suppose, was a very welcome sight to her.

Antomarchi was walking at her side, and they seemed to be talking incessantly, as they walked slowly round the croquet-ground, and sometimes with very earnest gravity.

Did it strike her that Lady Mardykes was distinguishing this stern and striking man, in a very marked way? He seemed to engross her. She stopped and spoke to but one other person, as she walked round and round the quadrangle. She had seen her guests, no doubt, since her arrival, before now; but she seemed, at present, to have neither eye nor ear for any one but Antomarchi.

He seemed very devoted, she thought. Might he not possibly entertain hopes which she had not suspected before, respecting this rich and brilliant widow? What was the meaning of her delegating to him, as he had said she did, even playfully, a commission to see after the health and spirits of her guests, during her absence?

And now Maud remembered a laughing warning given to her by this same Lady Mardykes, in answer to some speculations of hers about mesmerism. She said, “Don’t allow any one to mesmerise you, unless you want to fall in love with him.” Then came her special mention of Doctor Antomarchi, in the letter in which she promised to have him at her house, to meet Maud, as a potent mesmeriser.

Was this clever foreigner really on the high road to fortune and social position? Things as strange had happened.

Some illustrated papers had been sent to her at the same time with her breakfast, and Maud, taking one of them up, looked into her room, intending to take her paper-cutter from the table beside her bed, but it was not there.

She had left it on the table herself, beside her book, and she had seen it there afterwards; and by one of those accidents that sometimes fix trifles in the memory, she had remarked it as it lay in the same place, on her return, after her long look-out from the window, the night before, to her bed.

“Mercy, did you take my paper-knife from the table beside my bed? *I* did not remove it; look for it, please, and fetch it to me.”

“Me move it! Certainly not me, miss. La! miss, I would ‘av’ knewed you put it there, but I wasn’t a step nearer than the window, till you woke up and called me.”

She was fidgeting about the table by this time.

“No, miss, I don’t see no sign of no knife, paper or hotherwise. No, miss, nothing.”

"But I would not lose that pretty little paper-knife on any account, and it *must* be there; no one has been in the room to take it, and you really *must* find it."

But nowhere could the paper-knife be found. It was hardly the sort of thing which a thief would have selected for a prize, seeing on the table close by all the rings and trinkets that might have been as easily picked up.

"It was given me by a person I was very fond of, who is dead, and I won't lose it," said Miss Vernon, joining in the search, after an interval; but it did not turn up.

"La! miss, it must be a mistake. Where could it go to? If it was there, miss, last night, 'twould be there still; there's no signs on it; 'tis only worriting yourself, miss, to suppose it was ever there at all."

"I happen to know it was," said the young lady, nettled at this irritating line of reply, "and you must find it. I shan't go downstairs till I am satisfied about it."

"What was it like, please, miss?"

"It is a small mother-of-pearl paper-cutter, that answers as a marker beside, and it has my initials, M. G. V., on the side."

Maud was really vexed, and having a regard for this trifle, was resolved not to lose it; her attention was, however, called to another quarter by a gentle but distinct knock at the dressing-room door. A visit from Lady Mardykes, she thought, with a smile, as she stepped into the dressing-room, and called to her visitor to come in.

It was Doctor Antomarchi who opened the door, and made her a grave and very ceremonious bow. Maud was a little surprised.

"I fancied it was Lady Mardykes who knocked at my door," she said; "I was thinking of going out; I saw her from the window."

"Oh? I'm commissioned to make this little visit, to inquire how you have passed the night. Your nerves were a little more disturbed than you would allow by the shock of that unlucky rencontre on the road. I'll try your pulse, if you don't mind. Yes — yes — still nervous. You can have your walk quite safely in the croquet-ground, but don't think of taking a drive to-day, and you had better lunch and dine quietly upstairs; tomorrow you will be, I hope, all right, and then, of course, you command everything."

Antomarchi remained for a few minutes, and chatted on agreeably upon other things. He is apparently anxious to please; nothing could be more polite; but his smile is not winning. There is something in it she can't describe, deathlike and cruel. In his manner, soften it all he can, there is a latent sternness that might be prompt and terrible.

His large strange eyes, as if conscious of their power, he has not turned upon hers. In this slightly but studiously averted gaze, there is a hinting of treason.

When he is gone, Maud says to herself:

"Well! is it possible that nice creature can have taken a fancy to that horrible man? She certainly can't see him as I do. However, I suppose there is a charm, if one could only see it, in the sinister as there is in the beautiful."

"Well, miss, I have looked everywhere, and high and low, and I can't find no sich a thing; you couldn't have forgot it at Roydon, unbeknown to you?" said Mercy, returning from her search for the paper-knife.

Maud extinguished this theory peremptorily, and asked:

"Are you quite sure that no one was in that room except you and me?"

"Not a living soul, miss. Who could?"

Maud was now putting her things on for her little walk, and she called for her scissors from her dressing-case.

"You can have mine, miss, please."

But the young lady preferred her own.

"I don't see no scissors there, miss — — "

"Well, my penknife must do."

"Nor no knife, miss; only a few things."

Now came another alarm, another search, and a new disappointment.

"I can't understand it!" exclaimed Maud. "It *is* just possible, to be sure, as you say, that Jones may have left them out, and forgotten them. I'll write to her. But it is so unlikely, that I can't believe it. I really don't understand all this. I can't account for these things."

Maud's fiery eyes were upon Mercy Creswell as she thus spoke.

The fat freckled maid, with her chin rather high, tossed her head, with an air rather of defiance, and an assumption of offended dignity. But her eyes could not bear the frank gaze of her young mistress, and were unsteady and confused. She looked, in fact, extremely put out.

"I hope, miss, you don't suppose there's no one about you, miss, as would do any sich a thing as to make free with a lady's dressing-case. There never was none in this house but honest servants, nor none, I expects, as would so much as think of any sich things, no not for the minds of Peru! And as for myself, I hope, miss, you don't think or imagine you're not as safe as the queen's jewels with Mercy Creswell, which I can get a character, as many as I likes from Lady Mardykes, or from your own mamma, miss, Lady Vernon of Roydon, not to mention a many a lady besides, as would travel a many a mile to say the same for me, if so it was I stood in need of any sich a thing."

But Maud, not a bit daunted, had nothing more satisfactory to add.

"Charming!" thought Maud, "if in addition to her other accomplishments she should turn out a rogue! I wonder when mamma will allow me to have poor Jones back again."

The young lady, with her hat and jacket on, was now ready to go down.

"I'm not sure, Mercy, that I should know the way; you must come with me to the top of the stairs. I shall find out the rest of the way myself."

So they set out together, and Maud looked about her with some curiosity.

It was a vast house, and the gallery, the flooring of which was warped and ridged with age, was dark and dismal enough almost for an ogre's dwelling. On the way to the head of the stairs other passages crossed, in gloomy perspective, and in them they passed, here and there, several housemaids, with something, she could not exactly say what, a little unusual about them. They were in a sort of uniform; all wearing exactly the same strong, plain, dark-blue dress, white aprons, and neat caps. Lady Mardykes, she thought, enlists her servants and rules her house with a military eye. Those servants looked reserved and thoughtful, but, for the most part, goodnatured; they were all above thirty, and some past forty, and all looked remarkably firmly knit and strong; an extremely serviceable corps.

Finally, Maud and her guide had to make several zigzags.

In one respect, among others, before reaching the great staircase, these lofty and sombre galleries differed very pointedly from those of Roydon; from end to end, not a single picture hung upon their dark panelling, and Maud felt relieved when she had escaped from this monotonous gloom, and stood at last at the broad stairhead.

She heard voices in the hall, and when more than halfway down the stairs, she saw a footman near the foot, and asked him:

“Can you tell me whether Lady Mardykes is in the drawingroom?”

“No, please, my lady. She’s not there. I think her ladyship’s in the croquet-garden.”

“Will you please show me the way?”

So the servant preceded her deferentially, and led her at last to the door in the side of this great house, and opened it.

Maud paused for a moment. The spectacle before her was very different indeed from that which she had seen issuing from the same door, by moonlight, on the night before.

As a mere picture nothing could be gayer or more amusing. Such brilliant costume, so much animation, such curious contrasts! Such very odd people.

CHAPTER LXV.

MAUD WALKS IN THE CROQUET GROUND.

Maud descended the steps, and took the direction of the door opening into the courtyard. She looked at the people as they approached, lest by accident Lady Mardykes should pass her by on the broad gravel walk. People who had made their mark in the world no doubt, many of them. She longed to meet her hostess, and learn who was who, in this curious assembly. In this distinguished and multitudinous company she was glad to perceive that she seemed to excite little or no attention. She was now near enough to the corner to be certain that Lady Mardykes was not upon this walk; at the end of it she turned to the right, down a new side of the square. Many groups, and many people walking singly, passed her. But neither did she see Lady Mardykes upon this walk.

She paused for a minute at its farther angle, and looked across the croquet-ground, where two or three games were by this time in full activity, and the hollow knock of the roquet, and the bounding balls, and all the animated sights and sounds that attend the croquet game, for a moment drew her thoughts from Lady Mardykes, and her eyes from the search.

Among the players or spectators about the hoops, Lady Mardykes was not visible. Maud was beginning to feel a little uncomfortable. If Ethel Tintern had been there, or even Doctor Malkin, whom she had seen the night before, not to mention Maximilla Medwyn, she would have felt comparatively at her ease. But it was very awkward finding herself among such a crowd, without seeing a single face she knew.

She turned about. A very tall yew hedge, clipped in the old Dutch taste, rises there like a dark wall (those at the sides are comparatively low), and traverses the whole length of the quadrangle, opposite to the side of the house, high as the arcades of a cathedral aisle, with lofty and narrow doorways here and there, cut in this dark and thick partition. Possibly there is a walk within its shadow, and there she may at length discover her hostess.

As a little anxiously she is beginning to explore, intending to resume her search, she is accosted by a person whom she has observed before, as about the most singular if not the most grotesque of the figures she has passed.

He has been making a short promenade in the sun, backward and forward upon the walk close by, like a sentinel. He is one of the few persons there who seem to have observed her. He has bowed slightly, but very ceremoniously, as he passed her, but without raising his hat.

He is a man tall and well formed, with a short black cloak thrown Spanish fashion, in spite of the heat of the weather, across his breast and over his shoulder. He has a broadleafed black felt hat, looped at the front with something that looks like a little buckle of brilliants. His face is dark and handsome, with an expression of the most ineffable pride and self-complacency. His chin is high in the air, his movements are slow and graceful, he wears white kid gloves, and carries in his hand an ebony walking-cane, with a gold head, formed something like a crown, in which glimmers a brilliant. He is evidently dressed in "shorts," for the more advantageous exhibition of his handsome legs; so far as they are visible, that is, nearly to the knees, they are cased in black silk stockings, and he turns out his toes as he walks like Sir Christopher Hatton.

In Spanish first, which Maud understood not at all, and then, with better fortune, in French, in which she had no difficulty in conversing, he, with a lofty but smiling courtesy, asked the young lady whether he could direct her, or give her any information which she might require.

Maud thanked him, and asked if he had seen Lady Mardykes, or could say where she was.

He had seen her a little time ago, but he deeply regretted he could not say whether she was now in the garden or not.

"May I now," he said, drawing himself up to his full height with a smile of haughty urbanity, "venture a question in return?"

"Certainly," said the young lady. They were conversing still in French.

"It is this. Have you observed, I entreat, any peculiarity in me? I anticipate your reply. You have. You remarked that in accosting you I merely touched, without removing, my hat. The reason of that is not dishonourable. I have the very great honour to represent her majesty the

Queen of Spain" (there was such a personage then) "at the court of St. James's. I cannot therefore uncover to a subject. You understand. It is alike my painful prerogative and my loyal duty. I must in all but a royal presence retain my hat. I need not say more. I see, with infinite satisfaction, how fully you assent. My servants, if indeed they were in attendance, as they ought to be, I should send with pleasure in quest of Lady Mardykes; but, alas! here, in the country, they always claim a privilege of irregularity, and are never to be found."

He made another stately bow, drew back a step or two to indicate that the audience was over, folded his arms, threw back his head, and smiled, with half-closed eyes, haughtily.

Miss Vernon passed under the tall arch in the dark green wall of yew, and found herself in a long and sombre walk, fenced in by two solemn hedges of shorn foliage, between which but a few groups were now to be seen in the perspective. Some were walking before her in the same direction, diminished in the distance; others slowly approaching. The people who made their promenade in this walk were, possibly, of a graver turn of mind than those who kept the sunnier haunts. Nevertheless, now and then they would pause in their sauntering walk to stand before one of the open archways, and look out upon the croquet-ground and its amusing vicissitudes and garrulous players.

A gentleman walking with two ladies, and conversing gravely, seemed to observe her solitary state and evident search for some missing friend, and politely inquired, taking off his hat, whether he could do anything for her. In reply to her question, he told her that it was more than half an hour since he had seen Lady Mardykes and rather thought she had left the croquet-ground, but could not be quite certain. If she would permit him, he added, perhaps prompted to this heroism by her striking beauty, he would have pleasure in assisting her in her search — an exertion which Maud, with many thanks, declined.

Mr. Darkdale, in a long, ungainly black coat, such as she thought she had seen Jesuits wear, and with a book under his arm, passed her by, a few moments later, at a brisk pace. His stern mouth and dark face were thoughtful, and his broad forehead lowered, and as he passed her, from their corners, his penetrating brown eyes for a moment fixed on her face; he made no sign of recognition, however, but glided with a light tread, in a straight line, upon his way.

"That man never was a servant," thought Maud, as she passed him with a chill feeling of suspicion. "I thought he said, or mamma, or Mercy Creswell said, *some* one did, I'm sure of that, that he was simply to take care of me here, and then to go — I forget where — to some other place, and yet here I still find him domesticated! And I am nearly certain I saw him directing the men who were conducting that funeral last night. He is not what he pretends. A Jesuit, I dare say, he is. He is one of the first persons I shall ask Lady Mardykes to explain."

As she reached the further end of this cool and shadowy walk she saw, at her left, the walls of what had been an oldfashioned square tea-house, two stories high, such as used to fill an angle in the wall of a Dutch garden. Roof and floorings were now gone, and the brick was covered with ivy, and looked very dark under the spreading branches of the tall trees that overhung the outer wall.

She turned aside to peep into this ruin. She had expected to find it empty; but it was no such thing. Inside was a thin old gentleman, with stooped and narrow shoulders, and a very long and melancholy face; he had a conical fur cap on, and large tortoise-shell spectacles, and was seated at a table, with an enormous ink-bottle beside him, totting up figures in a mighty book like a ledger. There were innumerable sheaves of papers, neatly folded and docketed, placed in order, upon the table at each side; and under it, and beside him, on the ground, was a huge litter, consisting chiefly of files stuck up to the very hooks with papers, and several leather bags stuffed, no doubt, with old balance-sheets and account-books. On a row of nails along the wall were hanging a series of "stock-lists," with the sparrows twittering above, and bees and flies buzzing about them in the ivy.

With a grimace as if he had suddenly crunched a sour gooseberry, this sage rose, with a stamp on the ground, and, jerking his pen behind his ear, gazed angrily at Maud, and muttered:

"Is not the garden wide enough for you and for me, madam? Saints and angels! How is it possible for an overworked old man to get through his business, interrupted as I am? Pray don't go for a moment; on the contrary, wait; the mischief is done. I claim this, because I want to prevent this occurring again. It is something to keep the complicated and never-ending accounts of this enormous house. It is something to make and direct all the prodigious investments that are going on, and to be able at an instant's notice to tell to a fractional part of a farthing what the entire figure is, and each item stands at, every day of the week. It requires an arithmetical secretary such as England does not see every day, to get all that within the circle of his head, madam. But when you are ordered to make up a tot of forty years' figures on pain of losing your splendid rights, at a single voyage, between morning light and setting sun, it screws too tight, you see, on an old fellow's temples." He pressed three fingers of each hand on his temples, and turned up his eyes. "It is enough to make them burst in or out, by Heaven, like a ship. I remember the time I could have done it like *that*" (he snapped his fingers), "but we grow old ma'am, non sum qualis eram; and always interrupted, never quiet. Some one looks in; just as I have it, some one laughs, or a cock crows, or the light goes out; and I, simple as you see me, entitled to all that stock, unclaimed dividends, if I could only finish it, and bring my tots into court. It is a hard, *hard* thing with all that, and so exquisitely near it, to be still doomed at my years to a life of slavery! Always so near it, always so near; always interrupted. Here I came out to-day to take the fresh air in this place a little; shut up perpetually in my office, and just as I had got midway in the tot you look in, and — immortal gods! blessed patience! hell and Satan! — all is lost in one frightful moment of forgetfulness! Always so near. It makes one's thumbs tremble! Always blasted. It makes one squint. It is enough to make a man stark, staring *mad!* Pray make no excuses, madam. They waste time; you looked in; do so no more, and I'll forgive you."

He made her a short bow, placed his finger on his lip, turned up his eyes, and shook his head, with a profound groan, and addressed himself forthwith to his work again.

With a mixture of compassion and amusement, she left the den of this old humorist, into which she had unwittingly intruded, and continued her search.

A prepossessing young lady, dressed in very exquisite taste, walking slowly, and looking about her with an air and smile of quiet enjoyment and hauteur, hesitated as Maud approached, stood still, looking on her with a gracious and kind expression, and a countenance so riant that Miss Vernon hesitated also in the almost irresistible attraction.

CHAPTER LXVI.

HER GRACE THE DUCHESS OF FALCONBURY.

In this pleasant green shade they had come to a standstill.

"Pretty creature," said this lady, in very sweet tones, "you are looking for somebody, I think. You have not been long here; I have not seen your face before. First, tell me who it is you want; I may be able to help you."

"Thank you very much; I have been looking everywhere for Lady Mardykes, and no one seems to know where she is."

"Oh! Lady Mardykes? You'll find her time enough. You are very young, dear; Lady Mardykes is a charming companion. But if you knew as much as I do of this curious world, you would hardly be in such a hurry to find her; you would wait with a great deal of patience until she found you."

The young lady looked in the face of her new acquaintance, who spoke so oddly of her hostess. That unknown friend laughed musically and softly, and looked very archly from the corners of her eyes, and nodded a little more gravely, as if to say, "Although I laugh I mean it seriously."

What she did say in continuation, was this:

"Come through this arch; there is a seat here that commands a very good view of the croquet-ground and the open walks. And what is your name, child?" she continued, as they walked side by side; "you are sweetly pretty; but by no means so pretty as I."

This little qualification Maud, of course, accepted as a pleasantry, which yet might be quite true, for this lady, although by no means so young as she, was extremely pretty.

"You, now, begin by telling me who you are," said this lady, taking her place on the rustic seat, to which, she had led the way, and pointing with her parasol to Maud, invited her to sit down also, "and then you shall hear everything about me."

"My name," said Maud, "is Vernon, my mamma is Lady Vernon; we live at Roydon, a little more than forty miles from this."

"Indeed! Lady Vernon of Roydon? We ought to know one another then. I knew your mamma at one time, when I was a very young girl; it is twelve years ago. You have heard her speak of me, the Duchess of Falconbury. My greatest misfortune overtook me very early.”

She turned away, and sighed deeply.

Maud had heard of that lady’s bereavement. It had been a marriage of love. The young duke died in the second year of what promised to be a perfectly happy union, and the beautiful dowager had refused to listen to any solicitations to change her widowed state ever since.

“I like your face, I love your voice, which, for me, has a greater charm than even the features,” said the duchess. And she placed her hand on Maud’s as it lay upon the seat, and looked for a moment earnestly in her face. “Yes, we shall be very good friends; I can trust you; I ought to trust you, for, otherwise, I cannot warn you.”

“Warn me?”’ repeated Maud.

“Yes, *warn* you. I see you looking round again for Lady Mardykes.”

“I don’t see her anywhere,” said Maud.

“So much the better,” said the duchess, this time with a little shudder.

Maud looked at her. But her dark look was but the shadow of a passing cloud. The sunshine of her smile immediately succeeded, and was soon darkened again.

“For five years a miserable secret has lain heavy at my heart; I breathed it but once, and then to a person who visited me under circumstances so strange, that I scarcely know whether he is of this world or of the next. Can you keep a secret? Will you, while you live?” she whispered, drawing nearer to Maud.

I wonder whether priests and physicians, who have so many secrets thrust upon them, in the way of their trade, have any curiosity left for those which fortune may throw in their way? But people who enjoy no such professional obligations and opportunities, have for the most part a large and accommodating appetite for all such mental aliment.

Maud looked for a moment in the pretty face which had so suddenly grown pale and thoughtful, and with hardly a hesitation she accepted the proffered trust.

“You like Lady Mardykes?” asks the duchess.

“Extremely — all I know of her.”

“Well said. Well guarded— ‘all you know of her.’ You shall know more of her before you leave me. She is a pretty woman still, but, of course, passée. When I knew her first, she was beautiful; how beautiful you could not now believe. But always something, to my sense, funeste; a beautiful flower dedicated to death. Yet she seemed the analogy of some exquisite and wonderful flower that grows somewhere in dreamland, in enchanted gardens, where you will, but always in shade, never in light. Her face was beautiful, gentle, melancholy, but, to my eye, baleful. I should have liked to have held my parasol between it and me. Do you understand that feeling? Those flowers are associated in my mind with a poison that blasts the very air."

"An odd guest," thought Maud, "to speak so of her entertainer."

"You think it strange," said the duchess, oddly echoing Maud's thoughts, "that I should speak so of Lady Mardykes. You shall hear and judge."

This lady spoke, I may parenthetically mention, in a particularly low, sweet voice, and with a curious fluency, which, if one had only heard without seeing her, would have led one to suppose that she was reading a written composition rather than talking in colloquial English. She continued thus:

"You know her. She is very winning and gentle; she is, or was, one of the most fascinating persons I ever met. She is radiant with the beauty of candour. Her expression is soft and quite angelic; and she, among all living women, possesses the blackest heart and is capable of the most enormous crimes."

As she murmured these words, the lady, with a dismal gaze in her face, pressed her hand on Maud's wrist.

"You can't believe that I am serious," said the duchess. "I'll convince you. You think it odd I should know her and meet her. I'll convince you in a way you little expect. The days of detection are marked in this little red book. No one reads it but myself, and that only for a date." She showed a little book about two inches square, bound in scarlet leather. "I'm talking to you in an unknown tongue; you will understand me perfectly another time," she continued, a little embarrassed. "I'll tell you at present enough to justify what I have said of her. I am fettered and she is fettered. You cannot yet understand that; and, as sometimes happens, from the first moment we met there was a mutual embarrassment, that is, mutual fear and dislike; even more, mutual horror and antipathy, the reasons of which depend on —— Well, by-and-bye I may speak of it again; but for the present we let that pass. There is the cause of my permitting her to live, and of her permitting me to live. Those are strong terms, but true. Listen. I make no half-confidences. She liked my dear husband before his marriage. Gentle and soft as she looks, she is an ambitious and daring woman. He suspected nothing of it. She loved him passionately, and in proportion as jealousy began to infuse itself into it, that passion became atrocious. Here is the secret. Sit closer to me. My husband died by the hand of a poisoner; and that hand was afterwards directed against my life."

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed Maud, feeling as if she were still in a horrible dream.

"Hush! Dear child, it is of the last importance that no human being should suspect that I have imparted a secret to you. Your life would be practised upon immediately, and the ultimate vindication of justice be defeated. You shall know, by-and-bye, the curious circumstances which, for a time, prevent the sword from descending upon Lady Mardykes, and which, although she knows that a movement of my finger may bring it down, yet compel her to tolerate my existence, and constrain both to live on mutual terms of exterior friendliness. Do you see that man coming toward us?"

"Doctor Antomarchi?" said Maud.

CHAPTER LXVII.

MAUD CHANGES HER ROOMS.

Doctor Antomarchi was walking slowly in that direction, with his eye upon them.

"I see you know him. He is a very particular friend, and has been for many years, of Lady Mardykes. I never smell any perfume, no, not even a flower, that he presents. You will do wisely to follow my example. Lady Mardykes chooses her instruments astutely. See how he watches us. Let us get up; he will think, if we seem so absorbed, that we are talking of that which — might not please him."

The duchess rose as she spoke, and Maud with her.

Could Maud Vernon credit one particle of the shocking melodrama she had just been listening to? One thing was certain: her new friend had not been mystifying her. Her colour came and went as she told her story, and the expression was too genuinely that of a person pursued by an agitating and horrible recollection to be counterfeited.

"You can't believe all this?" resumed the duchess. "I shall be here for a walk at eleven in the morning; meet me, and we shall have another talk. Till then, upon this subject we are mute."

Antomarchi was now near. To the duchess he made a very ceremonious bow, and one not quite so profound to Miss Vernon.

"Oh, Doctor Antomarchi," said the duchess, loftily, drawing up, "can you tell us where Lady Mardykes is? Miss Vernon has been looking for her."

"I believe, your grace, she is not likely to see her this evening; Lady Mardykes has been called away. But she will certainly be here again in the morning."

Doctor Antomarchi had to address the conclusion of this speech to Maud only, for the Duchess of Falconbury turned her head away with an air of scarcely concealed disdain, which implied very pointedly how exclusively in the interest of her companion her inquiry respecting Lady Mardykes had been made.

“And can you tell me,” said Maud, “whether Miss Medwyn has arrived, or how soon she is expected?”

“I know that Miss Medwyn has not come; I do not know when she may come; but certainly she is not expected today,” he answered. “I think, Miss Vernon, I need scarcely ask you whether you feel a good deal knocked up to-day?”

“I am a little tired.”

“And a little nervous?”

“I slept so little last night, and went to bed rather tired, and I really do think there is nothing else.”

“Well, you must consent to remain perfectly quiet for the remainder of the afternoon, and get to bed before ten tonight, and tomorrow you will be quite yourself. You are more tired, and your nerves more shaken, than you suppose. You may bring on an attack of illness else.”

“But if Lady Mardykes should come tonight I should like so much to be ready to go down.”

“She will not be here tonight, assure yourself of that. Or I’ll put it, if you please, in a way you may like better. If she does come tonight I undertake that she will certainly pay you a visit in your room, the very first thing she does.”

“That is very good of Doctor Antomarchi,” said the duchess, with a satirical smile on her lips, and irony in her tone. “I shall be going out for a drive after luncheon, so I suppose, dear, I shan’t see you, unless Doctor Antomarchi should give leave, again to-day, but tomorrow we shall meet, and I think till then I shall say goodbye.”

She nodded prettily to Maud, and smiled lingeringly over her shoulder as she turned away and reentered the shady walk from which they had lately emerged together.

Doctor Antomarchi, although not included in the lady’s leavetaking, took off his hat with another ceremonious bow, and at the same moment a servant stationed on the terrace began to ring a bell.

“That is the luncheon-bell,” said the doctor.

The polite company assembled on the croquet-ground threw down their mallets at sound of it, and they and all the loiterers on the walks, and among the flowers, began to troop toward the door through which she had entered, and in a very short time this pretty quadrangle was nearly emptied, while, more slowly, Doctor Antomarchi walking by her side, they two moved in the same direction.

Maud did feel a little, indeed a good deal, tired, and this, together with the dispiriting absence of her hostess, and the agitating stories, false she was certain, communicated by her fanciful new friend, the duchess, predisposed her to adopt Antomarchi's advice.

Maud found Mercy Creswell awaiting her in the passage. She ducked a little curtsy, with a face of awe, to Doctor Antomarchi as he passed her; and then told her young mistress that "she had been moved to much more beautifuller rooms."

On reaching them, under Mercy Creswell's guidance, she found that they were next the suite which she had occupied on the night before, but at the near side of that strong door which seemed to form a very marked boundary in the house.

They consisted of four rooms, a bedroom, a dressing-room adjoining it, and a sitting-room beyond that; there was also a narrow room for her maid, with a door of communication with the young lady's room, and another opening on the passage. Nothing could have been devised more charming than the taste in which the rooms, intended for Miss Vernon's use, were furnished and got up. If they had been prepared by some wealthy vassal for the reception of a royal visitor, they could not have been more elegant, and even magnificent. Who could have fancied that these bare, gloomy corridors led to anything so gorgeous and refined? Maud looked round, smiling with surprise and pleasure.

"They was only finished this morning, miss," said Mercy, also turning round slowly, with a fat smile of complacency, for she participated in the distinction.

"Was all this done for me?" Maud inquired at last.

"Every bit, miss," rejoined her maid.

"How extremely kind! What taste! What beautiful combinations of colour!"

Maud ran on in inexhaustible admiration for some time, examining now, bit by bit, the details of her sitting-room.

"Lady Mardykes will be here tomorrow morning," said Maud, at last; "it really will be a relief to me to thank her. I hardly know what to say."

Her eloquence was interrupted by the arrival of luncheon, served on beautiful china and silver.

When she had had her luncheon, she began to question Mercy about the people whom she had seen in the croquet-ground under the windows.

“Do you know the appearance of the Spanish minister?” she asked.

“Spanish hambassador? Oh! La, yes, miss. Don Ferdnando Tights they calls him in the servants’ hall.”

“What kind of person is he?”

“Well, he’s a quiet creature; there’s no harm in him, only, they say, he is woundy proud.”

“That is pretty plain. And the Duchess of Falconbury? She was talking to me a good deal of Lady Mardykes. Are they good friends?”

“Oh! bless you, that’s a troublesome one. Never a good word for no one has she. I would not advise no one that’s here to make a companion of that lass; she has got many a light head into trouble, not that there’s nothing dangerous about her, only this, that she is always atrying to make mischief.”

“That is a good deal, however. Do you mean that she tells untruths?”

“Well, no; I do believe she really half thinks what she says, but her head is always running on mischief, and that’s the sort she is.”

“How do you mean that she has got people into trouble?”

“Well, I mean by putting mischievous thoughts in their heads, you see, and breeding doubt and ill-will.”

“Do you recollect any particular thing she said, of that kind?” asked Maud, curiously.

“Not I, miss. Ho! bless you, miss, she’d talk faster than the river runs, or the mill turns. That’s the sort she is with her airs and her grandeur, fit to burst with pride.”

Miss Vernon was pleased at this testimony to the dubious nature of this great lady’s scandal. A mist, however, not quite comfortable, still remained. She wished very much that she had never heard her stories.

Maud had still a slight flicker of her nervous headache, and was really tired besides, and not sorry of an excuse to spend the rest of the day quietly with her pleasant books and music, for a piano had been placed in her sitting-room, now and then relieved by so much of Mercy Creswell’s gossip as she cared to call for, and, in this way, before she was well aware, the curtain of night descended upon her first day.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE THIEF.

It was past nine o’clock next morning, notwithstanding her resolution to be up and stirring early, when Maud got up.

Lady Mardykes was expected, as we know, to arrive that morning; and Maud peeped often from the window, as she sat at her dressing-table near it.

In her dressing-gown and slippers, she went into the sitting-room on hearing the maid arrive with her breakfast things.

“Can you tell me,” asked Maud, “whether Lady Mardykes has arrived?”

“Please ‘m, is that the lady that is coming from — — “

“No matter where she’s coming from,” interrupted Mercy Creswell, sharply; “it is Lady Mardykes, the lady that came yesterday, and is expected again this morning. She’s a new servant, not a week in the house,” says the femme de chambre to Maud, in a hasty aside. “I think you might know whether her ladyship’s harrived or no,” and she darted at the maid a look black as thunder.

“Yes ‘m, I’m quite new here, please. I don’t half know the ways of the ‘ouse yet. I was ‘ired by — — “

“Don’t you mind who you was ‘ired by. I’ll make out all about it, miss, myself, if you please, just now,” again interposed Mercy.

And before she had time to reflect upon this odd dialogue between the maids, Miss Vernon’s attention was pleasantly engaged by satisfactory evidence on the subject of her inquiry, for she saw Lady Mardykes enter the now quiet croquet-ground from the further side, in company with Antomarchi. Except for these two figures the large quadrangle was deserted.

Antomarchi was speaking earnestly to her; she was looking down upon the walk. The distance was too great to read faces at; but Maud saw Lady Mardykes apply her handkerchief once or twice to her eyes. She was evidently weeping.

Her father had not died. Her dress was as brilliant as good taste would allow, and the morning paper said that there were no longer any grounds for uneasiness about him. Had Maud's eye accidentally lighted on a scene? Was this strange, and as she thought, repulsive man, urging his suit upon this lady over whom he had succeeded, possibly, in establishing a mysterious influence?

Lady Mardykes glanced up suddenly towards this long line of windows, as if suddenly recollecting that she may be observed.

Then she walked with more of her accustomed air; and she and Antomarchi crossing the grass-plot, ascended the broad flight of steps that scale the terrace, at its middle point, exactly opposite to the door in the side of the house, nearly under Maud's window. Through this door they entered the house, and Miss Vernon, for the present, lost sight of them.

On the breakfast table by the Morning Post, where, among other interesting pieces of news, she read: "Lady Mardykes is at present entertaining a distinguished circle of friends at Carsbrook;" and then followed a selection from the names. Her interest more than revived as she read this long list of names, containing so much that was distinguished. There was one omission. The Honourable Charles Marston did not figure with other honourables in the list. But that list was but a selection, and Charles Marston had not yet made his mark in the world, and might easily be omitted, and be at Carsbrook, notwithstanding.

She would not ask Mercy Creswell; for she did not choose Lady Vernon to hear anything that might awake her suspicions. And that reserved and prevaricating femme de chambre had written, she knew, the day before, to Lady Vernon, and considered herself as in *her* employment, and not in Maud's. It behoved her, therefore, to be very much on her guard in talking to that person.

Maud never found Mercy Creswell so slow and clumsy in assisting at her toilet as this morning. There was very little to be done to equip her for her ramble in the croquet-ground; but that little was retarded by so many blunders, that Maud first laughed, and then stared and wondered.

She saw Mercy Creswell frequently look at her big watch, and not until after she had successfully repeated it pretty often, did she perceive that this sly young woman was pointing out to her in the quadrangle below, which was now beginning to fill, persons, and little incidents in succession, which tempted her again and again to look from the window, and delayed her. All this time the femme de chambre, affecting to laugh with her young mistress, and to be highly interested in the doings of the croquet-ground, was plainly thinking with some anxiety of something totally different, and watching the lapse of the minutes whenever she thought she could, unobserved, consult her watch.

Maud looking in the glass, saw her do this, with an anxious face, and then hold it to her ear, doubtful if it were going, time seemed, I suppose, to creep so slowly.

Why was it that this maid, this agent of her mother's, seemed always occupied about something different from what she pretended to be about, and to have always something to conceal?

Another delay arose about the young lady's boots. Her maid had put them out of her hand, she could not for the life of her remember where.

"It seems to me, Mercy, you have made up your mind not to let me out until your watch says I may go; so unless you find them in a minute more, I shall walk out in my slippers."

As the young lady half in jest said this, the great clock of the old house, which is fixed in that side of it that overlooks the croquet-ground, struck eleven. And the clang of its bell seemed to act like magic upon Mercy Creswell, for she instantly found the boots, and in a minute or two more had done all that was required of her, and her young mistress went out, full of excited expectation, and not a little curious to observe more closely the odd relations of confidence and sympathy which seemed to have established themselves between the wealthy lady of Carsbrook and the clever foreign adventurer who had, she fancied, marked her for his own.

The gallery that passes her door is a very long one, and exactly as she entered it from her dressing-room, there emerged from a side-door near the further extremity, to her great surprise, two persons, whom she saw to be Lady Mardykes and Doctor Antomarchi. The lady stepped out quickly; their way lay toward the head of the stairs. They were in low and earnest conversation, and plainly had not seen her.

Lady Mardykes walked with a quick and agitated step, intending, it seemed, to avoid observation. Had it been otherwise, Maud would have run to overtake her. What was she to think?

She would try to keep Lady Mardykes in sight, and when she got downstairs there would be no awkwardness in speaking to her.

Lady Mardykes and Antomarchi had but just appeared, and Maud had hardly made two steps toward them from her door, when Mercy Creswell peeped out.

"Lord! There's her ladyship!" gasped the maid in unaccountable consternation, and with a stamp on the floor she called to her young mistress, still in a suppressed voice, as she tried to catch her dress in her hand. "Come back, miss, you must not follow her ladyship. It's as much as my place is worth if you do."

"What on earth do you mean? What *can* you mean?" said Maud, turning towards her for a moment in astonishment. "I'm going downstairs, I'm going to the croquet-ground. Go back to my room, please, and wait for me there."

The femme de chambre glared on her irresolutely, with her fingertips to her underlip, and the other hand extended in the attitude in which she had grasped with it at the lady's dress. Suddenly she drew back a step, with a look a little demure and frightened, and dropping a short curtsy, she dived back into the room again.

This woman, to whose care Lady Vernon had consigned her toilet, was becoming more and more unaccountable and unpleasant every day. But there were subjects of curiosity that piqued her too nearly to allow the image of Mercy Creswell a place in her thoughts just now.

As she moved along the gallery, she saw the door, through which Lady Mardykes and Antomarchi had just passed, open, and a man's head and part of his figure protruded; it was only for a moment while he dropped a black leather bag at the side of the door next the stairs, and then withdrew, closing but not quite shutting the door; but she had no difficulty in recognising the peculiar countenance of Mr. Darkdale.

As she passed she heard a voice she recognised. It was the same she had heard from the carriage that passed them in the pine-wood on the night of her journey, and which, allowing for the hoarseness produced by shouting, so nearly resembled that of Captain Vivian.

"Imprisoned by Lady Mardykes, you know as well as I, I can't get away, no one ever can from this house: I shall never leave this room alive — — "

These odd words reached her, and the door was shut, as they were rapidly spoken. It was not the voice of an angry man. It was spoken in a tone of utter despondency. Some people, however, have an exaggerated way of talking; and this was not worth a great deal.

Maud knew her way to the great staircase perfectly now. As she went down she met the Duchess of Falconbury coming up. This great lady was dressed, as usual, in very elegant taste, and looked quite charming. She stopped at the landing where she met Maud.

“So I have found my friend at last. Come to my arms, my long lost swain!” she exclaimed, and smiling placed her arms about her neck and kissed her, before Maud had well time to be even astonished. The duchess laughed a little silvery laugh. “I really began to fear I was never to see you again, and I have so much to tell you. So much *more*,” she whispered, “and you don’t know what it is to have a confidence to make, and no one with either honour or sympathy to hear it; and that was my sad case, until I met you. I forgot my watch in its case on my dressing-table. I don’t mind sending; I go myself. I lock up everything,” she said in a still lower whisper, and held up a little ormolu key, and she added significantly, “you had better do so, while you remain here. I used to lose something or other every day till I took that precaution; they steal all my penknives and scissors. Where are you going now?”

“I’m trying to find a friend.” (She did not care to mention Lady Mardykes particularly, as her name might easily set the duchess off upon one of her “hominies,” as they call such stories in the north country.) “I think I shall have no difficulty in finding her.”

“And *then?* Where shall I look for you?”

“I suppose I shall go where every one seems to go, here, to the croquet-ground.”

“Yes — the croquet-ground, that will do very nicely, and I will meet you there.”

She nodded, and smiled over her shoulder as she ran up the stairs, and Maud ran down, in hopes of recovering Lady Mardykes’s track, but, for the time, she had effectually lost sight of her.

There was no footman at this moment in the hall near the stairs. The servant who was at the hall-door had not seen her. She had probably taken the way to the croquet-ground, the general muster before luncheon.

She made a wrong turn in threading the long passages, and found herself at the door of the odd, oval room in which her interview with Doctor

Antomarchi, on the night of her arrival, had taken place.

The door was a little open. It occurred to her that possibly Lady Mardykes might be there. She tapped at the door. There was no answer; she pushed it more, opened it, and stepped in.

This room had a peculiar character, as I have said. Something sternly official and mysterious. It might be the first audience-chamber, in a series, in the Inquisition. Maud looked about her. She was alone.

On the massive table I have mentioned, near the large desk which stood at one end of it, was spread a square piece of letter-paper, on which were laid, side by side, three trifling toys, of very little collective value, but which at once riveted the attention of Miss Vernon.

She stooped over them; there could be no doubt as to their identity. There was the tiny paper-cutter she had missed, with its one little steel blade in the handle. There were the scissors with the gold mounting of her dressing-case, from which they had been stolen, and there, finally, a little penknife, also stolen from her dressing-case, but which she had not missed. The pretty little penknife had her monogram, M. G. V., upon it. The paper-knife had this, and the device of the Rose and the Key beside; and about the scissors there could be no doubt whatever. If there had been any it would have been removed by a memorandum written in a clear, masculine hand, upon the sheet of paper on which they lay.

It was simply these words:

Septm. — th, 1864.
Miss Vernon.
Roydon Hall.
See K. L. L., vol iii., folio 378.
Three articles; *viz.* scissors, paper-cutter, penknife.
Questionable.

“Questionable! What can he mean? Is this a piece of insolence of that foreigner, about whom Lady Mardykes appears infatuated? Questionable? What on earth can he mean or suspect?”

Her first impulse was to seize her own property, and the paper, and bring the whole thing before Lady Mardykes. But her more dignified instincts told her differently. She would leave these stolen trifles where they were, and mention the discovery, perhaps, after consultation with her cousin Maximilla, whom she was sure to see in a day or two.

Maud turned about now, and walked out of the door, almost hoping to meet Doctor Antomarchi. She did not; for he returned through another door, and too late discovered his oversight. But he little suspected that Miss Vernon had herself visited the room, and by a perverse accident had seen and recognised her missing property. He glanced jealously round the room, with eyes that, whenever he was roused, became wild and burning.

“Strange forgetfulness! But nothing has been stirred. That dear Lady Mardykes, she is so excitable! One can’t avoid being disturbed.”

He shut the door sharply, opened a large cabinet, and popped these trophies of larceny into one of a multitude of pigeon-holes.

“What will Damian say? What will Damian think? He’s past the age of thinking against a hard head like this,” and he tapped his square forehead with his pencil-case, smiling and musing.

CHAPTER LXIX.

A RIOT.

In the mean time, Maud had reached the steps of the door which opens on the terrace-walk of the quadrangle; and from that elevation she made a survey of the ground.

This fruitless pursuit of her hostess was beginning to grow ridiculous; she would have laughed, I dare say, if she had not been also very near crying. For her comprehensive survey was unrewarded by a sight of Lady Mardykes; and here was she already in the third day of her visit, without having yet exchanged a word with her hostess, or having been introduced to a single person; and were it not for the absurdly magnificent proofs of Lady Mardykes's very marked attention to her comforts and luxuries, displayed in the number of rooms assigned to her use, and the exquisite taste in which they were furnished, she would have begun to suspect that Lady Mardykes had quite forgotten that she had ever invited her to Carsbrook. Occupied, somewhat uncomfortably, with these thoughts, Maud wandered across the croquet-ground, and up and down some of the shady alleys which lie beyond it. But her search was fruitless. Lady Mardykes was nowhere to be found.

So Maud, disappointed and a little offended, returned with a slower step to the place from whence she came, wondering whether she was ever to meet Lady Mardykes again.

Her guests certainly did not seem to trouble her a great deal and, so far as Maud could see, she was pleased to leave them very much to amuse and take care of themselves. Well, it was disappointing; but, after all, Lady Mardykes was sure to be home for luncheon, possibly an hour before it. In the mean time, other people might introduce themselves, as had happened yesterday, and so her acquaintance might grow.

Her anticipations were quickly justified, for as she was walking down, by this time pretty well resigned to her disappointment, toward the yew-hedge walk, a singular-looking person accosted her.

He was almost a pigmy in stature, and his air was ineffably pompous; his face was long and pallid, with a turn-up nose, and he wore an expression of conceit and scorn as he eyed passers-by, such as Miss Vernon could not have believed in except perhaps in the caricature of a pantomime. He walked slowly, rising on his toes as he did so, and carried a big portfolio and a small shagreen case under his arm, and a quadrant strapped across his back. To Miss Vernon he made a slight bow and a smile, so transitory that it amounted to little more than a momentary grimace, the effect of which was rather odd than alluring.

His long chin terminated in a lank white beard, unaccompanied by either whisker or moustache. A solemn gloom overspread his countenance, and an habitual look of surprise made his small eyes round, except when a smirk of contempt or of self-esteem lighted his face.

It seemed to be the rule in this house not to wait for introduction. The appearance of this dwarfish sage aroused Miss Vernon's curiosity, and she was rather glad that she had so quickly found some one willing to entertain her.

"You have heard, madam," said he, walking at her side, "of Laplace, of Newton, you have heard of Watt, you have heard of Davy. I see, by your head and eye, that you have an intellect and an interest for the physical sciences, and, I need scarcely add, you have heard of Sidebotham, and the perpetuum mobile. He is at present a guest at this place, and of course he comes and goes as he pleases."

"Oh? Indeed!" said Miss Vernon, affecting a greater interest in the worthies of science than perhaps she felt, and ashamed to admit that she had never before heard of Sidebotham in that brilliant muster-roll. "Lady Mardykes has so many distinguished guests that one is scarcely surprised to meet any great name among them."

He simpered with gratified self-complacency and made his bow, and in an instant was more solemn than ever.

"The individual who has the honour of addressing you," he continued, "is Sidebotham, the mechanist, the mechanical genius of this, and *all* ages, as I have had the honour of being termed."

At this moment a sweet voice inquired:

"Well, Mr. Sidebotham, how goes on the perpetual motion?"

And raising her eyes, Maud saw the Duchess of Falconbury before her, smiling.

"That is a question that answers itself," said the professor, slowly averting his face with upturned nose and a sublime sneer. "How goes on the perpetuum mobile? Why it goes *on for ever?* Ha, ha, ha!"

And he laughed, as demons do in melodramas, in three distinct "Ha's."

Her grace was not in the least ruffled, for her attention was engaged by a melancholy but gentlemanlike looking man who was approaching.

"You see that man," whispered the duchess in Maud's ear; her eyes looking down the shady walk, which they had now entered.

"The Spanish ambassador?" inquired Maud, who saw that minister, in the antique costume which he affected, approaching with toes turned out, at a slow and grand pace, in the rear of the melancholy man.

"Ambassador! He's *no* ambassador, my dear; he has lost his head a little; he's a Mr. Ap-Jenkins, who has a slate quarry in Carnarvonshire; but it is not about him. You see this man in black who walks towards us, looking down on the gravel over his shoulder. Did you ever see such a comically miserable face? When he comes up we'll talk to him; he'll amuse you."

Maud thought that such pining misery and malignity as were expressed in that dark face, could not have been conveyed in the human countenance.

The duchess said, as he was passing by, unheeding:

"I hope, Mr. Poinders, you find that boiling sensation a little better to-day?"

"*Sensation?*" he repeated, stopping suddenly, and raising his dreadful face. "Heat and motion tell pretty plainly, when water, much less blood, is bubbling at a boil? No, not better, *worse.* My blood boils; as yesterday, so to-day, and so for ever and ever, amen!"

"I'm so sorry," said the duchess, pressing her hand ever so little on Maud's arm, by way of showing her enjoyment of what was passing.

The sufferer, about to resume his walk, added:

"And I am subject, to-day, to violent shocks of electricity."

He ground his teeth, and muttered to himself, and so passed on. The duchess was laughing quietly, as she turned again to Maud, who was anything but amused; she was very much shocked, on the contrary.

"The poor man is perfectly mad," whispered the duchess.

Miss Vernon felt a hand laid softly on her shoulder, before she could speak; and looking round, saw that frightful face.

He said rapidly, with his eyes close to hers:

"I am beyond the hope of salvation!"

And he turned and pursued his slow, solitary walk through the valley of the shadow of death. What on earth could induce Lady Mardykes to permit a madman to walk about these grounds? A filmy suspicion was stealing over Maud, too terrific for utterance.

The Spanish ambassador, in full fig, arrived. There was an opening just here in the yew-hedge, and a low hedge of sweetbriar, running for some yards, at the edge of the walk, made the air at this spot fragrant.

His excellency, the Spanish minister, having arrived, the little party came to a halt, here commanding a view of the house and the croquet-ground, as well as one of the long and sequestered alleys in both directions.

The minister made his kinglike greeting. They were standing on the grass, that with a broad belt skirts the walk; the croquet-ground before them, the little sweetbriar hedge in the rear.

His excellency, notwithstanding the sultry weather, wears, as before, the skirt of his black mantle flung across his breast, over his shoulder. He is speaking loud, throwing his chest well out; his head is thrown back, his dark eyes half-closed. His clear brown complexion and black moustache, white, even teeth, and handsome features, lend a cavalier-like grace to the contemptuous smile with which he surveys the pigmy of perpetual motion, and flouts him with a lofty irony.

The dialogue grows a little more spirited, as the ambassador with folded arms persists in his lofty vein of banter. The homunculus becomes more fiercely voluble on his perpetual motion, and treats his excellency with a good deal less ceremony than he likes. Both parties are waxing fiery.

"Mechanic! perpetuum mobile! Professor! Philosopher!" said his excellency, smiling on, and quite closing his eyes for a short time. "A great European name. Sidebotham and Co., grocers, Cheapside. Why, no one who lives near you can fail to discover the perpetual motion. It exists in your tongue, ha, ha! your tongue — it is nowhere else about you — and it never ceases."

The sage gasped; sprang back two or three steps; and rose, as usual, to his toes, with his fists clenched, trembling all over, his teeth set, and his eyes starting from their sockets.

"You have no business talking so," said the duchess, haughtily, "if we spare you all inquiry into the authenticity of your diploma, or whatever you please to call it, I think you might, at least, remember what is due to rank; you can hardly suppose that it can be an agreeable pastime to the Duchess of Falconbury to witness a low quarrel between two such persons as Mr. Sidebotham and Mr. Ap-Jenkins."

But the minister, nothing moved from his faith in his own representative dignity, smiled superbly, with folded arms, his black cane, tipped with its golden crown, held gracefully in his French-gloved hand, and with his chin high in air, he observed, in a tone of cold ridicule:

"Duchess of Falconbury! Ha! Ha! ha! How charmingly that comes from the lips of Mrs. Fish, of New York!"

And he made the lady a satirically ceremonious bow.

The eyes of the duchess gleamed actual fire; her face, her very lips grew white. She stood open-lipped and breathless. It was hard to say whether the great lady or the pigmy was most furiously agitated.

To the latter his excellency turned again with a haughty wave of his white-gloved hand, and observed:

"As for you, you illiterate dwarf and grocer, I shall order my secretary to take you by the cocked-nose, and jerk you over that wall, like one of your own bad red-herrings."

The lady uttered a sudden scream of fury, and the philosopher jumped in the air, and slapped his forehead, with a roulade of blasphemies, yelling still more shrilly, "Let *me* — let *me* — I'll annihilate him! I'll *annihilate* him!" and they rushed nearly together upon his excellency the Spanish ambassador, who smiled in haughty scorn, as well he might, of such an attack.

The homunculus, strung to double his natural strength by fury, was first to reach the object of assault, and grasping the Goliath in his arms below the knees, and, nothing daunted by the untoward interference of his own quadrant, which, in the feat, swung over his head, and hit him a smart blow over the nose, lifted the minister fairly off his feet; and this superb personage, in spite of a frantic effort to recover his equilibrium, fell backward, with an undignified souse, and a grunt, through the tangled hedge of sweetbriar, so that half his person lay on the grass, at the other side, and his shapely legs were struggling wildly for escape, at this.

With the acumen and promptitude of her sex, the enraged duchess caught up the jet-black cane with its head of gold, that had flown from his hand, and with immense rapidity discharged a shower of whistling cuts, right and left, on the silken calves of the ambassador, who kicked right and left, shrieking horrible threats and wild appeals to his sovereign, to heaven, to the laws of nations, to his servants, in the vain endeavour to struggle through the thick fence, while the professor of mechanics, who had transferred himself to the other side, seized his hair and moustache in both hands, and with his heels against his shoulders, tugged as hard as if it had been to tear his last beefsteak from the jaws of a tiger. The ambassador was roaring "murder" by this time, and the shrieks and gabble of the executioners rose horribly over his roars of panic, while his mouth was dragged upward at the corners by the moustache into a monstrous caricature of a smile.

The uproar, wilder and fiercer, alarmed the loungers and the croquet players. Mallets were dropped and balls abandoned. Some whooped and threw up their hats in saturnine ferocity. Others broke into screeching laughter. A frightful and contagious excitement ran swiftly through the strange throng.

At this moment, however, several strong, grave-looking men, who acted unobserved as a patrol in those pleasure-grounds, came running up at the top of their speed to quell the outbreak.

Professor Sidebotham let go the moustache and dropped the ambassador's head on the ground, as an Irishman would say, like a hot potato; rearranged his quadrant and recovered his hat, concealed his bleeding nose with one hand, and affected to be a sedate professor and an ornament to society, and highly to disapprove of the mysterious riot.

Not so the duchess. She had tasted blood, and plied the supple cane with shrieks and Billingsgate, resolutely, and even ferociously, resisting all interference. She turned now upon the men who had caught her wrists and disarmed her; she scratched, she stamped, she kicked, she bit.

Darkdale emerged from the house in the midst of this struggle. He had a strange, short garment in his hand with enormously long sleeves. The duchess seemed to recognise this, for at sight of it she redoubled her struggles, she became quite furious. By a kind of magic, in spite of all, without violence, by a sinister dexterity, Darkdale with the aid of the other men got it on her. The arms were drawn across her breast, and the long sleeves crossed and tied behind, so that no force or skill which she could exert could in the least avail to extricate her.

All her struggles could effect nothing. She was quietly and completely overpowered and hurried, now uttering long despairing screams, but no longer offering active resistance, swiftly across the grass to the terrace, and so disappeared into the door through which she had lately emerged in so different a mood.

“What is that you have just put upon that lady?” Maud, who was horribly agitated, inquired of a broad-shouldered, dark-faced man in a short fustian-coat. He looked at her silently for a minute, and smiled cynically.

“It is a thing we calls a strait-waistcoat,” he answered.

“But that is for people who are quite *mad*,” said Maud.

“Well, I take it,” he replied, “you don’t want to see no one madder than that.”

CHAPTER LXX.

CAGED.

It seemed to Maud Vernon that she did not breathe once, from the time she left the scene of the too significant buffoonery she had just witnessed, until she found herself, she could not tell how, in her own dressing-room.

It seemed as if she awoke there.

She saw Mercy Creswell standing with her back against the wall, pale as a ghost, with a dark stare, and the corners of her mouth screwed down hard as she gazed at her. She looked scared and guilty, and as if she expected she did not know what; her hands she held folded together as tightly as the joints could clasp, and was as motionless as the wooden door-case behind her, and never took her frightened, watchful eyes off her young mistress.

There was something in the look and mien of the young lady, you may be sure, to account for the panic of the maid.

Miss Vernon sat down trembling, and then got up, pressing her hands to her temples, with a terrible look of helplessness, and she walked round and round the room, with long stifled moans. After a time she stopped, and looked slowly about her.

“My God!” she gasped, “I’m terrified! *Did* it all happen?”

She glided over to the window, and looked out on the gaily dressed and busy crowd, and, with a cry of despairing terror, she covered her eyes with her hands.

Now she is passed swiftly from one room to another, back and forward; and thus she ran toward Mercy Creswell, and standing fixed, like an apparition, before her, cried:

“I see it all; I understand it now! Mercy Creswell, help me to think. Do you know what has happened? My God! they have inveigled me into a madhouse! Oh, you wretch — *you* have led me into a madhouse!” The sentence broke into a shriek at the close.

“Now don’t, Miss Maud, don’t, now; there’s a darling!” cried Mercy Creswell, as quick and shrill as the words could fly from her lips, and with her hands extended towards her. “Ye’ll take a parrokism, ye will, indeed;

indeed ye will; ye'll take a parrokism, if ye don't be quiet; ye will, ye'll have it."

"*You* have done it; and mamma; and Lady Mardykes; and cousin Max. Merciful God! *All* my friends! And cousin Maximilla! There's no one left — I have none to help me! Oh! where shall I hide? Help me to think of something, Mercy Creswell, my old friend; you could not forsake me — you would not. Poor Miss Maud. Oh, think of long ago, at Roydon; if ever you hope for God's forgiveness, get me out of this horrible place."

"It wasn't me, miss, so it wasn't; so 'elp me, miss; 'twas your mamma. I've no more to do with it, as God's my 'ope, than the hinfant babe unborn," protested Mercy Creswell, in a shrilly whine.

"I'll not stay in this dreadful place," cried Maud, "I'll lose my life, or I'll get out of it. Oh! mamma — mamma — how could you — could you — could you? I shall go mad. I *can't* stay here! I'll not eat or drink here; I'll find a way, some way, a short way. Oh, mamma! you'll be sorry, then."

Again she was walking swiftly from room to room. Now up and down the floor of one; now to and fro across the floor of another, shifting her hands across her forehead with an uncertain movement.

"I *can't* be imprisoned here; I'm not a slave. Where is the nearest posting-house? I'll have advice; I'll write to Mr. Coke; that can't be prevented; I'll escape from this house now."

And she ran to the bedroom door. Mercy Creswell knew that it was secured, and running into the dressing-room, she adroitly bolted the door of communication between the two apartments.

Maud now found herself a prisoner in her room. She tried both doors with growing impetuosity, but they resisted her utmost efforts.

Her own maid had locked her in, by a trick, and she was securely imprisoned in her room. This outrage fired her resentment so as, for the moment, to displace her panic.

"Open the door," she cried, shaking the lock with all her strength; "Mercy Creswell, open the door," she repeated again and again; and she heard the creak of the servant's shoe, faintly, as she stood holding her breath, close to the other side of the door.

"Open the door; how dare you treat me so? Am I to be insulted by my own servant? Let me out."

Mercy heard her run to the window, and throw it up. More cadaverous than ever her face looked, as, in a momentary hesitation, she extended her dumpy fingers, that trembled visibly, to the bolt, but she changed her mind, and withdrawing her hand, ran, instead, to the brass handle that was fixed in the wall, pulled it, and a deep-toned bell sounded all down the gallery. She had remembered that the window as it went up, drew with it a strong wire grating, which made it safe against all attempts at escape, or worse.

She stood on the gallery, and almost instantly two of those firmly-knit, hardy women, whom we may call housemaids, emerged from a room at its further end, which formed a sort of guardroom for the detachment in charge of that wing of the house, and up they came at a jog-trot; and almost at the same instant, for the alarm sounded also in the opposite direction, the iron door across the passage opened, and a keeper, a powerful man, in barragan jacket, with a white scar across his brown forehead and nose, telling of old service, entered, clanging the door behind him. Beckoning them on, and waiting till they were ready to enter, Mercy unlocked the door of Maud's room, keeping herself in the rear.

"Who are you?" asked Maud, who was standing now in the middle of the room; "I have been led to suppose, this is my room. What do you all want here?"

The man stepped in.

"By your leave, miss," said he, looking with his shrewd quick glance at her hands, and then, with another, about the room; and then striding to the window, and shutting it down, he turned some little pins at the side, and said to Mercy: "You should 'a fixed the window."

"There's the grating, though."

"No matter," he replied.

"What do you mean by shutting my window without my leave?" inquired Maud, with a fiery glance.

The man took no notice of the question, but asked Mercy Creswell:

"Is there fire-irons, or anything hard and heavy, that way, here?"

"No, nothing," answered she.

"But I asked you — — " repeated Maud Vernon.

"I'll attend to you just now, miss," said the man. "Nor nothing sharp?" he continued.

"I'll mention your conduct. Who is in the house, to whom I can make a complaint?" said the young lady, who was not accustomed to be treated so by servants.

She had directed her question to Mercy Creswell; but the man answered it, scarcely looking at her, as he did so.

"To the doctor, please, miss, Doctor Antomarchi," and he continued in the same even tone. "You should not 'a left her alone; don't you know this 'ere number's entered questionable? Mr. Darkdale will put another with you if you want her. Look here."

And he wet his thumb in his mouth, and turned over the leaves of a little book rapidly, and showed her something inscribed upon a page.

"Well I *would* like another in call. She could sit in the next room, d'ye see; I'm not fit alone," said Mercy Creswell, with nervous earnestness.

"I'll not remain here, I shan't stay, I'll go," said Maud, going to the wardrobe and pulling the drawers open, and beginning to place her things upon the table close by.

"And ye shouldn't leave a thing like that here," said the man, with a frown and a wag of his head, availing himself of Maud's having gone to a distant part of the room, and taking in his hand the silk cord of her dressing-gown, which lay on the back of a chair close by. "You might 'a remembered Miss Bangles, it ain't so long ago. Is there any more bits of cord about?"

"No, not one."

"Tell some one to order me a chaise from the nearest place, as soon as possible, or go and order it yourself," said Maud to the man.

"But I can't, miss; none of us, without the doctor's orders."

"Then I'll go on foot, I'll go this moment. Tell him I've left."

The man looked away with a sheepish smile, amused, and cleared his voice, and then looked grave.

"It won't do, miss; you can't go out without the doctor's order, and you must make your mind 'appy; for you can no more go out o' this house, without it was allowed, than you could walk through a wall. But it is easy for you, miss, to talk to the doctor, and tell him what ye wants, and if you persuades him, it will be all right, you know; and he's a reasonable gentleman; and anyhow, it can't do no one no harm."

Maud walked about the room, agitated.

"Very good," she said at last, "tell him I should like to see him."

CHAPTER LXXI.

MAUD AND ANTOMARCHI UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.

Nearly ten minutes had passed, and Maud was sitting in her room, in profound gloom, almost a stupor; without motion; with her eyes upon the floor.

Mercy Creswell, unable to divine what her thoughts might be, was only a few steps away, standing against the wall, with her arms folded across, and her eyes turned, with a nervous side-glance on the young lady.

In the room beyond that, sat one of the athletic housemaids, who could have lifted Maud on her feet and carried her about the house, as easily as her hat and jacket.

At this, the sitting-room door, now came a knock.

Doctor Antomarchi was there; Maud was on her feet in a moment.

This doctor had the peculiar marble skin which is ascribed to the first Napoleon. Dark and colourless, his strongly pronounced underjaw, and thin lips, his delicate black eyebrows, and piercing, cold eyes, gave a character of severity and decision to his massive face, which inspired fear in all who were subjected to his authority.

Some little sensation of this kind modified Miss Vernon's agitated feelings as he entered the room, and made his bow of ceremony, in obedience to her summons.

"Oh, Doctor Antomarchi!" she said, calmly, "I will try to tell you how I have been duped. I came here under the persuasion that I was on my way to Carsbrook, Lady Mardykes's house. I find that I have been horribly deceived. I am a prisoner, and I can't escape. I am here, helpless, in the most awful place a mortal can be committed to — a madhouse. I have not a single friend or adviser to turn to in this great danger. I am utterly alone. I have been brought up in a very lonely way, in the country, and I don't know much of the ways of the world, or what I ought to do in this dreadful case. May God help me!" Her lip trembled. "You, sir, can have no wish to keep me here, if I am perfectly in my right mind; and, as God is my hope, I am not mad, nor ever was supposed to be! My good cousin, Maximilla

Medwyn, when I write to her, will come and tell you so. And you, I have heard, are learned, and clever, and can easily decide whether I tell you truth; and if you find that I am what I describe, you will set me at liberty."

"What you say is reasonable," replied Antomarchi, not one muscle of whose stern face had evinced a sign of life during Maud's appeal, and whose dark grey eye had shown neither light nor softening. "Shall I say a word in private?" he added, glancing at the servant.

"Do — pray."

He signed to Mercy Creswell to leave the room, which she did.

He then in a low tone, with an air of very marked deference, said:

"Your request is grounded on a supposition, which, if sustained by proof, would insure its being instantly granted. All you say is quite fair. As to the fact on which you rely, however, it is, I regret to say, more than disputed in the papers which have been placed before us; and while you remain here, which may be a very short time indeed, I need scarcely say, you shall be treated with the greatest possible consideration, and everything done to make your sojourn as little disagreeable as possible. Would you object, Miss Vernon, to accompany me to my room downstairs. I wish very much, with your permission, to call your attention to a circumstance."

The lady assented. Together they entered the gallery. Doctor Antomarchi took a key from his pocket and opened the iron door, which separated that portion of the long corridor, from which Miss Vernon's rooms opened, from the remainder of the gallery, passing westward.

In the wildest dream, no matter how fantastic the situation and strange the scenery, the dreamer follows the action of his vision with good faith and the sense of incredulity slumbers. But here was a reality strangely horrible as any dream she had ever dreamed. She heard their tread on the boards, she felt the cold smooth bannister on which her hand rested, as they went down the private spiral stair, and it was an effort to think it real.

Now she had arrived. The door was shut. When she had placed herself in one of the great chairs in the oval room, of which she and Doctor Antomarchi were the only tenants, he touched a bell, without speaking, and Mr. Darkdale entered.

Maud wondered what was intended. Antomarchi rose quickly, and two or three steps brought him to Darkdale's side. That slight dark man inclined his ear; and as Antomarchi concluded a few whispered sentences, he nodded, and immediately withdrew.

Maud heard nothing of what passed.

The doctor returned, and sat down at the opposite side of the table.

“I think it desirable to impress upon you, Miss Vernon, two or three facts, which, while here, you will find it very much to your advantage to bear in mind.”

An intimidating change had come over Doctor Antomarchi’s face, and he was speaking in stern, measured accents. His ceremonious manner was quite gone and he was talking as a cold, insolent colonel might to a defaulting drummer-boy on the parade ground.

“The inmates of that part of the house in which apartments are assigned to you, are generally quite competent to understand what I now say. It is my duty to treat you with what skill I possess; it is yours to submit; and submit you shall. I have heard of your language, of your violence, of your covert menace of forcing an escape, or committing self-destruction. Sufficient precautions are taken in this establishment to render that crime impracticable. There are people confined here whose desire to commit suicide never leaves them. They hope for nothing else, they dream of nothing else: they are persistent and crafty, and yet all their persistence, cunning, and wickedness are daily defeated with perfect ease and certainty. Violence, here, leads necessarily to repression; contumacy, in the most trifling particulars, to increased restraint; and angry language, as tending in certain nervous states to produce corresponding action, necessarily to subjection to a treatment that is intensely disagreeable. These, you understand, are not punishments; they are precautions, and processes, though painful, strictly of a sanatory kind. And now, you distinctly comprehend, that neither unmeasured language, nor violence of temper, nor threats of suicide, or of escape, ever fail to bring down on the patient who indulges in them consequences which are deplorable.”

All the time he thus spoke his eyes were fixed on those of the young lady, who felt the power of that indescribable coercion.

Under it thought grew vague, and the power to will became torpid.

“You will be so good, Miss Vernon, as to accompany me a little further,” said Antomarchi, his eye upon her, as he suddenly arose. The young lady, without answering, followed him.

Through a door at the side of this room, a short and narrow passage, tiled and lighted by a window over the door, conducted them to a small but lofty room, also tiled, the arrangements of which were singular.

In the corner of this room rose something that looked like a tall iron press, of some four feet square, which reached or rather seemed to pass through the ceiling. There was no other furniture except two small shelves; and a piece of thick rug lay on the floor.

"You are here, Miss Vernon, merely as a spectator, to witness, in part, the practice to which the refractory are subjected. There is nothing more refreshing than a shower-bath. Taken in the ordinary way it is a luxurious stimulant. You will see what it is when administered in a case of morbidly over-excited energies. This is a powerful shower-bath. The patient upon whom you will see it exercised is a lady whom you have seen not an hour ago. She styles herself the Duchess of Falconbury. You shall see, in her case, how we reduce that unhappy state upon sanatory principles."

Darkdale opened the door and looked in.

"The patient is coming;" and he inquired, "do you wish it *now?*"

"Yes," said Antomarchi.

Maud heard a sound of feet descending the stairs, accompanied by a muffled noise of furious hysterics.

"Your maid, Mercy Creswell, is to attend her," said Antomarchi, coolly. "It will show you that she is a woman of nerve, and can do her duty."

This impertinence did not fire Maud's pride, as an hour or two ago it would. A part of her nature had been reduced to a state of trance.

"You have taken an ordinary shower-bath, I dare say, Miss Vernon, and found it quite long and heavy enough? This, from its greater height, has a fall more than twice as heavy. Yours lasted only a fraction of a minute, this will descend without interruption for exactly thirty-five minutes. Yours, probably, contained between two and three stone weight of water; this will discharge between eight and nine tons. You observe, then, that it is very different from anything you have experienced. Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir," answered Mercy Creswell, who looked a little pale. "How long, please, sir?"

"Thirty-five minutes," said the doctor.

"But please, sir," said Creswell, growing paler, "that is five minutes longer than the longest."

The doctor nodded.

“She never had it before, sir.”

“Better *once* effectually, than half-measures repeatedly,” remarked the doctor to Miss Vernon, with his watch in his hand. “Take the winch,” he said to Mercy Creswell. “When the minute-hand reaches halfpast (keep your eye on the clock), you turn it on; and when it reaches five minutes past, you turn it off. You are ready? Stay — wait — look to the minute-hand — now.”

As the doctor uttered the final direction, at the same instant Mercy Creswell turned the handle, and a rush perceptibly louder and heavier than any heard in those toys of luxury, which don’t deserve the name of shower-bath in sight of these titanic appliances.

The cries and shrieks of the unfortunate patient are soon hushed. No sound is heard in that torture-room but the ceaseless, thundering fall of the water, and the loud ticking of the clock as it slowly tells off the allotted time.

At length the dreadful half-hour has passed. Five minutes remain — the hand is measuring the last minute. Antomarchi’s eye is on the second-hand of his watch — the last second is touched. “Stop,” cries his loud voice, and the winch is turned.

The noise of the falling water has ceased. The door is open, the room is as still as the dead-house of an hospital, where no one comes to claim the dead outcast. A great silence has come. In a whisper Mercy directs the women, who obey in silence.

The “patient” is lifted out, and placed on a chair in the midst of the room. She looks lifeless. Her long dark hair clings about her shoulders. Her arms hang helplessly and the water streams over her, over her hair, over her closed eyes, in rivulets; over her pretty face that looks in a sad sleep; over her lace and vanities; over her white slender hands that hang by her sides, and over her rings, making little rills and pools along the tiles.

There must be the agonies of drowning in all this; worse than common drowning, drowning by a slower suffocation and with a protracted consciousness.

And now there is the greater agony of recovery.

The doctor had returned to the side of the poor duchess, who was now breathing, or rather sighing, heavily, and staring vaguely before her.

His fingers were again on her pulse.

“Give her the white mixture,” he said to Mercy Creswell, glancing at a phial which stands beside a cup on a table a little way off.

“Oh sir, please, doctor, not this time, sir,” faltered Mercy Creswell. “She eat no breakfast, I hear, sir, and she’ll be very bad for hours after she takes the mixture.”

“Shake it first; pour it into the cup; and administer it to the patient. Do your duty, Creswell.”

She shook the bottle, poured its contents into the cup, and, with a frightened face, did as she was ordered.

Antomarchi said to Darkdale: “The patient may go now. You will show them Mrs. Fish’s new rooms. Creswell, you are not to accompany her. You attend Miss Vernon now as before. Miss Vernon, you can return to your rooms.”

He made her a bow, and in a moment more Maud and her femme de chambre had left the room.

“Miss Vernon, a spirited young lady,” mused Antomarchi. “She has had her first lesson.”

CHAPTER LXXII.

QUESTION AND ANSWER.

It is well when, even in afterlife, we can see that our sufferings have made us better — that God has purged the tree, and not cursed it — that the fire from heaven has purified, and not left all barren, for ever, like the Dead Sea plain.

This awful time in Maud's life will do a good work in her. Her character has suffered from the coldness of her mother, from occasional periods of parental caprice and coercion, and from long intervals of the indulgence of absolute neglect. God has found her a time and a place in which to think upon Him, and on herself. These awful days, if they lead her to see and to amend her faults, will not have passed in vain.

For four-and-twenty hours Maud never opened her lips to speak one word to Mercy Creswell. But the quarrel of the two sailors in the lighthouse would not do here; and a little reflection tells Maud that Mercy Creswell, after all, has acted in this affair under orders, and in good faith, believing all representations made to her by so great and good a woman as Lady Vernon, and walking honestly in such light as she had. These silent relations would not be long endurable to Maud herself; and her anger against Mercy Creswell was not altogether reasonable.

I do not wonder, therefore, that before the evening of the next day Maud was on speaking terms again with her maid. The situation was now distinctly before her mind; but hope, irrepressible, began to revive.

"Do you know, Mercy," asked the young lady, after they had talked a little, and a short silence had intervened, during which she was in deep thought, "upon what subject they say I am mad?"

"I don't know, indeed, miss; I don't know at all. Only Lady Vernon told me the doctors said so; and she had no doubt of it herself." Mercy Creswell was speaking now without the preliminary hesitation which gave, while Maud was still in the dark as to the nature of the real relations in which they stood, and of the house of which she was an inmate, an air of reserve and prevarication to all her answers. "But, miss, it mayn't last no time. There was a lady sent away from here last week, quite right again, as had bin here only two months."

"But is there nothing? Why were my scissors and penknives taken away? And the breakfast knives are silver, like dessert knives?"

"Oh, yes, miss! Yes, to be sure. It was said you threatened, different times, to take away your life, miss. That was the reason."

Another silence followed.

"Every girl, when she's vexed, wishes herself dead. But she does not mean it. I never had a thought of suicide all the time I was at home — *never*, at *any* time. I am foolish and violent sometimes; but I am not wicked. Mercy Creswell, do you care about me?"

"La! miss, I like ye well, miss, and always did."

"Do people listen at the doors, here?" she said, lowering her voice.

"Not they, miss; they have no time — too busy — they don't care, not a jackstraw, what you're talking about, and if anything goes wrong there's the bell at hand. *That* will bring hands enough in no time."

"For how long have you been here?" asked Maud.

"It will be five years next November, miss."

"Then you can't be mistaken about anything here," mused Maud. "You must know all their rules —— I wonder, Mercy, whether you care for me?"

"Yes, surely, miss," she answered.

Maud was silent again, looking at Mercy thoughtfully.

"You were very young, Mercy, and I only a child, when we were together in Roydon nursery; but — I'm afraid — you have no affection for me."

"Why will ye say that, Miss Maud; don't you know I always liked ye well? Affection! well, miss, I think 'twould be less than kind in me if I hadn't."

Maud looked again thoughtfully at Mercy Creswell, and then on the ground, and then raising her eyes, she said:

"Do they often inflict that dreadful punishment that I witnessed yesterday?"

"The bath, ma'am? La! You wouldn't call that a punishment. There's nothing Doctor Antomarchi is more paticlar about than that — not one of us here dar' call it a punishment."

"Well, half-drowning, or whole-drowning, as it may turn out, is that *often* inflicted in this place?"

"Well, Mr. Damian would not allow it, perhaps, twice in a year; when he's at home, and then only ten or twelve minutes, and no white mixture. But Doctor Antomarchi, he'd be harder on them — he's a man that won't stand no nonsense from *no* one." Mercy nodded with a dark significance at Maud as she said this. "He won't spare neither high nor low. He may do as he pleases. La! no one ever minds what a patient says. The doctor has only to smile and shake his head, and whisper a word in the ear of father, or mother, or brother, or whoever comes to see that the patient is comfortable, and all his grumbling and complaints, they're just took for so much dreams, and nothings, and no one never believed but the doctor."

"It is very bad — it is horrible," and poor Maud shuddered.

There was another silence, and then Maud asked:

"Has Lady Mardykes sold her place? Is this Carsbrook?"

"La! no, miss; this is Glarewoods, Mr. Damian's asylum. It is like Carsbrook in a way, and it's not like it. They are both black and white houses. But Carsbrook is a beautiful house; not so big as this great barracks, but you never saw a prettier. There's nothing in this to look at, without they fits up two or three rooms special like these was done for you. It is a bare-looking place, and furnished very plain; but Carsbrook is beautiful all through. It is too grand almost. You'd say 'tis a pity to walk on the carpets, or sit on the chairs."

"But — but it was described to me exactly like this. The croquet-ground, and everything."

"Yes, it has a croquet-ground, with a hedge round it; but it is shaped different; round at the corners; and it lies to t'other side of the house."

"And the flower-garden round it," says Maud, still a little bewildered.

"Ay, the flower-knots; yes, they was laid out by the same man as settled them that's at Carsbrook. But as for all the rest, if you was to see the two places, you would not think there was two things about 'em alike; no more there ain't."

"Glarewoods — I think I have heard it mentioned — and Mr. Damian's name — — "

"He's a hard man in some things, miss. But 'twould be well if all was like him," she added, with a dark little nod.

She had already told Maud of his absence, and the uncertainty respecting the time of his return.

A time of great mental agony, however measured by clock or calendar, is a time of great duration. The moment when her terrific discovery broke upon her, seemed now a long way off. The period of violent agitation was over; and a gloomy, calculating listlessness had come instead. Almost without effort of her own, everything, in turn, that promised a chance of liberation, revolved in her mind, hovered there a little, and gave place to some new hope, or thought, call it which you will.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

There was another silence now, and Maud got up, and walked slowly about the room. At the piano, which she had not touched for two days, she lingered for a little, and now with one hand she softly struck a chord or two, as she went on thinking.

"I certainly saw Lady Mardykes here. There could be no deception, at least, about that. Does she know that I am here?"

"No, miss; I'm sure she don't."

"Why do you suppose that?"

"Well, miss, ye won't say a word if I tells you — if you *do*, it might be the worse for me."

"Certainly, not a word," promised Maud, whose curiosity was excited.

"Well, miss, Doctor Antomarchi told me you wasn't to get into the croquet-ground, nor out of your own room, yesterday morning, till after Lady Mardykes was gone, and he told me the minute to keep ye to, and I did; and something more, and so I did; but after all, ye was as near meeting — la! but ye was — as ever two was, in the gallery!"

"Perhaps she knew, but did not herself wish to see me?" ruminated Maud.

"'No, not a bit, she's not that way, no, she's very goodnatured. She came all the way from Carsbrook the morning after you came, and yesterday, only to see about that poor young man, Mr. Vivian Mardykes, her husband's nephew. 'Twas him, on his way here, as overtook us near Torvey's Cross. 'Twas a very sad thing. He went mad after a fall from his horse out a-hunting; and he was promised in marriage to a young lady near Oxford; and he thinks, poor fella, he's a capting in the army! La, but it is funny, poor lad! And he hates the name of Mardykes and won't call himself nothing but Vivian, Capting Vivian! and Lady Mardykes took it to heart, awful. He got well again, very near, for awhile, and he took bad after, and had to come back, as you saw. And, to-day, they say, he's very bad — some inflammation that may kill him — and goodness knows 'twould be a mercy he was took."

“Whose funeral was that I saw from my window the first night I slept here?”

“That was Lord Corrington’s second son; I believe he drank, poor man; he grew paralytic; a’ deal on ‘em goes off that way.”

“It was you,” said Maud, suddenly, after another pause, “who took away my penknives and scissors.”

“Well, it *was*, miss,” said Mercy, brazening it out with sullen resolution. “I must do as I am ordered; and I *will*, and there’s the whole story out.”

“How could you tell me all the untruths you did, about that and other things?”

“La, miss! if you was in my place you’d do the same. We must humour patients, or we could not get on, no time.”

“Patients! And you really think me mad?”

“I’m not fit to judge, miss; ’tis for wiser heads than me.’’

A longer silence than before ensued; Maud was thinking, as she leaned her head lightly on her hand.

It was a horrible thought that even her companion had no faith in her sanity; horrible too, that her own word went for nothing. How can she prove that she is *not* mad? Prove a negative! A dreadful excitement streams up to her brain, gush after gush. The small vigilant eyes of Mercy Creswell watched her with a restless, sidelong scrutiny.

“Fetch me a glass of water,” said Maud, and sipped some. “Give me the eau-de-cologne,” she said, and bathed her temples and forehead.

For a good while there was silence, and Mercy Creswell stood, as before, eyeing her young mistress.

Maud sighed and looked at her, and seemed on the point of saying something that lay near her heart, but changed her mind.

“Will Lady Mardykes be here again soon?” she asked, instead.

“I told Mr. Darkdale to ask, on account of you, miss, for I did not want to get into trouble unawares; and he told me she might not come for another month, or more, for the doctor promised to write to her, telling how Mr. Vivian Mardykes is getting along.”

Maud looked down again, and sighed. There was another silence. Then, she raised her eyes, and looked for a time earnestly at her humble companion; and once more she asked her oft-repeated question:

“Mercy, do you really care about me?”

"Why, miss, you knows I do. 'Twould be a queer thing if I didn't, sure. I always liked you, Miss Maud; I always did, indeed."

"If you care for me ever so little," said Maud, suddenly standing before her, with her hand on her shoulder, and looking hard in her face, with dark eyes, now dilated and stern, with the earnestness of horror, "you will help me, Mercy, to escape from this place."

"Escape, miss!" exclaimed Mercy, after she had gaped at her for some seconds, in consternation. "La bless you, miss, all the wit in fifty heads would not manage that. They're wide awake, and lots of hands and eyes everywhere; and good locks, and safe windows, and high walls, and bell-wires, in a many a place, miss, ye would not suppose, that would ring, almost, if a fly walked over them. There's no chance of getting out that way; and anyhow, I could not have act or part in it, and I *won't*, Miss Maud; and you mustn't never talk that way in my hearing, miss, for I'm bound to report it, and won't run no risks for nonsense. Ye must not be offended, miss, for I knows a sight better than you do, all about it."

"If you won't aid me in that, at least you will manage to have a letter put in the post for me. I must write to Mr. Coke, my attorney; and to my cousin, Miss Medwyn. I ask for nothing but inquiry. There can be no honest reason for refusing that."

"I'm sorry, miss, to refuse you," said the maid, doggedly; "but the rule is that all letters is subject to inspection— 'subject to inspection' is the words in the order-book, and no letter from a patient to be conveyed to the postoffice, 'conveyed to the postoffice,' mind, 'or by a messenger' — I'm telling ye the very words of the order— 'except by the permission of the principal, or his rapperrasentative' — I'm telling you the very words, miss — 'in the one case, by the postbag of the consulting-room,' and he has the only key of it in the house, 'and in the other, by the messenger of the consulting-room for the day.' Them's the identical words, I could say them in my sleep."

"Then you won't — oh, my God! — you won't; and I have none to help me!"

"I won't do that, miss; no, I won't."

There was a long interval of silence, during which Maud walked distractedly about the room. At last she turned and said gently:

"Well, Mercy, you may, at least, do this — you may write yourself to my cousin, Miss Medwyn, and tell her I am here, and that I implore of her to come and see me without delay."

"No, miss, I can't do that."

"Not for me, in this extremity? It isn't much. Oh! think — think — take pity on me — you could not be so cruel."

"I won't do it for no one, miss. You don't know this 'ouse, miss, like I does. It's no use a-pressing of me. I *won't*, miss; and what's more, I couldn't, if I would. And don't say no more about it, or I must report it to the doctor."

Mercy delivered this speech with a flushed face, and many a wag of her head, looking straight at the wall, and not at Maud.

"I'll tell you what, miss, if you be as you say," resumed Mercy, after an interval, "and has nothing to signify wrong with you — you'll not be long here. Only you must draw it mild — I mean ye must 'ave patience, and do hevrything accordin' to the rules. Look at that poor foolish Mrs. Fish, jest puttin' herself in a tantarem with that creature Ap-Jenkins; it's jest like puttin' a light to one o' them fireworks; once they takes fire, away they goes, and none to hold 'em till they has the fun out; and now she's out o' this side, beyond the cross-door, among the dangerous 'uns, and much stricter looked after; you'll not see her in the croquet-ground very like for a year to come again."

Not for a year! How frightful that Mercy should assume that she was still to be an inmate of Glarewoods at the end of a year!

Maud had made up her mind not to quarrel with Mercy, and here it required a little effort to avoid it.

It was dismaying to meet this rebuff, where she had begun to hope for sympathy and active aid. What sordid brutality it was!

But already Maud Vernon had grown more tolerant. In this strange seclusion she had learned more of human nature, and had her sense of superiority more humbled, in two or three days, than in all her life before.

"Service is no inheritance, miss, as I've often heard say, and if *I* don't look to myself, who will? You know, miss, 'twould never do to get the sack from here, and not know where to turn to. But if ye'll jest have patience, and don't get into no rows, nor refuse your meals, nor your walking and driving, or whatever's ordered for you, nor never sulk, noways, about nothing, you'll not be long till something turns up. Why should the doctor want to keep you here, miss, a day longer than is fit? There's never a room empty in this house; and one customer's money is as good as another's; so don't you think or imagine, if you're not a case for Glarewoods, you'll be here any time to speak of, and when you're on the convalescent list you'll have more liberty, and ye'll be allowed to write to your friends. Only don't ye mar all by nonsense. If you're ever so well in your wits, you'll drive yourself out of them, so sure as ye take to moping, and sulking, and roaring, and raving. 'Tis best to be quiet, and orderly, and cheerful, and happy, and that's my advice to you, miss; be always pleasant, while you stays at Glarewoods."

CHAPTER LXXIV.

A FRIEND'S FACE. — A MENACE.

It was only about three days after this that Maud, having gone down for her accustomed walk in the croquet-ground, had a rather agitating adventure.

On the ground floor the passages are a little complicated; and Maud, whose thoughts were, as often happened now, far away, missed the turn which would have led her direct to the terrace-door, and entered the passage that terminates in one of the doors of Doctor Antomarchi's oval-room of audience.

The passage is pretty long, and the door into Antomarchi's room is at the further end of it.

That door was now open. Doctor Antomarchi was standing at the table, speaking to a lady who had been listening in a chair at the opposite side, and was now rising as it seemed to take her leave. The figure and profile of that lady she distinctly saw. Wild with excitement, she recognised the features, and raising her arms with a shrill scream, cried, "Lady Mardykes!" and rushed toward the door.

What fatality seemed always to blast her hopes of liberation!

As she ran forward she saw Lady Mardykes move a step towards a different door, which happened also to be open at the side of the room, in the evident belief that the voice proceeded from that direction; and at the same moment the picture was hidden. Before Maud could reach it the door shut. Against its thick panelling she rushed; she beat it with her hands, she cried wildly again and again: "It is I, Maud Vernon; hear me, take me, save me, Lady Mardykes, for God's sake don't go!"

It was vain; there was no answer, not a sound from within. They had left the room; and Maud ran round the passage to reach the terrace-walk.

But the terrace-door, instead of standing open, as usual at this time of day, had been shut, and without a key she could not open it; she screamed for help; but her piercing appeals rang down the empty corridor, and produced no sign in return.

Half-frantic, she ran round toward the great hall, and had it and the hall-door been unguarded she would have rushed from it in pursuit of her friend, and perhaps have even effected a momentary escape.

But that door was always safely kept. It was protected by a second door, which prevented access to the hall without the aid of the footman's key, who, of course, exercised due caution in using it.

An oval piece of plate-glass enables one to see the hall from inside that door, and availing herself of this, Maud saw Lady Mardykes get into her carriage, take her leave of Antomarchi, and drive rapidly away.

Beating her hands together, with a long cry of agony, Maud witnessed the disappearance of her friend, her last hope, and then she turned, and with her hands over her eyes, cast herself down on the stairs, sobbing as if her heart would burst. She would have liked to die then and there. Why should she live on in that hideous captivity? No other chance would ever come; Mr. Vivian Mardykes was to be removed, that day, to other quarters, and the occasional visits of Lady Mardykes to Glarewoods would totally cease.

The first paroxysm over, Maud dejectedly returned to her room, and without speaking to Mercy Creswell, threw herself on her bed, and wept with her face buried in the pillows.

In a little time a knock came at the dressing-room door. Mercy Creswell, perplexed, and even a little dismayed, went to answer it, and found Mr. Darkdale waiting in the gallery outside. He there made her one of his brief, quiet communications, and departed.

Uncomfortably ruminating, Mercy Creswell returned, and sat down near the bed.

By this time Maud's tears had ceased to flow, and she was lying without motion. Mercy Creswell thought that she had fallen asleep. But it was not so; for hearing a faint sound, she half opened her eyes, and saw Mercy Creswell making a sign to some one at the door.

Turning her eyes in the same direction, she saw two of the sturdy housemaids standing there.

On seeing her looking that way, probably at another sign from Mercy Creswell, they receded a step or two into the dressing-room.

In the apathy of her dejection, Maud did not care to ask why they were there. She turned again and lay still, still sobbing at intervals, although she was no longer weeping.

In a little while she heard a quick, and not a light step, with a creaking boot, cross the floor, and looking up she saw the dreaded face of Doctor Antomarchi, looking sternly down upon her.

"Your pulse, please," he said, extending his hand.

She placed her wrist in his fingers, and in silence he made his trial of its throb. He then placed his fingers on her forehead for a moment.

"Does she complain of headache?"

"No, sir — do you, miss?" answered and inquired Mercy Creswell in a breath.

"No," said Maud, faintly.

"No, sir, she don't."

"Has she been talking violently?"

"No, sir, not a word," Mercy hastened to assure him; "very quiet."

He beckoned her to follow him to the next room, and there he said in tones, which to her terror Maud distinctly heard:

"Report her demeanour and language to Darkdale, who will call at the door every half-hour, and at the end of two hours I shall let you know whether you are to prepare her for the bath."

She heard Mercy ejaculate, in a horrified aside, "Lord grant it mayn't be so!" The energetic tread crossed the dressing-room, the door opened and shut, and for the present Antomarchi was gone.

Maud sat up trembling and weeping.

"Now, miss, do you only be quiet, and I think it won't come to nothing," urged Mercy.

Maud continued to weep in silence. After some time she got up, bathed her eyes and temples in cold water, adjusted her dress, and sat down in the dressing-room to await the result.

Did Antomarchi intend to inflict an atrocious revenge, and did he interpose a two hours' suspense, only to enhance its severity?

She would afford him no pretext or excuse. She sat still, and spoke not a word.

At the end of two hours, Antomarchi reappeared. He again felt her pulse, put a question or two to Mercy Creswell, revolved the answers in his mind for a minute or two, and then announced his resolve.

"She can go on just as usual."

"Thank God!" interpolated Mercy Creswell, in a fervent whisper.

“You keep a strict watch upon her words and demeanour, as before, and report to the man on duty when he passes. Mrs. Macklin will send you one of the women on night-duty to assist. These women remain with you for the present.”

With these words he left the room.

That evening Mercy Creswell, entering the sitting-room where Maud was, made her short curtsy near the door, and with a mysterious air said:

“A message, please, miss, from Doctor Antomarchi.”

Darkdale entered the room with a very slight bow, and an eye that searched every corner in a moment. He said:

“I have been directed by Doctor Antomarchi to tell you, Miss Vernon, that he considers such agitations as you threw yourself into this morning as in the highest degree prejudicial to your health; that you must not seek interviews, while you remain at Glarewoods, with casual visitors to other patients; that another scene, such as that of yesterday, he must regard and treat as an outbreak of morbid contumacy” — here he paused while you might count ten— “indicating a condition which must be reduced by the usual sanatory process, and if necessary by others.”

He paused, again for a like time.

Her old spirit for a moment flashed from Maud’s eyes. She started to her feet, flushed and trembling, on the point of uttering her wild defiance. But it was only a lighting up of a moment; and pretty Maud, covering her eyes with her hands, sat down and burst into tears.

Mr. Darkdale was not moved by such distresses. He was inured to the eloquence and pathos of the madhouse, and employed the interval, during which he thought her tears would prevent her hearing his message, in directing his shrewd glance upon everything in the room in turn.

There was, apparently, nothing to criticise, however, and when all was a little quieter he continued in the same tone, as if there had been no interruption.

“He wishes you to understand that he will forward, through the post, any letters you may desire to write to your mother, Lady Vernon.”

“It’s a mockery! it’s a mockery! he knows it is. It is she who keeps me in this dreadful place. Oh, sir — Mr. Darkdale, you are a man. Is this manly? You have children, perhaps, whom you love. If they should ever come, and they can’t be more helpless than I am, under the power of strangers, think how you would have them dealt with. All I ask for is light. Let some impartial people try whether I am mad or not. Let me have but a trial; no one loses liberty for ever, and the society of human creatures, and the sight of friends, and is buried in such a fearful place for life, without a fair inquiry. Sir, let me see my friends, and have a chance for my freedom, like any other prisoner."

"I have no more power than you in the matter," answered Darkdale, dryly; "anything you have to say on that subject you can mention to Doctor Antomarchi. I am in this house only like Creswell there, or, in a higher sense, yourself, Miss Vernon, to obey orders, or abide the consequences."

Here there was a pause.

"Except to Lady Vernon, and transmitted by Doctor Antomarchi," continued Mr. Darkdale, "there must be *no* letters, he says, peremptorily; and he must take measures upon any attempt to send, or even to write one. I have neither act nor part, beyond that of simple messenger, you understand, in this."

And so saying, with another slight bow, he left the room quickly.

CHAPTER LXXV.

A NEW LEGEND OF THE ROSE AND THE KEY.

Days and nights came and passed in monotonous round. Sometimes Maud had, as unaccountably as a dream of heaven, a half-hour of hope, almost of confidence, she knew not why. Sometimes came hours of the blackest despair. Sometimes a frenzy of terror.

In external matters, one day was like another, except that on Sunday a pale little resident chaplain with a consumptive cough read the morning service, and preached in the chapel.

It is alleged as a scientific fact, that a man may go into an oven and sit there with a raw mutton-pie suspended by a string in his hand, and come out, himself none the worse, with the same mutton-pie perfectly well baked. We don’t know what human nature can bear till it is submitted to experiment. As it grows late in life with us, we look back over the wide waste of years, and meditate on the things that have happened; through some of which we thought we could not have lived, and retained our reason, and yet here we sit, and in our right minds.

And so it was with Maud. Day after day she lived on, and wondered how she lived, how she had not lost her mind. Except when, now and then, as I have said, despair or terror seized her, life moved on in a dream, stupid and awful, but still a dream.

One morning, taking her accustomed walk a little earlier than usual round the croquet-ground, she was astounded to see taking his leave of the philosopher Sidebotham, with whom he had been conversing, a man she knew. He was about the last person of her acquaintance she should have thought it likely to meet in that part of the world.

The figure was youthful and athletic, and the costume clerical. In fact it was the curate of the vicar of Roydon, the Reverend Michael Doody, who stood before her, shaking, with his powerful leavetaking, the hand of the little discoverer of the perpetual motion, who swayed and skipped in that gigantic swing, and showed by a screw of mouth and brow, and a sudden ogle, the force of the Reverend Mr. Doody’s grip.

The goodnatured curate, who had been away on a ten days' holiday, was here to make personal inspection of the great mechanist, at the request of a friend who took an interest in him.

He was now walking toward Miss Vernon on the side walk that leads straight to the courtyard door, which he was approaching, with swinging strides, laughing to himself, as he looked down on the gravel walk, and repeating the words perpetuum mobile, in low tones, with an irrepressible chuckle.

Maud stood still; she felt on the very point of fainting. All depended on a word with him, unobserved. If he were to escape her now, years might pass, and no such opportunity occur again. He was scarcely a hundred paces from her; for a moment all darkened, and she lost sight of him. When light returned, she saw him, at an interval of only twelve steps, approaching at the same pace, and still chuckling over his recent conversation.

She put back her veil, and before he could pass he heard a voice, nearly before him, earnestly repeat his name. He raised his eyes, checking his pace, and saw Miss Vernon, of Roydon. It was the face of a person who had suffered. She was pale, and looked at him earnestly, and even imploringly.

"Good — good Heavens! Miss Vernon!" he said in a whisper, staring at her, himself suddenly pale, with a great frown.

"Will you give a message for me?"

"A hundred — send me where you like. Good Heaven! Miss Vernon, I'm very sorry."

"It is only this — they won't allow me to write, or to send a message to a friend, by my maid, and I ask you to do this — and you must not tell any one here that you know me — I want only a chance. Do you know a place called Warhampton?"

"Lord Warhampton's place?"

"Yes," she answered.

"I'll make it out — well?"

"You must see his son, Mr. Charles Marston, and tell him where you found me, and say I sent him this, and don't fail me, in my trouble, and may God for ever bless you."

And she placed in his hand a rose which she had plucked from the tree beside her, and at the same time passed on without turning her head again.

“Be the powers o’ Moll Kelly!” exclaimed the curate, recurring, in deep amazement, to an ejaculation which he had not employed till now since his initiation into theology. “The crayture! Bless us all! How close that was kept! Not one at Roydon, except her ladyship, has an idaya.”

He looked over his shoulder ruefully after the young lady, and saw her now in the distance.

“I’m not to tell them I know her. I’ll not be looking that way after her.” As he thus soliloquised he was folding the rose carefully into a letter, and placing it in his breastpocket.

“Lady Vernon won’t like it. But how can I help that? If the poor young lady *is* mad, what harm can it do? And if she bain’t, it may do a deal of good. There is no refusing the crayture. I don’t know where the place is. But I’ll go, if it’s a hundred miles.”

So ruminated and resolved the curate, as, by favour of the key of one of the keepers who constantly hovered about the croquet-ground, he passed out by the door that gives access to the court, and got into his fly in front of the house, and drove to the railway-station, from whence he had come.

As Maud walked in a state of indescribable but controlled agitation towards the lower walk that lies within the yew-hedge, Antomarchi emerged from it. At sight of this man, whose eye seemed everywhere, and to pierce all disguises, she felt as if she would have sunk into the earth. She had drawn her veil closely over her face; he might possibly fail to recognise her. That, indeed, was not very likely. But he generally passed her with a bow. And she hoped he would do so now.

But he did not. He stopped and spoke to her, fixing his eyes upon her.

Every vibration of that dreaded voice seemed to tremble at her heart, and awake a separate terror.

“Have you seen,” he asked, with slow emphasis, “an old friend, Miss Vernon, anywhere about here?”

Maud’s veil covered her face so as to conceal the signs of her alarm.

“Who is it — what old friend?” she asked.

He paused; perhaps there was something unconsciously careless in the tone of her inquiry that quieted his uneasiness.

“I’m sure it is a mistake. They said the Duchess of Falconbury, as she calls herself, Mrs. Fish, had contrived to get in.” And with another bow he went on.

He was nearly satisfied that Miss Vernon had not spoken to the clerical visitor from Roydon, whose untoward arrival, together with her unusually early promenade in the croquet-ground, might easily have resulted in such an occurrence.

Maud hurried back to the house.

Mercy Creswell remarked that she looked ill. No wonder. Such a tumult in heart and brain! Oh! for a friend, however humble, whom she could trust! With Mercy Creswell, in some sort a spy, she must be circumspect. She asked an indifferent question or two, and, with a bursting heart, sat down and played waltzes on the piano.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

AT CARSBROOK.

I need not follow the Reverend Michael Doody all the way to Warhampton, nor thence, in pursuit of Charles Marston, to Carsbrook.

It was not until the day after he left Glarewoods that his devious journey brought him to the door of the beautiful old mansion, where that charming widow dispensed her hospitalities. Ample time had passed for a careful consideration of the nature of his message, and of the best manner of communicating it.

In the library he saw the young gentleman alone, told his message, and delivered his significant token.

He had nothing, of his own knowledge, to add to the words of his message. He had been as much amazed to see Maud at Glarewoods, and almost as much horrified, as Marston was himself to hear the news.

His message delivered, the Reverend Mr. Doody, with all the impulsive energy which was peculiar to him, took a hasty leave, and rushed off to catch his train.

Charles Marston, with the precious rose still nodding in his hand, stood thinking for awhile in the library, where this strange interview had just taken place.

He was scared and agitated. Here was the rose plucked by her own hand so lately. He pressed it to his lips. Sent to him, Charles Marston, with a message from her own lips. He laid it fondly to his heart.

Yes, here was the rose. But, alas! for this pettifogging, vulgar generation, where was the key? His ancestor had but to lift his arm, take down his battle-axe, and ride out at the head of his men-at-arms and archers to the siege of the northern castle; but here was no work for manhood, or emotion. The lady must be rescued, alas! by writs and commissioners; and her best champion would be a competent attorney. Every man is a knight-errant in his love; and, like every other Quixote, intolerant of the mean and sober restraints of a well-regulated world. It was hard that this thing was feasible, if at all, without immense pummelling and slaughter, and that he could not even get badly wounded in the process.

He was glad that his sister, Lady Mardykes, was out taking a drive with some of her guests. It was clear that the more secret he could be the better. Lady Mardykes had received a note from Lady Vernon on the day of Maud's expected arrival, saying that her daughter was not very well, that she required a little rest, and that, with the advice of a physician, she would leave home for some weeks; perhaps a little longer, but that she hoped she would very soon be quite herself again.

A note to a similar effect had reached Maximilla Medwyn. Maximilla immediately wrote to offer her services as a companion to Maud; but Lady Vernon did not seem to want her, so she could not press it.

Miss Medwyn had left Carsbrook only a day or two before. Her absence was unfortunate. It involved loss of time; for she was the only person acquainted with those "friends of the family," who might be usefully taken into council, and without whom Charles Marston could scarcely hope a successful issue for his enterprise.

He left a little note for his sister, Lady Mardykes, accounting for his flight. A very dear friend of his was in trouble; he must go for a few days and try to be of use. But he won't let her off; she must receive him again when he returns.

Leaving this to account for himself, away he started for Wybourne, to find Maximilla Medwyn at the Hermitage.

He did find her there that evening. She in turn was astounded and terrified. After the first eloquent half-hour, she began to think more coolly.

"*Now* I understand, for the first time, a singular persecution to which Maud and I were exposed during our little tour in Wales. We were watched and followed everywhere by an ill-looking, canting man; his name was Lizard, and I saw him once shortly after at Roydon. I'm quite certain that man was instructed to follow us, and to collect information and make notes of everything we, that is to say, Maud, said or did which could be perverted into evidence of insanity."

So the old lady indignantly ran on.

"I can swear, and I fancy I have had as good opportunities of judging as Mr. Lizard, that no person was ever of sounder or clearer intellect than Maud Vernon, and there never was anything the least eccentric, in either word or act, except what was natural to the high and wayward spirits of a girl emancipated for a brief holiday from the gloom and formality of a cold and joyless home. You and I are among the very last who saw her, before this amazing step was taken, and I think neither you nor I can have the slightest difficulty in pronouncing her as sane as ourselves. Mind," she said a little later, "I don't charge Barbara Vernon with acting in this dreadful business contrary to her belief. But she is the kind of person who believes whatever it pleases her passions should be true. She has a kind of conscience, and advises with it. But she bullies it into whatever shape she pleases. I never in my life met a person with the same power of self-delusion. There is no character more dangerous."

At first Miss Medwyn recommended immediate recourse to Mr. Coke, the family attorney. On second thoughts, however, she took a different view. It was quite possible that Mr. Coke's mind was already charged with perverted evidence, and his adhesion secured for Lady Vernon's view of the question. Lady Vernon was artful and able in managing people; and her social influence was potent.

Ultimately, therefore, for a variety of reasons, she decided on old Richard Dawe as the safest person to consult and act with in this crisis. He was sagacious and taciturn. He knew Barbara Vernon thoroughly, and was not a bit afraid of her. He was attached to the family of Vernon; he was a man of inflexible probity, and where he took up a cause, he was a thorough friend and a persevering.

Furnished with his address, and a letter from Maximilla Medwyn, Marston set out without losing a moment unnecessarily. And early next morning had an interview with Mr. Dawe.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

AT ROYDON.

Lady Vernon was, as usual, busy in the library at Roydon, noting letters to be answered by her secretary, and answering others which she thought deserved the distinction of an autograph.

With a face marble-like and serene, she is promoting the conversion of the human race to Christianity. To make them all, even as she is, is worth a great sacrifice. And, beside teaching them to walk in the light, and tend to heaven, she promotes, as we know, all sorts of benevolent designs, schools, mild reformatories, temperance associations, savings-banks on new and liberal principles, building societies for the poor, farms for their employment and sustentation, loan societies, convalescent hospitals, asylums for all sorts of deserving and suffering people.

If this pale, still lady, with the black hair and large grey eyes, had her way with the world, you would know it no longer. There would not be a sorrowful soul or a writhing body on earth. It would be a paradise, and heaven, anticipated, would reign in every corner of the globe. One wide, universal heaven, musical with angelic joy and gratitude. Ay, good reader, it would be all heaven; except that one small hell, very deep, very murky, in which stands motionless the white figure of her child.

In momentary reveries, as she pens her letter to the president of the Benevolent Society in Aid of Children, by Death, or other Causes, bereft of the Tender Care of Parents, the eye of her spirit opens, and she sees, through the letter, beneath her feet, far below, in the nether earth, that pale hell, and raises her face momentarily, as if from the breath of a furnace.

She looks round on books and busts, and through the windows on the majestic trees, and is reassured by a sight of the material world about her.

“I have duties, some painful, but many happy,” she thought. “I try to acquit myself of all.”

And when she looked on the long list of her charities and benefactions, and on the antique binding of the folio, containing no less than fifty-seven distinct addresses from as many admirable societies, each acknowledging with decorous panegyric her magnificent benefactions; addresses or resolutions, proposed and seconded by bishops, eminent dissenters, and religious peers, amidst the unanimous applause of meaner Christians — could she feel otherwise than reassured?

She could not say she was happy; some of her duties pained her; but she heaved over these latter a comfortable sigh, and her irrepressible self-esteem reasserted itself.

It was at this moment, just as she had resumed her writing, that her tall footman stood at the door, and informed her that Mr. Dawe and Mr. Marston had arrived in a chaise, had come in, and had asked particularly to see her.

"Did you say I was not very well?"

"Yes, my lady."

"I don't think those gentlemen can have understood — go and tell Mr. Dawe that I am not sufficiently well to see any one today."

So said Lady Vernon a little peremptorily, with her head high, and the footman backed from the door and vanished.

Lady Vernon sat, with a very still respiration, and her pen resting on her desk, without a stir, awaiting the issue of a diplomacy which she feared.

She could have had no difficulty if it had been any one else on earth. But with Mr. Dawe it was a different matter. His relations with her were very peculiar. His persistence was formidable. And she knew, if he thought himself right, he would, not very improbably, carry his point.

The hectic fires, those signals of danger, were already burning in each cheek, under her cold steady eyes.

"What detains him all this time?" she asked, in her solitude, with an angry tap on her desk.

There is more suspense in this trifling situation than is pleasant. She is in the acutest irritation of impatience.

The footman returns, and finds her apparently busily writing.

"What is it, Edward?" she asked, a little peevishly, glancing toward the door.

"Please, my lady, Mr. Dawe says that his business is particularly hurgent, and that you would be displeased, my lady, if he went away without hacquainting you with it."

"Oh!" said Lady Vernon, gently; "then you had better show him, and the other gentleman, his friend, into the great drawingroom. And let some one tell Latimer that I want her, and tell Mr. Penrhyn that I should be obliged to him to come here for a few minutes."

"Yes, my lady," and again the footman disappeared.

The maid arrived before the secretary.

"Latimer, I may have to speak to Mr. Dawe about business; he's here now; and I don't feel strong, and I think the best thing I can take is a little sal-volatile, and do you just put some in water, the same quantity you did yesterday, and fetch it to me."

"Yes, my lady — you're not looking very well — they should not come to trouble you about business now."

"I think not, Latimer," she answered. "But it is old Mr. Dawe, and I suppose he fancies I should see him if I were dying; people are so selfish. I won't if I can help it; but if I must, I must, and at all events let me have my sal-volatile."

"She's worriting herself over everything, and she looks as if she was a good halfways into a fever this minute," remarked Mrs. Latimer, straight and thin in her black silk dress, as she hurried up the stairs to execute her message.

She had hardly gone when a knock came at the door.

"Come in."

The secretary came in, with the peculiar drowsiness of air and face that tedious work, too long continued, bestows. He was not sorry of the little interruption, and an opportunity of lifting his head and shaking his ears, and although Jack was growing a dull boy, he smiled politely, and I think, could have yawned.

"You wished to speak to me, Lady Vernon?"

"Yes, won't you sit down? I wanted to tell you that Mr. Dawe, with a friend, has called, and wants to talk with me about business; and I should be so glad to avoid it, if possible, I feel so poorly. So I'm going to ask you kindly to see him for me, and, if it is anything that you can settle, I should be so much obliged if you would arrange it, as I really don't feel able to talk at any length to-day, and you could make him understand that."

"Oh, certainly — of course he could not think — I have only to explain," said the secretary, with polite peremptoriness.

"Thank you so very much," she said, more glad of his confident prognostics than her pride would have confessed.

In came Latimer with the sal-volatile and water.

"Thanks," said Lady Vernon. "I'll take it now."

And she drank it off.

"Well, my lady, I must tell you, you're not looking yourself; and don't you go and bother yourself about Mr. Dawe's business, my lady; it is a shame all the trouble they puts upon you."

"I've sent Mr. Penrhyn to try whether he can't arrange it for me, and I'm in hopes he can. Thanks, that will do, Latimer, you can go."

Mr. Penrhyn's return was delayed long enough to raise a strong hope in her mind that Mr. Dawe was, after all, avoidable.

In a few minutes more the secretary returned.

"Well, what is it about?" asked Lady Vernon, affecting to raise her eyes from the letter she was *not* writing.

"Upon that point, Lady Vernon, I'm as much in the dark as when I left you."

"Oh!"

"I pressed him all I could, but he insists he can open the matter only to you, Lady Vernon, and he seems a very obstinate old gentleman."

The secretary she fancied was curious; but his eyes, as he related the result of his interview, were lowered steadily to the table.

"And I then asked him to write a note. I hope, Lady Vernon, I did as you would have wished?"

"Certainly," said Lady Vernon. "Thanks — and that is it?"

She extended her fingers to receive it.

It was a pencilled note, merely turned down at the corner. She did not open it.

"He is still in the drawingroom?"

"He and his friend," acquiesced Mr. Penrhyn.

"Did he say it was anything of much importance?" she asked, looking wistfully at the note which she was, somehow, reluctant to open.

"No, not exactly; he said he must decline opening his business, I think those were his words, except to you, Lady Vernon; and it required some little pressing to get him to write."

"Yes — I dare say — and he indicated nothing more?" and she looked again wistfully at the note.

"Nothing. He is more of a listener than a talker. I don't think he uttered twenty words."

"Yes, he *is* silent. Thanks, Mr. Penrhyn, I think you have done everything possible for me — thank you very much."

"You don't wish me to return to him, Lady Vernon?"

"No, thanks, I'll look into this, and send him an answer. I shan't trouble you any more at present."

So Mr. Penrhyn made his bow, and Lady Vernon was alone.

She knew perfectly what Mr. Dawe had come about. But her case was too strong. She defied him to pick a hole in her proofs. Was there not a responsibility and a duty?

She opened his note. It said:

Dear Barbara, — I must see *you.* Your secretary will not do. What I have to say is too harrowing. You may anticipate.

She read these words with a sullen chill and sickness; for the first time a maternal thrill, like a pain in an unknown nerve, stole through her. The words had touched a thought that had before been peremptorily "laid."

Has the miserable girl made away with herself?

She felt faint for a moment.

But the next words cleared his meaning up:

I have preferred seeing you, and obtaining your prompt acquiescence, to taking a public step. If you deny me an interview, my next measure will be decisive. I shall not postpone action in this grave matter.

Yours faithfully,

Richard Dawe.

She touched the bell.

“Show Mr. Dawe, but not the gentleman who came with him, into this room,” she said to her footman.

And now, leaning back a little, with her cold gaze fixed on the door, she awaits the conflict.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

DEBATE.

The servant announces “Mr. Dawe.” And that swarthy little gentleman, with wooden features and black wig, walks in, and approaches. There is, as it were, a halo of darkness round him. His countenance shows no excitement; nothing but its customary solemn reserve.

The door closes.

Lady Vernon receives him standing, and does not sit again for some minutes. Mr. Dawe is thus kept standing; and thus the meeting acquires an odd air of formality. He steps up to her as if he had to announce nothing more important than a purchase of fifty pounds’ worth of Three-per-Cent stock.

He extends his hand, as usual; but she does not take it.

This coldness, or severity, does not seem to disconcert Mr. Dawe in the slightest degree; in fact, he seems scarcely conscious of it.

“Your reluctance to see me, assures me that you anticipate the subject on which I mean to speak,” he began.

“It might have assured you, if my words had not, that I was not well enough to see any one. I can’t be certain what subject you mean; but I am pretty sure it is nothing pleasant; you never trouble your head about anything pleasant.”

“That is rather true, Barbara,” he said, “and this is *not* pleasant. Your daughter Maud has been placed in the madhouse at Glarewoods.”

“I have acted with too much reluctance; I have acted under strong pressure from my advisers; I have acted in obedience to urgent medical advice. She *is* an inmate of Glarewoods, under the care of that good and able man, against whom, even you, will hesitate to venture an ill word — Mr. Damian.”

“I know. But Mr. Damian is not there. He’s at Brighton. Doctor Antomarchi, no worse and no better, I suppose, than an ordinary mad-doctor, received her, and has, at present, and will have for some time to come, the sole control of that place. The fact has become known to your daughter's friends, who, believing her to be sane, wish to know why she is in a madhouse."

"She is in a madhouse, I answer in the coarse terms you seem best to understand, because she is mad."

"She's not mad; not a bit mad; not half so mad as you," replied the little man, sternly. "The people who intimately associated with her immediately before her imprisonment in that place, are convinced of her sanity, and prepared to depose to it."

Lady Vernon's rising wrath subsided suddenly as these words opened a new vein of suspicion.

"Captain Vivian, you mean," she said; growing deadly pale, with a smile of horrible scorn.

"No, I don't; I mean people who are more likely to be attended to," he answered as sternly.

There was a silence. Lady Vernon looked down. She still thought that Captain Vivian was the mainspring of this untoward movement.

"You seem to think I am bound to give account to you of all I do," she said, in sarcastic tones.

"You, Barbara, seem to think you are accountable to *no* one," he retorted, dryly.

"I am answerable to my God," she replied, with flashing eyes. "My stewardship is to Him, not to you. I'll give no account to you, further than to say, and *that* only to stop slander, that all responsibility is removed from me; that I have been directed by the advice of as able and conscientious men as are to be found in England; and that copies of the depositions, for I chose to reduce the evidence to that shape, are lodged with Mr. Damian."

"May I see them?"

"He has got them, not I," she said, coldly.

Mr. Dawe grunted, after his fashion, and with brows more knit than usual, looked down for a few seconds.

"You have the originals — you can let me see them?" he persisted.

"You have no more claim than any other person; perhaps less. I shan't show them to you without consideration: certainly not now; possibly never. Why, what motive," she broke out, fiercely, "but the noblest, can a mother have in making so terrible a sacrifice of feeling?"

"*I*, and I *only*, know the existence of a motive," said Mr. Dawe; "and if Satan has put it in your mind to do this — — "

"Satan! How dare you talk of Satan to me, sir?" cried the lady in a choking voice, rising with a crimson flush, and stamping on the floor with pride and hate glaring in her face. "Do you know who I am? Satan in *my* mind! You wicked old man! You *alone* know my secret. That's true. Tell it where you will, and have done with these infamous threats. You may wound, but you can't disgrace me. The world knows something of me. The Christian world. I've done my duty in all things; especially by my daughter; and all the false tongues in England shan't frighten me!"

"You ought to know me, Barbara, by this time. High words, hard words, don't affect me, no more than flatteries do — in at one ear and out at the other," and he touched alternately the sides of his black wig. "Be reasonable. Your violence deprives you of the power of considering consequences. You *have* a powerful motive; and motives, often unrecognised, control our actions. I know what power the death of Maud unmarried would give you by your father's will. I know what it would enable you to do for Elwyn Howard — Captain Vivian, as we style him — your son. I know the sad story of his birth, and of your secret marriage, that turned out to be a nugatory one, with that weak, strange man, Elwyn Howard, the vicar."

"Stop, in God's name! — spare the dead. My noble Elwyn, my pure, noble, heartbroken Elwyn; my first, and best, and only beloved, in his grave!"

And she burst into shrill screaming sobs, and, wringing her hands, walked to and fro in the room.

The little man in the black wig said nothing, but waved his hand toward her again and again, as one beckons a child to be quiet.

The paroxysm subsided, and she stood before him with stern eyes.

"You come to me always like a messenger from the grave. Have I ever seen you but for trouble? Have you ever had a pleasant or even a merciful word for me? Have you ever spared me one pang, or spared the dead or the living in your mission of torture?"

"If it be torture, Barbara, the fault is yours, not mine. I believe she is in her right mind; and I have come to make you an offer. Liberate her, and let her case be examined into, here or in London, with her own solicitor to watch her interests, and such of her friends as she may choose to name to attend and lend their aid. If you won't do this I'll take a course you may like less, for I'll not allow her to be immured there, without an effort to set her free."

"Then you propose to put me formally on my trial, in my own house, on a charge of having entered into a conspiracy to imprison my daughter in a madhouse?"

"You are a self-willed, impetuous woman, Barbara. You are intolerant of argument, and prefer error and illusion to truth when it stands in your way. Look into your heart. Is there nothing there to startle you? When you have done that, call up the past. Consider what happened. You would believe whatever favoured your wishes. You would listen to no warning. With headstrong infatuation you married Elwyn Howard, without the consent or knowledge of your parents. And have you ever known a quiet hour since? All are dead, but I, who knew your secret. Your father, your mother, your old nurse, and your husband; he made a cowardly and cruel use of it; but his cruelty does not justify yours, wreaked upon your child. No lesson instructs you. You are what you were — perverse, one-idead, headstrong. Where you have a sufficient motive nothing will stop you. You don't, perhaps, see the motives that rule you now. You dread, as well you may, the complication which your secret threatens. It would be a brief way of solving this horrible danger to hide Maud Vernon in Glarewoods for the rest of her days. Moreover, it would be a short way to a provision for the child you love, to consign the child you hate to what must attend the incarceration of a spirited girl in such a place, an early death. You live in delusion, a serenity of egotism, from which the stroke of death alone will startle you too late. I will invoke in this case the intervention of the Chancellor, unless you consent to the proposition I have made you."

With these words Mr. Dawe closed the longest speech he was ever known to deliver at a single spell; and in his face and voice there was something more threatening than they had ever evidenced before.

Whiter and whiter grew the handsome face of Lady Vernon as Mr. Dawe proceeded. She rose like an evoked spirit to his incantation, and stood with a countenance in which fear, and rage, and derision were blended with a force worthy of an evil spirit.

“I have listened to your hideous calumny till it is expended. Let it be your comfort that your last act has been worthy of all your former malignant intercourse with me, and that you leave a broken-hearted woman with a curse, and a falsehood, and a threat on your lips. It is our last meeting. I shall never hear your ill-omened voice again. I disdain your offers; I defy your threats.” She rang furiously at the bell. “And I command you never more to enter this house, or to presume to claim acquaintance with me.”

She turned and walked away from him, into the room.

Hearing the door open, she turned again, and said to the footman who had come in:

“This gentleman is going; show him to the hall-door.”

Dawe nodded sullenly at the door of the room, and said in his accustomed tones:

“I shall act strictly on what you have said to me: and as it can’t be mended, I accept the terms you prescribe. Farewell, Barbara.”

The little figure in the black wig withdrew at his customary gait; his dark wooden face presenting its solemn furrows and accustomed carving, and his voice and his whole demeanour, dry and phlegmatic, as if nothing of interest had occurred.

Trembling, Lady Vernon sat down. There is always a “devil’s advocate” to pervert the motives and distort the conduct of the saints, and so it had just been with her. His insults still quivered on her nerves. Does not Satan plague scrupulous consciences with doubts and upbraidings utterly fantastic? The “still small voice” within her had been whispering vaguely the same thing that now she had heard croaked with coarse distinctness by an external voice. It was this harmony and iteration that made that croaking voice eloquent, and when it ceased, left Lady Vernon trembling.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

LIGHT APPROACHES.

In a situation in any degree resembling Maud's — a captivity in which all contact with the outer world, and all communication with friends, are effectually prevented — delays unexplained appear supernaturally long; time moves so slowly; the idea of neglect and oblivion is so often uppermost; and despair always near.

One morning, some time after the scene at Roydon between Lady Vernon and Mr. Dawe, Mercy Creswell appeared before Maud, with an unusually reserved countenance.

"You'll be wanted downstairs, miss, at twelve o'clock, in the doctor's office, to-day," she said.

"And what is this for?" asked Maud, startled.

"Well, miss, I do believe it is a gentleman from the Lord High Chancellor as is come down to ask you some questions," answered Mercy.

"Oh! oh! Really?" faltered Maud, with a secret prescience of a coming crisis. Her message had not been in vain, and here was the result of a powerful and friendly interposition.

"You need not to be frightened, miss, they won't do you no harm. There was one came down here last year to see a very rich patient, and I dessay the Chancellor was making a nice thing of his money and estates, while he was locked up here; I should not wonder: anyhow, he would not let him out from here till he found he could not keep him shut up no longer. So before he took him out he sends one of his gentlemen down here to make, as we thought, all the fuss he could about letting him away and home again to manage his own business, but home he went for all that. His name was Hempenfeldt, a tall thin man of fifty, with a hooked nose, and gold hy-glass, and used to wear a white hat and blue frock-coat, and buff waistcoat, and them varnish boots."

Maud looked at her watch. It was past eleven.

"Did you hever see the Honourable Mr. Marston, Lady Mardykes's brother, miss?" inquired Mercy, who had grown to be on easy terms with the young lady in her charge.

"Yes, I have. What about him?" inquired Maud, as carelessly as if her heart had not fluttered up to her lips and dropped down dead again.

"Because I saw him, and a little black gentleman, just up to his elbow, talking to Doctor Antomarchi, and Miss Medwyn is in the waiting-room."

Perhaps Mercy thought that these signs betokened the early liberation of Maud, and became more communicative as the likelihood of her again emerging into light, and becoming a personage in the living world, improved.

Maud knew now that battle was actually waged in her behalf, and that a few hours might see her free, and on her way to Wybourne with dear old Maximilla Medwyn.

But, oh, no! she would not allow herself to believe anything so incredible. It could not happen. To admit a hope so immense would be to insure a plunge into the deepest hell of disappointment. And yet that hope possessed her, and she was nearly wild with its excitement.

"Do you think Miss Medwyn will be allowed to see me?" asked Maud.

"I don't know, miss; they was jealous of you seeing any one; and I'm sure there's no good in you asking, whatever they may say when *she* does."

Maud, being quite of the same opinion, made no move, well knowing that Maximilla would leave no stone unturned to obtain a few minutes' sight of her.

Mr. Darkdale arrived, with a knock at the sitting-room door. His business was to deliver a formal intimation from Doctor Antomarchi that Miss Vernon was to hold herself in readiness to come to his room, at twelve o'clock, to answer some questions which an official person would have to put to her, and to request that she would be good enough not to leave her rooms until his messenger should arrive to conduct her to his office.

In a state of suspense Maud awaited Antomarchi's summons in her sitting-room. Twelve o'clock came, and no summons yet. Ten minutes, twenty minutes, half an hour passed. The little timepiece in her room struck one.

Mr. Darkdale arrived a minute or two later. He looked stern and thoughtful. Mercy Creswell was summoned. She was to go alone with Mr. Darkdale. Miss Vernon was to be so good as to await her, or his, return where she was. These attendants would wait upon her in the mean time.

Two of the stalwart housemaids in the Glarewoods uniform entered quietly, and stood near the door.

Mercy Creswell looked a little disagreeably surprised at the occurrence; but she accompanied Mr. Darkdale in silence; and Maud remained in utter ignorance of all that was taking place downstairs, upon the issue of the ordeal that was to decide her fate.

In less than ten minutes Mercy Creswell returned, looking hot and agitated. The temporary attendants were withdrawn, and Maud, being alone with her maid, questioned her as to what was going on.

“I’m not to tell nothing about it, miss; them’s my orders.”

“The inquiry is about me, isn’t it? Surely you can tell me so much,” urged Maud.

“Well, yes, miss; it is about you, and not another thing will I say about it. Where’s the use of me running that risk without no good to no one?”

Mercy was obstinate and held to her resolution spite of all Maud’s importunities and promises of secrecy; and Maud in the burning fever of her agitation walked from room to room, and from window to window, unable to rest for a moment.

If she could only tell how it was going! By what right was she excluded from her own trial? How unfairly her case might be dealt with! And, oh! but to think of all that depends on the next hour.

In the waiting-room Mr. Marston and old Miss Medwyn had met Mr. Dawe, and were in high chat when Mr. Tintern was shown in. He had not perhaps expected to meet Miss Vernon’s friends in such force. He knew only that he was to see Mr. Dawe there. He would have preferred not meeting Miss Medwyn. He smiled pensively, and shook hands, and shrugged pathetically over the melancholy state of things which had called them there.

“And poor Lady Vernon, what a deplorable thing for her! Only think, a mother, you know, and all that kind of thing; so awfully distressing! I know, for my part, I should rather lose a child by death outright, and be spared the anguish of such an affliction as this.”

He looked round upon them with a sad shake of the head, and a slow wave of his hand, which was intended generally to indicate Miss Vernon, the lunatic asylum, its inmates and apparatus; and this pantomime terminated in a slight but expressive elevation of the eyes and hand, and another desolate shrug.

"Lady Vernon lives in hopes," he continued, liking, I fancy, to talk rather than to be talked to, on this subject. "She thinks this will not be a very tedious — a — a — illness. All this is, of course, quite dark at Roydon. No one there — I have not even mentioned it to my wife — not a human being but I and Doctor Malkin — — "

"Ho! Doctor Malkin! Well, that does not surprise me," exclaimed Miss Medwyn, in an angry parenthesis.

"Not a living person but he and I, and Lady Vernon herself, in all that part of the world, has the least idea there is anything of the kind; and you know we may look to see her very soon, I do hope, quite as we could wish."

"Very soon, I should hope, Mr. Tintern; sooner even than some of her friends expect," said Maximilla, with a tart emphasis. "She is under very special restraint here. They won't permit me so much as to see her! What can be the reason of that? I don't suppose I can hurt her; and as to my share of the danger, I'm quite willing to risk that, ha ha, ha! — poor little Maud!" and with these words Maximilla Medwyn suddenly burst into tears.

Mr. Tintern looked with much feeling at Mr. Dawe; but a blacker shadow seemed to have gathered about that odd figure.

Mr. Marston, at the further end of the long room, was trying to read some papers connected with the proceedings, but his eye every moment wandered to the door, through which he expected the summons of a messenger from the commissioner.

Maximilla's tears disconcerted Mr. Tintern, who walked first to the window, and then to Mr. Dawe, to whom, with another shrug, he murmured:

"Most harrowing! No place for ladies, this!"

Mr. Dawe grunted.

Maximilla's sobs did not last long. A footman entered and presented a little note to Mr. Dawe.

Mr. Dawe read it. The eyes of Mr. Marston and Miss Medwyn were now directed on him very anxiously.

"It is all right," said Mr. Dawe, in his dry tones.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Maximilla. And Mr. Marston looked as if he would have said the same.

Mr. Tintern eyed them curiously. What was “all right?” He would have given something to know.

Mr. Dawe walked up to Maximilla briskly, and saying, “Read that,” placed the note in her hands.

It said:

Dear Mr. Dawe, — I have very great pleasure in saying that Mr. Commissioner Steele has no objection, under the circumstances of this case, to your being present, although your request, coming from one who is not related to the family, is not usual; and the only condition he imposes is, that you make no public use of what you are permitted to witness; and he reserves to himself, of course, the right of dispensing with your presence at any time he may express a wish to be more to himself. I write this with pleasure, as I look upon your presence as a protection to myself.

Yours truly,

Michael Antomarchi.

P.S. — You are at liberty to accompany Mr. Tintern when the commissioner sends for him.

This summons was not long in coming.

Mr. Tintern looked with an air of studied curiosity and polite surprise at Mr. Dawe as that gentleman accompanied him.

Mr. Dawe did not care. Those looks did not overawe him.

CHAPTER LXXX.

BEFORE THE COMMISSIONER.

They found the commissioner, with Doctor Antomarchi, in the oval-room, to which the servant conducted them.

Mr. Commissioner Steele is a tall, gentlemanlike looking man, with a dark face, closely shaved, black curly hair, a little streaked with white, growing close over his broad, but not high, forehead. He looks at them with eyes nearly shut, and a little frown, after the manner of near-sighted people, and he is twirling round his finger an eyeglass. He rises, and receives these gentlemen with a short bow, and looks to Doctor Antomarchi to explain them. The doctor, who has seen them before, does so.

"Oh! Mr. Dawe? The gentleman who wishes to be present on behalf of Miss Vernon?" asked the commissioner.

"Yes," said Antomarchi.

"Have you considered, Doctor Antomarchi," hesitated Mr. Tintern, "whether Lady Vernon would quite wish that arrangement? The young lady's mother," he explains to the commissioner, "she is naturally extremely anxious that as little as possible of this very painful case should become generally known; she wished it, in fact, as private as possible."

"Yes; but in this case it is not a simple relation of mother and child," said Mr. Steele, fluently, while arranging his papers. "The young lady has quite different interests, and on a very great scale; and it is only reasonable that some one, in whom her relations have confidence, should be permitted, in her interest, to hear what passes. Mr. Tintern, you are a magistrate?"

"Yes, sir."

"The depositions in this matter, were sworn before you?"

"They were, sir."

"You have brought with you the original depositions?"

"Yes, sir."

"Be so kind as to hand them to me. Thanks; Mr. Dawe, while I read these, you can read the attested copies which Doctor Antomarchi will be so good as to give you."

Doctor Antomarchi placed the papers before Mr. Dawe, who received them with one of his stiff bows, and read them with characteristic care.

"Lady Vernon is not here?" asked the commissioner.

"No," answered Antomarchi.

"Nor that man, Elihu Lizard?"

"He is not here."

"These affidavits are very strong. Lady Vernon deposes that her daughter, the subject of this inquiry, has for some years exhibited a growing eccentricity and violence, which have caused her extreme anxiety; that latterly these peculiarities had, in her opinion, become distinctly morbid, and that on a certain evening, the date of which she states, Miss Vernon intimated an intention of putting an end to her own life. That this had been preceded by two distinct occurrences of a similar kind, within little more than a year antecedent to the last threat of this sort, at Roydon Hall."

The commissioner paused and looked at Mr. Dawe.

"Doctor Malkin, the family physician, states that the young lady is of a highly nervous temperament, with strange ideas, such as are popularly termed flighty, that she is hysterical and impetuous, and without sufficient self-control to counteract the obvious tendencies of such a mental and nervous condition. That with this knowledge of predisposing causes at work, he cannot refer the facts set out in Lady Vernon's and Elihu Lizard's depositions to any cause other than insanity too considerably developed to be safely committed to any but the constant supervision and treatment of an able physician, residing under the same roof, and experienced in the treatment of insanity. He says he cannot undertake the responsibility of advising Lady Vernon to keep the young lady at home, an experiment which has often been attended, he remarks, especially when suicidal tendencies have existed, with fatal consequences. That is very strong, you observe," he said, throwing his head back, and glancing at Mr. Dawe.

Mr. Dawe grunted.

"You think that very strong?" said the commissioner.

"No," said Mr. Dawe, "I don't mind Lady Vernon; and the Roydon doctor is in her pocket. He thinks what *she* thinks, and *she* thinks whatever she likes."

Mr. Commissioner Steele popped his glass in his eye and stared at this outspoken little man, as he might at a curious creature in a menagerie, and then he resumed.

“Well, here’s Elihu Lizard,” said the commissioner, who had opened another paper; “I think *here* perhaps it will be as well to ask Miss Medwyn to be good enough to come in — she may, possibly, have something to explain.”

Mr. Steele leaned back in his chair, and Doctor Antomarchi again touched the bell, and the servant in a minute more announced Miss Medwyn.

The commissioner rose and made his bow. Miss Medwyn glanced shrewdly at him, to ascertain what manner of man the judge might be.

“I’ll tell you what Elihu Lizard states, if you please, Miss Medwyn, and you can make any remarks that strike you.”

“So I shall,” said Miss Medwyn.

“He swears he followed Miss Vernon from place to place.”

“Who sent him?” asked Mr. Dawe.

“I know no more than the affidavit states; you have the copy. He found that she acted with very marked eccentricity during a tour she made with her cousin, that was you, Miss Medwyn; she concealed her name, and passed herself off as a Miss Maud Guendoline; she represented herself as being, and the deponent seems to think, for the time, actually believed the statement, obliged to make her livelihood by selling her water-colour sketches; she told people that she was miserably poor, and, in social position, extremely humble; and Elihu Lizard believes that, at the time, she seriously thought that all these statements were true.”

“She thought no such thing,” said Miss Medwyn. “It was all done in the spirit of frolic; just what any young creature a little wayward, and quite wild with spirits, as she was, in the enjoyment of a little holiday, would do; and no one ever dreamed of supposing her mad.”

“Did she tell you, Miss Medwyn, during your excursion, at any time, that she did not believe these representations herself?”

“No, certainly, it was quite unnecessary; she knew that such an idea had never entered my mind.”

“You have a strong opinion, then, in favour of Miss Vernon’s sanity?”

“It is not an opinion, I am quite certain of it.”

“But suppose it were proved to you that she has, at three distinct times, threatened her own life while at Roydon; and that once, since she came here, she has not only threatened, but attempted it; would not that modify your opinion as to the expediency of removing at once all restraint and superintendence in her case?"

"It's quite untrue. I have no other answer. It is utterly false."

"I only say, as a supposition, *suppose* it were proved — — "

"It would not make the least difference; I could not believe it," she answered peremptorily; "I never shall."

The commissioner smiled and shook his head.

"There is another odd circumstance deposed to here," he resumes; "at a ball at a place called Wy — Wymering, I think it is; where she went with — with *you*, Miss Medwyn, to join the party of a Mrs. Tintern — — "

"My wife," interposed Mr. Tintern, softly.

"Oh! I see, thanks; where Miss Vernon went to join Mrs. Tintern's party," continued the commissioner. "She insisted on visiting the gallery of the town-hall, before the company had assembled, and once more, in an unreal character, she presented herself as your servant, the deposition says."

"That was precisely in the same spirit; a mere whim; she had been looking forward, for a long time, to the ball, and was in such spirits, poor little thing!"

Miss Medwyn was as near as possible crying again, and had to pull up suddenly.

The commissioner offered no criticism on Miss Medwyn's explanation. And after a little silence, for he saw she was agitated, he asked:

"Perhaps you would like to look over Lady Vernon's statement? There is no objection."

Miss Medwyn thanked him, and took the paper, which she read over, her face frowning a little, pale and scornful, as she did so.

When she had conned it over, and returned the paper, he asked:

"Have you anything, Miss Medwyn, by way of explanation, or generally, to state, which you think might throw light on this inquiry?"

Miss Medwyn had a great deal to say, and said it, more than once, with great volubility, and in high scorn of all opposition. When her harangue was over, the commissioner thanked her very much, and rose, with a bow or two, and Doctor Antomarchi politely conducted her again to the waiting-room, where Mr. Marston received her with intense anxiety.

Mr. Dawe had, on hearing his narrative, peremptorily forbidden his appearance as a witness, and blew up Maximilla roundly, in his proper laconics, for having permitted all that masquerading which now furnished the chief material of the case.

Maximilla answered that she *could* not have prevented it; and that if that had never happened, still a case would not have been wanting, because it was plain, from different things in Barbara's statement, that she had employed people to watch Maud wherever she went.

As Mr. Marston and Maximilla Medwyn were now conversing, Mr. Dawe, whose chief object was to note carefully in his memory the facts on which the theory of Maud's insanity was based, with a view to action of a different kind should this measure fail, had the pleasure of listening to Mercy Creswell's description of what she had termed Maud's "parrokism."

Then came an account of her attempt to get into the hall in pursuit of Lady Mardykes; of her throwing herself on the stairs, of what was called her violence, and ultimate reduction to submission under moral influences. Then Doctor Antomarchi made his statement, stronger, abler, more learned than the opinion of Doctor Malkin, and in conclusion he said:

"This is a case, I admit, I should be happy to be relieved of. It is a case round which family feuds and jealousies gather and prepare for battle. We have never been in litigation here; and although I cannot conscientiously recommend Lady Vernon to take the young lady home, I should be very much obliged if she would remove her to some other house."

CHAPTER LXXXI.

MAUD IS SUMMONED.

“I should like,” said the commissioner, “to see the young lady now; and after that, Doctor Antomarchi, if you please, I could have a few words with you. Mr. Dawe, are you acquainted with Miss Vernon?”

Mr. Dawe assented.

“What do you say, Doctor Antomarchi, to Mr. Dawe’s remaining while Miss Vernon answers a few questions?”

“I should be most happy if I were not certain that in her present state a meeting of the kind would be, as respects the progress of her recovery, almost the worst thing that could happen to Miss Vernon. I speak with the responsibility of her medical adviser; and I must request Mr. Dawe to withdraw, unless you, sir, should direct otherwise.”

“Then, Mr. Dawe, I must ask you to retire,” says the commissioner, making him a little bow.

Mr. Dawe rose, and returned it with a nod; the servant conducted him to the waiting-room; and Doctor Antomarchi turned the key in the door through which he had retreated.

Doctor Antomarchi and Mr. Commissioner Steele had a little bit of earnest conversation. The long period of Miss Vernon’s suspense at length expired.

Never did imprisoned lady in the Reign of Terror hear herself summoned to the presence of the tremendous Fouquier Tinville with a colder pang of horror than that which unnerved Maud Vernon, at the tap at her door, and the intimation that the time had come, and her presence was required by the commissioner.

“Are there many people in the room with him?” Maud asked, rising quickly, very pale, and feeling a little dizzy.

“Only the doctor, please, miss.”

The young lady followed the servant; Mercy Creswell stumping after, with a supernaturally solemn countenance.

Maud did not know how she reached the office door. At sight of that solid barrier, its well varnished panels and oak veining, her heart bounded as if it would suffocate her.

"Wait a moment," she whispered to the man who was about opening the door to announce her. "Not yet."

She must not seem flurried. All for her depended on her perfect self-possession in presence of this stranger, who held the key of her prison.

She signed to the man, who opened the door; and she heard her name announced.

Now she is in the room. Antomarchi, whom she distrusts and fears, rises and makes her a very grave and ceremonious bow. She turns from that smooth face, that frightens her, to the commissioner, who has also risen, and makes her a less elaborate bow. Intelligent, energetic, narrow, utterly unsympathetic, is the face of her judge. Instinctively she is dismayed by it.

She sits down, hardly knowing what she does, in a chair opposite the commissioner. He asks her some question, the purport of which she does not distinctly catch. She sees nothing but that cold, shrewd, self-complacent face which dismays her.

The stern ringing voice of Antomarchi repeats the question, and she turns. He is looking at her. She finds herself under the spell of those baleful eyes.

"Mr. Commissioner Steele asked you whether you are aware that you are sworn to have on three distinct occasions, at Roydon, threatened to take away your life?'"

"I was not aware, that is, I don't know what is said against me," she says with, an effort, and a little confusedly.

"May I ask her a few questions?" inquires Antomarchi.

"Do, pray," acquiesces the commissioner.

He bowed to Mr. Steele, and then said:

"Be so good as to look a little this way." She had averted her eyes. "I want to be assured that you hear me."

She submitted, and he proceeded.

"You are frank, Miss Vernon, and would not mislead this inquiry. Did you not intend to commit suicide at Roydon?"

Miss Vernon faltered; she tried instinctively to raise her hand to her eyes, but she did not raise it higher than her throat, where she felt a great ball rising.

"I'm sorry to press you, but we must accept your silence as an admission," said the cold bass of Antomarchi. "Is it not true," he persisted, sternly, "that you intended suicide, three distinct times, when at Roydon?"

"I — I can't," faltered Maud.

"I know you can't," he repeated, "and you could not *there*, I believe."

"I could not there — I believe — if — if —— What am I saying? Oh, God! *what* am I saying?"

"Never regret speaking candidly to friends; Mr. Commissioner Steele, of whom you seem so much in awe, can have no object in this inquiry but what tends to your good. Now, as to what occurred *here* — upstairs — when you told Mercy Creswell you would make away with yourself, and she locked you into your room in consequence, and you then threw up the window. Come, be frank, Miss Vernon, did you not do so with the intention of taking away your life, by throwing yourself from it; you confessed it."

"Did I — did I confess it? I confessed — — " she murmured, with white lips.

"You did — that's right — it is hardly necessary to do so again, but if you can deny it, or explain it, you are at liberty to do so."

Mr. Steele was, while this was passing, glancing at his notes, and marking the papers before him with his pen, and saw nothing of the fatuised look that had stolen over Maud's face, and if he had, would have attributed it to her imputed mental condition.

"You *can't* explain, or deny it — I am to infer *that*," persisted Antomarchi; "you *can't*."

"I can't — can I? — I can't — oh! what is it? — I feel so strangely." She shook her ears as if a fly was humming at them, and lifted her pretty fingers towards her temple vaguely.

"You say you can't, and that is quite enough — I expected no less from your candour; and as you say you feel a little oddly, it will perhaps be better that you should return to your room, if Mr. Commissioner has no objection?"

"Certainly not," acquiesced the official, who, with half-closed eyes, was now eyeing Miss Vernon curiously.

"You may go, Miss Vernon. See Miss Vernon to her room," said Antomarchi to the servant. "Instantly, please; she is agitated."

Maud was standing now, and looked a little about her, bewildered, as if newly awakened from sleep.

"Oh! what is it? What have I said? let me remember — — "

"Never regret having spoken truth, Miss Vernon," said Antomarchi; "you must go," he said sternly to her, and added quickly in a whisper to Mr. Steele, "If she stays we shall have a paroxysm."

The commissioner, who had no fancy for anything of the kind, rose at the same moment, and made a hasty bow.

"Oh, sir; no, don't send me back; have mercy on me! It is false," she screamed. "If I said anything against myself, I retract it all. You are here to try me; God sees us; oh, my last hope!"

This last cry was heard in the passage as the door shut; and the commissioner and Doctor Antomarchi were left tête-à-tête.

The doctor smiled and shrugged.

"Retract, retract; they all retract after an admission. People who don't know something of them, as you and I do, have no notion how much cunning belongs to that state, and how little scruple. You see the excitement she has gone away in, and simply from having seen you and me! What would it be if she were to see an intimate friend? How could we separate them? And yet, I venture to say, Miss Medwyn thinks it a great hardship she has not had an interview with the young lady — I should not wonder if the patient became violent; I rather expect to be sent for."

This, and a good deal more, said Doctor Antomarchi; and, after some conversation, invited the commissioner to luncheon which that semi-judicial functionary, having first consulted his Bradshaw, agreed to partake of; and over it he relaxed, and conversed about fifty things, very pleasantly, and laughed over the agreeable doctor's amusing stories. While upstairs, Maud Vernon, on her knees, with her face buried in the coverlet, writhed and sobbed wildly in the solitude of an immeasurable despair.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

DOCTOR DAMIAN.

Mr. Tintern had more than was pleasant to think of, as he glided homeward upon the rails. His matrimonial plans for his daughter had found in that young lady a very stubborn resistance. He could divine no reason for it; and he took to sulking and bullying by turns. It was very desirable to establish his daughter just now, and to secure the particular son-in-law who sought the young lady's hand, because he was very wealthy, and, owing to peculiar circumstances, in a position to make certain difficulties of a very pressing nature easy to Mr. Tintern. He had "gone into a mine," which was insolvent; and he had made the directors an offer, by way of compromise, which would save him; and his intended son-in-law was one of these directors. There was another trouble, a foolish bank speculation, in which the same gentleman had also a potent influence, and might modify the urgency and rapidity of coming calls, of which Mr. Tintern, as well he might, stood much in fear. Mr. Tintern, therefore, in his homeward drive, had ample matter for reflection. On his arrival at the Grange, he asked for Miss Ethel. There was an inexplicable cloud over the household. The servants were solemn and laconic. No one knew distinctly where she was; and all were agreed in referring him to Mrs. Tintern, who was not very well, and in her room.

Up the stairs, with very uncomfortable qualms and vague misgivings, he ran; and, in the darkened room of his wife, learned that Ethel had eloped!

All was mystery. Mrs. Tintern had not a great deal of energy or judgment in an emergency. She had sent a carriage express to the town of Roydon to bring the Reverend Mr. Foljambe, the vicar, and Mr. Puntles, the antiquary, to advise her in her perplexity. The assistance of these admirably selected counsellors did not result in very much; except, indeed, that the occurrence became speedily well known throughout the whole town of Roydon.

A sage servant, on a steady horse, was sent off, at a jog-trot, to the nearest railway station to make inquiry, and returned some hours later a little tipsy, and in other respects as wise as he set out.

The only clue to the mysterious disappearance of the young lady was that a carriage had been seen for some time on the narrow road in the rear of the Grange, where the wooded ground affords the closest cover for an unobserved approach. The same carriage, or one very like it, had been seen in the village of Crowpton, near which five roads meet; and here, in bewilderment, the pursuit was, after a time, abandoned.

When Mr. Tintern arrived, nearly five hours had passed since Miss Tintern's flight. That did not deter him, however; he started without delay, and did not return until late next day, to find that Mrs. Tintern had received a short and rather distracted letter from her daughter, who was, in fact, married to Captain Vivian. For many hours after his arrival, under this great blow to all his plans, Mr. Tintern quite forgot Roydon Hall and its concerns.

Lady Vernon was, however, far too important an influence in the general scheme of his speculations, to be long out of his thoughts. Lady Vernon, therefore, had a note from him, a part of which she did not very well understand, not at all in Mr. Tintern's usual neat style.

It said that not knowing whether Lady Vernon was well enough to see him, he had been compelled, without even taking off his hat at the Grange, to run on upon business of the very most momentous kind. He had been in attendance at Glarewoods, and he and Antomarchi were both of opinion that the commissioner took precisely the same view of the case in which so many concur, who are profoundly and painfully interested in the case of Miss Vernon. "Captain Vivian, whom, owing to special circumstances with which I shall acquaint you, I cannot, for a moment, dismiss from my thoughts, has behaved like a villain. It pains me to apply that term to any person who was ever honoured by your notice or consideration."

At that moment, not a living creature, except Mr. and Mrs. Tintern, and the absconding lover, was aware that Captain Vivian had any but the slightest acquaintance with Miss Ethel Tintern, or dreamed of connecting her disappearance with him.

Lady Vernon, who was always perfectly up in the Roydon news, without making the least apparent effort to learn it, had heard of Ethel's flight, without knowing whether quite to believe it or not, or, in any case, caring about it. Mr. Tintern's words respecting Captain Vivian — Elwyn, as she called him — she, with a morbid terror, referred to the suspicion that was nearest her own heart. Fate seemed driving her into a corner. Must she avow the grand folly and humiliation of her life? Must that proud, conspicuous woman stand in the gaze of the world in abject penance?

In the mean time Mr. Marston, furnished with a report of what had taken place before the commissioner, noted down from the careful narrative of Mr. Dawe, ran up to London that night to talk the matter over with an able Chancery Q.C., who always lingered late in town, and who was leader in all the Warhampton business. This gentleman knew Mr. Steele officially, and could estimate the view he was likely to take.

"Damian's establishment, and Damian's opinion, stand very high in our court," he said. "Antomarchi has only appeared once or twice, second fiddle, you know; Damian's thinking the depositions sufficient, will go a great way; and the evidence is so strong and clear — — "

"So plausible and audacious," said Marston.

"That I am quite satisfied," continued the barrister, "there is not a chance of getting the court to order the young lady's discharge. I don't think by habeas corpus, at common law, with such evidence, you would have the smallest chance, either. You must lie by for a time, and if it be as her friends think, the medical people there will find it out, and all ultimately be as you would wish. But I should not advise public proceedings. They would fail; and the young lady occupying so conspicuous a position, the affair would become the talk of all England. It is better to wait."

A gloomy and distracted letter Marston wrote to Maximilla Medwyn; and one as gloomy, but more reserved, to Mr. Dawe.

What was he now to do? Inaction in such a state of things was intolerable! A few hours later saw him at Brighton, on the doorsteps of the house in which Mr. Damian for the time resided; it was night, and the moon shining, and a thin chill mist made sea, and shipping, and houses vague.

"Can I see Doctor Damian?" he asked of the servant who opened the door.

"If you please to wait a moment, sir, I'll inquire; who shall I say?"

"He does not know me, and my name will hardly help him; give him this card, however, and say that I call upon urgent business connected with Glarewoods. I'll wait here till you come down."

He stood on the steps, looking toward the sea, wondering whether Mr. Damian would see him, and without any distinct plan as to how to order and arrange what he had to say.

The servant returned; Doctor Damian would see him.

He followed to the drawingroom, in which were an unusual number of candles burning, and for the first time he saw Doctor Damian, of whom he had heard a great deal in the course of his life.

He saw, standing at some distance, a tall, lean man, broad-shouldered, erect, with hair white as snow, a broad square forehead, and a resolute face.

He had heard that this man was benevolent and pious. He saw nothing in his face but cold command and sternness.

He placed a chair for Mr. Marston, with a slight bow, and asked him, by name, to sit down.

"You are a son of Lord Warhampton, I conjecture, from the address upon your card?" said the old man, in a voice still clear, and, like his aspect, somewhat stern.

Mr. Marston assented, and the doctor, taking a chair, asked him to state the object of his visit.

Doctor Damian listened to the young man's fluent and sometimes vehement address with a countenance unmoved and impenetrable.

"We have never had at Glarewoods a single case of fraudulently imputed insanity," he said with cold decision. "The statement on which Miss Vernon was admitted, and furnished in the form of attested copies of affidavits, was conclusive upon that point; I assume them to be true; you mention the inquiry just held at Glarewoods, on the motion of friends and relations, into this case. I have heard from Antomarchi on the subject. Have you about you the report you said you had of what occurred there, and if so can you permit me to read it?"

Mr. Marston placed the paper in his hands. He glanced through it. Mr. Marston could not help admiring the large, cold, grey eyes with which the old man read it. To judge by his countenance, it had not made the slightest impression upon him.

"When shall we know the nature of the commissioner's report?" he asked.

"In a day or two, I believe," Marston said.

"And what particular request, Mr. Marston, do you urge upon me?" he inquired.

"I want you, with the immense powers you possess in this matter, to recognise the awful obligation so obviously imposed on your conscience, and to take this inquiry actively into your own hands."

The old man smiled coldly.

"You are frank, Mr. Marston. You may fail to persuade, but you don't mince the matter."

"I hope, Doctor Damian, I have not spoken too strongly; I would not offend you for any consideration."

"I am never offended, sir, by bluntness. Will you take some tea, sir, or a glass of sherry; or will you allow me to order some supper: it is later than I thought."

All these hospitable offers were declined with thanks.

"I don't say I am not obliged to you, Mr. Marston, for this call; but you must remember that I speak with a knowledge of Doctor Antomarchi's great ability, and of the statement on which the patient was received at Glarewoods. I quite accept the responsibility that rests upon me; but, from a rather long experience, I can assure you that relations are often very much at issue upon the question of a patient's insanity, when a medical man can entertain no doubt either of its existence or of its very advanced development. I will bear your request in mind. That is the utmost I can say. But I counsel you not to be sanguine. I don't share your hopes."

"But, Mr. Damian, you will not let the matter rest?"

"I shall make the inquiries necessary to satisfy the friends and relations whom you represent, sir; I can say no more on the subject."

There was something harsh in the tones in which this was spoken that warned Charles Marston that he might possibly do wisely to forbear any further pressure. The old gentleman was accustomed to command, and his air and looks were peremptory.

"Not much sympathy there," thought Charles Marston, as, with a heavy heart, he descended the steps, and walked back toward the London railway.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THREE DOCTORS.

A letter reached Mr. Dawe two days later, from his solicitor, stating that the commissioner had reported strongly against removing Miss Vernon from the restraints of her present position; and that the court would not intervene.

This letter made its dismal tour of the three principal promoters of the inquiry; from Mr. Dawe to Miss Medwyn it flew, and from Miss Medwyn to Mr. Marston.

Mr. Marston, on receipt of it, took wing instantly for the Hermitage, in the vague pursuit of sympathy, and longing for some one to talk to.

There are situations and states of mind in which it is quite impossible to remain stationary; a universal irritation of the nervous system, which can only be subdued by overpowering bodily fatigue, and in which nature instinctively impels to change and exertion.

Things were looking very black. He was not aware, until the adverse result was actually made known, how much hope he had secretly cherished.

Whirling up the embowered avenue of the quiet Hermitage, with four reeking horses, at a canter — he would have had six if they would have brought him there five minutes sooner — Charles Marston reached the steps of the oldfashioned house, and running up them he rang at the hall-door as impetuously as if his best-beloved lay within, in the agonies of death, and he had arrived with a specific in his hand.

On learning that Miss Medwyn was in the drawingroom, without waiting to be announced, he hurried to the room, and found her with Mr. Dawe, who had arrived only ten minutes before.

Mr. Dawe had other things beside this to trouble him. A letter had reached him from Captain Vivian, in whom, by a kind of adoption, he took a very near interest, relating what had occurred. Mr. Dawe was angry. He had been tricked in return for years of kindness.

Why should he be surprised or angry? If it were not that every child of earth must learn wisdom for himself, in the school of pain and labour, and if experience were orally communicable, as old people are prone to fancy it is, and if youth were less conceited and selfish, comparatively few foolish things would be done, and this life would lose, in a large measure, its efficacy as a place of discipline.

Mr. Dawe is going on with this particular news to Lady Vernon. She may or may not see him, as she thinks fit; but she ought to hear it as soon as he; and he is not deterred by the language she held to him a few weeks ago.

“I must see Lady Vernon first, upon quite another matter,” said Mr. Dawe, therefore, mysteriously. “But I will meet you, Mr. Marston, in town, at my attorney’s, this day week. I have put my hand to the plough, and will not look back.”

“Could you not name an earlier day?” urged Mr. Marston.

“This day week, if you please,” said Mr. Dawe.

“And where will a letter find you in the mean time?” asked active Miss Medwyn, who rather liked writing notes.

“I shall sleep, tomorrow night, at the Verney Arms; and I shall not leave Roydon till evening. I have business in the neighbourhood.”

And so Mr. Dawe took his leave.

A week’s delay, to a man upon the rack, is a good deal. It was quite impossible that Charles Marston should be quiet all that time.

Maximilla liked his impatience, and sympathised with all his unreasonableness.

“Quite accidentally,” she said, “I heard such a character of Doctor Antomarchi, from our rector, here; he had a cousin who was confined at Glarewoods, and discharged about a year ago; and he says that Doctor Antomarchi is quite a charming person, and the kindest man you can imagine; and he thought Mr. Damian, on the contrary, a severe man, with hardly a human sympathy, although his establishment is conducted on very genial and indulgent principles. His view of Mr. Damian corresponds very much with your impression, on seeing him at Brighton. He thought him conscientious, but cold and stern. Now I have taken a whim into my head; I don’t know why, but I do fancy if we went to Glarewoods and saw Doctor Antomarchi, to-day, some good would come of it. I think he would allow me to see Maud, and I have been two or three times on the point of ordering the carriage and setting out for the railway.”

Full of this whimsical presentiment, I shall leave her, still in conference with Charles Marston, who is only too well pleased to find the active old lady almost as restless as himself.

Night descends on Glarewoods, and all the country round. Moonlight falls on lofty trees and dark yew hedges, on high, carved chimneys, steep roofs, and black oak cagework with white plaster between. From long rows of windows overlooking the croquet-ground peeps the peculiar soft light, emitted through the dull globes fixed in the ceilings of the patients' rooms. This is not one of the festive nights at Glarewoods, and neither ball nor concert stirs the strange gaiety of the colony that dwells there.

The great house, with its sylvan surroundings, looks all serenity and happiness; more like fair Belmont, as Lorenzo and Jessica beheld it, in the moonlight, than a madhouse.

A visitor is closeted with Antomarchi. It is Doctor Malkin, who has come from Roydon, to talk and hear, on Lady Vernon's behalf, all that it may at this moment concern her to learn.

They have had their conference, and have dined together. They are sitting now at an open window, looking out on the moonlit croquet-ground. A small round table, with decanters and glasses on it, stands close by; they are sipping their claret, with their eyes turned toward the drooping flowers and dewy foliage, while they talk for a minute longer about Miss Vernon.

Candles are burning at the further end of the room. They prefer the open window and the moon.

"You and Miss Medwyn are at issue respecting the young lady's state of mind," said Antomarchi.

"I am a very secondary opinion on the question," answered Malkin, peering into the claret in his glass; "you may observe that I contribute, myself, next to nothing to the proof, and rest my opinion entirely upon the assumption that the evidence on which I found it is strictly true; and I have been looking the subject up, and I'm not afraid to maintain that opinion anywhere."

"Nor am I; nor is Damian," said Antomarchi. "She is violent; she was troublesome this morning. Tomorrow, at twelve, I have arranged to give that young lady a fright that will a good deal tame her."

"It is very sad it should be so," murmured Doctor Malkin, still looking down with a gloomy shake of his head.

"It is very sad," echoed Antomarchi, abstractedly.

And there followed a silence, during which Darkdale entered the room.

"Miss Medwyn, the old lady who was here before the commissioner," Mr. Darkdale said softly, leaning over his shoulder, "is in the waiting-room, with a friend, and hopes that you will see her, and desires me to say, that she is most anxious to visit Miss Vernon, for ever so short a time, in her room."

"Tell her I regret I can't possibly permit an interview with Miss Vernon; but that I shall be very happy, in a few minutes, to see Miss Medwyn in the waiting-room."

"I remember you, Antomarchi, in Paris," said Doctor Malkin, as soon as Darkdale was gone. "You and I have played billiards there, and could hardly afford our demi-tasse of coffee after. I little fancied I should see you what you are. If I had your cards to play, I should die a baronet with ten thousand a year, and you can play them better than I. I wish you'd tell me your secret; what god do you worship? Æsculapius, Fortune, Satan? Do give a poor devil a wrinkle."

"Fill your glass; take comfort; I'm not quite so prosperous as you fancy. I have burnt my fingers a little in that cursed thing that old Tintern went into; but, as you say, I am making way, notwithstanding."

"Making way? Why, my dear fellow, you know all this must belong to you, it *must*, and managed as you would manage it, it is the revenue of a principality. When does old Damian return?"

"In a month, perhaps; perhaps in six; perhaps *never*," says Antomarchi, who was in a state of luxurious goodhumour. "It is high time he should take a little rest; it is only fair. He can't be many months on this side of seventy, and he may sing Non sum qualis eram."

"I am not what I used to was," translated Doctor Malkin, facetiously.

"He does not like work as he used," continued Antomarchi, "and he has confidence in me; and he feels he need not fatigue himself as he used; he may take his ease, and yet all go well."

"All go better," said Malkin.

"I did not say that; but it is not a great way from the truth. He is sometimes a little bit in one's way; but his name in the concern is valuable, and he is a good man, and always, at least, means well."

"He'll make over the whole concern to you before a year, on an annuity, and he won't live three years after; and then you are monarch of all you survey! You'll be wanting a sharp fellow to play second fiddle, eh? And if you think *I* would answer, it is the kind of thing I should like."

"First make me monarch of all I survey. It would be idle choosing my man Friday till I step into my island."

A slight noise at the other end of the room attracted the eyes of both. They saw a tall man with a resolute face, and hair white as snow, standing near the door, hat in hand, as if off a journey.

With an odd sensation, for he did not know at what moment he had entered, Doctor Malkin, sitting in the moonlight, with his claret glass in his fingers, recognised Mr. Damian, exhibited, like a figure of Schalkin's, in the oblique candlelight.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

LIGHT.

“How d’ye do, Doctor Malkin?” said Mr. Damian, with a short nod. “I called at Roydon Hall to-day, only an hour after you had left it. How d’ye do, Antomarchi?” Antomarchi had walked up to him, and extended his hand, which Damian took, and shook civilly, but with no great energy. “I have come here to-day,” he continued, “about Miss Vernon’s case; I’m not quite satisfied about it. I ought to have stayed perhaps to see her. We could then have consulted. But it seemed on the statement a very clear case. Had I known that her family were divided on the point, I should have thought twice.”

“I can’t say *that*,” said Antomarchi, promptly. “There is no division of the family, sir; but one dissentient, an old lady, Miss Medwyn, who said her say here, and nothing in it. Mr. Dawe is no relation, Mr. Marston is none; although I’m told he would have no objection to become one.”

“I had a letter from Mr. Dawe this morning,” said Mr. Damian.

“He’s a very strong partisan,” observed Antomarchi, with a satirical smile.

“Yes,” acquiesced Damian, and turned to Malkin. “You recollect, sir, the substance of your statement?” said Damian. “May I put two or three questions to you upon it?”

Damian sat down, and he and Malkin had a short talk; and Damian thanked him in a gentle abstraction, like a man who is meditating on the materials of a hypothesis.

A few minutes later, Doctor Malkin had taken his leave, and was on his way to the railway.

Damian was still sitting in his cloak, his white head leaning on his hand, thinking. On a sudden looking up, he said gently:

“We may as well see the young lady now.”

“Don’t you think, sir, it may be a little late?” suggested Antomarchi.

Damian looked at his watch.

"I think not; only a quarter past eight," said he. "Let the young lady decide. I will send the message. We can see her in the office."

Thither they went.

"I am very glad on my own account you have come, sir. I was glad to have even Mr. Dawe, the other day; when a question *is* raised, it is not pleasant to be quite alone."

"I'm sure of it," said Damian.

He touched the office-bell, and told the servant to send Mr. Darkdale to him.

He charged that officer with his message to Miss Vernon; and when he had gone, he sent for the "register" and the "ledger" of the establishment.

"You will see in the ledger a reference to a letter of Lady Vernon's, it is intended only for *your* eye and mine."

"In the ledger? You mean the register, I suppose," said Damian.

"No — the ledger," said Antomarchi, coolly.

"Then it refers to terms," said Damian.

"Certainly; this is it."

He had taken from the office desk a letter, which looked more like a law paper, folded attorney fashion, and he placed it on the ledger which had been laid before Damian.

At this moment the door opened, and Miss Vernon, followed by Mercy Creswell, came in.

The young lady was looking pale and ill.

Damian stood up, and received her with a bow, courteously, and, taking her by the hand, he led her to a chair.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Vernon," he said. "I merely want to talk a little with you, and to ask you how you are; I assure you there is nothing to make you the least uncomfortable in anything that has passed between Doctor Antomarchi and me. Therefore, you must not be nervous; and if you would prefer tomorrow, any time, we can put off our little conversation. Or we can repeat it as often as you please; so that should you feel nervous or put out at one time, you will not be so at another; and I will make every allowance for a little flurry and embarrassment."

"I should much rather you asked me any questions you please, now; but not here."

"And why not here?" he asked, with a smile.

"I can't answer collectedly while Doctor Antomarchi fixes his eyes on me; I am nervous while I am in the same room."

Antomarchi smiled faintly and shrugged, looking at Damian.

"Perhaps, Antomarchi, you would kindly leave us for a little — — "

"*Certainly*," he exclaimed with sudden alacrity, and another little shrug; and so he left the room.

Then Damian, not looking at her otherwise than a well-bred old gentleman might, began to tell her of his journey, and fifty other things, and so drew her into talk; and now and then, adroitly, he insinuated a question; and after fifteen minutes or so, at the end of their interview, he said:

"You will be glad to hear I have no objection to your seeing Miss Medwyn, or any other friend who may call; you may write to any one you please, and your letters shall reach you without being opened. Your stay here will be a short one."

Old Mr. Damian, wrinkled, haggard, grey, as he spoke these words, looked, she thought, like an angel of light. She could have dropped on her knees, and kissed his feet. He talked a little more, encouragingly and kindly. Maud could say nothing; she was crying.

By his direction Mercy Creswell returned; and to her he put many questions; all which she answered with the directness of fear. So she, in turn, was dismissed.

A few minutes more and he was sitting there alone, in deep thought. Presently he touched the bell, and sent for Antomarchi.

"Where is the letter you spoke of? Oh, *here*," said Damian.

He put on his glasses, untied the red tape, and opened the paper.

"This is an agreement," he observed.

He drew back his head a little from it, as if he had seen a centipede or a wasp on the page. He knit his brows and held it closer to the candle, and his countenance darkened as he read on; and when he had come to the end, with the same severe aspect, he read it over again more rapidly, and threw it down on the table. Then he looked to the index of the huge ledger, and opened at the folio indicated as that containing the account of Lady Vernon of Roydon, for her daughter, Miss Maud Guendoline Vernon, for residence, expenses, advice, &c. &c. He let the ledger shut with a heavy slap, and took a turn or two in silence up and down the room. At last he stopped at the other side of the table, looking stern and pale, and said:

"The evidence in Miss Vernon's case looks very well on paper; but it won't stand the test. I saw Lady Vernon to-day. She could not evade my questions. Those threats of suicide melt into mere follies of temper. I have examined Creswell respecting the alleged threat and attempt here. That was temper also. The girl had no more real idea of killing herself than Creswell had. If I had not believed her mother's testimony on the point of suicide, I should have insisted on evidence of more developed symptoms than are set out in the statement. You observe there is no pretence of any delusion?"

Antomarchi assented and said: "That is not necessary to constitute insanity."

"No, quite right," said Damian. "We have had here too many cases of melancholia, of mania, in its slighter degrees — and of suicidal mania fully developed — to require the presence of delusion as a test. But there is no impulse to suicide here. The evidence of Elihu Lizard without this is not enough. It is explained away by the statement, very clear and sensible, of Miss Medwyn, which reached me last night in a letter from Mr. Dawe, and I am informed that Elihu Lizard is in custody, the judge before whom he appeared in a will case having directed a prosecution for perjury against him. Lastly, I have had a long conversation with the young lady. It has satisfied me. She shall leave this forthwith."

Antomarchi smiled, but his face darkened.

"I am very glad, sir, you take so decided a view. I told Mr. Steele, and all Miss Vernon's friends, that I should be for my part, only too glad to be relieved of the responsibility. It is an ugly case."

"It was not an ugly case," said old Damian, sternly, "until that letter was written and received. Has it been acted upon?"

"There has been the outfit, and the furniture and decoration."

"How much money has been paid?"

"Two thousand five hundred pounds."

"Five thousand a year for the maintenance of one girl!"

"With servants and carriage for her exclusive use," said Antomarchi.

"All which would not have cost us seven hundred a year," added Damian. "I wish I had known of the existence of that letter to-day," and Damian struck the knuckles of his open hand upon it sharply, "and I should have held different language to my Lady Vernon."

He turned and resumed his impatient walk up and down the room.

“If I had thought it the least excessive, I should have been the last man to agree to it, sir,” said Antomarchi, coldly.

“It can’t bear the light,” said Damian. “It is a very black case.”

“You’ll please not to apply such terms to anything *I* have sanctioned,” said Antomarchi. “I suppose we are to do something more than simply pay expenses here? I rather think we have a right to profits; and, considering all our labour and responsibilities, large profits too. I might have hid that letter from you if I had been what you, I think, dare not insinuate.”

He might have added that he had seriously thought of doing so, but rejected it as too hazardous a game.

“I have passed through life with honour,” continued Damian. “To think that my house and name should be abused to such a purpose!”

Antomarchi’s pale face glared angrily after the old man as he walked toward the upper end of the room.

“It *is* the right course,” mused Damian, gloomily, to himself. “I have been long enough here. I think I shall relinquish it.”

Antomarchi heard these words with a presentiment that the retirement which he had long looked forward to was imminent.

After an interval, Damian arrested his walk opposite to Antomarchi, and looking him sternly in the face, he said:

“I shall break up this establishment.”

“Break it up? Transfer it, I fancy, you mean,” remarked Antomarchi.

“Transfer it; to whom?” said Damian.

“To me, of course,” answered Antomarchi, doggedly.

“Certainly not,” answered the old man; “we part, you and I, forthwith.”

“You’ll think twice, before you try that,” said Antomarchi, his black beard and brows looking blacker as his face whitened and his eyes gleamed with fury. “See, old man; I have given many of the best years of my life to maintaining your enormous revenues, and, by my priceless exertions, supporting your undeserved reputation. I have no notion of being sold by your caprice. I’m a partner, and if you presume intentionally to hurt the business of this concern to the value of a guinea, I’ll make you repent it.”

“My powers, under our deed, are clear; I mean to act upon them,” said Damian, with cold decision.

“You mean to say that letter is a covenant to bribe us; that I have sold myself to a conspiracy, of which Lady Vernon is the mainspring, and her daughter the victim, and that your superior conscience or delicacy interposes to save her?” demanded Antomarchi.

Damian made him no answer.

“If you seriously meditate what you say, you have lost your head, and as your partner I shall look after my property, and see that you are restrained from inflicting the injury you meditate; I have more lines of defence and attack than you are, perhaps, prepared for.” Antomarchi smiled with a baleful eye on the resolute old man, as he said this. “You have taken the letter,” he added; “you will be good enough to replace it in the office desk.”

“One moment,” said Damian, who had been writing a few lines on two sheets of notepaper, and now rose and touched the bell. He desired the servant to send Mr. Darkdale, who forthwith was there.

“Take this copy, Mr. Darkdale, and compare, as I read the original aloud. Doctor Antomarchi, this is addressed to you.” And he read aloud a formal notice of the dissolution of partnership, which he then handed to Antomarchi.

“And take notice, Mr. Darkdale,” said Antomarchi, “original and copy are no better than waste paper.”

“Tonight, or tomorrow, which you please, you shall have a cheque for the liquidated sum to which, on retirement, you are entitled by the deed,” said old Damian.

“You expect to get out of all this, sir,” said Antomarchi, with a sarcastic laugh, as Damian withdrew with the grim formality of a bow, “on particularly easy terms.”

Antomarchi was not a devil to be easily cast out. His cool and vigorous head was already scheming mischief.

In the mean time, having learned that Miss Medwyn was in the waiting-room, Damian proceeded thither, and having heard her request, instantly granted it; shook Mr. Marston by the hand, and added:

“I have carefully considered Miss Vernon’s case, and I am perfectly clear that she is, and always has been, of perfectly sound mind.”

After immense jubilation and many tears from Miss Medwyn, came the happy thought.

“And she may leave this, with me, tonight?”

“I see no objection; but you must give me a letter to say that you receive her only till her proper guardians shall have made their wishes known.”

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE ANTECHAMBER.

I need not trouble you with details. That night Maud Vernon was free, and slept under the roof of the pleasant Hermitage.

Charles Marston passed the night at the Star and Garter, at Wybourne, whence he popped in upon the party at breakfast.

Never was so happy a breakfast; never was known, before or since, so delightful a ramble as followed, among the selfsame grassy slopes and lordly trees, near the ivy-bound walls and arches of the ruined manorhouse of Wybourne, among which Charles Marston had on a tumultuously happy afternoon, in the early summer, avowed his love for the beautiful stranger, who was resolved to remain a mystery.

Let us leave them to their happy recollections and foolish talk, and follow a less romantic rambler to his destination.

Mr. Dawe had driven through the town of Roydon the day before. His carriage pulled up at the door of Doctor Malkin. But the physician was making a visit to Lady Vernon, preliminary to his departure for Glarewoods.

So Mr. Dawe, changing his plans, decided on taking Mr. Tintern first.

He had some difficulty in finding him. He was taking a furious walk in his wide plantations, switching the heads off nettles, kicking the withered cones of the pines when they came in his way, and talking fiercely to himself. He found him, at last, in the depths of his solitudes of pine and larch.

Mr. Tintern knew nothing about the “young people,” and desired to know nothing. He hoped he might never see his daughter’s face again. He hoped they might come to the workhouse, and he had many other pleasant things to say in the same vein.

Mr. Dawe talked as if he took an interest in the young man, and confessed that he intended doing something handsome for him, if Mr. Tintern would contribute in a fair proportion; and now came Mr. Tintern’s bleak and furious confession of ruin, as he stood white under the black shadow of his pine-trees, shaking his walking-cane in his clenched fist in the face of an imaginary persecutor, and making the brown colonnades of his sober trees ring with threats, and boasts, and blasphemies; and then the thin old coxcomb, overcome by self-commiseration, on a sudden broke down, and began to cry hysterically.

"I say it's awful; you ought to consider; it was you who brought that d — d fellow down here; and he has been more than half the ruin of me; and now that the thing is past cure, I think you are bound to use your influence with Lady Vernon to exercise her power of appointment under the will in my favour. It would enable me to do what you wish — for I could raise money on it, and she might as well do that, as give it to strangers, or let it go to charitable institutions, that no one cares about. I wish you would — won't you? Do, like a good fellow; *promise* me; and, upon my soul, if I get it, I'll make whatever settlements you ask me, in reason. You may believe me; by Heaven I will."

Perhaps Mr. Dawe was thinking in the same direction, for he grunted rather in the tone of assent. And having heard enough of Mr. Tintern's declamation, and observing that the sun was near the horizon, he took his leave, simply promising to see what could be done, and so made his escape. The conversation had never once touched upon the situation of Miss Vernon. Mr. Tintern was absorbed, for the present, by his last and greatest misfortune.

It was too late, by the time Mr. Dawe reached the town of Roydon, to think of going up to the Hall, to try whether Lady Vernon would see him. He therefore put up for the night at the Verney Arms, and next day walked up to Roydon Hall.

Mr. Dawe, with his usual forethought, had come provided with a note, at which, he thought, her doors would most likely open to him; and while the servant took it to his mistress he stood upon the steps, looking down the avenue, between the double files of lordly trees, whose foliage was already thinned and yellowed in the suns and winds of autumn.

That queer little black-wigged man had, perhaps, his feeling for the picturesque, as handsomer people have. He had paid more than you would have thought for the exquisite little landscapes that hung upon his walls at East Mauling. I should not wonder if he had his secret poetry, and deeper still, his secret romance. It is hard to say what may be in a man so reserved as he, and so sensitive that he takes vows of silence, and wears the habit of a cynic.

The footman now came to say that Lady Vernon will see him, and he follows, not to his left, as he enters, where, at the front of the house, lie the long suite of drawingrooms, but to the right, beyond the shield-room, where, at the rear, a different suite of rooms is placed.

Into one of these he is shown; a square room with a single window, through which you see the funereal yew worked into cloistered walls and arches, and a sombre tree standing near, which keeps the room in perpetual shadow. The heavy curtains hide part of the window, and increase the gloom. Some bygone Vernon seems to have got up this apartment under a caprice of melancholy.

There are three pictures, with something depressing in each. The first, a landscape; a cold, frowning forest glade, that looks as if sun had never shone there, nor bird sung in its leaves. Such a forest as Dante may have seen, with a black marble tomb with sombre weeds drooping over it, near the front, and a solitary figure like a shadow gliding away among the trees into the darker distance. Opposite the window is a fine picture of Cleopatra fainting, with the asp to her bosom. And at the right, scarcely the depth of a step, between the floor and the lower end of the frame, hangs a large repulsive painting of the death of Sapphira. It is powerful, but odious. She lies distorted on the oak flooring, a bit of carpet, with Dutch anachronism, torn in her convulsion from the nails in the boards, is in her dead hand, her jaw fallen, her eyes all white; almost the only light in the picture is that one beam which strikes on the bald head of Peter, who looks ferocious as a brigand. The “young men,” who are stooping to carry her out, smile like ghouls, and behind, row after row, till they disappear in the deepening shadow, the spectators, like ghosts awaiting judgment, stand with dim long faces, white and horror-stricken.

He has time enough to examine these saturnine old pictures, and has more than once peeped at his watch.

At length the thin figure of Latimer, in her accustomed black silk, appears in the doorway close beside the evil-minded “young men,” and the corpse in the shadow; and she looks like a lean matron introduced to show them the way to the dead-house.

“Please, Mr. Dawe, sir, her ladyship has a bad headache; nothing more, she desires me to say; but she is not equal to much exertion, and if you would please to excuse her dressing-gown and slippers, and to make any business you may have as short as you can, she would feel it a kindness.”

“Certainly, Latimer; not five minutes if I can help it,” said he.

“This way please, sir.”

And she led the way into a darksome, but long and stately room.

The shutters of the window next the door are partly open, but the blind down. Those of the remaining two are closed, and the curtains also. The whole room therefore is lighted by less that half a window; and so imperfectly at the upper end, that on first coming in you could not discern objects there.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

LADY VERNON LEAVES ROYDON.

"This is Mr. Dawe, please, my lady," said Latimer, and withdrew softly.

"How do you do, Mr. Dawe?" said the well-known sweet voice from the darkened part of the room; "I'm suffering from headache; but take a chair, where there is a little light, and I'll come as near as I can bear."

He saw a white figure moving slowly towards him; and soon it emerged in the twilight; and Lady Vernon appeared. She had a loose grey dress on, of a very thick soft silk. She pointed to a chair, which accordingly Dawe took; she herself sat down, and appeared a little out of breath.

He was shocked at the change he observed. She had grown thin, and it seemed to him stooped, and was deadly pale except for a small hectic patch in each cheek, which used to come only with agitation. Her eyes looked larger and fiercer, but had the glassy look that strangely suited her peaked features.

She looked sinister as the woman of Endor. He thought the hand of death was on her.

He relented, though his brown corded face and prominent eyes showed no sign; and he said:

"You look ill, Barbara; you must be ill. Who is attending you?"

"No one; I prescribe for myself; it is not anything serious; and I know what suits me."

"You ought to have the best advice from town," he persisted. "And — and, Barbara, I have known you in your cradle; I have had you on my knee when you were a little child; you'll shake hands with me."

He had approached, with his brown hand extended.

"Another time; not to-day," she said, coldly; "pray take my own account of it; I am *not* seriously ill; and be kind enough not to tell my friends that I am dying; I'm bored to death by calls and notes; I shall be quite well in a week. What about Elwyn? *Do* say at once; I implore of you, come to the point."

"I find that Elwyn Howard, or Vivian, your son, is the person who has married Miss Ethel Tintern."

"I knew it, I guessed it," she said after a pause. "There is always a shock when evil surmises turn out true; but I was sure it was so."

"I had a letter this morning from Miss Medwyn," says Mr. Dawe. "She says that Damian pronounces Maud perfectly well, and has sent her away in Maximilla's care from Glarewoods."

"Mr. Damian is doting; but that doesn't excuse his writing libels," said Lady Vernon, flushing a bright scarlet, and then growing deadly pale. "I had a letter of insinuation and insult from him this morning, which he shall rue. I'm glad Maud is set at liberty without my sanction; let her kill me, or kill herself; what does it matter, compared with the tragedy she threatened, and which is now impossible!"

Mr. Dawe nodded, and in a few moments said:

"I have seen Mr. Tintern."

"The wretch!" whispered she, looking down steadfastly on the floor, with cheeks still flushed, and baleful eyes; you might have fancied a Canidia looking down on the blood of her enemy. "He was the contriver of all that misery. He thought that you would provide for the young man. He is utterly false."

"I believe he had quite other intentions for the young lady," said Dawe.

"Don't believe it; what better could a country squire do for his daughter? Mr. Tintern never goes straight to anything. You never discover what he intends, except by his bad acting. And to think of their having caught my beautiful boy in their toils! When he came here ill, he looked so like my own noble Elwyn, the sight of him almost broke my heart. You must bring him to see me; I have made up my mind to tell him everything. He shall know his father, and his poor, broken-hearted mother."

"Well, Barbara, I fear you are exerting yourself too much. One thing I mention for your consideration. Use your power of appointment under the will in favour of Tintern, and you can dictate his settlements for your son, and thus provide for him handsomely."

"It is too late. I executed a deed which excludes him irrevocably; and it is in Mr. Coke's custody."

"You might have consulted me, or some one, with more caution than yourself, Barbara, before taking such a step," said Dawe, after a pause.

"It is taken, and no power on earth can recal it," she said, coldly.

"It is a pity," said Dawe. After a short silence, "I am told there is not a nicer girl in England than Ethel Tintern."

"I hope she mayn't live long," said Lady Vernon, in her cold tones. "'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.' Let His justice be done, and my poor Elwyn released from the wicked companion who deceived him. Ill as I am," she continued, after a pause, "I have written to Mr. Coke to come down to consult upon the letter of that slanderous old man, Mr. Damian; I have walked with God all my days, why will he not spare me one drop in this dreadful cup? I have lived a life of virtue. I have done my duty. I have nothing to retract; nothing to repent of. I will see Maud's face no more. She has never been a child to me. She has been the source of half my misery. Another parent would leave her with a curse. I turn from her in silence. Good people understand and honour me. The wicked I trample under my feet. 'These speak evil of those things which they know not.'" She made her quotation with a low utterance, and with a slow and bitter emphasis. She was talking, as it were, to herself. "'Woe unto them, for they have gone in the way of Cain, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. These are spots in your feasts of charity. Trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness — for ever.'"

She turned as she said this, and Mr. Dawe thought she was weeping, for he heard one or two little sobs.

Latimer, a minute after, in the adjoining room, heard a hoarse voice calling her in strange loud accents. At sound of this discordant summons, through Latimer's brain, with a sure omen, flashed a dreadful suspicion.

Now she is in the room, she does not know how, stooping over the chair, calling distractedly, "My lady! my lady!" in an ear that will never hear sound again. She is holding her up in the chair, but the head sinks and rolls, this way or that, as the weight inclines. "'Tis a faint! 'tis a faint! my God! 'Tis only a faint!" Latimer cries wildly in her terror.

Mr. Dawe has thrown open the shutter, the window itself; and the fitful autumn air eddies in, and the elegant little lace coiffure and its long, dark, grey-and-blue silk ribbons flutter about the dead face and open mouth. Mr.

Dawe has sprinkled water on her face. It streams over it as rain would over a marble bust.

Latimer despairs; she cries out with terror, “What is it, what is it? Is she gone? Oh! she’s gone, she *is* gone! she’s gone!”

Mr. Dawe at the door is calling for help, and soon many feet and voices are in the room. Strange liberties are taken with awful Lady Vernon’s sanctuary. The shutters are thrown open, the curtains dragged back, furniture is wheeled out of the way, huddled together. “My lady’s” Bible lies flat on its face on the floor with its covers open, beside a gilt candlestick and broken candle; broken, too, lies the pretty malachite paper-cutter which dead and buried Vicar Howard owned long since, which he had given her three-and-twenty years ago, and which ever since his death has always been beside her. On the carpet are strewn letters and two or three books, and the gold mounted ink-bottle lies on its side on the rich table-cover, as it were in a swoon, and bleeding ink profusely, quite neglected.

The great and faultless Lady Vernon is by this time on the sofa, a shawl over her feet, her head propped with the pillow, and something under her chin to close her mouth. There are no disclosures of “making up.” The tints on her cheek fade naturally into the proper hue of death.

This solitary lady with one great and untold affection among the living, one passionate affection among the dead, is more alone than ever now. Her pride, her passion, her strong affections, her wickedness, the whole story of her life, signed, sealed, and delivered, and passed out of her keeping now.

A servant is galloping by this time halfway to Shillingsworth to bring the doctor, the Roydon doctor not yet having returned, and Mr. Dawe wishing some skilled inspection, in the case of so great a lady.

All goes on as usual. The little town recovers from its momentary stupor. The scepticism of startled people subsides, and the great conviction is established. Lady Vernon of Roydon is dead.

Mr. Dawe remains at the Verney Arms; Mr. Coke arrives, letters are flying in all directions. Lady Vernon’s will has never been executed. She had not been able quite to make up her mind upon some points, and had no idea that her hour was so near.

The letters that radiate from the Hall to many scores of other homes, chiefly of the great, announce that the physicians agree in referring the sad event to heart-complaint, developed with unusual rapidity.

CONCLUSION.

The remainder of my story pretty nearly tells itself.

In Lady Vernon's secret marriage with the vicar, Elwyn Howard, there was no taint of guilt. There was extreme rashness. Each honestly believed that the wicked person whom he had married in his romantic nonage, and lived with little more than a week, had been dead for years. Her own family had not only published her death, but sworn to the fact, and actually administered some trifling property of hers. It was not until after his marriage, not his seeking, but urged upon him by the wayward and impassioned girl, that the dreadful uncertainty of the situation was, for the first time, suspected. The story is curious, but true. The spoiled girl had revealed her passion to no one. It was not until circumstances compelled her to choose between confidence or exposure, that she disclosed her situation. Mr. Dawe was the sole confidant of her parents in this dark emergency in secret family history. By his advice the young lady and her father set out as if for a short tour on the Continent. The journey diverged and really ended in a sequestered place near a little Welsh village. Here the child of this illfated and invalid marriage was born. Mr. Dawe undertook to direct every particular respecting its early care, its subsequent education, and final position in life.

They were to leave in a day or two, and to return home, in a little time, by a very wide circuit, having taken every precaution necessary for a complete mystification of the good gossips of Roydon, when who should light upon them, traversing a path through the very grounds of the house they inhabited, but about the most unlikely man in the world to be found in that sequestered corner, Sir Amyrald Vernon, the young lady's rejected suitor. He saw signs of alarm and agitation in both, on recognising him, by no means to be accounted for by an accidental meeting with a rejected lover.

They departed; but he remained, and without disclosing their real names, he made himself master of their secret. He tracked Mr. Dawe, and insisted that he should be taken into confidence, and took such a tone, that with the advice of the young lady's father, Mr. Dawe told him the facts of the case, which, painful as they were, yet supplied an answer to suspicions of a more degrading kind.

It was the possession of this secret that enabled him, after the death of the vicar, to bend the proud young lady to his will.

I now turn to Charles Marston and Maud Vernon, who, in due time, there being no longer any let or hindrance, were united. At present they live very much abroad; and, when in England, they do not stay at Roydon, which the young lady associates with many painful recollections, but at their beautiful house of Darrel Abbey.

Doctor Malkin was one of those persons whom Lady Vernon's death disappointed. He wishes very much he had been a little less active in managing that Glarewoods business. But who could have supposed that Lady Vernon would have died before the appointments she intended for him were filled up? He has no liking for the young lady. But for reasons of his own he never hints at the Glarewoods secret, and the good people of Roydon were led to believe that Maud, during her absence, had been making a little tour for her health.

Antomarchi, finding old Damian resolute against committing to him, after the disclosures of which he took so strong a view, a trust so awful as the autocracy of such an empire as Glarewoods, took steps in the Court of Chancery to restrain Mr. Damian from breaking up that establishment, and selling the house and grounds.

This attempt recoiled upon Antomarchi. The court read him an astounding lecture on the facts. The press took it up; and that able adventurer found that England was no longer a field for his talents.

I have heard various accounts of the after adventures of that brilliant rogue, some of which represent him in sore straits; others, following dark and downward paths, and picking gold and silver, but in danger, all the while, of breaking his neck, and lost sight of by the decent upper world.

Mr. Tintern is not quite ruined after all, but he has had to sell nearly all his estates, except the Grange, and a rental of about seven hundred a year. He lives in France; and refuses to see Ethel; and I heard this morning from old Puntles, whom I happened to meet, that he has just had a slight paralytic attack. His temper continues precisely in the state in which his misfortunes left it.

The Reverend Michael Doody has been presented to one of the comfortable livings in the gift of the Roydon Vernons. He is a good deal sobered, and has lost something of his wild spirits and eccentricities. But his energy and goodnature are unabated. It is said that he has cast eyes of affection on a niece of Mr. Puntles. But of this I have heard only as rumour, and must, therefore, speak with reserve.

Vivian and Ethel are as happy as any two people, except perhaps Charles Marston, now Lord Warhampton, and his good and beautiful young wife, can be. Charles and Maud have, indeed, little on earth to desire, for an heir is born to the title of Warhampton, and that heir is not without merry little companions in the nursery. Maximilla almost lives with her old friend Maud, and over the gateway of Warhampton stands, in well-chiselled relief, the time-honoured device of *The Rose and the Key.*

THE END

WILLING TO DIE

Sheridan Le Fanu’s last novel, the unnervingly-titled *Willing to Die*, was published posthumously in three volumes by Hurst and Blackett in 1873, having been serialised in *All the Year Round* earlier that year.

An undated portrait of Le Fanu

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The original title page

TO THE READER.

First, I must tell you how I intend to relate my story. Having never before undertaken to write a long narrative, I have considered and laid down a few rules which I shall observe. Some of these are unquestionably good; others, I daresay, offend against the canons of composition; but I adopt them, because they will enable me to tell my story better than, with my imperfect experience, better rules possibly would. In the first place, I shall represent the people with whom I had to deal quite fairly. I have met some bad people, some indifferent, and some who at this distance of time seem to me like angels in the unchanging light of heaven.

My narrative shall be arranged in the order of the events; I shall not recapitulate or anticipate.

What I have learned from others, and did not witness, that which I narrate, in part, from the hints of living witnesses, and, in part, conjecturally, I shall record in the historic third person; and I shall write it down with as much confidence and particularity as if I had actually seen it; in that respect imitating, I believe, all great historians, modern and ancient. But the scenes in which I have been an actor, that which my eyes have seen, and my ears heard, I will relate accordingly. If I can be clear and true, my clumsiness and irregularity, I hope, will be forgiven me.

*

My name is Ethel Ware.

I am not an interesting person by any means. You shall judge. I shall be forty-two my next birthday. That anniversary will occur on the first of May, 1873; and I am unmarried.

I don’t look quite the old maid I am, they tell me. They say I don’t look five-and-thirty, and I am conscious, sitting before the glass, that there is nothing sour or peevish in my features. What does it matter, even to me? I shall, of course, never marry; and, honestly, I don’t care to please any one. If I cared twopence how I looked, I should probably look worse than I do.

I wish to be honest. I have looked in the glass since I wrote that sentence. I have just seen the faded picture of what may have been a pretty, at least what is called a piquant face; a forehead broad and well-formed, over which the still dark-brown hair grows low; large and rather good grey eyes and features, with nothing tragic, nothing classic — just fairly good.

I think there was always energy in my face! I think I remember, long ago, something at times comic; at times, also, something sad and tender, and even dreamy, as I fixed flowers in my hair or talked to my image in the glass. All that has been knocked out of me pretty well. What I do see there now is resolution.

There are processes of artificial hatching in use, if I remember rightly, in Egypt, by which you may, at your discretion, make the bird all beak, or all claw, all head, or all drumstick, as you please to develope it, before the shell breaks, by a special application of heat. It is a chick, no doubt, but a monstrous chick; and something like such a chick was I. Circumstances, in my very early days, hatched my character altogether out of equilibrium.

The caloric had been applied quite different in my mother's case, and produced a prodigy of quite another sort.

I loved my mother with a very warm, but, I am now conscious, with a somewhat contemptuous affection. It never was an angry nor an arrogant contempt; a very tender one, on the contrary. She loved me, I am sure, as well as she was capable of loving a child — better than she ever loved my sister — and I would have laid down my life for her; but, with all my love, I looked down upon her, although I did not know it, till I thought my life over in the melancholy honesty of solitude.

I am not romantic. If I ever was it is time I should be cured of all that. I can laugh heartily, but I think I sigh more than most people.

I am not a bit shy, but I like solitude; partly because I regard my kind with not unjust suspicion.

I am speaking very frankly. I enjoy, perhaps you think cynically, this hard-featured self-delineation. I don't spare myself; I need not spare any one else. But I am not a cynic. There is vacillation and timidity in that ironical egotism. It is something deeper with me. I don't delight in that sordid philosophy. I have encountered magnanimity and self-devotion on earth. It is not true that there is neither nobility nor beauty in human nature, that is not also more or less shabby and grotesque.

I have an odd story to tell. On my father's side I am the granddaughter of a viscount; on my mother's, the granddaughter of a baronet. I have had my early glimpses of the great world, and a wondrous long stare round the dark world beneath it.

When I lower my hand, and in one of the momentary reveries that tempt a desultory writer tickle my cheek slowly with the feathered end of my pen — for I don't incise my sentences with a point of steel, but, in the old fashion, wing my words with a possibly too appropriate grey-goose plume — I look through a tall window in an old house on the scenery I have loved best and earliest in the world. The noble Welsh mountains are on my right, the purple headlands stooping grandly into the waves; I look upon the sea, the enchanted element, my first love and my last! How often I lean upon my hand and smile back upon the waters that silently smile on me, rejoicing under the summer heavens; and in wintry moonlights, when the north wind drives the awful waves upon the rocks, and I see the foam shooting cloud after cloud into the air, I have found myself, after long hours, still gazing, as if my breath were frozen, on the one peaked black rock, thinking what the storm and foam once gave me up there, until, with a sudden terror, and a gasp, I wake from the spell, and recoil from the white image, as if a spirit had been talking with me all the time.

From this same window, in the foreground, I see, in morning light or melancholy sunset, with very perfect and friendly trust, the shadowy old churchyard, where I have arranged my narrow bed shall be. There my mother-earth, at last, shall hold me in her bosom, and I shall find my anodyne and rest. There over me shall hover through the old church windows faintly the sweet hymns and the voices in prayer I heard long ago; there the shadow of tower and tree shall slowly move over the grass above me, from dawn till night, and there, within the fresh and solemn sound of its waves, I shall lie near the ceaseless fall and flow of the sea I loved so well.

I am not sorry, as I sit here, with my vain recollections and my direful knowledge, that my life has been what it was.

A member of the upper ten thousand, I should have known nothing. I have bought my knowledge dear. But truth is a priceless jewel. Would you part with it, fellow-mourner, and return to the simplicities and illusions of early days? Consider the question truly; be honest; and you will answer "No." In the volume of memory, every page of which, like "Cornelius Agrippa's bloody book," has power to evoke a spectre, would you yet erase a line? We can willingly part with nothing that ever was part of mind, or memory, or self. The lamentable past is our own for ever.

Thank Heaven, my childhood was passed in a tranquil nook, where the roar of the world's traffic is not so much as heard; among scenery, where there lurks little capital, and no enterprise; where the good people are asleep; and where, therefore, the irreparable improvements that in other places carry on their pitiless work of obliteration are undreamed of. I am looking out on scenes that remain unchanged as heaven itself. The summer comes and goes; the autumn drifts of leaves, and winter snows; and all things here remain as my round childish eyes beheld them in stupid wonder and delight when first the world was opening upon them. The trees, the tower, the stile, the very gravestones, are my earliest friends; I stretch my arms to the mountains, as if I could fold them to my heart. And in the opening through the ancient trees, the great estuary stretches northward, wider and wider, into the grey horizon of the open sea.

The sinking sun askance,
Spreads a dull glare,
Through evening air;
And, in a happy trance,
Forest and wave, and white cliff stand,
Like an enchanted sea and land.

The sea-breeze wakens clear and cold,
Over the azure wide;
Before whose breath, in threads of gold,
The ruddy ripples glide,
And chasing, break and mingle;
While clear as bells,
Each wavelet tells,
O'er the stones on the hollow shingle.

The rising of winds and the fall of the waves!
I love the music of shingle and caves.

And the billows that travel so far to die,
In foam, on the loved shore where they lie.

I lean my cold cheek on my hand;
And as a child, with open eyes,
Listens, in a dim surprise,
To some high story
Of grief and glory,
It cannot understand;
So, like that child,
To meanings of a music wild,
I listen, in a rapture lonely,
Not understanding, listening only,
To a story not for me;
And let my fancies come and go,
And fall and flow,
With the eternal sea.

And so, to leave rhyme, and return to prose, I end my preface, and begin my story here.

CHAPTER I.

AN ARRIVAL.

One of the earliest scenes I can remember with perfect distinctness is this. My sister and I, still denizens of the nursery, had come down to take our tea with good old Rebecca Torkill, the Malory housekeeper, in the room we called the cedar parlour. It is a long and rather sombre room, with two tall windows looking out upon the shadowy courtyard. There are on the wall some dingy portraits, whose pale faces peep out, as it were, through a background of black fog, from the canvas; and there is one, in better order than the others, of a grave man in the stately costume of James the First, which hangs over the mantelpiece. As a child I loved this room; I loved the half-decipherable pictures; it was solemn and even gloomy, but it was with the delightful gloom and solemnity of one of Rebecca Torkill's stories of castles, giants, and goblins.

It was evening now, with a stormy, red sky in the west. Rebecca and we two children were seated round the table, sipping our tea, eating hot cake, and listening to her oft-told tale, entitled the Knight of the Black Castle.

This knight, habited in black, lived in his black castle, in the centre of a dark wood, and being a giant, and an ogre, and something of a magician besides, he used to ride out at nightfall with a couple of great black bags, to stow his prey in, at his saddle-bow, for the purpose of visiting such houses as had their nurseries well-stocked with children. His tall black horse, when he dismounted, waited at the hall-door, which, however mighty its bars and bolts, could not resist certain magical words which he uttered in a sepulchral voice —

“Yoke, yoke,
Iron and oak;
One, two, and three,
Open to me.”

At this charmed summons the door turned instantly on its hinges, without warning of creak or rattle, and the black knight mounted the stairs to the nursery, and was drawing the children softly out of their beds, by their feet, before any one knew he was near.

As this story, which with childish love of iteration we were listening to now for the fiftieth time, went on, I, whose chair faced the window, saw a tall man on a tall horse — both looked black enough against the red sky — ride by at a walk.

I thought it was the gaunt old vicar, who used to ride up now and then to visit our gardener's mother, who was sick and weak, and troubling my head no more about him, was instantly as much absorbed as ever in the predatory prowlings of the Knight of the Black Castle.

It was not until I saw Rebecca's face, in which I was staring with the steadiness of an eager interest, undergo a sudden and uncomfortable change, that I discovered my error. She stopped in the middle of a sentence, and her eyes were fixed on the door. Mine followed hers thither. I was more than startled. In the very crisis of a tale of terror, ready to believe any horror, I thought, for a moment, that I actually beheld the Black Knight, and felt that his horse, no doubt, and his saddle-bags, were waiting at the hall-door to receive me and my sister.

What I did see was a man who looked to me gigantic. He seemed to fill the tall door-case. His dress was dark, and he had a pair of leather overalls, I believe they called them, which had very much the effect of jack-boots, and he had a low-crowned hat on. His hair was long and black, his prominent black eyes were fixed on us, his face was long, but handsome, and deadly pale, as it seemed to me, from intense anger. A child's instinctive reading of countenance is seldom at fault. The ideas of power and mystery surround grown persons in the eyes of children. A gloomy or forbidding face upon a person of great stature inspires something like panic; and if that person is a stranger, and evidently transported with anger, his mere appearance in the same room will, I can answer for it, frighten a child half into hysterics. This alarming face, with its black knit brows, and very blue shorn chin, was to me all the more fearful that it was that of a man no longer young. He advanced to the table with two strides, and said, in resonant, deep tones, to which my very heart seemed to vibrate:

“Mr. Ware’s not here, but he will be, soon enough; you give him that;” and he hammered down a letter on the table, with a thump of his huge fist. “That’s my answer; and tell him, moreover, that I took his letter,” — and he plucked an open letter deliberately from his greatcoat pocket— “and tore it, this way and that way, across and across,” and he suited the action fiercely to the words, “and left it for him, there!”

So saying, he slapped down the pieces with his big hand, and made our tea-spoons jump and jingle in our cups, and turned and strode again to the door.

“And tell him this,” he added, in a tone of calmer hatred, turning his awful face on us again, “that there’s a God above us, who judges righteously.”

The door shut, and we saw him no more. I and my sister burst into clamorous tears, and roared and cried for a full half hour, from sheer fright — a demonstration which, for a time, gave Rebecca Torkill ample occupation for all her energies and adroitness.

This recollection remains, with all the colouring and exaggeration of a horrible impression received in childhood, fixed in my imagination. I and dear Nelly long remembered the apparition, and in our plays used to call him, after the goblin hero of the romance to which we had been listening when he entered, the Knight of the Black Castle.

The adventure made, indeed, a profound impression upon our nerves, and I have related it, with more detail than it seems to deserve, because it was, in truth, connected with my story; and I afterwards, unexpectedly, saw a good deal more of the awful man in whose presence my heart had quaked, and after whose visit I and my sister seemed for days to have drunk of “the cup of trembling.”

I must take up my story now at a point a great many years later.

Let the reader fancy me and my sister Helen; I dark-haired, and a few months past sixteen; she, with flaxen, or rather golden hair and large blue eyes, and only fifteen, standing in the hall at Malory, lighted with two candles; one in the oldfashioned glass bell that swings by three chains from the ceiling, the other carried out hastily from the housekeeper’s room, and flaming on the table, in the foggy puffs of the February night air that entered at the wide-open hall-door.

Old Rebecca Torkill stood on the steps, with her broad hand shading her eyes, as if the moon dazzled them.

"There's nothing, dear; no, Miss Helen, it mustn't a' bin the gate. There's no sign o' nothin' comin' up, and no sound nor nothing at all; come in, dear; you shouldn't a' come out to the open door, with your cough in this fog."

So in she stumped, and shut the door; and we saw no more of the dark trunks and boughs of the elms at the other side of the courtyard, with the smoky mist between; and we three trooped together to the housekeeper's room, where we had taken up our temporary quarters.

This was the second false alarm that night, sounded, in Helen's fancy, by the quavering scream of the old iron gate. We had to wait and watch in the fever of expectation for some time longer.

Our old house of Malory was, at the best, in the forlorn condition of a ship of war out of commission. Old Rebecca and two rustic maids, and Thomas Jones, who was boots, gardener, hen-wife, and farmer, were all the hands we could boast; and at least three-fourths of the rooms were locked up, with shutters closed; and many of them, from year to year, never saw the light, and lay in perennial dust.

The truth is, my father and mother seldom visited Malory. They had a house in London, and led a very gay life; were very "good people," immensely in request, and everywhere. Their rural life was not at Malory, but spent in making visits at one country-house after another. Helen and I, their only children, saw very little of them. We sometimes were summoned up to town for a month or two for lessons in dancing, music, and other things, but there we saw little more of them than at home. The being in society, judging by its effects upon them, appeared to me a very harassing and laborious profession. I always felt that we were half in the way and half out of sight in town, and was immensely relieved when we were dismissed again to our holland frocks, and to the beloved solitudes of Malory.

This was a momentous night. We were expecting the arrival of a new governess, or rather companion.

Laura Grey — we knew no more than her name, for in his hurried note we could not read whether she was Miss or Mrs. — my father had told us, was to arrive this night at about nine o'clock. I had asked him, when he paid his last visit of a day here, and announced the coming event, whether she was a married lady; to which he answered, laughing:

“You wise little woman! That’s a very pertinent question, though I never thought of it, and I have been addressing her as Miss Grey all this time. She certainly is old enough to be married.”

“Is she cross, papa, I wonder?” I further inquired.

“Not cross — perhaps a little severe. ‘She whipped two female ‘prentices to death, and hid them in the coal-hole,’ or something of that kind, but she has a very cool temper;” and so he amused himself with my curiosity.

Now, although we knew that all this, including the quotation, was spoken in jest, it left an uncomfortable suspicion. Was this woman old and ill-tempered? A great deal was in the power of a governess here. An artful woman, who liked power, and did not like us, might make us very miserable.

At length the little party in the housekeeper’s room did hear sounds at which we all started up with one consent. They were the trot of a horse’s hoofs and the roll of wheels, and before we reached the hall-door the bell was ringing.

Rebecca swung open the door, and we saw in the shadow of the house, with the wheels touching the steps, a one-horse conveyance, with some luggage on top, dimly lighted by the candles in the hall.

A little bonnet was turned towards us from the windows; we could not see what the face was like; a slender hand turned the handle, and a lady, whose figure, though enveloped in a tweed cloak, looked very slight and pretty, came down, and ran up the steps, and hesitated, and being greeted encouragingly by Rebecca Torkill, entered the hall smiling, and showed a very pretty and modest face, rather pale, and very young.

“My name is Grey; I am the new governess,” she said, in a pleasant voice, which, with her pretty looks, was very engaging; “and these are the young ladies?” she continued, glancing at Rebecca and back again at us; “you are Ethel, and you Helen Ware?” and a little timidly she offered her hand to each.

I liked her already.

“Shall I go with you to your room,” I asked, “while Rebecca is making tea for us in the housekeeper’s room? We thought we should be more comfortable there tonight.”

“I’m so glad — I shall feel quite at home. It is the very thing I should have liked,” she said; and talked on as I led her to her room, which, though very oldfashioned, looked extremely cosy, with a good fire flickering abroad and above on walls and ceiling.

I remember everything about that evening so well. I have reason to remember Miss Laura Grey. Some people would have said that there was not a regular feature in her face, except her eyes, which were very fine; but she had beautiful little teeth, and a skin wonderfully smooth and clear, and there was refinement and energy in her face, which was pale and spiritual, and indescribably engaging. To my mind, whether according to rule or not, she was nothing short of beautiful.

I have reason to remember that pale, pretty young face. The picture is clear and living before me this moment, as it was then in the firelight. Standing there, she smiled on me very kindly — she looked as if she would have kissed me — and then, suddenly thoughtful, she stretched her slender hands to the fire, and, in a momentary reverie, sighed very deeply.

I left her, softly, with her trunks and boxes, which Thomas Jones had already carried up, and ran downstairs.

I remember the pictures of that night with supernatural distinctness; for at that point of time fate changed my life, and with pretty Miss Grey another pale figure entered, draped in black, and calamity was my mate for many a day after.

Our tea-party, however, this night in Mrs. Torkill's room, was very happy. I don't remember what we talked about, but we were in high goodhumour with our young lady-superioress, and she seemed to like us.

I am going to tell you very shortly my impressions of this lady. I never met any one in my life who had the same influence over me; and, for a time, it puzzled me. When we were not at French, German, music — our studies, in fact — she was exactly like one of ourselves, always ready to do whatever we liked best, always pleasant, gentle, and, in her way, even merry. When she was alone, or thinking, she was sad. That seemed the habit of her mind; but she was naturally gay and sympathetic, as ready as we for a walk on the strand to pick up shells, for a ride on the donkeys to Penruthyn Priory, to take a sail or a row on the estuary, or a drive in our little pony-carriage anywhere. Sometimes on our rambles we would cross the stile and go into the pretty little churchyard that lies to the left of Malory, near the sea, and if it was a sunny day we would read the old inscriptions and loiter away half an hour among the tombstones.

And when we came home to tea we would sit round the fire and tell stories, of which she had ever so many, German, French, Scotch, Irish, Icelandic, and I know not what; and sometimes we went to the housekeeper's room, and, with Rebecca Torkill's leave, made a hot cake, and baked it on the griddle there, with great delight.

The secret of Laura Grey's power was in her gentle temper, her inflexible conscience, and her angelic firmness in all matters of duty. I never saw her excited, or for a moment impatient; and at idle times, as I said, she was one of ourselves. The only threat she ever used was to tell us that she could not stay at Malory as our governess if we would not do what she thought right. There is in young people an instinctive perception of motive, and no truer spirit than Laura Grey ever lived on earth. I loved her. I had no fear of her. She was our gentle companion and playmate; and yet, in a certain sense, I never stood so much in awe of any human being.

Only a few days after Laura Grey had come home, we were sitting in our accustomed room, which was stately, but not uncomfortably spacious, and, like many at the same side of the house, panelled up to the ceiling. I remember, it was just at the hour of the still early sunset, and the ruddy beams were streaming their last through the trunks of the great elms. We were in high chat over Helen's little sparrow, Dickie, a wonderful bird, whose appetite and spirits we were always discussing, when the door opened, and Rebecca said, "Young ladies, please, here's Mr. Carmel;" and Miss Grey, for the first time, saw a certain person who turns up at intervals and in odd scenes in the course of this autobiography.

The door is at some distance from the window, and through its panes across that space upon the opposite wall the glow of sunset fell mistily, making the clear shadow, in which our visitor stood, deeper. The figure stood out against this background like a pale old portrait, his black dress almost blended with the background; but, indistinct as it was, it was easy to see that the dress he wore was of some ecclesiastical fashion not in use among Church of England men. The coat came down a good deal lower than his knees. His thin slight figure gave him an effect of height far greater than his real stature; his fine forehead showed very white in contrast with his close dark hair, and his thin, delicate features, as he stepped slowly in, with an ascetic smile, and his hand extended, accorded well with ideas of abstinence and penance. Gentle as was his manner, there was something of authority also in it, and in the tones of his voice.

"How do you do, Miss Ethel? How do you do, Miss Helen? I am going to write my weekly note to your mamma, and — oh! Miss Grey, I believe?" — he interrupted himself, and bowed rather low to the young governess, disclosing the small tonsure on the top of his head.

Miss Grey acknowledged his bow, but I could see that she was puzzled and surprised.

"I am to tell your mamma, I hope, that you are both quite well?" he said, addressing himself to me, and taking my hand: "and in good spirits, I suppose, Miss Grey?" he said, apparently recollecting that she was to be recognized; "I may say that?"

He turned to her, still holding my hand.

"Yes, they are quite well, and, I believe, happy," she said, still looking at him, I could see, with curiosity.

It was a remarkable countenance, with large earnest eyes, and a mouth small and melancholy, with those brilliant red lips that people associate with early decay. It was a pale face of suffering and decision, which so vaguely indicated his years that he might be any age you please, from six-and-twenty up to six-and-thirty, as you allowed more or less in the account for the afflictions of a mental and bodily discipline.

He stood there for a little while chatting with us. There was something engaging in this man, cold, severe, and melancholy as his manner was. I was conscious that he was agreeable, and, young as I was, I felt that he was a man of unusual learning and ability.

In a little time he left us. It was now twilight, and we saw him, with his slight stoop, pass our window with slow step and downcast eyes.

CHAPTER II.

OUR CURIOSITY IS PIQUED.

And so that odd vision was gone; and Laura Grey turned to us eagerly for information.

We could not give her much. We were ourselves so familiar with the fact of Mr. Carmel's existence, that it never occurred to us that his appearance could be a surprise to any one.

Mr. Carmel had come about eight months before to reside in the small old house in which the land-steward had once been harboured, and which, built in continuation of the side of the house, forms a sort of retreating wing to it, with a hall-door to itself, but under the same roof.

This Mr. Carmel was, undoubtedly, a Roman Catholic, and an ecclesiastic; of what order I know not. Possibly he was a Jesuit. I never was very learned or very curious upon such points; but some one, I forgot who, told me that he positively was a member of the Society of Jesus.

My poor mother was very High Church, and on very friendly terms with Catholic personages of note. Mr. Carmel had been very ill, and was still in delicate health, and a quiet nook in the country, in the neighbourhood of the sea, had been ordered for him. The vacant house I have described she begged for his use from my father, who did not at all like the idea of lending it, as I could gather from the partly jocular and partly serious discussions which he maintained upon the point, every now and then, at the breakfast-table, when I was last in town.

I remember hearing my father say at last, "You know, my dear Mabel, I'm always ready to do anything you like. I'll be a Catholic myself, if it gives you the least pleasure, only be sure, first, about this thing, that you really do like it. I shouldn't care if the man were hanged — he very likely deserves it — but I'll give him my house if it makes you happy. You must remember, though, the Cardyllion people won't like it, and you'll be talked about, and I daresay he'll make nuns of Ethel and Helen. He won't get a great deal by that, I'm afraid. And I don't see why those pious people — Jesuits, and that sort of persons, who don't know what to do with their money — should not take a house for him if he wants it, or what business they have quartering their friars and rubbish upon poor Protestants like you and me."

The end of it was that about two months later this Mr. Carmel arrived, duly accredited by my father, who told me when he paid us one of his visits of a day, soon after, that he was under promise not to talk to us about religion, and that if he did I was to write to tell him immediately.

When I had told my story to Laura Grey, she was thoughtful for a little time.

"Are his visits only once a week?" she asked.

"Yes," said I.

"And does he stay as short a time always?" she continued.

We both agreed that he usually stayed a little longer.

"And has he never talked on the subject of religion?"

"No, never. He has talked about shells, or flowers, or anything he found us employed about, and always told us something curious or interesting. I had heard papa say that he was engaged upon a work from which great things were expected, and boxes of books were perpetually coming and going between him and his correspondents."

She was not quite satisfied, and in a few days there arrived from London two little books on the great controversy between Luther and the Pope; and out of these, to the best of her poor ability, she drilled us, by way of a prophylactic against Mr. Carmel's possible machinations.

It did not appear, however, to be Mr. Carmel's mission to flutter the little nest of heresy so near him. When he paid his next visit, it so happened that one of these duodecimo disputants lay upon the table. Without thinking, as he talked, he raised it, and read the title on the cover, and smiled gently. Miss Grey blushed. She had not intended disclosing her suspicions.

"In two different regiments, Miss Grey," he said, "but both under the same king;" and he laid the book quietly upon the table again, and talked on of something quite different.

Laura Grey, in a short time, became less suspicious of Mr. Carmel, and rather enjoyed his little visits, and looked forward with pleasure to them.

Could you imagine a quieter or more primitive life than ours, or, on earth, a much happier one?

Malory owns an oldfashioned square pew in the aisle of the pretty church of Cardyllion. In this spacious pew we three sat every Sunday, and on one of these occasions, a few weeks after Miss Grey's arrival, from my corner I thought I saw a stranger in the Verney seat, which is at the opposite side of the aisle, and had not had an occupant for several months. There was certainly a man in it; but the stove that stood nearly between us would not allow me to see more than his elbow, and the corner of an open book, from which I suppose he was reading.

I was not particularly curious about this person. I knew that the Verneys, who were distant cousins of ours, were abroad, and the visitor was not likely to be very interesting.

A long, indistinct sermon interposed, and I did not recollect to look at the Verney pew until the congregation were trooping decorously out, and we had got some way down the aisle. The pew was empty by that time.

"Some one in the Verney's pew," I remarked to our governess, so soon as we were quite out of the shadow of the porch.

"Which is the Verney's pew?" she asked.

I described it.

"Yes, there was. I have got a headache, my dear. Suppose we go home by the Mill Road?"

We agreed.

It is a very pretty, and in places rather a steep road, very narrow, and ascending with a high and wooded bank at its right, and a precipitous and thickly-planted glen to its left. The opposite side is thickly wooded also, and a stream far below splashes and tinkles among the rocks under the darkening foliage.

As we walked up this shadowy road, I saw an old gentleman walking down it, towards us. He was descending at a brisk pace, and wore a chocolate-coloured greatcoat, made with a cape, and fitting his figure closely. He wore a hat with a rather wide brim, turned up at the sides. His face was very brown. He had a thin, high nose, with very thin nostrils, rather prominent eyes, and carried his head high. Altogether he struck me as a particularly gentlemanlike and ill-tempered looking old man, and his features wore a character of hauteur that was perfectly insolent.

He was pretty near to us by the time I turned to warn our governess, who was beside me, to make way for him to pass. I did not speak; for I was a little startled to see that she was very much flushed, and almost instantly turned deadly pale.

We came nearly to a standstill, and the old gentleman was up to us in a few seconds. As he approached, his prominent eyes were fixed on Laura Grey. He stopped, with the same haughty stare, and, raising his hat, said in a cold, rather high key, “Miss Grey, I think? Miss Laura Grey? You will not object, I dare say, to allow me a very few words?”

The young lady bowed very slightly, and said, in a low tone, “Certainly not.”

I saw that she looked pained, and even faint. This old gentleman’s manner, and the stern stare of his prominent eyes, embarrassed even me, who did not directly encounter them.

“Perhaps we had better go on, Helen and I, to the seat; we can wait for you there?” I said softly to her.

“Yes, dear, I think it will be as well,” she answered gently.

We walked on slowly. The bench was not a hundred steps up the steep. It stands at the side of the road, with its back against the bank. From this seat I could see very well what passed, though, of course, quite out of hearing.

The old gentleman had a black cane in his fingers, which he poked about in the gravel. You would have said from his countenance that at every little stab he punched an enemy’s eye out.

First, the gentleman made a little speech, with his head very high, and an air of determination and severity. The young lady seemed to answer, briefly and quietly. Then ensued a colloquy of a minute or more, during which the old gentleman’s head nodded often with emphasis, and his gestures became much more decided. The young lady seemed to say little, and very quietly: her eyes were lowered to the ground as she spoke.

She said something, I suppose, which he chose to resent, for he smiled sarcastically, and raised his hat; then, suddenly resuming his gravity, he seemed to speak with a sharp and hectoring air, as if he were laying down the law upon some point once for all.

Laura Grey looked up sharply, with a brilliant colour, and with her head high, replied rapidly for a minute or more, and turning away, without waiting for his answer, walked slowly, with her head still high, towards us.

The gentleman stood looking after her with his sarcastic smile, but that was gone in a moment, and he continued looking, with an angry face, and muttering to himself, until suddenly he turned away, and walked off at a quick pace down the path towards Cardyllion.

A little uneasily, Helen and I stood up to meet our governess. She was still flushed and breathing quickly, as people do from recent agitation.

“No bad news? Nothing unpleasant?” I asked, looking very eagerly into her face.

“No; no bad news, dear.”

I took her hand. I felt that she was trembling a little, and she had become again more than usually pale. We walked homeward in silence.

Laura Grey seemed in deep and agitated thought. We did not, of course, disturb her. An unpleasant excitement like that always disposes one to silence. Not a word, I think, was uttered all the way to the steps of Malory. Laura Grey entered the hall, still silent, and when she came down to us, after an hour or two passed in her room, it was plain she had been crying.

CHAPTER III.

THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

Of what happened next I have a strangely imperfect recollection. I cannot tell you the intervals, or even the order, in which some of the events occurred. It is not that the mist of time obscures it; what I do recollect is dreadfully vivid; but there are spaces of the picture gone. I see faces of angels, and faces that make my heart sink; fragments of scenes. It is like something reflected in the pieces of a smashed looking-glass.

I have told you very little of Helen, my sister, my one darling on earth. There are things which people, after an interval of half a life, have continually present to their minds, but cannot speak of. The idea of opening them to strangers is insupportable. A sense of profanation shuts the door, and we "wake" our dead alone. I could not have told you what I am going to write. I did not intend inscribing here more than the short, bleak result. But I write it as if to myself, and I will get through it.

To you it may seem that I make too much of this, which is, as Hamlet says, "common." But you have not known what it is to be for all your early life shut out from all but one beloved companion, and never after to have found another.

Helen had a cough, and Laura Grey had written to mamma, who was then in Warwickshire, about it. She was referred to the Cardyllion doctor. He came; he was a skilful man. There were the hushed, dreadful moments, while he listened, through his stethoscope, thoughtfully, to the "still, small voice" of fate, to us inaudible, pronouncing on the dread issues of life or death.

"No sounder lungs in England," said Doctor Mervyn, looking up with a congratulatory smile.

He told her, only, that she must not go in the way of cold, and by-and-by sent her two bottles from his surgery; and so we were happy once more.

But doctors' advices, like the warnings of fate, are seldom obeyed; least of all by the young. Nelly's little pet-sparrow was ailing, or we fancied it was. She and I were up every hour during the night to see after it. Next evening Nelly had a slight pain in her chest. It became worse, and by twelve o'clock was so intense that Laura Grey, in alarm, sent to Cardyllion for the doctor. Thomas Jones came back without him, after a delay of an hour. He had been called away to make a visit somewhere, but the moment he came back he would come to Malory.

It came to be three o'clock; he had not appeared; darling Nelly was in actual torture. Again Doctor Mervyn was sent for; and again, after a delay, the messenger returned with the same dismaying answer. The governess and Rebecca Torkill exhausted in vain their little list of remedies. I was growing terrified. Intuitively I perceived the danger. The doctor was my last earthly hope. Death, I saw, was drawing nearer and nearer every moment, and the doctor might be ten miles away. Think what it was to stand, helpless, by her. Can I ever forget her poor little face, flushed scarlet, and gasping and catching at breath, hands, throat, every sinew quivering in the mortal struggle!

At last a knock and a ring at the hall-door. I rushed to the window; the first chill grey of winter's dawn hung sicklily over the landscape. No one was on the steps, or on the grey gravel of the court. But, yes — I do hear voices and steps upon the stair approaching. Oh! Heaven be thanked, the doctor is come at last!

I ran out upon the lobby, just as I was, in my dressing-gown, with my hair about my shoulders, and slippers on my bare feet. A candlestick, with the candle burnt low, was standing on the broad head of the clumsy old bannister, and Mr. Carmel, in a black riding-coat, with his hat in his hand, and that kind of riding-boots that used to be called clerical, on, was talking in a low, earnest tone to our governess.

The faint grey from the low lobby window was lost at this point, and the delicate features of the pale ecclesiastic, and Miss Grey's pretty and anxious face, were lighted, like a fine portrait of Schalken's, by the candle only.

Throughout this time of agony and tumult, the memory of my retina remains unimpaired, and every picture retains its hold upon my brain. And, oh! had the doctor come? Yes, Mr. Carmel had ridden all the way, fourteen miles, to Llwynan, and brought the doctor back with him. He might not have been here for hours otherwise. He was now downstairs making preparations, and would be in the room in a few minutes.

I looked at that fine, melancholy, energetic face as if he had saved me. I could not thank him. I turned and entered our room again, and told Nelly to be of good courage, that the doctor was come. “And, oh! please God, he’ll do you good, my own darling, darling — precious darling!”

In a minute more the doctor was in the room. My eyes were fixed upon his face as he talked to his poor little patient; he did not look at all as he had done on his former visit. I see him before me as I write; his bald head shining in the candlelight, his dissatisfied and gloomy face, and his shrewd light blue eyes, reading her looks askance, as his fingers rested on her pulse.

I remember, as if the sick-room had changed into it, finding myself in the small room opposite, with no one there but the doctor and Miss Grey, we three, in the cold morning light, and his saying, “Well all this comes of violating directions. There is very intense inflammation, and her chest is in a most critical state.”

Then Miss Grey said, after a moment’s hush, the awful words, “Is there any danger?” and he answered shortly, “I wish I could say there wasn’t.” I felt my ears sing as if a pistol had been fired. No one spoke for another minute or more.

The doctor stayed, I think, for a long time, and he must have returned after, for he mixed up in almost every scene I can remember during that jumbled day of terror.

There was, I know, but one day, and part of a night. But it seems to me as if whole nights intervened, and suns set and rose, and days uncounted and undistinguished passed, in that miserable period.

The pain subsided, but worse followed; a dreadful cough, that never ceased — a long, agonised struggle against a slow drowning of the lungs. The doctor gave her up. They wanted me to leave the room, but I could not.

The hour had come at last, and she was gone. The wild cry — the terrible farewell — nothing can move inexorable death. All was still.

As the ship lies serene in the caverns of the cold sea, and feels no more the fury of the wind, the strain of cable, and the crash of wave, this forlorn wreck lay quiet now. Oh! little Nelly! I could not believe it.

She lay in her nightdress under the white coverlet. Was this whole scene an awful vision, and was my heart breaking in vain? Oh, poor simple little Nelly, to think that you should have changed into anything so sublime and terrible!

I stood dumb by the bedside, staring at the white face that was never to move again. Such a look I had never seen before. The white glory of an angel was upon it.

Rebecca Torkill spoke to me, I think. I remember her kind, sorrowful old face near me, but I did not hear what she said. I was in a stupor, or a trance. I had not shed a tear; I had not said a word. For a time I was all but mad. In the light of that beautiful transfiguration my heart was bursting with the wildest rebellion against the law of death that had murdered my innocent sister before my eyes; against the fate of which humanity is the sport; against the awful Power who made us! What spirit knows, till the hour of temptation, the height or depth of its own impiety?

Oh, gentle, patient little Nelly! The only good thing I can see in myself in those days is my tender love of you, and my deep inward certainty of my immeasurable inferiority. Gentle, humble little Nelly, who thought me so excelling in cleverness, in wisdom, and countless other perfections, how humble in my secret soul I felt myself beside you, although I was too proud to say so! In your presence my fierce earthy nature stood revealed, and wherever I looked my shadow was cast along the ground by the pure light that shone from you.

I don’t know what time passed without a word falling from my lips. I suppose people had other things to mind, and I was left to myself. But Laura Grey stole her hand into mine, she kissed me, and I felt her tears on my cheek.

“Ethel, darling, come with me,” she said, crying, very gently. “You can come back again. You’ll come with me, won’t you? Our darling is happier, Ethel, than ever she could have been on earth, and she will never know change or sorrow again.”

I began to sob distractedly. I do really believe I was half out of my mind. I began to talk to her volubly, vehemently, crying passionately all the time. I do not remember now a word I uttered; I know its purport only from the pain, and even horror, I remember in Laura Grey’s pale face. It has taken a long and terrible discipline to expel that evil spirit. I know what I was in those days. My pilgrimage since then has been by steep and solitary paths, in great dangers, in darkness, in fear; I have eaten the bread of affliction, and my drink has been of the waters of bitterness; I am tired and footsore yet, though through a glass darkly, I think I can now see why it all was, and

I thank God with a contrite heart for the terrors and the mercies he has shown me. I begin to discover through the mist who was the one friend who never forsook me through all those stupendous wanderings, and I long for the time when I shall close my tired eyes, all being over, and lie at the feet of my Saviour.

CHAPTER IV.

MY FATHER.

Forth sped Laura Grey's letter to mamma. She was then at Roydon; papa was with her. The Easter recess had just sent down some distinguished visitors, who were glad to clear their heads for a few days of the hum of the Houses and the smell of the river; and my father, although not in the House, ran down with them. Little Nelly had been his pet, as I was mamma's.

There was an awkwardness in postoffice arrangements between the two places then, and letters had to make a considerable circuit. There was a delay of three clear days between the despatch of the letter and the reply.

I must say a word about papa. He was about the most agreeable and careless man on earth. There are men whom no fortune could keep out of debt. A man of that sort seems to me not to have any defined want or enjoyment, but the horizon of his necessities expands in proportion as he rises in fortune, and always exceeds the ring-fence of his estate. What its periphery may be, or his own real wants, signifies very little. His permanent necessity is always to exceed his revenue.

I don't think my father's feelings were very deep. He was a goodnatured husband, but, I am afraid, not a good one. I loved him better than I loved mamma. Children are always captivated by gaiety and indulgence. I was not of an age to judge of higher things, and I never missed the article of religion, of which, I believe, he had none. Although he lived so much in society that he might almost be said to have no domestic life whatever, no man could be simpler, less suspicious, or more easily imposed upon.

The answer to Miss Grey's letter was the arrival of my father. He was in passionate grief, and in a state of high excitement. He ran upstairs, without waiting to take off his hat; but at the door of our darling's room he hesitated. I did not know he had arrived till I heard him, some minutes later, walking up and down the room, sobbing. Though he was selfish, he was affectionate. No one liked to go in to disturb him. She lay by this time in her coffin. The tint of clay darkened her pretty features. The angelic beauty that belongs to death is transitory beyond all others. I would not look at her again, to obscure its glory. She lay now in her shroud, a forlorn sunken image of decay.

When he came out he talked wildly and bitterly. His darling had been murdered, he said, by neglect. He upbraided us all round, including Rebecca Torkill, for our cruel carelessness. He blamed the doctor. He had no right, in a country where there was but one physician, to go so far away as fourteen miles, and to stay away so long. He denounced even his treatment. He ought to have bled her. It was, every one knew, the proper way of treating such a case.

Than Laura Grey, no one could have been more scrupulously careful. She could not have prevented, even if she had suspected the possibility of such a thing, her stealing out of bed now and then to look at her sick sparrow. All this injustice was, however, but the raving of his grief.

In poor little Nelly's room my father's affectionate nature was convulsed with sorrow. When he came down I cried with him for a long time. I think this affliction has drawn us nearer. He was more tender to me than I ever remembered him before.

At last the ghastly wait and suspense were ended. I saw no more strange faces in the lobbies; and the strange voices on the stairs and footsteps in the room, and the muffled sounds that made me feel faint, were heard no more. The funeral was over, and pretty Nelly was gone for ever and ever, and I would come in and go out and read my books, and take my walks alone; and the flowers, and the long summer evenings, and the song of birds would come again, and the leaves make their soft shadow in the nooks where we used to sit together in the wood, but gentle little Nelly would never come again.

During these terrible days, Laura Grey was a sister to me, both in affection and in sorrow. Oh, Laura, can I ever forget your tender, patient sympathy? How often my thoughts recall your loved face as I lay my head upon my lonely pillow, and my blessings follow you over the wide sea to your far-off home!

Papa took a long solitary ride that day through the warren, and away by Penruthyn Priory, and did not return till dark.

When he did, he sent for me. I found him in the room which, in the oldfashioned style, was called the oak parlour. A log-fire — we were well supplied from the woods in the rear of the house — lighted the room with a broad pale flicker. My father was looking ill and tired. He was leaning with his elbow on the mantelpiece, and said:

"Ethel, darling, I want to know what you would like best. We are going abroad for a little time; it is the only thing for your mamma. This place would kill her. I shall be leaving this tomorrow afternoon, and you can make up your mind which you would like best — to come with us and travel for some months, or to wait here, with Miss Grey, until our return. You shall do precisely whatever you like best — I don't wish you to hurry yourself, darling. I'd rather you thought it over at your leisure."

Then he sat down and talked about other things; and turned about to the fire with his decanter of sherry by him, and drank a good many glasses, and leaned back in his chair before he had finished it.

My father, I thought, was dozing, but was not sure; and being a good deal in awe of him — a natural consequence of seeing so little of him — I did not venture either to waken him, or to leave the room without his permission.

There are two doors in that room. I was standing irresolutely near that which is next the window, when the other opened, and the long whiskers and goodhumoured, sensible face of portly Wynne Williams, the town-clerk and attorney of Cardyllion, entered. My father awoke, with a start, at the sound, and seeing him, smiled and extended his hand.

"How d'ye do, Williams? It's so good of you to come. Sit down. I'm off tomorrow, so I sent you a note. Try that sherry; it is better than I thought. And now I must tell you, that old scoundrel, Rokestone, is going to foreclose the mortgage, and they have served one of the tenants at Darlip with an ejectment; that's more serious; I fancy he means mischief there also. What do you think?"

"I always thought he might give us annoyance there; but Mandrick's opinion was with us. Do you wish me to look after that?"

"Certainly. And he's bothering me about that trust."

"I know," said Mr. Wynne Williams, with rather gloomy rumination.

"That fellow has lost me — I was reckoning it up only a day or two ago — between five and six thousand pounds in mere law costs, beside all the direct mischief he has done me; and he has twice lost me a seat in the House — first by maintaining that petition at King's Firkins, a thing that must have dropped but for his money; he had nothing on earth to do with it, and no motive but his personal, fiendish feelings; and next by getting up the contest against me at Shillingsworth, where, you know, it was ten to one; by Heavens! I should have had a walk over. There is not an injury that man could do me he has not done. I can prove that he swore he would strip me of everything I possessed. It is ever so many years since I saw him — you know all about it — and the miscreant pursues me still relentlessly. He swore to old Dymock, I'm told, and I believe it, that he would never rest till he had brought me to a prison. I could have him before a jury for that. There's some remedy, I suppose, there's some protection? If I had done what I wished ten years ago, I'd have had him out; it's not too late yet to try whether pistols can't settle it. I wish I had not taken advice; in a matter like that, the man who does always does wrong. I daresay, Williams, you think with me, now it's a case for cutting the Gordian knot?"

"I should not advise it, sir; he's an old man, and he's not afraid of what people say, and people know he has fought. He'd have you in the Queen's Bench, and as his feelings are of that nature, I'd not leave him the chance — I wouldn't trust him."

"It's not easy to know what one should do — a miscreant like that. I hope and pray that the curse of — — "

My father spoke with a fierce tremble in his voice, and at that moment he saw me. He had forgotten that I was in the room, and said instantly:

"You may as well run away, dear; Mr. Williams and I have some business to talk over — and tiresome business it is. Good night, darling."

So away I went, glad of my escape, and left them talking. My father rang the bell soon, and called for more wine; so I suppose the council sat till late. I joined Laura Grey, to whom I related all that had passed, and my decision on the question, which was, to remain with her at Malory. She kissed me, and said, after a moment's thought:

"But will they think it unkind of you, preferring to remain here?"

"No," I said; "I think I should be rather in the way if I went; and, besides, I know papa is never high with any one, and really means what he says; and I should feel a little strange with them. They are very kind, and love me very much, I know, and so do I love them; but I see them so little, and you are such a friend, and I don't wish to leave this place; I like it better than any other in all the world; and I feel at home with you, more than I could with any one else in the world."

So that point was settled, and next day papa took leave of me very affectionately; and, notwithstanding his excited language, I heard nothing more of pistols and Mr. Rokestone. But many things were to happen before I saw papa again.

I remained, therefore, at Malory, and Laura Grey with me; and the shadow of Mr. Carmel passed the window every evening, but he did not come in to see us, as he used. He made inquiries at the door instead, and talked, sometimes for five minutes together, with Rebecca Torkill. I was a little hurt at this; I did not pretend to Laura to perceive it; but in our walks, or returning in the evening, if by chance I saw his tall, thin, but graceful figure approaching by the same path, I used to make her turn aside and avoid him by a detour. In so lonely a place as Malory the change was marked; and there was pain in that neglect. I would not let him fancy, however, that I wished, any more than he, to renew our old and near acquaintance.

So weeks passed away, and leafy May had come, and Laura Grey and I were sitting in our accustomed room, in the evening, talking in our desultory way.

“Don’t you think papa very handsome?” I asked.

“Yes, he is handsome,” she answered; “there is something refined as well as clever in his face; and his eyes are fine; and all that goes a great way. But many people might think him not actually handsome, though very good-looking and prepossessing.”

“They must be hard to please,” I said.

She smiled goodnaturedly.

“Mamma fell in love with him at first sight, Rebecca Torkill says,” I persisted, “and mamma was not easily pleased. There was a gentleman who was wildly in love with her; a man of very old family, Rebecca says, and good-looking, but she would not look at him when once she had seen papa.”

“I think I heard of that. He is a baronet now; but he was a great deal older than Mr. Ware, I believe.”

“Yes, he was; but Rebecca says he did not look ten years older than papa, and *he* was very young indeed then,” I answered. “It was well for mamma she did not like him, for I once heard Rebecca say that he was a very bad man.”

"Did you ever hear of mamma's aunt Lorrimer?" I resumed, after a little pause.

"Not that I recollect."

"She is very rich, Rebecca says. She has a house in London, but she is hardly ever there. She's not very old — not sixty. Rebecca is always wondering whom she will leave her money to; but that don't much matter, for I believe we have more than we want. Papa says, about ten years ago, she lived for nothing but society, and was everywhere; and now she has quite given up all that, and wanders about the Continent."

Our conversation subsided; and there was a short interval in which neither spoke.

"Why is it, Laura," said I, after this little silence, "that you never tell me anything about yourself, and I am always telling you everything I think or remember? Why are you so secret? Why don't you tell me your story?"

"My story; what does it signify? I suppose it is about an average story. Some people are educated to be governesses; and some of us take to it later, or by accident; and we are amateurs, and do our best. The Jewish custom was wise; every one should learn a mechanic's business. Saint Paul was a tent-maker. If fortune upsets the boat, it is well to have anything to lay hold of — anything rather than drowning; an hospital matron, a companion, a governess, there are not many chances, when things go wrong, between a poor woman and the workhouse."

"All this means, you will tell me nothing," I said.

"I am a governess, darling. What does it matter what I was? I am happier with you than ever I thought I could be again. If I had a story that was pleasant to hear, there is no one on earth I would tell it to so readily; but my story —— There is no use in thinking over misfortune," she continued; "there is no greater waste of time than regretting, except wishing. I know, Ethel, you would not pain me. I can't talk about those things; I may another time."

"You shan't speak of them, Laura, unless you wish it. I am ashamed of having bothered you so," I kissed her. "But, will you tell me one thing, for I am really curious about it? I have been thinking about that very peculiar-looking old gentleman, who wore a chocolate-coloured greatcoat, and met us in the Mill Walk, and talked to you, you remember, on the Sunday we returned from church that way. Now, I want you to tell me, is that old man's name Rokestone?"

"No, dear, it is not; I don't think he even knows him. But isn't it time for us to have our tea? Will you not make it, while I put our books up in the other room?"

So I undertook this office, and was alone.

The window was raised, the evening was warm, and the sun by this time setting. It was the pensive hour when solitude is pleasant; when grief is mellowed, and even a thoughtless mind, like mine, is tinged with melancholy. I was thinking now of our recluse neighbour. I had seen him pass, as Miss Grey and I were talking. He still despatched those little notes about the inmates of Malory; for mamma always mentioned, when she wrote to me, in her wanderings on the Continent, that she had heard from Mr. Carmel that I was well, and was out every day with my governess, and so on. I wondered why he had quite given up those little weekly visits, and whether I could have unwittingly offended him.

These speculations would recur oftener than perhaps was quite consistent with the disdain I affected on the subject. But people who live in cities have no idea how large a space in one's thoughts, in a solitude like Malory, a neighbour at all agreeable must occupy.

I was ruminating in a great armchair, with my hand supporting my head, and my eyes fixed on my foot, which was tapping the carpet, when I heard the cold, clear voice of Mr. Carmel at the window. I looked up, and my eyes met his.

CHAPTER V.

THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK.

Our eyes met, I said; they remained fixed for a moment, and then mine dropped. I had been, as it were, detected, while meditating upon this capricious person. I daresay I even blushed; I certainly was embarrassed. He was repeating his salutation, “How d’ye do, Miss Ware?”

“Oh, I’m very well, thanks, Mr. Carmel,” I answered, looking up; “and — and I heard from mamma on Thursday. They are very well; they are at Genoa now. They think of going to Florence in about three weeks.”

“I know; yes. And you have no thoughts of joining them?”

“Oh! none. I should not like to leave this. They have not said a word about it lately.”

“It is such a time, Miss Ethel, since I had the pleasure of seeing you — I don’t mean, of course, at a distance, but near enough to ask you how you are. I dared not ask to see you too soon, and I thought — I fancied — you wished your walks uninterrupted.”

I saw that he had observed my strategy; I was not sorry.

“I have often wished to thank you, Mr. Carmel; you were so very kind.”

“I had no opportunity, Miss Ethel,” he answered, with more feeling than before. “My profession obliges me to be kind — but I had no opportunity — Miss Grey is quite well?”

“She is very well, thanks.”

With a softened glory, in level lines, the beams of the setting sun broke, scattered, through the trunks of the old elms, and one touched the head of the pale young man, as he stood at the window, looking in; his delicate and melancholy features were in the shade, and the golden light, through his thick, brown hair, shone softly, like the glory of a saint. As, standing thus, he looked down in a momentary reverie, Laura Grey came in, and paused, in manifest surprise, on seeing Mr. Carmel at the window.

I smiled, in spite of my efforts to look grave, and the governess, advancing, asked the young ecclesiastic how he was? Thus recalled, by a new voice, he smiled and talked with us for a few minutes. I think he saw our tea-equipage, and fancied that he might be, possibly, in the way; for he was taking his leave when I said, "Mr. Carmel, you must take tea before you go."

"Tea! — I find it very hard to resist. Will you allow me to take it, like a beggarman, at the window? I shall feel less as if I were disturbing you; for you have only to shut the window down, when I grow prosy."

So, laughing, Laura Grey gave him a cup of tea, which he placed on the window-stone, and seating himself a little sideways on the bench that stands outside the window, he leaned in, with his hat off, and sipped his tea and chatted; and sitting as Miss Grey and I did, near the window, we made a very sociable little party of three.

I had quite given up the idea of renewing our speaking acquaintance with Mr. Carmel, and here we were, talking away, on more affable terms than ever! It seemed to me like a dream.

I don't say that Mr. Carmel was chatting with the *insouciance* and gaiety of a French abbé. There was, on the contrary, something very peculiar, both in his countenance and manner, something that suggested the life and sufferings of an ascetic. Something also, not easily defined, of command; I think it was partly in the severe though gentle gravity with which he spoke anything like advice or opinion.

I felt a little awed in his presence, I could not exactly tell why; and yet I was more glad than I would have confessed that we were good friends again. He sipped his cup of tea slowly, as he talked, and was easily persuaded to take another.

"I see, Miss Ethel, you are looking at my book with curious eyes."

It was true; the book was a very thick and short volume, bound in black shagreen, with silver clasps, and lay on the window-stone, beside his cup. He took it up in slender fingers, smiling as he looked at me.

"You wish to know what it is; but you are too ceremonious to ask me. I should be curious myself, if I saw it for the first time. I have often picked out a book from a library, simply for its characteristic binding. Some books look interesting. Now what do you take this to be?"

"Haven't you books called breviaries? I think this is one," said I.

"That is your guess; it is not a bad one — but no, it is not a breviary. What do you say, Miss Grey?"

"Well, I say it is a book of the offices of the Church."

“Not a bad guess, either. But it is no such thing. I think I must tell you — it is what you would call a storybook.”

“Really!” I exclaimed, and Miss Grey and I simultaneously conceived a longing to borrow it.

“The book is two hundred and seventy years old, and written in very old French. You would call them stories,” he said, smiling on the back of the book; “but you must not laugh at them; for I believe them all implicitly. They are legends.”

“Legends?” said I, eagerly— “I should so like to hear one. Do, pray, tell one of them.”

“I’ll read one, if you command me, into English. They are told here as shortly as it is possible to relate them. Here, for instance, is a legend of John of Parma. I think I can read it in about two minutes.”

“I’m sorry it is so short; do, pray, begin,” I said.

Accordingly, there being still light enough to read by, he translated the legend as follows: —

“John of Parma, general of the order of Friars Minors, travelling one winter’s night, with some brothers of the order, the party went astray in a dense forest, where they wandered about for several hours, unable to find the right path. Wearied with their fruitless efforts, they at length knelt down, and having commended themselves to the protection of the mother of God, and of their patron, Saint Francis, began to recite the first nocturn of the Office of the Blessed Virgin. They had not been long so engaged, when they heard a bell in the distance, and rising at once, and following the direction whence the sound proceeded, soon came to an extensive abbey, at the gate of which they knocked for admittance. The doors were instantly thrown open, and within they beheld a number of monks evidently awaiting their arrival, who, the moment they appeared, led them to a fire, washed their feet, and then seated them at a table, where supper stood ready; and having attended them during their meal, they conducted them to their beds. Wearied with their toilsome journey, the other travellers slept soundly; but John, rising in the night to pray, as was his custom, heard the bell ring for matins, and quitting his cell, followed the monks of the abbey to the chapel, to join with them in reciting the divine office.

“Arrived there, one of the monks began with this verse of the Thirty-fifth Psalm, ‘Ibi ceciderunt qui operantur iniquitatem;’ to which the choir responded, ‘Expulsi sunt nec potuerunt stare.’ Startled by the strange despairing tone in which the words were intoned, as well as by the fact that this is not the manner in which matins are usually commenced, John’s suspicions were aroused, and addressing the monks, he commanded them, in the name of the Saviour, to tell him who and what they were. Thus adjured, he who appeared an abbot replied, that they were all angels of darkness, who, at the prayer of the Blessed Virgin, and of Saint Francis, had been sent to serve him and his brethren in their need. As he spoke, all disappeared; and the next moment John found himself and his companions in a grotto, where they remained, absorbed in prayer and singing the praises of God, until the return of day enabled them to resume their journey.”

“How picturesque that is!” I said, as he closed the little book.

He smiled, and answered:

“So it is. Dryden would have transmuted such a legend into noble verse; painters might find great pictures in it — but, to the faithful, it is more. To me, these legends are sweet and holy readings, telling how the goodness, vigilance, and wisdom of God work by miracles for his children, and how these celestial manifestations have never ceased throughout the history of his Church on earth. To you they are, as I said, but stories; as such you may wish to look into them. I believe, Miss Grey, you may read them without danger.” He smiled gently, as he looked at the governess.

“Oh! certainly, Laura,” cried I. “I am so much obliged.”

“It is very kind of you,” said Miss Grey. “They are, I am sure, very interesting; but does this little book contain anything more?”

“Nothing, I am afraid, that could possibly interest you: nothing, in fact, but a few litanies, and what we call elevations — you will see in a moment. There is nothing controversial. I am no proselytiser, Miss Grey,” — he laughed a little— “my duty is quite of a different kind. I am collecting authorities, making extracts and precis, and preparing a work, not of my own, for the press, under a greater than I.”

“Recollect, Laura, it is lent to me — isn’t it, Mr. Carmel?” I pleaded, as I took the little volume and turned over its pages.

“Very well — certainly,” he acquiesced, smiling.

He stood up now. The twilight was deepening; he laid his hand on the window sash, and leaned his forehead upon it, as he looked in, and continued to chat for a few minutes longer; and then, with a slight adieu, he left us.

When he was gone, we talked him over a little.

"I wonder what he is? — a priest only or a Jesuit," said I; "or, perhaps, a member of some other order. I should like so much to know."

"You'd not be a bit wiser if you did," said Laura.

"Oh, you mean because I know nothing of these orders; but I could easily make out. I think he would have told us tonight in the twilight, if we had asked him."

"I don't think he would have told us anything he had not determined beforehand to tell. He has told us nothing about himself we did not know already. We know he is a Roman Catholic, and an ecclesiastic — his tonsure proclaims that; and your mamma told you that he is writing a book, so that is no revelation either. I think he is profoundly reserved, cautious, and resolute; and with a kind of exterior gentleness, he seems to me to be really inflexible and imperious."

"I like that unconscious air of command, but I don't perceive those signs of cunning and reserve. He seemed to grow more communicative the longer he stayed." I answered.

"The darker it grew," she replied. "He is one of those persons who become more confident the more effectually their countenances are concealed. There ceases to be any danger of a conflict between looks and language — a danger that embarrasses some people."

"You are suspicious this evening," I said. "I don't think you like him."

"I don't know him; but I fancy that, talk as he may to us, neither you nor I have for one moment a peep into his real mind. His world may be perfectly celestial and serene, or it may be an ambitious, dark, and bad one; but it is an invisible world for us."

The candles were by this time lighted, and Miss Grey was closing the window, when the glitter of the silver clasp of the little book caught her eye.

"Have you found anything?" said I.

"Only the book — I forgot all about it. I am almost sorry we allowed him to lend it."

"We borrowed it; I don't think he wanted to lend it," said I; "but, however it was, I'm very glad we have got it. One would fancy you had lighted on a scorpion. I’m not afraid of it; I know it can’t do any one the least harm, for they are only stories.”

“Oh, I think so. I don’t see myself that they can do any harm; but I am almost sorry we have got into that sort of relation with him.”

“What relation, Laura?”

“Borrowing books and discussing them.”

“But we need not discuss them; I won’t — and you are so well up in the controversy with your two books of theology, that I think he’s in more danger of being converted than you. Give me the book, and I’ll find out something to read to you.”

CHAPTER VI.

A STRANGER APPEARS.

Next day Miss Grey and I were walking on the lonely road towards Penruthyn Priory. The sea lies beneath it on the right, and on the left is an old grass-grown bank, shaggy with brambles. Round a clump of ancient trees that stand at a bend of this green rampart, about a hundred steps before us, came, on a sudden, Mr. Carmel, and a man dressed also in black, slight, but not so tall as he. They were walking at a brisk pace, and the stranger was talking incessantly to his companion.

That did not prevent his observing us, for I saw him slightly touch Mr. Carmel's arm with his elbow as he looked at us. Mr. Carmel evidently answered a question, and, as he did so, glanced at us; and immediately the stranger resumed his conversation. They were quickly up to us, and stopped. Mr. Carmel raised his hat, and asked leave to introduce his friend. We bowed, so did the stranger; but Mr. Carmel did not repeat his name very distinctly.

This friend was far from prepossessing. He was of middle height, and narrow-shouldered, what they call "putty-faced," and closely shorn, the region of the beard and whisker being defined in smooth dark blue. He looked about fifty. His movements were short and quick, and restless; he rather stooped, and his face and forehead inclined as if he were looking on the ground. But his eyes were not upon the ground; they were very fierce, but seldom rested for more than a moment on any one object. As he made his bow, raising his hat from his massive forehead, first to me, and afterwards to Miss Grey, his eyes, compressed with those wrinkles with which near-sighted people assist their vision, scrutinised us each with a piercing glance under his black eyebrows. It was a face at once intellectual, mean, and intimidating.

"Walking; nothing like walking, in moderation. You have boating here also, and you drive, of course; which do you like best, Miss Ware?" The stranger spoke with a slightly foreign accent, and, though he smiled, with a harsh and rapid utterance.

I forget how I answered this, his first question — rather an odd one. He turned and walked a little way with us.

"Charming country. Heavenly weather. But you must find it rather lonely, living down here. How you must both long for a week in London!"

"For my part, I like this better," I answered. "I don't like London in summer, even in winter I prefer this."

"You have lived here with people you like, I dare say, and for their sakes you love the place?" he mused.

We walked on a little in silence. His words recalled darling Nelly. This was our favourite walk long ago; it led to what we called the blackberry wilderness, rich in its proper fruits in the late autumn, and in May with banks all covered with cowslips and primroses. A sudden thought, that finds simple associations near, is affecting, and my eyes filled with tears. But with an effort I restrained them. The presence of a stranger, the sense of publicity, seals those fountains. How seldom people cry at the funerals of their beloved! They go through the public rite like an execution, pale and collected, and return home to break their hearts alone.

"You have been here some months, Miss Grey. You find Miss Ware a very amenable pupil, I venture to believe. I think I know something of physiognomy, and I may congratulate you on a very sweet and docile pupil, eh?"

Laura Grey, governess as she was, looked a little haughtily at this officious gentleman, who, as he put the question, glanced sharply for a moment at her, and then as rapidly at me, as if to see how it told.

"I think — I hope we are very happy together," said Miss Grey. "I can answer for myself."

"Precisely what I expected," said the stranger, taking a pinch of snuff. "I ought to mention that I am a very particular acquaintance, friend I may say, of Mrs. Ware, and am, therefore, privileged."

Mr. Carmel was walking beside his friend in silence, with his eyes apparently lowered to the ground all this time.

My blood was boiling with indignation at being treated as a mere child by this brusque and impertinent old man. He turned to me.

"I see, by your countenance, young lady, that you respect authority. I think your governess is very fortunate; a dull pupil is a bad bargain, and you are not dull. But a contumacious pupil is utterly intolerable; you are not that, either; you are sweetness and submission itself, eh?"

I felt my cheeks flushing, and I directed on him a glance which, if the fire of ladies' eyes be not altogether a fable, ought at least to have scorched him.

"I have no need of submission, sir. Miss Grey does not think of exercising authority over me. I shall be eighteen my next birthday. I shall be coming out, papa says, in less than a year. I am not treated like a child any longer, sir. I think, Laura, we have walked far enough. Hadn't we better go home? We can take a walk another time — any time would be pleasanter than now."

Without waiting for her answer, I turned, holding my head very high, breathing quickly, and feeling my cheeks in a flame.

The odious stranger, nothing daunted by my dignified resentment, smiled shrewdly, turned about quite unconcernedly, and continued to walk by my side. On my other side was Laura Grey, who told me afterwards that she greatly enjoyed my spirited treatment of his ill-breeding.

She walked by my side, looking straight before her, as I did. Out of the corners of my eyes I saw the impudent old man marching on as if quite unconscious, or, at least, careless of having given offence. Beyond him I saw, also, in the same oblique way, Mr. Carmel, walking with downcast eyes as before.

He ought to be ashamed, I thought, of having introduced such a person.

I had not time to think a great deal, before the man of the harsh voice and restless eyes suddenly addressed me again.

"You are coming out, you say, Miss Ware, when you are eighteen?"

I made him no answer.

"You are now seventeen, and a year intervenes," he continued, and turning to Mr. Carmel, "Edwyn, run you down to the house, and tell the man to put my horse to."

So Mr. Carmel crossed the stile at the roadside, and disappeared by the path leading to the stables of Malory. And then turning again to me, the stranger said:

"Suppose your father and mother have placed you in my sole charge, with a direction to remove you from Malory, and take you under my immediate care and supervision, to-day; you will hold yourself in readiness to depart immediately, attended by a lady appointed to look after you, with the approbation of your parents — eh?”

“No, sir, I’ll not go. I’ll remain with Miss Grey. I’ll not leave Malory,” I replied, stopping short, and turning towards him. I felt myself growing very pale, but I spoke with resolution.

“You’ll not? what, my good young lady, not if I show you your father’s letter?”

“Certainly not. Nothing but violence shall remove me from Malory, until I see papa himself. He certainly would not do anything so cruel!” I exclaimed, while my heart sank within me.

He studied my face for a moment with his dark and fiery eyes.

“You are a spirited young lady; a will of your own!” he said. “Then you won’t obey your parents?”

“I’ll do as I have said,” I answered, inwardly quaking.

He addressed Miss Grey now.

“You’ll make her do as she’s ordered?” said this man, whose looks seemed to me more sinister every moment.

“I really can’t. Besides, in a matter of so much importance, I think she is right not to act without seeing her father, or, at least, hearing directly from him.”

“Well, I must take my leave,” said he. “And I may as well tell you it is a mere mystification; I have no authority, and no wish to disturb your stay at Malory; and we are not particularly likely ever to meet again; and you’ll forgive an old fellow his joke, young ladies?”

With these brusque and eccentric sentences, he raised his hat, and with the activity of a younger man, ran up the bank at the side of the road; and, on the summit, looked about him for a moment, as if he had forgotten us altogether; and then, at his leisure, he descended at the other side and was quite lost to view.

Laura Grey and I were both staring in the direction in which he had just disappeared. Each, after a time, looked in her companion’s face.

“I almost think he’s mad!” said Miss Grey.

“What could have possessed Mr. Carmel to introduce such a person to us?” I exclaimed. “Did you hear his name?” I asked, after we had again looked in the direction in which he had gone, without discovering any sign of his return.

“Droqville, I think,” she answered.

“Oh! Laura, I am so frightened! Do you think papa can really intend any such thing? He’s too kind. I am sure it is a falsehood.”

“It is a joke, he says himself,” she answered. “I can’t help thinking a very odd joke, and very pointless; and one that did not seem to amuse even himself.”

“Then you do not think it is true?” I urged, my panic returning.

“Well, I can’t think it is true, because, if it were, why should he say it was a joke? We shall soon know. Perhaps Mr. Carmel will enlighten us.”

“I thought he seemed in awe of that man,” I said.

“So did I,” answered Miss Grey. “Perhaps he is his superior.”

“I’ll write to-day to papa, and tell him all about it; you shall help me; and I’ll implore of him not to think of anything so horrible and cruel.”

Laura Grey stopped short, and laid her hand on my wrist for a moment, thinking.

“Perhaps it would be as well if we were to turn about and walk a little further, so as to give him time to get quite away.”

“But if he wants to take me away in that carriage, or whatever it is, he’ll wait any time for my return.”

“So he would; but the more I think over it, the more persuaded I am that there is nothing in it.”

“In any case, I’ll go back,” I said. “Let us go into the house and lock the doors; and if that odious Mr. Droqville attempts to force his way in, Thomas Jones will knock him down; and we’ll send Anne Owen to Cardyllion, for Williams, the policeman. I hate suspense. If there is to be anything unpleasant, it is better to have it decided, one way or other, as soon as possible.”

Laura Grey smiled, and spoke merrily of our apprehensions; but I don’t think she was quite so much at ease as she assumed to be.

Thus we turned about, I, at least, with a heart thumping very fast; and we walked back towards the old house of Malory, where, as you have this moment heard, we had made up our minds to stand a siege.

CHAPTER VII.

TASSO.

I daresay I was a great fool; but if you had seen the peculiar and unpleasant face of Monsieur Droqville, and heard his harsh nasal voice, in which there was something of habitual scorn, you would make excuses. I confess I was in a great fright by the time we had got well into the dark avenue that leads up to the house.

I hesitated a little as we reached that point in the carriage-road, not a long one, which commands a clear view of the hall-door steps. I had heard awful stories of foolish girls spirited away to convents, and never heard of more. I have doubts as to whether, had I seen Monsieur Droqville or his carriage there, I should not have turned about, and ran through the trees. But the courtyard in front of the house was, as usual, empty and still. On its gravel surface reposed the sharp shadows of the pointed gables above, and the tufts of grass on its surface had not been bruised by recent carriage wheels. Instead, therefore, of taking to flight, I hurried forward, accompanied by Laura Grey, to seize the fortress before it was actually threatened.

In we ran, lightly, and locked the hall door, and drew chain and bolt against Monsieur Droqville; and up the great stairs to our room, each infected by the other's panic. Safely in the room, we locked and bolted our door, and stood listening, until we had recovered breath. Then I rang our bell furiously, and up came Anne Owen, or, as her countrymen pronounce it, Anne Wan. There had been, after all, no attack; no human being had attempted to intrude upon our cloistered solitude.

"Where is Mrs. Torkill?" I asked, through the door.

"In the still-room, please, miss."

"Well, you must lock and bolt the back-door, and don't let any one in, either way."

We passed an hour in this state of preparation, and finally ventured downstairs, and saw Rebecca Torkill. From her we learned that the strange gentleman who had been with Mr. Carmel had driven away more than half an hour before; and Laura Grey and I, looking in one another's faces, could not help laughing a little.

Rebecca had overheard a portion of a conversation, which she related to me; but not for years after. At the time she had no idea that it could refer to any one in whom she was interested; and even at this hour I am not myself absolutely certain, but only conjecture, that I was the subject of their talk. I will tell it to you as nearly as I can recollect.

Rebecca Torkill, nearly an hour before, being in the still-room, heard voices near the window, and quietly peeped out.

You must know that immediately in the angle formed by the junction of the old house, known as the steward's house, which Mr. Carmel had been assigned as a residence, and the rear of the great house of Malory, stand two or three great trees, and a screen of yews, behind which, so embossed in ivy as to have the effect of a background of wood, stands the gable of the still-room. This strip of ground, lying immediately in the rear of the steward's house, was a flower-garden; but a part of it is now carpeted with grass, and lies under the shadow of the great trees, and is walled round with the dark evergreens I have mentioned. The rear of the stableyard of Malory, also mantled with ivy, runs parallel to the back of the steward's house, and forms the other boundary of this little enclosure, which simulates the seclusion of a cloister; and but for the one well-screened window I have mentioned, would really possess it. Standing near this window she saw Mr. Carmel, whom she always regarded with suspicion, and his visitor, that gentleman in black, whose looks nobody seemed to like.

"I told you, sir," said Mr. Carmel, "through my friend Ambrose, I had arranged to have prayers twice a week, at the Church in Paris, for that one soul."

"Yes, yes, yes; that is all very well, very good, of course," answered the hard voice; "but there are things we must do for ourselves — the saints won't shave us, you know."

"I am afraid, sir, I did not quite understand your letter," said Mr. Carmel.

"Yes, you did, pretty well. You see she may be, one day, a very valuable acquisition. It is time you put your shoulder to the wheel — d'ye see? Put your shoulder to the wheel. The man who said all that is able to do it. So mind you put your shoulder to the wheel forthwith."

The younger man bowed.

"You have been sleeping," said the harsh, peremptory voice. "You said there was enthusiasm and imagination. I take that for granted. I find there is spirit, courage, a strong will; obstinacy — impracticability — no milksop — a bit of a virago! Why did not you make out all that for yourself? To discover character you must apply tests. You ought in a single conversation to know everything."

The young man bowed again.

"You shall write to me weekly; but don't post your letters at Cardyllion. I'll write to you through Hickman, in the old way."

She could hear no more, for they moved away. The elder man continued talking, and looked up at the back-windows of Malory, which became visible as they moved away. It was one of his fierce, rapid glances; but he was satisfied, and continued his conversation for two or three minutes more. Then he abruptly turned, and entered the steward's house quickly; and, in two or three minutes more, was driving away from Malory at a rapid pace.

A few days after this adventure — for in our life any occurrence that could be talked over for ten minutes was an adventure — I had a letter in mamma's pretty hand, and in it occurred this passage:

"The other day I wrote to Mr. Carmel, and I asked him to do me a kindness. If he would read a little Italian with you, and Miss Grey I am sure would join, I should be so much pleased. He has passed so much of his life in Rome, and is so accomplished in Italian; simple as people think it, that language is more difficult to pronounce correctly even than French. I forget whether Miss Grey mentioned Italian among the languages she could teach. But however that may be, I think, if Mr. Carmel will take that trouble, it would be very desirable."

Mr. Carmel, however, made no sign. If the injunction to "put his shoulder to the wheel" had been given for my behoof, the promise was but indifferently kept, for I did not see Mr. Carmel again for a fortnight. During the greater part of that interval he was away from Malory, we could not learn where. At the end of that time, one evening, just as unexpectedly as before, he presented himself at the window. Very much the same thing happened. He drank tea with us, and sat on the bench — his bench, he called it — outside the window, and remained, I am sure, two hours, chatting very agreeably. You may be sure we did not lose the opportunity of trying to learn something of the gentleman whom he had introduced to us.

Yes, his name was Droqville.

"We fancied," said Laura, "that he might be an ecclesiastic."

"His being a priest, or not, I am sure you think does not matter much, provided he is a good man, and he is that; and a very clever man, also," answered Mr. Carmel. "He is a great linguist: he has been in almost every country in the world. I don't think Miss Ethel has been a traveller yet, but you have, I dare say." And in that way he led us quietly away from Monsieur Droqville to Antwerp, and I know not where else.

One result, however, did come of this visit. He actually offered his services to read Italian with us. Not, of course, without opening the way for this by directing our talk upon kindred subjects, and thus deviously up to the point. Miss Grey and I, who knew what each expected, were afraid to look at each other; we should certainly have laughed, while he was leading us up so circuitously and adroitly to his "palpable ambuscade."

We settled Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in each week for our little evening readings. Mr. Carmel did not always now sit outside, upon his bench, as at first. He was often at our tea-table, like one of ourselves; and sometimes stayed later than he used to do. I thought him quite delightful. He certainly was clever, and, to me, appeared a miracle of learning; he was agreeable, fluent, and very peculiar.

I could not tell whether he was the coldest man on earth, or the most impassioned. His eyes seemed to me more enthusiastic and extraordinary the oftener and longer I beheld them. Their strange effect, instead of losing, seemed to gain by habit and observation. It seemed to me that the cold and melancholy serenity that held us aloof was artificial, and that underneath it could be detected the play and fire of a nature totally different.

I was always fluctuating in my judgment upon this issue; and the problem occupied me during many an hour of meditation.

How dull the alternate days had become; and how pleasant even the look-forward to our little meetings! Thus, very agreeably, for about a fortnight our readings proceeded, and, one evening on our return, expecting the immediate arrival of our "master," as I called Mr. Carmel, we found, instead, a note addressed to Miss Grey. It began: "Dear Miss Eth," and across these three letters a line was drawn, and "Grey" was supplied. I liked even that evidence that his first thought had been of me. It went on:

"Duty, I regret, calls me for a time away from Malory, and our Italian readings, I have but a minute to write to tell you not to expect me this evening, and to say I regret I am unable, at this moment, to name the day of my return.

"In great haste, and with many regrets, "Yours very truly, "E. Carmel."

"So he's gone again!" I said, very much vexed. "What shall we do tonight?"

"Whatever you like best; I don't care — I'm sorry he's gone."

"How restless he is! I wonder why he could not stay quietly here; he can't have any real business away. It may be duty; but it looks very like idleness. I dare say he began to think it a bore coming to us so often to read Tasso, and listen to my nonsense; and I think it a very cool note, don't you?"

"Not cool; a little cold; but not colder than he is," said Laura Grey. "He'll come back, when he has done his business; I'm sure he has business; why should he tell an untruth about the matter?"

I was huffed at his going, and more at his note. That pale face, and those large eyes, I thought the handsomest in the world. I took up one of Laura's manuals of The Controversy, which had fallen rather into disuse after the first panic had subsided, and Mr. Carmel had failed to make any, even the slightest, attack upon our faith. I was fiddling with its leaves, and I said:

"If I were an inexperienced young priest, Laura, I should be horribly afraid of those little tea-parties. I dare say he is afraid — afraid of your eyes, and of falling in love with you."

"Certainly not with me," she answered. "Perhaps you mean he is afraid of people talking? I think you and I should be the persons to object to that, if there was a possibility of any such thing. But we are talking folly. These men meet us, and talk to us, and we see them; but there is a wall between, that is simply impassable. Suppose a sheet of plate glass, through which you see as clearly as through air, but as thick as the floor of ice on which a Dutch fair is held. That is what their vow is."

"I wonder whether a girl ever fell in love with a priest. That would be a tragedy!" I said.

"A ridiculous one," answered Laura; "you remember the old spinster who fell in love with the Apollo Belvedere? It could happen only to a madwoman."

I think this was a dull evening to Laura Grey; I know it was for me.

CHAPTER VIII.

THUNDER.

We saw or heard nothing for a week or more of Mr. Carmel. It was possible that he would never return. I was in low spirits. Laura Grey had been shut up by a cold, and on the day of which I am now speaking she had not yet been out. I therefore took my walk alone towards Penruthyn Priory, and, as dejected people not unfrequently do, I was well enough disposed to indulge and even to nurse my melancholy.

A thunderstorm had been for hours moving upwards from the south-east, among the grand ranges of distant mountains that lie, tier beyond tier, at the other side of the estuary, and now it rested on a wide and lurid canopy of cloud upon the summits of the hills and headlands that overlook the water.

It was evening, later than my usual return to tea. I knew that Laura Grey minded half-an-hour here or there as little as I did, and a thunderstorm seen and heard from the neighbourhood of Malory is one of the grandest spectacles in its way on earth. Attracted by the mighty hills on the other side, these awful elemental battles seldom visit our comparatively level shore, and we see the lightning no nearer than about halfway across the water. Vivid against blackening sky and purple mountain, the lightning flies and shivers. From broad hillside, through rocky gorges, reflected and returned from precipice to precipice, through the hollow windings of the mountains, the thunder rolls and rattles, dies away, explodes again, and at length subsides in the strangest and grandest of all sounds, spreading through all that mountainous region for minutes after, like the roar and tremble of an enormous seething cauldron.

Suppose these aërial sounds reverberating from cliff to cliff, from peak to peak, and crag to crag, from one hillside to another, like the cannon in the battles of Milton’s angels; suppose the light of the setting sun, through a chink in the black curtain of cloud behind me, touching with misty fire the graves and headstones in the pretty churchyard, where, on the stone bench under the eastern window, I have taken my seat, near the grave of my darling sister; and suppose an uneasy tumult, not a breeze, in the air, sometimes still, and sometimes in moaning gusts, tossing sullenly the boughs of the old trees that darken the churchyard.

For the first time since her death I had now visited this spot without tears. My thoughts of death had ceased to be pathetic, and were, at this moment, simply terrible. “My heart was disquieted within me, and the fear of death had fallen upon me.” I sat with my hands clasped together, and my eyes fixed on the thunderous horizon before me, and the grave of my darling under my eyes, and she, in her coffin, but a few feet beneath. The grave, God’s prison, as old Rebecca Torkill used to say, and then the Judgment! This new sense of horror and despair was, I dare say, but an unconscious sympathy with the vengeful and melancholy aspect of nature.

I heard a step near me, and turned. It was Mr. Carmel who approached. He was looking more than usually pale, I thought, and ill. I was surprised, and a little confused. I cannot recall our greeting. I said, after that was over, something, I believe, about the thunderstorm.

“And yet,” he answered, “you understand these awful phenomena — their causes. You remember our little talk about electricity — here it is! We know all that is but the restoration of an equilibrium. Think what it will be when God restores the moral balance, and settles the equities of eternity! There are moods, times, and situations in which we contemplate justly our tremendous Creator. Fear him who, after he has killed the body, has power to cast into hell. Yea, I say unto you, fear him. Here all suffering is transitory. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. This life is the season of time and of mercy; but once in hell, mercy is no more, and eternity opens, and endures, and has no end.”

Here he ceased for a time to speak, and looked across the estuary, listening, as it seemed, to the roll and tremble of the thunder. After a little while, he said:

“That you are to die is most certain; nothing more uncertain than the time and manner; by a slow or a sudden death; in a state of grace or sin. Therefore, we are warned to be ready at all hours. Better twenty years too soon than one moment late; for to perish once is to be lost for ever. Your death depends upon your life; such as your life is, such will be your death. How can we dare to live in a state that we dare not die in?”

I sat gazing at this young priest, who, sentence after sentence, was striking the very key-note of the awful thought that seemed to peal and glare in the storm. He stood with his head uncovered, his great earnest eyes sometimes raised, sometimes fixed on me, and the uncertain gusts at fitful intervals tossed his hair this way and that. The light of the setting sun touched his thin hand, and his head, and glimmered on the long grass; the graves lay around us; and the voice of God himself seemed to speak in the air.

Mr. Carmel drew nearer, and in the same earnest vein talked on. There was no particle of which is termed the controversial in what he had said. He had not spoken a word that I could not subscribe. He had quoted, also, from our version of the Bible; but he presented the terrors of revelation with a prominence more tremendous than I was accustomed to, and the tone of his discourse was dismaying.

I will not attempt to recollect and to give you in detail the conversation that followed. He presented, with a savage homeliness of illustration, with the same simplicity and increasing force, the same awful view of Christianity. Beyond the naked strength of the facts, and the terrible brevity with which he stated them in their different aspects, I don't know that there was any special eloquence in his discourse, but in the language of Scripture, his words made "both my ears tingle."

He did not attempt to combat my Protestant tenets directly; that might have alarmed me; he had too much tact for that. Anything he said with that tendency was in the way simply of a discourse of the teaching and practice of his own Church.

"In the little volume of legends you were so good as to say you would like to look into," he said, "you will find the prayer of Saint Louis de Gonzaga; you will also find an anonymous prayer, very pathetic and beautiful. I have drawn a line in red ink down the margin at its side, so it is easily found. These will show you the spirit in which the faithful approach the Blessed Virgin. They may interest you. They will, I am sure, interest your sympathies for those who have suffered, like you, and have found peace and hope in these very prayers."

He then spoke very touchingly of my darling sister, and my tears at last began to flow. It was the strangest half-hour I had ever passed. Religion during that time had appeared in a gigantic and terrible aspect. My grief for my sister was now tinged with terror. Do not we from our Lutheran pulpits too lightly appeal to that potent emotion — fear?

For awhile this tall thin priest in black, whose pale face and earnest eyes seemed to gleam on me with an intense and almost painful enthusiasm, looked like a spirit in the deepening twilight; the thunder rattled and rolled on among the echoing mountains, the gleam of the lightning grew colder and wilder as the darkness increased, and the winds rushed mournfully, and tossed the churchyard grass, and bowed the heads of the great trees about us; and as I walked home, with my head full of awful thoughts, and my heart agitated, I felt as if I had been talking with a messenger from that other world.

CHAPTER IX.

AWAKENED.

We do these proselytising priests great wrong when we fancy them cold-blooded practisers upon our credulity, who seek, for merely selfish ends, to entangle us by sophistries, and inveigle us into those mental and moral catacombs from which there is no escape. We underrate their danger when we deny their sincerity. Mr. Carmel sought to save my soul; nobler or purer motive, I am sure, never animated man. If he acted with caution, and even by stratagem, he believed it was in the direct service of Heaven, and for my eternal weal. I know him better, his strength and his weakness, now — his asceticism, his resolution, his tenderness. That young priest — long dead — stands before me, in the white robe of his purity, kinglike. I see him, as I saw him last, his thin, handsome features, the light of patience on his face, the pale smile of suffering and of victory. His tumults and his sorrows are over. Cold and quiet he lies now. My thanks can never reach him; my unavailing blessings and gratitude follow my true and long-lost friend, and tears wrung from a yearning heart.

Laura Grey seemed to have lost her suspicions of this ecclesiastic. We had more of his society than before. Our reading went on, and sometimes he joined us in our walks. I used to see him from an upper window every morning early, busy with spade and trowel, in the tiny flower-garden which belonged to the steward's house. He used to work there for an hour punctually, from before seven till nearly eight. Then he vanished for many hours, and was not seen till nearly evening, and we had, perhaps, our *Gerusalemme Liberata*, or he would walk with us for a mile or more, and talk in his gentle but cold way, pleasantly, on any topic we happened to start. We three grew to be great friends. I liked to see him when he, and, I may add, Laura Grey also, little thought I was looking at his simple garden-work under the shadow of the grey wall from which the old cherry and rose-trees drooped, in picturesque confusion, under overhanging masses of ivy.

He and I talked as opportunity occurred more and more freely upon religion. But these were like lovers' confidences, and, by a sort of tacit consent, never before Laura Grey. Not that I wished to deceive her; but I knew very well what she would think and say of my imprudence. It would have embarrassed me to tell her; but here remonstrances would not have prevailed; I would not have desisted; we should have quarrelled; and yet I was often on the point of telling her, for any reserve with her pained me.

In this quiet life we had glided from summer into autumn, and suddenly, as before, Mr. Carmel vanished, leaving just such a vague little note as before.

I was more wounded, and a great deal more sorry this time. The solitude I had once loved so well was irksome without him. I could not confess to Laura, scarcely to myself, how much I missed him.

About a week after his disappearance, we had planned to drink tea in the housekeeper's room. I had been sitting at the window in the gable that commanded the view of the steward's garden, which had so often shown me my hermit at his morning's work. The roses were already shedding their honours on the mould, and the sear of autumn was mellowing the leaves of the old fruit-trees. The shadow of the ancient stone house fell across the garden, for by this time the sun was low in the west, and I knew that the next morning would come and go, and the next, and bring no sign of his return, and so on, and on, perhaps for ever.

Never was little garden so sad and silent! The fallen leaves lay undisturbed, and the weeds were already peeping here and there among the flowers.

"Is it part of your religion?" I murmured bitterly to myself, as, with folded hands, I stood a little way back, looking down through the open window, "to leave willing listeners thus half-instructed? Business? What is the business of a good priest? I should have thought the care and culture of human souls was, at least, part of a priest's business. I have no one to answer a question now — no one to talk to. I am, I suppose, forgotten."

I dare say there was some affectation in this. But my dejection was far from affected, and hiding my sorrowful and bitter mood, I left the window and came down the backstairs to our place of meeting. Rebecca Torkill and Laura Grey were in high chat. Tea being just made, and everything looking so delightfully comfortable, I should have been, at another time, in high spirits.

"Ethel, what do you think? Rebecca has been just telling me that the mystery about Mr. Carmel is quite cleared up. Mr. Prichard, the grocer, in Cardyllion, was visiting his cousin, who has a farm near Plasnwyd, and whom should he see there but our missing friar, in a carriage driving with Mrs. Tredwynyd, of Plasnwyd. She is a beautiful woman still, and one of the richest widows in Wales, Rebecca says; and he has been living there ever since he left this; and his last visit, when we thought he was making a religious sojourn in a monastery, was to the same house and lady! What do you think of that? But it is not near ended yet. Tell the rest of the story, Mrs. Torkill, to Miss Ethel — please do."

"Well, miss, there's nothin' very particular, only they say all round Plasnwyd that she was in love with him, and that he's goin' to turn Protestant, and it's all settled they're to be married. Every one is singin' to the same tune all round Plasnwyd, and what every one says must be true, as I've often heard say."

I laughed, and asked whether our teacake was ready, and looked out of the window. The boughs of the old fruit-trees in the steward's garden hung so near it that the ends of the sprays would tap the glass, if the wind blew. As I leaned against the shutter, drumming a little tune on the window, and looking as careless as any girl could, I felt cold and faint, and my heart was bursting. I don't know what prevented my dropping on the floor in a swoon.

Laura, little dreaming of the effect of this story upon me, was chatting still with Rebecca, and neither perceived that I was moved by the news.

That night I cried for hours in my bed, after Laura Grey was fast asleep. It never occurred to me to canvass the probability of the story. We are so prone to believe what we either greatly desire or greatly fear. The violence of my own emotions startled me. My eyes were opened at last to a part of my danger.

As I whispered, through convulsive sobs, "He's gone, he's gone — I have lost him — he'll never be here any more! Oh! why did you pretend to take an interest in me? Why did I listen to you? Why did I like you?" All this, and as much more girlish lamentation and upbraiding as you please to fancy, dispelled my dream and startled my reason. I had an interval to recover in; happily for me, this wild fancy had not had time to grow into a more impracticable and dangerous feeling. I felt like an awakened somnambulist at the brink of a precipice. Had I become attached to Mr. Carmel, my heart must have broken in silence, and my secret have perished with me.

Some weeks passed, and an advent occurred, which more than my girlish pride and resolutions turned my thoughts into a new channel, and introduced a memorable actor upon the scene of my life.

CHAPTER X.

A SIGHT FROM THE WINDOWS.

We are now in stormy October; a fierce and melancholy month! August and September touch the greenwood leaves with gold and russet, and gently loosen the hold of every little stalk on forest bough; and then, when all is ready, October comes on in storm, with sounds of trump and rushing charge and fury not to be argued or dallied with, and thoroughly executes the sentence of mortality that was recorded in the first faint yellow of the leaf, in the still sun of declining July.

October is all the more melancholy for the still, golden days that intervene, and show the thinned branches in the sunlight, soft, and clear as summer's, and the boughs cast their skeleton shadows across brown drifts of leaves.

On the evening I am going to speak of, there was a wild, threatening sunset, and the boatmen of Cardyllion foretold a coming storm. Their predictions were verified.

The breeze began to sigh and moan through the trees and chimney-stacks of Malory shortly after sunset, and in another hour it came on to blow a gale from the northwest. From that point the wind sweeps right up the estuary from the open sea; and after it has blown for a time, and the waves have gathered their strength, the sea bursts grandly upon the rocks a little in front of Malory.

We were sitting cosily in our accustomed tea-room. The rush and strain of the wind on the windows became momentarily more vehement, till the storm reached its highest and most tremendous pitch.

"Don't you think," said Laura, after an awful gust, "that the windows may burst in? The wind is frightful! Hadn't we better get to the back of the house?"

"Not the least danger," I answered; "these windows have small panes, and immensely strong sashes; and they have stood so many gales that we may trust them for this."

"There again!" she exclaimed. "How awful!"

“No danger to us, though. These walls are thick, and as firm as rock; not like your flimsy brick houses; and the chimneys are as strong as towers. You must come up with me to the window in the tawny-room; there is an open space in the trees opposite, and we can see pretty well. It is worth looking at; you never saw the sea here in a storm.”

With very little persuasion, I induced her to run upstairs with me. Along the corridor, we reached the chamber in question, and placing our candle near the door, and running together to the window, we saw the grand spectacle we had come to witness.

Over the sea and land, rock and wood, a dazzling moon was shining. Tattered bits of cloud, the “scud” I believe they call it, were whirling over us, more swiftly than the flight of a bird, as far as your eye could discern: till the sea was lost in the grey mist of the horizon it was streaked and ridged with white. Nearer to the stooping trees that bowed and quivered in the sustained blast, and the little churchyard dormitory that nothing could disturb, the black peaked rock rose above the turmoil, and a dark causeway of the same jagged stone, sometimes defined enough, sometimes submerged, connected it almost with the mainland. A few hundred yards beyond it, I knew, stretched the awful reef on which the Intrinsic, years before I could remember, had been wrecked. Beyond that again, we could see the waves leaping into sheets of foam, that seemed to fall as slowly and softly as clouds of snow. Nearer, on the dark rock, the waves flew up high into the air, like cannon-smoke.

Within these rocks, which make an awful breakwater, full of mortal peril to ships driving before the storm, the estuary, near the shores of Malory, was comparatively quiet.

At the window, looking on this wild scene, we stood, side by side, in the fascination which the sea in its tumultuous mood never fails to exercise. Thus, not once turning our eyes from the never-flagging variety of the spectacle, we gazed for a full half-hour, when, suddenly, there appeared — was it the hull of a vessel shorn of its masts? No, it was a steamer — a large one, with low chimneys. It seemed to be about a mile and a half away, but was driving on very rapidly. Sometimes the hull was quite lost to sight, and then again rose black and sharp on the crest of the sea. We held our breaths. Perhaps the vessel was trying to make the shelter of the pier of Cardyllion; perhaps she was simply driving before the wind.

To me there seemed something uncertain and staggering in the progress of the ship. Before her lay the ominous reef, on which many a good ship and brave life had perished. There was quite room enough, I knew, with good steering, between the head of the reef and the sandbank at the other side, to make the pier of Cardyllion. But was there any one on board who knew the intricate navigation of our dangerous estuary? Could any steering in such a tempest avail? And, above all, had the ship been crippled? In any case, I knew enough to be well aware that she was in danger.

Reader, if you have never witnessed such a spectacle, you cannot conceive the hysterical excitement of that suspense. All those on board are, for the time, your near friends; your heart is among them — their terrors are yours. A ship driving with just the hand and eye of one man for its only chance, under Heaven, against the fury of sea and wind, and a front of deadly rock, is an unequal battle; the strongest heart sickens as the crisis nears, and the moments pass in an unconscious agony of prayer.

Rebecca Torkill joined us at this moment.

“Oh! Rebecca,” I said, “there is a ship coming up the estuary — do you think they can escape?”

“The telescope should be on the shelf at the back stairhead,” she answered, as soon as she had taken a long look at the steamer. “Lord ha’ mercy on them, poor souls! — that’s the very way the Intrinsic drove up before the wind the night she was lost; and I think this will be the worse night of the two.”

Mrs. Torkill returned with the long sea telescope, in its worn casing of canvas.

I took the first “look out.” After wandering hither and thither over a raging sea, and sometimes catching the tossing head of some tree in the foreground, the glass lighted, at length, upon the vessel. It was a large steamer, pitching and yawing frightfully. Even to my inexperienced eye, it appeared nearly unmanageable. I handed the glass to Laura. I felt faint.

Some of the Cardyllion boatmen came running along the road that passes in front of Malory. I saw that two or three of them had already arrived on the rising ground beside the churchyard, and were watching events from that wind-swept point. I knew all the Cardyllion boatmen, for we often employed them, and I said:

“I can’t stay here — I must hear what the boatmen say. Come, Laura, come with me.”

Laura was willing enough.

“Nonsense! Miss Ethel,” exclaimed the housekeeper. “Why, dear Miss Grey, you could not keep hat or bonnet on in a wind like that! You could not keep your feet in it!”

Remonstrance, however, was in vain. I tied a handkerchief tight over my head and under my chin — Laura did the same; and out we both sallied, notwithstanding Rebecca Torkill’s protest and entreaty. We had to go by the back door; it would have been impossible to close the hall-door against such a gale.

Now we were out in the bright moonlight under the partial shelter of the trees, which bent and swayed with the roar of a cataract over our heads. Near us was the hillock we tried to gain; it was next to impossible to reach it against the storm. Often we were brought to a standstill, and often forced backward, notwithstanding all our efforts.

At length, in spite of all, we stood on the little platform, from which the view of the rocks and sea beyond was clear. Williams, the boatman, was close to me, at my right hand, holding his low-crowned hat down on his head with his broad, hard hand. Laura was at my other side. Our dresses were slapping and rattling in the storm like the cracking of a thousand whips; and such a roaring was in my ears, although my handkerchief was tied close over them, that I could scarcely hear anything else.

CHAPTER XI.

CATASTROPHE.

The steamer looked very near now and large. It was plain it had no longer any chance of clearing the rocks. The boatmen were bawling to one another, but I could not understand what they said, nor hear more than a word or two at a time.

The steamer mounted very high, and then seemed to dive headlong into the sea, and was lost to sight. Again, in less than a minute, the black mass was toppling at the summit of the sea, and again it seemed swallowed up.

"Her starboard paddle!" shouted a broad-shouldered sailor in a pilot-coat, with his palm to the side of his mouth.

Thomas Jones was among these men, without a hat, and on seeing me he fell back a little. I was only a step or two behind them.

"Thomas Jones," I screamed, and he inclined his ear to my shrill question, "is there no life-boat in Cardyllion?"

"Not one, miss," he roared; "and it could not make head against that if there was."

"Not an inch," bawled Williams.

"Is there any chance?" I cried.

"An anchor from the starn! A bad hold there — she's draggin' of it!" yelled Williams, whose voice, though little more than two feet away, sounded faint and half smothered in the storm.

Just then the steamer reared, or rather swooped, like the enchanted horse, in the air, and high above its black shape shot a huge canopy of foam; and then it staggered over and down, and nothing but raging sea was there.

"O God! are they all lost?" I shrieked.

"Anchor's fast. All right now," roared the man in the pilot-coat.

In some seconds more the vessel emerged, pitching high into the brilliant moonlight, and nearly the same thing was repeated again and again. The seafaring men who were looking on were shouting their opinions to one another, and from the little I was able to hear and understand, I gathered that she might ride it out if she did not drag her anchor, or "part" or "founder." But the sea was very heavy, and the rocks just under her bows now.

In this state of suspense a quarter of an hour or more must have passed. Suddenly the vessel seemed to rise nearer than before. The men crowded forward to the edge of the bank. It was plain something decisive had happened. Nearer it rose again, and then once more plunged forward and disappeared. I waited breathless. I waited longer than before, and longer. Nothing was there but rolling waves and springing foam beyond the rocks. The ship rose no more!

The first agony of suspense was over. Where she had been the waves were sporting in the ghastly moonlight. In my wild horror I screamed — I wrung my hands. I could not turn for a moment from the scene. I was praying all the time the same short prayer over and over again. Minute after minute passed, and still my eyes were fixed on the point where the ship had vanished; my hands were clasped over my forehead, and tears welled down my cheeks.

What's that? Upon the summit of the bare rock, all on a sudden, the figure of a man appeared; behind this mass of black stone, as each wave burst in succession, the foam leaped in clouds. For a moment the figure was seen sharp against the silvery distance; then he stooped, as if to climb down the near side of the rock, and we lost sight of him. The boatmen shouted, and held up each a hand (their others were holding their hats on) in token of succour near, and three or four of them, with Thomas Jones at their head, ran down the slope, at their utmost speed to the jetty, under which, in shelter, lay the Malory boat. Soon it was moving under the bank, four men pulling might and main against the gale; though they rowed in shelter of the reef, on the pinnacle of which we had seen the figure for a moment, still it was a rough sea, and far from safe for an open boat, the spray driving like hail against them, and the boat pitching heavily in the short cross sea.

No other figure crossed the edge of the rock, or for a a moment showed upon the bleak reef, all along which clouds of foam were springing high and wild into the air.

The men who had been watching the event from the bank, seemed to have abandoned all further hope, and began to descend the hill to the jetty to await the return of the boat. It did return, bearing the one rescued man.

Laura Grey and I went homeward. We made our way into the backyard, often forced to run, by the storm, in spite of ourselves. We had hardly reached the house when we saw the boatmen coming up.

We were now in the yard, about to enter the house at the back-door, which stood in shelter of the building. I saw Mrs. Torkill in the steward's house, with one of the maids, evidently in a fuss. I ran in.

"Oh, Miss Ethel, dear, did you see that? Lord a'mercy on us! A whole shipful gone like that! I thought the sight was leaving my eyes."

I answered very little. I felt ill, I was trembling still, and ready to burst again into tears.

"Here's bin Thomas Jones, miss, to ask leave for the drownded man to rest himself for the night, and, as Mr. Carmel's away, I knew your papa and mamma would not refuse; don't you think so, miss? So I said, ay, bring him here. Was I right, miss? And me and Anne Wan is tidyin' a bed for him."

"Quite right, I'm sure," said I, my interest again awakened, and almost at the same moment into the flagged passage came Thomas Jones, followed by several of the Cardyllion boatmen, their great shoes clattering over the flags.

In the front rank of these walked the one mortal who had escaped alive from the ship that was now a wreck on the fatal reef. You may imagine the interest with which I looked at him. I saw a graceful but manly figure, a young man in a short sailor-like coat, his dress drenched and clinging, his hat gone, his forehead and features finely formed, very energetic, and, I thought, stern — browned by the sun; but, allowing for that tint, no drowned face in the sea that night was paler than his, his long black hair, lank with sea-water, thrown back from his face like a mane. There was blood oozing from under its folds near his temple; there was blood also on his hand, which rested on the breast of his coat; on his finger there was a thick gold ring. I had little more than a moment in which to observe all this. He walked in, holding his head high, very faint and fierce, with a slight stagger in his gait, a sullen and defiant countenance, and eyes fixed and gazing straight before him, as I had heard somnambulists described. I saw him in the candlelight for only a moment as he walked by, with boatmen in thick shoes, as I said, clattering beside him. I felt a strange longing to run and clasp him by the hand!

I got into our own back-door, and found Laura Grey in the room in which we usually had our tea. She was as much excited as I.

"Could you have imagined," she almost cried, "anything so frightful? I wish I had not seen it. It will always be before my eyes."

"That is what I feel also; but we could not help it, we could not have borne the suspense. That is the reason why the people who are least able to bear it sometimes see the most dreadful sights."

As we were talking, and wondering where the steamer came from, and what was her name, and how many people were probably on board, in came Rebecca Torkill.

"I sent them boatmen home, miss, that rowed the boat out to the rock for that poor young man, with a pint o' strong ale, every one round, and no doubt he'll give them and Thomas Jones something in hand for taking him off the rock when he comes to himself a bit. He ought to be thanking the Almighty with a contrite heart."

"He did not look as if he was going to pray when I saw him," I said.

"Nor to thank God, nor no one, for anything," she chimed in. "And he sat down sulky and black as you please, at the side o' the bed, and said never a word, but stuck out his foot to Thomas Jones to unbutton his boot. I had a pint o' mulled port ready, and I asked him if I should send for the doctor, and he only shook his head and shrugged his shoulders, as he might turn up his nose at an ugly physic. And he fell a-thinking while Jones was takin' off the other boot, and in place of prayin' or thanksgiving, I heard him muttering to himself and grumbling; and, Lord forgive me if I wrong him, I think I heard him cursing some one. There was a thing for a man just took alive out o' the jaws o' death by the mercy o' God to do! There's them on earth, miss, that no lesson will teach, nor goodness melt, nor judgment frighten, but the last one, and then all's too late."

It was late by this time, and so we all got to our beds. But I lay long awake in the dark, haunted by the ceaseless rocking of that dreadful sea, and the apparition of that one pale, bleeding messenger from the ship of death. How unlike my idea of the rapture of a mortal just rescued from shipwreck! His face was that of one to whom an atrocious secret has been revealed, who was full of resentment and horror; whose lips were sealed.

In my eyes he was the most striking figure that had ever appeared before me. And the situation and my own dreadful excitement had elevated him into a hero.

CHAPTER XII.

OUR GUEST.

The first thing I heard of the stranger in the morning was that he had sent off early to the proprietor of the “Verney Arms” a messenger with a note for two large boxes which he had left there, when the yacht Foam Bell was at Cardyllion about a fortnight before. The note was signed with the letters R. M.

The Foam Bell had lain at anchor off the pier of Cardyllion for only two hours, so no one in the town knew much about her. Two or three of her men, with Foam Bell across the breasts of their blue shirts and on the ribbons of their flat glazed hats, had walked about the quaint town, and drunk their beer at the “George and Garter.” But there had not been time to make acquaintance with the townspeople. It was only known that the yacht belonged to Sir Dives Wharton, and that the gentleman who left the boxes in charge of the proprietor of the “Verney Arms,” was not that baronet.

The handwriting was the same as that in the memorandum he had left with the hotel-keeper, and which simply told him that the big black boxes were left to be called or written for by Edward Hathaway, and mentioned no person whose initials were R. M. So Mr. Hughes, of the “Verney Arms,” drove to Malory to see the gentleman at the steward’s house, and having there recognised him as the very gentleman who left the boxes in his charge, he sent them to him as directed.

Shortly after, Doctor Mervyn, our old friend walked up the avenue, and saw me and Laura at the window.

It was a calm, bright morning; the storm had done its awful work, and was at rest, and sea and sky looked glad and gentle in the brilliant sun. Already about fifty drowned persons had been carried up and laid upon the turf in the churchyard in rows, with their faces upward. I was glad it was upon the slope that was hid from us.

How murderous the dancing waves looked in the sunlight! And the black saw-edged reef I beheld with a start and a shudder. The churchyard, too, had a changed expression. What a spectacle lay behind that familiar grassy curve! I did not see the incongruous muster of death. Here a Liverpool dandy; there a white-whiskered City man; sharp bag-men; little children — strange companions in the churchyard — hard-handed sailors; women, too, in silk or serge — no distinction now.

I and Laura could not walk in that direction till all this direful seeking and finding were over.

The doctor, seeing us at the open window, raised his hat. The autumn sun through the thin leaves touched his bald head as he walked over to the window-stool, and placing his knee on the bench on which Mr. Carmel used sometimes to sit, he told us all he knew of the ship and the disaster. It was a Liverpool steamer called the Conway Castle, bound for Bristol. One of her paddles was disabled early in the gale, and thus she drove to leeward, and was wrecked.

"And now," said the doctor, "I'm going to look in upon the luckiest man in the kingdom, the one human being who escaped alive out of that ship. He must have been either the best or the worst man on board — either too good to be drowned or too bad, by Jove! He is the gentleman you were so kind as to afford shelter to last night in the steward's house there, round the corner, and he sent for me an hour ago. I daresay he feels queer this morning; and from what Thomas Jones says, I should not be surprised if he had broken a bone somewhere. Nothing of any great consequence, of course; but he must have got a thund'ring fling on those rocks. When I've seen him — if I find you here — I'll tell you what I think of him."

After this promise, you may be sure we did wait where we were, and he kept his word. We were in a fever of curiosity; my first question was, "Who is he?"

"I guessed you'd ask that the first moment you could," said the doctor, a little pettishly.

"Why?" said I.

"Because it is the very question I can't answer," he replied. "But I'll tell you all I do know," he continued, taking up his old position at the window, and leaning forward with his head in the room.

Every word the oracle spoke we devoured. I won't tell his story in his language, nor with our interruptions. I will give its substance, and in part its details, as I received them. The doctor was at least as curious as we were.

His patient was up, sitting by the fire, in dressing-gown and slippers, which he had taken with other articles of dress from the box which stood open on the floor. The window-curtain was partly drawn, the room rather dark. He saw the young man with his feet on the fender, seated by the wood fire. His features, as they struck the doctor, were handsome and spirited; he looked ill, with pale cheek and lips, speaking low and smiling.

"I'm Doctor Mervyn," said the doctor, making his bow, and eyeing the stranger curiously.

"Oh! Thanks, Doctor Mervyn! I hope it is not a long way from your house, I am here very ridiculously circumstanced. I should not have had any clothes, if it had not been for a very lucky accident, and for a day or two I shall be totally without money — a mere Robinson Crusoe."

"Oh, that don't matter; I shall be very happy to see after you in the meantime, if there should be anything in my way," answered the doctor, bluntly.

"You are very kind, thanks. This place, they tell me, is called Malory. What Mr. Ware is that to whom it belongs?"

"The Honourable Mr. Ware, brother of Lord H —— . He is travelling on the Continent at present with his wife, a great beauty some fifteen years since; and his daughter, his only child, is at present here with her governess."

"Oh, I thought some one said he had two?"

The doctor reasserted the fact, and for some seconds the stranger looked on the floor abstractedly.

"You wished a word or two of advice, I understand?" interrupted the doctor at length. "You have had a narrow escape, sir — a tremendous escape! You must have been awfully shaken. I don't know how you escaped being smashed on those nasty rocks."

"I am pretty well smashed, I fancy," said the young man.

"That's just what I wanted to ascertain."

"From head to foot, I'm covered with bruises," continued the stranger; "I got off with very few cuts. I have one over my temple, and half-a-dozen here and there, and one here on my wrist; but you need not take any trouble about them — a cut, when I get one, heals almost of itself. A bit of court-plaster is all I require for them, and Mrs. Something, the housekeeper here, has given me some; but I'm rather seedy. I must have swallowed a lot of salt water, I fancy. I've got off very well, though, if it's true all the other people were drowned. It was a devil of a fluke; you'd say I was the luckiest fellow alive, ha, ha, ha! I wish I could think so."

He laughed, a little bitterly.

"There are very few men glad to meet death when it comes," said Doctor Mervyn. "Some think they are fit to die, and some know they are not. You know best, sir, what reason you have to be thankful."

"I'm nothing but bruises and aches all over my body. I'm by no means well, and I've lost all my luggage, and papers, and money, since one o'clock yesterday, when I was flourishing. Two or three such reasons for thankfulness would inevitably finish me."

"All except you were drowned, sir," said the doctor, who was known in Cardyllion as a serious-minded man, a little severely.

"Like so many rats in a trap, poor devils," acquiesced the stranger. "They were hatched down. I was the only passenger on deck. I must have been drowned if I had been among them."

"All those poor fellow-passengers of yours," said Doctor Mervyn, in disgust, "had souls, sir, to be saved."

"I suppose so; but I never saw such an assemblage of snobs in my life. I really think that, except poor Haworth — he insisted it would be ever so much pleasanter than the railway; I did not find it so; he's drowned of course — I assure you, except ourselves, there was not a gentleman among them. And Sparks, he's drowned too, and I've lost the best servant I ever had in my life. But I beg your pardon, I'm wasting your time. Do you think I'm ill?"

He extended his wrist, languidly, to enable the doctor to feel his pulse. The physician suppressed his rising answer with an effort, and made his examination.

"Well, sir, you have had a shock."

"By Jove! I should not wonder," acquiesced the young man, with a sneer.

"And you are a good deal upset, and your contusions are more serious than you seem to fancy. I'll make up a liniment here, and I'll send you down something else that will prevent any tendency to fever; and I suppose you would like to be supplied from the 'Verney Arms.' You must not take any wine stronger than claret for the present, and a light dinner, and if you give me a line, or tell me what name — — "

“Oh, they know me there, thanks. I got these boxes from there this morning, and they are to send me everything I require.”

The doctor wanted his name. The town of Cardyllion, which was in a ferment, wanted it. Of course he must have the name; a medical practitioner who kept a ledger and sent out accounts, it was part of his business to know his patients’ names. How could he stand before the wags of the news-room, if he did not know the name of his own patients — of this one, of all others.

“Oh! put me down as R. M. simply,” said the young man.

“But wouldn’t it be more — more usual, if you had no objections — a little more at length?” insinuated the doctor.

“Well, yes; put it down a little more at length — say R. R. M. Three letters instead of two.”

The doctor, with his head inclined, laughed patiently, and the stranger, seeing him about to return to the attack, said a little petulantly: “You see, doctor, I’m not going to give my very insignificant name here to any one. If your book-keeper had it, every one in the town would know it; and Cardyllion is a place at which idle people turn up, and I have no wish to have my stray friends come up to this place to bother me for the two or three days I must stay here. You may suppose me an escaped convict, or anything else you please that will amuse the good people; but I’m hanged if I give my name, thank you!”

After this little interruption, the strictly professional conversation was resumed, and the doctor ended by directing him to stay quiet that day, and not to walk out out until he had seen him again next morning.

The doctor then began to mix the ingredients of his liniment. The young man in the silk dressing-gown limped to the window, and leaned his arm upon the sash, looking out, and the doctor observed him, in his ruminations, smiling darkly on the ivy that nodded from the opposite wall, as if he saw a confederate eyeing him from its shadow.

“He didn’t think I was looking at him,” said the doctor; “but I have great faith in a man’s smile when he thinks he is all to himself; and that smile I did not like; it was, in my mind, enough to damn him.”

All this, when his interview was over, the doctor came round and told us. He was by no means pleased with his patient, and being a religious man, of a quick temper, would very likely have declined the office of physician in this particular case, if he had not thought, judging by his “properties,” which were in a certain style that impressed Doctor Mervyn, and his air, and his refined features, and a sort of indescribable superiority which both irritated and awed the doctor, that he might be a “swell.”

He went the length, notwithstanding, of calling him, in his conversation with us, an “inhuman puppy,” but he remarked that there were certain duties which no Christian could shirk, among which that of visiting the sick held, of course, in the doctor’s mind, due rank.

CHAPTER XIII.

MEETING IN THE GARDEN.

I was a little shy, as country misses are; and, curious as I was, rather relieved when I heard that the shipwrecked stranger had been ordered to keep his quarters strictly, for that day at least. So, by-and-by, as Laura Grey had a letter to write, I put on my hat, and not caring to walk towards the town, and not daring to take the Penruthyn Road, I ran out to the garden. The garden of Malory is one of those monastic enclosures whose fruit-trees have long grown into venerable timber; whose walls are stained by time, and mantled in some places with ivy; where everything has been allowed, time out of mind, to have its own way; where walks are grass-grown, and weeds choke the intervals between old standard pear, and cherry, and apple-trees, and only a little plot of ground is kept in cultivation by a dawdling, desultory man, who carries in his daily basket of vegetables to the cook. There was a really good Ribston-pippin or two in this untidy, but not unpicturesque garden; and these trees were, I need scarcely tell you, a favourite resort of ours.

The gale had nearly stripped the trees of their ruddy honours, and thrifty Thomas Jones had, no doubt, carried the spoil away to store them in the apple-closet. One pippin only dangled still within reach, and I was whacking at this particularly good-looking apple with a long stick, but as yet in vain, when I suddenly perceived that a young man, whom I recognised as the very hero of the shipwreck, was approaching. He walked slowly and a little lame, and was leaning on a stick. He was smiling, and, detected in my undignified and rather greedy exercise — I had been jumping from the ground — I was ready to sink into the earth with shame. Perhaps, if I had been endowed with presence of mind, I should have walked away. But I was not, on that occasion at least; and I stood my ground, stick in hand, affecting not to see his slow advance.

It was a soft sunny day. He had come out without a hat; he had sent to Cardyllion to procure one, and had not yet got it, as he afterwards told me, with an apology for seeming to make himself so very much at home. How he introduced himself I forget; I was embarrassed and disconcerted; I know that he thanked me very much for my "hospitality," called me his "hostess," smiling, and told me that, although he did not know my father, he yet saw him everywhere during the season. Then he talked of the wreck; he described his own adventures very interestingly, and spoke of the whole thing in terms very different from those reported by Doctor Mervyn, and with a great deal of feeling. He asked me if I had seen anything of it from our house; and then it became my turn to speak. I very soon got over my shyness; he was so perfectly well-bred that it was impossible, even for a rustic such as I was, not to feel very soon quite at her ease in his company.

So I talked away, becoming more animated; and he smiled, looking at me, I thought, with a great deal of sympathy, and very much pleased. I thought him very handsome. He had one point of resemblance to Mr. Carmel. His face was pale, but, unlike his, as dark as a gipsy's. Its tint showed the white of his eyes and his teeth with fierce effect. What was the character of the face I saw now? Very different from the deathlike phantom that had crossed my sight the night before. It was a face of passion and daring. A broad, low forehead, and resolute mouth, with that pronounced underjaw which indicates sternness and decision. I contrasted him secretly with Mr. Carmel. But in his finely-cut features, and dark, fierce eyes, the ascetic and noble interest of the sadder face was wanting; but there was, for so young a person as I, a different and a more powerful fascination in the beauty of this young man of the world.

Before we parted I allowed him to knock down the apple I had been trying at, and this rustic service improved our acquaintance.

I began to think, however, that our interview had lasted quite long enough; so I took my leave, and I am certain he would have accompanied me to the house, had I not taken advantage of his lameness, and walked away very quickly.

As I let myself out at the garden-door, in turning I was able, unsuspected, to steal a parting look, and I saw him watching me intently as he leaned against the stem of a gigantic old pear-tree. It was rather pleasant to my vanity to think that I had made a favourable impression upon the interesting stranger.

Next day our guest met me again, near the gate of the avenue, as I was returning to the house.

"I had a call this morning from your clergyman," he said. "He seems a very kind old gentleman, the rector of Cardyllion; and the day is so beautiful, he proposed a sail upon the estuary, and if you were satisfied with him, by way of escort, and my steering — I'm an old sailor — I'm sure you'd find it just the day to enjoy a little boating."

He looked at me, smiling eagerly.

Laura Grey and I had agreed that nothing would tempt us to go upon the water, until all risk of lighting upon one of those horrible discoveries from the wreck, that were now beginning to come to the surface from hour to hour, was quite over. So I made our excuses as best I could, and told him that since the storm we had a horror of sailing. He looked vexed and gloomy. He walked beside me.

"Oh! I understand — Miss Grey? I was not aware — I ought, of course, to have included her. Perhaps your friend would change her mind and induce you to reconsider your decision. It is such a charming day."

I thanked him again, but our going was quite out of the question. He smiled and bowed a little, but looked very much chagrined. I fancied that he thought I meant to snub him, for proposing any such thing on so very slight an acquaintance. I daresay if I had I should have been quite right; but you must remember how young I was, and how unlearned in the world's ways. Nothing, in fact, was further from my intention. To soften matters a little, I said:

"I am very sorry we can't go. We should have liked it, I am sure, so much; but it is quite impossible."

He walked all the way to the hall-door with me; and then he asked if I did not intend continuing my walk a little. I bid him goodbye, however, and went in, very full of the agreeable idea that I had made a conquest.

Laura Grey and I, walking to Cardyllion, met Doctor Mervyn, who stopped to tell us that he had just seen his Malory patient, "R. R. M.," steering Williams's boat, with the old vicar on board.

"By Jove! one would have fancied he had got enough of the water for some time to come," remarked the doctor, in conclusion. "That is the most restless creature I ever encountered in all my professional experience! If he had kept himself quiet yesterday and to-day, he'd have been pretty nearly right by tomorrow; but if he goes on like this I should not wonder if he worked himself into a fever."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE INTRUDER.

Next morning, at about nine o'clock, whom do I see but the restless stranger, to my surprise, again upon the avenue as I return towards the house. I had run down to the gate before breakfast to meet our messenger, and learn whether any letters had come by the post. He, like myself, has come out before his breakfast. He turns on meeting me, and walks towards the house at my side. Never was man more persistent. He had got Williams's boat again, and not only the vicar, but the vicar's wife, was coming for a sail; surely I would venture with her? I was to remember, besides, that they were to sail to the side of the estuary furthest from the wreck; there could be no possible danger there of what I feared — and thus he continued to argue and entreat.

I really wished to go. I said, however, that I must ask Miss Grey, whom, upon some excuse which I now forget, he regretted very much he could not invite to come also. I had given him a conditional promise by the time we parted at the hall-door, and Laura saw no objection to my keeping it, provided old Mrs. Jermyn, the vicar's wife, were there to chaperon me. We were to embark from the Malory jetty, and she was to call for me at about three o'clock.

The shipwrecked stranger left me, evidently very well pleased. When he got into his quarters in the steward's house and found himself all alone, I dare say his dark face gleamed with the smile of which Doctor Mervyn had formed so ill an opinion. I had not yet seen that smile. Heaven help me! I have had reason to remember it.

Laura and I were sitting together, when who should enter the room but Mr. Carmel. I stood up and shook hands. I felt very strangely. I was glad the room was a dark one. I was less observed, and therefore less embarrassed.

It was not till he had been in the room some time that I observed how agitated he looked. He seemed also very much dejected, and from time to time sighed heavily. I saw that something had gone strangely wrong. It was a vague suspense. I was secretly very much frightened.

He would not sit down. He said he had not a moment to stay; and yet he lingered on, I fancied, debating something within himself. He was distrait, and, I thought, irresolute.

After a little talk he said:

“I came just to look in on my old quarters and see my old friends for a few minutes, and then I must disappear again for more than a month, and I find a gentleman in possession.”

We hastened to assure him that we had not expected him home for some time, and that the stranger was admitted but for a few days. We told him, each contributing something to the narrative, all about the shipwreck, and the reception of the forlorn survivor in the steward’s house.

He listened without a word of comment, almost without breathing, and with his eyes fixed in deep attention on the floor.

“Has he made your acquaintance?” he asked, raising them to me.

“He introduced himself to me,” I answered, “but Miss Grey has not seen him.”

Something seemed to weigh heavily upon his mind.

“What is your father’s present address?” he asked.

I told him, and he made a note of it in his pocketbook. He stood up now, and did at length take his leave.

“I am going to ask you to do a very kind thing. You have heard of sealed orders, not to be opened till a certain point has been reached in a voyage or a march? Will you promise, until I shall have left you fully five minutes, not to open this letter?”

I almost thought he was jesting, but I perceived very quickly that he was perfectly serious. Laura Grey looked at him curiously, and gave him the desired promise as she received the note. His carriage was at the door, and in another minute he was driving rapidly down the avenue. What had led to these odd precautions? — and what had they to do with the shipwrecked stranger?

At about eleven o’clock — that is to say, about ten minutes before Mr. Carmel’s visit to us — the stranger had been lying on a sofa in his quarters, with two ancient and battered novels from Austin’s Library in Cardyllion, when the door opened unceremoniously, and Mr. Carmel, in travelling costume, stepped into the room. The hall-door was standing open, and Mr. Carmel, on alighting from his conveyance, had walked straight in without encountering any one in the hall. On seeing an intruder in possession he stopped short; the gentleman on the sofa, interrupted, turned towards the door. Thus confronted, each stared at the other.

"Ha! Marston," exclaimed the ecclesiastic, with a startled frown, and an almost incredulous stare.

"Edwyn! by Jove!" responded the stranger, with a rather anxious smile, which faded, however, in a moment.

"What on earth brings you here?" said Mr. Carmel, sternly, after a silence of some seconds.

"What the devil brings you here?" inquired the stranger, almost at the same moment. "Who sent you? What is the meaning of it?"

Mr. Carmel did not approach him. He stood where he had first seen him, and his looks darkened.

"You are the last man living I should have looked for here," said he.

"I suppose we shall find out what we mean by-and-by," said Marston, cynically; "at present I can only tell you that when I saw you I honestly thought a certain old gentleman, I don't mean the devil, had sent you in search of me."

Carmel looked hard at him. "I've grown a very dull man since I last saw you, and I don't understand a joke as well as I once did," said he; "but if you are serious you cannot have learnt that this house has been lent to me by Mr. Ware, its owner, for some months at least; and these, I suppose, are your things? There is not room to put you up here."

"I didn't want to come. I am the famous man you may have read of in the papers — quite unique — the man who escaped alive from the Conway Castle. No Christian refuses shelter to the shipwrecked; and you are a Christian, though an odd one."

Edwyn Carmel looked at him for some seconds in silence.

"I am still puzzled," he said. "I don't know whether you are serious; but, in any case, there's a good hotel in the town — you can go there."

"Thank you — without a shilling," laughed the young man, a little wickedly.

"A word from me will secure you credit there."

"But I'm in the doctor's hands, don't you see?"

"It is nothing very bad," answered Mr. Carmel; "and you will be nearer the doctor there."

The stranger, sitting up straight, replied:

“I suppose I shall; but the doctor likes a walk, and I don’t wish him a bit nearer.”

“But this is, for the time being, my house, and you must go,” replied Edwyn Carmel, coldly and firmly.

“It is also my house, for the time being; for Miss Ware has given me leave to stay here.”

The ecclesiastic’s lips trembled, and his pale face grew paler, as he stared on the young man for a second or two in silence.

“Marston,” he said, “I don’t know, of all men, why you should specially desire to pain me.”

“Why, hang it! Why should I wish to pain you, Edwyn? I don’t. But I have no notion of this sort of hectoring. The idea of your turning me out of the — my house — the house they have lent me! I told you I didn’t want to come here; and now I don’t want to go away, and I won’t.”

The churchman looked at him, as if he strove to read his inmost thoughts.

“You know that your going to the hotel could involve no imaginable trouble,” urged Edwyn Carmel.

“Go to the hotel yourself, if you think it so desirable a place. I am satisfied with this, and I shall stay here.”

“What can be the motive of your obstinacy?”

“Ask that question of yourself, Mr. Carmel, and you may possibly obtain an answer,” replied the stranger.

The priest looked again at him, in stern doubt.

“I don’t understand your meaning,” he said, at last.

“I thought my meaning pretty plain. I mean that I rather think our motives are identical.”

“Honestly, Marston, I don’t understand you,” said Mr. Carmel, after another pause.

“Well, it is simply this: that I think Miss Ware a very interesting young lady, and I like being near her — don’t you?”

The ecclesiastic flushed crimson; Marston laughed contemptuously.

“I have been away for more than a month,” said the priest, a little paler, looking up angrily; “and I leave this to-day for as long a time again.”

“Conscious weakness! Weakness of that sentimental kind sometimes runs in families,” said the stranger with a sneer. It was plain that the stranger was very angry; the taunt was wicked, and, whatever it meant, stung Mr. Carmel visibly. He trembled, with a momentary quiver, as if a nerve had been pierced.

There was a silence, during which Mr. Carmel's little French clock over the chimneypiece, punctually wound every week by old Rebecca, might be heard sharply tick, tick, ticking.

"I shall not be deterred by your cruel tongue," said he, very quietly, at length, with something like a sob, "from doing my duty."

"Your duty! Of course, it is always duty; jealousy is quite unknown to a man in holy orders. But there is a difference. You can't tell me the least what I'm thinking of; you always suppose the worst of every one. Your duty! And what, pray, is your duty?"

"To warn Miss Ware and her governess," he answered promptly.

"Warn her of what?" said the stranger, sternly.

"Warn her that a villain has got into this house."

The interesting guest sprang to his feet, with his fists clenched. But he did not strike. He hesitated, and then he said:

"Look here; I'll not treat you as I would a man. You wish me to strike you, you Jesuit, and to get myself into hot water. But I shan't make a fool of myself. I tell you what I'll do with you — if you dare to injure me in the opinion of any living creature, by one word of spoken or hinted slander, I'll make it a police-office affair; and I'll bring out the whole story you found it on; and we'll see which suffers most, you or I, when the world hears it. And now, Mr. Carmel, you're warned. And you know I'm a fellow that means what he says."

Mr. Carmel turned with a pale face, and left the room.

I wonder what the stranger thought. I have often pondered over that scene; and, I believe, he really thought that Mr. Carmel would not, on reflection, venture to carry out his threat.

CHAPTER XV.

A WARNING.

We had heard nothing of Mr. Carmel's arrival. He had not passed our windows, but drove up instead by the back avenue; and now he was gone, and there remained no record of his visit but the letter which Laura held in her fingers, while we both examined it on all sides, and turned it over. It was directed, "To Miss Ware and Miss Grey. Malory." And when we opened it we read these words:

"Dear Young Ladies, — I know a great deal of the gentleman who has been permitted to take up his residence in the house adjoining Malory. It is enough for me to assure you that no acquaintance could be much more objectionable and unsafe, especially for young ladies living alone as you do. You cannot, therefore, exercise too much caution in repelling any advances he may make. —

Your true friend, "E. Carmel."

The shock of reading these few words prevented my speaking for some seconds. I had perfect confidence in Mr. Carmel's warning. I was very much frightened. And the vagueness of his language made it the more alarming. The same thoughts struck us both. What fools we were! How is he to be got out of the house? Whom have we to advise with? What is to be done?

In our first panic we fancied that we had got a burglar or an assassin under our roof. Mr. Carmel's letter, however, on consideration, did not bear out quite so violent a conclusion. We resolved, of course, to act upon that letter; and I blamed myself too late for having permitted the stranger to make, even in so slight a way, my acquaintance.

In great trepidation, I despatched a note to Mrs. Jermyn, to say I could not join her boating party. To the stranger I could send neither note nor message. It did not matter. He would, of course, meet that lady at the jetty, and there learn my resolve. Two o'clock arrived. Old Rebecca came in, and told us that the gentleman in the steward's house had asked her whether Mr. Carmel was gone; and on learning that he had actually driven away, hardly waited till she was out of the room "to burst out a-laughing," and talking to himself, and laughing like mad.

"And I don't think, with his laughing and cursing, he's like a man should be that fears God, and is only a day or two out of the jaws of death!"

This description increased our nervousness. Possibly this person was a lunatic, whose keeper had been drowned in the Conway Castle. There was no solution of the riddle which Mr. Carmel had left us to read, however preposterous, that we did not try; none possible, that was not alarming.

About an hour after, passing through the hall, I saw some one, I thought, standing outside, near the window that commands the steps beside the door. This window has a wire-blind, through which, from outside, it is impossible to see. From within, however, looking towards the light, you can see perfectly. I scarcely thought our now distrusted guest would presume to approach our door so nearly; but there he was. He had mounted the steps, I suppose, with the intention of knocking, but he was, instead, looking stealthily from behind the great elm that grows close beside; his hand was leaning upon its trunk, and his whole attention absorbed in watching some object which, judging from the direction of his gaze, must have been moving upon the avenue. I could not take my eyes off him. He was frowning, with compressed lips and eyes dilated; his attitude betokened caution, and as I looked he smiled darkly.

I recovered my self-possession. I took, directly, Doctor Mervyn's view of that very peculiar smile. I was suddenly frightened. There was nothing to prevent the formidable stranger from turning the handle of the door and letting himself into the hall. Two or three light steps brought me to the door, and I instantly bolted it. Then drawing back a little into the hall, I looked again through the window, but the intending visitor was gone.

Who had occupied his gaze the moment before? And what had determined the retreat? It flashed upon me suddenly again that he might be one of those persons who are described as "being known to the police," and that Mr. Carmel had possibly sent constables to arrest him.

I waited breathlessly at the window, to see what would come of it. In a minute more, from the direction in which I had been looking for a party of burly policemen, there arrived only my fragile friend, Laura Grey, who had walked down the road to see whether Mr. and Mrs. Jermyn were coming.

Encouraged by this reinforcement, I instantly opened the hall-door, and looked boldly out. The enemy had completely disappeared.

“Did you see him?” I exclaimed.

“See whom?” she asked.

“Come in quickly,” I answered. And when I had shut the hall-door, and again bolted it, I continued. “The man in the steward’s house. He was on the steps this moment.”

“No, I did not see him; but I was not looking towards the hall-door. I was looking up at the trees, counting the broken boughs — there are thirteen trees injured on the right hand, as you come up.”

“Well, I vote we keep the door bolted; he shan’t come in here,” said I. “This is the second siege you and I have stood together in this house. I do wish Mr. Carmel had been a little more communicative, but I scarcely think he would have been so unfriendly as to leave us quite to ourselves if he had thought him a highwayman, and certainly, if he is one, he is a very gentlemanlike robber.”

“I think he can merely have meant, as he says, to warn us against making his acquaintance,” said Miss Grey; “his letter says only that.”

“I wish Mr. Carmel would stay about home,” I said, “or else that the steward’s house were locked up.”

I suppose all went right about the boating party, and that Mrs. Jermyn got my note in good time.

No one called at Malory; the dubious stranger did not invade our steps again. We had constant intelligence of his movements from Rebecca Torkill; and there was nothing eccentric or suspicious about them, so far as we could learn.

Another evening passed, and another morning came; no letter by the post, Rebecca hastened to tell us, for our involuntary guest; a certain sign, she conjectured, that we were to have him for another day. Till money arrived he could not, it was plain, resume his journey.

Doctor Mervyn told us, with his customary accuracy and plenitude of information respecting other people’s affairs, when he looked in upon us, after his visit to his patient, that he had posted a letter the morning after his arrival, addressed to Lemuel Blount, Esquire, 5, Brunton Street, Regent’s Park; and that on reference to the London Directory, in the news-room, it was duly ascertained by the subscribers that “Blount, Lemuel,” was simply entered as “Esquire,” without any further clue whatsoever to guide an active-minded and inquiring community to a conclusion. So there, for the present, Doctor Mervyn’s story ended.

Our panic by this time was very much allayed. The unobtrusive conduct of the unknown, ever since his momentary approach to our side of the house, had greatly contributed to this. I could not submit to a blockade of any duration; so we took heart of grace, and ventured to drive in the little carriage to Cardyllion, where we had some shopping to do.

CHAPTER XVI.

DOUBTS.

I have been searching all this morning in vain for a sheet of written note paper, almost grown yellow by time when I last saw it. It contains three stanzas of very pretty poetry. At least I once thought so. I was curious to try, after so many years, what I should think of them now. Possibly they were not even original, though there certainly was no lack in the writer of that sort of cleverness which produces pretty verses.

I must tell you how I came by them. I found that afternoon a note, on the window-stool in our tea-room, addressed "Miss Ethel." Laura Grey did not happen to be in the room at the moment. There might have been some debate on the propriety of opening the note if she had been present. I could have no doubt that it came from our guest, and I opened and read it instantly.

In our few interviews I had discovered, once or twice, a scarcely disguised tenderness in the stranger's tones and looks. A very young girl is always pleased, though ever so secretly, with this sort of incense. I know I was. It is a thing hard to give up; and, after all, what was Mr. Carmel likely to know about this young man? — and if he did not know him, what were the canons of criticism he was likely to apply? And whatever the stranger might be, he talked and looked like a gentleman; he was unfortunate, and for the present dependent, I romantically thought, on our kindness. To have received a copy of verses was very pleasant to my girlish self-importance; and the flattery of the lines themselves was charming.

The first shock of Mr. Carmel's warning had evaporated by this time; and I was already beginning to explain away his note. I hid the paper carefully. I loved Laura Grey; but I had, in my inmost soul, a secret awe of her; I knew how peremptory would be her advice, and I said not a word about the verses to her. At the first distant approach of an affair of the heart, how cautious and reserved we grow, and in most girls how suddenly the change from kittens to cats sets in! It was plain he had no notion of shifting his quarters to the hotel. But a little before our early tea-hour, Rebecca Torkill came in and told us what might well account for his not having yet gone to Cardyllion.

“That poor young man,” she said, “he’s very bad. He’s lying on his back, with a handkercher full of eau-de-Cologne on his forehead, and he’s sent down to the town for chloroform, and a blister for the back of his neck. He called me in, and indeed, though his talk and his behaviour might well be improved, considering how near he has just bin to death, yet I could not but pity him. Says he, ‘Mrs. Torkill, for heaven’s sake don’t shake the floor, step as light as you can, and close the shutter next the sun,’ which I did; and says he, ‘I’m in a bad way; I may die before morning. My doctor in town tells me these headaches are very dangerous. They come from the spine.’ ‘Won’t you see Doctor Mervyn, please, sir?’ say I. ‘Not I,’ says he. ‘I know all about it better than he’ — them were his words— ‘and if the things that’s coming don’t set me to rights, I’m a gone man.’ And indeed he groaned as he might at parting of soul and body — and here’s a nice kettle o’ fish, if he should die here, poor, foolish young man, and we not knowing so much as where his people lives, nor even his name. ’Tis a mysterious thing of Providence to do. I can’t see how ’twas worth while saving him from drowning, only to bring him here to die of that headache. But all works together, we know. Thomas Jones is away down at the ferry; a nice thing, among a parcel o’ women, a strange gentleman dying on a sofa, and not a man in the house! What do you think is best to be done, Miss Grey?”

“If he grows worse, I think you should send for the doctor without asking his leave,” she answered. “If it is dangerous, it would not do to have no advice. It is very unlucky.”

“Well, it is what I was thinking myself,” said the housekeeper; “folks would be talking, as if we let him die without help. I’ll keep the boiler full in case he should want a bath. He said his skull was fractured once, where that mark is, near his temple, and that the wound has something to do with it, and, by evil chance, it was just there he got the knock in the wreck of the Conway Castle; the Lord be good to us all!”

So Mrs. Torkill fussed out of the room, leaving us rather uncomfortable; but Laura Grey, at least, was not sorry, although she did not like the cause, that there was no reason to apprehend his venturing out that evening.

Our early teathings came in. A glowing autumn sunset was declining; the birds were singing their farewell chorus from thick ivy over branch and wall, and Laura and I, each with her own secret, were discussing the chances of the stranger's illness, with exaggerated despondency and alarm. Our talk was interrupted. Through the window, which, the evening being warm, we, secure from intrusion, had left open, we heard a clear manly voice address us as "Miss Ethel and Miss Grey."

Could it be Mr. Carmel come back again? Good Heavens! no; it was the stranger in Mr. Carmel's place, as we had grown to call it. The same window, his hands, it seemed, resting on the very same spot on the window-stone, and his knee, just as Mr. Carmel used to place his, on the stone bench. I had no idea before how stern the stranger's face was; the contrast between the features I had for a moment expected, and those of our guest, revealed the character of his with a force assisted by the misty red beam that glanced on it, with a fierce melancholy, through the trees.

His appearance was as unexpected as if he had been a ghost. It came in the midst of a discussion as to what should be done if, by ill chance, he should die in the steward's house. I can't say how Laura Grey felt; I only know that I stared at his smiling face for some seconds, scarcely knowing whether the apparition was a reality or not.

"I hope you will forgive me; I hope I am not very impertinent; but I have just got up from an astounding headache all right again; and in consequence, in such spirits, that I never thought how audacious I was in venturing this little visit until it was too late."

Miss Grey and I were both too much confounded to say a word. But he rattled on: "I have had a visitor since you were so good as to give me shelter in my shipwrecked state — one quite unexpected. I don't mean my doctor, of course. I had a call to-day much more curious, and wholly unlooked for; an old acquaintance, a fellow named Carmel. I knew him at Oxford, and I certainly never expected to see him again."

"Oh! You know Mr. Carmel?" I said, my curiosity overcoming a kind of reluctance to talk.

"Know him? I rather think I do," he laughed. "Do you know him?"

"Yes," I answered; "that is, not very well; there is, of course, a little formality in our acquaintance — more, I mean, than if he were not a clergyman."

"But do you really know him? I fancied he was boasting when he said so." The gentleman appeared extremely amused.

"Yes; we know him pretty well. But why should it be so unlikely a thing our knowing him?"

"Oh, I did not say that." He still seemed as much amused as a man can quietly be. "But I certainly had not the least idea I should ever see him again, for he owes me a little money. He owes me money, and a grudge besides. There are some men you cannot know anything about without their hating you — that is, without their being afraid of you, which is the same thing. I unluckily heard something about him — quite accidentally, I give you my honour, for I certainly never had the pleasure of knowing him intimately. I don't think he would exactly come to me for a character. I had not an idea that he could be the Mr. Carmel who, they told me, had been permitted by Mr. Ware to reside in his house. I was a good deal surprised when I made the discovery. There can't have been, of course, any inquiry. I should not, I assure you, have spoken to Mr. Carmel had I met him anywhere else; but I could not help telling him how astonished I was at finding him established here. He begged very hard that I would not make a fuss about it, and said that he was going away, and that he would not wait even to take off his hat. So, if that is true, I shan't trouble anyone about him. Mr. Ware would naturally think me very impertinent if I were to interfere."

He now went on to less uncomfortable subjects, and talked very pleasantly. I could see Laura Grey looking at him as opportunity occurred; she was a good deal further in the shade than I and he. I fancied I saw him smile to himself, amused at baffling her curiosity, and he sat back a little further.

"I am quite sorry, Miss Ware," he said, "that I am about to be in funds again. My friends by this time must be weaving my wings — those wings of tissue-paper that come by the post, and take us anywhere. I'm awfully sorry, for I've fallen in love with this place. I shall never forget it." He said these latter words in a tone so low as to reach me only. I was sitting, as I mentioned, very much nearer the window than Laura Grey.

There was in this stranger for me — a country miss, quite inexperienced in the subtle flatteries of voice, manner, looks, which town-bred young ladies accept at their true value — a fascination before which suspicions and alarms melted away. His voice was low and sweet; he was animated, goodhumoured, and playful; and his features, though singular, and capable of very grim expression, were handsome.

He talked to me in the same low tone for a few minutes. Happening to look at Laura Grey, I was struck by the anger expressed in her usually serene and gentle face. I fancied that she was vexed at his directing his attentions exclusively to me, and I was rather pleased at my triumph.

"Ethel, dear," she said, "don't you think the air a little cold?"

"Oh, I so very much hope not," he almost whispered to me.

"Cold?" said I. "I think it is so very sultry, on the contrary."

"If you find it too cold, Miss Grey, perhaps you would do wisely, I think, to sit a little further from the window," said Mr. Marston, considerately.

"I am not at all afraid for myself," she answered a little pointedly, "but I am uneasy about Miss Ware. I do think, Ethel, you would do wisely to get a little further from that window."

"But I do assure you I am quite comfortable," I said, in perfect good faith.

I saw Mr. Marston glance for a moment with a malicious smile at Laura Grey. To me the significance of that smile was a little puzzling.

"I see you have got a piano there," he said to me, in his low tones, not meant for her ear. "Miss Grey plays, of course?"

"Yes; very well indeed."

"Well, then, would you mind asking her to play something?"

I had no idea at the time that he wanted simply to find occupation for her, and to fill her ears with her own music, while he talked on with me.

"Laura, will you play that pretty thing of Beethoven's that you tried last night?" I asked.

"Don't ask me, Ethel, dear, tonight; I don't think I could," she answered, I thought a little oddly.

"Perhaps, if Miss Grey knew," he said, smiling, "that she would oblige a shipwrecked stranger extremely, and bind him to do her any service she pleases to impose in return, she might be induced to comply."

"The more you expect from my playing, the less courage I have to play," she said, in reply to his appeal, which was made, I fancied, in a tone of faint irony that seemed to suggest an oblique meaning; and her answer, I also fancied, was spoken as if answering that hidden meaning. It was very quietly done, but I felt the singularity of those tones.

"And why so? Do, I entreat — do play."

"Shouldn't I interrupt your conversation?" she answered.

"I'll not allow you even that excuse," he said; "I'll promise (and won't you, Miss Ware?) to talk whenever we feel inclined. There, now, it's all settled, isn't it? Pray begin."

"No, I am not going to play tonight," she said.

"Who would suppose Miss Grey so resolute; so little a friend to harmony? Well, I suppose we can do nothing; we can't prevail; we can only regret."

I looked curiously at Laura, who had risen, and was approaching the window, close to which she took a chair and sat down.

Mr. Marston was silent. I never saw man look angrier, although he smiled. To his white teeth and vivid eyes his dark skin gave marked effect; and to me, who knew nothing of the situation, the whole affair was most disagreeably perplexing. I was curious to see whether there would be any sign of recognition; but I was sitting at the side that commanded a full view of our guest, and the table so near me that Laura could not have introduced her chair without a very pointed disclosure of her purpose. If Mr. Marston was disposed to snarl and snap at Miss Grey, he very quickly subdued that desire. It would have made a scene, and frightened me, and that would never do.

In his most goodhumoured manner, therefore, which speedily succeeded this silent paroxysm, he chatted on, now and then almost whispering a sentence or two to me. What a contrast this gay, reckless, and in a disguised way, almost tender talk, presented to the cold, peculiar, but agreeable conversation of the ascetic enthusiast, in whom this dark-faced, animated man of the world had uncomfortably disturbed my faith!

Laura Grey was restless all this time, angry, frightened. I fancied she was jealous and wounded; and although I was so fond of her, it did not altogether displease me.

The sunlight failed. The reflected glow from the western sky paled into grey, and twilight found our guest still in his place at the window, with his knee on the bench, and his elbows resting on the window-stone, our candles being lighted, chatting, as I thought, quite delightfully, talking sense and nonsense very pleasantly mixed, and hinting a great many very agreeable flatteries.

Laura Grey at length took courage, or panic, which often leads in the same direction, and rising, said quietly, but a little peremptorily: "I am going now, Ethel."

There was, of course, nothing for it but to submit. I confess I was angry. But it would certainly not have been dignified to show my resentment in Mr. Marston's presence. I therefore acquiesced with careless goodhumour. The stranger bid us a reluctant goodnight, and Laura shut down the window, and drew the little bolt across the window-sash, with, as it seemed to me, a rather inconsistent parade of suspicion. With this ungracious dismissal he went away in high goodhumour, notwithstanding.

"Why need we leave the drawingroom so very early?" said I, in a pet.

"We need not go now, as that man is gone," she said, and quickly closed the window-shutters, and drew the curtains.

Laura, when she had made these arrangements, laid her hand on my shoulder, and looked with great affection and anxiety in my face.

"You are vexed, darling, because I got rid of that person."

"No," said I; "but I'm vexed because you got rid of him rudely."

"I should have prevented his staying at the window for a single minute, if I had been quite sure he is the person I suppose. If he is — oh! how I wish he were a thousand miles away!"

"I don't think you would be quite so hard upon him, if he had divided his conversation a little more equally," I said with the bluntness of vexation.

Laura hardly smiled. There was a pained, disappointed look in her face, but the kindest you can imagine.

"No, Ethel, I did not envy your good fortune. There is no one on earth to whom I should not prefer talking."

"But who is he?" I urged.

"I can't tell you."

"Surely you can say the name of the person you take him for?" I insisted.

"I am not certain; if he be the person he resembles, he took care to place himself so that I could not, or, at least, did not, see him well; there are two or three people mixed up in a great misfortune, whom I hate to name, or think of. I thought at one time I recognised him; but afterwards I grew doubtful. I never saw the person I mean more than twice in my life; but I know very well what he is capable of; his name is Marston; but I am not at all certain that this is he."

"You run away with things," I said. "How do you know that Mr. Carmel's account may not be a very unfair one?"

"I don't rely on Mr. Carmel's account of Mr. Marston, if this is he. I knew a great deal about him. You must not ask me how that was, or anything more. He is said to be, and I believe it, a bad, selfish, false man. I am terrified when I think of your having made his acquaintance. If he continues here, we must go up to town. I am half distracted. He dare not give us any trouble there."

"How did he quarrel with Mr. Carmel?" I asked, full of curiosity.

"I never heard; I did not know that he was even acquainted with him; but I think you may be perfectly certain that everything he said about Mr. Carmel is untrue. He knows that Mr. Carmel warned us against making his acquaintance; and his reason for talking as he does, is simply to discredit him. I dare say he'll take an opportunity of injuring him also. There is not time to hear from Mr. Ware. The only course, if he stays here for more than a day or two, is, as I said, to run up to your papa's house in town, and stay there till he is gone."

Again my belief in Mr. Marston was shaken; and I reviewed my hard thoughts of Mr. Carmel with something like compunction. The gloom and pallor of Laura's face haunted me.

CHAPTER XVII.

LEMUEL BLOUNT.

Next morning, at about halfpast ten, as Laura and I sat in our breakfast-room, a hired carriage with two horses, which had evidently been driven at a hard pace, passed our window at a walk. The driver, who was leading his beasts, asked a question of Thomas Jones, who was rolling the gravel on the courtyard before the window; and then he led them round the corner toward the steward's house. The carriage was empty; but in another minute it was followed up by the person whom we might presume to have been its occupant. He turned towards our window as he passed, so that we had a full view of this new visitor.

He was a man who looked past sixty, slow-paced, and very solemn; he was dressed in a clumsy black suit; his face was large, square, and sallow; his cheek and chin were smoothly shorn and blue. His hat was low-crowned, and broad in the brim. He had a cotton umbrella in his big gloved hand, and a coloured pockethandkerchief sticking out of his pocket. A great bunch of seals hung from his watch-chain under his black waistcoat. He was walking so slowly that we had no difficulty in observing these details; and he stopped before the hall-door, as if doubtful whether he should enter there. A word, however, from Thomas Jones set him right, and he in turn disappeared round the corner.

We did not know what to make of this figure, whom we now conjectured to have come in quest of the shipwrecked stranger.

Thomas Jones ran round before him to the door of the steward's house, which he opened; and the newcomer thanked him with a particularly kind smile. He knocked on chance at the door to the right, and the voice of our unknown guest told him to come in.

"Oh, Mr. Blount!" said the young gentleman, rising, hesitating, and then tendering his hand very respectfully, and looking in the sensible, vulgar face of the old man as if he were by no means sure how that tender might be received. "I hope, sir, I have not quite lost your friendship. I hope I retain some, were it ever so little, of the goodwill you once bore me. I hope, at least, that you will allow me to say that I am glad to see you: I feel it."

The old man bowed his head, holding it a little on one side while the stranger spoke; it was the attitude of listening rather than of respect. When the young gentleman had done speaking, his visitor raised his head again. The young man smiled faintly, and still extended his hand, looking very pale. Mr. Blount did not smile in answer; his countenance was very sombre, one might say sad.

"I never yet, sir, refused the hand of any man living when offered to me in sincerity, especially that of one in whom I felt, I may say, at one time a warm interest, although he may have given me reason to alter the opinion I then entertained of him."

Thus speaking, he gravely took the young man's hand, and shook it in a thoughtful, melancholy way, lowering his head again as he had done before.

"I don't ask how my uncle feels towards me," said the young man, half inquiringly.

"You need not," answered the visitor.

"I am at all events very much obliged to you," said the young man, humbly, "for your friendship, Mr. Blount. There is, I know, but one way of interesting your sympathy, and that is by telling you frankly how deep and true my repentance is; how I execrate my ingratitude; how I deplore my weakness and criminality." He paused, looking earnestly at the old man, who, however, simply bowed his head again, and made no comment.

"I can't justify anything I have done; but in my letter I ventured to say a few words in extenuation," he continued. "I don't expect to soften my uncle's just resentment, but I am most anxious, Mr. Blount, my best friend on earth, to recover something, were it ever so little, of the ground I have lost in your opinion."

"Time, sir, tries all things," answered the newcomer, gently; "if you mean to lead a new life, you will have opportunity to prove it."

"Was my uncle softened, ever so little, when he heard that the Conway Castle had gone down?" asked the young man, after a short silence.

"I was with him at breakfast when the morning paper brought the intelligence," said Mr. Blount. "I don't recollect that he expressed any regret."

"I dare say; I can quite suppose it; I ought to have known that he was pleased rather."

"No; I don't think he was pleased. I rather think he exhibited indifference," answered Mr. Blount.

With some grim remarks I believe the young man's uncle had received the sudden news of his death.

"Did my uncle see the letter I wrote to you, Mr. Blount?"

"No."

"And why not?"

"You will not think, I hope, that I would for any consideration use a phrase that could wound you unnecessarily when I tell you?"

"Certainly not."

"Your letter mentioned that you had lost your papers and money in the ship. Now, if it should turn out that you had, in short, misstated anything —— "

"Told a lie, you mean," interrupted the young man, his face growing white, and his eyes gleaming.

"It would have been discourteous in me to say so, but such was my meaning," he answered, with a very kind look. "It has been one object with me during my life to reconcile courtesy with truth. I am happy in the belief that I have done so, and I believe during a long life I have never once offended against the laws of politeness. Had you deceived him so soon again it would have sunk you finally and for ever. I thought it advisable, therefore, to give you an opportunity of reconsidering the statements of your letter before committing you by placing them before him as fact."

The young man flushed suddenly. It was his misfortune that he could not resent suspicion, however gross, although he might wince under the insult, all the more that it was just. Rather sulkily he said:

"I can only repeat, sir, that I have not a shilling, nor a cheque; I left every paper and every farthing I possessed in my despatch-box, in my berth. Of course, I can't prove it; I can only repeat that every guinea I had in the world has gone to the bottom."

Mr. Blount raised his head. His square face and massive features confronted the younger man, and his honest brown eyes were fixed upon him with a grave and undisguised inquiry.

"I don't say that you have any certainty of recovering a place in your uncle's esteem, but the slightest prevarication in matters of this kind would be simply suicidal. Now, I ask you, sir, on your honour, did no part of your money, or of your papers, go by rail either to Bristol or to London?"

"Upon my honour, Mr. Blount, not a farthing. I had only about ten pounds in gold, all the rest was in letters of credit and cheques; and, bad as I am, I should scarcely be fool enough to practise a trick, which, from its nature, must be almost instantaneously self-exposed. My uncle could have stopped payment of them; probably he has done so."

"I see you understand something of business, sir."

"I should have understood a great deal more, Mr. Blount, and been a much better man, if I had listened to you long ago. I hope, in future, to be less my own adviser, and more your pupil."

To this flattering speech the old man listened attentively, but made no answer.

"Your letter followed me to Chester," said Mr. Blount, after an interval. "I received it last night. He was in London when I saw him last; and my letter, telling him that you are still living, may not reach him, possibly, for some days. Thus, you see, you would have the start of him, if I may so describe it, without rudeness; and you are aware he has no confidence in you; and, certainly, if you will permit me to say so, he ought not to have any. I have a note of the number of the cheque; you can write a line saying that you have lost it, and requesting that payment may be stopped; and I will enclose it to Messrs. Dignum and Budget."

"There's pen and ink here; I'll do it this moment. I thought you had renounced me also; and I was going to write again to try you once more, before taking to the high road," he said, with dismal jocularity.

It wrung the pride of the young man sorely to write the note. But the bitter pill was swallowed; and he handed it, but with signs of suppressed anger, to Mr. Blount.

"That will answer perfectly," said the man in black.

"It enables you to stop that cheque by this post, without first seeing my uncle; and it relieves you," said the young man, with bitter and pitiless irony, "of the folly of acting in the most trifling matter upon my word of honour. It is certainly making the most of the situation. I have made one great slip — a crime, if you like — — "

"Quite so, sir," acquiesced Mr. Blount, with melancholy politeness.

"Under great momentary temptation," continued the young man, "and without an idea of ultimately injuring any human being to the amount of a single farthing. I'm disowned; any one that pleases may safely spit in my face. I'm quite aware how I stand in this infernal pharisaical world."

Mr. Blount looked at him gravely, but made him no answer. The young gentleman did not want to quarrel with Mr. Blount just then. He could not afford it.

"I don't mean you, of course," he said; "you have been always only too much my friend. I am speaking of the world; you know, quite well, if this unlucky thing takes wind, and my uncle's conduct towards me is the very thing to set people talking and inquiring, I may as well take off my hat to you all, drink your healths in a glass of prussic acid, and try how a trip to some other world agrees with me."

"You are speaking, of course, sir, in jest," said Mr. Blount, with some disgust in his grave countenance; "but I may mention that the unfortunate occurrence is known but to your uncle and to me, and to no other person on earth. You bear the name of Marston — you'll excuse me for reminding you, sir — and upon that point he is sensitive and imperious. He considered, sir, that your bearing that name, if I may so say, without being supposed guilty of a rudeness, would slur it; and, therefore, you'll change it, as arranged, on embarking at Southampton. It would be highly inexpedient to annoy your uncle by any inadvertence upon this point. Your contemplating suicide would be — you will pardon the phrase — cowardly and impious. Not, indeed, if I may so say consistently with the rules of politeness," he added, thoughtfully, "that your sudden removal would involve any loss to anybody, except, possibly, some few Jews, and people of that kind."

"Certainly — of course. You need not insist upon that. I feel my degradation, I hope, sufficiently. It is not his fault, at least, if I don't."

"And, from myself, I suggest that he will be incensed, if he learns that you are accepting the hospitality of Mr. Ware's house. I think, sir, that men of the world, especially gentlemen, will regard it, if the phrase be not discourteous, in the light of a shabby act."

"Shabby, sir! what do you mean by shabby?" said Mr. Marston, flaming up.

"I mean, sir — you'll excuse me — paltry; don't you see? — or mean. His feelings would be strongly excited by your partaking of Mr. Ware's hospitality."

"Hospitality! Shelter, you mean; slates, walls — little more than they give a beast in a pound! Why, I don't owe them a crust, or a cup of tea. I get everything from the hotel there, at Cardyllion; and Mr. Ware is a thousand miles away!"

"I speak of it simply as a question of expediency, sir. He will be inflamed against you, if he hears you have, in ever so small a matter, placed yourself under any obligation to Mr. Ware."

"But he need not hear of it; why should you mention it?"

"I cannot practise reserve with a man who treats me with unlimited confidence," he answered, gently. "Why should you not go to the hotel?"

"I have no money."

"But you get everything you want there on credit?"

"Well, yes, that's true; but it would scarcely do to make that move; I have been as ill as ever I was in my life since that awful night on the rocks down there. You can have no idea what it was; and the doctor says I must keep quiet. It isn't worth while moving now; so soon as I have funds, I'll leave this."

"I will lend you what you require, with much pleasure, sir," proffered Mr. Blount.

"Well, thanks, it is not very much, and it's hard to refuse; one feels such a fool without a shilling to give to a messenger, or to the servants; I haven't even a fee for the doctor who has been attending me."

Determined by this pathetic appeal, Mr. Blount took a banknote of ten pounds from his purse and lent it to Mr. Marston.

"And, I suppose, you'll remove forthwith to the hotel," he said.

"The moment I feel equal to it," he replied. "Why, d —— it, don't you think I'm ready to go, when I'm able? I — I —— Don't mind me, pray. Your looks reprove me. I'm shocked at myself when I use those phrases. I know very well that I have just escaped by a miracle from death. I feel how utterly unfit I was to die; and, I assure you, I'm not ungrateful. You shall see that my whole future life will be the better for it. I'm not the graceless wretch I have been. One such hour as preceded my scaling that rock out there is a lesson for a life. You have often spoken to me on the subjects that ought to interest us all. I mean when I was a boy. Your words have returned upon me. You derive happiness from the good you do to others. I thought you had cast your bread upon the waters to see it no more; but you have found it at last. I am very grateful to you."

Did Mr. Marston believe that good people are open, in the manner of their apostleship, to flattery, as baser mortals are in matters of another sort? It was to be hoped that Mr. Marston felt half what he uttered. His words, however, did produce a favourable and a pleasant impression upon Mr. Blount. His large face beamed for a moment with honest gratification. His eyes looked evil upon him, as if the benevolence of his inmost heart spoke out through them.

"If anything can possibly please him, sir, in connection with you," said Mr. Blount, with all his customary suavity and unconscious bluntness, "it will be to learn that recent events have produced a salutary impression and a total change in you. Not that I suppose he cares very much; but I'm glad to have to represent to him anything favourable in this particular case. I mean to return to London direct, and if your uncle is still there you shall hear in a day or two — at all events very soon; but I wish you were in the hotel."

"Well, I'll go to the hotel, if they can put me up. I'll go at once; address to me to the postoffice — Richard Marston, I suppose?"

"Just so, sir, Richard Marston."

Mr. Blount had risen, and stood gravely, prepared to take his leave.

"I have kept you a long time, Mr. Blount; will you take anything?"

Mr. Blount declined refreshments.

"I must leave you now, sir; there is a crisis in every life. What has happened to you is stupendous; the danger and the deliverance. That hour is past. May its remembrance be with you ever — day and night! Do not suppose that it can rest in your mind without positive consequences. It must leave you a great deal better or a great deal worse. Farewell, sir."

So they parted. Mr. Marston seemed to have lost all his spirits and half his energy in that interview. He sat motionless in the chair into which he had thrown himself, and gazed listlessly on the floor in a sulky reverie. At length he said —

"That is a most unpleasant old fellow; I wish he was not so unscrupulously addicted to telling truth."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IDENTIFIED.

It was a gloomy day; I had left Laura Grey in the room we usually occupied, where she was now alone, busy over some of our accounts. I dare say her thoughts now and then wandered into speculations respecting the identity of the visitor who, the night before, evaded her recognition, if indeed he was recognisable by her at all. Her doubts were now resolved. The room door opened, and the tenant of the steward’s house entered coolly, and approached the table where she was sitting. Laura Grey did not rise; she did not speak; she sat, pen in hand, staring at him as if she were on the point of fainting. The star-shaped scar on his forehead, fixed there by some old fracture, and his stern and energetic features, were now distinctly before her. He kept his eye fixed upon her, and smiled, dubious of his reception.

“I saw you, Miss Grey, yesterday afternoon, though you did not see me. I avoided your eye then; but it was idle supposing that I could continue even a few days longer in this place without you seeing me. I came last night with my mind made up to reveal myself, but I put it off till we should be to ourselves, as we are now. I saw you half guessed me, but you weren’t sure, and I left you in doubt.”

He approached till his hands rested upon the table opposite, and said, with a very stern and eager face,

“Miss Grey, upon my honour, upon my soul, if I can give you an assurance which can bind a gentleman, I entreat you to believe me. I shan’t offer one syllable contrary to what I now feel to be your wishes. I shan’t press you, I shan’t ask you to hear me upon the one subject you say you object to. You allege that I have done you a wrong. I will spare no pains to redress it. I will do my utmost in any way you please to dictate. I will do all this, I swear by everything a gentleman holds most sacred, upon one very easy condition.”

He paused. He was leaning forward, his dark eyes were fixed upon her with a piercing gaze. She did not, or could not, speak. She was answering his gaze with a stare wilder and darker, but her very lips were white.

"I know I have stood in your way; I admit I have injured you, not by accident; it was with the design and wish to injure you, if the endeavour to detach a fellow like that be an injury. You shall forgive me; the most revengeful woman can forgive a man the extravagances of his jealousy. I am here to renounce all, to retrieve everything. I admit the injury; it shall be repaired."

She spoke now for the first time, and said, hardly above her breath:

"It's irreparable. It can't be undone — quite irreparable."

"When I undertake a thing I do it; I'll do this at any sacrifice — yes, at any, of pride or opinion. Suppose I go to the persons in question, and tell them that they have been deceived, and that I deceived them, and now confess the whole thing a tissue of lies?"

"You'll never do that."

"By Heavens, as I stand here, I'll do it! Do you suppose I care for their opinion in comparison with a real object? I'll do it. I'll write and sign it in your presence; you shall have it to lock up in that desk, and do what you please with it, upon one condition."

A smile of incredulity lighted Laura Grey's face faintly, as she shook her head.

"You don't believe me, but you shall. Tell me what will satisfy you — what practicable proof will convince you. I'll set you right with them. You believe in a Providence. Do you think I was saved from that wreck for nothing?"

Laura Grey looked down upon her desk; his fierce eyes were fixed on her with intense eagerness, for he thought he read in her pale face and her attitude signs of compliance. It needed, he fancied, perhaps but a slight impulse to determine her.

"I'll do it all; but, as I told you, on one condition."

There was a silence for a time. He was still watching her intently.

"Let us both be reasonable," he resumed. "I ought, I now know, to have seen long ago, Miss Grey, that there was no use in my talking to you as I did. I have been mad. There's the whole story; and now I renounce it all. I despair; it's over. I'll give you the very best proof of that. I shall devote myself to another, and you shall aid me. Pray, not a word, till you have heard me out; that's the condition. If you accept it, well. If not, so sure as there is life in me, you may regret it."

"There's nothing more you can do I care for now," she broke out with a look of agony. "Oh, Heaven help me!"

"You'll find there is," he continued, with a quiet laugh. "You can talk as long as you please when your turn comes. Just hear me out. I only want you to have the whole case before you. I say you can help me, and you shall. I'm a very good fellow to work with, and a bitter one to work against. Now, one moment. I have made the acquaintance of a young lady whom I wish to marry. Upon my sacred honour, I have no other intention. She is poor; her father is over head and ears in debt; she can never have a guinea more than two thousand pounds. It can't be sordid, you'll allow. There is a Jesuit fellow hanging about this place. He hates me; he has been in here telling lies of me. I expect you to prevent my being prejudiced by that slanderer. You can influence the young lady in my favour, and enable me to improve our acquaintance. I expect you to do so. These are my conditions. She is Miss Ethel Ware."

The shock of a disclosure so entirely unexpected, and the sting possibly of wounded vanity, made her reply more spirited than it would have been. She stood up, and said, quietly and coldly:

"I have neither right nor power in the matter; and if I had, nothing on earth could induce me to exercise them in your favour. You can write, if you please, to Mr. Ware, for leave to pay your addresses to his daughter. But without his leave you shall not visit here, nor join her in her walks; and if you attempt to do either, I will remove Miss Ware, and place her under the care of some one better able than I to protect her."

The young man looked at her with a very pale face.

"I thought you knew me better, Miss Grey," he said, with an angry sneer. "You refuse your chance of reconciliation."

He paused, as if to allow her time to think better of it.

"Very well; I'm glad I've found you out. Don't you think your situation is rather an odd one — a governess in Mr. Ware's country quarters? We all know pretty well what sort of gentleman Mr. Ware is, a gentleman particularly well qualified by good taste and high spirits to make his house agreeable. He was here, I understand, for about a week a little time ago, but his wife does not trouble your solitude much; and now that he is on his travels, he is succeeded by a young friar. I happen to know what sort of person Carmel was, and is. Was ever young lady so fortunate? One only wonders that Mr. Ware, under these circumstances, is not a little alarmed for the Protestantism of his governess. I should scarcely have believed that you had found so easily so desirable a home; but fate has ordained that I should light upon your retreat, and hear with my own ears the good report of the neighbours, and see with my own eyes how very comfortable and how extremely happy you are."

He smiled and bowed ironically, and drew towards the door.

"There was nothing to prevent our being on the friendliest terms — nothing."

He paused, but she made him no answer.

"No reason on earth why we should not. You could have done me a very trifling kindness. I could have served you vitally."

Another pause here.

"I can ascribe your folly to nothing but the most insensate malice. I shall take care of myself. You ought to know me. Whatever befalls, you have to thank but your own infatuated obstinacy for it."

"I have friends still," she cried, in a sudden burst of agony. "Your cowardice, your threats and insults, your persecution of a creature quite defenceless and heartbroken, and with no one near to help her — — "

Her voice faltered.

"Find out your friends, if you have got them; tell them what you please; and, if it is worth while, I will contradict your story. I'll fight your friends. I'll pit my oath against yours."

There was no sneer on his features now, no irony in his tones; he was speaking with the bitter vehemence of undisguised fury.

"I shrink from nothing. Things have happened since to make me more reckless, and by so much the more dangerous. If you knew a little more you would scarcely dare to quarrel with me." He dashed his hand as he spoke upon the table.

"I am afraid — I'm frightened; but nothing on earth shall make me do what you ask."

"That's enough — that closes it," said he. There was a little pause. "And remember, the consequences I promise are a great deal nearer than you probably dream of."

With these words, spoken slowly, with studied meaning, he left the room as suddenly as he had appeared. Laura Grey was trembling. Her thoughts were not very clear. She was shocked, and even terrified.

The sea, which had swallowed all the rest, had sent up that one wicked man alive. How many good, kind, and useful lives were lost to earth, she thought, in those dreadful moments, and that one life, barren of all good, profligate and cruel, singled out alone for mercy!

CHAPTER XIX.

PISTOLS FOR TWO.

I knew nothing of all this. I was not to learn what had passed at that interview till many years later. Laura Grey, on my return, told me nothing. I am sure she was right. There were some things she could not have explained, and the stranger's apparently insane project of marrying penniless me was a secret better in her own keeping than in that of a simple and very self-willed girl.

When I returned there were signs of depression and anxiety in her looks, and her silence and abstraction excited my curiosity. She easily put me off, however. I knew that her spirits sometimes failed her, although she never talked about her troubles; and therefore her dejection was, after all, not very remarkable. We heard nothing more of our guest till next day, when Rebecca Torkill told us that he was again suffering from one of his headaches. The intelligence did not excite all the sympathy she seemed to expect. Shortly after sunset we saw him pass the window of our room, and walk by under the trees.

With an ingrained perversity, the more Laura Grey warned me against this man, the more I became interested in him. She and I were both unusually silent that evening. I think that her thoughts were busy with him; I know that mine were.

"We won't mind opening the window tonight," said Laura.

"I was just thinking how pleasant it would be. Why should we not open it?" I answered.

"Because we should have him here again; and he is not the sort of person your mamma would like you to become acquainted with."

I was a little out of humour, but did not persist. I sat in a sullen silence, my eyes looking dreamily through the window. The early twilight had faded into night by the time the stranger reappeared. I saw him turn the line of his walk near the window; and seeing it shut, pause for a moment. I dare say he was more vexed than I. He made up his mind, however, against a scene. He looked on the ground and over his shoulder, again at the window.

Mr. Marston walked round the corner to the steward's house. The vague shadows and lights of night were abroad by this time. Candles were in his room; he found Rebecca Torkill there, with a small tankard and a tea-cup on a salver, awaiting his return.

"La! sir, to think of you doing such another wild thing, and you, only this minute, at death's door with your head! And how is it now, please, sir?"

"A thousand thanks. My head is as well as my hat. My headache goes as it comes, in a moment. What is this?"

"Some gruel, please, sir, with sugar, white wine, and nutmeg. I thought you might like it."

"Caudle, by Jove!" smiled the gentleman, "isn't it?"

"Well, it is; and it's none the worse o' that."

"All the better," exclaimed Mr. Marston, who chose to be on friendly terms with the old lady. "How can I thank you?"

"It's just the best thing in the world to make you sleep after a headache. You'll take some while it's hot."

"I can't thank you half enough," he said.

"I'll come back, sir, and see you by-and-by," and the good woman toddled out, leaving him alone with his gruel.

"I must not offend her." He poured some out into his cup, tasted it, and laughed quietly. "Sipping caudle! Well, this is rather a change for Richard Marston, by Jove! A change every day. Let us make a carouse of it," he said, and threw it out of the window.

Mr. Marston threw on his loose wrapper, and folded his muffler about his throat, replaced his hat, and with his cane in his fingers, was about to walk down to the town of Cardyllion. A word or two spoken, quite unsuspiciously, by Doctor Mervyn that morning, had touched a sensitive nerve, and awakened a very acute anxiety in Mr. Marston's mind. The result was his intended visit, at the fall of night, to the High-street of the quaint little town.

He was on the point of setting out, when Rebecca Torkill returned with a sliced lemon on a plate.

"Some likes a squeeze of a lemon in it," she observed, "and I thought I might as well leave it here."

"It is quite delicious, really," he replied, as Mrs. Torkill peeped into the open flagon.

“Why,” said she, in unfeigned admiration, “I’m blest if he’s left a drop! Ah! ah! Well, it was good; and I’ll have some more for you before you go to bed. But you shouldn’t drink it off, all at a pull, like that. You might make yourself ill that way.”

“We men like good liquor so well — so well — we — we — what was I saying? Oh! yes, we like our liquor so well, we never know when we have had enough. It’s a bad excuse; but let it pass. I’m going out for a little walk, it always sets me up after one of those headaches. Good evening, Mrs. Torkill.”

He was thinking plainly of other matters than her, or her caudle; and, before she had time to reply, he was out of the door.

It was a sweet, soft night; the moon was up. The walk from Malory to the town is lonely and pretty. He took the narrow road that approaches Cardyllion in an inland line, parallel to the road that runs by the shore of the estuary. His own echoing footsteps among the moonlit trees was the only sign of life, except the distant barking of a watchdog, now and then, that was audible. A melancholy wind was piping high in the air, from over the sea; you might fancy it the aërial lamentations of the drowned.

He was passing the churchyard now, and stopped partly to light a cigar, partly to look at the old church, the effect of which, in the moonlight, was singular. Its gable and towers cast a sharp black shadow across the grass and gravestones, like that of a gigantic hand whose finger pointed towards him. He smiled cynically as the fancy struck him.

“Another grave there, I should not wonder if the news is true. What an ass that fellow is! Another grave, I dare say; and in my present luck, I suppose I shall fill it — fill it! That’s ambiguous; yes, the more like an oracle. That shadow does look curiously like a finger pointing at me!”

He smoked for a time, leaning on the pier of the iron wicket that from this side admits to the churchyard, and looking in with thoughts very far from edifying.

“This will be the second disagreeable discovery, without reckoning Carmel, I shall have made since my arrival in this queer corner of the world. Who could have anticipated meeting Laura here? — or that whining fool, Carmel? Who would have fancied that Jennings, of all men, would have turned up in this out-of-the-way nook? By Jove! I’m like Saint Paul, hardly out of the shipwreck when a viper fastens on my hand. Old Sprague made us turn all that into elegiacs. I wonder whether I could make elegiacs now."

He loitered slowly on, by the same old road, into Castle Street, the high-street of the quaint little town of steep roofs and many gables. The hall-door of the "Verney Arms" was open, and the light of the lamp glowed softly on the pavement.

Mr. Marston hated suspense. He would rather make a bad bargain, offhand, than endure the torture of a long negotiation. He would stride out to meet a catastrophe rather than await its slow, sidelong approaches. This intolerance of uncertainty made him often sudden in action. He had come down to the town simply to reconnoitre. He was beginning, by this time, to meditate something more serious. Under the shadow of the houses opposite, he walked slowly up and down the silent flagway, eyeing the door of the "Verney Arms" askance, as he finished his cigar.

It so happened, that exactly as he had thrown away the stump of it, a smoker, who had just commenced his, came slowly down the steps of the "Verney Arms," and stood upon the deserted flagway, and as he puffed indolently, he looked up the street, and down the street, and up at the sky.

The splendid moon shone full on his face, and Mr. Marston knew him. He was tall and slight, and rather good-looking, with a face of great intelligence, heightened with something of enthusiasm, and stood there smoking, in happy unconsciousness that an unfriendly eye was watching him across the street.

Mr. Marston stood exactly opposite. The smoker, who had emerged from the "Verney Arms," stood before the centre of the steps, and Mr. Marston, on a sudden, as if he was bent on walking straight through him into the hotel, walked at a brisk pace across the street, and halted, within a yard, in front of him.

"I understand," said Marston instantly, in a low, stern tone, "that you said at Black's, when I was away yachting, that you had something to say to me."

The smoker had lowered his cigar, and was evidently surprised, as well he might be; he looked at him hard for some time, and at length replied as grimly: "Yes, I said so; yes I do; I mean to speak to you."

"All right; no need to raise our voices here though; I think you had better find some place where we can talk without exciting attention."

"Come this way," said the tall young man, turning suddenly and walking up the street at a leisurely pace. Mr. Marston walked beside him, a yard or two apart. They might be very good friends, for anything that appeared to a passer-by. He turned down a short and narrow by-street, with only room for a house or two, and they found themselves on the little common that is known as the Green of Cardyllion. The sea, at its further side, was breaking in long, tiny waves along the shingle, the wind came over the old castle with a melancholy soughing; the green was solitary; and only here and there, from the windows of the early little town, a light gleamed. The moon shone bright on the green, turning the grass to grey, and silvering the ripples on the dark estuary, and whitening the misty outlines of the noble Welsh mountains across the water. A more tranquillising scene could scarcely be imagined.

When they had got to the further end, they stopped, as if by common consent.

"I'm ready to hear you," said Marston.

"Well, I have only to tell you, and I'm glad of this opportunity, that I have ascertained the utter falsehood of your stories, and that you are a coward and a villain."

"Thanks; that will do, Mr. Jennings," answered Marston, growing white with fury, but speaking with cold and quiet precision. "You have clenched this matter by an insult which I should have answered by cutting you across the face with this," — and he made his cane whistle in the air,— "but that I reserve you for something more effectual, and shall run no risk of turning the matter into a police-office affair. I have neither pistols nor friend here. We must dispense with formalities; we can do all that is necessary for ourselves, I suppose. I'll call tomorrow, early, at the 'Verney Arms.' A word or two will settle everything."

He raised his hat ever so little, implying that that conference, for the present, was over; but before he could turn, Mr. Jennings, who did not choose to learn more than was unavoidable to his honour, said:

"You will find a note at the bar."

"Address it Richard Wynyard, then."

"Your friend?"

"No; myself."

"Oh! a false name?" sneered Mr. Jennings.

“You may use the true one, of course. My tailor is looking for me a little more zealously, I fancy, than you were; and if you publish it in Cardyllion, it may lead to his arresting me, and saving you all further trouble in this, possibly, agitating affair.” The young man accompanied these words with a cold laugh.

“Well, Richard Wynyard be it,” said Mr. Jennings, with a slight flush.

And with these words the two young men turned their backs on each other. Mr. Jennings walked along beside the shingle, with the sound of the light waves in his ear, and thinking rather hurriedly, as men will, whom so serious a situation has suddenly overtaken. Marston turned, as I said, the other way, and without entering the town again, approached Malory by the narrow road that passes close under the castle walls, and follows the line of the high banks overlooking the estuary.

If there be courage and mental activity, and no conscience, we have a very dangerous devil. A spoiled child, in which self is supreme, who has no softness of heart, and some cleverness and energy, easily degenerates into that sort of Satan. And yet, in a kind of way, Marston was popular. He could spend money freely — it was not his own — and when he was in spirits he was amusing.

When he stared in Jennings’ face this evening, the bruise and burning of an old jealousy were in his heart. The pain of that hellish hate is often lightly inflicted; but what is more cruel than vanity? He had abandoned the pursuit in which that jealousy was born, but the hatred remained. And now he had his revenge in hand. It is a high stake, one’s life on a match of pistol-shooting. But his brute courage made nothing of it. It was an effort to him to think himself in danger, and he did not make that effort. He was thinking how to turn the situation to account.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WOOD OF PLAS YLWD.

Next morning, Mr. Marston, we learned, had been down to Cardyllion early. He had returned at about ten o'clock, and he had his luggage packed up, and despatched again to the proprietor of the "Verney Arms." So we might assume that he was gone.

The mountain that had weighed on Laura Grey's spirits was perceptibly lightened. I heard her whisper to herself, "Thank God!" when she heard Rebecca Torkill's report, and the further intelligence that their guest had told her and Thomas Jones that he was going to the town, to return no more to Malory. Laura was now, again, quite like herself. For my part, I was a little glad, and (shall I confess it?) also a little sorry! I had not quite made up my mind respecting this agreeable Mr. Marston, of whom Mr. Carmel and Miss Grey had given each so alarming a character.

About an hour later, I was writing to mamma, and sitting at the window, when, raising my eyes, I saw Laura Grey and Mr. Marston, much to my surprise, walking side by side up the avenue towards the hall-door. They appeared to be in close conversation; Mr. Marston seemed to talk volubly and carelessly, and cut the heads of the weeds with his cane as he sauntered by her side. Laura Grey held her handkerchief to her eyes, except now and then, when she spoke a few words, as it seemed passionately.

When they came to the courtyard, opposite to the hall-door, she broke away from him, hurried across, ran up the steps, and shut the door. He stood where she had left him, looking after her and smiling. I thought he was going to follow; he saw me in the window, and raised his hat, still smiling, and with this farewell salute he turned on his heel and walked slowly away towards the gate. I ran to the hall, and there found Laura Grey. She had been crying, and was agitated.

"Ethel, darling," she said, "let nothing on earth induce you to speak to that man again. I implore of you to give me your solemn promise. If he speaks truth it will not cost you anything, for he says he is going away this moment, not to return."

It certainly looked very like it, for he had actually despatched his two boxes, he had "tipped" the servants handsomely at the steward's house, and having taken a courteous leave of them, and left with Mrs. Torkill a valedictory message of thanks for me, he had got into a "fly" and driven off to the "Verney Arms."

Well, whether for good or ill, he had now unquestionably taken his departure; but not without leaving a sting. The little he had spoken to Miss Grey, at the moment of his flight, had proved, it seemed, a Parthian arrow tipped with poison. She seemed to grow more and more miserable every hour. She had lain down on her bed, and was crying bitterly, and trembling. I began to grow vexed at the cruelty of the man who had deliberately reduced her to that state. I knew not what gave him the power of torturing her. If I was angry, I was also intensely curious. My questions produced no clearer answers than this: "Nothing, dear, that you could possibly understand without first hearing a very long story. I hope the time is coming when I may tell it all to you. But the secret is not mine; it concerns other people; and at present I must keep it."

Mr. Marston had come and gone, then, like a flash of light, leaving my eyes dazzled. The serenity of Malory seemed now too quiet for me; the day was dull. I spent my time sitting in the window, or moping about the place. I must confess that I had, by no means, the horror of this stranger that the warnings of Mr. Carmel and Laura Grey ought, I suppose, to have inspired. On the contrary, his image came before me perpetually, and everything I looked at, the dark trees, the windowsill, the garden, the estuary, and the ribs of rock round which the cruel sea was sporting, recalled the hero of a terrible romance.

I tried in vain to induce Laura to come with me for a walk, late in the afternoon. So I set out alone, turning my back on Cardyllion, in the direction of Penruthyn Priory. The sun was approaching the western horizon as I drew near the picturesque old farmhouse of Plas Ylwd.

A little to the south of this stretches a fragment of old forest, covering some nine or ten acres of peaty ground. It is a decaying wood, and in that melancholy and miserable plight, I think, very beautiful. I would commend it as a haunt to artists in search of "studies," who love huge trees with hollow trunks, some that have "cast" half their boughs as deer do their antlers; some wreathed and laden with ivy, others that stretch withered and barkless branches into the air; ground that is ribbed and unequal, and cramped with great ringed, snakelike roots, that writhe and knot themselves into the earth; here and there overspread with little jungles of bramble, and broken and burrowed by rabbits.

Into this grand and singular bit of forest, now glorified by the coloured light of evening, I had penetrated some little way. Arrested in my walk by the mellow song of a blackbird, I listened in the sort of ecstasy that every one has, I suppose, experienced under similar circumstances; and I was in the full enjoyment of this sylvan melody, when I was startled, and the bird put to flight, by the near report of firearms. Once or twice I had heard boys shooting at the birds in this wood, but they had always accompanied their practice with shouting and loud talking. A dead silence followed this. I had no reason for any misgivings about so natural an interruption in such a place, but I did feel an ominous apprehension. I began to move, and was threading my way through one of these blackberry thickets, when I heard, close to my side, the branches of some underwood thrust aside, and Mr. Marston, looking pale and wicked, walked quickly by. It was plain he did not see me; I was screened by the stalks and sprays through which I saw him. He had no weapon as he passed me; he was drawing on his glove. The sudden appearance of Mr. Marston whom I believed to be by this time miles away — at the other side of Cardyllion — was a shock that rather confirmed my misgivings.

I waited till he was quite gone, and then passed down the path he had come by. I saw nothing to justify alarm, so I walked a little in the same direction, looking to the right and left. In a little opening among the mossgrown trunks of the trees, I soon saw something that frightened me. It was a man lying on his back, deadly pale, upon the ground; his waistcoat was open, and his shirt-front covered with blood, that seemed to ooze from under his hand, which was pressed on it; his hat was on the ground, some way behind. A pistol lay on the grass beside him, and another not far from his feet.

I was very much frightened, and the sight of blood made me feel faint. The wounded man saw me, I knew, for his eyes were fixed on me; his lips moved, and there was a kind of straining in his throat; he said a word or two, though I could not at first hear what. With a horrible reluctance, I came near and leaned a little over him, and then heard distinctly:

“Pray send help.”

I bethought me instantly of the neighbouring farmhouse of Plas Ylwd, and knowing this little forest tract well, I ran through it nearly direct to the farmyard, and quickly succeeded in securing the aid of Farmer Prichard and all his family, except his wife, who stayed at home to get a bed ready for the reception of the wounded stranger. We all trooped back again through the woods, at a trot, I at their head, quite forgetting my dignity in my excitement. The wounded man appeared fainter. But he beckoned to us with his hand, without raising his arm, and with a great effort he said: “The blame is mine — all my fault — remember, if I die. I compelled this meeting.”

I got Prichard to send his son, without a moment’s delay, to Cardyllion, to bring Dr. Mervyn, and as they got the bleeding man on towards Plas Ylwd, I, in a state of high excitement, walked swiftly homeward, hoping to reach Malory before the declining light failed altogether.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PATIENT AT PLAS YLWD.

I got home just as the last broad beam of the setting sun was spent, and twilight overspread churchyard and manorhouse, sea and land, with its grey mantle. Lights were gleaming from the drawingroom window as I approached; a very welcome light to me, for it told me that Laura Grey had come down, and I was longing to tell her my story. I found her, as I expected, seated quietly at our tea-table, and saw, in her surprised and eager looks, how much she was struck by the excitement which mine exhibited, as, without waiting to take off my hat or coat, I called on her to listen, and stumbled and hurried through the opening of my strange story.

I had hardly mentioned the sudden appearance of Mr. Marston, when Laura Grey rose with her hands clasped:

“Was any one shot? For God’s sake, tell me quickly!”

I described all I had seen. She pressed her hand hard to her heart.

“Oh! he has killed him — the villain! His threats are always true — his promises never. Oh! Ethel, darling, he has been so near me, and I never dreamed it.”

“Who? What is it, Laura? Don’t, darling, be so frightened; he’s not killed — nobody’s killed. I daresay it is very trifling, and Doctor Mervyn is with him by this time.”

“I am sure he’s badly wounded; he has killed him. He has hated him so long, he would never have left him till he had killed him.”

She was growing quite distracted; I, all the time, doing my utmost to reassure her.

“What is his name?” at length I asked.

The question seemed to quiet her. She looked at me, and then down; and then again at me.

Once or twice she had mentioned a brother whom she loved very much, and who was one of her great anxieties. Was this wounded man he? If not, was he a lover? This latter could hardly be; for she had once, after a long, laughing fencing with my close questions, told me suddenly, quite gravely, "I have no lover, and no admirer, except one whom I despise and dislike as much as I can any one on earth." It was very possible that her brother was in debt, or in some other trouble that made her, for the present, object to disclose anything about him. I thought she was going to tell me a great deal now — but I was disappointed. I was again put off; but I knew she spoke truth, for she was the truest person I ever met, when she said that she longed to tell me all her story, and that the time would soon come when she could. But now, poor thing! she was, in spite of all I could say, in a state, very nearly, of distraction. She never was coherent, except when, in answer to her constantly repeated questioning, I again and again described the appearance of the wounded man, which each time seemed to satisfy her on the point of identity, but without preventing her from renewing her inquiries with increasing detail.

That evening passed miserably enough for us both. Doctor Mervyn, on his way to his patient, looked in upon us early next morning, intent on learning all he could from me about the circumstances of the discovery of his patient. I had been too well drilled by prudent Rebecca Torkill, to volunteer any information respecting the unexpected appearance of Mr. Marston so suspiciously near the scene of the occurrence. I described, therefore, simply the spectacle presented by the wounded man, on my lighting upon him in the wood, and his removal to the farmhouse of Plas Ylwd.

"It's all very fine, saying it was a accident," said the doctor, with a knowing nod and a smile. "Accident, indeed! If it was, why should he refuse to say who had a hand in the accident, besides himself? But there's no need to make a secret of the matter, for unless something unexpected should occur, he must, in the ordinary course of things, be well in little more than a week. It's an odd wound. The ball struck the collar bone and broke it, glancing upward. If it had penetrated obliquely downward instead, it might have killed him on the spot."

"Do you know his name?" I inquired.

"No; he's very reserved; fellows in his situation often are; they don't like figuring in the papers, you understand; or being bound over to be of good behaviour; or, possibly, prosecuted. But no trouble will come of this; and he'll be on his legs again in a very few days."

With this reassuring news the doctor left us. Miss Grey was relieved. One thing seemed pretty certain; and that was that the guilty and victorious duellist would not venture to appear in our part of the world for some time to come.

"Will you come with me to-day, to ask how he gets on?" I said to Laura as soon as the doctor was gone.

"No, I can't do that; but it would be very kind of you: that is, if you have no objection."

"None in the world; we must get Rebecca to make broth, or whatever else the doctor may order, and shall I mention your name to Mrs. Prichard? I mean, do you wish the patient — shall we call him — to know that you are here?"

"Oh! no, pray. He is the last person on earth — — "

"You are sure?"

"Perfectly. I entreat, dear Ethel, that you run no risk of my name being mentioned."

"Why, Mr. Marston knows that you are here," I said persistently.

"Bad as that was, this would be intolerable. I know, Ethel, I may rely on you."

"Well, I won't say a word — I won't mention your name, since you so ordain it."

Two or three days passed. As I had been the good Samaritan, in female garb, who aided the wounded man in his distress, I was now the visiting Sister of Mercy, the ministering angel — whatever you are good enough to call me — who every day saw after his wants, and sent, sometimes soup, and sometimes jelly, to favour the recovery of which the doctor spoke so sanguinely.

I did not feel the romantic interest I ought perhaps to have felt in the object of my benevolence. I had no wish to see his face again. I was haunted by a recollection of him that was ghastly. I am not wanting in courage, physical or moral. But I should have made a bad nurse, and a worse soldier; at the sight of blood I immediately grow faint, and a sense of indescribable disgust remains.

I sometimes think we women are perverse creatures. For there is an occult interest about the guilty and audacious, if it be elevated by masculine courage and beauty, and surrounded by ever so little of mystery and romance. Shall I confess it? The image of that wicked Mr. Marston, notwithstanding all Laura's hard epithets, and the startling situation in which I had seen him last, haunted me often, and with something more of fascination than I liked to confess. Let there be energy, cleverness, beauty, and I believe a reckless sort of wickedness will not stand the least in the way of a foolish romance. I think I had energy; I know I was impetuous. Insipid or timid virtue would have had no chance with me.

I was going to the farmhouse one day, I forget how long after the occurrence which had established my interesting relations with Plas Ylwd. My mother had a large cheval-glass; it had not often reflected her pretty image; it was the only one in the house, the furniture of which was very much out of date. It had been removed to my room, and before it I now stood, in my hat and jacket, to make a last inspection before I started. What did I see before me? I have courage to speak my real impressions, for there is no one near to laugh at me. A girl of eighteen, above the middle height, slender, with large, dark, grey eyes and long lashes, not much colour, not pink and white, by any means, but a very clear-tinted and marble-smooth skin; lips of carmine-scarlet, and teeth very white; thick, dark brown hair; and a tendency, when talking or smiling, to dimple in cheek and chin. There was something, too, spirited and energetic in the face that I contemplated with so much satisfaction.

I remained this day a little longer before my glass than usual. Half an hour later, I stood at the heavy stone doorway of Plas Ylwd. It is one of the prettiest farmhouses in the world. Round the farmyard stand very old hawthorn and lime trees, and the farmhouse is a composite building in which a wing of the old Tudor manorhouse of Plas Ylwd is incorporated, under a common thatch, which has grown brown and discoloured, and sunk and risen into hillocks and hollows by time. The door is protected by a thatched porch, with worn stone pillars; and here I stood, and learned that "the gentleman upstairs" was very well that afternoon, and sitting up; the doctor thought he would be out for a walk in two or three days. Having learned this, and all the rest that it concerned Rebecca Torkill to hear, I took my leave of good Mrs. Prichard, and crossing the stile from the farmyard, I entered the picturesque old wood in which the inmate of Plas Ylwd had received his wound. Through this sylvan solitude I intended returning to Malory.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE OUTLAW.

As I followed my path over the unequal flooring of the forest, among the crowded trunks of the trees and the thickets of brambles, I saw, on a sudden, Mr. Marston almost beside me. I was a good deal startled, and stood still. There was something in his air and looks, as he stood with his hat raised, so unspeakably deprecatory, that I felt at once reassured. Without my permission it was plain he would not dream of accompanying me, or even of talking to me. All Laura's warnings and entreaties sounded at that moment in my ears like a far-off and unmeaning tinkle. He had no apologies to make; and yet he looked like a penitent. I was embarrassed, but without the slightest fear of him. I spoke; but I don't recollect what I said.

"I have come here, Miss Ware, as I believe, at some risk; I should have done the same thing had the danger been a hundred times greater. I tried to persuade myself that I came for no other purpose than to learn how that foolish fellow, who would force a quarrel on me, is getting on. But I came, in truth, on no such errand; I came here on the almost desperate chance of meeting you, and in the hope, if I were so fortunate, that you would permit me to say a word in my defence. I am unfortunate in having two or three implacable enemies, and fate has perversely collected them here. Miss Grey stands in very confidential relations with you, Miss Ethel; her prejudices against me are cruel, violent, and in every way monstrous."

He was walking beside me as he said this.

"Mr. Marston," I interposed, "I can't hear you say a word against Miss Grey. I have the highest opinion of her; she is my very dearest friend — she is truth itself."

"One word you say I don't dispute, Miss Ware. She means all she says for truth; but she is cruelly prejudiced, and, without suspecting it, does me the most merciless injustice. Whenever she is at liberty to state her whole case against me — at present I haven't so much as heard it — I undertake to satisfy you of its unfairness. There is no human being to whom I would say all this, or before whom I would stoop to defend myself and sue for an acquittal, where I am blameless, but you, Miss Ware."

I felt myself blushing. I think that sign of emotion fired him.

"I could not tell," he said, extending his hand towards Plas Ylwd, "whether that foolish man was dead or living; and this was the last place on earth I should have come to, in common prudence, while that was in doubt; but I was willing to brave that danger for a chance of seeing you once more — I could not live without seeing you."

He was gazing at me, with eyes glowing with admiration. I thought he looked wonderfully handsome. There was dash and recklessness, I thought, enough for an old-world outlaw, in his talk and looks, and, for all I knew, in his reckless doings; and the scene, the shadow, this solemn decaying forest, accorded well, in my romantic fancy, with the wild character I assigned him. There was something flattering in the devotion of this prompt and passionate man.

"Make me no answer," he continued— "no answer, I entreat. It would be mere madness to ask it now; you know nothing of me but, perhaps, the wildest slanders that prejudice ever believed, or hatred forged. From the moment I saw you, in the old garden at Malory, I loved you! Love at first sight! It was no such infatuation. It was the recalling of some happy dream. I had forgotten it in my waking hours; but I recognised, with a pang and rapture, in you, the spirit that had enthralled me. I loved you long before I knew it. I can't escape, Ethel, I adore you!"

I don't know how I felt. I was pretty sure that I ought to have been very angry. And I was half angry with myself for not being angry. I was, however — which answered just as well, a little alarmed; I felt as a child does when about to enter a dark room, and I drew back at the threshold.

"Pray, Mr. Marston, don't speak so to me any longer. It is quite true, I do not know you; you have no right to talk to me in my walks — pray leave me now."

"I shall obey you, Miss Ware; whatever you command, I shall do. My last entreaty is that you will not condemn me unheard; and pray do not mention to my enemies the infatuation that has led me here, with the courage of despair — no, not quite despair, I won't say that. I shall never forget you. Would to Heaven I could! I shall never forget or escape you; who can disenchant me? I shall never forget, or cease to pursue you, Ethel, I swear by Heaven!”

He looked in my face for a moment, raised my hand gently, but quickly, and pressed it to his lips, before I had recovered from my momentary tumult. I did not turn to look after him. I instinctively avoided that, but I heard his footsteps, in rapid retreat, in the direction of the farmhouse which I had just left.

It was not until I had got more than halfway on my return to Malory that I began to think clearly on what had just occurred. What had I been dreaming of? I was shocked to think of it. Here was a total stranger admitted to something like the footing of a declared lover! What was I to do? What would papa or mamma say if my folly were to come to their ears? I did not even know where Mr. Marston was to be found. Some one has compared the Iliad to a frieze, which ceases, but does not end; and precisely of the same kind was this awkward epic of the wood of Plas Ylwd. Who could say when the poet might please to continue his work? Who could say how I could now bring the epic to a peremptory termination?

I must confess, however, although I felt the embarrassment of the situation, this lawless man interested me. Like many whimsical young ladies, I did not quite know my own mind.

On the step of the stile that crosses the churchyard wall, near Malory, I sat down, in rather uncomfortable rumination. I was interrupted by the sound of a step upon the road, approaching from the direction of Malory. I looked up, and, greatly to my surprise, saw Mr. Carmel, quite close to me. I stood up, and walked a few steps to meet him; we shook hands, he smiling, very glad, I knew, to meet me.

“You did not expect to see me so soon again, Miss Ware? And I have ever so much to tell you. I can’t say whether it will please or vex you; but if you and Miss Grey will give me my old chair at your tea-table, I will look in for half an hour this evening. I have first to call at old Parry’s, and give him a message that reached me from your mamma yesterday.”

He smiled again, as he continued his walk, leaving me full of curiosity as to the purport of his news.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A JOURNEY.

Behold us now, about an hour later, at our tea-table. Mr. Carmel, as he had promised, came in and talked, as usual, agreeably; but, if he had any particular news to tell us, he had not yet begun to communicate it.

"You found your old quarters awaiting your return. We have lost our interesting stranger," I said; "I wish you would tell us all you know about him."

Mr. Carmel's head sank; his eyes were fixed, in painful thought, upon the table. "No," he said, looking up sharply, "God knows all, and that's enough. The story could edify no one."

He looked so pained, and even agitated, that I could not think of troubling him more.

"I had grown so attached to this place," said Mr. Carmel, rising and looking from the window, "that I can scarcely make up my mind to say goodbye, and turn my back on it for ever; yet I believe I must in a few days. I don't know. We soldiers, ecclesiastics, I mean, must obey orders, and I scarcely hope that mine will ever call me here again. I have news for you, also, Miss Ethel; I had a letter from your mamma, and a note from Mr. Ware, last night, and there is to be a break-up here, and a movement townward; you are to come out next season, Miss Ethel; your mamma and papa will be in town, for a week or so, in a few days; and, Miss Grey, she hopes you will not leave her on account of the change."

He paused; but she made no answer.

"Oh! darling Laura, you won't leave me?" I exclaimed.

"Certainly not, dear Ethel; and whenever the time for parting comes," she said very kindly, "it will cost me a greater pang than perhaps it will cost you. But though I am neither a soldier nor an ecclesiastic, my movements do not always depend upon myself."

Unrestrained by Mr. Carmel's presence, we kissed each other heartily.

"Here is a note, Miss Grey, enclosed for you," he murmured, and handed it to Laura.

In our eagerness we had got up and stood with Mr. Carmel in the recess of the window. It was twilight, and the table on which the candles burned stood at a considerable distance. To the light Laura Grey took her letter, and as she read it, quite absorbed, Mr. Carmel talked to me in low tones.

As he stood in the dim recess of the window, with trains of withered leaves rustling outside, and the shadow of the sear and half-stript elms upon the court and window, he said, kindly and gently:

“And now, at last, Miss Ethel forsakes her old home, and takes leave of her humble friends, to go into the great world. I don’t think she will forget them, and I am sure they won’t forget her. We have had a great many pleasant evenings here, and in our conversations in these happy solitudes, the terrors and glories of eternal truth have broken slowly upon your eyes. Beware! If you trifle with Heaven’s mercy, the world, or hell, or heaven itself, has no narcotic for the horrors of conscience. In the midst of pleasure and splendour, and the tawdry triumphs of vanity, the words of Saint Paul will startle your ears like thunder. It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance. The greater the privilege, the greater the liability. The higher the knowledge, the profounder the danger. You have seen the truth afar off; rejoice, therefore, and tremble.”

He drew back and joined Miss Grey.

I had been thinking but little, for many weeks, of our many conversations. Incipient convictions had paled in the absence of the sophist or the sage — I knew not which. When he talked on this theme, his voice became cold and stern; his gentleness seemed to me to partake of an awful apathy; he looked like a man who had witnessed a revelation full of horror; my fancy, I am sure, contributed something to the transformation; but it did overawe me. I never was so impressed as by him. The secret was not in his words. It was his peculiar earnestness. He spoke like an eye-witness, and seemed under unutterable fear himself. He had the preacher’s master-gift of alarming.

When Mr. Carmel had taken his leave for the night, I told Laura Grey my adventure in the wood of Plas Ylwd. I don’t think I told it quite as frankly as I have just described it to you. The story made Miss Grey very grave for a time.

She broke the silence that followed by saying, “I am rather glad, Ethel, that we are leaving this. I think you will be better in town; I know I shall be more comfortable about you. You have no idea, and I earnestly hope you never may have, how much annoyance may arise from an acquaintance with that plausible, wicked man. He won’t venture to force his acquaintance upon you in town. Here it is different, of course.”

We sat up very late together, chatting this night in my room. I did not quite know how I felt about the impending change. My approaching journey to London was, to me, as great an event as her drive to the ball in her pumpkin-coach was to Cinderella. Of course there was something dazzling and delightful in the prospect. But the excitement and joy were like that of the happy bride who yet weeps because she is looking her last on the old homely life, that will always be dear and dearer as the irrevocable separation goes on. So, though she is sure she is passing into paradise, it is a final farewell to the beloved past. I felt the conflict; I loved Malory better than I could ever love a place again. But youth is the season of enterprise. God has ordained it. We go like the younger son in the parable, selfish, sanguine, adventurous; but the affections revive and turn homeward, and from a changed heart sometimes breaks on the solitude a cry, unheard by living ear, of yearning and grief, that would open the far-off doors, if that were possible, and return.

Next day arrangements took a definite form. All was fuss and preparation. I was to go the day following; Mr. Carmel was to take charge of me on the journey, and place me safely in the hands of Mrs. Beauchamp, our town housekeeper. Laura Grey, having wound up and settled all things at Malory, was to follow to town in less than a week; and, at about the same time, mamma and papa were to arrive.

A drive of ten miles or so brought us to the station; then came a long journey by rail. London was not new to me; but London with my present anticipations was. I was in high spirits, and Mr. Carmel made a very agreeable companion, though I fancied he was a little out of spirits.

I was tired enough that night when I at length took leave of Mr. Carmel at the door of our house in —— Street. The street lamps were already lighted. Mrs. Beauchamp, in a black silk dress, received me with a great deal of quiet respect, and rustled upstairs before me to show me my room. Her grave and regulated politeness contrasted chillily with the hearty, and sometimes even boisterous welcome of old Rebecca Torkill. Mamma and papa were to be home, she told me, in a few days — she could not say exactly the day. I was, after an hour or so, a great deal lonelier than I had expected to be. I wrote a long letter to Laura, of whom I had taken leave only that morning (what a long time it seemed already!), and told her how much I already wished myself back again in Malory, and urged her to come sooner than she had planned her journey.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ARRIVALS.

Laura had not waited any longer than I for a special justification of a letter. She had nothing to say, and she said it in a letter as long as my own, which reached me at breakfast next morning.

Sitting in a spacious room, looking out into a quiet fashionable street, in a house all of whose decorations and arrangements had an air of cold elegance and newness, the letter, with the friendly Cardyllion postmark on it, seemed to bring with it something of the clear air, and homely comfort, and free life of Malory, and made me yearn all the more for the kind faces, the old house, and beloved scenery I had left behind. It was insufferably dull here, and I soon found myself in that state which is described as not knowing what to do with oneself. For two days no further letter from Laura reached me. On the third, I saw her well-known handwriting on the letter that awaited me on the breakfast-table. As I looked, as people will, at the direction before opening the envelope, I was struck by the postmark "Liverpool," and turning it over and over, I nowhere saw Cardyllion.

I began to grow too uncomfortable to wait longer; I opened the letter with misgivings. At the top of the note there was nothing written but the day of the week. It said —

"My Dearest Ethel, — A sudden and total change in my unhappy circumstances separates me from you. It is impossible that I should go to London now; and it is possible that I may not see you again for a long time, if ever. I write to say farewell; and in doing so to solemnly repeat my warning against permitting the person who obtained a few days' shelter in the steward's house, after the shipwreck, to maintain even the slightest correspondence or acquaintance with you. Pray, dearest Ethel, trust me in this. I implore of you to follow my advice. You may hear from me again. In the meantime, I am sure you will be glad to know that your poor governess is happy — happier than she ever desired, or ever hoped to be. My fond love is always yours, and my thoughts are hourly with you. — Ever your loving

Laura Grey."

"May God for ever bless you, darling! Goodbye."

I don't think I could easily exaggerate the effect of this letter. I will not weary you with that most tiresome of all relations, an account of another person's grief.

Mamma and papa arrived that evening. If I had lived less at Malory, and more with mamma, I should not, in some points, have appreciated her so highly. When I saw her, for the first time, after a short absence, I was always struck by her beauty and her elegance, and it seemed to me that she was taller than I recollected her. She was looking very well, and so young! I saw papa but for a moment. He went to his room immediately to dress, and then went off to his club. Mamma took me to her room, where we had tea. She said I had grown, and was very much pleased with my looks. Then she told me all her plans about me. I was to have masters, and I was not to come out till April.

She then got me to relate all the circumstances of Nelly's death, and cried a good deal. Then she had in her maid Lexley, and they held a council together over me on the subject of dress. My Malory wardrobe, from which I had brought up to town with me what I considered an unexceptionable selection, was not laughed at, was not even discussed — it was simply treated as non-extant. It gave me a profound sense of the barbarism in which I had lived.

Laura Grey's letter lay heavy at my heart, but I had not yet mentioned it to mamma. There was no need, however, to screw my courage to that point. Among the letters brought up to her was one from Laura. When she read it she was angry in her querulous way. She threw herself into a chair in a pet. She had confidence in Laura Grey, and foresaw a good deal of trouble to herself in this desertion. "I am so particularly unfortunate!" she began— "everything that can possibly go wrong! everything that never happens to any one else! I could have got her to take you to Monsieur Pontet's, and your drives, and to shop — and — she must be a most unprincipled person. She had no right to go away as she has done. It is too bad! Your papa allows every one of that kind to treat me exactly as they please, and really, when I am at home, my life is one continual misery! What am I to do now? I don't believe any one else was ever so entirely at the mercy of her servants. I don't know, my dear, how I can possibly do all that is to be done for you without assistance — and *there* was a person I thought I could depend upon. A total stranger I should not like, and really, for anything I can see at present, I think you must go back again to Malory, and do the best you can. I am not a strong person. I was not made for all this, and I really feel I could just go to my bed, and cry till morning."

My heart had been very full, and I was relieved by this opportunity of crying.

"I wonder at your crying about so good-for-nothing a person," exclaimed mamma, impatiently. "If she had cared the least about you, she could not have left you as she has done. A satisfactory person, certainly, that young lady has turned out!"

Notwithstanding all this, mamma got over her troubles, and engaged a dull and even-tempered lady, named Anna Maria Pounden, whose manners were quiet and unexceptionable, and whose years were about fifty. She was not much of a companion for me, you may suppose. She answered, however, very well for all purposes intended by mamma. She was ladylike and kind, and seemed made for keeping keys, arranging drawers, packing boxes, and taking care of people when they were ill. She spoke French, besides, fluently, and with a good accent, and mamma insisted that she and I should always talk in that language. All the more persistently for this change, my thoughts were with my beloved friend, Laura Grey.

From Malory, Rebecca Torkill told me, in a rather incoherent letter, the particulars of Laura Grey's departure from Malory. She had gone out for a walk, leaving her things half packed, for she was to go from Malory next day. She did not return; but a note reached Mrs. Torkill, next morning, telling her simply she could not return; and that she would write to mamma and to me in London the same day. Mrs. Torkill's note, like mine, had the Liverpool postmark; and her conjecture was thus expressed: "I don't think, miss, she had no notions to leave that way when she went out. It must have bin something sudding. She went fest, I do sepose to Olyhed, and thens to Liverpule in one of them pakkats. Mr. Williams, the town-clerk, and the vicar and his lady, and Doctor Mervyn, is all certing sure it could be no other wise."

Mamma did not often come down to breakfast, during her short stay at this unseasonable time of year in town. On one of those rare occasions, however, something took place that I must describe.

Mamma was in a pretty morning *negligé* as we used to call such careless dresses then, looking as delicately pretty as the old china teacups before her. Papa was looking almost as perplexingly young as she, and I made up the little party to the number of the Graces. Mamma must have been forty, and I really don't think she looked more than two-and-thirty. Papa looked about five-and-thirty; and I think he must have been at least ten years older than he looked. That kind of life that is supposed to wear people out, seemed for them to have had an influence like the elixir vitæ; and I certainly have seen rustics, in the full enjoyment of mountain breezes, simple fare, and early hours, look many a day older than their years. The old rule, so harped upon, that "early to bed and early to rise" is the secret of perpetual youth, I don't dispute; but then, if it be early to go to bed at sunset in winter, say four in the evening, and to rise at four in the morning, is it not still earlier to anticipate that hour, and go to bed at four in the morning, and get up at one in the afternoon? At all events, I know that this mode of life seemed to agree with papa and mamma. I don't think, indeed, that either suffered much from the cares that poison enjoyment, and break down strength. Mamma threw all hers unexamined upon papa; who threw all his with equal nonchalance upon Mr. Norman, a kind of factotum, secretary, comptroller, diplomatist, financier, and every other thing that comes within the words "making oneself generally useful."

I never knew exactly what papa had a year to live upon. Mamma had money also. But they were utterly unfit to manage their own affairs, and I don't think they ever tried. Papa had his worries now and then; but they seldom seemed to last more than a day, or at most a week or two. There were a number of what he thought small sums, varying from two to five thousand pounds, which under old settlements dropped in opportunely, and extricated him. These sums ought to have been treated, not as income, but as capital, as I heard a moneyed man of business say long ago; but papa had not the talent of growing rich, or even of continuing rich, if a good fairy had gifted him with fortune.

Papa was in a reverie, leaning back in his chair; mamma yawned over a letter she was reading; I was drumming some dance music with my fingers on my knee under the tablecloth, when suddenly he said to mamma:

"You don't love your aunt Lorrimer very much?"

"No, I don't love her — I never said I did, did I?"

"No, but I mean, you don't like her, you don't care about her?"

"No," said mamma, languidly, and looking wonderingly at him with her large pretty eyes. "I don't very much — I don't quite know — I have an affection for her."

"You don't love her, and you don't even like her, but you have an affection for her," laughed papa.

"You are so teasing. I did not say that; what I mean is, she has a great many faults and oddities, and I don't like them — but I have an affection for her. Why should it seem so odd to you that one should care for one's relations? I do feel that for her, and there let it rest."

"Well, but it ought not to rest there — as you do like her."

"Why, dear — have you heard anything of her?"

"No; but there is one thing I should not object to hear about her just now."

"One thing? What do you mean, dear?"

"That she had died, and left us her money. I know what a brute I am, and how shocked you are; but I assure you we rather want it at this moment. You write to her, don't you?"

"N-not very often. Once since we saw her at Naples."

"Well, that certainly is not very often," he laughed. "But she writes to you. You thought she seemed rather to like us — I mean you?"

"Yes."

"She has no one else to care about that I know of. I don't pretend to care about her — I think her an old fool."

"She isn't that, dear," said mamma, quietly.

"I wish we knew where she is now. Seriously, you ought to write to her a little oftener, dear; I wish you would."

"I'll write to her, certainly, as soon as I am a little more myself. I could not do it just to-day; I have not been very well, you know."

"Oh! my darling, I did not mean to hurry you. Of course, not till you feel perfectly well; don't suppose I could be such a monster. But — I don't want, of course, to pursue her — but there is a middle course between that and having to drop her. She really has no one else, poor old thing! to care about, or to care about her. Not that *I* care about her, but you're her kinswoman, and I don't see why — — "

At this moment the door opened, and there entered, with the air of an assumed intimacy and a certain welcome, a person whom I little expected to see there. I saw him with a shock. It was the man with the fine eyes and great forehead, the energetic gait and narrow shoulders. The grim, mean-looking, intelligent, agreeable man of fifty, Mr. Droqville.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DOCTOR'S NEWS.

"Oh! how do you do, Doctor Droqville?" said mamma, with a very real welcome in looks and accent.

"How d'ye do, Droqville?" said my father, a little dryly, I fancied.

"Have you had your breakfast?" asked mamma.

"Two hours ago."

"We are very late here," said papa.

"I should prefer thinking I am very early, in my primitive quarters," answered Mr. Droqville.

"I had not an idea we should have found you in town, just now."

"In season or out of season, a physician should always be at his post. I'm beginning to learn rather late there's some truth in that old proverb about moss, you know, and rolling stones, and it costs even a bachelor something to keep body and soul together in this mercenary, tailoring, cutlet-eating world." At this moment he saw me, and made me a bow. "Miss Ware?" he said, a little inquiringly to mamma. "Yes, I knew perfectly it was the young lady I had seen at Malory. Some faces are not easily forgotten," he added, gallantly, with a glance at me. "I threatened to run away with her, but she was firm as fate," he smiled and went on; "and I paid a visit to our friend Carmel, you know."

"And how did you think he was?" she asked; and I listened with interest for the answer.

"He's consumptive. He's at this side of the Styx, it is true; but his foot is in the water, and Charon's obolus is always between his finger and thumb. He'll die young. He may live five years, it is true; but he is not likely to live two. And if he happens to take cold and begins to cough, he might not last four months."

"My wife has been complaining," said papa; "I wish you could do something for her. You still believe in Doctor Droqville? I think she half believes you have taken a degree in divinity as well as in medicine; if so, a miracle, now and then, would be quite in your way."

"But I assure you, Doctor Droqville, I never said any such thing. It was you who thought," she said to my father, "that Doctor Droqville was in orders."

Droqville laughed.

"But, Doctor Droqville, I think," said mamma, "you would have made a very good priest."

"There are good priests, madame, of various types; Madame de Genlis, for instance, commends an abbé of her acquaintance; he was a most respectable man, she says, and never ridiculed revealed religion but with moderation."

Papa laughed, but I could see that he did not like Doctor Droqville. There was something dry, and a little suspicious in his manner, so slight that you could hardly define it, but which contrasted strikingly with the decision and *insouciance* of Doctor Droqville's talk.

"But, you know, you never do that, even with moderation; and you can argue so closely when you please."

"There, madame, you do me too much honour. I am the worst logician in the world. I wrote a part of an essay on Christian chivalry, and did pretty well, till I began to reason; the essay ended, and I was swallowed up in this argument — pray listen to it. To sacrifice your life for the lady you adore is a high degree of heroism; but to sacrifice your soul for her is the highest degree of heroism. But the highest degree of heroism is but another name for Christianity; and, therefore, to act thus can't sacrifice your soul, and if it doesn't you don't practise a heroism, and therefore no Christianity, and, therefore, you do sacrifice your soul. But if you do sacrifice your soul, it is the highest heroism — therefore Christianity; and, therefore, you don't sacrifice your soul, and so, *da capo*, it goes on for ever — and I can't extricate myself. When I mean to make a boat, I make a net; and this argument that I invented to carry me some little way on my voyage to truth, not only won't hold water, but has caught me by the foot, entangles, and drowns me. I never went on with my essay."

In this cynical trifling there was a contemptuous jocularity quite apparent to me, although mamma took it all in good faith, and said:

"It is very puzzling, but it can't be true; and I should think it almost a duty to find out where it is wrong."

Papa laughed, and said:

"My dear, don't you see that Doctor Droqville is mystifying us?"

I was rather glad, for I did not like it. I was vexed for mamma. Doctor Droqville's talk seemed to me an insolence.

"It is quite true, I am no logician; I had better continue as I am. I make a tolerable physician; if I became a preacher, with my defective ratiocination, I should inevitably lose myself and my audience in a labyrinth. You make but a very short stay in town, I suppose?" he broke off suddenly. "It isn't tempting, so many houses sealed — a city of the dead. One does not like, madame, as your Doctor Johnson said to Mrs. Thrale, to come down to vacuity."

"Well, it is only a visit of two or three days. My daughter Ethel is coming out next spring, and she came up to meet us here. I wish her to have a few weeks with masters, and there are more things to be thought of than you would suppose. Do you think there is anything a country miss would do well to read up that we might have forgotten?"

"Read? read? Oh! yes, two things."

"What are they?"

"If she has a sound knowledge of the heathen mythology, and a smattering of the Bible, she'll do very well."

"But she won't talk about the Bible," laughed papa; "people who like it, read it to themselves."

"Very true," said Doctor Droqville, "you never mention it; but, quite unconsciously, you are perpetually alluding to it. Nothing strikes a stranger more, if he understands your language as I do. You had a note from Lady Lorrimer?"

"No," said mamma.

The word "note," I think, struck papa as implying that she was nearer than letter-writing distance, and he glanced quickly at Doctor Droqville.

"And where is Lady Lorrimer now?" asked papa.

"That is what I came to tell you. She is at Mivart's. I told her you were in town, and I fancied you would have had a note from her; but I thought I might as well look in and tell you."

"She's quite well, I hope?" said mamma.

"Now did you ever, Mrs. Ware, in all your life, see her quite well? I never did. She would lose all pleasure in life, if she thought she wasn't leaving it. She arrived last night, and summoned me to her at ten this morning. I felt her pulse. It was horribly regular. She had slept well, and breakfasted well, but that was all. In short, I found her suffering under her usual chronic attack of good health, and, as the case was not to be trifled with, I ordered her instantly some medicine which could not possibly produce any effect whatever; and in that critical state I left her, with a promise to look in again in the afternoon to ascertain that the more robust symptoms were not gaining ground, and in the interval I came to see you and tell you all about it."

"I suppose, then, I should find her in her bed?" said mamma.

"No; I rather think she has postponed dying till after dinner — she ordered a very good one — and means to expire in her sitting-room, where you'll find her. And you have not been very well?"

"Remember the story he has just told you of your aunt Lorrimer, and take care he doesn't tell her the same story of you," said papa, laughing.

"I wish I could," said Doctor Droqville; "few things would please me better. That pain in the nerves of the head is a very real torment."

So he and mamma talked over her headaches in an undertone for some minutes; and while this was going on there came in a note for mamma. The servant was was waiting for an answer in the hall.

"Shall I read it?" said papa, holding it up by the corner. "It is Lady Lorrimer's, I'm sure."

"Do, dear," said mamma, and she continued her confidences in Doctor Droqville's ear.

Papa smiled a little satirically as he read it. He threw it across the table, saying:

"You can read it, Ethel; it concerns you rather."

I was very curious. The hand was youthful and pretty, considering Lady Lorrimer's years. It was a whimpering, apathetic, selfish little note. She was miserable, she said, and had quite made up her mind that she could not exist in London smoke. She had sent for the doctor.

She continued: "I shall make an effort to see you, if you can look in about three, for a few minutes. Have you any of your children with you? If they are very quiet I should like to see them. It would amuse me. It is an age since I saw your little people, and I really forget their ages, and even their names. Say if I am to expect you at three. I have told the servant to wait."

People who live in the country fancy themselves of more importance than they really are. I was mortified, and almost shocked at the cool sentences about “the little people,” *etc.*

“Well, you promise to be very quiet, won’t you? You won’t pull the cat’s tail, or light paper in the fire, or roar for plumcake?” said papa.

“I don’t think she wants to see us. I don’t think she cares the least about us. Perhaps mamma won’t go,” I said, resentfully, hoping that she would not pay that homage to the insolent old woman.

Doctor Droqville stood up, having written a prescription.

“Well, I’m off; and I think this will do you a world of good. Can I do any commission for you about town; I shall be in every possible direction in the next three hours?”

No, there was nothing; and this man, whom I somehow liked less than ever, although he rather amused me, vanished, and we saw his cab drive by the window.

“Well, here’s her note. You’ll go to see her, I suppose?” said papa.

“Certainly; I have a great affection for my aunt. She was very kind to me when there was no one else to care about me.”

Mamma spoke with more animation than I believed her capable of — I thought I even saw tears in her eyes. It struck me that she did not like papa’s tone in speaking about her. The same thing probably struck him.

“You are quite right, darling, as you always are in a matter of feeling, and you’ll take Ethel, won’t you?”

“Yes, I should like her to come.”

“And you know, if she should ask you, don’t tell her I’m a bit better off than I really am. I have had some awful losses lately. I don’t like bothering you about business, and it was no fault or negligence of mine; but I really — it is of very great importance she should not do anything less that she intended for you, or anything whimsical or unjust. I give you my honour there isn’t a guinea to spare now, it would be a positive cruelty.”

Mamma looked at him, but she was by this time so accustomed to alarms of that kind that they did not make a very deep impression upon her.

“I don’t think she’s likely to talk about such matters, dear,” said mamma; “but if she should make any inquiries, I shall certainly tell her the truth.”

I remembered Lady Lorrimer long ago at Malory. It was a figure seen in the haze of infancy, and remembered through the distance of many years. I recollect coming down the stairs, the nursery-maid holding me by the hand, and seeing a carriage and servants in the court before the door. I remember, as part of the same dream, sitting in the lap of a strange lady in the drawingroom, who left a vague impression of having been richly dressed, who talked to me in a sweet, gentle voice, and gave me toys, and whom I always knew to have been Lady Lorrimer. How much of this I actually saw, and how much was picked up with the vivid power of reproducing pictures from description that belongs to children, I cannot say; but I always heard of Aunt Lorrimer afterwards with interest, and now at length I was about to see her. Her note had disappointed me, still I was curious.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LADY LORRIMER.

My curiosity was soon gratified. After luncheon we drove to Mivart's, and there in her sitting-room I saw Lady Lorrimer. I was agreeably surprised. Her figure was still beautiful. She was, I believe, past sixty then; but, like all our family whom I have ever seen, she looked a great deal younger than her years. I thought her very handsome, very like my idea of Mary Queen of Scots in her later years; and her good looks palpably owed nothing to "making up." Her smile was very winning, and her eyes still soft and brilliant. Through so many years, her voice as she greeted us returned with a strange and very sweet recognition upon my ear.

She put her arms about mamma's neck, and kissed her tenderly. In like manner she kissed me. She made me sit beside her on a sofa, and held my hands in hers. Mamma sat opposite in a chair.

Lady Lorrimer might be very selfish — lonely people often are; but she certainly was very affectionate. There were tears in her fine eyes as she looked at me. It was not such a stare as a dealer might bestow on a picture, to which, as a child, I had sometimes been subjected by old friends in search of a likeness. By-and-by she talked of me.

"The flight of my years is so silent," she said, with a sad smile to mamma, "that I forgot, as I wrote to you, how few are left me, and that Ethel is no longer a child. I think her quite lovely; she is like what I remember you, but it is only a likeness — not the same; she does not sacrifice her originality. I'm not afraid, dear, to say all that before you," she said, turning on me for a moment her engaging smile. "I think, Ethel, in this world, where people without a particle of merit are always pushing themselves to the front, young people who have beauty should know it. But, my dear," she said, looking on me again, "good looks don't last very long. Your mamma, there, keeps hers wonderfully; but look at me. I was once a pretty girl, as you are now; and see what I am!

'Le même cours des planètes Régle nos jours et nos nuits; On me vit ce que vous êtes, Vous serez ce que je suis.'

"So I qualify my agreeable truths with a little uncomfortable morality. She'll be coming out immediately?"

Mamma told her, hereupon, all her plans about me.

"And so sure as you take her out, her papa will be giving her away; and, remember, I'm to give her her diamonds whenever she marries. You are to write to me whenever anything is settled, or likely to come about. They always know at my house here, when I am on my travels, where a letter will find me. No, you're not to thank me," she interrupted us. "I saw Lady Rimington's, and I intend that your daughter's shall be a great deal better than hers."

Our old Malory housekeeper, Rebecca Torkill, had a saying, "Nothing so grateful as pride." I think I really liked my aunt Lorrimer better for her praises of my good looks than for her munificent intentions about my bridal brilliants. But for either I could only show my pleasure by my looks. I started up to thank her for her promised diamonds. But, as I told you, she would not hear a word, and drew me down gently with a smile again beside her.

Then she talked, and mamma talked. For such a recluse, Lady Lorrimer was a wonderful gossip, and devoured all mamma's news, and told her old stories of all the old people who figured in such oral history. I must do her justice. There seemed to me to be no malice whatever in her stories. The comic was what she enjoyed most. Her lively pictures amused even me, who knew nothing of the originals; and the longer I sat with her, the more confidence did I feel in her goodnature.

A good deal of this conversation was all but whispered, and she had despatched me with her maid to look at some china she had brought home for her cabinets in London, at the other end of the room. When I returned their heads were still very near, and they were talking low with the same animation. I sat down again beside Lady Lorrimer. I had spun out my inspection of the china as long as I could. Lady Lorrimer patted my head gently, as I sat down again, without, I fancy, remembering at the moment that I had been away. She was answering, I think, a remark of mamma's, and upon a subject which had lain rather heavily at my heart since Monsieur Droqville's visit to our breakfast-table that morning.

"I don't know," she said; "Monsieur Droqville is a clever physician, but it seems to me he has always made too much of Mr. Carmel's illness, or delicacy, or whatever it is. I do not think Mr. Carmel is in any real danger — I don’t think there is anything seriously wrong with him — more, in fact, than with any other thin young man, and now and then he has a cough. Three years ago, when I first made his acquaintance — and what a charming creature he is! — Monsieur Droqville told me he could not live more than two years; and this morning, when I asked how Mr. Carmel was, he allowed him three years still to live; so if he goes on killing him at that easy rate, he may live as long as Old Parr. And now that I think of it, did you hear a rumour about Sir Harry?”

“There are so many Sir Harrys,” said mamma. “Do you mean Sir Harry Rokestone?”

“Of course I mean Sir Harry Rokestone,” she answered; “have you heard anything of him?”

“Nothing, but the old story,” said mamma.

“And what is that?” asked Lady Lorrimer.

“Only that he hates us with all his heart and soul, and never loses an opportunity of doing us all the mischief he can. He has twice prevented my husband getting into the House — and cost him a great deal more money than he could afford; and he has had opportunities, from those old money dealings that you know of between the two families, of embarrassing my poor husband most cruelly. If you knew what enormous law expenses we have been put to, and all the injuries he has done us, you would say that you never heard of anything so implacable, so malignant, and — — “

“So natural,” said Lady Lorrimer. “I don’t mean to fight Sir Harry Rokestone’s battle for him. I dare say he has been stern and vindictive; he was a proud, fierce man; and, my dear Mabel, you treated him very ill; so did Francis Ware. If he treats you as you have treated him, nothing can be much worse. I always liked him better than your husband; he was better, and is better. I use the privilege of an old kinswoman; and I say nothing could have been more foolish than your treatment of him, except your choice of a husband. I think Francis Ware is one of those men who never ought to have married. He is a clever man; but in some respects, and these of very great importance, he has always acted like a fool. Harry Rokestone was worth twenty of him, and would have made a much better husband than ever he did. I always thought he was the handsomer man; he had twice the real ability of Francis Ware; he had all the masculine attributes of mind. I say nothing about his immensely superior wealth; that you chose to regard as a point quite unworthy of consideration. The only thing not in his favour was that he was some years older."

"Twenty years nearly," said mamma.

"Well, my dear, a man with his peculiar kind of good looks, and his commanding character, wears better than a younger man. You recollect the answer of the old French mareschal to the young petit-maître who asked him his age. 'Je ne vous le dirai pas precisement; mais soyez sur qu'un âne est plus âgé à vingt ans qu'un homme ne l'est à soixante.' I don't say that the term would have fairly described Francis Ware. I know very well he was brilliant; but those talents, if there are no more solid gifts to support them, grow less and less suitable as men get into years, until they become frivolous. However, I am sure that Harry Rokestone does hate you both; and he's just the man to make his hatred felt. The time has passed for forgiveness. When the fire of romance has expired, the metal that might have taken another shape cools down and hardens in the mould. He will never forgive or change, I am afraid; and you must both lay your account with his persevering animosity. But, you say, you haven't heard any story about him lately?"

"No, nothing."

"Well, old Mrs. Jennings, of Golden Friars, sometimes writes to me, and she says he is going to marry that rich spinster, Miss Goulding of Wrybiggins. She only says she hears so; and I thought you might know."

"I should not wonder — it is not at all an unlikely thing. I don't see that they could do better; there's nothing to prevent it, so far as I can see."

But although mamma thus applauded the arrangement, I could see that in her inmost heart she did not like it. There is something of desertion in these late marriages of long-cast-off lovers, who have worshipped our shadows in secret, through lonely years; and I could see dimly a sad little mortification in mamma's pretty face.

As we drove home I mused over Lady Lorrimer. The only disagreeable recollection that disturbed my pleasant retrospect was that part of her conversation that referred to papa. She said she "used the privilege of an old kinswoman." I should have said abused it rather. But mamma did not seem to resent it — I suppose they were on terms to discuss him; and they either forgot me, or thought I had no business to be in the way. In every other respect, I was very much pleased with my visit, as I well might be. She was much more clever than I expected, more animated, more fascinating. I was haunted with the thought how lovely she must have been when she was young!

“Don’t a great many older women than Lady Lorrimer go out a great deal?” I asked.

“Yes,” answered mamma, “but they have young people to take out very often.”

“But papa mentioned some this morning, who are everywhere, and never chaperon any one.”

“I suppose they enjoy it, as they can’t live without it. Pull up that window, dear.”

“I wonder very much she doesn’t go out; she’s so handsome, really beautiful, considering her years, I think; and so very agreeable.”

“I suppose she doesn’t care,” she answered, a little drily.

“But she complained of being lonely,” I resumed, “and I thought she sighed when she spoke of my coming out, as if she would like a look at the gay world again.”

“My dear, you bore me; I suppose Lady Lorrimer will do, with respect to that, as she does about everything else — precisely what pleases her best.”

These words mamma spoke in a way that very plainly expressed: “Now you have heard, once for all, everything I mean to say on this subject; and you will be good enough to talk and think of something quite different.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHAT CAN SHE MEAN?

We had promised to go and see Lady Lorrimer again next day at the same hour. My head was still full of her. Mamma did not come down to breakfast; so I interrupted papa at his newspaper to sound him, very much as I had sounded her.

“Why doesn’t she stay at home, and go out?” he repeated, smiling faintly as he did so. “I suppose she understands her own business; I can’t say — but you mustn’t say anything of that kind before her. She has done some foolish things, and got herself talked about; and you’ll hear it all, I daresay, time enough. She’s not a bit worse than other people, but a much greater fool; so don’t ask people those questions, it would vex your mamma, and do nobody any good, do you see?”

Shortly after this, Miss Pounden came down to tell me that we were not going to see Lady Lorrimer that day. I was horribly disappointed, and ran up to the drawingroom, where mamma then was, to learn the cause of our visit being put off.

“Here, dear, is my aunt’s note,” she said, handing it to me, and scarcely interrupting her consultation with her maid about the millinery they were discussing. It was open, and I read these words:

“My dear Mabel, — I must say goodbye a little earlier than I had intended. My plans are upset. I find my native air insupportable, and fly northward for my life! I am thinking at present of Buxton for a few days; the weather is so genial here, that my doctor tells me I may find it still endurable in that cold region. It grieves me not to see your dear faces before I go. Do not let your pretty daughter forget me. I may, it is just possible, return through London — so we may meet soon again. I shall have left Mivart’s and begun my journey before this note reaches you. God bless you, my dear Mabel! — Your affectionate

Aunt.”

So she was actually gone! What a dull day it would be! Well, there was no good in railing at fate. But was I ever to see that charming lady more?

In my drive that day with Miss Pounden, thinking it was just possible that Lady Lorrimer, whimsical as she was said to be, might have once more changed her mind, I called at Mivart's to inquire. She was no longer there. She had left with bag and baggage, and all her servants, that morning at nine o'clock. I had called with very little hope of finding that her journey had been delayed, and I drove away with even that small hope extinguished. She was my Mary, Queen of Scots. She had done something too rash and generous for the epicurean, sarcastic, and specious society of London. From the little that papa had said, I conjectured that Lady Lorrimer's secession from society was not quite voluntary; but she interested me all the more. In my dull life the loss of my new acquaintance so soon was a real blow. Mamma was not much of a companion to me. She liked to talk of people she knew, and to people who knew them. Except what concerned my dress and accomplishments, we had as yet no topics in common.

Dear Laura Grey, how I missed you now! The resentment I had felt at first was long since quite lost in my real sorrow, and there remained nothing but affectionate regrets.

I take up the thread of my personal narrative where I dropped it on the day of my ineffectual visit at Lady Lorrimer's hotel. In the afternoon Doctor Droqville came to see mamma. He had been to see Lady Lorrimer that morning, just before she set out on her journey.

"She was going direct to Buxton, as she hinted to you," said Doctor Droqville, "and I advised her to make a week's stay there. When she leaves it, she says she is going on to Westmoreland, and to stay for a fortnight or three weeks at Golden Friars. She's fanciful; there was gout in her family, and she is full of gouty whims and horrors. She is as well as a woman of her years need be, if she would only believe it."

"Have you heard lately from Mr. Carmel?" asked mamma.

I listened with a great deal of interest for the answer.

"Yes, I heard this morning," he replied. "He's in Wales."

"Not at Malory?" said mamma.

"No, not at Malory; a good way from Malory."

I should have liked to ask how long he had been in Wales, for I had been secretly offended at his apparent neglect of me; but I could not muster courage for the question.

Next morning I took it into my head that I should like a walk; and with mamma's leave, Miss Pounden and I set out, of course keeping among the quiet streets in the neighbourhood. While, as we walked, I was in high chat with Miss Pounden, who was chiefly a listener, and sometimes, I must admit, a rather absent one, I raised my eyes and could scarcely believe their report. Not ten yards away, walking up the flagged way towards us, were two figures. One was Lady Lorrimer I was certain. She was dressed in a very full velvet cloak, and had a small book in her hand. At her left, at a distance of more than a yard, walked a woman in a peculiar costume. This woman looked surly, and stumped beside her with a limp, as if one leg were shorter than the other. They approached at a measured pace, looking straight before them, and in total silence.

My eyes were fixed on Lady Lorrimer with a smile, which I every moment expected would be answered by one of recognition from her. But no such thing. She must have seen me; but nearer and nearer they came. They never deviated from their line of march. Lady Lorrimer continued to look straight before her. It was the sternest possible "cut," insomuch that I felt actually incredulous, and began to question my first identification. Her velvet actually brushed my dress as I stood next the railings. She passed me with her head high, and the same stony look.

"Shall we go on, dear?" asked Miss Pounden, who did not understand why we had come to a standstill.

I moved on in silence; but the street being a very quiet one, I turned about for a last look. I saw them ascend the steps of a house, and at the same moment the door opened, and Mr. Carmel came out, with his hat in his hand, and followed the two ladies in. The door was then shut. We resumed our walk homeward. We had a good many streets to go through, and I did not know my way. I was confounded, and walked on in utter silence, looking down in confused rumination on the flags under my feet.

Till we got home I did not say a word; and then I sat down in my room, and meditated on that odd occurrence, as well as my perturbation would let me. It was a strange mixture of surprise, doubt, and intense mortification. It was very stupid of me not to have ascertained at the time the name of the street which was the scene of this incident. Miss Pounden had never seen either Lady Lorrimer or Mr. Carmel; and the occurrence had not made the least impression upon her. She could not therefore help me, ever so little, next day, to recover the name of the street in which I had stood still for a few seconds, looking at she knew not what. There was just a film of doubt, derived from the inexplicable behaviour of the supposed Lady Lorrimer. When I told mamma, she at first insisted it was quite impossible. But, as I persisted, and went into detail, she said it was very odd. She was thoughtful for a little time, and sighed. Then she made me repeat all I had told her, and seemed very uncomfortable, but did not comment upon it. At length she said:

"You must promise me, Ethel, not to say a word about it to your papa. It would only lead to vexation. I have good reasons for thinking so. Speak of it to no one. Let the matter rest. I don't think I shall ever understand some people. But let us talk about it no more."

And with this charge the subject dropped.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SEMI-QUARREL.

Mamma did not remain long in town. Bleak as the weather now was, she and papa went to Brighton for a fortnight. They then went, for a few days, to Malory; and from that, northward, to Golden Friars. I dare say papa would have liked to find Lady Lorrimer there. I don't know that he did.

I, meanwhile, was left in the care of Miss Pounden, who made a very staid and careful chaperon. I danced every day, and pounded a piano, and sang a little, and spoke French incessantly to Miss Pounden. My spirits were sustained by the consciousness that I was very soon to come out. I was not entirely abandoned to Miss Pounden's agreeable society. Mr. Carmel reappeared. Three times a week he came in and read, and spoke Italian with me for an hour, Miss Pounden sitting by — at least, she was supposed to be sitting there on guard — but she really was as often out of the room as in it. One day I said to him:

"You know Lady Lorrimer, my aunt?"

"Yes," he answered, carelessly.

"Did you know she was my aunt?"

"Your great-aunt, yes."

"I wonder, then, why you never mentioned her to me," said I.

"There is nothing to wonder at," he replied, with a smile. "Respecting her, I have no curiosity, and nothing to tell."

"Oh! But you must know something about her — ever so little — and I really know nothing. Why does she lead so melancholy a life?"

"She has sickened of gaiety, I have been told."

"There's something more than that," I insisted.

"She's not young, you know, and society is a laborious calling."

"There's some reason; none of you will tell me," I said. "I used to tell every one everything, until I found that no one told me anything; now I say, 'Ethel, seal your lips, and open your ears; don't you be the only fool in this listening, sly, suspicious world.' But, if you'll tell nothing else, at least you'll tell me this. What were you all about when you opened the door of a house, in some street not far from this, to Lady Lorrimer, and an odd-looking woman who was walking beside her, on the day after she had written to mamma to say she had actually left London. What was the meaning of that deception?"

"I don't know whether Lady Lorrimer outstayed the time of her intended departure or not," he answered; "she would write what she pleased, and to whom she pleased, without telling me. And now I must tell you, if Lady Lorrimer had confided a harmless secret to me, I should not betray it by answering either 'yes' or 'no' to any questions. Therefore, should you question me upon any such subject, you must not be offended if I am silent."

I was vexed.

"One thing you must tell me," I persisted. "I have been puzzling myself over her very odd looks that day; and also over the odd manner and disagreeable countenance of the woman who was walking at her side. Is Lady Lorrimer, at times, a little out of her mind?"

"Who suggested that question?" he asked, fixing his eyes suddenly on me.

"Who suggested it?" I repeated. "No one. People, I suppose, can ask their own questions."

I was surprised and annoyed, and I suppose looked so. I continued: "That woman looked like a keeper, I fancied, and Lady Lorrimer — I don't know what it was — but there was something so unaccountable about her."

"I don't know a great deal of Lady Lorrimer, but I am grateful to her for, at least, one great kindness, that of having introduced me to your family," he said; "and I can certainly testify that there is no clearer mind anywhere. No suspicion of that kind can approach her; she is said to be one of the cleverest, shrewdest intellects, and the most cultivated, you can imagine. But people say she is an *esprit fort*, and believes in nothing. It does not prevent her doing a kind office for a person such as I. She has more charity than many persons who make loud professions of faith."

I had felt a little angry at this short dialogue. He was practising reserve, and he looked at one time a little stern, and unlike himself.

"But I want to ask you a question — only one more," I said, for I wished to clear up my doubts.

"Certainly," he said, more like himself.

"About my meeting Lady Lorrimer that day, and seeing you, as I told you." I paused, and he simply sat listening. "My question," I continued, "is this — I may as well tell you; the whole thing appeared to me so unaccountable that I have been ever since doubting the reality of what I saw; and I want you simply to tell me whether it did happen as I have described?"

At this renewed attack, Mr. Carmel's countenance underwent no change, even the slightest, that could lead me to an inference; he said, with a smile:

"It might, perhaps, be the easiest thing in the world for me to answer distinctly, 'no;' but I remember that Dean Swift, when asked a certain question, said that Lord Somers had once told him never to give a negative answer, although truth would warrant it, to a question of that kind; because, if he made that his habit, when he could give a denial, whenever he declined to do so, would amount to an admission. I think that a wise rule, and all such questions I omit to answer."

"That is an evasion," I replied, in high indignation.

"Forgive me, it is no evasion — it is simply silence."

"You know it is cowardly, and indirect, and — characteristic," I persisted, in growing wrath.

He was provokingly serene.

"Well, let me give you another reason for silence respecting Lady Lorrimer. Your mamma has specially requested me to keep silence on the subject; and in your case, Miss Ethel, her daughter, can I consider that request otherwise than as a command?"

"Not comprehending casuistry, I don't quite see how your promise to papa, to observe silence respecting the differences of the two Churches, is less binding than your promise to mamma of silence respecting Lady Lorrimer."

"Will you allow me to answer that sarcasm?" he asked, flushing a little.

"How I hate hypocrisy and prevarication!" I repeated, rising even above my old level of scorn.

"I have been perfectly direct," he said, "upon that subject; for the reason I have mentioned, I can't and won't speak."

"Then for the present, I think, we shall talk upon no other," I said, getting up, going out of the room, and treating him at the door to a haughty little bow.

So we parted for that day.

I understood Mr. Carmel, however; I knew that he had acted as he always did when he refused to do what other people wished, from a reason that was not to be overcome; and I don't recollect that I ever renewed my attack. We were on our old terms in a day or two. Between the stanzas of Tasso, often for ten minutes unobserved, he talked upon the old themes — eternity, faith, the Church, the saints, the Blessed Virgin. He supplied me with books; but this borrowing and lending was secret as the stolen correspondence of lovers.

I have thought over that strange period of my life: the little books that wrought such wonders, the spell of whose power is broken now; the tone of mind induced by them, by my solitude, my agitations, the haunting affections of the dead; and all these influences reacting again upon the cold and supernatural character of Mr. Carmel's talk. My exterior life had been going on, the rural monotony of Malory, its walks, its boating, its little drives; and now the dawning ambitions of a more vulgar scene, the town life, the excitement of a new world were opening. But among these realities, ever recurring, and dominating all, there seemed to be ever present a stupendous vision!

So it seemed to me my life was divided between frivolous realities and a gigantic trance. Into this I receded every now and then, alone and unwatched. The immense perspective of a towering cathedral aisle seemed to rise before me, shafts and ribbed stone, lost in smoke of incense floating high in air; mitres and gorgeous robes, and golden furniture of the altar, and chains of censers and jewelled shrines, glimmering far off in the tapers' starlight, and the inspired painting of the stupendous Sacrifice reared above the altar in dim reality. I fancied I could hear human voices, plaintive and sublime as the aërial choirs heard high over dying saints and martyrs by faithful ears; and the mellow thunder of the organ rolling through unseen arches above. Sometimes, less dimly, I could see the bowed heads of myriads of worshippers, "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues." It was, to my visionary senses, the symbol of the Church. Always the selfsame stupendous building, the same sounds and sights, the same high-priest and satellite bishops; but seen in varying lights — now in solemn beams, striking down and crossing the shadow in mighty bars of yellow, crimson, green, and purple through the stained windows, and now in the dull red gleam of the tapers.

Was I more under the influence of religion in this state? I don't believe I was. My imagination was exalted, my anxiety was a little excited, and the subject generally made me more uncomfortable than it did before. Some of the forces were in action which might have pushed me, under other circumstances, into a decided course. One thing, which logically had certainly no bearing upon the question, did affect me, I now know, powerfully. There was a change in Mr. Carmel's manner which wounded me, and piqued my pride. I used to think he took an interest in Ethel Ware. He seemed now to feel none, except in the discharge of his own missionary duties, and I fancied that, if it had not been for his anxiety to acquit himself of a task imposed by others, and exacted by his conscience, I should have seen no more of Mr. Carmel.

I was a great deal too proud to let him perceive my resentment — I was just as usual — I trifled and laughed, read my Italian, and made blunders, and asked questions; and, in those intervals of which I have spoken, I listened to what he had to say, took the books he offered, and thanked him with a smile, but with no great fervour. The temperature of our town drawingroom was perceptibly cooler than that of Malory, and the distance between our two chairs had appreciably increased. Nevertheless, we were apparently, at least, very good friends.

But terms like these are sometimes difficult to maintain. I was vexed at his seeming to acquiesce so easily in my change of manner, which, imperceptible to any one else, I somehow knew could not be hidden from him. I had brought down, and laid on the drawingroom table at which we sat, the only book which I then had belonging to Mr. Carmel. It was rather a dark day. Something in the weather made me a little more cross than usual. Miss Pounden was, according to her wont, flitting to and fro, and not minding in the least what we read or said. I laid down my Tasso, and laughed. Mr. Carmel looked at me a little puzzled.

"That, I think, is the most absurd stanza we have read. I ought, I suppose, to say the most sublime. But it is as impossible to read it without laughing as to read the rest without yawning."

I said this with more scorn than I really felt, but it certainly was one of those passages in which good Homer nods. A hero's head is cut off, I forget his name — a kinsman, I daresay, of Saint Denis; and he is so engrossed with the battle that he forgets his loss, and goes on fighting for some time.

"I hope it is not very wrong, and very stupid, but I am so tired of the *Gerusalemme Liberata*."

He looked at me for a moment or two. I think he did not comprehend the spirit in which I said all this, but perhaps he suspected something of it — he looked a little pained.

"But, I hope, you are not tired of Italian? There are other authors."

"Yes, so there are. I should like Ariosto, I daresay. I like fairy-tales, and that is the reason, I think, I like reading the lives of the saints, and the other books you have been so kind as to lend me."

I said this quite innocently, but there was a great deal of long-husbanded cruelty in it. He dropped his fine eyes to the table, and leaned for a short time on his hand.

"Well, even so, it is something gained to have read them," meditated Mr. Carmel, and looking up at me, he added, "and we never know by what childish instincts and simple paths we may be led to the sublimest elevations."

There was so much gentleness in his tone and looks that my heart smote me. My momentary compunction, however, did not prevent my going on, now that I had got fairly afloat.

"I have brought down the book you were so kind as to lend me last week. I am sure it is very eloquent, but there's so much I cannot understand."

"Can I explain anything?" he began, taking up the book at the same time.

"I did not mean that — no. I was going to return it, with my very best thanks," I said. "I have been reading a great deal that is too high for me — books meant for wiser people and deeper minds than mine."

"The mysteries of faith remain, for all varieties of mind, mysteries still," he answered sadly. "No human vision can pierce the veil. I do not flatter you, but I have met with no brighter intelligence than yours. In death the scales will fall from our eyes. Until then, yea must be yea, and nay, nay, and let us be patient."

"I don't know, Mr. Carmel, that I ought to read these books without papa's consent. I have imperceptibly glided into this kind of reading. 'I will tell you about Swedenborg,' you said; 'we must not talk of Rome or Luther — we can't agree, and they are forbidden subjects,' do you remember? And then you told me what an enemy Swedenborg was of the Catholic Church — you remember that? And then you read me what he said about vastation, as he calls it; and you lent me the book to read; and when you took it back, you explained to me that his account of vastation differs in no respect from purgatory; and in the same way, when I read the legends of the saints, you told me a great deal more of your doctrine; and in the same way, also, you discussed those beautiful old hymns, so that in a little while, although, as you said, Rome and Luther were forbidden subjects, or rather names, I found myself immersed in a controversy, which I did not understand, with a zealous and able priest. You have been artful, Mr. Carmel!"

"Have I been artful in trying to save you?" he answered gently.

"You would not, I think, practise the same arts with other people — you treat me like a fool," I said. "You would not treat that Welsh lady so, whom you visit — I mean — I really forget her name, but you remember all about her."

He rose unconsciously, and looked for a minute from the window.

"A good priest," he said, returning, "is no respecter of persons. Blessed should I be if I could beguile a benighted traveller into safety! Blessed and happy were my lot if I could die in the endeavour thus to save one human soul bent on self-destruction!"

His answer vexed me. The theological level on which he placed all human souls did not please me. After all our friendly evenings at Malory, I did not quite understand his being, as he seemed to boast, no "respecter of persons."

"I am sure that it is quite right," I said, carelessly, "and very prudent, too, because, if you were to lose your life in converting me, or a Hottentot chief, or anyone else, you would, you think, go straight to heaven; so, after all, the wish is not altogether too heroic for this selfish world."

He smiled; but there was doubt, I thought, in the eyes which he turned for a moment upon me.

"Our motives are so mixed," he said, "and death, besides, is to some men less than happier people think; my life has been austere and afflicted; and what remains of it will, I know, be darker. I see sometimes where all is drifting. I never was so happy, and I never shall be, as I have been for a time at Malory. I shall see that place perhaps no more. Happy the people whose annals are dull!" he smiled. "How few believe that well-worn saying in their own case! Yet, Miss Ethel, when you left Malory, you left quiet behind you, perhaps for ever!"

He was silent; I said nothing. The spirit of what he had said echoed, though he knew it not, the forebodings of my own heart. The late evening sun was touching with its slanting beams the houses opposite, and the cold grimy brick in which the dingy taste of our domestic architecture some forty years before delighted; and as I gazed listlessly from my chair, through the window, on the dismal formality of the street, I saw in the same sunlight nothing of those bricks and windows: I saw Malory and the church-tower, the trees, the glimmering blue of the estuary, the misty mountains, all fading in the dreamy quietude of the declining light, and I sighed.

"Well, then," he said, closing the book, "we close Tasso here. If you care to try Ariosto, I shall be only too happy. Shall we commence tomorrow? And as for our other books, those I mean that you were good enough to read — — "

"I'm not afraid of them," I said: "we shan't break our old Malory custom yet; and I ought to be very grateful to you, Mr. Carmel."

His countenance brightened, but the unconscious reproach of his wounded look still haunted me. And after he was gone, with a confusion of feelings which I could not have easily analysed, I laid my hands over my eyes, and cried for some time bitterly.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MY BOUQUET.

I remember so vividly the night of my first ball. The excitement of the toilet; mamma's and the maid's consultations and debates; the tremulous anticipations; the "pleasing terror;" the delightful, anxious flutter, and my final look in the tall glass. I hardly knew myself. I gazed at myself with the irrepressible smile of elation. I never had looked so well. There are degrees of that delightful excitement that calls such tints to girlish cheeks, and such fires to the eyes, as visit them no more in our wiser afterlife. The enchantment wanes, and the flowers and brilliants fade and we soon cease to see them. I went down to the drawingroom to wait for mamma. The candles were lighted, and whom should I find there but Mr. Carmel?

"I asked your mamma's leave to come and see you dressed for your first ball," he said. "How very pretty it all is!"

He surveyed me, smiling with a melancholy pride, it seemed to me, in my good looks and brilliant dress.

"No longer, and never more, the Miss Ethel of my quiet Malory recollections. Going out at last! If any one can survive the ordeal and come forth scathless, you, I think, will. But to me it seems that this is a farewell, and that my pupil dies tonight, and a new Miss Ethel returns. You cannot help it; all the world cannot prevent it, if so it is to be. As an old friend, I knew I might bring you these."

"Oh, Mr. Carmel, what beautiful flowers!" I exclaimed.

It was certainly an exquisite bouquet; one of those beautiful and costly offerings that perish in an hour, and seems to me like the pearl thrown into the cup of wine.

"I am so grateful. It was so kind of you. It is too splendid a great deal. It is quite impossible that there can be anything like it in the room."

I was really lost in wonder and admiration, and I suppose looked delighted. I was pleased that the flowers should have come from Mr. Carmel's hand.

"If you think that the flowers are worthy of you, you think more highly than I do of them," he answered, with a smile that was at once sad and pleased. "I am such an old friend, you know; a month at quiet Malory counts for a year anywhere else. And as you say of the flowers, I may say more justly of my pupil, there will be no one like her there. It is the compensation of being such as I, that we may speak frankly, like good old women, and no one be offended. And, oh, Miss Ethel, may God grant they be not placed like flowers upon a sacrifice or on the dead. Do not forget your better thoughts. You are entering scenes of illusion, where there is little charity, and almost no sincerity, where cruel feelings are instilled, the love of flattery and dominion awakened, and all the evil and enchantments of the world beset you. Encourage those good thoughts; watch and pray, or a painless and even pleasant death sets in, and no one can arrest it."

How my poor father would have laughed at such an exhortation at the threshold of a ball-room! No doubt it had its comic side, but not for me, and that was all Mr. Carmel cared for.

This was a ball at an official residence, and besides the usual muster, Cabinet and other Ministers would be there, and above all, that judicious rewarder of public virtue, and instructor of the conscience of the hustings, the patronage secretary of the Treasury. Papa had at last discovered a constituency which he thought promised success, he had made it a point, of course, to go to places where he had opportunities for a talk with that important personage. Papa was very sanguine, and now, as usual, whenever he had a project of that kind on hand, was in high spirits.

He came into the drawingroom. He always seemed to me as if he did not quite know whether he liked or disliked Mr. Carmel. Whenever I saw them together, he appeared to me, like Mrs. Malaprop, to begin with a little aversion, and gradually to become more and more genial. He greeted Mr. Carmel a little coldly, and brightened as he looked on me; he was evidently pleased with me, and talked me over with myself very goodhumouredly. I took care to show him my flowers. He could not help admiring them.

"These are the best flowers I have seen anywhere. How did you contrive to get them? Really, Mr. Carmel, you are a great deal too kind. I hope Ethel thanked you. Ethel, you ought really to tell Mr. Carmel how very much obliged you are."

“Oh! she has thanked me a great deal too much; she has made me quite ashamed,” said he.

And so we talked on, waiting for mamma, and I remember papa said he wondered how Mr. Carmel, who had lived in London and at Oxford, and at other places, where in one kind of life or another one really does live, contrived to exist month after month at Malory, and he drew an amusing and cruel picture of its barbarism and the nakedness of the town of Cardyllion. Mr. Carmel took up the cudgels for both, and I threw in a word wherever I had one to say. I remember this laughing debate, because it led to this little bit of dialogue.

“I fortunately never bought many things there — two brushes, I remember; all their hairs fell out, and they were bald before the combs they sent for to London arrived. If I had been dependent on the town of Cardyllion, I should have been reduced to a state of utter simplicity.”

“Oh, but I assure you, papa, they have a great many very nice things at Jones’s shop in Castle Street,” I remonstrated.

“Certainly not for one’s dressing room. There are tubs at the regattas, and sponges at their dinners, I daresay,” papa began, in a punning vein.

“But you’ll admit that London supplies no such cosmetics as Malory,” said Mr. Carmel, with a kind glance at me.

“Well, you have me there, I admit,” laughed papa, looking very pleasantly at me, who, no doubt, was at that moment the centre of many wild hopes of his.

Mamma came down now; there was no time to lose. My heart bounded, half with fear. Mr. Carmel came downstairs with us, and saw us into the carriage. He stood at the doorsteps smiling, his short cloak wrapped about him, his hat in his hand. Now the horses made their clattering scramble forward; the carriage was in motion. Mr. Carmel’s figure, in the attitude of his last look, receded; he was gone; it was like a farewell to Malory, and we were rolling on swiftly towards the ball-room, and a new life for me.

I am not going to describe this particular ball, nor my sensations on entering this new world, so artificial and astonishing. What an arduous life, with its stupendous excitement, fatigues, and publicity! There were in the new world on which I was entering, of course, personal affections and friendships, as among all other societies of human beings. But the canons on which it governs itself are, it seemed to me, inimical to both. The heart gives little, and requires little there. It assumes nothing deeper than relations of acquaintance; and there is no time to bestow on any other. It is the recognised business of every one to enjoy, and if people have pains or misfortunes they had best keep them to themselves, and smile. No one has a right to be ailing or unfortunate, much less to talk as if he were so, in that happy valley. Such people are “tainted wethers of the flock,” and are bound to abolish themselves forthwith. No doubt kind things are done, and charitable, by people who live in it. But they are no more intended to see the light of that life than Mr. Snake’s goodnatured actions were. This dazzling microcosm, therefore, must not be expected to do that which it never undertook. Its exertions in pursuit of pleasure are enormous; its exhaustion prodigious; the necessary restorative cycle must not be interrupted by private agonies, small or great. If that were permitted, who could recruit for his daily task? I am relating, after an interval of very many years, the impressions of a person who, then very young, was a denizen of “the world” only for a short time; but the application of these principles of selfishness seemed to me sometimes ghastly.

One thing that struck me very much in a little time was that society, as it is termed, was so limited in numbers. You might go everywhere, it seemed to me, and see, as nearly as possible, the same people night after night. The same cards always, merely shuffled. This, considering the size and wealth of England and of London, did seem to me unaccountable.

My first season, like that of every girl who is admired and danced with a great deal, was glorified by illusions, chief among which was that the men who danced with me as they could every night did honestly adore me. We learn afterwards how much and how little those triumphs mean; that new faces are liked simply because they are new; and that girls are danced with because they are the fashion and dance well. I am not boasting — I was admired; and papa was in high goodhumour and spirits. There is sunshine even in that region; like winter suns, bright but cold. Such as it is, let the birds of that enchanted forest enjoy it while it lasts; flutter their wings and sing in its sheen, for it may not be for long.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE KNIGHT OF THE BLACK CASTLE.

My readings with Mr. Carmel totally ceased; in fact, there was no time for any but that one worship which now absorbed me altogether. Every now and then, however, he was in London, and mamma, in the drawingroom, used at times to converse with him, in so low a tone, so earnestly and so long, that I used to half suspect her of making a shrift, and receiving a whispered absolution. Mamma, indeed, stood as it were with just one foot upon the very topmost point of our "high church," ready to spread her wings, and to float to the still more exalted level of the cross on the dome of St. Peter's. But she always hesitated when the moment for making the aërial ascent arrived, and was still trembling in her old attitude on her old pedestal.

I don't think mamma's theological vagaries troubled papa. Upon all such matters he talked like a goodnatured Sadducee; and if religion could have been carried on without priests, I don't think he would have objected to any of its many forms.

Mamma had Mr. Carmel to luncheon often, during his stay in town. Whenever he could find an opportunity, he talked with me. He struggled hard to maintain his hold upon me. Mamma seemed pleased that he should; yet I don't think that she had made up her mind even upon my case. I daresay, had I then declared myself a "Catholic," she would have been in hysterics. Her own religious state, just then, I could not perfectly understand. I don't think she did. She was very uncomfortable about once a fortnight. Her tremors returned when a cold or any other accident had given her a dull day.

When the season was over, I went with papa and mamma to some country houses, and while they completed their circuit of visits Miss Pounden and I were despatched to Malory. The new world which had dazzled me for a time had not changed me. I had acquired a second self; but my old self was still living. It had not touched my heart, nor changed my simple tastes. I enjoyed the quiet of Malory, and its rural ways, and should have been as happy there as ever, if I could only have recovered the beloved companions whom I missed.

My loneliness was very agreeably relieved one day, as I was walking home from Penruthyn Priory, by meeting Mr. Carmel. He joined me, and we sauntered towards home in very friendly talk. He was to make a little stay at the steward's house. We agreed to read *I Promessi Sposi* together. Malory was recovering its old looks. I asked him all the news that he was likely to know and I cared to hear.

"Where was Lady Lorrimer?" I inquired.

Travelling, he told me, on the Continent, he could not say where. "We must not talk of her," he said, with a shrug and a laugh. "I think, Miss Ware, we were never so near quarrelling upon any subject as upon Lady Lorrimer, and I then resolved never again to approach that irritating topic."

So with common consent we talked of other things, among which I asked him:

"Do you remember Mr. Marston?"

"You mean the shipwrecked man who was quartered for some days at the steward's house?" he asked. "Yes — I remember him very well." He seemed to grow rather pale as he looked at me, and added, "Why do you ask?"

"Because," I answered, "you told me that he was in good society, and I have not seen him anywhere — not once."

"He was in society; but he's not in London, nor in England now, I believe. I once knew him pretty well, and I know only too much of him. I know him for a villain; and had he been still in England I should have warned you again, Miss Ethel, and warned your mamma, also, against permitting him to claim your acquaintance. But I don't think he will be seen again in this part of the world — not, at all events, until after the death of a person who is likely to live a long time."

"But what has he done?" I asked.

"I can't tell you — I can't tell you how cruelly he has wounded me," he answered. "I have told you in substance all I know, when I say he is a villain."

"I do believe, Mr. Carmel, your mission on earth is to mortify my curiosity. You won't tell me anything of any one I'm the least curious to hear about."

"He is a person I hate to talk of, or even to think of. He is a villain — he is incorrigible — and, happen what may, a villain, I think, he will be to the end."

I was obliged to be satisfied with this, for I had learned that it was a mere waste of time trying to extract from Mr. Carmel any secret which he chose to keep.

Here, then, in the old scenes, our quiet life began for awhile once more. I did not see more of Mr. Carmel now than formerly, and there continued the slightly altered tone, in talk and manner, which had secretly so sorely vexed me in town, and which at times I almost ascribed to my fancy.

Mr. Carmel's stay at Malory was desultory, too, as before; he was often absent for two or three days together. During one of these short absences, there occurred a very trifling incident, which, however, I must mention.

The castle of Cardyllion is a vast ruin, a military fortress of the feudal times, built on a great scale, and with prodigious strength. Its ponderous walls and towers are covered thick with ivy. It is so vast that the few visitors who are to be found there when the summer is over, hardly disquiet its wide solitudes and its silence. For a time I induced Miss Pounden to come down there nearly every afternoon, and we used to bring our novels, and she, sometimes her work; and we sat in the old castle, feeling, in the quiet autumn, as if we had it all to ourselves. The inner court is nearly two hundred feet square, and, ascending a circular stair in the angle next the great gate, you find yourself at the end of a very dark stone-floored corridor, running the entire length of the building. This long passage is lighted at intervals by narrow loopholes placed at the left; and in the wall to the right, after having passed several doors, you come, about mid-way, to one admitting to the chapel. It is a small stone-floored chamber, with a lofty groined roof, very gracefully proportioned; a tall stone-shafted window admits a scanty light from the east, over the site of the dismantled altar; deep shadow prevails everywhere else in this pretty chapel, which is so dark in most parts that, in order to read or work, one must get directly under the streak of light that enters through the window, necessarily so narrow as not to compromise the jealous rules of mediæval fortification. A small arch, at each side of the door, opens a view of this chamber from two small rooms, or galleries, reached by steps from this corridor.

We had placed our camp-stools nearly under this window, and were both reading; when I raised my eyes they encountered those of a very remarkable-looking old man, whom I instantly recognised, with a start. It was the man whom we used, long ago, to call the Knight of the Black Castle. His well-formed, bronzed face and features were little changed, except for those lines that time deepens or produces. His dark, fierce eyes were not dimmed by the years that had passed, but his long black hair, which was uncovered, as tall men in those low passages were obliged to remove their hats, was streaked now with grey. This stern old man was gazing fixedly on me, from the arch beside the door, to my left, as I looked at him, and he did not remove his eyes as mine met his. Sullen, gloomy, stern was the face that remained inflexibly fixed in the deep shadow which enhanced its pallor. I turned with an effort to my companion, and said:

"Suppose we come out, and take a turn in the grounds."

To which, as indeed to everything I proposed, Miss Pounden assented.

I walked for a minute or two about the chapel before I stole a glance backward at the place where I had seen the apparition. He was gone. The arch, and the void space behind, were all that remained; there was nothing but deep shadow where that face had loomed. I asked Miss Pounden if she had seen the old man looking in; she had not.

Well, we left the chapel, and retraced our steps through the long corridor, I watching through the successive loopholes for the figure of the old man pacing the grass beneath; but I did not see him. Down the stairs we came, I peeping into every narrow doorway we passed, and so out upon the grassy level of the inner court. I looked in all directions there, but nowhere could I see him. Under the arched gateway, where the portcullis used to clang, we passed into the outer court, and there I peeped about, also in vain.

I dare say Miss Pounden, if she could wonder at anything, wondered what I could be in pursuit of; but that most convenient of women never troubled me with a question.

Through the outer gate, in turn, we passed, and to Richard Pritchard's lodge, at the side of the gate admitting visitors from Castle Street to the castle grounds. Tall Richard Pritchard, with his thin stoop, his wideawake hat, brown face, lantern jaws, and perpetual smirk, listened to my questions, and answered that he had let in such a gentleman, about ten minutes before, as I described. This gentleman had given his horse to hold to a donkey-boy outside the gate, and Richard Pritchard went on to say, with his usual volubility, and his curious interpolation of phrases of politeness, without the slightest regard to their connection with the context, but simply to heighten the amiability and polish of his discourse:

"And he asked a deal, miss, about the family down at Malory, I beg your pardon; and when he heard you were there, miss, he asked if you ever came down to the town — yes, indeed. So when I told him you were in the castle now — very well, I thank you, miss — he asked whereabout in the castle you were likely to be — yes, indeed, miss, very true — and he gave me a shilling — he did, indeed — and I showed him the way to the chapel — I beg your pardon, miss — where you very often go — very true indeed, miss; and so I left him at the top of the stairs. Ah, ha! yes, indeed, miss; and he came back just two or three minutes, and took his horse and rode down towards the water gate — very well, I thank you, miss."

This was the substance of Richard Pritchard's information. So, then, he had ridden down Castle Street and out of the town. It was odd his caring to have that look at me. What could he mean by it? His was a countenance ominous of nothing good. After so long an interval, it was not pleasant to see it again, especially associated with inquiries about Malory and its owners, and the sinister attraction which had drawn him to the chapel to gaze upon me, and, as I plainly perceived, by no means with eyes of liking. The years that had immediately followed his last visit, I knew had proved years of great loss and peril to papa. May heaven avert the omen! I silently prayed. I knew that old Rebecca Torkill could not help to identify, him, for I had been curious on the point before. She could not bring to her recollection the particular scene that had so fixed itself upon my memory; for, as she said, in those evil years there was hardly a day that did not bring down some bawling creditor from London to Malory in search of papa.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RUSTICATION.

Malory was not visited that year by either papa or mamma. I had been so accustomed to a lonely life there that my sojourn in that serene and beautiful spot never seemed solitary. Besides, town life would open again for me in the early spring. Had it not been for that near and exciting prospect, without Laura Grey, I might possibly have felt my solitude more; but the sure return to the whirl and music of the world made my rural weeks precious. They were to end earlier even than our return to town. I was written for, to Roydon, where mamma and papa then were making a short visit, and was deposited safely in that splendid but rather dull house by Miss Pounden, who sped forthwith to London, where I suppose she enjoyed her liberty her own quiet way.

I enjoyed very much our flitting from country-house to country-house, and the more familiar society of that kind of life. As these peregrinations and progresses, however, had no essential bearing upon my history, I shall mention them only to say this. At Roydon I met a person whom I very little expected to see there. The same person afterwards turned up at a very much pleasanter house — I mean Lady Mardykes's house at Carsbrook, where a really delightful party were assembled. Who do you think this person was? No titled person — not known to the readers of newspapers, except as a name mentioned now and then as forming a unit in a party at some distinguished house; no brilliant name in the lists of talent; a man apparently not worth propitiating on any score: and yet everywhere, and knowing everybody! Who, I say, do you suppose he was? Simply Doctor Droqville! In London I had seen him very often. He used to drop in at balls or garden-parties for an hour or two, and vanish. There was a certain decision, animation, and audacity in his talk, which seemed, although I did not like it, to please better judges very well. No one appeared to know much more about him than I did. Some people, I suppose, like mamma, did know quite enough; but by far the greater part took him for granted, and seeing that other people had him at their houses, did likewise.

Very agreeably the interval passed; and in due time we found ourselves once more in London.

My second season wanted something of the brilliant delirium of the first; and yet, I think I enjoyed it more. Papa was not in such spirits by any means. I dare say, as my second season drew near its close, he was disappointed that I was not already a peeress. But papa had other grounds for anxiety; and very anxious he began to look. It was quite settled now that at the next election he was to stand for the borough of Shillingsworth, with the support of the Government. Every one said he would do very well in the House; but that we ought to have begun earlier. Papa was full of it; but somehow not quite so sanguine and cheery as he used to be about his projects. I had seen ministers looking so haggard and overworked, and really suffering at times, that I began to think that politics were as fatiguing a pursuit almost as pleasure. The iron seemed to have entered into poor papa's soul already.

Although our breakfast hour was late, mamma was hardly ever down to it, and I not always. But one day when we did happen to be all three at breakfast together, he put down his newspaper with a rustle on his knee, and said to mamma, "I have been intending to ask you this long time, and I haven't had an opportunity — or at least it has gone out of my head when I might have asked; have you been writing lately to Lady Lorrimer?"

"Yes, I — at least, I heard from her, a little more than a week ago — a very kind letter — she wrote from Naples — she has been there for the winter."

"And quite well?"

"Complaining a little, as usual; but I suppose she is really quite well."

"I wish she did not hate me quite so much as she does," said papa. "I'd write to her myself — I dare say you haven't answered her letter?"

"Well, really, you know, just now it is not easy to find time," mamma began.

"Oh! hang it, time! Why, you forget you have really nothing to do," answered papa, more tartly than I had ever heard him speak to mamma before. "You don't answer her letters, I think; at least not for months after you get them! I don't wish you to flatter her — I wish that as little as you do — but I think you might be civil — where's the good of irritating her?"

"I never said I saw any," answered mamma, a little high.

"No; but I see the mischief of it," he continued; "it's utter folly — and it's not right, besides. You'll just lose her, that'll be the end of it — she is the only one of your relations who really cares anything about you — and she intends making Ethel a present — diamonds — it is just, I do believe, that she wishes to show what she intends further. You are the person she would naturally like to succeed her in anything she has to leave; and you take such a time about answering her letters, you seem to wish to vex her. You'll succeed at last — and, I can tell you, you can't afford to throw away friendship just now. I shall want every friend, I mean every real friend, I can count upon. More than you think depends on this affair. If I'm returned for Shillingsworth, I'm quite certain I shall get something very soon — and if I once get it, depend upon it, I shall get on. Some people would say I'm a fool for my pains, but it is money very well spent — it is the only money, I really think, I ever laid out wisely in my life, and it is a very serious matter our succeeding in this. Did not your aunt Lorrimer say that she thought she would be at Golden Friars again this year?"

"Yes, I think so; why?" said mamma, listlessly.

"Because she must have some influence over that beast Rokestone — I often wonder what devil has got hold of my affairs, or how Rokestone happens to meet me at so many points — and if she would talk to him a little, she might prevent his doing me a very serious mischief. She is sure to see him when she goes down there."

"He's not there often, you know; I can always find a time to go to Golden Friars without a chance of seeing him. I shall never see him again, I hope." I thought mamma sighed a little, as she said this. "But I'll write and ask Lady Lorrimer to say whatever you wish to him, when her visit to Golden Friars is quite decided on."

So the conversation ended, and upon that theme was not resumed, at least within my hearing, during the remainder of our stay in town.

My journal, which I kept pretty punctually during that season, lies open on the table before me. I have been aiding my memory with it. It has, however, helped me to nothing that bears upon my story. It is a register, for the most part, of routine. Now we lunched with Lady This — now we went to the Duchess of So-and-so's garden-party — every night either a ball, or a musical party, or the opera. Sometimes I was asked out to dinner, sometimes we went to the play. Ink and leaves are discoloured by time. The score years and more that have passed, have transformed this record of frivolity into a solemn and melancholy Mentor. So many of the names that figure there have since been carved on tombstones! Among those that live still, and hold their heads up, there is change everywhere — some for better, some for worse; and yet riven, shattered, scattered, as this muster-roll is, with perfect continuity and solidity, that smiling Sadduceeic world without a home, the community that lives out of doors, and accepts, as it seems to me, satire and pleasure in lieu of the affections, lives and works on upon its old principles and aliment; diamonds do not fail, nor liveries, nor highbred horses, nor pretty faces, nor witty men, nor chaperons, nor fools, nor rascals.

I must tell you, however, what does not distinctly appear in this diary. Among the many so-called admirers who asked for dances in the ball-room, were two who appeared to like me with a deeper feeling than the others. One was handsome Colonel Saint-George Dacre, with an estate of thirty thousand a year, as my friends told mamma, who duly conveyed the fact to me. But young ladies, newly come out and very much danced with, are fastidious, and I was hard to please. My heart was not preoccupied, but even in my lonely life I had seen men who interested me more. I liked my present life and freedom too well, and shrank from the idea of being married. The other was Sir Henry Park, also rich, but older. Papa, I think, looked even higher for me, and fancied that I might possibly marry so as to make political connection for him. He did not, therefore, argue the question with me; but overrating me more than I did myself, thought he was quite safe in leaving me free to do as I pleased.

These gentlemen, therefore, were, with the most polite tenderness for their feelings, dismissed — one at Brighton, in August; the other, a little later, at Carsbrook, where he chose to speak. I have mentioned these little affairs in the order in which they occurred, as I might have to allude to them in the pages that follow.

Every one has, once or twice, in his or her life, I suppose, commenced a diary which was to have been prosecuted as diligently and perseveringly as that of Samuel Pepys. I did, I know, oftener than I could now tell you; I have just mentioned one of mine, and from this fragmentary notebook I give you the following extracts, which happen to help my narrative at this particular point.

"At length, thank Heaven! news of darling Laura Grey. I can hardly believe that I am to see her so soon. I wonder whether I shall be able, a year hence, to recall the delight of this expected moment. It is true, there is a great deal to qualify my happiness, for her language is ominous. Still it will be delightful to meet her, and hear her adventures, and have one of our good long talks together, such as made Malory so happy.

"I was in mamma's room about half-an-hour ago; she was fidgeting about in her dressing-gown and slippers, and had just sat down before her dressing-table, when Wentworth (her maid) came in with letters by the early post. Mamma has as few secrets, I think, as most people, and her correspondence is generally very uninteresting. Whenever I care to read them, she allows me to amuse myself with her letters when she has opened and read them herself. I was in no mood to do so to-day; but I fancied I saw a slight but distinct change in her careless looks as she peeped into one. She read it a second time, and handed it to me. It is, indeed, from Laura Grey! It says that she is in great affliction, and that she will call at our town house 'tomorrow,' that is to-day, 'Thursday,' at one o'clock, to try whether mamma would consent to see her.

"'I think that very cool. I don't object to seeing her, however,' said mamma; 'but she shall know what I think of her.'

"I don't like the idea of such an opening as mamma would make. I must try to see Laura before she meets her. She must have wonders to tell me; it cannot have been a trifling thing that made her use me, apparently, so unkindly.

"Thursday — halfpast one. No sign of Laura yet.

"Thursday — six o'clock. She has not appeared! What am I to think?

"Her letter is written, as it seems to me, in the hurry of agitation. I can't understand what all this means.

"Thursday night — eleven o'clock. Before going to bed. Laura has not appeared. No note. Mamma more vexed than I have often seen her. I fancy she had a hope of getting her back again, as I know I had.

"Friday. I waked in the dark, early this morning, thinking of Laura, and fancying every horrible thing that could have befallen her since her note of yesterday morning was written.

"Went to mamma, who had her breakfast in her bed, and told her how miserable I was about Laura Grey. She said, 'There is nothing the matter with Miss Grey, except that she does not know how to behave herself.’ I don’t agree with mamma, and I am sure that she does not really think any such thing of Laura Grey. I am still very uneasy about her; there is no address to her note.

“I have just been again with mamma, to try whether she can recollect anything by which we could find her out. She says she can remember no circumstance by which we can trace her. Mamma says she had been trying to find a governess at some of the places where lists of ladies seeking such employment are kept, but without finding one who exactly answered; papa had then seen an advertisement in the *Times*, which seemed to promise satisfactorily, and Miss Grey answered mamma’s note, and referred to a lady, who immediately called on her; mamma could only recollect that she knew this lady’s name, that she had heard of her before, and that she spoke with the greatest affection of Miss Grey, and shed tears while she lamented her determination to seek employment as a governess, instead of living at home with her. The lady had come in a carriage, with servants, and had all the appearance of being rich, and spoke of Laura as her cousin. But neither her name nor address could mamma recollect, and there remained no clue by which to trace her. It was some comfort to think that the lady who claimed her as a kinswoman, and spoke of her with so much affection, was wealthy, and anxious to take her to her own home; but circumstances are always mutable, and life transitory — how can we tell where that lady is now?”

“I have still one hope — Laura may have written one o’clock ‘Thursday,’ and meant Friday. It is only a chance — still I cling to it.

“Friday — three o’clock. Laura has not appeared. What are we to think? I can’t get it out of my head that something very bad has happened. My poor Laura!

“Saturday night — a quarter to eleven. Going to bed. Another day, and no tidings of Laura. I have quite given up the hope of seeing her.”

She did not come next day. On the subject on which mamma felt so sharply, she had not an opportunity of giving her a piece of her mind then, or the next day.

*

So the season being over, behold us again in the country!

After our visit to Carsbrook, mamma and papa were going to Haitly Abbey. For some reason, possibly the very simple one that I had been forgotten in the invitation, I was not to accompany them; I was despatched in charge of old Lady Hester Wigmore, who was going that way, to Chester, where Miss Pounden took me up; and with her, “to my great content,” as old Samuel Pepys says, I went to Malory, which I always revisited with an unutterable affection, as my only true home.

Nothing happened during my stay at Malory, which was unexpectedly interrupted by a note from mamma appointing to meet me at Chester. Papa had been obliged to go to town to consult with some friends, and he was then to go down to Shillingsworth to speak at a public dinner. She and I were going northward. She would tell me all when we met. I need not bring any of my finery with me.

With this scanty information, and some curiosity as to our destination in the North, I arrived at Chester, and there met mamma, from whom I soon learned that our excursion was to lead us into wild and beautiful scenery quite new to me.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AT THE GEORGE AND DRAGON.

We had to wait for a long time at some station, I forget its name. The sun set, and night overtook us before we reached the end of our journey by rail. We had then to drive about twelve miles. The road, for many miles, lay through a desolate black moss. I could not have believed there was anything so savage in England. A thin mist was stretched like a veil over the more distant level of the dark expanse, on which, here and there, a wide pool gleamed faintly under the moonlight. To the right there rose a grand mass of mountain. We were soon driving through a sort of gorge, and found ourselves fenced in by the steep sides of gigantic mountains, as we followed a road that wound and ascended among them. I shall never forget the beautiful effect of the scene suddenly presented, and for the first time, as the road reached its highest elevation, and I saw, with the dark receding sides of the mountain we had been penetrating for a proscenium, my first view of Golden Friars. Oh! how beautiful!

Surrounded by an amphitheatre of Alpine fells, the broad mere of Golden Friars glimmered cold under the moonlight, and the quaint little town of steep gables, built of light grey stone, rose from its grassy margin surrounded by elms, single or in clumps, that looked almost black in contrast with the gleaming lake and the white masonry of the town. It looked like enchanted ground. A silvery hoarfrost seemed to cover the whole scene, giving it a filmy and half-visionary character that enhanced its beauty. I was exclaiming in wonder and delight as every minute some new beauty unfolded itself to view. Mamma was silent, as she looked from the window; I saw that she cried gently, thinking herself unobserved. A beautiful scene, where childish days were passed, awakes so many sweet and bitter fancies! The yearnings for the irrevocable, the heartache of the memory, opened the fountains of her tears; and I was careful not to interrupt her lonely thoughts. I left her to the enjoyment of that melancholy luxury, and gazed on in strange delight.

Here, then, was the dwelling-place of that redoubted enemy of our house whom fate seemed to have ordained as our persecutor. Here lived the old enchanter whose malign spells were woven about us, in busy London and quiet Malory, or the distant scenes of France and Italy. Even this thought added interest to the romantic scene.

We had now descended to the level of the shore of the lake, along whose margin our road swept in a gentle curve. The fells from this level rose stupendous, all around, striking their silvery peaks into the misty moonlight, and looking so aërial that one might fancy a stone thrown would pass through their sides as if they were vapour. Now we passed under the shadow of the first clump of mighty elms; and now the white fronts and chimneys of the village houses rose in the foreground. There was no sign of life but the barking of the watchdogs, and the cackling of the vigilant geese, and the light that glanced from the hall of the "George and Dragon," the substantial old inn that, looking across the road, faces the lake and distant fells. At the door of this ancient and comfortable inn drew up our chaise and four horses, no mere ostentation, but a simple necessity, where carriage and luggage were pulled, towards the close of so long a stage, over the steeps where the road pushes its way high among the fells.

So our journey was over; and we stood in the hall. Before we went up to our rooms mamma inquired whether Lady Lorrimer had arrived. Yes, her ladyship had been there since the day before yesterday. Mamma seemed nervous and uncomfortable. She sent down her maid to find out whether Sir Harry Rokestone was in the country; and when the servant returned and told her that he was not expected to arrive at Dorracleugh before a fortnight, she sighed, and I heard her say faintly, "Thank God!"

I confess it was rather a disappointment than a relief to me. I rather wished to see this truculent old wizard. After a sound sleep, which we both needed, I got up and had a little peep at that beautiful place, in the early sunlight, before breakfast. Lady Lorrimer's maid came with inquiries from her mistress, for mamma and me. Her ladyship was not very well, and could not see us till about twelve. She was so vexed at having to put us off, and hoped we were not tired; and also that we would take our dinner with her. To this mamma agreed.

I was curious to see Lady Lorrimer once more. My ideas had grown obscure, and my theory of that kinswoman had been disagreeably disturbed, ever since the evening on which she, or her double, had passed by me so resolutely in the street.

Having heard that she was quite ready to see us, we paid our visit. I wondered how she would receive me, and my suspense amounted almost to excitement as I reached the door. A moment more, and I could not believe that Lady Lorrimer and the woman who so resembled her were the same. Nothing could be more affectionate than Lady Lorrimer. She received us with a very real welcome, and so much pleasure in her looks, tones, and words. She was not, indeed, looking well, but her spirits seemed cheerful. She embraced mamma, and kissed her very fondly; then she kissed me over and over again. I was utterly puzzled, and more than doubted the identity of this warm-hearted, affectionate woman with the person who had chosen to cut me with such offensive and sinister persistence.

"See how this pretty creature looks at me!" she said to mamma, laughing, as she detected my conscious scrutiny.

I blushed and looked down; I did not know what to say.

"I'm very much obliged to you, dear, for looking at me, so few people do now-a-days; and I was just going to steal a good look at you, when I found I was anticipated. I have just been saying to your mamma that I have ordered a boat, and we must all have a sail together on the lake after dinner; what do you say?"

Of course I was delighted; I thought the place perfectly charming.

"I lived the earlier part of my life here," she resumed, "and so did your mamma, you know — when she was a little girl, and until she came to be nineteen or twenty — I forget which you were, dear, when you were married?" she said, turning to mamma.

"Twenty-two," said mamma, smiling.

"Twenty-two? Really! Well, we lived at Mardykes. I'll point out the place on the water when we take our sail; you can't see it from these windows."

"And where does Sir Harry Rokestone live?" I asked.

"You can't see that either from these windows. It is further than Mardykes, at the same side. But we shall see it from the boat."

Then she and mamma began to talk, and I went to the window and looked out.

Lady Lorrimer, with all her airs of conventual seclusion, hungered and thirsted after gossip; and whenever they met, she learned all the stories from mamma, and gave her, in return, old scandal and ridiculous anecdotes about the predecessors of the people with whose sayings, doings, and mishaps mamma amused her.

Two o’clock dinners, instead of luncheons, were the rule in this part of the world. And people turned tea into a very substantial supper, and were all in bed and asleep before the hour arrived at which the London ladies and gentlemen are beginning to dress for a ball.

You are now to suppose us, on a sunny evening, on board the boat that had been moored for some time at the jetty opposite the door of the “George and Dragon.” We were standing up the lake, and away from the Golden Friars shore, towards a distant wood, which they told me was the forest of Clusted.

“Look at that forest, Ethel,” said Lady Lorrimer. “It is the haunted forest of Clusted — the last resort of the fairies in England. It was there, they say, that Sir Bale Mardykes, long ago, made a compact with the Evil One.”

Through the openings of its magnificent trees, as we nearer, from time to time, the ivied ruins of an old manorhouse were visible. In this beautiful and, in spite of the monotony of the gigantic fells that surround the lake, ever-varying scenery, my companions gradually grew silent for a time; even I felt the dreamy influence of the scene, and liked the listless silence, in which nothing was heard but the rush of the waters, and the flap of the sail now and then. I was living in a world of fancy: they in a sadder one of memory.

In a little while, in gentle tones, they were exchanging old remembrances; a few words now and then sufficed; the affecting associations of scenes of early life revisited were crowding up everywhere. As happens to some people when death is near, a change, that seemed to be quite beautiful, came over mamma’s mind in the air and lights of this beautiful place! How I wished that she could remain always as she was now!

With the old recollections seemed to return the simple rural spirit of the early life. What is the town life, of which I had tasted, compared with this? How much simpler, tenderer, sublimer, this is! How immensely nearer heaven! The breeze was light, and the signs of the sky assured the boatmen that we need fear none of those gusts and squalls that sometimes burst so furiously down through the cloughs and hollows of the surrounding mountains. I, with the nautical knowledge acquired at Malory, took the tiller, under direction of the boatmen. We had a good deal of tacking to get near enough to the shore at Clusted to command a good view of that fine piece of forest. We then sailed northward, along the margin of the "mere," as they call the lake; and, when we had gone in that direction for a mile or more, turned the boat's head across the water, and ran before the breeze towards the Mardykes side. There is a small island near the other side, with a streak of grey rock and bushes nearly surrounding what looked like a ruined chapel or hermitage, and Lady Lorrimer told me to pass this as nearly as I could.

The glow of evening was by this time in the western sky. The sun was hidden behind the fells that form a noble barrier between Golden Friars and the distant moss of Dardale, where stands Haworth Hall. In deepest purple shadow the mountains here closely overhang the lake. Under these, along the margin, Lady Lorrimer told me to steer.

We were gliding slowly along, so that there was ample leisure to note every tree and rock upon the shore as we passed. As we drifted, rather than sailed, along the shore, there suddenly opened from the margin a narrow valley, reaching about a quarter of a mile. It was a sudden dip in the mountains that here rise nearly from the edge of the lake. Steep-sided and wild was this hollow, and backed by a mountain that, to me, looking up from the level of the lake, appeared stupendous.

The valley lay flat in one unbroken field of short grass. A broad-fronted, feudal tower, with a few more modern buildings about it, stood far back, fronting the river. A rude stone pier afforded shelter to a couple of boats, and a double line of immense lime-trees receded from that point about halfway up to the tower. Whether it was altogether due to the peculiar conformation of the scene, or that it owed its character in large measure to its being enveloped in the deep purple shadow cast by the surrounding mountain, and the strange effect of the glow reflected downward from the evening clouds, which touched the summits of the trees, and the edges of the old tower, like the light of a distant conflagration, I cannot say; but never did I see a spot with so awful a character of solitude and melancholy.

In the gloom we could see a man standing alone on the extremity of the stone pier, looking over the lake. This figure was the only living thing we could discover there.

"Well, dear, now you see it. That's Dorracleugh — that's Harry Rokestone's place," said Lady Lorrimer.

"What a spot! Fit only for a bear or an anchorite. Do you know," she added, turning to mamma, "he is there a great deal more than he used to be, they tell me. I know if I were to live in that place for six months I should never come out of it a sane woman. To do him justice, he does not stay very long here when he does come, and for years he never came at all. He has other places, far away from this; and if a certain event had happened about two-and-twenty years ago," she added, for my behalf, "he intended building quite a regal house a little higher up, on a site that is really enchanting, but your mamma would not allow him; and so, and so — — " Lady Lorrimer had turned her glasses during her sentence upon the figure which stood motionless on the end of the pier; and she said, forgetting what she had been telling me, "I really think — I'm nearly certain — that man standing there is Harry Rokestone!"

Mamma started. I looked with all my eyes; little more than a hundred yards interposed, but the shadow was so intense, and the effect of the faint reflected light so odd and puzzling, that I could be certain of nothing, but that the man stood very erect, and was tall and powerfully built. Lady Lorrimer was too much absorbed in her inspection to offer me her glasses, which I was longing to borrow, but for which I could not well ask, and so we sailed slowly by, and the hill that flanked the valley gradually glided between us and the pier, and the figure disappeared from view. Lady Lorrimer, lowering her glasses, said:

"I can't say positively, but I'm very nearly certain it was he."

Mamma said nothing, but was looking pale, and during the rest of our sail seemed absent and uncomfortable, if not unhappy.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NOTICE TO QUIT.

We drank tea with Lady Lorrimer. Mamma continued very silent, and I think she had been crying in her room.

"They can't tell me here whether Harry has arrived or not," said Lady Lorrimer. "He might have returned by the Dardale Road, and if so, he would not have passed through Golden Friars, so it is doubtful. But I'm pretty sure that was he."

"I wish I were sure of that," said mamma.

"Well, I don't know," said Lady Lorrimer, "what to advise. I was just going to say it might be a wise thing if you were to make up your mind to see him, and to beard the lion in his den."

"No," said mamma; "if you mean to meet him and speak to him, I could not do that. I shall never see him again — nothing but pain could come of it; and he would not see me, and he ought not to see me; and he ought not to forgive me — never!"

"Well, dear, I can't deny it, you did use him very ill. And he is, and always was, a fierce and implacable enemy," answered Lady Lorrimer. "I fancied, perhaps, if he did see you, the old chord might be touched again, and yield something of its old tone on an ear saddened by time. But I daresay you are right. It was a Quixotic inspiration, and might have led to disaster; more probably, indeed, than to victory."

"I am quite sure of that — in fact, I know it," said mamma.

And there followed a silence.

"I sometimes think, Mabel — I was thinking so all this evening," said Lady Lorrimer, "it might have been happier for us if we had never left this lonely place. We might have been happier if we had been born under harder conditions; the power of doing what pleases us best leads us so often into sorrow."

Another silence followed. Mamma was looking over her shoulder, sadly, through the window at the familiar view of lake and mountain, indolently listening.

“I regret it, and I don’t regret it,” continued Lady Lorrimer. “If I could go back again into my early self — I wish I could — but the artificial life so perverts and enervates one, I hardly know, honestly, what I wish. I only know there is regret enough to make me discontented, and I think I should have been a great deal happier if I had been compelled to stay at Golden Friars, and had never passed beyond the mountains that surround us here. I have not so long as you to live, Mabel, and I’m glad of it. I am not quite so much of a Sadducee as you used to think me, and I hope there may be a happier world for us all. And, now that I have ended my homminy, as they call such long speeches in this country, will you, dear Ethel, give me a cup of tea?”

Lady Lorrimer and I talked. I was curious about some of the places and ruins I had seen, and asked questions, which it seemed to delight her to answer. It is a region abounding in stories strange and marvellous, family traditions, and legends of every kind.

“I think,” said mamma, *à propos des bottes*, “if he has returned they are sure to know in the town before ten tonight. Would you mind asking again by-and-by?”

“You mean about Harry Rokestone?”

“Yes.”

“I will. I’ll make out all about him. We saw his castle to-day,” she continued, turning to me. “Our not knowing whether he was there or not made it a very interesting contemplation. You remember the short speech Sheridan wrote to introduce Kelly’s song at Drury Lane— ‘There stands my Matilda’s cottage! She must be in it, or else out of it?’”

Again mamma dropped out, and the conversation was maintained by Lady Lorrimer and myself. In a little while mamma took her leave, complaining of a headache; and our kinswoman begged that I would remain for an hour or so, to keep her company. When mamma had bid her good night, and was gone, the door being shut, Lady Lorrimer laughed, and said:

“Now, tell me truly, don’t you think if your papa had been with us to-day in the boat, and seen the change that took place in your mamma’s looks and spirits from the moment she saw Dorracleugh, and the tall man who stood on the rock, down to the hour of her headache and early good night, he would have been a little jealous?”

I did not quite know whether she was joking or serious, and I fancy there was some puzzle in my face as I answered:

"But it can't be that she liked Sir Harry Rokestone; she is awfully afraid of him — that is the reason, I'm sure, she was so put out. She never liked him."

"Don't be too sure of that, little woman," she answered, gaily.

"Do you really think mamma liked him? Why, she was in love with papa."

"No, it was nothing so deep," said Lady Lorrimer; "she did not love your papa. It was a violent whim, and if she had been left just five weeks to think, she would have returned to Rokestone."

"But there can be no sentiment remaining still," I remarked. "Sir Harry Rokestone is an old man!"

"Yes, he is an old man; he is — let me see — he's fifty-six. And she did choose to marry your papa. But I'm sure she thinks she made a great mistake. I am very sure she thinks that, with all his faults, Rokestone was the more loveable man, the better man, the truer. He would have taken good care of her. I don't know of any one point in which he was your papa's inferior, and there are fifty in which he was immeasurably his superior. He was a handsomer man, if that is worth anything. I think I never saw so handsome a man, in his peculiar style. You think me a very odd old woman to tell you my opinion of your father so frankly; but I am speaking as your mamma's friend and kinswoman, and I say your papa has not used her well. He is goodhumoured, and has good spirits, and he has some goodnature, quite subordinated to his selfishness. And those qualities, so far as I know, complete the muster-roll of his virtues. But he has made her, in no respect, a good husband. In some a very bad one. And he employs half-a-dozen attorneys, to whom he commits his business at random; and he is too indolent to look after anything. Of course he's robbed, and everything at sixes and sevens; and he has got your mamma to take legal steps to make away with her money for his own purposes; and the foolish child, the merest simpleton in money matters, does everything he bids her; and I really believe she has left herself without a guinea. I don't like him — no one could who likes *her*. Poor, dear Mabel, she wants energy; I never knew a woman with so little will. She never showed any but once, and that was when she did a foolish thing, and married your father."

“And did Sir Harry Rokestone like mamma very much?” I asked.

“He was madly in love with her, and when she married your papa, he wanted to shoot him. I think he was, without any metaphor, very nearly out of his mind. He has been a sort of anchorite ever since. His money is of no use to him. He is a bitter and eccentric old man.”

“And he can injure papa now?”

“So I’m told. Your papa thinks so; and he seldom takes the trouble to be alarmed about danger three or four months distant.”

Then, to my disappointment and, also, my relief, that subject dropped. It had interested and pained me; and sometimes I felt that it was scarcely right that I should hear all she was saying, without taking up the cudgels for papa. Now, with great animation, she told me her recollections of her girlish days here at Golden Friars, when the old gentry were such bores and humorists as are no longer to be met with anywhere. And as she made me laugh at these recitals, her maid, whom she had sent down to “the bar” to make an inquiry, returned, and told her something in an undertone. As soon as she was gone, Lady Lorrimer said:

“Yes, it is quite true. Tell your mamma that Harry Rokestone is at Dorracleugh.”

She became thoughtful. Perhaps she was rehearsing mentally the mediatory conference she had undertaken.

We had not much more conversation that night; and we soon parted with a very affectionate goodnight. My room adjoined mamma’s, and finding that she was not yet asleep, I went in and gave her Lady Lorrimer’s message. Mamma changed colour, and raised herself suddenly on her elbow, looking in my face.

“Very well, dear,” said she, a little flurried. “We must leave this tomorrow morning.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SIR HARRY'S ANSWER.

About eleven o'clock next morning our chaise was at the door of the "George and Dragon." We had been waiting with our bonnets on to say goodbye to Lady Lorrimer. I have seen two or three places in my life to which my affections were drawn at first sight, and this was one of them. I was standing at the window, looking my last at this beautiful scene. Mamma was restless and impatient. I knew she was uneasy lest some accident should bring Sir Harry Rokestone to the door before we had set out upon our journey.

At length Lady Lorrimer's foreign maid came to tell us that milady wished to see us now. Accordingly we followed the maid, who softly announced us.

The room was darkened; only one gleam, through a little opening in the far shutter, touched the curtains of her bed, showing the oldfashioned chintz pattern, like a transparency, through the faded lining. She was no longer the gay Lady Lorrimer of the evening before. She was sitting up among her pillows, nearly in the dark, and the most melancholy, whimpering voice you can imagine came through the gloom from among the curtains.

"Is my sweet Ethel there, also?" she asked when she had kissed mamma. "Oh, that's right; I should not have been happy if I had not bid you goodbye. Give me your hand, darling. And so you are going, Mabel? I'm sorry you go so soon, but perhaps you are right — I think you are. It would not do, perhaps, to meet. I'll do what I can, and write to tell you how I succeed."

Mamma thanked and kissed her again.

"I'm not so well as people think, dear, nor as I wish to think myself. We may not meet for a long time, and I wish to tell you, Mabel — I wish to tell you both — that I won't leave you dependent on that reckless creature, Francis Ware. I want you two to be safe. I have none but you left me to love on earth." Here poor Lady Lorrimer began to cry. "Whenever I write to you, you must come to me; don't let anything prevent you. I am so weak. I want to leave you both very well, and I intend to put it out of my power to change it — who's that at the door? Just open it, Ethel, dear child, and see if any one is there — my maid, I mean — you can say you dropped your handkerchief — hush!"

There was no one in the lobby.

"Shut it quietly, dear; I'll do what I say — don't thank me — don't say a word about it to any one, and if you mention it to Francis Ware, charge him to tell no one else. There, dears, both, don't stay longer. God bless you! Go, go; God bless you!"

And with these words, having kissed us both very fondly, she dismissed us.

Mamma ran down, and out to the carriage very quickly, and sat back as far as she could at the far side. I followed, and all being ready, in a minute more we were driving swiftly from the "George and Dragon," and soon town, lake, forest, and distant fells were hidden from view by the precipitous sides of the savage gorge, through which the road winds its upward way.

Our drive into Golden Friars had been a silent one, and so was our drive from it, though from different causes. I was thinking over our odd interview with poor Lady Lorrimer. In what a low, nervous state she seemed, and how affectionately she spoke! I had no inquisitive tendencies, and I was just at the age when people take the future for granted. No sordid speculations therefore, I can honestly say, were busy with my brain.

We were to have stayed at least ten days at Golden Friars, and here we were flying from it before two days were spent. All our plans were upset by the blight of Sir Harry Rokestone's arrival at least a fortnight before the date of his usual visit, just as Napoleon's Russian calculations were spoilt by the famous early winter of 1812. I was vexed in my way. I should not have been sorry to hear that he had been well ducked in the lake. Mamma was vexed in her own way, also, when, about an hour after, she escaped from the thoughts that agitated her at first, and descended to her ordinary level. A gap of more than a week was made in her series of visits. What was to be done with it?

"Where are you going, mamma?" I asked, innocently enough.

"Nowhere — everywhere. To Chester," she answered, presently.

"And where then?" I asked.

"Why do you ask questions that I can't answer? Why should you like to make me more miserable than I am? Everything is thrown into confusion. I'm sure I don't know the least. I have no plans. I literally don't know where we are to lay our heads tonight. There's no one to take care of us. As usual, whenever I want assistance, there's none to be had, and my maid is so utterly helpless, and your papa in town. I only know that I'm not strong enough for this kind of thing; you can write to your papa when we come to Chester. We shan't see him for Heaven knows how long — he may have left London by this time; and he'll write to Golden Friars — and now that I think of it — oh! how am I to live through all this! — I forgot to tell the people there where to send our letters. Oh! dear, oh! dear, it is such a muddle! And I could not have told them, literally, for I don't know where we are going. We had better just stay at Chester till he comes, whenever that may be; and I really could just lie down and cry."

I was glad we were to ourselves, for mamma's looks and tones were so utterly despairing that in a railway carriage we should have made quite an excitement. In such matters mamma was very easy to persuade by any one who would take the trouble of thinking on himself, and she consented to come to Malory instead; and there, accordingly, we arrived next day, much to the surprise of Rebecca Torkill, who received us with a very glad welcome, solemnized a little by a housekeeper's responsibilities.

Mamma enjoyed her simple life here wonderfully — more, a great deal, than I had ventured to hope. She seemed to me naturally made for a rural life, though fate had consigned her to a town one. She reminded me of the German prince mentioned in Tom Moore's journal, who had a great taste for navigation, but whose principality unfortunately was inland.

Papa did not arrive until the day before that fixed for his and mamma's visit to Dromelton. He was in high spirits, everything was doing well; his canvass was prospering, and now Lady Lorrimer's conversation at parting, as reported by mamma, lighted up the uncertain future with a steady glory, and set his sanguine spirit in a blaze. Attorneys, foreclosures, bills of exchange hovering threateningly in the air, and biding their brief time to pounce upon him, all lost their horrors, for a little, in the exhilarating news.

Mamma had been expecting a letter from Lady Lorrimer — one, at length, arrived this morning. Papa had walked round by the mill-road to visit old Captain Etheridge. Mamma and I were in the drawingroom as she read it. It was a long one. She looked gloomy, and said, when she had come to the end:

"I was right — it was not worth trying. I'm afraid this will vex your papa. You may read it. You heard Aunt Lorrimer talk about it. Yes, I was right. She was a great deal too sanguine."

I read as follows: —

"My Dearest Mabel, — I have a disagreeable letter to write. You desired me to relate with rigour every savage thing he said — I mean Harry Rokestone, of course — and I must keep my promise, although I think you will hate me for it. I had almost given him up, and thinking that for some reason he was resolved to forget his usual visit to me, and I being equally determined to make him see me, was this morning thinking of writing him a little cousinly note, to say that I was going to see him in his melancholy castle. But to-day, at about one, there came on one of those fine thunderstorms among the fells that you used to admire so much. It grew awfully dark — portentous omen! — and some enormous drops of rain, as big as bullets, came smacking down upon the window-stone. Perhaps these drove him in; for in he came, announced by the waiter, exactly as a very much nearer clap of thunder startled all the echoes of Golden Friars into a hundred reverberations; a finer heralding, and much more characteristic of the scene and man than that flourish of trumpets to which kings always enter in Shakespeare. In he came, my dear Mabel, looking so kinglike, and as tall as the Catstean on Dardale Moss, and gloomy as the sky. He is as like Allan Macaulay, in the 'Legend of Montrose,' as ever. A huge dog, one of that grand sort you remember long ago at Dorracleugh, came striding in beside him. He used to smile long ago. But it is many years, you know, since fortune killed that smile; and he took my poor thin fingers in his colossal hand, with what Clarendon calls a 'glooming' countenance. We talked for some time as well as the thunder and the clatter of the rain, mixed with hail, would let us.

"By the time its violence was a little abated, I, being as you know, not a bad diplomatist, managed, without startling him, to bring him face to face with the subject on which I wished to move him. I may as well tell you at once, my dear Mabel, I might just as well (to return to my old simile) have tried to move the Catstean. When I described the danger in which the proceedings would involve you, as well as your husband, he suddenly smiled; it was his first smile, so far as I remember, for many a day. It was not pleasant sunlight — it was more like the glare of the lightning.

"'We have not very far to travel in life's journey,' I said, 'you and I. We have had our enemies and our quarrels, and fought our battles stoutly enough. It is time we should forget and forgive.'

"'I have forgotten a great deal,' he answered. 'I'll forgive nothing.'

"'You can't mean you have forgotten pretty Mabel?' I exclaimed.

"'Let me bury my dead out of my sight,' was all he said. He did not say it kindly. It was spoken sulkily and peremptorily.

"'Well, Harry,' I said, returning upon his former speech, 'I can't suppose you really intend to forgive nothing.'

"'It is a hypocritical world,' he answered. 'If it were anything else, every one would confess what every one knows, that no one ever forgave any one anything since man was created.'

"'Am I, then, to assume that you will prosecute this matter, to their ruin, through revenge?' I asked, rather harshly.

"'Certainly not,' said he. 'That feud is dead and rotten. It is twenty years and more since I saw them. I'm tired of their names. The man I sometimes remember — I'd like to see him flung over the crags of Darness Heugh — but the girl I never think of — she's clean forgot. To me they are total strangers. I'm a trustee in this matter; why should I swerve from my duty, and incur, perhaps, a danger for those whom I know not?'

"'You are not obliged to do this — you know you are not,' I urged. 'You have the power, that's all, and you choose to exercise it.'

"'Amen, so be it; and now we've said enough,' he replied.

"'No,' I answered, warmly, for it was impossible to be diplomatic with a man like this. 'I must say a word more. I ask you only to treat them as you describe them, that is as strangers. You would not put yourself out of your way to crush a stranger. There was a time when you were kind.'

"'And foolish,' said he.

"'Kind,' I repeated; 'you were a kind man.'

"'The volume of life is full of knowledge,' he answered, 'and I have turned over some pages since then.'

"'A higher knowledge leads us to charity,' I pleaded.

"'The highest to justice,' he said, with a scoff. 'I'm no theologian, but I know that fellow deserves the very worst. He refused to meet me, when a crack or two of a pistol might have blown away our feud, since so you call it — feud with such a mafflin!' Every now and then, when he is excited, out pops one of these strange words. They came very often in this conversation, but I don't remember them. 'The mafflin! the coward!'

"I give you his words; his truculent looks I can't give you. It is plain he has not forgiven him, and never will. Your husband, we all know, did perfectly right in declining that wild challenge. All his friends so advised him. I was very near saying a foolish thing about you, but I saw it in time, and turned my sentence differently; and when I had done, he said:

"'I am going now — the shower is over.' He took my hand, and said 'Goodbye.' But he held it still, and looking me in the face with his gloomy eyes, he added: 'See, I like you well; but if you will talk of those people, or so much as mention their names again, we meet as friends no more.'

"'Think better of it, do, Harry,' I called after him, but he was already clanking over the lobby in his cyclopean shoes. Whether he heard me or not, he walked down the stairs, with his big brute at his heels, without once looking over his shoulder.

"And now, dear Mabel, I have told you everything. You are, of course, to take for granted those Northumbrian words and idioms which drop from him, as I reminded you, as he grows warm in discussion. This is a 'report' rather than a letter, and I have sat up very late to finish it, and I send it to the postoffice before I go to bed. Good night, and Heaven bless you, and I hope this gloomy letter may not vex you as much as its purport does me; disappoint you, judging from what you said to me when we talked the matter over, I scarcely think it can."

There is a Latin proverb, almost the only four words of Latin I possess, which says, *Omne ignotum pro magnifico*, for which, and for its translation, I am obliged to Mr. Carmel: "The unknown is taken for the sublime." I did not at the time at all understand the nature of the danger that threatened, and its vagueness magnified it. Papa came in. He read the letter, and the deeper he got in it the paler his face grew, and the more it darkened. He drew a great breath as he laid it down.

"Well, it's not worse than you expected?" said mamma at last. "I hope not. I've had so much to weary, and worry, and break me down; you have no idea what the journey to the Golden Friars was to me. I have not been at all myself. I've been trying to do too much. Ethel there will tell you all I said to my aunt; and really things go so wrong and so unluckily, no matter what one does, that I almost think I'll go to my bed and cry."

"Yes, dear," said papa, thinking, a little bewildered. "It's — it's — it is — it's very perverse. The old scoundrel! I suppose this is something else."

He took up a letter that had followed him by the same post, and nervously broke the seal. I was watching his face intently as he read. It brightened.

"Here — here's a bit of good luck at last! Where's Mabel? Oh, yes! it's from Cloudesly. There are some leases just expired at Ellenston, and we shall get at least two thousand pounds, he thinks, for renewing. That makes it all right for the present. I wish it had been fifteen hundred more; but it's a great deal better than nothing. We'll tide it over, you'll find." And papa kissed her with effusion.

"And you can give three hundred pounds to Le Panier and Tarlton; they have been sending so often lately," said mamma, recovering from her despondency.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LADY MARDYKES'S BALL.

The autumn deepened, and leaves were brown, and summer's leafy honours spread drifting over the short grass and the forest roots. Winter came, and snow was on the ground, and presently spring began to show its buds, and blades, and earliest flowers; and the London season was again upon us.

Lady Lorrimer had gone, soon after our visit to Golden Friars, to Naples for the winter. She was to pass the summer in Switzerland, and the autumn somewhere in the north of Italy, and again she was to winter in her old quarters at Naples. We had little chance, therefore, of seeing her again in England for more than a year. Her letters were written in varying spirits, sometimes cheery, sometimes *de profundis*. Sometimes she seemed to think that she was just going to break up and sink; and then her next letter would unfold plans looking far into the future, and talking of her next visit to England. There was an uneasy and even violent fluctuation in these accounts, which did not exactly suggest the idea of a merely fanciful invalid. She spoke at times, also, of intense and exhausting pain. And she mentioned that in Paris she had been in the surgeons' hands, and that there was still uncertainty as to what good they might have done her. This may have been at the root of her hysterical vacillations. But, in addition to this, there was something very odd in Lady Lorrimer's correspondence. She had told mamma to write to her once a fortnight, and promised to answer punctually; but nothing could be more irregular. At one time, so long an interval as two whole months passed without bringing a line from her. Then, again, she would complain of mamma's want of punctuality. She seemed to have forgotten things that mamma had told her; and sometimes she alluded to things as if she had told them to mamma, which she had never mentioned before. Either the postoffice was playing tricks with her letters, or poor Lady Lorrimer was losing her head.

I think, if we had been in a quiet place like Malory, we should have been more uneasy about Lady Lorrimer than, in the whirl of London, we had time to be. There was one odd passage in one of her letters; it was as follows: “Send your letters, not by the post, I move about so much; but, when you have an opportunity, send them by a friend. I wish I were happier. I don’t do always as I like. If we were for a time together — but all I do is so uncertain!”

Papa heard more than her letters told of her state of health. A friend of his, who happened to be in Paris at the time, told papa that one of the medical celebrities whom she had consulted there had spoken to him in the most desponding terms of poor Lady Lorrimer’s chances of recovery, I do not know whether it was referable to that account of her state of health or simply to the approach of the time when he was to make his *début* in the House; but the fact is that papa gave a great many dinner-parties this season; and mamma took her drives in a new carriage, with a new and very pretty pair of horses; and a great deal of new plate came home; and it was plain that he was making a fresh start in a style suited to his new position, which he assumed to be certain and near. He was playing rather deep upon this throw. It must be allowed, however, that nothing could look more promising.

Sir Luke Pyneweck, a young man, with an estate and an overpowering influence in the town of Shillingsworth, had sat for three years for that borough, not in the House, but in his carriage, or a Bath-chair, in various watering-places at home and abroad — being, in fact, a miserable invalid. This influential young politician had written a confidential letter, with only two or three slips in spelling and grammar, to his friend the Patronage Secretary, telling him to look out for a man to represent Shillingsworth till he had recovered his health, which was not returning quite so quickly as he expected, and promising his strenuous support to the nominee of the minister. Papa’s confidence, therefore, was very reasonably justified, and the matter was looked upon by those sages of the lobbies who count the shadowy noses of unborn Houses of Commons as settled. It was known that the dissolution would take place early in the autumn.

Presently there came a letter to the “whip,” from his friend Sir Luke Pyneweck, announcing that he was so much better that he had made up his mind to try once more before retiring.

This was a stunning blow to papa. Sir Luke could do without the government better than the government could do without him. And do or say what they might, no one could carry the borough against him. The

Patronage Secretary really liked my father; and, I believe, would have wished him, for many reasons, in the House. But what was to be done? Sir Luke was neither to be managed nor bullied; he was cunning and obstinate. He did not want anything for himself, and did not want anything for any other person. With a patriot of that type who could do anything?

It was a pity the “whip” did not know this before every safe constituency was engaged. A pity papa did not know it before he put an organ into Shillingsworth church, and subscribed six hundred pounds towards the building of the meeting-house. I never saw papa so cast down and excited as he was by this disappointment. Looking very ill, however, he contrived to rally his spirits when he was among his friends, and seemed resolved, one way or other, to conquer fortune.

Balls, dinners, concerts, garden-parties, nevertheless, devoured our time, and our drives, and shopping, and visits went on, as if nothing had happened, and nothing was impending.

Two notable engagements for the next week, because they were connected, in the event, with my strange story, I mention now. On Tuesday there was Lady Mardykes’s ball, on that day week papa had a political party to dinner, among whom were some very considerable names indeed. Lady Mardykes’s balls were always, as you know, among the most brilliant of the season. While dancing one of those quadrilles that give us breathing time between the round dances, I saw a face that riveted my attention, and excited my curiosity. A slight old gentleman, in evening costume, with one of those obsolete under-waistcoats, which seemed to me such a pretty fashion (his was of blue satin), was the person I mean. A forbidding-looking man was this, with a thin face, as brown as a nut, hawk’s eyes and beak, thin lips, and a certain character of dignified ill-temper, and even insolence, which, however, did not prevent its being a very gentlemanlike face. I instantly recognised him as the old man, in the chocolate-coloured coat, who had talked so sharply, as it seemed to me and poor Nelly, with Laura Grey on the Milk-walk, in the shadow of the steep bank and the overhanging trees.

“Who is that old gentleman standing near the door at the end of the room, with that blue satin about his neck? Now he’s speaking to Lady Westerbroke.”

“Oh! that’s Lord Rillingdon,” answered my friend.

"He does not go to many places? I have seen him, I think, but once before," I said.

"No, I fancy he does not care about this sort of thing."

"Doesn't he speak very well? I think I've heard — — "

"Yes, he speaks only in Indian debates. He's very well up on India — he was there, you know."

"Don't you think he looks very cross?" I said.

"They say he is very cross," said my informant, laughing: and here the dance was resumed, and I heard no more of him.

Old Lord Rillingdon had his eyes about him. He seemed, as much as possible, to avoid talking to people, and I thought was looking very busily for somebody. As I now and then saw this old man, who, from time to time, changed his point of observation, my thoughts were busy with Laura Grey, and the pain of my uncertainty returned — pain mingled with remorse. My enjoyment of this scene contrasted with her possible lot, upbraided me, and for a time I wished myself at home.

A little later I thought I saw a face that had not been seen in London for more than a year. I was not quite sure, but I thought I saw Monsieur Droqville. In rooms so crowded, one sometimes has so momentary a peep of a distant face that recognition is uncertain. Very soon I saw him again, and this time I had no doubt whatever. He seemed as usual, chatty, and full of energy; but I soon saw, or at least fancied, that he did not choose to see mamma or me. It is just possible I may have been doing him wrong. I did not see him, it is true, so much as once glance towards us; but Doctor or Monsieur Droqville was a man who saw everything, as Rebecca Torkill would say, with half an eye — always noting everything that passed; full of curiosity, suspicion, and conclusion, and with an eye quick and piercing as a falcon's.

This man, I thought, had seen, and was avoiding us, without wishing to appear to do so. It so happened, however, that some time later, in the tea-room, mamma was placed beside him. I was near enough to hear. Mamma recognised him with a smile and a little bow. He replied with just surprise enough in his looks and tones to imply that he had not known, up to that moment, that she was there.

"You are surprised to see me here?" he said; "I can scarcely believe it myself. I've been away thirteen months — a wanderer all over Europe; and

I shall be off again in a few days. By-the-bye, you hear from Lady Lorrimer sometimes: I saw her at Naples, in January. She was looking flourishing then, but complaining a good deal. She has not been so well since — but I'll look in upon you tomorrow or the next day. I shall be sure to see her again, immediately. Your friends, the Wiclyffs, were at Baden this summer, so were the D'Acres. Lord Charles is to marry that French lady; it turns out she's rather an heiress; it is very nearly arranged, and they seemed all very well pleased. Have you seen my friend Carmel lately?"

"About three weeks ago; he was going to North Wales," she said.

"He is another of those interesting people who are always dying, and never die," said Monsieur Droqville.

I felt a growing disgust for this unfeeling man. He talked a little longer, and then turned to me and said:

"There's one advantage, Miss Ware, in being an old fellow — one can tell a young lady, in such charming and brilliant looks as yours tonight, what he thinks, just as he might give his opinion upon a picture. But I won't venture mine; I'll content myself with making a petition. I only ask that, when you are a very great lady, you'll remember a threadbare doctor, who would be very glad of an humble post about the court, and who is tired of wandering over the world in search of happiness, and finding a fee only once in fifty miles."

I do not know what was in this man's mind at that moment. If he was a Jesuit, he certainly owed very little to those arts and graces of which rumour allows so large a share to the order. But brusque and almost offensive as I thought him, there was something about him that seemed to command acceptance, and carry him everywhere he chose to go. He went away, and I saw him afterwards talking now to one great lady, and now to another. Lord Rillingdon, who looked like the envious witch whom Madame D'Aulnois introduces sometimes at the feasts of her happy kings and queens, throwing a malign gloom on all about them, had vanished.

That night, however, was to recall, as unexpectedly, another face, a more startling reminder of Malory and Laura Grey.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NEWS OF LADY LORRIMER.

Old Lord Verney, of all persons in the world, took a fancy to take me down to the tea-room. I think he believed, as other wiser people did, that papa, who was certainly clever, and a very shrewd club-house politician, might come to be somebody in the House, in time.

As usual, he was telling an interminable story, without point or beginning or end, about himself, and all mixed up with the minister, and the opposition leader, and an amendment, and some dismal bill, that I instantly lost my way in. As we entered the tea-room, a large room opening from the landing, he nodded, without interrupting his story, to a gentleman who was going downstairs. My eye followed this recognition, and I saw a tall, rather good-looking young man. I saw him only for a moment. I was so startled that I involuntarily almost stopped Lord Verney as we passed; but I recovered myself instantly. It was tantalising. He always talks as if he were making a speech; one can't, without rudeness, edge in a word; he is so pompous, I dare not interrupt him. He did that office for himself, however, by taking an ice; and I seized the transitory silence, and instantly asked him the name of the gentleman to whom he had bowed; I thought he said, "Mr. Jennings," and as a clever artist of that odd name had lately painted a portrait of Lord Verney, I was satisfied that I had heard him aright.

This was to be a night of odd recognitions. I was engaged to Lord John Roxford, who came up, and saying, "I think this is our dance, Miss Ware?" took me away, to my great relief, from Lord Verney. Well, we danced and talked a little; and I learned nothing that I remember, except that he was to return to Paris the next day. Before he took me to mamma, however, he said:

"A very dear friend has asked me, as the greatest favour I can do him, to introduce him to you, Miss Ware; you will allow me?"

He repeated, I thought — for he was looking for him, and his face at that moment was turned a little away, and the noise considerable — the same name that Lord Verney had mentioned. As Rebecca Torkill used to say, "my heart jumped into my mouth," as I consented. A moment more, and I found myself actually acquainted with the very man! How strange it seemed! Was that smiling young man of fashion the same I had seen stretched on the rugged peat and roots at Plas Ylwd, with white face and leaden lips, and shirt soaked in blood? He was, with his white-gloved hand on the pier-table beside me, inquiring what dance I could give him. I was engaged for this; but I could not risk the chance of forfeiting my talk with my new acquaintance. I gave it to him, and having the next at my disposal, transferred it to the injured man whom I had ousted.

The squabble, the innocent surprise, the regrets, the other hypocrisies, and finally the compromise over, away we went to take our places in the quadrille. I was glad it was not a round dance. I wanted to hear him talk a little. How strange it seemed to me, standing beside him in this artificial atmosphere of waxlight and music! Each affecting the air of an acquaintance made then and there; each perfectly recognising the other, as we stood side by side talking of the new primo tenore, the play, the Aztecs, and I know not what besides!

This young man's manner was different from what I had been accustomed to in ball-rooms. There was none of the trifling, and no sign of the admiration which the conversation and looks of others seemed to imply. His tone, perfectly gentlemanlike, was merely friendly, and he seemed to take an interest in me, much as I fancied an unknown relation might. We talked of things of no particular interest, until he happened to ask something of my occasional wanderings in the country. It was my opportunity, and I seized it like a general.

"I like the country," I said. "I enjoy it thoroughly; I've lived nearly all my life in the country, in a place I am so fond of, called Malory. I think all about there so beautiful! It is close to Cardyllion — have you ever seen Cardyllion?"

"Yes, I've been to Cardyllion once — only once, I think. I did not see a great deal of it. But you, now, see a great deal more of the country — you have been to the lakes?"

"Oh! yes; but I want to ask how you liked Cardyllion. How long is it since you were there?"

"About two years, or a little more, perhaps," he answered.

"Oh! that's just about the time the Conway Castle was wrecked — how awful that was! I had a companion then, my dearest friend — Laura Grey was her name; she left us so suddenly, when I was away from Malory, and I have never seen her since. I have been longing so to meet any one who could tell me anything about her. You don't happen to know any one, do you, who knows a young lady of that name? I make it a rule to ask every one I can; and I'm sure I shall make her out at last."

"Nothing like perseverance," said he. "I shall be most happy to be enlisted; and if I should light upon a lady of that name, I may tell her that Miss Ware is very well, and happy?"

"No, not happy — at least, not quite happy, until she writes to tell me where she is, or comes to see me; and tell her I could not have believed she would have been so unkind."

Conversations are as suddenly cut short in ball-rooms as they are in a beleaguered city, where the head of one of the interlocutors is carried off by a round-shot. Our dialogue ended with the sudden arrival of the illused man, whom I could no longer postpone, and who carried me off, very much vexed, as you may suppose, and scarcely giving my companion time to make a bow.

Never was "fast dance" so slow as this! At length it was over, and wherever I went my eyes wandered hither and thither in search of the tall young man with whom I had danced. The man who had figured in a scene which had so often returned to my imagination was now gone; I saw him neither in the dancing-rooms nor in any others. By this time there was a constant double current to and from the supper-room, up and down the stairs. As I went down, immediately before me was Monsieur Droqville. He did not follow the stream, but passed into the hall.

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Monsieur Droqville put on his loose black wrapper, and wound a shawl about his throat, and glanced, from habit, with his shrewd, hard eyes at the servants as he passed through them in the hall. He jumped into a cab, told the driver where to stop, lighted a cigar, and smoked.

He got out at the corner of a fashionable but rather dingy street not very far away. Then he dismissed his vehicle, walked up the pavement smoking, passed into a still quieter street, also fashionable, that opens from it at an obtuse angle. Here he walked slowly, and, as it were, softly. The faint echo of his own steps was the only sound that met him as he entered it. He crossed, threw his head back, and shrewdly scanned the upper windows, blowing out a thin stream of tobacco-smoke as he looked.

"Not flown yet, *animula*, *vagula blandula*? Still on the perch," he said, as he crossed the street again.

His cigar was just out, and he threw it away as he reached the steps. He did not need to knock or ring; he admitted himself with a latchkey. A bedroom candlestick in the hall had a candle still burning in it. He took it and walked quietly up. The boards of the stairs and lobbies were bare, and a little dust lay on the wall and bannister, indicating the neglected state of a house abandoned by its tenants for a journey or a very long stay in the country. He opened the back drawingroom door and put his head in. A pair of candles lighted the room. A thin elderly lady, in an odd costume, was the only person there. She wore a white, quilted headcloth, a black robe, and her beads and cross were at her side. She was reading, with spectacles on, a small book which she held open in both hands, as he peeped in. With a slight start she rose. There was a little crucifix on the table, and a coloured print of the Madonna hung on the wall, on the nail from which a Watteau had been temporarily removed.

"Has your patient been anointed yet?" said Monsieur Droqville, in his short nasal tones.

"Not yet, reverend father," she answered. They were both speaking French.

"Has she been since nearly *in articulo*?"

"At about eleven o'clock, reverend father, her soul seemed at her very lips."

"In this complaint so it will often be. Is Sister Cecilia upstairs?"

"Yes, reverend father."

"Father Edwyn here?"

"Yes, reverend father."

He withdrew his head, closed the door, and walked upstairs. He tapped gently at the door of the front bedroom.

A French nun, in a habit precisely similar to that of the lady downstairs, stood noiselessly at the door. She was comparatively young, wore no spectacles, and had a kind and rather sad countenance. He whispered a word to her, heard her answer softly, and then he entered the room with a soundless step — it was thickly carpeted, and furnished luxuriously — and stood at the side of a huge four-post bed, with stately curtains of silk, within which a miserable shrunken old woman, with a face brown as clay, sunk and flaccid, and staring feebly with wide glassy eyes, with her back coiled into a curve, and laden with shawls, was set up, among pillows, breathing, or rather gasping, with difficulty.

Here she was, bent, we may say, in the grip of two murderers, heart complaint and cancer. The irresistible chemistry of death had set in; the return of "earth to earth" was going on. Who could have recognised, in this breathing effigy of death, poor Lady Lorrimer? But disease now and then makes short work of such transformations.

The good nurse here, like the other downstairs, had her little picture against the wall, and had been curtseying and crossing herself before it, in honest prayer for the dying old lady, to whom Monsieur Droqville whispered something, and then leaned his ear close to her lips. He felt her pulse, and said, "Madame has some time still to meditate and pray."

Again his ear was to her lips. "Doubt it not, madame. Every consolation."

She whispered something more; it lasted longer, and was more earnest this time. Her head was nodding on her shoulders, and her eyes were turned up to his dark energetic face, imploringly.

"You can't do that, madame — it is not yours — you have given it to God."

The woman turned her eyes on him with a piteous look.

"No, madame," he said, sharply; "it is too late to withhold a part. This, madame, is temptation — a weakness of earth; the promises are to her that overcometh."

Her only answer was an hysterical whimper and imperfect sobbing.

"Be calm," he resumed. "It is meritorious. Discharge your mind of it, and the memory of your sacrifice will be sweeter, and its promise more glorious the nearer you draw to your darkest hour on earth."

She had another word to say; her fingers were creeping on the coverlet to his hand.

"No, madame, there won't be any struggle — you will faint, that is all, and waken, we trust among the blest. I'm sorry I can't stay just now. But

Father Edwyn is here, and Dr. Garnet.”

Again she turned her wavering head towards him, and lifted her eyes, as if to speak.

“No, no, you must not exert yourself — husband your strength — you’ll want it, madame.”

It was plain, however, she would have one last word more, and a little sourly he stooped his ear again.

“Pardon me, madame, I never said or supposed that after you signed it you were still at liberty to deal with any part; if you have courage to take it back, it is another matter. I won’t send you before the Judge Eternal with a sacrilege in your right hand.”

He spoke quietly, but very sternly, raising his finger upward, with his eyes fixed upon her, while his dark face looked pale.

She answered only with the same helpless whimper. He beckoned to the nun.

“Let me see that book.”

He looked through its pages.

“Read aloud to madame the four first elevations; agony is near.”

As he passed from the room, he beckoned the lady in the religious habit again, and whispered in her ear in the lobby:

“Lock this door, and admit none but those you know.”

He went down this time to the front drawingroom, and entered it suddenly. Mr. Carmel was seated there, with candles beside him, reading. Down went his book instantly, and he rose.

“Our good friend upstairs won’t last beyond three or four hours — possibly five,” began Monsieur Droqville. “Garnet will be here in a few minutes; keep the doors bolted! people might come in and disturb the old lady. You need not mind now. I locked the hall-door as I came in. Why don’t you make more way with Miss Ware? Her mother is no obstacle — favourable rather. Her father is a mere pagan, and never at home; and the girl likes you.”

Mr. Carmel stared.

“Yes, you are blind; but I have my eyes. Why don’t you read your Montaigne? ‘Les agaceries des femmes sont des declarations d’amour.’ You interest her, and yet you profit nothing by your advantage. There she is, romantic, passionate, Quixotic, and makes, without knowing it, a hero of you. You are not what I thought you."

Mr. Carmel's colour flushed to his very temples; he looked pained and agitated; his eyes were lowered before his superior.

"Why need you look like a fool? Understand me," continued Monsieur Droqville, in his grim, harsh nasals. "The weaknesses of human nature are Heaven's opportunities. The godly man knows how to use them with purity. She is not conscious of the position she gives you; but you should understand its powers. You can illuminate, elevate, save her."

He paused for a moment; Mr. Carmel stood before him with his eyes lowered.

"What account am I to give of you?" he resumed. "Remember, you have no business to be afraid. You must use all influences to save a soul, and serve the Church. A good soldier fights with every weapon he has — sword, pistol, bayonet, fist — in the cause of his king. What shall I say of you? A loyal soldier, but wanting head, wanting action, wanting presence of mind. A theorist, a scholar, a deliberator. But not a man for the field; no coup d'oeil, no promptitude, no perception of a great law, where it is opposed by a small quibble, no power of deciding between a trifle and an enormity, between seeing your king robbed or breaking the thief's fingers. Why, can't you see that the power that commands is also the power that absolves? I thought you had tact — I thought you had insinuation. Have I been mistaken? If so, we must cut out other work for you. Have you anything to say?"

He paused only for a second, and in that second Mr. Carmel raised his head to speak; but with a slight downward motion of his hand, and a frown, Droqville silenced him, and proceeded:

"True, I told you not to precipitate matters. But you need not let the fire go out, because I told you not to set the chimney in a blaze. There is Mrs. Ware; her most useful position is where she is, *in equilibrio*. She can serve no one by declaring herself a Catholic; the *eclat* of such a thing would spoil the other mission, that must be conducted with judgment and patience. The old man I told you of is a Puritan, and must see or suspect nothing. While he lives there can be no avowal. But up to that point all must now proceed. Ha! there goes a carriage — that's the third I have heard — Lady Mardykes's party breaking up. The Wares don't return this way. I'll see you again tomorrow. Tonight you accomplish your duty here. The old woman upstairs will scarcely last till dawn."

He nodded and left the room as suddenly as he had entered it.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A LAST LOOK.

At about eleven o'clock next morning, mamma came to my bedside, having thrown her dressing-gown on, and holding a note in her hand. I was awakened by her calling me by my name; and the extraordinary exertion of getting out of her bed at such an hour, the morning after a ball, even if there had not been consternation in her looks, would have satisfied me that something unusual had happened. I sat up staring at her.

"Oh, dear Ethel, here's a note from Doctor Droqville; I'm so shocked — poor, dear Aunt Lorrimer is dead." And mamma burst into tears, and, sobbing, told me to read the note, which, so soon as I had a little collected myself, I did. It said:

"Dear Mrs. Ware, — I could not, of course, last night tell you the sad news about Lady Lorrimer. She arrived, it seems, on Tuesday last, to die in England. On leaving Lady Mardykes's last night, I went to her house to make inquiries; she was good enough to wish to see me. I found her in a most alarming state, and quite conscious of her danger. She was sinking rapidly. I was, therefore, by no means surprised, on calling about half an hour ago, to learn that she was no more. I lose no time in communicating the sad intelligence. It will be consolatory to you to learn that the nurses, who were present during her last moments, tell me that she died without any pain or struggle. I shall call to morrow, as near twelve as I can, to learn whether there is anything in which you think my poor services can be made available. — I remain, dear Mrs. Ware, Ever yours sincerely,

P. Droqville."

I was very sorry. I even shed some tears, a thing oftener written about than done.

Mamma cried for a long time. She had now no near kinswoman left. When we are "pretty well on," and the thinned ranks of one generation only stand between us and death, the disappearance of the old over the verge is a serious matter. Between mamma and Lady Lorrimer, too, there were early recollections and sympathies in common, and the chasm was not so wide.

But for the young, and I was then young, the old seem at best a sort of benevolent ghosts, whose presence, more or less, chills and awes, and whose home is not properly with the younger generation. Their memories are busy with a phantom world that passed away before we were born. They are puckered masks and glassy eyes, peeping from behind the door of the sepulchre that stands ajar, closing little by little to shut them in for ever. I am now but little past forty, yet I feel this isolation stealing upon me. I acquiesce in the law of nature, though it seems a cynical one. I know I am no longer of the young; I grow shy of them; there is a real separation between us.

The world is for the young — it belongs to them, and time makes us ugly, and despised, and solitary, and prepares for our unregretted removal, for nature has ordained that death shall trouble the pleasure and economy of the vigorous, high-spirited world as little as may be.

Mamma was more grieved, a great deal, than I at all expected. I am writing now in solitude, and from my interior convictions, under a sort of obligation to tell, not only nothing but the truth, but the whole truth also; and I confess that mamma was selfish, and, in a degree, exacting. The education of her whole married life had tended to form those habits; but she was also affectionate, and her grief was vehement, and did not subside, as I thought it would, after its first outburst. The only practical result of her grief was a determination to visit the house, and see the remains of the poor lady.

I never could understand the comfort that some people seem to derive from contemplating such a spectacle! To me the sight is simply shocking. Mamma made it a point, however, that I should accompany her. She could not make up her mind to go that day. The next day Doctor Droqville called. Mamma saw him. After they had talked for a little, mamma declared her intention of seeing poor Lady Lorrimer as she lay in her bed.

“Allow me to advise you, as a physician, to do no such thing,” said Droqville. “You’ll inflict a great deal of pain on yourself, and do nobody any good.”

“But unless I see her once more I shall be miserable,” pleaded mamma.

“You have not nerve for such scenes,” he replied; “you’d not be yourself again for a month after.”

I joined my entreaties to Doctor Droqville’s representations, and I thought we had finally prevailed over mamma’s facile will.

He gave us a brief account of Lady Lorrimer's illness and last moments, and then talked on other subjects; finally he said, "You told me you wished me to return a bracelet that does not answer, to St. Aumand, when I pass again through Paris. I find I shall be there in a few days — can you let me have it now?"

Mamma's maid was out, so she went to get it herself, and, while she was away, Doctor Droqville said to me, with rather a stern look:

"Don't you allow her to go; your mamma has a form of the same affection of the heart. We can't tell her that; but quiet nerves are essential to her. She touches the spring of the mischief, and puts it in action at any moment by agitating herself."

"I think she has given up that intention," I answered; "but for Heaven's sake, Doctor Droqville, tell me, is mamma in any danger?"

"No, if she will only keep quiet. She may live for many years to come; but every woman, of course, who has a weakness of the kind, may kill herself easily and quickly; but — I hear her — don't allow her to go."

Mamma returned, and Doctor Droqville soon took his departure, leaving me very miserable, and very much alarmed. She now talked only of postponing her last look at poor Lady Lorrimer until tomorrow. Her vacillations were truly those of weakness, but they were sometimes violent; and when her emotions overcame her indolence, she was not easily managed.

The dark countenance of Doctor Droqville, as he urged his prohibition, excited vague suspicions. It was by no means benevolent — it was grim, and even angry. It struck me instinctively that he might have some motive, other than the kind one which he professed, in wishing to scare away mamma from the house of death.

Doctor Droqville was, I believe, a very clever physician; but his visits to England, being desultory, he could not, of course, take the position of any but an occasional adviser. He had acquired an influence over mamma, and I think if he had been a resident in London, she would have consulted no other. As matters were, however, Sir Jacob Lake was her "physician in ordinary." To him I wrote the moment I had an opportunity, stating what had occurred, enclosing his fee, and begging of him to look in about two next day, on any pretext he could think of, to determine the question.

Next day came, and with two o’clock, just as we were sitting down to lunch, Sir Jacob arrived. I ran up instantly to the drawingroom, leaving mamma to follow, for sages of his kind have not many minutes to throw away. He relieved my mind a little about mamma, but not quite, and before he had spoken half-a-dozen sentences she came in. He made an excuse of poor Lady Lorrimer’s death, and had brought with him two or three letters of hers, describing her case, which he thought might be valuable should any discussion arise respecting the nature of her disease.

The conversation thus directed, I was enabled to put the question on which Doctor Droqville had been so peremptory. Sir Jacob said there was nothing to prevent mamma’s going, and that she was a great deal more likely to be agitated by a dogged opposition to a thing she had so set her heart on.

Now that mamma found herself quite at liberty to go, I think she grew a little frightened. She was looking ill; she had eaten nearly nothing for the last two days, seen nobody but Doctor Droqville and the doctor who had just now called, and her head was full of her mourning and mine. Her grief was very real. Through Lady Lorrimer’s eyes she had been accustomed to look back into her own early life. They had both seen the same scenes and people that she remembered, and now there was no one left with whom she could talk over old times. Mamma was irresolute till late in the afternoon, and then at last she made up her mind.

We drove through half-a-dozen streets. I did not know in what street my poor aunt Lorrimer’s house was. We suddenly pulled up, and the footman came to the door to say that there was a chain across the street at each end. We had nothing for it but to get out and to walk past the paviors who had taken possession of it. The sun was, I suppose, at this time about setting. The sunlight fell faintly on the red brick chimneys above, but all beneath was dark and cold. In its present state it was a melancholy and silent street. It was, I instantly saw, the very same street in which Lady Lorrimer had chosen to pass me by.

“Is that the house, the one with the tan before it?” I asked.

It was. I was now clear upon the point. Into that house I had seen her go. The woman in the odd costume who had walked beside her, Mr. Carmel’s thin figure and melancholy ascetic face, and the silence in which they moved, were all remembered, and recalled the sense of curious mystery with which I had observed the parting, more than two years ago, and mingled an unpleasant ingredient in the gloom that deepened about me as I now approached the door.

It was all to be cleared up soon. The door was instantly opened by a man in black placed in the hall. A man also in black, thin, very perpendicular, with a long neck, sallow face, and black eyes, very stern, passed us by in silence with a glance. He turned about before he reached the hall door, and in a low tone, a little grimly, inquired our business. I told him, and also who we were.

We were standing at the foot of the stairs. On hearing our names he took off his hat, and, more courteously, requested us to wait for a moment where we were, till he should procure a person to conduct us to the room. This man was dressed something in the style of our own High-Church divines, except that his black coat was longer, I think. He had hardly left us when there was a ring at the bell, and a poor woman, holding a little girl by the hand, came in, whispered to the man in the hall, and then, passing us by, went up the stairs in silence and disappeared. They were met by a second clergyman coming down, rather corpulent, with a tallowy countenance and spectacles, who looked at us suspiciously, and went out just as a party of three came into the hall, and passed us by like the former.

Almost immediately the clergyman we had first met returned, and conducted us up the stairs as far as the first landing, where we were met by a lady in a strange brown habit, with a rosary, and a hood over her head, whom I instantly knew to be a nun. We followed her up the stairs. There was a strange air of mystery and of publicity in the proceedings; the house seemed pretty well open to all comers; no one who whispered a few words satisfactorily to the porter in the hall failed to obtain immediate access to the upper floor of the house. Everything was carried on in whispers, and there was a perpetual tramping of feet slowly going up and down stairs.

It was much more silent as we reached the level of the drawingrooms. The nun opened the back drawingroom, and without more ceremony than a quiet movement of her hand, signed to us to go in. I think mamma’s heart half failed her; I almost hoped she would change her mind, for she hesitated, and sighed two or three times heavily, with her hand pressed to her heart, and looked very faint.

The light that escaped through the halfopened door was not that of day, but the light of candles. Mamma took my arm, and in silence hurried me into the room.

Now I will tell you what I saw. The room was hung with black, which probably enhanced the effect of its size, for it appeared very large. The windows were concealed by the hangings of black cloth, which were continued without interruption round all the walls of the room. A great many large wax candles were burning in it, and the black background, reflecting no light, gave to all the objects standing in the room an odd sharpness and relief.

At the far end of the apartment stood a sort of platform, about as wide as a narrow bed, covered with a deep velvet cushion, with a drapery of the same material descending to the floor. On this lay the body of Lady Lorrimer, habited in the robes and hood of the order, I think, of the Carmelites; her hands were placed together on her breast, and her rosary was twined through her fingers. The hood was drawn quite up about the head and cheeks of the corpse. Her dress, the cushion on which she lay, the pillow creased by the pressure of her cold head, were strewn with flowers. I had resolved not to look at it — such sights haunt me afterwards; but an irresistible curiosity overcame me. It was just one momentary glance, but the picture has remained on my inner sight ever since, as if I had gazed for an hour.

There was at the foot of this catafalque an altar, on which was placed a large crucifix; huge candlesticks with tall tapers stood on the floor beside it. Many of the strangers who came in kneeled before the crucifix and prayed, no doubt for the departed spirit. Many smaller crucifixes were hung upon the walls, and before these also others of the visitors from time to time said a prayer. Two nuns stood one at each side of the body, like effigies of contemplation and prayer, telling their beads. It seemed to me that there was a profusion of waxlights. The transition from the grey evening light, darker in the house, into this illumination of tapers, had a strange influence upon my imagination. The reality of the devotion, and the more awful reality of death, quite overpowered the theatrical character of the effect.

I saw the folly of mamma’s irrepressible desire to come here. I thought she was going to faint; I dare say she would have done so, she looked so very ill, but that tears relieved her. They were tears in which grief had but a subordinate share; they were nervous tears, the thunder-shower of the hysteria which had been brewing ever since she had entered the room. I don’t know whether she was sorry that she had come. I am sure she would have been better if she had never wished it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

STORM.

A few days later, mamma and I were talking in the drawingroom, when the door opened, and papa came in, his umbrella in his hand, and his hat on his head, looking as white as death. He stood for a time without speaking. We were both staring in his face, as dumb as he.

"Droqville's a villain!" he said, suddenly. "They have got that miserable old fool's money — every guinea. I told you how it would be, and now it has all happened!"

"What has happened?" asked mamma, still gazing at him, with a look of terror. I was myself freezing with horror. I never saw despair so near the verge of madness in a human face before as in papa's.

"What? We're ruined! If there's fifty pounds in the bank it's all, and only that between us and nothing."

"My God!" exclaimed mamma, whiter than ever, and almost in a whisper.

"Your God! What are you talking about? It is you that have done it all — filling the house with priests and Jesuits. I knew how it would be, you fool!"

Papa was speaking with the sternness of actual fury.

"I'm not to blame — it is not my doing. Frank, for Heaven's sake, don't speak so — you'll drive me mad! I don't know what they have done — I don't understand it!" cried mamma, and burst into a helpless flood of tears.

"You may as well stop that crying — you can do it in the streets by-and-by. Understand it? By Heaven, you'll understand it well enough before long. I hope you may, as you deserve it!"

With those dreadful looks, and a voice hoarse with passion, poor papa strode out of the room, and we heard him shut the hall-door after him with a crash.

We were left with the vaguest ideas of the nature of our misfortune; his agitation was so great as to assure me that an alarming calamity had really befallen us. Mamma cried on. She was frightened by his evident alarm, and outraged by his violence, so shocking in one usually so gay, gentle, and serene. She went up to her room to cry there, and to declare herself the most miserable of women. Her maid gave her sal-volatile, and I, seeing no good or comfort in my presence, ran down to the drawingroom. I had hardly got into the room, when whom should I see arriving at the door in a cab, with some papers in his hand, but Mr. Forrester, papa's principal attorney. I knew papa was out, and I was so afraid of his attorney's going away without giving us any light on the subject of our alarms that I ran downstairs, and told the servant to show him into the dining-room, and on no account to let him go away. I went into the room myself, and there awaited him. In came Mr. Forrester, and looked surprised at finding me only.

"Oh! Mr. Forrester," I said, going quickly to him, and looking up in his eyes, "what is this about Lady Lorrimer, and — are we quite ruined?"

"Ruined?" he repeated. "Oh, dear, not at all," and he threw a cautionary glance towards the door, and lowered his voice a little. "Why should you be ruined? It's only a disappointment. It has been very artfully done, and I was only this moment at the Temple talking the will over with one of the best men at the Bar, to whom I'm to send a brief, though I can't see, myself, any good that is likely to come of it. Everything has been done, you see, under the best possible advice, and all the statutes steered clear of. Her estates were all turned into money — that is, the reversions sold — two years ago. The whole thing is very nearly a quarter of a million, all in money, and the will declares no trust — a simple bequest. I haven't the slightest hope of any case on the ground of undue influence. I daresay she was, in the meaning of the law, a perfectly free agent; and if she was not, depend upon it we shall never find it out."

"But does it do us any particular injury?" I inquired, not understanding one sentence in three that he spoke.

"Why, no injury, except a disappointment. In the natural course of things, all this, or the bulk of it, might very likely have come to you here. But only that. It now goes elsewhere; and I fear there is not the least chance of disturbing it."

"Then we are not ruined?" I repeated.

He looked at me, as if he were not quite sure of my meaning, and with a smile, answered:

"You are not a bit worse off than you were a year ago. She might have left you money, but she could take nothing from you. You have property at

Cardyllion, I think, a place called Malory, and more at Golden Friars, and other things besides. But your country solicitors would know all about those things."

And thus having in some measure reassured me, he took his leave, saying he would go to papa's clubs to look for him.

I ran up to mamma, more cheerful than when I had left her. She, also, was cheered by my report, and being comforted on the immediate subject of her alarm, she began to think that his excitement was due to some fresh disappointment in his electioneering projects, and her resentment at his ill-temper increased.

This was the evening of papa's political dinner-party. A gentleman's party strictly it was to be, and he did not choose to allow poor Aunt Lorrimer's death to prevent it. Perhaps he was sorry now that he had not postponed it; but it was too late to think of that. We were very near the close of the session. The evenings were perceptibly shortening. I remember every particular connected with that evening and night, with a sharp precision.

Papa came in at dusk. He ran upstairs, and before dressing he came into mamma's bedroom, where I was sitting at her bedside. He looked tired and ill, but was comparatively tranquil now.

"Never mind, May," he said; "it will all come right, I daresay. I wish this dinner was not to be till tomorrow. They are talking of putting me up for Dawling. One way or other, we must not despair yet. I'll come up and see you when they go away. We are a small party — only nine, you know — and I don't think there are two among them who won't be of very real use to me. If I get in, I don't despair. I have been very low before, two or three times, and we've got up again. I don't see why we shouldn't now, as we did before."

Judging by his looks, you would have said that papa had just got out of a sick-bed, pale, ill, haggard. He looked at his watch; it was later than he thought, and he went away. We heard him ring for his man, and presently the double knocks began at the hall-door, and his party were arriving. Mamma was not very well, and whenever she was, or fancied herself ill, papa slept in another bedroom, adjoining hers, with a dressing-room off it. Ours was a large house, handsomer than would naturally have fallen to our lot; it had belonged to my grandfather, Lord Chellwood, and when he built the new house in Blank Street settled this upon his younger son.

Mamma and I had some dinner in her room, and some tea there also. She had got over her first alarm. Papa's second visit had been reassuring, and she took it very nearly for granted that, after some harassing delays, and possibly a good deal of worry, the danger, whatever it was, would subside, as similar dangers had subsided before, and things would run again in their accustomed channel.

It was a very animated party; we could hear the muffled sound of their talking and laughing from the drawingroom, where they were now taking their tea and coffee, and talking, as it seemed, nearly all together. At length, however, the feast was ended, the guests departed, and papa, according to promise, came upstairs, and, with hardly a knock at the door, came in. Had he been drinking more than usual? I don't know. He was in high spirits. He was excited, and looked flushed, and talked incessantly, and laughed ever so much at what seemed to me very indifferent jokes.

I tried to edge in a question or two about the election matters, but he did not seem to mind, or even to hear what I said, but rattled and laughed on in the same breathless spirits.

"I'm going to bed now," he said, suddenly. "I've ever so much to do tomorrow, and I'm tired. I shall be glad when this thing is all ended."

Mamma called after him, "But you did not bid us goodnight." The candle, however, vanished through the second bedroom into the dressing-room, and we heard him shut the door.

"He did not hear," said mamma; "his head is so full of his election. He seems very well. I suppose everything will be right, after all."

So mamma and I talked on for a little; but it was high time that she should settle to rest. I kissed her, and away I went to my own room. There my maid, as she brushed my hair, told me all the rumours of the servants' hall and the housekeeper's room about papa's electioneering prospects. All promised great things, and, absurd as these visions were, there was something cheering in listening to them. It was past twelve by the time my maid left me.

Very shortly after I heard a step come to my door, and papa asked, "Can I come in, dear, to say a word?"

"Oh! yes; certainly, papa," I answered, a little curious.

"I won't sit down," he said, looking round the room vaguely. He laid his candle on my table; he had a small box in his hand, in which mamma had told me he kept little lozenges of opium, his use of which had lately given her a great deal of secret uneasiness. “I have found it all out. It was that villain Droqville who did it all. He has brought us very low — broken my heart, my poor child!” He heaved a great sigh. “If that woman had never lived, if we had never heard of her, I should not have been so improvident. But that’s all over. You must read your Bible, Ethel; it is a good book; there’s something in it — something in it. That governess, Miss Grey, was a good woman. I say you are young; you are not spoiled yet. You must read a little bit every night, or I’ll come and scold you. Do you mind? You look very well, Ethel. You must not let your spirits down — your courage. I wish it was morning. All in good time. Get to sleep, darling. Good night — goodbye.” He kissed me on the cheek and departed.

I was soon fast asleep. I think the occurrences of the earlier part of the day had made me nervous. I awoke with a start, and a vague consciousness of having been in the midst of an unpleasant dream. I thought I heard mamma call me. I jumped out of bed, threw my dressing-gown about me, and, with bare feet, walked along the lobby, now quite dark, towards mamma’s door. When I got almost to it I suddenly recollected that I could not have heard mamma’s voice in my room from hers. In total darkness, solitude, and silence, I experienced the sort of chill which accompanies the discovery of such an illusion. I was just turning about, to make a hasty retreat to my own room, when I did hear mamma’s voice. I heard her call papa’s name, and then there was a silence. I changed my mind. I went on, and tapped at her door. Rather nervously she asked, “Who’s there?” and on hearing me answer, told me to come in. There was only the night-light she usually had burning in her room. She was sitting up in her bed, and told me she had been startled by seeing papa looking in at the door (she nodded toward the one that opened to his bedroom). The night-light was placed on a little table close beside it.

“And oh! my dear Ethel, he looked so horribly ill I was frightened; I hardly knew him, and I called to him, but he only said, ‘That’s enough,’ and drew back, and shut the door. He looked so ill, that I should have followed him in, but I found the door locked, and I heard him shut the door of his dressing-room. Do you think he is ill?”

“Oh! no, mamma; if he had been ill he’d have told you so; I’m sure it was the miserable light in this room — everything looks so strange in it.” And so with a few words more we bid goodnight once again; and, having seen her reclining with her head on her pillow, I made my way back again to my own room.

I felt very uncomfortable; the few words mamma had said presented an image that somehow was mysterious and ill-omened. I held my door open, and listened with my head stretched into the dark. Papa's dressing-room door was nearly opposite. I was reassured by hearing his step on the floor; then I heard something move; I closed my door once more, and got into bed.

The laws of acoustics are, I believe, well ascertained; and, of course, they never vary. But their action, I confess, has often puzzled me.

In the house where I now write, there are two rooms separated only by a narrow passage, in one of which, under a surgical operation, three dreadful shrieks were uttered, not one of which was, even faintly, heard in the other room, where two near and loving relations awaited the result in the silence and agony of suspense. In the same way, but not so strikingly, because the interposing space is considerably greater, no sound was ever heard in mamma's room, from papa's dressing-room, when the doors were shut. But from my door, when the rest of the house was silent, you could very distinctly hear a heavy step, or any other noise, in that room.

My visit to mamma's room had, as nurses say, "put my sleep astray," and I lay awake until I began to despair of going to sleep again till morning. From my meditations in the dead silence, I was suddenly startled by a sound like the clapping of the dressing-room door with one violent clang. I jumped up again; I thought I should hear papa's step running down the stairs, and all my wild misgivings returned. I put my head out of the door, and listened. I heard no step — nothing stirring. Once more in my dressing-gown I stole out; his candle was still burning, for I saw a ray of light slanting towards the lobby floor from the keyhole of his room, with the motes quivering in it. It pointed like a wand to something white that lay upon the ground. I remembered that this was the open leaf of the old Bible — too much neglected book, alas! in our house — that had fallen from its little shelf on the lobby, and which I had been specially moved to replace as I passed it an hour or two before, seeing, in my superstitious mood, omens in all things. Hurried on, however, by mamma's voice calling me, I had not carried out my intention.

"Dislodged from your place, you may be," I now thought, as I stooped to take the book in my hand; "but never to be trampled on!"

I was interrupted by a voice, a groan, I thought from inside the dressing-room.

I was not quite certain; staring breathlessly at the door, I listened; no sound followed. I stepped to the door and knocked. No answer came. With my lips close to the door, and my hand upon the handle, I called, "Papa, papa, papa!" I was frightened; I pushed open the door, and hesitated. I called again, "Papa — answer, answer! Are you there, papa?" I was calling upon silence. With a little effort I stepped in.

The candle was burning on the table; there was a film of blue smoke hovering in the air — a faint smell of burning. I saw papa lying on the floor; he appeared to have dropped from the armchair, and to have fallen over on his back; a pistol lay by his halfopen hand; the side of his face looked black and torn, as if a thunderbolt had scorched him, and a stream of blood seemed throbbing from his ear.

The smell of powder, the smoke, the pistol on the ground, told what had happened. Freezing with terror, I screamed the words, "Papa, papa! O God! speak! He's killed!" I was on my knees beside him; he was not quite dead. His eyes were fixed in the earnest stare of the last look, and there was a faint movement of the mouth, as if he were trying to speak. It was only for a few seconds. Then all motion ceased — his jaw fell — he was dead.

I staggered back against the wall, uttering a frightful scream.

Under excitement so tremendous as mine, people, I think, are more than half spiritualized. We seem to find ourselves translated from place to place by thought rather than effort.

It seemed to me only a second after I had left that frightful room, that I stood beside Miss Pounden's bed upstairs. She slept with not only her shutters, but the window open. It was so perfectly silent, the street as well as the house, that through the wall from the nursery next door I could faintly hear a little baby crying. The moonlight shone dazzlingly on the white curtains of Miss Pounden's bed. I shook her by the shoulder, and called her. She started up, and I remember the odd effect of her wide open eyes, lighted by the white reflection, and staring from the shadow at me with a horror that she caught from my looks.

“Merciful Heaven! Miss Ware — my dear child — why are you here? — what is it?”

“Come with me; we must get help. Papa is dreadfully hurt in the dressing-room. Mamma knows nothing of it; don’t say a word as you pass her door.”

Together we went down, steadily drawing towards the awful room, from which we saw, at the end of the dark passage, the faint flush of the candle fall on the carpet.

When I told Miss Pounden what had happened, nothing would induce her to come with me beyond the lobby. I had to go into the room alone; I had to look in to be sure that he was actually dead. Oh! it was appalling, incredible. I, Ethel Ware, looking at my handsome, gay, goodnatured father, killed by his own hands, the smoke of the fatal shot not yet quite cleared away! Why was there no pitying angel near to call me but a minute earlier? My tap at the door would have arrested his hand, and the moment of temptation would have passed harmlessly by. All too late — for time and eternity all is irretrievable now. One glance was sufficient. I could not breathe; I could not, for some dreadful moments, withdraw my eyes. With a faint cry, I stepped backward. I was trembling violently as I asked Miss Pounden to send any one of the servants for Sir Jacob Lake, and to tell whoever was going not to leave his house without him.

I waited in the drawingroom while she went down, and I heard her call to the servants over the stairs. The message was soon arranged, and the messenger gone. I had not cried all this time; I continued walking quickly about the drawingroom, with my hands clenched together, talking wildly to myself and to God. When Miss Pounden returned, I implored of her not to leave me.

“Come up to my room; we’ll wait there till Sir Jacob Lake comes. Mamma must not know it, except as he advises. If she learned it too suddenly, she would lose her mind.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FAREWELL, MISS WARE.

I do not mean to describe the terrible scenes that followed. When death comes attended with a scandal like this, every recollection connected with it is torture. The gross and ghastly publicity, the merciless prying into details, and over all the gloom of the maddest and most mysterious of crimes! You look in vain in the shadow for the consoling image of hope and repose; a medium is spread around that discolours and horrifies, and the Tempter seems to haunt the house.

Then, the outrage of a public tribunal canvassing the agitations and depressions of "the deceased" in the house which within a few days was his own, handling the fatal pistol, discussing the wounds, the silent records of a mental agony that happy men cannot even imagine, and that will for life darken the secret reveries of those who loved the dead!

But as one of our proverbs, old as the days of Glastonbury, says:

"Be the day never so long,
At length cometh the even song."

Mamma is now in her crape and widow's cap; I in my deep mourning also, laden with crape. A great many people have called to inquire, and have left cards. A few notes, which could not be withheld, of embarrassed condolence, have come from the more intimate, who thought themselves obliged to make that sacrifice and exertion. Two or three were very kind indeed. Sore does one feel at the desertions that attend a great and sudden change of fortune. But I do not, on fairly thinking it over, believe that there is more selfishness or less goodnature in the world in which we were living than in that wider world which lies at a lower social level. We are too ready to take the intimacies of pleasure or mere convenience as meaning a great deal more than they ever fairly can mean. They are not contracted to involve the liabilities of friendship. If they did, they would be inconveniently few. You must not expect people to sacrifice themselves for you merely because they think you good company or have similar tastes. When you begin the *facilis deccensus*, people won't walk with you very far on the way. The most you can expect is a graceful, and sometimes a compassionate, farewell.

It was about a fortnight after poor papa's death that some law-papers came, which, understanding as little about such matters as most young ladies do, I sent, with mamma's approval, to Mr. Forrester, who, I mentioned, had been poor papa's man of business in town.

Next day he called. I was with mamma in her room at the time, and the servant came up with a little pencilled note. It said, "The papers are important, and the matter must be looked after immediately, to prevent unpleasantness." Mamma and I were both startled. "Business," which we had never heard of before, now met us sternly face to face, and demanded instant attention. The servant said that Mr. Forrester was waiting in the drawingroom, to know whether mamma wished to see him. She asked me to go down instead, which accordingly I did.

As I entered, he was standing looking from the window with a thoughtful and rather disgusted countenance, as if he had something disagreeable to tell. He came forward and spoke very kindly, and then told me that the papers were notices to the effect that unless certain mortgages were paid off upon a certain early day, which was named, the house and furniture would be sold. He saw how startled I was. He looked very kindly, and as if he pitied me.

"Has your mamma any relation, who understands business, to advise with under her present circumstances?" he asked.

"Chellwood, I think, ought," I began.

"I know. But this will be very troublesome; and they say Lord Chellwood is not a man of business. He'll never undertake it, I'm sure. We can try, if you like; but I think it is merely losing time and a sheet of paper, and he's abroad, I know, at Vichy; for I wrote to him to try to induce him to take an assignment of this very mortgage, and he would not, or said he could not, which means the same thing. I don't think he'll put himself out of his way for anybody. Can you think of no one else?"

"We have very few kinsmen," I answered; "they are too remote, and we know too little about them, to have any chance of their taking any trouble for us."

"But there was a family named Rokestone connected with you at Golden Friars?"

"There is only Sir Harry Rokestone, and he is not friendly. We have reason to know he is very much the reverse," I answered.

"I hope, Miss Ware, you won't think me impertinent, but it is right you should ascertain, without further loss of time, how you stand. There are expenses going on. And all I positively know is that poor Mr. Ware's affairs are left in a very entangled state. Does your mamma know what balance there is in the bank?"

"How much money in the bank?" I repeated. "Papa said there was fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds! Oh, there must be more than that," he replied, and looked down, with a frown, upon the floor, and, with his hands in his pockets, meditated for a minute or two.

"I don't like acting alone, if it can be helped," he began again; "but if Mrs. Ware, your mamma, wishes it, I'll write to the different professional men, Mr. Jarlcot at Golden Friars, and Mr. Williams at Cardyllion, and the two solicitors in the south of England, and I'll ascertain for her, as nearly as we can, what is left, and how everything stands, and we must learn at the bank what balance stands to your credit. But I think your mamma should know that she can't possibly afford to live in the way she has been accustomed to, and it would only be prudent and right that she should give all the servants, except two or three whom she can't do without, notice of discharge. Is there a will?"

"I don't know. I think not — mamma thinks not," I said.

"I don't believe there is," he added. "It's not likely, and the law makes as good a will for him as he could have made for himself." He thought for a minute, and then went on. "I felt a great reluctance, Miss Ware, to talk upon these unpleasant subjects: but it would not have been either kind or honest to be silent. You and your mamma will meet your change of circumstances with good sense and good feeling, I am sure. A very great change, I fear, it will be. You are not to consider me as a professional man, tell your mamma. I am acting as a friend. I wish to do all I can to prevent expense, and to put you in possession of the facts as quickly and clearly as I can, and then you will know exactly the case you have to deal with."

He took his leave, with the same air of care, thought, and suppressed fuss which belongs to the overworked man of business.

When these people make a present of their time, they are giving us something more than gold. I was not half grateful enough to him then. Thought and years have enabled me to estimate his goodnature.

I was standing at the window of a back drawingroom, a rather dark room, pondering on the kind but alarming words, at which, as at the sound of a bell, the curtain seemed to rise for a new act in my life. These worldly terrors were mingling a new poison in my grief. The vulgar troubles, which are the hardest to bear, were near us. At this inopportune moment I heard the servant announce some one, and, looking over my shoulder quickly, I saw Mr. Carmel come in. I felt myself grow pale. I saw his eye wander for a moment in search, I fancied, of mamma. I did not speak or move. The mirror reflected my figure back upon myself as I turned towards him. What did he see? Not quite the same Ethel Ware he had been accustomed to. My mourning-dress made me look taller, thinner, and paler than before. I could not have expected to see him; I looked, I suppose, as I felt, excited, proud, pained, resentful.

He came near; his dark eyes looked at me inquiringly. He extended his hand, hesitated, and said:

"I am afraid I did wrong. I ought not to have asked to see you."

"We have not seen anyone — mamma or I — except one old friend, who came a little time ago."

My own voice sounded cold and strange in my ear; I felt angry and contemptuous. Had I not reason? I did not give him my hand, or appear to perceive that he had advanced his. I could see, though I did not look direct at him, that he seemed pained.

"I thought, perhaps, that I had some claim, also, as an old friend," he began, and paused.

"Oh! I quite forgot that," I repeated, in the same tones; "an old friend, to be sure." I felt that I smiled bitterly.

"You look at me as if you hated me, Miss Ware," he said— "why should you? What have I done?"

"Why do you ask me? Ask yourself. Look into your conscience. I think, Mr. Carmel, you are the last person who should have come here."

"I won't affect to misunderstand you; you think I influenced Lady Lorrimer," he said.

"The whole thing is coarse and odious," I said. "I hate to speak or think of it; but, shocking as it is, I must. Lady Lorrimer had no near relations but mamma; and she intended — she told her so in my hearing — leaving money to her by her will. It is, I think, natural and right that people should leave their money to those they love — their own kindred — and not to strangers. I would not complain if Lady Lorrimer had acted of her own thought and will in the matter. But it was far otherwise; a lady, nervous and broken in health, was terrified, as death approached, by people, of whom you were one, and thus constrained to give all she possessed into the hands of strangers, to forward theological intrigues, of which she could understand nothing. I say it was unnatural, cruel, and rapacious. That kind lady, if she had done as she wished, would have saved us from all our misery."

"Will you believe me, Miss Ware?" he said, in the lowest possible tones, grasping the back of the chair, on which his hand rested, very hard, "I never knew, heard, or suspected that Lady Lorrimer had asked or received any advice respecting that will, which I see has been publicly criticised in some of the papers. I never so much as heard that she had made a will. I entreat, Miss Ware, that you will believe me."

"In matters where your Church is concerned, Mr. Carmel, I have heard that prevarication is a merit. With respect to all that concerns poor Lady Lorrimer, I shall never willingly hear another word from you, nor ever speak to you again."

I turned to the window, and looked out for a minute or two, with my fingers on the window-sash. Then I turned again rather suddenly. He was standing on the same spot, in the same attitude, his hands clasped together, his head lowered, his eyes fixed in a reverie on the ground, and I thought I saw the trace of tears on his cheek.

My moving recalled him, and he instantly looked up and said:

"Let me say a word — whatever sacrifice my holy calling may impose, I accept with gratitude to Heaven. We are not pressed into this service — we are volunteers. The bride at the altar never took vow more freely. We have sworn to obey, to suffer, to fight, to die. Forewarned, and with our eyes opened, we have cast all behind us: the vanities, hopes, and affections of mortality — according to the word of God, hating father, mother, sister, brother; we take up the heavy cross, and follow in the bloodstained footsteps of our Master, pressing forward; with blind obedience and desperate stoicism, we smile at hunger, thirst, heat and cold, sickness, perils, bonds, and death. Such soldiers, you are right in thinking, will dare everything but treason. If I had been commanded to withhold information from my dearest friend, to practise any secresy, or to exert for a given object any influence, I should have done so. All human friendship is subject with me to these inexorable conditions. Is there any prevarication there? But with respect to Lady Lorrimer's will, I suggested nothing, heard nothing, thought nothing."

All this seemed to me very cool. I was angry. I smiled again, and said:

"You must think all that very childish, Mr. Carmel. You tell me you are ready to mislead me upon any subject, and you expect me to believe you upon this."

"Of course that strikes you," he said, "and I have no answer but this: I have no possible motive in deceiving you — all that is past, inexorable, fixed as death itself!"

"I neither know nor care with what purpose you speak. It is clear to me, Mr. Carmel, that with your principles, as I suppose I must call them, you could be no one's friend, and no one but a fool could be yours. It seems to me you are isolated from all human sympathies; toward such a person I could feel nothing but antipathy and fear; you don't stand before me like a fellow-creature, but like a spirit — and not a good one."

"These principles, Miss Ware, of which you speak so severely, Protestants, the most religious, practise with as little scruple as we, in their warfare, in their litigation, in their diplomacy, in their ordinary business, wherever, in fact, hostile action is suspected. If a Laodicean community were as earnest about winning souls as they are about winning battles, or lawsuits, or money, or elections, we should hear very little of such weak exceptions against the inevitable strategy of zeal and faith."

I made him no answer; perhaps I could not do so at the moment. I was excited; his serene temper made me more so.

"I have described my obligations, Miss Ware," he said. "Your lowest view of them can now charge me with no treachery to you. It is true I cannot be a friend in the sense in which the world reads friendship. My first allegiance is to Heaven; and in the greatest, as in the minutest things, all my obedience is due to that organ of its will which Heaven has placed above me. If all men thought more justly, such relations would not require to be disclosed or defended; they would simply be taken for granted — reason deduces them from the facts of our faith; we are the creatures of one God, who has appointed one Church to be the interpreter of his will upon earth."

"Every traitor is a sophist, sir; I have neither skill nor temper for such discussions," I answered, proving my latter position sufficiently. "I had no idea that you could have thought of visiting here, and I hoped I should have been spared the pain of seeing you again. Nor should I like to continue this conversation, because I might be tempted to say even more pointedly what I think than I care to do. Goodbye, Mr. Carmel, goodbye, sir," I repeated, with a quiet emphasis meant to check, as I thought, his evident intention to speak again.

He so understood it. He paused for a moment, undecided, and then said:

"Am I to understand that you command me to come no more?"

"Certainly," I answered, coldly and angrily.

His hand was on the door, and he asked very gently, but I thought with some little agitation:

"And that you now end our acquaintance?"

"Certainly," I repeated, in the same tone.

"Heaven has sent my share of sorrow," he said; "but no soldier of Christ goes to his grave without many scars. I deserve my wounds and submit. It must be long before we meet again under any circumstances; never, perhaps, in this life."

He looked at me. He was very pale, and his large eyes were full of kindness. He held out his hand to me silently, but I did not take it. He sighed deeply, and placed it again on the handle of the door, and said, very low:

"Farewell, Miss Ware — Ethel — my pupil, and may God for ever bless you!" So the door opened, and he went.

I heard the hall door shut. That sullen sound smote my heart like a signal telling me that my last friend was gone.

Few people who have taken an irrevocable step on impulse, even though they have done rightly, think very clearly immediately after. My own act for a while confounded me. I don't think that Mr. Carmel was formed by nature for deception. I think, in my inmost soul, I believed his denial, and was sure that he had neither act nor part in the management of Lady Lorrimer's will. I know I felt a sort of compunction, and I experienced that melancholy doubt as to having been quite in the right, which sometimes follows an angry scene. In this state I returned to mamma to tell her all that had passed.

CHAPTER XL.

A RAINY DAY.

Mamma knew nothing distinctly about the state of our affairs, but she knew something generally of the provision made at her marriage, and she thought we should have about a thousand a year to live upon.

I could hardly recognise the possibility of this, with Mr. Forrester's forbodings. But if that, or even something like it, were secured to us, we could go down to Malory, and live there very comfortably. Mamma's habits of thinking, and the supine routine of her useless life, had sustained a shock, and her mind seemed now to rest with pleasure on the comparative solitude and quiet of a country life.

All our servants, except one or two, were under notice to go. I had also got leave from mamma to get our plate, horses, carriages, and other superfluous things valued, and fifty other trifling measures taken to expedite the winding-up of our old life, and our entrance upon our new one, the moment Mr. Forrester should tell us that our income was ascertained, and available.

I was longing to be gone, so also was mamma. She seemed very easy about our provision for the future, and I, alternating between an overweening confidence and an irrepressible anxiety, awaited the promised disclosures of Mr. Forrester, which were to end our suspense.

Nearly a fortnight passed before he came again. A note reached us the day before, saying that he would call at four, unless we should write in the meantime to put him off. He did come, and I shall never forget the interview that followed. Mamma and I were sitting in the front drawingroom, expecting him. My heart was trembling. I know of no state so intolerable as suspense upon a vital issue. It is the state in which people in money troubles are, without intermission. How it is lived through for years, as often as it is, and without the loss of reason, is in my eyes the greatest physical and psychological wonder of this sorrowful world.

A gloomier day could hardly have heralded the critical exposition that was to disclose our future lot. A dark sky, clouds dark as coal-smoke, and a steady downpour of rain, large-dropped and violent, that keeps up a loud and gusty drumming on the panes, down which the wet is rushing in rivers. Now and then the noise rises to a point that makes conversation difficult. Every minute at this streaming window I was looking into the street, where cabs and umbrellas, few and far between, were scarcely discoverable through the rivulets that coursed over the glass.

At length I saw a cab, like a waving mass of black mist, halt at the door, and a double knock followed. My breath almost left me. In a minute or two the servant, opening the door, said, "Mr. Forrester," and that gentleman stepped into the gloomy room, with a despatch-box in his hand, looking ominously grave and pale. He took mamma's hand, and looked, I thought, with a kind of doubtful inquiry in her face, as if measuring her strength to bear some unpleasant news. I almost forgot to shake hands with him, I was so horribly eager to hear him speak.

Mamma was much more confident than I, and said, as soon as he had placed his box beside him, and sat down:

"I'm so obliged to you, Mr. Forrester; you have been so extremely kind to us. My daughter told me that you intended making inquiries, and letting us know all you heard; I hope you think it satisfactory?"

He looked down, and shook his head in silence. Mamma flushed very much, and stood up, staring at him, and grew deadly pale.

"It is not — it can't be less — I hope it's not — than nine hundred a year. If it is not that, what is to become of us?"

Mamma's voice sounded hard and stern, though she spoke very low. I, too, was staring at the messenger of fate with all my eyes, and my heart was thumping hard.

"Very far from satisfactory. I wish it were anything at all like the sum you have named," said Mr. Forrester, very dejectedly, but gathering courage for his statement as he proceeded. "I'll tell you, Mrs. Ware, the result of my correspondence, and I am really pained and grieved that I should have such a statement to make. I find that you opened your marriage settlement, except the provision for your daughter, which, I regret to say, is little more than a thousand pounds, and she takes nothing during your life, and then we can't put it down at more than forty pounds a year."

"But — but I want to know," broke in poor mamma, with eyes that glared, and her very lips white, "what there is — how much we have got to live on?”

“I hope from my heart there may be something, Mrs. Ware, but I should not be treating you fairly if I did not tell you frankly that it seems to me a case in which relations ought to come forward.”

I felt so stunned that I could not speak.

“You mean, ask their assistance?” said mamma. “My good God! I can’t — we can’t — I could not do that!”

“Mamma,” said I, with white lips, “had not we better hear all that Mr. Forrester has to tell us?”

“Allow me,” continued mamma, excitedly; “there must be something, Ethel — don’t talk folly. We can live at Malory, and, however small our pittance, we must make it do. But I won’t consent to beg.” Mamma’s colour came again as she said this, with a look of haughty resentment at Mr. Forrester. That poor gentleman seemed distressed, and shifted his position a little uneasily.

“Malory,” he began, “would be a very suitable place, if an income were arranged. But Malory will be in Sir Harry Rokestone’s possession in two or three days, and without his leave you could not get there; and I’m afraid I dare not encourage you to entertain any hopes of a favourable, or even a courteous, hearing in that quarter. Since I had the pleasure of seeing Miss Ware here, about ten days or a fortnight since, I saw Mr. Jarlcot, of Golden Friars; a very intelligent man he evidently is, and does Sir Harry Rokestone’s business in that part of the world, and seemed very friendly; but he says that in that quarter” — Mr. Forrester paused, and shook his head gloomily, looking on the carpet— “we have nothing good to look for. He bears your family, it appears an implacable animosity, and does not scruple to express it in very violent language indeed.”

“I did not know that Sir Harry Rokestone had any claim upon Malory,” said mamma; “I don’t know by what right he can prevent our going into my house.”

“I’m afraid there can be no doubt as to his right as a trustee; but it was not obligatory on him to enforce it. Some charges ought to have been paid off four years ago; it is a very peculiar deed, and, instead of that, interest has been allowed to accumulate. I took the liberty of writing to Sir Harry Rokestone a very strong letter, the day after my last interview with Miss Ware; but he has taken not the slightest notice of it, and that is very nearly a fortnight ago, and Jarlcot seems to think that, if he lets me off with silence, I'm getting off very easily. They all seem afraid of him down there."

I fancied that Mr. Forrester had been talking partly to postpone a moment of pain. If there was a shock coming, he wanted resolution to precipitate the crisis, and looked again with a perplexed and uneasy countenance on the carpet. He glanced at mamma, once or twice, quickly, as if he had nearly made up his mind to break the short silence that had followed. While he was hesitating, however, I was relieved by mamma's speaking, and very much to the point.

"And how much do you think, Mr. Forrester, we shall have to live upon?"

"That," said he, looking steadfastly on the table, with a very gloomy countenance, "is the point on which, I fear, I have nothing satisfactory — or even hopeful," he added, raising his head, and looking a little stern, and even frightened, "to say. You must only look the misfortune in the face; and a great misfortune it is, accustomed as you have been to everything that makes life happy and easy. It is, as I said before, a case in which relations who are wealthy, and well able to do it, should come forward."

"But do say what it is," said mamma, trembling violently. "I shan't be frightened, only say distinctly. Is it only four hundred? — or only three hundred a year?" She paused, looking imploringly at him.

"I should be doing very wrong if I told you there was anything — anything like that — anything whatever certain, in fact, however small. There's nothing certain, and it would be very wrong to mislead you. I don't think the assets and property will be sufficient to pay the debts."

"Great Heaven! Sir — oh! oh! — is there nothing left?"

He shook his head despondingly. The murder was out now; there was no need of any more questioning — no case could be simpler. We were not worth a shilling!

If in my vain and godless days the doctor at my bedside had suddenly told me that I must die before midnight, I could not have been more bewildered. Without knowing what I did, I turned and walked to the window, on which the rain was thundering, and rolling down in rivers. I heard nothing — my ears were stunned.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE FLITTING.

We were ruined! What must the discovery have been to poor mamma? She saw all the monstrous past — the delirium was dissipated. An abyss was between her and her former life. In the moment of social death, all that she was leaving had become almost grotesque, incredibly ghastly. Here in a moment was something worse than poverty, worse even than death.

During papa's life the possibility of those vague vexations known as "difficulties" and "embarrassments," might have occurred to me, but that I should ever have found myself in the plight in which I now stood had never entered my imagination.

Suppose, on a fine evening, a ship, with a crash like a cannon, tears open her planks on a hidden rock, and the water gushes and whirls above the knees, the waists, the throats of the polite people round the tea-table in the state-cabin, without so much as time interposed to say God bless us! between the warning and the catastrophe, and you have our case!

Young ladies, you live in a vague and pleasant dream. Gaslight in your hall and lobbies, wax lights, fires, decorous servants, flowers, spirited horses, millinery, soups and wines, are products of nature, and come of themselves. There is, nevertheless, such a thing as poverty, as there is such a thing as death. We hold them both as doctrines, and, of course, devoutly believe in them, but when either lays its cold hand on your shoulder, and you look it in the face, you are as much appalled as if you had never heard its name before.

Carelessness, indolence, a pleasurable supineness, without any other grievous fault or enormous mistake, had, little by little, prepared all for the catastrophe. Mamma was very ill that night. In the morning Mr. Forrester came again. Mamma could not see him; but I had a long interview with him. He was very kind. I will tell you, in a few words, the upshot of our conference.

In the first place, the rather startling fact was disclosed that we had, in the world, but nine pounds, eight shillings, which mamma happened still to have in her purse, out of her last money for dress. Nine pounds, eight shillings! That was all that interposed between us and the wide republic of beggary. Then Mr. Forrester told me that mamma must positively leave the house in which we were then residing, to avoid being made, as he said, "administratrix in her own wrong," and put to great annoyance, and seeing any little fund that relations might place at her disposal wasted in expenses and possible litigation.

So it was settled we were to leave the house, but where were we to go? That was provided for. Near High Holborn, in a little street entered between two narrow piers, stood an odd and ancient house, as old as the times of James the First, which was about to be taken down to make way for a model lodging-house. The roof was sound, and the drainage good, that was all he could say for it; and he could get us leave to occupy it, free of rent, until its demolition should be commenced. He had, in fact, already arranged that for mamma.

Poor papa had owed him a considerable sum for law costs. He meant, he said, to remit the greater part of it, and whatever the estate might give him, on account of them, he would hand over to mamma. He feared the sum would be a small one. He thought it would hardly amount to a hundred pounds, but in the meantime she could have fifty pounds on account of it.

She might also remove a very little furniture, but no more than would just suffice, in the scantiest way, for our bedrooms and one sitting-room, and such things as a servant might take for the kitchen. He would make himself responsible to the creditors for these.

I need not go further into particulars. Of course there were many details to be adjusted, and the conduct of all these arrangements devolved upon me. Mr. Forrester undertook all the dealings with the servants whom it was necessary to dismiss and pay forthwith.

The house was now very deserted. There was no life in it but that feverish fuss like the preparations that condemned people make for their executions. The arrangements for our sorrowful flight went on like the dismal worry of a sick dream. In our changed state we preferred country servants, and I wrote for good old Rebecca Torkill and one of her rustic maids at Malory, who arrived, and entered on their duties the day before our departure. How outlandish these good creatures appeared when transplanted from the primitive life and surroundings of Malory to the artificial scenes of London!

But how comfortable and kindly was their clumsiness, compared with the cynical politeness and growing contempt of the cosmopolitan servants of London!

Well, at last we were settled in our strange habitation. It was by no means so uncomfortable as you might have supposed. We found ourselves in a sitting-room of handsome dimensions, panelled with oak up to its ceiling, which, however, from the size of the room, appeared rather low. It was richly moulded, after the style of James the First's reign, but the coarse smear of newly-applied whitewash covered its traceries.

Our scanty furniture was collected at the upper end of the apartment, which was covered with a piece of carpet, and shut off from the lower part of the room by a folding screen. Some kind friend had placed flowers in a glass on the table, and three pretty plants in full blow upon the window-stones. Some books from a circulating library were on the table, and some volumes also of engravings. These little signs of care and refinement took off something of the gaunt and desolate character which would have, otherwise, made this habitation terrifying.

A rich man, with such a house in the country, might have made it curiously beautiful; but where it was, tenanted by paupers, and condemned to early demolition, who was to trouble his head about it?

Mamma had been better in the morning, but was now suffering, again, from a violent palpitation, and was sitting up in her bed; it was her own bed, which had been removed for her use. Rebecca Torkill, who had been for some hours managing everything to receive her, was now in her room. I was in our "drawingroom," I suppose I am to call it, quite alone. My elbows rested on the table, my hands were over my eyes, and I was crying vehemently. These were tears neither of cowardice nor of sorrow. They were tears of rage. I was one of those impracticable and defiant spirits who, standing more in need than any other of the chastisements of Heaven, resent its discipline as an outrage, and upbraid its justice with impious fury. I dried my eyes fiercely. I looked round our strange room with a bitter smile. Black oak floor, black oak panelling up to the ceiling; as evening darkened how melancholy this grew!

I looked out of the window. The ruddy sky of evening was fading into grey. A grass-grown brick wall, as old as the house perhaps, and springing from the two piers, enclosed the space once occupied by the street in which it had stood. Nothing now remained of the other houses but high piles of rubbish, broken bricks, and plaster, through which, now and then, a black spar or plank of worn wood was visible in this dismal enclosure; beyond these hillocks of ruin, and the jagged and worn brick wall, were visible the roofs with slates no bigger than oyster-shells, and the clumsy old chimneys of poverty-stricken dwellings, existing on sufferance, and sure to fall before long beneath the pick and crowbar; beyond these melancholy objects spread the expiring glow of sunset with a veil of smoke before it.

As I looked back upon this sombre room, and then out upon the still more gloomy and ruinous prospect, with a feeling of disgust and fear, and the intolerable consciousness that we were here under the coercion of actual poverty, you may fancy what my ruminations were. I don't know whether, in my family, there was a vein of that hereditary melancholy called suicidal. I know I felt, just then, its horrible promptings. Like the invitations of the Erl-king in Goethe's ballad, it "whispered low in mine ear." There is nothing so startling as the first real allurement to this tremendous step. There remains a sense of an actual communication at which mind and soul tremble. I felt it once afterwards.

Its insidiousness and power are felt on starting from the dream, and finding oneself, as I did, alone, with silence and darkness and frightful thoughts. I think that, but for mamma, it would have been irresistible. The sudden exertion of my will, and in spite of my impious mood, I am sure, an inward cry to God for help, scared away the brood that had gathered about me with their soft monotonous seduction. Have you ever experienced the same thing? The temptation breaks from you like a murmur changed to a laugh, and leaves you horrified. I hated life; my energies were dead already. Why should I drag on, with broken heart, in solitude and degradation?

Some pitying angel kept me in remembrance of mamma, sick, helpless, so long and entirely in the habit of leaning upon others for counsel and for action. When sickness follows poverty, fate has little left to inflict. One good thing in our present habitation was the fact of its being as completely out of sight as the inmost cavern of the catacombs. That was consolatory. I felt, at first, as if I never should wish to see the light again. But every expression of life is strong in the young; energy, health, spirits, hope.

The dread of this great downfall began to subside, and I could see a little before me; my head grew clearer, and was already full of plans for earning my bread. That, I dare say, would have been easy enough, if I could have made up my mind to leave mamma, or if she could have consented to part with me. But there were many things I could do at home. Mamma was sometimes better, but her spirits never rallied. She cried almost incessantly; I think she was heartbroken. If she could have given me some of her gentleness, and if I could have inspired her with some of my courage, we should have done better.

The day after our arrival, as I looked out of the window listlessly, I saw a van drive between the piers. Two men were on the driver's seat. They stopped before they had got very far. It was difficult navigation among the promontories and islands of rubbish. The driver turned a disgusted look up towards our windows, and made some remark to his companion. They got down and led the horses with circumspection, and with many turns and windings up to the door, and then began to speak to our servant; but, at this interesting moment, I was summoned by Rebecca Torkill to mamma's room, where I forgot all about the van.

But, on returning a few minutes later, I found a piano in our drawingroom. Our rustic maid had not heard or even asked from whom it came; and when a tuner arrived an hour later, I found that nothing could prevail on him to disclose the name of the person or place from which it had come. It had not any indication but the maker's name and that was no guide.

Two or three days after our flight to this melancholy place, Mr. Forrester called. I saw him in our strange sitting-room. It was pleasant to see a friendly face. He had not many minutes to give me. He listened to my plans, and rather approved of them; told me that he had some clients who might be useful, and that he would make it a point to do what he could with them. Then I thanked him very much for the flowers, and the books, and the piano. But it was not he who had sent them. I began to be rather unpleasantly puzzled about the quarter from which these favours came. Our melancholy habitation must be known to more persons than we supposed. I was thinking uncomfortably on this problem when he went on to say:

"As Mrs. Ware is not well enough to see me, I should like to read to you a draft of the letter I was thinking of sending to-day to Lord Chellwood's house. He's to be home, I understand, for a day or two before the end of this week; and I want to hit him on the wing, if I can."

He then read the letter for me.

"Pray leave out what you say of me," I said.

"Why, Miss Ware?"

"Because, if I can't live by my own labour, I will die," I answered. "I think it is his duty to do something for mamma, who is ill, and the widow of his brother, and who has lost her provision by poor papa's misfortunes; but I mean to work; and I hope to earn quite enough to support me; and if I can't, as I said, I don't wish to live. I will accept nothing from him."

"And why not from him, Miss Ware? You know he's your uncle. Whom could you more naturally look to in such an emergency?"

"He's not my uncle; papa was his half-brother only, by a later marriage. He never liked papa — nor us."

"Never mind — he'll do something. I've had some experience; and I tell you, he can't avoid contributing in a case like this; it comes too near him," said Mr. Forrester.

"I have seen him — I have heard him talk; I know the kind of person he is. I have heard poor papa say, 'I wish some one would relieve Norman's mind: he seems to fancy we have a design on his pocket, or his will. He is always keeping us at arm's-length. I don't think my wife is ever likely to have to ask him for anything.' I have heard poor papa say, I think, those very words. Bread from his hand would choke me, and I can't eat it."

"Well, Miss Ware, if you object to that passage, I shall strike it out, of course. I wrote a second time to Sir Harry Rokestone, and have not yet had a line in reply, and I don't think it likely I ever shall. I'll try him once more; and if that doesn't bring an answer, I think we may let him alone for some time to come."

And now Mr. Forrester took his leave and was gone. The forlorn old house was silent again.

CHAPTER XLII.

A FORLORN HOPE.

Another week passed; mamma was better — not much better in spirits, but very much apparently in health. She was now a good deal more tranquil, though in great affliction. Poor mamma! No book interested her now but the Bible; the great, wise, gentle friend so seldom listened to when all goes well — always called in to console, when others fail.

Mr. Forrester had got me some work to do — work much more interesting than I had proposed for myself. It was to make a translation of a French work for a publisher. For a few days it was simply experimental, but it was found that I did it well and quickly enough; and I calculated that if I could only obtain constant employment of this kind, I might earn about seventy pounds a year. Here was a resource — something between us and actual want — something between me and the terrible condition of dependence. My ambition was humble enough now.

For about two days this discovery of my power, under favourable circumstances, to make sixty or seventy pounds a year, actually cheered me; but this healthier effect was of short duration. The miseries of our situation were too obvious and formidable to be long kept out of view. Gloom and distraction soon returned — the same rebellious violence inflamed by the fresh alarm of mamma’s returning illness.

She was very ill again the night but one after the good news about my translation — breathless, palpitating. I began to grow frightened and desponding about her. I had fancied before that her symptoms were mere indications of her state of mind; but now, when her mind seemed more tranquil, and her nerves quiet, their return was ominous. I was urging her to see Sir Jacob Lake, when Mr. Forrester called, and I went to our drawingroom to see him. He had got a note, cold and petulant, from my uncle, Lord Chellwood, that morning. This letter said that “no person who knew of the number and magnitude of the charges affecting his property could be so unreasonable as to suppose that he could, even if he had the power, which was not quite so clear, think of charging an annuity upon it, however small, for the benefit of any one.” That “he deeply commiserated the distressing circumstances in which poor Frank’s widow found herself; but surely he, Lord Chellwood, was not to blame for it. He had never lost an opportunity of pressing upon his brother the obligation he conceived every married man to be under, to make provision for his wife; and had been at the trouble to show him, by some very pertinent figures, how impracticable it was for him to add to the burdens that weighed on the estates, and how totally he, Lord Chellwood, was without the power of mitigating to any extent the consequences of his rashness, if he should leave his wife without a suitable provision.” So it went on; and ended by saying that “he might possibly be able, next spring, to make — it could be but a small one — a present to the poor lady, who had certainly much to answer for in the imprudent career in which she had contributed to engage her husband, and during which she had wilfully sacrificed her settlement to the pleasures and vanities of an expensive and unsuitable life.” The letter went on in this strain, and hinted that the present he spoke of could not exceed a hundred and fifty pounds, and could not possibly be repeated.

“This looks very black, you see,” said the goodnatured solicitor. “But I hope it may not be quite so bad as he says. If he could be got to do a little more, a small annuity might be purchased.”

I did not like my uncle. It is very hard to get over first impressions, and the repulsion of an entirely uncongenial countenance. There was nothing manly in his face — it was narrow, selfish, conceited. He was pale as wax. He had manners at once dry and languid; and whether it was in his eye or not, I can’t say, but there was something in his look, though he smiled as much as was called for, and never said a disagreeable thing, that conveyed very clearly to me, although neither papa nor mamma seemed to perceive it, that he positively disliked us, each and every one, not even excepting poor, gay, goodnatured papa. We all knew he was stingy; he had one hobby, and that was the nursing and rehabilitation of the estates which had come to him, with the title, in a very crippled state.

With these feelings, and the pride which is strongest in youth, I fancied that I should have died rather than have submitted to the humiliation of accepting, much less asking, money from his hand.

*

I must carry you three weeks further on. It was dark; I can’t tell you now what o’clock it was; I am sure it was not much earlier than nine. I had my cloak and bonnet on; Rebecca Torkill was at my side, and her thin hand was upon my arm.

“And where are you going, my darling, at this time of night?” she said, looking frightened into my face.

“To see Lord Chellwood; to see papa’s unnatural brother; to tell him that mamma must die unless he helps her.”

“But, my child, this is no time — you would not go out through them wicked streets at this hour — you shan’t go!” she said sturdily, taking a firm hold of my arm.

I snatched it from her grasp angrily, and walked quickly away. I looked over my shoulder, as I reached the two piers, and saw the figure of old Rebecca looking black in the doorway, with a background of misty light from the candle at the foot of the stairs. I think she was wavering between the risk of leaving the house and mamma only half protected, and the urgent necessity of pursuing and bringing me back. I was out of her reach, however, before she could make up her mind.

I was walking as quickly as I could through the streets that led towards Regent Street. I had studied them on the map.

These out-of-the-way streets were quiet now, but not deserted; now and then I passed the blaze of a gin-palace. It was a strange fear and excitement to me to be walking through these poor by-streets by gaslight. No fugitive threading the streets of a town in the throes of revolution had a keener sense of danger, or moved with eye and sinew more ready every moment to start from a walk into a run. I suppose they allow poor people, such as I might well be taken for, walking quickly upon their business, to pass undisturbed. I was not molested.

At length I was in Regent Street. I felt safe now; the broad pavement, the stream of traffic, the long line of gas-lamps, and the still open shops, enabled me, without fear, a little to slacken my pace. I required this relief. I had been ill for two days, and was worse. I felt chilly and aguish; I was suffering from one of those stupendous headaches which possibly give the sufferer some idea of the action of that iron “cap of silence” with which, during the reign of good King Bomba, so many Neapolitan citizens were made acquainted. I can afford to speak lightly of it now; but I was very ill. I ought to have been in my bed. Nothing but my tremor about mamma would have given me nerve and strength for this excursion.

She had that day had a sudden return of the breathlessness and palpitation from which she had suffered so much, and I had succeeded in getting Sir Jacob Lake to come to see her.

It was a hurried visit, as his visits always were. He saw her, gave some general directions, wrote a prescription, spoke cheerfully to her, and his manner seemed to say he apprehended nothing. I came with him to the stairs, which we went down together, and in the drawingroom I heard the astounding words that told me mamma could not live many months, and might be carried off at any moment in one of those attacks. He told me to get her to the country, her native air, if that could be managed, immediately. That might prolong her life a little. It was only a chance, and at best a reprieve. But without it he could not answer for a week. He told me that I must be careful not to let mamma know that he thought her in danger. She was in a critical state, and any agitation might be fatal. He took his leave, and I was alone with his dreadful words in my ears.

Now, how was I to carry out his directions? The journey to Golden Friars, as he planned it, would cost us at least twenty pounds, and he ordered claret, then a very expensive wine, for mamma. He did not know that he was carrying away our last guinea in his pocket. I had but half a sovereign and a few shillings in my purse. Mr. Forrester was out of town; and even if he were within reach, it was scarcely likely that he would lend or bestow anything like the sum required. The work was not sufficiently advanced to justify a hope that he would give me, a stranger, a sum of money on account of a task which I might never complete. Poverty had come in its direst shape. In the distraction of that dreadful helplessness my pride broke down. This was the reason of my wild excursion.

As I now walked at a more moderate pace, I felt the effect of my unnatural exertion more painfully — every pulse was a throb of torture. It was an effort to keep my mind clear, and to banish perpetually rising confusions, the incipient exhalations of fever. What drowsiness is to the system in health, this tendency to drop into delirium is to the sick.

I found myself, at length, almost exhausted, at my noble kinsman’s door. I knocked; I asked to see him. The footman did not recognise me. He simply said, looking across the street over my head, with a careless disdain:

“I say, what’s the row, miss?”

Certainly such a visitor as I, and at such an hour, had no very recognisable claim to a ceremonious reception.

“Charles,” I said, “don’t you know me? — Miss Ware.”

The man started a little, looked hard at me, drew himself up formally, as he made his salutation, receding a step, with the hall-door open in his hand.

“Is his lordship at home?” I asked.

“No, miss, he dined out to-day.”

“But I must see him, Charles. If he knew it was I he could not refuse. Tell him mamma is dangerously ill, and I have no one to help me.”

“He is out, miss; and he sleeps out of town — at Colonel Anson’s tonight.”

I uttered an exclamation of despair.

“And when is he to return?”

“He will not be in town again for a fortnight, miss; he’s going to Harleigh Castle.”

I stood on the steps for a minute, stunned by the disappointment, staring helplessly into the man’s face.

“Please, shall I call a cab, miss?”

“No — no,” I said dreamily. I turned and went away quickly. It troubled me little what the servants might say or think of my strange visit.

This blow was distracting. The doctor had distinctly said that mamma’s immediate removal to country air was a necessity.

As people will under excitement, I was walking at the swiftest pace I could. I was pacing under the evergreens of the neighbouring square, back and forward, again and again; I saw young ladies get from a house opposite into a carriage, and drive away, as I once used to do. I hated them — I hated every one who was as fortunate as I once was. I hated the houses on the other side with their well-lighted halls. I hated even the great prosperous shopkeeping class, with their overgrown persons and purses. Why did not fortune take other people, the purse-proud, the scheming, the vicious, the arrogant, the avaricious, instead of us — drag them from their places, and batter and trundle them in the gutter? Here was I, for no fault — none, none! — reduced to a worse plight than a beggar’s. The beggar has been brought up to his calling, and can make something of it; while I could not set about it, had not even that form of pluck which people call meanness, and was quite past the age at which the art is to be learned.

All this time I was growing more and more ill. The breathless walking and the angry agitation were precipitating the fever that was already upon me. I had an increasing horror of the dismal abode which was now my home. Distraction like mine demands rapid locomotion as its proper and only anodyne. Despair and quietude quickly subside into madness.

Some public clock not far off struck the hour; I did not count it; but it reminded me suddenly of the risk of exciting alarm at home by delaying my return. So with an effort, and as it were an awakening, I began to direct my steps homewards. But before I reached that melancholy goal, an astounding adventure was fated to befall me.

CHAPTER XLIII.

COLD STEEL.

I am quite certain now that the impious sophistries to which some proud minds in affliction abandon themselves, are the direful suggestions of intelligences immensely superior in power to themselves. When they call to us in the air we listen; when they knock at the door we go down and open to them; we take them in to sup with us, we make them our guests, they become sojourners in the house, and are about our paths, and about our beds, and spying out all our ways; their thoughts become our thoughts, their wickedness our wickedness, their purposes our purposes, till, without perceiving it, we are their slaves. And then when a fit opportunity presents itself, they make, in Doctor Johnson's phrase, "a snatch of us." Something like this was near happening to me. You shall hear.

I grew, on a sudden, faint and cold; a horror of returning home stole over me. I could not go home, and yet I had no other choice but death. I had scarcely thought of death, when a longing seized me. Death grew so beautiful in my eyes! The false smile, the mysterious welcome, the sweep of deep waters, the vague allurement of a profound endless welcome, drew me on and on.

Two men chatting passed me by as one said to the other, "The tide's full in at Waterloo Bridge now; the moon must look quite lovely there." It was spoken in harmony with my thoughts. I had read in my happier days in the papers how poor girls had ended their misery by climbing over the balustrade of Waterloo Bridge, over the black abyss, dotted with the reflected lamps, and stepping off it into the dark air into death. I was going now to that bridge — people would direct me — by the time I reached it the thoroughfare would be still and deserted enough. I can't say I had determined upon this — I can't say I ever thought about it — it was only that the scene and the event had taken possession of me, with the longing of a child for its home.

The streets were quieter now; but some shops were still open. Among these was a jeweller's. The shutters were up, and only the door open. I stepped in, I don't in the least know why. The fever, I suppose, had touched my brain. There were only three men in the shop — one behind the counter, a smiling, ceremonious man, whom I believe to have been the owner — the two others were customers. One was a young man, sitting on a chair with his elbow on the counter, examining and turning over some jewellery that glittered in a little heap on the counter. The other, older and dressed in black, was leaning over the counter, with his back to me, and discussing, in low, careless tones, the merits of a dagger, which, from their talk, not distinctly heard, I conjectured the young man had been recommending as a specific against garotters. I was in no condition to comprehend or care for the debate. The elder man, as he talked, sometimes laid the little weapon down upon the counter, and sometimes took it up, fitting it in his hand.

The intense light of the gas striking on my eyes made them ache acutely. I don't know why, or how, I entered the shop; I only know that I found myself standing within the door in a blaze of gaslight.

The jeweller, looking at me sharply across the counter, said:

"Well, ma'am?"

I answered:

"Can you give me change for a sovereign?"

I must have been losing my head; for though I spoke in perfect good faith, I had not a shilling about me. It was not forgetfulness, but distinctly an illusion; for I not only had the picture of the imaginary sovereign distinctly before me, but thought I had it actually in my hand.

The jeweller was talking in subdued and urbane accents to his customer, and pointing out, no doubt, the special beauties and workmanship of his *bijouterie*.

"Sorry I can't oblige you; you must try elsewhere," he said, again directing a hard glance at me. I think he was satisfied that I was not a thief; and he continued his talk with the young man who was making his selection, and who was probably a little hard to please. I turned to leave the shop, and the jeweller went into the next room, possibly in search of something more likely to please his fastidious client at the counter.

I had not yet seen the face of either of the visitors to the shop, but I was conscious that the younger of the two had once or twice looked over his shoulder at me. He now said, taking his purse from his pocket — it was but as a parenthesis in his talk with his companion:

“I beg pardon; perhaps I can manage that change for you.”

I drew nearer. What occurred next appeared to me like an incident in a dream, in which our motives are often so obscure that our own acts take us by surprise. Whether it was a mad moment or a lucid moment I don’t know; for in extreme misery, if our courage does not fail us, our thoughts are always wicked.

I stood there, a slight figure, in crape, cloaked, veiled — in pain, giddy, confused. I cannot tell you what interest the commonplace spectacle before me had for me, nor why I stayed there, gazing towards the three gas lamps that seemed each girt with a dazzling halo that made my eyes ache. What sounds and sights smote my sick senses with a jarring recognition? The hard, nasal tones of the elderly man in black, who leaned over the counter, and the pallid, scornful face, with its fine, restless eyes and sinister energy, were those of Monsieur Droqville!

He was talking to his companion, and did not trouble himself to look at me. He little dreamed what an image of death stood at his elbow!

They were not talking any longer about the pretty dagger that lay on the counter, by his open fingers. Monsieur Droqville was now indulging his cynical vein upon another theme. He was finishing a satirical summing up of poor papa’s character. I saw the sneer, the shrug; I heard in his hard, bitter talk the name made sacred to me by unutterable calamity; I listened to the outrage from the lips of the man who had done all. Oh, beloved, ruined father! Can I ever forget the pale smile of despair, the cold, piteous voice with which, on that frightful night, he said, “Droqville has done it all — he has broken my heart.” And here was the very Droqville, with the scoff, the contempt, the triumph in his pitiless face; and poor papa in his bloody shroud, and mamma dying! What cared I what became of me? An icy chill seemed to stream from my brain through me, to my feet, to my finger tips; as a shadow moves, I had leaned over, and the hand that holds this pen had struck the dagger into Droqville’s breast.

In a moment his face darkened, with a horrified, vacant look. His mouth opened, as if to speak or call out, but no sound came; his deep-set eyes, fixed on me, were darkening; he was sinking backward, with a groping motion of his hand, as if to ward off another blow.

Was it real? For a second I stared, freezing with horror; and then, with a gasp, darted through the shopdoor.

An accident, as I afterwards learned, had lamed Droqville's companion, and thus favoured my escape. Before many seconds, however, pursuit was on my track. I soon heard its cry and clatter. The street was empty when I ran out. My echoing steps were the only sound there for some seconds. I fled with the speed of the wind. I turned to the left down a narrow street, and from that to the right into a kind of stable lane. I heard shouting and footsteps in pursuit. I ran for some time, but the shouting of sounds and pursuit continued. My strength failed me; I stopped short behind a kind of buttress, beside a coachhouse gate; I was hardly a second there. An almost suicidal folly prompted me. I know not why, but I stepped out again from my place of concealment, intending to give myself up to my pursuers. I walked slowly back a few steps towards them. One was now close to me. A man without a hat, crying, "Stop, stop, police!" ran furiously past me. It clearly never entered his mind that I, walking slowly towards him, could possibly be the fugitive.

So this moment, as I expected of perdition, passed innocuously by.

By what instinct, chance, or miracle I made the rest of my way home, I know not. When I reached the door-stone, Rebecca Torkill was standing there watching for me in irrepressible panic.

When she was sure it was I, she ran out, crying, "Oh! God be thanked, miss, it's you, my child!" She caught me in her arms, and kissed me with honest vehemence. I did not return her caress — I was worn out; it all seemed like a frightful dream. Her voice sounded ever so far away. I saw her, as raving people see objects mixed with unrealities. I did not say a word as she conveyed me upstairs with her stalwart arm round my waist.

I heard her say, "Your mamma's better; she's quite easy now." I could not say, "Thank God!" I was conscious that I showed no trace of pleasure, nor even of comprehension, in my looks.

She was looking anxiously in my face as she talked to me, and led me into the drawingroom. I did not utter a word, nor look to the right or left. With a moan I sat down on the sofa. I was shivering uncontrollably.

Another phantom was now before me, talking with Rebecca. It was Mr. Carmel; his large, strange eyes — how dark and haggard they looked — fixed on my face with a gaze almost of agony! Something fell from my hand on the table as my fingers relaxed. I had forgotten that I held anything in them. I saw them both look at it, and then on one another with a glance of alarm, and even horror. It was the dagger, stained with blood, that had dropped upon that homely table.

I was unable to follow their talk. I saw him take it up quickly, and look from it to me, and to Rebecca again, with a horrible uncertainty. It was, indeed, a rather sinister waif to find in the hand of a person evidently so ill as I was, especially with a mark of blood also upon that trembling hand. He looked at it again very carefully; then he put it into Rebecca's hand, and said something very earnestly.

They talked on for a time. I neither understood nor cared what they said; nor cared, indeed, at all what became of me.

"You're not hurt, darling?" she whispered, with her earnest old eyes very near mine.

"I? No. Oh, no!" I answered.

"Not with that knife?"

"No," I repeated.

I was rapidly growing worse.

A little time passed thus, and then I saw Mr. Carmel pray with his hands clasped for a few moments, and I heard him distinctly say to Rebecca, "She's very ill. I'll go for the doctor;" and he added some words to her. He looked ghastly pale: as he gazed in my face, his eyes seemed to burn into my brain. Then another figure was added to the group; our maid glided in, and stood beside Rebecca Torkill, and as it seemed to me, murmured vaguely. I could not understand what she or they said. She looked as frightened as the rest. I had perception enough left to feel that they all thought me dying. So the thought filled my darkened mind that I was indeed passing into the state of the dead. The black curtain that had been suspended over me for so long at last descended, and I remember no more for many days and nights.

The secret was, for the present, mine only. I lay, as the old writers say, "at God's mercy," the sword's point at my throat, in the privation, darkness, and utter helplessness of fever. Safe enough it was with me. My brain could recall nothing; my lips were sealed. But though I was speechless, another person was quickly in possession of the secret.

Some weeks, as I have said, are simply struck out of my existence. When gradually the cold, grey light of returning life stole in upon me, I almost hoped it might be fallacious. I hated to come back to the frightful routine of existence. I was so very weak that even after the fever left me I might easily have died at any moment.

I was promoted at length to the easy-chair, in which, in dressing-gown and slippers, people recover from dangerous illness. There, in the listlessness of exhaustion, I used to sit for hours, without reading, without speaking, without even thinking. Gradually, by little, my spirit revived, and, as life returned, the black cares and fears essential to existence glided in, and gathered round with awful faces.

One day old Rebecca, who, no doubt, had long been anxious, asked:

"How did you come by that knife, Miss Ethel, that you fetched home in your hand the night you took ill?"

"A knife? Did I?" I spoke, quietly suppressing my horror. "What was it like?"

I was almost unconscious until then that I had really taken away the dagger in my hand. This speech of Rebecca's nearly killed me. They were the first words I had heard connecting me distinctly with that ghastly scene.

She described it, and repeated her question.

"Where is it?" I asked.

"Mr. Carmel took it away with him," she replied, "the same night."

"Mr. Carmel?" I repeated, remembering with a new terror his connexion with Monsieur Droqville. "You had no business to allow him to see it, much less — good Heaven! — to take it."

I stood up in my terror, but I was too weak, and stumbled back into the chair.

I would answer no question of hers. She saw that she was agitating me, and desisted.

The whole scene in the jeweller's shop remained emblazoned in vivid tints and lights on my memory. But there was something more, and that perhaps the most terrible ingredient in it.

I had recognised another face besides Droqville's. It started between me and the wounded man as I recoiled from my own blow. One hand was extended towards me, to prevent my repeating the stroke — the other held up the wounded man.

Sometimes I doubted whether the whole of that frightful episode was not an illusion. Sometimes it seemed only that the pale face, so much younger and handsomer than Monsieur Droqville's — the fiery eyes, the frown, the scarred forehead, the suspended smile that had for only that dreadful moment started into light before me so close to my face, were those of a spectre.

The young man who had been turning over the jewels at the counter, and who had offered to give me change for my imaginary sovereign, was the very man I had seen shipwrecked at Malory; the man who had in the wood near Plas Ylwd fought that secret duel; and who had afterwards made, with so reckless an audacity, those mad declarations of love to me; the man who, for a time, had so haunted my imagination, and respecting whom I had received warnings so dark and formidable.

Nothing could be more vivid than this picture, nothing more uncertain than its reality. I did not see recognition in the face; all was so instantaneous. Well, I cared not. I was dying. What was the world to me? I had assigned myself to death; and I was willing to accept that fate rather than reascend to my frightful life.

My poor mother, who knew nothing of my strange adventure, had experienced one of those deceitful rallies which sometimes seem to promise a long reprieve, in that form of heart-complaint under which she suffered. She only knew that I had had brain-fever. How near to death I had been she never knew. She was spared, too, the horror of my dreadful adventure. I was now recovering rapidly and surely; but I was so utterly weak and heartbroken that I fancied I must die, and thought that they were either deceived themselves, or trying kindly, but in vain, to deceive me. I was at length convinced by finding myself able, as I have said, to sit up. Mamma was often with me, cheered by my recovery, I dare say she had been more alarmed than Rebecca supposed.

I learned from mamma that the money that had maintained us through my illness had come from Mr. Carmel. Little as it was, it must have cost him exertion to get it; for men in his position cannot, I believe, own money of their own. It was very kind. I said nothing, but I was grateful; his immovable fidelity touched me deeply. I wondered whether Mr. Carmel had often made inquiries during my illness, or had shown an interest in my recovery. But I dared not ask.

CHAPTER XLIV.

AN OMINOUS VISIT.

I have sometimes felt that, even without a revelation, we might have discovered that the human race was born to immortality. Death is an intrusion here. Children can't believe in it. When they see it first, it strikes them with curiosity and wonder. It is a long time before they comprehend its real character, or believe that it is common to all; to the end of our days we are hardly quite sincere when we talk of our own deaths.

Seeing mamma better, I thought no more of her danger than if the angel of death had never been within our doors, and I had never seen the passing shadow of that spectre in her room.

As my strength returned, I grew more and more gloomy and excited. I was haunted by never-slumbering, and very reasonable, forecastings of danger. In the first place, I was quite in the dark as to whether Monsieur Droqville was dangerously or mortally hurt, and I had no way of learning anything of him. Rebecca, it is true, used to take in, for her special edification, a Sunday paper, in which all the horrors of the week were displayed, and she used to con it over regularly, day after day, till the next number made its appearance. If Monsieur Droqville's name, with which she was familiar, had occurred in this odious register, she had at least had a fair chance of seeing it, and if she had seen it, she would be pretty sure to have mentioned it. Secretly, however, I was in miserable fear. Mr. Carmel had not returned since my recovery had ceased to be doubtful, and he was in possession of the weapon that had fallen from my hand.

In his retention of this damning piece of evidence, and his withdrawing himself so carefully from my presence, coupled with my knowledge of the principles that bound him to treat all private considerations, feelings, and friendships as non-existent, when they stood ever so little in the way of his all-pervading and supreme duty to his order — there was a sinister augury. I lived in secret terror; no wonder I was not recovering quickly.

One day, when we had sat a long time silent, I asked Rebecca how I was dressed the night I had gone to Lord Chellwood's. I was immensely relieved when she told me, among other things, that I had worn a thick black veil. This was all I wanted to be assured of; for I could not implicitly rely upon my recollection through the haze and mirage of fever. It was some comfort to think that neither Monsieur Droqville nor Mr. Marston could have recognised my features.

In this state of suspense I continued for two or three weeks. At the end of that time a little adventure happened. I was sitting in an armchair, in our drawingroom, with pillows about me, one afternoon, and had fallen into a doze. Mamma was in the room, and, when I had last seen her, was reading her Bible, which she now did sometimes for hours together — sometimes with tears, always with the trembling interest of one who has lost everything else.

I had fallen asleep. I was waked by tones that terrified me. I thought that I was still dreaming, or that I had lost my reason. I heard the nasal and energetic tones of Monsieur Droqville, talking with his accustomed rapidity in the room — not to mamma, for, as I afterwards found, she had left the room while I was asleep, but to Rebecca.

Happily for me, a screen stood between me and the door, and I suppose he did not know that I was in the room. At every movement of his foot on the floor, at every harsh emphasis in his talk, my heart bounded. I was afraid to move, almost to breathe, lest I should draw his attention to me.

My illness had quite unnerved me. I was afraid that, restless and inquisitive as I knew him to be, he would peep round the screen, and see and talk to me. I did not know the object of his visit; but in terror I surmised it, and I lay among my pillows, motionless, and with my eyes closed, while I heard him examine Rebecca, sharply, as to the date of my illness, and the nature of it.

“When was Miss Ware last out, before her illness?” he asked at length.

“I could not tell you that exactly, sir,” answered Rebecca, evasively. “She left the house but seldom, just before she was took ill; for her mamma being very bad, she was but little out of doors then.”

He made a pretence of learning the facts of my case simply as a physician, and he offered in that capacity to see me at the moment. He asked the question in an offhand way. “I can see her, I dare say? I’m a doctor, you know. Where is Miss Ware?”

The moment of silence that intervened before her answer seemed to me to last five minutes. She answered, however, quite firmly:

"No, sir; I thank you. She's attended by a doctor, quite reg'lar, and she's asleep now."

Rebecca had heard me speak with horror of Monsieur Droqville, and did not forget my antipathy.

He hesitated. I heard his fingers drumming, as he mused, upon the other side of the screen.

"Well," he said, dwelling on the word meditatively, "it doesn't matter much. I don't mind; only it might have been as well. However, you can tell Mrs. Ware a note to my old quarters will find me, and I shall be very happy."

And so saying, I heard him walk, at first slowly, from the room, and then run briskly down the stairs. Then the old hall-door shut smartly after him.

The fear that this man inspired, and not without reason, in my mind, was indescribable. I can't be mistaken in my recollection upon that point, for, as soon as he was gone, I fainted.

When I recovered, my fears returned. No one who has not experienced that solitary horror, knows what it is to keep an undivulged secret, full of danger, every hour inspiring some new terror, with no one to consult, and no courage but your own to draw upon. Even mamma's dejected spirits took fire at what she termed the audacity of Monsieur Droqville's visit. My anger, greater than hers, was silenced by fear. Mamma was roused; she ran volubly — though interrupted by many sobs and gushes of tears — over the catalogue of her wrongs and miseries, all of which she laid to Monsieur Droqville's charge.

The storm blew over, however, in an hour or so. But later in the evening mamma was suffering under a return of her illness, brought on by her agitation. It was not violent; still there was suffering; and, to me, gloomier proof that her malady was established, and the grave in a nearer perspective. This turned my alarms into a new channel.

She was very patient and gentle. As I sat by her bedside, looking at her sad face, what unutterable tenderness, what sorrow trembled at my heart! At about six o'clock she had fallen asleep, and with this quietude my thoughts began to wander, and other fears returned. It was for no good, I was sure, that Monsieur Droqville had tracked us to our dismal abode. Whatever he might do in this affair of my crime, or mania, passion would not guide it, nor merely social considerations; it would be directed by a policy the principles of which I could not anticipate. I had no clue to guide me; I was in utter darkness, and surrounded by all the fancies that imagination conjures from the abyss.

I was not destined to wait very long in uncertainty.

CHAPTER XLV.

CONFIDENTIAL.

The sun was setting, when, on tip-toe, scarcely letting my dress rustle, so afraid I was of disturbing mamma’s sleep, I stole from her room, intending to give some directions to Rebecca Torkill. As I went down the dusky stairs I passed our Malory maid, who said something, pointing to the drawingroom. I saw her lips move, but, as will happen when one is preoccupied, I took in nothing of what she said, but, with a mechanical acquiescence, followed the direction of her hand, and entered the sitting-room.

Our house stood upon high ground, and the nearest houses between our front-windows and the west were low, so that the last beams of sunset, red with smoke and mist, passed over their roofs, and shone dimly on the oak panels opposite. The windows were narrow, and the room rather dark. I saw some one standing at the window-frame in the shade. I was startled, and hesitated, close to the door. The figure turned quickly, the sun glancing on his features. It was Mr. Carmel. He came towards me quickly; and he said, as I fancied, very coldly,

“Can you spare me two or three minutes alone, Miss Ware? I have but little to say,” he added, as I did not answer. “But it is important, and I will make my words as few as possible.”

We were standing close to the door. I assented. He closed it gently, and we walked slowly, side by side, to the window where he had been standing. He turned. The faint sun, like a distant fire, lighted his face. What singular dark eyes he had, so large, so enthusiastic! and had ever human eye such a character of suffering? I knew very well what he was going to speak of. The face, sad, sombre, ascetic, with which I was so familiar, I now, for the first time, understood.

The shadow of the confessional was on it. It was the face of one before whom human nature, in moments of terrible sincerity, had laid bare its direful secrets, and submitted itself to a melancholy anatomisation. To some minds, sympathetic, proud, sensitive the office of the confessor must be full of self-abasement, pain, and horror. We who know our own secrets, and no one else's, know nothing of the astonishment, and melancholy, and disgust that must strike some minds on contemplating the revelations of others, and discovering, for certain, that the standard of human nature is not above such and such a level.

"I have brought you this," he said, scarcely above his breath, holding the knife so that it lay across the hollow of his hand. His haggard eyes were fixed on me, and he said, "I know the whole story of it. Unless you forbid me, I will drop it into the river tonight; it is the evidence of an act for which you are, I thank God, no more accountable than a somnambulist for what she does in her dream. Over Monsieur Droqville I have neither authority nor influence; on the contrary, he can command me. But of this much I am sure — so long as your friends do not attack Lady Lorrimer's will — and I believe they have no idea of taking any such step — you need fear no trouble whatever from him."

I made him no reply, but I think he saw something in my face that made him add, with more emphasis:

"You may be sure of that."

I was immensely and instantly relieved, for I knew that there was not the slightest intention of hazarding any litigation on the subject of the will.

"But," he resumed, in the same cold tones, and with the same anxiety in his dark eyes, "there is a person from whom you may possibly experience annoyance. There are circumstances of which, as yet, you know nothing, that may, not unnaturally, bring you once more into contact with Mr. Marston. If that should happen, you must be on your guard. I understand that he said something that implies his suspicions. It may have been no more than conjecture. It may be that it was impossible he could have recognised you with certainty. If, I repeat, an untoward destiny should bring you together under the same roof, be wise, stand aloof from him, admit nothing; defeat his suspicions and his cunning by impenetrable caution. He has an interest in seeking to disgrace you, and where he has an object to gain he has neither conscience nor mercy. I wish I could inspire you with the horror of that mean and formidable character which so many have acquired by a bitter experience. I can but repeat my warning, and implore of you to act upon it, if the time should come. This thing I retain for the present" — he glanced at the weapon in his hand— "and dispose of it tonight, as I said."

There was no emotion in his manner; no sign of any special interest in me; but his voice and looks were unspeakably earnest, and inspired me with a certain awe.

I had not forgiven Mr. Carmel yet, or rather my pride would not retract; and my parting with him at our former house was fresh in my recollection. So it was, I might suppose, in his; for his manner was cold, and even severe.

"Our old acquaintance ended, Miss Ware, by your command, and, on reflection, with my own willing submission. When last we parted, I thought it unlikely that we should ever meet again, and this interview is not voluntary — necessity compelled it. I have simply done my duty, and, I earnestly hope, not in vain. It must be something very unlooked for, indeed, that shall ever constrain me to trouble you again."

He showed no sign of wishing to bid me a kindlier farewell. The actual, as well as metaphorical, distance between us had widened; he was by this time at the door; he opened it, and took his leave, very coldly. It was very unlike his former parting. I had only said:

"I am very grateful, Mr. Carmel, for your care of me — miserable me!"

He made no answer; he simply repeated his farewell, as gently and coldly as before, and left the room, and I saw him walk away from our door in the fast-fading light. Heavier and heavier was my heart, as I saw him move quickly away. I had yearned, during our cold interview, to put out my hand to him, and ask him, in simple phrase, to make it up with me. I burned to tell him that I had judged him too hardly, and was sorry; but my pride forbade it. His pride too, I thought, had held him aloof, and so I had lost my friend. My eyes filled with tears, that rolled heavily over my cheeks.

I sat at one of our windows, looking, over the distant roofs, towards the discoloured and disappearing tints of evening and the melancholy sky, which even through the smoke of London has its poetry and tenderness, until the light faded, and the moon began to shine through the twilight. Then I went upstairs, and found mamma still sleeping. As I stood by the bed looking at her, Rebecca Torkill at my side whispered:

"She's looking very pale, poor thing, don't you think, miss? Too pale, a deal."

I did think so; but she was sleeping tranquilly. Every change in her looks was now a subject of anxiety, but her hour had not quite come yet. She looked so very pale that I began to fear she had fainted; but she awoke just then, and said she would sit up for a little time. Her colour did not return; she seemed faint, but thought she should be more herself by-and-by.

She came down to the drawingroom, and soon did seem better, and chatted more than she had done, I think, since our awful misfortune had befallen us, and appeared more like her former self; I mean, that simpler and tender self that I had seen far away from artificial London, among the beautiful solitudes of her birthplace.

While we were talking here, Rebecca Torkill, coming in now and then, and lending a word, after the manner of privileged old rustic servants, to keep the conversation going, the business of this story was being transacted in other places.

*

Something of Mr. Carmel's adventures that night I afterwards learned. He had two or three calls to make before he went to his temporary home. A friend had lent him, during his absence abroad, his rooms in the Temple. Arrived there, he let himself in by a latchkey. It was night, the shutters unclosed, the moon shining outside, and its misty beams, slanting in at the dusky windows, touched objects here and there in the dark room with a cold distinctness.

To a man already dejected, what is more dispiriting than a return to empty and unlighted rooms? Mr. Carmel moved like a shadow through this solitude, and in his melancholy listlessness, stood for a time at the window.

Here and there a light, from a window in the black line of buildings opposite, showed that human thought and eyes were busy; but if these points of light and life made the prospect less dismal, they added by contrast to the gloom that pervaded his own chambers.

As he stood, some dimly-seen movement caught his eye, and, looking over his shoulder, he saw the door through which he himself had come in slowly open, and a man put in his head, and then enter silently, and shut the door. This figure, faintly seen in the imperfect light, resembled but one man of all his acquaintance, and he the last man in the world, as he thought, who would have courted a meeting. Carmel stood for a moment startled and chilled by his presence.

"I say, Carmel, don't you know me?" said a very peculiar voice. "I saw you come in, and intended to knock; but you left your door open."

By this time he had reached the window, and stood beside Mr. Carmel, with the moonlight revealing his features sharply enough. That pale light fell upon the remarkable face of Mr. Marston.

"I'm not a ghost, though I've been pretty near it two or three times. I see what you're thinking — death may have taken better men? I might have been very well spared? and having escaped it, I should have laid the lesson to heart? Well, so I have. I was very nearly killed at the great battle of Fuentas. I fought for the Queen of Spain, and be hanged to her! She owes me fifteen pounds ten and elevenpence, British currency, to this day. It only shows my luck. In that general action there were only four living beings hit so as to draw blood — myself, a venerable orange-woman, a priest's mule, and our surgeon-in-chief, whose thumb and razor were broken off by a spent ball, as he was shaving a grenadier, under an umbrella, while the battle was raging. You see the Spaniard is a discreet warrior, and we very seldom got near enough to hurt each other. I was hit by some blundering beast. He must have shut his eyes, like Gil Blas, for there was not a man in either army who could ever hit anything he aimed at. No matter, he very nearly killed me; half an inch higher, and I must have made up my mind to see you, dear Carmel, no more, and to shut my eyes on this sweet, jesuitical world. It was the first ugly wound of the campaign, and the enemy lived for a long time on the reputation of it. But the truth is, I have suffered a great deal in sickness, wounds, and fifty other ways. I have been as miserable a devil as any righteous man could wish me to be; and I am changed; upon my honour, I'm as different a man from what I was as you are from me. But I can't half see you; do light your candles, I entreat."

"Not while you are here," said Carmel.

"Why, what are you afraid of?" said Marston. "You haven't, I hope, got a little French milliner behind your screen, like Joseph Surface, who, I think, would have made a very pretty Jesuit. Why should you object to light?"

"Your ribaldry is out of place here," said Carmel, who knew very well that Marston had not come to talk nonsense, and recount his adventures in Spain; and that his business, whatever it may be, was likely to be odious.

"What right have you to enter my room? What right to speak to me anywhere?"

"Come, Carmel, don't be unreasonable; you know very well I can be of use to you."

"You can be of none," answered Carmel, a little startled; "and if you could, I would not have you. Leave my room, sir."

"You can exorcise some evil spirits, but not me, till I've said my say," answered Marston, with a smile that looked grim and cynical in the moonlight. "I say I can be of use to you."

"It's enough; I won't have it; go," said Carmel, with a sterner emphasis.

Marston smiled again, and looked at him.

"Well, I can be of use," he said, "and I don't want particularly to be of use to you; but you can do me a kindness, and it is better to do it quietly than upon compulsion. Will you be of use to me? I'll show you how?"

"God forbid!" said Carmel, quickly. "It is nothing good, I'm sure."

Marston looked at him with an evil eye; it was a sneer of intense anger.

After some seconds he said, his eyes still fixed askance on Mr. Carmel:

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive, et cæa — eh? I suppose you sometimes pray your paternoster? A pretty time you have kept up that old grudge against me — haven't you — about Ginevra?"

He kept his eyes on Carmel, as if he enjoyed the spectacle of the torture he applied, and liked to see the wince and quiver that accompanied its first thrill.

At the word, Edwyn Carmel's eyes started up from the floor, to which they had been lowered, with a flash to the face of his visitor. His forehead flushed; he remained speechless for some seconds. Marston did not smile; his features were fixed, but there was a secret, cruel smile in his eyes as he watched these evidences of agitation.

"Well, I should not have said the name; I should not have alluded to it; I did wrong," he said, after some seconds; "but I was going, before you riled me, to say how really I blame myself, now, for all that deplorable business. I do, upon my soul! What more can a fellow say, when reparation is impossible, than that he is sorry? Is not repentance all that a man like me can offer? I saw you were thinking of it; you vexed me; I was angry, and I could not help saying what I did. Now do let that miserable subject drop;

and hear me, on quite another, without excitement. It is not asking a great deal."

Carmel placed his hand to his head, as if he had not heard what he said, and then groaned.

"Why don't you leave me?" he said, piteously, turning again towards Marston; "don't you see that nothing but pain and reproach can result from your staying here?"

"Let me first say a word," said Marston; "you can assist me in a very harmless and perfectly unobjectionable matter. Every fellow who wants to turn over a new leaf marries. The lady is poor — there is that proof, at least, that it is not sordid; you know her, you can influence her — — "

"Perhaps I do know her; perhaps I know who she is — I may as well say, at once, I do. I have no influence; and if I had, I would not use it for you. I think I know your reasons, also; I think I can see them."

"Well, suppose there are reasons, it's not the worse for that," said Marston, growing again angry. "I thought I would just come and try whether you chose to be on friendly terms. I'm willing; but if you won't, I can't help you. I'll make use of you all the same. You had better think again. I'm pleasanter as a friend than an enemy."

"I don't fear you as an enemy, and I do fear you as a friend. I will aid you in nothing; I have long made up my mind," answered Carmel, savagely.

"I think, through Monsieur Droqville, I'll manage that. Oh, yes, you will give me a lift."

"Why should Monsieur Droqville control my conduct?" asked Mr. Carmel sharply.

"It was he who made you a Catholic; and I suspect he has a fast hold on your conscience and obedience. If he chooses to promote the matter, I rather think you must."

"You may think as you please," said Carmel.

"That's a great deal from your Church," sneered Marston; and, changing his tone again, he said: "Look here, Carmel, once more; where's the good in our quarrelling? I won't press that other point, if you don't like; but you must do this, the most trifling thing in the world — you must tell me where Mrs. Ware lives. No one knows since old Ware made a fool of himself, poor devil! But I think you'll allow that, with my feelings, I may, at least, speak to the young lady's mother? Do tell me where they are. You know, of course?"

"If I did know, I should not tell you; so it does not matter," answered Carmel.

Marston looked very angry, and a little silence followed.

"I suppose you have now said everything," resumed Carmel; "and again I desire that you will leave me."

"I mean to do so," said Marston, putting on his hat with a kind of emphasis, "though it's hard to leave such romantic, light, and brilliant company. You might have had peace, and you prefer war. I think there are things you have at heart that I could forward, if all went right with me." He paused, but Carmel made no sign. "Well, you take your own way now, not mine; and, by-and-by, I think you'll have reason to regret it."

Marston left the room, with no other farewell. The clap with which he shut the door, as he went, had hardly ceased to ring round the walls, when Carmel saw him emerge in the court below, and walk away with a careless air, humming a tune in the moonlight.

Why is it that there are men upon earth whose secret thoughts are always such as to justify fear; and nearly all whose plans, if not through malice, from some other secret obliquity, involve evil to others? We have most of us known something of some such man; a man whom we are disposed to watch in silence; who, smile as he may, brings with him a sense of insecurity, and whose departure is a real relief. Such a man seems to me a stranger on earth; his confidences to be with unseen companions; his mental enjoyments not human; and his mission here cruel and mysterious. I look back with wonder and with thankfulness. Fearful is the strait of any one who, in the presence of such an influence, under such a fascination, loses the sense of danger.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AFTER OFFICE HOURS.

Next day our doctor called. He was very kind. He had made mamma many visits, and attended me through my tedious fever, and would never take a fee after the first one. I daresay that other great London physicians, whom the world reputes worldly, often do similar charities by stealth. My own experience is that affliction like ours does not lower the sufferer's estimate of human nature. It is a great discriminator of character, and sifts men like wheat. Those among our friends who are all chaff it blows away altogether; those who have noble attributes, it leaves all noble. There is no more petulance, no more hurry or carelessness; we meet, in after-contact with them, be it much or little, only the finer attributes, gentleness, tenderness, respect, patience.

I do not remember one of those who had known us in better days, among the very few who now knew where to find us, who did not show us even more kindness than they could have had opportunity of showing if we had been in our former position. Who could be kinder than Mr. Forrester? Who more thoughtful than Mr. Carmel, to whom at length we had traced the flowers, and the books, and the piano, that were such a resource to me; and who had, during my illness, come every day to see mamma?

In his necessarily brief visits, Sir Jacob Lake was energetic and cheery; there was in his manner that which inspired confidence; but I fancied this day, as he was taking his leave of mamma, that I observed something like a shadow on his face, a transitory melancholy, that alarmed me. I accompanied him downstairs, and he stopped for a moment in the lobby outside the drawingroom.

"Has there been anything done since about that place — Malory, I think you call it?" he asked.

"No," I answered; "there is not the least chance. Sir Harry Rokestone is going to sell it, Mr. Jarlcot says; just through hatred of us, he thinks. He's an old enemy of ours; he says he hates our very name; and he won't write; he hasn't answered a single letter of Mr. Forrester's."

"I was only going to say that it wouldn't do; she could not bear so long a journey just now. I think she had better make no effort; she must not leave this at present."

"I'm afraid you think her very ill," I said, feeling myself grow pale.

"She is ill; and she will never be much better; but she may be spared to you for a long time yet. This kind of thing, however, is always uncertain; and it may end earlier than we think — I don't say it is likely, only possible. You must send for me whenever you want me; and I'll look in now and then, and see that all goes on satisfactorily."

I began to thank him earnestly, but he stopped me very goodnaturedly. He could spare me little more than a minute; I walked with him to the hall-door, and although he said but little, and that little very cautiously, he left me convinced that I might lose my darling mother any day or hour. He had implied this very vaguely, but I was sure of it. People who have suffered great blows like mine, regard the future as an adversary, and believe its threatenings.

In flurry and terror I returned to the drawingroom, and shut the door; then, with the instinct that prevails, I went to mamma's room and sat down beside her.

I suppose every one has felt as I have felt. How magically the society of the patient, if not actually suffering, reassures us! The mere contiguity, the voice, the interest she takes in the common topics of our daily life, the cheerful and easy tone, even the little peevishness about the details of the sick-room, soon throw death again into perspective, and the instinct of life prevails against all facts and logic.

The form of heart-complaint from which my mother suffered had in it nothing revolting. I think I never remember her so pretty. The tint of her lips, and the colour of her cheeks, always lovely, were now more delicately brilliant than ever; and the lustre of her eyes, thus enhanced, was quite beautiful. The white tints a little paler, and her face and figure slightly thinner, but not unbecomingly, brought back a picture so girlish that I wondered while I looked; and when I went away the pretty face haunted me as the saddest and gentlest I had ever seen.

So many people have said that the approach of death induces a change of character, that I almost accept it for a general law of nature. I saw it, I know, in mamma. Not exactly an actual change, perhaps, but, rather, a subsidence of whatever was less lovely in her nature, and a proportionate predominance of all its sweetness and gentleness. There came also a serenity very different from the state of mind in which she had been from papa's death up to the time of my illness. I do not know whether she was conscious of her imminent danger. If she suspected it, she certainly did not speak of it to me or to Rebecca Torkill. But death is a subject on which some people, I believe, practise as many reserves as others do in love.

Next day mamma was much better, and sat in our drawingroom, and I read and talked to her, and amused her with my music. She sat in slippers and dressing-gown in an easy-chair, and we talked over a hundred plans which seemed to interest her. The effort to cheer mamma did me good, and I think we were both happier that day than we had been since ruin had so tragically overtaken us.

While we were thus employed at home, events connected with us and our history were not standing still in other places.

Mr. Forrester's business was very large; he had the assistance of two partners; but all three were hard worked. The offices of the firm occupied two houses in one of the streets which run down from the Strand to the river, at no great distance from Temple Bar. I saw these offices but once in my life; I suppose there was little to distinguish them and their arrangements from those of other well-frequented chambers; but I remember being struck with their air of business and regularity, and by the complicated topography of two houses fused into one.

Mr. Forrester, in his private office, had locked up his desk. He was thinking of taking his leave of business for the day. It was now past four, and he had looked into the office where the collective firm did their business, and where his colleagues were giving audience to a deputation about a complicated winding-up. This momentary delay cost him more time than he intended, for a clerk came in and whispered in his ear:

"A gentleman wants to see you, sir."

"Why, hang it! I've left the office," said Mr. Forrester, tartly— "don't you see? Here's my hat in my hand! Go and look for me in my office, and you'll see I'm not there."

Very deferentially, notwithstanding this explosion, the messenger added:

"I thought, sir, before sending him away, you might like to see him; he seemed to think he was doing us a favour in looking in, and he has been hearing from you, and would not take the trouble to write; and he won't call again."

"What's his name?" asked Mr. Forrester, vacillating a little.

"Sir Harry Rokestone," he said.

"Sir Harry Rokestone? Oh! Well, I suppose I must see him. Yes, I'll see him; bring him up to my private room."

Mr. Forrester had hardly got back, laid aside his hat and umbrella, and placed himself in his chair of state behind his desk, when his aide-de-camp returned and introduced "Sir Harry Rokestone."

Mr. Forrester rose, and received him with a bow. He saw a tall man, with something grand and simple in his gait and erect bearing, with a brown handsome face, and a lofty forehead, noble and stern as if it had caught something of the gloomy character of the mountain scenery among which his home was. He was dressed in the rustic and careless garb of an oldfashioned country gentleman, with gaiters up to his knees, as if he were going to stride out upon the heather with his gun on his shoulder and his dogs at his heel.

Mr. Forrester placed a chair for this gentleman, who, with hardly a nod, and without a word, sat down. The door closed, and they were alone.

CHAPTER XLVII.

SIR HARRY SPEAKS.

"You're Mr. Forrester?" said Sir Harry, in a deep, clear voice, quite in character with his appearance, and with a stern eye fixed on the solicitor.

That gentleman made a slight inclination of assent.

"I got all your letters, sir — every one," said the rustic baronet.

Mr. Forrester bowed.

"I did not answer one of them."

Mr. Forrester bowed again.

"Did it strike you, as a man of business, sir, that it was rather an odd omission your not mentioning where the ladies representing the late Mr. Ware's interests — if he had any remaining, which I don't believe — are residing?"

"I had actually written — — " answered Mr. Forrester, turning the key in his desk, and slipping his hand under the cover, and making a momentary search. He had hesitated on the question of sending the letter or not; but, having considered whether there could be any possible risk in letting him know, and having come to the conclusion that there was none, he now handed this letter, a little obsolete as it was, to Sir Harry Rokestone.

"What's this?" said Sir Harry, breaking the seal and looking at the contents of the note, and thrusting it, thinking as it seemed all the time of something different, into his coatpocket.

"The present address of Mrs. and Miss Ware, which I understood you just now to express a wish for," answered Mr. Forrester.

"Express a wish, sir, for their address!" exclaimed Sir Harry, with a scoff. "Dall me if I did, though! What the deaul, man, should I want o' their *address*, as ye call it? They may live where they like for me. And so Ware's dead — died a worse death than the hangman's; and died not worth a plack, as I always knew he would. And what made you write all those foolish letters to me? Why did you go on plaguing me, when you saw I never gave you an answer to one of them? You that should be a man of head, how could ye be such a mafflin?" His northern accent became broader as he became more excited.

The audacity and singularity of this old man disconcerted Mr. Forrester. He did not afterwards understand why he had not turned him out of his room.

"I think, Sir Harry, you will find my reasons for writing very distinctly stated in my letters, if you are good enough to look into them."

"Ay, so I did; and I don't understand them, nor you neither."

It was not clear whether he intended that the reasons or the attorney were beyond his comprehension. Mr. Forrester selected the first interpretation, and, I daresay, rightly, as being the least offensive.

"Pardon me, Sir Harry Rokestone," said he, with a little dry dignity; "I have not leisure to throw away upon writing nonsense; I am one of those men who are weak enough to believe that there are rights besides those defined by statute or common law, and duties, consequently, you'll excuse me for saying, even more obligatory — Christian duties, which, in this particular case, plainly devolve upon you."

"Christian flam! Humbug! and you an attorney!"

"I'm not accustomed, sir, to be talked to in that way," said Mr. Forrester, who felt that his visitor was becoming insupportable.

"Of course you're not; living in this town you never hear a word of honest truth," said Sir Harry; "but I'm not so much in the dark; I understand you pretty well, now; and I think you a precious impudent fellow."

Both gentlemen had risen by this time, and Mr. Forrester, with a flush in his cheeks, replied, raising his head as he stooped over his desk while turning the key in the lock:

"And I beg to say, sir, that I, also, have formed my own very distinct opinion of you!"

Mr. Forrester flushed more decidedly, for he felt, a little too late, that he had perhaps made a rather rash speech, considering that his visitor seemed to have so little control over his temper, and also that he was gigantic.

The herculean baronet, however, who could have lifted him up by the collar, and flung him out of the window, only smiled sardonically, and said:

"Then we part, you and I, wiser men than we met. You write me no more letters, and I'll pay you no more visits."

With another cynical grin, he turned on his heel, and walked slowly down the stairs, leaving Mr. Forrester more ruffled than he had been for many a day.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE OLD LOVE.

The hour had now arrived at which our room looked really becoming. It had been a particularly fine autumn; and I have mentioned the effect of a warm sunset streaming through the deep windows upon the oak panelling. This light had begun to fade, and its melancholy serenity had made us silent. I had heard the sound of wheels near our door, but that was nothing unusual, for carts often passed close by, carrying away the rubbish that had accumulated in the old houses now taken down.

Annie Owen, our Malory maid, peeped in at the door — came in, looking frightened and important, and closed it before she spoke. She was turning something about in her fingers.

“What is it, Anne?” I asked.

“Please, miss, there’s an old gentleman downstairs; and he wants to know, ma’am,” she continued, now addressing mamma, “whether you’ll be pleased to see him.”

Mamma raised herself, and looked at the girl with anxious, startled eyes.

“What is that you have got in your hand?” I asked.

“Oh! I beg your pardon, ma’am; he told me to give you this, please.” And she handed a card to mamma. She looked at it and grew very pale. She stood up with a flurried air.

“Are you sure?” she said.

“Please, ma’am?” inquired the girl in perplexity.

“No matter. Ethel, dear, it is he. Yes, I’ll see him,” she said to the girl, in an agitated way; “show him up. Ethel, it’s Harry Rokestone — don’t go; he is so stern — I know how he’ll speak to me — but I ought not to refuse to see him.”

I was angry at my mother’s precipitation. If it had rested with me, what an answer the savage old man should have had! I was silent. By this time the girl was again at the hall-door. The first moment of indignation over, I was thunderstruck. I could not believe that anything so portentous was on the eve of happening.

The moments of suspense were not many. My eyes were fixed on the door as if an executioner were about to enter by it. It opened, and I saw — need I tell you? — the very same tall, handsome old man I had seen in the chapel of Cardyllion Castle.

"Oh! Mabel," he said, and stopped. It was the most melancholy, broken voice I had ever heard. "My darling!"

My mother stood with her hand stretched vaguely towards him, trembling.

"Oh! Mabel, it is you, and we've met at last!"

He took her hand in one of his, and laid the other suddenly across his eyes and sobbed. There was silence for a good while, and then he spoke again.

"My pretty Mabel! I lost ye; I tried to hate ye, Mabel; but all would not do, for I love ye still. I was mad and broken-hearted — I tried to hate ye, but I couldn't; I'd a' given my life for you all the time, and you shall have Malory — it's your own — I've bought it — ye'll not be too proud to take a gift from the old man, my only darling! The spring and summer are over, it's winter now wi' the old fellow, and he'll soon lie under the grass o' the kirk-garth, and what does it all matter then? And you, bonny Mabel, there's wonderful little change wi' you!"

He was silent again, and tears coursed one another down his rugged cheeks.

"I saw you sometimes a long way off, when you didn't think I was looking, and the sight o' ye wrung my heart, that I didn't hold up my head for a week after. A lonely man I've been for your sake, Mabel; and down to Gouden Friars, and among the fells, and through the lonnins of old Clusted Forest, and sailin' on the mere, where we two often were, thinkin' I saw ye in the shaddas, and your voice in my ear as far away as the call o' the wind — dreams, dreams — and now I've met ye."

He was holding mamma's hand in his, and she was crying bitterly.

"I knew nothing of all this till to-day — I got all Forrester's letters together. I was on the Continent — and you've been complaining, Mabel; but you're looking so young and bonny! It was care, care was the matter, care and trouble; but that's all over, and you shall never know anxiety more — you'll be well again — you shall live at Malory, if you like it, or Gouden Friars — Mardykes is to let. I've a right to help you, Mabel, and you have none to refuse my help, for I'm the only living kinsman you have. I don't count that blackguard lord for anything. You shall never know care again. For twenty years and more an angry man and dow I've been, caring for no one, love or likin, when I had lost yours. But now it is past and over, and the days are sped."

A few melancholy and broken words more, and he was gone, promising to return next day at twelve, having seen Mr. Forrester in the meantime at his house in Piccadilly, and had a talk with him.

He was gone. He had not spoken a word to me — had not even appeared conscious that I was present. I daresay he was not. It was a little mortifying. To me he appeared a mixture, such as I never saw before, of brutality and tenderness. The scene had moved me.

Mamma was now talking excitedly. It had been an agitating meeting, and, till he had disclosed his real feelings, full of uncertainty. To prevent her from exerting herself too much, I took my turn in the conversation, and, looking from the window, still in the direction in which his cab had disappeared, I descanted with immense delight on the likelihood of his forthwith arranging that Malory should become our residence.

As I spoke, I turned about to listen for the answer I expected from mamma. I was shocked to see her look so very ill. I was by her side in a moment. She said a few words scarcely audible, and ceased speaking before she had ended her sentence. Her lips moved, and she made an eager gesture with her hand; but her voice failed. She made an effort, I thought, to rise, but her strength forsook her, and she fainted.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ALONE IN THE WORLD.

Sir Harry did not find Mr. Forrester at home; the solicitor was at a consultation in the Temple. Thither drove the baronet, who was impetuous in most things, and intolerant of delay where an object lay near his heart. Up to the counsel's chambers in the Temple mounted Sir Harry Rokestone. He hammered his double knock at the door as peremptorily as he would have done at his own hall door.

Mr. Forrester afforded him just half a minute; and they parted good friends, having made an appointment for the purpose of talking over poor mamma's affairs, and considering what was best to be done.

Sir Harry strode with the careless step of a mountaineer, along the front of the buildings, till he reached the entrance to which, in answer to a sudden inquiry, Mr. Forrester had directed him. Up the stairs he marched, and stopped at the door of the chambers occupied by Mr. Carmel. There he knocked again as stoutly as before. The door was opened by Edwyn Carmel himself.

"Is Mr. Carmel here?" inquired the old man.

"I am Mr. Carmel," answered he.

"And I am Sir Harry Rokestone," said the baronet. "I found a letter from you this morning; it had been lying at my house unopened for some time," said the baronet.

Mr. Carmel invited him to come in. There were candles lighted, for it was by this time nearly dark; he placed a chair for his visitor: they were alone.

Sir Harry Rokestone seated himself, and began:

"There was no need, sir, of apology for your letter; intervention on behalf of two helpless and suffering ladies was honourable to you; but I had also heard some particulars from their own professional man of business; that, however, you could not have known. I have called to tell you that I quite understand the case. So much for your letter. But, sir, I have been informed that you are a Jesuit."

"I am a Catholic priest, sir."

"Well, sir, I won't press the point; but the ruin of that family has been brought about, so far as I can learn, by gentlemen of that order. They got about that poor foolish creature, Lady Lorrimer; and, by cajoleries and terror, they got hold of every sixpence of her fortune, which, according to all that's right and kind in nature, should have gone to her nearest kindred."

Sir Harry's eyes were fixed on him, as if he expected an answer.

"Lady Lorrimer did, I suppose, what pleased her best in her will," said the young man, coldly; "Mrs. Ware had expectations, I believe, which have been, you say, disappointed."

"And do you mean to tell me that you don't know that fact for certain?" said the old gentleman, growing hot.

"I'm not certain of anything of which I have no proof, Sir Harry," answered Mr. Carmel. "If I were a Jesuit, and your statement were a just one, still I should know no more about the facts than I do now; for it would not be competent for me to inquire into the proceedings of my superiors in the order. It is enough for me to say that I know nothing of any such influence exerted by any human being upon Lady Lorrimer; and I need scarcely add that I have never, by word or act, endeavoured ever so slightly to influence Lady Lorrimer's dealings with her property! Your ear, sir, has been abused by slander."

"By Jea! Here's modesty!" said Sir Harry, exploding in a gruff laugh of scorn, and standing up. "What a pack o' gaumless gannets you must take us for! Look-ye now, young sir. I have my own opinion about all that. And tell your superiors, as you call them, they'll never get a plack of old Harry Rokestone's money, while hand and seal can bind, and law's law; and if I catch a priest in my house, ye may swear he'll get out of it quicker than he came in. I'd thank you more for your letter, sir, if I was a little more sure of the motive; and now I've said my say, and I wish ye good evening."

With a fierce smile, the old man looked at him steadily for a few seconds, and then turning abruptly, left the room and shut the door, with a firm clap, after him.

That was, to me, an anxious night. Mamma continued ill; I had written rather a wild note for our doctor; but he did not come for many hours. He did not say much; he wrote a prescription, and gave some directions; he was serious and reserved, which, in a physician, means alarm. In answer to my flurried inquiries, as I went downstairs by his side, he said:

"I told you, you recollect, that it is a capricious kind of thing; I hope she may be better when I look in in the morning; the nature of it is that it may end at any time, with very little warning; but with caution she may live a year, or possibly two years. I've known cases, as discouraging as hers, where life has been prolonged for three years."

Next morning came, and I thought mamma much better. I told her all that was cheery in the doctor's opinion, and amused her with plans for our future. But the hour was drawing near when doctors' opinions, and friends' hopes and flatteries, and the kindly illusions of plans looking pleasantly into an indefinite future, were to be swallowed in the tremendous event.

About half an hour before our kind doctor's call, mamma's faintness returned. I now began, and not an hour too soon, to despair. The medicine he had ordered the day before, to support her in those paroxysms, had lost its power. Mamma had been for a time in the drawingroom, but having had a long fainting-fit there, I persuaded her, so soon as she was a little recovered, to return to her bed.

I find it difficult, I may say, indeed, impossible, to reduce the occurrences of this day to order. The picture is not, indeed, so chaotic as my recollection of the times and events that attended my darling Nelly's death. The shock, in that case, had affected my mind. But I do not believe that any one retains a perfectly arranged recollection of the flurried and startling scenes that wind up our hopes in the dread catastrophe. I never met a person yet who could have told the story of such a day with perfect accuracy and order.

I don't know what o'clock it was when the doctor came. There is something of the character of sternness in the brief questions, the low tone, and the silent inspection that mark his last visit to the sick-room. What is more terrible than the avowed helplessness that follows, and his evident acquiescence in the inevitable?

"Don't go. Oh, don't go yet; wait till I come back, only a few minutes; there might be a change, and something might be done."

I entreated; I was going up to mamma's room; I had come down with him to the drawingroom.

"Well, my dear, I'll wait." He looked at his watch. "I'll remain with you for ten minutes."

I suppose I looked very miserable, for I saw a great compassion in his face. He was very goodnatured, and he added, placing his hand upon my arm, and looking gently in my face, “But, my poor child, you must not flatter yourself with hopes, for I have none — there are none.”

But what so headstrong and so persistent as hope? Terrible must be that place where it never comes.

I had scarcely left the drawingroom, when Sir Harry Rokestone, of the kindly change in whom I had spoken to our good doctor, knocked at the hall-door. Our rustic maid, Anne Owen, who was crying, let him in, and told him the sudden news; he laid his hand against the doorpost and grew pale. He did not say a word for as long as you might count twenty, then he asked:

“Is the doctor here?”

The girl led the way to the drawingroom.

“Bad news, doctor?” said the tall old man, in an agitated voice, as he entered, with his eyes fixed on Sir Jacob Lake. “My name is Rokestone — Sir Harry Rokestone. Tell me, is it so bad as the servant says? You have not given her up?”

The doctor shook his head; he advanced slowly a step or two to meet Sir Harry, and said, in a low tone:

“Mrs. Ware is dying — sinking very fast.”

Sir Harry walked to the mantelpiece, laid his hand on it, and stood there without moving. After a little he turned again, and came to Sir Jacob Lake.

“You London doctors — you’re so hurried,” he said, a little wildly, “from place to place. I think — I think — look, doctor; save her! save her, man!” — he caught the doctor’s wrist in his hand— “and I’ll make your fortune. Ye need never do an hour’s work more. Man was never so rewarded, not for a queen.”

The doctor looked very much offended; but, coarse as the speech was, it was delivered with a pathetic and simple vehemence that disarmed him.

“You mistake me, sir,” he said. “I take a very deep interest in this case. I have known Mrs. Ware from the time when she came to live in London. I hope I do my duty in every case, but in this I have been particularly anxious, and I do assure you, if —— What’s that?”

It was, as Shakespeare says, “a cry of women,” the sudden shrilly clamour of female voices heard through distant doors.

The doctor opened the door, and stood at the foot of the stairs.

“Ay, that’s it,” he said, shaking his head a little. “It’s all over.”

CHAPTER L.

A PROTECTOR.

I was in mamma’s room; I was holding up her head; old Rebecca and Anne Owen were at the bedside. My terrified eyes saw the doctor drawing near softly in the darkened room. I asked him some wild questions, and he answered gently, “No, dear; no, no.”

The doctor took his stand at the bedside, and, with his hands behind his back, looked down at her face sadly. Then he leaned over. He laid his hand gently on mamma’s, put his fingers to her wrist, felt, also, for the beating of her heart, looked again at her face, and rose from his stooping posture with a little shake of the head and a sigh, looked in the still face once more for a few seconds, and turning to me, said tenderly:

“You had better come away, dear; there’s nothing more to be done. You must not distress yourself.”

That last look of the physician at his patient, when he stands up, and becomes on a sudden no more than any other spectator, his office over, his command ended, is terrifying.

For two or three minutes I scarcely knew who was going or coming. The doctor, who had just gone downstairs, returned with an earnest request from Sir Harry Rokestone that in an hour or so he might be permitted to come back and take a last look of mamma. He did come back, but his heart failed him. He could not bear to see her now. He went into the drawingroom, and, a few minutes later, Rebecca Torkill came into my room, where, by this time, I was crying alone, and said:

“Ye mustn’t take on so, my darling; rouse yourself a bit. That old man, Sir Harry Rokestone, is down in the drawingroom in a bit of a taking, and he says he must see you before he goes.”

“I can’t see him, Rebecca,” I said.

“But what am I to say to him?” said she.

“Simply that. Do tell him I can’t go down to see anybody.”

“But ain’t it as well to go and have it over, miss? — for see you he will, I am sure of that; and I can’t manage him.”

"Does be seem angry?" I said, "or only in grief? I daresay he is angry. Yesterday, when he was here, he never spoke one word to me — he took no notice of me whatever."

At another time an interview with Sir Harry Rokestone might have inspired many more nervous misgivings; as it was, I had only this: I knew that he had hated papa, and I, as my father's child, might well "stand within his danger," as the old phrase was. And the eccentric and violent old man, I thought, might, in the moment and agony of having lost for ever the object of an affection which my father had crossed, have sent for me, his child, simply to tell me that with my father's blood I had inherited his curse.

"I can't say, miss, indeed. He was talking to himself, and stamping with his thick shoes on the floor a bit as he walked. But ain't it best to have done with him at once, if he ain't friendly, and not keep him here, coming and going? — for see you he will, sooner or later."

"I don't very much care. Perhaps you are right. Yes, I will go down and see him," I said. "Go you down, Rebecca, and tell him that I am coming."

I had been lying on my bed, and required to adjust my hair, and dress a little.

As I came downstairs a few minutes later, I passed poor mamma's door; the key turned in it. Was I walking in a dream? Mamma dead, and Sir Harry Rokestone waiting in the drawingroom to see me! I leaned against the wall, feeling faint for a minute.

As I approached the drawingroom door, which was open, I heard Rebecca's voice talking to him; and then the old man said, in a broken voice:

"Where's the child? Bring her here. I will see the bairn."

I was the "bairn" summoned to his presence. This broad north-country dialect, the language, I suppose, of his early childhood, always returned to him in moments when his feelings were excited. I entered the room, and he strode towards me.

"Ha! the lassie," he cried, gently. There was a little tremor in his deep voice; a pause followed, and he added, vehemently, "By the God above us, I'll never forsake you!"

He held me to his heart for some seconds without speaking.

"Gimma your hand. I love you for her sake," he said, and took my hand firmly and kindly in his, and he looked earnestly in my face for awhile in silence. “You’re like her; but, oh! lassie, you’ll never be the same. There’ll never be another such as Mabel.”

Tears, which he did not dry or conceal, trickled down his rugged cheeks.

He had been talking with Rebecca Torkill, and had made her tell him everything she could think of about mamma.

“Sit ye down here, lass,” he said to me, having recovered his self-possession. “You are to come home wi’ me, to Gouden Friars, or wherever else you like best. You shall have music and flowers, and books and dresses, and you shall have your maid to wait on you, like other young ladies, and you shall bring Rebecca with you. I’ll do my best to be kind and helpful; and you’ll be a blessing to a very lonely old man; and as I love you now for Mabel’s sake, I’ll come to love you after for your own.”

I did not think his stern old face could look so gentle and sorrowful, and the voice, generally so loud and commanding, speak so tenderly. The light of that look was full of compassion and melancholy, and indicated a finer nature than I had given the uncouth old man credit for. He seemed pleased by what I said; he was doing, he felt, something for mamma in taking care of the child she had left so helpless.

Days were to pass before he could speak to me in a more businesslike way upon his plans for my future life, and those were days of agitation and affliction, from which, even in memory, I turn away.

I am going to pass over some little time. An interval of six weeks finds me in a lofty wainscoted room, with two stone-shafted windows, large and tall, in proportion, admitting scarcely light enough however, to make it cheerful. These windows are placed at the end of an oblong apartment, and the view they command is melancholy and imposing. I was looking through the sudden hollow of a mountain gorge, with a level of pasture between its craggy sides, upon a broad lake, nearly three hundred yards away, a barrier of mountains rising bold and purple from its distant margin. A file of gigantic trees stretches from about midway down to the edge of the lake, and partakes of the sombre character of the scene. On the steeps at either side, in groups or singly, stand some dwarf oak and birch-trees, scattered and wild, very picturesque, but I think enhancing the melancholy of the view.

For me this spot, repulsive as it would have been to most young people, had a charm; not, indeed, that of a “happy valley,” but the charm of seclusion, which to a wounded soul is above price. Those who have suffered a great reverse will understand my horror of meeting the people whom I had once known, my recoil from recognition, and how welcome are the shadows and silence of the cloister compared with the anguish of a comparative publicity.

Experience had early dissipated the illusions of youth, and taught me to listen to the whisperings of hope with cold suspicion. I had no trust in the future — my ghastly mischances had filled me with disgust and terror. My knowledge haunted me; I could not have learned it from the experience of another, though my instructor had come to me from the dead. I was here, then, under no constraint, not the slightest. It was of my own free choice that I came, and remained here. Sir Harry Rokestone would have taken me anywhere I pleased.

Other people spoke of him differently; I can speak only of my own experience. Nothing could be more considerate and less selfish than his treatment of me, nothing more tender and parental. Kind as he was, however, I always felt a sort of awe in his presence. It was not, indeed, quite the awe that is founded on respect — he was old — in most relations stern — and his uneducated moral nature, impetuous and fierce, seemed capable of tragic things. It was not a playful nature, with which the sympathies and spirits of a young person could at all coalesce.

Thormen Fell, at the north of the lake, that outtopped the rest, and shielded us from the wintry wind, rearing its solemn head in solitude, snowy, rocky, high in air, the first of the fells visible, the first to greet me, far off in the sunshine, with its dim welcome as I returned to Golden Friars. It was friendly, it was kindly, but stood aloof and high, and was always associated in my mind with danger, isolation, and mystery. And I think my liking for Sir Harry Rokestone partook of my affection for Thormen Fell.

So, as you have no doubt surmised, I was harboured in the old baronet's feudal castle of Dorracleugh. A stern, wild, melancholy residence, but one that suited wonderfully my present mood.

He was at home; another old gentleman, whose odd society I liked very well, was also at that time an inmate of the house. I will tell you more about him in my next chapter.

CHAPTER LI.

A WARNING.

The old gentleman I speak of, I had seen once before — it was at Malory. He was that very Mr. Lemuel Blount whom I and Laura Grey had watched with so much interest as he crossed the courtyard before our windows, followed by a chaise.

As Sir Harry and I, at the end of our northward journey from London, arrived before the door of his ancient house of Dorracleugh, Mr. Blount appeared at the threshold in the light, and ran down, before the servant could reach it, to the door of our chaise. There was something kindly and pleasant in the voice of this old man, who was so earnest about our comforts. I afterwards found that he was both wise and simple, a sound adviser, and as merry often as a goodnatured boy. He contrasted, in this latter respect, very agreeably for me, with Sir Harry Rokestone, whom solitary life, and a habit of brooding over the irreparable, had made both gloomy and silent.

Mr. Blount was easily amused, and was something of an innocent gossip. He used to go down to the town of Golden Friars every day, and gather all the news, and bring home his budget, and entertain me with it, giving all the information I required with respect to the *dramatis personæ*. He liked boating as well as I did, and although the storms of the equinox prevailed, and the surrounding mountains, with their gorges, made the winds squally and uncertain, and sailing upon the lake in certain states of the weather dangerous, he and I used to venture out I daresay oftener than was strictly prudent. Sir Harry used to attack him for these mad adventures, and once or twice grew as tempestuous almost as the weather. Although I was afraid of Sir Harry, I could not help laughing at Mr. Blount's frightened and penitent countenance, and his stolen glances at Sir Harry, so like what I fancied those of a fat schoolboy might be when called up for judgment before his master.

Sir Harry knew all the signs of the weather, and it ended by his putting us under condition never to go out without his leave, and old Mr. Blount's pleadings and quarrelsome resentment under his prohibition were almost as laughable as his alarms.

In a little time neighbours began to call upon me, and I was obliged, of course, to return these visits; but neighbours do not abound in these wild regions, and my quiet, which I had grown to love, was wonderfully little disturbed.

One morning at breakfast, among the letters laid beside Sir Harry was one, on opening which his face darkened suddenly, and an angry light glowed in his deep-set eyes. He rapped his knuckles on the table, he stood up and muttered, sat down again in a little while, and once more looked into the letter. He read it through this time; and then turning to Lemuel Blount, who had been staring at him in silence, as it seemed to me knowing very well what the subject of the letter must be:

"Look at that," said the Baronet, whisking the letter across the table to Mr. Blount, "I don't understand him — I never did."

Mr. Blount took the letter to the window and read it thoughtfully.

"Come along," said the Baronet, rising, and beckoning him with his finger, "I'll give him an answer."

Sir Harry, with these words, strode out of the room, followed by Mr. Blount; and I was left alone to my vain conjectures. It was a serene and sunny day; the air, as in late autumn it always is, though the sun has not lost its power, was a little sharp. Some hours later, I and my old comrade, Mr. Blount, had taken to the water. A boatman sat in the bow. I held the tiller, abandoned to me by my companion, in right of my admitted superiority in steering, an art which I had learned on the estuary at Cardyllion. Mr. Blount was not so talkative as usual. I said to him at last:

"Do you know, Mr. Blount, I once saw you, before I met you here."

"Did you?" said he. "But I did not see you. Where was that?"

"At Malory, near Cardyllion, after the wreck of the Conway Castle, when Mr. Marston was there."

"Yes, so he was," said the old gentleman; "but I did not know that any of Mr. Ware's family were at home at the time. You may have seen me, but I did not see you — or, if I did, you made no impression upon me."

This was one of my good friend's unconscious compliments which often made me smile.

“And what became of that Mr. Marston?” I asked. “He had a wonderful escape!”

“So he had — he went abroad.”

“And is he still abroad?”

“About six weeks ago he left England again; he was here only for a flying visit of two or three months. It would be wise, I think, if he never returned. I think he has definitely settled now, far away from this country, and I don’t think we are likely to see his face again. You’re not keeping her near enough to the wind.”

I was curious to learn more about this Mr. Marston, of whom Mr. Carmel and Laura Grey — each judging him, no doubt, from totally different facts, and from points of view so dissimilar — had expressed such singularly ill opinions.

“You know Mr. Marston pretty well, do you?” I asked.

“Yes, very well; I have been trying to do him a service,” answered Mr. Blount. “See, see, there — see — those can’t be wild ducks? Blessed are the peacemakers. I wish I could, and I think I may. Now, I think you may put her about, eh?”

I did as he advised.

“I have heard people speak ill of that Mr. Marston,” I said; “do you know any reason why he should not be liked?”

“Why, yes — that is by people who sit in judgment upon their neighbours — he has been an ill friend to himself. I know but one bad blot he has made, and that, I happen to be aware, hurt no one on earth but himself; but there is no use in talking about him, it vexes me.”

“Only one thing more — where is he now?”

“In America. Put this over your feet, please — the air is cold — allow me to arrange it. Ay, the Atlantic is wide enough — let him rest — out of sight, out of mind, for the present at least, and so best.”

Our talk now turned upon other subjects, and returned no more to Mr. Marston during our sail.

In this house, as in most other old country-houses, there is a room that is called the library. It had been assigned to Mr. Blount as his special apartment. He had made me free of it — either to sit there and read, whenever I should take a fancy to do so, or to take away any of the books to the drawingroom. My life was as quiet and humdrum as life could be; but never was mortal in the enjoyment of more absolute liberty. Except in the matter of drowning myself and Mr. Blount in the mere, I could do in all respects exactly as I pleased. Dear old Rebecca Torkill was established as a retainer of the house, to my great comfort — she talked me to sleep every night, and drank a cup of tea every afternoon in my room. The quietude and seclusion of my life recalled my early days, and the peaceful routine of Malory. Of course, a time might come when I should like all this changed a little — for the present, it was the only life I thought endurable.

About a week after my conversation with Mr. Blount during our sail, Sir Harry Rokestone was called away for a short time by business; and I had not been for many days in the enjoyment of my tête-à-tête with Mr. Blount, when there occurred an incident which troubled me extremely, and was followed by a state of vague suspense and alarm, such as I never expected to have known in that quiet region.

One morning as I sat at breakfast with Mr. Blount for my vis-à-vis, and no one by but the servant who had just handed us our letters, I found before me an envelope addressed with a singularity that struck me as a little ominous. The direction was traced, not in the ordinary handwriting, but in Roman characters, in imitation of printing; and the penmanship was thin and feeble, but quite accurate enough to show that it was not the work of a child.

I was already cudgelling my brains to discover whether I could remember among my friends any waggish person who might play me a trick of this kind; but I could recollect no one; especially at a time when my mourning would have made jesting of that kind so inopportune. Odder still, it bore the Malory postmark, and unaccountable as this was, its contents were still more so. They were penned in the same Roman character, and to the following effect:

"Miss Ware, — Within the next ten days, a person will probably visit Golden Friars, who intends you a mischief. So soon as you see, you will recognize your enemy. Yours, — A Friend."

My first step would have been to consult Mr. Blount upon this letter; but I could tell him nothing of my apprehensions from Monsieur Droqville, in whom my fears at once recognised the "enemy" pointed at by the letter. It might possibly, indeed, be some one else, but by no means, I thought so probable as the other. Who was my "friend," who subscribed this warning?

If it was not Mr. Carmel, who else could he be? And yet, why should not Mr. Carmel write to me as frankly as he had spoken and written before? If it came from him, the warning could not point to Monsieur Droqville. There was more than enough to perplex and alarm one in this enigmatical note.

CHAPTER LII.

MINE ENEMY.

I was afraid to consult even Rebecca Torkill; she was a little given to talking, and my alarms might have become, in a day or two, the property of Sir Harry's housekeeper. There is no use in telling you all the solutions which my fears invented for this riddle.

In my anxiety I wrote to the Rector's wife at Cardyllion, telling her that I had got an anonymous note, bearing the Malory postmark, affecting so much mystery that I was totally unable to interpret it. I begged of her therefore to take every opportunity of making out, if possible, who was the author, and to tell me whether there was any acquaintance of mine at present there, who might have written such a note by way of a practical joke to mystify me; and I entreated of her to let me know her conjectures. Then I went into the little world of Cardyllion and inquired about all sorts of people, great and small, and finally I asked if Mr. Carmel had been lately there.

In addition to this, I wrote to the postmaster, describing the appearance of the letter I had got, and asked whether he could help me to a description of the person who had posted it? Every time a new theory struck me, I read my "friend's" note over again.

At length I began to think that it was most probably the thoughtless production of some real but harmless friend, who intended herself paying me a visit here, on visiting the Golden Friars. A female visitor was very likely, as the note was framed so as to indicate nothing of the sex of the "enemy;" and two or three young lady friends, not very reasonable, had been attacking me in their letters for not answering more punctually.

My mind was perpetually working upon this problem. I was very uncomfortable, and at times frightened, and even agitated. I don't, even now, wonder at the degree to which I suffered.

A note of a dream in one of my fragmentary diaries at that time will show you how nervous I was. It is set down in much greater detail than you or I can afford it here. I will just tell you its "heads," as old sermons say. I thought I had arrived here, at Dorracleugh, after a long journey. Mr. Blount and a servant came in carrying one of my large black travelling boxes, and tugged it along the ground. The servant then went out, and Mr. Blount, who I fancied was very pale, looked at me fixedly, and placing his finger to his lip in token of silence, softly went out, also, and shut the door, leaving me rather awestruck. My box, I thought, on turning my eyes upon it again, from my gaze at Mr. Blount, seemed much longer, and its shape altered; but such transformations do not trouble us in our dreams, and I began fumbling with the key, which did not easily fit the lock. At length I opened it, and instead of my dresses I saw a long piece of rumpled linen, and perceived that the box was a coffin. With the persistent acquiescence in monstrosities by which dreams are characterized, I experienced the slightest possible bewilderment at this, and drew down the linen covering, and discovered the shrouded face of Mr. Marston. I was absolutely horrified, and more so when the dead man sat up, with his eyes open, in the coffin, and looked at me with an expression so atrocious that I awoke with a scream, and a heart bounding with terror, and lay awake for more than an hour. This dream was the vague embodiment of one of my conjectures, and pointed at one of the persons whom, against all probability, I had canvassed as the "enemy" of my warning.

Solitude and a secret fear go a long way towards making us superstitious. I became more and more nervous as the suspense extended from day to day. I was afraid to go into Golden Friars, lest I should meet my enemy. I made an excuse, and stayed at home from church on Sunday for the same reason. I was afraid even of passing a boat upon the lake. I don't know whether Mr. Blount observed my increased depression; we played our hit of backgammon, nevertheless, as usual, in the evening, and took, when the weather was not boisterous, our little sail on the lake.

I heard from the Rector's wife. She was not able, any more than the Cardyllion postmaster, to throw the least light upon my letter. Mr. Carmel had not been in that part of the world for a long time. I was haunted, nevertheless, by the image of Mr. Marston, whom my dream had fixed in my imagination.

These letters had reached me as usual as we sat at breakfast. Mine absorbed me, and by demolishing all theories, had directed me upon new problems. I sat looking into my tea-cup, as if I could divine from it. I raised my eyes at length and said:

“When did you say — I forget — you last heard from Mr. Marston?”

He looked up. I perceived that he had been just as much engrossed by his letter as I had been with mine. He laid it down, and asked me to repeat my question. I did. Mr. Blount smiled.

“Well, that is very odd. I have just heard from him,” said he, raising the letter he had been reading by the corner. “It came by the mail that reached London yesterday evening.”

“And where is he?” I asked.

“He’s at New York now; but he says he is going in a few days to set out for Canada, or the backwoods — he has not yet made up his mind which. I think, myself, he will choose the back-settlements; he has a passion for adventure.”

At these words of Mr. Blount, my theories respecting Mr. Marston fell to the ground, and my fears again gathered about the meaner figure of Monsieur Droqville; and as soon as breakfast was ended, I sat down in the window, and studied my anonymous letter carefully once more.

Business called Mr. Blount that evening to Golden Friars; and after dinner I went into the library, and sat looking out at the noble landscape. A red autumnal sunset illuminated the summits of the steep side of the glen, at my left, leaving all the rest of the cleugh in deep, purple-grey shadow. It opens, as I told you, on the lake, which stretched before me in soft shadow, except where its slow moving ripple caught the light with a fiery glimmer; and far away the noble fells, their peaks and ribs touched with the same misty glow, stood out like majestic shadows, and closed the view sublimely.

I sat here, I can’t say reading, although I had an old book open upon my knees. I was too anxious, and my head too busy, to read. Twilight came, and then gradually a dazzling, icy moonlight transformed the landscape. I leaned back in my low chair, my head and shoulders half hidden among the curtains, looking out on the beautiful effect.

This moonlight had prevailed for, I dare say, ten or fifteen minutes, when something occurred to rouse me from my listless reverie. Some object moved upon the window-stone, and caught my eye. It was a human hand suddenly placed there; its fellow instantly followed; an elbow, a hat, a head, a knee; and a man kneeled in the moonlight upon the window-stone, which was there some eight or ten feet from the ground.

Was I awake or in a dream? Gracious Heaven! There were the scarred forehead and the stern face of Mr. Marston with knit brows, and his hand shading his eyes, as he stared close to the glass into the room.

I was in the shadow, and cowered back deeper into the folds of the curtain. He plainly did not see me. He was looking into the further end of the room. I was afraid to cry out; it would have betrayed me. I remained motionless, in the hope that, when he was satisfied that there was no one in the room, he would withdraw from his place of observation, and go elsewhere.

I was watching him with the fascinated terror of a bird, in its ivied nook, when a kite hovers at night within a span of it.

He now seized the window-sash — how I prayed that it had been secured — and with a push or two the window ascended, and he stepped in upon the floor. The cold night air entered with him; he stood for a minute looking into the room, and then very softly he closed the window. He seemed to have made up his mind to establish himself here, for he lazily pushed Mr. Blount's easy-chair into the recess at the window, and sat down very nearly opposite to me. If I had been less shocked and frightened, I might have seen the absurdity of my situation.

He leaned back in Mr. Blount's chair, like a tired man, and extended his heels on the carpet; his hand clutched the arm of the chair. His face was in the bright white light of the moon, his chin was sunk on his chest. His features looked haggard and wicked. Two or three times I thought he saw me, for his eyes were fixed on me for more than a minute; but my perfect stillness, the deep shadow that enveloped me, and the brilliant moonlight in his eyes, protected me.

Suddenly I heard a step — it was Mr. Blount; the door opened, and the step was arrested; to my infinite relief a voice, it was Mr. Blount's, called a little sternly:

"Who's that?"

"The prodigal, the outcast," answered Mr. Marston's deep voice, bitterly. "I have been, and am, too miserable not to make one more trial, and to seek to be reconciled. You, sir, are very kind — you are a staunch friend; but you have never yet done all you could do for me. Why have you not faith? Your influence is unlimited.”

“My good gracious!” exclaimed Mr. Blount, not moving an inch from where he stood. “Why, it is only this morning I received your letter from New York. What is all this? I don’t understand.”

“I came by the same mail that brought my letter. Second thoughts are the best. I changed my mind,” said the young man, standing up. “Why should I live the sort of life he seems to have planned for me, if he intends anything better at any time? And if he don’t, what do I owe him? It is vindictive and unnatural. I’m worn out; my patience has broken down.”

“I could not have believed my eyes,” said Mr. Blount. “I did not — dear, dear me! I don’t know what to make of it; he’ll be very much displeased. Mr. Marston, sir, you seem bent on ruining yourself with him, quite.”

“I don’t know — what chance have I out there? Out of sight out of mind, you used to say. He’d have forgotten me, you’d have forgotten me; I should not have had a friend soon, who knew or cared whether I was alive or dead. Speak to him; tell him he may as well listen to me. I’m perfectly desperate,” and he struck his open hand on the back of the chair, and clenched the sentence with a bitter oath.

“I am not to blame for it,” said Mr. Blount.

“I know that; I know it very well, Mr. Blount. You are too good a friend of our family. I know it, and I feel it — I do, indeed; but look here, where’s the good of driving a fellow to desperation? I tell you I’ll do something that will bring it to a crisis; I can’t stand the hell I live in. And let him prosecute me if he likes; it is very easy for me to put a pistol to my head — it’s only half a second and it’s over — and I’ll leave a letter telling the world how he has used me, and then see how he’ll like the mess he has made of it.”

“Now, pardon me, sir,” said Mr. Blount, ceremoniously, “that’s all stuff; I mean he won’t believe you. When I have an unacceptable truth to communicate, I make it a rule to do so in the most courteous manner; and, happily, I have, hitherto, found the laws of truth and of politeness always reconcilable; he has told me, my dear sir, fifty times, that you are a great deal too selfish ever to hurt yourself. There is no use, then, in trying, if I may be permitted the phrase, to bully him. If you seek, with the smallest chance of success, to make an impression upon Sir Harry Rokestone, you must approach him in a spirit totally unlike that. I’ll tell you what you must do. Write me a penitent letter, asking my intercession, and if you can make, with perfect sincerity, fair promises for the future, and carefully avoid the smallest evidence of the spirit you chose to display in your last — and it is very strange if you have learned nothing — I'll try again what I can do."

The young man advanced, and took Mr. Blount's hand and wrung it fervently.

I don't think Mr. Blount returned the demonstration with equal warmth. He was rather passive on the occasion.

"Is he — here?" asked Mr. Marston.

"No, and you must not remain an hour in this house, nor at Golden Friars, nor shall you go to London, but to some perfectly quiet place; write to me, from thence, a letter such as I have described, and I will lay it before him, with such representations of my own as perhaps may weigh with him, and we shall soon know what will come of it. Have the servants seen you?"

"No one."

"So much the better."

"I scaled your window about ten minutes ago. I thought you would soon turn up, and I was right. I know you will forgive me."

"Well, no matter, you had better get away as you came; how was that?"

"By boat, sir; I took it at the Three Oaks."

"It is all the better you were not in the town; I should not like him to know you are in England, until I have got your letter to show him; I hope, sir, you will write in it no more than you sincerely feel. I cannot enter into any but an honest case. Where did your boat wait?"

"At the jetty here."

"Very good; as you came by the window, you may as well go by it, and I will meet you a little way down the path; I may have something more to say."

"Thank you, sir, from my heart," said Marston.

"No, no, don't mind, I want you to get away again; there, get away as quickly as you can." He had opened the window for him. "Ah, you have climbed that many a time when you were a boy; you should know every stone by heart."

"I'll do exactly as you tell me, sir, in all things," said the young man, and dropped lightly from the window-stone to the ground, and I saw his shadowy figure glide swiftly down the grass, towards the great lime-trees that stand in a receding row between the house and the water. Mr. Blount lowered the window quietly, and looked for a moment after him.

“Some men are born to double sorrow — sorrow for others — sorrow for themselves. I don’t quite know what to make of him.”

The old man sighed heavily, and left the room. I felt very like a spy, and very much ashamed of myself for having overheard a conversation certainly not intended for my ears. I can honestly say it was not curiosity that held me there; that I was beyond measure distressed at my accidental treachery; and that, had there been a door near enough to enable me to escape unseen I should not have overheard a sentence of what had passed. But I had not courage to discover myself; and wanting nerve at the beginning to declare myself, I had, of course, less and less as the conference proceeded, and my situation became more equivocal.

The departure of Mr. Blount, whom I now saw descending the steps in pursuit of his visitor, relieved me, and I got away from the room, haunted by the face that had so lately appeared to me in my ominous dream, and by the voice whose tones excited a strange tremor, and revived stranger recollections.

In the drawingroom, before a quarter of an hour, I was joined by Mr. Blount. Our tête-à-tête was an unusually silent one, and, after tea, we played a rather spiritless hit or two at backgammon.

I was glad when the time came to get to my room, to the genial and garrulous society of Rebecca Torkill; and after my candle was put out, I lay long enough awake, trying to put together the as yet imperfect fragments of a story and a situation which were to form the groundwork of the drama in which I instinctively felt that I was involved.

CHAPTER LIII.

ONE MORE CHANCE.

Sir Harry came home, and met me more affectionately and kindly than ever. I soon perceived that there was something of more than usual gravity under discussion between him and Mr. Blount. I knew, of course, very well what was the question they were debating. I was very uncomfortable while this matter was being discussed; Mr. Blount seemed nervous and uneasy; and it was plain that the decision was not only suspended but uncertain. I don't suppose there was a more perturbed little family in all England at that moment, over whom, at the same time, there hung apparently no cloud of disaster.

At last I could perceive that something was settled; for the discussions between Mr. Blount and Sir Harry seemed to have lost the character of debate and remonstrance, and to have become more like a gloomy confidence and consultation between them. I can only speak of what I may call the external appearance of these conversations, for I was not permitted to hear one word of their substance.

In a little while Sir Harry went away again. This time his journey, I afterwards learned, was to one of the quietest little towns in North Wales, where his chaise drew up at the Bull Inn. The tall northern baronet got out of the chaise, and strode to the bar of that rural hostelry.

"Is there a gentleman named Marston staying here?" he asked of the plump elderly lady who sat within the bow-window of the bar.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Marston, Number Seven, up one pair of stairs."

"Upstairs now?" asked Sir Harry.

"He'll be gone out to take his walk, sir, by this time," answered the lady.

"Can I talk to you for a few minutes, anywhere, madam, in private?" asked Sir Harry.

The old lady looked at him, a little surprised.

"Yes, sir," she said. "Is it anything very particular, please?"

"Yes, ma'am, very particular," answered the baronet.

She called to her handmaid, and installed her quickly in her seat, and so led the baronet to an occupied room on the ground-floor. Sir Harry closed the door, and told her who he was. The landlady recognised his baronetage with a little courtesy.

"I'm a relation of Mr. Marston's, and I've come down here to make an inquiry; I want to know whether he has been leading an orderly, quiet life since he came to your house."

"No one more so, please, sir; a very nice regular gentleman, and goes to church every Sunday he's been here, and that is true. We have no complaint to make of him, please, sir; and he has paid his bill twice since he came here."

The woman looked honest, with frank, round eyes.

"Thank you, ma'am," said Sir Harry; "that will do."

An hour later it was twilight, and Mr. Marston, on entering his sitting-room after his walk, saw the baronet, who got up from his chair before the fire as he came in.

The young man instantly took off his hat, and stood near the door, the very image of humility. Sir Harry did not advance, or offer him his hand; he gave him a nod. Nothing could be colder than this reception.

"So, Richard, you have returned to England, as you have done most other things, without consulting me," said the cold, deep voice of Sir Harry.

"I've acted rashly sir, I fear. I acted on an impulse. I could not resist it. It was only twelve hours before the ship left New York when the thought struck me. I ought to have waited, I ought to have thought it over. It seemed to me my only chance, and I'm afraid it has but sunk me lower in your esteem."

"It is clear you should have asked my leave first, all things considered," said Sir Harry, in the same tone.

The young man bowed his head.

"I see that very clearly now, sir; but I have been so miserable under your displeasure, and I do not always see things as my calmer reason would view them. I thought of nothing but my chance of obtaining your forgiveness, and, at so great a distance, I despaired."

"So it was to please me you set my authority at naught? By Jea! that's logic."

Sir Harry spoke this with a scornful and angry smile.

“I am the only near kinsman you have left, sir, of your blood and name.”

“My name, sir!” challenged Sir Harry, fiercely.

“My second name is Rokestone — called after you,” pleaded Mr. Marston.

“By my sang, young man, if you and I had borne the same name, I’d have got the Queen’s letter, and changed mine to Smith.”

To this the young gentleman made no reply. His uncle broke the silence that followed.

“We’ll talk at present, if you please, as little as need be; there’s nothing pleasant to say between us. But I’ll give you a chance; I’ll see if you are a changed man, as your letter says. I’ll try what work is in you, or what good. You said you’d like farming. Well, we’ll see what sort of farmer you’ll make. You’ll do well to remember ’tis but a trial. In two or three days Mr. Blount will give you particulars by letter. Good evening. Don’t come down; stay here. I’ll go alone. Say no more; I’ll have no thanks or professions. Your conduct, steadiness, integrity, shall guide me. That’s all. Farewell.”

Mr. Marston, during this colloquy, had gradually advanced a little, and now stood near the window. Sir Harry accompanied his farewell with a short nod, and stalked down the stairs. Mr. Marston knew he meant what he said, and therefore did not attempt to accompany him downstairs. And so, with a fresh pair of horses, Sir Harry immediately started on his homeward journey.

I, who knew at the time nothing of what I afterwards learned, was still in a suspense which nobody suspected. It was ended one evening by Sir Harry Rokestone, who said:

“Tomorrow my nephew, Richard Marston, will be here to stay, I have not yet determined for how long. He is a dull young man. You’ll not like him; he has not a word to throw at a dog.”

So, whatever his description was worth, his announcement was conclusive, and Richard Marston was to become an inmate of Dorracleugh next day. I find my diary says, under date of the next day:

“I have been looking forward, with a trepidation I can hardly account for, to the arrival which Sir Harry announced yesterday. The event of the day occurred at three o’clock. I was thinking of going out for a walk, and had my hat and jacket on, and was standing in the hall. I wished to postpone, as long as I could, the meeting with Mr. Marston, which I dreaded. At that critical moment his double knock at the hall-door, and the distant peal of our rather deep-mouthed bell, startled me. I guessed it was he, and turned to run up to my room, but met Sir Harry, who said, laying his hand gently on my shoulder:

"'Wait, dear — this is my nephew. I saw him from the window. I want to introduce him.'

"Of course I had to submit. The door was opened. There he was, the veritable Mr. Marston, of Malory, the hero of the Conway Castle, of the duel, and likewise of so many evil stories — the man who had once talked so romantically and so madly to me. I felt myself growing pale, and then blushing. Sir Harry received him coldly enough, and introduced me, simply mentioning my name and his; and then I ran down the steps, with two of the dogs as my companions, while the servants were getting in Mr. Marston's luggage.

"I met him again at dinner. He is very little changed, except that he is much more sunburnt. He has got a look, too, of command and melancholy. I am sure he has suffered, and suffering, they say, makes people better. He talked very little during dinner, and rather justified Sir Harry's description. Sir Harry talked about the farm he intends for him — they are to look at it tomorrow together. Mr. Blount seems to have got a load off his mind.

"The farm is not so far away as I had imagined — it is only at the other side of the lake, about five hundred acres at Clusted, which came to Sir Harry, Mr. Blount says, through the Mardykes family. I wonder whether there is a house upon it — if so, he will probably live at the other side of the lake, and his arrival will have made very little difference to us. So much the better, perhaps.

"I saw him and Sir Harry, at about eight o'clock this morning, set out together in the big boat, with two men, to cross the lake.

"Farming is, I believe, a very absorbing pursuit. He won't feel his solitude much; and Mr. Blount says he will have to go to fairs and markets. It is altogether a grazing farm."

The reader will perceive that I am still quoting my diary.

"To-day, old Miss Goulding, of Wrybiggins, the old lady whom the gossips of Golden Friars once assigned to Sir Harry as a wife, called with a niece who is with her on a visit, so I suppose they had heard of Mr. Marston's arrival, and came to see what kind of person he is. I'm rather glad they were disappointed. I ordered luncheon for them, and I saw them look toward the door every time it opened, expecting, I am sure, to see Mr. Marston. I maliciously postponed telling them, until the very last moment, that he was at the other side of the mere, as they call the lake, although I suffered for my cruelty, for they dawdled on here almost interminably.

"Sir Harry and Mr. Marston did not return till tea-time, when it was quite dark; they had dined at a farmhouse at the other side. Sir Harry seems, I think a little more friendly with him. They talked, it is true, of nothing but farming and live stock; and Mr. Blount joined. I took, therefore, in solitude, to my piano, and, when I was tired of that, to my novel.

"A very dull evening — the dullest, I think, I've passed since we came to Dorracleugh. I daresay Mr. Marston will make a very good farmer. I hope very much there may be a suitable residence found for him at the other side of the lake."

Next my diary contains the following entry:

"Mr. Marston off again at eight o'clock to his farm. Mr. Blount and I took a sail to-day, with Sir Harry's leave, in the small boat. He tells me that there is no necessity for Mr. Marston's going every day to the farm — that Sir Harry has promised him a third of whatever the farm, under his management, makes. He seems very anxious to please Sir Harry. I can't conceive what can have made me so nervous about the arrival of this very humdrum squire, whose sole object appears to be the prosperity of his colony of cows and sheep.

"Sunday. — Of course to-day he has taken a holiday, but he has not given us the benefit of it. He chose to walk all day, instead of going to church with us to Golden Friars. It is not far from Haworth. So he prefers a march of four and twenty miles to the fatigue of our society!"

On the Tuesday following I find, by the same record, Sir Harry went to visit his estate of Tarlton, about forty miles from Golden Friars, to remain away for three or four days. That day I find also Mr. Marston was, as usual, at his farm at Clusted, and did not come home till about nine o'clock.

I went to my room immediately after his arrival, so that he had an uninterrupted tête-à-tête with Mr. Blount.

Next day he went away at his usual early hour, and returned not so late. I made an excuse of having some letters to write, and left the two gentlemen to themselves a good deal earlier than the night before.

“Mr. Marston certainly is very little in my way; I have not spoken twenty words to him since his arrival. I begin to think him extremely impertinent.”

The foregoing is a very brief note of the day, considering how diffuse and particular I often was when we were more alone. I make up for it on the following day. The text runs thus:

“Mr. Marston has come off his high horse, and broken silence at last. It was blowing furiously in the morning, and I suppose, however melancholy he may be, he has no intention of drowning himself. At all events, there has been no crossing the mere this morning.

“He has appeared, for the first time since his arrival, at breakfast. Sir Harry’s absence seems to have removed a great constraint. He talked very agreeably, and seemed totally to have forgotten the subject of farming; he told us a great deal of his semi-military life in Spain, which was very amusing. I know he made me laugh heartily. Old Mr. Blount laughed also. Our breakfast was a very pleasant meal. Mr. Blount was himself in Spain for more than a year when he was young, and got up and gave us a representation of his host, an eccentric fan-maker, walking with his toes pointed and his chest thrown out, and speaking sonorous Spanish with pompous gesture. I had no idea he had so much fun in him. The goodnatured old man seemed quite elated at our applause and very real laughter.

“Mr. Marston suddenly looked across the lake, and recollected his farm.

“‘How suddenly that storm went down!’ he said. ‘I can’t say I’m glad of it, for I suppose I must make my usual trip, and visit my four-footed friends over the way.’

“‘No,’ said Mr. Blount; ‘let them shift for themselves to-day; I’ll take it on myself. There’s no necessity for you going every day as you do.’

“‘But how will it be received by the authorities? Will my uncle think it an omission? I should not like him to suppose that, under any temptation, I had forgotten my understanding with him.’

“He glanced at me. Whether he thought me the temptation, or only wished to include me in the question, I don’t know.

“‘Oh! no,’ said Mr. Blount; ‘stay at home for this once — I’ll explain it all; and we can go out and have a sail, if the day continues as fine as it promises.’

“Mr. Marston hesitated; he looked at me as if for an opinion, but I said nothing.

“‘Well,’ he said, ‘I can’t resist. I’ll take your advice, Mr. Blount, and make this a holiday.’

“I think Mr. Marston very much improved in some respects. His manners and conversation are not less spirited, but gentler; and he is so very agreeable! I think he has led an unhappy life, and no doubt was often very much in the wrong. But I have remarked that we condemn people not in proportion to their moral guilt, but in proportion to the inconvenience their faults inflict on us. I wonder very much what those stories were which caused Mr. Carmel and Laura Grey to speak of him so bitterly and sternly? They were both so good that things which other people would have thought lightly enough of, would seem to them enormous. I dare say it is all about debt, or very likely play; and people who have possibly lost money by his extravagance have been exaggerating matters, and telling stories their own way. He seems very much sobered now, at all events. One can’t help pitying him.

“He went down to the jetty before luncheon. I found afterwards that it was to get cloaks and rugs arranged for me.

“He lunched with us, and we were all very talkative. He certainly will prevent our all falling asleep in this drowsy place. We had such a pleasant sail. I gave him the tiller; but his duties as helmsman did not prevent his talking. We could hear one another very well, in spite of the breeze, which was rather more than Sir Harry would have quite approved of.

“Mr. Marston had many opportunities to-day of talking to me without any risk of being overheard. He did not, however, say a single word in his old vein. I am very glad of this; it would be provoking to lose his conversation, which is amusing, and, I confess, a great resource in this solitude.

“He is always on the watch to find if I want anything, and gets or does it instantly. I wish his farm was at this side of the lake. I dare say when Sir Harry comes back we shall see as little as ever of him. It will end by his being drowned in that dangerous lake. It seems odd that Sir Harry, who is so tender of my life and Mr. Blount’s, should have apparently no feeling whatever about his. But it is their affair. I’m not likely to be consulted; so I need not trouble my head about it.

"I write in my room, the day now over, and dear old Rebecca Torkill is fussing about from table to wardrobe, and from wardrobe to drawers, pottering, and fidgeting, and whispering to herself. She has just told me that Mrs. Shackleton, the housekeeper here at Dorracleugh, talked to her a good deal this evening about Mr. Marston. She gives a very good account of him. When he went to school, and to Oxford, she saw him only at intervals, but he was a manly, goodnatured boy she said, 'and never, that she knew, any harm in him, only a bit wild, like other young men at such places.' I write, as nearly as I can, Rebecca's words.

"The subject of the quarrel with Sir Harry Rokestone, Mrs. Shackleton says, was simply that Mr. Marston positively refused to marry some one whom his uncle had selected for a niece-in-law. That is exactly the kind of disobedience that old people are sometimes most severe upon. She told Rebecca to be very careful not to say a word of it to the other servants, as it was a great secret.

"After all there may be two sides to this case, as to others, and Mr. Marston's chief mutiny may have been of that kind which writers of romance and tragedy elevate into heroism.

"He certainly is very much improved."

Here my diary for that day left Mr. Marston, and turned to half-a-dozen trifles, treated, I must admit, with much comparative brevity.

CHAPTER LIV.

DANGEROUS GROUND.

Old Mr. Blount was a religious man. Sir Harry, whose ideas upon such subjects I never could exactly divine, went to church every Sunday; but he scoffed at bishops, and neither loved nor trusted clergymen. He had, however, family prayers every morning, at which Mr. Blount officiated, with evident happiness and peace in the light of his simple countenance.

No radiance of this happy light was reflected on the face of Sir Harry Rokestone, who sat by the mantelpiece, in one of the old oak arm chairs, a colossal image of solitude, stern and melancholy, and never, it seemed to me, so much alone as at those moments which seem to draw other mortals nearer. I fancied that some associations connected with such simple gatherings long ago, perhaps, recalled mamma to his thoughts. He seemed to sit in a stern and melancholy reverie, and he would often come over to me, when the prayer was ended, and, looking at me with great affection, ask gently:

"Well, my little lass, do they try to make you happy here? Is there anything you think of that you'd like me to get down from Lunnon? You must think. I'd like to be doing little things for you; think, and tell me this evening." And at such times he would turn on me a look of full-hearted affection, and smoothe my hair caressingly with his old hand.

Sometimes he would say: "You like this place, you tell me; but the winters here, I'm thinking, will be too hard for you."

"But I like a good, cold, frosty winter," I would answer him. "There is nothing I think so pleasant."

"Ay, but maybe ye'll be getting a cough or something."

"No, I assure you I'm one of the few persons on earth who never take cold," I urged, for I really wished to spend the winter at Golden Friars.

"Well, pretty lass, ye shall do as you like best, but you mustn't fall sick; if you do, what's to become o' the auld man?"

You must allow me here to help myself with my diary once more. I am about to quote from what I find there, dated the following Sunday:

"We went to Golden Friars to church as usual; and Mr. Marston, instead of performing his devotions twelve miles away, came with us.

"After the service was ended, Sir Harry, who had a call to make, took leave of us. The day was so fine that we were tempted to walk home instead of driving.

"We chose the path by the lake, and sent the carriage on to Dorracleugh.

"Mr. Blount chooses to talk over the sermon, and I am sure thinks it profane to mention secular subjects on Sunday. I think this a mistake; and I confess I was not sorry when good Mr. Blount stopped and told us he was going into Shenstone's cottage. I felt that a respite of five minutes from the echoes of the good vicar's sermon would be pleasant. But when he went on to say that he was going in to read some of the Bible and talk a little with the consumptive little boy, placing me under Mr. Marston's escort for the rest of the walk, which was about a mile, I experienced a new alarm. I had no wish that Mr. Marston should return to his old heroics.

"I did not well know what to say or do, Mr. Blount's goodbye came so suddenly. My making a difficulty about walking home with Mr. Marston would to him, who knew nothing of what had passed at Malory, have appeared an unaccountable affectation of prudery. I asked Mr. Blount whether he intended staying any time. He answered, 'Half an hour at least; and if the poor boy wishes it, I shall stay an hour,' he added.

"Mr. Marston, who, I am sure, perfectly understood me, did not say a word. I had only to make the best of an uncomfortable situation, and, very nervous, I nodded and smiled my farewell to Mr. Blount, and set out on my homeward march with Mr. Marston.

"I need not have been in such a panic — it was very soon perfectly plain that Mr. Marston did not intend treating me to any heroics.

"'I don't know any one in the world I have a much higher opinion of than Mr. Blount,' he said; 'but I do think it a great mercy to get away from him a little on Sundays; I can't talk to him in his own way, and I turn simply into a Trappist — I become, I mean, perfectly dumb.'

"I agreed, but said that I had such a regard for Mr. Blount that I could not bring myself to vex him.

"'That is my rule also,' he said, 'only I carry it a little further, ever since I received my education,' he smiled, darkly; 'that is, since I begun to suffer, about three years ago, I have learned to practise it with all my friends. You would not believe what constraint I often place upon myself to avoid saying that which is in my heart and next my lips, but which I fear — I fear with too good reason — might not be liked by others. There was a time, I daresay, when Hamlet blurted out everything that came into his mind, before he learned in the school of sorrow to say, "But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue."'

"He looked very expressively, and I thought I knew perfectly what he meant, and that if by any blunder I happened to say a foolish thing, I might find myself, before I knew where I was, in the midst of a conversation as wild as that of the wood of Plas Ylwd.

"In reply to this I said, not very adroitly:

"And what a beautiful play *Hamlet* is! I have been trying to copy Retsch's outline, but I have made such a failure. The faces are so fine and forcible, and the expression of the hands is so wonderful, and my hands are so tame and clumsy; I can do nothing but the ghost, and that is because he is the only absurd figure in the series."

"'Yes,' he acquiesced, 'like a thing in an *opera bouffe*.'

"I could perceive very plainly that my rather precipitate and incoherent excursion into Retsch's outlines, into which he had followed me with the best grace he could, had wounded him. It was equally plain, however, that he was in good faith practising the rule he had just now mentioned, and was by no means the insolent and overbearing suitor he had shown himself in that scene, now removed alike by time and distance, in which I had before seen him.

"No one could be more submissive than he to my distinct decision that there was to be no more such wild talk.

"For the rest of our walk he talked upon totally indifferent subjects. Certainly, of the two, I had been the most put out by his momentary ascent to a more tragic level. I wonder now whether I did not possibly suspect a great deal more than was intended. If so, what a fool I must have appeared! Is there anything so ridiculous as a demonstration of resistance where no attack is meditated? I began to feel so confused and ashamed that I hardly took the trouble to follow what he said. As we approached Dorracleugh, I began to feel more like myself. After a little silence he said what I am going to set down; I have gone over it again and again in my mind; I know I have added nothing, and I really think I write very nearly exactly as he spoke it.

"'When I had that strange escape with my life from the Conway Castle,' he said, 'no man on earth was more willing and less fit to die than I. I don't suppose there was a more miserable man in England. I had disappointed my uncle by doing what seemed a very foolish thing. I could not tell him my motive — no one knew it — the secret was not mine — everything combined to embarrass and crush me. I had the hardest thing on earth to endure — unmerited condemnation was my portion. Some good people, whom, notwithstanding, I have learned to respect, spoke of me to my face as if I had committed a murder. My uncle understands me now, but he has not yet forgiven me. When I was at Malory, I was in a mood to shoot myself through the head; I was desperate, I was bitter, I was furious. Every unlucky thing that could happen did happen there. The very people who had judged me most cruelly turned up; and among them one who forced a quarrel on me, and compelled that miserable duel in which I wished at the time I had been killed.'

"I listened to all this with more interest than I allowed him to see, as we walked on together side by side, I looking down on the path before us, and saying nothing.

"'If it were not for one or two feelings left me, I should not know myself for the shipwrecked man who thanked his young hostess at Malory for her invaluable hospitality,' he said; 'there are some things one never forgets. I often think of Malory — I have thought of it in all kinds of distant, out-of-the-way, savage places; it rises before me as I saw it last. My life has all gone wrong. While hope remains, we can bear anything — but my last hope seems pretty near its setting — and, when it is out, I hope, seeing I cross and return in all weathers, there is drowning enough in that lake to give a poor fool, at least, a cool head and a quiet heart.'

"Then, without any tragic pause, he turned to other things lightly, and never looked towards me to discover what effect his words were producing; but he talked on, and now very pleasantly. We loitered a little at the hall-door. I did not want him to come into the drawingroom, and establish himself there. Here were the open door, the hall, the courtyard, the windows, all manner of possibilities for listeners, and I felt I was protected from any embarrassment that an impetuous companion might please to inflict if favoured by a tête-à-tête.

“I must, however, do him justice: he seemed very anxious not to offend — very careful so to mask any disclosure of his feelings as to leave me quite free to ‘ignore’ it, and, as it seemed to me, on the watch to catch any evidence of my impatience.

“He is certainly very agreeable and odd; and the time passed very pleasantly while we loitered in the courtyard.

“Mr. Blount soon came up, and after a word or two I left them, and ran up to my room.”

CHAPTER LV.

MR. CARMEL TAKES HIS LEAVE.

About this time there was a sort of fête at Golden Friars. Three very pretty fountains were built by Sir Richard Mardykes and Sir Harry, at the upper end of the town, in which they both have property; and the opening of these was a sort of gala.

I did not care to go. Sir Harry Rokestone and Mr. Blount, were, of course, there; Mr. Marston went, instead, to his farm, at the other side; and I took a whim to go out on the lake, in a row-boat, in the direction of Golden Friars. My boatmen rowed me near enough to hear the music, which was very pretty; but we remained sufficiently far out, to prevent becoming mixed up with the other boats which lay near the shore.

It was a pleasant, clear day, with no wind stirring, and although we were now fairly in winter, the air was not too sharp, and with just a rug about one's feet, the weather was very pleasant. My journal speaks of this evening as follows:

"It was, I think, near four o'clock, when I told the men to row towards Dorracleugh. Before we reached it, the filmy haze of a winter's evening began to steal over the landscape, and a red sunset streamed through the break in the fells above the town with so lovely an effect that I told the men to slacken their speed. So we moved, with only a dip of the oar, now and then; and I looked up the mere, enjoying the magical effect.

"A boat had been coming, a little in our wake, along the shore. I had observed it, but without the slightest curiosity; not even with a conjecture that Sir Harry and Mr. Blount might be returning in it, for I knew that it was arranged that they were to come back together in the carriage.

"Voices from this boat caught my ear; and one suddenly that startled me, just as it neared us. It glided up. I fancy about thirty yards were between the sides of the two boats; and the men, like those in my boat, had been ordered merely to dip their oars, and were now moving abreast of ours; the drips from their oars sparkled like drops of molten metal. What I heard — the only thing I now heard — was the harsh nasal voice of Monsieur Droqville.

“There he was, in his black dress, standing in the stern of the boat, looking round on the landscape, from point to point. The light, as he looked this way and that, touched his energetic bronzed features, the folds of his dress, and the wet planks of the boat, with a fire that contrasted with the grey shadows behind and about.

“I heard him say, pointing with his outstretched arm, ‘And is that Dorracleugh?’ To which, one of the people in the boat made him an answer.

“I can’t think of that question without terror. What has brought that man down here? What interest can he have in seeking out Dorracleugh, except that it happens to be my present place of abode?

“I am sure he did not see me. When he looked in my direction, the sun was in his eyes, and my face in shadow; I don’t think he can have seen me. But that matters nothing if he has come down for any purpose connected with me.”

A sure instinct told me that Monsieur Droqville would be directed inflexibly by the interests of his order, to consult which, at all times, unawed by consequences to himself or others, was his stern and narrow duty.

Here, in this beautiful and sequestered corner of the world, how far, after all, I had been from quiet. Well might I cry with Campbell’s exile —

“Ah! cruel fate, wilt thou never replace me
In a mansion of peace where no perils can chase me?”

My terrors hung upon a secret I dared not disclose. There was no one to help me; for I could consult no one.

The next day I was really ill. I remained in my room. I thought Monsieur Droqville would come to claim an interview; and perhaps would seek, by the power he possessed, to force me to become an instrument in forwarding some of his plans, affecting either the faith or the property of others. I was in an agony of suspense and fear.

Days passed; a week; and no sign of Monsieur Droqville. I began to breathe. He was not a man, I knew, to waste weeks, or even days, in search of the picturesque, in a semi-barbarous region like Golden Friars.

At length I summoned courage to speak to Rebecca Torkill. I told her I had seen Monsieur Droqville, and that I wanted her, without telling the servants at Dorracleugh, to make inquiry at the "George and Dragon," whether a person answering that description had been there. No such person was there. So I might assume he was gone. He had come with Sir Richard Mardykes, I conjectured, from Carsbrook, where he often was. But such a man was not likely to make even a pleasure excursion without an eye to business. He had, I supposed, made inquiries; possibly, he had set a watch upon me. Under the eye of such a master of strategy as Monsieur Droqville I could not feel quite at ease.

Nevertheless, in a little time, such serenity as I had enjoyed at Dorracleugh gradually returned; and I enjoyed a routine life, the dulness of which would have been in another state of my spirits insupportable, with very real pleasure.

We were now deep in winter, and in its snowy shroud how beautiful the landscape looked! Cold, but stimulating and pleasant was the clear, dry air; and our frost-bound world sparkled in the wintry sun.

Old Sir Harry Rokestone, a keen sportsman, proof as granite against cold, was out by moonlight on the grey down with his oldfashioned duck-guns, and, when the lake was not frozen over, with two hardy men manoeuvring his boat for him. Town-bred, Mr. Blount contented himself with his brisk walk, stick in hand, and a couple of the dogs for companions to the town; and Mr. Marston was away upon some mission, on which his uncle had sent him, Mr. Blount said, to try whether he was "capable of business and steady."

One night, at this time, as I sat alone in the drawingroom, I was a little surprised to see old Rebecca Torkill come in with her bonnet and cloak on, looking mysterious and important. Shutting the door, she peeped cautiously round.

"What do you think, miss? Wait — listen," she all but whispered, with her hand raised as she trotted up to my side. "Who do you think I saw, not three minutes ago, at the lime-trees, near the lake?"

I was staring in her face, filled with shapeless alarms.

"I was coming home from Farmer Shenstone's, where I went with some tea for that poor little boy that's ailing, and just as I got over the stile, who should I see, as plain as I see you now, but Mr. Carmel, just that minute got out of his boat, and making as if he was going to walk up to the house. He knew me the minute he saw me — it is a very bright moon — and he asked me how I was; and then how you were, most particular; and he said he was only for a few hours in Golden Friars, and took a boat on the chance of seeing you for a minute, but that he did not know whether you would like it, and he begged of me to find out and bring him word. If you do, he's waiting down there, Miss Ethel, and what shall I say?"

"Come with me," I said, getting up quickly; and, putting on in a moment my sealskin jacket and my hat, without another thought or word, much to Rebecca's amazement, I sallied out into the still night air. Turning the corner of the old building, at the end of the courtyard, I found myself treading with rapid steps the crisp grass, under a dazzling moon, and before me the view of the distant fells, throwing their snowy speaks high into the air, with the solemn darkness of the lake, and its silvery gleams below, and the shadowy gorge and great lime-trees in the foreground. Down the gentle slope I walked swiftly, leaving Rebecca Torkill a long way behind.

I was now under the towering lime-trees. I paused: with a throbbing heart I held my breath. I heard hollow steps coming up on the other side of the file of gigantic stems. I passed between, and saw Mr. Carmel walking slowly towards me. In a moment he was close to me, and took my hand in his old kindly way.

"This is very kind; how can I thank you, Miss Ware? I had hardly hoped to be allowed to call at the house; I am going a long journey, and have not been quite so well as I used to be, and I thought that if I lost this opportunity, in this uncertain world, I might never see my pupil again. I could hardly bear that, without just saying goodbye."

"And you are going?" I said, wringing his hand.

"Yes, indeed; the ocean will be between us soon, and half the world, and I am not to return."

All his kindness rose up before me — his thoughtful goodness, his fidelity — and I felt for a moment on the point of crying.

He was muffled in furs, and was looking thin and ill, and in the light of the moon the lines of his handsome face were marked as if carved in ivory.

"You and your old tutor have had a great many quarrels, and always made it up again; and now at last we part, I am sure, good friends."

"You are going, and you're ill," was all I could say; but I was conscious there was something of that wild tone that real sorrow gives in my voice.

"How often I have thought of you, Miss Ethel — how often I shall think of you, be my days many or few. How often!"

"I am so sorry, Mr. Carmel — so awfully sorry!" I repeated. I had not unclasped my hand; I was looking in his thin, pale, smiling face with the saddest augury.

"I want you to remember me; it is folly, I know, but it is a harmless folly; all human nature shares in it, and" — there was a little tremble, and a momentary interruption— "and your old tutor, the sage who lectured you so wisely, is, after all, no less a fool than the rest. Will you keep this little cross? It belonged to my mother, and is, by permission of my superiors, my own, so you may accept it with a clear conscience." He smiled. "If you wear it, or even let it lie on your table, it will sometimes" — the same momentary interruption occurred again— "it may perhaps remind you of one who took a deep interest in you."

It was a beautiful little gold cross, with five brilliants in it.

"And oh, Ethel! let me look at you once again."

He led me — it was only a step or two — out of the shadow of the tree into the bright moonlight, and, still holding my hand, looked at me intently for a little time with a smile, to me, the saddest that ever mortal face wore.

"And now, here she stands, my wayward, generous, clever Ethel! How proud I was of my pupil! The heart knoweth its own bitterness," he said gently. "And oh! in the day when our Redeemer makes up his jewels, may you be precious among them! I have seen you; farewell!"

Suddenly he raised my hand, and kissed it gently, twice. Then he turned, and walked rapidly down to the water's edge, and stepped into the boat. The men dipped their oars, and the water rose like diamonds from the touch. I saw his dark figure standing, with arm extended, for a moment, in the stern, in his black cloak, pointing towards Golden Friars. The boat was now three lengths away; twenty — fifty; out on the bosom of the stirless water. The tears that I had restrained burst forth, and sobbing as if my heart would break I ran down to the margin of the lake, and stood upon the broad, flat stone, and waved my hand wildly and unseen towards my friend, whom I knew I was never to see again.

I stood there watching, till the shape of the boat and the sound of the oars were quite lost in the grey distance.

CHAPTER LVI.

“LOVE TOOK UP THE GLASS OF TIME.”

Weeks glided by, and still the same clear, bright frost, and low, cold, cheerful suns. The dogs so wild with spirits, the distant sounds travelling so sharp to the ear — ruddy sunsets — early darkness — and the roaring fires at home.

Sir Harry Rokestone’s voice, clear and kindly, often heard through the house, calls me from the hall; he wants to know whether “little Ethel” will come out for a ride; or, if she would like a drive with him into the town to see the skaters, for in the shallower parts the mere is frozen.

One day I came into Sir Harry’s room, on some errand, I forget what. Mr. Blount was standing, leaning on the mantelpiece, and Sir Harry was withdrawing a large key from the door of an iron safe, which seemed to be built into the wall. Each paused in the attitude in which I had found him, with his eyes fixed on me, in silence. I saw that I was in their way, and said, a little flurried:

“I’ll come again; it was nothing of any consequence,” and I was drawing back, when Sir Harry said, beckoning to me with his finger:

“Stay, little Ethel — stay a minute — I see no reason, Blount, why we should not tell the lassie.”

Mr. Blount nodded acquiescence.

“Come here, my bonny Ethel,” said Sir Harry, and turning the key again in the lock, he pulled the door open. “Look in; ye see that shelf? Well, mind that’s where I’ll leave auld Harry Rokestone’s will — ye’ll remember where it lies?”

Then he drew me very kindly to him, smoothed my hair gently with his hand, and said:

“God bless you, my bonny lass!” and kissed me on the forehead.

Then locking the door again, he said:

“Ye’ll mind, it’s this iron box, that’s next the picture. That’s all, lassie.”

And thus dismissed, I took my departure.

In this retreat, time was stealing on with silent steps. Christmas was past. Mr. Marston had returned; he lived, at this season, more at our side of the lake, and the house was more cheerful.

Can I describe Mr. Marston with fidelity? Can I rely even upon my own recollection of him? What had I become? A dreamer of dreams — a dupe of magic. Everything had grown strangely interesting — the lonely place was lonely no more — the old castle of Dorracleugh was radiant with unearthly light. Unconsciously, I had become the captive of a magician. I had passed under a sweet and subtle mania, and was no longer myself. Little by little, hour by hour, it grew, until I was transformed. Well, behold me now, wildly in love with Richard Marston.

Looking back now on that period of my history, I see plainly enough that it was my inevitable fate. So much together, and surrounded by a solitude, we were the only young people in the little group which formed our society. Handsome and fascinating — wayward, and even wicked he might have been, but that I might hope was past — he was energetic, clever, passionate; and of his admiration he never allowed me to be doubtful.

My infatuation had been stealing upon me, but it was not until we had reached the month of May that it culminated in a scene that returns again and again in my solitary reveries, and always with the same tumult of sweet and bitter feelings.

One day before that explanation took place, my diary, from which I have often quoted, says thus:

“May 9th. — There was no letter, I am sure, by the early post from Mr. Marston; Sir Harry or Mr. Blount would have been sure to talk of it at breakfast. It is treating his uncle, I think, a little cavalierly.

“Sailed across the lake to-day, alone, to Clusted, and walked about a quarter of a mile up the forest road. How beautiful everything is looking, but how melancholy! When last I saw this haunted wood, Sir Harry Rokestone and Mr. Marston were with me.

“It seems odd that Mr. Marston stays away so long, and hard to believe that if he tried he might not have returned sooner. He went on the 28th of April, and Mr. Blount thought he would be back again in a week: that would have been on the 5th of this month. I dare say he is glad to get away for a little time — I cannot blame him; I dare say he finds it often very dull, say what he will. I wonder what he meant, the other day, when he said he was ‘born to be liked least where he loved most’? He seems very melancholy. I wonder whether there has been some old love and parting? Why, unless he liked some one else, should he have quarrelled with Sir Harry, rather than marry as he wished him? Sir Harry would not have chosen any one for him who was not young and good-looking. I heard him say something one morning that showed his opinion upon that point; and young men, who don’t like any one in particular, are easily persuaded to marry. Well, perhaps his constancy will be rewarded; it is not likely that the young lady should have given him up.

“May 10th. — How shall I begin? What have I done? Heaven forgive me if I have done wrong! Oh! kind, true friend, Sir Harry, how have I requited you? It is too late now — the past is past. And yet, in spite of this, how happy I am!

“Let me collect my thoughts, and write down as briefly as I can an outline of the events of this happy, agitating day. No lovelier May day was ever seen. I was enjoying a lonely saunter, about one o’clock, under the boughs of Lynder Wood, here and there catching the gleam of the waters through the trees, and listening from time to time to the call of the cuckoo from the hollows of the forest. In that lonely region there is no more lonely path than this.

“On a sudden, I heard a step approaching fast from behind me on the path, and, looking back, I saw Mr. Marston coming on, with a very glad smile, to overtake me. I stopped; I felt myself blushing. He was speaking as he approached: I was confused, and do not recollect what he said; but hardly a moment passed till he was at my side. He was smiling, but very pale. I suppose he had made up his mind to speak. He did not immediately talk of the point on which hung so much; he spoke of other things — I can recollect nothing of them.

“He began at length to talk upon that other theme that lay so near our hearts; our pace grew slower and slower as he spoke on, until we came to a standstill under the great beech-tree, on whose bark our initials, now spread by time and touched with lichen, but possibly still legible, are carved.

“Well, he has spoken, and I have answered — I can’t remember our words; but we are betrothed in the sight of Heaven by vows that nothing can ever cancel, till those holier vows, plighted at the altar-steps, are made before God himself, or until either shall die.

“Oh! Richard, my love, and is it true? Can it be that you love your poor Ethel with a love so tender, so deep, so desperate? He has loved me, he says, ever since he first saw me, on the day after his escape, in the garden at Malory!

“I liked him from the first. In spite of all their warnings, I could not bring myself to condemn or distrust him long. I never forgot him during the years we have been separated; he has been all over the world since, and often in danger, and I have suffered such great and unexpected changes of fortune — to think of our being brought together at last! Has not Fate ordained it?

“The only thing that darkens the perfect sunshine of to-day is that our attachment and engagement must be a secret. He says so, and I am sure he knows best. He says that Sir Harry has not half forgiven him yet, and that he would peremptorily forbid our engagement. He could unquestionably effect our separation, and make us both inexpressibly miserable. But when I look at Sir Harry’s kind, melancholy face, and think of all he has done for me, my heart upbraids me, and tonight I had to turn hastily away, for my eyes filled suddenly with tears.”

CHAPTER LVII.

AN AWKWARD PROPOSAL.

I will here make a few extracts more from my diary, because they contain matters traced there merely in outline, and of which it is more convenient to present but a skeleton account.

"May 11th. — Richard went early to his farm to-day. I told him last night that I would come down to see him off this morning. But he would not hear of it; and again enjoined the strictest caution. I must do nothing to induce the least suspicion of our engagement, or even of our caring for each other. I must not tell Rebecca Torkill a word about it, nor hint it to any one of the few friends I correspond with. I am sure he is right; but this secrecy is very painful. I feel so treacherous, and so sad, when I see Sir Harry's kind face.

"Richard was back at three o'clock; we met by appointment, in the same path, in Lynder Wood. He has told ever so much, of which I knew nothing before. Mr. Blount told him, he says, that Sir Harry means to leave me an annuity of two hundred a year. How kind and generous! I feel more than ever the pain and meanness of my reserve. He intends to leave Richard eight hundred a year, and the farm at the other side of the lake. Richard thinks, if he had not displeased him, he would have done more for him. All this, that seems to me very noble, depends, however, upon his continuing to like us, as he does at present. Richard says that he will settle everything he has in the world upon me. It hurts me, his thinking me so mercenary, and talking so soon upon the subject of money and settlements; I let him see this, for the idea of his adding to what my benefactor Sir Harry intended for me had not entered my mind.

"'It is just, my darling, because you are so little calculating for yourself that I must look a little forward for you,' he said, and so tenderly. 'Whose business is it now to think of such things for you, if not mine? And you won't deny me the pleasure of telling you that I can prevent, thank Heaven, some of the dangers you were so willing to encounter for my sake.'

"Then he told me that the bulk of Sir Harry's property is to go to people not very nearly related to him, called Strafford; and he gave me a great charge not to tell a word of all this to a living creature, as it would involve him in a quarrel with Mr. Blount, who had told him Sir Harry's intentions under the seal of secrecy.

"I wish I had not so many secrets to keep; but his goodness to me makes me love Sir Harry better every day. I told him all about Sir Harry's little talk with me about his will. I can have no secrets now from Richard."

For weeks, for months, this kind of life went on, eventless, but full of its own hopes, misgivings, agitations. I loved Golden Friars for many reasons, if things so light as associations and sentiments can so be called — founded they were, however, in imagination and deep affection. One of these was and is that my darling mother is buried there; and the simple and sad inscription on her monument, in the pretty church, is legible on the wall opposite the Rokestone pew.

"That's a kind fellow, the vicar," said Sir Harry; "a bit too simple; but if other sirs were like him, there would be more folk in the church to hear the sermon!"

When Sir Harry made this speech, he and I were sitting in the boat, the light evening air hardly filled the sails, and we were tacking slowly back and forward on the mere, along the shore of Golden Friars. It was a beautiful evening in August, and the little speech and our loitering here were caused by the sweet music that pealed from the organ through the open church windows. The good old vicar was a fine musician; and often in the long summer and autumn evenings, the lonely old man visited the organ-loft and played those sweet and solemn melodies that so well accorded with the dreamlike scene.

It was the music that recalled the vicar to Sir Harry's thoughts — but his liking for him was not all founded upon that, nor even upon his holy life and kindly ways. It was this: that when he read the service at mamma's funeral, the white-haired vicar, who remembered her a beautiful child, wept — and tears rolled down his old cheeks as with upturned eyes he repeated the noble and pathetic farewell.

When it was over, Sir Harry, who had a quarrel with the vicar before, came over and shook him by the hand, heartily and long, speaking never a word — his heart was too full. And from that time he liked him, and did not know how to show it enough.

In these long, lazy tacks, sweeping slowly by the quaint old town in silence, broken only by the ripple of the water along the planks, and the sweet and distant swell of the organ across the water, the time flew by. The sun went down in red and golden vapours, and the curfew from the ivied tower of Golden Friars sounded over the darkened lake — the organ was heard no more — and the boat was making her slow way back again to Dorracleugh.

Sir Harry looked at me very kindly, in silence, for awhile. He arranged a rug about my feet, and looked again in my face.

“Sometimes you look so like bonny Mabel — and when you smile — ye mind her smile? ’Twas very pretty.”

Then came a silence.

“I must tell Renwick, when the shooting begins, to send down a brace of birds every day to the vicar,” said Sir Harry. “I’ll be away myself in a day or two, and I shan’t be back again for three weeks. I’ll take a house in London, lass — I won’t have ye moping here too long — you’d begin to pine for something to look at, and folks to talk to, and sights to see.”

I was alarmed, and instantly protested that I could not imagine any life more delightful than this at Golden Friars.

“No, no; it won’t do — you’re a good lass to say so — but it’s not the fact — oh, no — it isn’t natural — I can’t take you to balls, and all that, for I don’t know the people that give them — and all my great lady friends that I knew when I was a younker, are off the hooks by this time — but there’s plenty of sights to see besides — there’s the waxworks, and the wild beasts, and the players, and the pictures, and all the shows.”

“But I assure you, I like Golden Friars, and my quiet life at Dorracleugh, a thousand times better than all the sights and wonders in the world,” I protested.

If he had but known half the terror with which I contemplated the possibility of my removal from my then place of abode, he would have given me credit for sincerity in my objections to our proposed migration to the capital.

“No, I say, it won’t do; you women can’t bring yourselves ever to say right out to us men what you think; you mean well — you’re a good little thing — you don’t want to put the auld man out of his way — but you’d like Lunnon best, and Lunnon ye shall have. You shall have a house you can see your auld acquaintance in, such, I mean, as showed themselves goodnatured when all went wrong wi' ye. You shall show them ye can haud your head as high as ever, and are not a jot down in the world. Never mind, I have said it."

In vain I protested; Sir Harry continued firm. One comfort was that he would not return to put his threat into execution for, at least, three weeks. If anything was wanting to complete my misery, it was Sir Harry's saying after a little silence:

"And see, lass; don't you tell a word of it to Richard Marston; 'twould only make him fancy I'm going to take him; and I'd as lief take the devil — so mind ye, it's a secret."

I smiled as well as I could, and said something that seemed to satisfy him, or he took it for granted, for he went on and talked, being much more communicative this evening than usual; while my mind was busy with the thought of a miserable separation, and all the difficulties of correspondence that accompany a secret engagement.

So great was the anguish of these anticipations that I hazarded one more effort to induce him to abandon his London plans, and to let me continue to enjoy my present life at Dorracleugh.

He was, however, quite immovable; he laughed; he told me, again and again, that it would not "put him out of his way — not a bit;" and he added, "You're falling into a moping, unnatural life, and you've grown to like it, and the more you like it, the less it is fit for you; if you lose your spirits, you can't keep your health long."

And when I still persisted, he looked in my face a little darkly, on a sudden, as if a doubt as to my motive had crossed his mind. That look frightened me. I felt that matters might be worse.

Sir Harry had got it into his head, I found, that my health would break down, unless he provided the sort of change and amusement which he had decided on. I don't know to which of the wiseacres of Golden Friars I was obliged for this crotchet, which promised me such an infinity of suffering, but I had reason to think, afterwards, that old Miss Goulding of Wrybiggins was the friend who originated these misgivings about my health and spirits. She wished, I was told, to marry her niece to Richard Marston, and thought, if I and Sir Harry were out of the way, her plans would act more smoothly.

Richard was at home — it was our tea-time — I had not an opportunity of saying a word to him unobserved. I don’t know whether he saw by my looks that I was unhappy.

CHAPTER LVIII.

DANGER.

Sir Harry took his coffee with us, and read to me a little now and then from the papers which had come by the late mails. Mr. Blount had farming news to tell Richard. It was a dreadful tea-party.

I was only able that night to appoint with Richard to meet me, next day, at our accustomed trysting-place.

Three o'clock was our hour of meeting. The stupid, feverish day dragged on, and the time at length arrived. I got on my things quickly, and trembling lest I should be joined by Sir Harry or Mr. Blount, I betook myself through the orchard, and by the wicket in the hedge, to the lonely path through the thick woods where we had, a few months since, plighted our troth.

Richard appeared very soon; he was approaching by the path opposite to that by which I had come.

The foliage was thick and the boughs hang low in that place. You could have fancied him a figure walking in the narrow passage of a monastery, so dark and well-defined is the natural roofing of the pathway there. He raised his open hand, and shook his head as he drew near; he was not smiling; he looked very sombre.

He glanced back over his shoulder, and looked sharply down the path I had come by, and being now very near me, with another gloomy shake of the head, he said, with a tone and look of indescribable reproach and sorrow: "So Ethel has her secrets, and tells me but half her mind."

"What can you mean, Richard?"

"Ah! Ethel, I would not have treated you so," he continued.

"You distract me, Richard; what have I done?"

"I have heard it all by accident, I may say, from old Mr. Blount, who has been simpleton enough to tell me. You have asked my uncle to take you to London, and you are going."

"Asked him! I have all but implored of him to leave me here. I never heard a word of it till last night, as we returned together in the boat. Oh!

Richard, how could you think such things? That is the very thing I have been so longing to talk to you about."

"Ethel, darling, are you opening your heart entirely to me now; is there no reserve? No; I am sure there is not; you need not answer."

"It is distracting news; is there nothing I can do to prevent it?" I said.

He looked miserable enough, as walking slowly along the path, and sometimes standing still, we talked it over.

"Yes," he said; "the danger is that you may lead him by resistance to look for some secret motive. If he should suspect our engagement, few worse misfortunes could befall us. Good heavens! shall I ever have a quiet home? Ethel, I know what will happen — you will go to London; I shall be forgotten. It will end in the ruin of all my hopes." So he raved on.

I wept, and upbraided, and vowed my old vows over again.

At length after this tempestuous scene had gone on for some time, we two walking side by side up and down the path, and sometimes stopping short, I crying, if you will, like a fool, he took my hand and looked in my face very sadly, and he said after a little:

"Only I know that he would show more anger, I should have thought that my uncle knew of our engagement, and was acting expressly to frustrate it. He has found work for me at his property near Hull, and from that I am to go to Warwickshire, so that I suppose I can't be here again before the middle of October, and long before then you will be at Brighton, where, Mr. Blount says, he means to take you first, and from that to London."

"But you are not to leave this immediately?" I said.

He smiled bitterly, and answered:

"He takes good care I shall. I am to leave this tomorrow morning."

I could not speak for a moment.

"Oh, Richard, Richard, how am I to live through this separation?" I cried wildly. "You must contrive some way to see me. I shall die unless you do."

"Come, Ethel, let us think it over; it seems to me that we have nothing for it, for the present, but submission. I am perfectly certain that our attachment is not suspected. If it were, far more cruel and effectual measures would be taken. We must, therefore, be cautious. Let us betray nothing of our feelings. You shall see me undergo the ordeal with the appearance of carelessness, and even cheerfulness, although my heart be bursting. You, darling, must do the same; one way or other I will manage to see you sometimes, and to correspond regularly. We are bound each to the other by promises we dare not break, and when I desert you, may God desert me! Ethel, will you say the same?"

"Yes, Richard," I repeated, vehemently, through sobs, "when I forsake you, may God forsake me! You know I could not live without you. Oh! Richard, darling, how shall I see you all this evening, knowing it to be the last? How can I look at you, or hear your voice, and yet no sign, and talk or listen just as usual, as if nothing had gone wrong? Richard, is there no way to escape? Do you think if we told your uncle? Might it not be the best thing after all? Could it possibly make matters worse?"

"Yes, it would, a great deal worse; that is not to be thought of," said Richard, with a thoughtful frown; "I know him better than you do. No; we have nothing for it but patience, and entire trust in one another. As for me, if I am away from you, the more solitary I am, the more bearable my lot. With you it will be different; you will soon be in the stream and whirl of your old life. I shall lose you, Ethel." He stamped on the ground, and struck his forehead with his open hand in sheer distraction. "As for me, I can enjoy nothing without you; I may have been violent, wicked, reckless, what you will; but selfish or fickle, no one ever called me."

I was interrupting him all the time with my passionate vows of fidelity, which he seemed hardly to hear; he was absorbed in his own thoughts. After a silence of a minute or two, he said, suddenly:

"Look here, Ethel; if you don't like your London life, you can't be as well there as here, and you can, if you will, satisfy my uncle that you are better, as well as happier, here at Golden Friars. You can do that, and that is the way to end it — the only way to end it that I see. You can write to me, Ethel, without danger. You will, I know, every day, just a line; and when you tell me how to address mine, you shall have an answer by every post. Don't go out in London, Ethel; you must promise that."

I did, vehemently and reproachfully. I wondered how he could suspect me of wishing to go out. But I could not resent the jealousy that proved his love.

It was, I think, just at this moment that I heard a sound that made my heart bound within me, and then sink with terror. It was the clear, deep voice of Sir Harry, so near that it seemed a step must bring him round the turn in the path, and full in view of us.

“Go, darling, quickly,” said Richard, pressing me gently with one hand, and with the other pointing in the direction furthest from the voice that was so near a signal of danger. He himself turned, and walked quickly to meet Sir Harry, who was conferring with his ranger about thinning the timber.

I was out of sight in a moment, and, in agitation indescribable, made my way home.

CHAPTER LIX.

AN INTRUDER.

It was all true. Richard left Dorracleugh early next morning. Those who have experienced such a separation know its bitterness, and the heartache and apathy that follow.

I was going to be left quite alone, and mistress at Dorracleugh for three weeks at least; perhaps for twice as long. Mr. Blount was to leave next day for France, to pay a visit of a fortnight to Vichy. Sir Harry Rokestone, a few days later, was to leave Dorracleugh for Brighton.

Nothing could be kinder than Sir Harry. It was plain that he suspected nothing of the real situation.

"You'll be missing your hit of backgammon with Lemuel Blount," he said, "and your sail on the mere wi' myself, and our talk round the tea-table of an evening. 'Twill be dowly down here, lass; but ye'll be coming soon where you'll see sights and hear noise enough for a dozen. So think o' that, and when we are gone you munnon be glumpin' about the house, but chirp up, and think there are but a few weeks between you and Brighton and Lunnon."

How directly this kind consolation went to the source of my dejection you may suppose.

So the time came, and I was alone. Solitude was a relief. I could sit looking at the lake, watching the track where his boat used to come and go over the water, and thinking of him half the day. I could walk in the pathway, and sit under the old beech-tree, and murmur long talks with him in fancy, without fear of interruption; but oh! the misgivings, the suspense, the dull, endless pain of separation!

Not a line reached me from Richard. He insisted that while I remained at Dorracleugh there should be no correspondence. In Golden Friars, and about the postoffice, there were so many acute ears and curious eyes.

Sir Harry had been gone about three weeks, when he sent me a really exquisite little enamelled watch, set in brilliants; it was brought to Dorracleugh by a Golden Friars neighbour whom he had met in his travels.

Then, after a silence of a week, another letter came from Sir Harry. He was going up to London, he said, to see after the house, and to be sure that nothing was wanted to "make it smart."

Then some more days of silence followed, interrupted very oddly. I was out, taking my lonely walk in the afternoon, when a chaise with a portmanteau, a hat-box, and some other luggage on top, drove up to the hall-door; the driver knocked and rang, and out jumped Richard Marston, who ran up the steps, and asked the servant, with an accustomed air of command, to take the luggage up to his room.

He had been some minutes in the hall before he inquired whether I was in the house. He sat down on a hall-chair, in his hat and greatcoat, just as he had come out of the chaise, lost in deep thought. He seemed for a time undecided where to go; he went to the foot of the stairs, and stopped short, with his hand on the banister, and turned back; then he stood for a little while in the middle of the hall, looking down on his dusty boots, again in deep thought; then he walked to the hall-door, stood on the steps in the same undecided state, and sauntered in again, and said to the servant:

"And Miss Ware, you say, is out walking? Well, go you and tell the housekeeper that I have come, and shall be coming and going for a few days, till I hear from London."

The man departed to execute his message. Richard Marston had paid the vicar a visit of about five minutes, as he drove through the town of Golden Friars, and had had a very private and earnest talk with him. He seemed very uncomfortable and fidgety. He took off his hat and laid it down, and put it on again, and looked dark and agitated, like a man in a sudden danger, who expects a struggle for his life. He went again to the foot of the stairs, and listened for a few seconds; and then, without much ado, he walked over and turned the key that was in Sir Harry's study-door, took it out, and went into the room, looking very stern and nervous.

In a little more than five minutes Mrs. Shackleton, the housekeeper, in her thick brown silk, knocked sharply at the door.

"Come in," called Richard Marston's voice.

"I can't, sir."

"Can't? Why? What's the matter?"

"You've bolted it, please, on the inside," she answered, very tartly.

"I? I haven't bolted it," Richard Marston answered, with a quiet laugh. "Try again."

She did, a little fiercely; but the door opened, and disclosed Richard Marston sitting in his uncle's easy chair, with one of the newspapers he had bought in his railway carriage expanded on his knees. He looked up carelessly.

"Well, Mrs. Shackleton, what's the row?"

"No row, sir, please," she answered, sharply rustling into the room, and looking round. She didn't like him. "But the door was bolted, I assure you, sir, only a minute before, when I tried it first; and my master, Sir Harry, told me no one was to be allowed into this room while he's away."

"So I should have thought; his letters lying about — but I found the door open, and the key in the lock — here it is; so I thought it safer to take it out."

The old woman made a short curtsey as she took it, dryly, from his fingers; and she stood, resolutely waiting.

"Oh! I suppose," he said, starting up, and stretching himself, with a smile and a little yawn, "you want me to turn out?"

"Yes, sir, please," said Mrs. Shackleton peremptorily.

The young gentleman cast a careless glance through the far window, looked lazily round, as if to see that he had not forgotten anything, and then said, with a smile:

"Mrs. Shackleton, happy the man who has such a lady to take care of his worldly goods."

"I'm no lady, sir; I'm not above my business," she said, with another hard little curtsey. "I tries to do my dooty accordin' to my conscience. Sorry to have to disturb you, sir."

"Not the least; no disturbance," he said, sauntering out of the room, with another yawn.

He was cudgelling his brains to think what civility he could do the old lady, or how he could please or make her friendly; but Mrs. Shackleton had her northern pride, he knew, which was easily ruffled, and he must approach her very cautiously.

CHAPTER LX.

SIR HARRY'S KEY.

Up to his room he went; his things were all there — he wished to get rid of the dust and smuts of his railway journey.

He made his toilet rapidly; and just as he was about to open his door, a knock came to it.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The vicar has called, sir, and wants to know if you can see him."

"Certainly. Tell him I'll be down in a moment."

Mr. Marston had foreseen this pursuit with a prescience of which he was proud. He went downstairs, and found the white-haired vicar alone in the drawingroom.

"I am so delighted you have come," said Richard Marston, advancing quickly, with an outstretched hand, from the door, without giving him a moment to begin. "I have only had time to dress since I arrived, and I have made up my mind that it is better to replace this key in your hand, without using it — and, in the meantime, it is better in your keeping than in mine. Don't you think so?"

"Well, sir," said the good vicar, "I do. It is odd, but the very same train of thought passed through my mind, and, in fact, induced me to pay you this visit. You see it was placed in my charge, and I think, until it is formally required of me, I should not part with it."

"Just so," acquiesced the young man.

"We both acted, perhaps, a little too precipitately."

"So we did, sir," said Richard Marston, "but I take the entire blame on myself. I'm too apt to be impulsive and foolish. I generally think too late; happily this time, however, I did reflect, and with your concurrence, I am now sure I was right."

The young man paused and thought, with his hand on the vicar's arm.

"One thing," he said, "I would stipulate, however; as we are a good deal in the dark, my reason for declining to take charge of the key would be but half answered, as I must be a great deal in this house, and there may be other keys that open it, and I can't possibly answer for servants, and other people who will be coming and going, unless you will kindly come into the next room with me for a moment."

The vicar consented; and Mr. Marston was eloquent. Mrs. Shackelton was sent for, and with less reluctance opened the door for the vicar, whom she loved. She did not leave it, however — they did not stay long. In a few minutes the party withdrew.

"Won't you have some luncheon?" asked Richard, in the hall.

"No, thank you," said the vicar, "I am very much hurried. I am going to see that poor boy to whom Mr. Blount has been so kind, and who is, I fear, dying."

And with a few words more, and the key again in his keeping, he took his leave.

I was all this time in my favourite haunt, alone, little thinking that the hero of my dreams was near, when suddenly I saw him walking rapidly up the path. With a cry, I ran to meet him. He seemed delighted and radiant with love as he drew me to him, folded me for a moment in his arms, and kissed me passionately. He had ever so much to say; and yet, when I thought it over, there was nothing in it but one delightful promise; and that was that henceforward, he expected to see a great deal more of me than he had hitherto done.

There was a change in his manner, I thought — he spoke with something of the confidence and decision of a lover who had a right to command. He was not more earnest, but more demonstrative. I might have resented his passionate greeting, if I had been myself less surprised and happy at his sudden appearance. He was obliged to go down to the village, but would be back again, he said, very soon. It would not do to make people talk, which they would be sure to do, if he and I were not very cautious.

Therefore I let him go, without entreaty or remonstrance, although it cost me an indescribable pang to lose him, even for an hour, so soon after our long separation. He promised to be back in an hour, and although that was nearly impracticable, I believed him. "Lovers trample upon impossibilities."

By a different route I came home. He had said:

"When I return, I shall come straight to the drawingroom — will you be there?"

So to the drawingroom I went. I was afraid to leave it even for a moment, lest some accident should make him turn back, and he should find the room empty. There was to me a pleasure in obeying him, and I liked him to see it. How I longed for his return! How restless I was! How often I played his favourite airs on the piano; how often I sat at the window, looking down at the trees and the mere, in the direction from which I had so often seen his boat coming, you will easily guess.

All this time I had a secret misgiving. There was a change in Richard's manner, as I have said; there was confidence, security, carelessness — a kind of carelessness — not that he seemed to admire me less — but it was a change. There seemed something ominous about it.

As time wore on I became so restless that I could hardly remain quiet for a minute in any one place. I was perpetually holding the door open, and listening for the sound of horses' hoofs, or wheels, or footsteps. In vain.

An hour beyond the appointed time had passed; two hours. I was beginning to fancy all sorts of horrors. Was he drowned in the mere? Had his horse fallen and killed him? There was no catastrophe too improbable to be canvassed among the wild conjectures of my terror.

The sun was low, and I almost despairing, when the door opened, and Richard came in. I had heard no sound at the door, no step approaching, only he was there.

CHAPTER LXI.

A DISCOVERY.

I started to my feet and was going to meet him, but he raised his hand, as I fancied to warn me that some one was coming. So I stopped short, and he approached.

"I shall be very busy for two or three days, dear Ethel; and," what he added was spoken very slowly, and dropped word by word, "you are such a rogue!"

I was very much astonished. Neither his voice nor look was playful. His face at the moment wore about the most disagreeable expression which human face can wear. That of a smile, not a genuine but a pretended smile, which, at the same time, the person who smiles affects to try to suppress. To me it looks cruel, cynical, mean. I was so amazed, as he looked into my eyes with this cunning, shabby smile, that I could not say a word, and stood stock-still looking in return, in stupid wonder, in his face.

At length I broke out, very pale, for I was shocked, "I can't understand! What is it? Oh, Richard, what can you mean?"

"Now don't be a little fool. I really believe you are going to cry. You are a great deal too clever, you lovely little rogue, to fancy that a girl's tears ever yet did any good. Listen to me; come!"

He walked away, still smiling that insulting smile, and he took my hand in his, and shook his finger at me, with the same cynical affectation of the playful. "What did I mean?"

"Yes, what can you mean?" I stamped the emphasis on the floor, with tears in my eyes. "It is cruel, it is horrible, after our long separation."

"Well, I'll tell you what I mean," he said, and for a moment the smile almost degenerated to a sneer. "Look here; come to the window."

I faltered; I accompanied him to it, looking in his face in an agony of alarm and surprise. It seemed to me like the situation of a horrid dream.

"Do you know how I amused myself during the last twenty miles of my railway journey?" he said. "Well, I'll tell you: I was reading all that time a curious criminal trial, in which a most respectable old gentleman, aged sixty-seven, has just been convicted of having poisoned a poor girl forty years ago, and is to be hanged for it before three weeks!"

"Well?" said I, with an effort — I should not have known my own voice, and I felt a great ball in my throat.

"Well?" he repeated; "don't you see?"

He paused with the same horrid smile; this time, in the silence, he laughed a little; it was no use trying to hide from myself the fact that I dimly suspected what he was driving at. I should have liked to die that moment, before he had time to complete another sentence.

"Now, you see, the misfortune of that sort of thing is that time neither heals nor hides the offence. There is a principle of law which says that no lapse of time bars the Crown. But I see this kind of conversation bores you."

I was near saying something very wild and foolish, but I did not.

"I won't keep you a moment," said he— "just come a little nearer the window; I want you to look at something that may interest you."

I did go a little nearer. I was moving as he commanded, as if I had been mesmerised.

"You lost," he continued, "shortly before your illness, the only photograph you possessed of your sister Helen? But why are you so put out by it? Why should you tremble so violently? It is only I, you know; you need not mind. You dropped that on the floor of a jeweller's shop one night, when I and Droqville happened to be there together, and I picked it up; it represents you both together. I want to restore it; here it is."

I extended my hand to take it. I don't know whether I spoke, but the portrait faded suddenly from my sight, and darkness covered everything. I heard his voice, like that of a person talking in excitement, a long way off, at the other side of a wall in another room — it was no more than a hum, and even that was growing fainter. I forgot everything, in utter unconsciousness, for some seconds. When I opened my eyes, water was trickling down my face and forehead, and the window was open. I sighed deeply. I saw him looking over me with a countenance of gloom and anxiety. In happy forgetfulness of all that had passed, I smiled and said:

"Oh, Richard! Thank God!" and stretched my arms to him.

"That's right — quite right," he said; "you may have every confidence in me."

The dreadful recollection began to return.

“Don’t get up yet,” he said, earnestly, and even tenderly; “you’re not equal to it. Don’t think of leaving me — you must have confidence in me. Why didn’t you trust me long ago? — trust me altogether? Fear nothing while I am near you.”

So he continued speaking, until my recollection had quite returned.

“Why, darling, will you not trust me? Can you be surprised at my being wounded by your reserve? How have I deserved it? Forget the pain of this discovery, and remember only that against all the world, to the last hour of my life, with my last thought, the last drop of my blood, I am your defender.”

He kissed my hands passionately; he drew me towards him, and kissed my lips. He murmured caresses and vows of unalterable love — nothing could be more tender and impassioned. I was relieved by a passionate burst of tears.

“It’s over now,” he said— “it’s all over; you’ll forgive me, won’t you? I have more to forgive, darling, than you — the hardest of all things to forgive in one whom we idolise — a want of confidence in us. You ought to have told me all this before.”

I told him, as well as I could between my sobs, that there was no need to tell any one of a madness which had nothing to do with waking thoughts or wishes, and was simply the extravagance of delirium — that I was then actually in fever, had been at the point of death, and that Mr. Carmel knew everything about it.

“Well, darling,” he said, “you must trouble your mind no more. Of course you are not accountable for it. If people in brain fever were not carefully watched and restrained, a day would not pass without some tragedy. But what care I, Ethel, if it had been a real crime of passion? Nothing. Do you fancy it would or could, for an instant, have shaken my desperate love for you? Don’t you remember Moore’s lines:

‘I ask not, I care not, if guilt’s in thy heart; I but know that thou lov’st me, whatever thou art.’

“That is my feeling, fixed as adamant; never suspect me. I can’t I never can, tell you how I felt your suspicion of my love; how cruel I thought it. What had I done to deserve it? There, darling, take this — it is yours.” He kissed the little photograph, he placed it in my hand, he kissed me again fervently. “Look here, Ethel, I came all this way, ever so much out of my way, to see you. I made an excuse of paying the vicar a visit on business — my real business was to see you. I must be this evening at Wrexham, but I shall be here again tomorrow, as early as possible. I am a mere slave at present, and business hurries me from point to point; but cost what it may, I shall be with you some time in the afternoon tomorrow.”

“To stay?” I asked.

He smiled, and shook his head.

“I can’t say that, darling,” he said; he was going towards the door.

“But you’ll be here early tomorrow; do you think before two?”

“No, not before two, I am afraid. I may be delayed, and it is a long way; but you may look out for me early in the evening.”

Then came a leavetaking. He would not let me come with him to the hall-door — there were servants there, and I looked so ill. I stood at the window and saw him drive away. You may suppose I did feel miserable. I think I was near fainting again when he was gone.

In a little time I was sufficiently recovered to get up to my room, and then I rang for Rebecca Torkill.

I don’t know how that long evening went by. The night came, and a miserable nervous night I passed, starting in frightful dreams from the short dozes I was able to snatch.

CHAPTER LXII.

SIR HARRY WITHDRAWS.

Next morning, when the grey light came, I was neither glad nor sorry. The shock of my yesterday's interview with the only man on earth I loved, remained. It was a shock, I think, never to be quite recovered from. I got up and dressed early. How ill and strange I looked out of the glass in my own face!

I did not go down. I remained in my room, loitering over the hours that were to pass before the arrival of Richard. I was haunted by his changed face. I tried to fix in my recollection the earnest look of love on which my eyes had opened from my swoon. But the other would take its place and remain; and I could not get rid of the startled pain of my heart. I was haunted now, as I had been ever since that scene had taken place, with a vague misgiving of something dreadful going to happen.

I think it was between four and five in the evening that Rebecca Torkill came in, looking pale and excited.

"Oh, Miss Ethel, dear, what do you think has happened?" she said, lifting up both hands and eyes as soon as she was in at the door.

"Good Heaven, Rebecca!" I said, starting up; "is it anything bad?"

I was on the point of saying "anything about Mr. Marston?"

"Oh, miss! what do you think? Poor Sir Harry Rokestone is dead."

"Sir Harry dead!" I exclaimed.

"Dead, indeed, miss," said Rebecca. "Thomas Byres is just come up from the vicar's, and he's had a letter from Mr. Blount this morning, and the vicar's bin down at the church with Dick Mattox, the sexton, giving him directions about the vault. Little thought I, when I saw him going away — a fine man he was, six feet two, Adam Bell says, in his boots — little thought I, when I saw him walk down the steps, so tall and hearty, he'd be coming back so soon in his coffin, poor gentleman. But, miss, they say dead folk's past feeling, and what does it all matter now? One man's breath is another man's death. And so the world goes on, and all forgot before long.

‘To the grave with the dead,
And the quick to the bread.’

“A rough gentleman he was, but kind — the tenants will be all sorry. They’re all talking, the servants, downstairs. He was one that liked to see his tenants and his poor comfortable.”

All this and a great deal more Rebecca discoursed. I could hardly believe her news. A letter, I thought, would have been sure to reach Dorracleugh, as soon as the vicar’s house, at least.

Possibly this dismaying news would turn out to be mere rumour, I thought, and end in nothing worse than a sharp attack of gout in London. Surely we should have heard of his illness before it came to this catastrophe. Nevertheless I had to tear up my first note to the vicar — I was so flurried, and it was full of blunders — and I was obliged to write another. It was simply to entreat information in this horrible uncertainty, which had for the time superseded all my other troubles.

A mounted messenger was despatched forthwith to the vicar’s house. But we soon found that the rumour was everywhere, for people were arriving from all quarters to inquire at the house. It was, it is true, so far as we could learn, mere report; but its being in so many places was worse than ominous.

The messenger had not been gone ten minutes, when Richard Marston arrived. From my room I saw the chaise come to the hall-door, and I ran down at once to the drawingroom. Richard had arrived half an hour before his time. He entered the room from the other door as I came in, and met me eagerly, looking tired and anxious, but very loving. Not a trace of the Richard whose smile had horrified me the day before.

Almost my first question to him was whether he had heard any such rumour. He was holding my hand in his as I asked the question — he laid his other on it, and looked sadly in my eyes as he answered, “It is only too true. I have lost the best friend that man ever had.”

I was too much startled to speak for some seconds, then I burst into tears.

“No, no,” he said, in answer to something I had said. “It is only too certain — there can be no doubt; look at this.”

He took a telegraph paper from his pocket and showed it to me. It was from “Lemuel Blount, London.” It announced the news in the usual shocking laconic manner, and said, “I write to you to Dykham.”

“I shall get the letter this evening when I reach Dykham, and I’ll tell you all that is in it tomorrow. The telegraph message had reached me yesterday, when I saw you, but I could not bear to tell you the dreadful news until I had confirmation, and that has come. The vicar has had a message, about which there can be no mistake. And now, darling, put on your things, and come out for a little walk — I have ever so many things to talk to you about.”

Here was a new revolution in my troubled history. More or less of the horror of uncertainty again encompassed my future years. But grief, quite unselfish, predominated in my agitation. I had lost a benefactor. His kind face was before me, and the voice, always subdued to tenderness when he spoke to me, was in my ear. I was grieved to the heart.

I got on my hat and jacket, and with a heavy heart went out with Richard.

For many reasons the most secluded path was that best suited for our walk. Richard Marston had just told the servants the substance of the message he had received that morning from Mr. Blount, so that that they could have no difficulty about answering inquiries at the hall-door.

We soon found ourselves in the path that had witnessed so many of our meetings. I wondered what Richard intended talking about. He had been silent and thoughtful. He hardly uttered a word during our walk, until we had reached what I may call our trysting-tree, the grand old beech-tree, under which a huge log of timber, roughly squared, formed a seat.

Though little disposed myself to speak, his silence alarmed me.

“Ethel, darling,” he said, suddenly, “have you formed any plans for the future?”

“Plans!” I echoed. “I don’t know — what do you mean, Richard?”

“I mean,” he continued, sadly, “have you considered how this misfortune may affect us? Did Sir Harry ever tell you anything about his intentions — I mean what he thought of doing by his will? Don’t look so scared, darling,” he added, with a melancholy smile; “you will see just now what my reasons are. You can’t suppose that a sordid thought ever entered my mind.”

I was relieved.

“No; he never said a word to me about his will, except what I told you,” I answered.

“Because the people who knew him at Wrexham are talking. Suppose he has cut me off and provided for you, could I any longer in honour hold you to an engagement, to fulfil which I could contribute nothing?”

“Oh, Richard, darling, how can you talk so? Don’t you know, whatever I possess on earth is yours.”

“Then my little woman refuses to give me up, even if there were difficulties?” he said, pressing my hands, and smiling down upon my face in a kind rapture.

“I could not give you up, Richard — you know I couldn’t,” I answered.

“My darling!” he exclaimed, softly, looking down upon me still with the same smile.

“Richard, how could you ever have dreamed such a thing? You don’t know how you wound me.”

“I never thought it, I never believed it, darling. I knew it was impossible; whatever difficulties might come between us, I knew that I could not live without you; and I thought you loved me as well. Nothing then shall part us — nothing. Don’t you say so? Say it, Ethel. I swear it, nothing.”

I gave him the promise; it was but repeating what I had often said before. Never was vow uttered from a more willing heart. Even now I am sure he reminded me, and, after his manner, loved me with a vehement passion.

“But there are other people, Ethel,” he resumed, “who think that I shall be very well off, who think that I shall inherit all my uncle’s great fortune. But all may not go smoothly, you see; there may be great difficulties. Promise me, swear it once more, that you will suffer no obstacles to separate us; that we shall be united, be they what they may; that you will never, so help you Heaven, forsake me or marry another.”

I did repeat the promise. We walked towards home; I wondering what special difficulty he could be thinking of now; but, restrained by a kind of fear, I did not ask him.

“I’m obliged to go away again, immediately,” said he, after another short silence; “but my business will be over tonight, and I shall be here again in the morning, and then I shall be my own master for a time, and have a quiet day or two, and be able to open my heart to you, Ethel.”

We walked on again in silence. Suddenly he stopped, laying his hand on my shoulder, and looking sharply into my face, said:

"I'll leave you here — it is time, Ethel, that I should be off." He held my hand in his, and his eyes were fixed steadily upon mine. "Look here," he said, after another pause, "I must make a bitter confession, Ethel; you know me with all my faults — I have no principle of calculation in me — equity and all that sort of thing, would stand a poor chance with me against passion — I am all passion; it has been my undoing, and will yet I hope," and he looked on me with a wild glow in his dark eyes, "be the making of me, Ethel. No obstacle shall separate us, you have sworn; and mind, Ethel, I am a fellow that never forgives, and as Heaven is my judge, if you give me up, I'll not forgive you. But that will never be. God bless you, darling — you shall see me early tomorrow. Go you in that direction — let us keep our secret a day or two longer. You look as if you thought me mad — I'm not that — though I sometimes half think so myself. There has been enough in my life to make a steadier brain than mine crazy. Goodbye, Ethel, darling, till tomorrow. God bless you!"

With these words he left me. His reckless language had plainly a meaning in it. My heart sank as I thought on the misfortune that had reduced me again to uncertainty, and perhaps to a miserable dependence. It was by no means impossible that nothing had been provided for either him or me by Sir Harry Rokestone. Men, prompt and accurate in everything else, so often go on postponing a will until "the door is shut to," and the hour passed for ever. It was horrible allowing such thoughts to intrude; but Richard's conversation was so full of the subject, and my position was so critical and dependent, that it did recur, not with sordid hopes, but in the form of a great and reasonable fear.

When Richard was out of sight, as he quickly was among the trees, I turned back, and sitting down again on the rude bench under our own beech-tree, I had a long and bitter cry, all to myself.

CHAPTER LXIII.

AT THE THREE NUNS.

When Richard Marston left me, his chaise stood at the door, with a team of four horses, quite necessary to pull a four-wheeled carriage over the fells, through whose gorges the road to the nearest railway-station is carried.

The pleasant setting sun flashed over the distant fells, and glimmered on the pebbles of the courtyard, and cast a long shadow of Richard Marston, as he stood upon the steps, looking down upon the yellow, worn flags, in dark thought.

"Here, put this in," he said, handing his only piece of luggage, a black leather travelling-bag, to one of the postboys. "You know the town of Golden Friars?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, stop at Mr. Jarlcot's house."

Away went the chaise, with its thin roll of dust, like the smoke of a hedge-fire, all along the road, till they pulled up at Mr. Jarlcot's house.

Out jumped Mr. Marston, and knocked a sharp summons with the brass knocker on the hall-door.

The maid opened the door, and stood on the step with a mysterious look of inquiry in Mr. Marston's face. The rumour that was already slowly spreading in Golden Friars had suddenly been made sure by a telegraphic message from Lemuel Blount to Mr. Jarlcot. His good wife had read it just five minutes before Mr. Marston's arrival.

"When is Mr. Jarlcot to be home again?"

"Day after tomorrow, please, sir."

"Well, when he comes, don't forget to tell him I called. No, this is better," and he wrote in pencil on his card the date and the words, "Called twice — most anxious to see Mr. Jarlcot;" and laid it on the table. "Can I see Mr. Spaight?" he inquired.

Tall, stooping Mr. Spaight, the confidential man, with his bald head, spectacles, and long nose, emerged politely, with a pen behind his ear, at this question, from the door of the front room, which was Mr. Jarlcot's office.

"Oh! Mr. Spaight," said Richard Marston, "have you heard from Mr. Jarlcot to-day?"

"A short letter, Mr. Marston, containing nothing of business — only a few items of news; he's in London till tomorrow — he saw Mr. Blount there."

"Then he has heard, of course, of our misfortune?"

"Yes, sir; and we all sympathise with you, Mr. Marston, deeply, sir, in your affliction. Will you please to step in, sir, and look at the letter?"

Mr. Marston accepted the invitation.

There were two or three sentences that interested him.

"I have had a conversation with Mr. Blount this morning. He fears very much that Sir Harry did not execute the will. I saw Messrs. Hutt and Babbage, who drafted the will; but they can throw no light upon the matter, and say that the result of a search, only, can; which Mr. Blount says won't take five minutes to make."

This was interesting; but the rest was rubbish. Mr. Marston took his leave, got into the chaise again, and drove under the windows of the "George and Dragon," along the already deserted road that ascends the fells from the margin of the lake.

Richard Marston put his head from the window and looked back; there was no living creature in his wake. Before him he saw nothing but the postboys' stooping backs, and the horses with their four patient heads bobbing before him. The light was failing, still it would have served to read by for a little while; and there was something he was very anxious to read. He was irresolute — there was a risk in it — he could not make up his mind.

He looked at his watch — it would take him nearly three hours to reach the station at the other side of the fells. Unlucky the delay at Dorracleugh!

The light failed. White mists began to crawl across the road, and were spreading and rising fantastically on the hillsides. The moon came out. He was growing more impatient. In crossing a mountain the eye measures so little distance gained for the time expended. The journey seemed, to him, interminable.

At one of the zig-zag turns of the road, there rises a huge fragment of white stone, bearing a rude resemblance to a horseman; a highwayman, you might fancy him, awaiting the arrival of the travellers. In Richard's eye it took the shape of old Sir Harry Rokestone, as he used to sit, when he had reined in his tall iron-grey hunter, and was waiting to have a word with some one coming up.

He muttered something as he looked sternly ahead at this fantastic reminder. On they drove; the image resolved itself into its rude sides and angles, and was passed; and the pale image of Sir Harry no longer waylaid his nephew.

Slowly the highest point of the road was gained, and then begins the flying descent; and the well-known landmarks, as he consults his watch, from time to time, by the moonlight, assure him that they will reach the station in time to catch the train.

He is there. He pays his postboys, and with his black travelling-bag in hand, runs out upon the gravelled front, from which the platform extends its length.

“The up-train not come yet?” inquired the young man, looking down the line eagerly.

“Not due for four minutes, Mr. Marston,” said the station-master, with officious politeness, “and we shall hardly have it up till some minutes later. They are obliged to slacken speed in the Malwyn cutting at present. Your luggage all right, I hope? Shall I get your ticket for you, Mr. Marston?”

The extraordinary politeness of the official had, perhaps, some connection with the fact that the rumour of Sir Harry's death was there already, and the Rokestone estates extended beyond the railway. Richard Marston was known to be the only nephew of the deceased baronet, and to those who knew nothing of the interior politics of the family, his succession appeared certain.

Mr. Marston thanked him, but would not give him the trouble; he fancied that the station-master, who was perfectly innocent of any treacherous design, wished to play the part of a detective, and find out all he could about his movements and belongings.

Richard Marston got away from him as quickly as he civilly could, without satisfying his curiosity on any point. The train was up, and the doors clapping a few minutes later; and he, with his bag, rug, and umbrella, got into his place with a thin, sour old lady in black, opposite; a nurse at one side, with two children in her charge, who were always jumping down on people's feet, or climbing up again, and running to the window, and bawling questions with incessant clamour; and at his other side, a mummy-coloured old gentleman with an olive-green cloth cap, the flaps of which were tied under his chin, and a cream-coloured muffler.

He had been hoping for a couple of hours' quiet — perhaps a tenantless carriage. This state of things for a man in search of meditation was disappointing.

They were now, at length, at Dykham. A porter in waiting, from the inn called the "Three Nuns," took Marston's bag and rug, and led the way to that house, only fifty yards off, where he took up his quarters for the night.

He found Mr. Blount's promised letter from London there. He did not wait for candles and his sitting-room. In his hat and overcoat, by the gaslight at the bar, he read it breathlessly. It said substantially what Mr. Jarlcot's letter had already told him, and nothing more. It was plain, then, that Sir Harry had left every one in the dark as to whether he had or had not executed the will.

In answer to the waiter's hospitable inquiries about supper, he said he had dined late. It was not true; but it was certain that he had no appetite.

He got a sitting-room to himself; he ordered a fire, for he thought the night chilly. He had bought a couple of books, two or three magazines, and as many newspapers. He had his window-curtains drawn; and their agreeable smell of old tobacco smoke assured him that there would be no objection to his cigar.

"I'll ring when I want anything," he said; "and, in the meantime, let me be quiet."

It was here, when he had been negotiating for Sir Harry the renewal of certain leases to a firm in Dykham, that the telegraph had brought him the startling message, and Mr. Blount said in the same message that he was writing particulars by that day's post.

Mr. Marston had not allowed grass to grow under his feet, as you see; and he was now in the same quarters, about to put the case before himself, with a thorough command of its facts.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE WILL.

Candles lighted, shutters closed, curtains drawn, and a small but cheerful fire flickering in the grate. The oldfashioned room looked pleasant; Richard Marston was nervous, and not like himself. He looked over the "deaths" in the papers, but Sir Harry's was not among them. He threw the papers one after the other on the table, and read nothing.

He got up and stood with his back to the fire. He looked like a man who had got a chill, whom nothing could warm, who was in for a fever. He was in a state he had not anticipated — he almost wished he had left undone the things he had done.

He bolted the door — he listened at it — he tried it with his hand. He had something in his possession that embarrassed and almost frightened him, as if it had been some damning relic of a murdered man.

He sat down and drew from his breastpocket a tolerably bulky paper, a law-paper with a piece of red tape about it, and a seal affixing the tape to the paper. The paper was endorsed in pencil, in Sir Harry's hand, with the words, "Witnessed by Darby Mayne and Hugh Fenwick," and the date followed.

A sudden thought struck him; he put the paper into his pocket again, and made a quiet search of the room, even opening and looking into the two old cupboards, and peeping behind the curtains to satisfy his nervous fancy that no one was concealed there.

Then again he took out the paper, cut the tape, broke the seal, unfolded the broad document, and holding it extended in both hands, read, "The last will and testament of Sir Harry Rokestone, of Dorracleugh, in the County of —— , Baronet."

Here, then, was the great sacrilege. He stood there with the spoils of the dead in his hands. But there was no faltering now in his purpose.

He read on: "I, Harry Rokestone, etc., Baronet, of Dorracleugh, etc., being of sound mind, and in good health, do make this my last will," *etc.*

And on and on he read, his face darkening.

“Four trustees,” he muttered, and read on for awhile, for he could not seize its effect as rapidly and easily as an expert would. “Well, yes, two thousand two hundred pounds sterling by way of annuity — annuity! — to be paid for the term of his natural life, in four equal sums, on the first of May, the first of August — yes, and so on — as a first charge upon all the said estates, and so forth. Well, what else?”

And so he went on humming and humming over the paper, his head slowly turning from side to side as he read.

“And Blount to have two hundred a year! I guessed that old Methodist knew what he was about; and then there’s the money. What about the money?” He read on as before. “Five thousand pounds. Five thousand for me. Upon my soul! out of one hundred and twenty thousand pounds in government stock. That’s modest, all things considered, and an annuity just of two thousand two hundred a year for my life, the rental of the estates, as I happen to know, being nearly nine thousand.” This he said with a sneering, uneasy chuckle. “And that is all!”

And he stood erect, holding the paper by the corner between his finger and thumb, and letting it lie against his knee.

“And everything else,” he muttered, “land and money, without exception, goes to Miss Ethel Ware. She the lady of the fee; I a poor annuitant!”

Here he was half stifled with rage and mortification.

“I see now, I see what he means. I see the drift of the whole thing. I see my way. I mustn’t make a mistake, though — there can’t be any. Nothing can be more distinct.”

He folded up the will rapidly, and replaced it in his pocket.

Within the last half hour his forehead had darkened, and his cheeks had hollowed. How strangely these subtle muscular contractions correspond with the dominant moral action of the moment!

He took out another paper, a very old one, worn at the edges, and indorsed “Case on behalf of Richard Rokestone Marston, Esquire.” I suppose he had read it at least twenty times that day, during his journey to Dorracleugh. “No, nothing on earth can be clearer or more positive,” he thought. “The whole thing is as plain as that two and two make four. It covers everything.”

There were two witnesses to this will corresponding with the indorsement, each had signed in presence of the other; all was technically exact.

Mr. Marston had seen and talked with these witnesses on his arrival at Dorracleugh, and learned enough to assure him that nothing was to be apprehended from them. They were persons in Sir Harry's employment, and Sir Harry had called them up on the day that the will was dated, and got them to witness in all about a dozen different documents, which they believed to be leases, but were not sure. Sir Harry had told them nothing about the nature of the papers they were witnessing, and had never mentioned a will to them. Richard Marston had asked Mrs. Shackelton also, and she had never heard Sir Harry speak of a will.

While the news of Sir Harry's death rested only upon a telegraphic message, which might be forged or precipitate, he dared not break the seal and open the will. Mr. Blount's and Mr. Jarlcot's letters, which he had read this evening, took that event out of the possibility of question.

He was safe also in resolving a problem that was now before him. Should he rest content with his annuity and five thousand pounds, or seize the entire property, by simply destroying the will?

If the will were allowed to stand he might count on my fidelity, and secure possession of all it bequeathed by marrying me. He had only to place the will somewhere in Sir Harry's room, where it would be sure to be found, and the affair would proceed in its natural course without more trouble to him.

But Mr. Blount was appointed, with very formidable powers, my guardian, and one of his duties was to see, in the event of my marrying, that suitable settlements were made, and that there was no reasonable objection to the candidate for my hand.

Mr. Blount was a quiet but very resolute man in all points of duty. Knowing what was Sir Harry's opinion of his nephew, would he, within the meaning of the will, accept him as a suitor against whom no reasonable objection lay? And even if this were got over, Mr. Blount would certainly sanction no settlement which did not give me as much as I gave. My preponderance of power, as created by the will, must therefore be maintained by the settlement. I had no voice in the matter; and thus it seems that in most respects, even by marriage, the operation of the will was inexorable. Why, then, should the will exist? and why, with such a fortune and liberty within his grasp, should he submit to conditions that would fetter him?

Even the pleasure of depriving Mr. Blount of his small annuity, ridiculous as such a consideration seemed, had its influence. He was keenly incensed with that officious and interested agent. The vicar, in their first conversation, had opened his eyes as to the action of that pretended friend.

“Mr. Blount told me, just before he left this,” said the good vicar, “that he had been urging and even entreating Sir Harry for a long time to execute a will which he had by him, requiring nothing but his signature, but, as yet, without success, and that he feared he would never do it.”

Now approached the moment of decision. He had read a trial in the newspapers long before, in which a curious case was proved. A man in the position of a gentleman had gone down to a deserted house that belonged to him, for the express purpose of there destroying a will which would have injuriously affected him.

He had made up his mind to destroy it, but he was haunted with the idea that, do it how he might in the village where he lived, one way or other the crime would be discovered. Accordingly he visited, with many precautions, this old house, which was surrounded closely by a thick wood. From one of the chimneys a boy, in search of jackdaws, saw one little puff of smoke escape, and his curiosity being excited, he climbed to the window of the room to which the chimney corresponded, and peeping in, he saw something flaming on the hob, and near it a man, who started, and hurriedly left the room on observing him.

Fancying pursuit, the detected man took his departure, without venturing to return to the room.

The end of the matter was that his journey to the old house was tracked, and not only did the boy identify him, but the charred pieces of burnt paper found on the hob, having been exposed to chemical action, had revealed the writing, a portion of which contained the signatures of the testator, and the witnesses, and these and other part thus rescued, identified it with the original draft in possession of the dead man’s attorney. Thus the crime was proved, and the will set up and supplemented by what, I believe, is termed secondary evidence.

Who could be too cautious, then, in such a matter? It seemed as hard to hide away effectually all traces of a will destroyed as the relics of a murder.

Again he was tempted to spare the will, and rest content with an annuity and safety. It was but a temptation, however, and a passing one.

He unbolted the door softly, and rang the bell. The waiter found him extended on a sofa, apparently deep in his magazine.

He ordered tea — nothing else; he was precise in giving his order — he did not want the servant pottering about his room — he had reasons for choosing to be specially quiet.

The waiter returned with his tea-tray, and found him buried, as before, in his magazine.

“Is everything there?” inquired Richard Marston.

“Everything there? Yes, sir, everything.”

“Well, then, you need not come again till I touch the bell.”

The waiter withdrew.

Mr. Marston continued absorbed in his magazine for just three minutes. Then he rose softly, stepped lightly to the door, and listened. He bolted it again; tried it, and found it fast.

In a moment the will was in his hand. He gave one dark, searching look round the room, and then he placed the document in the very centre of the embers. He saw it smoke sullenly, and curl and slowly warp, and spring with a faint sound, that made him start more than ever cannon did, into sudden flame. That little flame seemed like a bale-fire to light up the broad sky of night with a vengeful flicker, and throw a pale glare over the wide parks and mosses, the forests, fells, and mere, of dead Sir Harry’s great estate; and when the flame leaped up and died, it seemed that there was no light left in the room, and he could see nothing but the myriad little worms of fire wriggling all over the black flakes which he thrust, like struggling enemies, into the hollow of the fire.

Richard Marston was a man of redundant courage, and no scruple. But have all men some central fibre of fear that can be reached, and does the ghost of the conscience they have killed within them sometimes rise and overshadow them with horror? Richard Marston, with his feet on the fender and the tongs in his hands, pressed down the coals upon the ashes of the will, and felt faint and dizzy, as he had done on the night of the shipwreck, when, with bleeding forehead, he had sat down for the first time in the steward’s house at Malory.

An event as signal had happened now. After nearly ten minutes had passed, during which he had never taken his eyes off the spot where the ashes were glowing, he got up and took the candle down to see whether a black film of the paper had escaped from the grate. Then stealthily he opened the window to let out any smell of burnt paper.

He lighted his cigar, and smoked; and unbolted the door, rang the bell, and ordered brandy-and-water. The suspense was over, and the crisis past.

He was resolved to sit there till morning, to see that fire burnt out.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE SERPENT’S SMILE.

There came on a sudden a great quiet over Dorracleugh — the quiet of death.

There was no longer any doubt, all the country round, as to the fact that the old baronet was dead. Richard Marston had placed at all the gates notices to the effect that the funeral would not take place for a week, at soonest — that no day had yet been fixed for it, and that early notice should be given.

The slight fuss that had prevailed within doors, for the greater part of a day, had now quite subsided — and, quiet as it always was, Dorracleugh was now more silent and stirless than ever.

I could venture now to extend my walks anywhere about the place, without the risk of meeting any stranger.

If there is a melancholy there is also something sublime and consolatory in the character of the scenery that surrounds it. Every one has felt the influence of lofty mountains near. This region is all beautiful; but the very spirit of solitude and grandeur is over it.

I was just consulting with my maid about some simple provisional mourning, for which I was about to despatch her to the town, when our conference was arrested by the appearance of Richard Marston before the window.

I had my things on, for I thought it not impossible he might arrive earlier than he had the day before.

I told my maid to come again by-and-by; and I went out to meet him.

Well, we were now walking on the wild path, along the steep side of the cleugh, towards the lake. What kind of conversation is this going to be? His voice and manner are very gentle — but he looks pale and stern, like a man going into a battle. The signs are very slight, but dreadful. Oh! that the next half-hour was over! What am I about to hear?

We walked on for a time in silence.

The first thing he said was:

"You are to stay here at Dorracleugh — you must not go — but I'm afraid you will be vexed with me."

Then we advanced about twenty steps; we were walking slowly, and not a word was spoken during that time.

He began again:

"Though, after all, it need not make any real difference. There is no will, Ethel; the vicar can tell you that; he had the key, and has made search — no will; and you are left unprovided for — but that shan't affect you. I am heir-at-law, and nearest-of-kin. You know what that means. Everything he possessed, land or money, comes to me. But — I've put my foot into it; it is too late regretting. I can't marry."

There was an interval of silence — he was looking in my face.

"There! the murder's out. I knew you would be awfully vexed. So am I — miserable — but I can't. That is, perhaps, for many years."

There was another silence. I could no more have spoken than I could, by an effort of my will, have lifted the mountain at the other side of the lake from its foundation.

Perhaps he misinterpreted my silence.

"I ought to have been more frank with you, Ethel — I blame myself very much, I assure you. Can't you guess? Well, I was an awful fool — I'll tell you everything. I feel that I ought to have done so, long ago; but you know, one can't always make up one's mind to be quite frank, and tell a painful story. I am married. In an evil hour, I married a woman in every way unsuited to me — pity me. In a transitory illusion, I sacrificed my life — and, what is dearer, my love. I have not so much as seen her for years, and I am told she is not likely to live long. In the meantime I am yours only — yours entirely and irrevocably, your own. I can offer you safety here, and happiness, my own boundless devotion and adoration, an asylum here, and all the authority and rights of a wife. Ethel — dearest — you won't leave me?"

I looked up in his face, scared — a sudden look, quite unexpected. I saw a cunning, selfish face gloating down on me, with a gross, confident, wicked simper.

That odious smile vanished, his eye shrank; he looked detected or disconcerted for a moment, but he rallied.

"I say, I look on myself, in the sight of heaven, as married to you. You have pledged yourself to me by every vow that can tie woman to man; you have sworn that no obstacle shall keep us apart. That oath was not without a meaning, and you know it wasn't; and, by heaven! you shan't break my heart for nothing! Come, Ethel, be a girl of sense — don't you see we are controlled by fate? Look at the circumstances. Where's the good in quarrelling with me? Don't you see the position I'm placed in, about that miserable evidence? Don't you see that I am able and anxious to do everything for you? Could a girl in your situation do a better or a wiser thing than unite her interests with mine, indissolubly? For God's sake, where's the use of making me desperate? What do you want to drive me to? Why should you insist on making me your enemy? How do you think it's all to end?"

Could I have dreamed that he could ever have looked at me with such a countenance, and spoken to me in such a tone? I felt myself growing colder and colder; I could not move my eyes from him. His image seemed to swim before me; his harsh, frightful tones grow confused. My hands were to my temples, I could not speak; my answer was one piteous scream.

I found myself hurrying along the wild path, towards the house, with hardly a clear recollection, without one clear thought. I don't know whether he tried to detain me, or began to follow me. I remember, at the hall-door, from habit, going up a step or two, in great excitement — we act so nearly mechanically! A kind of horror seized me at sight of the halfopen door. I turned and hurried down the avenue.

It was not until I had reached the "George and Dragon" — at the sleepiest hour, luckily, of the tranquil little town of Golden Friars — that I made a first effectual effort to collect my thoughts.

I was simply a fugitive. To return to Dorracleugh, where Richard Marston was now master, was out of the question. I was in a mood to accept all ill news as certain. It never entered my mind that he had intended to deceive me with respect to Sir Harry's will. Neither had he as to my actually unprovided state. Here then I stood a fugitive.

I walked up to Mr. Turnbull, the host of the "George and Dragon," whom I saw at the inn-door, and having heard his brief but genuine condolences, without half knowing what he was saying, I ordered a carriage to bring me to the railway station; and while I was waiting I wrote a note in the quiet little room, with a window looking across the lake, to the good vicar.

Mr. Turnbull was one of those heavy, comfortable persons who are willing to take everybody's business and reasons for granted. He therefore bored me with no surmises as to the reasons of my solitary excursion at so oddly chosen a time.

I think, now, that my wiser course would have been to go to the vicar, and explaining generally my objections to remaining at Dorracleugh, to have asked frankly for permission to place myself under his care until the arrival of Mr. Blount.

There were fifty other things I ought to have thought of, though I only wonder, considering the state in which my mind was at the moment, that I was able to write so coherently as I did to the vicar. I had my purse with me, containing fifty pounds, which poor Sir Harry had given me just before he left Dorracleugh. With no more than this, which I had fortunately brought down with me to the drawingroom, for the purpose of giving my maid a banknote to take to the town to pay for my intended purchases, I was starting on my journey to London! Without luggage, or servant, or companion, or plan of any kind — inspired by the one instinct, to get as rapidly as possible out of sight and reach of Dorracleugh, and to earn my bread by my own exertions.

CHAPTER LXVI.

LAURA GREY.

You are to suppose my journey safely ended in London. The first thing I did after securing lodgings, and making some few purchases, was to go to the house where my great friend Sir Harry Rokestone, had died. But Mr. Blount, I found, had left London for Golden Friars, only a few hours before my arrival.

Another disappointment awaited me at Mr. Forrester's chambers — he was out of town, taking his holiday.

I began now to experience the consequences of my precipitation. It was too late, however, to reflect; and if the plunge was to be made, perhaps the sooner the better. I wrote to the vicar, to give him my address, also to Mr. Blount, telling him the course on which I had decided. I at once resolved to look for a situation, as governess to very young children. I framed an advertisement with a great deal of care, which I published in the *Times*; but no satisfactory result followed, and two or three days passed in like manner.

After paying for my journey, and my London purchases, there remained to me, of my fifty pounds, about thirty-two. My situation was not so frightful as it might have been. But with the strictest economy a limited time must see my store exhausted; and no one who has not been in such a situation can fancy the ever-recurring panic of counting, day after day, the diminishing chances between you and the chasm to whose edge you are slowly sliding.

A few days brought me a letter from the good vicar. There occurred in it a passage which finally quieted the faint struggle of hope now and then reviving. He said, "I observe by your letter that you are already apprised of the disappointing result of my search for the will of the late Sir Harry Rokestone. He had informed several persons of the spot where, in the event of his executing one, which he always, I am told, treated as very doubtful, it would be found. He had placed the key of the safe along with some other things at his departure, but without alluding to his will. At the request of Mr. Marston I opened the safe, and the result was, I regret to say, that no will was found.” I was now, then, in dread earnest to lay my account for a life of agitation and struggle.

At last a promising answer to my advertisement reached me. It said, “The Countess of Rillingdon will be in town till this day week, and will be happy to see L.Y.L.X., whose advertisement appeared in the *Times* of this morning, if possible to-day before two.” The house was in Belgrave Square. It was now near twelve. I called immediately with a note, to say I would call at a quarter to two, and at that hour precisely I returned.

It was plain that this was but a flying visit of the patrician owners of the house. Some luggage, still in its shiny black casings, was in the hall; the lamps hung in bags; carpets had disappeared; curtains were pinned up; and servants seemed scanty, and more fussy than in the organized discipline of a household. I told the servant that I had called in consequence of a note from Lady Rillingdon, and he conducted me forthwith up the stairs. We passed on the way a young lady coming down, whom I conjectured to be on the same errand as myself. We exchanged stolen looks as we passed, each, I daresay, conjecturing the other’s chances.

“Her ladyship will see you presently,” he said, opening a door.

I entered, and whom should I see waiting in the room, in a chair, in her hat, with her parasol in her hand, but Laura Grey.

“Ethel!”

“Laura!”

“Darling!”

And each in a moment was locked in the other’s embrace. With tears, with trembling laughter, and more kisses than I can remember, we signalized our meeting.

“How wonderful that I should have met you here, Laura!” said I; though what was the special wonder in meeting her there more than anywhere else, I could not easily have defined. “You must tell me, darling, if you are looking to come to Lady Rillingdon, for, if you are, I would not for the world think of it.”

Laura laughed very merrily at this.

“Why, Ethel, what are you dreaming of? I’m Lady Rillingdon!”

Sometimes a mistake seizes upon us with an unaccountable obstinacy. Laura’s claiming to be Lady Rillingdon seemed to me simply a jest of that poor kind which relies entirely on incongruity, without so much colour of possibility as to make it humorous.

I laughed, faintly enough, with Laura, from mere politeness, wondering when this poor joke would cease to amuse her; and the more she looked in my face, the more heartily she laughed, and the more melancholy became my endeavour to accompany her.

"What can I do to convince you, darling?" she exclaimed at length, half distracted.

She got up and touched the bell. I began to be a little puzzled. The servant appeared, and she asked:

"Is his lordship at home?"

"I'll inquire, my lady," he answered, and retired.

This indeed was demonstration; I could be incredulous no longer. We kissed again and again, and were once more laughing and gabbling together, when the servant returned with:

"Please, my lady, his lordship went out about half an hour ago."

"I'm so sorry," she said, turning to me, "but he'll be back very soon, I'm sure. I want so much to introduce him; I think you'll like him."

Luncheon soon interrupted us; and when that little interval was over, she took me to the same quiet room, and we talked and mutually questioned, and got out of each the whole history of the other.

There was only one little child of this marriage, which seemed, in every way but that, so happy — a daughter. Their second, a son, had died. This pretty little creature we had with us for a time, and then it went out with its nurse for a drive, and we, over our afternoon tea, resumed our confessions and inquiries. Laura had nearly as much to tell as I. In the midst of our talk Lord Rillingdon came in. I knew whom I was to meet. I was therefore not surprised when the very man whom I had seen faint and bleeding in the wood of Plas Ylwd, whom Richard Marston had shot, and whom I had seen but once since at Lady Mardykse' ball, stood before me. In a moment we were old friends.

He remained with us for about ten minutes, talked kindly and pleasantly, and drank his cup of tea.

These recollections, in my present situation, were agitating. The image of Richard Marston had reappeared in the sinister shadow in which it had been early presented to me by the friends who had warned me so kindly, but in vain.

In a little time we talked on as before, and everything she told me added to the gloom and horror in which Marston was now shrouded in my sorrowful imagination.

As soon as the first delighted surprise of meeting Laura had a little subsided, my fears returned, and all I had to dread from the active malice of Richard Marston vaguely gathered on my stormy horizon again.

CHAPTER LXVII.

ACHAPTER OF EXPLANATIONS.

Laura's long talk with me resulted in these facts. They cleared up her story.

She was the only daughter of Mr. Grey, of Halston Manor, of whom I had often heard. He had died in possession of a great estate, and of shares in the Great Central Bank worth two hundred thousand pounds. Within a few weeks after his death the bank failed, and the estate was drawn into the ruin. Of her brother there is no need to speak, for he died only a year after, and has no connection with my story.

Laura Grey would have been a suitable, and even a princely match for a man of rank and fortune, had it not been for this sudden and total reverse. Old Lord Rillingdon — Viscount Rillingdon, his son, had won his own position in the peerage by brilliant service — had wished to marry his son to the young lady. No formal overtures had been made; but Lord Rillingdon's house, Northcot Hall, was near, and the young people were permitted to improve their acquaintance into intimacy, and so an unavowed attachment was formed. The crash came, and Lord Rillingdon withdrew his son, Mr. Jennings, from the perilous neighbourhood.

A year elapsed before the exact state of Mr. Grey's affairs was ascertained. During that time Richard Marston, who had seen and admired Laura Grey, whose brother was an intimate friend of his, came to the neighbourhood and endeavoured to insinuate himself into her good graces. He had soon learned her ruined circumstances, and founded the cruellest hopes upon this melancholy knowledge.

To forward his plans he had conveyed scandalous falsehoods to Mr. Jennings, with the object of putting an end to his rivalry. These Mr. Jennings had refused to believe; but there were others no less calculated to excite his jealousy, and to alienate his affection. He had shown the effect of this latter influence by a momentary coldness, which roused Laura Grey's fiery spirit; for gentle as she was, she was proud.

She had written to tell Mr. Jennings that all was over between them, and that she would never see him more. He had replied in a letter which did not reach her till long after, in terms the most passionate and agonising, vowing that he held himself affianced to her while he lived, and would never marry any one but her.

In this state of things Miss Grey had come to us, resolved to support herself by her own exertions.

Lord Rillingdon, having reason to suspect his son’s continued attachment to Laura Grey, and having learned accidentally that there was a lady of that name residing at Malory, made a visit to Cardyllion. He was the old gentleman in the chocolate-coloured coat, who had met us as we returned from church, and held a conversation with her, under the trees, on the mill-road.

His object was to exact a promise that she would hold no communication with his son for the future. His tone was insolent, dictatorial, and in the highest degree irritating. She repelled his insinuations with spirit, and peremptorily refused to make any reply whatever to demands urged in a temper so arrogant and insulting.

The result was that he parted from her highly incensed, and without having carried his point, leaving my dear sister and me in a fever of curiosity.

Richard Rokestone Marston was the only near relation of Sir Harry Rokestone. He had fallen under the baronet’s just and high displeasure. After a course of wild and wicked extravagance, he had finally ruined himself in the opinion of Sir Harry by committing a fraud, which, indeed, would never have come to light had it not been for a combination of unlucky chances.

In consequence of this his uncle refused to see him; but at Mr. Blount’s intercession agreed to allow him a small annual sum, on the strict condition that he was to leave England. It was when actually on his way to London, which, for reason that, except in its result, has no connection with my story, he chose to reach through Bristol, that he had so nearly lost his life in the disaster of the Conway Castle.

Here was the first contact of my story with his.

His short stay at Malory was signalised by his then unaccountable suit to me, and by his collision with Mr. Jennings, who had come down there on some very vague information that Laura Grey was in the neighbourhood. He had succeeded in meeting her, and in renewing their engagement, and at last had persuaded her to consent to a secret marriage, which at first involved the anguish of a long separation, during which a dangerous illness threatened the life of her husband.

I am hurrying through this explanation, but I must relate a few more events and circumstances which throw a light upon some of the passages in the history I have been giving you of my life.

Why did Richard Marston conceive, in perfect good faith, a fixed purpose to marry a girl of whom he knew enough to be aware that she was without that which prudence would have insisted on as a first necessity in his circumstances — money.

Well, it turned out to have been by no means so imprudent a plan. I learned from Mr. Blount the particulars that explained it.

Mr. Blount, who took an interest in him, and had always cherished a belief that he was reclaimable, told him repeatedly that Sir Harry had often said that he would take one of Mabel Ware's daughters for his heiress. This threat he had secretly laughed at, knowing the hostility that subsisted between the families. He was, however, startled at last. Mr. Blount had shown him a letter in which Sir Harry distinctly stated that he had made up his mind to leave everything he possessed to me. This he showed him for the purpose of inducing a patient endeavour to regain his lost place in the old man's regard. It effectually alarmed Richard Marston; and when a chance storm threw him at our door, the idea of averting that urgent danger, and restoring himself to his lost position, by an act of masterly strategy, occurred to him, and instantly bore fruit in action.

After his return, and his admission as an inmate at Dorracleugh, the danger appeared still more urgent, and his opportunities were endless.

He had succeeded, as I have told you, in binding me by an engagement. In that position he was safe, no matter what turned up. He had, however, now made his election; and how cruelly, you already know. Did he, according to his low standard, love me? I believe, so far as was consistent with his nature, he did. He was furious at my having escaped him, and would have pursued, and no doubt discovered me, had he been free at the moment to leave Dorracleugh.

His alleged marriage was, I believe, a fiction. But he could not bear, I think, to lose me; and had he obtained another interview, he would have held very different language. Mr. Blount thought that he had, perhaps, formed some scheme for a marriage of ambition, in favour of which I was to have been put aside. If so, however, I do not think that he would have purchased the enjoyment of such ambition at the price of losing me at once and for ever. I dare say you will laugh at the simplicity of this vanity in a woman who, in a case like this, could suppose such a thing. I do suppose it, notwithstanding. I am sure that, so far as his nature was capable of love, he did love me. With the sad evidences on which this faith was grounded, I will not weary you. Let those vain conclusions rest where they are, deep in my heart.

The important post which Lord Rillingdon had filled, in one of our greatest dependencies, and the skill, courage, and wisdom with which he had directed affairs during a very critical period, had opened a way for him to still higher things. He and Laura were going out in about six months to India, and she and he insisted that I should accompany them as their guest. This would have been too delightful under happier circumstances; but the sense of dependence, however disguised, is dreadful. We are so constructed that for an average mind it is more painful to share in idle dependence the stalled ox of a friend than to work for one's own dinner of herbs.

They were going to Brighton, and I consented to make them a visit there of three or four weeks; after which I was to resume my search for a "situation." Laura entreated me at least to accept the care of her little child; but this, too, I resolutely declined. At first sight you will charge me with folly; but if you, being of my sex, will place yourself for a moment in my situation, you will understand why I refused. I felt that I should have been worse than useless. Laura would never have ordered me about as a good mother would like to order the person in charge of her only child. She would have been embarrassed and unhappy, and I conscious of being in the way.

Two other circumstances need explanation. Laura told me, long after, that she had received a farewell letter from Mr. Carmel, who told her that he had written to warn me, but with much precaution, as Sir Harry had a strong antipathy to persons of his profession, of a danger which he was not then permitted to define. Monsieur Droqville, whom Mr. Marston had courted, and sought to draw into relations with him, had received a letter from that young man, stating that he had made up his mind to leave America by the next ship, and establish himself once more at Dorracleugh. It was Mr.

Carmel, then, who had written the note that puzzled me so much, and conveyed it, by another hand, to the postoffice of Cardyllion.

Monsieur Droqville had no confidence in Richard Marston. He had been informed, besides, of the exact nature of Sir Harry's will, and of a provision that made his bequest to me void, in case I should embrace the Roman Catholic faith.

It was in consequence of that provision in the draft-will of Sir Harry Rokestone, and from a consideration of the impolicy of any action while Lady Lorrimer's death was so recent, and my indignation so hot, that Droqville had resolved that, for a time, at least, the attempt to gain me to the Church of Rome should not be renewed.

Taking the clear, hard view they do of the office of the Church upon earth, they are right to discriminate. In the sight of Heaven, the souls of Dives and of Lazarus are equally precious. In electing which to convert, then, they discharge but a simple duty in choosing that proselyte who will most strengthen the influence and action of the Church upon earth. In that respect, considering the theories they hold, they do right. Common sense acquits them.

I have now ended my necessary chapter of explanation, and my story goes on its way.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE LAST OF THE ROKESTONES.

A solemn low-voiced fuss was going on in the old house at Dorracleugh; preparations and consultations were afoot; a great deal was not being done, but there were the whispering and restlessness of expectation, and the few grisly arrangements for the reception of the coffined guest.

Old Mrs. Shackleton, the housekeeper, crept about the rooms, her handkerchief now and then to her eyes; and the housemaid-in-chief, with her attendant women, was gliding about.

Sir Harry had, years before, left a letter in Mr. Blount's hands, that there might be no delay in searching for a will, directing all that concerned his funeral.

The coffin was to be placed in the great hall of the house, according to ancient custom, on tressels, under the broad span of the chimney. This arrangement is more than once alluded to in Pepys's Diary. He was to be followed to the grave by his tenantry, and such of the gentry, his neighbours, as might please to attend. There was to be ample repast for all comers, consisting of as much "meat and drink of the best as they could consume;" what remained was to be distributed among the poor in the evening.

He was to be laid in the family vault adjoining the church of Golden Friars; a stone with the family arms, and a short inscription, "but no flatteries," was to be set up in the church, on the south wall, next the vault, and near the other family monuments, and it was to mention that he died unmarried, and was the last of the old name of Rokestone, of Dorracleugh.

The funeral was to proceed to Golden Friars, not by the "mere road," but, as in the case of other family funerals, from Dorracleugh to Golden Friars, by the old highroad.

If he should die at home, at Dorracleugh, but not otherwise, he was to be "waked" in the same manner as his father and his grandfather had been.

There were other directions, presents to the sexton and parish-clerk, and details that would weary you.

About twelve o'clock the hearse arrived, and two or three minutes after Mr. Blount drove up in a chaise.

The almost gigantic coffin was carried up the steps, and placed under the broad canopy assigned to it at the upper end of the hall.

Mr. Blount, having given a few directions, inquired for Mr. Marston, and found that gentleman, in a suit of black, in the drawingroom.

He came forward; he did not intend it, but there was something in the gracious and stately melancholy of his reception, which seemed to indicate not only the chief mourner, but the master of the house.

"Altered circumstances — a great change," said Mr. Marston, taking his hand. "Many will feel his death deeply. He was to me — I have said it a thousand times — the best friend that ever man had."

"Yes, yes, sir; he did show wonderful patience and forbearance with you, considering his temper, which was proud and fiery, you know — poor gentleman! — poor Sir Harry! — but grandly generous, sir, grandly generous."

"It is a consolation to me, having lost a friend, and, I may say, a father, who was, in patience, forbearance, and generosity, all you describe, and all you know, that we were lately, thanks, my good friend, mainly to your kind offices, upon the happiest terms. He used to talk to me about that farm; he took such an interest in it — sit down, pray — won't you have some sherry and a biscuit — and such a growing interest in me."

"I think he really was coming gradually not to think quite so ill of you as he did," said good Mr. Blount. "No sherry, no biscuit — no, I shan't mind. I know, sir, that under great and sudden temptation a man may do the thing he ought not to have done, and repent from his heart afterwards, and from very horror of his one great lapse, may walk, all the rest of his life, not only more discreetly, but more safely than a man who has never slipped at all. But Sir Harry was sensitive and fiery. He had thought that you were to represent the old house, and perhaps to bear the name after his death; and that both should be slurred by, if I may be allowed the expression, a shabby crime...."

"Once for all, Mr. Blount, you'll be good enough to remember that such language is offensive and intolerable," interrupted Richard Marston, firmly and sharply. "My uncle had a right to lecture me on the subject — you can have none."

“Except as a friend,” said Mr. Blount. “I shall, however, for the future, observe your wishes upon that subject. You got my letter about the funeral, I see.”

“Yes, they are doing everything exactly as you said,” said Marston, recovering his affability.

“Here is the letter,” said Mr. Blount. “You should run your eye over it.”

“Ha! It is dated a long time ago,” said Mr. Marston. “It was no sudden presentiment, then. How well he looked when I was leaving this!”

“We are always astonished when death gives no warning,” said Mr. Blount; “it hardly ever does to the persons most interested. Doctors, friends, they themselves, are all in a conspiracy to conceal the thief who has got into the bedroom. It matters very little that the survivors have had warning.”

Richard Marston shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

“Some day I must learn prudence,” said he.

“Let it be the true prudence,” said Mr. Blount. “It is a short foresight that sees no further than the boundary of this life.”

Mr. Marston opened the letter, and the old gentleman left him, to see after the preparations.

Some one at Golden Friars — I think it was the vicar — sent me the country paper, with a whole column in mourning, with a deep black edge, giving a full account of the funeral of Sir Harry Rokestone, of Dorracleugh. The ancient family whose name he bore was now extinct. I saw in the list the names of county people who had come in their carriages more than twenty miles to attend the funeral, and people who had come by rail hundreds of miles. It was a great county gathering mostly that followed the last of the Rokestones, of Dorracleugh, to the grave.

CHAPTER LXIX.

SEARCH FOR THE WILL.

The funeral was over; but the old house of Dorracleugh was not quiet again till the night fell, and there was no more to-ing and fro-ing in the stableyard, and the last tenant had swallowed his last draught of beer, and mounted and ridden away through the mist, over the fells, to his distant farm.

The moon shone peacefully over mere and fell, and on the timeworn church of Golden Friars, and through the window, bright, on the grey flags that lie over Sir Harry Rokestone. Never did she keep serener watch over the first night of a mortal's sleep in his last narrow bed.

Richard Marston saw this pure light, and musing, looked from the window. It shone, he thought, over his wide estate. Beyond the mere, all but Clusted, for many a mile was his own. At this side, away in the direction of distant Haworth, a broad principality of moss and heath, with scattered stretches of thin arable and pasture, ran side by side with the Mardykes estate, magnificent in vastness, if not in rental.

His dreams were not of feudal hospitality and the hearty old-world life. His thoughts were far away from this grand scenery or lonely Dorracleugh. Ambition built his castles in the air; nothing very noble. It was not even the tawdry and tradesman-like ambition of modern times. He had no taste for that particular form of meanness, nor patience for its drudgery. He would subscribe to election funds, place his county influence at the disposal of the minister; spend money on getting and keeping a seat; be found in his place whenever a critical vote was impending; and by force of this, and of his county position, and the old name — for he would take the name of Rokestone, in spite of his uncle's awkward direction about his epitaph, and no one could question his relationship — by dint of all this, with, I daresay, the influence of a high marriage, he hoped to get on, not from place to place, but what would answer him as well, from title to title. First to revive the baronetage, and then, after some fifteen or twenty years more of faithful service, to become Baron Rokestone, of Dorracleugh.

It was not remorse, then, that kept the usurper's eyes wide open, as he lay that night in the dark in his bed, his brain in a fever. His conscience had no more life in it than the window-stone. It troubled him with no compunction. There was at his heart, on the contrary, a vindictive elation at having defeated with so much simplicity the unnatural will of his uncle.

Bright rose the sun next morning over Dorracleugh, a sun of good omen. Richard Marston had appointed three o'clock as the most convenient hour for all members of the conference, for a meeting and a formality. A mere formality, in truth, it was, a search for the will of Sir Harry Rokestone. Mr. Blount had slept at Dorracleugh. Mr. Jarlcot, a short, plump man, of five-and-fifty, with a grave face and a bullet head, covered with short, lank, black hair, accompanied by his confidential man, Mr. Spaight, arrived in his gig, just as the punctual clock of Dorracleugh struck three.

Very soon after the old vicar rode up, on his peaceable pony, and came into the drawingroom, where the little party were assembled, with sad, kind face, and gentle, oldfashioned ceremony, with a little powdering of dust in the wrinkles of his clerical costume.

It was with a sense of pleasant satire that Richard Marston had observed old Lemuel Blount ever since he had been assured that the expected will was not forthcoming. These holy men, how they love an annuity! Not that they like money, of course; that's Mammon; but because it lifts them above earthy cares, and gives them the power of relieving the wants of their fellow-Christians. How slyly the old gentleman had managed it! How thoughtful his appointing himself guardian to the young lady! What endless opportunities his powers over the settlements would present of making handsome terms for himself with an intending bridegroom!

On arriving, in full confidence that the will was safe in its iron repository, Christian could not have looked more comfortable when he enjoyed his famous prospect from the delectable mountains. But when it turned out that the will was nowhere, the same Christian, trudging on up the hill of difficulty in his old "burdened fashion," could not have looked more hang-dog and overpowered than he.

His low spirits, his sighs and ejaculations, amused Richard Marston extremely. When he heard him say to himself, when first he learned that the vicar had looked into the safe and found nothing, "How sad! How strange! How very sad!" as he stood at the window, with his head lowered, and his fingers raised, he was tempted to rebuke his audacity with some keen and cautious irony; but those who win may laugh — he could afford to be goodhumoured, and a silent sneer contented him.

Mr. Blount, having, as I said, heard that the vicar had searched the "safe," and that Mr. Spaight, accompanied by Mr. Marston, and the housekeeper, had searched all the drawers, desks, boxes, presses, and other lock-up places in the house in vain, for any paper having even a resemblance to a will, said: "It is but a form; but as you propose it, be it so."

And now this form was to be complied with. Mr. Marston told the servant to send Mrs. Shackelton with the keys. Mr. Marston led the way, and four other gentlemen followed, attended by the housekeeper.

There was not much talking; a clatter of feet on uncarpeted floors, the tiny jingle of small keys, the opening of doors, and clapping of lids, and now and then Mrs. Shackelton's hard treble was heard in answer to an interrogatory.

This went on for more than twenty minutes upstairs, and then the exploring party came down the stairs again, Richard Marston talking to the vicar, Mr. Blount to Mr. Spaight, while Mr. Jarlcot, the attorney, listened to Mrs. Shackleton, the housekeeper.

Richard Marston led the party to Sir Harry's room. The carpet was still on the floor, the curtains hanging still, in gloomy folds, to the ground. Sir Harry's hat and stick lay on the small round table, where he had carelessly thrown them when he came in from his last walk about Dorracleugh, his slippers lay on the hearthrug before his easy-chair, and his pipe was on the mantelpiece.

The party stood in this long and rather gloomy room in straggling disarray, still talking.

"There's Pixie," said old Mr. Spaight, who had been a bit of a sportsman, and loved coursing in his youth, as he stopped before a portrait of a greyhound, poking his long nose and spectacles, with a faint smirk, close into the canvas. "Sir Harry's dog; fine dog, Pixie, won the cup twice on Doppleton Lea thirty-two years ago." But this was a murmured meditation, for he was a staid man of business now, and his liking for dogs and horses was incongruous, and no one in the room heard him. Mr. Jarlcot's voice recalled him.

"Mr. Marston was speaking to you, Mr. Spaight."

"Oh! I was just saying I think nothing could have been more careful," said Mr. Marston, "than the search you made upstairs, in the presence of me and Mrs. Shackleton, on Thursday last?"

"No, sir — certainly nothing — it could not possibly have escaped us," answered Mr. Spaight.

"And that is your opinion also?" asked Mr. Jarlcot of Richard Marston.

"Clearly," he answered.

"I'll make a note of that, if you'll allow me," said Mr. Jarlcot; and he made an entry, with Mr. Marston's concurrence, in his pocketbook.

"And now about this," said Mr. Jarlcot, with a clumsy bow to Mr. Marston, and touching the door of the safe with his open hand.

"You have got the key, sir?" said Marston to the good vicar with silver hair, who stood meekly by, distrait and melancholy, an effigy of saintly contemplation.

"Oh, yes," said the vicar wakening up. "Yes; the key, but — but you know there's nothing there."

He moved the key vaguely about as he looked from one to the other, as if inviting any one who pleased to try.

"I think, sir, perhaps it will be as well if you will kindly open it yourself," said Marston.

"Yes, surely — I suppose so — with all my heart," said the vicar.

The door of the safe opened easily, and displayed the black iron void, into which all looked.

Blessed are they who expect nothing, for they shall not be disappointed. Of course no one was surprised. But Mr. Blount shook his head, lifted up his hands, and groaned audibly, "I am very sorry."

Mr. Marston did not affect to hear him.

CHAPTER LXX.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

"I think," said Mr. Jarlcot, "it will be desirable that I should take a note of any information which Mr. Marston and the vicar may be so good as to supply with respect to the former search in the same place. I think, sir," he continued, addressing the vicar, "you mentioned that the deceased, Sir Harry Rokestone, placed that key in your charge on the evening of his departure from this house for London?"

"So it was, sir," said the vicar.

"Was it out of your possession for any time?"

"For about three quarters of an hour. I handed it to Mr. Marston on his way to this house; but as I was making a sick-call near this, I started not many minutes after he left me, and on the way it struck me that I might as well have back the key. I arrived here, I believe, almost as soon as he, and he quite agreed with me that I had better get the key again into — — "

"Into your own custody," interposed Marston. "You may recollect that it was I who suggested it the moment you came."

"And the key was not out of your possession, Mr. Marston, during the interval?" said Mr. Jarlcot.

"Not for one moment," answered Richard Marston, promptly.

"And you did not, I think you mentioned, open that safe?"

"Certainly not. I made no use whatever of that key at any time. I never saw that safe open until the vicar opened it in my presence, and we both saw that it contained nothing; so did Mrs. Shackleton, as intelligent a witness as any. And, I think, we can all — I know I can, for my part — depose, on oath, to the statements we have made."

Mr. Jarlcot raised his eyebrows solemnly, slowly shook his head, and having replaced his notebook in his pocket, drew a long breath in through his rounded lips, with a sound that almost amounted to a whistle.

"Nothing could be more distinct; it amounts to demonstration," he said, raising his head, putting his hands into his trousers-pockets, and looking slowly round the cornice. "Haven't you something to say?" he added, laying his hand gently on Mr. Blount's arm, and then turning a step or two away; while Marston, who could not comprehend what he fancied to be an almost affected disappointment at the failure to discover a will, thought he saw his eyes wander, when he thought no one was looking, curiously to the grate and the hobs; perhaps in search, as he suspected, of paper ashes.

"I am awfully sorry," exclaimed Mr. Blount, throwing himself into a chair in undisguised despondency. "The will, as it was drafted, would have provided splendidly for Miss Ethel Ware, and left you, Mr. Marston, an annuity of two thousand five hundred a year, and a sum of five thousand pounds. For two or three years I had been urging him to execute it; it is evident he never did. He has destroyed the draft, instead of executing it. That hope is quite gone — totally."

Mr. Blount stood up and said, laying his hand upon his forehead, "I am grieved — I am shocked — I am profoundly grieved."

Mr. Marston was strongly tempted to tell Mr. Blount what he thought of him. Jarlcot and he, no doubt, understood one another, and had intended making a nice thing of it.

He could not smile, nor even sneer, just then, but Mr. Marston fixed on Lemuel Blount a sidelong look of the sternest contempt.

"There is, then," said Mr. Blount, collecting himself, "no will."

"That seems pretty clear," said Mr. Marston, with, in spite of himself, a cold scorn in his tone. "I think so; and I rather fancy you think so too."

"Except this," continued Mr. Blount, producing a paper from his pocket, at which he had been fumbling. "Mr. Jarlcot will hand you a copy. I urged him, God knows how earnestly, to revoke it. It was made at the period of his greatest displeasure with you; it leaves everything to Miss Ethel Ware, and gives you, I grieve to say, but an annuity of four hundred a year. It appoints me guardian to the young lady, in the same terms that the latter will would have done, and leaves me, besides, an annuity of five hundred a year, half of which I shall, if you don't object, make over to you."

"Oh! oh! a will! That's all right," said Marston, trying to smile with lips that had grown white; "I, of course, you — we all wish nothing but what is right and fair."

Mr. Jarlcot handed him a new neatly-folded paper, endorsed "Copy of the Will of the late Sir Harry Rokestone, Bart." Richard Marston took it with a hand that trembled, a hand that had not often trembled before.

“Then, I suppose, Mr. Blount, you will look in on me, by-and-by, to arrange about the steps to be taken about proving it,” said Mr. Jarlcot.

“It’s all right, I dare say,” said Mr. Marston, vaguely, looking from man to man uncertainly. “I expected a will, of course: I don’t suppose I have a friend among you, gentlemen, why should I? I am sure I have some enemies. I don’t know what country attorneys, and nincompoops, and Golden Friars’ bumpkins may think of it, but I know what the world will think, that I’m swindled by d — d conspiracy, and that that old man, who’s in his grave, has behaved like a villain.”

“Oh, Mr. Marston, your dead uncle!” said the good vicar, lifting his hand in deprecation, with gentle horror. “You wouldn’t, you can’t!”

“What the devil is it to you, sir?” cried Marston, with a look as if he could have struck him. “I say it’s all influence, and d — d juggling — I’m not such a simpleton. No one expected, of course, that opportunities like those should not have been improved. The thing’s transparent. I wish you joy, Mr. Blount, of your five hundred a year, and you, Mr. Jarlcot, of your approaching management of the estates and the money. If you fancy a will like that, turning his own nephew adrift on the world in favour of methodists and attorneys, and a girl he never saw till the other day, is to pass unchallenged, you’re very much mistaken; it’s just the thing that always happens when an old man like that dies — there’s a will of course — every one understands it. I’ll have you all where you won’t like.”

Mrs. Shackleton, with her mouth pursed, her nose high in the air, and her brows knit over a vivid pair of eyes, was the only one of the group who seemed ready to explode in reply; Mr. Blount looked simply shocked and confounded; the vicar maintained his bewildered and appealing stare; Mr. Spaight’s eyebrows were elevated above his spectacles, and his mouth opened, as he leaned forward his long nose; Mr. Jarlcot’s brow looked thunderous, and his chops a little flushed; all were staring for some seconds in silence on Mr. Marston, whose concluding sentences had risen almost to a shriek, with a laugh running through it.

“I think, Mr. Marston,” said Jarlcot, after a couple of efforts, “you would do well to — to consider, a little, the bearing of your language; I don’t think you can quite see its force.”

“I wish you could — I mean it; and I’m d — d but you shall feel it too! You shall hear of me sooner than you all think. I’m not a fellow to be pigeoned so simply.”

With these words, he walked into the hall, and a few moments after they heard the door shut with a violent clang.

A solemn silence reigned in the room for a little time; these peaceable people seemed stunned by the explosion.

“Evasit, erupit,” murmured the vicar, sadly, raising his hands, and shaking his head. “How very painful!”

“I don’t wonder — I make great allowances,” said Mr. Blount, “I have been very unhappy myself, ever since it was ascertained that he had not executed the new will. I am afraid the young man will never consent to accept a part of my annuity — he is so spirited.”

“Don’t be uneasy on that point,” said Mr. Jarlcot; “if you lodge it, he’ll draw it; not — but I think — you might do — better — with your money.”

There was something in the tone, undefinable, that prompted a dark curiosity.

Mr. Blount turned on him a quick look of inquiry. Mr. Jarlcot lowered his eyes, and then turned them to the window, with the remark that the summer was making a long stay this year.

Mr. Blount looked down and slowly rubbed his forehead, thinking, and sighing deeply, as he said, “It’s a wonderful world, this — may the Lord have mercy on us all!”

CHAPTER LXXI.

A WOMAN'S HEART.

Two or three notices, which, Mr. Jarlcot said, would not cost five pounds, were served on behalf of Mr. Marston, and with these the faint echo of his thunders subsided. There was, in fact, no material for litigation.

"The notices," Mr. Jarlcot said, "came from Marshall and Whitaker, the solicitors who had years before submitted the cases for him, upon his uncle's title, and upon the question of his own position as nearest of kin and heir-at-law. He was very carefully advised as to how exactly he should stand in the event of his uncle's dying intestate."

I was stunned when I heard of my enormous fortune, involving, as it did, his ruin. I would at once have taken measures to deal as generously with him as the other will, of which I then knew no more than that Sir Harry must have contemplated, at one time, the possibility at least of signing it.

When I left Golden Friars I did so with an unalterable resolution never to see Richard Marston again. But this was compatible with the spirit of my intention to provide more suitably for him. I took Mr. Blount into council; but I was disappointed. The will had been made during my father's lifetime, and in evident apprehension of his influence over me, and deprived me of the power of making any charge upon the property, whether land or money. I could do nothing but make him a yearly present of a part of my income, and even that was embarrassed by many ingenious conditions and difficulties.

It was about this time that a letter reached me from Richard Marston, the most extraordinary I had ever read — a mad letter in parts, and wicked — a letter, also, full of penitence and self-upbraiding. "I am a fiend. I have been all cruelty and falsehood, you all mercy and truth," it said. "I have heard of your noble wishes — I know how vain they are. You can do nothing that I would accept. I am well enough. Think no more of the wretch. I have found, too late, I cannot live without you. You shall hear of me no more; only forgive me."

There are parts of this strange letter that I never understood, that may bear many interpretations, no one distinctly.

When Mr. Blount spoke of him he never gave me his conclusions, and it was always in the sad form “Let us hope;” he never said exactly what he suspected. Mr. Jarlcot plainly had but one opinion of him, and that the worst.

I agreed, I think, with neither. I relied on instinct, which no one can analyse or define — the wild inspiration of nature — the saddest, and often the truest guide. Let me not condemn, then, lest I be condemned.

The good here are not without wickedness, nor the wicked without goodness. With death begins the defection. Each character will be sifted as wheat. The eternal Judge will reduce each, by the irresistible chemistry of his power and truth, to its basis, for neither hell nor heaven can receive a mixed character.

I did hear of Richard Marston again once more — it was about five months later, when the news of his death by fever, at Marseilles, reached Mr. Blount.

Since then my life has been a retrospect. Two years I passed in India with my beloved friend, Laura. But my melancholy grew deeper; the shadows lengthened — and an irrepressible yearning to revisit Golden Friars and Malory seized me. I returned to England.

I am possessed of fortune. I thank God for its immunities — I well know how great they are. For its pleasures, I have long ceased to care. To the poor, I try to make it useful — but I am quite conscious that in this there is no merit. I have no pleasure in money. I think I have none in flattery. I need deny myself nothing, and yet be in the eyes of those who measure charity arithmetically a princely Christian benefactress. I wish I were quite sure of having ever given a cup of cold water in the spirit that my Maker commends.

A few weeks after my return, Mr. Blount showed me a letter. The signature startled me. It was from Monsieur Droqville, and a very short one. It was chiefly upon some trifling business, and it said, near the end:

“You sometimes see Miss Ware, I believe; she will be sorry to hear that her old friend, Mr. Carmel, died last summer at his missionary post in South America. A truer soldier of Christ never fell in the field of his labours. Requiescat!”

There was a tremble at my heart, and a swelling. I held the sentence before my eyes till they filled with tears.

My faithful, noble friend! At my side in every trouble. The one of all mortals I have met who strove with his whole heart to win me, according to his lights, to God. May God receive and for ever bless you for it, patient, gentle Edwyn Carmel! His griefs are over. To me there seems an angelic light around him — the pale enthusiast in the robe of his purity stands saint-like before me. I remember all your tender care. I better understand, too, the wide differences that separated us, now, than in my careless girlhood — but these do not dismay me. I know that "in my father's house are many mansions," and I hope that when the clouds that darken this life are passed, we may yet meet and thank and bless you, my noblehearted friend, where, in one love and light, the redeemed shall walk for evermore.

At Golden Friars I lived again for a short time. But the associations of Dorracleugh were too new and harrowing. I left that place to the care of good Mr. Blount, who loves it better than any other. He pays me two or three visits every year at Malory, and advises me in all matters of business.

I do not affect the airs of an anchorite. But my life is, most people would think, intolerably monotonous and lonely. To me it is not only endurable, but the sweetest that, in my peculiar state of mind, I could have chosen.

With the flight of my years, and the slow approach of the hour when dust will return to dust, the love of solitude steals on me, and no regrets for the days I have lost, as my friends insist, and no yearnings for a return to an insincere and tawdry world, have ever troubled me. In girlhood I contracted my love of this simple rural solitude, and my premature experience of all that is disappointing and deplorable in life confirms it. But the spell of its power is in its recollections. It is a place, unlike Dorracleugh, sunny and cheerful, as well as beautiful, and this tones the melancholy of its visions, and prevents their sadness from becoming overpowering.

I wonder how many people are living, like me, altogether in the past, and in hourly communion with visionary companions?

Richard Marston, does awaking hour ever pass without, at some moment, recalling your image? I do not mistake you; I have used no measured language in describing you. I know you for the evil, fascinating, reckless man you were. Such a man as, had I never seen you, and only known the sum of his character, I ought to have hated. A man who, being such as he was, meditated against me a measureless wrong. I look into my heart, is there vengeance there against you? Is there judgment? Is there even alienation?

Oh! how is it that reason, justice, virtue, all cannot move you from a secret place in my inmost heart? Can any man who has once been an idol, such as you were, ever perish utterly in that mysterious shrine — a woman's heart? In solitary hours, as I, unseen, look along the sea, my cheeks are wet with tears; in the wide silence of the night my lonely sobs are heard. Is my grief for you mere madness? Why is it that man so differs from man? Why does he often so differ from the noble creature he might have been, and sometimes almost was?

Over an image partly dreamed and partly real, shivered utterly, but still in memory visible, I pour out the vainest of all sorrows.

In the wonderful working that subdues all things to itself — in all the changes of spirit, or the spaces of eternity, is there, shall there never be, from the first failure, evolved the nobler thing that might have been? I care for no other. I can love no other; and were I to live and keep my youth through eternity, I think I never could be interested or won again. Solitude has become dear to me, because he is in it. Am I giving this infinite true love in vain? I comfort myself with one vague hope. I cannot think that nature is so cynical. Does the loved phantom represent nothing? And is the fidelity that nature claims, but an infatuation and a waste?

THE END

The Shorter Fiction

Trinity College, Dublin, where Le Fanu studied Law

THE PURCELL PAPERS

WITH A MEMOIR BY ALFRED PERCEVAL GRAVES

This classic short story collection was published posthumously in three volumes in 1880. However, all of the stories had originally been published in the *Dublin University Magazine* and date from before the major phase of Le Fanu's career as a novelist. Indeed, 'The Ghost and the Bone Setter' was Le Fanu's first published short story. As such they mostly retain the Irish setting ubiquitous in Le Fanu's early work. The first twelve stories are presented as a collection of documents from the papers of the Catholic Priest, Rev. Francis Purcell of Drumcoolagh. These date from 1838-40. The stories are usually reprinted without this framing device, but this is the form in which they had originally appeared in the *Magazine*. The final tale, written in 1850, stands alone.

Almost all of the stories could be described as falling within the Gothic genre, with many containing a strong supernatural element. 'Passages in the Secret History of an Irish Countess' and 'A Chapter in the History of a Tyrone Family' were later expanded into novels (*Uncle Silas* and *The Wyvern Mystery*, respectively), while themes and ideas from 'The Fortunes of Sir Robert Ardagh' were reused in Le Fanu's later novella *The Haunted Baronet*. As well as being the source for a later novel of Le Fanu's, 'History of a Tyrone Family' has also been put forward (by E.F. Benson and others) as a possible inspiration for Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847).

Whilst numerous tales enact a commentary on the state of the Irish gentry by purporting to be documents on the history of that class, some intriguing formal narrative devices are also employed to further the humour and ambiguity of some of the tales and of the ghost story and folklore tradition itself. A good example of this is the aforementioned 'Fortunes of Sir Robert Ardagh', which first related as a typical example of the Gothic folktale (complete with Faustian pact, Byronic anti-hero and a picturesque castle) that the story has become, before being undercut by a more objective telling of the 'original facts' of which the folkloric version is a patent exaggeration.

‘Strange Event in the Life of Schalken the Painter’ is probably the best known of all of the tales and is still widely anthologised and read today, but the collection contains many little-known gems and is well-worth rediscovering.

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Le Fanu, c. 1842

THE GHOST AND THE BONE SETTER.

In looking over the papers of my late valued and respected friend, Francis Purcell, who for nearly fifty years discharged the arduous duties of a parish priest in the south of Ireland, I met with the following document. It is one of many such; for he was a curious and industrious collector of old local traditions — a commodity in which the quarter where he resided mightily abounded. The collection and arrangement of such legends was, as long as I can remember him, his hobby; but I had never learned that his love of the marvellous and whimsical had carried him so far as to prompt him to commit the results of his inquiries to writing, until, in the character of residuary legatee, his will put me in possession of all his manuscript papers. To such as may think the composing of such productions as these inconsistent with the character and habits of a country priest, it is necessary to observe, that there did exist a race of priests — those of the old school, a race now nearly extinct — whose education abroad tended to produce in them tastes more literary than have yet been evinced by the alumni of Maynooth.

It is perhaps necessary to add that the superstition illustrated by the following story, namely, that the corpse last buried is obliged, during his juniority of interment, to supply his brother tenants of the churchyard in which he lies, with fresh water to allay the burning thirst of purgatory, is prevalent throughout the south of Ireland.

The writer can vouch for a case in which a respectable and wealthy farmer, on the borders of Tipperary, in tenderness to the corns of his departed helpmate, enclosed in her coffin two pair of brogues, a light and a heavy, the one for dry, the other for sloppy weather; seeking thus to mitigate the fatigues of her inevitable perambulations in procuring water and administering it to the thirsty souls of purgatory. Fierce and desperate conflicts have ensued in the case of two funeral parties approaching the same churchyard together, each endeavouring to secure to his own dead priority of sepulture, and a consequent immunity from the tax levied upon the pedestrian powers of the last-comer. An instance not long since occurred, in which one of two such parties, through fear of losing to their deceased friend this inestimable advantage, made their way to the churchyard by a short cut, and, in violation of one of their strongest prejudices, actually threw the coffin over the wall, lest time should be lost in making their entrance through the gate. Innumerable instances of the same kind might be quoted, all tending to show how strongly among the peasantry of the south this superstition is entertained. However, I shall not detain the reader further by any prefatory remarks, but shall proceed to lay before him the following:

Extract from the MS. Papers of the late Rev. Francis Purcell, of Drumcoolagh.

I tell the following particulars, as nearly as I can recollect them, in the words of the narrator. It may be necessary to observe that he was what is termed a well-spoken man, having for a considerable time instructed the ingenious youth of his native parish in such of the liberal arts and sciences as he found it convenient to profess — a circumstance which may account for the occurrence of several big words in the course of this narrative, more distinguished for euphonious effect than for correctness of application. I proceed then, without further preface, to lay before you the wonderful adventures of Terry Neil.

‘Why, thin, ’tis a quare story, an’ as thrue as you’re sittin’ there; and I’d make bould to say there isn’t a boy in the seven parishes could tell it better nor crickther than myself, for ’twas my father himself it happened to, an’ many’s the time I heerd it out iv his own mouth; an’ I can say, an’ I’m proud av that same, my father’s word was as incredible as any squire’s oath in the counthry; and so signs an’ if a poor man got into any unlucky throuble, he was the boy id go into the court an’ prove; but that doesn’t signify — he was as honest and as sober a man, barrin’ he was a little bit too partial to the glass, as you’d find in a day’s walk; an’ there wasn’t the likes of him in the counthry round for nate labourin’ an’ baan diggin’; and he was mighty handy entirely for carpenther’s work, and men din’ ould spudethrees, an’ the likes i’ that. An’ so he tuk up with bone-settin’, as was most nathural, for none of them could come up to him in mendin’ the leg iv a stool or a table; an’ sure, there never was a bone-setter got so much custom-man an’ child, young an’ ould — there never was such breakin’ and mendin’ of bones known in the memory of man. Well, Terry Neil — for that was my father’s name — began to feel his heart growin’ light, and his purse heavy; an’ he took a bit iv a farm in Squire Phelim’s ground, just undher the ould castle, an' a pleasant little spot it was; an' day an' mornin' poor crathurs not able to put a foot to the ground, with broken arms and broken legs, id be comin' ramblin' in from all quarters to have their bones spliced up. Well, yer honour, all this was as well as well could be; but it was customary when Sir Phelim id go anywhere out iv the country, for some iv the tinants to sit up to watch in the ould castle, just for a kind of compliment to the ould family — an' a mighty unplisant compliment it was for the tinants, for there wasn't a man of them but knew there was something quare about the ould castle. The neighbours had it, that the squire's ould grandfather, as good a gintlenlan — God be with him — as I heer'd, as ever stood in shoe-leather, used to keep walkin' about in the middle iv the night, ever sinst he bursted a blood vessel pullin' out a cork out iv a bottle, as you or I might be doin', and will too, plase God — but that doesn't signify. So, as I was sayin', the ould squire used to come down out of the frame, where his picthur was hung up, and to break the bottles and glasses — God be marciful to us all — an' dthrink all he could come at — an' small blame to him for that same; and then if any of the family id be comin' in, he id be up again in his place, looking as quite an' as innocent as if he didn't know anything about it — the mischievous ould chap.

'Well, your honour, as I was sayin', one time the family up at the castle was stayin' in Dublin for a week or two; and so, as usual, some of the tinants had to sit up in the castle, and the third night it kem to my father's turn. "Oh, tare an' ouns!" says he unto himself, "an' must I sit up all night, and that ould vagabone of a sperit, glory be to God," says he, "serenadin' through the house, an' doin' all sorts iv mischief?" However, there was no gettin' aff, and so he put a bould face on it, an' he went up at nightfall with a bottle of pottieen, and another of holy wather.

'It was rainin' smart enough, an' the evenin' was darksome and gloomy, when my father got in; and what with the rain he got, and the holy wather he sprinkled on himself, it wasn't long till he had to swally a cup iv the pottieen, to keep the cowld out iv his heart. It was the ould steward, Lawrence Connor, that opened the door — and he an' my father wor always very great. So when he seen who it was, an' my father tould him how it was his turn to watch in the castle, he offered to sit up along with him; and you may be sure my father wasn't sorry for that same. So says Larry:

'"We'll have a bit iv fire in the parlour," says he.

'"An' why not in the hall?" says my father, for he knew that the squire's picthur was hung in the parlour.

'"No fire can be lit in the hall," says Lawrence, "for there's an ould jackdaw's nest in the chimney."

'"Oh thin," says my father, "let us stop in the kitchen, for it's very unproper for the likes iv me to be sittin' in the parlour," says he.

'"Oh, Terry, that can't be," says Lawrence; "if we keep up the ould custom at all, we may as well keep it up properly," says he.

'"Divil sweep the ould custom!" says my father — to himself, do ye mind, for he didn't like to let Lawrence see that he was more afeard himself.

'"Oh, very well," says he. "I'm agreeable, Lawrence," says he; and so down they both wint to the kitchen, until the fire id be lit in the parlour — an' that same wasn't long doin'.

'Well, your honour, they soon wint up again, an' sat down mighty comfortable by the parlour fire, and they beginned to talk, an' to smoke, an' to dhrink a small taste iv the pottieen; and, moreover, they had a good rousin' fire o' bogwood and turf, to warm their shins over.

'Well, sir, as I was sayin' they kep' convarsin' and smokin' together most agreeable, until Lawrence beginn'd to get sleepy, as was but nathural for him, for he was an ould sarvint man, and was used to a great dale iv sleep.

'"Sure it's impossible," says my father, "it's gettin' sleepy you are?"

'"Oh, divil a taste," says Larry; "I'm only shuttin' my eyes," says he, "to keep out the parfume o' the tibacky smoke, that's makin' them wather," says he. "So don't you mind other people's business," says he, stiff enough, for he had a mighty high stomach av his own (rest his sowl), "and go on," says he, "with your story, for I'm listenin'," says he, shuttin' down his eyes.

'Well, when my father seen spakin' was no use, he went on with his story. By the same token, it was the story of Jim Soolivan and his ould goat he was tellin' — an' a plisant story it is — an' there was so much divarsion in it, that it was enough to waken a dormouse, let alone to pervint a Christian goin' asleep. But, faix, the way my father tould it, I believe there never was the likes heerd sinst nor before, for he bawled out every word av it, as if the life was fairly lavin' him, thrying to keep ould Larry awake; but, faix, it was no use, for the hoorsness came an him, an' before he kem to the end of his story Larry O'Connor beginned to snore like a bagpipes.

'"Oh, blur an' agres," says my father, "isn't this a hard case," says he, "that ould villain, lettin' on to be my friend, and to go asleep this way, an' us both in the very room with a sperit," says he. "The crass o' Christ about us!" says he; and with that he was goin' to shake Lawrence to waken him, but he just remimbered if he roused him, that he'd surely go off to his bed, an' lave him complately alone, an' that id be by far worse.

'"Oh thin," says my father, "I'll not disturb the poor boy. It id be neither friendly nor good-nathured," says he, "to tormint him while he is asleep," says he; "only I wish I was the same way, myself," says he.

'An' with that he beginned to walk up an' down, an' sayin' his prayers, until he worked himself into a sweat, savin' your presence. But it was all no good; so he dthrunk about a pint of sperits, to compose his mind.

'"Oh," says he, "I wish to the Lord I was as asy in my mind as Larry there. Maybe," says he, "if I thried I could go asleep;" an' with that he pulled a big armchair close beside Lawrence, an' settled himself in it as well as he could.

'But there was one quare thing I forgot to tell you. He couldn't help, in spite av himself, lookin' now an' thin at the picthur, an' he immediately obsarved that the eyes av it was follyin' him about, an' starin' at him, an' winkin' at him, wheriver he wint. "Oh," says he, when he seen that, "it's a poor chance I have," says he; "an' bad luck was with me the day I kem into this unforthunate place," says he. "But any way there's no use in bein' freckened now," says he; "for if I am to die, I may as well parspire undaunted," says he.

'Well, your honour, he thried to keep himself quite an' asy, an' he thought two or three times he might have wint asleep, but for the way the storm was groanin' and creakin' through the great heavy branches outside, an' whistlin' through the ould chimleys iv the castle. Well, afther one great roarin' blast iv the wind, you'd think the walls iv the castle was just goin' to fall, quite an' clane, with the shakin' iv it. All av a suddint the storm stopt, as silent an' as quite as if it was a July evenin'. Well, your honour, it wasn't stopped blowin' for three minnites, before he thought he hard a sort iv a noise over the chimley-piece; an' with that my father just opened his eyes the smallest taste in life, an' sure enough he seen the ould squire gettin' out iv the picthur, for all the world as if he was throwin' aff his ridin' coat, until he stept out clane an' complate, out av the chimley-piece, an' thrun himself down an the floor. Well, the slieveen ould chap — an' my father thought it was the dirtiest turn iv all — before he beginned to do anything out iv the way, he stopped for a while to listen wor they both asleep; an' as soon as he thought all was quite, he put out his hand and tuk hould iv the whisky bottle, an dhrank at laste a pint iv it. Well, your honour, when he tuk his turn out iv it, he settled it back mighty cute entirely, in the very same spot it was in before. An' he beginned to walk up an' down the room, lookin' as sober an' as solid as if he never done the likes at all. An' whinever he went apast my father, he thought he felt a great scent of brimstone, an' it was that that freckened him entirely; for he knew it was brimstone that was burned in hell, savin' your presence. At any rate, he often heerd it from Father Murphy, an' he had a right to know what belonged to it — he's dead since, God rest him. Well, your honour, my father was asy enough until the sperit kem past him; so close, God be marciful to us all, that the smell iv the sulphur tuk the breath clane out iv him; an' with that he tuk such a fit iv coughin', that it al-a-most shuk him out iv the chair he was sittin' in.

'"Ho, ho!" says the squire, stoppin' short about two steps aff, and turnin' round facin' my father, "is it you that's in it? — an' how's all with you, Terry Neil?"

'"At your honour's sarvice," says my father (as well as the fright id let him, for he was more dead than alive), "an' it's proud I am to see your honour tonight," says he.

'"Terence," says the squire, "you're a respectable man" (an' it was thrue for him), "an industhrious, sober man, an' an example of inebriety to the whole parish," says he.

'"Thank your honour," says my father, gettin' courage, "you were always a civil spoken gintleman, God rest your honour."

'"REST my honour?" says the sperit (fairly gettin' red in the face with the madness), "Rest my honour?" says he. "Why, you ignorant spalpeen," says he, "you mane, niggarly ignoramush," says he, "where did you lave your manners?" says he. "If I AM dead, it's no fault iv mine," says he; "an' it's not to be thrun in my teeth at every hand's turn, by the likes iv you," says he, stampin' his foot an the flure, that you'd think the boords id smash undther him.

'"Oh," says my father, "I'm only a foolish, ignorant poor man," says he.

'"You're nothing else," says the squire: "but any way," says he, "it's not to be listenin' to your gosther, nor convarsin' with the likes iv you, that I came UP — down I mane," says he — (an' as little as the mistake was, my father tuk notice iv it). "Listen to me now, Terence Neil," says he: "I was always a good masther to Pathrick Neil, your grandfather," says he.

'"'Tis thrue for your honour," says my father.

'"And, moreover, I think I was always a sober, riglar gintleman," says the squire.

'"That's your name, sure enough," says my father (though it was a big lie for him, but he could not help it).

'"Well," says the sperit, "although I was as sober as most men — at laste as most gintlemin," says he; "an' though I was at different pariods a most extempory Christian, and most charitable and inhuman to the poor," says he; "for all that I'm not as asy where I am now," says he, "as I had a right to expect," says he.

'"An' more's the pity," says my father. "Maybe your honour id wish to have a word with Father Murphy?"

'"Hould your tongue, you misherable bliggard," says the squire; "it's not iv my sowl I'm thinkin' — an' I wondther you'd have the impitence to talk to a gintleman consarnin' his sowl; and when I want THAT fixed," says he, slappin' his thigh, "I'll go to them that knows what belongs to the likes," says he. "It's not my sowl," says he, sittin' down opossite my father; "it's not my sowl that's annoyin' me most — I'm unasy on my right leg," says he, "that I bruk at Glenvarloch cover the day I killed black Barney."

'My father found out afther, it was a favourite horse that fell undher him, afther leapin' the big fence that runs along by the glin.

'"I hope," says my father, "your honour's not unasy about the killin' iv him?"

'"Hould your tongue, ye fool," said the squire, "an' I'll tell you why I'm unasy on my leg," says he. "In the place, where I spend most iv my time," says he, "except the little leisure I have for lookin' about me here," says he, "I have to walk a great dale more than I was ever used to," says he, "and by far more than is good for me either," says he; "for I must tell you," says he, "the people where I am is ancommonly fond iv cowld wather, for there is nothin' betther to be had; an', moreover, the weather is hotter than is altogether plisant," says he; "and I'm appinted," says he, "to assist in carryin’ the wather, an’ gets a mighty poor share iv it myself,” says he, “an’ a mighty throublesome, wearin’ job it is, I can tell you,” says he; “for they’re all iv them surprisinly dthry, an’ dthrinks it as fast as my legs can carry it,” says he; “but what kills me intirely,” says he, “is the wakeness in my leg,” says he, “an’ I want you to give it a pull or two to bring it to shape,” says he, “and that’s the long an’ the short iv it,” says he.

‘“Oh, plase your honour,” says my father (for he didn’t like to handle the sperit at all), “I wouldn’t have the impidence to do the likes to your honour,” says he; “it’s only to poor crathurs like myself I’d do it to,” says he.

‘“None iv your blarney,” says the squire. “Here’s my leg,” says he, cockin’ it up to him— “pull it for the bare life,” says he; an’”if you don’t, by the immortial powers I’ll not lave a bone in your carcish I’ll not powdher,” says he.

‘When my father heerd that, he seen there was no use in purtendin’, so he tuk hould iv the leg, an’ he kep’ pullin’ an’ pullin’, till the sweat, God bless us, beginned to pour down his face.

‘“Pull, you divil!” says the squire.

‘“At your sarvice, your honour,” says my father.

‘“Pull harder,” says the squire.

‘My father pulled like the divil.

‘“I’ll take a little sup,” says the squire, rachin’ over his hand to the bottle, “to keep up my courage,” says he, lettin’ an to be very wake in himself intirely. But, as cute as he was, he was out here, for he tuk the wrong one. “Here’s to your good health, Terence,” says he; “an’ now pull like the very divil.” An’ with that he lifted the bottle of holy wather, but it was hardly to his mouth, whin he let a screech out, you’d think the room id fairly split with it, an’ made one chuck that sent the leg clane aff his body in my father’s hands. Down wint the squire over the table, an’ bang wint my father halfway across the room on his back, upon the flure. Whin he kem to himself the cheerful mornin’ sun was shinin’ through the windy shutthers, an’ he was lying flat an his back, with the leg iv one of the great ould chairs pulled clane out iv the socket an’ tight in his hand, pintin’ up to the ceilin’, an’ ould Larry fast asleep, an’ snorin’ as loud as ever. My father wint that mornin’ to Father Murphy, an’ from that to the day of his death, he never neglected confission nor mass, an’ what he tould was betther believed that he spake av it but seldom. An’, as for the squire, that is the sperit, whether it was that he did not like his liquor, or by rason iv the loss iv his leg, he was never known to walk agin.’

THE FORTUNES OF SIR ROBERT ARDAGH.

Being a second Extract from the Papers of the late Father Purcell.

> ‘The earth hath bubbles as the water hath —
> And these are of them.’

In the south of Ireland, and on the borders of the county of Limerick, there lies a district of two or three miles in length, which is rendered interesting by the fact that it is one of the very few spots throughout this country, in which some vestiges of aboriginal forest still remain. It has little or none of the lordly character of the American forest, for the axe has felled its oldest and its grandest trees; but in the close wood which survives, live all the wild and pleasing peculiarities of nature: its complete irregularity, its vistas, in whose perspective the quiet cattle are peacefully browsing; its refreshing glades, where the grey rocks arise from amid the nodding fern; the silvery shafts of the old birch trees; the knotted trunks of the hoary oak, the grotesque but graceful branches which never shed their honours under the tyrant pruning-hook; the soft green sward; the chequered light and shade; the wild luxuriant weeds; the lichen and the moss — all, all are beautiful alike in the green freshness of spring, or in the sadness and sere of autumn. Their beauty is of that kind which makes the heart full with joy — appealing to the affections with a power which belongs to nature only. This wood runs up, from below the base, to the ridge of a long line of irregular hills, having perhaps, in primitive times, formed but the skirting of some mighty forest which occupied the level below.

But now, alas! whither have we drifted? whither has the tide of civilisation borne us? It has passed over a land unprepared for it — it has left nakedness behind it; we have lost our forests, but our marauders remain; we have destroyed all that is picturesque, while we have retained everything that is revolting in barbarism. Through the midst of this woodland there runs a deep gully or glen, where the stillness of the scene is broken in upon by the brawling of a mountain-stream, which, however, in the winter season, swells into a rapid and formidable torrent.

There is one point at which the glen becomes extremely deep and narrow; the sides descend to the depth of some hundred feet, and are so steep as to be nearly perpendicular. The wild trees which have taken root in the crannies and chasms of the rock have so intersected and entangled, that one can with difficulty catch a glimpse of the stream, which wheels, flashes, and foams below, as if exulting in the surrounding silence and solitude.

This spot was not unwisely chosen, as a point of no ordinary strength, for the erection of a massive square tower or keep, one side of which rises as if in continuation of the precipitous cliff on which it is based. Originally, the only mode of ingress was by a narrow portal in the very wall which overtopped the precipice, opening upon a ledge of rock which afforded a precarious pathway, cautiously intersected, however, by a deep trench cut with great labour in the living rock; so that, in its original state, and before the introduction of artillery into the art of war, this tower might have been pronounced, and that not presumptuously, almost impregnable.

The progress of improvement and the increasing security of the times had, however, tempted its successive proprietors, if not to adorn, at least to enlarge their premises, and at about the middle of the last century, when the castle was last inhabited, the original square tower formed but a small part of the edifice.

The castle, and a wide tract of the surrounding country, had from time immemorial belonged to a family which, for distinctness, we shall call by the name of Ardagh; and owing to the associations which, in Ireland, almost always attach to scenes which have long witnessed alike the exercise of stern feudal authority, and of that savage hospitality which distinguished the good old times, this building has become the subject and the scene of many wild and extraordinary traditions. One of them I have been enabled, by a personal acquaintance with an eye-witness of the events, to trace to its origin; and yet it is hard to say whether the events which I am about to record appear more strange or improbable as seen through the distorting medium of tradition, or in the appalling dimness of uncertainty which surrounds the reality.

Tradition says that, sometime in the last century, Sir Robert Ardagh, a young man, and the last heir of that family, went abroad and served in foreign armies; and that, having acquired considerable honour and emolument, he settled at Castle Ardagh, the building we have just now attempted to describe. He was what the country people call a DARK man; that is, he was considered morose, reserved, and ill-tempered; and, as it was supposed from the utter solitude of his life, was upon no terms of cordiality with the other members of his family.

The only occasion upon which he broke through the solitary monotony of his life was during the continuance of the racing season, and immediately subsequent to it; at which time he was to be seen among the busiest upon the course, betting deeply and unhesitatingly, and invariably with success. Sir Robert was, however, too well known as a man of honour, and of too high a family, to be suspected of any unfair dealing. He was, moreover, a soldier, and a man of an intrepid as well as of a haughty character; and no one cared to hazard a surmise, the consequences of which would be felt most probably by its originator only.

Gossip, however, was not silent; it was remarked that Sir Robert never appeared at the race-ground, which was the only place of public resort which he frequented, except in company with a certain strange-looking person, who was never seen elsewhere, or under other circumstances. It was remarked, too, that this man, whose relation to Sir Robert was never distinctly ascertained, was the only person to whom he seemed to speak unnecessarily; it was observed that while with the country gentry he exchanged no further communication than what was unavoidable in arranging his sporting transactions, with this person he would converse earnestly and frequently. Tradition asserts that, to enhance the curiosity which this unaccountable and exclusive preference excited, the stranger possessed some striking and unpleasant peculiarities of person and of garb — she does not say, however, what these were — but they, in conjunction with Sir Robert's secluded habits and extraordinary run of luck — a success which was supposed to result from the suggestions and immediate advice of the unknown — were sufficient to warrant report in pronouncing that there was something QUEER in the wind, and in surmising that Sir Robert was playing a fearful and a hazardous game, and that, in short, his strange companion was little better than the devil himself.

Years, however, rolled quietly away, and nothing novel occurred in the arrangements of Castle Ardagh, excepting that Sir Robert parted with his odd companion, but as nobody could tell whence he came, so nobody could say whither he had gone. Sir Robert's habits, however, underwent no consequent change; he continued regularly to frequent the race meetings, without mixing at all in the convivialities of the gentry, and immediately afterwards to relapse into the secluded monotony of his ordinary life.

It was said that he had accumulated vast sums of money — and, as his bets were always successful, and always large, such must have been the case. He did not suffer the acquisition of wealth, however, to influence his hospitality or his housekeeping — he neither purchased land, nor extended his establishment; and his mode of enjoying his money must have been altogether that of the miser — consisting merely in the pleasure of touching and telling his gold, and in the consciousness of wealth.

Sir Robert's temper, so far from improving, became more than ever gloomy and morose. He sometimes carried the indulgence of his evil dispositions to such a height that it bordered upon insanity. During these paroxysms he would neither eat, drink, nor sleep. On such occasions he insisted on perfect privacy, even from the intrusion of his most trusted servants; his voice was frequently heard, sometimes in earnest supplication, sometime as if in loud and angry altercation with some unknown visitant; sometimes he would, for hours together, walk to and fro throughout the long oak wainscoted apartment, which he generally occupied, with wild gesticulations and agitated pace, in the manner of one who has been roused to a state of unnatural excitement by some sudden and appalling intimation.

These paroxysms of apparent lunacy were so frightful, that during their continuance even his oldest and most-faithful domestics dared not approach him; consequently, his hours of agony were never intruded upon, and the mysterious causes of his sufferings appeared likely to remain hidden for ever.

On one occasion a fit of this kind continued for an unusual time, the ordinary term of their duration — about two days — had been long past, and the old servant who generally waited upon Sir Robert after these visitations, having in vain listened for the well-known tinkle of his master's hand-bell, began to feel extremely anxious; he feared that his master might have died from sheer exhaustion, or perhaps put an end to his own existence during his miserable depression. These fears at length became so strong, that having in vain urged some of his brother servants to accompany him, he determined to go up alone, and himself see whether any accident had befallen Sir Robert.

He traversed the several passages which conducted from the new to the more ancient parts of the mansion, and having arrived in the old hall of the castle, the utter silence of the hour, for it was very late in the night, the idea of the nature of the enterprise in which he was engaging himself, a sensation of remoteness from anything like human companionship, but, more than all, the vivid but undefined anticipation of something horrible, came upon him with such oppressive weight that he hesitated as to whether he should proceed. Real uneasiness, however, respecting the fate of his master, for whom he felt that kind of attachment which the force of habitual intercourse not unfrequently engenders respecting objects not in themselves amiable, and also a latent unwillingness to expose his weakness to the ridicule of his fellow-servants, combined to overcome his reluctance; and he had just placed his foot upon the first step of the staircase which conducted to his master's chamber, when his attention was arrested by a low but distinct knocking at the hall-door. Not, perhaps, very sorry at finding thus an excuse even for deferring his intended expedition, he placed the candle upon a stone block which lay in the hall, and approached the door, uncertain whether his ears had not deceived him. This doubt was justified by the circumstance that the hall entrance had been for nearly fifty years disused as a mode of ingress to the castle. The situation of this gate also, which we have endeavoured to describe, opening upon a narrow ledge of rock which overhangs a perilous cliff, rendered it at all times, but particularly at night, a dangerous entrance. This shelving platform of rock, which formed the only avenue to the door, was divided, as I have already stated, by a broad chasm, the planks across which had long disappeared by decay or otherwise, so that it seemed at least highly improbable that any man could have found his way across the passage in safety to the door, more particularly on a night like that, of singular darkness. The old man, therefore, listened attentively, to ascertain whether the first application should be followed by another. He had not long to wait; the same low but singularly distinct knocking was repeated; so low that it seemed as if the applicant had employed no harder or heavier instrument than his hand, and yet, despite the immense thickness of the door, with such strength that the sound was distinctly audible.

The knock was repeated a third time, without any increase of loudness; and the old man, obeying an impulse for which to his dying hour he could never account, proceeded to remove, one by one, the three great oaken bars which secured the door. Time and damp had effectually corroded the iron chambers of the lock, so that it afforded little resistance. With some effort, as he believed, assisted from without, the old servant succeeded in opening the door; and a low, square-built figure, apparently that of a man wrapped in a large black cloak, entered the hall. The servant could not see much of this visitant with any distinctness; his dress appeared foreign, the skirt of his ample cloak was thrown over one shoulder; he wore a large felt hat, with a very heavy leaf, from under which escaped what appeared to be a mass of long sooty-black hair; his feet were cased in heavy riding-boots. Such were the few particulars which the servant had time and light to observe. The stranger desired him to let his master know instantly that a friend had come, by appointment, to settle some business with him. The servant hesitated, but a slight motion on the part of his visitor, as if to possess himself of the candle, determined him; so, taking it in his hand, he ascended the castle stairs, leaving his guest in the hall.

On reaching the apartment which opened upon the oak-chamber he was surprised to observe the door of that room partly open, and the room itself lit up. He paused, but there was no sound; he looked in, and saw Sir Robert, his head and the upper part of his body reclining on a table, upon which burned a lamp; his arms were stretched forward on either side, and perfectly motionless; it appeared that, having been sitting at the table, he had thus sunk forward, either dead or in a swoon. There was no sound of breathing; all was silent, except the sharp ticking of a watch, which lay beside the lamp. The servant coughed twice or thrice, but with no effect; his fears now almost amounted to certainty, and he was approaching the table on which his master partly lay, to satisfy himself of his death, when Sir Robert slowly raised his head, and throwing himself back in his chair, fixed his eyes in a ghastly and uncertain gaze upon his attendant. At length he said, slowly and painfully, as if he dreaded the answer:

‘In God’s name, what are you?’

‘Sir,’ said the servant, ‘a strange gentleman wants to see you below.’

At this intimation Sir Robert, starting on his feet and tossing his arms wildly upwards, uttered a shriek of such appalling and despairing terror that it was almost too fearful for human endurance; and long after the sound had ceased it seemed to the terrified imagination of the old servant to roll through the deserted passages in bursts of unnatural laughter. After a few moments Sir Robert said:

‘Can’t you send him away? Why does he come so soon? O God! O God! let him leave me for an hour; a little time. I can’t see him now; try to get him away. You see I can’t go down now; I have not strength. O God! O God! let him come back in an hour; it is not long to wait. He cannot lose anything by it; nothing, nothing, nothing. Tell him that; say anything to him.’

The servant went down. In his own words, he did not feel the stairs under him till he got to the hall. The figure stood exactly as he had left it. He delivered his master’s message as coherently as he could. The stranger replied in a careless tone:

‘If Sir Robert will not come down to me, I must go up to him.’

The man returned, and to his surprise he found his master much more composed in manner. He listened to the message, and though the cold perspiration rose in drops upon his forehead faster than he could wipe it away, his manner had lost the dreadful agitation which had marked it before. He rose feebly, and casting a last look of agony behind him, passed from the room to the lobby, where he signed to his attendant not to follow him. The man moved as far as the head of the staircase, from whence he had a tolerably distinct view of the hall, which was imperfectly lighted by the candle he had left there.

He saw his master reel, rather than walk down the stairs, clinging all the way to the banisters. He walked on, as if about to sink every moment from weakness. The figure advanced as if to meet him, and in passing struck down the light. The servant could see no more; but there was a sound of struggling, renewed at intervals with silent but fearful energy. It was evident, however, that the parties were approaching the door, for he heard the solid oak sound twice or thrice, as the feet of the combatants, in shuffling hither and thither over the floor, struck upon it. After a slight pause he heard the door thrown open with such violence that the leaf seemed to strike the side-wall of the hall, for it was so dark without that this could only be surmised by the sound. The struggle was renewed with an agony and intenseness of energy that betrayed itself in deep-drawn gasps. One desperate effort, which terminated in the breaking of some part of the door, producing a sound as if the doorpost was wrenched from its position, was followed by another wrestle, evidently upon the narrow ledge which ran outside the door, overtopping the precipice. This proved to be the final struggle, for it was followed by a crashing sound as if some heavy body had fallen over, and was rushing down the precipice, through the light boughs that crossed near the top. All then became still as the grave, except when the moan of the night wind sighed up the wooded glen.

The old servant had not nerve to return through the hall, and to him the darkness seemed all but endless; but morning at length came, and with it the disclosure of the events of the night. Near the door, upon the ground, lay Sir Robert's sword-belt, which had given way in the scuffle. A huge splinter from the massive doorpost had been wrenched off by an almost superhuman effort — one which nothing but the gripe of a despairing man could have severed — and on the rock outside were left the marks of the slipping and sliding of feet.

At the foot of the precipice, not immediately under the castle, but dragged some way up the glen, were found the remains of Sir Robert, with hardly a vestige of a limb or feature left distinguishable. The right hand, however, was uninjured, and in its fingers were clutched, with the fixedness of death, a long lock of coarse sooty hair — the only direct circumstantial evidence of the presence of a second person. So says tradition.

This story, as I have mentioned, was current among the dealers in such lore; but the original facts are so dissimilar in all but the name of the principal person mentioned and his mode of life, and the fact that his death was accompanied with circumstances of extraordinary mystery, that the two narratives are totally irreconcilable (even allowing the utmost for the exaggerating influence of tradition), except by supposing report to have combined and blended together the fabulous histories of several distinct bearers of the family name. However this may be, I shall lay before the reader a distinct recital of the events from which the foregoing tradition arose. With respect to these there can be no mistake; they are authenticated as fully as anything can be by human testimony; and I state them principally upon the evidence of a lady who herself bore a prominent part in the strange events which she related, and which I now record as being among the few well-attested tales of the marvellous which it has been my fate to hear. I shall, as far as I am able, arrange in one combined narrative the evidence of several distinct persons who were eye-witnesses of what they related, and with the truth of whose testimony I am solemnly and deeply impressed.

Sir Robert Ardagh, as we choose to call him, was the heir and representative of the family whose name he bore; but owing to the prodigality of his father, the estates descended to him in a very impaired condition. Urged by the restless spirit of youth, or more probably by a feeling of pride which could not submit to witness, in the paternal mansion, what he considered a humiliating alteration in the style and hospitality which up to that time had distinguished his family, Sir Robert left Ireland and went abroad. How he occupied himself, or what countries he visited during his absence, was never known, nor did he afterwards make any allusion or encourage any inquiries touching his foreign sojourn. He left Ireland in the year 1742, being then just of age, and was not heard of until the year 1760 — about eighteen years afterwards — at which time he returned. His personal appearance was, as might have been expected, very greatly altered, more altered, indeed, than the time of his absence might have warranted one in supposing likely. But to counterbalance the unfavourable change which time had wrought in his form and features, he had acquired all the advantages of polish of manner and refinement of taste which foreign travel is supposed to bestow. But what was truly surprising was that it soon became evident that Sir Robert was very wealthy — wealthy to an extraordinary and unaccountable degree; and this fact was made manifest, not only by his expensive style of living, but by his proceeding to disembarrass his property, and to purchase extensive estates in addition. Moreover, there could be nothing deceptive in these appearances, for he paid ready money for everything, from the most important purchase to the most trifling.

Sir Robert was a remarkably agreeable man, and possessing the combined advantages of birth and property, he was, as a matter of course, gladly received into the highest society which the metropolis then commanded. It was thus that he became acquainted with the two beautiful Miss F —— ds, then among the brightest ornaments of the highest circle of Dublin fashion. Their family was in more than one direction allied to nobility; and Lady D —— , their elder sister by many years, and sometime married to a once well-known nobleman, was now their protectress. These considerations, beside the fact that the young ladies were what is usually termed heiresses, though not to a very great amount, secured to them a high position in the best society which Ireland then produced. The two young ladies differed strongly, alike in appearance and in character. The elder of the two, Emily, was generally considered the handsomer — for her beauty was of that impressive kind which never failed to strike even at the first glance, possessing as it did all the advantages of a fine person and a commanding carriage. The beauty of her features strikingly assorted in character with that of her figure and deportment. Her hair was raven-black and richly luxuriant, beautifully contrasting with the perfect whiteness of her forehead — her finely pencilled brows were black as the ringlets that clustered near them — and her blue eyes, full, lustrous, and animated, possessed all the power and brilliancy of brown ones, with more than their softness and variety of expression. She was not, however, merely the tragedy queen. When she smiled, and that was not seldom, the dimpling of cheek and chin, the laughing display of the small and beautiful teeth — but, more than all, the roguish archness of her deep, bright eye, showed that nature had not neglected in her the lighter and the softer characteristics of woman.

Her younger sister Mary was, as I believe not unfrequently occurs in the case of sisters, quite in the opposite style of beauty. She was light-haired, had more colour, had nearly equal grace, with much more liveliness of manner. Her eyes were of that dark grey which poets so much admire — full of expression and vivacity. She was altogether a very beautiful and animated girl — though as unlike her sister as the presence of those two qualities would permit her to be. Their dissimilarity did not stop here — it was deeper than mere appearance — the character of their minds differed almost as strikingly as did their complexion. The fair-haired beauty had a large proportion of that softness and pliability of temper which physiognomists assign as the characteristics of such complexions. She was much more the creature of impulse than of feeling, and consequently more the victim of extrinsic circumstances than was her sister. Emily, on the contrary, possessed considerable firmness and decision. She was less excitable, but when excited her feelings were more intense and enduring. She wanted much of the gaiety, but with it the volatility of her younger sister. Her opinions were adopted, and her friendships formed more reflectively, and her affections seemed to move, as it were, more slowly, but more determinedly. This firmness of character did not amount to anything masculine, and did not at all impair the feminine grace of her manners.

Sir Robert Ardagh was for a long time apparently equally attentive to the two sisters, and many were the conjectures and the surmises as to which would be the lady of his choice. At length, however, these doubts were determined; he proposed for and was accepted by the dark beauty, Emily F —— d.

The bridals were celebrated in a manner becoming the wealth and connections of the parties; and Sir Robert and Lady Ardagh left Dublin to pass the honeymoon at the family mansion, Castle Ardagh, which had lately been fitted up in a style bordering upon magnificent. Whether in compliance with the wishes of his lady, or owing to some whim of his own, his habits were henceforward strikingly altered; and from having moved among the gayest if not the most profligate of the votaries of fashion, he suddenly settled down into a quiet, domestic, country gentleman, and seldom, if ever, visited the capital, and then his sojourns were as brief as the nature of his business would permit.

Lady Ardagh, however, did not suffer from this change further than in being secluded from general society; for Sir Robert's wealth, and the hospitality which he had established in the family mansion, commanded that of such of his lady's friends and relatives as had leisure or inclination to visit the castle; and as their style of living was very handsome, and its internal resources of amusement considerable, few invitations from Sir Robert or his lady were neglected.

Many years passed quietly away, during which Sir Robert's and Lady Ardagh's hopes of issue were several times disappointed. In the lapse of all this time there occurred but one event worth recording. Sir Robert had brought with him from abroad a valet, who sometimes professed himself to be French, at others Italian, and at others again German. He spoke all these languages with equal fluency, and seemed to take a kind of pleasure in puzzling the sagacity and balking the curiosity of such of the visitors at the castle as at any time happened to enter into conversation with him, or who, struck by his singularities, became inquisitive respecting his country and origin. Sir Robert called him by the French name, JACQUE, and among the lower orders he was familiarly known by the title of 'Jack, the devil,' an appellation which originated in a supposed malignity of disposition and a real reluctance to mix in the society of those who were believed to be his equals. This morose reserve, coupled with the mystery which enveloped all about him, rendered him an object of suspicion and inquiry to his fellow-servants, amongst whom it was whispered that this man in secret governed the actions of Sir Robert with a despotic dictation, and that, as if to indemnify himself for his public and apparent servitude and self-denial, he in private exacted a degree of respectful homage from his so-called master, totally inconsistent with the relation generally supposed to exist between them.

This man's personal appearance was, to say the least of it, extremely odd; he was low in stature; and this defect was enhanced by a distortion of the spine, so considerable as almost to amount to a hunch; his features, too, had all that sharpness and sickliness of hue which generally accompany deformity; he wore his hair, which was black as soot, in heavy neglected ringlets about his shoulders, and always without powder — a peculiarity in those days. There was something unpleasant, too, in the circumstance that he never raised his eyes to meet those of another; this fact was often cited as a proof of his being something not quite right, and said to result not from the timidity which is supposed in most cases to induce this habit, but from a consciousness that his eye possessed a power which, if exhibited, would betray a supernatural origin. Once, and once only, had he violated this sinister observance: it was on the occasion of Sir Robert's hopes having been most bitterly disappointed; his lady, after a severe and dangerous confinement, gave birth to a dead child. Immediately after the intelligence had been made known, a servant, having upon some business passed outside the gate of the castleyard, was met by Jacque, who, contrary to his wont, accosted him, observing, 'So, after all the pother, the son and heir is still-born.' This remark was accompanied by a chuckling laugh, the only approach to merriment which he was ever known to exhibit. The servant, who was really disappointed, having hoped for holiday times, feasting and debauchery with impunity during the rejoicings which would have accompanied a christening, turned tartly upon the little valet, telling him that he should let Sir Robert know how he had received the tidings which should have filled any faithful servant with sorrow; and having once broken the ice, he was proceeding with increasing fluency, when his harangue was cut short and his temerity punished, by the little man raising his head and treating him to a scowl so fearful, half-demoniac, half-insane, that it haunted his imagination in nightmares and nervous tremors for months after.

To this man Lady Ardagh had, at first sight, conceived an antipathy amounting to horror, a mixture of loathing and dread so very powerful that she had made it a particular and urgent request to Sir Robert, that he would dismiss him, offering herself, from that property which Sir Robert had by the marriage settlements left at her own disposal, to provide handsomely for him, provided only she might be relieved from the continual anxiety and discomfort which the fear of encountering him induced.

Sir Robert, however, would not hear of it; the request seemed at first to agitate and distress him; but when still urged in defiance of his peremptory refusal, he burst into a violent fit of fury; he spoke darkly of great sacrifices which he had made, and threatened that if the request were at any time renewed he would leave both her and the country for ever. This was, however, a solitary instance of violence; his general conduct towards Lady Ardagh, though at no time uxorious, was certainly kind and respectful, and he was more than repaid in the fervent attachment which she bore him in return.

Some short time after this strange interview between Sir Robert and Lady Ardagh; one night after the family had retired to bed, and when everything had been quiet for some time, the bell of Sir Robert's dressing-room rang suddenly and violently; the ringing was repeated again and again at still shorter intervals, and with increasing violence, as if the person who pulled the bell was agitated by the presence of some terrifying and imminent danger. A servant named Donovan was the first to answer it; he threw on his clothes, and hurried to the room.

Sir Robert had selected for his private room an apartment remote from the bedchambers of the castle, most of which lay in the more modern parts of the mansion, and secured at its entrance by a double door. As the servant opened the first of these, Sir Robert's bell again sounded with a longer and louder peal; the inner door resisted his efforts to open it; but after a few violent struggles, not having been perfectly secured, or owing to the inadequacy of the bolt itself, it gave way, and the servant rushed into the apartment, advancing several paces before he could recover himself. As he entered, he heard Sir Robert's voice exclaiming loudly— 'Wait without, do not come in yet;' but the prohibition came too late. Near a low truckle-bed, upon which Sir Robert sometimes slept, for he was a whimsical man, in a large armchair, sat, or rather lounged, the form of the valet Jacque, his arms folded, and his heels stretched forward on the floor, so as fully to exhibit his misshapen legs, his head thrown back, and his eyes fixed upon his master with a look of indescribable defiance and derision, while, as if to add to the strange insolence of his attitude and expression, he had placed upon his head the black cloth cap which it was his habit to wear.

Sir Robert was standing before him, at the distance of several yards, in a posture expressive of despair, terror, and what might be called an agony of humility. He waved his hand twice or thrice, as if to dismiss the servant, who, however, remained fixed on the spot where he had first stood; and then, as if forgetting everything but the agony within him, he pressed his clenched hands on his cold damp brow, and dashed away the heavy drops that gathered chill and thickly there.

Jacque broke the silence.

'Donovan,' said he, 'shake up that drone and drunkard, Carlton; tell him that his master directs that the travelling carriage shall be at the door within half-an-hour.'

The servant paused, as if in doubt as to what he should do; but his scruples were resolved by Sir Robert's saying hurriedly, 'Go — go, do whatever he directs; his commands are mine; tell Carlton the same.'

The servant hurried to obey, and in about half-an-hour the carriage was at the door, and Jacque, having directed the coachman to drive to B —— n, a small town at about the distance of twelve miles — the nearest point, however, at which posthorses could be obtained — stepped into the vehicle, which accordingly quitted the castle immediately.

Although it was a fine moonlight night, the carriage made its way but very slowly, and after the lapse of two hours the travellers had arrived at a point about eight miles from the castle, at which the road strikes through a desolate and heathy flat, sloping up distantly at either side into bleak undulatory hills, in whose monotonous sweep the imagination beholds the heaving of some dark sluggish sea, arrested in its first commotion by some preternatural power. It is a gloomy and divested spot; there is neither tree nor habitation near it; its monotony is unbroken, except by here and there the grey front of a rock peering above the heath, and the effect is rendered yet more dreary and spectral by the exaggerated and misty shadows which the moon casts along the sloping sides of the hills.

When they had gained about the centre of this tract, Carlton, the coachman, was surprised to see a figure standing at some distance in advance, immediately beside the road, and still more so when, on coming up, he observed that it was no other than Jacque whom he believed to be at that moment quietly seated in the carriage; the coachman drew up, and nodding to him, the little valet exclaimed:

‘Carlton, I have got the start of you; the roads are heavy, so I shall even take care of myself the rest of the way. Do you make your way back as best you can, and I shall follow my own nose.’

So saying, he chucked a purse into the lap of the coachman, and turning off at a right angle with the road, he began to move rapidly away in the direction of the dark ridge that lowered in the distance.

The servant watched him until he was lost in the shadowy haze of night; and neither he nor any of the inmates of the castle saw Jacque again. His disappearance, as might have been expected, did not cause any regret among the servants and dependants at the castle; and Lady Ardagh did not attempt to conceal her delight; but with Sir Robert matters were different, for two or three days subsequent to this event he confined himself to his room, and when he did return to his ordinary occupations, it was with a gloomy indifference, which showed that he did so more from habit than from any interest he felt in them. He appeared from that moment unaccountably and strikingly changed, and thenceforward walked through life as a thing from which he could derive neither profit nor pleasure. His temper, however, so far from growing wayward or morose, became, though gloomy, very — almost unnaturally — placid and cold; but his spirits totally failed, and he grew silent and abstracted.

These sombre habits of mind, as might have been anticipated, very materially affected the gay housekeeping of the castle; and the dark and melancholy spirit of its master seemed to have communicated itself to the very domestics, almost to the very walls of the mansion.

Several years rolled on in this way, and the sounds of mirth and wassail had long been strangers to the castle, when Sir Robert requested his lady, to her great astonishment, to invite some twenty or thirty of their friends to spend the Christmas, which was fast approaching, at the castle. Lady

Ardagh gladly complied, and her sister Mary, who still continued unmarried, and Lady D —— were of course included in the invitations. Lady Ardagh had requested her sisters to set forward as early as possible, in order that she might enjoy a little of their society before the arrival of the other guests; and in compliance with this request they left Dublin almost immediately upon receiving the invitation, a little more than a week before the arrival of the festival which was to be the period at which the whole party were to muster.

For expedition's sake it was arranged that they should post, while Lady D — — 's groom was to follow with her horses, she taking with herself her own maid and one male servant. They left the city when the day was considerably spent, and consequently made but three stages in the first day; upon the second, at about eight in the evening, they had reached the town of K —— k, distant about fifteen miles from Castle Ardagh. Here, owing to Miss F —— d's great fatigue, she having been for a considerable time in a very delicate state of health, it was determined to put up for the night. They, accordingly, took possession of the best sitting-room which the inn commanded, and Lady D —— remained in it to direct and urge the preparations for some refreshment, which the fatigues of the day had rendered necessary, while her younger sister retired to her bedchamber to rest there for a little time, as the parlour commanded no such luxury as a sofa.

Miss F —— d was, as I have already stated, at this time in very delicate health; and upon this occasion the exhaustion of fatigue, and the dreary badness of the weather, combined to depress her spirits. Lady D —— had not been left long to herself, when the door communicating with the passage was abruptly opened, and her sister Mary entered in a state of great agitation; she sat down pale and trembling upon one of the chairs, and it was not until a copious flood of tears had relieved her, that she became sufficiently calm to relate the cause of her excitement and distress. It was simply this. Almost immediately upon lying down upon the bed she sank into a feverish and unrefreshing slumber; images of all grotesque shapes and startling colours flitted before her sleeping fancy with all the rapidity and variety of the changes in a kaleidoscope. At length, as she described it, a mist seemed to interpose itself between her sight and the ever-shifting scenery which sported before her imagination, and out of this cloudy shadow gradually emerged a figure whose back seemed turned towards the sleeper; it was that of a lady, who, in perfect silence, was expressing as far as pantomimic gesture could, by wringing her hands, and throwing her head from side to side, in the manner of one who is exhausted by the over indulgence, by the very sickness and impatience of grief; the extremity of misery. For a long time she sought in vain to catch a glimpse of the face of the apparition, who thus seemed to stir and live before her. But at length the figure seemed to move with an air of authority, as if about to give directions to some inferior, and in doing so, it turned its head so as to display, with a ghastly distinctness, the features of Lady Ardagh, pale as death, with her dark hair all dishevelled, and her eyes dim and sunken with weeping. The revulsion of feeling which Miss F —— d experienced at this disclosure — for up to that point she had contemplated the appearance rather with a sense of curiosity and of interest, than of anything deeper — was so horrible, that the shock awoke her perfectly. She sat up in the bed, and looked fearfully around the room, which was imperfectly lighted by a single candle burning dimly, as if she almost expected to see the reality of her dreadful vision lurking in some corner of the chamber. Her fears were, however, verified, though not in the way she expected; yet in a manner sufficiently horrible — for she had hardly time to breathe and to collect her thoughts, when she heard, or thought she heard, the voice of her sister, Lady Ardagh, sometimes sobbing violently, and sometimes almost shrieking as if in terror, and calling upon her and Lady D —— , with the most imploring earnestness of despair, for God’s sake to lose no time in coming to her. All this was so horribly distinct, that it seemed as if the mourner was standing within a few yards of the spot where Miss F —— d lay. She sprang from the bed, and leaving the candle in the room behind her, she made her way in the dark through the passage, the voice still following her, until as she arrived at the door of the sitting-room it seemed to die away in low sobbing.

As soon as Miss F —— d was tolerably recovered, she declared her determination to proceed directly, and without further loss of time, to Castle Ardagh. It was not without much difficulty that Lady D —— at length prevailed upon her to consent to remain where they then were, until morning should arrive, when it was to be expected that the young lady would be much refreshed by at least remaining quiet for the night, even though sleep were out of the question. Lady D —— was convinced, from the nervous and feverish symptoms which her sister exhibited, that she had already done too much, and was more than ever satisfied of the necessity of prosecuting the journey no further upon that day. After some time she persuaded her sister to return to her room, where she remained with her until she had gone to bed, and appeared comparatively composed. Lady D —— then returned to the parlour, and not finding herself sleepy, she remained sitting by the fire. Her solitude was a second time broken in upon, by the entrance of her sister, who now appeared, if possible, more agitated than before. She said that Lady D —— had not long left the room, when she was roused by a repetition of the same wailing and lamentations, accompanied by the wildest and most agonized supplications that no time should be lost in coming to Castle Ardagh, and all in her sister's voice, and uttered at the same proximity as before. This time the voice had followed her to the very door of the sitting-room, and until she closed it, seemed to pour forth its cries and sobs at the very threshold.

Miss F —— d now most positively declared that nothing should prevent her proceeding instantly to the castle, adding that if Lady D —— would not accompany her, she would go on by herself. Superstitious feelings are at all times more or less contagious, and the last century afforded a soil much more congenial to their growth than the present. Lady D —— was so far affected by her sister's terrors, that she became, at least, uneasy; and seeing that her sister was immovably determined upon setting forward immediately, she consented to accompany her forthwith. After a slight delay, fresh horses were procured, and the two ladies and their attendants renewed their journey, with strong injunctions to the driver to quicken their rate of travelling as much as possible, and promises of reward in case of his doing so.

Roads were then in much worse condition throughout the south, even than they now are; and the fifteen miles which modern posting would have passed in little more than an hour and a half, were not completed even with every possible exertion in twice the time. Miss F —— d had been nervously restless during the journey. Her head had been constantly out of the carriage window; and as they approached the entrance to the castle demesne, which lay about a mile from the building, her anxiety began to communicate itself to her sister. The postillion had just dismounted, and was endeavouring to open the gate — at that time a necessary trouble; for in the middle of the last century porter’s lodges were not common in the south of Ireland, and locks and keys almost unknown. He had just succeeded in rolling back the heavy oaken gate so as to admit the vehicle, when a mounted servant rode rapidly down the avenue, and drawing up at the carriage, asked of the postillion who the party were; and on hearing, he rode round to the carriage window and handed in a note, which Lady D —— received. By the assistance of one of the coach-lamps they succeeded in deciphering it. It was scrawled in great agitation, and ran thus:

‘MY DEAR SISTER — MY DEAR SISTERS BOTH, — In God’s name lose no time, I am frightened and miserable; I cannot explain all till you come. I am too much terrified to write coherently; but understand me — hasten — do not waste a minute. I am afraid you will come too late.

‘E. A.’

The servant could tell nothing more than that the castle was in great confusion, and that Lady Ardagh had been crying bitterly all the night. Sir Robert was perfectly well. Altogether at a loss as to the cause of Lady Ardagh’s great distress, they urged their way up the steep and broken avenue which wound through the crowding trees, whose wild and grotesque branches, now left stripped and naked by the blasts of winter, stretched drearily across the road. As the carriage drew up in the area before the door, the anxiety of the ladies almost amounted to agony; and scarcely waiting for the assistance of their attendant, they sprang to the ground, and in an instant stood at the castle door. From within were distinctly audible the sounds of lamentation and weeping, and the suppressed hum of voices as if of those endeavouring to soothe the mourner. The door was speedily opened, and when the ladies entered, the first object which met their view was their sister, Lady Ardagh, sitting on a form in the hall, weeping and wringing her hands in deep agony. Beside her stood two old, withered crones, who were each endeavouring in their own way to administer consolation, without even knowing or caring what the subject of her grief might be.

Immediately on Lady Ardagh’s seeing her sisters, she started up, fell on their necks, and kissed them again and again without speaking, and then taking them each by a hand, still weeping bitterly, she led them into a small room adjoining the hall, in which burned a light, and, having closed the door, she sat down between them. After thanking them for the haste they had made, she proceeded to tell them, in words incoherent from agitation, that Sir Robert had in private, and in the most solemn manner, told her that he should die upon that night, and that he had occupied himself during the evening in giving minute directions respecting the arrangements of his funeral. Lady D —— here suggested the possibility of his labouring under the hallucinations of a fever; but to this Lady Ardagh quickly replied:

‘Oh! no, no! Would to God I could think it. Oh! no, no! Wait till you have seen him. There is a frightful calmness about all he says and does; and his directions are all so clear, and his mind so perfectly collected, it is impossible, quite impossible.’ And she wept yet more bitterly.

At that moment Sir Robert’s voice was heard in issuing some directions, as he came downstairs; and Lady Ardagh exclaimed, hurriedly:

‘Go now and see him yourself. He is in the hall.’

Lady D —— accordingly went out into the hall, where Sir Robert met her; and, saluting her with kind politeness, he said, after a pause:

‘You are come upon a melancholy mission — the house is in great confusion, and some of its inmates in considerable grief.’ He took her hand, and looking fixedly in her face, continued: ‘I shall not live to see tomorrow’s sun shine.’

‘You are ill, sir, I have no doubt,’ replied she; ‘but I am very certain we shall see you much better tomorrow, and still better the day following.’

‘I am NOT ill, sister,’ replied he. ‘Feel my temples, they are cool; lay your finger to my pulse, its throb is slow and temperate. I never was more perfectly in health, and yet do I know that ere three hours be past, I shall be no more.’

‘Sir, sir,’ said she, a good deal startled, but wishing to conceal the impression which the calm solemnity of his manner had, in her own despite, made upon her, ‘Sir, you should not jest; you should not even speak lightly upon such subjects. You trifle with what is sacred — you are sporting with the best affections of your wife — — ‘

‘Stay, my good lady,’ said he; ‘if when this clock shall strike the hour of three, I shall be anything but a helpless clod, then upbraid me. Pray return now to your sister. Lady Ardagh is, indeed, much to be pitied; but what is past cannot now be helped. I have now a few papers to arrange, and some to destroy. I shall see you and Lady Ardagh before my death; try to compose her — her sufferings distress me much; but what is past cannot now be mended.’

Thus saying, he went upstairs, and Lady D —— returned to the room where her sisters were sitting.

‘Well,’ exclaimed Lady Ardagh, as she reentered, ‘is it not so? — do you still doubt? — do you think there is any hope?’

Lady D —— was silent.

‘Oh! none, none, none,’ continued she; ‘I see, I see you are convinced.’ And she wrung her hands in bitter agony.

‘My dear sister,’ said Lady D —— , ‘there is, no doubt, something strange in all that has appeared in this matter; but still I cannot but hope that there may be something deceptive in all the apparent calmness of Sir Robert. I still must believe that some latent fever has affected his mind, or that, owing to the state of nervous depression into which he has been sinking, some trivial occurrence has been converted, in his disordered imagination, into an augury foreboding his immediate dissolution.’

In such suggestions, unsatisfactory even to those who originated them, and doubly so to her whom they were intended to comfort, more than two hours passed; and Lady D —— was beginning to hope that the fated term might elapse without the occurrence of any tragical event, when Sir Robert entered the room. On coming in, he placed his finger with a warning gesture upon his lips, as if to enjoin silence; and then having successively pressed the hands of his two sisters-in-law, he stooped sadly over the fainting form of his lady, and twice pressed her cold, pale forehead, with his lips, and then passed silently out of the room.

Lady D —— , starting up, followed to the door, and saw him take a candle in the hall, and walk deliberately up the stairs. Stimulated by a feeling of horrible curiosity, she continued to follow him at a distance. She saw him enter his own private room, and heard him close and lock the door after him. Continuing to follow him as far as she could, she placed herself at the door of the chamber, as noiselessly as possible, where after a little time she was joined by her two sisters, Lady Ardagh and Miss F —— d. In breathless silence they listened to what should pass within. They distinctly heard Sir Robert pacing up and down the room for some time; and then, after a pause, a sound as if some one had thrown himself heavily upon the bed. At this moment Lady D —— , forgetting that the door had been secured within, turned the handle for the purpose of entering; when some one from the inside, close to the door, said, ‘Hush! hush!’ The same lady, now much alarmed, knocked violently at the door; there was no answer. She knocked again more violently, with no further success. Lady Ardagh, now uttering a piercing shriek, sank in a swoon upon the floor. Three or four servants, alarmed by the noise, now hurried upstairs, and Lady Ardagh was carried apparently lifeless to her own chamber. They then, after having knocked long and loudly in vain, applied themselves to forcing an entrance into Sir Robert’s room. After resisting some violent efforts, the door at length gave way, and all entered the room nearly together. There was a single candle burning upon a table at the far end of the apartment; and stretched upon the bed lay Sir Robert Ardagh. He was a corpse — the eyes were open — no convulsion had passed over the features, or distorted the limbs — it seemed as if the soul had sped from the body without a struggle to remain there. On touching the body it was found to be cold as clay — all lingering of the vital heat had left it. They closed the ghastly eyes of the corpse, and leaving it to the care of those who seem to consider it a privilege of their age and sex to gloat over the revolting spectacle of death in all its stages, they returned to Lady Ardagh, now a widow. The party assembled at the castle, but the atmosphere was tainted with death. Grief there was not much, but awe and panic were expressed in every face. The guests talked in whispers, and the servants walked on tiptoe, as if afraid of the very noise of their own footsteps.

The funeral was conducted almost with splendour. The body, having been conveyed, in compliance with Sir Robert’s last directions, to Dublin, was there laid within the ancient walls of St. Audoen’s Church — where I have read the epitaph, telling the age and titles of the departed dust. Neither painted escutcheon, nor marble slab, have served to rescue from oblivion the story of the dead, whose very name will ere long moulder from their tracery,

> ‘Et sunt sua fata sepulchris.’(1)

(1) This prophecy has since been realised; for the aisle in which Sir Robert’s remains were laid has been suffered to fall completely to decay; and the tomb which marked his

grave, and other monuments more curious, form now one indistinguishable mass of rubbish.

The events which I have recorded are not imaginary. They are FACTS; and there lives one whose authority none would venture to question, who could vindicate the accuracy of every statement which I have set down, and that, too, with all the circumstantiality of an eye-witness.(2)

(2) This paper, from a memorandum, I find to have been written in 1803. The lady to whom allusion is made, I believe to be Miss Mary F —— d. She never married, and survived both her sisters, living to a very advanced age.

THE LAST HEIR OF CASTLE CONNOR.

Being a third Extract from the legacy of the late Francis Purcell, P. P. of Drumcoolagh.

There is something in the decay of ancient grandeur to interest even the most unconcerned spectator — the evidences of greatness, of power, and of pride that survive the wreck of time, proving, in mournful contrast with present desolation and decay, what WAS in other days, appeal, with a resistless power, to the sympathies of our nature. And when, as we gaze on the scion of some ruined family, the first impulse of nature that bids us regard his fate with interest and respect is justified by the recollection of great exertions and self-devotion and sacrifices in the cause of a lost country and of a despised religion — sacrifices and efforts made with all the motives of faithfulness and of honour, and terminating in ruin — in such a case respect becomes veneration, and the interest we feel amounts almost to a passion.

It is this feeling which has thrown the magic veil of romance over every roofless castle and ruined turret throughout our country; it is this feeling that, so long as a tower remains above the level of the soil, so long as one scion of a prostrate and impoverished family survives, will never suffer Ireland to yield to the stranger more than the 'mouth honour' which fear compels.(3) I who have conversed viva voce et propria persona with those whose recollections could run back so far as the times previous to the confiscations which followed the Revolution of 1688 — whose memory could repeople halls long roofless and desolate, and point out the places where greatness once had been, may feel all this more strongly, and with a more vivid interest, than can those whose sympathies are awakened by the feebler influence of what may be called the PICTURESQUE effects of ruin and decay.

(3) This passage serves (mirabile dictu) to corroborate a statement of Mr. O'Connell's, which occurs in his evidence given before the House of Commons, wherein he affirms that the principles of the Irish priesthood

‘ARE democratic, and were those of Jacobinism.’ — See digest of the evidence upon the state of Ireland, given before the House of Commons.

There do, indeed, still exist some fragments of the ancient Catholic families of Ireland; but, alas! what VERY fragments! They linger like the remnants of her aboriginal forests, reft indeed of their strength and greatness, but proud even in decay. Every winter thins their ranks, and strews the ground with the wreck of their loftiest branches; they are at best but tolerated in the land which gave them birth — objects of curiosity, perhaps of pity, to one class, but of veneration to another.

The O’Connors, of Castle Connor, were an ancient Irish family. The name recurs frequently in our history, and is generally to be found in a prominent place whenever periods of tumult or of peril called forth the courage and the enterprise of this country. After the accession of William III., the storm of confiscation which swept over the land made woeful havoc in their broad domains. Some fragments of property, however, did remain to them, and with it the building which had for ages formed the family residence.

About the year 17 — , my uncle, a Catholic priest, became acquainted with the inmates of Castle Connor, and after a time introduced me, then a lad of about fifteen, full of spirits, and little dreaming that a profession so grave as his should ever become mine.

The family at that time consisted of but two members, a widow lady and her only son, a young man aged about eighteen. In our early days the progress from acquaintance to intimacy, and from intimacy to friendship is proverbially rapid; and young O’Connor and I became, in less than a month, close and confidential companions — an intercourse which ripened gradually into an attachment ardent, deep, and devoted — such as I believe young hearts only are capable of forming.

He had been left early fatherless, and the representative and heir of his family. His mother’s affection for him was intense in proportion as there existed no other object to divide it — indeed — such love as that she bore him I have never seen elsewhere. Her love was better bestowed than that of mothers generally is, for young O’Connor, not without some of the faults, had certainly many of the most engaging qualities of youth. He had all the frankness and gaiety which attract, and the generosity of heart which confirms friendship; indeed, I never saw a person so universally popular; his very faults seemed to recommend him; he was wild, extravagant, thoughtless, and fearlessly adventurous — defects of character which, among the peasantry of Ireland, are honoured as virtues. The combination of these qualities, and the position which O'Connor occupied as representative of an ancient Irish Catholic family — a peculiarly interesting one to me, one of the old faith — endeared him to me so much that I have never felt the pangs of parting more keenly than when it became necessary, for the finishing of his education, that he should go abroad.

Three years had passed away before I saw him again. During the interval, however, I had frequently heard from him, so that absence had not abated the warmth of our attachment. Who could tell of the rejoicings that marked the evening of his return? The horses were removed from the chaise at the distance of a mile from the castle, while it and its contents were borne rapidly onward almost by the pressure of the multitude, like a log upon a torrent. Bonfires blared far and near — bagpipes roared and fiddles squeaked; and, amid the thundering shouts of thousands, the carriage drew up before the castle.

In an instant young O'Connor was upon the ground, crying, 'Thank you, boys — thank you, boys;' while a thousand hands were stretched out from all sides to grasp even a finger of his. Still, amid shouts of 'God bless your honour — long may you reign!' and 'Make room there, boys! clear the road for the masther!' he reached the threshold of the castle, where stood his mother weeping for joy.

Oh! who could describe that embrace, or the enthusiasm with which it was witnessed? 'God bless him to you, my lady — glory to ye both!' and 'Oh, but he is a fine young gentleman, God bless him!' resounded on all sides, while hats flew up in volleys that darkened the moon; and when at length, amid the broad delighted grins of the thronging domestics, whose sense of decorum precluded any more boisterous evidence of joy, they reached the parlour, then giving way to the fulness of her joy the widowed mother kissed and blessed him and wept in turn. Well might any parent be proud to claim as son the handsome stripling who now represented the Castle Connor family; but to her his beauty had a peculiar charm, for it bore a striking resemblance to that of her husband, the last O'Connor.

I know not whether partiality blinded me, or that I did no more than justice to my friend in believing that I had never seen so handsome a young man. I am inclined to think the latter. He was rather tall, very slightly and elegantly made; his face was oval, and his features decidedly Spanish in cast and complexion, but with far more vivacity of expression than generally belongs to the beauty of that nation. The extreme delicacy of his features and the varied animation of his countenance made him appear even younger than his years — an illusion which the total absence of everything studied in his manners seemed to confirm. Time had wrought no small change in me, alike in mind and spirits; but in the case of O'Connor it seemed to have lost its power to alter. His gaiety was undamped, his generosity unchilled; and though the space which had intervened between our parting and reunion was but brief, yet at the period of life at which we were, even a shorter interval than that of three years has frequently served to form or DEform a character.

Weeks had passed away since the return of O'Connor, and scarce a day had elapsed without my seeing him, when the neighbourhood was thrown into an unusual state of excitement by the announcement of a race-ball to be celebrated at the assembly-room of the town of T —— , distant scarcely two miles from Castle Connor.

Young O'Connor, as I had expected, determined at once to attend it; and having directed in vain all the powers of his rhetoric to persuade his mother to accompany him, he turned the whole battery of his logic upon me, who, at that time, felt a reluctance stronger than that of mere apathy to mixing in any of these scenes of noisy pleasure for which for many reasons I felt myself unfitted. He was so urgent and persevering, however, that I could not refuse; and I found myself reluctantly obliged to make up my mind to attend him upon the important night to the spacious but ill-finished building, which the fashion and beauty of the county were pleased to term an assembly-room.

When we entered the apartment, we found a select few, surrounded by a crowd of spectators, busily performing a minuet, with all the congees and flourishes which belonged to that courtly dance; and my companion, infected by the contagion of example, was soon, as I had anticipated, waving his chapeau bras, and gracefully bowing before one of the prettiest girls in the room. I had neither skill nor spirits to qualify me to follow his example; and as the fulness of the room rendered it easy to do so without its appearing singular, I determined to be merely a spectator of the scene which surrounded me, without taking an active part in its amusements.

The room was indeed very much crowded, so that its various groups, formed as design or accident had thrown the parties together, afforded no small fund of entertainment to the contemplative observer. There were the dancers, all gaiety and goodhumour; a little further off were the tables at which sat the card-players, some plying their vocation with deep and silent anxiety — for in those days gaming often ran very high in such places — and others disputing with all the vociferous pertinacity of undisguised ill-temper. There, again, were the sallow, blue-nosed, grey-eyed dealers in whispered scandal; and, in short, there is scarcely a group or combination to be met with in the court of kings which might not have found a humble parallel in the assembly-room of T —— .

I was allowed to indulge in undisturbed contemplation, for I suppose I was not known to more than five or six in the room. I thus had leisure not only to observe the different classes into which the company had divided itself, but to amuse myself by speculating as to the rank and character of many of the individual actors in the drama.

Among many who have long since passed from my memory, one person for some time engaged my attention, and that person, for many reasons, I shall not soon forget. He was a tall, square-shouldered man, who stood in a careless attitude, leaning with his back to the wall; he seemed to have secluded himself from the busy multitudes which moved noisily and gaily around him, and nobody seemed to observe or to converse with him. He was fashionably dressed, but perhaps rather extravagantly; his face was full and heavy, expressive of sullenness and stupidity, and marked with the lines of strong vulgarity; his age might be somewhere between forty and fifty. Such as I have endeavoured to describe him, he remained motionless, his arms doggedly folded across his broad chest, and turning his sullen eyes from corner to corner of the room, as if eager to detect some object on which to vent his ill-humour.

It is strange, and yet it is true, that one sometimes finds even in the most commonplace countenance an undefinable something, which fascinates the attention, and forces it to recur again and again, while it is impossible to tell whether the peculiarity which thus attracts us lies in feature or in expression, or in both combined, and why it is that our observation should be engrossed by an object which, when analysed, seems to possess no claim to interest or even to notice. This unaccountable feeling I have often experienced, and I believe I am not singular. but never in so remarkable a degree as upon this occasion. My friend O'Connor, having disposed of his fair partner, was crossing the room for the purpose of joining me, in doing which I was surprised to see him exchange a familiar, almost a cordial, greeting with the object of my curiosity. I say I was surprised, for independent of his very questionable appearance, it struck me as strange that though so constantly associated with O'Connor, and, as I thought, personally acquainted with all his intimates, I had never before even seen this individual. I did not fail immediately to ask him who this gentleman was. I thought he seemed slightly embarrassed, but after a moment's pause he laughingly said that his friend over the way was too mysterious a personage to have his name announced in so giddy a scene as the present; but that on the morrow he would furnish me with all the information which I could desire. There was, I thought, in his affected jocularity a real awkwardness which appeared to me unaccountable, and consequently increased my curiosity; its gratification, however, I was obliged to defer. At length, wearied with witnessing amusements in which I could not sympathise, I left the room, and did not see O'Connor until late in the next day.

I had ridden down towards the castle for the purpose of visiting the O'Connors, and had nearly reached the avenue leading to the mansion, when I met my friend. He was also mounted; and having answered my inquiries respecting his mother, he easily persuaded me to accompany him in his ramble. We had chatted as usual for some time, when, after a pause, O'Connor said:

'By the way, Purcell, you expressed some curiosity respecting the tall, handsome fellow to whom I spoke last night.'

'I certainly did question you about a TALL gentleman, but was not aware of his claims to beauty,' replied I.

'Well, that is as it may be,' said he; 'the ladies think him handsome, and their opinion upon that score is more valuable than yours or mine. Do you know,' he continued, 'I sometimes feel half sorry that I ever made the fellow's acquaintance: he is quite a marked man here, and they tell stories of him that are anything but reputable, though I am sure without foundation. I think I know enough about him to warrant me in saying so.'

'May I ask his name?' inquired I.

'Oh! did not I tell you his name?' rejoined he. 'You should have heard that first; he and his name are equally well known. You will recognise the individual at once when I tell you that his name is — Fitzgerald.'

'Fitzgerald!' I repeated. 'Fitzgerald! — can it be Fitzgerald the duellist?'

'Upon my word you have hit it,' replied he, laughing; 'but you have accompanied the discovery with a look of horror more tragic than appropriate. He is not the monster you take him for — he has a good deal of old Irish pride; his temper is hasty, and he has been unfortunately thrown in the way of men who have not made allowance for these things. I am convinced that in every case in which Fitzgerald has fought, if the truth could be discovered, he would be found to have acted throughout upon the defensive. No man is mad enough to risk his own life, except when the doing so is an alternative to submitting tamely to what he considers an insult. I am certain that no man ever engaged in a duel under the consciousness that he had acted an intentionally aggressive part.'

'When did you make his acquaintance?' said I.

'About two years ago,' he replied. 'I met him in France, and you know when one is abroad it is an ungracious task to reject the advances of one's countryman, otherwise I think I should have avoided his society — less upon my own account than because I am sure the acquaintance would be a source of continual though groundless uneasiness to my mother. I know, therefore, that you will not unnecessarily mention its existence to her.'

I gave him the desired assurance, and added:

'May I ask you. O'Connor, if, indeed, it be a fair question, whether this Fitzgerald at any time attempted to engage you in anything like gaming?'

This question was suggested by my having frequently heard Fitzgerald mentioned as a noted gambler, and sometimes even as a blackleg. O'Connor seemed, I thought, slightly embarrassed. He answered:

'No, no — I cannot say that he ever attempted anything of the kind. I certainly have played with him, but never lost to any serious amount; nor can I recollect that he ever solicited me — indeed he knows that I have a strong objection to deep play. YOU must be aware that my finances could not bear much pruning down. I never lost more to him at a sitting than about five pounds, which you know is nothing. No, you wrong him if you imagine that he attached himself to me merely for the sake of such contemptible winnings as those which a broken-down Irish gentleman could afford him. Come, Purcell, you are too hard upon him — you judge only by report; you must see him, and decide for yourself. — Suppose we call upon him now; he is at the inn, in the High Street, not a mile off.'

I declined the proposal drily.

'Your caution is too easily alarmed,' said he. 'I do not wish you to make this man your bosom friend: I merely desire that you should see and speak to him, and if you form any acquaintance with him, it must be of that slight nature which can be dropped or continued at pleasure.'

From the time that O'Connor had announced the fact that his friend was no other than the notorious Fitzgerald, a foreboding of something calamitous had come upon me, and it now occurred to me that if any unpleasantness were to be feared as likely to result to O'Connor from their connection, I might find my attempts to extricate him much facilitated by my being acquainted, however slightly, with Fitzgerald. I know not whether the idea was reasonable — it was certainly natural; and I told O'Connor that upon second thoughts I would ride down with him to the town, and wait upon Mr. Fitzgerald.

We found him at home; and chatted with him for a considerable time. To my surprise his manners were perfectly those of a gentleman, and his conversation, if not peculiarly engaging, was certainly amusing. The politeness of his demeanour, and the easy fluency with which he told his stories and his anecdotes, many of them curious, and all more or less entertaining, accounted to my mind at once for the facility with which he had improved his acquaintance with O'Connor; and when he pressed upon us an invitation to sup with him that night, I had almost joined O'Connor in accepting it. I determined, however, against doing so, for I had no wish to be on terms of familiarity with Mr. Fitzgerald; and I knew that one evening spent together as he proposed would go further towards establishing an intimacy between us than fifty morning visits could do. When I arose to depart, it was with feelings almost favourable to Fitzgerald; indeed I was more than half ashamed to acknowledge to my companion how complete a revolution in my opinion respecting his friend half an hour's conversation with him had wrought. His appearance certainly WAS against him; but then, under the influence of his manner, one lost sight of much of its ungainliness, and of nearly all its vulgarity; and, on the whole, I felt convinced that report had done him grievous wrong, inasmuch as anybody, by an observance of the common courtesies of society, might easily avoid coming into personal collision with a gentleman so studiously polite as Fitzgerald. At parting, O'Connor requested me to call upon him the next day, as he intended to make trial of the merits of a pair of greyhounds, which he had thoughts of purchasing; adding, that if he could escape in anything like tolerable time from Fitzgerald's supper-party, he would take the field soon after ten on the next morning. At the appointed hour, or perhaps a little later, I dismounted at Castle Connor; and, on entering the hall, I observed a gentleman issuing from O'Connor's private room. I recognised him, as he approached, as a Mr. M'Donough, and, being but slightly acquainted with him, was about to pass him with a bow, when he stopped me. There was something in his manner which struck me as odd; he seemed a good deal flurried if not agitated, and said, in a hurried tone:

'This is a very foolish business, Mr. Purcell. You have some influence with my friend O'Connor; I hope you can induce him to adopt some more moderate line of conduct than that he has decided upon. If you will allow me, I will return for a moment with you, and talk over the matter again with O'Connor.'

As M'Donough uttered these words, I felt that sudden sinking of the heart which accompanies the immediate anticipation of something dreaded and dreadful. I was instantly convinced that O'Connor had quarrelled with Fitzgerald, and I knew that if such were the case, nothing short of a miracle could extricate him from the consequences. I signed to M'Donough to lead the way, and we entered the little study together. O'Connor was standing with his back to the fire; on the table lay the breakfast-things in the disorder in which a hurried meal had left them; and on another smaller table, placed near the hearth, lay pen, ink, and paper. As soon as O'Connor saw me, he came forward and shook me cordially by the hand.

'My dear Purcell,' said he, 'you are the very man I wanted. I have got into an ugly scrape, and I trust to my friends to get me out of it.'

'You have had no dispute with that man — that Fitzgerald, I hope,' said I, giving utterance to the conjecture whose truth I most dreaded.

‘Faith, I cannot say exactly what passed between us,’ said he, ‘inasmuch as I was at the time nearly half seas over; but of this much I am certain, that we exchanged angry words last night. I lost my temper most confoundedly; but, as well as I can recollect, he appeared perfectly cool and collected. What he said was, therefore, deliberately said, and on that account must be resented.’

‘My dear O’Connor, are you mad?’ I exclaimed. ‘Why will you seek to drive to a deadly issue a few hasty words, uttered under the influence of wine, and forgotten almost as soon as uttered? A quarrel with Fitzgerald it is twenty chances to one would terminate fatally to you.’

‘It is exactly because Fitzgerald IS such an accomplished shot,’ said he, ‘that I become liable to the most injurious and intolerable suspicions if I submit to anything from him which could be construed into an affront; and for that reason Fitzgerald is the very last man to whom I would concede an inch in a case of honour.’

‘I do not require you to make any, the slightest sacrifice of what you term your honour,’ I replied; ‘but if you have actually written a challenge to Fitzgerald, as I suspect you have done, I conjure you to reconsider the matter before you despatch it. From all that I have heard you say, Fitzgerald has more to complain of in the altercation which has taken place than you. You owe it to your only surviving parent not to thrust yourself thus wantonly upon — I will say it, the most appalling danger. Nobody, my dear O’Connor, can have a doubt of your courage; and if at any time, which God forbid, you shall be called upon thus to risk your life, you should have it in your power to enter the field under the consciousness that you have acted throughout temperately and like a man, and not, as I fear you now would do, having rashly and most causelessly endangered your own life and that of your friend.’

‘I believe, Purcell, your are right,’ said he. ‘I believe I HAVE viewed the matter in too decided a light; my note, I think, scarcely allows him an honourable alternative, and that is certainly going a step too far — further than I intended. Mr. M’Donough, I’ll thank you to hand me the note.’

He broke the seal, and, casting his eye hastily over it, he continued:

‘It is, indeed, a monument of folly. I am very glad, Purcell, you happened to come in, otherwise it would have reached its destination by this time.’

He threw it into the fire; and, after a moment’s pause, resumed:

‘You must not mistake me, however. I am perfectly satisfied as to the propriety, nay, the necessity, of communicating with Fitzgerald. The difficulty is in what tone I should address him. I cannot say that the man directly affronted me — I cannot recollect any one expression which I could lay hold upon as offensive — but his language was ambiguous, and admitted frequently of the most insulting construction, and his manner throughout was insupportably domineering. I know it impressed me with the idea that he presumed upon his reputation as a DEAD SHOT, and that would be utterly unendurable.’

‘I would now recommend, as I have already done,’ said M’Donough, ‘that if you write to Fitzgerald, it should be in such a strain as to leave him at perfect liberty, without a compromise of honour, in a friendly way, to satisfy your doubts as to his conduct.’

I seconded the proposal warmly, and O’Connor, in a few minutes, finished a note, which he desired us to read. It was to this effect:

‘O’Connor, of Castle Connor, feeling that some expressions employed by Mr. Fitzgerald upon last night, admitted of a construction offensive to him, and injurious to his character, requests to know whether Mr. Fitzgerald intended to convey such a meaning.

‘Castle Connor, Thursday morning.’

This note was consigned to the care of Mr. M’Donough, who forthwith departed to execute his mission. The sound of his horse’s hoofs, as he rode rapidly away, struck heavily at my heart; but I found some satisfaction in the reflection that M’Donough appeared as averse from extreme measures as I was myself, for I well knew, with respect to the final result of the affair, that as much depended upon the tone adopted by the SECOND, as upon the nature of the written communication.

I have seldom passed a more anxious hour than that which intervened between the departure and the return of that gentleman. Every instant I imagined I heard the tramp of a horse approaching, and every time that a door opened I fancied it was to give entrance to the eagerly expected courier. At length I did hear the hollow and rapid tread of a horse’s hoof upon the avenue. It approached — it stopped — a hurried step traversed the hall — the room door opened, and M’Donough entered.

‘You have made great haste,’ said O’Connor; ‘did you find him at home?’

‘I did,’ replied M’Donough, ‘and made the greater haste as Fitzgerald did not let me know the contents of his reply.’

At the same time he handed a note to O’Connor, who instantly broke the seal. The words were as follow:

‘Mr. Fitzgerald regrets that anything which has fallen from him should have appeared to Mr. O’Connor to be intended to convey a reflection upon his honour (none such having been meant), and begs leave to disavow any wish to quarrel unnecessarily with Mr. O’Connor.

‘T —— Inn, Thursday morning.’

I cannot describe how much I felt relieved on reading the above communication. I took O’Connor’s hand and pressed it warmly, but my emotions were deeper and stronger than I cared to show, for I was convinced that he had escaped a most imminent danger. Nobody whose notions upon the subject are derived from the duelling of modern times, in which matters are conducted without any very sanguinary determination upon either side, and with equal want of skill and coolness by both parties, can form a just estimate of the danger incurred by one who ventured to encounter a duellist of the old school. Perfect coolness in the field, and a steadiness and accuracy (which to the unpractised appeared almost miraculous) in the use of the pistol, formed the characteristics of this class; and in addition to this there generally existed a kind of professional pride, which prompted the duellist, in default of any more malignant feeling, from motives of mere vanity, to seek the life of his antagonist. Fitzgerald’s career had been a remarkably successful one, and I knew that out of thirteen duels which he had fought in Ireland, in nine cases he had KILLED his man. In those days one never heard of the parties leaving the field, as not unfrequently now occurs, without blood having been spilt; and the odds were, of course, in all cases tremendously against a young and unpractised man, when matched with an experienced antagonist. My impression respecting the magnitude of the danger which my friend had incurred was therefore by no means unwarranted.

I now questioned O’Connor more accurately respecting the circumstances of his quarrel with Fitzgerald. It arose from some dispute respecting the application of a rule of piquet, at which game they had been playing, each interpreting it favourably to himself, and O’Connor, having lost considerably, was in no mood to conduct an argument with temper —

an altercation ensued, and that of rather a pungent nature, and the result was that he left Fitzgerald's room rather abruptly, determined to demand an explanation in the most peremptory tone. For this purpose he had sent for M'Donough, and had commissioned him to deliver the note, which my arrival had fortunately intercepted.

As it was now past noon, O'Connor made me promise to remain with him to dinner; and we sat down a party of three, all in high spirits at the termination of our anxieties. It is necessary to mention, for the purpose of accounting for what follows, that Mrs. O'Connor, or, as she was more euphoniously styled, the lady of Castle Connor, was precluded by ill-health from taking her place at the dinner-table, and, indeed, seldom left her room before four o'clock.(4) We were sitting after dinner sipping our claret, and talking, and laughing, and enjoying ourselves exceedingly, when a servant, stepping into the room, informed his master that a gentleman wanted to speak with him.

(4) It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader, that at the period spoken of, the important hour of dinner occurred very nearly at noon.

'Request him, with my compliments, to walk in,' said O'Connor; and in a few moments a gentleman entered the room.

His appearance was anything but prepossessing. He was a little above the middle size, spare, and rawboned; his face very red, his features sharp and bluish, and his age might be about sixty. His attire savoured a good deal of the SHABBY-GENTEEL; his clothes, which had much of tarnished and faded pretension about them, did not fit him, and had not improbably fluttered in the stalls of Plunket Street. We had risen on his entrance, and O'Connor had twice requested of him to take a chair at the table, without his hearing, or at least noticing, the invitation; while with a slow pace, and with an air of mingled importance and effrontery, he advanced into the centre of the apartment, and regarding our small party with a supercilious air, he said:

‘I take the liberty of introducing myself — I am Captain M’Creagh, formerly of the — infantry. My business here is with a Mr. O’Connor, and the sooner it is despatched the better.’

‘I am the gentleman you name,’ said O’Connor; ‘and as you appear impatient, we had better proceed to your commission without delay.’

‘Then, Mr. O’Connor, you will please to read that note,’ said the captain, placing a sealed paper in his hand.

O’Connor read it through, and then observed:

‘This is very extraordinary indeed. This note appears to me perfectly unaccountable.’

‘You are very young, Mr. O’Connor,’ said the captain, with vulgar familiarity; ‘but, without much experience in these matters, I think you might have anticipated something like this. You know the old saying, “Second thoughts are best;” and so they are like to prove, by G — !’

‘You will have no objection, Captain M’Creagh, on the part of your friend, to my reading this note to these gentlemen; they are both confidential friends of mine, and one of them has already acted for me in this business.’

‘I can have no objection,’ replied the captain, ‘to your doing what you please with your own. I have nothing more to do with that note once I put it safe into your hand; and when that is once done, it is all one to me, if you read it to half the world — that’s YOUR concern, and no affair of mine.’

O’Connor then read the following:

‘Mr. Fitzgerald begs leave to state, that upon reperusing Mr. O’Connor’s communication of this morning carefully, with an experienced friend, he is forced to consider himself as challenged. His friend, Captain M’Creagh, has been empowered by him to make all the necessary arrangements.

‘T —— Inn, Thursday.’

I can hardly describe the astonishment with which I heard this note. I turned to the captain, and said:

‘Surely, sir, there is some mistake in all this?’

‘Not the slightest, I’ll assure you, sir.’ said he, coolly; ‘the case is a very clear one, and I think my friend has pretty well made up his mind upon it. May I request your answer?’ he continued, turning to O’Connor; ‘time is precious, you know.’

O’Connor expressed his willingness to comply with the suggestion, and in a few minutes had folded and directed the following rejoinder:

‘Mr. O’Connor having received a satisfactory explanation from Mr. Fitzgerald, of the language used by that gentleman, feels that there no longer exists any grounds for misunderstanding, and wishes further to state, that the note of which Mr. Fitzgerald speaks was not intended as a challenge.’

With this note the captain departed; and as we did not doubt that the message which he had delivered had been suggested by some unintentional misconstruction of O’Connor’s first billet, we felt assured that the conclusion of his last note would set the matter at rest. In this belief, however, we were mistaken; before we had left the table, and in an incredibly short time, the captain returned. He entered the room with a countenance evidently tasked to avoid expressing the satisfaction which a consciousness of the nature of his mission had conferred; but in spite of all his efforts to look gravely unconcerned, there was a twinkle in the small grey eye, and an almost imperceptible motion in the corner of the mouth, which sufficiently betrayed his internal glee, as he placed a note in the hand of O’Connor. As the young man cast his eye over it, he coloured deeply, and turning to M’Donough, he said:

‘You will have the goodness to make all the necessary arrangements for a meeting. Something has occurred to render one between me and Mr. Fitzgerald inevitable. Understand me literally, when I say that it is now totally impossible that this affair should be amicably arranged. You will have the goodness, M’Donough, to let me know as soon as all the particulars are arranged. Purcell,’ he continued, ‘will you have the kindness to accompany me?’ and having bowed to M’Creagh, we left the room.

As I closed the door after me, I heard the captain laugh, and thought I could distinguish the words— ‘By —— I knew Fitzgerald would bring him to his way of thinking before he stopped.’

I followed O’Connor into his study, and on entering, the door being closed, he showed me the communication which had determined him upon hostilities. Its language was grossly impertinent, and it concluded by actually threatening to ‘POST’ him, in case he further attempted ‘to be OFF.’ I cannot describe the agony of indignation in which O’Connor writhed under this insult. He said repeatedly that ‘he was a degraded and dishohoured man,’ that ‘he was dragged into the field,’ that ‘there was ignominy in the very thought that such a letter should have been directed to him.’ It was in vain that I reasoned against this impression; the conviction that he had been disgraced had taken possession of his mind. He said again and again that nothing but his DEATH could remove the stain which his indecision had cast upon the name of his family. I hurried to the hall, on hearing M’Donough and the captain passing, and reached the door just in time to hear the latter say, as he mounted his horse:

‘All the rest can be arranged on the spot; and so farewell, Mr. M’Donough — we’ll meet at Philippi, you know;’ and with this classical allusion, which was accompanied with a grin and a bow, and probably served many such occasions, the captain took his departure.

M’Donough briefly stated the few particulars which had been arranged. The parties were to meet at the stand-house, in the race-ground, which lay at about an equal distance between Castle Connor and the town of T —— . The hour appointed was halfpast five on the next morning, at which time the twilight would be sufficiently advanced to afford a distinct view; and the weapons to be employed were PISTOLS — M’Creagh having claimed, on the part of his friend, all the advantages of the CHALLENGED party, and having, consequently, insisted upon the choice of ‘TOOLS,’ as he expressed himself; and it was further stipulated that the utmost secrecy should be observed, as Fitzgerald would incur great risk from the violence of the peasantry, in case the affair took wind. These conditions were, of course, agreed upon by O’Connor, and M’Donough left the castle, having appointed four o’clock upon the next morning as the hour of his return, by which time it would be his business to provide everything necessary for the meeting. On his departure, O’Connor requested me to remain with him upon that evening, saying that ‘he could not bear to be alone with his mother.’ It was to me a most painful request, but at the same time one which I could not think of refusing. I felt, however, that the difficulty at least of the task which I had to perform would be in some measure mitigated by the arrival of two relations of O’Connor upon that evening.

‘It is very fortunate,’ said O’Connor, whose thoughts had been running upon the same subject, ‘that the O’Gradys will be with us tonight; their gaiety and goodhumour will relieve us from a heavy task. I trust that nothing may occur to prevent their coming.’ Fervently concurring in the same wish, I accompanied O’Connor into the parlour, there to await the arrival of his mother.

God grant that I may never spend such another evening! The O’Gradys DID come, but their high and noisy spirits, so far from relieving me, did but give additional gloom to the despondency, I might say the despair, which filled my heart with misery — the terrible forebodings which I could not for an instant silence, turned their laughter into discord, and seemed to mock the smiles and jests of the unconscious party. When I turned my eyes upon the mother, I thought I never had seen her look so proudly and so lovingly upon her son before — it cut me to the heart — oh, how cruelly I was deceiving her! I was a hundred times on the very point of starting up, and, at all hazards, declaring to her how matters were; but other feelings subdued my better emotions. Oh, what monsters are we made of by the fashions of the world! how are our kindlier and nobler feelings warped or destroyed by their baleful influences! I felt that it would not be HONOURABLE, that it would not be ETIQUETTE, to betray O’Connor’s secret. I sacrificed a higher and a nobler duty than I have since been called upon to perform, to the dastardly fear of bearing the unmerited censure of a world from which I was about to retire. O Fashion! thou gaudy idol, whose feet are red with the blood of human sacrifice, would I had always felt towards thee as I now do!

O’Connor was not dejected; on the contrary, he joined with loud and lively alacrity in the hilarity of the little party; but I could see in the flush of his cheek, and in the unusual brightness of his eye, all the excitement of fever — he was making an effort almost beyond his strength, but he succeeded — and when his mother rose to leave the room, it was with the impression that her son was the gayest and most lighthearted of the company. Twice or thrice she had risen with the intention of retiring, but O’Connor, with an eagerness which I alone could understand, had persuaded her to remain until the usual hour of her departure had long passed; and when at length she arose, declaring that she could not possibly stay longer, I alone could comprehend the desolate change which passed over his manner; and when I saw them part, it was with the sickening conviction that those two beings, so dear to one another, so loved, so cherished, should meet no more.

O’Connor briefly informed his cousins of the position in which he was placed, requesting them at the same time to accompany him to the field, and this having been settled, we separated, each to his own apartment. I had wished to sit up with O'Connor, who had matters to arrange sufficient to employ him until the hour appointed for M'Donough's visit; but he would not hear of it, and I was forced, though sorely against my will, to leave him without a companion. I went to my room, and, in a state of excitement which I cannot describe, I paced for hours up and down its narrow precincts. I could not — who could? — analyse the strange, contradictory, torturing feelings which, while I recoiled in shrinking horror from the scene which the morning was to bring, yet forced me to wish the intervening time annihilated; each hour that the clock told seemed to vibrate and tinkle through every nerve; my agitation was dreadful; fancy conjured up the forms of those who filled my thoughts with more than the vividness of reality; things seemed to glide through the dusky shadows of the room. I saw the dreaded form of Fitzgerald — I heard the hated laugh of the captain — and again the features of O'Connor would appear before me, with ghastly distinctness, pale and writhed in death, the gouts of gore clotted in the mouth, and the eyeballs glared and staring. Scared with the visions which seemed to throng with unceasing rapidity and vividness, I threw open the window and looked out upon the quiet scene around. I turned my eyes in the direction of the town; a heavy cloud was lowering darkly about it, and I, in impious frenzy, prayed to God that it might burst in avenging fires upon the murderous wretch who lay beneath. At length, sick and giddy with excess of excitement, I threw myself upon the bed without removing my clothes, and endeavoured to compose myself so far as to remain quiet until the hour for our assembling should arrive.

A few minutes before four o'clock I stole noiselessly downstairs, and made my way to the small study already mentioned. A candle was burning within; and, when I opened the door, O'Connor was reading a book, which, on seeing me, he hastily closed, colouring slightly as he did so. We exchanged a cordial but mournful greeting; and after a slight pause he said, laying his hand upon the volume which he had shut a moment before:

'Purcell, I feel perfectly calm, though I cannot say that I have much hope as to the issue of this morning's rencounter. I shall avoid half the danger. If I must fall, I am determined I shall not go down to the grave with his blood upon my hands. I have resolved not to fire at Fitzgerald — that is, to fire in such a direction as to assure myself against hitting him. Do not say a word of this to the O'Gradys. Your doing so would only produce fruitless altercation; they could not understand my motives. I feel convinced that I shall not leave the field alive. If I must die to-day, I shall avoid an awful aggravation of wretchedness. Purcell,' he continued, after a little space, 'I was so weak as to feel almost ashamed of the manner in which I was occupied as you entered the room. Yes, *I* — *I* who will be, before this evening, a cold and lifeless clod, was ashamed to have spent my last moment of reflection in prayer. God pardon me! God pardon me!' he repeated.

I took his hand and pressed it, but I could not speak. I sought for words of comfort, but they would not come. To have uttered one cheering sentence I must have contradicted every impression of my own mind. I felt too much awed to attempt it. Shortly afterwards, M'Donough arrived. No wretched patient ever underwent a more thrilling revulsion at the first sight of the case of surgical instruments under which he had to suffer, than did I upon beholding a certain oblong flat mahogany box, bound with brass, and of about two feet in length, laid upon the table in the hall. O'Connor, thanking him for his punctuality, requested him to come into his study for a moment, when, with a melancholy collectedness, he proceeded to make arrangements for our witnessing his will. The document was a brief one, and the whole matter was just arranged, when the two O'Gradys crept softly into the room.

'So! last will and testament,' said the elder. 'Why, you have a very BLUE notion of these matters. I tell you, you need not be uneasy. I remember very well, when young Ryan of Ballykealey met M'Neil the duellist, bets ran twenty to one against him. I stole away from school, and had a peep at the fun as well as the best of them. They fired together. Ryan received the ball through the collar of his coat, and M'Neil in the temple; he spun like a top: it was a most unexpected thing, and disappointed his friends damnably. It was admitted, however, to have been very pretty shooting upon both sides. To be sure,' he continued, pointing to the will, 'you are in the right to keep upon the safe side of fortune; but then, there is no occasion to be altogether so devilish down in the mouth as you appear to be.'

'You will allow,' said O'Connor, 'that the chances are heavily against me.'

‘Why, let me see,’ he replied, ‘not so hollow a thin, either. Let me see, we’ll say about four to one against you; you may chance to throw doublets like him I told you of, and then what becomes of the odds I’d like to know? But let things go as they will, I’ll give and take four to one, in pounds and tens of pounds. There, M’Donough, there’s a GET for you; b — t me, if it is not. Poh! the fellow is stolen away,’ he continued, observing that the object of his proposal had left the room; ‘but d —— it, Purcell, you are fond of a SOFT THING, too, in a quiet way — I’m sure you are — so curse me if I do not make you the same offeris it a go?’

I was too much disgusted to make any reply, but I believe my looks expressed my feelings sufficiently, for in a moment he said:

‘Well, I see there is nothing to be done, so we may as well be stirring. M’Donough, myself, and my brother will saddle the horses in a jiffy, while you and Purcell settle anything which remains to be arranged.’

So saying, he left the room with as much alacrity as if it were to prepare for a foxhunt. Selfish, heartless fool! I have often since heard him spoken of as A CURSED GOODNATURED DOG and a D —— GOOD FELLOW; but such eulogies as these are not calculated to mitigate the abhorrence with which his conduct upon that morning inspired me.

The chill mists of night were still hovering on the landscape as our party left the castle. It was a raw, comfortless morning — a kind of drizzling fog hung heavily over the scene, dimming the light of the sun, which had now risen, into a pale and even a grey glimmer. As the appointed hour was fast approaching, it was proposed that we should enter the race-ground at a point close to the stand-house — a measure which would save us a ride of nearly two miles, over a broken road; at which distance there was an open entrance into the race-ground. Here, accordingly, we dismounted, and leaving our horses in the care of a country fellow who happened to be stirring at that early hour, we proceeded up a narrow lane, over a side wall of which we were to climb into the open ground where stood the now deserted building, under which the meeting was to take place. Our progress was intercepted by the unexpected appearance of an old woman, who, in the scarlet cloak which is the picturesque characteristic of the female peasantry of the south, was moving slowly down the avenue to meet us, uttering that peculiarly wild and piteous lamentation well known by the name of ‘the Irish cry,’ accompanied throughout by all the customary gesticulation of passionate grief. This rencounter was more awkward than we had at first anticipated; for, upon a nearer approach, the person proved to be no other than an old attached dependent of the family, and who had herself nursed O'Connor. She quickened her pace as we advanced almost to a run; and, throwing her arms round O'Connor's neck, she poured forth such a torrent of lamentation, reproach, and endearment, as showed that she was aware of the nature of our purpose, whence and by what means I knew not. It was in vain that he sought to satisfy her by evasion, and gently to extricate himself from her embrace. She knelt upon the ground, and clasped her arms round his legs, uttering all the while such touching supplications, such cutting and passionate expressions of woe, as went to my very heart.

At length, with much difficulty, we passed this most painful interruption; and, crossing the boundary wall, were placed beyond her reach. The O'Gradys damned her for a troublesome hag, and passed on with O'Connor, but I remained behind for a moment. The poor woman looked hopelessly at the high wall which separated her from him she had loved from infancy, and to be with whom at that minute she would have given worlds, she took her seat upon a solitary stone under the opposite wall, and there, in a low, subdued key, she continued to utter her sorrow in words so desolate, yet expressing such a tenderness of devotion as wrung my heart.

'My poor woman,' I said, laying my hand gently upon her shoulder, 'you will make yourself ill; the morning is very cold, and your cloak is but a thin defence against the damp and chill. Pray return home and take this; it may be useful to you.'

So saying, I dropped a purse, with what money I had about me, into her lap, but it lay there unheeded; she did not hear me.

'Oh I my child, my child, my darlin',' she sobbed, 'are you gone from me? are you gone from me? Ah, mavourneen, mavourneen, you'll never come back alive to me again. The crathur that slept on my bosom — the lovin' crathur that I was so proud of — they'll kill him, they'll kill him. Oh, voh! voh!'

The affecting tone, the feeling, the abandonment with which all this was uttered, none can conceive who have not heard the lamentations of the Irish peasantry. It brought tears to my eyes. I saw that no consolation of mine could soothe her grief, so I turned and departed; but as I rapidly traversed the level sward which separated me from my companions, now considerably in advance, I could still hear the wailings of the solitary mourner.

As we approached the stand-house, it was evident that our antagonists had already arrived. Our path lay by the side of a high fence constructed of loose stones, and on turning a sharp angle at its extremity, we found ourselves close to the appointed spot, and within a few yards of a crowd of persons, some mounted and some on foot, evidently awaiting our arrival. The affair had unaccountably taken wind, as the number of the expectants clearly showed; but for this there was now no remedy.

As our little party advanced we were met and saluted by several acquaintances, whom curiosity, if no deeper feeling, had brought to the place. Fitzgerald and the Captain had arrived, and having dismounted, were standing upon the sod. The former, as we approached, bowed slightly and sullenly — while the latter, evidently in high good humour, made his most courteous obeisance. No time was to be lost; and the two seconds immediately withdrew to a slight distance, for the purpose of completing the last minute arrangements. It was a brief but horrible interval — each returned to his principal to communicate the result, which was soon caught up and repeated from mouth to mouth throughout the crowd. I felt a strange and insurmountable reluctance to hear the sickening particulars detailed; and as I stood irresolute at some distance from the principal parties, a topbooted squireen, with a hunting whip in his hand, bustling up to a companion of his, exclaimed:

‘Not fire together! — did you ever hear the like? If Fitzgerald gets the first shot all is over. M’Donough sold the pass, by —— , and that is the long and the short of it.’

The parties now moved down a little to a small level space, suited to the purpose; and the captain, addressing M’Donough, said:

‘Mr. M’Donough, you’ll now have the goodness to toss for choice of ground; as the light comes from the east the line must of course run north and south. Will you be so obliging as to toss up a crown-piece, while I call?’

A coin was instantly chucked into the air. The captain cried, ‘Harp.’ The HEAD was uppermost, and M’Donough immediately made choice of the southern point at which to place his friend — a position which it will be easily seen had the advantage of turning his back upon the light — no trifling superiority of location. The captain turned with a kind of laugh, and said:

'By —— , sir, you are as cunning as a dead pig; but you forgot one thing. My friend is a left-handed gunner, though never a bit the worse for that; so you see there is no odds as far as the choice of light goes.'

He then proceeded to measure nine paces in a direction running north and south, and the principals took their ground.

'I must be troublesome to you once again, Mr. M'Donough. One toss more, and everything is complete. We must settle who is to have the FIRST SLAP.'

A piece of money was again thrown into the air; again the captain lost the toss and M'Donough proceeded to load the pistols. I happened to stand near Fitzgerald, and I overheard the captain, with a chuckle, say something to him in which the word 'cravat' was repeated. It instantly occurred to me that the captain's attention was directed to a bright-coloured muffler which O'Connor wore round his neck, and which would afford his antagonist a distinct and favourable mark. I instantly urged him to remove it, and at length, with difficulty, succeeded. He seemed perfectly careless as to any precaution. Everything was now ready; the pistol was placed in O'Connor's hand, and he only awaited the word from the captain.

M'Creagh then said:

'Mr. M'Donough, is your principal ready?'

M'Donough replied in the affirmative; and, after a slight pause, the captain, as had been arranged, uttered the words:

'Ready — fire.'

O'Connor fired, but so wide of the mark that some one in the crowd exclaimed:

'Fired in the air.'

'Who says he fired in the air?' thundered Fitzgerald. 'By —— he lies, whoever he is.' There was a silence. 'But even if he was fool enough to fire in the air, it is not in HIS power to put an end to the quarrel by THAT. D —— my soul, if I am come here to be played with like a child, and by the Almighty —— you shall hear more of this, each and everyone of you, before I'm satisfied.'

A kind of low murmur, or rather groan, was now raised, and a slight motion was observable in the crowd, as if to intercept Fitzgerald's passage to his horse. M'Creagh, drawing the horse close to the spot where Fitzgerald stood, threatened, with the most awful imprecations, 'to blow the brains out of the first man who should dare to press on them.'

O'Connor now interfered, requesting the crowd to forbear, and some degree of order was restored. He then said, 'that in firing as he did, he had no intention whatever of waiving his right of firing upon Fitzgerald, and of depriving that gentleman of his right of prosecuting the affair to the utmost — that if any person present imagined that he intended to fire in the air, he begged to set him right; since, so far from seeking to exort an unwilling reconciliation, he was determined that no power on earth should induce him to concede one inch of ground to Mr. Fitzgerald.'

This announcement was received with a shout by the crowd, who now resumed their places at either side of the plot of ground which had been measured. The principals took their places once more, and M'Creagh proceeded, with the nicest and most anxious care, to load the pistols; and this task being accomplished, Fitzgerald whispered something in the Captain's ear, who instantly drew his friend's horse so as to place him within a step of his rider, and then tightened the girths. This accomplished, Fitzgerald proceeded deliberately to remove his coat, which he threw across his horse in front of the saddle; and then, with the assistance of M'Creagh, he rolled the shirt sleeve up to the shoulder, so as to leave the whole of his muscular arm perfectly naked. A cry of 'Coward, coward! butcher, butcher!' arose from the crowd. Fitzgerald paused.

'Do you object, Mr. M'Donough? and upon what grounds, if you please?' said he.

'Certainly he does not,' replied O'Connor; and, turning to M'Donough, he added, 'pray let there be no unnecessary delay.'

'There is no objection, then,' said Fitzgerald.

'*I* object,' said the younger of the O'Gradys, 'if nobody else will.'

' And who the devil are you, that DARES to object?' shouted Fitzgerald; 'and what d — d presumption prompts you to DARE to wag your tongue here?'

'I am Mr. O'Grady, of Castle Blake,' replied the young man, now much enraged; 'and by —— , you shall answer for your language to me.'

'Shall I, by —— ? Shall I?' cried he, with a laugh of brutal scorn; 'the more the merrier, d — n the doubt of it — so now hold your tongue, for I promise you you shall have business enough of your own to think about, and that before long.'

There was an appalling ferocity in his tone and manner which no words could convey. He seemed transformed; he was actually like a man possessed. Was it possible, I thought, that I beheld the courteous gentleman, the gay, goodhumoured retailer of amusing anecdote with whom, scarce two days ago, I had laughed and chatted, in the blasphemous and murderous ruffian who glared and stormed before me!

O'Connor interposed, and requested that time should not be unnecessarily lost.

'You have not got a second coat on?' inquired the Captain. 'I beg pardon, but my duty to my friend requires that I should ascertain the point.'

O'Connor replied in the negative. The Captain expressed himself as satisfied, adding, in what he meant to be a complimentary strain, 'that he knew Mr. O'Connor would scorn to employ padding or any unfair mode of protection.'

There was now a breathless silence. O'Connor stood perfectly motionless; and, excepting the deathlike paleness of his features, he exhibited no sign of agitation. His eye was steady — his lip did not tremble — his attitude was calm. The Captain, having re-examined the priming of the pistols, placed one of them in the hand of Fitzgerald. — M'Donough inquired whether the parties were prepared, and having been answered in the affirmative, he proceeded to give the word, 'Ready.' Fitzgerald raised his hand, but almost instantly lowered it again. The crowd had pressed too much forward as it appeared, and his eye had been unsteadied by the flapping of the skirt of a frieze riding-coat worn by one of the spectators.

'In the name of my principal,' said the Captain, 'I must and do insist upon these gentlemen moving back a little. We ask but little; fair play, and no favour.'

The crowd moved as requested. M'Donough repeated his former question, and was answered as before. There was a breathless silence. Fitzgerald fixed his eye upon O'Connor. The appointed signal, 'Ready, fire!' was given. There was a pause while one might slowly reckon three — Fitzgerald fired — and O'Connor fell helplessly upon the ground.

'There is no time to be lost,' said M'Creagrh; 'for, by —— , you have done for him.'

So saying, he threw himself upon his horse, and was instantly followed at a hard gallop by Fitzgerald.

‘Cold-blooded murder, if ever murder was committed,’ said O’Grady. ‘He shall hang for it; d — n me, but he shall.’

A hopeless attempt was made to overtake the fugitives; but they were better mounted than any of their pursuers, and escaped with ease. Curses and actual yells of execration followed their course; and as, in crossing the brow of a neighbouring hill, they turned round in the saddle to observe if they were pursued, every gesture which could express fury and defiance was exhausted by the enraged and defeated multitude.

‘Clear the way, boys,’ said young O’Grady, who with me was kneeling beside O’Connor, while we supported him in our arms; ‘do not press so close, and be d — d; can’t you let the fresh air to him; don’t you see he’s dying?’

On opening his waistcoat we easily detected the wound: it was a little below the chest — a small blue mark, from which oozed a single heavy drop of blood.

‘He is bleeding but little — that is a comfort at all events,’ said one of the gentlemen who surrounded the wounded man.

Another suggested the expediency of his being removed homeward with as little delay as possible, and recommended, for this purpose, that a door should be removed from its hinges, and the patient, laid upon this, should be conveyed from the field. Upon this rude bier my poor friend was carried from that fatal ground towards Castle Connor. I walked close by his side, and observed every motion of his. He seldom opened his eyes, and was perfectly still, excepting a nervous WORKING of the fingers, and a slight, almost imperceptible twitching of the features, which took place, however, only at intervals. The first word he uttered was spoken as we approached the entrance of the castle itself, when he said; repeatedly, ‘The back way, the back way.’ He feared lest his mother should meet him abruptly and without preparation; but although this fear was groundless, since she never left her room until late in the day, yet it was thought advisable, and, indeed, necessary, to caution all the servants most strongly against breathing a hint to their mistress of the events which had befallen.

Two or three gentlemen had ridden from the field one after another, promising that they should overtake our party before it reached the castle, bringing with them medical aid from one quarter or another; and we determined that Mrs. O’Connor should not know anything of the occurrence until the opinion of some professional man should have determined the extent of the injury which her son had sustained — a course of conduct which would at least have the effect of relieving her from the horrors of suspense. When O’Connor found himself in his own room, and laid upon his own bed, he appeared much revived — so much so, that I could not help admitting a strong hope that all might yet be well.

‘After all, Purcell,’ said he, with a melancholy smile, and speaking with evident difficulty, ‘I believe I have got off with a trifling wound. I am sure it cannot be fatal I feel so little pain — almost none.’

I cautioned him against fatiguing himself by endeavouring to speak; and he remained quiet for a little time. At length he said:

‘Purcell, I trust this lesson shall not have been given in vain. God has been very merciful to me; I feel — I have an internal confidence that I am not wounded mortally. Had I been fatally wounded — had I been killed upon the spot, only think on it’ — and he closed his eyes as if the very thought made him dizzy— ‘struck down into the grave, unprepared as I am, in the very blossom of my sins, without a moment of repentance or of reflection; I must have been lost — lost for ever and ever.’

I prevailed upon him, with some difficulty, to abstain from such agitating reflections, and at length induced him to court such repose as his condition admitted of, by remaining perfectly silent, and as much as possible without motion.

O’Connor and I only were in the room; he had lain for some time in tolerable quiet, when I thought I distinguished the bustle attendant upon the arrival of some one at the castle, and went eagerly to the window, believing, or at least hoping, that the sounds might announce the approach of the medical man, whom we all longed most impatiently to see.

My conjecture was right; I had the satisfaction of seeing him dismount and prepare to enter the castle, when my observations were interrupted, and my attention was attracted by a smothered, gurgling sound proceeding from the bed in which lay the wounded man. I instantly turned round, and in doing so the spectacle which met my eyes was sufficiently shocking.

I had left O’Connor lying in the bed, supported by pillows, perfectly calm, and with his eyes closed: he was now lying nearly in the same position, his eyes open and almost starting from their sockets, with every feature pale and distorted as death, and vomiting blood in quantities that were frightful. I rushed to the door and called for assistance; the paroxysm, though violent, was brief, and O'Connor sank into a swoon so deep and deathlike, that I feared he should waken no more.

The surgeon, a little, fussy man, but I believe with some skill to justify his pretensions, now entered the room, carrying his case of instruments, and followed by servants bearing basins and water and bandages of linen. He relieved our doubts by instantly assuring us that 'the patient' was still living; and at the same time professed his determination to take advantage of the muscular relaxation which the faint had induced to examine the wound — adding that a patient was more easily 'handled' when in a swoon than under other circumstances.

After examining the wound in front where the ball had entered, he passed his hand round beneath the shoulder, and after a little pause he shook his head, observing that he feared very much that one of the vertebrae was fatally injured, but that he could not say decidedly until his patient should revive a little. 'Though his language was very technical, and consequently to me nearly unintelligible, I could perceive plainly by his manner that he considered the case as almost hopeless.

O'Connor gradually gave some signs of returning animation, and at length was so far restored as to be enabled to speak. After some few general questions as to how he felt affected, etc., etc., the surgeon, placing his hand upon his leg and pressing it slightly, asked him if he felt any pressure upon the limb? O'Connor answered in the negative — he pressed harder, and repeated the question; still the answer was the same, till at length, by repeated experiments, he ascertained that all that part of the body which lay behind the wound was paralysed, proving that the spine must have received some fatal injury.

'Well, doctor,' said O'Connor, after the examination of the wound was over; 'well, I shall do, shan't I?'

The physician was silent for a moment, and then, as if with an effort, he replied:

'Indeed, my dear sir, it would not be honest to flatter you with much hope.'

‘Eh?’ said O’Connor with more alacrity than I had seen him exhibit since the morning; ‘surely I did not hear you aright; I spoke of my recovery — surely there is no doubt; there can be none — speak frankly, doctor, for God’s sake — am I dying?’

The surgeon was evidently no stoic, and his manner had extinguished in me every hope, even before he had uttered a word in reply.

‘You are — you are indeed dying. There is no hope; I should but deceive you if I held out any.’

As the surgeon uttered these terrible words, the hands which O’Connor had stretched towards him while awaiting his reply fell powerless by his side; his head sank forward; it seemed as if horror and despair had unstrung every nerve and sinew; he appeared to collapse and shrink together as a plant might under the influence of a withering spell.

It has often been my fate, since then, to visit the chambers of death and of suffering; I have witnessed fearful agonies of body and of soul; the mysterious shudderings of the departing spirit, and the heartrending desolation of the survivors; the severing of the tenderest ties, the piteous yearnings of unavailing love — of all these things the sad duties of my profession have made me a witness. But, generally speaking, I have observed in such scenes some thing to mitigate, if not the sorrows, at least the terrors, of death; the dying man seldom seems to feel the reality of his situation; a dull consciousness of approaching dissolution, a dim anticipation of unconsciousness and insensibility, are the feelings which most nearly border upon an appreciation of his state; the film of death seems to have overspread the mind’s eye, objects lose their distinctness, and float cloudily before it, and the apathy and apparent indifference with which men recognise the sure advances of immediate death, rob that awful hour of much of its terrors, and the deathbed of its otherwise inevitable agonies.

This is a merciful dispensation; but the rule has its exceptions — its terrible exceptions. When a man is brought in an instant, by some sudden accident, to the very verge of the fathomless pit of death, with all his recollections awake, and his perceptions keenly and vividly alive, without previous illness to subdue the tone of the mind as to dull its apprehensions — then, and then only, the deathbed is truly terrible.

Oh, what a contrast did O’Connor afford as he lay in all the abject helplessness of undisguised terror upon his deathbed, to the proud composure with which he had taken the field that morning. I had always before thought of death as of a quiet sleep stealing gradually upon exhausted nature, made welcome by suffering, or, at least, softened by resignation; I had never before stood by the side of one upon whom the hand of death had been thus suddenly laid; I had never seen the tyrant arrayed in his terror till then. Never before or since have I seen horror so intensely depicted. It seemed actually as if O'Connor's mind had been unsettled by the shock; the few words he uttered were marked with all the incoherence of distraction; but it was not words that marked his despair most strongly, the appalling and heart-sickening groans that came from the terror-stricken and dying man must haunt me while I live; the expression, too, of hopeless, imploring agony with which he turned his eyes from object to object, I can never forget. At length, appearing suddenly to recollect himself, he said, with startling alertness, but in a voice so altered that I scarce could recognise the tones:

'Purcell, Purcell, go and tell my poor mother; she must know all, and then, quick, quick, quick, call your uncle, bring him here; I must have a chance.' He made a violent but fruitless effort to rise, and after a slight pause continued, with deep and urgent solemnity: 'Doctor, how long shall I live? Don't flatter me. Compliments at a deathbed are out of place; doctor, for God's sake, as you would not have my soul perish with my body, do not mock a dying man; have I an hour to live?'

'Certainly,' replied the surgeon; 'if you will but endeavour to keep yourself tranquil; otherwise I cannot answer for a moment.'

'Well, doctor,' said the patient, 'I will obey you; now, Purcell, my first and dearest friend, will you inform my poor mother of — of what you see, and return with your uncle; I know you will.'

I took the dear fellow's hand and kissed it, it was the only answer I could give, and left the room. I asked the first female servant I chanced to meet, if her mistress were yet up, and was answered in the affirmative. Without giving myself time to hesitate, I requested her to lead me to her lady's room, which she accordingly did; she entered first, I supposed to announce my name, and I followed closely; the poor mother said something, and held out her hands to welcome me; I strove for words; I could not speak, but nature found expression; I threw myself at her feet and covered her hands with kisses and tears. My manner was enough; with a quickness almost preternatural she understood it all; she simply said the words: ‘O’Connor is killed;’ she uttered no more.

How I left the room I know not; I rode madly to my uncle’s residence, and brought him back with me — all the rest is a blank. I remember standing by O’Connor’s bedside, and kissing the cold pallid forehead again and again; I remember the pale serenity of the beautiful features; I remember that I looked upon the dead face of my friend, and I remember no more.

For many months I lay writhing and raving in the frenzy of brain fever; a hundred times I stood tottering at the brink of death, and long after my restoration to bodily health was assured, it appeared doubtful whether I should ever be restored to reason. But God dealt very mercifully with me; His mighty hand rescued me from death and from madness when one or other appeared inevitable. As soon as I was permitted pen and ink, I wrote to the bereaved mother in a tone bordering upon frenzy. I accused myself of having made her childless; I called myself a murderer; I believed myself accursed; I could not find terms strong enough to express my abhorrence of my own conduct. But, oh! what an answer I received, so mild, so sweet, from the desolate, childless mother! its words spoke all that is beautiful in Christianity — it was forgiveness — it was resignation. I am convinced that to that letter, operating as it did upon a mind already predisposed, is owing my final determination to devote myself to that profession in which, for more than half a century, I have been a humble minister.

Years roll away, and we count them not as they pass, but their influence is not the less certain that it is silent; the deepest wounds are gradually healed, the keenest griefs are mitigated, and we, in character, feelings, tastes, and pursuits, become such altered beings, that but for some few indelible marks which past events must leave behind them, which time may soften, but can never efface; our very identity would be dubious. Who has not felt all this at one time or other? Who has not mournfully felt it? This trite, but natural train of reflection filled my mind as I approached the domain of Castle Connor some ten years after the occurrence of the events above narrated. Everything looked the same as when I had left it; the old trees stood as graceful and as grand as ever; no plough had violated the soft green sward; no utilitarian hand had constrained the wanderings of the clear and sportive stream, or disturbed the lichen-covered rocks through which it gushed, or the wild coppice that overshadowed its sequestered nooks — but the eye that looked upon these things was altered, and memory was busy with other days, shrouding in sadness every beauty that met my sight.

As I approached the castle my emotions became so acutely painful that I had almost returned the way I came, without accomplishing the purpose for which I had gone thus far; and nothing but the conviction that my having been in the neighbourhood of Castle Connor without visiting its desolate mistress would render me justly liable to the severest censure, could overcome my reluctance to encountering the heavy task which was before me. I recognised the old servant who opened the door, but he did not know me. I was completely changed; suffering of body and mind had altered me in feature and in bearing, as much as in character. I asked the man whether his mistress ever saw visitors. He answered:

'But seldom; perhaps, however, if she knew that an old friend wished to see her for a few minutes, she would gratify him so far.'

At the same time I placed my card in his hand, and requested him to deliver it to his mistress. He returned in a few moments, saying that his lady would be happy to see me in the parlour, and I accordingly followed him to the door, which he opened. I entered the room, and was in a moment at the side of my early friend and benefactress. I was too much agitated to speak; I could only hold the hands which she gave me, while, spite of every effort, the tears flowed fast and bitterly.

'It was kind, very, very kind of you to come to see me,' she said, with far more composure than I could have commanded; 'I see it is very painful to you.'

I endeavoured to compose myself, and for a little time we remained silent; she was the first to speak:

'You will be surprised, Mr. Purcell, when you observe the calmness with which I can speak of him who was dearest to me, who is gone; but my thoughts are always with him, and the recollections of his love' — her voice faltered a little— 'and the hope of meeting him hereafter enables me to bear existence.'

I said I know not what; something about resignation, I believe.

'I hope I am resigned; God made me more: so,' she said. 'Oh, Mr. Purcell, I have often thought I loved my lost child TOO well. It was natural — he was my only child — he was — — ' She could not proceed for a few moments: ‘It was very natural that I should love him as I did; but it may have been sinful; I have often thought so. I doated upon him — I idolised him — I thought too little of other holier affections; and God may have taken him from me, only to teach me, by this severe lesson, that I owed to heaven a larger share of my heart than to anything earthly. I cannot think of him now without more solemn feelings than if he were with me. There is something holy in our thoughts of the dead; I feel it so.’ After a pause, she continued— ‘Mr. Purcell, do you remember his features well? they were very beautiful.’ I assured her that I did. ‘Then you can tell me if you think this a faithful likeness.’ She took from a drawer a case in which lay a miniature. I took it reverently from her hands; it was indeed very like — touchingly like. I told her so; and she seemed gratified.

As the evening was wearing fast, and I had far to go, I hastened to terminate my visit, as I had intended, by placing in her hand a letter from her son to me, written during his sojourn upon the Continent. I requested her to keep it; it was one in which he spoke much of her, and in terms of the tenderest affection. As she read its contents the heavy tears gathered in her eyes, and fell, one by one, upon the page; she wiped them away, but they still flowed fast and silently. It was in vain that she tried to read it; her eyes were filled with tears: so she folded the letter, and placed it in her bosom. I rose to depart, and she also rose.

‘I will not ask you to delay your departure,’ said she; ‘your visit here must have been a painful one to you. I cannot find words to thank you for the letter as I would wish, or for all your kindness. It has given me a pleasure greater than I thought could have fallen to the lot of a creature so very desolate as I am; may God bless you for it!’ And thus we parted; I never saw Castle Connor or its solitary inmate more.

THE DRUNKARD’S DREAM.

Being a Fourth Extract from the Legacy of the late F. Purcell, P. P. of Drumcoolagh.

> ‘All this *he* told with some confusion and
> Dismay, the usual consequence of dreams
> Of the unpleasant kind, with none at hand
> To expound their vain and visionary gleams,
> I’ve known some odd ones which seemed really planned
> Prophetically, as that which one deems
> “A strange coincidence,” to use a phrase
> By which such things are settled nowadays.’
>
> BYRON.

Dreams! What age, or what country of the world, has not and acknowledged the mystery of their origin and end? I have thought not a little upon the subject, seeing it is one which has been often forced upon my attention, and sometimes strangely enough; and yet I have never arrived at anything which at all appeared a satisfactory conclusion. It does appear that a mental phenomenon so extraordinary cannot be wholly without its use. We know, indeed, that in the olden times it has been made the organ of communication between the Deity and His creatures; and when, as I have seen, a dream produces upon a mind, to all appearance hopelessly reprobate and depraved, an effect so powerful and so lasting as to break down the inveterate habits, and to reform the life of an abandoned sinner, we see in the result, in the reformation of morals which appeared incorrigible, in the reclamation of a human soul which seemed to be irretrievably lost, something more than could be produced by a mere chimera of the slumbering fancy, something more than could arise from the capricious images of a terrified imagination; but once presented, we behold in all these things, and in their tremendous and mysterious results, the operation of the hand of God. And while Reason rejects as absurd the superstition which will read a prophecy in every dream, she may, without violence to herself, recognise, even in the wildest and most incongruous of the wanderings of a slumbering intellect, the evidences and the fragments of a language which may be spoken, which HAS been spoken, to terrify, to warn, and to command. We have reason to believe too, by the promptness of action which in the age of the prophets followed all intimations of this kind, and by the strength of conviction and strange permanence of the effects resulting from certain dreams in latter times, which effects we ourselves may have witnessed, that when this medium of communication has been employed by the Deity, the evidences of His presence have been unequivocal. My thoughts were directed to this subject, in a manner to leave a lasting impression upon my mind, by the events which I shall now relate, the statement of which, however extraordinary, is nevertheless ACCURATELY CORRECT.

About the year 17 — , having been appointed to the living of C — h, I rented a small house in the town, which bears the same name: one morning in the month of November, I was awakened before my usual time by my servant, who bustled into my bedroom for the purpose of announcing a sick call. As the Catholic Church holds her last rites to be totally indispensable to the safety of the departing sinner, no conscientious clergyman can afford a moment's unnecessary delay, and in little more than five minutes I stood ready cloaked and booted for the road, in the small front parlour, in which the messenger, who was to act as my guide, awaited my coming. I found a poor little girl crying piteously near the door, and after some slight difficulty I ascertained that her father was either dead or just dying.

'And what may be your father's name, my poor child?' said I. She held down her head, as if ashamed. I repeated the question, and the wretched little creature burst into floods of tears still more bitter than she had shed before. At length, almost provoked by conduct which appeared to me so unreasonable, I began to lose patience, spite of the pity which I could not help feeling towards her, and I said rather harshly:

'If you will not tell me the name of the person to whom you would lead me, your silence can arise from no good motive, and I might be justified in refusing to go with you at all.'

'Oh, don't say that — don't say that!' cried she. 'Oh, sir, it was that I was afeard of when I would not tell you — I was afeard, when you heard his name, you would not come with me; but it is no use hidin' it now — it's Pat Connell, the carpenter, your honour.'

She looked in my face with the most earnest anxiety, as if her very existence depended upon what she should read there; but I relieved her at once. The name, indeed, was most unpleasantly familiar to me; but, however fruitless my visits and advice might have been at another time, the present was too fearful an occasion to suffer my doubts of their utility or my reluctance to re-attempting what appeared a hopeless task to weigh even against the lightest chance that a consciousness of his imminent danger might produce in him a more docile and tractable disposition. Accordingly I told the child to lead the way, and followed her in silence. She hurried rapidly through the long narrow street which forms the great thoroughfare of the town. The darkness of the hour, rendered still deeper by the close approach of the oldfashioned houses, which lowered in tall obscurity on either side of the way; the damp, dreary chill which renders the advance of morning peculiarly cheerless, combined with the object of my walk, to visit the deathbed of a presumptuous sinner, to endeavour, almost against my own conviction, to infuse a hope into the heart of a dying reprobate — a drunkard but too probably perishing under the consequences of some mad fit of intoxication; all these circumstances united served to enhance the gloom and solemnity of my feelings, as I silently followed my little guide, who with quick steps traversed the uneven pavement of the main street. After a walk of about five minutes she turned off into a narrow lane, of that obscure and comfortless class which is to be found in almost all small oldfashioned towns, chill, without ventilation, reeking with all manner of offensive effluviae, and lined by dingy, smoky, sickly and pent-up buildings, frequently not only in a wretched but in a dangerous condition.

'Your father has changed his abode since I last visited him, and, I am afraid, much for the worse,' said I.

'Indeed he has, sir; but we must not complain,' replied she. 'We have to thank God that we have lodging and food, though it's poor enough, it is, your honour.'

Poor child! thought I, how many an older head might learn wisdom from thee — how many a luxurious philosopher, who is skilled to preach but not to suffer, might not thy patient words put to the blush! The manner and language of this child were alike above her years and station; and, indeed, in all cases in which the cares and sorrows of life have anticipated their usual date, and have fallen, as they sometimes do, with melancholy prematurity to the lot of childhood, I have observed the result to have proved uniformly the same. A young mind, to which joy and indulgence have been strangers, and to which suffering and self-denial have been familiarised from the first, acquires a solidity and an elevation which no other discipline could have bestowed, and which, in the present case, communicated a striking but mournful peculiarity to the manners, even to the voice, of the child. We paused before a narrow, crazy door, which she opened by means of a latch, and we forthwith began to ascend the steep and broken stairs which led upwards to the sick man's room.

As we mounted flight after flight towards the garret-floor, I heard more and more distinctly the hurried talking of many voices. I could also distinguish the low sobbing of a female. On arriving upon the uppermost lobby these sounds became fully audible.

'This way, your honour,' said my little conductress; at the same time, pushing open a door of patched and half-rotten plank, she admitted me into the squalid chamber of death and misery. But one candle, held in the fingers of a scared and haggard-looking child, was burning in the room, and that so dim that all was twilight or darkness except within its immediate influence. The general obscurity, however, served to throw into prominent and startling relief the deathbed and its occupant. The light was nearly approximated to, and fell with horrible clearness upon, the blue and swollen features of the drunkard. I did not think it possible that a human countenance could look so terrific. The lips were black and drawn apart; the teeth were firmly set; the eyes a little unclosed, and nothing but the whites appearing. Every feature was fixed and livid, and the whole face wore a ghastly and rigid expression of despairing terror such as I never saw equalled. His hands were crossed upon his breast, and firmly clenched; while, as if to add to the corpse-like effect of the whole, some white cloths, dipped in water, were wound about the forehead and temples.

As soon as I could remove my eyes from this horrible spectacle, I observed my friend Dr. D —— , one of the most humane of a humane profession, standing by the bedside. He had been attempting, but unsuccessfully, to bleed the patient, and had now applied his finger to the pulse.

‘Is there any hope?’ I inquired in a whisper.

A shake of the head was the reply. There was a pause while he continued to hold the wrist; but he waited in vain for the throb of life — it was not there: and when he let go the hand, it fell stiffly back into its former position upon the other.

‘The man is dead,’ said the physician, as he turned from the bed where the terrible figure lay.

Dead! thought I, scarcely venturing to look upon the tremendous and revolting spectacle. Dead! without an hour for repentance, even a moment for reflection; dead I without the rites which even the best should have. Is there a hope for him? The glaring eyeball, the grinning mouth, the distorted brow — that unutterable look in which a painter would have sought to embody the fixed despair of the nethermost hell. These were my answer.

The poor wife sat at a little distance, crying as if her heart would break — the younger children clustered round the bed, looking with wondering curiosity upon the form of death never seen before.

When the first tumult of uncontrollable sorrow had passed away, availing myself of the solemnity and impressiveness of the scene, I desired the heart-stricken family to accompany me in prayer, and all knelt down while I solemnly and fervently repeated some of those prayers which appeared most applicable to the occasion. I employed myself thus in a manner which, I trusted, was not unprofitable, at least to the living, for about ten minutes; and having accomplished my task, I was the first to arise.

I looked upon the poor, sobbing, helpless creatures who knelt so humbly around me, and my heart bled for them. With a natural transition I turned my eyes from them to the bed in which the body lay; and, great God! what was the revulsion, the horror which I experienced on seeing the corpse-like terrific thing seated half upright before me; the white cloths which had been wound about the head had now partly slipped from their position, and were hanging in grotesque festoons about the face and shoulders, while the distorted eyes leered from amid them —

‘A sight to dream of, not to tell.’

I stood actually riveted to the spot. The figure nodded its head and lifted its arm, I thought, with a menacing gesture. A thousand confused and horrible thoughts at once rushed upon my mind. I had often read that the body of a presumptuous sinner, who, during life, had been the willing creature of every satanic impulse, after the human tenant had deserted it, had been known to become the horrible sport of demoniac possession.

I was roused from the stupefaction of terror in which I stood, by the piercing scream of the mother, who now, for the first time, perceived the change which had taken place. She rushed towards the bed, but stunned by the shock, and overcome by the conflict of violent emotions, before she reached it she fell prostrate upon the floor.

I am perfectly convinced that had I not been startled from the torpidity of horror in which I was bound by some powerful and arousing stimulant, I should have gazed upon this unearthly apparition until I had fairly lost my senses. As it was, however, the spell was broken — superstition gave way to reason: the man whom all believed to have been actually dead was living!

Dr. D —— was instantly standing by the bedside, and upon examination he found that a sudden and copious flow of blood had taken place from the wound which the lancet had left; and this, no doubt, had effected his sudden and almost preternatural restoration to an existence from which all thought he had been for ever removed. The man was still speechless, but he seemed to understand the physician when he forbid his repeating the painful and fruitless attempts which he made to articulate, and he at once resigned himself quietly into his hands.

I left the patient with leeches upon his temples, and bleeding freely, apparently with little of the drowsiness which accompanies apoplexy; indeed, Dr. D —— told me that he had never before witnessed a seizure which seemed to combine the symptoms of so many kinds, and yet which belonged to none of the recognised classes; it certainly was not apoplexy, catalepsy, nor delirium tremens, and yet it seemed, in some degree, to partake of the properties of all. It was strange, but stranger things are coming.

During two or three days Dr. D —— would not allow his patient to converse in a manner which could excite or exhaust him, with anyone; he suffered him merely as briefly as possible to express his immediate wants.

And it was not until the fourth day after my early visit, the particulars of which I have just detailed, that it was thought expedient that I should see him, and then only because it appeared that his extreme importunity and impatience to meet me were likely to retard his recovery more than the mere exhaustion attendant upon a short conversation could possibly do; perhaps, too, my friend entertained some hope that if by holy confession his patient's bosom were eased of the perilous stuff which no doubt oppressed it, his recovery would be more assured and rapid. It was then, as I have said, upon the fourth day after my first professional call, that I found myself once more in the dreary chamber of want and sickness.

The man was in bed, and appeared low and restless. On my entering the room he raised himself in the bed, and muttered, twice or thrice:

'Thank God! thank God!'

I signed to those of his family who stood by to leave the room, and took a chair beside the bed. So soon as we were alone, he said, rather doggedly:

'There's no use in telling me of the sinfulness of bad ways — I know it all. I know where they lead to — I seen everything about it with my own eyesight, as plain as I see you.' He rolled himself in the bed, as if to hide his face in the clothes; and then suddenly raising himself, he exclaimed with startling vehemence: 'Look, sir! there is no use in mincing the matter: I'm blasted with the fires of hell; I have been in hell. What do you think of that? In hell — I'm lost for ever — I have not a chance. I am damned already — damned — damned!'

The end of this sentence he actually shouted. His vehemence was perfectly terrific; he threw himself back, and laughed, and sobbed hysterically. I poured some water into a tea-cup, and gave it to him. After he had swallowed it, I told him if he had anything to communicate, to do so as briefly as he could, and in a manner as little agitating to himself as possible; threatening at the same time, though I had no intention of doing so, to leave him at once, in case he again gave way to such passionate excitement.

'It's only foolishness,' he continued, 'for me to try to thank you for coming to such a villain as myself at all. It's no use for me to wish good to you, or to bless you; for such as me has no blessings to give.'

I told him that I had but done my duty, and urged him to proceed to the matter which weighed upon his mind. He then spoke nearly as follows:

‘I came in drunk on Friday night last, and got to my bed here; I don’t remember how. Sometime in the night it seemed to me I wakened, and feeling unasy in myself, I got up out of the bed. I wanted the fresh air; but I would not make a noise to open the window, for fear I’d waken the crathurs. It was very dark and throublesome to find the door; but at last I did get it, and I groped my way out, and went down as asy as I could. I felt quite sober, and I counted the steps one after another, as I was going down, that I might not stumble at the bottom.

‘When I came to the first landing-place — God be about us always! — the floor of it sunk under me, and I went down — down — down, till the senses almost left me. I do not know how long I was falling, but it seemed to me a great while. When I came rightly to myself at last, I was sitting near the top of a great table; and I could not see the end of it, if it had any, it was so far off. And there was men beyond reckoning, sitting down all along by it, at each side, as far as I could see at all. I did not know at first was it in the open air; but there was a close smothering feel in it that was not natural. And there was a kind of light that my eyesight never saw before, red and unsteady; and I did not see for a long time where it was coming from, until I looked straight up, and then I seen that it came from great balls of blood-coloured fire that were rolling high over head with a sort of rushing, trembling sound, and I perceived that they shone on the ribs of a great roof of rock that was arched overhead instead of the sky. When I seen this, scarce knowing what I did, I got up, and I said, “I have no right to be here; I must go.” And the man that was sitting at my left hand only smiled, and said, “Sit down again; you can NEVER leave this place.” And his voice was weaker than any child’s voice I ever heerd; and when he was done speaking he smiled again.

‘Then I spoke out very loud and bold, and I said, “In the name of God, let me out of this bad place.” And there was a great man that I did not see before, sitting at the end of the table that I was near; and he was taller than twelve men, and his face was very proud and terrible to look at. And he stood up and stretched out his hand before him; and when he stood up, all that was there, great and small, bowed down with a sighing sound, and a dread came on my heart, and he looked at me, and I could not speak. I felt I was his own, to do what he liked with, for I knew at once who he was; and he said, “If you promise to return, you may depart for a season;” and the voice he spoke with was terrible and mournful, and the echoes of it went rolling and swelling down the endless cave, and mixing with the trembling of the fire overhead; so that when he sat down there was a sound after him, all through the place, like the roaring of a furnace, and I said, with all the strength I had, “I promise to come back — in God’s name let me go!”

‘And with that I lost the sight and the hearing of all that was there, and when my senses came to me again, I was sitting in the bed with the blood all over me, and you and the rest praying around the room.’

Here he paused and wiped away the chill drops of horror which hung upon his forehead.

I remained silent for some moments. The vision which he had just described struck my imagination not a little, for this was long before Vathek and the ‘Hall of Eblis’ had delighted the world; and the description which he gave had, as I received it, all the attractions of novelty beside the impressiveness which always belongs to the narration of an EYE-WITNESS, whether in the body or in the spirit, of the scenes which he describes. There was something, too, in the stern horror with which the man related these things, and in the incongruity of his description, with the vulgarly received notions of the great place of punishment, and of its presiding spirit, which struck my mind with awe, almost with fear. At length he said, with an expression of horrible, imploring earnestness, which I shall never forget— ‘Well, sir, is there any hope; is there any chance at all? or, is my soul pledged and promised away for ever? is it gone out of my power? must I go back to the place?’

In answering him, I had no easy task to perform; for however clear might be my internal conviction of the groundlessness of his tears, and however strong my scepticism respecting the reality of what he had described, I nevertheless felt that his impression to the contrary, and his humility and terror resulting from it, might be made available as no mean engines in the work of his conversion from prodigacy, and of his restoration to decent habits, and to religious feeling.

I therefore told him that he was to regard his dream rather in the light of a warning than in that of a prophecy; that our salvation depended not upon the word or deed of a moment, but upon the habits of a life; that, in fine, if he at once discarded his idle companions and evil habits, and firmly adhered to a sober, industrious, and religious course of life, the powers of darkness might claim his soul in vain, for that there were higher and firmer pledges than human tongue could utter, which promised salvation to him who should repent and lead a new life.

I left him much comforted, and with a promise to return upon the next day. I did so, and found him much more cheerful and without any remains of the dogged sullenness which I suppose had arisen from his despair. His promises of amendment were given in that tone of deliberate earnestness, which belongs to deep and solemn determination; and it was with no small delight that I observed, after repeated visits, that his good resolutions, so far from failing, did but gather strength by time; and when I saw that man shake off the idle and debauched companions, whose society had for years formed alike his amusement and his ruin, and revive his long discarded habits of industry and sobriety, I said within myself, there is something more in all this than the operation of an idle dream.

One day, sometime after his perfect restoration to health, I was surprised on ascending the stairs, for the purpose of visiting this man, to find him busily employed in nailing down some planks upon the landing-place, through which, at the commencement of his mysterious vision, it seemed to him that he had sunk. I perceived at once that he was strengthening the floor with a view to securing himself against such a catastrophe, and could scarcely forbear a smile as I bid ‘God bless his work.’

He perceived my thoughts, I suppose, for he immediately said:

‘I can never pass over that floor without trembling. I’d leave this house if I could, but I can’t find another lodging in the town so cheap, and I’ll not take a better till I’ve paid off all my debts, please God; but I could not be asy in my mind till I made it as safe as I could. You’ll hardly believe me, your honour, that while I’m working, maybe a mile away, my heart is in a flutter the whole way back, with the bare thoughts of the two little steps I have to walk upon this bit of a floor. So it’s no wonder, sir, I’d thry to make it sound and firm with any idle timber I have.’

I applauded his resolution to pay off his debts, and the steadiness with which he perused his plans of conscientious economy, and passed on.

Many months elapsed, and still there appeared no alteration in his resolutions of amendment. He was a good workman, and with his better habits he recovered his former extensive and profitable employment. Everything seemed to promise comfort and respectability. I have little more to add, and that shall be told quickly. I had one evening met Pat Connell, as he returned from his work, and as usual, after a mutual, and on his side respectful salutation, I spoke a few words of encouragement and approval. I left him industrious, active, healthy — when next I saw him, not three days after, he was a corpse.

The circumstances which marked the event of his death were somewhat strange — I might say fearful. The unfortunate man had accidentally met an early friend just returned, after a long absence, and in a moment of excitement, forgetting everything in the warmth of his joy, he yielded to his urgent invitation to accompany him into a public-house, which lay close by the spot where the encounter had taken place. Connell, however, previously to entering the room, had announced his determination to take nothing more than the strictest temperance would warrant.

But oh! who can describe the inveterate tenacity with which a drunkard's habits cling to him through life? He may repent — he may reform — he may look with actual abhorrence upon his past profligacy; but amid all this reformation and compunction, who can tell the moment in which the base and ruinous propensity may not recur, triumphing over resolution, remorse, shame, everything, and prostrating its victim once more in all that is destructive and revolting in that fatal vice?

The wretched man left the place in a state of utter intoxication. He was brought home nearly insensible, and placed in his bed, where he lay in the deep calm lethargy of drunkenness. The younger part of the family retired to rest much after their usual hour; but the poor wife remained up sitting by the fire, too much grieved and shocked at the occurrence of what she had so little expected, to settle to rest; fatigue, however, at length overcame her, and she sank gradually into an uneasy slumber. She could not tell how long she had remained in this state, when she awakened, and immediately on opening her eyes, she perceived by the faint red light of the smouldering turf embers, two persons, one of whom she recognised as her husband, noiselessly gliding out of the room.

'Pat, darling, where are you going?' said she. There was no answer — the door closed after them; but in a moment she was startled and terrified by a loud and heavy crash, as if some ponderous body had been hurled down the stair. Much alarmed, she started up, and going to the head of the staircase, she called repeatedly upon her husband, but in vain. She returned to the room, and with the assistance of her daughter, whom I had occasion to mention before, she succeeded in finding and lighting a candle, with which she hurried again to the head of the staircase.

At the bottom lay what seemed to be a bundle of clothes, heaped together, motionless, lifeless — it was her husband. In going down the stair, for what purpose can never now be known, he had fallen helplessly and violently to the bottom, and coming head foremost, the spine at the neck had been dislocated by the shock, and instant death must have ensued. The body lay upon that landing-place to which his dream had referred. It is scarcely worth endeavouring to clear up a single point in a narrative where all is mystery; yet I could not help suspecting that the second figure which had been seen in the room by Connell's wife on the night of his death, might have been no other than his own shadow. I suggested this solution of the difficulty; but she told me that the unknown person had been considerably in advance of the other, and on reaching the door, had turned back as if to communicate something to his companion. It was then a mystery.

Was the dream verified? — whither had the disembodied spirit sped? — who can say? We know not. But I left the house of death that day in a state of horror which I could not describe. It seemed to me that I was scarce awake. I heard and saw everything as if under the spell of a nightmare. The coincidence was terrible.

PASSAGE IN THE SECRET HISTORY OF AN IRISH COUNTESS.

Being a Fifth Extract from the Legacy of the late Francis Purcell, P.P. of Drumcoolagh.

The following paper is written in a female hand, and was no doubt communicated to my much-regretted friend by the lady whose early history it serves to illustrate, the Countess D —— . She is no more — she long since died, a childless and a widowed wife, and, as her letter sadly predicts, none survive to whom the publication of this narrative can prove ‘injurious, or even painful.’ Strange! two powerful and wealthy families, that in which she was born, and that into which she had married, have ceased to be — they are utterly extinct.

To those who know anything of the history of Irish families, as they were less than a century ago, the facts which immediately follow will at once suggest THE NAMES of the principal actors; and to others their publication would be useless — to us, possibly, if not probably, injurious. I have, therefore, altered such of the names as might, if stated, get us into difficulty; others, belonging to minor characters in the strange story, I have left untouched.

My dear friend, — You have asked me to furnish you with a detail of the strange events which marked my early history, and I have, without hesitation, applied myself to the task, knowing that, while I live, a kind consideration for my feelings will prevent your giving publicity to the statement; and conscious that, when I am no more, there will not survive one to whom the narrative can prove injurious, or even painful.

My mother died when I was quite an infant, and of her I have no recollection, even the faintest. By her death, my education and habits were left solely to the guidance of my surviving parent; and, as far as a stern attention to my religious instruction, and an active anxiety evinced by his procuring for me the best masters to perfect me in those accomplishments which my station and wealth might seem to require, could avail, he amply discharged the task.

My father was what is called an oddity, and his treatment of me, though uniformly kind, flowed less from affection and tenderness than from a sense of obligation and duty. Indeed, I seldom even spoke to him except at meal-times, and then his manner was silent and abrupt; his leisure hours, which were many, were passed either in his study or in solitary walks; in short, he seemed to take no further interest in my happiness or improvement than a conscientious regard to the discharge of his own duty would seem to claim.

Shortly before my birth a circumstance had occurred which had contributed much to form and to confirm my father's secluded habits — it was the fact that a suspicion of MURDER had fallen upon his younger brother, though not sufficiently definite to lead to an indictment, yet strong enough to ruin him in public opinion.

This disgraceful and dreadful doubt cast upon the family name, my father felt deeply and bitterly, and not the less so that he himself was thoroughly convinced of his brother's innocence. The sincerity and strength of this impression he shortly afterwards proved in a manner which produced the dark events which follow. Before, however, I enter upon the statement of them, I ought to relate the circumstances which had awakened the suspicion; inasmuch as they are in themselves somewhat curious, and, in their effects, most intimately connected with my after-history.

My uncle, Sir Arthur T —— n, was a gay and extravagant man, and, among other vices, was ruinously addicted to gaming; this unfortunate propensity, even after his fortune had suffered so severely as to render inevitable a reduction in his expenses by no means inconsiderable, nevertheless continued to actuate him, nearly to the exclusion of all other pursuits; he was, however, a proud, or rather a vain man, and could not bear to make the diminution of his income a matter of gratulation and triumph to those with whom he had hitherto competed, and the consequence was, that he frequented no longer the expensive haunts of dissipation, and retired from the gay world, leaving his coterie to discover his reasons as best they might.

He did not, however, forego his favourite vice, for, though he could not worship his great divinity in the costly temples where it was formerly his wont to take his stand, yet he found it very possible to bring about him a sufficient number of the votaries of chance to answer all his ends. The consequence was, that Carrickleigh, which was the name of my uncle's residence, was never without one or more of such visitors as I have described.

It happened that upon one occasion he was visited by one Hugh Tisdall, a gentleman of loose habits, but of considerable wealth, and who had, in early youth, travelled with my uncle upon the Continent; the period of his visit was winter, and, consequently, the house was nearly deserted excepting by its regular inmates; it was therefore highly acceptable, particularly as my uncle was aware that his visitor's tastes accorded exactly with his own.

Both parties seemed determined to avail themselves of their suitability during the brief stay which Mr. Tisdall had promised; the consequence was, that they shut themselves up in Sir Arthur's private room for nearly all the day and the greater part of the night, during the space of nearly a week, at the end of which the servant having one morning, as usual, knocked at Mr. Tisdall's bedroom door repeatedly, received no answer, and, upon attempting to enter, found that it was locked; this appeared suspicious, and, the inmates of the house having been alarmed, the door was forced open, and, on proceeding to the bed, they found the body of its occupant perfectly lifeless, and hanging halfway out, the head downwards, and near the floor. One deep wound had been inflicted upon the temple, apparently with some blunt instrument which had penetrated the brain; and another blow, less effective, probably the first aimed, had grazed the head, removing some of the scalp, but leaving the skull untouched. The door had been double-locked upon the INSIDE, in evidence of which the key still lay where it had been placed in the lock.

The window, though not secured on the interior, was closed — a circumstance not a little puzzling, as it afforded the only other mode of escape from the room; it looked out, too, upon a kind of courtyard, round which the old buildings stood, formerly accessible by a narrow doorway and passage lying in the oldest side of the quadrangle, but which had since been built up, so as to preclude all ingress or egress; the room was also upon the second story, and the height of the window considerable. Near the bed were found a pair of razors belonging to the murdered man, one of them upon the ground, and both of them open. The weapon which had inflicted the mortal wound was not to be found in the room, nor were any footsteps or other traces of the murderer discoverable.

At the suggestion of Sir Arthur himself, a coroner was instantly summoned to attend, and an inquest was held; nothing, however, in any degree conclusive was elicited; the walls, ceiling, and floor of the room were carefully examined, in order to ascertain whether they contained a trap-door or other concealed mode of entrance — but no such thing appeared.

Such was the minuteness of investigation employed, that, although the grate had contained a large fire during the night, they proceeded to examine even the very chimney, in order to discover whether escape by it were possible; but this attempt, too, was fruitless, for the chimney, built in the old fashion, rose in a perfectly perpendicular line from the hearth to a height of nearly fourteen feet above the roof, affording in its interior scarcely the possibility of ascent, the flue being smoothly plastered, and sloping towards the top like an inverted funnel, promising, too, even if the summit were attained, owing to its great height, but a precarious descent upon the sharp and steep-ridged roof; the ashes, too, which lay in the grate, and the soot, as far as it could be seen, were undisturbed, a circumstance almost conclusive of the question.

Sir Arthur was of course examined; his evidence was given with clearness and unreserve, which seemed calculated to silence all suspicion. He stated that, up to the day and night immediately preceding the catastrophe, he had lost to a heavy amount, but that, at their last sitting, he had not only won back his original loss, but upwards of four thousand pounds in addition; in evidence of which he produced an acknowledgment of debt to that amount in the handwriting of the deceased, and bearing the date of the fatal night. He had mentioned the circumstance to his lady, and in presence of some of the domestics; which statement was supported by THEIR respective evidence.

One of the jury shrewdly observed, that the circumstance of Mr. Tisdall's having sustained so heavy a loss might have suggested to some ill-minded persons accidentally hearing it, the plan of robbing him, after having murdered him in such a manner as might make it appear that he had committed suicide; a supposition which was strongly supported by the razors having been found thus displaced, and removed from their case. Two persons had probably been engaged in the attempt, one watching by the sleeping man, and ready to strike him in case of his awakening suddenly, while the other was procuring the razors and employed in inflicting the fatal gash, so as to make it appear to have been the act of the murdered man himself. It was said that while the juror was making this suggestion Sir Arthur changed colour.

Nothing, however, like legal evidence appeared against him, and the consequence was that the verdict was found against a person or persons unknown; and for some time the matter was suffered to rest, until, after about five months, my father received a letter from a person signing himself Andrew Collis, and representing himself to be the cousin of the deceased. This letter stated that Sir Arthur was likely to incur not merely suspicion, but personal risk, unless he could account for certain circumstances connected with the recent murder, and contained a copy of a letter written by the deceased, and bearing date, the day of the week, and of the month, upon the night of which the deed of blood had been perpetrated. Tisdall's note ran as follows:

'DEAR COLLIS,

'I have had sharp work with Sir Arthur; he tried some of his stale tricks, but soon found that *I* was Yorkshire too: it would not do — you understand me. We went to the work like good ones, head, heart and soul; and, in fact, since I came here, I have lost no time. I am rather fagged, but I am sure to be well paid for my hardship; I never want sleep so long as I can have the music of a dice-box, and wherewithal to pay the piper. As I told you, he tried some of his queer turns, but I foiled him like a man, and, in return, gave him more than he could relish of the genuine DEAD KNOWLEDGE.

'In short, I have plucked the old baronet as never baronet was plucked before; I have scarce left him the stump of a quill; I have got promissory notes in his hand to the amount of — if you like round numbers, say, thirty thousand pounds, safely deposited in my portable strong-box, alias double-clasped pocketbook. I leave this ruinous old rat-hole early on tomorrow, for two reasons — first, I do not want to play with Sir Arthur deeper than I think his security, that is, his money, or his money's worth, would warrant; and, secondly, because I am safer a hundred miles from Sir Arthur than in the house with him. Look you, my worthy, I tell you this between ourselves — I may be wrong, but, by G — , I am as sure as that I am now living, that

Sir A —— attempted to poison me last night; so much for old friendship on both sides.

‘When I won the last stake, a heavy one enough, my friend leant his forehead upon his hands, and you’ll laugh when I tell you that his head literally smoked like a hot dumpling. I do not know whether his agitation was produced by the plan which he had against me, or by his having lost so heavily — though it must be allowed that he had reason to be a little funked, whichever way his thoughts went; but he pulled the bell, and ordered two bottles of champagne. While the fellow was bringing them he drew out a promissory note to the full amount, which he signed, and, as the man came in with the bottles and glasses, he desired him to be off; he filled out a glass for me, and, while he thought my eyes were off, for I was putting up his note at the time, he dropped something slyly into it, no doubt to sweeten it; but I saw it all, and, when he handed it to me, I said, with an emphasis which he might or might not understand:

‘“There is some sediment in this; I’ll not drink it.”

‘“Is there?” said he, and at the same time snatched it from my hand and threw it into the fire. What do you think of that? have I not a tender chicken to manage? Win or lose, I will not play beyond five thousand tonight, and tomorrow sees me safe out of the reach of Sir Arthur’s champagne. So, all things considered, I think you must allow that you are not the last who have found a knowing boy in

‘Yours to command,
‘HUGH TISDALL.’

Of the authenticity of this document I never heard my father express a doubt; and I am satisfied that, owing to his strong conviction in favour of his brother, he would not have admitted it without sufficient inquiry, inasmuch as it tended to confirm the suspicions which already existed to his prejudice.

Now, the only point in this letter which made strongly against my uncle, was the mention of the ‘double-clasped pocketbook’ as the receptacle of the papers likely to involve him, for this pocketbook was not forthcoming, nor anywhere to be found, nor had any papers referring to his gaming transactions been found upon the dead man. However, whatever might have been the original intention of this Collis, neither my uncle nor my father ever heard more of him; but he published the letter in Faulkner's newspaper, which was shortly afterwards made the vehicle of a much more mysterious attack. The passage in that periodical to which I allude, occurred about four years afterwards, and while the fatal occurrence was still fresh in public recollection. It commenced by a rambling preface, stating that 'a CERTAIN PERSON whom CERTAIN persons thought to be dead, was not so, but living, and in full possession of his memory, and moreover ready and able to make GREAT delinquents tremble.' It then went on to describe the murder, without, however, mentioning names; and in doing so, it entered into minute and circumstantial particulars of which none but an EYE-WITNESS could have been possessed, and by implications almost too unequivocal to be regarded in the light of insinuation, to involve the 'TITLED GAMBLER' in the guilt of the transaction.

My father at once urged Sir Arthur to proceed against the paper in an action of libel; but he would not hear of it, nor consent to my father's taking any legal steps whatever in the matter. My father, however, wrote in a threatening tone to Faulkner, demanding a surrender of the author of the obnoxious article. The answer to this application is still in my possession, and is penned in an apologetic tone: it states that the manuscript had been handed in, paid for, and inserted as an advertisement, without sufficient inquiry, or any knowledge as to whom it referred.

No step, however, was taken to clear my uncle's character in the judgment of the public; and as he immediately sold a small property, the application of the proceeds of which was known to none, he was said to have disposed of it to enable himself to buy off the threatened information. However the truth might have been, it is certain that no charges respecting the mysterious murder were afterwards publicly made against my uncle, and, as far as external disturbances were concerned, he enjoyed henceforward perfect security and quiet.

A deep and lasting impression, however, had been made upon the public mind, and Sir Arthur T —— n was no longer visited or noticed by the gentry and aristocracy of the county, whose attention and courtesies he had hitherto received. He accordingly affected to despise these enjoyments which he could not procure, and shunned even that society which he might have commanded.

This is all that I need recapitulate of my uncle's history, and I now recur to my own. Although my father had never, within my recollection, visited, or been visited by, my uncle, each being of sedentary, procrastinating, and secluded habits, and their respective residences being very far apart — the one lying in the county of Galway, the other in that of Cork — he was strongly attached to his brother, and evinced his affection by an active correspondence, and by deeply and proudly resenting that neglect which had marked Sir Arthur as unfit to mix in society.

When I was about eighteen years of age, my father, whose health had been gradually declining, died, leaving me in heart wretched and desolate, and, owing to his previous seclusion, with few acquaintances, and almost no friends.

The provisions of his will were curious, and when I had sufficiently come to myself to listen to or comprehend them, surprised me not a little: all his vast property was left to me, and to the heirs of my body, for ever; and, in default of such heirs, it was to go after my death to my uncle, Sir Arthur, without any entail.

At the same time, the will appointed him my guardian, desiring that I might be received within his house, and reside with his family, and under his care, during the term of my minority; and in consideration of the increased expense consequent upon such an arrangement, a handsome annuity was allotted to him during the term of my proposed residence.

The object of this last provision I at once understood: my father desired, by making it the direct, apparent interest of Sir Arthur that I should die without issue, while at the same time he placed me wholly in his power, to prove to the world how great and unshaken was his confidence in his brother's innocence and honour, and also to afford him an opportunity of showing that this mark of confidence was not unworthily bestowed.

It was a strange, perhaps an idle scheme; but as I had been always brought up in the habit of considering my uncle as a deeply-injured man, and had been taught, almost as a part of my religion, to regard him as the very soul of honour, I felt no further uneasiness respecting the arrangement than that likely to result to a timid girl, of secluded habits, from the immediate prospect of taking up her abode for the first time in her life among total strangers. Previous to leaving my home, which I felt I should do with a heavy heart, I received a most tender and affectionate letter from my uncle, calculated, if anything could do so, to remove the bitterness of parting from scenes familiar and dear from my earliest childhood, and in some degree to reconcile me to the measure.

It was during a fine autumn that I approached the old domain of Carrickleigh. I shall not soon forget the impression of sadness and of gloom which all that I saw produced upon my mind; the sunbeams were falling with a rich and melancholy tint upon the fine old trees, which stood in lordly groups, casting their long, sweeping shadows over rock and sward. There was an air of neglect and decay about the spot, which amounted almost to desolation; the symptoms of this increased in number as we approached the building itself, near which the ground had been originally more artificially and carefully cultivated than elsewhere, and whose neglect consequently more immediately and strikingly betrayed itself.

As we proceeded, the road wound near the beds of what had been formally two fish-ponds, which were now nothing more than stagnant swamps, overgrown with rank weeds, and here and there encroached upon by the straggling underwood; the avenue itself was much broken, and in many places the stones were almost concealed by grass and nettles; the loose stone walls which had here and there intersected the broad park were, in many places, broken down, so as no longer to answer their original purpose as fences; piers were now and then to be seen, but the gates were gone; and, to add to the general air of dilapidation, some huge trunks were lying scattered through the venerable old trees, either the work of the winter storms, or perhaps the victims of some extensive but desultory scheme of denudation, which the projector had not capital or perseverance to carry into full effect.

After the carriage had travelled a mile of this avenue, we reached the summit of rather an abrupt eminence, one of the many which added to the picturesqueness, if not to the convenience of this rude passage. From the top of this ridge the grey walls of Carrickleigh were visible, rising at a small distance in front, and darkened by the hoary wood which crowded around them. It was a quadrangular building of considerable extent, and the front which lay towards us, and in which the great entrance was placed, bore unequivocal marks of antiquity; the timeworn, solemn aspect of the old building, the ruinous and deserted appearance of the whole place, and the associations which connected it with a dark page in the history of my family, combined to depress spirits already predisposed for the reception of sombre and dejecting impressions.

When the carriage drew up in the grass-grown court yard before the hall-door, two lazy-looking men, whose appearance well accorded with that of the place which they tenanted, alarmed by the obstreperous barking of a great chained dog, ran out from some half-ruinous outhouses, and took charge of the horses; the hall-door stood open, and I entered a gloomy and imperfectly lighted apartment, and found no one within. However, I had not long to wait in this awkward predicament, for before my luggage had been deposited in the house, indeed, before I had well removed my cloak and other wraps, so as to enable me to look around, a young girl ran lightly into the hall, and kissing me heartily, and somewhat boisterously, exclaimed:

‘My dear cousin, my dear Margaret — I am so delighted — so out of breath. We did not expect you till ten o’clock; my father is somewhere about the place, he must be close at hand. James — Corney — run out and tell your master — my brother is seldom at home, at least at any reasonable hour — you must be so tired — so fatigued — let me show you to your room — see that Lady Margaret’s luggage is all brought up — you must lie down and rest yourself — Deborah, bring some coffee — up these stairs; we are so delighted to see you — you cannot think how lonely I have been — how steep these stairs are, are not they? I am so glad you are come — I could hardly bring myself to believe that you were really coming — how good of you, dear Lady Margaret.’

There was real goodnature and delight in my cousin’s greeting, and a kind of constitutional confidence of manner which placed me at once at ease, and made me feel immediately upon terms of intimacy with her. The room into which she ushered me, although partaking in the general air of decay which pervaded the mansion and all about it, had nevertheless been fitted up with evident attention to comfort, and even with some dingy attempt at luxury; but what pleased me most was that it opened, by a second door, upon a lobby which communicated with my fair cousin’s apartment; a circumstance which divested the room, in my eyes, of the air of solitude and sadness which would otherwise have characterised it, to a degree almost painful to one so dejected in spirits as I was.

After such arrangements as I found necessary were completed, we both went down to the parlour, a large wainscoted room, hung round with grim old portraits, and, as I was not sorry to see, containing in its ample grate a large and cheerful fire. Here my cousin had leisure to talk more at her ease; and from her I learned something of the manners and the habits of the two remaining members of her family, whom I had not yet seen.

On my arrival I had known nothing of the family among whom I was come to reside, except that it consisted of three individuals, my uncle, and his son and daughter, Lady T —— n having been long dead. In addition to this very scanty stock of information, I shortly learned from my communicative companion that my uncle was, as I had suspected, completely retired in his habits, and besides that, having been so far back as she could well recollect, always rather strict, as reformed rakes frequently become, he had latterly been growing more gloomily and sternly religious than heretofore.

Her account of her brother was far less favourable, though she did not say anything directly to his disadvantage. From all that I could gather from her, I was led to suppose that he was a specimen of the idle, coarse-mannered, profligate, low-minded ‘squirearchy’ — a result which might naturally have flowed from the circumstance of his being, as it were, outlawed from society, and driven for companionship to grades below his own — enjoying, too, the dangerous prerogative of spending much money.

However, you may easily suppose that I found nothing in my cousin’s communication fully to bear me out in so very decided a conclusion.

I awaited the arrival of my uncle, which was every moment to be expected, with feelings half of alarm, half of curiosity — a sensation which I have often since experienced, though to a less degree, when upon the point of standing for the first time in the presence of one of whom I have long been in the habit of hearing or thinking with interest.

It was, therefore, with some little perturbation that I heard, first a slight bustle at the outer door, then a slow step traverse the hall, and finally witnessed the door open, and my uncle enter the room. He was a striking-looking man; from peculiarities both of person and of garb, the whole effect of his appearance amounted to extreme singularity. He was tall, and when young his figure must have been strikingly elegant; as it was, however, its effect was marred by a very decided stoop. His dress was of a sober colour, and in fashion anterior to anything which I could remember. It was, however, handsome, and by no means carelessly put on; but what completed the singularity of his appearance was his uncut, white hair, which hung in long, but not at all neglected curls, even so far as his shoulders, and which combined with his regularly classic features, and fine dark eyes, to bestow upon him an air of venerable dignity and pride, which I have never seen equalled elsewhere. I rose as he entered, and met him about the middle of the room; he kissed my cheek and both my hands, saying:

‘You are most welcome, dear child, as welcome as the command of this poor place and all that it contains can make you. I am most rejoiced to see you — truly rejoiced. I trust that you are not much fatigued — pray be seated again.’ He led me to my chair, and continued: ‘I am glad to perceive you have made acquaintance with Emily already; I see, in your being thus brought together, the foundation of a lasting friendship. You are both innocent, and both young. God bless you — God bless you, and make you all that I could wish.’

He raised his eyes, and remained for a few moments silent, as if in secret prayer. I felt that it was impossible that this man, with feelings so quick, so warm, so tender, could be the wretch that public opinion had represented him to be. I was more than ever convinced of his innocence.

His manner was, or appeared to me, most fascinating; there was a mingled kindness and courtesy in it which seemed to speak benevolence itself. It was a manner which I felt cold art could never have taught; it owed most of its charm to its appearing to emanate directly from the heart; it must be a genuine index of the owner’s mind. So I thought.

My uncle having given me fully to understand that I was most welcome, and might command whatever was his own, pressed me to take some refreshment; and on my refusing, he observed that previously to bidding me goodnight, he had one duty further to perform, one in whose observance he was convinced I would cheerfully acquiesce.

He then proceeded to read a chapter from the Bible; after which he took his leave with the same affectionate kindness with which he had greeted me, having repeated his desire that I should consider everything in his house as altogether at my disposal. It is needless to say that I was much pleased with my uncle — it was impossible to avoid being so; and I could not help saying to myself, if such a man as this is not safe from the assaults of slander, who is? I felt much happier than I had done since my father's death, and enjoyed that night the first refreshing sleep which had visited me since that event.

My curiosity respecting my male cousin did not long remain unsatisfied — he appeared the next day at dinner. His manners, though not so coarse as I had expected, were exceedingly disagreeable; there was an assurance and a forwardness for which I was not prepared; there was less of the vulgarity of manner, and almost more of that of the mind, than I had anticipated. I felt quite uncomfortable in his presence; there was just that confidence in his look and tone which would read encouragement even in mere toleration; and I felt more disgusted and annoyed at the coarse and extravagant compliments which he was pleased from time to time to pay me, than perhaps the extent of the atrocity might fully have warranted. It was, however, one consolation that he did not often appear, being much engrossed by pursuits about which I neither knew nor cared anything; but when he did appear, his attentions, either with a view to his amusement or to some more serious advantage, were so obviously and perseveringly directed to me, that young and inexperienced as I was, even *I* could not be ignorant of his preference. I felt more provoked by this odious persecution than I can express, and discouraged him with so much vigour, that I employed even rudeness to convince him that his assiduities were unwelcome; but all in vain.

This had gone on for nearly a twelvemonth, to my infinite annoyance, when one day as I was sitting at some needlework with my companion Emily, as was my habit, in the parlour, the door opened, and my cousin Edward entered the room. There was something, I thought, odd in his manner — a kind of struggle between shame and impudence — a kind of flurry and ambiguity which made him appear, if possible, more than ordinarily disagreeable.

'Your servant, ladies,' he said, seating himself at the same time; 'sorry to spoil your tete-a-tete, but never mind, I'll only take Emily's place for a minute or two; and then we part for a while, fair cousin. Emily, my father wants you in the corner turret. No shilly-shally; he's in a hurry.' She hesitated. 'Be off — tramp, march!' he exclaimed, in a tone which the poor girl dared not disobey.

She left the room, and Edward followed her to the door. He stood there for a minute or two, as if reflecting what he should say, perhaps satisfying himself that no one was within hearing in the hall.

At length he turned about, having closed the door, as if carelessly, with his foot; and advancing slowly, as if in deep thought, he took his seat at the side of the table opposite to mine.

There was a brief interval of silence, after which he said:

‘I imagine that you have a shrewd suspicion of the object of my early visit; but I suppose I must go into particulars. Must I?’

‘I have no conception,’ I replied, ‘what your object may be.’

‘Well, well,’ said he, becoming more at his ease as he proceeded, ‘it may be told in a few words. You know that it is totally impossible — quite out of the question — that an offhand young fellow like me, and a good-looking girl like yourself, could meet continually, as you and I have done, without an attachment — a liking growing up on one side or other; in short, I think I have let you know as plain as if I spoke it, that I have been in love with you almost from the first time I saw you.’

He paused; but I was too much horrified to speak. He interpreted my silence favourably.

‘I can tell you,’ he continued, ‘I’m reckoned rather hard to please, and very hard to HIT. I can’t say when I was taken with a girl before; so you see fortune reserved me — — ‘

Here the odious wretch wound his arm round my waist. The action at once restored me to utterance, and with the most indignant vehemence I released myself from his hold, and at the same time said:

‘I have not been insensible, sir, of your most disagreeable attentions — they have long been a source of much annoyance to me; and you must be aware that I have marked my disapprobation — my disgust — as unequivocally as I possibly could, without actual indelicacy.’

I paused, almost out of breath from the rapidity with which I had spoken; and without giving him time to renew the conversation, I hastily quitted the room, leaving him in a paroxysm of rage and mortification. As I ascended the stairs, I heard him open the parlour-door with violence, and take two or three rapid strides in the direction in which I was moving. I was now much frightened, and ran the whole way until I reached my room; and having locked the door, I listened breathlessly, but heard no sound. This relieved me for the present; but so much had I been overcome by the agitation and annoyance attendant upon the scene which I had just gone through, that when my cousin Emily knocked at my door, I was weeping in strong hysterics.

You will readily conceive my distress, when you reflect upon my strong dislike to my cousin Edward, combined with my youth and extreme inexperience. Any proposal of such a nature must have agitated me; but that it should have come from the man whom of all others I most loathed and abhorred, and to whom I had, as clearly as manner could do it, expressed the state of my feelings, was almost too overwhelming to be borne. It was a calamity, too, in which I could not claim the sympathy of my cousin Emily, which had always been extended to me in my minor grievances. Still I hoped that it might not be unattended with good; for I thought that one inevitable and most welcome consequence would result from this painful eclaircissment, in the discontinuance of my cousin's odious persecution.

When I arose next morning, it was with the fervent hope that I might never again behold the face, or even hear the name, of my cousin Edward; but such a consummation, though devoutly to be wished, was hardly likely to occur. The painful impressions of yesterday were too vivid to be at once erased; and I could not help feeling some dim foreboding of coming annoyance and evil.

To expect on my cousin's part anything like delicacy or consideration for me, was out of the question. I saw that he had set his heart upon my property, and that he was not likely easily to forego such an acquisition — possessing what might have been considered opportunities and facilities almost to compel my compliance.

I now keenly felt the unreasonableness of my father's conduct in placing me to reside with a family of all whose members, with one exception, he was wholly ignorant, and I bitterly felt the helplessness of my situation. I determined, however, in case of my cousin's persevering in his addresses, to lay all the particulars before my uncle, although he had never in kindness or intimacy gone a step beyond our first interview, and to throw myself upon his hospitality and his sense of honour for protection against a repetition of such scenes.

My cousin's conduct may appear to have been an inadequate cause for such serious uneasiness; but my alarm was caused neither by his acts nor words, but entirely by his manner, which was strange and even intimidating to excess. At the beginning of the yesterday's interview there was a sort of bullying swagger in his air, which towards the end gave place to the brutal vehemence of an undisguised ruffian — a transition which had tempted me into a belief that he might seek even forcibly to extort from me a consent to his wishes, or by means still more horrible, of which I scarcely dared to trust myself to think, to possess himself of my property.

I was early next day summoned to attend my uncle in his private room, which lay in a corner turret of the old building; and thither I accordingly went, wondering all the way what this unusual measure might prelude. When I entered the room, he did not rise in his usual courteous way to greet me, but simply pointed to a chair opposite to his own. This boded nothing agreeable. I sat down, however, silently waiting until he should open the conversation.

'Lady Margaret,' at length he said, in a tone of greater sternness than I thought him capable of using, 'I have hitherto spoken to you as a friend, but I have not forgotten that I am also your guardian, and that my authority as such gives me a right to control your conduct. I shall put a question to you, and I expect and will demand a plain, direct answer. Have I rightly been informed that you have contemptuously rejected the suit and hand of my son Edward?'

I stammered forth with a good deal of trepidation:

'I believe — that is, I have, sir, rejected my cousin's proposals; and my coldness and discouragement might have convinced him that I had determined to do so.'

'Madam,' replied he, with suppressed, but, as it appeared to me, intense anger, 'I have lived long enough to know that COLDNESS and discouragement, and such terms, form the common cant of a worthless coquette. You know to the full, as well as I, that COLDNESS AND DISCOURAGEMENT may be so exhibited as to convince their object that he is neither distasteful or indifferent to the person who wears this manner. You know, too, none better, that an affected neglect, when skilfully managed, is amongst the most formidable of the engines which artful beauty can employ. I tell you, madam, that having, without one word spoken in discouragement, permitted my son's most marked attentions for a twelvemonth or more, you have no right to dismiss him with no further explanation than demurely telling him that you had always looked coldly upon him; and neither your wealth nor your LADYSHIP' (there was an emphasis of scorn on the word, which would have become Sir Giles Overreach himself) 'can warrant you in treating with contempt the affectionate regard of an honest heart.'

I was too much shocked at this undisguised attempt to bully me into an acquiescence in the interested and unprincipled plan for their own aggrandisement, which I now perceived my uncle and his son to have deliberately entered into, at once to find strength or collectedness to frame an answer to what he had said. At length I replied, with some firmness:

'In all that you have just now said, sir, you have grossly misstated my conduct and motives. Your information must have been most incorrect as far as it regards my conduct towards my cousin; my manner towards him could have conveyed nothing but dislike; and if anything could have added to the strong aversion which I have long felt towards him, it would be his attempting thus to trick and frighten me into a marriage which he knows to be revolting to me, and which is sought by him only as a means for securing to himself whatever property is mine.'

As I said this, I fixed my eyes upon those of my uncle, but he was too old in the world's ways to falter beneath the gaze of more searching eyes than mine; he simply said:

'Are you acquainted with the provisions of your father's will?'

I answered in the affirmative; and he continued:

'Then you must be aware that if my son Edward were — which God forbid — the unprincipled, reckless man you pretend to think him' — (here he spoke very slowly, as if he intended that every word which escaped him should be registered in my memory, while at the same time the expression of his countenance underwent a gradual but horrible change, and the eyes which he fixed upon me became so darkly vivid, that I almost lost sight of everything else)— 'if he were what you have described him, think you, girl, he could find no briefer means than wedding contracts to gain his ends? 'twas but to gripe your slender neck until the breath had stopped, and lands, and lakes, and all were his.'

I stood staring at him for many minutes after he had ceased to speak, fascinated by the terrible serpent-like gaze, until he continued with a welcome change of countenance:

‘I will not speak again to you upon this — topic until one month has passed. You shall have time to consider the relative advantages of the two courses which are open to you. I should be sorry to hurry you to a decision. I am satisfied with having stated my feelings upon the subject, and pointed out to you the path of duty. Remember this day month — not one word sooner.’

He then rose, and I left the room, much agitated and exhausted.

This interview, all the circumstances attending it, but most particularly the formidable expression of my uncle’s countenance while he talked, though hypothetically, of murder, combined to arouse all my worst suspicions of him. I dreaded to look upon the face that had so recently worn the appalling livery of guilt and malignity. I regarded it with the mingled fear and loathing with which one looks upon an object which has tortured them in a nightmare.

In a few days after the interview, the particulars of which I have just related, I found a note upon my toilet-table, and on opening it I read as follows:

‘MY DEAR LADY MARGARET,

‘You will be perhaps surprised to
see a strange face in your room to-day. I have dismissed your Irish maid, and secured a French one to wait upon you — a step rendered necessary by my proposing shortly to visit the Continent, with all my family.

‘Your faithful guardian,

‘ARTHUR T —— N.’

On inquiry, I found that my faithful attendant was actually gone, and far on her way to the town of Galway; and in her stead there appeared a tall, rawboned, ill-looking, elderly Frenchwoman, whose sullen and presuming manners seemed to imply that her vocation had never before been that of a lady’s-maid. I could not help regarding her as a creature of my uncle’s, and therefore to be dreaded, even had she been in no other way suspicious.

Days and weeks passed away without any, even a momentary doubt upon my part, as to the course to be pursued by me. The allotted period had at length elapsed; the day arrived on which I was to communicate my decision to my uncle. Although my resolution had never for a moment wavered, I could not shake of the dread of the approaching colloquy; and my heart sunk within me as I heard the expected summons.

I had not seen my cousin Edward since the occurrence of the grand eclaircissment; he must have studiously avoided me — I suppose from policy, it could not have been from delicacy. I was prepared for a terrific burst of fury from my uncle, as soon as I should make known my determination; and I not unreasonably feared that some act of violence or of intimidation would next be resorted to.

Filled with these dreary forebodings, I fearfully opened the study door, and the next minute I stood in my uncle's presence. He received me with a politeness which I dreaded, as arguing a favourable anticipation respecting the answer which I was to give; and after some slight delay, he began by saying:

'It will be a relief to both of us, I believe, to bring this conversation as soon as possible to an issue. You will excuse me, then, my dear niece, for speaking with an abruptness which, under other circumstances, would be unpardonable. You have, I am certain, given the subject of our last interview fair and serious consideration; and I trust that you are now prepared with candour to lay your answer before me. A few words will suffice — we perfectly understand one another.'

He paused, and I, though feeling that I stood upon a mine which might in an instant explode, nevertheless answered with perfect composure:

'I must now, sir, make the same reply which I did upon the last occasion, and I reiterate the declaration which I then made, that I never can nor will, while life and reason remain, consent to a union with my cousin Edward.'

This announcement wrought no apparent change in Sir Arthur, except that he became deadly, almost lividly pale. He seemed lost in dark thought for a minute, and then with a slight effort said:

'You have answered me honestly and directly; and you say your resolution is unchangeable. Well, would it had been otherwise — would it had been otherwise — but be it as it is — I am satisfied.'

He gave me his hand — it was cold and damp as death; under an assumed calmness, it was evident that he was fearfully agitated. He continued to hold my hand with an almost painful pressure, while, as if unconsciously, seeming to forget my presence, he muttered:

'Strange, strange, strange, indeed! fatuity, helpless fatuity!' there was here a long pause. 'Madness INDEED to strain a cable that is rotten to the very heart — it must break — and then — all goes.'

There was again a pause of some minutes, after which, suddenly changing his voice and manner to one of wakeful alacrity, he exclaimed:

'Margaret, my son Edward shall plague you no more. He leaves this country on tomorrow for France — he shall speak no more upon this subject — never, never more — whatever events depended upon your answer must now take their own course; but, as for this fruitless proposal, it has been tried enough; it can be repeated no more.'

At these words he coldly suffered my hand to drop, as if to express his total abandonment of all his projected schemes of alliance; and certainly the action, with the accompanying words, produced upon my mind a more solemn and depressing effect than I believed possible to have been caused by the course which I had determined to pursue; it struck upon my heart with an awe and heaviness which WILL accompany the accomplishment of an important and irrevocable act, even though no doubt or scruple remains to make it possible that the agent should wish it undone.

'Well,' said my uncle, after a little time, 'we now cease to speak upon this topic, never to resume it again. Remember you shall have no farther uneasiness from Edward; he leaves Ireland for France on tomorrow; this will be a relief to you. May I depend upon your HONOUR that no word touching the subject of this interview shall ever escape you?'

I gave him the desired assurance; he said:

'It is well — I am satisfied — we have nothing more, I believe, to say upon either side, and my presence must be a restraint upon you, I shall therefore bid you farewell.'

I then left the apartment, scarcely knowing what to think of the strange interview which had just taken place.

On the next day my uncle took occasion to tell me that Edward had actually sailed, if his intention had not been interfered with by adverse circumstances; and two days subsequently he actually produced a letter from his son, written, as it said, ON BOARD, and despatched while the ship was getting under weigh. This was a great satisfaction to me, and as being likely to prove so, it was no doubt communicated to me by Sir Arthur.

During all this trying period, I had found infinite consolation in the society and sympathy of my dear cousin Emily. I never in afterlife formed a friendship so close, so fervent, and upon which, in all its progress, I could look back with feelings of such unalloyed pleasure, upon whose termination I must ever dwell with so deep, yet so unembittered regret. In cheerful converse with her I soon recovered my spirits considerably, and passed my time agreeably enough, although still in the strictest seclusion.

Matters went on sufficiently smooth, although I could not help sometimes feeling a momentary, but horrible uncertainty respecting my uncle's character; which was not altogether unwarranted by the circumstances of the two trying interviews whose particulars I have just detailed. The unpleasant impression which these conferences were calculated to leave upon my mind, was fast wearing away, when there occurred a circumstance, slight indeed in itself, but calculated irresistibly to awaken all my worst suspicions, and to overwhelm me again with anxiety and terror.

I had one day left the house with my cousin Emily, in order to take a ramble of considerable length, for the purpose of sketching some favourite views, and we had walked about half a mile when I perceived that we had forgotten our drawing materials, the absence of which would have defeated the object of our walk. Laughing at our own thoughtlessness, we returned to the house, and leaving Emily without, I ran upstairs to procure the drawing-books and pencils, which lay in my bedroom.

As I ran up the stairs I was met by the tall, ill-looking Frenchwoman, evidently a good deal flurried.

'Que veut, madame?' said she, with a more decided effort to be polite than I had ever known her make before.

'No, no — no matter,' said I, hastily running by her in the direction of my room.

'Madame,' cried she, in a high key, 'restez ici, s'il vous plait; votre chambre n'est pas faite — your room is not ready for your reception yet.'

I continued to move on without heeding her. She was some way behind me, and feeling that she could not otherwise prevent my entrance, for I was now upon the very lobby, she made a desperate attempt to seize hold of my person: she succeeded in grasping the end of my shawl, which she drew from my shoulders; but slipping at the same time upon the polished oak floor, she fell at full length upon the boards.

A little frightened as well as angry at the rudeness of this strange woman, I hastily pushed open the door of my room, at which I now stood, in order to escape from her; but great was my amazement on entering to find the apartment preoccupied.

The window was open, and beside it stood two male figures; they appeared to be examining the fastenings of the casement, and their backs were turned towards the door. One of them was my uncle; they both turned on my entrance, as if startled. The stranger was booted and cloaked, and wore a heavy broadleafed hat over his brows. He turned but for a moment, and averted his face; but I had seen enough to convince me that he was no other than my cousin Edward. My uncle had some iron instrument in his hand, which he hastily concealed behind his back; and coming towards me, said something as if in an explanatory tone; but I was too much shocked and confounded to understand what it might be. He said something about 'REPAIRS — window — frames — cold, and safety.'

I did not wait, however, to ask or to receive explanations, but hastily left the room. As I went down the stairs I thought I heard the voice of the Frenchwoman in all the shrill volubility of excuse, which was met, however, by suppressed but vehement imprecations, or what seemed to me to be such, in which the voice of my cousin Edward distinctly mingled.

I joined my cousin Emily quite out of breath. I need not say that my head was too full of other things to think much of drawing for that day. I imparted to her frankly the cause of my alarms, but at the same time as gently as I could; and with tears she promised vigilance, and devotion, and love. I never had reason for a moment to repent the unreserved confidence which I then reposed in her. She was no less surprised than I at the unexpected appearance of Edward, whose departure for France neither of us had for a moment doubted, but which was now proved by his actual presence to be nothing more than an imposture, practised, I feared, for no good end.

The situation in which I had found my uncle had removed completely all my doubts as to his designs. I magnified suspicions into certainties, and dreaded night after night that I should be murdered in my bed. The nervousness produced by sleepless nights and days of anxious fears increased the horrors of my situation to such a degree, that I at length wrote a letter to a Mr. Jefferies, an old and faithful friend of my father's, and perfectly acquainted with all his affairs, praying him, for God's sake, to relieve me from my present terrible situation, and communicating without reserve the nature and grounds of my suspicions.

This letter I kept sealed and directed for two or three days always about my person, for discovery would have been ruinous, in expectation of an opportunity which might be safely trusted, whereby to have it placed in the postoffice. As neither Emily nor I were permitted to pass beyond the precincts of the demesne itself, which was surrounded by high walls formed of dry stone, the difficulty of procuring such an opportunity was greatly enhanced.

At this time Emily had a short conversation with her father, which she reported to me instantly.

After some indifferent matter, he had asked her whether she and I were upon good terms, and whether I was unreserved in my disposition. She answered in the affirmative; and he then inquired whether I had been much surprised to find him in my chamber on the other day. She answered that I had been both surprised and amused.

'And what did she think of George Wilson's appearance?'

'Who?' inquired she.

'Oh, the architect,' he answered, 'who is to contract for the repairs of the house; he is accounted a handsome fellow.'

'She could not see his face,' said Emily, 'and she was in such a hurry to escape that she scarcely noticed him.'

Sir Arthur appeared satisfied, and the conversation ended.

This slight conversation, repeated accurately to me by Emily, had the effect of confirming, if indeed anything was required to do so, all that I had before believed as to Edward's actual presence; and I naturally became, if possible, more anxious than ever to despatch the letter to Mr. Jefferies. An opportunity at length occurred.

As Emily and I were walking one day near the gate of the demesne, a lad from the village happened to be passing down the avenue from the house; the spot was secluded, and as this person was not connected by service with those whose observation I dreaded, I committed the letter to his keeping, with strict injunctions that he should put it without delay into the receiver of the town postoffice; at the same time I added a suitable gratuity, and the man having made many protestations of punctuality, was soon out of sight.

He was hardly gone when I began to doubt my discretion in having trusted this person; but I had no better or safer means of despatching the letter, and I was not warranted in suspecting him of such wanton dishonesty as an inclination to tamper with it; but I could not be quite satisfied of its safety until I had received an answer, which could not arrive for a few days. Before I did, however, an event occurred which a little surprised me.

I was sitting in my bedroom early in the day, reading by myself, when I heard a knock at the door.

'Come in,' said I; and my uncle entered the room.

'Will you excuse me?' said he. 'I sought you in the parlour, and thence I have come here. I desired to say a word with you. I trust that you have hitherto found my conduct to you such as that of a guardian towards his ward should be.'

I dared not withhold my consent.

'And,' he continued, 'I trust that you have not found me harsh or unjust, and that you have perceived, my dear niece, that I have sought to make this poor place as agreeable to you as may be.'

I assented again; and he put his hand in his pocket, whence he drew a folded paper, and dashing it upon the table with startling emphasis, he said:

'Did you write that letter?'

The sudden and tearful alteration of his voice, manner, and face, but, more than all, the unexpected production of my letter to Mr. Jefferies, which I at once recognised, so confounded and terrified me, that I felt almost choking.

I could not utter a word.

'Did you write that letter?' he repeated with slow and intense emphasis.' You did, liar and hypocrite! You dared to write this foul and infamous libel; but it shall be your last. Men will universally believe you mad, if I choose to call for an inquiry. I can make you appear so. The suspicions expressed in this letter are the hallucinations and alarms of moping lunacy. I have defeated your first attempt, madam; and by the holy God, if ever you make another, chains, straw, darkness, and the keeper's whip shall be your lasting portion!'

With these astounding words he left the room, leaving me almost fainting.

I was now almost reduced to despair; my last cast had failed; I had no course left but that of eloping secretly from the castle, and placing myself under the protection of the nearest magistrate. I felt if this were not done, and speedily, that I should be MURDERED.

No one, from mere description, can have an idea of the unmitigated horror of my situation — a helpless, weak, inexperienced girl, placed under the power and wholly at the mercy of evil men, and feeling that she had it not in her power to escape for a moment from the malignant influences under which she was probably fated to fall; and with a consciousness that if violence, if murder were designed, her dying shriek would be lost in void space; no human being would be near to aid her, no human interposition could deliver her.

I had seen Edward but once during his visit, and as I did not meet with him again, I began to think that he must have taken his departure — a conviction which was to a certain degree satisfactory, as I regarded his absence as indicating the removal of immediate danger.

Emily also arrived circuitously at the same conclusion, and not without good grounds, for she managed indirectly to learn that Edward's black horse had actually been for a day and part of a night in the castle stables, just at the time of her brother's supposed visit. The horse had gone, and, as she argued, the rider must have departed with it.

This point being so far settled, I felt a little less uncomfortable: when being one day alone in my bedroom, I happened to look out from the window, and, to my unutterable horror, I beheld, peering through an opposite casement, my cousin Edward's face. Had I seen the evil one himself in bodily shape, I could not have experienced a more sickening revulsion.

I was too much appalled to move at once from the window, but I did so soon enough to avoid his eye. He was looking fixedly into the narrow quadrangle upon which the window opened. I shrank back unperceived, to pass the rest of the day in terror and despair. I went to my room early that night, but I was too miserable to sleep.

At about twelve o'clock, feeling very nervous, I determined to call my cousin Emily, who slept, you will remember, in the next room, which communicated with mine by a second door. By this private entrance I found my way into her chamber, and without difficulty persuaded her to return to my room and sleep with me. We accordingly lay down together, she undressed, and I with my clothes on, for I was every moment walking up and down the room, and felt too nervous and miserable to think of rest or comfort.

Emily was soon fast asleep, and I lay awake, fervently longing for the first pale gleam of morning, reckoning every stroke of the old clock with an impatience which made every hour appear like six.

It must have been about one o'clock when I thought I heard a slight noise at the partition-door between Emily's room and mine, as if caused by somebody's turning the key in the lock. I held my breath, and the same sound was repeated at the second door of my room — that which opened upon the lobby — the sound was here distinctly caused by the revolution of the bolt in the lock, and it was followed by a slight pressure upon the door itself, as if to ascertain the security of the lock.

The person, whoever it might be, was probably satisfied, for I heard the old boards of the lobby creak and strain, as if under the weight of somebody moving cautiously over them. My sense of hearing became unnaturally, almost painfully acute. I suppose the imagination added distinctness to sounds vague in themselves. I thought that I could actually hear the breathing of the person who was slowly returning down the lobby. At the head of the staircase there appeared to occur a pause; and I could distinctly hear two or three sentences hastily whispered; the steps then descended the stairs with apparently less caution. I now ventured to walk quickly and lightly to the lobby-door, and attempted to open it; it was indeed fast locked upon the outside, as was also the other.

I now felt that the dreadful hour was come; but one desperate expedient remained — it was to awaken Emily, and by our united strength to attempt to force the partition-door, which was slighter than the other, and through this to pass to the lower part of the house, whence it might be possible to escape to the grounds, and forth to the village.

I returned to the bedside and shook Emily, but in vain. Nothing that I could do availed to produce from her more than a few incoherent words — it was a deathlike sleep. She had certainly drank of some narcotic, as had I probably also, spite of all the caution with which I had examined everything presented to us to eat or drink.

I now attempted, with as little noise as possible, to force first one door, then the other — but all in vain. I believe no strength could have effected my object, for both doors opened inwards. I therefore collected whatever movables I could carry thither, and piled them against the doors, so as to assist me in whatever attempts I should make to resist the entrance of those without. I then returned to the bed and endeavoured again, but fruitlessly, to awaken my cousin. It was not sleep, it was torpor, lethargy, death. I knelt down and prayed with an agony of earnestness; and then seating myself upon the bed, I awaited my fate with a kind of terrible tranquillity.

I heard a faint clanking sound from the narrow court which I have already mentioned, as if caused by the scraping of some iron instrument against stones or rubbish. I at first determined not to disturb the calmness which I now felt, by uselessly watching the proceedings of those who sought my life; but as the sounds continued, the horrible curiosity which I felt overcame every other emotion, and I determined, at all hazards, to gratify it. I therefore crawled upon my knees to the window, so as to let the smallest portion of my head appear above the sill.

The moon was shining with an uncertain radiance upon the antique grey buildings, and obliquely upon the narrow court beneath, one side of which was therefore clearly illuminated, while the other was lost in obscurity, the sharp outlines of the old gables, with their nodding clusters of ivy, being at first alone visible.

Whoever or whatever occasioned the noise which had excited my curiosity, was concealed under the shadow of the dark side of the quadrangle. I placed my hand over my eyes to shade them from the moonlight, which was so bright as to be almost dazzling, and, peering into the darkness, I first dimly, but afterwards gradually, almost with full distinctness, beheld the form of a man engaged in digging what appeared to be a rude hole close under the wall. Some implements, probably a shovel and pickaxe, lay beside him, and to these he every now and then applied himself as the nature of the ground required. He pursued his task rapidly, and with as little noise as possible.

‘So,’ thought I, as, shovelful after shovelful, the dislodged rubbish mounted into a heap, ‘they are digging the grave in which, before two hours pass, I must lie, a cold, mangled corpse. I am THEIRS — I cannot escape.'

I felt as if my reason was leaving me. I started to my feet, and in mere despair I applied myself again to each of the two doors alternately. I strained every nerve and sinew, but I might as well have attempted, with my single strength, to force the building itself from its foundation. I threw myself madly upon the ground, and clasped my hands over my eyes as if to shut out the horrible images which crowded upon me.

The paroxysm passed away. I prayed once more, with the bitter, agonised fervour of one who feels that the hour of death is present and inevitable. When I arose, I went once more to the window and looked out, just in time to see a shadowy figure glide stealthily along the wall. The task was finished. The catastrophe of the tragedy must soon be accomplished.

I determined now to defend my life to the last; and that I might be able to do so with some effect, I searched the room for something which might serve as a weapon; but either through accident, or from an anticipation of such a possibility, everything which might have been made available for such a purpose had been carefully removed. I must then die tamely and without an effort to defend myself.

A thought suddenly struck me — might it not be possible to escape through the door, which the assassin must open in order to enter the room? I resolved to make the attempt. I felt assured that the door through which ingress to the room would be effected, was that which opened upon the lobby. It was the more direct way, besides being, for obvious reasons, less liable to interruption than the other. I resolved, then, to place myself behind a projection of the wall, whose shadow would serve fully to conceal me, and when the door should be opened, and before they should have discovered the identity of the occupant of the bed, to creep noiselessly from the room, and then to trust to Providence for escape.

In order to facilitate this scheme, I removed all the lumber which I had heaped against the door; and I had nearly completed my arrangements, when I perceived the room suddenly darkened by the close approach of some shadowy object to the window. On turning my eyes in that direction, I observed at the top of the casement, as if suspended from above, first the feet, then the legs, then the body, and at length the whole figure of a man present himself. It was Edward T—— n.

He appeared to be guiding his descent so as to bring his feet upon the centre of the stone block which occupied the lower part of the window; and, having secured his footing upon this, he kneeled down and began to gaze into the room. As the moon was gleaming into the chamber, and the bed-curtains were drawn, he was able to distinguish the bed itself and its contents. He appeared satisfied with his scrutiny, for he looked up and made a sign with his hand, upon which the rope by which his descent had been effected was slackened from above, and he proceeded to disengage it from his waist; this accomplished, he applied his hands to the window-frame, which must have been ingeniously contrived for the purpose, for, with apparently no resistance, the whole frame, containing casement and all, slipped from its position in the wall, and was by him lowered into the room.

The cold night wind waved the bed-curtains, and he paused for a moment — all was still again — and he stepped in upon the floor of the room. He held in his hand what appeared to be a steel instrument, shaped something like a hammer, but larger and sharper at the extremities. This he held rather behind him, while, with three long, tip-toe strides, he brought himself to the bedside.

I felt that the discovery must now be made, and held my breath in momentary expectation of the execration in which he would vent his surprise and disappointment. I closed my eyes — there was a pause, but it was a short one. I heard two dull blows, given in rapid succession: a quivering sigh, and the long-drawn, heavy breathing of the sleeper was for ever suspended. I unclosed my eyes, and saw the murderer fling the quilt across the head of his victim: he then, with the instrument of death still in his hand, proceeded to the lobby-door, upon which he tapped sharply twice or thrice. A quick step was then heard approaching, and a voice whispered something from without. Edward answered, with a kind of chuckle, ‘Her ladyship is past complaining; unlock the door, in the devil’s name, unless you’re afraid to come in, and help me to lift the body out of the window.’

The key was turned in the lock — the door opened — and my uncle entered the room.

I have told you already that I had placed myself under the shade of a projection of the wall, close to the door. I had instinctively shrunk down, cowering towards the ground on the entrance of Edward through the window. When my uncle entered the room he and his son both stood so very close to me that his hand was every moment upon the point of touching my face. I held my breath, and remained motionless as death.

‘You had no interruption from the next room?’ said my uncle.

‘No,’ was the brief reply.

‘Secure the jewels, Ned; the French harpy must not lay her claws upon them. You’re a steady hand, by G —— ! not much blood — eh?’

‘Not twenty drops,’ replied his son, ‘and those on the quilt.’

‘I’m glad it’s over,’ whispered my uncle again. ‘We must lift the — the THING through the window, and lay the rubbish over it.’

They then turned to the bedside, and, winding the bedclothes round the body, carried it between them slowly to the window, and, exchanging a few brief words with some one below, they shoved it over the windowsill, and I heard it fall heavily on the ground underneath.

‘I’ll take the jewels,’ said my uncle; ‘there are two caskets in the lower drawer.’

He proceeded, with an accuracy which, had I been more at ease, would have furnished me with matter of astonishment, to lay his hand upon the very spot where my jewels lay; and having possessed himself of them, he called to his son:

‘Is the rope made fast above?’

‘I’m not a fool — to be sure it is,’ replied he.

They then lowered themselves from the window. I now rose lightly and cautiously, scarcely daring to breathe, from my place of concealment, and was creeping towards the door, when I heard my cousin’s voice, in a sharp whisper, exclaim: ‘Scramble up again! G — d d —— n you, you’ve forgot to lock the room-door!’ and I perceived, by the straining of the rope which hung from above, that the mandate was instantly obeyed.

Not a second was to be lost. I passed through the door, which was only closed, and moved as rapidly as I could, consistently with stillness, along the lobby. Before I had gone many yards, I heard the door through which I had just passed double-locked on the inside. I glided down the stairs in terror, lest, at every corner, I should meet the murderer or one of his accomplices.

I reached the hall, and listened for a moment to ascertain whether all was silent around; no sound was audible. The parlour windows opened on the park, and through one of them I might, I thought, easily effect my escape.

Accordingly, I hastily entered; but, to my consternation, a candle was burning in the room, and by its light I saw a figure seated at the dinner-table, upon which lay glasses, bottles, and the other accompaniments of a drinking-party. Two or three chairs were placed about the table irregularly, as if hastily abandoned by their occupants.

A single glance satisfied me that the figure was that of my French attendant. She was fast asleep, having probably drank deeply. There was something malignant and ghastly in the calmness of this bad woman's features, dimly illuminated as they were by the flickering blaze of the candle. A knife lay upon the table, and the terrible thought struck me— 'Should I kill this sleeping accomplice in the guilt of the murderer, and thus secure my retreat?'

Nothing could be easier — it was but to draw the blade across her throat — the work of a second. An instant's pause, however, corrected me. 'No,' thought I, 'the God who has conducted me thus far through the valley of the shadow of death, will not abandon me now. I will fall into their hands, or I will escape hence, but it shall be free from the stain of blood. His will be done.'

I felt a confidence arising from this reflection, an assurance of protection which I cannot describe. There was no other means of escape, so I advanced, with a firm step and collected mind, to the window. I noiselessly withdrew the bars and unclosed the shutters — I pushed open the casement, and, without waiting to look behind me, I ran with my utmost speed, scarcely feeling the ground under me, down the avenue, taking care to keep upon the grass which bordered it.

I did not for a moment slack my speed, and I had now gained the centre point between the park-gate and the mansion-house. Here the avenue made a wider circuit, and in order to avoid delay, I directed my way across the smooth sward round which the pathway wound, intending, at the opposite side of the flat, at a point which I distinguished by a group of old birch-trees, to enter again upon the beaten track, which was from thence tolerably direct to the gate.

I had, with my utmost speed, got about half way across this broad flat, when the rapid treading of a horse's hoofs struck upon my ear. My heart swelled in my bosom as though I would smother. The clattering of galloping hoofs approached — I was pursued — they were now upon the sward on which I was running — there was not a bush or a bramble to shelter me — and, as if to render escape altogether desperate, the moon, which had hitherto been obscured, at this moment shone forth with a broad clear light, which made every object distinctly visible.

The sounds were now close behind me. I felt my knees bending under me, with the sensation which torments one in dreams. I reeled — I stumbled — I fell — and at the same instant the cause of my alarm wheeled past me at full gallop. It was one of the young fillies which pastured loose about the park, whose frolics had thus all but maddened me with terror. I scrambled to my feet, and rushed on with weak but rapid steps, my sportive companion still galloping round and round me with many a frisk and fling, until, at length, more dead than alive, I reached the avenue-gate and crossed the stile, I scarce knew how.

I ran through the village, in which all was silent as the grave, until my progress was arrested by the hoarse voice of a sentinel, who cried: ‘Who goes there?’ I felt that I was now safe. I turned in the direction of the voice, and fell fainting at the soldier’s feet. When I came to myself; I was sitting in a miserable hovel, surrounded by strange faces, all bespeaking curiosity and compassion.

Many soldiers were in it also: indeed, as I afterwards found, it was employed as a guardroom by a detachment of troops quartered for that night in the town. In a few words I informed their officer of the circumstances which had occurred, describing also the appearance of the persons engaged in the murder; and he, without loss of time, proceeded to the mansion-house of Carrickleigh, taking with him a party of his men. But the villains had discovered their mistake, and had effected their escape before the arrival of the military.

The Frenchwoman was, however, arrested in the neighbourhood upon the next day. She was tried and condemned upon the ensuing assizes; and previous to her execution, confessed that ‘SHE HAD A HAND IN MAKING HUGH TISDAL’S BED.’ She had been a housekeeper in the castle at the time, and a kind of chere amie of my uncle’s. She was, in reality, able to speak English like a native, but had exclusively used the French language, I suppose to facilitate her disguise. She died the same hardened wretch which she had lived, confessing her crimes only, as she alleged, that her doing so might involve Sir Arthur T —— n, the great author of her guilt and misery, and whom she now regarded with unmitigated detestation.

With the particulars of Sir Arthur's and his son's escape, as far as they are known, you are acquainted. You are also in possession of their after fate — the terrible, the tremendous retribution which, after long delays of many years, finally overtook and crushed them. Wonderful and inscrutable are the dealings of God with His creatures.

Deep and fervent as must always be my gratitude to heaven for my deliverance, effected by a chain of providential occurrences, the failing of a single link of which must have ensured my destruction, I was long before I could look back upon it with other feelings than those of bitterness, almost of agony.

The only being that had ever really loved me, my nearest and dearest friend, ever ready to sympathise, to counsel, and to assist — the gayest, the gentlest, the warmest heart — the only creature on earth that cared for me — HER life had been the price of my deliverance; and I then uttered the wish, which no event of my long and sorrowful life has taught me to recall, that she had been spared, and that, in her stead, *I* were mouldering in the grave, forgotten and at rest.

THE BRIDAL OF CARRIGVARAH.

Being a Sixth Extract from the Legacy of the late Francis Purcell, P. P. of Drumcoolagh.

In a sequestered district of the county of Limerick, there stood my early life, some forty years ago, one of those strong stone buildings, half castle, half farmhouse, which are not unfrequent in the South of Ireland, and whose solid masonry and massive construction seem to prove at once the insecurity and the caution of the Cromwellite settlers who erected them. At the time of which I speak, this building was tenanted by an elderly man, whose starch and puritanic mien and manners might have become the morose preaching parliamentarian captain, who had raised the house and ruled the household more than a hundred years before; but this man, though Protestant by descent as by name, was not so in religion; he was a strict, and in outward observances, an exemplary Catholic; his father had returned in early youth to the true faith, and died in the bosom of the church.

Martin Heathcote was, at the time of which I speak, a widower, but his housekeeping was not on that account altogether solitary, for he had a daughter, whose age was now sufficiently advanced to warrant her father in imposing upon her the grave duties of domestic superintendence.

This little establishment was perfectly isolated, and very little intruded upon by acts of neighbourhood; for the rank of its occupants was of that equivocal kind which precludes all familiar association with those of a decidedly inferior rank, while it is not sufficient to entitle its possessors to the society of established gentility, among whom the nearest residents were the O’Maras of Carrigvarah, whose mansion-house, constructed out of the ruins of an old abbey, whose towers and cloisters had been levelled by the shot of Cromwell’s artillery, stood not half a mile lower upon the river banks.

Colonel O’Mara, the possessor of the estates, was then in a declining state of health, and absent with his lady from the country, leaving at the castle, his son young O’Mara, and a kind of humble companion, named Edward Dwyer, who, if report belied him not, had done in his early days some PECULIAR SERVICES for the Colonel, who had been a gay man — perhaps worse — but enough of recapitulation.

It was in the autumn of the year 17 — that the events which led to the catastrophe which I have to detail occurred. I shall run through the said recital as briefly as clearness will permit, and leave you to moralise, if such be your mood, upon the story of real life, which I even now trace at this distant period not without emotion.

It was upon a beautiful autumn evening, at that glad period of the season when the harvest yields its abundance, that two figures were seen sauntering along the banks of the winding river, which I described as bounding the farm occupied by Heathcote; they had been, as the rods and landing-nets which they listlessly carried went to show, plying the gentle, but in this case not altogether solitary craft of the fisherman. One of those persons was a tall and singularly handsome young man, whose dark hair and complexion might almost have belonged to a Spaniard, as might also the proud but melancholy expression which gave to his countenance a character which contrasts sadly, but not uninterestingly, with extreme youth; his air, as he spoke with his companion, was marked by that careless familiarity which denotes a conscious superiority of one kind or other, or which may be construed into a species of contempt; his comrade afforded to him in every respect a striking contrast. He was rather low in stature — a defect which was enhanced by a broad and square-built figure — his face was sallow, and his features had that prominence and sharpness which frequently accompany personal deformity — a remarkably wide mouth, with teeth white as the fangs of a wolf, and a pair of quick, dark eyes, whose effect was heightened by the shadow of a heavy black brow, gave to his face a power of expression, particularly when sarcastic or malignant emotions were to be exhibited, which features regularly handsome could scarcely have possessed.

‘Well, sir,’ said the latter personage, ‘I have lived in hall and abbey, town and country, here and abroad for forty years and more, and should know a thing or two, and as I am a living man, I swear I think the girl loves you.’

‘You are a fool, Ned,’ said the younger.

‘I may be a fool,’ replied the first speaker, ‘in matters where my own advantage is staked, but my eye is keen enough to see through the flimsy disguise of a country damsel at a glance; and I tell you, as surely as I hold this rod, the girl loves you.’

‘Oh I this is downright headstrong folly,’ replied the young fisherman. ‘Why, Ned, you try to persuade me against my reason, that the event which is most to be deprecated has actually occurred. She is, no doubt, a pretty girl — a beautiful girl — but I have not lost my heart to her; and why should I wish her to be in love with me? Tush, man, the days of romance are gone, and a young gentleman may talk, and walk, and laugh with a pretty country maiden, and never breathe aspirations, or vows, or sighs about the matter; unequal matches are much oftener read of than made, and the man who could, even in thought, conceive a wish against the honour of an unsuspecting, artless girl, is a villain, for whom hanging is too good.’

This concluding sentence was uttered with an animation and excitement, which the mere announcement of an abstract moral sentiment could hardly account for.

‘You are, then, indifferent, honestly and in sober earnest, indifferent to the girl?’ inquired Dwyer.

‘Altogether so,’ was the reply.

‘Then I have a request to make,’ continued Dwyer, ‘and I may as well urge it now as at any other time. I have been for nearly twenty years the faithful, and by no means useless, servant of your family; you know that I have rendered your father critical and important services — — ‘ he paused, and added hastily: ‘you are not in the mood — I tire you, sir.’

‘Nay,’ cried O’Mara, ‘I listen patiently — proceed.’

‘For all these services, and they were not, as I have said, few or valueless, I have received little more reward than liberal promises; you have told me often that this should be mended — I’ll make it easily done — I’m not unreasonable — I should be contented to hold Heathcote’s ground, along with this small farm on which we stand, as full quittance of all obligations and promises between us.’

‘But how the devil can I effect that for you; this farm, it is true, I, or my father, rather, may lease to you, but Heathcote’s title we cannot impugn; and even if we could, you would not expect us to ruin an honest man, in order to make way for YOU, Ned.’

‘What I am,’ replied Dwyer, with the calmness of one who is so accustomed to contemptuous insinuations as to receive them with perfect indifference, ‘is to be attributed to my devotedness to your honourable family — but that is neither here nor there. I do not ask you to displace

Heathcote, in order to made room for me. I know it is out of your power to do so. Now hearken to me for a moment; Heathcote's property, that which he has set out to tenants, is worth, say in rents, at most, one hundred pounds: half of this yearly amount is assigned to your father, until payment be made of a bond for a thousand pounds, with interest and soforth. Hear me patiently for a moment and I have done. Now go you to Heathcote, and tell him your father will burn the bond, and cancel the debt, upon one condition — that when I am in possession of this farm, which you can lease to me on what terms you think suitable, he will convey over his property to me, reserving what life-interest may appear fair, I engaging at the same time to marry his daughter, and make such settlements upon her as shall be thought fitting — he is not a fool — the man will close with the offer.'

O'Mara turned shortly upon Dwyer, and gazed upon him for a moment with an expression of almost unmixed resentment.

'How,' said he at length, 'YOU contract to marry Ellen Heathcote? the poor, innocent, confiding, lighthearted girl. No, no, Edward Dwyer, I know you too well for that — your services, be they what they will, must not, shall not go unrewarded — your avarice shall be appeased — but not with a human sacrifice! Dwyer, I speak to you without disguise; you know me to be acquainted with your history, and what's more, with your character. Now tell me frankly, were I to do as you desire me, in cool blood, should I not prove myself a more uncompromising and unfeeling villain than humanity even in its most monstrous shapes has ever yet given birth to?'

Dwyer met this impetuous language with the unmoved and impenetrable calmness which always marked him when excitement would have appeared in others; he even smiled as he replied: (and Dwyer's smile, for I have seen it, was characteristically of that unfortunate kind which implies, as regards the emotions of others, not sympathy but derision).

'This eloquence goes to prove Ellen Heathcote something nearer to your heart than your great indifference would have led me to suppose.'

There was something in the tone, perhaps in the truth of the insinuation, which at once kindled the quick pride and the anger of O'Mara, and he instantly replied:

'Be silent, sir, this is insolent folly.'

Whether it was that Dwyer was more keenly interested in the success of his suit, or more deeply disappointed at its failure than he cared to express, or that he was in a less complacent mood than was his wont, it is certain that his countenance expressed more emotion at this direct insult than it had ever exhibited before under similar circumstances; for his eyes gleamed for an instant with savage and undisguised ferocity upon the young man, and a dark glow crossed his brow, and for the moment he looked about to spring at the throat of his insolent patron; but the impulse whatever it might be, was quickly suppressed, and before O'Mara had time to detect the scowl, it had vanished.

'Nay, sir,' said Dwyer, 'I meant no offence, and I will take none, at your hands at least. I will confess I care not, in love and soforth, a single bean for the girl; she was the mere channel through which her father's wealth, if such a pittance deserves the name, was to have flowed into my possession — 'twas in respect of your family finances the most economical provision for myself which I could devise — a matter in which you, not I, are interested. As for women, they are all pretty much alike to me. I am too old myself to make nice distinctions, and too ugly to succeed by Cupid's arts; and when a man despairs of success, he soon ceases to care for it. So, if you know me, as you profess to do, rest satisfied "caeteris paribus;" the money part of the transaction being equally advantageous, I should regret the loss of Ellen Heathcote just as little as I should the escape of a minnow from my landing-net.'

They walked on for a few minutes in silence, which was not broken till Dwyer, who had climbed a stile in order to pass a low stone wall which lay in their way, exclaimed:

'By the rood, she's here — how like a philosopher you look.'

The conscious blood mounted to O'Mara's cheek; he crossed the stile, and, separated from him only by a slight fence and a gate, stood the subject of their recent and somewhat angry discussion.

'God save you, Miss Heathcote,' cried Dwyer, approaching the gate.

The salutation was cheerfully returned, and before anything more could pass, O'Mara had joined the party.

My friend, that you may understand the strength and depth of those impetuous passions, that you may account for the fatal infatuation which led to the catastrophe which I have to relate, I must tell you, that though I have seen the beauties of cities and of courts, with all the splendour of studied ornament about them to enhance their graces, possessing charms which had made them known almost throughout the world, and worshipped with the incense of a thousand votaries, yet never, nowhere did I behold a being of such exquisite and touching beauty, as that possessed by the creature of whom I have just spoken. At the moment of which I write, she was standing near the gate, close to which several brown-armed, rosy-cheeked damsels were engaged in milking the peaceful cows, who stood picturesquely grouped together. She had just thrown back the hood which is the graceful characteristic of the Irish girl's attire, so that her small and classic head was quite uncovered, save only by the dark-brown hair, which with graceful simplicity was parted above her forehead. There was nothing to shade the clearness of her beautiful complexion; the delicately-formed features, so exquisite when taken singly, so indescribable when combined, so purely artless, yet so meet for all expression. She was a thing so very beautiful, you could not look on her without feeling your heart touched as by sweet music. Whose lightest action was a grace — whose lightest word a spell — no limner's art, though ne'er so perfect, could shadow forth her beauty; and do I dare with feeble words try to make you see it?(1) Providence is indeed no respecter of persons, its blessings and its inflictions are apportioned with an undistinguishing hand, and until the race is over, and life be done, none can know whether those perfections, which seemed its goodliest gifts, many not prove its most fatal; but enough of this.

(1) Father Purcell seems to have had an admiration for the beauties of nature, particularly as developed in the fair sex; a habit of mind which has been rather improved upon than discontinued by his successors from Maynooth. — ED.

Dwyer strolled carelessly onward by the banks of the stream, leaving his young companion leaning over the gate in close and interesting parlance with Ellen Heathcote; as he moved on, he half thought, half uttered words to this effect:

'Insolent young spawn of ingratitude and guilt, how long must I submit to be trod upon thus; and yet why should I murmur — his day is even now declining — and if I live a year, I shall see the darkness cover him and his for ever. Scarce half his broad estates shall save him — but I must wait — I am but a pauper now — a beggar's accusation is always a libel — they must reward me soon — and were I independent once, I'd make them feel my power, and feel it SO, that I should die the richest or the best avenged servant of a great man that has ever been heard of — yes, I must wait — I must make sure of something at least — I must be able to stand by myself — and then — and then— ‘ He clutched his fingers together, as if in the act of strangling the object of his hatred. ‘But one thing shall save him — but one thing only — he shall pay me my own price — and if he acts liberally, as no doubt he will do, upon compulsion, why he saves his reputation — perhaps his neck — the insolent young whelp yonder would speak in an humbler key if he but knew his father’s jeopardy — but all in good time.’

He now stood upon the long, steep, narrow bridge, which crossed the river close to Carrigvarah, the family mansion of the O’Maras; he looked back in the direction in which he had left his companion, and leaning upon the battlement, he ruminated long and moodily. At length he raised himself and said:

‘He loves the girl, and WILL love her more — I have an opportunity of winning favour, of doing service, which shall bind him to me; yes, he shall have the girl, if I have art to compass the matter. I must think upon it.’

He entered the avenue and was soon lost in the distance.

Days and weeks passed on, and young O’Mara daily took his rod and net, and rambled up the river; and scarce twelve hours elapsed in which some of those accidents, which invariably bring lovers together, did not secure him a meeting of longer or shorter duration, with the beautiful girl whom he so fatally loved.

One evening, after a long interview with her, in which he had been almost irresistibly prompted to declare his love, and had all but yielded himself up to the passionate impulse, upon his arrival at home he found a letter on the table awaiting his return; it was from his father to the following effect:

‘To Richard O’Mara.
‘September, 17 — , L —— m, England.

‘MY DEAR SON,— ‘I have just had a severe attack of my old and almost forgotten enemy, the gout. This I regard as a good sign; the doctors telling me that it is the safest development of peccant humours; and I think my chest is less tormenting and oppressed than I have known it for some years. My chief reason for writing to you now, as I do it not without difficulty, is to let you know my pleasure in certain matters, in which I suspect some shameful, and, indeed, infatuated neglect on your part, “quem perdere vult deus prius dementat:” how comes it that you have neglected to write to Lady Emily or any of that family? the understood relation subsisting between you is one of extreme delicacy, and which calls for marked and courteous, nay, devoted attention upon your side. Lord —— is already offended; beware what you do; for as you will find, if this match be lost by your fault or folly, by —— I will cut you off with a shilling. I am not in the habit of using threats when I do not mean to fulfil them, and that you well know; however I do not think you have much real cause for alarm in this case. Lady Emily, who, by the way, looks if possible more charming than ever, is anything but hardhearted, at least when YOU solicit; but do as I desire, and lose no time in making what excuse you may, and let me hear from you when you can fix a time to join me and your mother here. ‘Your sincere well-wisher and father,

‘RICHARD O’MARA.’

In this letter was inclosed a smaller one, directed to Dwyer, and containing a cheque for twelve pounds, with the following words:

‘Make use of the enclosed, and let me hear if Richard is upon any wild scheme at present: I am uneasy about him, and not without reason; report to me speedily the result of your vigilance.

‘R. O’MARA.’

Dwyer just glanced through this brief, but not unwelcome, epistle; and deposited it and its contents in the secret recesses of his breeches pocket, and then fixed his eyes upon the face of his companion, who sat opposite, utterly absorbed in the perusal of his father’s letter, which he read again and again, pausing and muttering between whiles, and apparently lost in no very pleasing reflections. At length he very abruptly exclaimed:

‘A delicate epistle, truly — and a politic — would that my tongue had been burned through before I assented to that doubly-cursed contract. Why, I am not pledged yet — I am not; there is neither writing, nor troth, nor word of honour, passed between us. My father has no right to pledge me, even though I told him I liked the girl, and would wish the match. ’Tis not enough that my father offers her my heart and hand; he has no right to do it; a delicate woman would not accept professions made by proxy. Lady Emily! Lady Emily! with all the tawdry frippery, and finery of dress and demeanour — compare HER with —— Pshaw! Ridiculous! How blind, how idiotic I have been.'

He relapsed into moody reflections, which Dwyer did not care to disturb, and some ten minutes might have passed before he spoke again. When he did, it was in the calm tone of one who has irrevocably resolved upon some decided and important act.

'Dwyer,' he said, rising and approaching that person, 'whatever god or demon told you, even before my own heart knew it, that I loved Ellen Heathcote, spoke truth. I love her madly — I never dreamed till now how fervently, how irrevocably, I am hers — how dead to me all other interests are. Dwyer, I know something of your disposition, and you no doubt think it strange that I should tell to you, of all persons, SUCH a secret; but whatever be your faults, I think you are attached to our family. I am satisfied you will not betray me. I know — — '

'Pardon me,' said Dwyer, 'if I say that great professions of confidence too frequently mark distrust. I have no possible motive to induce me to betray you; on the contrary, I would gladly assist and direct whatever plans you may have formed. Command me as you please; I have said enough.'

'I will not doubt you, Dwyer,' said O'Mara; 'I have taken my resolution — I have, I think, firmness to act up to it. To marry Ellen Heathcote, situated as I am, were madness; to propose anything else were worse, were villainy not to be named. I will leave the country tomorrow, cost what pain it may, for England. I will at once break off the proposed alliance with Lady Emily, and will wait until I am my own master, to open my heart to Ellen. My father may say and do what he likes; but his passion will not last. He will forgive me; and even were he to disinherit me, as he threatens, there is some property which must descend to me, which his will cannot affect. He cannot ruin my interests; he SHALL NOT ruin my happiness. Dwyer, give me pen and ink; I will write this moment.'

This bold plan of proceeding for many reasons appeared inexpedient to Dwyer, and he determined not to consent to its adoption without a struggle.

'I commend your prudence,' said he, 'in determining to remove yourself from the fascinating influence which has so long bound you here; but beware of offending your father. Colonel O'Mara is not a man to forgive an act of deliberate disobedience, and surely you are not mad enough to ruin yourself with him by offering an outrageous insult to Lady Emily and to her family in her person; therefore you must not break off the understood contract which subsists between you by any formal act — hear me out patiently. You must let Lady Emily perceive, as you easily may, without rudeness or even coldness of manner, that she is perfectly indifferent to you; and when she understands this to be the case, it she possesses either delicacy or spirit, she will herself break off the engagement. Make what delay it is possible to effect; it is very possible that your father, who cannot, in all probability, live many months, may not live as many days if harassed and excited by such scenes as your breaking off your engagement must produce.'

'Dwyer,' said O'Mara, 'I will hear you out — proceed.'

'Besides, sir, remember,' he continued, 'the understanding which we have termed an engagement was entered into without any direct sanction upon your part; your father has committed HIMSELF, not YOU, to Lord —— . Before a real contract can subsist, you must be an assenting party to it. I know of no casuistry subtle enough to involve you in any engagement whatever, without such an ingredient. Tush! you have an easy card to play.'

'Well,' said the young man, 'I will think on what you have said; in the meantime, I will write to my father to announce my immediate departure, in order to join him.'

'Excuse me,' said Dwyer, 'but I would suggest that by hastening your departure you but bring your dangers nearer. While you are in this country a letter now and then keeps everything quiet; but once across the Channel and with the colonel, you must either quarrel with him to your own destruction, or you must dance attendance upon Lady Emily with such assiduity as to commit yourself as completely as if you had been thrice called with her in the parish church. No, no; keep to this side of the Channel as long as you decently can. Besides, your sudden departure must appear suspicious, and will probably excite inquiry. Every good end likely to be accomplished by your absence will be effected as well by your departure for Dublin, where you may remain for three weeks or a month without giving rise to curiosity or doubt of an unpleasant kind; I would therefore advise you strongly to write immediately to the colonel, stating that business has occurred to defer your departure for a month, and you can then leave this place, if you think fit, immediately, that is, within a week or so.'

Young O'Mara was not hard to be persuaded. Perhaps it was that, unacknowledged by himself, any argument which recommended his staying, even for an hour longer than his first decision had announced, in the neighbourhood of Ellen Heathcote, appeared peculiarly cogent and convincing; however this may have been, it is certain that he followed the counsel of his cool-headed follower, who retired that night to bed with the pleasing conviction that he was likely soon to involve his young patron in all the intricacies of disguise and intrigue — a consummation which would leave him totally at the mercy of the favoured confidant who should possess his secret.

Young O'Mara's reflections were more agitating and less satisfactory than those of his companion. He resolved upon leaving the country before two days had passed. He felt that he could not fairly seek to involve Ellen Heathcote in his fate by pledge or promise, until he had extricated himself from those trammels which constrained and embarrassed all his actions. His determination was so far prudent; but, alas! he also resolved that it was but right, but necessary, that he should see her before his departure. His leaving the country without a look or a word of parting kindness interchanged, must to her appear an act of cold and heartless caprice; he could not bear the thought.

'No,' said he, 'I am not child enough to say more than prudence tells me ought to say; this cowardly distrust of my firmness I should and will contemn. Besides, why should I commit myself? It is possible the girl may not care for me. No, no; I need not shrink from this interview. I have no reason to doubt my firmness — none — none. I must cease to be governed by impulse. I am involved in rocks and quicksands; and a collected spirit, a quick eye, and a steady hand, alone can pilot me through. God grant me a safe voyage!'

The next day came, and young O'Mara did not take his fishing-rod as usual, but wrote two letters; the one to his father, announcing his intention of departing speedily for England; the other to Lady Emily, containing a cold but courteous apology for his apparent neglect. Both these were despatched to the postoffice that evening, and upon the next morning he was to leave the country.

Upon the night of the momentous day of which we have just spoken, Ellen Heathcote glided silently and unperceived from among the busy crowds who were engaged in the gay dissipation furnished by what is in Ireland commonly called a dance (the expenses attendant upon which, music, etc., are defrayed by a subscription of one halfpenny each), and having drawn her mantle closely about her, was proceeding with quick steps to traverse the small field which separated her from her father's abode. She had not walked many yards when she became aware that a solitary figure, muffled in a cloak, stood in the pathway. It approached; a low voice whispered:

'Ellen.'

'Is it you, Master Richard?' she replied.

He threw back the cloak which had concealed his features.

'It is I, Ellen, he said; 'I have been watching for you. I will not delay you long.'

He took her hand, and she did not attempt to withdraw it; for she was too artless to think any evil, too confiding to dread it.

'Ellen,' he continued, even now unconsciously departing from the rigid course which prudence had marked out; 'Ellen, I am going to leave the country; going tomorrow. I have had letters from England. I must go; and the sea will soon be between us.'

He paused, and she was silent.

'There is one request, one entreaty I have to make,' he continued; 'I would, when I am far away, have something to look at which belonged to you. Will you give me — do not refuse it — one little lock of your beautiful hair?'

With artless alacrity, but with trembling hand, she took the scissors, which in simple fashion hung by her side, and detached one of the long and beautiful locks which parted over her forehead. She placed it in his hand.

Again he took her hand, and twice he attempted to speak in vain; at length he said:

'Ellen, when I am gone — when I am away — will you sometimes remember, sometimes think of me?'

Ellen Heathcote had as much, perhaps more, of what is noble in pride than the haughtiest beauty that ever trod a court; but the effort was useless;

the honest struggle was in vain; and she burst into floods of tears, bitterer than she had ever shed before.

I cannot tell how passions rise and fall; I cannot describe the impetuous words of the young lover, as pressing again and again to his lips the cold, passive hand, which had been resigned to him, prudence, caution, doubts, resolutions, all vanished from his view, and melted into nothing. ’Tis for me to tell the simple fact, that from that brief interview they both departed promised and pledged to each other for ever.

Through the rest of this story events follow one another rapidly.

A few nights after that which I have just mentioned, Ellen Heathcote disappeared; but her father was not left long in suspense as to her fate, for Dwyer, accompanied by one of those mendicant friars who traversed the country then even more commonly than they now do, called upon Heathcote before he had had time to take any active measures for the recovery of his child, and put him in possession of a document which appeared to contain satisfactory evidence of the marriage of Ellen Heathcote with Richard O’Mara, executed upon the evening previous, as the date went to show; and signed by both parties, as well as by Dwyer and a servant of young O’Mara’s, both these having acted as witnesses; and further supported by the signature of Peter Nicholls, a brother of the order of St. Francis, by whom the ceremony had been performed, and whom Heathcote had no difficulty in recognising in the person of his visitant.

This document, and the prompt personal visit of the two men, and above all, the known identity of the Franciscan, satisfied Heathcote as fully as anything short of complete publicity could have done. And his conviction was not a mistaken one.

Dwyer, before he took his leave, impressed upon Heathcote the necessity of keeping the affair so secret as to render it impossible that it should reach Colonel O’Mara’s ears, an event which would have been attended with ruinous consequences to all parties. He refused, also, to permit Heathcote to see his daughter, and even to tell him where she was, until circumstances rendered it safe for him to visit her.

Heathcote was a harsh and sullen man; and though his temper was anything but tractable, there was so much to please, almost to dazzle him, in the event, that he accepted the terms which Dwyer imposed upon him without any further token of disapprobation than a shake of the head, and a gruff wish that ‘it might prove all for the best.’

Nearly two months had passed, and young O’Mara had not yet departed for England. His letters had been strangely few and far between; and in short, his conduct was such as to induce Colonel O’Mara to hasten his return to Ireland, and at the same time to press an engagement, which Lord —— , his son Captain N —— , and Lady Emily had made to spend some weeks with him at his residence in Dublin.

A letter arrived for young O’Mara, stating the arrangement, and requiring his attendance in Dublin, which was accordingly immediately afforded.

He arrived, with Dwyer, in time to welcome his father and his distinguished guests. He resolved to break off his embarrassing connection with Lady Emily, without, however, stating the real motive, which he felt would exasperate the resentment which his father and Lord —— would no doubt feel at his conduct.

He strongly felt how dishonourably he would act if, in obedience to Dwyer’s advice, he seemed tacitly to acquiesce in an engagement which it was impossible for him to fulfil. He knew that Lady Emily was not capable of anything like strong attachment; and that even if she were, he had no reason whatever to suppose that she cared at all for him.

He had not at any time desired the alliance; nor had he any reason to suppose the young lady in any degree less indifferent. He regarded it now, and not without some appearance of justice, as nothing more than a kind of understood stipulation, entered into by their parents, and to be considered rather as a matter of business and calculation than as involving anything of mutual inclination on the part of the parties most nearly interested in the matter.

He anxiously, therefore, watched for an opportunity of making known his feelings to Lord —— , as he could not with propriety do so to Lady Emily; but what at a distance appeared to be a matter of easy accomplishment, now, upon a nearer approach, and when the immediate impulse which had prompted the act had subsided, appeared so full of difficulty and almost inextricable embarrassments, that he involuntarily shrunk from the task day after day.

Though it was a source of indescribable anxiety to him, he did not venture to write to Ellen, for he could not disguise from himself the danger which the secrecy of his connection with her must incur by his communicating with her, even through a public office, where their letters might be permitted to lie longer than the gossiping inquisitiveness of a country town would warrant him in supposing safe.

It was about a fortnight after young O'Mara had arrived in Dublin, where all things, and places, and amusements; and persons seemed thoroughly stale, flat, and unprofitable, when one day, tempted by the unusual fineness of the weather, Lady Emily proposed a walk in the College Park, a favourite promenade at that time. She therefore with young O'Mara, accompanied by Dwyer (who, by-the-by, when he pleased, could act the gentleman sufficiently well), proceeded to the place proposed, where they continued to walk for some time.

'Why, Richard,' said Lady Emily, after a tedious and unbroken pause of some minutes, 'you are becoming worse and worse every day. You are growing absolutely intolerable; perfectly stupid! not one good thing have I heard since I left the house.'

O'Mara smiled, and was seeking for a suitable reply, when his design was interrupted, and his attention suddenly and painfully arrested, by the appearance of two figures, who were slowly passing the broad walk on which he and his party moved; the one was that of Captain N —— , the other was the form of — Martin Heathcote!

O'Mara felt confounded, almost stunned; the anticipation of some impending mischief — of an immediate and violent collision with a young man whom he had ever regarded as his friend, were apprehensions which such a juxtaposition could not fail to produce.

'Is Heathcote mad?' thought he. 'What devil can have brought him here?'

Dwyer having exchanged a significant glance with O'Mara, said slightly to Lady Emily:

'Will your ladyship excuse me for a moment? I have a word to say to Captain N —— , and will, with your permission, immediately rejoin you.'

He bowed, and walking rapidly on, was in a few moments beside the object of his and his patron's uneasiness.

Whatever Heathcote's object might be, he certainly had not yet declared the secret, whose safety O'Mara had so naturally desired, for Captain N —— appeared in good spirits; and on coming up to his sister and her companion, he joined them for a moment, telling O'Mara, laughingly, that an old quiz had come from the country for the express purpose of telling tales, as it was to be supposed, of him (young O'Mara), in whose neighbourhood he lived.

During this speech it required all the effort which it was possible to exert to prevent O'Mara's betraying the extreme agitation to which his situation gave rise. Captain N —— , however, suspected nothing, and passed on without further delay.

Dinner was an early meal in those days, and Lady Emily was obliged to leave the Park in less than half an hour after the unpleasant meeting which we have just mentioned.

Young O'Mara and, at a sign from him, Dwyer having escorted the lady to the door of Colonel O'Mara's house, pretended an engagement, and departed together.

Richard O'Mara instantly questioned his comrade upon the subject of his anxiety; but Dwyer had nothing to communicate of a satisfactory nature. He had only time, while the captain had been engaged with Lady Emily and her companion, to say to Heathcote:

'Be secret, as you value your existence: everything will be right, if you be but secret.'

To this Heathcote had replied: 'Never fear me; I understand what I am about.'

This was said in such an ambiguous manner that it was impossible to conjecture whether he intended or not to act upon Dwyer's exhortation. The conclusion which appeared most natural, was by no means an agreeable one.

It was much to be feared that Heathcote having heard some vague report of O'Mara's engagement with Lady Emily, perhaps exaggerated, by the repetition, into a speedily approaching marriage, had become alarmed for his daughter's interest, and had taken this decisive step in order to prevent, by a disclosure of the circumstances of his clandestine union with Ellen, the possibility of his completing a guilty alliance with Captain N — — 's sister. If he entertained the suspicions which they attributed to him, he had certainly taken the most effectual means to prevent their being realised. Whatever his object might be, his presence in Dublin, in company with Captain N —— , boded nothing good to O'Mara.

They entered — — 's tavern, in Dame Street, together; and there, over a hasty and by no means a comfortable meal, they talked over their plans and conjectures. Evening closed in, and found them still closeted together, with nothing to interrupt, and a large tankard of claret to sustain their desultory conversation.

Nothing had been determined upon, except that Dwyer and O'Mara should proceed under cover of the darkness to search the town for Heathcote, and by minute inquiries at the most frequented houses of entertainment, to ascertain his place of residence, in order to procuring a full and explanatory interview with him. They had each filled their last glass, and were sipping it slowly, seated with their feet stretched towards a bright cheerful fire; the small table which sustained the flagon of which we have spoken, together with two pair of wax candles, placed between them, so as to afford a convenient resting-place for the long glasses out of which they drank.

'One good result, at all events, will be effected by Heathcote's visit,' said O'Mara. 'Before twenty-four hours I shall do that which I should have done long ago. I shall, without reserve, state everything. I can no longer endure this suspense — this dishonourable secrecy — this apparent dissimulation. Every moment I have passed since my departure from the country has been one of embarrassment, of pain, of humiliation. Tomorrow I will brave the storm, whether successfully or not is doubtful; but I had rather walk the high roads a beggar, than submit a day longer to be made the degraded sport of every accident — the miserable dependent upon a successful system of deception. Though PASSIVE deception, it is still unmanly, unworthy, unjustifiable deception. I cannot bear to think of it. I despise myself, but I will cease to be the despicable thing I have become. Tomorrow sees me free, and this harassing subject for ever at rest.'

He was interrupted here by the sound of footsteps heavily but rapidly ascending the tavern staircase. The room door opened, and Captain N ——, accompanied by a fashionably-attired young man, entered the room.

Young O'Mara had risen from his seat on the entrance of their unexpected visitants; and the moment Captain N —— recognised his person, an evident and ominous change passed over his countenance. He turned hastily to withdraw, but, as it seemed, almost instantly changed his mind, for he turned again abruptly.

‘This chamber is engaged, sir,’ said the waiter.

‘Leave the room, sir,’ was his only reply.

‘The room is engaged, sir,’ repeated the waiter, probably believing that his first suggestion had been unheard.

‘Leave the room, or go to hell!’ shouted Captain N —— ; at the same time seizing the astounded waiter by the shoulder, he hurled him headlong into the passage, and flung the door to with a crash that shook the walls. ‘Sir,’ continued he, addressing himself to O’Mara, ‘I did not hope to have met you until tomorrow. Fortune has been kind to me — draw, and defend yourself.’

At the same time he drew his sword, and placed himself in an attitude of attack.

‘I will not draw upon YOU,’ said O’Mara. ‘I have, indeed, wronged you. I have given you just cause for resentment; but against your life I will never lift my hand.’

‘You are a coward, sir,’ replied Captain N —— , with almost frightful vehemence, ‘as every trickster and swindler IS. You are a contemptible dastard — a despicable, damned villain! Draw your sword, sir, and defend your life, or every post and pillar in this town shall tell your infamy.’

‘Perhaps,’ said his friend, with a sneer, ‘the gentleman can do better without his honour than without his wife.’

‘Yes,’ shouted the captain, ‘his wife — a trull — a common — — ‘

‘Silence, sir!’ cried O’Mara, all the fierceness of his nature roused by this last insult— ‘your object is gained; your blood be upon your own head.’ At the same time he sprang across a bench which stood in his way, and pushing aside the table which supported the lights, in an instant their swords crossed, and they were engaged in close and deadly strife.

Captain N —— was far the stronger of the two; but, on the other hand, O’Mara possessed far more skill in the use of the fatal weapon which they employed. But the narrowness of the room rendered this advantage hardly available.

Almost instantly O’Mara received a slight wound upon the forehead, which, though little more than a scratch, bled so fast as to obstruct his sight considerably.

Those who have used the foil can tell how slight a derangement of eye or of hand is sufficient to determine a contest of this kind; and this knowledge will prevent their being surprised when I say, that, spite of O’Mara’s superior skill and practice, his adversary’s sword passed twice through and through his body, and he fell heavily and helplessly upon the floor of the chamber.

Without saying a word, the successful combatant quitted the room along with his companion, leaving Dwyer to shift as best he might for his fallen comrade.

With the assistance of some of the wondering menials of the place, Dwyer succeeded in conveying the wounded man into an adjoining room, where he was laid upon a bed, in a state bordering upon insensibility — the blood flowing, I might say WELLING, from the wounds so fast as to show that unless the bleeding were speedily and effectually stopped, he could not live for half an hour.

Medical aid was, of course, instantly procured, and Colonel O’Mara, though at the time seriously indisposed, was urgently requested to attend without loss of time. He did so; but human succour and support were all too late. The wound had been truly dealt — the tide of life had ebbed; and his father had not arrived five minutes when young O’Mara was a corpse. His body rests in the vaults of Christ Church, in Dublin, without a stone to mark the spot.

The counsels of the wicked are always dark, and their motives often beyond fathoming; and strange, unaccountable, incredible as it may seem, I do believe, and that upon evidence so clear as to amount almost to demonstration, that Heathcote’s visit to Dublin — his betrayal of the secret — and the final and terrible catastrophe which laid O’Mara in the grave, were brought about by no other agent than Dwyer himself.

I have myself seen the letter which induced that visit. The handwriting is exactly what I have seen in other alleged specimens of Dwyer’s penmanship. It is written with an affectation of honest alarm at O’Mara’s conduct, and expresses a conviction that if some of Lady Emily’s family be not informed of O’Mara’s real situation, nothing could prevent his concluding with her an advantageous alliance, then upon the tapis, and altogether throwing off his allegiance to Ellen — a step which, as the writer candidly asserted, would finally conduce as inevitably to his own disgrace as it immediately would to her ruin and misery.

The production was formally signed with Dwyer's name, and the postscript contained a strict injunction of secrecy, asserting that if it were ascertained that such an epistle had been despatched from such a quarter, it would be attended with the total ruin of the writer.

It is true that Dwyer, many years after, when this letter came to light, alleged it to be a forgery, an assertion whose truth, even to his dying hour, and long after he had apparently ceased to feel the lash of public scorn, he continued obstinately to maintain. Indeed this matter is full of mystery, for, revenge alone excepted, which I believe, in such minds as Dwyer's, seldom overcomes the sense of interest, the only intelligible motive which could have prompted him to such an act was the hope that since he had, through young O'Mara's interest, procured from the colonel a lease of a small farm upon the terms which he had originally stipulated, he might prosecute his plan touching the property of Martin Heathcote, rendering his daughter's hand free by the removal of young O'Mara. This appears to me too complicated a plan of villany to have entered the mind even of such a man as Dwyer. I must, therefore, suppose his motives to have originated out of circumstances connected with this story which may not have come to my ear, and perhaps never will.

Colonel O'Mara felt the death of his son more deeply than I should have thought possible; but that son had been the last being who had continued to interest his cold heart. Perhaps the pride which he felt in his child had in it more of selfishness than of any generous feeling. But, be this as it may, the melancholy circumstances connected with Ellen Heathcote had reached him, and his conduct towards her proved, more strongly than anything else could have done, that he felt keenly and justly, and, to a certain degree, with a softened heart, the fatal event of which she had been, in some manner, alike the cause and the victim.

He evinced not towards her, as might have been expected, any unreasonable resentment. On the contrary, he exhibited great consideration, even tenderness, for her situation; and having ascertained where his son had placed her, he issued strict orders that she should not be disturbed, and that the fatal tidings, which had not yet reached her, should be withheld until they might be communicated in such a way as to soften as much as possible the inevitable shock.

These last directions were acted upon too scrupulously and too long; and, indeed, I am satisfied that had the event been communicated at once, however terrible and overwhelming the shock might have been, much of the bitterest anguish, of sickening doubts, of harassing suspense, would have been spared her, and the first tempestuous burst of sorrow having passed over, her chastened spirit might have recovered its tone, and her life have been spared. But the mistaken kindness which concealed from her the dreadful truth, instead of relieving her mind of a burden which it could not support, laid upon it a weight of horrible fears and doubts as to the affection of O'Mara, compared with which even the certainty of his death would have been tolerable.

One evening I had just seated myself beside a cheerful turf fire, with that true relish which a long cold ride through a bleak and shelterless country affords, stretching my chilled limbs to meet the genial influence, and imbibing the warmth at every pore, when my comfortable meditations were interrupted by a long and sonorous ringing at the door-bell evidently effected by no timid hand.

A messenger had arrived to request my attendance at the Lodge — such was the name which distinguished a small and somewhat antiquated building, occupying a peculiarly secluded position among the bleak and heathy hills which varied the surface of that not altogether uninteresting district, and which had, I believe, been employed by the keen and hardy ancestors of the O'Mara family as a convenient temporary residence during the sporting season.

Thither my attendance was required, in order to administer to a deeply distressed lady such comforts as an afflicted mind can gather from the sublime hopes and consolations of Christianity.

I had long suspected that the occupant of this sequestered, I might say desolate, dwelling-house was the poor girl whose brief story we are following; and feeling a keen interest in her fate — as who that had ever seen her DID NOT? — I started from my comfortable seat with more eager alacrity than, I will confess it, I might have evinced had my duty called me in another direction.

In a few minutes I was trotting rapidly onward, preceded by my guide, who urged his horse with the remorseless rapidity of one who seeks by the speed of his progress to escape observation. Over roads and through bogs we splashed and clattered, until at length traversing the brow of a wild and rocky hill, whose aspect seemed so barren and forbidding that it might have been a lasting barrier alike to mortal sight and step, the lonely building became visible, lying in a kind of swampy flat, with a broad reedy pond or lake stretching away to its side, and backed by a farther range of monotonous sweeping hills, marked with irregular lines of grey rock, which, in the distance, bore a rude and colossal resemblance to the walls of a fortification.

Riding with undiminished speed along a kind of wild horse-track, we turned the corner of a high and somewhat ruinous wall of loose stones, and making a sudden wheel we found ourselves in a small quadrangle, surmounted on two sides by dilapidated stables and kennels, on another by a broken stone wall, and upon the fourth by the front of the lodge itself.

The whole character of the place was that of dreary desertion and decay, which would of itself have predisposed the mind for melancholy impressions. My guide dismounted, and with respectful attention held my horse's bridle while I got down; and knocking at the door with the handle of his whip, it was speedily opened by a neatly-dressed female domestic, and I was admitted to the interior of the house, and conducted into a small room, where a fire in some degree dispelled the cheerless air, which would otherwise have prevailed to a painful degree throughout the place.

I had been waiting but for a very few minutes when another female servant, somewhat older than the first, entered the room. She made some apology on the part of the person whom I had come to visit, for the slight delay which had already occurred, and requested me further to wait for a few minutes longer, intimating that the lady's grief was so violent, that without great effort she could not bring herself to speak calmly at all. As if to beguile the time, the good dame went on in a highly communicative strain to tell me, amongst much that could not interest me, a little of what I had desired to hear. I discovered that the grief of her whom I had come to visit was excited by the sudden death of a little boy, her only child, who was then lying dead in his mother's chamber.

'And the mother's name?' said I, inquiringly.

The woman looked at me for a moment, smiled, and shook her head with the air of mingled mystery and importance which seems to say, 'I am unfathomable.' I did not care to press the question, though I suspected that much of her apparent reluctance was affected, knowing that my doubts respecting the identity of the person whom I had come to visit must soon be set at rest, and after a little pause the worthy Abigail went on as fluently as ever. She told me that her young mistress had been, for the time she had been with her — that was, for about a year and a half — in declining health and spirits, and that she had loved her little child to a degree beyond expression — so devotedly that she could not, in all probability, survive it long.

While she was running on in this way the bell rang, and signing me to follow, she opened the room door, but stopped in the hall, and taking me a little aside, and speaking in a whisper, she told me, as I valued the life of the poor lady, not to say one word of the death of young O'Mara. I nodded acquiescence, and ascending a narrow and ill-constructed staircase, she stopped at a chamber door and knocked.

'Come in,' said a gentle voice from within, and, preceded by my conductress, I entered a moderately-sized, but rather gloomy chamber.

There was but one living form within it — it was the light and graceful figure of a young woman. She had risen as I entered the room; but owing to the obscurity of the apartment, and to the circumstance that her face, as she looked towards the door, was turned away from the light, which found its way in dimly through the narrow windows, I could not instantly recognise the features.

'You do not remember me, sir?' said the same low, mournful voice. 'I am — I WAS — Ellen Heathcote.'

'I do remember you, my poor child,' said I, taking her hand; 'I do remember you very well. Speak to me frankly — speak to me as a friend. Whatever I can do or say for you, is yours already; only speak.'

'You were always very kind, sir, to those — to those that WANTED kindness.'

The tears were almost overflowing, but she checked them; and as if an accession of fortitude had followed the momentary weakness, she continued, in a subdued but firm tone, to tell me briefly the circumstances of her marriage with O'Mara. When she had concluded the recital, she paused for a moment; and I asked again:

'Can I aid you in any way — by advice or otherwise?'

‘I wish, sir, to tell you all I have been thinking about,’ she continued. ‘I am sure, sir, that Master Richard loved me once — I am sure he did not think to deceive me; but there were bad, hardhearted people about him, and his family were all rich and high, and I am sure he wishes NOW that he had never, never seen me. Well, sir, it is not in my heart to blame him. What was *I* that I should look at him? — an ignorant, poor, country girl — and he so high and great, and so beautiful. The blame was all mine — it was all my fault; I could not think or hope he would care for me more than a little time. Well, sir, I thought over and over again that since his love was gone from me for ever, I should not stand in his way, and hinder whatever great thing his family wished for him. So I thought often and often to write him a letter to get the marriage broken, and to send me home; but for one reason, I would have done it long ago: there was a little child, his and mine — the dearest, the loveliest.’ She could not go on for a minute or two. ‘The little child that is lying there, on that bed; but it is dead and gone, and there is no reason NOW why I should delay any more about it.’

She put her hand into her breast, and took out a letter, which she opened. She put it into my hands. It ran thus:

‘DEAR MASTER RICHARD,

‘My little child is dead, and your happiness is all I care about now. Your marriage with me is displeasing to your family, and I would be a burden to you, and in your way in the fine places, and among the great friends where you must be. You ought, therefore, to break the marriage, and I will sign whatever YOU wish, or your family. I will never try to blame you, Master Richard — do not think it — for I never deserved your love, and must not complain now that I have lost it; but I will always pray for you, and be thinking of you while I live.’

While I read this letter, I was satisfied that so far from adding to the poor girl’s grief, a full disclosure of what had happened would, on the contrary, mitigate her sorrow, and deprive it of its sharpest sting.

‘Ellen,’ said I solemnly, ‘Richard O’Mara was never unfaithful to you; he is now where human reproach can reach him no more.’

As I said this, the hectic flush upon her cheek gave place to a paleness so deadly, that I almost thought she would drop lifeless upon the spot.

‘Is he — is he dead, then?’ said she, wildly.

I took her hand in mine, and told her the sad story as best I could. She listened with a calmness which appeared almost unnatural, until I had finished the mournful narration. She then arose, and going to the bedside, she drew the curtain and gazed silently and fixedly on the quiet face of the child: but the feelings which swelled at her heart could not be suppressed; the tears gushed forth, and sobbing as if her heart would break, she leant over the bed and took the dead child in her arms.

She wept and kissed it, and kissed it and wept again, in grief so passionate, so heartrending, as to draw bitter tears from my eyes. I said what little I could to calm her — to have sought to do more would have been a mockery; and observing that the darkness had closed in, I took my leave and departed, being favoured with the services of my former guide.

I expected to have been soon called upon again to visit the poor girl; but the Lodge lay beyond the boundary of my parish, and I felt a reluctance to trespass upon the precincts of my brother minister, and a certain degree of hesitation in intruding upon one whose situation was so very peculiar, and who would, I had no doubt, feel no scruple in requesting my attendance if she desired it.

A month, however, passed away, and I did not hear anything of Ellen. I called at the Lodge, and to my inquiries they answered that she was very much worse in health, and that since the death of the child she had been sinking fast, and so weak that she had been chiefly confined to her bed. I sent frequently to inquire, and often called myself, and all that I heard convinced me that she was rapidly sinking into the grave.

Late one night I was summoned from my rest, by a visit from the person who had upon the former occasion acted as my guide; he had come to summon me to the deathbed of her whom I had then attended. With all celerity I made my preparations, and, not without considerable difficulty and some danger, we made a rapid night-ride to the Lodge, a distance of five miles at least. We arrived safely, and in a very short time — but too late.

I stood by the bed upon which lay the once beautiful form of Ellen Heathcote. The brief but sorrowful trial was past — the desolate mourner was gone to that land where the pangs of grief, the tumults of passion, regrets and cold neglect, are felt no more. I leant over the lifeless face, and scanned the beautiful features which, living, had wrought such magic on all that looked upon them. They were, indeed, much wasted; but it was impossible for the fingers of death or of decay altogether to obliterate the traces of that exquisite beauty which had so distinguished her. As I gazed on this most sad and striking spectacle, remembrances thronged fast upon my mind, and tear after tear fell upon the cold form that slept tranquilly and for ever.

A few days afterwards I was told that a funeral had left the Lodge at the dead of night, and had been conducted with the most scrupulous secrecy. It was, of course, to me no mystery.

Heathcote lived to a very advanced age, being of that hard mould which is not easily impressionable. The selfish and the hardhearted survive where nobler, more generous, and, above all, more sympathising natures would have sunk for ever.

Dwyer certainly succeeded in extorting, I cannot say how, considerable and advantageous leases from Colonel O'Mara; but after his death he disposed of his interest in these, and having for a time launched into a sea of profligate extravagance, he became bankrupt, and for a long time I totally lost sight of him.

The rebellion of '98, and the events which immediately followed, called him forth from his lurking-places, in the character of an informer; and I myself have seen the hoary-headed, paralytic perjurer, with a scowl of derision and defiance, brave the hootings and the execrations of the indignant multitude.

STRANGE EVENT IN THE LIFE OF SCHALKEN THE PAINTER.

Being a Seventh Extract from the Legacy of the late Francis Purcell, P. P. of Drumcoolagh.

You will no doubt be surprised, my dear friend, at the subject of the following narrative. What had I to do with Schalken, or Schalken with me? He had returned to his native land, and was probably dead and buried, before I was born; I never visited Holland nor spoke with a native of that country. So much I believe you already know. I must, then, give you my authority, and state to you frankly the ground upon which rests the credibility of the strange story which I am, about to lay before you.

I was acquainted, in my early days, with a Captain Vandael, whose father had served King William in the Low Countries, and also in my own unhappy land during the Irish campaigns. I know not how it happened that I liked this man's society, spite of his politics and religion: but so it was; and it was by means of the free intercourse to which our intimacy gave rise that I became possessed of the curious tale which you are about to hear.

I had often been struck, while visiting Vandael, by a remarkable picture, in which, though no connoisseur myself, I could not fail to discern some very strong peculiarities, particularly in the distribution of light and shade, as also a certain oddity in the design itself, which interested my curiosity. It represented the interior of what might be a chamber in some antique religious building — the foreground was occupied by a female figure, arrayed in a species of white robe, part of which is arranged so as to form a veil. The dress, however, is not strictly that of any religious order. In its hand the figure bears a lamp, by whose light alone the form and face are illuminated; the features are marked by an arch smile, such as pretty women wear when engaged in successfully practising some roguish trick; in the background, and, excepting where the dim red light of an expiring fire serves to define the form, totally in the shade, stands the figure of a man equipped in the old fashion, with doublet and so forth, in an attitude of alarm, his hand being placed upon the hilt of his sword, which he appears to be in the act of drawing.

‘There are some pictures,’ said I to my friend, ‘which impress one, I know not how, with a conviction that they represent not the mere ideal shapes and combinations which have floated through the imagination of the artist, but scenes, faces, and situations which have actually existed. When I look upon that picture, something assures me that I behold the representation of a reality.’

Vandael smiled, and, fixing his eyes upon the painting musingly, he said:

‘Your fancy has not deceived you, my good friend, for that picture is the record, and I believe a faithful one, of a remarkable and mysterious occurrence. It was painted by Schalken, and contains, in the face of the female figure, which occupies the most prominent place in the design, an accurate portrait of Rose Velderkaust, the niece of Gerard Douw, the first and, I believe, the only love of Godfrey Schalken. My father knew the painter well, and from Schalken himself he learned the story of the mysterious drama, one scene of which the picture has embodied. This painting, which is accounted a fine specimen of Schalken’s style, was bequeathed to my father by the artist’s will, and, as you have observed, is a very striking and interesting production.’

I had only to request Vandael to tell the story of the painting in order to be gratified; and thus it is that I am enabled to submit to you a faithful recital of what I heard myself, leaving you to reject or to allow the evidence upon which the truth of the tradition depends, with this one assurance, that Schalken was an honest, blunt Dutchman, and, I believe, wholly incapable of committing a flight of imagination; and further, that Vandael, from whom I heard the story, appeared firmly convinced of its truth.

There are few forms upon which the mantle of mystery and romance could seem to hang more ungracefully than upon that of the uncouth and clownish Schalken — the Dutch boor — the rude and dogged, but most cunning worker in oils, whose pieces delight the initiated of the present day almost as much as his manners disgusted the refined of his own; and yet this man, so rude, so dogged, so slovenly, I had almost said so savage, in mien and manner, during his after successes, had been selected by the capricious goddess, in his early life, to figure as the hero of a romance by no means devoid of interest or of mystery.

Who can tell how meet he may have been in his young days to play the part of the lover or of the hero — who can say that in early life he had been the same harsh, unlicked, and rugged boor that, in his maturer age, he proved — or how far the neglected rudeness which afterwards marked his air, and garb, and manners, may not have been the growth of that reckless apathy not unfrequently produced by bitter misfortunes and disappointments in early life?

These questions can never now be answered.

We must content ourselves, then, with a plain statement of facts, or what have been received and transmitted as such, leaving matters of speculation to those who like them.

When Schalken studied under the immortal Gerard Douw, he was a young man; and in spite of the phlegmatic constitution and unexcitable manner which he shared, we believe, with his countrymen, he was not incapable of deep and vivid impressions, for it is an established fact that the young painter looked with considerable interest upon the beautiful niece of his wealthy master.

Rose Velderkaust was very young, having, at the period of which we speak, not yet attained her seventeenth year, and, if tradition speaks truth, possessed all the soft dimpling charms of the fail; light-haired Flemish maidens. Schalken had not studied long in the school of Gerard Douw, when he felt this interest deepening into something of a keener and intenser feeling than was quite consistent with the tranquillity of his honest Dutch heart; and at the same time he perceived, or thought he perceived, flattering symptoms of a reciprocity of liking, and this was quite sufficient to determine whatever indecision he might have heretofore experienced, and to lead him to devote exclusively to her every hope and feeling of his heart. In short, he was as much in love as a Dutchman could be. He was not long in making his passion known to the pretty maiden herself, and his declaration was followed by a corresponding confession upon her part.

Schalken, however, was a poor man, and he possessed no counterbalancing advantages of birth or position to induce the old man to consent to a union which must involve his niece and ward in the strugglings and difficulties of a young and nearly friendless artist. He was, therefore, to wait until time had furnished him with opportunity, and accident with success; and then, if his labours were found sufficiently lucrative, it was to be hoped that his proposals might at least be listened to by her jealous guardian. Months passed away, and, cheered by the smiles of the little Rose, Schalken's labours were redoubled, and with such effect and improvement as reasonably to promise the realisation of his hopes, and no contemptible eminence in his art, before many years should have elapsed.

The even course of this cheering prosperity was, however, destined to experience a sudden and formidable interruption, and that, too, in a manner so strange and mysterious as to baffle all investigation, and throw upon the events themselves a shadow of almost supernatural horror.

Schalken had one evening remained in the master's studio considerably longer than his more volatile companions, who had gladly availed themselves of the excuse which the dusk of evening afforded, to withdraw from their several tasks, in order to finish a day of labour in the jollity and conviviality of the tavern.

But Schalken worked for improvement, or rather for love. Besides, he was now engaged merely in sketching a design, an operation which, unlike that of colouring, might be continued as long as there was light sufficient to distinguish between canvas and charcoal. He had not then, nor, indeed, until long after, discovered the peculiar powers of his pencil, and he was engaged in composing a group of extremely roguish-looking and grotesque imps and demons, who were inflicting various ingenious torments upon a perspiring and pot-bellied St. Anthony, who reclined in the midst of them, apparently in the last stage of drunkenness.

The young artist, however, though incapable of executing, or even of appreciating, anything of true sublimity, had nevertheless discernment enough to prevent his being by any means satisfied with his work; and many were the patient erasures and corrections which the limbs and features of saint and devil underwent, yet all without producing in their new arrangement anything of improvement or increased effect.

The large, oldfashioned room was silent, and, with the exception of himself, quite deserted by its usual inmates. An hour had passed — nearly two — without any improved result. Daylight had already declined, and twilight was fast giving way to the darkness of night. The patience of the young man was exhausted, and he stood before his unfinished production, absorbed in no very pleasing ruminations, one hand buried in the folds of his long dark hair, and the other holding the piece of charcoal which had so ill executed its office, and which he now rubbed, without much regard to the sable streaks which it produced, with irritable pressure upon his ample Flemish inexpressibles.

‘Pshaw!’ said the young man aloud, ‘would that picture, devils, saint, and all, were where they should be — in hell!’

A short, sudden laugh, uttered startlingly close to his ear, instantly responded to the ejaculation.

The artist turned sharply round, and now for the first time became aware that his labours had been overlooked by a stranger.

Within about a yard and a half, and rather behind him, there stood what was, or appeared to be, the figure of an elderly man: he wore a short cloak, and broad-brimmed hat with a conical crown, and in his hand, which was protected with a heavy, gauntlet-shaped glove, he carried a long ebony walking-stick, surmounted with what appeared, as it glittered dimly in the twilight, to be a massive head of gold, and upon his breast, through the folds of the cloak, there shone what appeared to be the links of a rich chain of the same metal.

The room was so obscure that nothing further of the appearance of the figure could be ascertained, and the face was altogether overshadowed by the heavy flap of the beaver which overhung it, so that not a feature could be discerned. A quantity of dark hair escaped from beneath this sombre hat, a circumstance which, connected with the firm, upright carriage of the intruder, proved that his years could not yet exceed threescore or thereabouts.

There was an air of gravity and importance about the garb of this person, and something indescribably odd, I might say awful, in the perfect, stone-like movelessness of the figure, that effectually checked the testy comment which had at once risen to the lips of the irritated artist. He therefore, as soon as he had sufficiently recovered the surprise, asked the stranger, civilly, to be seated, and desired to know if he had any message to leave for his master.

‘Tell Gerard Douw,’ said the unknown, without altering his attitude in the smallest degree, ‘that Mynher Vanderhauseny of Rotterdam, desires to speak with him tomorrow evening at this hour, and, if he please, in this room, upon matters of weight — that is all. Goodnight.’

The stranger, having finished this message, turned abruptly, and, with a quick but silent step, quitted the room, before Schalken had time to say a word in reply.

The young man felt a curiosity to see in what direction the burgher of Rotterdam would turn on quitting the studio, and for that purpose he went directly to the window which commanded the door.

A lobby of considerable extent intervened between the inner door of the painter's room and the street entrance, so that Schalken occupied the post of observation before the old man could possibly have reached the street.

He watched in vain, however. There was no other mode of exit.

Had the old man vanished, or was he lurking about the recesses of the lobby for some bad purpose? This last suggestion filled the mind of Schalken with a vague horror, which was so unaccountably intense as to make him alike afraid to remain in the room alone and reluctant to pass through the lobby.

However, with an effort which appeared very disproportioned to the occasion, he summoned resolution to leave the room, and, having double-locked the door and thrust the key in his pocket, without looking to the right or left, he traversed the passage which had so recently, perhaps still, contained the person of his mysterious visitant, scarcely venturing to breathe till he had arrived in the open street.

'Mynher Vanderhausen,' said Gerard Douw within himself, as the appointed hour approached, 'Mynher Vanderhausen of Rotterdam! I never heard of the man till yesterday. What can he want of me? A portrait, perhaps, to be painted; or a younger son or a poor relation to be apprenticed; or a collection to be valued; or — pshaw I there's no one in Rotterdam to leave me a legacy. Well, whatever the business may be, we shall soon know it all.'

It was now the close of day, and every easel, except that of Schalken, was deserted. Gerard Douw was pacing the apartment with the restless step of impatient expectation, every now and then humming a passage from a piece of music which he was himself composing; for, though no great proficient, he admired the art; sometimes pausing to glance over the work of one of his absent pupils, but more frequently placing himself at the window, from whence he might observe the passengers who threaded the obscure by-street in which his studio was placed.

‘Said you not, Godfrey,’ exclaimed Douw, after a long and fruitless gaze from his post of observation, and turning to Schalken— ‘said you not the hour of appointment was at about seven by the clock of the Stadhouse?’

‘It had just told seven when I first saw him, sir,’ answered the student.

‘The hour is close at hand, then,’ said the master, consulting a horologe as large and as round as a full-grown orange. ‘Mynher Vanderhausen, from Rotterdam — is it not so?’

‘Such was the name.’

‘And an elderly man, richly clad?’ continued Douw.

‘As well as I might see,’ replied his pupil; ‘he could not be young, nor yet very old neither, and his dress was rich and grave, as might become a citizen of wealth and consideration.’

At this moment the sonorous boom of the Stadhouse clock told, stroke after stroke, the hour of seven; the eyes of both master and student were directed to the door; and it was not until the last peal of the old bell had ceased to vibrate, that Douw exclaimed:

‘So, so; we shall have his worship presently — that is, if he means to keep his hour; if not, thou mayst wait for him, Godfrey, if you court the acquaintance of a capricious burgomaster. As for me, I think our old Leyden contains a sufficiency of such commodities, without an importation from Rotterdam.’

Schalken laughed, as in duty bound; and after a pause of some minutes, Douw suddenly exclaimed:

‘What if it should all prove a jest, a piece of mummery got up by Vankarp, or some such worthy! I wish you had run all risks, and cudgelled the old burgomaster, stadholder, or whatever else he may be, soundly. I would wager a dozen of Rhenish, his worship would have pleaded old acquaintance before the third application.’

‘Here he comes, sir,’ said Schalken, in a low admonitory tone; and instantly, upon turning towards the door, Gerard Douw observed the same figure which had, on the day before, so unexpectedly greeted the vision of his pupil Schalken.

There was something in the air and mien of the figure which at once satisfied the painter that there was no mummery in the case, and that he really stood in the presence of a man of worship; and so, without hesitation, he doffed his cap, and courteously saluting the stranger, requested him to be seated.

The visitor waved his hand slightly, as, if in acknowledgment of the courtesy, but remained standing.

‘I have the honour to see Mynher Vanderhausen, of Rotterdam?’ said Gerard Douw.

‘The same,’ was the laconic reply of his visitant.

‘I understand your worship desires to speak with me,’ continued Douw, ‘and I am here by appointment to wait your commands.’

‘Is that a man of trust?’ said Vanderhausen, turning towards Schalken, who stood at a little distance behind his master.

‘Certainly,’ replied Gerard.

‘Then let him take this box and get the nearest jeweller or goldsmith to value its contents, and let him return hither with a certificate of the valuation.’

At the same time he placed a small case, about nine inches square, in the hands of Gerard Douw, who was as much amazed at its weight as at the strange abruptness with which it was handed to him.

In accordance with the wishes of the stranger, he delivered it into the hands of Schalken, and repeating HIS directions, despatched him upon the mission.

Schalken disposed his precious charge securely beneath the folds of his cloak, and rapidly traversing two or three narrow streets, he stopped at a corner house, the lower part of which was then occupied by the shop of a Jewish goldsmith.

Schalken entered the shop, and calling the little Hebrew into the obscurity of its back recesses, he proceeded to lay before him Vanderhausen’s packet.

On being examined by the light of a lamp, it appeared entirely cased with lead, the outer surface of which was much scraped and soiled, and nearly white with age. This was with difficulty partially removed, and disclosed beneath a box of some dark and singularly hard wood; this, too, was forced, and after the removal of two or three folds of linen, its contents proved to be a mass of golden ingots, close packed, and, as the Jew declared, of the most perfect quality.

Every ingot underwent the scrutiny of the little Jew, who seemed to feel an epicurean delight in touching and testing these morsels of the glorious metal; and each one of them was replaced in the box with the exclamation:

‘Mein Gott, how very perfect! not one grain of alloy — beautiful, beautiful!’

The task was at length finished, and the Jew certified under his hand the value of the ingots submitted to his examination to amount to many thousand rix-dollars.

With the desired document in his bosom, and the rich box of gold carefully pressed under his arm, and concealed by his cloak, he retraced his way, and entering the studio, found his master and the stranger in close conference.

Schalken had no sooner left the room, in order to execute the commission he had taken in charge, than Vanderhausen addressed Gerard Douw in the following terms:

‘I may not tarry with you tonight more than a few minutes, and so I shall briefly tell you the matter upon which I come. You visited the town of Rotterdam some four months ago, and then I saw in the church of St. Lawrence your niece, Rose Velderkaust. I desire to marry her, and if I satisfy you as to the fact that I am very wealthy — more wealthy than any husband you could dream of for her — I expect that you will forward my views to the utmost of your authority. If you approve my proposal, you must close with it at once, for I cannot command time enough to wait for calculations and delays.’

Gerard Douw was, perhaps, as much astonished as anyone could be by the very unexpected nature of Mynher Vanderhausen’s communication; but he did not give vent to any unseemly expression of surprise, for besides the motives supplied by prudence and politeness, the painter experienced a kind of chill and oppressive sensation, something like that which is supposed to affect a man who is placed unconsciously in immediate contact with something to which he has a natural antipathy — an undefined horror and dread while standing in the presence of the eccentric stranger, which made him very unwilling to say anything which might reasonably prove offensive.

‘I have no doubt,’ said Gerard, after two or three prefatory hems, ‘that the connection which you propose would prove alike advantageous and honourable to my niece; but you must be aware that she has a will of her own, and may not acquiesce in what WE may design for her advantage.'

'Do not seek to deceive me, Sir Painter,' said Vanderhausen; 'you are her guardian — she is your ward. She is mine if YOU like to make her so.'

The man of Rotterdam moved forward a little as he spoke, and Gerard Douw, he scarce knew why, inwardly prayed for the speedy return of Schalken.

'I desire,' said the mysterious gentleman, 'to place in your hands at once an evidence of my wealth, and a security for my liberal dealing with your niece. The lad will return in a minute or two with a sum in value five times the fortune which she has a right to expect from a husband. This shall lie in your hands, together with her dowry, and you may apply the united sum as suits her interest best; it shall be all exclusively hers while she lives. Is that liberal?'

Douw assented, and inwardly thought that fortune had been extraordinarily kind to his niece. The stranger, he thought, must be both wealthy and generous, and such an offer was not to be despised, though made by a humourist, and one of no very prepossessing presence.

Rose had no very high pretensions, for she was almost without dowry; indeed, altogether so, excepting so far as the deficiency had been supplied by the generosity of her uncle. Neither had she any right to raise any scruples against the match on the score of birth, for her own origin was by no means elevated; and as to other objections, Gerard resolved, and, indeed, by the usages of the time was warranted in resolving, not to listen to them for a moment.

'Sir,' said he, addressing the stranger, 'your offer is most liberal, and whatever hesitation I may feel in closing with it immediately, arises solely from my not having the honour of knowing anything of your family or station. Upon these points you can, of course, satisfy me without difficulty?'

'As to my respectability,' said the stranger, drily, 'you must take that for granted at present; pester me with no inquiries; you can discover nothing more about me than I choose to make known. You shall have sufficient security for my respectability — my word, if you are honourable: if you are sordid, my gold.'

‘A testy old gentleman,’ thought Douw; ‘he must have his own way. But, all things considered, I am justified in giving my niece to him. Were she my own daughter, I would do the like by her. I will not pledge myself unnecessarily, however.’

‘You will not pledge yourself unnecessarily,’ said Vanderhausen, strangely uttering the very words which had just floated through the mind of his companion; ‘but you will do so if it IS necessary, I presume; and I will show you that I consider it indispensable. If the gold I mean to leave in your hands satisfy you, and if you desire that my proposal shall not be at once withdrawn, you must, before I leave this room, write your name to this engagement.’

Having thus spoken, he placed a paper in the hands of Gerard, the contents of which expressed an engagement entered into by Gerard Douw, to give to Wilken Vanderhausen, of Rotterdam, in marriage, Rose Velderkaust, and so forth, within one week of the date hereof.

While the painter was employed in reading this covenant, Schalken, as we have stated, entered the studio, and having delivered the box and the valuation of the Jew into the hands of the stranger, he was about to retire, when Vanderhausen called to him to wait; and, presenting the case and the certificate to Gerard Douw, he waited in silence until he had satisfied himself by an inspection of both as to the value of the pledge left in his hands. At length he said:

‘Are you content?’

The painter said he would fain have an other day to consider.

‘Not an hour,’ said the suitor, coolly.

‘Well, then,’ said Douw, ‘I am content; it is a bargain.’

‘Then sign at once,’ said Vanderhausen; ‘I am weary.’

At the same time he produced a small case of writing materials, and Gerard signed the important document.

‘Let this youth witness the covenant,’ said the old man; and Godfrey Schalken unconsciously signed the instrument which bestowed upon another that hand which he had so long regarded as the object and reward of all his labours.

The compact being thus completed, the strange visitor folded up the paper, and stowed it safely in an inner pocket.

‘I will visit you tomorrow night, at nine of the clock, at your house, Gerard Douw, and will see the subject of our contract. Farewell.’ And so saying, Wilken Vanderhausen moved stiffly, but rapidly out of the room.

Schalken, eager to resolve his doubts, had placed himself by the window in order to watch the street entrance; but the experiment served only to support his suspicions, for the old man did not issue from the door. This was very strange, very odd, very fearful. He and his master returned together, and talked but little on the way, for each had his own subjects of reflection, of anxiety, and of hope.

Schalken, however, did not know the ruin which threatened his cherished schemes.

Gerard Douw knew nothing of the attachment which had sprung up between his pupil and his niece; and even if he had, it is doubtful whether he would have regarded its existence as any serious obstruction to the wishes of Mynher Vanderhausen.

Marriages were then and there matters of traffic and calculation; and it would have appeared as absurd in the eyes of the guardian to make a mutual attachment an essential element in a contract of marriage, as it would have been to draw up his bonds and receipts in the language of chivalrous romance.

The painter, however, did not communicate to his niece the important step which he had taken in her behalf, and his resolution arose not from any anticipation of opposition on her part, but solely from a ludicrous consciousness that if his ward were, as she very naturally might do, to ask him to describe the appearance of the bridegroom whom he destined for her, he would be forced to confess that he had not seen his face, and, if called upon, would find it impossible to identify him.

Upon the next day, Gerard Douw having dined, called his niece to him, and having scanned her person with an air of satisfaction, he took her hand, and looking upon her pretty, innocent face with a smile of kindness, he said:

‘Rose, my girl, that face of yours will make your fortune.’ Rose blushed and smiled. ‘Such faces and such tempers seldom go together, and, when they do, the compound is a love-potion which few heads or hearts can resist. Trust me, thou wilt soon be a bride, girl. But this is trifling, and I am pressed for time, so make ready the large room by eight o’clock tonight, and give directions for supper at nine. I expect a friend tonight; and observe me, child, do thou trick thyself out handsomely. I would not have him think us poor or sluttish.'

With these words he left the chamber, and took his way to the room to which we have already had occasion to introduce our readers — that in which his pupils worked.

When the evening closed in, Gerard called Schalken, who was about to take his departure to his obscure and comfortless lodgings, and asked him to come home and sup with Rose and Vanderhausen.

The invitation was of course accepted, and Gerard Douw and his pupil soon found themselves in the handsome and somewhat antique-looking room which had been prepared for the reception of the stranger.

A cheerful wood-fire blazed in the capacious hearth; a little at one side an oldfashioned table, with richly-carved legs, was placed — destined, no doubt, to receive the supper, for which preparations were going forward; and ranged with exact regularity, stood the tall-backed chairs, whose ungracefulness was more than counterbalanced by their comfort.

The little party, consisting of Rose, her uncle, and the artist, awaited the arrival of the expected visitor with considerable impatience.

Nine o'clock at length came, and with it a summons at the street-door, which, being speedily answered, was followed by a slow and emphatic tread upon the staircase; the steps moved heavily across the lobby, the door of the room in which the party which we have described were assembled slowly opened, and there entered a figure which startled, almost appalled, the phlegmatic Dutchmen, and nearly made Rose scream with affright; it was the form, and arrayed in the garb, of Mynher Vanderhausen; the air, the gait, the height was the same, but the features had never been seen by any of the party before.

The stranger stopped at the door of the room, and displayed his form and face completely. He wore a dark-coloured cloth cloak, which was short and full, not falling quite to the knees; his legs were cased in dark purple silk stockings, and his shoes were adorned with roses of the same colour. The opening of the cloak in front showed the under-suit to consist of some very dark, perhaps sable material, and his hands were enclosed in a pair of heavy leather gloves which ran up considerably above the wrist, in the manner of a gauntlet. In one hand he carried his walking-stick and his hat, which he had removed, and the other hung heavily by his side. A quantity of grizzled hair descended in long tresses from his head, and its folds rested upon the plaits of a stiff ruff, which effectually concealed his neck.

So far all was well; but the face! — all the flesh of the face was coloured with the bluish leaden hue which is sometimes produced by the operation of metallic medicines administered in excessive quantities; the eyes were enormous, and the white appeared both above and below the iris, which gave to them an expression of insanity, which was heightened by their glassy fixedness; the nose was well enough, but the mouth was writhed considerably to one side, where it opened in order to give egress to two long, discoloured fangs, which projected from the upper jaw, far below the lower lip; the hue of the lips themselves bore the usual relation to that of the face, and was consequently nearly black. The character of the face was malignant, even satanic, to the last degree; and, indeed, such a combination of horror could hardly be accounted for, except by supposing the corpse of some atrocious malefactor, which had long hung blackening upon the gibbet, to have at length become the habitation of a demon — the frightful sport of Satanic possession.

It was remarkable that the worshipful stranger suffered as little as possible of his flesh to appear, and that during his visit he did not once remove his gloves.

Having stood for some moments at the door, Gerard Douw at length found breath and collectedness to bid him welcome, and, with a mute inclination of the head, the stranger stepped forward into the room.

There was something indescribably odd, even horrible, about all his motions, something undefinable, that was unnatural, unhuman — it was as if the limbs were guided and directed by a spirit unused to the management of bodily machinery.

The stranger said hardly anything during his visit, which did not exceed half an hour; and the host himself could scarcely muster courage enough to utter the few necessary salutations and courtesies: and, indeed, such was the nervous terror which the presence of Vanderhausen inspired, that very little would have made all his entertainers fly bellowing from the room.

They had not so far lost all self-possession, however, as to fail to observe two strange peculiarities of their visitor.

During his stay he did not once suffer his eyelids to close, nor even to move in the slightest degree; and further, there was a deathlike stillness in his whole person, owing to the total absence of the heaving motion of the chest, caused by the process of respiration.

These two peculiarities, though when told they may appear trifling, produced a very striking and unpleasant effect when seen and observed. Vanderhausen at length relieved the painter of Leyden of his inauspicious presence; and with no small gratification the little party heard the street-door close after him.

‘Dear uncle,’ said Rose, ‘what a frightful man! I would not see him again for the wealth of the States!’

‘Tush, foolish girl!’ said Douw, whose sensations were anything but comfortable. ‘A man may be as ugly as the devil, and yet if his heart and actions are good, he is worth all the pretty-faced, perfumed puppies that walk the Mall. Rose, my girl, it is very true he has not thy pretty face, but I know him to be wealthy and liberal; and were he ten times more ugly — — ‘

‘Which is inconceivable,’ observed Rose.

‘These two virtues would be sufficient,’ continued her uncle, ‘to counterbalance all his deformity; and if not of power sufficient actually to alter the shape of the features, at least of efficacy enough to prevent one thinking them amiss.’

‘Do you know, uncle,’ said Rose, ‘when I saw him standing at the door, I could not get it out of my head that I saw the old, painted, wooden figure that used to frighten me so much in the church of St. Laurence of Rotterdam.’

Gerard laughed, though he could not help inwardly acknowledging the justness of the comparison. He was resolved, however, as far as he could, to check his niece’s inclination to ridicule the ugliness of her intended bridegroom, although he was not a little pleased to observe that she appeared totally exempt from that mysterious dread of the stranger which, he could not disguise it from himself, considerably affected him, as also his pupil Godfrey Schalken.

Early on the next day there arrived, from various quarters of the town, rich presents of silks, velvets, jewellery, and so forth, for Rose; and also a packet directed to Gerard Douw, which, on being opened, was found to contain a contract of marriage, formally drawn up, between Wilken Vanderhausen of the Boom-quay, in Rotterdam, and Rose Velderkaust of

Leyden, niece to Gerard Douw, master in the art of painting, also of the same city; and containing engagements on the part of Vanderhausen to make settlements upon his bride, far more splendid than he had before led her guardian to believe likely, and which were to be secured to her use in the most unexceptionable manner possible — the money being placed in the hands of Gerard Douw himself.

I have no sentimental scenes to describe, no cruelty of guardians, or magnanimity of wards, or agonies of lovers. The record I have to make is one of sordidness, levity, and interest. In less than a week after the first interview which we have just described, the contract of marriage was fulfilled, and Schalken saw the prize which he would have risked anything to secure, carried off triumphantly by his formidable rival.

For two or three days he absented himself from the school; he then returned and worked, if with less cheerfulness, with far more dogged resolution than before; the dream of love had given place to that of ambition.

Months passed away, and, contrary to his expectation, and, indeed, to the direct promise of the parties, Gerard Douw heard nothing of his niece, or her worshipful spouse. The interest of the money, which was to have been demanded in quarterly sums, lay unclaimed in his hands. He began to grow extremely uneasy.

Mynher Vanderhausen’s direction in Rotterdam he was fully possessed of. After some irresolution he finally determined to journey thither — a trifling undertaking, and easily accomplished — and thus to satisfy himself of the safety and comfort of his ward, for whom he entertained an honest and strong affection.

His search was in vain, however. No one in Rotterdam had ever heard of Mynher Vanderhausen.

Gerard Douw left not a house in the Boom-quay untried; but all in vain. No one could give him any information whatever touching the object of his inquiry; and he was obliged to return to Leyden, nothing wiser than when he had left it.

On his arrival he hastened to the establishment from which Vanderhausen had hired the lumbering though, considering the times, most luxurious vehicle which the bridal party had employed to convey them to Rotterdam. From the driver of this machine he learned, that having proceeded by slow stages, they had late in the evening approached Rotterdam; but that before they entered the city, and while yet nearly a mile from it, a small party of men, soberly clad, and after the old fashion, with peaked beards and moustaches, standing in the centre of the road, obstructed the further progress of the carriage. The driver reined in his horses, much fearing, from the obscurity of the hour, and the loneliness of the road, that some mischief was intended.

His fears were, however, somewhat allayed by his observing that these strange men carried a large litter, of an antique shape, and which they immediately set down upon the pavement, whereupon the bridegroom, having opened the coach-door from within, descended, and having assisted his bride to do likewise, led her, weeping bitterly and wringing her hands, to the litter, which they both entered. It was then raised by the men who surrounded it, and speedily carried towards the city, and before it had proceeded many yards the darkness concealed it from the view of the Dutch charioteer.

In the inside of the vehicle he found a purse, whose contents more than thrice paid the hire of the carriage and man. He saw and could tell nothing more of Mynher Vanderhausen and his beautiful lady. This mystery was a source of deep anxiety and almost of grief to Gerard Douw.

There was evidently fraud in the dealing of Vanderhausen with him, though for what purpose committed he could not imagine. He greatly doubted how far it was possible for a man possessing in his countenance so strong an evidence of the presence of the most demoniac feelings, to be in reality anything but a villain; and every day that passed without his hearing from or of his niece, instead of inducing him to forget his fears, on the contrary tended more and more to exasperate them.

The loss of his niece’s cheerful society tended also to depress his spirits; and in order to dispel this despondency, which often crept upon his mind after his daily employment was over, he was wont frequently to prevail upon Schalken to accompany him home, and by his presence to dispel, in some degree, the gloom of his otherwise solitary supper.

One evening, the painter and his pupil were sitting by the fire, having accomplished a comfortable supper, and had yielded to that silent pensiveness sometimes induced by the process of digestion, when their reflections were disturbed by a loud sound at the street-door, as if occasioned by some person rushing forcibly and repeatedly against it. A domestic had run without delay to ascertain the cause of the disturbance, and they heard him twice or thrice interrogate the applicant for admission, but without producing an answer or any cessation of the sounds.

They heard him then open the hall-door, and immediately there followed a light and rapid tread upon the staircase. Schalken laid his hand on his sword, and advanced towards the door. It opened before he reached it, and Rose rushed into the room. She looked wild and haggard, and pale with exhaustion and terror; but her dress surprised them as much even as her unexpected appearance. It consisted of a kind of white woollen wrapper, made close about the neck, and descending to the very ground. It was much deranged and travelsoiled. The poor creature had hardly entered the chamber when she fell senseless on the floor. With some difficulty they succeeded in reviving her, and on recovering her senses she instantly exclaimed, in a tone of eager, terrified impatience:

'Wine, wine, quickly, or I'm lost!'

Much alarmed at the strange agitation in which the call was made, they at once administered to her wishes, and she drank some wine with a haste and eagerness which surprised them. She had hardly swallowed it, when she exclaimed, with the same urgency:

'Food, food, at once, or I perish!'

A considerable fragment of a roast joint was upon the table, and Schalken immediately proceeded to cut some, but he was anticipated; for no sooner had she become aware of its presence than she darted at it with the rapacity of a vulture, and, seizing it in her hands she tore off the flesh with her teeth and swallowed it.

When the paroxysm of hunger had been a little appeased, she appeared suddenly to become aware how strange her conduct had been, or it may have been that other more agitating thoughts recurred to her mind, for she began to weep bitterly and to wring her hands.

'Oh! send for a minister of God,' said she; 'I am not safe till he comes; send for him speedily.'

Gerard Douw despatched a messenger instantly, and prevailed on his niece to allow him to surrender his bedchamber to her use; he also persuaded her to retire to it at once and to rest; her consent was extorted upon the condition that they would not leave her for a moment.

‘Oh that the holy man were here!’ she said; ‘he can deliver me. The dead and the living can never be one — God has forbidden it.’

With these mysterious words she surrendered herself to their guidance, and they proceeded to the chamber which Gerard Douw had assigned to her use.

‘Do not — do not leave me for a moment,’ said she. ‘I am lost for ever if you do.’

Gerard Douw’s chamber was approached through a spacious apartment, which they were now about to enter. Gerard Douw and Schalken each carried a was candle, so that a sufficient degree of light was cast upon all surrounding objects. They were now entering the large chamber, which, as I have said, communicated with Douw’s apartment, when Rose suddenly stopped, and, in a whisper which seemed to thrill with horror, she said:

‘O God! he is here — he is here! See, see — there he goes!’

She pointed towards the door of the inner room, and Schalken thought he saw a shadowy and ill-defined form gliding into that apartment. He drew his sword, and raising the candle so as to throw its light with increased distinctness upon the objects in the room, he entered the chamber into which the shadow had glided. No figure was there — nothing but the furniture which belonged to the room, and yet he could not be deceived as to the fact that something had moved before them into the chamber.

A sickening dread came upon him, and the cold perspiration broke out in heavy drops upon his forehead; nor was he more composed when he heard the increased urgency, the agony of entreaty, with which Rose implored them not to leave her for a moment.

‘I saw him,’ said she. ‘He’s here! I cannot be deceived — I know him. He’s by me — he’s with me — he’s in the room. Then, for God’s sake, as you would save, do not stir from beside me!’

They at length prevailed upon her to lie down upon the bed, where she continued to urge them to stay by her. She frequently uttered incoherent sentences, repeating again and again, ‘The dead and the living cannot be one — God has forbidden it!’ and then again, ‘Rest to the wakeful — sleep to the sleepwalkers.’

These and such mysterious and broken sentences she continued to utter until the clergyman arrived.

Gerard Douw began to fear, naturally enough, that the poor girl, owing to terror or ill-treatment, had become deranged; and he half suspected, by the suddenness of her appearance, and the unseasonableness of the hour, and, above all, from the wildness and terror of her manner, that she had made her escape from some place of confinement for lunatics, and was in immediate fear of pursuit. He resolved to summon medical advice as soon as the mind of his niece had been in some measure set at rest by the offices of the clergyman whose attendance she had so earnestly desired; and until this object had been attained, he did not venture to put any questions to her, which might possibly, by reviving painful or horrible recollections, increase her agitation.

The clergyman soon arrived — a man of ascetic countenance and venerable age — one whom Gerard Douw respected much, forasmuch as he was a veteran polemic, though one, perhaps, more dreaded as a combatant than beloved as a Christian — of pure morality, subtle brain, and frozen heart. He entered the chamber which communicated with that in which Rose reclined, and immediately on his arrival she requested him to pray for her, as for one who lay in the hands of Satan, and who could hope for deliverance — only from heaven.

That our readers may distinctly understand all the circumstances of the event which we are about imperfectly to describe, it is necessary to state the relative position of the parties who were engaged in it. The old clergyman and Schalken were in the anteroom of which we have already spoken; Rose lay in the inner chamber, the door of which was open; and by the side of the bed, at her urgent desire, stood her guardian; a candle burned in the bedchamber, and three were lighted in the outer apartment.

The old man now cleared his voice, as if about to commence; but before he had time to begin, a sudden gust of air blew out the candle which served to illuminate the room in which the poor girl lay, and she, with hurried alarm, exclaimed:

‘Godfrey, bring in another candle; the darkness is unsafe.’

Gerard Douw, forgetting for the moment her repeated injunctions in the immediate impulse, stepped from the bedchamber into the other, in order to supply what she desired.

‘O God I do not go, dear uncle!’ shrieked the unhappy girl; and at the same time she sprang from the bed and darted after him, in order, by her grasp, to detain him.

But the warning came too late, for scarcely had he passed the threshold, and hardly had his niece had time to utter the startling exclamation, when the door which divided the two rooms closed violently after him, as if swung to by a strong blast of wind.

Schalken and he both rushed to the door, but their united and desperate efforts could not avail so much as to shake it.

Shriek after shriek burst from the inner chamber, with all the piercing loudness of despairing terror. Schalken and Douw applied every energy and strained every nerve to force open the door; but all in vain.

There was no sound of struggling from within, but the screams seemed to increase in loudness, and at the same time they heard the bolts of the latticed window withdrawn, and the window itself grated upon the sill as if thrown open.

One LAST shriek, so long and piercing and agonised as to be scarcely human, swelled from the room, and suddenly there followed a deathlike silence.

A light step was heard crossing the floor, as if from the bed to the window; and almost at the same instant the door gave way, and, yielding to the pressure of the external applicants, they were nearly precipitated into the room. It was empty. The window was open, and Schalken sprang to a chair and gazed out upon the street and canal below. He saw no form, but he beheld, or thought he beheld, the waters of the broad canal beneath settling ring after ring in heavy circular ripples, as if a moment before disturbed by the immersion of some large and heavy mass.

No trace of Rose was ever after discovered, nor was anything certain respecting her mysterious wooer detected or even suspected; no clue whereby to trace the intricacies of the labyrinth and to arrive at a distinct conclusion was to be found. But an incident occurred, which, though it will not be received by our rational readers as at all approaching to evidence upon the matter, nevertheless produced a strong and a lasting impression upon the mind of Schalken.

Many years after the events which we have detailed, Schalken, then remotely situated, received an intimation of his father's death, and of his intended burial upon a fixed day in the church of Rotterdam. It was necessary that a very considerable journey should be performed by the funeral procession, which, as it will readily be believed, was not very numerously attended. Schalken with difficulty arrived in Rotterdam late in the day upon which the funeral was appointed to take place. The procession had not then arrived. Evening closed in, and still it did not appear.

Schalken strolled down to the church — he found it open — notice of the arrival of the funeral had been given, and the vault in which the body was to be laid had been opened. The official who corresponds to our sexton, on seeing a well-dressed gentleman, whose object was to attend the expected funeral, pacing the aisle of the church, hospitably invited him to share with him the comforts of a blazing wood fire, which, as was his custom in winter time upon such occasions, he had kindled on the hearth of a chamber which communicated, by a flight of steps, with the vault below.

In this chamber Schalken and his entertainer seated themselves, and the sexton, after some fruitless attempts to engage his guest in conversation, was obliged to apply himself to his tobacco-pipe and can to solace his solitude.

In spite of his grief and cares, the fatigues of a rapid journey of nearly forty hours gradually overcame the mind and body of Godfrey Schalken, and he sank into a deep sleep, from which he was awakened by some one shaking him gently by the shoulder. He first thought that the old sexton had called him, but HE was no longer in the room.

He roused himself, and as soon as he could clearly see what was around him, he perceived a female form, clothed in a kind of light robe of muslin, part of which was so disposed as to act as a veil, and in her hand she carried a lamp. She was moving rather away from him, and towards the flight of steps which conducted towards the vaults.

Schalken felt a vague alarm at the sight of this figure, and at the same time an irresistible impulse to follow its guidance. He followed it towards the vaults, but when it reached the head of the stairs, he paused; the figure paused also, and, turning gently round, displayed, by the light of the lamp it carried, the face and features of his first love, Rose Velderkaust. There was nothing horrible, or even sad, in the countenance. On the contrary, it wore the same arch smile which used to enchant the artist long before in his happy days.

A feeling of awe and of interest, too intense to be resisted, prompted him to follow the spectre, if spectre it were. She descended the stairs — he followed; and, turning to the left, through a narrow passage, she led him, to his infinite surprise, into what appeared to be an oldfashioned Dutch apartment, such as the pictures of Gerard Douw have served to immortalise.

Abundance of costly antique furniture was disposed about the room, and in one corner stood a four-post bed, with heavy black-cloth curtains around it; the figure frequently turned towards him with the same arch smile; and when she came to the side of the bed, she drew the curtains, and by the light of the lamp which she held towards its contents, she disclosed to the horror-stricken painter, sitting bolt upright in the bed, the livid and demoniac form of Vanderhausen. Schalken had hardly seen him when he fell senseless upon the floor, where he lay until discovered, on the next morning, by persons employed in closing the passages into the vaults. He was lying in a cell of considerable size, which had not been disturbed for a long time, and he had fallen beside a large coffin which was supported upon small stone pillars, a security against the attacks of vermin.

To his dying day Schalken was satisfied of the reality of the vision which he had witnessed, and he has left behind him a curious evidence of the impression which it wrought upon his fancy, in a painting executed shortly after the event we have narrated, and which is valuable as exhibiting not only the peculiarities which have made Schalken's pictures sought after, but even more so as presenting a portrait, as close and faithful as one taken from memory can be, of his early love, Rose Velderkaust, whose mysterious fate must ever remain matter of speculation.

The picture represents a chamber of antique masonry, such as might be found in most old cathedrals, and is lighted faintly by a lamp carried in the hand of a female figure, such as we have above attempted to describe; and in the background, and to the left of him who examines the painting, there stands the form of a man apparently aroused from sleep, and by his attitude, his hand being laid upon his sword, exhibiting considerable alarm: this last figure is illuminated only by the expiring glare of a wood or charcoal fire.

The whole production exhibits a beautiful specimen of that artful and singular distribution of light and shade which has rendered the name of Schalken immortal among the artists of his country. This tale is traditionary, and the reader will easily perceive, by our studiously omitting to heighten many points of the narrative, when a little additional colouring might have added effect to the recital, that we have desired to lay before him, not a figment of the brain, but a curious tradition connected with, and belonging to, the biography of a famous artist.

SCRAPS OF HIBERNIAN BALLADS.

Being an Eighth Extract from the Legacy of the late Francis Purcell, P. P. of Drumcoolagh.

I have observed, my dear friend, among other grievous misconceptions current among men otherwise well-informed, and which tend to degrade the pretensions of my native land, an impression that there exists no such thing as indigenous modern Irish composition deserving the name of poetry — a belief which has been thoughtlessly sustained and confirmed by the unconscionable literary perverseness of Irishmen themselves, who have preferred the easy task of concocting humorous extravaganzas, which caricature with merciless exaggeration the pedantry, bombast, and blunders incident to the lowest order of Hibernian ballads, to the more pleasurable and patriotic duty of collecting together the many, many specimens of genuine poetic feeling, which have grown up, like its wild flowers, from the warm though neglected soil of Ireland.

In fact, the productions which have long been regarded as pure samples of Irish poetic composition, such as 'The Groves of Blarney,' and 'The Wedding of Ballyporeen,' 'Ally Croker,' etc., etc., are altogether spurious, and as much like the thing they call themselves 'as I to Hercules.'

There are to be sure in Ireland, as in all countries, poems which deserve to be laughed at. The native productions of which I speak, frequently abound in absurdities — absurdities which are often, too, provokingly mixed up with what is beautiful; but I strongly and absolutely deny that the prevailing or even the usual character of Irish poetry is that of comicality. No country, no time, is devoid of real poetry, or something approaching to it; and surely it were a strange thing if Ireland, abounding as she does from shore to shore with all that is beautiful, and grand, and savage in scenery, and filled with wild recollections, vivid passions, warm affections, and keen sorrow, could find no language to speak withal, but that of mummery and jest. No, her language is imperfect, but there is strength in its rudeness, and beauty in its wildness; and, above all, strong feeling flows through it, like fresh fountains in rugged caverns.

And yet I will not say that the language of genuine indigenous Irish composition is always vulgar and uncouth: on the contrary, I am in possession of some specimens, though by no means of the highest order as to poetic merit, which do not possess throughout a single peculiarity of diction. The lines which I now proceed to lay before you, by way of illustration, are from the pen of an unfortunate young man, of very humble birth, whose early hopes were crossed by the untimely death of her whom he loved. He was a self-educated man, and in afterlife rose to high distinctions in the Church to which he devoted himself — an act which proves the sincerity of spirit with which these verses were written.

‘When moonlight falls on wave and wimple,
And silvers every circling dimple,
That onward, onward sails:
When fragrant hawthorns wild and simple
Lend perfume to the gales,
And the pale moon in heaven abiding,
O’er midnight mists and mountains riding,
Shines on the river, smoothly gliding
Through quiet dales,

‘I wander there in solitude,
Charmed by the chiming music rude
Of streams that fret and flow.
For by that eddying stream SHE stood,
On such a night I trow:
For HER the thorn its breath was lending,
On this same tide HER eye was bending,
And with its voice HER voice was blending
Long, long ago.

Wild stream! I walk by thee once more,
I see thy hawthorns dim and hoar,
I hear thy waters moan,

And night-winds sigh from shore to shore,
With hushed and hollow tone;
But breezes on their light way winging,
And all thy waters heedless singing,
No more to me are gladness bringing —
I am alone.

‘Years after years, their swift way keeping,
Like sere leaves down thy current sweeping,
Are lost for aye, and sped —
And Death the wintry soil is heaping
As fast as flowers are shed.
And she who wandered by my side,
And breathed enchantment o’er thy tide,
That makes thee still my friend and guide —
And she is dead.’

These lines I have transcribed in order to prove a point which I have heard denied, namely, that an Irish peasant — for their author was no more — may write at least correctly in the matter of measure, language, and rhyme; and I shall add several extracts in further illustration of the same fact, a fact whose assertion, it must be allowed, may appear somewhat paradoxical even to those who are acquainted, though superficially, with Hibernian composition. The rhymes are, it must be granted, in the generality of such productions, very latitudinarian indeed, and as a veteran votary of the muse once assured me, depend wholly upon the wowls (vowels), as may be seen in the following stanza of the famous ‘Shanavan Voicth.’

‘“What’ll we have for supper?”
Says my Shanavan Voicth;
“We’ll have turkeys and roast BEEF,
And we’ll eat it very SWEET,
And then we’ll take a SLEEP,”
Says my Shanavan Voicth.’

But I am desirous of showing you that, although barbarisms may and do exist in our native ballads, there are still to be found exceptions which furnish examples of strict correctness in rhyme and metre. Whether they be one whit the better for this I have my doubts. In order to establish my position, I subjoin a portion of a ballad by one Michael Finley, of whom more anon. The GENTLEMAN spoken of in the song is Lord Edward Fitzgerald.

‘The day that traitors sould him and inimies bought him,
The day that the red gold and red blood was paid —
Then the green turned pale and thrembled like the dead leaves in
Autumn, And the heart an’ hope iv Ireland in the could grave was
laid.

‘The day I saw you first, with the sunshine fallin’ round ye,
My heart fairly opened with the grandeur of the view:
For ten thousand Irish boys that day did surround ye,
An’ I swore to stand by them till death, an’ fight for you.

‘Ye wor the bravest gentleman, an’ the best that ever stood,
And your eyelid never thrembled for danger nor for dread,
An’ nobleness was flowin’ in each stream of your blood —
My bleasing on you night au’ day, an’ Glory be your bed.

‘My black an’ bitter curse on the head, an’ heart, an’ hand,
That plotted, wished, an’ worked the fall of this Irish hero
bold; God’s curse upon the Irishman that sould his native land,
An’ hell consume to dust the hand that held the thraitor’s
gold.’

Such were the politics and poetry of Michael Finley, in his day, perhaps, the most noted song-maker of his country; but as genius is never without its eccentricities, Finley had his peculiarities, and among these, perhaps the most amusing was his rooted aversion to pen, ink, and paper, in perfect independence of which, all his compositions were completed. It is impossible to describe the jealousy with which he regarded the presence of writing materials of any kind, and his ever wakeful fears lest some literary pirate should transfer his oral poetry to paper — fears which were not altogether without warrant, inasmuch as the recitation and singing of these original pieces were to him a source of wealth and importance. I recollect upon one occasion his detecting me in the very act of following his recitation with my pencil and I shall not soon forget his indignant scowl, as stopping abruptly in the midst of a line, he sharply exclaimed:

‘Is my pome a pigsty, or what, that you want a surveyor’s ground-plan of it?’

Owing to this absurd scruple, I have been obliged, with one exception, that of the ballad of ‘Phaudhrig Crohoore,’ to rest satisfied with such snatches and fragments of his poetry as my memory could bear away — a fact which must account for the mutilated state in which I have been obliged to present the foregoing specimen of his composition.

It was in vain for me to reason with this man of metres upon the unreasonableness of this despotic and exclusive assertion of copyright. I well remember his answer to me when, among other arguments, I urged the advisability of some care for the permanence of his reputation, as a motive to induce him to consent to have his poems written down, and thus reduced to a palpable and enduring form.

‘I often noticed,’ said he, ‘when a mist id be spreadin’, a little brier to look as big, you’d think, as an oak tree; an’ same way, in the dimmness iv the nightfall, I often seen a man tremblin’ and crassin’ himself as if a sperit was before him, at the sight iv a small thorn bush, that he’d leap over with ase if the daylight and sunshine was in it. An’ that’s the rason why I think it id be better for the likes iv me to be remimbered in tradition than to be written in history.’

Finley has now been dead nearly eleven years, and his fame has not prospered by the tactics which he pursued, for his reputation, so far from being magnified, has been wholly obliterated by the mists of obscurity.

With no small difficulty, and no inconsiderable manoeuvring, I succeeded in procuring, at an expense of trouble and conscience which you will no doubt think but poorly rewarded, an accurate ‘report’ of one of his most popular recitations. It celebrates one of the many daring exploits of the once famous Phaudhrig Crohoore (in prosaic English, Patrick Connor). I have witnessed powerful effects produced upon large assemblies by Finley’s recitation of this poem which he was wont, upon pressing invitation, to deliver at weddings, wakes, and the like; of course the power of the narrative was greatly enhanced by the fact that many of his auditors had seen and well knew the chief actors in the drama.

‘PHAUDHRIG CROHOORE.

Oh, Phaudhrig Crohoore was the broth of a boy,
And he stood six foot eight,
And his arm was as round as another man’s thigh,
’Tis Phaudhrig was great, —
And his hair was as black as the shadows of night,
And hung over the scars left by many a fight;
And his voice, like the thunder, was deep, strong, and loud,
And his eye like the lightnin’ from under the cloud.
And all the girls liked him, for he could spake civil,
And sweet when he chose it, for he was the divil.
An’ there wasn’t a girl from thirty-five undher,
Divil a matter how crass, but he could come round her.
But of all the sweet girls that smiled on him, but one
Was the girl of his heart, an’ he loved her alone.
An’ warm as the sun, as the rock firm an’ sure,
Was the love of the heart of Phaudhrig Crohoore;
An’ he’d die for one smile from his Kathleen O’Brien,
For his love, like his hatred, was sthrong as the lion.

‘But Michael O’Hanlon loved Kathleen as well
As he hated Crohoore — an’ that same was like hell.
But O’Brien liked HIM, for they were the same parties,
The O’Briens, O’Hanlons, an’ Murphys, and Cartys —
An’ they all went together an’ hated Crohoore,
For it’s many the batin’ he gave them before;
An’ O’Hanlon made up to O’Brien, an’ says he:
“I’ll marry your daughter, if you’ll give her to me.”
And the match was made up, an’ when Shrovetide came on,
The company assimbled three hundred if one:
There was all the O’Hanlons, an’ Murphys, an’ Cartys,
An’ the young boys an’ girls av all o’ them parties;

An’ the O’Briens, av coorse, gathered strong on day,
An’ the pipers an’ fiddlers were tearin’ away;
There was roarin’, an’ jumpin’, an’ jiggin’, an’ flingin’,
An’ jokin’, an’ blessin’, an’ kissin’, an’ singin’,
An’ they wor all laughin’ — why not, to be sure? —
How O’Hanlon came inside of Phaudhrig Crohoore.
An’ they all talked an’ laughed the length of the table,
Atin’ an’ dhrinkin’ all while they wor able,
And with pipin’ an’ fiddlin’ an’ roarin’ like tundher,
Your head you’d think fairly was splittin’ asundher;
And the priest called out, “Silence, ye blackguards, agin!”
An’ he took up his prayer-book, just goin’ to begin,
An’ they all held their tongues from their funnin’ and bawlin’,
So silent you’d notice the smallest pin fallin’;

An’ the priest was just beg’nin’ to read, whin the door
Sprung back to the wall, and in walked Crohoore —
Oh! Phaudhrig Crohoore was the broth of a boy,
Ant he stood six foot eight,
An’ his arm was as round as another man’s thigh,
’Tis Phaudhrig was great —
An’ he walked slowly up, watched by many a bright eye,
As a black cloud moves on through the stars of the sky,
An’ none sthrove to stop him, for Phaudhrig was great,
Till he stood all alone, just apposit the sate
Where O’Hanlon and Kathleen, his beautiful bride,
Were sitting so illigant out side by side;
An’ he gave her one look that her heart almost broke,
An’ he turned to O’Brien, her father, and spoke,
An’ his voice, like the thunder, was deep, sthrong, and loud,
An’ his eye shone like lightnin’ from under the cloud:
“I didn’t come here like a tame, crawlin’ mouse,
But I stand like a man in my inimy’s house;
In the field, on the road, Phaudhrig never knew fear,

Of his foemen, an' God knows he scorns it here;

So lave me at aise, for three minutes or four,
To spake to the girl I'll never see more."
An' to Kathleen he turned, and his voice changed its tone,
For he thought of the days when he called her his own,
An' his eye blazed like lightnin' from under the cloud
On his false-hearted girl, reproachful and proud,
An' says he: "Kathleen bawn, is it thrue what I hear,
That you marry of your free choice, without threat or fear?
If so, spake the word, an' I'll turn and depart,
Chated once, and once only by woman's false heart."
Oh! sorrow and love made the poor girl dumb,
An' she thried hard to spake, but the words wouldn't come,
For the sound of his voice, as he stood there fornint her,
Wint could on her heart as the night wind in winther.
An' the tears in her blue eyes stood tremblin' to flow,
And pale was her cheek as the moonshine on snow;
Then the heart of bould Phaudhrig swelled high in its place,
For he knew, by one look in that beautiful face,

That though sthrangers an' foemen their pledged hands might
sever, Her true heart was his, and his only, for ever.
An' he lifted his voice, like the agle's hoarse call,
An' says Phaudhrig, "She's mine still, in spite of yez all!"
Then up jumped O'Hanlon, an' a tall boy was he,
An' he looked on bould Phaudhrig as fierce as could be,
An' says he, "By the hokey! before you go out,
Bould Phaudhrig Crohoore, you must fight for a bout."
Then Phaudhrig made answer: "I'll do my endeavour,"
An' with one blow he stretched bould O'Hanlon for ever.
In his arms he took Kathleen, an' stepped to the door;
And he leaped on his horse, and flung her before;
An' they all were so bother'd, that not a man stirred
Till the galloping hoofs on the pavement were heard.

Then up they all started, like bees in the swarm,
An’ they riz a great shout, like the burst of a storm,
An’ they roared, and they ran, and they shouted galore;
But Kathleen and Phaudhrig they never saw more.

‘But them days are gone by, an’ he is no more;
An’ the green-grass is growin’ o’er Phaudhrig Crohoore,
For he couldn’t be aisy or quiet at all;
As he lived a brave boy, he resolved so to fall.
And he took a good pike — for Phaudhrig was great —
And he fought, and he died in the year ninetyeight.
An’ the day that Crohoore in the green field was killed,
A sthrong boy was sthretched, and a sthrong heart was stilled.’

It is due to the memory of Finley to say that the foregoing ballad, though bearing throughout a strong resemblance to Sir Walter Scott’s ‘Lochinvar,’ was nevertheless composed long before that spirited production had seen the light.

JIM SULIVAN'S ADVENTURES IN THE GREAT SNOW.

Being a Ninth Extract from the Legacy of the late Francis
Purcell, P.P. of Drumcoolagh.

Jim Sulivan was a dacent, honest boy as you'd find in the seven parishes, an' he was a beautiful singer, an' an illegant dancer intirely, an' a mighty plisant boy in himself; but he had the divil's bad luck, for he married for love, an 'av coorse he niver had an asy minute afther.

Nell Gorman was the girl he fancied, an' a beautiful slip of a girl she was, jist twinty to the minute when he married her. She was as round an' as complate in all her shapes as a firkin, you'd think, an' her two cheeks was as fat an' as red, it id open your heart to look at them.

But beauty is not the thing all through, an' as beautiful as she was she had the divil's tongue, an' the divil's timper, an' the divil's behaviour all out; an' it was impossible for him to be in the house with her for while you'd count tin without havin' an argymint, an' as sure as she riz an argymint with him she'd hit him a wipe iv a skillet or whatever lay next to her hand.

Well, this wasn't at all plasin' to Jim Sulivan you may be sure, an' there was scarce a week that his head wasn't plasthered up, or his back bint double, or his nose swelled as big as a pittaty, with the vilence iv her timper, an' his heart was scalded everlastin'ly with her tongue; so he had no pace or quietness in body or soul at all at all, with the way she was goin' an.

Well, your honour, one cowld snowin' evenin' he kim in afther his day's work regulatin' the men in the farm, an' he sat down very quite by the fire, for he had a scrimmidge with her in the mornin', an' all he wanted was an air iv the fire in pace; so divil a word he said but dhrew a stool an' sat down close to the fire. Well, as soon as the woman saw him,

'Move aff,' says she, 'an' don't be inthrudin' an the fire,' says she.

Well, he kept never mindin', an' didn't let an' to hear a word she was sayin', so she kim over an' she had a spoon in her hand, an' she took jist the smallest taste in life iv the boilin' wather out iv the pot, an' she dhropped it down an his shins, an' with that he let a roar you'd think the roof id fly aff iv the house.

‘Hould your tongue, you barbarrian,’ says she; ‘you’ll waken the child,’ says she.

‘An’ if I done right,’ says he, for the spoonful of boilin’ wather riz him entirely, ‘I’d take yourself,’ says he, ‘an’ I’d stuff you into the pot an the fire, an’ boil you.’ says he, ‘into castor oil,’ says he.

‘That’s purty behavour,’ says she; ‘it’s fine usage you’re givin’ me, isn’t it?’ says she, gettin’ wickeder every minute; ‘but before I’m boiled,’ says she, ‘thry how you like THAT,’ says she; an’, sure enough, before he had time to put up his guard, she hot him a rale terrible clink iv the iron spoon acrass the jaw.

‘Hould me, some iv ye, or I’ll murdher her,’ says he.

‘Will you?’ says she, an’ with that she hot him another tin times as good as the first.

‘By jabers,’ says he, slappin’ himself behind, ‘that’s the last salute you’ll ever give me,’ says he; ‘so take my last blessin’,’ says he, ‘you ungovernable baste!’ says he — an’ with that he pulled an his hat an’ walked out iv the door.

Well, she never minded a word he said, for he used to say the same thing all as one every time she dhrew blood; an’ she had no expectation at all but he’d come back by the time supper id be ready; but faix the story didn’t go quite so simple this time, for while he was walkin’, lonesome enough, down the borheen, with his heart almost broke with the pain, for his shins an’ his jaw was mighty troublesome, av course, with the thratement he got, who did he see but Mick Hanlon, his uncle’s sarvint by, ridin’ down, quite an asy, an the ould black horse, with a halter as long as himself.

‘Is that Mr. Soolivan?’ says the by. says he, as soon as he saw him a good bit aff.

‘To be sure it is, ye spalpeen, you,’ says Jim, roarin’ out; ‘what do you want wid me this time a-day?’ says he.

‘Don’t you know me?’ says the gossoon, ‘it’s Mick Hanlon that’s in it,’ says he.

‘Oh, blur an agers, thin, it’s welcome you are, Micky asthore,’ says Jim; ‘how is all wid the man an’ the woman beyant?’ says he.

‘Oh!’ says Micky, ‘bad enough,’ says he; ‘the ould man’s jist aff, an’ if you don’t hurry like shot,’ says he, ‘he’ll be in glory before you get there,’ says he.

‘It’s jokin’ ye are,’ says Jim, sorrowful enough, for he was mighty partial to his uncle intirely.

‘Oh, not in the smallest taste,’ says Micky; ‘the breath was jist out iv him,’ says he, ‘when I left the farm. “An”, says he, “take the ould black horse,” says he, “for he’s shure-footed for the road,” says he, “an’ bring, Jim Soolivan here,” says he, “for I think I’d die asy af I could see him onst,” says he.’

‘Well,’ says Jim, ‘will I have time,’ says he, ‘to go back to the house, for it would be a consolation,’ says he, ‘to tell the bad news to the woman?’ says he.

‘It’s too late you are already,’ says Micky, ‘so come up behind me, for God’s sake,’ says he, ‘an’ don’t waste time;’ an’ with that he brought the horse up beside the ditch, an’ Jim Soolivan mounted up behind Micky, an’ they rode off; an’ tin good miles it was iv a road, an’ at the other side iv Keeper intirely; an’ it was snowin’ so fast that the ould baste could hardly go an at all at all, an’ the two bys an his back was jist like a snowball all as one, an’ almost fruz an’ smothered at the same time, your honour; an’ they wor both mighty sorrowful intirely, an’ their toes almost dhroppin’ aff wid the could.

And when Jim got to the farm his uncle was gettin’ an illegantly, an’ he was sittin’ up sthrong an’ warm in the bed, an’ improvin’ every minute, an’ no signs av dyin’ an him at all at all; so he had all his throuble for nothin’.

But this wasn’t all, for the snow kem so thick that it was impassible to get along the roads at all at all; an’ faix, instead iv gettin’ betther, next mornin’ it was only tin times worse; so Jim had jist to take it asy, an’ stay wid his uncle antil such times as the snow id melt.

Well, your honour, the evenin’ Jim Soolivan wint away, whin the dark was closin’ in, Nell Gorman, his wife, beginned to get mighty anasy in herself whin she didn’t see him comin’ back at all; an’ she was gettin’ more an’ more frightful in herself every minute till the dark kem an’, an’ divil a taste iv her husband was coming at all at all.

‘Oh!’ says she, ‘there’s no use in purtendin’, I know he’s kilt himself; he has committed infantycide an himself,’ says she, ‘like a dissipated bliggard as he always was,’ says she, ‘God rest his soul. Oh, thin, isn’t it me an’ not you, Jim Soolivan, that’s the unforthunate woman,’ says she, ‘for ain’t I cryin’ here, an’ isn’t he in heaven, the bliggard,’ says she. ‘Oh, voh, voh, it’s not at home comfortable with your wife an' family that you are, Jim Soolivan,' says she, 'but in the other world, you aumathaun, in glory wid the saints I hope,' says she. 'It's I that's the unforthunate famale,' says she, 'an' not yourself, Jim Soolivan,' says she.

An' this way she kep' an till mornin', cryin' and lamintin; an' wid the first light she called up all the sarvint bys, an' she tould them to go out an' to sarch every inch iv ground to find the corpse, 'for I'm sure,' says she, 'it's not to go hide himself he would,' says she.

Well, they went as well as they could, rummagin' through the snow, antil, at last, what should they come to, sure enough, but the corpse of a poor thravelling man, that fell over the quarry the night before by rason of the snow and some liquor he had, maybe; but, at any rate, he was as dead as a herrin', an' his face was knocked all to pieces jist like an over-boiled pitaty, glory be to God; an' divil a taste iv a nose or a chin, or a hill or a hollow from one end av his face to the other but was all as flat as a pancake. An' he was about Jim Soolivan's size, an' dhressed out exactly the same, wid a ridin' coat an' new corderhoys; so they carried him home, an' they were all as sure as daylight it was Jim Soolivan himself, an' they were wondhering he'd do sich a dirty turn as to go kill himself for spite.

Well, your honour, they waked him as well as they could, with what neighbours they could git togither, but by rason iv the snow, there wasn't enough gothered to make much divarsion; however it was a plisint wake enough, an' the churchyard an' the priest bein' convanient, as soon as the youngsthers had their bit iv fun and divarsion out iv the corpse, they burried it without a great dale iv throuble; an' about three days afther the berrin, ould Jim Mallowney, from th'other side iv the little hill, her own cousin by the mother's side — he had a snug bit iv a farm an' a house close by, by the same token — kem walkin' in to see how she was in her health, an' he dhrew a chair, an' he sot down an' beginned to convarse her about one thing an' another, antil he got her quite an' asy into middlin' good humour, an' as soon as he seen it was time:

'I'm wondherin', says he, 'Nell Gorman, sich a handsome, likely girl, id be thinkin' iv nothin' but lamintin' an' the likes,' says he, 'an' lingerin' away her days without any consolation, or gettin' a husband,' says he.

'Oh,' says she, 'isn't it only three days since I burried the poor man,' says she, 'an' isn't it rather soon to be talkin iv marryin' agin?'

‘Divil a taste,’ says he, ‘three days is jist the time to a minute for cryin’ afther a husband, an’ there’s no occasion in life to be keepin’ it up,’ says he; ‘an’ besides all that,’ says he, ‘Shrovetide is almost over, an’ if you don’t be sturrin’ yourself an’ lookin’ about you, you’ll be late,’ says he, ‘for this year at any rate, an’ that’s twelve months lost; an’ who’s to look afther the farm all that time,’ says he, ‘an’ to keep the men to their work?’ says he.

‘It’s thrue for you, Jim Mallowney,’ says she, ‘but I’m afeard the neighbours will be all talkin’ about it,’ says she.

‘Divil’s cure to the word,’ says he.

‘An’ who would you advise?’ says she.

‘Young Andy Curtis is the boy,’ says he.

‘He’s a likely boy in himself,’ says she.

‘An’ as handy a gossoon as is out,’ says he.

‘Well, thin, Jim Mallowney,’ says she, ‘here’s my hand, an’ you may be talkin’ to Andy Curtis, an’ if he’s willin’ I’m agreeble — is that enough?’ says she.

So with that he made off with himself straight to Andy Curtis; an’ before three days more was past, the weddin’ kem an’, an’ Nell Gorman an’ Andy Curtis was married as complate as possible; an’ if the wake was plisint the weddin’ was tin times as agreeble, an’ all the neighbours that could make their way to it was there, an’ there was three fiddlers an’ lots iv pipers, an’ ould Connor Shamus(1) the piper himself was in it — by the same token it was the last weddin’ he ever played music at, for the next mornin’, whin he was goin’ home, bein’ mighty hearty an’ plisint in himself, he was smothered in the snow, undher the ould castle; an’ by my sowl he was a sore loss to the bys an’ girls twenty miles round, for he was the illigantest piper, barrin’ the liquor alone, that ever worked a bellas.

(1) Literally, Cornelius James — the last name employed as a patronymic. Connor is commonly used. Corney, pronounced Kurny, is just as much used in the South, as the short name for Cornelius.

Well, a week passed over smart enough, an’ Nell an’ her new husband was mighty well continted with one another, for it was too soon for her to begin to regulate him the way she used with poor Jim Soolivan, so they wor comfortable enough; but this was too good to last, for the thaw kem an’, an’ you may be sure Jim Soolivan didn’t lose a minute’s time as soon as the heavy dhrift iv snow was melted enough between him and home to let him pass, for he didn't hear a word iv news from home sinst he lift it, by rason that no one, good nor bad, could thravel at all, with the way the snow was dhrifted.

So one night, when Nell Gorman an' her new husband, Andy Curtis, was snug an' warm in bed, an' fast asleep, an' everything quite, who should come to the door, sure enough, but Jim Soolivan himself, an' he beginned flakin' the door wid a big blackthorn stick he had, an' roarin' out like the divil to open the door, for he had a dhrop taken.

'What the divil's the matther?' says Andy Curtis, wakenin' out iv his sleep.

'Who's batin' the door?' says Nell; 'what's all the noise for?' says she.

'Who's in it?' says Andy.

'It's me,' says Jim.

'Who are you?' says Andy; 'what's your name?'

'Jim Soolivan,' says he.

'By jabers, you lie,' says Andy.

'Wait till I get at you,' says Jim, hittin' the door a lick iv the wattle you'd hear half a mile off.

'It's him, sure enough,' says Nell; 'I know his speech; it's his wandherin' sowl that can't get rest, the crass o' Christ betune us an' harm.'

'Let me in,' says Jim, 'or I'll dhrive the door in a top iv yis.'

'Jim Soolivan — Jim Soolivan,' says Nell, sittin' up in the bed, an' gropin' for a quart bottle iv holy wather she used to hang by the back iv the bed, 'don't come in, darlin' — there's holy wather here,' says she; 'but tell me from where you are is there anything that's throublin' your poor sinful sowl?' says she. 'An' tell me how many masses 'ill make you asy, an' by this crass, I'll buy you as many as you want,' says she.

'I don't know what the divil you mane,' says Jim.

'Go back,' says she, 'go back to glory, for God's sake,' says she.

'Divil's cure to the bit iv me 'ill go back to glory, or anywhere else,' says he, 'this blessed night; so open the door at onst' an' let me in,' says he.

'The Lord forbid,' says she.

'By jabers, you'd betther,' says he, 'or it 'ill be the worse for you,' says he; an' wid that he fell to wallopin' the door till he was fairly tired, an' Andy an’ his wife crassin’ themselves an’ sayin’ their prayers for the bare life all the time.

‘Jim Soolivan,’ says she, as soon as he was done, ‘go back, for God’s sake, an’ don’t be freakenin’ me an’ your poor fatherless childhren,’ says she.

‘Why, you bosthoon, you,’ says Jim, ‘won’t you let your husband in,’ says he, ‘to his own house?’ says he.

‘You WOR my husband, sure enough,’ says she, ‘but it’s well you know, Jim Soolivan, you’re not my husband NOW,’ says she.

‘You’re as dhrunk as can be consaved, says Jim.

‘Go back, in God’s name, pacibly to your grave,’ says Nell.

‘By my sowl, it’s to my grave you’ll sind me, sure enough,’ says he, ‘you hardhearted bain’, for I’m jist aff wid the cowld,’ says he.

‘Jim Sulivan,’ says she, ‘it’s in your dacent coffin you should be, you unforthunate sperit,’ says she; ‘what is it’s annoyin’ your sowl, in the wide world, at all?’ says she; ‘hadn’t you everything complate?’ says she, ‘the oil, an’ the wake, an’ the berrin’?’ says she.

‘Och, by the hoky,’ says Jim, ‘it’s too long I’m makin’ a fool iv mysilf, gostherin’ wid you outside iv my own door,’ says he, ‘for it’s plain to be seen,’ says he, ‘you don’t know what your’re sayin’, an’ no one ELSE knows what you mane, you unforthunate fool,’ says he; ‘so, onst for all, open the door quietly,’ says he, ‘or, by my sowkins, I’ll not lave a splinther together,’ says he.

Well, whin Nell an’ Andy seen he was getting vexed, they beginned to bawl out their prayers, with the fright, as if the life was lavin’ them; an’ the more he bate the door, the louder they prayed, until at last Jim was fairly tired out.

‘Bad luck to you,’ says he; ‘for a rale divil av a woman,’ says he. I ‘can’t get any advantage av you, any way; but wait till I get hould iv you, that’s all,’ says he. An’ he turned aff from the door, an’ wint round to the cowhouse, an’ settled himself as well as he could, in the sthraw; an’ he was tired enough wid the thravellin’ he had in the daytime, an’ a good dale bothered with what liquor he had taken; so he was purty sure of sleepin’ wherever he thrun himself.

But, by my sowl, it wasn’t the same way with the man an’ the woman in the house — for divil a wink iv sleep, good or bad, could they get at all, wid the fright iv the sperit, as they supposed; an' with the first light they sint a little gossoon, as fast as he could wag, straight off, like a shot, to the priest, an' to desire him, for the love o' God, to come to them an the minute, an' to bring, if it was plasin' to his raverence, all the little things he had for sayin' mass, an' savin' sowls, an' banishin' sperits, an' freakenin' the divil, an' the likes iv that. An' it wasn't long till his raverence kem down, sure enough, on the ould grey mare, wid the little mass-boy behind him, an' the prayer-books an' Bibles, an' all the other mystarious articles that was wantin', along wid him; an' as soon as he kem in, 'God save all here,' says he.

'God save ye, kindly, your raverence,' says they.

'An' what's gone wrong wid ye?' says he; 'ye must be very bad,' says he,' entirely, to disturb my devotions,' says he, 'this way, jist at breakfast-time,' says he.

'By my sowkins,' says Nell, 'it's bad enough we are, your raverence,' says she, 'for it's poor Jim's sperit,' says she; 'God rest his sowl, wherever it is,' says she, 'that was wandherin' up an' down, opossite the door all night,' says she, 'in the way it was no use at all, thryin' to get a wink iv sleep,' says she.

'It's to lay it, you want me, I suppose,' says the priest.

'If your raverence 'id do that same, it 'id be plasin' to us,' says Andy.

'It'll be rather expinsive,' says the priest.

'We'll not differ about the price, your raverence,' says Andy.

'Did the sperit stop long?' says the priest.

'Most part iv the night,' says Nell, 'the Lord be merciful to us all!' says she.

'That'll make it more costly than I thought,' says he. 'An' did it make much noise?' says he.

'By my sowl, it's it that did,' says Andy; 'leatherin' the door wid sticks and stones,' says he, 'antil I fairly thought every minute,' says he, 'the ould boords id smash, an' the sperit id be in an top iv us — God bless us,' says he.

'Phiew!' says the priest; 'it'll cost a power iv money.'

'Well, your raverence,' says Andy, 'take whatever you like,' says he; 'only make sure it won't annoy us any more,' says he.

'Oh! by my sowkins,' says the priest, 'it'll be the quarest ghost in the siven parishes,' says he, 'if it has the courage to come back,' says he, 'afther what I’ll do this mornin’, plase God,’ says he; ‘so we’ll say twelve pounds; an’ God knows it’s chape enough,’ says he, ‘considherin’ all the sarcumstances,’ says he.

Well, there wasn’t a second word to the bargain; so they paid him the money down, an’ he sot the table doun like an althar, before the door, an’ he settled it out vid all the things he had wid him; an’ he lit a bit iv a holy candle, an’ he scathered his holy wather right an’ left; an’ he took up a big book, an’ he wint an readin’ for half an hour, good; an’ whin he kem to the end, he tuck hould iv his little bell, and he beginned to ring it for the bare life; an’, by my sowl, he rung it so well, that he wakened Jim Sulivan in the cowhouse, where he was sleepin’, an’ up he jumped, widout a minute’s delay, an’ med right for the house, where all the family, an’ the priest, an’ the little mass-boy was assimbled, layin’ the ghost; an’ as soon as his raverence seen him comin’ in at the door, wid the fair fright, he flung the bell at his head, an’ hot him sich a lick iv it in the forehead, that he sthretched him on the floor; but fain; he didn’t wait to ax any questions, but he cut round the table as if the divil was afther him, an’ out at the door, an’ didn’t stop even as much as to mount an his mare, but leathered away down the borheen as fast as his legs could carry him, though the mud was up to his knees, savin’ your presence.

Well, by the time Jim kem to himself, the family persaved the mistake, an’ Andy wint home, lavin’ Nell to make the explanation. An’ as soon as Jim heerd it all, he said he was quite contint to lave her to Andy, entirely; but the priest would not hear iv it; an’ he jist med him marry his wife over again, an’ a merry weddin’ it was, an’ a fine collection for his raverence. An’ Andy was there along wid the rest, an’ the priest put a small pinnance upon him, for bein’ in too great a hurry to marry a widdy.

An’ bad luck to the word he’d allow anyone to say an the business, ever after, at all, at all; so, av coorse, no one offinded his raverence, by spakin’ iv the twelve pounds he got for layin’ the sperit.

An’ the neighbours wor all mighty well plased, to be sure, for gettin’ all the divarsion of a wake, an’ two weddin’s for nothin.’

A CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF A TYRONE FAMILY

Being a Tenth Extract from the Legacy of the late Francis Purcell, P.P. of Drumcoolagh.

INTRODUCTION.

In the following narrative, I have endeavoured to give as nearly as possible the ipsissima verba of the valued friend from whom I received it, conscious that any aberration from HER mode of telling the tale of her own life would at once impair its accuracy and its effect.

Would that, with her words, I could also bring before you her animated gesture, her expressive countenance, the solemn and thrilling air and accent with which she related the dark passages in her strange story; and, above all, that I could communicate the impressive consciousness that the narrator had seen with her own eyes, and personally acted in the scenes which she described; these accompaniments, taken with the additional circumstance that she who told the tale was one far too deeply and sadly impressed with religious principle to misrepresent or fabricate what she repeated as fact, gave to the tale a depth of interest which the events recorded could hardly, themselves, have produced.

I became acquainted with the lady from whose lips I heard this narrative nearly twenty years since, and the story struck my fancy so much that I committed it to paper while it was still fresh in my mind; and should its perusal afford you entertainment for a listless half hour, my labour shall not have been bestowed in vain.

I find that I have taken the story down as she told it, in the first person, and perhaps this is as it should be.

She began as follows:

My maiden name was Richardson,(1) the designation of a family of some distinction in the county of Tyrone. I was the younger of two daughters, and we were the only children. There was a difference in our ages of nearly six years, so that I did not, in my childhood, enjoy that close companionship which sisterhood, in other circumstances, necessarily involves; and while I was still a child, my sister was married.

(1) I have carefully altered the names as they appear in the
original MSS., for the reader will see that some of the
circumstances recorded are not of a kind to reflect honour
upon those involved in them; and as many are still living,
in every way honoured and honourable, who stand in close
relation to the principal actors in this drama, the reader
will see the necessity of the course which we have adopted.

The person upon whom she bestowed her hand was a Mr. Carew, a gentleman of property and consideration in the north of England.

I remember well the eventful day of the wedding; the thronging carriages, the noisy menials, the loud laughter, the merry faces, and the gay dresses. Such sights were then new to me, and harmonised ill with the sorrowful feelings with which I regarded the event which was to separate me, as it turned out, for ever from a sister whose tenderness alone had hitherto more than supplied all that I wanted in my mother's affection.

The day soon arrived which was to remove the happy couple from Ashtown House. The carriage stood at the hall-door, and my poor sister kissed me again and again, telling me that I should see her soon.

The carriage drove away, and I gazed after it until my eyes filled with tears, and, returning slowly to my chamber, I wept more bitterly and, so to speak, more desolately, than ever I had done before.

My father had never seemed to love or to take an interest in me. He had desired a son, and I think he never thoroughly forgave me my unfortunate sex.

My having come into the world at all as his child he regarded as a kind of fraudulent intrusion, and as his antipathy to me had its origin in an imperfection of mine, too radical for removal, I never even hoped to stand high in his good graces.

My mother was, I dare say, as fond of me as she was of anyone; but she was a woman of a masculine and a worldly cast of mind. She had no tenderness or sympathy for the weaknesses, or even for the affections, of woman's nature and her demeanour towards me was peremptory, and often even harsh.

It is not to be supposed, then, that I found in the society of my parents much to supply the loss of my sister. About a year after her marriage, we received letters from Mr. Carew, containing accounts of my sister's health, which, though not actually alarming, were calculated to make us seriously uneasy. The symptoms most dwelt upon were loss of appetite and cough.

The letters concluded by intimating that he would avail himself of my father and mother's repeated invitation to spend some time at Ashtown, particularly as the physician who had been consulted as to my sister's health had strongly advised a removal to her native air.

There were added repeated assurances that nothing serious was apprehended, as it was supposed that a deranged state of the liver was the only source of the symptoms which at first had seemed to intimate consumption.

In accordance with this announcement, my sister and Mr. Carew arrived in Dublin, where one of my father's carriages awaited them, in readiness to start upon whatever day or hour they might choose for their departure.

It was arranged that Mr. Carew was, as soon as the day upon which they were to leave Dublin was definitely fixed, to write to my father, who intended that the two last stages should be performed by his own horses, upon whose speed and safety far more reliance might be placed than upon those of the ordinary posthorses, which were at that time, almost without exception, of the very worst order. The journey, one of about ninety miles, was to be divided; the larger portion being reserved for the second day.

On Sunday a letter reached us, stating that the party would leave Dublin on Monday, and, in due course, reach Ashtown upon Tuesday evening.

Tuesday came the evening closed in, and yet no carriage; darkness came on, and still no sign of our expected visitors.

Hour after hour passed away, and it was now past twelve; the night was remarkably calm, scarce a breath stirring, so that any sound, such as that produced by the rapid movement of a vehicle, would have been audible at a considerable distance. For some such sound I was feverishly listening.

It was, however, my father's rule to close the house at nightfall, and the window-shutters being fastened, I was unable to reconnoitre the avenue as I would have wished. It was nearly one o'clock, and we began almost to despair of seeing them upon that night, when I thought I distinguished the sound of wheels, but so remote and faint as to make me at first very uncertain. The noise approached; it became louder and clearer; it stopped for a moment.

I now heard the shrill screaming of the rusty iron, as the avenue-gate revolved on its hinges; again came the sound of wheels in rapid motion.

‘It is they,’ said I, starting up; ‘the carriage is in the avenue.’

We all stood for a few moments breathlessly listening. On thundered the vehicle with the speed of a whirlwind; crack went the whip, and clatter went the wheels, as it rattled over the uneven pavement of the court. A general and furious barking from all the dogs about the house, hailed its arrival.

We hurried to the hall in time to hear the steps let down with the sharp clanging noise peculiar to the operation, and the hum of voices exerted in the bustle of arrival. The hall-door was now thrown open, and we all stepped forth to greet our visitors.

The court was perfectly empty; the moon was shining broadly and brightly upon all around; nothing was to be seen but the tall trees with their long spectral shadows, now wet with the dews of midnight.

We stood gazing from right to left, as if suddenly awakened from a dream; the dogs walked suspiciously, growling and snuffing about the court, and by totally and suddenly ceasing their former loud barking, expressing the predominance of fear.

We stared one upon another in perplexity and dismay, and I think I never beheld more pale faces assembled. By my father’s direction, we looked about to find anything which might indicate or account for the noise which we had heard; but no such thing was to be seen — even the mire which lay upon the avenue was undisturbed. We returned to the house, more panic-struck than I can describe.

On the next day, we learned by a messenger, who had ridden hard the greater part of the night, that my sister was dead. On Sunday evening, she had retired to bed rather unwell, and, on Monday, her indisposition declared itself unequivocally to be malignant fever. She became hourly worse and, on Tuesday night, a little after midnight, she expired.(2)

(2) The residuary legatee of the late Frances Purcell, who has the honour of selecting such of his lamented old friend’s manuscripts as may appear fit for publication, in order that the lore which they contain may reach the world

before scepticism and utility have robbed our species of the precious gift of credulity, and scornfully kicked before them, or trampled into annihilation those harmless fragments of picturesque superstition which it is our object to preserve, has been subjected to the charge of dealing too largely in the marvellous; and it has been half insinuated that such is his love for diablerie, that he is content to wander a mile out of his way, in order to meet a fiend or a goblin, and thus to sacrifice all regard for truth and accuracy to the idle hope of affrighting the imagination, and thus pandering to the bad taste of his reader. He begs leave, then, to take this opportunity of asserting his perfect innocence of all the crimes laid to his charge, and to assure his reader that he never PANDERED TO HIS BAD TASTE, nor went one inch out of his way to introduce witch, fairy, devil, ghost, or any other of the grim fraternity of the redoubted Raw-head-and-bloody-bones. His province, touching these tales, has been attended with no difficulty and little responsibility; indeed, he is accountable for nothing more than an alteration in the names of persons mentioned therein, when such a step seemed necessary, and for an occasional note, whenever he conceived it possible, innocently, to edge in a word. These tales have been WRITTEN DOWN, as the heading of each announces, by the Rev. Francis Purcell, P.P., of Drumcoolagh; and in all the instances, which are many, in which the present writer has had an opportunity of comparing the manuscript of his departed friend with the actual traditions which are current amongst the families whose fortunes they pretend to illustrate, he has uniformly found that whatever of supernatural occurred in the story, so far from having been exaggerated by him, had been rather softened down, and, wherever it could be attempted, accounted for.

I mention this circumstance, because it was one upon which a thousand wild and fantastical reports were founded, though one would have thought that the truth scarcely required to be improved upon; and again, because it produced a strong and lasting effect upon my spirits, and indeed, I am inclined to think, upon my character.

I was, for several years after this occurrence, long after the violence of my grief subsided, so wretchedly low-spirited and nervous, that I could scarcely be said to live; and during this time, habits of indecision, arising out of a listless acquiescence in the will of others, a fear of encountering even the slightest opposition, and a disposition to shrink from what are commonly called amusements, grew upon me so strongly, that I have scarcely even yet altogether overcome them.

We saw nothing more of Mr. Carew. He returned to England as soon as the melancholy rites attendant upon the event which I have just mentioned were performed; and not being altogether inconsolable, he married again within two years; after which, owing to the remoteness of our relative situations, and other circumstances, we gradually lost sight of him.

I was now an only child; and, as my elder sister had died without issue, it was evident that, in the ordinary course of things, my father's property, which was altogether in his power, would go to me; and the consequence was, that before I was fourteen, Ashtown House was besieged by a host of suitors. However, whether it was that I was too young, or that none of the aspirants to my hand stood sufficiently high in rank or wealth, I was suffered by both parents to do exactly as I pleased; and well was it for me, as I afterwards found, that fortune, or rather Providence, had so ordained it, that I had not suffered my affections to become in any degree engaged, for my mother would never have suffered any SILLY FANCY of mine, as she was in the habit of styling an attachment, to stand in the way of her ambitious views — views which she was determined to carry into effect, in defiance of every obstacle, and in order to accomplish which she would not have hesitated to sacrifice anything so unreasonable and contemptible as a girlish passion.

When I reached the age of sixteen, my mother's plans began to develop themselves; and, at her suggestion, we moved to Dublin to sojourn for the winter, in order that no time might be lost in disposing of me to the best advantage.

I had been too long accustomed to consider myself as of no importance whatever, to believe for a moment that I was in reality the cause of all the bustle and preparation which surrounded me, and being thus relieved from the pain which a consciousness of my real situation would have inflicted, I journeyed towards the capital with a feeling of total indifference.

My father's wealth and connection had established him in the best society, and, consequently, upon our arrival in the metropolis we commanded whatever enjoyment or advantages its gaieties afforded.

The tumult and novelty of the scenes in which I was involved did not fail considerably to amuse me, and my mind gradually recovered its tone, which was naturally cheerful.

It was almost immediately known and reported that I was an heiress, and of course my attractions were pretty generally acknowledged.

Among the many gentlemen whom it was my fortune to please, one, ere long, established himself in my mother's good graces, to the exclusion of all less important aspirants. However, I had not understood or even remarked his attentions, nor in the slightest degree suspected his or my mother's plans respecting me, when I was made aware of them rather abruptly by my mother herself.

We had attended a splendid ball, given by Lord M —— , at his residence in Stephen's Green, and I was, with the assistance of my waiting-maid, employed in rapidly divesting myself of the rich ornaments which, in profuseness and value, could scarcely have found their equals in any private family in Ireland.

I had thrown myself into a lounging-chair beside the fire, listless and exhausted, after the fatigues of the evening, when I was aroused from the reverie into which I had fallen by the sound of footsteps approaching my chamber, and my mother entered.

'Fanny, my dear,' said she, in her softest tone, 'I wish to say a word or two with you before I go to rest. You are not fatigued, love, I hope?'

'No, no, madam, I thank you,' said I, rising at the same time from my seat, with the formal respect so little practised now.

'Sit down, my dear,' said she, placing herself upon a chair beside me; 'I must chat with you for a quarter of an hour or so. Saunders' (to the maid) 'you may leave the room; do not close the room-door, but shut that of the lobby.'

This precaution against curious ears having been taken as directed, my mother proceeded.

‘You have observed, I should suppose, my dearest Fanny — indeed, you MUST have observed Lord Glenfallen’s marked attentions to you?’

‘I assure you, madam — — ‘ I began.

‘Well, well, that is all right,’ interrupted my mother; ‘of course you must be modest upon the matter; but listen to me for a few moments, my love, and I will prove to your satisfaction that your modesty is quite unnecessary in this case. You have done better than we could have hoped, at least so very soon. Lord Glenfallen is in love with you. I give you joy of your conquest;’ and saying this, my mother kissed my forehead.

‘In love with me!’ I exclaimed, in unfeigned astonishment.

‘Yes, in love with you,’ repeated my mother; ‘devotedly, distractedly in love with you. Why, my dear, what is there wonderful in it? Look in the glass, and look at these,’ she continued, pointing with a smile to the jewels which I had just removed from my person, and which now lay a glittering heap upon the table.

‘May there not,’ said I, hesitating between confusion and real alarm— ‘is it not possible that some mistake may be at the bottom of all this?’

‘Mistake, dearest! none,’ said my mother. ‘None; none in the world. Judge for yourself; read this, my love.’ And she placed in my hand a letter, addressed to herself, the seal of which was broken. I read it through with no small surprise. After some very fine complimentary flourishes upon my beauty and perfections, as also upon the antiquity and high reputation of our family, it went on to make a formal proposal of marriage, to be communicated or not to me at present, as my mother should deem expedient; and the letter wound up by a request that the writer might be permitted, upon our return to Ashtown House, which was soon to take place, as the spring was now tolerably advanced, to visit us for a few days, in case his suit was approved.

‘Well, well, my dear,’ said my mother, impatiently; ‘do you know who Lord Glenfallen is?’

‘I do, madam,’ said I rather timidly, for I dreaded an altercation with my mother.

‘Well, dear, and what frightens you?’ continued she. ‘Are you afraid of a title? What has he done to alarm you? he is neither old nor ugly.’

I was silent, though I might have said, ‘He is neither young nor handsome.’

‘My dear Fanny,’ continued my mother, ‘in sober seriousness you have been most fortunate in engaging the affections of a nobleman such as Lord Glenfallen, young and wealthy, with first-rate — yes, acknowledged FIRST-RATE abilities, and of a family whose influence is not exceeded by that of any in Ireland. Of course you see the offer in the same light that I do — indeed I think you MUST.’

This was uttered in no very dubious tone. I was so much astonished by the suddenness of the whole communication that I literally did not know what to say.

‘You are not in love?’ said my mother, turning sharply, and fixing her dark eyes upon me with severe scrutiny.

‘No, madam,’ said I, promptly; horrified, as what young lady would not have been, at such a query.

‘I’m glad to hear it,’ said my mother, drily. ‘Once, nearly twenty years ago, a friend of mine consulted me as to how he should deal with a daughter who had made what they call a love-match — beggared herself, and disgraced her family; and I said, without hesitation, take no care for her, but cast her off. Such punishment I awarded for an offence committed against the reputation of a family not my own; and what I advised respecting the child of another, with full as small compunction I would DO with mine. I cannot conceive anything more unreasonable or intolerable than that the fortune and the character of a family should be marred by the idle caprices of a girl.’

She spoke this with great severity, and paused as if she expected some observation from me.

I, however, said nothing.

‘But I need not explain to you, my dear Fanny,’ she continued, ‘my views upon this subject; you have always known them well, and I have never yet had reason to believe you likely, voluntarily, to offend me, or to abuse or neglect any of those advantages which reason and duty tell you should be improved. Come hither, my dear; kiss me, and do not look so frightened. Well, now, about this letter, you need not answer it yet; of course you must be allowed time to make up your mind. In the meantime I will write to his lordship to give him my permission to visit us at Ashtown. Goodnight, my love.’

And thus ended one of the most disagreeable, not to say astounding, conversations I had ever had. It would not be easy to describe exactly what were my feelings towards Lord Glenfallen; — whatever might have been my mother's suspicions, my heart was perfectly disengaged — and hitherto, although I had not been made in the slightest degree acquainted with his real views, I had liked him very much, as an agreeable, well-informed man, whom I was always glad to meet in society. He had served in the navy in early life, and the polish which his manners received in his after intercourse with courts and cities had not served to obliterate that frankness of manner which belongs proverbially to the sailor.

Whether this apparent candour went deeper than the outward bearing, I was yet to learn. However, there was no doubt that, as far as I had seen of Lord Glenfallen, he was, though perhaps not so young as might have been desired in a lover, a singularly pleasing man; and whatever feeling unfavourable to him had found its way into my mind, arose altogether from the dread, not an unreasonable one, that constraint might be practised upon my inclinations. I reflected, however, that Lord Glenfallen was a wealthy man, and one highly thought of; and although I could never expect to love him in the romantic sense of the term, yet I had no doubt but that, all things considered, I might be more happy with him than I could hope to be at home.

When next I met him it was with no small embarrassment, his tact and good breeding, however, soon reassured me, and effectually prevented my awkwardness being remarked upon. And I had the satisfaction of leaving Dublin for the country with the full conviction that nobody, not even those most intimate with me, even suspected the fact of Lord Glenfallen's having made me a formal proposal.

This was to me a very serious subject of self-gratulation, for, besides my instinctive dread of becoming the topic of the speculations of gossip, I felt that if the situation which I occupied in relation to him were made publicly known, I should stand committed in a manner which would scarcely leave me the power of retraction.

The period at which Lord Glenfallen had arranged to visit Ashtown House was now fast approaching, and it became my mother's wish to form me thoroughly to her will, and to obtain my consent to the proposed marriage before his arrival, so that all things might proceed smoothly, without apparent opposition or objection upon my part. Whatever objections, therefore, I had entertained were to be subdued; whatever disposition to resistance I had exhibited or had been supposed to feel, were to be completely eradicated before he made his appearance; and my mother addressed herself to the task with a decision and energy against which even the barriers, which her imagination had created, could hardly have stood.

If she had, however, expected any determined opposition from me, she was agreeably disappointed. My heart was perfectly free, and all my feelings of liking and preference were in favour of Lord Glenfallen; and I well knew that in case I refused to dispose of myself as I was desired, my mother had alike the power and the will to render my existence as utterly miserable as even the most ill-assorted marriage could possibly have done.

You will remember, my good friend, that I was very young and very completely under the control of my parents, both of whom, my mother particularly, were unscrupulously determined in matters of this kind, and willing, when voluntary obedience on the part of those within their power was withheld, to compel a forced acquiescence by an unsparing use of all the engines of the most stern and rigorous domestic discipline.

All these combined, not unnaturally, induced me to resolve upon yielding at once, and without useless opposition, to what appeared almost to be my fate.

The appointed time was come, and my now accepted suitor arrived; he was in high spirits, and, if possible, more entertaining than ever.

I was not, however, quite in the mood to enjoy his sprightliness; but whatever I wanted in gaiety was amply made up in the triumphant and gracious goodhumour of my mother, whose smiles of benevolence and exultation were showered around as bountifully as the summer sunshine.

I will not weary you with unnecessary prolixity. Let it suffice to say, that I was married to Lord Glenfallen with all the attendant pomp and circumstance of wealth, rank, and grandeur. According to the usage of the times, now humanely reformed, the ceremony was made, until long past midnight, the season of wild, uproarious, and promiscuous feasting and revelry.

Of all this I have a painfully vivid recollection, and particularly of the little annoyances inflicted upon me by the dull and coarse jokes of the wits and wags who abound in all such places, and upon all such occasions.

I was not sorry when, after a few days, Lord Glenfallen's carriage appeared at the door to convey us both from Ashtown; for any change would have been a relief from the irksomeness of ceremonial and formality which the visits received in honour of my newly-acquired titles hourly entailed upon me.

It was arranged that we were to proceed to Cahergillagh, one of the Glenfallen estates, lying, however, in a southern county, so that, owing to the difficulty of the roads at the time, a tedious journey of three days intervened.

I set forth with my noble companion, followed by the regrets of some, and by the envy of many; though God knows I little deserved the latter. The three days of travel were now almost spent, when, passing the brow of a wild heathy hill, the domain of Cahergillagh opened suddenly upon our view.

It formed a striking and a beautiful scene. A lake of considerable extent stretching away towards the west, and reflecting from its broad, smooth waters, the rich glow of the setting sun, was overhung by steep hills, covered by a rich mantle of velvet sward, broken here and there by the grey front of some old rock, and exhibiting on their shelving sides, their slopes and hollows, every variety of light and shade; a thick wood of dwarf oak, birch, and hazel skirted these hills, and clothed the shores of the lake, running out in rich luxuriance upon every promontory, and spreading upward considerably upon the side of the hills.

'There lies the enchanted castle,' said Lord Glenfallen, pointing towards a considerable level space intervening between two of the picturesque hills, which rose dimly around the lake.

This little plain was chiefly occupied by the same low, wild wood which covered the other parts of the domain; but towards the centre a mass of taller and statelier forest trees stood darkly grouped together, and among them stood an ancient square tower, with many buildings of a humbler character, forming together the manorhouse, or, as it was more usually called, the Court of Cahergillagh.

As we approached the level upon which the mansion stood, the winding road gave us many glimpses of the timeworn castle and its surrounding buildings; and seen as it was through the long vistas of the fine old trees, and with the rich glow of evening upon it, I have seldom beheld an object more picturesquely striking.

I was glad to perceive, too, that here and there the blue curling smoke ascended from stacks of chimneys now hidden by the rich, dark ivy which, in a great measure, covered the building. Other indications of comfort made themselves manifest as we approached; and indeed, though the place was evidently one of considerable antiquity, it had nothing whatever of the gloom of decay about it.

‘You must not, my love,’ said Lord Glenfallen, ‘imagine this place worse than it is. I have no taste for antiquity — at least I should not choose a house to reside in because it is old. Indeed I do not recollect that I was even so romantic as to overcome my aversion to rats and rheumatism, those faithful attendants upon your noble relics of feudalism; and I much prefer a snug, modern, unmysterious bedroom, with well-aired sheets, to the waving tapestry, mildewed cushions, and all the other interesting appliances of romance. However, though I cannot promise you all the discomfort generally belonging to an old castle, you will find legends and ghostly lore enough to claim your respect; and if old Martha be still to the fore, as I trust she is, you will soon have a supernatural and appropriate anecdote for every closet and corner of the mansion; but here we are — so, without more ado, welcome to Cahergillagh!’

We now entered the hall of the castle, and while the domestics were employed in conveying our trunks and other luggage which we had brought with us for immediate use to the apartments which Lord Glenfallen had selected for himself and me, I went with him into a spacious sitting-room, wainscoted with finely polished black oak, and hung round with the portraits of various worthies of the Glenfallen family.

This room looked out upon an extensive level covered with the softest green sward, and irregularly bounded by the wild wood I have before mentioned, through the leafy arcade formed by whose boughs and trunks the level beams of the setting sun were pouring. In the distance a group of dairymaids were plying their task, which they accompanied throughout with snatches of Irish songs which, mellowed by the distance, floated not unpleasingly to the ear; and beside them sat or lay, with all the grave importance of conscious protection, six or seven large dogs of various kinds. Farther in the distance, and through the cloisters of the arching wood, two or three ragged urchins were employed in driving such stray kine as had wandered farther than the rest to join their fellows.

As I looked upon this scene which I have described, a feeling of tranquillity and happiness came upon me, which I have never experienced in so strong a degree; and so strange to me was the sensation that my eyes filled with tears.

Lord Glenfallen mistook the cause of my emotion, and taking me kindly and tenderly by the hand, he said:

‘Do not suppose, my love, that it is my intention to SETTLE here. Whenever you desire to leave this, you have only to let me know your wish, and it shall be complied with; so I must entreat of you not to suffer any circumstances which I can control to give you one moment’s uneasiness. But here is old Martha; you must be introduced to her, one of the heirlooms of our family.’

A hale, goodhumoured, erect old woman was Martha, and an agreeable contrast to the grim, decrepid hag which my fancy had conjured up, as the depository of all the horrible tales in which I doubted not this old place was most fruitful.

She welcomed me and her master with a profusion of gratulations, alternately kissing our hands and apologising for the liberty, until at length Lord Glenfallen put an end to this somewhat fatiguing ceremonial by requesting her to conduct me to my chamber if it were prepared for my reception.

I followed Martha up an oldfashioned oak staircase into a long, dim passage, at the end of which lay the door which communicated with the apartments which had been selected for our use; here the old woman stopped, and respectfully requested me to proceed.

I accordingly opened the door, and was about to enter, when something like a mass of black tapestry, as it appeared, disturbed by my sudden approach, fell from above the door, so as completely to screen the aperture; the startling unexpectedness of the occurrence, and the rustling noise which the drapery made in its descent, caused me involuntarily to step two or three paces backwards. I turned, smiling and half-ashamed, to the old servant, and said:

‘You see what a coward I am.’

The woman looked puzzled, and, without saying any more, I was about to draw aside the curtain and enter the room, when, upon turning to do so, I was surprised to find that nothing whatever interposed to obstruct the passage.

I went into the room, followed by the servant-woman, and was amazed to find that it, like the one below, was wainscoted, and that nothing like drapery was to be found near the door.

‘Where is it?’ said I; ‘what has become of it?’

‘What does your ladyship wish to know?’ said the old woman.

‘Where is the black curtain that fell across the door, when I attempted first to come to my chamber?’ answered I.

‘The cross of Christ about us!’ said the old woman, turning suddenly pale.

‘What is the matter, my good friend?’ said I; ‘you seem frightened.’

‘Oh no, no, your ladyship,’ said the old woman, endeavouring to conceal her agitation; but in vain, for tottering towards a chair, she sank into it, looking so deadly pale and horror-struck that I thought every moment she would faint.

‘Merciful God, keep us from harm and danger!’ muttered she at length.

‘What can have terrified you so?’ said I, beginning to fear that she had seen something more than had met my eye. ‘You appear ill, my poor woman!’

‘Nothing, nothing, my lady,’ said she, rising. ‘I beg your ladyship’s pardon for making so bold. May the great God defend us from misfortune!’

‘Martha,’ said I, ‘something HAS frightened you very much, and I insist on knowing what it is; your keeping me in the dark upon the subject will make me much more uneasy than anything you could tell me. I desire you, therefore, to let me know what agitates you; I command you to tell me.’

‘Your ladyship said you saw a black curtain falling across the door when you were coming into the room,’ said the old woman.

‘I did,’ said I; ‘but though the whole thing appears somewhat strange, I cannot see anything in the matter to agitate you so excessively.’

‘It’s for no good you saw that, my lady,’ said the crone; ‘something terrible is coming. It’s a sign, my lady — a sign that never fails.’

‘Explain, explain what you mean, my good woman,’ said I, in spite of myself, catching more than I could account for, of her superstitious terror.

‘Whenever something — something BAD is going to happen to the Glenfallen family, some one that belongs to them sees a black handkerchief or curtain just waved or falling before their faces. I saw it myself,’ continued she, lowering her voice, ‘when I was only a little girl, and I’ll never forget it. I often heard of it before, though I never saw it till then, nor since, praised be God. But I was going into Lady Jane’s room to waken her in the morning; and sure enough when I got first to the bed and began to draw the curtain, something dark was waved across the division, but only for a moment; and when I saw rightly into the bed, there was she lying cold and dead, God be merciful to me! So, my lady, there is small blame to me to be daunted when any one of the family sees it; for it’s many’s the story I heard of it, though I saw it but once.’

I was not of a superstitious turn of mind, yet I could not resist a feeling of awe very nearly allied to the fear which my companion had so unreservedly expressed; and when you consider my situation, the loneliness, antiquity, and gloom of the place, you will allow that the weakness was not without excuse.

In spite of old Martha’s boding predictions, however, time flowed on in an unruffled course. One little incident however, though trifling in itself, I must relate, as it serves to make what follows more intelligible.

Upon the day after my arrival, Lord Glenfallen of course desired to make me acquainted with the house and domain; and accordingly we set forth upon our ramble. When returning, he became for some time silent and moody, a state so unusual with him as considerably to excite my surprise.

I endeavoured by observations and questions to arouse him — but in vain. At length, as we approached the house, he said, as if speaking to himself:

‘‘Twere madness — madness — madness,’ repeating the words bitterly— ‘sure and speedy ruin.’

There was here a long pause; and at length, turning sharply towards me, in a tone very unlike that in which he had hitherto addressed me, he said:

‘Do you think it possible that a woman can keep a secret?’

‘I am sure,’ said I, ‘that women are very much belied upon the score of talkativeness, and that I may answer your question with the same directness with which you put it — I reply that I DO think a woman can keep a secret.’

‘But I do not,’ said he, drily.

We walked on in silence for a time. I was much astonished at his unwonted abruptness — I had almost said rudeness.

After a considerable pause he seemed to recollect himself, and with an effort resuming his sprightly manner, he said:

‘Well, well, the next thing to keeping a secret well is, not to desire to possess one — talkativeness and curiosity generally go together. Now I shall make test of you, in the first place, respecting the latter of these qualities. I shall be your BLUEBEARD — tush, why do I trifle thus? Listen to me, my dear Fanny; I speak now in solemn earnest. What I desire is intimately, inseparably, connected with your happiness and honour as well as my own; and your compliance with my request will not be difficult. It will impose upon you a very trifling restraint during your sojourn here, which certain events which have occurred since our arrival have determined me shall not be a long one. You must promise me, upon your sacred honour, that you will visit ONLY that part of the castle which can be reached from the front entrance, leaving the back entrance and the part of the building commanded immediately by it to the menials, as also the small garden whose high wall you see yonder; and never at any time seek to pry or peep into them, nor to open the door which communicates from the front part of the house through the corridor with the back. I do not urge this in jest or in caprice, but from a solemn conviction that danger and misery will be the certain consequences of your not observing what I prescribe. I cannot explain myself further at present. Promise me, then, these things, as you hope for peace here, and for mercy hereafter.’

I did make the promise as desired, and he appeared relieved; his manner recovered all its gaiety and elasticity: but the recollection of the strange scene which I have just described dwelt painfully upon my mind.

More than a month passed away without any occurrence worth recording; but I was not destined to leave Cahergillagh without further adventure. One day, intending to enjoy the pleasant sunshine in a ramble through the woods, I ran up to my room to procure my bonnet and shawl. Upon entering the chamber, I was surprised and somewhat startled to find it occupied. Beside the fireplace, and nearly opposite the door, seated in a large, oldfashioned elbow-chair, was placed the figure of a lady. She appeared to be nearer fifty than forty, and was dressed suitably to her age, in a handsome suit of flowered silk; she had a profusion of trinkets and jewellery about her person, and many rings upon her fingers. But although very rich, her dress was not gaudy or in ill taste. But what was remarkable in the lady was, that although her features were handsome, and upon the whole pleasing, the pupil of each eye was dimmed with the whiteness of cataract, and she was evidently stone-blind. I was for some seconds so surprised at this unaccountable apparition, that I could not find words to address her.

‘Madam,’ said I, ‘there must be some mistake here — this is my bedchamber.’

‘Marry come up,’ said the lady, sharply; ‘YOUR chamber! Where is Lord Glenfallen?’

‘He is below, madam,’ replied I; ‘and I am convinced he will be not a little surprised to find you here.’

‘I do not think he will,’ said she; ‘with your good leave, talk of what you know something about. Tell him I want him. Why does the minx dilly-dally so?’

In spite of the awe which this grim lady inspired, there was something in her air of confident superiority which, when I considered our relative situations, was not a little irritating.

‘Do you know, madam, to whom you speak?’ said I.

‘I neither know nor care,’ said she; ‘but I presume that you are some one about the house, so again I desire you, if you wish to continue here, to bring your master hither forthwith.’

‘I must tell you, madam,’ said I, ‘that I am Lady Glenfallen.’

‘What’s that?’ said the stranger, rapidly.

‘I say, madam,’ I repeated, approaching her that I might be more distinctly heard, ‘that I am Lady Glenfallen.’

‘It’s a lie, you trull!’ cried she, in an accent which made me start, and at the same time, springing forward, she seized me in her grasp, and shook me violently, repeating, ‘It’s a lie — it’s a lie!’ with a rapidity and vehemence which swelled every vein of her face. The violence of her action, and the fury which convulsed her face, effectually terrified me, and disengaging myself from her grasp, I screamed as loud as I could for help. The blind woman continued to pour out a torrent of abuse upon me, foaming at the mouth with rage, and impotently shaking her clenched fists towards me.

I heard Lord Glenfallen's step upon the stairs, and I instantly ran out; as I passed him I perceived that he was deadly pale, and just caught the words: 'I hope that demon has not hurt you?'

I made some answer, I forget what, and he entered the chamber, the door of which he locked upon the inside. What passed within I know not; but I heard the voices of the two speakers raised in loud and angry altercation.

I thought I heard the shrill accents of the woman repeat the words, 'Let her look to herself;' but I could not be quite sure. This short sentence, however, was, to my alarmed imagination, pregnant with fearful meaning.

The storm at length subsided, though not until after a conference of more than two long hours. Lord Glenfallen then returned, pale and agitated.

'That unfortunate woman,' said he, 'is out of her mind. I daresay she treated you to some of her ravings; but you need not dread any further interruption from her: I have brought her so far to reason. She did not hurt you, I trust.'

'No, no,' said I; 'but she terrified me beyond measure.'

'Well,' said he, 'she is likely to behave better for the future; and I dare swear that neither you nor she would desire, after what has passed, to meet again.'

This occurrence, so startling and unpleasant, so involved in mystery, and giving rise to so many painful surmises, afforded me no very agreeable food for rumination.

All attempts on my part to arrive at the truth were baffled; Lord Glenfallen evaded all my inquiries, and at length peremptorily forbid any further allusion to the matter. I was thus obliged to rest satisfied with what I had actually seen, and to trust to time to resolve the perplexities in which the whole transaction had involved me.

Lord Glenfallen's temper and spirits gradually underwent a complete and most painful change; he became silent and abstracted, his manner to me was abrupt and often harsh, some grievous anxiety seemed ever present to his mind; and under its influence his spirits sunk and his temper became soured.

I soon perceived that his gaiety was rather that which the stir and excitement of society produce, than the result of a healthy habit of mind; every day confirmed me in the opinion, that the considerate goodnature which I had so much admired in him was little more than a mere manner;

and to my infinite grief and surprise, the gay, kind, openhearted nobleman who had for months followed and flattered me, was rapidly assuming the form of a gloomy, morose, and singularly selfish man. This was a bitter discovery, and I strove to conceal it from myself as long as I could; but the truth was not to be denied, and I was forced to believe that Lord Glenfallen no longer loved me, and that he was at little pains to conceal the alteration in his sentiments.

One morning after breakfast, Lord Glenfallen had been for some time walking silently up and down the room, buried in his moody reflections, when pausing suddenly, and turning towards me, he exclaimed:

'I have it — I have it! We must go abroad, and stay there too; and if that does not answer, why — why, we must try some more effectual expedient. Lady Glenfallen, I have become involved in heavy embarrassments. A wife, you know, must share the fortunes of her husband, for better for worse; but I will waive my right if you prefer remaining here — here at Cahergillagh. For I would not have you seen elsewhere without the state to which your rank entitles you; besides, it would break your poor mother's heart,' he added, with sneering gravity. 'So make up your mind — Cahergillagh or France. I will start if possible in a week, so determine between this and then.'

He left the room, and in a few moments I saw him ride past the window, followed by a mounted servant. He had directed a domestic to inform me that he should not be back until the next day.

I was in very great doubt as to what course of conduct I should pursue, as to accompanying him in the continental tour so suddenly determined upon. I felt that it would be a hazard too great to encounter; for at Cahergillagh I had always the consciousness to sustain me, that if his temper at any time led him into violent or unwarrantable treatment of me, I had a remedy within reach, in the protection and support of my own family, from all useful and effective communication with whom, if once in France, I should be entirely debarred.

As to remaining at Cahergillagh in solitude, and, for aught I knew, exposed to hidden dangers, it appeared to me scarcely less objectionable than the former proposition; and yet I feared that with one or other I must comply, unless I was prepared to come to an actual breach with Lord Glenfallen. Full of these unpleasing doubts and perplexities, I retired to rest.

I was wakened, after having slept uneasily for some hours, by some person shaking me rudely by the shoulder; a small lamp burned in my room, and by its light, to my horror and amazement, I discovered that my visitant was the selfsame blind old lady who had so terrified me a few weeks before.

I started up in the bed, with a view to ring the bell, and alarm the domestics; but she instantly anticipated me by saying:

‘Do not be frightened, silly girl! If I had wished to harm you I could have done it while you were sleeping; I need not have wakened you. Listen to me, now, attentively and fearlessly, for what I have to say interests you to the full as much as it does me. Tell me here, in the presence of God, did Lord Glenfallen marry you — ACTUALLY MARRY you? Speak the truth, woman.’

‘As surely as I live and speak,’ I replied, ‘did Lord Glenfallen marry me, in presence of more than a hundred witnesses.’

‘Well,’ continued she, ‘he should have told you THEN, before you married him, that he had a wife living, which wife I am. I feel you tremble — tush! do not be frightened. I do not mean to harm you. Mark me now — you are NOT his wife. When I make my story known you will be so neither in the eye of God nor of man. You must leave this house upon tomorrow. Let the world know that your husband has another wife living; go you into retirement, and leave him to justice, which will surely overtake him. If you remain in this house after tomorrow you will reap the bitter fruits of your sin.’

So saying, she quitted the room, leaving me very little disposed to sleep.

Here was food for my very worst and most terrible suspicions; still there was not enough to remove all doubt. I had no proof of the truth of this woman’s statement.

Taken by itself, there was nothing to induce me to attach weight to it; but when I viewed it in connection with the extraordinary mystery of some of Lord Glenfallen’s proceedings, his strange anxiety to exclude me from certain portions of the mansion, doubtless lest I should encounter this person — the strong influence, nay, command which she possessed over him, a circumstance clearly established by the very fact of her residing in the very place where, of all others, he should least have desired to find her — her thus acting, and continuing to act in direct contradiction to his wishes; when, I say, I viewed her disclosure in connection with all these circumstances, I could not help feeling that there was at least a fearful verisimilitude in the allegations which she had made.

Still I was not satisfied, nor nearly so. Young minds have a reluctance almost insurmountable to believing, upon anything short of unquestionable proof, the existence of premeditated guilt in anyone whom they have ever trusted; and in support of this feeling I was assured that if the assertion of Lord Glenfallen, which nothing in this woman's manner had led me to disbelieve, were true, namely that her mind was unsound, the whole fabric of my doubts and fears must fall to the ground.

I determined to state to Lord Glenfallen freely and accurately the substance of the communication which I had just heard, and in his words and looks to seek for its proof or refutation. Full of these thoughts, I remained wakeful and excited all night, every moment fancying that I heard the step or saw the figure of my recent visitor, towards whom I felt a species of horror and dread which I can hardly describe.

There was something in her face, though her features had evidently been handsome, and were not, at first sight, unpleasing, which, upon a nearer inspection, seemed to indicate the habitual prevalence and indulgence of evil passions, and a power of expressing mere animal anger, with an intenseness that I have seldom seen equalled, and to which an almost unearthly effect was given by the convulsive quivering of the sightless eyes.

You may easily suppose that it was no very pleasing reflection to me to consider that, whenever caprice might induce her to return, I was within the reach of this violent and, for aught I knew, insane woman, who had, upon that very night, spoken to me in a tone of menace, of which her mere words, divested of the manner and look with which she uttered them, can convey but a faint idea.

Will you believe me when I tell you that I was actually afraid to leave my bed in order to secure the door, lest I should again encounter the dreadful object lurking in some corner or peeping from behind the window-curtains, so very a child was I in my fears.

The morning came, and with it Lord Glenfallen. I knew not, and indeed I cared not, where he might have been; my thoughts were wholly engrossed by the terrible fears and suspicions which my last night's conference had suggested to me. He was, as usual, gloomy and abstracted, and I feared in no very fitting mood to hear what I had to say with patience, whether the charges were true or false.

I was, however, determined not to suffer the opportunity to pass, or Lord Glenfallen to leave the room, until, at all hazards, I had unburdened my mind.

'My lord,' said I, after a long silence, summoning up all my firmness— 'my lord, I wish to say a few words to you upon a matter of very great importance, of very deep concernment to you and to me.'

I fixed my eyes upon him to discern, if possible, whether the announcement caused him any uneasiness; but no symptom of any such feeling was perceptible.

'Well, my dear,' said he, 'this is no doubt a very grave preface, and portends, I have no doubt, something extraordinary. Pray let us have it without more ado.'

He took a chair, and seated himself nearly opposite to me.

'My lord,' said I, 'I have seen the person who alarmed me so much a short time since, the blind lady, again, upon last night.' His face, upon which my eyes were fixed, turned pale; he hesitated for a moment, and then said:

'And did you, pray, madam, so totally forget or spurn my express command, as to enter that portion of the house from which your promise, I might say your oath, excluded you? — answer me that!' he added fiercely.

'My lord,' said I, 'I have neither forgotten your COMMANDS, since such they were, nor disobeyed them. I was, last night, wakened from my sleep, as I lay in my own chamber, and accosted by the person whom I have mentioned. How she found access to the room I cannot pretend to say.'

'Ha! this must be looked to,' said he, half reflectively; 'and pray,' added he, quickly, while in turn he fixed his eyes upon me, 'what did this person say? since some comment upon her communication forms, no doubt, the sequel to your preface.'

'Your lordship is not mistaken,' said I; 'her statement was so extraordinary that I could not think of withholding it from you. She told me, my lord, that you had a wife living at the time you married me, and that she was that wife.'

Lord Glenfallen became ashy pale, almost livid; he made two or three efforts to clear his voice to speak, but in vain, and turning suddenly from me, he walked to the window. The horror and dismay which, in the olden time, overwhelmed the woman of Endor when her spells unexpectedly conjured the dead into her presence, were but types of what I felt when thus presented with what appeared to be almost unequivocal evidence of the guilt whose existence I had before so strongly doubted.

There was a silence of some moments, during which it were hard to conjecture whether I or my companion suffered most.

Lord Glenfallen soon recovered his self-command; he returned to the table, again sat down and said:

'What you have told me has so astonished me, has unfolded such a tissue of motiveless guilt, and in a quarter from which I had so little reason to look for ingratitude or treachery, that your announcement almost deprived me of speech; the person in question, however, has one excuse, her mind is, as I told you before, unsettled. You should have remembered that, and hesitated to receive as unexceptionable evidence against the honour of your husband, the ravings of a lunatic. I now tell you that this is the last time I shall speak to you upon this subject, and, in the presence of the God who is to judge me, and as I hope for mercy in the day of judgment, I swear that the charge thus brought against me is utterly false, unfounded, and ridiculous; I defy the world in any point to taint my honour; and, as I have never taken the opinion of madmen touching your character or morals, I think it but fair to require that you will evince a like tenderness for me; and now, once for all, never again dare to repeat to me your insulting suspicions, or the clumsy and infamous calumnies of fools. I shall instantly let the worthy lady who contrived this somewhat original device, understand fully my opinion upon the matter. Good morning;' and with these words he left me again in doubt, and involved in all horrors of the most agonising suspense.

I had reason to think that Lord Glenfallen wreaked his vengeance upon the author of the strange story which I had heard, with a violence which was not satisfied with mere words, for old Martha, with whom I was a great favourite, while attending me in my room, told me that she feared her master had illused the poor blind Dutch woman, for that she had heard her scream as if the very life were leaving her, but added a request that I should not speak of what she had told me to any one, particularly to the master.

'How do you know that she is a Dutch woman?' inquired I, anxious to learn anything whatever that might throw a light upon the history of this person, who seemed to have resolved to mix herself up in my fortunes.

‘Why, my lady,’ answered Martha, ‘the master often calls her the Dutch hag, and other names you would not like to hear, and I am sure she is neither English nor Irish; for, whenever they talk together, they speak some queer foreign lingo, and fast enough, I’ll be bound. But I ought not to talk about her at all; it might be as much as my place is worth to mention her — only you saw her first yourself, so there can be no great harm in speaking of her now.’

‘How long has this lady been here?’ continued I.

‘She came early on the morning after your ladyship’s arrival,’ answered she; ‘but do not ask me any more, for the master would think nothing of turning me out of doors for daring to speak of her at all, much less to you, my lady.’

I did not like to press the poor woman further, for her reluctance to speak on this topic was evident and strong.

You will readily believe that upon the very slight grounds which my information afforded, contradicted as it was by the solemn oath of my husband, and derived from what was, at best, a very questionable source, I could not take any very decisive measure whatever; and as to the menace of the strange woman who had thus unaccountably twice intruded herself into my chamber, although, at the moment, it occasioned me some uneasiness, it was not, even in my eyes, sufficiently formidable to induce my departure from Cahergillagh.

A few nights after the scene which I have just mentioned, Lord Glenfallen having, as usual, early retired to his study, I was left alone in the parlour to amuse myself as best I might.

It was not strange that my thoughts should often recur to the agitating scenes in which I had recently taken a part.

The subject of my reflections, the solitude, the silence, and the lateness of the hour, as also the depression of spirits to which I had of late been a constant prey, tended to produce that nervous excitement which places us wholly at the mercy of the imagination.

In order to calm my spirits I was endeavouring to direct my thoughts into some more pleasing channel, when I heard, or thought I heard, uttered, within a few yards of me, in an odd, half-sneering tone, the words,

‘There is blood upon your ladyship’s throat.’

So vivid was the impression that I started to my feet, and involuntarily placed my hand upon my neck.

I looked around the room for the speaker, but in vain.

I went then to the room-door, which I opened, and peered into the passage, nearly faint with horror lest some leering, shapeless thing should greet me upon the threshold.

When I had gazed long enough to assure myself that no strange object was within sight, ‘I have been too much of a rake lately; I am racking out my nerves,’ said I, speaking aloud, with a view to reassure myself.

I rang the bell, and, attended by old Martha, I retired to settle for the night.

While the servant was — as was her custom — arranging the lamp which I have already stated always burned during the night in my chamber, I was employed in undressing, and, in doing so, I had recourse to a large looking-glass which occupied a considerable portion of the wall in which it was fixed, rising from the ground to a height of about six feet — this mirror filled the space of a large panel in the wainscoting opposite the foot of the bed.

I had hardly been before it for the lapse of a minute when something like a black pall was slowly waved between me and it.

‘Oh, God! there it is,’ I exclaimed, wildly. ‘I have seen it again, Martha — the black cloth.’

‘God be merciful to us, then!’ answered she, tremulously crossing herself. ‘Some misfortune is over us.’

‘No, no, Martha,’ said I, almost instantly recovering my collectedness; for, although of a nervous temperament, I had never been superstitious. ‘I do not believe in omens. You know I saw, or fancied I saw, this thing before, and nothing followed.’

‘The Dutch lady came the next morning,’ replied she.

‘But surely her coming scarcely deserved such a dreadful warning,’ I replied.

‘She is a strange woman, my lady,’ said Martha; ‘and she is not GONE yet — mark my words.’

‘Well, well, Martha,’ said I, ‘I have not wit enough to change your opinions, nor inclination to alter mine; so I will talk no more of the matter. Goodnight,’ and so I was left to my reflections.

After lying for about an hour awake, I at length fell into a kind of doze; but my imagination was still busy, for I was startled from this unrefreshing sleep by fancying that I heard a voice close to my face exclaim as before:

‘There is blood upon your ladyship’s throat.’

The words were instantly followed by a loud burst of laughter.

Quaking with horror, I awakened, and heard my husband enter the room. Even this was it relief.

Scared as I was, however, by the tricks which my imagination had played me, I preferred remaining silent, and pretending to sleep, to attempting to engage my husband in conversation, for I well knew that his mood was such, that his words would not, in all probability, convey anything that had not better be unsaid and unheard.

Lord Glenfallen went into his dressing-room, which lay upon the right-hand side of the bed. The door lying open, I could see him by himself, at full length upon a sofa, and, in about half an hour, I became aware, by his deep and regularly drawn respiration, that he was fast asleep.

When slumber refuses to visit one, there is something peculiarly irritating, not to the temper, but to the nerves, in the consciousness that some one is in your immediate presence, actually enjoying the boon which you are seeking in vain; at least, I have always found it so, and never more than upon the present occasion.

A thousand annoying imaginations harassed and excited me; every object which I looked upon, though ever so familiar, seemed to have acquired a strange phantom-like character, the varying shadows thrown by the flickering of the lamplight, seemed shaping themselves into grotesque and unearthly forms, and whenever my eyes wandered to the sleeping figure of my husband, his features appeared to undergo the strangest and most demoniacal contortions.

Hour after hour was told by the old clock, and each succeeding one found me, if possible, less inclined to sleep than its predecessor.

It was now considerably past three; my eyes, in their involuntary wanderings, happened to alight upon the large mirror which was, as I have said, fixed in the wall opposite the foot of the bed. A view of it was commanded from where I lay, through the curtains. As I gazed fixedly upon it, I thought I perceived the broad sheet of glass shifting its position in relation to the bed; I riveted my eyes upon it with intense scrutiny; it was no deception, the mirror, as if acting of its own impulse, moved slowly aside, and disclosed a dark aperture in the wall, nearly as large as an ordinary door; a figure evidently stood in this, but the light was too dim to define it accurately.

It stepped cautiously into the chamber, and with so little noise, that had I not actually seen it, I do not think I should have been aware of its presence. It was arrayed in a kind of woollen nightdress, and a white handkerchief or cloth was bound tightly about the head; I had no difficulty, spite of the strangeness of the attire, in recognising the blind woman whom I so much dreaded.

She stooped down, bringing her head nearly to the ground, and in that attitude she remained motionless for some moments, no doubt in order to ascertain if any suspicious sound were stirring.

She was apparently satisfied by her observations, for she immediately recommenced her silent progress towards a ponderous mahogany dressing-table of my husband's. When she had reached it, she paused again, and appeared to listen attentively for some minutes; she then noiselessly opened one of the drawers, from which, having groped for some time, she took something, which I soon perceived to be a case of razors. She opened it, and tried the edge of each of the two instruments upon the skin of her hand; she quickly selected one, which she fixed firmly in her grasp. She now stooped down as before, and having listened for a time, she, with the hand that was disengaged, groped her way into the dressing-room where Lord Glenfallen lay fast asleep.

I was fixed as if in the tremendous spell of a nightmare. I could not stir even a finger; I could not lift my voice; I could not even breathe; and though I expected every moment to see the sleeping man murdered, I could not even close my eyes to shut out the horrible spectacle, which I had not the power to avert.

I saw the woman approach the sleeping figure, she laid the unoccupied hand lightly along his clothes, and having thus ascertained his identity, she, after a brief interval, turned back and again entered my chamber; here she bent down again to listen.

I had now not a doubt but that the razor was intended for my throat; yet the terrific fascination which had locked all my powers so long, still continued to bind me fast.

I felt that my life depended upon the slightest ordinary exertion, and yet I could not stir one joint from the position in which I lay, nor even make noise enough to waken Lord Glenfallen.

The murderous woman now, with long, silent steps, approached the bed; my very heart seemed turning to ice; her left hand, that which was disengaged, was upon the pillow; she gradually slid it forward towards my head, and in an instant, with the speed of lightning, it was clutched in my hair, while, with the other hand, she dashed the razor at my throat.

A slight inaccuracy saved me from instant death; the blow fell short, the point of the razor grazing my throat. In a moment, I know not how, I found myself at the other side of the bed, uttering shriek after shriek; the wretch was, however, determined if possible to murder me.

Scrambling along by the curtains, she rushed round the bed towards me; I seized the handle of the door to make my escape. It was, however, fastened. At all events, I could not open it. From the mere instinct of recoiling terror, I shrunk back into a corner. She was now within a yard of me. Her hand was upon my face.

I closed my eyes fast, expecting never to open them again, when a blow, inflicted from behind by a strong arm, stretched the monster senseless at my feet. At the same moment the door opened, and several domestics, alarmed by my cries, entered the apartment.

I do not recollect what followed, for I fainted. One swoon succeeded another, so long and deathlike, that my life was considered very doubtful.

At about ten o’clock, however, I sunk into a deep and refreshing sleep, from which I was awakened at about two, that I might swear my deposition before a magistrate, who attended for that purpose.

I accordingly did so, as did also Lord Glenfallen, and the woman was fully committed to stand her trial at the ensuing assizes.

I shall never forget the scene which the examination of the blind woman and of the other parties afforded.

She was brought into the room in the custody of two servants. She wore a kind of flannel wrapper which had not been changed since the night before. It was torn and soiled, and here and there smeared with blood, which had flowed in large quantities from a wound in her head. The white handkerchief had fallen off in the scuffle, and her grizzled hair fell in masses about her wild and deadly pale countenance.

She appeared perfectly composed, however, and the only regret she expressed throughout, was at not having succeeded in her attempt, the object of which she did not pretend to conceal.

On being asked her name, she called herself the Countess Glenfallen, and refused to give any other title.

‘The woman’s name is Flora Van-Kemp,’ said Lord Glenfallen.

‘It WAS, it WAS, you perjured traitor and cheat!’ screamed the woman; and then there followed a volley of words in some foreign language. ‘Is there a magistrate here?’ she resumed; ‘I am Lord Glenfallen’s wife — I’ll prove it — write down my words. I am willing to be hanged or burned, so HE meets his deserts. I did try to kill that doll of his; but it was he who put it into my head to do it — two wives were too many; I was to murder her, or she was to hang me; listen to all I have to say.’

Here Lord Glenfallen interrupted.

‘I think, sir,’ said he, addressing the magistrate, ‘that we had better proceed to business; this unhappy woman’s furious recriminations but waste our time. If she refuses to answer your questions, you had better, I presume, take my depositions.’

‘And are you going to swear away my life, you black-perjured murderer?’ shrieked the woman. ‘Sir, sir, sir, you must hear me,’ she continued, addressing the magistrate; ‘I can convict him — he bid me murder that girl, and then, when I failed, he came behind me, and struck me down, and now he wants to swear away my life. Take down all I say.’

‘If it is your intention,’ said the magistrate, ‘to confess the crime with which you stand charged, you may, upon producing sufficient evidence, criminate whom you please.’

‘Evidence! — I have no evidence but myself,’ said the woman. ‘I will swear it all — write down my testimony — write it down, I say — we shall hang side by side, my brave lord — all your own handy-work, my gentle husband.’

This was followed by a low, insolent, and sneering laugh, which, from one in her situation, was sufficiently horrible.

‘I will not at present hear anything,’ replied he, ‘but distinct answers to the questions which I shall put to you upon this matter.’

‘Then you shall hear nothing,’ replied she sullenly, and no inducement or intimidation could bring her to speak again.

Lord Glenfallen's deposition and mine were then given, as also those of the servants who had entered the room at the moment of my rescue.

The magistrate then intimated that she was committed, and must proceed directly to gaol, whither she was brought in a carriage; of Lord Glenfallen's, for his lordship was naturally by no means indifferent to the effect which her vehement accusations against himself might produce, if uttered before every chance hearer whom she might meet with between Cahergillagh and the place of confinement whither she was despatched.

During the time which intervened between the committal and the trial of the prisoner, Lord Glenfallen seemed to suffer agonies of mind which baffle all description; he hardly ever slept, and when he did, his slumbers seemed but the instruments of new tortures, and his waking hours were, if possible, exceeded in intensity of terrors by the dreams which disturbed his sleep.

Lord Glenfallen rested, if to lie in the mere attitude of repose were to do so, in his dressing-room, and thus I had an opportunity of witnessing, far oftener than I wished it, the fearful workings of his mind. His agony often broke out into such fearful paroxysms that delirium and total loss of reason appeared to be impending. He frequently spoke of flying from the country, and bringing with him all the witnesses of the appalling scene upon which the prosecution was founded; then, again, he would fiercely lament that the blow which he had inflicted had not ended all.

The assizes arrived, however, and upon the day appointed Lord Glenfallen and I attended in order to give our evidence.

The cause was called on, and the prisoner appeared at the bar.

Great curiosity and interest were felt respecting the trial, so that the court was crowded to excess.

The prisoner, however, without appearing to take the trouble of listening to the indictment, pleaded guilty, and no representations on the part of the court availed to induce her to retract her plea.

After much time had been wasted in a fruitless attempt to prevail upon her to reconsider her words, the court proceeded, according to the usual form, to pass sentence.

This having been done, the prisoner was about to be removed, when she said, in a low, distinct voice:

'A word — a word, my lord! — Is Lord Glenfallen here in the court?'

On being told that he was, she raised her voice to a tone of loud menace, and continued:

‘Hardress, Earl of Glenfallen, I accuse you here in this court of justice of two crimes, — first, that you married a second wife, while the first was living; and again, that you prompted me to the murder, for attempting which I am to die. Secure him — chain him — bring him here.’

There was a laugh through the court at these words, which were naturally treated by the judge as a violent extemporary recrimination, and the woman was desired to be silent.

‘You won’t take him, then?’ she said; ‘you won’t try him? You’ll let him go free?’

It was intimated by the court that he would certainly be allowed ‘to go free,’ and she was ordered again to be removed.

Before, however, the mandate was executed, she threw her arms wildly into the air, and uttered one piercing shriek so full of preternatural rage and despair, that it might fitly have ushered a soul into those realms where hope can come no more.

The sound still rang in my ears, months after the voice that had uttered it was for ever silent.

The wretched woman was executed in accordance with the sentence which had been pronounced.

For some time after this event, Lord Glenfallen appeared, if possible, to suffer more than he had done before, and altogether his language, which often amounted to half confessions of the guilt imputed to him, and all the circumstances connected with the late occurrences, formed a mass of evidence so convincing that I wrote to my father, detailing the grounds of my fears, and imploring him to come to Cahergillagh without delay, in order to remove me from my husband’s control, previously to taking legal steps for a final separation.

Circumstanced as I was, my existence was little short of intolerable, for, besides the fearful suspicions which attached to my husband, I plainly perceived that if Lord Glenfallen were not relieved, and that speedily, insanity must supervene. I therefore expected my father’s arrival, or at least a letter to announce it, with indescribable impatience.

About a week after the execution had taken place, Lord Glenfallen one morning met me with an unusually sprightly air.

‘Fanny,’ said he, ‘I have it now for the first time in my power to explain to your satisfaction everything which has hitherto appeared suspicious or mysterious in my conduct. After breakfast come with me to my study, and I shall, I hope, make all things clear.’

This invitation afforded me more real pleasure than I had experienced for months. Something had certainly occurred to tranquillize my husband’s mind in no ordinary degree, and I thought it by no means impossible that he would, in the proposed interview, prove himself the most injured and innocent of men.

Full of this hope, I repaired to his study at the appointed hour. He was writing busily when I entered the room, and just raising his eyes, he requested me to be seated.

I took a chair as he desired, and remained silently awaiting his leisure, while he finished, folded, directed, and sealed his letter. Laying it then upon the table with the address downward, he said,

‘My dearest Fanny, I know I must have appeared very strange to you and very unkind — often even cruel. Before the end of this week I will show you the necessity of my conduct — how impossible it was that I should have seemed otherwise. I am conscious that many acts of mine must have inevitably given rise to painful suspicions — suspicions which, indeed, upon one occasion, you very properly communicated to me. I have got two letters from a quarter which commands respect, containing information as to the course by which I may be enabled to prove the negative of all the crimes which even the most credulous suspicion could lay to my charge. I expected a third by this morning’s post, containing documents which will set the matter for ever at rest, but owing, no doubt, to some neglect, or, perhaps, to some difficulty in collecting the papers, some inevitable delay, it has not come to hand this morning, according to my expectation. I was finishing one to the very same quarter when you came in, and if a sound rousing be worth anything, I think I shall have a special messenger before two days have passed. I have been anxiously considering with myself, as to whether I had better imperfectly clear up your doubts by submitting to your inspection the two letters which I have already received, or wait till I can triumphantly vindicate myself by the production of the documents which I have already mentioned, and I have, I think, not unnaturally decided upon the latter course. However, there is a person in the next room whose testimony is not without its value excuse me for one moment.'

So saying, he arose and went to the door of a closet which opened from the study; this he unlocked, and half opening the door, he said, 'It is only I,' and then slipped into the room and carefully closed and locked the door behind him.

I immediately heard his voice in animated conversation. My curiosity upon the subject of the letter was naturally great, so, smothering any little scruples which I might have felt, I resolved to look at the address of the letter which lay, as my husband had left it, with its face upon the table. I accordingly drew it over to me and turned up the direction.

For two or three moments I could scarce believe my eyes, but there could be no mistake — in large characters were traced the words, 'To the Archangel Gabriel in Heaven.'

I had scarcely returned the letter to its original position, and in some degree recovered the shock which this unequivocal proof of insanity produced, when the closet door was unlocked, and Lord Glenfallen reentered the study, carefully closing and locking the door again upon the outside.

'Whom have you there?' inquired I, making a strong effort to appear calm.

'Perhaps,' said he, musingly, 'you might have some objection to seeing her, at least for a time.'

'Who is it?' repeated I.

'Why,' said he, 'I see no use in hiding it — the blind Dutchwoman. I have been with her the whole morning. She is very anxious to get out of that closet; but you know she is odd, she is scarcely to be trusted.'

A heavy gust of wind shook the door at this moment with a sound as if something more substantial were pushing against it.

'Ha, ha, ha! — do you hear her?' said he, with an obstreperous burst of laughter.

The wind died away in a long howl, and Lord Glenfallen, suddenly checking his merriment, shrugged his shoulders, and muttered:

'Poor devil, she has been hardly used.'

'We had better not tease her at present with questions,' said I, in as unconcerned a tone as I could assume, although I felt every moment as if I should faint.

‘Humph! may be so,’ said he. ‘Well, come back in an hour or two, or when you please, and you will find us here.’

He again unlocked the door, and entered with the same precautions which he had adopted before, locking the door upon the inside; and as I hurried from the room, I heard his voice again exerted as if in eager parley.

I can hardly describe my emotions; my hopes had been raised to the highest, and now, in an instant, all was gone — the dreadful consummation was accomplished — the fearful retribution had fallen upon the guilty man — the mind was destroyed — the power to repent was gone.

The agony of the hours which followed what I would still call my AWFUL interview with Lord Glenfallen, I cannot describe; my solitude was, however, broken in upon by Martha, who came to inform me of the arrival of a gentleman, who expected me in the parlour.

I accordingly descended, and, to my great joy, found my father seated by the fire.

This expedition upon his part was easily accounted for: my communications had touched the honour of the family. I speedily informed him of the dreadful malady which had fallen upon the wretched man.

My father suggested the necessity of placing some person to watch him, to prevent his injuring himself or others.

I rang the bell, and desired that one Edward Cooke, an attached servant of the family, should be sent to me.

I told him distinctly and briefly the nature of the service required of him, and, attended by him, my father and I proceeded at once to the study. The door of the inner room was still closed, and everything in the outer chamber remained in the same order in which I had left it.

We then advanced to the closet-door, at which we knocked, but without receiving any answer.

We next tried to open the door, but in vain — it was locked upon the inside. We knocked more loudly, but in vain.

Seriously alarmed, I desired the servant to force the door, which was, after several violent efforts, accomplished, and we entered the closet.

Lord Glenfallen was lying on his face upon a sofa.

‘Hush!’ said I, ‘he is asleep.’ We paused for a moment.

‘He is too still for that,’ said my father.

We all of us felt a strong reluctance to approach the figure.

‘Edward,’ said I, ‘try whether your master sleeps.’

The servant approached the sofa where Lord Glenfallen lay. He leant his ear towards the head of the recumbent figure, to ascertain whether the sound of breathing was audible. He turned towards us, and said:

‘My lady, you had better not wait here; I am sure he is dead!’

‘Let me see the face,’ said I, terribly agitated; ‘you MAY be mistaken.’

The man then, in obedience to my command, turned the body round, and, gracious God! what a sight met my view. He was, indeed, perfectly dead.

The whole breast of the shirt, with its lace frill, was drenched with gore, as was the couch underneath the spot where he lay.

The head hung back, as it seemed, almost severed from the body by a frightful gash, which yawned across the throat. The instrument which had inflicted it was found under his body.

All, then, was over; I was never to learn the history in whose termination I had been so deeply and so tragically involved.

The severe discipline which my mind had undergone was not bestowed in vain. I directed my thoughts and my hopes to that place where there is no more sin, nor danger, nor sorrow.

Thus ends a brief tale whose prominent incidents many will recognise as having marked the history of a distinguished family; and though it refers to a somewhat distant date, we shall be found not to have taken, upon that account, any liberties with the facts, but in our statement of all the incidents to have rigorously and faithfully adhered to the truth.

AN ADVENTURE OF HARDRESS FITZGERALD, A ROYALIST CAPTAIN.

Being an Eleventh Extract from the Legacy of the late
Francis Purcell, P.P. of Drumcoolagh.

The following brief narrative contains a faithful account of one of the many strange incidents which chequered the life of Hardress Fitzgerald — one of the now-forgotten heroes who flourished during the most stirring and, though the most disastrous, by no means the least glorious period of our eventful history.

He was a captain of horse in the army of James, and shared the fortunes of his master, enduring privations, encountering dangers, and submitting to vicissitudes the most galling and ruinous, with a fortitude and a heroism which would, if coupled with his other virtues have rendered the unhappy monarch whom he served, the most illustrious among unfortunate princes.

I have always preferred, where I could do so with any approach to accuracy, to give such relations as the one which I am about to submit to you, in the first person, and in the words of the original narrator, believing that such a form of recitation not only gives freshness to the tale, but in this particular instance, by bringing before me and steadily fixing in my mind's eye the veteran royalist who himself related the occurrence which I am about to record, furnishes an additional stimulant to my memory, and a proportionate check upon my imagination.

As nearly as I can recollect then, his statement was as follows:

After the fatal battle of the Boyne, I came up in disguise to Dublin, as did many in a like situation, regarding the capital as furnishing at once a good central position of observation, and as secure a lurking-place as I cared to find.

I would not suffer myself to believe that the cause of my royal master was so desperate as it really was; and while I lay in my lodgings, which consisted of the garret of a small dark house, standing in the lane which runs close by Audoen's Arch, I busied myself with continual projects for the raising of the country, and the recollecting of the fragments of the defeated army — plans, you will allow, sufficiently magnificent for a poor devil who dared scarce show his face abroad in the daylight.

I believe, however, that I had not much reason to fear for my personal safety, for men’s minds in the city were greatly occupied with public events, and private amusements and debaucheries, which were, about that time, carried to an excess which our country never knew before, by reason of the raking together from all quarters of the empire, and indeed from most parts of Holland, the most dissolute and desperate adventurers who cared to play at hazard for their lives; and thus there seemed to be but little scrutiny into the characters of those who sought concealment.

I heard much at different times of the intentions of King James and his party, but nothing with certainty.

Some said that the king still lay in Ireland; others, that he had crossed over to Scotland, to encourage the Highlanders, who, with Dundee at their head, had been stirring in his behoof; others, again, said that he had taken ship for France, leaving his followers to shift for themselves, and regarding his kingdom as wholly lost, which last was the true version, as I afterwards learned.

Although I had been very active in the wars in Ireland, and had done many deeds of necessary but dire severity, which have often since troubled me much to think upon, yet I doubted not but that I might easily obtain protection for my person and property from the Prince of Orange, if I sought it by the ordinary submissions; but besides that my conscience and my affections resisted such time-serving concessions, I was resolved in my own mind that the cause of the royalist party was by no means desperate, and I looked to keep myself unimpeded by any pledge or promise given to the usurping Dutchman, that I might freely and honourably take a share in any struggle which might yet remain to be made for the right.

I therefore lay quiet, going forth from my lodgings but little, and that chiefly under cover of the dusk, and conversing hardly at all, except with those whom I well knew.

I had like once to have paid dearly for relaxing this caution; for going into a tavern one evening near the Tholsel, I had the confidence to throw off my hat, and sit there with my face quite exposed, when a fellow coming in with some troopers, they fell a-boozing, and being somewhat warmed, they began to drink ‘Confusion to popery,’ and the like, and to compel the peaceable persons who happened to sit there, to join them in so doing.

Though I was rather hot-blooded, I was resolved to say nothing to attract notice; but, at the same time, if urged to pledge the toasts which they were compelling others to drink, to resist doing so.

With the intent to withdraw myself quietly from the place, I paid my reckoning, and putting on my hat, was going into the street, when the countryman who had come in with the soldiers called out:

‘Stop that popish tom-cat!’

And running across the room, he got to the door before me, and, shutting it, placed his back against it, to prevent my going out.

Though with much difficulty, I kept an appearance of quietness, and turning to the fellow, who, from his accent, I judged to be northern, and whose face I knew — though, to this day, I cannot say where I had seen him before — I observed very calmly:

‘Sir, I came in here with no other design than to refresh myself, without offending any man. I have paid my reckoning, and now desire to go forth. If there is anything within reason that I can do to satisfy you, and to prevent trouble and delay to myself, name your terms, and if they be but fair, I will frankly comply with them.’

He quickly replied:

‘You are Hardress Fitzgerald, the bloody popish captain, that hanged the twelve men at Derry.’

I felt that I was in some danger, but being a strong man, and used to perils of all kinds, it was not easy to disconcert me.

I looked then steadily at the fellow, and, in a voice of much confidence, I said:

‘I am neither a Papist, a Royalist, nor a Fitzgerald, but an honester Protestant, mayhap, than many who make louder professions.’

‘Then drink the honest man’s toast,’ said he. ‘Damnation to the pope, and confusion to skulking Jimmy and his runaway crew.’

‘Yourself shall hear me,’ said I, taking the largest pewter pot that lay within my reach. ‘Tapster, fill this with ale; I grieve to say I can afford nothing better.’

I took the vessel of liquor in my hand, and walking up to him, I first made a bow to the troopers who sat laughing at the sprightliness of their facetious friend, and then another to himself, when saying, ‘G —— damn yourself and your cause!’ I flung the ale straight into his face; and before he had time to recover himself, I struck him with my whole force and weight with the pewter pot upon the head, so strong a blow, that he fell, for aught I know, dead upon the floor, and nothing but the handle of the vessel remained in my hand.

I opened the door, but one of the dragoons drew his sabre, and ran at me to avenge his companion. With my hand I put aside the blade of the sword, narrowly escaping what he had intended for me, the point actually tearing open my vest. Without allowing him time to repeat his thrust, I struck him in the face with my clenched fist so sound a blow that he rolled back into the room with the force of a tennis ball.

It was well for me that the rest were half drunk, and the evening dark; for otherwise my folly would infallibly have cost me my life. As it was, I reached my garret in safety, with a resolution to frequent taverns no more until better times.

My little patience and money were wellnigh exhausted, when, after much doubt and uncertainty, and many conflicting reports, I was assured that the flower of the Royalist army, under the Duke of Berwick and General Boisleau, occupied the city of Limerick, with a determination to hold that fortress against the prince’s forces; and that a French fleet of great power, and well freighted with arms, ammunition, and men, was riding in the Shannon, under the walls of the town. But this last report was, like many others then circulated, untrue; there being, indeed, a promise and expectation of such assistance, but no arrival of it till too late.

The army of the Prince of Orange was said to be rapidly approaching the town, in order to commence the siege.

On hearing this, and being made as certain as the vagueness and unsatisfactory nature of my information, which came not from any authentic source, would permit; at least, being sure of the main point, which all allowed — namely, that Limerick was held for the king — and being also naturally fond of enterprise, and impatient of idleness, I took the resolution to travel thither, and, if possible, to throw myself into the city, in order to lend what assistance I might to my former companions in arms, well knowing that any man of strong constitution and of some experience might easily make himself useful to a garrison in their straitened situation.

When I had taken this resolution, I was not long in putting it into execution; and, as the first step in the matter, I turned half of the money which remained with me, in all about seventeen pounds, into small wares and merchandise such as travelling traders used to deal in; and the rest, excepting some shillings which I carried home for my immediate expenses, I sewed carefully in the lining of my breeches waistband, hoping that the sale of my commodities might easily supply me with subsistence upon the road.

I left Dublin upon a Friday morning in the month of September, with a tolerably heavy pack upon my back.

I was a strong man and a good walker, and one day with another travelled easily at the rate of twenty miles in each day, much time being lost in the towns of any note on the way, where, to avoid suspicion, I was obliged to make some stay, as if to sell my wares.

I did not travel directly to Limerick, but turned far into Tipperary, going near to the borders of Cork.

Upon the sixth day after my departure from Dublin I learned, CERTAINLY, from some fellows who were returning from trafficking with the soldiers, that the army of the prince was actually encamped before Limerick, upon the south side of the Shannon.

In order, then, to enter the city without interruption, I must needs cross the river, and I was much in doubt whether to do so by boat from Kerry, which I might have easily done, into the Earl of Clare’s land, and thus into the beleaguered city, or to take what seemed the easier way, one, however, about which I had certain misgivings — which, by the way, afterwards turned out to be just enough. This way was to cross the Shannon at O’Brien’s Bridge, or at Killaloe, into the county of Clare.

I feared, however, that both these passes were guarded by the prince’s forces, and resolved, if such were the case, not to essay to cross, for I was not fitted to sustain a scrutiny, having about me, though pretty safely secured, my commission from King James — which, though a dangerous companion, I would not have parted from but with my life.

I settled, then, in my own mind, that if the bridges were guarded I would walk as far as Portumna, where I might cross, though at a considerable sacrifice of time; and, having determined upon this course, I turned directly towards Killaloe.

I reached the foot of the mountain, or rather high hill, called Keeper — which had been pointed out to me as a landmark — lying directly between me and Killaloe, in the evening, and, having ascended some way, the darkness and fog overtook me.

The evening was very chilly, and myself weary, hungry, and much in need of sleep, so that I preferred seeking to cross the hill, though at some risk, to remaining upon it throughout the night. Stumbling over rocks and sinking into bog-mire, as the nature of the ground varied, I slowly and laboriously plodded on, making very little way in proportion to the toil it cost me.

After half an hour's slow walking, or rather rambling, for, owing to the dark, I very soon lost my direction, I at last heard the sound of running water, and with some little trouble reached the edge of a brook, which ran in the bottom of a deep gully. This I knew would furnish a sure guide to the low grounds, where I might promise myself that I should speedily meet with some house or cabin where I might find shelter for the night.

The stream which I followed flowed at the bottom of a rough and swampy glen, very steep and making many abrupt turns, and so dark, owing more to the fog than to the want of the moon (for, though not high, I believe it had risen at the time), that I continually fell over fragments of rock and stumbled up to my middle into the rivulet, which I sought to follow.

In this way, drenched, weary, and with my patience almost exhausted, I was toiling onward, when, turning a sharp angle in the winding glen, I found myself within some twenty yards of a group of wild-looking men, gathered in various attitudes round a glowing turf fire.

I was so surprised at this rencontre that I stopped short, and for a time was in doubt whether to turn back or to accost them.

A minute's thought satisfied me that I ought to make up to the fellows, and trust to their good faith for whatever assistance they could give me.

I determined, then, to do this, having great faith in the impulses of my mind, which, whenever I have been in jeopardy, as in my life I often have, always prompted me aright.

The strong red light of the fire showed me plainly enough that the group consisted, not of soldiers, but of Irish kernes, or countrymen, most of them wrapped in heavy mantles, and with no other covering for their heads than that afforded by their long, rough hair.

There was nothing about them which I could see to intimate whether their object were peaceful or warlike; but I afterwards found that they had weapons enough, though of their own rude fashion.

There were in all about twenty persons assembled around the fire, some sitting upon such blocks of stone as happened to lie in the way; others stretched at their length upon the ground.

‘God save you, boys!’ said I, advancing towards the party.

The men who had been talking and laughing together instantly paused, and two of them — tall and powerful fellows — snatched up each a weapon, something like a short halberd with a massive iron head, an instrument which they called among themselves a rapp, and with two or three long strides they came up with me, and laying hold upon my arms, drew me, not, you may easily believe, making much resistance, towards the fire.

When I reached the place where the figures were seated, the two men still held me firmly, and some others threw some handfuls of dry fuel upon the red embers, which, blazing up, cast a strong light upon me.

When they had satisfied themselves as to my appearance, they began to question me very closely as to my purpose in being upon the hill at such an unseasonable hour, asking me what was my occupation, where I had been, and whither I was going.

These questions were put to me in English by an old half-military looking man, who translated into that language the suggestions which his companions for the most part threw out in Irish.

I did not choose to commit myself to these fellows by telling them my real character and purpose, and therefore I represented myself as a poor travelling chapman who had been at Cork, and was seeking his way to Killaloe, in order to cross over into Clare and thence to the city of Galway.

My account did not seem fully to satisfy the men.

I heard one fellow say in Irish, which language I understood, ‘Maybe he is a spy.’

They then whispered together for a time, and the little man who was their spokesman came over to me and said:

‘Do you know what we do with spies? we knock their brains out, my friend.’

He then turned back to them with whom he had been whispering, and talked in a low tone again with them for a considerable time.

I now felt very uncomfortable, not knowing what these savages — for they appeared nothing better — might design against me.

Twice or thrice I had serious thoughts of breaking from them, but the two guards who were placed upon me held me fast by the arms; and even had I succeeded in shaking them off, I should soon have been overtaken, encumbered as I was with a heavy pack, and wholly ignorant of the lie of the ground; or else, if I were so exceedingly lucky as to escape out of their hands, I still had the chance of falling into those of some other party of the same kind.

I therefore patiently awaited the issue of their deliberations, which I made no doubt affected me nearly.

I turned to the men who held me, and one after the other asked them, in their own language, 'Why they held me?' adding, 'I am but a poor pedlar, as you see. I have neither money nor money's worth, for the sake of which you should do me hurt. You may have my pack and all that it contains, if you desire it — but do not injure me.'

To all this they gave no answer, but savagely desired me to hold my tongue.

I accordingly remained silent, determined, if the worst came, to declare to the whole party, who, I doubted not, were friendly, as were all the Irish peasantry in the south, to the Royal cause, my real character and design; and if this avowal failed me, I was resolved to make a desperate effort to escape, or at least to give my life at the dearest price I could.

I was not kept long in suspense, for the little veteran who had spoken to me at first came over, and desiring the two men to bring me after him, led the way along a broken path, which wound by the side of the steep glen.

I was obliged willy nilly to go with them, and, half-dragging and half-carrying me, they brought me by the path, which now became very steep, for some hundred yards without stopping, when suddenly coming to a stand, I found myself close before the door of some house or hut, I could not see which, through the planks of which a strong light was streaming.

At this door my conductor stopped, and tapping gently at it, it was opened by a stout fellow, with buff-coat and jack-boots, and pistols stuck in his belt, as also a long cavalry sword by his side.

He spoke with my guide, and to my no small satisfaction, in French, which convinced me that he was one of the soldiers whom Louis had sent to support our king, and who were said to have arrived in Limerick, though, as I observed above, not with truth.

I was much assured by this circumstance, and made no doubt but that I had fallen in with one of those marauding parties of native Irish, who, placing themselves under the guidance of men of courage and experience, had done much brave and essential service to the cause of the king.

The soldier entered an inner door in the apartment, which opening disclosed a rude, dreary, and dilapidated room, with a low plank ceiling, much discoloured by the smoke which hung suspended in heavy masses, descending within a few feet of the ground, and completely obscuring the upper regions of the chamber.

A large fire of turf and heath was burning under a kind of rude chimney, shaped like a large funnel, but by no means discharging the functions for which it was intended. Into this inauspicious apartment was I conducted by my strange companions. In the next room I heard voices employed, as it seemed, in brief questioning and answer; and in a minute the soldier reentered the room, and having said, 'Votre prisonnier — le general veut le voir,' he led the way into the inner room, which in point of comfort and cleanliness was not a whit better than the first.

Seated at a clumsy plank table, placed about the middle of the floor, was a powerfully built man, of almost colossal stature — his military accoutrements, cuirass and rich regimental clothes, soiled, deranged, and spattered with recent hard travel; the flowing wig, surmounted by the cocked hat and plume, still rested upon his head. On the table lay his sword-belt with its appendage, and a pair of long holster pistols, some papers, and pen and ink; also a stone jug, and the fragments of a hasty meal. His attitude betokened the languor of fatigue. His left hand was buried beyond the lace ruffle in the breast of his cassock, and the elbow of his right rested upon the table, so as to support his head. From his mouth protruded a tobacco-pipe, which as I entered he slowly withdrew.

A single glance at the honest, goodhumoured, comely face of the soldier satisfied me of his identity, and removing my hat from my head I said, 'God save General Sarsfield!'

The general nodded

‘I am a prisoner here under strange circumstances,’ I continued ‘I appear before you in a strange disguise. You do not recognise Captain Hardress Fitzgerald!’

‘Eh, how’s this?’ said he, approaching me with the light.

‘I am that Hardress Fitzgerald,’ I repeated, ‘who served under you at the Boyne, and upon the day of the action had the honour to protect your person at the expense of his own.’ At the same time I turned aside the hair which covered the scar which you well know upon my forehead, and which was then much more remarkable than it is now.

The general on seeing this at once recognised me, and embracing me cordially, made me sit down, and while I unstrapped my pack, a tedious job, my fingers being nearly numbed with cold, sent the men forth to procure me some provision.

The general’s horse was stabled in a corner of the chamber where we sat, and his war-saddle lay upon the floor. At the far end of the room was a second door, which stood half open; a bogwood fire burned on a hearth somewhat less rude than the one which I had first seen, but still very little better appointed with a chimney, for thick wreaths of smoke were eddying, with every fitful gust, about the room. Close by the fire was strewed a bed of heath, intended, I supposed, for the stalwart limbs of the general.

‘Hardress Fitzgerald,’ said he, fixing his eyes gravely upon me, while he slowly removed the tobacco-pipe from his mouth, ‘I remember you, strong, bold and cunning in your warlike trade; the more desperate an enterprise, the more ready for it, you. I would gladly engage you, for I know you trustworthy, to perform a piece of duty requiring, it may be, no extraordinary quality to fulfil; and yet perhaps, as accidents may happen, demanding every attribute of daring and dexterity which belongs to you.’

Here he paused for some moments.

I own I felt somewhat flattered by the terms in which he spoke of me, knowing him to be but little given to compliments; and not having any plan in my head, farther than the rendering what service I might to the cause of the king, caring very little as to the road in which my duty might lie, I frankly replied:

‘Sir, I hope, if opportunity offers, I shall prove to deserve the honourable terms in which you are pleased to speak of me. In a righteous cause I fear not wounds or death; and in discharging my duty to my God and my king, I am ready for any hazard or any fate. Name the service you require, and if it lies within the compass of my wit or power, I will fully and faithfully perform it. Have I said enough?'

'That is well, very well, my friend; you speak well, and manfully,' replied the general. 'I want you to convey to the hands of General Boisleau, now in the city of Limerick, a small written packet; there is some danger, mark me, of your falling in with some outpost or straggling party of the prince's army. If you are taken unawares by any of the enemy you must dispose of the packet inside your person, rather than let it fall into their hands — that is, you must eat it. And if they go to question you with thumbscrews, or the like, answer nothing; let them knock your brains out first.' In illustration, I suppose, of the latter alternative, he knocked the ashes out of his pipe upon the table as he uttered it.

'The packet,' he continued, 'you shall have tomorrow morning. Meantime comfort yourself with food, and afterwards with sleep; you will want, mayhap, all your strength and wits on the morrow.'

I applied myself forthwith to the homely fare which they had provided, and I confess that I never made a meal so heartily to my satisfaction.

It was a beautiful, clear, autumn morning, and the bright beams of the early sun were slanting over the brown heath which clothed the sides of the mountain, and glittering in the thousand bright drops which the melting hoarfrost had left behind it, and the white mists were lying like broad lakes in the valleys, when, with my pedlar's pack upon my back, and General Sarsfield's precious despatch in my bosom, I set forth, refreshed and courageous.

As I descended the hill, my heart expanded and my spirits rose under the influences which surrounded me. The keen, clear, bracing air of the morning, the bright, slanting sunshine, the merry songs of the small birds, and the distant sounds of awakening labour that floated up from the plains, all conspired to stir my heart within me, and more like a mad-cap boy, broken loose from school, than a man of sober years upon a mission of doubt and danger, I trod lightly on, whistling and singing alternately for very joy.

As I approached the object of my early march, I fell in with a countryman, eager, as are most of his kind, for news.

I gave him what little I had collected, and professing great zeal for the king, which, indeed, I always cherished, I won upon his confidence so far, that he became much more communicative than the peasantry in those quarters are generally wont to be to strangers.

From him I learned that there was a company of dragoons in William's service, quartered at Willaloe; but he could not tell whether the passage of the bridge was stopped by them or not. With a resolution, at all events, to make the attempt to cross, I approached the town. When I came within sight of the river, I quickly perceived that it was so swollen with the recent rains, as, indeed, the countryman had told me, that the fords were wholly impassable.

I stopped then, upon a slight eminence overlooking the village, with a view to reconnoitre and to arrange my plans in case of interruption. While thus engaged, the wind blowing gently from the west, in which quarter Limerick lay, I distinctly heard the explosion of the cannon, which played from and against the city, though at a distance of eleven miles at the least.

I never yet heard the music that had for me half the attractions of that sullen sound, and as I noted again and again the distant thunder that proclaimed the perils, and the valour, and the faithfulness of my brethren, my heart swelled with pride, and the tears rose to my eyes; and lifting up my hands to heaven, I prayed to God that I might be spared to take a part in the righteous quarrel that was there so bravely maintained.

I felt, indeed, at this moment a longing, more intense than I have the power to describe, to be at once with my brave companions in arms, and so inwardly excited and stirred up as if I had been actually within five minutes' march of the field of battle.

It was now almost noon, and I had walked hard since morning across a difficult and broken country, so that I was a little fatigued, and in no small degree hungry. As I approached the hamlet, I was glad to see in the window of a poor hovel several large cakes of meal displayed, as if to induce purchasers to enter.

I was right in regarding this exhibition as an intimation that entertainment might be procured within, for upon entering and inquiring, I was speedily invited by the poor woman, who, it appeared, kept this humble house of refreshment, to lay down my pack and seat myself by a ponderous table, upon which she promised to serve me with a dinner fit for a king; and indeed, to my mind, she amply fulfilled her engagement, supplying me abundantly with eggs, bacon, and wheaten cakes, which I discussed with a zeal which almost surprised myself.

Having disposed of the solid part of my entertainment, I was proceeding to regale myself with a brimming measure of strong waters, when my attention was arrested by the sound of horses' hoofs in brisk motion upon the broken road, and evidently approaching the hovel in which I was at that moment seated.

The ominous clank of sword scabbards and the jingle of brass accoutrements announced, unequivocally, that the horsemen were of the military profession.

'The red-coats will stop here undoubtedly,' said the old woman, observing, I suppose, the anxiety of my countenance; 'they never pass us without coming in for half an hour to drink or smoke. If you desire to avoid them, I can hide you safely; but don't lose a moment. They will be here before you can count a hundred.'

I thanked the good woman for her hospitable zeal; but I felt a repugnance to concealing myself as she suggested, which was enhanced by the consciousness that if by any accident I were detected while lurking in the room, my situation would of itself inevitably lead to suspicions, and probably to discovery.

I therefore declined her offer, and awaited in suspense the entrance of the soldiers.

I had time before they made their appearance to move my seat hurriedly from the table to the hearth, where, under the shade of the large chimney, I might observe the coming visitors with less chance of being myself remarked upon.

As my hostess had anticipated, the horsemen drew up at the door of the hut, and five dragoons entered the dark chamber where I awaited them.

Leaving their horses at the entrance, with much noise and clatter they proceeded to seat themselves and call for liquor.

Three of these fellows were Dutchmen, and, indeed, all belonged, as I afterwards found, to a Dutch regiment, which had been recruited with Irish and English, as also partly officered from the same nations.

Being supplied with pipes and drink they soon became merry; and not suffering their smoking to interfere with their conversation, they talked loud and quickly, for the most part in a sort of barbarous language, neither Dutch nor English, but compounded of both.

They were so occupied with their own jocularity that I had very great hopes of escaping observation altogether, and remained quietly seated in a corner of the chimney, leaning back upon my seat as if asleep.

My taciturnity and quiescence, however, did not avail me, for one of these fellows coming over to the hearth to light his pipe, perceived me, and looking me very hard in the face, he said:

‘What countryman are you, brother, that you sit with a covered head in the room with the prince’s soldiers?’

At the same time he tossed my hat off my head into the fire. I was not fool enough, though somewhat hot-blooded, to suffer the insolence of this fellow to involve me in a broil so dangerous to my person and ruinous to my schemes as a riot with these soldiers must prove. I therefore, quietly taking up my hat and shaking the ashes out of it, observed:

‘Sir, I crave your pardon if I have offended you. I am a stranger in these quarters, and a poor, ignorant, humble man, desiring only to drive my little trade in peace, so far as that may be done in these troublous times.’

‘And what may your trade be?’ said the same fellow.

‘I am a travelling merchant,’ I replied; ‘and sell my wares as cheap as any trader in the country.’

‘Let us see them forthwith,’ said he; ‘mayhap I or my comrades may want something which you can supply. Where is thy chest, friend? Thou shalt have ready money’ (winking at his companions), ‘ready money, and good weight, and sound metal; none of your rascally pinchbeck. Eh, my lads? Bring forth the goods, and let us see.’

Thus urged, I should have betrayed myself had I hesitated to do as required; and anxious, upon any terms, to quiet these turbulent men of war, I unbuckled my pack and exhibited its contents upon the table before them.

‘A pair of lace ruffles, by the Lord!’ said one, unceremoniously seizing upon the articles he named.

‘A phial of perfume,’ continued another, tumbling over the farrago which I had submitted to them, ‘washballs, combs, stationery, slippers, small knives, tobacco; by —— , this merchant is a prize! Mark me, honest fellow, the man who wrongs thee shall suffer— ‘fore Gad he shall; thou shalt be fairly dealt with’ (this he said while in the act of pocketing a small silver tobacco-box, the most valuable article in the lot). ‘You shall come with me to headquarters; the captain will deal with you, and never haggle about the price. I promise thee his good will, and thou wilt consider me accordingly. You’ll find him a profitable customer — he has money without end, and throws it about like a gentleman. If so be as I tell thee, I shall expect, and my comrades here, a piece or two in the way of a compliment — but of this anon. Come, then, with us; buckle on thy pack quickly, friend.’

There was no use in my declaring my willingness to deal with themselves in preference to their master; it was clear that they had resolved that I should, in the most expeditious and advantageous way, turn my goods into money, that they might excise upon me to the amount of their wishes.

The worthy who had taken a lead in these arrangements, and who by his stripes I perceived to be a corporal, having insisted on my taking a dram with him to cement our newly-formed friendship, for which, however, he requested me to pay, made me mount behind one of his comrades; and the party, of which I thus formed an unwilling member, moved at a slow trot towards the quarters of the troop.

They reined up their horses at the head of the long bridge, which at this village spans the broad waters of the Shannon connecting the opposite counties of Tipperary and Clare.

A small tower, built originally, no doubt, to protect and to defend this pass, occupied the near extremity of the bridge, and in its rear, but connected with it, stood several straggling buildings rather dilapidated.

A dismounted trooper kept guard at the door, and my conductor having, dismounted, as also the corporal, the latter inquired:

‘Is the captain in his quarters?’

‘He is,’ replied the sentinel.

And without more ado my companion shoved me into the entrance of the small dark tower, and opening a door at the extremity of the narrow chamber into which we had passed from the street, we entered a second room in which were seated some half-dozen officers of various ranks and ages, engaged in drinking, and smoking, and play.

I glanced rapidly from man to man, and was nearly satisfied by my inspection, when one of the gentlemen whose back had been turned towards the place where I stood, suddenly changed his position and looked towards me.

As soon as I saw his face my heart sank within me, and I knew that my life or death was balanced, as it were, upon a razor's edge.

The name of this man whose unexpected appearance thus affected me was Hugh Oliver, and good and strong reason had I to dread him, for so bitterly did he hate me, that to this moment I do verily believe he would have compassed my death if it lay in his power to do so, even at the hazard of his own life and soul, for I had been — though God knows with many sore strugglings and at the stern call of public duty — the judge and condemner of his brother; and though the military law, which I was called upon to administer, would permit no other course or sentence than the bloody one which I was compelled to pursue, yet even to this hour the recollection of that deed is heavy at my breast.

As soon as I saw this man I felt that my safety depended upon the accident of his not recognising me through the disguise which I had assumed, an accident against which were many chances, for he well knew my person and appearance.

It was too late now to destroy General Sarsfield's instructions; any attempt to do so would ensure detection. All then depended upon a cast of the die.

When the first moment of dismay and heart-sickening agitation had passed, it seemed to me as if my mind acquired a collectedness and clearness more complete and intense than I had ever experienced before.

I instantly perceived that he did not know me, for turning from me to the soldier with all air of indifference, he said,

'Is this a prisoner or a deserter? What have you brought him here for, sirra?'

'Your wisdom will regard him as you see fit, may it please you,' said the corporal. 'The man is a travelling merchant, and, overtaking him upon the road, close by old Dame MacDonagh's cot, I thought I might as well make a sort of prisoner of him that your honour might use him as it might appear most convenient; he has many commododies which are not unworthy of price in this wilderness, and some which you may condescend to make use of yourself. May he exhibit the goods he has for sale, an't please you?'

'Ay, let us see them,' said he.

'Unbuckle your pack,' exclaimed the corporal, with the same tone of command with which, at the head of his guard, he would have said

‘Recover your arms.’ ‘Unbuckle your pack, fellow, and show your goods to the captain — here, where you are.’

The conclusion of his directions was suggested by my endeavouring to move round in order to get my back towards the windows, hoping, by keeping my face in the shade, to escape detection.

In this manoeuvre, however, I was foiled by the imperiousness of the soldier; and inwardly cursing his ill-timed interference, I proceeded to present my merchandise to the loving contemplation of the officers who thronged around me, with a strong light from an opposite window full upon my face.

As I continued to traffic with these gentlemen, I observed with no small anxiety the eyes of Captain Oliver frequently fixed upon me with a kind of dubious inquiring gaze.

‘I think, my honest fellow,’ he said at last, ‘that I have seen you somewhere before this. Have you often dealt with the military?’

‘I have traded, sir,’ said I, ‘with the soldiery many a time, and always been honourably treated. Will your worship please to buy a pair of lace ruffles? — very cheap, your worship.’

‘Why do you wear your hair so much over your face, sir?’ said Oliver, without noticing my suggestion. ‘I promise you, I think no good of thee; throw back your hair, and let me see thee plainly. Hold up your face, and look straight at me; throw back your hair, sir.’

I felt that all chance of escape was at an end; and stepping forward as near as the table would allow me to him, I raised my head, threw back my hair, and fixed my eyes sternly and boldly upon his face.

I saw that he knew me instantly, for his countenance turned as pale as ashes with surprise and hatred. He started up, placing his hand instinctively upon his sword-hilt, and glaring at me with a look so deadly, that I thought every moment he would strike his sword into my heart. He said in a kind of whisper: ‘Hardress Fitzgerald?’

‘Yes;’ said I, boldly, for the excitement of the scene had effectually stirred my blood, ‘Hardress Fitzgerald is before you. I know you well, Captain Oliver. I know how you hate me. I know how you thirst for my blood; but in a good cause, and in the hands of God, I defy you.’

‘You are a desperate villain, sir,’ said Captain Oliver; ‘a rebel and a murderer! Holloa, there! guard, seize him!’

As the soldiers entered, I threw my eyes hastily round the room, and observing a glowing fire upon the hearth, I suddenly drew General Sarsfield's packet from my bosom, and casting it upon the embers, planted my foot upon it.

'Secure the papers!' shouted the captain; and almost instantly I was laid prostrate and senseless upon the floor, by a blow from the butt of a carbine.

I cannot say how long I continued in a state of torpor; but at length, having slowly recovered my senses, I found myself lying firmly handcuffed upon the floor of a small chamber, through a narrow loophole in one of whose walls the evening sun was shining. I was chilled with cold and damp, and drenched in blood, which had flowed in large quantities from the wound on my head. By a strong effort I shook off the sick drowsiness which still hung upon me, and, weak and giddy, I rose with pain and difficulty to my feet.

The chamber, or rather cell, in which I stood was about eight feet square, and of a height very disproportioned to its other dimensions; its altitude from the floor to the ceiling being not less than twelve or fourteen feet. A narrow slit placed high in the wall admitted a scanty light, but sufficient to assure me that my prison contained nothing to render the sojourn of its tenant a whit less comfortless than my worst enemy could have wished.

My first impulse was naturally to examine the security of the door, the loophole which I have mentioned being too high and too narrow to afford a chance of escape. I listened attentively to ascertain if possible whether or not a guard had been placed upon the outside.

Not a sound was to be heard. I now placed my shoulder to the door, and sought with all my combined strength and weight to force it open. It, however, resisted all my efforts, and thus baffled in my appeal to mere animal power, exhausted and disheartened, I threw myself on the ground.

It was not in my nature, however, long to submit to the apathy of despair, and in a few minutes I was on my feet again.

With patient scrutiny I endeavoured to ascertain the nature of the fastenings which secured the door.

The planks, fortunately, having been nailed together fresh, had shrunk considerably, so as to leave wide chinks between each and its neighbour.

By means of these apertures I saw that my dungeon was secured, not by a lock, as I had feared, but by a strong wooden bar, running horizontally across the door, about midway upon the outside.

‘Now,’ thought I, ‘if I can but slip my fingers through the opening of the planks, I can easily remove the bar, and then — — ‘

My attempts, however, were all frustrated by the manner in which my hands were fastened together, each embarrassing the other, and rendering my efforts so hopelessly clumsy, that I was obliged to give them over in despair.

I turned with a sigh from my last hope, and began to pace my narrow prison floor, when my eye suddenly encountered an old rusty nail or holdfast sticking in the wall.

All the gold of Plutus would not have been so welcome as that rusty piece of iron.

I instantly wrung it from the wall, and inserting the point between the planks of the door into the bolt, and working it backwards and forwards, I had at length the unspeakable satisfaction to perceive that the beam was actually yielding to my efforts, and gradually sliding into its berth in the wall.

I have often been engaged in struggles where great bodily strength was required, and every thew and sinew in the system taxed to the uttermost; but, strange as it may appear, I never was so completely exhausted and overcome by any labour as by this comparatively trifling task.

Again and again was I obliged to desist, until my cramped finger-joints recovered their power; but at length my perseverance was rewarded, for, little by little, I succeeded in removing the bolt so far as to allow the door to open sufficiently to permit me to pass.

With some squeezing I succeeded in forcing my way into a small passage, upon which my prison-door opened.

This led into a chamber somewhat more spacious than my cell, but still containing no furniture, and affording no means of escape to one so crippled with bonds as I was.

At the far extremity of this room was a door which stood ajar, and, stealthily passing through it, I found myself in a room containing nothing but a few raw hides, which rendered the atmosphere nearly intolerable.

Here I checked myself, for I heard voices in busy conversation in the next room.

I stole softly to the door which separated the chamber in which I stood from that from which the voices proceeded.

A moment served to convince me that any attempt upon it would be worse than fruitless, for it was secured upon the outside by a strong lock, besides two bars, all which I was enabled to ascertain by means of the same defect in the joining of the planks which I have mentioned as belonging to the inner door.

I had approached this door very softly, so that, my proximity being wholly unsuspected by the speakers within, the conversation continued without interruption.

Planting myself close to the door, I applied my eye to one of the chinks which separated the boards, and thus obtained a full view of the chamber and its occupants.

It was the very apartment into which I had been first conducted. The outer door, which faced the one at which I stood, was closed, and at a small table were seated the only tenants of the room — two officers, one of whom was Captain Oliver. The latter was reading a paper, which I made no doubt was the document with which I had been entrusted.

'The fellow deserves it, no doubt' said the junior officer. 'But, methinks, considering our orders from headquarters, you deal somewhat too hastily.'

'Nephew, nephew,' said Captain Oliver, 'you mistake the tenor of our orders. We were directed to conciliate the peasantry by fair and gentle treatment, but not to suffer spies and traitors to escape. This packet is of some value, though not, in all its parts, intelligible to me. The bearer has made his way hither under a disguise, which, along with the other circumstances of his appearance here, is sufficient to convict him as a spy.'

There was a pause here, and after a few minutes the younger officer said:

'Spy is a hard term, no doubt, uncle; but it is possible — nay, likely, that this poor devil sought merely to carry the parcel with which he was charged in safety to its destination. Pshaw! he is sufficiently punished if you duck him, for ten minutes or so, between the bridge and the mill-dam.'

'Young man,' said Oliver, somewhat sternly, 'do not obtrude your advice where it is not called for; this man, for whom you plead, murdered your own father!'

I could not see how this announcement affected the person to whom it was addressed, for his back was towards me; but I conjectured, easily, that my last poor chance was gone, for a long silence ensued. Captain Oliver at length resumed:

‘I know the villain well. I know him capable of any crime; but, by —— , his last card is played, and the game is up. He shall not see the moon rise tonight.’

There was here another pause.

Oliver rose, and going to the outer door, called:

‘Hewson! Hewson!’

A grimlooking corporal entered.

‘Hewson, have your guard ready at eight o’clock, with their carbines clean, and a round of ball-cartridge each. Keep them sober; and, further, plant two upright posts at the near end of the bridge, with a cross one at top, in the manner of a gibbet. See to these matters, Hewson: I shall be with you speedily.’

The corporal made his salutations, and retired.

Oliver deliberately folded up the papers with which I had been commissioned, and placing them in the pocket of his vest, he said:

‘Cunning, cunning Master Hardress Fitzgerald hath made a false step; the old fox is in the toils. Hardress Fitzgerald, Hardress Fitzgerald, I will blot you out.’

He repeated these words several times, at the same time rubbing his finger strongly upon the table, as if he sought to erase a stain:

‘I WILL BLOT YOU OUT!’

There was a kind of glee in his manner and expression which chilled my very heart.

‘You shall be first shot like a dog, and then hanged like a dog: shot tonight, and hung tomorrow; hung at the bridgehead — hung, until your bones drop asunder!’

It is impossible to describe the exultation with which he seemed to dwell upon, and to particularise the fate which he intended for me.

I observed, however, that his face was deadly pale, and felt assured that his conscience and inward convictions were struggling against his cruel resolve. Without further comment the two officers left the room, I suppose to oversee the preparations which were being made for the deed of which I was to be the victim.

A chill, sick horror crept over me as they retired, and I felt, for the moment, upon the brink of swooning. This feeling, however, speedily gave place to a sensation still more terrible. A state of excitement so intense and tremendous as to border upon literal madness, supervened; my brain reeled and throbbed as if it would burst; thoughts the wildest and the most hideous flashed through my mind with a spontaneous rapidity that scared my very soul; while, all the time, I felt a strange and frightful impulse to burst into uncontrolled laughter.

Gradually this fearful paroxysm passed away. I kneeled and prayed fervently, and felt comforted and assured; but still I could not view the slow approaches of certain death without an agitation little short of agony.

I have stood in battle many a time when the chances of escape were fearfully small. I have confronted foemen in the deadly breach. I have marched, with a constant heart, against the cannon's mouth. Again and again has the beast which I bestrode been shot under me; again and again have I seen the comrades who walked beside me in an instant laid for ever in the dust; again and again have I been in the thick of battle, and of its mortal dangers, and never felt my heart shake, or a single nerve tremble: but now, helpless, manacled, imprisoned, doomed, forced to watch the approaches of an inevitable fate — to wait, silent and moveless, while death as it were crept towards me, human nature was taxed to the uttermost to bear the horrible situation.

I returned again to the closet in which I had found myself upon recovering from the swoon.

The evening sunshine and twilight was fast melting into darkness, when I heard the outer door, that which communicated with the guardroom in which the officers had been amusing themselves, opened and locked again upon the inside.

A measured step then approached, and the door of the wretched cell in which I lay being rudely pushed open, a soldier entered, who carried something in his hand; but, owing to the obscurity of the place, I could not see what.

'Art thou awake, fellow?' said he, in a gruff voice. 'Stir thyself; get upon thy legs.'

His orders were enforced by no very gentle application of his military boot.

‘Friend,’ said I, rising with difficulty, ‘you need not insult a dying man. You have been sent hither to conduct me to death. Lead on! My trust is in God, that He will forgive me my sins, and receive my soul, redeemed by the blood of His Son.’

There here intervened a pause of some length, at the end of which the soldier said, in the same gruff voice, but in a lower key:

‘Look ye, comrade, it will be your own fault if you die this night. On one condition I promise to get you out of this hobble with a whole skin; but if you go to any of your d —— d gammon, by G — , before two hours are passed, you will have as many holes in your carcase as a target.’

‘Name your conditions,’ said I, ‘and if they consist with honour, I will never balk at the offer.’

‘Here they are: you are to be shot tonight, by Captain Oliver’s orders. The carbines are cleaned for the job, and the cartridges served out to the men. By G — , I tell you the truth!’

Of this I needed not much persuasion, and intimated to the man my conviction that he spoke the truth.

‘Well, then,’ he continued, ‘now for the means of avoiding this ugly business. Captain Oliver rides this night to headquarters, with the papers which you carried. Before he starts he will pay you a visit, to fish what he can out of you with all the fine promises he can make. Humour him a little, and when you find an opportunity, stab him in the throat above the cuirass.’

‘A feasible plan, surely,’ said I, raising my shackled hands, ‘for a man thus completely crippled and without a weapon.’

‘I will manage all that presently for you,’ said the soldier. ‘When you have thus dealt with him, take his cloak and hat, and so forth, and put them on; the papers you will find in the pocket of his vest, in a red leather case. Walk boldly out. I am appointed to ride with Captain Oliver, and you will find me holding his horse and my own by the door. Mount quickly, and I will do the same, and then we will ride for our lives across the bridge. You will find the holster-pistols loaded in case of pursuit; and, with the devil’s help, we shall reach Limerick without a hair hurt. My only condition is, that when you strike Oliver, you strike home, and again and again, until he is FINISHED; and I trust to your honour to remember me when we reach the town.’

I cannot say whether I resolved right or wrong, but I thought my situation, and the conduct of Captain Oliver, warranted me in acceding to the conditions propounded by my visitant, and with alacrity I told him so, and desired him to give me the power, as he had promised to do, of executing them.

With speed and promptitude he drew a small key from his pocket, and in an instant the manacles were removed from my hands.

How my heart bounded within me as my wrists were released from the iron gripe of the shackles! The first step toward freedom was made — my self-reliance returned, and I felt assured of success.

‘Now for the weapon,’ said I.

‘I fear me, you will find it rather clumsy,’ said he; ‘but if well handled, it will do as well as the best Toledo. It is the only thing I could get, but I sharpened it myself; it has an edge like a skean.’

He placed in my hand the steel head of a halberd. Grasping it firmly, I found that it made by no means a bad weapon in point of convenience; for it felt in the hand like a heavy dagger, the portion which formed the blade or point being crossed nearly at the lower extremity by a small bar of metal, at one side shaped into the form of an axe, and at the other into that of a hook. These two transverse appendages being muffled by the folds of my cravat, which I removed for the purpose, formed a perfect guard or hilt, and the lower extremity formed like a tube, in which the pike-handle had been inserted, afforded ample space for the grasp of my hand; the point had been made as sharp as a needle, and the metal he assured me was good.

Thus equipped he left me, having observed, ‘The captain sent me to bring you to your senses, and give you some water that he might find you proper for his visit. Here is the pitcher; I think I have revived you sufficiently for the captain’s purpose.’

With a low savage laugh he left me to my reflections.

Having examined and adjusted the weapon, I carefully bound the ends of the cravat, with which I had secured the cross part of the spear-head, firmly round my wrist, so that in case of a struggle it might not easily be forced from my hand; and having made these precautionary dispositions, I sat down upon the ground with my back against the wall, and my hands together under my coat, awaiting my visitor.

The time wore slowly on; the dusk became dimmer and dimmer, until it nearly bordered on total darkness.

‘How’s this?’ said I, inwardly; ‘Captain Oliver, you said I should not see the moon rise tonight. Methinks you are somewhat tardy in fulfilling your prophecy.’

As I made this reflection, a noise at the outer door announced the entrance of a visitant. I knew that the decisive moment was come, and letting my head sink upon my breast, and assuring myself that my hands were concealed, I waited, in the attitude of deep dejection, the approach of my foe and betrayer.

As I had expected, Captain Oliver entered the room where I lay. He was equipped for instant duty, as far as the imperfect twilight would allow me to see; the long sword clanked upon the floor as he made his way through the lobbies which led to my place of confinement; his ample military cloak hung upon his arm; his cocked hat was upon his head, and in all points he was prepared for the road.

This tallied exactly with what my strange informant had told me.

I felt my heart swell and my breath come thick as the awful moment which was to witness the death-struggle of one or other of us approached.

Captain Oliver stood within a yard or two of the place where I sat, or rather lay; and folding his arms, he remained silent for a minute or two, as if arranging in his mind how he should address me.

‘Hardress Fitzgerald,’ he began at length, ‘are you awake? Stand up, if you desire to hear of matters nearly touching your life or death. Get up, I say.’

I arose doggedly, and affecting the awkward movements of one whose hands were bound,

‘Well,’ said I, ‘what would you of me? Is it not enough that I am thus imprisoned without a cause, and about, as I suspect, to suffer a most unjust and violent sentence, but must I also be disturbed during the few moments left me for reflection and repentance by the presence of my persecutor? What do you want of me?’

‘As to your punishment, sir,’ said he, ‘your own deserts have no doubt suggested the likelihood of it to your mind; but I now am with you to let you know that whatever mitigation of your sentence you may look for, must be earned by your compliance with my orders. You must frankly and fully explain the contents of the packet which you endeavoured this day to destroy; and further, you must tell all that you know of the designs of the popish rebels.'

'And if I do this I am to expect a mitigation of my punishment — is it not so?'

Oliver bowed.

'And what IS this mitigation to be? On the honour of a soldier, what is it to be?' inquired I.

'When you have made the disclosure required,' he replied, 'you shall hear. 'Tis then time to talk of indulgences.'

'Methinks it would then be too late,' answered I. 'But a chance is a chance, and a drowning man will catch at a straw. You are an honourable man, Captain Oliver. I must depend, I suppose, on your good faith. Well, sir, before I make the desired communication I have one question more to put. What is to befall me in case that I, remembering the honour of a soldier and a gentleman, reject your infamous terms, scorn your mitigations, and defy your utmost power?'

'In that case,' replied he, coolly, 'before half an hour you shall be a corpse.'

'Then God have mercy on your soul!' said I; and springing forward, I dashed the weapon which I held at his throat.

I missed my aim, but struck him full in the mouth with such force that most of his front teeth were dislodged, and the point of the spear-head passed out under his jaw, at the ear.

My onset was so sudden and unexpected that he reeled back to the wall, and did not recover his equilibrium in time to prevent my dealing a second blow, which I did with my whole force. The point unfortunately struck the cuirass, near the neck, and glancing aside it inflicted but a flesh wound, tearing the skin and tendons along the throat.

He now grappled with me, strange to say, without uttering any cry of alarm; being a very powerful man, and if anything rather heavier and more strongly built than I, he succeeded in drawing me with him to the ground. We fell together with a heavy crash, tugging and straining in what we were both conscious was a mortal struggle. At length I succeeded in getting over him, and struck him twice more in the face; still he struggled with an energy which nothing but the tremendous stake at issue could have sustained.

I succeeded again in inflicting several more wounds upon him, any one of which might have been mortal. While thus contending he clutched his hands about my throat, so firmly that I felt the blood swelling the veins of my temples and face almost to bursting. Again and again I struck the weapon deep into his face and throat, but life seemed to adhere in him with an almost INSECT tenacity.

My sight now nearly failed, my senses almost forsook me; I felt upon the point of suffocation when, with one desperate effort, I struck him another and a last blow in the face. The weapon which I wielded had lighted upon the eye, and the point penetrated the brain; the body quivered under me, the deadly grasp relaxed, and Oliver lay upon the ground a corpse!

As I arose and shook the weapon and the bloody cloth from my hand, the moon which he had foretold I should never see rise, shone bright and broad into the room, and disclosed, with ghastly distinctness, the mangled features of the dead soldier; the mouth, full of clotting blood and broken teeth, lay open; the eye, close by whose lid the fatal wound had been inflicted, was not, as might have been expected, bathed in blood, but had started forth nearly from the socket, and gave to the face, by its fearful unlikeness to the other glazing orb, a leer more hideous and unearthly than fancy ever saw. The wig, with all its rich curls, had fallen with the hat to the floor, leaving the shorn head exposed, and in many places marked by the recent struggle; the rich lace cravat was drenched in blood, and the gay uniform in many places soiled with the same.

It is hard to say, with what feelings I looked upon the unsightly and revolting mass which had so lately been a living and a comely man. I had not any time, however, to spare for reflection; the deed was done — the responsibility was upon me, and all was registered in the book of that God who judges rightly.

With eager haste I removed from the body such of the military accoutrements as were necessary for the purpose of my disguise. I buckled on the sword, drew off the military boots, and donned them myself, placed the brigadier wig and cocked hat upon my head, threw on the cloak, drew it up about my face, and proceeded, with the papers which I found as the soldier had foretold me, and the key of the outer lobby, to the door of the guardroom; this I opened, and with a firm and rapid tread walked through the officers, who rose as I entered, and passed without question or interruption to the street-door. Here I was met by the grimlooking corporal, Hewson, who, saluting me, said:

‘How soon, captain, shall the file be drawn out and the prisoner despatched?’

‘In half an hour,’ I replied, without raising my voice.

The man again saluted, and in two steps I reached the soldier who held the two horses, as he had intimated.

‘Is all right?’ said he, eagerly.

‘Ay,’ said I, ‘which horse am I to mount?’

He satisfied me upon this point, and I threw myself into the saddle; the soldier mounted his horse, and dashing the spurs into the flanks of the animal which I bestrode, we thundered along the narrow bridge. At the far extremity a sentinel, as we approached, called out, ‘Who goes there? stand, and give the word!’ Heedless of the interruption, with my heart bounding with excitement, I dashed on, as did also the soldier who accompanied me.

‘Stand, or I fire! give the word!’ cried the sentry.

‘God save the king, and to hell with the prince!’ shouted I, flinging the cocked hat in his face as I galloped by.

The response was the sharp report of a carbine, accompanied by the whiz of a bullet, which passed directly between me and my comrade, now riding beside me.

‘Hurrah!’ I shouted; ‘try it again, my boy.’

And away we went at a gallop, which bid fair to distance anything like pursuit.

Never was spur more needed, however, for soon the clatter of horses’ hoofs, in full speed, crossing the bridge, came sharp and clear through the stillness of the night.

Away we went, with our pursuers close behind; one mile was passed, another nearly completed. The moon now shone forth, and, turning in the saddle, I looked back upon the road we had passed.

One trooper had headed the rest, and was within a hundred yards of us.

I saw the fellow throw himself from his horse upon the ground.

I knew his object, and said to my comrade:

‘Lower your body — lie flat over the saddle; the fellow is going to fire.’

I had hardly spoken when the report of a carbine startled the echoes, and the ball, striking the hind leg of my companion’s horse, the poor animal fell headlong upon the road, throwing his rider head-foremost over the saddle.

My first impulse was to stop and share whatever fate might await my comrade; but my second and wiser one was to spur on, and save myself and my despatch.

I rode on at a gallop, turning to observe my comrade's fate. I saw his pursuer, having remounted, ride rapidly up to him, and, on reaching the spot where the man and horse lay, rein in and dismount.

He was hardly upon the ground, when my companion shot him dead with one of the holster-pistols which he had drawn from the pipe; and, leaping nimbly over a ditch at the side of the road, he was soon lost among the ditches and thornbushes which covered that part of the country.

Another mile being passed, I had the satisfaction to perceive that the pursuit was given over, and in an hour more I crossed Thomond Bridge, and slept that night in the fortress of Limerick, having delivered the packet, the result of whose safe arrival was the destruction of William's great train of artillery, then upon its way to the besiegers.

Years after this adventure, I met in France a young officer, who I found had served in Captain Oliver's regiment; and he explained what I had never before understood — the motives of the man who had wrought my deliverance. Strange to say, he was the foster-brother of Oliver, whom he thus devoted to death, but in revenge for the most grievous wrong which one man can inflict upon another!

THE QUARE GANDER.

Being a Twelfth Extract from the Legacy of the late Francis Purcell, P.P. of Drumcoolagh.

As I rode at a slow walk, one soft autumn evening, from the once noted and noticeable town of Emly, now a squalid village, towards the no less remarkable town of Tipperary, I fell into a meditative mood.

My eye wandered over a glorious landscape; a broad sea of corn-fields, that might have gladdened even a golden age, was waving before me; groups of little cabins, with their poplars, osiers, and light mountain ashes, clustered shelteringly around them, were scattered over the plain; the thin blue smoke arose floating through their boughs in the still evening air. And far away with all their broad lights and shades, softened with the haze of approaching twilight, stood the bold wild Galties.

As I gazed on this scene, whose richness was deepened by the melancholy glow of the setting sun, the tears rose to my eyes, and I said:

‘Alas, my country! what a mournful beauty is thine. Dressed in loveliness and laughter, there is mortal decay at thy heart: sorrow, sin, and shame have mingled thy cup of misery. Strange rulers have bruised thee, and laughed thee to scorn, and they have made all thy sweetness bitter. Thy shames and sins are the austere fruits of thy miseries, and thy miseries have been poured out upon thee by foreign hands. Alas, my stricken country! clothed with this most pity-moving smile, with this most unutterably mournful loveliness, thou sore-grieved, thou desperately-beloved! Is there for thee, my country, a resurrection?’

I know not how long I might have continued to rhapsodize in this strain, had not my wandering thoughts been suddenly recalled to my own immediate neighbourhood by the monotonous clatter of a horse’s hoofs upon the road, evidently moving, at that peculiar pace which is neither a walk nor a trot, and yet partakes of both, so much in vogue among the southern farmers.

In a moment my pursuer was up with me, and checking his steed into a walk he saluted me with much respect. The cavalier was a light-built fellow, with goodhumoured sunburnt features, a shrewd and lively black eye, and a head covered with a crop of close curly black hair, and surmounted with a turf-coloured caubeen, in the packthread band of which was stuck a short pipe, which had evidently seen much service.

My companion was a dealer in all kinds of local lore, and soon took occasion to let me see that he was so.

After two or three short stories, in which the scandalous and supernatural were happily blended, we happened to arrive at a narrow road or bohreen leading to a snug-looking farmhouse.

‘That’s a comfortable bit iv a farm,’ observed my comrade, pointing towards the dwelling with his thumb; ‘a shnug spot, and belongs to the Mooneys this long time. ’Tis a noted place for what happened wid the famous gandher there in former times.’

‘And what was that?’ inquired I.

‘What was it happened wid the gandher!’ ejaculated my companion in a tone of indignant surprise; ‘the gandher iv Ballymacrucker, the gandher! Your raverance must be a stranger in these parts. Sure every fool knows all about the gandher, and Terence Mooney, that was, rest his sowl. Begorra, ’tis surprisin’ to me how in the world you didn’t hear iv the gandher; and may be it’s funnin me ye are, your raverance.’

I assured him to the contrary, and conjured him to narrate to me the facts, an unacquaintance with which was sufficient it appeared to stamp me as an ignoramus of the first magnitude.

It did not require much entreaty to induce my communicative friend to relate the circumstance, in nearly the following words:

‘Terence Mooney was an honest boy and well to do; an’ he rinted the biggest farm on this side iv the Galties; an’ bein’ mighty cute an’ a sevare worker, it was small wonder he turned a good penny every harvest. But unluckily he was blessed with an ilegant large family iv daughters, an’ iv coorse his heart was allamost bruck, striving to make up fortunes for the whole of them. An’ there wasn’t a conthrivance iv any soart or description for makin’ money out iv the farm, but he was up to.

‘Well, among the other ways he had iv gettin’ up in the world, he always kep a power iv turkeys, and all soarts iv poultrey; an’ he was out iv all rason partial to geese — an’ small blame to him for that same — for twice’t a year you can pluck them as bare as my hand — an’ get a fine price for the feathers, an’ plenty of rale sizable eggs — an’ when they are too ould to lay any more, you can kill them, an’ sell them to the gintlemen for goslings, d’ye see, let alone that a goose is the most manly bird that is out.

‘Well, it happened in the coorse iv time that one ould gandher tuck a wondherful likin’ to Terence, an’ divil a place he could go serenadin’ about the farm, or lookin’ afther the men, but the gandher id be at his heels, an’ rubbin’ himself agin his legs, an’ lookin’ up in his face jist like any other Christian id do; an’ begorra, the likes iv it was never seen — Terence Mooney an’ the gandher wor so great.

‘An’ at last the bird was so engagin’ that Terence would not allow it to be plucked any more, an’ kep it from that time out for love an’ affection — just all as one like one iv his childer.

‘But happiness in perfection never lasts long, an’ the neighbours begin’d to suspect the nathur an’ intentions iv the gandher, an’ some iv them said it was the divil, an’ more iv them that it was a fairy.

‘Well, Terence could not but hear something of what was sayin’, an’ you may be sure he was not altogether asy in his mind about it, an’ from one day to another he was gettin’ more ancomfortable in himself, until he detarmined to sind for Jer Garvan, the fairy docthor in Garryowen, an’ it’s he was the ilegant hand at the business, an’ divil a sperit id say a crass word to him, no more nor a priest. An’ moreover he was very great wid ould Terence Mooney — this man’s father that’ was.

‘So without more about it he was sint for, an’ sure enough the divil a long he was about it, for he kem back that very evenin’ along wid the boy that was sint for him, an’ as soon as he was there, an’ tuck his supper, an’ was done talkin’ for a while, he begined of coorse to look into the gandher.

‘Well, he turned it this away an’ that away, to the right an’ to the left, an’ straightways an’ upside-down, an’ when he was tired handlin’ it, says he to Terence Mooney:

‘“Terence,” says he, “you must remove the bird into the next room,” says he, “an’ put a petticoat,” says he, “or anny other convaynience round his head,” says he.

‘“An’ why so?” says Terence.

‘“Becase,” says Jer, says he.

‘“Becase what?” says Terence.

‘“Becase,” says Jer, “if it isn’t done you’ll never be asy again,” says he, “or pusilanimous in your mind,” says he; “so ax no more questions, but do my biddin',” says he.

'“Well,” says Terence, “have your own way,” says he.

'An' wid that he tuck the ould gandher, an' giv' it to one iv the gossoons.

'“An' take care,” says he, “don't smother the crathur,” says he.

'Well, as soon as the bird was gone, says Jer Garvan says he:

'“Do you know what that ould gandher IS, Terence Mooney?”

'“Divil a taste,” says Terence.

'“Well then,” says Jer, “the gandher is your own father,” says he.

'“It's jokin' you are,” says Terence, turnin' mighty pale; “how can an ould gandher be my father?” says he.

'“I'm not funnin' you at all,” says Jer; “it's thrue what I tell you, it's your father's wandhrin' sowl,” says he, “that's naturally tuck pissession iv the ould gandher's body,” says he. “I know him many ways, and I wondher,” says he, “you do not know the cock iv his eye yourself,” says he.

'“Oh blur an' ages!” says Terence, “what the divil will I ever do at all at all,” says he; “it's all over wid me, for I plucked him twelve times at the laste,” says he.

'“That can't be helped now,” says Jer; “it was a sevare act surely,” says he, “but it's too late to lamint for it now,” says he; “the only way to prevint what's past,” says he, “is to put a stop to it before it happens,” says he.

'“Thrue for you,” says Terence, “but how the divil did you come to the knowledge iv my father's sowl,” says he, “bein' in the owld gandher,” says he.

'“If I tould you,” says Jer, “you would not undherstand me,” says he, “without book-larnin' an' gasthronomy,” says he; “so ax me no questions,” says he, “an' I'll tell you no lies. But blieve me in this much,” says he, “it's your father that's in it,” says he; “an' if I don't make him spake tomorrow mornin',” says he, “I'll give you lave to call me a fool,” says he.

'“Say no more,” says Terence, “that settles the business,” says he; “an' oh! blur and ages is it not a quare thing,” says he, “for a dacent respictable man,” says he, “to be walkin' about the counthry in the shape iv an ould gandher,” says he; “and oh, murdher, murdher! is not it often I plucked him,” says he, “an' tundher and ouns might not I have ate him,” says he; and wid that he fell into a could parspiration, savin' your prisince, an was on the pint iv faintin' wid the bare notions iv it.

'Well, whin he was come to himself agin, says Jerry to him quite an' asy:

'"Terence," says he, "don't be aggravatin' yourself," says he; "for I have a plan composed that 'ill make him spake out," says he, "an' tell what it is in the world he's wantin'," says he; "an' mind an' don't be comin' in wid your gosther, an' to say agin anything I tell you," says he, "but jist purtind, as soon as the bird is brought back," says he, "how that we're goin' to sind him tomorrow mornin' to market," says he. "An' if he don't spake tonight," says he, "or gother himself out iv the place," says he, "put him into the hamper airly, and sind him in the cart," says he, "straight to Tipperary, to be sould for ating," says he, "along wid the two gossoons," says he, "an' my name isn't Jer Garvan," says he, "if he doesn't spake out before he's halfway," says he. "An' mind," says he, "as soon as iver he says the first word," says he, "that very minute bring him aff to Father Crotty," says he; "an' if his raverince doesn't make him ratire," says he, "like the rest iv his parishioners, glory be to God," says he, "into the siclusion iv the flames iv purgathory," says he, "there's no vartue in my charums," says he.

'Well, wid that the ould gandher was let into the room agin, an' they all bigined to talk iv sindin' him the nixt mornin' to be sould for roastin' in Tipperary, jist as if it was a thing andoubtingly settled. But divil a notice the gandher tuck, no more nor if they wor spaking iv the Lord-Liftinant; an' Terence desired the boys to get ready the kish for the poulthry, an' to "settle it out wid hay soft an' shnug," says he, "for it's the last jauntin' the poor ould gandher 'ill get in this world," says he.

'Well, as the night was gettin' late, Terence was growin' mighty sorrowful an' downhearted in himself entirely wid the notions iv what was goin' to happen. An' as soon as the wife an' the crathurs war fairly in bed, he brought out some illigint potteen, an' himself an' Jer Garvan sot down to it; an' begorra, the more anasy Terence got, the more he dhrank, and himself and Jer Garvan finished a quart betune them. It wasn't an imparial though, an' more's the pity, for them wasn't anvinted antil short since; but divil a much matther it signifies any longer if a pint could hould two quarts, let alone what it does, sinst Father Mathew — the Lord purloin his raverence — begin'd to give the pledge, an' wid the blessin' iv timperance to deginerate Ireland.

'An' begorra, I have the medle myself; an' it's proud I am iv that same, for abstamiousness is a fine thing, although it's mighty dhry.

‘Well, whin Terence finished his pint, he thought he might as well stop; “for enough is as good as a faste,” says he; “an’ I pity the vagabond,” says he, “that is not able to conthroul his licquor,” says he, “an’ to keep constantly inside iv a pint measure,” said he; an’ wid that he wished Jer Garvan a goodnight, an’ walked out iv the room.

‘But he wint out the wrong door, bein’ a thrifle hearty in himself, an’ not rightly knowin’ whether he was standin’ on his head or his heels, or both iv them at the same time, an’ in place iv gettin’ into bed, where did he thrun himself but into the poulthry hamper, that the boys had settled out ready for the gandher in the mornin’. An’ sure enough he sunk down soft an’ complate through the hay to the bottom; an’ wid the turnin’ and roulin’ about in the night, the divil a bit iv him but was covered up as shnug as a lumper in a pittaty furrow before mornin’.

‘So wid the first light, up gets the two boys, that war to take the sperit, as they consaved, to Tipperary; an’ they cotched the ould gandher, an’ put him in the hamper, and clapped a good wisp iv hay an’ the top iv him, and tied it down sthrong wid a bit iv a coard, and med the sign iv the crass over him, in dhread iv any harum, an’ put the hamper up an the car, wontherin’ all the while what in the world was makin’ the ould burd so surprisin’ heavy.

‘Well, they wint along quite anasy towards Tipperary, wishin’ every minute that some iv the neighbours bound the same way id happen to fall in with them, for they didn’t half like the notions iv havin’ no company but the bewitched gandher, an’ small blame to them for that same.

‘But although they wor shaking in their skhins in dhread iv the ould bird beginnin’ to convarse them every minute, they did not let an’ to one another, bud kep singin’ an’ whistlin’ like mad, to keep the dread out iv their hearts.

‘Well, afther they war on the road betther nor half an hour, they kem to the bad bit close by Father Crotty’s, an’ there was one divil of a rut three feet deep at the laste; an’ the car got sich a wondherful chuck goin’ through it, that it wakened Terence widin in the basket.

‘“Bad luck to ye,” says he, “my bones is bruck wid yer thricks; what the divil are ye doin’ wid me?”

‘“Did ye hear anything quare, Thady?” says the boy that was next to the car, turnin’ as white as the top iv a musharoon; “did ye hear anything quare soundin’ out iv the hamper?” says he.

'"No, nor you," says Thady, turnin' as pale as himself, "it's the ould gandher that's gruntin' wid the shakin' he's gettin'," says he.

'"Where the divil have ye put me into," says Terence inside, "bad luck to your sowls," says he, "let me out, or I'll be smothered this minute," says he.

'"There's no use in purtending," says the boy, "the gandher's spakin', glory be to God," says he.

'"Let me out, you murdherers," says Terence.

'"In the name iv the blessed Vargin," says Thady, "an' iv all the holy saints, hould yer tongue, you unnatheral gandher," says he.

'"Who's that, that dar to call me nicknames?" says Terence inside, roaring wid the fair passion, "let me out, you blasphamious infiddles," says he, "or by this crass I'll stretch ye," says he.

'"In the name iv all the blessed saints in heaven," says Thady, "who the divil are ye?"

'"Who the divil would I be, but Terence Mooney," says he. "It's myself that's in it, you unmerciful bliggards," says he, "let me out, or by the holy, I'll get out in spite iv yes," says he, "an' by jaburs, I'll wallop yes in arnest," says he.

'"It's ould Terence, sure enough," says Thady, "isn't it cute the fairy docthor found him out," says he.

'"I'm an the pint iv snuffication," says Terence, "let me out, I tell you, an' wait till I get at ye," says he, "for begorra, the divil a bone in your body but I'll powdher," says he.

'An' wid that, he biginned kickin' and flingin' inside in the hamper, and dhrivin his legs agin the sides iv it, that it was a wonder he did not knock it to pieces.

'Well, as soon as the boys seen that, they skelped the ould horse into a gallop as hard as he could peg towards the priest's house, through the ruts, an' over the stones; an' you'd see the hamper fairly flyin' three feet up in the air with the joultin'; glory be to God.

'So it was small wondher, by the time they got to his Raverince's door, the breath was fairly knocked out of poor Terence, so that he was lyin' speechless in the bottom iv the hamper.

'Well, whin his Raverince kem down, they up an' they tould him all that happened, an' how they put the gandher into the hamper, an' how he beginned to spake, an' how he confissed that he was ould Terence Mooney;

an’ they axed his honour to advise them how to get rid iv the spirit for good an’ all.

‘So says his Raverince, says he:

‘“I’ll take my booke,” says he, “an’ I’ll read some rale sthrong holy bits out iv it,” says he, “an’ do you get a rope and put it round the hamper,” says he, “an’ let it swing over the runnin’ wather at the bridge,” says he, “an’ it’s no matther if I don’t make the spirit come out iv it,” says he.

‘Well, wid that, the priest got his horse, and tuck his booke in undher his arum, an’ the boys follied his Raverince, ladin’ the horse down to the bridge, an’ divil a word out iv Terence all the way, for he seen it was no use spakin’, an’ he was afeard if he med any noise they might thrait him to another gallop an finish him intirely.

‘Well, as soon as they war all come to the bridge, the boys tuck the rope they had with them, an’ med it fast to the top iv the hamper an’ swung it fairly over the bridge, lettin’ it hang in the air about twelve feet out iv the wather.

‘An’ his Raverince rode down to the bank of the river, close by, an’ beginned to read mighty loud and bould intirely.

‘An’ when he was goin’ on about five minutes, all at onst the bottom iv the hamper kem out, an’ down wint Terence, falling splash dash into the water, an’ the ould gandher a-top iv him. Down they both went to the bottom, wid a souse you’d hear half a mile off.

‘An’ before they had time to rise agin, his Raverince, wid the fair astonishment, giv his horse one dig iv the spurs, an’ before he knew where he was, in he went, horse an’ all, a-top iv them, an’ down to the bottom.

‘Up they all kem agin together, gaspin’ and puffin’, an’ off down wid the current wid them, like shot in under the arch iv the bridge till they kem to the shallow wather.

‘The ould gandher was the first out, and the priest and Terence kem next, pantin’ an’ blowin’ an’ more than half dhrounded, an’ his Raverince was so freckened wid the droundin’ he got, and wid the sight iv the sperit, as he consaved, that he wasn’t the better of it for a month.

‘An’ as soon as Terence could spake, he swore he’d have the life of the two gossoons; but Father Crotty would not give him his will. An’ as soon as he was got quiter, they all endivoured to explain it; but Terence consaved he went raly to bed the night before, and his wife said the same to shilter him from the suspicion for havin' th' dthrop taken. An' his Raverince said it was a mysthery, an' swore if he cotched anyone laughin' at the accident, he'd lay the horsewhip across their shouldhers.

'An' Terence grew fonder an' fonder iv the gandher every day, until at last he died in a wondherful old age, lavin' the gandher afther him an' a large family iv childher.

'An' to this day the farm is rinted by one iv Terence Mooney's lenial and legitimate postariors.'

BILLY MALOWNEY’S TASTE OF LOVE AND GLORY.

Let the reader fancy a soft summer evening, the fresh dews falling on bush and flower. The sun has just gone down, and the thrilling vespers of thrushes and blackbirds ring with a wild joy through the saddened air; the west is piled with fantastic clouds, and clothed in tints of crimson and amber, melting away into a wan green, and so eastward into the deepest blue, through which soon the stars will begin to peep.

Let him fancy himself seated upon the low mossy wall of an ancient churchyard, where hundreds of grey stones rise above the sward, under the fantastic branches of two or three half-withered ash-trees, spreading their arms in everlasting love and sorrow over the dead.

The narrow road upon which I and my companion await the taxcart that is to carry me and my basket, with its rich fruitage of speckled trout, away, lies at his feet, and far below spreads an undulating plain, rising westward again into soft hills, and traversed (every here and there visibly) by a winding stream which, even through the mists of evening, catches and returns the funereal glories of the skies.

As the eye traces its wayward wanderings, it loses them for a moment in the heaving verdure of whitethorns and ash, from among which floats from some dozen rude chimneys, mostly unseen, the transparent blue film of turf smoke. There we know, although we cannot see it, the steep old bridge of Carrickadrum spans the river; and stretching away far to the right the valley of Lisnamoe: its steeps and hollows, its straggling hedges, its fair-green, its tall scattered trees, and old grey tower, are disappearing fast among the discoloured tints and haze of evening.

Those landmarks, as we sit listlessly expecting the arrival of our modest conveyance, suggest to our companion — a bare-legged Celtic brother of the gentle craft, somewhat at the wrong side of forty, with a turf-coloured caubeen, patched frieze, a clear brown complexion, dark-grey eyes, and a right pleasant dash of roguery in his features — the tale, which, if the reader pleases, he is welcome to hear along with me just as it falls from the lips of our humble comrade.

His words I can give, but your own fancy must supply the advantages of an intelligent, expressive countenance, and, what is perhaps harder still, the harmony of his glorious brogue, that, like the melodies of our own dear country, will leave a burden of mirth or of sorrow with nearly equal propriety, tickling the diaphragm as easily as it plays with the heart-strings, and is in itself a national music that, I trust, may never, never — scouted and despised though it be — never cease, like the lost tones of our harp, to be heard in the fields of my country, in welcome or endearment, in fun or in sorrow, stirring the hearts of Irish men and Irish women.

My friend of the caubeen and naked shanks, then, commenced, and continued his relation, as nearly as possible, in the following words:

Av coorse ye often heerd talk of Billy Malowney, that lived by the bridge of Carrickadrum. 'Leum-a-rinka' was the name they put on him, he was sich a beautiful dancer. An' faix, it's he was the rale sportin' boy, every way — killing the hares, and gaffing the salmons, an' fightin' the men, an' funnin' the women, and coortin' the girls; an' be the same token, there was not a colleen inside iv his jurisdiction but was breakin' her heart wid the fair love iv him.

Well, this was all pleasant enough, to be sure, while it lasted; but inhuman beings is born to misfortune, an' Bill's divarshin was not to last always. A young boy can't be continially coortin' and kissin' the girls (an' more's the pity) without exposin' himself to the most eminent parril; an' so signs all' what should happen Billy Malowney himself, but to fall in love at last wid little Molly Donovan, in Coolnamoe.

I never could ondherstand why in the world it was Bill fell in love wid HER, above all the girls in the country. She was not within four stone weight iv being as fat as Peg Brallaghan; and as for redness in the face, she could not hould a candle to Judy Flaherty. (Poor Judy! she was my sweetheart, the darlin', an' coorted me constant, ever antil she married a boy of the Butlers; an' it's twenty years now since she was buried under the ould whitethorn in Garbally. But that's no matther!)

Well, at any rate, Molly Donovan tuck his fancy, an' that's everything! She had smooth brown hair — as smooth as silk-an' a pair iv soft coaxin' eyes — an' the whitest little teeth you ever seen; an', bedad, she was every taste as much in love wid himself as he was.

Well, now, he was raly stupid wid love: there was not a bit of fun left in him. He was good for nothin' an airth bud sittin' under bushes, smokin' tobacky, and sighin' till you'd wonder how in the world he got wind for it all.

An', bedad, he was an illigant scholar, moreover; an', so signs, it's many's the song he made about her; an' if you'd be walkin' in the evening, a mile away from Carrickadrum, begorra you'd hear him singing out like a bull, all across the country, in her praises.

Well, ye may be sure, ould Tim Donovan and the wife was not a bit too well plased to see Bill Malowney coortin' their daughter Molly; for, do ye mind, she was the only child they had, and her fortune was thirty-five pounds, two cows, and five illigant pigs, three iron pots and a skillet, an' a trifle iv poultry in hand; and no one knew how much besides, whenever the Lord id be plased to call the ould people out of the way into glory!

So, it was not likely ould Tim Donovan id be fallin' in love wid poor Bill Malowney as aisy as the girls did; for, barrin' his beauty, an' his gun, an' his dhudheen, an' his janius, the divil a taste of property iv any sort or description he had in the wide world!

Well, as bad as that was, Billy would not give in that her father and mother had the smallest taste iv a right to intherfare, good or bad.

'An' you're welcome to rayfuse me,' says he, 'whin I ax your lave,' says he; 'an' I'll ax your lave,' says he, 'whenever I want to coort yourselves,' says he; 'but it's your daughter I'm coortin' at the present,' says he, 'an that's all I'll say,' says he; 'for I'd as soon take a doase of salts as be discoursin' ye,' says he.

So it was a rale blazin' battle betune himself and the ould people; an', begorra, there was no soart iv blaguardin' that did not pass betune them; an' they put a solemn injection on Molly again seein' him or meetin' him for the future.

But it was all iv no use. You might as well be pursuadin' the birds agin flying, or sthrivin' to coax the stars out iv the sky into your hat, as be talking common sinse to them that's fairly bothered and burstin' wid love. There's nothin' like it. The toothache an' cholic together id compose you betther for an argyment than itself. It leaves you fit for nothin' bud nansinse.

It's stronger than whisky, for one good drop iv it will make you drunk for one year, and sick, begorra, for a dozen.

It's stronger than the say, for it'll carry you round the world an' never let you sink, in sunshine or storm; an', begorra, it's stronger than Death himself, for it is not afeard iv him, bedad, but dares him in every shape.

But lovers has quarrels sometimes, and, begorra, when they do, you'd a'most imagine they hated one another like man and wife. An' so, signs an', Billy Malowney and Molly Donovan fell out one evening at ould Tom Dundon's wake; an' whatever came betune them, she made no more about it but just draws her cloak round her, and away wid herself and the sarvant-girl home again, as if there was not a corpse, or a fiddle, or a taste of divarsion in it.

Well, Bill Malowney follied her down the boreen, to try could he deludher her back again; but, if she was bitther before, she gave it to him in airnest when she got him alone to herself, and to that degree that he wished her safe home, short and sulky enough, an' walked back again, as mad as the devil himself, to the wake, to pay a respect to poor Tom Dundon.

Well, my dear, it was aisy seen there was something wrong avid Billy Malowney, for he paid no attintion the rest of the evening to any soart of divarsion but the whisky alone; an' every glass he'd drink it's what he'd be wishing the divil had the women, an' the worst iv bad luck to all soarts iv courting, until, at last, wid the goodness iv the sperits, an' the badness iv his temper, an' the constant flusthration iv cursin', he grew all as one as you might say almost, saving your presince, bastely drunk!

Well, who should he fall in wid, in that childish condition, as he was deploying along the road almost as straight as the letter S, an' cursin' the girls, an' roarin' for more whisky, but the recruiting-sargent iv the Welsh Confusileers.

So, cute enough, the sargent begins to convarse him, an' it was not long until he had him sitting in Murphy's public-house, wid an elegant dandy iv punch before him, an' the king's money safe an' snug in the lowest wrinkle of his breeches-pocket.

So away wid him, and the dhrums and fifes playing, an' a dozen more unforthunate bliggards just listed along with him, an' he shakin' hands wid the sargent, and swearin' agin the women every minute, until, be the time he kem to himself, begorra, he was a good ten miles on the road to Dublin, an' Molly and all behind him.

It id be no good tellin' you iv the letters he wrote to her from the barracks there, nor how she was breaking her heart to go and see him just wanst before he'd go; but the father an' mother would not allow iv it be no manes.

An' so in less time than you'd be thinkin' about it, the colonel had him polished off into it rale elegant soger, wid his gun exercise, and his bagnet exercise, and his small sword, and broad sword, and pistol and dagger, an' all the rest, an' then away wid him on boord a man-a-war to furrin parts, to fight for King George agin Bonyparty, that was great in them times.

Well, it was very soon in everyone's mouth how Billy Malowney was batin' all before him, astonishin' the ginerals, an frightenin' the inimy to that degree, there was not a Frinchman dare say parley voo outside of the rounds iv his camp.

You may be sure Molly was proud iv that same, though she never spoke a word about it; until at last the news kem home that Billy Malowney was surrounded an' murdered by the Frinch army, under Napoleon Bonyparty himself. The news was brought by Jack Brynn Dhas, the peddlar, that said he met the corporal iv the regiment on the quay iv Limerick, an' how he brought him into a public-house and thrated him to a naggin, and got all the news about poor Billy Malowney out iv him while they war dhrinkin' it; an' a sorrowful story it was.

The way it happened, accordin' as the corporal tould him, was jist how the Jook iv Wellington detarmined to fight a rale tarin' battle wid the Frinch, and Bonyparty at the same time was aiqually detarmined to fight the divil's own scrimmidge wid the British foorces.

Well, as soon as the business was pretty near ready at both sides, Bonyparty and the general next undher himself gets up behind a bush, to look at their inimies through spyglasses, and thry would they know any iv them at the distance.

'Bedadad!' says the gineral, afther a divil iv a long spy, 'I'd bet half a pint,' says he, 'that's Bill Malowney himself,' says he, 'down there,' says he.

'Och!' says Bonypart, 'do you tell me so?' says he— 'I'm fairly heartscalded with that same Billy Malowney,' says he; 'an' I think if I was wanst shut iv him I'd bate the rest iv them aisy,' says he.

‘I’m thinking so myself,’ says the gineral, says he; ‘but he’s a tough bye,’ says he.

‘Tough!’ says Bonypart, ‘he’s the divil,’ says he.

‘Begorra, I’d be better plased.’ says the gineral, says he, ‘to take himself than the Duke iv Willinton,’ says he, ‘an’ Sir Edward Blakeney into the bargain,’ says he.

‘The Duke of Wellinton and Gineral Blakeney,’ says Bonypart, ‘is great for planning, no doubt,’ says he; ‘but Billy Malowney’s the boy for ACTION,’ says he— ‘an’ action’s everything, just now,’ says he.

So wid that Bonypart pushes up his cocked hat, and begins scratching his head, and thinning and considherin’ for the bare life, and at last says he to the gineral:

‘Gineral Commandher iv all the Foorces,’ says he, ‘I’ve hot it,’ says he: ‘ordher out the forlorn hope,’ says he, ‘an’ give them as much powdher, both glazed and blasting,’ says he, ‘an’ as much bullets do ye mind, an’ swan-dhrops an’ chain-shot,’ says he, ‘an’ all soorts iv waipons an’ combustables as they can carry; an’ let them surround Bill Malowney,’ says he, ‘an’ if they can get any soort iv an advantage,’ says he, ‘let them knock him to smithereens,’ says he, ‘an’ then take him presner,’ says he; ‘an’ tell all the bandmen iv the Frinch army,’ says he, ‘to play up “Garryowen,” to keep up their sperits,’ says he, ‘all the time they’re advancin’. An’ you may promise them anything you like in my name,’ says he; for, by my sowl, I don’t think its many iv them ‘ill come back to throuble us,’ says he, winkin’ at him.

So away with the gineral, an’ he ordhers out the forlorn hope, all’ tells the band to play, an’ everything else, just as Bonypart desired him. An’ sure enough, whin Billy Malowney heerd the music where he was standin’ taking a blast of the dhudheen to compose his mind for murdherin’ the Frinchmen as usual, being mighty partial to that tune intirely, he cocks his ear a one side, an’ down he stoops to listen to the music; but, begorra, who should be in his rare all the time but a Frinch grannideer behind a bush, and seeing him stooped in a convanient forum, bedad he let flies at him sthraight, and fired him right forward between the legs an’ the small iv the back, glory be to God! with what they call (saving your presence) a bum-shell.

Well, Bill Malowney let one roar out iv him, an' away he rowled over the field iv battle like a slitther (as Bonypart and the Duke iv Wellington, that was watching the manoeuvres from a distance, both consayved) into glory.

An' sure enough the Frinch was overjoyed beyant all bounds, an' small blame to them — an' the Duke of Wellington, I'm toult, was never all out the same man sinst.

At any rate, the news kem home how Billy Malowney was murdhered by the Frinch in furrin parts.

Well, all this time, you may be sure, there was no want iv boys comin' to coort purty Molly Donovan; but one way ar another, she always kept puttin' them off constant. An' though her father and mother was nathurally anxious to get rid of her respickably, they did not like to marry her off in spite iv her teeth.

An' this way, promising one while and puttin' it off another, she conthrived to get on from one Shrove to another, until near seven years was over and gone from the time when Billy Malowney listed for furrin sarvice.

It was nigh hand a year from the time whin the news iv Leum-a-rinka bein' killed by the Frinch came home, an' in place iv forgettin' him, as the saisins wint over, it's what Molly was growin' paler and more lonesome every day, antil the neighbours thought she was fallin' into a decline; and this is the way it was with her whin the fair of Lisnamoe kem round.

It was a beautiful evenin', just at the time iv the reapin' iv the oats, and the sun was shinin' through the red clouds far away over the hills iv Cahirmore.

Her father an' mother, an' the boys an' girls, was all away down in the fair, and Molly Sittin' all alone on the step of the stile, listening to the foolish little birds whistlin' among the leaves — and the sound of the mountain-river flowin' through the stones an' bushes — an' the crows flyin' home high overhead to the woods iv Glinvarlogh — an' down in the glen, far away, she could see the fair-green iv Lisnamoe in the mist, an' sunshine among the grey rocks and threes — an' the cows an' the horses, an' the blue frieze, an' the red cloaks, an' the tents, an' the smoke, an' the ould round tower — all as soft an' as sorrowful as a dhrame iv ould times.

An' while she was looking this way, an' thinking iv Leum-a-rinka — poor Bill iv the dance, that was sleepin' in his lonesome glory in the fields iv Spain — she began to sing the song he used to like so well in the ould times —

‘Shule, shule, shale a-roon;’

an’ when she ended the verse, what do you think but she heard a manly voice just at the other side iv the hedge, singing the last words over again!

Well she knew it; her heart flutthered up like a little bird that id be wounded, and then dhropped still in her breast. It was himself. In a minute he was through the hedge and standing before her.

‘Leum!’ says she.

‘Mavourneen cuishla machree!’ says he; and without another word they were locked in one another’s arms.

Well, it id only be nansinse for me thryin’ an’ tell ye all the foolish things they said, and how they looked in one another’s faces, an’ laughed, an’ cried, an’ laughed again; and how, when they came to themselves, and she was able at last to believe it was raly Billy himself that was there, actially holdin’ her hand, and lookin’ in her eyes the same way as ever, barrin’ he was browner and boulder, an’ did not, maybe, look quite as merry in himself as he used to do in former times — an’ fondher for all, an’ more lovin’ than ever — how he tould her all about the wars wid the Frinchmen — an’ how he was wounded, and left for dead in the field iv battle, bein’ shot through the breast, and how he was discharged, an’ got a pinsion iv a full shillin’ a day — and how he was come back to liv the rest iv his days in the sweet glen iv Lisnamoe, an’ (if only SHE’D consint) to marry herself in spite iv them all.

Well, ye may aisily think they had plinty to talk about, afther seven years without once seein’ one another; and so signs on, the time flew by as swift an’ as pleasant as a bird on the wing, an’ the sun wint down, an’ the moon shone sweet an’ soft instead, an’ they two never knew a ha’porth about it, but kept talkin’ an’ whisperin’, an’ whisperin’ an’ talkin’; for it’s wondherful how often a tinder-hearted girl will bear to hear a purty boy tellin’ her the same story constant over an’ over; ontil at last, sure enough, they heerd the ould man himself comin’ up the boreen, singin’ the ‘Colleen Rue’ — a thing he never done barrin’ whin he had a dhrop in; an’ the misthress walkin’ in front iv him, an’ two illigant Kerry cows he just bought in the fair, an’ the sarvint boys dhriving them behind.

‘Oh, blessed hour!’ says Molly, ‘here’s my father.’

‘I’ll spake to him this minute,’ says Bill.

‘Oh, not for the world,’ says she; ‘he’s singin’ the “Colleen Rue,”’ says she, ‘and no one dar raison with him,’ says she.

‘An’ where ‘ll I go, thin?’ says he, ‘for they’re into the haggard an top iv us,’ says he, ‘an’ they’ll see me iv I lep through the hedge,’ says he.

‘Thry the pig-sty,’ says she, ‘mavourneen,’ says she, ‘in the name iv God,’ says she.

‘Well, darlint,’ says he, ‘for your sake,’ says he, ‘I’ll condescend to them animals,’ says he.

An’ wid that he makes a dart to get in; bud, begorra, it was too late — the pigs was all gone home, and the pig-sty was as full as the Burr coach wid six inside.

‘Och! blur-an’-agers,’ says he, ‘there is not room for a suckin’-pig,’ says he, ‘let alone a Christian,’ says he.

‘Well, run into the house, Billy,’ says she, ‘this minute,’ says she, ‘an’ hide yourself antil they’re quiet,’ says she, ‘an’ thin you can steal out,’ says she, ‘anknownst to them all,’ says she.

‘I’ll do your biddin’, says he, ‘Molly asthore,’ says he.

‘Run in thin,’ says she, ‘an’ I’ll go an’ meet them,’ says she.

So wid that away wid her, and in wint Billy, an’ where ‘id he hide himself bud in a little closet that was off iv the room where the ould man and woman slep’. So he closed the doore, and sot down in an ould chair he found there convanient.

Well, he was not well in it when all the rest iv them comes into the kitchen, an’ ould Tim Donovan singin’ the ‘Colleen Rue’ for the bare life, an’ the rest iv them sthrivin’ to humour him, and doin’ exactly everything he bid them, because they seen he was foolish be the manes iv the liquor.

Well, to be sure all this kep’ them long enough, you may be sure, from goin’ to bed, so that Billy could get no manner iv an advantage to get out iv the house, and so he sted sittin’ in the dark closet in state, cursin’ the ‘Colleen Rue,’ and wondherin’ to the divil whin they’d get the ould man into his bed. An’, as if that was not delay enough, who should come in to stop for the night but Father O’Flaherty, of Cahirmore, that was buyin’ a horse at the fair! An’ av course, there was a bed to be med down for his raverence, an’ some other attintions; an’ a long discoorse himself an’ ould Mrs. Donovan had about the slaughter iv Billy Malowney, an’ how he was buried on the field iv battle; an’ his raverence hoped he got a dacent funeral, an’ all the other convaniences iv religion. An’ so you may suppose it was pretty late in the night before all iv them got to their beds.

Well, Tim Donovan could not settle to sleep at all at all, an’ so he kep’ discoorsin’ the wife about the new cows he bought, an’ the stripphers he sould, an’ so an for better than an hour, ontil from one thing to another he kem to talk about the pigs, an’ the poulthry; and at last, having nothing betther to discoorse about, he begun at his daughter Molly, an’ all the heartscald she was to him be raison iv refusin’ the men. An’ at last says he:

‘I onderstand,’ says he, ‘very well how it is,’ says he. ‘It’s how she was in love,’ says he, ‘wid that bliggard, Billy Malowney,’ says he, ‘bad luck to him!’ says he; for by this time he was coming to his raison.

‘Ah!’ says the wife, says she, ‘Tim darlint, don’t be cursin’ them that’s dead an’ buried,’ says she.

‘An’ why would not I,’ says he, ‘if they desarve it?’ says he.

‘Whisht,’ says she, ‘an’ listen to that,’ says she. ‘In the name of the Blessed Vargin,’ says she, ‘what IS it?’ says she.

An’ sure enough what was it but Bill Malowney that was dhroppin’ asleep in the closet, an’ snorin’ like a church organ.

‘Is it a pig,’ says he, ‘or is it a Christian?’

‘Arra! listen to the tune iv it,’ says she; ‘sure a pig never done the like is that,’ says she.

‘Whatever it is,’ says he, ‘it’s in the room wid us,’ says he. ‘The Lord be marciful to us!’ says he.

‘I tould you not to be cursin’,’ says she; ‘bad luck to you,’ says she, ‘for an ommadhaun!’ for she was a very religious woman in herself.

‘Sure, he’s buried in Spain,’ says he; ‘an’ it is not for one little innocent expression,’ says he, ‘he’d be comin’ all that a way to annoy the house,’ says he.

Well, while they war talkin’, Bill turns in the way he was sleepin’ into an aisier imposture; and as soon as he stopped snorin’ ould Tim Donovan’s courage riz agin, and says he:

‘I’ll go to the kitchen,’ says he, ‘an’ light a rish,’ says he.

An’ with that away wid him, an’ the wife kep’ workin’ the beads all the time, an’ before he kem back Bill was snorin’ as loud as ever.

‘Oh! bloody wars — I mane the blessed saints about us! — that deadly sound,’ says he; ‘it’s going on as lively as ever,’ says he.

‘I’m as wake as a rag,’ says his wife, says she, ‘wid the fair anasiness,’ says she. ‘It’s out iv the little closet it’s comin,’ says she.

‘Say your prayers,’ says he, ‘an’ hould your tongue,’ says he, ‘while I discoorse it,’ says he. ‘An’ who are ye,’ says he, ‘in the name iv of all the holy saints?’ says he, givin’ the door a dab iv a crusheen that wakened Bill inside. ‘I ax,’ says he, ‘who are you?’ says he.

Well, Bill did not rightly remember where in the world he was, but he pushed open the door, an’ says he:

‘Billy Malowney’s my name,’ says he, ‘an’ I’ll thank ye to tell me a betther,’ says he.

Well, whin Tim Donovan heard that, an’ actially seen that it was Bill himself that was in it, he had not strength enough to let a bawl out iv him, but he dhropt the candle out iv his hand, an’ down wid himself on his back in the dark.

Well, the wife let a screech you’d hear at the mill iv Killraghlin, an’ —

‘Oh,’ says she, ‘the spirit has him, body an’ bones!’ says she. ‘Oh, holy St. Bridget — oh, Mother iv Marcy — oh, Father O’Flaherty!’ says she, screechin’ murdher from out iv her bed.

Well, Bill Malowney was not a minute remimberin’ himself, an’ so out wid him quite an’ aisy, an’ through the kitchen; bud in place iv the door iv the house, it’s what he kem to the door iv Father O’Flaherty’s little room, where he was jist wakenin’ wid the noise iv the screechin’ an’ battherin’; an’ bedad, Bill makes no more about it, but he jumps, wid one boult, clever an’ clane into his raverance’s bed.

‘What do ye mane, you uncivilised bliggard?’ says his raverance. ‘Is that a venerable way,’ says he, ‘to approach your clargy?’ says he.

‘Hould your tongue,’ says Bill, ‘an’ I’ll do ye no harum,’ says he.

‘Who are you, ye scoundhrel iv the world?’ says his raverance.

‘Whisht!’ says he? ‘I’m Billy Malowney,’ says he.

‘You lie!’ says his raverance for he was frightened beyont all bearin’ — an’ he makes but one jump out iv the bed at the wrong side, where there was only jist a little place in the wall for a press, an’ his raverance could not as much as turn in it for the wealth iv kingdoms. ‘You lie,’ says he; ‘but for feared it's the truth you're tellin',' says he, 'here's at ye in the name iv all the blessed saints together!' says he.

An' wid that, my dear, he blazes away at him wid a Latin prayer iv the strongest description, an', as he said himself afterwards, that was iv a nature that id dhrive the divil himself up the chimley like a puff iv tobacky smoke, wid his tail betune his legs.

'Arra, what are ye sthrivin' to say,' says Bill; says he, 'if ye don't hould your tongue,' says he, 'wid your parly voo;' says he, 'it's what I'll put my thumb on your windpipe,' says he, 'an' Billy Malowney never wint back iv his word yet,' says he.

'Thundher-an-owns,' says his raverance, says he — seein' the Latin took no infect on him, at all at all an' screechin' that you'd think he'd rise the thatch up iv the house wid the fair fright— 'and thundher and blazes, boys, will none iv yes come here wid a candle, but lave your clargy to be choked by a spirit in the dark?' says he.

Well, be this time the sarvint boys and the rest iv them wor up an' half dressed, an' in they all run, one on top iv another, wid pitchforks and spades, thinkin' it was only what his raverence slep' a dhrame iv the like, by means of the punch he was afther takin' just before he rowl'd himself into the bed. But, begorra, whin they seen it was raly Bill Malowney himself that was in it, it was only who'd be foremost out agin, tumblin' backways, one over another, and his raverence roarin' an' cursin' them like mad for not waitin' for him.

Well, my dear, it was betther than half an hour before Billy Malowney could explain to them all how it raly was himself, for begorra they were all iv them persuadin' him that he was a spirit to that degree it's a wondher he did not give in to it, if it was only to put a stop to the argiment.

Well, his raverence tould the ould people then, there was no use in sthrivin' agin the will iv Providence an' the vagaries iv love united; an' whin they kem to undherstand to a sartinty how Billy had a shillin' a day for the rest iv his days, begorra they took rather a likin' to him, and considhered at wanst how he must have riz out of all his nansinse entirely, or his gracious Majesty id never have condescinded to show him his countenance that way every day of his life, on a silver shillin'.

An' so, begorra, they never stopt till it was all settled — an' there was not sich a weddin' as that in the counthry sinst. It's more than forty years ago, an’ though I was no more nor a gossoon myself, I remimber it like yestherday. Molly never looked so purty before, an’ Billy Malowney was plisant beyont all hearin,’ to that degree that half the girls in it was fairly tarin’ mad — only they would not let on — they had not him to themselves in place iv her. An’ begorra I’d be afeared to tell ye, because you would not believe me, since that blessid man Father Mathew put an end to all soorts of sociality, the Lord reward him, how many gallons iv pottieen whisky was dhrank upon that most solemn and tindher occasion.

Pat Hanlon, the piper, had a faver out iv it; an’ Neddy Shawn Heigue, mountin’ his horse the wrong way, broke his collarbone, by the manes iv fallin’ over his tail while he was feelin’ for his head; an’ Payther Brian, the horse-docther, I am tould, was never quite right in the head ever afther; an’ ould Tim Donovan was singin’ the ‘Colleen Rue’ night and day for a full week; an’ begorra the weddin’ was only the foundation iv fun, and the beginning iv divarsion, for there was not a year for ten years afther, an’ more, but brought round a christenin’ as regular as the sasins revarted.

GHOST STORIES AND TALES OF MYSTERY

This rare short story collection, published anonymously in Dublin in 1851 by James McGlashan, was Le Fanu's first published collection of short fiction. The Gothic tale 'The Murdered Cousin' (also known as 'Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess') and the locked-room mystery *The Evil Guest* were later expanded into *Uncle Silas* and *A Lost Name* respectively.

The Evil Guest had originally appeared in *Dublin University Magazine* in April-June 1848 under the title 'Some Account of the Latter Days of the Honourable Richard Marston of Dunoran'. As well as a change of title, *The Evil Guest* also utilised a different location, substituting the English town of Chester for the Irish Dunoran. The ghost story 'The Watcher' (the first tale in this collection) would later be reworked as the better-known story 'The Familiar' in the later collection *In a Glass Darkly*.

The collection contains four illustrations by Phiz, who famously illustrated Dickens' novels.

Cover illustration for the first edition

Title page of the first edition

Frontispiece for the first edition, by Phiz

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Illustration for ‘The Murdered Cousin’, by Phiz

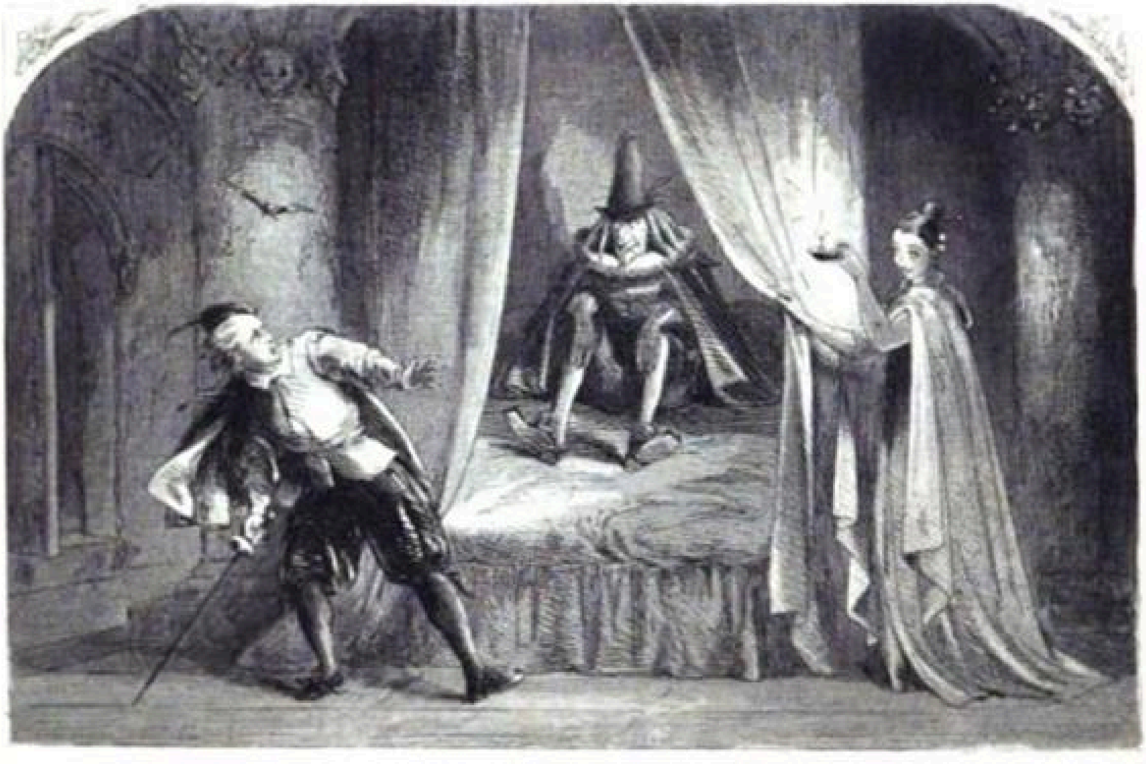

Illustration for 'Schalken the Painter', by Phiz

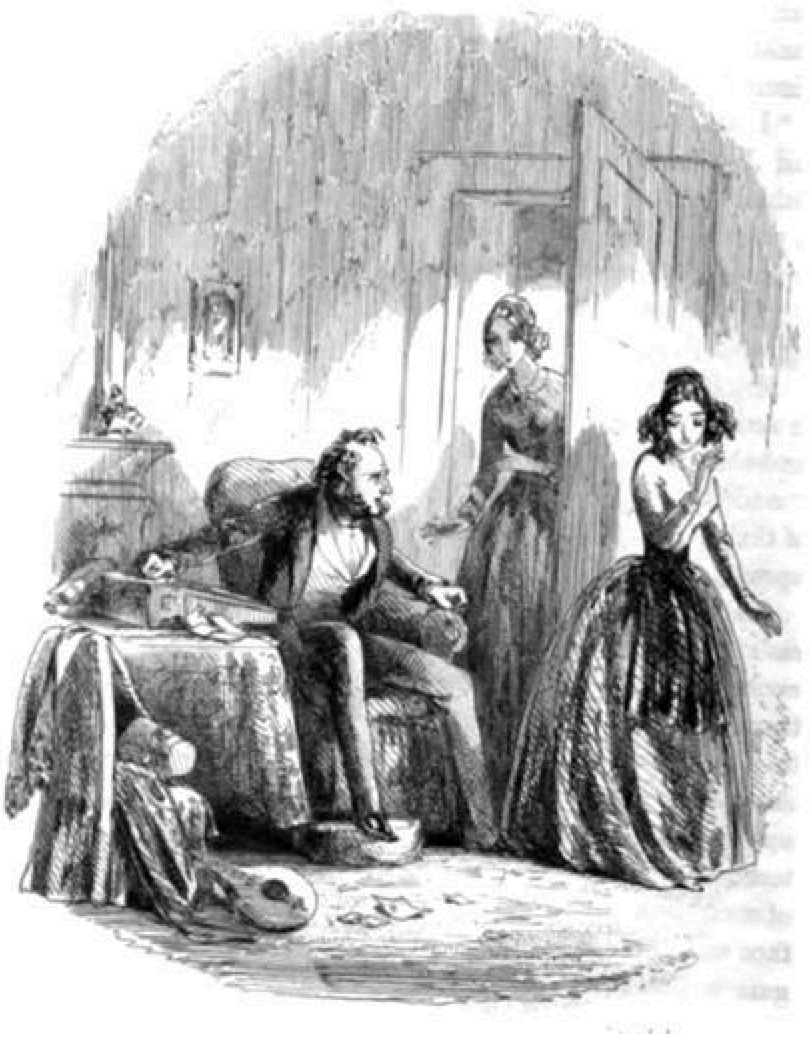

Illustration for ‘The Evil Guest’, by Phiz

Title card for the 1979 BBC TV adaptation of Schalken the Painter

THE WATCHER

It is now more than fifty years since the occurrences which I am about to relate caused a strange sensation in the gay society of Dublin. The fashionable world, however, is no recorder of traditions; the memory of selfishness seldom reaches far; and the events which occasionally disturb the polite monotony of its pleasant and heartless progress, however stamped with the characters of misery and horror, scarcely outlive the gossip of a season, and (except, perhaps, in the remembrance of a few more directly interested in the consequences of the catastrophe) are in a little time lost to the recollection of all. The appetite for scandal, or for horror, has been sated; the incident can yield no more of interest or novelty; curiosity, frustrated by impenetrable mystery, gives over the pursuit in despair; the tale has ceased to be new, grows stale and flat; and so, in a few years, inquiry subsides into indifference.

Somewhere about the year 1794, the younger brother of a certain baronet, whom I shall call Sir James Barton, returned to Dublin. He had served in the navy with some distinction, having commanded one of his Majesty's frigates during the greater part of the American war. Captain Barton was now apparently some two or three-and-forty years of age. He was an intelligent and agreeable companion, when he chose it, though generally reserved, and occasionally even moody. In society, however, he deported himself as a man of the world and a gentleman. He had not contracted any of the noisy brusqueness sometimes acquired at sea; on the contrary, his manners were remarkably easy, quiet, and even polished. He was in person about the middle size, and somewhat strongly formed; his countenance was marked with the lines of thought, and on the whole wore an expression of gravity and even of melancholy. Being, however, as we have said, a man of perfect breeding, as well as of affluent circumstances and good family, he had, of course, ready access to the best society of the metropolis, without the necessity of any other credentials. In his personal habits Captain Barton was economical. He occupied lodgings in one of the then fashionable streets in the south side of the town, kept but one horse and one servant, and though a reputed free-thinker, he lived an orderly and moral life, indulging neither in gaming, drinking, nor any other vicious pursuit, living very much to himself, without forming any intimacies, or choosing any companions, and appearing to mix in gay society rather for the sake of its bustle and distraction, than for any opportunities which it offered of interchanging either thoughts or feelings with its votaries. Barton was therefore pronounced a saving, prudent, unsocial sort of a fellow, who bid fair to maintain his celibacy alike against stratagem and assault, and was likely to live to a good old age, die rich and leave his money to a hospital.

It was soon apparent, however, that the nature of Captain Barton's plans had been totally misconceived. A young lady, whom we shall call Miss Montague, was at this time introduced into the fashionable world of Dublin by her aunt, the Dowager Lady Rochdale. Miss Montague was decidedly pretty and accomplished, and having some natural cleverness, and a great deal of gaiety, became for a while the reigning toast. Her popularity, however, gained her, for a time, nothing more than that unsubstantial admiration which, however pleasant as an incense to vanity, is by no means necessarily antecedent to matrimony, for, unhappily for the young lady in question, it was an understood thing, that, beyond her personal attractions, she had no kind of earthly provision. Such being the state of affairs, it will readily be believed that no little surprise was consequent upon the appearance of Captain Barton as the avowed lover of the penniless Miss Montague.

His suit prospered, as might have been expected, and in a short time it was confidentially communicated by old Lady Rochdale to each of her hundred and fifty particular friends in succession, that Captain Barton had actually tendered proposals of marriage, with her approbation, to her niece, Miss Montague, who had, moreover, accepted the offer of his hand, conditionally upon the consent of her father, who was then upon his homeward voyage from India, and expected in two or three months at furthest. About his consent there could be no doubt. The delay, therefore, was one merely of form; they were looked upon as absolutely engaged, and Lady Rochdale, with a vigour of oldfashioned decorum with which her niece would, no doubt, gladly have dispensed, withdrew her thenceforward from all further participation in the gaieties of the town. Captain Barton was a constant visitor as well as a frequent guest at the house, and was permitted all the privileges and intimacy which a betrothed suitor is usually accorded. Such was the relation of parties, when the mysterious circumstances which darken this narrative with inexplicable melancholy first began to unfold themselves.

Lady Rochdale resided in a handsome mansion at the north side of Dublin, and Captain Barton's lodgings, as we have already said, were situated at the south. The distance intervening was considerable, and it was Captain Barton's habit generally to walk home without an attendant, as often as he passed the evening with the old lady and her fair charge. His shortest way in such nocturnal walks lay, for a considerable space, through a line of streets which had as yet been merely laid out, and little more than the foundations of the houses constructed. One night, shortly after his engagement with Miss Montague had commenced, he happened to remain unusually late, in company only with her and Lady Rochdale. The conversation had turned upon the evidences of revelation, which he had disputed with the callous scepticism of a confirmed infidel. What were called "French principles" had, in those days, found their way a good deal into fashionable society, especially that portion of it which professed allegiance to Whiggism, and neither the old lady nor her charge was so perfectly free from the taint as to look upon Captain Barton's views as any serious objection to the proposed union. The discussion had degenerated into one upon the supernatural and the marvellous, in which he had pursued precisely the same line of argument and ridicule. In all this, it is but true to state, Captain Barton was guilty of no affectation; the doctrines upon which he insisted were, in reality, but too truly the basis of his own fixed belief, if so it might be called; and perhaps not the least strange of the many strange circumstances connected with this narrative, was the fact that the subject of the fearful influences we are about to describe was himself, from the deliberate conviction of years, an utter disbeliever in what are usually termed preternatural agencies.

It was considerably past midnight when Mr. Barton took his leave, and set out upon his solitary walk homeward. He rapidly reached the lonely road, with its unfinished dwarf walls tracing the foundations of the projected rows of houses on either side. The moon was shining mistily, and its imperfect light made the road he trod but additionally dreary; that utter silence, which has in it something indefinably exciting, reigned there, and made the sound of his steps, which alone broke it, unnaturally loud and distinct. He had proceeded thus some way, when on a sudden he heard other footsteps, pattering at a measured pace, and, as it seemed, about two score steps behind him. The suspicion of being dogged is at all times unpleasant; it is, however, especially so in a spot so desolate and lonely: and this suspicion became so strong in the mind of Captain Barton, that he abruptly turned about to confront his pursuers, but, though there was quite sufficient moonlight to disclose any object upon the road he had traversed, no form of any kind was visible.

The steps he had heard could not have been the reverberation of his own, for he stamped his foot upon the ground, and walked briskly up and down, in the vain attempt to wake an echo. Though by no means a fanciful person, he was at last compelled to charge the sounds upon his imagination, and treat them as an illusion. Thus satisfying himself, he resumed his walk, and before he had proceeded a dozen paces, the mysterious footfalls were again audible from behind, and this time, as if with the special design of showing that the sounds were not the responses of an echo, the steps sometimes slackened nearly to a halt, and sometimes hurried for six or eight strides to a run, and again abated to a walk.

Captain Barton, as before, turned suddenly round, and with the same result; no object was visible above the deserted level of the road. He walked back over the same ground, determined that, whatever might have been the cause of the sounds which had so disconcerted him, it should not escape his search; the endeavour, however, was unrewarded. In spite of all his scepticism, he felt something like a superstitious fear stealing fast upon him, and, with these unwonted and uncomfortable sensations, he once more turned and pursued his way. There was no repetition of these haunting sounds, until he had reached the point where he had last stopped to retrace his steps. Here they were resumed, and with sudden starts of running, which threatened to bring the unseen pursuer close up to the alarmed pedestrian. Captain Barton arrested his course as formerly; the unaccountable nature of the occurrence filled him with vague and almost horrible sensations, and, yielding to the excitement he felt gaining upon him, he shouted, sternly, “Who goes there?”

The sound of one’s own voice, thus exerted, in utter solitude, and followed by total silence, has in it something unpleasantly exciting, and he felt a degree of nervousness which, perhaps, from no cause had he ever known before. To the very end of this solitary street the steps pursued him, and it required a strong effort of stubborn pride on his part to resist the impulse that prompted him every moment to run for safety at the top of his speed. It was not until he had reached his lodging, and sat by his own fireside, that he felt sufficiently reassured to arrange and reconsider in his own mind the occurrences which had so discomposed him: so little a matter, after all, is sufficient to upset the pride of scepticism, and vindicate the old simple laws of nature within us.

Mr. Barton was next morning sitting at a late breakfast, reflecting upon the incidents of the previous night, with more of inquisitiveness than awe — so speedily do gloomy impressions upon the fancy disappear under the cheerful influences of day — when a letter just delivered by the postman was placed upon the table before him. There was nothing remarkable in the address of this missive, except that it was written in a hand which he did not know — perhaps it was disguised — for the tall narrow characters were sloped backward; and with the self-inflicted suspense which we so often see practised in such cases, he puzzled over the inscription for a full minute before he broke the seal. When he did so, he read the following words, written in the same hand: —

“Mr. Barton, late Captain of the *Dolphin*, is warned of *danger*. He will do wisely to avoid —— Street — (here the locality of his last night’s adventure was named) — if he walks there as usual, he will meet with something bad. Let him take warning, once for all, for he has good reason to dread

“The Watcher.”

Captain Barton read and re-read this strange effusion; in every light and in every direction he turned it over and over. He examined the paper on which it was written, and closely scrutinized the handwriting. Defeated here, he turned to the seal; it was nothing but a patch of wax, upon which the accidental impression of a coarse thumb was imperfectly visible. There was not the slightest mark, no clue or indication of any kind, to lead him to even a guess as to its possible origin. The writer’s object seemed a friendly one, and yet he subscribed himself as one whom he had “good reason to dread.” Altogether, the letter, its author, and its real purpose, were to him an inexplicable puzzle, and one, moreover, unpleasantly suggestive, in his mind, of associations connected with the last night’s adventure.

In obedience to some feeling — perhaps of pride — Mr. Barton did not communicate, even to his intended bride, the occurrences which we have just detailed. Trifling as they might appear, they had in reality most disagreeably affected his imagination, and he cared not to disclose, even to the young lady in question, what she might possibly look upon as evidences of weakness. The letter might very well be but a hoax, and the mysterious footfall but a delusion of his fancy. But although he affected to treat the whole affair as unworthy of a thought, it yet haunted him pertinaciously, tormenting him with perplexing doubts, and depressing him with undefined apprehensions. Certain it is, that for a considerable time afterwards he carefully avoided the street indicated in the letter as the scene of danger.

It was not until about a week after the receipt of the letter which I have transcribed, that anything further occurred to remind Captain Barton of its contents, or to counteract the gradual disappearance from his mind of the disagreeable impressions which he had then received. He was returning one night, after the interval I have stated, from the theatre, which was then situated in Crow Street, and having there handed Miss Montague and Lady Rochdale into their carriage, he loitered for some time with two or three acquaintances. With these, however, he parted close to the College, and pursued his way alone. It was now about one o’clock, and the streets were quite deserted. During the whole of his walk with the companions from whom he had just parted, he had been at times painfully aware of the sound of steps, as it seemed, dogging them on their way. Once or twice he had looked back, in the uneasy anticipation that he was again about to experience the same mysterious annoyances which had so much disconcerted him a week before, and earnestly hoping that he might *see* some form from whom the sounds might naturally proceed. But the street was deserted; no form was visible. Proceeding now quite alone upon his homeward way, he grew really nervous and uncomfortable, as he became sensible, with increased distinctness, of the well-known and now absolutely dreaded sounds.

By the side of the dead wall which bounded the College Park, the sounds followed, recommencing almost simultaneously with his own steps. The same unequal pace, sometimes slow, sometimes, for a score yards or so, quickened to a run, was audible from behind him. Again and again he turned, quickly and stealthily he glanced over his shoulder almost at every half-dozen steps; but no one was visible. The horrors of this intangible and unseen persecution became gradually all but intolerable; and when at last he reached his home his nerves were strung to such a pitch of excitement that he could not rest, and did not attempt even to lie down until after the daylight had broken.

He was awakened by a knock at his chamber-door, and his servant entering, handed him several letters which had just been received by the early post. One among them instantly arrested his attention; a single glance at the direction aroused him thoroughly. He at once recognized its character, and read as follows: —

“You may as well think, Captain Barton, to escape from your own shadow as from me; do what you may, I will see you as often as I please, and you shall see me, for I do not want to hide myself, as you fancy. Do not let it trouble your rest, Captain Barton; for, with a *good conscience*, what need you fear from the eye of

“The Watcher?”

It is scarcely necessary to dwell upon the feelings elicited by a perusal of this strange communication. Captain Barton was observed to be unusually absent and out of spirits for several days afterwards; but no one divined the cause. Whatever he might think as to the phantom steps which followed him, there could be no possible illusion about the letters he had received; and, to say the least of it, their immediate sequence upon the mysterious sounds which had haunted him was an odd coincidence. The whole circumstance, in his own mind, was vaguely and instinctively connected with certain passages in his past life, which, of all others, he hated to remember.

It so happened that just about this time, in addition to his approaching nuptials, Captain Barton had fortunately, perhaps, for himself, some business of an engrossing kind connected with the adjustment of a large and long-litigated claim upon certain properties. The hurry and excitement of business had its natural effect in gradually dispelling the marked gloom which had for a time occasionally oppressed him, and in a little while his spirits had entirely resumed their accustomed tone.

During all this period, however, he was occasionally dismayed by indistinct and half-heard repetitions of the same annoyance, and that in lonely places, in the day time as well as after nightfall. These renewals of the strange impressions from which he had suffered so much were, however, desultory and faint, insomuch that often he really could not, to his own satisfaction, distinguish between them and the mere suggestions of an excited imagination. One evening he walked down to the House of Commons with a Mr. Norcott, a Member. As they walked down together he was observed to become absent and silent, and to a degree so marked as scarcely to consist with good breeding; and this, in one who was obviously in all his habits so perfectly a gentleman, seemed to argue the pressure of some urgent and absorbing anxiety. It was afterwards known that, during the whole of that walk, he had heard the well-known footsteps dogging him as he proceeded. This, however, was the last time he suffered from this phase of the persecution of which he was already the anxious victim. A new and a very different one was about to be presented.

Of the new series of impressions which were afterwards gradually to work out his destiny, that evening disclosed the first; and but for its relation to the train of events which followed, the incident would scarcely have been remembered by any one. As they were walking in at the passage, a man (of whom his friend could afterwards remember only that he was short in stature, looked like a foreigner, and wore a kind of travelling-cap) walked very rapidly, and, as if under some fierce excitement, directly towards them, muttering to himself fast and vehemently the while. This odd-looking person proceeded straight toward Barton, who was foremost, and halted, regarding him for a moment or two with a look of menace and fury almost maniacal; and then turning about as abruptly, he walked before them at the same agitated pace, and disappeared by a side passage. Norcott distinctly remembered being a good deal shocked at the countenance and bearing of this man, which indeed irresistibly impressed him with an undefined sense of danger, such as he never felt before or since from the presence of anything human; but these sensations were far from amounting to anything so disconcerting as to flurry or excite him — he had seen only a singularly evil countenance, agitated, as it seemed, with the excitement of madness. He was absolutely astonished, however, at the effect of this apparition upon Captain Barton. He knew him to be a man of proved courage and coolness in real danger, a circumstance which made his conduct upon this occasion the more conspicuously odd. He recoiled a step or two as the stranger advanced, and clutched his companion's arm in silence, with a spasm of agony or terror; and then, as the figure disappeared, shoving him roughly back, he followed it for a few paces, stopped in great disorder, and sat down upon a form. A countenance more ghastly and haggard it was impossible to fancy.

"For God's sake, Barton, what is the matter?" said Norcott, really alarmed at his friend's appearance. "You're not hurt, are you? nor unwell? What is it?"

"What did he say? I did not hear it. What was it?" asked Barton, wholly disregarding the question.

"Tut, tut, nonsense!" said Norcott, greatly surprised; "who cares what the fellow said? You are unwell, Barton, decidedly unwell; let me call a coach."

"Unwell! Yes, no, not exactly unwell," he said, evidently making an effort to recover his self-possession; "but, to say the truth, I am fatigued, a little overworked, and perhaps over anxious. You know I have been in Chancery, and the winding up of a suit is always a nervous affair. I have felt uncomfortable all this evening; but I am better now. Come, come, shall we go on?"

"No, no. Take my advice, Barton, and go home; you really do need rest; you are looking absolutely ill. I really do insist on your allowing me to see you home," replied his companion.

It was obvious that Barton was not himself disinclined to be persuaded. He accordingly took his leave, politely declining his friend's offered escort. Notwithstanding the few commonplace regrets which Norcott had expressed, it was plain that he was just as little deceived as Barton himself by the extempore plea of illness with which he had accounted for the strange exhibition, and that he even then suspected some lurking mystery in the matter.

Norcott called next day at Barton's lodgings, to inquire for him, and learned from the servant that he had not left his room since his return the night before; but that he was not seriously indisposed, and hoped to be out again in a few days. That evening he sent for Doctor Richards, then in large and fashionable practice in Dublin, and their interview was, it is said, an odd one.

He entered into a detail of his own symptoms in an abstracted and desultory kind of way, which seemed to argue a strange want of interest in his own cure, and, at all events, made it manifest that there was some topic engaging his mind of more engrossing importance than his present ailment. He complained of occasional palpitations, and headache. Doctor Richards asked him, among other questions, whether there was any irritating circumstance or anxiety to account for it. This he denied quickly and peevishly; and the physician thereupon declared his opinion, that there was nothing amiss except some slight derangement of the digestion, for which he accordingly wrote a prescription, and was about to withdraw, when Mr. Barton, with the air of a man who suddenly recollects a topic which had nearly escaped him, recalled him.

"I beg your pardon, doctor, but I had really almost forgot; will you permit me to ask you two or three medical questions? — rather odd ones, perhaps, but as a wager depends upon their solution, you will, I hope, excuse my unreasonableness."

The physician readily undertook to satisfy the inquirer.

Barton seemed to have some difficulty about opening the proposed interrogatories, for he was silent for a minute, then walked to his bookcase and returned as he had gone; at last he sat down, and said, —

"You'll think them very childish questions, but I can't recover my wager without a decision; so I must put them. I want to know first about lock-jaw. If a man actually has had that complaint, and appears to have died of it — so that in fact a physician of average skill pronounces him actually dead — may he, after all, recover?"

Doctor Richards smiled, and shook his head.

"But — but a blunder may be made," resumed Barton. "Suppose an ignorant pretender to medical skill; may *he* be so deceived by any stage of the complaint, as to mistake what is only a part of the progress of the disease, for death itself?"

"No one who had ever seen death," answered he, "could mistake it in the case of lock-jaw."

Barton mused for a few minutes. "I am going to ask you a question, perhaps still more childish; but first tell me, are not the regulations of foreign hospitals, such as those of, let us say, Lisbon, very lax and bungling? May not all kinds of blunders and slips occur in their entries of names, and so forth?"

Doctor Richards professed his inability to answer that query.

"Well, then, doctor, here is the last of my questions. You will probably laugh at it; but it must out nevertheless. Is there any disease, in all the range of human maladies, which would have the effect of perceptibly contracting the stature, and the whole frame — causing the man to shrink in all his proportions, and yet to preserve his exact resemblance to himself in every particular — with the one exception, his height and bulk; *any* disease, mark, no matter how rare, how little believed in, generally, which could possibly result in producing such an effect?"

The physician replied with a smile, and a very decided negative.

"Tell me, then," said Barton, abruptly, "if a man be in reasonable fear of assault from a lunatic who is at large, can he not procure a warrant for his arrest and detention?"

"Really, that is more a lawyer's question than one in my way," replied Doctor Richards; "but I believe, on applying to a magistrate, such a course would be directed."

The physician then took his leave; but, just as he reached the hall-door, remembered that he had left his cane upstairs, and returned. His reappearance was awkward, for a piece of paper, which he recognized as his own prescription, was slowly burning upon the fire, and Barton sitting close by with an expression of settled gloom and dismay. Doctor Richards had too much tact to appear to observe what presented itself; but he had seen quite enough to assure him that the mind, and not the body, of Captain Barton was in reality the seat of his sufferings.

A few days afterwards, the following advertisement appeared in the Dublin newspapers: —

"If Sylvester Yelland, formerly a foremast man on board his Majesty's frigate *Dolphin*, or his nearest of kin, will apply to Mr. Robery Smith, solicitor, at his office, Dame Street, he or they may hear of something greatly to his or their advantage. Admission may be had at any hour up to twelve o'clock at night for the next fortnight, should parties desire to avoid observation; and the strictest secrecy, as to all communications intended to be confidential, shall be honourably observed."

The *Dolphin*, as we have mentioned, was the vessel which Captain Barton had commanded; and this circumstance, connected with the extraordinary exertions made by the circulation of handbills, etc., as well as by repeated advertisements, to secure for this strange notice the utmost possible publicity, suggested to Doctor Richards the idea that Captain Barton's extreme uneasiness was somehow connected with the individual to whom the advertisement was addressed, and he himself the author of it. This, however, it is needless to add, was no more than a conjecture. No information whatsoever, as to the real purpose of the advertisement itself, was divulged by the agent, nor yet any hint as to who his employer might be.

Mr. Barton, although he had latterly begun to earn for himself the character of a hypochondriac, was yet very far from deserving it. Though by no means lively, he had yet, naturally, what are termed "even spirits," and was not subject to continual depressions. He soon, therefore, began to return to his former habits; and one of the earliest symptoms of this healthier tone of spirits was his appearing at a grand dinner of the Freemasons, of which worthy fraternity he was himself a brother. Barton, who had been at first gloomy and abstracted, drank much more freely than was his wont — possibly with the purpose of dispelling his own secret anxieties — and under the influence of good wine, and pleasant company, became gradually (unlike his usual self) talkative, and even noisy. It was under this unwonted excitement that he left his company at about halfpast ten o'clock; and as conviviality is a strong incentive to gallantry, it occurred to him to proceed forthwith to Lady Rochdale's, and pass the remainder of the evening with her and his destined bride.

Accordingly, he was soon at —— Street, and chatting gaily with the ladies. It is not to be supposed that Captain Barton had exceeded the limits which propriety prescribes to good fellowship; he had merely taken enough of wine to raise his spirits, without, however, in the least degree unsteadying his mind, or affecting his manners. With this undue elevation of spirits had supervened an entire oblivion or contempt of those undefined apprehensions which had for so long weighed upon his mind, and to a certain extent estranged him from society; but as the night wore away, and his artificial gaiety began to flag, these painful feelings gradually intruded themselves again, and he grew abstracted and anxious as heretofore. He took his leave at length, with an unpleasant foreboding of some coming mischief, and with a mind haunted with a thousand mysterious apprehensions, such as, even while he acutely felt their pressure, he, nevertheless, inwardly strove, or affected to contemn.

It was his proud defiance of what he considered to be his own weakness which prompted him upon this occasion to the course which brought about the adventure which we are now about to relate. Mr. Barton might have easily called a coach, but he was conscious that his strong inclination to do so proceeded from no cause other than what he desperately persisted in representing to himself to be his own superstitious tremors. He might also have returned home by a route different from that against which he had been warned by his mysterious correspondent; but for the same reason he dismissed this idea also, and with a dogged and half desperate resolution to force matters to a crisis of some kind, to see if there were any reality in the causes of his former suffering, and if not, satisfactorily to bring their delusiveness to the proof, he determined to follow precisely the course which he had trodden upon the night so painfully memorable in his own mind as that on which his strange persecution had commenced. Though, sooth to say, the pilot who for the first time steers his vessel under the muzzles of a hostile battery never felt his resolution more severely tasked than did Captain Barton, as he breathlessly pursued this solitary path; a path which, spite of every effort of scepticism and reason, he felt to be, as respected *him*, infested by a malignant influence.

He pursued his way steadily and rapidly, scarcely breathing from intensity of suspense; he, however, was troubled by no renewal of the dreaded footsteps, and was beginning to feel a return of confidence, as, more than three-fourths of the way being accomplished with impunity, he approached the long line of twinkling oil lamps which indicated the frequented streets. This feeling of self-congratulation was, however, but momentary. The report of a musket at some two hundred yards behind him, and the whistle of a bullet close to his head, disagreeably and startlingly dispelled it. His first impulse was to retrace his steps in pursuit of the assassin; but the road on either side was, as we have said, embarrassed by the foundations of a street, beyond which extended waste fields, full of rubbish and neglected lime and brick kilns, and all now as utterly silent as though no sound had ever disturbed their dark and unsightly solitude. The futility of attempting, single-handed, under such circumstances, a search for the murderer, was apparent, especially as no further sound whatever was audible to direct his pursuit.

With the tumultuous sensations of one whose life had just been exposed to a murderous attempt, and whose escape has been the narrowest possible, Captain Barton turned, and without, however, quickening his pace actually to a run, hurriedly pursued his way. He had turned, as we have said, after a pause of a few seconds, and had just commenced his rapid retreat, when on a sudden he met the well-remembered little man in the fur cap. The encounter was but momentary. The figure was walking at the same exaggerated pace, and with the same strange air of menace as before; and as it passed him, he thought he heard it say, in a furious whisper, "Still alive, still alive!"

The state of Mr. Barton's spirits began now to work a corresponding alteration in his health and looks, and to such a degree that it was impossible that the change should escape general remark. For some reasons, known but to himself, he took no step whatsoever to bring the attempt upon his life, which he had so narrowly escaped, under the notice of the authorities; on the contrary, he kept it jealously to himself; and it was not for many weeks after the occurrence that he mentioned it, and then in strict confidence to a gentleman, the torments of his mind at last compelled him to consult a friend.

Spite of his blue devils, however, poor Barton, having no satisfactory reason to render to the public for any undue remissness in the attentions which his relation to Miss Montague required, was obliged to exert himself, and present to the world a confident and cheerful bearing. The true source of his sufferings, and every circumstance connected with them, he guarded with a reserve so jealous, that it seemed dictated by at least a suspicion that the origin of his strange persecution was known to himself, and that it was of a nature which, upon his own account, he could not or dare not disclose.

The mind thus turned in upon itself, and constantly occupied with a haunting anxiety which it dared not reveal, or confide to any human breast, became daily more excited; and, of course, more vividly impressible, by a system of attack which operated through the nervous system; and in this state he was destined to sustain, with increasing frequency, the stealthy visitations of that apparition, which from the first had seemed to possess so unearthly and terrible a hold upon his imagination.

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It was about this time that Captain Barton called upon the then celebrated preacher, Doctor Macklin, with whom he had a slight acquaintance; and an extraordinary conversation ensued. The divine was seated in his chambers in college, surrounded with works upon his favourite pursuit and deep in theology, when Barton was announced. There was something at once embarrassed and excited in his manner, which, along with his wan and haggard countenance, impressed the student with the unpleasant consciousness that his visitor must have recently suffered terribly indeed to account for an alteration so striking, so shocking.

After the usual interchange of polite greeting, and a few commonplace remarks, Captain Barton, who obviously perceived the surprise which his visit had excited, and which Doctor Macklin was unable wholly to conceal, interrupted a brief pause by remarking, —

“This is a strange call, Doctor Macklin, perhaps scarcely warranted by an acquaintance so slight as mine with you. I should not, under ordinary circumstances, have ventured to disturb you, but my visit is neither an idle nor impertinent intrusion. I am sure you will not so account it, when— “

Doctor Macklin interrupted him with assurances, such as good breeding suggested, and Barton resumed, —

“I am come to task your patience by asking your advice. When I say your patience, I might, indeed, say more; I might have said your humanity, your compassion; for I have been, and am a great sufferer.”

“My dear sir,” replied the churchman, “it will, indeed, afford me infinite gratification if I can give you comfort in any distress of mind, but — but— “

“I know what you would say,” resumed Barton, quickly. “I am an unbeliever, and, therefore, incapable of deriving help from religion, but don’t take that for granted. At least you must not assume that, however unsettled my convictions may be, I do not feel a deep, a very deep, interest in the subject. Circumstances have lately forced it upon my attention in such a way as to compel me to review the whole question in a more candid and teachable spirit, I believe, than I ever studied it in before.”

“Your difficulties, I take it for granted, refer to the evidences of revelation,” suggested the clergyman.

“Why — no — yes; in fact I am ashamed to say I have not considered even my objections sufficiently to state them connectedly; but — but there is one subject on which I feel a peculiar interest."

He paused again, and Doctor Macklin pressed him to proceed.

"The fact is," said Barton, "whatever may be my uncertainty as to the authenticity of what we are taught to call revelation, of one fact I am deeply and horribly convinced: that there does exist beyond this a spiritual world — a system whose workings are generally in mercy hidden from us — a system which may be, and which is sometimes, partially and terribly revealed. I am sure, I know," continued Barton, with increasing excitement, "there is a God — a dreadful God — and that retribution follows guilt. In ways, the most mysterious and stupendous; by agencies, the most inexplicable and terrific; there is a spiritual system — great Heavens, how frightfully I have been convinced! — a system malignant, and inexorable, and omnipotent, under whose persecutions I am, and have been, suffering the torments of the damned! — yes, sir — yes — the fires and frenzy of hell!"

As Barton continued, his agitation became so vehement that the divine was shocked and even alarmed. The wild and excited rapidity with which he spoke, and, above all, the indefinable horror which stamped his features, afforded a contrast to his ordinary cool and unimpassioned self-possession, striking and painful in the last degree.

"My dear sir," said Doctor Macklin, after a brief pause, "I fear you have been suffering much, indeed; but I venture to predict that the depression under which you labour will be found to originate in purely physical causes, and that with a change of air and the aid of a few tonics, your spirits will return, and the tone of your mind be once more cheerful and tranquil as heretofore. There was, after all, more truth than we are quite willing to admit in the classic theories which assigned the undue predominance of any one affection of the mind to the undue action or torpidity of one or other of our bodily organs. Believe me, that a little attention to diet, exercise, and the other essentials of health, under competent direction, will make you as much yourself as you can wish."

"Doctor Macklin," said Barton, with something like a shudder, "I *cannot* delude myself with such a hope. I have no hope to cling to but one, and that is, that by some other spiritual agency more potent than that which tortures me, *it* may be combated, and I delivered. If this may not be, I am lost — now and for ever lost."

"But, Mr. Barton, you must remember," urged his companion, "that others have suffered as you have done, and— "

"No, no, no," interrupted he with irritability; "no, sir, I am not a credulous — far from a superstitious man. I have been, perhaps, too much the reverse — too sceptical, too slow of belief; but unless I were one whom no amount of evidence could convince, unless I were to contemn the repeated, the *perpetual* evidence of my own senses, I am now — now at last constrained to believe I have no escape from the conviction, the overwhelming certainty, that I am haunted and dogged, go where I may, by — by a Demon."

There was an almost preternatural energy of horror in Barton's face, as, with its damp and deathlike lineaments turned towards his companion, he thus delivered himself.

"God help you, my poor friend!" said Doctor Macklin, much shocked. "God help you; for, indeed, you *are* a sufferer, however your sufferings may have been caused."

"Ay, ay, God help me," echoed Barton sternly; "but *will* He help me? will He help me?"

"Pray to Him; pray in an humble and trusting spirit," said he.

"Pray, pray," echoed he again; "I can't pray; I could as easily move a mountain by an effort of my will. I have not belief enough to pray; there is something within me that will not pray. You prescribe impossibilities — literal impossibilities."

"You will not find it so, if you will but try," said Doctor Macklin.

"Try! I *have* tried, and the attempt only fills me with confusion and terror. I have tried in vain, and more than in vain. The awful, unutterable idea of eternity and infinity oppresses and maddens my brain, whenever my mind approaches the contemplation of the Creator; I recoil from the effort, scared, confounded, terrified. I tell you, Doctor Macklin, if I am to be saved, it must be by other means. The idea of the Creator is to me intolerable; my mind cannot support it."

"Say, then, my dear sir," urged he, "say how you would have me serve you. What you would learn of me. What can I do or say to relieve you?"

"Listen to me first," replied Captain Barton, with a subdued air, and an evident effort to suppress his excitement; "listen to me while I detail the circumstances of the terrible persecution under which my life has become all but intolerable — a persecution which has made me fear *death* and the world beyond the grave as much as I have grown to hate existence.”

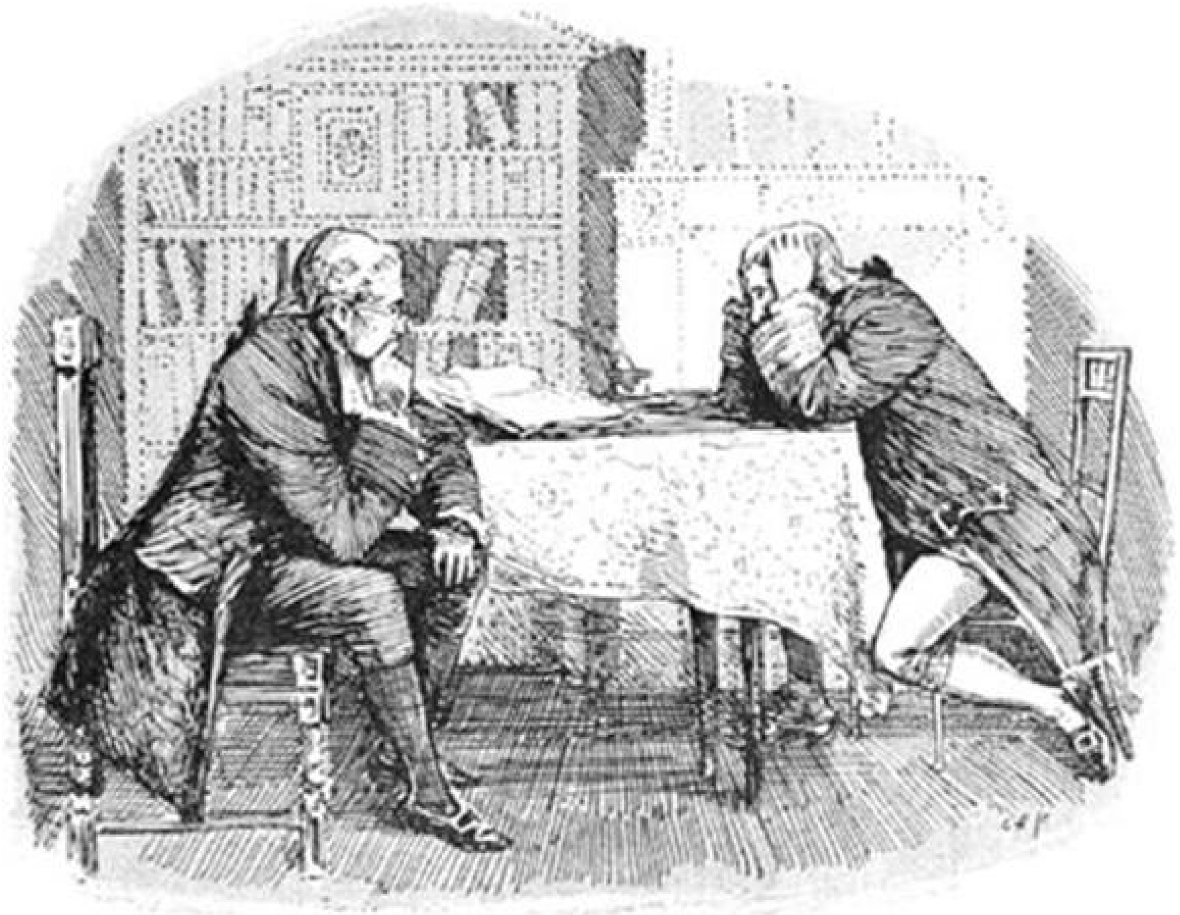
Barton then proceeded to relate the circumstances which we have already detailed, and then continued, —

“This has now become habitual — an accustomed thing. I do not mean the actual seeing him in the flesh; thank God, *that* at least is not permitted daily. Thank God, from the unutterable horrors of that visitation I have been mercifully allowed intervals of repose, though none of security; but from the consciousness that a malignant spirit is following and watching me wherever I go, I have never, for a single instant, a temporary respite: I am pursued with blasphemies, cries of despair, and appalling hatred; I hear those dreadful sounds called after me as I turn the corners of streets; they come in the night-time while I sit in my chamber alone; they haunt me everywhere, charging me with hideous crimes, and — great God! — threatening me with coming vengeance and eternal misery! Hush! do you hear *that*?” he cried, with a horrible smile of triumph. “There — there, will that convince you?”

The clergyman felt the chillness of horror irresistibly steal over him, while, during the wail of a sudden gust of wind, he heard, or fancied he heard, the half articulate sounds of rage and derision mingling in their sough.

“Well, what do you think of *that*?” at length Barton cried, drawing a long breath through his teeth.

“I heard the wind,” said Doctor Macklin; “what should I think of it? What is there remarkable about it?”



“THE PRINCE OF THE POWERS OF THE AIR!” MUTTERED BARTON.

“The prince of the powers of the air,” muttered Barton, with a shudder.

“Tut, tut! my dear sir!” said the student, with an effort to reassure himself; for though it was broad daylight, there was nevertheless something disagreeably contagious in the nervous excitement under which his visitor so obviously suffered. “You must not give way to those wild fancies: you must resist those impulses of the imagination.”

“Ay, ay; ‘resist the devil, and he will flee from thee,’” said Barton, in the same tone; “but *how* resist him? Ay, there it is: there is the rub. What — *what* am I to do? What *can* I do?”

“My dear sir, this is fancy,” said the man of folios; “you are your own tormentor.”

“No, no, sir; fancy has no part in it,” answered Barton, somewhat sternly. “Fancy, forsooth! Was it that made *you*, as well as me, hear, but this moment, those appalling accents of hell? Fancy, indeed! No, no."

"But you have seen this person frequently," said the ecclesiastic; "why have you not accosted or secured him? Is it not somewhat precipitate, to say no more, to assume, as you have done, the existence of preternatural agency, when, after all, everything may be easily accountable, if only proper means were taken to sift the matter."

"There are circumstances connected with this — this *appearance*," said Barton, "which it were needless to disclose, but which to *me* are proofs of its horrible and unearthly nature. I know that the being who haunts me is not *man*. I say I *know* this; I could prove it to your own conviction." He paused for a minute, and then added, "And as to accosting it, I dare not — I could not! When I see it I am powerless; I stand in the gaze of death, in the triumphant presence of preterhuman power and malignity; my strength, and faculties, and memory all forsake me. Oh, God! I fear, sir, you know not what you speak of. Mercy, mercy! heaven have pity on me!"

He leaned his elbow on the table, and passed his hand across his eyes, as if to exclude some image of horror, muttering the last words of the sentence he had just concluded, again and again.

"Dr. Macklin," he said, abruptly raising himself, and looking full upon the clergyman with an imploring eye, "I know you will do for me whatever may be done. You know now fully the circumstances and the nature of the mysterious agency of which I am the victim. I tell you I cannot help myself; I cannot hope to escape; I am utterly passive. I conjure you, then, to weigh my case well, and if anything may be done for me by vicarious supplication, by the intercession of the good, or by any aid or influence whatsoever, I implore of you, I adjure you in the name of the Most High, give me the benefit of that influence, deliver me from the body of this death! Strive for me; pity me! I know you will; you cannot refuse this; it is the purpose and object of my visit. Send me away with some hope, however little — some faint hope of ultimate deliverance, and I will nerve myself to endure, from hour to hour, the hideous dream into which my existence is transformed."

Doctor Macklin assured him that all he could do was to pray earnestly for him, and that so much he would not fail to do. They parted with a hurried and melancholy valediction. Barton hastened to the carriage which awaited him at the door, drew the blinds, and drove away, while Dr. Macklin returned to his chamber, to ruminate at leisure upon the strange interview which had just interrupted his studies.

It was not to be expected that Captain Barton's changed and eccentric habits should long escape remark and discussion. Various were the theories suggested to account for it. Some attributed the alteration to the pressure of secret pecuniary embarrassments; others to a repugnance to fulfil an engagement into which he was presumed to have too precipitately entered; and others, again, to the supposed incipiency of mental disease, which latter, indeed, was the most plausible, as well as the most generally received, of the hypotheses circulated in the gossip of the day.

From the very commencement of this change, at first so gradual in its advances, Miss Montague had, of course, been aware of it. The intimacy involved in their peculiar relation, as well as the near interest which it inspired, afforded, in her case, alike opportunity and motive for the successful exercise of that keen and penetrating observation peculiar to the sex. His visits became, at length, so interrupted, and his manner, while they lasted, so abstracted, strange, and agitated, that Lady Rochdale, after hinting her anxiety and her suspicions more than once, at length distinctly stated her anxiety, and pressed for an explanation. The explanation was given, and although its nature at first relieved the worst solicitudes of the old lady and her niece, yet the circumstances which attended it, and the really dreadful consequences which it obviously threatened as regarded the spirits, and, indeed, the reason, of the now wretched man who made the strange declaration, were enough, upon a little reflection, to fill their minds with perturbation and alarm.

General Montague, the young lady's father, at length arrived. He had himself slightly known Barton, some ten or twelve years previously, and being aware of his fortune and connections, was disposed to regard him as an unexceptionable and indeed a most desirable match for his daughter. He laughed at the story of Barton's supernatural visitations, and lost not a moment in calling upon his intended son-in-law.

"My dear Barton," he continued gaily, after a little conversation, "my sister tells me that you are a victim to blue devils in quite a new and original shape."

Barton changed countenance, and sighed profoundly.

“Come, come; I protest this will never do,” continued the General; “you are more like a man on his way to the gallows than to the altar. These devils have made quite a saint of you.”

Barton made an effort to change the conversation.

“No, no, it won’t do,” said his visitor, laughing; “I am resolved to say out what I have to say about this magnificent mock mystery of yours. Come, you must not be angry; but, really, it is too bad to see you, at your time of life, absolutely frightened into good behaviour, like a naughty child, by a bugaboo, and, as far as I can learn, a very particularly contemptible one. Seriously, though, my dear Barton, I have been a good deal annoyed at what they tell me; but, at the same time, thoroughly convinced that there is nothing in the matter that may not be cleared up, with just a little attention and management, within a week at furthest.”

“Ah, General, you do not know— “ he began.

“Yes, but I do know quite enough to warrant my confidence,” interrupted the soldier. “I know that all your annoyance proceeds from the occasional appearance of a certain little man in a cap and greatcoat, with a red vest and bad countenance, who follows you about, and pops upon you at the corners of lanes, and throws you into ague fits. Now, my dear fellow, I’ll make it my business to *catch* this mischievous little mountebank, and either beat him into a jelly with my own hands, or have him whipped through the town at the cart’s tail.”

“If *you* knew what I know,” said Barton, with gloomy agitation, “you would speak very differently. Don’t imagine that I am so weak and foolish as to assume, without proof the most overwhelming, the conclusion to which I have been forced. The proofs are here, locked up here.” As he spoke, he tapped upon his breast, and with an anxious sigh continued to walk up and down the room.

“Well, well, Barton,” said his visitor, “I’ll wager a rump and a dozen I collar the ghost, and convince yourself before many days are over.”

He was running on in the same strain when he was suddenly arrested, and not a little shocked, by observing Barton, who had approached the window, stagger slowly back, like one who had received a stunning blow — his arm feebly extended towards the street, his face and his very lips white as ashes — while he uttered, “There — there — there!”

General Montague started mechanically to his feet, and, from the window of the drawingroom, saw a figure corresponding, as well as his hurry would permit him to discern, with the description of the person whose appearance so constantly and dreadfully disturbed the repose of his friend. The figure was just turning from the rails of the area upon which it had been leaning, and without waiting to see more, the old gentleman snatched his cane and hat, and rushed down the stairs and into the street, in the furious hope of securing the person, and punishing the audacity of the mysterious stranger. He looked around him, but in vain, for any trace of the form he had himself distinctly beheld. He ran breathlessly to the nearest corner, expecting to see from thence the retreating figure, but no such form was visible. Back and forward, from crossing to crossing, he ran at fault, and it was not until the curious gaze and laughing countenances of the passers-by reminded him of the absurdity of his pursuit, that he checked his hurried pace, lowered his walking-cane from the menacing altitude which he had mechanically given it, adjusted his hat, and walked composedly back again, inwardly vexed and flurried. He found Barton pale and trembling in every joint; they both remained silent, though under emotions very different. At last Barton whispered, “You saw it?”

“It! — him — someone — you mean — to be sure I did,” replied Montague, testily. “But where is the good or the harm of seeing him? The fellow runs like a lamplighter. I wanted to *catch* him, but he had stolen away before I could reach the hall door. However, it is no great matter; next time, I dare say, I’ll do better; and, egad, if I once come within reach of him, I’ll introduce his shoulders to the weight of my cane, in a way to make him cry *peccavi*.”

Notwithstanding General Montague’s undertakings and exhortations, however, Barton continued to suffer from the selfsame unexplained cause. Go how, when, or where he would, he was still constantly dogged or confronted by the hateful being who had established over him so dreadful and mysterious an influence; nowhere, and at no time, was he secure against the odious appearance which haunted him with such diabolical perseverance. His depression, misery, and excitement became more settled and alarming every day, and the mental agonies that ceaselessly preyed upon him began at last so sensibly to affect his general health, that Lady Rochdale and General Montague succeeded (without, indeed, much difficulty) in persuading him to try a short tour on the Continent, in the hope that an entire change of scene would, at all events, have the effect of breaking through the influences of local association, which the more sceptical of his friends assumed to be by no means inoperative in suggesting and perpetuating what they conceived to be a mere form of nervous illusion. General Montague, moreover, was persuaded that the figure which haunted his intended son-in-law was by no means the creation of his own imagination, but, on the contrary, a substantial form of flesh and blood, animated by a spiteful and obstinate resolution, perhaps with some murderous object in perspective, to watch and follow the unfortunate gentleman. Even this hypothesis was not a very pleasant one; yet it was plain that if Barton could once be convinced that there was nothing preternatural in the phenomenon, which he had hitherto regarded in that light, the affair would lose all its terrors in his eyes, and wholly cease to exercise upon his health and spirits the baneful influence which it had hitherto done. He therefore reasoned, that if the annoyance were actually escaped from by mere change of scene, it obviously could not have originated in any supernatural agency.

Yielding to their persuasions, Barton left Dublin for England, accompanied by General Montague. They posted rapidly to London, and thence to Dover, whence they took the packet with a fair wind for Calais. The General's confidence in the result of the expedition on Barton's spirits had risen day by day since their departure from the shores of Ireland; for, to the inexpressible relief and delight of the latter, he had not, since then, so much as even once fancied a repetition of those impressions which had, when at home, drawn him gradually down to the very abyss of horror and despair. This exemption from what he had begun to regard as the inevitable condition of his existence, and the sense of security which began to pervade his mind, were inexpressibly delightful; and in the exultation of what he considered his deliverance, he indulged in a thousand happy anticipations for a future into which so lately he had hardly dared to look. In short, both he and his companion secretly congratulated themselves upon the termination of that persecution which had been to its immediate victim a source of such unspeakable agony.

It was a beautiful day, and a crowd of idlers stood upon the jetty to receive the packet, and enjoy the bustle of the new arrivals. Montague walked a few paces in advance of his friend, and as he made his way through the crowd, a little man touched his arm, and said to him, in a broad provincial *patois*, —

“Monsieur is walking too fast; he will lose his sick comrade in the throng, for, by my faith, the poor gentleman seems to be fainting.”

Montague turned quickly, and observed that Barton did indeed look deadly pale. He hastened to his side.

“My poor fellow, are you ill?” he asked anxiously.

The question was unheeded, and twice repeated, ere Barton stammered, —

“I saw him — by ——, I saw him!”

“*Him!* — who? — where? — when did you see him? — where is he?” cried Montague, looking around him.

“I saw him — but he is gone,” repeated Barton, faintly.

“But where — where? For God’s sake, speak,” urged Montague, vehemently.

“It is but this moment — *here*,” said he.

“But what did he look like? — what had he on? — what did he wear? — quick, quick,” urged his excited companion, ready to dart among the crowd, and collar the delinquent on the spot.

“He touched your arm — he spoke to you — he pointed to me. God be merciful to me, there is no escape!” said Barton, in the low, subdued tones of intense despair.

Montague had already bustled away in all the flurry of mingled hope and indignation; but though the singular *personnel* of the stranger who had accosted him was vividly and perfectly impressed upon his recollection, he failed to discover among the crowd even the slightest resemblance to him. After a fruitless search, in which he enlisted the services of several of the bystanders, who aided all the more zealously as they believed he had been robbed, he at length, out of breath and baffled, gave over the attempt.

“Ah, my friend, it won’t do,” said Barton, with the faint voice and bewildered, ghastly look of one who has been stunned by some mortal shock; “there is no use in contending with it; whatever it is, the dreadful association between me and it is now established; I shall never escape — never, never!”

“Nonsense, nonsense, my dear fellow; don’t talk so,” said Montague, with something at once of irritation and dismay; “you must not; never mind, I say — never mind, we’ll jockey the scoundrel yet.”

It was, however, but lost labour to endeavour henceforward to inspire Barton with one ray of hope; he became utterly desponding. This intangible and, as it seemed, utterly inadequate influence was fast destroying his energies of intellect, character, and health. His first object was now to return to Ireland, there, as he believed, and now almost hoped, speedily to die.

To Ireland, accordingly, he came, and one of the first faces he saw upon the shore was again that of his implacable and dreaded persecutor. Barton seemed at last to have lost not only all enjoyment and every hope in existence, but all independence of will besides. He now submitted himself passively to the management of the friends most nearly interested in his welfare. With the apathy of entire despair, he implicitly assented to whatever measures they suggested and advised; and, as a last resource, it was determined to remove him to a house of Lady Rochdale’s in the neighbourhood of Clontarf, where, with the advice of his medical attendant (who persisted in his opinion that the whole train of impressions resulted merely from some nervous derangement) it was resolved that he was to confine himself strictly to the house, and to make use only of those apartments which commanded a view of an enclosed yard, the gates of which were to be kept jealously locked. These precautions would at least secure him against the casual appearance of any living form which his excited imagination might possibly confound with the spectre which, as it was contended, his fancy recognized in every figure that bore even a distant or general resemblance to the traits with which he had at first invested it. A month or six weeks’ absolute seclusion under these conditions, it was hoped, might, by interrupting the series of these terrible impressions, gradually dispel the predisposing apprehension, and effectually break up the associations which had confirmed the supposed disease, and rendered recovery hopeless. Cheerful society and that of his friends was to be constantly supplied, and on the whole, very sanguine expectations were indulged in, that under this treatment the obstinate hypochondria of the patient might at length give way.

Accompanied, therefore, by Lady Rochdale, General Montague, and his daughter — his own affianced bride — poor Barton, himself never daring to cherish a hope of his ultimate emancipation from the strange horrors under which his life was literally wasting away, took possession of the apartments whose situation protected him against the dreadful intrusions from which he shrank with such unutterable terror.

After a little time, a steady persistence in this system began to manifest its results in a very marked though gradual improvement alike in the health and spirits of the invalid. Not, indeed, that anything at all approaching to complete recovery was yet discernible. On the contrary, to those who had not seen him since the commencement of his strange sufferings, such an alteration would have been apparent as might well have shocked them. The improvement, however, such as it was, was welcomed with gratitude and delight, especially by the poor young lady, whom her attachment to him, as well as her now singularly painful position, consequent on his mysterious and protracted illness, rendered an object of pity scarcely one degree less to be commiserated than himself.

A week passed — a fortnight — a month — and yet no recurrence of the hated visitation had agitated and terrified him as before. The treatment had, so far, been followed by complete success. The chain of association had been broken. The constant pressure upon the overtasked spirits had been removed, and, under these comparatively favourable circumstances, the sense of social community with the world about him, and something of human interest, if not of enjoyment, began to reanimate his mind.

It was about this time that Lady Rochdale, who, like most old ladies of the day, was deep in family receipts, and a great pretender to medical science, being engaged in the concoction of certain unpalatable mixtures of marvellous virtue, despatched her own maid to the kitchen garden with a list of herbs which were there to be carefully culled and brought back to her for the purpose stated. The handmaiden, however, returned with her task scarce half-completed, and a good deal flurried and alarmed. Her mode of accounting for her precipitate retreat and evident agitation was odd, and to the old lady unpleasantly startling.

It appeared that she had repaired to the kitchen garden, pursuant to her mistress's directions, and had there begun to make the specified selection among the rank and neglected herbs which crowded one corner of the enclosure, and while engaged in this pleasant labour she carelessly sang a fragment of an old song, as she said, "to keep herself company." She was, however, interrupted by a sort of mocking echo of the air she was singing; and looking up, she saw through the old thorn hedge, which surrounded the garden, a singularly ill-looking, little man, whose countenance wore the stamp of menace and malignity, standing close to her at the other side of the hawthorn screen. She described herself as utterly unable to move or speak, while he charged her with a message for Captain Barton, the substance of which she distinctly remembered to have been to the effect that he, Captain Barton, must come abroad as usual, and show himself to his friends out of doors, or else prepare for a visit in his own chamber. On concluding this brief message, the stranger had, with a threatening air, got down into the outer ditch, and seizing the hawthorn stems in his hands, seemed on the point of climbing through the fence, a feat which might have been accomplished without much difficulty. Without, of course, awaiting this result, the girl, throwing down her treasures of thyme and rosemary, had turned and run, with the swiftness of terror, to the house. Lady Rochdale commanded her, on pain of instant dismissal, to observe an absolute silence respecting all that portion of the incident which related to Captain Barton; and, at the same time, directed instant search to be made by her men in the garden and fields adjacent. This measure, however, was attended with the usual unsuccess, and filled with fearful and indefinable misgivings, Lady Rochdale communicated the incident to her brother. The story, however, until long afterwards, went no further, and of course it was jealously guarded from Barton, who continued to mend, though slowly and imperfectly.

Barton now began to walk occasionally in the courtyard which we have mentioned, and which, being surrounded by a high wall, commanded no view beyond its own extent. Here he, therefore, considered himself perfectly secure; and, but for a careless violation of orders by one of the grooms, he might have enjoyed, at least for some time longer, his much-prized immunity. Opening upon the public road, this yard was entered by a wooden gate, with a wicket in it, which was further defended by an iron gate upon the outside. Strict orders had been given to keep them carefully locked; but, in spite of these, it had happened that one day, as Barton was slowly pacing this narrow enclosure, in his accustomed walk, and reaching the further extremity, was turning to retrace his steps, he saw the boarded wicket ajar, and the face of his tormentor immovably looking at him through the iron bars. For a few seconds he stood riveted to the earth, breathless and bloodless, in the fascination of that dreaded gaze, and then fell helplessly upon the pavement.

There was he found a few minutes afterwards, and conveyed to his room, the apartment which he was never afterwards to leave alive. Henceforward, a marked and unaccountable change was observable in the tone of his mind. Captain Barton was now no longer the excited and despairing man he had been before; a strange alteration had passed upon him, an unearthly tranquillity reigned in his mind; it was the anticipated stillness of the grave.

"Montague, my friend, this struggle is nearly ended now," he said, tranquilly, but with a look of fixed and fearful awe. "I have, at last, some comfort from that world of spirits, from which my *punishment* has come. I know now that my sufferings will be soon over."

Montague pressed him to speak on.

"Yes," said he, in a softened voice, "my punishment is nearly ended. From sorrow perhaps I shall never, in time or eternity, escape; but my *agony* is almost over. Comfort has been revealed to me, and what remains of my allotted struggle I will bear with submission, even with hope."

"I am glad to hear you speak so tranquilly, my dear fellow," said Montague; "peace and cheerfulness of mind are all you need to make you what you were."

"No, no, I never can be that," said he, mournfully. "I am no longer fit for life. I am soon to die: I do not shrink from death as I did. I am to see *him* but once again, and then all is ended."

"He said so, then?" suggested Montague.

"*He?* No, no; good tidings could scarcely come through him; and these were good and welcome; and they came so solemnly and sweetly, with unutterable love and melancholy, such as I could not, without saying more than is needful or fitting, of other long-past scenes and persons, fully explain to you." As Barton said this he shed tears.

"Come, come," said Montague, mistaking the source of his emotions, "you must not give way. What is it, after all, but a pack of dreams and nonsense; or, at worst, the practices of a scheming rascal that enjoys his power of playing upon your nerves, and loves to exert it; a sneaking vagabond that owes you a grudge, and pays it off this way, not daring to try a more manly one."

"A grudge, indeed, he owes me; you say rightly," said Barton, with a sullen shudder; "a grudge as you call it. Oh, God! when the justice of heaven permits the Evil One to carry out a scheme of vengeance, when its execution is committed to the lost and frightful victim of sin, who owes his own ruin to the man, the very man, whom he is commissioned to pursue; then, indeed, the torments and terrors of hell are anticipated on earth. But heaven has dealt mercifully with me: hope has opened to me at last; and if death could come without the dreadful sight I am doomed to see, I would gladly close my eyes this moment upon the world. But though death is welcome, I shrink with an agony you cannot understand; a maddening agony, an actual frenzy of terror, from the last encounter with that — that DEMON, who has drawn me thus to the verge of the chasm, and who is himself to plunge me down. I am to see him again, once more, but under circumstances unutterably more terrific than ever."

As Barton thus spoke, he trembled so violently that Montague was really alarmed at the extremity of his sudden agitation, and hastened to lead him back to the topic which had before seemed to exert so tranquillizing an effect upon his mind.

"It was not a dream," he said, after a time; "I was in a different state, I felt differently and strangely; and yet it was all as real, as clear and vivid, as what I now see and hear; it was a reality."

"And what *did* you see and hear?" urged his companion.

"When I awakened from the swoon I fell into on seeing *him*," said Barton, continuing, as if he had not heard the question, "it was slowly, very slowly; I was reclining by the margin of a broad lake, surrounded by misty hills, and a soft, melancholy, rose-coloured light illuminated it all. It was indescribably sad and lonely, and yet more beautiful than any earthly scene. My head was leaning on the lap of a girl, and she was singing a strange and wondrous song, that told, I know not how, whether by words or harmony, of all my life, all that is past, and all that is still to come. And with the song the old feelings that I thought had perished within me came back, and tears flowed from my eyes, partly for the song and its mysterious beauty, and partly for the unearthly sweetness of her voice; yet I know the voice, oh! how well; and I was spellbound as I listened and looked at the strange and solitary scene, without stirring, almost without breathing, and, alas! alas! without turning my eyes toward the face that I knew was near me, so sweetly powerful was the enchantment that held me. And so, slowly and softly, the song and scene grew fainter, and ever fainter, to my senses, till all was dark and still again. And then I wakened to this world, as you saw, comforted, for I knew that I was forgiven much.” Barton wept again long and bitterly.

From this time, as we have said, the prevailing tone of his mind was one of profound and tranquil melancholy. This, however, was not without its interruptions. He was thoroughly impressed with the conviction that he was to experience another and a final visitation, illimitably transcending in horror all he had before experienced. From this anticipated and unknown agony he often shrunk in such paroxysms of abject terror and distraction, as filled the whole household with dismay and superstitious panic. Even those among them who affected to discredit the supposition of preternatural agency in the matter, were often in their secret souls visited during the darkness and solitude of night with qualms and apprehensions which they would not have readily confessed; and none of them attempted to dissuade Barton from the resolution on which he now systematically acted, of shutting himself up in his own apartment. The window-blinds of this room were kept jealously down; and his own man was seldom out of his presence, day or night, his bed being placed in the same chamber.

This man was an attached and respectable servant; and his duties, in addition to those ordinarily imposed upon *valets*, but which Barton’s independent habits generally dispensed with, were to attend carefully to the simple precautions by means of which his master hoped to exclude the dreaded intrusion of the “Watcher,” as the strange letter he had at first received had designated his persecutor. And, in addition to attending to these arrangements, which consisted merely in anticipating the possibility of his master’s being, through any unscreened window or opened door, exposed to the dreaded influence, the valet was never to suffer him to be for one moment alone: total solitude, even for a minute, had become to him now almost as intolerable as the idea of going abroad into the public ways; it was an instinctive anticipation of what was coming.

It is needless to say, that, under these mysterious and horrible circumstances, no steps were taken toward the fulfilment of that engagement into which he had entered. There was quite disparity enough in point of years, and indeed of habits, between the young lady and Captain

Barton, to have precluded anything like very vehement or romantic attachment on her part. Though grieved and anxious, therefore, she was very far from being heartbroken; a circumstance which, for the sentimental purposes of our tale, is much to be deplored. But truth must be told, especially in a narrative whose chief, if not only, pretensions to interest consist in a rigid adherence to facts, or what are so reported to have been.

Miss Montague, nevertheless, devoted much of her time to a patient but fruitless attempt to cheer the unhappy invalid. She read for him, and conversed with him; but it was apparent that whatever exertions he made, the endeavour to escape from the one constant and ever-present fear that preyed upon him was utterly and miserably unavailing.

Young ladies, as all the world knows, are much given to the cultivation of pets; and among those who shared the favour of Miss Montague was a fine old owl, which the gardener, who caught him napping among the ivy of a ruined stable, had dutifully presented to that young lady.

The caprice which regulates such preferences was manifested in the extravagant favour with which this grim and ill-favoured bird was at once distinguished by his mistress; and, trifling as this whimsical circumstance may seem, I am forced to mention it, inasmuch as it is connected, oddly enough, with the concluding scene of the story. Barton, so far from sharing in this liking for the new favourite, regarded it from the first with an antipathy as violent as it was utterly unaccountable. Its very vicinity was insupportable to him. He seemed to hate and dread it with a vehemence absolutely laughable, and to those who have never witnessed the exhibition of antipathies of this kind, his dread would seem all but incredible.

With these few words of preliminary explanation, I shall proceed to state the particulars of the last scene in this strange series of incidents. It was almost two o’clock one winter’s night, and Barton was, as usual at that hour, in his bed; the servant we have mentioned occupied a smaller bed in the same room, and a candle was burning. The man was on a sudden aroused by his master, who said, —

“I can’t get it out of my head that that accursed bird has escaped somehow, and is lurking in some corner of the room. I have been dreaming of him. Get up, Smith, and look about; search for him. Such hateful dreams!”

The servant rose, and examined the chamber, and while engaged in so doing, he heard the well-known sound, more like a long-drawn gasp than a hiss, with which these birds from their secret haunts affright the quiet of the night. This ghostly indication of its proximity, for the sound proceeded from the passage upon which Barton's chamber-door opened, determined the search of the servant, who, opening the door, proceeded a step or two forward for the purpose of driving the bird away. He had, however, hardly entered the lobby, when the door behind him slowly swung to under the impulse, as it seemed, of some gentle current of air; but as immediately over the door there was a kind of window, intended in the daytime to aid in lighting the passage, and through which the rays of the candle were then issuing, the valet could see quite enough for his purpose. As he advanced he heard his master (who, lying in a well-curtained bed had not, as it seemed, perceived his exit from the room) call him by name, and direct him to place the candle on the table by his bed. The servant, who was now some way in the long passage, did not like to raise his voice for the purpose of replying, lest he should startle the sleeping inmates of the house, began to walk hurriedly and softly back again, when, to his amazement, he heard a voice in the interior of the chamber answering calmly, and the man actually saw, through the window which overtopped the door, that the light was slowly shifting, as if carried across the chamber in answer to his master's call. Palsied by a feeling akin to terror, yet not unmingled with a horrible curiosity, he stood breathless and listening at the threshold, unable to summon resolution to push open the door and enter. Then came a rustling of the curtains, and a sound like that of one who in a low voice hushes a child to rest, in the midst of which he heard Barton say, in a tone of stifled horror — "Oh, God — oh, my God!" and repeat the same exclamation several times. Then ensued a silence, which again was broken by the same strange soothing sound; and at last there burst forth, in one swelling peal, a yell of agony so appalling and hideous, that, under some impulse of ungovernable horror, the man rushed to the door, and with his whole strength strove to force it open. Whether it was that, in his agitation, he had himself but imperfectly turned the handle, or that the door was really secured upon the inside, he failed to effect an entrance; and as he tugged and pushed, yell after yell rang louder and wilder through the chamber, accompanied all the while by the same hushing sounds. Actually freezing with terror, and scarce knowing what he did, the man turned and ran down the passage, wringing his hands in the extremity of horror and irresolution. At the stairhead he was encountered by General Montague, scared and eager, and just as they met the fearful sounds had ceased.

"What is it? — who — where is your master?" said Montague, with the incoherence of extreme agitation. "Has anything — for God's sake, is anything wrong?"

"Lord have mercy on us, it's all over," said the man, staring wildly towards his master's chamber. "He's dead, sir; I'm sure he's dead."

Without waiting for inquiry or explanation, Montague, closely followed by the servant, hurried to the chamber-door, turned the handle, and pushed it open. As the door yielded to his pressure, the ill-omened bird of which the servant had been in search, uttering its spectral warning, started suddenly from the far side of the bed, and flying through the doorway close over their heads, and extinguishing, in its passage, the candle which Montague carried, crashed through the skylight that overlooked the lobby, and sailed away into the darkness of the outer space.

"There it is, God bless us!" whispered the man, after a breathless pause.

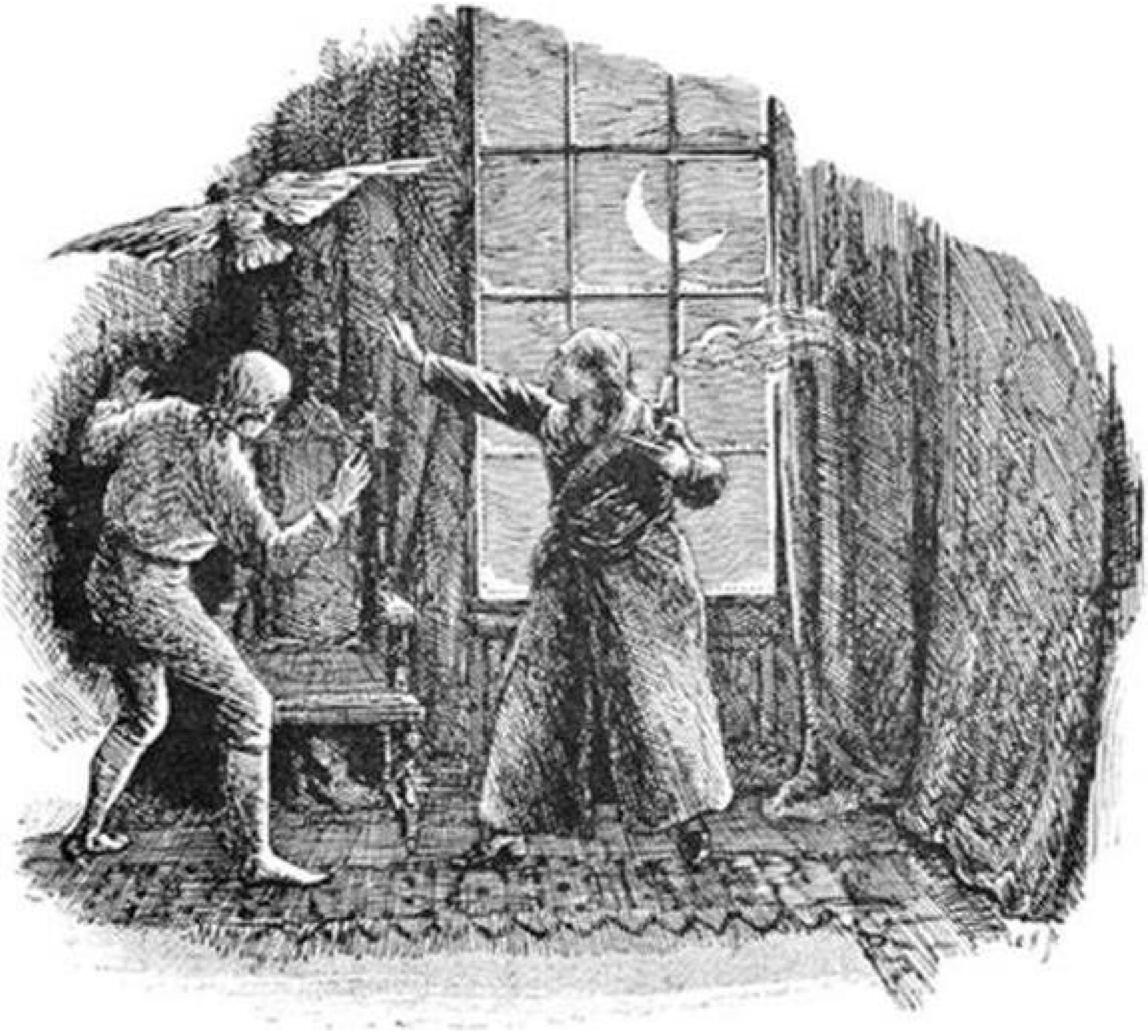
"Curse that bird!" muttered the general, startled by the suddenness of the apparition, and unable to conceal his discomposure.

"The candle was moved," said the man, after another breathless pause; "see, they put it by the bed!"

"Draw the curtains, fellow, and don't stand gaping there," whispered Montague, sternly.

The man hesitated.

"Hold this, then," said Montague, impatiently, thrusting the candlestick into the servant's hand; and himself advancing to the bedside, he drew the curtains apart. The light of the candle, which was still burning at the bedside, fell upon a figure huddled together, and half upright, at the head of the bed. It seemed as though it had shrunk back as far as the solid panelling would allow, and the hands were still clutched in the bedclothes.



EXTINGUISHING IN ITS PASSAGE THE CANDLE WHICH MONTAGUE CARRIED.

“Barton, Barton, Barton!” cried the general, with a strange mixture of awe and vehemence.

He took the candle, and held it so that it shone full upon his face. The features were fixed, stern and white; the jaw was fallen, and the sightless eyes, still open, gazed vacantly forward toward the front of the bed.

“God Almighty, he’s dead!” muttered the general, as he looked upon this fearful spectacle. They both continued to gaze upon it in silence for a minute or more. “And cold, too,” said Montague, withdrawing his hand from that of the dead man.

"And see, see; may I never have life, sir," added the man, after another pause, with a shudder, "but there was something else on the bed with him! Look there — look there; see that, sir!"

As the man thus spoke, he pointed to a deep indenture, as if caused by a heavy pressure, near the foot of the bed.

Montague was silent.

"Come, sir, come away, for God's sake!" whispered the man, drawing close up to him, and holding fast by his arm, while he glanced fearfully round; "what good can be done here now? — come away, for God's sake!"

At this moment they heard the steps of more than one approaching, and Montague, hastily desiring the servant to arrest their progress, endeavoured to loose the rigid grip with which the fingers of the dead man were clutched in the bedclothes, and drew, as well as he was able, the awful figure into a reclining posture. Then closing the curtains carefully upon it, he hastened himself to meet those who were approaching.

.....

It is needless to follow the personages so slightly connected with this narrative into the events of their after lives; it is enough for us to remark that no clue to the solution of these mysterious occurrences was ever afterwards discovered; and so long an interval having now passed, it is scarcely to be expected that time can throw any new light upon their inexplicable obscurity. Until the secrets of the earth shall be no longer hidden these transactions must remain shrouded in mystery.

The only occurrence in Captain Barton's former life to which reference was ever made, as having any possible connection with the sufferings with which his existence closed, and which he himself seemed to regard as working out a retribution for some grievous sin of his past life, was a circumstance which not for several years after his death was brought to light. The nature of this disclosure was painful to his relatives and discreditable to his memory.

It appeared, then, that some eight years before Captain Barton's final return to Dublin, he had formed, in the town of Plymouth, a guilty attachment, the object of which was the daughter of one of the ship's crew under his command. The father had visited the frailty of his unhappy child with extreme harshness, and even brutality, and it was said that she had died heartbroken. Presuming upon Barton's implication in her guilt, this man had conducted himself towards him with marked insolence, and Barton resented this — and what he resented with still more exasperated bitterness, his treatment of the unfortunate girl — by a systematic exercise of those terrible and arbitrary severities with which the regulations of the navy arm those who are responsible for its discipline. The man had at length made his escape, while the vessel was in port at Lisbon, but died, as it was said, in an hospital in that town, of the wounds inflicted in one of his recent and sanguinary punishments.

Whether these circumstances in reality bear or not upon the occurrences of Barton's afterlife, it is of course impossible to say. It seems, however, more than probable that they were, at least in his own mind, closely associated with them. But however the truth may be as to the origin and motives of this mysterious persecution, there can be no doubt that, with respect to the agencies by which it was accomplished, absolute and impenetrable mystery is like to prevail until the day of doom.

THE MURDERED COUSIN

”And they lay wait for their own blood: they lurk privily for
their own lives.

”So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh
away the life of the owner thereof.”

This story of the Irish peerage is written, as nearly as possible, in the very words in which it was related by its “heroine,” the late Countess D —— , and is therefore told in the first person.

My mother died when I was an infant, and of her I have no recollection, even the faintest. By her death my education was left solely to the direction of my surviving parent. He entered upon his task with a stern appreciation of the responsibility thus cast upon him. My religious instruction was prosecuted with an almost exaggerated anxiety; and I had, of course, the best masters to perfect me in all those accomplishments which my station and wealth might seem to require. My father was what is called an oddity, and his treatment of me, though uniformly kind, was governed less by affection and tenderness, than by a high and unbending sense of duty. Indeed I seldom saw or spoke to him except at meal-times, and then, though gentle, he was usually reserved and gloomy. His leisure hours, which were many, were passed either in his study or in solitary walks; in short, he seemed to take no further interest in my happiness or improvement, than a conscientious regard to the discharge of his own duty would seem to impose.

Shortly before my birth an event occurred which had contributed much to induce and to confirm my father’s unsocial habits; it was the fact that a suspicion of *murder* had fallen upon his younger brother, though not sufficiently definite to lead to any public proceedings, yet strong enough to ruin him in public opinion. This disgraceful and dreadful doubt cast upon the family name, my father felt deeply and bitterly, and not the less so that he himself was thoroughly convinced of his brother’s innocence. The sincerity and strength of this conviction he shortly afterwards proved in a manner which produced the catastrophe of my story.

Before, however, I enter upon my immediate adventures, I ought to relate the circumstances which had awakened that suspicion to which I have referred, inasmuch as they are in themselves somewhat curious, and in their effects most intimately connected with my own after-history.

My uncle, Sir Arthur Tyrrell, was a gay and extravagant man, and, among other vices, was ruinously addicted to gaming. This unfortunate propensity, even after his fortune had suffered so severely as to render retrenchment imperative, nevertheless continued to engross him, nearly to the exclusion of every other pursuit. He was, however, a proud, or rather a vain man, and could not bear to make the diminution of his income a matter of triumph to those with whom he had hitherto competed; and the consequence was, that he frequented no longer the expensive haunts of his dissipation, and retired from the gay world, leaving his coterie to discover his reasons as best they might. He did not, however, forego his favourite vice, for though he could not worship his great divinity in those costly temples where he was formerly wont to take his place, yet he found it very possible to bring about him a sufficient number of the votaries of chance to answer all his ends. The consequence was, that Carrickleigh, which was the name of my uncle's residence, was never without one or more of such visiters as I have described. It happened that upon one occasion he was visited by one Hugh Tisdall, a gentleman of loose, and, indeed, low habits, but of considerable wealth, and who had, in early youth, travelled with my uncle upon the Continent. The period of this visit was winter, and, consequently, the house was nearly deserted excepting by its ordinary inmates; it was, therefore, highly acceptable, particularly as my uncle was aware that his visiter's tastes accorded exactly with his own.

Both parties seemed determined to avail themselves of their mutual suitability during the brief stay which Mr. Tisdall had promised; the consequence was, that they shut themselves up in Sir Arthur's private room for nearly all the day and the greater part of the night, during the space of almost a week, at the end of which the servant having one morning, as usual, knocked at Mr. Tisdall's bedroom door repeatedly, received no answer, and, upon attempting to enter, found that it was locked. This appeared suspicious, and the inmates of the house having been alarmed, the door was forced open, and, on proceeding to the bed, they found the body of its occupant perfectly lifeless, and hanging halfway out, the head downwards, and near the floor. One deep wound had been inflicted upon the temple, apparently with some blunt instrument, which had penetrated the brain, and another blow, less effective — probably the first aimed — had grazed his head, removing some of the scalp. The door had been double locked upon the *inside*, in evidence of which the key still lay where it had been placed in the lock. The window, though not secured on the interior, was closed; a circumstance not a little puzzling, as it afforded the only other mode of escape from the room. It looked out, too, upon a kind of courtyard, round which the old buildings stood, formerly accessible by a narrow doorway and passage lying in the oldest side of the quadrangle, but which had since been built up, so as to preclude all ingress or egress; the room was also upon the second story, and the height of the window considerable; in addition to all which the stone windowsill was much too narrow to allow of any one’s standing upon it when the window was closed. Near the bed were found a pair of razors belonging to the murdered man, one of them upon the ground, and both of them open. The weapon which inflicted the mortal wound was not to be found in the room, nor were any footsteps or other traces of the murderer discoverable. At the suggestion of Sir Arthur himself, the coroner was instantly summoned to attend, and an inquest was held. Nothing, however, in any degree conclusive was elicited. The walls, ceiling, and floor of the room were carefully examined, in order to ascertain whether they contained a trap-door or other concealed mode of entrance, but no such thing appeared. Such was the minuteness of investigation employed, that, although the grate had contained a large fire during the night, they proceeded to examine even the very chimney, in order to discover whether escape by it were possible. But this attempt, too, was fruitless, for the chimney, built in the old fashion, rose in a perfectly perpendicular line from the hearth, to a height of nearly fourteen feet above the roof, affording in its interior scarcely the possibility of ascent, the flue being smoothly plastered, and sloping towards the top like an inverted funnel; promising, too, even if the summit were attained, owing to its great height, but a precarious descent upon the sharp and steep-ridged roof; the ashes, too, which lay in the grate, and the soot, as far as it could be seen, were undisturbed, a circumstance almost conclusive upon the point.

Sir Arthur was of course examined. His evidence was given with clearness and unreserve, which seemed calculated to silence all suspicion. He stated that, up to the day and night immediately preceding the catastrophe, he had lost to a heavy amount, but that, at their last sitting, he had not only won back his original loss, but upwards of £4,000 in addition; in evidence of which he produced an acknowledgment of debt to that amount in the handwriting of the deceased, bearing date the night of the catastrophe. He had mentioned the circumstance to Lady Tyrrell, and in presence of some of his domestics; which statement was supported by *their* respective evidence. One of the jury shrewdly observed, that the circumstance of Mr. Tisdall's having sustained so heavy a loss might have suggested to some ill-minded persons, accidentally hearing it, the plan of robbing him, after having murdered him in such a manner as might make it appear that he had committed suicide; a supposition which was strongly supported by the razors having been found thus displaced and removed from their case. Two persons had probably been engaged in the attempt, one watching by the sleeping man, and ready to strike him in case of his awakening suddenly, while the other was procuring the razors and employed in inflicting the fatal gash, so as to make it appear to have been the act of the murdered man himself. It was said that while the juror was making this suggestion Sir Arthur changed colour. There was nothing, however, like legal evidence to implicate him, and the consequence was that the verdict was found against a person or persons unknown, and for some time the matter was suffered to rest, until, after about five months, my father received a letter from a person signing himself Andrew Collis, and representing himself to be the cousin of the deceased. This letter stated that his brother, Sir Arthur, was likely to incur not merely suspicion but personal risk, unless he could account for certain circumstances connected with the recent murder, and contained a copy of a letter written by the deceased, and dated the very day upon the night of which the murder had been perpetrated. Tisdall's letter contained, among a great deal of other matter, the passages which follow: —

"I have had sharp work with Sir Arthur: he tried some of his stale tricks, but soon found that *I* was Yorkshire, too; it would not do — you understand me. We went to the work like good ones, head, heart, and soul; and in fact, since I came here, I have lost no time. I am rather fagged, but I am sure to be well paid for my hardship; I never want sleep so long as I can have the music of a dice-box, and wherewithal to pay the piper. As I told you, he tried some of his queer turns, but I foiled him like a man, and, in return, gave him more than he could relish of the genuine *dead knowledge*. In short, I have plucked the old baronet as never baronet was plucked before; I have scarce left him the stump of a quill. I have got promissory notes in his hand to the amount of —— ; if you like round numbers, say five-and-twenty thousand pounds, safely deposited in my portable strong box, alias, double-clasped pocketbook. I leave this ruinous old rat-hole early on tomorrow, for two reasons: first, I do not want to play with Sir Arthur deeper than I think his security would warrant; and, secondly, because I am safer a hundred miles away from Sir Arthur than in the house with him. Look you, my worthy, I tell you this between ourselves — I may be wrong — but, by —— , I am sure as that I am now living, that Sir A —— attempted to poison me last night. So much for old friendship on both sides. When I won the last stake, a heavy one enough, my friend leant his forehead upon his hands, and you'll laugh when I tell you that his head literally smoked like a hot dumpling. I do not know whether his agitation was produced by the plan which he had against me, or by his having lost so heavily; though it must be allowed that he had reason to be a little funked, whichever way his thoughts went; but he pulled the bell, and ordered two bottles of Champagne. While the fellow was bringing them, he wrote a promissory note to the full amount, which he signed, and, as the man came in with the bottles and glasses, he desired him to be off. He filled a glass for me, and, while he thought my eyes were off, for I was putting up his note at the time, he dropped something slyly into it, no doubt to sweeten it; but I saw it all, and, when he handed it to me, I said, with an emphasis which he might easily understand, 'There is some sediment in it, I'll not drink it.' 'Is there?' said he, and at the same time snatched it from my hand and threw it into the fire. What do you think of that? Have I not a tender bird in hand? Win or lose, I will not play beyond five thousand tonight, and tomorrow sees me safe out of the reach of Sir Arthur's Champagne."

Of the authenticity of this document, I never heard my father express a doubt; and I am satisfied that, owing to his strong conviction in favour of his brother, he would not have admitted it without sufficient inquiry, inasmuch as it tended to confirm the suspicions which already existed to his prejudice. Now, the only point in this letter which made strongly against my uncle, was the mention of the “double-clasped pocketbook,” as the receptacle of the papers likely to involve him, for this pocketbook was not forthcoming, nor anywhere to be found, nor had any papers referring to his gaming transactions been discovered upon the dead man.

But whatever might have been the original intention of this man, Collis, neither my uncle nor my father ever heard more of him; he published the letter, however, in Faulkner’s newspaper, which was shortly afterwards made the vehicle of a much more mysterious attack. The passage in that journal to which I allude, appeared about four years afterwards, and while the fatal occurrence was still fresh in public recollection. It commenced by a rambling preface, stating that “a *certain person* whom *certain* persons thought to be dead, was not so, but living, and in full possession of his memory, and moreover, ready and able to make *great* delinquents tremble”: it then went on to describe the murder, without, however, mentioning names; and in doing so, it entered into minute and circumstantial particulars of which none but an *eye-witness* could have been possessed, and by implications almost too unequivocal to be regarded in the light of insinuation, to involve the “*titled gambler*” in the guilt of the transaction.

My father at once urged Sir Arthur to proceed against the paper in an action of libel, but he would not hear of it, nor consent to my father’s taking any legal steps whatever in the matter. My father, however, wrote in a threatening tone to Faulkner, demanding a surrender of the author of the obnoxious article; the answer to this application is still in my possession, and is penned in an apologetic tone: it states that the manuscript had been handed in, paid for, and inserted as an advertisement, without sufficient inquiry, or any knowledge as to whom it referred. No step, however, was taken to clear my uncle’s character in the judgment of the public; and, as he immediately sold a small property, the application of the proceeds of which were known to none, he was said to have disposed of it to enable himself to buy off the threatened information; however the truth might have been, it is certain that no charges respecting the mysterious murder were afterwards publicly made against my uncle, and, as far as external disturbances were concerned, he enjoyed henceforward perfect security and quiet.

A deep and lasting impression, however, had been made upon the public mind, and Sir Arthur Tyrrell was no longer visited or noticed by the gentry of the county, whose attentions he had hitherto received. He accordingly affected to despise those courtesies which he no longer enjoyed, and shunned even that society which he might have commanded. This is all that I need recapitulate of my uncle’s history, and I now recur to my own.

Although my father had never, within my recollection, visited, or been visited by my uncle, each being of unsocial, procrastinating, and indolent habits, and their respective residences being very far apart — the one lying in the county of Galway, the other in that of Cork — he was strongly attached to his brother, and evinced his affection by an active correspondence, and by deeply and proudly resenting that neglect which had branded Sir Arthur as unfit to mix in society.

When I was about eighteen years of age, my father, whose health had been gradually declining, died, leaving me in heart wretched and desolate, and, owing to his habitual seclusion, with few acquaintances, and almost no friends. The provisions of his will were curious, and when I was sufficiently come to myself to listen to, or comprehend them, surprised me not a little: all his vast property was left to me, and to the heirs of my body, for ever; and, in default of such heirs, it was to go after my death to my uncle, Sir Arthur, without any entail. At the same time, the will appointed him my guardian, desiring that I might be received within his house, and reside with his family, and under his care, during the term of my minority; and in consideration of the increased expense consequent upon such an arrangement, a handsome allowance was allotted to him during the term of my proposed residence. The object of this last provision I at once understood; my father desired, by making it the direct apparent interest of Sir Arthur that I should die without issue, while at the same time he placed my person wholly in his power, to prove to the world how great and unshaken was his confidence in his brother’s innocence and honour. It was a strange, perhaps an idle scheme, but as I had been always brought up in the habit of considering my uncle as a deeply injured man, and had been taught, almost as a part of my religion, to regard him as the very soul of honour, I felt no further uneasiness respecting the arrangement than that likely to affect a shy and timid girl at the immediate prospect of taking up her abode for the first time in her life among strangers. Previous to leaving my home, which I felt I should do with a heavy heart, I received a most tender and affectionate letter from my uncle, calculated, if anything could do so, to remove the bitterness of parting from scenes familiar and dear from my earliest childhood, and in some degree to reconcile me to the measure. It was upon a fine autumn day that I approached the old domain of Carrickleigh. I shall not soon forget the impression of sadness and of gloom which all that I saw produced upon my mind; the sunbeams were falling with a rich and melancholy lustre upon the fine old trees, which stood in lordly groups, casting their long sweeping shadows over rock and sward; there was an air of neglect and decay about the spot, which amounted almost to desolation, and mournfully increased as we approached the building itself, near which the ground had been originally more artificially and carefully cultivated than elsewhere, and where consequently neglect more immediately and strikingly betrayed itself.

As we proceeded, the road wound near the beds of what had been formerly two fish-ponds, which were now nothing more than stagnant swamps, overgrown with rank weeds, and here and there encroached upon by the straggling underwood; the avenue itself was much broken; and in many places the stones were almost concealed by grass and nettles; the loose stone walls which had here and there intersected the broad park, were, in many places, broken down, so as no longer to answer their original purpose as fences; piers were now and then to be seen, but the gates were gone; and to add to the general air of dilapidation, some huge trunks were lying scattered through the venerable old trees, either the work of the winter storms, or perhaps the victims of some extensive but desultory scheme of denudation, which the projector had not capital or perseverance to carry into full effect.

After the carriage had travelled a full mile of this avenue, we reached the summit of a rather abrupt eminence, one of the many which added to the picturesqueness, if not to the convenience of this rude approach; from the top of this ridge the grey walls of Carrickleigh were visible, rising at a small distance in front, and darkened by the hoary wood which crowded around them; it was a quadrangular building of considerable extent, and the front, where the great entrance was placed, lay towards us, and bore unequivocal marks of antiquity; the timeworn, solemn aspect of the old building, the ruinous and deserted appearance of the whole place, and the associations which connected it with a dark page in the history of my family, combined to depress spirits already predisposed for the reception of sombre and dejecting impressions. When the carriage drew up in the grass-grown courtyard before the hall-door, two lazy-looking men, whose appearance well accorded with that of the place which they tenanted, alarmed by the obstreperous barking of a great chained dog, ran out from some half-ruinous outhouses, and took charge of the horses; the hall-door stood open, and I entered a gloomy and imperfectly-lighted apartment, and found no one within it. However, I had not long to wait in this awkward predicament, for before my luggage had been deposited in the house, indeed before I had well removed my cloak and other muffles, so as to enable me to look around, a young girl ran lightly into the hall, and kissing me heartily and somewhat boisterously exclaimed, “My dear cousin, my dear Margaret — I am so delighted — so out of breath, we did not expect you till ten o’clock; my father is somewhere about the place, he must be close at hand. James — Corney — run out and tell your master; my brother is seldom at home, at least at any reasonable hour; you must be so tired — so fatigued — let me show you to your room; see that Lady Margaret’s luggage is all brought up; you must lie down and rest yourself. Deborah, bring some coffee — up these stairs; we are so delighted to see you — you cannot think how lonely I have been; how steep these stairs are, are not they? I am so glad you are come — I could hardly bring myself to believe that you were really coming; how good of you, dear Lady Margaret.” There was real good nature and delight in my cousin’s greeting, and a kind of constitutional confidence of manner which placed me at once at ease, and made me feel immediately upon terms of intimacy with her. The room into which she ushered me, although partaking in the general air of decay which pervaded the mansion and all about it, had, nevertheless, been fitted up with evident attention to comfort, and even with some dingy attempt at luxury; but what pleased me most was that it opened, by a second door, upon a lobby which communicated with my fair cousin’s apartment; a circumstance which divested the room, in my eyes, of the air of solitude and sadness which would otherwise have characterised it, to a degree almost painful to one so depressed and agitated as I was.

After such arrangements as I found necessary were completed, we both went down to the parlour, a large wainscotted room, hung round with grim old portraits, and, as I was not sorry to see, containing, in its ample grate, a large and cheerful fire. Here my cousin had leisure to talk more at her ease;

and from her I learned something of the manners and the habits of the two remaining members of her family, whom I had not yet seen. On my arrival I had known nothing of the family among whom I was come to reside, except that it consisted of three individuals, my uncle, and his son and daughter, Lady Tyrrell having been long dead; in addition to this very scanty stock of information, I shortly learned from my communicative companion, that my uncle was, as I had suspected, completely retired in his habits, and besides that, having been, so far back as she could well recollect, always rather strict, as reformed rakes frequently become, he had latterly been growing more gloomily and sternly religious than heretofore. Her account of her brother was far less favourable, though she did not say anything directly to his disadvantage. From all that I could gather from her, I was led to suppose that he was a specimen of the idle, coarse-mannered, profligate "*squirearchy*" — a result which might naturally have followed from the circumstance of his being, as it were, outlawed from society, and driven for companionship to grades below his own — enjoying, too, the dangerous prerogative of spending a good deal of money. However, you may easily suppose that I found nothing in my cousin's communication fully to bear me out in so very decided a conclusion.

I awaited the arrival of my uncle, which was every moment to be expected, with feelings half of alarm, half of curiosity — a sensation which I have often since experienced, though to a less degree, when upon the point of standing for the first time in the presence of one of whom I have long been in the habit of hearing or thinking with interest. It was, therefore, with some little perturbation that I heard, first a slight bustle at the outer door, then a slow step traverse the hall, and finally witnessed the door open, and my uncle enter the room. He was a striking looking man; from peculiarities both of person and of dress, the whole effect of his appearance amounted to extreme singularity. He was tall, and when young his figure must have been strikingly elegant; as it was, however, its effect was marred by a very decided stoop; his dress was of a sober colour, and in fashion anterior to any thing which I could remember. It was, however, handsome, and by no means carelessly put on; but what completed the singularity of his appearance was his uncut, white hair, which hung in long, but not at all neglected curls, even so far as his shoulders, and which combined with his regularly classic features, and fine dark eyes, to bestow upon him an air of venerable dignity and pride, which I have seldom seen equalled elsewhere. I rose as he entered, and met him about the middle of the room; he kissed my cheek and both my hands, saying —

"You are most welcome, dear child, as welcome as the command of this poor place and all that it contains can make you. I am rejoiced to see you — truly rejoiced. I trust that you are not much fatigued; pray be seated again." He led me to my chair, and continued, "I am glad to perceive you have made acquaintance with Emily already; I see, in your being thus brought together, the foundation of a lasting friendship. You are both innocent, and both young. God bless you — God bless you, and make you all that I could wish."

He raised his eyes, and remained for a few moments silent, as if in secret prayer. I felt that it was impossible that this man, with feelings manifestly so tender, could be the wretch that public opinion had represented him to be. I was more than ever convinced of his innocence. His manners were, or appeared to me, most fascinating. I know not how the lights of experience might have altered this estimate. But I was then very young, and I beheld in him a perfect mingling of the courtesy of polished life with the gentlest and most genial virtues of the heart. A feeling of affection and respect towards him began to spring up within me, the more earnest that I remembered how sorely he had suffered in fortune and how cruelly in fame. My uncle having given me fully to understand that I was most welcome, and might command whatever was his own, pressed me to take some supper; and on my refusing, he observed that, before bidding me good night, he had one duty further to perform, one in which he was convinced I would cheerfully acquiesce. He then proceeded to read a chapter from the Bible; after which he took his leave with the same affectionate kindness with which he had greeted me, having repeated his desire that I should consider every thing in his house as altogether at my disposal. It is needless to say how much I was pleased with my uncle — it was impossible to avoid being so; and I could not help saying to myself, if such a man as this is not safe from the assaults of slander, who is? I felt much happier than I had done since my father's death, and enjoyed that night the first refreshing sleep which had visited me since that calamity. My curiosity respecting my male cousin did not long remain unsatisfied; he appeared upon the next day at dinner. His manners, though not so coarse as I had expected, were exceedingly disagreeable;

there was an assurance and a forwardness for which I was not prepared; there was less of the vulgarity of manner, and almost more of that of the mind, than I had anticipated. I felt quite uncomfortable in his presence; there was just that confidence in his look and tone, which would read encouragement even in mere toleration; and I felt more disgusted and annoyed at the coarse and extravagant compliments which he was pleased from time to time to pay me, than perhaps the extent of the atrocity might fully have warranted. It was, however, one consolation that he did not often appear, being much engrossed by pursuits about which I neither knew nor cared anything; but when he did, his attentions, either with a view to his amusement, or to some more serious object, were so obviously and perseveringly directed to me, that young and inexperienced as I was, even *I* could not be ignorant of their significance. I felt more provoked by this odious persecution than I can express, and discouraged him with so much vigour, that I did not stop even at rudeness to convince him that his assiduities were unwelcome; but all in vain.

This had gone on for nearly a twelvemonth, to my infinite annoyance, when one day, as I was sitting at some needlework with my companion, Emily, as was my habit, in the parlour, the door opened, and my cousin Edward entered the room. There was something, I thought, odd in his manner, a kind of struggle between shame and impudence, a kind of flurry and ambiguity, which made him appear, if possible, more than ordinarily disagreeable.

“Your servant, ladies,” he said, seating himself at the same time; “sorry to spoil your *tête-à-tête*; but never mind, I’ll only take Emily’s place for a minute or two, and then we part for a while, fair cousin. Emily, my father wants you in the corner turret; no shilly, shally, he’s in a hurry.” She hesitated. “Be off — tramp, march, I say,” he exclaimed, in a tone which the poor girl dared not disobey.

She left the room, and Edward followed her to the door. He stood there for a minute or two, as if reflecting what he should say, perhaps satisfying himself that no one was within hearing in the hall. At length he turned about, having closed the door, as if carelessly, with his foot, and advancing slowly, in deep thought, he took his seat at the side of the table opposite to mine. There was a brief interval of silence, after which he said: —

"I imagine that you have a shrewd suspicion of the object of my early visit; but I suppose I must go into particulars. Must I?"

"I have no conception," I replied, "what your object may be."

"Well, well," said he becoming more at his ease as he proceeded, "it may be told in a few words. You know that it is totally impossible, quite out of the question, that an offhand young fellow like me, and a good-looking girl like yourself, could meet continually as you and I have done, without an attachment — a liking growing up on one side or other; in short, I think I have let you know as plainly as if I spoke it, that I have been in love with you, almost from the first time I saw you." He paused, but I was too much horrified to speak. He interpreted my silence favourably. "I can tell you," he continued, "I'm reckoned rather hard to please, and very hard to *hit*. I can't say when I was taken with a girl before, so you see fortune reserved me — ."

Here the odious wretch actually put his arm round my waist: the action at once restored me to utterance, and with the most indignant vehemence I released myself from his hold, and at the same time said: —

"I *have*, sir, of course, perceived your most disagreeable attentions; they have long been a source of great annoyance to me; and you must be aware that I have marked my disapprobation, my disgust, as unequivocally as I possibly could, without actual indelicacy."

I paused, almost out of breath from the rapidity with which I had spoken; and without giving him time to renew the conversation, I hastily quitted the room, leaving him in a paroxysm of rage and mortification. As I ascended the stairs, I heard him open the parlour-door with violence, and take two or three rapid strides in the direction in which I was moving. I was now much frightened, and ran the whole way until I reached my room, and having locked the door, I listened breathlessly, but heard no sound. This relieved me for the present; but so much had I been overcome by the agitation and annoyance attendant upon the scene which I had just passed through, that when my cousin Emily knocked at the door, I was weeping in great agitation. You will readily conceive my distress, when you reflect upon my strong dislike to my cousin Edward, combined with my youth and extreme inexperience. Any proposal of such a nature must have agitated me; but that it should come from the man whom, of all others, I instinctively most loathed and abhorred, and to whom I had, as clearly as manner could do it, expressed the state of my feelings, was almost too annoying to be borne; it was a calamity, too, in which I could not claim the sympathy of my cousin Emily, which had always been extended to me in my minor grievances. Still I hoped that it might not be unattended with good; for I thought that one inevitable and most welcome consequence would result from this painful *éclaircissement*, in the discontinuance of my cousin's odious persecution.

When I arose next morning, it was with the fervent hope that I might never again behold his face, or even hear his name; but such a consummation, though devoutedly to be wished, was hardly likely to occur. The painful impressions of yesterday were too vivid to be at once erased; and I could not help feeling some dim foreboding of coming annoyance and evil. To expect on my cousin's part anything like delicacy or consideration for me, was out of the question. I saw that he had set his heart upon my property, and that he was not likely easily to forego such a prize, possessing what might have been considered opportunities and facilities almost to compel my compliance. I now keenly felt the unreasonableness of my father's conduct in placing me to reside with a family, with all the members of which, with one exception, he was wholly unacquainted, and I bitterly felt the helplessness of my situation. I determined, however, in the event of my cousin's persevering in his addresses, to lay all the particulars before my uncle, although he had never, in kindness or intimacy, gone a step beyond our first interview, and to throw myself upon his hospitality and his sense of honour for protection against a repetition of such annoyances.

My cousin's conduct may appear to have been an inadequate cause for such serious uneasiness; but my alarm was awakened neither by his acts nor by words, but entirely by his manner, which was strange and even intimidating. At the beginning of our yesterday's interview, there was a sort of bullying swagger in his air, which, towards the end, gave place to something bordering upon the brutal vehemence of an undisguised ruffian, a transition which had tempted me into a belief that he might seek, even forcibly, to extort from me a consent to his wishes, or by means still more horrible, of which I scarcely dared to trust myself to think, to possess himself of my property.

I was early next day summoned to attend my uncle in his private room, which lay in a corner turret of the old building; and thither I accordingly went, wondering all the way what this unusual measure might prelude.

When I entered the room, he did not rise in his usual courteous way to greet me, but simply pointed to a chair opposite to his own; this boded nothing agreeable. I sat down, however, silently waiting until he should open the conversation.

"Lady Margaret," at length he said, in a tone of greater sternness than I thought him capable of using, "I have hitherto spoken to you as a friend, but I have not forgotten that I am also your guardian, and that my authority as such gives me a right to controul your conduct. I shall put a question to you, and I expect and will demand a plain, direct answer. Have I rightly been informed that you have contemptuously rejected the suit and hand of my son Edward?"

I stammered forth with a good deal of trepidation: —

"I believe, that is, I have, sir, rejected my cousin's proposals; and my coldness and discouragement might have convinced him that I had determined to do so."

"Madame," replied he, with suppressed, but, as it appeared to me, intense anger, "I have lived long enough to know that *coldness and discouragement*, and such terms, form the common cant of a worthless coquette. You know to the full, as well as I, that *coldness and discouragement* may be so exhibited as to convince their object that he is neither distasteful nor indifferent to the person who wears that manner. You know, too, none better, that an affected neglect, when skillfully managed, is amongst the most formidable of the allurements which artful beauty can employ. I tell you, madame, that having, without one word spoken in discouragement, permitted my son's most marked attentions for a twelvemonth or more, you have no *right* to dismiss him with no further explanation than demurely telling him that you had always looked coldly upon him, and neither your wealth nor *your ladyship* (there was an emphasis of scorn on the word which would have become Sir Giles Overreach himself) can warrant you in treating with contempt the affectionate regard of an honest heart."

I was too much shocked at this undisguised attempt to bully me into an acquiescence in the interested and unprincipled plan for their own aggrandisement, which I now perceived my uncle and his son had deliberately formed, at once to find strength or collectedness to frame an answer to what he had said. At length I replied, with a firmness that surprised myself: —

"In all that you have just now said, sir, you have grossly misstated my conduct and motives. Your information must have been most incorrect, as far as it regards my conduct towards my cousin; my manner towards him could have conveyed nothing but dislike; and if anything could have added to the strong aversion which I have long felt towards him, it would be his attempting thus to frighten me into a marriage which he knows to be revolting to me, and which is sought by him only as a means for securing to himself whatever property is mine."

As I said this, I fixed my eyes upon those of my uncle, but he was too old in the world's ways to falter beneath the gaze of more searching eyes than mine; he simply said —

"Are you acquainted with the provisions of your father's will?"

I answered in the affirmative; and he continued:— "Then you must be aware that if my son Edward were, which God forbid, the unprincipled, reckless man, the ruffian you pretend to think him" — (here he spoke very slowly, as if he intended that every word which escaped him should be registered in my memory, while at the same time the expression of his countenance underwent a gradual but horrible change, and the eyes which he fixed upon me became so darkly vivid, that I almost lost sight of everything else)— "if he were what you have described him, do you think, child, he would have found no shorter way than marriage to gain his ends? A single blow, an outrage not a degree worse than you insinuate, would transfer your property to us!!"

I stood staring at him for many minutes after he had ceased to speak, fascinated by the terrible, serpent-like gaze, until he continued with a welcome change of countenance: —

"I will not speak again to you, upon this topic, until one month has passed. You shall have time to consider the relative advantages of the two courses which are open to you. I should be sorry to hurry you to a decision. I am satisfied with having stated my feelings upon the subject, and pointed out to you the path of duty. Remember this day month; not one word sooner."

He then rose, and I left the room, much agitated and exhausted.

This interview, all the circumstances attending it, but most particularly the formidable expression of my uncle's countenance while he talked, though hypothetically, of *murder*, combined to arouse all my worst suspicions of him. I dreaded to look upon the face that had so recently worn the appalling livery of guilt and malignity. I regarded it with the mingled fear and loathing with which one looks upon an object which has tortured them in a nightmare.

In a few days after the interview, the particulars of which I have just detailed, I found a note upon my toilet-table, and on opening it I read as follows: —

"*My Dear Lady Margaret*,

You will be, perhaps, surprised to see a strange face in your room today. I have dismissed your Irish maid, and secured a French one to wait upon you; a step rendered necessary by my proposing shortly to visit the Continent with all my family.

Your faithful guardian, "*ARTHUR TYRELL*."

On inquiry, I found that my faithful attendant was actually gone, and far on her way to the town of Galway; and in her stead there appeared a tall, rawboned, ill-looking, elderly Frenchwoman, whose sullen and presuming manners seemed to imply that her vocation had never before been that of a lady's-maid. I could not help regarding her as a creature of my uncle's, and therefore to be dreaded, even had she been in no other way suspicious.

Days and weeks passed away without any, even a momentary doubt upon my part, as to the course to be pursued by me. The allotted period had at length elapsed; the day arrived upon which I was to communicate my decision to my uncle. Although my resolution had never for a moment wavered, I could not shake off the dread of the approaching colloquy; and my heart sank within me as I heard the expected summons. I had not seen my cousin Edward since the occurrence of the grand *éclaircissement*; he must have studiously avoided me; I suppose from policy, it could not have been from delicacy. I was prepared for a terrific burst of fury from my uncle, as soon as I should make known my determination; and I not unreasonably feared that some act of violence or of intimidation would next be resorted to. Filled with these dreary forebodings, I fearfully opened the study door, and the next minute I stood in my uncle's presence. He received me with a courtesy which I dreaded, as arguing a favourable anticipation respecting the answer which I was to give; and after some slight delay he began by saying —

"It will be a relief to both of us, I believe, to bring this conversation as soon as possible to an issue. You will excuse me, then, my dear niece, for speaking with a bluntness which, under other circumstances, would be unpardonable. You have, I am certain, given the subject of our last interview fair and serious consideration; and I trust that you are now prepared with candour to lay your answer before me. A few words will suffice; we perfectly understand one another."

He paused; and I, though feeling that I stood upon a mine which might in an instant explode, nevertheless answered with perfect composure: "I must now, sir, make the same reply which I did upon the last occasion, and I reiterate the declaration which I then made, that I never can nor will, while life and reason remain, consent to a union with my cousin Edward."

This announcement wrought no apparent change in Sir Arthur, except that he became deadly, almost lividly pale. He seemed lost in dark thought for a minute, and then, with a slight effort, said, "You have answered me honestly and directly; and you say your resolution is unchangeable; well, would it had been otherwise — would it had been otherwise — but be it as it is; I am satisfied."

He gave me his hand — it was cold and damp as death; under an assumed calmness, it was evident that he was fearfully agitated. He continued to hold my hand with an almost painful pressure, while, as if unconsciously, seeming to forget my presence, he muttered, "Strange, strange, strange, indeed! fatuity, helpless fatuity!" there was here a long pause. "Madness *indeed* to strain a cable that is rotten to the very heart; it must break — and then — all goes." There was again a pause of some minutes, after which, suddenly changing his voice and manner to one of wakeful alacrity, he exclaimed,

"Margaret, my son Edward shall plague you no more. He leaves this country tomorrow for France; he shall speak no more upon this subject — never, never more; whatever events depended upon your answer must now take their own course; but as for this fruitless proposal, it has been tried enough; it can be repeated no more."

At these words he coldly suffered my hand to drop, as if to express his total abandonment of all his projected schemes of alliance; and certainly the action, with the accompanying words, produced upon my mind a more solemn and depressing effect than I believed possible to have been caused by the course which I had determined to pursue; it struck upon my heart with an awe and heaviness which *will* accompany the accomplishment of an important and irrevocable act, even though no doubt or scruple remains to make it possible that the agent should wish it undone.

"Well," said my uncle, after a little time, "we now cease to speak upon this topic, never to resume it again. Remember you shall have no farther uneasiness from Edward; he leaves Ireland for France tomorrow; this will be a relief to you; may I depend upon your *honour* that no word touching the subject of this interview shall ever escape you?" I gave him the desired assurance; he said, "It is well; I am satisfied; we have nothing more, I believe, to say upon either side, and my presence must be a restraint upon you, I shall therefore bid you farewell." I then left the apartment, scarcely knowing what to think of the strange interview which had just taken place.

On the next day my uncle took occasion to tell me that Edward had actually sailed, if his intention had not been prevented by adverse winds or weather; and two days after he actually produced a letter from his son, written, as it said, *on board*, and despatched while the ship was getting under weigh. This was a great satisfaction to me, and as being likely to prove so, it was no doubt communicated to me by Sir Arthur.

During all this trying period I had found infinite consolation in the society and sympathy of my dear cousin Emily. I never, in afterlife, formed a friendship so close, so fervent, and upon which, in all its progress, I could look back with feelings of such unalloyed pleasure, upon whose termination I must ever dwell with so deep, so yet unembittered a sorrow. In cheerful converse with her I soon recovered my spirits considerably, and passed my time agreeably enough, although still in the utmost seclusion. Matters went on smoothly enough, although I could not help sometimes feeling a momentary, but horrible uncertainty respecting my uncle's character; which was not altogether unwarranted by the circumstances of the two trying interviews, the particulars of which I have just detailed. The unpleasant impression which these conferences were calculated to leave upon my mind was fast wearing away, when there occurred a circumstance, slight indeed in itself, but calculated irrepressibly to awaken all my worst suspicions, and to overwhelm me again with anxiety and terror.

I had one day left the house with my cousin Emily, in order to take a ramble of considerable length, for the purpose of sketching some favourite views, and we had walked about half a mile when I perceived that we had forgotten our drawing materials, the absence of which would have defeated the object of our walk. Laughing at our own thoughtlessness, we returned to the house, and leaving Emily outside, I ran upstairs to procure the drawing-books and pencils which lay in my bedroom. As I ran up the stairs, I was met by the tall, ill-looking Frenchwoman, evidently a good deal flurried; "Que veut Madame?" said she, with a more decided effort to be polite, than I had ever known her make before. "No, no — no matter," said I, hastily running by her in the direction of my room. "Madame," cried she, in a high key, "restez ici s'il vous plaît, votre chambre n'est pas faite." I continued to move on without heeding her. She was some way behind me, and feeling that she could not otherwise prevent my entrance, for I was now upon the very lobby, she made a desperate attempt to seize hold of my person; she succeeded in grasping the end of my shawl, which she drew from my shoulders, but slipping at the same time upon the polished oak floor, she fell at full length upon the boards. A little frightened as well as angry at the rudeness of this strange woman, I hastily pushed open the door of my room, at which I now stood, in order to escape from her; but great was my amazement on entering to find the apartment preoccupied. The window was open, and beside it stood two male figures; they appeared to be examining the fastenings of the casement, and their backs were turned towards the door. One of them was my uncle; they both had turned on my entrance, as if startled; the stranger was booted and cloaked, and wore a heavy, broadleafed hat over his brows; he turned but for a moment, and averted his face; but I had seen enough to convince me that he was no other than my cousin Edward. My uncle had some iron instrument in his hand, which he hastily concealed behind his back; and coming towards me, said something as if in an explanatory tone; but I was too much shocked and confounded to understand what it might be. He said something about "*repairs* — window-frames — cold, and safety." I did not wait, however, to ask or to receive explanations, but hastily left the room. As I went down stairs I thought I heard the voice of the Frenchwoman in all the shrill volubility of excuse, and others uttering suppressed but vehement imprecations, or what seemed to me to be such.

I joined my cousin Emily quite out of breath. I need not say that my head was too full of other things to think much of drawing for that day. I imparted to her frankly the cause of my alarms, but, at the same time, as gently as I could; and with tears she promised vigilance, devotion, and love. I never had reason for a moment to repent the unreserved confidence which I then reposed in her. She was no less surprised than I at the unexpected appearance of Edward, whose departure for France neither of us had for a moment doubted, but which was now proved by his actual presence to be nothing more than an imposture practised, I feared, for no good end. The situation in which I had found my uncle had very nearly removed all my doubts as to his designs; I magnified suspicions into certainties, and dreaded night after night that I should be murdered in my bed. The nervousness produced by sleepless nights and days of anxious fears increased the horrors of my situation to such a degree, that I at length wrote a letter to a Mr. Jefferies, an old and faithful friend of my father's, and perfectly acquainted with all his affairs, praying him, for God's sake, to relieve me from my present terrible situation, and communicating without reserve the nature and grounds of my suspicions. This letter I kept sealed and directed for two or three days always about my person, for discovery would have been ruinous, in expectation of an opportunity, which might be safely trusted, of having it placed in the postoffice; as neither Emily nor I were permitted to pass beyond the precincts of the demesne itself, which was surrounded by high walls formed of dry stone, the difficulty of procuring such an opportunity was greatly enhanced.

At this time Emily had a short conversation with her father, which she reported to me instantly. After some indifferent matter, he had asked her whether she and I were upon good terms, and whether I was unreserved in my disposition. She answered in the affirmative; and he then inquired whether I had been much surprised to find him in my chamber on the other day. She answered that I had been both surprised and amused. "And what did she think of George Wilson's appearance?" "Who?" inquired she. "Oh! the architect," he answered, "who is to contract for the repairs of the house; he is accounted a handsome fellow." "She could not see his face," said Emily, "and she was in such a hurry to escape that she scarcely observed him." Sir Arthur appeared satisfied, and the conversation ended.

This slight conversation, repeated accurately to me by Emily, had the effect of confirming, if indeed any thing was required to do so, all that I had before believed as to Edward's actual presence; and I naturally became, if possible, more anxious than ever to despatch the letter to Mr. Jefferies. An opportunity at length occurred. As Emily and I were walking one day near the gate of the demesne, a lad from the village happened to be passing down the avenue from the house; the spot was secluded, and as this person was not connected by service with those whose observation I dreaded, I committed the letter to his keeping, with strict injunctions that he should put it, without delay, into the receiver of the town postoffice; at the same time I added a suitable gratuity, and the man having made many protestations of punctuality, was soon out of sight. He was hardly gone when I began to doubt my discretion in having trusted him; but I had no better or safer means of despatching the letter, and I was not warranted in suspecting him of such wanton dishonesty as a disposition to tamper with it; but I could not be quite satisfied of its safety until I had received an answer, which could not arrive for a few days. Before I did, however, an event occurred which a little surprised me. I was sitting in my bedroom early in the day, reading by myself, when I heard a knock at the door. "Come in," said I, and my uncle entered the room. "Will you excuse me," said he, "I sought you in the parlour, and thence I have come here. I desired to say a word to you. I trust that you have hitherto found my conduct to you such as that of a guardian towards his ward should be." I dared not withhold my assent. "And," he continued, "I trust that you have not found me harsh or unjust, and that you have perceived, my dear niece, that I have sought to make this poor place as agreeable to you as may be?" I assented again; and he put his hand in his pocket, whence he drew a folded paper, and dashing it upon the table with startling emphasis he said, "Did you write that letter?" The sudden and fearful alteration of his voice, manner, and face, but more than all, the unexpected production of my letter to Mr. Jefferies, which I at once recognised, so confounded and terrified me, that I felt almost choking. I could not utter a word. "Did you write that letter?" he repeated, with slow and intense emphasis. "You did, liar and hypocrite. You dared to write that foul and infamous libel; but it shall be your last. Men will universally believe you mad, if I choose to call for an inquiry. I can make you appear so. The suspicions expressed in this letter are the hallucinations and alarms of a moping lunatic. I have defeated your first attempt, madam; and by the holy God, if ever you make another, chains, darkness, and the keeper's whip shall be your portion." With these astounding words he left the room, leaving me almost fainting.

I was now almost reduced to despair; my last cast had failed; I had no course left but that of escaping secretly from the castle, and placing myself under the protection of the nearest magistrate. I felt if this were not done, and speedily, that I should be *murdered*. No one, from mere description, can have an idea of the unmitigated horror of my situation; a helpless, weak, inexperienced girl, placed under the power, and wholly at the mercy of evil men, and feeling that I had it not in my power to escape for one moment from the malignant influences under which I was probably doomed to fall; with a consciousness, too, that if violence, if murder were designed, no human being would be near to aid me; my dying shriek would be lost in void space.

I had seen Edward but once during his visit, and as I did not meet him again, I began to think that he must have taken his departure; a conviction which was to a certain degree satisfactory, as I regarded his absence as indicating the removal of immediate danger. Emily also arrived circuitously at the same conclusion, and not without good grounds, for she managed indirectly to learn that Edward's black horse had actually been for a day and part of a night in the castle stables, just at the time of her brother's supposed visit. The horse had gone, and as she argued, the rider must have departed with it.

This point being so far settled, I felt a little less uncomfortable; when being one day alone in my bedroom, I happened to look out from the window, and to my unutterable horror, I beheld peering through an opposite casement, my cousin Edward's face. Had I seen the evil one himself in bodily shape, I could not have experienced a more sickening revulsion. I was too much appalled to move at once from the window, but I did so soon enough to avoid his eye. He was looking fixedly down into the narrow quadrangle upon which the window opened. I shrunk back unperceived, to pass the rest of the day in terror and despair. I went to my room early that night, but I was too miserable to sleep.

At about twelve o'clock, feeling very nervous, I determined to call my cousin Emily, who slept, you will remember, in the next room, which communicated with mine by a second door. By this private entrance I found my way into her chamber, and without difficulty persuaded her to return to my room and sleep with me. We accordingly lay down together, she undressed, and I with my clothes on, for I was every moment walking up and down the room, and felt too nervous and miserable to think of rest or comfort. Emily was soon fast asleep, and I lay awake, fervently longing for the first pale gleam of morning, and reckoning every stroke of the old clock with an impatience which made every hour appear like six.

It must have been about one o'clock when I thought I heard a slight noise at the partition door between Emily's room and mine, as if caused by somebody's turning the key in the lock. I held my breath, and the same sound was repeated at the second door of my room, that which opened upon the lobby; the sound was here distinctly caused by the revolution of the bolt in the lock, and it was followed by a slight pressure upon the door itself, as if to ascertain the security of the lock. The person, whoever it might be, was probably satisfied, for I heard the old boards of the lobby creak and strain, as if under the weight of somebody moving cautiously over them. My sense of hearing became unnaturally, almost painfully acute. I suppose the imagination added distinctness to sounds vague in themselves. I thought that I could actually hear the breathing of the person who was slowly returning along the lobby.

At the head of the staircase there appeared to occur a pause; and I could distinctly hear two or three sentences hastily whispered; the steps then descended the stairs with apparently less caution. I ventured to walk quickly and lightly to the lobby door, and attempted to open it; it was indeed fast locked upon the outside, as was also the other. I now felt that the dreadful hour was come; but one desperate expedient remained — it was to awaken Emily, and by our united strength, to attempt to force the partition door, which was slighter than the other, and through this to pass to the lower part of the house, whence it might be possible to escape to the grounds, and so to the village. I returned to the bedside, and shook Emily, but in vain; nothing that I could do availed to produce from her more than a few incoherent words; it was a deathlike sleep. She had certainly drunk of some narcotic, as, probably, had I also, in spite of all the caution with which I had examined every thing presented to us to eat or drink. I now attempted, with as little noise as possible, to force first one door, then the other; but all in vain. I believe no strength could have affected my object, for both doors opened inwards. I therefore collected whatever moveables I could carry thither, and piled them against the doors, so as to assist me in whatever attempts I should make to resist the entrance of those without. I then returned to the bed and endeavoured again, but fruitlessly, to awaken my cousin. It was not sleep, it was torpor, lethargy, death. I knelt down and prayed with an agony of earnestness; and then seating myself upon the bed, I awaited my fate with a kind of terrible tranquillity.

I heard a faint clanking sound from the narrow court which I have already mentioned, as if caused by the scraping of some iron instrument against stones or rubbish. I at first determined not to disturb the calmness which I now experienced, by uselessly watching the proceedings of those who sought my life; but as the sounds continued, the horrible curiosity which I felt overcame every other emotion, and I determined, at all hazards, to gratify it. I, therefore, crawled upon my knees to the window, so as to let the smallest possible portion of my head appear above the sill.

The moon was shining with an uncertain radiance upon the antique grey buildings, and obliquely upon the narrow court beneath; one side of it was therefore clearly illuminated, while the other was lost in obscurity, the sharp outlines of the old gables, with their nodding clusters of ivy, being at first alone visible. Whoever or whatever occasioned the noise which had excited my curiosity, was concealed under the shadow of the dark side of the quadrangle. I placed my hand over my eyes to shade them from the moonlight, which was so bright as to be almost dazzling, and, peering into the darkness, I first dimly, but afterwards gradually, almost with full distinctness, beheld the form of a man engaged in digging what appeared to be a rude hole close under the wall. Some implements, probably a shovel and pickaxe, lay beside him, and to these he every now and then applied himself as the nature of the ground required. He pursued his task rapidly, and with as little noise as possible. "So," thought I, as shovelful after shovelful, the dislodged rubbish mounted into a heap, "they are digging the grave in which, before two hours pass, I must lie, a cold, mangled corpse. I am *theirs* — I cannot escape." I felt as if my reason was leaving me. I started to my feet, and in mere despair I applied myself again to each of the two doors alternately. I strained every nerve and sinew, but I might as well have attempted, with my single strength, to force the building itself from its foundations. I threw myself madly upon the ground, and clasped my hands over my eyes as if to shut out the horrible images which crowded upon me.

The paroxysm passed away. I prayed once more with the bitter, agonised fervour of one who feels that the hour of death is present and inevitable. When I arose, I went once more to the window and looked out, just in time to see a shadowy figure glide stealthily along the wall. The task was finished. The catastrophe of the tragedy must soon be accomplished. I determined now to defend my life to the last; and that I might be able to do so with some effect, I searched the room for something which might serve as a weapon; but either through accident, or else in anticipation of such a possibility, every thing which might have been made available for such a purpose had been removed.

I must then die tamely and without an effort to defend myself. A thought suddenly struck me; might it not be possible to escape through the door, which the assassin must open in order to enter the room? I resolved to make the attempt. I felt assured that the door through which ingress to the room would be effected was that which opened upon the lobby. It was the more direct way, besides being, for obvious reasons, less liable to interruption than the other. I resolved, then, to place myself behind a projection of the wall, the shadow would serve fully to conceal me, and when the door should be opened, and before they should have discovered the identity of the occupant of the bed, to creep noiselessly from the room, and then to trust to Providence for escape. In order to facilitate this scheme, I removed all the lumber which I had heaped against the door; and I had nearly completed my arrangements, when I perceived the room suddenly darkened, by the close approach of some shadowy object to the window. On turning my eyes in that direction, I observed at the top of the casement, as if suspended from above, first the feet, then the legs, then the body, and at length the whole figure of a man present itself. It was Edward Tyrrell. He appeared to be guiding his descent so as to bring his feet upon the centre of the stone block which occupied the lower part of the window; and having secured his footing upon this, he kneeled down and began to gaze into the room. As the moon was gleaming into the chamber, and the bed-curtains were drawn, he was able to distinguish the bed itself and its contents. He appeared satisfied with his scrutiny, for he looked up and made a sign with his hand. He then applied his hands to the window-frame, which must have been ingeniously contrived for the purpose, for with apparently no resistance the whole frame, containing casement and all, slipped from its position in the wall, and was by him lowered into the room. The cold night wind waved the bed-curtains, and he paused for a moment; all was still again, and he stepped in upon the floor of the room. He held in his hand what appeared to be a steel instrument, shaped something like a long hammer. This he held rather behind him, while, with three long, *tip-toe* strides, he brought himself to the bedside. I felt that the discovery must now be made, and held my breath in momentary expectation of the execration in which he would vent his surprise and disappointment. I closed my eyes; there was a pause, but it was a short one. I heard two dull blows, given in rapid succession; a quivering sigh, and the long-drawn, heavy breathing of the sleeper was for ever suspended. I unclosed my eyes, and saw the murderer fling the quilt across the head of his victim; he then, with the instrument of death still in his hand, proceeded to the lobby-door, upon which he tapped sharply twice or thrice. A quick step was then heard approaching, and a voice whispered something from without. Edward answered, with a kind of shuddering chuckle, “Her ladyship is past complaining; unlock the door, in the devil’s name, unless you’re afraid to come in, and help me to lift her out of the window.” The key was turned in the lock, the door opened, and my uncle entered the room. I have told you already that I had placed myself under the shade of a projection of the wall, close to the door. I had instinctively shrunk down cowering towards the ground on the entrance of Edward through the window. When my uncle entered the room, he and his son both stood so very close to me that his hand was every moment upon the point of touching my face. I held my breath, and remained motionless as death.

“You had no interruption from the next room?” said my uncle.

“No,” was the brief reply.

“Secure the jewels, Ned; the French harpy must not lay her claws upon them. You’re a steady hand, by G — d; not much blood — eh?”

“Not twenty drops,” replied his son, “and those on the quilt.”

“I’m glad it’s over,” whispered my uncle again; “we must lift the — the *thing* through the window, and lay the rubbish over it.”

They then turned to the bedside, and, winding the bedclothes round the body, carried it between them slowly to the window, and exchanging a few brief words with some one below, they shoved it over the windowsill, and I heard it fall heavily on the ground underneath.

"I'll take the jewels," said my uncle; "there are two caskets in the lower drawer."

He proceeded, with an accuracy which, had I been more at ease, would have furnished me with matter of astonishment, to lay his hand upon the very spot where my jewels lay; and having possessed himself of them, he called to his son: —

"Is the rope made fast above?"

"I'm no fool; to be sure it is," replied he.

They then lowered themselves from the window; and I rose lightly and cautiously, scarcely daring to breathe, from my place of concealment, and was creeping towards the door, when I heard my uncle's voice, in a sharp whisper, exclaim, "Get up again; G — d d — n you, you've forgot to lock the room door"; and I perceived, by the straining of the rope which hung from above, that the mandate was instantly obeyed. Not a second was to be lost. I passed through the door, which was only closed, and moved as rapidly as I could, consistently with stillness, along the lobby. Before I had gone many yards, I heard the door through which I had just passed roughly locked on the inside. I glided down the stairs in terror, lest, at every corner, I should meet the murderer or one of his accomplices. I reached the hall, and listened, for a moment, to ascertain whether all was silent around. No sound was audible; the parlour windows opened on the park, and through one of them I might, I thought, easily effect my escape. Accordingly, I hastily entered; but, to my consternation, a candle was burning in the room, and by its light I saw a figure seated at the dinner-table, upon which lay glasses, bottles, and the other accompaniments of a drinking party. Two or three chairs were placed about the table, irregularly, as if hastily abandoned by their occupants. A single glance satisfied me that the figure was that of my French attendant. She was fast asleep, having, probably, drank deeply. There was something malignant and ghastly in the calmness of this bad woman's features, dimly illuminated as they were by the flickering blaze of the candle. A knife lay upon the table, and the terrible thought struck me— "Should I kill this sleeping accomplice in the guilt of the murderer, and thus secure my retreat?" Nothing could be easier; it was but to draw the blade across her throat, the work of a second.

An instant's pause, however, corrected me. "No," thought I, "the God who has conducted me thus far through the valley of the shadow of death, will not abandon me now. I will fall into their hands, or I will escape hence, but it shall be free from the stain of blood; His will be done." I felt a confidence arising from this reflection, an assurance of protection which I cannot describe. There were no other means of escape, so I advanced, with a firm step and collected mind, to the window. I noiselessly withdrew the bars, and unclosed the shutters; I pushed open the casement, and without waiting to look behind me, I ran with my utmost speed, scarcely feeling the ground beneath me, down the avenue, taking care to keep upon the grass which bordered it. I did not for a moment slacken my speed, and I had now gained the central point between the park-gate and the mansion-house. Here the avenue made a wider circuit, and in order to avoid delay, I directed my way across the smooth sward round which the carriageway wound, intending, at the opposite side of the level, at a point which I distinguished by a group of old birch trees, to enter again upon the beaten track, which was from thence tolerably direct to the gate. I had, with my utmost speed, got about half way across this broad flat, when the rapid tramp of a horse's hoofs struck upon my ear. My heart swelled in my bosom, as though I would smother. The clattering of galloping hoofs approached; I was pursued; they were now upon the sward on which I was running; there was not a bush or a bramble to shelter me; and, as if to render escape altogether desperate, the moon, which had hitherto been obscured, at this moment shone forth with a broad, clear light, which made every object distinctly visible. The sounds were now close behind me. I felt my knees bending under me, with the sensation which unnerves one in a dream. I reeled, I stumbled, I fell; and at the same instant the cause of my alarm wheeled past me at full gallop. It was one of the young fillies which pastured loose about the park, whose frolics had thus all but maddened me with terror. I scrambled to my feet, and rushed on with weak but rapid steps, my sportive companion still galloping round and round me with many a frisk and fling, until, at length, more dead than alive, I reached the avenue-gate, and crossed the stile, I scarce knew how. I ran through the village, in which all was silent as the grave, until my progress was arrested by the hoarse voice of a sentinel, who cried "Who goes there?" I felt that I was now safe. I turned in the direction of the voice, and fell fainting at the soldier's feet.

When I came to myself, I was sitting in a miserable hovel, surrounded by strange faces, all bespeaking curiosity and compassion. Many soldiers were in it also; indeed, as I afterwards found, it was employed as a guardroom by a detachment of troops quartered for that night in the town. In a few words I informed their officer of the circumstances which had occurred, describing also the appearance of the persons engaged in the murder; and he, without further loss of time than was necessary to procure the attendance of a magistrate, proceeded to the mansion-house of Carrickleigh, taking with him a party of his men. But the villains had discovered their mistake, and had effected their escape before the arrival of the military.

The Frenchwoman was, however, arrested in the neighbourhood upon the next day. She was tried and condemned at the ensuing assizes; and previous to her execution confessed that "*she had a hand in making Hugh Tisdall's bed*." She had been a housekeeper in the castle at the time, and a *chère amie* of my uncle's. She was, in reality, able to speak English like a native, but had exclusively used the French language, I suppose to facilitate her designs. She died the same hardened wretch she had lived, confessing her crimes only, as she alleged, that her doing so might involve Sir Arthur Tyrrell, the great author of her guilt and misery, and whom she now regarded with unmitigated detestation.

With the particulars of Sir Arthur's and his son's escape, as far as they are known, you are acquainted. You are also in possession of their after fate; the terrible, the tremendous retribution which, after long delays of many years, finally overtook and crushed them. Wonderful and inscrutable are the dealings of God with his creatures!

Deep and fervent as must always be my gratitude to heaven for my deliverance, effected by a chain of providential occurrences, the failing of a single link of which must have ensured my destruction, it was long before I could look back upon it with other feelings than those of bitterness, almost of agony. The only being that had ever really loved me, my nearest and dearest friend, ever ready to sympathise, to counsel, and to assist; the gayest, the gentlest, the warmest heart; the only creature on earth that cared for me; *her* life had been the price of my deliverance; and I then uttered the wish, which no event of my long and sorrowful life has taught me to recall, that she had been spared, and that, in her stead, *I* were mouldering in the grave, forgotten, and at rest.

SCHALKEN THE PAINTER

“For he is not a man as I am that we should come together; neither is there any that might lay his hand upon us both. Let him, therefore, take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me.”

There exists, at this moment, in good preservation a remarkable work of Schalken’s. The curious management of its lights constitutes, as usual in his pieces, the chief apparent merit of the picture. I say *apparent*, for in its subject, and not in its handling, however exquisite, consists its real value. The picture represents the interior of what might be a chamber in some antique religious building; and its foreground is occupied by a female figure, in a species of white robe, part of which is arranged so as to form a veil. The dress, however, is not that of any religious order. In her hand the figure bears a lamp, by which alone her figure and face are illuminated; and her features wear such an arch smile, as well becomes a pretty woman when practising some prankish roguery; in the background, and, excepting where the dim red light of an expiring fire serves to define the form, in total shadow, stands the figure of a man dressed in the old Flemish fashion, in an attitude of alarm, his hand being placed upon the hilt of his sword, which he appears to be in the act of drawing.

There are some pictures, which impress one, I know not how, with a conviction that they represent not the mere ideal shapes and combinations which have floated through the imagination of the artist, but scenes, faces, and situations which have actually existed. There is in that strange picture, something that stamps it as the representation of a reality.

And such in truth it is, for it faithfully records a remarkable and mysterious occurrence, and perpetuates, in the face of the female figure, which occupies the most prominent place in the design, an accurate portrait of Rose Velderkaust, the niece of Gerard Douw, the first, and, I believe, the only love of Godfrey Schalken. My great grandfather knew the painter well; and from Schalken himself he learned the fearful story of the painting, and from him too he ultimately received the picture itself as a bequest. The story and the picture have become heirlooms in my family, and having described the latter, I shall, if you please, attempt to relate the tradition which has descended with the canvas.

There are few forms on which the mantle of romance hangs more ungracefully than upon that of the uncouth Schalken — the boorish but most cunning worker in oils, whose pieces delight the critics of our day almost as much as his manners disgusted the refined of his own; and yet this man, so rude, so dogged, so slovenly, in the midst of his celebrity, had in his obscure, but happier days, played the hero in a wild romance of mystery and passion.

When Schalken studied under the immortal Gerard Douw, he was a very young man; and in spite of his phlegmatic temperament, he at once fell over head and ears in love with the beautiful niece of his wealthy master. Rose Velderkaust was still younger than he, having not yet attained her seventeenth year, and, if tradition speaks truth, possessed all the soft and dimpling charms of the fair, light-haired Flemish maidens. The young painter loved honestly and fervently. His frank adoration was rewarded. He declared his love, and extracted a faltering confession in return. He was the happiest and proudest painter in all Christendom. But there was somewhat to dash his elation; he was poor and undistinguished. He dared not ask old Gerard for the hand of his sweet ward. He must first win a reputation and a competence.

There were, therefore, many dread uncertainties and cold days before him; he had to fight his way against sore odds. But he had won the heart of dear Rose Velderkaust, and that was half the battle. It is needless to say his exertions were redoubled, and his lasting celebrity proves that his industry was not unrewarded by success.

These ardent labours, and worse still, the hopes that elevated and beguiled them, were however, destined to experience a sudden interruption — of a character so strange and mysterious as to baffle all inquiry and to throw over the events themselves a shadow of preternatural horror.

Schalken had one evening outstayed all his fellow-pupils, and still pursued his work in the deserted room. As the daylight was fast falling, he laid aside his colours, and applied himself to the completion of a sketch on which he had expressed extraordinary pains. It was a religious composition, and represented the temptations of a pot-bellied Saint Anthony. The young artist, however destitute of elevation, had, nevertheless, discernment enough to be dissatisfied with his own work, and many were the patient erasures and improvements which saint and devil underwent, yet all in vain. The large, oldfashioned room was silent, and, with the exception of himself, quite emptied of its usual inmates. An hour had thus passed away, nearly two, without any improved result. Daylight had already declined, and twilight was deepening into the darkness of night. The patience of the young painter was exhausted, and he stood before his unfinished production, angry and mortified, one hand buried in the folds of his long hair, and the other holding the piece of charcoal which had so ill-performed its office, and which he now rubbed, without much regard to the sable streaks it produced, with irritable pressure upon his ample Flemish inexpressibles. “Curse the subject!” said the young man aloud; “curse the picture, the devils, the saint— “

At this moment a short, sudden sniff uttered close beside him made the artist turn sharply round, and he now, for the first time, became aware that his labours had been overlooked by a stranger. Within about a yard and half, and rather behind him, there stood the figure of an elderly man in a cloak and broad-brimmed, conical hat; in his hand, which was protected with a heavy gauntlet-shaped glove, he carried a long ebony walking-stick, surmounted with what appeared, as it glittered dimly in the twilight, to be a massive head of gold, and upon his breast, through the folds of the cloak, there shone the links of a rich chain of the same metal. The room was so obscure that nothing further of the appearance of the figure could be ascertained, and his hat threw his features into profound shadow. It would not have been easy to conjecture the age of the intruder; but a quantity of dark hair escaping from beneath this sombre hat, as well as his firm and upright carriage served to indicate that his years could not yet exceed threescore, or thereabouts. There was an air of gravity and importance about the garb of the person, and something indescribably odd, I might say awful, in the perfect, stone-like stillness of the figure, that effectually checked the testy comment which had at once risen to the lips of the irritated artist. He, therefore, as soon as he had sufficiently recovered his surprise, asked the stranger, civilly, to be seated, and desired to know if he had any message to leave for his master.

“Tell Gerard Douw,” said the unknown, without altering his attitude in the smallest degree, “that Minheer Vanderhausen, of Rotterdam, desires to speak with him on tomorrow evening at this hour, and if he please, in this room, upon matters of weight; that is all.”

The stranger, having finished this message, turned abruptly, and, with a quick, but silent step quitted the room, before Schalken had time to say a word in reply. The young man felt a curiosity to see in what direction the burgher of Rotterdam would turn, on quitting the studio, and for that purpose he went directly to the window which commanded the door. A lobby of considerable extent intervened between the inner door of the painter’s room and the street entrance, so that Schalken occupied the post of observation before the old man could possibly have reached the street. He watched in vain, however. There was no other mode of exit. Had the queer old man vanished, or was he lurking about the recesses of the lobby for some sinister purpose? This last suggestion filled the mind of Schalken with a vague uneasiness, which was so unaccountably intense as to make him alike afraid to remain in the room alone, and reluctant to pass through the lobby. However, with an effort which appeared very disproportioned to the occasion, he summoned resolution to leave the room, and, having locked the door and thrust the key in his pocket, without looking to the right or left, he traversed the passage which had so recently, perhaps still, contained the person of his mysterious visitant, scarcely venturing to breathe till he had arrived in the open street.

“Minheer Vanderhausen!” said Gerard Douw within himself, as the appointed hour approached, “Minheer Vanderhausen, of Rotterdam! I never heard of the man till yesterday. What can he want of me? A portrait, perhaps, to be painted; or a poor relation to be apprenticed; or a collection to be valued; or — pshaw! there’s no one in Rotterdam to leave me a legacy. Well, whatever the business may be, we shall soon know it all.”

It was now the close of day, and again every easel, except that of Schalken, was deserted. Gerard Douw was pacing the apartment with the restless step of impatient expectation, sometimes pausing to glance over the work of one of his absent pupils, but more frequently placing himself at the window, from whence he might observe the passengers who threaded the obscure by-street in which his studio was placed.

“Said you not, Godfrey,” exclaimed Douw, after a long and fruitful gaze from his post of observation, and turning to Schalken, “that the hour he appointed was about seven by the clock of the Stadhouse?”

"It had just told seven when I first saw him, sir," answered the student.

"The hour is close at hand, then," said the master, consulting a horologe as large and as round as an orange. "Minheer Vanderhausen from Rotterdam — is it not so?"

"Such was the name."

"And an elderly man, richly clad?" pursued Douw, musingly.

"As well as I might see," replied his pupil; "he could not be young, nor yet very old, neither; and his dress was rich and grave, as might become a citizen of wealth and consideration."

At this moment the sonorous boom of the Stadhouse clock told, stroke after stroke, the hour of seven; the eyes of both master and student were directed to the door; and it was not until the last peal of the bell had ceased to vibrate, that Douw exclaimed ——

"So, so; we shall have his worship presently, that is, if he means to keep his hour; if not, you may wait for him, Godfrey, if you court his acquaintance. But what, after all, if it should prove but a mummery got up by Vankarp, or some such wag? I wish you had run all risks, and cudgelled the old burgomaster soundly. I'd wager a dozen of Rhenish, his worship would have unmasked, and pleaded old acquaintance in a trice."

"Here he comes, sir," said Schalken, in a low monitory tone; and instantly, upon turning towards the door, Gerard Douw observed the same figure which had, on the day before, so unexpectedly greeted his pupil Schalken.

There was something in the air of the figure which at once satisfied the painter that there was no masquerading in the case, and that he really stood in the presence of a man of worship; and so, without hesitation, he doffed his cap, and courteously saluting the stranger, requested him to be seated. The visitor waved his hand slightly, as if in acknowledgment of the courtesy, but remained standing.

"I have the honour to see Minheer Vanderhausen of Rotterdam?" said Gerard Douw.

"The same," was the laconic reply of his visitor.

"I understand your worship desires to speak with me," continued Douw, "and I am here by appointment to wait your commands."

"Is that a man of trust?" said Vanderhausen, turning towards Schalken, who stood at a little distance behind his master.

“Certainly,” replied Gerard.

“Then let him take this box, and get the nearest jeweller or goldsmith to value its contents, and let him return hither with a certificate of the valuation.”

At the same time, he placed a small case about nine inches square in the hands of Gerard Douw, who was as much amazed at its weight as at the strange abruptness with which it was handed to him. In accordance with the wishes of the stranger, he delivered it into the hands of Schalken, and repeating his direction, despatched him upon the mission.

Schalken disposed his precious charge securely beneath the folds of his cloak, and rapidly traversing two or three narrow streets, he stopped at a corner house, the lower part of which was then occupied by the shop of a Jewish goldsmith. He entered the shop, and calling the little Hebrew into the obscurity of its back recesses, he proceeded to lay before him Vanderhausen’s casket. On being examined by the light of a lamp, it appeared entirely cased with lead, the outer surface of which was much scraped and soiled, and nearly white with age. This having been partially removed, there appeared beneath a box of some hard wood; which also they forced open and after the removal of two or three folds of linen, they discovered its contents to be a mass of golden ingots, closely packed, and, as the Jew declared, of the most perfect quality. Every ingot underwent the scrutiny of the little Jew, who seemed to feel an epicurean delight in touching and testing these morsels of the glorious metal; and each one of them was replaced in its berth with the exclamation: “*Mein Gott*, how very perfect! not one grain of alloy — beautiful, beautiful!” The task was at length finished, and the Jew certified under his hand the value of the ingots submitted to his examination, to amount to many thousand rix-dollars. With the desired document in his pocket, and the rich box of gold carefully pressed under his arm, and concealed by his cloak, he retraced his way, and entering the studio, found his master and the stranger in close conference. Schalken had no sooner left the room, in order to execute the commission he had taken in charge, than Vanderhausen addressed Gerard Douw in the following terms: ——

“I cannot tarry with you tonight more than a few minutes, and so I shall shortly tell you the matter upon which I come. You visited the town of Rotterdam some four months ago, and then I saw in the church of St.

Lawrence your niece, Rose Velderkaust. I desire to marry her; and if I satisfy you that I am wealthier than any husband you can dream of for her, I expect that you will forward my suit with your authority. If you approve my proposal, you must close with it here and now, for I cannot wait for calculations and delays."

Gerard Douw was hugely astonished by the nature of Minheer Vanderhausen's communication, but he did not venture to express surprise; for besides the motives supplied by prudence and politeness, the painter experienced a kind of chill and oppression like that which is said to intervene when one is placed in unconscious proximity with the object of a natural antipathy — an undefined but overpowering sensation, while standing in the presence of the eccentric stranger, which made him very unwilling to say anything which might reasonably offend him.

"I have no doubt," said Gerard, after two or three prefatory hems, "that the alliance which you propose would prove alike advantageous and honourable to my niece; but you must be aware that she has a will of her own, and may not acquiesce in what *we* may design for her advantage."

"Do not seek to deceive me, sir painter," said Vanderhausen; "you are her guardian — she is your ward — she is mine if *you* like to make her so."

The man of Rotterdam moved forward a little as he spoke, and Gerard Douw, he scarce knew why, inwardly prayed for the speedy return of Schalken.

"I desire," said the mysterious gentleman, "to place in your hands at once an evidence of my wealth, and a security for my liberal dealing with your niece. The lad will return in a minute or two with a sum in value five times the fortune which she has a right to expect from her husband. This shall lie in your hands, together with her dowry, and you may apply the united sum as suits her interest best; it shall be all exclusively hers while she lives: is that liberal?"

Douw assented, and inwardly acknowledged that fortune had been extraordinarily kind to his niece; the stranger, he thought, must be both wealthy and generous, and such an offer was not to be despised, though made by a humourist, and one of no very prepossessing presence. Rose had no very high pretensions for she had but a modest dowry, which she owed entirely to the generosity of her uncle; neither had she any right to raise exceptions on the score of birth, for her own origin was far from splendid, and as the other objections, Gerald resolved, and indeed, by the usages of the time, was warranted in resolving, not to listen to them for a moment.

"Sir" said he, addressing the stranger, "your offer is liberal, and whatever hesitation I may feel in closing with it immediately, arises solely from my not having the honour of knowing anything of your family or station. Upon these points you can, of course, satisfy me without difficulty?'

"As to my respectability," said the stranger, drily, "you must take that for granted at present; pester me with no inquiries; you can discover nothing more about me than I choose to make known. You shall have sufficient security for my respectability — my word, if you are honourable: if you are sordid, my gold."

"A testy old gentleman," thought Douw, "he must have his own way; but, all things considered, I am not justified to declining his offer. I will not pledge myself unnecessarily, however."

"You will not pledge yourself unnecessarily," said Vanderhausen, strangely uttering the very words which had just floated through the mind of his companion; "but you will do so if it is necessary, I presume; and I will show you that I consider it indispensable. If the gold I mean to leave in your hands satisfy you, and if you don't wish my proposal to be at once withdrawn, you must, before I leave this room, write your name to this engagement."

Having thus spoken, he placed a paper in the hands of the master, the contents of which expressed an engagement entered into by Gerard Douw, to give to Wilken Vanderhausen of Rotterdam, in marriage, Rose Velderkaust, and so forth, within one week of the date thereof. While the painter was employed in reading this covenant, by the light of a twinkling oil lamp in the far wall of the room, Schalken, as we have stated, entered the studio, and having delivered the box and the valuation of the Jew, into the hands of the stranger, he was about to retire, when Vanderhausen called to him to wait; and, presenting the case and the certificate to Gerard Douw, he paused in silence until he had satisfied himself, by an inspection of both, respecting the value of the pledge left in his hands. At length he said ——

"Are you content?"

The painter said he would fain have another day to consider.

"Not an hour," said the suitor, apathetically.

"Well then," said Douw, with a sore effort, "I am content, it is a bargain."

“Then sign at once,” said Vanderhausen, “for I am weary.”

At the same time he produced a small case of writing materials, and Gerard signed the important document.

“Let this youth witness the covenant,” said the old man; and Godfrey Schalken unconsciously attested the instrument which for ever bereft him of his dear Rose Velderkaust.

The compact being thus completed, the strange visitor folded up the paper, and stowed it safely in an inner pocket.

“I will visit you tomorrow night at nine o’clock, at your own house, Gerard Douw, and will see the object of our contract;” and so saying Wilken Vanderhausen moved stiffly, but rapidly, out of the room.

Schalken, eager to resolve his doubts, had placed himself by the window, in order to watch the street entrance; but the experiment served only to support his suspicions, for the old man did not issue from the door. This was *very* strange, odd, nay fearful. He and his master returned together, and talked but little on the way, for each had his own subjects of reflection, of anxiety, and of hope. Schalken, however, did not know the ruin which menaced his dearest projects.

Gerard Douw knew nothing of the attachment which had sprung up between his pupil and his niece; and even if he had, it is doubtful whether he would have regarded its existence as any serious obstruction to the wishes of Minheer Vanderhausen. Marriages were then and there matters of traffic and calculation; and it would have appeared as absurd in the eyes of the guardian to make a mutual attachment an essential element in a contract of the sort, as it would have been to draw up his bonds and receipts in the language of romance.

The painter, however, did not communicate to his niece the important step which he had taken in her behalf, a forebearance caused not by any anticipated opposition on her part, but solely by a ludicrous consciousness that if she were to ask him for a description of her destined bridegroom, he would be forced to confess that he had not once seen his face, and if called upon, would find it absolutely impossible to identify him. Upon the next day, Gerard Douw, after dinner, called his niece to him and having scanned her person with an air of satisfaction, he took her hand, and looking upon her pretty innocent face with a smile of kindness, he said: ——

“Rose, my girl, that face of yours will make your fortune.” Rose blushed and smiled. “Such faces and such tempers seldom go together, and when they do, the compound is a love charm, few heads or hearts can resist; trust me, you will soon be a bride, girl. But this is trifling, and I am pressed for time, so make ready the large room by eight o’clock tonight, and give directions for supper at nine. I expect a friend; and observe me, child, do you trick yourself out handsomely. I will not have him think us poor or sluttish.”

With these words he left her, and took his way to the room in which his pupils worked.

When the evening closed in, Gerard called Schalken, who was about to take his departure to his own obscure and comfortless lodgings, and asked him to come home and sup with Rose and Vanderhausen. The invitation was, of course, accepted and Gerard Douw and his pupil soon found themselves in the handsome and, even then, antique chamber, which had been prepared for the reception of the stranger. A cheerful wood fire blazed in the hearth, a little at one side of which an oldfashioned table, which shone in the firelight like burnished gold, was awaiting the supper, for which preparations were going forward; and ranged with exact regularity, stood the tall-backed chairs, whose ungracefulness was more than compensated by their comfort. The little party, consisting of Rose, her uncle, and the artist, awaited the arrival of the expected visitor with considerable impatience. Nine o’clock at length came, and with it a summons at the street door, which being speedily answered, was followed by a slow and emphatic tread upon the staircase; the steps moved heavily across the lobby, the door of the room in which the party we have described were assembled slowly opened, and there entered a figure which startled, almost appalled, the phlegmatic Dutchmen, and nearly made Rose scream with terror. It was the form, and arrayed in the garb of Minheer Vanderhausen; the air, the gait, the height were the same, but the features had never been seen by any of the party before. The stranger stopped at the door of the room, and displayed his form and face completely. He wore a dark-coloured cloth cloak, which was short and full, not falling quite to his knees; his legs were cased in dark purple silk stockings, and his shoes were adorned with roses of the same colour. The opening of the cloak in front showed the under-suit to consist of some very dark, perhaps sable material, and his hands were enclosed in a pair of heavy leather gloves, which ran up considerably above the wrist, in the manner of a gauntlet. In one hand he carried his walking-stick and his hat, which he had removed, and the other hung heavily by his side. A quantity of grizzled hair descended in long tresses from his head, and rested upon the plaits of a stiff ruff, which effectually concealed his neck. So far all was well; but the face! — all the flesh of the face was coloured with the bluish leaden hue, which is sometimes produced by metallic medicines, administered in excessive quantities; the eyes showed an undue proportion of muddy white, and had a certain indefinable character of insanity; the hue of the lips bearing the usual relation to that of the face, was, consequently, nearly black; and the entire character of the face was sensual, malignant, and even satanic. It was remarkable that the worshipful stranger suffered as little as possible of his flesh to appear, and that during his visit he did not once remove his gloves. Having stood for some moments at the door, Gerard Douw at length found breath and collectedness to bid him welcome, and with a mute inclination of the head, the stranger stepped forward into the room. There was something indescribably odd, even horrible, about all his motions, something undefinable, that was unnatural, unhuman; it was as if the limbs were guided and directed by a spirit unused to the management of bodily machinery. The stranger spoke hardly at all during his visit, which did not exceed half an hour; and the host himself could scarcely muster courage enough to utter the few necessary salutations and courtesies; and, indeed, such was the nervous terror which the presence of Vanderhausen inspired, that very little would have made all his entertainers fly in downright panic from the room. They had not so far lost all self-possession, however, as to fail to observe two strange peculiarities of their visitor. During his stay his eyelids did not once close, or, indeed, move in the slightest degree; and farther, there was a deathlike stillness in his whole person, owing to the absence of the heaving motion of the chest, caused by the process of respiration. These two peculiarities, though when told they may appear trifling, produced a very striking and unpleasant effect when seen and observed. Vanderhausen at length relieved the painter of Leyden of his inauspicious presence; and with no trifling sense of relief the little party heard the street door close after him.

“Dear uncle,” said Rose, “what a frightful man! I would not see him again for the wealth of the States.”

“Tush, foolish girl,” said Douw, whose sensations were anything but comfortable. “A man may be as ugly as the devil, and yet, if his heart and actions are good, he is worth all the pretty-faced perfumed puppies that walk the Mall. Rose, my girl, it is very true he has not thy pretty face, but I know him to be wealthy and liberal; and were he ten times more ugly, these two virtues would be enough to counter balance all his deformity, and if not sufficient actually to alter the shape and hue of his features, at least enough to prevent one thinking them so much amiss.”

“Do you know, uncle,” said Rose, “when I saw him standing at the door, I could not get it out of my head that I saw the old painted wooden figure that used to frighten me so much in the Church of St. Laurence at Rotterdam.”

Gerard laughed, though he could not help inwardly acknowledging the justness of the comparison. He was resolved, however, as far as he could, to check his niece’s disposition to dilate upon the ugliness of her intended bridegroom, although he was not a little pleased, as well as puzzled, to observe that she appeared totally exempt from that mysterious dread of the stranger which, he could not disguise it from himself, considerably affected him, as also his pupil Godfrey Schalken.

Early on the next day there arrived, from various quarters of the town, rich presents of silks, velvets, jewellery, and so forth, for Rose; and also a packet directed to Gerard Douw, which on being opened, was found to contain a contract of marriage, formally drawn up, between Wilken Vanderhausen of the *Boom-quay*, in Rotterdam, and Rose Velderkaust of Leyden, niece to Gerard Douw, master in the art of painting, also of the same city; and containing engagements on the part of Vanderhausen to make settlements upon his bride, far more splendid than he had before led her guardian to believe likely, and which were to be secured to her use in the most unexceptionable manner possible — the money being placed in the hand of Gerard Douw himself.

I have no sentimental scenes to describe, no cruelty of guardians, no magnanimity of wards, no agonies, or transport of lovers. The record I have to make is one of sordidness, levity, and heartlessness. In less than a week after the first interview which we have just described, the contract of marriage was fulfilled, and Schalken saw the prize which he would have risked existence to secure, carried off in solemn pomp by his repulsive rival. For two or three days he absented himself from the school; he then returned and worked, if with less cheerfulness, with far more dogged resolution than before; the stimulus of love had given place to that of ambition. Months passed away, and, contrary to his expectation, and, indeed, to the direct promise of the parties, Gerard Douw heard nothing of his niece or her worshipful spouse. The interest of the money, which was to have been demanded in quarterly sums, lay unclaimed in his hands.

He began to grow extremely uneasy. Minheer Vanderhausen's direction in Rotterdam he was fully possessed of; after some irresolution he finally determined to journey thither — a trifling undertaking, and easily accomplished — and thus to satisfy himself of the safety and comfort of his ward, for whom he entertained an honest and strong affection. His search was in vain, however; no one in Rotterdam had ever heard of Minheer Vanderhausen. Gerard Douw left not a house in the *Boom-quay* untried, but all in vain. No one could give him any information whatever touching the object of his inquiry, and he was obliged to return to Leyden nothing wiser and far more anxious, than when he had left it.

On his arrival he hastened to the establishment from which Vanderhausen had hired the lumbering, though, considering the times, most luxurious vehicle, which the bridal party had employed to convey them to Rotterdam. From the driver of this machine he learned, that having proceeded by slow stages, they had late in the evening approached Rotterdam; but that before they entered the city, and while yet nearly a mile from it, a small party of men, soberly clad, and after the old fashion, with peaked beards and moustaches, standing in the centre of the road, obstructed the further progress of the carriage. The driver reined in his horses, much fearing, from the obscurity of the hour, and the loneliness, of the road, that some mischief was intended. His fears were, however, somewhat allayed by his observing that these strange men carried a large litter, of an antique shape, and which they immediately set down upon the pavement, whereupon the bridegroom, having opened the coach-door from within, descended, and having assisted his bride to do likewise, led her, weeping bitterly, and wringing her hands, to the litter, which they both entered. It was then raised by the men who surrounded it, and speedily carried towards the city, and before it had proceeded very far, the darkness concealed it from the view of the Dutch coachman. In the inside of the vehicle he found a purse, whose contents more than thrice paid the hire of the carriage and man. He saw and could tell nothing more of Minheer Vanderhausen and his beautiful lady.

This mystery was a source of profound anxiety and even grief to Gerard Douw. There was evidently fraud in the dealing of Vanderhausen with him, though for what purpose committed he could not imagine. He greatly doubted how far it was possible for a man possessing such a countenance to be anything but a villain, and every day that passed without his hearing from or of his niece, instead of inducing him to forget his fears, on the contrary tended more and more to aggravate them. The loss of her cheerful society tended also to depress his spirits; and in order to dispel the gloom, which often crept upon his mind after his daily occupations were over, he was wont frequently to ask Schalken to accompany him home, and share his otherwise solitary supper.

One evening, the painter and his pupil were sitting by the fire, having accomplished a comfortable meal, and had yielded to the silent and delicious melancholy of digestion, when their ruminations were disturbed by a loud sound at the street door, as if occasioned by some person rushing and scrambling vehemently against it. A domestic had run without delay to ascertain the cause of the disturbance, and they heard him twice or thrice interrogate the applicant for admission, but without eliciting any other answer but a sustained reiteration of the sounds. They heard him then open the hall-door, and immediately there followed a light and rapid tread on the staircase. Schalken advanced towards the door. It opened before he reached it, and Rose rushed into the room. She looked wild, fierce and haggard with terror and exhaustion, but her dress surprised them as much as even her unexpected appearance. It consisted of a kind of white woollen wrapper, made close about the neck, and descending to the very ground. It was much deranged and travelsoiled. The poor creature had hardly entered the chamber when she fell senseless on the floor. With some difficulty they succeeded in reviving her, and on recovering her senses, she instantly exclaimed, in a tone of terror rather than mere impatience: ——

“Wine! wine! quickly, or I’m lost!”

Astonished and almost scared at the strange agitation in which the call was made, they at once administered to her wishes, and she drank some wine with a haste and eagerness which surprised them. She had hardly swallowed it, when she exclaimed, with the same urgency:

"Food, for God's sake, food, at once, or I perish."

A considerable fragment of a roast joint was upon the table, and Schalken immediately began to cut some, but he was anticipated, for no sooner did she see it than she caught it, a more than mortal image of famine, and with her hands, and even with her teeth, she tore off the flesh, and swallowed it. When the paroxysm of hunger had been a little appeased, she appeared on a sudden overcome with shame, or it may have been that other more agitating thoughts overpowered and scared her, for she began to weep bitterly and to wring her hands.

"Oh, send for a minister of God," said she; "I am not safe till he comes; send for him speedily."

Gerard Douw despatched a messenger instantly, and prevailed on his niece to allow him to surrender his bed chamber to her use. He also persuaded her to retire to it at once to rest; her consent was extorted upon the condition that they would not leave her for a moment.

"Oh that the holy man were here," she said; "he can deliver me: the dead and the living can never be one: God has forbidden it."

With these mysterious words she surrendered herself to their guidance, and they proceeded to the chamber which Gerard Douw had assigned to her use.

"Do not, do not leave me for a moment," said she; "I am lost for ever if you do."

Gerard Douw's chamber was approached through a spacious apartment, which they were now about to enter. He and Schalken each carried a candle, so that a sufficiency of light was cast upon all surrounding objects. They were now entering the large chamber, which as I have said, communicated with Douw's apartment, when Rose suddenly stopped, and, in a whisper which thrilled them both with horror, she said: ——

"Oh, God! he is here! he is here! See, see! there he goes!"

She pointed towards the door of the inner room, and Schalken thought he saw a shadowy and ill-defined form gliding into that apartment. He drew his sword, and, raising the candle so as to throw its light with increased distinctness upon the objects in the room, he entered the chamber into which the shadow had glided. No figure was there — nothing but the furniture which belonged to the room, and yet he could not be deceived as to the fact that something had moved before them into the chamber. A sickening dread came upon him, and the cold perspiration broke out in heavy drops upon his forehead; nor was he more composed, when he heard the increased urgency and agony of entreaty, with which Rose implored them not to leave her for a moment.

"I saw him," said she; "he's here. I cannot be deceived; I know him; he's by me; he is with me; he's in the room. Then, for God's sake, as you would save me, do not stir from beside me."

They at length prevailed upon her to lie down upon the bed, where she continued to urge them to stay by her. She frequently uttered incoherent sentences, repeating, again and again, "the dead and the living cannot be one: God has forbidden it." And then again, "Rest to the wakeful — sleep to the sleepwalkers." These and such mysterious and broken sentences, she continued to utter until the clergyman arrived. Gerard Douw began to fear, naturally enough, that terror or ill-treatment, had unsettled the poor girl's intellect, and he half suspected, by the suddenness of her appearance, the unseasonableness of the hour, and above all, from the wildness and terror of her manner, that she had made her escape from some place of confinement for lunatics, and was in imminent fear of pursuit. He resolved to summon medical advice as soon as the mind of his niece had been in some measure set at rest by the offices of the clergyman whose attendance she had so earnestly desired; and until this object had been attained, he did not venture to put any questions to her, which might possibly, by reviving painful or horrible recollections, increase her agitation. The clergyman soon arrived — a man of ascetic countenance and venerable age — one whom Gerard Douw respected very much, forasmuch as he was a veteran polemic, though one perhaps more dreaded as a combatant than beloved as a Christian — of pure morality, subtle brain, and frozen heart. He entered the chamber which communicated with that in which Rose reclined and immediately on his arrival, she requested him to pray for her, as for one who lay in the hands of Satan, and who could hope for deliverance only from heaven.

That you may distinctly understand all the circumstances of the event which I am going to describe, it is necessary to state the relative position of the parties who were engaged in it. The old clergyman and Schalken were in the anteroom of which I have already spoken; Rose lay in the inner chamber, the door of which was open; and by the side of the bed, at her urgent desire, stood her guardian; a candle burned in the bedchamber, and three were lighted in the outer apartment. The old man now cleared his voice as if about to commence, but before he had time to begin, a sudden gust of air blew out the candle which served to illuminate the room in which the poor girl lay, and she, with hurried alarm, exclaimed: ——

"Godfrey, bring in another candle; the darkness is unsafe."

Gerard Douw forgetting for the moment her repeated injunctions, in the immediate impulse, stepped from the bedchamber into the other, in order to supply what she desired.

"Oh God! do not go, dear uncle," shrieked the unhappy girl — and at the same time she sprung from the bed, and darted after him, in order, by her grasp, to detain him. But the warning came too late, for scarcely had he passed the threshold, and hardly had his niece had time to utter the startling exclamation, when the door which divided the two rooms closed violently after him, as if swung by a strong blast of wind. Schalken and he both rushed to the door, but their united and desperate efforts could not avail so much as to shake it. Shriek after shriek burst from the inner chamber, with all the piercing loudness of despairing terror. Schalken and Douw applied every nerve to force open the door; but all in vain. There was no sound of struggling from within, but the screams seemed to increase in loudness, and at the same time they heard the bolts of the latticed window withdrawn, and the window itself grated upon the sill as if thrown open. One *last* shriek, so long and piercing and agonized as to be scarcely human, swelled from the room, and suddenly there followed a deathlike silence. A light step was heard crossing the floor, as if from the bed to the window; and almost at the same instant the door gave way, and, yielding to the pressure of the external applicants, nearly precipitated them into the room. It was empty. The window was open, and Schalken sprung to a chair and gazed out upon the street and canal below. He saw no form, but he saw, or thought he saw, the waters of the broad canal beneath settling ring after ring in heavy circles, as if a moment before disturbed by the submission of some ponderous body.

No trace of Rose was ever after found, nor was anything certain respecting her mysterious wooer discovered or even suspected — no clue whereby to trace the intricacies of the labyrinth and to arrive at its solution, presented itself. But an incident occurred, which, though it will not be received by our rational readers in lieu of evidence, produced nevertheless a strong and a lasting impression upon the mind of Schalken. Many years after the events which we have detailed, Schalken, then residing far away received an intimation of his father's death, and of his intended burial upon a fixed day in the church of Rotterdam. It was necessary that a very considerable journey should be performed by the funeral procession, which as it will be readily believed, was not very numerously attended. Schalken with difficulty arrived in Rotterdam late in the day upon which the funeral was appointed to take place. It had not then arrived. Evening closed in, and still it did not appear.

Schalken strolled down to the church; he found it open; notice of the arrival of the funeral had been given, and the vault in which the body was to be laid had been opened. The sexton, on seeing a well-dressed gentleman, whose object was to attend the expected obsequies, pacing the aisle of the church, hospitably invited him to share with him the comforts of a blazing fire, which, as was his custom in winter time upon such occasions, he had kindled in the hearth of a chamber in which he was accustomed to await the arrival of such grisly guests and which communicated, by a flight of steps, with the vault below. In this chamber, Schalken and his entertainer seated themselves; and the sexton, after some fruitless attempts to engage his guest in conversation, was obliged to apply himself to his tobacco-pipe and can, to solace his solitude. In spite of his grief and cares, the fatigues of a rapid journey of nearly forty hours gradually overcame the mind and body of Godfrey Schalken, and he sank into a deep sleep, from which he awakened by someone's shaking him gently by the shoulder. He first thought that the old sexton had called him, but *he* was no longer in the room. He roused himself, and as soon as he could clearly see what was around him, he perceived a female form, clothed in a kind of light robe of white, part of which was so disposed as to form a veil, and in her hand she carried a lamp. She was moving rather away from him, in the direction of the flight of steps which conducted towards the vaults. Schalken felt a vague alarm at the sight of this figure and at the same time an irresistible impulse to follow its guidance. He followed it towards the vaults, but when it reached the head of the stairs, he paused; the figure paused also, and, turning gently round, displayed, by the light of the lamp it carried, the face and features of his first love, Rose Velderkaust. There was nothing horrible, or even sad, in the countenance. On the contrary, it wore the same arch smile which used to enchant the artist long before in his happy days. A feeling of awe and interest, too intense to be resisted, prompted him to follow the spectre, if spectre it were. She descended the stairs — he followed — and turning to the left, through a narrow passage, she led him, to his infinite surprise, into what appeared to be an oldfashioned Dutch apartment, such as the pictures of Gerard Douw have served to immortalize. Abundance of costly antique furniture was disposed about the room, and in one corner stood a four-post bed, with heavy black cloth curtains around it; the figure frequently turned towards him with the same arch smile; and when she came to the side of the bed, she drew the curtains, and, by the light of the lamp, which she held towards its contents, she disclosed to the horror-stricken painter, sitting bolt upright in the bed, the livid and demoniac form of Vanderhausen. Schalken had hardly seen him, when he fell senseless upon the floor, where he lay until discovered, on the next morning, by persons employed in closing the passages into the vaults. He was lying in a cell of considerable size, which had not been disturbed for a long time, and he had fallen beside a large coffin, which was supported upon small pillars, a security against the attacks of vermin.

To his dying day Schalken was satisfied of the reality of the vision which he had witnessed, and he has left behind him a curious evidence of the impression which it wrought upon his fancy, in a painting executed shortly after the event I have narrated, and which is valuable as exhibiting not only the peculiarities which have made Schalken’s pictures sought after, but even more so as presenting a portrait of his early love, Rose Velderkaust, whose mysterious fate must always remain matter of speculation.

THE EVIL GUEST

"When Lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth Sin: and Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth Death."

About sixty years ago, and somewhat more than twenty miles from the ancient town of Chester, in a southward direction, there stood a large, and, even then, an oldfashioned mansion-house. It lay in the midst of a demesne of considerable extent, and richly wooded with venerable timber; but, apart from the somber majesty of these giant groups, and the varieties of the undulating ground on which they stood, there was little that could be deemed attractive in the place. A certain air of neglect and decay, and an indescribable gloom and melancholy, hung over it. In darkness, it seemed darker than any other tract; when the moonlight fell upon its glades and hollows, they looked spectral and awful, with a sort of churchyard loneliness; and even when the blush of the morning kissed its broad woodlands, there was a melancholy in the salute that saddened rather than cheered the heart of the beholder.

This antique, melancholy, and neglected place, we shall call, for distinctness sake, Gray Forest. It was then the property of the younger son of a nobleman, once celebrated for his ability and his daring, but who had long since passed to that land where human wisdom and courage avail naught. The representative of this noble house resided at the family mansion in Sussex, and the cadet, whose fortunes we mean to sketch in these pages, lived upon the narrow margin of an encumbered income, in a reserved and unsocial discontent, deep among the solemn shadows of the old woods of Gray Forest.

The Hon. Richard Marston was now somewhere between forty and fifty years of age — perhaps nearer the latter; he still, however, retained, in an eminent degree, the traits of manly beauty, not the less remarkable for its unquestionably haughty and passionate character. He had married a beautiful girl, of good family, but without much money, somewhere about eighteen years before; and two children, a son and a daughter, had been the fruit of this union. The boy, Harry Marston, was at this time at Cambridge; and his sister, scarcely fifteen, was at home with her parents, and under the training of an accomplished governess, who had been recommended to them by a noble relative of Mrs. Marston. She was a native of France, but thoroughly mistress of the English language, and, except for a foreign accent, which gave a certain prettiness to all she said, she spoke it as perfectly as any native Englishwoman. This young Frenchwoman was eminently handsome and attractive. Expressive, dark eyes, a clear olive complexion, small even teeth, and a beautifully-dimpling smile, more perhaps than a strictly classic regularity of features, were the secrets of her unquestionable influence, at first sight, upon the fancy of every man of taste who beheld her.

Mr. Marston's fortune, never very large, had been shattered by early dissipation. Naturally of a proud and somewhat exacting temper, he actively felt the mortifying consequences of his poverty. The want of what he felt ought to have been his position and influence in the county in which he resided, fretted and galled him; and he cherished a resentful and bitter sense of every slight, imaginary or real, to which the same fruitful source of annoyance and humiliation had exposed him. He held, therefore, but little intercourse with the surrounding gentry, and that little not of the pleasantest possible kind; for, not being himself in a condition to entertain, in that style which accorded with his own ideas of his station, he declined, as far as was compatible with good breeding, all the proffered hospitalities of the neighborhood; and, from his wild and neglected park, looked out upon the surrounding world in a spirit of moroseness and defiance, very unlike, indeed, to that of neighborly goodwill.

In the midst, however, of many of the annoyances attendant upon crippled means, he enjoyed a few of those shadowy indications of hereditary importance, which are all the more dearly prized, as the substantial accessories of wealth have disappeared. The mansion in which he dwelt was, though oldfashioned, imposing in its aspect, and upon a scale unequivocally aristocratic; its walls were hung with ancestral portraits, and he managed to maintain about him a large and tolerably respectable staff of servants. In addition to these, he had his extensive demesne, his deer-park, and his unrivalled timber, wherewith to console himself; and, in the consciousness of these possessions, he found some imperfect assuagement of those bitter feelings of suppressed scorn and resentment, which a sense of lost station and slighted importance engendered. Mr. Marston's early habits had, unhappily, been of a kind to aggravate, rather than alleviate, the annoyances incidental to reduced means. He had been a gay man, a voluptuary, and a gambler. His vicious tastes had survived the means of their gratification. His love for his wife had been nothing more than one of those vehement and headstrong fancies, which, in self-indulgent men, sometimes result in marriage, and which seldom outlive the first few months of that life-long connection. Mrs. Marston was a gentle, noble-minded woman. After agonies or disappointment, which none ever suspected, she had at length learned to submit, in sad and gentle acquiescence, to her fate. Those feelings, which had been the charm of her young days, were gone, and, as she bitterly felt, forever. For them there was no recall they could not return; and, without complaint or reproach, she yielded to what she felt was inevitable. It was impossible to look at Mrs. Marston, and not to discern, at a glance, the ruin of a surpassingly beautiful woman; a good deal wasted, pale, and chastened with a deep, untold sorrow, but still possessing the outlines, both in face and form, of that noble beauty and matchless grace, which had made her, in happier days, the admired of all observers. But equally impossible was it to converse with her, for even a minute, without hearing, in the gentle and melancholy music of her voice, the sad echoes of those griefs to which her early beauty had been sacrificed, an undying sense of lost love, and happiness departed, never to come again.

One morning, Mr. Marston had walked, as was his custom when he expected the messenger who brought from the neighboring post office his letters, some way down the broad, straight avenue, with its double rows of lofty trees at each side, when he encountered the nimble emissary on his return. He took the letter-bag in silence. It contained but two letters — one addressed to “Mademoiselle de Barras, chez M. Marston,” and the other to himself. He took them both, dismissed the messenger, and opening that addressed to himself, read as follows, while he slowly retraced his steps towards the house: —

Dear Richard,

I am a whimsical fellow, as you doubtless remember, and have lately grown, they tell me, rather hippish besides. I do not know to which infirmity I am to attribute a sudden fancy that urges me to pay you a visit, if you will admit me. To say truth, my dear Dick, I wish to see a little of your part of the world, and, I will confess it, en passant, to see a little of you too. I really wish to make acquaintance with your family; and though they tell me my health is very much shaken, I must say, in self-defense, I am not a troublesome inmate. I can perfectly take care of myself, and need no nursing or caudling whatever. Will you present this, my petition, to Mrs. Marston, and report her decision thereon to me. Seriously, I know that your house may be full, or some other contretemps may make it impracticable for me just now to invade you. If it be so, tell me, my dear Richard, frankly, as my movements are perfectly free, and my time all my own, so that I can arrange my visit to suit your convenience.

— Yours, &c.,

WYNSTON E. BERKLEY

P.S. — Direct to me at —— Hotel, in Chester, as I shall probably be there by the time this reaches you.

"Illbred and pushing as ever," quoth Mr. Marston, angrily, as he thrust the unwelcome letter into his pocket. "This fellow, wallowing in wealth, without one nearer relative on earth than I, and associated more nearly still with me the — pshaw! not affection — the recollections of early and intimate companionship, leaves me unaided, for years of desertion and suffering, to the buffetings of the world, and the troubles of all but overwhelming pecuniary difficulties, and now, with the cool confidence of one entitled to respect and welcome, invites himself to my house. Coming here," he continued, after a gloomy pause, and still pacing slowly towards the house, "to collect amusing materials for next season's gossip — stories about the married Benedick — the bankrupt beau — the outcast tenant of a Cheshire wilderness"; and, as he said this, he looked at the neglected prospect before him with an eye almost of hatred. "Aye, to see the nakedness of the land is he coming, but he shall be disappointed. His money may buy him a cordial welcome at an inn, but curse me if it shall purchase him a reception here."

He again opened and glanced through the letter.

"Aye, purposely put in such a way that I can't decline it without affronting him," he continued doggedly. "Well, then, he has no one to blame but himself — affronted he shall be; I shall effectually put an end to this humorous excursion. Egad, it is rather hard if a man cannot keep his poverty to himself."

Sir Wynston Berkley was a baronet of large fortune — a selfish, fashionable man, and an inveterate bachelor. He and Marston had been schoolfellows, and the violent and implacable temper of the latter had as little impressed his companion with feelings of regard, as the frivolity and selfishness of the baronet had won the esteem of his relative. As boys, they had little in common upon which to rest the basis of a friendship, or even a mutual liking. Berkley was gay, cold, and satirical; his cousin — for cousins they were — was jealous, haughty, and relentless. Their negative disinclination to one another's society, not unnaturally engendered by uncongenial and unamiable dispositions, had for a time given place to actual hostility, while the two young men were at Oxford. In some intrigue, Marston discovered in his cousin a too-successful rival; the consequence was, a bitter and furious quarrel, which, but for the prompt and peremptory interference of friends, Marston would undoubtedly have pushed to a bloody issue. Time had, however, healed this rupture, and the young men came to regard one another with the same feelings, and eventually to reestablish the same sort of cold and indifferent intimacy which had subsisted between them before their angry collision.

Under these circumstances, whatever suspicion Marston might have felt on the receipt of the unexpected, and indeed unaccountable proposal, which had just reached him, he certainly had little reason to complain of any violation of early friendship in the neglect with which Sir Wynston had hitherto treated him. In deciding to decline his proposed visit, however, Marston had not consulted the impulses of spite or anger. He knew the baronet well; he knew that he cherished no good will towards him, and that in the project which he had thus unexpectedly broached, whatever indirect or selfish schemes might possibly be at the bottom of it, no friendly feeling had ever mingled. He was therefore resolved to avoid the trouble and the expense of a visit in all respects distasteful to him, and in a gentlemanlike way, but, at the same time, as the reader may suppose, with very little anxiety as to whether or not his gay correspondent should take offence at his reply, to decline, once for all, the proposed distinction.

With this resolution, he entered the spacious and somewhat dilapidated mansion which called him master; and entering a sitting room, appropriated to his daughter's use, he found her there, in company with her beautiful French governess. He kissed his child, and saluted her young preceptress with formal courtesy.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "I have got a letter for you; and, Rhoda," he continued, addressing his pretty daughter, "bring this to your mother, and say, I request her to read it."

He gave her the letter he himself had just received, and the girl tripped lightly away upon her mission.

Had he narrowly scrutinised the countenance of the fair Frenchwoman, as she glanced at the direction of that which he had just placed in her hand, he might have seen certain transient, but very unmistakable evidences of excitement and agitation. She quickly concealed the letter, however, and with a sigh, the momentary flush which it had called to her cheek subsided, and she was tranquil as usual.

Mr. Marston remained for some minutes — five, eight, or ten, we cannot say precisely — pretty much where he had stood on first entering the chamber, doubtless awaiting the return of his messenger, or the appearance of his wife. At length, however, he left the room himself to seek her; but, during his brief stay, his previous resolution had been removed. By what influence we cannot say; but removed completely it unquestionably was, and a final determination that Sir Wynston Berkley should become his guest had fixedly taken its place.

As Marston walked along the passages which led from this room, he encountered Mrs. Marston and his daughter.

"Well," said he, "you have read Wynston's letter?"

"Yes," she replied, returning it to him; "and what answer, Richard, do you purpose giving him?"

She was about to hazard a conjecture, but checked herself, remembering that even so faint an evidence of a disposition to advise might possibly be resented by her cold and imperious lord.

"I have considered it, and decided to receive him," he replied.

"Ah! I am afraid — that is, I hope — he may find our housekeeping such as he can enjoy," she said, with an involuntary expression of surprise; for she had scarcely had a doubt that her husband would have preferred evading the visit of his fine friend, under his gloomy circumstances.

"If our modest fare does not suit him," said Marston, with sullen bitterness, "he can depart as easily as he came. We, poor gentlemen, can but do our best. I have thought it over, and made up my mind."

"And how soon, my dear Richard, do you intend fixing his arrival?" she inquired, with the natural uneasiness of one upon whom, in an establishment whose pretensions considerably exceeded its resources, the perplexing cares of housekeeping devolved.

"Why, as soon as he pleases," replied he, "I suppose you can easily have his room prepared by tomorrow or next day. I shall write by this mail, and tell him to come down at once."

Having said this in a cold, decisive way, he turned and left her, as it seemed, not caring to be teased with further questions. He took his solitary way to a distant part of his wild park, where, far from the likelihood of disturbance or intrusion, he was often wont to amuse himself for the live-long day, in the sedentary sport of shooting rabbits. And there we leave him for the present, signifying to the distant inmates of his house the industrious pursuit of his unsocial occupation, by the dropping fire that sullenly, from hour to hour, echoed from the remote woods.

Mrs. Marston issued her orders; and having set on foot all the necessary preparations for so unwonted an event as a stranger's visit of some duration, she betook herself to her little boudoir — the scene of many an hour of patient but bitter suffering, unseen by human eye, and unknown, except to the just Searcher of hearts, to whom belongs mercy — and vengeance.

Mrs. Marston had but two friends to whom she had ever spoken upon the subject nearest her heart — the estrangement of her husband, a sorrow to which even time had failed to reconcile her. From her children this grief was carefully concealed. To them she never uttered the semblance of a complaint. Anything that could by possibility have reflected blame or dishonor upon their father, she would have perished rather than have allowed them so much as to suspect. The two friends who did understand her feelings, though in different degrees, were, one, a good and venerable clergyman, the Rev. Doctor Danvers, a frequent visitor and occasional guest at Gray Forest, where his simple manners and unaffected benignity and tenderness of heart had won the love of all, with the exception of its master, and commanded even his respect. The second was no other than the young French governess, Mademoiselle de Barras, in whose ready sympathy and consolatory counsels she found no small happiness. The society of this young lady had indeed become, next to that of her daughter, her greatest comfort and pleasure.

Mademoiselle de Barras was of a noble though ruined French family, and a certain nameless elegance and dignity attested, spite of her fallen condition, the purity of her descent. She was accomplished — possessed of that fine perception and sensitiveness, and that ready power of self-adaptation to the peculiarities and moods of others, which we term tact — and was, moreover, gifted with a certain natural grace, and manners the most winning imaginable. In short, she was a fascinating companion; and when the melancholy circumstances of her own situation, and the sad history of her once rich and noble family, were taken into account, with her striking attractions of person and air, the combination of all these associations and impressions rendered her one of the most interesting persons that could well be imagined. The circumstances of Mademoiselle de Barras's history and descent seemed to warrant, on Mrs. Marston's part, a closer intimacy and confidence than usually subsists between parties mutually occupying such a relation.

Mrs. Marston had hardly established herself in this little apartment, when a light foot approached, a gentle tap was given at the door, and Mademoiselle de Barras entered.

"Ah, mademoiselle, so kind — such pretty flowers. Pray sit down," said the lady, with a sweet and grateful smile, as she took from the tapered fingers of the foreigner the little bouquet, which she had been at the pains to gather.

Mademoiselle sat down, and gently took the lady's hand and kissed it. A small matter will overflow a heart charged with sorrow — a chance word, a look, some little office of kindness — and so it was with mademoiselle's bouquet and gentle kiss. Mrs. Marston's heart was touched; her eyes filled with bright tears; she smiled gratefully upon her fair and humble companion, and as she smiled, her tears overflowed, and she wept in silence for some minutes.

"My poor mademoiselle," she said, at last, "you are so very, very kind."

Mademoiselle said nothing; she lowered her eyes, and pressed the poor lady's hand.

Apparently to interrupt an embarrassing silence, and to give a more cheerful tone to their little interview, the governess, in a gay tone, on a sudden said —

“And so, madame, we are to have a visitor, Miss Rhoda tells me — a baronet, is he not?”

“Yes, indeed, mademoiselle — Sir Wynston Berkley, a gay London gentleman, and a cousin of Mr. Marston’s,” she replied.

“Ha — a cousin!” exclaimed the young lady, with a little more surprise in her tone than seemed altogether called for— “a cousin? oh, then, that is the reason of his visit. Do, pray, madame, tell me all about him; I am so much afraid of strangers, and what you call men of the world. Oh, dear Mrs. Marston, I am not worthy to be here, and he will see all that in a moment; indeed, indeed, I am afraid. Pray tell me all about him.”

She said this with a simplicity which made the elder lady smile, and while mademoiselle readjusted the tiny flowers which formed the bouquet she had just presented to her, Mrs. Marston goodnaturedly recounted to her all she knew of Sir Wynston Berkley, which, in substance, amounted to no more than we have already stated. When she concluded, the young Frenchwoman continued for some time silent, still busy with her flowers. But, suddenly, she heaved a deep sigh, and shook her head.

“You seem disquieted, mademoiselle,” said Mrs. Marston, in a tone of kindness.

“I am thinking, madame,” she said, still looking upon the flowers which she was adjusting, and again sighing profoundly, “I am thinking of what you said to me a week ago; alas!”

“I do not remember what it was, my good mademoiselle — nothing, I am sure, that ought to grieve you — at least nothing that was intended to have that effect,” replied the lady, in a tone of gentle encouragement.

“No, not intended, madame,” said the young Frenchwoman, sorrowfully.

“Well, what was it? Perhaps you misunderstood; perhaps I can explain what I said,” replied Mrs. Marston, affectionately.

“Ah, madame, you think — you think I am unlucky,” answered the young lady, slowly and faintly.

"Unlucky! Dear mademoiselle, you surprise me," rejoined her companion.

"I mean — what I mean is this, madame; you date unhappiness — if not its beginning, at least its great aggravation and increase," she answered, dejectedly, "from the time of my coming here, madame; and though I know you are too good to dislike me on that account, yet I must, in your eyes, be ever connected with calamity, and look like an ominous thing."

"Dear mademoiselle, allow no such thought to enter your mind. You do me great wrong, indeed you do," said Mrs. Marston, laying her hand upon the young lady's, kindly.

There was a silence for a little time, and the elder lady resumed:— "I remember now what you allude to, dear mademoiselle — the increased estrangement, the widening separation which severs me from one unutterably dear to me — the first and bitter disappointment of my life, which seems to grow more hopelessly incurable day by day."

Mrs. Marston paused, and, after a brief silence, the governess said: —

"I am very superstitious myself, dear madame, and I thought I must have seemed to you an inauspicious inmate — in short, unlucky — as I have said; and the thought made me very unhappy — so unhappy, that I was going to leave you, madame — I may now tell you frankly — going away; but you have set my doubts at rest, and I am quite happy again."

"Dear mademoiselle," cried the lady, tenderly, and rising, as she spake, to kiss the cheek of her humble friend; "never — never speak of this again. God knows I have too few friends on earth, to spare the kindest and tenderest among them all. No, no. You little think what comfort I have found in your warm-hearted and ready sympathy, and how dearly I prize your affection, my poor mademoiselle."

The young Frenchwoman rose, with downcast eyes, and a dimpling, happy smile; and, as Mrs. Marston drew her affectionately toward her, and kissed her, she timidly returned the embrace of her kind patroness. For a moment her graceful arms encircled her, and she whispered to her, "Dear madame, how happy — how very happy you make me."

Had Ithuriel touched with his spear the beautiful young woman, thus for a moment, as it seemed, lost in a trance of gratitude and love, would that angelic form have stood the test unscathed? A spectator, marking the scene, might have observed a strange gleam in her eyes — a strange expression in her face — an influence for a moment not angelic, like a shadow of some passing spirit, cross her visibly, as she leaned over the gentle lady's neck, and murmured, "Dear madame, how happy — how very happy you make me." Such a spectator, as he looked at that gentle lady, might have seen, for one dreamy moment, a lithe and painted serpent, coiled round and round, and hissing in her ear.

A few minutes more, and mademoiselle was in the solitude of her own apartment. She shut and bolted the door, and taking from her desk the letter which she had that morning received, threw herself into an armchair, and studied the document profoundly. Her actual revision and scrutiny of the letter itself was interrupted by long intervals of profound abstraction; and, after a full hour thus spent, she locked it carefully up again, and with a clear brow, and a gay smile, rejoined her pretty pupil for a walk.

We must now pass over an interval of a few days, and come at once to the arrival of Sir Wynston Berkley, which duly occurred upon the evening of the day appointed. The baronet descended from his chaise but a short time before the hour at which the little party, which formed the family at Gray Forest were wont to assemble for the social meal of supper. A few minutes devoted to the mysteries of the toilet, with the aid of an accomplished valet, enabled him to appear, as he conceived, without disadvantage at this domestic reunion.

Sir Wynston Berkley was a particularly gentlemanlike person. He was rather tall, and elegantly made, with gay, easy manners, and something indefinably aristocratic in his face, which, however, was a little more worn than his years would have strictly accounted for. But Sir Wynston had been a roué, and, spite of the cleverest possible making up, the ravages of excess were very traceable in the lively beau of fifty. Perfectly well dressed, and with a manner that was ease and gaiety itself, he was at home from the moment he entered the room. Of course, anything like genuine cordiality was out of the question; but Mr. Marston embraced his relative with perfect good breeding, and the baronet appeared determined to like everybody, and be pleased with everything. He had not been five minutes in the parlor, chatting gaily with Mr. and Mrs. Marston and their pretty daughter, when Mademoiselle de Barras entered the room. As she moved towards Mrs. Marston, Sir Wynston rose, and, observing her with evident admiration, said in an undertone, inquiringly, to Marston, who was beside him —

“And this?”

“That is Mademoiselle de Barras, my daughter’s governess, and Mrs. Marston’s companion,” said Marston, drily.

“Ha!” said Sir Wynston; “I thought you were but three at home just now, and I was right. Your son is at Cambridge; I heard so from our old friend, Jack Manbury. Jack has his boy there too. Egad, Dick, it seems but last week that you and I were there together.”

“Yes,” said Marston, looking gloomily into the fire, as if he saw, in its smoke and flicker, the phantoms of murdered time and opportunity; “but I hate looking back, Wynston. The past is to me but a medley of ill-luck and worse management.”

“Why what an ungrateful dog you are!” returned Sir Wynston, gaily, turning his back upon the fire, and glancing round the spacious and handsome, though somewhat faded apartment. “I was on the point of congratulating you on the possession of the finest park and noblest demesne in Cheshire, when you begin to grumble. Egad, Dick, all I can say to your complaint is, that I don’t pity you, and there are dozens who may honestly envy you — that is all.”

In spite of this cheering assurance, Marston remained sullenly silent. Supper, however, had now been served, and the little party assumed their places at the table.

“I am sorry, Wynston, I have no sport of any kind to offer you here,” said Marston, “except, indeed, some good trout-fishing, if you like it. I have three miles of excellent fishing at your command.”

“My dear fellow, I am a mere cockney,” rejoined Sir Wynston; “I am not a sportsman; I never tried it, and should not like to begin now. No, Dick, what I much prefer is, abundance of your fresh air, and the enjoyment of your scenery. When I was at Rouen three years ago— “

“Ha! — Rouen? Mademoiselle will feel an interest in that; it is her birthplace,” interrupted Marston, glancing at the Frenchwoman.

“Yes — Rouen — ah — yes!” said mademoiselle, with very evident embarrassment.

Sir Wynston appeared for a moment a little disconcerted too, but rallied speedily, and pursued his detail of his doings at that fair town of Normandy.

Marston knew Sir Wynston well; and he rightly calculated that whatever effect his experience of the world might have had in intensifying his selfishness or hardening his heart, it certainly could have had none in improving a character originally worthless and unfeeling. He knew, moreover, that his wealthy cousin was gifted with a great deal of that small cunning which is available for masking the little scheming of frivolous and worldly men; and that Sir Wynston never took trouble of any kind without a sufficient purpose, having its center in his own personal gratification.

This visit greatly puzzled Marston; it gave him even a vague sense of uneasiness. Could there exist any flaw in his own title to the estate of Gray Forest? He had an unpleasant, doubtful sort of remembrance of some apprehensions of this kind, when he was but a child, having been whispered in the family. Could this really be so, and could the baronet have been led to make this unexpected visit merely for the purpose of personally examining into the condition or a property of which he was about to become the legal invader? The nature of this suspicion affords, at all events, a fair gauge of Marston's estimate of his cousin's character. And as he revolved these doubts from time to time, and as he thought of Mademoiselle de Barras's transient, but unaccountable embarrassment at the mention of Rouen by Sir Wynston — an embarrassment which the baronet himself appeared for a moment to reciprocate — undefined, glimmering suspicions of another kind flickered through the darkness of his mind. He was effectually puzzled; his surmises and conjectures baffled; and he more than half repented that he had acceded to his cousin's proposal, and admitted him as an inmate of his house.

Although Sir Wynston comported himself as if he were conscious of being the very most welcome visitor who could possibly have established himself at Gray Forest, he was, doubtless, fully aware of the real feelings with which he was regarded by his host. If he had in reality an object in prolonging his stay, and wished to make the postponement of his departure the direct interest of his entertainer, he unquestionably took effectual measures for that purpose.

The little party broke up every evening at about ten o'clock, and Sir Wynston retired to his chamber at the same hour. He found little difficulty in inducing Marston to amuse him there with a quiet game of piquet. In his own room, therefore, in the luxurious ease of dressing gown and slippers he sat at cards with his host, often until an hour or two past midnight. Sir Wynston was exorbitantly wealthy, and very reckless in expenditure. The stakes for which they played, although they gradually became in reality pretty heavy, were in his eyes a very unimportant consideration. Marston, on the other hand, was poor, and played with the eye of a lynx and the appetite of a shark. The ease and perfect good-humor with which Sir Wynston lost were not unimproved by his entertainer, who, as may readily be supposed, was not sorry to reap this golden harvest, provided without the slightest sacrifice, on his part, of pride or independence. If, indeed, he sometimes suspected that his guest was a little more anxious to lose than to win, he was also quite resolved not to perceive it, but calmly persisted in, night after night, giving Sir Wynston, as he termed it, his revenge; or, in other words, treating him to a repetition of his losses. All this was very agreeable to Marston, who began to treat his visitor with, at all events, more external cordiality and distinction than at first.

An incident, however, occurred, which disturbed these amicable relations in an unexpected way. It becomes necessary here to mention that Mademoiselle de Barras's sleeping apartment opened from a long corridor. It was en suite with two dressing rooms, each opening also upon the corridor, but wholly unused and unfurnished. Some five or six other apartments also opened at either side, upon the same passage. These little local details being premised, it so happened that one day Marston, who had gone out with the intention of angling in the trout-stream which flowed through his park, though at a considerable distance from the house, having unexpectedly returned to procure some tackle which he had forgotten, was walking briskly through the corridor in question to his own apartment, when, to his surprise, the door of one of the deserted dressing-rooms, of which we have spoken, was cautiously pushed open, and Sir Wynston Berkley issued from it. Marston was almost beside him as he did so, and Sir Wynston made a motion as if about instinctively to draw back again, and at the same time the keen ear of his host distinctly caught the sound of rustling silks and a tiptoe tread hastily withdrawing from the deserted chamber. Sir Wynston looked nearly as much confused as a man of the world can look. Marston stopped short, and scanned his visitor for a moment with a very peculiar expression.

“You have caught me peeping, Dick. I am an inveterate explorer,” said the baronet, with an effectual effort to shake off his embarrassment. “An open door in a fine old house is a temptation which— “

“That door is usually closed, and ought to be kept so,” interrupted Marston, drily; “there is nothing whatever to be seen in the room but dust and cobwebs.”

“Pardon me,” said Sir Wynston, more easily, “you forget the view from the window.”

“Aye, the view, to be sure; there is a good view from it,” said Marston, with as much of his usual manner as he could resume so soon; and, at the same time, carelessly opening the door again, he walked in, accompanied by Sir Wynston, and both stood at the window together, looking out in silence upon a prospect which neither of them saw.

“Yes, I do think it is a good view,” said Marston; and as he turned carelessly away, he darted a swift glance round the chamber. The door opening toward the French lady’s apartment was closed, but not actually shut. This was enough; and as they left the room, Marston repeated his invitation to his guest to accompany him; but in a tone which showed that he scarcely followed the meaning of what he himself was saying.

He walked undecidedly toward his own room, then turned and went down stairs. In the hall he met his pretty child.

“Ha! Rhoda,” said he, “you have not been out today?”

“No, papa; but it is so very fine, I think I shall go now.”

“Yes; go, and mademoiselle can accompany you. Do you hear, Rhoda, mademoiselle goes with you, and you had better go at once.”

A few minutes more, and Marston, from the parlor-window, beheld Rhoda and the elegant French girl walking together towards the woodlands. He watched them gloomily, himself unseen, until the crowding underwood concealed their receding figures. Then, with a sigh, he turned, and reascended the great staircase.

“I shall sift this mystery to the bottom,” thought he. “I shall foil the conspirators, if so they be, with their own weapons; art with art; chicane with chicane; duplicity with duplicity.”

He was now in the long passage, which we have just spoken of, and glancing back and before him, to ascertain that no chance eye discerned him, he boldly entered mademoiselle’s chamber. Her writing desk lay upon the table. It was locked; and coolly taking it in his hands, Marston carried it into his own room, bolted his chamber-door, and taking two or three bunches of keys, he carefully tried nearly a dozen in succession, and when almost despairing of success, at last found one which fitted the lock, turned, and opened the desk.

Sustained throughout his dishonorable task by some strong and angry passion, the sight of the open escritoire checked and startled him for a moment. Violated privilege, invaded secrecy, base, perfidious espionage upbraided and stigmatized him, as the intricacies of the outraged sanctuary opened upon his intrusive gaze. He felt for a moment shocked and humbled. He was impelled to lock and replace the desk where he had originally found it, without having effected his meditated treason; but this hesitation was transient; the fiery and reckless impulse which had urged him to the act returned to enforce its consummation. With a guilty eye and eager hands, he searched the contents of this tiny repository of the fair Norman's written secrets.

"Ha! the very thing," he muttered, as he detected the identical letter which he himself had handed to Mademoiselle de Barras but a few days before. "The handwriting struck me, ill-disguised; I thought I knew it; we shall see."

He had opened the letter; it contained but a few lines: he held his breath while he read it. First he grew pale, then a shadow came over his face, and then another, and another, darker and darker, shade upon shade, as if an exhalation from the pit was momentarily blackening the air about him. He said nothing; there was but one long, gentle sigh, and in his face a mortal sternness, as he folded the letter again, replaced it, and locked the desk.

Of course, when Mademoiselle de Barras returned from her accustomed walk, she found everything in her room, to all appearances, undisturbed, and just as when she left it. While this young lady was making her toilet for the evening, and while Sir Wynston Berkley was worrying himself with conjectures as to whether Marston's evil looks, when he encountered him that morning in the passage, existed only in his own fancy, or were, in good truth, very grim and significant realities, Marston himself was striding alone through the wildest and darkest solitudes of his park, haunted by his own unholy thoughts, and, it may be, by those other evil and unearthly influences which wander, as we know, "in desert places." Darkness overtook him, and the chill of night, in these lonely tracts. In his solitary walk, what fearful company had he been keeping! As the shades of night deepened round him, the sense of the neighborhood of ill, the consciousness of the foul fancies or which, where he was now treading, he had been for hours the sport, oppressed him with a vague and unknown terror; a certain horror of the thoughts which had been his comrades through the day, which he could not now shake off, and which haunted him with a ghastly and defiant pertinacity, scared, while they halfenraged him. He stalked swiftly homewards, like a guilty man pursued.

Marston was not perfectly satisfied, though very nearly, with the evidence now in his possession. The letter, the stolen perusal of which had so agitated him that day, bore no signature; but, independently of the handwriting, which seemed, spite of the constraint of an attempted disguise, to be familiar to his eye, there existed, in the matter of the letter, short as it was, certain internal evidences, which, although not actually conclusive, raised, in conjunction with all the other circumstances, a powerful presumption in aid of his suspicions. He resolved, however, to sift the matter further, and to bide his time. Meanwhile his manner must indicate no trace of his dark surmises and bitter thoughts. Deception, in its two great branches, simulation and dissimulation, was easy to him. His habitual reserve and gloom would divest any accidental and momentary disclosure of his inward trouble of everything suspicious or unaccountable, which would have characterized such displays and eccentricities in another man.

His rapid and reckless ramble, a kind of physical vent for the paroxysm which had so agitated him throughout the greater part of the day, had soiled and disordered his dress, and thus had helped to give to his whole appearance a certain air of haggard wildness, which, in the privacy of his chamber, he hastened carefully and entirely to remove.

At supper, Marston was apparently in unusually good spirits. Sir Wynston and he chatted gaily and fluently upon many subjects, grave and gay. Among them the inexhaustible topic of popular superstition happened to turn up, and especially the subject of strange prophecies of the fates and fortunes of individuals, singularly fulfilled in the events of their afterlife.

"By-the-by, Dick, this is rather a nervous topic for me to discuss," said Sir Wynston.

"How so?" asked his host.

"Why, don't you remember?" urged the baronet.

"No, I don't recollect what you allude to," replied Marston, in all sincerity.

"Why, don't you remember Eton?" pursued Sir Wynston.

"Yes, to be sure," said Marston.

"Well?" continued his visitor.

"Well, I really don't recollect the prophecy," replied Marston.

"What! do you forget the gypsy who predicted that you were to murder me, Dick — eh?"

"Ah-ha, ha!" laughed Marston, with a start.

"Don't you remember it now?" urged his companion.

"Ah, why yes, I believe I do," said Marston; "but another prophecy was running in my mind; a gypsy prediction, too. At Ascot, do you recollect the girl told me I was to be Lord Chancellor of England, and a duke besides?"

"Well, Dick," rejoined Sir Wynston, merrily, "if both are to be fulfilled, or neither, I trust you may never sit upon the woolsack of England."

The party soon after broke up: Sir Wynston and his host, as usual, to pass some hours at piquet; and Mrs. Marston, as was her wont, to, spend some time in her own boudoir, over notes and accounts, and the worrying details of housekeeping.

While thus engaged, she was disturbed by a respectful tap at her door, and an elderly servant, who had been for many years in the employment of Mr. Marston, presented himself.

"Well, Merton, do you want anything?" asked the lady.

"Yes, ma'am, please, I want to give warning; I wish to leave the service, ma'am;" replied he, respectfully, but doggedly.

"To leave us, Merton!" echoed his mistress, both surprised and sorry for the man had been long her servant, and had been much liked and trusted.

"Yes, ma'am," he repeated.

“And why do you wish to do so, Merton? Has anything occurred to make the place unpleasant to you?” urged the lady.

“No, ma’am — no, indeed,” said he, earnestly, “I have nothing to complain of — nothing, indeed, ma’am.”

“Perhaps, you think you can do better, if you leave us?” suggested his mistress.

“No, indeed, ma’am, I have no such thought,” he said, and seemed on the point of bursting into tears; “but — but, somehow — ma’am, there is something come over me, lately, and I can’t help, but think, if I stay here, ma’am — some — some — misfortune will happen to us all — and that is the truth, ma’am.”

“This is very foolish, Merton — a mere childish fancy,” replied Mrs. Marston; “you like your place, and have no better prospect before you; and now, for a mere superstitious fancy, you propose giving it up, and leaving us. No, no, Merton, you had better think the matter over — and if you still, upon reflection, prefer going away, you can then speak to your master.”

“Thank you ma’am — God bless you,” said the man, withdrawing.

Mrs. Marston rang the bell for her maid, and retired to her room. “Has anything occurred lately,” she asked, “to annoy Merton?”

“No, ma’am, I don’t know of anything; but he is very changed, indeed, of late,” replied the maid.

“He has not been quarreling?” inquired she.

“Oh, no, ma’am, he never quarrels; he is very quiet, and keeps to himself always; he thinks a wonderful deal of himself,” replied the servant.

“But, you said that he is much changed — did you not?” continued the lady; for there was something strangely excited and unpleasant in the man’s manner, in this little interview, which struck Mrs. Marston, and alarmed her curiosity. He had seemed like one charged with some horrible secret — intolerable, and which he yet dared not reveal.

“What,” proceeded Mrs. Marston, “is the nature of the change of which you speak?”

“Why, ma’am, he is like one frightened, and in sorrow,” she replied; “he will sit silent, and now and then shaking his head, as if he wanted to get rid of something that is teasing him, for an hour together.”

“Poor man!” said she.

"And, then, when we are at meals, he will, all on a sudden, get up, and leave the table; and Jem Boulter, that sleeps in the next room to him, says, that, almost as often as he looks through the little window between the two rooms, no matter what hour in the night, he sees Mr. Merton on his knees by the bedside, praying or crying, he don't know which; but, any way, he is not happy — poor man! — and that is plain enough."

"It is very strange," said the lady, after a pause; "but, I think, and hope, after all, it will prove to have been no more than a little nervousness."

"Well, ma'am, I do hope it is not his conscience that is coming against him, now," said the maid.

"We have no reason to suspect anything of the kind," said Mrs. Marston, gravely, "quite the reverse; he has been always a particularly proper man."

"Oh, indeed," responded the attendant, "goodness forbid I should say or think anything against him; but I could not help telling you my mind, ma'am, meaning no harm."

"And, how long is it since you observed this sad change in poor Merton?" persisted the lady.

"Not, indeed, to say very long, ma'am," replied the girl; "somewhere about a week, or very little more — at least, as we remarked, ma'am."

Mrs. Marston pursued her inquiries no further that night. But, although she affected to treat the matter thus lightly, it had, somehow, taken a painful hold upon her imagination, and left in her mind those undefinable and ominous sensations, which, in certain mental temperaments, seem to foreshadow the approach of unknown misfortune.

For two or three days, everything went on smoothly, and pretty much as usual. At the end of this brief interval, however, the attention of Mrs. Marston was recalled to the subject of her servant's mysterious anxiety to leave, and give up his situation. Merton again stood before her, and repeated the intimation he had already given.

"Really, Merton, this is very odd," said the lady. "You like your situation, and yet you persist in desiring to leave it. What am I to think?"

"Oh, ma'am," said he, "I am unhappy; I am tormented, ma'am. I can't tell you, ma'am; I can't indeed ma'am!"

"If anything weighs upon your mind, Merton, I would advise you to consult our good clergyman, Dr. Danvers," urged the lady.

The servant hung his head, and mused for a time gloomily; and then said decisively— “No, ma’am; no use.”

“And pray, Merton, how long is it since you first entertained this desire?” asked Mrs. Marston.

“Since Sir Wynston Berkley came, ma’am,” answered he.

“Has Sir Wynston annoyed you in any way?” continued she.

“Far from it, ma’am,” he replied; “he is a very kind gentleman.”

“Well, his man, then; is he a respectable, inoffensive person?” she inquired.

“I never met one more so,” said the man, promptly, and raising his head.

“What I wish to know is, whether your desire to go is connected with Sir Wynston and his servant?” said Mrs. Marston.

The man hesitated, and shifted his position uneasily.

“You need not answer, Merton, if you don’t wish it,” she said kindly.

“Why, ma’am, yes, it has something to say to them both,” he replied, with some agitation.

“I really cannot understand this,” said she.

Merton hesitated for some time, and appeared much troubled. “It was something, ma’am — something that Sir Wynston’s man said to me; and there it is out,” he said at last, with an effort.

“Well, Merton,” said she, “I won’t press you further; but I must say, that as this communication, whatever it may be, has caused you, unquestionably, very great uneasiness, it seems to me but probable that it affects the safety or the interests of some person — I cannot say of whom; and, if so, there can be no doubt that it is your duty to acquaint those who are so involved in the disclosure, with its purport.”

“No, ma’am, there is nothing in what I heard that could touch anybody but myself. It was nothing but what others heard, without remarking it, or thinking about it. I can’t tell you anymore, ma’am; but I am very unhappy, and uneasy in my mind.”

As the man said this, he began to weep bitterly.

The idea that his mind was affected now seriously occurred to Mrs. Marston, and she resolved to convey her suspicions to her husband, and to leave him to deal with the case as to him should seem good.

“Don’t agitate yourself so, Merton; I shall speak to your master upon what you have said; and you may rely upon it, that no surmise to the prejudice of your character has entered my mind,” said Mrs. Marston, very kindly.

“Oh, ma’am, you are too good,” sobbed the poor man, vehemently. “You don’t know me, ma’am; I never knew myself till lately. I am a miserable man. I am frightened at myself, ma’am — frightened terribly. Christ knows, it would be well for me I was dead this minute.”

“I am very sorry for your unhappiness, Merton,” said Mrs. Marston; “and, especially, that I can do nothing to alleviate it; I can but speak, as I have said, to your master, and he will give you your discharge, and arrange whatever else remains to be done.”

“God bless you, ma’am,” said the servant, still much agitated, and left her.

Mr. Marston usually passed the early part of the day in active exercise, and she, supposing that he was, in all probability, at that moment far from home, went to “mademoiselle’s” chamber, which was at the other end of the spacious house, to confer with her in the interval upon the strange application thus urged by poor Merton.

Just as she reached the door of Mademoiselle de Barras’s chamber, she heard voices within exerted in evident excitement. She stopped in amazement. They were those of her husband and mademoiselle. Startled, confounded, and amazed, she pushed open the door, and entered. Her husband was sitting, one hand clutched upon the arm of the chair he occupied, and the other extended, and clenched, as it seemed, with the emphasis of rage, upon the desk that stood upon the table. His face was darkened with the stormiest passions, and his gaze was fixed upon the Frenchwoman, who was standing with a look half-guilty, half-imploring, at a little distance.

There was something, to Mrs. Marston, so utterly unexpected, and even so shocking, in this tableau, that she stood for some seconds pale and breathless, and gazing with a vacant stare of fear and horror from her husband to the French girl, and from her to her husband again. The three figures in this strange group remained fixed, silent, and aghast, for several seconds. Mrs. Marston endeavored to speak; but, though her lips moved, no sound escaped her; and, from very weakness, she sank, half-fainting, into a chair.

Marston rose, throwing, as he did so, a guilty and furious glance at the young Frenchwoman, and walked a step or two toward the door; he hesitated, however, and turned, just as mademoiselle, bursting into tears, threw her arms round Mrs. Marston's neck, and passionately exclaimed, "Protect me, madame, I implore, from the insults and suspicions of your husband."

Marston stood a little behind his wife, and he and the governess exchanged a glance of keen significance, as the latter sank, sobbing, like an injured child into its mother's embrace, upon the poor lady's tortured bosom.

"Madame, madame! he says — Mr. Marston says — I have presumed to give you advice, and to meddle, and to interfere; that I am endeavoring to make you despise his authority. Madame, speak for me. Say, madame, have I ever done so? — say, madame, am I the cause of bitterness and contumacy? Ah, mon Dieu! c'est trop — it is too much, madame. I shall go — I must go, madame. Why, ah! why, did I stay for this?"

As she thus spoke, mademoiselle again burst into a paroxysm of weeping, and again the same significant glance was interchanged.

"Go; yes, you shall go," said Marston, striding toward the window. "I will have no whispering or conspiring in my house: I have heard of your confidences and consultations. Mrs. Marston, I meant to have done this quietly," he continued, addressing his wife; "I meant to have given Mademoiselle de Barras my opinion and her dismissal without your assistance; but it seems you wish to interpose. You are sworn friends, and never fail one another, of course, at a pinch. I take it for granted that I owe your presence at our interview which I am resolved shall be, as respects mademoiselle, a final one, to a message from that intriguing young lady — eh?"

"I have had no message, Richard," said Mrs. Marston; "I don't know — do tell me, for God's sake, what is all this about?" And as the poor lady thus spoke, her overwrought feelings found vent in a violent flood of tears.

"Yes, madame, that is the question. I have asked him frequently what is all this anger, all these reproaches about; what have I done?" interposed mademoiselle, with indignant vehemence, standing erect, and viewing

Marston with a flashing eye and a flushed cheek. “Yes, I am called conspirator, meddler, intrigant. Ah, madame, it is intolerable.”

“But what have I done, Richard?” urged the poor lady, stunned and bewildered; “how have I offended you?”

“Yes, yes,” continued the Frenchwoman, with angry volubility, “what has she done that you call contumacy and disrespect? Yes, dear madame, there is the question; and if he cannot answer, is it not most cruel to call me conspirator, and spy, and intrigant, because I talk to my dear madame, who is my only friend in this place?”

“Mademoiselle de Barras, I need no declamation from you; and, pardon me, Mrs. Marston, nor from you either,” retorted he; “I have my information from one on whom I can rely; let that suffice. Of course you are both agreed in a story. I dare say you are ready to swear you never so much as canvassed my conduct, and my coldness and estrangement — eh? These are the words, are not they?”

“I have done you no wrong, sir; madame can tell you. I am no mischief-maker; no, I never was such a thing. Was I, madame?” persisted the governess— “bear witness for me?”

“I have told you my mind, Mademoiselle de Barras,” interrupted Marston; “I will have no altercation, if you please. I think, Mrs. Marston, we have had enough of this; may I accompany you hence?”

So saying, he took the poor lady’s passive hand, and led her from the room. Mademoiselle stood in the center of the apartment, alone, erect, with heaving breast and burning cheek — beautiful, thoughtful, guilty — the very type of the fallen angelic. There for a time, her heart all confusion, her mind darkened, we must leave her; various courses before her, and as yet without resolution to choose among them; a lost spirit, borne on the eddies of the storm; fearless and self-reliant, but with no star to guide her on her dark, malign, and forlorn way.

Mrs. Marston, in her own room, reviewed the agitating scene through which she had just been so unexpectedly carried. The tremendous suspicion which, at the first disclosure of the tableau we have described, smote the heart and brain of the poor lady with the stun of a thunderbolt, had been, indeed, subsequently disturbed, and afterwards contradicted; but the shock of her first impression remained still upon her mind and heart. She felt still through every nerve the vibrations of that maddening terror and despair which had overcome her senses for a moment. The surprise, the shock, the horror, outlived the obliterating influence of what followed. She was in this agitation when Mademoiselle de Barras entered her chamber, resolved with all her art to second and support the success of her prompt measures in the recent critical emergency. She had come, she said, to bid her dear madame farewell, for she was resolved to go. Her own room had been invaded, that insult and reproach might be heaped upon her; how utterly unmerited Mrs. Marston knew. She had been called by every foul name which applied to the spy and the maligner; she could not bear it. Some one had evidently been endeavoring to procure her removal, and had but too effectually succeeded. Mademoiselle was determined to go early the next morning; nothing should prevent or retard her departure; her resolution was taken. In this strain did mademoiselle run on, but in a subdued and melancholy tone, and weeping profusely.

The wild and ghastly suspicions which had for a moment flashed terribly upon the mind of Mrs. Marston, had faded away under the influences of reason and reflection, although, indeed, much painful excitement still remained, before Mademoiselle de Barras had visited her room. Marston's temper she knew but too well; it was violent, bitter, and impetuous; and though he cared little, if at all, for her, she had ever perceived that he was angrily jealous of the slightest intimacy or confidence by which any other than himself might establish an influence over her mind. That he had learned the subject of some of her most interesting conversations with mademoiselle she could not doubt, for he had violently upbraided that young lady in her presence with having discussed it, and here now was mademoiselle herself taking refuge with her from galling affront and unjust reproach, incensed, wounded, and weeping. The whole thing was consistent; all the circumstances bore plainly in the same direction; the evidence was conclusive; and Mrs. Marston's thoughts and feelings respecting her fair young confidante quickly found their old level, and flowed on tranquilly and sadly in their accustomed channel.

While Mademoiselle de Barras was thus, with the persevering industry of the spider, repairing the meshes which a chance breath had shattered, she would, perhaps, have been in her turn shocked and startled, could she have glanced into Marston's mind, and seen, in what was passing there, the real extent of her danger.

Marston was walking, as usual, alone, and in the most solitary region of his lonely park. One hand grasped his walking stick, not to lean upon it, but as if it were the handle of a battle-axe; the other was buried in his bosom; his dark face looked upon the ground, and he strode onward with a slow but energetic step, which had the air of deep resolution. He found himself at last in a little churchyard, lying far among the wild forest of his demesne, and in the midst of which, covered with ivy and tufted plants, now ruddy with autumnal tints, stood the ruined walls of a little chapel. In the dilapidated vault close by lay buried many of his ancestors, and under the little wavy hillocks of fern and nettles, slept many an humble villager. He sat down upon a worn tombstone in this lowly ruin, and with his eyes fixed upon the ground, he surrendered his spirit to the stormy and evil thoughts which he had invited. Long and motionless he sat there, while his foul fancies and schemes began to assume shape and order. The wind rushing through the ivy roused him for a moment, and as he raised his gloomy eye it alighted accidentally upon a skull, which some wanton hand had fixed in a crevice of the wall. He averted his glance quickly, but almost as quickly refixed his gaze upon the impassive symbol of death, with an expression glowering and contemptuous, and with an angry gesture struck it down among the weeds with his stick. He left the place, and wandered on through the woods.

"Men can't control the thoughts that flit across their minds," he muttered, as he went along, "anymore than they can direct the shadows of the clouds that sail above them. They come and pass, and leave no stain behind. What, then, of omens, and that wretched effigy of death? Stuff — pshaw! Murder, indeed! I'm incapable of murder. I have drawn my sword upon a man in fair duel; but murder! Out upon the thought, out upon it."

He stamped upon the ground with a pang at once of fury and horror. He walked on a little, stopped again, and folding his arms, leaned against an ancient tree.

"Mademoiselle de Barras, *vous êtes une traîtresse*, and you shall go.
Yes, go you shall; you have deceived me, and we must part."

He said this with melancholy bitterness; and, after a pause, continued:

"I will have no other revenge. No; though, I dare say, she will care but little for this; very little, if at all."

"And then, as to the other person," he resumed, after a pause, "it is not the first time he has acted like a trickster. He has crossed me before, and I will choose an opportunity to tell him my mind. I won't mince matters with him either, and will not spare him one insulting syllable that he deserves. He wears a sword, and so do I; if he pleases, he may draw it; he shall have the opportunity; but, at all events, I will make it impossible for him to prolong his disgraceful visit at my house."

On reaching home and his own study, the servant, Merton, presented himself, and his master, too deeply excited to hear him then, appointed the next day for the purpose. There was no contending against Marston's peremptory will, and the man reluctantly withdrew. Here was, apparently, a matter of no imaginable moment; whether this menial should be discharged on that day, or on the morrow; and yet mighty things were involved in the alternative.

There was a deeper gloom than usual over the house. The servants seemed to know that something had gone wrong, and looked grave and mysterious. Marston was more than ever dark and moody. Mrs. Marston's dimmed and swollen eyes showed that she had been weeping. Mademoiselle absented herself from supper, on the plea of a bad headache. Rhoda saw that something, she knew not what, had occurred to agitate her elders, and was depressed and anxious. The old clergyman, whom we have already mentioned, had called, and stayed to supper. Dr. Danvers was a man of considerable learning, strong sense, and remarkable simplicity of character. His thoughtful blue eye, and well-marked countenance, were full of gentleness and benevolence, and elevated by a certain natural dignity, of which purity and goodness, without one debasing shade of self-esteem and arrogance, were the animating spirit. Mrs. Marston loved and respected this good minister of God; and many a time had sought and found, in his gentle and earnest counsels, and in the overflowing tenderness of his sympathy, much comfort and support in the progress of her sore and protracted earthly trial. Most especially at one critical period in her history had he endeared himself to her, by interposing, and successfully, to prevent a formal separation which (as ending forever the one hope that cheered her on, even in the front of despair) she would probably not long have survived.

With Mr. Marston, however, he was far from being a favorite. There was that in his lofty and simple purity which abashed and silently reproached the sensual, bitter, disappointed man of the world. The angry pride of the scornful man felt its own meanness in the grand presence of a simple and humble Christian minister. And the very fact that all his habits had led him to hold such a character in contempt, made him but the more unreasonably resent the involuntary homage which its exhibition in Dr. Danvers's person invariably extorted from him. He felt in this good man's presence under a kind of irritating restraint; that he was in the presence of one with whom he had, and could have, no sympathy whatever, and yet one whom he could not help both admiring and respecting; and in these conflicting feelings were involved certain gloomy and humbling inferences about himself, which he hated, and almost feared to contemplate.

It was well, however, for the indulgence of Sir Wynston's conversational propensities, that Dr. Danvers had happened to drop in; for Marston was doggedly silent and sullen, and Mrs. Marston was herself scarcely more disposed than he to maintain her part in a conversation; so that, had it not been for the opportune arrival of the good clergyman, the supper must have been dispatched with a very awkward and unsocial taciturnity.

Marston thought, and, perhaps, not erroneously, that Sir Wynston suspected something of the real state of affairs, and he was, therefore, incensed to perceive, as he thought, in his manner, very evident indications of his being in unusually good spirits. Thus disposed, the party sat down to supper.

"One of our number is missing," said Sir Wynston, affecting a slight surprise, which, perhaps, he did not feel.

"Mademoiselle de Barras — I trust she is well?" said Doctor Danvers, looking towards Marston.

"I suppose she is; I don't know," said Marston, drily.

"Why! how should he know," said the baronet, gaily, but with something almost imperceptibly sarcastic in his tone. "Our friend, Marston, is privileged to be as ungallant as he pleases, except where he has the happy privilege to owe allegiance; but I, a gay young bachelor of fifty, am naturally curious. I really do trust that our charming French friend is not unwell."

He addressed his inquiry to Mrs. Marston, who, with some slight confusion, replied: —

"No; nothing, at least, serious; merely a slight headache. I am sure she will be quite well enough to come down to breakfast."

"She is, indeed, a very charming and interesting young person," said Doctor Danvers. "There is a certain simplicity about her which argues a good and kind heart, and an open nature."

"Very true, indeed, doctor," observed Berkley, with the same faint, but, to Marston, exquisitely provoking approximation to sarcasm. "There is, as you say, a very charming simplicity. Don't you think so, Marston?"

Marston looked at him for a moment, but continued silent.

"Poor mademoiselle! — she is, indeed, a most affectionate creature," said Mrs. Marston, who felt called upon to say something.

"Come, Marston, will you contribute nothing to the general fund of approbation?" said Sir Wynston, who was gifted by nature with an amiable talent for teasing, which he was fond of exercising in a quiet way. "We have all, but you, said something handsome of our absent young friend."

"I never praise anybody, Wynston; not even you," said Marston, with an obvious sneer.

"Well, well, I must comfort myself with the belief that your silence covers a great deal of goodwill, and, perhaps, a little admiration, too," answered his cousin, significantly.

"Comfort yourself in any honest way you will, my dear Wynston," retorted Marston, with a degree of asperity, which, to all but the baronet himself, was unaccountable. "You may be right, you may be wrong; on a subject so unimportant it matters very little which; you are at perfect liberty to practice delusions, if you will, upon yourself."

"By-the-bye, Mr. Marston, is not your son about to come down here?" asked Doctor Danvers, who perceived that the altercation was becoming, on Marston's part, somewhat testy, if not positively rude.

"Yes; I expect him in a few days," replied he, with a sudden gloom.

"You have not seen him, Sir Wynston?" asked the clergyman.

"I have that pleasure yet to come," said the baronet.

"A pleasure it is, I do assure you," said Doctor Danvers, heartily. "He is a handsome lad, with the heart of a hero — a fine, frank, generous lad, and as merry as a lark."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Marston; "he is well enough, and has done pretty well at Cambridge. Doctor Danvers, take some wine."

It was strange, but yet mournfully true, that the praises which the good Doctor Danvers thus bestowed upon his son were bitter to the soul of the unhappy Marston. They jarred upon his ear, and stung his heart; for his conscience converted them into so many latent insults and humiliations to himself.

"Your wine is very good, Marston. I think your clarets are many degrees better than any I can get," said Sir Wynston, sipping a glass of his favorite wine. "You country gentlemen are sad selfish dogs; and, with all your grumbling, manage to collect the best of whatever is worth having about you."

"We sometimes succeed in collecting a pleasant party," retorted Marston, with ironical courtesy, "though we do not always command the means of entertaining them quite as we would wish."

It was the habit of Doctor Danvers, without respect of persons or places, to propose, before taking his departure from whatever domestic party he chanced to be thrown among for the evening, to read some verses from that holy Book, on which his own hopes and peace were founded, and to offer up a prayer for all to the throne of grace. Marston, although he usually absented himself from such exercises, did not otherwise discourage them; but upon the present occasion, starting from his gloomy reverie, he himself was the first to remind the clergyman of his customary observance. Evil thoughts loomed upon the mind of Marston, like measureless black mists upon a cold, smooth sea. They rested, grew, and darkened there; and no heavensent breath came silently to steal them away. Under this dread shadow his mind lay waiting, like the deep, before the Spirit of God moved upon its waters, passive and awful. Why for the first time now did religion interest him? The unseen, intangible, was even now at work within him. A dreadful power shook his very heart and soul. There was some strange, ghastly wrestling going on in his own immortal spirit, a struggle that made him faint, which he had no power to determine. He looked upon the holy influence of the good man's prayer — a prayer in which he could not join

— with a dull, superstitious hope that the words, inviting better influence, though uttered by another, and with other objects, would, like a spell, chase away the foul fiend that was busy with his soul. Marston sate, looking into the fire, with a countenance of stern gloom, upon which the wayward lights of the flickering hearth sported fitfully; while at a distant table Doctor Danvers sate down, and, taking his well-worn Bible from his pocket, turned over its leaves, and began, in gentle but impressive tones, to read.

Sir Wynston was much too well bred to evince the slightest disposition to aught but the most proper and profound attention. The faintest imaginable gleam of ridicule might, perhaps, have been discerned in his features, as he leaned back in his chair, and, closing his eyes, composed himself to at least an attitude of attention. No man could submit with more cheerfulness to an inevitable bore.

In these things, then, thou hast no concern; the judgment troubles thee not; thou hast no fear of death, Sir Wynston Berkley; yet there is a heart beating near thee, the mysteries of which, could they glide out and stand before thy face, would perchance appal thee, cold, easy man of the world. Aye, couldst thou but see with those cunning eyes of thine, but twelve brief hours into futurity, each syllable that falls from that good man's lips unheeded would peal through thy heart and brain like maddening thunder. Hearken, hearken, Sir Wynston Berkley, perchance these are the farewell words of thy better angel — the last pleadings of despised mercy!

The party broke up. Doctor Danvers took his leave, and rode homeward, down the broad avenue, between the gigantic ranks of elm that closed it in. The full moon was rising above the distant hills; the mists lay like sleeping lakes in the laps of the hollows; and the broad demesne looked tranquil and sad under this chastened and silvery glory. The good old clergyman thought, as he pursued his way, that here at least, in a spot so beautiful and sequestered, the stormy passions and fell contentions of the outer world could scarcely penetrate. Yet, in that calm secluded spot, and under the cold, pure light which fell so holily, what a hell was weltering and glaring! — what a spectacle was that moon to go down upon! As Sir Wynston was leaving the parlor for his own room, Marston accompanied him to the hall, and said— "I shan't play tonight, Sir Wynston."

"Ah, ha! very particularly engaged?" suggested the baronet, with a faint, mocking smile. "Well, my dear fellow, we must endeavor to make up for it tomorrow — eh?”

“I don’t know that,” said Marston, “and — in a word, there is no use, sir, in our masquerading with one another. Each knows the other; each understands the other. I wish to have a word or two with you in your room tonight, when we shan’t be interrupted.”

Marston spoke in a fierce and grating whisper, and his countenance, more even than his accents, betrayed the intensity of his bridled fury. Sir Wynston, however, smiled upon his cousin as if his voice had been melody, and his looks all sunshine.

“Very good, Marston, just as you please,” he said; “only don’t be later than one, as I shall be getting into bed about that hour.”

“Perhaps, upon second thoughts, it is as well to defer what I have to say,” said Marston, musingly. “Tomorrow will do as well; so, perhaps, Sir Wynston, I may not trouble you tonight.”

“Just as suits you best, my dear Marston,” replied the baronet, with a tranquil smile; “only don’t come after the hour I have stipulated.”

So saying, the baronet mounted the stairs, and made his way to his chamber. He was in excellent spirits, and in high good-humor with himself: the object of his visit to Gray Forest had been, as he now flattered himself, attained. He had conducted an affair requiring the profoundest mystery in its prosecution, and the nicest tactic in its management, almost to a triumphant issue. He had perfectly masked his design, and completely outwitted Marston; and to a person who piqued himself upon his clever diplomacy, and vaunted that he had never yet sustained a defeat in any object which he had seriously proposed to himself, such a combination of successes was for the moment quite intoxicating.

Sir Wynston not only enjoyed his own superiority with all the vanity of a selfish nature, but he no less enjoyed, with a keen and malicious relish, the intense mortification which, he was well assured, Marston must experience; and all the more acutely, because of the utter impossibility, circumstanced as he was, of his taking any steps to manifest his vexation, without compromising himself in a most unpleasant way.

Animated by these amiable feelings, Sir Wynston Berkley sate down, and wrote the following short letter, addressed to Mrs. Gray, Wynston Hall: —

“Mrs. Gray,

“On receipt of this have the sitting rooms and several bedrooms put in order, and thoroughly aired. Prepare for my use the suite of three rooms over the library and drawing room; and have the two great wardrobes, and the cabinet in the state bedroom, removed into the large dressing room which opens upon the bedroom I have named. Make everything as comfortable as possible. If anything is wanted in the way of furniture, drapery, ornament, &c., you need only write to John Skelton, Esq., Spring-garden, London, stating what is required, and he will order and send them down. You must be expeditious, as I shall probably go down to Wynston, with two or three friends, at the beginning of next month.

“WYNSTON BERKLEY

“P.S. — I have written to direct Arkins and two or three of the other servants to go down at once. Set them all to work immediately.”

He then applied himself to another letter of considerably greater length, and from which, therefore, we shall only offer a few extracts. It was addressed to John Skelton, Esq., and began as follows. —

“My Dear Skelton,

“You are, doubtless, surprised at my long silence, but I have had nothing very particular to say. My visit to this dull and uncomfortable place was (as you rightly surmise) not without its object — a little bit of wicked romance; the pretty demoiselle of Rouen, whom I mentioned to you more than once — la belle de Barras — was, in truth, the attraction that drew me hither; and I think (for, as yet, she affects hesitation), I shall have no further trouble with her. She is a fine creature, and you will admit, when you have seen her, well worth taking some trouble about. She is, however, a very knowing little minx, and evidently suspects me of being a sad, fickle dog — and, as I surmise, has some plans, moreover, respecting my morose cousin, Marston, a kind of wicked Penruddock, who has carried all his London tastes into his savage retreat, a paradise of bogs and bushes. There is, I am very confident, a liaison in that quarter. The young lady is evidently a good deal afraid of him, and insists upon such precautions in our interviews, that they have been very few, and far between, indeed. Today, there has been a fracas of some kind. I have no doubt that Marston, poor devil, is jealous. His situation is really pitiably comic — with an intriguing mistress, a saintly wife, and a devil of a jealous temper of his own. I shall meet Mary on reaching town. Has Clavering (shabby dog!) paid his I.O.U. yet? Tell the little opera woman she had better be quiet. She ought to know me by this time; I shall do what is right, but won't submit to be bullied. If she is troublesome, snap your fingers at her, on my behalf, and leave her to her remedy. I have written to Gray, to get things at Wynston in order. She will draw upon you for what money she requires. Send down two or three of the servants, if they have not already gone. The place is very dusty and dingy, and needs a great deal of brushing and scouring. I shall see you in town very soon. By the way, has the claret I ordered from the Dublin house arrived yet? It is consigned to you, and goes by the 'Lizard'; pay the freightage, and get Edwards to pack it; ten dozen or so may as well go down to Wynston, and send other wines in proportion. I leave details to you…."

Some further directions upon other subjects followed; and having subscribed the dispatch, and addressed it to the gentlemanlike scoundrel who filled the onerous office of factotum to this profligate and exacting man of the world, Sir Wynston Berkley rang his bell, and gave the two letters into the hand of his man, with special directions to carry them himself in person, to the post office in the neighboring village, early next morning. These little matters completed, Sir Wynston stirred his fire, leaned back in his easy chair, and smiled blandly over the sunny prospect of his imaginary triumphs.

It here becomes necessary to describe, in a few words, some of the local relations of Sir Wynston's apartments. The bedchamber which he occupied opened from the long passage of which we have already spoken — and there were two other smaller apartments opening from it in train. In the further of these, which was entered from a lobby, communicating by a back stair with the kitchen and servants' apartments, lay Sir Wynston's valet, and the intermediate chamber was fitted up as a dressing room for the baronet himself. These circumstances it is necessary to mention, that what follows may be clearly intelligible.

While the baronet was penning these records of vicious schemes — dire waste of wealth and time — irrevocable time! — Marston paced his study in a very different frame of mind. There were a gloom and disorder in the room accordant with those of his own mind. Shelves of ancient tomes, darkened by time, and upon which the dust of years lay sleeping — dark oaken cabinets, filled with piles of deeds and papers, among which the nimble spiders were crawling — and, from the dusky walls, several stark, pale ancestors, looking down coldly from their tarnished frames. An hour, and another hour passed — and still Marston paced this melancholy chamber, a prey to his own fell passions and dark thoughts. He was not a superstitious man, but, in the visions which haunted him, perhaps, was something which made him unusually excitable — for, he experienced a chill of absolute horror, as, standing at the farther end of the room, with his face turned towards the entrance, he beheld the door noiselessly and slowly pushed open, by a pale, thin hand, and a figure dressed in a loose white robe, glide softly in. He stood for some seconds gazing upon this apparition, as it moved hesitatingly towards him from the dusky extremity of the large apartment, before he perceived that the form was that of Mrs. Marston.

"Hey, ha! — Mrs. Marston — what on earth has called you hither?" he asked, sternly. "You ought to have been at rest an hour ago; get to your chamber, and leave me, I have business to attend to."

"Now, dear Richard, you must forgive me," she said, drawing near, and looking up into his haggard face with a sweet and touching look of timidity and love; "I could not rest until I saw you again; your looks have been all this night so unlike yourself; so strange and terrible, that I am afraid some great misfortune threatens you, which you fear to tell me of."

"My looks! Why, curse it, must I give an account of my looks?" replied Marston, at once disconcerted and wrathful. "Misfortune! What misfortune can befall us more? No, there is nothing, nothing, I say, but your own foolish fancy; go to your room — go to sleep — my looks, indeed; pshaw!"

"I came to tell you, dear Richard, that I will do, in all respects, just as you desire. If you continue to wish it, I will part with poor mademoiselle; though, indeed, Richard, I shall miss her more than you can imagine; and all your suspicions have wronged her deeply," said Mrs. Marston. Her husband darted a sudden flashing glance of suspicious scrutiny upon her face; but its expression was frank, earnest, noble. He was disarmed; he hung his head gloomily upon his breast, and was silent for a time. She came nearer, and laid her hand upon his arm. He looked darkly into her upturned eyes, and a feeling which had not touched his heart for many a day — an emotion of pity, transient, indeed, but vivid, revisited him. He took her hand in his, and said, in gentler terms than she had heard him use for a long time —

"No, indeed, Gertrude, you have deceived yourself; no misfortune has happened, and if I am gloomy, the source of all my troubles is within. Leave me, Gertrude, for the present. As to the other matter, the departure of Mademoiselle de Barras, we can talk of that tomorrow — now I cannot; so let us part. Go to your room; good night."

She was withdrawing, and he added, in a subdued tone— "Gertrude, I am very glad you came — very glad. Pray for me tonight."

He had followed her a few steps toward the door, and now stopped short, turned about, and walked dejectedly back again —

"I am right glad she came," he muttered, as soon as he was once more alone. "Wynston is provoking and fiery, too. Were I, in my present mood, to seek a tête-à-tête with him, who knows what might come of it? Blood; my own heart whispers — blood! I'll not trust myself."

He strode to the study door, locked it, and taking out the key, shut it in the drawer of one of the cabinets.

"Now it will need more than accident or impulse to lead me to him. I cannot go, at least, without reflection, without premeditation. Avaunt, fiend. I have baffled you."

He stood in the center of the room, cowering and scowling as he said this, and looked round with a glance half-defiant, half-fearful, as if he expected to see some dreadful form in the dusky recesses of the desolate chamber. He sat himself by the smouldering fire, in somber and agitated rumination. He was restless; he rose again, unbuckled his sword, which he had not loosed since evening, and threw it hastily into a corner. He looked at his watch, it was halfpast twelve; he glanced at the door, and thence at the cabinet in which he had placed the key; then he turned hastily, and sate down again. He leaned his elbows on his knees, and his chin upon his clenched hand; still he was restless and excited. Once more he arose, and paced up and down. He consulted his watch again; it was now but a quarter to one.

Sir Wynston's man having received the letters, and his master's permission to retire to rest, got into his bed, and was soon beginning to dose. We have already mentioned that his and Sir Wynston's apartments were separated by a small dressing room, so that any ordinary noise or conversation could be heard but imperfectly from one to the other. The servant, however, was startled by a sound of something falling on the floor of his master's apartment, and broken to pieces by the violence of the shock. He sate up in his bed, listened, and heard some sentences spoken vehemently, and gabbled very fast. He thought he distinguished the words "wretch" and "God"; and there was something so strange in the tone in which they were spoken, that the man got up and stole noiselessly through the dressing room, and listened at the door.

He heard him, as he thought, walking in his slippers through the room, and making his customary arrangements previously to getting into bed. He knew that his master had a habit of speaking when alone, and concluded that the accidental breakage of some glass or chimney-ornament had elicited the volley of words he had heard. Well knowing that, except at the usual hours, or in obedience to Sir Wynston's bell, nothing more displeased his master than his presuming to enter his sleeping-apartment while he was there, the servant quietly retreated, and, perfectly satisfied that all was right, composed himself to slumber, and was soon beginning to dose again.

The adventures of the night, however, were not yet over. Waking, as men sometimes do, without any ascertainable cause; without a start or an uneasy sensation; without even a disturbance of the attitude of repose, he opened his eyes and beheld Merton, the servant of whom we have spoken, standing at a little distance from his bed. The moonlight fell in a clear flood upon this figure: the man was ghastly pale; there was a blotch of blood on his face; his hands were clasped upon something which they nearly concealed; and his eyes, fixed on the servant who had just awakened, shone in the cold light with a wild and lifeless glitter. This specter drew close to the side of the bed, and stood for a few moments there with a look of agony and menace, which startled the newly-awakened man, who rose upright, and said —

"Mr. Merton, Mr. Merton — in God's name, what is the matter?"

Merton recoiled at the sound of his voice; and, as he did so, dropped something on the floor, which rolled away to a distance; and he stood gazing silently and horribly upon his interrogator.

"Mr. Merton, I say, what is it?" urged the man. "Are you hurt? Your face is bloody."

Merton raised his hand to his face mechanically, and Sir Wynston's man observed that it, too, was covered with blood.

“Why, man,” he said, vehemently, and actually freezing with horror,” you are all bloody; hands and face; all over blood.”

“My hand is cut to the bone,” said Merton, in a harsh whisper; and speaking to himself, rather than addressing the servant— “I wish it was my neck; I wish to God I bled to death.”

“You have hurt your hand, Mr. Merton,” repeated the man, scarce knowing what he said.

“Aye,” whispered Merton, wildly drawing toward the bedside again; “who told you I hurt my hand? It is cut to the bone, sure enough.”

He stooped for a moment over the bed, and then cowered down toward the floor to search for what he had dropped.

“Why, Mr. Merton, what brings you here at this hour?” urged the man, after a pause of a few seconds. “It is drawing toward morning.”

“Aye, aye,” said Merton, doubtfully, and starting upright again, while he concealed in his bosom what he had been in search of. “Near morning, is it? Night and morning, it is all one to me. I believe I am going mad, by— “

“But what do you want? What did you come here for at this hour?” persisted the man.

“What! Aye, that is it; why, his boots and spurs, to be sure. I forgot them. His — his — Sir Wynston’s boots and spurs; I forgot to take them, I say,” said Merton, looking toward the dressing room, as if about to enter it.

“Don’t mind them tonight, I say, don’t go in there,” said the man, peremptorily, and getting out upon the floor. “I say, Mr. Merton, this is no hour to be going about searching in the dark for boots and spurs. You’ll waken the master. I can’t have it, I say; go down, and let it be for tonight.”

Thus speaking, in a resolute and somewhat angry under-key, the valet stood between Merton and the entrance of the dressing-room; and, signing with his hand toward the other door of the apartment, continued —

“Go down, I say, Mr. Merton, go down; you may as well quietly, for, I tell you plainly, you shall neither go a step further, nor stay here a moment longer.”

The man drew his shoulders up, and made a sort of shivering moan, and clasping his hands together, shook them, as it seemed, in great agony. He then turned abruptly, and hurried from the room by the door leading to the kitchen.

"By my faith," said the servant, "I am glad he is gone. The poor chap is turning crazy, as sure as I am a living man. I'll not have him prowling about here anymore, however; that I am resolved on."

In pursuance of this determination, by no means an imprudent one, as it seemed, he fastened the door communicating with the lower apartments upon the inside. He had hardly done this, when he heard a step traversing the stableyard, which lay under the window of his apartment. He looked out, and saw Merton walking hurriedly across, and into a stable at the farther end.

Feeling no very particular curiosity about his movements, the man hurried back to his bed. Merton's eccentric conduct of late had become so generally remarked and discussed among the servants, that Sir Wynston's man was by no means surprised at the oddity of the visit he had just had; nor, after the first few moments of doubt, before the appearance of blood had been accounted for, had he entertained any suspicions whatever connected with the man's unexpected presence in the room. Merton was in the habit of coming up every night to take down Sir Wynston's boots, whenever the baronet had ridden in the course of the day; and this attention had been civilly undertaken as a proof of goodwill toward the valet, whose duty this somewhat soiling and ungentlemanlike process would otherwise have been. So far, the nature of the visit was explained; and the remembrance of the friendly feeling and good offices which had been mutually interchanged, as well as of the inoffensive habits for which Merton had earned a character for himself, speedily calmed the uneasiness, for a moment amounting to actual alarm, with which the servant had regarded his appearance.

We must now pass on to the morrow, and ask the reader's attention for a few moments to a different scene.

In contact with Gray Forest upon the northern side, and divided by a common boundary, lay a demesne, in many respects presenting a very striking contrast to its grander neighbor. It was a comparatively modern place. It could not boast the towering timber which enriched and overshadowed the vast and varied expanse of its aristocratic rival; but, if it was inferior in the advantages of antiquity, and, perhaps, also in some of those of nature, its superiority in other respects was striking, and important. Gray Forest was not more remarkable for its wild and neglected condition, than was Newton Park for the care and elegance with which it was kept. No one could observe the contrast, without, at the same time, divining its cause. The proprietor of the one was a man of wealth, fully commensurate with the extent and pretensions of the residence he had chosen; the owner of the other was a man of broken fortunes.

Under a green shade, which nearly met above, a very young man, scarcely one-and-twenty, of a frank and sensible, rather than a strictly handsome countenance, was walking, followed by half a dozen dogs of as many breeds and sizes. This young man was George Mervyn, the only son of the present proprietor of the place. As he approached the great gate, the clank of a horse's hoofs in quick motion upon the sequestered road which ran outside it, reached him; and hardly had he heard these sounds, when a young gentleman rode briskly by, directing his look into the demesne as he passed. He had no sooner seen him, than wheeling his horse about, he rode up to the iron gate, and dismounting, threw it open, and let his horse in.

"Ha! Charles Marston, I protest!" said the young man, quickening his pace to meet his friend. "Marston, my dear fellow," he called aloud, "how glad I am to see you."

There was another entrance into Newton Park, opening from the same road, about half a mile further on; and Charles Marston made his way lie through this. Thus the young people walked on, talking of a hundred things as they proceeded, in the mirth of their hearts.

Between the fathers of the two young men, who thus walked so affectionately together, there subsisted unhappily no friendly feelings. There had been several slight disagreements between them, touching their proprietary rights, and one of these had ripened into a formal and somewhat expensive litigation, respecting a certain right of fishing claimed by each. This legal encounter had terminated in the defeat of Marston. Mervyn, however, promptly wrote to his opponent, offering him the free use of the waters for which they had thus sharply contested, and received a curt and scarcely civil reply, declining the proposed courtesy. This exhibition of resentment on Marston's part had been followed by some rather angry collisions, where chance or duty happened to throw them together. It is but justice to say that, upon all such occasions, Marston was the aggressor. But Mervyn was a somewhat testy old gentleman, and had a certain pride of his own, which was not to be trifled with. Thus, though near neighbors, the parents of the young friends were more than strangers to each other. On Mervyn's side, however, this estrangement was unalloyed with bitterness, and simply of that kind which the great moralist would have referred to "defensive pride." It did not include any member of Marston's family, and Charles, as often as he desired it, which was, in truth, as often as his visits could escape the special notice of his father, was a welcome guest at Newton Park.

These details respecting the mutual relation in which the two families stood, it was necessary to state, for the purpose of making what follows perfectly clear. The young people had now reached the further gate, at which they were to part. Charles Marston, with a heart beating happily in the anticipation of many a pleasant meeting, bid him farewell for the present, and in a few minutes more was riding up the broad, straight avenue, towards the gloomy mansion which closed in the hazy and somber perspective. As he moved onward, he passed a laborer, with whose face, from his childhood, he had been familiar.

"How do you do, Tom?" he cried.

"At your service, sir," replied the man, uncovering, "and welcome home, sir."

There was something dark and anxious in the man's looks, which ill-accorded with the welcome he spoke, and which suggested some undefined alarm.

"The master, and mistress, and Miss Rhoda — are all well?" he asked eagerly.

"All well, sir, thank God," replied the man.

Young Marston spurred on, filled with vague apprehensions, and observing the man still leaning upon his spade, and watching his progress with the same gloomy and curious eye.

At the hall-door he met with one of the servants, booted and spurred.

"Well, Daly," he said, as he dismounted, "how are all at home?"

This man, like the former, met his smile with a troubled countenance, and stammered —

"All, sir — that is, the master, and mistress, and Miss Rhoda — quite well, sir; but— "

"Well, well," said Charles, eagerly, "speak on — what is it?"

"Bad work, sir," replied the man, lowering his voice. "I am going off this minute for— "

"For what?" urged the young gentleman.

"Why, sir, for the coroner," replied he.

"The coroner — the coroner! Why, good God, what has happened?" cried Charles, aghast with horror.

"Sir Wynston," commenced the man, and hesitated.

"Well?" pursued Charles, pale and breathless.

"Sir Wynston — he — it is he," said the man.

"He? Sir Wynston? Is he dead, or who is? — Who is dead?" demanded the young man, almost fiercely.

"Sir Wynston, sir; it is he that is dead. There is bad work, sir — very bad, I'm afraid," replied the man.

Charles did not wait to inquire further, but, with a feeling of mingled horror and curiosity, entered the house.

He hurried up the stairs, and entered his mother's sitting room. She was there, perfectly alone, and so deadly pale, that she scarcely looked like a living being. In an instant they were locked in one another's arms.

"Mother — my dear mother, you are ill," said the young man, anxiously.

"Oh, no, no, dear Charles, but frightened, horrified;" and as she said this, the poor lady burst into tears.

"What is this horrible affair? Something about Sir Wynston. He is dead, I know, but is it — is it suicide?" he asked.

"Oh, no, not suicide," said Mrs. Marston, greatly agitated.

"Good God! Then he is murdered," whispered the young man, growing very pale.

"Yes, Charles — horrible — dreadful! I can scarcely believe it," replied she, shuddering while she wept.

"Where is my father?" inquired the young man, after a pause.

"Why, why, Charles, darling — why do you ask for him?" she said, wildly, grasping him by the arm, as she looked into his face with a terrified expression.

"Why — why, he could tell me the particulars of this horrible tragedy," answered he, meeting her agonized look with one of alarm and surprise, "as far as they have been as yet collected. How is he, mother — is he well?"

"Oh, yes, quite well, thank God," she answered, more collectedly— "quite well, but, of course, greatly, dreadfully shocked."

"I will go to him, mother; I will see him," said he, turning towards the door.

"He has been wretchedly depressed and excited for some days," said Mrs. Marston, dejectedly, "and this dreadful occurrence will, I fear, affect him most deplorably."

The young man kissed her tenderly and affectionately, and hurried down to the library, where his father usually sat when he desired to be alone, or was engaged in business. He opened the door softly. His father was standing at one of the windows, his face haggard as from a night's watching, unkempt and unshorn, and with his hands thrust into his pockets. At the sound of the revolving door he started, and seeing his son, first recoiled a little, with a strange, doubtful expression, and then rallying, walked quickly towards him with a smile, which had in it something still more painful.

"Charles, I am glad to see you," he said, shaking him with an agitated pressure by both hands, "Charles, this is a great calamity, and what makes it still worse, is that the murderer has escaped; it looks badly, you know."

He fixed his gaze for a few moments upon his son, turned abruptly, and walked a little way into the room then, in a disconcerted manner, he added, hastily turning back —

"Not that it signifies to us, of course — but I would fain have justice satisfied."

"And who is the wretch — the murderer?" inquired Charles.

"Who? Why, everyone knows! — that scoundrel, Merton," answered Marston, in an irritated tone— "Merton murdered him in his bed, and fled last night; he is gone — escaped — and I suspect Sir Wynston's man of being an accessory."

"Which was Sir Wynston's bedroom?" asked the young man.

"The room that old Lady Mostyn had — the room with the portrait of Grace Hamilton in it."

“I know — I know,” said the young man, much excited. “I should wish to see it.”

“Stay,” said Marston; “the door from the passage is bolted on the inside, and I have locked the other; here is the key, if you choose to go, but you must bring Hughes with you, and do not disturb anything; leave all as it is; the jury ought to see, and examine for themselves.”

Charles took the key, and, accompanied by the awestruck servant, he made his way by the back stairs to the door opening from the dressing-room, which, as we have said, intervened between the valet’s chamber and Sir Wynston’s. After a momentary hesitation, Charles turned the key in the door, and stood.

“In the dark chamber of white death.”

The shutters lay partly open, as the valet had left them some hours before, on making the astounding discovery, which the partially admitted light revealed. The corpse lay in the silk-embroidered dressing gown, and other habiliments, which Sir Wynston had worn, while taking his ease in his chamber, on the preceding night. The coverlet was partially dragged over it. The mouth was gaping, and filled with clotted blood; a wide gash was also visible in the neck, under the ear; and there was a thickening pool of blood at the bedside, and quantities of blood, doubtless from other wounds, had saturated the bedclothes under the body. There lay Sir Wynston, stiffened in the attitude in which the struggle of death had left him, with his stern, stony face, and dim, terrible gaze turned up.

Charles looked breathlessly for more than a minute upon this mute and unchanging spectacle, and then silently suffered the curtain to fall back again, and stepped, with the light tread of awe, again to the door. There he turned back, and pausing for a minute, said, in a whisper, to the attendant —

“And Merton did this?”

“Troth, I’m afeard he did, sir,” answered the man, gloomily.

“And has made his escape?” continued Charles.

“Yes, sir; he stole away in the night-time,” replied the servant, “after the murder was done” (and he glanced fearfully toward the bed); “God knows where he’s gone.”

“The villain!” muttered Charles; “but what was his motive? why did he do all this — what does it mean?”

"I don't know exactly, sir, but he was very queer for a week and more before it," replied the man; "there was something bad over him for a long time."

"It is a terrible thing," said Charles, with a profound sigh; "a terrible and shocking occurrence."

He hesitated again at the door, but his feelings had sustained a terrible revulsion at sight of the corpse, and he was no longer disposed to prosecute his purposed examination of the chamber and its contents; with a view to conjecturing the probable circumstances of the murder.

"Observe, Hughes, that I have moved nothing in the chamber from the place it occupied when we entered," he said to the servant, as they withdrew.

He locked the door, and as he passed through the hall, on his return, he encountered his father, and, restoring the key, said —

"I could not stay there; I am almost sorry I have seen it; I am overpowered; what a determined, ferocious murder it was; the place is all in a pool of gore; he must have received many wounds."

"I can't say; the particulars will be elicited soon enough; those details are for the inquest; as for me, I hate such spectacles," said Marston, gloomily; "go now, and see your sister; you will find her there."

He pointed to the small room where we have first seen her and her fair governess; Charles obeyed the direction, and Marston proceeded himself to his wife's sitting room.

The young man, dispirited and horrified by the awful spectacle he had just contemplated, hurried to the little study occupied by his sister. Marston himself ascended, as we have said, the great staircase leading to his wife's private sitting room.

"Mrs. Marston," he said, entering, "this is a hateful occurrence, a dreadful thing to have taken place here; I don't mean to affect grief which I don't feel; but the thing is very shocking, and particularly so, as having occurred under my roof; but that cannot now be helped. I have resolved to spare no exertions, and no influence, to bring the assassin to justice; and a coroner's jury will, within a few hours, sift the evidence which we have succeeded in collecting. But my purpose in seeking you now is, to recur to the conversation we yesterday had, respecting a member of this establishment."

“Mademoiselle de Barras?” suggested the lady.

“Yes, Mademoiselle de Barras,” echoed Marston; “I wish to say, that, having reconsidered the circumstances affecting her, I am absolutely resolved that she shall not continue to be an inmate of this house.”

He paused, and Mrs. Marston said —

“Well, Richard, I am sorry, very sorry for it; but your decision shall never be disputed by me.”

“Of course,” said Marston, drily; “and, therefore, the sooner you acquaint her with it, and let her know that she must go, the better.”

Having said this, he left her, and went to his own chamber, where he proceeded to make his toilet with elaborate propriety, in preparation for the scene which was about to take place under his roof.

Mrs. Marston, meanwhile, suffered from a horrible uncertainty. She never harbored, it is true, one doubt as to her husband’s perfect innocence of the ghastly crime which filled their house with fear and gloom; but at the same time that she thoroughly and indignantly scouted the possibility of his, under any circumstances, being accessory to such a crime, she experienced a nervous and agonizing anxiety lest anyone else should possibly suspect him, however obliquely and faintly, of any participation whatever in the foul deed. This vague fear tortured her; it had taken possession of her mind; and it was the more acutely painful, because it was of a kind which precluded the possibility of her dispelling it, as morbid fears so often are dispelled, by taking counsel upon its suggestions with a friend.

The day wore on, and strange faces began to fill the great parlor. The coroner, accompanied by a physician, had arrived. Several of the gentry in the immediate vicinity had been summoned as jurors, and now began to arrive in succession. Marston, in a handsome and sober suit, received these visitors with a stately and melancholy courtesy, befitting the occasion. Mervyn and his son had both been summoned, and, of course, were in attendance. There being now a sufficient number to form a jury, they were sworn, and immediately proceeded to the chamber where the body of the murdered man was lying.

Marston accompanied them, and with a pale and stern countenance, and in a clear and subdued tone, called their attention successively to every particular detail which he conceived important to be noted. Having thus employed some minutes, the jury again returned to the parlor, and the examination of the witnesses commenced.

Marston, at his own request, was first sworn and examined. He deposed merely to the circumstance of his parting, on the night previous, with Sir Wynston, and to the state in which he had seen the room and the body in the morning. He mentioned also the fact, that on hearing the alarm in the morning, he had hastened from his own chamber to Sir Wynston's, and found, on trying to enter, that the door opening upon the passage was secured on the inside. This circumstance showed that the murderer must have made his egress at least through the valet's chamber, and by the backstairs. Marston's evidence went no further.

The next witness sworn was Edward Smith, the servant of the late Sir Wynston Berkley. His evidence was a narrative of the occurrences we have already stated. He described the sounds which he had overheard from his master's room, the subsequent appearance of Merton, and the conversation which had passed between them. He then proceeded to mention, that it was his master's custom to have himself called at seven o'clock, at which hour he usually took some medicine, which it was the valet's duty to bring to him; after which he either settled again to rest, or rose in a short time, if unable to sleep. Having measured and prepared the dose in the dressing room, the servant went on to say, he had knocked at his master's door, and receiving no answer, had entered the room, and partly unclosed the shutters. He perceived the blood on the carpet, and on opening the curtains, saw his master lying with his mouth and eyes open, perfectly dead, and weltering in gore. He had stretched out his hand, and seized that of the dead man, which was quite stiff and cold; then, losing heart, he had run to the door communicating with the passage, but found it locked, and turned to the other entrance, and ran down the backstairs, crying "murder." Mr. Hughes, the butler, and James Carney, another servant, came immediately, and they all three went back into the room. The key was in the outer door, upon the inside, but they did not unlock it until they had viewed the body. There was a great pool of blood in the bed, and in it was lying a red-handled case knife, which was produced, and identified by the witness. Just then they heard Mr. Marston calling for admission, and they opened the door with some difficulty, for the lock was rusty. Mr. Marston had ordered them to leave the things as they were, and had used very stern language to the witness. They had then left the room, securing both doors.

This witness underwent a severe and searching examination, but his evidence was clear and consistent.

In conclusion, Marston produced a dagger, which was stained with blood, and asked the man whether he recognized it.

Smith at once stated this to have been the property of his late master, who, when traveling, carried it, together with his pistols, along with him. Since his arrival at Gray Forest, it had lain upon the chimneypiece in his bedroom, where he believed it to have been upon the previous night.

James Carney, one of Marston's servants, was next sworn and examined. He had, he said, observed a strange and unaccountable agitation and depression in Merton's manner for some days past; he had also been several times disturbed at night by his talking aloud to himself, and walking to and fro in his room. Their bedrooms were separated by a thin partition, in which was a window, through which Carney had, on the night of the murder, observed a light in Merton's room, and, on looking in, had seen him dressing hastily. He also saw him twice take up, and again lay down, the red-hafted knife which had been found in the bed of the murdered man. He knew it by the handle being broken near the end. He had no suspicion of Merton having any mischievous intentions, and lay down again to rest. He afterwards heard him pass out of his room, and go slowly up the backstairs leading to the upper story. Shortly after this he had fallen asleep, and did not hear or see him return. He then described, as Smith had already done, the scene which presented itself in the morning, on his accompanying him into Sir Wynston's bedchamber.

The next witness examined was a little Irish boy, who described himself as "a poor scholar." His testimony was somewhat singular. He deposed that he had come to the house on the preceding evening, and had been given some supper, and was afterwards permitted to sleep among the hay in one of the lofts. He had, however, discovered what he considered a snugger berth. This was an unused stable, in the further end of which lay a quantity of hay. Among this he had lain down, and gone to sleep. He was, however, awakened in the course of the night by the entrance of a man, whom he saw with perfect distinctness in the moonlight, and his description of his dress and appearance tallied exactly with those of Merton. This man occupied himself for sometime in washing his hands and face in a stable bucket, which happened to stand by the door; and, during the whole of this process, he continued to moan and mutter, like one in woeful perturbation. He said, distinctly, twice or thrice, "by —— , I am done for;" and every now and then he muttered, "and nothing for it, after all." When he had done washing his hands, he took something from his coatpocket, and looked at it, shaking his head; at this time he was standing with his back turned toward the boy, so that he could not see what this object might be. The man, however, put it into his breast, and then began to search hurriedly, as it seemed, for some hiding place for it. After looking at the pavement, and poking at the chinks of the wall, he suddenly went to the window, and forced up the stone which formed the sill. Under this he threw the object which the boy had seen him examine with so much perplexity, and then he readjusted the stone, and removed the evidences of its having been recently stirred. The boy was a little frightened, but very curious about all that he saw; and when the man left the stable in which he lay, he got up, and following to the door, peeped after him. He saw him putting on an outside-coat and hat, near the yard gate; and then, with great caution, unbolt the wicket, constantly looking back towards the house, and so let himself out. The boy was uneasy, and sat in the hay, wideawake, until morning. He then told the servants what he had seen, and one of the men having raised the stone, which he had not strength to lift, they found the dagger, which Smith had identified as belonging to his master. This weapon was stained with blood; and some hair, which was found to correspond in color with Sir Wynston's, was sticking in the crevice between the blade and the handle.

"It appears very strange that one man should have employed two distinct instruments of this kind," observed Mervyn, after a pause. A silence followed.

"Yes, strange; it does seem strange," said Marston, clearing his voice.

"Yet, it is clear," said another of the jury, "that the same hand did employ them. It is proved that the knife was in Merton's possession just as he left his chamber; and proved, also, that the dagger was secreted by him after he quitted the house."

"Yes," said Marston, with a grisly sort of smile, and glancing sarcastically at Mervyn, while he addressed the last speaker— "I thank you for recalling my attention to the facts. It certainly is not a very pleasant suggestion, that there still remains within my household an undetected murderer."

Mervyn ruminated for a time, and said he should wish to put a few more questions to Smith and Carney. They were accordingly recalled, and examined in great detail, with a view to ascertain whether any indication of the presence of a second person having visited the chamber with Merton was discoverable. Nothing, however, appeared, except that the valet mentioned the noise and the exclamations which he had indistinctly heard.

"You did not mention that before, sir," said Marston, sharply.

"I did not think of it, sir," replied the man, "the gentlemen were asking me so many questions; but I told you, sir, about it in the morning."

"Oh, ah — yes, yes — I believe you did," said Marston; "but you then said that Sir Wynston often talked when he was alone; eh, sir?"

"Yes, sir, and so he used, which was the reason I did not go into the room when I heard it," replied the man.

"How long afterwards was it when you saw Merton in your own room?" asked Mervyn.

"I could not say, sir," answered Smith; "I was soon asleep, and can't say how long I slept before he came."

"Was it an hour?" pursued Mervyn.

"I can't say," said the man, doubtfully.

"Was it five hours?" asked Marston.

"No, Sir; I am sure it was not five."

"Could you swear it was more than half-an-hour?" persisted Marston.

"No, I could not swear that," answered he.

"I am afraid, Mr. Mervyn; you have found a mare's nest," said Marston, contemptuously.

"I have done my duty, sir," retorted Mervyn, cynically; "which plainly requires that I shall have no doubt, which the evidence of the witness can clear up, unsifted and unsatisfied. I happened to think it of some moment to ascertain, if possible, whether more persons than one were engaged in this atrocious murder. You don't seem to think the question so important a one; different men, sir, take different views."

"Views, sir, in matters of this sort, especially where they tend to multiply suspicions, and to implicate others, ought to be supported by something more substantial than mere fancies," retorted Marston.

"I don't know what you call fancies," replied Mervyn, testily; "but here are two deadly weapons, a knife and a dagger, each, it would seem, employed in doing this murder; if you see nothing odd in that, I can't enable you to do so."

"Well, sir," said Marston, grimly, "the whole thing is, as you term it, odd; and I can see no object in your picking out this particular singularity for long-winded criticism, except to cast scandal upon my household, by leaving a hideous and vague imputation floating among the members of it. Sir, sir, this is a foul way," he cried, sternly, "to gratify a paltry spite."

"Mr. Marston," said Mervyn, rising, and thrusting his hands into his pockets, while he confronted him to the full as sternly, "the country knows in which of our hearts the spite, if any there be between us, is harbored. I owe you no friendship, but, sir, I cherish no malice, either; and against the worst enemy I have on earth I am incapable of perverting an opportunity like this, and inflicting pain, under the pretence of discharging a duty."

Marston was on the point of retorting, but the coroner interposed, and besought them to confine their attention strictly to the solemn inquiry which they were summoned together to prosecute.

There remained still to be examined the surgeon who had accompanied the coroner, for the purpose of reporting upon the extent and nature of the injuries discoverable upon the person of the deceased. He, accordingly, deposed, that having examined the body, he found no less than three deep wounds, inflicted with some sharp instrument; two of them had actually penetrated the heart, and were, of course, supposed to cause instant death. Besides these, there were two contusions, one upon the back of the head, the other upon the forehead, with a slight abrasion of the eyebrow. There was a large lock of hair torn out by the roots at the front of the head, and the palm and fingers of the right hand were cut. This evidence having been taken, the jury once more repaired to the chamber where the body lay, and proceeded with much minuteness to examine the room, with a view to ascertain, if possible, more particularly the exact circumstances of the murder.

The result of this elaborate scrutiny was as follows: — The deceased, they conjectured, had fallen asleep in his easy chair, and, while he was unconscious, the murderer had stolen into the room, and, before attacking his victim, had secured the bedroom-door upon the inside. This was argued from the non-discovery of blood upon the handle, or any other part of the door. It was supposed that he had then approached Sir Wynston, with the view either of robbing, or of murdering him while he slept, and that the deceased had awakened just after he had reached him; that a brief and desperate struggle had ensued, in which the assailant had struck his victim with his fist upon the forehead, and having stunned him, had hurriedly clutched him by the hair, and stabbed him with the dagger, which lay close by upon the chimneypiece, forcing his head violently against the back of the chair. This part of the conjecture was supported by the circumstance of there being discovered a lock of hair upon the ground at the spot, and a good deal of blood. The carpet, too, was tumbled, and a water-decanter, which had stood upon the table close by, was lying in fragments upon the floor. It was supposed that the murderer had then dragged the half-lifeless body to the bed, where, having substituted the knife, which he had probably brought to the room in the same pocket from which the boy afterwards saw him take the dagger, he dispatched him; and either hearing some alarm — perhaps the movement of the valet in the adjoining room, or from some other cause — he dropped the knife in the bed, and was not able to find it again. The wounds upon the hand of the dead man indicated his having caught and struggled to hold the blade of the weapon with which he was assailed. The impression of a bloody hand thrust under the bolster, where it was Sir Wynston's habit to place his purse and watch, when making his arrangements for the night, supplied the motive of this otherwise unaccountable atrocity.

After some brief consultation, the jury agreed upon a verdict of willful murder against John Merton, a finding of which the coroner expressed his entire approbation.

Marston, as a justice of the peace, had informations, embodying the principal part of the evidence given before the coroner, sworn against Merton, and transmitted a copy of them to the Home Office. A reward for the apprehension of the culprit was forthwith offered, but for some months without effect.

Marston had, in the interval, written to several of Sir Wynston's many relations, announcing the catastrophe, and requesting that steps might immediately be taken to have the body removed. Meanwhile undertakers were busy in the chamber of death. The corpse was enclosed in lead, and that again in cedar, and a great oak shell, covered with crimson cloth and goldheaded nails, and with a gilt plate, recording the age, title, &c. &c., of the deceased, was screwed down firmly over all.

Nearly a fortnight elapsed before any reply to Marston's letters was received. A short epistle at last arrived from Lord H —— , the late Sir Wynston's uncle, deeply regretting the "sad and inexplicable occurrence," and adding, that the will, which, on receipt of the "distressing intelligence," was immediately opened and read, contained no direction whatever respecting the sepulture of the deceased, which had therefore better be completed as modestly and expeditiously as possible, in the neighborhood; and, in conclusion, he directed that the accounts of the undertakers, &c., employed upon the melancholy occasion, might be sent in to Mr. Skelton, who had kindly undertaken to leave London without any delay, for the purpose of completing these last arrangements, and who would, in any matter of business connected with the deceased, represent him, Lord H —— , as executor of the late baronet.

This letter was followed, in a day or two, by the arrival of Skelton, a well-dressed, languid, impertinent London tuft-hunter, a good deal faded, with a somewhat sallow and puffy face, charged with a pleasant combination at once of meanness, insolence, and sensuality — just such a person as Sir Wynston's parasite might have been expected to prove.

However well disposed to impress the natives with high notions of his extraordinary refinement and importance, he very soon discovered that, in Marston, he had stumbled upon a man of the world, and one thoroughly versed in the ways and characters of London life. After some ineffectual attempts, therefore, to overawe and astonish his host, Mr. Skelton became aware of the fruitlessness of the effort, and condescended to abate somewhat of his pretensions. Marston could not avoid inviting this person to pass the night at his house, an invitation which was accepted, of course; and next morning, after a late breakfast, Mr. Skelton observed, with a yawn — "And now, about this body — poor Berkley! — what do you propose to do with him?"

"I have no proposition to make," said Marston, drily. "It is no affair of mine, except that the body may be removed without more delay. I have no suggestion to offer."

"H — — 's notion was to have him buried as near the spot as may be," said Skelton.

Marston nodded.

"There is a kind of vault, is not there, in the demesne, a family burial-place?" inquired the visitor.

"Yes, sir," replied Marston, curtly.

"Well?" drawled Skelton.

"Well, sir, what then?" responded Marston.

"Why, as the wish of the parties is to have him buried — poor fellow! — as quietly as possible, I think he might just as well be laid there as anywhere else!"

"Had I desired it, Mr. Skelton, I should myself have made the offer," said Marston, abruptly.

"Then you don't wish it?" said Skelton.

"No, sir; certainly not — most peremptorily not," answered Marston, with more sharpness than, in his early days, he would have thought quite consistent with politeness.

"Perhaps," replied Skelton, for want of something better to say, and with a callous sort of levity; "perhaps you hold the idea — some people do — that murdered men can't rest in their graves until their murderers have expiated their guilt?"

Marston made no reply, but shot two or three lurid glances from under his brow at the speaker.

"Well, then, at all events," continued Skelton, indolently resuming his theme, "if you decline your assistance, may I, at least, hope for your advice? Knowing nothing of this country, I would ask you whither you would recommend me to have the body conveyed?"

"I don't care to advise in the matter," said Marston; "but if I were directing, I should have the remains buried in Chester. It is not more than twenty miles from this; and if, at any future time, his family should desire to remove the body, it could be effected more easily from thence. But you can decide."

"Egad! I believe you are right," said Skelton, glad to be relieved of the trouble of thinking about the matter; "and I shall take your advice."

In accordance with this declaration the body was, within four-and-twenty hours, removed to Chester, and buried there, Mr. Skelton attending on behalf of Sir Wynston's numerous and afflicted friends and relatives.

There are certain heartaches for which time brings no healing; nay, which grow but the sorer and fiercer as days and years roll on; of this kind, perhaps, were the stern and bitter feelings which now darkened the face of Marston with an almost perpetual gloom. His habits became even more unsocial than before. The society of his son he no longer seemed to enjoy. Long and solitary rambles in his wild and extensive demesne consumed the listless hours or his waking existence; and when the weather prevented this, he shut himself up, upon pretence of business, in his study.

He had not, since the occasion we have already mentioned, referred to the intended departure of Mademoiselle de Barras. Truth to say, his feelings with respect to that young lady were of a conflicting and mysterious kind; and as often as his dark thoughts wandered to her (which, indeed, was frequently enough), his muttered exclamation seemed to imply some painful and horrible suspicions respecting her.

"Yes," he would mutter, "I thought I heard your light foot upon the lobby, on that accursed night. Fancy! Well, it may have been, but assuredly a strange fancy. I cannot comprehend that woman. She baffles my scrutiny. I have looked into her face with an eye she might well understand, were it indeed as I sometimes suspect, and she has been calm and unmoved. I have watched and studied her; still — doubt, doubt, hideous doubt! — is she what she seems, or — a tigress?"

Mrs. Marston, on the other hand, procrastinated from day to day the painful task of announcing to Mademoiselle de Barras the stern message with which she had been charged by her husband. And thus several weeks had passed, and she began to think that his silence upon the subject, notwithstanding his seeing the young French lady at breakfast every morning, amounted to a kind of tacit intimation that the sentence of banishment was not to be carried into immediate execution, but to be kept suspended over the unconscious offender.

It was now six or eight weeks since the hearse carrying away the remains of the illfated Sir Wynston Berkley had driven down the dusky avenue; the autumn was deepening into winter, and as Marston gloomily trod the woods of Gray Forest, the withered leaves whirled drearily along his pathway, and the gusts that swayed the mighty branches above him were rude and ungenial. It was a bleak and somber day, and as he broke into a long and picturesque vista, deep among the most sequestered woods, he suddenly saw before him, and scarcely twenty paces from the spot on which he stood, an apparition, which for some moments absolutely froze him to the earth.

Travelsoiled, tattered, pale, and wasted, John Merton, the murderer, stood before him. He did not exhibit the smallest disposition to turn about and make his escape. On the contrary, he remained perfectly motionless, looking upon his former master with a wild and sorrowful gaze. Marston twice or thrice essayed to speak; his face was white as death, and had he beheld the specter of the murdered baronet himself, he could not have met the sight with a countenance of ghastlier horror.

“Take me, sir,” said Merton, doggedly.

Still Marston did not stir.

“Arrest me, sir, in God’s name! here I am,” he repeated, dropping his arms by his side; “I’ll go with you wherever you tell me.”

“Murderer!” cried Marston, with a sudden burst of furious horror, “murderer — assassin — miscreant — take that!”

And, as he spoke, he discharged one of the pistols he always carried about him full at the wretched man. The shot did not take effect, and Merton made no other gesture but to clasp his hands together, with an agonized pressure, while his head sunk upon his breast.

"Shoot me; shoot me," he said hoarsely; "kill me like a dog: better for me to be dead than what I am."

The report of Marston's pistol had, however, reached another ear; and its ringing echoes had hardly ceased to vibrate among the trees, when a stern shout was heard not fifty yards away, and, breathless and amazed, Charles Marston sprang to the place. His father looked from Merton to him, and from him again to Merton, with a guilty and stupefied scowl, still holding the smoking pistol in his hand.

"What — how! Good God — Merton!" ejaculated Charles.

"Aye, sir, Merton; ready to go to gaol, or wherever you will," said the man, recklessly.

"A murderer; a madman; don't believe him," muttered Marston, scarce audibly, with lips as white as wax.

"Do you surrender yourself, Merton?" demanded the young man, sternly, advancing toward him.

"Yes, sir; I desire nothing more; God knows I wish to die," responded he, despairingly, and advancing slowly to meet Charles.

"Come, then," said young Marston, seizing him by the collar, "come quietly to the house. Guilty and unhappy man, you are now my prisoner, and, depend upon it, I shall not let you go."

"I don't want to go, I tell you, sir. I have traveled fifteen miles today, to come here and give myself up to the master."

"Accursed madman," said Marston unconsciously, gazing at the prisoner; and then suddenly rousing himself, he said, "Well, miscreant, you wish to die, and, by —— , you are in a fair way to have your wish."

"So best," said the man, doggedly. "I don't want to live; I wish I was in my grave; I wish I was dead a year ago."

Some fifteen minutes afterwards, Merton, accompanied by Marston and his son Charles, entered the hall of the mansion which, not ten weeks before, he had quitted under circumstances so guilty and terrible. When they reached the house, Merton seemed much agitated, and wept bitterly on seeing two or three of his former fellow servants, who looked on him in silence as they passed, with a gloomy and fearful curiosity. These, too, were succeeded by others, peeping and whispering, and upon one pretence or another crossing and recrossing the hall, and stealing hurried glances at the criminal. Merton sate with his face buried in his hands, sobbing, and taking no note of the humiliating scrutiny of which he was the subject. Meanwhile Marston, pale and agitated, made out his committal, and having sworn in several of his laborers and servants as special constables, dispatched the prisoner in their charge to the county gaol, where, under lock and key, we leave him in safe custody for the present.

After this event Marston became excited and restless. He scarcely ate or slept, and his health seemed now as much scattered as his spirits had been before. One day he glided into the room in which, as we have said, it was Mrs. Marston's habit frequently to sit alone. His wife was there, and, as he entered, she uttered an exclamation of doubtful joy and surprise. He sate down near her in silence, and for some time looked gloomily on the ground. She did not care to question him, and anxiously waited until he should open the conversation. At length he raised his eyes, and, looking full at her, asked abruptly— "Well, what about mademoiselle?"

Mrs. Marston was embarrassed, and hesitated.

"I told you what I wished with respect to that young lady some time ago, and commissioned you to acquaint her with my pleasure; and yet I find her still here, and apparently as much established as ever."

Again Mrs. Marston hesitated. She scarcely knew how to confess to him that she had not conveyed his message.

"Don't suppose, Gertrude, that I wish to find fault. I merely wanted to know whether you had told Mademoiselle de Barras that we were agreed as to the necessity or expediency, or what you please, of dispensing henceforward with her services, I perceive by your manner that you have not done so. I have no doubt your motive was a kind one, but my decision remains unaltered; and I now assure you again that I wish you to speak to her; I wish you explicitly to let her know my wishes and yours."

"Not mine, Richard," she answered faintly.

"Well, mine, then," he replied, roughly; "we shan't quarrel about that."

"And when — how soon — do you wish me to speak to her on this, to both of us, most painful subject?" asked she, with a sigh.

“Today — this hour — this minute, if you can; in short the sooner the better,” he replied, rising. “I see no reason for holding it back any longer. I am sorry my wishes were not complied with immediately. Pray, let there be no further hesitation or delay. I shall expect to learn this evening that all is arranged.”

Marston having thus spoken, left her abruptly, went down to his study with a swift step, shut himself in, and throwing himself into a great chair, gave a loose to his agitation, which was extreme.

Meanwhile Mrs. Marston had sent for Mademoiselle de Barras, anxious to get through her painful task as speedily as possible. The fair French girl quickly presented herself.

“Sit down, mademoiselle,” said Mrs. Marston, taking her hand kindly, and drawing her to the prie-dieu chair beside herself.

Mademoiselle de Barras sate down, and, as she did so, read the countenance of her patroness with one rapid glance of her flashing eyes. These eyes, however, when Mrs. Marston looked at her the next moment, were sunk softly and sadly upon the floor. There was a heightened color, however, in her cheek, and a quicker heaving of her bosom, which indicated the excitement of an anticipated and painful disclosure. The outward contrast of the two women, whose hands were so lovingly locked together, was almost as striking as the moral contrast of their hearts. The one, so chastened, sad, and gentle; the other, so capable of pride and passion; so darkly excitable, and yet so mysteriously beautiful. The one, like a Niobe seen in the softest moonshine; the other, a Venus, lighted in the glare of distant conflagration.

“Mademoiselle, dear mademoiselle, I am so much grieved at what I have to say, that I hardly know how to speak to you,” said poor Mrs. Marston, pressing her hand; “but Mr. Marston has twice desired me to tell you, what you will hear with far less pain than it costs me to say it.”

Mademoiselle de Barras stole another flashing glance at her companion, but did not speak.

“Mr. Marston still persists, mademoiselle, in desiring that we shall part.”

“Est-il possible?” cried the Frenchwoman, with a genuine start.

“Indeed, mademoiselle, you may well be surprised,” said Mrs. Marston, encountering her full and dilated gaze, which, however, dropped again in a moment to the ground. “You may, indeed, naturally be surprised and shocked at this, to me, most severe decision.”

“When did he speak last of it?” said she, rapidly.

“But a few moments since,” answered Mrs. Marston.

“Ha,” said mademoiselle, and remained silent and motionless for more than a minute.

“Madame,” she cried at last, mournfully, “I suppose, then, I must go; but it tears my heart to leave you and dear Miss Rhoda. I would be very happy if, before departing, you would permit me, dear madame, once more to assure Mr. Marston of my innocence, and, in his presence, to call heaven to witness how unjust are all his suspicions.”

“Do so, mademoiselle, and I will add my earnest assurances again; though, heaven knows,” she said, despondingly, “I anticipate little success; but it is well to leave no chance untried.”

Marston was sitting, as we have said, in his library. His agitation had given place to a listless gloom, and he leaned back in his chair, his head supported by his hand, and undisturbed, except by the occasional fall of the embers upon the hearth. There was a knock at the chamber door. His back was towards it, and, without turning or moving, he called to the applicant to enter. The door opened — closed again: a light tread was audible — a tall shadow darkened the wall: Marston looked round, and Mademoiselle de Barras was standing before him. Without knowing how or why, he rose, and stood gazing upon her in silence.

“Mademoiselle de Barras!” he said, at last, in a tone of cold surprise.

“Yes, poor Mademoiselle de Barras,” replied the sweet voice of the young Frenchwoman, while her lips hardly moved as the melancholy tones passed them.

“Well, mademoiselle, what do you desire?” he asked, in the same cold accents, and averting his eyes.

“Ah, monsieur, do you ask? — can you pretend to be ignorant? Have you not sent me a message, a cruel, cruel message?”

She spoke so low and gently, that a person at the other end of the room could hardly have heard her words.

“Yes, Mademoiselle de Barras, I did send you a message,” he replied, doggedly. “A cruel one you will scarcely presume to call it, when you reflect upon your own conduct, and the circumstances which have provoked the measures I have taken."

"What have I done, Monsieur? — what circumstances do you mean?" asked she, plaintively.

"What have you done! A pretty question, truly. Ha, ha!" he repeated, bitterly, and then added, with suppressed vehemence, "ask your own heart, mademoiselle."

"I have asked, I do ask, and my heart answers — nothing," she replied, raising her fine melancholy eyes for a moment to his face.

"It lies, then," he retorted, with a fierce scoff.

"Monsieur, before heaven I swear, you wrong me foully," she said, earnestly, clasping her hands together.

"Did ever woman say she was accused rightly, mademoiselle?" retorted Marston, with a sneer.

"I don't know — I don't care. I only know that I am innocent," continued she, piteously. "I call heaven to witness you have wronged me."

"Wronged you! — why, after all, with what have I charged you?" said he, scoffingly; "but let that pass. I have formed my opinions, arrived at my conclusions. If I have not named them broadly, you at least seem to understand their nature thoroughly. I know the world. I am no novice in the arts of women, mademoiselle. Reserve your vows and attestations for schoolboys and simpletons; they are sadly thrown away upon me."

Marston paced to and fro, with his hands thrust into his pockets, as he thus spoke.

"Then you don't, or rather you will not believe what I tell you?" said she, imploringly. "No," he answered, drily and slowly, as he passed her. "I don't, and I won't (as you say) believe one word of it; so, pray spare yourself further trouble about the matter."

She raised her head, and darted after him a glance that seemed absolutely to blaze, and at the same time smote her little hand fast clenched upon her breast. The words, however, that trembled on her pale lips were not uttered; her eyes were again cast down, and her fingers played with the little locket that hung round her neck.

“I must make, before I go,” she said, with a deep sigh and a melancholy voice, “one confidence — one last confidence: judge me by it. You cannot choose but believe me now: it is a secret, and it must even here be whispered, whispered, whispered!”

As she spoke, the color fled from her face, and her tones became so strange and resolute, that Marston turned short upon his heel, and stopped before her. She looked in his face; he frowned, but lowered his eyes. She drew nearer, laid her hand upon his shoulder, and whispered for a few moments in his ear. He raised his face suddenly: its features were sharp and fixed; its hue was changed; it was livid and moveless, like a face cut in gray stone. He staggered back a little and a little more, and then a little more, and fell backward. Fortunately, the chair in which he had been sitting received him, and he lay there insensible as a corpse. When at last his eyes opened, there was no gleam of triumph, no shade of anger, nothing perceptible of guilt or menace, in the young woman’s countenance. The flush had returned to her cheeks; her dimpled chin had sunk upon her full white throat; sorrow, shame, and pride seemed struggling in her handsome face, and she stood before him like a beautiful penitent, who has just made a strange and humbling shrift to her father confessor.

Next day, Marston was mounting his horse for a solitary ride through his park, when Doctor Danvers rode abruptly into the courtyard from the back entrance. Marston touched his hat, and said —

“I don’t stand on forms with you, doctor, and you, I know, will waive ceremony with me. You will find Mrs. Marston at home.”

“Nay, my dear sir,” interrupted the clergyman, sitting firm in his saddle, “my business lies with you today.”

“The devil it does!” said Marston, with discontented surprise.

“Truly it does, sir,” repeated he, with a look of gentle reproof, for the profanity of Marston’s ejaculation, far more than the rudeness of his manner, offended him; “and I grieve that your surprise should have somewhat carried you away— “

“Well, then, Doctor Danvers,” interrupted Marston, drily, and without heeding his concluding remark, “if you really have business with me, it is, at all events, of no very pressing kind, and may be as well told after supper as now. So, pray, go into the house and rest yourself: we can talk together in the evening.”

"My horse is not tired," said the clergyman, patting his steed's neck; "and if you do not object, I will ride by your side for a short time, and as we go, I can say out what I have to tell."

"Well, well, be it so," said Marston, with suppressed impatience, and without more ceremony, he rode slowly along the avenue, and turned off upon the soft sward in the direction of the wildest portion of his wooded demesne, the clergyman keeping close beside him. They proceeded some little way at a walk before Doctor Danvers spoke.

"I have been twice or thrice with that unhappy man," at length he said.

"What unhappy man? Unhappiness is no distinguishing singularity, is it?" said Marston, sharply.

"No, truly, you have well said," replied Doctor Danvers. "True it is that man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward. I speak, however, of your servant, Merton — a most unhappy wretch."

"Ha! you have been with him, you say?" replied Marston, with evident interest and anxiety.

"Yes, several times, and conversed with him long and gravely," continued the clergyman.

"Humph! I thought that had been the chaplain's business, not yours, my good friend," observed Marston.

"He has been unwell," replied Dr. Danvers; "and thus, for a day or two, I took his duty, and this poor man, Merton, having known something of me, preferred seeing me rather than a stranger; and so, at the chaplain's desire and his, I continued my visits."

"Well, and you have taught him to pray and sing psalms, I suppose; and what has come of it all?" demanded Marston, testily.

"He does pray, indeed, poor man! and I trust his prayers are heard with mercy at the throne of grace," said his companion, in his earnestness disregarding the sneering tone of his companion. "He is full of compunction, and admits his guilt."

"Ho! that is well — well for himself — well for his soul, at least; you are sure of it; he confesses; confesses his guilt?"

Marston put his question so rapidly and excitedly, that the clergyman looked with a slight expression of surprise; and recovering himself, he added, in an unconcerned tone —

“Well, well — it was just as well he did so; the evidence is too clear for doubt or mystification; he knew he had no chance, and has taken the seemliest course; and, doubtless, the best for his hopes hereafter.”

“I did not question him upon the subject,” said Doctor Danvers; “I even declined to hear him speak upon it at first; but he told me he was resolved to offer no defense, and that he saw the finger of God in the fate which had overtaken him.”

“He will plead guilty, then, I suppose?” suggested Marston, watching the countenance of his companion with an anxious and somewhat sinister eye.

“His words seem to imply so much,” answered he; “and having thus frankly owned his guilt, and avowed his resolution to let the law take its due course in his case, without obstruction or evasion, I urged him to complete the grand work he had begun, and to confess to you, or to some other magistrate fully, and in detail, every circumstance connected with the perpetration of the dreadful deed.”

Marston knit his brows, and rode on for some minutes in silence. At length he said, abruptly —

“In this, it seems to me, sir, you a little exceeded your commission.”

“How so, my dear sir?” asked the clergyman.

“Why, sir,” answered Marston, “the man may possibly change his mind before the day of trial, and it is the hangman’s office, not yours, my good sir, to fasten the halter about his neck. You will pardon my freedom; but, were this deposition made as you suggest, it would undoubtedly hang him.”

“God forbid, Mr. Marston,” rejoined Danvers, “that I should induce the unhappy man to forfeit his last chances of escape, and to shut the door of human mercy against himself, but on this he seems already resolved; he says so; he has solemnly declared his resolution to me; and even against my warning, again and again reiterated the same declaration.”

“That I should have thought quite enough, were I in your place, without inviting a detailed description of the whole process by which this detestable butchery was consummated. What more than the simple knowledge of the man’s guilt does any mortal desire; guilty, or not guilty, is the plain question which the law asks, and no more; take my advice, sir, as a poor Protestant layman, and leave the acts of the confessional and inquisition to Popish priests.”

"Nay, Mr. Marston, you greatly misconceive me; as matters stand, there exists among the coroner's jury, and thus among the public, some faint and unfounded suspicion of the possibility of Merton's having had an accessory or accomplice in the perpetration of this foul murder."

"It is a lie, sir — a malignant, d —— d lie — the jury believe no such thing, nor the public neither," said Marston, starting in his saddle, and speaking in a voice of thunder; "you have been crammed with lies, sir; malicious, unmeaning, vindictive lies; lies invented to asperse my family, and torture my feelings; suggested in my presence by that scoundrel Mervyn, and scouted by the common sense of the jury."

"I do assure you," replied Doctor Danvers, in a voice which seemed scarcely audible, after the stunning and passionate explosion of Marston's wrath, "I did not imagine that you could feel thus sorely upon the point; nay, I thought that you yourself were not without such painful doubts."

"Again, I tell you, sir," said Marston, in a tone somewhat calmer, but no less stern, "such doubts as you describe have no existence; your unsuspecting ear has been alarmed by a vindictive wretch, an old scoundrel who has scarce a passion left but spite towards me; few such there are, thank God; few such villains as would, from a man's very calamities, distil poison to kill the peace and character of his family."

"I am sorry, Mr. Marston," said the clergyman, "you have formed so ill an opinion of a neighbor, and I am very sure that Mr. Mervyn meant you no ill in frankly expressing whatever doubts still rested on his mind, after the evidence was taken."

"He did — the scoundrel!" said Marston, furiously striking his hand, in which his whip was clutched, upon his thigh; "he did mean to wound and torture me; and with the same object he persists in circulating what he calls his doubts. Meant me no ill, forsooth! why, my great God, sir, could any man be so stupid as not to perceive that the suggestion of such suspicions — absurd, contradictory, incredible as they were — was precisely the thing to exasperate feelings sufficiently troubled already, and not content with raising the question, where it was scouted, as I said, as soon as named, the vindictive slanderer proceeds to propagate and publish his pretended surmises — d —— n him."

"Mr. Marston, you will pardon me when I say that, as a Christian minister, I cannot suffer a spirit so ill as that you manifest, and language so unseemly as that you have just uttered, to pass unreproved," said Danvers, solemnly. "If you will cherish those bitter and unchristian feelings, at least for the brief space that I am with you, command your fierce, unbecoming words."

Marston was about to make a sneering retort, but restrained himself, and turned his head away.

"The wretched man himself appears now very anxious to make some further disclosures," resumed Doctor Danvers, after a pause, "and I recommended him to make them to you, Mr. Marston, as the most natural depository of such a statement."

"Well, Mr. Danvers, to cut the matter short, as it appears that a confession of some sort is to be made, be it so. I will attend and receive it. The judges will not be here for eight or ten weeks to come, so there is no great hurry about it. I shall ride down to the town, and see him in the jail some time in the next week."

With this assurance Marston parted from the old clergyman, and rode on alone through the furze and fern of his wild and somber park.

After supper that evening Marston found himself alone in the parlor with his wife. Mrs. Marston availed herself of the opportunity to redeem her pledge to Mademoiselle de Barras. She was not aware of the strange interview which had taken place between him and the lady for whom she pleaded. The result of her renewed entreaties perhaps the reader has anticipated. Marston listened, doubted, listened, hesitated again, put questions, pondered the answers; debated the matter inwardly, and at last gruffly consented to give the young lady another trial, and permit her to remain some time longer. Poor Mrs. Marston, little suspecting the dreadful future, overwhelmed her husband with gratitude for granting to her entreaties (as he had predetermined to do) this fatal boon. Not caring to protract this scene — either from a disinclination to listen to expressions of affection, which had long lost their charm for him, and had become even positively distasteful, or perhaps from some instinctive recoil from the warm expression of gratitude from lips which, were the truth revealed, might justly have trembled with execration and reproach — he abruptly left the room, and Mrs. Marston, full of her good news, hastened, in the kindness of her heart, to communicate the fancied result of her advocacy to Mademoiselle de Barras.

It was about a week after this, that Marston was one evening surprised in his study by the receipt of the following letter from Dr. Danvers: —

"My Dear Sir,

"You will be shocked to hear that Merton is most dangerously ill, and at this moment in imminent peril. He is thoroughly conscious of his situation, and himself regards it as a merciful interposition of Providence to spare him the disgrace and terror of the dreadful fate, which he anticipated. The unhappy man has twice repeated his anxious desire, this day, to state some facts connected with the murder of the late Sir Wynston Berkley, which, he says, it is of the utmost moment that you should hear. He says that he could not leave the world in peace without having made this disclosure, which he especially desires to make to yourself, and entreats that you will come to receive his communication as early as you can in the morning. This is indeed needful, as the physician says that he is fast sinking. I offer no apology for adding my earnest solicitations to those or the dying man; and am, dear sir, your very obedient servant,

"J. Danvers"

"He regards it as a merciful interposition of Providence," muttered Marston, as he closed the letter, with a sneer. "Well, some men have odd notions of mercy and providence, to be sure; but if it pleases him, certainly I shall not complain for one."

Marston was all this evening in better spirits than he had enjoyed for months, or even years. A mountain seemed to have been lifted from his heart. He joined in the conversation during and after supper, listened with apparent interest, talked with animation, and even laughed and jested. It is needless to say all this flowed not from the healthy cheer of a heart at ease, but from the excited and almost feverish sense of sudden relief.

Next morning, Marston rode into the oldfashioned town, at the further end of which the dingy and grated front of the jail looked warningly out upon the rustic passengers. He passed the sentries and made his inquiries of the official at the hatch. He was relieved from the necessity of pushing these into detail, however, by the appearance of the physician, who at that moment passed from the interior of the prison.

"Dr. Danvers told me he expected to see you here this morning," said the medical man, after the customary salutation had been interchanged. "Your call, I believe, is connected with the prisoner, John Merton?"

"Yes, sir, so it is," said Marston. "Is he in a condition, pray, to make a statement of considerable length?"

"Far from it, Mr. Marston; he has but a few hours to live," answered the physician, "and is now insensible; but I believe he last night saw Dr. Danvers, and told him whatever was weighing upon his mind."

"Ha! — And can you say where Dr. Danvers now is?" inquired Marston, anxiously and hurriedly. "Not here, is he?"

"No; but I saw him, as I came here, not ten minutes since, ride into the town. It is market-day, and you will probably find him somewhere in the high street for an hour or two to come," answered he.

Marston thanked him, and, lost in abstraction, rode down to the little inn, entered a sitting room, and wrote a hurried line to Dr. Danvers, entreating his attendance there, as a place where they might converse less interruptedly than in the street; and committing this note to the waiter, with the injunction to deliver it at once, and an intimation of where Dr. Danvers was probably to be found, he awaited, with intense and agitating anxiety, the arrival of the clergyman.

It was not for nearly ten minutes, however, which his impatience magnified into an eternity, that the well-known voice of Dr. Danvers reached him from the little hall. It was in vain that Marston strove to curb his violent agitation: his heart swelled as if it would smother him; he felt, as it were, the chill of death pervade his frame, and he could scarcely see the door through which he momentarily expected the entrance of the clergyman.

A few minutes more, and Dr. Danvers entered the little apartment.

"My dear sir," said he, gravely and earnestly, as he grasped the cold hand of Marston, "I am rejoiced to see you. I have matters of great moment and the strangest mystery to lay before you."

"I dare say — I was sure — that is, I suspected so much," answered Marston, breathing fast, and looking very pale. "I heard at the prison that the murderer, Merton, was fast dying, and now is in an unconscious state; and from the physician, that you had seen him, at his urgent entreaty, last night. My mind misgives me, sir, I fear I know not what. I long, yet dread, to hear the wretched man's confession. For God's sake tell me, does it implicate anybody else in the guilt?"

"No; no one specifically; but it has thrown a hideous additional mystery over the occurrence. Listen to me, my dear sir, and the whole narrative, as he stated it to me, shall be related now to you," said Dr. Danvers.

Marston had closed the door carefully, and they sate down together at the further end of the apartment. Marston, breathless and ghastly pale; his lips compressed — his brows knit — and his dark, dilated gaze fixed immovably upon the speaker. Dr. Danvers, on the other hand, tranquil and solemn, and with, perhaps, some shade of awe overcasting the habitual sweetness of his countenance.

"His confession was a strange one," renewed Dr. Danvers, shaking his head gravely. "He said that the first idea of the crime was suggested by Sir Wynston's man accidentally mentioning, a few days after their arrival, that his master slept with his banknotes, to the amount of some hundreds of pounds, in a pocketbook under his pillow. He declared that as the man mentioned this circumstance, something muttered the infernal suggestion in his ear, and from that moment he was the slave of that one idea; it was ever present with him. He contended against it in vain; he dreaded and abhorred it; but still it possessed him; he felt his power of resistance yielding. This horrible stranger which had stolen into his heart, waxed in power and importunity, and tormented him day and night. He resolved to fly from the house. He gave notice to you and Mrs. Marston of his intended departure; but accident protracted his stay until that fatal night which sealed his doom. The influence which had mastered him forced him to rise from his bed, and take the knife — the discovery of which afterwards helped to convict him — and led him to Sir Wynston's chamber; he entered; it was a moonlight night."

Here the clergyman, glancing round the room, lowered his voice, and advanced his lips so near to Marston, that their heads nearly touched. In this tone and attitude he continued his narrative for a few minutes. At the end of this brief space, Marston rose up slowly, and with a movement backward, every feature strung with horror, and saying, in a long whisper, the one word, "yes," which seemed like the hiss of a snake before he makes his last deadly spring. Both were silent for a time. At last Marston broke out with hoarse vehemence.

"Dreadful — horrible — oh, God! God! — My God! How frightful!"

And throwing himself into a chair, he clasped his hands across his eyes and forehead, while the sweat of agony literally poured down his pale face.

“Truly it is so,” said the clergyman, scarcely above his breath; and, after a long interval— “horrible indeed!”

“Well,” said Marston, rising suddenly to his feet, wiping the dews of horror from his face, and looking wildly round, like one newly awoke from a nightmare, “I must make the most of this momentous and startling disclosure. I shall spare no pains to come at the truth,” said he, energetically. “Meanwhile, my dear sir, for the sake of justice and of mercy, observe secrecy. Leave me to sift this matter; give no note anywhere that we suspect. Observe this reserve and security, and with it detection will follow. Breathe but one word, and you arm the guilty with double caution, and turn licentious gossip loose upon the fame of an innocent and troubled family. Once more I entreat — I expect — I implore silence — silence, at least, for the present — silence!”

“I quite agree with you, my dear Mr. Marston,” answered Dr. Danvers. “I have not divulged one syllable of that poor wretch’s confession, save to yourself alone. You, as a magistrate, a relative of the murdered gentleman, and the head of that establishment among whom the guilt rests, are invested with an interest in detecting, and powers of sifting the truth in this matter, such as none other possesses. I clearly see, with you, too, the inexpediency and folly of talking, for talking’s sake, of this affair. I mean to keep my counsel, and shall most assuredly, irrespectively even of your request — which should, however, of course, have weight with me — maintain a strict and cautious silence upon this subject.”

Some little time longer they remained together, and Marston, buried in strange thoughts, took his leave, and rode slowly back to Gray Forest.

Months passed away — a year, and more — and though no new character appeared upon the stage, the relations which had subsisted among the old ones became, in some respects, very materially altered. A gradual and disagreeable change came over Mademoiselle de Barras’s manner; her affectionate attentions to Mrs. Marston became less and less frequent; nor was the change merely confined to this growing coldness; there was something of a positive and still more unpleasant kind in the alteration we have noted. There was a certain independence and carelessness, conveyed in a hundred intangible but significant little incidents and looks — a something which, without being open to formal rebuke or remonstrance, yet bordered, in effect, upon impertinence, and even insolence. This indescribable and provoking self-assertion, implied in glances, tones, emphasis, and general bearing, surprised Mrs. Marston far more than it irritated her. As often as she experienced one of these studied slights or insinuated impertinences, she revolved in her own mind all the incidents of their past intercourse, in the vain endeavor to recollect some one among them which could possibly account for the offensive change so manifest in the conduct of the young Frenchwoman.

Mrs. Marston, although she sometimes rebuked these artful affronts by a grave look, a cold tone, or a distant manner, yet had too much dignity to engage in a petty warfare of annoyance, and had, in reality, no substantial and well-defined ground of complaint against her, such as would have warranted her either in taking the young lady herself to task, or in bringing her conduct under the censure of Marston.

One evening, it happened that Mrs. Marston and Mademoiselle de Barras had been left alone together. After the supper-party had dispersed, they had been for a long time silent. Mrs. Marston resolved to improve the Tate-à-Tate, for the purpose of eliciting from mademoiselle an explanation of her strange behavior.

"Mademoiselle," said she, "I have lately observed a very marked change in your conduct to me."

"Indeed!" said the Frenchwoman.

"Yes, mademoiselle; you must be yourself perfectly aware of that change; it is a studied and intentional one," continued Mrs. Marston, in a gentle but dignified tone. "Although I have felt some doubt as to whether it were advisable, so long as you observe toward me the forms of external respect, and punctually discharge the duties you have undertaken, to open any discussion whatever upon the subject; yet I have thought it better to give you a fair opportunity of explaining frankly, should you desire to do so, the feelings and impressions under which you are acting."

"Ah, you are very obliging, madame," said she, coolly.

"It is quite clear, mademoiselle, that you have either misunderstood me, or that you are dissatisfied with your situation among us: your conduct cannot otherwise be accounted for," said Mrs. Marston, gravely.

“My conduct — *ma foi!* what conduct?” retorted the handsome Frenchwoman, confidently, and with a disdainful glance.

“If you question the fact, mademoiselle,” said the elder lady, “it is enough. Your ungracious manner and ungentle looks, I presume, arise from what appears to you a sufficient and well-defined cause, of which, however, I know nothing.”

“I really was not aware,” said Mademoiselle de Barras, with a supercilious smile, “that my looks and my manner were subjected to so strict a criticism, or that it was my duty to regulate both according to so nice and difficult a standard.”

“Well, mademoiselle,” continued Mrs. Marston, “it is plain that whatever may be the cause of your dissatisfaction, you are resolved against confiding it to me. I only wish to know frankly from your own lips, whether you have formed a wish to leave this situation. If so, I entreat you to declare it freely.”

“You are very obliging, indeed, madame,” said the pretty foreigner, drily, “but I have no such wish, at least at present.”

“Very well, mademoiselle,” replied Mrs. Marston, with gentle dignity; “I regret your want of candor, on your own account. You would, I am sure, be much happier, were you to deal frankly with me.”

“May I now have your permission, madame, to retire to my room?” asked the French girl, rising, and making a low courtesy— “that is, if madame has nothing further to censure.”

“Certainly, mademoiselle; I have nothing further to say,” replied the elder lady.

The Frenchwoman made another and a deeper courtesy, and withdrew. Mrs. Marston, however, heard, as she was designed to do, the young lady tittering and whispering to herself, as she lighted her candle in the hall. This scene mortified and grieved poor Mrs. Marston inexpressibly. She was little, if at all, accessible to emotions of anger and certainly, none such mingled in the feelings with which she regarded Mademoiselle de Barras. But she had found in this girl a companion, and even a confidante in her melancholy solitude; she had believed her affectionate, sympathetic, tender, and the disappointment was as bitter as unimagined.

The annoyances which she was fated to receive from Mademoiselle de Barras were destined, however, to grow in number and in magnitude. The

Frenchwoman sometimes took a fancy, for some unrevealed purpose, to talk a good deal to Mrs. Marston, and on such occasions would persist, notwithstanding that lady's marked reserve and discouragement, in chatting away, as if she were conscious that her conversation was the most welcome entertainment possible to her really unwilling auditor. No one of their interviews did she ever suffer to close without in some way or other suggesting or insinuating something mysterious and untold to the prejudice of Mr. Marston. Those vague and intangible hints, the meaning of which, for an instant legible and terrific, seemed in another moment to dissolve and disappear, tortured Mrs. Marston like the intrusion of a specter; and this, along with the portentous change, rather felt than visible, in mademoiselle's conduct toward her, invested the beautiful Frenchwoman, in the eyes of her former friend and patroness, with an indefinable character that was not only repulsive but formidable.

Mrs. Marston's feelings with respect to this person were still further disturbed by the half-conveyed hints and innuendoes of her own maid, who never lost an opportunity of insinuating her intense dislike of the Frenchwoman, and appeared perpetually to be upon the very verge of making some explicit charges, or some shocking revelations, respecting her, which, however, she as invariably evaded; and even when Mrs. Marston once or twice insisted upon her explaining her meaning distinctly, she eluded her mistress's desire, and left her still in the same uneasy uncertainty.

Marston, on his part, however much his conduct might tend to confirm suspicion, certainly did nothing to dissipate the painful and undefined apprehension respecting himself, which Mademoiselle de Barras, with such malign and mysterious industry, labored to raise. His spirits and temper were liable to strange fluctuations. In the midst of that excited gaiety, to which, until lately, he had been so long a stranger, would sometimes intervene paroxysms of the blackest despair, all the ghastlier for the contrast, and with a suddenness so abrupt and overwhelming, that one might have fancied him crossed by the shadow of some terrific apparition. Sometimes for a whole day, or even more, he would withdraw himself from the society of his family, and, in morose and moody solitude, take his meals alone in his library, and steal out unattended to wander among the thickets and glades of his park. Sometimes, again, he would sit for hours in the room which had been Sir Wynston's, and, with a kind of horrible resolution, often loiter there till after nightfall. In such hours, the servants would listen with curious awe, as they heard his step, pacing to and fro, in that deserted and inauspicious chamber, while his voice, in broken sentences, was also imperfectly audible, as if maintaining a muttered dialogue. These eccentric practices gradually invested him, in the eyes of his domestics, with a certain preternatural mystery, which enhanced the fear with which they habitually regarded him, and was subsequently confirmed by his giving orders to have the furniture taken out of the ominous suite of rooms, and the doors nailed up and secured. He gave no reason for this odd and abrupt measure, and gossip of course reported that the direction had originated in his having encountered the specter of the murdered baronet, in one of these strange and unseasonable visits to the scene of the fearful catastrophe.

In addition to all this, Marston's conduct towards his wife became strangely capricious. He avoided her society more than ever; and when he did happen to exchange a few words with her, they were sometimes harsh and violent, and at others remorsefully gentle and sad, and this without any changes of conduct upon her part to warrant the wayward uncertainty of his treatment. Under all these circumstances, Mrs. Marston's unhappiness and uneasiness greatly increased. Mademoiselle de Barras, too, upon several late occasions, had begun to assume a tone of authority and dictation, which justly offended the mistress of the establishment. Meanwhile Charles Marston had returned to Cambridge; and Rhoda, no longer enjoying happy walks with her brother, pursued her light and easy studies with Mademoiselle de Barras, and devoted her leisure hours to the loved society of her mother.

One day Mrs. Marston, sitting in her room with Rhoda, had happened to call her own maid, to take down and carefully dust some richly bound volumes which filled a bookcase in the little chamber.

"You have been crying, Willett," said Mrs. Marston, observing that the young woman's eyes were red and swollen.

"Indeed, and I was, ma'am," she replied, reluctantly, "and I could not help it, so I could not."

"Why, what has happened to vex you? Has anyone ill-treated you?" said Mrs. Marston, who had an esteem for the poor girl. "Come, come, you must not fret about it; only tell me what has vexed you."

"Oh! Ma'am, no one has illused me, ma'am; but I can't but be vexed sometimes, ma'am, and fretted to see how things is going on. I have one wish, just one wish, ma'am, and if I got that, I'd ask no more," said the girl.

"And what is it?" asked Mrs. Marston; "what do you wish for? Speak plainly, Willett; what is it?"

"Ah! Ma'am, if I said it, maybe you might not be pleased. Don't ask me, ma'am," said the girl dusting the books very hard, and tossing them down again with angry emphasis. "I don't desire anybody's harm, God knows; but, for all that, I wish what I wish, and that is the truth."

"Why, Willett, I really cannot account for your strange habit of lately hinting, and insinuating, and always speaking riddles, and refusing to explain your meaning. What do you mean? Speak plainly. If there are any dishonest practices going on, it is your duty to say so distinctly."

"Oh! Ma'am, it is just a wish I have. I wish — ; but it's no matter. If I could once see the house clear of that Frenchwoman— "

"If you mean Mademoiselle de Barras, she is a lady," interrupted Mrs. Marston.

"Well, ma'am, I beg pardon," continued the woman; "lady or no lady, it is all one to me; for I am very sure, ma'am, she'll never leave the house till there is something bad comes about; and — and — . I can't bring myself to talk to you about her, ma'am. I can't say what I want to tell you: but — but — . Oh, ma'am, for God's sake, try and get her out, any way, no matter how; try and get rid of her."

As she said this, the poor girl burst into a passionate agony of tears, and Mrs. Marston and Rhoda looked on in silent amazement, while she for some minutes continued to sob and weep.

The party were suddenly recalled from their various reveries by a knock at the chamber-door. It opened, and the subject of the girl's deprecatory entreaty entered. There was something unusually excited and assured in Mademoiselle de Barras's air and countenance; perhaps she had a suspicion that she had been the topic of their conversation. At all events, she looked round upon them with a smile, in which there was something supercilious, and even defiant; and, without waiting to be invited, sate herself down, with a haughty air.

"I was about to ask you to sit down, mademoiselle, but you have anticipated me," said Mrs. Marston, gravely. "You have something to say to me, I suppose; I am quite at leisure, so pray let me hear it now."

"Thank you, thank you, madame," replied she, with a sharp, and even scornful glance; "I ought to have asked your permission to sit; I forgot; but you have condescended to give it without my doing so; that was very kind, very kind, indeed."

"But I wish to know, mademoiselle, whether you have anything very particular to say to me?" said Mrs. Marston.

"You wish to know! — and why, pray madame?" asked Mademoiselle de Barras, sharply.

"Because, unless it is something very urgent, I should prefer your talking to me some other time; as, at present, I desire to be alone with my daughter."

"Oh, ho! I ought to ask pardon again," said mademoiselle, with the same glance, and the same smile. "I find I am de trop — quite in the way. Hélas! I am very unfortunate today."

Mademoiselle de Barras made not the slightest movement, and it was evident that she was resolved to prolong her stay, in sheer defiance of Mrs. Marston's wishes.

"Mademoiselle, I conclude from your silence that you have nothing very pressing to say, and, therefore, must request that you will have the goodness to leave me for the present," said Mrs. Marston, who felt that the spirit of the French girl's conduct was too apparent not to have been understood by Rhoda and the servant, and that it was of a kind, for example sake, impossible to be submitted to, or tolerated.

Mademoiselle de Barras darted a fiery and insolent glance at Mrs. Marston, and was, doubtless, upon the point of precipitating the open quarrel which was impending, by setting her authority at defiance; but she checked herself, and changed her line of operations.

"We are not alone madame," she said, with a heightened color, and a slight toss of the head. "I was about to speak of Mr. Marston. I had something, not much, I confess, to say; but before servants I shan't speak; nor, indeed, now at all. So, madame, as you desire it, I shall no further interrupt you. Come, Miss Rhoda, come to the music-room, if you please, and finish your practice for today."

"You forget, mademoiselle, that I wish to have my daughter with me at present," said Mrs. Marston.

"I am very sorry, madame," said the French lady, with the same heightened color and unpleasant smile, and her finely-penciled brows just discernibly knit, so as to give a novel and menacing expression to her beautiful face— "I am very sorry, madame, but she must, so long as I remain accountable for her education, complete her allotted exercises at the appointed hours; and nothing shall, I assure you, with my consent, interfere with these duties. Come, Miss Rhoda, precede me, if you please, to the music-room. Come, come."

"Stay where you are, Rhoda," said Mrs. Marston, firmly and gently, and betraying no symptom of excitement, except in a slight tremor of her voice, and a faint flush upon her cheek— "Stay where you are, my dear child. I am your mother, and, next to your father, have the first claim upon your obedience. Mademoiselle," she continued, addressing the Frenchwoman, calmly but firmly, "my daughter will remain here for some time longer, and you will have the goodness to withdraw. I insist upon it, Mademoiselle de Barras."

"I will not leave the room, I assure you, madame, without my pupil," retorted mademoiselle, with resolute insolence. "Your husband, madame, has invested me with this authority, and she shall obey me. Miss Rhoda, I say again, go down to the music-room."

"Remain where you are, Rhoda," said Mrs. Marston again. "Mademoiselle; you have long been acting as if your object were to provoke me to part with you. I find it impossible any longer to overlook this grossly disrespectful conduct; conduct of which I had, indeed, believed you absolutely incapable. Willett," she continued, addressing the maid, who was evidently bursting with rage at the scene she had just witnessed, "your master is, I believe, in the library; go down, and tell him that I entreat him to come here immediately."

The maid started on her mission with angry alacrity, darting a venomous glance at the handsome Frenchwoman as she passed.

Mademoiselle de Barras, meanwhile, sate, listless and defiant, in her chair, and tapping her little foot with angry excitement upon the floor.

Rhoda sate close by her mother, holding her hand fast, and looking frightened, perplexed, and as if she were on the point of weeping. Mrs. Marston, though flushed and excited, yet maintained her dignified and grave demeanor. And thus, in silence, did they all three await the arrival of the arbiter to whom Mrs. Marston had so promptly appealed.

A few minutes more, and Marston entered the room. Mademoiselle's expression changed as he did so to one of dejected and sorrowful submission; and, as Marston's eye lighted upon her, his brow darkened and his face grew pale.

"Well, well — what is it? — What is all this?" he said, glancing with a troubled eye from one to the other. "Speak, someone. Mrs. Marston, you sent for me; what is it?"

"I want to know, Mr. Marston, from your own lips," said the lady, in reply, "whether Rhoda is to obey me or Mademoiselle de Barras?"

"Bah! — A question of women's prerogative," said Marston, with muttered vehemence.

"Of a wife's and a mother's prerogative, Richard," said Mrs. Marston, with gentle emphasis. "A very simple question, and one I should have thought needing no deliberation to decide it."

"Well, child," sad he, turning to Rhoda, with angry irony, "pray what is all this fuss about? You are a very ill used young lady, I dare aver. Pray what cruelties does Mademoiselle de Barras propose inflicting upon you, that you need to appeal thus to your mother for protection?"

"You quite mistake me, Richard," interposed Mrs. Marston; "Rhoda is perfectly passive in the matter. I simply wish to learn from you, in mademoiselle's presence, whether I or she is to command my daughter?"

"Command!" said Marston, evading the direct appeal; "and pray what is all this commanding about? — What do you want the girl to do?"

"I wish her to remain here with me for a little time, and mademoiselle, knowing this, desires her instantly to go to the music-room, and leave me. That is all," said Mrs. Marston.

"And pray, is there nothing to make her going to the music-room advisable or necessary? Has she no music to learn, or studies to pursue? Pshaw! Mrs. Marston, what needs all this noise about nothing? Go, miss," he added, sharply and peremptorily, addressing Rhoda, "go this moment to the music-room."

The girl glided from the room, and mademoiselle, as she followed, shot a glance at Mrs. Marston which wounded and humbled her in the dust.

“Oh! Richard, Richard, if you knew all, you would not have subjected me to this indignity,” she said; and throwing her arms about his neck, she wept, for the first time for many a long year, upon his breast.

Marston was embarrassed and agitated. He disengaged her arms from his neck, and placed her gently in a chair. She sobbed on for some time in silence — a silence which Marston himself did not essay to break. He walked to the door, apparently with the intention of leaving her. He hesitated however, and returned; took a hurried turn through the room; hesitated again; sat down; then returned to the door, not to depart, but to close it carefully, and walked gloomily to the window, whence he looked forth, buried in agitating and absorbing thoughts.

“Richard, to you this seems a trifling thing; but, indeed it is not so,” said Mrs. Marston, sadly.

“You are very right, Gertrude,” he said, quickly, and almost with a start; “it is very far from a trifling thing; it is very important.”

“You don’t blame me, Richard?” said she.

“I blame nobody,” said he.

“Indeed, I never meant to offend you, Richard,” she urged.

“Of course not; no, no; I never said so,” he interrupted, sarcastically; “what could you gain by that?”

“Oh! Richard, better feelings have governed me,” she said, in a melancholy and reproachful tone.

“Well, well, I suppose so,” he said; and after an interval, he added abstractedly, “This cannot, however, go on; no, no — it cannot. Sooner or later it must have come; better at once — better now.”

“What do you mean, Richard?” she said, greatly alarmed, she knew not why. “What are you resolving upon? Dear Richard, in mercy tell me. I implore of you, tell me.”

“Why, Gertrude, you seem to me to fancy that, because I don’t talk about what is passing, that I don’t see it either. Now this is quite a mistake,” said Marston, calmly and resolutely— “I have long observed your growing dislike of Mademoiselle de Barras. I have thought it over; this fracas of today has determined me; it is decisive. I suppose you now wish her to go, as earnestly as you once wished her to stay. You need not answer. I know it.

I neither ask nor care to whose fault I am to attribute these changed feelings — female caprice accounts sufficiently for it; but whatever the cause, the effect is undeniable; and the only way to deal satisfactorily with it is, to dismiss mademoiselle at once. You need take no part in the matter; I take it upon myself. Tomorrow morning she shall have left this house. I have said it, and am perfectly resolved."

As he thus spoke, as if to avoid the possibility of any further discussion, he turned abruptly from her, and left the room.

The extreme agitation which she had just undergone combined with her physical delicacy to bring on an hysterical attack; and poor Mrs. Marston, with an aching head and a heavy heart, lay down upon her bed. She had swallowed an opiate, and before ten o'clock upon that night, an eventful one as it proved, she had sunk into a profound slumber.

Some hours after this, she became in a confused way conscious of her husband's presence in the room. He was walking, with an agitated mien, up and down the chamber, and casting from time to time looks of great trouble toward the bed where she lay. Though the presence of her husband was a strange and long unwonted occurrence there, at such an hour, and though she felt the strangeness of the visit, the power of the opiate overwhelmed her so, that she could only see this apparition gliding slowly back and forward before her, with the passive wonder and curiosity with which one awaits the issue of an interesting dream.

For a time she lay once more in an uneasy sleep; but still, throughout even this, she was conscious of his presence; and when, a little while after, she again saw him, he was not walking to and fro before the foot of the bed, but sitting beside her, with one hand laid upon the pillow on which her head was resting, the other supporting his chin. He was looking steadfastly upon her, with a changed face, an expression of bitter sorrow, compunction, and tenderness. There was not one trace of sternness; all was softened. The look was what she fancied he might have turned upon her had she lain there dead, ere yet the love of their early and illfated union had grown cold in his heart. There was something in it which reminded her of days and feelings gone, never to return. And while she looked in his face with a sweet and mournful fascination, tears unconsciously wet the pillow on which her poor head was resting. Unable to speak, unable to move, she heard him say— "It was not your fault, Gertrude — it was not yours, nor mine. There is a destiny in these things too strong for us. Past is past — what is done, is done forever; and even were it all to do over again, what power have I to mend it? No, no; how could I contend against the combined power of passions, circumstances, influences — in a word, of fate? You have been good and patient, while I — ; but no matter. Your lot, Gertrude, is a happier one than mine."

Mrs. Marston heard him and saw him, but she had not the power, nor even the will, herself to speak or move. He appeared before her passive sense like the phantasm of a dream. He stood up at the bedside, and looked on her steadfastly, with the same melancholy expression. For a moment he stooped over her, as if about to kiss her face, but checked himself, stood erect again at the bedside, then suddenly turned; the curtain fell back into its place, and she saw him no more.

With a strange mixture of sweet and bitter feelings this vision rested upon the memory of Mrs. Marston, until, gradually, deep slumber again overcame her senses, and the incident and all its attendant circumstances faded into oblivion.

It was past eight o'clock when Mrs. Marston awoke next morning. The sun was shining richly and cheerily in at the windows; and as the remembrance of Marston's visit to her chamber, and the unwonted manifestations of tenderness and compunction which accompanied it, returned, she felt something like hope and happiness, to which she had long been a stranger, flutter her heart. The pleasing reverie to which she was yielding was, however, interrupted. The sound of stifled sobbing in the room reached her ear, and, pushing back the bed-curtains, and leaning forward to look, she saw her maid, Willett, sitting with her back to the wall, crying bitterly, and striving, as it seemed, to stifle her sobs with her apron, which was wrapped about her face.

"Willet, Willett, is it you who are sobbing? What is the matter with you, child?" said Mrs. Marston, anxiously.

The girl checked herself, dried her eyes hastily, and walking briskly to a little distance, as if engaged in arranging the chamber, she said, with an affectation of carelessness —

"Oh, ma'am, it is nothing; nothing at all, indeed, ma'am."

Mrs. Marston remained silent for a time, while all her vague apprehensions returned. Meantime the girl continued to shove the chairs hither and thither, and to arrange and disarrange everything in the room with a fidgety industry, intended to cover her agitation. A few minutes, however, served to weary her of this, for she abruptly stopped, stood by the bedside, and, looking at her mistress, burst into tears.

"Good God! What is it?" said Mrs. Marston, shocked and even terrified, while new alarms displaced her old ones. "Is Miss Rhoda — can it be — is she — is my darling well?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am," answered the maid, "very well, ma'am; she is up, and out walking and knows nothing of all this."

"All what?" urged Mrs. Marston. "Tell me, tell me, Willett, what has happened. What is it? Speak, child; say what it is?"

"Oh, ma'am! Oh my poor dear mistress!" continued the girl, and stopped, almost stifled with sobs.

"Willett, you must speak; you must say what is the matter. I implore of you — desire you!" urged the distracted lady. Still the girl, having made one or two ineffectual efforts to speak, continued to sob.

"Willett, you will drive me mad. For mercy's sake, for God's sake, speak — tell me what it is!" cried the unhappy lady.

"Oh, ma'am, it is — it is about the master," sobbed the girl.

"Why he can't — he has not — oh, merciful God! He has not hurt himself," she almost screamed.

"No, ma'am, no; not himself; no, no, but— " and again she hesitated.

"But what? Speak out, Willett; dear Willett have mercy on me, and speak out," cried her wretched mistress.

"Oh, ma'am, don't be fretted; don't take it to heart, ma'am," said the maid, clasping her hands together in anguish.

"Anything, anything, Willett; only speak at once," she answered.

"Well, ma'am, it is soon said — it is easy told. The master, ma'am — the master is gone with the Frenchwoman; they went in the traveling coach last night, ma'am; he is gone away with her, ma'am; that is all."

Mrs. Marston looked at the girl with a gaze of stupefied, stony terror; not a muscle of her face moved; not one heaving respiration showed that she was living. Motionless, with this fearful look fixed upon the girl, and her thin hands stretched towards her, she remained, second after second. At last her outstretched hands began to tremble more and more violently; and as if for the first time the knowledge of this calamity had reached her, with a cry, as though body and soul were parting, she fell back motionless in her bed.

Several hours had passed before Mrs. Marston was restored to consciousness. To this state of utter insensibility, one of silent, terrified stupor succeeded; and it was not until she saw her daughter Rhoda standing at her bedside, weeping, that she found voice and recollection to speak.

“My child; my darling, my poor child,” she cried, sobbing piteously, as she drew her to her heart and looked in her face alternately— “my darling, my darling child!”

Rhoda could only weep, and return her poor mother’s caresses in silence. Too young and inexperienced to understand the full extent and nature of this direful calamity, the strange occurrence, the general and apparent consternation of the whole household, and the spectacle of her mother’s agony, had filled her with fear, perplexity, and anguish. Scared and stunned with a vague sense of danger, like a young bird that, for the first time, cowers under a thunderstorm, she nestled in her mother’s bosom; there, with a sense of protection, and of boundless love and tenderness, she lay frightened, wondering, and weeping.

Two or three days passed, and Dr. Danvers came and sate for several hours with poor Mrs. Marston. To comfort and console were, of course, out of his power. The nature of the bereavement, far more terrible than death — its recent occurrence — the distracting consciousness of all its complicated consequences — rendered this a hopeless task. She bowed herself under the blow with the submission of a broken heart. The hope to which she had clung for years had vanished; the worst that ever her imagination feared had come in earnest.

One idea was now constantly present in her mind. She felt a sad, but immovable assurance, that she should not live long, and the thought, “what will become of my darling when I am gone; who will guard and love my child when I am in my grave; to whom is she to look for tenderness and protection then?” perpetually haunted her, and superadded the pangs of a still wilder despair to the desolation of a broken heart.

It was not for more than a week after this event, that one day Willett, with a certain air of anxious mystery, entered the silent and darkened chamber where Mrs. Marston lay. She had a letter in her hand; the seal and handwriting were Mr. Marston's. It was long before the injured wife was able to open it; when she did so, the following sentences met her eye: —

"Gertrude,

"You can be ignorant neither of the nature nor of the consequences of the decisive step I have taken: I do not seek to excuse it. For the censure of the world, its meddling and mouthing hypocrisy, I care absolutely nothing; I have long set it at defiance. And you yourself, Gertrude, when you deliberately reconsider the circumstances of estrangement and coldness under which, though beneath the same roof, we have lived for years, without either sympathy or confidence, can scarcely, if at all, regret the rupture of a tie which had long ceased to be anything better than an irksome and galling formality. I do not desire to attribute to you the smallest blame. There was an incompatibility, not of temper but of feelings, which made us strangers though calling one another man and wife. Upon this fact I rest my own justification; our living together under these circumstances was, I dare say, equally undesired by us both. It was, in fact, but a deference to the formal hypocrisy of the world. At all events, the irrevocable act which separates us forever is done, and I have now merely to state so much of my intentions as may relate in anywise to your future arrangements. I have written to your cousin, and former guardian, Mr. Latimer, telling him how matters stand between us. You, I told him, shall have, without opposition from me, the whole of your own fortune to your own separate use, together with whatever shall be mutually agreed upon as reasonable, from my income, for your support and that of my daughter. It will be necessary to complete your arrangements with expedition, as I purpose returning to Gray Forest in about three weeks; and as, of course, a meeting between you and those by whom I shall be accompanied is wholly out of the question, you will see the expediency of losing no time in adjusting everything for yours and my daughter's departure. In the details, of course, I shall not interfere. I think I have made myself clearly intelligible, and would recommend your communicating at once with Mr. Latimer, with a view to completing temporary arrangements, until your final plans shall have been decided upon.

"RICHARD MARSTON"

The reader can easily conceive the feelings with which this letter was perused. We shall not attempt to describe them; nor shall we weary his patience by a detail of all the circumstances attending Mrs. Marston's departure. Suffice it to mention that, in less than a fortnight after the receipt of the letter which we have just copied, she had forever left the mansion of Gray Forest.

In a small house, in a sequestered part of the rich county of Warwick, the residence of Mrs. Marston and her daughter was for the present fixed. And there, for a time, the heartbroken and desolate lady enjoyed, at least, the privilege of an immunity from the intrusions of all external trouble. But the blow, under which the feeble remains of her health and strength were gradually to sink, had struck too surely home; and, from month to month — almost from week to week — the progress of decay was perceptible.

Meanwhile, though grieved and humbled, and longing to comfort his unhappy mother Charles Marston, for the present absolutely dependant upon his father, had no choice but to remain at Cambridge, and to pursue his studies there.

At Gray Forest Marston and the partner of his guilt continued to live. The old servants were all gradually dismissed, and new ones hired by Mademoiselle de Barras. There they dwelt, shunned by everybody, in a stricter and more desolate seclusion than ever. The novelty of the unrestraint and licence of their new mode of life speedily passed away, and with it the excited and guilty sense of relief which had for a time produced a false and hollow gaiety. The sense of security prompted in mademoiselle a hundred indulgences which, in her former precarious position, she would not have dreamed of. Outbreaks of temper, sharp and sometimes violent, began to manifest themselves on her part, and renewed disappointment and blacker remorse to darken the soul of Marston himself. Often, in the dead of the night, the servants would overhear their bitter and fierce altercations ringing through the melancholy mansion, and often the reckless use of terrible and mysterious epithets of crime. Their quarrels increased in violence and in frequency, and, before two years had passed, feelings of bitterness, hatred, and dread, alone seemed to subsist between them. Yet upon Marston she continued to exercise a powerful and mysterious influence. There was a dogged, apathetic submission on his part, and a growing insolence on hers, constantly more and more strikingly visible. Neglect, disorder, and decay, too, were more than ever apparent in the dreary air of the place.

Doctor Danvers, save by rumor and conjecture, knew nothing of Marston and his abandoned companion. He had, more than once, felt a strong disposition to visit Gray Forest, and expostulate, face to face, with its guilty proprietor. This idea, however, he had, upon consideration, dismissed; not on account of any shrinking from the possible repulses and affronts to which the attempt might subject him, but from a thorough conviction that the endeavor would be utterly fruitless for good, while it might, very obviously, expose him to painful misinterpretation and suspicion, and leave it to be imagined that he had been influenced, if by no meaner motive, at least by the promptings of a coarse curiosity.

Meanwhile he maintained a correspondence with Mrs. Marston, and had even once or twice since her departure visited her. Latterly, however, this correspondence had been a good deal interrupted, and its intervals had been supplied occasionally by Rhoda, whose letters, although she herself appeared unconscious of the mournful event the approach of which they too plainly indicated, were painful records of the rapid progress of mortal decay.

He had just received one of those ominous letters, at the little post office in the town we have already mentioned, and, full of the melancholy news it contained, Dr. Danvers was returning slowly towards his home. As he rode into a lonely road, traversing an undulating tract of some three miles in length, the singularity, it may be, of his costume attracted the eye of another passenger, who was, as it turned out, no other than Marston himself. For two or three miles of this desolate road, their ways happened to lie together. Marston’s first impulse was to avoid the clergyman; his second, which he obeyed, was to join company, and ride along with him, at all events, for so long as would show that he shrank from no encounter which fortune or accident presented. There was a spirit of bitter defiance in this, which cost him a painful effort.

“How do you do, Parson Danvers?” said Marston, touching his hat with the handle of his whip.

Danvers thought he had seldom seen a man so changed in so short a time. His face had grown sallow and wasted, and his figure slightly stooped, with an appearance almost of feebleness.

"Mr. Marston," said the clergyman, gravely, and almost sternly, though with some embarrassment, "it is a long time since you and I have seen one another, and many and painful events have passed in the interval. I scarce know upon what terms we meet. I am prompted to speak to you, and in a tone, perhaps, which you will hardly brook; and yet, if we keep company, as it seems likely we may, I cannot, and I ought not, to be silent."

"Well, Mr. Danvers, I accept the condition — speak what you will," said Marston, with a gloomy promptitude. "If you exceed your privilege, and grow uncivil, I need but use my spurs, and leave you behind me preaching to the winds."

"Ah! Mr. Marston," said Dr. Danvers, almost sadly, after a considerable pause, "when I saw you close beside me, my heart was troubled within me."

"You looked on me as something from the nether world, and expected to see the cloven hoof," said Marston, bitterly, and raising his booted foot a little as he spoke; "but, after all, I am but a vulgar sinner of flesh and blood, without enough of the preternatural about me to frighten an old nurse, much less to agitate a pillar of the Church."

"Mr. Marston, you talk sarcastically, but you feel that recent circumstances, as well as old recollections, might well disturb and trouble me at sight of you," answered Dr. Danvers.

"Well — yes — perhaps it is so," said Marston, hastily and sullenly, and became silent for a while.

"My heart is full, Mr. Marston; charged with grief, when I think of the sad history of those with whom, in my mind, you must ever be associated," said Doctor Danvers.

"Aye, to be sure," said Marston, with stern impatience; "but, then, you have much to console you. You have got your comforts and your respectability; all the dearer, too, from the contrast of other people's misfortunes and degradations; then you have your religion moreover— "

"Yes," interrupted Danvers, earnestly, and hastening to avoid a sneer upon this subject; "God be blessed, I am an humble follower of his gracious Son, our Redeemer; and though, I trust, I should bear with patient submission whatever chastisement in his wisdom and goodness he might see fit to inflict upon me, yet I do praise and bless him for the mercy which has hitherto spared me, and I do feel that mercy all the more profoundly, from the afflictions and troubles with which I daily see others overtaken."

"And in the matter of piety and decorum, doubtless, you bless God also," said Marston, sarcastically, "that you are not as other men are, nor even as this publican."

"Nay, Mr. Marston; God forbid I should harden my sinful heart with the wicked pride of the Pharisee. Evil and corrupt am I already over much. Too well I know the vileness of my heart, to make myself righteous in my own eyes," replied Dr. Danvers, humbly. "But, sinner as I am, I am yet a messenger of God, whose mission is one of authority to his fellow-sinners; and woe is me if I speak not the truth at all seasons, and in all places where my words may be profitably heard."

"Well, Doctor Danvers, it seems you think it your duty to speak to me, of course, respecting my conduct and my spiritual state. I shall save you the pain and trouble of opening the subject; I shall state the case for you in two words," said Marston, almost fiercely. "I have put away my wife without just cause, and am living in sin with another woman. Come, what have you to say on this theme? Speak out. Deal with me as roughly as you will, I will hear it, and answer you again."

"Alas, Mr. Marston! And do not these things trouble you?" exclaimed Dr. Danvers, earnestly. "Do they not weigh heavy upon your conscience? Ah, sir, do you not remember that, slowly and surely, you are drawing towards the hour of death, and the Day of Judgment?"

"The hour or death! Yes, I know it is coming, and I await it with indifference. But, for the Day of Judgment, with its books and trumpets! My dear doctor, pray don't expect to frighten me with that."

Marston spoke with an angry scorn, which had the effect of interrupting the conversation for some moments.

They rode on, side by side, for a long time, without speaking. At length, however, Marston unexpectedly broke the silence —

"Doctor Danvers," said he, "you asked me some time ago if I feared the hour of death, and the Day of Judgment. I answered you truly, I do not fear them; nay death, I think, I could meet with a happier and a quieter heart than any other chance that can befall me; but there are other fears; fears that do trouble me much."

Doctor Danvers looked inquiringly at him; but neither spoke for a time.

"You have not seen the catastrophe of the tragedy yet," said Marston, with a stern, stony look, made more horrible by a forced smile and something like a shudder. “I wish I could tell you — you, Doctor Danvers — for you are honorable and gentle-hearted. I wish I durst tell you what I fear; the only, only thing I really do fear. No mortal knows it but myself, and I see it coming upon me with slow, but unconquerable power. Oh, God — dreadful Spirit — spare me!”

Again they were silent, and again Marston resumed —

“Doctor Danvers, don’t mistake me,” he said, turning sharply, and fixing his eyes with a strange expression upon his companion. “I dread nothing human; I fear neither death, nor disgrace, nor eternity; I have no secrets to keep — no exposures to apprehend; but I dread — I dread— “

He paused, scowled darkly, as if stung with pain, turned away, muttering to himself, and gradually became much excited.

“I can’t tell you now, sir, and I won’t,” he said, abruptly and fiercely, and with a countenance darkened with a wild and appalling rage that was wholly unaccountable. “I see you searching me with your eyes. Suspect what you will, sir, you shan’t inveigle me into admissions. Aye, pry — whisper — stare — question, conjecture, sir — I suppose I must endure the world’s impertinence, but d —— n me if I gratify it.”

It would not be easy to describe Dr. Danvers’ astonishment at this unaccountable explosion of fury. He was resolved, however, to bear his companion’s violence with temper.

They rode on slowly for fully ten minutes in utter silence, except that Marston occasionally muttered to himself, as it seemed, in excited abstraction. Danvers had at first felt naturally offended at the violent and insulting tone in which he had been so unexpectedly and unprovokedly addressed; but this feeling of irritation was but transient, and some fearful suspicions as to Marston’s sanity flitted through his mind. In a calmer and more dogged tone, his companion now addressed him: —

“There is little profit you see, doctor, in worrying me about your religion,” said Marston. “it is but sowing the wind, and reaping the whirlwind; and, to say the truth, the longer you pursue it, the less I am in the mood to listen. If ever you are cursed and persecuted as I have been, you will understand how little tolerant of gratuitous vexations and contradictions a man may become. We have squabbled over religion long enough, and each holds his own faith still. Continue to sun yourself in your happy delusions, and leave me untroubled to tread the way of my own dark and cheerless destiny."

Thus saying, he made a sullen gesture of farewell, and spurring his horse, crossed the broken fence at the roadside, and so, at a listless pace, through gaps and by farm-roads, penetrated towards his melancholy and guilty home.

Two years had now passed since the decisive event which had forever separated Marston from her who had loved him so devotedly and so fatally; two years to him of disappointment, abasement, and secret rage; two years to her of gentle and heartbroken submission to the chastening hand of heaven. At the end of this time she died. Marston read the letter that announced the event with a stern look, and silently, but the shock he felt was terrific. No man is so self-abandoned to despair and degradation, that at some casual moment thoughts of amendment — some gleams of hope, however faint and transient, from the distant future — will not visit him. With Marston, those thoughts had somehow ever been associated with vague ideas of a reconciliation with the being whom he had forsaken — good and pure, and looking at her from the darkness and distance of his own fallen state, almost angelic as she seemed. But she was now dead; he could make her no atonement; she could never smile forgiveness upon him. This long-familiar image — the last that had reflected for him one ray of the lost peace and love of happier times — had vanished, and henceforward there was before him nothing but storm and fear.

Marston's embarrassed fortunes made it to him an object to resume the portion of his income heretofore devoted to the separate maintenance of his wife and daughter. In order to effect this it became, of course, necessary to recall his daughter, Rhoda, and fix her residence once more at Gray Forest. No more dreadful penalty could have been inflicted upon the poor girl — no more agonizing ordeal than that she was thus doomed to undergo. She had idolized her mother, and now adored her memory. She knew that Mademoiselle de Barras had betrayed and indirectly murdered the parent she had so devotedly loved; she knew that that woman had been the curse, the fate of her family, and she regarded her naturally with feelings of mingled terror and abhorrence, the intensity of which was indescribable.

The few scattered friends and relatives, whose sympathies had been moved by the melancholy fate of poor Mrs. Marston, were unanimously agreed that the intended removal of the young and innocent daughter to the polluted mansion of sin and shame, was too intolerably revolting to be permitted. But each of these virtuous individuals unhappily thought it the duty of the others to interpose; and with a running commentary of wonder and reprobation, and much virtuous criticism, events were suffered uninterruptedly to take their sinister and melancholy course.

It was about two months after the death of Mrs. Marston, and on a bleak and ominous night at the wintry end of autumn, that poor Rhoda, in deep mourning, and pale with grief and agitation, descended from a chaise at the well-known door of the mansion of Gray Forest. Whether from consideration for her feelings, or, as was more probable, from pure indifference, Rhoda was conducted, on her arrival, direct to her own chamber, and it was not until the next morning that she saw her father. He entered her room unexpectedly, he was very pale, and as she thought, greatly altered, but he seemed perfectly collected, and free from agitation. The marked and even shocking change in his appearance, and perhaps even the trifling though painful circumstance that he wore no mourning for the beloved being who was gone, caused her, after a moment's mute gazing in his face, to burst into an irrepressible flood of tears. Marston waited stoically until the paroxysm had subsided, and then taking her hand, with a look in which a dogged sternness was contending with something like shame, he said: —

"There, there; you can weep when I am gone. I shan't say very much to you at present, Rhoda, and only wish you to attend to me for one minute. Listen, Rhoda; the lady whom you have been in the habit (here he slightly averted his eyes) of calling Mademoiselle de Barras, is no longer so; she is married; she is my wife, and consequently you will treat her with the respect due to" — he would have said "a mother," but could not, and supplied the phrase by adding, "to that relation."

Rhoda was unable to speak, but almost unconsciously bowed her head in token of attention and submission, and her father pressed her hand more kindly, as he continued: —

"I have always found you a dutiful and obedient child, Rhoda, and expected no other conduct from you. Mrs. Marston will treat you with proper kindness and consideration, and desires me to say that you can, whenever you please, keep strictly to yourself, and need not, unless you feel so disposed, attend the regular meals of the family. This privilege may suit your present depressed spirits, and you must not scruple to use it.”

After a few words more, Marston withdrew, leaving his daughter to her reflections, and bleak and bitter enough they were.

Some weeks passed away, and perhaps we shall best consult our readers’ ease by substituting for the formal precision of narrative, a few extracts from the letters which Rhoda wrote to her brother, still at Cambridge. These will convey her own impressions respecting the scenes and personages among whom she was now to move.

“The house and place are much neglected, and the former in some parts suffered almost to go to decay. The windows broken in the last storm, nearly eight months ago, they tell me, are still unmended, and the roof, too, unrepaired. The pretty garden, near the well, among the lime trees, that our darling mother was so fond of, is all but obliterated with weeds and grass, and since my first visit I have not had heart to go near it again. All the old servants are gone; new faces everywhere.

“I have been obliged several times, through fear of offending my father, to join the party in the drawing room. You may conceive what I felt at seeing mademoiselle in the place once filled by our dear mamma, I was so choked with sorrow, bitterness, and indignation, and my heart so palpitated, that I could not speak, and I believe they thought I was going to faint. Mademoiselle looked very angry, but my father pretending to show me, heaven knows what, from the window, led me to it, and the air revived me a little. Mademoiselle (for I cannot call her by her new name) is altered a good deal — more, however, in the character than in the contour of her face and figure. Certainly, however, she has grown a good deal fuller, and her color is higher; and whether it is fancy or not, I cannot say, but certainly to me it seems that the expression of her face has acquired something habitually lowering and malicious, and which, I know not how, inspires me with an undefinable dread. She has, however, been tolerably civil to me, but seems contemptuous and rude to my father, and I am afraid he is very wretched, I have seen them exchange such looks, and overheard such intemperate and even appalling altercations between them, as indicate something worse and deeper than ordinary ill-will. This makes me additionally wretched, especially as I cannot help thinking that some mysterious cause enables her to frighten and tyrannise over my poor father.

I sometimes think he absolutely detests her; yet, though fiery altercations ensue, he ultimately submits to this bad and cruel woman. Oh, my dear Charles, you have no idea of the shocking, or rather the terrifying, reproaches I have heard interchanged between them, as I accidently passed the room where they were sitting — such terms as have sent me to my room, feeling as if I were in a horrid dream, and made me cry and tremble for hours after I got there…. I see my father very seldom, and when I do, he takes but little notice of me…. Poor Willett, you know, returned with me. She accompanies me in my walks, and is constantly dropping hints about mademoiselle, from which I know not what to gather….

"I often fear that my father has some secret and mortal ailment. He generally looks ill, and sometimes quite wretchedly. He came twice lately to my room, I think to speak to me on some matter of importance; but he said only a sentence or two, and even these broken and incoherent. He seemed unable to command spirits for the interview; and, indeed, he grew so agitated and strange, that I was alarmed, and felt greatly relieved when he left me….

"I do not, you see, disguise my feelings, dear Charles; I do not conceal from you the melancholy and anguish of my present situation. How intensely I long for your promised arrival. I have not a creature to whom I can say one word in confidence, except poor Willett; who, though very goodnatured, and really dear to me, is yet far from being a companion. I sometimes think my intense anxiety to see you here is almost selfish; for I know you will feel as acutely as I do, the terrible change observable everywhere. But I cannot help longing for your return, dear Charles, and counting the days and the very hours till you arrive….

"Be cautious, in writing to me, not to say anything which you would not wish mademoiselle to see; for Willett tells me that she knows that she often examines, and even intercepts the letters that arrive; and, though Willett may be mistaken, and I hope she is, yet it is better that you should be upon your guard. Ever since I heard this, I have brought my letters to the post office myself, instead of leaving them with the rest upon the hall table; and you know it is a long walk for me….

"I go to church every Sunday, and take Willett along with me. No one from this seems to think of doing so but ourselves. I see the Mervyns there. Mrs. Mervyn is particularly kind; and I know that she wishes to offer me an asylum at Newton Park; and you cannot think with how much tenderness and delicacy she conveys the wish. But I dare not hint the subject to my father; and, earnestly as I desire it, I could not but feel that I should go there, not to visit, but to reside. And so even in this, in many respects, delightful project, is mingled the bitter apprehension of dependence — something so humiliating, that, kindly and delicately as the offer is made, I could not bring myself to embrace it. I have a great deal to say to you, and long to see you."…

These extracts will enable the reader to form a tolerably accurate idea of the general state of affairs at Gray Forest. Some particulars must, however, be added.

Marston continued to be the same gloomy and joyless being as heretofore. Sometimes moody and apathetic, sometimes wayward and even savage, but never for a moment at ease, never social — an isolated, disdainful, ruined man.

One day as Rhoda sate and read under the shade of some closely-interwoven evergreens, in a lonely and sheltered part of the neglected pleasure-grounds, with her honest maid Willett in attendance, she was surprised by the sudden appearance of her father, who stood unexpectedly before her. Though his attitude for some time was fixed, his countenance was troubled with anxiety and pain, and his sunken eyes rested upon her with a fiery and fretted gaze. He seemed lost in thought for a while, and then, touching Willett sharply on the shoulder, said abruptly:

"Go; I shall call you when you are wanted. Walk down that alley." And, as he spoke, he indicated with his walking-cane the course he desired her to take.

When the maid was sufficiently distant to be quite out of hearing, Marston sate down beside Rhoda upon the bench, and took her hand in silence. His grasp was cold, and alternately relaxed and contracted with an agitated uncertainty, while his eyes were fixed upon the ground, and he seemed meditating how to open the conversation. At last, as if suddenly awaking from a fearful reverie, he said— "You correspond with Charles?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, with the respectful formality prescribed by the usages of the time, "we correspond regularly."

"Aye, aye; and, pray, when did you last hear from him?" he continued.

"About a month since, sir," she replied.

"Ha — and — and — was there nothing strange — nothing — nothing mysterious and menacing in his letter? Come, come, you know what I speak of." He stopped abruptly, and stared in her face with an agitated gaze.

"No, indeed, sir; there was not anything of the kind," she replied.

"I have been greatly shocked, I may say incensed," said Marston excitedly, "by a passage in his last letter to me. Not that it says anything specific; but — but it amazes me — it enrages me."

He again checked himself, and Rhoda, much surprised, and even shocked, said, stammeringly —

"I am sure, sir, that dear Charles would not intentionally say or do anything that could offend you."

"Ah, as to that, I believe so, too. But it is not with him I am indignant; no, no. Poor Charles! I believe he is, as you say, disposed to conduct himself as a son ought to do, respectfully and obediently. Yes, yes, Charles is very well; but I fear he is leading a bad life, notwithstanding — a very bad life. He is becoming subject to influences which never visit or torment the good; believe me, he is."

Marston shook his head, and muttered to himself, with a look of almost craven anxiety, and then whispered to his daughter —

"Just read this, and then tell me is it not so. Read it, read it, and pronounce."

As he thus spoke, he placed in her hand the letter of which he had spoken, and with the passage to which he invited her attention folded down. It was to the following effect: —

"I cannot tell you how shocked I have been by a piece of scandal, as I must believe it, conveyed to me in an anonymous letter, and which is of so very delicate a nature, that without your special command I should hesitate to pain you by its recital. I trust it may be utterly false. Indeed I assume it to be so. It is enough to say that it is of a very distressing nature, and affects the lady (Mademoiselle de Barras) whom you have recently honored with your hand."

"Now you see," cried Marston, with a shuddering fierceness, as she returned the letter with a blanched cheek and trembling hand— "now you see it all. Are you stupid? — the stamp of the cloven hoof — eh?"

Rhoda, unable to gather his meaning, but, at the same time, with a heart full and trembling very much, stammered a few frightened words, and became silent.

"It is he, I tell you, that does it all; and if Charles were not living an evil life, he could not have spread his nets for him," said Marston, vehemently. "He can't go near anything good; but, like a scoundrel, he knows where to find a congenial nature; and when he does, he has skill enough to practice upon it. I know him well, and his arts and his smiles; aye, and his scowls and his grins, too. He goes, like his master, up and down, and to and fro upon the earth, for ceaseless mischief. There is not a friend of mine he can get hold of, but he whispered in his ear some damned slander of me. He is drawing them all into a common understanding against me; and he takes an actual pleasure in telling me how the thing goes on — how, one after the other, he has converted my friends into conspirators and libelers, to blast my character, and take my life, and now the monster essays to lure my children into the hellish confederation."

"Who is he, father, who is he?" faltered Rhoda.

"You never saw him," retorted Marston, sternly.

"No, no; you can't have seen him, and you probably never will; but if he does come here again, don't listen to him. He is half-fiend and half-idiot, and no good comes of his mouthing and muttering. Avoid him, I warn you, avoid him. Let me see: how shall I describe him? Let me see. You remember — you remember Berkley — Sir Wynston Berkley. Well, he greatly resembles that dead villain: he has all the same grins, and shrugs, and monkey airs, and his face and figure are like. But he is a grimed, ragged, wasted piece of sin, little better than a beggar — a shrunken, malignant libel on the human shape. Avoid him, I tell you, avoid him: he is steeped in lies and poison, like the very serpent that betrayed us. Beware of him, I say, for if he once gains your ear, he will delude you, spite of all your vigilance; he will make you his accomplice, and thenceforth, inevitably, there is nothing but mortal and implacable hatred between us!"

Frightened at this wild language, Rhoda did not answer, but looked up in his face in silence. A fearful transformation was there — a scowl so livid and maniacal, that her very senses seemed leaving her with terror. Perhaps the sudden alteration observable in her countenance, as this spectacle so unexpectedly encountered her, recalled him to himself; for he added, hurriedly, and in a tone of gentler meaning —

"Rhoda, Rhoda, watch and pray. My daughter, my child! keep your heart pure, and nothing bad can approach you for ill. No, no; you are good, and the good need not fear!"

Suddenly Marston burst into tears, as he ended this sentence, and wept long and convulsively. She did not dare to speak, or even to move; but after a while he ceased, appeared uneasy, half ashamed and half angry; and looking with a horrified and bewildered glance into her face, he said —

"Rhoda, child, what — what have I said? My God! what have I been saying?
Did I — do I look ill? Oh, Rhoda, Rhoda, may you never feel this!"

He turned away from her without awaiting her answer, and walked away with the appearance of intense agitation, as if to leave her. He turned again, however, and with a face pallid and sunken as death, approached her slowly —

"Rhoda," said he, "don't tell what I have said to anyone — don't, I conjure you, even to Charles. I speak too much at random, and say more than I mean — a foolish, rambling habit: so do not repeat one word of it, not one word to any living mortal. You and I, Rhoda, must have our little secrets."

He ended with an attempt at a smile, so obviously painful and fear-stricken that as he walked hurriedly away, the astounded girl burst into a bitter flood of tears. What was, what could be, the meaning of the shocking scene she had then been forced to witness? She dared not answer the question. Yet one ghastly doubt haunted her like her shadow — a suspicion that the malignant and hideous light of madness was already glaring upon his mind. As, leaning upon the arm of her astonished attendant, she retracted her steps, the trees, the flowers, the familiar hall-door, the echoing passages — every object that met her eye — seemed strange and unsubstantial, and she gliding on among them in a horrid dream.

Time passed on: there was no renewal of the painful scene which dwelt so sensibly in the affrighted imagination of Rhoda. Marston's manner was changed towards her; he seemed shy, cowed, and uneasy in her presence, and thenceforth she saw less than ever of him. Meanwhile the time approached which was to witness the long expected, and, by Rhoda, the intensely prayed for arrival of her brother.

Some four or five days before this event, Mr. Marston, having, as he said, some business in Chester, and further designing to meet his son there, took his departure from Gray Forest, leaving poor Rhoda to the guardianship of her guilty stepmother; and although she had seen so little of her father, yet the very consciousness of his presence had given her a certain confidence and sense of security, which vanished at the moment of his departure. Fear-stricken and wretched as he had been, his removal, nevertheless, seemed to her to render the lonely and inauspicious mansion still more desolate and ominous than before.

She had, with a vague and instinctive antipathy, avoided all contact and intercourse with Mrs. Marston, or as, for distinctness sake, we shall continue to call her, "Mademoiselle," since her return; and she on her part had appeared to acquiesce with a sort of scornful nonchalance, in the tacit understanding that she and her former pupil should see and hear as little as might be of one another.

Meanwhile poor Willett, with her goodnatured honesty and her inexhaustible gossip, endeavored to amuse and reassure her young mistress, and sometimes even with some partial success.

We must now follow Mr. Marston in his solitary expedition to Chester. When he took his place in the stagecoach he had the whole interior of the vehicle to himself, and thus continued to be its solitary occupant for several miles. The coach, however, was eventually hailed, brought to, and the door being opened, Dr. Danvers got in, and took his place opposite to the passenger already established there. The worthy man was so busied in directing the disposition of his luggage from the window, and in arranging the sundry small parcels with which he was charged, that he did not recognize his companion until they were in motion. When he did so it was with no very pleasurable feeling; and it is probable that Marston, too, would have gladly escaped the coincidence which thus reduced them once more to the temporary necessity of a Tate-à-Tate. Embarrassing as each felt the situation to be, there was, however, no avoiding it, and, after a recognition and a few forced attempts at conversation, they became, by mutual consent, silent and uncommunicative.

The journey, though in point of space a mere trifle, was, in those slowcoach days, a matter of fully five hours' duration; and before it was completed the sun had set, and darkness began to close. Whether it was that the descending twilight dispelled the painful constraint under which Marston had seemed to labor, or that some more purely spiritual and genial influence had gradually dissipated the repulsion and distrust with which, at first, he had shrunk from a renewal of intercourse with Dr. Danvers, he suddenly accosted him thus.

"Dr. Danvers, I have been fifty times on the point of speaking to you — confidentially of course — while sitting here opposite to you, what I believe I could scarcely bring myself to hint to any other man living; yet I must tell it, and soon, too, or I fear it will have told itself."

Dr. Danvers intimated his readiness to hear and advise, if desired; and Marston resumed abruptly, after a pause —

"Pray, Doctor Danvers, have you heard any stories of an odd kind; any surmises — I don't mean of a moral sort, for those I hold very cheap — to my prejudice? Indeed I should hardly say to my prejudice; I mean — I ought to say — in short, have you heard people remark upon any fancied eccentricities, or that sort of thing, about me?"

He put the question with obvious difficulty, and at last seemed to overcome his own reluctance with a sort of angry and excited self-contempt and impatience. Doctor Danvers was a little puzzled by the interrogatory, and admitted, in reply, that he did not comprehend its drift.

"Doctor Danvers," he resumed, sternly and dejectedly, "I told you, in the chance interview we had some months ago, that I was haunted by a certain fear. I did not define it, nor do I think you suspect its nature. It is a fear of nothing mortal, but of the immortal tenant of this body. My mind; sir, is beginning to play me tricks; my guide mocks and terrifies me."

There was a perceptible tinge of horror in the look of astonishment with which Dr. Danvers listened.

"You are a gentleman, sir, and a Christian clergyman; what I have said and shall say is confided to your honor; to be held sacred as the confession of misery, and hidden from the coarse gaze of the world. I have become subject to a hideous delusion. It comes at intervals. I do not think any mortal suspects it, except, maybe, my daughter Rhoda. It comes and disappears, and comes again. I kept my pleasant secret for a long time, but at last I let it slip, and committed myself fortunately, to but one person, and that my daughter; and, even so, I hardly think she understood me. I recollected myself before I had disclosed the grotesque and infernal chimera that haunts me."

Marston paused. He was stooped forward, and looking upon the floor of the vehicle, so that his companion could not see his countenance. A silence ensued, which was interrupted by Marston, who once more resumed.

"Sir," said he, "I know not why, but I have longed, intensely longed, for some trustworthy ear into which to pour this horrid secret; why I repeat, I cannot tell, for I expect no sympathy, and hate compassion. It is, I suppose, the restless nature of the devil that is in me; but, be it what it may, I will speak to you, but to you only, for the present, at least, to you alone."

Doctor Danvers again assured him that he might repose the most entire confidence in his secrecy.

"The human mind, I take it, must have either comfort in the past or hope in the future," he continued, "otherwise it is in danger. To me, sir, the past is intolerably repulsive; one boundless, barren, and hideous Golgotha of dead hopes and murdered opportunities; the future, still blacker and more furious, peopled with dreadful features of horror and menace, and losing itself in utter darkness. Sir, I do not exaggerate. Between such a past and such a future I stand upon this miserable present; and the only comfort I still am capable of feeling is, that no human being pities me; that I stand aloof from the insults of compassion and the hypocrisies of sympathetic morality; and that I can safely defy all the respectable scoundrels in Christendom to enhance, by one feather's weight, the load which I myself have accumulated, and which I myself hourly and unaided sustain."

Doctor Danvers here introduced a word or two in the direction of their former conversation.

"No, sir, there is no comfort from that quarter either," said Marston, bitterly; "you but cast your seeds, as the parable terms your teaching, upon the barren sea, in wasting them on me. My fate, be it what it may, is as irrevocably fixed, as though I were dead and judged a hundred years ago.

"This cursed dream," he resumed abruptly, "that everyday enslaves me more and more, has reference to that — that occurrence about Wynston

Berkley — he is the hero of the hellish illusion. At certain times, sir, it seems to me as if he, though dead, were still invested with a sort of spurious life; going about unrecognized, except by me, in squalor and contempt, and whispering away my fame and life; laboring with the malignant industry of a fiend to involve me in the meshes of that special perdition from which alone I shrink, and to which this emissary of hell seems to have predestined me. Sir, this is a monstrous and hideous extravagance, a delusion, but, after all, no more than a trick of the imagination; the reason, the judgment, is untouched. I cannot choose but see all the damned phantasmagoria, but I do not believe it real, and this is the difference between my case and — and — madness!"

They were now entering the suburbs of Chester, and Doctor Danvers, pained and shocked beyond measure by this unlooked-for disclosure, and not knowing what remark or comfort to offer, relieved his temporary embarrassment by looking from the window, as though attracted by the flash of the lamps, among which the vehicle was now moving. Marston, however, laid his hand upon his arm, and thus recalled him, for a moment, to a forced attention.

"It must seem strange to you, Doctor, that I should trust this cursed secret to your keeping," he said; "and, truth to say, it seems so to myself. I cannot account for the impulse, the irresistible power of which has forced me to disclose the hateful mystery to you, but the fact is this, beginning like a speck, this one idea has gradually darkened and dilated, until it has filled my entire mind. The solitary consciousness of the gigantic mastery it has established there had grown intolerable; I must have told it. The sense of solitude under this aggressive and tremendous delusion was agony, hourly death to my soul. That is the secret of my talkativeness; my sole excuse for plaguing you with the dreams of a wretched hypochondriac."

Doctor Danvers assured him that no apologies were needed, and was only restrained from adding the expression of that pity which he really felt, by the fear of irritating a temper so full of bitterness, pride and defiance. A few minutes more, and the coach having reached its destination, they bid one another farewell, and parted.

At that time there resided in a decent mansion about a mile from the town of Chester, a dapper little gentleman, whom we shall call Doctor Parkes. This gentleman was the proprietor and sole professional manager of a private asylum for the insane and enjoyed a high reputation, and a proportionate amount of business, in his melancholy calling. It was about the second day after the conversation we have just sketched, that this little gentleman, having visited, according to his custom, all his domestic patients, was about to take his accustomed walk in his somewhat restricted pleasure grounds, when his servant announced a visitor.

"A gentleman," he repeated; "you have seen him before — eh?"

"No, sir," replied the man; "he is in the study, sir."

"Ha! a professional call. Well, we shall see."

So saying, the little gentleman summoned his gravest look, and hastened to the chamber of audience.

On entering he found a man dressed well, but gravely, having in his air and manner something of high breeding. In countenance striking, dark-featured, and stern, furrowed with the lines of pain or thought, rather than of age, although his dark hairs were largely mingled with white.

The physician bowed, and requested the stranger to take a chair; he, however, nodded slightly and impatiently, as if to intimate an intolerance of ceremony, and, advancing a step or two, said abruptly —

"My name, sir, is Marston; I have come to give you a patient."

The doctor bowed with a still deeper inclination, and paused for a continuance of the communication thus auspiciously commenced.

"You are Dr. Parkes, I take it for granted," said Marston, in the same tone.

"Your most obedient, humble servant, sir," replied he, with the polite formality of the day, and another grave bow.

"Doctor," demanded Marston, fixing his eye upon him sternly, and significantly tapping his own forehead, "can you stay execution?"

The physician looked puzzled, hesitated, and at last requested his visitor to be more explicit.

"Can you," said Marston, with the same slow and stern articulation, and after a considerable pause— "can you prevent the malady you profess to cure? — can you meet and defeat the enemy halfway? — can you scare away the spirit of madness before it takes actual possession, and while it is still only hovering about its threatened victim?"

"Sir," he replied, "in certain cases — in very many, indeed — the enemy, as you well call it, may thus be met, and effectually worsted at a distance. Timely interposition, in ninety cases out of a hundred, is everything; and, I assure you, I hear your question with much pleasure, inasmuch as I assume it to have reference to the case of the patient about whom you desire to consult me; and who is, therefore, I hope, as yet merely menaced with the misfortune from which you would save him."

"I, myself, am that patient, sir," said Marston, with an effort; "your surmise is right. I am not mad, but unequivocally menaced with madness; it is not to be mistaken. Sir, there is no misunderstanding the tremendous and intolerable signs that glare upon my mind."

"And pray, sir, have you consulted your friends or your family upon the course best to be pursued?" inquired Dr. Parkes, with grave interest.

"No, sir," he answered sharply, and almost fiercely; "I have no fancy to make myself the subject of a writ *de lunatico inquirendo*; I don't want to lose my liberty and my property at a blow. The course I mean to take has been advised by no one but myself — is known to no other. I now disclose it, and the causes of it, to you, a gentleman, and my professional adviser, in the expectation that you will guard with the strictest secrecy my spontaneous revelations; this you promise me?"

"Certainly, Mr. Marston; I have neither the disposition nor the right to withhold such a promise," answered the physician.

"Well, then, I will first tell you the arrangement I propose, with your permission, to make, and then I shall answer all your questions, respecting my own case," resumed Marston, gloomily. "I wish to place myself under your care, to live under your roof, reserving my full liberty of action. I must be free to come and to go as I will; and on the other hand, I undertake that you shall find me an amenable and docile patient enough. In addition, I stipulate that there shall be no attempt whatever made to communicate with those who are connected with me: these terms agreed upon, I place myself in your hands. You will find in me, as I said before, a deferential patient, and I trust not a troublesome one. I hope you will excuse my adding, that I shall myself pay the charge of my sojourn here from week to week, in advance."

The proposed arrangement was a strange one; and although Dr. Parkes dimly foresaw some of the embarrassments which might possibly arise from his accepting it, there was yet so much that was reasonable as well as advantageous in the proposal, that he could not bring himself to decline it.

The preliminary arrangement concluded, Dr. Parkes proceeded to his more strictly professional investigation. It is, of course, needless to recapitulate the details of Marston's tormenting fancies, with which the reader has indeed been already sufficiently acquainted. Doctor Parkes, having attentively listened to the narrative, and satisfied himself as to the physical health of his patient, was still sorely puzzled as to the probable issue of the awful struggle already but too obviously commenced between the mind and its destroyer in the strange case before him. One satisfactory symptom unquestionably was, the as yet transitory nature of the delusion, and the evident and energetic tenacity with which reason contended for her vital ascendancy. It was a case, however, which for many reasons sorely perplexed him, but of which, notwithstanding, he was disposed, whether rightly or wrongly the reader will speedily see, to take by no means a decidedly gloomy view.

Having disburdened his mind of this horrible secret, Marston felt for a time a sense of relief amounting almost to elation. With far less of apprehension and dismay than he had done so for months before, he that night repaired to his bedroom. There was nothing in his case, Doctor Parkes believed, to warrant his keeping any watch upon Marston's actions, and accordingly he bid him goodnight, in the full confidence of meeting him, if not better, at least not worse, on the ensuing morning.

He miscalculated, however. Marston had probably himself been conscious of some coming crisis in his hideous malady, when he took the decisive step of placing himself under the care of Doctor Parkes. Certain it is, that upon that very night the disease broke forth in a new and appalling development. Doctor Parkes, whose bedroom was next to that occupied by Marston, was awakened in the dead of night by a howling, more like that of a beast than a human voice, and which gradually swelled into an absolute yell; then came some horrid laughter and entreaties, thick and frantic; then again the same unearthly howl. The practiced ear of Doctor Parkes recognized but too surely the terrific import of those sounds. Springing from his bed, and seizing the candle which always burned in his chamber, in anticipation of such sudden and fearful emergencies, he hurried with a palpitating heart, and spite of his long habituation to such scenes as he expected, with a certain sense of horror, to the chamber of his aristocratic patient.

Late as it was, Marston had not yet gone to bed; his candle was still burning, and he himself, half dressed, stood in the center of the floor, shaking and livid, his eyes burning with the preterhuman fires of insanity. As Doctor Parkes entered the chamber, another shout, or rather yell, thundered from the lips of this demoniac effigy; and the mad-doctor stood freezing with horror in the doorway, and yet exerting what remained to him of presence of mind, in the vain endeavor, in the flaring light of the candle, to catch and fix with his own practiced eye the gaze of the maniac. Second after second, and minute after minute, he stood confronting this frightful slave of Satan, in the momentary expectation that he would close with and destroy him. On a sudden, however, this brief agony of suspense was terminated; a change like an awakening consciousness of realities, or rather like the withdrawal of some hideous and visible influence from within, passed over the tense and darkened features of the wretched being; a look of horrified perplexity, doubt, and inquiry, supervened, and he at last said, in a subdued and sullen tone, to Doctor Parkes:

"Who are you, sir? What do you want here? Who are you, sir, I say?"

"Who am I? Why, your physician, sir; Doctor Parkes, sir; the owner of this house, sir," replied he, with all the sternness he could command, and yet white as a specter with agitation. "For shame, sir, for shame, to give way thus. What do you mean by creating this causeless alarm, and disturbing the whole household at so unseasonable an hour? For shame, sir; go to your bed; undress yourself this moment; for shame."

Doctor Parkes, as he spoke, was reassured by the arrival of one of his servants, alarmed by the unmistakable sounds of violent frenzy; he signed, however, to the man not to enter, feeling confident, as he did, that the paroxysm had spent itself.

"Aye, aye," muttered Marston, looking almost sheepishly; "Doctor Parkes, to be sure. What was I thinking of? how cursedly absurd! And this," he continued, glancing at his sword, which he threw impatiently upon a sofa as he spoke. "Folly — nonsense! A false alarm, as you say, doctor. I beg your pardon."

As Marston spoke, he proceeded with much agitation slowly to undress himself. He had, however, but commenced the process, when, turning abruptly to Doctor Parkes, he said, with a countenance of horror, and in a whisper —

"By —— , doctor, it has been upon me worse than ever, I would have sworn I had the villain with me for hours — hours, sir — torturing me with his damned sneering threats; till, by —— , I could stand it no longer, and took my sword. Oh, doctor, can't you save me? can nothing be done for me?"

Pale, covered with the dews of horror, he uttered these last words in accents of such imploring despair, as might have borne across the dreadful gulf the prayer of Dives for that one drop of water which never was to cool his burning tongue.

When Rhoda learned that her father, on leaving Gray Forest, had fixed no definite period for his return, she began to feel her situation at home so painful and equivocal, that, having taken honest Willett to counsel, she came at last to the resolution of accepting the often conveyed invitation of Mrs. Mervyn and sojourning, at all events until her father's return, at Newton Park.

"My dear young friend," said the kind lady, as soon as she heard Rhoda's little speech to its close, "I can scarcely describe the gratification with which I see you here; the happiness with which I welcome you to Newton Park; nor, indeed, the anxiety with which I constantly contemplated your trying and painful position at Gray Forest. Indeed I ought to be angry with you for having refused me this happiness so long; but you have made amends at last; though, indeed, it was impossible to have deferred it longer. You must not fancy, however, that I will consent to lose you so soon as you seem to have intended. No, no; I have found it too hard to catch you, to let you take wing so easily; besides, I have others to consult as well as myself, and persons, too, who are just as anxious as I am to make a prisoner of you here."

The good Mrs. Mervyn accompanied these words with looks so sly, and emphasis so significant, that Rhoda was fain to look down, to hide her blushes; and compassionating the confusion she herself had caused, the kind old lady led her to the chamber which was henceforward, so long as she consented to remain, to be her own apartment.

How that day was passed, and how fleetly its hours sped away, it is needless to tell. Old Mervyn had his gentle as well as his grim aspect; and no welcome was ever more cordial and tender than that with which he greeted the unprotected child of his morose and repulsive neighbor. It would be impossible to convey any idea of the countless assiduities and the secret delight with which young Mervyn attended their rambles.

The party were assembled at supper. What a contrast did this cheerful, happy — unutterably happy — gathering, present, in the mind of Rhoda, to the dull, drear, fearful evenings which she had long been wont to pass at Gray Forest.

As they sate together in cheerful and happy intercourse, a chaise drove up to the hall-door, and the knocking had hardly ceased to reverberate, when a well-known voice was heard in the hall.

Young Mervyn started to his feet, and merrily ejaculating, "Charles Marston! this is delightful!" disappeared, and in an instant returned with Charles himself.

We pass over all the embraces of brother and sister; the tears and smiles of reunited affection. We omit the cordial shaking of hands; the kind looks; the questions and answers; all these, and all the little attentions of that good oldfashioned hospitality, which was never weary of demonstrating the cordiality of its welcome, we abandon to the imagination of the goodnatured reader.

Charles Marston, with the advice of his friend, Mr. Mervyn, resolved to lose no time in proceeding to Chester, whither it was ascertained his father had gone, with the declared intention of meeting and accompanying him home. He arrived in that town in the evening; and having previously learned that Doctor Danvers had been for some time in Chester, he at once sought him at his usual lodgings, and found the worthy old gentleman at his solitary "dish" of tea.

"My dear Charles," said he, greeting his young friend with earnest warmth, "I am rejoiced beyond measure to see you. Your father is in town, as you supposed; and I have just had a note from him, which has, I confess, not a little agitated me, referring, as it does, to a subject of painful and horrible interest; one with which, I suppose, you are familiar, but upon which I myself have never yet spoken fully to any person, excepting your father only."

"And pray, my dear sir, what is this topic?" inquired Charles, with marked interest.

"Read this note," answered the clergyman, placing one at the same time in his young visitor's hand.

Charles read as follows:

"My Dear Sir,

"I have a singular communication to make to you, but in the strictest privacy, with reference to a subject which, merely to name, is to awaken feelings of doubt and horror; I mean the confession of Merton, with respect to the murder of Wynston Berkley. I will call upon you this evening after dark; for I have certain reasons for not caring to meet old acquaintances about town; and if you can afford me half an hour, I promise to complete my intended disclosure within that time. Let us be strictly private; this is my only proviso.

"Yours with much respect,

"Richard Marston"

"Your father has been sorely troubled in mind," said Doctor Danvers, as soon as the young man had read this communication; "he has told me as much; it may be that the discovery he has now made may possibly have relieved him from certain galling anxieties. The fear that unjust suspicion should light upon himself, or those connected with him, has, I dare say, tormented him sorely. God grant, that as the providential unfolding of all the details of this mysterious crime comes about, he maybe brought to recognize, in the just and terrible process, the hand of heaven. God grant, that at last his heart may be softened, and his spirit illuminated by the blessed influence he has so long and so sternly rejected."

As the old man thus spake — as if in symbolic answering to his prayer — a sudden glory from the setting sun streamed through the funereal pile of clouds which filled the western horizon, and flooded the chamber where they were.

After a silence, Charles Marston said, with some little embarrassment—"It may be a strange confession to make, though, indeed, hardly so to you — for you know but too well the gloomy reserve with which my father has uniformly treated me — that the exact nature of Merton's confession never reached my ears; and once or twice, when I approached the subject, in conversation with you, it seemed to me that the subject was one which, for some reason, it was painful to you to enter upon."

"And so it was, in truth, my young friend — so it was; for that confession left behind it many fearful doubts, proving, indeed, nothing but the one fact, that, morally, the wretched man was guilty of the murder."

Charles, urged by a feeling of the keenest interest, requested Dr. Danvers to detail to him the particulars of the dying man's narration.

"Willingly," answered Dr. Danvers, with a look of gloom, and heaving a profound sigh— "willingly, for you have now come to an age when you may safely be entrusted with secrets affecting your own family, and which, although, thank God, as I believe they in no respect involve the honor of anyone of its members, yet might deeply involve its peace and its security against the assaults of vague and horrible slander. Here, then, is the narrative: Merton, when he was conscious of the approach of death, qualified, by a circumstantial and detailed statement, the absolute confession of guilt which he had at first sullenly made. In this he declared that the guilt of design and intention only was his — that in the act itself he had been anticipated. He stated, that from the moment when Sir Wynston's servant had casually mentioned the circumstance of his master's usually sleeping with his watch and pocketbook under his pillow, the idea of robbing him had taken possession of his mind. With the idea of robbing him (under the peculiar circumstances, his servant sleeping in the apartment close by, and the slightest alarm being, in all probability, sufficient to call him to the spot) the idea of anticipating resistance by murder had associated itself. He had contended against these haunting and growing solicitations of Satan, with an earnest agony. He had intended to leave his place, and fly from the mysterious temptation which he felt he wanted power to combat, but accident or fate prevented him. In a state of ghastly excitement he had, on the memorable night of Sir Wynston's murder, proceeded, as had afterwards appeared in evidence, by the back stair to the baronet's chamber; he had softly stolen into it, and gone to the bedside, with the weapon in his hand. He drew his breath for the decisive stroke, which was to bereave the (supposedly) sleeping man of life, and when stretching his left hand under the clothes, it rested upon a dull, cold corpse, and, at the same moment, his right hand was immersed in a pool of blood. He dropped the knife, recoiled a pace or so. With a painful effort, however, he again grasped with his hand to recover the weapon he had suffered to escape, and secured, as it afterwards turned out, not the knife with which he had meditated the commission of his crime, but the dagger which was afterwards found where he had concealed it. He was now fully alive to the horror of his situation; he was compromised as fully as if he had in very deed driven home the weapon. To be found under such circumstances, would convict him as surely as if fifty eyes had seen him strike the blow. He had nothing now for it but flight; and in order to guard himself against the contingency of being surprised from the door opening upon the corridor, he bolted it; then groped under the murdered man's pillow for the booty which had so fatally fascinated his imagination. Here he was disappointed. What further happened you already know."

Charles listened with breathless attention to this recital, and, after a painful interval, said —

"Then the actual murderer is, after all, unascertained. This is, indeed, horrible; it was very natural that my father should have felt the danger to which such a disclosure would have exposed the reputation of our family, yet I should have preferred encountering it, were it ten times as great, to the equivocal prudence of suppressing the truth with respect to a murder committed under my own roof."

"He has, however, it would seem, arrived at some new conclusions," said Dr. Danvers, "and is now prepared to throw some unanticipated light upon the whole transaction."

Even as they were talking, a knocking was heard at the hall-door, and after a brief and hurried consultation, it was agreed, that, considering the strict condition of privacy attached to this visit by Mr. Marston himself, as well as his reserved and wayward temper, it might be better for Charles to avoid presenting himself to his father on this occasion. A few seconds afterwards the door opened, and Mr. Marston entered the apartment. It was now dark, and the servant, unbidden, placed candles upon the table. Without answering one word to Dr. Danvers' greeting, Marston sat down, as it seemed, in agitated abstraction. Removing his hat suddenly (for he had not even made this slight homage to the laws of courtesy), he looked round with a careworn, fiery eye, and a pale countenance, and said —

"We are quite alone, Dr. Danvers — no one anywhere near?"

Dr. Danvers assured him that all was secure. After a long and agitated pause, Marston said —

"You remember Merton's confession. He admitted his intention to kill Berkley, but denied that he was the actual murderer. He spoke truth — no one knew it better than I; for I am the murderer."

Dr. Danvers was so shocked and overwhelmed that he was utterly unable to speak.

"Aye, sir, in point of law and of morals, literally and honestly, the murderer of Wynston Berkley. I am resolved you shall know it all. Make what use of it you will — I care for nothing now, but to get rid of the d —— d, unsustainable secret, and that is done. I did not intend to kill the scoundrel when I went to his room; but with the just feelings of exasperation with which I regarded him, it would have been wiser had I avoided the interview; and I meant to have done so. But his candle was burning; I saw the light through the door, and went in. It was his evil fortune to indulge in his old strain of sardonic impertinence. He provoked me; I struck him — he struck me again — and with his own dagger I stabbed him three times. I did not know what I had done; I could not believe it. I felt neither remorse nor sorrow — why should I? — but the thing was horrible, astounding. There he sat in the corner of his cushioned chair, with the old fiendish smile on still. Sir, I never thought that any human shape could look so dreadful. I don't know how long I stayed there, freezing with horror and detestation, and yet unable to take my eyes from the face. Did you see it in the coffin? Sir, there was a sneer of triumph on it that was diabolic and prophetic."

Marston was fearfully agitated as he spoke, and repeatedly wiped from his face the cold sweat that gathered there.

"I could not leave the room by the back stairs," he resumed, "for the valet slept in the intervening chamber. I felt such an appalled antipathy to the body, that I could scarcely muster courage to pass it. But, sir, I am not easily cowed — I mastered this repugnance in a few minutes — or, rather, I acted spite of it, I knew not how; but instinctively it seemed to me that it was better to lay the body in the bed, than leave it where it was, shewing, as its position might, that the thing occurred in an altercation. So, sir, I raised it, and bore it softly across the room, and laid it in the bed; and, while I was carrying it, it swayed forward, the arms glided round my neck, and the head rested against my cheek — that was a parody upon a brotherly embrace!

"I do not know at what moment it was, but some time when I was carrying Wynston, or laying him in the bed," continued Marston, who spoke rather like one pursuing a horrible reverie, than as a man relating facts to a listener, "I heard a light tread, and soft breathing in the lobby. A thunderclap would have stunned me less that minute. I moved softly, holding my breath, to the door. I believe, in moments of strong excitement, men hear more acutely than at other times; but I thought I heard the rustling of a gown, going from the door again. I waited — it ceased; I waited until all was quiet. I then extinguished the candle, and groped my way to the door; there was a faint light in the corridor, and I thought I saw a head projected from the chamber-door, next to the Frenchwoman's — mademoiselle's. As I came on, it was softly withdrawn, and the door not quite noiselessly closed. I could not be absolutely certain, but I learned all afterward. And now, sir, you have the story of Sir Wynston's murder."

Dr. Danvers groaned in spirit, being wrung alike with fear and sorrow. With hands clasped, and head bowed down, in an exceeding bitter agony of soul, he murmured only the words of the Litany— "Lord, have mercy upon us; Christ, have mercy upon us; Lord, have mercy upon us."

Marston had recovered his usual lowering aspect and gloomy self-possession in a few moments, and was now standing erect and defiant before the humbled and afflicted minister of God. The contrast was terrible — almost sublime.

Doctor Danvers resolved to keep this dreadful secret, at least for a time, to himself. He could not make up his mind to inflict upon those whom he loved so well as Charles and Rhoda the shame and agony of such a disclosure; yet he was sorely troubled, for his was a conflict of duty and mercy, of love and justice.

He told Charles Marston, when urged with earnest inquiry, that what he had heard that evening was intended solely for his own ear, and gently but peremptorily declined telling, at least until some future time, the substance of his father's communication.

Charles now felt it necessary to see his father, for the purpose of letting him know the substance of the letter respecting "mademoiselle" and the late Sir Wynston which had reached him. Accordingly, he proceeded, accompanied by Doctor Danvers, on the next morning, to the hotel where Marston had intimated his intention of passing the night.

On their inquiring for him in the hall, the porter appeared much perplexed and disturbed, and as they pressed him with questions, his answers became conflicting and mysterious. Mr. Marston was there — he had slept there last night; he could not say whether or not he was then in the house; but he knew that no one could be admitted to see him. He would, if the gentlemen wished it, send their cards to (not Mr. Marston, but) the proprietor. And, finally, he concluded by begging that they would themselves see "the proprietor," and dispatched a waiter to apprise him of the circumstances of the visit. There was something odd and even sinister in all this, which, along with the whispering and the curious glances of the waiters, who happened to hear the errand on which they came, inspired the two companions with vague misgivings, which they did not care mutually to disclose.

In a few moments they were shown into a small sitting room up stairs, where the proprietor, a fussy little gentleman, and apparently very uneasy and frightened, received them.

"We have called here to see Mr. Marston," said Doctor Danvers, "and the porter has referred us to you."

"Yes, sir, exactly — precisely so," answered the little man, fidgeting excessively, and as it seemed, growing paler every instant; "but — but, in fact, sir, there is, there has been — in short, have you not heard of the — the accident?"

He wound up with a prodigious effort, and wiped his forehead when he had done.

"Pray, sir, be explicit: we are near friends of Mr. Marston; in fact, sir, this is his son," said Doctor Danvers, pointing to Charles Marston; "and we are both uneasy at the reserve with which our inquiries have been met. Do, I entreat of you, say what has happened?"

"Why — why," hesitated the man, "I really — I would not for five hundred pounds it had happened in my house. The — the unhappy gentleman has, in short— "

He glanced at Charles, as if afraid of the effect of the disclosure he was on the point of making, and then hurriedly said— "He is dead, sir; he was found dead in his room, this morning, at eight o'clock. I assure you I have not been myself ever since."

Charles Marston was so stunned by this sudden blow, that he was upon the point of fainting. Rallying, however, with a strong effort, he demanded to be conducted to the chamber where the body lay. The man assented, but hesitated on reaching the door, and whispered something in the ear of

Doctor Danvers, who, as he heard it, raised his hands and eyes with a mute expression of horror, and turning to Charles, said —

"My dear young friend, remain where you are for a few moments. I will return to you immediately, and tell you whatever I have ascertained. You are in no condition for such a scene at present."

Charles, indeed, felt that the fact was so, and, sick and giddy, suffered Doctor Danvers, with gentle compulsion, to force him into a seat.

In silence the venerable clergyman followed his conductor. With a palpitating heart he advanced to the bedside, and twice essayed to draw the curtain, and twice lost courage; but gathering resolution at last, he pulled the drapery aside, and beheld all he was to see again of Richard Marston.

The bedclothes were drawn so as nearly to cover the mouth.

"There is the wound, sir," whispered the man, as with coarse officiousness he drew back the bedclothes from the throat of the corpse, and exhibited a gash, as it seemed, nearly severing the head from the body. With sickening horror Doctor Danvers turned away from the awful spectacle. He covered his face in his hands, and it seemed to him as if a soft, solemn voice whispered in his ear the mystic words, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."

The hand which, but a few years before, had, unsuspected, consigned a fellow-mortal to the grave, had itself avenged the murder — Marston had perished by his own hand.

Naturally ambitious and intriguing, the perilous tendencies of such a spirit in Mademoiselle de Barras had never been schooled by the mighty and benignant principles of religion; of her accidental acquaintance at Rouen with Sir Wynston Berkley, and her subsequent introduction, in an evil hour, into the family at Gray Forest, it is unnecessary to speak. The unhappy terms on which she found Marston living with his wife, suggested, in their mutual alienation, the idea of founding a double influence in the household; and to conceive the idea, and to act upon it, were, in her active mind, the same. Young, beautiful, fascinating, she well knew the power of her attractions, and determined, though probably without one thought of transgressing the limits of literal propriety, to bring them to bear upon the discontented, retired roué, for whom she cared absolutely nothing, except as the instrument, and in part the victim of her schemes. Thus yielding to the double instinct that swayed her, she gratified, at the same time, her love of intrigue and her love of power. At length, however, came the hour which demanded a sacrifice to the evil influence she had hitherto worshipped on such easy terms. She found that her power must now be secured by crime, and she fell. Then came the arrival of Sir Wynston — his murder — her elopement with Marston, and her guilty and joyless triumph. At last, however, came the blow, long suspended and terrific, which shattered all her hopes and schemes, and drove her once again upon the world. The catastrophe we have just described. After it she made her way to Paris. Arrived in the capital of France, she speedily dissipated whatever remained of the money and valuables which she had taken with her from Gray Forest; and Madame Marston, as she now styled herself, was glad to place herself once more as a governess in an aristocratic family. So far her good fortune had prevailed in averting the punishment but too well earned by her past life. But a day of reckoning was to come. A few years later France was involved in the uproar and conflagration of revolution. Noble families were scattered, beggared, decimated; and their dependants, often dragged along with them into the flaming abyss, in many instances suffered the last dire extremities of human ill. It was at this awful period that a retribution so frightful and extraordinary overtook Madame Marston, that we may hereafter venture to make it the subject of a separate narrative. Until then the reader will rest satisfied with what he already knows of her history; and meanwhile bid a long, and as it may possibly turn out, an eternal farewell to that beautiful embodiment of an evil and disastrous influence.

The concluding chapter in a novel is always brief, though seldom so short as the world would have it. In a tale like this, the “winding up” must be proportionately contracted. We have scarcely a claim to so many lines as the formal novelist may occupy pages, in the distribution of poetic justice, and the final grouping of his characters into that effective tableau upon which, at last, the curtain gracefully descends. We, too, may be all the briefer, inasmuch as the reader has doubtless anticipated the little we have to say. It amounts, then, to this: — Within two years after the fearful event which we have just recorded, an alliance had drawn together, in nearer and dearer union, the inmates of Gray Forest and Newton Park. Rhoda had given her hand to young Mervyn, of ulterior consequences we say nothing — the nursery is above our province. And now, at length, after this Christmas journey through somewhat stern and gloomy scenery, in this long-deferred flood of golden sunshine we bid thee, gentle reader, a fond farewell.

THE END

GHOSTLY TALES

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AN ACCOUNT OF SOME STRANGE DISTURBANCES IN AUNGIER STREET

It is not worth telling, this story of mine — at least, not worth writing. Told, indeed, as I have sometimes been called upon to tell it, to a circle of intelligent and eager faces, lighted up by a good after-dinner fire on a winter's evening, with a cold wind rising and wailing outside, and all snug and cosy within, it has gone off — though I say it, who should not — indifferent well. But it is a venture to do as you would have me. Pen, ink, and paper are cold vehicles for the marvellous, and a "reader" decidedly a more critical animal than a "listener." If, however, you can induce your friends to read it after nightfall, and when the fireside talk has run for a while on thrilling tales of shapeless terror; in short, if you will secure me the *mollia tempora fandi*, I will go to my work, and say my say, with better heart. Well, then, these conditions presupposed, I shall waste no more words, but tell you simply how it all happened.

My cousin (Tom Ludlow) and I studied medicine together. I think he would have succeeded, had he stuck to the profession; but he preferred the Church, poor fellow, and died early, a sacrifice to contagion, contracted in the noble discharge of his duties. For my present purpose, I say enough of his character when I mention that he was of a sedate but frank and cheerful nature; very exact in his observance of truth, and not by any means like myself — of an excitable or nervous temperament.

My Uncle Ludlow — Tom's father — while we were attending lectures, purchased three or four old houses in Aungier Street, one of which was unoccupied. *He* resided in the country, and Tom proposed that we should take up our abode in the untenanted house, so long as it should continue unlet; a move which would accomplish the double end of settling us nearer alike to our lecture-rooms and to our amusements, and of relieving us from the weekly charge of rent for our lodgings.

Our furniture was very scant — our whole equipage remarkably modest and primitive; and, in short, our arrangements pretty nearly as simple as those of a bivouac. Our new plan was, therefore, executed almost as soon as conceived. The front drawingroom was our sitting-room. I had the bedroom over it, and Tom the back bedroom on the same floor, which nothing could have induced me to occupy.

The house, to begin with, was a very old one. It had been, I believe, newly fronted about fifty years before; but with this exception, it had nothing modern about it. The agent who bought it and looked into the titles for my uncle, told me that it was sold, along with much other forfeited property, at Chichester House, I think, in 1702; and had belonged to Sir Thomas Hacket, who was Lord Mayor of Dublin in James II.'s time. How old it was *then*, I can't say; but, at all events, it had seen years and changes enough to have contracted all that mysterious and saddened air, at once exciting and depressing, which belongs to most old mansions.

There had been very little done in the way of modernising details; and, perhaps, it was better so; for there was something queer and by-gone in the very walls and ceilings — in the shape of doors and windows — in the odd diagonal site of the chimneypieces — in the beams and ponderous cornices — not to mention the singular solidity of all the woodwork, from the banisters to the window-frames, which hopelessly defied disguise, and would have emphatically proclaimed their antiquity through any conceivable amount of modern finery and varnish.

An effort had, indeed, been made, to the extent of papering the drawingrooms; but somehow, the paper looked raw and out of keeping; and the old woman, who kept a little dirt-pie of a shop in the lane, and whose daughter — a girl of two and fifty — was our solitary handmaid, coming in at sunrise, and chastely receding again as soon as she had made all ready for tea in our state apartment; — this woman, I say, remembered it, when old Judge Horrocks (who, having earned the reputation of a particularly "hanging judge," ended by hanging himself, as the coroner's jury found, under an impulse of "temporary insanity," with a child's skipping-rope, over the massive old bannisters) resided there, entertaining good company, with fine venison and rare old port. In those halcyon days, the drawingrooms were hung with gilded leather, and, I dare say, cut a good figure, for they were really spacious rooms.

The bedrooms were wainscoted, but the front one was not gloomy; and in it the cosiness of antiquity quite overcame its sombre associations. But the back bedroom, with its two queerly-placed melancholy windows, staring vacantly at the foot of the bed, and with the shadowy recess to be found in most old houses in Dublin, like a large ghostly closet, which, from congeniality of temperament, had amalgamated with the bedchamber, and dissolved the partition. At night-time, this “alcove” — as our “maid” was wont to call it — had, in my eyes, a specially sinister and suggestive character. Tom’s distant and solitary candle glimmered vainly into its darkness. *There* it was always overlooking him — always itself impenetrable. But this was only part of the effect. The whole room was, I can’t tell how, repulsive to me. There was, I suppose, in its proportions and features, a latent discord — a certain mysterious and indescribable relation, which jarred indistinctly upon some secret sense of the fitting and the safe, and raised indefinable suspicions and apprehensions of the imagination. On the whole, as I began by saying, nothing could have induced me to pass a night alone in it.

I had never pretended to conceal from poor Tom my superstitious weakness; and he, on the other hand, most unaffectedly ridiculed my tremors. The sceptic was, however, destined to receive a lesson, as you shall hear.

We had not been very long in occupation of our respective dormitories, when I began to complain of uneasy nights and disturbed sleep. I was, I suppose, the more impatient under this annoyance, as I was usually a sound sleeper, and by no means prone to nightmares. It was now, however, my destiny, instead of enjoying my customary repose, every night to “sup full of horrors.” After a preliminary course of disagreeable and frightful dreams, my troubles took a definite form, and the same vision, without an appreciable variation in a single detail, visited me at least (on an average) every second night in the week.

Now, this dream, nightmare, or infernal illusion — which you please — of which I was the miserable sport, was on this wise: ——

I saw, or thought I saw, with the most abominable distinctness, although at the time in profound darkness, every article of furniture and accidental arrangement of the chamber in which I lay. This, as you know, is incidental to ordinary nightmare. Well, while in this clairvoyant condition, which seemed but the lighting up of the theatre in which was to be exhibited the monotonous tableau of horror, which made my nights insupportable, my attention invariably became, I know not why, fixed upon the windows opposite the foot of my bed; and, uniformly with the same effect, a sense of dreadful anticipation always took slow but sure possession of me. I became somehow conscious of a sort of horrid but undefined preparation going forward in some unknown quarter, and by some unknown agency, for my torment; and, after an interval, which always seemed to me of the same length, a picture suddenly flew up to the window, where it remained fixed, as if by an electrical attraction, and my discipline of horror then commenced, to last perhaps for hours. The picture thus mysteriously glued to the window-panes, was the portrait of an old man, in a crimson flowered silk dressing-gown, the folds of which I could now describe, with a countenance embodying a strange mixture of intellect, sensuality, and power, but withal sinister and full of malignant omen. His nose was hooked, like the beak of a vulture; his eyes large, grey, and prominent, and lighted up with a more than mortal cruelty and coldness. These features were surmounted by a crimson velvet cap, the hair that peeped from under which was white with age, while the eyebrows retained their original blackness. Well I remember every line, hue, and shadow of that stony countenance, and well I may! The gaze of this hellish visage was fixed upon me, and mine returned it with the inexplicable fascination of nightmare, for what appeared to me to be hours of agony. At last ——

The cock he crew, away then flew

the fiend who had enslaved me through the awful watches of the night; and, harassed and nervous, I rose to the duties of the day.

I had — I can’t say exactly why, but it may have been from the exquisite anguish and profound impressions of unearthly horror, with which this strange phantasmagoria was associated — an insurmountable antipathy to describing the exact nature of my nightly troubles to my friend and comrade. Generally, however, I told him that I was haunted by abominable dreams; and, true to the imputed materialism of medicine, we put our heads together to dispel my horrors, not by exorcism, but by a tonic.

I will do this tonic justice, and frankly admit that the accursed portrait began to intermit its visits under its influence. What of that? Was this singular apparition — as full of character as of terror — therefore the creature of my fancy, or the invention of my poor stomach? Was it, in short, *subjective* (to borrow the technical slang of the day) and not the palpable aggression and intrusion of an external agent? That, good friend, as we will both admit, by no means follows. The evil spirit, who enthralled my senses in the shape of that portrait, may have been just as near me, just as energetic, just as malignant, though I saw him not. What means the whole moral code of revealed religion regarding the due keeping of our own bodies, soberness, temperance, etc.? here is an obvious connexion between the material and the invisible; the healthy tone of the system, and its unimpaired energy, may, for aught we can tell, guard us against influences which would otherwise render life itself terrific. The mesmerist and the electro-biologist will fail upon an average with nine patients out of ten — so may the evil spirit. Special conditions of the corporeal system are indispensable to the production of certain spiritual phenomena. The operation succeeds sometimes — sometimes fails — that is all.

I found afterwards that my would-be sceptical companion had his troubles too. But of these I knew nothing yet. One night, for a wonder, I was sleeping soundly, when I was roused by a step on the lobby outside my room, followed by the loud clang of what turned out to be a large brass candlestick, flung with all his force by poor Tom Ludlow over the banisters, and rattling with a rebound down the second flight of stairs; and almost concurrently with this, Tom burst open my door, and bounced into my room backwards, in a state of extraordinary agitation.

I had jumped out of bed and clutched him by the arm before I had any distinct idea of my own whereabouts. There we were — in our shirts — standing before the open door — staring through the great old banister opposite, at the lobby window, through which the sickly light of a clouded moon was gleaming.

“What’s the matter, Tom? What’s the matter with you? What the devil’s the matter with you, Tom?” I demanded shaking him with nervous impatience.

He took a long breath before he answered me, and then it was not very coherently.

“It’s nothing, nothing at all — did I speak? — what did I say? — where’s the candle, Richard? It’s dark; I — I had a candle!”

“Yes, dark enough,” I said; “but what’s the matter? — what *is* it? — why don’t you speak, Tom? — have you lost your wits? — what is the matter?”

“The matter? — oh, it is all over. It must have been a dream — nothing at all but a dream — don’t you think so? It could not be anything more than a dream.”

“Of *course*” said I, feeling uncommonly nervous, “it *was* a dream.”

“I thought,” he said, “there was a man in my room, and — and I jumped out of bed; and — and — where’s the candle?”

“In your room, most likely,” I said, “shall I go and bring it?”

“No; stay here — don’t go; it’s no matter — don’t, I tell you; it was all a dream. Bolt the door, Dick; I’ll stay here with you — I feel nervous. So, Dick, like a good fellow, light your candle and open the window — I am in a *shocking state*.”

I did as he asked me, and robing himself like Granuaile in one of my blankets, he seated himself close beside my bed.

Every body knows how contagious is fear of all sorts, but more especially that particular kind of fear under which poor Tom was at that moment labouring. I would not have heard, nor I believe would he have recapitulated, just at that moment, for half the world, the details of the hideous vision which had so unmanned him.

“Don’t mind telling me anything about your nonsensical dream, Tom,” said I, affecting contempt, really in a panic; “let us talk about something else; but it is quite plain that this dirty old house disagrees with us both, and hang me if I stay here any longer, to be pestered with indigestion and — and — bad nights, so we may as well look out for lodgings — don’t you think so? — at once.”

Tom agreed, and, after an interval, said ——

“I have been thinking, Richard, that it is a long time since I saw my father, and I have made up my mind to go down tomorrow and return in a day or two, and you can take rooms for us in the meantime.”

I fancied that this resolution, obviously the result of the vision which had so profoundly scared him, would probably vanish next morning with the damps and shadows of night. But I was mistaken. Off went Tom at peep of day to the country, having agreed that so soon as I had secured suitable lodgings, I was to recall him by letter from his visit to my Uncle Ludlow.

Now, anxious as I was to change my quarters, it so happened, owing to a series of petty procrastinations and accidents, that nearly a week elapsed before my bargain was made and my letter of recall on the wing to Tom; and, in the meantime, a trifling adventure or two had occurred to your humble servant, which, absurd as they now appear, diminished by distance, did certainly at the time serve to whet my appetite for change considerably.

A night or two after the departure of my comrade, I was sitting by my bedroom fire, the door locked, and the ingredients of a tumbler of hot whisky-punch upon the crazy spider-table; for, as the best mode of keeping the

Black spirits and white,
Blue spirits and grey,

with which I was environed, at bay, I had adopted the practice recommended by the wisdom of my ancestors, and "kept my spirits up by pouring spirits down." I had thrown aside my volume of Anatomy, and was treating myself by way of a tonic, preparatory to my punch and bed, to half-a-dozen pages of the *Spectator*, when I heard a step on the flight of stairs descending from the attics. It was two o'clock, and the streets were as silent as a churchyard — the sounds were, therefore, perfectly distinct. There was a slow, heavy tread, characterised by the emphasis and deliberation of age, descending by the narrow staircase from above; and, what made the sound more singular, it was plain that the feet which produced it were perfectly bare, measuring the descent with something between a pound and a flop, very ugly to hear.

I knew quite well that my attendant had gone away many hours before, and that nobody but myself had any business in the house. It was quite plain also that the person who was coming down stairs had no intention whatever of concealing his movements; but, on the contrary, appeared disposed to make even more noise, and proceed more deliberately, than was at all necessary. When the step reached the foot of the stairs outside my room, it seemed to stop; and I expected every moment to see my door open spontaneously, and give admission to the original of my detested portrait. I was, however, relieved in a few seconds by hearing the descent renewed, just in the same manner, upon the staircase leading down to the drawingrooms, and thence, after another pause, down the next flight, and so on to the hall, whence I heard no more.

Now, by the time the sound had ceased, I was wound up, as they say, to a very unpleasant pitch of excitement. I listened, but there was not a stir. I screwed up my courage to a decisive experiment — opened my door, and in a stentorian voice bawled over the banisters, "Who's there?" There was no answer but the ringing of my own voice through the empty old house, — no renewal of the movement; nothing, in short, to give my unpleasant sensations a definite direction. There is, I think, something most disagreeably disenchanting in the sound of one's own voice under such circumstances, exerted in solitude, and in vain. It redoubled my sense of isolation, and my misgivings increased on perceiving that the door, which I certainly thought I had left open, was closed behind me; in a vague alarm, lest my retreat should be cut off, I got again into my room as quickly as I could, where I remained in a state of imaginary blockade, and very uncomfortable indeed, till morning.

Next night brought no return of my barefooted fellow-lodger; but the night following, being in my bed, and in the dark — somewhere, I suppose, about the same hour as before, I distinctly heard the old fellow again descending from the garrets.

This time I had had my punch, and the *morale* of the garrison was consequently excellent. I jumped out of bed, clutched the poker as I passed the expiring fire, and in a moment was upon the lobby. The sound had ceased by this time — the dark and chill were discouraging; and, guess my horror, when I saw, or thought I saw, a black monster, whether in the shape of a man or a bear I could not say, standing, with its back to the wall, on the lobby, facing me, with a pair of great greenish eyes shining dimly out. Now, I must be frank, and confess that the cupboard which displayed our plates and cups stood just there, though at the moment I did not recollect it. At the same time I must honestly say, that making every allowance for an excited imagination, I never could satisfy myself that I was made the dupe of my own fancy in this matter; for this apparition, after one or two shiftings of shape, as if in the act of incipient transformation, began, as it seemed on second thoughts, to advance upon me in its original form. From an instinct of terror rather than of courage, I hurled the poker, with all my force, at its head; and to the music of a horrid crash made my way into my room, and double-locked the door. Then, in a minute more, I heard the horrid bare feet walk down the stairs, till the sound ceased in the hall, as on the former occasion.

If the apparition of the night before was an ocular delusion of my fancy sporting with the dark outlines of our cupboard, and if its horrid eyes were nothing but a pair of inverted teacups, I had, at all events, the satisfaction of having launched the poker with admirable effect, and in true "fancy" phrase, "knocked its two daylights into one," as the commingled fragments of my tea-service testified. I did my best to gather comfort and courage from these evidences; but it would not do. And then what could I say of those horrid bare feet, and the regular tramp, tramp, tramp, which measured the distance of the entire staircase through the solitude of my haunted dwelling, and at an hour when no good influence was stirring? Confound it! — the whole affair was abominable. I was out of spirits, and dreaded the approach of night.

It came, ushered ominously in with a thunderstorm and dull torrents of depressing rain. Earlier than usual the streets grew silent; and by twelve o'clock nothing but the comfortless pattering of the rain was to be heard.

I made myself as snug as I could. I lighted *two* candles instead of one. I forswore bed, and held myself in readiness for a sally, candle in hand; for, *coûte qui coûte*, I was resolved to *see* the being, if visible at all, who troubled the nightly stillness of my mansion. I was fidgetty and nervous and tried in vain to interest myself with my books. I walked up and down my room, whistling in turn martial and hilarious music, and listening ever and anon for the dreaded noise. I sate down and stared at the square label on the solemn and reserved-looking black bottle, until "FLANAGAN & CO'S BEST OLD MALT WHISKY" grew into a sort of subdued accompaniment to all the fantastic and horrible speculations which chased one another through my brain.

Silence, meanwhile, grew more silent, and darkness darker. I listened in vain for the rumble of a vehicle, or the dull clamour of a distant row. There was nothing but the sound of a rising wind, which had succeeded the thunderstorm that had travelled over the Dublin mountains quite out of hearing. In the middle of this great city I began to feel myself alone with nature, and Heaven knows what beside. My courage was ebbing. Punch, however, which makes beasts of so many, made a man of me again — just in time to hear with tolerable nerve and firmness the lumpy, flabby, naked feet deliberately descending the stairs again.

I took a candle, not without a tremour. As I crossed the floor I tried to extemporise a prayer, but stopped short to listen, and never finished it. The steps continued. I confess I hesitated for some seconds at the door before I took heart of grace and opened it. When I peeped out the lobby was perfectly empty — there was no monster standing on the staircase; and as the detested sound ceased, I was reassured enough to venture forward nearly to the banisters. Horror of horrors! within a stair or two beneath the spot where I stood the unearthly tread smote the floor. My eye caught something in motion; it was about the size of Goliah's foot — it was grey, heavy, and flapped with a dead weight from one step to another. As I am alive, it was the most monstrous grey rat I ever beheld or imagined.

Shakespeare says— "Some men there are cannot abide a gaping pig, and some that are mad if they behold a cat." I went wellnigh out of my wits when I beheld this *rat*; for, laugh at me as you may, it fixed upon me, I thought, a perfectly human expression of malice; and, as it shuffled about and looked up into my face almost from between my feet, I saw, I could swear it — I felt it then, and know it now, the infernal gaze and the accursed countenance of my old friend in the portrait, transfused into the visage of the bloated vermin before me.

I bounced into my room again with a feeling of loathing and horror I cannot describe, and locked and bolted my door as if a lion had been at the other side. D — n him or *it*; curse the portrait and its original! I felt in my soul that the rat — yes, the *rat*, the RAT I had just seen, was that evil being in masquerade, and rambling through the house upon some infernal night lark.

Next morning I was early trudging through the miry streets; and, among other transactions, posted a peremptory note recalling Tom. On my return, however, I found a note from my absent "chum," announcing his intended return next day. I was doubly rejoiced at this, because I had succeeded in getting rooms; and because the change of scene and return of my comrade were rendered specially pleasant by the last night's half ridiculous half horrible adventure.

I slept extemporaneously in my new quarters in Digges' Street that night, and next morning returned for breakfast to the haunted mansion, where I was certain Tom would call immediately on his arrival.

I was quite right — he came; and almost his first question referred to the primary object of our change of residence.

"Thank God," he said with genuine fervour, on hearing that all was arranged. "On *your* account I am delighted. As to myself, I assure you that no earthly consideration could have induced me ever again to pass a night in this disastrous old house."

"Confound the house!" I ejaculated, with a genuine mixture of fear and detestation, "we have not had a pleasant hour since we came to live here"; and so I went on, and related incidentally my adventure with the plethoric old rat.

"Well, if that were *all*," said my cousin, affecting to make light of the matter, "I don't think I should have minded it very much."

"Ay, but its eye — its countenance, my dear Tom," urged I; "if you had seen *that*, you would have felt it might be *anything* but what it seemed."

"I inclined to think the best conjurer in such a case would be an able-bodied cat," he said, with a provoking chuckle.

"But let us hear your own adventure," I said tartly.

At this challenge he looked uneasily round him. I had poked up a very unpleasant recollection.

"You shall hear it, Dick; I'll tell it to you," he said. "Begad, sir, I should feel quite queer, though, telling it *here*, though we are too strong a body for ghosts to meddle with just now."

Though he spoke this like a joke, I think it was serious calculation. Our Hebe was in a corner of the room, packing our cracked delft tea and dinner-services in a basket. She soon suspended operations, and with mouth and eyes wide open became an absorbed listener. Tom's experiences were told nearly in these words: ——

"I saw it three times, Dick — three distinct times; and I am perfectly certain it meant me some infernal harm. I was, I say, in danger — in *extreme* danger; for, if nothing else had happened, my reason would most certainly have failed me, unless I had escaped so soon. Thank God. I *did* escape.

"The first night of this hateful disturbance, I was lying in the attitude of sleep, in that lumbering old bed. I hate to think of it. I was really wide awake, though I had put out my candle, and was lying as quietly as if I had been asleep; and although accidentally restless, my thoughts were running in a cheerful and agreeable channel.

"I think it must have been two o'clock at least when I thought I heard a sound in that — that odious dark recess at the far end of the bedroom. It was as if someone was drawing a piece of cord slowly along the floor, lifting it up, and dropping it softly down again in coils. I sate up once or twice in my bed, but could see nothing, so I concluded it must be mice in the wainscot. I felt no emotion graver than curiosity, and after a few minutes ceased to observe it.

"While lying in this state, strange to say; without at first a suspicion of anything supernatural, on a sudden I saw an old man, rather stout and square, in a sort of roan-red dressing-gown, and with a black cap on his head, moving stiffly and slowly in a diagonal direction, from the recess, across the floor of the bedroom, passing my bed at the foot, and entering the lumber-closet at the left. He had something under his arm; his head hung a little at one side; and, merciful God! when I saw his face."

Tom stopped for a while, and then said ——

"That awful countenance, which living or dying I never can forget, disclosed what he was. Without turning to the right or left, he passed beside me, and entered the closet by the bed's head.

"While this fearful and indescribable type of death and guilt was passing, I felt that I had no more power to speak or stir than if I had been myself a corpse. For hours after it had disappeared, I was too terrified and weak to move. As soon as daylight came, I took courage, and examined the room, and especially the course which the frightful intruder had seemed to take, but there was not a vestige to indicate anybody's having passed there; no sign of any disturbing agency visible among the lumber that strewed the floor of the closet.

"I now began to recover a little. I was fagged and exhausted, and at last, overpowered by a feverish sleep. I came down late; and finding you out of spirits, on account of your dreams about the portrait, whose *original* I am now certain disclosed himself to me, I did not care to talk about the infernal vision. In fact, I was trying to persuade myself that the whole thing was an illusion, and I did not like to revive in their intensity the hated impressions of the past night — or to risk the constancy of my scepticism, by recounting the tale of my sufferings.

"It required some nerve, I can tell you, to go to my haunted chamber next night, and lie down quietly in the same bed," continued Tom. "I did so with a degree of trepidation, which, I am not ashamed to say, a very little matter would have sufficed to stimulate to downright panic. This night, however, passed off quietly enough, as also the next; and so too did two or three more. I grew more confident, and began to fancy that I believed in the theories of spectral illusions, with which I had at first vainly tried to impose upon my convictions.

"The apparition had been, indeed, altogether anomalous. It had crossed the room without any recognition of my presence: I had not disturbed *it*, and *it* had no mission to *me*. What, then, was the imaginable use of its crossing the room in a visible shape at all? Of course it might have *been* in the closet instead of *going* there, as easily as it introduced itself into the recess without entering the chamber in a shape discernible by the senses. Besides, how the deuce *had* I seen it? It was a dark night; I had no candle; there was no fire; and yet I saw it as distinctly, in colouring and outline, as ever I beheld human form! A cataleptic dream would explain it all; and I was determined that a dream it should be.

"One of the most remarkable phenomena connected with the practice of mendacity is the vast number of deliberate lies we tell ourselves, whom, of all persons, we can least expect to deceive. In all this, I need hardly tell you, Dick, I was simply lying to myself, and did not believe one word of the wretched humbug. Yet I went on, as men will do, like persevering charlatans and impostors, who tire people into credulity by the mere force of reiteration; so I hoped to win myself over at last to a comfortable scepticism about the ghost.

"He had not appeared a second time — that certainly was a comfort; and what, after all, did I care for him, and his queer old toggery and strange looks? Not a fig! I was nothing the worse for having seen him, and a good story the better. So I tumbled into bed, put out my candle, and, cheered by a loud drunken quarrel in the back lane, went fast asleep.

"From this deep slumber I awoke with a start. I knew I had had a horrible dream; but what it was I could not remember. My heart was thumping furiously; I felt bewildered and feverish; I sate up in the bed and looked about the room. A broad flood of moonlight came in through the curtainless window; everything was as I had last seen it; and though the domestic squabble in the back lane was, unhappily for me, allayed, I yet could hear a pleasant fellow singing, on his way home, the then popular comic ditty called, 'Murphy Delany.' Taking advantage of this diversion I lay down again, with my face towards the fireplace, and closing my eyes, did my best to think of nothing else but the song, which was every moment growing fainter in the distance: ——

"'Twas Murphy Delany, so funny and frisky,
Stept into a shebeen shop to get his skin full;
He reeled out again pretty well lined with whiskey,
As fresh as a shamrock, as blind as a bull.

"The singer, whose condition I dare say resembled that of his hero, was soon too far off to regale my ears any more; and as his music died away, I myself sank into a doze, neither sound nor refreshing. Somehow the song had got into my head, and I went meandering on through the adventures of my respectable fellow-countryman, who, on emerging from the 'shebeen shop,' fell into a river, from which he was fished up to be 'sat upon' by a coroner's jury, who having learned from a 'horse-doctor' that he was 'dead as a door-nail, so there was an end,' returned their verdict accordingly, just as he returned to his senses, when an angry altercation and a pitched battle between the body and the coroner winds up the lay with due spirit and pleasantry.

"Through this ballad I continued with a weary monotony to plod, down to the very last line, and then *da capo*, and so on, in my uncomfortable half-sleep, for how long, I can't conjecture. I found myself at last, however, muttering, '*dead* as a door-nail, so there was an end'; and something like another voice within me, seemed to say, very faintly, but sharply, 'dead! dead! *dead*! and may the Lord have mercy on your soul!' and instantaneously I was wide awake, and staring right before me from the pillow.

"Now — will you believe it, Dick? — I saw the same accursed figure standing full front, and gazing at me with its stony and fiendish countenance, not two yards from the bedside."

Tom stopped here, and wiped the perspiration from his face. I felt very queer. The girl was as pale as Tom; and, assembled as we were in the very scene of these adventures, we were all, I dare say, equally grateful for the clear daylight and the resuming bustle out of doors.

"For about three seconds only I saw it plainly; then it grew indistinct; but, for a long time, there was something like a column of dark vapour where it had been standing, between me and the wall; and I felt sure that he was still there. After a good while, this appearance went too. I took my clothes downstairs to the hall, and dressed there, with the door half open; then went out into the street, and walked about the town till morning, when I came back, in a miserable state of nervousness and exhaustion. I was such a fool, Dick, as to be ashamed to tell you how I came to be so upset. I thought you would laugh at me; especially as I had always talked philosophy, and treated *your* ghosts with contempt. I concluded you would give me no quarter; and so kept my tale of horror to myself.

"Now, Dick, you will hardly believe me, when I assure you, that for many nights after this last experience, I did not go to my room at all. I used to sit up for a while in the drawingroom after you had gone up to your bed; and then steal down softly to the hall-door, let myself out, and sit in the 'Robin Hood' tavern until the last guest went off; and then I got through the night like a sentry, pacing the streets till morning.

"For more than a week I never slept in bed. I sometimes had a snooze on a form in the 'Robin Hood,' and sometimes a nap in a chair during the day; but regular sleep I had absolutely none.

"I was quite resolved that we should get into another house; but I could not bring myself to tell you the reason, and I somehow put it off from day to day, although my life was, during every hour of this procrastination, rendered as miserable as that of a felon with the constables on his track. I was growing absolutely ill from this wretched mode of life.

"One afternoon I determined to enjoy an hour's sleep upon your bed. I hated mine; so that I had never, except in a stealthy visit every day to unmake it, lest Martha should discover the secret of my nightly absence, entered the ill-omened chamber.

"As ill-luck would have it, you had locked your bedroom, and taken away the key. I went into my own to unsettle the bedclothes, as usual, and give the bed the appearance of having been slept in. Now, a variety of circumstances concurred to bring about the dreadful scene through which I was that night to pass. In the first place, I was literally overpowered with fatigue, and longing for sleep; in the next place, the effect of this extreme exhaustion upon my nerves resembled that of a narcotic, and rendered me less susceptible than, perhaps, I should in any other condition have been, of the exciting fears which had become habitual to me. Then again, a little bit of the window was open, a pleasant freshness pervaded the room, and, to crown all, the cheerful sun of day was making the room quite pleasant. What was to prevent my enjoying an hour's nap *here*? The whole air was resonant with the cheerful hum of life, and the broad matter-of-fact light of day filled every corner of the room.

"I yielded — stifling my qualms — to the almost overpowering temptation; and merely throwing off my coat, and loosening my cravat, I lay down, limiting myself to *half*-an-hour's doze in the unwonted enjoyment of a feather bed, a coverlet, and a bolster.

"It was horribly insidious; and the demon, no doubt, marked my infatuated preparations. Dolt that I was, I fancied, with mind and body worn out for want of sleep, and an arrear of a full week's rest to my credit, that such measure as *half*-an-hour's sleep, in such a situation, was possible. My sleep was deathlike, long, and dreamless.

"Without a start or fearful sensation of any kind, I waked gently, but completely. It was, as you have good reason to remember, long past midnight — I believe, about two o'clock. When sleep has been deep and long enough to satisfy nature thoroughly, one often wakens in this way, suddenly, tranquilly, and completely.

"There was a figure seated in that lumbering, old sofa-chair, near the fireplace. Its back was rather towards me, but I could not be mistaken; it turned slowly round, and, merciful heavens! there was the stony face, with its infernal lineaments of malignity and despair, gloating on me. There was now no doubt as to its consciousness of my presence, and the hellish malice with which it was animated, for it arose, and drew close to the bedside. There was a rope about its neck, and the other end, coiled up, it held stiffly in its hand.

"My good angel nerved me for this horrible crisis. I remained for some seconds transfixed by the gaze of this tremendous phantom. He came close to the bed, and appeared on the point of mounting upon it. The next instant I was upon the floor at the far side, and in a moment more was, I don't know how, upon the lobby.

"But the spell was not yet broken; the valley of the shadow of death was not yet traversed. The abhorred phantom was before me there; it was standing near the banisters, stooping a little, and with one end of the rope round its own neck, was poising a noose at the other, as if to throw over mine; and while engaged in this baleful pantomime, it wore a smile so sensual, so unspeakably dreadful, that my senses were nearly overpowered. I saw and remember nothing more, until I found myself in your room.

"I had a wonderful escape, Dick — there is no disputing *that* — an escape for which, while I live, I shall bless the mercy of heaven. No one can conceive or imagine what it is for flesh and blood to stand in the presence of such a thing, but one who has had the terrific experience. Dick, Dick, a shadow has passed over me — a chill has crossed my blood and marrow, and I will never be the same again — never, Dick — never!"

Our handmaid, a mature girl of two-and-fifty, as I have said, stayed her hand, as Tom's story proceeded, and by little and little drew near to us, with open mouth, and her brows contracted over her little, beady black eyes, till stealing a glance over her shoulder now and then, she established herself close behind us. During the relation, she had made various earnest comments, in an undertone; but these and her ejaculations, for the sake of brevity and simplicity, I have omitted in my narration.

"It's often I heard tell of it," she now said, "but I never believed it rightly till now — though, indeed, why should not I? Does not my mother, down there in the lane, know quare stories, God bless us, beyant telling about it? But you ought not to have slept in the back bedroom. She was loath to let me be going in and out of that room even in the day time, let alone for any Christian to spend the night in it; for sure she says it was his own bedroom."

"*Whose* own bedroom?" we asked, in a breath.

"Why, *his* — the ould Judge's — Judge Horrock's, to be sure, God rest his sowl"; and she looked fearfully round.

"Amen!" I muttered. "But did he die there?"

"Die there! No, not quite *there*," she said. "Shure, was not it over the banisters he hung himself, the ould sinner, God be merciful to us all? and was not it in the alcove they found the handles of the skipping-rope cut off, and the knife where he was settling the cord, God bless us, to hang himself with? It was his housekeeper's daughter owned the rope, my mother often told me, and the child never throve after, and used to be starting up out of her sleep, and screeching in the night time, wid dhrames and frights that cum an her; and they said how it was the speerit of the ould Judge that was tormentin' her; and she used to be roaring and yelling out to hould back the big ould fellow with the crooked neck; and then she'd screech 'Oh, the master! the master! he's stampin' at me, and beckoning to me! Mother, darling, don't let me go!' And so the poor crathure died at last, and the docthers said it was wather on the brain, for it was all they could say."

"How long ago was all this?" I asked.

"Oh, then, how would I know?" she answered. "But it must be a wondherful long time ago, for the housekeeper was an ould woman, with a pipe in her mouth, and not a tooth left, and better nor eighty years ould when my mother was first married; and they said she was a rale buxom, fine-dressed woman when the ould Judge come to his end; an', indeed, my mother's not far from eighty years ould herself this day; and what made it worse for the unnatural ould villain, God rest his soul, to frighten the little girl out of the world the way he did, was what was mostly thought and believed by every one. My mother says how the poor little crathure was his own child; for he was by all accounts an ould villain every way, an' the hangin'est judge that ever was known in Ireland's ground."

"From what you said about the danger of sleeping in that bedroom," said I, "I suppose there were stories about the ghost having appeared there to others."

"Well, there was things said — quare things, surely," she answered, as it seemed, with some reluctance. "And why would not there? Sure was it not up in that same room he slept for more than twenty years? and was it not in the *alcove* he got the rope ready that done his own business at last, the way he done many a betther man's in his lifetime? — and was not the body lying in the same bed after death, and put in the coffin there, too, and carried out to his grave from it in Pether's churchyard, after the coroner was done? But there was quare stories — my mother has them all — about how one Nicholas Spaight got into trouble on the head of it."

"And what did they say of this Nicholas Spaight?" I asked.

"Oh, for that matther, it's soon told," she answered.

And she certainly did relate a very strange story, which so piqued my curiosity, that I took occasion to visit the ancient lady, her mother, from whom I learned many very curious particulars. Indeed, I am tempted to tell the tale, but my fingers are weary, and I must defer it. But if you wish to hear it another time, I shall do my best.

When we had heard the strange tale I have *not* told you, we put one or two further questions to her about the alleged spectral visitations, to which the house had, ever since the death of the wicked old Judge, been subjected.

"No one ever had luck in it," she told us. "There was always cross accidents, sudden deaths, and short times in it. The first that tuck, it was a family — I forget their name — but at any rate there was two young ladies and their papa. He was about sixty, and a stout healthy gentleman as you'd wish to see at that age. Well, he slept in that unlucky back bedroom; and, God between us an' harm! sure enough he was found dead one morning, half out of the bed, with his head as black as a sloe, and swelled like a puddin', hanging down near the floor. It was a fit, they said. He was as dead as a mackerel, and so *he* could not say what it was; but the ould people was all sure that it was nothing at all but the ould Judge, God bless us! that frightened him out of his senses and his life together.

"Some time after there was a rich old maiden lady took the house. I don't know which room *she* slept in, but she lived alone; and at any rate, one morning, the servants going down early to their work, found her sitting on the passage-stairs, shivering and talkin' to herself, quite mad; and never a word more could any of *them* or her friends get from her ever afterwards but, 'Don't ask me to go, for I promised to wait for him.' They never made out from her who it was she meant by *him*, but of course those that knew all about the ould house were at no loss for the meaning of all that happened to her.

"Then afterwards, when the house was let out in lodgings, there was Micky Byrne that took the same room, with his wife and three little children; and sure I heard Mrs. Byrne myself telling how the children used to be lifted up in the bed at night, she could not see by what mains; and how they were starting and screeching every hour, just all as one as the housekeeper's little girl that died, till at last one night poor Micky had a dhrop in him, the way he used now and again; and what do you think in the middle of the night he thought he heard a noise on the stairs, and being in liquor, nothing less id do him but out he must go himself to see what was wrong. Well, after that, all she ever heard of him was himself sayin', 'Oh, God!' and a tumble that shook the very house; and there, sure enough, he was lying on the lower stairs, under the lobby, with his neck smashed double undher him, where he was flung over the banisters."

Then the handmaiden added ——

"I'll go down to the lane, and send up Joe Gavvey to pack up the rest of the taythings, and bring all the things across to your new lodgings."

And so we all sallied out together, each of us breathing more freely, I have no doubt, as we crossed that ill-omened threshold for the last time.

Now, I may add thus much, in compliance with the immemorial usage of the realm of fiction, which sees the hero not only through his adventures, but fairly out of the world. You must have perceived that what the flesh, blood, and bone hero of romance proper is to the regular compounder of fiction, this old house of brick, wood, and mortar is to the humble recorder of this true tale. I, therefore, relate, as in duty bound, the catastrophe which ultimately befell it, which was simply this — that about two years subsequently to my story it was taken by a quack doctor, who called himself Baron Duhlstoerf, and filled the parlour windows with bottles of indescribable horrors preserved in brandy, and the newspapers with the usual grandiloquent and mendacious advertisements. This gentleman among his virtues did not reckon sobriety, and one night, being overcome with much wine, he set fire to his bed curtains, partially burned himself, and totally consumed the house. It was afterwards rebuilt, and for a time an undertaker established himself in the premises.

I have now told you my own and Tom's adventures, together with some valuable collateral particulars; and having acquitted myself of my engagement, I wish you a very good night, and pleasant dreams.

AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE OF A HAUNTED HOUSE

[The Editor of the UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE submits the following very remarkable statement, with every detail of which he has been for some years acquainted, upon the ground that it affords the most authentic and ample relation of a series of marvellous phenoma, in nowise connected with what is technically termed "spiritualism," which he has anywhere met with. All the persons — and there are many of them living — upon whose separate evidence some parts, and upon whose united testimony others, of this most singular recital depend, are, in their several walks of life, respectable, and such as would in any matter of judicial investigation be deemed wholly unexceptionable witnesses. There is not an incident here recorded which would not have been distinctly deposed to on oath had any necessity existed, by the persons who severally, and some of them in great fear, related their own distinct experiences. The Editor begs most pointedly to meet in limine the suspicion, that he is elaborating a trick, or vouching for another ghost of Mrs. Veal. As a mere story the narrative is valueless: its sole claim to attention is its absolute truth. For the good faith of its relator he pledges his own and the character of this Magazine. With the Editor's concurrence, the name of the watering-place, and some special circumstances in no essential way bearing upon the peculiar character of the story, but which might have indicated the locality, and possibly annoyed persons interested in house property there, have been suppressed by the narrator. Not the slightest liberty has been taken with the narrative, which is presented precisely in the terms in which the writer of it, who employs throughout the first person, would, if need were, fix it in the form of an affidavit.]

Within the last eight years — the precise date I purposely omit — I I was ordered by my physician, my health being in an unsatisfactory state, to change my residence to one upon the sea-coast; and accordingly, I took a house for a year in a fashionable watering-place, at a moderate distance from the city in which I had previously resided, and connected with it by a railway.

Winter was setting in when my removal thither was decided upon; but there was nothing whatever dismal or depressing in the change. The house I had taken was to all appearance, and in point of convenience, too, quite a modern one. It formed one in a cheerful row, with small gardens in front, facing the sea, and commanding sea air and sea views in perfection. In the rear it had coachhouse and stable, and between them and the house a considerable grass-plot, with some flowerbeds, interposed.

Our family consisted of my wife and myself, with three children, the eldest about nine years old, she and the next in age being girls; and the youngest, between six and seven, a boy. To these were added six servants, whom, although for certain reasons I decline giving their real names, I shall indicate, for the sake of clearness, by arbitrary ones. There was a nurse, Mrs. Southerland; a nursery-maid, Ellen Page; the cook, Mrs. Greenwood; and the housemaid, Ellen Faith; a butler, whom I shall call Smith, and his son, James, about two-and-twenty.

We came out to take possession at about seven o'clock in the evening; every thing was comfortable and cheery; good fires lighted, the rooms neat and airy, and a general air of preparation and comfort, highly conducive to good spirits and pleasant anticipations.

The sitting-rooms were large and cheerful, and they and the bedrooms more than ordinarily lofty, the kitchen and servants' rooms, on the same level, were well and comfortably furnished, and had, like the rest of the house, an air of recent painting and fitting up, and a completely modern character, which imparted a very cheerful air of cleanliness and convenience.

There had been just enough of the fuss of settling agreeably to occupy us, and to give a pleasant turn to our thoughts after we had retired to our rooms. Being an invalid, I had a small bed to myself — resigning the four-poster to my wife. The candle was extinguished, but a night-light was burning. I was coming up stairs, and she, already in bed, had just dismissed her maid, when we were both startled by a wild scream from her room; I found her in a state of the extremest agitation and terror. She insisted that she had seen an unnaturally tall figure come beside her bed and stand there. The light was too faint to enable her to define any thing respecting this apparition, beyond the fact of her having most distinctly seen such a shape, colourless from the insufficiency of the light to disclose more than its dark outline.

We both endeavoured to reassure her. The room once more looked so cheerful in the candlelight, that we were quite uninfluenced by the contagion of her terrors. The movements and voices of the servants down stairs still getting things into their places and completing our comfortable arrangements, had also their effect in steeling us against any such influence, and we set the whole thing down as a dream, or an imperfectly-seen outline of the bed-curtains. When, however, we were alone, my wife reiterated, still in great agitation, her clear assertion that she had most positively seen, being at the time as completely awake as ever she was, precisely what she had described to us. And in this conviction she continued perfectly firm.

A day or two after this, it came out that our servants were under an apprehension that, somehow or other, thieves had established a secret mode of access to the lower part of the house. The butler, Smith, had seen an ill-looking woman in his room on the first night of our arrival; and he and other servants constantly saw, for many days subsequently, glimpses of a retreating figure, which corresponded with that so seen by him, passing through a passage which led to a back area in which were some coal-vaults.

This figure was seen always in the act of retreating, its back turned, generally getting round the corner of the passage into the area, in a stealthy and hurried way, and, when closely followed, imperfectly seen again entering one of the coal-vaults, and when pursued into it, nowhere to be found.

The idea of any thing supernatural in the matter had, strange to say, not yet entered the mind of any one of the servants. They had heard some stories of smugglers having secret passages into houses, and using their means of access for purposes of pillage, or with a view to frighten superstitious people out of houses which they needed for their own objects, and a suspicion of similar practices here, caused them extreme uneasiness. The apparent anxiety also manifested by this retreating figure to escape observation, and her always appearing to make her egress at the same point, favoured this romantic hypothesis. The men, however, made a most careful examination of the back area, and of the coal-vaults, with a view to discover some mode of egress, but entirely without success. On the contrary, the result was, so far as it went, subversive of the theory; solid masonry met them on every hand.

I called the man, Smith, up, to hear from his own lips the particulars of what he had seen; and certainly his report was very curious. I give it as literally as my memory enables me: ——

His son slept in the same room, and was sound asleep; but he lay awake, as men sometimes will on a change of bed, and having many things on his mind. He was lying with his face towards the wall, but observing a light and some little stir in the room, he turned round in his bed, and saw the figure of a woman, squalid, and ragged in dress; her figure rather low and broad; as well as I recollect, she had something — either a cloak or shawl — on, and wore a bonnet. Her back was turned, and she appeared to be searching or rummaging for something on the floor, and, without appearing to observe him, she turned in doing so towards him. The light, which was more like the intense glow of a coal, as he described it, being of a deep red colour, proceeded from the hollow of her hand, which she held beside her head, and he saw her perfectly distinctly. She appeared middle-aged, was deeply pitted with the smallpox, and blind of one eye. His phrase in describing her general appearance was, that she was "a miserable, poor-looking creature."

He was under the impression that she must be the woman who had been left by the proprietor in charge of the house, and who had that evening, after having given up the keys, remained for some little time with the female servants. He coughed, therefore, to apprize her of his presence, and turned again towards the wall. When he again looked round she and the light were gone; and odd as was her method of lighting herself in her search, the circumstances excited neither uneasiness nor curiosity in his mind, until he discovered next morning that the woman in question had left the house long before he had gone to his bed.

I examined the man very closely as to the appearance of the person who had visited him, and the result was what I have described. It struck me as an odd thing, that even then, considering how prone to superstition persons in his rank of life usually are, he did not seem to suspect any thing supernatural in the occurrence; and, on the contrary, was thoroughly persuaded that his visitant was a living person, who had got into the house by some hidden entrance.

On Sunday, on his return from his place of worship, he told me that, when the service was ended, and the congregation making their way slowly out, he saw the very woman in the crowd, and kept his eye upon her for several minutes, but such was the crush, that all his efforts to reach her were unavailing, and when he got into the open street she was gone. He was quite positive as to his having distinctly seen her, however, for several minutes, and scouted the possibility of any mistake as to identity; and fully impressed with the substantial and living reality of his visitant, he was very much provoked at her having escaped him. He made inquiries also in the neighbourhood, but could procure no information, nor hear of any other persons having seen any woman corresponding with his visitant.

The cook and the housemaid occupied a bedroom on the kitchen floor. It had whitewashed walls, and they were actually terrified by the appearance of the shadow of a woman passing and repassing across the side wall opposite to their beds. They suspected that this had been going on much longer than they were aware, for its presence was discovered by a sort of accident, its movements happening to take a direction in distinct contrariety to theirs.

This shadow always moved upon one particular wall, returning after short intervals, and causing them extreme terror. They placed the candle, as the most obvious specific, so close to the infested wall, that the flame all but touched it; and believed for some time that they had effectually got rid of this annoyance; but one night, notwithstanding this arrangement of the light, the shadow returned, passing and repassing, as heretofore, upon the same wall, although their only candle was burning within an inch of it, and it was obvious that no substance capable of casting such a shadow could have interposed; and, indeed, as they described it, the shadow seemed to have no sort of relation to the position of the light, and appeared, as I have said, in manifest defiance of the laws of optics.

I ought to mention that the housemaid was a particularly fearless sort of person, as well as a very honest one; and her companion, the cook, a scrupulously religious woman, and both agreed in every particular in their relation of what occurred.

Meanwhile, the nursery was not without its annoyances, though as yet of a comparatively trivial kind. Sometimes, at night, the handle of the door was turned hurriedly as if by a person trying to come in, and at others a knocking was made at it. These sounds occurred after the children had settled to sleep, and while the nurse still remained awake. Whenever she called to know "who is there," the sounds ceased; but several times, and particularly at first, she was under the impression that they were caused by her mistress, who had come to see the children, and thus impressed she had got up and opened the door, expecting to see her, but discovering only darkness, and receiving no answer to her inquiries.

With respect to this nurse, I must mention that I believe no more perfectly trustworthy servant was ever employed in her capacity; and, in addition to her integrity, she was remarkably gifted with sound common sense.

One morning, I think about three or four weeks after our arrival, I was sitting at the parlour window which looked to the front, when I saw the little iron door which admitted into the small garden that lay between the window where I was sitting and the public road, pushed open by a woman who so exactly answered the description given by Smith of the woman who had visited his room on the night of his arrival as instantaneously to impress me with the conviction that she must be the identical person. She was a square, short woman, dressed in soiled and tattered clothes, scarred and pitted with smallpox, and blind of an eye. She stepped hurriedly into the little enclosure, and peered from a distance of a few yards into the room where I was sitting. I felt that now was the moment to clear the matter up; but there was something stealthy in the manner and look of the woman which convinced me that I must not appear to notice her until her retreat was fairly cut off. Unfortunately, I was suffering from a lame foot, and could not reach the bell as quickly as I wished. I made all the haste I could, and rang violently to bring up the servant Smith. In the short interval that intervened, I observed the woman from the window, who having in a leisurely way, and with a kind of scrutiny, looked along the front windows of the house, passed quickly out again, closing the gate after her, and followed a lady who was walking along the footpath at a quick pace, as if with the intention of begging from her. The moment the man entered I told him— "the blind woman you described to me has this instant followed a lady in that direction, try to overtake her." He was, if possible, more eager than I in the chase, but returned in a short time after a vain pursuit, very hot, and utterly disappointed. And, thereafter, we saw her face no more.

All this time, and up to the period of our leaving the house, which was not for two or three months later, there occurred at intervals the only phenomenon in the entire series having any resemblance to what we hear described of "Spiritualism." This was a knocking, like a soft hammering with a wooden mallet, as it seemed in the timbers between the bedroom ceilings and the roof. It had this special peculiarity, that it was always rythmical, and, I think, invariably, the emphasis upon the last stroke. It would sound rapidly "one, two, three, *four* — one, two, three, *four*;" or "one, two, *three* — one, two, *three*," and sometimes "one, *two* — one, *two*,"

&c., and this, with intervals and resumptions, monotonously for hours at a time.

At first this caused my wife, who was a good deal confined to her bed, much annoyance; and we sent to our neighbours to inquire if any hammering or carpentering was going on in their houses but were informed that nothing of the sort was taking place. I have myself heard it frequently, always in the same inaccessible part of the house, and with the same monotonous emphasis. One odd thing about it was, that on my wife's calling out, as she used to do when it became more than usually troublesome, "stop that noise," it was invariably arrested for a longer or shorter time.

Of course none of these occurrences were ever mentioned in hearing of the children. They would have been, no doubt, like most children, greatly terrified had they heard any thing of the matter, and known that their elders were unable to account for what was passing; and their fears would have made them wretched and troublesome.

They used to play for some hours every day in the back garden — the house forming one end of this oblong inclosure, the stable and coachhouse the other, and two parallel walls of considerable height the sides. Here, as it afforded a perfectly safe playground, they were frequently left quite to themselves; and in talking over their days' adventures, as children will, they happened to mention a woman, or rather the woman, for they had long grown familiar with her appearance, whom they used to see in the garden while they were at play. They assumed that she came in and went out at the stable door, but they never actually saw her enter or depart. They merely saw a figure — that of a very poor woman, soiled and ragged — near the stable wall, stooping over the ground, and apparently grubbing in the loose clay in search of something. She did not disturb, or appear to observe them; and they left her in undisturbed possession of her nook of ground. When seen it was always in the same spot, and similarly occupied; and the description they gave of her general appearance — for they never saw her face — corresponded with that of the one-eyed woman whom Smith, and subsequently as it seemed, I had seen.

The other man, James, who looked after a mare which I had purchased for the purpose of riding exercise, had, like every one else in the house, his little trouble to report, though it was not much. The stall in which, as the most comfortable, it was decided to place her, she peremptorily declined to enter. Though a very docile and gentle little animal, there was no getting her into it. She would snort and rear, and, in fact, do or suffer any thing rather than set her hoof in it. He was fain, therefore, to place her in another. And on several occasions he found her there, exhibiting all the equine symptoms of extreme fear. Like the rest of us, however, this man was not troubled in the particular case with any superstitious qualms. The mare had evidently been frightened; and he was puzzled to find out how, or by whom, for the stable was well-secured, and had, I am nearly certain, a lock-up yard outside.

One morning I was greeted with the intelligence that robbers had certainly got into the house in the night; and that one of them had actually been seen in the nursery. The witness, I found, was my eldest child, then, as I have said, about nine years of age. Having awoke in the night, and lain awake for some time in her bed, she heard the handle of the door turn, and a person whom she distinctly saw — for it was a light night, and the window-shutters unclosed — but whom she had never seen before, stepped in on tiptoe, and with an appearance of great caution. He was a rather small man, with a very red face; he wore an oddly cut frock coat, the collar of which stood up, and trousers, rough and wide, like those of a sailor, turned up at the ankles, and either short boots or clumsy shoes, covered with mud. This man listened beside the nurse's bed, which stood next the door, as if to satisfy himself that she was sleeping soundly; and having done so for some seconds, he began to move cautiously in a diagonal line, across the room to the chimneypiece, where he stood for a while, and so resumed his tiptoe walk, skirting the wall, until he reached a chest of drawers, some of which were open, and into which he looked, and began to rummage in a hurried way, as the child supposed, making search for something worth taking away. He then passed on to the window, where was a dressing-table, at which he also stopped, turning over the things upon it, and standing for some time at the window as if looking out, and then resuming his walk by the side wall opposite to that by which he had moved up to the window, he returned in the same way toward the nurse's bed, so as to reach it at the foot. With its side to the end wall, in which was the door, was placed the little bed in which lay my eldest child, who watched his proceedings with the extremest terror. As he drew near she instinctively moved herself in the bed, with her head and shoulders to the wall, drawing up her feet; but he passed by without appearing to observe, or, at least, to care for her presence. Immediately after the nurse turned in her bed as if about to waken; and when the child, who had drawn the clothes about her head, again ventured to peep out, the man was gone.

The child had no idea of her having seen any thing more formidable than a thief. With the prowling, cautious, and noiseless manner of proceeding common to such marauders, the air and movements of the man whom she had seen entirely corresponded. And on hearing her perfectly distinct and consistent account, I could myself arrive at no other conclusion than that a stranger had actually got into the house. I had, therefore, in the first instance, a most careful examination made to discover any traces of an entrance having been made by any window into the house. The doors had been found barred and locked as usual; but no sign of any thing of the sort was discernible. I then had the various articles — plate, wearing apparel, books, &c., counted; and after having conned over and reckoned up every thing, it became quite clear that nothing whatever had been removed from the house, nor was there the slightest indication of any thing having been so much as disturbed there. I must here state that this child was remarkably clear, intelligent, and observant; and that her description of the man, and of all that had occurred, was most exact, and as detailed as the want of perfect light rendered possible.

I felt assured that an entrance had actually been effected into the house, though for what purpose was not easily to be conjectured. The man, Smith, was equally confident upon this point; and his theory was that the object was simply to frighten us out of the house by making us believe it haunted; and he was more than ever anxious and on the alert to discover the conspirators. It often since appeared to me odd. Every year, indeed, more odd, as this cumulative case of the marvellous becomes to my mind more and more inexplicable — that underlying my sense of mystery and puzzle, was all along the quiet assumption that all these occurrences were one way or another referable to natural causes. I could not account for them, indeed, myself; but during the whole period I inhabited that house, I never once felt, though much alone, and often up very late at night, any of those tremors and thrills which every one has at times experienced when situation and the hour are favourable. Except the cook and housemaid, who were plagued with the shadow I mentioned crossing and recrossing upon the bedroom wall, we all, without exception, experienced the same strange sense of security, and regarded these phenomena rather with a perplexed sort of interest and curiosity, than with any more unpleasant sensations.

The knockings which I have mentioned at the nursery door, preceded generally by the sound of a step on the lobby, meanwhile continued. At that time (for my wife, like myself, was an invalid) two eminent physicians, who came out occasionally by rail, were attending us. These gentlemen were at first only amused, but ultimately interested, and very much puzzled by the occurrences which we described. One of them, at last, recommended that a candle should be kept burning upon the lobby. It was in fact a recurrence to an old woman's recipe against ghosts — of course it might be serviceable, too, against impostors; at all events, seeming, as I have said, very much interested and puzzled, he advised it, and it was tried. We fancied that it was successful; for there was an interval of quiet for, I think, three or four nights. But after that, the noises — the footsteps on the lobby — the knocking at the door, and the turning of the handle recommenced in full force, notwithstanding the light upon the table outside; and these particular phenomena became only more perplexing than ever.

The alarm of robbers and smugglers gradually subsided after a week or two; but we were again to hear news from the nursery. Our second little girl, then between seven and eight years of age, saw in the night time — she alone being awake — a young woman, with black, or very dark hair, which hung loose, and with a black cloak on, standing near the middle of the floor, opposite the hearthstone, and fronting the foot of her bed. She appeared quite unobservant of the children and nurse sleeping in the room. She was very pale, and looked, the child said, both "sorry and frightened," and with something very peculiar and terrible about her eyes, which made the child conclude that she was dead. She was looking, not at, but in the direction of the child's bed, and there was a dark streak across her throat, like a scar with blood upon it. This figure was not motionless; but once or twice turned slowly, and without appearing to be conscious of the presence of the child, or the other occupants of the room, like a person in vacancy or abstraction. There was on this occasion a night-light burning in the chamber; and the child saw, or thought she saw, all these particulars with the most perfect distinctness. She got her head under the bedclothes; and although a good many years have passed since then, she cannot recall the spectacle without feelings of peculiar horror.

One day, when the children were playing in the back garden, I asked them to point out to me the spot where they were accustomed to see the woman who occasionally showed herself as I have described, near the stable wall. There was no division of opinion as to this precise point, which they indicated in the most distinct and confident way. I suggested that, perhaps, something might be hidden there in the ground; and advised them digging a hole there with their little spades, to try for it. Accordingly, to work they went, and by my return in the evening they had grubbed up a piece of a jawbone, with several teeth in it. The bone was very much decayed, and ready to crumble to pieces, but the teeth were quite sound. I could not tell whether they were human grinders; but I showed the fossil to one of the physicians I have mentioned, who came out the next evening, and he pronounced them human teeth. The same conclusion was come to a day or two later by the other medical man. It appears to me now, on reviewing the whole matter, almost unaccountable that, with such evidence before me, I should not have got in a labourer, and had the spot effectually dug and searched. I can only say, that so it was. I was quite satisfied of the moral truth of every word that had been related to me, and which I have here set down with scrupulous accuracy. But I experienced an apathy, for which neither then nor afterwards did I quite know how to account. I had a vague, but immovable impression that the whole affair was referable to natural agencies. It was not until some time after we had left the house, which, by-the-by, we afterwards found had had the reputation of being haunted before we had come to live in it, that on reconsideration I discovered the serious difficulty of accounting satisfactorily for all that had occurred upon ordinary principles. A great deal we might arbitrarily set down to imagination. But even in so doing there was, *in limine*, the oddity, not to say improbability, of so many different persons having nearly simultaneously suffered from different spectral and other illusions during the short period for which we had occupied that house, who never before, nor so far as we learned, afterwards were troubled by any fears or fancies of the sort. There were other things, too, not to be so accounted for. The odd knockings in the roof I frequently heard myself.

There were also, which I before forgot to mention, in the daytime, rappings at the doors of the sitting-rooms, which constantly deceived us; and it was not till our “come in” was unanswered, and the hall or passage outside the door was discovered to be empty, that we learned that whatever else caused them, human hands did not. All the persons who reported having seen the different persons or appearances here described by me, were just as confident of having literally and distinctly seen them, as I was of having seen the hard-featured woman with the blind eye, so remarkably corresponding with Smith’s description.

About a week after the discovery of the teeth, which were found, I think, about two feet under the ground, a friend, much advanced in years, and who remembered the town in which we had now taken up our abode, for a very long time, happened to pay us a visit. He goodhumouredly pooh-poohed the whole thing; but at the same time was evidently curious about it. “We might construct a sort of story,” said I (I am giving, of course, the substance and purport, not the exact words, of our dialogue), “and assign to each of the three figures who appeared their respective parts in some dreadful tragedy enacted in this house. The male figure represents the murderer; the ill-looking, one-eyed woman his accomplice, who, we will suppose, buried the body where she is now so often seen grubbing in the earth, and where the human teeth and jawbone have so lately been disinterred; and the young woman with dishevelled tresses, and black cloak, and the bloody scar across her throat, their victim. A difficulty, however, which I cannot get over, exists in the cheerfulness, the great publicity, and the evident very recent date of the house.” “Why, as to that,” said he, “the house is *not* modern; it and those beside it formed an old government store, altered and fitted up recently as you see. I remember it well in my young days, fifty years ago, before the town had grown out in this direction, and a more entirely lonely spot, or one more fitted for the commission of a secret crime, could not have been imagined.”

I have nothing to add, for very soon after this my physician pronounced a longer stay unnecessary for my health, and we took our departure for another place of abode. I may add, that although I have resided for considerable periods in many other houses, I never experienced any annoyances of a similar kind elsewhere; neither have I made (stupid dog! you will say), any inquiries respecting either the antecedents or subsequent history of the house in which we made so disturbed a sojourn. I was content with what I knew, and have here related as clearly as I could, and I think it a very pretty puzzle as it stands.

[Thus ends the statement, which we abandon to the ingenuity of our readers, having ourselves no satisfactory explanation to suggest; and simply repeating the assurance with which we prefaced it, namely, that we can vouch for the perfect good faith and the accuracy of the narrator. —E.D.U.M.]

ULTOR DE LACY: A LEGEND OF CAPPERCULLEN

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CHAPTER I

The Jacobite's Legacy

In my youth I heard a great many Irish family traditions, more or less of a supernatural character, some of them very peculiar, and all, to a child at least, highly interesting. One of these I will now relate, though the translation to cold type from oral narrative, with all the aids of animated human voice and countenance, and the appropriate *mise-en-scène* of the oldfashioned parlour fireside and its listening circle of excited faces, and, outside, the wintry blast and the moan of leafless boughs, with the occasional rattle of the clumsy old window-frame behind shutter and curtain, as the blast swept by, is at best a trying one.

About midway up the romantic glen of Cappercullen, near the point where the counties of Limerick, Clare, and Tipperary converge, upon the then sequestered and forest-bound range of the Slieve-Felim hills, there stood, in the reigns of the two earliest Georges, the picturesque and massive remains of one of the finest of the Anglo-Irish castles of Munster — perhaps of Ireland.

It crowned the precipitous edge of the wooded glen, itself half-buried among the wild forest that covered that long and solitary range. There was no human habitation within a circle of many miles, except the half-dozen hovels and the small thatched chapel composing the little village of Murroa, which lay at the foot of the glen among the straggling skirts of the noble forest.

Its remoteness and difficulty of access saved it from demolition. It was worth nobody's while to pull down and remove the ponderous and clumsy oak, much less the masonry or flagged roofing of the pile. Whatever would pay the cost of removal had been long since carried away. The rest was abandoned to time — the destroyer.

The hereditary owners of this noble building and of a wide territory in the contiguous counties I have named, were English — the De Lacys — long naturalized in Ireland. They had acquired at least this portion of their estate in the reign of Henry VIII, and held it, with some vicissitudes, down to the establishment of the revolution in Ireland, when they suffered attainder, and, like other great families of that period, underwent a final eclipse.

The De Lacy of that day retired to France, and held a brief command in the Irish Brigade, interrupted by sickness. He retired, became a poor hangeron of the Court of St. Germains, and died early in the eighteenth century — as well as I remember, 1705 — leaving an only son, hardly twelve years old, called by the strange but significant name of Ultor.

At this point commences the marvellous ingredient of my tale.

When his father was dying, he had him to his bedside, with no one by except his confessor; and having told him, first, that on reaching the age of twenty-one, he was to lay claim to a certain small estate in the county of Clare, in Ireland, in right of his mother — the title-deeds of which he gave him — and next, having enjoined him not to marry before the age of thirty, on the ground that earlier marriages destroyed the spirit and the power of enterprise, and would incapacitate him from the accomplishment of his destiny — the restoration of his family — he then went on to open to the child a matter which so terrified him that he cried lamentably, trembling all over, clinging to the priest's gown with one hand and to his father's cold wrist with the other, and imploring him, with screams of horror, to desist from his communication.

But the priest, impressed, no doubt, himself, with its necessity, compelled him to listen. And then his father showed him a small picture, from which also the child turned with shrieks, until similarly constrained to look. They did not let him go until he had carefully conned the features, and was able to tell them, from memory, the colour of the eyes and hair, and the fashion and hues of the dress. Then his father gave him a black box containing this portrait, which was a full-length miniature, about nine inches long, painted very finely in oils, as smooth as enamel, and folded above it a sheet of paper, written over in a careful and very legible hand.

The deeds and this black box constituted the most important legacy bequeathed to his only child by the ruined Jacobite, and he deposited them in the hands of the priest, in trust, till his boy, Ultor, should have attained to an age to understand their value, and to keep them securely.

When this scene was ended, the dying exile's mind, I suppose, was relieved, for he spoke cheerily, and said he believed he would recover; and they soothed the crying child, and his father kissed him, and gave him a little silver coin to buy fruit with; and so they sent him off with another boy for a walk, and when he came back his father was dead.

He remained in France under the care of this ecclesiastic until he had attained the age of twenty-one, when he repaired to Ireland, and his title being unaffected by his father's attainder, he easily made good his claim to the small estate in the county of Clare.

There he settled, making a dismal and solitary tour now and then of the vast territories which had once been his father's, and nursing those gloomy and impatient thoughts which befitted the enterprises to which he was devoted.

Occasionally he visited Paris, that common centre of English, Irish, and Scottish disaffection; and there, when a little past thirty, he married the daughter of another ruined Irish house. His bride returned with him to the melancholy seclusion of their Munster residence, where she bore him in succession two daughters — Alice, the elder, dark-eyed and dark-haired, grave and sensible — Una, four years younger, with large blue eyes and long and beautiful golden hair.

Their poor mother was, I believe, naturally a lighthearted, sociable, high-spirited little creature; and her gay and childish nature pined in the isolation and gloom of her lot. At all events she died young, and the children were left to the sole care of their melancholy and embittered father. In process of time the girls grew up, tradition says, beautiful. The elder was designed for a convent, the younger her father hoped to mate as nobly as her high blood and splendid beauty seemed to promise, if only the great game on which he had resolved to stake all succeeded.

CHAPTER II

The Fairies in the Castle

The Rebellion of ‘45 came, and Ultor de Lacy was one of the few Irishmen implicated treasonably in that daring and romantic insurrection. Of course there were warrants out against him, but he was not to be found. The young ladies, indeed, remained as heretofore in their father’s lonely house in Clare; but whether he had crossed the water or was still in Ireland was for some time unknown, even to them. In due course he was attainted, and his little estate forfeited. It was a miserable catastrophe — a tremendous and beggarly waking up from a life-long dream of returning principality.

In due course the officers of the crown came down to take possession, and it behoved the young ladies to flit. Happily for them the ecclesiastic I have mentioned was not quite so confident as their father, of his winning back the magnificent patrimony of his ancestors; and by his advice the daughters had been secured twenty pounds a year each, under the marriage settlement of their parents, which was all that stood between this proud house and literal destitution.

Late one evening, as some little boys from the village were returning from a ramble through the dark and devious glen of Cappercullen, with their pockets laden with nuts and “frahans,” to their amazement and even terror they saw a light streaming redly from the narrow window of one of the towers overhanging the precipice among the ivy and the lofty branches, across the glen, already dim in the shadows of the deepening night.

“Look — look — look— ’tis the Phooka’s tower!” was the general cry, in the vernacular Irish, and a universal scamper commenced.

The bed of the glen, strewn with great fragments of rock, among which rose the tall stems of ancient trees, and overgrown with a tangled copse, was at the best no favourable ground for a run. Now it was dark; and, terrible work breaking through brambles and hazels and tumbling over rocks. Little Shaeen Mull Ryan, the last of the panic rout, screaming to his mates to wait for him — saw a whitish figure emerge from the thicket at the base of the stone flight of steps that descended the side of the glen, close by the castle-wall, intercepting his flight, and a discordant male voice shrieked ——

"I have you!"

At the same time the boy, with a cry of terror, tripped and tumbled; and felt himself roughly caught by the arm, and hauled to his feet with a shake.

A wild yell from the child, and a volley of terror and entreaty followed.

"Who is it, Larry; what's the matter?" cried a voice, high in air, from the turret window, The words floated down through the trees, clear and sweet as the low notes of a flute.

"Only a child, my lady; a boy."

"Is he hurt?"

"Are you hurted?" demanded the whitish man, who held him fast, and repeated the question in Irish; but the child only kept blubbering and crying for mercy, with his hands clasped, and trying to drop on his knees.

Larry's strong old hand held him up. He *was* hurt, and bleeding from over his eye.

"Just a trifle hurted, my lady!"

"Bring him up here."

Shaeen Mull Ryan gave himself over. He was among "the good people," who he knew would keep him prisoner for ever and a day. There was no good in resisting. He grew bewildered, and yielded himself passively to his fate, and emerged from the glen on the platform above; his captor's knotted old hand still on his arm, and looked round on the tall mysterious trees, and the gray front of the castle, revealed in the imperfect moonlight, as upon the scenery of a dream.

The old man who, with thin wiry legs, walked by his side, in a dingy white coat, and blue facings, and great pewter buttons, with his silver gray hair escaping from under his battered three-cocked hat; and his shrewd puckered resolute face, in which the boy could read no promise of sympathy, showing so white and phantom-like in the moonlight, was, as he thought, the incarnate ideal of a fairy.

This figure led him in silence under the great arched gateway, and across the grass-grown court, to the door in the far angle of the building; and so, in the dark, round and round, up a stone screw stair, and with a short turn into a large room, with a fire of turf and wood, burning on its long unused hearth, over which hung a pot, and about it an old woman with a great wooden spoon was busy. An iron candlestick supported their solitary candle; and about the floor of the room, as well as on the table and chairs, lay a litter of all sorts of things; piles of old faded hangings, boxes, trunks, clothes, pewter-plates, and cups; and I know not what more.

But what instantly engaged the fearful gaze of the boy were the figures of two ladies; red drugget cloaks they had on, like the peasant girls of Munster and Connaught, and the rest of their dress was pretty much in keeping. But they had the grand air, the refined expression and beauty, and above all, the serene air of command that belong to people of a higher rank.

The elder, with black hair and full brown eyes, sat writing at the deal table on which the candle stood, and raised her dark gaze to the boy as he came in. The other, with her hood thrown back, beautiful and *riant*, with a flood of wavy golden hair, and great blue eyes, and with something kind, and arch, and strange in her countenance, struck him as the most wonderful beauty he could have imagined.

They questioned the man in a language strange to the child. It was not English, for he had a smattering of that, and the man's story seemed to amuse them. The two young ladies exchanged a glance, and smiled mysteriously. He was more convinced than ever that he was among the good people. The younger stepped gaily forward and said ——

"Do you know who *I* am, my little man? Well, I'm the fairy Una, and this is my palace; and that fairy you see there (pointing to the dark lady, who was looking out something in a box), is my sister and family physician, the Lady Graveairs; and these (glancing at the old man and woman), are some of my courtiers; and I'm considering now what I shall do with *you*, whether I shall send you tonight to Lough Guir, riding on a rush, to make my compliments to the Earl of Desmond in his enchanted castle; or, straight to your bed, two thousand miles under ground, among the gnomes; or to prison in that little corner of the moon you see through the window — with the man-in-the-moon for your gaoler, for thrice three hundred years and a day! There, don't cry. You only see how serious a thing it is for you, little boys, to come so near my castle. Now, for this once, I'll let you go. But, henceforward, any boys I, or my people, may find within half a mile round my castle, shall belong to me for life, and never behold their home or their people more."

And she sang a little air and chased mystically half a dozen steps before him, holding out her cloak with her pretty fingers, and courtesying very low, to his indescribable alarm.

Then, with a little laugh, she said ——

"My little man, we must mend your head."

And so they washed his scratch, and the elder one applied a plaister to it. And she of the great blue eyes took out of her pocket a little French box of bonbons and emptied it into his hand, and she said ——

"You need not be afraid to eat these — they are very good — and I'll send my fairy, Blanc-et-bleu, to set you free. Take him (she addressed Larry), and let him go, with a solemn charge."

The elder, with a grave and affectionate smile, said, looking on the fairy ——

"Brave, dear, wild Una! nothing can ever quell your gaiety of heart."

And Una kissed her merrily on the cheek.

So the oak door of the room again opened, and Shaeen, with his conductor, descended the stair. He walked with the scared boy in grim silence near half way down the wild hillside toward Murroa, and then he stopped, and said in Irish ——

"You never saw the fairies before, my fine fellow, and 'tisn't often those who once set eyes on us return to tell it. Whoever comes nearer, night or day, than this stone," and he tapped it with the end of his cane, "will never see his home again, for we'll keep him till the day of judgment; goodnight, little gossoon — and away with you."

So these young ladies, Alice and Una, with two old servants, by their father's direction, had taken up their abode in a portion of that side of the old castle which overhung the glen; and with the furniture and hangings they had removed from their late residence, and with the aid of glass in the casements and some other indispensable repairs, and a thorough airing, they made the rooms they had selected just habitable, as a rude and temporary shelter.

CHAPTER III

The Priest's Adventures in the Glen

At first, of course, they saw or heard little of their father. In general, however, they knew that his plan was to procure some employment in France, and to remove them there. Their present strange abode was only an adventure and an episode, and they believed that any day they might receive instructions to commence their journey.

After a little while the pursuit relaxed. The government, I believe, did not care, provided he did not obtrude himself, what became of him, or where he concealed himself. At all events, the local authorities showed no disposition to hunt him down. The young ladies' charges on the little forfeited property were paid without any dispute, and no vexatious inquiries were raised as to what had become of the furniture and other personal property which had been carried away from the forfeited house.

The haunted reputation of the castle — for in those days, in matters of the marvellous, the oldest were children — secured the little family in the seclusion they coveted. Once, or sometimes twice a week, old Laurence, with a shaggy little pony, made a secret expedition to the city of Limerick, starting before dawn, and returning under the cover of the night, with his purchases. There was beside an occasional sly moonlit visit from the old parish priest, and a midnight mass in the old castle for the little outlawed congregation.

As the alarm and inquiry subsided, their father made them, now and then, a brief and stealthy visit. At first these were but of a night's duration, and with great precaution; but gradually they were extended and less guarded. Still he was, as the phrase is in Munster, "on his keeping." He had firearms always by his bed, and had arranged places of concealment in the castle in the event of a surprise. But no attempt nor any disposition to molest him appearing, he grew more at ease, if not more cheerful.

It came, at last, that he would sometimes stay so long as two whole months at a time, and then depart as suddenly and mysteriously as he came. I suppose he had always some promising plot on hand, and his head full of ingenious treason, and lived on the sickly and exciting dietary of hope deferred.

Was there a poetical justice in this, that the little *ménage* thus secretly established, in the solitary and timeworn pile, should have themselves experienced, but from causes not so easily explicable, those very supernatural perturbations which they had themselves essayed to inspire?

The interruption of the old priest's secret visits was the earliest consequence of the mysterious interference which now began to display itself. One night, having left his cob in care of his old sacristan in the little village, he trudged on foot along the winding pathway, among the gray rocks and ferns that threaded the glen, intending a ghostly visit to the fair recluses of the castle, and he lost his way in this strange fashion.

There was moonlight, indeed, but it was little more than quarter-moon, and a long train of funereal clouds were sailing slowly across the sky — so that, faint and wan as it was, the light seldom shone full out, and was often hidden for a minute or two altogether. When he reached the point in the glen where the castle-stairs were wont to be, he could see nothing of them, and above, no trace of the castle-towers. So, puzzled somewhat, he pursued his way up the ravine, wondering how his walk had become so unusually protracted and fatiguing.

At last, sure enough, he saw the castle as plain as could be, and a lonely streak of candlelight issuing from the tower, just as usual, when his visit was expected. But he could not find the stair; and had to clamber among the rocks and copsewood the best way he could. But when he emerged at top, there was nothing but the bare heath. Then the clouds stole over the moon again, and he moved along with hesitation and difficulty, and once more he saw the outline of the castle against the sky, quite sharp and clear. But this time it proved to be a great battlemented mass of cloud on the horizon. In a few minutes more he was quite close, all of a sudden, to the great front, rising gray and dim in the feeble light, and not till he could have struck it with his good oak "wattle" did he discover it to be only one of those wild, gray frontages of living rock that rise here and there in picturesque tiers along the slopes of those solitary mountains. And so, till dawn, pursuing this mirage of the castle, through pools and among ravines, he wore out a night of miserable misadventure and fatigue.

Another night, riding up the glen, so far as the level way at bottom would allow, and intending to make his nag fast at his customary tree, he heard on a sudden a horrid shriek at top of the steep rocks above his head, and something — a gigantic human form, it seemed — came tumbling and bounding headlong down through the rocks, and fell with a fearful impetus just before his horse's hoofs and there lay like a huge palpitating carcass. The horse was scared, as, indeed, was his rider, too, and more so when this apparently lifeless thing sprang up to his legs, and throwing his arms apart to bar their further progress, advanced his white and gigantic face towards them. Then the horse started about, with a snort of terror, nearly unseating the priest, and broke away into a furious and uncontrollable gallop.

I need not recount all the strange and various misadventures which the honest priest sustained in his endeavours to visit the castle, and its isolated tenants. They were enough to wear out his resolution, and frighten him into submission. And so at last these spiritual visits quite ceased; and fearing to awaken inquiry and suspicion, he thought it only prudent to abstain from attempting them in the daytime.

So the young ladies of the castle were more alone than ever. Their father, whose visits were frequently of long duration, had of late ceased altogether to speak of their contemplated departure for France, grew angry at any allusion to it, and they feared, had abandoned the plan altogether.

CHAPTER IV

The Light in the Bell Tower

Shortly after the discontinuance of the priest's visits, old Laurence, one night, to his surprise, saw light issuing from a window in the Bell Tower. It was at first only a tremulous red ray, visible only for a few minutes, which seemed to pass from the room, through whose window it escaped upon the courtyard of the castle, and so to lose itself. This tower and casement were in the angle of the building, exactly confronting that in which the little outlawed family had taken up their quarters.

The whole family were troubled at the appearance of this dull red ray from the chamber in the Bell Tower. Nobody knew what to make of it. But Laurence, who had campaigned in Italy with his old master, the young ladies' grandfather— "the heavens be his bed this night!" — was resolved to see it out, and took his great horse-pistols with him, and ascended to the corridor leading to the tower. But his search was vain.

This light left a sense of great uneasiness among the inmates, and most certainly it was not pleasant to suspect the establishment of an independent and possibly dangerous lodger or even colony, within the walls of the same old building.

The light very soon appeared again, steadier and somewhat brighter, in the same chamber. Again old Laurence buckled on his armour, swearing ominously to himself, and this time bent in earnest upon conflict. The young ladies watched in thrilling suspense from the great window in *their* stronghold, looking diagonally across the court. But as Laurence, who had entered the massive range of buildings opposite, might be supposed to be approaching the chamber from which this ill-omened glare proceeded, it steadily waned, finally disappearing altogether, just a few seconds before his voice was heard shouting from the arched window to know which way the light had gone.

This lighting up of the great chamber of the Bell Tower grew at last to be of frequent and almost continual recurrence. It was, there, long ago, in times of trouble and danger, that the De Lacys of those evil days used to sit in feudal judgment upon captive adversaries, and, as tradition alleged, often gave them no more time for shrift and prayer, than it needed to mount to the battlement of the turret overhead, from which they were forthwith hung by the necks, for a caveat and admonition to all evil disposed persons viewing the same from the country beneath.

Old Laurence observed these mysterious glimmerings with an evil and an anxious eye, and many and various were the stratagems he tried, but in vain, to surprise the audacious intruders. It is, however, I believe, a fact that no phenomenon, no matter how startling at first, if prosecuted with tolerable regularity, and unattended with any new circumstances of terror, will very long continue to excite alarm or even wonder.

So the family came to acquiesce in this mysterious light. No harm accompanied it. Old Laurence, as he smoked his lonely pipe in the grass-grown courtyard, would cast a disturbed glance at it, as it softly glowed out through the darking aperture, and mutter a prayer or an oath. But he had given over the chase as a hopeless business. And Peggy Sullivan, the old dame of all work, when, by chance, for she never willingly looked toward the haunted quarter, she caught the faint reflection of its dull effulgence with the corner of her eye, would sign herself with the cross or fumble at her beads, and deeper furrows would gather in her forehead, and her face grow ashen and perturbed. And this was not mended by the levity with which the young ladies, with whom the spectre had lost his influence, familiarity, as usual, breeding contempt, had come to talk, and even to jest, about it.

CHAPTER V

The Man with the Claret Mark

But as the former excitement flagged, old Peggy Sullivan produced a new one; for she solemnly avowed that she had seen a thin-faced man, with an ugly red mark all over the side of his cheek, looking out of the same window, just at sunset, before the young ladies returned from their evening walk.

This sounded in their ears like an old woman's dream, but still it was an excitement, jocular in the morning, and just, perhaps, a little fearful as night overspread the vast and desolate building, but still, not wholly unpleasant. This little flicker of credulity suddenly, however, blazed up into the full light of conviction.

Old Laurence, who was not given to dreaming, and had a cool, hard head, and an eye like a hawk, saw the same figure, just about the same hour, when the last level gleam of sunset was tinting the summits of the towers and the tops of the tall trees that surrounded them.

He had just entered the court from the great gate, when he heard all at once the hard peculiar twitter of alarm which sparrows make when a cat or a hawk invades their safety, rising all round from the thick ivy that overclimbed the wall on his left, and raising his eyes listlessly, he saw, with a sort of shock, a thin, ungainly man, standing with his legs crossed, in the recess of the window from which the light was wont to issue, leaning with his elbows on the stone mullion, and looking down with a sort of sickly sneer, his hollow yellow cheeks being deeply stained on one side with what is called a "claret-mark."

"I have you at last, you villain!" cried Larry, in a strange rage and panic: "drop down out of that on the grass here, and give yourself up, or I'll shoot you."

The threat was backed with an oath, and he drew from his coat pocket the long holster pistol he was wont to carry, and covered his man cleverly.

"I give you while I count ten — one-two-three-four. If you draw back, I'll fire, mind; five-six — you'd better be lively — seven-eight-nine — one chance more; will you come down? Then take it — ten!"

Bang went the pistol. The sinister stranger was hardly fifteen feet removed from him, and Larry was a dead shot. But this time he made a scandalous miss, for the shot knocked a little white dust from the stone wall a full yard at one side; and the fellow never shifted his negligent posture or qualified his sardonic smile during the procedure.

Larry was mortified and angry.

"You'll not get off this time, my tulip!" he said with a grin, exchanging the smoking weapon for the loaded pistol in reserve.

"What are you pistolling, Larry?" said a familiar voice close by his elbow, and he saw his master, accompanied by a handsome young man in a cloak.

"That villain, your honour, in the window, there."

"Why there's nobody there, Larry," said De Lacy, with a laugh, though that was no common indulgence with him.

As Larry gazed, the figure somehow dissolved and broke up without receding. A hanging tuft of yellow and red ivy nodded queerly in place of the face, some broken and discoloured masonry in perspective took up the outline and colouring of the arms and figure, and two imperfect red and yellow lichen streaks carried on the curved tracing of the long spindle shanks. Larry blessed himself, and drew his hand across his damp forehead, over his bewildered eyes, and could not speak for a minute. It was all some devilish trick; he could take his oath he saw every feature in the fellow's face, the lace and buttons of his cloak and doublet, and even his long finger nails and thin yellow fingers that overhung the cross-shaft of the window, where there was now nothing but a rusty stain left.

The young gentleman who had arrived with De Lacy, stayed that night and shared with great apparent relish the homely fare of the family. He was a gay and gallant Frenchman, and the beauty of the younger lady, and her pleasantry and spirit, seemed to make his hours pass but too swiftly, and the moment of parting sad.

When he had departed early in the morning, Ultor De Lacy had a long talk with his elder daughter, while the younger was busy with her early dairy task, for among their retainers this *proles generosa* reckoned a "kind" little Kerry cow.

He told her that he had visited France since he had been last at Cappercullen, and how good and gracious their sovereign had been, and how he had arranged a noble alliance for her sister Una. The young gentleman was of high blood, and though not rich, had, nevertheless, his acres and his *nom de terre*, besides a captain's rank in the army. He was, in short, the very gentleman with whom they had parted only that morning. On what special business he was now in Ireland there was no necessity that he should speak; but being here he had brought him hither to present him to his daughter, and found that the impression she had made was quite what was desirable.

"You, you know, dear Alice, are promised to a conventual life. Had it been otherwise— "

He hesitated for a moment.

"You are right, dear father," she said, kissing his hand, "I *am* so promised, and no earthly tie or allurement has power to draw me from that holy engagement."

"Well," he said, returning her caress, "I do not mean to urge you upon that point. It must not, however, be until Una's marriage has taken place. That cannot be, for many good reasons, sooner than this time twelve months; we shall then exchange this strange and barbarous abode for Paris, where are many eligible convents, in which are entertained as sisters some of the noblest ladies of France; and there, too, in Una's marriage will be continued, though not the name, at all events the blood, the lineage, and the title which, so sure as justice ultimately governs the course of human events, will be again established, powerful and honoured in this country, the scene of their ancient glory and transitory misfortunes. Meanwhile, we must not mention this engagement to Una. Here she runs no risk of being sought or won; but the mere knowledge that her hand was absolutely pledged, might excite a capricious opposition and repining such as neither I nor you would like to see; therefore be secret."

The same evening he took Alice with him for a ramble round the castle wall, while they talked of grave matters, and he as usual allowed her a dim and doubtful view of some of those cloud-built castles in which he habitually dwelt, and among which his jaded hopes revived.

They were walking upon a pleasant short sward of darkest green, on one side overhung by the gray castle walls, and on the other by the forest trees that here and there closely approached it, when precisely as they turned the angle of the Bell Tower, they were encountered by a person walking directly towards them. The sight of a stranger, with the exception of the one visitor introduced by her father, was in this place so absolutely unprecedented, that Alice was amazed and affrighted to such a degree that for a moment she stood stock-still.

But there was more in this apparition to excite unpleasant emotions, than the mere circumstance of its unexpectedness. The figure was very strange, being that of a tall, lean, ungainly man, dressed in a dingy suit, somewhat of a Spanish fashion, with a brown laced cloak, and faded red stockings. He had long lank legs, long arms, hands, and fingers, and a very long sickly face, with a drooping nose, and a sly, sarcastic leer, and a great purplish stain overspreading more than half of one cheek.

As he strode past, he touched his cap with his thin, discoloured fingers, and an ugly side glance, and disappeared round the corner. The eyes of father and daughter followed him in silence.

Ultor De Lacy seemed first absolutely terror-stricken, and then suddenly inflamed with ungovernable fury. He dropped his cane on the ground, drew his rapier, and, without wasting a thought on his daughter, pursued.

He just had a glimpse of the retreating figure as it disappeared round the far angle. The plume, and the lank hair, the point of the rapier-scabbard, the flutter of the skirt of the cloak, and one red stocking and heel; and this was the last he saw of him.

When Alice reached his side, his drawn sword still in his hand, he was in a state of abject agitation.

“Thank Heaven, he’s gone!” she exclaimed.

“He’s gone,” echoed Ultor, with a strange glare.

“And you are safe,” she added, clasping his hand.

He sighed a great sigh.

“And you don’t think he’s coming back?”

“He! — who?”

“The stranger who passed us but now. Do you know him, father?”

“Yes — and — no, child — I know him not — and yet I know him too well. Would to heaven we could leave this accursed haunt tonight. Cursed be the stupid malice that first provoked this horrible feud, which no sacrifice and misery can appease, and no exorcism can quell or even suspend. The wretch has come from afar with a sure instinct to devour my last hope — to dog us into our last retreat — and to blast with his triumph the very dust and ruins of our house. What ails that stupid priest that he has given over his visits? Are *my* children to be left without mass or confession — the sacraments which *guard* as well as save — because he once loses his way in a mist, or mistakes a streak of foam in the brook for a dead man's face? D — n him!"

"See, Alice, if he won't come," he resumed, "you must only *write* your confession to him in full — you and Una. Laurence is trusty, and will carry it — and we'll get the bishop's — or, if need be, the Pope's leave for him to give you absolution. I'll move heaven and earth, but you *shall* have the sacraments, poor children! — and see him. I've been a wild fellow in my youth, and never pretended to sanctity; but I know there's but one safe way — and — and — keep you each a bit of this — (he opened a small silver box) — about you while you stay here — fold and sew it up reverently in a bit of the old psaltery parchment and wear it next your hearts— 'tis a fragment of the consecrated wafer — and will help, with the saints' protection, to guard you from harm — and be strict in fasts, and constant in prayer — *I* can do nothing — nor devise any help. The curse has fallen, indeed, on me and mine."

And Alice, saw, in silence, the tears of despair roll down his pale and agitated face.

This adventure was also a secret, and Una was to hear nothing of it.

CHAPTER VI

Voices

Now Una, nobody knew why, began to lose spirit, and to grow pale. Her fun and frolic were quite gone! Even her songs ceased. She was silent with her sister, and loved solitude better. She said she was well, and quite happy, and could in no wise be got to account for the lamentable change that had stolen over her. She had grown odd too, and obstinate in trifles; and strangely reserved and cold.

Alice was very unhappy in consequence. What was the cause of this estrangement — had she offended her, and how? But Una had never before borne resentment for an hour. What could have altered her entire nature so? Could it be the shadow and chill of coming insanity?

Once or twice, when her sister urged her with tears and entreaties to disclose the secret of her changed spirits and demeanour, she seemed to listen with a sort of silent wonder and suspicion, and then she looked for a moment full upon her, and seemed on the very point of revealing all. But the earnest dilated gaze stole downward to the floor, and subsided into an odd wily smile, and she began to whisper to herself, and the smile and the whisper were both a mystery to Alice.

She and Alice slept in the same bedroom — a chamber in a projecting tower — which on their arrival, when poor Una was so merry, they had hung round with old tapestry, and decorated fantastically according to their skill and frolic. One night, as they went to bed, Una said, as if speaking to herself ——

"'Tis my last night in this room — I shall sleep no more with Alice."

"And what has poor Alice done, Una, to deserve your strange unkindness?"

Una looked on her curiously, and half frightened, and then the odd smile stole over her face like a gleam of moonlight.

"My poor Alice, what have you to do with it?" she whispered.

"And why do you talk of sleeping no more with me?" said Alice.

“Why? Alice dear — no why — no reason — only a knowledge that it must be so, or Una will die.”

“Die, Una darling! — what can you mean?”

“Yes, sweet Alice, die, indeed. We must all die some time, you know, or — or undergo a change; and my time is near — *very* near — unless I sleep apart from you.”

“Indeed, Una, sweetheart, I think you *are* ill, but not near death.”

“Una knows what you think, wise Alice — but she’s not mad — on the contrary, she’s wiser than other folks.”

“She’s sadder and stranger too,” said Alice, tenderly.

“Knowledge is sorrow,” answered Una, and she looked across the room through her golden hair which she was combing — and through the window, beyond which lay the tops of the great trees, and the still foliage of the glen in the misty moonlight.

“’Tis enough, Alice dear; it must be so. The bed must move hence, or Una’s bed will be low enough ere long. See, it shan’t be far though, only into that small room.”

She pointed to an inner room or closet opening from that in which they lay. The walls of the building were hugely thick, and there were double doors of oak between the chambers, and Alice thought, with a sigh, how completely separated they were going to be.

However she offered no opposition. The change was made, and the girls for the first time since childhood lay in separate chambers. A few nights afterwards Alice awoke late in the night from a dreadful dream, in which the sinister figure which she and her father had encountered in their ramble round the castle walls, bore a principal part.

When she awoke there were still in her ears the sounds which had mingled in her dream. They were the notes of a deep, ringing, bass voice rising from the glen beneath the castle walls — something between humming and singing — listlessly unequal and intermittent, like the melody of a man whiling away the hours over his work. While she was wondering at this unwonted minstrelsy, there came a silence, and — could she believe her ears? — it certainly was Una’s clear low contralto — softly singing a bar or two from the window. Then once more silence — and then again the strange manly voice, faintly chaunting from the leafy abyss.

With a strange wild feeling of suspicion and terror, Alice glided to the window. The moon who sees so many things, and keeps all secrets, with her cold impenetrable smile, was high in the sky. But Alice saw the red flicker of a candle from Una's window, and, she thought, the shadow of her head against the deep side wall of its recess. Then this was gone, and there were no more sights or sounds that night.

As they sate at breakfast, the small birds were singing merrily from among the sun-tipped foliage.

"I love this music," said Alice, unusually pale and sad; "it comes with the pleasant light of morning. I remember, Una, when you used to sing, like those gay birds, in the fresh beams of the morning; that was in the old time, when Una kept no secret from poor Alice."

"And Una knows what her sage Alice means; but there are other birds, silent all day long, and, they say, the sweetest too, that love to sing by *night* alone."

So things went on — the elder girl pained and melancholy — the younger silent, changed, and unaccountable.

A little while after this, very late one night, on awaking, Alice heard a conversation being carried on in her sister's room. There seemed to be no disguise about it. She could not distinguish the words, indeed, the walls being some six feet thick, and two great oak doors intercepting. But Una's clear voice, and the deep bell-like tones of the unknown, made up the dialogue.

Alice sprung from her bed, threw her clothes about her, and tried to enter her sister's room; but the inner door was bolted. The voices ceased to speak as she knocked, and Una opened it, and stood before her in her nightdress, candle in hand.

"Una — Una, darling, as you hope for peace, tell me who is here?" cried frightened Alice, with her trembling arms about her neck.

Una drew back, with her large innocent blue eyes fixed full upon her.

"Come in, Alice," she said, coldly.

And in came Alice, with a fearful glance around. There was no hiding place there; a chair, a table, a little bedstead, and two or three pegs in the wall to hang clothes on; a narrow window, with two iron bars across; no hearth or chimney — nothing but bare walls.

Alice looked round in amazement, and her eyes glanced with painful inquiry into those of her sister. Una smiled one of her peculiar sidelong smiles, and said ——

"Strange dreams! I've been dreaming — so has Alice. She hears and sees Una's dreams, and wonders — and well she may."

And she kissed her sister's cheek with a cold kiss, and lay down in her little bed, her slender hand under her head, and spoke no more.

Alice, not knowing what to think, went back to hers.

About this time Ultor De Lacy returned. He heard his elder daughter's strange narrative with marked uneasiness, and his agitation seemed to grow rather than subside. He enjoined her, however, not to mention it to the old servant, nor in presence of anybody she might chance to see, but only to him and to the priest, if he could be persuaded to resume his duty and return. The trial, however, such as it was, could not endure very long; matters had turned out favourably. The union of his younger daughter might be accomplished within a few months, and in eight or nine weeks they should be on their way to Paris.

A night or two after her father's arrival, Alice, in the dead of the night, heard the well-known strange deep voice speaking softly, as it seemed, close to her own window on the outside; and Una's voice, clear and tender, spoke in answer. She hurried to her own casement, and pushed it open, kneeling in the deep embrasure, and looking with a stealthy and affrighted gaze towards her sister's window. As she crossed the floor the voices subsided, and she saw a light withdrawn from within. The moonbeams slanted bright and clear on the whole side of the castle overlooking the glen, and she plainly beheld the shadow of a man projected on the wall as on a screen.

This black shadow recalled with a horrid thrill the outline and fashion of the figure in the Spanish dress. There were the cap and mantle, the rapier, the long thin limbs and sinister angularity. It was so thrown obliquely that the hands reached to the windowsill, and the feet stretched and stretched, longer and longer as she looked, toward the ground, and disappeared in the general darkness; and the rest, with a sudden flicker, shot downwards, as shadows will on the sudden movement of a light, and was lost in one gigantic leap down the castle wall.

“I do not know whether I dream or wake when I hear and see these sights; but I will ask my father to sit up with me, and we *two* surely cannot be mistaken. May the holy saints keep and guard us!” And in her terror she buried her head under the bedclothes, and whispered her prayers for an hour.

CHAPTER VII

Una's Love

"I have been with Father Denis," said De Lacy, next day, "and he will come tomorrow; and, thank Heaven! you may both make your confession and hear mass, and my mind will be at rest; and you'll find poor Una happier and more like herself."

But 'tween cup and lip there's many a slip. The priest was not destined to hear poor Una's shrift. When she bid her sister goodnight she looked on her with her large, cold, wild eyes, till something of her old human affections seemed to gather there, and they slowly filled with tears, which dropped one after the other on her homely dress as she gazed in her sister's face.

Alice, delighted, sprang up, and clasped her arms about her neck. "My own darling treasure,'tis all over; you love your poor Alice again, and will be happier than ever."

But while she held her in her embrace Una's eyes were turned towards the window, and her lips apart, and Alice felt instinctively that her thoughts were already far away.

"Hark! — listen! — hush!" and Una, with her delighted gaze fixed, as if she saw far away beyond the castle wall, the trees, the glen, and the night's dark curtain, held her hand raised near her ear, and waved her head slightly in time, as it seemed, to music that reached not Alice's ear, and smiled her strange pleased smile, and then the smile slowly faded away, leaving that sly suspicious light behind it which somehow scared her sister with an uncertain sense of danger; and she sang in tones so sweet and low that it seemed but a reverie of a song, recalling, as Alice fancied, the strain to which she had just listened in that strange ecstasy, the plaintive and beautiful Irish ballad, "Shule, shule, shule, aroon," the midnight summons of the outlawed Irish soldier to his darling to follow him.

Alice had slept little the night before. She was now overpowered with fatigue; and leaving her candle burning by her bedside, she fell into a deep sleep. From this she awoke suddenly, and completely, as will sometimes happen without any apparent cause, and she saw Una come into the room.

She had a little purse of embroidery — her own work — in her hand; and she stole lightly to the bedside, with her peculiar oblique smile, and evidently thinking that her sister was asleep.

Alice was thrilled with a strange terror, and did not speak or move; and her sister slipped her hand softly under her bolster, and withdrew it. Then Una stood for while by the hearth, and stretched her hand up to the mantelpiece, from which she took a little bit of chalk, and Alice thought she saw her place it in the fingers of a long yellow hand that was stealthily introduced from her own chamber-door to receive it; and Una paused in the dark recess of the door, and smiled over her shoulder toward her sister, and then glided into her room, closing the doors.

Almost freezing with terror, Alice rose and glided after her, and stood in her chamber, screaming ——

"Una, Una, in heaven's name what troubles you?"

But Una seemed to have been sound asleep in her bed, and raised herself with a start, and looking upon her with a peevish surprise, said ——

"What does Alice seek here?"

"You were in my room, Una, dear; you seem disturbed and troubled."

"Dreams, Alice. My dreams crossing your brain; only dreams — dreams. Get you to bed, and sleep."

And to bed she went, but *not* to sleep. She lay awake more than an hour; and then Una emerged once more from her room. This time she was fully dressed, and had her cloak and thick shoes on, as their rattle on the floor plainly discovered. She had a little bundle tied up in a handkerchief in her hand, and her hood was drawn about her head; and thus equipped, as it seemed, for a journey, she came and stood at the foot of Alice's bed, and stared on her with a look so soulless and terrible that her senses almost forsook her. Then she turned and went back into her own chamber.

She may have returned; but Alice thought not — at least she did not see her. But she lay in great excitement and perturbation; and was terrified, about an hour later, by a knock at her chamber door — not that opening into Una's room, but upon the little passage from the stone screw staircase. She sprang from her bed; but the door was secured on the inside, and she felt relieved. The knock was repeated, and she heard some one laughing softly on the outside.

The morning came at last; that dreadful night was over. But Una! Where was Una?

Alice never saw her more. On the head of her empty bed were traced in chalk the words — Ultor De Lacy, Ultor O'Donnell. And Alice found beneath her own pillow the little purse of embroidery she had seen in Una's hand. It was her little parting token, and bore the simple legend— "Una's love!"

De Lacy's rage and horror were boundless. He charged the priest, in frantic language, with having exposed his child, by his cowardice and neglect, to the machinations of the Fiend, and raved and blasphemed like a man demented.

It is said that he procured a solemn exorcism to be performed, in the hope of disenthralling and recovering his daughter. Several times, it is alleged, she was seen by the old servants. Once on a sweet summer morning, in the window of the tower, she was perceived combing her beautiful golden tresses, and holding a little mirror in her hand; and first, when she saw herself discovered, she looked affrighted, and then smiled, her slanting, cunning smile. Sometimes, too, in the glen, by moonlight, it was said belated villagers had met her, always startled first, and then smiling, generally singing snatches of old Irish ballads, that seemed to bear a sort of dim resemblance to her melancholy fate. The apparition has long ceased. But it is said that now and again, perhaps once in two or three years, late on a summer night, you may hear — but faint and far away in the recesses of the glen — the sweet, sad notes of Una's voice, singing those plaintive melodies. This, too, of course, in time will cease, and all be forgotten.

CHAPTER VIII

Sister Agnes and the Portrait

When Ultor De Lacy died, his daughter Alice found among his effects a small box, containing a portrait such as I have described. When she looked on it, she recoiled in horror. There, in the plenitude of its sinister peculiarities, was faithfully portrayed the phantom which lived with a vivid and horrible accuracy in her remembrance. Folded in the same box was a brief narrative, stating that, “A.D. 1601, in the month of December, Walter De Lacy, of Cappercullen, made many prisoners at the ford of Ownhey, or Abington, of Irish and Spanish soldiers, flying from the great overthrow of the rebel powers at Kinsale, and among the number one Roderic O’Donnell, an arch traitor, and near kinsman to that other O’Donnell who led the rebels; who, claiming kindred through his mother to De Lacy, sued for his life with instant and miserable entreaty, and offered great ransom, but was by De Lacy, through great zeal for the queen, as some thought, cruelly put to death. When he went to the tower-top, where was the gallows, finding himself in extremity, and no hope of mercy, he swore that though he could work them no evil before his death, yet that he would devote himself thereafter to blast the greatness of the De Lacys, and never leave them till his work was done. He hath been seen often since, and always for that family perniciously, insomuch that it hath been the custom to show to young children of that lineage the picture of the said O’Donnell, in little, taken among his few valuables, to prevent their being misled by him unawares, so that he should not have his will, who by devilish wiles and hell-born cunning, hath steadfastly sought the ruin of that ancient house, and especially to leave that *stemma generosum* destitute of issue for the transmission of their pure blood and worshipful name.”

Old Miss Croker, of Ross House, who was near seventy in the year 1821, when she related this story to me, had seen and conversed with Alice De Lacy, a professed nun, under the name of Sister Agnes, in a religious house in King-street, in Dublin, founded by the famous Duchess of Tyrconnell, and had the narrative from her own lips. I thought the tale worth preserving, and have no more to say.

GHOST STORIES OF CHAPELIZOD

Take my word for it, there is no such thing as an ancient village, especially if it has seen better days, unillustrated by its legends of terror. You might as well expect to find a decayed cheese without mites, or an old house without rats, as an antique and dilapidated town without an authentic population of goblins. Now, although this class of inhabitants are in nowise amenable to the police authorities, yet, as their demeanor directly affects the comforts of her Majesty's subjects, I cannot but regard it as a grave omission that the public have hitherto been left without any statistical returns of their numbers, activity, etc., *etc.* And I am persuaded that a Commission to inquire into and report upon the numerical strength, habits, haunts, etc., etc., of supernatural agents resident in Ireland, would be a great deal more innocent and entertaining than half the Commissions for which the country pays, and at least as instructive. This I say, more from a sense of duty, and to deliver my mind of a grave truth, than with any hope of seeing the suggestion adopted. But, I am sure, my readers will deplore with me that the comprehensive powers of belief, and apparently illimitable leisure, possessed by parliamentary commissions of inquiry, should never have been applied to the subject I have named, and that the collection of that species of information should be confided to the gratuitous and desultory labours of individuals, who, like myself, have other occupations to attend to. This, however, by the way.

Among the village outposts of Dublin, Chapelizod once held a considerable, if not a foremost rank. Without mentioning its connexion with the history of the great Kilmainham Preceptory of the Knights of St. John, it will be enough to remind the reader of its ancient and celebrated Castle, not one vestige of which now remains, and of the fact that it was for, we believe, some centuries, the summer residence of the Viceroys of Ireland. The circumstance of its being up, we believe, to the period at which that corps was disbanded, the headquarters of the Royal Irish Artillery, gave it also a consequence of an humbler, but not less substantial kind. With these advantages in its favour, it is not wonderful that the town exhibited at one time an air of substantial and semi-aristocratic prosperity unknown to Irish villages in modern times.

A broad street, with a well-paved footpath, and houses as lofty as were at that time to be found in the fashionable streets of Dublin; a goodly stone-fronted barrack; an ancient church, vaulted beneath, and with a tower clothed from its summit to its base with the richest ivy; an humble Roman Catholic chapel; a steep bridge spanning the Liffey, and a great old mill at the near end of it, were the principal features of the town. These, or at least most of them, remain still, but the greater part in a very changed and forlorn condition. Some of them indeed are superseded, though not obliterated by modern erections, such as the bridge, the chapel, and the church in part; the rest forsaken by the order who originally raised them, and delivered up to poverty, and in some cases to absolute decay.

The village lies in the lap of the rich and wooded valley of the Liffey, and is overlooked by the high grounds of the beautiful Phoenix Park on the one side, and by the ridge of the Palmerstown hills on the other. Its situation, therefore, is eminently picturesque; and factory-fronts and chimneys notwithstanding, it has, I think, even in its decay, a sort of melancholy picturesqueness of its own. Be that as it may, I mean to relate two or three stories of that sort which may be read with very good effect by a blazing fire on a shrewd winter’s night, and are all directly connected with the altered and somewhat melancholy little town I have named. The first I shall relate concerns

The Village Bully

About thirty years ago there lived in the town of Chapelizod an ill-conditioned fellow of herculean strength, well known throughout the neighbourhood by the title of Bully Larkin. In addition to his remarkable physical superiority, this fellow had acquired a degree of skill as a pugilist which alone would have made him formidable. As it was, he was the autocrat of the village, and carried not the sceptre in vain. Conscious of his superiority, and perfectly secure of impunity, he lorded it over his fellows in a spirit of cowardly and brutal insolence, which made him hated even more profoundly than he was feared.

Upon more than one occasion he had deliberately forced quarrels upon men whom he had singled out for the exhibition of his savage prowess; and in every encounter his overmatched antagonist had received an amount of “punishment” which edified and appalled the spectators, and in some instances left ineffaceable scars and lasting injuries after it.

Bully Larkin's pluck had never been fairly tried. For, owing to his prodigious superiority in weight, strength, and skill, his victories had always been certain and easy; and in proportion to the facility with which he uniformly smashed an antagonist, his pugnacity and insolence were inflamed. He thus became an odious nuisance in the neighbourhood, and the terror of every mother who had a son, and of every wife who had a husband who possessed a spirit to resent insult, or the smallest confidence in his own pugilistic capabilities.

Now it happened that there was a young fellow named Ned Moran — better known by the soubriquet of "Long Ned," from his slender, lathy proportions — at that time living in the town. He was, in truth, a mere lad, nineteen years of age, and fully twelve years younger than the stalwart bully. This, however, as the reader will see, secured for him no exemption from the dastardly provocations of the ill-conditioned pugilist. Long Ned, in an evil hour, had thrown eyes of affection upon a certain buxom damsel, who, notwithstanding Bully Larkin's amorous rivalry, inclined to reciprocate them.

I need not say how easily the spark of jealousy, once kindled, is blown into a flame, and how naturally, in a coarse and ungoverned nature, it explodes in acts of violence and outrage.

"The bully" watched his opportunity, and contrived to provoke Ned Moran, while drinking in a public-house with a party of friends, into an altercation, in the course of which he failed not to put such insults upon his rival as manhood could not tolerate. Long Ned, though a simple, goodnatured sort of fellow, was by no means deficient in spirit, and retorted in a tone of defiance which edified the more timid, and gave his opponent the opportunity he secretly coveted.

Bully Larkin challenged the heroic youth, whose pretty face he had privately consigned to the mangling and bloody discipline he was himself so capable of administering. The quarrel, which he had himself contrived to get up, to a certain degree covered the ill blood and malignant premeditation which inspired his proceedings, and Long Ned, being full of generous ire and whiskey punch, accepted the gauge of battle on the instant. The whole party, accompanied by a mob of idle men and boys, and in short by all who could snatch a moment from the calls of business, proceeded in slow procession through the old gate into the Phoenix Park, and mounting the hill overlooking the town, selected near its summit a level spot on which to decide the quarrel.

The combatants stripped, and a child might have seen in the contrast presented by the slight, lank form and limbs of the lad, and the muscular and massive build of his veteran antagonist, how desperate was the chance of poor Ned Moran.

“Seconds” and “bottle-holders” — selected of course for their love of the game — were appointed, and “the fight” commenced.

I will not shock my readers with a description of the cool-blooded butchery that followed. The result of the combat was what anybody might have predicted. At the eleventh round, poor Ned refused to “give in”; the brawny pugilist, unhurt, in good wind, and pale with concentrated and as yet unslaked revenge, had the gratification of seeing his opponent seated upon his second’s knee, unable to hold up his head, his left arm disabled; his face a bloody, swollen, and shapeless mass; his breast scarred and bloody, and his whole body panting and quivering with rage and exhaustion.

“Give in, Ned, my boy,” cried more than one of the bystanders.

“Never, never,” shrieked he, with a voice hoarse and choking.

Time being “up,” his second placed him on his feet again. Blinded with his own blood, panting and staggering, he presented but a helpless mark for the blows of his stalwart opponent. It was plain that a touch would have been sufficient to throw him to the earth. But Larkin had no notion of letting him off so easily. He closed with him without striking a blow (the effect of which, prematurely dealt, would have been to bring him at once to the ground, and so put an end to the combat), and getting his battered and almost senseless head under his arm, fast in that peculiar “fix” known to the fancy pleasantly by the name of “chancery,” he held him firmly, while with monotonous and brutal strokes he beat his fist, as it seemed, almost into his face. A cry of “shame” broke from the crowd, for it was plain that the beaten man was now insensible, and supported only by the herculean arm of the bully. The round and the fight ended by his hurling him upon the ground, falling upon him at the same time with his knee upon his chest.

The bully rose, wiping the perspiration from his white face with his bloodstained hands, but Ned lay stretched and motionless upon the grass. It was impossible to get him upon his legs for another round. So he was carried down, just as he was, to the pond which then lay close to the old Park gate, and his head and body were washed beside it. Contrary to the belief of all he was not dead. He was carried home, and after some months to a certain extent recovered. But he never held up his head again, and before the year was over he had died of consumption. Nobody could doubt how the disease had been induced, but there was no actual proof to connect the cause and effect, and the ruffian Larkin escaped the vengeance of the law. A strange retribution, however, awaited him.

After the death of Long Ned, he became less quarrelsome than before, but more sullen and reserved. Some said "he took it to heart," and others, that his conscience was not at ease about it. Be this as it may, however, his health did not suffer by reason of his presumed agitations, nor was his worldly prosperity marred by the blasting curses with which poor Moran's enraged mother pursued him; on the contrary he had rather risen in the world, and obtained regular and well-remunerated employment from the Chief Secretary's gardener, at the other side of the Park. He still lived in Chapelizod, whither, on the close of his day's work, he used to return across the Fifteen Acres.

It was about three years after the catastrophe we have mentioned, and late in the autumn, when, one night, contrary to his habit, he did not appear at the house where he lodged, neither had he been seen anywhere, during the evening, in the village. His hours of return had been so very regular, that his absence excited considerable surprise, though, of course, no actual alarm; and, at the usual hour, the house was closed for the night, and the absent lodger consigned to the mercy of the elements, and the care of his presiding star. Early in the morning, however, he was found lying in a state of utter helplessness upon the slope immediately overlooking the Chapelizod gate. He had been smitten with a paralytic stroke: his right side was dead; and it was many weeks before he had recovered his speech sufficiently to make himself at all understood.

He then made the following relation: — He had been detained, it appeared, later than usual, and darkness had closed before he commenced his homeward walk across the Park. It was a moonlit night, but masses of ragged clouds were slowly drifting across the heavens. He had not encountered a human figure, and no sounds but the softened rush of the wind sweeping through bushes and hollows met his ear. These wild and monotonous sounds, and the utter solitude which surrounded him, did not, however, excite any of those uneasy sensations which are ascribed to superstition, although he said he did feel depressed, or, in his own phraseology, “lonesome.” Just as he crossed the brow of the hill which shelters the town of Chapelizod, the moon shone out for some moments with unclouded lustre, and his eye, which happened to wander by the shadowy enclosures which lay at the foot of the slope, was arrested by the sight of a human figure climbing, with all the haste of one pursued, over the churchyard wall, and running up the steep ascent directly towards him. Stories of “resurrectionists” crossed his recollection, as he observed this suspicious-looking figure. But he began, momentarily, to be aware with a sort of fearful instinct which he could not explain, that the running figure was directing his steps, with a sinister purpose, towards himself.

The form was that of a man with a loose coat about him, which, as he ran, he disengaged, and as well as Larkin could see, for the moon was again wading in clouds, threw from him. The figure thus advanced until within some two score yards of him, it arrested its speed, and approached with a loose, swaggering gait. The moon again shone out bright and clear, and, gracious God! what was the spectacle before him? He saw as distinctly as if he had been presented there in the flesh, Ned Moran, himself, stripped naked from the waist upward, as if for pugilistic combat, and drawing towards him in silence. Larkin would have shouted, prayed, cursed, fled across the Park, but he was absolutely powerless; the apparition stopped within a few steps, and leered on him with a ghastly mimicry of the defiant stare with which pugilists strive to cow one another before combat. For a time, which he could not so much as conjecture, he was held in the fascination of that unearthly gaze, and at last the thing, whatever it was, on a sudden swaggered close up to him with extended palms. With an impulse of horror, Larkin put out his hand to keep the figure off, and their palms touched — at least, so he believed — for a thrill of unspeakable agony, running through his arm, pervaded his entire frame, and he fell senseless to the earth.

Though Larkin lived for many years after, his punishment was terrible. He was incurably maimed; and being unable to work, he was forced, for existence, to beg alms of those who had once feared and flattered him. He suffered, too, increasingly, under his own horrible interpretation of the preternatural encounter which was the beginning of all his miseries. It was vain to endeavour to shake his faith in the reality of the apparition, and equally vain, as some compassionately did, to try to persuade him that the greeting with which his vision closed was intended, while inflicting a temporary trial, to signify a compensating reconciliation.

“No, no,” he used to say, “all won’t do. I know the meaning of it well enough; it is a challenge to meet him in the other world — in Hell, where I am going — that’s what it means, and nothing else.”

And so, miserable and refusing comfort, he lived on for some years, and then died, and was buried in the same narrow churchyard which contains the remains of his victim.

I need hardly say, how absolute was the faith of the honest inhabitants, at the time when I heard the story, in the reality of the preternatural summons which, through the portals of terror, sickness, and misery, had summoned Bully Larkin to his long, last home, and that, too, upon the very ground on which he had signalised the guiltiest triumph of his violent and vindictive career.

I recollect another story of the preternatural sort, which made no small sensation, some five-and-thirty years ago, among the good gossips of the town; and, with your leave, courteous reader, I shall relate it.

The Sexton’s Adventure

Those who remember Chapelizod a quarter of a century ago, or more, may possibly recollect the parish sexton. Bob Martin was held much in awe by truant boys who sauntered into the churchyard on Sundays, to read the tombstones, or play leap frog over them, or climb the ivy in search of bats or sparrows’ nests, or peep into the mysterious aperture under the eastern window, which opened a dim perspective of descending steps losing themselves among profounder darkness, where lidless coffins gaped horribly among tattered velvet, bones, and dust, which time and mortality had strewn there. Of such horribly curious, and otherwise enterprising juveniles, Bob was, of course, the special scourge and terror. But terrible as was the official aspect of the sexton, and repugnant as his lank form, clothed in rusty, sable vesture, his small, frosty visage, suspicious grey eyes, and rusty, brown scratch-wig, might appear to all notions of genial frailty; it was yet true, that Bob Martin’s severe morality sometimes nodded, and that Bacchus did not always solicit him in vain.

Bob had a curious mind, a memory well stored with “merry tales,” and tales of terror. His profession familiarized him with graves and goblins, and his tastes with weddings, wassail, and sly frolics of all sorts. And as his personal recollections ran back nearly three score years into the perspective of the village history, his fund of local anecdote was copious, accurate, and edifying.

As his ecclesiastical revenues were by no means considerable, he was not unfrequently obliged, for the indulgence of his tastes, to arts which were, at the best, undignified.

He frequently invited himself when his entertainers had forgotten to do so; he dropped in accidentally upon small drinking parties of his acquaintance in public houses, and entertained them with stories, queer or terrible, from his inexhaustible reservoir, never scrupling to accept an acknowledgment in the shape of hot whiskey-punch, or whatever else was going.

There was at that time a certain atrabilious publican, called Philip Slaney, established in a shop nearly opposite the old turnpike. This man was not, when left to himself, immoderately given to drinking; but being naturally of a saturnine complexion, and his spirits constantly requiring a fillip, he acquired a prodigious liking for Bob Martin’s company. The sexton’s society, in fact, gradually became the solace of his existence, and he seemed to lose his constitutional melancholy in the fascination of his sly jokes and marvellous stories.

This intimacy did not redound to the prosperity or reputation of the convivial allies. Bob Martin drank a good deal more punch than was good for his health, or consistent with the character of an ecclesiastical functionary. Philip Slaney, too, was drawn into similar indulgences, for it was hard to resist the genial seductions of his gifted companion; and as he was obliged to pay for both, his purse was believed to have suffered even more than his head and liver.

Be this as it may, Bob Martin had the credit of having made a drunkard of “black Phil Slaney” — for by this cognomen was he distinguished; and Phil Slaney had also the reputation of having made the sexton, if possible, a “bigger bliggard” than ever. Under these circumstances, the accounts of the concern opposite the turnpike became somewhat entangled; and it came to pass one drowsy summer morning, the weather being at once sultry and cloudy, that Phil Slaney went into a small back parlour, where he kept his books, and which commanded, through its dirty window-panes, a full view of a dead wall, and having bolted the door, he took a loaded pistol, and clapping the muzzle in his mouth, blew the upper part of his skull through the ceiling.

This horrid catastrophe shocked Bob Martin extremely; and partly on this account, and partly because having been, on several late occasions, found at night in a state of abstraction, bordering on insensibility, upon the high road, he had been threatened with dismissal; and, as some said, partly also because of the difficulty of finding anybody to "treat" him as poor Phil Slaney used to do, he for a time forswore alcohol in all its combinations, and became an eminent example of temperance and sobriety.

Bob observed his good resolutions, greatly to the comfort of his wife, and the edification of the neighbourhood, with tolerable punctuality. He was seldom tipsy, and never drunk, and was greeted by the better part of society with all the honours of the prodigal son.

Now it happened, about a year after the grisly event we have mentioned, that the curate having received, by the post, due notice of a funeral to be consummated in the churchyard of Chapelizod, with certain instructions respecting the site of the grave, despatched a summons for Bob Martin, with a view to communicate to that functionary these official details.

It was a lowering autumn night: piles of lurid thunderclouds, slowly rising from the earth, had loaded the sky with a solemn and boding canopy of storm. The growl of the distant thunder was heard afar off upon the dull, still air, and all nature seemed, as it were, hushed and cowering under the oppressive influence of the approaching tempest.

It was past nine o'clock when Bob, putting on his official coat of seedy black, prepared to attend his professional superior.

"Bobby, darlin'," said his wife, before she delivered the hat she held in her hand to his keeping, "sure you won't, Bobby, darlin' — you won't — you know what."

"I *don't* know what," he retorted, smartly, grasping at his hat.

"You won't be throwing up the little finger, Bobby, acushla?" she said, evading his grasp.

"Arrah, why would I, woman? there, give me my hat, will you?"

"But won't you promise me, Bobby darlin' — won't you, alanna?"

"Ay, ay, to be sure I will — why not? — there, give me my hat, and let me go."

"Ay, but you're not promisin', Bobby, mavourneen; you're not promisin' all the time."

"Well, divil carry me if I drink a drop till I come back again," said the sexton, angrily; "will that do you? And *now* will you give me my hat?"

"Here it is, darlin'," she said, "and God send you safe back."

And with this parting blessing she closed the door upon his retreating figure, for it was now quite dark, and resumed her knitting till his return, very much relieved; for she thought he had of late been oftener tipsy than was consistent with his thorough reformation, and feared the allurements of the half dozen "publics" which he had at that time to pass on his way to the other end of the town.

They were still open, and exhaled a delicious reek of whiskey, as Bob glided wistfully by them; but he stuck his hands in his pockets and looked the other way, whistling resolutely, and filling his mind with the image of the curate and anticipations of his coming fee. Thus he steered his morality safely through these rocks of offence, and reached the curate's lodging in safety.

He had, however, an unexpected sick call to attend, and was not at home, so that Bob Martin had to sit in the hall and amuse himself with the devil's tattoo until his return. This, unfortunately, was very long delayed, and it must have been fully twelve o'clock when Bob Martin set out upon his homeward way. By this time the storm had gathered to a pitchy darkness, the bellowing thunder was heard among the rocks and hollows of the Dublin mountains, and the pale, blue lightning shone upon the staring fronts of the houses.

By this time, too, every door was closed; but as Bob trudged homeward, his eye mechanically sought the public-house which had once belonged to Phil Slaney. A faint light was making its way through the shutters and the glass panes over the doorway, which made a sort of dull, foggy halo about the front of the house.

As Bob's eyes had become accustomed to the obscurity by this time, the light in question was quite sufficient to enable him to see a man in a sort of loose riding-coat seated upon a bench which, at that time, was fixed under the window of the house. He wore his hat very much over his eyes, and was smoking a long pipe. The outline of a glass and a quart bottle were also dimly traceable beside him; and a large horse saddled, but faintly discernible, was patiently awaiting his master's leisure.

There was something odd, no doubt, in the appearance of a traveller refreshing himself at such an hour in the open street; but the sexton accounted for it easily by supposing that, on the closing of the house for the night, he had taken what remained of his refection to the place where he was now discussing it al fresco.

At another time Bob might have saluted the stranger as he passed with a friendly "good night"; but, somehow, he was out of humour and in no genial mood, and was about passing without any courtesy of the sort, when the stranger, without taking the pipe from his mouth, raised the bottle, and with it beckoned him familiarly, while, with a sort of lurch of the head and shoulders, and at the same time shifting his seat to the end of the bench, he pantomimically invited him to share his seat and his cheer. There was a divine fragrance of whiskey about the spot, and Bob half relented; but he remembered his promise just as he began to waver, and said:

"No, I thank you, sir, I can't stop tonight."

The stranger beckoned with vehement welcome, and pointed to the vacant space on the seat beside him.

"I thank you for your polite offer," said Bob, "but it's what I'm too late as it is, and haven't time to spare, so I wish you a good night."

The traveller jingled the glass against the neck of the bottle, as if to intimate that he might at least swallow a dram without losing time. Bob was mentally quite of the same opinion; but, though his mouth watered, he remembered his promise, and shaking his head with incorruptible resolution, walked on.

The stranger, pipe in mouth, rose from his bench, the bottle in one hand, and the glass in the other, and followed at the sexton's heels, his dusky horse keeping close in his wake.

There was something suspicious and unaccountable in this importunity.

Bob quickened his pace, but the stranger followed close. The sexton began to feel queer, and turned about. His pursuer was behind, and still inviting him with impatient gestures to taste his liquor.

"I told you before," said Bob, who was both angry and frightened, "that I would not taste it, and that's enough. I don't want to have anything to say to you or your bottle; and in God’s name,” he added, more vehemently, observing that he was approaching still closer, “fall back and don’t be tormenting me this way.”

These words, as it seemed, incensed the stranger, for he shook the bottle with violent menace at Bob Martin; but, notwithstanding this gesture of defiance, he suffered the distance between them to increase. Bob, however, beheld him dogging him still in the distance, for his pipe shed a wonderful red glow, which duskily illuminated his entire figure like the lurid atmosphere of a meteor.

“I wish the devil had his own, my boy,” muttered the excited sexton, “and
I know well enough where you’d be.”

The next time he looked over his shoulder, to his dismay he observed the importunate stranger as close as ever upon his track.

“Confound you,” cried the man of skulls and shovels, almost beside himself with rage and horror, “what is it you want of me?”

The stranger appeared more confident, and kept wagging his head and extending both glass and bottle toward him as he drew near, and Bob Martin heard the horse snorting as it followed in the dark.

“Keep it to yourself, whatever it is, for there is neither grace nor luck about you,” cried Bob Martin, freezing with terror; “leave me alone, will you.”

And he fumbled in vain among the seething confusion of his ideas for a prayer or an exorcism. He quickened his pace almost to a run; he was now close to his own door, under the impending bank by the river side.

“Let me in, let me in, for God’s sake; Molly, open the door,” he cried, as he ran to the threshold, and leant his back against the plank. His pursuer confronted him upon the road; the pipe was no longer in his mouth, but the dusky red glow still lingered round him. He uttered some inarticulate cavernous sounds, which were wolfish and indescribable, while he seemed employed in pouring out a glass from the bottle.

The sexton kicked with all his force against the door, and cried at the same time with a despairing voice.

“In the name of God Almighty, once for all, leave me alone.”

His pursuer furiously flung the contents of the bottle at Bob Martin; but instead of fluid it issued out in a stream of flame, which expanded and whirled round them, and for a moment they were both enveloped in a faint blaze; at the same instant a sudden gust whisked off the stranger's hat, and the sexton beheld that his skull was roofless. For an instant he beheld the gaping aperture, black and shattered, and then he fell senseless into his own doorway, which his affrighted wife had just unbarred.

I need hardly give my reader the key to this most intelligible and authentic narrative. The traveller was acknowledged by all to have been the spectre of the suicide, called up by the Evil One to tempt the convivial sexton into a violation of his promise, sealed, as it was, by an imprecation. Had he succeeded, no doubt the dusky steed, which Bob had seen saddled in attendance, was destined to have carried back a double burden to the place from whence he came.

As an attestation of the reality of this visitation, the old thorn tree which overhung the doorway was found in the morning to have been blasted with the infernal fires which had issued from the bottle, just as if a thunderbolt had scorched it.

The moral of the above tale is upon the surface, apparent, and, so to speak, *self-acting* — a circumstance which happily obviates the necessity of our discussing it together. Taking our leave, therefore, of honest Bob Martin, who now sleeps soundly in the same solemn dormitory where, in his day, he made so many beds for others, I come to a legend of the Royal Irish Artillery, whose headquarters were for so long a time in the town of Chapelizod. I don't mean to say that I cannot tell a great many more stories, equally authentic and marvellous, touching this old town; but as I may possibly have to perform a like office for other localities, and as Anthony Poplar is known, like Atropos, to carry a shears, wherewith to snip across all "yarns" which exceed reasonable bounds, I consider it, on the whole, safer to despatch the traditions of Chapelizod with one tale more.

Let me, however, first give it a name; for an author can no more despatch a tale without a title, than an apothecary can deliver his physic without a label. We shall, therefore, call it —

The Spectre Lovers

There lived some fifteen years since in a small and ruinous house, little better than a hovel, an old woman who was reported to have considerably exceeded her eightieth year, and who rejoiced in the name of Alice, or popularly, Ally Moran. Her society was not much courted, for she was neither rich, nor, as the reader may suppose, beautiful. In addition to a lean cur and a cat she had one human companion, her grandson, Peter Brien, whom, with laudable good nature, she had supported from the period of his orphanage down to that of my story, which finds him in his twentieth year. Peter was a goodnatured slob of a fellow, much more addicted to wrestling, dancing, and lovemaking, than to hard work, and fonder of whiskey-punch than good advice. His grandmother had a high opinion of his accomplishments, which indeed was but natural, and also of his genius, for Peter had of late years begun to apply his mind to politics; and as it was plain that he had a mortal hatred of honest labour, his grandmother predicted, like a true fortuneteller, that he was born to marry an heiress, and Peter himself (who had no mind to forego his freedom even on such terms) that he was destined to find a pot of gold. Upon one point both agreed, that being unfitted by the peculiar bias of his genius for work, he was to acquire the immense fortune to which his merits entitled him by means of a pure run of good luck. This solution of Peter's future had the double effect of reconciling both himself and his grandmother to his idle courses, and also of maintaining that even flow of hilarious spirits which made him everywhere welcome, and which was in truth the natural result of his consciousness of approaching affluence.

It happened one night that Peter had enjoyed himself to a very late hour with two or three choice spirits near Palmerstown. They had talked politics and love, sung songs, and told stories, and, above all, had swallowed, in the chastened disguise of punch, at least a pint of good whiskey, every man.

It was considerably past one o'clock when Peter bid his companions goodbye, with a sigh and a hiccough, and lighting his pipe set forth on his solitary homeward way.

The bridge of Chapelizod was pretty nearly the midway point of his night march, and from one cause or another his progress was rather slow, and it was past two o'clock by the time he found himself leaning over its old battlements, and looking up the river, over whose winding current and wooded banks the soft moonlight was falling.

The cold breeze that blew lightly down the stream was grateful to him. It cooled his throbbing head, and he drank it in at his hot lips. The scene, too, had, without his being well sensible of it, a secret fascination. The village was sunk in the profoundest slumber, not a mortal stirring, not a sound afloat, a soft haze covered it all, and the fairy moonlight hovered over the entire landscape.

In a state between rumination and rapture, Peter continued to lean over the battlements of the old bridge, and as he did so he saw, or fancied he saw, emerging one after another along the river bank in the little gardens and enclosures in the rear of the street of Chapelizod, the queerest little whitewashed huts and cabins he had ever seen there before. They had not been there that evening when he passed the bridge on the way to his merry tryst. But the most remarkable thing about it was the odd way in which these quaint little cabins showed themselves. First he saw one or two of them just with the corner of his eye, and when he looked full at them, strange to say, they faded away and disappeared. Then another and another came in view, but all in the same coy way, just appearing and gone again before he could well fix his gaze upon them; in a little while, however, they began to bear a fuller gaze, and he found, as it seemed to himself, that he was able by an effort of attention to fix the vision for a longer and a longer time, and when they waxed faint and nearly vanished, he had the power of recalling them into light and substance, until at last their vacillating indistinctness became less and less, and they assumed a permanent place in the moonlit landscape.

"Be the hokey," said Peter, lost in amazement, and dropping his pipe into the river unconsciously, "them is the quarist bits iv mud cabins I ever seen, growing up like musharoons in the dew of an evening, and poppin' up here and down again there, and up again in another place, like so many white rabbits in a warren; and there they stand at last as firm and fast as if they were there from the Deluge; bedad it's enough to make a man a'most believe in the fairies."

This latter was a large concession from Peter, who was a bit of a free-thinker, and spoke contemptuously in his ordinary conversation of that class of agencies.

Having treated himself to a long last stare at these mysterious fabrics, Peter prepared to pursue his homeward way; having crossed the bridge and passed the mill, he arrived at the corner of the main-street of the little town, and casting a careless look up the Dublin road, his eye was arrested by a most unexpected spectacle.

This was no other than a column of foot soldiers, marching with perfect regularity towards the village, and headed by an officer on horseback. They were at the far side of the turnpike, which was closed; but much to his perplexity he perceived that they marched on through it without appearing to sustain the least check from that barrier.

On they came at a slow march; and what was most singular in the matter was, that they were drawing several cannons along with them; some held ropes, others spoked the wheels, and others again marched in front of the guns and behind them, with muskets shouldered, giving a stately character of parade and regularity to this, as it seemed to Peter, most unmilitary procedure.

It was owing either to some temporary defect in Peter's vision, or to some illusion attendant upon mist and moonlight, or perhaps to some other cause, that the whole procession had a certain waving and vapoury character which perplexed and tasked his eyes not a little. It was like the pictured pageant of a phantasmagoria reflected upon smoke. It was as if every breath disturbed it; sometimes it was blurred, sometimes obliterated; now here, now there. Sometimes, while the upper part was quite distinct, the legs of the column would nearly fade away or vanish outright, and then again they would come out into clear relief, marching on with measured tread, while the cocked hats and shoulders grew, as it were, transparent, and all but disappeared.

Notwithstanding these strange optical fluctuations, however, the column continued steadily to advance. Peter crossed the street from the corner near the old bridge, running on tip-toe, and with his body stooped to avoid observation, and took up a position upon the raised footpath in the shadow of the houses, where, as the soldiers kept the middle of the road, he calculated that he might, himself undetected, see them distinctly enough as they passed.

"What the div — , what on airth," he muttered, checking the irreligious ejaculation with which he was about to start, for certain queer misgivings were hovering about his heart, notwithstanding the factitious courage of the whiskey bottle. "What on airth is the manin' of all this? is it the French that's landed at last to give us a hand and help us in airnest to this blessed repale? If it is not them, I simply ask who the div — , I mane who on airth are they, for such sogers as them I never seen before in my born days?"

By this time the foremost of them were quite near, and truth to say they were the queerest soldiers he had ever seen in the course of his life. They wore long gaiters and leather breeches, three-cornered hats, bound with silver lace, long blue coats, with scarlet facings and linings, which latter were shewn by a fastening which held together the two opposite corners of the skirt behind; and in front the breasts were in like manner connected at a single point, where and below which they sloped back, disclosing a long-flapped waistcoat of snowy whiteness; they had very large, long cross-belts, and wore enormous pouches of white leather hung extraordinarily low, and on each of which a little silver star was glittering. But what struck him as most grotesque and outlandish in their costume was their extraordinary display of shirt-frill in front, and of ruffle about their wrists, and the strange manner in which their hair was frizzled out and powdered under their hats, and clubbed up into great rolls behind. But one of the party was mounted. He rode a tall white horse, with high action and arching neck; he had a snow-white feather in his three-cornered hat, and his coat was shimmering all over with a profusion of silver lace. From these circumstances Peter concluded that he must be the commander of the detachment, and examined him as he passed attentively. He was a slight, tall man, whose legs did not half fill his leather breeches, and he appeared to be at the wrong side of sixty. He had a shrunken, weather-beaten, mulberry-coloured face, carried a large black patch over one eye, and turned neither to the right nor to the left, but rode on at the head of his men, with a grim, military inflexibility.

The countenances of these soldiers, officers as well as men, seemed all full of trouble, and, so to speak, scared and wild. He watched in vain for a single contented or comely face. They had, one and all, a melancholy and hang-dog look; and as they passed by, Peter fancied that the air grew cold and thrilling.

He had seated himself upon a stone bench, from which, staring with all his might, he gazed upon the grotesque and noiseless procession as it filed by him. Noiseless it was; he could neither hear the jingle of accoutrements, the tread of feet, nor the rumble of the wheels; and when the old colonel turned his horse a little, and made as though he were giving the word of command, and a trumpeter, with a swollen blue nose and white feather fringe round his hat, who was walking beside him, turned about and put his bugle to his lips, still Peter heard nothing, although it was plain the sound had reached the soldiers, for they instantly changed their front to three abreast.

“Botheration!” muttered Peter, “is it deaf I’m growing?”

But that could not be, for he heard the sighing of the breeze and the rush of the neighbouring Liffey plain enough.

“Well,” said he, in the same cautious key, “by the piper, this bangs Banagher fairly! It’s either the Frinch army that’s in it, come to take the town iv Chapelizod by surprise, an’ makin’ no noise for feard iv wakenin’ the inhabitants; or else it’s — it’s — what it’s — somethin’ else. But, tundher-an-ouns, what’s gone wid Fitzpatrick’s shop across the way?”

The brown, dingy stone building at the opposite side of the street looked newer and cleaner than he had been used to see it; the front door of it stood open, and a sentry, in the same grotesque uniform, with shouldered musket, was pacing noiselessly to and fro before it. At the angle of this building, in like manner, a wide gate (of which Peter had no recollection whatever) stood open, before which, also, a similar sentry was gliding, and into this gateway the whole column gradually passed, and Peter finally lost sight of it.

“I’m not asleep; I’m not dhramin’,” said he, rubbing his eyes, and stamping slightly on the pavement, to assure himself that he was wide awake. “It is a quare business, whatever it is; an’ it’s not alone that, but everything about town looks strange to me. There’s Tresham’s house new painted, bedad, an’ them flowers in the windies! An’ Delany’s house, too, that had not a whole pane of glass in it this morning, and scarce a slate on the roof of it! It is not possible it’s what it’s dhrunk I am. Sure there’s the big tree, and not a leaf of it changed since I passed, and the stars overhead, all right. I don’t think it is in my eyes it is.”

And so looking about him, and every moment finding or fancying new food for wonder, he walked along the pavement, intending, without further delay, to make his way home.

But his adventures for the night were not concluded. He had nearly reached the angle of the short land that leads up to the church, when for the first time he perceived that an officer, in the uniform he had just seen, was walking before, only a few yards in advance of him.

The officer was walking along at an easy, swinging gait, and carried his sword under his arm, and was looking down on the pavement with an air of reverie.

In the very fact that he seemed unconscious of Peter's presence, and disposed to keep his reflections to himself, there was something reassuring. Besides, the reader must please to remember that our hero had a quantum sufficit of good punch before his adventure commenced, and was thus fortified against those qualms and terrors under which, in a more reasonable state of mind, he might not impossibly have sunk.

The idea of the French invasion revived in full power in Peter's fuddled imagination, as he pursued the nonchalant swagger of the officer.

"Be the powers iv Moll Kelly, I'll ax him what it is," said Peter, with a sudden accession of rashness. "He may tell me or not, as he plases, but he can't be offinded, anyhow."

With this reflection having inspired himself, Peter cleared his voice and began —

"Captain!" said he, "I ax your pardon, captain, an' maybe you'd be so condescindin' to my ignorance as to tell me, if it's plasin' to yer honour, whether your honour is not a Frinchman, if it's plasin' to you."

This he asked, not thinking that, had it been as he suspected, not one word of his question in all probability would have been intelligible to the person he addressed. He was, however, understood, for the officer answered him in English, at the same time slackening his pace and moving a little to the side of the pathway, as if to invite his interrogator to take his place beside him.

"No; I am an Irishman," he answered.

"I humbly thank your honour," said Peter, drawing nearer — for the affability and the nativity of the officer encouraged him— "but maybe your honour is in the *sarvice* of the King of France?"

"I serve the same King as you do," he answered, with a sorrowful significance which Peter did not comprehend at the time; and, interrogating in turn, he asked, "But what calls you forth at this hour of the day?"

"The *day,* your honour! — the night, you mane."

"It was always our way to turn night into day, and we keep to it still," remarked the soldier. "But, no matter, come up here to my house; I have a job for you, if you wish to earn some money easily. I live here."

As he said this, he beckoned authoritatively to Peter, who followed almost mechanically at his heels, and they turned up a little lane near the old Roman Catholic chapel, at the end of which stood, in Peter's time, the ruins of a tall, stone-built house.

Like everything else in the town, it had suffered a metamorphosis. The stained and ragged walls were now erect, perfect, and covered with pebble-dash; window-panes glittered coldly in every window; the green hall-door had a bright brass knocker on it. Peter did not know whether to believe his previous or his present impressions; seeing is believing, and Peter could not dispute the reality of the scene. All the records of his memory seemed but the images of a tipsy dream. In a trance of astonishment and perplexity, therefore, he submitted himself to the chances of his adventure.

The door opened, the officer beckoned with a melancholy air of authority to Peter, and entered. Our hero followed him into a sort of hall, which was very dark, but he was guided by the steps of the soldier, and, in silence, they ascended the stairs. The moonlight, which shone in at the lobbies, showed an old, dark wainscoting, and a heavy, oak banister. They passed by closed doors at different landing-places, but all was dark and silent as, indeed, became that late hour of the night.

Now they ascended to the topmost floor. The captain paused for a minute at the nearest door, and, with a heavy groan, pushing it open, entered the room. Peter remained at the threshold. A slight female form in a sort of loose, white robe, and with a great deal of dark hair hanging loosely about her, was standing in the middle of the floor, with her back towards them.

The soldier stopped short before he reached her, and said, in a voice of great anguish, "Still the same, sweet bird — sweet bird! still the same." Whereupon, she turned suddenly, and threw her arms about the neck of the officer, with a gesture of fondness and despair, and her frame was agitated as if by a burst of sobs. He held her close to his breast in silence; and honest Peter felt a strange terror creep over him, as he witnessed these mysterious sorrows and endearments.

"Tonight, tonight — and then ten years more — ten long years — another ten years."

The officer and the lady seemed to speak these words together; her voice mingled with his in a musical and fearful wail, like a distant summer wind, in the dead hour of night, wandering through ruins. Then he heard the officer say, alone, in a voice of anguish —

“Upon me be it all, for ever, sweet birdie, upon me.”

And again they seemed to mourn together in the same soft and desolate wail, like sounds of grief heard from a great distance.

Peter was thrilled with horror, but he was also under a strange fascination; and an intense and dreadful curiosity held him fast.

The moon was shining obliquely into the room, and through the window Peter saw the familiar slopes of the Park, sleeping mistily under its shimmer. He could also see the furniture of the room with tolerable distinctness — the old balloon-backed chairs, a four-post bed in a sort of recess, and a rack against the wall, from which hung some military clothes and accoutrements; and the sight of all these homely objects reassured him somewhat, and he could not help feeling unspeakably curious to see the face of the girl whose long hair was streaming over the officer’s epaulet.

Peter, accordingly, coughed, at first slightly, and afterward more loudly, to recall her from her reverie of grief; and, apparently, he succeeded; for she turned round, as did her companion, and both, standing hand in hand, gazed upon him fixedly. He thought he had never seen such large, strange eyes in all his life; and their gaze seemed to chill the very air around him, and arrest the pulses of his heart. An eternity of misery and remorse was in the shadowy faces that looked upon him.

If Peter had taken less whisky by a single thimbleful, it is probable that he would have lost heart altogether before these figures, which seemed every moment to assume a more marked and fearful, though hardly definable, contrast to ordinary human shapes.

“What is it you want with me?” he stammered.

“To bring my lost treasure to the churchyard,” replied the lady, in a silvery voice of more than mortal desolation.

The word “treasure” revived the resolution of Peter, although a cold sweat was covering him, and his hair was bristling with horror; he believed, however, that he was on the brink of fortune, if he could but command nerve to brave the interview to its close.

“And where,” he gasped, “is it hid — where will I find it?”

They both pointed to the sill of the window, through which the moon was shining at the far end of the room, and the soldier said —

"Under that stone."

Peter drew a long breath, and wiped the cold dew from his face, preparatory to passing to the window, where he expected to secure the reward of his protracted terrors. But looking steadfastly at the window, he saw the faint image of a new-born child sitting upon the sill in the moonlight, with its little arms stretched toward him, and a smile so heavenly as he never beheld before.

At sight of this, strange to say, his heart entirely failed him, he looked on the figures that stood near, and beheld them gazing on the infantine form with a smile so guilty and distorted, that he felt as if he were entering alive among the scenery of hell, and shuddering, he cried in an irrepressible agony of horror —

"I'll have nothing to say with you, and nothing to do with you; I don't know what yez are or what yez want iv me, but let me go this minute, every one of yez, in the name of God."

With these words there came a strange rumbling and sighing about Peter's ears; he lost sight of everything, and felt that peculiar and not unpleasant sensation of falling softly, that sometimes supervenes in sleep, ending in a dull shock. After that he had neither dream nor consciousness till he wakened, chill and stiff, stretched between two piles of old rubbish, among the black and roofless walls of the ruined house.

We need hardly mention that the village had put on its wonted air of neglect and decay, or that Peter looked around him in vain for traces of those novelties which had so puzzled and distracted him upon the previous night.

"Ay, ay," said his grandmother, removing her pipe, as he ended his description of the view from the bridge, "sure enough I remember myself, when I was a slip of a girl, these little white cabins among the gardens by the river side. The artillery sogers that was married, or had not room in the barracks, used to be in them, but they're all gone long ago.

"The Lord be merciful to us!" she resumed, when he had described the military procession, "It's often I seen the regiment marchin' into the town, jist as you saw it last night, acushla. Oh, voch, but it makes my heart sore to think iv them days; they were pleasant times, sure enough; but is not it terrible, avick, to think it's what it was the ghost of the rigiment you seen?

The Lord betune us an' harm, for it was nothing else, as sure as I'm sittin' here."

When he mentioned the peculiar physiognomy and figure of the old officer who rode at the head of the regiment —

"That," said the old crone, dogmatically, "was ould Colonel Grimshaw, the Lord presarve us! he's buried in the churchyard iv Chapelizod, and well I remember him, when I was a young thing, an' a cross ould floggin' fellow he was wid the men, an' a devil's boy among the girls — rest his soul!"

"Amen!" said Peter; "it's often I read his tombstone myself; but he's a long time dead."

"Sure, I tell you he died when I was no more nor a slip iv a girl — the Lord betune us and harm!"

"I'm afeard it is what I'm not long for this world myself, afther seeing such a sight as that," said Peter, fearfully.

"Nonsinse, avourneen," retorted his grandmother, indignantly, though she had herself misgivings on the subject; "sure there was Phil Doolan, the ferryman, that seen black Ann Scanlan in his own boat, and what harm ever kem of it?"

Peter proceeded with his narrative, but when he came to the description of the house, in which his adventure had had so sinister a conclusion, the old woman was at fault.

"I know the house and the ould walls well, an' I can remember the time there was a roof on it, and the doors an' windows in it, but it had a bad name about being haunted, but by who, or for what, I forget intirely."

"Did you ever hear was there goold or silver there?" he inquired.

"No, no, avick, don't be thinking about the likes; take a fool's advice, and never go next to near them ugly black walls again the longest day you have to live; an' I'd take my davy, it's what it's the same word the priest himself id be afther sayin' to you if you wor to ax his raverence consarnin' it, for it's plain to be seen it was nothing good you seen there, and there's neither luck nor grace about it."

Peter's adventure made no little noise in the neighbourhood, as the reader may well suppose; and a few evenings after it, being on an errand to old Major Vandeleur, who lived in a snug oldfashioned house, close by the river, under a perfect bower of ancient trees, he was called on to relate the story in the parlour.

The Major was, as I have said, an old man; he was small, lean, and upright, with a mahogany complexion, and a wooden inflexibility of face; he was a man, besides, of few words, and if *he* was old, it follows plainly that his mother was older still. Nobody could guess or tell *how* old, but it was admitted that her own generation had long passed away, and that she had not a competitor left. She had French blood in her veins, and although she did not retain her charms quite so well as Ninon de l'Enclos, she was in full possession of all her mental activity, and talked quite enough for herself and the Major.

"So, Peter," she said, "you have seen the dear, old Royal Irish again in the streets of Chapelizod. Make him a tumbler of punch, Frank; and Peter, sit down, and while you take it let us have the story."

Peter accordingly, seated, near the door, with a tumbler of the nectarian stimulant steaming beside him, proceeded with marvellous courage, considering they had no light but the uncertain glare of the fire, to relate with minute particularity his awful adventure. The old lady listened at first with a smile of goodnatured incredulity; her cross-examination touching the drinking-bout at Palmerstown had been teazing, but as the narrative proceeded she became attentive, and at length absorbed, and once or twice she uttered ejaculations of pity or awe. When it was over, the old lady looked with a somewhat sad and stern abstraction on the table, patting her cat assiduously meanwhile, and then suddenly looking upon her son, the Major, she said —

"Frank, as sure as I live he has seen the wicked Captain Devereux."

The Major uttered an inarticulate expression of wonder.

"The house was precisely that he has described. I have told you the story often, as I heard it from your dear grandmother, about the poor young lady he ruined, and the dreadful suspicion about the little baby. *She*, poor thing, died in that house heartbroken, and you know he was shot shortly after in a duel."

This was the only light that Peter ever received respecting his adventure. It was supposed, however, that he still clung to the hope that treasure of some sort was hidden about the old house, for he was often seen lurking about its walls, and at last his fate overtook him, poor fellow, in the pursuit;

for climbing near the summit one day, his holding gave way, and he fell upon the hard uneven ground, fracturing a leg and a rib, and after a short interval died, and he, like the other heroes of these true tales, lies buried in the little churchyard of Chapelizod.

*

THE MYSTERIOUS LODGER

PART I

About the year 1822 I resided in a comfortable and roomy old house, the exact locality of which I need not particularise, further than to say that it was not very far from Old Brompton, in the immediate neighbourhood, or rather continuity (as even my Connemara readers perfectly well know), of the renowned city of London.

Though this house was roomy and comfortable, as I have said, it was not, by any means, a handsome one. It was composed of dark red brick, with small windows, and thick white sashes; a porch, too — none of your flimsy trelliswork, but a solid projection of the same vermillion masonry — surmounted by a leaded balcony, with heavy, half-rotten balustrades, darkened the hall-door with a perennial gloom. The mansion itself stood in a walled enclosure, which had, perhaps, from the date of the erection itself, been devoted to shrubs and flowers. Some of the former had grown there almost to the dignity of trees; and two dark little yews stood at each side of the porch, like swart and inauspicious dwarfs, guarding the entrance of an enchanted castle. Not that my domicile in any respect deserved the comparison: it had no reputation as a haunted house; if it ever had any ghosts, nobody remembered them. Its history was not known to me: it may have witnessed plots, cabals, and forgeries, bloody suicides and cruel murders. It was certainly old enough to have become acquainted with iniquity; a small stone slab, under the balustrade, and over the arch of the porch I mentioned, had the date 1672, and a half-effaced coat of arms, which I might have deciphered any day, had I taken the trouble to get a ladder, but always put it off. All I can say for the house is, that it was well stricken in years, with a certain air of sombre comfort about it; contained a vast number of rooms and closets; and, what was of far greater importance, was got by me a dead bargain.

Its individuality attracted me. I grew fond of it for itself, and for its associations, until other associations of a hateful kind first disturbed, and then destroyed, their charm. I forgave its dull red brick, and pinched white windows, for the sake of the beloved and cheerful faces within: its ugliness was softened by its age; and its sombre evergreens, and mossgrown stone flower-pots, were relieved by the brilliant hues of a thousand gay and graceful flowers that peeped among them, or nodded over the grass.

Within that old house lay my life's treasure! I had a darling little girl of nine, and another little darling — a boy — just four years of age; and dearer, unspeakably, than either — a wife — the prettiest, gayest, best little wife in all London. When I tell you that our income was scarcely £380 a-year, you will perceive that our establishment cannot have been a magnificent one; yet, I do assure you, we were more comfortable than a great many lords, and happier, I dare say, than the whole peerage put together.

This happiness was not, however, what it ought to have been. The reader will understand at once, and save me a world of moralising circumlocution, when he learns, bluntly and nakedly, that, among all my comforts and blessings, I was an infidel.

I had not been without religious training; on the contrary, more than average pains had been bestowed upon my religious instruction from my earliest childhood. My father, a good, plain, country clergyman, had worked hard to make me as good as himself; and had succeeded, at least, in training me in godly habits. He died, however, when I was but twelve years of age; and fate had long before deprived me of the gentle care of a mother. A boarding-school, followed by a college life, where nobody having any very direct interest in realising in my behalf the ancient blessing, that in fulness of time I should "die a good old man," I was left very much to my own devices, which, in truth, were none of the best.

Among these were the study of Voltaire, Tom Paine, Hume, Shelley, and the whole school of infidels, poetical as well as prose. This pursuit, and the all but blasphemous vehemence with which I gave myself up to it, was, perhaps, partly reactionary. A somewhat injudicious austerity and precision had indissolubly associated in my childish days the ideas of restraint and gloom with religion. I bore it a grudge; and so, when I became thus early my own master, I set about paying off, after my own fashion, the old score I owed it. I was besides, like every other young infidel whom it has been my fate to meet, a conceited coxcomb. A smattering of literature, without any real knowledge, and a great assortment of all the cut-and-dry flippancies of the school I had embraced, constituted my intellectual stock in trade. I was, like most of my school of philosophy, very proud of being an unbeliever;

and fancied myself, in the complacency of my wretched ignorance, at an immeasurable elevation above the churchgoing, Bible-reading herd, whom I treated with a goodhumoured superciliousness which I thought vastly indulgent.

My wife was an excellent little creature and truly pious. She had married me in the full confidence that my levity was merely put on, and would at once give way before the influence she hoped to exert upon my mind. Poor little thing! she deceived herself. I allowed her, indeed, to do entirely as she pleased; but for myself, I carried my infidelity to the length of an absolute superstition. I made an ostentation of it. I would rather have been in a "hell" than in a church on Sunday; and though I did not prevent my wife's instilling her own principles into the minds of our children, I, in turn, took especial care to deliver mine upon all occasions in their hearing, by which means I trusted to sow the seeds of that unprejudiced scepticism in which I prided myself, at least as early as my good little partner dropped those of her own gentle "superstition" into their infant minds. Had I had my own absurd and impious will in this matter, my children should have had absolutely no religious education whatsoever, and been left wholly unshackled to choose for themselves among all existing systems, infidelity included, precisely as chance, fancy, or interest might hereafter determine.

It is not to be supposed that such a state of things did not afford her great uneasiness. Nevertheless, we were so very fond of one another, and in our humble way enjoyed so many blessings, that we were as entirely happy as any pair can be without the holy influence of religious sympathy.

But the even flow of prosperity which had for so long gladdened my little household was not destined to last for ever. It was ordained that I should experience the bitter truth of more than one of the wise man's proverbs, and first, especially, of that which declares that "he that hateth suretyship is sure." I found myself involved (as how many have been before) by a "d — d goodnatured friend," for more than two hundred pounds. This agreeable intelligence was conveyed to me in an attorney's letter, which, to obviate unpleasant measures, considerately advised my paying the entire amount within just one week of the date of his pleasant epistle. Had I been called upon within that time to produce the Pitt diamond, or to make title to the Buckingham estates, the demand would have been just as easily complied with.

I have no wish to bore my reader further with this little worry — a very serious one to me, however — and it will be enough to mention, that the kindness of a friend extricated me from the clutches of the law by a timely advance, which, however, I was bound to replace within two years. To enable me to fulfill this engagement, my wife and I, after repeated consultations, resolved upon the course which resulted in the odd and unpleasant consequences which form the subject of this narrative.

We resolved to advertise for a lodger, with or without board, &c.; and by resolutely submitting, for a single year, to the economy we had prescribed for ourselves, as well as to the annoyance of a stranger's intrusion, we calculated that at the end of that term we should have liquidated our debt.

Accordingly, without losing time, we composed an advertisement in the most tempting phraseology we could devise, consistently with that economic laconism which the cost per line in the columns of the *Times* newspaper imposes upon the rhetoric of the advertising public.

Somehow we were unlucky; for although we repeated our public notification three times in the course of a fortnight, we had but two applications. The one was from a clergyman in ill health — a man of great ability and zealous piety, whom we both knew by reputation, and who has since been called to his rest. My good little wife was very anxious that we should close with his offer, which was very considerably under what we had fixed upon; and I have no doubt that she was influenced by the hope that his talents and zeal might exert a happy influence upon my stubborn and unbelieving heart. For my part, his religious character displeased me. I did not wish my children's heads to be filled with mythic dogmas — for so I judged the doctrines of our holy faith — and instinctively wished him away. I therefore declined his offer; and I have often since thought not quite so graciously as I ought to have done. The other offer — if so it can be called — was so very inadequate that we could not entertain it.

I was now beginning to grow seriously uneasy — our little project, so far from bringing in the gains on which we had calculated, had put me considerably out of pocket; for, independently of the cost of the advertisement I have mentioned, there were sundry little expenses involved in preparing for the meet reception of our expected inmate, which, under ordinary circumstances, we should not have dreamed of. Matters were in this posture, when an occurrence took place which immediately revived my flagging hopes.

As we had no superfluity of servants, our children were early obliged to acquire habits of independence; and my little girl, then just nine years of age, was frequently consigned with no other care than that of her own good sense, to the companionship of a little band of playmates, pretty similarly circumstanced, with whom it was her wont to play. Having one fine summer afternoon gone out as usual with these little companions, she did not return quite so soon as we had expected her; when she did so, she was out of breath, and excited.

"Oh, papa," she said, "I have seen such a nice old, kind gentleman, and he told me to tell you that he has a particular friend who wants a lodging in a quiet place, and that he thinks your house would suit him exactly, and ever so much more; and, look here, he gave me this."

She opened her hand, and shewed me a sovereign.

"Well, this does look promisingly," I said, my wife and I having first exchanged a smiling glance.

"And what kind of gentleman was he, dear?" inquired she. "Was he well dressed — whom was he like?"

"He was not like any one that I know," she answered; "but he had very nice new clothes on, and he was one of the fattest men I ever saw; and I am sure he is sick, for he looks very pale, and he had a crutch beside him."

"Dear me, how strange!" exclaimed my wife; though, in truth there was nothing very wonderful in the matter. "Go on, child," I said; "let us hear it all out."

"Well, papa, he had such an immense yellow waistcoat! — I never did see such a waistcoat," she resumed; "and he was sitting or leaning, I can't say which, against the bank of the green lane; I suppose to rest himself, for he seems very weak, poor gentleman!"

"And how did you happen to speak to him?" asked my wife.

"When we were passing by, none of us saw him at all but I suppose he heard them talking to me, and saying my name; for he said, 'Fanny — little Fanny — so, that's your name — come here child, I have a question to ask you.'"

"And so you went to him?" I said.

"Yes," she continued, "he beckoned to me, and I did go over to him, but not very near, for I was greatly afraid of him at first."

"Afraid! dear, and why afraid?" asked I.

"I was afraid, because he looked very old, very frightful, and as if he would hurt me."

"What was there so old and frightful about him?" I asked.

She paused and reflected a little, and then said —

"His face was very large and pale, and it was looking upwards: it seemed very angry, I thought, but maybe it was angry from pain; and sometimes one side of it used to twitch and tremble for a minute, and then to grow quite still again; and all the time he was speaking to me, he never looked at me once, but always kept his face and eyes turned upwards; but his voice was very soft, and he called me little Fanny, and gave me this pound to buy toys with; so I was not so frightened in a little time, and then he sent a long message to you, papa, and told me if I forgot it he would beat me; but I knew he was only joking, so that did not frighten me either."

"And what was the message, my girl?" I asked, patting her pretty head with my hand.

"Now, let me remember it all," she said, reflectively; "for he told it to me twice. He asked me if there was a good bedroom at the top of the house, standing by itself — and you know there is, so I told him so; it was exactly the kind of room that he described. And then he said that his friend would pay two hundred pounds a-year for that bedroom, his board and attendance; and he told me to ask you, and have your answer when he should next meet me."

"Two hundred pounds!" ejaculated my poor little wife; "why that is nearly twice as much as we expected."

"But did he say that his friend was sick, or very old; or that he had any servant to be supported also?" I asked.

"Oh! no; he told me that he was quite able to take care of himself, and that he had, I think he called it, an asthma, but nothing else the matter; and that he would give no trouble at all, and that any friend who came to see him, he would see, not in the house, but only in the garden."

"In the garden!" I echoed, laughing in spite of myself.

"Yes, indeed he said so; and he told me to say that he would pay one hundred pounds when he came here, and the next hundred in six months, and so on," continued she.

"Oh, ho! half-yearly in advance — better and better," said I.

"And he bid me say, too, if you should ask about his character, that he is just as good as the master of the house himself," she added; "and when he said that, he laughed a little."

"Why, if he gives us a hundred pounds in advance," I answered, turning to my wife, "we are safe enough; for he will not find half that value in plate and jewels in the entire household, if he is disposed to rob us. So I see no reason against closing with the offer, should it be seriously meant — do you, dear?"

"Quite the contrary, love," said she. "I think it most desirable — indeed, most *providential*."

"Providential! my dear little bigot!" I repeated, with a smile. "Well, be it so. I call it *lucky* merely; but, perhaps, you are happier in your faith, than I in my philosophy. Yes, you are *grateful* for the chance that I only rejoice at. You receive it as a proof of a divine and tender love — I as an accident. Delusions are often more elevating than truth."

And so saying, I kissed away the saddened cloud that for a moment overcast her face.

"Papa, he bid me be sure to have an answer for him when we meet again," resumed the child. "What shall I say to him when he asks me?"

"Say that we agree to his proposal, my dear — or stay," I said, addressing my wife, "may it not be prudent to reduce what the child says to writing, and accept the offer so? This will prevent misunderstanding, as she may possibly have made some mistake."

My wife agreed, and I wrote a brief note, stating that I was willing to receive an inmate upon the terms recounted by little Fanny, and which I distinctly specified, so that no mistake could possibly arise owing to the vagueness of what lawyers term a parole agreement. This important memorandum I placed in the hands of my little girl, who was to deliver it whenever the old gentleman in the yellow waistcoat should chance to meet her. And all these arrangements completed, I awaited the issue of the affair with as much patience as I could affect. Meanwhile, my wife and I talked it over incessantly; and she, good little soul, almost wore herself to death in settling and unsettling the furniture and decorations of our expected inmate's apartments. Days passed away — days of hopes deferred, tedious and anxious. We were beginning to despond again, when one morning our little girl ran into the breakfast-parlour, more excited even than she had been before, and fresh from a new interview with the gentleman in the yellow waistcoat. She had encountered him suddenly, pretty nearly where she had met him before, and the result was, that he had read the little note I have mentioned, and desired the child to inform me that his friend, *Mr. Smith*, would take possession of the apartments I proposed setting, on the terms agreed between us, that very evening.

"This evening!" exclaimed my wife and I simultaneously — *I* full of the idea of making a first instalment on the day following; *she*, of the hundred-and-one preparations which still remained to be completed.

"And so Smith is his name! Well, that does not tell us much," said I; "but where did you meet your friend on this occasion, and how long is it since?"

"Near the corner of the wallflower lane (so we indicated one which abounded in these fragrant plants); he was leaning with his back against the old tree you cut my name on, and his crutch was under his arm."

"But how long ago?" I urged.

"Only this moment; I ran home as fast as I could," she replied.

"Why, you little blockhead, you should have told me that at first," I cried, snatching up my hat, and darting away in pursuit of the yellow waistcoat, whose acquaintance I not unnaturally coveted, inasmuch as a man who, for the first time, admits a stranger into his house, on the footing of permanent residence, desires generally to know a little more about him than that his name is Smith.

The place indicated was only, as we say, a step away; and as yellow waistcoat was fat, and used a crutch, I calculated on easily overtaking him. I was, however, disappointed; crutch, waistcoat, and all had disappeared. I climbed to the top of the wall, and from this commanding point of view made a sweeping observation — but in vain. I returned home, cursing my ill-luck, the child's dulness, and the fat old fellow's activity.

I need hardly say that Mr. Smith, in all his aspects, moral, social, physical, and monetary, formed a fruitful and interesting topic of speculation during dinner. How many phantom Smiths, short and long, stout and lean, ill-tempered and well-tempered — rich, respectable, or highly dangerous merchants, spies, forgers, nabobs, swindlers, danced before us, in the endless mazes of fanciful conjecture, during that anxious *tête-à-tête*, which was probably to be interrupted by the arrival of the gentleman himself.

My wife and I puzzled over the problem as people would over the possible *dénouement* of a French novel; and at last, by mutual consent, we came to the conclusion that Smith could, and would turn out to be no other than the goodnatured valetudinarian in the yellow waistcoat himself, a humorist, as was evident enough, and a millionaire, as we unhesitatingly pronounced, who had no immediate relatives, and as I hoped, and my wife "was certain," taken a decided fancy to our little Fanny; I patted the child's head with something akin to pride, as I thought of the magnificent, though remote possibilities, in store for her.

Meanwhile, hour after hour stole away. It was a beautiful autumn evening, and the amber lustre of the declining sun fell softly upon the yews and flowers, and gave an air, half melancholy, half cheerful, to the dark-red brick piers surmounted with their cracked and grass-grown stone urns, and furnished with the light foliage of untended creeping plants. Down the short broad walk leading to this sombre entrance, my eye constantly wandered; but no impatient rattle on the latch, no battering at the gate, indicated the presence of a visited, and the lazy bell hung dumbly among the honeysuckles.

"When will he come? Yellow waistcoat promised *this evening*! It has been evening a good hour and a half, and yet he is not here. When will he come? It will soon be dark — the evening will have passed — will he come at all?"

Such were the uneasy speculations which began to trouble us. Redder and duskier grew the light of the setting sun, till it saddened into the mists of night. Twilight came, and then darkness, and still no arrival, no summons at the gate. I would not admit even to my wife the excess of my own impatience. I could, however, stand it no longer; so I took my hat and walked to the gate, where I stood by the side of the public road, watching every vehicle and person that approached, in a fever of expectation. Even these, however, began to fail me, and the road grew comparatively quiet and deserted. Having kept guard like a sentinel for more than half an hour, I returned in no very good humour, with the punctuality of an expected inmate — ordered the servant to draw the curtains and secure the hall-door; and so my wife and I sate down to our disconsolate cup of tea. It must have been about ten o'clock, and we were both sitting silently — she working, I looking moodily into a paper — and neither of us any longer entertaining a hope that anything but disappointment would come of the matter, when a sudden tapping, very loud and sustained, upon the window pane, startled us both in an instant from our reveries.

I am not sure whether I mentioned before that the sitting-room we occupied was upon the ground-floor, and the sward came close under the window. I drew the curtains, and opened the shutters with a revived hope; and looking out, saw a very tall thin figure, a good deal wrapped up, standing about a yard before me, and motioning with head and hand impatiently towards the hall-door. Though the night was clear, there was no moon, and therefore I could see no more than the black outline, like that of an *ombre chinoise* figure, signing to me with mop and moe. In a moment I was at the hall-door, candle in hand; the stranger stept in — his long fingers clutched in the handle of a valise, and a bag which trailed upon the ground behind him.

The light fell full upon him. He wore a long, ill-made, black surtout, buttoned across, and which wrinkled and bagged about his lank figure; his hat was none of the best, and rather broad in the brim; a sort of white woollen muffler enveloped the lower part of his face; a pair of prominent green goggles, fenced round with leather, completely concealed his eyes; and nothing of the genuine man, but a little bit of yellow forehead, and a small transverse segment of equally yellow cheek and nose, encountered the curious gaze of your humble servant.

"You are — I suppose" — I began; for I really was a little doubtful about my man.

"Mr. Smith — the same; be good enough to show me to my bedchamber," interrupted the stranger, brusquely, and in a tone which, spite of the muffler that enveloped his mouth, was sharp and grating enough.

"Ha! — Mr. Smith — so I supposed. I hope you may find everything as comfortable as we desire to make it— "

I was about making a speech, but was cut short by a slight bow, and a decisive gesture of the hand in the direction of the staircase. It was plain that the stranger hated ceremony.

Together, accordingly, we mounted the staircase; he still pulling his luggage after him, and striding lightly up without articulating a word; and on reaching his bedroom, he immediately removed his hat, showing a sinister, black scratch-wig underneath, and then began unrolling the mighty woolen wrapping of his mouth and chin.

"Come," thought I, "we *shall* see something of your face after all."

This something, however, proved to be very little; for under his muffler was a loose cravat, which stood up in front of his chin and upon his mouth, he wore a respirator — an instrument which I had never seen before, and of the use of which I was wholly ignorant.

There was something so excessively odd in the effect of this piece of unknown mechanism upon his mouth, surmounted by the huge goggles which encased his eyes, that I believe I should have laughed outright, were it not for a certain unpleasant and peculiar impressiveness in the *tout ensemble* of the narrow-chested, long-limbed, and cadaverous figure in black. As it was, we stood looking at one another in silence for several seconds.

"Thank you, sir," at last he said, abruptly. "I shan't want anything whatever tonight; if you can only spare me this candle."

I assented; and, becoming more communicative, he added —

"I am, though an invalid, an independent sort of fellow enough. I am a bit of a philosopher; I am my own servant, and, I hope, my own master, too. I rely upon myself in matters of the body and of the mind. I place valets and priests in the same category — fellows who live by our laziness, intellectual or corporeal. I am a Voltaire, without his luxuries — a Robinson Crusoe, without his Bible — an anchorite, without a superstition — in short, my indulgence is asceticism, and my faith infidelity. Therefore, I shan't disturb your servants much with my bell, nor yourselves with my psalmody. You have got a rational lodger, who knows how to attend upon himself."

During this singular address he was drawing off his ill-fitting black gloves, and when he had done so, a banknote, which had been slipped underneath for safety, remained in his hand.

"Punctuality, sir, is one of my poor pleasures," he said; "will you allow me to enjoy it now? Tomorrow you may acknowledge this; I should not rest were you to decline it."

He extended his bony and discoloured fingers, and placed the note in my hand. Oh, Fortune and Plutus! It was a £100 banknote.

“Pray, not one word, my dear sir,” he continued, unbending still further; “it is simply done pursuant to agreement. We shall know one another better, I hope, in a little time; you will find me always equally punctual. At present pray give yourself no further trouble; I require nothing more. Good night.”

I returned the valediction, closed his door, and groped my way down the stairs. It was not until I had nearly reached the hall, that I recollected that I had omitted to ask our new inmate at what hour he would desire to be called in the morning, and so I groped my way back again. As I reached the lobby on which his chamber opened, I perceived a long line of light issuing from the partially-opened door, within which stood Mr. Smith, the same odd figure I had just left; while along the boards was creeping towards him across the lobby, a great, big-headed, buff-coloured cat. I had never seen this ugly animal before; and it had reached the threshold of his door, arching its back, and rubbing itself on the post, before either appeared conscious of my approach, when, with an angry growl, it sprang into the stranger’s room.

“What do you want?” he demanded, sharply, standing in the doorway.

I explained my errand.

“I shall call myself,” was his sole reply; and he shut the door with a crash that indicated no very pleasurable emotions.

I cared very little about my lodger’s temper. The stealthy rustle of his banknote in my waistcoat pocket was music enough to sweeten the harshest tones of his voice, and to keep alive a cheerful good humour in my heart; and although there was, indisputably, something queer about him, I was, on the whole, very well pleased with my bargain.

The next day our new inmate did not ring his bell until noon. As soon as he had had some breakfast, of which he very sparingly partook, he told the servant that, for the future, he desired that a certain quantity of milk and bread might be left outside his door; and this being done, he would dispense with regular meals. He desired, too, that, on my return, I should be acquainted that he wished to see me in his own room at about nine o’clock; and, meanwhile, he directed that he should be left undisturbed. I found my little wife full of astonishment at Mr. Smith’s strange frugality and seclusion, and very curious to learn the object of the interview he had desired with me. At nine o’clock I repaired to his room.

I found him in precisely the costume in which I had left him — the same green goggles — the same muffling of the mouth, except that being now no more than a broadly-folded black silk handkerchief, very loose, and covering even the lower part of the nose, it was obviously intended for the sole purpose of concealment. It was plain I was not to see more of his features than he had chosen to disclose at our first interview. The effect was as if the lower part of his face had some hideous wound or sore. He closed the door with his own hand on my entrance, nodded slightly, and took his seat. I expected him to begin, but he was so long silent that I was at last constrained to address him.

I said, for want of something more to the purpose, that I hoped he had not been tormented by the strange cat the night before.

“What cat?” he asked, abruptly; “what the plague do you mean?”

“Why, I certainly did see a cat go into your room last night,” I resumed.

“Hey, and what if you did — though I fancy you dreamed it — I’m not afraid of a cat; are you?” he interrupted, tartly.

At this moment there came a low growling mew from the closet which opened from the room in which we sat.

“Talk of the devil,” said I, pointing towards the closet. My companion, without any exact change of expression, looked, I thought, somehow still more sinister and lowering; and I felt for a moment a sort of superstitious misgiving, which made the rest of the sentence die away on my lips.

Perhaps Mr. Smith perceived this, for he said, in a tone calculated to reassure me —

“Well, sir, I think I am bound to tell you that I like my apartments very well; they suit me, and I shall probably be your tenant for much longer than at first you anticipated.”

I expressed my gratification.

He then began to talk, something in the strain in which he had spoken of his own peculiarities of habit and thinking upon the previous evening. He disposed of all classes and denominations of superstition with an easy sarcastic slang, which for me was so captivating, that I soon lost all reserve, and found myself listening and suggesting by turns — acquiescent and pleased — sometimes hazarding dissent; but whenever I did, foiled and floored by a few pointed satirical sentences, whose sophistry, for such I must now believe it, confounded me with a rapidity which, were it not for the admiration with which he had insensibly inspired me, would have piqued and irritated my vanity not a little.

While this was going on, from time to time the mewing and growling of a cat within the closet became more and more audible. At last these sounds became so loud, accompanied by scratching at the door, that I paused in the midst of a sentence, and observed —

"There certainly is a cat shut up in the closet?"

"Is there?" he ejaculated, in a surprised tone; "nay, I do not hear it."

He rose abruptly and approached the door; his back was towards me, but I observed he raised the goggles which usually covered his eyes, and looked steadfastly at the closet door. The angry sounds all died away into a low, protracted growl, which again subsided into silence. He continued in the same attitude for some moments, and then returned.

"I do not hear it," he said, as he resumed his place, and taking a book from his capacious pocket, asked me if I had seen it before? I never had, and this surprised me, for I had flattered myself that I knew, at least by name, every work published in England during the last fifty years in favour of that philosophy in which we both delighted. The book, moreover, was an odd one, as both its title and table of contents demonstrated.

While we were discoursing upon these subjects, I became more and more distinctly conscious of a new class of sounds proceeding from the same closet. I plainly heard a measured and heavy tread, accompanied by the tapping of some hard and heavy substance like the end of a staff, pass up and down the floor — first, as it seemed, stealthily, and then more and more unconcealedly. I began to feel very uncomfortable and suspicious. As the noise proceeded, and became more and more unequivocal, Mr. Smith abruptly rose, opened the closet door, just enough to admit his own lath-like person, and steal within the threshold for some seconds. What he did I could not see — I felt conscious he had an associate concealed there; and though my eyes remained fixed on the book, I could not avoid listening for some audible words, or signal of caution. I heard, however, nothing of the kind. Mr. Smith turned back — walked a step or two towards me, and said —

"I fancied I heard a sound from that closet, but there is nothing — nothing — nothing whatever; bring the candle, let us both look."

I obeyed with some little trepidation, for I fully anticipated that I should detect the intruder, of whose presence my own ears had given me, for nearly half an hour, the most unequivocal proofs. We entered the closet together; it contained but a few chairs and a small spider table. At the far end of the room there was a sort of grey woollen cloth upon the floor, and a bundle of something underneath it. I looked jealously at it, and half thought I could trace the outline of a human figure; but, if so, it was perfectly motionless.

"Some of my poor wardrobe," he muttered, as he pointed his lean finger in the direction. "It did not sound like a cat, did it — hey — did it?" he muttered; and without attending to my answer, he went about the apartment, clapping his hands, and crying, "Hish — hish — hish!"

The game, however, whatever it was, did not start. As I entered I had seen, however, a large crutch reposing against the wall in the corner opposite to the door. This was the only article in the room, except that I have mentioned, with which I was not familiar. With the exception of our two selves, there was not a living creature to be seen there; no shadow but ours upon the bare walls; no feet but our own upon the comfortless floor.

I had never before felt so strange and unpleasant a sensation.

"There is nothing unusual in the room but that crutch," I said.

"What crutch, you dolt? I see no crutch," he ejaculated, in a tone of sudden but suppressed fury.

"Why, *that* crutch," I answered (for somehow I neither felt nor resented his rudeness), turning and pointing to the spot where I had seen it. It was gone! — it was neither there nor anywhere else. It must have been an illusion — rather an odd one, to be sure. And yet I could at this moment, with a safe conscience, *swear* that I never saw an object more distinctly than I had seen it but a second before.

My companion was muttering fast to himself as we withdrew; his presence rather scared than reassured me; and I felt something almost amounting to horror, as, holding the candle above his cadaverous and sable figure, he stood at his threshold, while I descended the stairs, and said, in a sort of whisper —

"Why, but that I am, like yourself, a philosopher, I should say that your house is — is — a — ha! ha! ha! — HAUNTED!"

"You look very pale, my love," said my wife, as I entered the drawingroom, where she had been long awaiting my return. "Nothing unpleasant has happened?"

"Nothing, nothing, I assure you. Pale! — *do* I look pale?" I answered. "We are excellent friends, I assure you. So far from having had the smallest disagreement, there is every prospect of our agreeing but too well, as you will say; for I find that he holds all my opinions upon speculative subjects. We have had a great deal of conversation this evening, I assure you; and I never met, I think, so scholarlike and able a man."

"I am sorry for it, dearest," she said, sadly. "The greater his talents, if such be his opinions, the more dangerous a companion is he."

We turned, however, to more cheerful topics, and it was late before we retired to rest. I believe it was pride — perhaps only vanity — but, at all events, some obstructive and stubborn instinct of my nature, which I could not overcome — that prevented my telling my wife the odd occurrences which had disturbed my visit to our guest. I was unable or ashamed to confess that so slight a matter had disturbed me; and, above all, that any accident could possibly have clouded, even for a moment, the frosty clearness of my pure and lofty scepticism with the shadows of superstition.

Almost every day seemed to develop some new eccentricity of our strange guest. His dietary consisted, without any variety or relief, of the monotonous bread and milk with which he started; his bed had not been made for nearly a week; nobody had been admitted into his room since my visit, just described; and he never ventured down stairs, or out of doors, until after nightfall, when he used sometimes to glide swiftly round our little enclosed shrubbery, and at others stand quite motionless, composed, as if in an attitude of deep attention. After employing about an hour in this way, he would return, and steal up stairs to his room, when he would shut himself up, and not be seen again until the next night — or, it might be, the night after that — when, perhaps, he would repeat his odd excursion.

Strange as his habits were, their eccentricity was all upon the side least troublesome to us. He required literally no attendance; and as to his occasional night ramble, even *it* caused not the slightest disturbance of our routine hour for securing the house and locking up the hall-door for the night, inasmuch as he had invariably retired before that hour arrived.

All this stimulated curiosity, and, in no small degree, that of my wife, who, notwithstanding her vigilance and her anxiety to see our strange inmate, had been hitherto foiled by a series of cross accidents. We were sitting together somewhere about ten o'clock at night, when there came a tap at the room-door. We had just been discussing the unaccountable Smith; and I felt a sheepish consciousness that he might be himself at the door, and have possibly even overheard our speculation — some of them anything but complimentary, respecting himself.

"Come in," cried, I, with an effort; and the tall form of our lodger glided into the room. My wife was positively frightened, and stood looking at him, as he advanced, with a stare of manifest apprehension, and even recoiled mechanically, and caught my hand.

Sensitiveness, however, was not his fault: he made a kind of stiff nod as I mumbled an introduction; and seating himself unasked, began at once to chat in that odd, offhand, and sneering style, in which he excelled, and which had, as he wielded it, a sort of fascination of which I can pretend to convey no idea.

My wife's alarm subsided, and although she still manifestly felt some sort of misgiving about our visitor, she yet listened to his conversation, and, spite of herself, soon began to enjoy it. He stayed for nearly half an hour. But although he glanced at a great variety of topics, he did not approach the subject of religion. As soon as he was gone, my wife delivered judgment upon him in form. She admitted he was agreeable; but then he was such an unnatural, awful-looking object: there was, besides, something indescribably frightful, she thought, in his manner — the very tone of his voice was strange and hateful; and, on the whole, she felt unutterably relieved at his departure.

A few days after, on my return, I found my poor little wife agitated and dispirited. Mr. Smith had paid her a visit, and brought with him a book, which he stated he had been reading, and which contained some references to the Bible which he begged of her to explain in that profounder and less obvious sense in which they had been cited. This she had endeavoured to do; and affecting to be much gratified by her satisfactory exposition, he had requested her to reconcile some discrepancies which he said had often troubled him when reading the Scriptures. Some of them were quite new to my good little wife; they startled and even horrified her. He pursued this theme, still pretending only to seek for information to quiet his own doubts, while in reality he was sowing in her mind the seeds of the first perturbations that had ever troubled the sources of her peace. He had been with her, she thought, no more than a quarter of an hour; but he had contrived to leave her abundant topics on which to ruminate for days. I found her shocked and horrified at the doubts which this potent Magus had summoned from the pit — doubts which she knew not how to combat, and from the torment of which she could not escape.

“He has made me very miserable with his deceitful questions. I never thought of them before; and, merciful Heaven! I cannot answer them! What am I to do? My serenity is gone; I shall never be happy again.”

In truth, she was so very miserable, and, as it seemed to me, so disproportionately excited, that, inconsistent in me as the task would have been, I would gladly have explained away her difficulties, and restored to her mind its wonted confidence and serenity, had I possessed sufficient knowledge for the purpose. I really pitied her, and heartily wished Mr. Smith, for the nonce, at the devil.

I observed after this that my wife’s spirits appeared permanently affected. There was a constantly-recurring anxiety, and I thought something was lying still more heavily at her heart than the uncertainties inspired by our lodger.

One evening, as we two were sitting together, after a long silence, she suddenly laid her hand upon my arm, and said —

“Oh, Richard, my darling! would to God you could pray for me!”

There was something so agitated, and even terrified, in her manner, that I was absolutely startled. I urged her to disclose whatever preyed upon her mind.

“You can’t sympathise with me — you can’t help me — you can scarcely compassionate me in my misery! Oh, dearest Richard! Some evil influence has been gaining upon my heart, dulling and destroying my convictions, killing all my holy affections, and — and absolutely transforming me. I look inward upon myself with amazement, with terror — with — oh, God! — with actual despair!”

Saying this, she threw herself on her knees, and wept an agonised flood of tears, with her head reposing in my lap.

Poor little thing, my heart bled for her! But what could I do or say?

All I could suggest was what I really thought, that she was unwell — hysterical — and needed to take better care of her precious self; that her change of feeling was fancied, not real; and that a few days would restore her to her old health and former spirits and serenity.

"And sometimes," she resumed, after I had ended a consolatory discussion, which it was but too manifest had fallen unprofitably upon her ear, "such dreadful, impious thoughts come into my mind, whether I choose it or not; they come, and stay, and return, strive as I may; and I can't pray against them. They are forced upon me with the strength of an independent will; and oh! — horrible — frightful — they blaspheme the character of God himself. They upbraid the Almighty upon his throne, and I can't pray against them; there is something in me now that resists prayer."

There was such a real and fearful anguish in the agitation of my gentle companion, that it shook my very soul within me, even while I was affecting to make light of her confessions. I had never before witnessed a struggle at all like this, and I was awestruck at the spectacle.

At length she became comparatively calm. I did gradually succeed, though very imperfectly, in reassuring her. She strove hard against her depression, and recovered a little of her wonted cheerfulness.

After a while, however, the cloud returned. She grew sad and earnest, though no longer excited; and entreated, or rather implored, of me to grant her one special favour, and this was, to avoid the society of our lodger.

"I never," she said, "could understand till now the instinctive dread with which poor Margaret, in *Faust*, shrinks from the hateful presence of Mephistopheles. I now feel it in myself. The dislike and suspicion I first felt for that man — Smith, or whatever else he may call himself — has grown into literal detestation and terror. I hate him — I am afraid of him — I never knew what anguish of mind was until he entered our doors; and would to God — would to God he were gone."

I reasoned with her — kissed her — laughed at her; but could not dissipate, in the least degree, the intense and preternatural horror with which she had grown to regard the poor philosophic invalid, who was probably, at that moment, poring over some metaphysical book in his solitary bedchamber.

The circumstance I am about to mention will give you some notion of the extreme to which these excited feelings had worked upon her nerves. I was that night suddenly awakened by a piercing scream — I started upright in the bed, and saw my wife standing at the bedside, white as ashes with terror.

It was some seconds, so startled was I, before I could find words to ask her the cause of her affright. She caught my wrist in her icy grasp, and climbed, trembling violently, into bed. Notwithstanding my repeated entreaties, she continued for a long time stupified and dumb. At length, however, she told me, that having lain awake for a long time, she felt, on a sudden, that she could pray, and lighting the candle, she had stolen from beside me, and kneeled down for the purpose. She had, however, scarcely assumed the attitude of prayer, when somebody, she said, clutched her arm violently near the wrist, and she heard, at the same instant, some blasphemous menace, the import of which escaped her the moment it was spoken, muttered close in her ear. This terrifying interruption was the cause of the scream which had awakened me; and the condition in which she continued during the remainder of the night confirmed me more than ever in the conviction, that she was suffering under some morbid action of the nervous system.

After this event, which *I* had no hesitation in attributing to fancy, she became literally afraid to pray, and her misery and despondency increased proportionately.

It was shortly after this that an unusual pressure of business called me into town one evening after office hours. I had left my dear little wife tolerably well, and little Fanny was to be her companion until I returned. She and her little companion occupied the same room in which we sat on the memorable evening which witnessed the arrival of our eccentric guest. Though usually a lively child, it most provokingly happened upon this night that Fanny was heavy and drowsy to excess. Her mamma would have sent her to bed, but that she now literally feared to be left alone; although, however, she could not so far overcome her horror of solitude as to do this, she yet would not persist in combating the poor child's sleepiness.

Accordingly, little Fanny was soon locked in a sound sleep, while her mamma quietly pursued her work beside her. They had been perhaps some ten minutes thus circumstanced, when my wife heard the window softly raised from without — a bony hand parted the curtains, and Mr. Smith leaned into the room.

She was so utterly overpowered at sight of this apparition, that even had it, as she expected, climbed into the room, she told me she could not have uttered a sound, or stirred from the spot where she sate transfixed and petrified.

"Ha, ha!" he said gently, "I hope you'll excuse this, I must admit, very odd intrusion; but I knew I should find you here, and could not resist the opportunity of raising the window just for a moment, to look in upon a little family picture, and say a word to yourself. I understand that you are troubled, because for some cause you cannot say your prayers — because what you call your 'faith' is, so to speak, dead and gone, and also because what *you* consider bad thoughts are constantly recurring to your mind. Now, all that is very silly. If it is really impossible for you to believe and to pray, what are you to infer from that? It is perfectly plain your Christian system can't be a true one — faith and *prayer* it everywhere represents as the conditions of grace, acceptance, and salvation; and yet your Creator will not *permit* you either to believe or pray. The Christian system is, forsooth, a *free* gift, and yet he who formed *you* and *it*, makes it absolutely impossible for you to accept it. *Is* it, I ask you, from your own experience — is it a free gift? And if your own experience, in which you can't be mistaken, gives its pretensions the lie, why, in the name of common sense, will you persist in believing it? I say it is downright blasphemy to think it has emanated from the Good Spirit — assuming that there is one. It tells you that you must be tormented hereafter in a way only to be made intelligible by the image of eternal fires — pretty strong, we must all allow — unless you comply with certain conditions, which it pretends are so easy that it is a positive pleasure to embrace and perform them; and yet, for the life of you, you can't — physically *can't* — do either. Is this truth and mercy? — or is it swindling and cruelty? Is it the part of the Redeemer, or that of the tyrant, deceiver, and tormentor?"

Up to that moment, my wife had sate breathless and motionless, listening, in the catalepsy of nightmare, to a sort of echo of the vile and impious reasoning which had haunted her for so long. At the last words of the sentence his voice became harsh and thrilling; and his whole manner bespoke a sort of crouching and terrific hatred, the like of which she could not have conceived.

Whatever may have been the cause, she was on a sudden disenchanted. She started to her feet; and, freezing with horror though she was, in a shrill cry of agony commanded him, in the name of God, to depart from her. His whole frame seemed to darken; he drew back silently; the curtains dropped into their places, the window was let down again as stealthily as it had just been raised; and my wife found herself alone in the chamber with our little child, who had been startled from her sleep by her mother's cry of anguish, and with the fearful words, "tempter," "destroyer," "devil," still ringing in her ears, was weeping bitterly, and holding her terrified mother's hand.

There is nothing, I believe, more infectious than that species of nervousness which shows itself in superstitious fears. I began — although I could not bring myself to admit anything the least like it — to partake insensibly, but strongly of the peculiar feelings with which my wife, and indeed my whole household, already regarded the lodger up stairs. The fact was, beside, that the state of my poor wife's mind began to make me seriously uneasy; and, although I was fully sensible of the pecuniary and other advantages attendant upon his stay, they were yet far from outweighing the constant gloom and frequent misery in which the protracted sojourn was involving my once cheerful house. I resolved, therefore, at whatever monetary sacrifice, to put an end to these commotions; and, after several debates with my wife, in which the subject was, as usual, turned in all its possible and impossible bearings, we agreed that, deducting a fair proportion for his five weeks' sojourn, I should return the remainder of his £100, and request immediate possession of his apartments. Like a man suddenly relieved of an insufferable load, and breathing freely once more, I instantly prepared to carry into effect the result of our deliberations.

In pursuance of this resolution, I waited upon Mr. Smith. This time my call was made in the morning, somewhere about nine o'clock. He received me at his door, standing as usual in the stealthy opening which barely admitted his lank person. There he stood, fully equipped with goggles and respirator, and swathed, rather than dressed, in his puckered black garments.

As he did not seem disposed to invite me into his apartment, although I had announced my visit as one of business, I was obliged to open my errand where I stood; and after a great deal of fumbling and muttering, I contrived to place before him distinctly the resolution to which I had come.

"But I can't think of taking back any portion of the sum I have paid you," said he, with a cool, dry emphasis.

"Your reluctance to do so, Mr. Smith, is most handsome, and I assure you, appreciated," I replied. "It is very generous; but, at the same time, it is quite impossible for me to accept what I have no right to take, and I must beg of you not to mention that part of the subject again."

"And why should *I* take it?" demanded Mr. Smith.

"Because you have paid this hundred pounds for six months, and you are leaving me with nearly five months of the term still unexpired," I replied. "I expect to receive fair play myself, and always give it."

"But who on earth said that I was going away so soon?" pursued Mr. Smith, in the same dry, sarcastic key. "*I* have not said so — because I really don't intend it; I mean to stay here to the last day of the six months for which I have paid you. I have no notion of vacating my hired lodgings, simply because you say, *go*. I shan't quarrel with you — I never quarrel with anybody. I'm as much your friend as ever; but, without the least wish to disoblige, I can't do this, positively I cannot. Is there anything else?"

I had not anticipated in the least the difficulty which thus encountered and upset our plans. I had so set my heart upon effecting the immediate retirement of our inauspicious inmate, that the disappointment literally stunned me for a moment. I, however, returned to the charge: I urged, and prayed, and almost besought him to give up his apartments, and to leave us. I offered to repay every farthing of the sum he had paid me — reserving nothing on account of the time he had already been with us. I suggested all the disadvantages of the house. I shifted my ground, and told him that my wife wanted the rooms; I pressed his gallantry — his good nature — his economy; in short, I assailed him upon every point — but in vain, he did not even take the trouble of repeating what he had said before — he neither relented, nor showed the least irritation, but simply said —

"I can't do this; here I am, and here I stay until the half-year has expired. You wanted a lodger, and you have got one — the quietest, least troublesome, least expensive person you could have; and though your house, servants, and furniture are none of the best, I don't care for that. I pursue my own poor business and enjoyments here entirely to my satisfaction."

Having thus spoken, he gave me a sort of nod, and closed the door.

So, instead of getting rid of him the next day, as we had hoped, we had nearly five months more of his company in expectancy; I hated, and my wife dreaded the prospect. She was literally miserable and panic-struck at her disappointment — and grew so nervous and wretched that I made up my mind to look out for lodgings for her and the children (subversive of all our schemes of retrenchment as such a step would be), and surrendering the house absolutely to Mr. Smith and the servants during the remainder of his term.

Circumstances, however, occurred to prevent our putting this plan in execution. My wife, meanwhile, was, if possible, more depressed and nervous every day. The servants seemed to sympathise in the dread and gloom which involved ourselves; the very children grew timid and spiritless, without knowing why — and the entire house was pervaded with an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear. A poorhouse or a dungeon would have been cheerful, compared with a dwelling haunted unceasingly with unearthly suspicions and alarms. I would have made any sacrifice short of ruin, to emancipate our household from the odious mental and moral thraldom which was invisibly established over us — overcasting us with strange anxieties and an undefined terror.

About this time my wife had a dream which troubled her much, although she could not explain its supposed significance satisfactorily by any of the ordinary rules of interpretation in such matters. The vision was as follows.

She dreamed that we were busily employed in carrying out our scheme of removal, and that I came into the parlour where she was making some arrangements, and, with rather an agitated manner, told her that the carriage had come for the children. She thought she went out to the hall, in consequence, holding little Fanny by one hand, and the boy — or, as we still called him, "baby," — by the other, and feeling, as she did so, an unaccountable gloom, almost amounting to terror, steal over her. The children, too, seemed, she thought, frightened, and disposed to cry.

So close to the hall-door as to exclude the light, stood some kind of vehicle, of which she could see nothing but that its door was wide open, and the interior involved in total darkness. The children, she thought, shrunk back in great trepidation, and she addressed herself to induce them, by persuasion, to enter, telling them that they were only "going to their new home." So, in a while, little Fanny approached it; but, at the same instant, some person came swiftly up from behind, and, raising the little boy in his hands, said fiercely, "No, the baby first"; and placed him in the carriage. This person was our lodger, Mr. Smith, and was gone as soon as seen. My wife, even in her dream, could not act or speak; but as the child was lifted into the carriage-door, a man, whose face was full of beautiful tenderness and compassion, leaned forward from the carriage and received the little child, which, stretching his arms to the stranger, looked back with a strange smile upon his mother.

"He is safe with me, and I will deliver him to you when you come."

These words the man spoke, looking upon her, as he received him, and immediately the carriage-door shut, and the noise of its closing wakened my wife from her nightmare.

This dream troubled her very much, and even haunted my mind unpleasantly too. We agreed, however, not to speak of it to anybody, not to divulge any of our misgivings respecting the stranger. We were anxious that neither the children nor the servants should catch the contagion of those fears which had seized upon my poor little wife, and, if truth were spoken, upon myself in some degree also. But this precaution was, I believe, needless, for, as I said before, everybody under the same roof with Mr. Smith was, to a certain extent, affected with the same nervous gloom and apprehension.

And now commences a melancholy chapter in my life. My poor little Fanny was attacked with a cough which soon grew very violent, and after a time degenerated into a sharp attack of inflammation. We were seriously alarmed for her life, and nothing that care and medicine could effect was spared to save it. Her mother was indefatigable, and scarcely left her night or day; and, indeed, for some time, we all but despaired of her recovery.

One night, when she was at the worst, her poor mother, who had sat for many a melancholy hour listening, by her bedside, to those plaintive incoherences of delirium and moanings of fever, which have harrowed so many a fond heart, gained gradually from her very despair the courage which she had so long wanted, and knelt down at the side of her sick darling's bed to pray for her deliverance.

With clasped hands, in an agony of supplication, she prayed that God would, in his mercy, spare her little child — that, justly as she herself deserved the sorest chastisement his hand could inflict, he would yet deal patiently and tenderly with her in this one thing. She poured out her sorrows before the mercy-seat — she opened her heart, and declared her only hope to be in his pity; without which, she felt that her darling would only leave the bed where she was lying for her grave.

Exactly as she came to this part of her supplication, the child, who had grown, as it seemed, more and more restless, and moaned and muttered with increasing pain and irritation, on a sudden started upright in her bed, and, in a thrilling voice, cried —

"No! no! — the baby first."

The mysterious sentence which had secretly tormented her for so long, thus piercingly uttered by this delirious, and, perhaps, dying child, with what seemed a preternatural earnestness and strength, arrested her devotions, and froze her with a feeling akin to terror.

"Hush, hush, my darling!" said the poor mother, almost wildly, as she clasped the attenuated frame of the sick child in her arms; "hush, my darling; don't cry out so loudly — there — there — my own love."

The child did not appear to see or hear her, but sate up still with feverish cheeks, and bright unsteady eyes, while her dry lips were muttering inaudible words.

"Lie down, my sweet child — lie down, for your own mother," she said; "if you tire yourself, you can't grow well, and your poor mother will lose you."

At these words, the child suddenly cried out again, in precisely the same loud, strong voice— "No! no! the baby first, the baby first" — and immediately afterwards lay down, and fell, for the first time since her illness into a tranquil sleep.

My good little wife sate, crying bitterly by her bedside. The child was better — *that* was, indeed, delightful. But then there was an omen in the words, thus echoed from her dream, which she dared not trust herself to interpret, and which yet had seized, with a grasp of iron, upon every fibre of her brain.

"Oh, Richard," she cried, as she threw her arms about my neck, "I am terrified at this horrible menace from the unseen world. Oh! poor, darling little baby, I shall lose you — I am sure I shall lose you. Comfort me, darling, and say he is not to die."

And so I did; and tasked all my powers of argument and persuasion to convince her how unsubstantial was the ground of her anxiety. The little boy was perfectly well, and, even were he to die before his sister that event might not occur for seventy years to come. I could not, however, conceal from myself that there was something odd and unpleasant in the coincidence; and my poor wife had grown so nervous and excitable, that a much less ominous conjecture would have sufficed to alarm her.

Meanwhile, the unaccountable terror which our lodger's presence inspired continued to increase. One of our maids gave us warning, solely from her dread of our queer inmate, and the strange accessories which haunted him. She said — and this was corroborated by her fellow-servant — that Mr. Smith seemed to have constantly a companion in his room; that although they never heard them speak, they continually and distinctly heard the tread of two persons walking up and down the room together, and described accurately the peculiar sound of a stick or crutch tapping upon the floor, which my own ears had heard. They also had seen the large, ill-conditioned cat I have mentioned, frequently steal in and out of the stranger's room; and observed that when our little girl was in greatest danger, the hateful animal was constantly writhing, fawning, and crawling about the door of the sick room after nightfall. They were thoroughly persuaded that this ill-omened beast was the foul fiend himself, and I confess I could not — sceptic as I was — bring myself absolutely to the belief that he was nothing more than a "harmless, necessary cat." These and similar reports — implicitly believed as they palpably were by those who made them — were certainly little calculated to allay the perturbation and alarm with which our household was filled.

The evenings had by this time shortened very much, and darkness often overtook us before we sate down to our early tea. It happened just at this period of which I have been speaking, after my little girl had begun decidedly to mend, that I was sitting in our dining-parlour, with my little boy fast asleep upon my knees, and thinking of I know not what, my wife having gone up stairs, as usual, to sit in the room with little Fanny. As I thus sate in what was to me, in effect, total solitude, darkness unperceived stole on us.

On a sudden, as I sate, with my elbow leaning upon the table, and my other arm round the sleeping child, I felt, as I thought, a cold current of air faintly blowing upon my forehead. I raised my head, and saw, as nearly as I could calculate, at the far end of the table on which my arm rested, two large green eyes confronting me. I could see no more, but instantly concluded they were those of the abominable cat. Yielding to an impulse of horror and abhorrence, I caught a water-croft that was close to my hand,

and threw it full at it with all my force. I must have missed my object, for the shining eyes continued fixed for a second, and then glided still nearer to me, and then a little nearer still. The noise of the glass smashed with so much force upon the table called in the servant, who happened to be passing. She had a candle in her hand, and, perhaps, the light alarmed the odious beast, for as she came in it was gone.

I had had an undefined idea that its approach was somehow connected with a designed injury of some sort to the sleeping child. I could not be mistaken as to the fact that I had plainly seen the two broad, glaring, green eyes. Where the cursed animal had gone I had not observed: it might, indeed, easily have run out at the door as the servant opened it, but neither of us had seen it do so; and we were every one of us in such a state of nervous excitement, that even this incident was something in the catalogue of our ambiguous experiences.

It was a great happiness to see our darling little Fanny every day mending, and now quite out of danger: this was cheering and delightful. It was also something to know that more than two months of our lodger’s term of occupation had already expired; and to realise, as we now could do, by anticipation, the unspeakable relief of his departure.

My wife strove hard to turn our dear child’s recovery to good account for me; but the impressions of fear soon depart, and those of religious gratitude must be preceded by religious faith. All as yet was but as seed strewn upon the rock.

Little Fanny, though recovering rapidly, was still very weak, and her mother usually passed a considerable part of every evening in her bedroom — for the child was sometimes uneasy and restless at night. It happened at this period that, sitting as usual at Fanny’s bedside, she witnessed an occurrence which agitated her not a little.

The child had been, as it seems, growing sleepy, and was lying listlessly, with eyes half open, apparently taking no note of what was passing. Suddenly, however, with an expression of the wildest terror, she drew up her limbs, and cowered in the bed’s head, gazing at some object; which, judging from the motion of her eyes, must have been slowly advancing from the end of the room next the door.

The child made a low shuddering cry, as she grasped her mother’s hand, and, with features white and tense with terror, slowly following with her eyes the noiseless course of some unseen spectre, shrinking more and more fearfully backward every moment.

"What is it? Where? What is it that frightens you, my darling?" asked the poor mother, who, thrilled with horror, looked in vain for the apparition which seemed to have all but bereft the child of reason.

"Stay with me — save me — keep it away — look, look at it — making signs to me — don't let it hurt me — it is angry — Oh! mamma, save me, save me!"

The child said this, all the time clinging to her with both her hands, in an ecstasy of panic.

"There — there, my darling," said my poor wife, "don't be afraid; there's nothing but me — your own mamma — and little baby in the room; nothing, my darling; nothing indeed."

"Mamma, mamma, don't move; don't go near him"; the child continued wildly. "It's only his back now; don't make him turn again; he's untying his handkerchief. Oh! baby, baby; he'll *kill* baby! and he's lifting up those green things from his eyes; don't you see him doing it? Mamma, mamma, why does he come here? Oh, mamma, poor baby — poor little baby!"

She was looking with a terrified gaze at the little boy's bed, which lay directly opposite to her own, and in which he was sleeping calmly.

"Hush, hush, my darling child," said my wife, with difficulty restraining an hysterical burst of tears; "for God's sake don't speak so wildly, my own precious love — there, there — don't be frightened — there, darling, there."

"Oh! poor baby — poor little darling baby," the child continued as before; "will no one save him — tell that wicked man to go away — oh — there — why, mamma — don't — oh, sure you won't let him — don't — don't — he'll take the child's life — will you let him lie down that way on the bed — save poor little baby — oh, baby, baby, waken — his head is on your face."

As she said this she raised her voice to a cry of despairing terror which made the whole room ring again.

This cry, or rather yell, reached my ears as I sate reading in the parlour by myself, and fearing I knew not what, I rushed to the apartment; before I reached it, the sound had subsided into low but violent sobbing; and, just as I arrived at the threshold I heard, close at my feet, a fierce protracted growl, and something rubbing along the surbase. I was in the dark, but, with a feeling of mingled terror and fury, I stamped and struck at the abhorred brute with my feet, but in vain. The next moment I was in the room, and heard little Fanny, through her sobs, cry —

"Oh, poor baby is killed — that wicked man has killed him — he uncovered his face, and put it on him, and lay upon the bed and killed poor baby. I knew he came to kill him. Ah, papa, papa, why did you not come up before he went? — he is gone, he went away as soon as he killed our poor little darling baby."

I could not conceal my agitation, quite, and I said to my wife —

"Has he, Smith, been here?"

"No."

"What is it, then?"

"The child has seen *some* one."

"Seen whom? Who? Who has been here?"

"I did not see it; but — but I am sure the child saw — that is, *thought* she saw *him*; — the person you have named. Oh, God, in mercy deliver us! What shall I do — what shall I do!"

Thus saying, the dear little woman burst into tears, and crying, as if her heart would break, sobbed out an entreaty that I would look at baby; adding, that she herself had not courage to see whether her darling was sleeping or dead.

"Dead!" I exclaimed. "Tut, tut, my darling; you must not give way to such morbid fancies — he is very well, I see him breathing;" and so saying, I went over to the bed where our little boy was lying. He was slumbering; though it seemed to me very heavily, and his cheeks were flushed.

"Sleeping tranquilly, my darling — tranquilly, and deeply; and with a warm colour in his cheeks," I said, rearranging the coverlet, and retiring to my wife, who sate almost breathless whilst I was looking at our little boy.

"Thank God — thank God," she said quietly; and she wept again; and rising, came to his bedside.

"Yes, yes — alive; thank God; but it seems to me he is breathing very short, and with difficulty, and he looks — *does* he not look hot and feverish? Yes, he *is* very hot; feel his little hand — feel his neck; merciful heaven! he is burning."

It was, indeed, very true, that his skin was unnaturally dry and hot; his little pulse, too, was going at a fearful rate.

"I do think," said I — resolved to conceal the extent of my own apprehensions— "I do think that he is just a *little* feverish; but he has often been much more so; and will, I dare say, in the morning, be perfectly well again. I dare say, but for little Fanny's *dream*, we should not have observed it at all."

"Oh, my darling, my darling, my darling!" sobbed the poor little woman, leaning over the bed, with her hands locked together, and looking the very picture of despair. "Oh, my darling, what has happened to you? I put you into your bed, looking so well and beautiful, this evening, and here you are, stricken with sickness, my own little love. Oh, you will not — you cannot, leave your poor mother!"

It was quite plain that she despaired of the child from the moment we had ascertained that it was unwell. As it happened, her presentiment was but too truly prophetic. The apothecary said the child's ailment was "suppressed smallpox"; the physician pronounced it "typhus." The only certainty about it was the issue — the child died.

To me few things appear so beautiful as a very young child in its shroud. The little innocent face looks so sublimely simple and confiding amongst the cold terrors of death — crimeless, and fearless, that little mortal has passed alone under the shadow, and explored the mystery of dissolution. There is death in its sublimest and purest image — no hatred, no hypocrisy, no suspicion, no care for the morrow ever darkened that little face; death has come lovingly upon it; there is nothing cruel, or harsh, in his victory. The yearnings of love, indeed, cannot be stifled; for the prattle, and smiles, and all the little world of thoughts that were so delightful, are gone for ever. Awe, too, will overcast us in its presence — for we are looking on death; but we do not fear for the little, lonely voyager — for the child has gone, simple and trusting, into the presence of its all-wise Father; and of such, we know, is the kingdom of heaven.

And so we parted from poor little baby. I and his poor old nurse drove in a mourning carriage, in which lay the little coffin, early in the morning, to the churchyard of —— . Sore, indeed, was my heart, as I followed that little coffin to the grave! Another burial had just concluded as we entered the churchyard, and the mourners stood in clusters round the grave, into which the sexton was now shovelling the mould.

As I stood, with head uncovered, listening to the sublime and touching service which our ritual prescribes, I found that a gentleman had drawn near also, and was standing at my elbow. I did not turn to look at him until the earth had closed over my darling boy; I then walked a little way apart, that I might be alone, and drying my eyes, sat down upon a tombstone, to let the confusion of my mind subside.

While I was thus lost in a sorrowful reverie, the gentleman who had stood near me at the grave was once more at my side. The face of the stranger, though I could not call it handsome, was very remarkable; its expression was the purest and noblest I could conceive, and it was made very beautiful by a look of such compassion as I never saw before.

“Why do you sorrow as one without hope?” he said, gently.

“I *have* no hope,” I answered.

“Nay, I think you have,” he answered again; “and I am sure you will soon have more. That little child for which you grieve, has escaped the dangers and miseries of life; its body has perished; but he will receive in the end the crown of life. God has given him an early victory.”

I know not what it was in him that rebuked my sullen pride, and humbled and saddened me, as I listened to this man. He was dressed in deep mourning, and looked more serene, noble, and sweet than any I had ever seen. He was young, too, as I have said, and his voice very clear and harmonious. He talked to me for a long time, and I listened to him with involuntary reverence. At last, however, he left me, saying he had often seen me walking into town, about the same hour that he used to go that way, and that if he saw me again he would walk with me, and so we might reason of these things together.

It was late when I returned to my home, now a house of mourning.

PART II

Our home was one of sorrow and of fear. The child's death had stricken us with terror no less than grief. Referring it, as we both tacitly did, to the mysterious and fiendish agency of the abhorred being whom, in an evil hour, we had admitted into our house, we both viewed him with a degree and species of fear for which I can find no name.

I felt that some further calamity was impending. I could not hope that we were to be delivered from the presence of the malignant agent who haunted, rather than inhabited our home, without some additional proofs alike of his malice and his power.

My poor wife's presentiments were still more terrible and overpowering, though not more defined, than my own. She was never tranquil while our little girl was out of her sight; always dreading and expecting some new revelation of the evil influence which, as we were indeed both persuaded, had bereft our darling little boy of life. Against an hostility so unearthly and intangible there was no guarding, and the sense of helplessness intensified the misery of our situation. Tormented with doubts of the very basis of her religion, and recoiling from the ordeal of prayer with the strange horror with which the victim of hydrophobia repels the pure water, she no longer found the consolation which, had sorrow reached her in any other shape, she would have drawn from the healing influence of religion. We were both of us unhappy, dismayed, DEMON-STRICKEN.

Meanwhile, our lodger's habits continued precisely the same. If, indeed, the sounds which came from his apartments were to be trusted, he and his agents were more on the alert than ever. I can convey to you, good reader, no notion, even the faintest, of the dreadful sensation always more or less present to my mind, and sometimes with a reality which thrilled me almost to frenzy — the apprehension that I had admitted into my house the incarnate spirit of the dead or damned, to torment me and my family.

It was some nights after the burial of our dear little baby; we had not gone to bed until late, and I had slept, I suppose, some hours, when I was awakened by my wife, who clung to me with the energy of terror. She said nothing, but grasped and shook me with more than her natural strength. She had crept close to me, and was cowering with her head under the bedclothes.

The room was perfectly dark, as usual, for we burned no night-light; but from the side of the bed next her proceeded a voice as of one sitting there with his head within a foot of the curtains — and, merciful heavens! it was the voice of our lodger.

He was discoursing of the death of our baby, and inveighing, in the old mocking tone of hate and suppressed fury, against the justice, mercy, and goodness of God. He did this with a terrible plausibility of sophistry, and with a resolute emphasis and precision, which seemed to imply, "I have got something to tell you, and, whether you like it or like it not, I *will* say out my say."

To pretend that I felt anger at his intrusion, or emotion of any sort, save the one sense of palsied terror, would be to depart from the truth. I lay, cold and breathless, as if frozen to death — unable to move, unable to utter a cry — with the voice of that demon pouring, in the dark, his undisguised blasphemies and temptations close into my ears. At last the dreadful voice ceased — whether the speaker went or stayed I could not tell — the silence, which he might be improving for the purpose of some hellish strategem, was to me more tremendous even than his speech.

We both lay awake, not daring to move or speak, scarcely even breathing, but clasping one another fast, until at length the welcome light of day streamed into the room through the opening door, as the servant came in to call us. I need not say that our nocturnal visitant had left us.

The magnanimous reader will, perhaps, pronounce that I ought to have pulled on my boots and inexpressibles with all available despatch, run to my lodger's bedroom, and kicked him forthwith downstairs, and the entire way moreover out to the public road, as some compensation for the scandalous affront put upon me and my wife by his impertinent visit. Now, at that time, I had no scruples against what are termed the laws of honour, was by no means deficient in "pluck," and gifted, moreover, with a somewhat excitable temper. Yet, I will honestly avow that, so far from courting a collision with the dreaded stranger, I would have recoiled at his very sight, and given my eyes to avoid him, such was the ascendancy which he had acquired over me, as well as everybody else in my household, in his own quiet, irresistible, hellish way.

The shuddering antipathy which our guest inspired did not rob his infernal homily of its effect. It was not a new or strange thing which he presented to our minds. There was an awful subtlety in the train of his suggestions. All that he had said had floated through my own mind before, without order, indeed, or shew of logic. From my own rebellious heart the same evil thoughts had risen, like pale apparitions hovering and lost in the fumes of a necromancer's cauldron. His was like the summing up of all this — a reflection of my own feelings and fancies — but reduced to an awful order and definiteness, and clothed with a sophistical form of argument. The effect of it was powerful. It revived and exaggerated these bad emotions — it methodised and justified them — and gave to impulses and impressions, vague and desultory before, something of the compactness of a system.

My misfortune, therefore, did not soften, it exasperated me. I regarded the Great Disposer of events as a persecutor of the human race, who took delight in their miseries. I asked why my innocent child had been smitten down into the grave? — and why my darling wife, whose first object, I knew, had ever been to serve and glorify her Maker, should have been thus tortured and desolated by the cruelest calamity which the malignity of a demon could have devised? I railed and blasphemed, and even in my agony defied God with the impotent rage and desperation of a devil, in his everlasting torment.

In my bitterness, I could not forbear speaking these impenitent repetitions of the language of our nightly visitant, even in the presence of my wife. She heard me with agony, almost with terror. I pitied and loved her too much not to respect even her weaknesses — for so I characterised her humble submission to the chastisements of heaven. But even while I spared her reverential sensitiveness, the spectacle of her patience but enhanced my own gloomy and impenitent rage.

I was walking into town in this evil mood, when I was overtaken by the gentleman whom I had spoken with in the churchyard on the morning when my little boy was buried. I call him *gentleman*, but I could not say *what* was his rank — I never thought about it; there was a grace, a purity, a compassion, and a grandeur of intellect in his countenance, in his language, in his mien, that was beautiful and kinglike. I felt, in his company, a delightful awe, and an humbleness more gratifying than any elation of earthly pride.

He divined my state of feeling, but he said nothing harsh. He did not rebuke, but he reasoned with me — and oh! how mighty was that reasoning — without formality — without effort — as the flower grows and blossoms. Its process was in harmony with the successions of nature — gentle, spontaneous, irresistible.

At last he left me. I was grieved at his departure — I was wonder-stricken. His discourse had made me cry tears at once sweet and bitter; it had sounded depths I knew not of, and my heart was disquieted within me. Yet my trouble was happier than the resentful and defiant calm that had reigned within me before.

When I came home, I told my wife of my having met the same good, wise man I had first seen by the grave of my child. I recounted to her his discourse, and, as I brought it again to mind, my tears flowed afresh, and I was happy while I wept.

I now see that the calamity which bore at first such evil fruit, was good for me. It fixed my mind, however rebelliously, upon God, and it stirred up all the passions of my heart. Levity, inattention, and self-complacency are obstacles harder to be overcome than the violence of evil passions — the transition from hate is easier than from indifference, to love. A mighty change was making on my mind.

I need not particularise the occasions upon which I again met my friend, for so I knew him to be, nor detail the train of reasoning and feeling which in such interviews he followed out; it is enough to say, that he assiduously cultivated the good seed he had sown, and that his benignant teachings took deep root, and flourished in my soul, heretofore so barren.

One evening, having enjoyed on the morning of the same day another of those delightful and convincing conversations, I was returning on foot homeward; and as darkness had nearly closed, and the night threatened cold and fog, the footpaths were nearly deserted.

As I walked on, deeply absorbed in the discourse I had heard on the same morning, a person overtook me, and continued to walk, without much increasing the interval between us, a little in advance of me. There came upon me, at the same moment, an indefinable sinking of the heart, a strange and unaccountable fear. The pleasing topics of my meditations melted away, and gave place to a sense of danger, all the more unpleasant that it was vague and objectless. I looked up. What was that which moved before me? I stared — I faltered; my heart fluttered as if it would choke me, and then stood still. It was the peculiar and unmistakeable form of our lodger.

Exactly as I looked at him, he turned his head, and looked at me over his shoulder. His face was muffled as usual. I cannot have seen its features with any completeness, yet I felt that his look was one of fury. The next instant he was at my side; and my heart quailed within me — my limbs all but refused their office; yet the very emotions of terror, which might have overcome me, acted as a stimulus, and I quickened my pace.

"Hey! what a pious person! So I suppose you have learned at last that 'evil communications corrupt good manners'; and you are absolutely afraid of the old infidel, the old blasphemer, hey?"

I made him no answer; I was indeed too much agitated to speak.

"You'll make a good Christian, no doubt," he continued; "the independent man, who thinks for himself, reasons his way to his principles, and sticks fast to them, is sure to be true to whatever system he embraces. You have been so consistent a philosopher, that I am sure you will make a steady Christian. You're not the man to be led by the nose by a sophistical mumbler. *You* could never be made the prey of a grasping proselytism; *you* are not the sport of every whiff of doctrine, nor the facile slave of whatever superstition is last buzzed in your ear. No, no: you've got a masculine intellect, and think for yourself, hey?"

I was incapable of answering him. I quickened my pace to escape from his detested persecution; but he was close beside me still.

We walked on together thus for a time, during which I heard him muttering fast to himself, like a man under fierce and malignant excitement. We reached, at length, the gateway of my dwelling; and I turned the latchkey in the wicket, and entered the enclosure. As we stood together within, he turned full upon me, and confronting me with an aspect whose character I felt rather than saw, he said —

"And so you mean to be a Christian, after all! Now just reflect how very absurdly you are choosing. Leave the Bible to that class of fanatics who may hope to be saved under its system, and, in the name of common sense, study the Koran, or some less ascetic tome. Don't be gulled by a plausible slave, who wants nothing more than to multiply *professors* of his theory.

Why don’t you *read* the Bible, you miserable, puling poltroon, before you hug it as a treasure? Why don’t you read it, and learn out of the mouth of the founder of Christianity, that there is one sin for which there is *no* forgiveness — blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, hey? — and that sin I myself have heard you commit by the hour — in my presence — in my room. I have heard you commit it in our free discussions a dozen times. The Bible seals against you the lips of mercy. If *it* be true, you are this moment as irrevocably damned as if you had died with those blasphemies on your lips.”

Having thus spoken, he glided into the house. I followed slowly.

His words rang in my ears — I was stunned. What he had said I feared might be true. Giant despair felled me to the earth. He had recalled, and lighted up with a glare from the pit, remembrances with which I knew not how to cope. It was true I had spoken with daring impiety of subjects whose sacredness I now began to appreciate. With trembling hands I opened the Bible. I read and re-read the mysterious doom recorded by the Redeemer himself against blasphemers of the Holy Ghost — monsters set apart from the human race, and damned and dead, even while they live and walk upon the earth. I groaned — I wept. Henceforward the Bible, I thought, must be to me a dreadful record of despair. I dared not read it.

I will not weary you with all my mental agonies. My dear little wife did something toward relieving my mind, but it was reserved for the friend, to whose heavenly society I owed so much, to tranquillise it once more. He talked this time to me longer, and even more earnestly than before. I soon encountered him again. He expounded to me the ways of Providence, and showed me how needful sorrow was for every servant of God. How mercy was disguised in tribulation, and our best happiness came to us, like our children, in tears and wailing. He showed me that trials were sent to call us up, with a voice of preternatural power, from the mortal apathy of sin and the world. And then, again, in our new and better state, to prove our patience and our faith —

“The more trouble befalls you, the nearer is God to you. He visits you in sorrow — and sorrow, as well as joy, is a sign of his presence. If, then, other griefs overtake you, remember this — be patient, be faithful; and bless the name of God.”

I returned home comforted and happy, although I felt assured that some further and sadder trial was before me.

Still our household was overcast by the same insurmountable dread of our tenant. The same strange habits characterised him, and the same unaccountable sounds disquieted us — an atmosphere of death and malice hovered about his door, and we all hated and feared to pass it.

Let me now tell, as well and briefly as I may, the dreadful circumstances of my last great trial. One morning, my wife being about her household affairs, and I on the point of starting for town, I went into the parlour for some letters which I was to take with me. I cannot easily describe my consternation when, on entering the room, I saw our lodger seated near the window, with our darling little girl upon his knee.

His back was toward the door, but I could plainly perceive that the respirator had been removed from his mouth, and that the odious green goggles were raised. He was sitting, as it seemed, absolutely without motion, and his face was advanced close to that of the child.

I stood looking at this group in a state of stupor for some seconds. He was, I suppose, conscious of my presence, for although he did not turn his head, or otherwise take any note of my arrival, he readjusted the muffler which usually covered his mouth, and lowered the clumsy spectacles to their proper place.

The child was sitting upon his knee as motionless as he himself, with a countenance white and rigid as that of a corpse, and from which every trace of meaning, except some vague character of terror, had fled, and staring with a fixed and dilated gaze into his face.

As it seemed, she did not perceive my presence. Her eyes were transfixed and fascinated. She did not even seem to me to breathe. Horror and anguish at last overcame my stupefaction.

“What — what is it?” I cried; “what ails my child, my darling child?”

“I’d be glad to know, myself,” he replied, coolly; “it is certainly something very queer.”

“What is it, darling?” I repeated, frantically, addressing the child.

“What is it?” he reiterated. “Why it’s pretty plain, I should suppose, that the child is ill.”

“Oh merciful God!” I cried, half furious, half terrified— “You have injured her — you have terrified her. Give me my child — give her to me.”

These words I absolutely shouted, and stamped upon the floor in my horrid excitement.

"Pooh, pooh!" he said, with a sort of ugly sneer; "the child is nervous — you'll make her more so — be quiet and she'll probably find her tongue presently. I have had her on my knee some minutes, but the sweet bird could not tell what ails her."

"Let the child go," I shouted in a voice of thunder; "let her go, I say — let her go."

He took the passive, deathlike child, and placed her standing by the window, and rising, he simply said —

"As soon as you grow cool, you are welcome to ask me what questions you like. The child is plainly ill. I should not wonder if she had seen something that frightened her."

Having thus spoken, he passed from the room. I felt as if I spoke, saw, and walked in a horrid dream. I seized the darling child in my arms, and bore her away to her mother.

"What is it — for mercy's sake what is the matter?" she cried, growing in an instant as pale as the poor child herself.

"I found that — that *demon* — in the parlour with the child on his lap, staring in her face. She is manifestly terrified."

"Oh! gracious God! she is lost — she is killed," cried the poor mother, frantically looking into the white, apathetic, meaningless face of the child.

"Fanny, darling Fanny, tell us if you are ill," I cried, pressing the little girl in terror to my heart.

"Tell your own mother, my darling," echoed my poor little wife. "Oh! darling, darling child, speak to your poor mother."

It was all in vain. Still the same dilated, imploring gaze — the same pale face — wild and dumb. We brought her to the open window — we gave her cold water to drink — we sprinkled it in her face. We sent for the apothecary, who lived hard by, and he arrived in a few moments, with a parcel of tranquillising medicines. These, however, were equally unavailing.

Hour after hour passed away. The darling child looked upon us as if she would have given the world to speak to us, or to weep, but she uttered no sound. Now and then she drew a long breath as though preparing to say something, but still she was mute. She often put her hand to her throat, as if there was some pain or obstruction there.

I never can, while I live, lose one line of that mournful and terrible portrait — the face of my stricken child. As hour after hour passed away, without bringing the smallest change or amendment, we grew both alarmed, and at length absolutely terrified for her safety.

We called in a physician toward night, and told him that we had reason to suspect that the child had somehow been frightened, and that in no other way could we at all account for the extraordinary condition in which he found her.

This was a man, I may as well observe, though I do not name him, of the highest eminence in his profession, and one in whose skill, from past personal experience, I had the best possible reasons for implicitly confiding.

He asked a multiplicity of questions, the answers to which seemed to baffle his attempts to arrive at a satisfactory diagnosis. There was something undoubtedly anomalous in the case, and I saw plainly that there were features in it which puzzled and perplexed him not a little.

At length, however, he wrote his prescription, and promised to return at nine o'clock. I remember there was something to be rubbed along her spine, and some medicines beside.

But these remedies were as entirely unavailing as the others. In a state of dismay and distraction we watched by the bed in which, in accordance with the physician's direction, we had placed her. The absolute changelessness of her condition filled us with despair. The day which had elapsed had not witnessed even a transitory variation in the dreadful character of her seizure. Any change, even a change for the worse, would have been better than this sluggish, hopeless monotony of suffering.

At the appointed hour the physician returned. He appeared disappointed, almost shocked, at the failure of his prescriptions. On feeling her pulse he declared that she must have a little wine. There had been a wonderful prostration of all the vital powers since he had seen her before. He evidently thought the case a strange and precarious one.

She was made to swallow the wine, and her pulse rallied for a time, but soon subsided again. I and the physician were standing by the fire, talking in whispers of the darling child's symptoms, and likelihood of recovery, when we were arrested in our conversation by a cry of anguish from the poor mother, who had never left the bedside of her little child, and this cry broke into bitter and convulsive weeping.

The poor little child had, on a sudden, stretched down her little hands and feet, and died. There is no mistaking the features of death: the filmy eye and dropt jaw once seen, are recognised whenever we meet them again. Yet, spite of our belief, we cling to hope; and the distracted mother called on the physician, in accents which might have moved a statue, to say that her darling was not dead, not quite dead — that something might still be done — that it could not be all over. Silently he satisfied himself that no throb of life still fluttered in that little frame.

"It is, indeed, all over," he said, in tones scarce above a whisper; and pressing my hand kindly, he said, "comfort your poor wife"; and so, after a momentary pause, he left the room.

This blow had smitten me with stunning suddenness. I looked at the dead child, and from her to her poor mother. Grief and pity were both swallowed up in transports of fury and detestation with which the presence in my house of the wretch who had wrought all this destruction and misery filled my soul. My heart swelled with ungovernable rage; for a moment my habitual fear of him was neutralised by the vehemence of these passions. I seized a candle in silence, and mounted the stairs. The sight of the accursed cat, flitting across the lobby, and the loneliness of the hour, made me hesitate for an instant. I had, however, gone so far, that shame sustained me. Overcoming a momentary thrill of dismay, and determined to repel and defy the influence that had so long awed me, I knocked sharply at the door, and, almost at the same instant, pushed it open, and entered our lodger's chamber.

He had had no candle in the room, and it was lighted only by the "darkness visible" that entered through the window. The candle which I held very imperfectly illuminated the large apartment; but I saw his spectral form floating, rather than walking, back and forward in front of the windows.

At sight of him, though I hated him more than ever, my instinctive fear returned. He confronted me, and drew nearer and nearer, without speaking. There was something indefinably fearful in the silent attraction which seemed to be drawing him to me. I could not help recoiling, little by little, as he came toward me, and with an effort I said —

"You know why I have come: the child — she's dead!"

"Dead — ha! — *dead* — is she?" he said, in his odious, mocking tone.

"Yes — dead!" I cried, with an excitement which chilled my very marrow with horror; "and *you* have killed her, as you killed my other."

"How? — I killed her! — eh? — ha, ha!" he said, still edging nearer and nearer.

"Yes; I say you!" I shouted, trembling in every joint, but possessed by that unaccountable infatuation which has made men invoke, spite of themselves, their own destruction, and which I was powerless to resist— "deny it as you may, it is you who killed her — wretch! — FIEND! — no wonder she could not stand the breath and glare of HELL!"

"And you are one of those who believe that not a sparrow falls to the ground without your Creator's consent," he said, with icy sarcasm; "and this is a specimen of Christian resignation — hey? You charge his act upon a poor fellow like me, simply that you may cheat the devil, and rave and rebel against the decrees of heaven, under pretence of abusing me. The breath and flare of hell! — eh? You mean that I removed this and these (touching the covering of his mouth and eyes successively) as I *shall* do now again, and show you there's no great harm in that."

There was a tone of menace in his concluding words not to be mistaken.

"Murderer and liar from the beginning, as you are, I defy you!" I shouted, in a frenzy of hate and horror, stamping furiously on the floor.

As I said this, it seemed to me that he darkened and dilated before my eyes. My senses, thoughts, consciousness, grew horribly confused, as if some powerful, extraneous will, were seizing upon the functions of my brain. Whether I were to be mastered by death, or madness, or possession, I knew not; but hideous destruction of some sort was impending: all hung upon the moment, and I cried aloud, in my agony, an adjuration in the name of the three persons of the Trinity, that he should not torment me.

Stunned, bewildered, like a man recovered from a drunken fall, I stood, freezing and breathless, in the same spot, looking into the room, which wore, in my eyes, a strange, unearthly character. Mr. Smith was cowering darkly in the window, and, after a silence, spoke to me in a croaking, sulky tone, which was, however, unusually submissive.

"Don't it strike you as an odd procedure to break into a gentleman's apartment at such an hour, for the purpose of railing at him in the coarsest language? If you have any charge to make against me, do so; I invite inquiry and defy your worst. If you think you can bring home to me the smallest share of blame in this unlucky matter, call the coroner, and let his inquest examine and cross-examine me, and sift the matter — if, indeed, there is anything to *be* sifted — to the bottom. Meanwhile, go you about your business, and leave me to mine. But I see how the wind sits; you want to get rid of me, and so you make the place odious to me. But it won’t do; and if you take to making criminal charges against me, you had better look to yourself; for two can play at that game.”

There was a suppressed whine in all this, which strangely contrasted with the cool and threatening tone of his previous conversation.

Without answering a word I hurried from the room, and scarcely felt secure, even when once more in the melancholy chamber, where my poor wife was weeping.

Miserable, horrible was the night that followed. The loss of our child was a calamity which we had not dared to think of. It had come, and with a suddenness enough to bereave me of reason. It seemed all unreal, all fantastic. It needed an effort to convince me, minute after minute, that the dreadful truth was so; and the old accustomed feeling that she was still alive, still running from room to room, and the expectation that I should hear her step and her voice, and see her entering at the door, would return. But still the sense of dismay, of having received some stunning, irreparable blow, remained behind; and then came the horrible effort, like that with which one rouses himself from a haunted sleep, the question, “What disaster is this that has befallen?” — answered, alas! but too easily, too terribly! Amidst all this was perpetually rising before my fancy the obscure, dilated figure of our lodger, as he had confronted me in his malign power that night. I dismissed the image with a shudder as often as it recurred; and even now, at this distance of time, I have felt more than I could well describe in the mere effort to fix my recollection upon its hated traits, while writing the passages I have just concluded.

This hateful scene I did not recount to my poor wife. Its horrors were too fresh upon me. I had not courage to trust myself with the agitating narrative; and so I sate beside her, with her hand locked in mine: I had no comfort to offer but the dear love I bore her.

At last, like a child, she cried herself to sleep — the dull, heavy slumber of worn-out grief. As for me, the agitation of my soul was too fearful and profound for repose. My eye accidentally rested on the holy volume, which lay upon the table open, as I had left it in the morning; and the first words which met my eye were these— "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." This blessed sentence riveted my attention, and shed a stream of solemn joy upon my heart; and so the greater part of that mournful night, I continued to draw comfort and heavenly wisdom from the same inspired source.

Next day brought the odious incident, the visit of the undertaker — the carpentery, upholstery, and millinery of death. Why has not civilisation abolished these repulsive and shocking formalities? What has the poor corpse to do with frills, and pillows, and napkins, and all the equipage in which it rides on its last journey? There is no intrusion so jarring to the decent grief of surviving affection, no conceivable mummery more derisive of mortality.

In the room which we had been so long used to call "the nursery," now desolate and mute, the unclosed coffin lay, with our darling shrouded in it. Before we went to our rest at night we visited it. In the morning the lid was to close over that sweet face, and I was to see the child laid by her little brother. We looked upon the well-known and loved features, purified in the sublime serenity of death, for a long time, whispering to one another, among our sobs, how sweet and beautiful we thought she looked; and at length, weeping bitterly, we tore ourselves away.

We talked and wept for many hours, and at last, in sheer exhaustion, dropt asleep. My little wife awaked me, and said —

"I think they have come — the — the undertakers."

It was still dark, so I could not consult my watch; but they were to have arrived early, and as it was winter, and the nights long, the hour of their visit might well have arrived.

"What, darling, is your reason for thinking so?" I asked.

"I am sure I have heard them for some time in the nursery," she answered. "Oh! dear, dear little Fanny! Don't allow them to close the coffin until I have seen my darling once more."

I got up, and threw some clothes hastily about me. I opened the door and listened. A sound like a muffled knocking reached me from the nursery.

"Yes, my darling!" I said, "I think they have come. I will go and desire them to wait until you have seen her again."

And, so saying, I hastened from the room.

Our bedchamber lay at the end of a short corridor, opening from the lobby, at the head of the stairs, and the nursery was situated nearly at the end of a corresponding passage, which opened from the same lobby at the opposite side As I hurried along I distinctly heard the same sounds. The light of dawn had not yet appeared, but there was a strong moonlight shining through the windows. I thought the morning could hardly be so far advanced as we had at first supposed; but still, strangely as it now seems to me, suspecting nothing amiss, I walked on in noiseless, slippered feet, to the nursery-door. It stood half open; some one had unquestionably visited it since we had been there. I stepped forward, and entered. At the threshold horror arrested my advance.

The coffin was placed upon tressles at the further extremity of the chamber, with the foot of it nearly towards the door, and a large window at the side of it admitted the cold lustre of the moon full upon the apparatus of mortality, and the objects immediately about it.

At the foot of the coffin stood the ungainly form of our lodger. He seemed to be intently watching the face of the corpse, and was stooped a little, while with his hands he tapped sharply, from time to time at the sides of the coffin, like one who designs to awaken a slumberer. Perched upon the body of the child, and nuzzling among the grave-clothes, with a strange kind of ecstasy, was the detested brute, the cat I have so often mentioned.

The group thus revealed, I looked upon but for one instant; in the next I shouted, in absolute terror —

"In God's name! what are you doing?"

Our lodger shuffled away abruptly, as if disconcerted; but the ill-favoured cat, whisking round, stood like a demon sentinel upon the corpse, growling and hissing, with arched back and glaring eyes.

The lodger, turning abruptly toward me, motioned me to one side. Mechanically I obeyed his gesture, and he hurried hastily from the room.

Sick and dizzy, I returned to my own chamber. I confess I had not nerve to combat the infernal brute, which still held possession of the room, and so I left it undisturbed.

This incident I did not tell to my wife until some time afterwards; and I mention it here because it was, and is, in my mind associated with a painful circumstance which very soon afterwards came to light.

That morning I witnessed the burial of my darling child. Sore and desolate was my heart; but with infinite gratitude to the great controller of all events, I recognised in it a change which nothing but the spirit of all good can effect. The love and fear of God had grown strong within me — in humbleness I bowed to his awful will — with a sincere trust I relied upon the goodness, the wisdom, and the mercy of him who had sent this great affliction. But a further incident connected with this very calamity was to test this trust and patience to the uttermost.

It was still early when I returned, having completed the last sad office. My wife, as I afterwards learned, still lay weeping upon her bed. But somebody awaited my return in the hall, and opened the door, anticipating my knock. This person was our lodger.

I was too much appalled by the sudden presentation of this abhorred spectre even to retreat, as my instinct would have directed, through the open door.

"I have been expecting your return," he said, "with the design of saying something which it might have profited you to learn, but now I apprehend it is too late. What a pity you are so violent and impatient; you would not have heard me, in all probability, this morning. You cannot think how cross-grained and intemperate you have grown since you became a saint — but that is your affair, not mine. You have buried your little daughter this morning. It requires a good deal of that new attribute of yours, *faith*, which judges all things by a rule of contraries, and can never see anything but kindness in the worst afflictions which malignity could devise, to discover benignity and mercy in the torturing calamity which has just punished you and your wife for *nothing*! But I fancy that it will be harder still when I tell you what I more than suspect — ha, ha. It would be really ridiculous, if it were not heartrending; that your little girl has been actually buried *alive*; do you comprehend me? — alive. For, upon my life, I fancy she was not dead as she lay in her coffin."

I knew the wretch was exulting in the fresh anguish he had just inflicted. I know not how it was, but any announcement of *disaster* from his lips, seemed to me to be necessarily true. Half-stifled with the dreadful emotions he had raised, palpitating between hope and terror, I rushed frantically back again, the way I had just come, running as fast as my speed could carry me, toward the, alas! distant burial-ground where my darling lay.

I stopped a cab slowly returning to town, at the corner of the lane, sprang into it, directed the man to drive to the church of —— , and promised him anything and everything for despatch. The man seemed amazed; doubtful, perhaps, whether he carried a maniac or a malefactor. Still he took his chance for the promised reward, and galloped his horse, while I, tortured with suspense, yelled my frantic incentives to further speed.

At last, in a space immeasurably short, but which to me was protracted almost beyond endurance, we reached the spot. I halloed to the sexton, who was now employed upon another grave, to follow me. I myself seized a mattock, and in obedience to my incoherent and agonised commands, he worked as he had never worked before. The crumbling mould flew swiftly to the upper soil — deeper and deeper, every moment, grew the narrow grave — at last I sobbed, "Thank God — thank God," as I saw the face of the coffin emerge; a few seconds more and it lay upon the sward beside me, and we both, with the edges of our spades, ripped up the lid.

There was the corpse — but not the tranquil statue I had seen it last. Its knees were both raised, and one of its little hands drawn up and clenched near its throat, as if in a feeble but agonised struggle to force up the superincumbent mass. The eyes, that I had last seen closed, were now open, and the face no longer serenely pale, but livid and distorted.

I had time to see all in an instant; the whole scene reeled and darkened before me, and I swooned away.

When I came to myself, I found that I had been removed to the vestry-room. The open coffin was in the aisle of the church, surrounded by a curious crowd. A medical gentleman had examined the body carefully, and had pronounced life totally extinct. The trepidation and horror I experienced were indescribable. I felt like the murderer of my own child. Desperate as I was of any chance of its life, I dispatched messengers for no less than three of the most eminent physicians then practising in London. All concurred — the child was now as dead as any other, the oldest tenant of the churchyard.

Notwithstanding which, I would not permit the body to be reinterred for several days, until the symptoms of decay became unequivocal, and the most fantastic imagination could no longer cherish a doubt. This, however, I mention only parenthetically, as I hasten to the conclusion of my narrative. The circumstance which I have last described found its way to the public, and caused no small sensation at the time.

I drove part of the way home, and then discharged the cab, and walked the remainder. On my way, with an emotion of ecstasy I cannot describe, I met the good being to whom I owed so much. I ran to meet him, and felt as if I could throw myself at his feet, and kiss the very ground before him. I knew by his heavenly countenance he was come to speak comfort and healing to my heart.

With humbleness and gratitude, I drank in his sage and holy discourse. I need not follow the gracious and delightful exposition of God's revealed will and character with which he cheered and confirmed my faltering spirit. A solemn joy, a peace and trust, streamed on my heart. The wreck and desolation there, lost their bleak and ghastly character, like ruins illuminated by the mellow beams of a solemn summer sunset.

In this conversation, I told him what I had never revealed to any one before — the absolute terror, in all its stupendous and maddening amplitude, with which I regarded our ill-omened lodger, and my agonised anxiety to rid my house of him. My companion answered me —

"I know the person of whom you speak — he designs no good for you or any other. He, too, knows me, and I have intimated to him that he must now leave you, and visit you no more. Be firm and bold, trusting in God, through his Son, like a good soldier, and you will win the victory from a greater and even worse than he — the *unseen* enemy of mankind. You need not see or speak with your evil tenant any more. Call to him from your hall, in the name of the Most Holy, to leave you bodily, with all that appertains to him, this evening. He knows that he must go, and will obey you. But leave the house as soon as may be yourself; you will scarce have peace in it. Your own remembrances will trouble you and *other minds have established associations within its walls and chambers too*.”

These words sounded mysteriously in my ears.

Let me say here, before I bring my reminiscences to a close, a word or two about the house in which these detested scenes occurred, and which I did not long continue to inhabit. What I afterwards learned of it, seemed to supply in part a dim explanation of these words.

In a country village there is no difficulty in accounting for the tenacity with which the sinister character of a haunted tenement cleaves to it. Thin neighbourhoods are favourable to scandal; and in such localities the reputation of a house, like that of a woman, once blown upon, never quite recovers. In huge London, however, it is quite another matter; and, therefore, it was with some surprise that, five years after I had vacated the house in which the occurrences I have described took place, I learned that a respectable family who had taken it were obliged to give it up, on account of annoyances, for which they could not account, and all proceeding from the apartments formerly occupied by our “lodger.” Among the sounds described were footsteps restlessly traversing the floor of that room, accompanied by the peculiar tapping of the crutch.

I was so anxious about this occurrence, that I contrived to have strict inquiries made into the matter. The result, however, added little to what I had at first learned — except, indeed, that our old friend, the cat, bore a part in the transaction as I suspected; for the servant, who had been placed to sleep in the room, complained that something bounded on and off, and ran to-and-fro along the foot of the bed, in the dark. The same servant, while in the room, in the broad daylight, had heard the sound of walking, and even the rustling of clothes near him, as of people passing and repassing; and, although he had never seen anything, he yet became so terrified that he would not remain in the house, and ultimately, in a short time, left his situation.

These sounds, attention having been called to them, were now incessantly observed — the measured walking up and down the room, the opening and closing of the door, and the teazing tap of the crutch — all these sounds were continually repeated, until at last, worn out, frightened, and worried, its occupants resolved on abandoning the house.

About four years since, having had occasion to visit the capital, I resolved on a ramble by Old Brompton, just to see if the house were still inhabited. I searched for it, however, in vain, and at length, with difficulty, ascertained its site, upon which now stood two small, staring, bran-new brick houses, with each a gay enclosure of flowers. Every trace of our old mansion, and, let us hope, of our "mysterious lodger," had entirely vanished.

Let me, however, return to my narrative where I left it.

Discoursing upon heavenly matters, my good and gracious friend accompanied me even within the outer gate of my own house. I asked him to come in and rest himself, but he would not; and before he turned to depart, he lifted up his hand, and blessed me and my household.

Having done this, he went away. My eyes followed him till he disappeared, and I turned to the house. My darling wife was standing at the window of the parlour. There was a seraphic smile on her face — pale, pure, and beautiful as death. She was gazing with an humble, heavenly earnestness on us. The parting blessing of the stranger shed a sweet and hallowed influence on my heart. I went into the parlour, to my darling: childless she was now; I had now need to be a tender companion to her.

She raised her arms in a sort of transport, with the same smile of gratitude and purity, and, throwing them round my neck, she said —

"I have seen him — it is he — the man that came with you to the door, and blessed us as he went away — is the same I saw in my dream — the same who took little baby in his arms, and said he would take care of him, and give him safely to me again."

More than a quarter of a century has glided away since then; other children have been given us by the good God — children who have been, from infancy to maturity, a pride and blessing to us. Sorrows and reverses, too, have occasionally visited us; yet, on the whole, we have been greatly blessed; prosperity has long since ended all the cares of the *res angusta domi*, and expanded our power of doing good to our fellow-creatures. God has given it; and God, we trust, directs its dispensation. In our children, and — would you think it? — our *grand*-children, too, the same beneficent God has given us objects that elicit and return all the delightful affections, and exchange the sweet converse that makes home and family dearer than aught else, save that blessed home where the Christian family shall meet at last.

The dear companion of my early love and sorrows still lives, blessed be Heaven! The evening tints of life have fallen upon her; but the dear remembrance of a first love, that never grew cold, makes her beauty changeless for me. As for your humble servant, he is considerably her senior, and looks it: time has stolen away his raven locks, and given him a *chevelure* of snow instead. But, as I said before, I and my wife love, and, I believe, *admire* one another more than ever; and I have often seen our elder children smile archly at one another, when they thought we did not observe them, thinking, no doubt, how like a pair of lovers we two were.

LAURA SILVER BELL

In the five Northumbrian counties you will scarcely find so bleak, ugly, and yet, in a savage way, so picturesque a moor as Dardale Moss. The moor itself spreads north, south, east, and west, a great undulating sea of black peat and heath.

What we may term its shores are wooded wildly with birch, hazel, and dwarf-oak. No towering mountains surround it, but here and there you have a rocky knoll rising among the trees, and many a wooded promontory of the same pretty, because utterly wild, forest, running out into its dark level.

Habitations are thinly scattered in this barren territory, and a full mile away from the meanest was the stone cottage of Mother Carke.

Let not my southern reader who associates ideas of comfort with the term "cottage" mistake. This thing is built of shingle, with low walls. Its thatch is hollow; the peat-smoke curls stingily from its stunted chimney. It is worthy of its savage surroundings.

The primitive neighbours remark that no rowan-tree grows near, nor holly, nor bracken, and no horseshoe is nailed on the door.

Not far from the birches and hazels that straggle about the rude wall of the little enclosure, on the contrary, they say, you may discover the broom and the rag-wort, in which witches mysteriously delight. But this is perhaps a scandal.

Mall Carke was for many a year the *sage femme* of this wild domain. She has renounced practice, however, for some years; and now, under the rose, she dabbles, it is thought, in the black art, in which she has always been secretly skilled, tells fortunes, practises charms, and in popular esteem is little better than a witch.

Mother Carke has been away to the town of Willarden, to sell knit stockings, and is returning to her rude dwelling by Dardale Moss. To her right, as far away as the eye can reach, the moor stretches. The narrow track she has followed here tops a gentle upland, and at her left a sort of jungle of dwarf-oak and brushwood approaches its edge. The sun is sinking blood-red in the west. His disk has touched the broad black level of the moor, and his parting beams glare athwart the gaunt figure of the old beldame, as she strides homeward stick in hand, and bring into relief the folds of her mantle, which gleam like the draperies of a bronze image in the light of a fire. For a few moments this light floods the air — tree, gorse, rock, and bracken glare; and then it is out, and gray twilight over everything.

All is still and sombre. At this hour the simple traffic of the thinly-peopled country is over, and nothing can be more solitary.

From this jungle, nevertheless, through which the mists of evening are already creeping, she sees a gigantic man approaching her.

In that poor and primitive country robbery is a crime unknown. She, therefore, has no fears for her pound of tea, and pint of gin, and sixteen shillings in silver which she is bringing home in her pocket. But there is something that would have frighted another woman about this man.

He is gaunt, sombre, bony, dirty, and dressed in a black suit which a beggar would hardly care to pick out of the dust.

This ill-looking man nodded to her as he stepped on the road.

"I don't know you," she said.

He nodded again.

"I never sid ye neyawheere," she exclaimed sternly.

"Fine evening, Mother Carke," he says, and holds his snuff-box toward her.

She widened the distance between them by a step or so, and said again sternly and pale,

"I hev nowt to say to thee, whoe'er thou beest."

"You know Laura Silver Bell?"

"That's a byneyam; the lass's neyam is Laura Lew," she answered, looking straight before her.

"One name's as good as another for one that was never christened, mother."

"How know ye that?" she asked grimly; for it is a received opinion in that part of the world that the fairies have power over those who have never been baptised.

The stranger turned on her a malignant smile.

"There is a young lord in love with her," the stranger says, "and I'm that lord. Have her at your house tomorrow night at eight o'clock, and you must stick cross pins through the candle, as you have done for many a one before, to bring her lover thither by ten, and her fortune's made. And take this for your trouble."

He extended his long finger and thumb toward her, with a guinea temptingly displayed.

"I have nowt to do wi' thee. I nivver sid thee afoore. Git thee awa'! I earned nea goold o' thee, and I'll tak' nane. Awa' wi' thee, or I'll find ane that will mak' thee!"

The old woman had stopped, and was quivering in every limb as she thus spoke.

He looked very angry. Sulkily he turned away at her words, and strode slowly toward the wood from which he had come; and as he approached it, he seemed to her to grow taller and taller, and stalked into it as high as a tree.

"I conceited there would come something o't", she said to herself. "Farmer Lew must git it done nesht Sunda'. The a'ad awpy!"

Old Farmer Lew was one of that sect who insist that baptism shall be but once administered, and not until the Christian candidate had attained to adult years. The girl had indeed for some time been of an age not only, according to this theory, to be baptised, but if need be to be married.

Her story was a sad little romance. A lady some seventeen years before had come down and paid Farmer Lew for two rooms in his house. She told him that her husband would follow her in a fortnight, and that he was in the mean time delayed by business in Liverpool.

In ten days after her arrival her baby was born, Mall Carke acting as *sage femme* on the occasion; and on the evening of that day the poor young mother died. No husband came; no wedding-ring, they said, was on her finger. About fifty pounds was found in her desk, which Farmer Lew, who was a kind old fellow and had lost his two children, put in bank for the little girl, and resolved to keep her until a rightful owner should step forward to claim her.

They found half-a-dozen love-letters signed "Francis," and calling the dead woman "Laura."

So Farmer Lew called the little girl Laura; and her *sobriquet* of "Silver Bell" was derived from a tiny silver bell, once gilt, which was found among her poor mother's little treasures after her death, and which the child wore on a ribbon round her neck.

Thus, being very pretty and merry, she grew up as a North-country farmer's daughter; and the old man, as she needed more looking after, grew older and less able to take care of her; so she was, in fact, very nearly her own mistress, and did pretty much in all things as she liked.

Old Mall Carke, by some caprice for which no one could account, cherished an affection for the girl, who saw her often, and paid her many a small fee in exchange for the secret indications of the future.

It was too late when Mother Carke reached her home to look for a visit from Laura Silver Bell that day.

About three o'clock next afternoon, Mother Carke was sitting knitting, with her glasses on, outside her door on the stone bench, when she saw the pretty girl mount lightly to the top of the stile at her left under the birch, against the silver stem of which she leaned her slender hand, and called,

"Mall, Mall! Mother Carke, are ye alane all by yersel'?"

"Ay, Laura lass, we can be clooas enoo, if ye want a word wi' me," says the old woman, rising, with a mysterious nod, and beckoning her stiffly with her long fingers.

The girl was, assuredly, pretty enough for a "lord" to fall in love with. Only look at her. A profusion of brown rippling hair, parted low in the middle of her forehead, almost touched her eyebrows, and made the pretty oval of her face, by the breadth of that rich line, more marked. What a pretty little nose! what scarlet lips, and large, dark, long-fringed eyes!

Her face is transparently tinged with those clear Murillo tints which appear in deeper dyes on her wrists and the backs of her hands. These are the beautiful gipsy-tints with which the sun dyes young skins so richly.

The old woman eyes all this, and her pretty figure, so round and slender, and her shapely little feet, cased in the thick shoes that can't hide their comely proportions, as she stands on the top of the stile. But it is with a dark and saturnine aspect.

"Come, lass, what stand ye for atoppa t' wall, whar folk may chance to see thee? I hev a thing to tell thee, lass."

She beckoned her again.

"An' I hev a thing to tell *thee*, Mall."

"Come hidder," said the old woman peremptorily.

"But ye munna gie me the creepin's" (make me tremble). "I winna look again into the glass o' water, mind ye."

The old woman smiled grimly, and changed her tone.

“Now, hunny, git tha down, and let ma see thy canny feyace,” and she beckoned her again.

Laura Silver Bell did get down, and stepped lightly toward the door of the old woman’s dwelling.

“Tak this,” said the girl, unfolding a piece of bacon from her apron, “and I hev a silver sixpence to gie thee, when I’m gaen away heyam.”

They entered the dark kitchen of the cottage, and the old woman stood by the door, lest their conference should be lighted on by surprise.

“Afoore ye begin,” said Mother Carke (I soften her patois), “I mun tell ye there’s ill folk watchin’ ye. What’s auld Farmer Lew about, he doesna get t’ sir” (the clergyman) “to baptise thee? If he lets Sunda’ next pass, I’m afeared ye’ll never be sprinkled nor signed wi’ cross, while there’s a sky aboon us.”

“Agoy!” exclaims the girl, “who’s lookin’ after me?”

“A big black fella, as high as the kipples, came out o’ the wood near Deadman’s Grike, just after the sun gaed down yester e’en; I knew weel what he was, for his feet ne’er touched the road while he made as if he walked beside me. And he wanted to gie me snuff first, and I wouldna hev that; and then he offered me a gowden guinea, but I was no sic awpy, and to bring you here tonight, and cross the candle wi’ pins, to call your lover in. And he said he’s a great lord, and in luve wi’ thee.”

“And you refused him?”

“Well for thee I did, lass,” says Mother Carke.

“Why, it’s every word true!” cries the girl vehemently, starting to her feet, for she had seated herself on the great oak chest.

“True, lass? Come, say what ye mean,” demanded Mall Carke, with a dark and searching gaze.

“Last night I was coming heyam from the wake, wi’ auld farmer Dykes and his wife and his daughter Nell, and when we came to the stile, I bid them goodnight, and we parted.”

“And ye came by the path alone in the night-time, did ye?” exclaimed old Mall Carke sternly.

“I wasna afeared, I don’t know why; the path heyam leads down by the wa’as o’ auld Hawarth Castle.”

“I knaa it weel, and a dowly path it is; ye’ll keep indoors o’ nights for a while, or ye’ll rue it. What saw ye?”

“No freetin, mother; nowt I was feared on.”

“Ye heard a voice callin’ yer neyame?”

“I heard nowt that was dow, but the hullyhoo in the auld castle wa’s,” answered the pretty girl. “I heard nor sid nowt that’s dow, but mickle that’s conny and gladsome. I heard singin’ and laughin’ a long way off, I consaited; and I stopped a bit to listen. Then I walked on a step or two, and there, sure enough in the Pie-Mag field, under the castle wa’s, not twenty steps away, I sid a grand company; silks and satins, and men wi’ velvet coats, wi’ gowd-lace striped over them, and ladies wi’ necklaces that would dazzle ye, and fans as big as griddles; and powdered footmen, like what the shirra hed behind his coach, only these was ten times as grand.”

“It was full moon last night,” said the old woman.

“Sa bright ‘twould blind ye to look at it,” said the girl.

“Never an ill sight but the deaul finds a light,” quoth the old woman. “There’s a rinnin brook thar — you were at this side, and they at that; did they try to mak ye cross over?”

“Agoy! didn’t they? Nowt but civility and kindness, though. But ye mun let me tell it my own way. They was talkin’ and laughin’, and eatin’, and drinkin’ out o’ long glasses and goud cups, seated on the grass, and music was playin’; and I keekin’ behind a bush at all the grand doin’s; and up they gits to dance; and says a tall fella I didna see afoore, ‘Ye mun step across, and dance wi’ a young lord that’s faan in luv wi’ thee, and that’s mysel’,’ and sure enow I keeked at him under my lashes and a conny lad he is, to my teyaste, though he be dressed in black, wi’ sword and sash, velvet twice as fine as they sells in the shop at Gouden Friars; and keekin’ at me again fra the corners o’ his een. And the same fella telt me he was mad in luv wi’ me, and his fadder was there, and his sister, and they came all the way from Catstean Castle to see me that night; and that’s t’ other side o’ Gouden Friars.”

“Come, lass, yer no mafflin; tell me true. What was he like? Was his feyace grimed wi’ sut? a tall fella wi’ wide shouthers, and lukt like an ill-thing, wi’ black clothes amaist in rags?”

“His feyace was long, but weel-faured, and darker nor a gipsy; and his clothes were black and grand, and made o’ velvet, and he said he was the young lord himsel’; and he lukt like it.”

"That will be the same fella I sid at Deadman's Grike," said Mall Carke, with an anxious frown.

"Hoot, mudder! how cud that be?" cried the lass, with a toss of her pretty head and a smile of scorn. But the fortuneteller made no answer, and the girl went on with her story.

"When they began to dance," continued Laura Silver Bell, "he urged me again, but I wudna step o'er; 'twas partly pride, coz I wasna dressed fine enough, and partly contrairiness, or something, but gaa I wudna, not a fut. No but I more nor half wished it a' the time."

"Weel for thee thou dudstna cross the brook."

"Hoitytoity, why not?"

"Keep at heyame after nightfall, and don't ye be walking by yersel' by daylight or any light lang lonesome ways, till after ye're baptised," said Mall Carke.

"I'm like to be married first."

"Tak care *that* marriage won't hang i' the bell-ropes," said Mother Carke.

"Leave me alane for that. The young lord said he was maist daft wi' luv o' me. He wanted to gie me a conny ring wi' a beautiful stone in it. But, drat it, I was sic an awpy I wudna tak it, and he a young lord!"

"Lord, indeed! are ye daft or dreamin'? Those fine folk, what were they? I'll tell ye. Dobies and fairies; and if ye don't du as yer bid, they'll tak ye, and ye'll never git out o' their hands again while grass grows," said the old woman grimly.

"Od wite it!" replies the girl impatiently, "who's daft or dreamin' noo? I'd a bin dead wi' fear, if 'twas any such thing. It cudna be; all was sa luvesome, and bonny, and shaply."

"Weel, and what do ye want o' me, lass?" asked the old woman sharply.

"I want to know — here's t' sixpence — what I sud du," said the young lass. "'Twud be a pity to lose such a marrow, hey?"

"Say yer prayers, lass; *I* can't help ye," says the old woman darkly. "If ye gaa wi' *the* people, ye'll never come back. Ye munna talk wi' them, nor eat wi' them, nor drink wi' them, nor tak a pin's-worth by way o' gift fra them — mark weel what I say — or ye're *lost!*"

The girl looked down, plainly much vexed.

The old woman stared at her with a mysterious frown steadily, for a few seconds.

“Tell me, lass, and tell me true, are ye in luve wi’ that lad?”

“What for sud I?” said the girl with a careless toss of her head, and blushing up to her very temples.

“I see how it is,” said the old woman, with a groan, and repeated the words, sadly thinking; and walked out of the door a step or two, and looked jealously round. “The lass is witched, the lass is witched!”

“Did ye see him since?” asked Mother Carke, returning.

The girl was still embarrassed; and now she spoke in a lower tone, and seemed subdued.

“I thought I sid him as I came here, walkin’ beside me among the trees; but I consait it was only the trees themsels that lukt like rinnin’ one behind another, as I walked on.”

“I can tell thee nowt, lass, but what I telt ye afoore,” answered the old woman peremptorily. “Get ye heyame, and don’t delay on the way; and say yer prayers as ye gaa; and let none but good thoughts come nigh ye; and put nayer foot autside the door-steyan again till ye gaa to be christened; and get that done a Sunda’ next.”

And with this charge, given with grizzly earnestness, she saw her over the stile, and stood upon it watching her retreat, until the trees quite hid her and her path from view.

The sky grew cloudy and thunderous, and the air darkened rapidly, as the girl, a little frightened by Mall Carke’s view of the case, walked homeward by the lonely path among the trees.

A black cat, which had walked close by her — for these creatures sometimes take a ramble in search of their prey among the woods and thickets — crept from under the hollow of an oak, and was again with her. It seemed to her to grow bigger and bigger as the darkness deepened, and its green eyes glared as large as halfpennies in her affrighted vision as the thunder came booming along the heights from the Willarden-road.

She tried to drive it away; but it growled and hissed awfully, and set up its back as if it would spring at her, and finally it skipped up into a tree, where they grew thickest at each side of her path, and accompanied her, high over head, hopping from bough to bough as if meditating a pounce upon her shoulders. Her fancy being full of strange thoughts, she was frightened, and she fancied that it was haunting her steps, and destined to undergo some hideous transformation, the moment she ceased to guard her path with prayers.

She was frightened for a while after she got home. The dark looks of Mother Carke were always before her eyes, and a secret dread prevented her passing the threshold of her home again that night.

Next day it was different. She had got rid of the awe with which Mother Carke had inspired her. She could not get the tall dark-featured lord, in the black velvet dress, out of her head. He had "taken her fancy"; she was growing to love him. She could think of nothing else.

Bessie Hennock, a neighbour's daughter, came to see her that day, and proposed a walk toward the ruins of Hawarth Castle, to gather "blaebirries." So off the two girls went together.

In the thicket, along the slopes near the ivied walls of Hawarth Castle, the companions began to fill their baskets. Hours passed. The sun was sinking near the west, and Laura Silver Bell had not come home.

Over the hatch of the farmhouse door the maids leant ever and anon with outstretched necks, watching for a sign of the girl's return, and wondering, as the shadows lengthened, what had become of her.

At last, just as the rosy sunset gilding began to overspread the landscape, Bessie Hennock, weeping into her apron, made her appearance without her companion.

Her account of their adventures was curious.

I will relate the substance of it more connectedly than her agitation would allow her to give it, and without the disguise of the rude Northumbrian dialect.

The girl said, that, as they got along together among the brambles that grow beside the brook that bounds the Pie-Mag field, she on a sudden saw a very tall big-boned man, with an ill-favoured smirched face, and dressed in worn and rusty black, standing at the other side of a little stream. She was frightened; and while looking at this dirty, wicked, starved figure, Laura Silver Bell touched her, gazing at the same tall scarecrow, but with a countenance full of confusion and even rapture. She was peeping through the bush behind which she stood, and with a sigh she said:

"Is na that a conny lad? Agoy! See his bonny velvet clothes, his sword and sash; that's a lord, I can tell ye; and weel I know who he follows, who he luves, and who he'll wed."

Bessie Hennock thought her companion daft.

“See how luvesome he luks!” whispered Laura.

Bessie looked again, and saw him gazing at her companion with a malignant smile, and at the same time he beckoned her to approach.

“Darrat ta! gaa not near him! he’ll wring thy neck!” gasped Bessie in great fear, as she saw Laura step forward with a look of beautiful bashfulness and joy.

She took the hand he stretched across the stream, more for love of the hand than any need of help, and in a moment was across and by his side, and his long arm about her waist.

“Fares te weel, Bessie, I’m gain my ways,” she called, leaning her head to his shoulder; “and tell gud Fadder Lew I’m gain my ways to be happy, and may be, at lang last, I’ll see him again.”

And with a farewell wave of her hand, she went away with her dismal partner; and Laura Silver Bell was never more seen at home, or among the “coppies” and “wickwoods,” the bonny fields and bosky hollows, by Dardale Moss.

Bessie Hennock followed them for a time.

She crossed the brook, and though they seemed to move slowly enough, she was obliged to run to keep them in view; and she all the time cried to her continually, “Come back, come back, bonnie Laurie!” until, getting over a bank, she was met by a white-faced old man, and so frightened was she, that she thought she fainted outright. At all events, she did not come to herself until the birds were singing their vespers in the amber light of sunset, and the day was over.

No trace of the direction of the girl’s flight was ever discovered. Weeks and months passed, and more than a year.

At the end of that time, one of Mall Carke’s goats died, as she suspected, by the envious practices of a rival witch who lived at the far end of Dardale Moss.

All alone in her stone cabin the old woman had prepared her charm to ascertain the author of her misfortune.

The heart of the dead animal, stuck all over with pins, was burnt in the fire; the windows, doors, and every other aperture of the house being first carefully stopped. After the heart, thus prepared with suitable incantations, is consumed in the fire, the first person who comes to the door or passes by it is the offending magician.

Mother Carke completed these lonely rites at dead of night. It was a dark night, with the glimmer of the stars only, and a melancholy night-wind was soughing through the scattered woods that spread around.

After a long and dead silence, there came a heavy thump at the door, and a deep voice called her by name.

She was startled, for she expected no man's voice; and peeping from the window, she saw, in the dim light, a coach and four horses, with gold-laced footmen, and coachman in wig and cocked hat, turned out as if for a state occasion.

She unbarred the door; and a tall gentleman, dressed in black, waiting at the threshold, entreated her, as the only *sage femme* within reach, to come in the coach and attend Lady Lairdale, who was about to give birth to a baby, promising her handsome payment.

Lady Lairdale! She had never heard of her.

"How far away is it?"

"Twelve miles on the old road to Golden Friars."

Her avarice is roused, and she steps into the coach. The footman claps-to the door; the glass jingles with the sound of a laugh. The tall dark-faced gentleman in black is seated opposite; they are driving at a furious pace; they have turned out of the road into a narrower one, dark with thicker and loftier forest than she was accustomed to. She grows anxious; for she knows every road and by-path in the country round, and she has never seen this one.

He encourages her. The moon has risen above the edge of the horizon, and she sees a noble old castle. Its summit of tower, watchtower and battlement, glimmers faintly in the moonlight. This is their destination.

She feels on a sudden all but overpowered by sleep; but although she nods, she is quite conscious of the continued motion, which has become even rougher.

She makes an effort, and rouses herself. What has become of the coach, the castle, the servants? Nothing but the strange forest remains the same.

She is jolting along on a rude hurdle, seated on rushes, and a tall, big-boned man, in rags, sits in front, kicking with his heel the ill-favoured beast that pulls them along, every bone of which sticks out, and holding the halter which serves for reins. They stop at the door of a miserable building of loose stone, with a thatch so sunk and rotten, that the roof-tree and couples protrude in crooked corners, like the bones of the wretched horse, with enormous head and ears, that dragged them to the door.

The long gaunt man gets down, his sinister face grimed like his hands.

It was the same grimy giant who had accosted her on the lonely road near Deadman's Grike. But she feels that she "must go through with it" now, and she follows him into the house.

Two rushlights were burning in the large and miserable room, and on a coarse ragged bed lay a woman groaning piteously.

"That's Lady Lairdale," says the gaunt dark man, who then began to stride up and down the room rolling his head, stamping furiously, and thumping one hand on the palm of the other, and talking and laughing in the corners, where there was no one visible to hear or to answer.

Old Mall Carke recognized in the faded half-starved creature who lay on the bed, as dark now and grimy as the man, and looking as if she had never in her life washed hands or face, the once blithe and pretty Laura Lew.

The hideous being who was her mate continued in the same odd fluctuations of fury, grief, and merriment; and whenever she uttered a groan, he parodied it with another, as Mother Carke thought, in saturnine derision.

At length he strode into another room, and banged the door after him.

In due time the poor woman's pains were over, and a daughter was born.

Such an imp! with long pointed ears, flat nose, and enormous restless eyes and mouth. It instantly began to yell and talk in some unknown language, at the noise of which the father looked into the room, and told the *sage femme* that she should not go unrewarded.

The sick woman seized the moment of his absence to say in the ear of Mall Carke:

"If ye had not been at ill work tonight, he could not hev fetched ye. Tak no more now than your rightful fee, or he'll keep ye here."

At this moment he returned with a bag of gold and silver coins, which he emptied on the table, and told her to help herself.

She took four shillings, which was her primitive fee, neither more nor less; and all his urgency could not prevail with her to take a farthing more. He looked so terrible at her refusal, that she rushed out of the house.

He ran after her.

“You’ll take your money with you,” he roared, snatching up the bag, still half full, and flung it after her.

It lighted on her shoulder; and partly from the blow, partly from terror, she fell to the ground; and when she came to herself, it was morning, and she was lying across her own door-stone.

It is said that she never more told fortune or practised spell. And though all that happened sixty years ago and more, Laura Silver Bell, wise folk think, is still living, and will so continue till the day of doom among the fairies.

WICKED CAPTAIN WALSHAWE, OF WAULING

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CHAPTER I.

Peg O'Neill Pays the Captain's Debts

A very odd thing happened to my uncle, Mr. Watson, of Haddlestone; and to enable you to understand it, I must begin at the beginning.

In the year 1822, Mr. James Walshawe, more commonly known as Captain Walshawe, died at the age of eighty-one years. The Captain in his early days, and so long as health and strength permitted, was a scamp of the active, intriguing sort; and spent his days and nights in sowing his wild oats, of which he seemed to have an inexhaustible stock. The harvest of this tillage was plentifully interspersed with thorns, nettles, and thistles, which stung the husbandman unpleasantly, and did not enrich him.

Captain Walshawe was very well known in the neighborhood of Wauling, and very generally avoided there. A "captain" by courtesy, for he had never reached that rank in the army list. He had quitted the service in 1766, at the age of twenty-five; immediately previous to which period his debts had grown so troublesome, that he was induced to extricate himself by running away with and marrying an heiress.

Though not so wealthy quite as he had imagined, she proved a very comfortable investment for what remained of his shattered affections; and he lived and enjoyed himself very much in his old way, upon her income, getting into no end of scrapes and scandals, and a good deal of debt and money trouble.

When he married his wife, he was quartered in Ireland, at Clonmel, where was a nunnery, in which, as pensioner, resided Miss O'Neill, or as she was called in the country, Peg O'Neill — the heiress of whom I have spoken.

Her situation was the only ingredient of romance in the affair, for the young lady was decidedly plain, though goodhumoured looking, with that style of features which is termed *potato*; and in figure she was a little too plump, and rather short. But she was impressible; and the handsome young English Lieutenant was too much for her monastic tendencies, and she eloped.

In England there are traditions of Irish fortune-hunters, and in Ireland of English. The fact is, it was the vagrant class of each country that chiefly visited the other in old times; and a handsome vagabond, whether at home or abroad, I suppose, made the most of his face, which was also his fortune.

At all events, he carried off the fair one from the sanctuary; and for some sufficient reason, I suppose, they took up their abode at Wauling, in Lancashire.

Here the gallant captain amused himself after his fashion, sometimes running up, of course on business, to London. I believe few wives have ever cried more in a given time than did that poor, dumpy, potato-faced heiress, who got over the nunnery garden wall, and jumped into the handsome Captain's arms, for love.

He spent her income, frightened her out of her wits with oaths and threats, and broke her heart.

Latterly she shut herself up pretty nearly altogether in her room. She had an old, rather grim, Irish servant-woman in attendance upon her. This domestic was tall, lean, and religious, and the Captain knew instinctively she hated him; and he hated her in return, often threatened to put her out of the house, and sometimes even to kick her out of the window. And whenever a wet day confined him to the house, or the stable, and he grew tired of smoking, he would begin to swear and curse at her for a *diddled* old mischief-maker, that could never be easy, and was always troubling the house with her cursed stories, and so forth.

But years passed away, and old Molly Doyle remained still in her original position. Perhaps he thought that there must be somebody there, and that he was not, after all, very likely to change for the better.

CHAPTER II

The Blessed Candle

He tolerated another intrusion, too, and thought himself a paragon of patience and easy good nature for so doing. A Roman Catholic clergyman, in a long black frock, with a low standing collar, and a little white muslin fillet round his neck — tall, sallow, with blue chin, and dark steady eyes — used to glide up and down the stairs, and through the passages; and the Captain sometimes met him in one place and sometimes in another. But by a caprice incident to such tempers he treated this cleric exceptionally, and even with a surly sort of courtesy, though he grumbled about his visits behind his back.

I do not know that he had a great deal of moral courage, and the ecclesiastic looked severe and self-possessed; and somehow he thought he had no good opinion of him, and if a natural occasion were offered, might say extremely unpleasant things, and hard to be answered.

Well the time came at last, when poor Peg O'Neill — in an evil hour Mrs. James Walshawe — must cry, and quake, and pray her last. The doctor came from Penlynden, and was just as vague as usual, but more gloomy, and for about a week came and went oftener. The cleric in the long black frock was also daily there. And at last came that last sacrament in the gates of death, when the sinner is traversing those dread steps that never can be retraced; when the face is turned for ever from life, and we see a receding shape, and hear a voice already irrevocably in the land of spirits.

So the poor lady died; and some people said the Captain "felt it very much." I don't think he did. But he was not very well just then, and looked the part of mourner and penitent to admiration — being seedy and sick. He drank a great deal of brandy and water that night, and called in Farmer Dobbs, for want of better company, to drink with him; and told him all his grievances, and how happy he and "the poor lady upstairs" might have been, had it not been for liars, and pick-thanks, and tale-bearers, and the like, who came between them — meaning Molly Doyle — whom, as he waxed eloquent over his liquor, he came at last to curse and rail at by name, with more than his accustomed freedom. And he described his own natural character and amiability in such moving terms, that he wept maudlin tears of sensibility over his theme; and when Dobbs was gone, drank some more grog, and took to railing and cursing again by himself; and then mounted the stairs unsteadily, to see "what the devil Doyle and the other —— old witches were about in poor Peg's room."

When he pushed open the door, he found some half-dozen crones, chiefly Irish, from the neighbouring town of Hackleton, sitting over tea and snuff, etc., with candles lighted round the corpse, which was arrayed in a strangely cut robe of brown serge. She had secretly belonged to some order — I think the Carmelite, but I am not certain — and wore the habit in her coffin.

"What the d —— are you doing with my wife?" cried the Captain, rather thickly. "How dare you dress her up in this —— trumpery, you — you cheating old witch; and what's that candle doing in her hand?"

I think he was a little startled, for the spectacle was grisly enough. The dead lady was arrayed in this strange brown robe, and in her rigid fingers, as in a socket, with the large wooden beads and cross wound round it, burned a wax candle, shedding its white light over the sharp features of the corpse. Moll Doyle was not to be put down by the Captain, whom she hated, and accordingly, in her phrase, "he got as good as he gave." And the Captain's wrath waxed fiercer, and he chucked the wax taper from the dead hand, and was on the point of flinging it at the old serving-woman's head.

"The holy candle, you sinner!" cried she.

"I've a mind to make you eat it, you beast," cried the Captain.

But I think he had not known before what it was, for he subsided a little sulkily, and he stuffed his hand with the candle (quite extinct by this time) into his pocket, and said he —

"You know devilish well you had no business going on with y-y-your d —— *witch*-craft about my poor wife, without my leave — you do — and you'll please take off that d —— brown pinafore, and get her decently into her coffin, and I'll pitch your devil's waxlight into the sink."

And the Captain stalked out of the room.

"An' now her poor sowl's in prison, you wretch, be the mains o' ye; an' may yer own be shut into the wick o' that same candle, till it's burned out, ye savage."

“I’d have you ducked for a witch, for twopence,” roared the Captain up the staircase, with his hand on the banisters, standing on the lobby. But the door of the chamber of death clapped angrily, and he went down to the parlour, where he examined the holy candle for a while, with a tipsy gravity, and then with something of that reverential feeling for the symbolic, which is not uncommon in rakes and scamps, he thoughtfully locked it up in a press, where were accumulated all sorts of obsolete rubbish — soiled packs of cards, disused tobacco pipes, broken powder flasks, his military sword, and a dusky bundle of the “Flash Songster,” and other questionable literature.

He did not trouble the dead lady’s room any more. Being a volatile man it is probable that more cheerful plans and occupations began to entertain his fancy.

CHAPTER III

My Uncle Watson Visits Wauling

So the poor lady was buried decently, and Captain Walshawe reigned alone for many years at Wauling. He was too shrewd and too experienced by this time to run violently down the steep hill that leads to ruin. So there was a method in his madness; and after a widowed career of more than forty years, he, too, died at last with some guineas in his purse.

Forty years and upwards is a great *edax rerum*, and a wonderful chemical power. It acted forcibly upon the gay Captain Walshawe. Gout supervened, and was no more conducive to temper than to enjoyment, and made his elegant hands lumpy at all the small joints, and turned them slowly into crippled claws. He grew stout when his exercise was interfered with, and ultimately almost corpulent. He suffered from what Mr. Holloway calls "bad legs," and was wheeled about in a great leathern-backed chair, and his infirmities went on accumulating with his years.

I am sorry to say, I never heard that he repented, or turned his thoughts seriously to the future. On the contrary, his talk grew fouler, and his fun ran upon his favourite sins, and his temper waxed more truculent. But he did not sink into dotage. Considering his bodily infirmities, his energies and his malignities, which were many and active, were marvellously little abated by time. So he went on to the close. When his temper was stirred, he cursed and swore in a way that made decent people tremble. It was a word and a blow with him; the latter, luckily, not very sure now. But he would seize his crutch and make a swoop or a pound at the offender, or shy his medicine-bottle, or his tumbler, at his head.

It was a peculiarity of Captain Walshawe, that he, by this time, hated nearly everybody. My uncle, Mr. Watson, of Haddlestone, was cousin to the Captain, and his heir-at-law. But my uncle had lent him money on mortgage of his estates, and there had been a treaty to sell, and terms and a price were agreed upon, in "articles" which the lawyers said were still in force.

I think the ill-conditioned Captain bore him a grudge for being richer than he, and would have liked to do him an ill turn. But it did not lie in his way; at least while he was living.

My uncle Watson was a Methodist, and what they call a “classleader”; and, on the whole, a very good man. He was now near fifty — grave, as beseemed his profession — somewhat dry — and a little severe, perhaps — but a just man.

A letter from the Penlynden doctor reached him at Haddlestone, announcing the death of the wicked old Captain; and suggesting his attendance at the funeral, and the expediency of his being on the spot to look after things at Wauling. The reasonableness of this striking my good uncle, he made his journey to the old house in Lancashire incontinently, and reached it in time for the funeral.

My uncle, whose traditions of the Captain were derived from his mother, who remembered him in his slim, handsome youth — in shorts, cocked-hat and lace, was amazed at the bulk of the coffin which contained his mortal remains; but the lid being already screwed down, he did not see the face of the bloated old sinner.

CHAPTER IV

In the Parlour

What I relate, I had from the lips of my uncle, who was a truthful man, and not prone to fancies.

The day turning out awfully rainy and tempestuous, he persuaded the doctor and the attorney to remain for the night at Wauling.

There was no will — the attorney was sure of that; for the Captain's enmities were perpetually shifting, and he could never quite make up his mind, as to how best to give effect to a malignity whose direction was constantly being modified. He had had instructions for drawing a will a dozen times over. But the process had always been arrested by the intending testator.

Search being made, no will was found. The papers, indeed, were all right, with one important exception: the leases were nowhere to be seen. There were special circumstances connected with several of the principal tenancies on the estate — unnecessary here to detail — which rendered the loss of these documents one of very serious moment, and even of very obvious danger.

My uncle, therefore, searched strenuously. The attorney was at his elbow, and the doctor helped with a suggestion now and then. The old serving-man seemed an honest deaf creature, and really knew nothing.

My uncle Watson was very much perturbed. He fancied — but this possibly was only fancy — that he had detected for a moment a queer look in the attorney's face; and from that instant it became fixed in his mind that he knew all about the leases. Mr. Watson expounded that evening in the parlour to the doctor, the attorney, and the deaf servant. Ananias and Sapphira figured in the foreground; and the awful nature of fraud and theft, of tampering in anywise with the plain rule of honesty in matters pertaining to estates, etc., were pointedly dwelt upon; and then came a long and strenuous prayer, in which he entreated with fervour and aplomb that the hard heart of the sinner who had abstracted the leases might be softened or broken in such a way as to lead to their restitution; or that, if he continued reserved and contumacious, it might at least be the will of Heaven to bring him to public justice and the documents to light. The fact is, that he was praying all this time at the attorney.

When these religious exercises were over, the visitors retired to their rooms, and my Uncle Watson wrote two or three pressing letters by the fire. When his task was done, it had grown late; the candles were flaring in their sockets, and all in bed, and, I suppose, asleep, but he.

The fire was nearly out, he chilly, and the flame of the candles throbbing strangely in their sockets, shed alternate glare and shadow round the old wainscoted room and its quaint furniture. Outside were all the wild thunder and piping of the storm; and the rattling of distant windows sounded through the passages, and down the stairs, like angry people astir in the house.

My Uncle Watson belonged to a sect who by no means rejected the supernatural, and whose founder, on the contrary, has sanctioned ghosts in the most emphatic way. He was glad therefore to remember, that in prosecuting his search that day, he had seen some six inches of wax candle in the press in the parlour; for he had no fancy to be overtaken by darkness in his present situation. He had no time to lose; and taking the bunch of keys — of which he was now master — he soon fitted the lock, and secured the candle — a treasure in his circumstances; and lighting it, he stuffed it into the socket of one of the expiring candles, and extinguishing the other, he looked round the room in the steady light reassured. At the same moment, an unusual violent gust of the storm blew a handful of gravel against the parlour window, with a sharp rattle that startled him in the midst of the roar and hubbub; and the flame of the candle itself was agitated by the air.

CHAPTER V

The BedChamber

My uncle walked up to bed, guarding his candle with his hand, for the lobby windows were rattling furiously, and he disliked the idea of being left in the dark more than ever.

His bedroom was comfortable, though oldfashioned. He shut and bolted the door. There was a tall looking-glass opposite the foot of his four-poster, on the dressing-table between the windows. He tried to make the curtains meet, but they would not draw; and like many a gentleman in a like perplexity, he did not possess a pin, nor was there one in the huge pincushion beneath the glass.

He turned the face of the mirror away therefore, so that its back was presented to the bed, pulled the curtains together, and placed a chair against them, to prevent their falling open again. There was a good fire, and a reinforcement of round coal and wood inside the fender. So he piled it up to ensure a cheerful blaze through the night, and placing a little black mahogany table, with the legs of a satyr, beside the bed, and his candle upon it, he got between the sheets, and laid his red nightcapped head upon his pillow, and disposed himself to sleep.

The first thing that made him uncomfortable was a sound at the foot of his bed, quite distinct in a momentary lull of the storm. It was only the gentle rustle and rush of the curtains, which fell open again; and as his eyes opened, he saw them resuming their perpendicular dependence, and sat up in his bed almost expecting to see something uncanny in the aperture.

There was nothing, however, but the dressing-table, and other dark furniture, and the window-curtains faintly undulating in the violence of the storm. He did not care to get up, therefore — the fire being bright and cheery — to replace the curtains by a chair, in the position in which he had left them, anticipating possibly a new recurrence of the relapse which had startled him from his incipient doze.

So he got to sleep in a little while again, but he was disturbed by a sound, as he fancied, at the table on which stood the candle. He could not say what it was, only that he wakened with a start, and lying so in some amaze, he did distinctly hear a sound which startled him a good deal, though there was nothing necessarily supernatural in it. He described it as resembling what would occur if you fancied a thinnish table-leaf, with a convex warp in it, depressed the reverse way, and suddenly with a spring recovering its natural convexity. It was a loud, sudden thump, which made the heavy candlestick jump, and there was an end, except that my uncle did not get again into a doze for ten minutes at least.

The next time he awoke, it was in that odd, serene way that sometimes occurs. We open our eyes, we know not why, quite placidly, and are on the instant wide awake. He had had a nap of some duration this time, for his candle-flame was fluttering and flaring, *in articulo*, in the silver socket. But the fire was still bright and cheery; so he popped the extinguisher on the socket, and almost at the same time there came a tap at his door, and a sort of crescendo "hush-sh-sh!" Once more my uncle was sitting up, scared and perturbed, in his bed. He recollected, however, that he had bolted his door; and such inveterate materialists are we in the midst of our spiritualism, that this reassured him, and he breathed a deep sigh, and began to grow tranquil. But after a rest of a minute or two, there came a louder and sharper knock at his door; so that instinctively he called out, "Who's there?" in a loud, stern key. There was no sort of response, however. The nervous effect of the start subsided; and I think my uncle must have remembered how constantly, especially on a stormy night, these creaks or cracks which simulate all manner of goblin noises, make themselves naturally audible.

CHAPTER VI

The Extinguisher Is Lifted

After a while, then, he lay down with his back turned toward that side of the bed at which was the door, and his face toward the table on which stood the massive old candlestick, capped with its extinguisher, and in that position he closed his eyes. But sleep would not revisit them. All kinds of queer fancies began to trouble him — some of them I remember.

He felt the point of a finger, he averred, pressed most distinctly on the tip of his great toe, as if a living hand were between his sheets, and making a sort of signal of attention or silence. Then again he felt something as large as a rat make a sudden bounce in the middle of his bolster, just under his head. Then a voice said “Oh!” very gently, close at the back of his head. All these things he felt certain of, and yet investigation led to nothing. He felt odd little cramps stealing now and then about him; and then, on a sudden, the middle finger of his right hand was plucked backwards, with a light playful jerk that frightened him awfully.

Meanwhile the storm kept singing, and howling, and ha-ha-hooing hoarsely among the limbs of the old trees and the chimney-pots; and my Uncle Watson, although he prayed and meditated as was his wont when he lay awake, felt his heart throb excitedly, and sometimes thought he was beset with evil spirits, and at others that he was in the early stage of a fever.

He resolutely kept his eyes closed, however, and, like St. Paul’s shipwrecked companions, wished for the day. At last another little doze seems to have stolen upon his senses, for he awoke quietly and completely as before — opening his eyes all at once, and seeing everything as if he had not slept for a moment.

The fire was still blazing redly — nothing uncertain in the light — the massive silver candlestick, topped with its tall extinguisher, stood on the centre of the black mahogany table as before; and, looking by what seemed a sort of accident to the apex of this, he beheld something which made him quite misdoubt the evidence of his eyes.

He saw the extinguisher lifted by a tiny hand, from beneath, and a small human face, no bigger than a thumb-nail, with nicely proportioned features, peep from beneath it. In this Lilliputian countenance was such a ghastly consternation as horrified my uncle unspeakably. Out came a little foot then and there, and a pair of wee legs, in short silk stockings and buckled shoes, then the rest of the figure; and, with the arms holding about the socket, the little legs stretched and stretched, hanging about the stem of the candlestick till the feet reached the base, and so down the satyr-like leg of the table, till they reached the floor, extending elastically, and strangely enlarging in all proportions as they approached the ground, where the feet and buckles were those of a well-shaped, full grown man, and the figure tapering upward until it dwindled to its original fairy dimensions at the top, like an object seen in some strangely curved mirror.

Standing upon the floor he expanded, my amazed uncle could not tell how, into his proper proportions; and stood pretty nearly in profile at the bedside, a handsome and elegantly shaped young man, in a bygone military costume, with a small laced, three-cocked hat and plume on his head, but looking like a man going to be hanged — in unspeakable despair.

He stepped lightly to the hearth, and turned for a few seconds very dejectedly with his back toward the bed and the mantelpiece, and he saw the hilt of his rapier glittering in the firelight; and then walking across the room he placed himself at the dressing-table, visible through the divided curtains at the foot of the bed. The fire was blazing still so brightly that my uncle saw him as distinctly as if half a dozen candles were burning.

CHAPTER VII

The Visitation Culminates

The looking-glass was an oldfashioned piece of furniture, and had a drawer beneath it. My uncle had searched it carefully for the papers in the daytime; but the silent figure pulled the drawer quite out, pressed a spring at the side, disclosing a false receptable behind it, and from this he drew a parcel of papers tied together with pink tape.

All this time my uncle was staring at him in a horrified state, neither winking nor breathing, and the apparition had not once given the smallest intimation of consciousness that a living person was in the same room. But now, for the first time, it turned its livid stare full upon my uncle with a hateful smile of significance, lifting up the little parcel of papers between his slender finger and thumb. Then he made a long, cunning wink at him, and seemed to blow out one of his cheeks in a burlesque grimace, which, but for the horrific circumstances, would have been ludicrous. My uncle could not tell whether this was really an intentional distortion or only one of those horrid ripples and deflections which were constantly disturbing the proportions of the figure, as if it were seen through some unequal and perverting medium.

The figure now approached the bed, seeming to grow exhausted and malignant as it did so. My uncle's terror nearly culminated at this point, for he believed it was drawing near him with an evil purpose. But it was not so; for the soldier, over whom twenty years seemed to have passed in his brief transit to the dressing-table and back again, threw himself into a great high-backed armchair of stuffed leather at the far side of the fire, and placed his heels on the fender. His feet and legs seemed indistinctly to swell, and swathings showed themselves round them, and they grew into something enormous, and the upper figure swayed and shaped itself into corresponding proportions, a great mass of corpulence, with a cadaverous and malignant face, and the furrows of a great old age, and colourless glassy eyes; and with these changes, which came indefinitely but rapidly as those of a sunset cloud, the fine regimentals faded away, and a loose, gray, woollen drapery, somehow, was there in its stead; and all seemed to be stained and rotten, for swarms of worms seemed creeping in and out, while the figure grew paler and paler, till my uncle, who liked his pipe, and employed the simile naturally, said the whole effigy grew to the colour of tobacco ashes, and the clusters of worms into little wriggling knots of sparks such as we see running over the residuum of a burnt sheet of paper. And so with the strong draught caused by the fire, and the current of air from the window, which was rattling in the storm, the feet seemed to be drawn into the fireplace, and the whole figure, light as ashes, floated away with them, and disappeared with a whisk up the capacious old chimney.

It seemed to my uncle that the fire suddenly darkened and the air grew icy cold, and there came an awful roar and riot of tempest, which shook the old house from top to base, and sounded like the yelling of a bloodthirsty mob on receiving a new and long-expected victim.

Good Uncle Watson used to say, "I have been in many situations of fear and danger in the course of my life, but never did I pray with so much agony before or since; for then, as now, it was clear beyond a cavil that I had actually beheld the phantom of an evil spirit."

CONCLUSION

Now there are two curious circumstances to be observed in this relation of my uncle's, who was, as I have said, a perfectly veracious man.

First — The wax candle which he took from the press in the parlour and burnt at his bedside on that horrible night was unquestionably, according to the testimony of the old deaf servant, who had been fifty years at Wauling, that identical piece of "holy candle" which had stood in the fingers of the poor lady's corpse, and concerning which the old Irish crone, long since dead, had delivered the curious curse I have mentioned against the Captain.

Secondly — Behind the drawer under the looking-glass, he did actually discover a second but secret drawer, in which were concealed the identical papers which he had suspected the attorney of having made away with. There were circumstances, too, afterwards disclosed which convinced my uncle that the old man had deposited them there preparatory to burning them, which he had nearly made up his mind to do.

Now, a very remarkable ingredient in this tale of my Uncle Watson was this, that so far as my father, who had never seen Captain Walshawe in the course of his life, could gather, the phantom had exhibited a horrible and grotesque, but unmistakeable resemblance to that defunct scamp in the various stages of his long life.

Wauling was sold in the year 1837, and the old house shortly after pulled down, and a new one built nearer to the river. I often wonder whether it was rumoured to be haunted, and, if so, what stories were current about it. It was a commodious and stanch old house, and withal rather handsome; and its demolition was certainly suspicious.

THE CHILD THAT WENT WITH THE FAIRIES

Eastward of the old city of Limerick, about ten Irish miles under the range of mountains known as the Slieveelim hills, famous as having afforded Sarsfield a shelter among their rocks and hollows, when he crossed them in his gallant descent upon the cannon and ammunition of King William, on its way to the beleaguering army, there runs a very old and narrow road. It connects the Limerick road to Tipperary with the old road from Limerick to Dublin, and runs by bog and pasture, hill and hollow, straw-thatched village, and roofless castle, not far from twenty miles.

Skirting the healthy mountains of which I have spoken, at one part it becomes singularly lonely. For more than three Irish miles it traverses a deserted country. A wide, black bog, level as a lake, skirted with copse, spreads at the left, as you journey northward, and the long and irregular line of mountain rises at the right, clothed in heath, broken with lines of grey rock that resemble the bold and irregular outlines of fortifications, and riven with many a gully, expanding here and there into rocky and wooded glens, which open as they approach the road.

A scanty pasturage, on which browsed a few scattered sheep or kine, skirts this solitary road for some miles, and under shelter of a hillock, and of two or three great ash-trees, stood, not many years ago, the little thatched cabin of a widow named Mary Ryan.

Poor was this widow in a land of poverty. The thatch had acquired the grey tint and sunken outlines, that show how the alternations of rain and sun have told upon that perishable shelter.

But whatever other dangers threatened, there was one well provided against by the care of other times. Round the cabin stood half a dozen mountain ashes, as the rowans, inimical to witches, are there called. On the worn planks of the door were nailed two horseshoes, and over the lintel and spreading along the thatch, grew, luxuriant, patches of that ancient cure for many maladies, and prophylactic against the machinations of the evil one, the house-leek. Descending into the doorway, in the *chiaroscuro* of the interior, when your eye grew sufficiently accustomed to that dim light, you might discover, hanging at the head of the widow's wooden-roofed bed, her beads and a phial of holy water.

Here certainly were defences and bulwarks against the intrusion of that unearthly and evil power, of whose vicinity this solitary family were constantly reminded by the outline of Lisnavoura, that lonely hillhaunt of the "Good people," as the fairies are called euphemistically, whose strangely domelike summit rose not half a mile away, looking like an outwork of the long line of mountain that sweeps by it.

It was at the fall of the leaf, and an autumnal sunset threw the lengthening shadow of haunted Lisnavoura, close in front of the solitary little cabin, over the undulating slopes and sides of Slieveelim. The birds were singing among the branches in the thinning leaves of the melancholy ash-trees that grew at the roadside in front of the door. The widow's three younger children were playing on the road, and their voices mingled with the evening song of the birds. Their elder sister, Nell, was "within in the house," as their phrase is, seeing after the boiling of the potatoes for supper.

Their mother had gone down to the bog, to carry up a hamper of turf on her back. It is, or was at least, a charitable custom — and if not disused, long may it continue — for the wealthier people when cutting their turf and stacking it in the bog, to make a smaller stack for the behoof of the poor, who were welcome to take from it so long as it lasted, and thus the potato pot was kept boiling, and hearth warm that would have been cold enough but for that goodnatured bounty, through wintry months.

Moll Ryan trudged up the steep "bohereen" whose banks were overgrown with thorn and brambles, and stooping under her burden, reentered her door, where her dark-haired daughter Nell met her with a welcome, and relieved her of her hamper.

Moll Ryan looked round with a sigh of relief, and drying her forehead, uttered the Munster ejaculation:

"Eiah, wisha! It's tired I am with it, God bless it. And where's the craythurs, Nell?"

"Playin' out on the road, mother; didn't ye see them and you comin' up?"

"No; there was no one before me on the road," she said, uneasily; "not a soul, Nell; and why didn't ye keep an eye on them?"

"Well, they're in the haggard, playin' there, or round by the back o' the house. Will I call them in?"

"Do so, good girl, in the name o' God. The hens is comin' home, see, and the sun was just down over Knockdoulah, an' I comin' up."

So out ran tall, dark-haired Nell, and standing on the road, looked up and down it; but not a sign of her two little brothers, Con and Bill, or her little sister, Peg, could she see. She called them; but no answer came from the little haggard, fenced with straggling bushes. She listened, but the sound of their voices was missing. Over the stile, and behind the house she ran — but there all was silent and deserted.

She looked down toward the bog, as far as she could see; but they did not appear. Again she listened — but in vain. At first she had felt angry, but now a different feeling overcame her, and she grew pale. With an undefined boding she looked toward the heathy boss of Lisnavoura, now darkening into the deepest purple against the flaming sky of sunset.

Again she listened with a sinking heart, and heard nothing but the farewell twitter and whistle of the birds in the bushes around. How many stories had she listened to by the winter hearth, of children stolen by the fairies, at nightfall, in lonely places! With this fear she knew her mother was haunted.

No one in the country round gathered her little flock about her so early as this frightened widow, and no door "in the seven parishes" was barred so early.

Sufficiently fearful, as all young people in that part of the world are of such dreaded and subtle agents, Nell was even more than usually afraid of them, for her terrors were infected and redoubled by her mother's. She was looking towards Lisnavoura in a trance of fear, and crossed herself again and again, and whispered prayer after prayer. She was interrupted by her mother's voice on the road calling her loudly. She answered, and ran round to the front of the cabin, where she found her standing.

"And where in the world's the craythurs — did ye see sight o' them anywhere?" cried Mrs. Ryan, as the girl came over the stile.

"Arrah! mother, 'tis only what they're run down the road a bit. We'll see them this minute coming back. It's like goats they are, climbin' here and runnin' there; an' if I had them here, in my hand, maybe I wouldn't give them a hiding all round."

"May the Lord forgive you, Nell! the childhers gone. They're took, and not a soul near us, and Father Tom three miles away! And what'll I do, or who's to help us this night? Oh, wirristhru, wirristhru! The craythurs is gone!"

“Whisht, mother, be aisy: don’t ye see them comin’ up?”

And then she shouted in menacing accents, waving her arm, and beckoning the children, who were seen approaching on the road, which some little way off made a slight dip, which had concealed them. They were approaching from the westward, and from the direction of the dreaded hill of Lisnavoura.

But there were only two of the children, and one of them, the little girl, was crying. Their mother and sister hurried forward to meet them, more alarmed than ever.

“Where is Billy — where is he?” cried the mother, nearly breathless, so soon as she was within hearing.

“He’s gone — they took him away; but they said he’ll come back again,” answered little Con, with the dark brown hair.

“He’s gone away with the grand ladies,” blubbered the little girl.

“What ladies — where? Oh, Leum, asthora! My darlin’, are you gone away at last? Where is he? Who took him? What ladies are you talkin’ about? What way did he go?” she cried in distraction.

“I couldn’t see where he went, mother; ’twas like as if he was going to Lisnavoura.”

With a wild exclamation the distracted woman ran on towards the hill alone, clapping her hands, and crying aloud the name of her lost child.

Scared and horrified, Nell, not daring to follow, gazed after her, and burst into tears; and the other children raised high their lamentations in shrill rivalry.

Twilight was deepening. It was long past the time when they were usually barred securely within their habitation. Nell led the younger children into the cabin, and made them sit down by the turf fire, while she stood in the open door, watching in great fear for the return of her mother.

After a long while they did see their mother return. She came in and sat down by the fire, and cried as if her heart would break.

“Will I bar the doore, mother?” asked Nell.

“Ay, do — didn’t I lose enough, this night, without lavin’ the doore open, for more o’ yez to go; but first take an’ sprinkle a dust o’ the holy waters over ye, acuishla, and bring it here till I throw a taste iv it over myself and the craythurs; an’ I wondher, Nell, you’d forget to do the like yourself, lettin’ the craythurs out so near nightfall. Come here and sit on my knees, asthora, come to me, mavourneen, and hould me fast, in the name o’ God, and I’ll hould you fast that none can take yez from me, and tell me all about it, and what it was — the Lord between us and harm — an’ how it happened, and who was in it.”

And the door being barred, the two children, sometimes speaking together, often interrupting one another, often interrupted by their mother, managed to tell this strange story, which I had better relate connectedly and in my own language.

The Widow Ryan’s three children were playing, as I have said, upon the narrow old road in front of her door. Little Bill or Leum, about five years old, with golden hair and large blue eyes, was a very pretty boy, with all the clear tints of healthy childhood, and that gaze of earnest simplicity which belongs not to town children of the same age. His little sister Peg, about a year older, and his brother Con, a little more than a year elder than she, made up the little group.

Under the great old ash-trees, whose last leaves were falling at their feet, in the light of an October sunset, they were playing with the hilarity and eagerness of rustic children, clamouring together, and their faces were turned toward the west and storied hill of Lisnavoura.

Suddenly a startling voice with a screech called to them from behind, ordering them to get out of the way, and turning, they saw a sight, such as they never beheld before. It was a carriage drawn by four horses that were pawing and snorting, in impatience, as it just pulled up. The children were almost under their feet, and scrambled to the side of the road next their own door.

This carriage and all its appointments were oldfashioned and gorgeous, and presented to the children, who had never seen anything finer than a turf car, and once, an old chaise that passed that way from Killaloe, a spectacle perfectly dazzling.

Here was antique splendour. The harness and trappings were scarlet, and blazing with gold. The horses were huge, and snow white, with great manes, that as they tossed and shook them in the air, seemed to stream and float sometimes longer and sometimes shorter, like so much smoke — their tails were long, and tied up in bows of broad scarlet and gold ribbon. The coach itself was glowing with colours, gilded and emblazoned. There were footmen in gay liveries, and three-cocked hats, like the coachman’s; but he had a great wig, like a judge’s, and their hair was frizzed out and powdered, and a long thick “pigtail,” with a bow to it, hung down the back of each.

All these servants were diminutive, and ludicrously out of proportion with the enormous horses of the equipage, and had sharp, sallow features, and small, restless fiery eyes, and faces of cunning and malice that chilled the children. The little coachman was scowling and showing his white fangs under his cocked hat, and his little blazing beads of eyes were quivering with fury in their sockets as he whirled his whip round and round over their heads, till the lash of it looked like a streak of fire in the evening sun, and sounded like the cry of a legion of “fillapoueeks” in the air.

“Stop the princess on the highway!” cried the coachman, in a piercing treble.

“Stop the princess on the highway!” piped each footman in turn, scowling over his shoulder down on the children, and grinding his keen teeth.

The children were so frightened they could only gape and turn white in their panic. But a very sweet voice from the open window of the carriage reassured them, and arrested the attack of the lackeys.

A beautiful and “very grand-looking” lady was smiling from it on them, and they all felt pleased in the strange light of that smile.

“The boy with the golden hair, I think,” said the lady, bending her large and wonderfully clear eyes on little Leum.

The upper sides of the carriage were chiefly of glass, so that the children could see another woman inside, whom they did not like so well.

This was a black woman, with a wonderfully long neck, hung round with many strings of large variously-coloured beads, and on her head was a sort of turban of silk striped with all the colours of the rainbow, and fixed in it was a golden star.

This black woman had a face as thin almost as a death’s-head, with high cheekbones, and great goggle eyes, the whites of which, as well as her wide range of teeth, showed in brilliant contrast with her skin, as she looked over the beautiful lady’s shoulder, and whispered something in her ear.

“Yes; the boy with the golden hair, I think,” repeated the lady.

And her voice sounded sweet as a silver bell in the children’s ears, and her smile beguiled them like the light of an enchanted lamp, as she leaned from the window with a look of ineffable fondness on the golden-haired boy, with the large blue eyes; insomuch that little Billy, looking up, smiled in return with a wondering fondness, and when she stooped down, and stretched her jewelled arms towards him, he stretched his little hands up, and how they touched the other children did not know; but, saying, "Come and give me a kiss, my darling," she raised him, and he seemed to ascend in her small fingers as lightly as a feather, and she held him in her lap and covered him with kisses.

Nothing daunted, the other children would have been only too happy to change places with their favoured little brother. There was only one thing that was unpleasant, and a little frightened them, and that was the black woman, who stood and stretched forward, in the carriage as before. She gathered a rich silk and gold handkerchief that was in her fingers up to her lips, and seemed to thrust ever so much of it, fold after fold, into her capacious mouth, as they thought to smother her laughter, with which she seemed convulsed, for she was shaking and quivering, as it seemed, with suppressed merriment; but her eyes, which remained uncovered, looked angrier than they had ever seen eyes look before.

But the lady was so beautiful they looked on her instead, and she continued to caress and kiss the little boy on her knee; and smiling at the other children she held up a large russet apple in her fingers, and the carriage began to move slowly on, and with a nod inviting them to take the fruit, she dropped it on the road from the window; it rolled some way beside the wheels, they following, and then she dropped another, and then another, and so on. And the same thing happened to all; for just as either of the children who ran beside had caught the rolling apple, somehow it slipt into a hole or ran into a ditch, and looking up they saw the lady drop another from the window, and so the chase was taken up and continued till they got, hardly knowing how far they had gone, to the old cross-road that leads to Owney. It seemed that there the horses' hoofs and carriage wheels rolled up a wonderful dust, which being caught in one of those eddies that whirl the dust up into a column, on the calmest day, enveloped the children for a moment, and passed whirling on towards Lisnavoura, the carriage, as they fancied, driving in the centre of it; but suddenly it subsided, the straws and leaves floated to the ground, the dust dissipated itself, but the white horses and the lackeys, the gilded carriage, the lady and their little golden-haired brother were gone.

At the same moment suddenly the upper rim of the clear setting sun disappeared behind the hill of Knockdoula, and it was twilight. Each child felt the transition like a shock — and the sight of the rounded summit of Lisnavoura, now closely overhanging them, struck them with a new fear.

They screamed their brother's name after him, but their cries were lost in the vacant air. At the same time they thought they heard a hollow voice say, close to them, "Go home."

Looking round and seeing no one, they were scared, and hand in hand — the little girl crying wildly, and the boy white as ashes, from fear, they trotted homeward, at their best speed, to tell, as we have seen, their strange story.

Molly Ryan never more saw her darling. But something of the lost little boy was seen by his former playmates.

Sometimes when their mother was away earning a trifle at haymaking, and Nelly washing the potatoes for their dinner, or "beatling" clothes in the little stream that flows in the hollow close by, they saw the pretty face of little Billy peeping in archly at the door, and smiling silently at them, and as they ran to embrace him, with cries of delight, he drew back, still smiling archly, and when they got out into the open day, he was gone, and they could see no trace of him anywhere.

This happened often, with slight variations in the circumstances of the visit. Sometimes he would peep for a longer time, sometimes for a shorter time, sometimes his little hand would come in, and, with bended finger, beckon them to follow; but always he was smiling with the same arch look and wary silence — and always he was gone when they reached the door. Gradually these visits grew less and less frequent, and in about eight months they ceased altogether, and little Billy, irretrievably lost, took rank in their memories with the dead.

One wintry morning, nearly a year and a half after his disappearance, their mother having set out for Limerick soon after cockcrow, to sell some fowls at the market, the little girl, lying by the side of her elder sister, who was fast asleep, just at the grey of the morning heard the latch lifted softly, and saw little Billy enter and close the door gently after him. There was light enough to see that he was barefoot and ragged, and looked pale and famished. He went straight to the fire, and cowered over the turf embers, and rubbed his hands slowly, and seemed to shiver as he gathered the smouldering turf together.

The little girl clutched her sister in terror and whispered, “Waken, Nelly, waken; here’s Billy come back!”

Nelly slept soundly on, but the little boy, whose hands were extended close over the coals, turned and looked toward the bed, it seemed to her, in fear, and she saw the glare of the embers reflected on his thin cheek as he turned toward her. He rose and went, on tiptoe, quickly to the door, in silence, and let himself out as softly as he had come in.

After that, the little boy was never seen any more by any one of his kindred.

“Fairy doctors,” as the dealers in the preternatural, who in such cases were called in, are termed, did all that in them lay — but in vain. Father Tom came down, and tried what holier rites could do, but equally without result. So little Billy was dead to mother, brother, and sisters; but no grave received him. Others whom affection cherished, lay in holy ground, in the old churchyard of Abington, with headstone to mark the spot over which the survivor might kneel and say a kind prayer for the peace of the departed soul. But there was no landmark to show where little Billy was hidden from their loving eyes, unless it was in the old hill of Lisnavoura, that cast its long shadow at sunset before the cabin-door; or that, white and filmy in the moonlight, in later years, would occupy his brother’s gaze as he returned from fair or market, and draw from him a sigh and a prayer for the little brother he had lost so long ago, and was never to see again.

STORIES OF LOUGH GUIR

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When the present writer was a boy of twelve or thirteen, he first made the acquaintance of Miss Anne Baily, of Lough Guir, in the county of Limerick. She and her sister were the last representatives at that place, of an extremely good old name in the county. They were both what is termed "old maids," and at that time past sixty. But never were old ladies more hospitable, lively, and kind, especially to young people. They were both remarkably agreeable and clever. Like all old county ladies of their time, they were great genealogists, and could recount the origin, generations, and intermarriages, of every county family of note.

These ladies were visited at their house at Lough Guir by Mr. Crofton Croker; and are, I think, mentioned, by name, in the second series of his fairy legends; the series in which (probably communicated by Miss Anne Baily), he recounts some of the picturesque traditions of those beautiful lakes — lakes, I should no longer say, for the smaller and prettier has since been drained, and gave up from its depths some long lost and very interesting relics.

In their drawingroom stood a curious relic of another sort: old enough, too, though belonging to a much more modern period. It was the ancient stirrup cup of the hospitable house of Lough Guir. Crofton Croker has preserved a sketch of this curious glass. I have often had it in my hand. It had a short stem; and the cup part, having the bottom rounded, rose cylindrically, and, being of a capacity to contain a whole bottle of claret, and almost as narrow as an oldfashioned ale glass, was tall to a degree that filled me with wonder. As it obliged the rider to extend his arm as he raised the glass, it must have tried a tipsy man, sitting in the saddle, pretty severely. The wonder was that the marvellous tall glass had come down to our times without a crack.

There was another glass worthy of remark in the same drawingroom. It was gigantic, and shaped conically, like one of those oldfashioned jelly glasses which used to be seen upon the shelves of confectioners. It was engraved round the rim with the words, "The glorious, pious, and immortal memory"; and on grand occasions, was filled to the brim, and after the manner of a loving cup, made the circuit of the Whig guests, who owed all to the hero whose memory its legend invoked.

It was now but the transparent phantom of those solemn convivialities of a generation, who lived, as it were, within hearing of the cannon and shoutings of those stirring times. When I saw it, this glass had long retired from politics and carousals, and stood peacefully on a little table in the drawingroom, where ladies' hands replenished it with fair water, and crowned it daily with flowers from the garden.

Miss Anne Baily's conversation ran oftener than her sister's upon the legendary and supernatural; she told her stories with the sympathy, the colour, and the mysterious air which contribute so powerfully to effect, and never wearied of answering questions about the old castle, and amusing her young audience with fascinating little glimpses of old adventure and bygone days. My memory retains the picture of my early friend very distinctly. A slim straight figure, above the middle height; a general likeness to the full-length portrait of that delightful Countess d'Aulnois, to whom we all owe our earliest and most brilliant glimpses of fairyland; something of her gravely-pleasant countenance, plain, but refined and ladylike, with that kindly mystery in her sidelong glance and uplifted finger, which indicated the approaching climax of a tale of wonder.

Lough Guir is a kind of centre of the operations of the Munster fairies. When a child is stolen by the "good people," Lough Guir is conjectured to be the place of its unearthly transmutation from the human to the fairy state. And beneath its waters lie enchanted, the grand old castle of the Desmonds, the great earl himself, his beautiful young countess, and all the retinue that surrounded him in the years of his splendour, and at the moment of his catastrophe.

Here, too, are historic associations. The huge square tower that rises at one side of the stableyard close to the old house, to a height that amazed my young eyes, though robbed of its battlements and one story, was a stronghold of the last rebellious Earl of Desmond, and is specially mentioned in that delightful old folio, the *Hibernia Pacata*, as having, with its Irish garrison on the battlements, defied the army of the lord deputy, then marching by upon the summits of the overhanging hills. The house, built under shelter of this stronghold of the once proud and turbulent Desmonds, is old, but snug, with a multitude of small low rooms, such as I have seen in houses of the same age in Shropshire and the neighbouring English counties.

The hills that overhang the lakes appeared to me, in my young days (and I have not seen them since), to be clothed with a short soft verdure, of a hue so dark and vivid as I had never seen before.

In one of the lakes is a small island, rocky and wooded, which is believed by the peasantry to represent the top of the highest tower of the castle which sank, under a spell, to the bottom. In certain states of the atmosphere, I have heard educated people say, when in a boat you have reached a certain distance, the island appears to rise some feet from the water, its rocks assume the appearance of masonry, and the whole circuit presents very much the effect of the battlements of a castle rising above the surface of the lake.

This was Miss Anne Baily’s story of the submersion of this lost castle:

The Magician Earl

It is well known that the great Earl of Desmond, though history pretends to dispose of him differently, lives to this hour enchanted in his castle, with all his household, at the bottom of the lake.

There was not, in his day, in all the world, so accomplished a magician as he. His fairest castle stood upon an island in the lake, and to this he brought his young and beautiful bride, whom he loved but too well; for she prevailed upon his folly to risk all to gratify her imperious caprice.

They had not been long in this beautiful castle, when she one day presented herself in the chamber in which her husband studied his forbidden art, and there implored him to exhibit before her some of the wonders of his evil science. He resisted long; but her entreaties, tears, and wheedlings were at length too much for him and he consented.

But before beginning those astonishing transformations with which he was about to amaze her, he explained to her the awful conditions and dangers of the experiment.

Alone in this vast apartment, the walls of which were lapped, far below, by the lake whose dark waters lay waiting to swallow them, she must witness a certain series of frightful phenomena, which once commenced, he could neither abridge nor mitigate; and if throughout their ghastly succession she spoke one word, or uttered one exclamation, the castle and all that it contained would in one instant subside to the bottom of the lake, there to remain, under the servitude of a strong spell, for ages.

The dauntless curiosity of the lady having prevailed, and the oaken door of the study being locked and barred, the fatal experiments commenced.

Muttering a spell, as he stood before her, feathers sprouted thickly over him, his face became contracted and hooked, a cadaverous smell filled the air, and, with heavy winnowing wings, a gigantic vulture rose in his stead, and swept round and round the room, as if on the point of pouncing upon her.

The lady commanded herself through this trial, and instantly another began.

The bird alighted near the door, and in less than a minute changed, she saw not how, into a horribly deformed and dwarfish hag: who, with yellow skin hanging about her face and enormous eyes, swung herself on crutches toward the lady, her mouth foaming with fury, and her grimaces and contortions becoming more and more hideous every moment, till she rolled with a yell on the floor, in a horrible convulsion, at the lady's feet, and then changed into a huge serpent, with crest erect, and quivering tongue. Suddenly, as it seemed on the point of darting at her, she saw her husband in its stead, standing pale before her, and, with his finger on his lip, enforcing the continued necessity of silence. He then placed himself at his length on the floor, and began to stretch himself out and out, longer and longer, until his head nearly reached to one end of the vast room, and his feet to the other.

This horror overcame her. The ill-starred lady uttered a wild scream, whereupon the castle and all that was within it, sank in a moment to the bottom of the lake.

But, once in every seven years, by night, the Earl of Desmond and his retinue emerge, and cross the lake, in shadowy cavalcade. His white horse is shod with silver. On that one night, the earl may ride till daybreak, and it behoves him to make good use of his time; for, until the silver shoes of his steed be worn through, the spell that holds him and his beneath the lake, will retain its power.

When I (Miss Anne Baily) was a child, there was still living a man named Teigue O'Neill, who had a strange story to tell.

He was a smith, and his forge stood on the brow of the hill, overlooking the lake, on a lonely part of the road to Cahir Conlish. One bright moonlight night, he was working very late, and quite alone. The clink of his hammer, and the wavering glow reflected through the open door on the bushes at the other side of the narrow road, were the only tokens that told of life and vigil for miles around.

In one of the pauses of his work, he heard the ring of many hoofs ascending the steep road that passed his forge, and, standing in this doorway, he was just in time to see a gentleman, on a white horse, who was dressed in a fashion the like of which the smith had never seen before. This man was accompanied and followed by a mounted retinue, as strangely dressed as he.

They seemed, by the clang and clatter that announced their approach, to be riding up the hill at a hard hurry-scurry gallop; but the pace abated as they drew near, and the rider of the white horse who, from his grave and lordly air, he assumed to be a man of rank, and accustomed to command, drew bridle and came to a halt before the smith's door.

He did not speak, and all his train were silent, but he beckoned to the smith, and pointed down to one of his horse's hoofs.

Teigue stooped and raised it, and held it just long enough to see that it was shod with a silver shoe; which, in one place, he said, was worn as thin as a shilling. Instantaneously, his situation was made apparent to him by this sign, and he recoiled with a terrified prayer. The lordly rider, with a look of pain and fury, struck at him suddenly, with something that whistled in the air like a whip; and an icy streak seemed to traverse his body as if he had been cut through with a leaf of steel. But he was without scathe or scar, as he afterwards found. At the same moment he saw the whole cavalcade break into a gallop and disappear down the hill, with a momentary hurtling in the air, like the flight of a volley of cannon shot.

Here had been the earl himself. He had tried one of his accustomed stratagems to lead the smith to speak to him. For it is well known that either for the purpose of abridging or of mitigating his period of enchantment, he seeks to lead people to accost him. But what, in the event of his succeeding, would befall the person whom he had thus ensnared, no one knows.

Moll Rial’s Adventure

When Miss Anne Baily was a child, Moll Rial was an old woman. She had lived all her days with the Bailys of Lough Guir; in and about whose house, as was the Irish custom of those days, were a troop of barefooted country girls, scullery maids, or laundresses, or employed about the poultry yard, or running of errands.

Among these was Moll Rial, then a stout goodhumoured lass, with little to think of, and nothing to fret about. She was once washing clothes by the process known universally in Munster as beetling. The washer stands up to her ankles in water, in which she has immersed the clothes, which she lays in that state on a great flat stone, and smacks with lusty strokes of an instrument which bears a rude resemblance to a cricket bat, only shorter, broader, and light enough to be wielded freely with one hand. Thus, they smack the dripping clothes, turning them over and over, sousing them in the water, and replacing them on the same stone, to undergo a repetition of the process, until they are thoroughly washed.

Moll Rial was plying her “beetle” at the margin of the lake, close under the old house and castle. It was between eight and nine o’clock on a fine summer morning, everything looked bright and beautiful. Though quite alone, and though she could not see even the windows of the house (hidden from her view by the irregular ascent and some interposing bushes), her loneliness was not depressing.

Standing up from her work, she saw a gentleman walking slowly down the slope toward her. He was a “grand-looking” gentleman, arrayed in a flowered silk dressing-gown, with a cap of velvet on his head; and as he stepped toward her, in his slippered feet, he showed a very handsome leg. He was smiling graciously as he approached, and drawing a ring from his finger with an air of gracious meaning, which seemed to imply that he wished to make her a present, he raised it in his fingers with a pleased look, and placed it on the flat stones beside the clothes she had been beetling so industriously.

He drew back a little, and continued to look at her with an encouraging smile, which seemed to say: “You have earned your reward; you must not be afraid to take it.”

The girl fancied that this was some gentleman who had arrived, as often happened in those hospitable and haphazard times, late and unexpectedly the night before, and who was now taking a little indolent ramble before breakfast.

Moll Rial was a little shy, and more so at having been discovered by so grand a gentleman with her petticoats gathered a little high about her bare shins. She looked down, therefore, upon the water at her feet, and then she saw a ripple of blood, and then another, ring after ring, coming and going to and from her feet. She cried out the sacred name in horror, and, lifting her eyes, the courtly gentleman was gone, but the blood-rings about her feet spread with the speed of light over the surface of the lake, which for a moment glowed like one vast estuary of blood.

Here was the earl once again, and Moll Rial declared that if it had not been for that frightful transformation of the water she would have spoken to him next minute, and would thus have passed under a spell, perhaps as direful as his own.

The Banshee

So old a Munster family as the Bailys, of Lough Guir, could not fail to have their attendant banshee. Everyone attached to the family knew this well, and could cite evidences of that unearthly distinction. I heard Miss Baily relate the only experience she had personally had of that wild spiritual sympathy.

She said that, being then young, she and Miss Susan undertook a long attendance upon the sick bed of their sister, Miss Kitty, whom I have heard remembered among her contemporaries as the merriest and most entertaining of human beings. This lighthearted young lady was dying of consumption. The sad duties of such attendance being divided among many sisters, as there then were, the night watches devolved upon the two ladies I have named: I think, as being the eldest.

It is not improbable that these long and melancholy vigils, lowering the spirits and exciting the nervous system, prepared them for illusions. At all events, one night at dead of night, Miss Baily and her sister, sitting in the dying lady's room, heard such sweet and melancholy music as they had never heard before. It seemed to them like distant cathedral music. The room of the dying girl had its windows toward the yard, and the old castle stood near, and full in sight. The music was not in the house, but seemed to come from the yard, or beyond it. Miss Anne Baily took a candle, and went down the back stairs. She opened the back door, and, standing there, heard the same faint but solemn harmony, and could not tell whether it most resembled the distant music of instruments, or a choir of voices. It seemed to come through the windows of the old castle, high in the air. But when she approached the tower, the music, she thought, came from above the house, at the other side of the yard; and thus perplexed, and at last frightened, she returned.

This aerial music both she and her sister, Miss Susan Baily, avowed that they distinctly heard, and for a long time. Of the fact she was clear, and she spoke of it with great awe.

The Governess's Dream

This lady, one morning, with a grave countenance that indicated something weighty upon her mind, told her pupils that she had, on the night before, had a very remarkable dream.

The first room you enter in the old castle, having reached the foot of the spiral stone stair, is a large hall, dim and lofty, having only a small window or two, set high in deep recesses in the wall. When I saw the castle many years ago, a portion of this capacious chamber was used as a store for the turf laid in to last the year.

Her dream placed her, alone, in this room, and there entered a grave-looking man, having something very remarkable in his countenance: which impressed her, as a fine portrait sometimes will, with a haunting sense of character and individuality.

In his hand this man carried a wand, about the length of an ordinary walking cane. He told her to observe and remember its length, and to mark well the measurements he was about to make, the result of which she was to communicate to Mr. Baily of Lough Guir.

From a certain point in the wall, with this wand, he measured along the floor, at right angles with the wall, a certain number of its lengths, which he counted aloud; and then, in the same way, from the adjoining wall he measured a certain number of its lengths, which he also counted distinctly. He then told her that at the point where these two lines met, at a depth of a certain number of feet which he also told her, treasure lay buried. And so the dream broke up, and her remarkable visitant vanished.

She took the girls with her to the old castle, where, having cut a switch to the length represented to her in her dream, she measured the distances, and ascertained, as she supposed, the point on the floor beneath which the treasure lay. The same day she related her dream to Mr. Baily. But he treated it laughingly, and took no step in consequence.

Some time after this, she again saw, in a dream, the same remarkable-looking man, who repeated his message, and appeared displeased. But the dream was treated by Mr. Baily as before.

The same dream occurred again, and the children became so clamorous to have the castle floor explored, with pick and shovel, at the point indicated by the thrice-seen messenger, that at length Mr. Baily consented, and the floor was opened, and a trench was sunk at the spot which the governess had pointed out.

Miss Anne Baily, and nearly all the members of the family, her father included, were present at this operation. As the workmen approached the depth described in the vision, the interest and suspense of all increased; and when the iron implements met the solid resistance of a broad flagstone, which returned a cavernous sound to the stroke, the excitement of all present rose to its acme.

With some difficulty the flag was raised, and a chamber of stone work, large enough to receive a moderately-sized crock or pit, was disclosed. Alas! it was empty. But in the earth at the bottom of it, Miss Baily said, she herself saw, as every other bystander plainly did, the circular impression of a vessel: which had stood there, as the mark seemed to indicate, for a very long time.

Both the Miss Bailys were strong in their belief hereafterwards, that the treasure which they were convinced had actually been deposited there, had been removed by some more trusting and active listener than their father had proved.

This same governess remained with them to the time of her death, which occurred some years later, under the following circumstances as extraordinary as her dream.

The Earl’s Hall

The good governess had a particular liking for the old castle, and when lessons were over, would take her book or her work into a large room in the ancient building, called the Earl’s Hall. Here she caused a table and chair to be placed for her use, and in the chiaroscuro would so sit at her favourite occupations, with just a little ray of subdued light, admitted through one of the glassless windows above her, and falling upon her table.

The Earl’s Hall is entered by a narrow-arched door, opening close to the winding stair. It is a very large and gloomy room, pretty nearly square, with a lofty vaulted ceiling, and a stone floor. Being situated high in the castle, the walls of which are immensely thick, and the windows very small and few, the silence that reigns here is like that of a subterranean cavern. You hear nothing in this solitude, except perhaps twice in a day, the twitter of a swallow in one of the small windows high in the wall.

This good lady having one day retired to her accustomed solitude, was missed from the house at her wonted hour of return. This in a country house, such as Irish houses were in those days, excited little surprise, and no harm. But when the dinner hour came, which was then, in country houses, five o’clock, and the governess had not appeared, some of her young friends, it being not yet winter, and sufficient light remaining to guide them through the gloom of the dim ascent and passages, mounted the old stone stair to the level of the Earl’s Hall, gaily calling to her as they approached.

There was no answer. On the stone floor, outside the door of the Earl’s Hall, to their horror, they found her lying insensible. By the usual means she was restored to consciousness; but she continued very ill, and was conveyed to the house, where she took to her bed.

It was there and then that she related what had occurred to her. She had placed herself, as usual, at her little work table, and had been either working or reading — I forget which — for some time, and felt in her usual health and serene spirits. Raising her eyes, and looking towards the door, she saw a horrible-looking little man enter. He was dressed in red, was very short, had a singularly dark face, and a most atrocious countenance. Having walked some steps into the room, with his eyes fixed on her, he stopped, and beckoning to her to follow, moved back toward the door. About half way, again he stopped once more and turned. She was so terrified that she sat staring at the apparition without moving or speaking. Seeing that she had not obeyed him, his face became more frightful and menacing, and as it underwent this change, he raised his hand and stamped on the floor. Gesture, look, and all, expressed diabolical fury. Through sheer extremity of terror she did rise, and, as he turned again, followed him a step or two in the direction of the door. He again stopped, and with the same mute menace, compelled her again to follow him.

She reached the narrow stone doorway of the Earl's Hall, through which he had passed; from the threshold she saw him standing a little way off, with his eyes still fixed on her. Again he signed to her, and began to move along the short passage that leads to the winding stair. But instead of following him further, she fell on the floor in a fit.

The poor lady was thoroughly persuaded that she was not long to survive this vision, and her foreboding proved true. From her bed she never rose. Fever and delirium supervened in a few days and she died. Of course it is possible that fever, already approaching, had touched her brain when she was visited by the phantom, and that it had no external existence.

THE VISION OF TOM CHUFF

At the edge of melancholy Catstean Moor, in the north of England, with half-a-dozen ancient poplar-trees with rugged and hoary stems around, one smashed across the middle by a flash of lightning thirty summers before, and all by their great height dwarfing the abode near which they stand, there squats a rude stone house, with a thick chimney, a kitchen and bedroom on the ground-floor, and a loft, accessible by a ladder, under the shingle roof, divided into two rooms.

Its owner was a man of ill repute. Tom Chuff was his name. A shockheaded, broad-shouldered, powerful man, though somewhat short, with lowering brows and a sullen eye. He was a poacher, and hardly made an ostensible pretence of earning his bread by any honest industry. He was a drunkard. He beat his wife, and led his children a life of terror and lamentation, when he was at home. It was a blessing to his frightened little family when he absented himself, as he sometimes did, for a week or more together.

On the night I speak of he knocked at the door with his cudgel at about eight o'clock. It was winter, and the night was very dark. Had the summons been that of a bogie from the moor, the inmates of this small house could hardly have heard it with greater terror.

His wife unbarred the door in fear and haste. Her hunchbacked sister stood by the hearth, staring toward the threshold. The children cowered behind.

Tom Chuff entered with his cudgel in his hand, without speaking, and threw himself into a chair opposite the fire. He had been away two or three days. He looked haggard, and his eyes were bloodshot. They knew he had been drinking.

Tom raked and knocked the peat fire with his stick, and thrust his feet close to it. He signed towards the little dresser, and nodded to his wife, and she knew he wanted a cup, which in silence she gave him. He pulled a bottle of gin from his coatpocket, and nearly filling the teacup, drank off the dram at a few gulps.

He usually refreshed himself with two or three drams of this kind before beating the inmates of his house. His three little children, cowering in a corner, eyed him from under a table, as Jack did the ogre in the nursery tale. His wife, Nell, standing behind a chair, which she was ready to snatch up to meet the blow of the cudgel, which might be levelled at her at any moment, never took her eyes off him; and hunchbacked Mary showed the whites of a large pair of eyes, similarly employed, as she stood against the oaken press, her dark face hardly distinguishable in the distance from the brown panel behind it.

Tom Chuff was at his third dram, and had not yet spoken a word since his entrance, and the suspense was growing dreadful, when, on a sudden, he leaned back in his rude seat, the cudgel slipped from his hand, a change and a deathlike pallor came over his face.

For a while they all stared on; such was their fear of him, they dared not speak or move, lest it should prove to have been but a doze, and Tom should wake up and proceed forthwith to gratify his temper and exercise his cudgel.

In a very little time, however, things began to look so odd, that they ventured, his wife and Mary, to exchange glances full of doubt and wonder. He hung so much over the side of the chair, that if it had not been one of cyclopean clumsiness and weight, he would have borne it to the floor. A leaden tint was darkening the pallor of his face. They were becoming alarmed, and finally braving everything his wife timidly said, “Tom!” and then more sharply repeated it, and finally cried the appellative loudly, and again and again, with the terrified accompaniment, “He’s dying — he’s dying!” her voice rising to a scream, as she found that neither it nor her plucks and shakings of him by the shoulder had the slightest effect in recalling him from his torpor.

And now from sheer terror of a new kind the children added their shrilly piping to the talk and cries of their seniors; and if anything could have called Tom up from his lethargy, it might have been the piercing chorus that made the rude chamber of the poacher’s habitation ring again. But Tom continued unmoved, deaf, and stirless.

His wife sent Mary down to the village, hardly a quarter of a mile away, to implore of the doctor, for whose family she did duty as laundress, to come down and look at her husband, who seemed to be dying.

The doctor, who was a goodnatured fellow, arrived. With his hat still on, he looked at Tom, examined him, and when he found that the emetic he had brought with him, on conjecture from Mary’s description, did not act, and that his lancet brought no blood, and that he felt a pulseless wrist, he shook his head, and inwardly thought:

“What the plague is the woman crying for? Could she have desired a greater blessing for her children and herself than the very thing that has happened?”

Tom, in fact, seemed quite gone. At his lips no breath was perceptible. The doctor could discover no pulse. His hands and feet were cold, and the chill was stealing up into his body.

The doctor, after a stay of twenty minutes, had buttoned up his greatcoat again and pulled down his hat, and told Mrs. Chuff that there was no use in his remaining any longer, when, all of a sudden, a little rill of blood began to trickle from the lancet-cut in Tom Chuffs temple.

“That’s very odd,” said the doctor. “Let us wait a little.”

I must describe now the sensations which Tom Chuff had experienced.

With his elbows on his knees, and his chin upon his hands, he was staring into the embers, with his gin beside him, when suddenly a swimming came in his head, he lost sight of the fire, and a sound like one stroke of a loud church bell smote his brain.

Then he heard a confused humming, and the leaden weight of his head held him backward as he sank in his chair, and consciousness quite forsook him.

When he came to himself he felt chilled, and was leaning against a huge leafless tree. The night was moonless, and when he looked up he thought he had never seen stars so large and bright, or sky so black. The stars, too, seemed to blink down with longer intervals of darkness, and fiercer and more dazzling emergence, and something, he vaguely thought, of the character of silent menace and fury.

He had a confused recollection of having come there, or rather of having been carried along, as if on men’s shoulders, with a sort of rushing motion. But it was utterly indistinct; the imperfect recollection simply of a sensation. He had seen or heard nothing on his way.

He looked round. There was not a sign of a living creature near. And he began with a sense of awe to recognise the place.

The tree against which he had been leaning was one of the noble old beeches that surround at irregular intervals the churchyard of Shackleton, which spreads its green and wavy lap on the edge of the Moor of Catstean, at the opposite side of which stands the rude cottage in which he had just lost consciousness. It was six miles or more across the moor to his habitation, and the black expanse lay before him, disappearing dismally in the darkness. So that, looking straight before him, sky and land blended together in an undistinguishable and awful blank.

There was a silence quite unnatural over the place. The distant murmur of the brook, which he knew so well, was dead; not a whisper in the leaves about him; the air, earth, everything about and above was indescribably still; and he experienced that quaking of the heart that seems to portend the approach of something awful. He would have set out upon his return across the moor, had he not an undefined presentiment that he was waylaid by something he dared not pass.

The old grey church and tower of Shackleton stood like a shadow in the rear. His eye had grown accustomed to the obscurity, and he could just trace its outline. There were no comforting associations in his mind connected with it; nothing but menace and misgiving. His early training in his lawless calling was connected with this very spot. Here his father used to meet two other poachers, and bring his son, then but a boy, with him.

Under the church porch, towards morning, they used to divide the game they had taken, and take account of the sales they had made on the previous day, and make partition of the money, and drink their gin. It was here he had taken his early lessons in drinking, cursing, and lawlessness. His father’s grave was hardly eight steps from the spot where he stood. In his present state of awful dejection, no scene on earth could have so helped to heighten his fear.

There was one object close by which added to his gloom. About a yard away, in rear of the tree, behind himself, and extending to his left, was an open grave, the mould and rubbish piled on the other side. At the head of this grave stood the beech-tree; its columnar stem rose like a huge monumental pillar. He knew every line and crease on its smooth surface. The initial letters of his own name, cut in its bark long ago, had spread out and wrinkled like the grotesque capitals of a fanciful engraver, and now with a sinister significance overlooked the open grave, as if answering his mental question, “Who for is t’ grave cut?”

He felt still a little stunned, and there was a faint tremor in his joints that disinclined him to exert himself; and, further, he had a vague apprehension that take what direction he might, there was danger around him worse than that of staying where he was.

On a sudden the stars began to blink more fiercely, a faint wild light overspread for a minute the bleak landscape, and he saw approaching from the moor a figure at a kind of swinging trot, with now and then a zig-zag hop or two, such as men accustomed to cross such places make, to avoid the patches of slob or quag that meet them here and there. This figure resembled his father's, and like him, whistled through his finger by way of signal as he approached; but the whistle sounded not now shrilly and sharp, as in old times, but immensely far away, and seemed to sing strangely through Tom's head. From habit or from fear, in answer to the signal, Tom whistled as he used to do five-and-twenty years ago and more, although he was already chilled with an unearthly fear.

Like his father, too, the figure held up the bag that was in his left hand as he drew near, when it was his custom to call out to him what was in it. It did not reassure the watcher, you may be certain, when a shout unnaturally faint reached him, as the phantom dangled the bag in the air, and he heard with a faint distinctness the words, "Tom Chuff's soul!"

Scarcely fifty yards away from the low churchyard fence at which Tom was standing, there was a wider chasm in the peat, which there threw up a growth of reeds and bulrushes, among which, as the old poacher used to do on a sudden alarm, the approaching figure suddenly cast itself down.

From the same patch of tall reeds and rushes emerged instantaneously what he at first mistook for the same figure creeping on all-fours, but what he soon perceived to be an enormous black dog with a rough coat like a bear's, which at first sniffed about, and then started towards him in what seemed to be a sportive amble, bouncing this way and that, but as it drew near it displayed a pair of fearful eyes that glowed like live coals, and emitted from the monstrous expanse of its jaws a terrifying growl.

This beast seemed on the point of seizing him, and Tom recoiled in panic and fell into the open grave behind him. The edge which he caught as he tumbled gave way, and down he went, expecting almost at the same instant to reach the bottom. But never was such a fall! Bottomless seemed the abyss! Down, down, down, with immeasurable and still increasing speed, through utter darkness, with hair streaming straight upward, breathless, he shot with a rush of air against him, the force of which whirled up his very arms, second after second, minute after minute, through the chasm downward he flew, the icy perspiration of horror covering his body, and suddenly, as he expected to be dashed into annihilation, his descent was in an instant arrested with a tremendous shock, which, however, did not deprive him of consciousness even for a moment.

He looked about him. The place resembled a smoke-stained cavern or catacomb, the roof of which, except for a ribbed arch here and there faintly visible, was lost in darkness. From several rude passages, like the galleries of a gigantic mine, which opened from this centre chamber, was very dimly emitted a dull glow as of charcoal, which was the only light by which he could imperfectly discern the objects immediately about him.

What seemed like a projecting piece of the rock, at the corner of one of these murky entrances, moved on a sudden, and proved to be a human figure, that beckoned to him. He approached, and saw his father. He could barely recognise him, he was so monstrously altered.

"I've been looking for you, Tom. Welcome home, lad; come along to your place."

Tom's heart sank as he heard these words, which were spoken in a hollow and, he thought, derisive voice that made him tremble. But he could not help accompanying the wicked spirit, who led him into a place, in passing which he heard, as it were from within the rock, deadful cries and appeals for mercy.

"What is this?" said he.

"Never mind."

"Who are they?"

"Newcomers, like yourself, lad," answered his father apathetically. "They give over that work in time, finding it is no use."

"What shall I do?" said Tom, in an agony.

"It's all one."

"But what shall I do?" reiterated Tom, quivering in every joint and nerve.

"Grin and bear it, I suppose."

"For God's sake, if ever you cared for me, as I am your own child, let me out of this!"

"There's no way out."

"If there's a way in there's a way out, and for Heaven's sake let me out of this."

But the dreadful figure made no further answer, and glided backwards by his shoulder to the rear; and others appeared in view, each with a faint red halo round it, staring on him with frightful eyes, images, all in hideous variety, of eternal fury or derision. He was growing mad, it seemed, under the stare of so many eyes, increasing in number and drawing closer every moment, and at the same time myriads and myriads of voices were calling him by his name, some far away, some near, some from one point, some from another, some from behind, close to his ears. These cries were increased in rapidity and multitude, and mingled with laughter, with flitting blasphemies, with broken insults and mockeries, succeeded and obliterated by others, before he could half catch their meaning.

All this time, in proportion to the rapidity and urgency of these dreadful sights and sounds, the epilepsy of terror was creeping up to his brain, and with a long and dreadful scream he lost consciousness.

When he recovered his senses, he found himself in a small stone chamber, vaulted above, and with a ponderous door. A single point of light in the wall, with a strange brilliancy illuminated this cell.

Seated opposite to him was a venerable man with a snowy beard of immense length; an image of awful purity and severity. He was dressed in a coarse robe, with three large keys suspensed from his girdle. He might have filled one's idea of an ancient porter of a city gate; such spiritual cities, I should say, as John Bunyan loved to describe.

This old man's eyes were brilliant and awful, and fixed on him as they were, Tom Chuff felt himself helplessly in his power. At length he spoke:

"The command is given to let you forth for one trial more. But if you are found again drinking with the drunken, and beating your fellow-servants, you shall return through the door by which you came, and go out no more."

With these words the old man took him by the wrist and led him through the first door, and then unlocking one that stood in the cavern outside, he struck Tom Chuff sharply on the shoulder, and the door shut behind him with a sound that boomed peal after peal of thunder near and far away, and all round and above, till it rolled off gradually into silence. It was totally dark, but there was a fanning of fresh cool air that overpowered him. He felt that he was in the upper world again.

In a few minutes he began to hear voices which he knew, and first a faint point of light appeared before his eyes, and gradually he saw the flame of the candle, and, after that, the familiar faces of his wife and children, and he heard them faintly when they spoke to him, although he was as yet unable to answer.

He also saw the doctor, like an isolated figure in the dark, and heard him say:

"There, now, you have him back. He'll do, I think."

His first words, when he could speak and saw clearly all about him, and felt the blood on his neck and shirt, were:

"Wife, forgie me. I'm a changed man. Send for't sir."

Which last phrase means, "Send for the clergyman."

When the vicar came and entered the little bedroom where the scared poacher, whose soul had died within him, was lying, still sick and weak, in his bed, and with a spirit that was prostrate with terror, Tom Chuff feebly beckoned the rest from the room, and, the door being closed, the good parson heard the strange confession, and with equal amazement the man's earnest and agitated vows of amendment, and his helpless appeals to him for support and counsel.

These, of course, were kindly met; and the visits of the rector, for some time, were frequent.

One day, when he took Tom Chuff's hand on bidding him goodbye, the sick man held it still, and said:

"Ye'r vicar o' Shackleton, sir, and if I sud dee, ye'll promise me a'e thing, as I a promised ye a many. I a said I'll never gie wife, nor barn, nor folk o' no sort, skelp nor sizzup more, and ye'll know o' me no more among the sipers. Nor never will Tom draw trigger, nor set a snare again, but in an honest way, and after that ye'll no make it a bootless bene for me, but bein', as I say, vicar o' Shackleton, and able to do as ye list, ye'll no let them bury me within twenty good yerd-wands measure o' the a'd beech trees that's round the churchyard of Shackleton."

"I see; you would have your grave, when your time really comes, a good way from the place where lay the grave you dreamed of."

"That's jest it. I'd lie at the bottom o' a marl-pit liefer! And I'd be laid in anither churchyard just to be shut o' my fear o' that, but that a' my kinsfolk is buried beyond in Shackleton, and ye'll gie me yer promise, and no break yer word."

"I do promise, certainly. I'm not likely to outlive you; but, if I should, and still be vicar of Shackleton, you shall be buried somewhere as near the middle of the churchyard as we can find space."

"That'll do."

And so content they parted.

The effect of the vision upon Tom Chuff was powerful, and promised to be lasting. With a sore effort he exchanged his life of desultory adventure and comparative idleness for one of regular industry. He gave up drinking; he was as kind as an originally surly nature would allow to his wife and family; he went to church; in fine weather they crossed the moor to Shackleton Church; the vicar said he came there to look at the scenery of his vision, and to fortify his good resolutions by the reminder.

Impressions upon the imagination, however, are but transitory, and a bad man acting under fear is not a free agent; his real character does not appear. But as the images of the imagination fade, and the action of fear abates, the essential qualities of the man reassert themselves.

So, after a time, Tom Chuff began to grow weary of his new life; he grew lazy, and people began to say that he was catching hares, and pursuing his old contraband way of life, under the rose.

He came home one hard night, with signs of the bottle in his thick speech and violent temper. Next day he was sorry, or frightened, at all events repentant, and for a week or more something of the old horror returned, and he was once more on his good behaviour. But in a little time came a relapse, and another repentance, and then a relapse again, and gradually the return of old habits and the flooding in of all his old way of life, with more violence and gloom, in proportion as the man was alarmed and exasperated by the remembrance of his despised, but terrible, warning.

With the old life returned the misery of the cottage. The smiles, which had begun to appear with the unwonted sunshine, were seen no more. Instead, returned to his poor wife's face the old pale and heartbroken look. The cottage lost its neat and cheerful air, and the melancholy of neglect was visible. Sometimes at night were overheard, by a chance passer-by, cries and sobs from that ill-omened dwelling. Tom Chuff was now often drunk, and not very often at home, except when he came in to sweep away his poor wife's earnings.

Tom had long lost sight of the honest old parson. There was shame mixed with his degradation. He had grace enough left when he saw the thin figure of "t' sir" walking along the road to turn out of his way and avoid meeting him. The clergyman shook his head, and sometimes groaned, when his name was mentioned. His horror and regret were more for the poor wife than for the relapsed sinner, for her case was pitiable indeed.

Her brother, Jack Everton, coming over from Hexley, having heard stories of all this, determined to beat Tom, for his ill-treatment of his sister, within an inch of his life. Luckily, perhaps, for all concerned, Tom happened to be away upon one of his long excursions, and poor Nell besought her brother, in extremity of terror, not to interpose between them. So he took his leave and went home muttering and sulky.

Now it happened a few months later that Nelly Chuff fell sick. She had been ailing, as heartbroken people do, for a good while. But now the end had come.

There was a coroner's inquest when she died, for the doctor had doubts as to whether a blow had not, at least, hastened her death. Nothing certain, however, came of the inquiry. Tom Chuff had left his home more than two days before his wife's death. He was absent upon his lawless business still when the coroner had held his quest.

Jack Everton came over from Hexley to attend the dismal obsequies of his sister. He was more incensed than ever with the wicked husband, who, one way or other, had hastened Nelly's death. The inquest had closed early in the day. The husband had not appeared.

An occasional companion — perhaps I ought to say accomplice — of Chuff's happened to turn up. He had left him on the borders of Westmoreland, and said he would probably be home next day. But Everton affected not to believe it. Perhaps it was to Tom Chuff, he suggested, a secret satisfaction to crown the history of his bad married life with the scandal of his absence from the funeral of his neglected and abused wife.

Everton had taken on himself the direction of the melancholy preparations. He had ordered a grave to be opened for his sister beside her mother's, in Shackleton churchyard, at the other side of the moor. For the purpose, as I have said, of marking the callous neglect of her husband, he determined that the funeral should take place that night. His brother Dick had accompanied him, and they and his sister, with Mary and the children, and a couple of the neighbours, formed the humble cortège.

Jack Everton said he would wait behind, on the chance of Tom Chuff coming in time, that he might tell him what had happened, and make him cross the moor with him to meet the funeral. His real object, I think, was to inflict upon the villain the drubbing he had so long wished to give him. Anyhow, he was resolved, by crossing the moor, to reach the churchyard in time to anticipate the arrival of the funeral, and to have a few words with the vicar, clerk, and sexton, all old friends of his, for the parish of Shackleton was the place of his birth and early recollections.

But Tom Chuff did not appear at his house that night. In surly mood, and without a shilling in his pocket, he was making his way homeward. His bottle of gin, his last investment, half emptied, with its neck protruding, as usual on such returns, was in his coatpocket.

His way home lay across the moor of Catstean, and the point at which he best knew the passage was from the churchyard of Shackleton. He vaulted the low wall that forms its boundary, and strode across the graves, and over many a flat, half-buried tombstone, toward the side of the churchyard next Catstean Moor.

The old church of Shackleton and its tower rose, close at his right, like a black shadow against the sky. It was a moonless night, but clear. By this time he had reached the low boundary wall, at the other side, that overlooks the wide expanse of Catstean Moor. He stood by one of the huge old beech-trees, and leaned his back to its smooth trunk. Had he ever seen the sky look so black, and the stars shine out and blink so vividly? There was a deathlike silence over the scene, like the hush that precedes thunder in sultry weather. The expanse before him was lost in utter blackness. A strange quaking unnerved his heart. It was the sky and scenery of his vision! The same horror and misgiving. The same invincible fear of venturing from the spot where he stood. He would have prayed if he dared. His sinking heart demanded a restorative of some sort, and he grasped the bottle in his coatpocket. Turning to his left, as he did so, he saw the piled-up mould of an open grave that gaped with its head close to the base of the great tree against which he was leaning.

He stood aghast. His dream was returning and slowly enveloping him. Everything he saw was weaving itself into the texture of his vision. The chill of horror stole over him.

A faint whistle came shrill and clear over the moor, and he saw a figure approaching at a swinging trot, with a zig-zag course, hopping now here and now there, as men do over a surface where one has need to choose their steps. Through the jungle of reeds and bulrushes in the foreground this figure advanced; and with the same unaccountable impulse that had coerced him in his dream, he answered the whistle of the advancing figure.

On that signal it directed its course straight toward him. It mounted the low wall, and, standing there, looked into the graveyard.

“Who med answer?” challenged the newcomer from his post of observation.

“Me,” answered Tom.

“Who are you?” repeated the man upon the wall.

“Tom Chuff; and who’s this grave cut for?” He answered in a savage tone, to cover the secret shudder of his panic.

“I’ll tell you that, ye villain!” answered the stranger, descending from the wall, “I a’ looked for you far and near, and waited long, and now you’re found at last.”

Not knowing what to make of the figure that advanced upon him, Tom Chuff recoiled, stumbled, and fell backward into the open grave. He caught at the sides as he fell, but without retarding his fall.

An hour later, when lights came with the coffin, the corpse of Tom Chuff was found at the bottom of the grave. He had fallen direct upon his head, and his neck was broken. His death must have been simultaneous with his fall. Thus far his dream was accomplished.

It was his brother-in-law who had crossed the moor and approached the churchyard of Shackleton, exactly in the line which the image of his father had seemed to take in his strange vision. Fortunately for Jack Everton, the sexton and clerk of Shackleton church were, unseen by him, crossing the churchyard toward the grave of Nelly Chuff, just as Tom the poacher stumbled and fell. Suspicion of direct violence would otherwise have inevitably attached to the exasperated brother. As it was, the catastrophe was followed by no legal consequences.

The good vicar kept his word, and the grave of Tom Chuff is still pointed out by the old inhabitants of Shackleton pretty nearly in the centre of the churchyard. This conscientious compliance with the entreaty of the panic-stricken man as to the place of his sepulture gave a horrible and mocking emphasis to the strange combination by which fate had defeated his precaution, and fixed the place of his death.

The story was for many a year, and we believe still is, told round many a cottage hearth, and though it appeals to what many would term superstition, it yet sounded, in the ears of a rude and simple audience, a thrilling, and let us hope, not altogether fruitless homily.

DICKON THE DEVIL

About thirty years ago I was selected by two rich old maids to visit a property in that part of Lancashire which lies near the famous forest of Pendle, with which Mr. Ainsworth’s “Lancashire Witches” has made us so pleasantly familiar. My business was to make partition of a small property, including a house and demesne, to which they had a long time before succeeded as co-heiresses.

The last forty miles of my journey I was obliged to post, chiefly by cross-roads, little known, and less frequented, and presenting scenery often extremely interesting and pretty. The picturesqueness of the landscape was enhanced by the season, the beginning of September, at which I was travelling.

I had never been in this part of the world before; I am told it is now a great deal less wild, and, consequently, less beautiful.

At the inn where I had stopped for a relay of horses and some dinner — for it was then past five o’clock — I found the host, a hale old fellow of five-and-sixty, as he told me, a man of easy and garrulous benevolence, willing to accommodate his guests with any amount of talk, which the slightest tap sufficed to set flowing, on any subject you pleased.

I was curious to learn something about Barwyke, which was the name of the demesne and house I was going to. As there was no inn within some miles of it, I had written to the steward to put me up there, the best way he could, for a night.

The host of the “Three Nuns,” which was the sign under which he entertained wayfarers, had not a great deal to tell. It was twenty years, or more, since old Squire Bowes died, and no one had lived in the Hall ever since, except the gardener and his wife.

“Tom Wyndsour will be as old a man as myself; but he’s a bit taller, and not so much in flesh, quite,” said the fat innkeeper.

“But there were stories about the house,” I repeated, “that they said, prevented tenants from coming into it?”

“Old wives’ tales; many years ago, that will be, sir; I forget ‘em; I forget ‘em all. Oh yes, there always will be, when a house is left so; foolish folk will always be talkin’; but I hadn’t heard a word about it this twenty year.”

It was vain trying to pump him; the old landlord of the “Three Nuns,” for some reason, did not choose to tell tales of Barwyke Hall, if he really did, as I suspected, remember them.

I paid my reckoning, and resumed my journey, well pleased with the good cheer of that old-world inn, but a little disappointed.

We had been driving for more than an hour, when we began to cross a wild common; and I knew that, this passed, a quarter of an hour would bring me to the door of Barwyke Hall.

The peat and furze were pretty soon left behind; we were again in the wooded scenery that I enjoyed so much, so entirely natural and pretty, and so little disturbed by traffic of any kind. I was looking from the chaise-window, and soon detected the object of which, for some time, my eye had been in search. Barwyke Hall was a large, quaint house, of that cagework fashion known as “black-and-white,” in which the bars and angles of an oak framework contrast, black as ebony, with the white plaster that overspreads the masonry built into its interstices. This steep-roofed Elizabethan house stood in the midst of parklike grounds of no great extent, but rendered imposing by the noble stature of the old trees that now cast their lengthening shadows eastward over the sward, from the declining sun.

The park-wall was grey with age, and in many places laden with ivy. In deep grey shadow, that contrasted with the dim fires of evening reflected on the foliage above it, in a gentle hollow, stretched a lake that looked cold and black, and seemed, as it were, to skulk from observation with a guilty knowledge.

I had forgot that there was a lake at Barwyke; but the moment this caught my eye, like the cold polish of a snake in the shadow, my instinct seemed to recognize something dangerous, and I knew that the lake was connected, I could not remember how, with the story I had heard of this place in my boyhood.

I drove up a grass-grown avenue, under the boughs of these noble trees, whose foliage, dyed in autumnal red and yellow, returned the beams of the western sun gorgeously.

We drew up at the door. I got out, and had a good look at the front of the house; it was a large and melancholy mansion, with signs of long neglect upon it; great wooden shutters, in the old fashion, were barred, outside, across the windows; grass, and even nettles, were growing thick on the courtyard, and a thin moss streaked the timber beams; the plaster was discoloured by time and weather, and bore great russet and yellow stains. The gloom was increased by several grand old trees that crowded close about the house.

I mounted the steps, and looked round; the dark lake lay near me now, a little to the left. It was not large; it may have covered some ten or twelve acres; but it added to the melancholy of the scene. Near the centre of it was a small island, with two old ash trees, leaning toward each other, their pensive images reflected in the stirless water. The only cheery influence in this scene of antiquity, solitude, and neglect was that the house and landscape were warmed with the ruddy western beams. I knocked, and my summons resounded hollow and ungenial in my ear; and the bell, from far away, returned a deep-mouthed and surly ring, as if it resented being roused from a score years' slumber.

A light-limbed, jolly-looking old fellow, in a barracan jacket and gaiters, with a smile of welcome, and a very sharp, red nose, that seemed to promise good cheer, opened the door with a promptitude that indicated a hospitable expectation of my arrival.

There was but little light in the hall, and that little lost itself in darkness in the background. It was very spacious and lofty, with a gallery running round it, which, when the door was open, was visible at two or three points. Almost in the dark my new acquaintance led me across this wide hall into the room destined for my reception. It was spacious, and wainscoted up to the ceiling. The furniture of this capacious chamber was oldfashioned and clumsy. There were curtains still to the windows, and a piece of Turkey carpet lay upon the floor; those windows were two in number, looking out, through the trunks of the trees close to the house, upon the lake. It needed all the fire, and all the pleasant associations of my entertainer's red nose, to light up this melancholy chamber. A door at its farther end admitted to the room that was prepared for my sleeping apartment. It was wainscoted, like the other. It had a four-post bed, with heavy tapestry curtains, and in other respects was furnished in the same old-world and ponderous style as the other room. Its window, like those of that apartment, looked out upon the lake.

Sombre and sad as these rooms were, they were yet scrupulously clean. I had nothing to complain of; but the effect was rather dispiriting. Having given some directions about supper — a pleasant incident to look forward to — and made a rapid toilet, I called on my friend with the gaiters and red nose (Tom Wyndsour) whose occupation was that of a “bailiff,” or under-steward, of the property, to accompany me, as we had still an hour or so of sun and twilight, in a walk over the grounds.

It was a sweet autumn evening, and my guide, a hardy old fellow, strode at a pace that tasked me to keep up with.

Among clumps of trees at the northern boundary of the demesne we lighted upon the little antique parish church. I was looking down upon it, from an eminence, and the park-wall interposed; but a little way down was a stile affording access to the road, and by this we approached the iron gate of the churchyard. I saw the church door open; the sexton was replacing his pick, shovel, and spade, with which he had just been digging a grave in the churchyard, in their little repository under the stone stair of the tower. He was a polite, shrewd little hunchback, who was very happy to show me over the church. Among the monuments was one that interested me; it was erected to commemorate the very Squire Bowes from whom my two old maids had inherited the house and estate of Barwyke. It spoke of him in terms of grandiloquent eulogy, and informed the Christian reader that he had died, in the bosom of the Church of England, at the age of seventy-one.

I read this inscription by the parting beams of the setting sun, which disappeared behind the horizon just as we passed out from under the porch.

“Twenty years since the Squire died,” said I, reflecting as I loitered still in the churchyard.

“Ay, sir; ‘twill be twenty year the ninth o’ last month.”

“And a very good old gentleman?”

“Goodnatured enough, and an easy gentleman he was, sir; I don’t think while he lived he ever hurt a fly,” acquiesced Tom Wyndsour. “It ain’t always easy sayin’ what’s in ‘em though, and what they may take or turn to afterwards; and some o’ them sort, I think, goes mad.”

“You don’t think he was out of his mind?” I asked.

“He? La! no; not he, sir; a bit lazy, mayhap, like other old fellows; but a knew devilish well what he was about.”

Tom Wyndsour’s account was a little enigmatical; but, like old Squire Bowes, I was “a bit lazy” that evening, and asked no more questions about him.

We got over the stile upon the narrow road that skirts the churchyard. It is overhung by elms more than a hundred years old, and in the twilight, which now prevailed, was growing very dark. As side-by-side we walked along this road, hemmed in by two loose stone-like walls, something running towards us in a zig-zag line passed us at a wild pace, with a sound like a frightened laugh or a shudder, and I saw, as it passed, that it was a human figure. I may confess now, that I was a little startled. The dress of this figure was, in part, white: I know I mistook it at first for a white horse coming down the road at a gallop. Tom Wyndsour turned about and looked after the retreating figure.

"He'll be on his travels tonight," he said, in a low tone. "Easy served with a bed, *that* lad be; six foot o' dry peat or heath, or a nook in a dry ditch. That lad hasn't slept once in a house this twenty year, and never will while grass grows."

"Is he mad?" I asked.

"Something that way, sir; he's an idiot, an awpy; we call him 'Dickon the devil,' because the devil's almost the only word that's ever in his mouth."

It struck me that this idiot was in some way connected with the story of old Squire Bowes.

"Queer things are told of him, I dare say?" I suggested.

"More or less, sir; more or less. Queer stories, some."

"Twenty years since he slept in a house? That's about the time the Squire died," I continued.

"So it will be, sir; and not very long after."

"You must tell me all about that, Tom, tonight, when I can hear it comfortably, after supper."

Tom did not seem to like my invitation; and looking straight before him as we trudged on, he said,

"You see, sir, the house has been quiet, and nout's been troubling folk inside the walls or out, all round the woods of Barwyke, this ten year, or more; and my old woman, down there, is clear against talking about such matters, and thinks it best — and so do I — to let sleepin' dogs be."

He dropped his voice towards the close of the sentence, and nodded significantly.

We soon reached a point where he unlocked a wicket in the park wall, by which we entered the grounds of Barwyke once more.

The twilight deepening over the landscape, the huge and solemn trees, and the distant outline of the haunted house, exercised a sombre influence on me, which, together with the fatigue of a day of travel, and the brisk walk we had had, disinclined me to interrupt the silence in which my companion now indulged.

A certain air of comparative comfort, on our arrival, in great measure dissipated the gloom that was stealing over me. Although it was by no means a cold night, I was very glad to see some wood blazing in the grate; and a pair of candles aiding the light of the fire, made the room look cheerful. A small table, with a very white cloth, and preparations for supper, was also a very agreeable object.

I should have liked very well, under these influences, to have listened to Tom Wyndsour's story; but after supper I grew too sleepy to attempt to lead him to the subject; and after yawning for a time, I found there was no use in contending against my drowsiness, so I betook myself to my bedroom, and by ten o'clock was fast asleep.

What interruption I experienced that night I shall tell you presently. It was not much, but it was very odd.

By next night I had completed my work at Barwyke. From early morning till then I was so incessantly occupied and hard-worked, that I had not time to think over the singular occurrence to which I have just referred. Behold me, however, at length once more seated at my little supper-table, having ended a comfortable meal. It had been a sultry day, and I had thrown one of the large windows up as high as it would go. I was sitting near it, with my brandy and water at my elbow, looking out into the dark. There was no moon, and the trees that are grouped about the house make the darkness round it supernaturally profound on such nights.

"Tom," said I, so soon as the jug of hot punch I had supplied him with began to exercise its genial and communicative influence; "you must tell me who beside your wife and you and myself slept in the house last night."

Tom, sitting near the door, set down his tumbler, and looked at me askance, while you might count seven, without speaking a word.

"Who else slept in the house?" he repeated, very deliberately. "Not a living soul, sir"; and he looked hard at me, still evidently expecting something more.

"That *is* very odd," I said returning his stare, and feeling really a little odd. "You are sure *you* were not in my room last night?"

"Not till I came to call you, sir, this morning; *I* can make oath of that."

"Well," said I, "there was some one there, *I* can make oath of that. I was so tired I could not make up my mind to get up; but I was waked by a sound that I thought was some one flinging down the two tin boxes in which my papers were locked up violently on the floor. I heard a slow step on the ground, and there was light in the room, although I remembered having put out my candle. I thought it must have been you, who had come in for my clothes, and upset the boxes by accident. Whoever it was, he went out and the light with him. I was about to settle again, when, the curtain being a little open at the foot of the bed, I saw a light on the wall opposite; such as a candle from outside would cast if the door were very cautiously opening. I started up in the bed, drew the side curtain, and saw that the door *was* opening, and admitting light from outside. It is close, you know, to the head of the bed. A hand was holding on the edge of the door and pushing it open; not a bit like yours; a very singular hand. Let me look at yours."

He extended it for my inspection.

"Oh no; there's nothing wrong with your hand. This was differently shaped; fatter; and the middle finger was stunted, and shorter than the rest, looking as if it had once been broken, and the nail was crooked like a claw. I called out 'Who's there?' and the light and the hand were withdrawn, and I saw and heard no more of my visitor."

"So sure as you're a living man, that was him!" exclaimed Tom Wyndsour, his very nose growing pale, and his eyes almost starting out of his head.

"Who?" I asked.

"Old Squire Bowes; 'twas *his* hand you saw; the Lord a' mercy on us!" answered Tom. "The broken finger, and the nail bent like a hoop. Well for you, sir, he didn't come back when you called, that time. You came here about them Miss Dymock's business, and he never meant they should have a foot o' ground in Barwyke; and he was making a will to give it away quite different, when death took him short. He never was uncivil to no one; but he couldn't abide them ladies. My mind misgave me when I heard 'twas about their business you were coming; and now you see how it is; he'll be at his old tricks again!"

With some pressure and a little more punch, I induced Tom Wyndsour to explain his mysterious allusions by recounting the occurrences which followed the old Squire's death.

"Squire Bowes of Barwyke died without making a will, as you know," said Tom. "And all the folk round were sorry; that is to say, sir, as sorry as folk will be for an old man that has seen a long tale of years, and has no right to grumble that death has knocked an hour too soon at his door. The Squire was well liked; he was never in a passion, or said a hard word; and he would not hurt a fly; and that made what happened after his decease the more surprising.

"The first thing these ladies did, when they got the property, was to buy stock for the park.

"It was not wise, in any case, to graze the land on their own account. But they little knew all they had to contend with.

"Before long something went wrong with the cattle; first one, and then another, took sick and died, and so on, till the loss began to grow heavy. Then, queer stories, little by little, began to be told. It was said, first by one, then by another, that Squire Bowes was seen, about evening time, walking, just as he used to do when he was alive, among the old trees, leaning on his stick; and, sometimes when he came up with the cattle, he would stop and lay his hand kindly like on the back of one of them; and that one was sure to fall sick next day, and die soon after.

"No one ever met him in the park, or in the woods, or ever saw him, except a good distance off. But they knew his gait and his figure well, and the clothes he used to wear; and they could tell the beast he laid his hand on by its colour — white, dun, or black; and that beast was sure to sicken and die. The neighbours grew shy of taking the path over the park; and no one liked to walk in the woods, or come inside the bounds of Barwyke: and the cattle went on sickening and dying as before.

"At that time there was one Thomas Pyke; he had been a groom to the old Squire; and he was in care of the place, and was the only one that used to sleep in the house.

"Tom was vexed, hearing these stories; which he did not believe the half on 'em; and more especial as he could not get man or boy to herd the cattle; all being afeared. So he wrote to Matlock in Derbyshire, for his brother, Richard Pyke, a clever lad, and one that knew nout o' the story of the old Squire walking.

"Dick came; and the cattle was better; folk said they could still see the old Squire, sometimes, walking, as before, in openings of the wood, with his stick in his hand; but he was shy of coming nigh the cattle, whatever his reason might be, since Dickon Pyke came; and he used to stand a long bit off, looking at them, with no more stir in him than a trunk o' one of the old trees, for an hour at a time, till the shape melted away, little by little, like the smoke of a fire that burns out.

"Tom Pyke and his brother Dickon, being the only living souls in the house, lay in the big bed in the servants' room, the house being fast barred and locked, one night in November.

"Tom was lying next the wall, and he told me, as wide awake as ever he was at noonday. His brother Dickon lay outside, and was sound asleep.

"Well, as Tom lay thinking, with his eyes turned toward the door, it opens slowly, and who should come in but old Squire Bowes, his face lookin' as dead as he was in his coffin.

"Tom's very breath left his body; he could not take his eyes off him; and he felt the hair rising up on his head.

"The Squire came to the side of the bed, and put his arms under Dickon, and lifted the boy — in a dead sleep all the time — and carried him out so, at the door.

"Such was the appearance, to Tom Pyke's eyes, and he was ready to swear to it, anywhere.

"When this happened, the light, wherever it came from, all on a sudden went out, and Tom could not see his own hand before him.

"More dead than alive, he lay till daylight.

"Sure enough his brother Dickon was gone. No sign of him could he discover about the house; and with some trouble he got a couple of the neighbours to help him to search the woods and grounds. Not a sign of him anywhere.

"At last one of them thought of the island in the lake; the little boat was moored to the old post at the water's edge. In they got, though with small hope of finding him there. Find him, nevertheless, they did, sitting under the big ash tree, quite out of his wits; and to all their questions he answered nothing but one cry— 'Bowes, the devil! See him; see him; Bowes, the devil!’ An idiot they found him; and so he will be till God sets all things right. No one could ever get him to sleep under roof-tree more. He wanders from house to house while daylight lasts; and no one cares to lock the harmless creature in the workhouse. And folk would rather not meet him after nightfall, for they think where he is there may be worse things near.”

A silence followed Tom’s story. He and I were alone in that large room; I was sitting near the open window, looking into the dark night air. I fancied I saw something white move across it; and I heard a sound like low talking that swelled into a discordant shriek— “Hoo-oo-oo! Bowes, the devil! Over your shoulder. Hoo-oo-oo! ha! ha! ha!” I started up, and saw, by the light of the candle with which Tom strode to the window, the wild eyes and blighted face of the idiot, as, with a sudden change of mood, he drew off, whispering and tittering to himself, and holding up his long fingers, and looking at the tips like a “hand of glory.”

Tom pulled down the window. The story and its epilogue were over. I confess I was rather glad when I heard the sound of the horses’ hoofs on the courtyard, a few minutes later; and still gladder when, having bidden Tom a kind farewell, I had left the neglected house of Barwyke a mile behind me.

CHRONICLES OF GOLDEN FRIARS

Published in three volumes by Richard Bentley in 1871, this rare collection of stories is set in the imaginary English village of Golden Friars. Although the collection contains only three long tales, ‘A Strange Adventure in the Life of Miss Laura Mildmay’ incorporates a shorter tale, ‘Madam Crowl’s Ghost’, which was first published anonymously on its own in 1870 in the journal *All the Year Round.*

The original publishing agreement for the collection

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THE HAUNTED BARONET
THE BIRD OF PASSAGE: A STORY OF A FIRST LOVE.

The rare first edition of the collection

A STRANGE ADVENTURE IN THE LIFE OF MISS LAURA MILDMAY

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CHAPTER I.

NEWS FROM HILERIA PULLEN.

OUTSIDE, the moon is shining over a solemn winter landscape. Towering mountains, with their bases so near the foreground that you can see the rude fences and solitary trees that mark them, rise wilder and bolder into snowy altitudes, above which, in the deep blue of night, the stars are twinkling frostily. Dropped here suddenly, you might think yourself in a Swiss valley. But the character of the little village that stands by the margin of the lake, though in some respects singular, and altogether quaint, is decidedly English.

This scene lies in the North of England. The village is called Golden Friars; and the grey stone house, with the piers, and the shadow of the sombre elms, that stands within a stone's throw of the village churchyard, is the vicar's ancient dwelling.

In wintry weather — in the long nights — every room looks cheery that glows with a mixture of firelight and candles. The curtains were drawn on the narrow windows; and the flicker of that warm light showed very pleasantly on walls varied with press and cupboard, and with some oldfashioned bookshelves, well stored with volumes, and visited the portrait of the vicar's grandfather, who, having been a doctor of laws near a hundred years ago at Oxford, was taken in his red hood, which glowed grandly out from the shadow, and helped to light up the homely chamber.

The Vicar of Golden Friars was a natty man, and the soul of punctuality. His sermons were all written on Thursday afternoon for delivery from the pulpit on the Sunday following. He had just completed one. The last page was open on the table; the light of the candle was glittering from the still wet ink.

The vicar, as he leaned back in his chair with his fingers interlaced, and the tips of his thumbs together, looked down, sidelong, on his performance with an air of complacency-not quite a smile, but very near it. The Reverend Hugh Jenner was, I must confess, conceited of his sermons. As he looked, the horn of the mail-coach, driving through the High Street, sounded clear in the frosty air, as it were, a little flourish of triumph not inappropriate.

His good wife was working at her *broderie anglaise,* at the other side of the fire. She was absorbed apparently in it, really in a rumination; and, as people will under the circumstances, she gazed upon her work with dull and gloating eyes, and lips pursed, and forgot next Sunday's sermon, the husband of her bosom, and the little dog that slept in a basket on a cushion at her feet.

Once or twice Doctor Jenner stole a glance at his wife, expecting the good woman, after her wont, to inquire how the sermon pleased him, what was the subject, and so forth.

I think, if she had owned a nursery duly stocked, or had ever had such a pleasant and anxious little colony to look after, she might not have cared quite so much for the sermon, and someone else would have stitched them into their purple paper covers. People are never, of course, quite content with the thing that is. Nature hides away the ugliness of decay, disease, and death. There is, if we could fathom it, a profound mystery in the fact that man anticipates good from every change; and that the pain that belongs to every imaginable situation is hidden from all but those who suffer it.

I think that these two people, living in the quaint grey house, with the tall piers, capped with stone balls, in front, between which swung the iron gate, flanked without by clumps of lofty elms, were possibly a happier pair than if they had obtained the wish of their hearts — a hope they had long ceased to cherish — a little child to look in their faces, and prattle and play about the trim, quiet rooms.

Well, they had been twenty years married, and were childless. And, as it turned out, by an odd coincidence — for it chimed in with her own thoughts at the moment — the vicar, who had now risen, and was standing with his back to the fire, said at last —

"I have finished the sermon, my love; and it treats a good deal of the case of Elkanah and Hannah."

"How very odd!" said Mrs. Jenner; "I can't account for it."

"For what, Dolly?"inquired the vicar.

"I dreamed last night that we had such a darling little child.

I thought it lay sleeping, poor little thing! on my knees; and that while I was looking at it, you were reading aloud such a beautiful sermon about

Hannah and Elkanah; and here it is — the very subject! And, oddly enough, I was thinking of it at the very moment!"

"Very odd, my dear!" said the vicar— "very odd!"

And he stepped over to her side, smiling, and kissed her cheek gently, and patting it, smiled still with great affection upon her, saying —

"Dolly, my darling, we must not fret about the matter. Let us leave all in the hands of God, Who has given us one another, and this quiet and happy life. Remember the kind reproach of Elkanah to his beloved wife: 'Am not I better to thee than ten sons?' There is some good reason, or the God of all comfort would not deny us this. And is there not compensation? For my part, Dolly, when I look at you I feel that I already owe more love on earth than I can ever repay."

So they kissed very tenderly, and she said —

"I'm sure it is true. But I don't repine; you must not fancy that. It is only when my darling man is out, making his visits, that I do sometimes feel lonely, and think that if I had a little creature to play with— "

"Little creature to play with, my dear? It might be a young man of twenty by this time," said the vicar.

"I don't see why it should," expostulated his wife. "But I can't help wishing; and I know it would be delightful if a kind fairy would come, as happens in the old fairy-tale, and give us our wish, and a pretty present for the little creature at its christening."

At this moment the door opened, and the maid entered with a letter.

It had the postmark. It had just arrived by the coach. It was for the vicar.

"What an odd hand! Who is it?"

The vicar had replaced his spectacles, and was standing with his side to the candle, and the letter open in his fingers. He had just begun to read it, but rumpled it round, to read the signature for his wife.

"Hileria Pullen."

"What an odd name!" exclaimed Mrs. Jenner.

"Yes," said the vicar, "it is odd. Hilaria one could have understood; but Hileria — it is odd; it is barbarous. I never heard of the person. I don't think I ever knew any one of that name. Pullen? No."

"What is the postmark? "asked his wife curiously.

"Guildford, Surrey," he answered. "I don't know a soul who lives there."

He drew nearer to the candle, and read for a few seconds undisturbed.

“Aren’t there some people related to you called Torquil?” he asked.

“Yes, my second cousin, Janet Ayger married a Captain Torquil,” answered Dolly.

“Well — yes. Listen to this,” said the vicar. “Shall I read it aloud for you, as well as I can?”

“Do, like a darling,” said she, and the vicar began.

“It is rather long, and I have only read a little way.”

CHAPTER II.

THE VICAR AND HIS WIFE ARE ADJURED.

THE letter began thus: —

‘REVEREND SIR, — Please your divine, I am the woman by name Hileria Pullen, who cares the dearling child resently left an orphen by that angle of goodness the deseased Mrs. Mildmay, of Queen’s Snedley, and which I do suppose was well known to you and your lady, if she be still living; and Mr. Mildmay, whose lamentable departure likewise you saw, from a fall from his gig being in the papers — and the horse ran away, which caused his lamentable departure, a year before my mistress that was. Leaving her and her dearling infent, only eight months old, to lament his departure.’

“These people are all new to me,” said the vicar, shaking his head a little, and lowering the letter to the table, as he looked on his wife.

“Yes; that’s poor Alice. She married Mr. Mildmay, of Queen’s Snedley. I thought she took airs a little, and we have not written to one another this long time. Perhaps I wronged her; and so she’s gone, poor thing.”

“And he also died, it seems, a year before; and this is the nurse, I suppose,” said the vicar.

The vicar resumed:

‘Two days after my lamentable mistress died, Captain Torquil came to Queen’s Snedley, having given an order to Floss and Company for the funeral, which was done private. He has took the child and me to Guildford, where it and me at this present time is. We are comfortable in every particular as yet. Mrs. Torquil is here herself, but is not happy, nor, I think, in ‘ealth, to make it sootable for Miss Mildmay when she comes to grow up a bit to stay here, even if the captain was a saint upon earth — which it is far from so. Because, as I can make plain, I am very Unhappy about the dear child. He comes down here from London, sometimes every day for a bit, and sometimes he will not come for a week. Mrs. Torquil says she is a relative of your lady, and asked me after her very kindly, if she be still living, which I cannot tell, not having knewed the name.'

"That's true, isn't it?" asked the vicar. "They are related?"

"Yes, she is a cousin — not a first cousin — and I never saw very much of her. But go on, dear."

"Well-yes. Where was I? Oh! here."

And the vicar continued, thus:

'But I am very anxious, please your divine, on account of the darling baby, you are aware it is only eighteen months old on the seventh of December last, and there is a many things you should know about; there being no near relative, and me in very great fear for the consequences. The captain is a pillite gentleman, and nice spoken to me. But I cannot write to your divine the cause of me being so very frightened as I am. For the captain he has been very kind to me, and I have nothing to complain. But has come to the nursery frequently, and looks at the child, and always offers me a drink, which is not the place of a gentleman to such as me; and having charge of the dearling child to offer me a drink, and press me to take it as he does.'

"Very odd, indeed," said Mrs. Jenner. "I wonder what aged person this is?"

"I haven't a notion, my dear," answered the vicar.

"But what can he mean by it?" repeated his wife, with dignity.

"It is possibly mere good nature," said her husband.

"I hope so," said Mrs. Jenner. "I don't think it gentlemanlike."

"She may be an old woman, you know," said the vicar.

"Extremely unlikely," said the good lady, with an offended air. "You may as well read on, Hugh."

The vicar read on therefore:

‘Being myself a many a year in the world, and having seen a great deal—‘

“Oh! then she *is* a person of a certain age,” said the vicar.

“I’m glad she is. She’s the fitter person to take charge of children,” said his wife. “But I never heard any good of that Captain Torquil, and, Heaven forgive me if I wrong him, I don’t believe any; and I don’t say so without having heard a good deal about him. But read on, darling.”

“Very good,” said the vicar. “I wonder what on earth she can want of me? however, we’ll see,” and he read on:

‘It seems to me the captain wants to take the management of the dearling baby out of my hands hole us bole us.’

“She spells very oddly, “said the vicar.

“Never mind. What more, darling?” said Mrs. Jenner.

‘And the notions of such a thing puts me to my wits end, and, ‘indeed, God alone is my chief hope.’

“That, under all circumstances, I trust,” interpolated the vicar.

‘And I would wash my ends of it, and leave the place, was it not for that dearling baby, and the dreadful sin which it would lay on my soul — which the Lord forbid — and what may become of it I know not, if you will not see fit to come here and remove the poor little dearling. It will not do to write to me here, for it will fall, most likely, into the ends of the captain, which it would be a great break up, and the undoing of me; for he is, I hear, a very violent gentleman when he is crossed, and I should then be quite heartbroke about the dearling baby, for it would pass altogether into other ends, and so God only knows the consequence; and you being a parson, and acquainted with all goodness, will know what is right to be done by the poor innocent, and your own kin, and a great sin ‘twill be if you let the child come to evil. Great Heaven, if you but knew the hawful state I am in this hour, and the baby, poor innocent darling, in so great a danger, you would not fail to take coach for here — Guildford, Surrey, Old Hall, at the grocer's in High Street, Samuel Folder's, they will tell you of me; and as you hope for mercy yourself, come here and take away the child to stay in safety in your care.'

That was the end of the letter; and when he had read it, he lowered it again to the table, and looked in his wife's face, and she looked in his.

CHAPTER III.

VOICES IN THE HALL

“I DON’T see, my love, do you,” said the vicar, “that I am called upon to take any step on this odd letter from a servant-maid? ““But, Hugh, dear, suppose she says true? Suppose there is a good reason for her alarm and urgency?”

“People of that rank of life don’t understand ours. I don’t believe, Dolly, there is any reason such as an educated person would act on.”

“And — I was just thinking, Hugh — does not this offer, as it were, from Providence of a little child of our kindred to take in, and protect, and educate, and love, I might say, very wonderfully? It might be such a darling-just eighteen months old, and a little orphan, poor little thing; and it must be a darling little creature, or she could not love it so very much.”

“But, my dear, the woman may be mad. If I could be certain there was anything in it — but I don’t even understand what she means.”

“Don’t you think she means that the child will be kidnapped, or made away with somehow?”

“Well, suppose she does, is it not more likely that a woman in her rank of life should be either stupid, or tipsy, or even mad, than that Captain — what’s his name?-should meditate any such enormity?”

“But you told us, Hugh, last Sunday, in that beautiful sermon on the text, ‘Search the Scriptures,’ that that was the very argument-wasn’t it? — by which that wicked man, Mr. Hume, attacked revealed religion.”

“Very well argued, I allow, Dolly,” said the vicar, smiling and patting her cheek affectionately.

“I am not sure, but I know it was something like it. And suppose, Hugh, dear, that anything bad did happen to the poor little child in consequence of your holding back and leaving it to its fate, would you ever forgive yourself? Think what a treasure it might be; and, oh, could you-could you feel quite happy if you resolve on leaving the poor little thing to take its chance after this warning?”

“I see, my good little Dolly, you have set your heart on our burning our fingers with other people’s chestnuts,” said the vicar, who secretly was more of his wife’s way of feeling and thinking in the matter than he cared to avow; and even at the cost of the long joumey-a longer one than the rail makes of it — he was very well disposed to be urged into the affair. “I see you have made up your mind, and I suppose, with such a termagant for a wife, I may as well make up mine,” he continued merrily. “It would be odd, Dolly, if it turned out as you say, and supplied a little inmate for that one lonely nook in the house, the quiet room upstairs, that may be noisy enough yet. But you must give me time to arrange about my duty, and to speak to Stubbs and Mompesson. And you’ll allow me to pack my trunk, also. I think you will? And so we’ll see what’s to be done, and should anything come of it, I may be delayed. I may be absent two Sundays; and, do you observe, the letter is stamped ‘late.’

I see the date corresponds. It has been a day longer making the journey than it ought; but that accounts for it. The last mail. They are so dilatory in that rank of life. Yes, we must reckon two Sundays’ absence. If you look at the map he pointed to a large map of England hanging on the screen— “you’ll see that it is a long way between this and Guildford.”

By this time the vicar was a little fussed, and had begun to feel the distraction of the coming journey.

Dorothy had got Hileria Pullen’s letter, and was reading it, over again.

“Well, darling, may God bless the undertaking,” said the vicar, after a silence of some minutes, laying his hand kindly on his wife’s shoulder. “But the more I think of it, the more I am satisfied we are right.”

She looked up, meeting his fond glance as fondly.

“Yes, Hugh, it will be the longest separation we have had since we were married.”

And these good people, who loved very fondly and kissed easily, kissed very tenderly again, and she laid her hand in his as he sat down by her side, and they looked with inexpressible affection and happiness in each other’s faces. I wonder if it was possible for two human beings to be happier; and yet the wish of these hearts was still to seek-*quifit Mecaenas*?

As, hand locked in hand, they fell thus into a reverie, on a sudden the iron gate opened, a tramp of feet and the sound of voices reached the hall door, at which came a loud knock like a woundy pelt, as they say in that country, of a hammer. This was followed by a great peal of the bell, and was so startling that good Mrs. Jenner bounded with an ejaculation, and the vicar, holding his wife's hand tighter than he intended, looked round to the window.

There were several voices talking, and the bell rang again.

"Some one ill, I'm afraid," said the vicar, going to the head of the stairs to hurry the maid.

She was already at the door, and he heard feet entering, and some talk, and the deep bass voice of Tom Shackles among the rest.

"By the mess!" cried the lusty voice of the girl. "Here will be news for the master and mistress. In wi' it here. By Jen!"

The other voices meanwhile were talking loudly enough in the hall to make it no easy matter for the vicar, calling over the banister at the head of the stairs, to make himself heard.

"Fetch it in!"

Could it be some half-drowned body picked out of the lake, and brought in to recover or die, as God might please, in the vicar's house?

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH A PERSON COMES TO MAKE A VISIT TO THE VICARAGE.

THE talking in the hall continued, but Catherine Bell, the vicar's servant, ran upstairs, and seeing her master calling unheeded over the banister, she accosted him from the landing below in these words, with a delighted grin on her ruddy face —

"Oh, sir, beggin' yer pardon, please, there be a bam coom."

"A child come. What child? Whose child? What's the meaning of all this? Is that Tom Shackles I hear downstairs? Will you tell him to come up to the lobby? I shall never know what it is otherwise; and come yourself also."

And he put his head into the drawingroom and said, "Something that will interest you, my love. It never rains but it pours. A baby arrived, and coming up."

"Bring the child up with you; that is, if it is fit to come up, of course. How do you do, Shackles? Come up for a moment; we want to hear what it is."

"Here they come, dear," he said, returning to the drawingroom, where his wife was standing near the door in a high state of excitement.

"Is he coming?" she asked.

"I'll carry it. Gie't to me, Tom, will ye?" said Catherine Bell, in a giggle of ecstacy, coming up the stairs with the baby lying across in her arms, looking like a bale of flannels, with a tweed shawl folded round it, and some thick veils pinned over its face.

"Bring the darling here, near the candles," said kind Dolly Jenner to her maid. "Lay it on my lap."

"The bonny bab! it's sleepin', ma'am."

"Oh! the darling!" pursued the vicar's wife. "We must take care, Kitty, not to let the light on its eyes, the poor little thing!"

"'Twill be a bonny wee thing, I'll warrant ye, ma'am. Shall I unpin the clout from its face?"

“Do, Kitty, quickly,” answered the lady, who was looking down on the lace veil — which indicated the rank of this little outcast’s people — longing, if it were possible, to see through it to the little slumbering face that was hidden from her eager eyes.

While they were thus employed, the vicar talked with Tom Shackles near the door.

Tom was the parish clerk, and followed other callings too. A tall fellow, of a long and solemn face, with a somewhat golden tint, and thick blackhair streaked with white, anda verybluechin.

“As ’twas a matter for your reverence, they sent round the corner for me. You’d say the woman was dyin’ a’most, and she calls for the sacrament. She’s down at the George, they’ve got her to bed. She says there be them on her tracks that would hurt the child, and that’s why she could not hold her peace till the babby was in charge o’ your reverence. She asked was your wife living, and when she heard so, she took heart and thanked God, and cried a bit. She did not come by the mail-coach. She got out at Scardon Hall, and took a chaise across. She thinks she’s followed, and she’s took wi’ the creepings at every stir in the hall. The doctor’s wi’ her noo. She was bad settin’ out, and she’s liggin’ in her bed now. I thought she was a bit strackle-brained, I did truly, when I saw her first. I couldn’t tell what she was drivin’ at; but she knew well enough herself. She was troubled in mind, and freated terrible about the babby, and that betwattled I ‘most thought she was daft.”

“But she’s not mad?” asked the vicar.

“Na, na, not a bit; only put about, and scared like.”

“Where does she come from?”

“South — Lonnon, I take it — a long way. She looks like death ‘most.”

“Did she mention her name?” asked the vicar.

“Ay, sir, I wrote it down here.”

And he plucked a scrap of paper from his waistcoat and read, Hileria Pullen.”

“Hileria Pullen! Dear me!” said the vicar, with the scrap of paper in his fingers, and turning to his wife, who, with Kitty Bell, was busy over the child. “Why, here’s that woman, Hileria Pullen, actually arrived at the George, and that’s the child, and the woman’s very ill. You saw her, didn’t you? What kind of person does she seem to you to be? respectable? “asked the vicar.

“That she does, sir; yes, a decent, farrantly woman, none o’ your fussocks, you know. A thin atomy of a woman, but well dressed. Not young, nor good-lookin’.”

“All the better, perhaps,” said the vicar.

“Thin and white-faced; fluke-mouthed, you’d say, sir.”

“No, Tom, not that phrase,” said the vicar.

“And hollow in the cheeks — dish-faced, you know. But I couldn’t see very well, for the candle was little better than a pigtail-and they’s dark enough-except just where a twine of the candlelight fell.”

“And she wants to see me? “said the vicar, lighting a bedroom candle.

“Just so, your reverence.”

“And the sacrament, you’re sure?”

“Certain, sir.”

Come in here, Tom. There is some of the port open from last Sunday. You will carry it down; the rest we shall find there.”

And into the vicar’s study they stepped.

There, in a corner under the secretary, the bottle stood, also the simple silver cup and the patten. These the clerk put up, while the vicar took his hat, and coat, and thick woollen gloves, and his stick.

“I’m going, my love, to see the poor woman; down to the George; only a step,” said Doctor Jenner, with his mufflers on and his hat in his hand, extinguishing the candle he had just set down.

“And what is to be done with this poor little thing, Hugh?

I wish so much it might remain.”

“Certainly, darling, whatever you like best-exactly what you think best; and I shan’t be very long away, and you shall hear all when I come back. And hadn’t I better send Mrs. Joliffe up here? she knows everything that ought to be done, and we pass her door on the way to the George.”

“Oh, thank you, Hugh, darling-the very thing. It is so thoughtful of you. You do always think of everything.”

And running up close to him for her farewell, she kissed him with her arms about him, on the lobby, she added, in a hurried whisper —

“You darling, I am so delighted!”

Smiling, the vicar ran down, and, opening the hall-door, the beautiful moonlight scene was before him. The solitary old trees in the foreground, the lake with its dark expanse and glimmering lights, and the mountains rising round like mighty shadows.

“A beautiful night, Tom,” said the vicar, as they stood for a moment on the hard, dry ground before his door.

“A black frost belike, sir,” answered Tom.

“The countless watch-fires of an unseen host, Tom,” said the vicar, looking up at the glorious field of stars above him, and then down again on the beautiful lake, and across it to the huge, phantom-like mountains; and then, a little to the left, the antique George Inn close by met his view and recalled him. So with a sigh he said-

“Let us get on, Tom; we have a serious duty before us. Poor woman! I trust we may find her better.”

And walking on the short green grass, beneath which the frozen earth echoed to their tread, he approached the one red light that glowed from its porch.

“Just tell Mrs. Joliffe, Tom, as we pass, that the mistress wants her at the house this moment.”

“May God send all for the best,” murmured the vicar as, alone, he raised his eyes to heaven. “But come whatsoever his wisdom may decree, the poor little thing is welcome to share with us.”

Hereupon he entered the door of the George, which was still open. He inquired for the sick woman.

The doctor was still with her, and was giving her hot negus. “A very good thing, and there can’t be any fever, then, I take it,” said the vicar, relieved.

“I’ll go upstairs, Tom, and see the doctor,” he said, addressing Shackles, who had joined him; “and I’ll take the bag in my hand,” he added, not caring that the silver vessels of the church should run a risk of accidental irreverence; “and I will call for you, Tom, as soon as you are required.”

Tom sat down at the bar for a chat with Mrs. Winder, and the vicar mounted the stairs with a gentle and measured step.

CHAPTER V.

THE BABY’S FACE.

WHILE the vicar had been talking to Tom Shackles, his wife and Kitty Bell had been equally busy about the little creature whom the girl called the “barn.”

The first thing that struck them was the fineness and even elegance of the interior wrappings in which it was enveloped.

“How nicely she keeps it! That must be a really conscientious woman, that Mrs. Pullen,” said the good lady. “I hope, poor thing, she may recover.”

Perhaps she was thinking of tempting Hileria Pullen to make Golden Friars her residence, and to live at the vicarage.

“How soundly it sleeps, poor little darling! I wonder, Kitty, whether it would matter if we unpinned the covering over its darling face? I do so long to look at it.”

“Not it, ma’am. I would. I’d fain gie’t a smoucher, the canny darlin’.”

“But we mustn’t kiss it yet, you know; not till it’s awake; and now that I think, we ought not to lose a moment first in getting the nursery to rights. Mary will do that, and light a very good fire; and come back when you have told her. Is the little bed in the same place exactly?”

Ay, ma’am; it stoodens just where it did, in the nook by the fire.”

“Yes, that’s the best place. Run, Kitty, and see to that, and come back in a moment.”

Away ran Kitty, and good Mrs. Jenner, in the delighted importance of her vicarious maternity, carried the little bale of flannels in her arms to the fireplace, where, very cautiously, she sat down, smiling, her head already full of the future, and the air glorious with cloudy castles and grand romances, of which the heroine lay so helpless and unconscious in her lap.

From the nursery, which good Mrs. Jenner for years had looked after, every now and then — lest, I suppose, a family should come upon them by surprise-Kitty Bell came quickly back again, with the same irrepressible grin upon her hale, honest face.

“Well, Kitty, a good fire in the nursery?”

“Hoot! ma’am, a grand fire, like a Kersmas stock a’most; the room’s all alight wi’t. The folk’ll see it a gliskin’ i’ the lake, across from the fells, it gars a look so gladsome.”

“We must not set the house on fire, though,” said her mistress, in high glee.

“Na, na, that won’t be, ma’am. Dick Carpenter says ye couldna burn the vicarage, ’tis so well biggit, all stone and hard oak; and dear me! baint it tired, poor, weeny, winsome thing; winking still, it be, God bless it.”

“Yes, fast asleep; but I think we might peep now, Kitty, what do you say?”

“Surely, ma’am. Do let us, just a glent; ‘twill do us good to see the weeny face o’t.”

And so, in eager whispers, speaking under their breath, they exchanged suggestions and cautions as they withdrew pin after pin; and at length the slumbering baby’s face was disclosed to their longing eyes.

To say they were disappointed would be nothing-they were shocked. It was the ugliest baby they had ever seen, and looked, moreover, as if it were dying.

“Adzooks!” gasped Kitty, after a silence of some seconds. “Dear me! Poor little thing!” said Mrs. Jenner, in a whisper of amazement. “It certainly is very plain.”

“Did I ever see such a windered babby as that!” exclaimed Kitty.

“It certainly is very thin,” observed the vicar’s wife to herself.

“It looks as if ’twas just un-gone,” exclaimed Kitty.

“All but dead indeed, poor little thing!” said the mistress, echoing Kitty’s criticism; “and I think that cheek is swollen. Oh, dear! it is such a pity.”

“Did ye ever see sic a poor blea’ little face?” continued Kitty, employing the epithet which in that country expresses pale and livid. “Happen as ca’ad it be?”

“No, it ain’t cold — quite warm,” said the crestfallen lady, very gently touching its cheek with her fingertips.

“I hope it mayn’t prove a nafflin,” added Kitty.

“No, no, no, Kitty; it’s a plain child, but I see no sign of its being foolish or weak. Heaven forbid!” said Mrs. Jenner, alarmed.

“Whoever sid sic a barn?” repeated Kitty, that Job’s comforter, deliberately, “now that the can’le shines right down on’t. By t’ mess!

What'll the maister say when he comes back. 'Twill be a rue-bargain wi' him, I'm thinkin'."

"No, he'll not regret it— 'twasn't for its looks he took it. He thought it right; and he always does what he thinks right; but he will be disappointed — that can't be helped."

"We may come to like it yet, ma'am," said Kitty, to whose woman's heart something in that helpless, ugly little face appealed.

"I was just thinking so — I was," said the lady. "We may love it even more if it is sickly, poor little thing; and the less beauty it has, and the more suffering, the higher right has God given it to our compassion, help, and love."

Her eyes filled up with gentle tears as she spoke, and she stooped down and kissed the little baby; drawing it fondly to her lips, and again and again making amends, as it were, for the cold hospitality of its reception.

"'Twill— 'twill indeed— 'twill be welcome," said Kitty relenting also.

And in the midst of these caresses and welcomings, the child, I suppose under the endearments of good Mrs. Jenner, awoke and began to cry.

Its crying was not of the angry and shrilly sort. It was a low, gentle wail and sobbing, and much more moving than that higher-pitched and more energetic lamentation to which we are accustomed.

"There, there, there," said the women, and all kinds of hushing and soothing accompanied its sorrowing.

"Has Mrs. Jolliffe come, I wonder?"

Yes, she had arrived, and was in the nursery when Kitty Bell had left it.

"Come up to the nursery, Kitty. Take the candle, and I'll carry the child. I like carrying it, poor little thing. I feel I have been so unkind to it. I wish it could understand me, that I might beg its pardon."

So they trooped up to the nursery, where good Mrs. Jolliffe, tall, with a grave and kindly face, made her curtsey, and took the baby in her experienced arms; and with these movements, and sayings, and unintelligible words of power, intoned according to tradition, she tranquillised that troubled spirit in a way that Kitty, who was watching over one shoulder, admired and Mrs. Jenner, peering over the other, envied.

"How do she and the child so delightfully understand one another?" thought the vicar's wife. "How happy and how conceited Mrs. Joliffe must be."

“By Jen!” exclaimed Kitty.

“You must not swear, Kitty,” said the vicar’s good wife.

“No, ma’am; but, lawk! don’t ye see, ma’am? Look at its eyen! Hoot! sic a gloo it has.”

“No, no, it does not squint,” expostulated Mrs. Jenner in a new distress. “Surely it doesn’t squint, Mrs. Joliffe?”

“That little gloo is only the teething, ma’am; it won’t signify.”

“Thank Heaven,” said poor Mrs. Jenner.

“Amen,” responded Kitty. “And, oh, ma’am, doant the nursery look gladsome! Look around, ma’am, do, wi’ the fire and the candle, and the poor weeny thing in the flannels, and Mrs. Joliffe a singin’ to it. For a nursery without a baby, it does look dowley, ma’am.”

“So it does, indeed,” said the vicar’s wife, with a kind look at the girl, that was almost as good as a kiss.

“And when Mrs. Joliffe ain’t here, I’m to take care o’ the child, and I’ll talk and sing to it so canty all day; ain’t I, ma’am?”

“Very likely, Kitty.”

“Ha, ha!” said Kitty, with a broad grin.

CHAPTER VI.

HILERIA PULLEN.

WHILE all this and a great deal more was going on in the nursery, in the George Inn, whose porch and sign you could see from the window in the moonlight, the vicar had walked upstairs and tapped at the door to which the chambermaid had conducted him. The doctor told him to come in.

There was now quite a little levee in the stranger's room. Hileria Pullen was in bed. She was, in truth, neither young nor pretty, being somewhat yellow, and very sharp of feature. She looked woefully exhausted, and thought that she was dying. She lay making a straight, narrow ridge down the centre of a rather large four-poster. At the foot stood Mr. Turnbull, of the George, grave, bald, and florid, in a vast white waistcoat, a brass-buttoned blue coat, and a big bunch of watch-seals dangling on the paunch of his drab trousers. At the end of the bolster stood short, energetic Doctor Lincote, with his fingers on Hileria's pulse, and his watch in the palm of his other hand. The vicar glided silently to the side of the pillow opposite the doctor, who, stuffing his watch into his fob, said with decision —

"Don't mind your sensations, ma'am, you're better. Glad to see you, Mr. Jenner. This is the vicar, ma'am. I hope we'll disappoint him, ma'am. We'll hardly ask for our viaticum yet, Mr. Vicar, ha, hey?"

"Glad to hear you say so, doctor. You're in very safe hands, Mrs. Pullen. How do you feel, pray?"

"Jest gone, sir, please," answered the patient querulously. The doctor winked across the bed to the vicar, to intimate that he was to take that announcement with a grain of allowance.

"And you remember you told Mr. Turnbull to let nobody into his inn; but that couldn't be, you know; so you must be more precise, and say who you mean, do you see? and if you want to talk to him, you must take a glass of sherry first for I need not tell you, you are very much exhausted. I see she *does* wish to speak to you, Turnbull. Hand her a glass of sherry — hold it yourself to her lips, you'd better."

And while the host was doing that congenial office, the doctor came round the bed and signed to the vicar, who followed him to the corner of the room next the window, and there in a whisper he said —

"A very hysterical subject, she is; in a high state of excitement, and utterly over-fatigued and exhausted. You may guess what that is; but there's nothing at present to alarm."

"You have been giving her ether," said the vicar; "I smell it."

"Very sharp — very sharp, Mr. Vicar; you know the leading medicines, and the leading cases. You have a very pretty notion of medicine; I often told you. She's half mad with fright about some captain she says is pursuing her. By Jove! he must be a very hot-blooded fellow — eh?"

"I'm only a poor woman," said the female voice in a quaver from the bed; "but you are gentlemen, and you'll consider me all the same; and Captain Torquil is coming after me on account of that child — and he's a dangerous man." Here the doctor winked again at the vicar. "And my life would not be safe if his anger got the better of him; and you must not let him know or guess I'm here. If you do, you'll have all to answer for."

"No, my good woman, you may rely upon it. Of course, Turnbull, she may depend upon you. Make your mind quite easy, upon my honour you may," said the doctor. And aside to the vicar he whispered —

"Did you ever, in all your days, see a poor creature in such a terror? I really believe, if he got into the room, 'twould either kill her outright, or put her out of her reason."

"Poor thing! it is most pitiable," said the vicar.

"And oh, sir, is the child safe?"

"Quite, my good woman," answered the vicar, drawing near.

"And in your house, sir?"

"In my house," answered he.

"And if you give it up, may you be judged."

"Now, my good woman, you must not be trying to sit up; don't you see you're not equal to it?" said the doctor. "Compose yourself for tonight, and in the morning you may talk as long as you like."

"I shan't live to see the morning, sir. May the Lord have mercy, and forgive my sins," she answered in an agony. "And now, sir, parson Jenner, give me the holy sacrament to my comfort, and pray for me, as you hope for mercy yourself, when you come to this dreadful hour."

CHAPTER VII.

NEXT MORNING

FERVENTLY, with upturned eyes, with hands joined together, with the dew of agony on her face, and a trembling voice, did Hileria Pullen do her part in the great rite of the Church.

And when it was over, she did seem comforted, and after a while, composed; and at last, worn out with fatigue, and aided by Doctor Lincote's draught, she fell asleep, and slept deep and serenely till nearly ten o'clock next morning.

The little child slept also a great deal, but not so easily. Mrs. Jolliffe, who had remained in charge of it, was of opinion that there was some sickness hanging over it.

All through the night it was starting, as if in sudden pain, and "blarin' ye could hear it across the green a'most; and there's arrals come out all over its skin; and its poor, tiny-winey joints is creaked wi' fits like, and 'twas always workin' aswint in the bed; and it looks so pined," said Mrs. Jolliffe, making her report; "and the babby's very bad-there's nout else to be said; and what its sickness may be, there's none can tell; 'taint like none that's go in', unless happen the doctor might guess."

In the midst of this consternation the doctor, who had been sent for, arrived.

Mrs. Jenner, Mrs. Jolliffe, Kitty, and even Mall, the cook, were assembled there, hanging upon the words, and even the looks of the sage.

The doctor examined the child curiously, like a work of art. Then he stood up and looked at it with a frown, and asked some questions of Mrs. Jolliffe; and then he peered at it again, and felt its skin, and its pulse, and looked keenly into its eyes, and at last he remarked —

"It's a very odd case indeed. Did you ever see a case like that, quite, Mrs. Jolliffe? No, I rather think not. It's as odd a case as ever I saw. That child's diet must have been played with. I'd say-only I know it has been in honest hands-the child was poisoned. Not enough, I hope, to kill it, whatever's wrong. But it has had a squeak for it. Warm bathing; just a very little medicine I'll send; as much whey and goat's milk as it will drink, and the room kept warm but airy; and trust the rest to young blood, and the energy of new life. Disease, Mrs. Jenner, ma'am, quails before children."

"You observe its eyes, Mr. Lincote. Do you think there is a -a squint, doctor?"

"I don't think so, ma'am," he answered. "It is a more dangerous thing — a symptom of pressure on the brain. Only slight, but it shows how general the derangement is."

"I knew 'twas bad," said Kitty, "for it only healed when I sang til't, and jinked t'keys before its een."

"If the light hurts its eyes, put a screen before it; and give it nothing solid to eat; and we'll see how it gets on towards evening again."

So the doctor took his leave.

Saint George and the Dragon, in spite of the sanguinary character of the situation, looked quite pleasant in the sharp, frosty sun this morning.

Familiar as this piece of blazonry was to the vicar's eyes, hanging over the'edge of the road, exactly opposite the porch of the George Inn, the good clergyman thought that the valiant knight's casque and mail, and the dragon's scales, splendid in Dutch gold, and the georgeous crimson throat of the monster, down which the saint of the azure cloak and red cross had insinuated his gilded lance, never looked more; becomingly. The animated spires of the reptile's burnished tail, and the goodhumoured grace with which the saint tickled rather than pierced its vermillion interior, gave an air of amicable frolic to the encounter, which quite took away any unpleasantness in the affair.

"Brilliant day, Mr. Turnbull," said the vicar, with brilliant Saint George and the Dragon still in his eye; "and how is the poor woman to-day?"

"She freats a deal after the bam, sir," said the innkeeper; "but the doctor says she's better this morning, and she's wearying to see you."

"She shan't weary long then," said the vicar cheerily.

And in a few minutes more he stood in the sick woman's room.

"How does Mrs. Pullen to-day?" he asked. "I'm glad to hear the doctor says you are better."

"I wish I could see it, sir; I thank you all the same," whimpered Hileria, who liked the sympathy due to sickness. "I'm very weak, sir. I hope I may leave this bed alive, sir."

“Would you rather that I looked in another time, Mrs. Pullen? I live close by.”

“Please, sir, how is the poor darling baby?” she inquired. “They are taking every care of it; and the doctor shall look after it until it is quite well again, which I trust may be very soon.”

“Thank God, sir. It’s a sweet little thing, sir. May heaven bless and keep it. My heart’s a-breakin’-I miss it so.”

And Hileria, not finding her pockethandkerchief at the moment, hastily applied the hem of the sheet to her eyes.

“You will be sufficiently recovered, I trust, very soon, Mrs. Pullen, to come and see the child; and if not, the child will very soon be well enough to come and see you.”

“I’m thinking, sir, that can hardly be. I’m afraid, sir-I’m afraid of my life-of that man. I’m well off, sir: I’m well to do — thanks to the poor mistress. She left me by her will five hundred pounds, and I have my savings beside; and I’ll be easy for the rest of my days, I hope; and I’ll keep out of sight, sir, please, till this thing’s blowed over; for he’s a bad man, I’m afraid, sir; and he’s driven nigh desperate by losses and crosses lately, they say; and I should not wonder at anything he may do — he’s that savage; and t’would be a mercy almost he drew his razor across his throat, and made away with himself.”

“You speak of-of whom?” said the vicar.

“Captain Torquil, sir. He has not been here yet, but he will, I’m sure o’ that; and Mr. Turnbull has promised he won’t let him suppose I’m here. And you, sir, won’t neither; for he’s in a mad state, he is, and till I’m away, and out of his reach, I don’t count my life safe.”

“I’m shocked to hear you so speak of Captain Torquil. Not that I’m acquainted with him, or know anything particularly about him; but, everything considered, it is very shocking to think there should have been anything to give a colour in your mind to such language.”

“I’ll tell you, sir — I’ll tell you all,” said Hileria. “That is one reason has brought me here. If you can spare time now, ‘twill be best you should hear it at once. And I’d like to have it off my mind, sir; for I sometimes think ‘twill set me mad, striving to keep it to myself.

“You need not hurry yourself, I can afford you plenty of time,” said the vicar. “Shall I take a chair?”

“Please, sir; and I’ll tell you the best I can. I’m very weak, sir, as you see, but I’ll try and tell it as short as I can, sir.”

Hileria Pullen, with a lean, bilious face and very black eyes, was sitting up in the bed, with a wrapper on and a shawl drawn round her angular figure; a nightcap, with a broad, faded silk ribbon pinned tightly about it, round her head; and some black hair, streaked with white, peeping from under this pale ligature of lilac and faint green.

“Thank you, sir,” said she, and she hemmed to clear her voice, as the vicar took his seat near the foot of the bed, crossing his gaitered leg, and holding his hat and stick on his knee as he inclined an attentive ear towards the sick woman who had a story to tell.

CHAPTER VIII.

HILERIA PULLEN'S ACCOUNT OF CAPTAIN AND MRS. TORQUIL.

"YOU don't know that family, sir, Captain and Mrs. Torquil?" she began.

"No, I've never seen them," said he.

"After the poor mistress died, sir, the captain came down hot foot to Snedley with his lawyer — his lady, Mrs. Torquil, being named in the will for something-and he took a deal on him, and directed all things; and, not having no copy of the will at the time, which I have one now, I could not gainsay nothing. And he ordered me and the child away to Mrs. Torquil at Guildford."

"And weren't you comfortable there?" asked the vicar.

"Yes, sir, well enough in a way, but theie was things against it; comfortable in a manner, but not a house such as quiet folk would like to live in. Captain Torquil was a very nice-spoken gentleman at first, but no one likes him long; and he's scarce ever at Guildford, always in London. So much the better for them as lives in t'other place. A very violent-tempered, dangerous gentleman."

"But Mrs. Torquil, you found *her* kind, I dare say?" said the vicar.

"Mrs. Torquil, sir, is nothing in her own house," said she.

"Oh! controlled by her husband, I suppose?" he suggested.

"Well, sir, I may mention to you, she's scarce ever out of her bedroom. The fact is, sir — what I wouldn't on no account tell to another — the poor lady has her failin', and it's come to that she's scarce ever out of her bed.

"She's too fond of drinkin', sir, and has ruined her 'ealth, which she cannot last very long, sir; and 'twill not fret them much, I'm afraid, that should fret most. 'Tis a bad world, sir, and a sorrowful; and I'm told, poor lady, if she had bin happier mated she'd a bin very different in many ways."

"Dear me! poor thing! that's very sad," said the clergyman, with something of wonder as well as of pain. "That such things are, who could believe if one didn't see them? Ah, Mrs. Pullen, in the midst of life we are in death — that spiritual death, which is so unspeakably more terrible for us than its awful physical image. It is very sad indeed, Mrs. Pullen, what you tell me."

"So it is, sir, and he leading such a life they do say — gambling, and every other wickedness-and no servants stops there any length of time; and often not the price of a loaf in that house for days together, and credit hard to get for that house, I can tell you, sir.

"But how did Mrs. Mildmay, of Queen's Snedley, come to admit him at her house?"

"Law love you, sir, she knew nothing. If she had a knewn what sort he was, or she, poor lady, she'd a' never left them nothing in hei will, nor suffered him nigh the house. But he had a way with him, and flattered her, poor good lady; she was too simple for such like. It wasn't till I came to Guildford that I got a copy of the will from Mr. Tute, the lawyer. I have it here, sii, in this bag, by my bed; and I'd be glad, sir, if you'd read it, or get a copy took, since the poor darling child is under your care, which, as you will hear, is the saving of its life, no less, the blessed baby."

"Pray explain — do, my good friend, explain what you mean."

"What I mean, sir, please, is just this. The poor mistress has left all she can, except about fifty pounds a year, to her cousin, Mrs. Torquil, which she would as soon have burnt her hand in the fire as have done it, if she had a knewn that the poor lady was always more or less in liquor, and seldom out of her bedroom, or fit to speak to no one, I'm sorry to say, sir."

The vicar raised his hands and eyes, and shook his head slowly. "She had in her power to leave about a thousand a year, which she has left to the darling child, Miss Laura; and if the dear baby should die unmarried, it is all to go, you will see, sir, when you come to read the will, to her afflicted cousin-little she thought what was afflicting of her — Mrs. Torquil."

"Is Captain Torquil appointed guardian to the child?"

"Not he, sir."

"Then he has no more right to the custody of that child than he has to the custody of you or me!" said the vicar. "He has no more right than Mr. Turnbull, the innkeeper here — less in fact; because if anything happened to the child he would have a great accession of fortune. He is, for that reason, the very last person who should have charge of the child; no selection could possibly be more improper."

"Well, sir, I'll tell you just what happened; but please, sir, you'll promise not to get me into no trouble for speaking so plain; for, indeed, sir, except to show you how the matter really is, and what a sin it would be in the sight of God to give the child back to that bad man, I would not open my lips to no one on the matter."

"I see what you mean — that is, I can understand why Captain Torquil, as I have said, should, on consideration, most gladly rid himself of all responsibility about the child."

"Ah! sir, that ain't what the captain wants. But I don't like it no ways, and I could not stay no longer at Guildford, at no price. I could not allow him to take to doctoring the baby, sir." And she looked darkly at the vicar, and nodded.

"Eh? I don't quite understand," hesitated the good man.

"This was it, you must know, sir. He didn't trouble us out at Guildford much with his company, no more than his money, and he never paid a shilling nowhere without disputing and fighting over it like a dog and cat; but that's neither here nor there. He did come out to Guildford about ten days after we got there, and he spoke me fair, and made me a present, and for all that there was something about him I did not like, and I could not know myself what it was, only there *was.* What I then saw first against him was the way he used to walk into poor Mrs. Torquil's room; just shove open the door and walk in, as if 'twas a stable, and look at her as if he'd like to strangle her; and never a good morning, nor how do you do; and she all of a tremble while he was there, and no word, I am sorry to say, sir, too bad to call her. And whatever she may be, poor lady, it isn't for him to call her them dreadful names — before servants more especially, when 'twas his own bad treatment that brought her to it; and she there with never a word, nothing but just crying and sobbing, poor thing, as if her heart would break; and whatever money there was, everyone knew 'twas with her it came. Well, he never stayed long, I must say, in her room, only to rummage about for her letters, and reading every scrap ôf paper he could find.

"Well, sir, the first time Captain Torquil came out I did not know him so well, and he walked upstairs right to the nursery — a queer place for a gentleman to be poking into-and he was very nice-spoken and smiling, and he asked how I was, and hoped I was comfortable, and told me to ask for whatever I wanted. And he said he heard the child had a cold. And I said it had, but was getting better; and he said smiling, ‘You know, nurse, I’m a great doctor,’ which I told him I did not know it before.

‘Yes,’ said he. ‘Would you mind putting it to bed, and I’ll have it quite well by tomorrow. It is feverish, and till that is right it can’t get better.’

“Well, sir, it was only wrapped round with its flannels and my quilted shawl, and the little cot all ready, so I did as he bid me; and said he, ‘The thing it wants is James’s powder, and you know how to manage it.’

“And then he went downstairs, and came back, and divided the powder he brought, with him in two; and he said he’d come back and see how it did. And I gave it that powder-he standing by — and it never was the same since.”

“H’m!” said the vicar, with his eyes fixed on a knot in the floor.

And a little silence followed.

“Well, sir, you see, he was angry when I refused to give the child the t’other half of the powder; and when he frowns, and laughs, and turns white, as he does when he’s vexed, he looks very bad, and I could not get his face out of my head, although he did not stay long, nor make much of the matter. But lately he’s bin coming up again to the nursery, and he says the child isn’t thriving with me, which I know well what it was as disagreed with the darling infant, and he wanted me to give it a bottle he had made up in his coat pocket, and I said I’d raything not, and he pulled off the wrapper and showed me the label with ‘Daffy’s Elixir’ on it, and the name of the apothecary; and he said, ‘You *must* give it the medicine, the child will die else;’ and I said, ‘I won’t give it no physic, except what the doctor over the way orders and makes up;’ and with that he laughed and called me a fool, and slapt his hand down on the table, and told me to be ready to quit the house and give up the child to a new nurse the next morning; and he gave me a look that frighted me, and I heard him laughing very angry as he ran down the stairs.

“Now, if that stuff in the bottle was really ‘Daffy’s Elixir’ and nothing mixed in it, why mightn’t he a’ left it where he had put it, on the table, instead of taking it away again in his pocket? Mind ye, sir, I don’t say nothing, but I know what I thought. I was as cold as lead, and trembling all over, and I think I’d a took a fit, only I looked at the poor darling little baby, and I burst out a-cryin,’ and that I think saved me.”

Here Hileria Pullen paused, and the vicar said what is told in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

HILERIA PULLEN'S ADVENTURES.

"YOU are right, Mrs. Pullen, to be very cautious in what you say, because there is no proof, nothing but suspicion. You may depend upon me. You were right to be frank, and you have acted perfectly right. How soon after that did you leave?"

"I'll tell you all, sir, please. I never was so frightened in all my days. It was easy enough for me to take care of myself. It was just the thing he'd a liked best, for me to take myself off, and leave him to say what he liked of me, and have his will of the darling babby. I knowed well enough what I was afraid of, and who to hinder him? La, sir, you would not think the taking I was in."

"I can well understand it, Mrs. Pullen, *well;* go on, pray, I'm all attention," said the vicar.

"I was ill, sir, and that made matters worse," said Mrs. Pullen, "*much* worse. I wasn't good for nothing; there wasn't 'amost no life in me. I thought of this thing and that, as well as I could, with my poor head; and I'd a blessed God, if an angel had come into the room, and told me that me and the baby was to die that night. But God knows best what's fit for us all."

"Very true, Mrs. Pullen; that is our best consolation, come what may. If we could only believe that 'God is Love,' we should bear the afflictions of this life with serener hearts," interposed the good vicar.

"I soon made up my mind," continued Hileria Pullen, "that, come what would, the baby I would not leave. But then, where was the good of my staying there till the captain came back, with his screeching curses, and his bottles, and powders, and a new nurse — nurse, indeed! Hileria Pullen would not have been long for that nursery! And the darling babby would have been in strange arms, and a bad business at the 'old Hall' before a week, and, most like, no talk about it; or, if there was, some awful story trumped up to fix the blame on me. May the Lord deliver us from all evil!"

"It is a world of sorrow, Mrs. Pullen," observed the vicar. "It is a world of wickedness, sir," said Hileria.

"That it is, also," allowed Dr. Jenner; "sin and sorrow, twin offspring of the Fall. Go on, pray."

"The thought came to me-I trust in the Lord it may have been from Him-that as *there* I could not stay, and, moreover, as leave the babby I loved, better, I may say, than myself, in that place, to them that was going to take it in hand, I could not; which it would have been nothing less but to lend a hand in what was intended to be done, which God forbid."

"Amen, *amen,"* murmured the clergyman.

"So there was nothing left me, but one chance for it. I made up my mind I'd take the child with me, or lose my life," said Hileria Pullen. "Being as you are, you can't understand, sir, how I felt. If you was me, in that dismal place, undertaking that great risk, with the chance of meeting Captain Torquil, who was drove desperate almost by his crosses and losses, being one of them wicked men that would not stop at nothing, you would know what it was to fear for your life like I did. As he now is, I really think he would do or say anything almost."

"I hope not; I trust not. Still it was, you know, a great venture, under any circumstances; it was, you know, irregular, and appearances might be held to be against you; but undoubtedly you did right, and I think you a heroine, Mrs. Pullen," said the clergyman.

"So I am, sir, I hope, and all my papers and discharges correct. A good nurse I have bin to the poor babby, according to my opportunities. Well, sir, the end of it was, having made my mind up, sir, to try it, and having, by the mercy of heaven, some money in my box; that night, I said nothing to any one living, and I took the child, poor little thing, and I dressed it, as you see. And, ill though I was, I stole away with the baby, and no one missed me till next morning, I take it — for that was a house where most people did as they liked, except when the master was there — and none cared about their own business — much less other people's."

"But you said Captain Torquil followed you. How was that?"

"We were two hours late the second day, at a small town called Twinton, when I got out with the baby, meaning to cross to this."

"Two hours late, were you? How was that?" asked the vicar.

"We had thirty mile of snow on the way, sir," said Hileria, looking as miserable as she could, "and north of that, some of the road all one sheet of ice."

“Yes, to be sure; so I heard; there was a fall of snow between Scardon and Derby. We shall have it here soon, I dare say,” obsérved Mr. Jenner, looking toward the windows.

“You’ll mind the inn at Twinton, sir?” said she.

“To be sure, ‘The Guy of Warwick.’ You found it a comfortable place, I’m sure. It is a kinsman of Mr. Turnbull, our host here, who keeps it,” said Mr. Jenner.

“Yes; good fires they had, sir. It was there we stopped. I was afraid to stay downstairs in the public room, and I kept the child under my cloak, so that the people downstairs could not see it; for I could not tell who might be asking them questions by-and-by. So up the stairs I went, and the chambermaid put me into a big room over the door, and there was a fire at the far end; but I could not keep away from the big bow window looking along the white frosty road, towards London. La! sir, everything that came up that way, how my heart went thump and flutter, flutter and thump!

“Why did you stay so long on such dangerous ground?” inquired the vicar.

“There was a coach expected every minute that would bring me more than half way to Golden Friars, and I could get out at a place called Scardon Hall, where there was horses.

I thought if the captain came up, what should I do, me and the child, if he should hear at Twinton there was any one had ordered a shay for Golden Friars. He’d have questioned them all, through and through, right and left, up and down, he’d ‘a bin out in the stable, and up in the garrets, and if I was hid in the cock-loft, he’d have ferreted me out, and heaven ‘ave mercy on me then! So I thought, as there might be a delay, ‘twould be wiser to say little, and keep out of observation, and just take the coach, when it came up, as far as Scardon Hall. The coach was a bit late, and every minute seemed as long as an hour to me, thinking I never could be out of the highway soon enough.

“The baby was asleep, poor little thing. I laid it on the bed, not far from the fire. I could not eat a mouthful, I was too much afraid for that; I could not stay near the fire, cold as I was; I could do but one thing, and that was, to stand in the window, and watch the road, holding my breath, and counting the minutes by my watch.

“I was there more than an hour I should think, and it was moonlight still, and I saw a chaise and four pull up at the door, and Captain Torquil put his head out of the window, and he asked how long it was since the mail-coach passed, and they told him. They were wetting the horses’ mouths, and though it was a frosty night, they were steaming up in a cloud with heat; and he asked how far on was the place where they changed horses, and they told him five miles only; and he said, ‘They have left that, I suppose, half an hour ago;’ and they said, ‘That at least;’ and he said, ‘They were behind time here;’ and they said they lost time by the ice on the road, where the floods were — which was true — and they were bringing it up now. Then he asked them how long the next stage was, and they told him thirteen miles; and he said, ‘We shan’t overtake them next stage, then;’ and they said, hardly.”

“You remember all this very distinctly,” said the vicar.

“Every word of it went into my ear like a penknife, I’ll never forget word or look, or turn or sight of the four minutes that passed then. I was standing with the baby in the big window over the door, and in the broad moonlight, and I could no more move from where I stood than the post outside with the painted sign swinging to it.

“I did not feel myself nor the child for the time, nor as if I had a body at all, but only just eye and ear, and like to fall down dead with fear of him, for you don’t know all I’ve heard of that man. Well, sir, you may guess how I felt when he raised his eyes to the very window where me with the baby in my arms was standing.

“I felt my eyes growing as big as saucers in my head, staring at him; and the captain leaned out, and made as if he was going to open the door. But, heaven be thanked, he did not see me. I think ’twas the shine of the moonlight back again from the panes of glass that hid me. He held his watch in the light of the moon, leaning out, and he called to the postboys to be off; and, I thank God, I saw them drive on at a great pace the next minute. I had been trembling the whole journey, in fear of him overtaking me, for I knew that he would think I had taken the northern coach, having a sister married in Edinburgh, and he knew she wanted me to go to live with her; and I do suppose he went right to the coach office when he heard I was gone, and found out what passengers went, and then he followed. I mentioned you to him, also, once, sir, as one that should be consulted; and when he finds I haven't gone on by the coach, I know he'll make straight for this."

"Not unlikely. Give me the copy of the will, and I will have our lawyer's opinion as to its effect; and — there is Mr. Turnbull. I hear him in the lobby."

And he called in the innkeeper, and gave him a solemn charge, in case of inquiries after Mrs. Pullen, to withhold all information, which that grave person undertook to do.

"My people doesn't know her name, and I'll give them directions to say nothing."

"And should Captain Torquil, or any one on his behalf, make inquiry about the child, please say that I have taken that matter in hand, and refer him to my attorney, Mr. Tarlcot. And now I'll take the copy of the will, ma'am-thanks; and I'll bring it back to you when he has made a note of it."

So he bid her goodbye, and was approaching the door, when suddenly she screamed, starting upright in the bed, "Oh law, sir, he's come!"

"Hush! Captain Torquil do you mean?"

"Oh! yes, sir. I hear his voice."

CHAPTER X.

CAPTAIN TORQUIL.

THE vicar leaned over the banisters, and heard a clear and somewhat sharp voice talking in the hall with Mr. Turnbull, and his own name mentioned.

At this time of year few strangers passed through Golden Friars, and having never before heard those clear resolute tones in which he was named, he concluded that the visitor could be no other than Captain Torquil.

So that worthy divine put his hat on his head, and with a dignified air went down the back stair, and through the inn yard, with swift paces to the attorney's house.

Brevity was urgent, for although there was nothing excited in the gentlemanlike accents which he had overheard, Mr. Turnbull, of the George, would at once, as agreed, send Captain Torquil on to the attorney. It would be awkward to be surprised there, and the clerical costume, the good vicar pointedly observed, would make identification inevitable.

Mr. Luke Tarlcot, the attorney, was a goodnatured fellow enough — a man of sixty years and upwards, a serious man, a fat man, cautious and taciturn, and diplomatic on occasion.

Holding this gentleman by the corner of his coat collar, he poured, as briefly as he could, into his ear the strange story of Hileria Pullen and Captain Torquil, and produced the late Mrs. Mildmay's will, which, happily, was very short.

I'll get away, I won't meet him; he'll be here in no time. Let me out through your garden; come-come-quickly." And out the back way, through Mr. Tarlcot's leafless plum-trees and winter cabbages, and under the thick ivied arch into the lane, the clergyman marched quickly, and so away by the hard pathway, with his back to the lake and the town, towards the solemn mountains, at whose foot lay the farmstead of his sick parishioner, Farmer Bligh, trusting that by the time of his return at sunset, Captain Torquil would be many miles beyond the outlines of the purple mountains that surround Golden Friars.

Mr. Tarlcot returned thoughtfully to his room, which was somewhat darksome, and had an oldfashioned and grimy air, and sat himself down in his office chair, and slipped the copy of the will into the drawer before him. And almost at the same moment he heard a gentlemanlike voice say, "This way?" And before the maid could announce him, a handsome man, with an air of fashion, very black hair, very delicately-chiselled features, which had something the effect of a carving in ivory, a little yellowed by time, entered the room.

This gentleman had his hat in his hand, and an exquisite little walking-stick, and he carried a sort of light drap wrapper across his arm. The attorney observed this gentleman's French boots and French gloves, and also that he appeared quite unconscious how much finer he was than the figures that usually walked about the purlieus of the George in Golden Friars.

He made a slight bow, and walked towards the table, at which the attorney had risen to receive him.

"I've looked in about a very odd affair, Mr. Tarlcot. My name is Torquil. Your clergyman here, Mr. Jenner, has probably mentioned Captain Torquil. The most extraordinary piece of villainy has been practised upon me and my wife, Mrs. Torquil, by a servant who has kidnapped — may I sit down?" said the captain, not waiting, however, for leave— "kidnapped I may say our child — a young child consigned to our care by the will of its mother, a widow, a very near relation of my wife's.

I have had an infinity of trouble. I've followed all the way from London forty miles north of this place, and found on overtaking the coach that she had got out, and come across, as I rightly conjectured, here. At your hotel, round the comer, they tell me that she did so, and brought the infant with her. They say they don't know what's become of her, but that your — yourthe Reverend Mr. Jenner makes himself responsible for the child."

Here was a little silence. The attorney did not break it. He looked down industriously on his desk, and leaned a little forward.

"Am I rightly informed?" asked Captain Torquil.

"If you will permit me, when you have quite done, I shall then state all I am at liberty to state on the subject."

"Oh! exactly; then I shan't say another word. The child has been stolen, and your client, the rector, or whatever he is, says I'm to look to him, and refers me to you, so here I am."

"Is there any particular question you wish to put to me?" asked Mr. Tarlcot.

"Certainly. Being the guardian of the child, I demand its restoration. Where shall I find it?"

"I can't tell you where the child is to be found, Captain Torquil. But the Reverend Mr. Jenner is differently advised as to your position in relation to that child; and his information is fortified by the copy of the will of the late Mrs. Mildmay, of Queen's Snedley, Mrs. Jenner's relative."

"Your copy can hardly be better than a-a-quiz, sir, if it omits that. But it is perfectly immaterial to me. I know my rights and powers, and once for all, and to save your client the ruinous consequences into which you are about to run him, I demand that the child be replaced in my hands."

"I have not got it, sir, and I may as well be quite explicit. If that child were in my custody I should not feel warranted in placing it in your hands; and I should decline to do so," said the old attorney firmly.

"Then you know where it is."

"I don't say that, sir."

"And you refuse to restore or to disclose it," continued the captain.

The attorney was silent.

"You refuse to give me any information?"

"I don't say that I have any to give, sir; but if I had I should refuse it," said Mr. Tarlcot.

The captain stared at him fixedly, with whitening face, and eyes that gleamed for a few moments.

"Very well, sir," said the captain, with a sudden effort. "Your client adopts the outrage of that servant, and receives and conceals my kidnapped ward. Very good, sir, I suppose you understand your own business. We'll try that. I'll open your eyes. You shall hear from me, you may tell your parson."

"You may possibly hear from us first, sir," said Mr. Tarlcot, determined not to be bullied.

"What do you mean by that, sir?" asked the captain, in an icy tone, leaning the knuckles of both hands on the desk, and advancing his sharp and pallid features towards the attorney. "It seems to me, sir, that you would not object to my losing my temper and striking you. I'll not make any such fool of myself. You shan't get your hand into my pocket for damages. I'll make short work with your clerical patron. I'll drive off to that town — what's its name? — nine miles away, and I'll get the police here."

The attorney bowed. He did not wish further to heat his enemy, who had arrived already at the candescent point.

Grasping his hat, stick, and wrapper, which he had laid down on the table, he flung from the room, laughing and grinding his teeth as he passed through the hall; and before the attorney who followed him to do the honours, could overtake him, he had clapped the door with a clang that made the whole house vibrate.

CHAPTER XI.

APPROACHING.

HIS chaise had followed him to the steps, and he sprang into it, shut the door himself, pulled up the window, and leaned back. He was not long in collecting his ideas, for the attorney, standing in the middle of his room, saw him let down the front window and call something to the driver, who forthwith got his horses into motion.

Mr. Tarlcot, watching the vehicle as it drove away, observed that it turned the comer, not in the direction of the town he had named, but of the George.

“Forgot something there,” conjectured the lawyer. “Oh! hey? why he may be going on to the vicar’s house, and upon my life there’s no one there but a parcel of women to meet him.

In haste he put on his hat, and was out on the steps in a moment, and trotted down to the comer, with an anxious face.

There one commands a view across the front of the George inn, and of some houses beyond it, along the margin of the lake, to the vicar’s house.

The elm trees and the two grey piers, capped with stone balls, stained and worn with the rains and suns of two centuries, stood hardly four hundred yards away.

It was with a very uncomfortable sensation that he saw the chaise draw up at the vicar’s house, and Captain Torquil spring out and run up to the hall door.

Mr. Tarlcot was nothing short of very much frightened when he saw this. He was a serious man, and never swore-and the “bless my soul!” with which he witnessed the occurrence very inadequately expressed the intensity of his feeling. The attorney looked this way and that, in his perplexity; and he bethought him of Tom Shackles, whom he saw at that moment striding into the George. So he followed him in, and talked a little with him in the hall.

In the meantime, the vicar’s house had received this sinister visitor.

When he knocked at the door, good Mrs. Jenner was in the scene of her new and delightful interest. The baby was in a sound sleep — Mrs. Jolliffe pronounced it very refreshing — and Mrs. Jenner and Kitty Bell, with their souls in their eyes, smiled down benedictions and thanksgivings in breathless silence upon the little slumberer. When the knock was heard at the hall-door, Mrs. Jenner, with a shudder, wondered how any one could be so brutal as to run such a risk as that of drumming a doubleknock just at the hour when it might be supposed the little darling was asleep.

She stole softly out on the lobby, and listened. She heard the stranger inquire for her, and Mall answer that she was at home. She then heard them both go up to the drawingroom and the visitor say “Captain Torquil.”

A sudden faintness overcame Mrs. Jenner for a moment on hearing that dreaded name. But her very terror strung up her energies; and with a light step, and pale face, she entered the nursery, and said —

“Here’s a man come about the baby. Lock the door on the inside, when I go, and keep my precious darling safe.”

“Agoy!” exclaimed Kitty, popping her head out at the nursery door, with round eyes, and round mouth, and good honest round cheeks. “What shall we do wi’ t’ bab, ma’am? We can’t get down wi”t, ‘twould begin bledderin’, and he’d be sure to catch it. If I had but the sword that’s in the master’s study, ma’am.”

“Be quiet, Kitty-don’t talk like a mafflin’. Get into the room, and open to no one till I tell you.”

And with these words, Mrs. Jenner assumed her stateliest air; and shaking out her brown silk dress a little, she went downstairs to the drawingroom with as dauntless a demeanour as she could command, and an awful tremor at her heart.

Mrs. Jenner was quite a lady, though something of that stiff school which has quite passed away.

With her a curtsey was no make-belief, but a dignified salutation, during which you might leisurely count four, or walk across the room. She saw a man lightly and elegantly made, and strikingly handsome, though not young.

He turned about from the window, where he stood as she entered, looking across the lake at the mountains that seemed so towering and so near, and made her a grand-seigneur bow, as ceremonious and more graceful than her own old English curtsey.

She was agreeably surprised! There was here something so deferential, so graceful, so engaging.

Captain Torquil introduced himself, and made many apologies for disturbing her. Ladies in the country, who were known to be really kind and charitable, he knew, had hardly ever an hour to themselves.

He was so glad, he said, that this little excursion to look after a foolish runaway servant should have led him back, though only for a moment, to Golden Friars. When he was a boy he had been here for three months, every year, for three years in succession; and had walked over those beautiful mountains again and again; and knew every rivulet and ravine, every curve and hollow, especially of that huge clump of mountains that overhung the lake. He remembered this house so well; that was long before her time. It was a Mr. Drayton, he thought, that had it then. A change very much for the better when Mr. Jenner came.

This he said pointedly.

And particularly he remembered Mrs. Drayton. She was not at all liked down here. Country people are very discriminating; they know a lady. It would be a great pleasure to his poor wife, who was a sad invalid, to hear how her cousin at Golden Friars was. What this delightful air and exquisite scenery can do for people! A paradise that communicates its own immortality. He wished so much he could get his poor wife into some such exquisite panorama, and vivifying atmosphere.

“She’s not old. Still, I need not tell you, a young woman, poor Janet might be almost in her best looks at this moment; and if she had lived in a place like this, she would have been. You and she are contemporaries, I know.”

Good Mrs. Jenner was six years her senior.

“And I find it certainly very hard to believe. My poor wife so often speaks of you. I felt as if I knew you; as if — I hope I was not very impertinent — I had a kind of right, almost, to come in in this unceremonious way. And there is my particular friend, General Donnington — Sir Edward Donnington he is now, you know, and very rich — a great sum, Indian prize-money. Of course you heard. Poor fellow! He never married, and never will, I suppose. He had his romance, and his grief; I know all about that,” said he, very low, looking down on the carpet.

"And he's another friend who talks to me, more than I need say, about Golden Friars, and our relations there."

Mrs. Jenner always blushed easily, and she blushed now, looking down with a faint little smile, and a gentle sigh; and she thought what a melancholy music was in Captain Torquil's voice, and what a charming person he was, and what nice simple tastes and feelings he seemed to have.

"I am thinking of getting away from town life, I'm tired of London. There is nothing on earth, I think, I should so entirely enjoy as living in a place like this-in this very place — living and dying here."

There was here a pause, as he looked pensively across the lake to the grand background of mountain.

"And," he continued, "we have had a little responsibility — a very pleasant one — thrown upon us by poor dear Alice Mildmay. You have heard of her death, of course, poor thing. She was fond of my wife, and honoured me with her confidence and good opinion, and consulted me latterly about everything, and her poor little girl, only eighteen months old, she has left in our charge; and it would be so delightful to have it here-close to you-and perhaps, sooner or later, we might induce you to take it altogether under your care. The fact is, my poor wife's miserable health would quite unfit her, except for a short time, for the anxieties and trouble of such a charge. But it would be a very ungracious thing to refuse, and for a few months, I suppose, we must submit and comply with so solemn a request, until we find — I should be so delighted if it were eventually in this house-a suitable protectress for the poor little thing. At present I have had to follow down here a person whom I wish I could describe as simply foolish — in fact, a particularly wicked and audacious woman, who has stolen the child. I detest having to punish any one — in fact, if you knew me, you would understand that it is downright torture to me, the bare idea of doing so. But that wicked woman — it is a duty one can't get over to stop such doings peremptorily; and I'm come all this way, you see, to do that. Her name is Hileria Pullen. Is she in the house?"

"No, certainly," said Mrs. Jenner, who, as the crisis seemed to approach, flushed very much, and grew plainly very uncomfortable. "I never saw her-she never was in this house."

"But the little child is; Doctor Jenner says so, and in a better place it could not possibly be," said Captain Torquil, "nor under more admirable superintendence or kinder care. You'll kindly allow me, however, to see the child, and assure myself that it is the very child, and all safe, and quite out of the hands of that wicked woman. And, being once assured upon these points, I would ask you kindly to take pity upon me, who have no servant with me capable of taking charge of the infant, and to permit it to remain here, in your kind hands, as much longer as will consist with your convenience and liking." Here was a polite and plausible speech enough. But what was that in the captain's dark greedy eye — in his thin lips, and finely-cut pallid features, that affrighted Mrs. Jenner with a sudden sense of treachery and danger!

CHAPTER XII.

CAPTAIN TORQUIL LEAVES THE DRAWINGROOM.

CAPTAIN TORQUIL smiled. The smile was not at all like the smile of theatrical villainy. It was intended to be genial and reassuring. He was handsome, and doing his best; yet the smile inexplicably alarmed Mrs. Jenner.

Certain shadows that had crossed his face immediately before it, had, no doubt, something to do with the sudden eclipse of the celestial Captain Torquil, and the vague revelation of a counterpart more or less infernal.

The captain, I think, saw the unpleasant change in Mrs. Jenner's mind, and he tried to restore her happier impressions.

"I see, Mrs. Jenner, we are entirely agreed as to the cruelty of punishing people, and the fact is that I should be immensely relieved if you and Mr. Jenner would join in advising me *not* to put the law in motion against her. Hileria Pullen is one of the most entirely unscrupulous persons on earth. She fancied she had got poor Mrs. Mildmay entirely in her hands. She hated me because she saw that her mistress consulted me. She fancied that I had an influence. Perhaps she was right. But if I had, the will, leaving but a miserable fifty pounds a year to my wife, shows how I used it. The woman was bitterly disappointed at the amount of her own legacy — handsome as it was. Furious with her late mistress, furious with me, furious with my poor wife, enraged at seeing her prey slip through her fingers, she framed a plan to abscond with the child. She's a woman of profound dissimulation — intensely artful and vindictive, beyond your power to conceive. I don't care a farthing, of course, what she says of me. It can't be worse than she has already said, again and again, when it suited her purpose, of her dead mistress and benefactress. I have detected her in so many and such awful untruths, that one word she utters I don't believe. In consequence of these — which justice to the memory of poor Alice Mildmay compelled me to notice — I told her she should leave our service next morning, and she ran away over night with the infant, which she had with her own ears heard poor Alice Mildmay consign, in the most solemn and passionate terms, to my care. This-and I suppose the usual cloud of slanders — she proposes for her revenge, and a mode of accounting for her abrupt departure, and perhaps ultimately of extorting money from more persons than one."

As he spoke, the lady, over whom was stealing again a mist of perplexity, raised her eyes quite suddenly, and detected those of Captain Torquil fixed upon her with an expectant look that was cunning and intense; it was triumphant, and shocked her. She returned it unconsciously with a fixed stare of fear.

The fascination of this stare continued for little more than a second. It was dispelled; but an ineffaceable lesson remained.

The lady stood up, and very coldly but pointedly asked —

"With respect to poor Alice Mildmay's child, be good enough, Captain Torquil, to say exactly what you wish?"

"I want you kindly to direct your servant to bring down the child, so as to enable me to satisfy myself by actual inspection that the child is really here. Will you do so?"

"I will not, sir."

The captain, beginning to forget his politeness, laughed a short, dangerous laugh.

"And may I ask," said the captain, his eyes beginning to gleam, and his features to grow sharper and whiter, "your reason for that particularly unsustainable resolution?"

The captain leaned a little forward as he put his question, his fingers clenched on each side upon the brim of his hat, which he held firmly to his waistcoat, while the crown was presented for the inspection of Mrs. Jenner.

He peered in her face with a look of the intensest fury, which trembled under strong momentary restraint, at the very point of explosion.

With the crisis Mrs. Jenner's courage had come. She was terrified; she was excited; she was resolute.

"I won't have the child brought down, because you might seize it and take it away. Nothing on earth will induce me to part with it until the law has determined who shall keep it. You shan't see the child, sir; and be good enough to let your visit end."

"Have you quite decided, Mrs. Jenner?"

"Quite, sir."

He bowed with a kind of shrug and a fixed smile, and backed towards the door, at which he made her another bow.

This simple lady made him one of her curtseys, fancying that he was taking his departure, and had her hand upon the bell, when it was arrested by a sound which called her instantly to the lobby.

Captain Torquil was not descending, but mounting the stairs, with long and rapid steps, and as she came out on the lobby he was striding up the second staircase.

As luck would have it, the baby was crying, and the sound too surely conducted him to the nursery door. With a loud scream the affrighted lady followed.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I love thee, I doat on thy features so fine,
I must and will have thee, and force makes thee mine."

MRS. JENNER quite forgot her dignity, and actually ran up the stairs after the gentleman who was scaling them.

Had careless Kitty Bell actually locked the door? Was any one in the nursery except the darling who was bawling? What would that incensed gentleman do when he got in? Would he murder the child outright, or carry it off, swinging by the feet, as the man in the "Promessi Sposi" did the live turkeys?

A thousand dreadful conjectures whirled in the eddy of that moment through her biain, and she shrieked as she ran up —

"Kitty, lock the door; Kitty, lock the door!"

And the baby wailed; and, to her comfort, the women's voices also were heard from within.

The captain's hand was on the handle of the door, which he twisted about with a few violent jerks.

It was a clumsy oak door, with a keyhole almost as big as a modem hall-door; and Mrs. Jenner almost fainted with sudden relief when she saw that it resisted.

"Open the door," said Captain Torquil.

"Oh! no, no, no, no," cried Mrs. Jenner.

The women's voices were hushed, and in a tone of undisguised fury Captain Torquil cried again —

"Open the door!"

And Mrs. Jenner's distracted accompaniment of "No, no, oh! no, no, no, no-o-o!" resounded and quivered through staircase, hall, and passage.

The captain struck the door a furious blow with his foot; but it was none of those flimsy defences which fall down before a pop-gun; but mingled with the ba-a-a-ing of the child came now the frightened whimper of women from within. Captain Torquil recoiled three or four steps, and, with a rush, sprang with his shoulder and side against the door, and — heaven and earth! What is this?

Admirable door this is: heart of oak; solid as the wooden walls of England! Here is a lock and key strong and clumsy as Vulcan himself.

If people hold that locks and keys are necessary to their doors — and what more effectual security against the miscreant on the lobby?-it is worth seeing that the mechanism is in working order. Here the door was right, the key was right, the lock, properly so called, was right; but, alas! the iron socket that receives the bolt, which in rude fashion was there screwed to the doorpost, stripped by the worthy vicar, in an emergency when screws were wanted and not elsewhere at hand, of all its screws but one, yielded to the weight of the captain's charge, and flew in with ominous clatter among the garrison, and with a tremulous swing, door, key, and lock revolved, and the beseiger, white with rage, strode in through the breach.

Mrs. Jenner, rushing forward with her new-found motherly instincts all alive, screamed wildly; Mrs. Jolliffe, with her palms raised and fingers extended, screamed also. Kitty Bell bawled "By Jen! The deaul clake thee," and dealt the ogre a lusty thump over the head with her shut fist, which made the captain's small ears sing under the close curls of his black perfumed hair.

Captain Torquil was not accustomed to such handling, and he loosed the hold which Kitty had laid upon his collar with so little ceremony that the heroic girl spun halfway round, and sat involuntarily, with the whole force of her plump person, upon the nurse's chair of state, from which, for a moment, she gazed bewildered; while Captain Torquil, stooping at the child's bedside, before any one of the women had recovered the power of action, dived his hands under the infant.

So all seemed over-*conclamatum est.* In two seconds more the captain would have been running down the vicar's stairs with his short, vile laugh and the prize in his arms, to spring with it into the chaise, and drive from Golden Friars as fast as the whip of a bribed postboy could speed him.

But it was not to be this time. A powerful chuck at the nape of his neck whisked the captain at this critical moment backward, staggering with a good apparent likelihood of tumbling on the floor.

"Here's douce wark, clamperin' through the vicar's house!" said the stentorian bass of Tom Shackles.

If the captain had thought upon the question of odds at that moment, he would have seen at a glance that Tom was altogether too huge and sinewy to leave him a chance against that modem athlete. But Captain Torquil was for the moment beside himself with anger, and rallying, he struck with all his force at Tom's face.

The women screamed appeals to heaven at this renewal of the battle, and Tom caught the blow on his open hand; and having a vague idea that the captain was a relation of the family, and therefore to be treated with tenderness, he returned it, not with his formidable knuckles, but with the same open hand he dealt him a slap on the cheek and ear such as is happily seldom heard in a nursery; and the captain staggered against the wall, where he looked for a moment as if he was going to sleep.

"By my sang, my lad, I've a mind to gie thee a gud bevellin'," said Tom; and to the women he said, pointing to the door that opened into an inner room, "take the bam in there, and shut the door, and don't stand gapin' here; 't may be killed else."

"Give up that child!" cried Captain Torquil, again staggering forward — a manifestation which although Tom Shackles placed himself between, hurried the movements of the women, who, with the child in a hasty roll of blankets, scurried into the inner room, through the door and shut it.

At the same moment, grinning happily from ear to ear, the bluff face of Dick Wykes, who had come clanking up in shoes of four pound weight apiece to have his share of the mill, entered the nursery.

"Is thee him?" Dick inquired. "Hoot, man! Lap up! I thout there wor fower o' ye. Why, I'd thraa thee out o' t' window wi' yan hand!" said this smiling intruder, of whose speech Captain Torquil understood nothing but the goodhumoured contempt expressed in his face and demeanour.

He eyed the two Herculean fellows over. Even in his then State of mind he saw the folly of any attempt to cope with their united strength.

Mrs. Jenner stood staring wildly from the lobby on the strange scene which had for a minute or so profaned the homely roof of the vicarage. The captain looked from one Titan to the other, and collected enough sense not to make a fool of himself by fighting. He was quivering with passion nevertheless.

"You have taken the child; you've assaulted me, you-hoo-oo scoundrel! As I hope for heaven, I'll make every one of you suffer! I'll have the police here in half an hour."

He ran downstairs; he roared a curse or two at the postboy, and jumped into the chaise, and sat for a few seconds bewildered, looking first out at one window and then out at the other; and then, seeing that some idlers had collected about the vicar's door, perceiving that something odd was occurring within, he lowered the front window, and bawled to the driver —

"You go-you drive-ha, ha!-drive towards the place you came from."

And he pulled up the window, and leaned back, and stared wickedly in the faces of the people who were looking there. And Captain Torquil sped away, leaving wild and sinister impressions of himself, and no material memento of his visit except a piece of wrenched iron and his hat on the nursery floor.

Captain Torquil drove away at a great pace-it was to be supposed, in hot haste to accomplish some scheme. Of course, a man with his ear tingling from a blow, and with such a case as regarded the child, and in the state of intense exasperation in which he was, and with his hat impounded in the vicar's nursery, could hardly have gone away with threats so fierce against all parties without very resolute intentions.

But when the vicar returned after sunset to his hysterical household, the captain had not reappeared.

The vicar, like a wise governor, took prompt measures in this state of affairs. He sealed up Captain Torquil's hat in a bandbox, lest there should be litigation with respect to that property. He caused Tom Shackles to make a note of the captain's sayings and doings. He locked up the twisted iron which attested his violence, and he retained Tom as a garrison, keeping up through the night a sharp look-out in the moonlight, lest the enemy should return and attempt a surprise.

But that night passed over quietly. And the next day came and went without tidings of or from the captain, and a week or more, without even a letter from a London attorney.

CHAPTER XIV.

AGITATIONS

THERE came an odd letter from Mrs. Torquil, to her cousin Mrs. Jenner.

It dwelt in an affectionate strain upon old recollections, and deplored the unhappy occurrences in which the name of her dear cousin at Golden Friars was involved, and which had placed her own dear husband in an attitude of, she feared, very determined antagonism to hers.

Her husband could not in the least conceive what motive actuated Mr. Jenner in sanctioning the conduct of that flagitious servant, Hileria Pullen, and in disputing his (Captain Torquil's) right to the custody of the child. That right does not rest upon the language of the will, but upon the earnest entreaty of poor Alice, conveyed, not in conversation only, but in repeated letters of a conclusive and unmistakeable kind. These, of course, would be put in evidence at the proper time. To her, nothing could have occurred more painful than that their husbands should stand mutually in such relations, especially as it had been her cherished hope and project to come down to Golden Friars, and to make it their headquarters; and so coon as the dear child had been with them a sufficient time to satisfy the solemn promises under which they were *both* bound to poor Alice, to endeavour to induce her (Mrs. Jenner) to undertake the care of the dear infant, which she felt would severely task her own strength.

All this, to her inexpressible grief, had been frustrated by the wickedness of one artful servant. Her husband was supported by a wealthy relation in the expensive-and, to Mr. Jenner she feared, the ruinous — litigation into which they were about to plunge. Her husband, Captain Torquil, was very angry; and all she implored of her dear cousin was charitably to dissociate her from the oppressive litigation which the captain was about to direct against the Reverend Hugh Jenner. She hoped to hear from her to say that she would view these miserable proceedings in the same charitable way.

This letter, somehow, produced an unpleasant effect even upon the vicar. It was so very plausible — even so alarming. He went down with it in his pocket to Mr. Tarlcot, who, with the suspicion of his craft, treated it simply as a piece of cajolery and brag — the concoction of a cunning terrorist.

"It never was she who wrote that letter, Mr. Jenner. It's not a lady's letter. That letter, sir, was written by Captain Torquil, and copied by his wife; and it satisfies me that he has no notion of going on; he has not means for such a thing. I happen to know of an execution against him for four hundred and eighteen pounds. He's in no position to throw away money; and he knew all along he had not a leg to stand on. Suppose we go down and ask Mrs. Pullen what she thinks of it?"

"But — but — don't you see, we really know nothing about this Mrs. Pullen," said the vicar.

"Don't be influenced by that letter, my dear sir. That woman is as straight as an arrow. I wish I had such a witness in Hazel and Wrangham. She's as honest as the sun."

"You understand such people better than I. I confess I thought her a most respectable person; and I'm quite sure it was this letter that made me hesitate. Let us go to the George and see her."

Mrs. Pullen was a great deal better, and sitting up, and about to set out on her travels next day.

"Well, Mrs. Pullen, what do you think of that letter?" inquired the attorney, so soon as the vicar, having read it aloud, replaced it in his pocket. "Mrs. Torquil must like writing letters, else she'd hardly write so long a one."

"Bless you, sir," said Hileria Pullen disdainfully, "the poor lady has never wrote a line of that letter. Allow me to see, sir, please, whether it is even in her handwriting. Well, yes, I know her writing," she resumed after inspection. "I think it is. But that was wrote for her — every word. She daren't write a line of any such thing of her own will — she dursn't-oh, no, no!" And she shook her head slowly with a melancholy scorn. "Why, sir, she never writes a line if she can help it; and that she dursn't write. Why, if you knewed, sir, she'd as ready put her hand in the fire as write a line of that, without she was, I may say, ordered to do it by master."

So the attorney looked and nodded gravely to the vicar, who said, returning his nod-

"Yes, I dare say you are right."

And the vicar walked away with a sense of relief — very delightful relief — in thinking that he was in no serious danger of being involved in the tremendous eddy of litigation.

Even Tom Shackles had suffered mentally under apprehensions of a similar sort, being a responsible man, and clerk of Golden Friars, and conscious of that box on the ear which he had dealt the desperate captain.

Kitty Bell, too, had given him what she called a bang on his black, curly pate, and cried serious tears at the chaff with which Dick Wykes threatened her with transportation for “walin’” a soger.

The relief was therefore general when, a fortnight having passed, nothing had occurred to corroborate the captain’s threats uttered when, in Kitty Bell’s phrase, “he banged out o’ t’dure, and we saa na meyar on him.”

But these holloing folk were not quite out of the wood yet, for, like a brief, stem clap of thunder, that made his ears ring, there came an attorney’s letter from a firm in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, to the vicar, demanding to be put in communication with his “solicitor.”

Still Mr. Tarlcot was sceptical. He communicated, and so did the vicar by return.

CHAPTER XV.

LAURA MILDMAY.

So the field was clear, and battle coming.

Here was the peace of tranquil Golden Friars broken, and the world again by the ears, all by the supreme influence and waywardness of women; old Hileria Pullen's wild escapade," and good Mrs. Jenner's fancy for adopting other people's progeny; the baby itself being of the same unlucky sex.

But notwithstanding these alarms, the sceptical attorney of Golden Friars was right — nothing followed.

With the great and distant metropolis was, indeed, thus spun the one fine thread of interest that connected it with the isolation of Golden Friars, and henceforward any bit of news respecting the movements of Captain Torquil was discussed with good appetite in the drawingroom and nursery of the vicar's house, in the snuggery of Tom Shackles, in the humble dwelling of jolly Dick Wykes, and in the office of shrewd old Tarlcot from whose London correspondents, who had themselves had some unpleasant dealings with the captain, these little bits of news were derived.

I am making a little chronicle, and shall jot down all I ever heard of this captain, while in due chronological order noting, also, such occurrences as illustrate Golden Friars during the brief period of my story.

In the first place, then, without any show of opposition, the good vicar was appointed to take care of this little ward of Chancery, by the decree of that High Court. And now, *cedant arma togoe.* The vicar might snap his fingers at the captain.

He was, like some others I have heard of, a married gentleman, who, without pretending to be single, lives like a bachelor, and puts his incumbrance quite out of view, like a by-gone indiscretion and sin of his youth.

He was an Eton man, a member of good clubs, and had started well enough. His patrimony was gone, but he did not trouble any one with maunderings about that misfortune, and nobody ever asked after it. He paid his debts of honour lightly, and was one of the best dressed men about town. He lived, I dare say, on his luck and — skill.

I don't know exactly what it was, but Torquil grew to be not quite so well liked, and some men were a little shy of him, and his temper at Guildford was tremendous.

The fact is that Captain Torquil was fast caught in that vice, the winch of which is twisted tighter and tighter hourly, and whose metallic bite whitens with hell-fire. He was in the torture of debt, and, *worse,* of the frightful shifts into which that agony drives some minds.

He was in that selfish agony, quivering on the edge of despair, with just one devil's throw for it; and he threw, as we know, and lost it.

And now, in the dust and crash of a hideous ruin, Captain Torquil had vanished. After a time he turned up in Spain, where two royal pretenders were at that time campaigning and enlisting free lances.

Then Captain Torquil was wounded; a very bad wound, for it knocked his eye out.

"He was, as you know, such a handsome fellow," said the writer of the letter, "and now you never beheld such an object. A glass eye the doctor says he can't use, and I assure you it is a perfect chasm. I suppose they will stick a patch or something over it, but, so far as appearance goes, he is done for."

Shortly after came a letter to the vicar, saying that Captain Torquil's friends were, in his present forlorn state, making up a little purse for him, and trusted that, being connected with his family, he would be so good as to contribute something. The good vicar sent five pounds, and Mr. Tarlcot said that a fool and his money are soon parted.

Then it was stated that a legacy had been left him by an aunt of his, but no one seemed to know how much.

About five years after that, a letter reached the vicar's wife from Mrs. Torquil; not very long, but extremely plaintive, in which occurred this passage: "Since the death of my unhappy husband, Captain Torquil, I have suffered much distress of mind and body, if you thought your good husband who was so kind to mine, could," &c. &c.

And so it appeared, that with that fierce and selfish spirit, "life's fitful fever" was over.

Poor Mrs. Torquil, not very long after, embraced the Roman Catholic faith, and was received into a charitable institution. This event was, perhaps, the saving of her life, for she could now no longer procure alcohol.

Years had now passed, and the delights of good Mrs. Jenner's vicarious maternity seemed always increasing.

How had this little child-so windered, as Kitty Bell had said, with the blea, or, in more familiar phrase, the plae, livid complexion, the suspected gloo, or squint, and whose little figure was held, by the same authority, to be all a-cracked, or, as we say, crooked — how had this poor misthriven, blasted flower lived through this time? and what did it look like now?

"Well," said Kitty Bell, now, after the flight of eighteen years, a little less light of foot, with streaks of grey in her brown hair, and lines traced deep enough across her once smooth forehead, and others etched about her kindly eyes-"well, who'd a thought the night she came here, when I held the can'le by her poor little pined face-an ill-favvert bab it was; poisoned, the doctor said— 'twould ever a chirp'd up sooa? The weeny thing we used to see snoozlin' in the weeny bed — lookin' just like as if it was going to dee — who'd a thought 'twould ever a spired up and stiffened like that? She's t' bonniest and t' cantiest lass that ever set foot in Golden Friars — and the kindest."

She was now a beautiful girl, lithe and slender, with rich brown hair, and large, long-lashed eyes of blue, and lips so crimson, and cheeks so clear, and such a pretty oval formed her face, that Laura Mildmay was really one of the prettiest creatures that ever lover dreamed of.

A little shy-with something wild and fiery in those dark eyes, proud and often sad, and sometimes merry — if you had seen her walking those mountain paths with a step like the deer's, you might have taken her for the genius of those beautiful solitudes. I am going to tell you something of this young lady, who has risen from her temporary death to this beautiful shape, to be the late-found heroine of this little tale.

CHAPTER XVI.

SUITORS APPEAR.

IT is not to be supposed that a heroine like Laura Mildmay, even in this sublime solitude, was quite without adorers.

There were no doubt many who, for obvious reasons, never told their love. But two there were who in their different degrees were quite eligible; and in watching the movements of these rivals, good Mrs. Jenner discovered a new delight, and a perfectly novel exercise of the maternal instinct.

What good woman is there without that sort of active benevolence which the coarse world calls matchmaking? I put the question to any good lady with enough experience to answer it — is not the fact so with regard to her neighbours? And as regards herself, I inquire, is there any other construction of castles in the air so entirely absorbing, preposterous, and enchanting?

Allow me to tell in half a dozen lines something of the situation and the persons. I could easily make a volume of them, for they talked and felt, and had features and clothes, and there was a good deal of love, and some jealousy. And good Mrs. Jenner saw both sides of the question, on each of which much was to be said; and being of a nature that overflowed, with compassion her heart bled alternately for each, as the fortune of war favoured this or that pretender. Her romance was with the younger man, but the elder paid her more court, and had other points in his favour.

Among the persons who prayed every Sunday in the variegated light of the stained glass eastern windows of the church at Golden Friars, and listened to — or at least heard — Doctor Jenner's sermons, were to be seen middle-aged Sir John Mardykes and young Mr. Charles Shirley.

Sir John is a bachelor of some fifty years. There is nothing hideous about him. His height hardly attains the average of mankind, and his figure is gently oval, being plump, and the effect assisted by a cutaway coat; the outline is of the pear or peg-top form. His face is plump and oblong. He is not yet grey, and curls his small whiskers with great punctuality. His hair is close and smooth, and at top decidedly thin. He carries himself very erect, and if not elegant, is at least dapper. He is grave, but very polite to ladies, and not being quick at the interpretation of puzzles, jokes, and the like deep sayings, he is reserved, not to say suspicious, in general society, and a man of few words, as well as of few ideas.

Sir John's place, about five miles away upon the lake, is beautiful, and his rental is five thousand a year, and something more; and his ancestors can be traced about the same covers and sheepwalks for five hundred years and upwards.

Sir John's father is buried in the church, which is within ten minutes' walk of his gate. His state pew is there, and the walls are eloquent with the virtues and dignities of his ancestors. But he drives away four miles and attends the church at Golden Friars every Sunday.

Charles Shirley is quite a young fellow, not five-and-twenty, certainly handsome, tall and lithe, very goodnatured, very merry, and with always a great deal to say for himself. The Shirleys are just as old a family as the Mardykes, but the young man's rental is but a quarter of the worthy baronet's.

The young lady was, on a moderate scale, an heiress. During her minority her revenues had improved, and had now reached more than a thousand a year. The great estates of her family had, however, passed in the male line to a remote kinsman.

Stated in a gross, commercial way, the facts and figures are thus:

Miss Laura Mildmay — annual value, £1,300.
Sir John Mardykes-annual value, £5,600.
Charles Shirley — annual value, £1,400.

The young lady was still a ward of Chancery. Doctor Jenner was not sure that the sort of flirtation that was attempted might not be of the nature of a contempt. The lady, he assumed, still walked the beautiful paths of this grand solitude in maiden meditation fancy free, and he insisted on holding the suitors, during her minority, at arm's length.

The minority had now so nearly expired, that the vicar, who was punctual and orderly in all things, directed his London attorney (for our serious friend, Luke Tarlcot, was by this time sleeping soundly in Golden Friars churchyard, with a mural tablet over the family pew, containing a very handsome certificate of his virtues, the feelings of his sorrowing friends, and his own general importance) to take the best opinion procurable upon certain queries which he thought the will of her deceased mother, Mrs. Mildmay of Queen's Snedley, suggested. He also asked him to request Mrs. Torquil's attorney to submit a case on her behalf to counsel, as there was no doubt that she was by the will to succeed absolutely to the property in the event of Laura Mildmay dying unmarried before the age of thirty.

Mrs. Torquil, of whose being still alive the vicar had some doubts, years having passed without any sign from her, turned out to be alive, and a great deal better and more active than she had been twenty years before, and she seemed to have a very keen sense indeed of the value of her reversion.

"It is proper," he wrote to Mrs. Torquil's attorney, "that all these points should be clearly ascertained as promptly as may be, as I am satisfied that on Miss Mildmay's coming of age, which will be in eleven weeks from this time, she will receive more than one eligible proposal of marriage."

"Now," said he to Mrs. Jenner, holding one of the rather cunning letters of Mrs. Torquil's attorney by the comer, as he stood at the window where he had been reading it, "I see the Jesuit in all these letters. That poor woman no more inspires them than I do. She has got herself into their hands, and they want her money for a college or a mission; and do you recollect the smooth-faced man with the spectacles, and the oddly-made coat, and the collar, you know, who came down here by way of looking at the scenery? I pointed him out to you. That gentleman came down, depend upon it, to make enquiries, and ascertain exactly what we were all about. Well were it for our church if we had one-half their activity."

All things contrary, one against the other. There was a counterpoise here; for the ecclesiastical invasion alluded to was more than compensated for by a visit promised in a letter from his admirable friend the Dean of Crutchley Abbey.

"I have made acquaintance with a charming person, a Mr. Burton, an enthusiastic church extensionist. He is about visiting the northern counties, and goes furnished with introductions. If you have any movement of that kind on foot just now, I think you will find him able and willing to give you a lift. I showed him the ground plan and elevations of our little building at

Crutchley Abbey, and he instantly subscribed. He would have put himself down for fifty pounds if we had not limited our subscription, as I told you. As he is going northward, and loves the picturesque, I recommended him to visit your beautiful town, which he very likely will in a few days; and I ventured to give him a line of introduction to you, as one who could tell him where to find all that is curious and beautiful about Golden Friars."

The vicar had his secret misgivings, and his wife her private hopes that the visitor might prove a new suitor to Laura. Upon this point suspense was soon ended.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. BURTON.

MR. BURTON arrived at night at the George, where he put up. He saw his landlord, and intimated his particular likings and dislikings. Also it came out that he meant to stay a few days — possibly weeks-under his comfortable roof. He inquired about the vicar, to whom he had a letter, and heard that he was well, but that Mrs. Jenner had sprained her ankle the other day in a foolish scramble among the mountains.

Mr. Burton had no servant with him, but the nature and magnificence of his correspondence more than made up for this. He had sat up writing till past eleven, and the letters which he sent down in the morning for the little postoffice struck honest Mr. Turnbull with very great respect. There was one to a Sir Somebody Something, Bart.; there were two to noble lords — peers of the realm; and there was one, big enough to require two stamps, to his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury.

At the same time, no person could be more modest in his demeanour, and in all respects less a troublesome inmate than Mr. Burton.

He was affable, even chatty, with his host, who could not fail to perceive in a little time that Mr. Burton was a man in whose mind religion, though never obtruded, was always present.

He felt a very great respect, under all the circumstances, for Mr. Burton.

Shortly after breakfast, the stranger made an early call at the vicar’s, being anxious to find him at home. It was a beautiful summer morning, and he stood on the vicar’s steps, smiling at the noble mountains on the other side of the lake, as if they had been beloved and long-lost friends.

Mr. Burton was announced. It was a venerable man who entered the vicar’s study, rather tall-not infirm-bald, but not very bald, and with the finest silken white hair, rather long, and a ruddy complexion and a smiling countenance, and a manner very gracious and urbane.

The vicar received him as a hospitable man of God should. They chatted very agreeably on all manner of subjects. The stranger seemed much interested about the state of religion in the region with which the vicar was best acquainted, and asked leave to make a note or two of some facts which he told him.

They then went out, and saw the town and the church, about which Mr. Burton, to the great delight of the vicar, became quite enthusiastic.

"It is quite a gem, a treasure, this little church. To think that we should not have known a word about it in London! You are quite right, though; your predecessors have obscured, and even injured, some parts of the building. Do you know Lord Complines?"

No, the vicar had not that honour.

"Oh! Then I must write to him myself. He's one of us. We are a little society of some fifteen people, and in the way of restoration and that sort of thing we have been doing, you'd say, a good deal. I'll write to him tonight, and tell him all about it; and when I get back to town, if you entirely approve, we'll get an architect to run down and look at it; and I can answer for it, if you'll give us leave, and aid us with advice and direction, it shall be one of the very earliest things we undertake."

The vicar was charmed with his new friend, and soon Miss Mildmay was equally pleased. This old man was so accomplished, and was, in a very pleasant way, able to interest and instruct her so very much, by new lights and curious facts and anecdotes, on the subjects she liked best, that if he had been only some thirty years younger, I think Charles Shirley and Sir John Mardykes would have suspended their mutual jealousies, and turned their united animosities upon the fortunate Mr. Burton.

The old gentleman did not care very much for dining out, but very often he dropped in to tea. Here Charles Shirley, who lived hardly two miles away from the town, very often made one of the party.

Bitter was the chagrin with which this, among other advantages attendant on the young man's proximity to Golden Friars, inspired the sensitive baronet, who lived in Mardyke Hall, four miles away, and could not, without exciting undue observation, be at all as perpetually as he liked in the purlieus of Golden Friars.

It was rather hard that Mr. Burton, the quietest of mortals, here in the seclusion of his "Happy Valley," should be involved indirectly, but very uncomfortably, in a sort of quarrel.

Mr. Burton was in church on Sunday, a pattern of attention, solemnity, and benignity, to all good church-goers.

From the Mardykes' pew, the clear and solemn accents of this venerable man, whom Sir John politely harbours, with himself, in that sanctuary, as it were dominates the responses which the clerk leads. The solemn and silvery tones were distinguishable in every nook of the church; and, indeed, from most parts of it was visible the reverend white head of that tall worshipper.

In the town, so far as he was known, he was highly esteemed. He had already made out two or three cases of poverty and suffering, which, after due inquiry, he unostentatiously relieved. It was his principle that a wayfarer, like himself, should become a citizen, in all points, during the time of his sojourn; he thus took care, that while enjoying his holiday, he did not divest himself of the charitable offices of a Christian, nor wrong the place of his temporary abode of the advantage of an inhabitant. In all matters of duty he was a little severe with himself.

He took Mr. Turnbull, of the "George and Dragon," into council, and talked over many things with him that concerned the town, and made notes of the information he obtained.

"I like the town, I like the people," he would say; "and before I take my leave, I should like to do it and you a service. You are not to talk about what I say — it is between you and me; but you want a little money down here. For instance — it's a trifle, but still, to the 'George' it is something-the little jetty and the three boats that, I am told, were at the service of the inn in old times, have disappeared, the boats altogether, and the jetty nothing but the piles left. Well, that's a pity. The town paid two-thirds of the cost, while it was a borough, and the 'George and Dragon' one-third, in old times. But that arrangement is over and gone, and your inn has neither boats nor jetty. Now, six or seven hundred pounds would restore all that, and I'll see that the money is forthcoming. Before I leave this, I'll have people down here to look after it, and we'll make the boats the property of the inn; do you understand, for the use of the innkeeper for the time being. I'm so placed with relation to some people of influence, and with so handsome a fund to act with, that I can undertake for that and a great deal more. I'm charmed with your town. I haven't seen so pretty a thing in England, and I have only to make the proper representations to have things undertaken here, and an outlay of some six thousand pounds in improving the beauty and convenience of the place. We have been doing wonders elsewhere, and I like this better than any place I have visited. You need not mind telling the people here, you know, that anything of the kind is intended."

But in spite of all his cautions, honest Mr. Turnbull could not keep all this quite to himself, and Mr. Burton began to be looked at across the street, and even in church, with more reverence than was awarded to common mortals.

Dr. Lincote especially admired him. He had paid that physician a visit about the projected dispensary, asked many questions, and finally put down his name for two hundred pounds, which he would be happy to pay when the right time came. A letter would always reach him under cover to his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, wherever he might be, which would not be very distant, and he might reckon upon his cheque within a week after.

"He's in correspondence with the Archbishop, I know that from old Turnbull," swore Doctor Lincote, "and with half the swells in England; I tell you it was not the worst thing that ever happened for Golden Friars, Mr. Burton's coming down here; and I think you'll find he won't stop at the Dispensary!"

On this particular Sunday Mr. Burton was as devout as usual in Sir John Mardyke's pew. Devout enough for both, the worthy baronet seemed to think, for his eyes and thoughts were engaged very agreeably by a graceful figure in the vicar's pew across the aisle.

After church he walked up to the vicar's with Sir John Mardykes and beautiful Miss Laura Mildmay. On the other side walked Charles Shirley. Two rivals for supporters. The baronet looked very sulky. Did not pretty Miss Laura incline more to the younger man? Heaven send there be not a bloody hand, in earnest, in the matter!

After luncheon, Miss Mildmay went up to sit with good Mrs. Jenner. Mr. Burton and the vicar fell into talk; and the baronet and Charles Shirley, having nothing to say to one another, said goodbye to their host and departed.

When Mr. Burton, a little after, had taken his leave of the vicar, a gloom came over him, and he walked silently by the shore, not of the far-resounding deep, but of the stirless lake, in which were reflected the sky and mountains.

I can understand the strange sense of relief with which an old traveller, into whose pleasant book I lately happened to look, exclaims, on losing sight of the Alps, “Thank heaven, I have at length quite escaped from these terrible mountains!”

Very distant mountains convey no idea of the sombre fascination and awe of mountain scenery. You are barred and ribbed in by huge purple ramparts, furrowed by ravines, swelling into rocky curves, or sinking into deep murky shadow. The steep and solitary ascent mounts upward and upward still, until fainter as it soars, its summits plae into shadows, or show their white pinnacles sheeted in snow faintly against the sky.

Here, at Golden Friars, on a more contracted scale, the same influence is felt. This pretty village of many gables and steep roofs, clumped round with noble trees, among which rises eminent the grey church tower, standing at the margin of the lake, and overtopped nearly on every side by mountains near and high, has an air of solitude that is overpowering.

Those impressions, of course, lose something of their force by habit. But I have never stayed there long enough to impair them; and although the people are not wanting in cheerfulness, there is, it always seemed to me, a spirit of quietude and solemnity over the people themselves.

For me, this place has always had the glory of a paradise, but with a sense of imprisonment also. I have looked round with the thrill and elevation that brings tears to the eyes, and yet with a heart oppressed with a strange gloom. The forms and habitations of man seem to dwindle to nothing in such an amphitheatre, and looking up its huge and solitary sides, the imagination stills and quails.

Was it the effect of the scenery, or was it the shadow of a coming annoyance? Mr. Burton sat down in what seemed unusual gloom upon the trunk of a fallen tree, and leaning his chin upon his hand, looked across the lake with a darkened countenance, not like that ever cheerful benevolence which charmed the little circle of Golden Friars.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. BURTON IN DESHABILLE.

IT was some hours later, and a fine moonlight night. The afternoon service was long over, and what cause on earth could have induced Sir John Mardykes to mount his taxcart, and drive at the best pace of his famous trotter, Flying Dutchman, who won the wager on the Brighton road, back again at this hour all the way from Mardykes Hall to Golden Friars?

Sir John was glowering and sniffing, and purpling in the moonlight; such was his resentment as he flew along the beautiful road that winds by the margin of the lake.

A letter had reached him late that evening. It had come with others, and his servant had brought it from the neighbouring postoffice.

It was written in a vulgar hand and ill-spelled, and the story it told was this: That Charles Shirley had amused Miss Laura Mildmay less than a week before by telling her how he (Sir John) dyed his whiskers, and twisted in curl-papers so much hair as Time had left him; how his insteps were entirely composed of cotton wadding, his feet being “as flat as flounders”; how his shoulders were formed of the same material, nature having denied him any; how he was known to rouge at the race and hunt balls, and practised dancing with old Mrs. Hinchley, his housekeeper, in a deserted garret at Mardykes Hall, with a great deal more that was ridiculous and insulting; and how all this was said in presence of Mr. Burton, who could not deny it.

A two-pint pot, although it may hold many quarts of beer in succession, cannot hold more than one quart at a time. The measure of the capacity of Sir John Mardykes’ head was represented by one idea. That it could hold — but not a second, without displacing the first.

Sir John was too full of his one subject to think of artificial proprieties-to think of anything else, in fact.

Up the stairs of the George he trotted, hot and serious, and, with the ceremony of a knock, but without waiting for an answer, he opened Mr. Burton’s door and walked in, saying —

"How d'ye do, Mr. Burton-how do you do, sir? I — ohl."

Sir John stopped short in the middle of the room.

It was Mr. Burton's habit to lock his door when he came up for the evening. He could have sworn he had done so on this occasion. But Homer nods-and Mr. Burton had palpably neglected to turn his key as usual in his door.

He was sitting with his dressing-gown on, in an easy-chair, with a bottle of brandy and some water, and a glass before him; a half-smoked cigar-smouldered between his fingers, and a pair of candles burned on his table. But Sir John was a good deal startled.

Mr. Burton's teeth were gone, and his left eye was out, and a deep ugly hole was in the place of that organ. He had screwed his mouth into a grim grimace, and his face looked ever so broad, and ever so short.

His whole face was crimson with the fire of brandy, not brandy-and-water, for the aroma was fiercer than even moderate dilution would account for. His lips were pursed and working, as they will over toothless gums. The blank eye puzzled the baronet, and the other pierced him with a gleam of fire.

On the dressing-table close by were two tumblers of water, in one of which were Mr. Burton's teeth, and in the other his glass eye.

The loss of these unsuspected auxiliaries made a very disconcerting change in Mr. Burton's appearance — a transformation, indeed, that absolutely astounded Sir John Mardykes; and perhaps the discovery a little abashed and irritated the stranger, who, still staring hard at the baronet, rose, and both remained for some seconds silent.

"I'm afraid I've somehow put my foot in it, sir," said Sir John bluntly; "I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Burton, that I should have interrupted you."

"You have interrupted nothing, sir. I don't know what you mean. I intend, if you allow me, to go on with my cigar; and my doctor tells me I must sip a little brandy-and-water. Will you try a cigar? or will you take a little brandy-and-water? or may I tell them to bring a little sherry and a biscuit?"

Was it fancy, or was it the loss of Mr. Burton's teeth? It seemed to the baronet that that excellent man was speaking ever so little thickly.

"You're very good, but — no, thank you very much, nothing. I came — I was very anxious — to say a few words; but I'm afraid I'm rather in your way; am I?"

"Dear me, Sir John, not in the least. I hope I should be found always ready to confess any infirmity; but personal infirmities I can't conceive any one's being ashamed of. For the sake of articulation I use those things over there, and to prevent my being quite shocking to my friends, I use the glass eye. I lost my eye in a trifling accident in a railway carriage, on my way to our great and interesting meeting about the Jewish mission. Looking out of the window, a particle of iron, hardly so large as the point of a pin, flew into my eye. I neglected it, an ulcer formed, the cornea was perforated, and-and the thing was done. It is a comfort, Sir John, we know that everything is ordered, and all for the best, for those who rest their hopes where alone is safety, and peace, and happiness. Won't you sit? (he placed a chair for his visitor), and can I be useful in any way?"

Mr. Burton, who had been fidgeting about the room, had by this time got to the door.

"You don't object, Sir John, to my making this a little more-more— "and he bolted the door. "I usually do. I don't care to be surprised in my — ha! ha! hai-déshabille by the waiters and people of the house.

"You're very good, sir — very kind. I shan't detain you long. I — this thing reached me, Mr. Burton, and I don't mind it — not much — but I thought I might as well show it to you."

And he handed him the letter from "Felix Friendly," and Mr. Burton took it, and using his spectacles like an eyeglass, applied a lens to his extant eye, and read the paper through, his lips pursing and working as he did so, and Sir John watching these indications from the seat of vision. The living eye was turned away from him, and nothing but the sunken crater to speculate upon.

When he had finished the letter, lowering the hand which held it to the table with a little emphasis, and directing a vivid glance which showed a good deal of the white eyeball across the bridge of his nose, upon Sir John, he said, a little sternly —

"And who the — who on *earth* can this person be, who takes the liberty of mixing my name up in a local affair of this nature? But no, I shan't allow myself to be ruffled by it. Naturally a hot-tempered man, Sir John, I am thankful that I have learned to watch over and to resist my impulses."

He returned the letter with a slight bow. Sir John took it, but did not put it up.

"But, Mr. Burton, you know, sir-don't you see? I can't let it rest so. I came here, sir, in consequence of it. I came to ask, is it so? I want to know, Mr. Burton, whether the letter says fact or no?"

Sir John was excited, red, and a little confused; but still his one idea filled his head with great stolidity.

"Sir John, you are a man of the world, too sensitive of ridicule, and if you will, contempt. Why not imitate me? My personal infirmities, wherever discovered, have been laughed at. It has troubled me little, my thoughts are elsewhere. Your view is directed too much upon the level of earth. Why not, Sir John, look a little more on and up-on and up?"

"But, a-aw, that's all very well about a fellow's religion, or his soul; but this, don't you see, is about my *person*; and, zounds-I beg you pardon, but really, it *is,* you know, a sort of thing a fellow can't afford to — to — to — and, in short, I have a right to know— "

"Dear me! how unfortunate! Don't you see, my dear Sir John, how likely such a thing is to produce ill-feeling? Why should you ask me?"

"*Why* — whaw — haw — aw — eh, don't you see? Because — you happen to *know,* and I don't see why you should be ashamed or afraid to say the truth."

"The truth? Ha, yes, you have me there, Sir John. Ay, you *have.* Dear, dear, dear! I do so wish I had my dear friend Marvel here, he always takes so clear, simple, and decided a view of duty. He *is* such a guide; but I think I know what he would say. He'd say, as he always does, 'Truth first, consequences afterward'; especially where, as here, worse consequences would probably follow upon silence. But-oh, shame that such things should be!"

"Whaw-aw — *what* things?" demanded the baronet.

"Anonymous informers-spies — traitors. Sir, you must kindly pi omise that you will not mention my name, should you ever speak upon this subject to any one."

"Certainly not, Mr. Burton — not the least occasion. But is that — that *tissue* " — and he knocked the back of his disengaged fingers upon the letter, with a reddening face— "that — that, is it true, sir — is it *true,* Mr. Burton?"

"Well, Sir John, as you put it to me that way — and most distressing it is — I'll tell you. It *is* true — the statement is *true,* but it was most unjustifiable, and it must have come from some extremely low person; and great allowances are to be made for a young man so much in love and so much alarmed at rivalry, and so anxious to enlist the young lady's feeling of elegance and sense of ridicule in his favour. They all do it. Pray, let there be no more said about it."

The baronet was staring at him with very goggle eyes and a purpling face, and before he could speak, seemed to swallow down a big bit of hot bread.

He cleared his voice, and said —

"Thank you, thank you very much. It's all plain sailing now."

"And it is a foolish affair," said Mr. Burton. "You'll not think of it-I may *tell* him so?"

"You may tell him, with my compliments, he's a blackguard and a liar!"

"Sir!"

"That is, of course, I mean any one may tell him, and I shall be very much obliged."

"But, dear Sir John Mardykes, surely you'll modify these dreadful terms, which include everything? You will withdraw them, I am very sure?" pleaded Mr. Burton.

"I think he's all that, sir. Mr. Burton, I hold to it! and I think he's a coward, sir, beside — a nasty dog, sir — a sneak and a coward, Mr. Burton, and — and I shouldn't the least wonder if he had prejudiced me."

"Oh, you'll sleep on it, Sir John. Do you stay here?"

"No, sir; I'm going home."

"You'll look in at the vicar's house?"

"Straight home — certainly not. I'm going home, sir. I-l — know what I think. Good night, Mr. Burton," he added, stopping suddenly at the door-he had nearly omitted that courtesy. "I may have a talk with the vicar tomorrow — a shabby scoundrel! I'm off, Mr. Burton. Good night, sir."

"And you kindly don't mention my name, Sir John?"

"Certainly not. Farewell, Mr. Bui ton."

"Heaven bless you!" said Mr. Burton, very kindly. And bolting his door again, he swallowed what remained of the brandy he had been sipping, and looked from his window and saw the baronet drive away at a very hard pace back again towards Mardykes.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. BURTON MEDIATES.

IN five minutes more, good Mr. Burton having quite recovered his eye and his teeth, and looking very much as usual, only a little more florid, was walking in the moonlight by the margin of the lake, smiling in a luxury of contemplation across its luminous surface, toward those sublime headlands that rise like phantoms, built up of aerial shadow and light, into the sky.

He paused now and then, with his hands raised a little in a sort of silent worship.

The vicar's windows were open, and from the drawingroom faintly came voices and laughter pleasant to hear.

The edge of the lake is not many yards away from the road that passes the front of the vicar's house, and from the window the vicar's voice called to him, and the maid came running down with a message asking him to join their little tea-party.

Mr. Burton complied. Candles were lighted there, and the moon shone in at the open windows, through which the glorious prospect showed like the unsubstantial scenery of an enchanted land.

Quaint and clumsy as was this old stone house, the drawingroom looked positively elegant; such is the effect of a profusion of flowers, and the presence of so beautiful a girl as Laura Mildmay, who sat in the window, oddly lighted in part by the moon, in part by the candles-a study for the painter. Charles Shirley was there, chatting very gaily, and supremely happy. Mrs. Jenner was not yet in the drawingroom. She was better, and old Mrs. Twiss was paying her a visit in her bedroom.

The conversation was, I suppose, about as clever as other conversations in like circumstances, and I never heard more of it than this, that Mr. Burton said-

"To-day, Miss Mildmay, walking on that ridge that you see in that direction, I discovered several specimens of the beautiful little flower" — and he named its name, which I forget— "that you so wished to light upon; and I, old as I am, climbed a little critical bit and got one, which, however, was afterwards spoiled in my hand as I got over the fence. I intended it for your book; but you are such an enthusiastic botanist, and know what the mountains are so well, that perhaps you would like to make that your tomorrow's ramble, and permit an old fellow, but a good pedestrian, to act as your guide. It is very rare, as you know. I have not found six specimens in all my mountain rambles in England."

Miss Laura's pretty face lighted up so at the news, that the sight was more than sufficient reward for Mr. Burton's little gallantry.

Certainly she would go-delighted, and so very much obliged.

Handsome Charles Shirley looked at the vicar. That good man, but prudent, knew what was in his mind; but, like a wise man, the vicar leaned to Sir John Mardykes, who could not be old, of course, for did not the vicar remember him in short frocks, and trousers made of pea-green jean-a hideous costume, which had impressed his memory-and in all other respects was he not immensely to be preferred? The vicar, therefore, looked a little sternly at the mountain at the other side of the lake, and Charles knew that there would be danger in his proposing to be of the party.

"No one treads a mountain path as you do," said the old gentleman gallantly to the pretty girl. "It is a beautiful accomplishment, that of walking with grace. The Spanish ladies have it-the gipsies often have it-Taglioni had it. But our English women, as a rule, they don't walk-they stump. When one's eye has become accustomed to the true nymph-like tread, it is positively shocking to see the other thing. I involuntarily contract my foot as one of them pounds by.

"My wife walks a hillside very gracefully," said the good vicar.

I wish kind Mrs. Jenner could have heard his little interpolation. She would have remembered it a long time, and often thought of it, and often, mayhap, as she did with other little admiring sentences, asked the beloved vicar, with a smile, if he remembered having said one evening, so-and-so. And, indeed, it is well to speak out these honest little compliments that are so sweet to remember. Don't let them die untold in the love where they sound like music, never forgotten, and the heart they have made to tremble with an exquisite and untold delight, will soon enough be cold. These little sayings are treasured and found again, long after, among the pages of the past, like a violet given by a beloved hand, when the book is opened.

"No doubt," said Mr. Burton, "Miss Mildmay is a relation, you told me, and nothing is more characteristic of a family than their mode of walking. There is something indescribably delighttul in walking the heights of mountains," he continued, modifying his theme a little. "When I was young I never lost an opportunity, and, on a grander scale, once, for I was one of the few young Englishmen who, as they say, made the ascent of Mont Blanc. But I am an old fellow, now. I can't do much; still I find myself strong enough for these fells, as we call them here."

"In that case, Mr. Burton, you are strong enough for anything," said the vicar.

Mr. Burton laughed and shook his head.

"No, no; I speak of fair walking upon the heather; but when I remember what I used to do in the Highlands long ago, and look at the things that pull me up, now, I see the difference.

I can't climb anything. I'm no longer a mountaineer. I'm just a good up-hill pedestrian for a fellow of my years. But I dare no more follow Miss Mildmay's lead upon those hills now, than she could have followed mine five-and-twenty years ago on the Alps."

The conversation then turned on something else; we need not follow it.

And now the hour had come for "prayers," and the worthy man assembled his little household, and opened the ponderous Bible and the little book of "family prayer." Mr. Burton closed his lids devoutly, over his live eye and his glass one, of which latter no soul at Golden Friars suspected anything, except Sir John Mardykes, who had by chance seen the ugly chasm behind it.

And when they had risen, the benignant, florid old man smiled till his teeth, that Sir John had seen in the tumbler, glimmered in the moonlight as he arranged an hour with Miss Mildmay for their next day's floral ramble; and then he prayed "Heaven bless her," and kindly shook the vicar's hand, and smiled round the room, and begged to be remembered to Mrs. Jenner, "though that is a little unreasonable, I fear, as I have not yet had the honour of being introduced," he added.

He and Charles Shirley passed down the steps together, and paused for a moment at the piers of the outer gate, looking at the sublime picture before them, and each thinking of something totally different.

The young man stole a glance over his shoulder at the house he was leaving. His heart was heavy with an untold care, and the vagueness and darkness of the future made him sigh.

“Too early for you to sigh, and so deeply, my young friend,” said the old man gently, with an old man’s privilege. “I had something on my mind — shall we walk this way?-but I hesitated to say it. Somehow, that sigh has decided me. It is only a word of caution. May I speak it?”

Charles Shirley looked in his face, doubtful whether he had heard him aright. He had scarcely an acquaintance with Mr. Burton. It seemed odd his proposing to make a warning confidence.

“Certainly, very much obliged,” said the young man.

“You are going to be put in a very disagreeable position, I’m afraid,” said Mr. Burton.

“May I ask how, sir?” inquired Charles Shirley.

“You have incurred the displeasure of a gentleman who, I’m afraid, means to call you to account,” said Mr. Burton.

“I! I have not an idea. Do you mean a hostile message?” inquired Charles smiling.

“I should not wonder,” said the old gentleman in a low tone, “come a little this way, please. You have drawn down upon you the resentment of Sir John Mardykes.”

“I don’t mean, sir, to take any step to conciliate Sir John Mardykes”; said Mr. Shirley. “I don’t understand what he can possibly mean; and I don’t care a farthing.”

“It seems to me, however, if you allow me to say so, that you ought. Let us get a little nearer to the lake: how beautiful it is!-you ought to apologise to Sir John Mardykes-you ought indeed.”

“Apologise! I don’t see what you mean,” said Charles, with a start, a little sharply.

“What I mean is to prevent unpleasantness.”

“There is none whatever, sir,” said the young man.

“Believe me it is coming, though, unless you do as I say.”

“This is certainly something new,” said Charles, with a slight uncomfortable laugh.

They were walking now very slowly on the margin of the lake, over which the moonlight was trembling.

“You have enemies in this part of the world, I’m afraid, Mr. Shirley. Some mischievous person overheard, and has reported to Sir John Mardykes, some inconsiderate expressions you employed one evening when you and I and Miss Mildmay were sitting at the drawingroom window up there; and there were some fellows, I quite forget who, talking to Mr. Jenner — a clerk and some one else, and two servants bringing in tea and things. I remember, for I ventured once or twice to talk about something else; but unfortunately, as it now seems, you went on — some fun about his dyeing his whiskers, and I don’t know what else; and his informant was good enough to refer him to me for confirmation of his story — the whole thing is so low and disgusting! But he put it on me as a matter of *truth* — and, in fact, he got me into a comer, for I found that my silence was confirming him in the belief that every syllable he had recounted had been literally uttered by you, while in reality what you said was comparatively harmless. So as he was extremely angry, I thought it best to be frank. I could not help admitting what was true; but the greater part of his information, I assured him, was utterly false.”

“I’m sure I’m very much obliged, and very sorry you should have had any trouble on my account. But I’ll tell you frankly, I don’t care one farthing what Sir John Mardykes thinks about me; and I should not myself have walked from this to the lake there to undeceive him. I think him a stupid old ridiculous fool. I really forget what I said of him, but I’ll say that, and everything else I believe of him, with pleasure, and fifty’times more, so that he need not employ spies to listen, if he wants to hear all I think of him.”

“Come, come, my dear Mr. Shirley, surely you can’t think this either wise or Christian. Oh! my dear young friend, let me entreat — don’t you know to what a situation you may be reduced? Sir John can look back thirty years, to his early manhood; in those days I can tell you gentlemen were only too ready to appeal to the pistol, and I never saw a man more angry. I assure you the language he used is still painfully ringing in my ears.”

“He spoke of *me,* did he?”

“Why, to be sure he did.”

“Not in a very complimentary way, I suppose.”

Mr. Burton shrugged, and then sighed with a “heigh-ho!” as if he were tired of the world.

“I suppose he said I did not speak truth?” said Charles.

“I should have no hesitation in telling you what he said, because it would show you how very threatening it is, and on what uncomfortable ground you stand; but I should insist on your giving me your word of honour that my name should not be mentioned in the matter, nor any allusion to the circumstance.”

“Oh, sir, I should not dream of such a thing.”

“Well, sir, he did say something to that effect, and a great deal more that it pained me to hear, and which I mention only to show you that the matter is becoming serious, and to support my entreaty that you will, just like a frank Christian gentleman, beg his pardon, for he has termed you, among other things, a liar, a blackguard, and a fool — from which you will gather how transported he is with anger, and how likely this miserable misunderstanding is to be carried into consequences that are direful and sinful; and I may add that he is likely to repeat those phrases, or their equivalents, where you would least like to have them heard. Now do, I implore, my dear young friend, do humble your proud heart a little; ask his forgiveness, and allow me to enjoy the happiness and the blessing of the peacemaker.”

“Did he ask you to tell me all that?” said the young man.

“I can’t say that he did; but I may tell you that I think he would wish you to know exactly how he feels.”

“I see,” said the young man, with a little laugh, and throwing a pebble that was in his fingers a yard or two into the water. “Thank you very much. I think I must get home. Shall I walk with you to your hotel?”

“You are very good. No, thanks. I’ll say goodnight-and all will be well and happy, I hope. Good night.”

And so they parted. And there hung over that quiet scene the cloud of coming battle.

CHAPTER XX.

A GHOST STORY.

WHEN Laura Mildmay ran upstairs, after prayers, to sit a little and talk with Mrs. Jenner; she found that old lady still in her chair, and good Mrs. Jolliffe in the room.

Twenty years have passed since you last saw Mrs. Jolliffe's tall slim figure. She is now past seventy, and can't have many milestones more to count on the journey that will bring her to her long home. The hair has grown white as snow, that is parted under her cap, over her shrew'd, but kindly face. But her figure is still straight, and her step light and active.

She has taken of late years to the care of adult invalids, having surrendered to younger hands the little people who inhabit cradles, and crawl on all-fours. Those who remember that goodnatured face among the earliest that emerge from the darkness of nonentity, and who owe to her their first lessons in the accomplishment of walking, and a delighted appreciation of their first babblings and earliest teeth, have "spired up" into tall lads and lasses, now. Ay, by'r lady, and some of them shew streaks of white by this time, in the brown locks, "the bonny gouden" hair, that she was so proud to brush and shew to admiring mothers, who are seen no more on the green of Golden Friars, and whose names are traced now on the flat grey stones in the churchyard.

So time is ripening some, and searing others; and the saddening and tender sunset hour has come; and it is evening with the kind old north-country dame, who nuised pretty Laura Mildmay, who now stepping into the room, smiles so gladly, and throws her arms round the old woman's neck, and kisses her twice.

"Now, this is so lucky!" said Mrs. Jenner, "you have just come in time to hear a story."

"Really! That's delightful."

"Na, na, od wite it! no story, ouer true for that, I sid it a' wi my aan eyen. But the bam here, w'ould not like, at these hours, just goin' to her bed, to hear tell of freets and boggarts."

“Ghosts? The very thing of all others I should most like to hear of.”

“Well, dear,” said Mrs. Jenner, “if you are not afraid, sit ye down here, with us.”

“She was just going to tell me all about her first engagement to attend a dying old woman,” says Mrs. Jenner, “and of the ghost she saw there. Now, Mrs. Jolliffe, make your tea first and then begin.”

The good woman obeyed, and having prepared a cup of that companionable nectar, she sipped a little, drew her brows slightly together to collect her thoughts, and then looked up with a wondrous solemn face to begin.

Good Mrs. Jenner, and the pretty girl, each gazed with eyes of solemn expectation in the face of the old woman, who seemed to gather awe from the recollections she was summoning.

The old room was a good scene for such a narrative, with the oak-wainscoting, quaint, and clumsy furniture, the heavy beams that crossed its ceiling, and the tall four-post bed, with dark curtains, within which you might imagine what shadows you please.

Mrs. Jolliffe cleared her voice, rolled her eyes slowly round, and began her tale in these words:

MADAM CROWL’S GHOST.

“I’m an aid woman now; and I was but thirteen, my last birthday, the night I came to Applewale House. My aunt was the housekeeper there, and a sort o’ one-horse carriage was down at Lexhoe waitin’ to take me and my box up to Applewale.

“I was a bit frightened by the time I got to Lexhoe, and when I saw the carriage and horse, I wished myself back again with my mother at Hazelden. I was crying when I got into the ‘shay that’s what we used to call it — and old John Mulbery that drove it, and was a goodnatured fellow, bought me a handful of apples at the Golden Lion to cheer me up a bit; and he told me that there was a currant-cake, and tea, and pork-chops, waiting for me, all hot, in my aunt’s room at the great house. It was a fine moonlight night, and I ate the apples, lookin’ out o’ the shay winda.

“It’s a shame for gentlemen to frighten a poor foolish child like I was. I sometimes think it might be tricks. There was two on ‘em on the tap o’ the coach beside me. And they began to question me after nightfall, when the moon rose, where I was going to. Well, I told them it was to wait on Dame Arabella Crowl, of Applewale House, near by Lexhoe.

"'Ho, then,' says one of them, 'you'll not be long there!' "And I looked at him as much as to say 'Why not?' for I had spoken out when I told them where I was goin', as if 'twas something clever I hed to say.

"'Because,' says he, 'and don't you for your life tell no one, only watch her and see — she's possessed by the devil, and more an half a ghost. Have you got a Bible?'

"'Yes, sii,' says I. For my mother put my little Bible in my box, and I knew it was there: and by the same token, though the piint's too sm?ll for my aid eyes, I have it in my press to this hour.

"As I looked up at him saying 'Yes, sir,' I thought I saw' him winkin' at his friend; but I could not be sure.

"'Well,' says he, 'be sure you put it under your bolster every night, it will keep the aid girl's claws aff ye.'

"And I got such a fright when he said that, you wouldn't fancy! And I'd a liked to ask him a lot about the aid lady, but I was too shy, and he and his friend began talkin' together about their own consams, and dowly enough I got down, as I told ye, at Lexhoe. My heait sank as I drove into the dark avenue. The trees stand very thick and big, as aid as the aid house almost, and four people, with their arms out and fingertips touchin', barely girds round some of them.

"Well my neck was stretched out o' the winda, looking for the fiist view o' the great house; and all at once we pulled up in front of it.

"A great white-and-black house it is, wi' great black beams across and right up it, and gables lookin' out, as white as a sheet, to the moon, and the shadows o' the trees, two or three up and down in front, you could count the leaves on them, and all the little diamond-shaped winda-panes, glimmering on the great hall winda, and great shutters, in the old fashion, hinged on the wall outside, boulted across all the rest o' the windas in front, for there was but three or four servants, and the old lady in the house, and most o' t'rooms was locked up.

"My heart was in my mouth when I sid the journey was over, and this the great house afoore me, and I sa near my aunt that I never sid till noo, and Dame Crowl, that I was come to wait upon, and was afeard on already.

"My aunt kissed me in the hall, and brought me to her room. She was tall and thin, wi' a pale face and black eyes, and long thin hands wi' black mittins on. She was past fifty, and her word was short; but her word was law. I hev no complaints to make of her; but she was a hard woman, and I think she would hev bin kinder to me if I had bin her sister's child in place of her brother's. But all that's o' no consequence noo.

"The squire — his name was Mr. Chevenix Crowl, he was Dame Crowl's grandson — came down there, by way of seeing that the old lady was well treated, about twice or thrice in the year. I sid him but twice all the time I was at Applewale House.

"I can't say but she was well taken care of, notwithstanding; but that was because my aunt and Meg Wyvern, that was her maid, had a conscience, and did their duty by her.

"Mrs. Wyvern — Meg Wyvern my aunt called her to herself, and Mrs. Wyvern to me-was a fat, jolly lass of fifty, a good height and a good breadth, always goodhumoured and walked slow. She had fine wages, but she was a bit stingy, and kept all her fine clothes under lock and key, and wore, mostly, a twilled chocolate cotton, wi' red, and yellow, and green sprigs and balls on it, and it lasted wonderful.

"She never gave me nout, not the vally o' a brass thimble, all the time I was there; but she was goodhumoured, and always laughin', and she talked no end o' proas over her tea; and seeing me sa sackless and dowly, she roused me up wi' her laughin' and stories; and I think I liked her better than my aunt — children is so taken wi' a bit o' fun or a story — though my aunt was very good to me, but a hard woman about some things, and silent always.

"My aunt took me into her bedchamber, that I might rest myself a bit while she was settin' the tea in her room. But first she patted me on the shouther, and said I was a tall lass o' my years, and had spired up well, and asked me if I could do plain work and stitchin'; and she looked in my face, and said I was like my father, her brother, that was dead and gone, and she hoped I was a better Christian, and wad na du a' that lids.

"It was a hard sayin' the first time I set my foot in her room, I thought.

"When I went into the next room, the housekeeper's room — very comfortable, yak (oak) all round-there was a fine fire blazin' away, wi' coal, and peat, and wood, all in a low together, and tea on the table, and hot cake, and smokin' meat; and there was Mrs. Wyvern, fat, jolly, and talkin' away, more in an hour than my aunt would in a year.

"While I was still at my tea my aunt went upstairs to see Madam Crowl.

"'She's agone up to see that old Judith Squailes is awake,' says Mrs. Wyvern. 'Judith sits with Madam Crowl when me and Mrs. Shutters' — that was my aunt's name— 'is away. She's a troublesome old lady. Ye'll hev to be sharp wi' her, or she'll be into the fire, or out 'o t' winda. She goes on wires, she does, old though she be.'

"'How old, ma'am?' says I.

"'Ninety-three her last birthday, and that's eight months gone,' says she; and she laughed. 'And don't be askin' questions about her before your aunt-mind, I tell ye; just take her as you find her, and that's all.'

"'And what's to be my business about her, please, ma'am?' says I.

"'About the old lady? Well,' says she, 'your aunt Mrs. Shutters, will tell you that; but I suppose you'll hev to sit in the room with your work, and see she's at no mischief, and let her amuse herself with her things on the table, and get her her food or drink as she calls for it, and keep her out o' mischief, and ring the bell hard if she's troublesome.'

"'Is she deaf, ma'am?'

"'No, nor blind,' says she; 'as sharp as a needle, but she's gone quite aupy, and can't remember nout rightly; and Jack the Giant Killer, or Goody Twoshoes will please her as well as the king's court, or the affairs of the nation.'

"'And what did the little girl go away for, ma'am, that went on Friday last? My aunt wrote to my mother she was to go.' "'Yes; she's gone.'

"'What for?' says I again.

"'She didn't answer Mrs. Shutters, I do suppose,' says she.

'I don't know. Don't be talkin'; your aunt can't abide a talkin' child.'

"'And please, ma'am, is the old lady well in health?' says I. "'It ain't no harm to ask that,' says she. 'She's torflin a bit lately, but better this week past, and I dare say she'll last out her hundred years yet. Hish! Here's your aunt coming down the passage.'

"In comes my aunt, and begins talkin 'to Mrs. Wyvern, and I, beginnin' to feel more comfortable and at home like, was walkin' about the room lookin' at this thing and at that. There was pretty old china things on the cupboard, and pictures again the wall; and there was a door open in the wainscot, and I sees a queer old leathern jacket, wi' straps and buckles to it, and sleeves as long as the bedpost hangin' up inside.

"'What's that you're at, child?' says my aunt, sharp enough, turning about when I thought she least minded. 'What's that in your hand?'

"'This, ma'am?' says I, turning about with the leathern jacket. 'I don't know what it is, ma'am.'

"Pale as she was, the red came up in her cheeks, and her eyes flashed wi' anger, and I think only she had half a dozen steps to take, between her and me, she'd a gev me a sizzup. But she did gie me a shake by the shouther, and she plucked the thing out o' my hand, and says she, 'While ever you stay here, don't ye meddle wi' nout that don't belong to ye,' and she hung it up on the pin that was there, and shut the door wi'a bang and locke d it fast.

"Mrs. Wyvern was liftin' up her hands and laughin' all this time, quietly, in her chair, rolling herself a bit in it, as she used when she was kinkin'.

"The tears was in my eyes, and she winked at my aunt, and says she, dryin' her own eyes that was wet wi' the laughin', 'Tut, the child meant no harm — come here to me, child. It's only a pair o' crutches for lame ducks, and ask us no questions mind, and we'll tell ye no lies; and come here and sit down, and drink a mug o' beer before ye go to your bed.'

"My room, mind ye, was upstairs, next to the old lady's, and Mrs. Wyvern's bed was near hers in her room, and I was to be ready at call, if need should be.

"The old lady was in one of her tantrums that night and part of the day before. She used to take fits o' the sulks. Sometimes she would not let them dress her, and at other times she would not let them take her clothes off. She was a great beauty, they said, in her day. But there was no one about Applewale that remembered her in her prime. And she was dreadful fond o' dress, and had thick silks, and stiff satins, and velvets, and laces, and all sorts, enough to set up seven shops at the least. All her dresses was oldfashioned and queer, but worth a fortune.

"Well, I went to my bed. I lay for a while awake; for a' things was new to me; and I think the tea was in my nerves, too, for I wasn't used to it, except now and then on a holiday, or the like. And I heard Mrs. Wyvern talkin', and I listened with my hand to my ear; but I could not hear Mrs. Crowl, and I don't think she said a word.

"There was great care took of her. The people at Applewale knew that when she died they would every one get the sack; and their situations was well paid and easy.

"The doctor come twice a week to see the old lady, and you may be sure they all did as he bid them. One thing was the same every time; they were never to cross or frump her, any way, but to humour and please her in everything.

"So she lay in her clothes all that night, and next day, not a word she said, and I was at my needlework all that day, in my own room, except when I went down to my dinner.

"I would a liked to see the aid lady, and even to hear her speak. But she might as well a' bin in Lunnon a' the time for me.

"When I had my dinner my aunt sent me out for a walk for an hour. I was glad when I came back, the trees was so big, and the place so dark and lonesome, and 'twas a cloudy day, and I cried a deal, thinkin' of home, while I was walkin' alone there. That evening, the candles bein' alight, I was sittin' in my room, and the door was open into Madam Crowl's chamber, where my aunt was. It was, then, for the first time I heard what I suppose was the aid lady talking.

"It was a queer noise like, I couldn't well say which, a bird, or a beast, only it had bleatin' sound in it, and was very small.

"I pricked my ears to hear all I could. But I could not make out one word she said. And my aunt answered:

"'The evil one can't hurt no one, ma'am, bout the Lord permits.'

"Then the same queer voice from the bed says something more that I couldn't make head nor tail on.

"And my aunt med answer again: 'Let them pull faces, ma'am, and say what they will; if the Lord be for us, who can be against us?'

"I kept listenin' with my ear turned to the door, holdin' my breath, but not another word or sound came in from the room. In about twenty minutes, as I was sittin' by the table, lookin' at the pictures in the old AEsop's Fables, I was aware o' something moving at the door, and lookin' up I sid my aunt's face lookin' in at the door, and her hand raised.

"'Hish!' says she, very soft, and comes over to me on tiptoe, and she says in a whisper: 'Thank God, she's asleep at last, and don't ye make no noise till I come back, for I'm goin' down to take my cup o' tea, and I'll be back i’ noo — me and Mrs. Wyvern, and she’ll be sleepin’ in the room, and you can run down when we come up, and Judith will gie ye yaur supper in my room.’

“And with that away she goes.

“I kep’ looking at the picture-book, as before, listenin’ every noo and then, but there was no sound, not a breath, that I could hear; an’ I began whisperin’ to the pictures and talkin’ to myself to keep my heart up, for I was growin’ feared in that big room.

“And at last up I got, and began walkin’ about the room, lookin’ at this and peepin’ at that, to amuse my mind, ye’ll understand. And at last what sud I do but peeps into Madam Crowl’s bedchamber.

“A grand chamber it was, wi’ a great four-poster, wi’ flowered silk curtains as tall as the ceilin’, and foldin’ down on the floor, and drawn close all round. There was a lookin’-glass, the biggest I ever sid before, and the room was a blaze o’ light.

I counted twenty-two wax candles, all alight. Such was her fancy, and no one dared say her nay.

“I listened at the door, and gaped and wondered all round. When I heard there was not a breath, and did not see so much as a stir in the curtains, I took heart, and walked into the room on tiptoe, and looked round again. Then I takes a keek at myself in the big glass; and at last it came in my head, ‘Why couldn’t I ha’ a keek at the aid lady herself in the bed?’

“Ye’d think me a fule if ye knew half how I longed to see Dame Crowl, and I thought to myself if I didn’t peep now I might wait many a day before I got so gude a chance again.

“Well, my dear, I came to the side o’ the bed, the curtains bein’ close, and my heart a’most failed me. But I took courage, and I slips my finger in between the thick curtains, and then my hand. So I waits a bit, but all was still as death. So, softly, softly draws the curtain, and there, sure enough, I sid before me, stretched out like the painted lady on the tomb-stean in Lexhoe Church, the famous Dame Crowl, of Applewale House. There she was, dressed out. You never sid the like in they days. Satin and silk, and scarlet and green, and gold and pint lace; by Jen! ’twas a sight! A big powdered wig, half as high as herself, was a-top o’ her head, and, wow!-was ever such wrinkles?-and her old baggy throat all powdered white, and her cheeks rouged, and mouse-skin eyebrows, that Mrs. Wyvern used to stick on, and thae she lay proud and stark, wi' a pair o' clocked silk hose on, and heels to her shoon as tall as ninepins. Lawks! But her nose was crooked and thin, and half the whites o' her eyes was open. She used to stand, dressed as she was, gigglin' and dribblin' before the lookin'-glass, wi' a fan in her hand, and a big nosegay in her bodice. Her wrinkled little hands was stretched down by her sides, and such long nails, all cut into points, I never sid in my days. Could it ever a bin the fashion for grit fowk to war their fingernails so?

"Well, I think ye'd a-bin frightened yourself if ye'd a sid such a sight. I couldn't let go the curtain, nor move an inch, nor take my eyes off her; my very heart stood still. And in an instant she opens her eyes, and up she sits, and spins herself round, and down wi' her, wi' a clack on her two tall heels on the floor, facin' me, ogglin' in my face wi' her two great glassy eyes, and a wicked simper wi' her old wrinkled lips, and lang fause teeth.

"Well, a corpse is a natural thing; but this was the dreadfullest sight I ever sid. She had her fingers straight out pointin' at me, and her back was crooked, round again wi' age. Says she:

"'Ye little limb! what for did ye say I killed the boy? I'll tickle ye till ye're stiff!'

"If I'd a thought an instant, I'd a turned about and run. But I couldn't take my eyes off her, and I backed from her as soon as I could; and she came clatterin' after like a thing on wires, with her fingers pointing to my throat, and she makin' all the time a sound with her tongue like zizz-zizz-zizz.

"I kept backin' and backin' as quick as I could, and her fingers was only a few inches away from my throat, and I felt I'd lose my wits if she touched me.

"I went back this way, right into the corner, and I gev a yellock, ye'd think saul and body was partin', and that minute my aunt, from the door, calls out wi' a blare, and the aid lady turns round on her, and I turns about, and ran through my room, and down the stairs, as hard as my legs could carry me.

"I cried hearty, I can tell you, when I got down to the housekeeper's room. Mrs. Wyvern laughed a deal when I told her what happened. But she changed her key when she heared the ale lady's words.

"'Say them again,' says she.

"So I told her.

"'Ye little limb! What for did ye say I killed the boy? I'll tickle ye till ye're stiff.'

"'And did ye say she killed a boy?' says she.

"'Not I, ma'am,' says I.

"Judith was always up with me, after that, when the two older women was away from her. I would a jumped out at winda, rather than stay alone in the same room wi' her.

"It was about a week after, as well as I can remember, Mrs. Wyvern, one day when me and her was alone, told me a thing about Madam Crowl that I did not know before.

"She being young, and a great beauty, full seventy year before, hed married Squire Crowl, of Applewale. But he was a widower, and had a son about nine years old.

"There never was tale or tidings of this boy after one momin'. No one could say where he went to. He was allowed too much liberty, and used to be off in the morning, one day, to the keeper's cottage and breakfast wi' him, and away to the warren, and not home, mayhap, till evening; and another time down to the lake, and bathe there, and spend the day fishin' there, or paddlin' about in the boat. Well, no one could say what was gone wi' him; only this, that his hat was found by the lake, under a haathom that grows thar to this day, and 'twas thought he was drowned bathin'. And the squire's son, by his second marriage, with this Madam Crowl that lived sa dreadful lang, came in far the estates. It was his son, the aid lady's grandson, Squire Chevenix Crowl, that owned the estates at the time I came to Applewale.

"There was a deal o' talk lang before my aunt's time about it; and 'twas said the stepmother knew more than she was like to let out. And she managed her husband, the aid squire, wi' her whiteheft and flatteries. And as the boy was never seen more, in course of time the thing died out of fowks' minds.

"I'm going to tell ye noo about what I sid wi' my own een.

"I was not there six months, and it was winter time, when the aid lady took her last sickness.

"The doctor was afeard she might a took a fit o' madness, as she did fifteen years befoore, and was bucked up, many a time, in a strait-waistcoat, which was the very leathern jerkin I sid in the closet, off my aunt's room.

"Well, she didn't. She pined, and windered, and went off, torflin', torflin', quite enough, till a day or two before her flittin', and then she took to rabblin', and sometimes skirlin' in the bed, ye'd think a robber had a knife to her throat, and she used to work out o' the bed, and not being strong enough, then, to walk or stand, she'd fall on the flure, wi' her aid wizened hands stretched before her face, and skirlin' still for mercy.

"Ye may guess I didn't go into the room, and I used to be shiverin' in my bed wi' fear, at her skirlin' and scraffiin' on the flure, and blarin' out words that id make your skin turn blue.

"My aunt, and Mrs. Wyvern, and Judith Squailes, and a woman from Lexhoe, was always about her. At last she took fits, and they wore her out.

"T' sir was there, and prayed for her; but she was past praying with. I suppose it was right, but none could think there was much good in it, and sa at lang last she made her flittin', and a' was over, and old Dame Crowl was shrouded and coffined, and Squire Chevenix was wrote for. But he was away in France, and the delay was sa lang, that t' sir and doctor both agreed it would not du to keep her langer out o' her place, and no one cared but just them two, and my aunt and the rest o' us, from Applewale, to go to the buryin'. So the old lady of Applewale was laid in the vault under Lexhoe Church; and we lived up at the great house till such time as the squire should come to tell his will about us, and pay off such as he chose to discharge.

"I was put into another room, two doors away from what was Dame Crowl's chamber, after her death, and this thing happened the night before Squire Chevenix came to Applewale.

"The room I was in now was a large square chamber, covered wi' yak pennels, but unfurnished except for my bed, which had no curtains to it, and a chair and a table, or so that looked nothing at all in such a big room. And the big looking-glass, that the old lady used to keek into and admire herself from head to heel, now that there was na muir o' that wark, was put out of the way, and stood against the wall in my room, for there was shiftin' o' many things in her chamber ye may suppose, when she came to be coffined.

"The news had come that day that the squire was to be down next morning at Applewale; and not sorry was I, for I thought I was sure to be sent home again to my mother. And right glad was I, and I was thinkin' of a' at hame, and my sister Janet, and the kitten and the pymag, and Trimmer the tike, and all the rest, and I got sa fidgetty, I couldn’t sleep, and the clock struck twelve, and me wide awake, and the room as dark as pick. My back was turned to the door, and my eyes toward the wall opposite.

“Well, it could na be a full quarter past twelve, when I sees a lightin’ on the wall befoore me, as if something took fire behind, and the shadas o’ the bed, and the chair, and my gown, that was hangin’ from the wall, was dancin’ up and down on the ceilin’ beams and the yak pannels; and I turns my head ower my shoulther quick, thinkin’ something must a gone a’ fire.

“And what sud I see, by Jen! but the likeness o’ the aid beldame, bedizened out in her satins and velvets, on her dead body, simperin’, wi’ her eyes as wide as saucers, and her face like the fiend himself. ’Twas a red light that rose about her in a fuffin low, as if her dress round her feet was blazin’. She was drivin’ on right for me, wi’ her aid shrivelled hands crooked as if she was goin’ to claw me. I could not stir, but she passed me straight by, wi’ a blast o’ cald air, and I sid her, at the wall, in the alcove as my aunt used to call it, which was a recess where the state bed used to stand in aid times, wi’ a door open wide, and her hands gropin’ in at somethin’ was there. I never sid that door befoore. And she turned round to me, like a thing on a pivot, flyrin’, and I standin’ at the far side o’ the bed; I don’t know how I got there, and I found my tongue at last, and if I did na blare a yellock, rennin’ down the gallery and almost pulled Mrs. Wyvern’s door off t’ hooks, and frighted her half out o’ wits.

“Ye may guess I did na sleep that night; and wi’ the first light, down wi’ me to my aunt, as fast as my two legs cud carry me.

“Well, my aunt did na frump or flite me, as I thought, she would, but she held me by the hand, and looked hard in my face all the time. And she telt me not to be feared; and says she:

“‘Hed the appearance a key in its hand?’

“‘Yes,’ says I, bringin’ it to mind, ‘a big key in a queer brass handle.’

“‘Stop a bit,’ says she, lettin’ go ma hand, and openin’ the cupboard-door. ‘Was it like this?’ says she, takin’ one out in her fingers, and showing it to me, with a dark look in my face.

“‘That was it,’ says I, quick enough.

“‘Are ye sure?’ she says, turnin’ it round.

“‘Sart,’ says I, and felt like I was gain’ to faint when I sid it. “‘Well, that will do, child,’ says she, saftly thinkin’, and she locked it up again.

"'The squire himself will be here to-day, before twelve o'clock, and ye must tell him all about it,' says she, thinkin', 'and I suppose I'll be leavin' soon, and so the best thing for the present is, that ye should go home this afternoon, and I'll look out another place for you when I can.'

"Fain was I, ye may guess at that word.

"My aunt packed up my things for me, and the three pounds that was due to me, to bring home, and Squire Crowl himself came down to Applewale that day, a handsome man, about thirty years aid. It was the second time I sid him. But this was the first time he spoke to me.

"My aunt talked wi' him in the housekeeper's room, and I don't know what they said. I was a bit feared on the squire, he bein' a great gentleman down in Lexhoe, and I dam't go near till I was called. And says he, smilin':

"'What's a' this ye a sen, child? it mun be a dream, for ye know there's na sic a thing as a be or a freet in a' the world. But whatever it was, ma little maid, sit ye doyvn and tell all about it from first to last.'

"Well, so soon as I med an end, he thought a bit, and says he to my aunt:

"'I mind the place well. In old Sir Olivur's time lame Wyndel told me there was a door in that recess, to the left, where the lassie dreamed she saw my grandmother open it. He was past eighty when he telt me that, and I but a boy. It's twenty year sen. The plate and jewels used to be kept there, long ago, before the iron closet was made in the arras chamber, and he told me the key had a brass handle, and this ye say was found in the bottom o' the kist where she kept her old fans. Now, would not it be a queer thing if we found some spoons or diamonds forgot there? Ye mun come up wi' us, lassie, and point to the very spot.'

"Loth was I, and my heart in my mouth, and fast I held by my aunt's hand as I stept into that awsome room, and showed them both how she came and passed me by, and the spot where she stood, and where the door seemed to open.

"There was an aid empty press against the wall then, and shoving it aside, sure enough there was the tracing of a door in the wainscot, and a keyhole stopped with wood, and planed across as smooth as the rest, and the joining of the door all stopped wi' putty the colour o' yak, and, but for the hinges that showed, a bit when the press was shoved aside, ye would not consayt there was a door there at all.

"'Ha!' says he, wi' a queer smile, 'this looks like it.'

"It took some minutes wi' a small chisel and hammer to pick the bit o' wood out o' the keyhole. The key fitted, sure enough, and, wi' a strang twist and a lang shreak, the boult went back and he pulled the door open.

"There was another door inside, stranger than the first, but the lacks was gone, and it opened easy. Inside was a narrow floor and walls and vault o' brick; we could not see what was in it, for 'twas dark as pick.

"When my aunt had lighted the candle, the squire held it up and stept in.

"My aunt stood on tiptoe tryin' to look over his shouther, and I did na see nout.

"'Ha! ha!' says the squire, steppin' backward. 'What's that? Gi' ma the poker-quick!' says he to my aunt. And as she went to the hearth I peeps beside his arm, and I sid squat down in the far corner a monkey or a flayin' on the chest, or else the maist shrivelled up, wizzened aid wife that ever was sen on yearth.

"'By Jen!' says my aunt, as, puttin' the poker in his hand, she keeked by his shouther, and sid the ill-favoured thing, 'hae a care, sir, what ye're doin'. Back wi' ye, and shut to the door!'

"But in place o' that he steps in saftly, wi' the poker pointed like a swoord, and he gies it a poke, and down it a' tumbles together, head and a', in a heap o' bayans and dust, little meyar an' a hatful.

"'Twas the bayans o' a child; a' the rest went to dust at a touch. They said nout for a while, but he turns round the skull, as it lay on the floor.

"Young as I was, I consayted I knew well enough what they was thinkin' on.

"'A dead cat!' says he, pushin' back and blowin' out the can'le, and shuttin' to the door. 'We'll come back, you and me, Mrs. Shutters, and look on the shelves by-and-bye. I've other matters first to speak to ye about; and this little girl's goin' hame, ye say. She has her wages, and I mun mak' her a present,' says he, pattin' my shouther wi' his hand.

"And he did gimma a goud pound, and I went off to Lexhoe about an hour after, and sa hame by the stagecoach, and fain was I to be at hame again; and I niver sid Dame Crowl o' Apple» wale, God be thanked, either in appearance or in dream, at-efter. But when I was grown to be a woman, my aunt spent a day and night wi' me at Littleham, and she telt me there was na doubt it was the poor little boy that was missing sa lang sen, that was shut up to die thar in the dark by that wicked beldame, whar his skirls, or his prayers, or his thumpin’ cud na be heard, and his hat was left by the water’s edge, whoever did it, to mak’ belief he was drowned. The clothes, at the first touch, a’ ran into a snuff o’ dust in the cell whar the bayans was found. But there was a handful o’ jet buttons, and a knife with a green heft, together wi’ a couple o’ pennies the poor little fella had in his pocket, I suppose, when he was decoyed in thar, and sid his last o’ the light. And there was, amang the squire’s papers, a copy o’ the notice that was prented after he was lost, when the aid squire thought he might ‘a run away, or bin took by gipsies, and it said he had a green-hefted knife wi’ him, and that his buttons were o’ cut jet. Sa that is a’ I hev to say consamin’ aid Dame Crowl, o’ Applewale House.”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MEETING.

NEVER did morning dawn more glorious. There was just cloud enough in the still sky here and there to dapple the steep sides of the towering mountains, and to give to the face of some bold projection a character of gloom and menace.

At the appointed time Mr. Burton stood at the outer gate, raised his hat from his snow-white hair, and smiled at the young lady in the drawingroom window, who, smiling in return, ran down to join him.

"It is so kind of you, Mr. Burton," she said, as she came down the steps, "to take all this trouble; and the walk will be, I'm afraid, so tiresome to you who took it only on Saturday. It's too goodnatured of you."

"If I were a younger man I should now make ever so many pretty speeches," said Mr. Burton; "I shall only answer, however, that it is to me an ever new delight scaling those magnificent hills. I never could tire of them, and I can honestly say, beside, that your society will greatly add to the charm of the walk. Richard Wyke's boat is waiting, and once at the other side, the distance is really nothing. By-the-bye, have you got your little tin case to put the flowers in?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, everything."

So they went on their way chatting together very cheerfully, for she felt quite at ease in the society of this kind, communicative, and accomplished old man.

The row across the lake was delightful, and the village of Golden Friars from this point of view, diminished but distinct in the distance, with its new background of mountain, and the lake in front, and its dark elms standing in groups or singly about the oldfashioned gables, presents a singularly picturesque feature in the landscape.

And now, chatting pleasantly, the old man with his stick in his hand, and the young lady listening to his stories about foreign flowers, and Alpine, Pyrenean, and Himalayan wonders, ascended the foot of the mountain that rises from the very margin of the lake, and they crossed the little shingle road-as old, possibly, as the days of the Picts-that coils its way over the hills; and by its side they walked on, and though, ascending, still pretty nearly parallel to the margin of the lake. The mountain grows steeper from that base as they proceed.

Thus, in good Mr. Burton’s phrase of the evening before, ‘on and upward’ they proceeded at a gentle pace, ascending above the sounds of life — its sights, also, growing perceptibly more remote, as they entered a lighter and breezier air. The bold mountain side rose steep at their right, and with a gentler declivity slanted down to the water.

The old man laughed at himself and shook his head, but he confessed that for the first time since his arrival at Golden Friars he began to feel the mountains a little too much for him, and now and then, asking Laura Mildmay’s leave, he sat down for a minute or two on the roadside bank to rest.

“We old fellows, we find it out, sometimes suddenly, we are not quite what we were. On Saturday — it seems so ridiculous I should be so easily knocked up now — I could have walked to the very top of the mountain and over it, with more ease than I have accomplished this little walk. *You* are not a bit tired. I’m quite ashamed; but now I’m at your command again. Suppose we go on.”

So on they went.

A few hundred yards below the point at which they had crossed this old road-if anything so narrow and inartificial deserved to be called so-the hill, shelving a little, forms a level platform, in diameter about a hundred yards. With no floral purposes, and by no means in search of the picturesque, quite another party, consisting of five gentlemen, were assembled, and a little encampment of traps — three of these-and horses, and one vehicle, nondescript, with C springs, which had conveyed the doctor from Dingham. There were servants with these horses and vehicles, which were screened from the little green area on which the gentlemen were assembled by a projecting bank, overgrown with birch and whitethorn.

No more convenient or secluded spot for a duel could have been selected, and should a combatant happen to be wounded, there was the very gentle descent of the road from this point, on the level turf, beside which a carriage might run as softly as over the pile of half a dozen Turkey carpets.

Outside this little knot of persons, not a human being anywhere, except perhaps one, suspected an assemblage of gentlemen for any purpose, much less this, upon the green platform I have described, and which, lying in a gentle hollow, was fenced from distant View. This place, for its facilities of access and departure, was selected by shrewd old Doctor Jollock, who, when affairs of this kind were more frequent, had acquired a serviceable experience.

My reader and I have lighted upon them at a critical moment. That trying interval spent by the seconds in discussing and determining arrangements was passed. Each had accomplished the process of loading the "saw-handles," which the principals were about to level one at the other. The empty cases were on the ground-Sir John Mardykes' an heirloom, made of rosewood, inlaid with brass, an extremely pretty article; and, indeed, we see no reason, observing the amount of decoration expended upon coffins by fashionable undertakers, why these other cases of death should not also borrow something from our sense of the beautiful and the elegant.

Another case, just as grizzly, lay also upon the sward a little apart. It was that which contained honest Doctor Jollock's surgical instruments. The doctor himself stood by — his jolly port-wine complexion bleached to yellow by the suspense — for the decisive moment had come. The stout little baronet, in'a green "cutaway" coat, with gilt buttons, a hat exquisitely brushed, and Wellington boots, that shone intensely in the sun, was standing in the spot where his "friend" had just placed him, with a pistol already in his hand, looking very pale and glowering.

About twelve steps away stood Charles Shirley, receiving a word or two, spoken low, from his seconda tall, slight, elderly gentleman, with a rather red sharp nose, and a resolute and important air, and his coat buttoned across his chest. His nose was near Charles's ear as he whispered, and he held a pistol in each hand, with the butt uppermost. And now he retires backward about a dozen steps, and takes his handkerchief from his pocket. The baronet's second, a short, plump man, with a short high nose, and a double chin, an eyeglass and a white hat, stood at the other side.

Doctor Jollock, a little in the second's rear, stands motionless, with his lips tightly screwed together, and frowning hard, as if he expected a box on the ear — staring breathless and still on the combatants.

"Gentlemen, are you both ready?" cries the second, with the handkerchief in his fingers.

Each adjusts himself and says "yes," or "all right."

"Now mind, gentlemen, when I drop it."

There ensued one dreadful second of suspense, and — blowing his nose violently in the fatal handkerchief — to the surprise of each, the tall thin second steps hurriedly between them, and with the incoherence of a madman, as he stuffs the handkerchief into his pocket, cries across to his brother "second," in a loud voice —

"Now stick your cane in the ground, and mind, the best shooting in six shots wins the hundred, and you begin, Sir John.

And then, waving his hand forward a little, he called, "Please steady for a moment; only twelve shots, and you can pass; but there's a wager here. Will you kindly wait for a very few minutes?"

Now this last speech was addressed to a tall "scraggy" man, with a very long neck, and a black frock-coat on, that somehow looked at once new and seedy — dyed, perhaps, and smoothed by some process into an unnatural gloss. This man drew a paper from his pocket as he rounded the little screen of bushes, and was closely followed by two equally oddly got-up gentlemen.

The "friend" with the red nose, who had seen such apparitions before, had no difficulty in recognising a "detective," and "policemen in plain clothes"; and, with excellent presence of mind, he had lied cheerfully, as we have heard.

The tall stranger with the long neck beckoned to him, saying, "I beg your pardon, sir," as he fumbled with his paper, and still advanced.

"Well?" said the second, making up his mind and stepping forward to meet him.

The stranger may have had his suspicions, but he was upon quite other game.

"Did you happen to see Mr. Burton, that's stopping down here at the George, sir, going this way?" he asked.

"No."

The detective had a word to say to him aside; and when it was said, the "friend" beckoned to his brother "second," who heard likewise, and called, "Sir John, do come here for a moment"; and to the policeman he added, "Sir John Mardykes is a magistrate of our county."

Sir John arrived, and also heard the murmured words of the detective; and Charles Shirley drew near, and heard likewise.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Charles, very pale; "he is gone up the hill with Miss Mildmay."

"This thing's at an end, of course," said the "friend" with the nose, drawing his associate apart by the arm.

"Of course," whispered the fat friend in the white hat energetically, "resting upon such a basis!"

They both agreed, as they brought their principals quietly together. Those "principals," at the instance of their friends shook hands, but, I am bound to say, rather coldly, and instantly the united party moved up the hill, following the line of the road, for Charles, who had seen them set out in the boat, rightly conjectured whereabout they must be.

CHAPTER XXII.

GIDDY.

OLD Mr. Burton, with his companion, had got on, languid and smiling, but very agreeably, notwithstanding his occasional pauses for rest; and I shall now describe the point at which he said with a smile, and a sigh, and a little shrug —

"Ha, ha-at last — here we are!"

He looked pallid, tired, and in a dark reverie, from which, suddenly awakening, he said —

'You can see the flowers, *there."*

With his stick he pointed; and she answered, delighted —

"Oh, dear! how beautiful — how wonderful! but how shall we get them?"

The old road, half-hidden, with its close nap of grass, and skirted with the spreading mantle of heath and ferns that cover the steeps that ascend at their right, is traced at the downward side by a halfobliterated fence of peat and here and there of stones, which had in this spot been displaced. With a steep convexity, the hill bends downward here. The near horizon, as you look from the road, terminates in a sudden curve not ten steps down the descent.

'I am jo unaccountably and absurdly knocked up, to-day," said he, "that I can do nothing. Do you see just there, not nine feet down the slope, that little ridge? I rested my feet upon that, and plucked the flower, and came up again; but to-day I am quite good-for-nothing, as you see — utterly done up — hardly able to walk; but if you are not afraid to do what an old fellow did only two days ago, you can hold the end of my stick, and with your feet resting on that little ledge and so pluck the flowers, as many as you like. It is perfectly easy, or I should not allow you to try."

Laura Mildmay could walk those mountains, to which from her childhood she had been accustomed, like a chamois; but this was an unpleasant venture. Over the brow of the steep you could see, five hundred feet below, the distant town of Golden Friars like a tiny toy village beneath them, and a strip of the blue lake.

"Are you quite sure, Mr. Burton, that the little ridge there, as you call it, is perfectly firm?"

"As the mountain itself, my dear child. I stood upon it for five minutes on Saturday, of course leaning on the bank at the same time; and I weigh fourteen stone, and you hardly seven."

"Oh, then, there *can* be no danger," she said. "It would be so cowardly to return without the flowers; and if you kindly hold your stick to me, it will make me feel quite comfortable."

In a moment it was arranged, and, kneeling on the slope, and holding fast to the end of the stick, she allowed herself to slide down till her feet rested on the prominence on which she relied for support.

It turned out to be merely a mass of peat, detached from its position at the edge of the road; and it instantly slipped under the pressure of her feet, and slid down the smooth turf, fast er and faster, till it disappeared ovei the deepening edge.

"Hullo! what's that! Good heaven!" cried Mr. Burton from above, as in her momentary panic she suddenly endeavoured to recover the summit by the aid of his stick, which escaped from his hold, and she found herself lying, without support, upon the smooth declivity, which was clothed with a short grass baked by the sun as brown and shiny as the hair on the back of a trunk.

"Don't be frightened — be steady, it will be all right," cried Mr. Burton. But the young lady was already slipping slowly down the glassy surface.

Her tremendous situation was now too plain, and a piercing scream burst from her lips and soared away through the wide vacuity.

She had turned on her side, her shoulder touching the smooth turf, trying vainly to bury her fingers in the hard surface. Thus, inch by inch, slowly she glided by the end of a huge mass of rock which hung close by her, flanking her descent, and then, within a foot, she caught a glimpse of that towards which, a little lower down, she was drifting. She was, as it were, slipping down the steep roof of a dome, and near enough to its side-edge to measure the fall to which she was hastening. There suddenly opened the sunny landscape beneath, the immense distance and the smooth stone precipice, that, with a slight convexity, curved darkly down five hundred feet to the verge of the lake, like a wall. She shut her eyes and screamed again.

A man passing by, summoned by that cry, ran to the spot, and, with a word or two of horror in his queer dialect, ran to his dwelling to fetch a rope.

At every yard the bank was steeper. Little hope there was. She felt herself still slipping. Her hand lighted on a solitary tuft of fern, and she caught it. She opened her eyes.

A crow came sailing slowly over, only a few feet above the level of the turf, and dived towards her as it passed, curiously, and so swooped over the airy ledge.

She heard the singing of some ladies in a boat, far below, upon the lake, rising sweet and faint, but distinct.

Every leaf and blade of vegetation on the slanting brink close under her eye, grew horribly sharp and exaggerated.

With white lips and eyes dimming with terror, she held by the frail stay her hand but encountered. It broke, and with it in her fingers she again slipped downward, a little more, and a little more, and now a good deal, and she felt that her feet had actually cleared the edge.

And now a frenzy seized Mr. Burton, who, in distraction, threw himself on his knees, crying aloud; and as he stood up and stamped about in his agony, a great stone, dislodged by him, bounded down so close that the earth shook under her, as it flew over the edge of the cliff.

Again her fingers encountered a resisting object, a little angle of rock peeped scarce an inch above the turf.

Once more Mr. Burton's stampings and running hither and thither brought down a piece of rock which again bounded close by her.

She shut her eyes, and wildly she sex earned the awful name of her Creator; her fingers scarcely felt the hold on which her next moment's life depended.

But, heaven and earth! what is this?

Voices are heard above — many; one that she knew. It was Charles Shirley's, approaching lower and lower, nearer and nearer, cheering, exhorting her; and now a strong arm is round her — firmly, convulsively.

A rope with a running knot, sustained by many hands from above, secures him.

At first, little by little, but now with better progress, they are making upward way — and still — and still — and the same powerful arm clasps her like a girdle of iron.

And now — thank Heaven! at last — at top, safe-on level ground; and Laura Mildmay knows no more for many minutes. She has fainted.

What has become of Mr. Burton, alias Blinks, alias Amyot, alias and truly Captain Torquil — alive, and still possessed with his sordid and murderous purpose? While every hand was employed in the rescue of Laura Mildmay, this man, accused of many forgeries and frauds, and crowning his guilt with this ferocious perfidy, has escaped.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE whole town is alarmed. You may be sure the vicar's house is in a pretty flutter at the news. Miss Laura, always something of an idol, is now, and for days after, worshipped with a frantic adoration.

Dr. Lincote and Mr. Tarlcot are at the "George and Dragon," with Mr. Turnbull; and these three wise men of Golden Friars are putting their heads together over this ghastly breakdown of their pattern philanthropist.

"I never was so deceived in man!" said the doctor. "'Pon my soul, it's a nice knock to our dispensary! And Sir John says he found him with his teeth in one tumbler, and his eye in another, and a hole in its place you could put a turnip in, and his face like a nutcracker, and blazing like a furnace, and the old villain himself as drunk as a fiddler! He must be a heartless scoundrel, or he could not have played such a trick on the poor."

"I never had occasion to advise anyone about him. It was only through the vicar and you, that I knew anything of him," said Mr. Tarlcot. "He did not take me in, I promise you. I hope he has not hit you very hard, Mr. Turnbull — a stiff bill, I'm afraid?"

Mr. Turnbull scratched his head, and looked pompous, and perhaps a little sheepish.

"Might a' bin worse, sir. There's a big boxful o' things upstairs; but I mun lose five pounds or more. Who'd a' took him for such a ramscallion?"

"Did he get drunk here?" asked the doctor. "I think you should have put us a bit on our guard."

"I never sid him nappy," said Mr. Turnbull. "But he got through a deal o' brandy, considering what an old man he was. I could a' wished it *less,* sir," said the innkeeper, and considering that it was not paid for, I can well believe him.

"But didn't he correspond with half the swells in England?" inquired the attorney.

"Well, I was thinking o' that. I'm not sa sure. He sent letters to the highest in the land, no doubt; no end o' them. But I can't mind that he got many letters in answer. I don't think he did. Why, I could write to the Archbishop o' Canterbury every week — what for no? — and to the Dook o' Wellington, or the Lord Mayor o' Lunnon, though I never sid one o' the lot, and that, I do consayt, was that old boy's case."

"Not a bad notion," said the attorney, with an attorney's amused appreciation.

In the meantime, a full score of tall fellows from the town and about it, with hasty fury threw down sledge, or spade, or cricket-bat, and set off to scour the fells in search of the old miscreant.

Evening came. The elder townsmen were gathered on the margin of the water, and many glasses were directed to the opposite side of the lake, the bleak mountain sides, the jagged ravines, and angular summits. But a fog spread gradually down the sides of the mountains, and by-and-by shrouded the scene of the pursuit in white folds of vapour from their view.

It was late that night in the thick fog, which, creeping across the lake, had by this time enveloped the town, when, in broken detachments, by twos and threes, the police, with the other pursuers, dropped in, unsuccessful, and quite "done up."

It was prodigious that the old villain should have foiled the police and a body of the most experienced mountaineers in Golden Friars!

The mysterious veil of fog was still hanging over the landscape next morning, when people peeped out of their bedroom windows in Golden Friars, in vain search for the outline of the fells. Hidden behind that curtain was the scene of Mr. Burton's bivouac. One comfort was, that the most which impeded search, also very nearly precluded escape.

The fells aie so precipitous at the further side that, the fog taken into account, it was next to impossible he could, walled in by those awful stone frontages, have found a passage among them to the level beneath.

The pursuers this morning divided their force into two parties; one beginning their march across the fells from the upper end of the lake, the other from the end nearest Golden Friars; and so soon as the mist began to clear, they commenced their movement from opposite ends of the range, in a long chain of scouts, each maintaining its respective communications by shouting and signalling from point to point.

They had taken their rations with them, and returned again to Golden Friars at nightfall, after a fatiguing and fruitless search.

If they had known the truth it would have saved them many renewed searches and many scourings of those steep and dangerous mountains.

Another week revealed it, and the swollen body of the old villain, drowned in the lake on the night of his attempt on the life of Miss Mildmay, in the endeavour, under cover of the mountain fog, to accomplish his escape, came to the surface, and was floated by the breeze to the shore, not far from Golden Friars.

Need I say what further happened; or how happy Laura and Charles Shirley are in the union that followed?

THE END

THE HAUNTED BARONET

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CHAPTER XXX

CHAPTER I

The George and Dragon

The pretty little town of Golden Friars — standing by the margin of the lake, hemmed round by an amphitheatre of purple mountain, rich in tint and furrowed by ravines, high in air, when the tall gables and narrow windows of its ancient graystone houses, and the tower of the old church, from which every evening the curfew still rings, show like silver in the moonbeams, and the black elms that stand round throw moveless shadows upon the short level grass — is one of the most singular and beautiful sights I have ever seen.

There it rises, 'as from the stroke of the enchanter's wand,' looking so light and filmy, that you could scarcely believe it more than a picture reflected on the thin mist of night.

On such a still summer night the moon shone splendidly upon the front of the George and Dragon, the comfortable graystone inn of Golden Friars, with the grandest specimen of the old inn-sign, perhaps, left in England. It looks right across the lake; the road that skirts its margin running by the steps of the hall-door, opposite to which, at the other side of the road, between two great posts, and framed in a fanciful wrought-iron border splendid with gilding, swings the famous sign of St. George and the Dragon, gorgeous with colour and gold.

In the great room of the George and Dragon, three or four of the old *habitués* of that cozy lounge were refreshing a little after the fatigues of the day.

This is a comfortable chamber, with an oak wainscot; and whenever in summer months the air is sharp enough, as on the present occasion, a fire helped to light it up; which fire, being chiefly wood, made a pleasant broad flicker on panel and ceiling, and yet did not make the room too hot.

On one side sat Doctor Torvey, the doctor of Golden Friars, who knew the weak point of every man in the town, and what medicine agreed with each inhabitant — a fat gentleman, with a jolly laugh and an appetite for all sorts of news, big and little, and who liked a pipe, and made a tumbler of punch at about this hour, with a bit of lemon-peel in it. Beside him sat William Peers, a thin old gentleman, who had lived for more than thirty years in India, and was quiet and benevolent, and the last man in Golden Friars who wore a pigtail. Old Jack Amerald, an ex-captain of the navy, with his short stout leg on a chair, and its wooden companion beside it, sipped his grog, and bawled in the oldfashioned navy way, and called his friends his 'hearties.' In the middle, opposite the hearth, sat deaf Tom Hollar, always placid, and smoked his pipe, looking serenely at the fire. And the landlord of the George and Dragon every now and then strutted in, and sat down in the high-backed wooden armchair, according to the oldfashioned republican ways of the place, and took his share in the talk gravely, and was heartily welcome.

"And so Sir Bale is coming home at last," said the Doctor. "Tell us any more you heard since."

"Nothing," answered Richard Turnbull, the host of the George. "Nothing to speak of; only 'tis certain sure, and so best; the old house won't look so dowly now."

"Twyne says the estate owes a good capful o' money by this time, hey?" said the Doctor, lowering his voice and winking.

"Weel, they do say he's been nout at dow. I don't mind saying so to *you*, mind, sir, where all's friends together; but he'll get that right in time."

"More like to save here than where he is," said the Doctor with another grave nod.

"He does very wisely," said Mr. Peers, having blown out a thin stream of smoke, "and creditably, to pull-up in time. He's coming here to save a little, and perhaps he'll marry; and it is the more creditable, if, as they say, he dislikes the place, and would prefer staying where he is."

And having spoken thus gently, Mr. Peers resumed his pipe cheerfully.

"No, he don't like the place; that is, I'm told he *didn't*," said the innkeeper.

"He *hates* it," said the Doctor with another dark nod.

"And no wonder, if all's true I've heard," cried old Jack Amerald. "Didn't he drown a woman and her child in the lake?"

"Hollo! my dear boy, don't let them hear you say that; you're all in the clouds."

"By Jen!" exclaimed the landlord after an alarmed silence, with his mouth and eyes open, and his pipe in his hand, "why, sir, I pay rent for the house up there. I'm thankful — dear knows, I *am* thankful — we're all to ourselves!"

Jack Amerald put his foot on the floor, leaving his wooden leg in its horizontal position, and looked round a little curiously.

"Well, if it wasn't him, it was some one else. I'm sure it happened up at Mardykes. I took the bearings on the water myself from Glads Scaur to Mardykes Jetty, and from the George and Dragon sign down here — down to the white house under Forrick Fells. I could fix a buoy over the very spot. Some one here told me the bearings, I'd take my oath, where the body was seen; and yet no boat could ever come up with it; and that was queer, you know, so I clapt it down in my log."

"Ay, sir, there *was* some flummery like that, Captain," said Turnbull; "for folk will be gabbin'. But 'twas his grandsire was talked o', not him; and 'twould play the hangment wi' me doun here, if 'twas thought there was stories like that passin' in the George and Dragon.'

"Well, his grandfather; 'twas all one to him, I take it."

"There never was no proof, Captain, no more than smoke; and the family up at Mardykes wouldn't allow the king to talk o' them like that, sir; for though they be lang deod that had most right to be angered in the matter, there's none o' the name but would be half daft to think 'twas still believed, and he full out as mich as any. Not that I need care more than another, though they do say he's a bit frowsy and short-waisted; for he can't shouther me out o' the George while I pay my rent, till nine hundred and ninety-nine year be rin oot; and a man, be he ne'er sa het, has time to cool before then. But there's no good quarrellin' wi' teathy folk; and it may lie in his way to do the George mony an ill turn, and mony a gude one; an' it's only fair to say it happened a long way before he was born, and there's no good in vexin' him; and I lay ye a pound, Captain, the Doctor hods wi' me."

The Doctor, whose business was also sensitive, nodded; and then he said, "But for all that, the story's old, Dick Turnbull — older than you or I, my jolly good friend."

"And best forgotten," interposed the host of the George.

"Ay, best forgotten; but that it's not like to be," said the Doctor, plucking up courage. "Here's our friend the Captain has heard it; and the mistake he has made shows there's one thing worse than its being quite remembered, and that is, its being *half* remembered. We can't stop people talking; and a story like that will see us all off the hooks, and be in folks' mouths, still, as strong as ever."

"Ay; and now I think on it, 'twas Dick Harman that has the boat down there — an old tar like myself — that told me that yarn. I was trying for pike, and he pulled me over the place, and that's how I came to hear it. I say, Tom, my hearty, serve us out another glass of brandy, will you?" shouted the Captain's voice as the waiter crossed the room; and that florid and grizzled naval hero clapped his leg again on the chair by its wooden companion, which he was wont to call his jury-mast.

"Well, I do believe it will be spoke of longer than we are like to hear," said the host, "and I don't much matter the story, if it baint told o' the wrong man." Here he touched his tumbler with the spoon, indicating by that little ring that Tom, who had returned with the Captain's grog, was to replenish it with punch. "And Sir Bale is like to be a friend to this house. I don't see no reason why he shouldn't. The George and Dragon has bin in our family ever since the reign of King Charles the Second. It was William Turnbull in that time, which they called it the Restoration, he taking the lease from Sir Tony Mardykes that was then. They was but knights then. They was made baronets first in the reign of King George the Second; you may see it in the list of baronets and the nobility. The lease was made to William Turnbull, which came from London; and he built the stables, which they was out o' repair, as you may read to this day in the lease; and the house has never had but one sign since — the George and Dragon, it is pretty well known in England — and one name to its master. It has been owned by a Turnbull from that day to this, and they have not been counted bad men." A murmur of applause testified the assent of his guests. "They has been steady churchgoin' folk, and brewed good drink, and maintained the best o' characters, hereaways and farther off too, though 'tis I, Richard Turnbull, that says it; and while they pay their rent, no man has power to put them out; for their title's as good to the George and Dragon, and the two fields, and the croft, and the grazing o' their kye on the green, as Sir Bale Mardykes to the Hall up there and estate. So 'tis nout to me, except in the way o' friendliness, what the family may think o' me; only the George and they has always been kind and friendly, and I don't want to break the old custom."

"Well said, Dick!" exclaimed Doctor Torvey; "I own to your conclusion; but there ain't a soul here but ourselves — and we're all friends, and you are your own master — and, hang it, you'll tell us that story about the drowned woman, as you heard it from your father long ago."

"Ay, do, and keep us to our liquor, my hearty!" cried the Captain.

Mr. Peers looked his entreaty; and deaf Mr. Hollar, having no interest in the petition, was at least a safe witness, and, with his pipe in his lips, a cozy piece of furniture.

Richard Turnbull had his punch beside him; he looked over his shoulder. The door was closed, the fire was cheery, and the punch was fragrant, and all friendly faces about him. So said he:

"Gentlemen, as you're pleased to wish it, I don't see no great harm in it; and at any rate, 'twill prevent mistakes. It is more than ninety years since. My father was but a boy then; and many a time I have heard him tell it in this very room."

And looking into his glass he mused, and stirred his punch slowly.

CHAPTER II

The Drowned Woman

"It ain't much of a homminy," said the host of the George. "I'll not keep you long over it, gentlemen. There was a handsome young lady, Miss Mary Feltram o' Cloostedd by name. She was the last o' that family; and had gone very poor. There's but the walls o' the house left now; grass growing in the hall, and ivy over the gables; there's no one livin' has ever hard tell o' smoke out o' they chimblies. It stands on t'other side o' the lake, on the level wi' a deal o' a'ad trees behint and aside it at the gap o' the clough, under the pike o' Maiden Fells. Ye may see it wi' a spyin'-glass from the boatbield at Mardykes Hall."

"I've been there fifty times," said the Doctor.

"Well there was dealin's betwixt the two families; and there's good and bad in every family; but the Mardykes, in them days, was a wild lot. And when old Feltram o' Cloostedd died, and the young lady his daughter was left a ward o' Sir Jasper Mardykes — an ill day for her, poor lass! — twenty year older than her he was, an' more; and nothin' about him, they say, to make anyone like or love him, ill-faur'd and little and dow."

"Dow — that's gloomy," Doctor Torvey instructed the Captain aside.

"But they do say, they has an old blud-stean ring in the family that has a charm in't; and happen how it might, the poor lass fell in love wi' him. Some said they was married. Some said it hang'd i' the bell-ropes, and never had the priest's blessing; but anyhow, married or no, there was talk enough amang the folk, and out o' doors she would na budge. And there was two wee barns; and she prayed him hard to confess the marriage, poor thing! But t'was a bootlese bene, and he would not allow they should bear his name, but their mother's; he was a hard man, and hed the bit in his teeth, and went his ain gait. And having tired of her, he took in his head to marry a lady of the Barnets, and it behoved him to be shut o' her and her children; and so she nor them was seen no more at Mardykes Hall. And the eldest, a boy, was left in care of my grandfather's father here in the George."

“That queer Philip Feltram that’s travelling with Sir Bale so long is a descendant of his?” said the Doctor.

“Grandson,” observed Mr. Peers, removing his pipe for a moment; “and is the last of that stock.”

“Well, no one could tell where she had gone to. Some said to distant parts, some said to the madhouse, some one thing, some another; but neither she nor the barn was ever seen or spoke to by the folk at Mardykes in life again. There was one Mr. Wigram that lived in them times down at Moultry, and had sarved, like the Captain here, in the king’s navy in his day; and early of a morning down he comes to the town for a boat, sayin’ he was looking towards Snakes Island through his spyin’-glass, and he seen a woman about a hundred and fifty yards outside of it; the Captain here has heard the bearings right enough. From her hips upwards she was stark and straight out o’ the water, and a baby in her arms. Well, no one else could see it, nor he neither, when they went down to the boat. But next morning he saw the same thing, and the boatman saw it too; and they rowed for it, both pulling might and main; but after a mile or so they could see it no more, and gave over. The next that saw it was the vicar, I forget his name now — but he was up the lake to a funeral at Mortlock Church; and coming back with a bit of a sail up, just passin’ Snakes Island, what should they hear on a sudden but a wowl like a death-cry, shrill and bleak, as made the very blood hoot in their veins; and looking along the water not a hundred yards away, saw the same grizzled sight in the moonlight; so they turned the tiller, and came near enough to see her face — blea it was, and drenched wi’ water — and she was above the lake to her middle, stiff as a post, holdin’ the weeny barn out to them, and flyrin’ [smiling scornfully] on them as they drew nigh her. They were half-frighted, not knowing what to make of it; but passing as close as the boatman could bring her side, the vicar stretched over the gunwale to catch her, and she bent forward, pushing the dead bab forward; and as she did, on a sudden she gave a yelloch that scared them, and they saw her no more. ’Twas no livin’ woman, for she couldn’t rise that height above the water, as they well knew when they came to think; and knew it was a dobby they saw; and ye may be sure they didn’t spare prayer and blessin’, and went on their course straight before the wind; for neither would a-took the worth o’ all the Mardykes to look sich a freetin’ i’ the face again. ’Twas seen another time by market-folk crossin’ fra Gyllenstan in the selfsame place; and Snakes Island got a bad neam, and none cared to go nar it after nightfall."

"Do you know anything of that Feltram that has been with him abroad?" asked the Doctor.

"They say he's no good at anything — a harmless mafflin; he was a long gaumless gawky when he went awa," said Richard Turnbull. "The Feltrams and the Mardykes was sib, ye know; and that made what passed in the misfortune o' that young lady spoken of all the harder; and this young man ye speak of is a grandson o' the lad that was put here in care o' my grandfather."

"*Great*-grandson. His father was grandson," said Mr. Peers; "he held a commission in the army and died in the West Indies. This Philip Feltram is the last o' that line — illegitimate, you know, it is held — and the little that remained of the Feltram property went nearly fourscore years ago to the Mardykes, and this Philip is maintained by Sir Bale; it is pleasant, notwithstanding all the stories one hears, gentlemen, that the only thing we know of him for certain should be so creditable to his kindness."

"To be sure," acquiesced Mr. Turnbull.

While they talked the horn sounded, and the mail-coach drew up at the door of the George and Dragon to set down a passenger and his luggage.

Dick Turnbull rose and went out to the hall with careful bustle, and Doctor Torvey followed as far as the door, which commanded a view of it, and saw several trunks cased in canvas pitched into the hall, and by careful Tom and a boy lifted one on top of the other, behind the corner of the banister. It would have been below the dignity of his cloth to go out and read the labels on these, or the Doctor would have done otherwise, so great was his curiosity.

CHAPTER III

Philip Feltram

The new guest was now in the hall of the George, and Doctor Torvey could hear him talking with Mr. Turnbull. Being himself one of the dignitaries of Golden Friars, the Doctor, having regard to first impressions, did not care to be seen in his post of observation; and closing the door gently, returned to his chair by the fire, and in an undertone informed his cronies that there was a new arrival in the George, and he could not hear, but would not wonder if he were taking a private room; and he seemed to have trunks enough to build a church with.

"Don't be too sure we haven't Sir Bale on board," said Amerald, who would have followed his crony the Doctor to the door — for never was retired naval hero of a village more curious than he — were it not that his wooden leg made a distinct pounding on the floor that was inimical, as experience had taught him, to mystery.

"That can't be," answered the Doctor; "Charley Twyne knows everything about it, and has a letter every second day; and there's no chance of Sir Bale before the tenth; this is a tourist, you'll find. I don't know what the d — l keeps Turnbull; he knows well enough we are all naturally willing to hear who it is."

"Well, he won't trouble us here, I bet ye;" and catching deaf Mr. Hollar's eye, the Captain nodded, and pointed to the little table beside him, and made a gesture imitative of the rattling of a dice-box; at which that quiet old gentleman also nodded sunnily; and up got the Captain and conveyed the backgammon-box to the table, near Hollar's elbow, and the two worthies were soon sinc-ducing and catre-acing, with the pleasant clatter that accompanies that ancient game. Hollar had thrown sizes and made his double point, and the honest Captain, who could stand many things better than Hollar's throwing such throws so early in the evening, cursed his opponent's luck and sneered at his play, and called the company to witness, with a distinctness which a stranger to smiling Hollar's deafness would have thought hardly civil; and just at this moment the door opened, and

Richard Turnbull showed his new guest into the room, and ushered him to a vacant seat near the other corner of the table before the fire.

The stranger advanced slowly and shyly, with something a little deprecatory in his air, to which a lathy figure, a slight stoop, and a very gentle and even heartbroken look in his pale long face, gave a more marked character of shrinking and timidity.

He thanked the landlord aside, as it were, and took his seat with a furtive glance round, as if he had no right to come in and intrude upon the happiness of these honest gentlemen.

He saw the Captain scanning him from under his shaggy grey eyebrows while he was pretending to look only at his game; and the Doctor was able to recount to Mrs. Torvey when he went home every article of the stranger's dress.

It was odd and melancholy as his peaked face.

He had come into the room with a short black cloak on, and a rather tall foreign felt hat, and a pair of shiny leather gaiters or leggings on his thin legs; and altogether presented a general resemblance to the conventional figure of Guy Fawkes.

Not one of the company assembled knew the appearance of the Baronet. The Doctor and old Mr. Peers remembered something of his looks; and certainly they had no likeness, but the reverse, to those presented by the newcomer. The Baronet, as now described by people who had chanced to see him, was a dark man, not above the middle size, and with a certain decision in his air and talk; whereas this person was tall, pale, and in air and manner feeble. So this broken trader in the world's commerce, with whom all seemed to have gone wrong, could not possibly be he.

Presently, in one of his stealthy glances, the Doctor's eye encountered that of the stranger, who was by this time drinking his tea — a thin and feminine liquor little used in that room.

The stranger did not seem put out; and the Doctor, interpreting his look as a permission to converse, cleared his voice, and said urbanely,

"We have had a little frost by night, down here, sir, and a little fire is no great harm — it is rather pleasant, don't you think?"

The stranger bowed acquiescence with a transient wintry smile, and looked gratefully on the fire.

“This place is a good deal admired, sir, and people come a good way to see it; you have been here perhaps before?”

“Many years ago.”

Here was another pause.

“Places change imperceptibly — in detail, at least — a good deal,” said the Doctor, making an effort to keep up a conversation that plainly would not go on of itself; “and people too; population shifts — there’s an old fellow, sir, they call *Death*.”

“And an old fellow they call the *Doctor*, that helps him,” threw in the Captain humorously, allowing his attention to get entangled in the conversation, and treating them to one of his tempestuous ha-ha-ha’s.

“We are expecting the return of a gentleman who would be a very leading member of our little society down here,” said the Doctor, not noticing the Captain’s joke. “I mean Sir Bale Mardykes. Mardykes Hall is a pretty object from the water, sir, and a very fine old place.”

The melancholy stranger bowed slightly, but rather in courtesy to the relator, it seemed, than that the Doctor’s lore interested him much.

“And on the opposite side of the lake,” continued Doctor Torvey, “there is a building that contrasts very well with it — the old house of the Feltrams — quite a ruin now, at the mouth of the glen — Cloostedd House, a very picturesque object.”

“Exactly opposite,” said the stranger dreamily, but whether in the tone of acquiescence or interrogatory, the Doctor could not be quite sure.

“That was one of our great families down here that has disappeared. It has dwindled down to nothing.”

“Duce ace,” remarked Mr. Hollar, who was attending to his game.

“While others have mounted more suddenly and amazingly still,” observed gentle Mr. Peers, who was great upon county genealogies.

“Sizes!” thundered the Captain, thumping the table with an oath of disgust.

“And Snakes Island is a very pretty object; they say there used to be snakes there,” said the Doctor, enlightening the visitor.

“Ah! that’s a mistake,” said the dejected guest, making his first original observation. “It should be spelt *Snaiks*. In the old papers it is called Sen-aiks Island from the seven oaks that grew in a clump there.”

“Hey? that’s very curious, egad! I daresay,” said the Doctor, set right thus by the stranger, and eyeing him curiously.

“Very true, sir,” observed Mr. Peers; “three of those oaks, though, two of them little better than stumps, are there still; and Clewson of Heckleston has an old document — — “

Here, unhappily, the landlord entered the room in a fuss, and walking up to the stranger, said, “The chaise is at the door, Mr. Feltram, and the trunks up, sir.”

Mr. Feltram rose quietly and took out his purse, and said,

“I suppose I had better pay at the bar?”

“As you like best, sir,” said Richard Turnbull.

Mr. Feltram bowed all round to the gentlemen, who smiled, ducked or waved their hands; and the Doctor fussily followed him to the hall-door, and welcomed him back to Golden Friars — there was real kindness in this welcome — and proffered his broad brown hand, which Mr. Feltram took; and then he plunged into his chaise, and the door being shut, away he glided, chaise, horses, and driver, like shadows, by the margin of the moonlighted lake, towards Mardykes Hall.

And after a few minutes’ stand upon the steps, looking along the shadowy track of the chaise, they returned to the glow of the room, in which a pleasant perfume of punch still prevailed; and beside Mr. Philip Feltram’s deserted teathings, the host of the George enlightened his guests by communicating freely the little he had picked up. The principal fact he had to tell was, that Sir Bale adhered strictly to his original plan, and was to arrive on the tenth. A few days would bring them to that, and the nine-days wonder run its course and lose its interest. But in the meantime, all Golden Friars was anxious to see what Sir Bale Mardykes was like.

CHAPTER IV

The Baronet Appears

As the candles burn blue and the air smells of brimstone at the approach of the Evil One, so, in the quiet and healthy air of Golden Friars, a depressing and agitating influence announced the coming of the long-absent Baronet.

From abroad, no good whatever had been at any time heard of him, and a great deal that was, in the ears of simple folk living in that unsophisticated part of the world, vaguely awful.

Stories that travel so far, however, lose something of their authority, as well as definiteness, on the way; there was always room for charity to suggest a mistake or exaggeration; and if good men turned up their hands and eyes after a new story, and ladies of experience, who knew mankind, held their heads high and looked grim and mysterious at mention of his name, nevertheless an interval of silence softened matters a little, and the sulphureous perfume dissipated itself in time.

Now that Sir Bale Mardykes had arrived at the Hall, there were hurried consultations held in many households. And though he was tried and sentenced by drumhead over some austere hearths, as a rule the law of gravitation prevailed, and the greater house drew the lesser about it, and county people within the visiting radius paid their respects at the Hall.

The Reverend Martin Bedel, the then vicar of Golden Friars, a stout short man, with a mulberry-coloured face and small gray eyes, and taciturn habits, called and entered the drawingroom at Mardykes Hall, with his fat and garrulous wife on his arm.

The drawingroom has a great projecting Tudor window looking out on the lake, with its magnificent background of furrowed and purple mountains.

Sir Bale was not there, and Mrs. Bedel examined the pictures, and ornaments, and the books, making such remarks as she saw fit; and then she looked out of the window, and admired the prospect. She wished to stand well with the Baronet, and was in a mood to praise everything.

You may suppose she was curious to see him, having heard for years such strange tales of his doings.

She expected the hero of a brilliant and wicked romance; and listened for the step of the truant Lovelace who was to fulfil her idea of manly beauty and fascination.

She sustained a slight shock when he did appear.

Sir Bale Mardykes was, as she might easily have remembered, a middle-aged man — and he looked it. He was not even an imposing-looking man for his time of life: he was of about the middle height, slightly made, and dark featured. She had expected something of the gaiety and animation of Versailles, and an evident cultivation of the art of pleasing. What she did see was a remarkable gravity, not to say gloom, of countenance — the only feature of which that struck her being a pair of large dark-gray eyes, that were cold and earnest. His manners had the ease of perfect confidence; and his talk and air were those of a person who might have known how to please, if it were worth the trouble, but who did not care twopence whether he pleased or not.

He made them each a bow, courtly enough, but there was no smile — not even an affectation of cordiality. Sir Bale, however, was chatty, and did not seem to care much what he said, or what people thought of him; and there was a suspicion of sarcasm in what he said that the rustic literality of good Mrs. Bedel did not always detect.

"I believe I have not a clergyman but *you*, sir, within any reasonable distance?"

"Golden Friars *is* the nearest," said Mrs. Bedel, answering, as was her pleasure on all practicable occasions, for her husband. "And southwards, the nearest is Wyllarden — and by a bird's flight that is thirteen miles and a half, and by the road more than nineteen — twenty, I may say, by the road. Ha, ha, ha! it is a long way to look for a clergyman."

"Twenty miles of road to carry you thirteen miles across, hey? The road-makers lead you a pretty dance here; those gentlemen know how to make money, and like to show people the scenery from a variety of points. No one likes a straight road but the man who pays for it, or who, when he travels, is brute enough to wish to get to his journey's end."

"That is so true, Sir Bale; one never cares if one is not in a hurry. That's what Martin thinks — don't we, Martin? — And then, you know, coming home is the time you *are* in a hurry — when you are thinking of your cup of tea and the children; and *then*, you know, you have the fall of the ground all in your favour."

"It's well to have anything in your favour in this place. And so there are children?"

"A good many," said Mrs. Bedel, with a proud and mysterious smile, and a nod; "you wouldn't guess how many."

"Not I; I only wonder you did not bring them all."

"That's very goodnatured of you, Sir Bale, but all could not come at *one* bout; there are — tell him, Martin — ha, ha, ha! there are eleven."

"It must be very cheerful down at the vicarage," said Sir Bale graciously; and turning to the vicar he added, "But how unequally blessings are divided! You have eleven, and I not one — that I'm aware of."

"And then, in that direction straight before you, you have the lake, and then the fells; and five miles from the foot of the mountain at the other side, before you reach Fottrell — and that is twenty-five miles by the road — — "

"Dear me! how far apart they are set! My gardener told me this morning that asparagus grows very thinly in this part of the world. How thinly clergymen grow also down here — in one sense," he added politely, for the vicar was stout.

"We were looking out of the window — we amused ourselves that way before you came — and your view is certainly the very best anywhere round this side; your view of the lake and the fells — what mountains they are, Sir Bale!"

"'Pon my soul, they are! I wish I could blow them asunder with a charge of duck-shot, and I shouldn't be stifled by them long. But I suppose, as we can't get rid of them, the next best thing is to admire them. We are pretty well married to them, and there is no use in quarrelling."

"I know you don't think so, Sir Bale, ha, ha, ha! You wouldn't take a good deal and spoil Mardykes Hall."

"You can't get a mouthful or air, or see the sun of a morning, for those frightful mountains," he said with a peevish frown at them.

"Well, the lake at all events — that you *must* admire, Sir Bale?"

"No ma'am, I don't admire the lake. I'd drain the lake if I could — I hate the lake. There's nothing so gloomy as a lake pent up among barren mountains. I can’t conceive what possessed my people to build our house down here, at the edge of a lake; unless it was the fish, and precious fish it is — pike! I don’t know how people digest it — *I* can’t. I’d as soon think of eating a watchman’s pike.”

“I thought that having travelled so much abroad, you would have acquired a great liking for that kind of scenery, Sir Bale; there is a great deal of it on the Continent, ain’t there?” said Mrs. Bedel. “And the boating.”

“Boating, my dear Mrs. Bedel, is the dullest of all things; don’t you think so? Because a boat looks very pretty from the shore, we fancy the shore must look very pretty from a boat; and when we try it, we find we have only got down into a pit and can see nothing rightly. For my part I hate boating, and I hate the water; and I’d rather have my house, like Haworth, at the edge of a moss, with good wholesome peat to look at, and an open horizon — savage and stupid and bleak as all that is — than be suffocated among impassable mountains, or upset in a black lake and drowned like a kitten. O, there’s luncheon in the next room; won’t you take some?”

CHAPTER V

Mrs. Julaper's Room

Sir Bale Mardykes being now established in his ancestral house, people had time to form conclusions respecting him. It must be allowed he was not popular. There was, perhaps, in his conduct something of the caprice of contempt. At all events his temper and conduct were uncertain, and his moods sometimes violent and insulting.

With respect to but one person was his conduct uniform, and that was Philip Feltram. He was a sort of aide-de-camp near Sir Bale's person, and chargeable with all the commissions and offices which could not be suitably intrusted to a mere servant. But in many respects he was treated worse than any servant of the Baronet's. Sir Bale swore at him, and cursed him; laid the blame of everything that went wrong in house, stable, or field upon his shoulders; railed at him, and used him, as people said, worse than a dog.

Why did Feltram endure this contumelious life? What could he do but endure it? was the answer. What was the power that induced strong soldiers to put off their jackets and shirts, and present their hands to be tied up, and tortured for hours, it might be, under the scourge, with an air of ready volition? The moral coercion of despair; the result of an unconscious calculation of chances which satisfies them that it is ultimately better to do all that, bad as it is, than try the alternative. These unconscious calculations are going on every day with each of us, and the results embody themselves in our lives; and no one knows that there has been a process and a balance struck, and that what they see, and very likely blame, is by the fiat of an invisible but quite irresistible power.

A man of spirit would rather break stones on the highway than eat that bitter bread, was the burden of every man's song on Feltram's bondage. But he was not so sure that even the stone-breaker's employment was open to him, or that he could break stones well enough to retain it on a fair trial. And he had other ideas of providing for himself, and a different alternative in his mind.

Goodnatured Mrs. Julaper, the old housekeeper at Mardykes Hall, was kind to Feltram, as to all others who lay in her way and were in affliction.

She was one of those good women whom Nature provides to receive the burden of other people's secrets, as the reeds did long ago, only that no chance wind could steal them away, and send them singing into strange ears.

You may still see her snuggery in Mardykes Hall, though the housekeeper's room is now in a different part of the house.

Mrs. Julaper's room was in the oldest quarter of that old house. It was wainscoted, in black panels, up to the ceiling, which was stuccoed over in the fanciful diagrams of James the First's time. Several dingy portraits, banished from time to time from other statelier rooms, found a temporary abode in this quiet spot, where they had come finally to settle and drop out of remembrance. There is a lady in white satin and a ruff; a gentleman whose legs have faded out of view, with a peaked beard, and a hawk on his wrist. There is another in a black periwig lost in the dark background, and with a steel cuirass, the gleam of which out of the darkness strikes the eye, and a scarf is dimly discoverable across it. This is that foolish Sir Guy Mardykes, who crossed the Border and joined Dundee, and was shot through the temple at Killiecrankie and whom more prudent and whiggish scions of the Mardykes family removed forthwith from his place in the Hall, and found a retirement here, from which he has not since emerged.

At the far end of this snug room is a second door, on opening which you find yourself looking down upon the great kitchen, with a little balcony before you, from which the housekeeper used to issue her commands to the cook, and exercise a sovereign supervision.

There is a shelf on which Mrs Julaper had her Bible, her *Whole Duty of Man*, and her *Pilgrim's Progress*; and, in a file beside them, her books of housewifery, and among them volumes of MS. recipes, cookery-books, and some too on surgery and medicine, as practised by the Ladies Bountiful of the Elizabethan age, for which an antiquarian would nowadays give an eye or a hand.

Gentle half-foolish Philip Feltram would tell the story of his wrongs, and weep and wish he was dead; and kind Mrs. Julaper, who remembered him a child, would comfort him with cold pie and cherry-brandy, or a cup of coffee, or some little dainty.

"O, ma'am, I'm tired of my life. What's the good of living, if a poor devil is never let alone, and called worse names than a dog? Would not it be better, Mrs. Julaper, to be dead? Wouldn't it be better, ma'am? I think so; I think it night and day. I'm always thinking the same thing. I don't care, I'll just tell him what I think, and have it off my mind. I'll tell him I can't live and bear it longer."

"There now, don't you be frettin'; but just sip this, and remember you're not to judge a friend by a wry word. He does not mean it, not he. They all had a rough side to their tongue now and again; but no one minded that. I don't, nor you needn't, no more than other folk; for the tongue, be it never so bitin', it can't draw blood, mind ye, and hard words break no bones; and I'll make a cup o' tea — ye like a cup o' tea — and we'll take a cup together, and ye'll chirp up a bit, and see how pleasant and ruddy the sun shines on the lake this evening."

She was patting him gently on the shoulder, as she stood slim and stiff in her dark silk by his chair, and her rosy little face smiled down on him. She was, for an old woman, wonderfully pretty still. What a delicate skin she must have had! The wrinkles were etched upon it with so fine a needle, you scarcely could see them a little way off; and as she smiled her cheeks looked fresh and smooth as two ruddy little apples.

"Look out, I say," and she nodded towards the window, deep set in the thick wall. "See how bright and soft everything looks in that pleasant light; *that's* better, child, than the finest picture man's hand ever painted yet, and God gives it us for nothing; and how pretty Snakes Island glows up in that light!"

The dejected man, hardly raising his head, followed with his eyes the glance of the old woman, and looked mournfully through the window.

"That island troubles me, Mrs. Julaper."

"Everything troubles you, my poor goosecap. I'll pull your lug for ye, child, if ye be so dowly;" and with a mimic pluck the goodnatured old housekeeper pinched his ear and laughed.

"I'll go to the still-room now, where the water's boiling, and I'll make a cup of tea; and if I find ye so dow when I come back, I'll throw it all out o' the window, mind."

It was indeed a beautiful picture that Feltram saw in its deep frame of old masonry. The near part of the lake was flushed all over with the low western light; the more distant waters lay dark in the shadow of the mountains; and against this shadow of purple the rocks on Snakes Island, illuminated by the setting sun, started into sharp clear yellow.

But this beautiful view had no charm — at least, none powerful enough to master the latent horror associated with its prettiest feature — for the weak and dismal man who was looking at it; and being now alone, he rose and leant on the window, and looked out, and then with a kind of shudder clutching his hands together, and walking distractedly about the room.

Without his perceiving, while his back was turned, the housekeeper came back; and seeing him walking in this distracted way, she thought to herself, as he leant again upon the window:

"Well, it *is* a burning shame to worrit any poor soul into that state. Sir Bale was always down on someone or something, man or beast; there always was something he hated, and could never let alone. It was not pretty; it was his nature. Happen, poor fellow, he could not help it; but so it was."

A maid came in and set the teathings down; and Mrs. Julaper drew her sad guest over by the arm, and made him sit down, and she said: "What has a man to do, frettin' in that way? By Jen, I'm ashamed o' ye, Master Philip! Ye like three lumps o' sugar, I think, and — look cheerful, ye must! — a good deal o' cream?"

"You're so kind, Mrs. Julaper, you're so cheery. I feel quite comfortable after awhile when I'm with you; I feel quite happy," and he began to cry.

She understood him very well by this time and took no notice, but went on chatting gaily, and made his tea as he liked it; and he dried his tears hastily, thinking she had not observed.

So the clouds began to clear. This innocent fellow liked nothing better than a cup of tea and a chat with gentle and cheery old Mrs. Julaper, and a talk in which the shadowy old times which he remembered as a child emerged into sunlight and lived again.

When he began to feel better, drawn into the kindly old times by the tinkle of that harmless old woman's tongue, he said:

"I sometimes think I would not so much mind — I should not care so much — if my spirits were not so depressed, and I so agitated. I suppose I am not quite well."

"Well, tell me what's wrong, child, and it's odd but I have a recipe on the shelf there that will do you good."

“It is not a matter of that sort I mean; though I’d rather have you than any doctor, if I needed medicine, to prescribe for me.”

Mrs. Julaper smiled in spite of herself, well pleased; for her skill in pharmacy was a point on which the good lady prided herself, and was open to flattery, which, without intending it, the simple fellow administered.

“No, I’m well enough; I can’t say I ever was better. It is only, ma’am, that I have such dreams — you have no idea.”

“There are dreams and dreams, my dear: there’s some signifies no more than the babble of the lake down there on the pebbles, and there’s others that has a meaning; there’s dreams that is but vanity, and there’s dreams that is good, and dreams that is bad. Lady Mardykes — heavens be her bed this day! that’s his grandmother I mean — was very sharp for reading dreams. Take another cup of tea. Dear me! what a noise the crows keep aboon our heads, going home! and how high they wing it! — that’s a sure sign of fine weather. An’ what do you dream about? Tell me your dream, and I may show you it’s a good one, after all. For many a dream is ugly to see and ugly to tell, and a good dream, with a happy meaning, for all that.”

CHAPTER VI

The Intruder

"Well, Mrs. Julaper, dreams I've dreamed like other people, old and young; but this, ma'am, has taken a fast hold of me," said Mr. Feltram dejectedly, leaning back in his chair and looking down with his hands in his pockets. "I think, Mrs. Julaper, it is getting into me. I think it's like possession."

"Possession, child! what do you mean?"

"I think there is something trying to influence me. Perhaps it is the way fellows go mad; but it won't let me alone. I've seen it three times, think of that!"

"Well, dear, and what *have* ye seen?" she asked, with an uneasy cheerfulness, smiling, with eyes fixed steadily upon him; for the idea of a madman — even gentle Philip in that state — was not quieting.

"Do you remember the picture, full-length, that had no frame — the lady in the white-satin saque — she was beautiful, *funeste*," he added, talking more to himself; and then more distinctly to Mrs. Julaper again — — "in the white-satin saque; and with the little mob cap and blue ribbons to it, and a bouquet in her fingers; that was — that — you know who she was?"

"That was your great-grandmother, my dear," said Mrs. Julaper, lowering her eyes. "It was a dreadful pity it was spoiled. The boys in the pantry had it for a year there on the table for a tray, to wash the glasses on and the like. It was a shame; that was the prettiest picture in the house, with the gentlest, rosiest face."

"It ain't so gentle or rosy now, I can tell you," said Philip. "As fixed as marble; with thin lips, and a curve at the nostril. Do you remember the woman that was found dead in the clough, when I was a boy, that the gipsies murdered, it was thought, — a cruel-looking woman?"

"Agoy! Master Philip, dear! ye would not name that terrible-looking creature with the pretty, fresh, kindly face!"

"Faces change, you see; no matter what she's like; it's her talk that frightens me. She wants to make use of me; and, you see, it is like getting a share in my mind, and a voice in my thoughts, and a command over me gradually; and it is just one idea, as straight as a line of light across the lake — see what she's come to. O Lord, help me!"

"Well, now, don't you be talkin' like that. It is just a little bit dowly and troubled, because the master says a wry word now and then; and so ye let your spirits go down, don't ye see, and all sorts o' fancies comes into your head."

"There's no fancy in my head," he said with a quick look of suspicion; "only you asked me what I dreamed. I don't care if all the world knew. I dreamed I went down a flight of steps under the lake, and got a message. There are no steps near Snakes Island, we all know that," and he laughed chillily. "I'm out of spirits, as you say; and — and — O dear! I wish — Mrs. Julaper — I wish I was in my coffin, and quiet."

"Now that's very wrong of you, Master Philip; you should think of all the blessings you have, and not be makin' mountains o' molehills; and those little bits o' temper Sir Bale shows, why, no one minds 'em — that is, to take 'em to heart like you do, don't ye see?"

"I daresay; I suppose, Mrs. Julaper, you are right. I'm unreasonable often, I know," said gentle Philip Feltram. "I daresay I make too much of it; I'll try. I'm his secretary, and I know I'm not so bright as he is, and it is natural he should sometimes be a little impatient; I ought to be more reasonable, I'm sure. It is all that thing that has been disturbing me — I mean fretting, and, I think, I'm not quite well; and — and letting myself think too much of vexations. It's my own fault, I'm sure, Mrs. Julaper; and I know I'm to blame."

"That's quite right, that's spoken like a wise lad; only I don't say you're to blame, nor no one; for folk can't help frettin' sometimes, no more than they can help a headache — none but a mafflin would say that — and I'll not deny but he has dowly ways when the fit's on him, and he frumps us all round, if such be his humour. But who is there hasn't his faults? We must bear and forbear, and take what we get and be cheerful. So chirp up, my lad; Philip, didn't I often ring the a'd rhyme in your ear long ago?

"Be always as merry as ever you can,
For no one delights in a sorrowful man.

“So don’t ye be gettin’ up off your chair like that, and tramping about the room wi’ your hands in your pockets, looking out o’ this window, and staring out o’ that, and sighing and crying, and looking so black-ox-trodden, ‘twould break a body’s heart to see you. Ye must be cheery; and happen you’re hungry, and don’t know it. I’ll tell the cook to grill a hot bit for ye.”

“But I’m not hungry, Mrs. Julaper. How kind you are! dear me, Mrs. Julaper, I’m not worthy of it; I don’t deserve half your kindness. I’d have been heartbroken long ago, but for you.”

“And I’ll make a sup of something hot for you; you’ll take a rummer-glass of punch — you must.”

“But I like the tea better; I do, indeed, Mrs. Julaper.”

“Tea is no drink for a man when his heart’s down. It should be something with a leg in it, lad; something hot that will warm your courage for ye, and set your blood a-dancing, and make ye talk brave and merry; and will you have a bit of a broil first? No? Well then, you’ll have a drop o’ punch? — ye sha’n’t say no.”

And so, all resistance overpowered, the consolation of Philip Feltram proceeded.

A gentler spirit than poor Feltram, a more goodnatured soul than the old housekeeper, were nowhere among the children of earth.

Philip Feltram, who was reserved enough elsewhere, used to come into her room and cry, and take her by both hands piteously, standing before her and looking down in her face, while tears ran deviously down his cheeks.

“Did you ever know such a case? was there ever a fellow like *me*? did you ever *know* such a thing? You know what I am, Mrs. Julaper, and who I am. They call me Feltram; but Sir Bale knows as well as I that my true name is not that. I’m Philip Mardykes; and another fellow would make a row about it, and claim his name and his rights, as she is always croaking in my ear I ought. But you know that is not reasonable. My grandmother was married; she was the true Lady Mardykes; *think* what it was to see a woman like that turned out of doors, and her children robbed of their name. O, ma’am, you *can’t* think it; unless you were me, you couldn’t — you couldn’t — you couldn’t!”

“Come, come, Master Philip, don’t you be taking on so; and ye mustn’t be talking like that, d’ye mind? You know he wouldn’t stand that; and it’s an old story now, and there’s naught can be proved concerning it; and what

I think is this — I wouldn’t wonder the poor lady was beguiled. But anyhow she surely thought she was his lawful wife; and though the law may hev found a flaw somewhere — and I take it ’twas so — yet sure I am she was an honourable lady. But where’s the use of stirring that old sorrow? or how can ye prove aught? and the dead hold their peace, you know; dead mice, they say, feels no cold; and dead folks are past fooling. So don’t you talk like that; for stone walls have ears, and ye might say that ye couldn’t *un*say; and death’s day is doom’s day. So leave all in the keeping of God; and, above all, never lift hand when ye can’t strike.”

“Lift my hand! O, Mrs. Julaper, you couldn’t think that; you little know me; I did not mean that; I never dreamed of hurting Sir Bale. Good heavens! Mrs. Julaper, you couldn’t think that! It all comes of my poor impatient temper, and complaining as I do, and my misery; but O, Mrs. Julaper, you could not think I ever meant to trouble him by law, or any other annoyance! I’d like to see a stain removed from my family, and my name restored; but to touch his property, O, no! — O, no! that never entered my mind, by heaven! that never entered my mind, Mrs. Julaper. I’m not cruel; I’m not rapacious; I don’t care for money; don’t you know that, Mrs. Julaper? O, surely you won’t think me capable of attacking the man whose bread I have eaten so long! I never dreamed of it; I should hate myself. Tell me you don’t believe it; O, Mrs. Julaper, say you don’t!”

And the gentle feeble creature burst into tears and good Mrs. Julaper comforted him with kind words; and he said,

“Thank you, ma’am; thank you. God knows I would not hurt Bale, nor give him one uneasy hour. It is only this: that I’m — I’m so miserable; and I’m only casting in my mind where to turn to, and what to do. So little a thing would be enough, and then I shall leave Mardykes. I’ll go; not in any anger, Mrs. Julaper — don’t think that; but I can’t stay, I must be gone.”

“Well, now, there’s nothing yet, Master Philip, to fret you like that. You should not be talking so wild-like. Master Bale has his sharp word and his short temper now and again; but I’m sure he likes you. If he didn’t, he’d a-said so to me long ago. I’m sure he likes you well.”

“Hollo! I say, who’s there? Where the devil’s Mr. Feltram?” called the voice of the baronet, at a fierce pitch, along the passage.

“La! Mr. Feltram, it’s him! Ye’d better run to him,” whispered Mrs. Julaper.

“D — n me! does nobody hear? Mrs. Julaper! Hollo! ho! house, there! ho! D — n me, will nobody answer?”

And Sir Bale began to slap the wainscot fast and furiously with his walking-cane with a clatter like a harlequin’s lath in a pantomime.

Mrs. Julaper, a little paler than usual, opened her door, and stood with the handle in her hand, making a little curtsey, enframed in the door-case; and Sir Bale, being in a fume, when he saw her, ceased whacking the panels of the corridor, and stamped on the floor, crying,

“Upon my soul, ma’am, I’m glad to see you! Perhaps you can tell me where Feltram is?”

“He is in my room, Sir Bale. Shall I tell him you want him, please?”

“Never mind; thanks,” said the Baronet. “I’ve a tongue in my head;” marching down the passage to the housekeeper’s room, with his cane clutched hard, glaring savagely, and with his teeth fast set, like a fellow advancing to beat a vicious horse that has chafed his temper.

CHAPTER VII

The Bank Note

Sir Bale brushed by the housekeeper as he strode into her sanctuary, and there found Philip Feltram awaiting him dejectedly, but with no signs of agitation.

If one were to judge by the appearance the master of Mardykes presented, very grave surmises as to impending violence would have suggested themselves; but though he clutched his cane so hard that it quivered in his grasp, he had no notion of committing the outrage of a blow. The Baronet was unusually angry notwithstanding, and stopping short about three steps away, addressed Feltram with a pale face and gleaming eyes. It was quite plain that there was something very exciting upon his mind.

"I've been looking for you, Mr. Feltram; I want a word or two, if you have done your — your — whatever it is." He whisked the point of his stick towards the modest tea-tray. "I should like five minutes in the library."

The Baronet was all this time eyeing Feltram with a hard suspicious gaze, as if he expected to read in his face the shrinkings and trepidations of guilt; and then turning suddenly on his heel he led the way to his library — a good long march, with a good many turnings. He walked very fast, and was not long in getting there. And as Sir Bale reached the hearth, on which was smouldering a great log of wood, and turned about suddenly, facing the door, Philip Feltram entered.

The Baronet looked oddly and stern — so oddly, it seemed to Feltram, that he could not take his eyes off him, and returned his grim and somewhat embarrassed gaze with a stare of alarm and speculation.

And so doing, his step was shortened, and grew slow and slower, and came quite to a stop before he had got far from the door — a wide stretch of that wide floor still intervening between him and Sir Bale, who stood upon the hearthrug, with his heels together and his back to the fire, cane in hand, like a drill-sergeant, facing him.

"Shut that door, please; that will do; come nearer now. I don't want to bawl what I have to say. Now listen."

The Baronet cleared his voice and paused, with his eyes upon Feltram.

"It is only two or three days ago," said he, "that you said you wished you had a hundred pounds. Am I right?"

"Yes; I think so."

"*Think*? you know it, sir, devilish well. You said that you wished to get away. I have nothing particular to say against that, more especially now. Do you understand what I say?"

"Understand, Sir Bale? I do, sir — quite."

"I daresay quite" he repeated with an angry sneer. "Here, sir, is an odd coincidence: you want a hundred pounds, and you can't earn it, and you can't borrow it — there's another way, it seems — but I have got it — a Bank-of-England note of £100 — locked up in that desk;" and he poked the end of his cane against the brass lock of it viciously. "There it is, and there are the papers you work at; and there are two keys — I've got one and you have the other — and devil another key in or out of the house has any one living. Well, do you begin to see? Don't mind. I don't want any d —— d lying about it."

Feltram was indeed beginning to see that he was suspected of something very bad, but exactly what, he was not yet sure; and being a man of that unhappy temperament which shrinks from suspicion, as others do from detection, he looked very much put out indeed.

"Ha, ha! I think we do begin to see," said Sir Bale savagely. "It's a bore, I know, troubling a fellow with a story that he knows before; but I'll make mine short. When I take my key, intending to send the note to pay the crown and quit-rents that you know — you — you — no matter — you know well enough must be paid, I open it so — and so — and look *there*, where I left it, for my note; and the note's gone — you understand, the note's *gone*!"

Here was a pause, during which, under the Baronet's hard insulting eye, poor Feltram winced, and cleared his voice, and essayed to speak, but said nothing.

"It's gone, and we know where. Now, Mr. Feltram, *I* did not steal that note, and no one but you and I have access to this desk. You wish to go away, and I have no objection to that — but d — n me if you take away that note with you; and you may as well produce it now and here, as hereafter in a worse place."

“O, my good heaven!” exclaimed poor Feltram at last. “I’m very ill.”

“So you are, of course. It takes a stiff emetic to get all that money off a fellow’s stomach; and it’s like parting with a tooth to give up a banknote. Of course you’re ill, but that’s no sign of innocence, and I’m no fool. You had better give the thing up quietly.”

“May my Maker strike me — — “

“So He will, you d —— d rascal, if there’s justice in heaven, unless you produce the money. I don’t want to hang you. I’m willing to let you off if you’ll let me, but I’m cursed if I let my note off along with you; and unless you give it up forthwith, I’ll get a warrant and have you searched, pockets, bag, and baggage.”

“Lord! am I awake?” exclaimed Philip Feltram.

“Wide awake, and so am I,” replied Sir Bale. “You don’t happen to have got it about you?”

“God forbid, sir! O, Sir — O, Sir Bale — why, Bale, *Bale*, it’s impossible! You *can’t* believe it. When did I ever wrong you? You know me since I was not higher than the table, and — and — — “

He burst into tears.

“Stop your snivelling, sir, and give up the note. You know devilish well I can’t spare it; and I won’t spare you if you put me to it. I’ve said my say.”

Sir Bale signed towards the door; and like a somnambulist, with dilated gaze and pale as death, Philip Feltram, at his wit’s end, went out of the room. It was not till he had again reached the housekeeper’s door that he recollected in what direction he was going. His shut hand was pressed with all his force to his heart, and the first breath he was conscious of was a deep wild sob or two that quivered from his heart as he looked from the lobby-window upon a landscape which he did not see.

All he had ever suffered before was mild in comparison with this dire paroxysm. Now, for the first time, was he made acquainted with his real capacity for pain, and how near he might be to madness and yet retain intellect enough to weigh every scruple, and calculate every chance and consequence, in his torture.

Sir Bale, in the meantime, had walked out a little more excited than he would have allowed. He was still convinced that Feltram had stolen the note, but not quite so certain as he had been. There were things in his manner that confirmed, and others that perplexed, Sir Bale.

The Baronet stood upon the margin of the lake, almost under the evening shadow of the house, looking towards Snakes Island. There were two things about Mardykes he specially disliked.

One was Philip Feltram, who, right or wrong, he fancied knew more than was pleasant of his past life.

The other was the lake. It was a beautiful piece of water, his eye, educated at least in the excellences of landscape-painting, acknowledged. But although he could pull a good oar, and liked other lakes, to this particular sheet of water there lurked within him an insurmountable antipathy. It was engendered by a variety of associations.

There is a faculty in man that will acknowledge the unseen. He may scout and scare religion from him; but if he does, superstition perches near. His boding was made-up of omens, dreams, and such stuff as he most affected to despise, and there fluttered at his heart a presentiment and disgust.

His foot was on the gunwale of the boat, that was chained to its ring at the margin; but he would not have crossed that water in it for any reason that man could urge.

What was the mischief that sooner or later was to befall him from that lake, he could not define; but that some fatal danger lurked there, was the one idea concerning it that had possession of his fancy.

He was now looking along its still waters, towards the copse and rocks of Snakes Island, thinking of Philip Feltram; and the yellow level sunbeams touched his dark features, that bore a saturnine resemblance to those of Charles II, and marked sharply their firm grim lines, and left his deep-set eyes in shadow.

Who has the happy gift to seize the present, as a child does, and live in it? Who is not often looking far off for his happiness, as Sidney Smith says, like a man looking for his hat when it is upon his head? Sir Bale was brooding over his double hatred, of Feltram and of the lake. It would have been better had he struck down the raven that croaked upon his shoulder, and listened to the harmless birds that were whistling all round among the branches in the golden sunset.

CHAPTER VIII

Feltram's Plan

This horror of the beautiful lake, which other people thought so lovely, was, in that mind which affected to scoff at the unseen, a distinct creation of downright superstition.

The nursery tales which had scared him in his childhood were founded on the tragedy of Snakes Island, and haunted him with an unavowed persistence still. Strange dreams untold had visited him, and a German conjuror, who had made some strangely successful vaticinations, had told him that his worst enemy would come up to him from a lake. He had heard very nearly the same thing from a fortuneteller in France; and once at Lucerne, when he was waiting alone in his room for the hour at which he had appointed to go upon the lake, all being quiet, there came to the window, which was open, a sunburnt, lean, wicked face. Its ragged owner leaned his arm on the window-frame, and with his head in the room, said in his patois, "Ho! waiting are you? You'll have enough of the lake one day. Don't you mind watching; they'll send when you're wanted;" and twisting his yellow face into a malicious distortion, he went on.

This thing had occurred so suddenly, and chimed-in so oddly with his thoughts, which were at that moment at distant Mardykes and the haunted lake, that it disconcerted him. He laughed, he looked out of the window. He would have given that fellow money to tell him why he said that. But there was no good in looking for the scamp; he was gone.

A memory not preoccupied with that lake and its omens, and a presentiment about himself, would not have noted such things. But *his* mind they touched indelibly; and he was ashamed of his childish slavery, but could not help it.

The foundation of all this had been laid in the nursery, in the winter's tales told by its fireside, and which seized upon his fancy and his fears with a strange congeniality.

There is a large bedroom at Mardykes Hall, which tradition assigns to the lady who had perished tragically in the lake. Mrs. Julaper was sure of it; for her aunt, who died a very old woman twenty years before, remembered the time of the lady's death, and when she grew to woman's estate had opportunity in abundance; for the old people who surrounded her could remember forty years farther back, and tell everything connected with the old house in beautiful Miss Feltram's time.

This large oldfashioned room, commanding a view of Snakes Island, the fells, and the lake — somewhat vast and gloomy, and furnished in a stately old fashion — was said to be haunted, especially when the wind blew from the direction of Golden Friars, the point from which it blew on the night of her death in the lake; or when the sky was overcast, and thunder rolled among the lofty fells, and lightning gleamed on the wide sheet of water.

It was on a night like this that a lady visitor, who long after that event occupied, in entire ignorance of its supernatural character, that large room; and being herself a lady of a picturesque turn, and loving the grander melodrama of Nature, bid her maid leave the shutters open, and watched the splendid effects from her bed, until, the storm being still distant, she fell asleep.

It was travelling slowly across the lake, and it was the deep-mouthed clangour of its near approach that startled her, at dead of night, from her slumber, to witness the same phenomena in the tremendous loudness and brilliancy of their near approach.

At this magnificent spectacle she was looking with the awful ecstasy of an observer in whom the sense of danger is subordinated to that of the sublime, when she saw suddenly at the window a woman, whose long hair and dress seemed drenched with water. She was gazing in with a look of terror, and was shaking the sash of the window with vehemence. Having stood there for a few seconds, and before the lady, who beheld all this from her bed, could make up her mind what to do, the storm-beaten figure, wringing her hands, seemed to throw herself backward, and was gone.

Possessed with the idea that she had seen some poor woman overtaken in the storm, who, failing to procure admission there, had gone round to some of the many doors of the mansion, and obtained an entry there, she again fell asleep.

It was not till the morning, when she went to her window to look out upon the now tranquil scene, that she discovered what, being a stranger to the house, she had quite forgotten, that this room was at a great height — some thirty feet — from the ground.

Another story was that of good old Mr. Randal Rymer, who was often a visitor at the house in the late Lady Mardykes' day. In his youth he had been a campaigner; and now that he was a preacher he maintained his hardy habits, and always slept, summer and winter, with a bit of his window up. Being in that room in his bed, and after a short sleep lying awake, the moon shining softly through the window, there passed by that aperture into the room a figure dressed, it seemed to him, in gray that was nearly white. It passed straight to the hearth, where was an expiring wood fire; and cowering over it with outstretched hands, it appeared to be gathering what little heat was to be had. Mr. Rymer, amazed and awestruck, made a movement in his bed; and the figure looked round, with large eyes that in the moonlight looked like melting snow, and stretching its long arms up the chimney, they and the figure itself seemed to blend with the smoke, and so pass up and away.

Sir Bale, I have said, did not like Feltram. His father, Sir William, had left a letter creating a trust, it was said, in favour of Philip Feltram. The document had been found with the will, addressed to Sir Bale in the form of a letter.

"That is mine," said the Baronet, when it dropped out of the will; and he slipped it into his pocket, and no one ever saw it after.

But Mr. Charles Twyne, the attorney of Golden Friars, whenever he got drunk, which was pretty often, used to tell his friends with a grave wink that he knew a thing or two about that letter. It gave Philip Feltram two hundred a-year, charged on Harfax. It was only a direction. It made Sir Bale a trustee, however; and having made away with the "letter," the Baronet had been robbing Philip Feltram ever since.

Old Twyne was cautious, even in his cups, in his choice of an audience, and was a little enigmatical in his revelations. For he was afraid of Sir Bale, though he hated him for employing a lawyer who lived seven miles away, and was a rival. So people were not quite sure whether Mr. Twyne was telling lies or truth, and the principal fact that corroborated his story was Sir Bale's manifest hatred of his secretary. In fact, Sir Bale's retaining him in his house, detesting him as he seemed to do, was not easily to be accounted for, except on the principle of a tacit compromise — a miserable compensation for having robbed him of his rights.

The battle about the banknote proceeded. Sir Bale certainly had doubts, and vacillated; for moral evidence made powerfully in favour of poor Feltram, though the evidence of circumstance made as powerfully against him. But Sir Bale admitted suspicion easily, and in weighing probabilities would count a virtue very lightly against temptation and opportunity; and whatever his doubts might sometimes be, he resisted and quenched them, and never let that ungrateful scoundrel Philip Feltram so much as suspect their existence.

For two days Sir Bale had not spoken to Feltram. He passed by on stair and passage, carrying his head high, and with a thundrous countenance, rolling conclusions and revenges in his soul.

Poor Feltram all this time existed in one long agony. He would have left Mardykes, were it not that he looked vaguely to some just power — to chance itself — against this hideous imputation. To go with this indictment ringing in his ears, would amount to a confession and flight.

Mrs. Julaper consoled him with might and main. She was a sympathetic and trusting spirit, and knew poor Philip Feltram, in her simplicity, better than the shrewdest profligate on earth could have known him. She cried with him in his misery. She was fired with indignation by these suspicions, and still more at what followed.

Sir Bale showed no signs of relenting. It might have been that he was rather glad of so unexceptionable an opportunity of getting rid of Feltram, who, people thought, knew something which it galled the Baronet's pride that he should know.

The Baronet had another shorter and sterner interview with Feltram in his study. The result was, that unless he restored the missing note before ten o'clock next morning, he should leave Mardykes.

To leave Mardykes was no more than Philip Feltram, feeble as he was of will, had already resolved. But what was to become of him? He did not very much care, if he could find any calling, however humble, that would just give him bread.

There was an old fellow and his wife (an ancient dame,) who lived at the other side of the lake, on the old territories of the Feltrams, and who, from some tradition of loyalty, perhaps, were fond of poor Philip Feltram. They lived somewhat high up on the fells — about as high as trees would grow — and those which were clumped about their rude dwelling were nearly the last you passed in your ascent of the mountain. These people had a multitude of sheep and goats, and lived in their airy solitude a pastoral and simple life, and were childless. Philip Feltram was hardy and active, having passed his early days among that arduous scenery. Cold and rain did not trouble him; and these people being wealthy in their way, and loving him, would be glad to find him employment of that desultory pastoral kind which would best suit him.

This vague idea was the only thing resembling a plan in his mind.

When Philip Feltram came to Mrs. Julaper's room, and told her that he had made up his mind to leave the house forthwith — to cross the lake to the Cloostedd side in Tom Marlin's boat, and then to make his way up the hill alone to Trebeck's lonely farmstead, Mrs. Julaper was overwhelmed.

"Ye'll do no such thing tonight, anyhow. You're not to go like that. Ye'll come into the small room here, where he can't follow; and we'll sit down and talk it over a bit, and ye'll find 'twill all come straight; and this will be no night, anyhow, for such a march. Why, man,'twould take an hour and more to cross the lake, and then a long uphill walk before ye could reach Trebeck's place; and if the night should fall while you were still on the mountain, ye might lose your life among the rocks. It can't be 'tis come to that yet; and the call was in the air, I'm told, all yesterday, and distant thunder to-day, travelling this way over Blarwyn Fells; and 'twill be a night no one will be out, much less on the mountain side."

CHAPTER IX

The Crazy Parson

Mrs. Julaper had grown weatherwise, living for so long among this noble and solitary scenery, where people must observe Nature or else nothing — where signs of coming storm or change are almost local, and record themselves on particular cliffs and mountain-peaks, or in the mists, or in mirrored tints of the familiar lake, and are easily learned or remembered. At all events, her presage proved too true.

The sun had set an hour and more. It was dark; and an awful thunderstorm, whose march, like the distant reverberations of an invading army, had been faintly heard beyond the barriers of Blarwyn Fells throughout the afternoon, was near them now, and had burst in deep-mouthed battle among the ravines at the other side, and over the broad lake, that glared like a sheet of burnished steel under its flashes of dazzling blue. Wild and fitful blasts sweeping down the hollows and cloughs of the fells of Golden Friars agitated the lake, and bent the trees low, and whirled away their sere leaves in melancholy drift in their tremendous gusts. And from the window, looking on a scene enveloped in more than the darkness of the night, you saw in the pulsations of the lightning, before "the speedy gleams the darkness swallowed," the tossing trees and the flying foam and eddies on the lake.

In the midst of the hurlyburly, a loud and long knocking came at the hall-door of Mardykes. How long it had lasted before a chance lull made it audible I do not know.

There was nothing picturesquely poor, any more than there were evidences of wealth, anywhere in Sir Bale Mardykes' household. He had no lack of servants, but they were of an inexpensive and homely sort; and the hall-door being opened by the son of an old tenant on the estate — the tempest beating on the other side of the house, and comparative shelter under the gables at the front — he saw standing before him, in the agitated air, a thin old man, who muttering, it might be, a benediction, stepped into the hall, and displayed long silver tresses, just as the storm had blown them, ascetic and eager features, and a pair of large light eyes that wandered wildly. He was dressed in threadbare black; a pair of long leather gaiters, buckled high above his knee, protecting his thin shanks through moss and pool; and the singularity of his appearance was heightened by a wide-leafed felt hat, over which he had tied his handkerchief, so as to bring the leaf of it over his ears, and to secure it from being whirled from his head by the storm.

This odd and storm-beaten figure — tall, and a little stooping, as well as thin — was not unknown to the servant, who saluted him with something of fear as well as of respect as he bid him reverently welcome, and asked him to come in and sit by the fire.

"Get you to your master, and tell him I have a message to him from one he has not seen for two-and-forty years."

As the old man, with his harsh old voice, thus spoke, he unknotted his handkerchief and bet the rain-drops from his hat upon his knee.

The servant knocked at the library-door, where he found Sir Bale.

"Well, what's the matter?" cried Sir Bale sharply, from his chair before the fire, with angry eyes looking over his shoulder.

"Here's 't sir cumman, Sir Bale," he answered.

"Sir," or "the Sir," is still used as the clergyman's title in the Northumbrian counties.

"What sir?"

"Sir Hugh Creswell, if you please, Sir Bale."

"Ho! — mad Creswell? — O, the crazy parson. Well, tell Mrs. Julaper to let him have some supper — and — and to let him have a bed in some suitable place. That's what he wants. These mad fellows know what they are about."

"No, Sir Bale Mardykes, that is not what he wants," said the loud wild voice of the daft sir over the servant's shoulder. "Often has Mardykes Hall given me share of its cheer and its shelter and the warmth of its fire; and I bless the house that has been an inn to the wayfarer of the Lord. But tonight I go up the lake to Pindar's Bield, three miles on; and there I rest and refresh — not here."

"And why not *here*, Mr. Creswell?" asked the Baronet; for about this crazy old man, who preached in the fields, and appeared and disappeared so suddenly in the orbit of his wide and unknown perambulations of those northern and border counties, there was that sort of superstitious feeling which attaches to the mysterious and the good — an idea that it was lucky to harbour and dangerous to offend him. No one knew whence he came or whither he went. Once in a year, perhaps, he might appear at a lonely farmstead door among the fells, salute the house, enter, and be gone in the morning. His life was austere; his piety enthusiastic, severe, and tinged with the craze which inspired among the rustic population a sort of awe.

"I'll not sleep at Mardykes tonight; neither will I eat, nor drink, nor sit me down — no, nor so much as stretch my hands to the fire. As the man of God came out of Judah to king Jeroboam, so come I to you, sent by a vision, to bear a warning; and as he said, 'If thou wilt give me half thy house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place,' so also say I."

"Do as you please," said Sir Bale, a little sulkily. "Say your say; and you are welcome to stay or go, if go you will on so mad a night as this."

"Leave us," said Creswell, beckoning the servant back with his thin hands; "what I have to say is to your master."

The servant went, in obedience to a gesture from Sir Bale, and shut the door.

The old man drew nearer to the Baronet, and lowering his loud stern voice a little, and interrupting his discourse from time to time, to allow the near thunder-peals to subside, he said,

"Answer me, Sir Bale — what is this that has chanced between you and Philip Feltram?"

The Baronet, under the influence of that blunt and peremptory demand, told him shortly and sternly enough.

"And of all these facts you are sure, else ye would not blast your early companion and kinsman with the name of thief?"

"I *am* sure," said Sir Bale grimly.

"Unlock that cabinet," said the old man with the long white locks.

"I've no objection," said Sir Bale; and he did unlock an old oak cabinet that stood, carved in high relief with strange figures and gothic grotesques, against the wall, opposite the fireplace. On opening it there were displayed a system of little drawers and pigeon-holes such as we see in more modern escritoires.

“Open that drawer with the red mark of a seal upon it,” continued Hugh Creswell, pointing to it with his lank finger.

Sir Bale did so; and to his momentary amazement, and even consternation, there lay the missing note, which now, with one of those sudden caprices of memory which depend on the laws of suggestion and association, he remembered having placed there with his own hand.

“That is it,” said old Creswell with a pallid smile, and fixing his wild eyes on the Baronet. The smile subsided into a frown, and said he: “Last night I slept near Haworth Moss; and your father came to me in a dream, and said: ‘My son Bale accuses Philip of having stolen a banknote from his desk. He forgets that he himself placed it in his cabinet. Come with me.’ I was, in the spirit, in this room; and he led me to this cabinet, which he opened; and in that drawer he showed me that note. ‘Go,’ said he, ‘and tell him to ask Philip Feltram’s pardon, else he will but go in weakness to return in power;’ and he said that which it is not lawful to repeat. My message is told. Now a word from myself,” he added sternly. “The dead, through my lips, has spoken, and under God’s thunder and lightning his words have found ye. Why so uppish wi’ Philip Feltram? See how ye threaped, and yet were wrong. He’s no tazzle — he’s no taggelt. Ask his pardon. Ye must change, or he will no taggelt. Go, in weakness, come in power: mark ye the words. ‘Twill make a peal that will be heard in toon and desert, in the swirls o’ the mountain, through pikes and valleys, and mak’ a waaly man o’ thee.”

The old man with these words, uttered in the broad northern dialect of his common speech, strode from the room and shut the door. In another minute he was forth into the storm, pursuing what remained of his long march to Pindar’s Bield.

“Upon my soul!” said Sir Bale, recovering from his sort of stun which the sudden and strange visit had left, “that’s a cool old fellow! Come to rate me and teach me my own business in my own house!” and he rapped out a fierce oath. “Change his mind or no, here he sha’n’t stay tonight — not an hour.”

Sir Bale was in the lobby in a moment, and thundered to his servants:

“I say, put that fool out of the door — put him out by the shoulder, and never let him put his foot inside it more!”

But the old man’s yea was yea, and his nay nay. He had quite meant what he said; and, as I related, was beyond the reach of the indignity of extrusion.

Sir Bale on his return shut his door as violently as if it were in the face of the old prophet.

"Ask Feltram's pardon, by Jove! For what? Why, any jury on earth would have hanged him on half the evidence; and I, like a fool, was going to let him off with his liberty and my hundred pound-note! Ask his pardon indeed!"

Still there were misgivings in his mind; a consciousness that he did owe explanation and apology to Feltram, and an insurmountable reluctance to undertake either. The old dislike — a contempt mingled with fear — not any fear of his malevolence, a fear only of his carelessness and folly; for, as I have said, Feltram knew many things, it was believed, of the Baronet's Continental and Asiatic life, and had even gently remonstrated with him upon the dangers into which he was running. A simple fellow like Philip Feltram is a dangerous depository of a secret. This Baronet was proud, too; and the mere possession of his secrets by Feltram was an involuntary insult, which Sir Bale could not forgive. He wished him far away; and except for the recovery of his banknote, which he could ill spare, he was sorry that this suspicion was cleared up.

The thunder and storm were unabated; it seemed indeed that they were growing wilder and more awful.

He opened the window-shutter and looked out upon that sublimest of scenes; and so intense and magnificent were its phenomena, that Sir Bale, for a while, was absorbed in this contemplation.

When he turned about, the sight of his £100 note, still between his finger and thumb, made him smile grimly.

The more he thought of it, the clearer it was that he could not leave matters exactly as they were. Well, what should he do? He would send for Mrs. Julaper, and tell her vaguely that he had changed his mind about Feltram, and that he might continue to stay at Mardykes Hall as usual. That would suffice. She could speak to Feltram.

He sent for her; and soon, in the lulls of the great uproar without, he could hear the jingle of Mrs. Julaper's keys and her light tread upon the lobby.

"Mrs. Julaper," said the Baronet, in his dry careless way, "Feltram may remain; your eloquence has prevailed. What have you been crying about?"

he asked, observing that his housekeeper's usually cheerful face was, in her own phrase, 'all cried.'

"It is too late, sir; he's gone."

"And when did he go?" asked Sir Bale, a little put out. "He chose an odd evening, didn't he? So like him!"

"He went about half an hour ago; and I'm very sorry, sir; it's a sore sight to see the poor lad going from the place he was reared in, and a hard thing, sir; and on such a night, above all."

"No one asked him to go tonight. Where is he gone to?"

"I don't know, I'm sure; he left my room, sir, when I was upstairs; and Janet saw him pass the window not ten minutes after Mr. Creswell left the house."

"Well, then, there's no good, Mrs. Julaper, in thinking more about it; he has settled the matter his own way; and as he so ordains it — amen, say I. Goodnight."

CHAPTER X

Adventure in Tom Marlin's Boat

Philip Feltram was liked very well — a gentle, kindly, and very timid creature, and, before he became so heartbroken, a fellow who liked a joke or a pleasant story, and could laugh heartily. Where will Sir Bale find so unresisting and respectful a butt and retainer? and whom will he bully now?

Something like remorse was worrying Sir Bale's heart a little; and the more he thought on the strange visit of Hugh Creswell that night, with its unexplained menace, the more uneasy he became.

The storm continued; and even to him there seemed something exaggerated and inhuman in the severity of his expulsion on such a night. It was his own doing, it was true; but would people believe that? and would he have thought of leaving Mardykes at all if it had not been for his kinsman's severity? Nay, was it not certain that if Sir Bale had done as Hugh Creswell had urged him, and sent for Feltram forthwith, and told him how all had been cleared up, and been a little friendly with him, he would have found him still in the house? — for he had not yet gone for ten minutes after Creswell's departure, and thus, all that was to follow might have been averted. But it was too late now, and Sir Bale would let the affair take its own course.

Below him, outside the window at which he stood ruminating, he heard voices mingling with the storm. He could with tolerable certainty perceive, looking into the obscurity, that there were three men passing close under it, carrying some very heavy burden among them.

He did not know what these three black figures in the obscurity were about. He saw them pass round the corner of the building toward the front, and in the lulls of the storm could hear their gruff voices talking.

We have all experienced what a presentiment is, and we all know with what an intuition the faculty of observation is sometimes heightened. It was such an apprehension as sometimes gives its peculiar horror to a dream — a sort of knowledge that what those people were about was in a dreadful way connected with his own fate.

He watched for a time, thinking that they might return; but they did not. He was in a state of uncomfortable suspense.

"If they want me, they won't have much trouble in finding me, nor any scruple, egad, in plaguing me; they never have."

Sir Bale returned to his letters, a score of which he was that night getting off his conscience — an arrear which would not have troubled him had he not ceased, for two or three days, altogether to employ Philip Feltram, who had been accustomed to take all that sort of drudgery off his hands.

All the time he was writing now he had a feeling that the shadows he had seen pass under his window were machinating some trouble for him, and an uneasy suspense made him lift his eyes now and then to the door, fancying sounds and footsteps; and after a resultless wait he would say to himself, "If any one is coming, why the devil don't he come?" and then he would apply himself again to his letters.

But on a sudden he heard good Mrs. Julaper's step trotting along the lobby, and the tiny ringing of her keys.

Here was news coming; and the Baronet stood up looking at the door, on which presently came a hurried rapping; and before he had answered, in the midst of a long thunderclap that suddenly broke, rattling over the house, the good woman opened the door in great agitation, and cried with a tremulous uplifting of her hands.

"O, Sir Bale! O, la, sir! here's poor dear Philip Feltram come home dead!"

Sir Bale stared at her sternly for some seconds.

"Gome, now, do be distinct," said Sir Bale; "what has happened?"

"He's lying on the sofer in the old still-room. You never saw — my God! — O, sir — what is life?"

"D — n it, can't you cry by-and-by, and tell me what's the matter now?"

"A bit o' fire there, as luck would have it; but what is hot or cold now? La, sir, they're all doin' what they can; he's drowned, sir, and Tom Warren is on the gallop down to Golden Friars for Doctor Torvey."

"*Is* he drowned, or is it only a ducking? Come, bring me to the place. Dead men don't usually want a fire, or consult doctors. I'll see for myself."

So Sir Bale Mardykes, pale and grim, accompanied by the light-footed Mrs. Julaper, strode along the passages, and was led by her into the old still-room, which had ceased to be used for its original purpose. All the servants in the house were now collected there, and three men also who lived by the margin of the lake; one of them thoroughly drenched, with rivulets of water still trickling from his sleeves, water along the wrinkles and pockets of his waistcoat and from the feet of his trousers, and pumping and oozing from his shoes, and streaming from his hair down the channels of his cheeks like a continuous rain of tears.

The people drew back a little as Sir Bale entered with a quick step and a sharp pallid frown on his face. There was a silence as he stooped over Philip Feltram, who lay on a low bed next the wall, dimly lighted by two or three candles here and there about the room.

He laid his hand, for a moment, on his cold wet breast.

Sir Bale knew what should be done in order to give a man in such a case his last chance for life. Everybody was speedily put in motion. Philip's drenched clothes were removed, hot blankets enveloped him, warming-pans and hot bricks lent their aid; he was placed at the prescribed angle, so that the water flowed freely from his mouth. The old expedient for inducing artificial breathing was employed, and a lusty pair of bellows did duty for his lungs.

But these helps to life, and suggestions to nature, availed not. Forlorn and peaceful lay the features of poor Philip Feltram; cold and dull to the touch; no breath through the blue lips; no sight in the fish-like eyes; pulseless and cold in the midst of all the hot bricks and warming-pans about him.

At length, everything having been tried, Sir Bale, who had been directing, placed his hand within the clothes, and laid it silently on Philip's shoulder and over his heart; and after a little wait, he shook his head, and looking down on his sunken face, he said,

"I am afraid he's gone. Yes, he's gone, poor fellow! And bear you this in mind, all of you; Mrs. Julaper there can tell you more about it. She knows that it was certainly in no compliance with my wish that he left the house tonight: it was his own obstinate perversity, and perhaps — I forgive him for it — a wish in his unreasonable resentment to throw some blame upon this house, as having refused him shelter on such a night; than which imputation nothing can be more utterly false. Mrs. Julaper there knows how welcome he was to stay the night; but he would not; he had made up his mind, it seems, without telling any person. Had he told you, Mrs. Julaper?"

"No, sir," sobbed Mrs. Julaper from the centre of a pockethandkerchief in which her face was buried.

"Not a human being: an angry whim of his own. Poor Feltram! and here's the result," said the Baronet. "We have done our best — done everything. I don't think the doctor, when he comes, will say that anything has been omitted; but all won't do. Does any one here know how it happened?"

Two men knew very well — the man who had been ducked, and his companion, a younger man, who was also in the still-room, and had lent a hand in carrying Feltram up to the house.

Tom Marlin had a queer old stone tenement by the edge of the lake just under Mardykes Hall. Some people said it was the stump of an old tower that had once belonged to Mardykes Castle, of which in the modern building scarcely a relic was discoverable.

This Tom Marlin had an ancient right of fishing in the lake, where he caught pike enough for all Golden Friars; and keeping a couple of boats, he made money beside by ferrying passengers over now and then. This fellow, with a furrowed face and shaggy eyebrows, bald at top, but with long grizzled locks falling upon his shoulders, said,

"He wer wi' me this mornin', sayin' he'd want t' boat to cross the lake in, but he didn't say what hour; and when it came on to thunder and blow like this, ye guess I did not look to see him tonight. Well, my wife was just lightin' a pigtail — tho' light enough and to spare there was in the lift already — when who should come clatterin' at the latch-pin in the blow o' thunder and wind but Philip, poor lad, himself; and an ill hour for him it was. He's been some time in ill fettle, though he was never frowsy, not he, but always kind and dooce, and canty once, like anither; and he asked me to tak the boat across the lake at once to the Clough o' Cloostedd at t'other side. The woman took the pet and wodn't hear o't; and, 'Dall me, if I go tonight,' quoth I. But he would not be put off so, not he; and dingdrive he went to it, cryin' and putrein' ye'd a-said, poor fellow, he was wrang i' his garrets a'most. So at long last I bethought me, there's nout o' a sea to the north o' Snakes Island, so I'll pull him by that side — for the storm is blowin' right up by Golden Friars, ye mind — and when we get near the point, thinks I, he'll see wi' his een how the lake is, and gie it up. For I liked him, poor lad; and seein' he'd set his heart on't, I wouldn't vex nor frump him wi' a no. So down we three — myself, and Bill there, and Philip

Feltram — come to the boat; and we pulled out, keeping Snakes Island atwixt us and the wind. ’Twas smooth water wi’ us, for ’twas a scug there, but white enough was all beyont the point; and passing the finger-stone, not forty fathom from the shore o’ the island, Bill and me pullin’ and he sittin’ in the stern, poor lad, up he rises, a bit rabblin’ to himself, wi’ his hands lifted so.

“‘Look a-head!’ says I, thinkin’ something wos comin’ atort us.

“But ’twasn’t that. The boat was quiet, for while we looked, oo’er our shouthers, oo’er her bows, we didn’t pull, so she lay still; and lookin’ back again on Philip, he was rabblin’ on all the same.

“‘It’s nobbut a prass wi’ himsel”, poor lad,’ thinks I.

“But that wasn’t it neither; for I sid something white come out o’ t’ water, by the gunwale, like a hand. By Jen! and he leans oo’er and tuk it; and he sagged like, and so it drew him in, under the mere, before I cud du nout. There was nout to thraa tu him, and no time; down he went, and I followed; and thrice I dived before I found him, and brought him up by the hair at last; and there he is, poor lad! and all one if he lay at the bottom o’ t’ mere.”

As Tom Marlin ended his narrative — often interrupted by the noise of the tempest without, and the peals of thunder that echoed awfully above, like the chorus of a melancholy ballad — the sudden clang of the hall-door bell, and a more faintly-heard knocking, announced a new arrival.

CHAPTER XI

Sir Bale's Dream

It was Doctor Torvey who entered the old still-room now, buttoned-up to the chin in his greatcoat, and with a muffler of many colours wrapped partly over that feature.

"Well! — hey? So poor Feltram's had an accident?"

The Doctor was addressing Sir Bale, and getting to the bedside as he pulled off his gloves.

"I see you've been keeping him warm — that's right; and a considerable flow of water from his mouth; turn him a little that way. Hey? O, ho!" said the Doctor, as he placed his hand upon Philip, and gently stirred his limbs. "It's more than an hour since this happened. I'm afraid there's very little to be done now;" and in a lower tone, with his hand on poor Philip Feltram's arm, and so down to his fingers, he said in Sir Bale Mardykes' ear, with a shake of his head,

"Here, you see, poor fellow, here's the cadaveric stiffness; it's very melancholy, but it's all over, he's gone; there's no good trying any more. Come here, Mrs. Julaper. Did you ever see any one dead? Look at his eyes, look at his mouth. You ought to have known that, with half an eye. And you know," he added again confidentially in Sir Bale's ear, "trying any more *now* is all my eye."

Then after a few more words with the Baronet, and having heard his narrative, he said from time to time, "Quite right; nothing could be better; capital practice, sir," and so forth. And at the close of all this, amid the sobs of kind Mrs. Julaper and the general whimpering of the humbler handmaids, the Doctor standing by the bed, with his knuckles on the coverlet, and a glance now and then on the dead face beside him, said — by way of 'quieting men's minds,' as the old tract-writers used to say — a few words to the following effect:

"Everything has been done here that the most experienced physician could have wished. Everything has been done in the best way. I don't know anything that has not been done, in fact. If I had been here myself, I don't know — hot bricks — salt isn't a bad thing. I don't know, I say, that anything of any consequence has been omitted." And looking at the body, "You see," and he drew the fingers a little this way and that, letting them return, as they stiffly did, to their former attitude, "you may be sure that the poor gentleman was quite dead by the time he arrived here. So, since he was laid there, nothing has been lost by delay. And, Sir Bale, if you have any directions to send to Golden Friars, sir, I shall be most happy to undertake your message."

"Nothing, thanks; it is a melancholy ending, poor fellow! You must come to the study with me, Doctor Torvey, and talk a little bit more; and — very sad, doctor — and you must have a glass of sherry, or some port — the port used not to be bad here; I don't take it — but very melancholy it is — bring some port and sherry; and, Mrs. Julaper, you'll be good enough to see that everything that should be done here is looked to; and let Marlin and the men have supper and something to drink. You have been too long in your wet clothes, Marlin."

So, with gracious words all round, he led the Doctor to the library where he had been sitting, and was affable and hospitable, and told him his own version of all that had passed between him and Philip Feltram, and presented himself in an amiable point of view, and pleased the Doctor with his port and flatteries — for he could not afford to lose anyone's good word just now; and the Doctor was a bit of a gossip, and in most houses in that region, in one character or another, every three months in the year.

So in due time the Doctor drove back to Golden Friars, with a high opinion of Sir Bale, and higher still of his port, and highest of all of himself: in the best possible humour with the world, not minding the storm that blew in his face, and which he defied in goodhumoured mock-heroics spoken in somewhat thick accents, and regarding the thunder and lightning as a lively gala of fireworks; and if there had been a chance of finding his cronies still in the George and Dragon, he would have been among them forthwith, to relate the tragedy of the night, and tell what a good fellow, after all, Sir Bale was; and what a fool, at best, poor Philip Feltram.

But the George was quiet for that night. The thunder rolled over voiceless chambers; and the lights had been put out within the windows, on whose multitudinous small panes the lightning glared. So the Doctor went home to

Mrs. Torvey, whom he charmed into goodhumoured curiosity by the tale of wonder he had to relate.

Sir Bale's qualms were symptomatic of something a little less sublime and more selfish than conscience. He was not sorry that Philip Feltram was out of the way. His lips might begin to babble inconveniently at any time, and why should not his mouth be stopped? and what stopper so effectual as that plug of clay which fate had introduced? But he did not want to be charged with the odium of the catastrophe. Every man cares something for the opinion of his fellows. And seeing that Feltram had been well liked, and that his death had excited a vehement commiseration, Sir Bale did not wish it to be said that he had made the house too hot to hold him, and had so driven him to extremity.

Sir Bale's first agitation had subsided. It was now late, he had written many letters, and he was tired. It was not wonderful, then, that having turned his lounging-chair to the fire, he should have fallen asleep in it, as at last he did.

The storm was passing gradually away by this time. The thunder was now echoing among the distant glens and gorges of Daulness Fells, and the angry roar and gusts of the tempest were subsiding into the melancholy soughing and piping that soothe like a lullaby.

Sir Bale therefore had his unpremeditated sleep very comfortably, except that his head was hanging a little uneasily; which, perhaps, helped him to this dream.

It was one of those dreams in which the continuity of the waking state that immediately preceded it seems unbroken; for he thought that he was sitting in the chair which he occupied, and in the room where he actually was. It seemed to him that he got up, took a candle in his hand, and went through the passages to the old still-room where Philip Feltram lay. The house seemed perfectly still. He could hear the chirp of the crickets faintly from the distant kitchen, and the tick of the clock sounded loud and hollow along the passage. In the old still-room, as he opened the door, was no light, except what was admitted from the candle he carried. He found the body of poor Philip Feltram just as he had left it — his gentle face, saddened by the touch of death, was turned upwards, with white lips: with traces of suffering fixed in its outlines, such as caused Sir Bale, standing by the bed, to draw the coverlet over the dead man's features, which seemed silently to upbraid him. “Gone in weakness!” said Sir Bale, repeating the words of the “daft sir,” Hugh Creswell; as he did so, a voice whispered near him, with a great sigh, “Come in power!” He looked round, in his dream, but there was no one; the light seemed to fail, and a horror slowly overcame him, especially as he thought he saw the figure under the coverlet stealthily beginning to move. Backing towards the door, for he could not take his eyes off it, he saw something like a huge black ape creep out at the foot of the bed; and springing at him, it griped him by the throat, so that he could not breathe; and a thousand voices were instantly round him, holloaing, cursing, laughing in his ears; and in this direful plight he waked.

Was it the ring of those voices still in his ears, or a real shriek, and another, and a long peal, shriek after shriek, swelling madly through the distant passages, that held him still, freezing in the horror of his dream?

I will tell you what this noise was.

CHAPTER XII

Marcella Bligh and Judith Wale Keep Watch

After his bottle of port with Sir Bale, the Doctor had gone down again to the room where poor Philip Feltram lay.

Mrs. Julaper had dried her eyes, and was busy by this time; and two old women were making all their arrangements for a night-watch by the body, which they had washed, and, as their phrase goes, ‘laid out’ in the humble bed where it had lain while there was still a hope that a spark sufficient to rekindle the fire of life might remain. These old women had points of resemblance: they were lean, sallow, and wonderfully wrinkled, and looked each malign and ugly enough for a witch.

Marcella Bligh’s thin hooked nose was now like the beak of a bird of prey over the face of the drowned man, upon whose eyelids she was placing pennypieces, to keep them from opening; and her one eye was fixed on her work, its sightless companion showing white in its socket, with an ugly leer.

Judith Wale was lifting the pail of hot water with which they had just washed the body. She had long lean arms, a hunched back, a great sharp chin sunk on her hollow breast, and small eyes restless as a ferret’s; and she clattered about in great bowls of shoes, old and clouted, that were made for a foot as big as two of hers.

The Doctor knew these two old women, who were often employed in such dismal offices.

“How does Mrs. Bligh? See me with half an eye? Hey — that’s rhyme, isn’t it? — And, Judy lass — why, I thought you lived nearer the town — here making poor Mr. Feltram’s last toilet. You have helped to dress many a poor fellow for his last journey. Not a bad notion of drill either — they stand at attention stiff and straight enough in the sentry-box. Your recruits do you credit, Mrs. Wale.”

The Doctor stood at the foot of the bed to inspect, breathing forth a vapour of very fine old port, his hands in his pockets, speaking with a lazy thickness, and looking so comfortable and facetious, that Mrs. Julaper would have liked to turn him out of the room.

But the Doctor was not unkind, only extremely comfortable. He was a goodnatured fellow, and had thought and care for the living, but not a great deal of sentiment for the dead, whom he had looked in the face too often to be much disturbed by the spectacle.

"You'll have to keep that bandage on. You should be sharp; you should know all about it, girl, by this time, and not let those muscles stiffen. I need not tell you the mouth shuts as easily as this snuff-box, if you only take it in time. — I suppose, Mrs. Julaper, you'll send to Jos Fringer for the poor fellow's outfit. Fringer is a very proper man — there ain't a properer undaker in England. I always re-mmend Fringer — in Church-street in Golden Friars. You know Fringer, I daresay."

"I can't say, sir, I'm sure. That will be as Sir Bale may please to direct," answered Mrs. Julaper.

"You've got him very straight — straighter than I thought you could; but the large joints were not so stiff. A very little longer wait, and you'd hardly have got him into his coffin. He'll want a vr-r-ry long one, poor lad. Short cake is life, ma'am. Sad thing this. They'll open their eyes, I promise you, down in the town. 'Twill be cool enough, I'd shay, affre all th-thunr-thunnle, you know. I think I'll take a nip, Mrs. Jool-fr, if you wouldn't mine makin' me out a thimmle-ful bran-band-bran-rand-andy, eh, Mishs Joolfr?"

And the Doctor took a chair by the fire; and Mrs. Julaper, with a dubious conscience and dry hospitality, procured the brandy-flask and wine-glass, and helped the physician in a thin hesitating stream, which left him ample opportunity to cry "Hold — enough!" had he been so minded. But that able physician had no confidence, it would seem, in any dose under a bumper, which he sipped with commendation, and then fell asleep with the firelight on his face — to tender-hearted Mrs. Julaper's disgust — and snored with a sensual disregard of the solemnity of his situation; until with a profound nod, or rather dive, toward the fire, he awoke, got up and shook his ears with a kind of start, and standing with his back to the fire, asked for his muffler and horse; and so took his leave also of the weird sisters, who were still pottering about the body, with croak and whisper, and nod and ogle. He took his leave also of good Mrs. Julaper, who was completing arrangements with teapot and kettle, spiced elderberry wine, and other comforts, to support them through their proposed vigil. And finally, in a sort of way, he took his leave of the body, with a long businesslike stare, from the foot of the bed, with his short hands stuffed into his pockets. And so, to Mrs. Julaper's relief, this unseemly doctor, speaking thickly, departed.

And now, the Doctor being gone, and all things prepared for the 'wake' to be observed by withered Mrs. Bligh of the one eye, and yellow Mrs. Wale of the crooked back, the house grew gradually still. The thunder had by this time died into the solid boom of distant battle, and the fury of the gale had subsided to the long sobbing wail that is charged with so eerie a melancholy. Within all was stirless, and the two old women, each a 'Mrs.' by courtesy, who had not much to thank Nature or the world for, sad and cynical, and in a sort outcasts told off by fortune to these sad and grizzly services, sat themselves down by the fire, each perhaps feeling unusually at home in the other's society; and in this soured and forlorn comfort, trimming their fire, quickening the song of the kettle to a boil, and waxing polite and chatty; each treating the other with that deprecatory and formal courtesy which invites a return in kind, and both growing strangely happy in this little world of their own, in the unusual and momentary sense of an importance and consideration which were delightful.

The old still-room of Mardykes Hall is an oblong room wainscoted. From the door you look its full length to the wide stone-shafted Tudor window at the other end. At your left is the ponderous mantelpiece, supported by two spiral stone pillars; and close to the door at the right was the bed in which the two crones had just stretched poor Philip Feltram, who lay as still as an uncoloured waxwork, with a heavy pennypiece on each eye, and a bandage under his jaw, making his mouth look stern. And the two old ladies over their tea by the fire conversed agreeably, compared their rheumatisms and other ailments wordily, and talked of old times, and early recollections, and of sick-beds they had attended, and corpses that "you would not know, so pined and windered" were they; and others so fresh and canny, you'd say the dead had never looked so bonny in life.

Then they began to talk of people who grew tall in their coffins, of others who had been buried alive, and of others who walked after death. Stories as true as holy writ.

"Were you ever down by Hawarth, Mrs. Bligh — hard by Dalworth Moss?" asked crook-backed Mrs. Wale, holding her spoon suspended over her cup.

"Neea whaar sooa far south, Mrs. Wale, ma'am; but ma father was off times down thar cuttin' peat."

"Ah, then ye'll not a kenned farmer Dykes that lived by the Lin-tree Scaur. 'Tweer I that laid him out, poor aad fellow, and a dow man he was when aught went cross wi' him; and he cursed and sweared, twad gar ye dodder to hear him. They said he was a hard man wi' some folk; but he kep a good house, and liked to see plenty, and many a time when I was swaimous about my food, he'd clap t' meat on ma plate, and mak' me eat ma fill. Na, na — there was good as well as bad in farmer Dykes. It was a year after he deed, and Tom Ettles was walking home, down by the Birken Stoop one night, and not a soul nigh, when he sees a big ball, as high as his knee, whirlin' and spangin' away before him on the road. What it wer he could not think; but he never consayted there was a freet or a bo thereaway; so he kep near it, watching every spang and turn it took, till it ran into the gripe by the roadside. There was a gravel pit just there, and Tom Ettles wished to take another gliff at it before he went on. But when he keeked into the pit, what should he see but a man attoppa a horse that could not get up or on: and says he, 'I think ye be at a dead-lift there, gaffer.' And wi' the word, up looks the man, and who sud it be but farmer Dykes himsel; and Tom Ettles saw him plain eneugh, and kenned the horse too for Black Captain, the farmer's aad beast, that broke his leg and was shot two years and more before the farmer died. 'Ay,' says farmer Dykes, lookin' very bad; 'forsett-and-backsett, ye'll tak me oot, Tom Ettles, and clap ye doun behint me quick, or I'll claw ho'd o' thee.' Tom felt his hair risin' stiff on his heed, and his tongue so fast to the roof o' his mouth he could scarce get oot a word; but says he, 'If Black Jack can't do it o' noo, he'll ne'er do't and carry double.' 'I ken my ain business best,' says Dykes. 'If ye gar me gie ye a look, 'twill gie ye the creepin's while ye live; so git ye doun, Tom;' and with that the dobby lifts its neaf, and Tom saw there was a red light round horse and man, like the glow of a peat fire. And says Tom, 'In the name o' God, ye'll let me pass;' and with the word the gooast draws itsel' doun, all a-creaked, like a man wi' a sudden pain; and Tom Ettles took to his heels more deed than alive."

They had approached their heads, and the story had sunk to that mysterious murmur that thrills the listener, when in the brief silence that followed they heard a low odd laugh near the door.

In that direction each lady looked aghast, and saw Feltram sitting straight up in the bed, with the white bandage in his hand, and as it seemed, for one foot was below the coverlet, near the floor, about to glide forth.

Mrs. Bligh, uttering a hideous shriek, clutched Mrs. Wale, and Mrs. Wale, with a scream as dreadful, gripped Mrs. Bligh; and quite forgetting their somewhat formal politeness, they reeled and tugged, wrestling towards the window, each struggling to place her companion between her and the ‘dobby,’ and both uniting in a direful peal of yells.

This was the uproar which had startled Sir Bale from his dream, and was now startling the servants from theirs.

CHAPTER XIII

The Mist on the Mountain

Doctor Torvey was sent for early next morning, and came full of wonder, learning and scepticism. Seeing is believing, however; and there was Philip Feltram living, and soon to be, in all bodily functions, just as usual.

"Upon my soul, Sir Bale, I couldn't have believed it, if I had not seen it with my eyes," said the Doctor impressively, while sipping a glass of sherry in the 'breakfast parlour,' as the great panelled and pictured room next the dining-room was called. "I don't think there is any similar case on record — no pulse, no more than the poker; no respiration, by Jove, no more than the chimneypiece; as cold as a lead image in the garden there. Well, you'll say all that might possibly be fallacious; but what will you say to the cadaveric stiffness? Old Judy Wale can tell you; and my friend Marcella — Monocula would be nearer the mark — Mrs. Bligh, she knows all those common, and I may say up to this, infallible, signs of death, as well as I do. There is no mystery about them; they'll depose to the literality of the symptoms. You heard how they gave tongue. Upon my honour, I'll send the whole case up to my old chief, Sir Hervey Hansard, to London. You'll hear what a noise it will make among the profession. There never was — and it ain't too much to say there never *will* be — another case like it."

During this lecture, and a great deal more, Sir Bale leaned back in his chair, with his legs extended, his heels on the ground, and his arms folded, looking sourly up in the face of a tall lady in white satin, in a ruff, and with a bird on her hand, who smiled down superciliously from her frame on the Baronet. Sir Bale seemed a little bit high and dry with the Doctor.

"You physicians are unquestionably," he said, "a very learned profession."

The Doctor bowed.

"But there's just one thing you know nothing about — — "

"Eh? What's that?" inquired Doctor Torvey.

"Medicine," answered Sir Bale. "I was aware you never knew what was the matter with a sick man; but I didn't know, till now, that you couldn't tell when he was dead."

"Ha, ha! — well — ha, ha! — *yes* — well, you see, you — ha, ha! — you certainly have me there. But it's a case without a parallel — it is, upon my honour. You'll find it will not only be talked about, but written about; and, whatever papers appear upon it, will come to me; and I'll take care, Sir Bale, you shall have an opportunity of reading them."

"Of which I shan't avail myself," answered Sir Bale. "Take another glass of sherry, Doctor."

The Doctor made his acknowledgments and filled his glass, and looked through the wine between him and the window.

"Ha, ha! — see there, your port, Sir Bale, gives a fellow such habits — looking for the beeswing, by Jove. It isn't easy, in one sense at least, to get your port out of a fellow's head when once he has tasted it."

But if the honest Doctor meant a hint for a glass of that admirable bin, it fell pointless; and Sir Bale had no notion of making another libation of that precious fluid in honour of Doctor Torvey.

"And I take it for granted," said Sir Bale, "that Feltram will do very well; and, should anything go wrong, I can send for you — unless he should die again; and in that case I think I shall take my own opinion."

So he and the Doctor parted.

Sir Bale, although he did not consult the Doctor on his own case, was not particularly well. "That lonely place, those frightful mountains, and that damp black lake" — which features in the landscape he cursed all round— "are enough to give any man blue devils; and when a fellow's spirits go, he's all gone. That's why I'm dyspeptic — that and those d —— d debts — and the post, with its flight of croaking and screeching letters from London. I wish there was no post here. I wish it was like Sir Amyrald's time, when they shot the York mercer that came to dun him, and no one ever took anyone to task about it; and now they can pelt you at any distance they please through the post; and fellows lose their spirits and their appetite and any sort of miserable comfort that is possible in this odious abyss."

Was there gout in Sir Bale's case, or 'vapours'? I know not what the faculty would have called it; but Sir Bale's mode of treatment was simply to work off the attack by long and laborious walking.

This evening his walk was upon the Fells of Golden Friars — long after the landscape below was in the eclipse of twilight, the broad bare sides and angles of these gigantic uplands were still lighted by the misty western sun.

There is no such sense of solitude as that which we experience upon the silent and vast elevations of great mountains. Lifted high above the level of human sounds and habitations, among the wild expanses and colossal features of Nature, we are thrilled in our loneliness with a strange fear and elation — an ascent above the reach of life's vexations or companionship, and the tremblings of a wild and undefined misgiving. The filmy disc of the moon had risen in the east, and was already faintly silvering the shadowy scenery below, while yet Sir Bale stood in the mellow light of the western sun, which still touched also the summits of the opposite peaks of Morvyn Fells.

Sir Bale Mardykes did not, as a stranger might, in prudence, hasten his descent from the heights at which he stood while yet a gleam of daylight remained to him. For he was, from his boyhood, familiar with those solitary regions; and, beside this, the thin circle of the moon, hung in the eastern sky, would brighten as the sunlight sank, and hang like a lamp above his steps.

There was in the bronzed and resolute face of the Baronet, lighted now in the parting beams of sunset, a resemblance to that of Charles the Second — not our "merry" ideal, but the more energetic and saturnine face which the portraits have preserved to us.

He stood with folded arms on the side of the slope, admiring, in spite of his prejudice, the unusual effects of a view so strangely lighted — the sunset tints on the opposite peaks, lost in the misty twilight, now deepening lower down into a darker shade, through which the outlines of the stone gables and tower of Golden Friars and the light of fire or candle in their windows were dimly visible.

As he stood and looked, his more distant sunset went down, and sudden twilight was upon him, and he began to remember the beautiful Homeric picture of a landscape coming out, rock and headland, in the moonlight.

There had hung upon the higher summits, at his right, a heavy fold of white cloud, which on a sudden broke, and, like the smoke of artillery, came rolling down the slopes toward him. Its principal volume, however, unfolded itself in a mighty flood down the side of the mountain towards the lake; and that which spread towards and soon enveloped the ground on which he stood was by no means so dense a fog. A thick mist enough it was;

but still, to a distance of twenty or thirty yards, he could discern the outline of a rock or scaur, but not beyond it.

There are few sensations more intimidating than that of being thus enveloped on a lonely mountain-side, which, like this one, here and there breaks into precipice.

There is another sensation, too, which affects the imagination. Overtaken thus on the solitary expanse, there comes a new chill and tremour as this treacherous medium surrounds us, through which unperceived those shapes which fancy conjures up might approach so near and bar our path.

From the risk of being reduced to an actual standstill he knew he was exempt. The point from which the wind blew, light as it was, assured him of that. Still the mist was thick enough seriously to embarrass him. It had overtaken him as he was looking down upon the lake; and he now looked to his left, to try whether in that direction it was too thick to permit a view of the nearest landmarks. Through this white film he saw a figure standing only about five-and-twenty steps away, looking down, as it seemed, in precisely the same direction as he, quite motionless, and standing like a shadow projected upon the smoky vapour. It was the figure of a slight tall man, with his arm extended, as if pointing to a remote object, which no mortal eye certainly could discern through the mist. Sir Bale gazed at this figure, doubtful whether he were in a waking dream, unable to conjecture whence it had come; and as he looked, it moved, and was almost instantly out of sight.

He descended the mountain cautiously. The mist was now thinner, and through the haze he was beginning to see objects more distinctly, and, without danger, to proceed at a quicker pace. He had still a long walk by the uplands towards Mardykes Hall before he descended to the level of the lake.

The mist was still quite thick enough to circumscribe his view and to hide the general features of the landscape; and well was it, perhaps, for Sir Bale that his boyhood had familiarised him with the landmarks on the mountain-side.

He had made nearly four miles on his solitary homeward way, when, passing under a ledge of rock which bears the name of the Cat’s Skaitch, he saw the same figure in the short cloak standing within some thirty or forty yards of him — the thin curtain of mist, through which the moonlight touched it, giving to it an airy and unsubstantial character.

Sir Bale came to a standstill. The man in the short cloak nodded and drew back, and was concealed by the angle of the rock.

Sir Bale was now irritated, as men are after a start, and shouting to the stranger to halt, he ‘slapped’ after him, as the northern phrase goes, at his best pace. But again he was gone, and nowhere could he see him, the mist favouring his evasion.

Looking down the fells that overhang Mardykes Hall, the mountain-side dips gradually into a glen, which, as it descends, becomes precipitous and wooded. A footpath through this ravine conducts the wayfarer to the level ground that borders the lake; and by this dark pass Sir Bale Mardykes strode, in comparatively clear air, along the rocky path dappled with moonlight.

As he emerged upon the lower ground he again encountered the same figure. It approached. It was Philip Feltram.

CHAPTER XIV

A New Philip Feltram

The Baronet had not seen Feltram since his strange escape from death. His last interview with him had been stern and threatening; Sir Bale dealing with appearances in the spirit of an incensed judge, Philip Feltram lamenting in the submission of a helpless despair.

Feltram was full in the moonlight now, standing erect, and smiling cynically on the Baronet.

There was that in the bearing and countenance of Feltram that disconcerted him more than the surprise of the sudden meeting.

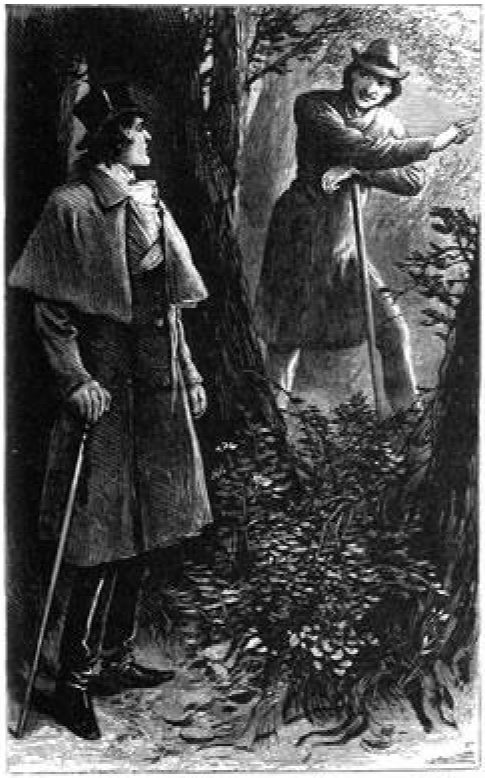
He had determined to meet Feltram in a friendly way, whenever that not very comfortable interview became inevitable. But he was confused by the suddenness of Feltram's appearance; and the tone, cold and stern, in which he had last spoken to him came first, and he spoke in it after a brief silence.

"I fancied, Mr. Feltram, you were in your bed; I little expected to find you here. I think the Doctor gave very particular directions, and said that you were to remain perfectly quiet."

"But I know more than the Doctor," replied Feltram, still smiling unpleasantly.

"I think, sir, you would have been better in your bed," said Sir Bale loftily.

"Come, come, come, come!" exclaimed Philip Feltram contemptuously.



It was the figure of a slight tall man, with his arm extended, as if pointing to a remote object.

"It seems to me," said Sir Bale, a good deal astonished, "you rather forget yourself."

"Easier to forget oneself, Sir Bale, than to forgive others, at times," replied Philip Feltram in his unparalleled mood.

"That's the way fools knock themselves up," continued Sir Bale. "You've been walking ever so far — away to the Fells of Golden Friars. It was you whom I saw there. What d —— d folly! What brought you there?"

"To observe you," he replied.

"And have you walked the whole way there and back again? How did you get there?"

"Pooh! how did I come — how did you come — how did the fog come? From the lake, I suppose. We all come up, and then down." So spoke Philip Feltram, with serene insolence.

"You are pleased to talk nonsense," said Sir Bale.

"Because I like it — with a *meaning*."

Sir Bale looked at him, not knowing whether to believe his eyes and ears. He did not know what to make of him.

"I had intended speaking to you in a conciliatory way; you seem to wish to make that impossible" — Philip Feltram's face wore its repulsive smile;

— “and in fact I don’t know what to make of you, unless you are ill; and ill you well may be. You can’t have walked much less than twelve miles.”

“Wonderful effort for me!” said Feltram with the same sneer.

“Rather surprising for a man so nearly drowned,” answered Sir Bale Mardykes.

“A dip: you don’t like the lake, sir; but I do. And so it is: as Antaeus touched the earth, so I the water, and rise refreshed.”

“I think you’d better get in and refresh there. I meant to tell you that all the unpleasantness about that banknote is over.”

“Is it?”

“Yes. It has been recovered by Mr. Creswell, who came here last night. I’ve got it, and you’re not to blame,” said Sir Bale.

“But some one *is* to blame,” observed Mr. Feltram, smiling still.

“Well, *you* are not, and that ends it,” said the Baronet peremptorily.

“Ends it? Really, how good! how very good!”

Sir Bale looked at him, for there was something ambiguous and even derisive in the tone of Feltram’s voice.

But before he could quite make up his mind, Feltram spoke again.

“Everything is settled about you and me?”

“There is nothing to prevent your staying at Mardykes now,” said Sir Bale graciously.

“I shall be with you for two years, and then I go on my travels,” answered Feltram, with a saturnine and somewhat wild look around him.

“Is he going mad?” thought the Baronet.

“But before I go, I’m to put you in a way of paying off your mortgages. That is my business here.”

Sir Bale looked at him sharply. But now there was not the unpleasant smile, but the darkened look of a man in secret pain.

“You shall know it all by and by.”

And without more ceremony, and with a darkening face, Philip Feltram made his way under the boughs of the thick oaks that grew there, leaving on Sir Bale’s mind an impression that he had been watching some one at a distance, and had gone in consequence of a signal.

In a few seconds he followed in the same direction, halloaing after Feltram; for he did not like the idea of his wandering about the country by moonlight, or possibly losing his life among the precipices, and bringing a new discredit upon his house. But no answer came; nor could he in that thick copse gain sight of him again.

When Sir Bale reached Mardykes Hall he summoned Mrs. Julaper, and had a long talk with her. But she could not say that there appeared anything amiss with Philip Feltram; only he seemed more reserved, and as if he was brooding over something he did not intend to tell.

"But, you know, Sir Bale, what happened might well make a thoughtful man of him. If he's ever to think of Death, it should be after looking him so hard in the face; and I'm not ashamed to say, I'm glad to see he has grace to take the lesson, and I hope his experiences may be sanctified to him, poor fellow! Amen."

"Very good song, and very well sung," said Sir Bale; "but it doesn't seem to me that he has been improved, Mrs. Julaper. He seems, on the contrary, in a queer temper and anything but a heavenly frame of mind; and I thought I'd ask you, because if he is ill — I mean feverish — it might account for his eccentricities, as well as make it necessary to send after him, and bring him home, and put him to bed. But I suppose it is as you say, — his adventure has upset him a little, and he'll sober in a day or two, and return to his old ways."

But this did not happen. A change, more comprehensive than at first appeared, had taken place, and a singular alteration was gradually established.

He grew thin, his eyes hollow, his face gradually forbidding.

His ways and temper were changed: he was a new man with Sir Bale; and the Baronet after a time, people said, began to grow afraid of him. And certainly Feltram had acquired an extraordinary influence over the Baronet, who a little while ago had regarded and treated him with so much contempt.

CHAPTER XV

The Purse of Gold

The Baronet was very slightly known in his county. He had led a reserved and inhospitable life. He was pressed upon by heavy debts; and being a proud man, held aloof from society and its doings. He wished people to understand that he was nursing his estate; but somehow the estate did not thrive at nurse. In the country other people's business is admirably well known; and the lord of Mardykes was conscious, perhaps, that his neighbours knew as well he did, that the utmost he could do was to pay the interest charged upon it, and to live in a frugal way enough.

The lake measures some four or five miles across, from the little jetty under the walls of Mardykes Hall to Cloostedd.

Philip Feltram, changed and morose, loved a solitary row upon the lake; and sometimes, with no one to aid him in its management, would take the little sailboat and pass the whole day upon those lonely waters.

Frequently he crossed to Cloostedd; and mooring the boat under the solemn trees that stand reflected in that dark mirror, he would disembark and wander among the lonely woodlands, as people thought, cherishing in those ancestral scenes the memory of ineffaceable injuries, and the wrath and revenge that seemed of late to darken his countenance, and to hold him always in a moody silence.

One autumnal evening Sir Bale Mardykes was sourly ruminating after his solitary meal. A very red sun was pouring its last low beams through the valley at the western extremity of the lake, across its elsewhere sombre waters, and touching with a sudden and blood-red tint the sail of the skiff in which Feltram was returning from his lonely cruise.

"Here comes my domestic water-fiend," sneered Sir Bale, as he lay back in his cumbrous armchair. "Cheerful place, pleasant people, delicious fate! The place alone has been enough to set that fool out of his little senses, d — n him!"

Sir Bale averted his eyes, and another subject not pleasanter entered his mind. He was thinking of the races that were coming off next week at

Heckleston Downs, and what sums of money might be made there, and how hard it was that he should be excluded by fortune from that brilliant lottery.

“Ah, Mrs. Julaper, is that you?”

Mrs. Julaper, who was still at the door, curtsied, and said, “I came, Sir Bale, to see whether you’d please to like a jug of mulled claret, sir.”

“Not I, my dear. I’ll take a mug of beer and my pipe; that homely solace better befits a ruined gentleman.”

“H’m, sir; you’re not that, Sir Bale; you’re no worse than half the lords and great men that are going. I would not hear another say that of you, sir.”

“That’s very kind of you, Mrs. Julaper; but you won’t call *me* out for backbiting myself, especially as it is true, d —— d true, Mrs. Julaper! Look ye; there never was a Mardykes here before but he could lay his hundred or his thousand pounds on the winner of the Heckleston Cup; and what could I bet? Little more than that mug of beer I spoke of. It was my great-grandfather who opened the course on the Downs of Heckleston, and now *I* can’t show there! Well, what must I do? Grin and bear it, that’s all. If you please, Mrs. Julaper, I will have that jug of claret you offered. I want spice and hot wine to keep me alive; but I’ll smoke my pipe first, and in an hour’s time it will do.”

When Mrs. Julaper was gone, he lighted his pipe, and drew near the window, through which he looked upon the now fading sky and the twilight landscape.

He smoked his pipe out, and by that time it had grown nearly dark. He was still looking out upon the faint outlines of the view, and thinking angrily what a little bit of luck at the races would do for many a man who probably did not want it half so much as he. Vague and sombre as his thoughts were, they had, like the darkening landscape outside, shape enough to define their general character. Bitter and impious they were — as those of egotistic men naturally are in suffering. And after brooding, and muttering by fits and starts, he said:

“How many tens and hundreds of thousands of pounds will change hands at Heckleston next week; and not a shilling in all the change and shuffle will stick to me! How many a fellow would sell himself, like Dr. Faustus, just for the knowledge of the name of the winner! But he’s no fool, and does not buy his own.”

Something caught his eye; something moving on the wall. The fire was lighted, and cast a flickering and gigantic shadow upward; the figure of a man standing behind Sir Bale Mardykes, on whose shoulder he placed a lean hand. Sir Bale turned suddenly about, and saw Philip Feltram. He was looking dark and stern, and did not remove his hand from his shoulder as he peered into the Baronet's face with his deep-set mad eyes.

"Ha, Philip, upon my soul!" exclaimed Sir Bale, surprised. "How time flies! It seems only this minute since I saw the boat a mile and a half away from the shore. Well — yes; there has been time; it is dark now. Ha, ha! I assure you, you startled me. Won't you take something? Do. Shall I touch the bell?"

"You have been troubled about those mortgages. I told you I should pay them off, I thought."

Here there was a pause, and Sir Bale looked hard in Feltram's face. If he had been in his ordinary spirits, or perhaps in some of his haunts less solitary than Mardykes, he would have laughed; but here he had grown unlike himself, gloomy and credulous, and was, in fact, a nervous man.

Sir Bale smiled, and shook his head dismally.

"It is very kind of you, Feltram; the idea shows a kindly disposition. I know you would do me a kindness if you could."

As Sir Bale, each looking in the other's eyes, repeated in this sentence the words "kind," "kindly," "kindness," a smile lighted Feltram's face with at each word an intenser light; and Sir Bale grew sombre in its glare; and when he had done speaking, Feltram's face also on a sudden darkened.

"I have found a fortuneteller in Cloostedd Wood. Look here."

And he drew from his pocket a leathern purse, which he placed on the table in his hand; and Sir Bale heard the pleasant clink of coin in it.

"A fortuneteller! You don't mean to say she gave you that?" said Sir Bale.

Feltram smiled again, and nodded.

"It *was* the custom to give the fortuneteller a trifle. It is a great improvement making *her* fee you," observed Sir Bale, with an approach to his old manner.

"He put that in my hand with a message," said Feltram.

"He? O, then it was a male fortuneteller!"

"Gipsies go in gangs, men and women. *He* might lend, though *she* told fortunes," said Feltram.

"It's the first time I ever heard of gipsies lending money;" and he eyed the purse with a whimsical smile.

With his lean fingers still holding it, Feltram sat down at the table. His face contracted as if in cunning thought, and his chin sank upon his breast as he leaned back.

"I think," continued Sir Bale, "ever since they were spoiled, the Egyptians have been a little shy of lending, and leave that branch of business to the Hebrews."

"What would you give to know, now, the winner at Heckleston races?" said Feltram suddenly, raising his eyes.

"Yes; that would be worth something," answered Sir Bale, looking at him with more interest than the incredulity he affected would quite warrant.

"And this money I have power to lend you, to make your game."

"Do you mean that really?" said Sir Bale, with a new energy in tone, manner, and features.

"That's heavy; there are some guineas there," said Feltram with a dark smile, raising the purse in his hand a little, and letting it drop upon the table with a clang.

"There is *something* there, at all events," said Sir Bale.

Feltram took the purse by the bottom, and poured out on the table a handsome pile of guineas.

"And do you mean to say you got all that from a gipsy in Cloostedd Wood?"

"A friend, who is — *myself*," answered Philip Feltram.

"Yourself! Then it is yours — *you* lend it?" said the Baronet, amazed; for there was no getting over the heap of guineas, and the wonder was pretty equal whence they had come.

"Myself, and not myself," said Feltram oracularly; "as like as voice and echo, man and shadow."

Had Feltram in some of his solitary wanderings and potterings lighted upon hidden treasure? There was a story of two Feltrams of Cloostedd, brothers, who had joined the king's army and fought at Marston Moor, having buried in Cloostedd Wood a great deal of gold and plate and jewels. They had, it was said, intrusted one tried servant with the secret; and that servant remained at home. But by a perverse fatality the three witnesses had perished within a month: the two brothers at Marston Moor; and the confidant, of fever, at Cloostedd. From that day forth treasure-seekers had from time to time explored the woods of Cloostedd; and many a tree of mark was dug beside, and the earth beneath many a stone and scar and other landmark in that solitary forest was opened by night, until hope gradually died out, and the tradition had long ceased to prompt to action, and had become a story and nothing more.

The image of the nursery-tale had now recurred to Sir Bale after so long a reach of years; and the only imaginable way, in his mind, of accounting for penniless Philip Feltram having all that gold in his possession was that, in some of his lonely wanderings, chance had led him to the undiscovered hoard of the two Feltrams who had died in the great civil wars.

“Perhaps those gipsies you speak of found the money where you found them; and in that case, as Cloostedd Forest, and all that is in it is my property, their sending it to me is more like my servant’s handing me my hat and stick when I’m going out, than making me a present.”

“You will not be wise to rely upon the law, Sir Bale, and to refuse the help that comes unasked. But if you like your mortgages as they are, keep them; and if you like my terms as they are, take them; and when you have made up your mind, let me know.”

Philip Feltram dropped the heavy purse into his capacious coatpocket, and walked, muttering, out of the room.

CHAPTER XVI

The Message from Cloostedd

“Come back, Feltram; come back, Philip!” cried Sir Bale hastily. “Let us talk, can’t we? Come and talk this odd business over a little; you must have mistaken what I meant; I should like to hear all about it.”

“All is not much, sir,” said Philip Feltram, entering the room again, the door of which he had half closed after him. “In the forest of Cloostedd I met to-day some people, one of whom can foretell events, and told me the names of the winners of the first three races at Heckleston, and gave me this purse, with leave to lend you so much money as you care to stake upon the races. I take no security; you shan’t be troubled; and you’ll never see the lender, unless you seek him out.”

“Well, those are not bad terms,” said Sir Bale, smiling wistfully at the purse, which Feltram had again placed upon the table.

“No, not bad,” repeated Feltram, in the harsh low tone in which he now habitually spoke.

“You’ll tell me what the prophet said about the winners; I should like to hear their names.”

“The names I shall tell you if you walk out with me,” said Feltram.

“Why not here?” asked Sir Bale.

“My memory does not serve me here so well. Some people, in some places, though they be silent, obstruct thought. Come, let us speak,” said Philip Feltram, leading the way.

Sir Bale, with a shrug, followed him.

By this time it was dark. Feltram was walking slowly towards the margin of the lake; and Sir Bale, more curious as the delay increased, followed him, and smiled faintly as he looked after his tall, gaunt figure, as if, even in the dark, expressing a ridicule which he did not honestly feel, and the expression of which, even if there had been light, there was no one near enough to see.

When he reached the edge of the lake, Feltram stooped, and Sir Bale thought that his attitude was that of one who whispers to and caresses a reclining person. What he fancied was a dark figure lying horizontally in the shallow water, near the edge, turned out to be, as he drew near, no more than a shadow on the elsewhere lighter water; and with his change of position it had shifted and was gone, and Philip Feltram was but dabbling his hand this way and that in the water, and muttering faintly to himself. He rose as the Baronet drew near, and standing upright, said,

"I like to listen to the ripple of the water among the grass and pebbles; the tongue and lips of the lake are lapping and whispering all along. It is the merest poetry; but you are so romantic, you excuse me."

There was an angry curve in Feltram's eyebrows, and a cynical smile, and something in the tone which to the satirical Baronet was almost insulting. But even had he been less curious, I don't think he would have betrayed his mortification; for an odd and unavowed influence which he hated was gradually establishing in Feltram an ascendency which sometimes vexed and sometimes cowed him.

"You are not to tell," said Feltram, drawing near him in the dusk. "The secret is yours when you promise."

"Of course I promise," said Sir Bale. "If I believed it, you don't think I could be such an ass as to tell it; and if I didn't believe it, I'd hardly take the trouble."

Feltram stooped, and dipping the hollow of his hand in the water, he raised it full, and said he, "Hold out your hand — the hollow of your hand — like this. I divide the water for a sign — share to me and share to you." And he turned his hand, so as to pour half the water into the hollow palm of Sir Bale, who was smiling, with some uneasiness mixed in his mockery.

"Now, you promise to keep all secrets respecting the teller and the finder, be that who it may?"

"Yes, I promise," said Sir Bale.

"Now do as I do," said Feltram. And he shed the water on the ground, and with his wet fingers touched his forehead and his breast; and then he joined his hand with Sir Bale's, and said, "Now you are my safe man."

Sir Bale laughed. "That's the game they call 'grand mufti,'" said he.

"Exactly; and means nothing," said Feltram, "except that some day it will serve you to remember by. And now the names. Don't speak; listen — you may break the thought else. The winner of the first is *Beeswing*; of the second, *Falcon*; and of the third, *Lightning*."

He had stood for some seconds in silence before he spoke; his eyes were closed; he seemed to bring up thought and speech with difficulty, and spoke faintly and drowsily, both his hands a little raised, and the fingers extended, with the groping air of a man who moves in the dark. In this odd way, slowly, faintly, with many a sigh and scarcely audible groan, he gradually delivered his message and was silent. He stood, it seemed, scarcely half awake, muttering indistinctly and sighing to himself. You would have said that he was exhausted and suffering, like a man at his last hour resigning himself to death.

At length he opened his eyes, looked round a little wildly and languidly, and with another great sigh sat down on a large rock that lies by the margin of the lake, and sighed heavily again and again. You might have fancied that he was a second time recovering from drowning.

Then he got up, and looked drowsily round again, and sighed like a man worn out with fatigue, and was silent.

Sir Bale did not care to speak until he seemed a little more likely to obtain an answer. When that time came, he said, "I wish, for the sake of my believing, that your list was a little less incredible. Not one of the horses you name is the least likely; not one of them has a chance."

"So much the better for you; you'll get what odds you please. You had better seize your luck; on Tuesday Beeswing runs," said Feltram. "When you want money for the purpose, I'm your banker — here is your bank."

He touched his breast, where he had placed the purse, and then he turned and walked swiftly away.

Sir Bale looked after him till he disappeared in the dark. He fluctuated among many surmises about Feltram. Was he insane, or was he practising an imposture? or was he fool enough to believe the predictions of some real gipsies? and had he borrowed this money, which in Sir Bale's eyes seemed the greatest miracle in the matter, from those thriving shepherd mountaineers, the old Trebecks, who, he believed, were attached to him? Feltram had, he thought, borrowed it as if for himself; and having, as Sir Bale in his egotism supposed, "a sneaking regard" for him, had meant the loan for his patron, and conceived the idea of his using his revelations for the purpose of making his fortune. So, seeing no risk, and the temptation being strong, Sir Bale resolved to avail himself of the purse, and use his own judgment as to what horse to back.

About eleven o'clock Feltram, unannounced, walked, with his hat still on, into Sir Bale's library, and sat down at the opposite side of his table, looking gloomily into the Baronet's face for a time.

"Shall you want the purse?" he asked at last.

"Certainly; I always want a purse," said Sir Bale energetically.

"The condition is, that you shall back each of the three horses I have named. But you may back them for much or little, as you like, only the sum must not be less than five pounds in each hundred which this purse contains. That is the condition, and if you violate it, you will make some powerful people very angry, and you will feel it. Do you agree?"

"Of course; five pounds in the hundred — certainly; and how many hundreds are there?"

"Three."

"Well, a fellow with luck may win something with three hundred pounds, but it ain't very much."

"Quite enough, if you use it aright."

"Three hundred pounds," repeated the Baronet, as he emptied the purse, which Feltram had just placed in his hand, upon the table; and contemplating them with grave interest, he began telling them off in little heaps of five-and-twenty each. He might have thanked Feltram, but he was thinking more of the guineas than of the grizzly donor.

"Ay," said he, after a second counting, "I think there *are* exactly three hundred. Well, so you say I must apply three times five — fifteen of these. It is an awful pity backing those queer horses you have named; but if I must make the sacrifice, I must, I suppose?" he added, with a hesitating inquiry in the tone.

"If you don't, you'll rue it," said Feltram coldly, and walked away.

"Penny in pocket's a merry companion," says the old English proverb, and Sir Bale felt in better spirits and temper than he had for many a day as he replaced the guineas in the purse.

It was long since he had visited either the racecourse or any other place of amusement. Now he might face his kind without fear that his pride should be mortified, and dabble in the fascinating agitations of the turf once more.

"Who knows how this little venture may turn out?" he thought. "It is time the luck should turn. My last summer in Germany, my last winter in Paris

— d — n me, I’m owed something. It’s time I should win a bit.”

Sir Bale had suffered the indolence of a solitary and discontented life imperceptibly to steal upon him. It would not do to appear for the first time on Heckleston Lea with any of those signs of negligence which, in his case, might easily be taken for poverty. All his appointments, therefore, were carefully looked after; and on the Monday following, he, followed by his groom, rode away for the Saracen’s Head at Heckleston, where he was to put up, for the races that were to begin on the day following, and presented as handsome an appearance as a peer in those days need have cared to show.

CHAPTER XVII

On the Course — Beeswing, Falcon, and Lightning

As he rode towards Golden Friars, through which his route lay, in the early morning light, in which the mists of night were clearing, he looked back towards Mardykes with a hope of speedy deliverance from that hated imprisonment, and of a return to the continental life in which he took delight. He saw the summits and angles of the old building touched with the cheerful beams, and the grand old trees, and at the opposite side the fells dark, with their backs towards the east; and down the side of the wooded and precipitous clough of Feltram, the light, with a pleasant contrast against the beetling purple of the fells, was breaking in the faint distance. On the lake he saw the white speck that indicated the sail of Philip Feltram's boat, now midway between Mardykes and the wooded shores of Cloostedd.

"Going on the same errand," thought Sir Bale, "I should not wonder. I wish him the same luck. Yes, he's going to Cloostedd Forest. I hope he may meet his gipsies there — the Trebecks, or whoever they are."

And as a momentary sense of degradation in being thus beholden to such people smote him, "Well," thought he, "who knows? Many a fellow will make a handsome sum of a poorer purse than this at Heckleston. It will be a light matter paying them then."

Through Golden Friars he rode. Some of the spectators who did not like him, wondered audibly at the gallant show, hoped it was paid for, and conjectured that he had ridden out in search of a wife. On the whole, however, the appearance of their Baronet in a smarter style than usual was popular, and accepted as a change to the advantage of the town.

Next morning he was on the racecourse of Heckleston, renewing old acquaintance and making himself as agreeable as he could — an object, among some people, of curiosity and even interest. Leaving the carriage-sides, the hoods and bonnets, Sir Bale was soon among the betting men, deep in more serious business.

How did he make his book? He did not break his word. He backed Beeswing, Falcon, and Lightning. But it must be owned not for a shilling more than the five guineas each, to which he stood pledged. The odds were forty-five to one against Beeswing, sixty to one against Lightning, and fifty to one against Falcon.

"A pretty lot to choose!" exclaimed Sir Bale, with vexation. "As if I had money so often, that I should throw it away!"

The Baronet was testy thinking over all this, and looked on Feltram's message as an impertinence and the money as his own.

Let us now see how Sir Bale Mardykes' pocket fared.

Sulkily enough at the close of the week he turned his back on Heckleston racecourse, and took the road to Golden Friars.

He was in a rage with his luck, and by no means satisfied with himself; and yet he had won something. The result of the racing had been curious. In the three principal races the favourites had been beaten: one by an accident, another on a technical point, and the third by fair running. And what horses had won? The names were precisely those which the "fortuneteller" had predicted.

Well, then, how was Sir Bale in pocket as he rode up to his ancestral house of Mardykes, where a few thousand pounds would have been very welcome? He had won exactly 775 guineas; and had he staked a hundred instead of five on each of the names communicated by Feltram, he would have won 15,500 guineas.

He dismounted before his hall-door, therefore, with the discontent of a man who had lost nearly 15,000 pounds. Feltram was upon the steps, and laughed dryly.

"What do you laugh at?" asked Sir Bale tartly.

"You've won, haven't you?"

"Yes, I've won; I've won a trifle."

"On the horses I named?"

"Well, yes; it so turned out, by the merest accident."

Feltram laughed again dryly, and turned away.

Sir Bale entered Mardykes Hall, and was surly. He was in a much worse mood than before he had ridden to Heckleston. But after a week or so ruminating upon the occurrence, he wondered that Feltram spoke no more of it. It was undoubtedly wonderful. There had been no hint of repayment yet, and he had made some hundreds by the loan; and, contrary to all likelihood, the three horses named by the unknown soothsayer had won.

Who was this gipsy? It would be worth bringing the soothsayer to Mardykes, and giving his people a camp on the warren, and all the poultry they could catch, and a pig or a sheep every now and then. Why, that seer was worth the philosopher's stone, and could make Sir Bale's fortune in a season. Some one else would be sure to pick him up if he did not.

So, tired of waiting for Feltram to begin, he opened the subject one day himself. He had not seen him for two or three days; and in the wood of Mardykes he saw his lank figure standing among the thick trees, upon a little knoll, leaning on a staff which he sometimes carried with him in his excursions up the mountains.

"Feltram!" shouted Sir Bale.

Feltram turned and beckoned. Sir Bale muttered, but obeyed the signal.

"I brought you here, because you can from this point with unusual clearness today see the opening of the Clough of Feltram at the other side, and the clump of trees, where you will find the way to reach the person about whom you are always thinking."

"Who said I am always thinking about him?" said the Baronet angrily; for he felt like a man detected in a weakness, and resented it.

"*I* say it, because I *know* it; and *you* know it also. See that clump of trees standing solitary in the hollow? Among them, to the left, grows an ancient oak. Cut in its bark are two enormous letters H — F; so large and bold, that the rugged furrows of the oak bark fail to obscure them, although they are ancient and spread by time. Standing against the trunk of this great tree, with your back to these letters, you are looking up the Glen or Clough of Feltram, that opens northward, where stands Cloostedd Forest spreading far and thick. Now, how do you find our fortuneteller?"

"That is exactly what I wish to know," answered Sir Bale; "because, although I can't, of course, believe that he's a witch, yet he has either made the most marvellous fluke I've heard of, or else he has got extraordinary sources of information; or perhaps he acts partly on chance, partly on facts. Be it which you please, I say he's a marvellous fellow; and I should like to see him, and have a talk with him; and perhaps he could arrange with me. I should be very glad to make an arrangement with him to give me the benefit of his advice about any matter of the same kind again."

"I think he's willing to see you; but he's a fellow with a queer fancy and a pig-head. He'll not come here; you must go to him; and approach him his own way too, or you may fail to find him. On these terms he invites you."

Sir Bale laughed.

"He knows his value, and means to make his own terms."

"Well, there's nothing unfair in that; and I don't see that I should dispute it. How is one to find him?"

"Stand, as I told you, with your back to those letters cut in the oak. Right before you lies an old Druidic altar-stone. Cast your eye over its surface, and on some part of it you are sure to see a black stain about the size of a man's head. Standing, as I suppose you, against the oak, that stain, which changes its place from day to day, will give you the line you must follow through the forest in order to light upon him. Take carefully from it such trees or objects as will guide you; and when the forest thickens, do the best you can to keep to the same line. You are sure to find him."

"You'll come, Feltram. I should lose myself in that wilderness, and probably fail to discover him," said Sir Bale; "and I really wish to see him."

"When two people wish to meet, it is hard if they don't. I can go with you a bit of the way; I can walk a little through the forest by your side, until I see the small flower that grows peeping here and there, that always springs where those people walk; and when I begin to see that sign, I must leave you. And, first, I'll take you across the lake."

"By Jove, you'll do no such thing!" said Sir Bale hastily.

"But that is the way he chooses to be approached," said Philip Feltram.

"I have a sort of feeling about that lake; it's the one childish spot that is left in my imagination. The nursery is to blame for it — old stories and warnings; and I can't think of that. I should feel I had invoked an evil omen if I did. I know it is all nonsense; but we are queer creatures, Feltram. I must only ride there."

"Why, it is five-and-twenty miles round the lake to that; and after all were done, he would not see you. He knows what he's worth, and he'll have his own way," answered Feltram. "The sun will soon set. See that withered branch, near Snakes Island, that looks like fingers rising from the water? When its points grow tipped with red, the sun has but three minutes to live."

"That is a wonder which I can't see; it is too far away."

"Yes, the lake has many signs; but it needs sight to see them," said Feltram.

"So it does," said the Baronet; "more than most men have got. I'll ride round, I say; and I make my visit, for this time, my own way."

"You'll not find him, then; and he wants his money. It would be a pity to vex him."

"It was to you he lent the money," said Sir Bale.

"Yes."

"Well, you are the proper person to find him out and pay him," urged Sir Bale.

"Perhaps so; but he invites you; and if you don't go, he may be offended, and you may hear no more from him."

"We'll try. When can you go? There are races to come off next week, for once and away, at Langton. I should not mind trying my luck there. What do you say?

"You can go there and pay him, and ask the same question — what horses, I mean, are to win. All the county are to be there; and plenty of money will change hands."

"I'll try," said Feltram.

"When will you go?"

"Tomorrow," he answered.

"I have an odd idea, Feltram, that you are really going to pay off those cursed mortgages."

He laid his hand with at least a gesture of kindness on the thin arm of Feltram, who coldly answered,

"So have I;" and walked down the side of the little knoll and away, without another word or look.

CHAPTER XVIII

On the Lake, at Last

Next day Philip Feltram crossed the lake; and Sir Bale, seeing the boat on the water, guessed its destination, and watched its progress with no little interest, until he saw it moored and its sail drop at the rude pier that affords a landing at the Clough of Feltram. He was now satisfied that Philip had actually gone to seek out the 'cunning man,' and gather hints for the next race.

When that evening Feltram returned, and, later still, entered Sir Bale's library, the master of Mardykes was gladder to see his face and more interested about his news than he would have cared to confess.

Philip Feltram did not affect unconsciousness of that anxiety, but, with great directness, proceeded to satisfy it.

"I was in Cloostedd Forest to-day, nearly all day — and found the old gentleman in a wax. He did not ask me to drink, nor show me any kindness. He was huffed because you would not take the trouble to cross the lake to speak to him yourself. He took the money you sent him and counted it over, and dropped it into his pocket; and he called you hard names enough and to spare; but I brought him round, and at last he did talk."

"And what did he say?"

"He said that the estate of Mardykes would belong to a Feltram."

"He might have said something more likely," said Sir Bale sourly. "Did he say anything more?"

"Yes. He said the winner at Langton Lea would be Silver Bell."

"Any other name?"

"No."

"Silver Bell? Well, that's not so odd as the last. Silver Bell stands high in the list. He has a good many backers — long odds in his favour against most of the field. I should not mind backing Silver Bell."

The fact is, that he had no idea of backing any other horse from the moment he heard the soothsayer's prediction. He made up his mind to no half measures this time. He would go in to win something handsome.

He was in great force and full of confidence on the racecourse. He had no fears for the result. He bet heavily. There was a good margin still untouched of the Mardykes estate; and Sir Bale was a good old name in the county. He found a ready market for his offers, and had soon staked — such is the growing frenzy of that excitement — about twenty thousand pounds on his favourite, and stood to win seven.

He did not win, however. He lost his twenty thousand pounds.

And now the Mardykes estate was in imminent danger. Sir Bale returned, having distributed I O Us and promissory notes in all directions about him — quite at his wit's end.

Feltram was standing — as on the occasion of his former happier return — on the steps of Mardykes Hall, in the evening sun, throwing eastward a long shadow that was lost in the lake. He received him, as before, with a laugh.

Sir Bale was too much broken to resent this laugh as furiously as he might, had he been a degree less desperate.

He looked at Feltram savagely, and dismounted.

"Last time you would not trust him, and this time he would not trust you. He's huffed, and played you false."

"It was not he. I should have backed that d —— d horse in any case," said Sir Bale, grinding his teeth. "What a witch you have discovered! One thing is true, perhaps. If there was a Feltram rich enough, he might have the estate now; but there ain't. They are all beggars. So much for your conjurer."

"He may make amends to you, if you make amends to him."

"He! Why, what can that wretched impostor do? D — n me, I'm past helping now."

"Don't you talk so," said Feltram. "Be civil. You must please the old gentleman. He'll make it up. He's placable when it suits him. Why not go to him his own way? I hear you are nearly ruined. You must go and make it up."

"Make it up! With whom? With a fellow who can't make even a guess at what's coming? Why should I trouble my head about him more?"

"No man, young or old, likes to be frumped. Why did you cross his fancy? He won't see you unless you go to him as he chooses."

"If he waits for that, he may wait till doomsday. I don't choose to go on that water — and cross it I won't," said Sir Bale.

But when his distracting reminders began to pour in upon him, and the idea of dismembering what remained of his property came home to him, his resolution faltered.

"I say, Feltram, what difference can it possibly make to him if I choose to ride round to Cloostedd Forest instead of crossing the lake in a boat?"

Feltram smiled darkly, and answered.

"I can't tell. Can you?"

"Of course I can't — I say I can't; besides, what audacity of a fellow like that presuming to prescribe to me! Utterly ludicrous! And he can't predict — do you really think or believe, Feltram, that he can?"

"I know he can. I know he misled you on purpose. He likes to punish those who don't respect his will; and there is a reason in it, often quite clear — not ill-natured. Now you see he compels you to seek him out, and when you do, I think he'll help you through your trouble. He said he would."

"Then you have seen him since?"

"Yesterday. He has put a pressure on you; but he means to help you."

"If he means to help me, let him remember I want a banker more than a seer. Let him give me a lift, as he did before. He must lend me money."

"He'll not stick at that. When he takes up a man, he carries him through."

"The races of Byermere — I might retrieve at them. But they don't come off for a month nearly; and what is a man like me to do in the meantime?"

"Every man should know his own business best. I'm not like you," said Feltram grimly.

Now Sir Bale's trouble increased, for some people were pressing. Something like panic supervened; for it happened that land was bringing just then a bad price, and more must be sold in consequence.

"All I can tell them is, I am selling land. It can't be done in an hour. I'm selling enough to pay them all twice over. Gentlemen used to be able to wait till a man sold his acres for payment. D — n them! do they want my body, that they can't let me alone for five minutes?"

The end of it was, that before a week Sir Bale told Feltram that he would go by boat, since that fellow insisted on it; and he did not very much care if he were drowned.

It was a beautiful autumnal day. Everything was bright in that mellowed sun, and the deep blue of the lake was tremulous with golden ripples; and crag and peak and scattered wood, faint in the distance, came out with a filmy distinctness on the fells in that pleasant light.

Sir Bale had been ill, and sent down the night before for Doctor Torvey. He was away with a patient. Now, in the morning, he had arrived inopportunely. He met Sir Bale as he issued from the house, and had a word with him in the court, for he would not turn back.

"Well," said the Doctor, after his brief inspection, "you ought to be in your bed; that's all I can say. You are perfectly mad to think of knocking about like this. Your pulse is at a hundred and ten; and, if you go across the lake and walk about Cloostedd, you'll be raving before you come back."

Sir Bale told him, apologetically, as if his life were more to his doctor than to himself, that he would take care not to fatigue himself, and that the air would do him good, and that in any case he could not avoid going; and so they parted.

Sir Bale took his seat beside Feltram in the boat, the sail was spread, and, bending to the light breeze that blew from Golden Friars, she glided from the jetty under Mardykes Hall, and the eventful voyage had begun.

CHAPTER XIX

Mystagogus

The sail was loosed, the boat touched the stone step, and Feltram sprang out and made her fast to the old iron ring. The Baronet followed. So! he had ventured upon that water without being drowned. He looked round him as if in a dream. He had not been there since his childhood. There were no regrets, no sentiment, no remorse; only an odd return of the associations and fresh feelings of boyhood, and a long reach of time suddenly annihilated.

The little hollow in which he stood; the three hawthorn trees at his right; every crease and undulation of the sward, every angle and crack in the lichen-covered rock at his feet, recurred with a sharp and instantaneous recognition to his memory.

"Many a time your brother and I fished for hours together from that bank there, just where the bramble grows. That bramble has not grown an inch ever since, not a leaf altered; we used to pick blackberries off it, with our rods stuck in the bank — it was later in the year than now — till we stript it quite bare after a day or two. The steward used to come over — they were marking timber for cutting and we used to stay here while they rambled through the wood, with an axe marking the trees that were to come down. I wonder whether the big old boat is still anywhere. I suppose she was broken up, or left to rot; I have not seen her since we came home. It was in the wood that lies at the right — the other wood is called the forest; they say in old times it was eight miles long, northward up the shore of the lake, and full of deer; with a forester, and a reeve, and a verderer, and all that. Your brother was older than you; he went to India, or the Colonies; is he living still?"

"I care not."

"That's goodnatured, at all events; but do you know?"

"Not I; and what matter? If he's living, I warrant he has his share of the curse, the sweat of his brow and his bitter crust; and if he is dead, he's dust or worse, he's rotten, and smells accordingly."

Sir Bale looked at him; for this was the brother over whom, only a year or two ago, Philip used to cry tears of pathetic longing. Feltram looked darkly in his face, and sneered with a cold laugh.

"I suppose you mean to jest?" said Sir Bale.

"Not I; it is the truth. It is what you'd say, if you were honest. If he's alive, let him keep where he is; and if he's dead, I'll have none of him, body or soul. Do you hear that sound?"

"Like the wind moaning in the forest?"

"Yes."

"But I feel no wind. There's hardly a leaf stirring."

"I think so," said Feltram. "Come along."

And he began striding up the gentle slope of the glen, with many a rock peeping through its sward, and tufted ferns and furze, giving a wild and neglected character to the scene; the background of which, where the glen loses itself in a distant turn, is formed by its craggy and wooded side.

Up they marched, side by side, in silence, towards that irregular clump of trees, to which Feltram had pointed from the Mardykes side.

As they approached, it showed more scattered, and two or three of the trees were of grander dimensions than in the distance they had appeared; and as they walked, the broad valley of Cloostedd Forest opened grandly on their left, studding the sides of the valley with solitary trees or groups, which thickened as it descended to the broad level, in parts nearly three miles wide, on which stands the noble forest of Cloostedd, now majestically reposing in the stirless air, gilded and flushed with the melancholy tints of autumn.

I am now going to relate wonderful things; but they rest on the report, strangely consistent, it is true, of Sir Bale Mardykes. That all his senses, however, were sick and feverish, and his brain not quite to be relied on at that moment, is a fact of which sceptics have a right to make all they please and can.

Startled at their approach, a bird like a huge mackaw bounced from the boughs of the trees, and sped away, every now and then upon the ground, toward the shelter of the forest, fluttering and hopping close by the side of the little brook which, emerging from the forest, winds into the glen, and beside the course of which Sir Bale and Philip Feltram had ascended from the margin of the lake.

It fluttered on, as if one of its wings were hurt, and kept hopping and bobbing and flying along the grass at its swiftest, screaming all the time discordantly.

“That must be old Mrs. Amerald’s bird, that got away a week ago,” said Sir Bale, stopping and looking after it. “Was not it a mackaw?”

“No,” said Feltram; “that was a gray parrot; but there are stranger birds in Cloostedd Forest, for my ancestors collected all that would live in our climate, and were at pains to find them the food and shelter they were accustomed to until they grew hardy — that is how it happens.”

“By Jove, that’s a secret worth knowing,” said Sir Bale. “That would make quite a feature. What a fat brute that bird was! and green and dusky-crimson and yellow; but its head is white — age, I suspect; and what a broken beak — hideous bird! splendid plumage; something between a mackaw and a vulture.”

Sir Bale spoke jocularly, but with the interest of a bird-fancier; a taste which, when young, he had indulged; and for the moment forgot his cares and the object of his unwonted excursion.

A moment after, a lank slim bird, perfectly white, started from the same boughs, and winged its way to the forest.

“A kite, I think; but its body is a little too long, isn’t it?” said Sir Bale again, stopping and looking after its flight also.

“A foreign kite, I daresay?” said Feltram.

All this time there was hopping near them a jay, with the tameness of a bird accustomed to these solitudes. It peered over its slender wing curiously at the visitors; pecking here and nodding there; and thus hopping, it made a circle round them more than once. Then it fluttered up, and perched on a bough of the old oak, from the deep labyrinth of whose branches the other birds had emerged; and from thence it flew down and lighted on the broad druidic stone, that stood like a cyclopean table on its sunken stone props, before the snakelike roots of the oak.

Across this it hopped conceitedly, as over a stage on which it figured becomingly; and after a momentary hesitation, with a little spring, it rose and winged its way in the same direction which the other birds had taken, and was quickly lost in thick forest to the left.

“Here,” said Feltram, “this is the tree.”

“I remember it well! A gigantic trunk; and, yes, those marks; but I never before read them as letters. Yes, H.F., so they are — very odd I should not have remarked them. They are so large, and so strangely drawn-out in some places, and filled-in in others, and distorted, and the moss has grown about them; I don’t wonder I took them for natural cracks and chasms in the bark,” said Sir Bale.

“Very like,” said Feltram.

Sir Bale had remarked, ever since they had begun their walk from the shore, that Feltram seemed to undergo a gloomy change. Sharper, grimmer, wilder grew his features, and shadow after shadow darkened his face wickedly.

The solitude and grandeur of the forest, and the repulsive gloom of his companion’s countenance and demeanour, communicated a tone of anxiety to Sir Bale; and they stood still, side by side, in total silence for a time, looking toward the forest glades; between themselves and which, on the level sward of the valley, stood many a noble tree and fantastic group of forked birch and thorn, in the irregular formations into which Nature had thrown them.

“Now you stand between the letters. Cast your eyes on the stone,” said Feltram suddenly, and his low stern tones almost startled the Baronet.

Looking round, he perceived that he had so placed himself that his point of vision was exactly from between the two great letters, now halfobliterated, which he had been scrutinizing just as he turned about to look toward the forest of Cloostedd.

“Yes, so I am,” said Sir Bale.

There was within him an excitement and misgiving, akin to the sensation of a man going into battle, and which corresponded with the pale and sombre frown which Feltram wore, and the manifest change which had come over him.

“Look on the stone steadily for a time, and tell me if you see a black mark, about the size of your hand, anywhere upon its surface,” said Feltram.

Sir Bale affected no airs of scepticism now; his imagination was stirred, and a sense of some unknown reality at the bottom of that which he had affected to treat before as illusion, inspired a strange interest in the experiment.

“Do you see it?” asked Feltram.

Sir Bale was watching patiently, but he had observed nothing of the kind.

Sharper, darker, more eager grew the face of Philip Feltram, as his eyes traversed the surface of that huge horizontal block.

“Now?” asked Feltram again.

No, he had seen nothing.

Feltram was growing manifestly uneasy, angry almost; he walked away a little, and back again, and then two or three times round the tree, with his hands shut, and treading the ground like a man trying to warm his feet, and so impatiently he returned, and looked again on the stone.

Sir Bale was still looking, and very soon said, drawing his brows together and looking hard,

“Ha! — yes — hush. There it is, by Jove! — wait — yes — there; it is growing quite plain.”

It seemed not as if a shadow fell upon the stone, but rather as if the stone became semi-transparent, and just under its surface was something dark — a hand, he thought it — and darker and darker it grew, as if coming up toward the surface, and after some little wavering, it fixed itself movelessly, pointing, as he thought, toward the forest.

“It looks like a hand,” said he. “By Jove, it is a hand — pointing towards the forest with a finger.”

“Don’t mind the finger; look only on that black blurred mark, and from the point where you stand, taking that point for your direction, look to the forest. Take some tree or other landmark for an object, enter the forest there, and pursue the same line, as well as you can, until you find little flowers with leaves like wood-sorrel, and with tall stems and a red blossom, not larger than a drop, such as you have not seen before, growing among the trees, and follow wherever they seem to grow thickest, and there you will find him.”

All the time that Feltram was making this little address, Sir Bale was endeavouring to fix his route by such indications as Feltram described; and when he had succeeded in quite establishing the form of a peculiar tree — a melancholy ash, one huge limb of which had been blasted by lightning, and its partly stricken arm stood high and barkless, stretching its white fingers, as it were, in invitation into the forest, and signing the way for him ——

“I have it now,” said he. “Come Feltram, you’ll come a bit of the way with me.”

Feltram made no answer, but slowly shook his head, and turned and walked away, leaving Sir Bale to undertake his adventure alone.

The strange sound they had heard from the midst of the forest, like the rumble of a storm or the far-off trembling of a furnace, had quite ceased. Not a bird was hopping on the grass, or visible on bough or in the sky. Not a living creature was in sight — never was stillness more complete, or silence more oppressive.

It would have been ridiculous to give way to the old reluctance which struggled within him. Feltram had strode down the slope, and was concealed by a screen of bushes from his view. So alone, and full of an interest quite new to him, he set out in quest of his adventures.

CHAPTER XX

The Haunted Forest

Sir Bale Mardykes walked in a straight line, by bush and scaur, over the undulating ground, to the blighted ash-tree; and as he approached it, its withered bough stretched more gigantically into the air, and the forest seemed to open where it pointed.

He passed it by, and in a few minutes had lost sight of it again, and was striding onward under the shadow of the forest, which already enclosed him. He was directing his march with all the care he could, in exactly that line which, according to Feltram's rule, had been laid down for him. Now and then, having, as soldiers say, taken an object, and fixed it well in his memory, he would pause and look about him.

As a boy he had never entered the wood so far; for he was under a prohibition, lest he should lose himself in its intricacies, and be benighted there. He had often heard that it was haunted ground, and that too would, when a boy, have deterred him. It was on this account that the scene was so new to him, and that he cared so often to stop and look about him. Here and there a vista opened, exhibiting the same utter desertion, and opening farther perspectives through the tall stems of the trees faintly visible in the solemn shadow. No flowers could he see, but once or twice a wood anemone, and now and then a tiny grove of wood-sorrel.

Huge oak-trees now began to mingle and show themselves more and more frequently among the other timber; and gradually the forest became a great oak wood unintruded upon by any less noble tree. Vast trunks curving outwards to the roots, and expanding again at the branches, stood like enormous columns, striking out their groining boughs, with the dark vaulting of a crypt.

As he walked under the shadow of these noble trees, suddenly his eye was struck by a strange little flower, nodding quite alone by the knotted root of one of those huge oaks.

He stooped and picked it up, and as he plucked it, with a harsh scream just over his head, a large bird with heavy beating wings broke away from the midst of the branches. He could not see it, but he fancied the scream was like that of the huge mackaw whose ill-poised flight he had watched. This conjecture was but founded on the odd cry he had heard.

The flower was a curious one — a stem fine as a hair supported a little bell, that looked like a drop of blood, and never ceased trembling. He walked on, holding this in his fingers; and soon he saw another of the same odd type, then another at a shorter distance, then one a little to the right and another to the left, and farther on a little group, and at last the dark slope was all over trembling with these little bells, thicker and thicker as he descended a gentle declivity to the bank of the little brook, which flowing through the forest loses itself in the lake. The low murmur of this forest stream was almost the first sound, except the shriek of the bird that startled him a little time ago, which had disturbed the profound silence of the wood since he entered it. Mingling with the faint sound of the brook, he now heard a harsh human voice calling words at intervals, the purport of which he could not yet catch; and walking on, he saw seated upon the grass, a strange figure, corpulent, with a great hanging nose, the whole face glowing like copper. He was dressed in a bottle-green cut-velvet coat, of the style of Queen Anne's reign, with a dusky crimson waistcoat, both overlaid with broad and tarnished gold lace, and his silk stockings on thick swollen legs, with great buckled shoes, straddling on the grass, were rolled up over his knees to his short breeches. This ill-favoured old fellow, with a powdered wig that came down to his shoulders, had a dice-box in each hand, and was apparently playing his left against his right, and calling the throws with a hoarse cawing voice.

Raising his black piggish eyes, he roared to Sir Bale, by name, to come and sit down, raising one of his dice-boxes, and then indicating a place on the grass opposite to him.

Now Sir Bale instantly guessed that this was the man, gipsy, warlock, call him what he might, of whom he had come in search. With a strange feeling of curiosity, disgust, and awe, he drew near. He was resolved to do whatever this old man required of him, and to keep him, this time, in good humour.

Sir Bale did as he bid him, and sat down; and taking the box he presented, they began throwing turn about, with three dice, the copper-faced old man teaching him the value of the throws, as he proceeded, with many a curse and oath; and when he did not like a throw, grinning with a look of such real fury, that the master of Mardykes almost expected him to whip out his sword and prick him through as he sat before him.

After some time spent at this play, in which guineas passed now this way, now that, chucked across the intervening patch of grass, or rather moss, that served them for a green cloth, the old man roared over his shoulder,

"Drink;" and picking up a longstemmed conical glass which Sir Bale had not observed before, he handed it over to the Baronet; and taking another in his fingers, he held it up, while a very tall slim old man, dressed in a white livery, with powdered hair and cadaverous face, which seemed to run out nearly all into a long thin hooked nose, advanced with a flask in each hand. Looking at the unwieldly old man, with his heavy nose, powdered head, and all the bottle-green, crimson, and gold about him, and the long slim serving man, with sharp beak, and white from head to heel, standing by him, Sir Bale was forcibly reminded of the great old macaw and the long and slender kite, whose colours they, after their fashion, reproduced, with something, also indescribable, of the air and character of the birds. Not standing on ceremony, the old fellow held up his own glass first, which the white lackey filled from the flask, and then he filled Sir Bale's glass.

It was a large glass, and might have held about half a pint; and the liquor with which the servant filled it was something of the colour of an opal, and circles of purple and gold seemed to be spreading continually outward from the centre, and running inward from the rim, and crossing one another, so as to form a beautiful rippling network.

"I drink to your better luck next time," said the old man, lifting his glass high, and winking with one eye, and leering knowingly with the other; "and you know what I mean."

Sir Bale put the liquor to his lips. Wine? Whatever it was, never had he tasted so delicious a flavour. He drained it to the bottom, and placing it on the grass beside him, and looking again at the old dicer, who was also setting down his glass, he saw, for the first time, the graceful figure of a young woman seated on the grass. She was dressed in deep mourning, had a black hood carelessly over her head, and, strangely, wore a black mask, such as are used at masquerades. So much of her throat and chin as he could see were beautifully white; and there was a prettiness in her air and figure which made him think what a beautiful creature she in all likelihood was.

She was reclining slightly against the burly man in bottle-green and gold, and her arm was round his neck, and her slender white hand showed itself over his shoulder.

"Ho! my little Geaiette," cried the old fellow hoarsely; "it will be time that you and I should get home. — So, Bale Mardykes, I have nothing to object to you this time; you've crossed the lake, and you've played with me and won and lost, and drank your glass like a jolly companion, and now we know one another; and an acquaintance is made that will last. I'll let you go, and you'll come when I call for you. And now you'll want to know what horse will win next month at Rindermere races. — Whisper me, lass, and I'll tell him."

So her lips, under the black curtain, crept close to his ear, and she whispered.

"Ay, so it will;" roared the old man, gnashing his teeth; "it will be Rainbow, and now make your best speed out of the forest, or I'll set my black dogs after you, ho, ho, ho! and they may chance to pull you down. Away!"

He cried this last order with a glare so black, and so savage a shake of his huge fist, that Sir Bale, merely making his general bow to the group, clapped his hat on his head, and hastily began his retreat; but the same discordant voice yelled after him:

"You'll want that, you fool; pick it up." And there came hurtling after and beside him a great leather bag, stained, and stuffed with a heavy burden, and bounding by him it stopped with a little wheel that brought it exactly before his feet.

He picked it up, and found it heavy.

Turning about to make his acknowledgments, he saw the two persons in full retreat; the profane old scoundrel in the bottle-green limping and stumbling, yet bowling along at a wonderful rate, with many a jerk and reel, and the slender lady in black gliding away by his side into the inner depths of the forest.

So Sir Bale, with a strange chill, and again in utter solitude, pursued his retreat, with his burden, at a swifter pace, and after an hour or so, had recovered the point where he had entered the forest, and passing by the druidic stone and the mighty oak, saw down the glen at his right, standing by the edge of the lake, Philip Feltram, close to the bow of the boat.

CHAPTER XXI

Rindermere

Feltram looked grim and agitated when Sir Bale came up to him, as he stood on the flat-stone by which the boat was moored.

“You found him?” said he.

“Yes.”

“The lady in black was there?”

“She was.”

“And you played with him?”

“Yes.”

“And what is that in your hand?”

“A bag of something, I fancy money; it is heavy; he threw it after me. We shall see just now; let us get away.”

“He gave you some of his wine to drink?” said Feltram, looking darkly in his face; but there was a laugh in his eyes.

“Yes; of course I drank it; my object was to please him.”

“To be sure.”

The faint wind that carried them across the lake had quite subsided by the time they had reached the side where they now were.

There was now not wind enough to fill the sail, and it was already evening.

“Give me an oar; we can pull her over in little more than an hour,” said Sir Bale; “only let us get away.”

He got into the boat, sat down, and placed the leather bag with its heavy freightage at his feet, and took an oar. Feltram loosed the rope and shoved the boat off; and taking his seat also, they began to pull together, without another word, until, in about ten minutes, they had got a considerable way off the Cloostedd shore.

The leather bag was too clumsy a burden to conceal; besides, Feltram knew all about the transaction, and Sir Bale had no need to make a secret. The bag was old and soiled, and tied about the “neck” with a long leather thong, and it seemed to have been sealed with red wax, fragments of which were still sticking to it.

He got it open, and found it full of guineas.

"Halt!" cried Sir Bale, delighted, for he had half apprehended a trick upon his hopes; "gold it is, and a lot of it, by Jove!"

Feltram did not seem to take the slightest interest in the matter. Sulkily and drowsily he was leaning with his elbow on his knee, and it seemed thinking of something far away. Sir Bale could not wait to count them any longer. He reckoned them on the bench, and found two thousand.

It took some time; and when he had got them back into the leather bag, and tied them up again, Feltram, with a sudden start, said sharply,

"Come, take your oar — unless you like the lake by night; and see, a wind will soon be up from Golden Friars!"

He cast a wild look towards Mardykes Hall and Snakes Island, and applying himself to his oar, told Sir Bale to take his also; and nothing loath, the Baronet did so.

It was slow work, for the boat was not built for speed; and by the time they had got about midway, the sun went down, and twilight and the melancholy flush of the sunset tints were upon the lake and fells.

"Ho! here comes the breeze — up from Golden Friars," said Feltram; "we shall have enough to fill the sails now. If you don't fear spirits and Snakes Island, it is all the better for us it should blow from that point. If it blew from Mardykes now, it would be a stiff pull for you and me to get this tub home."

Talking as if to himself, and laughing low, he adjusted the sail and took the tiller, and so, yielding to the rising breeze, the boat glided slowly toward still distant Mardykes Hall.

The moon came out, and the shore grew misty, and the towering fells rose like sheeted giants; and leaning on the gunwale of the boat, Sir Bale, with the rush and gurgle of the water on the boat's side sounding faintly in his ear, thought of his day's adventure, which seemed to him like a dream — incredible but for the heavy bag that lay between his feet.

As they passed Snakes Island, a little mist, like a fragment of a fog, seemed to drift with them, and Sir Bale fancied that whenever it came near the boat's side she made a dip, as if strained toward the water; and Feltram always put out his hand, as if waving it from him, and the mist seemed to obey the gesture; but returned again and again, and the same thing always happened.

It was three weeks after, that Sir Bale, sitting up in his bed, very pale and wan, with his silk nightcap nodding on one side, and his thin hand extended on the coverlet, where the doctor had been feeling his pulse, in his darkened room, related all the wonders of this day to Doctor Torvey. The doctor had attended him through a fever which followed immediately upon his visit to Cloostedd.

“And, my dear sir, by Jupiter, can you really believe all that delirium to be sober fact?” said the doctor, sitting by the bedside, and actually laughing.

“I can’t help believing it, because I can’t distinguish in any way between all that and everything else that actually happened, and which I must believe. And, except that this is more wonderful, I can find no reason to reject it, that does not as well apply to all the rest.”

“Come, come, my dear sir, this will never do — nothing is more common. These illusions accompanying fever frequently antedate the attack, and the man is actually raving before he knows he is ill.”

“But what do you make of that bag of gold?”

“Some one has lent it. You had better ask all about it of Feltram when you can see him; for in speaking to me he seemed to know all about it, and certainly did not seem to think the matter at all out of the commonplace. It is just like that fisherman’s story, about the hand that drew Feltram into the water on the night that he was nearly drowned. Every one can see what that was. Why of course it was simply the reflection of his own hand in the water, in that vivid lightning. When you have been out a little and have gained strength you will shake off these dreams.”

“I should not wonder,” said Sir Bale.

It is not to be supposed that Sir Bale reported all that was in his memory respecting his strange vision, if such it was, at Cloostedd. He made a selection of the incidents, and threw over the whole adventure an entirely accidental character, and described the money which the old man had thrown to him as amounting to a purse of five guineas, and mentioned nothing of the passages which bore on the coming race.

Good Doctor Torvey, therefore, reported only that Sir Bale’s delirium had left two or three illusions sticking in his memory.

But if they were illusions, they survived the event of his recovery, and remained impressed on his memory with the sharpness of very recent and accurately observed fact.

He was resolved on going to the races of Rindermere, where, having in his possession so weighty a guarantee as the leather purse, he was determined to stake it all boldly on Rainbow — against which horse he was glad to hear there were very heavy odds.

The race came off. One horse was scratched, another bolted, the rider of a third turned out to have lost a buckle and three halfpence and so was an ounce and a half under weight, a fourth knocked down the post near Rinderness churchyard, and was held to have done it with his left instead of his right knee, and so had run at the wrong side. The result was that Rainbow came in first, and I should be afraid to say how much Sir Bale won. It was a sum that paid off a heavy debt, and left his affairs in a much more manageable state.

From this time Sir Bale prospered. He visited Cloostedd no more; but Feltram often crossed to that lonely shore as heretofore, and it is believed conveyed to him messages which guided his betting. One thing is certain, his luck never deserted him. His debts disappeared; and his love of continental life seemed to have departed. He became content with Mardykes Hall, laid out money on it, and although he never again cared to cross the lake, he seemed to like the scenery.

In some respects, however, he lived exactly the same odd and unpopular life. He saw no one at Mardykes Hall. He practised a very strict reserve. The neighbours laughed at and disliked him, and he was voted, whenever any accidental contact arose, a very disagreeable man; and he had a shrewd and ready sarcasm that made them afraid of him, and himself more disliked.

Odd rumours prevailed about his household. It was said that his old relations with Philip Feltram had become reversed; and that he was as meek as a mouse, and Feltram the bully now. It was also said that Mrs. Julaper had one Sunday evening when she drank tea at the Vicar’s, told his good lady very mysteriously, and with many charges of secrecy, that Sir Bale was none the better of his late-found wealth; that he had a load upon his spirits, that he was afraid of Feltram, and so was every one else, more or less, in the house; that he was either mad or worse; and that it was an eerie dwelling, and strange company, and she should be glad herself of a change.

Good Mrs. Bedel told her friend Mrs. Torvey; and all Golden Friars heard all this, and a good deal more, in an incredibly short time.

All kinds of rumours now prevailed in Golden Friars, connecting Sir Bale's successes on the turf with some mysterious doings in Cloostedd Forest. Philip Feltram laughed when he heard these stories — especially when he heard the story that a supernatural personage had lent the Baronet a purse full of money.

"You should not talk to Doctor Torvey so, sir," said he grimly; "he's the greatest tattler in the town. It was old Farmer Trebeck, who could buy and sell us all down here, who lent that money. Partly from goodwill, but not without acknowledgment. He has my hand for the first, not worth much, and yours to a bond for the two thousand guineas you brought home with you. It seems strange you should not remember that venerable and kind old farmer whom you talked with so long that day. His grandson, who expects to stand well in his will, being a trainer in Lord Varney's stables, has sometimes a tip to give, and he is the source of your information."

"By Jove, I must be a bit mad, then, that's all," said Sir Bale, with a smile and a shrug.

Philip Feltram moped about the house, and did precisely what he pleased. The change which had taken place in him became more and more pronounced. Dark and stern he always looked, and often malignant. He was like a man possessed of one evil thought which never left him.

There was, besides, the good old Gothic superstition of a bargain or sale of the Baronet's soul to the arch-fiend. This was, of course, very cautiously whispered in a place where he had influence. It was only a coarser and directer version of a suspicion, that in a more credulous generation penetrated a level of society quite exempt from such follies in our day.

One evening at dusk, Sir Bale, sitting after his dinner in his window, saw the tall figure of Feltram, like a dark streak, standing movelessly by the lake. An unpleasant feeling moved him, and then an impatience. He got up, and having primed himself with two glasses of brandy, walked down to the edge of the lake, and placed himself beside Feltram.

"Looking down from the window," said he, nerved with his Dutch courage, "and seeing you standing like a post, do you know what I began to think of?"

Feltram looked at him, but answered nothing.

“I began to think of taking a wife — *marrying*.”

Feltram nodded. The announcement had not produced the least effect.

“Why the devil will you make me so uncomfortable! Can’t you be like yourself — what you *were*, I mean? I won’t go on living here alone with you. I’ll take a wife, I tell you. I’ll choose a good churchgoing woman, that will have every man, woman, and child in the house on their marrow-bones twice a day, morning and evening, and three times on Sundays. How will you like that?”

“Yes, you will be married,” said Feltram, with a quiet decision which chilled Sir Bale, for he had by no means made up his mind to that desperate step.

Feltram slowly walked away, and that conversation ended.

Now an odd thing happened about this time. There was a family of Feltram — county genealogists could show how related to the vanished family of Cloostedd — living at that time on their estate not far from Carlisle. Three co-heiresses now represented it. They were great beauties — the belles of their county in their day.

One was married to Sir Oliver Haworth of Haworth, a great family in those times. He was a knight of the shire, and had refused a baronetage, and, it was said, had his eye on a peerage. The other sister was married to Sir William Walsingham, a wealthy baronet; and the third and youngest, Miss Janet, was still unmarried, and at home at Cloudesly Hall, where her aunt, Lady Harbottle, lived with her, and made a dignified chaperon.

Now it so fell out that Sir Bale, having business at Carlisle, and knowing old Lady Harbottle, paid his respects at Cloudesly Hall; and being no less than five-and-forty years of age, was for the first time in his life, seriously in love.

Miss Janet was extremely pretty — a fair beauty with brilliant red lips and large blue eyes, and ever so many pretty dimples when she talked and smiled. It was odd, but not perhaps against the course of nature, that a man, though so old as he, and quite *blasé*, should fall at last under that fascination.

But what are we to say of the strange infatuation of the young lady? No one could tell why she liked him. It was a craze. Her family were against it, her intimates, her old nurse — all would not do; and the oddest thing was, that he seemed to take no pains to please her. The end of this strange courtship was that he married her; and she came home to Mardykes Hall, determined to please everybody, and to be the happiest woman in England.

With her came a female cousin, a good deal her senior, past thirty — Gertrude Mainyard, pale and sad, but very gentle, and with all the prettiness that can belong to her years.

This young lady has a romance. Her hero is far away in India; and she, content to await his uncertain return with means to accomplish the hope of their lives, in that frail chance has long embarked all the purpose and love of her life.

When Lady Mardykes came home, a new leaf was, as the phrase is, turned over. The neighbours and all the country people were willing to give the Hall a new trial. There was visiting and returning of visits; and young Lady Mardykes was liked and admired. It could not indeed have been otherwise. But here the improvement in the relations of Mardykes Hall with other homes ceased. On one excuse or another Sir Bale postponed or evaded the hospitalities which establish intimacies. Some people said he was jealous of his young and beautiful wife. But for the most part his reserve was set down to the old inhospitable cause, some ungenial defect in his character; and in a little time the tramp of horses and roll of carriage-wheels were seldom heard up or down the broad avenue of Mardykes Hall.

Sir Bale liked this seclusion; and his wife, "so infatuated with her idolatry of that graceless old man," as surrounding young ladies said, that she was well content to forego the society of the county people for a less interrupted enjoyment of that of her husband. "What she could see in him" to interest or amuse her so, that for his sake she was willing to be "buried alive in that lonely place," the same critics were perpetually wondering.

A year and more passed thus; for the young wife, happily — *very* happily indeed, had it not been for one topic on which she and her husband could not agree. This was Philip Feltram; and an odd quarrel it was.

CHAPTER XXII

Sir Bale is Frightened

To Feltram she had conceived, at first sight, a horror. It was not a mere antipathy; fear mingled largely in it. Although she did not see him often, this restless dread grew upon her so, that she urged his dismissal upon Sir Bale, offering to provide, herself, for him a handsome annuity, charged on that part of her property which, by her marriage settlement, had remained in her power. There was a time when Sir Bale was only too anxious to get rid of him. But that was changed now. Nothing could now induce the Baronet to part with him. He at first evaded and resisted quietly. But, urged with a perseverance to which he was unused, he at last broke into fury that appalled her, and swore that if he was worried more upon the subject, he would leave her and the country, and see neither again. This exhibition of violence affrighted her all the more by reason of the contrast; for up to this he had been an uxorious husband. Lady Mardykes was in hysterics, and thoroughly frightened, and remained in her room for two or three days. Sir Bale went up to London about business, and was not home for more than a week. This was the first little squall that disturbed the serenity of their sky.

This point, therefore, was settled; but soon there came other things to sadden Lady Mardykes. There occurred a little incident, soon after Sir Bale's return from London, which recalled the topic on which they had so nearly quarrelled.

Sir Bale had a dressing-room, remote from the bedrooms, in which he sat and read and sometimes smoked. One night, after the house was all quiet, the Baronet being still up, the bell of this dressing-room rang long and furiously. It was such a peal as a person in extreme terror might ring. Lady Mardykes, with her maid in her room, heard it; and in great alarm she ran in her dressing-gown down the gallery to Sir Bale's room. Mallard the butler had already arrived, and was striving to force the door, which was secured. It gave way just as she reached it, and she rushed through.

Sir Bale was standing with the bell-rope in his hand, in the extremest agitation, looking like a ghost; and Philip Feltram was sitting in his chair, with a dark smile fixed upon him. For a minute she thought he had attempted to assassinate his master. She could not otherwise account for the scene.

There had been nothing of the kind, however; as her husband assured her again and again, as she lay sobbing on his breast, with her arms about his neck.

“To her dying hour,” she afterwards said to her cousin, “she never could forget the dreadful look in Feltram’s face.”

No explanation of that scene did she ever obtain from Sir Bale, nor any clue to the cause of the agony that was so powerfully expressed in his countenance. Thus much only she learned from him, that Feltram had sought that interview for the purpose of announcing his departure, which was to take place within the year.

“You are not sorry to hear that. But if you knew all, you might. Let the curse fly where it may, it will come back to roost. So, darling, let us discuss him no more. Your wish is granted, *dis iratis*.”

Some crisis, during this interview, seemed to have occurred in the relations between Sir Bale and Feltram. Henceforward they seldom exchanged a word; and when they did speak, it was coldly and shortly, like men who were nearly strangers.

One day in the courtyard, Sir Bale seeing Feltram leaning upon the parapet that overlooks the lake, approached him, and said in a low tone,

“I’ve been thinking if we — that is, I — do owe that money to old Trebeck, it is high time I should pay it. I was ill, and had lost my head at the time; but it turned out luckily, and it ought to be paid. I don’t like the idea of a bond turning up, and a lot of interest.”

“The old fellow meant it for a present. He is richer than you are; he wished to give the family a lift. He has destroyed the bond, I believe, and in no case will he take payment.”

“No fellow has a right to force his money on another,” answered Sir Bale. “I never asked him. Besides, as you know, I was not really myself, and the whole thing seems to me quite different from what you say it was; and, so far as my brain is concerned, it was all a phantasmagoria; but, you say, it was he.”

“Every man is accountable for what he intends and for what he *thinks* he does,” said Feltram cynically.

"Well, I'm accountable for dealing with that wicked old dicer I *thought* I saw — isn't that it? But I must pay old Trebeck all the same, since the money was his. Can you manage a meeting?"

"Look down here. Old Trebeck has just landed; he will sleep tonight at the George and Dragon, to meet his cattle in the morning at Golden Friars fair. You can speak to him yourself."

So saying Feltram glided away, leaving Sir Bale the task of opening the matter to the wealthy farmer of Cloostedd Fells.

A broad night of steps leads down from the courtyard to the level of the jetty at the lake: and Sir Bale descended, and accosted the venerable farmer, who was bluff, honest, and as frank as a man can be who speaks a *patois* which hardly a living man but himself can understand.

Sir Bale asked him to come to the Hall and take luncheon; but Trebeck was in haste. Cattle had arrived which he wanted to look at, and a pony awaited him on the road, hard by, to Golden Friars; and the old fellow must mount and away.

Then Sir Bale, laying his hand upon his arm in a manner that was at once lofty and affectionate, told in his ears the subject on which he wished to be understood.

The old farmer looked hard at him, and shook his head and laughed in a way that would have been insupportable in a house, and told him, "I hev narra bond o' thoine, mon."

"I know how that is; so does Philip Feltram."

"Well?"

"Well, I must replace the money."

The old man laughed again, and in his outlandish dialect told him to wait till he asked him. Sir Bale pressed it, but the old fellow put it off with outlandish banter; and as the Baronet grew testy, the farmer only waxed more and more hilarious, and at last, mounting his shaggy pony, rode off, still laughing, at a canter to Golden Friars; and when he reached Golden Friars, and got into the hall of the George and Dragon, he asked Richard Turnbull with a chuckle if he ever knew a man refuse an offer of money, or a man want to pay who did not owe; and inquired whether the Squire down at Mardykes Hall mightn't be a bit "wrang in t' garrets." All this, however, other people said, was intended merely to conceal the fact that he really had, through sheer loyalty, lent the money, or rather bestowed it, thinking the old family in jeopardy, and meaning a gift, was determined to hear no more about it. I can't say; I only know people held, some by one interpretation, some by another.

As the caterpillar sickens and changes its hue when it is about to undergo its transformation, so an odd change took place in Feltram. He grew even more silent and morose; he seemed always in an agitation and a secret rage. He used to walk through the woodlands on the slopes of the fells above Mardykes, muttering to himself, picking up the rotten sticks with which the ground was strewn, breaking them in his hands, and hurling them from him, and stamping on the earth as he paced up and down.

One night a thunderstorm came on, the wind blowing gently up from Golden Friars. It was a night black as pitch, illuminated only by the intermittent glare of the lightning. At the foot of the stairs Sir Bale met Feltram, whom he had not seen for some days. He had his cloak and hat on.

"I am going to Cloostedd tonight," he said, "and if all is as I expect, I sha'n't return. We remember all, you and I." And he nodded and walked down the passage.

Sir Bale knew that a crisis had happened in his own life. He felt faint and ill, and returned to the room where he had been sitting. Throughout that melancholy night he did not go to his bed.

In the morning he learned that Marlin, who had been out late, saw Feltram get the boat off, and sail towards the other side. The night was so dark that he could only see him start; but the wind was light and coming up the lake, so that without a tack he could easily make the other side. Feltram did not return. The boat was found fast to the ring at Cloostedd landing-place.

Lady Mardykes was relieved, and for a time was happier than ever. It was different with Sir Bale; and afterwards her sky grew dark also.

CHAPTER XXIII

A Lady in Black

Shortly after this, there arrived at the George and Dragon a stranger. He was a man somewhat past forty, embrowned by distant travel, and, his years considered, wonderfully good-looking. He had good eyes; his dark-brown hair had no sprinkling of gray in it; and his kindly smile showed very white and even teeth. He made inquiries about neighbours, especially respecting Mardykes Hall; and the answers seemed to interest him profoundly. He inquired after Philip Feltram, and shed tears when he heard that he was no longer at Mardykes Hall, and that Trebeck or other friends could give him no tidings of him.

And then he asked Richard Turnbull to show him to a quiet room; and so, taking the honest fellow by the hand, he said,

"Mr. Turnbull, don't you know me?"

"No, sir," said the host of the George and Dragon, after a puzzled stare, "I can't say I do, sir."

The stranger smiled a little sadly, and shook his head: and with a gentle laugh, still holding his hand in a very friendly way, he said, "I should have known you anywhere, Mr. Turnbull — anywhere on earth or water. Had you turned up on the Himalayas, or in a junk on the Canton river, or as a dervish in the mosque of St. Sophia, I should have recognised my old friend, and asked what news from Golden Friars. But of course I'm changed. You were a little my senior; and one advantage among many you have over your juniors is that you don't change as we do. I have played many a game of hand-ball in the inn-yard of the George, Mr. Turnbull. You often wagered a pot of ale on my play; you used to say I'd make the best player of fives, and the best singer of a song, within ten miles round the meer. You used to have me behind the bar when I was a boy, with more of an appetite than I have now. I was then at Mardykes Hall, and used to go back in old Marlin's boat. Is old Marlin still alive?"

"Ay, that — he — is," said Turnbull slowly, as he eyed the stranger again carefully. "I don't know who you can be, sir, unless you are — the boy —

William Feltram. La! he was seven or eight years younger than Philip. But, lawk! — Well — By Jen, and *be* you Willie Feltram? But no, you can't!"

"Ay, Mr. Turnbull, that very boy — Willie Feltram — even he, and no other; and now you'll shake hands with me, not so formally, but like an old friend."

"Ay, that I will," said honest Richard Turnbull, with a great smile, and a hearty grasp of his guest's hand; and they both laughed together, and the younger man's eyes, for he was an affectionate fool, filled up with tears.

"And I want you to tell me this," said William, after they had talked a little quietly, "now that there is no one to interrupt us, what has become of my brother Philip? I heard from a friend an account of his health that has caused me unspeakable anxiety."

"His health was not bad; no, he was a hardy lad, and liked a walk over the fells, or a pull on the lake; but he was a bit daft, every one said, and a changed man; and, in troth, they say the air o' Mardykes don't agree with every one, no more than him. But that's a tale that's neither here nor there."

"Yes," said William, "that was what they told me — his mind affected. God help and guard us! I have been unhappy ever since; and if I only knew it was well with poor Philip, I think I should be too happy. And where is Philip now?"

"He crossed the lake one night, having took leave of Sir Bale. They thought he was going to old Trebeck's up the Fells. He likes the Feltrams, and likes the folk at Mardykes Hall — though those two families was not always o'er kind to one another. But Trebeck seed nowt o' him, nor no one else; and what has gone wi' him no one can tell."

"*I* heard that also," said William with a deep sigh. "But *I* hoped it had been cleared up by now, and something happier been known of the poor fellow by this time. I'd give a great deal to know — I don't know what I *would* not give to know — I'm so unhappy about him. And now, my good old friend, tell your people to get me a chaise, for I must go to Mardykes Hall; and, first, let me have a room to dress in."

At Mardykes Hall a pale and pretty lady was looking out, alone, from the stone-shafted drawingroom window across the courtyard and the balustrade, on which stood many a great stone cup with flowers, whose leaves were half shed and gone with the winds — emblem of her hopes. The solemn melancholy of the towering fells, the ripple of the lonely lake, deepened her sadness.

The unwonted sound of carriage-wheels awoke her from her reverie.

Before the chaise reached the steps, a hand from its window had seized the handle, the door was thrown open, and William Feltram jumped out.

She was in the hall, she knew not how; and, with a wild scream and a sob, she threw herself into his arms.

Here at last was an end of the long waiting, the dejection which had reached almost the point of despair. And like two rescued from shipwreck, they clung together in an agony of happiness.

William had come back with no very splendid fortune. It was enough, and only enough, to enable them to marry. Prudent people would have thought it, very likely, too little. But he was now home in England, with health unimpaired by his long sojourn in the East, and with intelligence and energies improved by the discipline of his arduous struggle with fortune. He reckoned, therefore, upon one way or other adding something to their income; and he knew that a few hundreds a year would make them happier than hundreds of thousand could other people.

It was five years since they had parted in France, where a journey of importance to the Indian firm, whose right hand he was, had brought him.

The refined tastes that are supposed to accompany gentle blood, his love of art, his talent for music and drawing, had accidentally attracted the attention of the little travelling-party which old Lady Harbottle chaperoned. Miss Janet, now Lady Mardykes, learning that his name was Feltram, made inquiry through a common friend, and learned what interested her still more about him. It ended in an acquaintance, which his manly and gentle nature and his entertaining qualities soon improved into an intimacy.

Feltram had chosen to work his own way, being proud, and also prosperous enough to prevent his pride, in this respect, from being placed under too severe a pressure of temptation. He heard not from but of his brother, through a friend in London, and more lately from Gertrude, whose account of him was sad and even alarming.

When Lady Mardykes came in, her delight knew no bounds. She had already formed a plan for their future, and was not to be put off — William Feltram was to take the great grazing farm that belonged to the Mardykes estate; or, if he preferred it, to farm it for her, sharing the profits. She wanted something to interest her, and this was just the thing. It was hardly half-a-mile away, up the lake, and there was such a comfortable house and garden, and she and Gertrude could be as much together as ever almost; and, in fact, Gertrude and her husband could be nearly always at Mardykes Hall.

So eager and entreating was she, that there was no escape. The plan was adopted immediately on their marriage, and no happier neighbours for a time were ever known.

But was Lady Mardykes content? was she even exempt from the heartache which each mortal thinks he has all to himself? The longing of her life was for children; and again and again had her hopes been disappointed.

One tiny pretty little baby indeed was born, and lived for two years, and then died; and none had come to supply its place and break the childless silence in the great old nursery. That was her sorrow; a greater one than men can understand.

Another source of grief was this: that Sir Bale Mardykes conceived a dislike to William Feltram that was unaccountable. At first suppressed, it betrayed itself negatively only; but with time it increased; and in the end the Baronet made little secret of his wish to get rid of him. Many and ingenious were the annoyances he contrived; and at last he told his wife plainly that he wished William Feltram to find some other abode for himself.

Lady Mardykes pleaded earnestly, and even with tears; for if Gertrude were to leave the neighbourhood, she well knew how utterly solitary her own life would become.

Sir Bale at last vouchsafed some little light as to his motives. There was an old story, he told her, that his estate would go to a Feltram. He had an instinctive distrust of that family. It was a feeling not given him for nothing; it might be the means of defeating their plotting and strategy. Old Trebeck, he fancied, had a finger in it. Philip Feltram had told him that Mardykes was to pass away to a Feltram. Well, they might conspire; but he would take what care he could that the estate should not be stolen from his family. He did not want his wife stript of her jointure, or his children, if he had any, left without bread.

All this sounded very like madness; but the idea was propounded by Philip Feltram. His own jealousy was at bottom founded on superstition which he would not avow and could hardly define. He bitterly blamed himself for having permitted William Feltram to place himself where he was.

In the midst of these annoyances William Feltram was seriously thinking of throwing up the farm, and seeking similar occupation somewhere else.

One day, walking alone in the thick wood that skirts the lake near his farm, he was discussing this problem with himself; and every now and then he repeated his question, “Shall I throw it up, and give him the lease back if he likes?” On a sudden he heard a voice near him say:

“Hold it, you fool! — hold hard, you fool! — hold it, you fool!”

The situation being lonely, he was utterly puzzled to account for the interruption, until on a sudden a huge parrot, green, crimson, and yellow, plunged from among the boughs over his head to the ground, and partly flying, and partly hopping and tumbling along, got lamely, but swiftly, out of sight among the thick underwood; and he could neither start it nor hear it any more. The interruption reminded him of that which befel Robinson Crusoe. It was more singular, however; for he owned no such bird; and its strangeness impressed the omen all the more.

He related it when he got home to his wife; and as people when living a solitary life, and also suffering, are prone to superstition, she did not laugh at the adventure, as in a healthier state of spirits, I suppose, she would.

They continued, however, to discuss the question together; and all the more industriously as a farm of the same kind, only some fifteen miles away, was now offered to all bidders, under another landlord. Gertrude, who felt Sir Bale’s unkindness all the more that she was a distant cousin of his, as it had proved on comparing notes, was very strong in favour of the change, and had been urging it with true feminine ingenuity and persistence upon her husband. A very singular dream rather damped her ardour, however, and it appeared thus:

She had gone to her bed full of this subject; and she thought, although she could not remember having done so, had fallen asleep. She was still thinking, as she had been all the day, about leaving the farm. It seemed to her that she was quite awake, and a candle burning all the time in the room, awaiting the return of her husband, who was away at the fair near Haworth; she saw the interior of the room distinctly. It was a sultry night, and a little bit of the window was raised. A very slight sound in that direction attracted her attention; and to her surprise she saw a jay hop upon the windowsill, and into the room.

Up sat Gertrude, surprised and a little startled at the visit of so large a bird, without presence of mind for the moment even to frighten it away, and staring at it, as they say, with all her eyes. A sofa stood at the foot of the bed; and under this the bird swiftly hopped. She extended her hand now to take the bell-rope at the left side of the bed, and in doing so displaced the curtains, which were open only at the foot. She was amazed there to see a lady dressed entirely in black, and with the oldfashioned hood over her head. She was young and pretty, and looked kindly at her, but with now and then a slight contraction of lips and eyebrows that indicates pain. This little twitching was momentary, and recurred, it seemed, about once or twice in a minute.

How it was that she was not frightened on seeing this lady, standing like an old friend at her bedside, she could not afterwards understand. Some influence besides the kindness of her look prevented any sensation of terror at the time. With a very white hand the young lady in black held a white handkerchief pressed to her bosom at the top of her bodice.

"Who are you?" asked Gertrude.

"I am a kinswoman, although you don't know me; and I have come to tell you that you must not leave Faxwell" (the name of the place) "or Janet. If you go, I will go with you; and I can make you fear me."

Her voice was very distinct, but also very faint, with something undulatory in it, that seemed to enter Gertrude's head rather than her ear.

Saying this she smiled horribly, and, lifting her handkerchief, disclosed for a moment a great wound in her breast, deep in which Gertrude saw darkly the head of a snake writhing.

Hereupon she uttered a wild scream of terror, and, diving under the bedclothes, remained more dead than alive there, until her maid, alarmed by her cry, came in, and having searched the room, and shut the window at her desire, did all in her power to comfort her.

If this was a nightmare and embodied only by a form of expression which in some states belongs to the imagination, a leading idea in the controversy in which her mind had long been employed, it had at least the effect of deciding her against leaving Faxwell. And so that point was settled; and unpleasant relations continued between the tenants of the farm and the master of Mardykes Hall.

To Lady Mardykes all this was very painful, although Sir Bale did not insist upon making a separation between his wife and her cousin. But to Mardykes Hall that cousin came no more. Even Lady Mardykes thought it better to see her at Faxwell than to risk a meeting in the temper in which Sir Bale then was. And thus several years passed.

No tidings of Philip Feltram were heard; and, in fact, none ever reached that part of the world; and if it had not been highly improbable that he could have drowned himself in the lake without his body sooner or later having risen to the surface, it would have been concluded that he had either accidentally or by design made away with himself in its waters.

Over Mardykes Hall there was a gloom — no sound of children's voices was heard there, and even the hope of that merry advent had died out.

This disappointment had no doubt helped to fix in Sir Bale's mind the idea of the insecurity of his property, and the morbid fancy that William Feltram and old Trebeck were conspiring to seize it; than which, I need hardly say, no imagination more insane could have fixed itself in his mind.

In other things, however, Sir Bale was shrewd and sharp, a clear and rapid man of business, and although this was a strange whim, it was not so unnatural in a man who was by nature so prone to suspicion as Sir Bale Mardykes.

During the years, now seven, that had elapsed since the marriage of Sir Bale and Miss Janet Feltram, there had happened but one event, except the death of their only child, to place them in mourning. That was the decease of Sir William Walsingham, the husband of Lady Mardykes' sister. She now lived in a handsome old dower-house at Islington, and being wealthy, made now and then an excursion to Mardykes Hall, in which she was sometimes accompanied by her sister Lady Haworth. Sir Oliver being a Parliament-man was much in London and deep in politics and intrigue, and subject, as convivial rogues are, to occasional hard hits from gout.

But change and separation had made no alteration in these ladies' mutual affections, and no three sisters were ever more attached.

Was Lady Mardykes happy with her lord? A woman so gentle and loving as she, is a happy wife with any husband who is not an absolute brute. There must have been, I suppose, some good about Sir Bale. His wife was certainly deeply attached to him. She admired his wisdom, and feared his inflexible will, and altogether made of him a domestic idol. To acquire this enviable position, I suspect there must be something not essentially disagreeable about a man. At all events, what her neighbours goodnaturedly termed her infatuation continued, and indeed rather improved by time.

CHAPTER XXIV

An Old Portrait

Sir Bale — whom some remembered a gay and convivial man, not to say a profligate one — had grown to be a very gloomy man indeed. There was something weighing upon his mind; and I daresay some of the good gossips of Golden Friars, had there been any materials for such a case, would have believed that Sir Bale had murdered Philip Feltram, and was now the victim of the worm and fire of remorse.

The gloom of the master of the house made his very servants gloomy, and the house itself looked sombre, as if it had been startled with strange and dismal sights.

Lady Mardykes was something of an artist. She had lighted lately, in an out-of-the-way room, upon a dozen or more old portraits. Several of these were full-lengths; and she was — with the help of her maid, both in long aprons, amid sponges and basins, soft handkerchiefs and varnish-pots and brushes — busy in removing the dust and smoke-stains, and in laying-on the varnish, which brought out the colouring, and made the transparent shadows yield up their long-buried treasures of finished detail.

Against the wall stood a full-length portrait as Sir Bale entered the room; having for a wonder, a word to say to his wife.

"O," said the pretty lady, turning to him in her apron, and with her brush in her hand, "we are in such in pickle, Munnings and I have been cleaning these old pictures. Mrs. Julaper says they are the pictures that came from Cloostedd Hall long ago. They were buried in dust in the dark room in the clock-tower. Here is such a characteristic one. It has a long powdered wig — George the First or Second, I don't know which — and such a combination of colours, and such a face. It seems starting out of the canvas, and all but speaks. Do look; that is, I mean, Bale, if you can spare time."

Sir Bale abstractedly drew near, and looked over his wife's shoulder on the full-length portrait that stood before him; and as he did so a strange expression for a moment passed over his face.

The picture represented a man of swarthy countenance, with signs of the bottle glowing through the dark skin; small fierce pig eyes, a rather flat pendulous nose, and a grim forbidding mouth, with a large wart a little above it. On the head hung one of those full-bottomed powdered wigs that look like a cloud of cotton-wadding; a lace cravat was about his neck; he wore short black-velvet breeches with stockings rolled over them, a bottle-green coat of cut velvet and a crimson waistcoat with long flaps; coat and waistcoat both heavily laced with gold. He wore a sword, and leaned upon a crutch-handled cane, and his figure and aspect indicated a swollen and gouty state. He could not be far from sixty. There was uncommon force in this fierce and forbidding-looking portrait. Lady Mardykes said, "What wonderful dresses they wore! How like a fine magic-lantern figure he looks! What gorgeous colouring! it looks like the plumage of a mackaw; and what a claw his hand is! and that huge broken beak of a nose! Isn't he like a wicked old mackaw?"

"Where did you find that?" asked Sir Bale.

Surprised at his tone, she looked round, and was still more surprised at his looks.

"I told you, dear Bale, I found them in the clock-tower. I hope I did right; it was not wrong bringing them here? I ought to have asked. Are you vexed, Bale?"

"Vexed! not I. I only wish it was in the fire. I must have seen that picture when I was a child. I hate to look at it. I raved about it once, when I was ill. I don't know who it is; I don't remember when I saw it. I wish you'd tell them to burn it."

"It is one of the Feltrams," she answered. "'Sir Hugh Feltram' is on the frame at the foot; and old Mrs. Julaper says he was the father of the unhappy lady who was said to have been drowned near Snakes Island."

"Well, suppose he is; there's nothing interesting in that. It is a disgusting picture. I connect it with my illness; and I think it is the kind of thing that would make any one half mad, if they only looked at it often enough. Tell them to burn it; and come away, come to the next room; I can't say what I want here."

Sir Bale seemed to grow more and more agitated the longer he remained in the room. He seemed to her both frightened and furious; and taking her a little roughly by the wrist, he led her through the door.

When they were in another apartment alone, he again asked the affrighted lady who had told her that picture was there, and who told her to clean it.

She had only the truth to plead. It was, from beginning to end, the merest accident.

"If I thought, Janet, that you were taking counsel of others, talking me over, and trying clever experiments— " he stopped short with his eyes fixed on hers with black suspicion.

His wife's answer was one pleading look, and to burst into tears.

Sir Bale let-go her wrist, which he had held up to this; and placing his hand gently on her shoulder, he said,

"You must not cry, Janet; I have given you no excuse for tears. I only wished an answer to a very harmless question; and I am sure you would tell me, if by any chance you have lately seen Philip Feltram; he is capable of arranging all that. No one knows him as I do. There, you must not cry any more; but tell me truly, has he turned up? is he at Faxwell?"

She denied all this with perfect truth; and after a hesitation of some time, the matter ended. And as soon as she and he were more themselves, he had something quite different to tell her.

"Sit down, Janet; sit down, and forget that vile picture and all I have been saying. What I came to tell you, I think you will like; I am sure it will please you."

And with this little preface he placed his arm about her neck, and kissed her tenderly. She certainly was pleased; and when his little speech was over, she, smiling, with her tears still wet upon her cheeks, put her arms round her husband's neck, and in turn kissed him with the ardour of gratitude, kissed him affectionately; again and again thanking him all the time.

It was no great matter, but from Sir Bale Mardykes it was something quite unusual.

Was it a sudden whim? What was it? Something had prompted Sir Bale, early in that dark shrewd month of December, to tell his wife that he wished to call together some of his county acquaintances, and to fill his house for a week or so, as near Christmas as she could get them to come. He wished her sisters — Lady Haworth (with her husband) and the Dowager Lady Walsingham — to be invited for an early day, before the coming of the other guests, so that she might enjoy their society for a little time quietly to herself before the less intimate guests should assemble.

Glad was Lady Mardykes to hear the resolve of her husband, and prompt to obey. She wrote to her sisters to beg them to arrange to come, together, by the tenth or twelfth of the month, which they accordingly arranged to do. Sir Oliver, it was true, could not be of the party. A minister of state was drinking the waters at Bath; and Sir Oliver thought it would do him no harm to sip a little also, and his fashionable doctor politely agreed, and "ordered" to those therapeutic springs the knight of the shire, who was "consumedly vexed" to lose the Christmas with that jolly dog, Bale, down at Mardykes Hall. But a fellow must have a stomach for his Christmas pudding, and politics takes it out of a poor gentleman deucedly; and health's the first thing, egad!

So Sir Oliver went down to Bath, and I don't know that he tippled much of the waters, but he did drink the burgundy of that haunt of the ailing; and he had the honour of making a fourth not unfrequently in the secretary of state's whist-parties.

It was about the 8th of December when, in Lady Walsingham's carriage, intending to post all the way, that lady, still young, and Lady Haworth, with all the servants that were usual in such expeditions in those days, started from the great Dower House at Islington in high spirits.

Lady Haworth had not been very well — low and nervous; but the clear frosty sun, and the pleasant nature of the excursion, raised her spirits to the point of enjoyment; and expecting nothing but happiness and gaiety — for, after all, Sir Bale was but one of a large party, and even he could make an effort and be agreeable as well as hospitable on occasion — they set out on their northward expedition. The journey, which is a long one, they had resolved to break into a four days' progress; and the inns had been written to, bespeaking a comfortable reception.

CHAPTER XXV

Through the Wall

On the third night they put-up at the comfortable old inn called the Three Nuns. With an effort they might easily have pushed on to Mardykes Hall that night, for the distance is not more than five-and-thirty miles. But, considering her sister's health, Lady Walsingham in planning their route had resolved against anything like a forced march.

Here the ladies took possession of the best sitting-room; and, notwithstanding the fatigue of the journey, Lady Haworth sat up with her sister till near ten o'clock, chatting gaily about a thousand things.

Of the three sisters, Lady Walsingham was the eldest. She had been in the habit of taking the command at home; and now, for advice and decision, her younger sisters, less prompt and courageous than she, were wont, whenever in her neighbourhood, to throw upon her all the cares and agitations of determining what was best to be done in small things and great. It is only fair to say, in addition, that this submission was not by any means exacted; it was the deference of early habit and feebler will, for she was neither officious nor imperious.

It was now time that Lady Haworth, a good deal more fatigued than her sister, should take leave of her for the night.

Accordingly they kissed and bid each other goodnight; and Lady Walsingham, not yet disposed to sleep, sat for some time longer in the comfortable room where they had taken tea, amusing the time with the book that had, when conversation flagged, beguiled the weariness of the journey. Her sister had been in her room nearly an hour, when she became herself a little sleepy. She had lighted her candle, and was going to ring for her maid, when, to her surprise, the door opened, and her sister Lady Haworth entered in a dressing-gown, looking frightened.

"My darling Mary!" exclaimed Lady Walsingham, "what is the matter? Are you well?"

"Yes, darling," she answered, "quite well; that is, I don't know what is the matter — I'm frightened." She paused, listening, with her eyes turned towards the wall. “O, darling Maud, I am so frightened! I don’t know what it can be.”

“You must not be agitated, darling; there’s nothing. You have been asleep, and I suppose you have had a dream. Were you asleep?”

Lady Haworth had caught her sister fast by the arm with both hands, and was looking wildly in her face.

“Have *you* heard nothing?” she asked, again looking towards the wall of the room, as if she expected to hear a voice through it.

“Nonsense, darling; you are dreaming still. Nothing; there has been nothing to hear. I have been awake ever since; if there had been anything to hear, I could not have missed it. Come, sit down. Sip a little of this water; you are nervous, and over-tired; and tell me plainly, like a good little soul, what is the matter; for nothing has happened here; and you ought to know that the Three Nuns is the quietest house in England; and I’m no witch, and if you won’t tell me what’s the matter, I can’t divine it.”

“Yes, of course,” said Mary, sitting down, and glancing round her wildly. “I don’t hear it now; *you* don’t?”

“Do, my dear Mary, tell me what you mean,” said Lady Walsingham kindly but firmly.

Lady Haworth was holding the still untasted glass of water in her hand.

“Yes, I’ll tell you; I have been so frightened! You are right; I had a dream, but I can scarcely remember anything of it, except the very end, when I wakened. But it was not the dream; only it was connected with what terrified me so. I was so tired when I went to bed, I thought I should have slept soundly; and indeed I fell asleep immediately; and I must have slept quietly for a good while. How long is it since I left you?”

“More than an hour.”

“Yes, I must have slept a good while; for I don’t think I have been ten minutes awake. How my dream began I don’t know. I remember only that gradually it came to this: I was standing in a recess in a panelled gallery; it was lofty, and, I thought, belonged to a handsome but oldfashioned house. I was looking straight towards the head of a wide staircase, with a great oak banister. At the top of the stairs, as near to me, about, as that window there, was a thick short column of oak, on top of which was a candlestick. There was no other light but from that one candle; and there was a lady standing beside it, looking down the stairs, with her back turned towards me; and from her gestures I should have thought speaking to people on a lower lobby, but whom from my place I could not see. I soon perceived that this lady was in great agony of mind; for she beat her breast and wrung her hands every now and then, and wagged her head slightly from side to side, like a person in great distraction. But one word she said I could not hear. Nor when she struck her hand on the banister, or stamped, as she seemed to do in her pain, upon the floor, could I hear any sound. I found myself somehow waiting upon this lady, and was watching her with awe and sympathy. But who she was I knew not, until turning towards me I plainly saw Janet's face, pale and covered with tears, and with such a look of agony as — O God! — I can never forget."

"Pshaw! Mary darling, what is it but a dream! I have had a thousand more startling; it is only that you are so nervous just now."

"But that is not all — nothing; what followed is so dreadful; for either there is something very horrible going on at Mardykes, or else I am losing my reason," said Lady Haworth in increasing agitation. "I wakened instantly in great alarm, but I suppose no more than I have felt a hundred times on awakening from a frightful dream. I sat up in my bed; I was thinking of ringing for Winnefred, my heart was beating so, but feeling better soon I changed my mind. All this time I heard a faint sound of a voice, as if coming through a thick wall. It came from the wall at the left side of my bed, and I fancied was that of some woman lamenting in a room separated from me by that thick partition. I could only perceive that it was a sound of crying mingled with ejaculations of misery, or fear, or entreaty. I listened with a painful curiosity, wondering who it could be, and what could have happened in the neighbouring rooms of the house; and as I looked and listened, I could distinguish my own name, but at first nothing more. That, of course, might have been an accident; and I knew there were many Marys in the world besides myself. But it made me more curious; and a strange thing struck me, for I was now looking at that very wall through which the sounds were coming. I saw that there was a window in it. Thinking that the rest of the wall might nevertheless be covered by another room, I drew the curtain of it and looked out. But there is no such thing. It is the outer wall the entire way along. And it is equally impossible of the other wall, for it is to the front of the house, and has two windows in it; and the wall that the head of my bed stands against has the gallery outside it all the way; for I remarked that as I came to you."

"Tut, tut, Mary darling, nothing on earth is so deceptive as sound; this and fancy account for everything."

"But hear me out; I have not told you all. I began to hear the voice more clearly, and at last quite distinctly. It was Janet's, and she was conjuring you by name, as well as me, to come to her to Mardykes, without delay, in her extremity; yes, *you*, just as vehemently as me. It was Janet's voice. It still seemed separated by the wall, but I heard every syllable now; and I never heard voice or words of such anguish. She was imploring of us to come on, without a moment's delay, to Mardykes; and crying that, if we were not with her, she should go mad."

"Well, darling," said Lady Walsingham, "you see I'm included in this invitation as well as you, and should hate to disappoint Janet just as much; and I do assure you, in the morning you will laugh over this fancy with me; or rather, she will laugh over it with us, when we get to Mardykes. What you do want is rest, and a little sal-volatile."

So saying she rang the bell for Lady Haworth's maid. Having comforted her sister, and made her take the nervous specific she recommended, she went with her to her room; and taking possession of the armchair by the fire, she told her that she would keep her company until she was asleep, and remain long enough to be sure that the sleep was not likely to be interrupted. Lady Haworth had not been ten minutes in her bed, when she raised herself with a start to her elbow, listening with parted lips and wild eyes, her trembling fingers behind her ears. With an exclamation of horror, she cried,

"There it is again, upbraiding us! I can't stay longer."

She sprang from the bed, and rang the bell violently.

"Maud," she cried in an ecstasy of horror, "nothing shall keep me here, whether you go or not. I will set out the moment the horses are put to. If you refuse to come, Maud, mind the responsibility is yours — listen!" and with white face and starting eyes she pointed to the wall. "Have you ears; don't you hear?"

The sight of a person in extremity of terror so mysterious, might have unnerved a ruder system than Lady Walsingham's. She was pale as she replied; for under certain circumstances those terrors which deal with the supernatural are more contagious than any others. Lady Walsingham still, in terms, held to her opinion; but although she tried to smile, her face showed that the panic had touched her.

"Well, dear Mary," she said, "as you will have it so, I see no good in resisting you longer. Here, it is plain, your nerves will not suffer you to rest. Let us go then, in heaven's name; and when you get to Mardykes Hall you will be relieved."

All this time Lady Haworth was getting on her things, with the careless hurry of a person about to fly for her life; and Lady Walsingham issued her orders for horses, and the general preparations for resuming the journey.

It was now between ten and eleven; but the servant who rode armed with them, according to the not unnecessary usage of the times, thought that with a little judicious bribing of postboys they might easily reach Mardykes Hall before three o'clock in the morning.

When the party set forward again, Lady Haworth was comparatively tranquil. She no longer heard the unearthly mimickry of her sister's voice; there remained only the fear and suspense which that illusion or visitation had produced.

Her sister, Lady Walsingham, after a brief effort to induce something like conversation, became silent. A thin sheet of snow had covered the darkened landscape, and some light flakes were still dropping. Lady Walsingham struck her repeater often in the dark, and inquired the distances frequently. She was anxious to get over the ground, though by no means fatigued. Something of the anxiety that lay heavy at her sister's heart had touched her own.

CHAPTER XXVI

Perplexed

The roads even then were good, and very good horses the posting-houses turned out; so that by dint of extra pay the rapid rate of travelling undertaken by the servant was fully accomplished in the first two or three stages.

While Lady Walsingham was continually striking her repeater in her ear, and as they neared their destination, growing in spite of herself more anxious, her sister's uneasiness showed itself in a less reserved way; for, cold as it was, with snowflakes actually dropping, Lady Haworth's head was perpetually out at the window, and when she drew it up, sitting again in her place, she would audibly express her alarms, and apply to her sister for consolation and confidence in her suspense.

Under its thin carpet of snow, the pretty village of Golden Friars looked strangely to their eyes. It had long been fast asleep, and both ladies were excited as they drew up at the steps of the George and Dragon, and with bell and knocker roused the slumbering household.

What tidings awaited them here? In a very few minutes the door was opened, and the porter staggered down, after a word with the driver, to the carriage-window, not half awake.

"Is Lady Mardykes well?" demanded Lady Walsingham.

"Is Sir Bale well?"

"Are all the people at Mardykes Hall quite well?"

With clasped hands Lady Haworth listened to the successive answers to these questions which her sister hastily put. The answers were all satisfactory. With a great sigh and a little laugh, Lady Walsingham placed her hand affectionately on that of her sister; who, saying, "God be thanked!" began to weep.

"When had you last news from Mardykes?" asked Lady Walsingham.

"A servant was down here about four o'clock."

"O! no one since?" said she in a disappointed tone.

No one had been from the great house since, but all were well then.

"They are early people, you know, dear; and it is dark at four, and that is as late as they could well have heard, and nothing could have happened since — very unlikely. We have come very fast; it is only a few minutes past two, darling."

But each felt the chill and load of their returning anxiety.

While the people at the George were rapidly getting a team of horses to, Lady Walsingham contrived a moment for an order from the other window to her servant, who knew Golden Friars perfectly, to knock-up the people at Doctor Torvey's, and to inquire whether all were well at Mardykes Hall.

There he learned that a messenger had come for Doctor Torvey at ten o'clock, and that the Doctor had not returned since. There was no news, however, of any one's being ill; and the Doctor himself did not know what he was wanted about. While Lady Haworth was talking to her maid from the window next the steps, Lady Walsingham was, unobserved, receiving this information at the other.

It made her very uncomfortable.

In a few minutes more, however, with a team of fresh horses, they were again rapidly passing the distance between them and Mardykes Hall.

About two miles on, their drivers pulled-up, and they heard a voice talking with them from the roadside. A servant from the Hall had been sent with a note for Lady Walsingham, and had been ordered, if necessary, to ride the whole way to the Three Nuns to deliver it. The note was already in Lady Walsingham's hand; her sister sat beside her, and with the corner of the open note in her fingers, she read it breathlessly at the same time by the light of a carriage-lamp which the man held to the window. It said:

My dearest love — my darling sister — dear sisters both! — in God's name, lose not a moment. I am so overpowered and *terrified*. I cannot explain; I can only implore of you to come with all the haste you can make. Waste no time, darlings. I hardly understand what I write. Only this, dear sisters; I feel that my reason will desert me, unless you come soon. You will not fail me now. Your poor distracted

JANET

The sisters exchanged a pale glance, and Lady Haworth grasped her sister's hand.

“Where is the messenger?” asked Lady Walsingham.

A mounted servant came to the window.

“Is any one ill at home?” she asked.

“No, all were well — my lady, and Sir Bale — no one sick.”

“But the Doctor was sent for; what was that for?”

“I can’t say, my lady.”

“You are quite certain that no one — think — *no* one is ill?”

“There is no one ill at the Hall, my lady, that I have heard of.”

“Is Lady Mardykes, my sister, still up?”

“Yes, my lady; and her maid is with her.”

“And Sir Bale, are you certain he is quite well?”

“Sir Bale is quite well, my lady; he has been busy settling papers tonight, and was as well as usual.”

“That will do, thanks,” said the perplexed lady; and to her own servant she added, “On to Mardykes Hall with all the speed they can make. I’ll pay them well, tell them.”

And in another minute they were gliding along the road at a pace which the muffled beating of the horses’ hoofs on the thin sheet of snow that covered the road showed to have broken out of the conventional trot, and to resemble something more like a gallop.

And now they were under the huge trees, that looked black as hearse-plumes in contrast with the snow. The cold gleam of the lake in the moon which had begun to shine out now met their gaze; and the familiar outline of Snakes Island, its solemn timber bleak and leafless, standing in a group, seemed to watch Mardykes Hall with a dismal observation across the water. Through the gate and between the huge files of trees the carriage seemed to fly; and at last the steaming horses stood panting, nodding and snorting, before the steps in the courtyard.

There was a light in an upper window, and a faint light in the hall, the door of which was opened; and an old servant came down and ushered the ladies into the house.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Hour

Lightly they stepped over the snow that lay upon the broad steps, and entering the door saw the dim figure of their sister, already in the large and faintly-lighted hall. One candle in the hand of her scared maid, and one burning on the table, leaving the distant parts of that great apartment in total darkness, touched the figures with the odd sharp lights in which Schalken delights; and a streak of chilly moonlight, through the open door, fell upon the floor, and was stretched like a white sheet at her feet. Lady Mardykes, with an exclamation of agitated relief, threw her arms, in turn, round the necks of her sisters, and hugging them, kissed them again and again, murmuring her thanks, calling them her "blessed sisters," and praising God for his mercy in having sent them to her in time, and altogether in a rapture of agitation and gratitude.

Taking them each by a hand, she led them into a large room, on whose panels they could see the faint twinkle of the tall gilded frames, and the darker indication of the old portraits, in which that interesting house abounds. The moonbeams, entering obliquely through the Tudor stone-shafts of the window and thrown upon the floor, reflected an imperfect light; and the candle which the maid who followed her mistress held in her hand shone dimly from the sideboard, where she placed it. Lady Mardykes told her that she need not wait.

"They don't know; they know only that we are in some great confusion; but — God have mercy on me! — nothing of the reality. Sit down, darlings; you are tired."

She sat down between them on a sofa, holding a hand of each. They sat opposite the window, through which appeared the magnificent view commanded from the front of the house: in the foreground the solemn trees of Snakes Island, one great branch stretching upward, bare and moveless, from the side, like an arm raised to heaven in wonder or in menace towards the house; the lake, in part swept by the icy splendour of the moon, trembling with a dazzling glimmer, and farther off lost in blackness; the

Fells rising from a base of gloom, into ribs and peaks white with snow, and looking against the pale sky, thin and transparent as a haze. Right across to the storied woods of Cloostedd, and the old domains of the Feltrams, this view extended.

Thus alone, their mufflers still on, their hands clasped in hers, they breathlessly listened to her strange tale.

Connectedly told it amounted to this: Sir Bale seemed to have been relieved of some great anxiety about the time when, ten days before, he had told her to invite her friends to Mardykes Hall. This morning he had gone out for a walk with Trevor, his under-steward, to talk over some plans about thinning the woods at this side; and also to discuss practically a proposal, lately made by a wealthy merchant, to take a very long lease, on advantageous terms to Sir Bale as he thought, of the old park and chase of Cloostedd, with the intention of building there, and making it once more a handsome residence.

In the improved state of his spirits, Sir Bale had taken a shrewd interest in this negotiation; and was actually persuaded to cross the lake that morning with his adviser, and to walk over the grounds with him.

Sir Bale had seemed unusually well, and talked with great animation. He was more like a young man who had just attained his majority, and for the first time grasped his estates, than the grim elderly Baronet who had been moping about Mardykes, and as much afraid as a cat of the water, for so many years.

As they were returning toward the boat, at the roots of that same scathed elm whose barkless bough had seemed, in his former visit to this old wood, to beckon him from a distance, like a skeleton arm, to enter the forest, he and his companion on a sudden missed an old map of the grounds which they had been consulting.

“We must have left it in the corner tower of Cloostedd House, which commands that view of the grounds, you remember; it would not do to lose it. It is the most accurate thing we have. I’ll sit down here and rest a little till you come back.”

The man was absent little more than twenty minutes. When he returned, he found that Sir Bale had changed his position, and was now walking to and fro, around and about, in what, at a distance, he fancied was mere impatience, on the open space a couple of hundred paces nearer to the turn in the valley towards the boat. It was not impatience. He was agitated. He looked pale, and he took his companion’s arm — a thing he had never thought of doing before — and said, “Let us away quickly. I’ve something to tell at home, — and I forgot it.”

Not another word did Sir Bale exchange with his companion. He sat in the stern of the boat, gloomy as a man about to glide under traitor’s-gate. He entered his house in the same sombre and agitated state. He entered his library, and sat for a long time as if stunned.

At last he seemed to have made-up his mind to something; and applied himself quietly and diligently to arranging papers, and docketing some and burning others. Dinner-time arrived. He sent to tell Lady Mardykes that he should not join her at dinner, but would see her afterwards.

“It was between eight and nine,” she continued, “I forget the exact time, when he came to the tower drawingroom where I was. I did not hear his approach. There is a stone stair, with a thick carpet on it. He told me he wished to speak to me there. It is an out-of-the-way place — a small old room with very thick walls, and there is a double door, the inner one of oak — I suppose he wished to guard against being overheard.

“There was a look in his face that frightened me; I saw he had something dreadful to tell. He looked like a man on whom a lot had fallen to put some one to death,” said Lady Mardykes. “O, my poor Bale! my husband, my husband! he knew what it would be to me.”

Here she broke into the wildest weeping, and it was some time before she resumed.

“He seemed very kind and very calm,” she said at last; “he said but little; and, I think, these were his words: ‘I find, Janet, I have made a great miscalculation — I thought my hour of danger had passed. We have been many years together, but a parting must sooner or later be, and my time has come.’

“I don’t know what I said. I would not have so much minded — for I could not have believed, if I had not seen him — but there was that in his look and tone which no one could doubt.

“‘I shall die before tomorrow morning,’ he said. ‘You must command yourself, Janet; it can’t be altered now.’

“‘O, Bale,’ I cried nearly distracted, ‘you would not kill yourself!’

"'Kill myself! poor child! no, indeed,' he said; 'it is simply that I shall die. No violent death — nothing but the common subsidence of life — I have made up my mind; what happens to everybody can't be so very bad; and millions of worse men than I die every year. You must not follow me to my room, darling; I shall see you by and by.'

"His language was collected and even cold; but his face looked as if it was cut in stone; you never saw, in a dream, a face like it."

Lady Walsingham here said, "I am certain he is ill; he's in a fever. You must not distract and torture yourself about his predictions. You sent for Doctor Torvey; what did he say?"

"I could not tell him all."

"O, no; I don't mean that; they'd only say he was mad, and we little better for minding what he says. But did the Doctor see him? and what did he say of his health?"

"Yes; he says there is nothing wrong — no fever — nothing whatever. Poor Bale has been so kind; he saw him to please me," she sobbed again wildly. "I wrote to implore of him. It was my last hope, strange as it seems; and O, would to God I could think it! But there is nothing of that kind. Wait till you have seen him. There is a frightful calmness about all he says and does; and his directions are all so clear, and his mind so perfectly collected, it is quite impossible."

And poor Lady Mardykes again burst into a frantic agony of tears.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Sir Bale in the Gallery

"Now, Janet darling, you are yourself low and nervous, and you treat this fancy of Bale's as seriously as he does himself. The truth is, he is a hypochondriac, as the doctors say; and you will find that I am right; he will be quite well in the morning, and I daresay a little ashamed of himself for having frightened his poor little wife as he has. I will sit up with you. But our poor Mary is not, you know, very strong; and she ought to lie down and rest a little. Suppose you give me a cup of tea in the drawingroom. I will run up to my room and get these things off, and meet you in the drawingroom; or, if you like it better, you can sit with me in my own room; and for goodness' sake let us have candles enough and a bright fire; and I promise you, if you will only exert your own good sense, you shall be a great deal more cheerful in a very little time."

Lady Walsingham's address was kind and cheery, and her air confident. For a moment a ray of hope returned, and her sister Janet acknowledged at least the possibility of her theory. But if confidence is contagious, so also is panic; and Lady Walsingham experienced a sinking of the heart which she dared not confess to her sister, and vainly strove to combat.

Lady Walsingham went up with her sister Mary, and having seen her in her room, and spoken again to her in the same cheery tone in which she had lectured her sister Lady Mardykes, she went on; and having taken possession of her own room, and put off her cloaks and shawls, she was going downstairs again, when she heard Sir Bale's voice, as he approached along the gallery, issuing orders to a servant, as it seemed, exactly in his usual tone.

She turned, with a strange throb at her heart, and met him.

A little sterner, a little paler than usual he looked; she could perceive no other change. He took her hand kindly and held it, as with dilated eyes he looked with a dark inquiry for a moment in her face. He signed to the servant to go on, and said, "I'm glad you have come, Maud. You have heard what is to happen; and I don't know how Janet could have borne it without your support. You did right to come; and you'll stay with her for a day or two, and take her away from this place as soon as you can."

She looked at him with the embarrassment of fear. He was speaking to her with the calmness of a leavetaking in the pressroom — the serenity that overlies the greatest awe and agony of which human nature is capable.

"I am glad to see you, Bale," she began, hardly knowing what she said, and she stopped short.

"You are come, it turns out, on a sad mission," he resumed; "you find all about to change. Poor Janet! it is a blow to her. I shall not live to see tomorrow's sun."

"Come," she said, startled, "you must not talk so. No, Bale, you have no right to speak so; you can have no reason to justify it. It is cruel and wicked to trifle with your wife's feelings. If you are under a delusion, you must make an effort and shake it off, or, at least, cease to talk of it. You are not well; I know by your looks you are ill; but I am very certain we shall see you much better by tomorrow, and still better the day following."

"No, I'm not ill, sister. Feel that pulse, if you doubt me; there is no fever in it. I never was more perfectly in health; and yet I know that before the clock, that has just struck three, shall have struck five, I, who am talking to you, shall be dead."

Lady Walsingham was frightened, and her fear irritated her.

"I have told you what I think and believe," she said vehemently. "I think it wrong and cowardly of you to torture my poor sister with your whimsical predictions. Look into your own mind, and you will see you have absolutely no reason to support what you say. How *can* you inflict all this agony upon a poor creature foolish enough to love you as she does, and weak enough to believe in your idle dreams?"

"Stay, sister; it is not a matter to be debated so. If tomorrow I can hear you, it will be time enough to upbraid me. Pray return now to your sister; she needs all you can do for her. She is much to be pitied; her sufferings afflict me. I shall see you and her again before my death. It would have been more cruel to leave her unprepared. Do all in your power to nerve and tranquillise her. What is past cannot now be helped."

He paused, looking hard at her, as if he had half made up his mind to say something more. But if there was a question of the kind, it was determined in favour of silence.

He dropped her hand, turned quickly, and left her.

CHAPTER XXIX

Dr. Torvey's Opinion

When Lady Walsingham reached the head of the stairs, she met her maid, and from her learned that her sister, Lady Mardykes, was downstairs in the same room. On approaching, she heard her sister Mary's voice talking with her, and found them together. Mary, finding that she could not sleep, had put on her clothes again, and come down to keep her sister company. The room looked more comfortable now. There were candles lighted, and a good fire burnt in the grate; teathings stood on a little table near the fire, and the two sisters were talking, Lady Mardykes appearing more collected, and only they two in the room.

"Have you seen him, Maud?" cried Lady Mardykes, rising and hastily approaching her the moment she entered.

"Yes, dear; and talked with him, and — — "

"Well?"

"And I think very much as I did before. I think he is nervous, he says he is not ill; but he is nervous and whimsical, and as men always are when they happen to be out of sorts, very positive; and of course the only thing that can quite undeceive him is the lapse of the time he has fixed for his prediction, as it is sure to pass without any tragic result of any sort. We shall then all see alike the nature of his delusion."

"O, Maud, if I were only sure you thought so! if I were sure you really had hopes! Tell me, Maud, for God's sake, what you really think."

Lady Walsingham was a little disconcerted by the unexpected directness of her appeal.

"Come, darling, you must not be foolish," she said; "we can only talk of impressions, and we are imposed upon by the solemnity of his manner, and the fact that he evidently believes in his own delusion; every one does believe in his own delusion — there is nothing strange in that."

"O, Maud, I see you are not convinced; you are only trying to comfort me. You have no hope — none, none, none!" and she covered her face with her hands, and wept again convulsively.

Lady Walsingham was silent for a moment, and then with an effort said, as she placed her hand on her sister's arm, "You see, dear Janet, there is no use in my saying the same thing over and over again; an hour or two will show who is right. Sit down again, and be like yourself. My maid told me that you had sent to the parlour for Doctor Torvey; he must not find you so. What would he think? Unless you mean to tell him of Bale's strange fancy; and a pretty story that would be to set afloat in Golden Friars. I think I hear him coming."

So, in effect, he was. Doctor Torvey — with the florid gravity of a man who, having just swallowed a bottle of port, besides some glasses of sherry, is admitted to the presence of ladies whom he respects — entered the room, made what he called his "leg and his compliments," and awaited the ladies' commands.

"Sit down, Doctor Torvey," said Lady Walsingham, who in the incapacity of her sister undertook the doing of the honours. "My sister, Lady Mardykes, has got it into her head somehow that Sir Bale is ill. I have been speaking to him; he certainly does not look very well, but he says he is quite well. Do you think him well? — that is, we know you don't think there is anything of importance amiss — but she wishes to know whether you think him *perfectly* well."

The Doctor cleared his voice and delivered his lecture, a little thickly at some words, upon Sir Bale's case; the result of which was that it was no case at all; and that if he would only live something more of a country gentleman's life, he would be as well as any man could desire — as well as any man, gentle or simple, in the country.

"The utmost I should think of doing for him would be, perhaps, a little quinine, nothing mo' — shurely — he is really and toory a very shoun' shtay of health."

Lady Walsingham looked encouragingly at her sister and nodded.

"I've been shen' for, La'y Walsh — Walse — Walsing — *ham*; old Jack Amerald — he likshe his glass o' port," he said roguishly, "and shuvversh accord'n'ly," he continued, with a compassionating paddle of his right hand; "one of thoshe aw — odd feels in his stomach; and as I have pretty well done all I can man-n'ge down here, I must be off, ye shee. Wind up from Golden Friars, and a little flutter ovv zhnow, thazh all;" and with some remarks about the extreme cold of the weather, and the severity of their night journey, and many respectful and polite parting speeches, the Doctor took his leave; and they soon heard the wheels of his gig and the tread of his horse, faint and muffled from the snow in the courtyard, and the Doctor, who had connected that melancholy and agitated household with the outer circle of humanity, was gone.

There was very little snow falling, half-a-dozen flakes now and again, and their flight across the window showed, as the Doctor had in a manner boasted, that the wind was in his face as he returned to Golden Friars. Even these desultory snowflakes ceased, at times, altogether; and returning, as they say, "by fits and starts," left for long intervals the landscape, under the brilliant light of the moon, in its wide white shroud. The curtain of the great window had not been drawn. It seemed to Lady Walsingham that the moonbeams had grown more dazzling, that Snakes Island was nearer and more distinct, and the outstretched arm of the old tree looked bigger and angrier, like the uplifted arm of an assassin, who draws silently nearer as the catastrophe approaches.

Cold, dazzling, almost repulsive in this intense moonlight and white sheeting, the familiar landscape looked in the eyes of Lady Walsingham. The sisters gradually grew more and more silent, an unearthly suspense overhung them all, and Lady Mardykes rose every now and then and listened at the open door for step or voice in vain. They all were overpowered by the intenser horror that seemed gathering around them. And thus an hour or more passed.

CHAPTER XXX

Hush!

Pale and silent those three beautiful sisters sat. The horrible quietude of a suspense that had grown all but insupportable oppressed the guests of Lady Mardykes, and something like the numbness of despair had reduced her to silence, the dreadful counterfeit of peace.

Sir Bale Mardykes on a sudden softly entered the room. Reflected from the floor near the window, the white moonlight somehow gave to his fixed features the character of a smile. With a warning gesture, as he came in, he placed his finger to his lips, as if to enjoin silence; and then, having successively pressed the hands of his two sisters-in-law, he stooped over his almost fainting wife, and twice pressed her cold forehead with his lips; and so, without a word, he went softly from the room.

Some seconds elapsed before Lady Walsingham, recovering her presence of mind, with one of the candlesticks from the table in her hand, opened the door and followed.

She saw Sir Bale mount the last stair of the broad flight visible from the hall, and candle in hand turn the corner of the massive banister, and as the light thrown from his candle showed, he continued, without hurry, to ascend the second flight.

With the irrepressible curiosity of horror she continued to follow him at a distance.

She saw him enter his own private room, and close the door.

Continuing to follow she placed herself noiselessly at the door of the apartment, and in breathless silence, with a throbbing heart, listened for what should pass.

She distinctly heard Sir Bale pace the floor up and down for some time, and then, after a pause, a sound as if some one had thrown himself heavily on the bed. A silence followed, during which her sisters, who had followed more timidly, joined her. She warned them with a look and gesture to be silent.

Lady Haworth stood a little behind, her white lips moving, and her hands clasped in a silent agony of prayer. Lady Mardykes leaned against the massive oak door-case.

With her hand raised to her ear, and her lips parted, Lady Walsingham listened for some seconds — for a minute, two minutes, three. At last, losing heart, she seized the handle in her panic, and turned it sharply. The door was locked on the inside, but some one close to it said from within, "Hush, hush!"

Much alarmed now, the same lady knocked violently at the door. No answer was returned.

She knocked again more violently, and shook the door with all her fragile force. It was something of horror in her countenance as she did so, that, no doubt, terrified Lady Mardykes, who with a loud and long scream sank in a swoon upon the floor.

The servants, alarmed by these sounds, were speedily in the gallery. Lady Mardykes was carried to her room, and laid upon her bed; her sister, Lady Haworth, accompanying her. In the meantime the door was forced. Sir Bale Mardykes was found stretched upon his bed.

Those who have once seen it, will not mistake the aspect of death. Here, in Sir Bale Mardykes' room, in his bed, in his clothes, is a stranger, grim and awful; in a few days to be insupportable, and to pass alone into the prison-house, and to be seen no more.

Where is Sir Bale Mardykes now, whose roof-tree and whose place at board and bed will know him no more? Here lies a chapfallen, fish-eyed image, chilling already into clay, and stiffening in every joint.

There is a marble monument in the pretty church of Golden Friars. It stands at the left side of what antiquarians call "the high altar." Two pillars at each end support an arch with several armorial bearings on as many shields sculptured above. Beneath, on a marble flooring raised some four feet, with a cornice round, lies Sir Bale Mardykes, of Mardykes Hall, ninth Baronet of that ancient family, chiseled in marble with knee-breeches and buckled-shoes, and *ailes de pigeon*, and single-breasted coat and long waistcoat, ruffles and sword, such as gentlemen wore about the year 1770, and bearing a strong resemblance to the features of the second Charles. On the broad marble which forms the background is inscribed an epitaph, which has perpetuated to our times the estimate formed by his “inconsolable widow,” the Dowager Lady Mardykes, of the virtues and accomplishments of her deceased lord.

Lady Walsingham would have qualified two or three of the more highly-coloured hyperboles, at which the Golden Friars of those days sniffed and tittered. They don’t signify now; there is no contemporary left to laugh or whisper. And if there be not much that is true in the letter of that inscription, it at least perpetuates something that *is* true — that wonderful glorificaion of partisanship, the affection of an idolising wife.

Lady Mardykes, a few days after the funeral, left Mardykes Hall for ever. She lived a great deal with her sister, Lady Walsingham; and died, as a line cut at the foot of Sir Bale Mardykes’ epitaph records, in the year 1790; her remains being laid beside those of her beloved husband in Golden Friars.

The estates had come to Sir Bale Mardykes free of entail. He had been pottering over a will, but it was never completed, nor even quite planned; and after much doubt and scrutiny, it was at last ascertained that, in default of a will and of issue, a clause in the marriage-settlement gave the entire estates to the Dowager Lady Mardykes.

By her will she bequeathed the estates to “her cousin, also a kinsman of the late Sir Bale Mardykes her husband,” William Feltram, on condition of his assuming the name and arms of Mardykes, the arms of Feltram being quartered in the shield.

Thus was oddly fulfilled the prediction which Philip Feltram had repeated, that the estates of Mardykes were to pass into the hands of a Feltram.

About the year 1795 the baronetage was revived, and William Feltram enjoyed the title for fifteen years, as Sir William Mardykes.

THE BIRD OF PASSAGE: A STORY OF A FIRST LOVE.

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CHAPTER XXX.

CHAPTER I.

A VOICE AND NOTHING MORE.

EVERY one knows Golden Friars — that quaint old village of gray stone gables, under the shadow of dark elms that grow in little groups of twos and threes, standing by the margin of a lake which is built round with an amphitheatre of the grandest mountain.

Westward of this beautiful scene — so wooded, solemn, solitary — the aspect of the country changes gradually; and about twelve miles away from that little town, you find yourself in a region strangely different. It is monotonous, bleak, and repulsive, with the peculiar melancholy and ugliness that characterize a "moss."

Dardale Moss is said to be twelve miles long, and, in some places, seven miles broad It is a wide, black level, with only here and there a break or a hillock, or a tuft of furze, or a little screen of osiers, to vary the stretch of peat and quagmire.

The arable and pasture land, by which this dank expanse is encompassed as by a shore, throws out long promontories, or recedes into mimic bays. Patches of dwarf oak and hazel, and graceful groups of the silver-stemmed birch, irregularly fringe its edges, or gather thickly on the natural moles and causeways that throw their arms into the wide morass.

This sylvan skirting, and the irregular ascent of the ground immediately surrounding the moss, redeem its ugliness, and render many of its recesses positively picturesque.

The moon had risen over that black expanse, full ten miles long and eight broad, which is well known in one of our northern English counties, as I have said, as Dardale Moss.

The lonely young Squire of Hazelden was striding from tussock to tussock over its treacherous surface, homeward, his gun over his shoulder. There is not a living soul of his kith and kin in that home, for which, nevertheless, he feels a kindly attachment as he draws nearer. Excepting a few scattered boors and peasants, there is not a human being living within five miles of Haworth House. “So much the better,” thinks the Squire, a little bitterly, for he is poor and proud.

The Squire that day had encountered but one adventure, which, except in the solitude of that region, would have been none at all. Before the storm had got up, as the sun was setting beyond the low horizon of the wide, flat moss, he heard not far from him, issuing from the thickets of the wood that there skirted the moor, a voice with whose sweetness the melancholy of the western light and tinted woods accorded; it rose so clear and sad, that he stopped to listen as it sang these words:

“The hawthorn tree Is dear to me,
The elver-stone likewise,
The lonely air That lingers there,
And thought that never dies.

“In evening glow
The May will blow,
The stone a shadow cast —
And stone and tree
A bield will be
As in the summers past.

“And words as dear
Will others hear
Beneath the hawthorn tree,
In leafy May At fall of day,
Where I no more shall be.”

The long note died away as the last beam of the setting sun lighted the autumnal boughs of the wood, and silence and twilight came together. For some seconds he paused, enchanted; and then, curious to discover the minstrel whose music had moved him so strangely, he strode into the wood, and paced its rugged banks and hollows in a vain search.

After this he sat down for a while upon a rock, musing upon this song, which had left a vague tenderness in his mind; and I am almost ashamed to say that by the time he had recovered his lost ground, and resumed his homeward route, the moon had risen, and a high chill wind had begun to blow.

It is late in autumn now, and this prematurely wintry wind is sweeping the melancholy moor; the scud is drifting wildly across the moon, and the irregular groups of thorn and stunted oak and birch that gather near the edge of the wide moss are tossing their arms in an eerie ecstasy, as if beckoning the bogles and dobbies across that desolate expanse.

William Haworth, the Squire of Hazelden, is a tall, active fellow, with a face that is gentle and manly, and light-brown hair and blue eyes — a Saxon supported by genealogy, for an ancestor of his fought at Hastings for Harold against the Norman.

Did ever young fellow lead so solitary a life? It has made him, perhaps, something of an enthusiast and a dreamer. It has not, however, impaired his energy. In this wild solitude he has passions, plans, and pride enough to find him work. His life is by no means idle or unambitious.

Striking swiftly towards his home among the bending trees, in the sweep of the cold wind, he found himself on a sudden before the Druidic ring of cyclopean stones, a relic of prehistoric times, for which among antiquarians that lonely place is famous. White, tall, and worn — they stood in the moonlight, which, checkered by the flying scud, passed over them with swift alternations.

Light and shadow flew on and on before him over the grass, in rapid pulsations, and the old stones alternately gleamed in dazzling light and sank in darkness. For the scud was driving across the moon, and the flying shadows rolled as if the sward itself was driving in ceaseless undulations beneath his feet and through those cyclopean columns.

Standing against one of these stones was a human form. To one who well knew the solitude of that neighborhood the appearing of living man or woman at that hour, in such a place, was a wonder.

The wind was cold and wild. The figure was that of a tall slender woman with a cloak on, the hood of which was over her head. She was leaning lightly with her shoulder against the timeworn stone that rose from the grass high above her, and a solitary thorn-tree at her side was bending and tossing in the storm, in which also such comers of her cloak as she had not gathered close about her were flapping and quivering.

As William Haworth drew near she turned her head for a moment, and seemed to look toward him. She took no further notice of his approach, and appeared serenely indifferent alike about him and the storm.

The Squire had nothing of the leaven of the man of the world in him except ambition. He was the son of solitude and thought. He had his castles in the air, but spared not himself to make them one day real. Thus the romance and shyness of earlier youth remained with him, although his pride would have declined to confess either.

"I beg pardon — but surely you won't stay there; it is quite awful, and the night is growing wilder."

There was no answer.

"And it is so cold — miserably," he added.

"I am on a journey, sir," said a clear low voice, and the cloak did not move.

"Well, but you can't do without shelter, and the nearest is miles away, except my house; there are dangerous places, too, about this moss, and people have been lost in it. If you have no objection, good old Mrs. Gillyflower will make you comfortable for the night, and you are very welcome. The house is mine, and I am going home. She will be very glad to see you — pray, don't think of staying here."

"You are a man that is kind to the poor — you would wish to see them better," said the same voice, very silvery and civil, with no suspicion of the mendicant's whine in it, or of the uncouth dialect and intonation of those northern regions. It was the tone of a person whose opinion was of value, and who had a right to give it.

"It matters little what I am, provided I speak truth; this is neither hour nor weather for making a journey on foot, and the storm grows worse."

"It is past seven o'clock?" said the mantle.

"Nearer eight; it was seven when I passed the cat-stone at Elverden, and that is three miles away."-

"Well, then, I will go — thank you, sir," said this voice, that he thought so sweet; and she made a little step forward and stopped, to intimate that she was ready to go when he should lead the way.

It is not always easy to say from what our impressions are gathered: perhaps it was something in the shape and bearing, no less than in the sweet and fearless tone of the female in the cloak, that resembles the grace of a princess who accepts a right, with a secret consciousness that in so doing she confers a distinction.

Men who live alone, if they are more reserved, are also simpler than their brethren who rough it, and revel in the inns and highways of life.

“Thank you very much,” said he, very respectfully; and they walked together towards Haworth House, which stands close by.

Passing by moss-gray rocks, and tossing broom and bramble, and groups of birch and oak, over a very uneven sward, which she trod with a step as light and stately as a deer’s, they moved side by side.

He longed to speak to her, but something restrained him, and never a word said she.

And now before them rises the strong old house of Haworth, built of gray stone, with a shingle roof and small windows; and the shadows of the ancient elms that toss and nod about it are sharp on the walls, or blurred, as the uncertain moonlight changes.

The hall-door has a great oldfashioned latch, and standing together under the stone porch the Squire essayed to open his door and give his guest welcome, but the bolts were drawn and all secure. Then he hammered at the door with the knocker, and then whacked the old oak more lustily with the butt of his gun.

“I’m so sorry the storm prevents their hearing,” said he, a little ashamed of his hospitality.

Perhaps old Martha Gillyflower thought he had outstayed the due hour of return, and intended a hint to that effect.

“I’ll call them, at the windows,” said he. And running round the corner and to the far window, which is that one of the three kitchen-windows which looks from the side of the house, and having there summoned the garrison effectually, he returned to the porch before the hall-door was opened.

CHAPTER II.

HAWORTH HALL.

GOOD MRS. GILLYFLOWER was the Squire’s housekeeper. Mall Darrell was a wiry girl — a “hobble-de-hoy,” with a check bedgown, bare arms, and a rubber that had plainly touched the pots always in her hand, and one shoulder something higher than the other; arid Mall constituted the household whom Mrs. Gillyflower chiefly commanded. There was, besides, Peter Clinton — a thick fellow in barragan jacket, and trousers always clayey about the knees; for he was gardener as well as groom, and outdoor factotum. Tom’s thumbs looked as if they had been beaten broad long ago on an anvil, and his nails and hands were always grimed with garden-mould, and he lived in two rooms that were somewhere among the stables.

The hall-door, being unbarred, opened with a swoop that carried Mall Darrell, who did the office of porteress, against the wall, and made the candle, prudently held a long way off in Martha Gillyflower’s hand, flare with a great agitation.

“Come in, please,” said William Haworth.

And the stranger in the cloak, fluttering in the breeze, stepped into the hall; and William got his stalwart shoulder to the old oak-door, and forced it, with a struggle, into its place, and there was an instantaneous calm; and the candle-fiame was serene, and lighted stout old Martha’s face till every wrinkle was marked, and every pucker stood out like those of a burgomaster’s wife in a Dutch portrait.

When Mrs. Gillyflower beheld the stranger, her voluble welcome and remonstrance just commenced was suspended, and her lips closed With her chin in the air, and die comers of her mouth depressed, she eyed the tall stranger askance, with a jealousy that bordered on dignified scorn.

Without removing her hood, the tall slender form in the dark cloak glanced quickly, this way and that, over her shoulder, and from under that hood William Haworth had just a shadowy glimpse of an oval face and a splendid pair of eyes.

It was but momentary and obscure, for now she was looking straight at the housekeeper, and the Squire could see again but the *tournure* of the draped figure.

"Martha — I say, Mrs. Gillyflower — pray attend to me. I wish you to make this" (how was he to style her?)— "this lady as comfortable as you can. There's a fire, of course — and tea — and — and supper. And she is making a journey; and she'll pass tonight under your care; and — and treat her hospitably and kindly, if you please."

The young Squire said this with an effort of self-assertion, for he was extremely embarrassed by old Martha's fixed and severe glance, which she had transferred from the unknown to him.

He felt indescribably disconcerted — he felt that he was looking "put out;" and his pride resented the contrast which it recognized in his guest, who stood there looking at the old woman with an air as serene as that of a princess who has taken the veil.

"Certainly, sir — you're master here," said the old servant, dryly; and making a short courtesy, that was rather a snub than a civility, to the stranger, she led the way to the kitchen.

He watched his guest as she walked down the tiled passage, and then he turned and entered his study.

The rooms in that house are not stately — very much the reverse; they are very low, and not very large. Here was one hardly fourteen feet square, wainscoted round with oak, with two narrow windows, curtained with thick red stuff, discolored by time, and with a threadbare carpet, much too small for the floor.

But it is an extremely cosy room notwithstanding. It has a huge oldfashioned hearth, in which was then burning a cheery fire of mingled peat, wood, and coals, lighting it all up merrily. Right opposite, ticked from the wainscot that homeliest and snuggest of inelegant articles — a Dutch clock, near to which hung his trout and pike rods» his landing-net and gaff, an old silver-mounted pair of family horse-pistols, and a duck-gun; all round the room were fixed the antlers of deer — ancient decorations transferred from the hall; and the studious pretensions of the young man were vouched for by a few shelves, as rude as the other furniture of the room, from which his books showed their well-worn backs. All the furniture was clumsy and out of date, and before the fire stood a table hardly compatible with romance, on which were teathings, bread, butter, and a red round of beef; while a brass kettle sang pleasantly from the bars.

"I do hope old Martha is really making her comfortable. I wonder who she is? If she is a lady, she does not choose to be recognized as such — that is plain. She will know, of course, that I could not have asked her, having no lady to receive her, into these sitting-rooms.". He glanced round, and smiled as he thought the dignified phrase, for he did not actually speak it. "Well — yes; I may be better yet — finery, wealth; never so snug again, though."

I wonder whether moments ever came in which our liberated friend Robinson Crusoe regretted his cave, with its rude furniture, its chests and his hammock, and his harmless comrades the dog and the parrot, and dismissed the tranquil image with a sigh.

"I'll make no difference: I'll go to the kitchen at my usual hour, and smoke my ten minutes by the chimney; but I don't think old Martha would like to disgrace Haworth by neglecting a guest."

The young Squire was hungry; he ate heartily. And then he sat before the fire; and the thought of the beautiful figure in the dark mantle was with him still.

CHAPTER III.

A BATTLE WITHOUT RESULTS.

WILLIAM HAWORTH had poked the fire only twice, when a sharp knock at the door announced Mrs. Gillyflower. She closed the door, having stumped in, clearing her voice, not to lose time as she did so, in such hot haste to speak was she; and she made a halt, and a "right-face," and a courtesy.

William was very fond of old Martha, and a little henpecked by her. Her air and look embarrassed him; he was in an unpleasant suspense, and had only time to say, "Well, Martha?"

"I'm come, sir, to gie ye warning; I'll leave you this day month, or any day sooner ye please. I a' been lang enough in Haworth House. I shouldn't ken the aid place, wi' the changes that's like to be."

"Why, what do you mean, Martha? — what have I done?" said the Squire, standing up and opening his hands in expostulation.

"What a' ye done, Master Willie? Well, I think when ye bring in a young fool o' a lass like that — a young lady, I believe I'm to call her — Lady, indeed! Cow-lady (ladybird) off the moss, more like — bring her in, I say, by the hand— "

"I did not bring her in by the hand," replied William, indignantly.

"And what has that to do wi' the matter, Master Willie? What does it signify, sir? Not that bit o' stick that's burning in the peat, there. But whether ye brought her in by the hand or no, it's plain ye should put her out by the lug."

"Why, what the devil has she been doing?" demanded William, firing up with a stamp on the floor.

"I don't say she's been doin' nout, did I? All I say's this — and queer crack-brain'd work it is! — how does you and me know who or what she is? I won't make a butty o' such folk for no one; catter-waulin' over the moss wi' her company-keeper, mayhap — and a brave gowk they've made o' you — and I'm vexed to think you'd be so dafy. Ye usedn't to du a that lids, Master Willie — and what will the nebbers consait? — and what will the nebbers say?”

“Neighbors, indeed! I’d like to know where the neighbors are; and I give them all leave, when you can find them, to say what they please. I tell you, Martha, with your nonsense, you are enough to ruin the character of fifty men.” And as he said this, indignantly looking on her consequential face and dumpy person, his own speech was on a sudden so very near upsetting him, that he turned abruptly, and I think his shoulders shook a little.

“Listen to me,” he said, turning again, with a countenance graver than ever; “and perhaps, once for all, you’ll hear reason. Returning home, only three minutes before I knocked at the kitchen-window, I saw this young woman — I suppose she’s young, as you say so; I’m sure I don’t know — standing alone in the storm, at the Mickle Steans. I suppose the poor creature meant to pass the night there. Would it have been creditable to Haworth House, and the old name, and to you as housekeeper, if I had passed her by, and left her in the mirk and storm — to be found dead, perhaps, in the morning, within ten-score steps of our door? Do you really mean to say that, in the name of virtue, I should have left her, the young woman as you call her, in a storm like this — do you hear the windows? do you hear the noise? — without a bield to shelter her, and perhaps to be smoored in the moss? I hope there’s hardly such a monster on earth.”

“Well, you know. Don’t ye be in such a hurry. How could *I* know? and if, as you say, ’twas so near the door, and the night being so — I’ll no deny. But ye ought to be prudent, Master Willie; ye’re the head o’ a house now, mind, and ye’ll be looked to for example; and the apostle says — there’s a waster on yon can’le— ‘ye must not avoid evil only, but the appearance thereof.’ And I suppose she’ll no’ be puttin’ her staff here, and she’ll be gangin’ in the morning; and ’twas very unfortunate the thing should have happened so, but being as you say, I suppose it just couldn’t be helped, ye’ll no’ be makin’ a custom of it, and that’s all we can say about it, if we were to talk till doomsday.”

Had the guest of Haworth Hall been short and crooked, pitted with the smallpox, and blind of an eye, this debate upon eternal principles would, I daresay, have been spared: Mrs. Gillyflower would not have had a word to say in favor of exposing young women, for whole nights together, to storms in the dark; and the ancient rites of hospitality would not have found, perhaps, quite so passionate a vindicator William Haworth.

If feminine beauty be, in general, a letter of recommendation, it is also, with the gentler sex, a challenge and an alarm. It is only a different acknowledgment of the power of the talisman.

He laughed to himself, as he poked the fire for the third time. “Certainly it is high time I should stand up for my rights a little. Good old Martha would tread down my prerogative to something very small indeed, if I allowed her to bully me as she seems to wish; in that I suppose they are all pretty much alike, but who is there like her in everything else? I could not live in this place if she went away, and she could not live away from it; she’s the last of the old people here, and she’s such an old darling! I hope, I’m sure,” he suddenly thought, “she’ll give her her breakfast in the morning.”

CHAPTER IV.

SMOKE.

Now, it was a custom of our recluse Squire, every night at a quarter to ten (for which important hour he used punctually to set the "alarum" of his Dutch clock), to shut his book, take his pipe, and pay old Martha a visit in the kitchen, and have a talk with her as he smoked his churchwarden up the capacious chimney.

At that hour Mall's scrubbing and scouring for the day was over, and good Mrs. Gillyflower's labors of direction had come to an end; and the kitchen was tranquil, and the "housekeeper" disposed to chat a little before she betook herself to her bed.

The shrilly ring of the clock suddenly startled William from his book — it was a quarter to ten.

"Yes, my smoke. No, I'll *not* smoke here. I don't see why I shouldn't take my pipe to the kitchen, as usual, and have a look at her. I will."

And accordingly he popped his homely canister of tobacco into his pocket, and with his pipe in his fingers, and a candlestick in the other hand (for the hall of Haworth boasted no light), he set out on an exploration unusually interesting.

As he entered the tiled passage he heard such sounds of merriment from the kitchen as had not enlivened Haworth Hall for many a day. The sound of laughter is not only cheery to listen to, but it excites a sympathetic merriment in the hearers; and alone as he was, and utterly ignorant of the fun that provoked it, William laughed quietly in unison, in spite of himself.

The laughter which echoed from the kitchen was that of hale old Martha, and the young clear cacchination of Mall Darrell; and between these peals he heard a low sweet voice narrating the story that, no doubt, stimulated all the mirth.

He could not find it in his heart to risk its interruption, and he waited, enjoying a sympathetic laugh, every time the merriment grew wild in the kitchen, until the story was plainly ended, and old Mrs. Gillyflower and Mall with great hilarity began to talk together. When this had a little subsided, William, with his pipe in one hand and his candle in the other, entered the snug old kitchen.

His guest was standing in the attitude in which she may have recounted her story, with one hand on the tall back of the chair, and an indescribable grace, and even dignity, in her pose. He thought he had never seen so beautiful and singular a creature.

There was no vulgar flurry or fidget; she simply awaited his notice, if he chose to give it, with a serene self-possession.

Perhaps I shall best describe the points that struck him in the stranger, by transcribing a little pencil-note he made in his study, an hour later, in meditative idleness, to aid his memory in making a sketch. It is as follows:

"Black hair — *very* black; low forehead; small head, beautifully set on; large brilliant black eyes, with long lashes; an oval face; a very small nose; small pretty ears; very pretty mouth, brilliantly red; very even little teeth; complexion clear brown, with a color seen richly through. Her figure, long-limbed, slender; flat shoulders, and very slender waist; distance from the waist to the feet long in proportion; her hands small; in walking, her steps not long enough to show her feet before her dress; her dress, I think, a very dark gray, comes up to her throat, and is long in the skirt She has put aside her cloak; a very high bearing; an air of independence and equality that resembles command, yet very civil and gentle; perfectly self-possessed; her voice low and very sweet, with a pretty accent.

"How comes this something wild and queenlike, with so perfectly feminine a bearing?

"She *is* a lady — I think a foreign one; her accent is not quite English. A Spaniard, perhaps.

"Suppose she should prove an escaped nun I "Not a bad conjecture. I wonder whether that is a conventual dress. I wish I had some drawings. We shall see its color with certainty in the morning. I think I saw beads and a cross for a moment.

"We shall see how she bears the Bible; we shall hear what she has to say about religion.

"What a Diana she looks!

"I should like to see the villain who, as Sheridan Knowles says, dares touch her with but a look!"

This was jotted down an hour later, and the sheet of paper has several sketches, each an improvement on the other, not one satisfactory; and under his disappointing essays he had written, in a kind of despair: —

"Or like the borealis' race, That flits ere you can mark the place."

Whatever William had expected, he certainly fancied that the embarrassment would have been altogether on the stranger's side. Well, it had turned out differently. This girl — she did not look more than eighteen — was quite unabashed, and William somehow did not mind lighting his pipe until he returned to his quaint study.

He did not return to his book — that was pretty well out of his head.

It was simple curiosity, he told himself. Of - course she was herself a very interesting person, he allowed, for he was a frank fellow; but it was the situation — the romance — the utter uncertainty, that really employed his thoughts; it was, in short, the story more than the heroine, he could swear, that exercised his imagination.

After he had bidden her welcome to Haworth Hall, and they had exchanged courtesies upon that occasion as guest and host, she seemed no longer to concern herself about his presence; her attention was unaffectedly engaged about other things. And while he was telling old Martha the story of his adventures on the moss that night, he was secretly mortified to observe that the stranger (for whom he perhaps intended it) was whispering something to Mall Darrell.

One thing was plain, and did not displease him: Martha Gillyflower had grown into something more than toleration of her, and the unknown had, in fact, grown into high favor with Martha.

William Haworth went to sleep that night thinking of his guest, and the first thing he thought of in the morning was. the same runaway nun. But was she a nun?

She had made them almost die of laughing with the story of a series of adventures which a poor man whom she knew had undergone at a fair in Warwickshire. Was that the sort of story which a young lady who had taken the veil would have been likely to hear? On the other hand, why should she not? She had not always been a nun, and even nuns hear stories.

"I think old Gillyflower would like to keep her for a little longer;" and if so, he would give her leave.

CHAPTER V.

HER STORY.

MRS. GILLYFLOWER and she were sitting next morning in the kitchen, at the little deal table, with a coarse but very white cloth on it, and the teathings. Mall Darrell had done her breakfast, and was washing potatoes and peeling turnips, quite out of hearing, at the open door of die scullery, through which, faintly, were audible in the kitchen the crow and gobble of the busy poultry; and close to the kitchen-window, that opened in the side-wall, roses, planted by Peter Clinton, shook themselves up and nodded in the comparative shelter, and tapped on the panes, while the tall trees outside swayed their boughs and rustled boisterously in the still vehement wind.

"Darrat ta, lass! yer no gangin' to-day. Why, see how it blaas, an' the branches swings, an' the Squire himsel' has bid ye. An' I tell ye ye'll no flit the day — ye shan't goa noo, not a bit — ye'll just bide where ye er; ye'll stay ower the night, an' gang in the mornin,' if ye will. I like ye, lass; I see ye're none o' them fiirligig fools; ye hev sense an' observation, an' ye ken the aid saw to 'be merry an' wise.' Ye can make a body laugh when ye like. But ye're no gilliver, not a bit; ye heve principles an' feelin' like mysel', though ye don't keep braggin' o' them, nor talkin' any such clish-ma-clash; an' I like ye, lass, an' I should na wonder if I came to like ye better."

Old Martha was talking heartily, and honestly too. She had formed instinctively a good opinion of her new acquaintance; and such opinions, mysteriously but irresistibly derived, command our confidence often more than any others.

She meant to be encouraging; she had placed her broad dumpy hand upon the slender one of the girl, whose arm rested on the table.

The girl looked at her with a grave countenance, in which were yet mingled expressions odd: something of amusement — something of disdain — something of liking.

"Well, Mrs. Gillyflower," she said, drawing back her hand sedately, "you're kind — I don't mind if I do; 'twill be four rounds of the clock tomorrow; after that, I provide for myself."

"Provide for yersel'? Well, I'm glad ye hev no care o' that sort to grieve ye; ye're sure ye can?"

"I can."

"H'm! Well, that's a comfort — people and friends, I daresay?"

"I have friends, and I have relations," said the girl, quietly.

"Where do they live?"

"A good many miles away, but not so far that my feet won't carry me to them. I can walk a long way, when I like."

Mrs. Gillyflower was curious; her little round gray eyes were peering vainly into the dark, fiery, unfathomable eyes of the girl.

She felt that this girl was a different nature — a more potent spirit — that she could make nothing of her.

"Well, lass, I tell ye what," said the old woman. "We are not ower rich here, any o' us; that is, we hev quite enough, d'ye mind, but none to spare. But I doubt ye'r ill-provided — an' I have a bit o' money by me — an' I'd like to lend ye a pound, an' ye'll pay me whean ye can, or whean ye like; but ye'll want somethin' by the way, an' ye'll no refuse."

The girl quickly replaced her hand on the dumpy fingers of the old woman, with a movement like a caress; and with a wild smile she looked on her for a moment, and said, "You are very goodnatured, Mrs. Gillyflower — yes, and if it ever lies in my way to do you a good turn, I'll do it Thank you very kindly; it was well-meant, but I don't need it, Mrs. Gillyflower. Look here!" and from her pocket she took a little scarlet-cloth purse with a silk cord tied round it, and poured out a tiny pile of silver on the table; and then, sweeping it back again, she continued: "And I'll tell you how I happen to be making this journey alone — I didn't intend, but you're goodnatured — I ran away!"

"Ran away, child — hey? Not from a husband, though?" she asked, with a sudden consternation.

The stranger laughed.

"No — no! that never was our way. I've been used cruel bad. I've a stepmother. I wouldn't wonder if you had a stepmother yourself, once?" she added, after a moment's pause.

"Well, noo, that *is* queer. So I had, lass, that *was* a tazzle, I can tell ye, and mickle she made me dree. I forgie her, an' may God forgie her too! But I'll never forget her, if I was to live for a thousand year. — An' so ye hev a stepmother? Tell me more, poor lassie! I ween there was cause, an' to spare, why ye should flee out o' her hands, as Jacob did fra the hands o' his unnatural brother Esau." '

"'Twas all about a man," said the girl.

"A man?" repeated Martha Gillyflower, much interested. "Well — go on, dear."

"She wanted to give me to a wicked man — the worst fellow, almost, she knew. Ha!"

The ejaculation was like a gasp, quick and hard, and accompanied with a strange smile that showed her little white teeth suddenly — expressed abhorrence powerfully.

"That fellow, as I guess from the looks and whispers of some that knows all about him, has murdered people — several, and I think I know where some of the graves is. Well, *there* was a man to choose! And I said '*No.'* She wanted to be rid o' me, for one thing, and to put me into the hands of a devil for smother. I said '*No,* I'd die first'"

"Ye were right; I'd a' done the same my lass. I telt ye, right I kenned quick enough ye were nane o' them strackle-brained queans, I kenned ye had reason for what ye did."

"Ay, so I had. And she and I had words, and she snatched up the cudgel to break my head; and I caught it fast in my hand, and I flung her down; and 'twas just ay or no with me should I kill her — it's a heavy cudgel— 'twas like lightnin'; I did not know myself — just a flicker and a chance — but I didn't come down with it, and I flung it over the casties; and said I, 'Tis the last time ye'll ever lift that to me!' and I left her that night."

"And right well done o' you. I'm maist sorry ye did not gie her a clink whaar 'twould make her lugs sing, a-toppa t' head; but ye did right to spare her, 'twas only what a Christian should."

"And she'll try to set that fellow on my track," continued the girl, "to kill me, if she can."

"And where did you live?"

"Well — a good way off — the name don't matter."

"And where are ye gangin'?"

"To friends and kin."

"And had ye no kin living nigh yer stepmother?"

“Ay, some; they left me to her, though — they don’t care. I have a grand-aunt there; if she was younger, she loves me, and would not see me wronged, but she’s too old for that work; and — ye were so kind, I’ve told ye all — and I mind the time I thought there was not a sore heart or wildered brain in all the world. — Hey! Why, there’s a bird and a pretty cage! That’s a bullfinch, and it can’t whistle, I’m sure, but I’ll teach it!” And by this time she was beside the cage, and began very sweetly to whistle a little tune. “Ay — av, see how he cocks his ear! I love birds! He will, the darling — he’ll whistle, I tell ye!”

CHAPTER VI.

SUNRISE AND LIGHT.

PETER CLINTON rode the pony to the queer little post-town nine miles away, once a week, sometimes twice, when the Squire expected a letter, and brought home, at least, the county newspaper.

That morning the *Beacon of Northumbria* lay long on his table unopened. The Squire's head was running upon the adventure of last night, and the beautiful guest whom, a chance storm had cast at his door. When at last he did unfold that chronicle, a minute assured him that "there was nothing in the paper." How wearisome seemed the doings of the magistrates, the price of sheep, even the excitement of the hour — the inquest upon the peddler who died of a heart-complaint, at the "George" in Golden Friars!

But when he took up the paper a second time, a little paragraph, hid away in a corner, accidentally caught his eye, and instantly riveted his attention. It was printed in the following terms: —

"The neighborhood of Fothergang, twelve miles from Tatham, on the old Harrowgate road, and on the borders of Lancashire and Yorkshire, was thrown into considerable excitement, on the morning of the 14th instant, by the intelligence that a young nun had made her escape in the course of the night from the Convent of St. Mary, which was opened about five years since, as our readers will remember, with considerable *éclat,* near that hamlet She is supposed to be travelling on foot, most probably in the direction of Morpeth, where she is stated to have some Protestant relatives resident, on whose protection she probably reckons. Formal information has been given to the magistrates of this elopement by the Superioress of the Convent who thus invokes the aid of the civil power to recover the custody of the young person who has made her escape. It is understood, however, that some messengers in the employment of the convent are already in pursuit In the convent she is styled Sister Euphemia — her real name has not transpired. She is stated to be under 20, rather tall and slight, with dark eyes and hair — intelligent and good-looking. Her conventual faults were— 'too great a proneness to talk,' 'restlessness,' a 'tendency to levity,' and 'a disposition to question the authority of superiors.' Great excitement prevails in the neighborhood, and we need hardly say that the sympathies of the inhabitants are altogether with the poor young nun who has made her escape. It is thought that any attempt to bring her back publicly, and consign her to the tender mercies of the conventual authorities, would produce a very alarming state of feeling in the vicinity — possibly a somewhat notous search and rescue within the walls of the convent itself. It is stated that the local magistrates have applied to the Home Office for instructions under the circumstances."

This piece of intelligence William Haworth read over and over till he could have repeated it, word for word, by rote.

Nothing in the paper, indeed? Floods of light!

William changed color again and again — from red to pale, and from pale to red.

Had that eloquent paper, the *Beacon of Northumbria*, ever excited readers so fearfully before?

- With a great sigh, at last the Squire laid the paper down, smiling darkly to himself over the discovered mystery. For the present he would keep his proofs to himself. With his penknife he carved the paragraph out of its place in the paper, and locked it up quickly in his desk.

He would not take old Martha quite into his confidence; but he must sound her, and put the solution conjecturally before her. Her opportunities were so multitudinous; trifles would help the proof. It was very odd, but the idea had struck him, at once, that this girl, with her singular manners and unaccountable dignity, might be what this paragraph very nearly proved her.

He might, he thought, fairly be a little conceited of his penetration. The thing, however, was not quite proved yet. The solution might be something quite different. But, with the same dark smile, he thought, "We must at least admit that it is not altogether improbable."

Half an hour after, also, Mrs. Gillyflower, having no one else to talk to, popped into William's study, and after some conversation — about Peter Clinton's administration of the garden, and the old kitchen-jack that would not wind — suddenly recalled his wandering thoughts, and fixed them in a moment, by beginning: "That poor young lass has been and telt me all that's foan-out at heyam, and ill-served she has been wi' a raggard stepmother. I ken that sort ower-weel mysel'."

And with this exordium she told the story, and William shut his Sanscrit Dictionary, and stood listening with a romantic intensity, and his elbow on the chimneypiece.

The Squire of Haworth Hall had been a distinguished man in his college — a hard reader when he chose, a debater, a writer of essays; and he was, like many ingenious men with brilliant imaginations, one who could see a good way into a millstone.

"That young lady," said he— "for so I am sure she is — has a rosary with a cross to it; I saw it for a moment Mind, Martha, this is quite between you and me, and you are not to repeat a word of it She has quarrelled with her superioress, and possibly about some confessor she dislikes. She calls her superioress a stepmother, and so on. If we had time, I've a book there, which says, that when nuns have any complaint to make of their condition to people of the world, they often do so in allegory — I mean, a kind of parable."

"Well, that is queer. I never saa a nun in a' my days before, an' I should not wonder; but who'd think, to look at her an' hear her talk, she was that sly; but I consayted them nuns was always dressed in a windin'-sheet like, but doubtless you know best."

"Nothing, except from books. And she stays till tomorrow, then? That's right The wind has shifted, not at this side of the house now; but still it is a high wind, and may be higher by evening."

"I left her whistling to the bird. She did look bonny, keekin' into the cage! She's a bonny lass, ain't she?"

"Yes — I daresay those who like dark beauties; but I'm held so fast to my books that my eyes are growing old, I fancy, and they can hardly admire anything. My eyes are on Sanscrit, and my heart in India. Not but I hope to come home, some day, with a hatful of money, to spend the rest of my days in the old place — where you are to welcome me back again, mind; and you'll keep the old house together, and the fire burning, while I'm away, and write me a letter every post; and you'll have my tea and a hot bannock ready for me, just in the old way, the evening I come back."

And, so saying, he placed a hand on each shoulder of the old woman, and looked very kindly down into her face.

"Hey, yer na gane yet man — who kens?" said the old woman.

"True enough — who kens? as you say, Martha."

“Ay, ay — man proposes, God disposes; and I’ll not be greetin’ for my bonny lad, till I see his trunk packed and his hat on, for the flittm’.”

And with these words, smiling bravely, her eyes filled up with tears; and turning briskly, she said:

“Hoot, lad — I’m wastin’ the whole mornin’, and nothin’ down for dinner yet, and talk ‘ill never mak ye fat. Get along wi’ ye, an’ let’s mind our business.”

And away she trotted.

The Squire went to the window; and to the left, a little way off, he saw the tall slender girl, very busy choosing and plucking roses from the huge bushes that grew near the paling.

How her head is set on! How she holds herself! She steps like a deer. How beautiful she is! — how elegant! How small her hand is!

Her black tresses were blown in the wind, and her fingers brushed them back every now and then. He lowered the window, smiling. At the noise she looked round at him, from the nodding bunch of roses in her hand, standing quite still, very gravely. Then she said something he could not hear, and smiled a little anxiously, and looked gravely at him again.

“You are too much at the corner there,” he called, smilingly; “it is quite sheltered this way.”

She drew near, in her leisurely way, walking with her short steps and high air; and with her grave proud look, she said, with the roses in her hand, a little toward him:

“I was gathering some flowers, sir; I hope it ain’t any harm?”

There is something interesting in that voice, so sweet and gentle, that contrasts, somehow, with the style of her beauty and her proud bearing.

“Would not you be better with something on? Aren’t you afraid of this rough wind? If you’ll allow me, I’ll go and ask Mrs. Gillyflower for your cloak and bonnet; I’ll fetch it in a moment.”

“No, thank you, sir,” she answered, still gravely, though he was smiling. “I like the wind; I’m used to it — it never hurt any one.”

“Well, you’ll allow me to show you where there are much better roses, and I think other flowers?”

“Thank you, sir.”

In a moment he was out on the grass — without a hat, of course; he would have been ashamed to wear one while her head was uncovered.

"It is so sheltered this way," he said, "just round this corner; and here, you see, the roses grow like great hedges."

And so they did — nothing the better of the wind, of course, but still very splendid festoons of red, white, and yellow roses.

"And this little nook is so sheltered; you don't feel the wind unpleasantly here."

It was a recess under the gable of the house, beyond which were the rear of tall stable-walls covered with ivy, and a great walnut-tree threw its shadow on the grass.

"Oh, yes; those roses are very fine; may I gather some, sir?"

"Certainly," said William, in a lower tone, that confessed the power of beauty. "You are *very* welcome to anything, everything you like, at Haworth."

William's color was heightened as he spoke. But there was nothing in the girl's manner to show that she thought herself addressed in any unusual strain, or that the speech could be made to comprehend more than the flowers she had asked leave to take.

For a few seconds they were both quite silent, and the handsome girl went on plucking these roses.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SQUIRE IMPROVES HIS ACQUAINTANCE WITH HIS GUEST.

WILLIAM was longing to talk, but he did not know how to begin. He felt a little *gêné.* In the girl's serenity there was, a feeling of inferiority that embarrassed him. He was very much afraid that she would have completed her task, and gone away with her arm laden with flowers, before he had made up his mind what to say. He was standing beside her without a word, and looking, he began to think, very foolish; and his awkwardness was enhanced by the secret misgiving, "What an ass she must think me!"

At last a thought struck him, and he said: —

"I was so glad you stayed with us."

"You are very kind, sir — yes, forty-eight hours — thank you, sir."

"If you had gone, you know, it would have been as much as saying you thought us churls, and did not trust our hospitality; and I wish — it is not impertinence, I assure you — to ask you, if you'll allow me, just a question or two. May I?"

"Certainly, sir," said the girl, turning toward him, and standing like a picture of a Southern Flora, with her roses hanging clustered over her arm, and her eyes lowered to the grass near her foot. She does not look as if he were going to question her, but proud and grave, as a princess going to hear a petition.

"It was only this," he began. "Mrs. Gillyflower says you are going to make a journey to the residence of some of your friends. I don't know, of course, what the distance may be; but if you will allow me, I will tell Clinton, and you can drive in the taxcart, twenty miles, in any direction you please."

"Thank you, sir — that's very kind of you; but I'll walk, sir," said this independent heroine. "I've very good shoes, sir."

And, by way of demonstration, she put out, in a strong shoe, the very slenderest and shapeliest foot he had ever seen.

"Well — and will you pardon me this? You know you are very young," he added, wisely, "and you can't have much experience in travelling, especially in such travelling. And I radier think you have been leading a particularly quiet life."

He said this pointedly, *apropos* of another accidental glimpse of her rosary, and he paused for a little; but there followed not the least sign or movement to indicate acquiescence or denial.

"And at all events," he said, "I wish so very much you would allow me to renew Mrs. Gillyflower's offer; she is really quite unhappy about it, and so am I — very; you ought to have some little provision more than she says you have about you."

"That's good of you, sir, but I have more money than I want; very little would carry me a long way."

"I see you are more cruel than you look; you won't allow me to be of the least use — you'll accept nothing from us. I think that is hardly kind, Miss — Miss — You have not even told me your name."

"Any name you please will do, sir."

"Oh, I may take my choice," he laughed. "I know that young ladies, when they betake themselves to a solitary life, change their names, as they do when they marry. Miss Mayflower, or Miss Nightingale, becomes Sister Eugenia, or Sister Cecilia; and I suppose you mean that I am at liberty to choose from the calendar, and I can't choose very wrong."

He said all this archly; he fancied —— simple youth! — that he might bring about a confidence, and become a champion; and he was growing to feel that he would give half Haworth for a chance of fighting in her quarrel. But the girl stood, as before, with her eyes lowered to the grass near her foot "You've refused all my poor requests," said he. "I believe that compassion is killed in the shadow of the cloister, and a cruel purity, taintless and cold as snow, dwells only in that colorless and freezing life. May I ask you a question?"

"Surely, sir."

"Is it true that you fear a revengeful man is in pursuit of you?"

"Mrs. Gillyflower told you that — did not she?" asked the girl, raising her splendid eyes to his.

"Yes, certainly, it was she," he replied. "It is so, sir — quite true. That's why I stayed; I would not have him overtake me in a lonely place. He's always plotting mischief and rolling revenges. They say he's mad; drink, I think, has made his brain unsound. I should have to run and fight and fight and run, for my life. He would not think twice; he'd fell me with his cudgel, as ready as look, and throw me in a brook."

"Thank you for speaking so frankly," said he. "Now, remember you are my guest and your life is *dear* to me; you shan't leave this tomorrow."

"Have you heard he's about here?" she asked.

"No matter," said he, evading. "You must stay over tomorrow. I say I will not risk you."

"I would stay tomorrow, sir, only I'm sure my people will be looking for me; I sent them word."

"That's no reason. If they care for you as they ought, they should be only too glad that you were made safe until that ruffian is off your track. Pray remain; do — I entreat!"

He placed his hand upon her arm as he pleaded.

"It is very good of you, sir; and as you say, so I will."

"You have made me so happy," said he, and he did look quite radiant; "and I'll tell Martha. Perhaps you'd prefer that she should ask you; and would not it be well if you told her everything? You have no idea what a wise old woman she is. She could give you such good counsel, and who knows but it may end by your staying with her — for I'm sure you like a quiet life — a great deal longer than you ever dreamed."

And so he went on, eloquently, for a good while.

What was there so odd and unsatisfactory in the expression of her beautiful features, as the girl listened to his eloquence? He tried afterwards to analyze it. It resembled the expression which they wore in conversation with Martha Gillyflower — the expression with which a beautiful girl might listen to the kindly prattle of a child who thought itself wondrous wise. Amused superiority and goodnature, and something of sadness and compassion, were there.

"Well, I've been giving very wise advice, as I supposed, and I see you are laughing at me," said he, with a smile.

"No, sir, I don't laugh; you would not think that, but what you say would not answer me; there's no one thing about it I could do."

She smiled genuinely now, and shook her head.

"Well, I've had my innings, and done no good; will you try now? I should be very glad of good advice. Here I am, a poor man, of an old but decayed family, and far from content with his lot: what do you advise me to do?"

"I'm not fit to advise such as you are, sir."

"Pray do, though. How can you tell? — how can I? I have no one to advise me, and your counsel might be the very best I could have."

"I don't think so."

"Well, but try — pray do."

"Do you understand horses?"

"No."

"Are you going for a soldier?"

"No; what would you change about me?"

"I don't know, sir; I think I'd throw the books out o' the window."

"Why?"

"They're not manly. Why should you be sitting all day, like a woman, in a room — stifling?"

"But I must earn money, and I can't do that without reading."

"Liberty is better than money. What does a man want, after all, but bread and health? Men shutting themselves up in a house, like ladies! I sometimes wonder they're not ashamed!"

There was no enthusiasm, real or affected, in this speech, which she spoke musingly; but it nettled him, for he thought he saw in her pretty face more of the old expression of amusement and disdain.

"Well, I for one don't like it — I hate it!" pleaded he. "But so it is. We must do it, or be nowhere in the great race."

"The great race up a hill, they say, and over a scawr; that's what makes them old and tired before they're well begun, spending their lives chasing — nothing! — in place of learning how little will make a man happy, and living in freedom."

He looked in her face, and somehow he felt that the girl was right, and life a fallacy and a perversion.

"I dare say you are right," he said, with a sigh. "I'm sure you *are* right; but we are entered so early for the race — in for the combat before we know; and then habit and pride, You speak truth, I think; but after a certain point is past, truth only makes us sad."

"I'm going now, sir; in— "

"And — and — you won't tell me your name?"

"I could tell you many names, sir, that would do as well as mine."

"As well! — How?"

"As well to call me by, for a day."

"Well, you won't trust me."

"There's none but enemies near here that knows my name. I'd rather not, sir."

"I must only make a guess, then — shall' I?"

"No harm, sir — no good; you'll never guess it," she answered, carelessly.

"Will you tell me truly if I make a good guess?"

"I don't think you will."

"I think I could tell you one that is very like it."

"Perhaps you could, sir."

"Well, then, I think it is not very unlike — *Euphemia*," said William Haworth, with a smile.

His meaning glance was met by a sudden flash from the girl's splendid eyes; and she looked at him, for a moment or two, with a sort of startled expectation. It subsided in a moment more, but the Squire had made his inferences.

"You see, I'm not quite so much in the dark as you supposed," said he, still smiling; and then more earnestly he continued: "But you are not to suppose — I am sure you could not do me that wrong — that if an accident has told me more than you intended to confess, I could be base and cowardly enough to permit any human being, while you honor my poor house with your presence, to trouble your quiet, or endanger your liberty. Pray rely upon me. We have never been cowards — never been traitors. I would defend you with my life!"

She looked with a side-glance of her large eyes in the face of the enthusiastic young man, and then down on the flowers that lay in a blooming sheaf on her arm, and said: —

"Some folks say you northern squires are hard — but all agree you're proud — and you'll allow none, small or great, that depends on you to be wronged; and I think you're kind beside, sir, and would not like to see any one in trouble. Is not that so?"

William smiled.

“You give us north - countrymen a good character, and me in particular; and I am too much gratified by your commendation to refuse it. But, be that how it may, rely on us; we will take good care of you while you remain at Haworth.”

“You are good to me — all,” said the girl; “and please, sir, I’ll go in with these roses now — very kind; and I hope God will bless you!”

“And, mind, you’ve promised you stay over tomorrow?”

“Yes, sir — thanks.”

“Give me your hand upon it.”

And so she did, instantly. What a pretty slender hand it was! He was holding it longer than need be.

“I keep my word, sir, always. I’m grateful, sir, for your kindness,” she said, with a grave and gentle air, drawing her hand back at the same time, as if to settle the straggling flowers on her arm; and so she was gone, and he alone.

And William Haworth sighed, and leaned his shoulder against the tree, and sighed again. He was thinking of liberty, and sighing, to think that yeaning for it was vain as for heaven. And yet — why?

CHAPTER VIII.

“YOCK, NACK, BALLO.”

THAT evening, in his study, William was disturbed by faint and far-away sounds of merriment from the kitchen. It is a house of thick walls and strong doors, but in the silence of his room the merry vibration reached him. He went into the hall and listened, and heard, at the end of the passage which leads to the kitchen, such a hurlyburly of hilarity as he could not have conceived it possible for only three people to make.

The old housekeeper was screaming peal after peal of laughter, such as he did not think mortal could utter, and retain any breath at all. A wonderful grunting or snoring sound, uttered with a sort of rhythm, accompanied one of the oddest songs he had ever heard, the melody of which resembled a piece of church-music, with a wild comic refrain attached to it at every verse. It was sung by a very sweet voice — a demi-contralto, rich and powerful, which somehow he had no difficulty in allotting to the stranger.

Now what could the row be, he wondered: some fun, of course, that delightful girl has set going.

Well, certainly, she was the mistress of these revels, and very funny the fun was to witness, “if hot to describe.

They had been drinking their tea together — Mrs. Gillyflower, the guest, and Mall. Tea ended, the girl had resumed her work, and old Martha and the stranger began to talk. A very voluble companion, in truth, was this guest, and kept the old woman, who loved a talk and a story, very agreeably employed.

Now she was telling her a long story — the sort of thing that old housekeepers like to gossip over. It was about her mother’s last illness, and her death.

There were touching incidents at the close, and the young girl told them with a true simple eloquence, that moved good Martha Gillyflower, albeit she despised the melting mood, to tears.

That strange girl did not weep, although she drew tears from the proud energetic old woman.

“Come — come, ma’am, you must cry no more; I’ll bite your little finger if you do.”

The old woman looked at her, not knowing what to make of her threat; for she seemed very serious, and showed the tiny edge of her white teeth.

“Na — na, lass! ye’ll no bite my finger,” said Mrs. Gillyflower, drying her eyes quickly, with a little severity.

“Don’t you tempt me, Mrs. Gillyflower.”

“Don’t ye talk nonsense, child.”

“Well ye’ve stopped crying, and that’s all I wanted. Mall’s done her work; we’re going to dance a dance for ye. Give her leave to come — do, please; pray do. — Mall! Mrs. Gillyflower says ye may come.”

Well, Mrs. Gillyflower did agree, with just reluctance and conditions enough to reserve her’ importance, and in a moment the tiled floor was cleared.

“Where’s the bellows? that’s right — and here’s a stick. Now, Mrs. Gillyflower — mind, I’m the bear-leader, and a fiddler beside; and the bear is sick, and I’m lamenting with him over his sickness, and we try a dance now and then, but it won’t do; and Mall is the bear. I’ll have her ready in a minute; and may I throw this wood on the fire to make a good blaze, that you may see us well? Come in, Mall — bring your candle — come into the room, till I dress you for the bear.”

Grinning from ear to ear, in marched Mall, with lengthy strides, and in two or three minutes emerged with a vizard on, made of brown-paper stitched over with tufts of black wool, a clever imitation of a bear’s head; her arms and legs encased in long black stockings, the feet of which were stuffed out so as to resemble two long paws. The gait of the bear had been carefully rehearsed. The bear was muzzled, and a cord from its nose tied round the fiddler’s arm: and with bent knees, lifting its feet high at every step, and paws raised after the manner of a begging dog — her dark dress so disposed and tied about her as to harmonize with the other dispositions, and make a very good rough imitation of the brute — in came the interesting invalid, hanging his head, now on this side, now on that, and emitting dolorous grunts; while the woebegone fiddler, with his bellows to his chin, the stick, by way of bow, across it, and the cord about his arm — turning up his eyes in agony, or rolling them on the bear with rueful affection — gave a final charge to his associate performer:

“Now, mind all I said. Remember when ye sit down, and when ye stand up; and every time I call ye ‘Sir Bruin, the Bear,’ ye make a low bow, mind; and when I sing ‘My son! my son!’ ye hug me with your arms; and when I sing quick, ‘Oh, poor fallow — Yock, nack, ballo!’ (In a foreign language, which the stranger understood, these words mean “Eyes, nose, hair and were introduced in the refrain describing the ubiquity of the offerings of Sir Bruin, every part being affected) then ye dance round, first on one leg and then on the other; and when I say ‘Chatters, mooie, cherro — (In the same language, and similarly introduced, these words mean, “Teeth, mouth, head.”) We’ll drive him in the barrow,’ you sit down fainting-like. And now look, Mrs. Gillyflower, please; we’re just beginning.”

It needed no such exhortation, for that good woman, with a recluse’s appetite for fun, was staring and listening, all eye and ear, with a preparatory grin on.

So the dramatic dance and song commenced: and to those who have ever witnessed it performed with the gravity of genuine humor, the mutual and somewhat ceremonious respect of the bear and the fiddler, the suffering and the sympathy, ‘ the tender affection and condolings, and the momentary gleams of hope and hilarity — it will be no wonder that, before it had proceeded far, old Martha was in such screams of laughter that it was a marvel she did not roll off her chair, or die in the struggle to catch her breath.

The beautiful creature who played the fiddler could not, do what she would, divest herself of her grace and her prettiness, and her clever acting was made but the more irresistible by these pleasant incongruities.

Old Martha shook — she shrieked — she rolled; down her cheeks streamed tears of merriment; she inarticulately waved her hands imploringly, to arrest the fun that was convulsing her. But it proceeded to the end, and caused the uproar that disturbed William, who, I am afraid, was beginning to grow more idle than was right.

He would have liked to pay his visit to Mrs. Gillyflower then, but he feared he might interrupt the fun. He stood, and listened to the strange hurlyburly, highly amused, and also interested. Sometimes he lost patience with honest Martha, whose roars of laughter almost drowned the song, which he thought wonderfully quaint and pretty, and the voice quite beautiful. I think he was fast falling in love with his mysterious guest.

“Well,” said old Martha, breaking in on his solitude, “that’s the lithesomest lass that ever I sid. If you’d a’ sin how connily she did it!”

“I heard you laughing, and I thought I heard singing.”

“So you did,” cried Martha, hilariously, and she described the whole performance with boisterous merriment “I tell you what, I never laughed so in my life before; an’ I saw a play in the York theatre, an’ singin’ an’ dancin’ there, but nothin’ like this to make a body laugh. Hoot, man! where war ye that ye didn’t come and see it? — ye’d a’ never forget it while ye lived. I wish she may be as skilled in graver things, tho’, but I don’t know what to make of her.”

“What is it, then? tell me what you mean,” said he, struck by the sudden gravity of her looks.

“Well, I’ll tell ye. I took down the Bible this evening, when we had done our tea, and I read a chapter; and she listened quite quiet, and when I shut it she asked me, ‘What book is that?’ I looked at her, thinkin’ she was funnin’ me. But twasn’t nothin’ o’ the kind. Then I consayted she meant, ‘What book o’ the Old Testament is it?’ So I said, ‘Genesis.’

‘And who wrote Genesis?’ says she.

‘The Bible,’ says I, ‘is the Word of God.’

‘Ay, but you said this is Genesis,’ says she. ‘An’ don’t you know,’ says I, ‘that Genesis is a part o’ the Bible?’

‘I might a’ known it,’ says she, ‘if I liked.’ Well, that puzzled me a bit, and I looked at her in a sort o’ jummlement, for I didn’t know what to make o’ her; and seein’ me look so earnest, she laughed hearty, you’d think she’d a’ died a’most. Well, I considered, an’ remembrin’ what ye said, I thought, if she be a nun she must be a Catholic, an’ Catholics, as I’ve heard say, never reads their Bibles; so just to try, says I, ‘Tomorrow’s Sunda, ye’ll be cornin’ to church, I suppose?’

‘The Squire goes to church?’ says she. ‘Yes, an’ reads his Bible, too,’ says I. ‘I don’t mind if I do,’ says she; ‘but my bonnet blew off on the moss the evening I came, and can ye lend me anything to put on my head? — and’ I’ve no good clothes, nothin’ with me.’ So Mall is stayin’ at home, and she’ll lend her Sunda bonnet, an’ she’s cornin’ to church; so she can’t be a Catholic, ye see.”

“That does not follow — it is no proof at all. I’ve seen Roman Catholics in church. They have no objection — at least no difficulty. They can say their own prayers to themselves while ours are being read, and so don’t hear one word of them. Have you ever seen her tell her beads, though, or tap her breast with her closed hand at her prayers?”

“I don’t go into her room for her candle till she’s in bed, so I can’t say what her prayers may be.”

“Have you ever seen her ‘cross herself like this, before or after meals, when we say grace?”

“No, sir.”

“They do it very quietly, to avoid singularity; but watch her tomorrow, and we’ll see how church will please her. Her not being well up in her Bible looks very like it. I rely very much on first impressions. I think she is a foreigner, and I think she is a Roman Catholic. We shall see.”

“Well,” said Martha, “I’m jealous of that myself.”

“And now I’ll take my pipe to the kitchen; she won’t mind, and it would be a pity to break an old custom,” said the Squire.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RUINS OF HAZELDEN.

NEXT day William walked to Wymering Church, five miles away, whither Clinton drove Martha Gillyflower and her guest. The tall girl with her dark-gray cloak on, and a borrowed black straw bonnet of Mall's, and a black veil supplied by the good old woman, was a demure and nun-like figure enough. If she knew nothing of our church service, she nevertheless went through — shall I call it? — her drill very exactly; she imitated, I suppose, the down-sittings and up-risings, the kneelings and the courtesies, and the reverential air of the worthy old housekeeper, close by whose side she stood, enjoying, as they did in the quaint little church, a small seat to themselves near the door.

It is not possible, however, quite to veil such beauty as that of the young girl who stood beside Mrs. Gillyflower. That devout woman was made uneasy and indignant by the marked attention with which the three persons who constituted the worth and gallantry of that primitive place of worship regarded her companion. Squire Belleston, who lived four miles away at the other side, and is a lean young fellow of 50, with a good deal of gold-chain and jewelry, and a flower always in his button hole, ogled the pew, with marked but sly benignity, during the admirable sermon of the Rev. Doctor Runt. Short Mr. Alfred Runt, the rector's eldest son and heir, did, in more earnest if less graceful fashion, the same thing; and young Mr. Sudors, the doctor's assistant, who had come all the way from Golden Friars to spend the day, sacrificed the entire Litany to ogling in a lost sweet way the selfsame point of observation — sucking all the while the polished ivory ball that forms the handle of his cane, and which he was very near swallowing in consequence of a sudden look of fierce detection from Mrs. Martha Gillyflower.

These interesting young gentlemen would possibly have given that discreet chaperone further trouble, had they not been entangled in the porch by their, young lady acquaintances and others. So Martha in the taxcart led by Peter Clinton, and the strange girl on foot, found themselves quite unmolested ascending the steep bit of hill under the old ash-trees near the church.

Perched on a bough of one of these great ash-trees that stoop over that narrow road, and half-hid among the ivy that thickly covers it, a little blackeyed sunburnt boy looked down on them as they slowly made their way up the hill. He dropped from the branch to the road, and ran after the girl, begging with the whine of a professed mendicant.

When the horses had reached the top of the hill, the girl had fallen some way behind, and was talking with the little fellow, who was walking slowly up the hill beside her. She questioned the boy sharply, and lent an attentive ear, with a very thoughtful face, as he answered volubly. When Clinton looked back, he saw her dismiss him with a wave of her hand; and then she hurried after the taxcart, and got up in silence, with an anxious and pale face, and did not speak to Martha till they had got a long way towards home.

"How long have you lived, Mrs. Gillyflower?" she asked, at last.

"Hoot, lass — there's a question! Well, a good while, ye may suppose."

"Well — well! well — well!" said the girl, sadly.

"And what's the matter now, wisehead?"

"I was thinking ye must be pretty well tired," she said, sweetly, with a shrug.

"Tired! Not I, lass; I'm good for twenty years yet."

"I don't know what we're put here for. Life's a fire that burns *sore,* Mrs. Gillyflower; I'd rather mine was cold," wailed the girl. "'Taint long cutting a grave, and then there's no more trouble about a poor fool!"

"By Jen, here's a doleful homminy!" said the old woman. "Do you want to put us in the dumps? Awa' wi' ye, ye goose!"

"Goose and gander; your parson said the same to-day — up in his box," said the girl, more like herself. "If I'm a fool, he's a bigger! And what are you, Mrs. Gillyflower, to go all that way to listen to his preachment?"

"There's a wide difference between a parson in a pulpit and a chit like you, lass, jiggin' heam in a gig. Can't ye talk o' something else, dear, and leave those things to sich as understand them?"

"That's a secret we'll all understand some day," said the girl, and laughed gently.

About an hour later William tapped at the kitchen-window, close to which the girl was whistling to the bullfinch.

"Come out, Miss Perdita, please, till I show you one of our castles; and if old Martha hears you whistling on Sunday; I don't know what may happen. I know *I* dare not do it."

She blushed, she laughed, and she ran out.

"You were very good to come, and make no favor of it," said William, speaking low.

"It is none, sir. It may lie in my power yet to serve you, and if it should, I will."

"I'm sure you would — though I don't deserve it. I call you Miss Perdita, because I don't know your name, and you won't tell it; and I should consider that a favor, for instance, if you would."

"Any name you please, sir. Names are nothing."

"We go by this path. You see the ruin, quite close to us. We lived there once, before this house was built. But why won't you tell me your name? — ain't that very unkind?"

"'Twould be no kindness to tell it, sir; my name's no consequence."

"If you knew me better, perhaps you would tell it?"

"Yes, sir — if I knew you better."

"And liked me better?"

"I'm of no consequence, sir; I shan't be here long," she said, very gravely. "I should not like my name mentioned. If some people could find out where I was, they would hurt me, I think; and please, sir, don't ask me."

He walked on a few steps in silence, looking down at the grass near his feet — disappointed. After a while, said William, raising his eyes, and looking about him:

"There is one place that I have been at, that is wonderfully like this; and oh! I wish I knew everything that has ever happened there."

Rather a crazy speech was this, but he looked serious enough. He was thinking of the paragraph about the fugitive nun in the *Beacon of Northumbria,* which had begun to trouble him.

"It is a place on the borders of Lancashire and Yorkshire; it is very like this — only it has a nunnery, but that is in a hollow, and shows very little; and there is a ruined castle there — so like this — with just the same kind of trees about it; it is called Fothergang, and I think you have been there, not very long ago; I'm nearly sure — and — will you tell me?"

It was not mere curiosity that urged this question. It was an entreaty rather than a question, and urged with an earnestness that was pathetic.

The girl looked at him darkly with a side-glance for a second, and dropped her eyes, and then looked, in silence, at the walls of the old castle; and then, with a fearless look at William, dismissing her momentary embarrassment, and with a little tone of defiance in what she said, she answered:

"Yes, sir, I have seen that place; I suppose you have been told so. I've been at Fothergang lately; and now you may tell the people that's looking for me, if ye like."

She turned away slowly, pale, and with a faint smile in which he saw pain and scorn.

"Tell those people!" he repeated. "Why, I'd *die* to protect you! How can you — how could you — say anything so cruel? Not to living creature but yourself should I for worlds say anything that could endanger you!"

"I was vexed. I don't think, maybe, all I said; and I won't talk of Fothergang another word."

"Nor I," said the Squire,' "nor ask a question."

A considerable silence intervened before he resumed his office of cicerone.

"From this little knoll it looks very well. I don't know why they did not go on living there; it was a much finer building than the house. The house was built just 180 years ago, and we have been growing poorer and poorer ever since. It was not lucky, you see. There used to be fighting here long ago, in these northern counties — very different from our times. We had seven castles; that is half as many as the Howards had," said William.

"One house is enough for a family — and too much often," she said, quietly.

"You mean where there is not money to keep it," said William with a shrug and a laugh.

"You say you're poor, sir, but you've been very kind; would not it be vile in me to laugh at your poverty? You'll not think so of me." She looked beautifully proud, and her fiery black eyes turned on him for a moment. "I would not let any one make little of you, sir."

I don’t know that William Haworth had ever felt so gratified before. He was silent for a little time — he was so happy and proud.

He did not acknowledge it; he went on speaking of the ruined towers before them. He was looking at her, and had never seen, he thought, anything so beautiful. William Haworth, you never were in so great danger before! He was growing, without half knowing it, to love her.

“Come as far as that door; through it you can see a great deal.”

They stood side by side, and she looked into the *chiaroscuro* of the old chamber; and on its great stone angle, on which was seen the chiselling of seven hundred years before, she leaned her hand, an image of perishable youth and grace.

“You never saw a place like that before, did you?” said William.

“Oh yes, sir; we were once close to one very like this. I used to be in it every day, running up and down a curlikew stair like that, and running along the wall at top; I was always very nimble.”

So William told his story, and pointed out all that was worth seeing; and, leaning on the side of the doorway, he looked at her and sighed.

“I like *you* better every hour; it is hard you don’t like me better!” and with this odd and sad speech he was silent. Then he said:

“I tell you what — I’ll set this down in my mind. Whenever you tell me your name, it will be a sign that you trust me more, and like me better; and I won’t ask — you shall do it of yourself. But I’ll tell you mine. My name is Willie, and you must call me by it, and never ‘*Sir*’ any more.”

“I’m only a poor girl, sir; I could not do that.”

“You will — I entreat!”

“No, sir. My people — we keep separate — they like that best. I’ll take no such freedom, sir; I’m only a poor girl.”

“No, you’re not poor. You’re the wealthiest girl in England, in the true wealth of beauty, and grace, and mind; and the finest lady that ever I saw or could imagine!”

“I did not think you could talk so foolish, sir,” said the girl, turning her head toward home, with a pained look.

“Is it foolish ever to speak the truth?” said he, impetuously.

“I’m going home, sir, to the house; the old lady will be expecting me. There was a thing I was going to tell you — a question to ask — but that don’t matter.”

“But it does matter; I implore of you to tell me!”

“No, sir. I don’t like that wild talk you’re so fond of — it’s making little of me.”

“It was, perhaps, very wrong,” he said, after a moment’s thought. “I’ll be quite different, you’ll see. You must forgive me. You don’t think — you couldn’t — that I ever forgot the respect I owe you?”

“No, I don’t think that; but I don’t like it, sir, nohow; and can’t we talk quiet, like other folk?”

“Well — well, can I do more than promise? I won’t; I’ll speak just as you please. I’ll keep my word, upon my honor!”

“Well, sir, I’ll tell you.”

CHAPTER X.

THE TWO PURSUERS.

“IT is only this, sir,” said the girl. “A friend has warned me, that two men, who bear me an ill-will, are coming to the Fair of Willarden on Tuesday, and that they believe I am somewhere about this part of the country, and think to meet with me there. So, sir, I’ll leave this place early in the morning, before night; and I know the road they’re coming, and I can be sure, by making a round, to keep clear of them — and get safe, I hope, to my own friends. And I’m very grateful, sir, for your kindness. You’ve been good to me — may God bless you!”

“Oh, no! you’re not to think of going yet How can you like to torture me so? What is old Martha to do without you? Don’t you feel safe where you are? You say I’ve been kind. I know it is not in my power to show the kindness I feel — it is the curse of being so poor; but surely you won’t be so cruel as to go, on this short notice. It is the one favor I ask, that you don’t leave us for a few days — a week. These fellows will soon have left this part of the world; but in the meantime, how can you, or any one, tell where they may be prowling? And — and — I *entreat* you’ll not think of it.”

There was no mistaking the genuineness of his entreaty.

“Well, sir, it is a good chance to get clear away, but I won’t go for a few days. You ought not to tell me to stay. If I do, I can’t go till I learn what way they travel after the fair, and that could not be till Wednesday. I’ve been here too long — I have indeed, sir; it is best to go.”

“You are not to go. You consented to stay. I have your promise, and you must keep it.”

The girl looked in his face, and laughed low, and not unkindly.

“I like this place,” she said. “I like Mrs. Martha: you’re all good to me. I like Haworth, for a while, but I couldn’t stay long — no, no, I couldn’t.”

“Well, that can’t be helped, when the time comes; but you must stay a week, and then good-by. We’ll not think of it till the time comes; and then, if fate will have it so, farewell, our pleasant friend.” They walked side by side, a little way, in silence.

“Tell me,” he said, “if I should chance to meet those fellows, that I may know them and give you warning: what are they like, and what are their names?”

“There’s two, sir. They are very bad fellows. The old fellow is of middle height, but very broad in the shoulders, and awful strong — with a very brown face, and a flat nose, and very long black hair, and with always a stick in his hand — and he goes by the name of Cowper. The young man is tall and light-built, and he goes by the name of Lussha Sinfield. He wears a short coat, and he has a colored kerchief about his neck, red-and green, commonly. He has now got two horses to sell; one is chestnut, and the other, taller by a hand or more, is an iron-gray hunter. He rides very well; he’ll be putting the horse over jumps, to show him off, and he’s quick to quarrel, and bloody-minded; and he never forgets a wry word, or an ill-turn — he’s sure to pay you off some day; and he’s very strong, and awful good at the cudgel. He got three months in jail, they say, for killing a man, with a rap across the temple, in Lincoln. It was a fair fight, though, and that saved him. He has a cudgel in his hand commonly, and if he should get into a quarrel without one, the old man is sure to be nigh, and lends him his. And the old fellow will be going to and fro in the fair, you’d suppose he had nothing to do, but he’s after his own business for all that; and if you should see them anywhere near here, I’d like well you’d tell me, for there’s not two blacker-hearted men in England, or that wishes any creature worse than they do to me.”

“If I can help it they shan’t vex you. Why do you look so troubled? While you stay here it is impossible — the miscreants! — you are as safe as if you were in the Queen’s palace. But tell me how it happens that these men should hate and pursue you — so young, and, if it were no tiling else, so powerless, as you are, to harm them?”

“I despised them, sir; and I said they were thieves and worse, and they never forgive anything or any one; and they are cunning, sir, not easy to match them. If I was with my people, sir, I would not care, but it is a long way still. Those fellows would come here in a minute, if they thought they might find me, pretending to sell their horses — and there’s my danger.”

“But they are to be at the fair on Tuesday?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And do you know what road they are coming?”

"Up, sir, from the south."

"Well, this lies quite out of their way — to the left, don't you see? You are quite safe here, for the present, and I think I shall hear something about their movements. I shall learn all about them, and have them properly watched; and mind, you have promised to stay quietly here, a little longer — for a week, at least."

"I say again, God bless you, sir! Now I'll go in, sir, please; Mrs. Gillyflower will be wondering where I am."

"In a moment — only one word. I thought you had been in a convent, and had made your escape — that, I daresay, is all a mistake; but — will you forgive me? — your accent, your way of speaking, makes me think you have been with foreigners, and your appearance is foreign; and only one question — if it is impertinent, say so — but do any of your people live in Spain?"

"Yes, sir; when we were staying for awhile at a place called Church Sterndale, in Derbyshire, we met a man there; he was in trouble, but he had seen them there, and told us a deal about them. And I didn't much mind; I was a young thing then — just a fool of a child, sprawlin' on the grass, and stringin' daisies, and blowin' the clock-flower to see what hour it was; and I listened in a way, for it seemed to me like a story of king and queen, and the woods and the fairies. But that's all, and ask me no more about my people, nor where I came from, nor where I am going to. I must hold my tongue, and if you would have me speak, I can't — that's all — I can't, and I must only go."

"Did not I say that you were to answer *nothing* but what you pleased? And on this express condition I am going to venture one more question — very trifling — only about a toy, a little string of beads, with, I think, a cross to the end of it. It ain't a necklace, is it? I saw it quite accidentally — will you tell me what it is?"

"No, I'll not tell that — nor nothing; I'll hold my tongue about myself, sir, please," she said, with a look of unmixed disdain, and a sudden flash from her splendid eyes. "If you thought 'twas a toy, sir, you'd never have asked. I know what you think — and so you may; but no one will pick out from me more than I choose to tell, and no gentleman will try."

"Well, I did think it something more. I was wrong to ask. Won't you make it up? I did wrong."

“I was wrong too, sir, to speak so quick to you, that has been so good to me. I’m sorry, sir.

“You’ll give me your hand; it is all forgiven then, is not it?”

She did give him her hand, with a sigh. Grief is everywhere, like the air about us, though we don’t see it; and pain is coursing through its allotted channels, like the blood, though it throbs concealed!

CHAPTER XI.

LOST AND FOUND.

THAT night William smoked his pipe into the chimney, as usual. The girl, for a wonder, seemed out of spirits. William talked, but only old Martha answered; and when the time came, he wished all “Good night,” and went away to his study. The guest bid her “Good night” also, and departed to her room; and Martha Gillyflower, being now alone, made some final arrangements in the kitchen, and in a little time, according to her careful custom, knocked at the stranger’s door, purposing to go in and take away her candle.

No answer was returned.

“Just her head under her wing, and asleep wi’ her, like a bird,” said the old woman. But when she went in the girl was nowhere to be seen. The candle was there, but nothing was disturbed or missing except the small bag of scarlet cloth, and the things she had in it when she arrived. Her dark-gray cloak, too, had disappeared from the peg on which it hung beside the door.

“There it is!” said Mrs. Gillyflower, energetically. “See how she serves one! Why, it can’t be! There’s the bed turned down as I saw it an hour ago. Not a hand to it since — nothing stirred in the room but her cloak and the little red bag. Only her candle’s here. I’d say there wasn’t a soul in the room but myself tonight. And there’s her things gone, and her cloak; and — it may be she’s gone to Mall’s room to talk a bit; but I don’t think it — I don’t.

She hurried away, being, nevertheless, strongly of that opinion.

“Get up, Mall, and help me to look. The lass is gone! Sweetbrier’s goner as sure as you’re there! Get up, and don’t be ogglin’ there like a nofflin’; there’s Sweetbrier gane awa’, and tale or tidings o’ her nowhere.”

“Agoy!” exclaimed the lass, blinking and staring in wonder, just emerging from her deep first sleep.

“Come — will ye! Huddle yer things on, and come wi’ me this minute.”

Mall’s simple equipment was not long in completing.

“Now, ye look under the bedstocks — I can’t stoop so. Well, is she?”

“Na, neyâwheere,” answered the girl. “She’s outen — she’s awa’, I’m feared.”

“Nane o’ yer proas, child, but stir and look about ye. She was ever sa keen, but I doubt she is gane, she’d be awa’ like that Stir, lass — twill be a dull house without her.”

They were looking irresolutely about the room, as they stood with their backs to the bedstead; and there came from above, on Mrs. Gillyflower’s head, a tap with a little naked foot.

“Well, child?” said she, sharply, to Mall.

“Yes, ‘m,” answered Mall.

“Well? Is there aught? Is there nout to show or point to? WeH, will ye mind how ye’re turnin’ and knockin’ yersel’ about?”

“Yes, ‘m,” answered Mall “Ye searched the press, then — so did I, and now ye see— “

Here was another little tap of the same tiny foot “Stop that pushin’, ye fool!” said old Martha.

“Yes, ‘m,” said Mall, removing a little from her side.

“And noo ye see what gratitude is! She’s let herself out by the scullery-door, and she’s gane. She’s tae’n hersel’ awa’ without as much as ‘fares-ta-weel,’ the fause lass! We’ll just gang and see what way she went out, and then I’ll to your master in the study, and tell him a’ — and I could sit down here and greet!”

Mall looked on the point of “blubberin’,” as she termed it, also. At the same moment the same little foot was laid lightly on the shoulder of Mrs. Gillyflower, who had now turned towards the door.

“Tak yer hand aff my shooder — what’s the matter wi’ ye?” said the housekeeper, with a proper sense of the liberty — at the same time placing her own hand peremptorily, as she supposed, on Mall’s.

“I didn’t touch yer shooder, ma’am,” began the girl, but was interrupted by a squawl from Mrs. Gillyflower, and “Daratta! what’s that?”

The tiny toes that rested on her shoulder were in her grasp, instead of Mali’s fingers. Mall echoed Mrs. Gillyflower’s exclamation with a scream, as she beheld the same false hand for a moment on the old woman’s shoulder; and she bounced to the door with another bawl, where Martha clutched her with her right hand, hardly knowing what she did, with a “By Jen!” and a prayer.

A laugh — and down jumped the girlish stranger from the top of the oldfashioned low bedstead where she had been hiding.

"Ye did not see my shoes and stockings; I hid them in the bed, and my cloak is up there."

The girl was laughing heartily, and looked so merry and pretty, that if you had been there you would certainly have laughed with her.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Gillyflower, with the indignation of fright. "Of all the turns ye've ever served me, this is the warst!"

What the other ill-turns may have been it would, perhaps, have puzzled our good old friend to recount.

"To think o' yer treatin' me sa! I wouldn't a' believed the parson. Na, na, na, — nane o' that," die said, waving off the laughing girl. "Na, na — I've done wi' ye. I did na think 'twas in ye. What a nafflin' I was, to care tuppence about ye! Ye've sarved me right, and, bout in the way o' civility, I'll never speak word more till *ye.* I've done wi' ye — I've done wi' ye quite!"

She had turned with dignity, and her hand was on the door, when the girl caught her.

"No, no — not a bit; ye'll never have done with me. Ye'll kiss me before ye go out, and we'll dance together, you and me; for you're my darling always, and I'll be yours again."

"To think o' ye playin' at peeping-hide, like a child! — there, don't be a fool, let me go — and to give me that fright! Don't ye be holdin me — let go, I desire."

But all wouldn't do. The girl, with bare feet, laughing merrily, and not a bit daunted, pulled her out by the substantial waist, and, singing a meny tune, whisked the old lass round in spite of herself.

"Ye let me go, miss, if ye please — tak' yer hands away. I'm not going; I won't, miss — we're na' that intimate."

But on went the song, and round and round sails the good lady, protesting; and the girl — didn't she look roguish, wild, and pretty? — capered such pretty steps on her bare feet, that at last old Martha's dignity broke down, and, perhaps from the very effort to look grave, she burst out laughing, and never was the dance so wild as then.

"I don't care," screamed Martha. "I'm very angry, though I may be laughin'; and I'll tell ye what— "

But her laughter increased, and grew at last so continuous and uproarious, that it was vain contending with it; so giving herself up, she danced with her own goodwill, and set to her pretty partner, with her fat old arms "akimbo," and tears of laughter, in the general chorus, running down her ruddy cheeks. And at last, all laughing, they came to a standstill, and old Martha said, panting:

"Go to bed — I'm the biggest fool o' the whole lot!"

And she gave the girl a kiss on the cheek, and a little slap, and ran out of the room at a trot.

CHAPTER XII.

FORTUNETELLERS.

NEXT DAY at eleven o’clock, quite contrary to his bookish custom, William took his rod and flies, and pulled on his huge fishing-boots. Four miles he had to walk before he could cast his flies on the trout-stream; but he had not reached the hedgerow of the first field that lies within the evening shadow of the gables of Haworth Hall, when he heard the sweet voice of the stranger, singing. The song, that came clear from the leafy distance over the field, was the same which he had heard from the wooded slopes by Dardale Moss, and the same rich voice trembled in the air:

“The haw thorn-tree
Is dear to me,
The elver-stone likewise —
The lonely air
That lingers there,
And thought that never dies.”

He listened till the song was sung out, and its last sweet and melancholy note died away. And then, with a long sigh, he said: “I thought so. Yes, I thought the voice was the same, and now I know it. When I heard that song, I knew that I heard the call of fate; I would follow it over the world!”

Lightly he strode to the tall trees and thicket that are grouped at the point from which the song was audible. And now he could see her, though his view was interrupted by the hanging bough that interposed. She was sitting on a stile, leaning lightly on the ivy-grown stem of a great ash-tree, and with a little dog sitting beside her, to which she was talking gayly.

She ceased her prattling on seeing William through the screen of leaves, and as she saw him turn from the path and approach, she stepped down upon the grass.

“I heard your song,” said William. “You were sitting on the stile, among that ivy, with that spray of sweetbrier nodding over your shoulders. You see

I lost nothing. They call you ‘Sweetbrier,’ as you won’t help them to another name, and I think it so wild and pretty. I shall never ask your real name; when you like to tell me, if ever that time comes, I shall be very happy. I heard your song, and I could not resist turning aside. For, one evening, as I was trudging over the moss, dull and lonely enough, a different sort of fellow from what I have grown to be, I heard that very song before, little knowing what was coming. I love that song, and it makes me sad, and

"‘The hawthorn-tree
Is dear to me,
The elver-stone likewise.’

For, when I think of the song, I always see the hawthorn-tree and the old stone where I saw you first; and I’ll never forget them, or the song, or that evening. I came just to tell you who has sent me to fish in the Dwyle, four miles away; and I’ll go tomorrow, with my gun, across the moss. I’ll give up my books — I think I do little good over them now. It is easy to keep one’s eyes upon the page, but who will tie the fancy there? And the more I thing of it, the more I love the idea of the wild free life. And I’m going all the way, I said, to-day and tomorrow, and everyday, thinking of you — just because you told me — just in the hope to please you.” He lowered his voice as he spoke.

“Whatever’ s best for yourself, sir, you will know. I’m only a poor girl, and can’t tell what will answer gentlefolk,” she replied, in a low tone, and in that odd grave way, which somehow chilled and, in a manner, awed him.

William’s conventual theories had been strengthened by one or two trifles told him by old Martha respecting their guest First on Friday she had eaten no meat Secondly, she had described some odd circumstances about the burial of “her sister” — *a* sister, more probably, William thought. A circular piece of silk, bound with ribbons of red and blue, was laid over her heart; a gospel, or “scapular” (as William concluded), and a white cloth was placed on her feet, and a white cap, of a peculiar shape, on her head; and some of the things that had belonged to her were solemnly burnt. He would have given a great deal for a book, or a learned friend, in his solitude, to satisfy him upon his theory that all this indicated the costume and practice of some conventual order.

And further — proving how little worth was that crucial test which he fancied he was applying — she had told old Martha, with an odd little laugh, that she had never been in a Church-of-England place of worship before, but that "there was no harm in it, for her mother had *once* been in one." With a dispensation he was satisfied they might anywhere.

Then there was that in her manner that was very peculiar, when she wished him to understand that he was to stand aloof — something proud, gentle, dignified, which was his very ideal of the nun-like.

"Some time or other, perhaps, you will tell me your name," he said, "but that is a sign, you say, of confidence, and may be a long way off; but I have an old entreaty to plead again. You called me 'Sir.' Now, if you won't call me by nay name, don't at least call me *that;* but why not call me 'Willie,' as Martha does? I'll only ask it when we are alone, just as we are now; and if *I* could make any one so happy by so slight a thing, why won't you?"

"Well, there — Willie — Willie — Willie," she repeated, very sweetly, with a silence between each time; and there was a little laugh running lowly through it, but something for a moment almost fond in the tone and look.

"You've said it. I thought you never would. I wish I could tell how grateful I am to you. Oh, wonderful stranger! I wish I could see into the future."

She laughed. "Where's the good? Why should the coming time be happier than the past? Rich folks look sour enough often, and lords and ladies ain't always pleasantest."

"I wish I could believe in gypsies," said William. "I'd ride twenty miles to have my fortune told, but I'm not likely to meet them here; they never come this way. You've had your fortune told, I daresay?"

"Well — no," said the girl "Well, you've very likely heard others told theirs, and seen the whole thing?"

"Oh, very often," answers she, gayly.

"I wish I could believe in it," said he. "I've heard of very curious things they've told — things that came out quite true — and also what they told people about their past lives. I think you are a believer. How do you think they make it all out?"

"By the planets, and the lines on the hand, and the lines on the forehead."

“Will you tell my fortune?” said William Haworth, smiling.

“I will,” said she, quietly. “You cross my hand with silver.”

And so he did, still smiling; and she took the coin gravely, and dropping it into her pocket she took his hand, and held it, looking sometimes for a moment at its palm, and then, long and gravely, in his face.

William would have liked to listen to his fortune so told for the whole day long; and speaking low and fluently, and standing near his side, she said: —

“Although you are young, you have had sorrow, and you sometimes think to yourself it has done you good. You think you are better and wiser than if you had never known grief — d’ye mind what I say? You do not care for a great many people, but them you do like you like well and long. You are very true-hearted — d’ye mind what I say? — and you never were very much in love, but only a trifle; and one was dark, and there was another, with light hair and blue eyes — d’ye mind what I say? But the greatest love’s to come yet and the one that will last all your days — do you mind what I say? But you are very true, and will be married well to a lady that thinks a great deal of you — do you mind what I say? — and is very rich, and you’ll come to be a very great man, and you’ll have a great estate; and although you think you’re going to India, you’ll never go there — d’ye mind what I say? — and you’ll come to be a great man, here, at home, in England, and you’ll live long. And now put your hand in your pocket, and take any money you like in it and wish — that will do. You will suffer a good deal before three years are over, but after that you will be very happy; and you will see the lady then, for the first time, that you are to marry, and — “

“That will do; you are breaking down now. You began very well,” he laughed, and shook his head. “But no — I must go to the real gypsies to have my future told. You *did* guess my poor story — my past life — very well; you are so clever, you do everything well; but now you have predicted that which can *never* be — a sheer impossibility. No — I must *tell your* fortune. Let me try — won’t you?”

She smiled; for a moment, her little white teeth appeared, and she extended her slender hand, and he took it.

“Cross your hand with silver,” said she, and she restored William’s shilling.

So he held her hand, and he looked in her face — looked in her face, and held her hand — in a dream. Never was man so near speaking madness, but he did not: —

"You are a young lady, who parted with her nearest relations on earth, to find nearer in heaven, and who discovered, almost too late, that she had forsaken friends for tyrants, hope for despair, and liberty for a prison. You can repeat more Latin on your knees than many a Cambridge or Oxford man can upon his feet. You have discovered that silence is not quiet, nor solitude content. You found that you had exchanged a mother for a stepmother, and a home for a penitentiary. You have yielded more duty and found less love, and you have grown more wise and less patient. You have turned away in time from a dark and cruel mistake, and returned to light and duty. There are many people who admire you, and feel an interest in you, and there is one who loves you — a poor fellow, very lonely, not very happy, very little worth a thought or care of yours, except for that. He loves you — he thinks that no such creature ever saw the light before; he would lay down his life for you, and he holds your little hand in his, and he is where he would always be — by your side."

"You've told my fortune all wrong, sir," she said, withdrawing her hand; "it is all as far away as the sea."

What was it in that tone and manner that was so magical? To him it seemed that an invisible curtain had dropped between them. No vulgar airs, no toss of the head, no affected scorn, were there. Nothing could be quieter, more gentle, sadder even; her head was high, but her eyes were lowered. All was proud, cold, melancholy. Nothing was there in tone or look the least unkind, yet what could be more peremptory?

He had promised there should be no such talk. He had broken his word, and she had called him "Sir." He was horribly confounded and ashamed, and full of silent self-reproach.

"I've broken my promise. I've done very wrong. I've talked like a fool, but you must make it up. You'll shake hands — won't you — and say we are friends again?"

"Oh yes, sir," she said, and they shook hands and parted And William went away with a heart beating fast — troubled.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLACK PULLET.

"When will Mrs. Gillyflower come home?" asked the stranger.

"Oh, by nightfall."

"Well, and you say the master will be home by sunsetting too. The shadows are stretching, lass, and the air a little sharp; the Squire will be a hungry man by the time he comes back. What have ye for his supper?"

It was the red round of beef, and potatoes — dinner and supper, all in one. "Come, we'll give him a better supper than that — a bit of hot meat Go you and kill a fowl."

The girl protested, in her broad north-country patois. '

"Go, Mall — do as I bid ye," repeated the guest "She'll be stark starin' mad!" expostulated Mall.

"Go you and kill the fowl; I'll take the blame myself; there shan't a wry word fall on you."

"But," reasoned the girl, "it should a' bin killed; it would be too soon to roast it."

"He'll not be home for three hours. Leave that to me. I'll show you how to dress it — and he'll say he never eat one half so good before. Go you — talk no more, but kill the fowl; and come back quick to me, and I'll tell you what to do next."

There was a cool high tone here that Mall, somehow, could not disobey.

Never was cooking so odd. So very strange, indeed, was the process that I had better describe it.

Mall, indeed, expostulated — sometimes in profound anxiety as to what would follow when Mrs. Gillyflower, having returned, discovered the unauthorized slaughter of the pullet — and then aghast at the astounding directions imposed by the damsel who had taken the command of the kitchen in the absence of old Martha. Sometimes Mall would stand agape, and gasp "Agoy!" or "By Jen!"

Sometimes, half frightened, she would look perplexed, in her face — thinking that their eccentric guest had gone stark daft — and sometimes bursting into irrepressible screams of laughter, till, as she said, she “clean kinkt wi’ laughin’!” She lost all power, for a time, either to resist or to obey.

This curious procedure took place, to make it odder still, not in the kitchen, but in the little field, close to the gate of the yard, under the trees, in the open air.

The imperious beauty there compelled Mall to scoop out a little hollow in the ground with a spade. In this she kindled a fire of peat and sticks. That dope, she ordered Mall, aiding herself with great solicitude, to twist a strong rope of straw.

The next step reduced Mall, with sheer convulsions of laughter, almost to a fainting condition. The bird, with all its feathers on, was wound up in this Straw-rope, so that nothing but a sort of ball of straw appeared. It was next covered up in the hot ashes, which had by this time accumulated in the hole, and the peat and wood fire was heaped up, round and upon it. After this she made Mall take the potatoes she had washed for boiling, and, instead of placing them in a pot, carry them out to the fire in the field; and there she buried them — one here, another there — in the embers, in serene contempt of Mall’s terrified expostulations and screams of laughter.

“And mind ye, I cook the dinner today; and if I see your potato-pot on the fire, I’ll break it with one whack of the poker; and ye’ll do just as I bid ye, neither more nor less, Mall Darrell.”

When these preparations were accomplished, the young lady’s solicitude seemed at an end, and she was able to converse on indifferent matters with her accustomed passion or levity.

She sat down on the grass near the fire, now a glowing, smouldering heap. She had the dog and the cat out to keep her company (for she loved pets), and the cage of the bullfinch on her knee; and to these companions she talked and whistled, while Mall made her more rational dispositions in the kitchen.

Then the girl would return to have a peep at the bonfire, and fall again into Shrieks of laughter. And the young priestess of this strange sacrifice would make her sit down on the grass beside her; and she would sing her a song, or tell her a story of a murder in Epping Forest, or of two horses and a tipsy dealer drowned one snowy night in a flooded ford, or of the woman’s ghost that was seen nursing and fondling the neglected child in the lonely tent. She grew into great spirits — wild spirits — beside this extemporized fire, and sang again and danced on the grass; and after a time, on a sudden, she grew sad, and she said:

"If we did right, Mall, we'd let that poor little bird go." She had the cage again on her knee, by this time, and was looking, through the wires at the bird.

"Hoot, lass! I's no sa awpy as firtle in any such lids. If Mrs. Gillyflower came home and tound her wee bird fleed — woe werth Mall! Be ma sang, she'd be stark beside hersel'!"

Mall, having seen the holocaust of the fowl, believed the strange girl capable of anything.

"I like pets — all my people do. I had a squirrel called 'Jacka,' and a green parrot; it died, pool little thing, and I buried it near Wyndale, in Derbyshire, under the middle tree of the three hawthorns that grow on the moor's side, just at the turn of the brook. I was sick crying after it Lussha Lee had a pet fox, that frightened it, I think, and it died It would call me by my name; and it slept every day on its stick, after its dinner, not with its head under its wing, but just like an old gorgio, and its chin on its breast I'd have a parrot for a pet, or any outlandish bird that don't live wild here; but these small things, when they see their companions and the green leaves, don't you believe but their little hearts is sore — they're looking for the old life? And, Mall, will ye miss me when I'm gone? I'll be often thinking of ye all, and the pleasant fields of Haworth."

"Ye're no gangin' yet, lass, and I'll no greet till sorrow comes," said Mall, heartily.

The stranger laughed kindly.

"Hark! — hear! The birds are all singing. The chimney shadow is away as far as Hazelden wolds; and Mrs. Gillyflower will be coming home again, and then the Squire. Is all ready, lass? Run and see, and trim the fire; the frost is coming, and all is ready here."

And with the tip of her strong but tidy shoe she poked the edge of the ashes.

Mall had hardly returned, when Mrs. Gillyflower appeared; and her handmaid's heart sunk, as she thought of the murdered pullet and the unboiled potatoes and saw Martha, who was not to be trifled with, descend from the taxcart before it reached the yard-gate, and cross the low' stile, and stump over the sward towards the smouldering bonfire.

“Now mind, ye sid ye wod na let her flite me,” whispered Mall, in awful trepidation.

“Never you fear,” said the girl; and before Mrs. Gillyflower had quite reached them, the stranger called:

“I’m glad ye’re come home, ma’am; there has been sad doings. What do you think? Somebody has stolen the black pullet, Mrs. Gillyflower — what do ye think o’ that?”

“Stolen the black pullet!” echoed Mrs.

Gillyflower, corning to a standstill, and looking herself as black as the pullet.

“Tell her it’s there — can’t ye?” whispered Mall, in her agony.

“Ay, burnt to a cinder; why, it’s all afire, ye fool, like a bit o’ peat!” whispered the stranger, scornfully.

“Ay! it’s gone — ay, the black pullet” (blacker than ever) she said, aside to Mall.

“And what’s the fire here for?” exclaimed Mrs. Gillyflower, breaking again into speech.

“We were terrible cold, ma’am.”

“And why not sit be the kitchen-fire — what’s the matter wi’ ye all?”

“Why, Mall let it out, and we were almost famished. The cat’s come out, and the dog, and the bird even.”

“La! But, ma’am— “ broke in Mall.

“And whaar’s the pittayties for supper?” gasped Mrs. Gillyflower, with her hand pugilistically raised, and a stamp of distraction. “Whaar’s the pittayties?”

“Well,” said the stranger, “I do suppose they’re where they were, for there’s none in the pot, though I told her she’d get into a row about them — I did.”

“Aw! la! Look at ye — weel!” broke out the betrayed Mall.

“The black pullet gone, and narra pittayta!” exclaimed the old lady, with both her open hands thrown back in distraction. “If I had a souple-jack in my hand, wouldn’t I ken whaar to lay it Don’t ye stand there ogglin’ like a gowk, ye strackle-brain’d scollops! Not a word out o’ yer head. I’ll hae nane o’ yer miff-maff here. Sarts! it’s bonny doins; fires out, and narra pittayta, and the best pou’t o’ the lot stole, and you sittin’ here croodlin’ in a scog! By my sang! it’s a good bevellin’ ye want, and if I had a widdy in my fist yer worse than nothin'. There's the master cornin', and wet and cold, and not a spark o' fire in the study. If ever there was a rue-bargain, you're ane; woe werth the day I saw yer foolish face! I can't wait noo, but I'll be talkin' to ye i' now."

And with a florid complexion and angry brow away trotted she, to see after the Squire's fire.

"He is coming — I see him down yonder by the hedge. See his flies, they're caught in the bush," said the stranger.

"Sit you here while I run in for the things."

Away she ran, leaving Mall confounded and sore at the treatment she had received. And in a minute more she returned with two dishes and two tin covers, and a great knife and fork, and a huge cloth.

First from the glowing ashes forth came the potatoes, cased in their hard-baked skins, like roasted chestnuts; and well rubbed in the cloth and placed in the dish, did ever potatoes look so tempting?"

Mall began to feel happier. Next, in its thick black crust of burnt straw and feathers, emerged the fowl. Off came this crust, and never had Mall seen or dreamed of so savory and appetizing a dish as was now before her.

"By Jen!" gasped Mall Darrell, with a broad grin, and eyes jumping out of her head.

"Didn't I tell you to do just as I bid you, and all would be well? And I told you to kill the black pullet because Mrs. Gillyflower was thinking this morning she'd a' killed it, only she thought it would not a' been a cold evening, but I knew better. Come, you bring in the pullet, and I'll bring the potatoes, and ye'll see how pleased she'll be."

And so she was, and forgave them both; and laughed and wondered, and wondered and laughed, and called the blackeyed stranger a "naughty pack;" and she told William the history of that eccentric cookery — how it was done in a bonfire, in a nook of the hedge, by the big ash-tree, under the open sky.

Nothing better was ever eaten: epicures would do well to try it

CHAPTER XIV.

THE KNIGHT IN THE SADDLE.

NEXT morning it was Tuesday — the fair-day of Willarden. William had boasted to his young guest that he would take his gun, and walk half round the moss in search of game.

Instead of doing this, at daybreak he mounted his horse and rode away toward the old Northumbrian town of Willarden.

There was a light and pleasant autumnal frost in the air as the sun rose over the landscape, and showed sharply for a while the distant peaks of the fells of Golden Friars. The Squire was riding away from Haworth, and the scenery before him was wild and picturesque. Long stretches of light sward, with gray rocks peeping through, and masses of fern and furze, made a breezy undulating outline — steep enough at times, and relieved every here and there with groups of dwarf oak, and birch, and thorn.

This scenery though never beautiful, is always cheery, and sometimes even pretty. To William it seemed prettier than it had ever looked before. What way ever seemed dull to the man whose head is full of the beautiful imagery of romance, and who is speeding, in the way of his knight-errantry, on the service of his ladylove?

Exploit more foolish, passion more romantic, never animated the enterprise of gallant knight, in the days of prowess and beauty, than that which the breast of the Squire of Haworth harbored, as he rode over the wide plain that separated his hall from the fair-green of Willarden. We shall see how he sped.

As you approach Willarden, the character of wildness and loneliness, which gives its peculiar charm to the scenery, does not diminish. Wide slopes and gentle hollows swell and dip softly, showing shallow scaurs of gray rock here and there, traced in broken lines, like timeworn and fantastic battlements and fortifications; and through the crannies twisted hawthorn-trees stoop wildly, and birch-trees in twos and threes crown their summits.

These picturesque but hungry pastures, with their thin close grass and wavy fern, and hoar rocks peeping through, are browsed by scattered sheep of some old Northumbrian breed, small and agile, who seldom lie down to repose, like their fatter cousins of the South — can gallop far and lightly, and climb the rocks like goats. These sheep crop diligently the thin but sweet herbage which more highly-bred animals would despise, and are doubtless the descendants of those harried animals who made so many forced marches, this way and that, across the border, and saw the steel caps, lances, and shaggy ponies of the Scottish rievers.

And now, at last, the quaint little town of Willarden appears in view, as William Haworth reaches the summit of a long low undulation.

There four narrow roads meet — or, if you will, two long lines of road cross — the little town clumping itself upon and about the point of union. Stone houses with steep gables, look in the distance as if planted at random, as a child places dominoes. There was some tillage near; com stood in stooks and stacks, orchards and gardens made an irregular girdle about its walls; and the gray spire, with its gilded vane, glimmered pleasantly in the early sun, with a background of statelier foliage.

Cattle and carts were still pouring into the town as William approached, and the picture, without the sounds of bustle, was pleasant in the distance.

As you draw near, the scene loses something of its gentler charm, and that which was a picture becomes instinct with the character and vulgarity of actual life. Now you hear laughter and bawling and women’s prattle, the cries of the cattle-drovers. There are a few late carts and wagons making their way through Church Street to the fair-green. Cows are driving this way and that, with their horns low, on the same route; and sheep and horses and pigs are still moving in the same direction.

William draws bridle at die porch of the “Goat in Boots;” people are going in and out through the crowd, and two broad fellows, whom William has to shove asunder, already deep in a bargain about three cows. They both look shrewd and dogged — I wonder which will have the best of it On such days, with the flurry and flush of excitement all about, who would recognize the silent little inn of all the rest of the year?

William is hicky to find a nook in which to eat his breakfast A fat hearty fellow, with a shrewd hale face, wearing leather breeches and topboots, a long red waistcoat and a blue cutaway with brass buttons, clapped his big hand on William’s shoulder, with a grin, and greeted him with a salutation:

“Ech! Willie Haworth — is thou here, lad? And how’s a’ wi’ thee? Thou’s summat late, though. I a’ selt my kye weel, an hour sin’.”

And he laughed and wagged his head.

“Glad to see you, Dick. Mind you come down again this winter to Haworth, to the duck-shooting. I’ll have your corner by the fire, and your pipe and your mug ready; and you’ll stay a week, and bring your retriever, the best dog I ever saw — and I’ll take no excuse. So that’s settled.”

Dick laughed a huge laugh. “Maybe — who kens?” he responded joyously. “Thou’s sellin’ or buyin’?” he inquired, thinking that the young Squire might be pleasant to deal with either way.

“No; I have no business here except to look after a rogue.”

“Agoy! Weel — what more?” said Dick.

“Only, as you’ve nothing better to do, you’ll come with me and see the fun. I’m going to send him out o’ the county, and he won’t like it; and there will be a jolly row, I daresay.”

“Thou’s a justice, noo. Thou’ll be givin’ him a jerkin’ o’ stean. One raggard the less. I’ll lend ye a hand, but there’s constables if need be, and thou’ll hev the warrant in thy pocket.”

“Come then, Dick. We’ll go down to the fair-green; I like your company — that’s a glorious cudgel you’ve got!”

“Well, it do drive connily; a skelp o’ that wud make yer lug sing.”

“So I think. Come, let’s be off.”

So down Church Street the Squire of Haworth and Dick Hoggen the yeoman — a man of cattle, money, and mark in those regions — made their way; and over the narrow bridge, with its now roofless guard-tower, and so into the pretty fair-green of Willarden.

CHAPTER XV.

COWPER.

HERE were, of course, the proper scenery and furniture of a fair-green — tents and booths, merry-go-rounds, “Aunt Sally,” wheels of fortune, Rocks of Scilly, thimblerig and stacks of gingerbread, and horses and other quadrupeds. The “Step in, ladies and gentlemen!” of the polite showman resounded, and the milder invitation to the peep-show, and the jokes of Mr. Merryman; the big drum and trumpet thundered, the merry squeak of the fiddle was heard, and the stentorian “saucy Arethusa” of the two British sailors, in the usual mutilated condition of that gallant service, mingling now and then with the screaming of a refractory pig. All these sights and sounds failed to divert William from his purpose. He carried about with him two remarkable and very distinct pictures. He was looking about sharply for the originals, and was so absorbed in his search as to lose much of Dick Hoggen’s agreeable conversation.

His scrutiny was not rewarded. It was now twelve o’clock. I don’t know how it is now, but in those days there was a toll collected at the entrance to the fair-green. To the man who received this money William put some questions.

To the best of his recollection he had seen no such men that day; and certainly no such person as the tall young man whom William described had brought a gray and a chestnut horse into the fair.

William was disappointed. He and his friend Dick strolled up again to the “Goat in Boots,” and had some luncheon. On a sudden a direful thought dawned on the young Squire’s mind.

What if these two miscreants had been spying out his plans, and in his absence had made a descent upon Haworth Hall, and carried off his ladylove — to be immured, perhaps, in a convent? Who could say where Clinton might be, with the farm to look after? Possibly two miles away at the forge! What an awful fool he (William Haworth) was! He had left her, in fact, to the protection of an old woman and a simple girl, with two wily kidnappers on her track. If they happened to have found a clue to her present refuge, how frightful might prove the consequences of his blunder!

It was now one; he told the people to saddle his horse forthwith, but, on second thoughts, he resolved to visit the fair-green once more, in quest of the villains whom he had come in pursuit of.

And now, it was past one o'clock. Dick Hoggen — who had played at most of the games on the green, had his fling at Aunt Sally, and peeped into the shows — was now for mounting and overtaking the sheep he had bought, which were already some way on their march to Crink Farm.

"Come down once more to the green, Dick; and if there's still no news of my rogues, we'll say good-by."

So — down they went, and at the gate the man told William: "There has been a gray and a chestnut in since, and a tall greyhoundy chap, gypsy-like, w' 'em."

"Thank you," said William, with a pleasant nod; "I'm looking for a gray. Which way did he go?"

"Right in — right fomit — right atort the middle o' the green. I've no kennin noo, though — there's such a jummlement here."

"Thanks," William smiled, and nodded again.

He nodded and smiled, but there was the sudden thrill and suspense of coming battle at his heart — he had resolved on an exploit. His eye, as it searched the crowd, was brighter, his face paler and sterner, his step more resolute, and in a sudden silence his talk with honest Dick came untimely to an end.

On reaching a part of the green a little less crowded, he saw a figure — the most barbarous, perhaps, he had ever seen before on English ground; he thought he recognized the outline which his guest had given him — he had found his game.

This was an old square man, with the swarthiest face he had ever seen, broad-furrowed and forbidding, with long soot-black hair, a thick lock of which was brought straight down at each side before his ears. He had jet-black large eyes, the fire of which was sinister in sockets so lined and wrinkled. He wore a high-crowned broad-brimmed felt hat, such as Germans sometimes affect; he had a short chocolate-colored coat, and a sky-blue waistcoat — both faded and worn at the seams — and a pair of trousers, the lower parts of which were thrust into a pair of old topboots, which, in deep brown wrinkles, hung lower than the calves of his legs.

This strange figure, pacing up and down a short bit of sward, was totally alone, and twisting an oak cudgel, of about a yard long, by the middle — seemed without object or occupation.

A stranger or more savage figure he had never seen. It might have been taken for a Zamiel, or the smoked idol of some infernal worship, or a child's ideal of an ogre.

"Keep beside me now," said William Haworth to his friend; "I may want to borrow your cudgel."

"I say, Cowper!" cried William.

The swarthy old man turned on his heel, and, stopping short, confronted the young Squire, fixing on him his glare from under his savage brows. At the same time he shifted his hold of his cudgel, and planted the end of it on the ground.

"Ho! who wants me? — I'm Cowper," said he, in a hard loud voice.

"Where's the young fellow that came with you?" said William. "I'm told he has horses to sell, and his gray might answer me."

"You'll see 'em there," said the old man, indicating the direction with a prod of his cudgel.

"Where? — in a booth?"

"Ye can see a gray horse in daylight, I — expect."

William laughed. "I'll try," said he.

"On this ground a man and his nag won't be far apart," growled the man with the cudgel. "The lad will be having a pot o' swipes, mayhap."

And the old fellow turned again, swaggered up and down his beat once more, twirling his cudgel in the same singular fashion.

CHAPTER XVI.

LUSSHA SINFIELD.

RICHARD HOGGEN had grinned with much interest over this brief dialogue, and accompanied William with right goodwill, as he made his search for the man with the horses.

Coming round the corner of a booth suddenly, a tall bony slender fellow, riding a chestnut horse and leading a gray, was before them.

He was a handsome young man, very swarthy, with oval face, lowering forehead, black eyes, and black hair; about his neck, in a single tie, so that its ends hung loose and long, was that green-and-red handkerchief which he had noted in the description. He wore a wideawake hat, a gray coat with gilt buttons, a good deal worn at the seams, a red waistcoat, white corduroy knee-breeches, and brown leather gaiters.

William made a step forward and raised his hand; the man pulled up.

“Selling that gray?” asked William.

“Ay — d’ye like him?” said the man. “Can’t say till I look at him. Old Cowper told me I should find you about here. You’re Lussha Sinfield, ain’t you?”

“Ay,” said the man, boldly, but he eyed them suspiciously. “I’m the man. All the world’s welcome to look at me, and the horse too. Nothing to hide: he’s a beauty!”

“Has he been hunted?”

“Half last season; a lamb to handle — a devil to run. Jumps all slick — bar, ditch, or stonewall, all one to Faa; takes all sweet; beautiful trained. Look at his hoofs — just like a marble. Never made a mistake since he was dropped. Pedigree, points, action, training — not another’s been on this turf this six year like him. Try him yourself — you know a horse. Will ye come a bit this way? — and Mister Cowper will hold the chestnut.”

It was really a nice horse, William thought, with fine action. But he was not troubling his head much about horses. His business was of another sort.

“Well, come on, it’s close by,” said William, pointing toward the spot where he had left the old swarthy savage twirling his cudgel.

As they walked on, William Haworth's companion jogged him under his ribs, and mumbled his critical remarks on the horse, into his ear: a caution upon this point, a hint upon that, but a general admission that "the beast was no' that bad." And all the time the horseman, with his lids dropped, as if he was looking at the grass at his horse's hoof, was reading, through the long fringe of his eyelashes, with a practised skill, the countenances and bearing of these two friends, and he truly saw in William's that which dissatisfied and even alarmed him.

But Lussha Sinfield knew very well how he stood. "He need not care a curse for any one." He had little secrets, of course, of his own — something more than most men, but they were secrets. There was nothing that could turn up about him. "He did not care a d — n."

Cowper was now in sight, and he beckoned to him.

"Take the halter," said he quietly, and Cowper — than whom, as I have said, no fitter representative for the forest-demon in "Der Freyschütz" ever strode on earth — took the rope in his hand.

William Haworth was standing a little away, so as to take in the whole figure of the horse.

"He stands over his knees," says William.

"A good judge would think that a perfection, rather than otherwise," answered Sinfield, coolly.

"I take leave to think differently," says William, sharply.

"Every man to his taste," says the dealer, coolly.

"And, besides that, I think his shoulder too straight for a hunter, and his hindlegs too far away from him."

"If those points were better than they are," answers the man, with a scornful smile, "I'd be asking a hatful more than ninety pounds for him. But never mind that — the proof of the pudding is in the eating. You'd better see him over a few fences."

"I don't mind," says the Squire.

"Hollo, Jonnie!" cries the man, raising his arm, and a slight boy, blackeyed and blackhaired, with dark-brown skin, runs up to his side.

"That's a gypsy lad," says Dick Hoggen, struck by the peculiar physique of the boy.

"By my soul, he's not!" answers Sinfield, fiercely. "That's a clever boy, though. Now, Jonnie, take him over that bar."

A few steps brought them to the bar. The little fellow sits light as a fly on the horse's back, and, without fuss or excitement, the horse goes over.

"That will do; and what do you say to that double ditch?" says William, pointing to the fence of the fair-green close by them.

"Take him over that," says Lussha Sinfield to the boy, and the horse goes over the fence.

"What do you say to that? You saw how he changes his legs," said the dealer.

"He goes out of his tracks," says William.

The man answers with a derisive laugh.

"Take him over that again," he says, and over goes the horse.

"Bring the horse down here a bit, to the wall," says Sinfield. "Now take him over the wall for the Squire."

And over the wall he goes.

"See that!" cries Sinfield.

"What?" says the Squire.

"What!" echoes Sinfield. "Why, how he stands out, and sails over it. What! Ha — ha!"

"I say it's bad jumping," says William, coolly; "why, he runs under and bucks over. A hunter, you say!"

"That gentleman there," says Sinfield, pointing to Dick, and beginning to lose temper, "has an eye in his head, and knows what belongs to a horse. What do you say, sir?"

Dick screwed one eye close, and looked hard at the horse with the other. The dealer was on the point of citing the old distich: "Who winks with one eye and looks with the other, I would not trust him though he were my brother."

He did not quite know what to make of them, so, on the whole, he chose to try a little longer.

"Take him over the wall again," said Sinfield. And over went the gray, as before.

"Will ye try him?"

"I don't mind," answered William.

He mounts, and excited the horse with whip and spur, and gallops him round the empty upper end of the green, and pulls him up suddenly before the seller, who is growing angry.

“What the d — l do you mean by bucketing my horse about that way?”

“D — n it! you asked me to try him, didn’t you?”

“I didn’t tell you to drive him mad, and knock him about that lick — did I? And what do you say to him, after all that? — what do you say now?”

CHAPTER XVII.

MEASURE WEAPONS.

“WELL, what do you say? What will you take?” said William Haworth.

“He’s dog-cheap at a hundred guineas. I’ll say ninety, and not a penny under.”

The man was holding the horse’s head; horse and man were fine types of their several species.

William laughed, quietly and scornfully.

The man fixed a fiery stare on him. “Ay, and what do you say?” he asked.

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“What do I say? I’ve a good deal to say. You are Lussha Sinfield, and I’ve heard enough about you to help me to value your horse. I’ve no doubt he’s a cheat, and five pounds is too much for him;” and William laughed again contemptuously.

Sinfield turned pale under his swarthy skin; his brow lowered darker, and fire gleamed from his black eyes on William. He stands without motion for some seconds, like the statue of an evil spirit.

“You d — d gorgio!” he yelled, “you haven’t five pounds in the world.”

And, stamping, he broke into an extravagance of fury, of shrieking curses and abuse, gesticulating as if he was hurling handfuls of dust at William into the air. The effect of this frantic exhibition was increased by the rearing and plunging of the startled horse, which he held with his left hand by the bridle, which forced him to caper and spring, this way and that, by its struggles.

“Take the horse, and give me the cudgel!” he shouted to Cowper.

“Lend me your cudgel, Dick,” said William to his companion, who was utterly puzzled by the mad scene; and at the same time he grasped the weapon.

“A ring — a ring!” shouted the crowd, that had already begun to collect.

“Ay, a ring,” cries William Haworth, sternly. “I’ll fight that fellow, if he dares; I’ll drive him out of our county.”

“Will ye try the cudgel, ye d — d thief?” screamed the horse-dealer.

"Ay, I don't care."

Sinfield made a spring into the air, and twirled the heavy stick he held by the middle; then off went his coat and his waistcoat, and old Cowper rolled them tight together, and strapped them to the saddle; off went Sinfield's hat, and off went his green-and crimson handkerchief, which he tied instead tight about his small black head. There stands the handsome athlete, with this bright headgear, in his shirt and "shorts" and gaiters, looking so lowing and malignant.

He made his stick spin in the air as his black eyes gleamed on William. Light, long of limb, all bone and sinew, a very formidable adversary looked this champion, who had killed his man in fair fight with the selfsame tough bit of ash, and left his mark scarred on many a valorous youth — being, in fact, a highly skilled master of that weapon.

Every fellow who has not seen a good single-stick play fancies he can guard himself and hit another well enough to hold his own in a fight, and feels safe enough if he has a good stick in his hand. A little experience will open his eyes, if it does not close them.

"I back myself to win — five pounds," said Lussha Sinfield.

"Done!" cried William.

"I'll make it ten," rejoined Sinfield.

"Done, again!" said William. "We'll stake the money with Mr. Hoggen, here — Mr. Richard Hoggen; every one knows Mr. Hoggen."

"Aye, he'll do: I've heard tell of Mr. Hoggen."

"You'll hold the stakes, won't you, Dick?" asked William.

"I don't mind," said Dick; "but canst play? Have a care what you're doing," he whispered, with a wink.

"Well, I ought to know something about it; I was the best man at school at it, and, so far as I know, the best at Cambridge. I was worth something, I can tell you, in the town-and-gown rows; I used to knock them over like ninepins."

"Well. I'll take the money," said Dick; "and we'll keep a ring clear. Hollo! Dobbs! — Heyward! — Clewson! Come, lads, ye must keep a ring; get half-a-dozen more, and keep fair play. Here be the squire o' Haworth goin' to play a bout for the honor o' the old county."

Sinfield said a word to his comrade, taking the horses himself by their heads; and Cowper strode up to Dick Hoggen, and, with extended arm, held forth a £10 note, which honest Dick took with a careful scrutiny, folded, and, with ten sovereigns which William Haworth handed him, placed in his purse, and stuck into the lowest depth of his breastpocket.

"Now, mind ye don't press in," said Richard Hoggen, addressing the crowd. "If you don't keep the ring you'll spoil the fun, and stop the sport; and see, lads, the two foremost rows mun sit a t' ground."

William Haworth now threw off his coat, handed his watch to honest Dick Hoggen, and put off his waistcoat and hat; and instead of it, like his antagonist, tied a handkerchief tight about his head.

"Now we mun mezzur t' sapplins," said Dick; and on being placed together there was scarcely, as it turned out, a quarter of an inch difference in the length of the two sticks; and having satisfied himself that there was no loading in Sinfield's, he pronounced the cudgels fair, and restored each to its owner for the occasion.

The ring was already formed; an ample area of smooth short turf awaited their tread, and the North-country folk who were lucky enough to be on Willarden Fair Green that day were about to see some very pretty play.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOST AND WON.

“Now, mind ye,” said Dick, in a loud voice, “I’m goin’ to tell ye how the play mun be. It shan’t last o’er an hour; and, won or drawn, it ends then. Every ten minutes I cry “*Over*,” unless the play ‘s hot at the time, and then the players take five minutes’ rest An’ if one tak’s a skelp o’ the other, and when time’s ca’d he can’t be up and to’t, he’s bet; but an’ if it’s a banger over f head, en he’s floor’d, he has ten minutes’ rest, in place of five, to cum till himseF. En noo, is beath pleased?”

“Ay!” cried Sinfield.

“All right!” said William.

“Weel, then, blitely lads, lig intul to’t, noo!” shouted the yeoman, lifting his hand for a sign.

And, each eyeing his adversary closely, the two combatants stepped cautiously from opposite sides, with cudgels well-poised, towards one another.

And now the cudgels cross, and now come a few quick feints, and each player shows something more of caution. Each has formed, I suspect, a higher estimate of his antagonist.

William Haworth’s face is stem; he is heart and soul in the battle. Victory is more to him than any one dreams; it is everything to him; he would sell Haworth, I am sure, to secure it. Pale with an intense anxiety, and stem, looks the blue-eyed Saxon Squire. His swarthy adversary, on the contrary, grins merrily, showing under his lowering brow and fiery eyes white rows of small teeth.

That fellow has the tricks of a prizefighter — this smiling or grinning for the groundlings, a trick to maintain confidence, and ape good-humor. He has often played for money, one would conclude. The odds are awfully against the amateur.

Now comes a sudden break in this cautious play, and with beautiful rapidity cuts and parries whistle and rattle; and a heavy blow takes the horse-dealer across the leg, another at his head is parried, and he replies swiftly, and is met, in return, by a parry. They draw back a little, and the swarthy fellow laughs with all his glittering teeth.

Dick Hoggen looks at his watch, which is nestled snugly in his hand; it wants two minutes and a half still of the time at which he is to cry "Over!" His confidence in William has revived; and, judge of the lists though he be, he would like to call the five minutes' rest during which that resounding cut across the dark fellow's leg, just above the knee, would possibly stiffen and spoil his action.

But there remain two minutes still, and suddenly the dark fellow advances, and a very pretty and fierce bit of play follows instantly. "Click-dack — click-clack," with sightless speed and force the strokes and guards fly and meet. The ten minutes are up, but the play is at the moment too "hot" to be interrupted, in accordance with the articles.

The two minutes have passed, and on a sudden, with the sound of a stroke on a well-stretched sail, a single blow ended the "round."

You could hardly have seen who gave it or where it fell — all was so quick. But instantly William Haworth lay stretched on his back, looking up to the sky with a white sad face, and blood was trickling over his cheek and ear.

Well was it for William that his fall was so instantaneous, for his adversary followed it with a swinging swoop, that might have cut him across the temple, and ended his dream of love and glory.

Thus, by a few inches and a small fraction of a second he escaped, and folly and passion lived on; though, looking on the young fellow's face, some of the spectators feared he was dead. The cudgels with which they played were quite heavy enough for such a feat It was soon evident, however, that the Squire was not in that predicament.

A broken head, pure and simple, is a trifle where the cudgel is a pastime — is no more matter than a broken pipe. William Haworth sat up. His friends stanched the blood as well as they could; and as he was still giddy, "daddled" him, in Dick Hoggen's phrase, one at each side, across the arena.

Ten minutes rallying-time, according to agreement, was allowed William Haworth. He needed every second of it.

As William showed signs of recovery, his adversary frequently called to Dick Hoggen, "How's time?"

William was now on his legs, and his friend quietly advised his withdrawing from the contest, and so escaping the “bevellin’” that awaited him.

“I’m all right again — thank you, old fellow. You quite mistake. He’s a better man than I thought him, and I was too rash; but Ï know him now. The lesson was worth a knock, and I go in now to win, you’ll see.”

Sinfield, on the other hand, talked in an undertone, laughing, as he passed to and fro, to his companion; and the old fellow, fired by the combat and the sight of blood, jabbered fiercely in reply, and looked more horribly ugly than ever.

The fellows who had been sitting round on the grass stood up now, and a loud gabble was going on all round. When order was called, the ring was reformed; and, after a minute’s hurry and hustle, all was right again, and the battle recommenced.

There is evidently more caution on each side. It is plain, after the first slight skirmish, that the Squire of Haworth had suffered nothing in hand or eye by his disaster. It is also plain that the dark fencer, who has drawn first blood, is resolved not to throw away his advantage, but to await his opportunity, and make his victory sure.

The Squire’s hurt, oddly enough, proved in the end the cause of his safety. Thus it happened. Sinfield having trifled, and “dodged,” and worried, with the intention of tiring a man who had lost some blood and sustained a shock, on a sudden makes a determined and formidable attack, and the Squire of Haworth is sorely pressed — is in danger — five to one, it seems, against him; and Sinfield’s smile has vanished, and an atrocious glare and dark pallor unconsciously betray the animus with which he fights.

The people hold their breath; some in the first ranks stand up. Any instant may see the catastrophe, and at this moment Sinfield’s foot slips: he has placed it in the little patch of blood which flowed from his adversary’s wound. The slight derangement that attends this accident William Haworth avails himself of; and instantly a resounding “skelp,” as they term such a blow in the North-country, proclaims to the world that Sinfield’s skull has “caught it” this time, and, as he reels, quick almost as you can clap your hands, two others follows, and tall lithe Lussha Sinfield lies, face downward, on the short grass, his small black head and green-and-scarlet handkerchief on his doubled arm, and the cudgel in which he trusted a yard away from his open hand. — , The crowd had now closed in about the fallen man; and foremost among the gabbling faces were the silent heads of the gray and the chestnut, pulled over by the powerful old gipsy, who had picked up the cudgel on his way in a trice, and who is violently roaring, stamping, and gesticulating, with the stick and the bridle clenched in his right hand, and the halter in his left; so that the horses are frightened, throwing up their heads and snorting in the air, and in danger of trampling on the feet of the crowd, who are shoving and hustling with them, and bawling to Cowper to mind his horses.

"It's foul!" he is yelling. "He struck the man down! — he struck him foul! I don't care a d — n! — he struck him down! I claim stakes for Sinfield! It's all foul! I'll fight him for double the money, I will, myself! — I'll fight that chap myself if he's the man! — I'll fight him, double or quits; and Sinfield's winner! — He struck foul! I'll lay my oath to't! Give up the money here; I'll make ye!"

While he is yelling, in the midst of a sort of scuffle, the men about him are threatening and bawling, "Whar gangst thou, dafy? — wilt tramp the lad's feace!" and so forth.

It was a full hour before Sinfield came to himself. In the mean time, Dick Hoggen proclaimed the Squire of Haworth winner of the stakes. William took his own, and said he would let off Sinfield, on condition. He would give him a cheque, payable in three months, adding *£2* to it, provided that neither Sinfield nor Cowper appeared in the county for that time. If they did he would stop payment of the cheque at the bank.

After much shrieking, threats, and bluster, the terms were accepted, Sinfield and Cowper having conferred for a minute apart; and the crestfallen partners, having by good-luck sold the chestnut, set forth on their march northward.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOOKING EASTWARD.

THE battle was over between two and three o'clock. A thin little boy, dark and handsome, who, with great black eyes, had been watching the vicissitudes of the combat with silent interest, got quickly from the fair green so soon as the fight was ended, and ran, with a light foot, through the old town of Willarden, and away westward, towards Dardale Moss.

William had left home in the gray of the dawn; and old Martha Gillyflower, talking at breakfast to her guest, said: —

"Now, see, if here isn't a cow?" She had whisked round the tea-leaves that remained in the bottom of her cup, and inverted it in her saucer, and was now reading futurity, after the manner of her kind, in the tracing thus made on the sides of her tea-cup. "A cow. Look here; isn't there one horn, and there the other? — and its tail here? That's what he'll bring home, ye'll find — a cow; and if he does, he mun find room for her in his study, for there's none on the farm. He did the same at Crinkford — half-a-score sheep, without ever a word to Clinton, and more sheep at Haworth than Peter kenn'd what to do wi'."

The girl laughed. "Well, if he brings home a cow, it will be an odd day's shootin'."

"Shootin', child! The first time I heard of a gentleman shootin' at a fair," replied Martha.

"Oh! the fair? What fair? — Willarden?" asked the girl, carelessly, but with a slight change of color.

"Ay, Willarden. He's not gane there to sell, sa it mun be to buy, I consayte; it will not be the gingerbread and peep-shows that taks him thiddher."

The girl laughed. "Some young lady — a sweetheart, mayhap," said she.

"Na — na. Willie's nane o' that sort; he's too wise. Time enough to court when he's thinkin' to marry, and time enough to marry when he has meyar years o'er his pow, and meyar goud in his poke. He'll no du a' that lids. Na — na; he'll no be thinkin' o' fetchin' hame a marrow to Haworth this mony a year yet; en afoore ony sic like cattle comes hiddher to Haworth, I wish a'ad Martha may be far enough out o' the way."

The girl talked on very merrily. She was in great spirits. But so it was, that when Martha was no longer near, she grew thoughtful and restless, and after a time walked down to the ruin that stands near the road to Willarden, and stood on that eminence looking towards it. It was too early yet for any one to return from the fair. The narrow old road was deserted. She sat there, looking for a long time. She sang sometimes little snatches of airs, wild and quaint, of which the world knows nothing. Then came intervals of silence, and then, in her low sweet voice, she would talk to the dog, of which she made a pet, as it sat beside her, and then a silent watch again.

Then into the house die would run, and whistle to the bullfinch, or lend a hand in any work that was going on, and make a bit of fun for Mrs. Gillyflower.

"Wi' all your fun, thou's not eatin' a bit. Thou's not well, lass?" asked old Martha, kindly.

"Never better — only I was thinking, Mrs. Gillyflower; and where's the good of thinking? Everything dies — birds, flowers, lads, and lasses — all, and sorrow itself dies at last; and so, ma'am, I say, let us not care too much for any, for 'tis only grief, at best; and if you like them well, and their liking dies first, where are ye? So keep your heart sure locked, and the key where none can find it, and your love won't be stole away; and ye'll have a merry mind, and careless days, and light sleep, and ye'll die a good old woman. Shall I sing you the song of the little fiddler that died of love of Willie Faa's big aunt, and was buried on the top of the hill in his fiddle-case?"

So the strange girl sang this song, which affected from first to last a pedantic strain of philosophy, with a tune somewhat monotonous and severe, both of which, contrasted with the irresistibly absurd images and incidents of the tale, made old Mrs. Gillyflower's fat sides shake with laughter.

Away the girl ran again, before the laughter was half over, and was looking eastward once more from the same eminence — watching listlessly sometimes, and sometimes more anxiously, for the distant figure of the returning horseman.

Had she once been satisfied that she saw him and that he was safe, she would have returned, and the *preux chevalier* would never have known that his return had been so watched for.

Many restless toings-and-froings had there been.

It is now within an hour of sunset, and she hears a whistle, and guesses who is coming. She advances. A little blackeyed boy comes running up the foad, that here winds with a picturesque irregularity, and he sees her and raises his hands. She beckons, in her cold lofty way, and in a moment more he has reached her side.

He has a story to tell. It is related with wonderful gestures and volubility. She stands listening, with her hand extended. They are quite out of sight of the house.

Out comes her little red purse, and she gives the boy some money. He has a word or two more to say. He is going, but she beckons him back again, and has more questions to ask — possibly the old ones over again.

And now she waves him off, and away goes he; and she is alone, looking down on the grass beside her with a pale face.

CHAPTER XX.

THE NAME.

THE girl returned to the house, and talked and laughed as usual. The fuss of preparation for the Squire's return, with a keen appetite after his long ride, was over, and honest Martha was already predicting that the "darkening would come before Willie was heam," and rehearsing the lecture she would give him if so it should be.

The girl laughed. "Is he afraid of you, Mrs. Gillyflower?" asked she, suddenly grave again.

"Why sud he, lass, so lang as he keeps gude hours and gude manners? But he kens weel eneugh he's nobbut to tak' care o' himsel', and Martha's weel pleased."

"Wilful and wayward the young lads be— 'taint easy ruling them, ma'am," said her young guest, with the gravity of a sage. "I wonder how half o' them ever lives to thirty year."

"Thirty year! — not they. If they wam't looked after by wiser heads, there wad na be ane o' them left at yan score and twea — wi' couds en fevers, to say nowt of the faws, en clinks, en sizzupers they're gettin' ever an' always."

The concluding items in old Martha's catalogue sounded ominously in the girl's ear, but she laughed again. After a little time, she left the kitchen unnoticed, and passed out of the hall-door.

The renown of Lussha Sinfield was high as a master of the cudgel. She had heard the story of that day's fight. A chance had given William Haworth the victory, but a deadly hand had struck him.

Had not the same hand struck Tinkler Gordon, the Scot, what seemed but alight blow, and the Tinkler seemed never the worse for three whole days, and at the end of that time he sickened, and soon died; and it was found that the tap of Sinfield's skilful cudgel had broken the brawny Tinkler's skull.

In the meantime, William Haworth was riding homeward. The sun was just at the edge of the horizon, and the melancholy glory of evening tinted all the landscape.

As he rode at a walk, the by-road there making a little turn, looking over his right shoulder toward the old house, whose chimneys, now not three hundred yards away, rose over the familiar thorn-trees and elms — upon his saddle, on the left side, a hand was laid, and, with a quick glance, he saw his beautiful guest looking up in his face.

That look was radiant There was admiration, there was gratitude in it The Squire drew the bridle instantly, smiling down in return.

I dare say she thought Lussha Sinfield about the most formidable champion on earth. In her proud face was beaming that sympathy with the heroic that makes the beauty of girls almost sublime.

“Willie — Willie — oh Willie! — you’re hurt.”

“Nothing,” he laughed.

“All for me! I’ll never forget ye, Willie.”

“I say it is nothing. Oh, how I wish it were! I wish I could lay down my life for you,” said this romantic Squire, whose chivalry was rising to a wild adoration in the light of her beauty.

She was gazing up at him steadfastly, and speaking in her low sweet tones.

“My man! And all for a poor lass!”

“For my beautiful friend — my fairy-queen — my treasured guest!”

“I’m a proud girl.” Suddenly there was a little sob, and a little gush of tears.

Willie was by her side, and caught her hand in both his to his lips.

“No — no, none o’ that, Willie,” she said gently, but in the old sad way that was not to be gainsaid. “I’ll see to your wound, Willie. I’ll cure it myself. We have our own way of curing everything. I will — but oh! — that’s nothing.”

Willie laughed again, and said: —

“It *is* nothing — the hurt is nothing; but— “in a changed tone he said— “but that you should think of me, and care -for me, ever so little, is more than all the world and more than life to me.”

Gazing in his face, she repeated, as if to herself, with the same melancholy rapture, “My man — my man!”

“If you trusted me better now, if you thought me ever so little worthier, just as a little sign that you do not quite distrust me, you said you would tell me, some time— “

"My name? Oh yes! I will," she said slowly and very gently. "A strange name you'll think it. Euphan Curraple, that is it I would not tell it to another here."

"Euphan! It is a beautiful name! I know you ever so much better now, dear Euphan! Oh, Euphan! my only, only love!"

"No — no, Willie; you don't know me better, and you're not to talk so. You gave me your word. You're true-hearted — didn't I say you were? — and you'll keep your word. Get on your horse again, Willie, and no wild talk; but home, and I'll follow the path."

"Well, Euphan, there's a secret between us, isn't there? — a secret in my keeping. Your name. It is only a sign of trust between us. God bless you for it!"

"Come — come, Willie, up and home; they'll wonder what keeps you — they'll be coming."

"Well, Euphan, if I were never to say it more, you are my life and my hope, the star of my worship! Euphan, my darling!"

"If you were never to say it more, well, never say it more, Willie. Can't we talk like other folk? Can't we be kind without being foolish? We should know one another longer than we are ever like to do, before we can tell truly what's to say the one o' the other. Wide is the world, and many kinds, and chance or change, and nothing stays, some in walls, some under barns, no two songs the same, and some that meet and like, and lose; love passing like a ship at sea and comes no more; and so, Willie, be merry while ye may, lad, and we'll sing while the way lies together, and think after." And with a light sad laugh, the girl waved him toward the house, and herself ran up the little footpath in the same direction, and was lost among the briers and bushes that grow through the clefts of the old gray rocks that peep through the sward as you mount that wild and winding way to Haworth Hall.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CHANGE.

WILLIAM HAWORTH'S hurt looked no trifle, but he did not mind it In the veins of a young fellow in good training, and living in such wild free air, on good country fare, it is not blood but ichor that circulates, and wounds heal in no time.

It seemed to him that the beautiful girl who haunted his thoughts rather kept out of his way — that is, he could never see her except in the presence of old Martha now, or of Mall Darrell. He fancied that she had grown thoughtful.

Certain it was, when he was by she was silent. She was grave. She did not, he thought, even look at him, except when, driven to despair, he spoke to her. Then she spoke gently and pleasantly as ever.

Once only he caught her smiling at some joke he addressed to Mrs. Gillyflower — she smiled at the roses she was arranging in a glass for the dresser — and William felt prouder and happier for half the day.

What could this be? There was no affectation in the matter — there was no appearance of being offended; only you would have fancied that she was under orders to avoid a *tête-à-tête*, and to act with a little more reserve. I need hardly say, however, that there was no one to impose any such conditions.

William tortured himself to find reasons for it Perhaps the cause was in the rapturous audacity of his talk. She had thought it over, perhaps, and formed resolutions in counsel with herself.

The Squire affected to be careless, sometimes; and was often angry, and always miserable.

He had reviewed his theory of her being an escaped nun. He had another theory now, romantic also. Was ever wight more desperately in love?

She is expecting a letter or a message, and she is meditating her farewell; and she has made up her mind that there shall be no entanglement, even of sentiment "How cold and selfish they are!" he said, in his anger. What made it worse still was that he sometimes heard the old sounds of merriment from the kitchen — the laughter and the singing — and this cruel girl was clearly the origin and spring of all the gayety.

Some girls have affected this estrangement to pique a lover and make themselves more precious, or even from the mysterious pleasure that some find in an unexplained and smouldering quarrel — the pain and the submission of a suffering lover, his wanderings in the dark, and his pleadings for light.

But William Haworth did not suspect his Euphan of this. He felt that in that character, in some respects so volatile, there was a vein of common sense, decision, and dignity, where the deeper feelings were concerned, quite incompatible with any such shabby trifling.

In this mood, amid these conjectures, William Haworth took his gun, and spent the day in a lonely march over Dardale Moss.

The sun was touching the distant rim of the horizon, as William Haworth, with the butt of his gun over his shoulder, approached the scattered wood near Haworth Hall.

Far away, but still a bold feature in the landscape, are visible the towering fells of Golden Friars. Looking towards them, as you stand under the group of birch-trees, with your back to the sombre moor, the landscape has a wild and melancholy charm of its own, especially in certain lights.

Take sunset, for instance — as it now is — when, red with the mists that gather over that dark expanse, the sun seems sinking inch by inch into its black level, and throws your shadow long before you, touching every weed and thistle and long blade of grass with its fiery light, and with a softer tint lighting up the trees in the foreground.

Before you stands the old gray-fronted house of Haworth, its small windows now glimmering all over with the reflected flame of the west. About it, with an air of shelter and comfort, stand huge old trees. It is by no means a “palatial residence,” as county historians often term ancient family houses. It is a homely old house, shingle-roofed and strongly built; and 200 years hence may find it looking westward over the moss, with little or no change.

A little in the rear, and crowning an abrupt eminence of very modest pretensions, rise the ruins of Haworth Castle. In this land of raid and rapine, no less than seven such buildings are said to have belonged to the family of Haworth.

In the foreground near the margin of the moss, a little to the right, stands one of those mysterious relics that carry us back to cyclopean times. On a level, no doubt once surrounded by a forest of oak — the indications rather than the relics of which remain in the fragments of dwarf oak-wood which are to be found in that region — stands a druidic ring of huge stores. Two are prostrate, and two missing — blasted, perhaps, and carted away in fragments to contribute to some neighbouring building. It is, however, on the whole, an imposing and very perfect monument of this rude and mysterious architecture. Within and about this silent and venerable circle — whose origin, when the first stone of that ruinous castle was laid, was a secret as irrecoverably lost as it now is — grow a few hawthorn and elder trees. I suppose it figures in books of topography and antiquarian works. These objects, partially screened by the irregular wood I have described, make the scene picturesque and interesting.

No place is more solitary than this. In Sydney Smith’s phrase, “You must here send twelve miles, and over the fells too, for a lemon.” Golden Friars is the metropolis of this stem and somewhat savage region, and, thus placed within the circle of dependency, I may treat this relation as a chronicle of Golden Friars.

It was here, in moonlight, on that stormy night, not yet a fortnight since, that William had first come within the circle of a strange enchantment — when, like a spirit in the solitude, that beautiful girl stood before him. By the same path, as nearly as he could make it out, he now approached these tall time-furrowed stones.

Traversing a thick screen of hawthorn and wild birch, on a sudden this solemn circle stood full in view.

Not among these rude columns, but some twenty yards nearer to the spot where he then stood, on a slight elevation, full in the level light of the red sun, two figures were fixed in attitudes that betokened an engrossing dialogue.

William’s step was stayed. He gazed on them, breathless. One was Euphan Curraple — the other was a wonderful stranger.

CHAPTER XXII.

HECATE.

THIS stranger was an old woman, dark and grim beyond anything he could have imagined, and resembled nothing that William had ever heard of but the witch of a fairy-tale. Her shoulders were humped with age; her face extraordinarily long and swart, the chin resting on her breast. Her eyes were black and vivid. She wore a very wide-leafed black hat, tied down over her ears with a handkerchief, and a short dark cloak, from the folds of which her brown bare arm was extended; and her fingers, on which were several rings, grasped a long stick, on which she leaned.

Beautiful Euphan leaned with her shoulder lightly on the silvery stem of a birch-tree, one of three that sprang forking from the same root; and her arm and slender hand wound on a branch beside her, the small leaves of which waved and quivered slightly in answer to the motion, else unperceived, with which she accompanied her talk. Now and then her narrow shapely foot peeped forth, and listlessly poked the little tufts of grass.

Here, truly, were the embodied types of the graceful and the grotesque — the ugly and the beautiful — contrasted.

The old woman is talking now. The strange mask shines in the setting sun, like burnished bronze.

And now it is Euphan’s turn, and William sighs, “How beautiful she is! — how beautiful!”

What a mysterious prettiness, and novelty, and finish in all her movements, when a gesture or a change of attitude accompanies her speech! How strange and sinister the bright-eyed hag, who now and then, as she talks, lifts the point of her stick, and makes little diagrams and circles in the air! The shrivelled hand, the fixed smile, the hawk-like eye and myriad wrinkles, lend a malignant force to that picture of a witch performing an incantation.

Now they join hands, The old woman’s head is nodding in time to some last words; and now she walks, with her hunched stoop and wiry gait, swiftly enough to the old Druidic ring, close by, through which her path lies. As she reaches these tall gray stones, she turns, extending her long shrunken arm towards the girl, with an uncertain wave in the hand, as if pronouncing a farewell benediction. As she does so, William thinks she sees him; for it seemed, far as he was, that her piercing black eyes were directed suddenly on him. He had caught her eye, he felt She remained fixed, for a moment or two. Then — had she made a sign to the girl? — she turned again, and disappeared among those hoary stones and bushes.

Euphan Curraple looked towards William, smiled — not kindly, he thought — and remained where she was.

The young Squire was nettled. Here was a secret conference — a secret influence, he assumed — advising and planning going on; and he not informed even of the subject of it! He was stung and angry. Yet, could anything be more unreasonable? What right on earth had he to all this girl's confidence?

Is not the whole Court of Love near akin to Bedlam? Is ever love without jealousy? And what madder than jealousy — save love itself?

If William had reflected for a moment, being proud, I think he would have walked straight home without troubling Euphan with a word. But, being impulsive too, he walked straight up to her, and raised his hat ironically, and said: —

"I'm so afraid I've interrupted a conversation."

"Why need ye raise your hat, sir, to a gipsy girl?"

The avowal did not come by surprise on William. This was his second theory. But she interested him the more.

"I treat all people — and your sex especially — with respect."

"Oh no! That was banter, sir, and you're angry."

"Angry? Not a bit. Why should I?"

"Very true — why should you?" she replied, coldly.

"I say, I'm not angry!" said William, a little hotly. "Every one has their own business, and, provided that's not interfered with, I don't see what right any one has to be angry."

"It is I that should be angry, sir," said the girl.

"I don't think, lately," said William, "I have had an opportunity of saying anything to incur your displeasure."

"You should not have watched me, sir, like that; no gentleman would have done so."

As she spoke she waved her hand, ever so slightly, towards the spot where William had been standing.

"Watch you!" said William. "I never dreamed of such a thing. I was walking home, and saw you, ana was surprised — little more than one minute; and I did not hear one word you were saying — not a syllable. If you knew anything of me — if you cared to understand me — you would know that I'm no such person; that's quite impossible."

"Well, you need look no more, and guess no more; I've told you all."

A brilliant color flushed under the clear brown of that beautiful girl, and made her splendid black eyes burn like fire.

"You've told me only what I thought before, Euphan," he said, in a tone on a sudden quite changed. "I have read about your race, ever SQ much, with the deepest interest. Think what you will of me, Euphan, but don't think me a fool or a worldling. I treasure the words you said to me — words that you forget — when first you came, so true and wise, containing the very secret of all the happiness that this sad earth can yield."

"If you had asked me, sir, when I told you my name, I'd have told you all; we never deny our people. There are some of them passing, and they'll camp near the cat-stone, on the moss, tonight, They are bad gipsies; we don't like them, but they can fetch a message, and that old woman had a message for me. She says I may go on safely to my own people now. That was all; I would have told you, if you had asked me."

She spoke a little coldly — she looked pained. What a dignity there was in this young queen of nature!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE OPEN HEART.

“I HAVE told you the truth,” said William; “and when you think a little, Euphan, you will do me justice. I have not been watching you; you ought to have known that I was quite incapable of that.”

“I was wrong, sir, I’m sure. I had not time to think — I was angry.”

“Well, Euphan, you won’t refuse to shake hands.”

She laughed a little, and did shake hands.

“Euphan,” said William, still holding her hand in his, “you are the loveliest creature on earth — there is no other like you!”

“You don’t think so.”

“I do, Euphan. I never dreamed of such a creature. You are the finest spirit, the most beautiful being — I adore you I”

“No — no, you don’t.” She shook her head, as if smiling the thought away.

“Oh, Euphan! you wring my heart — you are cruel!”

Euphan smiled her proud wild smile, in which expressions mingled strangely — something of disdain, more of compassion, also something beautiful of gratification.

“You Rias talk so to us gipsy-girls, but you don’t mean it.”

“Oh, darling! you’ll break my heart. May God destroy me, but I do!”

He had taken her hand, and was holding it in both his.

“No, sir — ah no. ’Tis all folly,” she said, drawing it back, with a look that was grave, and even sad, and, having withdrawn it, she waved it back, ever so little, her arm extended; but it was a prohibition queenlike, quite natural — even girlish, but not to be disobeyed.

“Why did God make you so beautiful and so pitiless?” said William, clasping his hands.

“Beauty is only in the eyes that see it. We are all as we are, sir — we can’t change.”

“‘Sir!’ You call me ‘sir,’ and you promised to call me ‘Willie.’”

“’Twas in play.”

“No — it was no jesting; I never was so in earnest in my life,” said William, impetuously.

“There is a distance between us.”

“There’s no distance, Euphan; what shall I do to prove it?” wildly he answered.

“I don’t mean rank — there’s no rank,” she said, carelessly. “The real gipsy was never a servant from the time the world began.”

“Where is the distance, then?”

“Wide and wild as the sea,” she said sadly, and smiled, and was grave again.

“My mother told me, a Gorgio, long ago, married one of our people — a girl he fell in love with; it was but a fancy, it could not be more. It would not do — never; the tame and the wild bird should not mate.”

“God made us all, Euphan; there’s no such difference. I have read of your wild free life — there’s nothing like it. Young men of wealth and birth have so fallen in love with it as to renounce all, and follow the fortunes of the camp, and chosen beautiful wives of your mysterious race, and lived free and happy, and every year loved its liberty and beauty better, and never repented their choice, or thought with a sigh of the dull world they had left behind.”

Euphan smiled a melancholy smile at these wild words: —

“If I thought you spoke in earnest, sir, you should see me no more. You shan’t stay with me longer. Go your way home, Willie, as if you had not seen me. I’ll talk no more now, for Euphan’s heart is heavy.”

“Euphan!” he said, wild and pale, “you are going; if I leave you now I shall see you no more. Swear — that if I leave you, you will return as usual!”

“I will,” she said.

“You would not deceive me?” he pleaded.

“I’ll go back, as you say, sir. I’ll be thinking a bit here, alone; and I’ll go to the house again, and see you just the same as ever.”

The Squire looked in her face for a moment; it was pale and gentle, and the fires of her lustrous eyes were misty. In that saddened face was a look he could not doubt.

As he went homeward alone, a mad dream was whirling in his brain:

"Oh Euphan! if I thought you could ever love me best of all! Yes, the wild free life! — there's nothing like it; the miserable life that chains us to fear and drudgery is all a fallacy. Give me the life of the tent, the mountain march, the forest camp, the simple free republic, where mortals have time to think, and to enjoy, and live with nature — God's beautiful creation! Think no more of vain pre-eminence and tawdry competition, and the fever and lassitude of a shabby ambition. What a miserable slave I've been! — what a coward and a suicide! I've had enough of this. I have found courage at last. Beautiful Euphan! you are the spirit of liberty, who can break my chains, and lead me into an enchanted world!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

FURIOSO.

EUPHAN CURRAPLE kept her word. She was soon by old Martha’s side again! She was very merry. Never had the old kitchen rung to pleasanter peals of laughter.

William heard these sounds, as he paced his study, in a tumult of fancies and feelings. He opened the door, and leaned smiling at its side, with his arms folded. He hardly breathed, for the voice that was more silvery than choirs of angels in his ear was dimly audible in the merriment: and oh! how clear, and though the faintest, the only one he heard. He sighed, in his lonely rapture.

A world as new as the world of spirits was opening to him. These sounds of merriment were of good augury to him, he hoped. Had she thought over all he had said, and was she happy? Oh! if that friendless being could only love him as he loved her — hand-in-hand, through enchanted ground, they would walk henceforward together!

His darling was there — his idol, his muse, his beautiful spirit — and everything was interesting; the tick of his old Dutch clock was musical; the light of fairy land was on the panels of his homely house. The look down the dim passage was a gaze into beautiful futurity. O Time! wing on, and bear him swiftly to the gate of his paradise!

Next morning, just as usual, Euphan was there, very merry, at breakfast with old Martha.

You are not to suppose that she was a useless visitor. Ready to lend a hand whenever it was needed — very quick, very neat was she, and could use her needle for half an hour as well as any. She was a wise adviser, too, in all household matters; and old Martha had come, by this time, habitually to consult her — obliquely and accidentally, as it were; for the old housekeeper had her pride of rule and care, but made no secret of her opinion that the lass had a good notion of housekeeping, and would make a very pretty housewife in time. And anything she did was pleasantly done, with a song or a story.

Now it was the last loitering five or ten minutes after their last cup of tea, when Mall had gone to her work in the scullery, or among the poultry, and she and Mrs. Gillyflower were alone, each on her clumsy kitchen-chair, at the opposite side of the little deal table on which their cloth was spread — clumsy, but also beautifully white.

“There’s a song I used to laugh at,” said the handsome stranger, smiling down upon her hands that lay on the table— “about a poor girl that loved a prince, and the prince loved her, ever so much, and he would have married her; but she bethought her how his father the king, and his mother the queen, would rate him, and his lords and great folk despise him, and how he would be made little of, and sorry — and all for her sake. And just because she loved him too well, she would not marry him — and wasn’t she a big fool?”

“Never a bigger,” acquiesced Martha. “She was called Dun Alice, and he was the Lord of Linton, and a king’s son. And will ye miss the song and the dances, and all the nonsense — and think of me when I’m gone away?”

And suddenly, leaning across the table, she kissed old Martha on the cheek; and Martha caught her close to her heart, and said: —

“Gone, lass! Ye shan’t think o’ that for mony a day. I would not know my old self, or the old house, or the fields without ye, my bonny rogue!” s And thus saying, old Martha rose abruptly, with a little laugh, and trotted away to the dresser, and then to the cupboard — or (as in that northern region they term it) the “catmallison” — and was busy over cups and flagons in an instant; for she did not choose people to see her eyes wet, and dried them hastily, with her back turned, and speaking hilariously all the time.

William was not likely to make a secret of his love anywhere. But he could not tell how Euphan might resent his letting Martha guess it, and therefore he had to act with circumspection. Sorely it tried him, as you may fancy, to know that she was so near, and yet so effectually hidden from him. As to reading, that was quite out of the question; equally so was his remaining in his study. He was in a state of sublimest restlessness.

Quietly, with an unavowed fear of old Martha Gillyflower, he let himself out, gently, by the hall-door, and stood leaning on the outer edge of the porch, vainly looking for Euphan, listening for her voice.

Then the young Squire walked away through the trees to the right, and, making a detour, reached the wood of thorn and birch, oak and hazel, that skirts the moss, and so up again, by the Druid ring of tall stones — always, henceforward, an enchanted region for him.

“Quite lonely it now was, and beyond it, through rugged glades of scattered dwarf oak and birch, he still looked in vain.

He was in the *acme* of his fever — he could not rest. Those who measure all things by mundane prudences and proprieties will regard his infatuation with proper astonishment and disgust. There are others to whom it will appear essential true love, and in so far heavenly as it was uncontaminated by the sordid. The inner man, the ‘xardia’, the spiritual man who is to live forever, is the shrine of every celestial affection. There reside the true and the loving in all human nature. If not there, both are extinct, and what is then that inner man? An immortal principle of evil, the Satanic lord of the tabernacle of the flesh, which is not, as in the happier man, a veil through which, as in the countenance, the glory of the inner love and truth shines forth; but a fixed and a goodly mask, within which lurks and rules a satanic stranger. When, from the celestial tenant in the other, shines forth a sudden truth or affection — how the heavenly spirits thrill with a strange delight! In this law is the life of what we call romance — that noble folly, which to some seems so ridiculous, and to others so beautifully wise.

William is now walking in his dream — in his delirium. The intoxication’ is not, as in some, selfish. Generous madness! — who can charm it into sanity, or impose on it the laws of plodding quietude? Will it listen to reason, or be strapped down on its bed? Alas! no; it will talk from its frenzy, and enjoy its suicidal liberty — and gather supernatural strength from its very mania.

Euphan liked, when the sun shone out, to sit on a stile, or under an old tree, or to wander up and down the hedgerows — with the dog by her side, or the bird’s cage in her fingers — singing sometimes, sometimes silent, and sometimes talking to her mute companions.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE STONE AND TREE.

MANY such excursions “the young Squire” made that day, in vain. It was in the evening, on the old weird ground, where, among the wild woods, stand the huge gray blocks of the Druid worship, that he saw his love at last.

“Euphan! I feared I was never to find you.”

She laughed; and was not there, under her clear brown tint, a beautiful crimson, for a minute flooding up, and then ebbing softly away?

“How did this wild bird come to me?” thought William, as he looked on her with a tender wonder.

And so he began to talk, approaching that with which his heart was fullest.

“I told you I had read,” he said, “of beautiful girls of your race, Euphan, who have married into ours, and they and their daughters have become great ladies; and they have continued to maintain friendship with their own people, and have done them, in their day, great services.”

“They were bad gipsies, though,” said Euphan, with a shake of her small head, and a smile. “There’s but the one way — the wild life or the tame. They could never come back, like a bird that has been tamed; her own will shun her.”

“But, oh! if she loved the man, could not she leave all, and be happy?” said William.

Again that beautiful tint dyed her cheeks. There was a silence, and her eyes were lowered to the fern, with which the tip of her slim shoe was fiddling.

“She might leave all, but she could not be happy, for she’d always know he’d a’ done wiser to have married one of his own. But ’tis nothing to me,” she said, with a slight fierce change, and her eyes glanced by his with a sudden flame; and then, with a cold contemptuous carelessness, she continued:— “I care for nothing — no one — not even myself. I’m a young lass — nineteen I count young — and I’m happy enough; let them settle their affairs that has such nonsense to manage, and when I hear the story ‘twill make Euphan laugh hearty. There’s many a man has been kind to me, and I’ll give him my hand, and wish him luck from my heart, and glad to say a goodnatured word to him; but for love, I don’t know what it is, and for its sake I would not pluck that weed. That’s not Euphan — she’s not like that; there’ll never live the man she’d walk a mile to meet, or fret an hour if he was to go forever.”

She stood, pale, and smiling, with her fiery eyes on William, with a cruel pride.

The worst pain he had ever known was at William’s heart as he looked on the graceful cold girl. For a little time he was silent.

“I won’t leave you, Euphan, even for that,” he said, in the low tone of a deeply wounded man. And so beginning, little by little, he recounted the wild story of his love — and on, and on, into passionate pleading. “Don’t turn — don’t go; it costs you but a moment’s patience to hear me out, and when it’s over you’ll say you don’t like me, and never can like me, or let me hope for your love.”

“I *could* not say that, Willie,” she answered, with her hands locked together, and looking at him, as he stood by her shoulder, with such a pale mournful face as painter never dreamed. “Willie, where was the use of breaking Euphan’s heart? I wish I liked ye less — I might be happy then.”

“O God! — my darling!” he said, and his face was pale, in his rapture, as that of a man who had received his death wound.

“Willie — Willie — Willie,” she said, as gently as a child — each “Willie” sounding like a sob— “you don’t know; you shouldn’t a’ spoke kind to me — you should a’ let me go.”

“Oh, Euphan!” he cried, with a dreadful thought, “you like some one else — you like another better!”

“Never, never! — no, Willie, never. There’s none, and never was, but only you. But, for all that, the night ye found me in the storm, standing by the stone, ‘twould a’ been well if you had passed me by — or better,” she said, with a sudden wild sob, “if ye had put your gun to my head and shot me.”

The anguish of an uncertainty dashed his rapture. Proud, pale, happy, yet with the same strange anguish, he held her hand clasped in both his, and looked with dilated gaze for his unknown fate in her beautiful face. For a time not a word was spoken — he wondering, in tumultuous silence, what grief lay at; the little heart that was so near him. At last he said, scarcely above a whisper: —

“Euphan! — Euphan, darling! say, I implore, what it is!”

“’Tis only — nothing; only Euphan’s heart is sore.”

“You don’t doubt me? Oh, Euphan you are not so cruel. You said I was true-hearted,” pleaded the young Squire.

“You could not think me false.”

“No; if I had a’ thought that, I would a never looked at you,” she said, with a cold fierce smile and tone of disdain, that seemed to chill him; and she went on, like herself: “No, no, Willie — never, no; nothin’ false in you — a gentleman, true and high — a one to live and die for. Oh, Willie! the world’s all wrong.” And with these words came a sudden gush of tears.

Hastily she laid her hands across her eyes, and turned, and walked hurriedly backwards and forwards within the circuit of the gray monumental blocks among which they stood. William followed; but with her hand, in her wayward mood, she impatiently pushed him back, and continued, with a passionate step, to walk to and fro.

She stopped, and looked up and down, and clasped her hands, and stamped.

“Oh! mad — mad! Did ye ever see a fool like Euphan? The sky, nor the grassy nor my own voice, nor nothing, is like itself — all’s gone changed. I know ye so short a time, Willie, and can I never forget ye? The quiet times long ago! — children’s very happy. Just a wee thing, four years old, stretching after flowers in the tarn. Oh! why didn’t they let me drown that time, and this poor heart wouldn’t a’ been bearin’ now!”

It seemed to Willie that this flood of feeling must be suffered to rush and eddy its own way into quiet; he had laid his arm against one of the huge old stones, and leaned, following her with the sad eyes and patient love that watch the tossings and ravings of sickness.

With a change of mood she came to his side, and laid her small Oriental hand on his shoulder, looking up into his face, with a sad childlike trust in her eyes. She said, very lowly and softly: —

“You’ve, handsome hair — soft, rich brown. Ah! yes, my handsome Willie, that fought for me.”

“My beautiful spirit! Here I found you,” said he, enthusiastically.

“What will your fortune be, Willie? — what? I won’t tell your fortune now. Well, am I to call ye ‘Willie’?”

Though her eyes were upon him, it was not as if she asked Willie, but something else.

William Haworth smiled, and laid his hand tenderly on her shoulder, with the adoration of all his manly heart.

“I’ll tell it tomorrow — shall I? — and Euphan’s too. And J must have a bit of your hair, mind — Willie’s hair. “‘Twill be a good fortune, and you’ll be a great man. Some kind grief first and then all good after; and Euphan’s will be a long one, and — a short.”

As she spoke thus softly, as it were, to herself, with her fingers over his shoulder, she was choosing a lock of the silken-brown hair, that grew, in long curls, at the back of his head. It was quietly, as if she had a right to it, and she never asked him.

He smiled fondly down at her, as he might on a beautiful wayward child.

And now up come her tiny scissors, tied to thin blue-silk ribbon; and she snips off the lock of brown hair gravely, and holds it before her sad eyes, and then winds a little bit of red thread fast round it, and places it in her bosom.

She looked up now, with her pretty laugh.

“Ain’t we queer cats, and never thinks o’ one thing — no, not half an hour? Come, now; and look ye, we are going to be merry, now; cryin’ comes in change and time; and time and change will dry our tears again, and I am going to make ye laugh with the dance we danced before. Ah, lad — if we had but a clever fiddler! I’ll go home alone, mind.”

She smiled over her shoulder as she turned away, and had reached the farthest stone of the ring, when she turned her head, stopping, and looking at him, said softly, to herself, “One other look;” and her look was all the sadder that her smile still lingered there, and then, with a little wave of her hand, away ran the pretty stranger, with a tread light and proud as a deer’s.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BED UNTREASURED.

IT was a merry evening at Haworth House. William smoked his pipe in the kitchen chimney-nook, for his half-hour, which grew to twice as long; and quaint song and dance made the hour hilarious, pretty, long remembered.

All is over now. He is in his study. The Dutch clock, in the firelight, ticks briskly; and its friendly face glows kindly over the young man's romantic dreams of the Robin Hood life that is before him, with his nutbrown maid. The passion so sublime, the scenery so wild — all that is so true and yet so visionary —

"All that time has disenchanted."

All the house, but this room, is dark now. In a little time more he, too, is in his bed, and fast asleep. Deep in the night comes a dream. How it began — what it was about — he forgets. Only he hears in it the wild song: —

"The hawthorn-tree
Is dear to me,
The elver-stone likewise —
The lonely air
That lingers there,
And thought, that never dies."

The distant song, in his dream, sounded clear and sad. He started up, listening, with a beating heart. The notes seemed still in his ear. But the night-air was silent. The scenery of his dream had flown, and there was darkness only when he tried to recall it. It was as if he had dreamed only of a sweet voice issuing from darkness.

He sighed deeply, listening on. An unaccountable melancholy was heavy at his heart — that pure deep melancholy of a farewell in childhood, that hardly ever returns in afterlife.

Yet, why should it last? All was a dream. Nothing is changed. And so, after a while, he falls asleep again, and no dream comes.

Early he awakes, and is out among the trees in the morning air, with the restlessness of a lover. All his future is sweet with the opening flowers, and sparkles in the morning sun, and rustles with the freedom of the forest.

But that morning a change is to befall him.

He is now back again in his study; and at some time past nine o'clock, old Martha comes in, in a great taking, and stands to harangue him without closing the door. Her jolly old face is pale; she gesticulates indignantly, and is in a great excitement.

What she had to tell was this: Euphan, the girl, had totally disappeared. It was no accidentally late ramble in the fields or woodlands. The red bag, with the things she had brought with her, was gone; her gray cloak, which she never took in her walks with her, was gone also. She had made her bed, and the forsaken room was neat as ever, and the flowers stood in the glass on the little table beside the window. She must have visited the bedside of Mall, for some silver in a little bit of blue silk was pinned to the cover of her pillow, and a pretty little carved ivory needlecase, that Martha Gillyflower used to admire, was found tied round with a bit of silk ribbon in a bow, and in like manner pinned over old Martha's head. The hall-door and back-door were undisturbed; but the side-door, that opened on what was called the meadow, was unbarred, and through it she had gone.

William Haworth stands before her, like a ghost, speechless — his face ashy-white. For a long time he can't believe the story, and she has to repeat it over and over. Still he can't believe it — won't believe it.

He stalks by old Martha's side from room to room, to visit the evidences of the flight, in dumb half-credulous panic. Old Martha is at his elbow, denouncing, in her grim northern dialect, the ingratitude of the lass who has turned her back on her best friends without a "God-b'-wi'- ye," and "out o' window wi' her like a bird, and, God knows, none but a daffy would wish her back, the graceless lass!"

"She's gone!" said William, wildly. "My God! why didn't you look after her? She's gone! — you've let her go! I shall never see her again; and I charge you with it all!"

He shook his hand in the air distractedly, as if he could have cursed her; and he looked so scared and furious that Martha could not "find," as they say, "her tongue." She stared at him, with her mouth agape, for the second that he stood thus — and then he was gone, and the hall-door clapped after him; and when she had recovered breath, she said: —

"Agoy! there's a rageous lad for ye! Here's a clitter-clatter! An' all this coil, an' rampin' an' rearin', acos a firligig lass like that takes the road by night, and off to seek aunters, like that! Hev I bin winkin' all this time, en Willie in love wi' the lass! Who'd a' thought they wor so sly! Weel! I say, he shud nae hev made that undacent hirdum-durdum; she's a graceless lass, howe'er it be. But I sudna ca' her a firligig; she's nane o' that lids. Na — na, puir tiling! she was as harmless, and had as many tricks, as a kittling," she continued, softening. "Bonny and winsome she was. I could a'most wimple like a child — but, oh! she'll come back — she could not do so — she'll come again."

So old Martha — excited and disquieted — ruminated, thinking sometimes one thing, and sometimes another. Sometimes her anger was kindled against Euphan, who seemed in her eyes an artful "hizzy" who had ensnared the affections of the Squire of Haworth; and sometimes she fancied that she had flown to prevent her losing her heart to a gentleman quite out of her rank; and sometimes she thought only of the change, and how the hour would be dull without Euphan.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PURSUIT.

WILLIAM did not return that night — nor for two long years. During that time he travelled all England over. By woods and wilds, by moss and moor, wherever a fleeting gipsy camp was pitched, his wandering search was directed.

Euphan Curraple — any tidings of her? He would make it worth their telling. They should have what they asked for the discovery. These strange people listened to his earnest imploring appeals, gravely and civilly — sometimes thoughtfully — and spoke together in their own language; but always it ended in their saying that they knew no such person. People of the name they knew, but no Euphan Curraple.

He tracked his old adversary, Lussha Sinfield. That rogue did not like him, for a gipsy can bear most things better than being foiled at the game on which he prides himself by a "Gorgio." Still the Squire's money was as good coin as another man's, and William offered it freely for any tidings of Euphan.

The man eyed him with a dark steady gaze; he was civil, and heard him out, and was silent for a while after he had done.

Sinfield's gray and chestnut had been sold, I suppose; old Cowper was holding a cart-horse by a halter when the Squire reached them. They stood under a group of two or three trees at the edge of a common, where a little brook runs by, and meant to make a halt of some hours.

Sinfield looked out of the corners of his large dark eyes, as if at a distant object, and repeated: "Euphan Curraple! I can't say, I'm sure; I'll ask my partner."

And he turned on his heel, and walked to his comrade. William's heart beat violently as he watched him, and a mist seemed to cover his eyes.

Sinfield leaned across the horse's back, and talked with his companion in their own tongue. The old gipsy looked hard at the Squire, as they talked low, for a while. Then the young man turned about, and told William, carelessly: —

"No — he don't know no such woman."

"Did you tell him all I said?" exclaimed William. "Here! I say — you're Cowper, I saw you at the fair — I'll pay you what you please, if only you'll tell me where I may hear anything of Euphan Curraple."

"There's many a woman might tell you," said the surly old fellow.

"Where?" asked William, with his soul at his lips.

"What is she to you?" Cowper replied, in turn, with a question.

"She was a guest at Haworth, and she's gone," he answered; "and we don't know what's become of her."

"And how should we?" answered Cowper, gruffly.

"Who are those women you spoke of," urged William, "who could tell me anything of her?"

"Such as lives in tents," said Sinfield; and Cowper nodded.

"Ay, 'tis them I mean," said the old man, who was now stuffing his pipe with tobacco.

"Gipsies?" said William.

"Why not?" answered Cowper.

"Are there any hear here?" he asked, with a hope strangely rising into agony at his heart.

"There's five tents at Tarlton."

"That's about ten miles away?" said William, pointing with his arm northward.

"And a bit," added Sinfield.

The old fellow lighted his pipe.

"Is she with them?" asked William, awaiting the answer — with what feelings you may guess.

"Not as we know," interposed Sinfield; "you know more about that young woman yourself than me and Cowper does, I'm thinkin'."

"And — and what are they likely to tell me?" asked William.

"Cross their hands with gold and they'll tell ye," said the old man, sternly, at the same time carelessly.

And he and Sinfield both again looked hard at the Squire.

"Do they know? — Do you think they know? — How do they know?" asked William, all in a gush.

"By the planets, and the hand — how else?" said old Cowper, spitting on the ground.

"They'll tell you what they knows, and very like they'll tell ye what ye want."

"Come, now," said William, suddenly, "I know all about you. You and he, there, were pursuing that young girl Euphan Currraple; and, for anything I know, you may have waylaid her as she went; and by — ! if she's either hurt or missing, I'll make you out, though you were hid under a mountain; and if I don't hear of her within a week, I'll have a warrant from the nearest magistrate, and arrest you both."

Old Cowper looked at him from the corners of his eyes, and smoked on contemptuously.

"That's a d —— d rum way to talk to honest men," said Sinfield, with a swarthy flush, and a dangerous gleam from his dark eyes. "How do you know we ever heard her name? I don't care a blast!

I'm d — d if I ever saw her in my days!

You're talkin' like that stick, mayhap; the oak ain't out o' your head yet."

And he switched his clenched hand, as if dealing a blow with his cudgel.

William saw the ridicule and folly of a new row with these fellows; and a moment's reflection assured him of the improbability that one so cautious and astute, and, one way or other, so well-informed about their movements, should in reality have misdirected her way, and fallen into that danger.

"Well," said William, "you may be good fellows enough, though I don't think you have much to boast about oak-sticks; but if you do know, you may as well tell, and I'll make it better for you than I said — I will, indeed."

"We knows nothing, him nor me, about her. D — n it! isn't once enough?

Don't ye think we'd like what ye offers well enough? It takes a while at horse-dealin' to turn that money, I'll swear — doesn't it, Cowper?"

And Sinfield laughed angrily.

Cowper smoked on, listlessly. William waited in vain.

"Well, we shall see," said William, with a heavy sigh. "I'll try the people at Tarlton, as you say."

"You'll give us something to drink, after all that?" said Cowper, as the Squire turned his horse's head away, and William threw him a shilling that was loose in his pocket. And after he had got some way, looking back suddenly, he saw the two gipsies looking steadily after him, and fancied they were conversing upon the interview that had just ended.

They did not turn away, or affect to conceal it; on the contrary, they continued to follow him with their eyes, steadily, till he was out of sight.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A HOPE.

IT was nightfall when the Squire of Haworth reached the common of the little village of Tarlton, and beheld the gipsy tents and fires dimly before the darkening screen of wood, under the shelter of a green bank.

He dismounted, and led his weary horse up to the nearest tent. Every man who is good for anything knows, or at least remembers, the flutter and yearning with which he approached the place where he suspects his beloved may possibly be. Let him magnify this a thousandfold, and bring it up to the point of anguish, and he will guess what William felt as he strode across the twilight grass, toward this solitary little camp of the gipsies.

And now he was among them, his horse by the bridle. They saw a tall young man, with something fine in his bearing — pale, melancholy, and with the light of an intense anxiety in his eyes.

People less shrewd would have known that a call at such an hour indicated an unusual agitation.

A tall handsome gipsy, with very dark face, and a bright-colored handkerchief about his neck, stood with his arms folded, and his feet apart, smoking in front of the tent. William hesitated. He would rather ask the women. An instinctive trust, in such a case, in feminine sympathy determined him. As he drew near, dogs barked, and a pet fox yelped, and a startled parrot screamed from the shadow of the tents of this pet-loving people. The man drove back the dogs without disturbing his pose or his pipe, with a backward cut or two of the switch he held, in the air.

“You’d like your fortune told?” the man asked, civilly.

The Squire assented, and a sibyl of the same dark race emerged — not a young woman, nor yet old — somewhere about eight-and-thirty, a dark blackhaired matron, with a “rom” lying his length by the tent-fire smoking, and half-a-dozen wild little “charies” playing and gabbling together, and teasing a donkey.

So he crossed her hand and the fortune was told, and then again he crossed it; and they grew more confidential, and William made his tempting promises, and asked his earnest questions. She listened, and answered not, but signed to a girl who was lurking before a tent-door, and in a low tone gave her a message.

From a tent in the rear — the tent perhaps of the chief — she returned, accompanied by a mahogany-colored old woman, smiling, fierce-eyed; and the handsome girl who had summoned her, extending her arm, with the palm downward, indicated their visitor and his prophetess, and looking round the sky to guess the weather, or (as one might fancy) to read the stars, that had begun to glimmer, she stooped, and reentered the tent from which she had come.

The old woman raised her dark bony arm, regarding the sibyl with a fixed smile, and William's dark-eyed sorceress left him, and talked for a minute or two with the crone, whose countenance changed not; though the Squire, who watched intently, saw that she made one or two gestures, that were solemn and grim, as she spoke.

The old woman departed, and the sorceress returned.

"No," she said, in the same calm tone, "we don't know such a person, nor no such name; but let me see your hand."

"Is she," thought William, "about to make a circuitous revelation of facts, by way of prediction? And does she mean thus to mark what she regards as a betrayal, and to secure the reward I promise?"

But when it came, the disclosure was only this — that the person he was most anxious to see had not gone the way he supposed, but southward, and that she would soon be in Devonshire.

No more could he expect.

With a heavy heart he wished her "Goodnight," and rode slowly away.

"These people," he thought, "are a freemasonry — impenetrable and peculiar.

Their suspicion of us is profound. Their fidelity to their race is plainly incorruptible. Some irreparable disgrace attaches to the least betrayal; and the worst among them cannot be tempted to tell the secrets of the others. *There* is that Sinfield, who would injure her gladly, if he could; but he will not, for any sum I can offer, tell me one syllable about her; and yet he must know, generally, as he did before, something of her movements."

With the anguish of this thought, he rode his tired horse slowly through the twilight mist, toward the little inn of Tarlton.

But hope, that never leaves us absolutely or very long, soon returned, and pleased the Squire of Haworth with the same fancy that had cheered him before.

Sinfield, he thought, might have sent him on to the gipsy camp at this place, knowing that these people were possessed of the information that he sought; and they, in turn, clothed the fact he wanted in this prophetic guise, and, one day or other, might extract from his gratitude the reward they could not take on the terms on which it was offered. Thus once more the light of hope was kindled. If only he could see her face again, and plead his own cause with the wild despair and adoration of love! — she was not cruel; she would relent, and save him. Otherwise he must die!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE WANDERER.

THE madness of the Squire of Haworth increased rather than abated, as weeks were added to weeks, and months followed months, and his wanderings led him to nothing, and hope deferred made the heart sick.

There was nothing he did not try — even advertisements in *The Times*, and offers of reward for information posted at country fairs. Every attempt of this kind resulted in — simply nothing. He had himself no faith in these devices, but it was worth knowing that he had left nothing untried. All his appeals were followed by inexorable silence.

North, south, east, west — all over England, and through its most devious paths, and unexplored moors and woods, and picturesque gipsy haunts, the young Squire pursued the phantom of his love, in vain.

Sometimes, as he rode, dejected, by solitary paths, in moonlight, he would draw bridle suddenly, and listen, breathless, for a sweet voice, heard again for a moment, in fancy, and as suddenly lost, and waited and listened for in vain. Sometimes in darkening hollows, or in the shadowy forest-glades, the figure that haunted his imagination seemed to stand before him in the distance, and beckon him toward her.

Sometimes farther, sometimes nearer — in the picturesque ravines of Derbyshire, or in the nooks of wild and solitary Dartmoor — in his lonely travels, deep in the night, he has seen her — approached, and the illusion vanished; and under the bank or scaur where she seemed to be, he has sat down, and wept the bitter tears that are shed in solitude, and called her beloved name to the heedless rocks and bushes with a deepening sense of the irrevocable.

Heaven knows, in those days of exalted imagination and wild sorrow, how near to madness he may have been!

But Time, the consoler, works his slow but sure mercies. Not that consolation which grief, in its first wild agony, most fears — forgetfulness — or the subsidence of the first passionate affection; for who, in his wildest agony, would drink of the waters of Lethe, and think no more of the beloved and lost?

The chase is over — he will never see her more. In stilly evening, in the soft gloom, in the dark archways of the old trees, in the melancholy chasms of the ruins of Hazelden, or in the gloaming by "the hawthorn-tree" and "elver-stone," he sees a beautiful phantom. Or when "the call" is on the air — that far-off sighing sound, by which, in the North-country, they foretell the coming storm — the lonely Squire sometimes hears, like a voice from another shore (so faint), the silvery laughter and sad tones of his love.

The tumult is ended, and the melancholy, which Hope disturbs no more, is come.

Two years have passed, and the Squire is at Haworth — at home. The broken thread of his old life is, as it were, reknit.

Have these two years, filled with a wild episode, been quite lost? They will be the best remembered of all his life, though never told to any. They will sweeten and sadden all his future thoughts; and, no doubt, they have wrought their good and enduring work upon a character elevated by suffering.

He has returned to his books and his work; graver, more thoughtful, more gentle he has grown. Otherwise, prudent people will see no change. It will just be, in their opinion, that William Haworth has returned to his senses — is quite sobered, and that his heart is once more in his sensible plans, and bent on winning his way in this arduous world.

But the romance of life is not over. While memory lives it will never die. There is no one to speak to — no one who cares, or will ever know about it, now. But it will never die, for a year or an hour, till William Haworth dies. A man's works and his words are not always his life. The real life of the man is his dream and his love. Blessed is he for whom both are high and pure!

William is working now as hard as ever, and things go on in their old humdrum way at Haworth, duller than before. For, never to return, a vision from a wonderful land has lighted up that homely place and vanished, and the walls seem to darken and contract; and talk is tasteless, and the air drowsy. Not for a long time will any one care to laugh there; and work is work, and something always wanting.

Old Martha for a long time used to look toward the fields, and the thorn-trees, and the half-hidden gray columns among the copse, in the untold hope that some day would see her returning “home,” with her old smile and song, and her arch pranks, to make Haworth alive again.

But never more was that to be; and so, gradually, the hope died out, and Haworth was just a gray old house, as before, and the moss a wide black sea before it, and the people lonely.

Old Martha’s jealousy of the girl who had made Master Willie “daft” almost, had passed away, though it sometimes helped a little to reconcile her to her flight. Perhaps she was a little sore, too, at her leaving the old house and kind faces so easily. Also she missed her. And Mall’s heart also was heavy, and her eyes filled, when she thought of her.

William’s thoughts were for himself alone. Sweetbrier — Euphan was often thought of, but seldom named in that house. It was like a place in which the darling of the house had died.

Great changes were coming in William Haworth’s life — one of those sudden changes of destiny which sometimes befall poor men who are richly connected. A very simple series of events, no one very unlikely by itself, and turning upon the order in which so inevitable an event as death may reach some four or five people, will make a golden transformation in the life of such a man.

It was nothing in the fairyland of “Debrett.” No title had reached him. It was simply an estate, the right to which two or three unlikely deaths had transmitted to him, with the swift zigzag of a flash of lightning.

He has not gone to India; no need now of any such emigration. New duties have grown up about him — occupations, privileges, cares. But he is unchanged — gentle, manly, generous still, the same in heart. He has long left the solitudes of Haworth, to which, however, for a month or so, he returns every autumn, and shoots a little over the moss and the heath, and fishes in the Dwyle, as in old times.

By stone and tree the midnight shadows come and go, but the beautiful phantom of his earlier youth has faded from year to year, and comes no more. Still in the deep well of memory, where secrets lie, he sees it He can look, as men look in after-years upon a miniature, unseen by any, and solitary tears roll over the face that will smile no more in the light of those features.

But in the grosser light of the world his work must now be done. Its cares and labors are upon him. These are but the intervals.

Ten years have passed since the night when, with his gun on his shoulder, after the long march over the moss, he first saw Euphan Curraple, and offered her shelter, and placed her in the care of good old Martha Gillyflower. How far away it all seems now! How it has receded into perspective!

William Haworth is married. The kindest and truest of husbands, the gentle highborn lady, his wife, adores him. One beautiful child, a little girl now more than three years old, makes their house bright.

William is now a Member of Parliament, and has taken to his House of Commons' work with the love of distinction and contempt of labor which belong to his energetic character.

Things are changed since the old life at Haworth.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DREAM.

THE Session is not over, although it is the first week in August. It cannot last many days longer. There will be no House tonight, and William has taken a long ride into the country. He takes the road by which his pretty wife and little girl are returning. That gentle lady, with their one little daughter, has passed the day before with a friend, some eight-and-twenty miles out of town.

William surprises the beloved travellers at the little wayside posting-house where they change their horses. Here he kisses his treasures, and they have their quiet little chat, and she thanks him with all her heart.

And then she says, as they get into the carriage, smiling in William's face, for he has mounted his horse, and he smiles down upon her, answering: —

"You know your promise? You are to go your own pace and your own way home, and you are not to ride by the carriage, where you'll be covered with dust; and we'll meet there, and talk ever so much."

"My good little darling is always thinking of other people," he answered, fondly.

"And you must — you'll promise?"

"I will — I do," he laughed.

"Well then, you must ride on before."

"Imperious little woman, I obey!"

And he smiled and nodded, and rode on.

There was nothing in particular to trouble William Haworth; but why was there, that day, the melancholy of a foreboding at his heart? As he reached the old Forest of Epping he had slacked his space. Sunset was approaching. The gold and red were in the western clouds, and the amber-and-green tints of evening in the sky, across which, with a drowsy cawing — the only sounds upon the air — the crows were sailing homeward to their cover.

Just in that transitory light, "a fairer sadder scene" he could not have fancied. He dismounted, and led his horse along the edge of the road, hoping that the carriage might overtake him, as it soon did. And so a ten minutes' ramble was agreed on; William leading his horse, his pretty wife engrossed with the laughing care of the child, that was toddling and running and tumbling on the grass, as it gravely prattled to itself, or laughed, with arms extended, and hands halfopen.

There is a melancholy in the distant future as well as in the retrospect, and, looking at our children, the long vista opens, and "the summers that we shall not see" are in our thoughts.

William held his horse by the rein, on a little eminence among the old trees. Some gipsy tents showed in the foreground, at the edge of the thicker forest, and, saddened by association, the sight stole him slowly away into dreamland. And as he stood there in his reverie, among the faint sounds, over the soft lights of sunset, a sweet voice floated from the distant wood.

What is that? Like a voice from the land of spirits, the old song trembles on the evening air: —

"The hawthorn-tree
Is dear to me,
The elver-stone likewise;
The lonely air
That lingers there,
And thought that never dies.

"In evening glow
The may will blow,
The stone a shadow cast;
And stone and tree
A bield will be,
As in the summers past.

"And words as dear
Will others hear
Beneath the hawthorn-tree,
In leafy May,

At fall of day,
Where I no more shall be."

The long note died into silence, and came no more. With a strange sense of unreality, and a wild tremor of his heart, the Squire of Haworth walked down the gentle slope, over the ferns and daisies, toward the tents. At the door of one of them he saw his wife talking with a gipsy-woman. He followed, and leaving his horse's bridle in the hand of a man who was smoking his pipe, leaning against a cart whose shafts were in the air, he stooped, and entered the soft shadow of the wattled tent Very neat, singular, even pretty, were its arrangements, and a gleam of the evening sun, touching it, lighted a portion of the interior with a softened glow. As in a dream, William took his little child's hand in his, and stood, and "hearing heard not and seeing saw not," for it seemed all a vision.

"Send Euphan here," said the gipsy matron, stooping, and speaking through the tent-door.

"And now I'll tell your fortune, please, ma'am," said this grave polite matron, with the large dark eyes of her race. His wife smiled over her shoulder as she submitted her hand to the soothsayer, and in a minute more the low measured talk began, and in another minute Euphan was in the tent. A chill passed over William, as if he would have fainted. He saw her plainly as she saw him. Ten years had passed, and yet she was as beautiful, he thought, as ever, except for the sadness in her face — that was a change.

He felt that she knew him, but she showed no sign — not the least — of recognition. This perfect self-command and presence of mind, in a people by nature so fiery and impetuous, is a strange evidence of the dangers through which the race has passed. She came, and said some words he did not hear, and took his hand, and in her low sweet voice told his fortune thus: —

"You have married a very good lady, that is highborn and beautiful, and loves you well. You are very honorable, and you will be always true to her, and love er to the end of your life. You have one little child, and it will be beautiful, and good to you. And you have had sorrow, and you have passed it by, and it is over now. And you are kind to the poor, and would like to make them happy; and there's many a one that likes you, and wishes you well. And though you are so kind, you are very brave, and would fight for them you like, and spare none, nor your own blood. And there's some that were ungrateful, and some you thought ungrateful that never were so, but loved you well; for the good you do is not lost, though you may forget it. And there once was one that you thought ungrateful, and that person is single still, and will die single; and she thinks still of that one that Was best to her of all the world, and so will to the end of her years, though she'll never see you more, nor you her."

And gently she let go his hand, and she laid hers caressingly on the head of the child, and looked on the golden locks, that resembled her father's in his earlier youth, and in the true deep-blue eyes, that also were like his — and die smiled. He saw the even little teeth, as in the old times at Haworth.

"And will ye keep this, darling, from the gipsy girl?" And very gently she placed a curious little oldfashioned locket, that she took from her breast, tied with a red ribbon, in the child's hand.

And the little girl turns up her large blue gentle eyes wonderingly, and with some awe, looking into the wild and tender smile of the gipsy.

And Euphan caught her up softly, and folded the child in her arms, and kissed it over and over again, smiling; and as she sat it down, a voice called to William, and a gentle hand touched him, and he turned to his smiling wife.

"Yes, darling," he said, laying his hand upon her arm, as people do who want a moment's pause; and when he turned again, Euphan was gone, and he never heard her voice again, and never saw her more.

The last beams of the setting sun lighted them on their returning path, and William Haworth rode slowly home, and in the twilight, communing with his own thoughts, wept bitterly.

THE END

IN A GLASS DARKLY

This collection of five supernatural stories is widely regarded as Le Fanu’s masterpiece and a classic of Victorian fiction. The five stories are linked by a framing device that presents them as papers from the casebook of Dr Martin Hesselius, a scholar of paranormal phenomena and probably the first ‘occult detective’ in supernatural literature. It was published in three volumes by Richard Bentley in 1872. The title deliberately misquotes 1 Corinthians 13, which describes the human capacity to see the world not as it really is but only ‘through a glass darkly’.

‘Green Tea’, originally published in the journal *All the Year Round* in 1869, is a powerful story of a scholar’s fateful encounter with a spectral monkey. The tale maintains an ambiguity as to whether the creature is real or a product of the protagonist’s overfondness for the eponymous tea. ‘The Familiar’ tells the story of a sea captain who is haunted by ghostly footsteps and is a revised version of Le Fanu’s earlier story ‘The Watcher’. ‘Mr Justice Harbottle’ is also a revision of an earlier story, namely ‘An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street’, in which a callous eighteenth century judge receives a terrifying comeuppance. The novella ‘The Room at the Dragon Volant’ is a Gothic romance which contains no supernatural elements but does contain a decidedly nasty twist.

The most enduring tale in the collection however is ‘Carmilla’, a vampire novella with lesbian overtones set in rural Austria, which was originally serialised in *Dark Blue* between December 1871 and March 1872. Profoundly influencing the writing of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), it has spawned many literary and cinematic imitations and is an undisputed classic of vampire fiction.

Title page of the first edition

Illustration for the magazine publication of ‘Carmilla’, by D.H. Friston

Illustration for the magazine publication of ‘Carmilla’, by Michael Fitzgerald

Illustration for the magazine publication of ‘Carmilla’, by Michael Fitzgerald

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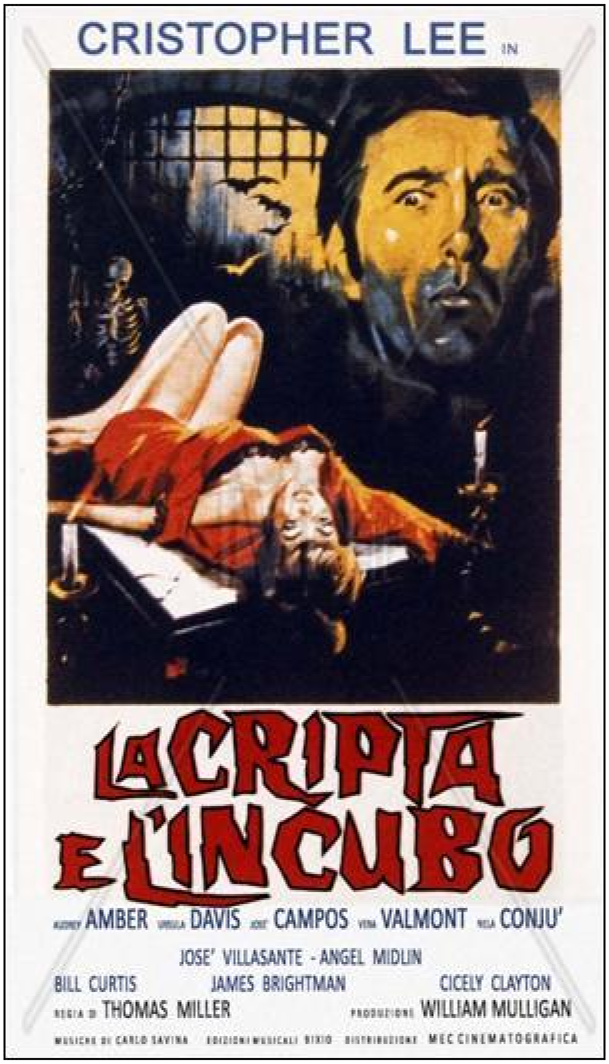
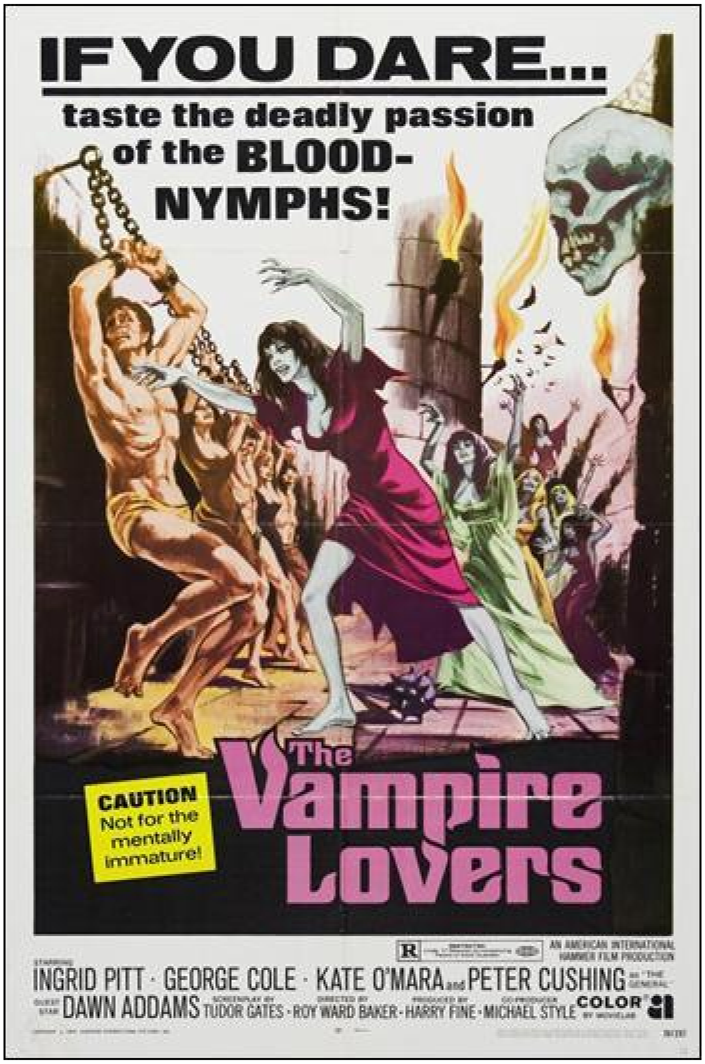
Carl Theodor Dreyor's Vampyr (1932) is a loose adaptation of 'Carmilla'

A still from Roger Vadim's Et mourir de plaisir (And Die of Pleasure; 1960), an acclaimed cinematic adaptation of 'Carmilla'


CRISTOPHER LEE IN
LA CRIPTA E L'INCUBO
AMBER DAVIS CAMPOS VALMONT CONJU'
JOSE' VILLASANTE - ANGEL MIDLIN
BILL CURTIS
JAMES BRIGHTMAN
CICELY CLAYTON
REGIA DI THOMAS MILLER
PRODUZIONE WILLIAM MULLIGAN
MUSICHE DI CARLO SAVINA
EDIZIONI MUSICALI SIXIO
DISTRIBUZIONE MEC CINEMATOGRAFICA

This 1964 Italian production by Thomas Miller is a fairly faithful adaptation of 'Carmilla'. The title translates as 'Crypt of the Vampire'.


IF YOU DARE...
taste the deadly passion of the BLOOD-NYMPHS!
CAUTION Not for the mentally immature!
The Vampire Lovers
R
AN AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL HAMMER FILM PRODUCTION
STARRING
INGRID PITT · GEORGE COLE · KATE O'MARA and PETER CUSHING as "THE GENERAL"
GUEST STAR DAWN ADDAMS
SCREENPLAY BY TUDOR GATES
DIRECTED BY ROY WARD BAKER
PRODUCED BY HARRY FINE
CO-PRODUCER MICHAEL STYLE
COLOR BY MOVIELAB

This 1970 Hammer Films production is based on 'Carmilla' and is notorious for its exaggeration of Le Fanu's homoerotic subtext.

TO
BRINSLEY HOMAN, ESQ.
THESE VOLUMES ARE INSCRIBED,
WITH MUCH AFFECTION,
BY HIS OLD FRIEND
THE AUTHOR.

VOLUME I.

GREEN TEA.

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PROLOGUE.

MARTIN HESSELIUS, THE GERMAN PHYSICIAN.

Though carefully educated in medicine and surgery, I have never practised either. The study of each continues, nevertheless, to interest me profoundly. Neither idleness nor caprice caused my secession from the honourable calling which I had just entered. The cause was a very trifling scratch inflicted by a dissecting knife. This trifle cost me the loss of two fingers, amputated promptly, and the more painful loss of my health, for I have never been quite well since, and have seldom been twelve months together in the same place.

In my wanderings I became acquainted with Dr. Martin Hesselius, a wanderer like myself, like me a physician, and like me an enthusiast in his profession. Unlike me in this, that his wanderings were voluntary, and he a man, if not of fortune, as we estimate fortune in England, at least in what our forefathers used to term “easy circumstances.” He was an old man when I first saw him; nearly five-and-thirty years my senior.

In Dr. Martin Hesselius, I found my master. His knowledge was immense, his grasp of a case was an intuition. He was the very man to inspire a young enthusiast, like me, with awe and delight. My admiration has stood the test of time and survived the separation of death. I am sure it was well-founded.

For nearly twenty years I acted as his medical secretary. His immense collection of papers he has left in my care, to be arranged, indexed and bound. His treatment of some of these cases is curious. He writes in two distinct characters. He describes what he saw and heard as an intelligent layman might, and when in this style of narrative he had seen the patient either through his own hall-door, to the light of day, or through the gates of darkness to the caverns of the dead, he returns upon the narrative, and in the terms of his art, and with all the force and originality of genius, proceeds to the work of analysis, diagnosis and illustration.

Here and there a case strikes me as of a kind to amuse or horrify a lay reader with an interest quite different from the peculiar one which it may possess for an expert. With slight modifications, chiefly of language, and of course a change of names, I copy the following. The narrator is Dr. Martin Hesselius. I find it among the voluminous notes of cases which he made during a tour in England about sixty-four years ago.

It is related in a series of letters to his friend Professor Van Loo of Leyden. The professor was not a physician, but a chemist, and a man who read history and metaphysics and medicine, and had, in his day, written a play.

The narrative is therefore, if somewhat less valuable as a medical record, necessarily written in a manner more likely to interest an unlearned reader.

These letters, from a memorandum attached, appear to have been returned on the death of the professor, in 1819, to Dr. Hesselius. They are written, some in English, some in French, but the greater part in German. I am a faithful, though I am conscious, by no means a graceful translator, and although here and there, I omit some passages, and shorten others and disguise names, I have interpolated nothing.

CHAPTER I.

DR. HESSELIUS RELATES HOW HE MET THE REV. MR. JENNINGS.

The Rev. Mr. Jennings is tall and thin. He is middle-aged, and dresses with a natty, oldfashioned, high-church precision. He is naturally a little stately, but not at all stiff. His features, without being handsome, are well formed, and their expression extremely kind, but also shy.

I met him one evening at Lady Mary Heyduke's. The modesty and benevolence of his countenance are extremely prepossessing. We were but a small party, and he joined agreeably enough in the conversation. He seems to enjoy listening very much more than contributing to the talk; but what he says is always to the purpose and well said. He is a great favourite of Lady Mary's, who it seems, consults him upon many things, and thinks him the most happy and blessed person on earth. Little knows she about him.

The Rev. Mr. Jennings is a bachelor, and has, they say, sixty thousand pounds in the funds. He is a charitable man. He is most anxious to be actively employed in his sacred profession, and yet though always tolerably well elsewhere, when he goes down to his vicarage in Warwickshire, to engage in the actual duties of his sacred calling his health soon fails him, and in a very strange way. So says Lady Mary.

There is no doubt that Mr. Jennings' health does break down in, generally a sudden and mysterious way, sometimes in the very act of officiating in his old and pretty church at Kenlis. It may be his heart, it may be his brain. But so it has happened three or four times, or oftener, that after proceeding a certain way in the service, he has on a sudden stopped short, and after a silence, apparently quite unable to resume, he has fallen into solitary, inaudible prayer, his hands and eyes uplifted, and then pale as death, and in the agitation of a strange shame and horror, descended trembling, and got into the vestry-room, leaving his congregation, without explanation, to themselves. This occurred when his curate was absent. When he goes down to Kenlis, now, he always takes care to provide a clergyman to share his duty, and to supply his place on the instant should he become thus suddenly incapacitated.

When Mr. Jennings breaks down quite, and beats a retreat from the vicarage, and returns to London, where, in a dark street off Piccadilly, he inhabits a very narrow house, Lady Mary says that he is always perfectly well. I have my own opinion about that. There are degrees of course. We shall see.

Mr. Jennings is a perfectly gentlemanlike man. People, however, remark something odd. There is an impression a little ambiguous. One thing which certainly contributes to it, people I think don't remember; or, perhaps, distinctly remark. But I did, almost immediately. Mr. Jennings has a way of looking sidelong upon the carpet, as if his eye followed the movements of something there. This, of course, is not always. It occurs only now and then. But often enough to give a certain oddity, as I have said to his manner, and in this glance travelling along the floor there is something both shy and anxious.

A medical philosopher, as you are good enough to call me, elaborating theories by the aid of cases sought out by himself, and by him watched and scrutinised with more time at command, and consequently infinitely more minuteness than the ordinary practitioner can afford, falls insensibly into habits of observation, which accompany him everywhere, and are exercised, as some people would say, impertinently, upon every subject that presents itself with the least likelihood of rewarding inquiry.

There was a promise of this kind in the slight, timid, kindly, but reserved gentleman, whom I met for the first time at this agreeable little evening gathering. I observed, of course, more than I here set down; but I reserve all that borders on the technical for a strictly scientific paper.

I may remark, that when I here speak of medical science, I do so, as I hope some day to see it more generally understood, in a much more comprehensive sense than its generally material treatment would warrant. I believe the entire natural world is but the ultimate expression of that spiritual world from which, and in which alone, it has its life. I believe that the essential man is a spirit, that the spirit is an organised substance, but as different in point of material from what we ordinarily understand by matter, as light or electricity is; that the material body is, in the most literal sense, a vesture, and death consequently no interruption of the living man's existence, but simply his extrication from the natural body — a process which commences at the moment of what we term death, and the completion of which, at furthest a few days later, is the resurrection "in power."

The person who weighs the consequences of these positions will probably see their practical bearing upon medical science. This is, however, by no means the proper place for displaying the proofs and discussing the consequences of this too generally unrecognised state of facts.

In pursuance of my habit, I was covertly observing Mr. Jennings, with all my caution — I think he perceived it — and I saw plainly that he was as cautiously observing me. Lady Mary happening to address me by my name, as Dr. Hesselius, I saw that he glanced at me more sharply, and then became thoughtful for a few minutes.

After this, as I conversed with a gentleman at the other end of the room, I saw him look at me more steadily, and with an interest which I thought I understood. I then saw him take an opportunity of chatting with Lady Mary, and was, as one always is, perfectly aware of being the subject of a distant inquiry and answer.

This tall clergyman approached me by-and-by: and in a little time we had got into conversation. When two people, who like reading, and know books and places, having travelled, wish to converse, it is very strange if they can't find topics. It was not accident that brought him near me, and led him into conversation. He knew German, and had read my Essays on Metaphysical Medicine which suggest more than they actually say.

This courteous man, gentle, shy, plainly a man of thought and reading, who moving and talking among us, was not altogether of us, and whom I already suspected of leading a life whose transactions and alarms were carefully concealed, with an impenetrable reserve from, not only the world, but his best beloved friends — was cautiously weighing in his own mind the idea of taking a certain step with regard to me.

I penetrated his thoughts without his being aware of it, and was careful to say nothing which could betray to his sensitive vigilance my suspicions respecting his position, or my surmises about his plans respecting myself.

We chatted upon indifferent subjects for a time; but at last he said:

"I was very much interested by some papers of yours, Dr. Hesselius, upon what you term Metaphysical Medicine — I read them in German, ten or twelve years ago — have they been translated?”

“No, I’m sure they have not — I should have heard. They would have asked my leave, I think.”

“I asked the publishers here, a few months ago, to get the book for me in the original German; but they tell me it is out of print.”

“So it is, and has been for some years; but it flatters me as an author to find that you have not forgotten my little book, although,” I added, laughing, “ten or twelve years is a considerable time to have managed without it; but I suppose you have been turning the subject over again in your mind, or something has happened lately to revive your interest in it.”

At this remark, accompanied by a glance of inquiry, a sudden embarrassment disturbed Mr. Jennings, analogous to that which makes a young lady blush and look foolish. He dropped his eyes, and folded his hands together uneasily, and looked oddly, and you would have said, guiltily for a moment.

I helped him out of his awkwardness in the best way, by appearing not to observe it, and going straight on, I said: “Those revivals of interest in a subject happen to me often; one book suggests another, and often sends me back a wild-goose chase over an interval of twenty years. But if you still care to possess a copy, I shall be only too happy to provide you; I have still got two or three by me — and if you allow me to present one I shall be very much honoured.”

“You are very good indeed,” he said, quite at his ease again, in a moment: “I almost despaired — I don’t know how to thank you.”

“Pray don’t say a word; the thing is really so little worth that I am only ashamed of having offered it, and if you thank me any more I shall throw it into the fire in a fit of modesty.”

Mr. Jennings laughed. He inquired where I was staying in London, and after a little more conversation on a variety of subjects, he took his departure.

CHAPTER II.

THE DOCTOR QUESTIONS LADY MARY, AND SHE ANSWERS.

"I like your vicar so much, Lady Mary," said I, so soon as he was gone. "He has read, travelled, and thought, and having also suffered, he ought to be an accomplished companion."

"So he is, and, better still, he is a really good man," said she. "His advice is invaluable about my schools, and all my little undertakings at Dawlbridge, and he's so painstaking, he takes so much trouble — you have no idea — wherever he thinks he can be of use: he's so goodnatured and so sensible."

"It is pleasant to hear so good an account of his neighbourly virtues. I can only testify to his being an agreeable and gentle companion, and in addition to what you have told me, I think I can tell you two or three things about him," said I.

"Really!"

"Yes, to begin with, he's unmarried."

"Yes, that's right, — go on."

"He has been writing, that is he was, but for two or three years perhaps, he has not gone on with his work, and the book was upon some rather abstract subject — perhaps theology."

"Well, he was writing a book, as you say; I'm not quite sure what it was about, but only that it was nothing that I cared for, very likely you are right, and he certainly did stop — yes."

"And although he only drank a little coffee here tonight, he likes tea, at least, did like it, extravagantly."

"Yes, that's *quite* true."

"He drank green tea, a good deal, didn't he?" I pursued.

"Well, that's very odd! Green tea was a subject on which we used almost to quarrel."

"But he has quite given that up," said I.

"So he has."

"And, now, one more fact. His mother or his father, did you know them?"

"Yes, both; his father is only ten years dead, and their place is near Dawlbridge. We knew them very well," she answered.

"Well, either his mother or his father — I should rather think his father, saw a ghost," said I.

"Well, you really are a conjurer, Dr. Hesselius."

"Conjurer or no, haven't I said right?" I answered merrily.

"You certainly have, and it was his father: he was a silent, whimsical man, and he used to bore my father about his dreams, and at last he told him a story about a ghost he had seen and talked with, and a very odd story it was. I remember it particularly, because I was so afraid of him. This story was long before he died — when I was quite a child — and his ways were so silent and moping, and he used to drop in, sometimes, in the dusk, when I was alone in the drawingroom, and I used to fancy there were ghosts about him."

I smiled and nodded.

"And now having established my character as a conjurer I think I must say goodnight," said I.

"But how *did* you find it out?"

"By the planets of course, as the gipsies do," I answered, and so, gaily, we said goodnight.

Next morning I sent the little book he had been inquiring after, and a note to Mr. Jennings, and on returning late that evening, I found that he had called, at my lodgings, and left his card. He asked whether I was at home, and asked at what hour he would be most likely to find me.

Does he intend opening his case, and consulting me "professionally," as they say? I hope so. I have already conceived a theory about him. It is supported by Lady Mary's answers to my parting questions. I should like much to ascertain from his own lips. But what can I do consistently with good breeding to invite a confession? Nothing. I rather think he meditates one. At all events, my dear Van L., I shan't make myself difficult of access; I mean to return his visit tomorrow. It will be only civil in return for his politeness, to ask to see him. Perhaps something may come of it. Whether much, little, or nothing, my dear Van L., you shall hear.

CHAPTER III.

DR. HESSELIUS PICKS UP SOMETHING IN LATIN BOOKS.

Well, I have called at Blank-street.

On inquiring at the door, the servant told me that Mr. Jennings was engaged very particularly with a gentleman, a clergyman from Kenlis, his parish in the country. Intending to reserve my privilege and to call again, I merely intimated that I should try another time, and had turned to go, when the servant begged my pardon, and asked me, looking at me a little more attentively than well-bred persons of his order usually do, whether I was Dr. Hesselius; and, on learning that I was, he said, “Perhaps then, sir, you would allow me to mention it to Mr. Jennings, for I am sure he wishes to see you.”

The servant returned in a moment, with a message from Mr. Jennings, asking me to go into his study, which was in effect his back drawingroom, promising to be with me in a very few minutes.

This was really a study — almost a library. The room was lofty, with two tall slender windows, and rich dark curtains. It was much larger than I had expected, and stored with books on every side, from the floor to the ceiling. The upper carpet — for to my tread it felt that there were two or three — was a Turkey carpet. My steps fell noiselessly. The bookcases standing out, placed the windows, particularly narrow ones, in deep recesses. The effect of the room was, although extremely comfortable, and even luxurious, decidedly gloomy, and aided by the silence, almost oppressive. Perhaps, however, I ought to have allowed something for association. My mind had connected peculiar ideas with Mr. Jennings. I stepped into this perfectly silent room, of a very silent house, with a peculiar foreboding; and its darkness, and solemn clothing of books, for except where two narrow looking-glasses were set in the wall, they were everywhere, helped this sombre feeling.

While awaiting Mr. Jennings’ arrival, I amused myself by looking into some of the books with which his shelves were laden. Not among these, but immediately under them, with their backs upward, on the floor, I lighted upon a complete set of Swedenborg's Arcana Cælestia, in the original Latin, a very fine folio set, bound in the natty livery which theology affects, pure vellum, namely, gold letters, and carmine edges. There were paper markers in several of these volumes, I raised and placed them, one after the other, upon the table, and opening where these papers were placed, I read in the solemn Latin phraseology, a series of sentences indicated by a pencilled line at the margin. Of these I copy here a few, translating them into English.

"When man's interior sight is opened, which is that of his spirit, then there appear the things of another life, which cannot possibly be made visible to the bodily sight."...

"By the internal sight it has been granted me to see the things that are in the other life, more clearly than I see those that are in the world. From these considerations, it is evident that external vision exists from interior vision, and this from a vision still more interior, and so on."...

"There are with every man at least two evil spirits."...

"With wicked genii there is also a fluent speech, but harsh and grating. There is also among them a speech which is not fluent, wherein the dissent of the thoughts is perceived as something secretly creeping along within it."...

"The evil spirits associated with man are, indeed, from the hells, but when with man they are not then in hell, but are taken out thence. The place where they then are is in the midst between heaven and hell, and is called the world of spirits — when the evil spirits who are with man, are in that world, they are not in any infernal torment, but in every thought and affection of the man, and so, in all that the man himself enjoys. But when they are remitted into their hell, they return to their former state."...

"If evil spirits could perceive that they were associated with man, and yet that they were spirits separate from him, and if they could flow in into the things of his body, they would attempt by a thousand means to destroy him; for they hate man with a deadly hatred."...

"Knowing, therefore, that I was a man in the body, they were continually striving to destroy me, not as to the body only, but especially as to the soul; for to destroy any man or spirit is the very delight of the life of all who are in hell; but I have been continually protected by the Lord. Hence it appears how dangerous it is for man to be in a living consort with spirits, unless he be in the good of faith."...

“Nothing is more carefully guarded from the knowledge of associate spirits than their being thus conjoint with a man, for if they knew it they would speak to him, with the intention to destroy him.”...

“The delight of hell is to do evil to man, and to hasten his eternal ruin.”

A long note, written with a very sharp and fine pencil, in Mr. Jennings’ neat hand, at the foot of the page, caught my eye. Expecting his criticism upon the text, I read a word or two, and stopped, for it was something quite different, and began with these words, *Deus misereatur mei*— “May God compassionate me.” Thus warned of its private nature, I averted my eyes, and shut the book, replacing all the volumes as I had found them, except one which interested me, and in which, as men studious and solitary in their habits will do, I grew so absorbed as to take no cognisance of the outer world, nor to remember where I was.

I was reading some pages which refer to “representatives” and “correspondents,” in the technical language of Swedenborg, and had arrived at a passage, the substance of which is, that evil spirits, when seen by other eyes than those of their infernal associates, present themselves, by “correspondence,” in the shape of the beast (*fera*) which represents their particular lust and life, in aspect direful and atrocious. This is a long passage, and particularises a number of those bestial forms.

CHAPTER IV.

FOUR EYES WERE READING THE PASSAGE.

I was running the head of my pencil-case along the line as I read it, and something caused me to raise my eyes.

Directly before me was one of the mirrors I have mentioned, in which I saw reflected the tall shape of my friend Mr. Jennings leaning over my shoulder, and reading the page at which I was busy, and with a face so dark and wild that I should hardly have known him.

I turned and rose. He stood erect also, and with an effort laughed a little, saying:

“I came in and asked you how you did, but without succeeding in awaking you from your book; so I could not restrain my curiosity, and very impertinently, I’m afraid, peeped over your shoulder. This is not your first time of looking into those pages. You have looked into Swedenborg, no doubt, long ago?”

“Oh dear, yes! I owe Swedenborg a great deal; you will discover traces of him in the little book on Metaphysical Medicine, which you were so good as to remember.”

Although my friend affected a gaiety of manner, there was a slight flush in his face, and I could perceive that he was inwardly much perturbed.

“I’m scarcely yet qualified, I know so little of Swedenborg. I’ve only had them a fortnight,” he answered, “and I think they are rather likely to make a solitary man nervous — that is, judging from the very little I have read — I don’t say that they have made me so,” he laughed; “and I’m so very much obliged for the book. I hope you got my note?”

I made all proper acknowledgments and modest disclaimers.

“I never read a book that I go with, so entirely, as that of yours,” he continued. “I saw at once there is more in it than is quite unfolded. Do you know Dr. Harley?” he asked, rather abruptly.

In passing, the editor remarks that the physician here named was one of the most eminent who had ever practised in England.

I did, having had letters to him, and had experienced from him great courtesy and considerable assistance during my visit to England.

"I think that man one of the very greatest fools I ever met in my life," said Mr. Jennings.

This was the first time I had ever heard him say a sharp thing of anybody, and such a term applied to so high a name a little startled me.

"Really! and in what way?" I asked.

"In his profession," he answered.

I smiled.

"I mean this," he said: "he seems to me, one half, blind — I mean one half of all he looks at is dark — preternaturally bright and vivid all the rest; and the worst of it is, it seems *wilful*. I can't get him — I mean he won't — I've had some experience of him as a physician, but I look on him as, in that sense, no better than a paralytic mind, an intellect half dead, I'll tell you — I know I shall some time — all about it," he said, with a little agitation. "You stay some months longer in England. If I should be out of town during your stay for a little time, would you allow me to trouble you with a letter?"

"I should be only too happy," I assured him.

"Very good of you. I am so utterly dissatisfied with Harley."

"A little leaning to the materialistic school," I said.

"A *mere* materialist," he corrected me; "you can't think how that sort of thing worries one who knows better. You won't tell any one — any of my friends you know — that I am hippish; now, for instance, no one knows — not even Lady Mary — that I have seen Dr. Harley, or any other doctor. So pray don't mention it; and, if I should have any threatening of an attack, you'll kindly let me write, or, should I be in town, have a little talk with you."

I was full of conjecture, and unconsciously I found I had fixed my eyes gravely on him, for he lowered his for a moment, and he said:

"I see you think I might as well tell you now, or else you are forming a conjecture; but you may as well give it up. If you were guessing all the rest of your life, you will never hit on it."

He shook his head smiling, and over that wintry sunshine a black cloud suddenly came down, and he drew his breath in, through his teeth as men do in pain.

“Sorry, of course, to learn that you apprehend occasion to consult any of us; but, command me when and how you like, and I need not assure you that your confidence is sacred.”

He then talked of quite other things, and in a comparatively cheerful way and after a little time, I took my leave.

CHAPTER V.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS IS SUMMONED TO RICHMOND.

We parted cheerfully, but he was not cheerful, nor was I. There are certain expressions of that powerful organ of spirit — the human face — which, although I have seen them often, and possess a doctor's nerve, yet disturb me profoundly. One look of Mr. Jennings haunted me. It had seized my imagination with so dismal a power that I changed my plans for the evening, and went to the opera, feeling that I wanted a change of ideas.

I heard nothing of or from him for two or three days, when a note in his hand reached me. It was cheerful, and full of hope. He said that he had been for some little time so much better — quite well, in fact — that he was going to make a little experiment, and run down for a month or so to his parish, to try whether a little work might not quite set him up. There was in it a fervent religious expression of gratitude for his restoration, as he now almost hoped he might call it.

A day or two later I saw Lady Mary, who repeated what his note had announced, and told me that he was actually in Warwickshire, having resumed his clerical duties at Kenlis; and she added, "I begin to think that he is really perfectly well, and that there never was anything the matter, more than nerves and fancy; we are all nervous, but I fancy there is nothing like a little hard work for that kind of weakness, and he has made up his mind to try it. I should not be surprised if he did not come back for a year."

Notwithstanding all this confidence, only two days later I had this note, dated from his house off Piccadilly:

"Dear Sir. — I have returned disappointed. If I should feel at all able to see you, I shall write to ask you kindly to call. At present I am too low, and, in fact, simply unable to say all I wish to say. Pray don't mention my name to my friends. I can see no one. By-and-by, please God, you shall hear from me. I mean to take a run into Shropshire, where some of my people are. God bless you! May we, on my return, meet more happily than I can now write."

About a week after this I saw Lady Mary at her own house, the last person, she said, left in town, and just on the wing for Brighton, for the London season was quite over. She told me that she had heard from Mr. Jennings' niece, Martha, in Shropshire. There was nothing to be gathered from her letter, more than that he was low and nervous. In those words, of which healthy people think so lightly, what a world of suffering is sometimes hidden!

Nearly five weeks passed without any further news of Mr. Jennings. At the end of that time I received a note from him. He wrote:

"I have been in the country, and have had change of air, change of scene, change of faces, change of everything and in everything — but *myself*. I have made up my mind, so far as the most irresolute creature on earth can do it, to tell my case fully to you. If your engagements will permit, pray come to me to-day, tomorrow, or the next day; but, pray defer as little as possible. You know not how much I need help. I have a quiet house at Richmond, where I now am. Perhaps you can manage to come to dinner, or to luncheon, or even to tea. You shall have no trouble in finding me out. The servant at Blank street, who takes this note, will have a carriage at your door at any hour you please; and I am always to be found. You will say that I ought not to be alone. I have tried everything. Come and see."

I called up the servant, and decided on going out the same evening, which accordingly I did.

He would have been much better in a lodging-house, or hotel, I thought, as I drove up through a short double row of sombre elms to a very oldfashioned brick house, darkened by the foliage of these trees, which overtopped, and nearly surrounded it. It was a perverse choice, for nothing could be imagined more triste and silent. The house, I found, belonged to him. He had stayed for a day or two in town, and, finding it for some cause insupportable, had come out here, probably because being furnished and his own, he was relieved of the thought and delay of selection, by coming here.

The sun had already set, and the red reflected light of the western sky illuminated the scene with the peculiar effect with which we are all familiar. The hall seemed very dark, but, getting to the back drawingroom, whose windows command the west, I was again in the same dusky light.

I sat down, looking out upon the richly-wooded landscape that glowed in the grand and melancholy light which was every moment fading. The corners of the room were already dark; all was growing dim, and the gloom was insensibly toning my mind, already prepared for what was sinister. I was waiting alone for his arrival, which soon took place. The door communicating with the front room opened, and the tall figure of Mr. Jennings, faintly seen in the ruddy twilight, came, with quiet stealthy steps, into the room.

We shook hands, and, taking a chair to the window, where there was still light enough to enable us to see each other's faces, he sat down beside me, and, placing his hand upon my arm, with scarcely a word of preface began his narrative.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW MR. JENNINGS MET HIS COMPANION.

The faint glow of the west, the pomp of the then lonely woods of Richmond, were before us, behind and about us the darkening room, and on the stony face or the sufferer — for the character of his face, though still gentle and sweet, was changed — rested that dim, odd glow which seems to descend and produce, where it touches, lights, sudden though faint, which are lost, almost without gradation, in darkness. The silence, too, was utter; not a distant wheel, or bark, or whistle from without; and within the depressing stillness of an invalid bachelor's house.

I guessed well the nature, though not even vaguely the particulars of the revelations I was about to receive, from that fixed face of suffering that so oddly flushed stood out, like a portrait of Schalken's, before its background of darkness.

"It began," he said, "on the 15th of October, three years and eleven weeks ago, and two days — I keep very accurate count, for every day is torment. If I leave anywhere a chasm in my narrative tell me.

"About four years ago I began a work, which had cost me very much thought and reading. It was upon the religious metaphysics of the ancients."

"I know," said I; "the actual religion of educated and thinking paganism, quite apart from symbolic worship? A wide and very interesting field."

"Yes; but not good for the mind — the Christian mind, I mean. Paganism is all bound together in essential unity, and, with evil sympathy, their religion involves their art, and both their manners, and the subject is a degrading fascination and the nemesis sure. God forgive me!

"I wrote a great deal; I wrote late at night. I was always thinking on the subject, walking about, wherever I was, everywhere. It thoroughly infected me. You are to remember that all the material ideas connected with it were more or less of the beautiful, the subject itself delightfully interesting, and I, then, without a care."

He sighed heavily.

“I believe that every one who sets about writing in earnest does his work, as a friend of mine phrased it, *on* something — tea, or coffee, or tobacco. I suppose there is a material waste that must be hourly supplied in such occupations, or that we should grow too abstracted, and the mind, as it were, pass out of the body, unless it were reminded often of the connection by actual sensation. At all events, I felt the want, and I supplied it. Tea was my companion — at first the ordinary black tea, made in the usual way, not too strong: but I drank a good deal, and increased its strength as I went on. I never experienced an uncomfortable symptom from it. I began to take a little green tea. I found the effect pleasanter, it cleared and intensified the power of thought so. I had come to take it frequently, but not stronger than one might take it for pleasure. I wrote a great deal out here, it was so quiet, and in this room. I used to sit up very late, and it became a habit with me to sip my tea — green tea — every now and then as my work proceeded. I had a little kettle on my table, that swung over a lamp, and made tea two or three times between eleven o’clock and two or three in the morning, my hours of going to bed. I used to go into town every day. I was not a monk, and, although I spent an hour or two in a library, hunting up authorities and looking out lights upon my theme, I was in no morbid state as far as I can judge. I met my friends pretty much as usual, and enjoyed their society, and, on the whole, existence had never been, I think, so pleasant before.

“I had met with a man who had some odd old books, German editions in mediæval Latin, and I was only too happy to be permitted access to them. This obliging person’s books were in the City, a very out-of-the-way part of it. I had rather outstayed my intended hour, and, on coming out, seeing no cab near, I was tempted to get into the omnibus which used to drive past this house. It was darker than this by the time the ‘bus had reached an old house, you may have remarked, with four poplars at each side of the door, and there the last passenger but myself got out. We drove along rather faster. It was twilight now. I leaned back in my corner next the door ruminating pleasantly.

“The interior of the omnibus was nearly dark. I had observed in the corner opposite to me at the other side, and at the end next the horses, two small circular reflections, as it seemed to me of a reddish light. They were about two inches apart, and about the size of those small brass buttons that yachting men used to put upon their jackets. I began to speculate, as listless men will, upon this trifle, as it seemed. From what centre did that faint but deep red light come, and from what — glass beads, buttons, toy decorations — was it reflected? We were lumbering along gently, having nearly a mile still to go. I had not solved the puzzle, and it became in another minute more odd, for these two luminous points, with a sudden jerk, descended nearer the floor, keeping still their relative distance and horizontal position, and then, as suddenly, they rose to the level of the seat on which I was sitting, and I saw them no more.

"My curiosity was now really excited, and, before I had time to think, I saw again these two dull lamps, again together near the floor; again they disappeared, and again in their old corner I saw them.

"So, keeping my eyes upon them, I edged quietly up my own side, towards the end at which I still saw these tiny discs of red.

"There was very little light in the 'bus. It was nearly dark. I leaned forward to aid my endeavour to discover what these little circles really were. They shifted their position a little as I did so. I began now to perceive an outline of something black, and I soon saw with tolerable distinctness the outline of a small black monkey, pushing its face forward in mimicry to meet mine; those were its eyes, and I now dimly saw its teeth grinning at me.

"I drew back, not knowing whether it might not meditate a spring. I fancied that one of the passengers had forgot this ugly pet, and wishing to ascertain something of its temper, though not caring to trust my fingers to it, I poked my umbrella softly towards it. It remained immovable — up to it — *through* it! For through it, and back and forward, it passed, without the slightest resistance.

"I can't, in the least, convey to you the kind of horror that I felt. When I had ascertained that the thing was an illusion, as I then supposed, there came a misgiving about myself and a terror that fascinated me in impotence to remove my gaze from the eyes of the brute for some moments. As I looked, it made a little skip back, quite into the corner, and I, in a panic, found myself at the door, having put my head out, drawing deep breaths of the outer air, and staring at the lights and trees we were passing, too glad to reassure myself of reality.

"I stopped the 'bus and got out. I perceived the man look oddly at me as I paid him. I daresay there was something unusual in my looks and manner, for I had never felt so strangely before.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE JOURNEY: FIRST STAGE.

“When the omnibus drove on, and I was alone upon the road, I looked carefully round to ascertain whether the monkey had followed me. To my indescribable relief I saw it nowhere. I can’t describe easily what a shock I had received, and my sense of genuine gratitude on finding myself, as I supposed, quite rid of it.

“I had got out a little before we reached this house, two or three hundred steps. A brick wall runs along the footpath, and inside the wall is a hedge of yew or some dark evergreen of that kind, and within that again the row of fine trees which you may have remarked as you came.

“This brick wall is about as high as my shoulder, and happening to raise my eyes I saw the monkey, with that stooping gait, on all fours, walking or creeping, close beside me on top of the wall. I stopped looking at it with a feeling of loathing and horror. As I stopped so did it. It sat up on the wall with its long hands on its knees looking at me. There was not light enough to see it much more than in outline, nor was it dark enough to bring the peculiar light of its eyes into strong relief. I still saw, however, that red foggy light plainly enough. It did not show its teeth, nor exhibit any sign of irritation, but seemed jaded and sulky, and was observing me steadily.

“I drew back into the middle of the road. It was an unconscious recoil, and there I stood, still looking at it, it did not move.

“With an instinctive determination to try something — anything, I turned about and walked briskly towards town with a skance look, all the time, watching the movements of the beast. It crept swiftly along the wall, at exactly my pace.

“Where the wall ends, near the turn of the road, it came down and with a wiry spring or two brought itself close to my feet, and continued to keep up with me, as I quickened my pace. It was at my left side, so close to my leg that I felt every moment as if I should tread upon it.

“The road was quite deserted and silent, and it was darker every moment. I stopped dismayed and bewildered, turning as I did so, the other way — I mean, towards this house, away from which I had been walking. When I stood still, the monkey drew back to a distance of, I suppose, about five or six yards, and remained stationary, watching me.

"I had been more agitated than I have said. I had read, of course, as every one has, something about 'spectral illusions,' as you physicians term the phenomena of such cases. I considered my situation, and looked my misfortune in the face.

"These affections, I had read, are sometimes transitory and sometimes obstinate. I had read of cases in which the appearance, at first harmless, had, step by step, degenerated into something direful and insupportable, and ended by wearing its victim out. Still as I stood there, but for my bestial companion, quite alone, I tried to comfort myself by repeating again and again the assurance, 'the thing is purely disease, a well-known physical affection, as distinctly as smallpox or neuralgia. Doctors are all agreed on that, philosophy demonstrates it. I must not be a fool. I've been sitting up too late, and I daresay my digestion is quite wrong, and with God's help, I shall be all right, and this is but a symptom of nervous dyspepsia.' Did I believe all this? Not one word of it, no more than any other miserable being ever did who is once seized and riveted in this satanic captivity. Against my convictions, I might say my knowledge, I was simply bullying myself into a false courage.

"I now walked homeward. I had only a few hundred yards to go. I had forced myself into a sort of resignation, but I had not got over the sickening shock and the flurry of the first certainty of my misfortune.

"I made up my mind to pass the night at home. The brute moved close beside me, and I fancied there was the sort of anxious drawing toward the house, which one sees in tired horses or dogs, sometimes as they come toward home.

"I was afraid to go into town, I was afraid of any one's seeing and recognising me. I was conscious of an irrepressible agitation in my manner. Also, I was afraid of any violent change in my habits, such as going to a place of amusement, or walking from home in order to fatigue myself. At the hall door it waited till I mounted the steps, and when the door was opened entered with me.

"I drank no tea that night. I got cigars and some brandy-and-water. My idea was that I should act upon my material system, and by living for a while in sensation apart from thought, send myself forcibly, as it it were, into a new groove. I came up here to this drawingroom. I sat just here. The monkey then got upon a small table that then stood *there*. It looked dazed and languid. An irrepressible uneasiness as to its movements kept my eyes always upon it. Its eyes were half closed, but I could see them glow. It was looking steadily at me. In all situations, at all hours, it is awake and looking at me. That never changes.

“I shall not continue in detail my narrative of this particular night. I shall describe, rather, the phenomena of the first year, which never varied, essentially. I shall describe the monkey as it appeared in daylight. In the dark, as you shall presently hear, there are peculiarities. It is a small monkey, perfectly black. It had only one peculiarity — a character of malignity — unfathomable malignity. During the first year it looked sullen and sick. But this character of intense malice and vigilance was always underlying that surly languor. During all that time it acted as if on a plan of giving me as little trouble as was consistent with watching me. Its eyes were never off me, I have never lost sight of it, except in my sleep, light or dark, day or night, since it came here, excepting when it withdraws for some weeks at a time, unaccountably.

“In total dark it is visible as in daylight. I do not mean merely its eyes. It is *all* visible distinctly in a halo that resembles a glow of red embers, and which accompanies it in all its movements.

“When it leaves me for a time, it is always at night, in the dark, and in the same way. It grows at first uneasy, and then furious, and then advances towards me, grinning and shaking its paws clenched, and, at the same time, there comes the appearance of fire in the grate. I never have any fire. I can’t sleep in the room where there is any, and it draws nearer and nearer to the chimney, quivering, it seems, with rage, and when its fury rises to the highest pitch, it springs into the grate, and up the chimney, and I see it no more.

“When first this happened I thought I was released. I was a new man. A day passed — a night — and no return, and a blessed week — a week — another week. I was always on my knees, Dr. Hesselius, always, thanking God and praying. A whole month passed of liberty, but on a sudden, it was with me again.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECOND STAGE.

“It was with me, and the malice which before was torpid under a sullen exterior, was now active. It was perfectly unchanged in every other respect. This new energy was apparent in its activity and its looks, and soon in other ways.

“For a time, you will understand, the change was shown only in an increased vivacity, and an air of menace, as if it was always brooding over some atrocious plan. Its eyes, as before, were never off me.”

“Is it here now?” I asked.

“No,” he replied, “it has been absent exactly a fortnight and a day — fifteen days. It has sometimes been away so long as nearly two months, once for three. Its absence always exceeds a fortnight, although it may be but by a single day. Fifteen days having past since I saw it last, it may return now at any moment.”

“Is its return,” I asked, “accompanied by any peculiar manifestation?”

“Nothing — no,” he said. “It is simply with me again. On lifting my eyes from a book, or turning my head, I see it as usual, looking at me, and then it remains, as before, for its appointed time. I have never told so much and so minutely before to any one.”

I perceived that he was agitated, and looking like death, and he repeatedly applied his handkerchief to his forehead; I suggested that he might be tired, and told him that I would call, with pleasure, in the morning, but he said:

“No, if you don’t mind hearing it all now. I have got so far, and I should prefer making one effort of it. When I spoke to Dr. Harley, I had nothing like so much to tell. You are a philosophic physician. You give spirit its proper rank. If this thing is real— “

He paused, looking at me with agitated inquiry.

“We can discuss it by-and-by, and very fully. I will give you all I think,” I answered, after an interval.

"Well — very well. If it is anything real, I say, it is prevailing, little by little, and drawing me more interiorly into hell. Optic nerves, he talked of. Ah! well — there are other nerves of communication. May God Almighty help me! You shall hear.

"Its power of action, I tell you, had increased. Its malice became, in a way aggressive. About two years ago, some questions that were pending between me and the bishop having been settled, I went down to my parish in Warwickshire, anxious to find occupation in my profession. I was not prepared for what happened, although I have since thought I might have apprehended something like it. The reason of my saying so, is this— "

He was beginning to speak with a great deal more effort and reluctance, and sighed often, and seemed at times nearly overcome. But at this time his manner was not agitated. It was more like that of a sinking patient, who has given himself up.

"Yes, but I will first tell you about Kenlis, my parish.

"It was with me when I left this place for Dawlbridge. It was my silent travelling companion, and it remained with me at the vicarage. When I entered on the discharge of my duties, another change took place. The thing exhibited an atrocious determination to thwart me. It was with me in the church — in the reading-desk — in the pulpit — within the communion rails. At last, it reached this extremity, that while I was reading to the congregation, it would spring upon the open book and squat there, so that I was unable to see the page. This happened more than once.

"I left Dawlbridge for a time. I placed myself in Dr. Harley's hands. I did everything he told me. He gave my case a great deal of thought. It interested him, I think. He seemed successful. For nearly three months I was perfectly free from a return. I began to think I was safe. With his full assent I returned to Dawlbridge.

"I travelled in a chaise. I was in good spirits. I was more — I was happy and grateful. I was returning, as I thought delivered from a dreadful hallucination, to the scene of duties which I longed to enter upon. It was a beautiful sunny evening, everything looked serene and cheerful, and I was delighted. I remember looking out of the window to see the spire of my church at Kenlis among the trees, at the point where one has the earliest view of it. It is exactly where the little stream that bounds the parish passes under the road by a culvert, and where it emerges at the roadside, a stone with an old inscription is placed. As we passed this point, I drew my head in and sat down, and in the corner of the chaise was the monkey.

"For a moment I felt faint, and then quite wild with despair and horror. I called to the driver, and got out, and sat down at the roadside, and prayed to God silently for mercy. A despairing resignation supervened. My companion was with me as I reentered the vicarage. The same persecution followed. After a short struggle I submitted, and soon I left the place.

"I told you," he said, "that the beast has before this become in certain ways aggressive. I will explain a little. It seemed to be actuated by intense and increasing fury, whenever I said my prayers, or even meditated prayer. It amounted at last to a dreadful interruption. You will ask, how could a silent immaterial phantom effect that? It was thus, whenever I meditated praying; it was always before me, and nearer and nearer.

"It used to spring on a table, on the back of a chair, on the chimneypiece, and slowly to swing itself from side to side, looking at me all the time. There is in its motion an indefinable power to dissipate thought, and to contract one's attention to that monotony, till the ideas shrink, as it were, to a point, and at last to nothing — and unless I had started up, and shook off the catalepsy I have felt as if my mind were on the point of losing itself. There are other ways," he sighed heavily; "thus, for instance, while I pray with my eyes closed, it comes closer and closer, and I see it. I know it is not to be accounted for physically, but I do actually see it, though my lids are closed, and so it rocks my mind, as it were, and overpowers me, and I am obliged to rise from my knees. If you had ever yourself known this, you would be acquainted with desperation."

CHAPTER IX.

THE THIRD STAGE.

“I see, Dr. Hesselius, that you don’t lose one word of my statement. I need not ask you to listen specially to what I am now going to tell you. They talk of the optic nerves, and of spectral illusions, as if the organ of sight was the only point assailable by the influences that have fastened upon me — I know better. For two years in my direful case that limitation prevailed. But as food is taken in softly at the lips, and then brought under the teeth, as the tip of the little finger caught in a mill crank will draw in the hand, and the arm, and the whole body, so the miserable mortal who has been once caught firmly by the end of the finest fibre of his nerve, is drawn in and in, by the enormous machinery of hell, until he is as I am. Yes, Doctor, as *I* am, for while I talk to you, and implore relief, I feel that my prayer is for the impossible, and my pleading with the inexorable.”

I endeavoured to calm his visibly increasing agitation, and told him that he must not despair.

While we talked the night had overtaken us. The filmy moonlight was wide over the scene which the window commanded, and I said:

“Perhaps you would prefer having candles. This light, you know, is odd. I should wish you, as much as possible, under your usual conditions while I make my diagnosis, shall I call it — otherwise I don’t care.”

“All lights are the same to me,” he said: “except when I read or write, I care not if night were perpetual. I am going to tell you what happened about a year ago. The thing began to speak to me.”

“Speak! How do you mean — speak as a man does, do you mean?”

“Yes; speak in words and consecutive sentences, with perfect coherence and articulation; but there is a peculiarity. It is not like the tone of a human voice. It is not by my ears it reaches me — it comes like a singing through my head.

“This faculty, the power of speaking to me, will be my undoing. It won’t let me pray, it interrupts me with dreadful blasphemies. I dare not go on, I could not. Oh! Doctor, can the skill, and thought, and prayers of man avail me nothing!"

"You must promise me, my dear sir, not to trouble yourself with unnecessarily exciting thoughts; confine yourself strictly to the narrative of *facts*; and recollect, above all, that even if the thing that infests you be as you seem to suppose, a reality with an actual independent life and will, yet it can have no power to hurt you, unless it be given from above: its access to your senses depends mainly upon your physical condition — this is, under God, your comfort and reliance: we are all alike environed. It is only that in your case, the '*paries*,' the veil of the flesh, the screen, is a little out of repair, and sights and sounds are transmitted. We must enter on a new course, sir — be encouraged. I'll give tonight to the careful consideration of the whole case."

"You are very good, sir; you think it worth trying, you don't give me quite up; but, sir, you don't know, it is gaining such an influence over me: it orders me about, it is such a tyrant, and I'm growing so helpless. May God deliver me!"

"It orders you about — of course you mean by speech?"

"Yes, yes; it is always urging me to crimes, to injure others, or myself. You see, Doctor, the situation is urgent, it is indeed. When I was in Shropshire, a few weeks ago" (Mr. Jennings was speaking rapidly and trembling now, holding my arm with one hand, and looking in my face), "I went out one day with a party of friends for a walk: my persecutor, I tell you, was with me at the time. I lagged behind the rest: the country near the Dee, you know, is beautiful. Our path happened to lie near a coal mine, and at the verge of the wood is a perpendicular shaft, they say, a hundred and fifty feet deep. My niece had remained behind with me — she knows, of course, nothing of the nature of my sufferings. She knew, however, that I had been ill, and was low, and she remained to prevent my being quite alone. As we loitered slowly on together the brute that accompanied me was urging me to throw myself down the shaft. I tell you now — oh, sir, think of it! — the one consideration that saved me from that hideous death was the fear lest the shock of witnessing the occurrence should be too much for the poor girl. I asked her to go on and take her walk with her friends, saying that I could go no further. She made excuses, and the more I urged her the firmer she became. She looked doubtful and frightened. I suppose there was something in my looks or manner that alarmed her; but she would not go, and that literally saved me. You had no idea, sir, that a living man could be made so abject a slave of Satan," he said, with a ghastly groan and a shudder.

There was a pause here, and I said, "You were preserved nevertheless. It was the act of God. You are in his hands and in the power of no other being: be therefore confident for the future."

CHAPTER X.

HOME.

I made him have candles lighted, and saw the room looking cheery and inhabited before I left him. I told him that he must regard his illness strictly as one dependent on physical, though *subtle* physical, causes. I told him that he had evidence of God's care and love in the deliverance which he had just described, and that I had perceived with pain that he seemed to regard its peculiar features as indicating that he had been delivered over to spiritual reprobation. Than such a conclusion nothing could be, I insisted, less warranted; and not only so, but more contrary to facts, as disclosed in his mysterious deliverance from that murderous influence during his Shropshire excursion. First, his niece had been retained by his side without his intending to keep her near him; and, secondly, there had been infused into his mind an irresistible repugnance to execute the dreadful suggestion in her presence.

As I reasoned this point with him, Mr. Jennings wept. He seemed comforted. One promise I exacted, which was that should the monkey at any time return, I should be sent for immediately; and, repeating my assurance that I would give neither time nor thought to any other subject until I had thoroughly investigated his case, and that tomorrow he should hear the result, I took my leave.

Before getting into the carriage I told the servant that his master was far from well, and that he should make a point of frequently looking into his room.

My own arrangements I made with a view to being quite secure from interruption.

I merely called at my lodgings, and with a travelling-desk and carpet-bag, set off in a hackney-carriage for an inn about two miles out of town, called The Horns, a very quiet and comfortable house, with good thick walls. And there I resolved, without the possibility of intrusion or distraction, to devote some hours of the night, in my comfortable sitting-room, to Mr. Jennings' case, and so much of the morning as it might require.

(There occurs here a careful note of Dr. Hesselius' opinion upon the case and of the habits, dietary, and medicines which he prescribed. It is curious — some persons would say mystical. But on the whole I doubt whether it would sufficiently interest a reader of the kind I am likely to meet with, to warrant its being here reprinted. The whole letter was plainly written at the inn where he had hid himself for the occasion. The next letter is dated from his town lodgings.)

I left town for the inn where I slept last night at halfpast nine, and did not arrive at my room in town until one o'clock this afternoon. I found a letter in Mr. Jennings' hand upon my table. It had not come by post, and, on inquiry, I learned that Mr. Jennings' servant had brought it, and on learning that I was not to return until to-day, and that no one could tell him my address, he seemed very uncomfortable, and said that his orders from his master were that he was not to return without an answer.

I opened the letter, and read:

"Dear Dr. Hesselius. It is here. You had not been an hour gone when it returned. It is speaking. It knows all that has happened. It knows everything — it knows you, and is frantic and atrocious. It reviles. I send you this. It knows every word I have written — I write. This I promised, and I therefore write, but I fear very confused, very incoherently. I am so interrupted, disturbed.

"Ever yours, sincerely yours,

"ROBERT LYNDER JENNINGS."

"When did this come?" I asked.

"About eleven last night: the man was here again, and has been here three times to-day. The last time is about an hour since."

Thus answered, and with the notes I had made upon his case in my pocket, I was in a few minutes driving towards Richmond, to see Mr. Jennings.

I by no means, as you perceive, despaired of Mr. Jennings' case. He had himself remembered and applied, though quite in a mistaken way, the principle which I lay down in my Metaphysical Medicine, and which governs all such cases. I was about to apply it in earnest. I was profoundly interested, and very anxious to see and examine him while the “enemy” was actually present.

I drove up to the sombre house, and ran up the steps, and knocked. The door, in a little time, was opened by a tall woman in black silk. She looked ill, and as if she had been crying. She curtseyed, and heard my question, but she did not answer. She turned her face away, extending her hand towards two men who were coming downstairs; and thus having, as it were, tacitly made me over to them, she passed through a side-door hastily and shut it.

The man who was nearest the hall, I at once accosted, but being now close to him, I was shocked to see that both his hands were covered with blood.

I drew back a little, and the man passing downstairs merely said in a low tone, “Here’s the servant, sir.”

The servant had stopped on the stairs, confounded and dumb at seeing me. He was rubbing his hands in a handkerchief, and it was steeped in blood.

“Jones, what is it, what has happened?” I asked, while a sickening suspicion overpowered me.

The man asked me to come up to the lobby. I was beside him in a moment, and frowning and pallid, with contracted eyes, he told me the horror which I already half guessed.

His master had made away with himself.

I went upstairs with him to the room — what I saw there I won’t tell you. He had cut his throat with his razor. It was a frightful gash. The two men had laid him on the bed and composed his limbs. It had happened as the immense pool of blood on the floor declared, at some distance between the bed and the window. There was carpet round his bed, and a carpet under his dressing-table, but none on the rest of the floor, for the man said he did not like a carpet on his bedroom. In this sombre, and now terrible room, one of the great elms that darkened the house was slowly moving the shadow of one of its great boughs upon this dreadful floor.

I beckoned to the servant and we went downstairs together. I turned off the hall into an oldfashioned pannelled room, and there standing, I heard all the servant had to tell. It was not a great deal.

“I concluded, sir, from your words, and looks, sir, as you left last night, that you thought my master seriously ill. I thought it might be that you were afraid of a fit, or something. So I attended very close to your directions. He sat up late, till past three o'clock. He was not writing or reading. He was talking a great deal to himself, but that was nothing unusual. At about that hour I assisted him to undress, and left him in his slippers and dressing-gown. I went back softly in about half an hour. He was in his bed, quite undressed, and a pair of candles lighted on the table beside his bed. He was leaning on his elbow and looking out at the other side of the bed when I came in. I asked him if he wanted anything, and he said no.

"I don't know whether it was what you said to me, sir, or something a little unusual about him, but I was uneasy, uncommon uneasy about him last night.

"In another half hour, or it might be a little more, I went up again. I did not hear him talking as before. I opened the door a little. The candles were both out, which was not usual. I had a bedroom candle, and I let the light in, a little bit, looking softly round. I saw him sitting in that chair beside the dressing-table with his clothes on again. He turned round and looked at me. I thought it strange he should get up and dress, and put out the candles to sit in the dark, that way. But I only asked him again if I could do anything for him. He said, no, rather sharp, I thought. I asked if I might light the candles, and he said, 'Do as you like, Jones,' So I lighted them, and I lingered about the room, and he said, 'Tell me truth, Jones, why did you come again — you did not hear any one cursing?' 'No, sir,' I said, wondering what he could mean.

"'No,' said he, after me, 'of course, no;' and I said to him, 'Wouldn't it be well, sir, you went to bed? It's just five o'clock;' and he said nothing but, 'Very likely; goodnight, Jones.' So I went, sir, but in less than hour I came again. The door was fast, and he heard me, and called as I thought from the bed to know what I wanted, and he desired me not to disturb him again. I lay down and slept for a little. It must have been between six and seven when I went up again. The door was still fast, and he made no answer, so I did not like to disturb him, and thinking he was asleep, I left him till nine. It was his custom to ring when he wished me to come, and I had no particular hour for calling him. I tapped very gently, and getting no answer, I stayed away a good while, supposing he was getting some rest then. It was not till eleven o'clock I grew really uncomfortable about him — for at the latest he was never, that I could remember, later than halfpast ten. I got no answer. I knocked and called, and still no answer. So not being able to force the door, I called Thomas from the stables, and together we forced it, and found him in the shocking way you saw."

Jones had no more to tell. Poor Mr. Jennings was very gentle, and very kind. All his people were fond of him. I could see that the servant was very much moved.

So, dejected and agitated, I passed from that terrible house, and its dark canopy of elms, and I hope I shall never see it more. While I write to you I feel like a man who has but half waked from a frightful and monotonous dream. My memory rejects the picture with incredulity and horror. Yet I know it is true. It is the story of the process of a poison, a poison which excites the reciprocal action of spirit and nerve, and paralyses the tissue that separates those cognate functions of the senses, the external and the interior. Thus we find strange bed-fellows, and the mortal and immortal prematurely make acquaintance.

CONCLUSION.

A WORD FOR THOSE WHO SUFFER.

My dear Van L —— , you have suffered from an affection similar to that which I have just described. You twice complained of a return of it.

Who, under God, cured you? Your humble servant, Martin Hesselius. Let me rather adopt the more emphasised piety of a certain good old French surgeon of three hundred years ago: “I treated, and God cured you.”

Come, my friend, you are not to be hippish. Let me tell you a fact.

I have met with, and treated, as my book shows, fifty-seven cases of this kind of vision, which I term indifferently “sublimated,” “precocious,” and “interior.”

There is another class of affections which are truly termed — though commonly confounded with those which I describe — spectral illusions. These latter I look upon as being no less simply curable than a cold in the head or a trifling dyspepsia.

It is those which rank in the first category that test our promptitude of thought. Fifty-seven such cases have I encountered, neither more nor less. And in how many of these have I failed? In no one single instance.

There is no one affliction of mortality more easily and certainly reducible, with a little patience, and a rational confidence in the physician. With these simple conditions, I look upon the cure as absolutely certain.

You are to remember that I had not even commenced to treat Mr. Jennings’ case. I have not any doubt that I should have cured him perfectly in eighteen months, or possibly it might have extended to two years. Some cases are very rapidly curable, others extremely tedious. Every intelligent physician who will give thought and diligence to the task, will effect a cure.

You know my tract on The Cardinal Functions of the Brain. I there, by the evidence of innumerable facts, prove, as I think, the high probability of a circulation arterial and venous in its mechanism, through the nerves. Of this system, thus considered, the brain is the heart. The fluid, which is propagated hence through one class of nerves, returns in an altered state through another, and the nature of that fluid is spiritual, though not immaterial, any more than, as I before remarked, light or electricity are so.

By various abuses, among which the habitual use of such agents as green tea is one, this fluid may be affected as to its quality, but it is more frequently disturbed as to equilibrium. This fluid being that which we have in common with spirits, a congestion found upon the masses of brain or nerve, connected with the interior sense, forms a surface unduly exposed, on which disembodied spirits may operate: communication is thus more or less effectually established. Between this brain circulation and the heart circulation there is an intimate sympathy. The seat, or rather the instrument of exterior vision, is the eye. The seat of interior vision is the nervous tissue and brain, immediately about and above the eyebrow. You remember how effectually I dissipated your pictures by the simple application of iced eau-de-cologne. Few cases, however, can be treated exactly alike with anything like rapid success. Cold acts powerfully as a repellant of the nervous fluid. Long enough continued it will even produce that permanent insensibility which we call numbness, and a little longer, muscular as well as sensational paralysis.

I have not, I repeat, the slightest doubt that I should have first dimmed and ultimately sealed that inner eye which Mr. Jennings had inadvertently opened. The same senses are opened in delirium tremens, and entirely shut up again when the overaction of the cerebral heart, and the prodigious nervous congestions that attend it, are terminated by a decided change in the state of the body. It is by acting steadily upon the body, by a simple process, that this result is produced — and inevitably produced — I have never yet failed.

Poor Mr. Jennings made away with himself. But that catastrophe was the result of a totally different malady, which, as it were, projected itself upon that disease which was established. His case was in the distinctive manner a complication, and the complaint under which he really succumbed, was hereditary suicidal mania. Poor Mr. Jennings I cannot call a patient of mine, for I had not even begun to treat his case, and he had not yet given me, I am convinced, his full and unreserved confidence. If the patient do not array himself on the side of the disease, his cure is certain.

THE FAMILIAR.

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PROLOGUE.

Out of about two hundred and thirty cases, more or less nearly akin to that I have entitled “Green Tea,” I select the following, which I call “The Familiar.”

To this MS. Doctor Hesselius, has, after his wont, attached some sheets of letter-paper, on which are written, in his hand nearly as compact as print, his own remarks upon the case. He says —

“In point of conscience, no more unexceptionable narrator, than the venerable Irish Clergyman who has given me this paper, on Mr. Barton’s case, could have been chosen. The statement is, however, medically imperfect. The report of an intelligent physician, who had marked its progress, and attended the patient, from its earlier stages to its close, would have supplied what is wanting to enable me to pronounce with confidence. I should have been acquainted with Mr. Barton’s probable hereditary predispositions; I should have known, possibly, by very early indications, something of a remoter origin of the disease than can now be ascertained.

“In a rough way, we may reduce all similar cases to three distinct classes. They are founded on the primary distinction between the subjective and the objective. Of those whose senses are alleged to be subject to supernatural impressions — some are simply visionaries, and propagate the illusions of which they complain, from diseased brain or nerves. Others are, unquestionably, infested by, as we term them, spiritual agencies, exterior to themselves. Others, again, owe their sufferings to a mixed condition. The interior sense, it is true, is opened; but it has been and continues open by the action of disease. This form of disease may, in one sense, be compared to the loss of the scarf-skin, and a consequent exposure of surfaces for whose excessive sensitiveness, nature has provided a muffling. The loss of this covering is attended by an habitual impassability, by influences against which we were intended to be guarded. But in the case of the brain, and the nerves immediately connected with its functions and its sensuous impressions, the cerebral circulation undergoes periodically that vibratory disturbance, which, I believe, I have satisfactorily examined and demonstrated, in my MS. Essay, A. 17. This vibratory disturbance differs, as I there prove, essentially from the congestive disturbance, the phenomena of which are examined in A. 19. It is, when excessive, invariably accompanied by *illusions*.

"Had I seen Mr. Barton, and examined him upon the points, in his case, which need elucidation, I should have without difficulty referred those phenomena to their proper disease. My diagnosis is now, necessarily, conjectural."

Thus writes Doctor Hesselius; and adds a great deal which is of interest only to a scientific physician.

The Narrative of the Rev. Thomas Herbert, which furnishes all that is known of the case, will be found in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER I.

FOOTSTEPS.

I was a young man at the time, and intimately acquainted with some of the actors in this strange tale; the impression which its incidents made on me, therefore, were deep, and lasting. I shall now endeavour, with precision, to relate them all, combining, of course, in the narrative, whatever I have learned from various sources, tending, however imperfectly, to illuminate the darkness which involves its progress and termination.

Somewhere about the year 1794, the younger brother of a certain baronet, whom I shall call Sir James Barton, returned to Dublin. He had served in the navy with some distinction, having commanded one of His Majesty's frigates during the greater part of the American war. Captain Barton was apparently some two or three-and-forty years of age. He was an intelligent and agreeable companion when he pleased it, though generally reserved, and occasionally even moody.

In society, however, he deported himself as a man of the world, and a gentleman. He had not contracted any of the noisy brusqueness sometimes acquired at sea; on the contrary, his manners were remarkably easy, quiet, and even polished. He was in person about the middle size, and somewhat strongly formed — his countenance was marked with the lines of thought, and on the whole wore an expression of gravity and melancholy; being, however, as I have said, a man of perfect breeding, as well as of good family, and in affluent circumstances, he had, of course, ready access to the best society of Dublin, without the necessity of any other credentials.

In his personal habits Mr. Barton was unexpensive. He occupied lodgings in one of the *then* fashionable streets in the south side of the town — kept but one horse and one servant — and though a reputed free-thinker, yet lived an orderly and moral life — indulging neither in gaming, drinking, nor any other vicious pursuit — living very much to himself, without forming intimacies, or choosing any companions, and appearing to mix in gay society rather for the sake of its bustle and distraction, than for any opportunities it offered of interchanging thought or feeling with its votaries.

Barton was therefore pronounced a saving, prudent, unsocial sort of fellow, who bid fair to maintain his celibacy alike against stratagem and assault, and was likely to live to a good old age, die rich, and leave his money to an hospital.

It was now apparent, however, that the nature of Mr. Barton's plans had been totally misconceived. A young lady, whom I shall call Miss Montague, was at this time introduced into the gay world, by her aunt, the Dowager Lady L —— . Miss Montague was decidedly pretty and accomplished, and having some natural cleverness, and a great deal of gaiety, became for a while a reigning toast.

Her popularity, however, gained her, for a time, nothing more than that unsubstantial admiration which, however, pleasant as an incense to vanity, is by no means necessarily antecedent to matrimony — for, unhappily for the young lady in question, it was an understood thing, that beyond her personal attractions, she had no kind of earthly provision. Such being the state of affairs, it will readily be believed that no little surprise was consequent upon the appearance of Captain Barton as the avowed lover of the penniless Miss Montague.

His suit prospered, as might have been expected, and in a short time it was communicated by old Lady L —— to each of her hundred-and-fifty particular friends in succession, that Captain Barton had actually tendered proposals of marriage, with her approbation, to her niece, Miss Montague, who had, moreover, accepted the offer of his hand, conditionally upon the consent of her father, who was then upon his homeward voyage from India, and expected in two or three weeks at the furthest.

About this consent there could be no doubt — the delay, therefore, was one merely of form — they were looked upon as absolutely engaged, and Lady L —— , with a rigour of oldfashioned decorum with which her niece would, no doubt, gladly have dispensed, withdrew her thenceforward from all further participation in the gaieties of the town.

Captain Barton was a constant visitor, as well as a frequent guest at the house, and was permitted all the privileges of intimacy which a betrothed suitor is usually accorded. Such was the relation of parties, when the mysterious circumstances which darken this narrative first begun to unfold themselves.

Lady L —— resided in a handsome mansion at the north side of Dublin, and Captain Barton's lodgings, as we have already said, were situated at the south. The distance intervening was considerable, and it was Captain Barton's habit generally to walk home without an attendant, as often as he passed the evening with the old lady and her fair charge.

His shortest way in such nocturnal walks, lay, for a considerable space, through a line of street which had as yet merely been laid out, and little more than the foundations of the houses constructed.

One night, shortly after his engagement with Miss Montague had commenced, he happened to remain unusually late, in company with her and Lady L —— . The conversation had turned upon the evidences of revelation, which he had disputed with the callous scepticism of a confirmed infidel. What were called "French principles," had in those days found their way a good deal into fashionable society, especially that portion of it which professed allegiance to Whiggism, and neither the old lady nor her charge were so perfectly free from the taint, as to look upon Mr. Barton's views as any serious objection to the proposed union.

The discussion had degenerated into one upon the supernatural and the marvellous, in which he had pursued precisely the same line of argument and ridicule. In all this, it is but truth to state, Captain Barton, was guilty of no affectation — the doctrines upon which he insisted, were, in reality, but, too truly the basis of his own fixed belief, if so it might be called; and perhaps not the least strange of the many strange circumstances connected with my narrative, was the fact, that the subject of the fearful influences I am about to describe, was himself, from the deliberate conviction of years, an utter disbeliever in what are usually termed preternatural agencies.

It was considerably past midnight when Mr. Barton took his leave, and set out upon his solitary walk homeward. He had now reached the lonely road, with its unfinished dwarf walls tracing the foundations of the projected row of houses on either side — the moon was shining mistily, and its imperfect light made the road he trod but additionally dreary — that utter silence which has in it something indefinably exciting, reigned there, and made the sound of his steps, which alone broke it, unnaturally loud and distinct.

He had proceeded thus some way, when he, on a sudden, heard other footfalls, pattering at a measured pace, and, as it seemed, about two score steps behind him.

The suspicion of being dogged is at all times unpleasant; it is, however, especially so in a spot so lonely; and this suspicion became so strong in the mind of Captain Barton, that he abruptly turned about to confront his pursuer, but, though there was quite sufficient moonlight to disclose any object upon the road he had traversed, no form of any kind was visible there.

The steps he had heard could not have been the reverberation of his own, for he stamped his foot upon the ground, and walked briskly up and down, in the vain attempt to awake an echo; though by no means a fanciful person, therefore he was at last fain to charge the sounds upon his imagination, and treat them as an illusion. Thus satisfying himself, he resumed his walk, and before he had proceeded a dozen paces, the mysterious footfall was again audible from behind, and this time, as if with the special design of showing that the sounds were not the responses of an echo — the steps sometimes slackened nearly to a halt, and sometimes hurried for six or eight strides to a run, and again abated to a walk.

Captain Barton, as before, turned suddenly round, and with the same result — no object was visible above the deserted level of the road. He walked back over the same ground, determined that, whatever might have been the cause of the sounds which had so disconcerted him, it should not escape his search — the endeavour, however, was unrewarded.

In spite of all his scepticism, he felt something like a superstitious fear stealing fast upon him, and with these unwonted and uncomfortable sensations, he once more turned and pursued his way. There was no repetition of these haunting sounds, until he had reached the point where he had last stopped to retrace his steps — here they were resumed — and with sudden starts of running, which threatened to bring the unseen pursuer up to the alarmed pedestrian.

Captain Barton arrested his course as formerly — the unaccountable nature of the occurrence filled him with vague and disagreeable sensations — and yielding to the excitement that was gaining upon him, he shouted sternly, “Who goes there?” The sound of one’s own voice, thus exerted, in utter solitude, and followed by total silence, has in it something unpleasantly dismaying, and he felt a degree of nervousness which, perhaps, from no cause had he ever known before.

To the very end of this solitary street the steps pursued him — and it required a strong effort of stubborn pride on his part, to resist the impulse that prompted him every moment to run for safety at the top of his speed. It was not until he had reached his lodging, and sate by his own fireside, that he felt sufficiently reassured to rearrange and reconsider in his own mind the occurrences which had so discomposed him. So little a matter, after all, is sufficient to upset the pride of scepticism and vindicate the old simple laws of nature within us.

CHAPTER II.

THE WATCHER.

Mr. Barton was next morning sitting at a late breakfast, reflecting upon the incidents of the previous night, with more of inquisitiveness than awe, so speedily do gloomy impressions upon the fancy disappear under the cheerful influence of day, when a letter just delivered by the postman was placed upon the table before him.

There was nothing remarkable in the address of this missive, except that it was written in a hand which he did not know — perhaps it was disguised — for the tall narrow characters were sloped backward; and with the self-inflicted suspense which we often see practised in such cases, he puzzled over the inscription for a full minute before he broke the seal. When he did so, he read the following words, written in the same hand: —

“Mr. Barton, late captain of the ‘Dolphin,’ is warned of DANGER. He will do wisely to avoid —— street — [here the locality of his last night’s adventure was named] — if he walks there as usual he will meet with something unlucky — let him take warning, once for all, for he has reason to dread

“THE WATCHER.”

Captain Barton read and re-read this strange effusion; in every light and in every direction he turned it over and over; he examined the paper on which it was written, and scrutinized the handwriting once more. Defeated here, he turned to the seal; it was nothing but a patch of wax, upon which the accidental impression of a thumb was imperfectly visible.

There was not the slightest mark, or clue of any kind, to lead him to even a guess as to its possible origin. The writer’s object seemed a friendly one, and yet he subscribed himself as one whom he had “reason to dread.” Altogether the letter, its author, and its real purpose were to him an inexplicable puzzle, and one, moreover, unpleasantly suggestive, in his mind, of other associations connected with his last night’s adventure.

In obedience to some feeling — perhaps of pride — Mr. Barton did not communicate, even to his intended bride, the occurrences which I have just detailed. Trifling as they might appear, they had in reality most disagreeably affected his imagination, and he cared not to disclose, even to the young lady in question, what she might possibly look upon as evidences of weakness. The letter might very well be but a hoax, and the mysterious footfall but a delusion or a trick. But although he affected to treat the whole affair as unworthy of a thought, it yet haunted him pertinaciously, tormenting him with perplexing doubts, and depressing him with undefined apprehensions. Certain it is, that for a considerable time afterwards he carefully avoided the street indicated in the letter as the scene of danger.

It was not until about a week after the receipt of the letter which I have transcribed, that anything further occurred to remind Captain Barton of its contents, or to counteract the gradual disappearance from his mind of the disagreeable impressions then received.

He was returning one night, after the interval I have stated, from the theatre, which was then situated in Crow-street, and having there seen Miss Montague and Lady L —— into their carriage, he loitered for some time with two or three acquaintances.

With these, however, he parted close to the college, and pursued his way alone. It was now fully one o’clock, and the streets were quite deserted. During the whole of his walk with the companions from whom he had just parted, he had been at times painfully aware of the sound of steps, as it seemed, dogging them on their way.

Once or twice he had looked back, in the uneasy anticipation that he was again about to experience the same mysterious annoyances which had so disconcerted him a week before, and earnestly hoping that he might see some form to account naturally for the sounds. But the street was deserted — no one was visible.

Proceeding now quite alone upon his homeward way, he grew really nervous and uncomfortable, as he became sensible, with increased distinctness, of the well-known and now absolutely dreaded sounds.

By the side of the dead wall which bounded the college park, the sounds followed, recommencing almost simultaneously with his own steps. The same unequal pace — sometimes slow, sometimes for a score yards or so, quickened almost to a run — was audible from behind him. Again and again he turned; quickly and stealthily he glanced over his shoulder — almost at every half-dozen steps; but no one was visible.

The irritation of this intangible and unseen pursuit became gradually all but intolerable; and when at last he reached his home, his nerves were strung to such a pitch of excitement that he could not rest, and did not attempt even to lie down until after the daylight had broken.

He was awakened by a knock at his chamber-door, and his servant entering, handed him several letters which had just been received by the penny post. One among them instantly arrested his attention — a single glance at the direction aroused him thoroughly. He at once recognized its character, and read as follows: —

"You may as well think, Captain Barton, to escape from your own shadow as from me; do what you may, I will see you as often as I please, and you shall see me, for I do not want to hide myself, as you fancy. Do not let it trouble your rest, Captain Barton; for, with a *good conscience*, what need you fear from the eye of

"THE WATCHER."

It is scarcely necessary to dwell upon the feelings that accompanied a perusal of this strange communication. Captain Barton was observed to be unusually absent and out of spirits for several days afterwards, but no one divined the cause.

Whatever he might think as to the phantom steps which followed him, there could be no possible illusion about the letters he had received; and, to say the least, their immediate sequence upon the mysterious sounds which had haunted him, was an odd coincidence.

The whole circumstance was, in his own mind, vaguely and instinctively connected with certain passages in his past life, which, of all others, he hated to remember.

It happened, however, that in addition to his own approaching nuptials, Captain Barton had just then — fortunately, perhaps, for himself — some business of an engrossing kind connected with the adjustment of a large and long-litigated claim upon certain properties.

The hurry and excitement of business had its natural effect in gradually dispelling the gloom which had for a time occasionally oppressed him, and in a little while his spirits had entirely recovered their accustomed tone.

During all this time, however, he was, now and then, dismayed by indistinct and half-heard repetitions of the same annoyance, and that in lonely places, in the daytime as well as after nightfall. These renewals of the strange impressions from which he had suffered so much, were, however, desultory and faint, insomuch that often he really could not, to his own satisfaction, distinguish between them and the mere suggestions of an excited imagination.

One evening he walked down to the House of Commons with a Member, an acquaintance of his and mine. This was one of the few occasions upon which I have been in company with Captain Barton. As we walked down together, I observed that he became absent and silent, and to a degree that seemed to argue the pressure of some urgent and absorbing anxiety.

I afterwards learned that during the whole of our walk, he had heard the well-known footsteps tracking him as we proceeded.

This, however, was the last time he suffered from this phase of the persecution, of which he was already the anxious victim. A new and a very different one was about to be presented.

CHAPTER III.

AN ADVERTISEMENT.

Of the new series of impressions which were afterwards gradually to work out his destiny, I that evening witnessed the first; and but for its relation to the train of events which followed, the incident would scarcely have been now remembered by me.

As we were walking in at the passage from College-Green, a man, of whom I remember only that he was short in stature, looked like a foreigner, and wore a kind of fur travelling-cap, walked very rapidly, and as if under fierce excitement, directly towards us, muttering to himself, fast and vehemently the while.

This odd-looking person walked straight toward Barton, who was foremost of the three, and halted, regarding him for a moment or two with a look of maniacal menace and fury; and then turning about as abruptly, he walked before us at the same agitated pace, and disappeared at a side passage. I do distinctly remember being a good deal shocked at the countenance and bearing of this man, which indeed irresistibly impressed me with an undefined sense of danger, such as I have never felt before or since from the presence of anything human; but these sensations were, on my part, far from amounting to anything so disconcerting as to flurry or excite me — I had seen only a singularly evil countenance, agitated, as it seemed, with the excitement of madness.

I was absolutely astonished, however, at the effect of this apparition upon Captain Barton. I knew him to be a man of proud courage and coolness in real danger — a circumstance which made his conduct upon this occasion the more conspicuously odd. He recoiled a step or two as the stranger advanced, and clutched my arm in silence, with what seemed to be a spasm of agony or terror! and then, as the figure disappeared, shoving me roughly back, he followed it for a few paces, stopped in great disorder, and sat down upon a form. I never beheld a countenance more ghastly and haggard.

“For God’s sake, Barton, what is the matter?” said —— , our companion, really alarmed at his appearance. “You’re not hurt, are you? — or unwell?

What is it?"

"What did he say? — I did not hear it — what was it?" asked Barton, wholly disregarding the question.

"Nonsense," said —— , greatly surprised; "who cares what the fellow said. You are unwell, Barton — decidedly unwell; let me call a coach."

"Unwell! No — not unwell," he said, evidently making an effort to recover his self-possession; "but, to say the truth, I am fatigued — a little overworked — and perhaps over anxious. You know I have been in chancery, and the winding up of a suit is always a nervous affair. I have felt uncomfortable all this evening; but I am better now. Come, come — shall we go on?"

"No, no. Take my advice, Barton, and go home; you really do need rest! you are looking quite ill. I really do insist on your allowing me to see you home," replied his friend.

I seconded — — 's advice, the more readily as it was obvious that Barton was not himself disinclined to be persuaded. He left us, declining our offered escort. I was not sufficiently intimate with —— to discuss the scene we had both just witnessed. I was, however, convinced from his manner in the few commonplace comments and regrets we exchanged, that he was just as little satisfied as I with the extempore plea of illness with which he had accounted for the strange exhibition, and that we were both agreed in suspecting some lurking mystery in the matter.

I called next day at Barton's lodgings, to enquire for him, and learned from the servant that he had not left his room since his return the night before; but that he was not seriously indisposed, and hoped to be out in a few days. That evening he sent for Dr. R —— , then in large and fashionable practice in Dublin, and their interview was, it is said, an odd one.

He entered into a detail of his own symptoms in an abstracted and desultory way which seemed to argue a strange want of interest in his own cure, and, at all events, made it manifest that there was some topic engaging his mind of more engrossing importance than his present ailment. He complained of occasional palpitations and headache.

Doctor R —— , asked him among other questions, whether there was any irritating circumstance or anxiety then occupying his thoughts. This he denied quickly and almost peevishly; and the physician thereupon declared his opinion, that there was nothing amiss except some slight derangement of the digestion, for which he accordingly wrote a prescription, and was about to withdraw, when Mr. Barton, with the air of a man who recollects a topic which had nearly escaped him, recalled him.

"I beg your pardon, Doctor, but I really almost forgot; will you permit me to ask you two or three medical questions — rather odd ones, perhaps, but a wager depends upon their solution, you will, I hope, excuse my unreasonableness."

The physician readily undertook to satisfy the inquirer.

Barton seemed to have some difficulty about opening the proposed interrogatories, for he was silent for a minute, then walked to his bookcase, and returned as he had gone; at last he sat down and said —

"You'll think them very childish questions, but I can't recover my wager without a decision; so I must put them. I want to know first about lock-jaw. If a man actually has had that complaint, and appears to have died of it — so much so, that a physician of average skill pronounces him actually dead — may he, after all, recover?"

The physician smiled, and shook his head.

"But — but a blunder may be made," resumed Barton. "Suppose an ignorant pretender to medical skill; may *he* be so deceived by any stage of the complaint, as to mistake what is only a part of the progress of the disease, for death itself?"

"No one who had ever seen death," answered he, "could mistake it in a case of lock-jaw."

Barton mused for a few minutes. "I am going to ask you a question, perhaps, still more childish; but first, tell me, are the regulations of foreign hospitals, such as that of, let us say, Naples, very lax and bungling. May not all kinds of blunders and slips occur in their entries of names, and soforth?"

Doctor R —— professed his incompetence to answer that query.

"Well, then, Doctor, here is the last of my questions. You will, probably, laugh at it; but it must out, nevertheless. Is there any disease, in all the range of human maladies, which would have the effect of perceptibly contracting the stature, and the whole frame — causing the man to shrink in all his proportions, and yet to preserve his exact resemblance to himself in every particular — with the one exception, his height and bulk; any disease, mark — no matter how rare — how little believed in, generally — which could possibly result in producing such an effect?”

The physician replied with a smile, and a very decided negative.

“Tell me, then,” said Barton, abruptly, “if a man be in reasonable fear of assault from a lunatic who is at large, can he not procure a warrant for his arrest and detention?”

“Really that is more a lawyer’s question than one in my way,” replied Dr. R —— : “but I believe, on applying to a magistrate, such a course would be directed.”

The physician then took his leave; but, just as he reached the hall-door, remembered that he had left his cane up stairs, and returned. His reappearance was awkward, for a piece of paper, which he recognised as his own prescription, was slowly burning upon the fire, and Barton sitting close by with an expression of settled gloom and dismay.

Doctor R —— had too much tact to observe what presented itself; but he had seen quite enough to assure him that the mind, and not the body, of Captain Barton was in reality the seat of suffering.

A few days afterwards, the following advertisement appeared in the Dublin newspapers.

“If Sylvester Yelland, formerly a foremast-man on board his Majesty’s frigate Dolphin, or his nearest of kin, will apply to Mr. Hubert Smith, attorney, at his office, Dame Street, he or they may hear of something greatly to his or their advantage. Admission may be had at any hour up to twelve o’clock at night, should parties desire to avoid observation; and the strictest secrecy, as to all communications intended to be confidential, shall be honourably observed.”

The Dolphin, as I have mentioned, was the vessel which Captain Barton had commanded; and this circumstance, connected with the extraordinary exertions made by the circulation of handbills, &c., as well as by repeated advertisements, to secure for this strange notice the utmost possible publicity, suggested to Dr. R —— the idea that Captain Barton’s extreme uneasiness was somehow connected with the individual to whom the advertisement was addressed, and he himself the author of it.

This, however, it is needless to add, was no more than a conjecture. No information whatsoever, as to the real purpose of the advertisement was divulged by the agent, nor yet any hint as to who his employer might be.

CHAPTER IV.

HE TALKS WITH A CLERGYMAN.

Mr. Barton, although he had latterly begun to earn for himself the character of an hypochondriac, was yet very far from deserving it. Though by no means lively, he had yet, naturally, what are termed “even spirits,” and was not subject to undue depressions.

He soon, therefore, began to return to his former habits; and one of the earliest symptoms of this healthier tone of spirits was, his appearing at a grand dinner of the Freemasons, of which worthy fraternity he was himself a brother. Barton, who had been at first gloomy and abstracted, drank much more freely than was his wont — possibly with the purpose of dispelling his own secret anxieties — and under the influence of good wine, and pleasant company, became gradually (unlike himself) talkative, and even noisy.

It was under this unwonted excitement that he left his company at about halfpast ten o’clock; and, as conviviality is a strong incentive to gallantry, it occurred to him to proceed forthwith to Lady L — — ‘s and pass the remainder of the evening with her and his destined bride.

Accordingly, he was soon at —— street, and chatting gaily with the ladies. It is not to be supposed that Captain Barton had exceeded the limits which propriety prescribes to good fellowship — he had merely taken enough wine to raise his spirits, without, however, in the least degree unsteadying his mind, or affecting his manners.

With this undue elevation of spirits had supervened an entire oblivion or contempt of those undefined apprehensions which had for so long weighed upon his mind, and to a certain extent estranged him from society; but as the night wore away, and his artificial gaiety began to flag, these painful feelings gradually intruded themselves again, and he grew abstracted and anxious as heretofore.

He took his leave at length, with an unpleasant foreboding of some coming mischief, and with a mind haunted with a thousand mysterious apprehensions, such as, even while he acutely felt their pressure, he, nevertheless, inwardly strove, or affected to contemn.

It was this proud defiance of what he regarded as his own weakness, which prompted him upon the present occasion to that course which brought about the adventure I am now about to relate.

Mr. Barton might have easily called a coach, but he was conscious that his strong inclination to do so proceeded from no cause other than what he desperately persisted in representing to himself to be his own superstitious tremors.

He might also have returned home by a *route* different from that against which he had been warned by his mysterious correspondent; but for the same reason he dismissed this idea also, and with a dogged and half desperate resolution to force matters to a crisis of some kind, if there were any reality in the causes of his former suffering, and if not, satisfactorily to bring their delusiveness to the proof, he determined to follow precisely the course which he had trodden upon the night so painfully memorable in his own mind as that on which his strange persecution commenced. Though, sooth to say, the pilot who for the first time steers his vessel under the muzzles of a hostile battery, never felt his resolution more severely tasked than did Captain Barton as he breathlessly pursued this solitary path — a path which, spite of every effort of scepticism and reason, he felt to be infested by some (as respected *him*) malignant being.

He pursued his way steadily and rapidly, scarcely breathing from intensity of suspense; he, however, was troubled by no renewal of the dreaded footsteps, and was beginning to feel a return of confidence, as more than three-fourths of the way being accomplished with impunity, he approached the long line of twinkling oil lamps which indicated the frequented streets.

This feeling of self-congratulation was, however, but momentary. The report of a musket at some hundred yards behind him, and the whistle of a bullet close to his head, disagreeably and startlingly dispelled it. His first impulse was to retrace his steps in pursuit of the assassin; but the road on either side was, as we have said, embarrassed by the foundations of a street, beyond which extended waste fields, full of rubbish and neglected lime and brick-kilns, and all now as utterly silent as though no sound had ever disturbed their dark and unsightly solitude. The futility of, single-handed, attempting, under such circumstances, a search for the murderer, was apparent, especially as no sound, either of retreating steps or any other kind, was audible to direct his pursuit.

With the tumultuous sensations of one whose life has just been exposed to a murderous attempt, and whose escape has been the narrowest possible, Captain Barton turned again; and without, however, quickening his pace actually to a run, hurriedly pursued his way.

He had turned, as I have said, after a pause of a few seconds, and had just commenced his rapid retreat, when on a sudden he met the well-remembered little man in the fur cap. The encounter was but momentary. The figure was walking at the same exaggerated pace, and with the same strange air of menace as before; and as it passed him, he thought he heard it say, in a furious whisper, “Still alive — still alive!”

The state of Mr. Barton’s spirits began now to work a corresponding alteration in his health and looks, and to such a degree that it was impossible that the change should escape general remark.

For some reasons, known but to himself, he took no step whatsoever to bring the attempt upon his life, which he had so narrowly escaped, under the notice of the authorities; on the contrary, he kept it jealously to himself; and it was not for many weeks after the occurrence that he mentioned it, and then in strict confidence, to a gentleman, whom the torments of his mind at last compelled him to consult.

Spite of his blue devils, however, poor Barton, having no satisfactory reason to render to the public for any undue remissness in the attentions exacted by the relation subsisting between him and Miss Montague was obliged to exert himself, and present to the world a confident and cheerful bearing.

The true source of his sufferings, and every circumstance connected with them, he guarded with a reserve so jealous, that it seemed dictated by at least a suspicion that the origin of his strange persecution was known to himself, and that it was of a nature which, upon his own account, he could not or dared not disclose.

The mind thus turned in upon itself, and constantly occupied with a haunting anxiety which it dared not reveal or confide to any human breast, became daily more excited, and, of course, more vividly impressible, by a system of attack which operated through the nervous system; and in this state he was destined to sustain, with increasing frequency, the stealthy visitations of that apparition which from the first had seemed to possess so terrible a hold upon his imagination.

It was about this time that Captain Barton called upon the then celebrated preacher, Dr. —— , with whom he had a slight acquaintance, and an extraordinary conversation ensued.

The divine was seated in his chambers in college, surrounded with works upon his favourite pursuit, and deep in theology, when Barton was announced.

There was something at once embarrassed and excited in his manner, which, along with his wan and haggard countenance, impressed the student with the unpleasant consciousness that his visitor must have recently suffered terribly indeed, to account for an alteration so striking — almost shocking.

After the usual interchange of polite greeting, and a few commonplace remarks, Captain Barton, who obviously perceived the surprise which his visit had excited, and which Doctor —— was unable wholly to conceal, interrupted a brief pause by remarking —

“This is a strange call, Doctor —— , perhaps scarcely warranted by an acquaintance so slight as mine with you. I should not under ordinary circumstances have ventured to disturb you; but my visit is neither an idle nor impertinent intrusion. I am sure you will not so account it, when I tell you how afflicted I am.”

Doctor —— interrupted him with assurances such as good breeding suggested, and Barton resumed —

“I am come to task your patience by asking your advice. When I say your patience, I might, indeed, say more; I might have said your humanity — your compassion; for I have been and am a great sufferer.”

“My dear sir,” replied the churchman, “it will, indeed, afford me infinite gratification if I can give you comfort in any distress of mind; but — you know — — “

“I know what you would say,” resumed Barton, quickly; “I am an unbeliever, and, therefore, incapable of deriving help from religion; but don’t take that for granted. At least you must not assume that, however unsettled my convictions may be, I do not feel a deep — a very deep —

interest in the subject. Circumstances have lately forced it upon my attention, in such a way as to compel me to review the whole question in a more candid and teachable spirit, I believe, than I ever studied it in before."

"Your difficulties, I take it for granted, refer to the evidences of revelation," suggested the clergyman.

"Why — no — not altogether; in fact I am ashamed to say I have not considered even my objections sufficiently to state them connectedly; but — but there is one subject on which I feel a peculiar interest."

He paused again, and Doctor —— pressed him to proceed.

"The fact is," said Barton, "whatever may be my uncertainty as to the authenticity of what we are taught to call revelation, of one fact I am deeply and horribly convinced, that there does exist beyond this a spiritual world — a system whose workings are generally in mercy hidden from us — a system which may be, and which is sometimes, partially and terribly revealed. I am sure — I *know*," continued Barton, with increasing excitement, "that there is a God — a dreadful God — and that retribution follows guilt, in ways the most mysterious and stupendous — by agencies the most inexplicable and terrific; — there is a spiritual system — great God, how I have been convinced! — a system malignant, and implacable, and omnipotent, under whose persecutions I am, and have been, suffering the torments of the damned! — yes, sir — yes — the fires and frenzy of hell!"

As Barton spoke, his agitation became so vehement that the Divine was shocked, and even alarmed. The wild and excited rapidity with which he spoke, and, above all, the indefinable horror, that stamped his features, afforded a contrast to his ordinary cool and unimpassioned self-possession striking and painful in the last degree.

CHAPTER V.

MR. BARTON STATES HIS CASE.

“My dear sir,” said Doctor —— , after a brief pause, “I fear you have been very unhappy, indeed; but I venture to predict that the depression under which you labour will be found to originate in purely physical causes, and that with a change of air, and the aid of a few tonics, your spirits will return, and the tone of your mind be once more cheerful and tranquil as heretofore. There was, after all, more truth than we are quite willing to admit in the classic theories which assigned the undue predominance of any one affection of the mind, to the undue action or torpidity of one or other of our bodily organs. Believe me, that a little attention to diet, exercise, and the other essentials of health, under competent direction, will make you as much yourself as you can wish.”

“Doctor — — “ said Barton, with something like a shudder, “I *cannot* delude myself with such a hope. I have no hope to cling to but one, and that is, that by some other spiritual agency more potent than that which tortures me, *it* may be combated, and I delivered. If this may not be, I am lost — now and for ever lost.”

“But, Mr. Barton, you must remember,” urged his companion, “that others have suffered as you have done, and — — “

“No, no, no,” interrupted he, with irritability— “no, sir, I am not a credulous — far from a superstitious man. I have been, perhaps, too much the reverse — too sceptical, too slow of belief; but unless I were one whom no amount of evidence could convince, unless I were to contemn the repeated, the *perpetual* evidence of my own senses, I am now — now at last constrained to believe — I have no escape from the conviction — the overwhelming certainty — that I am haunted and dogged, go where I may, by — by a DEMON!”

There was a preternatural energy of horror in Barton’s face, as, with its damp and deathlike lineaments turned towards his companion, he thus delivered himself.

"God help you, my poor friend," said Dr. —— , much shocked, "God help you; for, indeed, you *are* a sufferer, however your sufferings may have been caused."

"Ay, ay, God help me," echoed Barton, sternly; "but *will* he help me — will he help me?"

"Pray to him — pray in an humble and trusting spirit," said he.

"Pray, pray," echoed he again; "I can't pray — I could as easily move a mountain by an effort of my will. I have not belief enough to pray; there is something within me that will not pray. You prescribe impossibilities — literal impossibilities."

"You will not find it so, if you will but try," said Doctor —— .

"Try! I *have* tried, and the attempt only fills me with confusion; and, sometimes, terror; I have tried in vain, and more than in vain. The awful, unutterable idea of eternity and infinity oppresses and maddens my brain whenever my mind approaches the contemplation of the Creator; I recoil from the effort scared. I tell you, Doctor —— , if I am to be saved, it must be by other means. The idea of an eternal Creator is to me intolerable — my mind cannot support it."

"Say, then, my dear sir," urged he, "say how you would have me serve you — what you would learn of me — what I can do or say to relieve you?"

"Listen to me first," replied Captain Barton, with a subdued air, and an effort to suppress his excitement, "listen to me while I detail the circumstances of the persecution under which my life has become all but intolerable — a persecution which has made me fear *death* and the world beyond the grave as much as I have grown to hate existence."

Barton then proceeded to relate the circumstances which I have already detailed, and then continued:

"This has now become habitual — an accustomed thing. I do not mean the actual seeing him in the flesh — thank God, *that* at least is not permitted daily. Thank God, from the ineffable horrors of that visitation I have been mercifully allowed intervals of repose, though none of security; but from the consciousness that a malignant spirit is following and watching me wherever I go, I have never, for a single instant, a temporary respite. I am pursued with blasphemies, cries of despair and appalling hatred. I hear those dreadful sounds called after me as I turn the corners of the streets; they come in the night-time, while I sit in my chamber alone; they haunt me everywhere, charging me with hideous crimes, and — great God! — threatening me with coming vengeance and eternal misery. Hush! do you hear *that*?" he cried with a horrible smile of triumph; "there, there, will that convince you?"

The clergyman felt a chill of horror steal over him, while, during the wail of a sudden gust of wind, he heard, or fancied he heard, the half articulate sounds of rage and derision mingling in the sough.

"Well, what do you think of *that*?" at length Barton cried, drawing a long breath through his teeth.

"I heard the wind," said Doctor —— .

"What should I think of it — what is there remarkable about it?"

"The prince of the powers of the air," muttered Barton, with a shudder.

"Tut, tut! my dear sir," said the student, with an effort to reassure himself; for though it was broad daylight, there was nevertheless something disagreeably contagious in the nervous excitement under which his visitor so miserably suffered. "You must not give way to those wild fancies; you must resist these impulses of the imagination."

"Ay, ay; 'resist the devil and he will flee from thee,'" said Barton, in the same tone; "but *how* resist him? ay, there it is — there is the rub. What — *what* am I to do? what *can* I do?"

"My dear sir, this *is* fancy," said the man of folios; "you are your own tormentor."

"No, no, sir — fancy has no part in it," answered Barton, somewhat sternly. "Fancy! was it that made you, as well as me, hear, but this moment, those accents of hell? Fancy, indeed! No, no."

"But you have seen this person frequently," said the ecclesiastic; "why have you not accosted or secured him? Is it not a little precipitate, to say no more, to assume, as you have done, the existence of preternatural agency, when, after all, everything may be easily accountable, if only proper means were taken to sift the matter."

"There are circumstances connected with this — this *appearance*," said Barton, "which it is needless to disclose, but which to *me* are proof of its horrible nature. I know that the being that follows me is not human — I say I know this; I could prove it to your own conviction." He paused for a minute, and then added, "And as to accosting it, I dare not, I could not; when I see it I am powerless; I stand in the gaze of death, in the triumphant presence of infernal power and malignity. My strength, and faculties, and memory, all forsake me. O God, I fear, sir, you know not what you speak of. Mercy, mercy; heaven have pity on me!"

He leaned his elbow on the table, and passed his hand across his eyes, as if to exclude some image of horror, muttering the last words of the sentence he had just concluded, again and again.

"Doctor —— ," he said, abruptly raising himself, and looking full upon the clergyman with an imploring eye, "I know you will do for me whatever may be done. You know now fully the circumstances and the nature of my affliction. I tell you I cannot help myself; I cannot hope to escape; I am utterly passive. I conjure you, then, to weigh my case well, and if anything may be done for me by vicarious supplication — by the intercession of the good — or by any aid or influence whatsoever, I implore of you, I adjure you in the name of the Most High, give me the benefit of that influence — deliver me from the body of this death. Strive for me, pity me; I know you will; you cannot refuse this; it is the purpose and object of my visit. Send me away with some hope, however little, some faint hope of ultimate deliverance, and I will nerve myself to endure, from hour to hour, the hideous dream into which my existence has been transformed."

Doctor —— assured him that all he could do was to pray earnestly for him, and that so much he would not fail to do. They parted with a hurried and melancholy valediction. Barton hastened to the carriage that awaited him at the door, drew down the blinds, and drove away, while Doctor —— returned to his chamber, to ruminate at leisure upon the strange interview which had just interrupted his studies.

CHAPTER VI.

SEEN AGAIN.

It was not to be expected that Captain Barton's changed and eccentric habits should long escape remark and discussion. Various were the theories suggested to account for it. Some attributed the alteration to the pressure of secret pecuniary embarrassments; others to a repugnance to fulfil an engagement into which he was presumed to have too precipitately entered; and others, again, to the supposed incipiency of mental disease, which latter, indeed, was the most plausible as well as the most generally, received, of the hypotheses circulated in the gossip of the day.

From the very commencement of this change, at first so gradual in its advances, Miss Montague had of course been aware of it. The intimacy involved in their peculiar relation, as well as the near interest which it inspired afforded, in her case, a like opportunity and motive for the successful exercise of that keen and penetrating observation peculiar to her sex.

His visits became, at length, so interrupted, and his manner, while they lasted, so abstracted, strange, and agitated, that Lady L —— , after hinting her anxiety and her suspicions more than once, at length distinctly stated her anxiety, and pressed for an explanation.

The explanation was given, and although its nature at first relieved the worst solicitudes of the old lady and her niece, yet the circumstances which attended it, and the really dreadful consequences which it obviously indicated, as regarded the spirits, and indeed the reason of the now wretched man, who made the strange declaration, were enough, upon little reflection, to fill their minds with perturbation and alarm.

General Montague, the young lady's father, at length arrived. He had himself slightly known Barton, some ten or twelve years previously, and being aware of his fortune and connexions, was disposed to regard him as an unexceptionable and indeed a most desirable match for his daughter. He laughed at the story of Barton's supernatural visitations, and lost no time in calling upon his intended son-in-law.

"My dear Barton," he continued, gaily, after a little conversation, "my sister tells me that you are a victim to blue devils, in quite a new and original shape."

Barton changed countenance, and sighed profoundly.

"Come, come; I protest this will never do," continued the General; "you are more like a man on his way to the gallows than to the altar. These devils have made quite a saint of you."

Barton made an effort to change the conversation.

"No, no, it won't do," said his visitor laughing; "I am resolved to say what I have to say upon this magnificent mock mystery of yours. You must not be angry, but really it is too bad to see you at your time of life, absolutely frightened into good behaviour, like a naughty child by a bugaboo, and as far as I can learn, a very contemptible one. Seriously, I have been a good deal annoyed at what they tell me; but at the same time thoroughly convinced that there is nothing in the matter that may not cleared up, with a little attention and management, within a week at furthest."

"Ah, General, you do not know— " he began.

"Yes, but I do know quite enough to warrant my confidence," interrupted the soldier, "don't I know that all your annoyance proceeds from the occasional appearance of a certain little man in a cap and greatcoat, with a red vest and a bad face, who follows you about, and pops upon you at corners of lanes, and throws you into ague fits. Now, my dear fellow, I'll make it my business to catch this mischievous little mountebank, and either beat him to a jelly with my own hands, or have him whipped through the town, at the cart's-tail, before a month passes."

"If *you* knew what *I* knew," said Barton, with gloomy agitation, "you would speak very differently. Don't imagine that I am so weak as to assume, without proof the most overwhelming, the conclusion to which I have been forced — the proofs are here, locked up here." As he spoke he tapped upon his breast, and with an anxious sigh continued to walk up and down the room.

"Well, well, Barton," said his visitor, "I'll wager a rump and a dozen I collar the ghost, and convince even you before many days are over."

He was running on in the same strain when he was suddenly arrested, and not a little shocked, by observing Barton, who had approached the window, stagger slowly back, like one who had received a stunning blow; his arm extended toward the street — his face and his very lips white as ashes — while he muttered, “There — by heaven! — there — there!”

General Montague started mechanically to his feet, and from the window of the drawingroom, saw a figure corresponding as well as his hurry would permit him to discern, with the description of the person, whose appearance so persistently disturbed the repose of his friend.

The figure was just turning from the rails of the area upon which it had been leaning, and, without waiting to see more, the old gentleman snatched his cane and hat, and rushed down the stairs and into the street, in the furious hope of securing the person, and punishing the audacity of the mysterious stranger.

He looked round him, but in vain, for any trace of the person he had himself distinctly seen. He ran breathlessly to the nearest corner, expecting to see from thence the retiring figure, but no such form was visible. Back and forward, from crossing to crossing, he ran, at fault, and it was not until the curious gaze and laughing countenances of the passers-by reminded him of the absurdity of his pursuit, that he checked his hurried pace, lowered his walking cane from the menacing altitude which he had mechanically given it, adjusted his hat, and walked composedly back again, inwardly vexed and flurried. He found Barton pale and trembling in every joint; they both remained silent, though under emotions very different. At last Barton whispered, “You saw it?”

“*It!* — him — some one — you mean — to be sure I did,” replied Montague, testily. “But where is the good or the harm of seeing him? The fellow runs like a lamplighter. I wanted to *catch* him, but he had stole away before I could reach the hall-door. However, it is no great matter; next time, I dare say, I’ll do better; and egad, if I once come within reach of him, I’ll introduce his shoulders to the weight of my cane.”

Notwithstanding General Montague’s undertakings and exhortations, however, Barton continued to suffer from the selfsame unexplained cause; go how, when, or where he would, he was still constantly dogged or confronted by the being who had established over him so horrible an influence.

Nowhere and at no time was he secure against the odious appearance which haunted him with such diabolic perseverance.

His depression, misery, and excitement became more settled and alarming every day, and the mental agonies that ceaselessly preyed upon him, began at last so sensibly to affect his health, that Lady L —— and General Montague succeeded, without, indeed, much difficulty, in persuading him to try a short tour on the Continent, in the hope that an entire change of scene would, at all events, have the effect of breaking through the influences of local association, which the more sceptical of his friends assumed to be by no means inoperative in suggesting and perpetuating what they conceived to be a mere form of nervous illusion.

General Montague indeed was persuaded that the figure which haunted his intended son-in-law was by no means the creation of his imagination, but, on the contrary, a substantial form of flesh and blood, animated by a resolution, perhaps with some murderous object in perspective, to watch and follow the unfortunate gentleman.

Even this hypothesis was not a very pleasant one; yet it was plain that if Barton could ever be convinced that there was nothing preternatural in the phenomenon which he had hitherto regarded in that light, the affair would lose all its terrors in his eyes, and wholly cease to exercise upon his health and spirits the baleful influence which it had hitherto done. He therefore reasoned, that if the annoyance were actually escaped by mere locomotion and change of scene, it obviously could not have originated in any supernatural agency.

CHAPTER VII.

FLIGHT.

Yielding to their persuasions, Barton left Dublin for England, accompanied by General Montague. They posted rapidly to London, and thence to Dover, whence they took the packet with a fair wind for Calais. The General's confidence in the result of the expedition on Barton's spirits had risen day by day, since their departure from the shores of Ireland; for to the inexpressible relief and delight of the latter, he had not since then, so much as even once fancied a repetition of those impressions which had, when at home, drawn him gradually down to the very depths of despair.

This exemption from what he had begun to regard as the inevitable condition of his existence, and the sense of security which began to pervade his mind, were inexpressibly delightful; and in the exultation of what he considered his deliverance, he indulged in a thousand happy anticipations for a future into which so lately he had hardly dared to look; and in short, both he and his companion secretly congratulated themselves upon the termination of that persecution which had been to its immediate victim a source of such unspeakable agony.

It was a beautiful day, and a crowd of idlers stood upon the jetty to receive the packet, and enjoy the bustle of the new arrivals. Montague walked a few paces in advance of his friend, and as he made his way through the crowd, a little man touched his arm, and said to him, in a broad provincial *patois* —

"Monsieur is walking too fast; he will lose his sick comrade in the throng, for, by my faith, the poor gentleman seems to be fainting."

Montague turned quickly, and observed that Barton did indeed look deadly pale. He hastened to his side.

"My dear fellow, are you ill?" he asked anxiously.

The question was unheeded and twice, repeated, ere Barton stammered —

"I saw him — by —— , I saw him!"

"*Him!* — the wretch — who — where now? — where is he?" cried Montague, looking around him.

"I saw him — but he is gone," repeated Barton, faintly.

"But where — where? For God's sake speak," urged Montague, vehemently.

"It is but this moment — *here*," said he.

"But what did he look like — what had he on — what did he wear — quick, quick," urged his excited companion, ready to dart among the crowd and collar the delinquent on the spot.

"He touched your arm — he spoke to you — he pointed to me. God be merciful to me, there is no escape," said Barton, in the low, subdued tones of despair.

Montague had already bustled away in all the flurry of mingled hope and rage; but though the singular *personnel* of the stranger who had accosted him was vividly impressed upon his recollection, he failed to discover among the crowd even the slightest resemblance to him.

After a fruitless search, in which he enlisted the services of several of the bystanders, who aided all the more zealously, as they believed he had been robbed, he at length, out of breath and baffled, gave over the attempt.

"Ah, my friend, it won't do," said Barton, with the faint voice and bewildered, ghastly look of one who had been stunned by some mortal shock; "there is no use in contending; whatever it is, the dreadful association between me and it, is now established — I shall never escape — never!"

"Nonsense, nonsense, my dear Barton; don't talk so," said Montague with something at once of irritation and dismay; "you must not, I say; we'll jockey the scoundrel yet; never mind, I say — never mind."

It was, however, but labour lost to endeavour henceforward to inspire Barton with one ray of hope; he became desponding.

This intangible, and, as it seemed, utterly inadequate influence was fast destroying his energies of intellect, character, and health. His first object was now to return to Ireland, there, as he believed, and now almost hoped, speedily to die.

To Ireland accordingly he came and one of the first faces he saw upon the shore, was again that of his implacable and dreaded attendant. Barton seemed at last to have lost not only all enjoyment and every hope in existence, but all independence of will besides. He now submitted himself passively to the management of the friends most nearly interested in his welfare.

With the apathy of entire despair, he implicitly assented to whatever measures they suggested and advised; and as a last resource, it was determined to remove him to a house of Lady L — — ‘s, in the neighbourhood of Clontarf, where, with the advice of his medical attendant, who persisted in his opinion that the whole train of consequences resulted merely from some nervous derangement, it was resolved that he was to confine himself, strictly to the house, and to make use only of those apartments which commanded a view of an enclosed yard, the gates of which were to be kept jealously locked.

Those precautions would certainly secure him against the casual appearance of any living form, that his excited imagination might possibly confound with the spectre which, as it was contended, his fancy recognised in every figure that bore even a distant or general resemblance to the peculiarities with which his fancy had at first invested it.

A month or six weeks’ absolute seclusion under these conditions, it was hoped might, by interrupting the series of these terrible impressions, gradually dispel the predisposing apprehensions, and the associations which had confirmed the supposed disease, and rendered recovery hopeless.

Cheerful society and that of his friends was to be constantly supplied, and on the whole, very sanguine expectations were indulged in, that under the treatment thus detailed, the obstinate hypochondria of the patient might at length give way.

Accompanied, therefore, by Lady L —— , General Montague and his daughter — his own affianced bride — poor Barton — himself never daring to cherish a hope of his ultimate emancipation from the horrors under which his life was literally wasting away — took possession of the apartments, whose situation protected him against the intrusions, from which he shrank with such unutterable terror.

After a little time, a steady persistence in this system began to manifest its results, in a very marked though gradual improvement, alike in the health and spirits of the invalid. Not, indeed, that anything at all approaching complete recovery was yet discernible. On the contrary, to those who had not seen him since the commencement of his strange sufferings, such an alteration would have been apparent as might well have shocked them.

The improvement, however, such as it was, was welcomed with gratitude and delight, especially by the young lady, whom her attachment to him, as well as her now singularly painful position, consequent on his protracted illness, rendered an object scarcely one degree less to be commiserated than himself.

A week passed — a fortnight — a month — and yet there had been no recurrence of the hated visitation. The treatment had, so far forth, been followed by complete success. The chain of associations was broken. The constant pressure upon the overtasked spirits had been removed, and, under these comparatively favourable circumstances, the sense of social community with the world about him, and something of human interest, if not of enjoyment, began to reanimate him.

It was about this time that Lady L —— who, like most old ladies of the day, was deep in family receipts, and a great pretender to medical science, dispatched her own maid to the kitchen garden, with a list of herbs, which were there to be carefully culled, and brought back to her housekeeper for the purpose stated. The handmaiden, however, returned with her task scarce half completed, and a good deal flurried and alarmed. Her mode of accounting for her precipitate retreat and evident agitation was odd, and, to the old lady, startling.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOFTENED.

It appeared that she had repaired to the kitchen garden, pursuant to her mistress's directions, and had there begun to make the specified election among the rank and neglected herbs which crowded one corner of the enclosure, and while engaged in this pleasant labour, she carelessly sang a fragment of an old song, as she said, "to keep herself company." She was, however, interrupted by an ill-natured laugh; and, looking up, she saw through the old thorn hedge, which surrounded the garden, a singularly ill-looking little man, whose countenance wore the stamp of menace and malignity, standing close to her, at the other side of the hawthorn screen.

She described herself as utterly unable to move or speak, while he charged her with a message for Captain Barton; the substance of which she distinctly remembered to have been to the effect, that he, Captain Barton, must come abroad as usual, and show himself to his friends, out of doors, or else prepare for a visit in his own chamber.

On concluding this brief message, the stranger had, with a threatening air, got down into the outer ditch, and, seizing the hawthorn stems in his hands, seemed on the point of climbing through the fence — a feat which might have been accomplished without much difficulty.

Without, of course, awaiting this result, the girl — throwing down her treasures of thyme and rosemary — had turned and run, with the swiftness of terror, to the house. Lady L —— commanded her, on pain of instant dismissal, to observe an absolute silence respecting all that passed of the incident which related to Captain Barton; and, at the same time, directed instant search to be made by her men, in the garden and the fields adjacent. This measure, however, was as usual, unsuccessful, and, filled with undefinable misgivings, Lady L —— communicated the incident to her brother. The story, however, until long afterwards, went no further, and, of course, it was jealously guarded from Barton, who continued to amend, though slowly.

Barton now began to walk occasionally in the courtyard which I have mentioned, and which being enclosed by a high wall, commanded no view beyond its own extent. Here he, therefore, considered himself perfectly secure: and, but for a careless violation of orders by one of the grooms, he might have enjoyed, at least for some time longer, his much-prized immunity. Opening upon the public road, this yard was entered by a wooden gate, with a wicket in it, and was further defended by an iron gate upon the outside. Strict orders had been given to keep both carefully locked; but, spite of these, it had happened that one day, as Barton was slowly pacing this narrow enclosure, in his accustomed walk, and reaching the further extremity, was turning to retrace his steps, he saw the boarded wicket ajar, and the face of his tormentor immovably looking at him through the iron bars. For a few seconds he stood rivetted to the earth — breathless and bloodless — in the fascination of that dreaded gaze, and then fell helplessly insensible, upon the pavement.

There he was found a few minutes afterwards, and conveyed to his room — the apartment which he was never afterwards to leave alive. Henceforward a marked and unaccountable change was observable in the tone of his mind. Captain Barton was now no longer the excited and despairing man he had been before; a strange alteration had passed upon him — an unearthly tranquillity reigned in his mind — it was the anticipated stillness of the grave.

“Montague, my friend, this struggle is nearly ended now,” he said, tranquilly, but with a look of fixed and fearful awe. “I have, at last, some comfort from that world of spirits, from which my punishment has come. I now know that my sufferings will soon be over.”

Montague pressed him to speak on.

“Yes,” said he, in a softened voice, “my punishment is nearly ended. From sorrow, perhaps I shall never, in time or eternity, escape; but my *agony* is almost over. Comfort has been revealed to me, and what remains of my allotted struggle I will bear with submission — even with hope.”

“I am glad to hear you speak so tranquilly, my dear Barton,” said Montague; “peace and cheer of mind are all you need to make you what you were.”

“No, no — I never can be that,” said he mournfully. “I am no longer fit for life. I am soon to die. I am to see him but once again, and then all is ended."

"He said so, then?" suggested Montague.

"*He?* — No, no: good tidings could scarcely come through him; and these were good and welcome; and they came so solemnly and sweetly — with unutterable love and melancholy, such as I could not — without saying more than is needful, or fitting, of other long-past scenes and persons — fully explain to you." As Barton said this he shed tears.

"Come, come," said Montague, mistaking the source of his emotions, "you must not give way. What is it, after all, but a pack of dreams and nonsense; or, at worst, the practices of a scheming rascal that enjoys his power of playing upon your nerves, and loves to exert it — a sneaking vagabond that owes you a grudge, and pays it off this way, not daring to try a more manly one."

"A grudge, indeed, he owes me — you say rightly," said Barton, with a sudden shudder; "a grudge as you call it. Oh, my God! when the justice of Heaven permits the Evil one to carry out a scheme of vengeance — when its execution is committed to the lost and terrible victim of sin, who owes his own ruin to the man, the very man, whom he is commissioned to pursue — then, indeed, the torments and terrors of hell are anticipated on earth. But heaven has dealt mercifully with me — hope has opened to me at last; and if death could come without the dreadful sight I am doomed to see, I would gladly close my eyes this moment upon the world. But though death is welcome, I shrink with an agony you cannot understand — an actual frenzy of terror — from the last encounter with that — that demon, who has drawn me thus to the verge of the chasm, and who is himself to plunge me down. I am to see him again — once more — but under circumstances unutterably more terrific than ever."

As Barton thus spoke, he trembled so violently that Montague was really alarmed at the extremity of his sudden agitation, and hastened to lead him back to the topic which had before seemed to exert so tranquillizing an effect upon his mind.

"It was not a dream," he said, after a time; "I was in a different state — I felt differently and strangely; and yet it was all as real, as clear, and vivid, as what I now see and hear — it was a reality."

"And what *did* you see and hear?" urged his companion.

“When I wakened from the swoon I fell into on seeing *him*,” said Barton, continuing as if he had not heard the question, “it was slowly, very slowly — I was lying by the margin of a broad lake, with misty hills all round, and a soft, melancholy, rose-coloured light illuminated it all. It was unusually sad and lonely, and yet more beautiful than any earthly scene. My head was leaning on the lap of a girl, and she was singing a song, that told, I know not how — whether by words or harmonies — of all my life — all that is past, and all that is still to come; and with the song the old feelings that I thought had perished within me came back, and tears flowed from my eyes — partly for the song and its mysterious beauty, and partly for the unearthly sweetness of her voice; and yet I knew the voice — oh! how well; and I was spellbound as I listened and looked at the solitary scene, without stirring, almost without breathing — and, alas! alas! without turning my eyes toward the face that I knew was near me, so sweetly powerful was the enchantment that held me. And so, slowly, the song and scene grew fainter, and fainter, to my senses, till all was dark and still again. And then I awoke to this world, as you saw, comforted, for I knew that I was forgiven much.” Barton wept again long and bitterly.

From this time, as we have said, the prevailing tone of his mind was one of profound and tranquil melancholy. This, however, was not without its interruptions. He was thoroughly impressed with the conviction that he was to experience another and a final visitation, transcending in horror all he had before experienced. From this anticipated and unknown agony, he often shrank in such paroxysms of abject terror and distraction, as filled the whole household with dismay and superstitious panic. Even those among them who affected to discredit the theory of preternatural agency, were often in their secret souls visited during the silence of night with qualms and apprehensions, which they would not have readily confessed; and none of them attempted to dissuade Barton from the resolution on which he now systematically acted, of shutting himself up in his own apartment. The window-blinds of this room were kept jealously down; and his own man was seldom out of his presence, day or night, his bed being placed in the same chamber.

This man was an attached and respectable servant; and his duties, in addition to those ordinarily imposed upon valets, but which Barton’s independent habits generally dispensed with, were to attend carefully to the simple precautions by means of which his master hoped to exclude the dreaded intrusion of the “Watcher.” And, in addition to attending to those arrangements, which amounted merely to guarding against the possibility of his master’s being, through any unscreened window or open door, exposed to the dreaded influence, the valet was never to suffer him to be alone — total solitude, even for a minute, had become to him now almost as intolerable as the idea of going abroad into the public ways — it was an instinctive anticipation of what was coming.

CHAPTER IX.

REQUIESCAT.

It is needless to say, that under these circumstances, no steps were taken toward the fulfilment of that engagement into which he had entered. There was quite disparity enough in point of years, and indeed of habits, between the young lady and Captain Barton, to have precluded anything like very vehement or romantic attachment on her part. Though grieved and anxious, therefore, she was very far from being heartbroken.

Miss Montague, however, devoted much of her time to the patient but fruitless attempt to cheer the unhappy invalid. She read for him, and conversed with him; but it was apparent that whatever exertions he made, the endeavour to escape from the one ever waking fear that preyed upon him, was utterly and miserably unavailing.

Young ladies are much given to the cultivation of pets; and among those who shared the favour of Miss Montague was a fine old owl, which the gardener, who caught him napping among the ivy of a ruined stable, had dutifully presented to that young lady.

The caprice which regulates such preferences was manifested in the extravagant favour with which this grim and ill-favoured bird was at once distinguished by his mistress; and, trifling as this whimsical circumstance may seem, I am forced to mention it, inasmuch as it is connected, oddly enough, with the concluding scene of the story.

Barton, so far from sharing in this liking for the new favourite, regarded it from the first with an antipathy as violent as it was utterly unaccountable. Its very vicinity was unsupportable to him. He seemed to hate and dread it with a vehemence absolutely laughable, and which to those who have never witnessed the exhibition of antipathies of this kind, would seem all but incredible.

With these few words of preliminary explanation, I shall proceed to state the particulars of the last scene in this strange series of incidents. It was almost two o’clock one winter’s night, and Barton was, as usual at that hour, in his bed; the servant we have mentioned occupied a smaller bed in the same room, and a light was burning. The man was on a sudden aroused by his master, who said —

"I can't get it out of my head that that accursed bird has got out somehow, and is lurking in some corner of the room. I have been dreaming about him. Get up, Smith, and look about; search for him. Such hateful dreams!"

The servant rose, and examined the chamber, and while engaged in so doing, he heard the well-known sound, more like a long-drawn gasp than a hiss, with which these birds from their secret haunts affright the quiet of the night.

This ghostly indication of its proximity — for the sound proceeded from the passage upon which Barton's chamber-door opened — determined the search of the servant, who, opening the door, proceeded a step or two forward for the purpose of driving the bird away. He had however, hardly entered the lobby, when the door behind him slowly swung to under the impulse, as it seemed, of some gentle current of air; but as immediately over the door there was a kind of window, intended in the day time to aid in lighting the passage, and through which at present the rays of the candle were issuing, the valet could see quite enough for his purpose.

As he advanced he heard his master — who, lying in a well-curtained bed, had not, as it seemed, perceived his exit from the room — call him by name, and direct him to place the candle on the table by his bed. The servant, who was now some way in the long passage, and not liking to raise his voice for the purpose of replying, lest he should startle the sleeping inmates of the house, began to walk hurriedly and softly back again, when, to his amazement, he heard a voice in the interior of the chamber answering calmly, and actually saw, through the window which overtopped the door, that the light was slowly shifting, as if carried across the room in answer to his master's call. Palsied by a feeling akin to terror, yet not unmingled with curiosity, he stood breathless and listening at the threshold, unable to summon resolution to push open the door and enter. Then came a rustling of the curtains, and a sound like that of one who in a low voice hushes a child to rest, in the midst of which he heard Barton say, in a tone of stifled horror — "Oh, God — oh, my God!" and repeat the same exclamation several times. Then ensued a silence, which again was broken by the same strange soothing sound; and at last there burst forth, in one swelling peal, a yell of agony so appalling and hideous, that, under some impulse of ungovernable horror, the man rushed to the door, and with his whole strength strove to force it open. Whether it was that, in his agitation, he had himself but imperfectly turned the handle, or that the door was really secured upon the inside, he failed to effect an entrance; and as he tugged and pushed, yell after yell rang louder and wilder through the chamber, accompanied all the while by the same hushed sounds. Actually freezing with terror, and scarce knowing what he did, the man turned and ran down the passage, wringing his hands in the extremity of horror and irresolution. At the stairhead he was encountered by General Montague, scared and eager, and just as they met the fearful sounds had ceased.

"What is it? Who — where is your master?" said Montague with the incoherence of extreme agitation. "Has anything — for God's sake is anything wrong?"

"Lord have mercy on us, it's all over," said the man staring wildly towards his master's chamber. "He's dead, sir, I'm sure he's dead."

Without waiting for inquiry or explanation, Montague, closely followed by the servant, hurried to the chamber-door, turned the handle, and pushed it open. As the door yielded to his pressure, the ill-omened bird of which the servant had been in search, uttering its spectral warning, started suddenly from the far side of the bed, and flying through the doorway close over their heads, and extinguishing, in his passage, the candle which Montague carried, crashed through the skylight that overlooked the lobby, and sailed away into the darkness of the outer space.

"There it is, God bless us," whispered the man, after a breathless pause.

"Curse that bird," muttered the General, startled by the suddenness of the apparition, and unable to conceal his discomposure.

"The candle is moved," said the man, after another breathless pause, pointing to the candle that still burned in the room; "see, they put it by the bed."

"Draw the curtains, fellow, and don't stand gaping there," whispered Montague, sternly.

The man hesitated.

"Hold this, then," said Montague, impatiently thrusting the candlestick into the servant's hand, and himself advancing to the bedside, he drew the curtains apart. The light of the candle, which was still burning at the bedside, fell upon a figure huddled together, and half upright, at the head of the bed. It seemed as though it had slunk back as far as the solid panelling would allow, and the hands were still clutched in the bedclothes.

"Barton, Barton, *Barton*!" cried the General, with a strange mixture of awe and vehemence. He took the candle, and held it so that it shone full upon the face. The features were fixed, stern, and white; the jaw was fallen; and the sightless eyes, still open, gazed vacantly forward toward the front of the bed. "God Almighty! he's dead," muttered the General, as he looked upon this fearful spectacle. They both continued to gaze upon it in silence for a minute or more. "And cold, too," whispered Montague, withdrawing his hand from that of the dead man.

"And see, see — may I never have life, sir," added the man, after a another pause, with a shudder, "but there was something else on the bed with him. Look there — look there — see that, sir."

As the man thus spoke, he pointed to a deep indenture, as if caused by a heavy pressure, near the foot of the bed.

Montague was silent.

"Come, sir, come away, for God's sake," whispered the man, drawing close up to him, and holding fast by his arm, while he glanced fearfully round; "what good can be done here now — come away, for God's sake!"

At this moment they heard the steps of more than one approaching, and Montague, hastily desiring the servant to arrest their progress, endeavoured to loose the rigid gripe with which the fingers of the dead man were clutched in the bedclothes, and drew, as well as he was able, the awful figure into a reclining posture; then closing the curtains carefully upon it, he hastened himself to meet those persons that were approaching.

It is needless to follow the personages so slightly connected with this narrative, into the events of their after life; it is enough to say, that no clue to the solution of these mysterious occurrences was ever after discovered; and so long an interval having now passed since the event which I have just described concluded this strange history, it is scarcely to be expected that time can throw any new lights upon its dark and inexplicable outline. Until the secrets of the earth shall be no longer hidden, therefore, these transactions must remain shrouded in their original obscurity.

The only occurrence in Captain Barton's former life to which reference was ever made, as having any possible connexion with the sufferings with which his existence closed, and which he himself seemed to regard as working out a retribution for some grievous sin of his past life, was a circumstance which not for several years after his death was brought to light. The nature of this disclosure was painful to his relatives, and discreditable to his memory.

It appeared that some six years before Captain Barton's final return to Dublin, he had formed, in the town of Plymouth, a guilty attachment, the object of which was the daughter of one of the ship's crew under his command. The father had visited the frailty of his unhappy child with extreme harshness, and even brutality, and it was said that she had died heartbroken. Presuming upon Barton's implication in her guilt, this man had conducted himself toward him with marked insolence, and Barton retaliated this, and what he resented with still more exasperated bitterness — his treatment of the unfortunate girl — by a systematic exercise of those terrible and arbitrary severities which the regulations of the navy placed at the command of those who are responsible for its discipline. The man had at length made his escape, while the vessel was in port at Naples, but died, as it was said, in an hospital in that town, of the wounds inflicted in one of his recent and sanguinary punishments.

Whether these circumstances in reality bear, or not, upon the occurrences of Barton's afterlife, it is, of course, impossible to say. It seems, however more than probable that they were at least, in his own mind, closely associated with them. But however the truth may be, as to the origin and motives of this mysterious persecution, there can be no doubt that, with respect to the agencies by which it was accomplished, absolute and impenetrable mystery is like to prevail until the day of doom.

POSTSCRIPT BY THE EDITOR.

The preceding narrative is given in the *ipsissima verba* of the good old clergyman, under whose hand it was delivered to Doctor Hesselius. Notwithstanding the occasional stiffness and redundancy of his sentences, I thought it better to reserve to myself the power of assuring the reader, that in handing to the printer, the M.S. of a statement so marvellous, the Editor has not altered one letter of the original text. — [*Ed. Papers of Dr. Hesselius.*]

MR. JUSTICE HARBOTTLE.

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PROLOGUE.

On this case, Doctor Hesselius has inscribed nothing more than the words, "Harman's Report," and a simple reference to his own extraordinary Essay on "the Interior Sense, and the Conditions of the opening thereof."

The reference is to Vol. I. Section 317, Note Z^a. The note to which reference is thus made, simply says: "There are two accounts of the remarkable case of the Honourable Mr. Justice Harbottle, one furnished to me by Mrs. Trimmer of Tunbridge Wells (June, 1805); the other at a much later date, by Anthony Harman, Esq. I much prefer the former; in the first place, because it is minute and detailed, and written, it seems to me, with more caution and knowledge; and in the next, because the letters from Doctor Hedstone, which are embodied in it, furnish matter of the highest value to a right apprehension of the nature of the case. It was one of the best declared cases of an opening of the interior sense, which I have met with. It was affected, too, by the phenomenon, which occurs so frequently as to indicate a law of these eccentric conditions; that is to say, it exhibited, what I may term, the contagious character of this sort of intrusion of the spirit-world upon the proper domain of matter. So soon as the spirit-action has established itself in the case of one patient, its developed energy begins to radiate, more or less effectually, upon others. The interior vision of the child was opened; as was, also, that of its mother, Mrs. Pyneweck; and both the interior vision and hearing of the scullery-maid, were opened on the same occasion. After-appearances are the result of the law explained in Vol. II. Section 17 to 49. The common centre of association, simultaneously recalled, unites, or *re*unites, as the case may be, for a period measured, as we see, in Section 37. The *maximum* will extend to days, the *minimum* is little more than a second. We see the operation of this principle perfectly displayed, in certain cases of lunacy, of epilepsy, of catalepsy, and of mania, of a peculiar and painful character, though unattended by incapacity of business."

The memorandum of the case of Judge Harbottle, which was written by Mrs. Trimmer of Tunbridge Wells, which Doctor Hesselius thought the better of the two, I have been unable to discover among his papers. I found in his escritoire a note to the effect that he had lent the Report of Judge

Harbottle's case, written by Mrs. Trimmer to Doctor F. Heyne. To that learned and able gentleman accordingly I wrote, and received from him, in his reply, which was full of alarms and regrets on account of the uncertain safety of that "valuable MS.," a line written long since by Doctor Hesselius, which completely exonerated him, inasmuch as it acknowledged the safe return of the papers. The Narrative of Mr. Harman, is, therefore, the only one available for this collection. The late Dr. Hesselius, in another passage of the note that I have cited, says, "As to the facts (non-medical) of the case, the narrative of Mr. Harman exactly tallies with that furnished by Mrs. Trimmer." The strictly scientific view of the case would scarcely interest the popular reader; and, possibly, for the purposes of this selection, I should, even had I both papers to choose between, have preferred that of Mr. Harman, which is given, in full, in the following pages.

CHAPTER I.

THE JUDGE’S HOUSE.

Thirty years ago, an elderly man, to whom I paid quarterly a small annuity charged on some property of mine, came on the quarter-day to receive it. He was a dry, sad, quiet man, who had known better days, and had always maintained an unexceptionable character. No better authority could be imagined for a ghost story.

He told me one, though with a manifest reluctance; he was drawn into the narration by his choosing to explain what I should not have remarked, that he had called two days earlier than that week after the strict day of payment, which he had usually allowed to elapse. His reason was a sudden determination to change his lodgings, and the consequent necessity of paying his rent a little before it was due.

He lodged in a dark street in Westminster, in a spacious old house, very warm, being wainscoted from top to bottom, and furnished with no undue abundance of windows, and those fitted with thick sashes and small panes.

This house was, as the bills upon the windows testified, offered to be sold or let. But no one seemed to care to look at it.

A thin matron, in rusty black silk, very taciturn, with large, steady, alarmed eyes, that seemed to look in your face, to read what you might have seen in the dark rooms and passages through which you had passed, was in charge of it, with a solitary ‘maid-of-all-work’ under her command. My poor friend had taken lodgings in this house, on account of their extraordinary cheapness. He had occupied them for nearly a year without the slightest disturbance, and was the only tenant, under rent, in the house. He had two rooms; a sitting-room, and a bedroom with a closet opening from it, in which he kept his books and papers locked up. He had gone to his bed, having also locked the outer door. Unable to sleep, he had lighted a candle, and after having read for a time, had laid the book beside him. He heard the old clock at the stairhead strike one; and very shortly after, to his alarm, he saw the closet-door, which he thought he had locked, open stealthily, and a slight dark man, particularly sinister, and somewhere about fifty, dressed in mourning of a very antique fashion, such a suit as we see in Hogarth, entered the room on tip-toe. He was followed by an elder man, stout, and blotched with scurvy, and whose features, fixed as a corpse's, were stamped with dreadful force with a character of sensuality and villany.

This old man wore a flowered-silk dressing-gown and ruffles, and he remarked a gold ring on his finger, and on his head a cap of velvet, such as, in the days of perukes, gentlemen wore in undress.

This direful old man carried in his ringed and ruffled hand a coil of rope; and these two figures crossed the floor diagonally, passing the foot of his bed, from the closet-door at the farther end of the room, at the left, near the window, to the door opening upon the lobby, close to the bed's head, at his right.

He did not attempt to describe his sensations as these figures passed so near him. He merely said, that so far from sleeping in that room again, no consideration the world could offer would induce him so much as to enter it again alone, even in the daylight. He found both doors, that of the closet, and that of the room opening upon the lobby, in the morning fast locked, as he had left them before going to bed.

In answer to a question of mine, he said that neither appeared the least conscious of his presence. They did not seem to glide, but walked as living men do, but without any sound, and he felt a vibration on the floor as they crossed it. He so obviously suffered from speaking about the apparitions, that I asked him no more questions.

There were in his description, however, certain coincidences so very singular, as to induce me, by that very post, to write to a friend much my senior, then living in a remote part of England, for the information which I knew he could give me. He had himself more than once pointed out that old house to my attention, and told me, though very briefly, the strange story which I now asked him to give me in greater detail.

His answer satisfied me; and the following pages convey its substance.

Your letter (he wrote) tells me you desire some particulars about the closing years of the life of Mr. Justice Harbottle, one of the judges of the Court of Common Pleas. You refer, of course, to the extraordinary occurrences that made that period of his life long after a theme for 'winter tales' and metaphysical speculation. I happen to know perhaps more than any other man living of those mysterious particulars.

The old family mansion, when I revisited London, more than thirty years ago, I examined for the last time. During the years that have passed since then, I hear that improvement, with its preliminary demolitions, has been doing wonders for the quarter of Westminster in which it stood. If I were quite certain that the house had been taken down, I should have no difficulty about naming the street in which it stood. As what I have to tell, however, is not likely to improve its letting value, and as I should not care to get into trouble, I prefer being silent on that particular point.

How old the house was, I can't tell. People said it was built by Roger Harbottle, a Turkey merchant, in the reign of King James I. I am not a good opinion upon such questions; but having been in it, though in its forlorn and deserted state. I can tell you in a general way what it was like. It was built of dark-red brick, and the door and windows were faced with stone that had turned yellow by time. It receded some feet from the line of the other houses in the street; and it had a florid and fanciful rail of iron about the broad steps that invited your ascent to the hall-door, in which were fixed, under a file of lamps, among scrolls and twisted leaves, two immense 'extinguishers,' like the conical caps of fairies, into which, in old times, the footmen used to thrust their flambeaux when their chairs or coaches had set down their great people, in the hall or at the steps, as the case might be. That hall is panelled up to the ceiling, and has a large fireplace. Two or three stately old rooms open from it at each side. The windows of these are tall, with many small panes. Passing through the arch at the back of the hall, you come upon the wide and heavy well-staircase. There is a back staircase also. The mansion is large, and has not as much light, by any means, in proportion to its extent, as modern houses enjoy. When I saw it, it had long been untenanted, and had the gloomy reputation beside of a haunted house. Cobwebs floated from the ceilings or spanned the corners of the cornices, and dust lay thick over everything. The windows were stained with the dust and rain of fifty years, and darkness had thus grown darker.

When I made it my first visit, it was in company with my father, when I was still a boy, in the year 1808. I was about twelve years old, and my imagination impressible, as it always is at that age. I looked about me with great awe. I was here in the very centre and scene of those occurrences which I had heard recounted at the fireside at home, with so delightful a horror.

My father was an old bachelor of nearly sixty when he married. He had, when a child, seen Judge Harbottle on the bench in his robes and wig a dozen times at least before his death, which took place in 1748, and his appearance made a powerful and unpleasant impression, not only on his imagination, but upon his nerves.

The Judge was at that time a man of some sixty-seven years. He had a great mulberry-coloured face, a big, carbuncled nose, fierce eyes, and a grim and brutal mouth. My father, who was young at the time, thought it the most formidable face he had ever seen; for there were evidences of intellectual power in the formation and lines of the forehead. His voice was loud and harsh, and gave effect to the sarcasm which was his habitual weapon on the bench.

This old gentleman had the reputation of being about the wickedest man in England. Even on the bench he now and then showed his scorn of opinion. He had carried cases his own way, it was said, in spite of counsel, authorities, and even of juries, by a sort of cajolery, violence, and bamboozling, that somehow confused and overpowered resistance. He had never actually committed himself; he was too cunning to do that. He had the character of being, however, a dangerous and unscrupulous judge; but his character did not trouble him. The associates he chose for his hours of relaxation cared as little as he did about it.

CHAPTER II.

MR. PETERS.

One night during the session of 1746 this old Judge went down in his chair to wait in one of the rooms of the House of Lords for the result of a division in which he and his order were interested.

This over, he was about to return to his house close by, in his chair; but the night had become so soft and fine that he changed his mind, sent it home empty, and with two footmen, each with a flambeau, set out on foot in preference. Gout had made him rather a slow pedestrian. It took him some time to get through the two or three streets he had to pass before reaching his house.

In one of those narrow streets of tall houses, perfectly silent at that hour, he overtook, slowly as he was walking, a very singular-looking old gentleman.

He had a bottle-green coat on, with a cape to it, and large stone buttons, a broadleafed low-crowned hat, from under which a big powdered wig escaped; he stooped very much, and supported his bending knees with the aid of a crutch-handled cane, and so shuffled and tottered along painfully.

“I ask your pardon, sir,” said this old man in a very quavering voice, as the burly Judge came up with him, and he extended his hand feebly towards his arm.

Mr. Justice Harbottle saw that the man was by no means poorly dressed, and his manner that of a gentleman.

The Judge stopped short, and said, in his harsh peremptory tones, “Well, sir, how can I serve you?”

“Can you direct me to Judge Harbottle’s house? I have some intelligence of the very last importance to communicate to him.”

“Can you tell it before witnesses?” asked the Judge.

“By no means; it must reach *his* ear only,” quavered the old man earnestly.

“If that be so, sir, you have only to accompany me a few steps farther to reach my house, and obtain a private audience; for I am Judge Harbottle.”

With this invitation the infirm gentleman in the white wig complied very readily; and in another minute the stranger stood in what was then termed the front parlour of the Judge's house, *tête-à-tête* with that shrewd and dangerous functionary.

He had to sit down, being very much exhausted, and unable for a little time to speak; and then he had a fit of coughing, and after that a fit of gasping; and thus two or three minutes passed, during which the Judge dropped his roquelaure on an armchair, and threw his cocked-hat over that.

The venerable pedestrian in the white wig quickly recovered his voice. With closed doors they remained together for some time.

There were guests waiting in the drawingrooms, and the sound of men's voices laughing, and then of a female voice singing to a harpsichord, were heard distinctly in the hall over the stairs; for old Judge Harbottle had arranged one of his dubious jollifications, such as might well make the hair of godly men's heads stand upright, for that night.

This old gentleman in the powdered white wig, that rested on his stooped shoulders, must have had something to say that interested the Judge very much; for he would not have parted on easy terms with the ten minutes and upwards which that conference filched from the sort of revelry in which he most delighted, and in which he was the roaring king, and in some sort the tyrant also, of his company.

The footman who showed the aged gentleman out observed that the Judge's mulberry-coloured face, pimples and all, were bleached to a dingy yellow, and there was the abstraction of agitated thought in his manner, as he bid the stranger goodnight. The servant saw that the conversation had been of serious import, and that the Judge was frightened.

Instead of stumping upstairs forthwith to his scandalous hilarities, his profane company, and his great china bowl of punch — the identical bowl from which a bygone Bishop of London, good easy man, had baptised this Judge's grandfather, now clinking round the rim with silver ladles, and hung with scrolls of lemon-peel — instead, I say, of stumping and clambering up the great staircase to the cavern of his Circean enchantment, he stood with his big nose flattened against the window-pane, watching the progress of the feeble old man, who clung stiffly to the iron rail as he got down, step by step, to the pavement.

The hall-door had hardly closed, when the old Judge was in the hall bawling hasty orders, with such stimulating expletives as old colonels under excitement sometimes indulge in now-a-days, with a stamp or two of his big foot, and a waving of his clenched fist in the air. He commanded the footman to overtake the old gentleman in the white wig, to offer him his protection on his way home, and in no case to show his face again without having ascertained where he lodged, and who he was, and all about him.

"By —— , sirrah! if you fail me in this, you doff my livery tonight!"

Forth bounced the stalwart footman, with his heavy cane under his arm, and skipped down the steps, and looked up and down the street after the singular figure, so easy to recognise.

What were his adventures I shall not tell you just now.

The old man, in the conference to which he had been admitted in that stately panelled room, had just told the Judge a very strange story. He might be himself a conspirator; he might possibly be crazed; or possibly his whole story was straight and true.

The aged gentleman in the bottle-green coat, on finding himself alone with Mr. Justice Harbottle, had become agitated. He said,

"There is, perhaps you are not aware, my lord, a prisoner in Shrewsbury jail, charged with having forged a bill of exchange for a hundred and twenty pounds, and his name is Lewis Pyneweck, a grocer of that town."

"Is there?" says the Judge, who knew well that there was.

"Yes, my lord," says the old man.

"Then you had better say nothing to affect this case. If you do, by —— I'll commit you; for I'm to try it," says the Judge, with his terrible look and tone.

"I am not going to do anything of the kind, my lord; of him or his case I know nothing, and care nothing. But a fact has come to my knowledge which it behoves you to well consider."

"And what may that fact be?" inquired the Judge; "I'm in haste, sir, and beg you will use dispatch."

"It has come to my knowledge, my lord, that a secret tribunal is in process of formation, the object of which is to take cognisance of the conduct of the judges; and first, of *your* conduct, my lord: it is a wicked conspiracy."

"Who are of it?" demands the Judge.

"I know not a single name as yet. I know but the fact, my lord; it is most certainly true."

"I'll have you before the Privy Council, sir," says the Judge.

"That is what I most desire; but not for a day or two, my lord."

"And why so?"

"I have not as yet a single name, as I told your lordship; but I expect to have a list of the most forward men in it, and some other papers connected with the plot, in two or three days."

"You said one or two just now."

"About that time, my lord."

"Is this a Jacobite plot?"

"In the main I think it is, my lord."

"Why, then, it is political. I have tried no State prisoners, nor am like to try any such. How, then, doth it concern me?"

"From what I can gather, my lord, there are those in it who desire private revenges upon certain judges."

"What do they call their cabal?"

"The High Court of Appeal, my lord."

"Who are you sir? What is your name?"

"Hugh Peters, my lord."

"That should be a Whig name?"

"It is, my lord."

"Where do you lodge, Mr. Peters?"

"In Thames-street, my lord, over against the sign of the Three Kings."

"Three Kings? Take care one be not too many for you, Mr. Peters! How come you, an honest Whig, as you say, to be privy to a Jacobite plot? Answer me that."

"My lord, a person in whom I take an interest has been seduced to take a part in it; and being frightened at the unexpected wickedness of their plans, he is resolved to become an informer for the Crown."

"He resolves like a wise man, sir. What does he say of the persons? Who are in the plot? Doth he know them?"

"Only two, my lord; but he will be introduced to the club in a few days, and he will then have a list, and more exact information of their plans, and above all of their oaths, and their hours and places of meeting, with which he wishes to be acquainted before they can have any suspicions of his intentions. And being so informed, to whom, think you, my lord, had he best go then?"

"To the king's attorney-general straight. But you say this concerns me, sir, in particular? How about this prisoner, Lewis Pyneweck? Is he one of them?"

"I can't tell, my lord; but for some reason, it is thought your lordship will be well advised if you try him not. For if you do, it is feared 'twill shorten your days."

"So far as I can learn, Mr. Peters, this business smells pretty strong of blood and treason. The king's attorney-general will know how to deal with it. When shall I see you again, sir?"

"If you give me leave, my lord, either before your lordship's court sits, or after it rises, tomorrow. I should like to come and tell your lordship what has passed."

"Do so, Mr. Peters, at nine o'clock tomorrow morning. And see you play me no trick, sir, in this matter; if you do, by —— , sir, I'll lay you by the heels!"

"You need fear no trick from me, my lord; had I not wished to serve you, and acquit my own conscience, I never would have come all this way to talk with your lordship."

"I'm willing to believe you, Mr. Peters; I'm willing to believe you, sir."

And upon this they parted.

"He has either painted his face, or he is consumedly sick," thought the old Judge.

The light had shone more effectually upon his features as he turned to leave the room with a low bow, and they looked, he fancied, unnaturally chalky.

"D — him!" said the judge ungraciously, as he began to scale the stairs: "he has half-spoiled my supper."

But if he had, no one but the Judge himself perceived it, and the evidence was all, as any one might perceive, the other way.

CHAPTER III.

LEWIS PYNEWECK.

In the meantime, the footman dispatched in pursuit of Mr. Peters speedily overtook that feeble gentleman. The old man stopped when he heard the sound of pursuing steps, but any alarms that may have crossed his mind seemed to disappear on his recognising the livery. He very gratefully accepted the proferred assistance, and placed his tremulous arm within the servant's for support. They had not gone far, however, when the old man stopped suddenly, saying,

"Dear me! as I live, I have dropped it. You heard it fall. My eyes, I fear, won't serve me, and I'm unable to stoop low enough; but if you will look, you shall have half the find. It is a guinea; I carried it in my glove."

The street was silent and deserted. The footman had hardly descended to what he termed his "hunkers," and begun to search the pavement about the spot which the old man indicated, when Mr. Peters, who seemed very much exhausted, and breathed with difficulty, struck him a violent blow, from above, over the back of the head with a heavy instrument, and then another; and leaving him bleeding and senseless in the gutter, ran like a lamplighter down a lane to the right, and was gone.

When, an hour later, the watchman brought the man in livery home, still stupid and covered with blood, Judge Harbottle cursed his servant roundly, swore he was drunk, threatened him with an indictment for taking bribes to betray his master, and cheered him with a perspective of the broad street leading from the Old Bailey to Tyburn, the cart's tail, and the hangman's lash.

Notwithstanding this demonstration, the Judge was pleased. It was a disguised "affidavit man," or footpad, no doubt, who had been employed to frighten him. The trick had fallen through.

A "court of appeal," such as the false Hugh Peters had indicated, with assassination for its sanction, would be an uncomfortable institution for a "hanging judge" like the Honourable Justice Harbottle. That sarcastic and ferocious administrator of the criminal code of England, at that time a rather pharisaical, bloody, and heinous system of justice, had reasons of his own for choosing to try that very Lewis Pyneweck, on whose behalf this audacious trick was devised. Try him he would. No man living should take that morsel out of his mouth.

Of Lewis Pyneweck of course, so far as the outer world could see, he knew nothing. He would try him after his fashion, without fear, favour, or affection.

But did he not remember a certain thin man, dressed in mourning, in whose house, in Shrewsbury, the Judge’s lodgings used to be, until a scandal of his ill-treating his wife came suddenly to light? A grocer with a demure look, a soft step, and a lean face as dark as mahogany, with a nose sharp and long, standing ever so little awry, and a pair of dark steady brown eyes under thinly-traced black brows — a man whose thin lips wore always a faint unpleasant smile.

Had not that scoundrel an account to settle with the Judge? had he not been troublesome lately? and was not his name Lewis Pyneweck, some time grocer in Shrewsbury, and now prisoner in the jail of that town?

The reader may take it, if he pleases, as a sign that Judge Harbottle was a good Christian, that he suffered nothing ever from remorse. That was undoubtedly true. He had nevertheless done this grocer, forger, what you will, some five or six years before, a grievous wrong; but it was not that, but a possible scandal, and possible complications, that troubled the learned Judge now.

Did he not, as a lawyer, know, that to bring a man from his shop to the dock, the chances must be at least ninety-nine out of a hundred that he is guilty.

A weak man like his learned brother Withershins was not a judge to keep the highroads safe, and make crime tremble. Old Judge Harbottle was the man to make the evil-disposed quiver, and to refresh the world with showers of wicked blood, and thus save the innocent, to the refrain of the ancient saw he loved to quote:

Foolish pity
Ruins a city.

In hanging that fellow he could not be wrong. The eye of a man accustomed to look upon the dock could not fail to read “villain” written sharp and clear in his plotting face. Of course he would try him, and no one else should.

A saucy-looking woman, still handsome, in a mob-cap gay with blue ribbons, in a saque of flowered silk, with lace and rings on, much too fine for the Judge’s housekeeper, which nevertheless she was, peeped into his study next morning, and, seeing the Judge alone, stepped in.

“Here’s another letter from him, come by the post this morning. Can’t you do nothing for him?” she said wheedlingly, with her arm over his neck, and her delicate finger and thumb fiddling with the lobe of his purple ear.

“I’ll try,” said Judge Harbottle, not raising his eyes from the paper he was reading.

“I knew you’d do what I asked you,” she said.

The Judge clapt his gouty claw over his heart, and made her an ironical bow.

“What,” she asked, “will you do?”

“Hang him,” said the Judge with a chuckle.

“You don’t mean to; no, you don’t, my little man,” said she, surveying herself in a mirror on the wall.

“I’m d —— d but I think you’re falling in love with your husband at last!” said Judge Harbottle.

“I’m blest but I think you’re growing jealous of him,” replied the lady with a laugh. “But no; he was always a bad one to me; I’ve done with him long ago.”

“And he with you, by George! When he took your fortune and your spoons and your earrings, he had all he wanted of you. He drove you from his house; and when he discovered you had made yourself comfortable, and found a good situation, he’d have taken your guineas and your silver and your earrings over again, and then allowed you half-a-dozen years more to make a new harvest for his mill. You don’t wish him good; if you say you do, you lie.”

She laughed a wicked saucy laugh, and gave the terrible Rhadamanthus a playful tap on the chops.

“He wants me to send him money to fee a counsellor,” she said, while her eyes wandered over the pictures on the wall, and back again to the looking-glass; and certainly she did not look as if his jeopardy troubled her very much.

"Confound his impudence, the *scoundrel*!" thundered the old Judge, throwing himself back in his chair, as he used to do *in furore* on the bench, and the lines of his mouth looked brutal, and his eyes ready to leap from their sockets. "If you answer his letter from my house to please yourself, you'll write your next from somebody else's to please me. You understand, my pretty witch, I'll not be pestered. Come, no pouting; whimpering won't do. You don't care a brass farthing for the villain, body or soul. You came here but to make a row. You are one of Mother Carey's chickens; and where you come, the storm is up. Get you gone, baggage! get you *gone*!" he repeated with a stamp; for a knock at the hall-door made her instantaneous disappearance indispensable.

I need hardly say that the venerable Hugh Peters did not appear again. The Judge never mentioned him. But oddly enough, considering how he laughed to scorn the weak invention which he had blown into dust at the very first puff, his white-wigged visitor and the conference in the dark front parlour was often in his memory.

His shrewd eye told him that allowing for change of tints and such disguises as the playhouse affords every night, the features of this false old man, who had turned out too hard for his tall footman, were identical with those of Lewis Pyneweck.

Judge Harbottle made his registrar call upon the crown solicitor, and tell him that there was a man in town who bore a wonderful resemblance to a prisoner in Shrewsbury jail named Lewis Pyneweck, and to make inquiry through the post forthwith whether any one was personating Pyneweck in prison, and whether he had thus or otherwise made his escape.

The prisoner was safe, however, and no question as to his identity.

CHAPTER IV.

INTERRUPTION IN COURT.

In due time Judge Harbottle went circuit; and in due time the judges were in Shrewsbury. News travelled slowly in those days, and newspapers, like the wagons and stagecoaches, took matters easily. Mrs. Pyneweck, in the Judge's house, with a diminished household — the greater part of the Judge's servants having gone with him, for he had given up riding circuit, and travelled in his coach in state — kept house rather solitarily at home.

In spite of quarrels, in spite of mutual injuries — some of them, inflicted by herself, enormous — in spite of a married life of spited bickerings — a life in which there seemed no love or liking or forbearance, for years — now that Pyneweck stood in near danger of death, something like remorse came suddenly upon her. She knew that in Shrewsbury were transacting the scenes which were to determine his fate. She knew she did not love him; but she could not have supposed, even a fortnight before, that the hour of suspense could have affected her so powerfully.

She knew the day on which the trial was expected to take place. She could not get it out of her head for a minute; she felt faint as it drew towards evening.

Two or three days passed; and then she knew that the trial must be over by this time. There were floods between London and Shrewsbury, and news was long delayed. She wished the floods would last for ever. It was dreadful waiting to hear; dreadful to know that the event was over, and that she could not hear till self-willed rivers subsided; dreadful to know that they must subside and the news come at last.

She had some vague trust in the Judge's goodnature, and much in the resources of chance and accident. She had contrived to send the money he wanted. He would not be without legal advice and energetic and skilled support.

At last the news did come — a long arrear all in a gush: a letter from a female friend in Shrewsbury; a return of the sentences, sent up for the Judge; and most important, because most easily got at, being told with great aplomb and brevity, the long-deferred intelligence of the Shrewsbury Assizes in the *Morning Advertiser*. Like an impatient reader of a novel, who reads the last page first, she read with dizzy eyes the list of the executions.

Two were respited, seven were hanged; and in that capital catalogue was this line:

"Lewis Pyneweck — forgery."

She had to read it half-a-dozen times over before she was sure she understood it. Here was the paragraph:

"*Sentence, Death* — 7.

"Executed accordingly, on Friday the 13th instant, to wit:

"Thomas Primer, *alias* Duck — highway robbery.

"Flora Guy — stealing to the value of 11*s. 6d.*

"Arthur Pounden — burglary.

"Matilda Mummery — riot.

"Lewis Pyneweck — forgery, bill of exchange."

And when she reached this, she read it over and over, feeling very cold and sick. This buxom housekeeper was known in the house as Mrs. Carwell — Carwell being her maiden name, which she had resumed.

No one in the house except its master knew her history. Her introduction had been managed craftily. No one suspected that it had been concerted between her and the old reprobate in scarlet and ermine.

Flora Carwell ran up the stairs now, and snatched her little girl, hardly seven years of age, whom she met on the lobby, hurriedly up in her arms, and carried her into her bedroom, without well knowing what she was doing, and sat down, placing the child before her. She was not able to speak. She held the child before her, and looked in the little girl's wondering face, and burst into tears of horror.

She thought, the Judge could have saved him. I daresay he could. For a time she was furious with him; and hugged and kissed her bewildered little girl, who returned her gaze with large round eyes.

That little girl had lost her father, and knew nothing of the matter. She had been always told that her father was dead long ago.

A woman, coarse, uneducated, vain, and violent, does not reason, or even feel, very distinctly; but in these tears of consternation were mingling a self-upbraiding. She felt afraid of that little child.

But Mrs. Carwell was a person who lived not upon sentiment, but upon beef and pudding; she consoled herself with punch; she did not trouble herself long even with resentments; she was a gross and material person, and could not mourn over the irrevocable for more than a limited number of hours, even if she would.

Judge Harbottle was soon in London again. Except the gout, this savage old epicurean never knew a day's sickness. He laughed and coaxed and bullied away the young woman's faint upbraidings, and in a little time Lewis Pyneweck troubled her no more; and the Judge secretly chuckled over the perfectly fair removal of a bore, who might have grown little by little into something very like a tyrant.

It was the lot of the Judge whose adventures I am now recounting to try criminal cases at the Old Bailey shortly after his return. He had commenced his charge to the jury in a case of forgery, and was, after his wont, thundering dead against the prisoner, with many a hard aggravation and cynical gibe, when suddenly all died away in silence, and, instead of looking at the jury, the eloquent Judge was gaping at some person in the body of the court.

Among the persons of small importance who stand and listen at the sides was one tall enough to show with a little prominence; a slight mean figure, dressed in seedy black, lean and dark of visage. He had just handed a letter to the crier, before he caught the Judge's eye.

That Judge descried, to his amazement, the features of Lewis Pyneweck. He has the usual faint thin-lipped smile; and with his blue chin raised in air, and as it seemed quite unconscious of the distinguished notice he has attracted, he was stretching his low cravat with his crooked fingers, while he slowly turned his head from side to side — a process which enabled the Judge to see distinctly a stripe of swollen blue round his neck, which indicated, he thought, the grip of the rope.

This man, with a few others, had got a footing on a step, from which he could better see the court. He now stepped down, and the Judge lost sight of him.

His lordship signed energetically with his hand in the direction in which this man had vanished. He turned to the tipstaff. His first effort to speak ended in a gasp. He cleared his throat, and told the astounded official to arrest that man who had interrupted the court.

“He’s but this moment gone down *there*. Bring him in custody before me, within ten minutes’ time, or I’ll strip your gown from your shoulders and fine the sheriff!” he thundered, while his eyes flashed round the court in search of the functionary.

Attorneys, counsellors, idle spectators, gazed in the direction in which Mr. Justice Harbottle had shaken his gnarled old hand. They compared notes. Not one had seen any one making a disturbance. They asked one another if the Judge was losing his head.

Nothing came of the search. His lordship concluded his charge a great deal more tamely; and when the jury retired, he stared round the court with a wandering mind, and looked as if he would not have given sixpence to see the prisoner hanged.

CHAPTER V.

CALEB SEARCHER.

The Judge had received the letter; had he known from whom it came, he would no doubt have read it instantaneously. As it was he simply read the direction:

To the Honourable
The Lord Justice
Elijah Harbottle,

One of his Majesty's Justices of
the Honourable Court of Common Pleas.

It remained forgotten in his pocket till he reached home.

When he pulled out that and others from the capacious pocket of his coat, it had its turn, as he sat in his library in his thick silk dressing-gown; and then he found its contents to be a closely-written letter, in a clerk's hand, and an enclosure in 'secretary hand,' as I believe the angular scrivinary of law-writings in those days was termed, engrossed on a bit of parchment about the size of this page. The letter said:

"Mr. Justice Harbottle, — My Lord,

"I am ordered by the High Court of Appeal to acquaint your lordship, in order to your better preparing yourself for your trial, that a true bill hath been sent down, and the indictment lieth against your lordship for the murder of one Lewis Pyneweck of Shrewsbury, citizen, wrongfully executed for the forgery of a bill of exchange, on the — the day of —— last, by reason of the wilful perversion of the evidence, and the undue pressure put upon the jury, together with the illegal admission of evidence by your lordship, well knowing the same to be illegal, by all which the promoter of the prosecution of the said indictment, before the High Court of Appeal, hath lost his life.

"And the trial of the said indictment, I am farther ordered to acquaint your lordship is fixed for the 10th day of —— next ensuing, by the right honourable the Lord Chief-Justice Twofold, of the court aforesaid, to wit, the High Court of Appeal, on which day it will most certainly take place. And I am farther to acquaint your lordship, to prevent any surprise or miscarriage, that your case stands first for the said day, and that the said High Court of Appeal sits day and night, and never rises; and herewith, by order of the said court, I furnish your lordship with a copy (extract) of the record in this case, except of the indictment, whereof, notwithstanding, the substance and effect is supplied to your lordship in this Notice. And farther I am to inform you, that in case the jury then to try your lordship should find you guilty, the right honourable the Lord Chief-Justice will, in passing sentence of death upon you, fix the day of execution for the 10th day of —— , being one calendar month from the day of your trial."

It was signed by "CALEB SEARCHER,

"Officer of the Crown Solicitor in the
"Kingdom of Life and Death."

The Judge glanced through the parchment.

"'Sblood! Do they think a man like me is to be bamboozled by their buffoonery?"

The Judge's coarse features were wrung into one of his sneers; but he was pale. Possibly, after all, there was a conspiracy on foot. It was queer. Did they mean to pistol him in his carriage? or did they only aim at frightening him?

Judge Harbottle had more than enough of animal courage. He was not afraid of highwaymen, and he had fought more than his share of duels, being a foul-mouthed advocate while he held briefs at the bar. No one questioned his fighting qualities. But with respect to this particular case of Pyneweck, he lived in a house of glass. Was there not his pretty, dark-eyed, over-dressed housekeeper, Mrs. Flora Carwell? Very easy for people who knew Shrewsbury to identify Mrs. Pyneweck, if once put upon the scent; and had he not stormed and worked hard in that case? Had he not made it hard sailing for the prisoner? Did he not know very well what the bar thought of it? It would be the worst scandal that ever blasted judge.

So much there was intimidating in the matter, but nothing more. The Judge was a little bit gloomy for a day or two after, and more testy with every one than usual.

He locked up the papers; and about a week after he asked his housekeeper, one day, in the library:

“Had your husband never a brother?”

Mrs. Carwell squalled on this sudden introduction of the funereal topic, and cried exemplary “piggins full,” as the Judge used pleasantly to say. But he was in no mood for trifling now, and he said sternly:

“Come, madam! this wearies me. Do it another time; and give me an answer to my question.” So she did.

Pyneweck had no brother living. He once had one; but he died in Jamaica.

“How do you know he is dead?” asked the Judge.

“Because he told me so.”

“Not the dead man?”

“Pyneweck told me so.”

“Is that all?” sneered the Judge.

He pondered this matter; and time went on. The Judge was growing a little morose, and less enjoying. The subject struck nearer to his thoughts than he fancied it could have done. But so it is with most undivulged vexations, and there was no one to whom he could tell this one.

It was now the ninth; and Mr. Justice Harbottle was glad. He knew nothing would come of it. Still it bothered him; and tomorrow would see it well over.

[What of the paper, I have cited? No one saw it during his life; no one, after his death. He spoke of it to Dr. Hedstone; and what purported to be “a copy,” in the old Judge’s handwriting, was found. The original was nowhere. Was it a copy of an illusion, incident to brain disease? Such is my belief.]

CHAPTER VI.

ARRESTED.

Judge Harbottle went this night to the play at Drury Lane. He was one of those old fellows who care nothing for late hours, and occasional knocking about in pursuit of pleasure. He had appointed with two cronies of Lincoln's Inn to come home in his coach with him to sup after the play.

They were not in his box, but were to meet him near the entrance, and to get into his carriage there; and Mr. Justice Harbottle, who hated waiting, was looking a little impatiently from the window.

The Judge yawned.

He told the footman to watch for Counsellor Thavies and Counsellor Beller, who were coming; and, with another yawn, he laid his cocked-hat on his knees, closed his eyes, leaned back in his corner, wrapped his mantle closer about him, and began to think of pretty Mrs. Abington.

And being a man who could sleep like a sailor, at a moment's notice, he was thinking of taking a nap. Those fellows had no business to keep a judge waiting.

He heard their voices now. Those rakehell counsellors were laughing, and bantering, and sparring after their wont. The carriage swayed and jerked, as one got in, and then again as the other followed. The door clapped, and the coach was now jogging and rumbling over the pavement. The Judge was a little bit sulky. He did not care to sit up and open his eyes. Let them suppose he was asleep. He heard them laugh with more malice than goodhumour, he thought, as they observed it. He would give them a d —— d hard knock or two when they got to his door, and till then he would counterfeit his nap.

The clocks were chiming twelve. Beller and Thavies were silent as tombstones. They were generally loquacious and merry rascals.

The Judge suddenly felt himself roughly seized and thrust from his corner into the middle of the seat, and opening his eyes, instantly he found himself between his two companions.

Before he could blurt out the oath that was at his lips, he saw that they were two strangers — evil-looking fellows, each with a pistol in his hand,

and dressed like Bow Street officers.

The Judge clutched at the check-string. The coach pulled up. He stared about him. They were not among houses; but through the windows, under a broad moonlight, he saw a black moor stretching lifelessly from right to left, with rotting trees, pointing fantastic branches in the air, standing here and there in groups, as if they held up their arms and twigs like fingers, in horrible glee at the Judge's coming.

A footman came to the window. He knew his long face and sunken eyes. He knew it was Dingly Chuff, fifteen years ago a footman in his service, whom he had turned off at a moment's notice, in a burst of jealousy, and indicted for a missing spoon. The man had died in prison of the jail-fever.

The Judge drew back in utter amazement. His armed companions signed mutely; and they were again gliding over this unknown moor.

The bloated and gouty old man, in his horror, considered the question of resistance. But his athletic days were long over. This moor was a desert. There was no help to be had. He was in the hands of strange servants, even if his recognition turned out to be a delusion, and they were under the command of his captors. There was nothing for it but submission, for the present.

Suddenly the coach was brought nearly to a standstill, so that the prisoner saw an ominous sight from the window.

It was a gigantic gallows beside the road; it stood three-sided, and from each of its three broad beams at top depended in chains some eight or ten bodies, from several of which the cere-clothes had dropped away, leaving the skeletons swinging lightly by their chains. A tall ladder reached to the summit of the structure, and on the peat beneath lay bones.

On top of the dark transverse beam facing the road, from which, as from the other two completing the triangle of death, dangled a row of these unfortunates in chains, a hangman, with a pipe in his mouth, much as we see him in the famous print of the 'Idle Apprentice,' though here his perch was ever so much higher, was reclining at his ease and listlessly shying bones, from a little heap at his elbow, at the skeletons that hung round, bringing down now a rib or two, now a hand, now half a leg. A long-sighted man could have discerned that he was a dark fellow, lean; and from continually looking down on the earth from the elevation over which, in another sense, he always hung, his nose, his lips, his chin were pendulous and loose, and drawn down into a monstrous grotesque.

This fellow took his pipe from his mouth on seeing the coach, stood up, and cut some solemn capers high on his beam, and shook a new rope in the air, crying with a voice high and distant as the caw of a raven hovering over a gibbet, “A rope for Judge Harbottle!”

The coach was now driving on at its old swift pace.

So high a gallows as that, the Judge had never, even in his most hilarious moments, dreamed of. He thought he must be raving. And the dead footman! He shook his ears and strained his eyelids; but if he was dreaming, he was unable to awake himself.

There was no good in threatening these scoundrels. A *brutum fulmen* might bring a real one on his head.

Any submission to get out of their hands; and then heaven and earth he would move to unearth and hunt them down.

Suddenly they drove round a corner of a vast white building, and under a *porte-cochère*.

CHAPTER VII.

CHIEF JUSTICE TWOFOLD.

The Judge found himself in a corridor lighted with dingy oil-lamps, the walls of bare stone; it looked like a passage in a prison. His guards placed him in the hands of other people. Here and there he saw bony and gigantic soldiers passing to and fro, with muskets over their shoulders. They looked straight before them, grinding their teeth, in bleak fury, with no noise but the clank of their shoes. He saw these by glimpses, round corners, and at the ends of passages, but he did not actually pass them by.

And now, passing under a narrow doorway, he found himself in the dock, confronting a judge in his scarlet robes, in a large court-house. There was nothing to elevate this temple of Themis above its vulgar kind elsewhere. Dingy enough it looked, in spite of candles lighted in decent abundance. A case had just closed, and the last juror's back was seen escaping through the door in the wall of the jury-box. There were some dozen barristers, some fiddling with pen and ink, others buried in briefs, some beckoning, with the plumes of their pens, to their attorneys, of whom there were no lack; there were clerks to-ing and fro-ing, and the officers of the court, and the registrar, who was handing up a paper to the judge; and the tipstaff, who was presenting a note at the end of his wand to a king's counsel over the heads of the crowd between. If this was the High Court of Appeal, which never rose day or night, it might account for the pale and jaded aspect of everybody in it. An air of indescribable gloom hung upon the pallid features of all the people here; no one ever smiled; all looked more or less secretly suffering.

"The King against Elijah Harbottle!" shouted the officer.

"Is the appellant Lewis Pyneweck in court?" asked Chief-Justice Twofold, in a voice of thunder, that shook the woodwork of the Court, and boomed down the corridors.

Up stood Pyneweck from his place at the table.

"Arraign the prisoner!" roared the Chief; and Judge Harbottle felt the pannels of the dock round him, and the floor, and the rails quiver in the vibrations of that tremendous voice.

The prisoner, *in limine*, objected to this pretended court, as being a sham, and non-existent in point of law; and then, that, even if it were a court constituted by law, (the Judge was growing dazed), it had not and could not have any jurisdiction to try him for his conduct on the bench.

Whereupon the chief-justice laughed suddenly, and every one in court, turning round upon the prisoner, laughed also, till the laugh grew and roared all round like a deafening acclamation; he saw nothing but glittering eyes and teeth, a universal stare and grin; but though all the voices laughed, not a single face of all those that concentrated their gaze upon him looked like a laughing face. The mirth subsided as suddenly as it began.

The indictment was read. Judge Harbottle actually pleaded! He pleaded "Not guilty." A jury were sworn. The trial proceeded. Judge Harbottle was bewildered.

This could not be real. He must be either mad, or *going* mad, he thought.

One thing could not fail to strike even him. This Chief-Justice Twofold, who was knocking him about at every turn with sneer and gibe, and roaring him down with his tremendous voice, was a dilated effigy of himself; an image of Mr. Justice Harbottle, at least double his size, and with all his fierce colouring, and his ferocity of eye and visage, enhanced awfully.

Nothing the prisoner could argue, cite, or state was permitted to retard for a moment the march of the case towards its catastrophe.

The chief-justice seemed to feel his power over the jury, and to exult and riot in the display of it. He glared at them, he nodded to them; he seemed to have established an understanding with them. The lights were faint in that part of the court. The jurors were mere shadows, sitting in rows; the prisoner could see a dozen pair of white eyes shining, coldly, out of the darkness; and whenever the judge in his charge, which was contemptuously brief, nodded and grinned and gibed, the prisoner could see, in the obscurity, by the dip of all these rows of eyes together, that the jury nodded in acquiescence.

And now the charge was over, the huge chief-justice leaned back panting and gloating on the prisoner. Every one in the court turned about, and gazed with steadfast hatred on the man in the dock. From the jury-box where the twelve sworn brethren were whispering together, a sound in the general stillness like a prolonged "hiss-s-s!" was heard; and then, in answer to the challenge of the officer, “How say you, gentlemen of the jury, guilty or not guilty?” came in a melancholy voice the finding, “Guilty.”

The place seemed to the eyes of the prisoner to grow gradually darker and darker, till he could discern nothing distinctly but the lumen of the eyes that were turned upon him from every bench and side and corner and gallery of the building. The prisoner doubtless thought that he had quite enough to say, and conclusive, why sentence of death should not be pronounced upon him; but the lord chief-justice puffed it contemptuously away, like so much smoke, and proceeded to pass sentence of death upon the prisoner, having named the 10th of the ensuing month for his execution.

Before he had recovered the stun of this ominous farce, in obedience to the mandate, ‘Remove the prisoner,’ he was led from the dock. The lamps seemed all to have gone out, and there were stoves and charcoal-fires here and there, that threw a faint crimson light on the walls of the corridors through which he passed. The stones that composed them looked now enormous, cracked and unhewn.

He came into a vaulted smithy, where two men, naked to the waist, with heads like bulls, round shoulders, and the arms of giants, were welding red-hot chains together with hammers that pelted like thunderbolts.

They looked on the prisoner with fierce red eyes, and rested on their hammers for a minute; and said the elder to his companion, “Take out Elijah Harbottle’s gyves;” and with a pincers he plucked the end which lay dazzling in the fire from the furnace.

“One end locks,” said he, taking the cool end of the iron in one hand, while with the grip of a vice he seized the leg of the Judge, and locked the ring round his ankle. “The other,” he said with a grin, “is welded.”

The iron band that was to form the ring for the other leg lay still red-hot upon the stone floor, with brilliant sparks sporting up and down its surface.

His companion in his gigantic hands seized the old Judge’s other leg, and pressed his foot immovably to the stone floor; while his senior in a twinkling, with a masterly application of pincers and hammer, sped the glowing bar round his ankle so tight that the skin and sinews smoked and bubbled again, and old Judge Harbottle uttered a yell that seemed to chill the very stones, and make the iron chains quiver on the wall.

Chains, vaults, smiths, and smithy all vanished in a moment; but the pain continued. Mr. Justice Harbottle was suffering torture all round the ankle on which the infernal smiths had just been operating.

His friends Thavies and Beller were startled by the Judge’s roar in the midst of their elegant trifling about a marriage à-la-mode case which was going on. The Judge was in panic as well as pain. The street-lamps and the light of his own hall-door restored him.

“I’m very bad,” growled he between his set teeth; “my foot’s blazing. Who was he that hurt my foot? ’Tis the gout— ’tis the gout!” he said, awaking completely. “How many hours have we been coming from the playhouse? ‘Sblood, what has happened on the way? I’ve slept half the night?”

There had been no hitch or delay, and they had driven home at a good pace.

The Judge, however, was in gout; he was feverish too; and the attack, though very short, was sharp; and when, in about a fortnight, it subsided, his ferocious joviality did not return. He could not get this dream, as he chose to call it, out of his head.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMEBODY HAS GOT INTO THE HOUSE.

People remarked that the Judge was in the vapours. His doctor said he should go for a fortnight to Buxton.

Whenever the Judge fell into a brown study, he was always conning over the terms of the sentence pronounced upon him in his vision— “in one calendar month from the date of this day;” and then the usual form, “and you shall be hanged by the neck till you are dead,” &c. “That will be the 10th — I’m not much in the way of being hanged. I know what stuff dreams are, and I laugh at them; but this is continually in my thoughts, as if it forecast misfortune of some sort. I wish the day my dream gave me were passed and over. I wish I were well purged of my gout. I wish I were as I used to be. ’Tis nothing but vapours, nothing but a maggot.” The copy of the parchment and letter which had announced his trial with many a snort and sneer he would read over and over again, and the scenery and people of his dream would rise about him in places the most unlikely, and steal him in a moment from all that surrounded him into a world of shadows.

The Judge had lost his iron energy and banter. He was growing taciturn and morose. The Bar remarked the change, as well they might. His friends thought him ill. The doctor said he was troubled with hypochondria, and that his gout was still lurking in his system, and ordered him to that ancient haunt of crutches and chalk-stones, Buxton.

The Judge’s spirits were very low; he was frightened about himself; and he described to his housekeeper, having sent for her to his study to drink a dish of tea, his strange dream in his drive home from Drury Lane playhouse. He was sinking into the state of nervous dejection in which men lose their faith in orthodox advice, and in despair consult quacks, astrologers, and nursery story-tellers. Could such a dream mean that he was to have a fit, and so die on the 10th? She did not think so. On the contrary, it was certain some good luck must happen on that day.

The Judge kindled; and for the first time for many days, he looked for a minute or two like himself, and he tapped her on the cheek with the hand that was not in flannel.

"Odsbud! odsheart! you dear rogue! I had forgot. There is young Tom — yellow Tom, my nephew, you know, lies sick at Harrogate; why shouldn't he go that day as well as another, and if he does, I get an estate by it? Why, lookee, I asked Doctor Hedstone yesterday if I was like to take a fit any time, and he laughed, and swore I was the last man in town to go off that way."

The Judge sent most of his servants down to Buxton to make his lodgings and all things comfortable for him. He was to follow in a day or two.

It was now the 9th; and the next day well over, he might laugh at his visions and auguries.

On the evening of the 9th, Doctor Hedstone's footman knocked at the Judge's door. The doctor ran up the dusky stairs to the drawingroom. It was a March evening, near the hour of sunset, with an east wind whistling sharply through the chimney-stacks. A wood fire blazed cheerily on the hearth. And Judge Harbottle, in what was then called a brigadier-wig, with his red roquelaure on, helped the glowing effect of the darkened chamber, which looked red all over like a room on fire.

The Judge had his feet on a stool, and his huge grim purple face confronted the fire and seemed to pant and swell, as the blaze alternately spread upward and collapsed. He had fallen again among his blue devils, and was thinking of retiring from the Bench, and of fifty other gloomy things.

But the doctor, who was an energetic son of Æsculapius, would listen to no croaking, told the Judge he was full of gout, and in his present condition no judge even of his own case, but promised him leave to pronounce on all those melancholy questions, a fortnight later.

In the meantime the Judge must be very careful. He was overcharged with gout, and he must not provoke an attack, till the waters of Buxton should do that office for him, in their own salutary way.

The doctor did not think him perhaps quite so well as he pretended, for he told him he wanted rest, and would be better if he went forthwith to his bed.

Mr. Gerningham, his valet, assisted him, and gave him his drops; and the Judge told him to wait in his bedroom till he should go to sleep.

Three persons that night had specially odd stories to tell.

The housekeeper had got rid of the trouble of amusing her little girl at this anxious time by giving her leave to run about the sitting-rooms and look at the pictures and china, on the usual condition of touching nothing. It was not until the last gleam of sunset had for some time faded, and the twilight had so deepened that she could no longer discern the colours on the china figures on the chimneypiece or in the cabinets, that the child returned to the housekeeper's room to find her mother.

To her she related, after some prattle about the china, and the pictures, and the Judge's two grand wigs in the dressing-room off the library, an adventure of an extraordinary kind.

In the hall was placed, as was customary in those times, the sedan-chair which the master of the house occasionally used, covered with stamped leather, and studded with gilt nails, and with its red silk blinds down. In this case, the doors of this oldfashioned conveyance were locked, the windows up, and, as I said, the blinds down, but not so closely that the curious child could not peep underneath one of them, and see into the interior.

A parting beam from the setting sun, admitted through the window of a back room, shot obliquely through the open door, and lighting on the chair, shone with a dull transparency through the crimson blind.

To her surprise, the child saw in the shadow a thin man dressed in black seated in it; he had sharp dark features; his nose, she fancied, a little awry, and his brown eyes were looking straight before him; his hand was on his thigh, and he stirred no more than the waxen figure she had seen at Southwark fair.

A child is so often lectured for asking questions and on the propriety of silence, and the superior wisdom of its elders, that it accepts most things at last in good faith; and the little girl acquiesced respectfully in the occupation of the chair by this mahogany-faced person as being all right and proper.

It was not until she asked her mother who this man was, and observed her scared face as she questioned her more minutely upon the appearance of the stranger, that she began to understand that she had seen something unaccountable.

Mrs. Carwell took the key of the chair from its nail over the footman's shelf, and led the child by the hand up to the hall, having a lighted candle in her other hand. She stopped at a distance from the chair, and placed the candlestick in the child’s hand.

“Peep in, Margery, again, and try if there’s anything there,” she whispered; “hold the candle near the blind so as to throw its light through the curtain.”

The child peeped, this time with a very solemn face, and intimated at once that he was gone.

“Look again, and be sure,” urged her mother.

The little girl was quite certain; and Mrs. Carwell, with her mob-cap of lace and cherry-coloured ribbons, and her dark brown hair, not yet powdered, over a very pale face, unlocked the door, looked in, and beheld emptiness.

“All a mistake, child, you see.”

“*There*, ma’am! see there! He’s gone round the corner,” said the child.

“Where?” said Mrs. Carwell, stepping backward a step.

“Into that room.”

“Tut, child! ’twas the shadow,” cried Mrs. Carwell angrily, because she was frightened. “I moved the candle.” But she clutched one of the poles of the chair, which leant against the wall in the corner, and pounded the floor furiously with one end of it, being afraid to pass the open door the child had pointed to.

The cook and two kitchenmaids came running upstairs, not knowing what to make of this unwonted alarm.

They all searched the room; but it was still and empty, and no sign of any one’s having been there.

Some people may suppose that the direction given to her thoughts by this odd little incident will account for a very strange illusion which Mrs. Carwell herself experienced about two hours later.

CHAPTER IX.

THE JUDGE LEAVES HIS HOUSE.

Mrs. Flora Carwell was going up the great staircase with a posset for the Judge in a china bowl, on a little silver tray.

Across the top of the well-staircase there runs a massive oak rail; and, raising her eyes accidentally, she saw an extremely odd-looking stranger, slim and long, leaning carelessly over with a pipe between his finger and thumb. Nose, lips, and chin seemed all to droop downward into extraordinary length, as he leant his odd peering face over the banister. In his other hand he held a coil of rope, one end of which escaped from under his elbow and hung over the rail.

Mrs. Carwell, who had no suspicion at the moment, that he was not a real person, and fancied that he was some one employed in cording the Judge's luggage, called to know what he was doing there.

Instead of answering, he turned about, and walked across the lobby, at about the same leisurely pace at which she was ascending, and entered a room, into which she followed him. It was an uncarpeted and unfurnished chamber. An open trunk lay upon the floor empty, and beside it the coil of rope; but except herself there was no one in the room.

Mrs. Carwell was very much frightened, and now concluded that the child must have seen the same ghost that had just appeared to her. Perhaps, when she was able to think it over, it was a relief to believe so; for the face, figure, and dress described by the child were awfully like Pyneweck; and this certainly was not he.

Very much scared and very hysterical, Mrs. Carwell ran down to her room, afraid to look over her shoulder, and got some companions about her, and wept, and talked, and drank more than one cordial, and talked and wept again, and so on, until, in those early days, it was ten o'clock, and time to go to bed.

A scullery-maid remained up finishing some of her scouring and "scalding" for some time after the other servants — who, as I said, were few in number — that night had got to their beds. This was a low-browed, broad-faced, intrepid wench with black hair, who did not “vally a ghost not a button,” and treated the housekeeper’s hysterics with measureless scorn.

The old house was quiet, now. It was near twelve o’clock, no sounds were audible except the muffled wailing of the wintry winds, piping high among the roofs and chimneys, or rumbling at intervals, in under gusts, through the narrow channels of the street.

The spacious solitudes of the kitchen level were awfully dark, and this sceptical kitchen-wench was the only person now up and about, in the house. She hummed tunes to herself, for a time; and then stopped and listened; and then resumed her work again. At last, she was destined to be more terrified than even was the housekeeper.

There was a back-kitchen in this house, and from this she heard, as if coming from below its foundations, a sound like heavy strokes, that seemed to shake the earth beneath her feet. Sometimes a dozen in sequence, at regular intervals; sometimes fewer. She walked out softly into the passage, and was surprised to see a dusky glow issuing from this room, as if from a charcoal fire.

The room seemed thick with smoke.

Looking in, she very dimly beheld a monstrous figure, over a furnace, beating with a mighty hammer the rings and rivets of a chain.

The strokes, swift and heavy as they looked, sounded hollow and distant. The man stopped, and pointed to something on the floor, that, through the smoky haze, looked, she thought, like a dead body. She remarked no more; but the servants in the room close by, startled from their sleep by a hideous scream, found her in a swoon on the flags, close to the door, where she had just witnessed this ghastly vision.

Startled by the girl’s incoherent asseverations that she had seen the Judge’s corpse on the floor, two servants having first searched the lower part of the house, went rather frightened upstairs to inquire whether their master was well. They found him, not in his bed, but in his room. He had a table with candles burning at his bedside, and was getting on his clothes again; and he swore and cursed at them roundly in his old style, telling them that he had business, and that he would discharge on the spot any scoundrel who should dare to disturb him again.

So the invalid was left to his quietude.

In the morning it was rumoured here and there in the street that the Judge was dead. A servant was sent from the house three doors away, by Counsellor Traverse, to inquire at Judge Harbottle's hall-door.

The servant who opened it was pale and reserved, and would only say that the Judge was ill. He had had a dangerous accident; Doctor Hedstone had been with him at seven o'clock in the morning.

There were averted looks, short answers, pale and frowning faces, and all the usual signs that there was a secret that sat heavily upon their minds, and the time for disclosing which had not yet come. That time would arrive when the coroner had arrived, and the mortal scandal that had befallen the house could be no longer hidden. For that morning Mr. Justice Harbottle had been found hanging by the neck from the banister at the top of the great staircase, and quite dead.

There was not the smallest sign of any struggle or resistance. There had not been heard a cry or any other noise in the slightest degree indicative of violence. There was medical evidence to show that, in his atrabilious state, it was quite on the cards that he might have made away with himself. The jury found accordingly that it was a case of suicide. But to those who were acquainted with the strange story which Judge Harbottle had related to at least two persons, the fact that the catastrophe occurred on the morning of the 10th March seemed a startling coincidence.

A few days after, the pomp of a great funeral attended him to the grave; and so, in the language of Scripture, "the rich man died, and was buried."

VOLUME II.

THE ROOM IN THE DRAGON VOLANT.

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PROLOGUE.

The curious case which I am about to place before you, is referred to, very pointedly, and more than once, in the extraordinary Essay upon the drugs of the Dark and the Middle Ages, from the pen of Doctor Hesselius.

This Essay he entitles “Mortis Imago,” and he, therein, discusses the *Vinum letiferum*, the *Beatifica*, the *Somnus Angelorum*, the *Hypnus Sagarum*, the *Aqua Thessalliæ*, and about twenty other infusions and distillations, well known to the sages of eight hundred years ago, and two of which are still, he alleges, known to the fraternity of thieves, and, among them, as police-office inquiries sometimes disclose to this day, in practical use.

The Essay, *Mortis Imago*, will occupy as nearly as I can, at present, calculate, two volumes, the ninth and tenth, of the collected papers of Doctor Martin Hesselius.

This Essay, I may remark, in conclusion, is very curiously enriched by citations, in great abundance, from mediæval verse and prose romance, some of the most valuable of which, strange to say, are Egyptian.

I have selected this particular statement from among many cases equally striking, but hardly, I think, so effective as mere narratives, in this irregular form of publication, it is simply as a story that I present it.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE ROAD.

In the eventful year, 1815, I was exactly three-and-twenty, and had just succeeded to a very large sum in consols, and other securities. The first fall of Napoleon had thrown the continent open to English excursionists, anxious, let us suppose, to improve their minds by foreign travel; and I — the slight check of the ‘hundred days’ removed, by the genius of Wellington, on the field of Waterloo — was now added to the philosophic throng.

I was posting up to Paris from Bruxelles, following, I presume, the route that the allied army had pursued but a few weeks before — more carriages than you could believe were pursuing the same line. You could not look back or forward, without seeing into far perspective the clouds of dust which marked the line of the long series of vehicles. We were, perpetually, passing relays of return-horses, on their way, jaded and dusty, to the inns from which they had been taken. They were arduous times for those patient public servants. The whole world seemed posting up to Paris.

I ought to have noted it more particularly, but my head was so full of Paris and the future, that I passed the intervening scenery with little patience and less attention; I think, however, that it was about four miles to the frontier side of a rather picturesque little town, the name of which, as of many more important places through which I posted in my hurried journey, I forget, and about two hours before sunset, that we came up with a carriage in distress.

It was not quite an upset. But the two leaders were lying flat. The booted postillions had got down, and two servants who seemed very much at sea in such matters, were by way of assisting them. A pretty little bonnet and head were popped out of the window of the carriage in distress. Its *tournure*, and that of the shoulders that also appeared for a moment, was captivating: I resolved to play the part of a good Samaritan; stopped my chaise, jumped out, and with my servant lent a very willing hand in the emergency. Alas!

the lady with the pretty bonnet, wore a very thick, black veil. I could see nothing but the pattern of the Bruxelles lace, as she drew back.

A lean old gentleman, almost at the same time, stuck his head out of the window. An invalid he seemed, for although the day was hot, he wore a black muffler which came up to his ears and nose, quite covering the lower part of his face, an arrangement which he disturbed by pulling it down for a moment, and poured forth a torrent of French thanks, as he uncovered his black wig, and gesticulated with grateful animation.

One of my very few accomplishments besides boxing, which was cultivated by all Englishmen at that time, was French; and I replied, I hope and believe, grammatically. Many bows being exchanged, the old gentleman's head went in again, and the demure, pretty little bonnet once more appeared.

The lady must have heard me speak to my servant, for she framed her little speech in such pretty, broken English, and in a voice so sweet, that I more than ever cursed the black veil that baulked my romantic curiosity.

The arms that were emblazoned on the panel were peculiar; I remember especially, one device, it was the figure of a stork, painted in carmine, upon what the heralds call a 'field or.' The bird was standing upon one leg, and in the other claw held a stone. This is, I believe, the emblem of vigilance. Its oddity struck me, and remained impressed upon my memory. There were supporters besides, but I forget what they were.

The courtly manners of these people, the style of their servants, the elegance of their travelling carriage, and the supporters to their arms, satisfied me that they were noble.

The lady, you may be sure, was not the less interesting on that account. What a fascination a title exercises upon the imagination! I do not mean on that of snobs or moral flunkies. Superiority of rank is a powerful and genuine influence in love. The idea of superior refinement is associated with it. The careless notice of the squire tells more upon the heart of the pretty milkmaid, than years of honest Dobbin's manly devotion, and so on and up. It is an unjust world!

But in this case there was something more. I was conscious of being good-looking. I really believe I was; and there could be no mistake about my being nearly six feet high. Why need this lady have thanked me? Had not her husband, for such I assumed him to be, thanked me quite enough, and for both? I was instinctively aware that the lady was looking on me with no unwilling eyes; and, through her veil, I felt the power of her gaze.

She was now rolling away, with a train of dust behind her wheels, in the golden sunlight, and a wise young gentleman followed her with ardent eyes, and sighed profoundly as the distance increased.

I told the postillions on no account to pass the carriage, but to keep it steadily in view, and to pull up at whatever posting-house it should stop at. We were soon in the little town, and the carriage we followed drew up at the Belle Etoile, a comfortable old inn. They got out of the carriage and entered the house.

At a leisurely pace we followed. I got down, and mounted the steps listlessly, like a man quite apathetic and careless.

Audacious as I was, I did not care to inquire in what room I should find them. I peeped into the apartment to my right, and then into that on my left. *My* people were not there.

I ascended the stairs. A drawingroom door stood open. I entered with the most innocent air in the world. It was a spacious room, and, beside myself, contained but one living figure — a very pretty and ladylike one. There was the very bonnet with which I had fallen in love. The lady stood with her back toward me. I could not tell whether the envious veil was raised; she was reading a letter.

I stood for a minute in fixed attention, gazing upon her, in the vague hope that she might turn about, and give me an opportunity of seeing her features. She did not; but with a step or two she placed herself before a little cabriole-table, which stood against the wall, from which rose a tall mirror, in a tarnished frame.

I might, indeed, have mistaken it for a picture; for it now reflected a half-length portrait of a singularly beautiful woman.

She was looking down upon a letter which she held in her slender fingers, and in which she seemed absorbed.

The face was oval, melancholy, sweet. It had in it, nevertheless, a faint and undefinably sensual quality also. Nothing could exceed the delicacy of its features, or the brilliancy of its tints. The eyes, indeed, were lowered, so that I could not see their colour; nothing but their long lashes, and delicate eyebrows. She continued reading. She must have been deeply interested; I never saw a living form so motionless — I gazed on a tinted statue.

Being at that time blessed with long and keen vision, I saw this beautiful face with perfect distinctness. I saw even the blue veins that traced their wanderings on the whiteness of her full throat.

I ought to have retreated as noiselessly as I came in, before my presence was detected. But I was too much interested to move from the spot, for a few moments longer; and while they were passing, she raised her eyes. Those eyes were large, and of that hue which modern poets term “violet.”

These splendid melancholy eyes were turned upon me from the glass, with a haughty stare, and hastily the lady lowered her black veil, and turned about.

I fancied that she hoped I had not seen her. I was watching every look and movement, the minutest, with an attention as intense as if an ordeal involving my life depended on them.

CHAPTER II.

THE INN-YARD OF THE BELLE ETOILE.

The face was, indeed, one to fall in love with at first sight. Those sentiments that take such sudden possession of young men were now dominating my curiosity. My audacity faltered before her; and I felt that my presence in this room was probably an impertinence. This point she quickly settled, for the same very sweet voice I had heard before, now said coldly, and this time in French, "Monsieur cannot be aware that this apartment is not public."

I bowed very low, faltered some apologies, and backed to the door.

I suppose I looked penitent and embarrassed. I certainly felt so; for the lady said, by way it seemed of softening matters, "I am happy, however, to have an opportunity of again thanking Monsieur for the assistance, so prompt and effectual, which he had the goodness to render us to-day."

It was more the altered tone in which it was spoken, than the speech itself that encouraged me. It was also true that she need not have recognized me; and even if she had, she certainly was not obliged to thank me over again.

All this was indescribably flattering, and all the more so that it followed so quickly on her slight reproof.

The tone in which she spoke had become low and timid, and I observed that she turned her head quickly towards a second door of the room, I fancied that the gentleman in the black wig, a jealous husband, perhaps, might reappear through it. Almost at the same moment, a voice at once reedy and nasal, was heard snarling some directions to a servant, and evidently approaching. It was the voice that had thanked me so profusely, from the carriage windows, about an hour before.

"Monsieur will have the goodness to retire," said the lady, in a tone that resembled entreaty, at the same time gently waving her hand toward the door through which I had entered. Bowing again very low, I stepped back, and closed the door.

I ran down the stairs, very much elated. I saw the host of the Belle Etoile which, as I said, was the sign and designation of my inn.

I described the apartment I had just quitted, said I liked it, and asked whether I could have it.

He was extremely troubled, but that apartment and two adjoining rooms were engaged —

“By whom?”

“People of distinction.”

“But who are they? They must have names, or titles.”

“Undoubtedly, Monsieur, but such a stream is rolling into Paris, that we have ceased to inquire the names or titles of our guests — we designate them simply by the rooms they occupy.”

“What stay do they make?”

“Even that, Monsieur, I cannot answer. It does not interest us. Our rooms, while this continues, can never be, for a moment, disengaged.”

“I should have liked those rooms so much! Is one of them a sleeping apartment?”

“Yes, sir, and Monsieur will observe that people do not usually engage bedrooms, unless they mean to stay the night.”

“Well, I can, I suppose, have some rooms, any, I don’t care in what part of the house?”

“Certainly, Monsieur can have two apartments. They are the last at present disengaged.”

I took them instantly.

It was plain these people meant to make a stay here; at least they would not go till morning. I began to feel that I was all but engaged in an adventure.

I took possession of my rooms, and looked out of the window, which I found commanded the inn-yard. Many horses were being liberated from the traces, hot and weary, and others fresh from the stables, being put to. A great many vehicles — some private carriages, others, like mine, of that public class, which is equivalent to our old English postchaise, were standing on the pavement, waiting their turn for relays. Fussy servants were to-ing and fro-ing, and idle ones lounging or laughing, and the scene, on the whole, was animated and amusing.

Among these objects, I thought I recognized the travelling carriage, and one of the servants of the “persons of distinction” about whom I was, just then, so profoundly interested.

I therefore ran down the stairs, made my way to the back door; and so, behold me, in a moment, upon the uneven pavement, among all these sights and sounds which in such a place attend upon a period of extraordinary crush and traffic.

By this time the sun was near its setting, and threw its golden beams on the red brick chimneys of the offices, and made the two barrels, that figured as pigeon-houses, on the tops of poles, look as if they were on fire. Everything in this light becomes picturesque; and things interest us which, in the sober grey of morning, are dull enough.

After a little search, I lighted upon the very carriage, of which I was in quest. A servant was locking one of the doors, for it was made with the security of lock and key. I paused near, looking at the panel of the door.

"A very pretty device that red stork!" I observed, pointing to the shield on the door, "and no doubt indicates a distinguished family?"

The servant looked at me, for a moment, as he placed the little key in his pocket, and said with a slightly sarcastic bow and smile, "Monsieur is at liberty to conjecture."

Nothing daunted, I forthwith administered that laxative which, on occasion, acts so happily upon the tongue — I mean a "tip."

The servant looked at the Napoleon in his hand, and then, in my face, with a sincere expression of surprise.

"Monsieur is very generous!"

"Not worth mentioning — who are the lady and gentleman who came here, in this carriage, and whom, you may remember, I and my servant assisted to-day in an emergency, when their horses had come to the ground?"

"They are the Count, and the young lady we call the Countess — but I know not, she may be his daughter."

"Can you tell me where they live?"

"Upon my honour, Monsieur, I am unable — I know not."

"Not know where your master lives! Surely you know something more about him than his name?"

"Nothing worth relating, Monsieur; in fact, I was hired in Bruxelles, on the very day they started. Monsieur Picard, my fellow-servant, Monsieur the Comte's gentleman, he has been years in his service and knows everything; but he never speaks except to communicate an order. From him

I have learned nothing. We are going to Paris, however, and there I shall speedily pick up all about them. At present I am as ignorant of all that as Monsieur himself.”

“And where is Monsieur Picard?”

“He has gone to the cutler’s to get his razors set. But I do not think he will tell anything.”

This was a poor harvest for my golden sowing. The man, I think, spoke truth, and would honestly have betrayed the secrets of the family, if he had possessed any. I took my leave politely; and mounting the stairs, again I found myself once more in my room.

Forthwith I summoned my servant. Though I had brought him with me from England, he was a native of France — a useful fellow, sharp, bustling, and, of course, quite familiar with the ways and tricks of his countrymen.

“St. Clair, shut the door; come here. I can’t rest till I have made out something about those people of rank who have got the apartments under mine. Here are fifteen francs; make out the servants we assisted to-day; have them to a *petit souper*, and come back and tell me their entire history. I have, this moment, seen one of them who knows nothing, and has communicated it. The other, whose name I forget, is the unknown nobleman’s valet, and knows everything. Him you must pump. It is, of course, the venerable peer, and not the young lady who accompanies him, that interests me — you understand? Begone! fly! and return with all the details I sigh for, and every circumstance that can possibly interest me.”

It was a commission which admirably suited the tastes and spirits of my worthy St. Clair, to whom, you will have observed, I had accustomed myself to talk with the peculiar familiarity which the old French comedy establishes between master and valet.

I am sure he laughed at me in secret; but nothing could be more, polite and deferential.

With several wise looks, nods and shrugs, he withdrew; and looking down from my window, I saw him, with incredible quickness, enter the yard, where I soon lost sight of him among the carriages.

CHAPTER III.

DEATH AND LOVE TOGETHER MATED.

When the day drags, when a man is solitary, and in a fever of impatience and suspense; when the minute-hand of his watch travels as slowly as the hour-hand used to do, and the hour-hand has lost all appreciable motion; when he yawns, and beats the devil's tatto, and flattens his handsome nose against the window, and whistles tunes he hates, and, in short, does not know what to do with himself, it is deeply to be regretted that he cannot make a solemn dinner of three courses more than once in a day. The laws of matter, to which we are slaves, deny us that resource.

But in the times I speak of, supper was still a substantial meal, and its hour was approaching. This was consolatory. Three-quarters of an hour, however, still interposed. How was I to dispose of that interval?

I had two or three idle books, it is true, as travelling-companions; but there are many moods in which one cannot read. My novel lay with my rug and walking-stick on the sofa, and I did not care if the heroine and the hero were both drowned together in the water-barrel that I saw in the inn-yard under my window.

I took a turn or two up and down my room, and sighed, looking at myself in the glass, adjusted my great white "choker," folded and tied after Brummel, the immortal "Beau," put on a buff waistcoat and my blue swallow-tailed coat with gilt buttons; I deluged my pocket handkerchief with Eau-de-Cologne (we had not then the variety of bouquets with which the genius of perfumery has since blessed us); I arranged my hair, on which I piqued myself, and which I loved to groom in those days. That dark-brown *chevelure*, with a natural curl, is now represented by a few dozen perfectly white hairs, and its place — a smooth, bald, pink head — knows it no more. But let us forget these mortifications. It was then rich, thick, and dark-brown. I was making a very careful toilet. I took my unexceptionable hat from its case, and placed it lightly on my wise head, as nearly as memory and practice enabled me to do so, at that very slight inclination which the immortal person I have mentioned was wont to give to his. A pair of light French gloves and a rather club-like knotted walking-stick, such as just then came into vogue, for a year or two again in England, in the phraseology of Sir Walter Scott's romances, "completed my equipment."

All this attention to effect, preparatory to a mere lounge in the yard, or on the steps of the Belle Etoile, was a simple act of devotion to the wonderful eyes which I had that evening beheld for the first time, and never, never could forget! In plain terms, it was all done in the vague, very vague hope that those eyes might behold the unexceptionable get-up of a melancholy slave, and retain the image, not altogether without secret approbation.

As I completed my preparations the light failed me; the last level streak of sunlight disappeared, and a fading twilight only remained. I sighed in unison with the pensive hour, and threw open the window, intending to look out for a moment before going downstairs. I perceived instantly that the window underneath mine was also open, for I heard two voices in conversation, although I could not distinguish what they were saying.

The male voice was peculiar; it was, as I told you, reedy and nasal. I knew it, of course, instantly. The answering voice spoke in those sweet tones which I recognised only too easily. The dialogue was only for a minute; the repulsive male voice laughed, I fancied, with a kind of devilish satire, and retired from the window, so that I almost ceased to hear it.

The other voice remained nearer the window, but not so near as at first.

It was not an altercation; there was evidently nothing the least exciting in the colloquy. What would I not have given that it had been a quarrel — a violent one — and I the redresser of wrongs, and the defender of insulted beauty! Alas! so far as I could pronounce upon the character of the tones I heard, they might be as tranquil a pair as any in existence. In a moment more the lady began to sing an odd little *chanson*. I need not remind you how much farther the voice is heard *singing* than speaking. I could distinguish the words. The voice was of that exquisitely sweet kind which is called, I believe, a semi-contralto; it had something pathetic, and something, I fancied, a little mocking in its tones. I venture a clumsy, but adequate translation of the words: —

"Death and Love, together mated,
Watch and wait in ambuscade;

At early morn, or else belated.
They meet and mark the man or maid.

“Burning sigh, or breath that freezes,
Numbs or maddens man or maid;
Death or Love the victim seizes,
Breathing from their ambuscade.”
Breathing from their ambuscade.”

“Enough, Madame!” said the old voice, with sudden severity. “We do not desire, I believe, to amuse the grooms and hostlers in the yard with our music.”

The lady’s voice laughed gaily.

“You desire to quarrel, Madame!” And the old man, I presume, shut down the window. Down it went, at all events, with a rattle that might easily have broken the glass.

Of all thin partitions, glass is the most effectual excluder of sound. I heard no more, not even the subdued hum of the colloquy.

What a charming voice this Countess had! How it melted, swelled, and trembled! How it moved, and even agitated me! What a pity that a hoarse old jackdaw should have power to crow down such a Philomel! “Alas! what a life it is!” I moralized, wisely. “That beautiful Countess, with the patience of an angel and the beauty of a Venus and the accomplishments of all the Muses, a slave! She knows perfectly who occupies the apartments over hers; she heard me raise my window. One may conjecture pretty well for whom that music was intended — ay, old gentleman, and for whom you suspected it to be intended.”

In a very agreeable flutter I left my room, and descending the stairs, passed the Count’s door very much at my leisure. There was just a chance that the beautiful songstress might emerge. I dropped my stick on the lobby, near their door, and you may be sure it took me some little time to pick it up! Fortune, nevertheless, did not favour me. I could not stay on the lobby all night picking up my stick, so I went down to the hall.

I consulted the clock, and found that there remained but a quarter of an hour to the moment of supper.

Every one was roughing it now, every inn in confusion; people might do at such a juncture what they never did before. Was it just possible that, for once, the Count and Countess would take their chairs at the table-d’hôte?

CHAPTER IV.

MONSIEUR DROQVILLE.

Full of this exciting hope, I sauntered out, upon the steps of the Belle Etoile. It was now night, and a pleasant moonlight over everything. I had entered more into my romance since my arrival, and this poetic light heightened the sentiment. What a drama, if she turned out to be the Count's daughter, and in love with me! What a delightful — *tragedy*, if she turned out to be the Count's wife!

In this luxurious mood, I was accosted by a tall and very elegantly-made gentleman, who appeared to be about fifty. His air was courtly and graceful, and there was in his whole manner and appearance something so distinguished, that it was impossible not to suspect him of being a person of rank.

He had been standing upon the steps, looking out, like me, upon the moonlight effects that transformed, as it were, the objects and buildings in the little street. He accosted me, I say, with the politeness, at once easy and lofty, of a French nobleman of the old school. He asked me if I were not Mr. Beckett? I assented; and he immediately introduced himself as the Marquis d'Harmonville (this information he gave me in a low tone), and asked leave to present me with a letter from Lord R —— , who knew my father slightly, and had once done me, also, a trifling kindness.

This English peer, I may mention, stood very high in the political world, and was named as the most probable successor to the distinguished post of English Minister at Paris.

I received it with a low bow, and read:

"MY DEAR BECKETT,

"I beg to introduce my very dear friend, the Marquis d'Harmonville, who will explain to you the nature of the services it may be in your power to render him and us."

He went on to speak of the Marquis as a man whose great wealth, whose intimate relations with the old families, and whose legitimate influence with the court rendered him the fittest possible person for those friendly offices which, at the desire of his own sovereign, and of our government, he has so obligingly undertaken.

It added a great deal to my perplexity, when I read, further —

“By-the-bye, Walton was here yesterday, and told me that your seat was likely to be attacked; something, he says, is unquestionably going on at Domwell. You know there is an awkwardness in my meddling ever so cautiously. But I advise, if it is not very officious, your making Haxton look after it, and report immediately. I fear it is serious. I ought to have mentioned that, for reasons that you will see, when you have talked with him for five minutes, the Marquis — with the concurrence of all our friends — drops his title, for a few weeks, and is at present plain Monsieur Droqville.

“I am this moment going to town, and can say no more.

“Yours faithfully,
“R —— .”

I was utterly puzzled. I could scarcely boast of Lord — — ‘s acquaintance. I knew no one named Haxton, and, except my hatter, no one called Walton; and this peer wrote as if we were intimate friends! I looked at the back of the letter, and the mystery was solved. And now, to my consternation — for I was plain Richard Beckett — I read —

“*To George Stanhope Beckett, Esq., M.P.*”

I looked with consternation in the face of the Marquis.

“What apology can I offer to Monsieur the Mar — to Monsieur Droqville? It is true my name is Beckett — it is true I am known, though very slightly to Lord R —— ; but the letter was not intended for me. My name is Richard Beckett — this is to Mr. Stanhope Beckett, the member for Shillingsworth. What can I say, or do, in this unfortunate situation? I can only give you my honour as a gentleman, that, for me, the letter, which I now return, shall remain as unviolated a secret as before I opened it. I am so shocked and grieved that such a mistake should have occurred!”

I dare say my honest vexation and good faith were pretty legibly written in my countenance; for the look of gloomy embarrassment which had for a moment settled on the face of the Marquis, brightened; he smiled, kindly, and extended his hand.

"I have not the least doubt that Monsieur Beckett will respect my little secret. As a mistake was destined to occur, I have reason to thank my good stars that it should have been with a gentleman of honour. Monsieur Beckett will permit me, I hope, to place his name among those of my friends?"

I thanked the Marquis very much for his kind expressions. He went on to say —

"If, Monsieur, I can persuade you to visit me at Claironville, in Normandy, where I hope to see, on the 15th of August, a great many friends, whose acquaintance it might interest you to make, I shall be too happy."

I thanked him, of course, very gratefully for his hospitality. He continued:

"I cannot, for the present, see my friends, for reasons which you may surmise, at my house in Paris. But Monsieur will be so good as to let me know the hotel he means to stay at in Paris; and he will find that although the Marquis d'Harmonville is not in town, that Monsieur Droqville will not lose sight of him."

With many acknowledgments I gave him the information he desired.

"And in the meantime," he continued, "if you think of any way in which Monsieur Droqville can be of use to you, our communication shall not be interrupted, and I shall so manage matters that you can easily let me know."

I was very much flattered. The Marquis had, as we say, taken a fancy to me. Such likings at first sight often ripen into lasting friendships. To be sure it was just possible that the Marquis might think it prudent to keep the involuntary depository of a political secret, even so vague a one, in good humour.

Very graciously the Marquis took his leave, going up the stairs of the Belle Etoile.

I remained upon the steps, for a minute lost in speculation upon this new theme of interest. But the wonderful eyes, the thrilling voice, the exquisite figure of the beautiful lady who had taken possession of my imagination, quickly reasserted their influence. I was again gazing at the sympathetic moon, and descending the steps, I loitered along the pavements among strange objects, and houses that were antique and picturesque, in a dreamy state, thinking.

In a little while, I turned into the inn-yard again. There had come a lull. Instead of the noisy place it was, an hour or two before, the yard was perfectly still and empty, except for the carriages that stood here and there. Perhaps there was a servants' table-d'hôte just then. I was rather pleased to find solitude; and undisturbed I found out my ladylove's carriage, in the moonlight. I mused, I walked round it; I was as utterly foolish and maudlin as very young men, in my situation, usually are. The blinds were down, the doors, I suppose, locked. The brilliant moonlight revealed everything, and cast sharp, black shadows of wheel, and bar, and spring, on the pavement. I stood before the escutcheon painted on the door, which I had examined in the daylight. I wondered how often her eyes had rested on the same object. I pondered in a charming dream. A harsh, loud voice, over my shoulder, said suddenly,

"A red stork — good! The stork is a bird of prey; it is vigilant, greedy, and catches gudgeons. Red, too! — blood red! Ha! ha! the symbol is appropriate."

I had turned about, and beheld the palest face I ever saw. It was broad, ugly, and malignant. The figure was that of a French officer, in undress, and was six feet high. Across the nose and eyebrow there was a deep scar, which made the repulsive face grimmer.

The officer elevated his chin and his eyebrows, with a scoffing chuckle, and said,— "I have shot a stork, with a rifle bullet, when he thought himself safe in the clouds, for mere sport!" (He shrugged, and laughed malignantly). "See, Monsieur; when a man like me — a man of energy, you understand, a man with all his wits about him, a man who has made the tour of Europe under canvas, and, *parbleu!* often without it — resolves to discover a secret, expose a crime, catch a thief, spit a robber on the point of his sword, it is odd if he does not succeed. Ha! ha! ha! Adieu, Monsieur!"

He turned with an angry whisk on his heel, and swaggered with long strides out of the gate.

CHAPTER V.

SUPPER AT THE BELLE ETOILE.

The French army were in a rather savage temper, just then. The English, especially, had but scant courtesy to expect at their hands. It was plain, however, that the cadaverous gentleman who had just apostrophized the heraldry of the Count's carriage, with such mysterious acrimony, had not intended any of his malevolence for me. He was stung by some old recollection, and had marched off, seething with fury.

I had received one of those unacknowledged shocks which startle us, when fancying ourselves perfectly alone, we discover on a sudden, that our antics have been watched by a spectator, almost at our elbow. In this case, the effect was enhanced by the extreme repulsiveness of the face, and, I may add, its proximity, for, as I think, it almost touched mine. The enigmatical harangue of this person, so full of hatred and implied denunciation, was still in my ears. Here at all events was new matter for the industrious fancy of a lover to work upon.

It was time now to go to the table-d'hôte. Who could tell what lights the gossip of the supper-table might throw upon the subject that interested me so powerfully!

I stepped into the room, my eyes searching the little assembly, about thirty people, for the persons who specially interested me.

It was not easy to induce people, so hurried and overworked as those of the Belle Etoile just now, to send meals up to one's private apartments, in the midst of this unparalleled confusion; and, therefore, many people who did not like it, might find themselves reduced to the alternative of supping at the table-d'hôte, or starving.

The Count was not there, nor his beautiful companion; but the Marquis d'Harmonville, whom I hardly expected to see in so public a place, signed, with a significant smile, to a vacant chair beside himself. I secured it, and he seemed pleased, and almost immediately entered into conversation with me.

"This is, probably, your first visit to France?" he said.

I told him it was, and he said:

“You must not think me very curious and impertinent; but Paris is about the most dangerous capital a high-spirited and generous young gentleman could visit without a Mentor. If you have not an experienced friend as a companion during your visit— “ He paused.

I told him I was not so provided, but that I had my wits about me; that I had seen a good deal of life in England, and that, I fancied, human nature was pretty much the same in all parts of the world. The Marquis shook his head, smiling.

“You will find very marked differences, notwithstanding,” he said. “Peculiarities of intellect and peculiarities of character, undoubtedly, do pervade different nations; and this results, among the criminal classes, in a style of villainy no less peculiar. In Paris, the class who live by their wits, is three or four times as great as in London; and they live much better; some of them even splendidly. They are more ingenious than the London rogues; they have more animation, and invention, and the dramatic faculty, in which your countrymen are deficient, is everywhere. These invaluable attributes place them upon a totally different level. They can affect the manners and enjoy the luxuries of people of distinction. They live, many of them, by play.”

“So do many of our London rogues.”

“Yes, but in a totally different way. They are the *habitués* of certain gaming-tables, billiard-rooms, and other places, including your races, where high play goes on; and by superior knowledge of chances, by masking their play, by means of confederates, by means of bribery, and other artifices, varying with the subject of their imposture, they rob the unwary. But here it is more elaborately done, and with a really exquisite *finesse*. There are people whose manners, style, conversation, are unexceptionable, living in handsome houses in the best situations, with everything about them in the most refined taste, and exquisitely luxurious, who impose even upon the Parisian bourgeois, who believe them to be, in good faith, people of rank and fashion, because their habits are expensive and refined, and their houses are frequented by foreigners of distinction, and, to a degree, by foolish young Frenchmen of rank. At all these houses play goes on. The ostensible host and hostess seldom join in it; they provide it simply to plunder their guests, by means of their accomplices, and thus wealthy strangers are inveigled and robbed."

"But I have heard of a young Englishman, a son of Lord Rooksbury, who broke two Parisian gaming-tables only last year."

"I see," he said, laughing, "you are come here to do likewise. I, myself, at about your age, undertook the same spirited enterprise. I raised no less a sum than five hundred thousand francs to begin with; I expected to carry all before me by the simple expedient of going on doubling my stakes. I had heard of it, and I fancied that the sharpers, who kept the table, knew nothing of the matter. I found, however, that they not only knew all about it, but had provided against the possibility of any such experiments; and I was pulled up before I had well begun, by a rule which forbids the doubling of an original stake more than four times, consecutively."

"And is that rule in force still?" I inquired, chapfallen.

He laughed and shrugged, "Of course it is, my young friend. People who live by an art, always understand it better than an amateur. I see you had formed the same plan, and no doubt came provided."

I confessed I had prepared for conquest upon a still grander scale. I had arrived with a purse of thirty thousand pounds sterling.

"Any acquaintance of my very dear friend, Lord R —— , interests me; and, besides my regard for him, I am charmed with you; so you will pardon all my, perhaps, too officious questions and advice."

I thanked him most earnestly for his valuable counsel, and begged that he would have the goodness to give me all the advice in his power.

"Then if you take my advice," said he, "you will leave your money in the bank where it lies. Never risk a Napoleon in a gaming-house. The night I went to break the bank, I lost between seven and eight thousand pounds sterling of your English money; and my next adventure, I had obtained an introduction to one of those elegant gaming-houses which affect to be the private mansions of persons of distinction, and was saved from ruin by a gentleman, whom, ever since, I have regarded with increasing respect and friendship. It oddly happens he is in this house at this moment. I recognized his servant, and made him a visit in his apartments here, and found him the same brave, kind, honourable man I always knew him. But that he is living so entirely out of the world, now, I should have made a point of introducing you. Fifteen years ago he would have been the man of all others to consult.

The gentleman I speak of is the Comte de St. Alyre. He represents a very old family. He is the very soul of honour, and the most sensible man in the world, except in one particular."

"And that particular?" I hesitated. I was now deeply interested.

"Is that he has married a charming creature, at least five-and-forty years younger than himself, and is, of course, although I believe absolutely without cause, horribly jealous."

"And the lady?"

"The Countess is, I believe, in every way worthy of so good a man," he answered, a little drily.

"I think I heard her sing this evening."

"Yes, I daresay; she is very accomplished." After a few moments' silence he continued.

"I must not lose sight of you, for I should be sorry, when next you meet my friend Lord R —— , that you had to tell him you had been pigeoned in Paris. A rich Englishman as you are, with so large a sum at his Paris bankers, young, gay, generous, a thousand ghouls and harpies will be contending who shall be first to seize and devour you."

At this moment I received something like a jerk from the elbow of the gentleman at my right. It was an accidental jog, as he turned in his seat.

"On the honour of a soldier, there is no man's flesh in this company heals so fast as mine."

The tone in which this was spoken was harsh and stentorian, and almost made me bounce. I looked round and recognised the officer, whose large white face had half scared me in the inn-yard, wiping his mouth furiously, and then with a gulp of Maçon, he went on —

"*No* one! It's not blood; it is ichor! it's miracle! Set aside stature, thew, bone, and muscle — set aside courage, and by all the angels of death, I'd fight a lion naked and dash his teeth down his jaws with my fist, and flog him to death with his own tail! Set aside, I say, all those attributes, which I am allowed to possess, and I am worth six men in any campaign; for that one quality of healing as I do — rip me up; punch me through, tear me to tatters with bomb-shells, and nature has me whole again, while your tailor would fine-draw an old-coat. *Parbleu!* gentlemen, if you saw me naked, you would laugh? Look at my hand, a sabre-cut across the palm, to the bone, to save my head, taken up with three stitches, and five days afterwards I was playing ball with an English general, a prisoner in Madrid, against the wall of the convent of the Santa Maria de la Castita! At Arcola, by the great devil himself! that was an action. Every man there, gentlemen, swallowed as much smoke in five minutes as would smother you all, in this room! I received, at the same moment, two musket balls in the thighs, a grape shot through the calf of my leg, a lance through my left shoulder, a piece of a shrapnel in the left deltoid, a bayonet through the cartilage of my right ribs, a sabre-cut that carried away a pound of flesh from my chest, and the better part of a congreve rocket on my forehead. Pretty well, ha, ha! and all while you'd say *bah!* and in eight days and a half I was making a forced march, without shoes, and only one gaiter, the life and soul of my company, and as sound as a roach!"

"Bravo! Bravissimo! Per Bacco! un gallant uomo!" exclaimed, in a martial ecstacy, a fat little Italian, who manufactured tooth-picks and wicker cradles on the island of Notre Dame; "your exploits shall resound through Europe! and the history of those wars should be written in your blood!"

"Never mind! a trifle!" exclaimed the soldier. "At Ligny, the other day, where we smashed the Prussians into ten hundred thousand milliards of atoms, a bit of a shell cut me across the leg and opened an artery. It was spouting as high as the chimney, and in half a minute I had lost enough to fill a pitcher. I must have expired in another minute, if I had not whipped off my sash like a flash of lightning, tied it round my leg above the wound, whipt a bayonet out of the back of a dead Prussian, and passing it under, made a tournequet of it with a couple of twists, and so stayed the hemorrhage, and saved my life. But, *sacré bleu!* gentlemen, I lost so much blood, I have been as pale as the bottom of a plate ever since. No matter. A trifle. Blood well spent, gentlemen." He applied himself now to his bottle of *vin ordinaire*.

The Marquis had closed his eyes, and looked resigned and disgusted, while all this was going on.

"*Garçon*" said the officer, for the first time, speaking in a low tone over the back of his chair to the waiter; "who came in that travelling carriage, dark yellow and black, that stands in the middle of the yard, with arms and supporters emblazoned on the door, and a red stork, as red as my facings?"

The waiter could not say.

The eye of the eccentric officer, who had suddenly grown grim and serious, and seemed to have abandoned the general conversation to other people, lighted, as it were, accidentally, on me.

"Pardon me, Monsieur," he said. "Did I not see you examining the panel of that carriage at the same time that I did so, this evening? Can you tell me who arrived in it?"

"I rather think the Count and Countess de St. Alyre."

"And are they here, in the Belle Etoile?" he asked.

"They have got apartments upstairs," I answered.

He started up, and half pushed his chair from the table. He quickly sat down again, and I could hear him *sacré*-ing and muttering to himself, and grinning and scowling. I could not tell whether he was alarmed or furious.

I turned to say a word or two to the Marquis, but he was gone. Several other people had dropped out also, and the supper party soon broke up.

Two or three substantial pieces of wood smouldered on the hearth, for the night had turned out chilly. I sat down by the fire in a great armchair, of carved oak, with a marvellously high back, that looked as old as the days of Henry IV.

"*Garçon*," said I, "do you happen to know who that officer is?"

"That is Colonel Gaillarde, Monsieur."

"Has he been often here?"

"Once before, Monsieur, for a week; it is a year since."

"He is the palest man I ever saw."

"That is true, Monsieur; he has been often taken for a *revenant*."

"Can you give me a bottle of really good Burgundy?"

"The best in France, Monsieur."

"Place it, and a glass by my side, on this table, if you please. I may sit here for half an hour?"

"Certainly, Monsieur."

I was very comfortable, the wine excellent, and my thoughts glowing and serene. "Beautiful Countess! Beautiful Countess! shall we ever be better acquainted."

CHAPTER VI.

THE NAKED SWORD.

A man who has been posting all day long, and changing the air he breathes every half hour, who is well pleased with himself, and has nothing on earth to trouble him, and who sits alone by a fire in a comfortable chair after having eaten a hearty supper, may be pardoned if he takes an accidental nap.

I had filled my fourth glass when I fell asleep. My head, I daresay, hung uncomfortably; and it is admitted, that a variety of French dishes is not the most favourable precursor to pleasant dreams.

I had a dream as I took mine ease in mine inn on this occasion. I fancied myself in a huge cathedral, without light, except from four tapers that stood at the corners of a raised platform hung with black, on which lay, draped also in black, what seemed to me the dead body of the Countess de St. Alyre. The place seemed empty, it was cold, and I could see only (in the halo of the candles) a little way round.

The little I saw bore the character of Gothic gloom, and helped my fancy to shape and furnish the black void that yawned all round me. I heard a sound like the slow tread of two persons walking up the flagged aisle. A faint echo told of the vastness of the place. An awful sense of expectation was upon me, and I was horribly frightened when the body that lay on the catafalque said (without stirring), in a whisper that froze me, “They come to place me in the grave alive; save me.”

I found that I could neither speak nor move. I was horribly frightened.

The two people who approached now emerged from the darkness. One, the Count de St. Alyre glided to the head of the figure and placed his long thin hands under it. The white-faced Colonel, with the scar across his face, and a look of infernal triumph, placed his hands under her feet, and they began to raise her.

With an indescribable effort I broke the spell that bound me, and started to my feet with a gasp.

I was wide awake, but the broad, wicked face of Colonel Gaillarde was staring, white as death, at me, from the other side of the hearth. “Where is she?” I shuddered.

“That depends on who she is, Monsieur,” replied the Colonel, curtly.

“Good heavens!” I gasped, looking about me.

The Colonel, who was eyeing me sarcastically, had had his *demi-tasse* of *café noir*, and now drank his *tasse*, diffusing a pleasant perfume of brandy.

“I fell asleep and was dreaming,” I said, least any strong language, founded on the *rôle* he played in my dream, should have escaped me. “I did not know for some moments where I was.”

“You are the young gentleman who has the apartments over the Count and Countess de St. Alyre?” he said, winking one eye, close in meditation, and glaring at me with the other.

“I believe so — yes,” I answered.

“Well, younker, take care you have not worse dreams than that some night,” he said, enigmatically, and wagged his head with a chuckle. “Worse dreams,” he repeated.

“What does Monsieur the Colonel mean?” I inquired.

“I am trying to find that out myself,” said the Colonel; “and I think I shall. When *I* get the first inch of the thread fast between my finger and thumb, it goes hard but I follow it up, bit by bit, little by little, tracing it this way and that, and up and down, and round about, until the whole clue is wound up on my thumb, and the end, and its secret, fast in my fingers. Ingenious! Crafty as five foxes! wide awake as a weazel! *Parbleu!* if I had descended to that occupation I should have made my fortune as a spy. Good wine here?” he glanced interrogatively at my bottle.

“Very good,” said I, “Will Monsieur the Colonel try a glass?”

He took the largest he could find, and filled it, raised it with a bow, and drank it slowly. “Ah! ah! Bah! That is not it,” he exclaimed, with some disgust, filling it again. “You ought to have told *me* to order your Burgundy, and they would not have brought you that stuff.”

I got away from this man as soon as I civilly could, and, putting on my hat, I walked out with no other company than my sturdy walking stick. I visited the inn-yard, and looked up to the windows of the Countess’s apartments. They were closed, however, and I had not even the unsubstantial consolation of contemplating the light in which that beautiful lady was at that moment writing, or reading, or sitting and thinking of — any one you please.

I bore this serious privation as well as I could, and took a little saunter through the town. I shan't bore you with moonlight effects, nor with the maunderings of a man who has fallen in love at first sight with a beautiful face. My ramble, it is enough to say, occupied about half-an-hour, and, returning by a slight *détour*, I found myself in a little square, with about two high gabled houses on each side, and a rude stone statue, worn by centuries of rain, on a pedestal in the centre of the pavement. Looking at this statue was a slight and rather tall man, whom I instantly recognized as the Marquis d'Harmonville: he knew me almost as quickly. He walked a step towards me, shrugged and laughed:

"You are surprised to find Monsieur Droqville staring at that old stone figure by moonlight. Anything to pass the time. You, I see, suffer from *ennui*, as I do. These little provincial towns! Heavens! what an effort it is to live in them! If I could regret having formed in early life a friendship that does me honour, I think its condemning me to a sojourn in such a place would make me do so. You go on towards Paris, I suppose, in the morning?"

"I have ordered horses."

"As for me I await a letter, or an arrival, either would emancipate me; but I can't say how soon either event will happen."

"Can I be of any use in this matter?" I began.

"None, Monsieur, I thank you a thousand times. No, this is a piece in which every *rôle* is already cast. I am but an amateur, and induced, solely by friendship, to take a part."

So he talked on, for a time, as we walked slowly toward the Belle Etoile, and then came a silence, which I broke by asking him if he knew anything of Colonel Gaillarde.

"Oh! yes, to be sure. He is a little mad; he has had some bad injuries of the head. He used to plague the people in the War Office to death. He has always some delusion. They contrived some employment for him — not regimental, of course — but in this campaign Napoleon, who could spare nobody, placed him in command of a regiment. He was always a desperate fighter, and such men were more than ever needed."

There is, or was, a second inn, in this town, called l’Ecu de France. At its door the Marquis stopped, bade me a mysterious goodnight, and disappeared.

As I walked slowly toward my inn, I met, in the shadow of a row of poplars, the *garçon* who had brought me my Burgundy a little time ago. I was thinking of Colonel Gaillarde, and I stopped the little waiter as he passed me.

“You said, I think, that Colonel Gaillarde was at the Belle Etoile for a week at one time.”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“Is he perfectly in his right mind?”

The waiter stared. “Perfectly, Monsieur.”

“Has he been suspected at any time of being out of his mind?”

“Never, Monsieur; he is a little noisy, but a very shrewd man.”

“What is a fellow to think?” I muttered, as I walked on.

I was soon within sight of the lights of the Belle Etoile. A carriage, with four horses, stood in the moonlight at the door, and a furious altercation was going on in the hall, in which the yell of Colonel Gaillarde outtopped all other sounds.

Most young men like, at least, to witness a row. But, intuitively, I felt that this would interest me in a very special manner. I had only fifty yards to run, when I found myself in the hall of the old inn. The principal actor in this strange drama was, indeed, the Colonel, who stood facing the old Count de St. Alyre, who, in his travelling costume, with his black silk scarf covering the lower part of his face, confronted him; he had evidently been intercepted in an endeavour to reach his carriage. A little in the rear of the Count stood the Countess, also in travelling costume, with her thick black veil down, and holding in her delicate fingers a white rose. You can’t conceive a more diabolical effigy of hate and fury than the Colonel; the knotted veins stood out on his forehead, his eyes were leaping from their sockets, he was grinding his teeth, and froth was on his lips. His sword was drawn, in his hand, and he accompanied his yelling denunciations with stamps upon the floor and flourishes of his weapon in the air.

The host of the Belle Etoile was talking to the Colonel in soothing terms utterly thrown away. Two waiters, pale with fear, stared uselessly from behind. The Colonel screamed, and thundered, and whirled his sword. “I was not sure of your red birds of prey; I could not believe you would have the audacity to travel on high roads, and to stop at honest inns, and lie under the same roof with honest men. You! *you! both* — vampires, wolves, ghouls. Summon the *gendarmes*, I say. By St. Peter and all the devils, if either of you try to get out of that door I'll take your heads off."

For a moment I had stood aghast. Here was a situation! I walked up to the lady; she laid her hand wildly upon my arm. "Oh! Monsieur," she whispered, in great agitation, "that dreadful madman! What are we to do? He won't let us pass; he will kill my husband."

"Fear nothing, Madame," I answered, with romantic devotion, and stepping between the Count and Gaillarde, as he shrieked his invective, "Hold your tongue, and clear the way, you ruffian, you bully, you coward!" I roared.

A faint cry escaped the lady, which more than repaid the risk I ran, as the sword of the frantic soldier, after a moment's astonished pause, flashed in the air to cut me down.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WHITE ROSE.

I was too quick for Colonel Gaillarde. As he raised his sword, reckless of all consequences but my condign punishment, and quite resolved to cleave me to the teeth, I struck him across the side of his head, with my heavy stick; and while he staggered back, I struck him another blow, nearly in the same place, that felled him to the floor, where he lay as if dead.

I did not care one of his own regimental buttons, whether he was dead or not; I was, at that moment, carried away by such a tumult of delightful and diabolical emotions!

I broke his sword under my foot, and flung the pieces across the street. The old Count de St. Alyre skipped nimbly without looking to the right or left, or thanking anybody, over the floor, out of the door, down the steps, and into his carriage. Instantly I was at the side of the beautiful Countess, thus left to shift for herself; I offered her my arm, which she took, and I led her to her carriage. She entered, and I shut the door. All this without a word.

I was about to ask if there were any commands with which she would honour me — my hand was laid upon the lower edge of the window, which was open.

The lady's hand was laid upon mine timidly and excitedly. Her lips almost touched my cheek as she whispered hurriedly.

"I may never see you more, and, oh! that I could forget you. Go — farewell — for God's sake, go!"

I pressed her hand for a moment. She withdrew it, but tremblingly pressed into mine the rose which she had held in her fingers during the agitating scene she had just passed through.

All this took place while the Count was commanding, entreating, cursing his servants, tipsy, and out of the way during the crisis, my conscience afterwards insinuated, by my clever contrivance. They now mounted to their places with the agility of alarm. The postillions' whips cracked, the horses scrambled into a trot, and away rolled the carriage, with its precious freightage, along the quaint main street, in the moonlight, toward Paris.

I stood on the pavement, till it was quite lost to eye and ear in the distance.

With a deep sigh, I then turned, my white rose folded in my handkerchief — the little parting *gage* — the

“Favour secret, sweet, and precious;”

which no mortal eye but hers and mine had seen conveyed to me.

The care of the host of the Belle Etoile, and his assistants, had raised the wounded hero of a hundred fights partly against the wall, and propped him at each side with portmanteaus and pillows, and poured a glass of brandy, which was duly placed to his account, into his big mouth, where, for the first time, such a Godsend remained unswallowed.

A baldheaded little military surgeon of sixty, with spectacles, who had cut off eighty-seven legs and arms to his own share, after the battle of Eylau, having retired with his sword and his saw, his laurels and his sticking-plaster to this, his native town, was called in, and rather thought the gallant Colonel’s skull was fractured, at all events there was concussion of the seat of thought, and quite enough work for his remarkable self-healing powers, to occupy him for a fortnight.

I began to grow a little uneasy. A disagreeable surprise, if my excursion, in which I was to break banks and hearts, and, as you see, heads, should end upon the gallows or the guillotine. I was not clear, in those times of political oscillation, which was the established apparatus.

The Colonel was conveyed, snorting apoplectically to his room.

I saw my host in the apartment in which we had supped. Wherever you employ a force of any sort, to carry a point of real importance, reject all nice calculations of economy. Better to be a thousand per cent, over the mark, than the smallest fraction of a unit under it. I instinctively felt this.

I ordered a bottle of my landlord’s very best wine; made him partake with me, in the proportion of two glasses to one; and then told him that he must not decline a trifling *souvenir* from a guest who had been so charmed with all he had seen of the renowned Belle Etoile. Thus saying, I placed five-and-thirty Napoleons in his hand. At touch of which his countenance, by no means encouraging before, grew sunny, his manners thawed, and it was plain, as he dropped the coins hastily into his pocket, that benevolent relations had been established between us.

I immediately placed the Colonel's broken head upon the *tapis*. We both agreed that if I had not given him that rather smart tap of my walking-cane, he would have beheaded half the inmates of the Belle Etoile. There was not a waiter in the house who would not verify that statement on oath.

The reader may suppose that I had other motives, beside the desire to escape the tedious inquisition of the law, for desiring to recommence my journey to Paris with the least possible delay. Judge what was my horror then to learn, that for love or money, horses were nowhere to be had that night. The last pair in the town had been obtained from the Ecu de France, by a gentleman who dined and supped at the Belle Etoile, and was obliged to proceed to Paris that night.

Who was the gentleman? Had he actually gone? Could he possibly be induced to wait till morning?

The gentleman was now upstairs getting his things together, and his name was Monsieur Droqville.

I ran upstairs. I found my servant St. Clair in my room. At sight of him, for a moment, my thoughts were turned into a different channel.

"Well, St. Clair, tell me this moment who the lady is?" I demanded.

"The lady is the daughter or wife, it matters not which, of the Count de St. Alyre; — the old gentleman who was so near being sliced like a cucumber tonight, I am informed, by the sword of the general whom Monsieur, by a turn of fortune, has put to bed of an apoplexy."

"Hold your tongue, fool! The man's beastly drunk — he's sulking — he could talk if he liked — who cares? Pack up my things. Which are Monsieur Droqville's apartments?"

He knew, of course; he always knew everything.

Half an hour later Monsieur Droqville and I were travelling towards Paris, in my carriage, and with his horses. I ventured to ask the Marquis d'Harmonville, in a little while, whether the lady, who accompanied the Count, was certainly the Countess. "Has he not a daughter?"

"Yes; — I believe a very beautiful and charming young lady — I cannot say — it may have been she, his daughter by an earlier marriage. I saw only the Count himself to-day."

The Marquis was growing a little sleepy and, in a little while, he actually fell asleep in his corner. I dozed and nodded; but the Marquis slept like a top. He awoke only for a minute or two at the next posting-house, where he had fortunately secured horses by sending on his man, he told me.

"You will excuse my being so dull a companion," he said, "but till tonight I have had but two hours' sleep, for more than sixty hours. I shall have a cup of coffee here; I have had my nap. Permit me to recommend you to do likewise. Their coffee is really excellent." He ordered two cups of *café noir*, and waited, with his head from the window. "We will keep the cups," he said, as he received them from the waiter, "and the tray. Thank you."

There was a little delay as he paid for these things; and then he took in the little tray, and handed me a cup of coffee.

I declined the tray; so he placed it on his own knees, to act as a miniature table.

"I can't endure being waited for and hurried," he said, "I like to sip my coffee at leisure."

I agreed. It really *was* the very perfection of coffee.

"I, like Monsieur le Marquis, have slept very little for the last two or three nights; and find it difficult to keep awake. This coffee will do wonders for me; it refreshes one so."

Before we had half done, the carriage was again in motion.

For a time our coffee made us chatty, and our conversation was animated.

The Marquis was extremely goodnatured, as well as clever, and gave me a brilliant and amusing account of Parisian life, schemes, and dangers, all put so as to furnish me with practical warnings of the most valuable kind.

In spite of the amusing and curious stories which the Marquis related, with so much point and colour, I felt myself again becoming gradually drowsy and dreamy.

Perceiving this, no doubt, the Marquis goodnaturedly suffered our conversation to subside into silence. The window next him was open. He threw his cup out of it; and did the same kind office for mine, and finally the little tray flew after, and I heard it clank on the road; a valuable waif, no doubt, for some early wayfarer in wooden shoes.

I leaned back in my corner; I had my beloved *souvenir* — my white rose — close to my heart, folded, now, in white paper. It inspired all manner of romantic dreams. I began to grow more and more sleepy. But actual slumber did not come. I was still viewing, with my half-closed eyes, from my corner, diagonally, the interior of the carriage.

I wished for sleep; but the barrier between waking and sleeping seemed absolutely insurmountable; and instead, I entered into a state of novel and indescribable indolence.

The Marquis lifted his despatch-box from the floor, placed it on his knees, unlocked it, and took out what proved to be a lamp, which he hung with two hooks, attached to it, to the window opposite to him. He lighted it with a match, put on his spectacles, and taking out a bundle of letters, began to read them carefully.

We were making way very slowly. My impatience had hitherto employed four horses from stage to stage. We were in this emergency, only too happy to have secured two. But the difference in pace was depressing.

I grew tired of the monotony of seeing the spectacled Marquis reading, folding, and docketing, letter after letter. I wished to shut out the image which wearied me, but something prevented my being able to shut my eyes. I tried again and again; but, positively, I had lost the power of closing them.

I would have rubbed my eyes, but I could not stir my hand, my will no longer acted on my body — I found that I could not move one joint, or muscle, no more than I could, by an effort of my will, have turned the carriage about.

Up to this I had experienced no sense of horror. Whatever it was, simple nightmare was not the cause. I was awfully frightened! Was I in a fit?

It was horrible to see my goodnatured companion pursue his occupation so serenely, when he might have dissipated my horrors by a single shake.

I made a stupendous exertion to call out but in vain; I repeated the effort again and again, with no result.

My companion now tied up his letters, and looked out of the window, humming an air from an opera. He drew back his head, and said, turning to me —

“Yes, I see the lights; we shall be there in two or three minutes.”

He looked more closely at me, and with a kind smile, and a little shrug, he said, “Poor child! how fatigued he must have been — how profoundly he sleeps! when the carriage stops he will waken.”

He then replaced his letters in the despatch-box, locked it, put his spectacles in his pocket, and again looked out of the window.

We had entered a little town. I suppose it was past two o’clock by this time. The carriage drew up, I saw an inn-door open, and a light issuing from it.

“Here we are!” said my companion, turning gaily to me. But I did not awake.

“Yes, how tired he must have been!” he exclaimed, after he had waited for an answer.

My servant was at the carriage door, and opened it.

“Your master sleeps soundly, he is so fatigued! It would be cruel to disturb him. You and I will go in, while they change the horses, and take some refreshment, and choose something that Monsieur Beckett will like to take in the carriage, for when he awakes by-and-by, he will, I am sure, be hungry.”

He trimmed his lamp, poured in some oil; and taking care not to disturb me, with another kind smile, and another word or caution to my servant, he got out, and I heard him talking to St. Clair, as they entered the inn-door, and I was left in my corner, in the carriage, in the same state.

CHAPTER VIII.

A THREE MINUTES' VISIT.

I have suffered extreme and protracted bodily pain, at different periods of my life, but anything like that misery, thank God, I never endured before or since. I earnestly hope it may not resemble any type of death, to which we are liable. I was, indeed, a spirit in prison; and unspeakable was my dumb and unmoving agony.

The power of thought remained clear and active. Dull terror filled my mind. How would this end? Was it actual death?

You will understand that my faculty of observing was unimpaired. I could hear and see anything as distinctly as ever I did in my life. It was simply that my will had, as it were, lost its hold of my body.

I told you that the Marquis d'Harmonville had not extinguished his carriage lamp on going into this village inn. I was listening intently, longing for his return, which might result, by some lucky accident, in awaking me from my catalepsy.

Without any sound of steps approaching, to announce an arrival, the carriage-door suddenly opened, and a total stranger got in silently, and shut the door.

The lamp gave about as strong a light as a wax-candle, so I could see the intruder perfectly. He was a young man, with a dark grey, loose surtout, made with a sort of hood, which was pulled over his head. I thought, as he moved, that I saw the gold band of a military undress cap under it; and I certainly saw the lace and buttons of a uniform, on the cuffs of the coat that were visible under the wide sleeves of his outside wrapper.

This young man had thick moustaches, and an imperial, and I observed that he had a red scar running upward from his lip across his cheek.

He entered, shut the door softly, and sat down beside me. It was all done in a moment; leaning toward me, and shading his eyes with his gloved hand, he examined my face closely, for a few seconds.

This man had come as noiselessly as a ghost; and everything he did was accomplished with the rapidity and decision, that indicated a well defined and prearranged plan. His designs were evidently sinister. I thought he was going to rob, and, perhaps, murder me. I lay, nevertheless, like a corpse under his hands. He inserted his hand in my breast pocket, from which he took my precious white rose and all the letters it contained, among which was a paper of some consequence to me.

My letters he glanced at. They were plainly not what he wanted. My precious rose, too, he laid aside with them. It was evidently about the paper I have mentioned, that he was concerned; for the moment he opened it, he began with a pencil, in a small pocketbook, to make rapid notes of its contents.

This man seemed to glide through his work with a noiseless and cool celerity which argued, I thought, the training of the police-department.

He rearranged the papers, possibly in the very order in which he had found them, replaced them in my breastpocket, and was gone.

His visit, I think, did not quite last three minutes. Very soon after his disappearance, I heard the voice of the Marquis once more. He got in, and I saw him look at me, and smile, half envying me, I fancied, my sound repose. If he had but known all!

He resumed his reading and docketing, by the light of the little lamp which had just subserved the purposes of a spy.

We were now out of the town, pursuing our journey at the same moderate pace. We had left the scene of my police visit, as I should have termed it, now two leagues behind us, when I suddenly felt a strange throbbing in one ear, and a sensation as if air passed through it into my throat. It seemed as if a bubble of air, formed deep in my ear, swelled, and burst there. The indescribable tension of my brain seemed all at once to give way; there was an odd humming in my head, and a sort of vibration through every nerve of my body, such as I have experienced in a limb that has been, in popular phraseology, asleep. I uttered a cry and half rose from my seat, and then fell back trembling, and with a sense of mortal faintness.

The Marquis stared at me, took my hand, and earnestly asked if I was ill. I could answer only with a deep groan.

Gradually the process of restoration was completed; and I was able, though very faintly, to tell him how very ill I had been; and then to describe the violation of my letters, during the time of his absence from the carriage.

“Good heaven!” he exclaimed, “the miscreant did not get at my dispatch-box?”

I satisfied him, so far as I had observed, on that point. He placed the box on the seat beside him, and opened and examined its contents very minutely.

“Yes, undisturbed; all safe, thank heaven!” he murmured. “There are half-a-dozen letters here, that I would not have some people read, for a great deal.”

He now asked with a very kind anxiety all about the illness I complained of. When he had heard me, he said —

“A friend of mine once had an attack as like yours as possible. It was on board-ship, and followed a state of high excitement. He was a brave man like you; and was called on to exert both his strength and his courage suddenly. An hour or two after, fatigue overpowered him, and he appeared to fall into a sound sleep. He really sank into a state which he afterwards described so, that I think it must have been precisely the same affection as yours.”

“I am happy to think that my attack was not unique. Did he ever experience a return of it.”

“I knew him for years after, and never heard of any such thing. What strikes me is a parallel in the predisposing causes of each attack. Your unexpected, and gallant hand-to-hand encounter, at such desperate odds, with an experienced swordsman, like that insane colonel of dragoons, your fatigue, and, finally, your composing yourself, as my other friend did, to sleep.”

“I wish,” he resumed, “one could make out who that *coquin* was, who examined your letters. It is not worth turning back, however, because we should learn nothing. Those people always manage so adroitly. I am satisfied, however, that he must have been an agent of the police. A rogue of any other kind would have robbed you.”

I talked very little, being ill and exhausted, but the Marquis talked on agreeably.

“We grow so intimate,” said he, at last, “that I must remind you that I am not, for the present, the Marquis d’Harmonville, but only Monsieur Droqville; nevertheless, when we get to Paris, although I cannot see you often, I may be of use. I shall ask you to name to me the hotel at which you mean to put up; because the Marquis being, as you are aware, on his travels, the Hotel d'Harmonville is, for the present, tenanted only by two or three old servants, who must not even see Monsieur Droqville. That gentleman will, nevertheless, contrive to get you access to the box of Monsieur le Marquis, at the Opera; as well, possibly, as to other places more difficult; and so soon as the diplomatic office of the Marquis d'Harmonville is ended, and he at liberty to declare himself, he will not excuse his friend, Monsieur Beckett, from fulfilling his promise to visit him this autumn at the Château d'Harmonville."

You may be sure I thanked the Marquis.

The nearer we got to Paris, the more I valued his protection. The countenance of a great man on the spot, just then, taking so kind an interest in the stranger whom he had, as it were, blundered upon, might make my visit ever so many degrees more delightful than I had anticipated.

Nothing could be more gracious than the manner and looks of the Marquis; and, as I still thanked him, the carriage suddenly stopped in front of the place where a relay of horses awaited us, and where, as it turned out, we were to part.

CHAPTER IX.

GOSSIP AND COUNSEL.

My eventful journey was over, at last. I sat in my hotel window looking out upon brilliant Paris, which had, in a moment, recovered all its gaiety, and more than its accustomed bustle. Every one has read of the kind of excitement that followed the catastrophe of Napoleon, and the second restoration of the Bourbons. I need not, therefore, even if, at this distance, I could, recall and describe my experiences and impressions of the peculiar aspect of Paris, in those strange times. It was, to be sure, my first visit. But, often as I have seen it since, I don’t think I ever saw that delightful capital in a state, pleasurably, so excited and exciting.

I had been two days in Paris, and had seen all sorts of sights, and experienced none of that rudeness and insolence of which others complained, from the exasperated officers of the defeated French army.

I must say this, also. My romance had taken complete possession of me; and the chance of seeing the object of my dream, gave a secret and delightful interest to my rambles and drives in the streets and environs, and my visits to the galleries and other sights of the metropolis.

I had neither seen nor heard of Count or Countess, nor had the Marquis d’Harmonville made any sign. I had quite recovered the strange indisposition under which I had suffered during my night journey.

It was now evening, and I was beginning to fear that my patrician acquaintance had quite forgotten me, when the waiter presented me the card of ‘Monsieur Droqville;’ and, with no small elation and hurry, I desired him to show the gentleman up.

In came the Marquis d’Harmonville, kind and gracious as ever.

“I am a night-bird at present,” said he, so soon as we had exchanged the little speeches which are usual. “I keep in the shade, during the daytime, and even now I hardly ventured to come in a close carriage. The friends for whom I have undertaken a rather critical service, have so ordained it. They think all is lost, if I am known to be in Paris. First let me present you with these orders for my box. I am so vexed that I cannot command it oftener during the next fortnight; during my absence, I had directed my secretary to give it for any night to the first of my friends who might apply, and the result is, that I find next to nothing left at my disposal."

I thanked him very much.

"And now, a word, in my office of Mentor. You have not come here, of course, without introductions?"

I produced half-a-dozen letters, the addresses of which he looked at.

"Don't mind these letters," he said. "I will introduce you. I will take you myself from house to house. One friend at your side is worth many letters. Make no intimacies, no acquaintances, until then. You young men like best to exhaust the public amusements of a great city, before embarrassing yourself with the engagements of society. Go to all these. It will occupy you, day and night, for at least three weeks. When this is over, I shall be at liberty, and will myself introduce you to the brilliant but comparatively quiet routine of society. Place yourself in my hands; and in Paris remember, when once in society, you are always there."

I thanked him very much, and promised to follow his counsels implicitly.

He seemed pleased, and said —

"I shall now tell you some of the places you ought to go to. Take your map, and write letters or numbers upon the points I will indicate, and we will make out a little list. All the places that I shall mention to you are worth seeing."

In this methodical way, and with a great deal of amusing and scandalous anecdote, he furnished me with a catalogue and a guide, which, to a seeker of novelty and pleasure, was invaluable.

"In a fortnight, perhaps in a week," he said, "I shall be at leisure to be of real use to you. In the meantime, be on your guard. You must not play; you will be robbed if you do. Remember, you are surrounded, here, by plausible swindlers and villains of all kinds, who subsist by devouring strangers. Trust no one but those you know."

I thanked him again, and promised to profit by his advice. But my heart was too full of the beautiful lady of the Belle Etoile, to allow our interview to close without an effort to learn something about her. I therefore asked for the Count and Countess de St. Alyre, whom I had had the good fortune to extricate from an extremely unpleasant row in the hall of the inn.

Alas! he had not seen them since. He did not know where they were staying. They had a fine old house only a few leagues from Paris; but he thought it probable that they would remain, for a few days at least, in the city, as preparations would, no doubt, be necessary, after so long an absence, for their reception at home.

"How long have they been away?"

"About eight months, I think."

"They are poor, I think you said?"

"What *you* would consider poor. But, Monsieur, the Count has an income which affords them the comforts, and even the elegancies of life, living as they do, in a very quiet and retired way, in this cheap country."

"Then they are very happy?"

"One would say they *ought* to be happy."

"And what prevents?"

"He is jealous."

"But his wife — she gives him no cause?"

"I am afraid she does."

"How, Monsieur?"

"I always thought she was a little too — a *great deal* too— "

"Too *what*, Monsieur?"

"Too handsome. But although she has remarkably fine eyes, exquisite features, and the most delicate complexion in the world, I believe that she is a woman of probity. You have never seen her?"

"There was a lady, muffled up in a cloak, with a very thick veil on, the other night, in the hall of the Belle Etoile, when I broke that fellow's head who was bullying the old Count. But her veil was so thick I could not see a feature through it." My answer was diplomatic, you observe. "She may have been the Count's daughter. Do they quarrel?"

"Who, he and his wife?"

"Yes."

"A little."

"Oh! and what do they quarrel about?" "It is a long story; about the lady's diamonds. They are valuable — they are worth. La Perelleuse says, about a million of francs. The Count wishes them sold and turned into revenue, which he offers to settle as she pleases. The Countess, whose they are, resists, and for a reason which, I rather think, she can't disclose to him."

"And pray what is that?" I asked, my curiosity a good deal piqued.

"She is thinking, I conjecture, how well she will look in them when she marries her second husband."

"Oh? — yes, to be sure. But the Count de St. Alyre is a good man?"

"Admirable, and extremely intelligent."

"I should wish so much to be presented to the Count: you tell me he's so — "

"So agreeably married. But they are living quite out of the world. He takes her now and then to the Opera, or to a public entertainment; but that is all."

"And he must remember so much of the old *régime*, and so many of the scenes of the revolution!"

"Yes, the very man for a philosopher, like you! And he falls asleep after dinner; and his wife don't. But, seriously, he has retired from the gay and the great world, and has grown apathetic; and so has his wife; and nothing seems to interest her now, not even — her husband!"

The Marquis stood up to take his leave.

"Don't risk your money," said he. "You will soon have an opportunity of laying out some of it to great advantage. Several collections of really good pictures, belonging to persons who have mixed themselves up in this Bonapartist restoration, must come within a few weeks to the hammer. You can do wonders when these sales commence. There will be startling bargains! Reserve yourself for them. I shall let you know all about it. By-the-by," he said, stopping short as he approached the door, "I was so near forgetting. There is to be, next week, the very thing you would enjoy so much, because you see so little of it in England — I mean a *bal masqué*, conducted, it is said, with more than usual splendour. It takes place at Versailles — all the world will be there; there is such a rush for cards! But I think I may promise you one. Goodnight! Adieu!"

CHAPTER X.

THE BLACK VEIL.

Speaking the language fluently and with unlimited money, there was nothing to prevent my enjoying all that was enjoyable in the French capital. You may easily suppose how two days were passed. At the end of that time, and at about the same hour, Monsieur Droqville called again.

Courtly, goodnatured, gay, as usual, he told me that the masquerade ball was fixed for the next Wednesday, and that he had applied for a card for me.

How awfully unlucky. I was so afraid I should not be able to go.

He stared at me for a moment with a suspicious and menacing look which I did not understand, in silence, and then inquired, rather sharply.

“And will Monsieur Beckett be good enough to say, why not?”

I was a little surprised, but answered the simple truth: I had made an engagement for that evening with two or three English friends, and did not see how I could.

“Just so! You English, wherever you are, always look out for your English boors, your beer and ‘*bifstek*’; and when you come here, instead of trying to learn something of the people you visit, and pretend to study, you are guzzling, and swearing, and smoking with one another, and no wiser or more polished at the end of your travels than if you had been all the time carousing in a booth at Greenwich.”

He laughed sarcastically, and looked as if he could have poisoned me.

“There it is,” said he, throwing the card on the table. “Take it or leave it, just as you please. I suppose I shall have my trouble for my pains; but it is not usual when a man, such as I, takes trouble, asks a favour, and secures a privilege for an acquaintance, to treat him so.”

This was astonishingly impertinent!

I was shocked, offended, penitent. I had possibly committed unwittingly a breach of good-breeding, according to French ideas, which almost justified the brusque severity of the Marquis’s undignified rebuke.

In a confusion, therefore, of many feelings, I hastened to make my apologies, and to propitiate the chance friend who had showed me so much disinterested kindness.

I told him that I would, at any cost, break through the engagement in which I had unluckily entangled myself; that I had spoken with too little reflection, and that I certainly had not thanked him at all in proportion to his kindness and to my real estimate of it.

"Pray say not a word more; my vexation was entirely on your account; and I expressed it, I am only too conscious, in terms a great deal too strong, which, I am sure, your goodnature will pardon. Those who know me a little better are aware that I sometimes say a good deal more than I intend; and am always sorry when I do. Monsieur Beckett will forget that his old friend, Monsieur Droqville, has lost his temper in his cause, for a moment, and — we are as good friends as before."

He smiled like the Monsieur Droqville of the Belle Etoile, and extended his hand, which I took very respectfully and cordially.

Our momentary quarrel had left us only better friends.

The Marquis then told me I had better secure a bed in some hotel at Versailles, as a rush would be made to take them; and advised my going down next morning for the purpose.

I ordered horses accordingly for eleven o'clock; and, after a little more conversation, the Marquis d'Harmonville bid me goodnight, and ran down the stairs with his handkerchief to his mouth and nose, and, as I saw from my window, jumped into his close carriage again and drove away.

Next day I was at Versailles. As I approached the door of the Hotel de France, it was plain that I was not a moment too soon, if, indeed, I were not already too late.

A crowd of carriages were drawn up about the entrance, so that I had no chance of approaching except by dismounting and pushing my way among the horses. The hall was full of servants and gentlemen screaming to the proprietor, who, in a state of polite distraction, was assuring them, one and all, that there was not a room or a closet disengaged in his entire house.

I slipped out again, leaving the hall to those who were shouting, expostulating, wheedling, in the delusion that the host might, if he pleased, manage something for them. I jumped into my carriage and drove, at my horses' best pace, to the Hotel du Reservoir. The blockade about this door was as complete as the other. The result was the same. It was very provoking, but what was to be done? My postillion had, a little officiously, while I was in the hall talking with the hotel authorities, got his horses, bit by bit, as other carriages moved away, to the very steps of the inn door.

This arrangement was very convenient so far as getting in again was concerned. But, this accomplished, how were we to get on? There were carriages in front, and carriages behind, and no less than four rows of carriages, of all sorts, outside.

I had at this time remarkably long and clear sight, and if I had been impatient before, guess what my feelings were when I saw an open carriage pass along the narrow strip of roadway left open at the other side, a barouche in which I was certain I recognized the veiled Countess and her husband. This carriage had been brought to a walk by a cart which occupied the whole breadth of the narrow way, and was moving with the customary tardiness of such vehicles.

I should have done more wisely if I had jumped down on the *trottoir*, and run round the block of carriages in front of the barouche. But, unfortunately, I was more of a Murat than a Moltke, and preferred a direct charge upon my object to relying on *tactique*. I dashed across the back seat of a carriage which was next mine, I don't know how; tumbled through a sort of gig, in which an old gentleman and a dog were dozing; stepped with an incoherent apology over the side of an open carriage, in which were four gentlemen engaged in a hot dispute; tripped at the far side in getting out, and fell flat across the backs of a pair of horses, who instantly began plunging and threw me head foremost in the dust.

To those who observed my reckless charge without being in the secret of my object I must have appeared demented. Fortunately, the interesting barouche had passed before the catastrophe, and covered as I was with dust, and my hat blocked, you may be sure I did not care to present myself before the object of my Quixotic devotion.

I stood for a while amid a storm of *sacré*-ing, tempered disagreeably with laughter; and in the midst of these, while endeavouring to beat the dust from my clothes with my handkerchief, I heard a voice with which I was acquainted call, "Monsieur Beckett."

I looked and saw the Marquis peeping from a carriage-window. It was a welcome sight. In a moment I was at his carriage side.

"You may as well leave Versailles," he said; "you have learned, no doubt, that there is not a bed to hire in either of the hotels; and I can add that there is not a room to let in the whole town. But I have managed something for you that will answer just as well. Tell your servant to follow us, and get in here and sit beside me."

Fortunately an opening in the closely-packed carriages had just occurred, and mine was approaching.

I directed the servant to follow us; and the Marquis having said a word to his driver, we were immediately in motion.

"I will bring you to a comfortable place, the very existence of which is known to but few Parisians, where, knowing how things were here, I secured a room for you. It is only a mile away, and an old comfortable inn, called Le Dragon Volant. It was fortunate for you that my tiresome business called me to this place so early."

I think we had driven about a mile-and-a-half to the further side of the palace when we found ourselves upon a narrow old road, with the woods of Versailles on one side, and much older trees, of a size seldom seen in France, on the other.

We pulled up before an antique and solid inn, built of Caen stone, in a fashion richer and more florid than was ever usual in such houses, and which indicated that it was originally designed for the private mansion of some person of wealth, and probably, as the wall bore many carved shields and supporters, of distinction also. A kind of porch, less ancient than the rest, projected hospitably with a wide and florid arch, over which, cut in high relief in stone, and painted and gilded, was the sign of the inn. This was the Flying Dragon, with wings of brilliant red and gold, expanded, and its tail, pale green and gold, twisted and knotted into ever so many rings, and ending in a burnished point barbed like the dart of death.

"I shan't go in — but you will find it a comfortable place; at all events better than nothing. I would go in with you, but my incognito forbids. You will, I daresay, be all the better pleased to learn that the inn is haunted — I should have been, in my young days, I know. But don't allude to that awful fact in hearing of your host, for I believe it is a sore subject. Adieu. If you want to enjoy yourself at the ball take my advice, and go in a domino. I think I shall look in; and certainly, if I do, in the same costume. How shall we recognize one another? Let me see, something held in the fingers — a flower won't do, so many people will have flowers. Suppose you get a red cross a couple of inches long — you're an Englishman — stitched or pinned on the breast of your domino, and I a white one? Yes, that will do very well; and whatever room you go into keep near the door till we meet. I shall look for you at all the doors I pass; and you, in the same way, for me; and we *must* find each other soon. So that is understood. I can't enjoy a thing of that kind with any but a young person; a man of my age requires the contagion of young spirits and the companionship of some one who enjoys everything spontaneously. Farewell; we meet tonight."

By this time I was standing *on* the road; I shut the carriage-door; bid him goodbye; and away he drove.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DRAGON VOLANT.

I took one look about me.

The building was picturesque; the trees made it more so. The antique and sequestered character of the scene, contrasted strangely with the glare and bustle of the Parisian life, to which my eye and ear had become accustomed.

Then I examined the gorgeous old sign for a minute or two. Next I surveyed the exterior of the house more carefully. It was large and solid, and squared more with my ideas of an ancient English hostelrie, such as the Canterbury pilgrims might have put up at, than a French house of entertainment. Except, indeed, for a round turret, that rose at the left flank of the house, and terminated in the extinguisher-shaped roof that suggests a French château.

I entered and announced myself as Monsieur Beckett, for whom a room had been taken. I was received with all the consideration due to an English milord, with, of course, an unfathomable purse.

My host conducted me to my apartment. It was a large room, a little sombre, panelled with dark wainscoting, and furnished in a stately and sombre style, long out of date. There was a wide hearth, and a heavy mantelpiece, carved with shields, in which I might, had I been curious enough, have discovered a correspondence with the heraldry on the outer walls. There was something interesting, melancholy, and even depressing in all this. I went to the stone-shafted window, and looked out upon a small park, with a thick wood, forming the background of a château, which presented a cluster of such conical-topped turrets as I have just now mentioned.

The wood and château were melancholy objects. They showed signs of neglect, and almost of decay; and the gloom of fallen grandeur, and a certain air of desertion hung oppressively over the scene.

I asked my host the name of the château.

“That, Monsieur, is the Château de la Carque,” he answered.

“It is a pity it is so neglected,” I observed. “I should say, perhaps, a pity that its proprietor is not more wealthy?”

“Perhaps so, Monsieur.”

“*Perhaps*?” — I repeated, and looked at him. “Then I suppose he is not very popular.”

“Neither one thing nor the other, Monsieur,” he answered; “I meant only that we could not tell what use he might make of riches.”

“And who is he?” I inquired.

“The Count de St. Alyre.”

“Oh! The Count! You are quite sure?” I asked, very eagerly.

It was now the innkeeper’s turn to look at me.

“*Quite* sure, Monsieur, the Count de St. Alyre.”

“Do you see much of him in this part of the world?”

“Not a great deal, Monsieur; he is often absent for a considerable time.”

“And is he poor?” I inquired.

“I pay rent to him for this house. It is not much; but I find he cannot wait long for it,” he replied, smiling satirically.

“From what I have heard, however, I should think he cannot be very poor?” I continued.

“They say, Monsieur, he plays. I know not. He certainly is not rich. About seven months ago, a relation of his died in a distant place. His body was sent to the Count’s house here, and by him buried in Père la Chaise, as the poor gentleman had desired. The Count was in profound affliction; although he got a handsome legacy, they say, by that death. But money never seems to do him good for any time.”

“He is old, I believe?”

“Old? we call him the ‘Wandering Jew,’ except, indeed, that he has not always the five *sous* in his pocket. Yet, Monsieur, his courage does not fail him. He has taken a young and handsome wife.”

“And, she?” I urged —

“Is the Countess de St. Alyre.”

“Yes; but I fancy we may say something more? She has attributes?”

“Three, Monsieur, three, at least most amiable.”

“Ah! And what are they?”

“Youth, beauty, and — diamonds.”

I laughed. The sly old gentleman was foiling my curiosity.

"I see, my friend," said I, "you are reluctant— "

"To quarrel with the Count," he concluded. "True. You see, Monsieur, he could vex me in two or three ways; so could I him. But, on the whole, it is better each to mind his business, and to maintain peaceful relations; you understand."

It was, therefore, no use trying, at least for the present. Perhaps he had nothing to relate. Should I think differently, by-and-by, I could try the effect of a few Napoleons. Possibly he meant to extract them.

The host of the Dragon Volant was an elderly man, thin, bronzed, intelligent, and with an air of decision, perfectly military. I learned afterwards that he had served under Napoleon in his early Italian campaigns.

"One question, I think you may answer," I said, "without risking a quarrel. Is the Count at home?"

"He has many homes, I conjecture," said the host evasively. "But — but I think I may say, Monsieur, that he is, I believe, at present staying at the Château de la Carque."

I looked out of the window, more interested than ever, across the undulating grounds to the château, with its gloomy background of foliage.

"I saw him to-day, in his carriage at Versailles," I said.

"Very natural."

"Then his carriage and horses and servants are at the château?"

"The carriage he puts up here, Monsieur, and the servants are hired for the occasion. There is but one who sleeps at the château. Such a life must be terrifying for Madame the Countess," he replied.

"The old screw!" I thought. "By this torture, he hopes to extract her diamonds. What a life! What fiends to contend with — jealousy and extortion!"

The knight having made this speech to himself, cast his eyes once more upon the enchanter's castle, and heaved a gentle sigh — a sigh of longing, of resolution, and of love.

What a fool I was! and yet, in the sight of angels, are we any wiser as we grow older? It seems to me, only, that our illusions change as we go on; but, still, we are madmen all the same.

"Well, St. Clair," said I, as my servant entered, and began to arrange my things. "You have got a bed?"

“In the cock-loft, Monsieur, among the spiders, and, *par ma foi*! the cats and the owls. But we agree very well. *Vive la bagatelle*!”

“I had no idea it was so full.”

“Chiefly the servants, Monsieur, of those persons who were fortunate enough to get apartments at Versailles.”

“And what do you think of the Dragon Volant?”

“The Dragon Volant! Monsieur; the old fiery dragon! The devil himself, if all is true! On the faith of a Christian, Monsieur, they say that diabolical miracles have taken place in this house.”

“What do you mean? *Revenants*?”

“Not at all, sir; I wish it was no worse. *Revenants*? No! People who have *never* returned — who vanished, before the eyes of half-a-dozen men, all looking at them.”

“What do you mean, St. Clair? Let us hear the story, or miracle, or whatever it is.”

“It is only this, Monsieur, that an ex-master-of-the-horse of the late king, who lost his head — Monsieur will have the goodness to recollect, in the revolution — being permitted by the Emperor to return to France, lived here in this hotel, for a month, and at the end of that time vanished, visibly, as I told you, before the faces of half-a-dozen credible witnesses! The other was a Russian nobleman, six feet high and upwards, who, standing in the centre of the room, downstairs, describing to seven gentlemen of unquestionable veracity, the last moments of Peter the Great, and having a glass of *eau de vie* in his left hand, and his *tasse de café*, nearly finished, in his right, in like manner vanished. His boots were found on the floor where he had been standing; and the gentleman at his right, found, to his astonishment, his cup of coffee in his fingers, and the gentleman at his left, his glass of *eau de vie* — “

“Which he swallowed in his confusion,” I suggested.

“Which was preserved for three years among the curious articles of this house, and was broken by the *curé* while conversing with Mademoiselle Fidone in the housekeeper’s room; but of the Russian nobleman himself, nothing more was ever seen or heard! *Parbleu!* when *we* go out of the Dragon Volant, I hope it may be by the door. I heard all this, Monsieur, from the postillion who drove us.”

“Then it *must* be true!” said I, jocularly: but I was beginning to feel the gloom of the view, and of the chamber in which I stood; there had stolen over me, I know not how, a presentiment of evil; and my joke was with an effort, and my spirit flagged.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAGICIAN.

No more brilliant spectacle than this masked ball could be imagined. Among other *salons* and galleries, thrown open, was the enormous perspective of the “Grande Galerie des Glaces,” lighted up on that occasion with no less than four thousand wax candles, reflected and repeated by all the mirrors, so that the effect was almost dazzling. The grand suite of *salons* was thronged with masques, in every conceivable costume. There was not a single room deserted. Every place was animated with music, voices, brilliant colours, flashing jewels, the hilarity of extemporized comedy, and all the spirited incidents of a cleverly sustained masquerade. I had never seen before anything, in the least, comparable to this magnificent *fête*. I moved along, indolently, in my domino and mask, loitering, now and then, to enjoy a clever dialogue, a farcical song, or an amusing monologue, but, at the same time, keeping my eyes about me, lest my friend in the black domino, with the little white cross on his breast, should pass me by.

I had delayed and looked about me, specially, at every door I passed, as the Marquis and I had agreed; but he had not yet appeared.

While I was thus employed, in the very luxury of lazy amusement, I saw a gilded sedan chair, or, rather, a Chinese palanquin, exhibiting the fantastic exuberance of “Celestial” decoration, borne forward on gilded poles by four richly-dressed Chinese; one with a wand in his hand marched in front, and another behind; and a slight and solemn man, with a long black beard, a tall fez, such as a dervish is represented as wearing, walked close to its side. A strangely-embroidered robe fell over his shoulders, covered with hieroglyphic symbols; the embroidery was in black and gold, upon a variegated ground of brilliant colours. The robe was bound about his waist with a broad belt of gold, with cabalistic devices traced on it, in dark red and black; red stockings, and shoes embroidered with gold, and pointed and curved upward at the toes, in Oriental fashion, appeared below the skirt of the robe. The man’s face was dark, fixed, and solemn, and his eyebrows black, and enormously heavy — he carried a singular-looking book under his arm, a wand of polished black wood in his other hand, and walked with his chin sunk on his breast, and his eyes fixed upon the floor. The man in front waved his wand right and left to clear the way for the advancing palanquin, the curtains of which were closed; and there was something so singular, strange, and solemn about the whole thing, that I felt at once interested.

I was very well pleased when I saw the bearers set down their burthen within a few yards of the spot on which I stood.

The bearers and the men with the gilded wands forthwith clapped their hands, and in silence danced round the palanquin a curious and half frantic dance, which was yet, as to figures and postures, perfectly methodical. This was soon accompanied by a clapping of hands and a ha-ha-ing, rhythmically delivered.

While the dance was going on a hand was lightly laid on my arm, and, looking round, a black domino with a white cross stood beside me.

"I am so glad I have found you," said the Marquis; "and at this moment. This is the best group in the rooms. *You* must speak to the wizard. About an hour ago I lighted upon them, in another *salon*, and consulted the oracle, by putting questions. I never was more amazed. Although his answers were a little disguised it was soon perfectly plain that he knew every detail about the business, which no one on earth had heard of but myself, and two or three other men, about the most cautious persons in France. I shall never forget that shock. I saw other people who consulted him, evidently as much surprised, and more frightened than I. I came with the Count St. Alyre and the Countess."

He nodded toward a thin figure, also in a domino. It was the Count.

"Come," he said to me, "I'll introduce you."

I followed, you may suppose, readily enough.

The Marquis presented me, with a very prettily-turned allusion to my fortunate intervention in his favour at the Belle Etoile; and the Count overwhelmed me with polite speeches, and ended by saying, what pleased me better still:

"The Countess is near us, in the next *salon* but one, chatting with her old friend the Duchesse d'Argensaque; I shall go for her in a few minutes; and when I bring her here, she shall make your acquaintance; and thank you, also, for your assistance, rendered with so much courage when we were so very disagreeably interrupted.”

“You must, positively, speak with the magician,” said the Marquis to the Count de St. Alyre, “you will be so much amused. *I* did so; and, I assure you, I could not have anticipated such answers! I don’t know what to believe.”

“Really! Then, by all means, let us try,” he replied.

We three approached, together, the side of the palanquin, at which the black-bearded magician stood.

A young man, in a Spanish dress, who, with a friend at his side, had just conferred with the conjuror, was saying, as he passed us by:

“Ingenious mystification! Who is that in the palanquin. He seems to know everybody.”

The Count, in his mask and domino, moved along, stiffly, with us, toward the palanquin. A clear circle was maintained by the Chinese attendants, and the spectators crowded round in a ring.

One of these men — he who with a gilded wand had preceded the procession — advanced, extending his empty hand, palm upward.

“Money?” inquired the Count.

“Gold,” replied the usher.

The Count placed a piece of money in his hand; and I and the Marquis were each called on in turn to do likewise as we entered the circle. We paid accordingly.

The conjuror stood beside the palanquin, its silk curtain in his hand; his chin sunk, with its long, jet-black beard, on his chest; the outer hand grasping the black wand, on which he leaned; his eyes were lowered, as before, to the ground; his face looked absolutely lifeless. Indeed, I never saw face or figure so moveless, except in death.

The first question the Count put, was —

“Am I married, or unmarried?”

The conjuror drew back the curtain quickly, and placed his ear toward a richly-dressed Chinese, who sat in the litter; withdrew his head, and closed the curtain again; and then answered —

“Yes.”

The same preliminary was observed each time, so that the man with the black wand presented himself, not as a prophet, but as a medium; and answered, as it seemed, in the words of a greater than himself.

Two or three questions followed, the answers to which seemed to amuse the Marquis very much; but the point of which I could not see, for I knew next to nothing of the Count's peculiarities and adventures.

"Does my wife love me?" asked he, playfully.

"As well as you deserve."

"Whom do I love best in the world?"

"Self."

"Oh! That I fancy is pretty much the case with every one. But, putting myself out of the question, do I love anything on earth better than my wife?"

"Her diamonds."

"Oh!" said the Count.

The Marquis, I could see, laughed.

"Is it true," said the Count, changing the conversation peremptorily, "that there has been a battle in Naples?"

"No; in France."

"Indeed," said the Count, satirically, with a glance round. "And may I inquire between what powers, and on what particular quarrel?"

"Between the Count and Countess de St. Alyre, and about a document they subscribed on the 25th July, 1811."

The Marquis afterwards told me that this was the date of their marriage settlement.

The Count stood stock-still for a minute or so; and one could fancy that they saw his face flushing through his mask.

Nobody, but we two, knew that the inquirer was the Count de St. Alyre.

I thought he was puzzled to find a subject for his next question; and, perhaps, repented having entangled himself in such a colloquy. If so, he was relieved; for the Marquis, touching his arm, whispered —

"Look to your right, and see who is coming."

I looked in the direction indicated by the Marquis, and I saw a gaunt figure stalking toward us. It was not a masque. The face was broad, scarred, and white. In a word, it was the ugly face of Colonel Gaillarde, who, in the costume of a corporal of the Imperial Guard, with his left arm so adjusted as to look like a stump, leaving the lower part of the coat-sleeve empty, and pinned up to the breast. There were strips of very real sticking-plaster across his eyebrow and temple, where my stick had left its mark, to score, hereafter, among the more honourable scars of war.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ORACLE TELLS ME WONDERS.

I forgot for a moment how impervious my mask and domino were to the hard stare of the old campaigner, and was preparing for an animated scuffle. It was only for a moment, of course; but the Count cautiously drew a little back as the gasconading corporal, in blue uniform, white vest, and white gaiters — for my friend Gaillarde was as loud and swaggering in his assumed character as in his real one of a colonel of dragoons — drew near. He had already twice all but got himself turned out of doors for vaunting the exploits of Napoleon le Grand, in terrific mock-heroics, and had very nearly come to hand-grips with a Prussian hussar. In fact, he would have been involved in several sanguinary rows already, had not his discretion reminded him that the object of his coming there at all, namely, to arrange a meeting with an affluent widow, on whom he believed he had made a tender impression, would not have been promoted by his premature removal from the festive scene, of which he was an ornament, in charge of a couple of gendarmes.

"Money! Gold! Bah! What money can a wounded soldier like your humble servant have amassed, with but his sword-hand left, which, being necessarily occupied, places not a finger at his command with which to scrape together the spoils of a routed enemy?"

"No gold from him," said the magician. "His scars frank him."

"Bravo, Monsieur le prophète! Bravissimo! Here I am. Shall I begin, mon *sorcier*, without further loss of time, to question your— "

Without waiting for an answer, he commenced, in Stentorian tones.

After half-a-dozen questions and answers, he asked —

"Whom do I pursue at present?"

"Two persons."

"Ha! Two? Well, who are they?"

"An Englishman, whom, if you catch, he will kill you; and a French widow, whom if you find, she will spit in your face."

“Monsieur le magicien calls a spade a spade, and knows that his cloth protects him. No matter! Why do I pursue them?”

“The widow has inflicted a wound on your heart, and the Englishman a wound on your head. They are each separately too strong for you; take care your pursuit does not unite them.”

“Bah! How could that be?”

“The Englishman protects ladies. He has got that fact into your head. The widow, if she sees, will marry him. It takes some time, she will reflect, to become a colonel, and the Englishman is unquestionably young.”

“I will cut his cock’s-comb for him,” he ejaculated with an oath and a grin; and in a softer tone he asked, “Where is she?”

“Near enough to be offended if you fail.”

“So she ought, by my faith. You are right, Monsieur le prophète! A hundred thousand thanks! Farewell!” And staring about him, and stretching his lank neck as high as he could, he strode away with his scars, and white waistcoat and gaiters, and his bearskin shako.

I had been trying to see the person who sat in the palanquin. I had only once an opportunity of a tolerably steady peep. What I saw was singular. The oracle was dressed, as I have said, very richly, in the Chinese fashion. He was a figure altogether on a larger scale than the interpreter, who stood outside. The features seemed to me large and heavy, and the head was carried with a downward inclination! the eyes were closed, and the chin rested on the breast of his embroidered pelisse. The face seemed fixed, and the very image of apathy. Its character and *pose* seemed an exaggerated repetition of the immobility of the figure who communicated with the noisy outer world. This face looked blood-red; but that was caused, I concluded, by the light entering through the red silk curtains. All this struck me almost at a glance; I had not many seconds in which to make my observation. The ground was now clear, and the Marquis said, “Go forward, my friend.”

I did so. When I reached the magician, as we called the man with the black wand, I glanced over my shoulder to see whether the Count was near.

No, he was some yards behind; and he and the Marquis, whose curiosity seemed to be, by this time, satisfied, were now conversing generally upon some subject of course quite different.

I was relieved, for the sage seemed to blurt out secrets in an unexpected way; and some of mine might not have amused the Count.

I thought for a moment. I wished to test the prophet. A Church-of-England man was a *rara avis* in Paris.

"What is my religion?" I asked.

"A beautiful heresy," answered the oracle instantly.

"A heresy? — and pray how is it named?"

"Love."

"Oh! Then I suppose I am a polytheist, and love a great many?"

"One."

"But, seriously," I asked, intending to turn the course of our colloquy a little out of an embarrassing channel, "have I ever learned any words of devotion by heart?"

"Yes."

"Can you repeat them?"

"Approach."

I did, and lowered my ear.

The man with the black wand closed the curtains, and whispered, slowly and distinctly, these words, which, I need scarcely tell you, I instantly recognized:

I may never see you more; and, oh! that I could forget you! go — farewell — for God's sake, go!

I started as I heard them. They were, you know, the last words whispered to me by the Countess.

Good Heaven! How miraculous! Words heard, most assuredly, by no ear on earth but my own and the lady's who uttered them, till now!

I looked at the impassive face of the spokesman with the wand. There was no trace of meaning, or even of a consciousness that the words he had uttered could possibly interest me.

"What do I most long for?" I asked, scarcely knowing what I said.

"Paradise."

"And what prevents my reaching it?"

"A black veil."

Stronger and stronger! The answers seemed to me to indicate the minutest acquaintance with every detail of my little romance, of which not even the Marquis knew anything! And I, the questioner, masked and robed so that my own brother could not have known me!

"You said I loved some one. Am I loved in return?" I asked.

"Try."

I was speaking lower than before, and stood near the dark man with the beard, to prevent the necessity of his speaking in a loud key.

"Does any one love me?" I repeated.

"Secretly," was the answer.

"Much or little?" I inquired.

"Too well."

"How long will that love last?"

"Till the rose casts its leaves."

"The rose — another allusion!"

"Then — darkness!" I sighed. "But till then I live in light."

"The light of violet eyes."

Love, if not a religion, as the oracle had just pronounced it, is, at least, a superstition. How it exalts the imagination! How it enervates the reason! How credulous it makes us!

All this which, in the case of another, I should have laughed at, most powerfully affected me in my own. It inflamed my ardour, and half crazed my brain, and even influenced my conduct.

The spokesman of this wonderful trick — if trick it were — now waved me backward with his wand, and as I withdrew, my eyes still fixed upon the group, by this time encircled with an aura of mystery in my fancy; backing toward the ring of spectators, I saw him raise his hand suddenly, with a gesture of command, as a signal to the usher who carried the golden wand in front.

The usher struck his wand on the ground, and, in a shrill voice, proclaimed; "The great Confu is silent for an hour."

Instantly the bearers pulled down a sort of blind of bamboo, which descended with a sharp clatter, and secured it at the bottom; and then the man in the tall fez, with the black beard and wand, began a sort of dervish dance. In this the men with the gold wands joined, and finally, in an outer ring, the bearers, the palanquin being the centre of the circles described by these solemn dancers, whose pace, little by little, quickened, whose gestures grew sudden, strange, frantic, as the motion became swifter and swifter, until at length the whirl became so rapid that the dancers seemed to fly by with the speed of a mill-wheel, and amid a general clapping of hands, and universal wonder, these strange performers mingled with the crowd, and the exhibition, for the time at least, ended.

The Marquis d’Harmonville was standing not far away, looking on the ground, as one could judge by his attitude and musing. I approached, and he said:

“The Count has just gone away to look for his wife. It is a pity she was not here to consult the prophet; it would have been amusing, I daresay, to see how the Count bore it. Suppose we follow him. I have asked him to introduce you.”

With a beating heart, I accompanied the Marquis d’Harmonville.

CHAPTER XIV.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

We wandered through the salons, the Marquis and I. It was no easy matter to find a friend in rooms so crowded.

"Stay here," said the Marquis, "I have thought of a way of finding him. Besides, his jealousy may have warned him that there is no particular advantage to be gained by presenting you to his wife, I had better go and reason with him; as you seem to wish an introduction so very much."

This occurred in the room that is now called the "Salon d'Apollon." The paintings remained in my memory, and my adventure of that evening was destined to occur there.

I sat down upon a sofa; and looked about me. Three or four persons beside myself were seated on this roomy piece of gilded furniture. They were chatting all very gaily; all — except the person who sat next me, and she was a lady. Hardly two feet interposed between us. The lady sat apparently in a reverie. Nothing could be more graceful. She wore the costume perpetuated in Collignan's full-length portrait of Mademoiselle de la Vallière. It is, as you know, not only rich, but elegant. Her hair was powdered, but one could perceive that it was naturally a dark brown. One pretty little foot appeared, and could anything be more exquisite than her hand?

It was extremely provoking that this lady wore her mask, and did not, as many did, hold it for a time in her hand.

I was convinced that she was pretty. Availing myself of the privilege of a masquerade, a microcosm in which it is impossible, except by voice and allusion, to distinguish friend from foe, I spoke —

"It is not easy, Mademoiselle, to deceive me," I began.

"So much the better for Monsieur," answered the mask, quietly.

"I mean," I said, determined to tell my fib, "that beauty is a gift more difficult to conceal than Mademoiselle supposes."

"Yet Monsieur has succeeded very well," she said in the same sweet and careless tones.

"I see the costume of this, the beautiful Mademoiselle de la Vallière, upon a form that surpasses her own; I raise my eyes, and I behold a mask, and yet I recognise the lady; beauty is like that precious stone in the 'Arabian Nights,' which emits, no matter how concealed, a light that betrays it."

"I know the story," said the young lady. "The light betrayed it, not in the sun, but in darkness. Is there so little light in these rooms, Monsieur, that a poor glowworm can show so brightly. I thought we were in a luminous atmosphere, wherever a certain countess moved?"

Here was an awkward speech! How was I to answer? This lady might be, as they say some ladies are, a lover of mischief, or an intimate of the Countess de St. Alyre. Cautiously, therefore, I inquired,

"What countess?"

"If you know me, you must know that she is my dearest friend. Is she not beautiful?"

"How can I answer, there are so many countesses."

"Every one who knows me, knows who my best beloved friend is. You don't know me?"

"That is cruel. I can scarcely believe I am mistaken."

"With whom were you walking, just now?" she asked.

"A gentleman, a friend," I answered.

"I saw him, of course, a friend; but I think I know him, and should like to be certain. Is he not a certain marquis?"

Here was another question that was extremely awkward.

"There are so many people here, and one may walk, at one time, with one, and at another with a different one, that— "

"That an unscrupulous person has no difficulty in evading a simple question like mine. Know then, once for all, that nothing disgusts a person of spirit so much as suspicion. You, Monsieur, are a gentleman of discretion. I shall respect you accordingly."

"Mademoiselle would despise me, were I to violate a confidence."

"But you don't deceive me. You imitate your friend's diplomacy. I hate diplomacy. It means fraud and cowardice. Don't you think I know him. The gentleman with the cross of white ribbon on his breast. I know the Marquis d'Harmonville perfectly. You see to what good purpose your ingenuity has been expended."

"To that conjecture I can answer neither yes nor no."

“You need not. But what was your motive in mortifying a lady?”

“It is the last thing on earth I should do.”

“You affected to know me, and you don’t; through caprice or listlessness or curiosity you wished to converse, not with a lady, but with a costume. You admired, and you pretend to mistake me for another. But who is quite perfect? Is truth any longer to be found on earth?”

“Mademoiselle has formed a mistaken opinion of me.”

“And you also of me; you find me less foolish than you supposed. I know perfectly whom you intend amusing with compliments and melancholy declamation, and whom, with that amiable purpose, you have been seeking.”

“Tell me whom you mean,” I entreated.

“Upon one condition.”

“What is that?”

“That you will confess if I name the lady.”

“You describe my object unfairly.” I objected. “I can’t admit that I proposed speaking to any lady in the tone you describe.”

“Well, I shan’t insist on that; only if I name the lady, you will promise to admit that I am right.”

“*Must* I promise?”

“Certainly not, there is no compulsion; but your promise is the only condition on which I will speak to you again.”

I hesitated for a moment; but how could she possibly tell? The Countess would scarcely have admitted this little romance to any one; and the mask in the La Vallière costume could not possibly know who the masked domino beside her was.

“I consent,” I said, “I promise.”

“You must promise on the honour of a gentleman.”

“Well, I do; on the honour of a gentleman.”

“Then this lady is the Countess de St. Alyre.” I was unspeakably surprised; I was disconcerted; but I remembered my promise, and said —

“The Countess de St. Alyre *is*, unquestionably, the lady to whom I hoped for an introduction tonight; but I beg to assure you also on the honour of a gentleman, that she has not the faintest imaginable suspicion that I was seeking such an honour, nor, in all probability, does she remember that such a person as I exists. I had the honour to render her and the Count a trifling service, too trifling, I fear, to have earned more than an hour's recollection."

"The world is not so ungrateful as you suppose; or if it be, there are, nevertheless, a few hearts that redeem it. I can answer for the Countess de St. Alyre, she never forgets a kindness. She does not show all she feels; for she is unhappy, and cannot."

"Unhappy! I feared, indeed, that might be. But for all the rest that you are good enough to suppose, it is but a flattering dream."

"I told you that I am the Countess's friend, and being so I must know something of her character; also, there are confidences between us, and I may know more than you think, of those trifling services of which you suppose the recollection is so transitory."

I was becoming more and more interested. I was as wicked as other young men, and the heinousness of such a pursuit was as nothing, now that self-love and all the passions that mingle in such a romance, were roused. The image of the beautiful Countess had now again quite superseded the pretty counterpart of La Vallière, who was before me. I would have given a great deal to hear, in solemn earnest, that she did remember the champion who, for her sake, had thrown himself before the sabre of an enraged dragoon, with only a cudgel in his hand, and conquered.

"You say the Countess is unhappy," said I. "What causes her unhappiness?"

"Many things. Her husband is old, jealous, and tyrannical. Is not that enough? Even when relieved from his society, she is lonely."

"But you are her friend?" I suggested.

"And you think one friend enough?" she answered; "she has one alone, to whom she can open her heart."

"Is there room for another friend?"

"Try."

"How can I find a way?"

"She will aid you."

"How?"

She answered by a question. "Have you secured rooms in either of the hotels of Versailles?"

"No, I could not. I am lodged in the Dragon Volant, which stands at the verge of the grounds of the Château de la Carque."

“That is better still. I need not ask if you have courage for an adventure. I need not ask if you are a man of honour. A lady may trust herself to you, and fear nothing. There are few men to whom the interview, such as I shall arrange, could be granted with safety. You shall meet her at two o’clock this morning in the Park of the Château de la Carque. What room do you occupy in the Dragon Volant?”

I was amazed at the audacity and decision of this girl. Was she, as we say in England, hoaxing me?

“I can describe that accurately,” said I. “As I look from the rear of the house, in which my apartment is, I am at the extreme right, next the angle; and one pair of stairs up, from the hall.”

“Very well; you must have observed, if you looked into the park, two or three clumps of chestnut and lime-trees, growing so close together as to form a small grove. You must return to your hotel, change your dress, and, preserving a scrupulous secrecy, as to why or where you go, leave the Dragon Volant, and climb the park-wall, unseen; you will easily recognize the grove I have mentioned; there you will meet the Countess, who will grant you an audience of a few minutes, who will expect the most scrupulous reserve on your part, and who will explain to you, in a few words, a great deal which *I* could not so well tell you here.”

I cannot describe the feeling with which I heard these words. I was astounded. Doubt succeeded. I could not believe these agitating words.

“Mademoiselle will believe that if I only dared assure myself that so great a happiness and honour were really intended for me, my gratitude would be as lasting as my life. But how dare I believe that Mademoiselle does not speak, rather from her own sympathy or goodness, than from a certainty that the Countess de St. Alyre would concede so great an honour?”

“Monsieur believes either that I am not, as I pretend to be, in the secret which he hitherto supposed to be shared by no one but the Countess and himself, or else that I am cruelly mystifying him. That I am in her confidence, I swear by all that is dear in a whispered farewell. By the last companion of this flower!” and she took for a moment in her fingers the nodding head of a white rosebud that was nestled in her bouquet. “By my own good star, and hers — or shall I call it our ‘*belle* étoile?’ Have I said enough?”

“Enough?” I repeated, “more than enough — a thousand thanks.”

"And being thus in her confidence, I am clearly her friend; and being a friend would it be friendly to use her dear name so; and all for sake of practising a vulgar trick upon you — a stranger?"

"Mademoiselle will forgive me. Remember how very precious is the hope of seeing, and speaking to the Countess. Is it wonderful, then, that I should falter in my belief? You have convinced me, however, and will forgive my hesitation."

"You will be at the place I have described, then, at two o'clock?"

"Assuredly," I answered.

"And Monsieur, I know, will not fail, through fear. No, he need not assure me; his courage is already proved."

"No danger, in such a case, will be unwelcome to me."

"Had you not better go now, Monsieur, and rejoin your friend?"

"I promised to wait here for my friend's return. The Count de St. Alyre said that he intended to introduce me to the Countess."

"And Monsieur is so simple as to believe him?"

"Why should I not?"

"Because he is jealous and cunning. You will see. He will never introduce you to his wife. He will come here and say he cannot find her, and promise another time."

"I think I see him approaching, with my friend. No — there is no lady with him."

"I told you so. You will wait a long time for that happiness, if it is never to reach you except through his hands. In the meantime, you had better not let him see you so near me. He will suspect that we have been talking of his wife; and that will whet his jealousy and his vigilance."

I thanked my unknown friend in the mask, and withdrawing a few steps, came, by a little "circumbendibus," upon the flank of the Count.

I smiled under my mask, as he assured me that the Duchesse de la Roqueme had changed her place, and taken the Countess with her; but he hoped, at some very early time, to have an opportunity of enabling her to make my acquaintance.

I avoided the Marquis d'Harmonville, who was following the Count. I was afraid he might propose accompanying me home, and had no wish to be forced to make an explanation.

I lost myself quickly, therefore, in the crowd, and moved, as rapidly as it would allow me, toward the Galerie des Glaces, which lay in the direction opposite to that in which I saw the Count and my friend the Marquis moving.

CHAPTER XV.

STRANGE STORY OF THE DRAGON VOLANT.

These *fêtes* were earlier in those days, and in France, than our modern balls are in London. I consulted my watch. It was a little past twelve.

It was a still and sultry night; the magnificent suite of rooms, vast as some of them were, could not be kept at a temperature less than oppressive, especially to people with masks on. In some places the crowd was inconvenient, and the profusion of lights added to the heat. I removed my mask, therefore, as I saw some other people do, who were as careless of mystery as I. I had hardly done so, and began to breathe more comfortably, when I heard a friendly English voice call me by my name. It was Tom Whistlewick, of the — th Dragoons. He had unmasked, with a very flushed face, as I did. He was one of those Waterloo heroes, new from the mint of glory, whom, as a body, all the world, except France, revered; and the only thing I knew against him, was a habit of allaying his thirst, which was excessive, at balls, *fêtes*, musical parties, and all gatherings, where it was to be had, with champagne; and, as he introduced me to his friend, Monsieur Carmaignac, I observed that he spoke a little thick. Monsieur Carmaignac was little, lean, and as straight as a ramrod. He was bald, took snuff, and wore spectacles; and, as I soon learned, held an official position.

Tom was facetious, sly, and rather difficult to understand, in his present pleasant mood. He was elevating his eyebrows and screwing his lips oddly, and fanning himself vaguely with his mask.

After some agreeable conversation, I was glad to observe that he preferred silence, and was satisfied with the *rôle* of listener, as I and Monsieur Carmaignac chatted; and he seated himself, with extraordinary caution and indecision, upon a bench, beside us, and seemed very soon to find a difficulty in keeping his eyes open.

“I heard you mention,” said the French gentleman, “that you had engaged an apartment in the Dragon Volant, about half a league from this. When I was in a different police department, about four years ago, two very strange cases were connected with that house. One was of a wealthy *émigré*, permitted to return to France, by the Em — by Napoleon. He vanished. The other — equally strange — was the case of a Russian of rank and wealth. He disappeared just as mysteriously.”

“My servant,” I said, “gave me a confused account of some occurrences, and, as well as I recollect he described the same persons — I mean a returned French nobleman, and a Russian gentleman. But he made the whole story so marvellous — I mean in the supernatural sense — that, I confess, I did not believe a word of it.”

“No, there was nothing supernatural; but a great deal inexplicable,” said the French gentleman. “Of course there may be theories; but the thing was never explained, nor, so far as I know, was a ray of light ever thrown upon it.”

“Pray let me hear the story,” I said. “I think I have a claim, as it affects my quarters. You don’t suspect the people of the house?”

“Oh! it has changed hands since then. But there seemed to be a fatality about a particular room.”

“Could you describe that room?”

“Certainly. It is a spacious, panelled bedroom, up one pair of stairs, in the back of the house, and at the extreme right, as you look from its windows.”

“Ho! Really? Why, then, I have got the very room!” I said, beginning to be more interested — perhaps the least bit in the world, disagreeably. “Did the people die, or were they actually spirited away?”

“No, they did not die — they disappeared very oddly. I’ll tell you the particulars — I happen to know them exactly, because I made an official visit, on the first occasion, to the house, to collect evidence; and although I did not go down there, upon the second, the papers came before me, and I dictated the official letter despatched to the relations of the people who had disappeared; they had applied to the government to investigate, the affair. We had letters from the same relations more than two years later, from which we learned that the missing men had never turned up.”

He took a pinch of snuff, and looked steadily at me.

“Never! I shall relate all that happened, so far as we could discover. The French noble, who was the Chevalier Chateau Blassemare, unlike most *émigrés*, had taken the matter in time, sold a large portion of his property before the revolution had proceeded so far as to render that next to impossible, and retired with a large sum. He brought with him about half a million of francs, the greater part of which he invested in the French funds; a much larger sum remained in Austrian land and securities. You will observe then that this gentleman was rich, and there was no allegation of his having lost money, or being, in any way, embarrassed. You see?"

I assented.

"This gentleman's habits were not expensive in proportion to his means. He had suitable lodgings in Paris; and for a time, society, the theatres, and other reasonable amusements, engrossed him. He did not play. He was a middle-aged man, affecting youth, with the vanities which are usual in such persons; but, for the rest, he was a gentle and polite person, who disturbed nobody — a person, you see, not likely to provoke an enmity."

"Certainly not," I agreed.

"Early in the summer of 1811, he got an order permitting him to copy a picture in one of these *salons*, and came down here, to Versailles, for the purpose. His work was getting on slowly. After a time he left his hotel, here, and went, by way of change, to the Dragon Volant: there he took, by special choice, the bedroom which has fallen to you by chance. From this time, it appeared, he painted little; and seldom visited his apartments in Paris. One night he saw the host of the Dragon Volant, and told him that he was going into Paris, to remain for a day or two, on very particular business; that his servant would accompany him, but that he would retain his apartments at the Dragon Volant, and return in a few days. He left some clothes there, but packed a portmanteau, took his dressing-case, and the rest, and, with his servant behind his carriage, drove into Paris. You observe all this, Monsieur?"

"Most attentively," I answered.

"Well, Monsieur, as soon as they were approaching his lodgings, he stopped the carriage on a sudden, told his servant that he had changed his mind; that he would sleep elsewhere that night, that he had very particular business in the north of France, not far from Rouen, that he would set out before daylight on his journey, and return in a fortnight. He called a *fiacre*, took in his hand a leather bag which, the servant said, was just large enough to hold a few shirts and a coat, but that it was enormously heavy, as he could testify, for he held it in his hand, while his master took out his purse to count thirty-six Napoleons, for which the servant was to account when he should return. He then sent him on, in the carriage; and he, with the bag I have mentioned, got into the *fiacre*. Up to that, you see, the narrative is quite clear."

"Perfectly," I agreed.

"Now comes the mystery," said Monsieur Carmaignac. "After that, the Count Chateau Blassemare was never more seen, so far as we can make out, by acquaintance or friend. We learned that the day before the Count's stockbroker had, by his direction, sold all his stock in the French funds, and handed him the cash it realized. The reason he gave him for this measure tallied with what he said to his servant. He told him that he was going to the north of France to settle some claims, and did not know exactly how much might be required. The bag, which had puzzled the servant by its weight, contained, no doubt, a large sum in gold. Will Monsieur try my snuff?"

He politely tendered his open snuff-box, of which I partook, experimentally.

"A reward was offered," he continued, "when the inquiry was instituted, for any information tending to throw a light upon the mystery, which might be afforded by the driver of the *fiacre* 'employed on the night of' (so-and-so), 'at about the hour of halfpast ten, by a gentleman, with a black-leather travelling-bag in his hand, who descended from a private carriage, and gave his servant some money, which he counted twice over.' About a hundred-and-fifty drivers applied, but not one of them was the right man. We did, however, elicit a curious and unexpected piece of evidence in quite another quarter. What a racket that plaguey harlequin makes with his sword!"

"Intolerable!" I chimed in.

The harlequin was soon gone, and he resumed.

"The evidence I speak of, came from a boy, about twelve years old, who knew the appearance of the Count perfectly, having been often employed by him as a messenger. He stated that about halfpast twelve o'clock, on the same night — upon which you are to observe, there was a brilliant moon — he was sent, his mother having been suddenly taken ill, for the *sage femme* who lived within a stone's throw of the Dragon Volant. His father's house, from which he started, was a mile away, or more, from that inn, in order to reach which he had to pass round the park of the Château de la Carque, at the site most remote from the point to which he was going. It passes the old churchyard of St. Aubin, which is separated from the road only by a very low fence, and two or three enormous old trees. The boy was a little nervous as he approached this ancient cemetery; and, under the bright moonlight, he saw a man whom he distinctly recognised as the Count, whom they designated by a soubriquet which means ‘the man of smiles.’ He was looking rueful enough now, and was seated on the side of a tombstone, on which he had laid a pistol, while he was ramming home the charge of another.

“The boy got cautiously by, on tip-toe, with his eyes all the time on the Count Chateau Blassemare, or the man he mistook for him; his dress was not what he usually wore, but the witness swore that he could not be mistaken as to his identity. He said his face looked grave and stern; but though he did not smile, it was the same face he knew so well. Nothing would make him swerve from that. If that were he, it was the last time he was seen. He has never been heard of since. Nothing could be heard of him in the neighbourhood of Rouen. There has been no evidence of his death; and there is no sign that he is living.”

“That certainly is a most singular case,” I replied; and was about to ask a question or two, when Tom Whistlewick who, without my observing it, had been taking a ramble, returned, a great deal more awake, and a great deal less tipsy.

“I say, Carmaignac, it is getting late, and I must go; I really must, for the reason I told you — and, Beckett, we must soon meet again.”

“I regret very much, Monsieur, my not being able at present to relate to you the other case, that of another tenant of the very same room — a case more mysterious and sinister than the last — and which occurred in the autumn of the same year.”

“Will you both do a very goodnatured thing, and come and dine with me at the Dragon Volant tomorrow?”

So, as we pursued our way along the Galerie des Glaces, I extracted their promise.

“By Jove!” said Whistlewick, when this was done; “look at that pagoda, or sedan chair, or whatever it is, just where those fellows set it down, and not one of them near it! I can’t imagine how they tell fortunes so devilish well. Jack Nuffles — I met him here tonight — says they are gipsies — where are they, I wonder? I’ll go over and have a peep at the prophet.”

I saw him plucking at the blinds, which were constructed something on the principle of Venetian blinds; the red curtains were inside; but they did not yield, and he could only peep under one that did not come quite down.

When he rejoined us, he related: "I could scarcely see the old fellow, it's so dark. He is covered with gold and red, and has an embroidered hat on like a mandarin's; he's fast asleep; and, by Jove, he smells like a polecat! It's worth going over only to have it to say. Fiew! pooh! oh! It *is* a perfume. Faugh!"

Not caring to accept this tempting invitation, we got along slowly toward the door. I bid them goodnight, reminding them of their promise. And so found my way at last to my carriage; and was soon rolling slowly toward the Dragon Volant, on the loneliest of roads, under old trees, and the soft moonlight.

What a number of things had happened within the last two hours! what a variety of strange and vivid pictures were crowded together in that brief space! What an adventure was before me!

The silent, moonlighted, solitary road, how it contrasted with the many-eddied whirl of pleasure from whose roar and music, lights, diamonds and colours, I had just extricated myself.

The sight of lonely Nature at such an hour, acts like a sudden sedative. The madness and guilt of my pursuit struck me with a momentary compunction and horror. I wished I had never entered the labyrinth which was leading me, I knew not whither. It was too late to think of that now; but the bitter was already stealing into my cup; and vague anticipations lay, for a few minutes, heavy on my heart. It would not have taken much to make me disclose my unmanly state of mind to my lively friend, Alfred Ogle, nor even to the milder ridicule of the agreeable Tom Whistlewick.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PARC OF THE CHATEAU DE LA CARQUE.

There was no danger of the Dragon Volant's closing its doors on that occasion till three or four in the morning. There were quartered there many servants of great people, whose masters would not leave the ball till the last moment, and who could not return to their corners in the Dragon Volant, till their last services had been rendered.

I knew, therefore, I should have ample time for my mysterious excursion without exciting curiosity by being shut out.

And now we pulled up under the canopy of boughs, before the sign of the Dragon Volant, and the light that shone from its hall-door.

I dismissed my carriage, ran up the broad staircase, mask in hand, with my domino fluttering about me, and entered the large bedroom. The black wainscoting and stately furniture, with the dark curtains of the very tall bed, made the night there more sombre.

An oblique patch of moonlight was thrown upon the floor from the window to which I hastened. I looked out upon the landscape slumbering in those silvery beams. There stood the outline of the Château de la Carque, its chimneys, and many turrets with their extinguisher-shaped roofs black against the soft grey sky. There, also, more in the foreground, about midway between the window where I stood, and the château, but a little to the left, I traced the tufted masses of the grove which the lady in the mask had appointed as the trysting-place, where I and the beautiful Countess were to meet that night.

I took "the bearings" of this gloomy bit of wood, whose foliage glimmered softly at top in the light of the moon.

You may guess with what a strange interest and swelling of the heart I gazed on the unknown scene of my coming adventure.

But time was flying, and the hour already near. I threw my robe upon a sofa; I groped out a pair of boots, which I substituted for those thin heelless shoes, in those days called "pumps," without which a gentleman could not attend an evening party. I put on my hat, and lastly, I took a pair of loaded pistols which I had been advised were satisfactory companions in the then unsettled state of French society: swarms of disbanded soldiers, some of them alleged to be desperate characters, being everywhere to be met with. These preparations made, I confess I took a looking-glass to the window to see how I looked in the moonlight; and being satisfied, I replaced it, and ran downstairs.

In the hall I called for my servant.

"St. Clair," said I; "I mean to take a little moonlight ramble, only ten minutes or so. You must not go to bed until I return. If the night is very beautiful, I may possibly extend my ramble a little."

So down the steps I lounged, looking first over my right, and then over my left shoulder, like a man uncertain which direction to take, and I sauntered up the road, gazing now at the moon, and now at the thin white clouds in the opposite direction, whistling, all the time, an air which I had picked up at one of the theatres.

When I had got a couple of hundred yards away from the Dragon Volant, my minstrelsy totally ceased; and I turned about, and glanced sharply down the road that looked as white as hoarfrost under the moon, and saw the gable of the old inn, and a window, partly concealed by the foliage, with a dusky light shining from it.

No sound of footstep was stirring; no sign of human figure in sight. I consulted my watch, which the light was sufficiently strong to enable me to do. It now wanted but eight minutes of the appointed hour. A thick mantle of ivy at this point covered the wall and rose in a clustering head at top.

It afforded me facilities for scaling the wall, and a partial screen for my operations, if any eye should chance to be looking that way. And now it was done. I was in the park of the Château de la Carque, as nefarious a poacher as ever trespassed on the grounds of unsuspicious lord!

Before me rose the appointed grove, which looked as black as a clump of gigantic hearse-plumes. It seemed to tower higher and higher at every step; and cast a broader and blacker shadow toward my feet. On I marched, and was glad when I plunged into the shadow which concealed me. Now I was among the grand old lime and chestnut trees — my heart beat fast with expectation.

This grove opened, a little, near the middle; and in the space thus cleared, there stood with a surrounding flight of steps, a small Greek temple or shrine, with a statue in the centre. It was built of white marble with fluted Corinthian columns, and the crevices were tufted with grass; moss had shown itself on pedestal and cornice, and signs of long neglect and decay were apparent in its discoloured and weather-worn marble. A few feet in front of the steps a fountain, fed from the great ponds at the other side of the château, was making a constant tinkle and plashing in a wide marble basin, and the jet of water glimmered like a shower of diamonds in the broken moonlight. The very neglect and half-ruinous state of all this made it only the prettier, as well as sadder. I was too intently watching for the arrival of the lady, in the direction of the château, to study these things; but the half-noted effect of them was romantic, and suggested somehow the grotto and the fountain, and the apparition of Egeria.

As I watched a voice spoke to me, a little behind my left shoulder. I turned, almost with a start, and the masque, in the costume of Mademoiselle de la Vallière stood there.

"The Countess will be here presently," she said. The lady stood upon the open space, and the moonlight fell unbroken upon her. Nothing could be more becoming; her figure looked more graceful and elegant than ever. "In the meantime I shall tell you some peculiarities of her situation. She is unhappy; miserable in an ill-assorted marriage, with a jealous tyrant who now would constrain her to sell her diamonds, which are— "

"Worth thirty thousand pounds sterling. I heard all that from a friend. Can I aid the Countess in her unequal struggle? Say but how, and the greater the danger or the sacrifice, the happier will it make me. *Can* I aid her?"

"If you despise a danger — which, yet, is not a danger; if you despise, as she does, the tyrannical canons of the world; and, if you are chivalrous enough to devote yourself to a lady's cause, with no reward but her poor gratitude; if you can do these things you can aid her, and earn a foremost place, not in her gratitude only, but in her friendship."

At those words the lady in the mask turned away, and seemed to weep.

I vowed myself the willing slave of the Countess. "But," I added, "you told me she would soon be here."

"That is, if nothing unforeseen should happen; but with the eye of the Count de St. Alyre in the house, and open, it is seldom safe to stir."

"Does she wish to see me?" I asked, with a tender hesitation.

"First, say have you really thought of *her*, more than once, since the adventure of the Belle Etoile."

"She never leaves my thoughts; day and night her beautiful eyes haunt me; her sweet voice is always in my ear."

"Mine is said to resemble hers," said the mask.

"So it does," I answered. "But it is only a resemblance."

"Oh! then mine is better?"

"Pardon me, Mademoiselle, I did not say *that*. Yours is a sweet voice, but I fancy a little higher."

"A little shriller, you would say," answered the De la Vallière, I fancied a good deal vexed.

"No, not shriller: your voice is not shrill, it is beautifully sweet; but not so pathetically sweet as her."

"That is prejudice, Monsieur; it is not true."

I bowed; I could not contradict a lady.

"I see, Monsieur, you laugh at me; you think me vain, because I claim in some points to be equal to the Countess de St. Alyre. I challenge you to say, my hand, at least, is less beautiful than hers." As she thus spoke, she drew her glove off, and extended her hand, back upward, in the moonlight.

The lady seemed really nettled. It was undignified and irritating; for in this uninteresting competition the precious moments were flying, and my interview leading apparently to nothing.

"You will admit, then, that my hand is as beautiful as hers?"

"I cannot admit it, Mademoiselle," said I, with the honesty of irritation. "I will not enter into comparisons, but the Countess de St. Alyre is, in all respects, the most beautiful lady I ever beheld."

The masque laughed coldly, and then, more and more softly, said, with a sigh, "I will prove all I say." And as she spoke she removed the mask: and the Countess de St. Alyre, smiling, confused, bashful, more beautiful than ever, stood before me!

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed. "How monstrously stupid I have been. And it was to Madame la Comtesse that I spoke for so long in the *salon*!" I gazed on her in silence. And with a low sweet laugh of goodnature she extended her hand. I took it, and carried it to my lips.

"No, you must not do that," she said, quietly, "we are not old enough friends yet. I find, although you were mistaken, that you do remember the

Countess of the Belle Etoile, and that you are a champion true and fearless. Had you yielded to the claims just now pressed upon you by the rivalry of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, in her mask, the Countess de St. Alyre should never have trusted or seen you more. I now am sure that you are true, as well as brave. You now know that I have not forgotten you; and, also, that if you would risk your life for me, I, too, would brave some danger, rather than lose my friend for ever. I have but a few moments more. Will you come here again tomorrow night, at a quarter past eleven? I will be here at that moment; you must exercise the most scrupulous care to prevent suspicion that you have come here, Monsieur. *You owe that to me.*"

She spoke these last words with the most solemn entreaty.

I vowed again and again, that I would die rather than permit the least rashness to endanger the secret which made all the interest and value of my life.

She was looking, I thought, more and more beautiful every moment. My enthusiasm expanded in proportion.

"You must come tomorrow night by a different route," she said; "and if you come again, we can change it once more. At the other side of the château there is a little churchyard, with a ruined chapel. The neighbours are afraid to pass it by night. The road is deserted there, and a stile opens a way into these grounds. Cross it and you can find a covert of thickets, to within fifty steps of this spot."

I promised, of course, to observe her instructions implicitly.

"I have lived for more than a year in an agony of irresolution. I have decided at last. I have lived a melancholy life; a lonelier life than is passed in the cloister. I have had no one to confide in; no one to advise me; no one to save me from the horrors of my existence. I have found a brave and prompt friend at last. Shall I ever forget the heroic tableau of the hall of the Belle Etoile? Have you — have you really kept the rose I gave you, as we parted? Yes — you swear it. You need not; I trust you. Richard, how often have I in solitude repeated your name, learned from my servant. Richard, my hero! Oh! Richard! Oh, my king! I love you."

I would have folded her to my heart — thrown myself at her feet. But this beautiful and — shall I say it — inconsistent woman repelled me.

"No, we must not waste our moments in extravagances. Understand my case. There is no such thing as indifference in the married state. Not to love one’s husband,” she continued, “is to hate him. The Count, ridiculous in all else, is formidable in his jealousy. In mercy, then, to me, observe caution. Affect to all you speak to, the most complete ignorance of all the people in the Château de la Carque; and, if any one in your presence mentions the Count or Countess de St. Alyre, be sure you say you never saw either. I shall have more to say to you tomorrow night. I have reasons that I cannot now explain, for all I do, and all I postpone. Farewell. Go! Leave me.”

She waved me back, peremptorily. I echoed her “farewell,” and obeyed.

This interview had not lasted, I think, more than ten minutes. I scaled the park-wall again, and reached the Dragon Volant before its doors were closed.

I lay awake in my bed, in a fever of elation. I saw, till the dawn broke, and chased the vision, the beautiful Countess de St. Alyre, always in the dark, before me.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TENANT OF THE PALANQUIN.

The Marquis called on me next day. My late breakfast was still upon the table.

He had come, he said, to ask a favour. An accident had happened to his carriage in the crowd on leaving the ball, and he begged, if I were going into Paris, a seat in mine — I was going in, and was extremely glad of his company. He came with me to my hotel; we went up to my rooms. I was surprised to see a man seated in an easy chair, with his back towards us, reading a newspaper. He rose. It was the Count de St. Alyre, his gold spectacles on his nose; his black wig, in oily curls, lying close to his narrow head, and showing, like carved ebony over a repulsive visage of boxwood. His black muffler had been pulled down. His right arm was in a sling. I don't know whether there was anything unusual in his countenance that day, or whether it was but the effect of prejudice arising from all I had heard in my mysterious interview in his park, but I thought his countenance was more strikingly forbidding than I had seen it before.

I was not callous enough in the ways of sin to meet this man, injured at least in intent, thus suddenly, without a momentary disturbance.

He smiled.

"I called, Monsieur Beckett, in the hope of finding you here," he croaked, "and I meditated, I fear, taking a great liberty, but my friend the Marquis d'Harmonville, on whom I have perhaps some claim, will perhaps give me the assistance I require so much."

"With great pleasure," said the Marquis, "but not till after six o'clock. I must go this moment to a meeting of three or four people, whom I cannot disappoint, and I know, perfectly, we cannot break up earlier."

"What am I to do?" exclaimed the Count, "an hour would have done it all. Was ever *contretemps* so unlucky!"

"I'll give you an hour, with pleasure," said I.

"How very good of you, Monsieur, I hardly dare to hope it. The business, for so gay and charming a man as Monsieur Beckett, is a little *funeste*. Pray read this note which reached me this morning."

It certainly was not cheerful. It was a note stating that the body of his, the Count's cousin, Monsieur de St. Amand, who had died at his house, the Château Clery, had been, in accordance with his written directions, sent for burial at Père La Chaise, and, with the permission of the Count de St. Alyre, would reach his house (the Château de la Carque), at about ten o'clock on the night following, to be conveyed thence in a hearse, with any member of the family who might wish to attend the obsequies.

"I did not see the poor gentleman twice in my life," said the Count, "but this office, as he has no other kinsman, disagreeable as it is, I could scarcely decline, and so I want to attend at the office to have the book signed, and the order entered. But here is another misery. By ill luck, I have sprained my thumb, and can't sign my name for a week to come. However, one name answers as well as another. Yours as well as mine. And as you are so good as to come with me, all will go right."

Away, we drove. The Count gave me a memorandum of the christian and surnames of the deceased, his age, the complaint he died of, and the usual particulars; also a note of the exact position in which a grave, the dimensions of which were described, of the ordinary simple kind, was to be dug, between two vaults belonging to the family of St. Amand. The funeral, it was stated, would arrive at halfpast one o'clock A.M. (the next night but one); and he handed me the money, with extra fees, for a burial by night. It was a good deal; and I asked him, as he entrusted the whole affair to me, in whose name I should take the receipt.

"Not in mine, my good friend. They wanted me to become an executor, which I, yesterday, wrote to decline; and I am informed that if the receipt were in my name it would constitute me an executor in the eye of the law, and fix me in that position. Take it, pray, if you have no objection, in your own name."

This, accordingly, I did.

"You will see, by-and-by, why I am obliged to mention all these particulars."

The Count, meanwhile, was leaning back in the carriage, with his black silk muffler up to his nose, and his hat shading his eyes, while he dozed in his corner; in which state I found him on my return.

Paris had lost its charm for me. I hurried through the little business I had to do, longed once more for my quiet room in the Dragon Volant, the melancholy woods of the Château de la Carque, and the tumultuous and thrilling influence of proximity to the object of my wild but wicked romance.

I was delayed some time by my stockbroker. I had a very large sum, as I told you, at my banker's, uninvested. I cared very little for a few days' interest — very little for the entire sum, compared with the image that occupied my thoughts, and beckoned me with a white arm, through the dark, toward the spreading lime-trees and chestnuts of the Château de la Carque. But I had fixed this day to meet him, and was relieved when he told me that I had better let it lie in my banker's hands for a few days longer, as the funds would certainly fall immediately. This accident, too, was not without its immediate bearing on my subsequent adventures.

When I reached the Dragon Volant, I found, in my sitting-room, a good deal to my chagrin, my two guests, whom I had quite forgotten. I inwardly cursed my own stupidity for having embarrassed myself with their agreeable society. It could not be helped now, however, and a word to the waiters put all things in train for dinner.

Tom Whistlewick was in great force; and he commenced almost immediately with a very odd story.

He told me that not only Versailles, but all Paris, was in a ferment, in consequence of a revolting, and all but sacrilegious, practical joke, played off on the night before.

The pagoda, as he persisted in calling the palanquin, had been left standing on the spot where we last saw it. Neither conjuror, nor usher, nor bearers had ever returned. When the ball closed, and the company at length retired, the servants who attended to put out the lights, and secure the doors, found it still there.

It was determined, however, to let it stand where it was until next morning, by which time, it was conjectured, its owners would send messengers to remove it.

None arrived. The servants were then ordered to take it away; and its extraordinary weight, for the first time, reminded them of its forgotten human occupant. Its door was forced; and, judge what was their disgust, when they discovered, not a living man, but a corpse! Three or four days must have passed since the death of the burly man in the Chinese tunic and painted cap. Some people thought it was a trick designed to insult the Allies, in whose honour the ball was got up. Others were of opinion that it was nothing worse than a daring and cynical jocularity which, shocking as it was, might yet be forgiven to the high spirits and irrepressible buffoonery of youth. Others, again, fewer in number, and mystically given, insisted that the corpse was *bonâ fide* necessary to the exhibition, and that the disclosures and allusions which had astonished so many people were distinctly due to necromancy.

"The matter, however, is now in the hands of the police," observed Monsieur Carmaignac, "and we are not the body they were two or three months ago, if the offenders against propriety and public feeling are not traced, and convicted, unless, indeed, they have been a great deal more cunning than such fools generally are."

I was thinking within myself how utterly inexplicable was my colloquy with the conjuror, so cavalierly dismissed by Monsieur Carmaignac as a "fool;" and the more I thought the more marvellous it seemed.

"It certainly was an original joke, though not a very clear one," said Whistlewick.

"Not even original," said Carmaignac. "Very nearly the same thing was done, a hundred years ago or more, at a state ball in Paris; and the rascals who played the trick were never found out."

In this Monsieur Carmaignac, as I afterwards discovered, spoke truly; for, among my books of French anecdote and memoirs, the very incident is marked, by my own hand.

While we were thus talking, the waiter told us that dinner was served; and we withdrew accordingly; my guests more than making amends for my comparative taciturnity.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CHURCHYARD.

Our dinner was really good, so were the wines; better, perhaps, at this out-of-the-way inn, than at some of the more pretentious hotels in Paris. The moral effect of a really good dinner is immense — we all felt it. The serenity and goodnature that follow are more solid and comfortable than the tumultuous benevolences of Bacchus.

My friends were happy, therefore, and very chatty; which latter relieved me of the trouble of talking, and prompted them to entertain me and one another incessantly with agreeable stories and conversation, of which, until suddenly a subject emerged, which interested me powerfully, I confess, so much were my thoughts engaged elsewhere, I heard next to nothing.

"Yes," said Carmaignac, continuing a conversation which had escaped me, "there was another case, beside that Russian nobleman, odder still. I remembered it this morning, but cannot recall the name. He was a tenant of the very same room. By-the-by, Monsieur, might it not be as well," he added, turning to me, with a laugh, half joke whole earnest, as they say, "if you were to get into another apartment, now that the house is no longer crowded? that is, if you mean to make any stay here."

"A thousand thanks! no. I'm thinking of changing my hotel; and I can run into town so easily at night; and though I stay here, for this night, at least, I don't expect to vanish like those others. But you say there is another adventure, of the same kind, connected with the same room. Do let us hear it. But take some wine first."

The story he told was curious.

"It happened," said Carmaignac, "as well as I recollect, before either of the other cases. A French gentleman — I wish I could remember his name — the son of a merchant, came to this inn (the Dragon Volant), and was put by the landlord into the same room of which we have been speaking. *Your* apartment, Monsieur. He was by no means young — past forty — and very far from good-looking. The people here said that he was the ugliest man, and the most goodnatured, that ever lived. He played on the fiddle, sang, and wrote poetry. His habits were odd and desultory. He would sometimes sit all day in his room writing, singing, and fiddling, and go out at night for a walk. An eccentric man! He was by no means a millionaire, but he had a *modicum bonum* you understand — a trifle more than half a million of francs. He consulted his stockbroker about investing this money in foreign stocks, and drew the entire sum from his banker. You now have the situation of affairs when the catastrophe occurred."

"Pray fill your glass," I said.

"Dutch courage, Monsieur, to face the catastrophe!" said Whistlewick, filling his own.

"Now, that was the last that ever was heard of his money," resumed Carmaignac. "You shall hear about himself. The night after this financial operation, he was seized with a poetic frenzy; he sent for the then landlord of this house, and told him that he long meditated an epic, and meant to commence that night, and that he was on no account to be disturbed until nine o'clock in the morning. He had two pairs of wax candles, a little cold supper on a side-table, his desk open, paper enough upon it to contain the entire Henriade, and a proportionate store of pens and ink.

"Seated at this desk he was seen by the waiter who brought him a cup of coffee at nine o'clock, at which time the intruder said he was writing fast enough to set fire to the paper — that was his phrase; he did not look up, he appeared too much engrossed. But, when the waiter came back, half an hour afterwards, the door was locked; and the poet, from within, answered, that he must not be disturbed.

"Away went the *garçon*; and next morning at nine o'clock knocked at his door, and receiving no answer, looked through the keyhole; the lights were still burning, the window-shutters were closed as he had left them; he renewed his knocking, knocked louder, no answer came. He reported this continued and alarming silence to the innkeeper, who, finding that his guest had not left his key in the lock, succeeded in finding another that opened it. The candles were just giving up the ghost in their sockets, but there was light enough to ascertain that the tenant of the room was gone! The bed had not been disturbed; the window-shutter was barred. He must have let himself out, and, locking the door on the outside, put the key in his pocket, and so made his way out of the house. Here, however, was another difficulty, the Dragon Volant shut its doors and made all fast at twelve o’clock; after that hour no one could leave the house, except by obtaining the key and letting himself out, and of necessity leaving the door unsecured, or else by collusion and aid of some person in the house.

“Now it happened that, some time after the doors were secured, at halfpast twelve, a servant who had not been apprized of his order to be left undisturbed, seeing a light shine through the keyhole, knocked at the door to inquire whether the poet wanted anything. He was very little obliged to his disturber, and dismissed him with a renewed charge that he was not to be interrupted again during the night. This incident established the fact that he was in the house after the doors had been locked and barred. The innkeeper himself kept the keys, and swore that he found them hung on the wall above his head, in his bed, in their usual place, in the morning; and that nobody could have taken them away without awakening him. That was all we could discover. The Count de St. Alyre, to whom this house belongs, was very active and very much chagrined. But nothing was discovered.”

“And nothing heard since of the epic poet?” I asked.

“Nothing — not the slightest clue — he never turned up again. I suppose he is dead; if he is not, he must have got into some devilish bad scrape, of which we have heard nothing, that compelled him to abscond with all the secresy and expedition in his power. All that we know for certain is that, having occupied the room in which you sleep, he vanished, nobody ever knew how, and never was heard of since.”

“You have now mentioned three cases,” I said, “and all from the same room.”

“Three. Yes, all equally unintelligible. When men are murdered, the great and immediate difficulty the assassins encounter is how to conceal the body. It is very hard to believe that three persons should have been consecutively murdered, in the same room, and their bodies so effectually disposed of that no trace of them was ever discovered.”

From this we passed to other topics, and the grave Monsieur Carmaignac amused us with a perfectly prodigious collection of scandalous anecdote, which his opportunities in the police department had enabled him to accumulate.

My guests happily had engagements in Paris, and left me about ten.

I went up to my room, and looked out upon the grounds of the Château de la Carque. The moonlight was broken by clouds, and the view of the park in this desultory light, acquired a melancholy and fantastic character.

The strange anecdotes recounted of the room in which I stood, by Monsieur Carmaignac, returned vaguely upon my mind, drowning in sudden shadows the gaiety of the more frivolous stories with which he had followed them. I looked round me on the room that lay in ominous gloom, with an almost disagreeable sensation. I took my pistols now with an undefined apprehension that they might be really needed before my return tonight. This feeling, be it understood, in nowise chilled my ardour. Never had my enthusiasm mounted higher. My adventure absorbed and carried me away; but it added a strange and stern excitement to the expedition.

I loitered for a time in my room. I had ascertained the exact point at which the little churchyard lay. It was about a mile away; I did not wish to reach it earlier than necessary.

I stole quietly out, and sauntered along the road to my left, and thence entered a narrower track, still to my left, which, skirting the park wall, and describing a circuitous route, all the way, under grand old trees, passes the ancient cemetery. That cemetery is embowered in trees, and occupies little more than half an acre of ground, to the left of the road, interposing between it and the park of the Château de la Carque.

Here, at this haunted spot, I paused and listened. The place was utterly silent. A thick cloud had darkened the moon, so that I could distinguish little more than the outlines of near objects, and that vaguely enough; and sometimes, as it were, floating in black fog, the white surface of a tombstone emerged.

Among the forms that met my eye against the iron-grey of the horizon, were some of those shrubs or trees that grow like our junipers, some six feet high, in form like a miniature poplar, with the darker foliage of the yew. I do not know the name of the plant, but I have often seen it in such funereal places.

Knowing that I was a little too early, I sat down upon the edge of a tombstone to wait, as, for aught I knew, the beautiful Countess might have wise reasons for not caring that I should enter the grounds of the château earlier than she had appointed. In the listless state induced by waiting, I sat there, with my eyes on the object straight before me, which chanced to be that faint black outline I have described. It was right before me, about half-a-dozen steps away.

The moon now began to escape from under the skirt of the cloud that had hid her face for so long; and, as the light gradually improved, the tree on which I had been lazily staring began to take a new shape. It was no longer a tree, but a man standing motionless. Brighter and brighter grew the moonlight, clearer and clearer the image became, and at last stood out perfectly distinctly. It was Colonel Gaillarde.

Luckily, he was not looking toward me. I could only see him in profile; but there was no mistaking the white moustache, the *farouche* visage, and the gaunt six-foot stature. There he was, his shoulder toward me, listening and watching, plainly, for some signal or person expected, straight in front of him.

If he were, by chance, to turn his eyes in my direction, I knew that I must reckon upon an instantaneous renewal of the combat only commenced in the hall of the Belle Etoile. In any case, could malignant fortune have posted, at this place and hour, a more dangerous watcher? What ecstasy to him, by a single discovery, to hit me so hard, and blast the Countess de St. Alyre, whom he seemed to hate.

He raised his arm; he whistled softly; I heard an answering whistle as low; and, to my relief, the Colonel advanced in the direction of this sound, widening the distance between us at every step; and immediately I heard talking, but in a low and cautious key.

I recognized, I thought, even so, the peculiar voice of Gaillarde.

I stole softly forward in the direction in which those sounds were audible. In doing so, I had, of course, to use the extremest caution.

I thought I saw a hat above a jagged piece of ruined wall, and then a second — yes, I saw two hats conversing; the voices came from under them. They moved off, not in the direction of the park, but of the road, and I lay along the grass, peeping over a grave, as a skirmisher might, observing the enemy. One after the other, the figures emerged full into view as they mounted the stile at the roadside. The Colonel, who was last, stood on the wall for awhile, looking about him, and then jumped down on the road. I heard their steps and talk as they moved away together, with their backs toward me, in the direction which led them farther and farther from the Dragon Volant.

I waited until these sounds were quite lost in distance before I entered the park. I followed the instructions I had received from the Countess de St.

Alyre, and made my way among brushwood and thickets to the point nearest the ruinous temple, and crossed the short intervening space of open ground rapidly.

I was now once more under the gigantic boughs of the old lime and chestnut trees; softly, and with a heart throbbing fast, I approached the little structure.

The moon was now shining steadily, pouring down its radiance on the soft foliage, and here and there mottling the verdure under my feet.

I reached the steps; I was among its worn marble shafts. She was not there, nor in the inner sanctuary, the arched windows of which were screened almost entirely by masses of ivy. The lady had not yet arrived.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE KEY.

I stood now upon the steps, watching and listening. In a minute or two I heard the crackle of withered sticks trod upon, and, looking in the direction, I saw a figure approaching among the trees, wrapped in a mantle.

I advanced eagerly. It was the Countess. She did not speak, but gave me her hand, and I led her to the scene of our last interview. She repressed the ardour of my impassioned greeting with a gentle but peremptory firmness. She removed her hood, shook back her beautiful hair, and, gazing on me with sad and glowing eyes, sighed deeply. Some awful thought seemed to weigh upon her.

"Richard, I must speak plainly. The crisis of my life has come. I am sure you would defend me. I think you pity me; perhaps you even love me."

At these words I became eloquent, as young madmen in my plight do. She silenced me, however, with the same melancholy firmness.

"Listen, dear friend, and then say whether you can aid me. How madly I am trusting you; and yet my heart tells me how wisely! To meet you here as I do — what insanity it seems! How poorly you must think of me! But when you know all, you will judge me fairly. Without your aid I cannot accomplish my purpose. That purpose unaccomplished, I must die. I am chained to a man whom I despise — whom I abhor. I have resolved to fly. I have jewels, principally diamonds, for which I am offered thirty thousand pounds of your English money. They are my separate property by my marriage settlement; I will take them with me. You are a judge, no doubt, of jewels. I was counting mine when the hour came, and brought this in my hand to show you. Look."

"It is magnificent!" I exclaimed, as a collar of diamonds twinkled and flashed in the moonlight, suspended from her pretty fingers. I thought, even at that tragic moment, that she prolonged the show, with a feminine delight in these brilliant toys.

"Yes," she said, "I shall part with them all. I will turn them into money, and break, for ever, the unnatural and wicked bonds that tied me, in the name of a sacrament, to a tyrant. A man young, handsome, generous, brave as you, can hardly be rich. Richard, you say you love me; you shall share all this with me. We will fly together to Switzerland; we will evade pursuit; my powerful friends will intervene and arrange a separation; and I shall, at length, be happy and reward my hero."

You may suppose the style, florid and vehement, in which I poured forth my gratitude, vowed the devotion of my life, and placed myself absolutely at her disposal.

"Tomorrow night," she said, "my husband will attend the remains of his cousin, Monsieur de St. Amand, to Père la Chaise. The hearse, he says, will leave this at halfpast nine. You must be here, where we stand, at nine o'clock."

I promised punctual obedience.

"I will not meet you here; but you see a red light in the window of the tower at that angle of the château?"

I assented.

"I placed it there, that, tomorrow night, when it comes, you may recognize it. So soon as that rose-coloured light appears at that window, it will be a signal to you that the funeral has left the château, and that you may approach safely. Come, then, to that window; I will open it, and admit you. Five minutes after a travelling-carriage, with four horses, shall stand ready in the *porte-cochère*. I will place my diamonds in your hands; and so soon as we enter the carriage, our flight commences. We shall have at least five hours' start; and with energy, stratagem, and resource, I fear nothing. Are you ready to undertake all this for my sake?"

Again I vowed myself her slave.

"My only difficulty," she said, "is how we shall quickly enough convert my diamonds into money; I dare not remove them while my husband is in the house."

Here was the opportunity I wished for. I now told her that I had in my banker's hands no less a sum than thirty thousand pounds, with which, in the shape of gold and notes, I should come furnished, and thus the risk and loss of disposing of her diamonds in too much haste would be avoided.

"Good heaven!" she exclaimed, with a kind of disappointment. "You are rich, then? and I have lost the felicity of making my generous friend more happy. Be it so! since so it must be. Let us contribute, each, in equal shares, to our common fund. Bring you, your money; I, my jewels. There is a happiness to me even in mingling my resources with yours."

On this there followed a romantic colloquy, all poetry and passion, such as I should, in vain, endeavour to reproduce.

Then came a very special instruction.

"I have come provided, too, with a key, the use of which I must explain."

It was a double key — a long, slender stem, with a key at each end — one about the size which opens an ordinary room door; the other, as small, almost, as the key of a dressing-case.

"You cannot employ too much caution tomorrow night. An interruption would murder all my hopes. I have learned that you occupy the haunted room in the Dragon Volant. It is the very room I would have wished you in. I will tell you why — there is a story of a man who, having shut himself up in that room one night, disappeared before morning. The truth is, he wanted, I believe, to escape from creditors; and the host of the Dragon Volant, at that time, being a rogue, aided him in absconding. My husband investigated the matter, and discovered how his escape was made. It was by means of this key. Here is a memorandum and a plan describing how they are to be applied. I have taken them from the Count's escritoire. And now, once more I must leave to your ingenuity how to mystify the people at the Dragon Volant. Be sure you try the keys first, to see that the locks turn freely. I will have my jewels ready. You, whatever we divide, had better bring your money, because it may be many months before you can revisit Paris, or disclose our place of residence to any one; and our passports — arrange all that; in what names, and whither, you please. And now, dear Richard" (she leaned her arm fondly on my shoulder, and looked with ineffable passion in my eyes, with her other hand clasped in mine), "my very life is in your hands; I have staked all on your fidelity."

As she spoke the last word, she, on a sudden, grew deadly pale, and gasped, "Good God! who is here?"

At the same moment she receded through the door in the marble screen, close to which she stood, and behind which was a small roofless chamber, as small as the shrine, the window of which was darkened by a clustering mass of ivy so dense that hardly a gleam of light came through the leaves.

I stood upon the threshold which she had just crossed, looking in the direction in which she had thrown that one terrified glance. No wonder she was frightened. Quite close upon us, not twenty yards away, and approaching at a quick step, very distinctly lighted by the moon, Colonel Gaillarde and his companion were coming. The shadow of the cornice and a piece of wall were upon me. Unconscious of this, I was expecting the moment when, with one of his frantic yells, he should spring forward to assail me.

I made a step backward, drew one of my pistols from my pocket, and cocked it. It was obvious he had not seen me.

I stood, with my finger on the trigger, determined to shoot him dead if he should attempt to enter the place where the Countess was. It would, no doubt, have been a murder; but, in my mind, I had no question or qualm about it. When once we engage in secret and guilty practices we are nearer other and greater crimes than we at all suspect.

"There's the statue," said the Colonel, in his brief discordant tones. "That's the figure."

"Alluded to in the stanzas?" inquired his companion.

"The very thing. We shall see more next time. Forward, Monsieur; let us march."

And, much to my relief, the gallant Colonel turned on his heel, and marched through the trees, with his back toward the château, striding over the grass, as I quickly saw, to the park wall, which they crossed not far from the gables of the Dragon Volant.

I found the Countess trembling in no affected, but a very real terror. She would not hear of my accompanying her toward the château. But I told her that I would prevent the return of the mad Colonel; and upon that point, at least, that she need fear nothing. She quickly recovered, again bid me a fond and lingering goodnight, and left me, gazing after her, with the key in my hand, and such a phantasmagoria floating in my brain as amounted very nearly to madness.

There was I, ready to brave all dangers, all right and reason, plunge into murder itself, on the first summons, and entangle myself in consequences inextricable and horrible (what cared I?) for a woman of whom I knew nothing, but that she was beautiful and reckless!

I have often thanked heaven for its mercy in conducting me through the labyrinths in which I had all but lost myself.

CHAPTER XX.

A HIGH-CAULD CAP.

I was now upon the road, within two or three hundred yards of the Dragon Volant. I had undertaken an adventure with a vengeance! And by way of prelude, there not improbably awaited me, at my inn, another encounter, perhaps, this time, not so lucky, with the grotesque sabreur.

I was glad I had my pistols. I certainly was bound by no law to allow a ruffian to cut me down, unresisting.

Stooping boughs from the old park, gigantic poplars on the other side, and the moonlight over all, made the narrow road to the inn-door picturesque.

I could not think very clearly just now; events were succeeding one another so rapidly, and I, involved in the action of a drama so extravagant and guilty, hardly knew myself or believed my own story, as I slowly paced towards the still open door of the Flying Dragon.

No sign of the Colonel, visible or audible, was there. In the hall I inquired. No gentleman had arrived at the inn for the last half hour. I looked into the public room. It was deserted. The clock struck twelve, and I heard the servant barring the great door. I took my candle. The lights in this rural hostelry were by this time out, and the house had the air of one that had settled to slumber for many hours. The cold moonlight streamed in at the window on the landing, as I ascended the broad staircase; and I paused for a moment to look oyer the wooded grounds to the turreted château, to me, so full of interest. I bethought me, however, that prying eyes might read a meaning in this midnight gazing, and possibly the Count himself might, in his jealous mood, surmise a signal in this unwonted light in the stair-window of the Dragon Volant.

On opening my room door, with a little start, I met an extremely old woman with the longest face I ever saw; she had what used to be termed, a high-cauld-cap, on, the white border of which contrasted with her brown and yellow skin, and made her wrinkled face more ugly. She raised her curved shoulders, and looked up in my face, with eyes unnaturally black and bright.

"I have lighted a little wood, Monsieur, because the night is chill."

I thanked her, but she did not go. She stood with her candle in her tremulous fingers.

"Excuse an old woman. Monsieur," she said; "but what on earth can a young English *milord*, with all Paris at his feet, find to amuse him in the Dragon Volant?"

Had I been at the age of fairy tales, and in daily intercourse with the delightful Countess d'Aulnois, I should have seen in this withered apparition, the *genius loci*, the malignant fairy, at the stamp of whose foot, the illfated tenants of this very room had, from time to time, vanished. I was past that, however; but the old woman's dark eyes were fixed on mine, with a steady meaning that plainly told me that my secret was known. I was embarrassed and alarmed; I never thought of asking her what business that was of hers.

"These old eyes saw you in the park of the château tonight."

"*I!*" I began, with all the scornful surprise I could affect.

"It avails nothing, Monsieur; I know why you stay here; and I tell you to begone. Leave this house tomorrow morning, and never come again."

She lifted her disengaged hand, as she looked at me with intense horror in her eyes.

"There is nothing on earth — I don't know what you mean," I answered; "and why should you care about me?"

"I don't care about you, Monsieur — I care about the honour of an ancient family, whom I served in their happier days, when to be noble, was to be honoured. But my words are thrown away, Monsieur; you are insolent. I will keep my secret, and you, yours; that is all. You will soon find it hard enough to divulge it."

The old woman went slowly from the room and shut the door, before I had made up my mind to say anything. I was standing where she had left me, nearly five minutes later. The jealousy of Monsieur the Count, I assumed, appears to this old creature about the most terrible thing in creation. Whatever contempt I might entertain for the dangers which this old lady so darkly intimated, it was by no means pleasant, you may suppose, that a secret so dangerous should be so much as suspected by a stranger, and that stranger a partisan of the Count de St. Alyre.

Ought I not, at all risks, to apprize the Countess, who had trusted me so generously, or, as she said herself, so madly, of the fact that our secret was, at least, suspected by another? But was there not greater danger in attempting to communicate? What did the beldame mean by saying, “Keep your secret, and I’ll keep mine?”

I had a thousand distracting questions before me. My progress seemed like a journey through the Spessart, where at every step some new goblin or monster starts from the ground or steps from behind a tree.

Peremptorily I dismissed these harassing and frightful doubts. I secured my door, sat myself down at my table, and with a candle at each side, placed before me the piece of vellum which contained the drawings and notes on which I was to rely for full instructions as to how to use the key.

When I had studied this for awhile, I made my investigation. The angle of the room at the right side of the window was cut off by an oblique turn in the wainscot. I examined this carefully, and, on pressure, a small bit of the frame of the woodwork slid aside, and disclosed a keyhole. On removing my finger, it shot back to its place again, with a spring. So far I had interpreted my instructions successfully. A similar search, next the door, and directly under this, was rewarded by a like discovery. The small end of the key fitted this, as it had the upper keyhole; and now, with two or three hard jerks at the key, a door in the panel opened, showing a strip of the bare wall, and a narrow, arched doorway, piercing the thickness of the wall; and within which I saw a screw-staircase of stone.

Candle in hand I stepped in. I do not know whether the quality of air, long undisturbed, is peculiar; to me it has always seemed so, and the damp smell of the old masonry hung in this atmosphere. My candle faintly lighted the bare stone wall that enclosed the stair, the foot of which I could not see. Down I went, and a few turns brought me to the stone floor. Here was another door, of the simple, old, oak kind, deep sunk in the thickness of the wall. The large end of the key fitted this. The lock was stiff; I set the candle down upon the stair, and applied both hands; it turned with difficulty, and as it revolved, uttered a shriek that alarmed me for my secret.

For some minutes I did not move. In a little time, however, I took courage, and opened the door. The night-air floating in, puffed out the candle. There was a thicket of holly and underwood, as dense as a jungle, close about the door. I should have been in pitch-darkness, were it not that through the topmost leaves, there twinkled, here and there, a glimmer of moonshine.

Softly, lest any one should have opened his window, at the sound of the rusty bolt, I struggled through this, till I gained a view of the open grounds. Here I found that the brushwood spread a good way up the park, uniting with the wood that approached the little temple I have described.

A general could not have chosen a more effectually-covered approach from the Dragon Volant to the trysting-place where hitherto I had conferred with the idol of my lawless adoration.

Looking back upon the old inn, I discovered that the stair I descended, was enclosed in one of those slender turrets that decorate such buildings. It was placed at that angle which corresponded with the part of the paneling of my room indicated in the plan I had been studying.

Thoroughly satisfied with my experiment, I made my way back to the door, with some little difficulty, remounted to my room, locked my secret door again; kissed the mysterious key that her hand had pressed that night, and placed it under my pillow, upon which, very soon after, my giddy head was laid, not, for some time, to sleep soundly.

CHAPTER XXI.

I SEE THREE MEN IN A MIRROR.

I awoke very early next morning, and was too excited to sleep again. As soon as I could, without exciting remark, I saw my host. I told him that I was going into town that night, and thence to —— , where I had to see some people on business, and requested him to mention my being there to any friend who might call. That I expected to be back in about a week, and that in the meantime my servant, St. Clair, would keep the key of my room, and look after my things.

Having prepared this mystification for my landlord, I drove into Paris, and there transacted the financial part of the affair. The problem was to reduce my balance, nearly thirty thousand pounds, to a shape in which it would be not only easily portable, but available, wherever I might go, without involving correspondence, or any other incident which would disclose my place of residence, for the time being. All these points were as nearly provided for as they could be. I need not trouble you about my arrangements for passports. It is enough to say that the point I selected for our flight was, in the spirit of romance, one of the most beautiful and sequestered nooks in Switzerland.

Luggage, I should start with none. The first considerable town we reached next morning, would supply an extemporized wardrobe. It was now two o’clock; *only* two! How on earth was I to dispose of the remainder of the day?

I had not yet seen the cathedral of Notre Dame; and thither I drove. I spent an hour or more there; and then to the Conciergerie, the Palais de Justice, and the beautiful Sainte Chapelle. Still there remained some time to get rid of, and I strolled into the narrow streets adjoining the cathedral. I recollect seeing, in one of them, an old house with a mural inscription stating that it had been the residence of Canon Fulbert, the uncle of Abelard’s Eloise. I don’t know whether these curious old streets, in which I observed fragments of ancient gothic churches fitted up as warehouses, are still extant. I lighted, among other dingy and eccentric shops, upon one that seemed that of a broker of all sorts of old decorations, armour, china, furniture. I entered the shop; it was dark, dusty, and low. The proprietor was busy scouring a piece of inlaid armour, and allowed me to poke about his shop, and examine the curious things accumulated there, just as I pleased. Gradually I made my way to the farther end of it, where there was but one window with many panes, each with a bull's-eye in it, and in the dirtiest possible state. When I reached this window, I turned about, and in a recess, standing at right angles with the side wall of the shop, was a large mirror in an oldfashioned dingy frame. Reflected in this I saw, what in old houses I have heard termed an "alcove," in which, among lumber, and various dusty articles hanging on the wall, there stood a table, at which three persons were seated, as it seemed to me, in earnest conversation. Two of these persons I instantly recognized; one was Colonel Gaillarde, the other was the Marquis d'Harmonville. The third, who was fiddling with a pen, was a lean, pale man, pitted with the smallpox, with lank black hair, and about as mean-looking a person as I had ever seen in my life. The Marquis looked up, and his glance was instantaneously followed by his two companions. For a moment I hesitated what to do. But it was plain that I was not recognized, as indeed I could hardly have been, the light from the window being behind me, and the portion of the shop immediately before me, being very dark indeed.

Perceiving this, I had presence of mind to affect being entirely engrossed by the objects before me, and strolled slowly down the shop again. I paused for a moment to hear whether I was followed, and was relieved when I heard no step. You may be sure I did not waste more time in that shop, where I had just made a discovery so curious and so unexpected.

It was no business of mine to inquire what brought Colonel Gaillarde and the Marquis together, in so shabby, and even dirty a place, or who the mean person, biting the feather end of his pen, might be. Such employments as the Marquis had accepted sometimes make strange bed-fellows.

I was glad to get away, and just as the sun set, I had reached the steps of the Dragon Volant, and dismissed the vehicle in which I arrived, carrying in my hand a strong box, of marvellously small dimensions considering all it contained, strapped in a leather cover, which disguised its real character.

When I got to my room, I summoned St. Clair. I told him nearly the same story, I had already told my host. I gave him fifty pounds, with orders to expend whatever was necessary on himself, and in payment for my rooms till my return. I then eat a slight and hasty dinner. My eyes were often upon the solemn old clock over the chimneypiece, which was my sole accomplice in keeping tryste in this iniquitous venture. The sky favoured my design, and darkened all things with a sea of clouds.

The innkeeper met me in the hall, to ask whether I should want a vehicle to Paris? I was prepared for this question, and instantly answered that I meant to walk to Versailles, and take a carriage there. I called St. Clair.

“Go,” said I, “and drink a bottle of wine with your friends. I shall call you if I should want anything; in the meantime, here is the key of my room; I shall be writing some notes, so don’t allow any one to disturb me, for at least half an hour. At the end of that time you will probably find that I have left this for Versailles; and should you not find me in the room, you may take that for granted; and you take charge of everything, and lock the door, you understand?”

St. Clair took his leave, wishing me all happiness and no doubt promising himself some little amusement with my money. With my candle in my hand, I hastened upstairs. It wanted now but five minutes to the appointed time. I do not think there is anything of the coward in my nature; but I confess, as the crisis approached, I felt something of the suspense and awe of a soldier going into action. Would I have receded? Not for all this earth could offer.

I bolted my door, put on my great coat, and placed my pistols, one in each pocket. I now applied my key to the secret locks; drew the wainscot-door a little open, took my strong box under my arm, extinguished my candle, unbolted my door, listened at it for a few moments to be sure that no one was approaching, and then crossed the floor of my room swiftly, entered the secret door, and closed the spring lock after me. I was upon the screw-stair in total darkness, the key in my fingers. Thus far the undertaking was successful.

CHAPTER XXII.

RAPTURE.

Down the screw-stair I went in utter darkness; and having reached the stone floor, I discerned the door and groped out the keyhole. With more caution, and less noise than upon the night before, I opened the door, and stepped out into the thick brushwood. It was almost as dark in this jungle.

Having secured the door, I slowly pushed my way through the bushes, which soon became less dense. Then, with more ease, but still under thick cover, I pursued in the track of the wood, keeping near its edge.

At length, in the darkened air, about fifty yards away, the shafts of the marble temple rose like phantoms before me, seen through the trunks of the old trees. Everything favoured my enterprise. I had effectually mystified my servant and the people of the Dragon Volant, and so dark was the night, that even had I alarmed the suspicions of all the tenants of the inn, I might safely defy their united curiosity, though posted at every window of the house.

Through the trunks, over the roots of the old trees, I reached the appointed place of observation. I laid my treasure, in its leathern case, in the embrasure, and leaning my arms upon it, looked steadily in the direction of the château. The outline of the building was scarcely discernible, blending dimly, as it did, with the sky. No light in any window was visible. I was plainly to wait; but for how long?

Leaning on my box of treasure, gazing toward the massive shadow that represented the château, in the midst of my ardent and elated longings, there came upon me an odd thought, which you will think might well have struck me long before. It seemed on a sudden, as it came, that the darkness deepened, and a chill stole into the air around me.

Suppose I were to disappear finally, like those other men whose stories I had listened to! Had I not been at all the pains that mortal could, to obliterate every trace of my real proceedings, and to mislead every one to whom I spoke as to the direction in which I had gone?

This icy, snake-light thought stole through my mind, and was gone.

It was with me the full-blooded season of youth, conscious strength, rashness, passion, pursuit, the adventure! Here were a pair of double-barrelled pistols, four lives in my hands? What could possibly happen? The Count — except for the sake of my dulcinea, what was it to me whether the old coward whom I had seen, in an ague of terror before the brawling Colonel, interposed or not? I was assuming the worst that could happen. But with an ally so clever and courageous as my beautiful Countess, could any such misadventure befall? Bah! I laughed at all such fancies.

As I thus communed with myself, the signal light sprang up. The rose-coloured light, *couleur de rose*, emblem of sanguine hope, and the dawn of a happy day.

Clear, soft, and steady, glowed the light from the window. The stone shafts showed black against it. Murmuring words of passionate love as I gazed upon the signal, I grasped my strong box under my arm, and with rapid strides approached the Château de la Carque. No sign of light or life, no human voice, no tread of foot, no bark of dog, indicated a chance of interruption. A blind was down; and as I came close to the tall window, I found that half-a-dozen steps led up to it, and that a large lattice, answering for a door, lay open.

A shadow from within fell upon the blind; it was drawn aside, and as I ascended the steps, a soft voice murmured— "Richard, dearest Richard, come, oh! come! how I have longed for this moment?"

Never did she look so beautiful. My love rose to passionate enthusiasm. I only wished there were some real danger in the adventure worthy of such a creature. When the first tumultuous greeting was over, she made me sit beside her on a sofa. There we talked for a minute or two. She told me that the Count had gone, and was by that time more than a mile on his way, with the funeral, to Père la Chaise. Here were her diamonds. She exhibited, hastily, an open casket containing a profusion of the largest brilliants.

"What is this?" she asked.

"A box containing money to the amount of thirty thousand pounds," I answered.

"What! all that money?" she exclaimed.

"Every *sou*."

"Was it not unnecessary to bring so much, seeing all these," she said, touching her diamonds. "It would have been kind of you, to allow me to provide for both for a time, at least. It would have made me happier even than I am."

"Dearest, generous angel!" Such was my extravagant declamation. "You forget that it may be necessary, for a long time, to observe silence as to where we are, and impossible to communicate safely with any one."

"You have then here this great sum — are you certain; have you counted it?"

"Yes, certainly; I received it to-day," I answered, perhaps showing a little surprise in my face, "I counted it, of course, on drawing it from my bankers."

"It makes me feel a little nervous, travelling with so much money; but these jewels make as great a danger; *that* can add but little to it. Place them side by side; you shall take off your great coat when we are ready to go, and with it manage to conceal these boxes. I should not like the drivers to suspect that we were conveying such a treasure. I must ask you now to close the curtains of that window, and bar the shutters."

I had hardly done this when a knock was heard at the room-door.

"I know who this is," she said, in a whisper to me.

I saw that she was not alarmed. She went softly to the door, and a whispered conversation for a minute followed.

"My trusty maid, who is coming with us. She says we cannot safely go sooner than ten minutes. She is bringing some coffee to the next room."

She opened the door and looked in.

"I must tell her not to take too much luggage. She is so odd! Don't follow — stay where you are — it is better that she should not see you."

She left the room with a gesture of caution.

A change had come over the manner of this beautiful woman. For the last few minutes a shadow had been stealing over her, an air of abstraction, a look bordering on suspicion. Why was she pale? Why had there come that dark look in her eyes? Why had her very voice become changed? Had anything gone suddenly wrong? Did some danger threaten?

This doubt, however, speedily quieted itself. If there had been anything of the kind, she would, of course, have told me. It was only natural that, as the crisis approached, she should become more and more nervous. She did not return quite so soon as I had expected. To a man in my situation absolute quietude is next to impossible. I moved restlessly about the room. It was a small one. There was a door at the other end. I opened it, rashly enough. I listened, it was perfectly silent. I was in an excited, eager state, and every faculty engrossed about what was coming, and in so far detached from the immediate present. I can’t account, in any other way, for my having done so many foolish things that night, for I was, naturally, by no means deficient in cunning. About the most stupid of those was, that instead of immediately closing that door, which I never ought to have opened, I actually took a candle and walked into the room.

There I made, quite unexpectedly, a rather startling discovery.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CUP OF COFFEE.

The room was carpetless. On the floor were a quantity of shavings, and some score of bricks. Beyond these, on a narrow table, lay an object, which I could hardly believe I saw aright.

I approached and drew from it a sheet which had very slightly disguised its shape. There was no mistake about it. It was a coffin; and on the lid was a plate, with the inscription in French:

PIERRE DE LA ROCHE ST. AMAND.

AGÉE DE XXIII ANS.

I drew back with a double shock. So, then, the funeral after all had not yet left! Here lay the body. I had been deceived. This, no doubt, accounted for the embarrassment so manifest in the Countess's manner. She would have done more wisely had she told me the true state of the case.

I drew back from this melancholy room, and closed the door. Her distrust of me was the worst rashness she could have committed. There is nothing more dangerous than misapplied caution. In entire ignorance of the fact I had entered the room, and there I might have lighted upon some of the very persons it was our special anxiety that I should avoid.

These reflections were interrupted, almost as soon as begun, by the return of the Countess de St. Alyre. I saw at a glance that she detected in my face some evidence of what had happened, for she threw a hasty look towards the door.

"Have you seen anything — anything to disturb you, dear Richard? Have you been out of this room?"

I answered promptly, "Yes," and told her frankly what had happened.

"Well, I did not like to make you more uneasy than necessary. Besides, it is disgusting and horrible. The body *is* there; but the Count had departed a quarter of an hour before I lighted the coloured lamp, and prepared to receive you. The body did not arrive till eight or ten minutes after he had set out. He was afraid lest the people at Père la Chaise should suppose that the funeral was postponed. He knew that the remains of poor Pierre would certainly reach this tonight although an unexpected delay has occurred; and there are reasons why he wishes the funeral completed before tomorrow. The hearse with the body must leave this in ten minutes. So soon as it is gone, we shall be free to set out upon our wild and happy journey. The horses are to the carriage in the *porte-cochère*. As for this *funeste* horror (she shuddered very prettily), let us think of it no more."

She bolted the door of communication, and when she turned, it was with such a pretty penitence in her face and attitude, that I was ready to throw myself at her feet.

"It is the last time," she said, in a sweet sad little pleading, "I shall ever practise a deception on my brave and beautiful Richard — my hero? Am I forgiven."

Here was another scene of passionate effusion, and lovers' raptures and declamations, but only murmured, lest the ears of listeners should be busy.

At length, on a sudden, she raised her hand, as if to prevent my stirring, her eyes fixed on me, and her ear toward the door of the room in which the coffin was placed, and remained breathless in that attitude for a few moments. Then, with a little nod towards me, she moved on tip-toe to the door, and listened, extending her hand backward as if to warn me against advancing; and, after a little time, she returned, still on tip-toe, and whispered to me, "They are removing the coffin — come with me."

I accompanied her into the room from which her maid, as she told me, had spoken to her. Coffee and some old china cups, which appeared to me quite beautiful, stood on a silver tray; and some liqueur glasses, with a flask, which turned out to be noyeau, on a salver beside it.

"I shall attend you. I'm to be your servant here; I am to have my own way; I shall not think myself forgiven by my darling if he refuses to indulge me in anything." She filled a cup with coffee, and handed it to me with her left hand, her right arm she fondly, passed over my shoulder, and with her fingers through my curls caressingly, she whispered, "Take this, I shall take some just now."

It was excellent; and when I had done she handed me the liqueur, which I also drank.

“Come back, dearest, to the next room,” she said. “By this time those terrible people must have gone away, and we shall be safer there, for the present, than here.”

“You shall direct, and I obey; you shall command me, not only now, but always, and in all things, my beautiful queen!” I murmured.

My heroics were unconsciously, I daresay, founded upon my ideal of the French school of lovemaking. I am, even now, ashamed as I recall the bombast to which I treated the Countess de St. Alyre.

“There, you shall have another miniature glass — a fairy glass — of noyeau,” she said, gaily. In this volatile creature, the funereal gloom of the moment before, and the suspense of an adventure on which all her future was staked, disappeared in a moment. She ran and returned with another tiny glass, which, with an eloquent or tender little speech, I placed to my lips and sipped.

I kissed her hand, I kissed her lips, I gazed in her beautiful eyes, and kissed her again unresisting.

“You call me Richard, by what name am I to call my beautiful divinity?” I asked.

“You call me Eugenie, it is my name. Let us be quite real; that is, if you love as entirely as I do.”

“Eugenie!” I exclaimed, and broke into a new rapture upon the name.

It ended by my telling her how impatient I was to set out upon our journey; and, as I spoke, suddenly an odd sensation overcame me. It was not in the slightest degree like faintness. I can find no phrase to describe it, but a sudden constraint of the brain; it was as if the membrane in which it lies, if there be such a thing, contracted, and became inflexible.

“Dear Richard! what is the matter?” she exclaimed, with terror in her looks. “Good Heavens! are you ill. I conjure you, sit down; sit in this chair.” She almost forced me into one; I was in no condition to offer the least resistance. I recognised but too truly the sensations that supervened. I was lying back in the chair in which I sat without the power, by this time, of uttering a syllable, of closing my eyelids, of moving my eyes, of stirring a muscle. I had in a few seconds glided into precisely the state in which I had passed so many appalling hours when approaching Paris, in my nightdrive with the Marquis d’Harmonville.

Great and loud was the lady’s agony. She seemed to have lost all sense of fear. She called me by my name, shook me by the shoulder, raised my arm and let it fall, all the time imploring of me, in distracting sentences, to make the slightest sign of life, and vowing that if I did not, she would make away with herself.

These ejaculations, after a minute or two, suddenly subsided. The lady was perfectly silent and cool. In a very businesslike way she took a candle and stood before me, pale indeed, very pale, but with an expression only of intense scrutiny with a dash of horror in it. She moved the candle before my eyes slowly, evidently watching the effect. She then set it down, and rang a hand-bell two or three times sharply. She placed the two cases (I mean hers containing the jewels) and my strong box, side by side on the table; and I saw her carefully lock the door that gave access to the room in which I had just now sipped my coffee.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

HOPE.

She had scarcely set down my heavy box, which she seemed to have considerable difficulty in raising on the table, when the door of the room in which I had seen the coffin, opened, and a sinister and unexpected apparition entered.

It was the Count de St. Alyre, who had been, as I have told you, reported to me to be, for some considerable time, on his way to Père la Chaise. He stood before me for a moment, with the frame of the doorway and a background of darkness enclosing him, like a portrait. His slight, mean figure was draped in the deepest mourning. He had a pair of black gloves in his hand, and his hat with crape round it.

When he was not speaking his face showed signs of agitation; his mouth was puckering and working. He looked damnably wicked and frightened.

"Well, my dear Eugenie? Well, child — eh? Well, it all goes admirably?"

"Yes," she answered, in a low, hard tone. "But you and Planard should not have left that door open."

This she said sternly. "He went in there and looked about wherever he liked; it was fortunate he did not move aside the lid of the coffin."

"Planard should have seen to that," said the Count, sharply. "*Ma foi!* I can't be everywhere!" He advanced half-a-dozen short quick steps into the room toward me, and placed his glasses to his eyes.

"Monsieur Beckett," he cried sharply, two or three times, "Hi! don't you know me?"

He approached and peered more closely in my face; raised my hand and shook it, calling me again, then let it drop, and said— "It has set in admirably, my pretty *mignonne*. When did it commence?"

The Countess came and stood beside him, and looked at me steadily for some seconds.

You can't conceive the effect of the silent gaze of those two pairs of evil eyes.

The lady glanced to where, I recollected, the mantelpiece stood, and upon it a clock, the regular click of which I sharply heard.

"Four — five — six minutes and a half," she said slowly, in a cold hard way.

"Brava! Bravissima! my beautiful queen! my little Venus! my Joan of Arc! my heroine! my paragon of women!"

He was gloating on me with an odious curiosity, smiling, as he groped backward with his thin brown fingers to find the lady's hand; but she, not (I dare say) caring for his caresses, drew back a little.

"Come, *ma chère*, let us count these things. What is it? Pocketbook? Or — or — *what*?"

"It is *that*?" said the lady, pointing with a look of disgust to the box, which lay in its leather case on the table.

"Oh! Let us see — let us count — let us see," he said, as he was unbuckling the straps with his tremulous fingers. "We must count them — we must see to it. I have pencil and pocketbook — but — where's the key? See this cursed lock! My —— ! What is it? Where's the key?"

He was standing before the Countess, shuffling his feet, with his hands extended and all his fingers quivering.

"I have not got it; how could I? It is in his pocket, of course," said the lady.

In another instant the fingers of the old miscreant were in my pockets: he plucked out everything they contained, and some keys among the rest.

I lay in precisely the state in which I had been during my drive with the Marquis to Paris. This wretch I knew was about to rob me. The whole drama, and the Countess's *rôle* in it, I could not yet comprehend. I could not be sure — so much more presence of mind and histrionic resource have women than fall to the lot of our clumsy sex — whether the return of the Count was not, in truth, a surprise to her; and this scrutiny of the contents of my strong box, an extempore undertaking of the Count's. But it was clearing more and more every moment: and I was destined, very soon, to comprehend minutely my appalling situation.

I had not the power of turning my eyes this way or that, the smallest fraction of a hair's breadth. But let any one, placed as I was at the end of a room, ascertain for himself by experiment how wide is the field of sight, without the slightest alteration in the line of vision, he will find that it takes in the entire breadth of a large room, and that up to a very short distance before him; and imperfectly, by a refraction, I believe, in the eye itself, to a point very near indeed. Next to nothing that passed in the room, therefore, was hidden from me.

The old man had, by this time, found the key. The leather case was open. The box cramped round with iron, was next unlocked. He turned out its contents upon the table.

"Rouleaux of a hundred Napoleons each. One, two, three. Yes, quick. Write down a thousand Napoleons. One, two; yes, right. Another thousand, *write*!" And so, on and on till till gold was rapidly counted. Then came the notes.

"Ten thousand francs. *Write.* Ten thousand francs again: is it written? Another ten thousand francs: is it down? Smaller notes would have been better. They should have been smaller. These are horribly embarrassing. Bolt that door again; Planard would become unreasonable if he knew the amount. Why did you not tell him to get it in smaller notes? No matter now — go on — it can't be helped — *write* — another ten thousand francs — another — another." And so on, till my treasure was counted out, before my face, while I saw and heard all that passed with the sharpest distinctness, and my mental perceptions were horribly vivid. But in all other respects I was dead.

He had replaced in the box every note and rouleau as he counted it, and now having ascertained the sum total, he locked it, replaced it, very methodically, in its cover, opened a buffet in the wainscoting, and, having placed the Countess' jewel-case and my strong box in it, he locked it; and immediately on completing these arrangements he began to complain, with fresh acrimony and maledictions of Planard's delay.

He unbolted the door, looked in the dark room beyond, and listened. He closed the door again, and returned. The old man was in a fever of suspense.

"I have kept ten thousand francs for Planard," said the Count, touching his waistcoat pocket.

"Will that satisfy him?" asked the lady.

"Why — curse him!" screamed the Count. "Has he no conscience! I'll swear to him it's half the entire thing."

He and the lady again came and looked at me anxiously for awhile, in silence; and then the old Count began to grumble again about Planard, and to compare his watch with the clock. The lady seemed less impatient; she sat no longer looking at me, but across the room, so that her profile was toward me — and strangely changed, dark and witchlike it looked. My last hope died as I beheld that jaded face from which the mask had dropped. I was certain that they intended to crown their robbery by murder. Why did they not despatch me at once? What object could there be in postponing the catastrophe which would expedite their own safety. I cannot recall, even to myself, adequately the horrors unutterable that I underwent. You must suppose a real nightmare — I mean a nightmare in which the objects and the danger are real, and the spell of corporal death appears to be protractable at the pleasure of the persons who preside at your unearthly torments. I could have no doubt as to the cause of the state in which I was.

In this agony, to which I could not give the slightest expression, I saw the door of the room where the coffin had been, open slowly, and the Marquis d’Harmonville entered the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

DESPAIR.

A moment's hope, hope violent and fluctuating, hope that was nearly torture, and then came a dialogue, and with it the terrors of despair.

"Thank heaven, Planard, you have come at last," said the Count, taking him, with both hands, by the arm and clinging to it, and drawing him toward me. "See, look at him. It has all gone sweetly, sweetly, sweetly up to this. Shall I hold the candle for you?"

My friend d'Harmonville, Planard, whatever he was, came to me, pulling off his gloves, which he popped into his pocket.

"The candle, a little this way," he said, and stooping over me he looked earnestly in my face. He touched my forehead, drew his hand across it, and then looked in my eyes for a time.

"Well, doctor, what do you think?" whispered the Count.

"How much did you give him?" said the Marquis, thus suddenly stunted down to a doctor.

"Seventy drops," said the lady.

"In the hot coffee?"

"Yes; sixty in a hot cup of coffee and ten in the liqueur."

Her voice, low and hard, seemed to me to tremble a little. It takes a long course of guilt to subjugate nature completely, and prevent those exterior signs of agitation that outlive all good.

The doctor, however, was treating me as coolly as he might a subject which he was about to place on the dissecting-table for a lecture.

He looked into my eyes again for awhile, took my wrist, and applied his fingers to the pulse.

"That action suspended," he said to himself.

Then again he placed something that, for the moment I saw it, looked like a piece of gold-beater's leaf, to my lips, holding his head so far that his own breathing could not affect it.

"Yes," he said in soliloquy, very low.

Then he plucked my shirt-breast open and applied the stethoscope, shifted it from point to point, listened with his ear to its end, as if for a very far off sound, raised his head, and said, in like manner, softly to himself, "All appreciable action of the lungs has subsided."

Then turning from the sound, as I conjectured, he said:

"Seventy drops, allowing ten for waste, ought to hold him fast for six hours and a half — that is ample. The experiment I tried in the carriage was only thirty drops, and showed a highly sensitive brain. It would not do to kill him, you know. You are certain you did not exceed *seventy*?"

"Perfectly," said the lady.

"If he were to die the evaporation would be arrested, and foreign matter, some of it poisonous, would be found in the stomach, don't you see? If you are doubtful, it would be well to use the stomach-pump."

"Dearest Eugenie, be frank, be frank, do be frank," urged the Count.

"I am *not* doubtful, I am *certain*," she answered.

"How long ago, exactly? I told you to observe the time."

"I did; the minute-hand was exactly there, under the point of that Cupid's foot."

"It will last, then, probably for seven hours. He will recover then; the evaporation will be complete, and not one particle of the fluid will remain in the stomach."

It was reassuring, at all events, to hear that there was no intention to murder me. No one who has not tried it knows the terror of the approach of death, when the mind is clear, the instincts of life unimpaired, and no excitement to disturb the appreciation of that entirely new horror.

The nature and purpose of this tenderness was very, very peculiar, and as yet I had not a suspicion of it.

"You leave France, I suppose?" said the ex-Marquis.

"Yes, certainly, tomorrow," answered the Count.

"And where do you mean to go?"

"That I have not yet settled," he answered quickly.

"You won't tell a friend, eh?"

"I can't till I know. This has turned out an unprofitable affair."

"We shall settle that by-and-by."

"It is time we should get him lying down, eh?" said the Count, indicating me with one finger.

“Yes, we must proceed rapidly now. Are his nightshirt and nightcap — you understand — here?”

“All ready,” said the Count.

“Now, Madame,” said the doctor, turning to the lady, and making her, in spite of the emergency, a bow, “it is time you should retire.”

The lady passed into the room, in which I had taken my cup of treacherous coffee, and I saw her no more.

The Count took a candle, and passed through the door at the further end of the room, returning with a roll of linen in his hand. He bolted first one door, then the other.

They now, in silence, proceeded to undress me rapidly. They were not many minutes in accomplishing this.

What the doctor had termed my nightshirt, a long garment which reached below my feet, was now on, and a cap, that resembled a female nightcap more than anything I had ever seen upon a male head, was fitted upon mine, and tied under my chin.

And now, I thought, I shall be laid in a bed, to recover how I can, and, in the meantime, the conspirators will have escaped with their booty, and pursuit be in vain.

This was my best hope at the time; but it was soon clear that their plans were very different.

The Count and Planard now went, together, into the room that lay straight before me. I heard them talking low, and a sound of shuffling feet; then a long rumble; it suddenly stopped; it recommenced; it continued; side by side they came in at the door, their backs toward me. They were dragging something along the floor that made a continued boom and rumble, but they interposed between me and it, so that I could not see it until they had dragged it almost beside me; and then, merciful heaven! I saw it plainly enough. It was the coffin I had seen in the next room. It lay now flat on the floor, its edge against the chair in which I sat. Planard removed the lid. The coffin was empty.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CATASTROPHE.

“Those seem to be good horses, and we change on the way,” said Planard. “You give the men a Napoleon or two; we must do it within three hours and a quarter. Now, come; I’ll lift him, upright, so as to place his feet in their proper berth, and you must keep them together, and draw the white shirt well down over them.”

In another moment I was placed, as he described, sustained in Planard’s arms, standing at the foot of the coffin, and so lowered backward, gradually, till I lay my length in it. Then the man, whom he called Planard, stretched my arms by my sides, and carefully arranged the frills at my breast, and the folds of the shroud, and after that, taking his stand at the foot of the coffin, made a survey which seemed to satisfy him.

The Count, who was very methodical, took my clothes, which had just been removed, folded them rapidly together and locked them up, as I afterwards heard, in one of the three presses which opened by doors in the panel.

I now understood their frightful plan. This coffin had been prepared for *me*; the funeral of St. Amand was a sham to mislead inquiry; I had myself given the order at Père la Chaise, signed it, and paid the fees for the interment of the fictitious Pierre de St. Amand, whose place I was to take, to lie in his coffin, with his name on the plate above my breast, and with a ton of clay packed down upon me; to waken from this catalepsy, after I had been for hours in the grave, there to perish by a death the most horrible that imagination can conceive.

If, hereafter, by any caprice of curiosity or suspicion, the coffin should be exhumed, and the body it enclosed examined, no chemistry could detect a trace of poison, nor the most cautious examination the slightest mark of violence.

I had myself been at the utmost pains to mystify inquiry, should my disappearance excite surmises, and had even written to my few correspondents in England to tell them that they were not to look for a letter from me for three weeks at least.

In the moment of my guilty elation death had caught me, and there was no escape. I tried to pray to God in my unearthly panic, but only thoughts of terror, judgment, and eternal anguish, crossed the distraction of my immediate doom.

I must not try to recall what is indeed indescribable — the multiform horrors of my own thoughts. I will relate, simply, what befell, every detail of which remains sharp in my memory as if cut in steel.

“The undertaker’s men are in the hall,” said the Count.

“They must not come till this is fixed,” answered Planard. “Be good enough to take hold of the lower part while I take this end.” I was not left long to conjecture what was coming, for in a few seconds more something slid across, a few inches above my face, and entirely excluded the light, and muffled sound, so that nothing that was not very distinct reached my ears henceforward; but very distinctly came the working of a turnscrew, and the crunching home of screws in succession. Than these vulgar sounds, no doom spoken in thunder could have been more tremendous.

The rest I must relate, not as it then reached my ears, which was too imperfectly and interruptedly to supply a connected narrative, but as it was afterwards told me by other people.

The coffin-lid being screwed down, the two gentlemen arranged the room, and adjusted the coffin so that it lay perfectly straight along the boards, the Count being specially anxious that there should be no appearance of hurry or disorder in the room, which might have suggested remark and conjecture.

When this was done, Doctor Planard said he would go to the hall to summon the men who were to carry the coffin out and place it in the hearse. The Count pulled on his black gloves, and held his white handkerchief in his hand, a very impressive chief-mourner. He stood a little behind the head of the coffin, awaiting the arrival of the persons who accompanied Planard, and whose fast steps he soon heard approaching.

Planard came first. He entered the room through the apartment in which the coffin had been originally placed. His manner was changed; there was something of a swagger in it.

"Monsieur le Comte," he said, as he strode through the door, followed by half-a-dozen persons. "I am sorry to have to announce to you a most unseasonable interruption. Here is Monsieur Carmaignac, a gentleman holding an office in the police department, who says that information to the effect that large quantities of smuggled English and other goods have been distributed in this neighbourhood, and that a portion of them is concealed in your house. I have ventured to assure him, of my own knowledge, that nothing can be more false than that information, and that you would be only too happy to throw open for his inspection, at a moment's notice, every room, closet, and cupboard in your house."

"Most assuredly," exclaimed the Count, with a stout voice, but a very white face. "Thank you, my good friend, for having anticipated me. I will place my house and keys at his disposal, for the purpose of his scrutiny, so soon as he is good enough to inform me, of what specific contraband goods he comes in search."

"The Count de St. Alyre will pardon me," answered Carmaignac, a little dryly. "I am forbidden by my instructions to make that disclosure; and that I *am* instructed to make a general search, this warrant will sufficiently apprise Monsieur le Comte."

"Monsieur Carmaignac, may I hope," interposed Planard, "that you will permit the Count de St. Alyre to attend the funeral of his kinsman, who lies here, as you see— " (he pointed to the plate upon the coffin)— "and to convey whom to Père la Chaise, a hearse waits at this moment at the door."

"That, I regret to say, I cannot permit. My instructions are precise; but the delay, I trust, will be but trifling. Monsieur le Comte will not suppose for a moment that I suspect him; but we have a duty to perform, and I must act as if I did. When I am ordered to search, I search; things are sometimes hid in such *bizarre* places. I can't say, for instance, what that coffin may contain."

"The body of my kinsman, Monsieur Pierre de St. Amand," answered the Count, loftily.

"Oh! then you've seen him?"

"Seen him? Often, too often?" The Count was evidently a good deal moved.

"I mean the body?"

The Count stole a quick glance at Planard.

"N — no, Monsieur — that is, I mean only for a moment." Another quick glance at Planard.

"But quite long enough, I fancy, to recognize him?" insinuated that gentleman.

"Of course — of course; instantly — perfectly. What! Pierre de St. Amand? Not know him at a glance? No, no, poor fellow, I know him too well for that."

"The things I am in search of," said Monsieur Carmaignac, "would fit in a narrow compass — servants are so ingenious sometimes. Let us raise the lid."

"Pardon me, Monsieur," said the Count, peremptorily, advancing to the side of the coffin, and extending his arm across it. "I cannot permit that indignity — that desecration."

"There shall be none, sir, — simply the raising of the lid; you shall remain in the room. If it should prove as we all hope, you shall have the pleasure of one other look, really the last, upon your beloved kinsman."

"But, sir, I can't."

"But, Monsieur, I must."

"But, besides, the thing, the turnscrew, broke when the last screw was turned; and I give you my sacred honour there is nothing but the body in this coffin."

"Of course Monsieur le Comte believes all that; but he does not know so well as I the legerdemain in use among servants, who are accustomed to smuggling. Here, Philippe, you must take off the lid of that coffin."

The Count protested; but Philippe — a man with a bald head, and a smirched face, looking like a working blacksmith — placed on the floor a leather bag of tools, from which, having looked at the coffin, and picked with his nail at the screw-heads, he selected a turnscrew, and, with a few deft twirls at each of the screws, they stood up like little rows of mushrooms, and the lid was raised. I saw the light, of which I thought I had seen my last, once more; but the axis of vision remained fixed. As I was reduced to the cataleptic state in a position nearly perpendicular, I continued looking straight before me, and thus my gaze was now fixed upon the ceiling. I saw the face of Carmaignac leaning over me with a curious frown. It seemed to me that there was no recognition in his eyes. Oh, heaven! that I could have uttered were it but one cry! I saw the dark, mean mask of the little Count staring down at me from the other side; the face of the pseudo-marquis also peering at me, but not so full in the line of vision; there were other faces also.

“I see, I see,” said Carmaignac, withdrawing. “Nothing of the kind there.”

“You will be good enough to direct your man to readjust the lid of the coffin, and to fix the screws,” said the Count, taking courage; “and — and — really the funeral *must* proceed. It is not fair to the people who have but moderate fees for nightwork, to keep them hour after hour beyond the time.”

“Count de St. Alyre, you shall go in a very few minutes. I will direct, just now, all about the coffin.”

The Count looked toward the door, and there saw a gendarme; and two or three more grave and stalwart specimens of the same force were also in the room. The Count was very uncomfortably excited; it was growing insupportable.

“As this gentleman makes a difficulty about my attending the obsequies of my kinsman, I will ask you, Planard, to accompany the funeral in my stead.”

“In a few minutes,” answered the incorrigible Carmaignac. “I must first trouble you for the key that opens that press.”

He pointed direct at the press, in which the clothes had just been locked up.

“I — I have no objection,” said the Count— “none, of course; only they have not been used for an age. I’ll direct some one to look for the key.”

“If you have not got it about you, it is quite unnecessary. Philippe, try your skeleton-keys with that press. I want it opened. Whose clothes are these?” inquired Carmaignac when, the press having been opened, he took out the suit that had been placed there scarcely two minutes since.

“I can’t say,” answered the Count. “I know nothing of the contents of that press. A roguish servant, named Lablais, whom I dismissed about a year ago, had the key. I have not seen it open for ten years or more. The clothes are probably his.

“Here are visiting cards, see, and here a marked pockethandkerchief— ‘R.B.’ upon it. He must have stolen them from a person named Beckett — R. Beckett. ‘Mr. Beckett, Berkley Square,’ the card says; and, my faith!

here’s a watch and a bunch of seals; one of them with the initials ‘R.B.’ upon it. That servant, Lablais, must have been a consummate rogue!”

“So he was; you are right, sir.”

“It strikes me that he possibly stole these clothes,” continued Carmaignac, “from the man in the coffin, who, in that case, would be Monsieur Beckett, and not Monsieur de St. Amand. For, wonderful to relate, Monsieur, the watch is still going! That man in the coffin, I believe, is not dead, but simply drugged. And for having robbed and intended to murder him, I arrest you, Nicolas de la Marque, Count de St. Alyre.”

In another moment the old villain was a prisoner. I heard his discordant voice break quaveringly into sudden vehemence and volubility; now croaking — now shrieking, as he oscillated between protests, threats, and impious appeals to the God who will “judge the secrets of men!” And thus lying and raving, he was removed from the room, and placed in the same coach with his beautiful and abandoned accomplice, already arrested; and, with two *gendarmes* sitting beside them, they were immediately driving at a rapid pace towards the Conciergerie.

There were now added to the general chorus two voices, very different in quality; one was that of the gasconading Colonel Gaillarde, who had with difficulty been kept in the background up to this; the other was that of my jolly friend Whistlewick, who had come to identify me.

I shall tell you, just now, how this project against my property and life, so ingenious and monstrous, was exploded. I must first say a word about myself. I was placed in a hot bath, under the direction of Planard, as consummate a villain as any of the gang, but now thoroughly in the interests of the prosecution. Thence I was laid in a warm bed, the window of the room being open. These simple measures restored me in about three hours; I should otherwise, probably, have continued under the spell for nearly seven.

The practices of these nefarious conspirators had been carried on with consummate skill and secrecy. Their dupes were led, as I was, to be themselves auxiliary to the mystery which made their own destruction both safe and certain.

A search was, of course, instituted. Graves were opened in Père la Chaise. The bodies exhumed had lain there too long, and were too much decomposed to be recognized. One only was identified. The notice for the burial, in this particular case, had been signed, the order given, and the fees paid, by Gabriel Gaillarde, who was known to the official clerk, who had to transact with him this little funereal business. The very trick, that had been arranged for me, had been successfully practised in his case. The person for whom the grave had been ordered, was purely fictitious; and Gabriel Gaillarde himself filled the coffin, on the cover of which that false name was inscribed as well as upon a tombstone over the grave. Possibly, the same honour, under my pseudonym, may have been intended for me.

The identification was curious. This Gabriel Gaillarde had had a bad fall from a runaway horse, about five years before his mysterious disappearance. He had lost an eye and some teeth, in this accident, besides sustaining a fracture of the right leg, immediately above the ankle. He had kept the injuries to his face as profound a secret as he could. The result was, that the glass eye which had done duty for the one he had lost, remained in the socket, slightly displaced, of course, but recognizable by the "artist" who had supplied it.

More pointedly recognizable were the teeth, peculiar in workmanship, which one of the ablest dentists in Paris had himself adapted to the chasms, the cast of which, owing to peculiarities in the accident, he happened to have preserved. This cast precisely fitted the gold plate found in the mouth of the skull. The mark, also, above the ankle, in the bone, where it had reunited, corresponded exactly with the place where the fracture had knit in the limb of Gabriel Gaillarde.

The Colonel, his younger brother, had been furious about the disappearance of Gabriel, and still more so about that of his money, which he had long regarded as his proper keepsake, whenever death should remove his brother from the vexations of living. He had suspected for a long time, for certain adroitly discovered reasons, that the Count de St. Alyre and the beautiful lady, his companion, countess, or whatever else she was, had pigeoned him. To this suspicion were added some others of a still darker kind; but in their first shape, rather the exaggerated reflections of his fury, ready to believe anything, than well-defined conjectures.

At length an accident had placed the Colonel very nearly upon the right scent; a chance, possibly lucky for himself, had apprized the scoundrel Planard that the conspirators — himself among the number — were in danger. The result was that he made terms for himself, became an informer, and concerted with the police this visit made to the Château de la Carque, at the critical moment when every measure had been completed that was necessary to construct a perfect case against his guilty accomplices.

I need not describe the minute industry or forethought with which the police agents collected all the details necessary to support the case. They had brought an able physician, who, even had Planard failed, would have supplied the necessary medical evidence.

My trip to Paris, you will believe, had not turned out quite so agreeably as I had anticipated. I was the principal witness for the prosecution in this *cause célébre*, with all the *agrémens* that attend that enviable position. Having had an escape, as my friend Whistlewick said, "with a squeak" for my life, I innocently fancied that I should have been an object of considerable interest to Parisian society; but, a good deal to my mortification, I discovered that I was the object of a goodnatured but contemptuous merriment. I was a *balourd*, a *benêt*, *un âne*, and figured even in caricatures. I became a sort of public character, a dignity,

"Unto which I was not born,"

and from which I fled as soon as I conveniently could, without even paying my friend the Marquis d'Harmonville a visit at his hospitable château.

The Marquis escaped scot-free. His accomplice, the Count, was executed. The fair Eugenie, under extenuating circumstances — consisting, so far as I could discover of her good looks — got off for six years' imprisonment.

Colonel Gaillarde recovered some of his brother's money, out of the not very affluent estate of the Count and *soi-disant* Countess. This, and the execution of the Count, put him in high good humour. So far from insisting on a hostile meeting, he shook me very graciously by the hand, told me that he looked upon the wound on his head, inflicted by the knob of my stick, as having been received in an honourable, though irregular duel, in which he had no disadvantage or unfairness to complain of.

I think I have only two additional details to mention. The bricks discovered in the room with the coffin, had been packed in it, in straw, to supply the weight of a dead body, and to prevent the suspicions and contradictions that might have been excited by the arrival of an empty coffin at the château.

Secondly, the Countess's magnificent brilliants were examined by a lapidary, and pronounced to be worth about five pounds to a tragedy-queen, who happened to be in want of a suite of paste.

The Countess had figured some years before as one of the cleverest actresses on the minor stage of Paris, where she had been picked up by the Count and used as his principal accomplice.

She it was who, admirably disguised, had rifled my papers in the carriage on my memorable night-journey to Paris. She also had figured as the interpreting magician of the palanquin at the ball at Versailles. So far as I was affected by that elaborate mystification it was intended to reanimate my interest, which, they feared, might flag in the beautiful Countess. It had its design and action upon other intended victims also; but of them there is, at present, no need to speak. The introduction of a real corpse — procured from a person who supplied the Parisian anatomists — involved no real danger, while it heightened the mystery and kept the prophet alive in the gossip of the town and in the thoughts of the noodles with whom he had conferred.

I divided the remainder of the summer and autumn between Switzerland and Italy.

As the well-worn phrase goes, I was a sadder if not a wiser man. A great deal of the horrible impression left upon my mind was due, of course, to the mere action of nerves and brain. But serious feelings of another and deeper kind remained. My after life was ultimately formed by the shock I had then received. Those impressions led me — but not till after many years — to happier though not less serious thoughts; and I have deep reason to be thankful to the all-merciful Ruler of events, for an early and terrible lesson in the ways of sin.

CARMILLA.

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PROLOGUE.

Upon a paper attached to the Narrative which follows, Doctor Hesselius has written a rather elaborate note, which he accompanies with a reference to his Essay on the strange subject which the MS. illuminates.

This mysterious subject, he treats, in that Essay, with his usual learning and acumen, and with remarkable directness and condensation. It will form but one volume of the series of that extraordinary man's collected papers.

As I publish the case, in these volumes, simply to interest the "laity," I shall forestal the intelligent lady, who relates it, in nothing; and, after due consideration, I have determined, therefore, to abstain from presenting any *précis* of the learned Doctor's reasoning, or extract from his statement on a subject which he describes as "involving, not improbably, some of the profoundest arcana of our dual existence, and its intermediates."

I was anxious, on discovering this paper, to re-open the correspondence commenced by Doctor Hesselius, so many years before, with a person so clever and careful as his informant seems to have been. Much to my regret, however, I found that she had died in the interval.

She, probably, could have added little to the Narrative which she communicates in the following pages, with, so far as I can pronounce, such a conscientious particularity.

CHAPTER I.

AN EARLY FRIGHT.

In Styria, we, though by no means magnificent people, inhabit a castle, or schloss. A small income, in that part of the world, goes a great way. Eight or nine hundred a year does wonders. Scantily enough ours would have answered among wealthy people at home. My father is English, and I bear an English name, although I never saw England. But here, in this lonely and primitive place, where everything is so marvellously cheap, I really don’t see how ever so much more money would at all materially add to our comforts, or even luxuries.

My father was in the Austrian service, and retired upon a pension and his patrimony, and purchased this feudal residence, and the small estate on which it stands, a bargain.

Nothing can be more picturesque or solitary. It stands on a slight eminence in a forest. The road, very old and narrow, passes in front of its drawbridge, never raised in my time, and its moat, stocked with perch, and sailed over by many swans, and floating on its surface white fleets of water-lilies.

Over all this the schloss shows its many-windowed front; its towers, and its Gothic chapel.

The forest opens in an irregular and very picturesque glade before its gate, and at the right a steep Gothic bridge carries the road over a stream that winds in deep shadow through the wood.

I have said that this is a very lonely place. Judge whether I say truth. Looking from the hall door towards the road, the forest in which our castle stands extends fifteen miles to the right, and twelve to the left. The nearest inhabited village, is about seven of your English miles to the left. The nearest inhabited schloss of any historic associations, is that of old General Spielsdorf, nearly twenty miles away to the right.

I have said “the nearest *inhabited* village,” because there is, only three miles westward, that is to say in the direction of General Spielsdorf’s schloss, a ruined village, with its quaint little church, now roofless, in the aisle of which are the mouldering tombs of the proud family of Karnstein, now extinct, who once owned the equally desolate château which, in the thick of the forest, overlooks the silent ruins of the town.

Respecting the cause of the desertion of this striking and melancholy spot, there is a legend which I shall relate to you another time.

I must tell you now, how very small is the party who constitute the inhabitants of our castle. I don't include servants, or those dependents who occupy rooms in the buildings attached to the schloss. Listen, and wonder! My father, who is the kindest man on earth, but growing old; and I, at the date of my story, only nineteen. Eight years have passed since then. I and my father constituted the family at the schloss. My mother, a Styrian lady, died in my infancy, but I had a goodnatured governess, who had been with me from, I might almost say, my infancy. I could not remember the time when her fat, benignant face was not a familiar picture in my memory. This was Madame Perrodon, a native of Berne, whose care and good nature in part supplied to me the loss of my mother, whom I do not even remember, so early I lost her. She made a third at our little dinner party. There was a fourth, Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, a lady such as you term, I believe, a "finishing governess." She spoke French and German, Madame Perrodon French and broken English, to which my father and I added English, which, partly to prevent its becoming a lost language among us, and partly from patriotic motives, we spoke every day. The consequence was a Babel, at which strangers used to laugh, and which I shall make no attempt to reproduce in this narrative. And there were two or three young lady friends besides, pretty nearly of my own age, who were occasional visitors, for longer or shorter terms; and these visits I sometimes returned.

These were our regular social resources; but of course there were chance visits from "neighbours" of only five or six leagues distance. My life was, notwithstanding, rather a solitary one, I can assure you.

My gouvernantes had just so much control over me as you might conjecture such sage persons would have in the case of a rather spoiled girl, whose only parent allowed her pretty nearly her own way in everything.

The first occurrence in my existence, which produced a terrible impression upon my mind, which, in fact, never has been effaced, was one of the very earliest incidents of my life which I can recollect. Some people will think it so trifling that it should not be recorded here. You will see, however, by-and-bye, why I mention it. The nursery, as it was called, though I had it all to myself, was a large room in the upper story of the castle, with a steep oak roof. I can't have been more than six years old, when one night I awoke, and looking round the room from my bed, failed to see the nursery-maid. Neither was my nurse there; and I thought myself alone. I was not frightened, for I was one of those happy children who are studiously kept in ignorance of ghost stories, of fairy tales, and of all such lore as makes us cover up our heads when the door creeks suddenly, or the flicker of an expiring candle makes the shadow of a bedpost dance upon the wall, nearer to our faces. I was vexed and insulted at finding myself, as I conceived, neglected, and I began to whimper, preparatory to a hearty bout of roaring; when to my surprise, I saw a solemn, but very pretty face looking at me from the side of the bed. It was that of a young lady who was kneeling, with her hands under the coverlet. I looked at her with a kind of pleased wonder, and ceased whimpering. She caressed me with her hands, and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling; I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again. I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly. The lady started back, with her eyes fixed on me, and then slipped down upon the floor, and, as I thought, hid herself under the bed.

I was now for the first time frightened, and I yelled with all my might and main. Nurse, nursery-maid, housekeeper, all came running in, and hearing my story, they made light of it, soothing me all they could meanwhile. But, child as I was, I could perceive that their faces were pale with an unwonted look of anxiety, and I saw them look under the bed, and about the room, and peep under tables and pluck open cupboards; and the housekeeper whispered to the nurse: "Lay your hand along that hollow in the bed; some one *did* lie there, so sure as you did not; the place is still warm."

I remember the nursery-maid petting me, and all three examining my chest, where I told them I felt the puncture, and pronouncing that there was no sign visible that any such thing had happened to me.

The housekeeper and the two other servants who were in charge of the nursery, remained sitting up all night; and from that time a servant always sat up in the nursery until I was about fourteen.

I was very nervous for a long time after this. A doctor was called in, he was pallid and elderly. How well I remember his long saturnine face, slightly pitted with smallpox, and his chesnut wig. For a good while, every second day, he came and gave me medicine, which of course I hated.

The morning after I saw this apparition I was in a state of terror, and could not bear to be left alone, daylight though it was, for a moment.

I remember my father coming up and standing at the bedside, and talking cheerfully, and asking the nurse a number of questions, and laughing very heartily at one of the answers; and patting me on the shoulder, and kissing me, and telling me not to be frightened, that it was nothing but a dream and could not hurt me.

But I was not comforted, for I knew the visit of the strange woman was *not* a dream; and I was *awfully* frightened.

I was a little consoled by the nursery-maid's assuring me that it was she who had come and looked at me, and lain down beside me in the bed, and that I must have been half-dreaming not to have known her face. But this, though supported by the nurse, did not quite satisfy me.

I remember, in the course of that day, a venerable old man, in a black cassock, coming into the room with the nurse and housekeeper, and talking a little to them, and very kindly to me; his face was very sweet and gentle, and he told me they were going to pray, and joined my hands together, and desired me to say, softly, while they were praying, "Lord hear all good prayers for us, for Jesus' sake." I think these were the very words, for I often repeated them to myself, and my nurse used for years to make me say them in my prayers.

I remember so well the thoughtful sweet face of that white-haired old man, in his black cossack, as he stood in that rude, lofty, brown room, with the clumsy furniture of a fashion three hundred years old, about him, and the scanty light entering its shadowy atmosphere through the small lattice. He kneeled, and the three women with him, and he prayed aloud with an earnest quavering voice for, what appeared to me, a long time. I forget all my life preceding that event, and for some time after it is all obscure also, but the scenes I have just described stand out vivid as the isolated pictures of the phantasmagoria surrounded by darkness.

CHAPTER II.

A GUEST.

I am now going to tell you something so strange that it will require all your faith in my veracity to believe my story. It is not only true, nevertheless, but truth of which I have been an eye-witness.

It was a sweet summer evening, and my father asked me, as he sometimes did, to take a little ramble with him along that beautiful forest vista which I have mentioned as lying in front of the schloss.

“General Spielsdorf cannot come to us so soon as I had hoped,” said my father, as we pursued our walk.

He was to have paid us a visit of some weeks, and we had expected his arrival next day. He was to have brought with him a young lady, his niece and ward, Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt, whom I had never seen, but whom I had heard described as a very charming girl, and in whose society I had promised myself many happy days. I was more disappointed than a young lady living in a town, or a bustling neighbourhood can y possibly imagine. This visit, and the new acquaintance it promised, had furnished my day dream for many weeks.

“And how soon does he come?” I asked.

“Not till autumn. Not for two months, I dare say,” he answered. “And I am very glad now, dear, that you never knew Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt.”

“And why?” I asked, both mortified and curious.

“Because the poor young lady is dead,” he replied. “I quite forgot I had not told you, but you were not in the room when I received the General’s letter this evening.”

I was very much shocked. General Spielsdorf had mentioned in his first letter, six or seven weeks before, that she was not so well as he would wish her, but there was nothing to suggest the remotest suspicion of danger.

“Here is the General’s letter,” he said, handing it to me. “I am afraid he is in great affliction; the letter appears to me to have been written very nearly in distraction.”

We sat down on a rude bench, under a group of magnificent lime-trees. The sun was setting with all its melancholy splendour behind the sylvan horizon, and the stream that flows beside our home, and passes under the steep old bridge I have mentioned, wound through many a group of noble trees, almost at our feet, reflecting in its current the fading crimson of the sky. General Spielsdorf's letter was so extraordinary, so vehement, and in some places so self-contradictory, that I read it twice over — the second time aloud to my father — and was still unable to account for it, except by supposing that grief had unsettled his mind.

It said "I have lost my darling daughter, for as such I loved her. During the last days of dear Bertha's illness I was not able to write to you. Before then I had no idea of her danger. I have lost her, and now learn *all*, too late. She died in the peace of innocence, and in the glorious hope of a blessed futurity. The fiend who betrayed our infatuated hospitality has done it all. I thought I was receiving into my house innocence, gaiety, a charming companion for my lost Bertha. Heavens! what a fool have I been! I thank God my child died without a suspicion of the cause of her sufferings. She is gone without so much as conjecturing the nature of her illness, and the accursed passion of the agent of all this misery. I devote my remaining days to tracking and extinguishing a monster. I am told I may hope to accomplish my righteous and merciful purpose. At present there is scarcely a gleam of light to guide me. I curse my conceited incredulity, my despicable affectation of superiority, my blindness, my obstinacy — all — too late. I cannot write or talk collectedly now. I am distracted. So soon as I shall have a little recovered, I mean to devote myself for a time to enquiry, which may possibly lead me as far as Vienna. Some time in the autumn, two months hence, or earlier if I live, I will see you — that is, if you permit me; I will then tell you all that I scarce dare put upon paper now. Farewell. Pray for me, dear friend."

In these terms ended this strange letter. Though I had never seen Bertha Rheinfeldt my eyes filled with tears at the sudden intelligence; I was startled, as well as profoundly disappointed.

The sun had now set, and it was twilight by the time I had returned the General's letter to my father.

It was a soft clear evening, and we loitered, speculating upon the possible meanings of the violent and incoherent sentences which I had just been reading. We had nearly a mile to walk before reaching the road that passes the schloss in front, and by that time the moon was shining brilliantly. At the drawbridge we met Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, who had come out, without their bonnets, to enjoy the exquisite moonlight.

We heard their voices gabbling in animated dialogue as we approached. We joined them at the drawbridge, and turned about to admire with them the beautiful scene.

The glade through which we had just walked lay before us. At our left the narrow road wound away under clumps of lordly trees, and was lost to sight amid the thickening forest. At the right the same road crosses the steep and picturesque bridge, near which stands a ruined tower which once guarded that pass; and beyond the bridge an abrupt eminence rises, covered with trees, and showing in the shadows some grey ivy-clustered rocks.

Over the sward and low grounds a thin film of mist was stealing, like smoke, marking the distances with a transparent veil; and here and there we could see the river faintly flashing in the moonlight.

No softer, sweeter scene could be imagined. The news I had just heard made it melancholy; but nothing could disturb its character of profound serenity, and the enchanted glory and vagueness of the prospect.

My father, who enjoyed the picturesque, and I, stood looking in silence over the expanse beneath us. The two good governesses, standing a little way behind us, discoursed upon the scene, and were eloquent upon the moon.

Madame Perrodon was fat, middle-aged, and romantic, and talked and sighed poetically. Mademoiselle De Lafontaine — in right of her father, who was a German, assumed to be psychological, metaphysical, and something of a mystic — now declared that when the moon shone with a light so intense it was well known that it indicated a special spiritual activity. The effect of the full moon in such a state of brilliancy was manifold. It acted on dreams, it acted on lunacy, it acted on nervous people; it had marvellous physical influences connected with life. Mademoiselle related that her cousin, who was mate of a merchant ship, having taken a nap on deck on such a night, lying on his back, with his face full in the light of the moon, had wakened, after a dream of an old woman clawing him by the cheek, with his features horribly drawn to one side; and his countenance had never quite recovered its equilibrium.

“The moon, this night,” she said, “is full of odylic and magnetic influence — and see, when you look behind you at the front of the schloss, how all its windows flash and twinkle with that silvery splendour, as if unseen hands had lighted up the rooms to receive fairy guests.”

There are indolent states of the spirits in which, indisposed to talk ourselves, the talk of others is pleasant to our listless ears; and I gazed on, pleased with the tinkle of the ladies’ conversation.

“I have got into one of my moping moods tonight,” said my father, after a silence, and quoting Shakespeare, whom, by way of keeping up our English, he used to read aloud, he said:

“In truth I know not why I am so sad:
It wearies me; you say it wearies you;
But how I got it — came by it.”

“I forget the rest. But I feel as if some great misfortune were hanging over us. I suppose the poor General’s afflicted letter has had something to do with it.”

At this moment the unwonted sound of carriage wheels and many hoofs upon the road, arrested our attention.

They seemed to be approaching from the high ground overlooking the bridge, and very soon the equipage emerged from that point. Two horsemen first crossed the bridge, then came a carriage drawn by four horses, and two men rode behind.

It seemed to be the travelling carriage of a person of rank; and we were all immediately absorbed in watching that very unusual spectacle. It became, in a few moments, greatly more interesting, for just as the carriage had passed the summit of the steep bridge, one of the leaders, taking fright, communicated his panic to the rest, and after a plunge or two, the whole team broke into a wild gallop together, and dashing between the horsemen who rode in front, came thundering along the road towards us with the speed of a hurricane.

The excitement of the scene was made more painful by the clear, long-drawn screams of a female voice from the carriage window.

We all advanced in curiosity and horror; my father in silence, the rest with various ejaculations of terror.

Our suspense did not last long. Just before you reach the castle drawbridge, on the route they were coming, there stands by the roadside a magnificent lime-tree, on the other stands an ancient stone cross, at sight of which the horses, now going at a pace that was perfectly frightful, swerved so as to bring the wheel over the projecting roots of the tree.

I knew what was coming. I covered my eyes, unable to see it out, and turned my head away; at the same moment I heard a cry from my lady-friends, who had gone on a little.

Curiosity opened my eyes, and I saw a scene of utter confusion. Two of the horses were on the ground, the carriage lay upon its side with two wheels in the air; the men were busy removing the traces, and a lady, with a commanding air and figure had got out, and stood with clasped hands, raising the handkerchief that was in them every now and then to her eyes. Through the carriage door was now lifted a young lady, who appeared to be lifeless. My dear old father was already beside the elder lady, with his hat in his hand, evidently tendering his aid and the resources of his schloss. The lady did not appear to hear him, or to have eyes for anything but the slender girl who was being placed against the slope of the bank.

I approached; the young lady was apparently stunned, but she was certainly not dead. My father, who piqued himself on being something of a physician, had just had his fingers to her wrist and assured the lady, who declared herself her mother, that her pulse, though faint and irregular, was undoubtedly still distinguishable. The lady clasped her hands and looked upward, as if in a momentary transport of gratitude; but immediately she broke out again in that theatrical way which is, I believe, natural to some people.

She was what is called a fine looking woman for her time of life, and must have been handsome; she was tall, but not thin, and dressed in black velvet, and looked rather pale, but with a proud and commanding countenance, though now agitated strangely.

“Was ever being so born to calamity?” I heard her say, with clasped hands, as I came up. “Here am I, on a journey of life and death, in prosecuting which to lose an hour is possibly to lose all. My child will not have recovered sufficiently to resume her route for who can say how long. I must leave her; I cannot, dare not, delay. How far on, sir, can you tell, is the nearest village? I must leave her there; and shall not see my darling, or even hear of her till my return, three months hence."

I plucked my father by the coat, and whispered earnestly in his ear: "Oh! papa, pray ask her to let her stay with us — it would be so delightful. Do, pray."

"If Madame will entrust her child to the care of my daughter, and of her good gouvernante, Madame Perrodon, and permit her to remain as our guest, under my charge, until her return, it will confer a distinction and an obligation upon us, and we shall treat her with all the care and devotion which so sacred a trust deserves."

"I cannot do that, sir, it would be to task your kindness and chivalry too cruelly," said the lady, distractedly.

"It would, on the contrary, be to confer on us a very great kindness at the moment when we most need it. My daughter has just been disappointed by a cruel misfortune, in a visit from which she had long anticipated a great deal of happiness. If you confide this young lady to our care it will be her best consolation. The nearest village on your route is distant, and affords no such inn as you could think of placing your daughter at; you cannot allow her to continue her journey for any considerable distance without danger. If, as you say, you cannot suspend your journey, you must part with her tonight, and nowhere could you do so with more honest assurances of care and tenderness than here."

There was something in this lady's air and appearance so distinguished, and even imposing, and in her manner so engaging, as to impress one, quite apart from the dignity of her equipage, with a conviction that she was a person of consequence.

By this time the carriage was replaced in its upright position, and the horses, quite tractable, in the traces again.

The lady threw on her daughter a glance which I fancied was not quite so affectionate as one might have anticipated from the beginning of the scene; then she beckoned slightly to my father, and withdrew two or three steps with him out of hearing; and talked to him with a fixed and stern countenance, not at all like that with which she had hitherto spoken.

I was filled with wonder that my father did not seem to perceive the change, and also unspeakably curious to learn what it could be that she was speaking, almost in his ear, with so much earnestness and rapidity.

Two or three minutes at most I think she remained thus employed, then she turned, and a few steps brought her to where her daughter lay, supported by Madame Perrodon. She kneeled beside her for a moment and whispered, as Madame supposed, a little benediction in her ear; then hastily kissing her she stepped into her carriage, the door was closed, the footmen in stately liveries jumped up behind, the outriders spurred on, the postillions cracked their whips, the horses plunged and broke suddenly into a furious canter that threatened soon again to become a gallop, and the carriage whirled away, followed at the same rapid pace by the two horsemen in the rear.

CHAPTER III.

WE COMPARE NOTES.

We followed the *cortège* with our eyes until it was swiftly lost to sight in the misty wood; and the very sound of the hoofs and the wheels died away in the silent night air.

Nothing remained to assure us that the adventure had not been an illusion of a moment but the young lady, who just at that moment opened her eyes. I could not see, for her face was turned from me, but she raised her head, evidently looking about her, and I heard a very sweet voice ask complainingly, “Where is mamma?”

Our good Madame Perrodon answered tenderly, and added some comfortable assurances.

I then heard her ask:

“Where am I? What is this place?” and after that she said, “I don’t see the carriage; and Matska, where is she?”

Madame answered all her questions in so far as she understood them; and gradually the young lady remembered how the misadventure came about, and was glad to hear that no one in, or in attendance on, the carriage was hurt; and on learning that her mamma had left her here, till her return in about three months, she wept.

I was going to add my consolations to those of Madame Perrodon when Mademoiselle De Lafontaine placed her hand upon my arm, saying:

“Don’t approach, one at a time is as much as she can at present converse with; a very little excitement would possibly overpower her now.”

As soon as she is comfortably in bed, I thought, I will run up to her room and see her.

My father in the meantime had sent a servant on horseback for the physician, who lived about two leagues away; and a bedroom was being prepared for the young lady’s reception.

The stranger now rose, and leaning on Madame’s arm, walked slowly over the drawbridge and into the castle gate.

In the hall, servants waited to receive her, and she was conducted forthwith to her room.

The room we usually sat in as our drawingroom is long, having four windows, that looked over the moat and drawbridge, upon the forest scene I have just described.

It is furnished in old carved oak, with large carved cabinets, and the chairs are cushioned with crimson Utrecht velvet. The walls are covered with tapestry, and surrounded with great gold frames, the figures being as large as life, in ancient and very curious costume, and the subjects represented are hunting, hawking, and generally festive. It is not too stately to be extremely comfortable; and here we had our tea, for with his usual patriotic leanings he insisted that the national beverage should make its appearance regularly with our coffee and chocolate.

We sat here this night, and with candles lighted, were talking over the adventure of the evening.

Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine were both of our party. The young stranger had hardly lain down in her bed when she sank into a deep sleep; and those ladies had left her in the care of a servant.

"How do you like our guest?" I asked, as soon as Madame entered. "Tell me all about her?"

"I like her extremely," answered Madame, "she is, I almost think, the prettiest creature I ever saw; about your age, and so gentle and nice."

"She is absolutely beautiful," threw in Mademoiselle, who had peeped for a moment into the stranger's room.

"And such a sweet voice!" added Madame Perrodon.

"Did you remark a woman in the carriage, after it was set up again, who did not get out," inquired Mademoiselle, "but only looked from the window?"

"No, we had not seen her."

Then she described a hideous black woman, with a sort of coloured turban on her head, who was gazing all the time from the carriage window, nodding and grinning derisively towards the ladies, with gleaming eyes and large white eyeballs, and her teeth set as if in fury.

"Did you remark what an ill-looking pack of men the servants were?" asked Madame.

"Yes," said my father, who had just come in, "ugly, hang-dog looking fellows, as ever I beheld in my life. I hope they mayn't rob the poor lady in the forest. They are clever rogues, however; they got everything to rights in a minute."

"I dare say they are worn out with too long travelling," said Madame. "Besides looking wicked, their faces were so strangely lean, and dark, and sullen. I am very curious, I own; but I dare say the young lady will tell us all about it tomorrow, if she is sufficiently recovered."

"I don't think she will," said my father, with a mysterious smile, and a little nod of his head, as if he knew more about it than he cared to tell us.

This made me all the more inquisitive as to what had passed between him and the lady in the black velvet, in the brief but earnest interview that had immediately preceded her departure.

We were scarcely alone, when I entreated him to tell me. He did not need much pressing.

"There is no particular reason why I should not tell you. She expressed a reluctance to trouble us with the care of her daughter, saying she was in delicate health and nervous, but not subject to any kind of seizure — she volunteered that — nor to any illusion; being, in fact, perfectly sane."

"How very odd to say all that!" I interpolated. "It was so unnecessary."

"At all events it *was* said," he laughed, "and as you wish to know all that passed, which was indeed very little, I tell you. She then said, "I am making a long journey of *vital* importance — she emphasized the word — rapid and secret; I shall return for my child in three months; in the meantime, she will be silent as to who we are, whence we come, and whither we are travelling." That is all she said. She spoke very pure French. When she said the word "secret," she paused for a few seconds, looking sternly, her eyes fixed on mine. I fancy she makes a great point of that. You saw how quickly she was gone. I hope I have not done a very foolish thing, in taking charge of the young lady."

For my part, I was delighted. I was longing to see and talk to her; and only waiting till the doctor should give me leave. You, who live in towns, can have no idea how great an event the introduction of a new friend is, in such a solitude as surrounded us.

The doctor did not arrive till nearly one o'clock; but I could no more have gone to my bed and slept, than I could have overtaken, on foot, the carriage in which the princess in black velvet had driven away.

When the physician came down to the drawingroom, it was to report very favourably upon his patient. She was now sitting up, her pulse quite regular, apparently perfectly well. She had sustained no injury, and the little shock to her nerves had passed away quite harmlessly. There could be no harm certainly in my seeing her, if we both wished it; and, with this permission, I sent, forthwith, to know whether she would allow me to visit her for a few minutes in her room.

The servant returned immediately to say that she desired nothing more.

You may be sure I was not long in availing myself of this permission.

Our visitor lay in one of the handsomest rooms in the schloss. It was, perhaps, a little stately. There was a sombre piece of tapestry opposite the foot of the bed, representing Cleopatra with the asps to her bosom; and other solemn classic scenes were displayed, a little faded, upon the other walls. But there was gold carving, and rich and varied colour enough in the other decorations of the room, to more than redeem the gloom of the old tapestry.

There were candles at the bed side. She was sitting up; her slender pretty figure enveloped in the soft silk dressing gown, embroidered with flowers, and lined with thick quilted silk, which her mother had thrown over her feet as she lay upon the ground.

What was it that, as I reached the bedside and had just begun my little greeting, struck me dumb in a moment, and made me recoil a step or two from before her? I will tell you.

I saw the very face which had visited me in my childhood at night, which remained so fixed in my memory, and on which I had for so many years so often ruminated with horror, when no one suspected of what I was thinking.

It was pretty, even beautiful; and when I first beheld it, wore the same melancholy expression.

But this almost instantly lighted into a strange fixed smile of recognition.

There was a silence of fully a minute, and then at length *she* spoke; *I* could not.

“How wonderful!” she exclaimed, “Twelve years ago, I saw your face in a dream, and it has haunted me ever since.”

“Wonderful indeed!” I repeated, overcoming with an effort the horror that had for a time suspended my utterances. “Twelve years ago, in vision or reality, I certainly saw you. I could not forget your face. It has remained before my eyes ever since."

Her smile had softened. Whatever I had fancied strange in it, was gone, and it and her dimpling cheeks were now delightfully pretty and intelligent.

I felt reassured, and continued more in the vein which hospitality indicated, to bid her welcome, and to tell her how much pleasure her accidental arrival had given us all, and especially what a happiness it was to me.

I took her hand as I spoke. I was a little shy, as lonely people are, but the situation made me eloquent, and even bold. She pressed my hand, she laid hers upon it, and her eyes glowed, as, looking hastily into mine, she smiled again, and blushed.

She answered my welcome very prettily. I sat down beside her, still wondering; and she said:

"I must tell you my vision about you; it is so very strange that you and I should have had, each of the other so vivid a dream, that each should have seen, I you and you me, looking as we do now, when of course we both were mere children. I was a child, about six years old, and I awoke from a confused and troubled dream, and found myself in a room, unlike my nursery, wainscoted clumsily in some dark wood, and with cupboards and bedsteads, and chairs, and benches placed about it. The beds were, I thought, all empty, and the room itself without anyone but myself in it; and I, after looking about me for some time, and admiring especially an iron candlestick, with two branches, which I should certainly know again, crept under one of the beds to reach the window; but as I got from under the bed, I heard some one crying; and looking up, while I was still upon my knees, I saw *you* — most assuredly you — as I see you now; a beautiful young lady, with golden hair and large blue eyes, and lips — your lips — you, as you are here. Your looks won me; I climbed on the bed and put my arms about you, and I think we both fell asleep. I was aroused by a scream; you were sitting up screaming. I was frightened, and slipped down upon the ground, and, it seemed to me, lost consciousness for a moment; and when I came to myself, I was again in my nursery at home. Your face I have never forgotten since. I could not be misled by mere resemblance. You *are* the lady whom I then saw."

It was now my turn to relate my corresponding vision, which I did, to the undisguised wonder of my new acquaintance.

“I don’t know which should be most afraid of the other,” she said, again smiling— “If you were less pretty I think I should be very much afraid of you, but being as you are, and you and I both so young, I feel only that I have made your acquaintance twelve years ago, and have already a right to your intimacy; at all events it does seem as if we were destined, from our earliest childhood, to be friends. I wonder whether you feel as strangely drawn towards me as I do to you; I have never had a friend — shall I find one now?” She sighed, and her fine dark eyes gazed passionately on me.

Now the truth is, I felt rather unaccountably towards the beautiful stranger. I did feel, as she said, “drawn towards her,” but there was also something of repulsion. In this ambiguous feeling, however, the sense of attraction immensely prevailed. She interested and won me; she was so beautiful and so indescribably engaging.

I perceived now something of langour and exhaustion stealing over her, and hastened to bid her good night.

“The doctor thinks,” I added, “that you ought to have a maid to sit up with you tonight; one of ours is waiting, and you will find her a very useful and quiet creature.”

“How kind of you, but I could not sleep, I never could with an attendant in the room. I shan’t require any assistance — and, shall I confess my weakness, I am haunted with a terror of robbers. Our house was robbed once, and two servants murdered, so I always lock my door. It has become a habit — and you look so kind I know you will forgive me. I see there is a key in the lock.”

She held me close in her pretty arms for a moment and whispered in my ear, “Good night, darling, it is very hard to part with you, but goodnight; tomorrow, but not early, I shall see you again.”

She sank back on the pillow with a sigh, and her fine eyes followed me with a fond and melancholy gaze, and she murmured again “Good night, dear friend.”

Young people like, and even love, on impulse. I was flattered by the evident, though as yet undeserved, fondness she showed me. I liked the confidence with which she at once received me. She was determined that we should be very near friends.

Next day came and we met again. I was delighted with my companion; that is to say, in many respects.

Her looks lost nothing in daylight — she was certainly the most beautiful creature I had ever seen, and the unpleasant remembrance of the face presented in my early dream, had lost the effect of the first unexpected recognition.

She confessed that she had experienced a similar shock on seeing me, and precisely the same faint antipathy that had mingled with my admiration of her. We now laughed together over our momentary horrors.

CHAPTER IV.

HER HABITS — A SAUNTER.

I told you that I was charmed with her in most particulars.

There were some that did not please me so well.

She was above the middle height of women. I shall begin by describing her. She was slender, and wonderfully graceful. Except that her movements were languid — very languid — indeed, there was nothing in her appearance to indicate an invalid. Her complexion was rich and brilliant; her features were small and beautifully formed; her eyes large, dark, and lustrous; her hair was quite wonderful, I never saw hair so magnificently thick and long when it was down about her shoulders; I have often placed my hands under it, and laughed with wonder at its weight. It was exquisitely fine and soft, and in colour a rich very dark brown, with something of gold. I loved to let it down, tumbling with its own weight, as, in her room, she lay back in her chair talking, in her sweet low voice, I used to fold and braid it, and spread it out and play with it. Heavens! If I had but known all!

I said there were particulars which did not please me. I have told you that her confidence won me the first night I saw her; but I found that she exercised with respect to herself, her mother, her history, everything in fact connected with her life, plans, and people, an ever wakeful reserve. I dare say I was unreasonable, perhaps I was wrong; I dare say I ought to have respected the solemn injunction laid upon my father by the stately lady in black velvet. But curiosity is a restless and unscrupulous passion, and no one girl can endure, with patience, that her's should be baffled by another. What harm could it do anyone to tell me what I so ardently desired to know? Had she no trust in my good sense or honour? Why would she not believe me when I assured her, so solemnly, that I would not divulge one syllable of what she told me to any mortal breathing.

There was a coldness, it seemed to me, beyond her years, in her smiling melancholy persistent refusal to afford me the least ray of light.

I cannot say we quarrelled upon this point, for she would not quarrel upon any. It was, of course, very unfair of me to press her, very illbred, but I really could not help it; and I might just as well have let it alone.

What she did tell me amounted, in my unconscionable estimation — to nothing.

It was all summed up in three very vague disclosures:

First. — Her name was Carmilla.

Second. — Her family was very ancient and noble.

Third. — Her home lay in the direction of the west.

She would not tell me the name of her family, nor their armorial bearings, nor the name of their estate, nor even that of the country they lived in.

You are not to suppose that I worried her incessantly on these subjects. I watched opportunity, and rather insinuated than urged my inquiries. Once or twice, indeed, I did attack her more directly. But no matter what my tactics, utter failure was invariably the result. Reproaches and caresses were all lost upon her. But I must add this, that her evasion was conducted with so pretty a melancholy and deprecation, with so many, and even passionate declarations of her liking for me, and trust in my honour, and with so many promises that I should at last know all, that I could not find it in my heart long to be offended with her.

She used to place her pretty arms about my neck, draw me to her, and laying her cheek to mine, murmur with her lips near my ear, “Dearest, your little heart is wounded; think me not cruel because I obey the irresistible law of my strength and weakness; if your dear heart is wounded, my wild heart bleeds with yours. In the rapture of my enormous humiliation I live in your warm life, and you shall die — die, sweetly die — into mine. I cannot help it; as I draw near to you, you, in your turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty, which yet is love; so, for a while, seek to know no more of me and mine, but trust me with all your loving spirit.”

And when she had spoken such a rhapsody, she would press me more closely in her trembling embrace, and her lips in soft kisses gently glow upon my cheek.

Her agitations and her language were unintelligible to me.

From these foolish embraces, which were not of very frequent occurrence, I must allow, I used to wish to extricate myself; but my energies seemed to fail me. Her murmured words sounded like a lullaby in my ear, and soothed my resistance into a trance, from which I only seemed to recover myself when she withdrew her arms.

In these mysterious moods I did not like her. I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust. I had no distinct thoughts about her while such scenes lasted, but I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence. This I know is paradox, but I can make no other attempt to explain the feeling.

I now write, after an interval of more than ten years, with a trembling hand, with a confused and horrible recollection of certain occurrences and situations, in the ordeal through which I was unconsciously passing; though with a vivid and very sharp remembrance of the main current of my story. But, I suspect, in all lives there are certain emotional scenes, those in which our passions have been most wildly and terribly roused, that are of all others the most vaguely and dimly remembered.

Sometimes after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with the tumultuous respiration. It was like the ardour of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet overpowering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips travelled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, “You are mine, you *shall* be mine, you and I are one for ever.” Then she has thrown herself back in her chair, with her small hands over her eyes, leaving me trembling.

“Are we related,” I used to ask; “what can you mean by all this? I remind you perhaps of some one whom you love; but you must not, I hate it; I don’t know you — I don’t know myself when you look so and talk so.”

She used to sigh at my vehemence, then turn away and drop my hand.

Respecting these very extraordinary manifestations I strove in vain to form any satisfactory theory — I could not refer them to affectation or trick. It was unmistakably the momentary breaking out of suppressed instinct and emotion. Was she, notwithstanding her mother’s volunteered denial, subject to brief visitations of insanity; or was there here a disguise and a romance? I had read in old story books of such things. What if a boyish lover had found his way into the house, and sought to prosecute his suit in masquerade, with the assistance of a clever old adventuress. But there were many things against this hypothesis, highly interesting as it was to my vanity.

I could boast of no little attentions such as masculine gallantry delights to offer. Between these passionate moments there were long intervals of commonplace, of gaiety, of brooding melancholy, during which, except that I detected her eyes so full of melancholy fire, following me, at times I might have been as nothing to her. Except in these brief periods of mysterious excitement her ways were girlish; and there was always a langour about her, quite incompatible with a masculine system in a state of health.

In some respects her habits were odd. Perhaps not so singular in the opinion of a town lady like you, as they appeared to us rustic people. She used to come down very late, generally not till one o'clock, she would then take a cup of chocolate, but eat nothing; we then went out for a walk, which was a mere saunter, and she seemed, almost immediately, exhausted, and either returned to the schloss or sat on one of the benches that were placed, here and there, among the trees. This was a bodily langour in which her mind did not sympathise. She was always an animated talker, and very intelligent.

She sometimes alluded for a moment to her own home, or mentioned an adventure or situation, or an early recollection, which indicated a people of strange manners, and described customs of which we knew nothing. I gathered from these chance hints that her native country was much more remote than I had at first fancied.

As we sat thus one afternoon under the trees a funeral passed us by. It was that of a pretty young girl, whom I had often seen, the daughter of one of the rangers of the forest. The poor man was walking behind the coffin of his darling; she was his only child, and he looked quite heartbroken. Peasants walking two-and-two came behind, they were singing a funeral hymn.

I rose to mark my respect as they passed, and joined in the hymn they were very sweetly singing.

My companion shook me a little roughly, and I turned surprised.

She said brusquely, “Don't you perceive how discordant that is?”

“I think it very sweet, on the contrary,” I answered, vexed at the interruption, and very uncomfortable, lest the people who composed the little procession should observe and resent what was passing.

I resumed, therefore, instantly, and was again interrupted. “You pierce my ears,” said Carmilla, almost angrily, and stopping her ears with her tiny fingers. “Besides, how can you tell that your religion and mine are the same; your forms wound me, and I hate funerals. What a fuss! Why you must die — *everyone* must die; and all are happier when they do. Come home.”

“My father has gone on with the clergyman to the churchyard. I thought you knew she was to be buried to day.”

“*She?* I don’t trouble my head about peasants. I don’t know who she is,” answered Carmilla, with a flash from her fine eyes.

“She is the poor girl who fancied she saw a ghost a fortnight ago, and has been dying ever since, till yesterday, when she expired.”

“Tell me nothing about ghosts. I shan’t sleep tonight, if you do.”

“I hope there is no plague or fever coming; all this looks very like it,” I continued. “The swineherd’s young wife died only a week ago, and she thought something seized her by the throat as she lay in her bed, and nearly strangled her. Papa says such horrible fancies do accompany some forms of fever. She was quite well the day before. She sank afterwards, and died before a week.”

“Well, *her* funeral is over, I hope, and *her* hymn sung; and our ears shan’t be tortured with that discord and jargon. It has made me nervous. Sit down here, beside me; sit close; hold my hand; press it hard — hard — harder.”

We had moved a little back, and had come to another seat.

She sat down. Her face underwent a change that alarmed and even terrified me for a moment. It darkened, and became horribly livid; her teeth and hands were clenched, and she frowned and compressed her lips, while she stared down upon the ground at her feet, and trembled all over with a continued shudder as irrepressible as ague. All her energies seemed strained to suppress a fit, with which she was then breathlessly tugging; and at length a low convulsive cry of suffering broke from her, and gradually the hysteria subsided. “There! That comes of strangling people with hymns!” she said at last. “Hold me, hold me still. It is passing away.”

And so gradually it did; and perhaps to dissipate the sombre impression which the spectacle had left upon me, she became unusually animated and chatty; and so we got home.

This was the first time I had seen her exhibit any definable symptoms of that delicacy of health which her mother had spoken of. It was the first time, also, I had seen her exhibit anything like temper.

Both passed away like a summer cloud; and never but once afterwards did I witness on her part a momentary sign of anger. I will tell you how it happened.

She and I were looking out of one of the long drawingroom windows, when there entered the courtyard, over the drawbridge, a figure of a wanderer whom I knew very well. He used to visit the schloss generally twice a year.

It was the figure of a hunchback, with the sharp lean features that generally accompany deformity. He wore a pointed black beard, and he was smiling from ear to ear, showing his white fangs. He was dressed in buff, black, and scarlet, and crossed with more straps and belts than I could count, from which hung all manner of things. Behind, he carried a magic-lantern, and two boxes, which I well knew, in one of which was a salamander, and in the other a mandrake. These monsters used to make my father laugh. They were compounded of parts of monkeys, parrots, squirrels, fish, and hedge-hogs, dried and stitched together with great neatness and startling effect. He had a fiddle, a box of conjuring apparatus, a pair of foils and masks attached to his belt, several other mysterious cases dangling about him, and a black staff with copper ferrules in his hand. His companion was a rough spare dog, that followed at his heels, but stopped short, suspiciously at the drawbridge, and in a little while began to howl dismally.

In the meantime, the mountebank, standing in the midst of the courtyard, raised his grotesque hat, and made us a very ceremonious bow, paying his compliments very volubly in execrable French, and German not much better. Then, disengaging his fiddle, he began to scrape a lively air, to which he sang with a merry discord, dancing with ludicrous airs and activity, that made me laugh, in spite of the dog’s howling.

Then he advanced to the window with many smiles and salutations, and his hat in his left hand, his fiddle under his arm, and with a fluency that never took breath, he gabbled a long advertisement of all his accomplishments, and the resources of the various arts which he placed at our service, and the curiosities and entertainments which it was in his power, at our bidding, to display.

“Will your ladyships be pleased to buy an amulet against the oupire, which is going like the wolf, I hear, through these woods,” he said, dropping his hat on the pavement. “They are dying of it right and left, and here is a charm that never fails; only pinned to the pillow, and you may laugh in his face.”

These charms consisted of oblong slips of vellum, with cabalistic ciphers and diagrams upon them.

Carmilla instantly purchased one, and so did I.

He was looking up, and we were smiling down upon him, amused; at least, I can answer for myself. His piercing black eye, as he looked up in our faces, seemed to detect something that fixed for a moment his curiosity.

In an instant he unrolled a leather case, full of all manner of odd little steel instruments.

“See here, my lady,” he said, displaying it, and addressing me, “I profess, among other things less useful, the art of dentistry. Plague take the dog!” he interpolated. “Silence, beast! He howls so that your ladyships can scarcely hear a word. Your noble friend, the young, lady at your right, has the sharpest tooth, — long, thin, pointed, like an awl, like a needle; ha, ha! With my sharp and long sight, as I look up, I have seen it distinctly; now if it happens to hurt the young lady, and I think it must, here am I, here are my file, my punch, my nippers; I will make it round and blunt, if her ladyship pleases; no longer the tooth of a fish, but of a beautiful young lady as she is. Hey? Is the young lady displeased? Have I been too bold? Have I offended her?”

The young lady, indeed, looked very angry as she drew back from the window.

“How dares that mountebank insult us so? Where is your father? I shall demand redress from him. My father would have had the wretch tied up to the pump, and flogged with a cart-whip, and burnt to the bones with the castle brand!”

She retired from the window a step or two, and sat down, and had hardly lost sight of the offender, when her wrath subsided as suddenly as it had risen, and she gradually recovered her usual tone, and seemed to forget the little hunchback and his follies.

My father was out of spirits that evening. On coming in he told us that there had been another case very similar to the two fatal ones which had lately occurred. The sister of a young peasant on his estate, only a mile away, was very ill, had been, as she described it, attacked very nearly in the same way, and was now slowly but steadily sinking.

“All this,” said my father, “is strictly referable to natural causes. These poor people infect one another with their superstitions, and so repeat in imagination the images of terror that have infested their neighbours.”

“But that very circumstance frightens one horribly,” said Carmilla.

“How so?” inquired my father.

“I am so afraid of fancying I see such things; I think it would be as bad as reality.”

“We are in God’s hands; nothing can happen without his permission, and all will end well for those who love him. He is our faithful creator; He has made us all, and will take care of us.”

“Creator! *Nature!*” said the young lady in answer to my gentle father. “And this disease that invades the country is natural. Nature. All things proceed from Nature — don’t they? All things in the heaven, in the earth, and under the earth, act and live as Nature ordains? I think so.”

“The doctor said he would come here to-day,” said my father, after a silence. “I want to know what he thinks about it, and what he thinks we had better do.”

“Doctors never did me any good,” said Carmilla.

“Then you have been ill?” I asked.

“More ill than ever you were,” she answered.

“Long ago?”

“Yes, a long time. I suffered from this very illness; but I forget all but my pain and weakness, and they were not so bad as are suffered in other diseases.”

“You were very young then?”

“I dare say; let us talk no more of it. You would not wound a friend?” She looked languidly in my eyes, and passed her arm round my waist lovingly, and led me out of the room. My father was busy over some papers near the window.

“Why does your papa like to frighten us?” said the pretty girl, with a sigh and a little shudder.

"He doesn't, dear Carmilla, it is the very furthest thing from his mind."

"Are you afraid, dearest?"

"I should be very much if I fancied there was any real danger of my being attacked as those poor people were."

"You are afraid to die?"

"Yes, every one is."

"But to die as lovers may — to die together, so that they may live together. Girls are caterpillars while they live in the world, to be finally butterflies when the summer comes; but in the meantime there are grubs and larvæ, don't you see — each with their peculiar propensities, necessities and structure. So says Monsieur Buffon, in his big book, in the next room."

Later in the day the doctor came, and was closeted with papa for some time. He was a skilful man, of sixty and upwards, he wore powder, and shaved his pale face as smooth as a pumpkin. He and papa emerged from the room together, and I heard papa laugh, and say as they came out:

"Well, I do wonder at a wise man like you. What do you say to hippogriffs and dragons?"

The doctor was smiling, and made answer, shaking his head —

"Nevertheless life and death are mysterious states, and we know little of the resources of either."

And so they walked on, and I heard no more. I did not then know what the doctor had been broaching, but I think I guess it now.

CHAPTER V.

A WONDERFUL LIKENESS.

This evening there arrived from Gratz the grave, dark-faced son of the picture cleaner, with a horse and cart laden with two large packing cases, having many pictures in each. It was a journey of ten leagues, and whenever a messenger arrived at the schloss from our little capital of Gratz, we used to crowd about him in the hall, to hear the news.

This arrival created in our secluded quarters quite a sensation. The cases remained in the hall, and the messenger was taken charge of by the servants till he had eaten his supper. Then with assistants, and armed with hammer, ripping-chisel, and turnscrew, he met us in the hall, where we had assembled to witness the unpacking of the cases.

Carmilla sat looking listlessly on, while one after the other the old pictures, nearly all portraits, which had undergone the process of renovation, were brought to light. My mother was of an old Hungarian family, and most of these pictures, which were about to be restored to their places, had come to us through her.

My father had a list in his hand, from which he read, as the artist rummaged out the corresponding numbers. I don’t know that the pictures were very good, but they were, undoubtedly, very old, and some of them very curious also. They had, for the most part, the merit of being now seen by me, I may say, for the first time; for the smoke and dust of time had all but obliterated them.

“There is a picture that I have not seen yet,” said my father. “In one corner, at the top of it, is the name, as well as I could read, ‘Marcia Karnstein,’ and the date ‘1698’ and I am curious to see how it has turned out.”

I remembered it; it was a small picture, about a foot and a half high, and nearly square, without a frame; but it was so blackened by age that I could not make it out.

The artist now produced it, with evident pride. It was quite beautiful; it was startling; it seemed to live. It was the effigy of Carmilla!

“Carmilla, dear, here is an absolute miracle. Here you are, living, smiling, ready to speak, in this picture. Isn’t it beautiful, papa? And see, even the little mole on her throat.”

My father laughed, and said “Certainly it is a wonderful likeness,” but he looked away, and to my surprise seemed but little struck by it, and went on talking to the picture cleaner, who was also something of an artist, and discoursed with intelligence about the portraits or other works, which his art had just brought into light and colour, while *I* was more and more lost in wonder the more I looked at the picture.

“Will you let me hang this picture in my room, papa?” I asked.

“Certainly, dear,” said he, smiling, “I’m very glad you think it so like. It must be prettier even than I thought it, if it is.”

The young lady did not acknowledge this pretty speech, did not seem to hear it. She was leaning back in her seat, her fine eyes under their long lashes gazing on me in contemplation, and she smiled in a kind of rapture.

“And now you can read quite plainly the name that is written in the corner. It is not Marcia; it looks as if it was done in gold. The name is Mircalla, Countess Karnstein, and this is a little coronet over it, and underneath A.D. 1698. I am descended from the Karnsteins; that is, mamma was.”

“Ah!” said the lady, languidly, “so am I, I think, a very long descent, very ancient. Are there any Karnsteins living now?”

“None who bear the name, I believe. The family were ruined, I believe, in some civil wars, long ago, but the ruins of the castle are only about three miles away.”

“How interesting!” she said, languidly. “But see what beautiful moonlight!” She glanced through the hall-door, which stood a little open. “Suppose you take a little ramble round the court, and look down at the road and river.”

“It is so like the night you came to us,” I said.

She sighed, smiling.

She rose, and each with her arm about the other’s waist, we walked out upon the pavement.

In silence, slowly we walked down to the drawbridge, where the beautiful landscape opened before us.

"And so you were thinking of the night I came here?" she almost whispered. "Are you glad I came?"

"Delighted, dear Carmilla," I answered.

"And you asked for the picture you think like me, to hang in your room," she murmured with a sigh, as she drew her arm closer about my waist, and let her pretty head sink upon my shoulder.

"How romantic you are, Carmilla," I said. "Whenever you tell me your story, it will be made up chiefly of some one great romance."

She kissed me silently.

"I am sure, Carmilla, you have been in love; that there is, at this moment, an affair of the heart going on."

"I have been in love with no one, and never shall," she whispered, "unless it should be with you."

How beautiful she looked in the moonlight!

Shy and strange was the look with which she quickly hid her face in my neck and hair, with tumultuous sighs, that seemed almost to sob, and pressed in mine a hand that trembled.

Her soft cheek was glowing against mine. "Darling, darling," she murmured, "I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so."

I started from her.

She was gazing on me with eyes from which all fire, all meaning had flown, and a face colourless and apathetic.

"Is there a chill in the air, dear?" she said drowsily. "I almost shiver; have I been dreaming? Let us come in. Come; come; come in."

"You look ill, Carmilla; a little faint. You certainly must take some wine," I said.

"Yes, I will. I'm better now. I shall be quite well in a few minutes. Yes, do give me a little wine," answered Carmilla, as we approached the door. "Let us look again for a moment; it is the last time, perhaps, I shall see the moonlight with you."

"How do you feel now, dear Carmilla? Are you really better?" I asked.

I was beginning to take alarm, lest she should have been stricken with the strange epidemic that they said had invaded the country about us.

"Papa would be grieved beyond measure," I added, "if he thought you were ever so little ill, without immediately letting us know. We have a very skilful doctor near this, the physician who was with papa to-day."

"I'm sure he is. I know how kind you all are; but, dear child, I am quite well again. There is nothing ever wrong with me, but a little weakness. People say I am languid; I am incapable of exertion; I can scarcely walk as far as a child of three years old; and every now and then the little strength I have falters, and I become as you have just seen me. But after all I am very easily set up again; in a moment I am perfectly myself. See how I have recovered."

So, indeed, she had; and she and I talked a great deal, and very animated she was; and the remainder of that evening passed without any recurrence of what I called her infatuations. I mean her crazy talk and looks, which embarrassed, and even frightened me.

But there occurred that night an event which gave my thoughts quite a new turn, and seemed to startle even Carmilla's languid nature into momentary energy.

CHAPTER VI.

A VERY STRANGE AGONY.

When we got into the drawingroom, and had sat down to our coffee and chocolate, although Carmilla did not take any, she seemed quite herself again, and Madame, and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, joined us, and made a little card party, in the course of which papa came in for what he called his "dish of tea."

When the game was over he sat down beside Carmilla on the sofa, and asked her, a little anxiously, whether she had heard from her mother since her arrival.

She answered "No."

He then asked whether she knew where a letter would reach her at present.

"I cannot tell," she answered ambiguously, "but I have been thinking of leaving you; you have been already too hospitable and too kind to me. I have given you an infinity of trouble, and I should wish to take a carriage tomorrow, and post in pursuit of her; I know where I shall ultimately find her, although I dare not yet tell you."

"But you must not dream of any such thing," exclaimed my father, to my great relief. "We can't afford to lose you so, and I won't consent to your leaving us, except under the care of your mother, who was so good as to consent to your remaining with us till she should herself return. I should be quite happy if I knew that you heard from her; but this evening the accounts of the progress of the mysterious disease that has invaded our neighbourhood, grow even more alarming; and my beautiful guest, I do feel the responsibility, unaided by advice from your mother, very much. But I shall do my best; and one thing is certain, that you must not think of leaving us without her distinct direction to that effect. We should suffer too much in parting from you to consent to it easily."

"Thank you, sir, a thousand times for your hospitality," she answered, smiling bashfully. "You have all been too kind to me; I have seldom been so happy in all my life before, as in your beautiful château, under your care, and in the society of your dear daughter."

So he gallantly, in his oldfashioned way, kissed her hand, smiling and pleased at her little speech.

I accompanied Carmilla as usual to her room, and sat and chatted with her while she was preparing for bed.

"Do you think," I said at length, "that you will ever confide fully in me?"

She turned round smiling, but made no answer, only continued to smile on me.

"You won't answer that?" I said. "You can't answer pleasantly; I ought not to have asked you."

"You were quite right to ask me that, or anything. You do not know how dear you are to me, or you could not think any confidence too great to look for. But I am under vows, no nun half so awfully, and I dare not tell my story yet, even to you. The time is very near when you shall know everything. You will think me cruel, very selfish, but love is always selfish; the more ardent the more selfish. How jealous I am you cannot know. You must come with me, loving me, — to death; or else hate me and still come with me, and *hating* me through death and after. There is no such word as indifference in my apathetic nature."

"Now, Carmilla, you are going to talk your wild nonsense again," I said hastily.

"Not I, silly little fool as I am, and full of whims and fancies; for your sake I'll talk like a sage. Were you ever at a ball?"

"No; how you do run on. What is it like? How charming it must be."

"I almost forget, it is years ago."

I laughed.

"You are not so old. Your first ball can hardly be forgotten yet."

"I remember everything about it — with an effort. I see it all, as divers see what is going on above them, through a medium, dense, rippling, but transparent. There occurred that night what has confused the picture, and made its colours faint. I was all but assassinated in my bed, wounded *here*," she touched her breast, "and never was the same since."

"Were you near dying?"

"Yes, very — a cruel love — strange love, that would have taken my life. Love will have its sacrifices. No sacrifice without blood. Let us go to sleep now; I feel so lazy. How can I get up just now and lock my door?”

She was lying with her tiny hands buried in her rich wavy hair, under her cheek, her little head upon the pillow, and her glittering eyes followed me wherever I moved, with a kind of shy smile that I could not decipher.

I bid her goodnight, and crept from the room with an uncomfortable sensation.

I often wondered whether our pretty guest ever said her prayers. *I* certainly had never seen her upon her knees. In the morning she never came down until long after our family prayers were over, and at night she never left the drawingroom to attend our brief evening prayers in the hall.

If it had not been that it had casually come out in one of our careless talks that she had been baptised, I should have doubted her being a Christian. Religion was a subject on which I had never heard her speak a word. If I had known the world better, this particular neglect or antipathy would not have so much surprised me.

The precautions of nervous people are infectious, and persons of a like temperament are pretty sure, after a time, to imitate them. I had adopted Carmilla’s habit of locking her bedroom door, having taken into my head all her whimsical alarms about midnight invaders and prowling assassins. I had also adopted her precaution of making a brief search through her room, to satisfy herself that no lurking assassin or robber was “ensconced.”

These wise measures taken, I got into my bed and fell asleep. A light was burning in my room. This was an old habit, of very early date, and which nothing could have tempted me to dispense with.

Thus fortified I might take my rest in peace. But dreams come through stone walls, light up dark rooms, or darken light ones, and their persons make their exits and their entrances as they please, and laugh at locksmiths.

I had a dream that night that was the beginning of a very strange agony.

I cannot call it a nightmare, for I was quite conscious of being asleep. But I was equally conscious of being in my room, and lying in bed, precisely as I actually was. I saw, or fancied I saw, the room and its furniture just as I had seen it last, except that it was very dark, and I saw something moving round the foot of the bed, which at first I could not accurately distinguish. But I soon saw that it was a sooty-black animal that resembled a monstrous cat. It appeared to me about four or five feet long, for it measured fully the length of the hearthrug as it passed over it; and it continued to-ing and fro-ing with the lithe sinister restlessness of a beast in a cage. I could not cry out, although as you may suppose, I was terrified. Its pace was growing faster, and the room rapidly darker and darker, and at length so dark that I could no longer see anything of it but its eyes. I felt it spring lightly on the bed. The two broad eyes approached my face, and suddenly I felt a stinging pain as if two large needles darted, an inch or two apart, deep into my breast. I waked with a scream. The room was lighted by the candle that burnt there all through the night, and I saw a female figure standing at the foot of the bed, a little at the right side. It was in a dark loose dress, and its hair was down and covered its shoulders. A block of stone could not have been more still. There was not the slightest stir of respiration. As I stared at it, the figure appeared to have changed its place, and was now nearer the door; then, close to it, the door opened, and it passed out.

I was now relieved, and able to breathe and move. My first thought was that Carmilla had been playing me a trick, and that I had forgotten to secure my door. I hastened to it, and found it locked as usual on the inside. I was afraid to open it — I was horrified. I sprang into my bed and covered my head up in the bedclothes, and lay there more dead than alive till morning.

CHAPTER VII.

DESCENDING.

It would be vain my attempting to tell you the horror with which, even now, I recall the occurrence of that night. It was no such transitory terror as a dream leaves behind it. It seemed to deepen by time, and communicated itself to the room and the very furniture that had encompassed the apparition.

I could not bear next day to be alone for a moment. I should have told papa, but for two opposite reasons. At one time I thought he would laugh at my story, and I could not bear its being treated as a jest; and at another, I thought he might fancy that I had been attacked by the mysterious complaint which had invaded our neighbourhood. I had myself no misgivings of the kind, and as he had been rather an invalid for some time, I was afraid of alarming him.

I was comfortable enough with my goodnatured companions, Madame Paradon, and the vivacious Mademoiselle Lafontaine. They both perceived that I was out of spirits and nervous, and at length I told them what lay so heavy at my heart.

Mademoiselle laughed, but I fancied that Madame Paradon looked anxious.

"By-the-by," said Mademoiselle, laughing, "the long lime-tree walk, behind Carmilla's bedroom-window, is haunted!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Madame, who probably thought the theme rather inopportune, "and who tells that story, my dear?"

"Martin says that he came up twice, when the old yard-gate was being repaired, before sunrise, and twice saw the same female figure walking down the lime-tree avenue."

"So he well might, as long as there are cows to milk in the river fields," said Madame.

"I daresay; but Martin chooses to be frightened, and never did I see fool *more* frightened."

"You must not say a word about it to Carmilla, because she can see down that walk from her room window," I interposed, "and she is, if possible, a greater coward than I."

Carmilla came down rather later than usual that day.

"I was so frightened last night," she said, so soon as were together, "and I am sure I should have seen something dreadful if it had not been for that charm I bought from the poor little hunchback whom I called such hard names. I had a dream of something black coming round my bed, and I awoke in a perfect horror, and I really thought, for some seconds, I saw a dark figure near the chimneypiece, but I felt under my pillow for my charm, and the moment my fingers touched it, the figure disappeared, and I felt quite certain, only that I had it by me, that something frightful would have made its appearance, and, perhaps, throttled me, as it did those poor people we heard of."

"Well, listen to me," I began, and recounted my adventure, at the recital of which she appeared horrified.

"And had you the charm near you?" she asked, earnestly.

"No, I had dropped it into a china vase in the drawingroom, but I shall certainly take it with me tonight, as you have so much faith in it."

At this distance of time I cannot tell you, or even understand, how I overcame my horror so effectually as to lie alone in my room that night. I remember distinctly that I pinned the charm to my pillow. I fell asleep almost immediately, and slept even more soundly than usual all night.

Next night I passed as well. My sleep was delightfully deep and dreamless. But I wakened with a sense of lassitude and melancholy, which, however, did not exceed a degree that was almost luxurious.

"Well, I told you so," said Carmilla, when I described my quiet sleep, "I had such delightful sleep myself last night; I pinned the charm to the breast of my nightdress. It was too far away the night before. I am quite sure it was all fancy, except the dreams. I used to think that evil spirits made dreams, but our doctor told me it is no such thing. Only a fever passing by, or some other malady, as they often do, he said, knocks at the door, and not being able to get in, passes on, with that alarm."

"And what do you think the charm is?" said I.

"It has been fumigated or immersed in some drug, and is an antidote against the malaria," she answered.

"Then it acts only on the body?"

"Certainly; you don't suppose that evil spirits are frightened by bits of ribbon, or the perfumes of a druggist's shop? No, these complaints, wandering in the air, begin by trying the nerves, and so infect the brain, but before they can seize upon you, the antidote repels them. That I am sure is what the charm has done for us. It is nothing magical, it is simply natural."

I should have been happier if I could have quite agreed with Carmilla, but I did my best, and the impression was a little losing its force.

For some nights I slept profoundly; but still every morning I felt the same lassitude, and a languor weighed upon me all day. I felt myself a changed girl. A strange melancholy was stealing over me, a melancholy that I would not have interrupted. Dim thoughts of death began to open, and an idea that I was slowly sinking took gentle, and, somehow, not unwelcome, possession of me. If it was sad, the tone of mind which this induced was also sweet. Whatever it might be, my soul acquiesced in it.

I would not admit that I was ill, I would not consent to tell my papa, or to have the doctor sent for.

Carmilla became more devoted to me than ever, and her strange paroxysms of languid adoration more frequent. She used to gloat on me with increasing ardour the more my strength and spirits waned. This always shocked me like a momentary glare of insanity.

Without knowing it, I was now in a pretty advanced stage of the strangest illness under which mortal ever suffered. There was an unaccountable fascination in its earlier symptoms that more than reconciled me to the incapacitating effect of that stage of the malady. This fascination increased for a time, until it reached a certain point, when gradually a sense of the horrible mingled itself with it, deepening, as you shall hear, until it discoloured and perverted the whole state of my life.

The first change I experienced was rather agreeable. It was very near the turning point from which began the descent of Avernus.

Certain vague and strange sensations visited me in my sleep. The prevailing one was of that pleasant, peculiar cold thrill which we feel in bathing, when we move against the current of a river. This was soon accompanied by dreams that seemed interminable, and were so vague that I could never recollect their scenery and persons, or any one connected portion of their action. But they left an awful impression, and a sense of exhaustion, as if I had passed through a long period of great mental exertion and danger. After all these dreams there remained on waking a remembrance of having been in a place very nearly dark, and of having spoken to people whom I could not see; and especially of one clear voice, of a female's, very deep, that spoke as if at a distance, slowly, and producing always the same sensation of indescribable solemnity and fear. Sometimes there came a sensation as if a hand was drawn softly along my cheek and neck. Sometimes it was as if warm lips kissed me, and longer and more lovingly as they reached my throat, but there the caress fixed itself. My heart beat faster, my breathing rose and fell rapidly and full drawn; a sobbing, that rose into a sense of strangulation, supervened, and turned into a dreadful convulsion, in which my senses left me and I became unconscious.

It was now three weeks since the commencement of this unaccountable state. My sufferings had, during the last week, told upon my appearance. I had grown pale, my eyes were dilated and darkened underneath, and the languor which I had long felt began to display itself in my countenance.

My father asked me often whether I was ill; but, with an obstinacy which now seems to me unaccountable, I persisted in assuring him that I was quite well.

In a sense this was true. I had no pain, I could complain of no bodily derangement. My complaint seemed to be one of the imagination, or the nerves, and, horrible as my sufferings were, I kept them, with a morbid reserve, very nearly to myself.

It could not be that terrible complaint which the peasants called the oupire, for I had now been suffering for three weeks, and they were seldom ill for much more than three days, when death put an end to their miseries.

Carmilla complained of dreams and feverish sensations, but by no means of so alarming a kind as mine. I say that mine were extremely alarming. Had I been capable of comprehending my condition, I would have invoked aid and advice on my knees. The narcotic of an unsuspected influence was acting upon me, and my perceptions were benumbed.

I am going to tell you now of a dream that led immediately to an odd discovery.

One night, instead of the voice I was accustomed to hear in the dark, I heard one, sweet and tender, and at the same time terrible, which said, “Your mother warns you to beware of the assassin.” At the same time a light unexpectedly sprang up, and I saw Carmilla, standing, near the foot of my bed, in her white nightdress, bathed, from her chin to her feet, in one great stain of blood.

I wakened with a shriek, possessed with the one idea that Carmilla was being murdered. I remember springing from my bed, and my next recollection is that of standing on the lobby, crying for help.

Madame and Mademoiselle came scurrying out of their rooms in alarm; a lamp burned always on the lobby, and seeing me, they soon learned the cause of my terror.

I insisted on our knocking at Carmilla’s door. Our knocking was unanswered. It soon became a pounding and an uproar. We shrieked her name, but all was vain.

We all grew frightened, for the door was locked. We hurried back, in panic, to my room. There we rang the bell long and furiously. If my father’s room had been at that side of the house, we would have called him up at once to our aid. But, alas! he was quite out of hearing, and to reach him involved an excursion for which we none of us had courage.

Servants, however, soon came running up the stairs; I had got on my dressing-gown and slippers meanwhile, and my companions were already similarly furnished. Recognising the voices of the servants on the lobby, we sallied out together; and having renewed, as fruitlessly, our summons at Carmilla’s door, I ordered the men to force the lock. They did so, and we stood, holding our lights aloft, in the doorway, and so stared into the room.

We called her by name; but there was still no reply. We looked round the room. Everything was undisturbed. It was exactly in the state in which I had left it on bidding her good night. But Carmilla was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

SEARCH.

At sight of the room, perfectly undisturbed except for our violent entrance, we began to cool a little, and soon recovered our senses sufficiently to dismiss the men. It had struck Mademoiselle that possibly Carmilla had been wakened by the uproar at her door, and in her first panic had jumped from her bed, and hid herself in a press, or behind a curtain, from which she could not, of course, emerge until the majordomo and his myrmidons had withdrawn. We now recommenced our search, and began to call her by name again.

It was all to no purpose. Our perplexity and agitation increased. We examined the windows, but they were secured. I implored of Carmilla, if she had concealed herself, to play this cruel trick no longer — to come out, and to end our anxieties. It was all useless. I was by this time convinced that she was not in the room, nor in the dressing room, the door of which was still locked on this side. She could not have passed it. I was utterly puzzled. Had Carmilla discovered one of those secret passages which the old housekeeper said were known to exist in the schloss, although the tradition of their exact situation had been lost. A little time would, no doubt, explain all — utterly perplexed as, for the present, we were.

It was past four o'clock, and I preferred passing the remaining hours of darkness in Madame's room. Daylight brought no solution of the difficulty.

The whole household, with my father at its head, was in a state of agitation next morning. Every part of the château was searched. The grounds were explored. Not a trace of the missing lady could be discovered. The stream was about to be dragged; my father was in distraction; what a tale to have to tell the poor girl's mother on her return. I, too, was almost beside myself, though my grief was quite of a different kind.

The morning was passed in alarm and excitement. It was now one o'clock, and still no tidings. I ran up to Carmilla's room, and found her standing at her dressing-table. I was astounded. I could not believe my eyes.

She beckoned me to her with her pretty finger, in silence. Her face expressed extreme fear.

I ran to her in an ecstasy of joy; I kissed and embraced her again and again. I ran to the bell and rang it vehemently, to bring others to the spot, who might at once relieve my father's anxiety.

"Dear Carmilla, what has become of you all this time? We have been in agonies of anxiety about you," I exclaimed. "Where have you been? How did you come back?"

"Last night has been a night of wonders," she said.

"For mercy's sake, explain all you can."

"It was past two last night," she said, "when I went to sleep as usual in my bed, with my doors locked, that of the dressing-room, and that opening upon the gallery. My sleep was uninterrupted, and, so far as I know, dreamless; but I awoke just now on the sofa in the dressing-room there, and I found the door between the rooms open, and the other door forced. How could all this have happened without my being wakened? It must have been accompanied with a great deal of noise, and I am particularly easily wakened; and how could I have been carried out of my bed without my sleep having been interrupted, I whom the slightest stir startles?"

By this time, Madame, Mademoiselle, my father, and a number of the servants were in the room. Carmilla was, of course, overwhelmed with inquiries, congratulations, and welcomes. She had but one story to tell, and seemed the least able of all the party to suggest any way of accounting for what had happened.

My father took a turn up and down the room, thinking. I saw Carmilla's eye follow him for a moment with a sly, dark glance.

When my father had sent the servants away, Mademoiselle having gone in search of a little bottle of valerian and sal-volatile, and there being no one now in the room with Carmilla, except my father, Madame, and myself, he came to her thoughtfully, took her hand very kindly, led her to the sofa, and sat down beside her.

"Will you forgive me, my dear, if I risk a conjecture, and ask a question?"

"Who can have a better right?" she said. "Ask what you please, and I will tell you everything. But my story is simply one of bewilderment and darkness. I know absolutely nothing. Put any question you please. But you know, of course, the limitations mamma has placed me under."

“Perfectly, my dear child. I need not approach the topics on which she desires our silence. Now, the marvel of last night consists in your having been removed from your bed and your room, without being wakened, and this removal having occurred apparently while the windows were still secured, and the two doors locked upon the inside. I will tell you my theory, and first ask you a question.”

Carmilla was leaning on her hand dejectedly; Madame and I were listening breathlessly.

“Now, my question is this. Have you ever been suspected of walking in your sleep?”

“Never, since I was very young indeed.”

“But you did walk in your sleep when you were young?”

“Yes; I know I did. I have been told so often by my old nurse.”

My father smiled and nodded.

“Well, what has happened is this. You got up in your sleep, unlocked the door, not leaving the key, as usual, in the lock, but taking it out and locking it on the outside; you again took the key out, and carried it away with you to some one of the five-and-twenty rooms on this floor, or perhaps upstairs or downstairs. There are so many rooms and closets, so much heavy furniture, and such accumulations of lumber, that it would require a week to search this old house thoroughly. Do you see, now, what I mean?”

“I do, but not all,” she answered.

“And how, papa, do you account for her finding herself on the sofa in the dressing-room, which we had searched so carefully?”

“She came there after you had searched it, still in her sleep, and at last awoke spontaneously, and was as much surprised to find herself where she was as any one else. I wish all mysteries were as easily and innocently explained as yours, Carmilla,” he said, laughing. “And so we may congratulate ourselves on the certainty that the most natural explanation of the occurrence is one that involves no drugging, no tampering with locks, no burglars, or poisoners, or witches — nothing that need alarm Carmilla, or any one else, for our safety.”

Carmilla was looking charmingly. Nothing could be more beautiful than her tints. Her beauty was, I think, enhanced by that graceful languor that was peculiar to her. I think my father was silently contrasting her looks with mine, for he said:

"I wish my poor Laura was looking more like herself," and he sighed.

So our alarms were happily ended, and Carmilla restored to her friends.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DOCTOR.

As Carmilla would not hear of an attendant sleeping in her room, my father arranged that a servant should sleep outside her door, so that she could not attempt to make another such excursion without being arrested at her own door.

That night passed quietly; and next morning early, the doctor, whom my father had sent for without telling me a word about it, arrived to see me.

Madame accompanied me to the library; and there the grave little doctor, with white hair and spectacles, whom I mentioned before, was waiting to receive me.

I told him my story, and as I proceeded he grew graver and graver.

We were standing, he and I, in the recess of one of the windows, facing one another. When my statement was over, he leaned with his shoulders against the wall, and with his eyes fixed on me earnestly, with an interest in which was a dash of horror.

After a minute's reflection, he asked Madame if he could see my father.

He was sent for accordingly, and as he entered, smiling, he said:

"I dare say, doctor, you are going to tell me that I am an old fool for having brought you here; I hope I am."

But his smile faded into shadow as the doctor, with a very grave face, beckoned him to him.

He and the doctor talked for some time in the same recess where I had just conferred with the physician. It seemed an earnest and argumentative conversation. The room is very large, and I and Madame stood together, burning with curiosity, at the further end. Not a word could we hear, however, for they spoke in a very low tone, and the deep recess of the window quite concealed the doctor from view, and very nearly my father, whose foot, arm, and shoulder only could we see; and the voices were, I suppose, all the less audible for the sort of closet which the thick wall and window formed.

After a time my father's face looked into the room; it was pale, thoughtful, and, I fancied, agitated.

"Laura, dear, come here for a moment. Madame, we shan't trouble you, the doctor says, at present."

Accordingly I approached, for the first time a little alarmed; for, although I felt very weak, I did not feel ill; and strength, one always fancies, is a thing that may be picked up when we please.

My father held out his hand to me, as I drew near, but he was looking at the doctor, and he said:

"It certainly *is* very odd; I don't understand it quite. Laura, come here, dear; now attend to Doctor Spielsberg, and recollect yourself."

"You mentioned a sensation like that of two needles piercing the skin, somewhere about your neck, on the night when you experienced your first horrible dream. Is there still any soreness?"

"None at all," I answered.

"Can you indicate with your finger about the point at which you think this occurred?"

"Very little below my throat — here," I answered.

I wore a morning dress, which covered the place I pointed to.

"Now you can satisfy yourself," said the doctor. "You won't mind your papa's lowering your dress a very little. It is necessary, to detect a symptom of the complaint under which you have been suffering."

I acquiesced. It was only an inch or two below the edge of my collar.

"God bless me! — so it is," exclaimed my father, growing pale.

"You see it now with your own eyes," said the doctor, with a gloomy triumph.

"What is it?" I exclaimed, beginning to be frightened.

"Nothing, my dear young lady, but a small blue spot, about the size of the tip of your little ringer; and now," he continued, turning to papa, "the question is what is best to be done?"

"Is there any danger?" I urged, in great trepidation.

"I trust not, my dear," answered the doctor. "I don't see why you should not recover. I don't see why you should not begin *immediately* to get better. That is the point at which the sense of strangulation begins?"

"Yes," I answered.

"And — recollect as well as you can — the same point was a kind of centre of that thrill which you described just now, like the current of a cold stream running against you?"

"It may have been; I think it was."

"Ay, you see?" he added, turning to my father. "Shall I say a word to Madame?"

"Certainly," said my father.

He called Madame to him, and said:

"I find my young friend here far from well. It won't be of any great consequence, I hope; but it will be necessary that some steps be taken, which I will explain by-and-bye; but in the meantime, Madame, you will be so good as not to let Miss Laura be alone for one moment. That is the only direction I need give for the present. It is indispensable."

"We may rely upon your kindness, Madame, I know," added my father.

Madame satisfied him eagerly.

"And you, dear Laura, I know you will observe the doctor's direction."

"I shall have to ask your opinion upon another patient, whose symptoms slightly resemble those of my daughter, that have just been detailed to you — very much milder in degree, but I believe quite of the same sort. She is a young lady — our guest; but as you say you will be passing this way again this evening, you can't do better than take your supper here, and you can then see her. She does not come down till the afternoon."

"I thank you," said the doctor. "I shall be with you, then, at about seven this evening."

And then they repeated their directions to me and to Madame, and with this parting charge my father left us, and walked out with the doctor; and I saw them pacing together up and down between the road and the moat, on the grassy platform in front of the castle, evidently absorbed in earnest conversation.

The doctor did not return. I saw him mount his horse there, take his leave, and ride away eastward through the forest.

Nearly at the same time I saw the man arrive from Dranfeld with the letters, and dismount and hand the bag to my father.

In the meantime, Madame and I were both busy, lost in conjecture as to the reasons of the singular and earnest direction which the doctor and my father had concurred in imposing. Madame, as she afterwards told me, was afraid the doctor apprehended a sudden seizure, and that, without prompt assistance, I might either lose my life in a fit, or at least be seriously hurt.

This interpretation did not strike me; and I fancied, perhaps luckily for my nerves, that the arrangement was prescribed simply to secure a companion, who would prevent my taking too much exercise, or eating unripe fruit, or doing any of the fifty foolish things to which young people are supposed to be prone.

About half-an-hour after my father came in — he had a letter in his hand — and said:

“This letter had been delayed; it is from General Spielsdorf. He might have been here yesterday, he may not come till tomorrow, or he may be here to-day.”

He put the open letter into my hand; but he did not look pleased, as he used when a guest, especially one so much loved as the General, was coming. On the contrary, he looked as if he wished him at the bottom of the Red Sea. There was plainly something on his mind which he did not choose to divulge.

“Papa, darling, will you tell me this?” said I, suddenly laying my hand on his arm, and looking, I am sure, imploringly in his face.

“Perhaps,” he answered, smoothing my hair caressingly over my eyes.

“Does the doctor think me very ill?”

“No, dear; he thinks, if right steps are taken, you will be quite well again, at least, on the high road to a complete recovery, in a day or two,” he answered, a little drily. “I wish our good friend, the General, had chosen any other time; that is, I wish you had been perfectly well to receive him.”

“But do tell me, papa,” I insisted, “*what* does he think is the matter with me?”

“Nothing; you must not plague me with questions,” he answered, with more irritation than I ever remember him to have displayed before; and seeing that I looked wounded, I suppose, he kissed me, and added, “You shall know all about it in a day or two; that is, all that *I* know. In the meantime you are not to trouble your head about it.”

He turned and left the room, but came back before I had done wondering and puzzling over the oddity of all this; it was merely to say that he was going to Karnstein, and had ordered the carriage to be ready at twelve, and that I and Madame should accompany him; he was going to see the priest who lived near those picturesque grounds, upon business, and as Carmilla had never seen them, she could follow, when she came down, with Mademoiselle, who would bring materials for what you call a pic-nic, which might be laid for us in the ruined castle.

At twelve o'clock, accordingly, I was ready, and not long after, my father, Madame and I set out upon our projected drive.

Passing the drawbridge we turn to the right, and follow the road over the steep gothic bridge, westward, to reach the deserted village and ruined castle of Karnstein.

No sylvan drive can be fancied prettier. The ground breaks into gentle hills and hollows, all clothed with beautiful wood, totally destitute of the comparative formality which artificial planting and early culture and pruning impart.

The irregularities of the ground often lead the road out of its course, and cause it to wind beautifully round the sides of broken hollows and the steeper sides of the hills, among varieties of ground almost inexhaustible.

Turning one of these points, we suddenly encountered our old friend, the General, riding towards us, attended by a mounted servant. His portmanteaus were following in a hired waggon, such as we term a cart.

The General dismounted as we pulled up, and, after the usual greetings, was easily persuaded to accept the vacant seat in the carriage, and send his horse on with his servant to the schloss.

CHAPTER X.

BEREAVED.

It was about ten months since we had last seen him; but that time had sufficed to make an alteration of years in his appearance. He had grown thinner; something of gloom and anxiety had taken the place of that cordial serenity which used to characterise his features. His dark blue eyes, always penetrating, now gleamed with a sterner light from under his shaggy grey eyebrows. It was not such a change as grief alone usually induces, and angrier passions seemed to have had their share in bringing it about.

We had not long resumed our drive, when the General began to talk, with his usual soldierly directness, of the bereavement, as he termed it, which he had sustained in the death of his beloved niece and ward; and he then broke out in a tone of intense bitterness and fury, inveighing against the "hellish arts" to which she had fallen a victim, and expressing, with more exasperation than piety, his wonder that Heaven should tolerate so monstrous an indulgence of the lusts and malignity of hell.

My father, who saw at once that something very extraordinary had befallen, asked him, if not too painful to him, to detail the circumstances which he thought justified the strong terms in which he expressed himself.

"I should tell you all with pleasure," said the General, "but you would not believe me."

"Why should I not?" he asked.

"Because," he answered testily, "you believe in nothing but what consists with your own prejudices and illusions. I remember when I was like you, but I have learned better."

"Try me," said my father; "I am not such a dogmatist as you suppose. Besides which, I very well know that you generally require proof for what you believe, and am, therefore, very strongly predisposed to respect your conclusions."

"You are right in supposing that I have not been led lightly into a belief in the marvellous — for what I have experienced *is* marvellous — and I have been forced by extraordinary evidence to credit that which ran counter, diametrically, to all my theories. I have been made the dupe of a preternatural conspiracy.”

Notwithstanding his professions of confidence in the General’s penetration, I saw my father, at this point, glance at the General, with, as I thought, a marked suspicion of his sanity.

The General did not see it, luckily. He was looking gloomily and curiously into the glades and vistas of the woods that were opening before us.

“You are going to the Ruins of Karnstein?” he said. “Yes, it is a lucky coincidence; do you know I was going to ask you to bring me there to inspect them. I have a special object in exploring. There is a ruined chapel, ain’t there, with a great many tombs of that extinct family?”

“So there are — highly interesting,” said my father. “I hope you are thinking of claiming the title and estates?”

My father said this gaily, but the General did not recollect the laugh, or even the smile, which courtesy exacts for a friend’s joke; on the contrary, he looked grave and even fierce, ruminating on a matter that stirred his anger and horror.

“Something very different,” he said, gruffly. “I mean to unearth some of those fine people. I hope, by God’s blessing, to accomplish a pious sacrilege here, which will relieve our earth of certain monsters, and enable honest people to sleep in their beds without being assailed by murderers. I have strange things to tell you, my dear friend, such as I myself would have scouted as incredible a few months since.”

My father looked at him again, but this time not with a glance of suspicion — with an eye, rather, of keen intelligence and alarm.

“The house of Karnstein,” he said, “has been long extinct: a hundred years at least. My dear wife was maternally descended from the Karnsteins. But the name and title have long ceased to exist. The castle is a ruin; the very village is deserted; it is fifty years since the smoke of a chimney was seen there; not a roof left.”

“Quite true. I have heard a great deal about that since I last saw you; a great deal that will astonish you. But I had better relate everything in the order in which it occurred,” said the General. “You saw my dear ward — my child, I may call her. No creature could have been more beautiful, and only three months ago none more blooming.”

"Yes, poor thing! when I saw her last she certainly was quite lovely," said my father. "I was grieved and shocked more than I can tell you, my dear friend; I knew what a blow it was to you."

He took the General's hand, and they exchanged a kind pressure. Tears gathered in the old soldier's eyes. He did not seek to conceal them. He said:

"We have been very old friends; I knew you would feel for me, childless as I am. She had become an object of very near interest to me, and repaid my care by an affection that cheered my home and made my life happy. That is all gone. The years that remain to me on earth may not be very long; but by God's mercy I hope to accomplish a service to mankind before I die, and to subserve the vengeance of Heaven upon the fiends who have murdered my poor child in the spring of her hopes and beauty!"

"You said, just now, that you intended relating everything as it occurred," said my father. "Pray do; I assure you that it is not mere curiosity that prompts me."

By this time we had reached the point at which the Drunstall road, by which the General had come, diverges from the road which we were travelling to Karnstein.

"How far is it to the ruins?" inquired the General, looking anxiously forward.

"About half a league," answered my father. "Pray let us hear the story you were so good as to promise."

CHAPTER XI.

THE STORY.

“With all my heart,” said the General, with an effort; and after a short pause in which to arrange his subject, he commenced one of the strangest narratives I ever heard.

“My dear child was looking forward with great pleasure to the visit you had been so good as to arrange for her to your charming daughter.” Here he made me a gallant but melancholy bow. “In the meantime we had an invitation to my old friend the Count Carlsfeld, whose schloss is about six leagues to the other side of Karnstein. It was to attend the series of fêtes which, you remember, were given by him in honour of his illustrious visitor, the Grand Duke Charles.”

“Yes; and very splendid, I believe, they were,” said my father.

“Princely! But then his hospitalities are quite regal. He has Aladdin’s lamp. The night from which my sorrow dates was devoted to a magnificent masquerade. The grounds were thrown open, the trees hung with coloured lamps. There was such a display of fireworks as Paris itself had never witnessed. And such music — music, you know, is my weakness — such ravishing music! The finest instrumental band, perhaps, in the world, and the finest singers who could be collected from all the great operas in Europe. As you wandered through these fantastically illuminated grounds, the moonlighted château throwing a rosy light from its long rows of windows, you would suddenly hear these ravishing voices stealing from the silence of some grove, or rising from boats upon the lake. I felt myself, as I looked and listened, carried back into the romance and poetry of my early youth.

“When the fireworks were ended, and the ball beginning, we returned to the noble suite of rooms that were thrown open to the dancers. A masked ball, you know, is a beautiful sight; but so brilliant a spectacle of the kind I never saw before.

“It was a very aristocratic assembly. I was myself almost the only ‘nobody’ present.

“My dear child was looking quite beautiful. She wore no mask. Her excitement and delight added an unspeakable charm to her features, always lovely. I remarked a young lady, dressed magnificently, but wearing a mask, who appeared to me to be observing my ward with extraordinary interest. I had seen her, earlier in the evening, in the great hall, and again, for a few minutes, walking near us, on the terrace under the castle windows, similarly employed. A lady, also masked, richly and gravely dressed, and with a stately air, like a person of rank, accompanied her as a chaperon. Had the young lady not worn a mask, I could, of course, have been much more certain upon the question whether she was really watching my poor darling. I am now well assured that she was.

“We were now in one of the *salons*. My poor dear child had been dancing, and was resting a little in one of the chairs near the door; I was standing near. The two ladies I have mentioned had approached, and the younger took the chair next my ward; while her companion stood beside me, and for a little time addressed herself, in a low tone, to her charge.

“Availing herself of the privilege of her mask, she turned to me, and in the tone of an old friend, and calling me by my name, opened a conversation with me, which piqued my curiosity a good deal. She referred to many scenes where she had met me — at Court, and at distinguished houses. She alluded to little incidents which I had long ceased to think of, but which, I found, had only lain in abeyance in my memory, for they instantly started into life at her touch.

“I became more and more curious to ascertain who she was, every moment. She parried my attempts to discover very adroitly and pleasantly. The knowledge she showed of many passages in my life seemed to me all but unaccountable; and she appeared to take a not unnatural pleasure in foiling my curiosity, and in seeing me flounder, in my eager perplexity, from one conjecture to another.

“In the meantime the young lady, whom her mother called by the odd name of Millarca, when she once or twice addressed her, had, with the same ease and grace, got into conversation with my ward.

“She introduced herself by saying that her mother was a very old acquaintance of mine. She spoke of the agreeable audacity which a mask rendered practicable; she talked like a friend; she admired her dress, and insinuated very prettily her admiration of her beauty. She amused her with laughing criticisms upon the people who crowded the ball-room, and laughed at my poor child's fun. She was very witty and lively when she pleased, and after a time they had grown very good friends, and the young stranger lowered her mask, displaying a remarkably beautiful face. I had never seen it before, neither had my dear child. But though it was new to us, the features were so engaging, as well as lovely, that it was impossible not to feel the attraction powerfully. My poor girl did so. I never saw anyone more taken with another at first sight, unless, indeed, it was the stranger herself, who seemed quite to have lost her heart to her.

"In the meantime, availing myself of the licence of a masquerade, I put not a few questions to the elder lady.

"'You have puzzled me utterly,' I said, laughing. 'Is that not enough? won't you, now, consent to stand on equal terms, and do me the kindness to remove your mask?'

"'Can any request be more unreasonable?' she replied. 'Ask a lady to yield an advantage! Beside, how do you know you should recognise me? Years make changes.'

"'As you see,' I said, with a bow, and, I suppose, a rather melancholy little laugh.

"'As philosophers tell us,' she said; 'and how do you know that a sight of my face would help you?'

"'I should take chance for that,' I answered. 'It is vain trying to make yourself out an old woman; your figure betrays you.'

"'Years, nevertheless, have passed since I saw you, rather since you saw me, for that is what I am considering. Millarca, there, is my daughter; I cannot then be young, even in the opinion of people whom time has taught to be indulgent, and I may not like to be compared with what you remember me. You have no mask to remove. You can offer me nothing in exchange.'

"'My petition is to your pity, to remove it.'

"'And mine to yours, to let it stay where it is,' she replied.

"'Well, then, at least you will tell me whether you are French or German; you speak both languages so perfectly.'

"'I don't think I shall tell you that, General; you intend a surprise, and are meditating the particular point of attack.'

'At all events, you won't deny this,' I said, 'that being honoured by your permission to converse, I ought to know how to address you. Shall I say

Madame la Comtesse?’

“She laughed, and she would, no doubt, have met me with another evasion — if, indeed, I can treat any occurrence in an interview every circumstance of which was prearranged, as I now believe, with the profoundest cunning, as liable to be modified by accident.

“‘As to that,’ she began; but she was interrupted, almost as she opened her lips, by a gentleman, dressed in black, who looked particularly elegant and distinguished, with this drawback, that his face was the most deadly pale I ever saw, except in death. He was in no masquerade — in the plain evening dress of a gentleman; and he said, without a smile, but with a courtly and unusually low bow: —

“‘Will Madame la Comtesse permit me to say a very few words which may interest her?’

“The lady turned quickly to him, and touched her lip in token of silence; she then said to me, ‘Keep my place for me, General; I shall return when I have said a few words.’

“And with this injunction, playfully given, she walked a little aside with the gentleman in black, and talked for some minutes, apparently very earnestly. They then walked away slowly together in the crowd, and I lost them for some minutes.

“I spent the interval in cudgelling my brains for a conjecture as to the identity of the lady who seemed to remember me so kindly, and I was thinking of turning about and joining in the conversation between my pretty ward and the Countess’s daughter, and trying whether, by the time she returned, I might not have a surprise in store for her, by having her name, title, château, and estates at my fingers’ ends. But at this moment she returned, accompanied by the pale man in black, who said:

“‘I shall return and inform Madame la Comtesse when her carriage is at the door.’

“He withdrew with a bow.”

CHAPTER XII.

A PETITION.

"'Then we are to lose Madame la Comtesse, but I hope only for a few hours,' I said, with a low bow.

"'It may be that only, or it may be a few weeks. It was very unlucky his speaking to me just now as he did. Do you now know me?'

"I assured her I did not.

"'You shall know me,' she said, 'but not at present. We are older and better friends than, perhaps, you suspect. I cannot yet declare myself. I shall in three weeks pass your beautiful schloss, about which I have been making enquiries. I shall then look in upon you for an hour or two, and renew a friendship which I never think of without a thousand pleasant recollections. This moment a piece of news has reached me like a thunderbolt. I must set out now, and travel by a devious route, nearly a hundred miles, with all the dispatch I can possibly make. My perplexities multiply. I am only deterred by the compulsory reserve I practise as to my name from making a very singular request of you. My poor child has not quite recovered her strength. Her horse fell with her, at a hunt which she had ridden out to witness, her nerves have not yet recovered the shock, and our physician says that she must on no account exert herself for some time to come. We came here, in consequence, by very easy stages — hardly six leagues a day. I must now travel day and night, on a mission of life and death — a mission the critical and momentous nature of which I shall be able to explain to you when we meet, as I hope we shall, in a few weeks, without the necessity of any concealment.'

"She went on to make her petition, and it was in the tone of a person from whom such a request amounted to conferring, rather than seeking a favour. This was only in manner, and, as it seemed, quite unconsciously. Than the terms in which it was expressed, nothing could be more deprecatory. It was simply that I would consent to take charge of her daughter during her absence.

“This was, all things considered, a strange, not to say, an audacious request. She in some sort disarmed me, by stating and admitting everything that could be urged against it, and throwing herself entirely upon my chivalry. At the same moment, by a fatality that seems to have predetermined all that happened, my poor child came to my side, and, in an undertone, besought me to invite her new friend, Millarca, to pay us a visit. She had just been sounding her, and thought, if her mamma would allow her, she would like it extremely.

“At another time I should have told her to wait a little, until, at least, we knew who they were. But I had not a moment to think in. The two ladies assailed me together, and I must confess the refined and beautiful face of the young lady, about which there was something extremely engaging, as well as the elegance and fire of high birth, determined me; and, quite overpowered, I submitted, and undertook, too easily, the care of the young lady, whom her mother called Millarca.

“The Countess beckoned to her daughter, who listened with grave attention while she told her, in general terms, how suddenly and peremptorily she had been summoned, and also of the arrangement she had made for her under my care, adding that I was one of her earliest and most valued friends.

“I made, of course, such speeches as the case seemed to call for, and found myself, on reflection, in a position which I did not half like.

“The gentleman in black returned, and very ceremoniously conducted the lady from the room.

“The demeanour of this gentleman was such as to impress me with the conviction that the Countess was a lady of very much more importance than her modest title alone might have led me to assume.

“Her last charge to me was that no attempt was to be made to learn more about her than I might have already guessed, until her return. Our distinguished host, whose guest she was, knew her reasons.

“‘But here,’ she said, ‘neither I nor my daughter could safely remain for more than a day. I removed my mask imprudently for a moment, about an hour ago, and, too late, I fancied you saw me. So I resolved to seek an opportunity of talking a little to you. Had I found that you *had* seen me, I should have thrown myself on your high sense of honour to keep my secret for some weeks. As it is, I am satisfied that you did not see me; but if you now *suspect*, or, on reflection, *should* suspect, who I am, I commit myself, in like manner, entirely to your honour. My daughter will observe the same secresy, and I well know that you will, from time to time, remind her, lest she should thoughtlessly disclose it.'

"She whispered a few words to her daughter, kissed her hurriedly twice, and went away, accompanied by the pale gentleman in black, and disappeared in the crowd.

"'In the next room,' said Millarca, 'there is a window that looks upon the hall door. I should like to see the last of mamma, and to kiss my hand to her.'

"We assented, of course, and accompanied her to the window. We looked out, and saw a handsome oldfashioned carriage, with a troop of couriers and footmen. We saw the slim figure of the pale gentleman in black, as he held a thick velvet cloak, and placed it about her shoulders and threw the hood over her head. She nodded to him, and just touched his hand with hers. He bowed low repeatedly as the door closed, and the carriage began to move.

"'She is gone,' said Millarca, with a sigh.

"'She is gone,' I repeated to myself, for the first time — in the hurried moments that had elapsed since my consent — reflecting upon the folly of my act.

"'She did not look up,' said the young lady, plaintively.

"'The Countess had taken off her mask, perhaps, and did not care to show her face,' I said; 'and she could not know that you were in the window.'

"She sighed, and looked in my face. She was so beautiful that I relented. I was sorry I had for a moment repented of my hospitality, and I determined to make her amends for the unavowed churlishness of my reception.

"The young lady, replacing her mask, joined my ward in persuading me to return to the grounds, where the concert was soon to be renewed. We did so, and walked up and down the terrace that lies under the castle windows. Millarca became very intimate with us, and amused us with lively descriptions and stories of most of the great people whom we saw upon the terrace. I liked her more and more every minute. Her gossip, without being ill-natured, was extremely diverting to me, who had been so long out of the great world. I thought what life she would give to our sometimes lonely evenings at home.

“This ball was not over until the morning sun had almost reached the horizon. It pleased the Grand Duke to dance till then, so loyal people could not go away, or think of bed.

“We had just got through a crowded saloon, when my ward asked me what had become of Millarca. I thought she had been by her side, and she fancied she was by mine. The fact was, we had lost her.

“All my efforts to find her were vain. I feared that she had mistaken, in the confusion of a momentary separation from us, other people for her new friends, and had, possibly, pursued and lost them in the extensive grounds which were thrown open to us.

“Now, in its full force, I recognised a new folly in my having undertaken the charge of a young lady without so much as knowing her name; and fettered as I was by promises, of the reasons for imposing which I knew nothing, I could not even point my inquiries by saying that the missing young lady was the daughter of the Countess who had taken her departure a few hours before.

“Morning broke. It was clear daylight before I gave up my search. It was not till near two o’clock next day that we heard anything of my missing charge.

“At about that time a servant knocked at my niece’s door, to say that he had been earnestly requested by a young lady, who appeared to be in great distress, to make out where she could find the General Baron Spielsdorf and the young lady his daughter, in whose charge she had been left by her mother.

“There could be no doubt, notwithstanding the slight inaccuracy, that our young friend had turned up; and so she had. Would to heaven we had lost her!

“She told my poor child a story to account for her having failed to recover us for so long. Very late, she said, she had got to the housekeeper’s bedroom in despair of finding us, and had then fallen into a deep sleep which, long as it was, had hardly sufficed to recruit her strength after the fatigues of the ball.

“That day Millarca came home with us. I was only too happy, after all, to have secured so charming a companion for my dear girl.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WOODMAN.

"There soon, however, appeared some drawbacks. In the first place, Millarca complained of extreme languor — the weakness that remained after her late illness — and she never emerged from her room till the afternoon was pretty far advanced. In the next place, it was accidentally discovered, although she always locked her door on the inside, and never disturbed the key from its place till she admitted the maid to assist at her toilet, that she was undoubtedly sometimes absent from her room in the very early morning, and at various times later in the day, before she wished it to be understood that she was stirring. She was repeatedly seen from the windows of the schloss, in the first faint grey of the morning, walking through the trees, in an easterly direction, and looking like a person in a trance. This convinced me that, she walked in her sleep. But this hypothesis did not solve the puzzle. How did she pass out from her room, leaving the door locked on the inside? How did she escape from the house without unbarring door or window?

"In the midst of my perplexities, an anxiety of a far more urgent kind presented itself.

"My dear child began to lose her looks and health, and that in a manner so mysterious, and even horrible, that I became thoroughly frightened.

"She was at first visited by appalling dreams; then, as she fancied, by a spectre, sometimes resembling Millarca, sometimes in the shape of a beast, indistinctly seen, walking round the foot of her bed, from side to side. Lastly came sensations. One, not unpleasant, but very peculiar, she said, resembled the flow of an icy stream against her breast. At a later time, she felt something like a pair of large needles pierce her, a little below the throat, with a very sharp pain. A few nights after, followed a gradual and convulsive sense of strangulation; then came unconsciousness."

I could hear distinctly every word the kind old General was saying, because by this time we were driving upon the short grass that spreads on either side of the road as you approach the roofless village which had not shown the smoke of a chimney for more than half a century.

You may guess how strangely I felt as I heard my own symptoms so exactly described in those which had been experienced by the poor girl who, but for the catastrophe which followed, would have been at that moment a visitor at my father's château. You may suppose, also, how I felt as I heard him detail habits and mysterious peculiarities which were, in fact, those of our beautiful guest, Carmilla!

A vista opened in the forest; we were on a sudden under the chimneys and gables of the ruined village, and the towers and battlements of the dismantled castle, round which gigantic trees are grouped, overhung us from a slight eminence.

In a frightened dream I got down from the carriage, and in silence, for we had each abundant matter for thinking; we soon mounted the ascent, and were among the spacious chambers, winding stairs, and dark corridors of the castle.

"And this was once the palatial residence of the Karnsteins!" said the old General at length, as from a great window he looked out across the village, and saw the wide, undulating expanse of forest. "It was a bad family, and here its bloodstained annals were written," he continued. "It is hard that they should, after death, continue to plague the human race with their atrocious lusts. That is the chapel of the Karnsteins, down there."

He pointed down to the grey walls of the gothic building, partly visible through the foliage, a little way down the steep. "And I hear the axe of a woodman," he added, "busy among the trees that surround it; he possibly may give us the information of which I am in search, and point out the grave of Mircalla, Countess of Karnstein. These rustics preserve the local traditions of great families, whose stories die out among the rich and titled so soon as the families themselves become extinct."

"We have a portrait, at home, of Mircalla, the Countess Karnstein; should you like to see it?" asked my father.

"Time enough, dear friend," replied the General. "I believe that I have seen the original; and one motive which has led me to you earlier than I at first intended, was to explore the chapel which we are now approaching."

"What! see the Countess Mircalla," exclaimed my father; "why, she has been dead more than a century!"

“Not so dead as you fancy, I am told,” answered the General.

“I confess, General, you puzzle me utterly,” replied my father, looking at him, I fancied, for a moment with a return of the suspicion I detected before. But although there was anger and detestation, at times, in the old General’s manner, there was nothing flighty.

“There remains to me,” he said, as we passed under the heavy arch of the gothic church — for its dimensions would have justified its being so styled — “but one object which can interest me during the few years that remain to me on earth, and that is to wreak on her the vengeance which, I thank God, may still be accomplished by a mortal arm.”

“What vengeance can you mean?” asked my father, in increasing amazement.

“I mean, to decapitate the monster,” he answered, with a fierce flush, and a stamp that echoed mournfully through the hollow ruin, and his clenched hand was at the same moment raised, as if it grasped the handle of an axe, while he shook it ferociously in the air.

“What?” exclaimed my father, more than ever bewildered.

“To strike her head off.”

“Cut her head off!”

“Aye, with a hatchet, with a spade, or with anything that can cleave through her murderous throat. You shall hear,” he answered, trembling with rage. And hurrying forward he said:

“That beam will answer for a seat; your dear child is fatigued; let her be seated, and I will, in a few sentences, close my dreadful story.”

The squared block of wood, which lay on the grass-grown pavement of the chapel, formed a bench on which I was very glad to seat myself, and in the meantime the General called to the woodman, who had been removing some boughs which leaned upon the old walls; and, axe in hand, the hardy old fellow stood before us.

He could not tell us anything of these monuments; but there was an old man, he said, a ranger of this forest, at present sojourning in the house of the priest, about two miles away, who could point out every monument of the old Karnstein family; and, for a trifle, he undertook to bring him back with him, if we would lend him one of our horses, in little more than half-an-hour.

“Have you been long employed about this forest?” asked my father of the old man.

“I have been a woodman here,” he answered in his *patois*, “under the forester, all my days; so has my father before me, and so on, as many generations as I can count up. I could show you the very house in the village here, in which my ancestors lived.”

“How came the village to be deserted?” asked the General.

“It was troubled by *revenants*, sir; several were tracked to their graves, there detected by the usual tests, and extinguished in the usual way, by decapitation, by the stake, and by burning; but not until many of the villagers were killed.

“But after all these proceedings according to law,” he continued— “so many graves opened, and so many vampires deprived of their horrible animation — the village was not relieved. But a Moravian nobleman, who happened to be travelling this way, heard how matters were, and being skilled — as many people are in his country — in such affairs, he offered to deliver the village from its tormentor. He did so thus: There being a bright moon that night, he ascended, shortly after sunset, the towers of the chapel here, from whence he could distinctly see the churchyard beneath him; you can see it from that window. From this point he watched until he saw the vampire come out of his grave, and place near it the linen clothes in which he had been folded, and then glide away towards the village to plague its inhabitants.

“The stranger, having seen all this, came down from the steeple, took the linen wrappings of the vampire, and carried them up to the top of the tower, which he again mounted. When the vampire returned from his prowlings and missed his clothes, he cried furiously to the Moravian, whom he saw at the summit of the tower, and who, in reply, beckoned him to ascend and take them. Whereupon the vampire, accepting his invitation, began to climb the steeple, and so soon as he had reached the battlements, the Moravian, with a stroke of his sword, clove his skull in twain, hurling him down to the churchyard, whither, descending by the winding stairs, the stranger followed and cut his head off, and next day delivered it and the body to the villagers, who duly impaled and burnt them.

“This Moravian nobleman had authority from the then head of the family to remove the tomb of Mircalla, Countess Karnstein, which he did effectually, so that in a little while its site was quite forgotten."

"Can you point out where it stood?" asked the General, eagerly.

The forester shook his head and smiled.

"Not a soul living could tell you that now," he said; "besides, they say her body was removed; but no one is sure of that either."

Having thus spoken, as time pressed, he dropped his axe and departed, leaving us to hear the remainder of the General's strange story.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MEETING.

“My beloved child,” he resumed, “was now growing rapidly worse. The physician who attended her had failed to produce the slightest impression upon her disease, for such I then supposed it to be. He saw my alarm, and suggested a consultation. I called in an abler physician, from Gratz. Several days elapsed before he arrived. He was a good and pious, as well as a learned man. Having seen my poor ward together, they withdrew to my library to confer and discuss. I, from the adjoining room, where I awaited their summons, heard these two gentlemen’s voices raised in something sharper than a strictly philosophical discussion. I knocked at the door and entered. I found the old physician from Gratz maintaining his theory. His rival was combatting it with undisguised ridicule, accompanied with bursts of laughter. This unseemly manifestation subsided and the altercation ended on my entrance.

“‘Sir,’ said my first physician, ‘my learned brother seems to think that you want a conjuror, and not a doctor.’

“‘Pardon me,’ said the old physician from Gratz, looking displeased, ‘I shall state my own view of the case in my own way another time. I grieve, Monsieur le Général, that by my skill and science I can be of no use. Before I go I shall do myself the honour to suggest something to you.’

“He seemed thoughtful, and sat down at a table and began to write. Profoundly disappointed, I made my bow, and as I turned to go, the other doctor pointed over his shoulder to his companion who was writing, and then, with a shrug, significantly touched his forehead.

“This consultation, then, left me precisely where I was. I walked out into the grounds, all but distracted. The doctor from Gratz, in ten or fifteen minutes, overtook me. He apologised for having followed me, but said that he could not conscientiously take his leave without a few words more. He told me that he could not be mistaken; no natural disease exhibited the same symptoms; and that death was already very near. There remained, however, a day, or possibly two, of life. If the fatal seizure were at once arrested, with great care and skill her strength might possibly return. But all hung now upon the confines of the irrevocable. One more assault might extinguish the last spark of vitality which is, every moment, ready to die.

"'And what is the nature of the seizure you speak of?' I entreated.

"'I have stated all fully in this note, which I place in your hands upon the distinct condition that you send for the nearest clergyman, and open my letter in his presence, and on no account read it till he is with you; you would despise it else, and it is a matter of life and death. Should the priest fail you, then, indeed, you may read it.'

"He asked me, before taking his leave finally, whether I would wish to see a man curiously learned upon the very subject, which, after I had read his letter, would probably interest me above all others, and he urged me earnestly to invite him to visit him there; and so took his leave.

"The ecclesiastic was absent, and I read the letter by myself. At another time, or in another case, it might have excited my ridicule. But into what quackeries will not people rush for a last chance, where all accustomed means have failed, and the life of a beloved object is at stake?

"Nothing, you will say, could be more absurd than the learned man's letter. It was monstrous enough to have consigned him to a madhouse. He said that the patient was suffering from the visits of a vampire! The punctures which she described as having occurred near the throat, were, he insisted, the insertion of those two long, thin, and sharp teeth which, it is well known, are peculiar to vampires; and there could be no doubt, he added, as to the well-defined presence of the small livid mark which all concurred in describing as that induced by the demon's lips, and every symptom described by the sufferer was in exact conformity with those recorded in every case of a similar visitation.

"Being myself wholly sceptical as to the existence of any such portent as the vampire, the supernatural theory of the good doctor furnished, in my opinion, but another instance of learning and intelligence oddly associated with some one hallucination. I was so miserable, however, that, rather than try nothing, I acted upon the instructions of the letter.

"I concealed myself in the dark dressing-room, that opened upon the poor patient's room, in which a candle was burning, and watched there till she was fast asleep. I stood at the door, peeping through the small crevice, my sword laid on the table beside me, as my directions prescribed, until, a little after one, I saw a large black object, very ill-defined, crawl, as it seemed to me, over the foot of the bed, and swiftly spread itself up to the poor girl's throat, where it swelled, in a moment, into a great, palpitating mass.

"For a few moments I had stood petrified. I now sprang forward, with my sword in my hand. The black creature suddenly contracted toward the foot of the bed, glided over it, and, standing on the floor about a yard below the foot of the bed, with a glare of skulking ferocity and horror fixed on me, I saw Millarca. Speculating I know not what, I struck at her instantly with my sword; but I saw her standing near the door, unscathed. Horrified, I pursued, and struck again. She was gone; and my sword flew to shivers against the door.

"I can't describe to you all that passed on that horrible night. The whole house was up and stirring. The spectre Millarca was gone. But her victim was sinking fast, and before the morning dawned, she died."

The old General was agitated. We did not speak to him. My father walked to some little distance, and began reading the inscriptions on the tombstones; and thus occupied, he strolled into the door of a side-chapel to prosecute his researches. The General leaned against the wall, dried his eyes, and sighed heavily. I was relieved on hearing the voices of Carmilla and Madame, who were at that moment approaching. The voices died away.

In this solitude, having just listened to so strange a story, connected, as it was, with the great and titled dead, whose monuments were mouldering among the dust and ivy round us, and every incident of which bore so awfully upon my own mysterious case — in this haunted spot, darkened by the towering foliage that rose on every side, dense and high above its noiseless walls — a horror began to steal over me, and my heart sank as I thought that my friends were, after all, not about to enter and disturb this triste and ominous scene.

The old General's eyes were fixed on the ground, as he leaned with his hand upon the basement of a shattered monument.

Under a narrow, arched doorway, surmounted by one of those demoniacal grotesques in which the cynical and ghastly fancy of old Gothic carving delights, I saw very gladly the beautiful face and figure of Carmilla enter the shadowy chapel.

I was just about to rise and speak, and nodded smiling, in answer to her peculiarly engaging smile; when with a cry, the old man by my side caught up the woodman's hatchet, and started forward. On seeing him a brutalised change came over her features. It was an instantaneous and horrible transformation, as she made a crouching step backwards. Before I could utter a scream, he struck at her with all his force, but she dived under his blow, and unscathed, caught him in her tiny grasp by the wrist. He struggled for a moment to release his arm, but his hand opened, the axe fell to the ground, and the girl was gone.

He staggered against the wall. His grey hair stood upon his head, and a moisture shone over his face, as if he were at the point of death.

The frightful scene had passed in a moment. The first thing I recollect after, is Madame standing before me, and impatiently repeating again and again, the question, "Where is Mademoiselle Carmilla?"

I answered at length, "I don't know — I can't tell — she went there," and I pointed to the door through which Madame had just entered; "only a minute or two since."

"But I have been standing there, in the passage, ever since Mademoiselle Carmilla entered; and she did not return."

She then began to call "Carmilla," through every door and passage and from the windows, but no answer came.

"She called herself Carmilla?" asked the General, still agitated.

"Carmilla, yes," I answered.

"Aye," he said; "that is Millarca. That is the same person who long ago was called Mircalla, Countess Karnstein. Depart from this accursed ground, my poor child, as quickly as you can. Drive to the clergyman's house, and stay there till we come. Begone! May you never behold Carmilla more; you will not find her here."

CHAPTER XV.

ORDEAL AND EXECUTION.

As he spoke one of the strangest looking men I ever beheld, entered the chapel at the door through which Carmilla had made her entrance and her exit. He was tall, narrow-chested, stooping, with high shoulders, and dressed in black. His face was brown and dried in with deep furrows; he wore an oddly-shaped hat with a broad leaf. His hair, long and grizzled, hung on his shoulders. He wore a pair of gold spectacles, and walked slowly, with an odd shambling gait, with his face sometimes turned up to the sky, and sometimes bowed down toward the ground, seemed to wear a perpetual smile; his long thin arms were swinging, and his lank hands, in old black gloves ever so much too wide for them, waving and gesticulating in utter abstraction.

"The very man!" exclaimed the General, advancing with manifest delight. "My dear Baron, how happy I am to see you, I had no hope of meeting you so soon." He signed to my father, who had by this time returned, and leading the fantastic old gentleman, whom he called the Baron to meet him. He introduced him formally, and they at once entered into earnest conversation. The stranger took a roll of paper from his pocket, and spread it on the worn surface of a tomb that stood by. He had a pencil case in his fingers, with which he traced imaginary lines from point to point on the paper, which from their often glancing from it, together, at certain points of the building, I concluded to be a plan of the chapel. He accompanied, what I may term, his lecture, with occasional readings from a dirty little book, whose yellow leaves were closely written over.

They sauntered together down the side aisle, opposite to the spot where I was standing, conversing as they went; then they begun measuring distances by paces, and finally they all stood together, facing a piece of the side-wall, which they began to examine with great minuteness; pulling off the ivy that clung over it, and rapping the plaster with the ends of their sticks, scraping here, and knocking there. At length they ascertained the existence of a broad marble tablet, with letters carved in relief upon it.

With the assistance of the woodman, who soon returned, a monumental inscription, and carved escutcheon, were disclosed. They proved to be those of the long lost monument of Mircalla, Countess Karnstein.

The old General, though not I fear given to the praying mood, raised his hands and eyes to heaven, in mute thanksgiving for some moments.

"Tomorrow," I heard him say; "the commissioner will be here, and the Inquisition will be held according to law."

Then turning to the old man with the gold spectacles, whom I have described, he shook him warmly by both hands and said:

"Baron, how can I thank you? How can we all thank you? You will have delivered this region from a plague that has scourged its inhabitants for more than a century. The horrible enemy, thank God, is at last tracked."

My father led the stranger aside, and the General followed. I knew that he had led them out of hearing, that he might relate my case, and I saw them glance often quickly at me, as the discussion proceeded.

My father came to me, kissed me again and again, and leading me from the chapel, said:

"It is time to return, but before we go home, we must add to our party the good priest, who lives but a little way from this; and persuade him to accompany us to the schloss."

In this quest we were successful: and I was glad, being unspeakably fatigued when we reached home. But my satisfaction was changed to dismay, on discovering that there were no tidings of Carmilla. Of the scene that had occurred in the ruined chapel, no explanation was offered to me, and it was clear that it was a secret which my father for the present determined to keep from me.

The sinister absence of Carmilla made the remembrance of the scene more horrible to me. The arrangements for that night were singular. Two servants, and Madame were to sit up in my room that night; and the ecclesiastic with my father kept watch in the adjoining dressing-room.

The priest had performed certain solemn rites that night, the purport of which I did not understand any more than I comprehended the reason of this extraordinary precaution taken for my safety during sleep.

I saw all clearly a few days later.

The disappearance of Carmilla was followed by the discontinuance of my nightly sufferings.

You have heard, no doubt, of the appalling superstition that prevails in Upper and Lower Styria, in Moravia, Silisia, in Turkish Servia, in Poland, even in Russia; the superstition, so we must call it, of the Vampire.

If human testimony, taken with every care and solemnity, judicially, before commissions innumerable, each consisting of many members, all chosen for integrity and intelligence, and constituting reports more voluminous perhaps than exist upon any one other class of cases, is worth anything, it is difficult to deny, or even to doubt the existence of such a phenomenon as the Vampire.

For my part I have heard no theory by which to explain what I myself have witnessed and experienced, other than that supplied by the ancient and well-attested belief of the country.

The next day the formal proceedings took place in the Chapel of Karnstein. The grave of the Countess Mircalla was opened; and the General and my father recognised each his perfidious and beautiful guest, in the face now disclosed to view. The features, though a hundred and fifty years had passed since her funeral, were tinted with the warmth of life. Her eyes were open; no cadaverous smell exhaled from the coffin. The two medical men, one officially present, the other on the part of the promoter of the inquiry, attested the marvellous fact, that there was a faint but appreciable respiration, and a corresponding action of the heart. The limbs were perfectly flexible, the flesh elastic; and the leaden coffin floated with blood, in which to a depth of seven inches, the body lay immersed. Here then, were all the admitted signs and proofs of vampirism. The body, therefore, in accordance with the ancient practice, was raised, and a sharp stake driven through the heart of the vampire, who uttered a piercing shriek at the moment, in all respects such as might escape from a living person in the last agony. Then the head was struck off, and a torrent of blood flowed from the severed neck. The body and head were next placed on a pile of wood, and reduced to ashes, which were thrown upon the river and borne away, and that territory has never since been plagued by the visits of a vampire.

My father has a copy of the report of the Imperial Commission, with the signatures of all who were present at these proceedings, attached in verification of the statement. It is from this official paper that I have summarized my account of this last shocking scene.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

I write all this you suppose with composure. But far from it; I cannot think of it without agitation. Nothing but your earnest desire so repeatedly expressed, could have induced me to sit down to a task that has unstrung my nerves for months to come, and reinduced a shadow of the unspeakable horror which years after my deliverance continued to make my days and nights dreadful, and solitude insupportably terrific.

Let me add a word or two about that quaint Baron Vordenburg, to whose curious lore we were indebted for the discovery of the Countess Mircalla's grave.

He had taken up his abode in Gratz, where, living upon a mere pittance, which was all that remained to him of the once princely estates of his family, in Upper Styria, he devoted himself to the minute and laborious investigation of the marvellously authenticated tradition of Vampirism. He had at his fingers' ends all the great and little works upon the subject. "Magia Posthuma," "Phlegon de Mirabilibus," "Augustinus de curâ pro Mortuis," "Philosophicæ et Christiæ Cogitationes de Vampiris," by John Christofer Herenberg; and a thousand others, among which I remember only a few of those which he lent to my father. He had a voluminous digest of all the judicial cases, from which he had extracted a system of principles that appear to govern — some always, and others occasionally only — the condition of the vampire. I may mention, in passing, that the deadly pallor attributed to that sort of *revenants*, is a mere melodramatic fiction. They present, in the grave, and when they show themselves in human society, the appearance of healthy life. When disclosed to light in their coffins, the exhibit all the symptoms that are enumerated as those which proved the vampire-life of the long-dead Countess Karnstein.

How they escape from their graves and return to them for certain hours every day, without displacing the clay or leaving any trace of disturbance in the state of the coffin or the cerements, has always been admitted to be utterly inexplicable. The amphibious existence of the vampire is sustained by daily renewed slumber in the grave. Its horrible lust for living blood supplies the vigour of its waking existence. The vampire is prone to be fascinated with an engrossing vehemence, resembling the passion of love, by particular persons. In pursuit of these it will exercise inexhaustible patience and stratagem, for access to a particular object may be obstructed in a hundred ways. It will never desist until it has satiated its passion, and drained the very life of its coveted victim. But it will, in these cases, husband and protract its murderous enjoyment with the refinement of an epicure, and heighten it by the gradual approaches of an artful courtship. In these cases it seems to yearn for something like sympathy and consent. In ordinary ones it goes direct to its object, overpowers with violence, and strangles and exhausts often at a single feast.

The vampire is, apparently, subject, in certain situations, to special conditions. In the particular instance of which I have given you a relation, Mircalla seemed to be limited to a name which, if not her real one, should at least reproduce, without the omission or addition of a single letter, those, as we say, anagrammatically, which compose it. *Carmilla* did this; so did *Millarca*.

My father related to the Baron Vordenburg, who remained with us for two or three weeks after the expulsion of Carmilla, the story about the Moravian nobleman and the vampire at Karnstein churchyard, and then he asked the Baron how he had discovered the exact position of the long-concealed tomb of the Countess Millarca? The Baron's grotesque features puckered up into a mysterious smile; he looked down, still smiling on his worn spectacle-case and fumbled with it. Then looking up, he said:

"I have many journals, and other papers, written by that remarkable man; the most curious among them is one treating of the visit of which you speak, to Karnstein. The tradition, of course, discolours and distorts a little. He might have been termed a Moravian nobleman, for he had changed his abode to that territory, and was, beside, a noble. But he was, in truth, a native of Upper Styria. It is enough to say that in very early youth he had been a passionate and favoured lover of the beautiful Mircalla, Countess Karnstein. Her early death plunged him into inconsolable grief. It is the nature of vampires to increase and multiply, but according to an ascertained and ghostly law.

"Assume, at starting, a territory perfectly free from that pest. How does it begin, and how does it multiply itself? I will tell you. A person, more or less wicked, puts an end to himself. A suicide, under certain circumstances, becomes a vampire. That spectre visits living people in their slumbers; *they* die, and almost invariably, in the grave, develope into vampires. This happened in the case of the beautiful Mircalla, who was haunted by one of those demons. My ancestor, Vordenburg, whose title I still bear, soon discovered this, and in the course of the studies to which he devoted himself, learned a great deal more.

"Among other things, he concluded that suspicion of vampirism would probably fall, sooner or later, upon the dead Countess, who in life had been his idol. He conceived a horror, be she what she might, of her remains being profaned by the outrage of a posthumous execution. He has left a curious paper to prove that the vampire, on its expulsion from its amphibious existence, is projected into a far more horrible life; and he resolved to save his once beloved Mircalla from this.

"He adopted the stratagem of a journey here, a pretended removal of her remains, and a real obliteration of her monument. When age had stolen upon him, and from the vale of years he looked back on the scenes he was leaving, he considered, in a different spirit, what he had done, and a horror took possession of him. He made the tracings and notes which have guided me to the very spot, and drew up a confession of the deception that he had practised. If he had intended any further action in this matter, death prevented him; and the hand of a remote descendant has, too late for many, directed the pursuit to the lair of the beast."

We talked a little more, and among other things he said was this:

"One sign of the vampire is the power of the hand. The slender hand of Mircalla closed like a vice of steel on the General's wrist when he raised the hatchet to strike. But its power is not confined to its grasp; it leaves a numbness in the limb it seizes, which is slowly, if ever, recovered from."

The following Spring my father took me on a tour through Italy. We remained away for more than a year. It was long before the terror of recent events subsided; and to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations — sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawingroom door.

THE END

SPALATRO

In 1980, Le Fanu scholar W. J. McCormack recognised authoritatively Le Fanu's authorship of the Gothic novella, 'Spalatro From the Notes of Fra Giacomo', which was first published anonymously in the *Dublin University Magazine* in March and April 1843. The novella is an account of the bandit anti-hero Spalatro's bloody exploits, written from the point of view of a confessor in whom the eponymous bandit has confided. In typical Le Fanu fashion, the story is heavily indebted to Ann Radcliffe's late-eighteenth-century Gothic romances. Indeed, Radcliffe's own *The Italian* (1897) features a villain named Spalatro. The dreamlike scenes of macabre revelry are also strongly reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe, another figure whose influence is apparent throughout Le Fanu's writings. The main interest of the tale might perhaps be said to derive from an enigmatic female blood-drinker whom Spalatro encounters in the second part of the tale – a forerunner of Le Fanu's most famous creation, the vampiric Carmilla. This was also the longest piece of fiction that Le Fanu had written up to that point.

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SPALATRO

PART ONE

The Spalatro, surnamed Barbone, of whom we speak, was not the illustrious bandit of Napoleon’s early time, who assumed, or acquired, that name, but the celebrated original, who first bore it two centuries since. This man was nobly born, lost his parents early, squandered his fortune, and then “took to the road” professionally. He speedily became one of the most powerful, if not *the* most powerful, of Italian robbers of any age. His followers were so numerous, so well armed, and so hardy, that none of the states cared unnecessarily to meddle with him, but contented themselves with acting to the best of their ability upon the defensive; it is even said that *Venice* allowed this desperado a secret stipend upon the condition that her territories should be exempted from his depredations; however this may be, it is certain that he made himself so universally dreaded, that but for his singular rashness, he might have lived in as much security, and died in as much splendour, as ever did an absolute prince. He was, however, foolish enough to visit the city of St. Mark during the carnival, and happening to quarrel with a party of young fellows, he killed three of them, but being overpowered by numbers, was taken, and after a protracted examination before the state inquisition, was executed between the pillars in the piazetta, beside the Doge’s palace.

In the hall of the grand council, in the ducal palace, whither, upon the suppression of the republic, the famous library of St. Mark was transferred, the reader, should he happen to visit it, will find at the right of the great entrance, a series of huge tomes, in which are bound up a heterogenous mass of manuscripts of all kinds — poems, chronicles, and church music. Among them he will discover a voluminous collection, in the handwriting of one who calls himself “Fra Giacomo, the humblest of the servants of God, and of the republic, and messenger of peace to the victims of justice.” He appears for many years to have acted as confessor to the state prisoners of Venice, and jotted down, in his own hand, abundant notes of the secrets of which he thus became possessed.

On this day, writes brother Giacomo, I visited, for the fourth time, the renowned and unhappy Spalatro. He is the boldest criminal I ever spoke with; there is not in him the fear of death or the fear of God. He will neither pray, nor confess, nor have any of the rites of the church. Yesterday as I talked with him in the prison, he fell suddenly upon the floor in a fit of epilepsy, to which it seems he has been long subject. When he was somewhat recovered I began to argue with him on his hardened state of wickedness, and asked him if he never thought how he should fare in the other world, were death to come in one of these fearful seizures; to which he answered readily and coolly, that he knew well how he should fare, and had no need to inquire; thereupon I talked to him long and seriously, and he listened and answered with more respect than heretofore: he told me that he believed in the existence of God, and in that of the devil, but that he thought little about the Christian religion, having no interest in it. He went on with much excitement, and among other strange things he said— "Were I to tell you why I believe in the great spirits I have named, you would think me mad. I have seen things, these eyes have seen them, which my lips shall never tell. Were I to speak them, you and all other men would laugh at me, and you would pronounce the Truth, because it is unlike what you are in the habit of seeing every day, an impossibility and a lie; but of this be assured, that I know better than any other man can what is in store for me; as for your prayers, and relics, and solemnities, I hold them in mere contempt. You can alter no man's condition. You and your fraternity of monks could more easily dislodge the island upon whose breast this prison sits, than sway in the least degree the immutable destiny of a human soul, or bring its future dwelling one inch nearer to heaven, or farther from hell — tush! I know more of these matters than half your divines."

When I visited him to-day, this most unfortunate and sinful man was in extraordinary spirits, and full of jests and levity. I was so disgusted with this, that I was about to leave the cell, when he requested me to stay, at the same time apologising for his thoughtlessness, and assuring me he meant no offence. When he chooses he can be very courteous and even engaging. I staid with him for a long time, and he has told me the story of his life. Gracious God! such a story. I feel like one just awakened from a fearful dream. I cannot believe, and yet I know not how to reject it. The tale was told with groans, and tears, and tremblings, and agonies of excitement. My mind is full of doubts and fears. I have no more certainty, no more *knowledge*, mystery and illusion are above, and below, and around me. May God sustain me else my mind will be lost, irrevocably lost in the abyss of horror. The narrative was as follows, I give his own words as nearly as I can: —

"My mother was a lady of high birth, and of some fortune; she married, when a mere girl, a French nobleman, Count d'Orbois. This marriage was in every way unfortunate. The count was attached to the French court, whither he took his lady, and having been thus separated from her friends, she was speedily made to feel the dependence of her condition in the bitter sense of conjugal indifference and desertion. Under these ill auspices, which my after life in no part belied, I entered the world, and forty-eight hours after my birth my father, who had never set eyes upon me, having gambled all night with ill success, fought two duels in the morning, in the second of which he was so unfortunate as to be run twice through the body, and killed on the spot. My mother returned to Rome with some small wreck of property, and after two years of widowhood, being a person of singular beauty, agreeable and lively manners, and of unexceptionable birth, she was proposed for by the Marchese Picardi, and accepted him. My earliest recollections are associated with the noble scenery of the Apennines, to the eastward of Rome, and not far from Celano. There in the grand old castle, which has for ages belonged to the Picardi family, I passed the early and the only happy years of my existence. Here, however, I lost my best and tenderest friend, the only one who ever cared very much about me — my mother. She died when I was about six years of age, having had, by her second marriage two children — a son and a daughter. My step-father, for he soon made it plain that he was resolved to be no more to me, was a man of a naturally cold and somewhat stern temper. He did not love me, and his preference of the others, however natural, galled and wounded me. I resolved, so soon as I should have the right to demand the small sum of money which was my only inheritance, to claim it, and depart for ever from the castle. The feelings of pride and mortification in which this resolution had taken its rise, were far, however, from being always present to my mind. I loved my sister and my brother too — selfish though he was I loved him. I do believe, good father, that I might have been a worthy man, as men go, were it not for a certain pride, which rose into madness even under the show of wrong or oppression, and a kind of ardour and impetuosity which left no room for rest or caution. Although, as I have said, the Marquis Picardi refused me any place in his affections, he did not suffer me to want such an education as became a gentleman. Nor were my instructions confined to the mere corporal accomplishments of fencing, horsemanship, and the like; on the contrary, the larger portion of my time was devoted to intense and ardent study. My instructor in all intellectual pursuits was an old monk, from the neighbouring monastery of Carmelites; and as some strange adventures in my after life were connected with this man, you will excuse me if I describe him briefly. He was a man of great age, his features were commanding and classic, his forehead was bold and intellectual, and furrowed with lines of deep thought; the baldness of age had supplanted the tonsure, a few locks of snow-white hair, venerably covered his temples, and a long and singularly handsome beard of the same pure white, fell upon his bosom. His figure was rather tall, though slight, and might once have been athletic, but how it was bowed under the weight of years. Clothed in the brown habit of his order, it were hard to conceive a more picturesque impersonation of reverend age. One relic of departed youth alone remained to this venerable man, it was the fiery vivacity of an eye, which seemed as though it had never rested or grown dim — an eye under whose glance the buried secrets of the heart arose and showed themselves, which nothing could baffle or escape. This man, brother Anthony, as they called him in the monastery, was, as I have said, my instructor, and a more learned or subtle, but at the same time a more *unchristian* one could scarcely have been found. He had in me an ardent and, I believe, by no means an unapt pupil; but in dealing his instructions he had a strange delight in setting my mind to work upon subjects which I verily believe no human mind could bear. The fearful themes of time and eternity, and the Godhead in its vastest attributes, were topics in which he loved to engage the faculties of my mind; and I, entangled in the mazy subtleties of his reasoning, or overwhelmed by the magnitude of conceptions after which my mind strained, but which it had not scope or power to comprehend, felt myself often confounded and appalled to a degree which merged upon madness, in such moments the old monk would forget his gravity, and, leaning back in his chair, indulge in an excess of merriment, which little tended to compose my nerves; and strange to say, though I again and again resolved against conversing upon such matters, yet the old man, whenever he pleased, which was often enough, led me to them, as if to make sport for himself out of the perplexities and terrors in which such discourse never failed to involve me. He had, too, a strange pleasure in unsettling all the most established convictions of my mind, and in thus plunging me into an abyss of fearful uncertainty and scepticism from which I have never quite escaped. This kind of metaphysical conversation he not unfrequently seasoned with indirect and artful ridicule of religion, urging, too, in terms which scarcely affected disguise, a philosophy of sensuality unparalleled even in the doctrines of Epicurus. He had, however, in a remarkable degree, the Satanic art of clothing vice in the fairest disguise; and being himself so old as to have no individual interest, further than the inculcation of abstract truth, in the doctrines which he broached, they found the easier access to my mind. It is scarcely wonderful then, if in the hands of such a teacher, so far from acquiring any higher morality, even my natural sense of right and wrong became confused and blunted. This old man, corrupt in heart and powerful in understanding, acquired a strong control over me. I had no affection for him — such a feeling toward him were impossible; cold and full of satire, his nature exhibited to the eye of youth no one quality which was not essentially repulsive; he had yet such intellectual attributes as to fascinate and command. There was, too, between the situation and the character of the man, a strange and mysterious inconsistency, which filled me with a deep and indefinable interest. Than his station, garb, and habits of life, nothing could be more humble; than his appearance, nothing more worn and aged — yet there were ever breaking from him, not the aspirations of ambition, but the reckless scoffings of conscious and established superiority, and while all his feelings seemed to have withered into the scorched and bitter selfishness of age, his mental faculties were endued with preterhuman energy, and an activity nothing short of stupendous –

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“I was ascending the great stairs of the castle, when methought I heard a shriek. I paused, I listened, I *did* hear a shriek, and another, and another, in quick succession. It was my sister’s voice; I hurried towards her room. Several passages I had to traverse on the way; the screams were louder and more rapid, I reached the door, it was fast; I rushed against it and stood in the chamber. Heavens! what did I behold-my sister with hair dishevelled, struggling, terrified, locked in the grasp of the aged wretch, my instructor.

"You see this arm, good father, it was then as lusty and as sinewy as now; with all the force that frenzy gave, I struck the old villain in the face. I might as well have smitten a rock — he turned upon me like a beast at bay. I heard steps in the passage — servants were approaching, but before they entered the chamber the old man grappled with me, and seizing me by the throat, to my shame be it spoken, hurled me with tremendous force senseless upon the floor. When I came to myself the old friar had made his escape, and neither at the castle nor the monastery was heard of more. After this affair I remained at the castle but a year, at the end of which I was enabled to realize my old scheme of departure and independence.

"Mounted upon a powerful grey horse, whose speed and mettle I had often tried — fully equipped and armed for the road, and with some hundred crowns in my pocket — the remainder of my fortune, a small one enough, being lodged to my credit at Rome — I set forth from the old place which had been my home from my earliest days, to throw myself upon the chances of the world. It was not in nature that I should leave this place without keen regrets. Here all my life had been passed, and here were the only living persons who cared for or knew of my existence. As I rode slowly through the wild wood, which far away skirted the rising ground on which the castle stood, I turned to take a last look of the old building. The temper of our minds clothes even things inanimate with all accordant expression; and as I gazed upon its old grey front, it seemed to me that a familiar face looked sadly and reproachfully upon me. Every window and ivy-mantled battlement and buttress — all the picturesque irregularities — each nook and corner of the fine old pile, suggested to my busy memory some affectionate and pleasant remembrance, which moved my heart that we should thus part, and for a moment so softened me, that I was tempted to reject the long-cherished counsels of my pride, and return to the quiet haunts where I had been so happy. But my evil genius triumphed: the struggle was a short one, and I turned my back for ever on the castle, with a heart whose despondency, I might say desolation, gave too trite presage of my after life. I put my horse to a rapid pace, and had soon left the scenes of my childhood far behind, and out of sight for ever.

“The evening fell before I had accomplished more than half the way which separated the castle from the village in whose *hostelrie* I proposed to pass the night. The road was broken and difficult of passage — in all respects, except as it served to indicate the direction of my route, rather an obstruction to my progress than tendency to facilitate it. The scenery through which I passed, grand and beautiful at all times, began now to assume that wild and fantastic character which the broad and spectral lights and shadows of a cloudless moon shed on all beneath it. The track which I had for some time followed with much difficulty, now led through a deep and rugged gorge, whose sides, precipitous and broken, were clothed with a dark luxuriant copse. For more than an hour I had neither seen human form nor habitation; but now, for the first time, I felt the depression of solitude. The utter desertion and silence of the place, unbroken except by the moaning of the night wind, filled my mind with that vague, mysterious dread which men attribute to superstition. My heart leaped within me as some broad gray rook, like a sheeted phantom in the hoar light of the moon, suddenly revealed itself; or again, when my excited fancy beheld, in the dark top of some tall fir nodding in the night breeze, a gigantic demon saluting me with “mop and moe,” or beckoning me towards it with long fantastic arms. Full of such fancies, which scare us even when we laugh at them, I slowly and painfully pursued my solitary way, frequently scrambling through sloughs and fragments of timber, which storms had dislodged from among the overhanging rocks — often, too, obliged to dismount and lead my horse among chasms and difficulties where his instinct would scarcely have availed him. The labours and anxieties of my progress, were moreover enhanced by very considerable doubts as to the correctness of the path which I was pursuing — doubts which the difficulty, I might almost say the impracticability of the road, very nearly reduced to certainty. While thus struggling onward, my eye was caught by what appeared to be the figure of a horseman, moving cautiously round an abrupt and shadowy prominence, some four or five hundred yards in advance of me. As this figure slowly approached, I had ample opportunity of scanning his garb and equipments. He was mounted upon a tall, dark-coloured horse, and enveloped in a cloak. He wore, moreover, a broad-rimmed and high-crowned hat. Thus much I could plainly distinguish, as the form of the horseman moved between me and the moonlight. As the distance between us lessened, I cautiously laid my hand upon the butt or one of my holster pistols, resolved, if occasion should render it prudent, to deal very briefly with the cavalier in the cloak. When he had approached within about forty yards, or even less, he, perceiving me, it would appear, for the first time, suddenly reined in, and stood in the centre of my path, in strong and marked relief against the clear light of the moon, motionless and dark, as if horse and man were carved out of black marble. Although I never could accuse myself of much timidity in presence of a human antagonist, my situation was not by any means pleasant. That I stood in the presence and within almost certain range of one of those bandits, of whose quick and deadly aim many a marvellous tale was current, I had little doubt and yet my suspicions were not sufficiently confirmed to warrant me in anticipating his assault by any *overt* act of self-defence. It was clear that, if shots were to be exchanged, he must have the advantage of the first. With a keen and fixed gaze, therefore, I watched every movement of his, prepared, on the appearance of any gesture indicating an appeal to carbine or pistol, instantly to shoot him, if I could. The figure, however, made no such gesture, but, after a considerable pause, addressed me in a rough, goodhumoured voice —

"'Signor, you travel late, and on a foul track. Santa Maria! you need a stout heart. Whitherward do you ride?'

"'To Vallechia, signor,' replied I. 'How far do you call it hence?'

"'To Vallechia!' repeated he of the cloak, after a most unceremonious burst of merriment: '*from* Vallechia, I should say. Why, your back hath been turned upon the high road thither for ten miles at the least.'

"'Holy devil!' muttered I, 'here is a pleasant adventure! I even suspected as much.'

"'Nevertheless,' continued the horseman, 'as you *have* left your track, you may as well leave it a little farther. You will find shelter and food, though both somewhat of the coarsest, about a league farther on, in the village; but if you turn back, it is most like you will have to put up with a supperless nap by the road side. Your nag must be well nigh on his last legs. What a devil of a blunder!'

"'A devil of a blunder, indeed,' echoed I. 'I see no better course than that you recommend. About a league ahead you say the village lies?'

“With these words I put my horse again to a walk, intending, before I reached my acquaintance — whom, in spite of his frank air and honest voice, I did not quite like — to stop under pretence of setting my saddle-girths to rights; in reality, in order to let him pass me without the necessity of turning my back upon him.

“‘By Saint Anthony, Signor,’ exclaimed he, as I slowly approached him, ‘your horse has gone lame. This is worse again: see, he stumbles. By Bacchus, you must lead him and walk.’

“It was indeed too true. Some strain or damage received in scrambling through the broken inequalities and obstructions of the road had indeed rendered him perfectly lame.

“‘Holy apostle!’ cried my sympathetic acquaintance, ‘ this is the very extremity of ill luck. Yes, you have, indeed, but one course before you now, and well if you can achieve it. You must on to the village. Old Beppo can afford you shelter for the night, as well as a fair bottle of wine, and in the morning, if not before, he will set your beast to rights. An honest companion is old Giuseppe, and a first-rate farrier to boot. Three miles hence you will find the old inn by the road side. But here again — here is another rub. *You* must follow the road we are upon, seeing you know no other; and thus, at once, we have the distance doubled; — whereas, if you could but make out your way by the bridle track — Stay, it must want nearly two good hours of midnight. I have more than half a mind to turn about and set you on the path. I’m time enough — time enough, sir, for my errand — a funeral; but I am too early by an hour or more. I can walk my horse ten miles in little more than three hours, and there I am before two o’clock. So never make words about it; I am your man: follow me. I’ll lead you as far as the two chestnut trees, and thence I can point out the path to you — so that, unless misfortune is resolved to make a meal of you, you can’t well meet another mishap for this night.’

“So saying, my new friend put his horse into a slow walk in the direction in which I was about to move. ‘Of a truth,’ thought I, ‘a most accommodating gentleman! — somewhat suspicious, though; and yet why should he seem less trustworthy in my eyes than I in his? He may be, after all, a very honest, inoffensive sort of person. At all events, come what will, I cannot part company unless *he*choose it; after all, we stand but man to man — and the devil is in the dice if I cannot make good my own in a fair field.’ With these encouraging reflections, I followed my companion along the unequal road, under the broad shadowy boughs of the wild wood, which covered the sides of the glen. The path, after many windings, opened upon a wide level, surrounded by low hills, and covered unequally by patches of forest. As we pursued our way, my comrade chatted gaily, now and then interrupting his discourse with some fragment of an ancient ditty, and altogether with so frank and joyous an air, that my suspicions gradually disappeared, and instead of keeping cautiously in the rear, I took my place by his side. A handsome face, carrying an expression at once bold and honest, and lit up, as it seemed habitually, with a reckless, jolly good humour, further won upon my good opinion. I laughed and talked freely with him, and it was with real regret that at length I reached the spot where he was to leave me to explore the rest of my way alone.

“‘Here we are, Signor,’ said he, reining in his steed— ‘here we are at the two chestnuts, and here we part Now mark my directions, for a mistake may cost you your supper. You see that gray rock on which the moon is shining. It stands just beside three or four old trees. Pass by that and turn to your right behind that dark screen of wood; ride through the open glade for about half a mile, and when you reach the open ground, ride right ahead, and a few hundred yards will see you upon the road again then take the left hand, and ten minutes will bring you to the inn, the first building you meet, a large house with some old fruit trees about it — and so signor, good night.’

“With these words my companion turned his horse’s head away, and at a slow trot began to retrace his steps. I watched him until his receding figure disappeared in the mists of night; and then, with a light heart, began to follow the course which he had indicated.

“By a close attention to the directions which I had received, I reached the road, and was proceeding leisurely upon it toward the object of my immediate search, when my ear was struck by the sound of a voice chanting a song, but so far away that I could distinguish nothing more than that the tones were those of a man. As I rode on, however, the sounds became more and more distinct, and at length I clearly descried the object from whence they issued. A little man was seated by the road side, upon a block of stone, or some other temporary resting-place, and, with folded arms and his legs extended before him, was chanting lustily, and with no very harmonious cadences, some rude amatory verses. Upon seeing me he forthwith suspended his vocal exercises, stood erect, walked two or three paces away from the road — stopped, turned round, and altogether appeared very much discomposed by the interruption which evidently unexpected arrival had caused. Having exchanged a courteous salutation, I had passed on some short distance, when the little man overtook me.

"' Signor,' said he, doffing his cap with a lowly reverence, as soon as he had reached my horse's head, 'will you pardon a great liberty?'

"'Readily, I dare say,' replied I. 'Speak freely — can I serve you?'

"'Most essentially, your excellency,' replied he. ' I am a poor man, a trader in small wares: they are here in my pack — the whole set are not worth a ducat; and I have not sold to the value of a baiocco. I am, indeed, sir, miserably poor — oh, miserably poor!'

"'Do you want an alms?' inquired I.

"'No Signor,' he replied; 'no, I do not want alms, though I do not know how soon I may,' he added hastily. 'Heaven knows I am wretchedly poor!'

"'What, then, would you have of me, in the name of patience?' cried I. ' Speak out, man.'

"'Merely, sir,' replied he, with an effort— 'merely your company. I presume your course lies through some neighbouring town, where I might get my supper and rest. An onion and a piece of bread supplies the one, and an armful of straw the other. We poor men must live as we may.'

"'You have rightly guessed,' replied I. 'I am on the way to a place of refreshment; and unless the guide with whom I have just parted has deceived me, we are now even within a mile of it. So walk with me, and welcome.'

"The poor man was profuse in his acknowledgments; and so, toward the village we went, side by side. As we proceeded, I could perceive pretty plainly that my Companion was by no means well at ease. Many and fearful glances he stole around, and not unfrequently I detected him in the act of glancing stealthily and suspiciously at myself. Whatever misgivings, however, he may have had respecting me, they were soon laid at rest, and he began to converse with me with less reserve, and in a tone bordering upon the confidential.

"'Signor,' said he, 'I am rather a timid traveller, especially in the neighbourhood of these hills. The fact is, sir,' continued he, lowering his voice to a whisper, 'I was once robbed among them, about twenty years ago; stripped to my skin, and nothing left me but a pair of old trousers and, after all, I had a run of two miles or more to get out of the villains' hands. I should have died of fatigue and exhaustion but for the charity of some good monks — the saints reward them!'

"The caution of the worthy pedlar was, then, to say the least of it, perfectly justifiable; yet I own that I frequently gratified my taste for the comical during the course of our brief journey, by practising upon the ever-wakeful fears of my companion — ample opportunity for which was afforded in the dim uncertain outline of the rocks and underwood with which the ground was unequally covered, and which, in many places, offered a rude resemblance to the outline of human figures grouped together. Thus chatting, we had ridden on for some time, when to my infinite satisfaction, and no less so to that of my companion, we came in sight of the object of our march.

"The road, at the point at which we had arrived, made a sudden sweep down an abrupt descent, which terminated in the bottom of a glen, intersected in its middle by a winding river, whose foam and eddies glittered like silver in the moonlight. Over this river the road was conducted by an old ivy-mantled bridge, at the far end of which stood the ruins of an ancient town. Some fine old trees cast their broad leaves over the road, and sheltered, in picturesque groups, a quaint and extensive building, which stood upon the near side of the river, having something of the mixed character of a house and a castle — in many parts very much decayed and dilapidated, and in some even ruinous. The deep-mouthed baying of a watchdog now arose from the solitary yard of the old place, enhancing, if any thing were required to do so, by its angry howlings, the desolate and melancholy character of the scene. This old building, then, was the inn to which my recent guide had directed me, and a comfortless one, judging by external appearances, it was likely to prove. Arrived at the door, we gave summary notice of our advent by repeated knockings administered with hearty good will, and accompanied by the most vociferous clamours upon honest Beppo. But although these noises, by no means inconsiderable, were improved into a most energizing din by the furious yellings of the watchdog, we had long to wait before our summons produced any other effect than that of wearying ourselves. At length a window at some height in the building was opened, and a shrill cracked voice inquired, in no very courteous tones, what we wanted. After some parley, a window was closed again, and in a short time an old grey-headed little man, half habited, opened the door, and after a curious scrutiny, assisted by the light of a small lamp which he held in his hand, admitted myself and my companion into a kind of hall, whose shattered wainscotting and ruined appearance promise no very cheering reception. Before entering, I transferred my pistols from the holster pipes to my coat pocket, and throwing the reins upon my horse's neck, trusted to his exhausted condition to keep him from wandering far. At the same time I directed the old man, who was indeed Beppo himself, to have the beast cared for. This done, I followed mine host through several passages and chambers, at the end of which I found myself in a huge oldfashioned kitchen, on whose hearth blazed and crackled a cheerful fire of wood. Stretched upon the stone floor before it lay two boys, fast asleep, and by its side, in a chair, sat a girl, also soundly slumbering. At the harsh and well-known accents of old Beppo, the three sleepers started to their feet, and after some grumblings on their part, and not a few oaths and imprecations on his, they began to apply themselves in right earnest to make us comfortable.

"Speedily were we, myself and my humble companion, who at my invitation shared the repast, supplied with a cold pasty and a steaming omelet, and with right good will did we apply ourselves to these right savoury viands, seasoned, too, as I had been led to expect, with a bottle of excellent wine. When I had somewhat appeased the rage of hunger and thirst, I began leisurely to scan the apartment and its inmates. In the former I observed nothing worthy of remark, but to my no small surprise, among the latter I recognised, in the girl whom I had seen sleeping by the hearth on my entrance, a kitchen-wench, who having served in the Picardi castle for several years, had suddenly one night disappeared, without leaving any trace to suggest whitherward she had gone, or what had become of her. On seeing and recognising this poor creature thus unexpectedly, I was about to utter an exclamation of surprise when she checked me by a gesture of alarm and impatience, accompanied by a glance of peculiar significance towards the old innkeeper, who was now standing before the fire, with his back towards us. In compliance with the mute direction of the girl, I thereupon remained silent, having, by a repeated and more accurate inspection, satisfied myself of the identity of the person. There was something in the expression of face with which the girl had glanced at the old man, brief though that glance had been, which left upon my mind an indefinable and unpleasant impression; nor was this ambiguity of feeling towards my host at all favourably determined by the peculiarities of his outward man. He was, as I have said, a small man, his body, disproportioned to his limbs, was long, and curved, like that of a wasp; his shoulders were unusually narrow, and this defect was rendered more conspicuously striking by the enormous magnitude of his disproportioned head; his hair was grizzled and long, his eyebrows bushy, his eyes restless, and in expression very sinister, his nose flat and drooping, his mouth large and furnished with a perfect row of jagged fangs. A considerable projection of the under jaw, added to a face which expressed, in no ordinary degree, cunning and deceit, a character of sternness which, in moments of the smallest excitement, amounted almost to ferocity. Such features and such a cast of countenance were, in themselves, a cautionary notice; and though clothed in all the graces and smiles of what, from the moment that my dress, which was of rich material, caught the light, had become a studiously courteous welcome, could not banish or disguise what, in my mind, appeared the ineffaceable stamp of guilt. I know not how it was, however, though thus clearly appreciating the villainous character stamped upon the face of this man, no shadow of suspicion or thought of danger associated with him for a moment crossed my mind; on the contrary, I felt in unusual spirits, and altogether free from reserve. I laughed, I joked, I sang songs; I compelled the poor little pedlar to do the same, and whether it was that the snug fire and cosy kitchen had kindled the spirit of the vagrant merchant, or, as I more than half suspect, that the wine of which he had partaken contained some strange ingredient, certain it is that he met my gaiety with more than corresponding hilarity and confidence; he sang his best songs, and told a hundred stories of strange adventures, in which he himself had played the part of hero; he even went so far as to boast of his bargains, and dropped plentiful hints to the effect that he was by no means so poor a man as he might seem, and, in short, was to the full as indiscreet as I, if not more so.

"Suddenly, however, and almost in the midst of his boisterous jollity, the honest pedlar leaned back in his chair, and was almost instantly fast asleep. The innkeeper shrugged his misshapen shoulders, smiled, and shook his head, observing, at the same time, 'Poor devil! how tired he is — pity such a light heart should have so hard a trade. Would you, signor, desire to see your chamber!'

"I assented.

"' Martha,' continued he, turning to the girl, and pointing to the slumbering pedlar, 'let this honest man have such a resting-place as you can make out for him at so short notice. You may as well make it here — not in that corner, devil!' he suddenly exclaimed, fixing on the girl a tremendous look— 'not in that corner, you limb of hell!' and then, after a pause, he added, 'place it here, in the neighbourhood of the fire, snug and warm; the poor man must be made comfortable. These sluttish servants,' continued he, probably in the way of apology for his unaccountable burst of fury, 'are enough to make Job himself blaspheme.'

"So saying, and muttering all the way to himself, he led me through several passages to the foot of a clumsy and antique staircase of oak; this we ascended, and traversing the creaking and half rotten flooring of several rooms, whose bare and mildewed walls afforded but a dreary augury of what I was to expect, my host threw open a large door, with massive and dingy pillars of carved wood at either side, and with a low reverence informed me that this was my chamber. I entered, and found a spacious apartment hung with dusty and tattered tapestry, whose desolate appearance was much enhanced by the absence of all furniture, excepting a bed without curtains, whose four tall posts stood at their respective corners naked and comfortless as the shorn masts of a wreck; two or three old chairs and one small table completed the garniture of the room. Opposite to the foot of the bed, and at the same side with the door through which we had entered, was the hearth, exhibiting a huge and shadowy chasm, which might have stabled, at least, two horses comfortably. The cheerless aspect of this place, with all its dust, cobwebs, and nakedness about it, speedily subdued the frolicsome spirit which had kindled so madly within me in the snug old kitchen, by the roaring fire of crackling faggots. There was something hungry and treacherous in the dark and comfortless chamber, which accorded well with the sinister and forbidding aspect of my host — something which indistinctly boded danger, and whispered to the startled ear beware! My host placed the candle upon the table, and, with another profound reverence and a courteous benediction, took his departure.

“I was now alone. It is wonderful how intensely the outward securing of things, the mere forms and colour of what surrounds us, will move the temper of the mind. Had my host conducted me to a snug modern-looking chamber of moderate dimensions, with due allowance of tables, chairs, wardrobes, and curtains, and containing, above all, a cheery fire in the grate, I should probably have enjoyed the same cheerful good humour, sleeping or waking, throughout the night; but as it was, in so vast and im an old chamber, through whose damp vacancy a solitary candle shed a partial and uncertain light, if possible more depressing than darkness itself, far, as it seemed, from the inhabited part of the mansion, and separated by a long succession of passages, and chambers, and staircases, which I should have been puzzled to retrace, from all the human inhabitants of the house, I felt, I knew not how, a certain suspicion and uneasiness creep over me, which I could neither account for nor control; Without undressing, I threw myself upon the bed, leaving the candle burning upon the table beside me. I soon fell into an uneasy slumber, from which, however, I speedily started with that vague sensation of horror which sometimes overcomes the slumbering mind. I gazed fearfully round the room; it was empty as before. I sate up in the bed, and raised the candle above my head, so that its light might fall more distinctly on every object; but no, there was nothing to awaken my suspicions; all was silent, and just as I had left it. I lay down again, but could not sleep. I felt restless, anxious, and almost awestruck. A kind of vague, superstitious excitement came upon me; I could not rest; I could not remain still; I got up, and, taking the candle in my hand, resolved to satisfy myself that nothing was lurking in the obscure corners of the room. I seized my naked sword in one hand, and the candle in the other, and proceeded to search every nook and cranny of the chamber. I even went so far as to examine the huge chimney: in its dark chasm the faint light of the candle was lost at once, and I remember well thrusting, as high as my arm could reach with my raper, but without any result except that two or three bats whirred down, and flitted around me in wide, uneven circles. Few who have ever indulged the kind of uneasiness which at that moment actuated me, can be ignorant that when once yielded to, it asserts the most capricious and unreasonable dominion over its victim, leading him, in his fantastic search, to places which, so far from affording verge enough to a human being, could scarcely accommodate a reasonably-proportioned guinea-pig. In the course of my exploratory rambles, I clambered upon the table to examine the windowsills, which were placed high in the wall, and deeply sunk, lest some assassin should lie coiled in their recesses; and although, as you may have easily anticipated, I found nothing of the kind, yet my scrutiny was rewarded by a discovery which did not tend to quiet my uneasiness. This was no other than a complete set of thick, and by no means antique iron stauncheons, strong and firmly sunk into the stone window-frame above and below. Each window exhibited the same sinister and gaol-like security. I confess I thought this precaution somewhat strange, nor were my suspicions diminished by observing that these bars were unlike all the other garniture of the room, sound and in good repair, in some places exhibiting, apparently with the freshness of yesterday, traces of the skill of the plumber and the smith. I turned now to the door, and opening it, looked out open the dark passage. There was nothing there but the chill night air, which floated cheerlessly into the chamber, causing my candle to flare and flicker like a torch. I closed it again, and having examined the priming of my pistols, and laid them along with my sword close beside me, I threw myself once more upon the bed. I scorned to admit even to myself that I feared any thing. I had an unbounded reliance upon my own activity and strength, and a sanguine confidence in my fortune. With my good weapons beside me I set all odds at naught, and though ever and anon something within me whispered— 'Leave this room and get thee down — the Philistines be upon thee — bestir thyself, lest they take thee sleeping' — yet such thoughts crossed my mind but fleetingly, and were despised.

"As I lay thus listlessly, the sweet slumbers of fatigue stole over me; the chamber in which I lay gradually became confused and indistinct; my fatigues and anxieties were alike forgotten in deep and calm unconsciousness.

"From this state of happy oblivion I was aroused by the pressure of a hand upon my shoulder, and the administration of two or three impatient jolts thoroughly awakened me. I started upright in the bed, and mechanically stretched my hand towards the pistols which lay beside me. The precaution was unnecessary; my visitor was a female — the poor girl whose person I had recognised in the kitchen before. The candle had hardly wasted since I had closed my eyes; I could not have slept a quarter of an hour. I gazed fixedly upon the features of the servant girl; they were tense and pale as those of death: there was such mortal agitation in the face as filled my mind with awe. With an impressive and imploring gesture, several times repeated, she enjoined silence, and then leaning forward, she whispered with slow and startling emphasis —

"'Within a few minutes, *murderers* will come to your bedside: I wish you to escape. Draw the tapestry at this side of your bed; you will find a door behind it; a long passage leads from it to a flight of stairs, and they to the kitchen. Wait at the head of the stairs with your drawn sword in your hand, and when you hear me say, God send us all better days, it shall be a signal to you that one of them is about to enter from the kitchen the passage where you stand; drive the sword through him, and run into the kitchen, where you will find another, perhaps two; I shall take care that no more are there. Be firm, and pray to God.'

"With these words she glided speedily from the room, leaving me horror-struck at the sudden and ghastly intimation. With silent rapidity I rose from the bed — my preparations were speedily made. I stuck my pistols in my belt, and taking my naked sword under my arm, I soon found the door which my protectress had described. I extinguished the candle, and, entering the passage, closed the door behind me.

"This passage was extremely narrow and low; the floor and ceiling were of stone; and, as I imagined, its whole width lay in the thickness of the wall. Along this strange corridor I cautiously pushed my way; and, after a progress which appeared all but interminable, I reached the first of a flight of steep stone steps, leading downwards, and here I paused. I had hardly ceased to move when I became conscious that every sound, even that of the lightest foot-tread upon the kitchen floor, was distinctly audible where I stood. I heard the shuffling of many feet to and fro, accompanied by a great deal of whispering. These sounds continuing for a long time, without being followed by any decisive result, my nerves were gradually wrought by the suspense in which I stood to such a pitch of excitement, that I could not remain still. I descended the stairs with the utmost caution. When I had reached the foot, I found a space which afforded little more than standing room. Straight before me, and within a few inches of my face, was the door which opened upon the kitchen. This was a double door, constructed, as I afterwards found, so as to resemble from without a sort of cupboard. A broad chink in the centre, where the two valves met, admitted a bright stream of light; and placing my eye at the aperture, I witnessed, unobserved, a scene which no occurrence of my afterlife has availed to obliterate.

"At the side of the chamber opposite to that at which I was placed, stood the bed in which lay the poor pedlar: his deep stertorous breathing sufficiently attested the soundness of the slumber in which lie was locked. A blazing faggot flamed and flickered on the hearth, throwing an intense but uncertain light over the whole scene. Close by the fire stood two stout fellows, in one of whom I recognised, without difficulty, my goodhumoured guide. Beside them sat a third, with his legs extended towards the cheering blaze, while with an air of sublime abstraction, he leisurely smoked a long pipe. At the same time I observed the girl to whom I owed the timely warning, whose success was yet so doubtful, employed in carrying towards the bed in which my poor comrade was sleeping, a large tub, or bucket. Beside the bed stood Giuseppe himself, a hideous incarnation of evil, glaring upon the unconscious slumberer. A boy, resting his head upon the foot of the bed, was fast asleep also. Such was the scene which my first glance through the aperture of the door revealed, under the fierce and restless light of the blazing wood fire. The baleful and ominous scowl which darkened the features of the ill-favoured innkeeper, and something like a foreboding of what was about to happen, rivetted my attention to the group about the humble bed where the poor little traveller lay he innkeeper stooped forward, and with a sudden jerk of his hand threw the bedclothes down, so as to leave the upper part of the body of the sleeper bare, except for the coarse shirt which covered it. He next slid his arm gently under the shoulders of the unconscious man, and slowly drew his body towards the edge of the bed. At this moment the girl placed the bucket at the side of the pallet, and with an expression of strange horror turned towards the door where I stood, and passed on from my sight. Giuseppe now drew the shoulders completely over the edge of the couch, so that the head hung down towards the floor. The poor wretch continued to sleep. The innkeeper beckoned now to one of his companions, who stood at the fire. The man came over to the bed, and listlessly shoved the bucket with his foot, until he had brought it directly under the head of the sleeping man. 1 could endure no more. My resolution was taken. I set my shoulder against the door, and strained every muscle in my body in the desperate effort to burst it open. The effort, tremendous though it was, was made in vain. The door was fastened without, and that so effectively, that the assault with which I had just taxed its strength had hardly availed to make the fastenings creak. Well was it for me, however, that this sound, slight though it was, occurred while the villain was shoving the bucket, as I have just told you, with his foot along the floor. Had that little sound but reached the ear of any of the wretches who occupied the chamber, I must have perished. On such threads hang the lives of men! Weak and exhausted by the fruitless effort which I had made, I resigned myself in mute horror to witness the tragedy which I had no power to prevent. Giuseppe now, in a whisper which froze the life-blood at my heart, repeated the significant words— 'Il coltello,' *the knife*. His companion instantly turned to a cupboard, a few steps aside, and returned bearing in his hand the instrument, whose broad blade, as he walked along, he wiped in his jacket sleeve. The cold sweat burst from every pore in my body. I shook like a man in an ague: a deadly sickness came over me; yet I could not move my eyes from the objects, the sight of which filled me with this agony. The man, with the knife in his grasp, now placed himself by the bed, half sitting upon its edge. Giuseppe took the head of the sleeping man between his hands and supported it with the face turned directly towards the place where I stood. His companion now applied the edge of the knife to the skin of the throat, and moving it slightly along the surface, until it rested upon the spot which he judged most suitable to his purpose, he laid the palm of his left hand upon the back of the blade, and with his whole weight and strength forced it with a mangling gash, so far as almost to sever the head from the body. The crimson blood gushed, or rather spouted, from the chasm, and, with a gurgling sound, poured into the bucket. At the same moment the assassin, dropping the knife upon the floor, threw himself across the body, to control the convulsive strugglings of death. The pedlar had continued fast locked in sleep, until the knife had actually entered his throat. The moment, however, that the fatal stroke was given, the murdered man opened his eyes, and gazed with such an expression of imploring terror and agony, as fancy never beheld. At the same time he opened his mouth — perhaps to shriek — perhaps to pray; but sound was never more to come from thence. Blood bubbled forth, and streamed over his white and quivering face. Again and again he opened his mouth with ghastly strugglings. Nor did this fearful motion cease, until the eye fixed, and the mortal agony ended in death. The innkeeper then wrung the head round, while his companion, with the same knife, ploughed through the tendons and muscles, until they succeeded in actually cutting the head from the trunk. The body lay upon the bed, and the neck still hung bleeding over the tub, into which Giuseppe dropped the head. I could see no more. My brain grew dizzy. A sick faintness came upon me. I clambered, I know not how, up the stairs, and, sitting down upon the uppermost step, I clasped my damp forehead in my hands, and remained for some minutes almost unconscious of every thing, absorbed in one dull, vague feeling of horror.

"As soon as I came a little to myself, I plainly perceived, by what I could gather from the whisperings which I overheard from below, that the murderers were engaged in removing the body of their victim. Steps now slowly and unsteadily traversed the kitchen — I suppose those of him who carried the horrible burden. The outer door was cautiously opened; the steps passed forth, and the door closed again.

"'The gentleman sleeps like a top,' whispered a gruff voice. 'He has just put out his candle, and lies still as a dormouse.'

"'Take your stiletto,' replied another. 'Morning will break before you have finished.'

"'Remove your boots, bungler,' cried a female voice. 'Your spurs make jingle enough to ring the dead from their graves.'

"'Peace, gaol-bird,' cried Giuseppe. 'What's that to thee.'

"'Well, well,' exclaimed the girl, with a slow distinct utterance, 'God grant us all better days.'

"I needed not the warning, I had already placed myself in readiness. After a short delay the door, through which I had just witnessed the scene which I have attempted to describe, opened wide. A broad light flashed upon the rugged and narrow stairs, and a tall figure began to ascend. I stood in the deep shadow awaiting his advance; and as soon as he had arrived within two or three steps of the top, I sprang forward, and lunged full at his breast. This was not done so quickly that he did not catch a glimpse of me, as I started forward, in sufficient time to enable him with his arm perfectly to parry the thrust. As it happened, however, this was all the worse for himself; for instead of turning the sword aside, he merely struck the point upwards, and it entered somewhere near the eye, and, penetrating the brain, killed him on the spot. Without a groan he tumbled headlong over the steps.

Springing over his prostrate body, I rushed into the kitchen. Giuseppe and my honest guide were the only males within it. The latter stood nearest to me, and his astonishment at my entrance was such that he did not move. With a deliberate aim of two seconds, I levelled my pistol at his breast and fired, he fell — I know not whether mortally hurt or not, but I never saw him move again. Without the loss of an instant I levelled the second pistol at the innkeeper — but it missed fire — the wretch ran directly to the door, but before his hand had reached the latch I was up with him. With a hideous yell of defiance he sprang round and grappled with me. His strength far exceeded what his figure seemed to promise; but I felt that he was still no match for me. In a moment I hurled him back upon the gory pallet, and planted my knee upon his breast. As we struggled, he caught my left thumb within his teeth, and clenched them upon it until they fairly ground upon the bone. Heedless of the pain, I clutched his throat in my right hand, and pressed with all my might and strength — in vain he struggled — the eyes started — the face blackened. Froth covered my hands, and before two minutes he lay insensible.

"'For God's sake, girl,' cried I, 'give me the pistol.' Silently she obeyed me, and for a moment relaxing my grasp, I seized the weapon by the muzzle, and dashed the heavy butt into his skull — he was dead. Yet such was the strength with which his teeth were locked upon my thumb, that I could not release it until I had beaten out nearly half his teeth, I forced the barrel of the pistol into his mouth, and employing it as a lever, I, with much exertion, unlocked the clenched teeth, and loosed the mangled joint. At this moment I heard a heavy step without, the latch was raised, and one of the fellows who had been present at the murder of the pedlar entered. I did not give him time to recover his surprise, hut placing the pistol to his head, I said in a stern and determined voice— 'Villain! lead me to a horse. If I am discovered or interrupted, I will blow your brains out.'

"'Good Signor,' said the fellow, evidently ill at his ease, 'patience for heaven's sake — be not rash.'

"'I give you five seconds,' replied I, ' to bring me to a horse: at the end of that time, the condition unfulfilled, I will shoot you through the head, as sure as God is in heaven. Look at those corpses — you see I am in earnest.'

"The fellow said not one word more; but, being himself unarmed, led me quietly from the door of the inn at which we stood to that of the stable. I all the time holding him by the back of the collar, with the pistol close by his head.

"'Choose a strong one, scoundrel,' said I, as we entered the stable, in which stood several horses ready saddled. I compelled him to lead out the steed, and to mount first himself, and springing up behind him, I commanded him to ride on the shortest track leading to the high road to Rome. The moon had gone down, and the night was now so dark that I could not see many yards before me. In obedience to my directions the fellow rode at a hard trot. We had scarcely crossed the bridge, when two figures loomed suddenly in sight, and so directly in advance of us that it required a sudden and violent exertion of the bit which threw the animal back upon his haunches, to prevent our running foul of this nocturnal patrol.

"Who rides so hard?' inquired one in no very cultured accents. Here I pressed the muzzle of the pistol against my companion's head, as a salutary hint.

"'Who should it be,' exclaimed my comrade, 'but a friend — do not you know me?'

"'Faith, brother,' replied the same harsh voice, ' it is well we did not rob thee, and thou us;' and marvellously tickled with this pleasant conceit he laughed long and lustily. 'Any news?' added he— 'any rabbits in the burrow? any nightingales in the cage — eh?'

"'Ay, two,' replied my companion, ' with their necks wrung. You will see more at the inn. Good night.'

"We were passing on, when again one of them exclaimed —

"'Hey! what the devil have you gotten behind you?'

"Again, I let my honest companion feel that the weapon rested upon his skull; and with much *nonchalance*, he replied —

"'What is behind me? why a bag of bloody carrion, if you must have it — but we bandy words too long — when I get rid of this, I'll find you at old Beppo's.'

"'Well, good luck, most holy sexton,' replied the horseman; 'and as for your burthen, *requiescat in pace — amen*.'

"So saying, the two horsemen rode on, and we pursued our way, at the same hard pace until the morning's light began to streak the east.

"Watching my opportunity as we rode rapidly down a steep declivity, I bestowed my companion a vigorous shove, which sent him clean over the horse’s head; and before he had well done rolling I had left him four hundred yards behind me. With a courteous valediction I rode on, and without another adventure reached the glorious city of Rome, where strange things befel me, as I shall tell you. But first give me a cup of wine.”

PART TWO

"In the heart of a gay capital, possessed of finds which, to my shortsighted inexperience, seemed all but inexhaustible, full of ardour, curiosity, and passion, I threw myself heart and soul into the intoxication and excitement of all the folly, vice and extravagance which revolved around me; with more of inquisitiveness than of depravity, I hunted out vice in all secure and secret haunts, where, undisguised, and maddening, and terrible, it ruled and rioted. The adventures and perils of the wild scenes in which I mixed, had for me a strange attraction; I panted to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; I longed to try and prove those old and mighty rulers of the human kind — the ancient vices of the world in the high places of their power; recklessly I courted danger: wildly I plunged into the unfathomable gulf of sin, and madly did time fly by.

"My acquaintances were among the madcap young nobles of the city. There was nothing to withdraw me from the headlong career of sins and follies in which I was borne, except prudence or religion — and I had neither. I resolutely closed my eyes against all distant consequences; I saw but the present — I would see no more. I felt that when my wealth was squandered, I would find a way to get more; I cared not how, provided it were boldly, and in the manner of a soldier of fortune. Even then my coming destiny filled the vision of my mind; I beheld it perhaps with awe, but undismayed; for me it had a dreadful fascination — I rushed towards it with a bosom full of defiance and scornful recklessness.

"Fagged and jaded with the last night's debauch, I rose towards evening from the numb and heavy sleep of excess; and wandered forth to breathe the fresh air upon the Corso. It was the Carnival — the streets were thronged with masks, jugglers, itinerant gamesters with their various apparatus for cheating the incautious; mountebanks and empirics holding forth upon their crazy stages; noble ladies in rich attire walking with their highborn protectors, and shouldered and jostled by countrymen and beggars — all mingled up in the fantastic mazes of a bewildering and gorgeous dream. Captivated by the never-ending variety of the scene before me; hour after hour flew by; and when at length the sun went down, and twilight was succeeded by the wan splendour of the moon, I still was sauntering among the gay and idle throng, whose groups crossed and flitted before my eyes in such rich and grotesque contrariety. ‘Why so sad, young gentleman?’ exclaimed a voice close by my ear, while, at the same time, a party-coloured sword of lath was laid smartly upon my shoulder. The speaker was a harlequin, who had turned for a moment from his masked companions to accost me. ‘Has thy ladylove frowned, or thy Jew friend been cruel? has thy luck been hard and thine head soft? are thy creditors more than thy credit? art thou hungry, or thy sweetheart angry? has she broke her faith, and thou not thy fast? if so, sour looks will never mend the matter — lament tomorrow, but laugh tonight. The gods have given but one excuse for glum looks during carnival, and that is the cholic. If thou hast it, thou art right to be religious; but get thee home and pray in bed: thy public piety is a public nuisance. Owlet, avaunt!’ A loud smack from his lath weapon enforced the mandate, and under cover of the horse laugh with which the crowd greeted the conclusion of his lecture, the mask unperceived whispered sharply in my ear as he passed— ‘Keep your eye on me, friend, and follow me; your doing so may save your life. Enough.’ With these strange words he plunged once more into the crowd, and mingled as before in the madcap gaieties of the scene. My curiosity was however excited. I followed him carefully, and thought I could observe him occasionally abstract his attention for a moment from the tricks and railleries with which he abundantly entertained the multitude, to steal a glance toward me, and ascertain that I was present. Gradually the harlequin withdrew himself from the group with which he had borne his part, and by little and little separated himself from the crowd, I still following at a short distance. With many a fantastic pirouette and gambol away he flitted through by-lanes and alleys. Again and again was I obliged to run at the top of my speed to keep my strange conductor in view, watching the tall light form with a vigilance so close and exclusive that I knew not through what streets I passed, and scarcely in what direction I was moving. We passed through the scattered houses of the suburbs; and although I strained my sinews to the utmost, my guide gained upon me so fast that I began to grow fearful of losing him altogether. He was now running lightly by the banks of the Tiber — we passed the thronged dwellings of the city; and the cool air from the quiet country came rushing along the waters, the grateful and refreshing gift of nature. Half-vexed at the pertinacious speed with which my companion pursued his course, and half-suspecting the whole affair to be a hoax, I was just about to stop and turn about, when my intention was anticipated by the mask. He suddenly checked his course, sprang into the air, and, with a grotesque flourish of his sword, turned to the right about, awaiting with a low mock reverence my breathless pursuit. I was soon by his side. 'Now in the devil's name, sir harlequin,' exclaimed I, 'for what have you given me this unconscionable race? — your tidings must needs be worth the hearing when a man must run after them as if Beelzebub ran at his heels.''Fie, fie,' cried the mask, 'devil and Beelzebub are ugly words, and especially now and here. Be, I pray you, a little more pious: you know not what may be near you.' At these words my companion stooped down and lowered his head to a level with the reeds which grew by the river's brink, in the attitude of one who listens attentively for some distant sound — then raising himself, he added in a lower tone, 'We must go further; follow me yet a few steps more.' Accordingly he led the way along the river bank, but now at a slow pace. As he went along he began to sing a strange and mournful air, the like of which I never heard before or since, and *that* with a management of voice, if possible, stranger still. It appeared to me like the most extraordinary ventriloquism; for the sounds seemed sometimes to come from one side — sometimes from another — sometimes high in air — sometimes so far away as almost to be lost in the distance, and again swelling into a fierce and thrilling loudness, as if the voice was rushing toward us with the speed of a whirlwind. I cannot describe to you the strange effect of this music upon me: I felt ready either to laugh or cry — I felt a weight at my heart and an excitement in my head more than hysterical. The words which he sang were odd, and to me unintelligible; but he threw into them a laboured significance which added to the unpleasantness of the whole. The words have remained fixed in my mind, and to this day I cannot utter them without sensations which perhaps you would laugh at. They ran as follows: —

"Child of wrath, with the human bride, Mighty oppressor of earthly kind, Thy presence walks with us, side by side, I feel thee, and know thy soft laugh on the wind.

Kiss, kiss his hot lips again and again:

He has given thee his heart; now master his brain.

"The excitement under which I laboured increased until it amounted to a degree of horror almost unendurable. Under the vague impulse of superstitious terror, I was about to turn and run from my companion, when he, suddenly looking round, exhibited to my astounded sense the features of the hoary monk or demon, Father Anthony. Nerved by the extremity of terror, I turned my back upon the abhorred shape, and fled with the speed of light toward the city. The attempt to escape was utterly in vain. Though I ran with a speed which nothing but the agony of terror could have sustained, the fiendish monk not only kept up with me, but ran round and round me — sometimes in narrower, sometimes in wider circles, with gambols of preterhuman agility, and grimaces more hideous than nightmare ever saw. Suddenly he stopped short before me, and by an unearthly sympathy I was constrained to do the same: he sate down upon the earth; by an irresistible impulse I did so likewise. We were opposite to one another — face to face, and scarcely a yard asunder. He tossed his arms wildly in the air — I could not choose but do the same: he writhed his features into contortions such as delirium never portrayed, each one of which, with frenzied exaggeration, I felt forced to imitate. Into these hideous grimaces he threw, at times, expressions of demoniac passion so fearfully intense, that hell itself could not have exceeded them: these too, I was forced to follow, and the dreadful passions themselves possessed me in succession, while all the time, independently of these malignant inspirations, there remained within me, as it were looking on, a terrified self-consciousness. He yelled forth blasphemies the most awful, while my very brain sickened with horror — the unearthly power constrained me to echo them all, tone for tone, and word for word. He advanced his face, I did the same — our features almost touched. He burst into a peal of laughter like that if lunacy, I joined howling in the horrible mirth. Every word he spoke, I spoke — every movement he made, I made too. My motions all corresponded with his, with the simultaneousness and accuracy with which shadow follows substance; I felt as if my identity was merging into his. He placed his hand within his bosom — my hand copied the gesture, and rested upon my stiletto; he drew a dagger from his breast — I drew my poignard from mine. At the next instant his weapon was at his throat, and mine at mine. Another moment, and hell would have had its victim; but it was to be otherwise. A voice close by shouted, ‘ In the name of God, young man, forbear,’ and at the instant I was disenthralled; the hideous figure cast upon me one livid scowl, and threw himself on the ground. I saw no more, for my senses forsook me. How long the demon had made me the sport of his hellish mockeries I cannot say. As soon as consciousness returned I found myself supported in the arms of an honest peasant — he to whose intervention I owed my life.

"'So, so, master,' exclaimed he, 'a pleasant frolic this, for the carnival — time was, when you youngsters were satisfied with carving your neighbours' throats, but nothing will serve you now, forsooth, but cutting your own. In God's name, young man, why do you seek to harm yourself?'

"' Tell me,' said I eagerly, ' where he is gone — where is the mask — the harlequin — the devil? Bring me away from this place. Where is the monster you saw before me?'

"' Sir,' replied the man, 'I see you are disordered. I will go with you to the town; here, take my arm.'

"'Where,' I said with increased excitement, ' where is the hellish thing that sate on the ground before me?'

"' Pshaw, sir,' replied he, ' there was nothing before you but yonder old bush; to be sure,' he added, after a thoughtful pause, ' it did sway and tremble rather oddly; and then, when I came up, I saw something like an otter sliding softly through the sedges into the stream. But that is all — come on, signor, let us be moving.'

"Silently I walked with my friendly guide, who cast many a fearful look around, and muttered many a prayer as we proceeded — so contagious is mysterious terror.

"For more than a month I was in mind and body utterly prostrate. There is in youth, however, a recuperative power, an elasticity which never loses its spring while youth remains. In five weeks' time, after an illness, during which mind and body were bound down in the fiery chains of fever for nearly the space of a month, I was once more mingling in all the pleasures and follies of the capital, as if no fears or perils had ever crossed me. As time wore on, I began to grow weary of uncontrolled indulgence. Fashion is a hard task-master — vice and pleasure tire their pursuers at length more than the severest toil — monotony dulls the edge of enjoyment, and the solicitous repinings of conscience wear the spirits, and irritate and embitter the temper; all this I felt, and half (but *only* half) resolved to reform, and lead a better life. In this melancholy mood I was wandering through the oldest and least-frequented streets of the city, when a singular adventure befel me. There was walking before me, with slow and feeble steps, an old and venerable man; his dress was of the richest velvet of that hue which we call *ruby*, lined with yellow satin, and richly overlaid with gold lace; the fashion, however, of his garments was that of another day, and though the suit was no doubt originally a splendid one, it bore no less in its faded colour and tarnished embroider, than in its obsolete construction, the evidences of extreme antiquity. From under the shadow of a broadleafed hat his snow-white hair descended in venerable ringlets, covering the topmost folds of his short velvet cloak. In his hand he carried a crutch-handled stick of ebony, which, with measured and solemn action, he impressed upon the pavement as he proceeded. The figure of the old man was slight, and as well as I could discern, elegantly moulded; he bore about him, too, that indescribable air of high birth and breeding which cannot be mistaken. These circumstances, along with the striking peculiarities of which I have already spoken, irresistibly fixed my attention and engaged my curiosity. As I followed in the track of this old man, he suddenly tottered, as if through weakness or giddiness, and would, no doubt, have fallen upon the pavement, had not I instantly caught him in my arms and supported him. He speedily recovered, and with many courteous professions of gratitude, acknowledged my services. These professions were as courteously received as made, and I offered the aged man the support of my arm, during the remainder of his walk. The tender of my support was accepted with eager gratitude, and arm in arm, at a leisurely pace, we walked down the street together. The old man, as I have said, was soon quite recovered; and as we moved slowly along, he conversed with that easy and courtly gaiety by which age can so pleasingly and irresistibly engage and fascinate the young. Almost without knowing how, so pleasantly had my companion beguiled the way, I found myself at the entrance of a venerable mansion, before which my old acquaintance made a halt. I looked around me, for so completely had my attention been absorbed in the gay conversation of my comrade, that I had scarcely observed the objects through which we were passing. The street was dark and narrow — the houses on either side tall, sombre, and antique, and withal carrying upon them a character of decay and neglect which added gloom and sadness to a scene already sufficiently uncheery. The street had made a curving sweep, so that at the point we stood I could see but little way either up or down. As far as 1 could see, however, it was absolutely empty: there was neither sound of human voice, nor echo of footfalls, but a silence like that of desolation. We stood directly in front of a richly carved and massive stone doorway, the portal of a huge timeworn edifice — a palace, but so weather-stained neglected, and crumbling, that the evidences of its original architectural splendour served only to render its present aspect more solemn and more sad Reading, perhaps, in my face what was passing in my mind, the old man, with a melancholy musing smile, accosted me —

"'It is, indeed, a mournful place — little better, perhaps, than a ruin; the street, too, as you observe, well accords with the character of this deserted shrine of hospitality — the spirit of desolation dwells in and about it — the current of human life frets and chafes near and far, but no chance eddy thereof ever finds its way into this dim, silent channel. The roar of human occupation, toil, and jollity, is here swallowed in perennial silence — we never hear it — in almost every house this street contains, you see the monument of some noble family gone to ruin, wasted by prodigality, or struck down into the dust by the heavy arm of power. Those who dwell here seldom seek to look into the staring, noisy world; they think not of the present, but ever upon the past — and oh! how variously Silence here holds her eternal court — see, lest any careless footstep should break the quiet of the place, gentle dame Nature has spread her soft green mantle over the uneven pavement — the long grass waves in the wind here as in a churchyard: yet, amid all this lonely silence, is there any quiet for heart or brain? Oh, eternal, unforgiving spirit! is there any rest — is there any unconsciousness?'

"He clasped his hands together — his head sank upon his breast, and I saw the tears fall, one by one, fast upon his bosom.

More shocked than I can describe at what I heard and saw, I stood silently by, scarcely knowing what course to take. I soon, however, grew weary of my foolish situation, and, beginning to regard the whole thing is rather comic than imposing, I asked, somewhat abruptly, whether I could do any thing further for him, at the same time observing that the evening would soon close, and that I had better find my way home while I had light. This speech soon brought the old gentleman to his senses. With many apologies he pleaded to be excused.

"'Signor,' he continued, ' did you but knew half what I have endured, far less what I *must still*endure, you would pardon this else unpardonable vehemence. I will not, however, weary you with, after all, what is but too common a tale of life. Those who have seen as much of life as I have, are seldom happy. I can, however, as you perhaps have perceived, sometimes forget my griefs; and if you will vouch your forgiveness, by entering so poor and unpromising a dwelling as that before you, you will make me more your debtor, sir, than I am.'

"There was a gentleness and even a kindness in the tone and manner in which the old man addressed me which easily prevailed. I at once consented.

"From his pocket he drew a key, to which the street-door instantly yielded. Closing the hall door, which was of massive oak, he led the way through a stone vaulted passage, and through another door into a spacious and lofty hall, also vaulted, and built of stone; this latter door he also swung to with a heavy crash, which echoed through the empty chamber with many a dreary reverberation. The room in which we now stood was hung round with splendid full-length pictures. It seemed to be a gallery of ancestral portraits. They were superbly painted — evidently from the hands of the most celebrated of our Italian masters: the collection was worth a monarch's ransom.

"'You will find occupation for a few minutes in looking at these old family pictures,' said my host; 'and you will, I hope, pardon me if I leave you to entertain yourself for a brief space.' So saying, the old man made a deep reverence, an before I had time to reply, he darted through a door at the far extremity of the apartment, and disappeared.

"The pictures were very well worth an attentive examination, and afforded me no small pleasure. But there were three placed side by side, over each of which hung from top to bottom a black velvet pall, and although not without some reluctance upon the score of good breeding, to these my curiosity led me by an irresistible attraction. I took my stand upon a stool which stood beneath these against the wall, and raising the covering of the first, I beheld a faithful and very beautifully painted portrait of my entertainer, arrayed precisely as I had seen him. The painting looked old, and yet it represented him not as any younger than he now was. While musing upon this discrepancy, my eye accidentally fell upon some numerals dimly traced in the corner of the canvass. Heavens! the date they recorded was that of more than a century before: yet the portrait was undoubtedly his. It was a perfect likeness — character, expression, every thing — it was a facsimile of the original. My convictions, too, were yet further established by observing traces upon the back of the right hand, which rested upon a crutch-handle stick, a deep scar, which had caught my attention in the original, as his hand lay within my arm in our to-day's walk. Again I examined the date, I had read it aright — the year it recorded had been passed nearly a century and a half before, and the mellow tone of the picture itself tallied well with its silent but startling claim to antiquity. With a strange feeling of interest and of horror I suffered the sable drapery to fall again over the picture; and raising the covering of the next, I beheld the portrait of a young lady, richly dressed, and of such surpassing loveliness and grace as my eyes had never seen before. Entranced lost in wonder and rapture, I gazed upon this beautiful vision; a creature so perfect, of such unutterable, such infinite loveliness and grace had never even dimly visited me in my most ethereal fancies. Like one lost in a sad and beautiful dream, I stood rapt and moveless, my heart wrung with vain yearnings, for still the thought stole over me that all this most terrible beauty before whose image I stood in this intense worship of every faculty, had long ago passed to dust and darkness. Thus gazing and dreaming on, the tears flowed silently down my cheeks. Strange fascination!

"'You make yourself at home, signor, I'm glad to see,' said the old man, who unperceived by me was standing by my shoulder.

I started, and dropped the velvet curtain, and was for some time so confounded as not to be able to articulate a single word. There stood the old man, his figure disposed in precisely the attitude represented in the portrait, his tall crutch-handled stick in his right hand, and his left buried to the wrist in the bosom of his doublet; there he stood in all points — face, attitude, and garb the breathing incarnation of the picture on which I had just been looking.

"'You examine them, these portraits?' inquired the old man.

"'Two of them, signor,' I replied with some embarrassment.

"'This one,' continued he, raising the pall which covered the first, ' is accounted extremely like me; it is the portrait of one of my house, a brave man, who fell one hundred and forty years since in the service of the state of Venice. I am reckoned like him, strangers at least account me so.'

"He fixed his eyes upon me, I thought with that uncertain, curious gaze with which those who feel themselves the objects of suspicion, encounter a glance of scrutiny. I averted my eyes, and he, suffering the velvet cloth to drop into its place, turned upon his heel and walked twice or thrice rapidly through the hall; he stopped beside me, and laying his hand kindly upon my shoulder, he said —

"'Come, come, you must not grow melancholy, my young friend; you were looking, when I surprised you, at a portrait of singular beauty, that of a young woman. You shall probably have an opportunity before long of comparing the counterfeit with the original. Will that not bring a smile to your cheek? time was when such a promise would have led me blindfold any where; but I am partial, perhaps, she is my daughter.'

"If the old man looked for compliments upon the beauty of his child, I believe he must have been satisfied, if my words bore any proportion to my feelings. Man never spoke language of more passionate admiration than did I, he smiled and cried 'Bravo,' as I finished; then observing that it was growing dark, he placed his arm within mine, and led me from the hall.

"We passed through several apartments, lofty, damp, and dark, impressed with the character of desertion and decay, but every where carrying the evidences of former splendour.

We entered a chamber hung with dusky tapestry. The end at which we stood on entering was occupied by a table and some antique chairs, and upon the floor, corresponding with the angles of the table, but at the distance of some six feet, were placed four massive golden candlesticks containing huge wax tapers, which shot into the air to the height of twelve feet, and burned with a flame larger than that of a torch, but white and clear as the light of the sun. The strange effect of these arrangements was much enhanced by another still more extraordinary peculiarity which marked this chamber as unlike any which I had ever seen before. The end of the room at which we stood, as I have already said, was occupied by the table and the other furniture which I have mentioned, but the opposite extremity of the chamber I could not see. It was effectually shrouded from my sight by a light semi-transparent vapour, which rolled and eddied in cloudy volumes within some twenty or thirty feet of the table — beyond this distance it did not come — some invisible influence held it back, and there it hung, forming a strange, heaving barrier, a mysterious impenetrable veil between human vision and sights, perhaps, unsuited to its ken. These odd peculiarities of the room in which I found myself were not without their effect upon my imagination and spirits — a sense of unknown danger overshadowed me. I recounted in my own mind the circumstances of my meeting with my host; every thing which had happened since appeared to me to furnish matter of indefinite and horrible suspicion; yet when I looked upon the mild features of the venerable old man, and read in the play of his cheerful eye the returning animation of that gay spirit which had so won upon me at first, I felt my doubts rebuked, and my superstitious fears absolutely ridiculous. Still, however, a gloom was upon me, and it required a perpetual effort to prevent the unpleasant impressions which I could not dispel from deepening into awe and terror.

"The old man motioned to me to sit down in one of the great antique chairs by the table, which was covered with golden plates, and dishes, and cups. You will readily believe me when I tell you that I had no desire to eat. I took advantage then of my host's abstemiousness to avoid partaking of his viands, and this was the first and the last supper at which I ever sate where not one dish was invaded or even uncovered.

"'Well,' said my entertainer, 'as you will not eat, you needs must drink: if you will imitate my vices, copy at least my solitary virtue.' So saying he drew towards himself one of the cups which stood upon the table, and shoved another to me. 'Old men have a right to be selfish,' said he, 'and, therefore, wishing myself many repetitions of this evening, and that out of this casual rencounter may arise a lasting union between us, young man, with all my soul I pledge you.' Long and deep was the draught with which the old man drained to its last the golden goblet; as he raised the cup to his lips I raised mine to do him honour, and as I did so I thought I heard some one mutter over my shoulder— 'That is not wine.'

"I glanced round but there was no one from whom the sounds could have proceeded. I raised the cup once more, the crimson liquid foamed up towards my lips, a slight sensation of giddy sickness passed over me as I lifted the vessel, and the same voice, real or imagined, whispered sharply in my ear the startling words— 'But the *blood*, which is the life of it, thou shalt not eat.' Horrified I dropped the cup upon the floor, and whatever was the liquor which it contained, it was every drop shed upon the ground. The old man when this happened was still engaged in his deep potation, and did not perceive the accident, or if he did, he certainly did not pretend to do so. He wiped his mouth and rose from the table; he motioned me to be still, and kneeling upon the ground with his face toward the hidden part of the chamber, he continued apparently in long and earnest devotion, stretching his hands forth with many gestures of vehement entreaty. As he did so, the surface of the cloudy barrier became agitated, strange lights and shadows flitted over it; sometimes tracing in the eddying vapours wild ghastly features, which vanished almost as soon as they appeared, and sometimes dimly showing monstrous shapes, and now and then more faintly-traced forms of surpassing grace — all gliding and wheeling, appearing and melting away, separating and mingling like the endless shiftings of a wondrous dream. At length there came a low and marvellously sweet sound of far-off music, like holy choirs singing a wild requiem over the dead; the sound stole floating along, sometimes broken and disordered, as though the untutored wind swept at random through the chords of a thousand-stringed instrument, then again, coming with perfect harmony and unspeakable melody over the senses, until once more the music would lose itself in the wild burst of the wailing wind. Still, however, minute after minute these fitful wanderings of the melody grew less and less, and the music breathed on, louder and more clear, in sweet but unearthly order. As these wondrous sounds rose on the ear, I beheld in the cloudy curtain, at first so dimly traced that my eye lost it every moment, but gradually becoming more fixed and discernible, the shadowy semblance of a female form, wrapt in a thin mantle, and as it seemed of beauty more than human. This form, at first traced only in the faintest discernible shadow, grew gradually more and more clearly defined, until at length the outline became fixed, and the colours, and lights, and shadows, after some uncertain flittings to and fro, clearly developed themselves, and thus little by little, without my being able to remember at which point the transition had taken place, I beheld what had first been no more than the lightest shadow upon a fleeting vapour now stand before me in corporeal substance — a model of preternatural loveliness in limb and feature, but pale and bloodless as the dead. The old man arose, and stepping sadly and reverently to her, he took the small hand which hung languidly by her side, and led her slowly towards the table. The beautiful form moved lightly over the floor, but seemingly without more volition or purpose of its own than belongs to a mere automaton; the lips pale as marble, the eyes fixed and glittering, and every muscle of the perfect face still as death. He led her to a chair, and placing her in it, he took one of the large golden goblets, like that which he himself had just emptied, full of the dark red liquid, and putting its brim to her lips he poured every drop of its contents down her throat; he laid the vessel again in its place, and withdrawing to a little distance, he folded his arms, bowed his head downwards like one in deep dejection, and silently awaited the result. After two or three wild thrilling peals, the music gave place to utter silence, and at the same moment the glow of life spread it self gently over the face and limbs of the girl, and dyed her lips with the brightest crimson, the fixed glance gave place to the soft fire of animation, and I beheld before me the breathing archetype of the portrait whose beauty had so enchanted me. I approached her — I spoke with her, her voice was melody such as fills the ear with ever-varying sweetness, and floods the heart with mysterious joy; an embodied dream of divine beauty — unspeakable grace in every the slightest movement, and absolute fascination in every look; the very mystery of her being but heightened the wild interest which wrapt every faculty of my soul: delighted wonder, love and awe, fear and rapture, filled all my heart with a sweet and terrible delirium of worship. I saw revealed before me a divinity, clothed in the eternal majesty of ideal beauty — that glorious mystery after which the heart of man has panted and toiled, and yearned, even since the world was young. I know not how the time went by, many hours seemed but as the dream of a minute; the spell was broken by the old man her father, who taking me by the hand led me away through the dark part of the chamber; the chill and darkness of the cold cloudy medium through which we walked fell like death upon my heart — a revulsion of horror unutterable succeeded; sickness of heart and terror were upon me. The fearful transition was, however, of short duration; an unseen arm thrust me forward, and when I recovered my equilibrium I found myself in the aisle of a church, crowded with listeners, and lighted with many lamps. A preacher, too, was loudly haranguing them from the pulpit. How I had entered the place I knew not; I stood in the centre of the church; my movements, however, had undoubtedly been somewhat abrupt.

"'Sir,' exclaimed a bull-necked, redfaced burgher, with an indignant scowl, 'if you must make a row, you had better do it at the other side of the door. We came here to listen, not to be kicked and jostled.'

"'What the devil ails the young gentleman?' cried another; ' he bolts and butts like a mad bull.'

"' You have broken my hat,' ejaculated a third.

"'And my back,' groaned a fourth.

"These and such like exclamations, accompanied with abundance of sour looks, were quite sufficient to assure me that my impetuous entrance at least was not an illusion. The church was that of — one which I had often visited, and with all whose usual approaches I was thoroughly acquainted. I was therefore but the more puzzled and confounded in attempting to account to myself for my suddenly assumed position in the very centre of the congregation this was, however, the least marvel in a day of wonders.

Henceforward life had lost for me all interest. I had beheld loveliness which was not of this earth, beside the remembrance of which all that I had ever seen of beauty, either in nature or in art, seemed gross, insipid, and charmless. The comeliness of this world was no more for me; day and night the same thought haunted me — day and night one dream, from which it was agony to awaken, overspread my soul. I was unsocial, changed, spirit-stricken, night and morning, moving and living in the irresistible fascination of the same absorbing, yearning vision. Day after day, ay, and night after night, I traced the streets and lanes of the city in the hope of finding again the scene of my strange adventures — my searches were all in vain. I described the street, all its peculiarities, but no one could direct me to it, no one had seen it. Still I wandered through the city with the almost hopeless object of meeting the old man — this hope was equally abortive — disappointment, still disappointment. I was miserable — my life was mere weariness. I wandered on, a stranger to the pleasures and to the interests of men; none knew of the unearthly passion which wasted me; I neither had nor wished to have a companion; mysteries had revealed themselves to me — mysteries which men could not behold and be happy. Hour after hour, day after day, week after week, wore on in one long, all-absorbing, unsatisfied wish. I knew that the beautiful being, the worship of whom was wearing me away, could not be of this world; but fear I had none respecting her; there was indeed awe, but no fear, no revulsion.

"I seldom slept, but when I did, my slumbers were broken by a thousand fantastic dreams, but all more or less horrible. In these visions the foreground was ever occupied by the beautiful subject of my waking thoughts but darkly lurking in some obscure corner, or suddenly crossing my sight when I least remembered him, came the abhorred monk, scaring away the lovely illusion, and startling me into broad wakefulness again. After such dreams, troubled and checkered with terror though they were, the strange passion, which had now become the essence of my being, would return upon me with redoubled vehemence; existence had become to me one fevered, unsatisfied wish — a burthen too heavy for me to bear. One morning I started from one of those visions which continually broke my rest; as I opened my eyes, I distinctly saw some dark shapeless thing glide like a snake from my pillow down the side of the bed, where I lost sight of it. Hardly knowing why, I sprang upon the floor, and to my unutterable horror I beheld peering from under the bed, the face of the demon monk. With a yell of despairing terror I howled, ' In God's name avaunt;' and clasping my hands over my eyes I stood fixed and freezing in an agony of horror, not daring to expose myself to the terrors of a second gaze. I stood locked in this tremendous catalepsy, until my servant entering the chamber more than an hour after, recalled me to myself.

"'I see it, I see it all,' thought I, as with the excitement of madness I paced up and down my chamber— 'I know it, I am under the influence of Satan — in the power of the tormentor. Oh, God! is there no passage of escape? is there no refuge from this Satanic persecution? Must I waste away in strength of body and in the faculties of my mind, until body and soul perish for ever?'

"Almost as I uttered this agonized appeal, a thought struck me as suddenly as if it had been suggested by another speaker— 'Go present yourself to a priest; confess your sins in a penitent spirit, and he will give you good counsel in your present strait, and if on earth there be deliverance for you, it is thus.' The thought had hardly presented itself, when I put it into execution. I went to an aged and holy man and made my shrift, and on the imposition of a certain penance, he gave me absolution. I told him all I had suffered, and asked his advice under the peculiar and horrible case. Having heard me attentively, the good old man told me to be of good cheer.

"'My son,' said he, 'thou hast experienced one of those assaults of the evil one which we, who sit in the confessional, are often told of — ay, while the giddy unconscious world is scouting the very possibility of such things. Strangely, too, it is, that as in thy case, my child, it generally happens that those who come hither for counsel under such terrors as those which have so long haunted thee, are from among the gay fashionable votaries of pleasure, whose chief characteristic it is to lead the way in ridiculing all belief in such influences, and too often in covert derision of religion itself. Watch and pray, my son — by no consent of thine own invite the adversary; purify thy conscience by frequent confession; trust in the mercy of Heaven; walk in the ways of life uprightly and humbly; mortify every foolish as well as every sinful desire; and if thou dost so, Satan will never possess thee, body or soul, in all time, hereafter for ever.'

"I returned much comforted and with singleness of heart; I endeavoured in all things to conform myself to the directions of the good priest, and thus day by day the delirium under which my rest, and strength, and faculties were declining, gradually melted away and almost disappeared.

"A month had passed away, and I had become in health and spirits like other men, my mind being now thoroughly released from its former wanderings. I entered at nightfall the church of — . I knew not what feeling impelled me in the choice. There were but few worshippers in the church, and my thoughts, no doubt misled by the associations with which my last visit to this place was connected, wandered far away from the subject on which you will say they ought to have been fixed. My attention was, however, recalled to the scene before me by a circumstance which I shall hut soon forget. Two figures caught my eye, as it seemed to me, that of a male and of a female, but both wrapt in mantles so ample as effectually to conceal the limbs, and quite to overshadow the features of those who wore them; both had drawn the hoods of their cloaks over their heads. The instant my eye encountered these figures, a sudden conviction flashed upon my mind that they were those of the very objects of the search which had for so long absorbed me. Every moment served to confirm this conviction; and when I saw them rise and pass from the church it was with a fearful interest that I too arose and followed them. They passed into the street, now nearly dark, I still closely dogging their steps: when they had arrived there, after a short pause they separated, moving rapidly in opposite directions; without hesitation I followed the lighter of the two figures; inwardly convinced that it was in truth no other than that of the being whom most of all I should have shunned and dreaded Through many streets I followed the light gliding form, with a fascination too deep for words; with a blind obedience still I followed it, until it passed beyond the precincts of the city, and as the figure entered the broad fields, now sleeping under the misty light of the moon, I suffered the distance which separated us to increase, so far as to avoid the immediate likelihood of detection to which a near pursuit, though unremarked among the throng of the city streets, would in this sequestered and open place, have exposed me. Cautiously and at some distance then I followed, until I saw the object of my curiosity pause under the boughs of some tall trees; and, throwing back the hood from her face, and suffering the cloak to fall upon the ground, seat herself gently upon a large grey stone which stood there, and crossing her arms pensively on her lap, gaze fixedly upward at the broad bright disc of the beautiful moon.

"I resolved now to ascertain the correctness of my suspicions; and resisting as well as I might the misgivings and fears which crossed my mind, I stole noiselessly along under the broad friendly shade of the majestic tree, beneath which she was seated. Under cover of some brushwood I crept noiselessly onward, until I had reached to within some ten or twelve steps of the mysterious figure. The countenance was raised a little; the dark silken hair, parted on the forehead, fell in luxuriant folds upon the white shoulders and heaving bosom of the beautiful being. I beheld the full lustrous eye beneath its long dark lashes, and the exquisite features all revealed in the pale light of the moon, and clothed in the witching tenderness of sadness. A single glance told me that I was not mistaken; the conviction smote upon my heart; for an instant its pulses were suspended, and a chill, like that of death, shot through my frame, and then through every artery the tingling life-blood sprang with a recoil as impetuous and sudden. It was she — the dreamed-of — the longed-for — the enchantress. I abandoned myself to the intoxication of the moment. With words of passionate madness I threw myself at her feet: she raised me up — her arms were around me.

*

“Beautiful betrayer — passionately-beloved phantom — unearthly lover! — what have I done? I am a fear and wonder to myself. Are all thy tears and blushes a mockery, and can hell borrow the beauty and modesty of angels? Sweet terrible illusion, I will not curse thee: ’twas I — I and not thou who wooed these strange horrors — thou didst warn me — ay! fallen, lost for ever as thou wert, warn me in pity — with tears, and supplications, and shadowy threatenings implore and resist. Still night after night thy footsteps are my guide, thy smiles my life, thy bosom my pillow: the vital taper burns away — down, down, wasting in the fierce glare of fever. Where, where will end this agony of love and despair? Would to God that heart and brain were dust, so I might remember no more, and be at rest! But no, no, it may not be. Cruel, beautiful destroyer! thou wilt drink my life away sweetly, slowly, ever day by day. I am all thine own — heavier, heavier grows the dreary sleep. All men move around me strangers, and as far away from my world of existence as from the dimmest star that twinkles in the sky. I have but one companion, one interest, one object; ever within me dread and loathing wrestle against passionate love in eternal agony. Oh! God! whence art thou, beautiful destroyer? Thou wouldst not kill me for ever. There is pity — infinite pity — in thy words and looks — tenderness and sorrow ever in thy dark, soft, deadly eyes: thy sweet words, too, ever warning — ay! thou hast truly said. The grieved and vainly-resisting slave of others art thou — the unwilling thrall of agencies hated and feared, but from which never — never in time or eternity canst thou escape.

*

“One evening, in the self same church, I saw the other figure stand with her again; I followed them forth, but vainly looked for her to separate from him when they had reached the street. Together the two figures walked quickly onward, I following. Twice or thrice she turned her head, and with hasty gestures stealthily warned me off. Still doggedly I pursued: they walked, I know not whither, through streets strange to me; and at length, like a dream, around me rose the objects which my memory had so carefully treasured — the dark, silent street whither the old man had led me months before — the long grass waving in the night breeze over the pavement — the dim, tall, mouldering palaces at both sides towering darkly against the deep blue sky of midnight, and all over-shone by the pale moon. The two shapes stopped by the selfsame stone porch which had given me entrance to the habitation so terribly remembered. Like one in a dream, without fear or purpose, I stepped lightly to the gate before they entered. The old man (it was he) moved to meet me — bade me welcome a thousand times, and made me promise to come in with him. This I did eagerly, though I saw the girl who stood behind him wring her hands as if in sorrow. Glaring lights of many colours were streaming from the windows, and mirthful music, mixed with wild uproar like the mad gusts of a tempest, resounded from the distant chambers. Shadows too flitted and bounded across the casements. We entered the hall as before, the old man leading the way. As we moved around the girl whispered softly in my ear— 'You are in mortal peril. For your soul's sake eat nothing — drink nothing; speak to no being whom you do not know, and say to me no word of love, or you have perished everlastingly. They will have you. *He*(pointing to the old man) and a worse than he will torment you for ever. Guard against every look and word; trust not in your own strength, but elsewhere; be not terrified by their mockeries, and when you can escape, fly.'

"Still with a dull recklessness I followed the old man, and mounted with him a broad marble staircase. As we ascended, the sounds became louder and fiercer. Loud barbaric music, mingled with fierce bursts of maniac laughter — Bacchanalian shouts, and long-drawn yells, as it seemed of agony, along with the continuous shuffling and pounding of feet upon the floors, produced a combination of noises which few could have heard without terror. I paused for a moment at the door, and then, summoning my utmost resolution, I entered. The spectacle before me was one which, while consciousness remains, I can never forget. A vast chamber, lighted dazzlingly with a thousand lamps, or rather stars, for they were not supported nor suspended by any thing, but glowed, flickered, and sported, separate and self-sustained, rolling and eddying high in air — expanding, and contracting, and yielding in glorious succession all the most splendid colours which imagination can conceive. Beneath this gorgeous and ever-shifting illumination a vast throng of shapes were moving — all enacting, but with the courteous observations and jollity of a festive meeting. Some glided to and fro with courtly ease, but bearing upon their lifeless faces the fearful stamp of sin and eternal anguish; others sate looking on, their fixed features writhed into smiles which, but to dream of, would appal the fancy for days; others, with ghastly idiotic grimaces, made hideous music from strange instruments, which panted and quivered, and writhed like living things in agony; others leaped, and danced, and howled, and glared like the very fiends of madness; and all formed a crowd of such terrific and ghastly horror as words cannot even faintly shadow forth. I felt like one under the enchantment of opium: I feared nothing: I revelled in the horrors among which I was plunged: an intoxication too strong for body and mind was upon me. Among these appalling and tremendous sights I beheld close by me, with fierce rapture, the beautiful form of the mysterious being who had won my very soul. I spoke I know not what words of passion, and she, with grief and horror in her face, said softly to me —

"' Speak to me no more of love, as you would save your soul alive. In sin and sorrow my lot is fixed for ever. Beware how you court me here. I strive to save you. We are not all alike. I am not as these: I have mercy: I would deliver you: but these are stronger than I. The adversary has called me from my mournful dreams to work his will. They will have you — they will have you. Know you who they are?"

"I spoke again, I know not what. Beware — once more beware,' said she softly. ' See you not that these are in torment and hatred? You know what they are. If you regard not my counsel you will be among them, and of them in eternity. You are in mortal peril — beware.'

"Again, in wayward madness, I spoke.

"'The time draws nigh,' said she, while death-paleness overspread her cheeks. ' I foresaw this. I dreaded it. The time draws nigh — my mission will be ended. They will let me go to my quiet; but you they will possess and keep in the bondage of hell — in hatred and agony for ever and ever. It is too late now. You have spoken the word. I am going hence, where you will see me no more.'

"As she thus spoke, a cloudy indistinctness overspread the pale beautiful vision, and she began slowly and mournfully to recede from me. Stung with horror and agony at the sight, I cast myself before the fading form.

"'Stay, stay, beautiful, beloved illusion,' I said; 'leave me not, oh, leave me not alone — I can love none other — I am your slave, your worshipper — I am yours for ever — God be my witness.'

“As I ended the sentence, a yelling crash like the roar of ten thousand gigantic bells stunned my ears — total darkness swallowed every object, and my senses forsook me.

*

“I was found in the morning by the sexton of — , senseless, bruised, and covered with blood and foam, lying in the great aisles of that building. Since then I have been, you will say, mad — I say, the sport of other souls than my own — a blind, desperate instrument of hell, wending onward to an eternal doom which no imaginable power can avert. This consciousness of inevitable fate has been my companion ever since then, and it has taught me to despise opinion, virtue, vice — to trample on religion, and to laugh at punishment.

“Satan, whose I am, had chosen me for himself, to do his work even from the first. I am one with him, and he with me; and when I die, will merge forever into that dark mind. Think you, then, I care whether death come today, or tomorrow, or the next day? It must arrive soon; and then —

“Now, father, I have confessed enough, and you are welcome to tell my shrift to all the world. Absolve me now; and if you send me to heaven, I’ll give you credit for a wonder-worker when we meet.”

So saying, he laughed loud and bitterly.

*

He is to die tomorrow in the Place of St. Mark. They are building the scaffold. All are anxious to see the celebrated bravo and bandit.

They say that he has killed more than two hundred men in various broils and actions with his own hand. The caitiff mob of Venice admires the gigantic ruffian.

“Spalatro,” say they, “was a great man — a grand robber — a tremendous bravo. There will not soon again be such another dagger in Venice.”

*

It is over — the axe has fallen — the wretched sinner has passed from the world he so much abused. He spoke to the people from the scaffold, and all in mockery and jibes. The giddy crowd applauded him. When he had done speaking, and before the executioner was ready, of a sudden, and for the last time, a fit seized him; he cried out with a loud voice. The devil cast him down, and tore him. While he lay struggling on the planks the signal was made, and at two blows the head was severed from the body.

*

Thus ends the narrative of honest Giacamo. Whether or not he believed the tale I cannot tell: he certainly wrote it carefully out from end to end in his fair tall hand. For myself, I have little doubt that the story contains a pretty accurate detail of the successive attacks of *delirium tremens* which the drunken excesses of the wretch Spalatro were calculated to induce; for it is but giving the devil his due to admit, that it is not his usual practice to have young men to supper with a view to get off his daughters. I confess, too, that, under all the circumstances, I am strongly inclined to think that "the *old man*" who figures in the foregoing narrative, (and whom I take to be identical with the *old boy*) ought to have consummated his persecution of the poor highwayman by an action for breach of promise of marriage, which would certainly lie in such a case. Perhaps, however, the devil showed his good sense in preferring his own fireside to venturing into our courts of law for a remedy. However, my dear Harry, joke as we may, it is not easy, no nor possible, altogether to extract from the mind its inborn affection for the marvellous. Philosophy does but teach us the extent of our ignorance (I think I saw that somewhere or other before, but no matter). Do the dead return from the grave? Do strange influences reveal to mortal eye the shadowy vistas of futurity? Can demoniac agencies possess the body as of old, and blast the mind? What are these things that we call spectral illusions, dreams, madness? All around us is darkness and uncertainty. To what thing shall we say I understand thee? All is doubt — all is mystery; in short, in the words of our poetic countrymen— "It's all botheration from bottom to top."

Yours faithfully, though far away,
The Translator.

A STABLE FOR NIGHTMARES

OR, WEIRD TALES

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A DEBT OF HONOR.

A GHOST STORY.

HUSH! what was that cry, so low but yet so piercing, so strange but yet so sorrowful? It was not the marmot upon the side of the Righi — it was not the heron down by the lake; no, it was distinctively human. Hush! there it is again — from the churchyard which I have just left!

Not ten minutes have elapsed since I was sitting on the low wall of the churchyard of Weggis, watching the calm glories of the moonlight illuminating with silver splendor the lake of Lucerne; and I am certain there was no one within the inclosure but myself.

I am mistaken, surely. What a silence there is upon the night! Not a breath of air now to break up into a thousand brilliant ripples the long reflection of the August moon, or to stir the foliage of the chestnuts; not a voice in the village; no splash of oar upon the lake. All life seems at perfect rest, and the solemn stillness that reigns about the topmost glaciers of S. Gothard has spread its mantle over the warmer world below.

I must not linger; as it is, I shall have to wake up the porter to let me into the hotel. I hurry on.

Not ten paces, though. Again I hear the cry. This time it sounds to me like the long, sad sob of a wearied and broken heart. Without staying to reason with myself, I quickly retrace my steps.

I stumble about among the iron crosses and the graves, and displace in my confusion wreaths of immortelles and fresher flowers. A huge mausoleum stands between me and the wall upon which I had been sitting not a quarter of an hour ago. The mausoleum casts a deep shadow upon the side nearest to me. Ah! something is stirring there. I strain my eyes — the figure of a man passes slowly out of the shade, and silently occupies my place upon the wall. It must have been his lips that gave out that miserable sound.

What shall I do? Compassion and curiosity are strong. The man whose heart can be rent so sorely ought not to be allowed to linger here with his despair. He is gazing, as I did, upon the lake. I mark his profile — clear-cut and symmetrical; I catch the lustre of large eyes. The face, as I can see it, seems very still and placid. I may be mistaken; he may merely be a wanderer like myself; perhaps he heard the three strange cries, and has also come to seek the cause. I feel impelled to speak to him.

I pass from the path by the church to the east side of the mausoleum, and so come toward him, the moon full upon his features. Great heaven! how pale his face is!

"Good-evening, sir. I thought myself alone here, and wondered that no other travellers had found their way to this lovely spot. Charming, is it not?"

For a moment he says nothing, but his eyes are full upon me. At last he replies:

"It is charming, as you say, Mr. Reginald Westcar."

"You know me?" I exclaim, in astonishment.

"Pardon me, I can scarcely claim a personal acquaintance. But yours is the only English name entered to-day in the Livre des Étrangers."

"You are staying at the Hôtel de la Concorde, then?"

An inclination of the head is all the answer vouchsafed.

"May I ask," I continue, "whether you heard just now a very strange cry repeated three times?"

A pause. The lustrous eyes seem to search me through and through — I can hardly bear their gaze. Then he replies.

"I fancy I heard the echoes of some such sounds as you describe."

The *echoes*! Is this, then, the man who gave utterance to those cries of woe! is it possible? The face seems so passionless; but the pallor of those features bears witness to some terrible agony within.

"I thought some one must be in distress," I rejoin, hastily; "and I hurried back to see if I could be of any service."

"Very good of you," he answers, coldly; "but surely such a place as this is not unaccustomed to the voice of sorrow."

"No doubt. My impulse was a mistaken one."

"But kindly meant. You will not sleep less soundly for acting on that impulse, Reginald Westcar."

He rises as he speaks. He throws his cloak round him, and stands motionless. I take the hint. My mysterious countryman wishes to be alone. Some one that he has loved and lost lies buried here.

"Goodnight, sir," I say, as I move in the direction of the little chapel at the gate. "Neither of us will sleep the less soundly for thinking of the perfect repose that reigns around this place."

"What do you mean?" he asks.

"The dead," I reply, as I stretch my hand toward the graves. "Do you not remember the lines in 'King Lear'?

"'After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.'"

"But *you* have never died, Reginald Westcar. You know nothing of the sleep of death."

For the third time he speaks my name almost familiarly, and — I know not why — a shudder passes through me. I have no time, in my turn, to ask him what he means; for he strides silently away into the shadow of the church, and I, with a strange sense of oppression upon me, returned to my hotel.

* * *

The events which I have just related passed in vivid recollection through my mind as I travelled northward one cold November day in the year 185 — . About six months previously I had taken my degree at Oxford, and had since been enjoying a trip upon the continent; and on my return to London I found a letter awaiting me from my lawyers, informing me somewhat to my astonishment, that I had succeeded to a small estate in Cumberland. I must tell you exactly how this came about. My mother was a Miss Ringwood, and she was the youngest of three children: the eldest was Aldina, the second was Geoffrey, and the third (my mother) Alice. Their mother (who had been a widow since my mother's birth) lived at this little place in Cumberland, and which was known as The Shallows; she died shortly after my mother's marriage with my father, Captain Westcar. My aunt Aldina and my uncle Geoffrey — the one at that time aged twenty-eight, and the other twenty-six — continued to reside at The Shallows. My father and mother had to go to India, where I was born, and where, when quite a child, I was left an orphan. A few months after my mother's marriage my aunt disappeared; a few weeks after that event, and my uncle Geoffrey dropped down dead, as he was playing at cards with Mr. Maryon, the proprietor of a neighboring mansion known as The Mere. A fortnight after my uncle's death, my aunt Aldina returned to The Shallows, and never left it again till she was carried out in her coffin to her grave in the churchyard. Ever since her return from her mysterious disappearance she maintained an impenetrable reserve. As a schoolboy I visited her twice or thrice, but these visits depressed my youthful spirits to such an extent, that as I grew older I excused myself from accepting my aunt's not very pressing invitations; and at the time I am now speaking of I had not seen her for eight or ten years. I was rather surprised, therefore, when she bequeathed me The Shallows, which, as the surviving child, she inherited under her mother's marriage settlement.

But The Shallows had always exercised a grim influence over me, and the knowledge that I was now going to it as my home oppressed me. The road seemed unusually dark, cold, and lonely. At last I passed the lodge, and two hundred yards more brought me to the porch. Very soon the door was opened by an elderly female, whom I well remembered as having been my aunt's housekeeper and cook. I had pleasant recollections of her, and was glad to see her. To tell the truth, I had not anticipated my visit to my newly acquired property with any great degree of enthusiasm; but a very tolerable dinner had an inspiriting effect, and I was pleased to learn that there was a bin of old Madeira in the cellar. Naturally I soon grew cheerful, and consequently talkative; and summoned Mrs. Balk for a little gossip. The substance of what I gathered from her rather diffusive conversation was as follows:

My aunt had resided at The Shallows ever since the death of my uncle Geoffrey, but she had maintained a silent and reserved habit; and Mrs. Balk was of opinion that she had had some great misfortune. She had persistently refused all intercourse with the people at The Mere. Squire Maryon, himself a cold and taciturn man, had once or twice showed a disposition to be friendly, but she had sternly repulsed all such overtures. Mrs. Balk was of opinion that Miss Ringwood was not "quite right," as she expressed it, on some topics; especially did she seem impressed with the idea that The Mere ought to belong to her. It appeared that the Ringwoods and Maryons were distant connections; that The Mere belonged in former times to a certain Sir Henry Benet; that he was a bachelor, and that Squire Maryon's father and old Mr. Ringwood were cousins of his, and that there was some doubt as to which was the real heir; that Sir Henry, who disliked old Maryon, had frequently said he had set any chance of dispute at rest, by bequeathing the Mere property by will to Mr. Ringwood, my mother's father; that, on his death, no such will could be found; and the family lawyers agreed that Mr. Maryon was the legal inheritor, and my uncle Geoffrey and his sisters must be content to take the Shallows, or nothing at all. Mr. Maryon was comparatively rich, and the Ringwoods poor, consequently they were advised not to enter upon a costly lawsuit. My aunt Aldina maintained to the last that Sir Henry had made a will, and that Mr. Maryon knew it, but had destroyed or suppressed the document. I did not gather from Mrs. Balk's narrative that Miss Ringwood had any foundation for her belief, and I dismissed the notion at once as baseless.

"And my uncle Geoffrey died of apoplexy, you say, Mrs. Balk?"

"*I* don't say so, sir, no more did Miss Ringwood; but *they* said so."

"Whom do you mean by *they*?"

"The people at The Mere — the young doctor, a friend of Squire Maryon's, who was brought over from York, and the rest; he fell heavily from his chair, and his head struck against the fender."

"Playing at cards with Mr. Maryon, I think you said."

"Yes, sir; he was too fond of cards, I believe, was Mr. Geoffrey."

"Is Mr. Maryon seen much in the county — is he hospitable?"

"Well, sir, he goes up to London a good deal, and has some friends down from town occasionally; but he does not seem to care much about the people in the neighborhood."

"He has some children, Mrs. Balk?"

"Only one daughter, sir; a sweet pretty thing she is. Her mother died when Miss Agnes was born."

"You have no idea, Mrs. Balk, what my aunt Aldina's great misfortune was?"

"Well, sir, I can't help thinking it must have been a love affair. She always hated men so much."

"Then why did she leave The Shallows to me, Mrs. Balk?"

"Ah, you are laughing, sir. No doubt she considered that The Mere ought to belong to you, as the heir of the Ringwoods, and she placed you here, as near as might be to the place."

"In hopes that I might marry Miss Maryon, eh, Mrs. Balk?"

"You are laughing again, sir. I don't imagine she thought so much of that, as of the possibility of your discovering something about the missing will."

I bade the communicative Mrs. Balk good night and retired to my bedroom — a low, wide, sombre, oak-panelled chamber. I must confess that family stories had no great interest for me, living apart from them at school and college as I had done; and as I undressed I thought more of the probabilities of sport the eight hundred acres of wild shooting belonging to The Shallows would afford me, than of the supposed will my poor aunt had evidently worried herself about so much. Thoroughly tired after my long journey, I soon fell fast asleep amid the deep shadows of the huge four-poster I mentally resolved to chop up into firewood at an early date, and substitute for it a more modern iron bedstead.

How long I had been asleep I do not know, but I suddenly started up, the echo of a long, sad cry ringing in my ears.

I listened eagerly — sensitive to the slightest sound — painfully sensitive as one is only in the deep silence of the night.

I heard the oldfashioned clock I had noticed on the stairs strike three. The reverberation seemed to last a long time, then all was silent again. “A dream,” I muttered to myself, as I lay down upon the pillow; “Madeira is a heating wine. But what can I have been dreaming of?”

Sleep seemed to have gone altogether, and the busy mind wandered among the continental scenes I had lately visited. By and by I found myself in memory once more within the Weggis churchyard. I was satisfied; I had traced my dream to the cries that I had heard there. I turned round to sleep again. Perhaps I fell into a doze — I cannot say; but again I started up at the repetition, as it seemed outside my window, of that cry of sadness and despair. I hastily drew aside the heavy curtains of my bed — at that moment the room seemed to be illuminated with a dim, unearthly light — and I saw, gradually growing into human shape, the figure of a woman. I recognized in it my aunt, Miss Ringwood. Horror-struck, I gazed at the apparition; it advanced a little — the lips moved — I heard it distinctly say:

“*Reginald Westcar, The Mere belongs to you. Compel John Maryon to pay the debt of honor!*”

I fell back senseless.

When next I returned to consciousness, it was when I was called in the morning; the shutters were opened, and I saw the red light of the dawning winter sun.

There is a strange sympathy between the night and the mind. All one's troubles represent themselves as increased a hundredfold if one wakes in the night, and begins to think about them. A muscular pain becomes the certainty of an incurable internal disease; and a headache suggests incipient softening of the brain. But all these horrors are dissipated with the morning light, and the after-glow of a cold bath turns them into jokes. So it was with me on the morning after my arrival at The Shallows. I accounted most satisfactorily for all that had occurred, or seemed to have occurred, during the night; and resolved that, though the old Madeira was uncommonly good, I must be careful in future not to drink more than a couple of glasses after dinner. I need scarcely say that I said nothing to Mrs. Balk of my bad dreams, and shortly after breakfast I took my gun, and went out in search of such game as I might chance to meet with. At three o'clock I sent the keeper home, as his capacious pockets were pretty well filled, telling him that I thought I knew the country, and should stroll back leisurely. The gray gloom of the November evening was spreading over the sky as I came upon a small plantation which I believed belonged to me. I struck straight across it; emerging from its shadows, I found myself by a small stream and some marshy land; on the other side another small plantation. A snipe got up, I fired, and tailored it. I marked the bird into this other plantation, and followed. Up got a covey of partridges — bang, bang — one down by the side of an oak. I was about to enter this covert, when a lady and gentleman emerged, and, struck with the unpleasant thought that I was possibly trespassing, I at once went forward to apologize.

Before I could say a word, the gentleman addressed me.

"May I ask, sir, if I have given you permission to shoot over my preserves?"

"I beg to express my great regret, sir," I replied, as I lifted my hat in acknowledgment of the lady's presence, "that I should have trespassed upon your land. I can only plead, as my excuse, that I fully believed I was still upon the manor belonging to The Shallows."

"Gentlemen who go out shooting ought to know the limits of their estates," he answered harshly; "the boundaries of The Shallows are well defined, nor is the area they contain so very extensive. You have no right upon this side the stream, sir; oblige me by returning."

I merely bowed, for I was nettled by his tone, and as I turned away I noticed that the young lady whispered to him.

“One moment, sir,” he said, “my daughter suggests the possibility of your being the new owner of The Shallows. May I ask if this is so?”

It had not occurred to me before, but I understood in a moment to whom I had been speaking, and I replied:

“Yes, Mr. Maryon — my name is Westcar.”

Such was my introduction to Mr. and Miss Maryon. The proprietor of The Mere appeared to be a gentleman, but his manners were cold and reserved, and a careful observer might have remarked a perpetual restlessness in the eyes, as if they were physically incapable of regarding the same object for more than a moment. He was about sixty years of age, apparently; and though he now and again made an effort to carry himself upright, the head and shoulders soon drooped again, as if the weight of years, and, it might be, the memory of the past, were a heavy load to carry. Of Miss Maryon it is sufficient to say that she was nineteen or twenty, and it did not need a second glance to satisfy me that her beauty was of no ordinary kind.

I must hurry over the records of the next few weeks. I became a frequent visitor at The Mere. Mr. Maryon’s manner never became cordial, but he did not seem displeased to see me; and as to Agnes, — well, she certainly was not displeased either.

I think it was on Christmas Day that I suddenly discovered that I was desperately in love. Miss Maryon had been for two or three days confined to her room by a bad cold, and I found myself in a great state of anxiety to see her again. I am sorry to say that my thoughts wandered a good deal when I was at church upon that festival, and I could not help thinking what ample room there was for a bridal procession up the spacious aisle. Suddenly my eyes rested upon a mural tablet, inscribed, “To the memory of Aldina Ringwood.” Then with a cold thrill there came back upon me what I had almost forgotten, the dream, or whatever it was, that had occurred on that first night at The Shallows; and those strange words— “The Mere belongs to you. Compel John Maryon to pay the debt of honor!” Nothing but the remembrance of Agnes’ sweet face availed for the time to banish the vision, the statement, and the bidding.

Miss Maryon was soon downstairs again. Did I flatter myself too much in thinking that she was as glad to see me as I was to see her? No — I felt sure that I did not. Then I began to reflect seriously upon my position. My fortune was small, quite enough for me, but not enough for two; and as she was heiress of The Mere and a comfortable rent-roll of some six or eight thousand a year, was it not natural that Mr. Maryon expected her to make what is called a "good match"? Still, I could not conceal from myself the fact, that he evinced no objection whatever to my frequent visits at his house, nor to my taking walks with his daughter when he was unable to accompany us.

One bright, frosty day I had been down to the lake with Miss Maryon, and had enjoyed the privilege of teaching her to skate; and on returning to the house, we met Mr. Maryon upon the terrace, He walked with us to the conservatory; we went in to examine the plants, and he remained outside, pacing up and down the terrace. Both Agnes and myself were strangely silent; perhaps my tongue had found an eloquence upon the ice which was well met by a shy thoughtfulness upon her part. But there was a lovely color upon her cheeks, and I experienced a very considerable and unusual fluttering about my heart. It happened as we were standing at the door of the conservatory, both of us silently looking away from the flowers upon the frosty view, that our eyes lighted at the same time upon Mr. Maryon. He, too, was apparently regarding the prospect, when suddenly he paused and staggered back, as if something unexpected met his gaze.

"Oh, poor papa! I hope he is not going to have one of his fits!" exclaimed Agnes.

"Fits! Is he subject to such attacks?" I inquired.

"Not ordinary fits," she answered hurriedly; "I hardly know how to explain them. They come upon him occasionally, and generally at this period of the year."

"Shall we go to him?" I suggested.

"No; you cannot help him; and he cannot bear that they should be noticed."

We both watched him. His arms were stretched up above his head, and again he recoiled a step or two. I sought for an explanation in Agnes' face.

"A stranger!" she exclaimed. "Who can it be?"

I looked toward Mr. Maryon. A tall figure of a man had come from the farther side of the house; he wore a large, loose coat and a kind of military cap upon his head.

"Doubtless you are surprised to see me, John," we heard the newcomer say, in a confident voice, "but I am not the devil, man, that you should greet me with such a peculiar attitude." He held out his hand, and continued, "Come, don't let the warmth of old fellowship be all on one side, this wintry day."

We could see that Mr. Maryon took the proffered right hand with his left for an instant, then seemed to shrink away, but exchanged no word of this greeting.

"I don't understand this," said Agnes, and we both hurried forward. The stranger, seeing Agnes approach, lifted his cap.

"Ah, your daughter, John, no doubt. I see the likeness to her lamented mother. Pray introduce me."

Mr. Maryon's usually pallid features had assumed a still paler hue, and he said in a low voice:

"Colonel Bludyer — my daughter." Agnes barely bowed.

"Charmed to renew your acquaintance, Miss Maryon. When last I saw you, you were quite a baby; but your father and I are very old friends — are we not, John?"

Mr. Maryon vaguely nodded his head.

"Well, John, you have often pressed your hospitality upon me, but till now I have never had an opportunity of availing myself of your kind offers; so I have brought my bag, and intend at last to give you the pleasure of my company for a few days."

I certainly should have thought that a man of Mr. Maryon's disposition would have resented such conduct as this, or, at all events, have given this self-invited guest a chilling welcome. Mr. Maryon, however, in a confused and somewhat stammering tone, said that he was glad Colonel Bludyer had come at last, and bade his daughter go and make the necessary arrangements. Agnes, in silent astonishment, entered the house, and then Mr. Maryon turned to me hastily and bade me good-by. In a by no means comfortable frame of mind I returned to The Shallows.

The sudden advent of this miscellaneous colonel was naturally somewhat irritating to me. Not only did I regard the man as an intolerable bore, but I could not help fancying that he was something more than an old friend of Mr. Maryon's; in fact, I was led to judge, by Mr. Maryon's strange conduct, that this Bludyer had some power over him which might be exercised to the detriment of the Maryon family, and I was convinced there was some mystery it was my business to penetrate.

The following day I went up to The Mere to see if Miss Maryon was desirous of renewing her skating lesson. I found the party in the billiard-room, Agnes marking for her father and the Colonel. Mr. Maryon, whom I knew to be an exceptionally good player, seemed incapable of making a decent stroke; the Colonel, on the other hand, could evidently give a professional fifteen, and beat him easily. We all went down to the lake together. I had no chance of any quiet conversation with Agnes; the Colonel was perpetually beside us.

I returned home disgusted. For two whole days I did not go near The Mere. On the third day I went up, hoping that the horrid Colonel would be gone. It was beginning to snow when I left The Shallows at about two o'clock in the afternoon, and Mrs. Balk foretold a heavy storm, and bade me not be late returning.

The black winter darkness in the sky deepened as I approached The Mere. I was ushered again into the billiard-room. Agnes was marking, as upon the previous occasion, but two days had worked a sad difference in her face. Mr. Maryon hardly noticed my entrance; he was flushed, and playing eagerly; the Colonel was boisterous, declaring that John had never played better twenty years ago. I relieved Agnes of the duty of marking. The snow fell in a thick layer upon the skylight, and the Colonel became seriously anxious about my return home. As I did not think he was the proper person to give me hints, I resolutely remained where I was, encouraged in my behavior by the few words I gained from Agnes, and by the looks of entreaty she gave me. I had always considered Mr. Maryon to be an abstemious man, but he drank a good deal of brandy and soda during the long game of seven hundred up, and when he succeeded in beating the Colonel by forty-three, he was in roaring spirits, and insisted upon my staying to dinner. Need I say that I accepted the invitation?

I made such toilet as I could in a most unattainable chamber that was allotted to me, and hurried back to the drawingroom in the hope that I might get a few private words with Agnes. I was not disappointed. She, too, had hurried down, and in a few words I learned that this abominable Bludyer was paying her his coarse attentions, and with, apparently, the full consent of Mr. Maryon. My indignation was unbounded. Was it possible that Mr. Maryon intended to sacrifice this fair creature to that repulsive man?

Mr. Maryon had appeared in excellent spirits when dinner began, and the first glass or two of champagne made him merrier than I thought it possible for him to be. But by the time the dessert was on the table he had grown silent and thoughtful; nor did he respond to the warm eulogiums the Colonel passed upon the magnum of claret which was set before us.

After dinner we sat in the library. The Colonel left the room to fetch some cigars he had been loudly extolling. Then Agnes had an opportunity of whispering to me.

"Look at papa — see how strangely he sits — his hands clenching the arms of the chair, his eyes fixed upon the blazing coals! How old he seems to be tonight! His terrible fits are coming on — he is always like this toward the end of January!" The Colonel's return put an end to any further confidential talk.

When we separated for the night, I felt that my going to bed would be purposeless. I felt most painfully wide awake. I threw myself down upon my bed, and worried myself by trying to imagine what secret there could be between Maryon and Bludyer — for that a secret of some kind existed, I felt certain. I tossed about till I heard the stroke of one. A dreadful restlessness had come upon me. It seemed as if the solemn night-side of life was busy waking now, but the silence and solitude of my antique chamber became too much for me. I rose from my bed, and paced up and down the room. I raked up the dying embers of the fire, and drew an armchair to the hearth. I fell into a doze. By and by I woke up suddenly, and I was conscious of stealthy footsteps in the passage. My sense of hearing became painfully acute. I heard the footsteps retreating down the corridor, until they were lost in the distance. I cautiously opened the door, and, shading the candle with my hand, looked out — there was nothing to be seen; but I felt that I could not remain quietly in my room, and, closing the door behind me, I went out in search of I knew not what.

The sitting-rooms and bedrooms in ordinary use at The Mere were in the modern part of the house; but there was an old Elizabethan wing which I had often longed to explore, and in this strange ramble of mine I soon had reason to be satisfied that I was well within it. At the end of an oak-panelled narrow passage a door stood open, and I entered a low, sombre apartment fitted with furniture in the style of two hundred years ago. There was something awfully ghostly about the look of this room. A great four-post bedstead, with heavy hangings, stood in a deep recess; a round oak table and two high-backed chairs were in the centre of the room. Suddenly, as I gazed on these things, I heard stealthy footsteps in the passage, and saw a dim light advancing. Acting on a sudden impulse, I extinguished my candle and withdrew into the shadow of the recess, watching eagerly. The footsteps came nearer. My heart seemed to stand still with expectation. They paused outside the door, for a moment really — for an age it seemed to me. Then, to my astonishment, I saw Mr. Maryon enter. He carried a small night-lamp in his hand. Another glance satisfied me that he was walking in his sleep. He came straight to the round table, and set down the lamp. He seated himself in one of the high-backed chairs, his vacant eyes staring at the chair opposite; then his lips began to move quickly, as if he were addressing some one. Then he rose, went to the bureau, and seemed to take something from it; then he sat down again. What a strange action of his hands! At first I could not understand it; then it flashed upon me that in this dream of his he must be shuffling cards. Yes, he began to deal; then he was playing with his adversary — his lips moving anxiously at times.

A look of terrible eagerness came over the sleepwalker’s countenance. With nimble fingers he dealt the cards, and played. Suddenly with a sweep of his hand he seemed to fling the pack into the fireplace, started from his seat, grappled with his unseen adversary, raised his powerful right hand, and struck a tremendous blow. Hush! more footsteps along the passage! Am I deceived? From my concealment I watch for what is to follow. Colonel Bludyer comes in, half dressed, but wide awake.

“You maniac!” I hear him mutter: “I expected you were given to such tricks as these. Lucky for you no eyes but mine have seen your abject folly. Come back to your room.”

Mr. Maryon is still gazing, his arms lifted wildly above his head, upon the imagined foe whom he had felled to the ground. The Colonel touches him on the shoulder, and leads him away, leaving the lamp. My reasoning faculties had fully returned to me. I held a clue to the secret, and for Agnes’ sake it must be followed up. I took the lamp away, and placed it on a table where the chamber candlesticks stood, relit my own candle, and found my way back to my bedroom.

The next morning, when I came down to breakfast, I found Colonel Bludyer warming himself satisfactorily at the blazing fire. I learned from him that our host was far from well, and that Miss Maryon was in attendance upon her father; that the Colonel was charged with all kinds of apologies to me, and good wishes for my safe return home across the snow. I thanked him for the delivery of the message, while I felt perfectly convinced that he had never been charged with it. However that might be, I never saw Mr. Maryon that morning; and I started back to The Shallows through the snow.

For the next two or three days the weather was very wild, but I contrived to get up to The Mere, and ask after Mr. Maryon. Better, I was told, but unable to see any one. Miss Maryon, too, was fatigued with nursing her father. So there was nothing to do but to trudge home again.

"*Reginald Westcar, The Mere is yours. Compel John Maryon to pay the debt of honor!*"

Again and again these words forced themselves upon me, as I listlessly gazed out upon the white landscape. The strange scene that I had witnessed on that memorable night I passed beneath Mr. Maryon's roof had brought them back to my memory with redoubled force, and I began to think that the apparition I had seen — or dreamed of — on my first night at The Shallows had more of truth in it than I had been willing to believe.

Three more days passed away, and a carter-boy from The Mere brought me a note. It was Agnes' handwriting. It said:

"Dear Mr. Westcar: Pray come up here, if you possibly can. I cannot understand what is the matter with papa; and he wishes me to do a dreadful thing. Do come. I feel that I have no friend but you. I am obliged to send this note privately."

I need scarcely say that five minutes afterward I was plunging through the snow toward The Mere. It was already late on that dark February evening as I gained the shrubbery; and as I was pondering upon the best method of securing admittance, I became aware that the figure of a man was hurrying on some yards in front of me. At first I thought it must be one of the gardeners, but all of a sudden I stood still, and my blood seemed to freeze with horror, as I remarked that the figure in front of me *left no trace* *of footmarks on the snow*! My brain reeled for a moment, and I thought I should have fallen; but I recovered my nerves, and when I looked before me again, it had disappeared. I pressed on eagerly. I arrived at the front door — it was wide open; and I passed through the hall to the library. I heard Agnes' voice.

"No, no, papa. You must not force me to this! I cannot — will not — marry Colonel Bludyer!"

"You *must*," answered Mr. Maryon, in a hoarse voice; "you *must* marry him, and save your father from something worse than disgrace!"

Not feeling disposed to play the eavesdropper, I entered the room. Mr. Maryon was standing at the fireplace. Agnes was crouching on the ground at his feet. I saw at once that it was no use for me to dissemble the reason of my visit, and, without a word of greeting, I said:

"Miss Maryon, I have come, in obedience to your summons. If I can prevent any misfortune from falling upon you I am ready to help you, with my life. You have guessed that I love you. If my love is returned I am prepared to dispute my claim with any man."

Agnes, with a cry of joy, rose from her knees, and rushed toward me. Ah! how strong I felt as I held her in my arms!

"I have my answer," I continued. "Mr. Maryon, I have reason to believe that your daughter is in fear of the future you have forecast for her. I ask you to regard those fears, and to give her to me, to love and cherish as my wife."

Mr. Maryon covered his face with his hands; and I could hear him murmur, "Too late — too late!"

"No, not too late," I echoed. "What is this Bludyer to you, that you should sacrifice your daughter to a man whose very look proclaims him a villain? Nothing can compel you to such a deed — not even a *debt of honor*!"

What it was impelled me to say these last words I know not, but they had an extraordinary effect upon Mr. Maryon. He started toward me, then checked himself; his face was livid, his eyeballs glaring, and he threw up his arms in the strange manner I had already witnessed.

"What is all this?" exclaimed a harsh voice behind me. "Mr. Westcar insulting Miss Maryon and her father! it is time for me to interfere." And Colonel Bludyer approached me menacingly. All his jovial manner and fulsome courtesy was gone; and in his flushed face and insolent look the savage rascal was revealed.

"You will interfere at your peril," I replied. "I am a younger man than you are, and my strength has not been weakened by drink and dissipation. Take care."

The villain drew himself up to his full height; and, though he must have been at least some sixty years of age, I felt assured that I should meet no ordinary adversary if a personal struggle should ensue. Agnes fainted, and I laid her on a sofa.

"Miss Maryon wants air," said the Colonel, in a calmer voice. "Excuse me, Mr. Maryon, if I open a window." He tore open the shutters, and threw up the sash. "And now, Mr. Westcar, unless you are prepared to be sensible, and make your exit by the door, I shall be under the unpleasant necessity of throwing you out of the window."

The ruffian advanced toward me as he spoke. Suddenly he paused. His jaw dropped; his hair seemed literally to stand on end; his white lips quivered; he shook, as with an ague; his whole form appeared to shrink. I stared in amazement at the awful change. A strange thrill shot through me, as I heard a quiet voice say:

"Richard Bludyer, your grave is waiting for you. Go."

The figure of a man passed between me and him. The wretched man shrank back, and, with a wild cry, leaped from the window he had opened.

All this time Mr. Maryon was standing like a lifeless statue.

In helpless wonder I gazed at the figure before me. I saw clearly the features in profile, and, swift as lightning, my memory was carried back to the unforgotten scene in the churchyard upon the Lake of Lucerne, and I recognized the white face of the young man with whom I there had spoken.

"John Maryon," said the voice, "this is the night upon which, a quarter of a century ago, you killed me. It is your last night on earth. You must go through the tragedy again."

Mr. Maryon, still statue-like, beckoned to the figure, and opened a half-concealed door which led into his study. The strange but opportune visitant seemed to motion to me with a gesture of his hand, which I felt I must obey, and I followed in this weird procession. From the study we mounted by a private staircase to a large, well-furnished bedchamber. Here we paused.

Mr. Maryon looked tremblingly at the stranger, and said, in a low, stammering voice:

"This is my room. In this room, on this night, twenty-five years ago, you told me that you were certain Sir Henry Benet's will was in existence, and that you had made up your mind to dispute my possession to this property. You had discovered letters from Sir Henry to your father which gave you a clue to the spot where that will might be found. You, Geoffrey Ringwood, of generous and extravagant nature, offered to find the will in my presence. It was late at night, as now; all the household slept. I accepted your invitation, and followed you."

Mr. Maryon ceased; he seemed physically unable to continue. The terrible stranger, in his low, echoing voice, replied:

"Go on; confess all."

"You and I, Geoffrey, had been what the world calls friends. We had been much in London together; we were both passionately fond of cards. We had a common acquaintance, Richard Bludyer. He was present on the 2d of February, when I lost a large sum of money to you at *écarté*. He hinted to me that you might possibly use these sums in instituting a lawsuit against me for the recovery of this estate. Your intimation that you knew of the existence of the will alarmed me, as it had become necessary for me to remain owner of The Mere. As I have said, I accepted your invitation, and followed you to Sir Henry Benet's room; and now I follow you again."

As he said these words, Geoffrey Ringwood, or his ghost, passed silently by Mr. Maryon, and led the way into the corridor. At the end of the corridor all three paused outside an oak door which I remembered well. A gesture from the leader made Mr. Maryon continue:

"On this threshold you told me suddenly that Bludyer was a villain, and had betrayed your sister Aldina; that she had fled with him that night; that he could never marry her, as you had reason to know he had a wife alive. You made me swear to help you in your vengeance against him. We entered the room, as we enter it now."

Our leader had opened the door of the room, and we were in the same chamber I had wandered to when I had slept at The Mere. The figure of Geoffrey Ringwood paused at the round table, and looked again at Mr. Maryon, who proceeded:

"You went straight to the fifth panel from the fireplace, and then touched a spring, and the panel opened. You said that the will giving this property to your father and his heirs was to be found there. I was convinced that you spoke the truth, but, suddenly remembering your love of gambling, I suggested that we should play for it. You accepted at once. We searched among the papers, and found the will. We placed the will upon the table, and began to play. We agreed that we would play up to ten thousand pounds. Your luck was marvellous. In two hours the limit was reached. I owed you ten thousand pounds, and had lost The Mere. You laughed, and said, 'Well, John, you have had a fair chance. At ten o'clock this morning I shall expect you to pay me *your debt of honor*.' I rose; the devil of despair strong upon me. With one hand I swept the cards from the table into the fire, and with the other seized you by the throat, and dealt you a blow upon the temple. You fell dead upon the floor."

Need I say that as I heard this fearful narrative, I recognized the actions of the sleepwalker, and understood them all?

"To the end!" said the hollow voice. "Confess to the end!"

"The doctor who examined your body gave his opinion, at the inquest, that you had died of apoplexy, caused by strong cerebral excitement. My evidence was to the effect that I believed you had lost a very large sum of money to Captain Bludyer, and that you had told me you were utterly unable to pay it. The jury found their verdict accordingly, and I was left in undisturbed possession of The Mere. But the memory of my crime haunted me as only such memories can haunt a criminal, and I became a morose and miserable man. One thing bound me to life — my daughter. When Reginald Westcar appeared upon the scene I thought that the debt of honor would be satisfied if he married Agnes. Then Bludyer reappeared, and he told me that he knew that I had killed you. He threatened to revive the story, to exhume your body, and to say that Aldina Ringwood had told him all about the will. I could purchase his silence only by giving him my daughter, the heiress of The Mere. To this I consented."

As he said these last words, Mr. Maryon sunk heavily into the chair.

The figure of Geoffrey Ringwood placed one ghostly hand upon his left temple, and then passed silently out of the room. I started up, and followed the phantom along the corridor — down the staircase — out at the front door, which still stood open — across the snow-covered lawn — into the plantation; and then it disappeared as strangely as I first had seen it; and, hardly knowing whether I was mad or dreaming, I found my way back to The Shallows.

For some weeks I was ill with brain-fever. When I recovered I was told that terrible things had happened at The Mere. Mr. Maryon had been found dead in Sir Henry Benet’s room — an effusion of blood upon the brain, the doctors said — and the body of Colonel Bludyer had been discovered in the snow in an old disused gravel-pit not far from the house.

A year afterward I married Agnes Maryon; and, if all that I had seen and heard upon that 3d of February was not merely the invention of a fevered brain, the debt of honor was at last discharged, for I, the nephew of the murdered Geoffrey Ringwood, became the owner of The Mere.

DEVEREUX’S DREAM.

I GIVE you this story only at second-hand; but you have it in substance — and he wasted few words over it — as Paul Devereux told it me.

It was not the only queer story he could have told about himself if he had chosen, by a good many, I should say. Paul’s life had been an eminently unconventional one: the man’s face certified to that — hard, bronzed, war-worn, seamed and scarred with strange battle-marks — the face of a man who had dared and done most things.

It was not his custom to speak much of what he had done, however. Probably only because he and I were little likely to meet again that he told me this I am free to tell you now.

We had come across one another for the first time for years that afternoon on the Italian Boulevart. Paul had landed a couple of weeks previously at Marseilles from a long yacht-cruise in southern waters, the monotony of which we heard had been agreeably diversified by a little pirate-hunting and slaver-chasing — the evil tongues called it piracy and slave-running; and certainly Devereux was quite equal to either *métier*; and he was about starting on a promising little filibustering expedition across the Atlantic, where the chances were he would be shot, and the certainty was that he would be starved. So perhaps he felt inclined to be a trifle more communicative than usual, as we sat late that night over a blazing pyre of logs and in a cloud of Cavendish. At all events he was, and after this fashion.

I forget now exactly how the subject was led up to. Expression of some philosophic incredulity on my part regarding certain matters, followed by a ten-minutes’ silence on his side pregnant with unwonted words to come — that was it, perhaps. At last he said, more to himself, it seemed, than to me:

“‘Such stuff as dreams are made of.’ Well, who knows? You’re a Sadducee, Bertie; you call this sort of thing, politely, indigestion. Perhaps you’re right. But yet I had a queer dream once.”

“Not unlikely,” I assented.

“You’re wrong; I never dream, as a rule. But, as I say, I had a queer dream once; and queer because it came literally true three years afterward.”

“Queer indeed, Paul.”

"Happens to be true. What's queerer still, my dream was the means of my finding a man I owed a long score, and a heavy one, and of my paying him in full."

"Bad for the payee!" I thought.

Paul's face had grown terribly eloquent as he spoke those last words. On a sudden the expression of it changed — another memory was stirring in him. Wonderfully tender the fierce eyes grew; wonderfully tender the faint, sad smile, that was like sunshine on storm-scathed granite. That smile transfigured the man before me.

"Ah, poor child — poor Lucille!" I heard him mutter.

That was it, was it? So I let him be. Presently he lifted his head. If he had let himself get the least thing out of hand for a moment, he had got back his self-mastery the next.

"I'll tell you that queer story, Bertie, if you like," he said.

The proposition was flatteringly unusual, but the voice was quite his own.

"Somehow I'd sooner talk than think about — *her*," he went on after a pause.

I nodded. He might talk about this, you see, but *I* couldn't. He began with a question — an odd one:

"Did you ever hear I'd been married?"

Paul Devereux and a wife had always seemed and been to me a most unheard-of conjunction. So I laconically said:

"No."

"Well, I was once, years ago. She was my wife — that child — for a week. And then —— — "

I easily filled up the pause; but, as it happened, I filled it up wrongly; for he added:

"And then she was murdered."

I was not unused to our Paul's stony style of talk; but this last sentence was sufficiently startling.

"Eh?"

"Murdered — in her sleep. They never found the man who did it either, though I had Durbec and all the Rue de Jérusalem at work. But I forgave them that, for I found the man myself, and killed him."

He was filling his pipe again as he told me this, and he perhaps rammed the Cavendish in a little tighter, but that was all. The thing was a matter of course; I knew my Paul, well enough to know that. Of course he killed him.

"Mind you," he continued, kindling the black *brûle-gueule* the while— "mind you, I'd never seen this man before, never known of his existence, except in a way that — however, it was this way."

He let his grizzled head drop back on the cushions of his chair, and his eyes seemed to see the queer story he was telling enacted once more before him in the red hollows of the fire.

"As I said, it was years ago. I was waiting here in Paris for some fellows who were to join me in a campaign we'd arranged against the African big game. I never was more fit for anything of that sort than I was then. I only tell you this to show you that the thing can't be accounted for by my nerves having been out of order at all.

"Well: I was dining alone that day, at the Café Anglais. It was late when I sat down to my dinner in the little salon as usual. Only two other men were still lingering over theirs. All the time they stayed they bored me so persistently with some confounded story of a murder they were discussing, that I was once or twice more than half-inclined to tell them so. At last, though, they went away.

"But their talk kept buzzing abominably in my head. When the waiter brought me the evening paper, the first thing that caught my eye was a circumstantial account of the *probable* way the fellow did his murder. I say probable, for they never caught him; and, as you will see directly, they could only suppose how it occurred.

"It seemed that a well-known Paris banker, who was ascertained beyond doubt to have left one station alive and well, and with a couple of hundred thousand francs in a leathern *sac* under his seat, arrived at the next station the train stopped at with his throat cut and *minus* all his money, except a few banknotes to no great amount, which the assassin had been wise enough to leave behind him. The train was a night express on one of the southern lines; the banker travelled quite alone, in a first-class carriage; and the murder must have taken place between midnight and 1 a.m. next morning. The newspapers supposed — rightly enough, I think — that the murderer must have entered the carriage *from without*, stabbed his victim in his sleep — there were no signs of any struggle — opened the *sac*, taken what he wanted, and retreated, loot and all, by the way he came. I fully indorsed my particular writer's opinion that the murderer was an uncommonly cool and clever individual, especially as I fancy he got clear off and was never afterward laid hands on.

“When I had done that I thought I had done with the affair altogether. Not at all. I was regularly ridden with this confounded murder. You see the banker was rather a swell; everybody knew him: and that, of course, made it so shocking. So everybody kept talking about him: they were talking about him at the Opera, and over the *baccarat* and *bouillotte* at La Topaze’s later. To escape him I went to bed and smoked myself to sleep. And then a queer thing came to pass: I had a dream — I who never dream; and this is what I dreamed:

“I saw a wide, rich country that I knew. A starless night hung over it like a pall. I saw a narrow track running through it, straight, both ways, for leagues. Something sped along this track with a hurtling rush and roar. This something that at first had looked like a red-eyed devil, with dark sides full of dim fire, resolved itself, as I watched it, presently, into a more conventional night express-train. It flew along, though, as no express-train ever travelled yet; for all that, I was able to keep it quite easily in view. I could count the carriages as they whirled by. One — two — three — four — five — six; but I could only see distinctly into one. Into that one with perfect distinctness. Into that one I seemed forced to look.

“It was the fourth carriage. Two people were in it. They sat in opposite corners; both were sleeping. The one who sat facing forward was a woman — a girl, rather. I could see that; but I couldn’t see her face. The blind was drawn across the lamp in the roof, and the light was very dim; moreover, this girl lay back in the shadow. Yet I seemed to know her, and I knew that her face was very fair. She wore a cloak that shrouded her form completely, yet her form was familiar to me.

“The figure opposite to her was a man’s. Strangely familiar to me too this figure was. But, as he slept, his head had sunk upon his breast, and the shadow cast upon his face by the low-drawn travelling-cap he wore hid it from me. Yet if I had seemed to know the girl’s face, I was certain I knew the man’s. But as I could see, so I could remember, neither. And there was an absolute torture in this which I can’t explain to you, — in this inability, and in my inability to wake them from their sleep.

“From the first I had been conscious of a desire to do that. This desire grew stronger every second. I tried to call to them, and my tongue wouldn’t move. I tried to spring toward them, to thrust out my arms and touch them, and my limbs were paralyzed. And then I tried to shut my eyes to what I *knew* must happen, and my eyes were held open and dragged to look on in spite of me. And I saw this:

"I saw the door of the carriage where these two sleepers, whose sleep was so horribly sound, were sitting — I saw this door open, and out of the thick darkness another face look in.

"The light, as I have said, was very dim, but I could see his face as plainly as I can see yours. A large yellow face it was, like a wax mask. The lips were full, and lustful and cruel. The eyes were little eyes of an evil gray. Thin yellow streaks marked the absence of the eyebrows; thin yellow hair showed itself under a huge fur travelling-cap. The whole face seemed to grow slowly into absolute distinctness as I looked, by the sort of devilish light that it, as it were, radiated. I had chanced upon a good many damnable visages before then; but there was a cold fiendishness about this one such as I had seen on no man's face, alive or dead, till then.

"The next moment the man this face belonged to was standing in the carriage, that seemed to plunge and sway more furiously, as though to waken them that still slept on. He wore a long fur travelling-robe, girt about the waist with a fur girdle. Abnormally tall and broad as he was, he looked in this dress gigantic. Yet there was a marvellous cat-like lightness and agility about all his movements.

"He bent over the girl lying there helpless in her sleep. I don't make rash bargains as a rule, but I felt I would have given years of my life for five minutes of my lost freedom of limb just then. I tell you the torture was infernal.

"The assassin — I knew he was an assassin — bent awhile, gloatingly, over the girl. His great yellow hands were both bare, and on the forefinger of the right hand I could see some great stone blazing like an evil eye. In that right hand there gleamed something else. I saw him draw it slowly from his sleeve, and, as he drew it, turn round and look at the other sleeper with an infernal triumphant malignity and hate the Devil himself might have envied. But the man he looked at slept heavily on. And then — God! I feel the agony I felt in my dream then now! — then I saw the great yellow hand, with the great evil eye upon it, lifted murderously, and the bright steel it held shimmer as the assassin turned again and bent his yellow face down closer to that other face hidden from me in the shadow — the girl's face, that I knew was so fair.

"How can I tell this?... The blade flashed and fell.... There was the sound of a heavy sigh stifled under a heavy hand....

"Then the huge form of the assassin was reared erect, and the bloated yellow face seemed to laugh silently, while the hand that held the steel pointed at the sleeping man in diabolical menace.

"And so the huge form and the bloated yellow face seemed to fade away while I watched.

"The express rushed and roared through the blinding darkness without; the sleeping man slept on still; till suddenly a strong light fell full upon him, and he woke.

"And then I saw why I had been so certain that I knew him. For as he lifted his head, I saw his face in the strong light.

"*And the face was my own face; and the sleeper was myself!*"

Paul Devereux made a pause in his queer story here. Except when he had spoken of the girl, he had spoken in his usual cool, hard way. The pipe he had been smoking all the time was smoked out. He took time to fill another before he went on. I said never a word, for I guessed who the sleeping girl was.

"Well," Paul remarked presently, "that was a devilish queer dream, wasn't it? You'll account for it by telling me I'd been so pestered with the story of the banker's murder that I naturally had nightmare; perhaps, too, that my digestion was out of order. Call it a nightmare, call it dyspepsia, if you like. I *don't*, because —— — But you'll see why I don't directly.

"At the same moment that my dream-self awoke in my dream, my actual self woke in reality, and with the same ghastly horror.

"I say the *same* horror, for neither then nor afterward could I separate my one self from my other self. They seemed identical; so that this queer dream made a more lasting impression upon me than you'd think. However, in the life I led that sort of thing couldn't last very long. Before I came back from Africa I had utterly forgotten all about it. Before I left Paris, though, and while it was quite fresh in my memory, I sketched the big murderer just as I had seen him in my dream. The great yellow face, the great broad frame in the fur travelling-robe, the great hand with the great evil eye upon it — everything, carefully and minutely, as though I had been going to paint a portrait that I wanted to make lifelike. I think at the time I had some such intention. If I had, I never fulfilled it. But I made the sketch, as I say, carefully; and then I forgot all about it.

"Time passed — three years nearly. I was wintering in the south of France that year. There it was that I met her — Lucille. Old D'Avray, her father, and I had met before in Algeria. He was dying now. He left the child on his deathbed to me. The end was I married her.

"Poor little thing! I think I might have made her happy — who knows? She used to tell me often she was happy with me. Poor little thing!

"Well, we were to come straight to London. That was Lucille's notion. She wanted to go to my London first — nowhere else. Now I would rather have gone anywhere else; but, naturally, I let the child have her way. She seemed nervously eager about it, I remembered afterward; seemed to have a nervous objection to every other place I proposed. But I saw or suspected nothing to make me question her very closely, or the reasons for her preference for our grimy old Pandemonium. What could I suspect? Not the truth. If I only had! If I had only guessed what it was that made her, as she said, long to be safe there already. Safe? What had she to fear with me? Ah, what indeed!

"So we started on our journey to England. It was a cold, dark night, early in March. We reached Lyons somewhere about seven. I should have stayed there that night but for Lucille. She entreated me so earnestly and with such strange vehemence to go on by the night-mail to Paris, that at last, to satisfy her, I consented; though it struck me unpleasantly at the time that I had let her travel too long already, and that this feverishness was the consequence of over-fatigue. But she became pacified at once when I told her it should be as she wanted; and declared she should sleep perfectly well in the carriage with me beside her. She should feel quite safe then, she said.

"Safe! Where safer? you might ask. Nowhere, I believe. Alone with me — surely nowhere safer. The Paris express was a short train that night; but I managed to secure a compartment for ourselves. I left Lucille in her corner there while I went across to the *buffet* to fill a flask. I was gone barely five minutes; but when I came back the change in the child's face fairly startled me. I had seen it last with the smile it always wore for me on it, looking so childishly happy in the lamplight. Now it was all gray-pale and distorted; and the great blue eyes told me directly with what.

“Fear — sudden, terrible fear — I thought. But *fear*? Fear of what? I asked her. She clung close to me half-sobbing awhile before she could answer; and then she told me — nothing. There was nothing the matter; only she had felt a pain — a cruel pain — at her heart; and it had frightened her. Yes, that was it; it had frightened her, but it had passed; and she was well, quite well again now.

“All this time her eyes seemed to be telling me another story; but I said nothing; she was obviously too excited already. I did my best to soothe her, and I succeeded. She told me she felt quite well once more before we started. No, she had rather, much rather go on to Paris, as I had promised her she should. She should sleep all the way, if no one came into the carriage to disturb her. No one could come in? Then nothing could be better.

“And so it was that she and I started that night by the Paris mail.

“I made her up a bed of rugs and wraps upon the cushions; but she had rather rest her head upon my shoulder, she said, and feel my arm about her; nothing could hurt her then. Ah, strange how she harped on that.

“She lay there, then, as she loved best — with her head resting on my shoulder, not sleeping much or soundly; uneasily, with sudden waking starts, and with glances round her; till I would speak to her. And then she would look up into my face and smile; and so drop into that uneasy sleep again. And I would think she was over-tired, that was all; and reproach myself with having let her come on. And three or four hours passed like this; and then we had got as far as Dijon.

“But the child was fairly worn out now; and she offered no opposition when I asked her to let me pillow her head on something softer than my shoulder. So I folded, a great thick shawl she was too well cloaked to need, and she made that her pillow.

“We were rushing full swing through the wild, dark night, when she lifted up her face and bade me kiss her and bid her sleep well. And I put my arm round her, and kissed the child’s loving lips — for the last time while she lived. Then I flung myself on the seat opposite her; and, watching her till she slept soundly and peacefully, slept at last myself also. I had drawn the blind across the lamp in the roof, and the light in the carriage was very dim.

“How long I slept I don’t know; it couldn’t have been more than an hour and a half, because the express was slackening speed for its first halt beyond Dijon. I had slept heavily I knew; but I woke with a sudden, sharp sense of danger that made me broad awake, and strung every nerve in a moment. The sort of feeling you have when you wake on a prairie, where you have come across ‘Indian sign;’ on outpost-duty, when your *feldwebel* plucks gently at your cloak. You know what I mean.

“I was on my feet at once. As I said, the light in the carriage was very dim, and the shadow was deepest where Lucille lay. I looked there instinctively. She must have moved in her sleep, for her face was turned away from me; and the cloak I had put so carefully about her had partly fallen off. But she slept on still. Only soundly, very soundly; she scarcely seemed to breathe. And — *did* she breathe?

“A ghastly fear ran through my blood, and froze it. I understood why I had wakened. In my nostrils was an awful odor that I knew well enough. I bent over her; I touched her. Her face was very cold; her eyes glared glassily at me; my hands were wet with something. My hands were wet with blood — her blood!

“I tore away the blind from the lamp, and then I could see that my wife of a week lay there stabbed straight to the heart — dead — dead beyond doubting; murdered in her sleep.”

Devereux’s stern, low voice shook ever so little as he spoke those last words; and we both sat very silent after them for a good while. Only when he could trust his utterance again he went on.

“A curious piece of devilry, wasn’t it? That child — whom had she ever harmed? Who could hate her like this? I remember I thought that, in a dull, confused sort of way, when I found myself alone in that carriage with her lying dead on the cushions before me. *Alone* with her — you understand? It was confusing.

“I pass over what immediately followed. The express came duly to a halt; and then I called people to me, and — and the Paris express went on without that particular carriage.

“The inquiry began before some local authority next day. Very little came of it. What could come of it, unless they had convicted *me* of the murder of this child I would have given my own life to save?

“They might have done that at home; but they knew better here, and didn’t. They couldn’t find me the actual assassin, however; though I believe they did their best. All they found was his weapon, which he most purposely have left behind. I asked for this, and got it. It gave their police no clue; and it gave me none. But I had a fancy for it.

"It was a plain, double-edged, admirably-tempered dagger — a very workmanlike article indeed. On the cross hilt of it I swore one day that I would live thenceforth for one thing alone — the discovery of the murderer of old D'Avray's child, whom I had promised him to care for before all. When I had found this man, whoever he was, I also swore that I would kill him. Kill him myself, you understand; without any of the law's delay or uncertainty, without troubling *bourreau* or hangman. Kill him as he had killed her — to do this was what I meant to live for. There was war to the knife between him and me.

"I started, of course, under one heavy disadvantage. He knew me, probably, whereas I didn't know him at all. When he found that his amiable intention of fixing the crime on me had been frustrated, it must, I imagined, have occurred to him that the said crime might eventually be fixed by me on him. And he had proved himself to be a person who didn't stick at trifles. It behooved me, therefore, to go to work cautiously. But I hadn't fought Indians for nothing; and I *was* very cautious. I waited quiet till I got a clue. It was a curious one; and I got it in this way. It struck me one day, suddenly, that I had heard of a murder precisely similar to this already. I could not at first call the thing to mind; but presently I remembered — my dream. And then I asked myself this: *Had not this murder been done before my eyes three years ago?*

"I came to the conclusion that the circumstances of the murder in my dream were absolutely identical with the circumstances of the actual crime. Yes; the girl whose face in that dream I had never been able to see was Lucille. Yes; the assassin whose face I had seen so plainly in that dream was the real assassin. In short, I believe that the murder had been *rehearsed* before me three years previous to its actual committal.

"Now this sounds rather wild. Yet I came to this conviction quite coolly and deliberately. It *was* a conviction. Assuming it to be true, the odds against me grew shorter directly; *for I had the portrait of the man I wanted drawn by myself the day after I had seen him in my dream*. And the original of that portrait was a man not to be easily mistaken, supposing him to exist at all. The day I came across that sketch of him in that old forgotten sketch-book of mine, I was as sure he did exist as that I was alive myself. What I had to do was to find this man, and then I never doubted I should find the man I wanted. You see how the odds had shortened. If he knew me I knew him now, and he had no notion that I did know him. It was a good deal fairer fight between us.

"I fought it out alone. My story was hardly one the Rue de Jérusalem would have acted upon; and, besides, I wanted no interference. So, with the portrait before me, I sat down and began to consider who this man was, and why he had murdered that child. The big, burly frame, the heavy yellow face, the sandy-yellow hair, the physiognomy generally, was Teutonic. My man I put down as a North German. Now there were, and are probably, plenty of men who would have no objection whatever to put a knife into me, if they got the chance; but this man, whom I had never met, could have had no such quarrel as theirs with me. His quarrel with me must have been, then, Lucille. Yes, that was it — Lucille. I began to see clearly: a thwarted, devilish passion — a cool, infernal revenge. The child had feared something of this sort; had perhaps seen him that night. This explained her nervous terror, her nervous anxiety to stop nowhere, to travel on. In that carriage of that express-train, alone with me — where could she be safer? This accounted, too, for her anxiety to reach England. He would not dare follow her there, she had thought, or, at least, could not without my noticing him. And then she would have told me. She had not told me before evidently because she had feared for *me* too, in a quarrel with this man. She must, innocent child as she was, have had some instinctive knowledge of what he was capable.... Ay, a cool, infernal revenge, indeed. To kill her; to fix the murder on me. That dagger he had left behind.... The apparent impossibility of any one's entering the carriage as he must have entered it at all, to say nothing of the almost absolute impossibility of his doing so without disturbing either of us, — you see it might have gone hard with me if a British jury had had to decide on the case.

"Well, to cut this as short as may be, I made up my mind that the man I wanted was a North German; that he had conceived a hideous passion for Lucille before I knew her; that she had shrunk from it and him so unmistakably, that he knew he had no chance; that my taking her away as my wife, to which he might have been a witness, drove him to as hideous a revenge; that, hearing we were going to England, and seeing that we were likely to stop nowhere on the way, and so give him a chance of doing what he had made up his mind to do, he had decided to do what he had done as he had done it, — counting on finding us asleep as he had found us, or on his strength if it came to a fight between him and me; but coolly reckless enough to brave everything in any case. And the devil aiding, he had in great part and only too well succeeded. He was now either so far satisfied that, if I made no move against him — and how, he might think, could I? — he, feeling himself all safe, would let me be; or, on the other hand, he did not feel safe, and was not satisfied, and was arranging for my being disposed of by and by. I considered the latter frame of mind as his most probable one; I went to work cautiously, as I say. I ascertained that Lucille had made no mention of any obnoxious *prétendant* at any time; I didn't expect to find she had, her terror of the man was too intense. But this man must have met her somewhere — where?

"When old D'Avray came home to die, his daughter was just leaving her Paris *pensionnat*. All through his last illness he had seen no visitor but me, and Lucille had never quitted him. Besides, I had been there all the time. I presumed, then, that this man and she had met in Paris; and I believe they were only likely to have met at one of the half-dozen houses where the child would now and again be asked. I got a list of all these. One name only struck me; it happened to be a German name — Steinmetz. I wondered if Monsieur Steinmetz was my man. In the mean time, who was he? I had no trouble in finding that out: Monsieur Steinmetz was a German banker of good standing and repute, reasonably well off, and recently left a widower. Personally? *Dame*, personally Monsieur Steinmetz was a great man and a fat, with a big face and blond hair, and the appearance of what he really was — a *bon vivant* and a *bon enfant* yet *n'avait jamais fait de mal à personne — allez!* — All, yes; in effect, Madame had died about a year ago, and Monsieur had been inconsolable for a long time. He had changed his residence now, and inhabited a house in one of the new streets off the Champs Elysées.

"From another source I discovered that in the lifetime of Madame Steinmetz Lucille was frequently at the house. She had ceased to come there about the date of the commencement of Madame's sudden illness. I got this information by degrees, while I lay *perdu* in an old haunt of mine in the Pays Latin yonder; for I had always had an idea that I should find the man I wanted in Paris. When I had got it, I thought I should like to see

Monsieur Steinmetz, the agreeable banker. One night I strolled up as far as his new residence in the street off the Champs Elysées. Monsieur Steinmetz lived on the first-floor. There was a brilliant light there: Monsieur Steinmetz was entertaining friends, it seemed.

“It was a fine night; I established myself out of sight under the doorway of an unfinished house opposite, and waited. I don’t know why; perhaps I fancied that when his friends were gone, the fineness of the night might induce Monsieur Steinmetz to take a stroll, and that then I should be able to gratify my curiosity. You see, I knew that if he were my man, I should know him directly. I waited a good while: shadows crossed the lighted blinds; once a big, broad shadow appeared there, that made me fancy I mightn’t have been waiting for nothing after all, somehow. Presently Monsieur Steinmetz’s guests departed, and in a little while after there appeared on the little balcony of Monsieur Steinmetz’s apartment *the man I wanted*. There was a moon that night, and the cold white light fell on the great yellow face, with the full lustful lips, and the full cruel chin, just as I had seen the light fall on it in my dream. It was the same face, Bertie; the same face, the same man. I couldn’t be mistaken. I had no doubt; I *knew* that the assassin of my wife, of that tender, innocent, helpless child, stood there, twenty yards from me, on that balcony.

“I had got myself pretty well in hand; and it was as well. I never moved. The face I knew turned presently toward the spot where I stood hidden, — the face I had seen in my dream, beyond all doubting. The evil gray eyes glanced carelessly into the shadow, and up and down the quiet street; and then Monsieur Steinmetz, humming an air, got inside the window again, and closed it after him. Once more the great burly shadow that had at first told me I should not wait in that dark doorway in vain crossed the blinds; and then it disappeared. I saw my man no more that night; but I had seen enough. I knew who he was now, and where to find him.

“As I walked along home I thought what I would do. I quite meant to kill Monsieur Steinmetz; but I also meant to have no *démêlés* with an Impérial Procureur and the Cour d’Assizes for doing so. I didn’t want to murder him, either. I thought I would wait a little for the chance of a suitable opportunity for settling my business satisfactorily. And I did wait. I turned this delay to account, and got together a case of circumstantial evidence against my man that, though perhaps it might have broken down in a law-court, would have been alone amply sufficient for me.

"The reason why Lucille's visits to the banker's house ceased was, it appeared, because Madame Steinmetz had conceived all at once a jealous dislike to her. How far this was owing to Lucille herself I could well understand; but I could understand Madame's jealousy equally well. Madame's illness, strangely sudden, dated from the cessation of Lucille's visits. Was it hard to find a *cause* for that illness — a cause for the wife's subsequent suspected death? I thought not. Then had followed Lucille's departure from Paris. The child's anxiety for her father hid her *other fear* from his eyes and mine; but that fear must have been on her then. With us she forgot it in time; yet it or another reason had always prevented all mention of what had occasioned it. She became my wife. At that very time I easily ascertained that Steinmetz was absent from Paris; less easily, but indubitably, that he had, at all events, been as far south as Lyons. At Lyons it must have been that Lucille first discovered he was dogging us. Hence her alarm, which I had remembered, and her anxiety to proceed on our journey without stopping for the night, as I had previously arranged. The morning after the murder Steinmetz reappeared in Paris. From the hour at which he was seen at the *gare*, it was certain that he had travelled by the night express train in which Lucille and I had started from Lyons; and he wore that morning a travelling-coat of fur in all respects similar to the one I remembered so well.

"If I had ever had any doubt of my man after actually seeing him, I should probably have convinced myself that he was my man by the general tendency of these facts, which I got at slowly and one by one. But I had no need of such evidence; and of course no case, even with such evidence, for a court of law. However, courts of law I had never intended to trouble in the matter.

"The opportunity I was waiting was some time before it offered. Monsieur Steinmetz was a man of regular habits, I found — from his first-floor in the street off the Champs Elysées, every morning at eleven, to the Bourse; thence to his bureau hard by till four; from his bureau to his café, where he read papers and played dominoes till six; and then home slowly by the Boulevarts. He might consider himself tolerably safe from me while he led this sort of life, even supposing he was aware he was incurring any danger. I don't think he troubled much about that; till one night, when, over the count of the beloved domino-points, his eyes met mine fixed right upon him. I had arranged this little surprise to see how it would affect him.

"Perhaps my gaze may have expressed something more than the mere distraction I intended; but I noticed — though a more indifferent observer might easily have failed to notice — how the great yellow face, expanded in childish interest in the childish game, seemed suddenly to grow gray and harden; how the fat smile became a cruel baring of sharp white teeth; how the fat chin squared itself. The man knew me, and scented danger.

"A moment's reflection convinced Monsieur Steinmetz, though, that it could be by no means so certain that I knew him; five minutes' observation of me more than half satisfied him that I did not. Yet what did I want there? What was I doing in Paris? This might concern him nearly, he must have thought.

"I kept my own face in order, and watched his. It wasn't an easy one to read; but you see I had studied it closely, and in a way he couldn't have dreamed of. Monsieur Steinmetz was outwardly his wonted self, but inwardly not quite comfortable when he rose; and I saw the evil eye gleam on his great yellow finger as he took out his purse to pay the *garçon*, just as I had seen it when that finger pointed at *myself* in my dream. I felt curious sensations, Bertie, as I sat there and looked abstractedly at Monsieur Steinmetz. I wondered how long it would be before —— But my time hadn't come yet. He went out without another glance at me. I saw his huge form on the other side of the street when I left the café in my turn. This I had expected. Monsieur Steinmetz was naturally curious. It was hardly possible that I could know him; but it was quite certain that he ought to know all about me. So, when I moved on, he moved on; in short, Monsieur Steinmetz dogged me up one street and down another, till he finally dogged me home to my hiding-place in the Pays Latin. He did it very well, too — much better than you would have expected from so apparently unwieldy a *mouchard*. But I *remembered* how lightly he could move.

"Next day I had, of course, disappeared from my old quarters, and gone no one knew where. I suppose Monsieur Steinmetz didn't like this fact when he heard of it. It might have seemed suspicious. Suppose I *had* recognized him? In that case I had evidently a little game of my own, and was as evidently desirous to keep it dark. He was a cool hand; but I fancy my man began to get a little uneasy. He took some trouble to find me again. After a while I permitted him to do that. Once found, he seemed determined that I should not be lost sight of again for want of watching. I permitted that, too; it helped play my game, and I wanted to bring it to an end. To which intent, Monsieur Steinmetz got to hear from sources best known to himself as much of my plans as should bring him to the state I wanted. That was a murderous state. I wanted to get him to think that I was dangerous enough to be worth putting out of the way. I presume he was aware there were, or would be, weak joints in his armor, impenetrable as it seemed; and he preferred not risking the ordeal of legal battle if he could help it. At all events, he elected at last to rid himself of a person who might be dangerous, and was troublesome, by the shortest and the simplest means.

"I say so because when, believing my man was ripe for this, I left Paris about midday for a certain secluded little spot on the sea-coast, I saw one of Monsieur Steinmetz's employees on the platform; and because, two days after my arrival in my secluded spot, I met Monsieur Steinmetz in person, newly arrived also. Now this was exactly what I had intended and anticipated. Monsieur Steinmetz had come down there to put me out of his way, if he could. He passed me, leisurely strolling in the opposite direction, humming his favorite *aria*, bigger and yellower than ever, the evil eye fiery on his finger. His own eyes shot me as evil fire; but he said nothing.... I saw he was ripe, though.... My time was close at hand.

"It came. Monsieur Steinmetz and I met once more in the very place where I, knowing my ground, had intended we should meet. It was a dip in the cliffs like a hollowed palm, and just there the cliff jutted out a good bit, with a sheer fall on to the rocks below. It was a gray afternoon, at the end of summer. The wind was rising fast; there was a thunder of heavy waves already.

"I think he had been dogging me; but I hadn't chosen to let him get up to me till now. We were quite out of sight when he had reached the level bottom of the dip, where I had halted — quite out of sight, and quite alone. To do him justice, he came on steadily enough. His face was liker the sketch I had made of it, liker the face I had seen in my dream, than it had ever looked before. Evidently he had made up his mind.... At last, then!... Well, I had been waiting long!... He was close beside me.

"'*Ah! bon jour, cher Monsieur Steinmetz.*'

"'So?' he said, his little eyes contracting like a cobra's. 'Ah! Monsieur knows my name?'

"'Among other things about you — yes.'

"'So!' The yellow face was turning grayer and harder every minute — liker and liker to my likeness of it. 'And what other things? Has it never appeared to you that this you do, have been doing — this meddling, may be dangerous, *hein*?'

"He had changed his tone, as he had changed the person in which he addressed me. Yes, he had certainly made up his mind. And his big right hand was hidden inside his waistcoat, so that I could not see the evil eye I knew was on his finger.

"'Dangerous?' he repeated slowly.

"'Possibly.'

"'Ay, surely; I shall crush you!'

"'Try.'

"'In good time; wait. You plot against me. Take care; I am strong; I warn you. There must be an end of this, you understand, or — — '

"He nodded his big head significantly.

"'You are right,' I told him; 'there must be an end. It is coming.'

"'So?'

"'Yes; I know you. You know me now.'

"'I know you. What do you want?'

"'To kill you.'

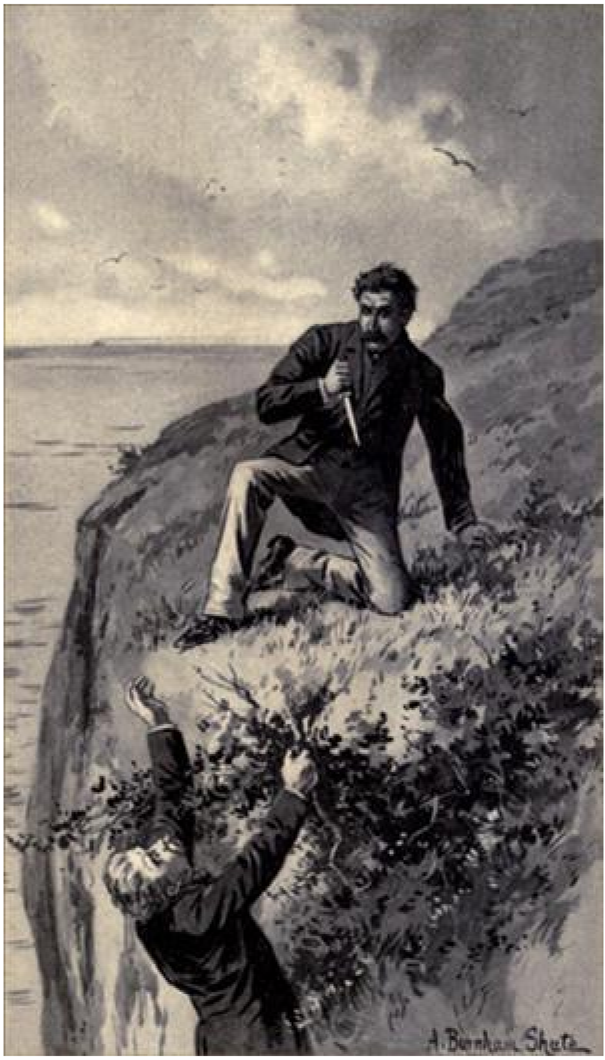
"'So?'

"'Yes; as you killed her.'

"'As I killed her? That is it, then? You know that?'

"'I know that.'

"'Well, it is true. I killed her. Now you can guess what I am going to do to you — to you, curse you! — whom she loved.'



"THE GREAT YELLOW FACE LOOKED SILENTLY UP AT ME; AND THEN — THEN IT DISAPPEARED."

"The very face I had seen in my dream now, Bertie, the very face! There was something besides the evil eye that gleamed in his right hand when he drew it from his breast. Once more he spoke.

"'Yes, I killed her. I meant worse for you. You escaped that; but you will not escape me now. Fool! were you mad to do this? Did not I hate you enough? And I would have let you be. Ah, die, then, if you will have it so!'

"His heavy right arm swung high as he spoke, and I saw the sharp steel gleam as it turned to fall. And I twisted from his grip, and caught the falling arm, and bent it till the dagger dropped to the ground. And then, for a fierce, desperate, devilish minute, I had him in my clutch, dragging him nearer the smooth, slippery edge. He was no match for me at this I knew, and he knew; but he held me with the hold of his despair, and I could not loose myself. Both of us together, he meant; but not I. Yet I only freed myself just as he rolled exhausted, but clutching at the tough, short bushes wildly, toward the brink, and partly over it.... Only the hold of his hands between him and his death. And I knelt above him, with the knife in my hand that was stained with *her* blood.

"The great yellow face, ashen now in its mortal agony, looked silently up at me — for three or four awful seconds; and then — then it disappeared.

"Bah!" Paul concluded, "that was the end of it."

CATHERINE’S QUEST.

IMAGINE to yourself an old, rambling, redbrick house, with odd corners and gables here and there, all bound and clasped together with ivy, and you have Craymoor Grange. It was built long before Queen Elizabeth’s time, and that illustrious monarch is said to have slept in it in one of her royal progresses — as where has she not slept?

There still remain some remnants of bygone ages, although it has been much modernized and added to in later days. Among these are the brewhouse and laundry — formerly, it is said, dining-hall and ball-room. The latter of these is chiefly remarkable for an immense arched window, such as you see in churches, with five lights.

When we came to the Grange this window had been partially blocked up, and in front of it, up to one-third of its height, was a wooden daïs, or platform, on which stood a cumbrous mangle, left there, I suppose, by the last tenants of the house.

Of these last tenants we knew very little, for it was so long since it had been inhabited that the oldest authority in the village could not remember it.

There were, however, some half-defaced monuments in the village church of Craymoor, bearing the figures and escutcheons of knights and dames of “the old family,” as the villagers said; but the inscriptions were worn and almost illegible, and for some time we none of us took the pains to decipher them.

We first came to Craymoor Grange in the summer of 1849, my husband having discovered the place in one of his rambles, and taken a fancy to it. At first I certainly thought we could never make it our home, it was so dilapidated and tumble-down; but by the time winter came on we had had several repairs done and alterations made, and the rooms really became quite presentable.

As our family was small we confined ourselves chiefly to the newest part of the house, leaving the older rooms to the mice, dust, and darkness. We made use of two of the old rooms, however, one as a servants’ bedroom and the other as an extra spare chamber, in case of many visitors. For myself, though I hope I am neither nervous nor superstitious, I confess that I would rather sleep in "our wing," as we called the part of the house we inhabited, than in any of the old rooms.

When Catherine l'Estrange came to us, however, during our first Christmas at Craymoor, I found that she was troubled with no such fancies, but declared that she delighted in queer old rooms, with raftered ceilings and deep window-seats, such as ours, and begged to be allowed to occupy the spare chamber. This I readily acceded to, as we had several visitors, and needed all the available rooms.

As my story has principally to do with Catherine l'Estrange, I suppose I ought to speak more fully about her. She was an old school-friend of my daughter Ella, and at the time of which I am speaking was just one-and-twenty, and the merriest girl I ever knew. She had stayed with us once or twice before we came to the Grange, but we then knew no other particulars concerning her family, than that her father had been an Indian officer, and that he and her mother had both died in India when she was about six years old, leaving her to the care of an aunt living in England.

I now, after a long, and I fear a tedious, preamble, come to my story.

On the eve of the new year of 1850, Catherine had a very bad sore throat, and was obliged, though sorely against her inclination, to stay in bed all day, and forego our small evening gayety.

At about 6 o'clock p.m., Ella took her some tea, and fearing she would be dull, offered to stay with her during the evening. This, however, Catherine would not hear of. "You go and entertain your company," said she laughingly, "and leave me to my own devices; I feel very lazy, and I dare say I shall go to sleep." As she had not slept much on the preceding night, Ella thought it was the best thing she could do; so she went out by the door leading on to the corridor, first placing the night-lamp on a table behind the door opening on to the laundry, so that it might not shine in her face.

She did not again visit Catherine's room until reminded to do so by my son George, at about halfpast ten. She then rapped at the door, and receiving no answer, opened it softly, and approached the bed. Catherine lay quite still, and Ella imagined her to be asleep. She therefore returned to the drawingroom without disturbing her.

As it was New Year's eve, we stayed up "to see the old year out and the new year in," and at a few minutes to twelve we all gathered round the open window on the stairs to hear the chimes ring out from the village church.

We were all listening breathlessly as the hall-clock struck twelve, when a piercing cry suddenly echoed through the house, causing us all to start in alarm. I knew that it could only proceed from Catherine's room, for the servants were all assembled at the window beneath us, listening, like ourselves, for the chimes. Thither therefore I flew, followed by Ella, and we found poor Catherine in a truly pitiable state.

She was deadly pale, in an agony of terror, and the perspiration stood in large drops upon her forehead. It was some time before we could succeed at all in composing her, and her first words were to implore us to take her into another room.

She was too weak to stand, so we wrapped her in blankets, and carried her into Ella's bedroom. I noticed that as she was taken through the laundry she shuddered, and put her hands before her eyes. When she was laid on Ella's bed she grew calmer, and apologized for the trouble she had caused, saying that she had had a dreadful dream.

With this explanation we were fain to be content, though I thought it hardly accounted for her excessive terror. I had observed, however, that any allusion to what had passed caused her to tremble and turn pale again, and I thought it best to refrain from exciting her further.

When morning came I found Catherine almost her usual self again; but I persuaded her to remain in bed until the evening, as her cold was not much better. Ella's curiosity to hear the dream which had so much excited her friend could now no longer be restrained; but whenever she asked to hear it, Catherine said, "Not now; another time, perhaps, I may tell you."

When she came down to dinner in the evening, we noticed that she was peculiarly silent, and we endeavored to rally her into her usual spirits, but in vain. She tried to laugh and to appear merry, poor child; but there was evidently something on her mind.

At last, as we all sat round the fire after dinner, she spoke. She addressed herself to my husband, but the tone of her voice caused us all to listen.

"Mr. Fanshawe, I have something to ask of you," said she, and then paused.

"Ask on," said Mr. Fanshawe.

"I know that you will think the request I am going to make a peculiar one; but I have a particular reason for making it," continued she. "It is that you will have the wooden daïs in front of the laundry window removed."

Mr. Fanshawe certainly was taken aback, as were we all. When he had mastered his bewilderment, and assured himself that he had heard aright —

“It is, indeed, a strange request, my dear Catherine,” said he; “what can be your reason for asking such a thing?”

“If you will only have it done, and not question me, you will understand my reason,” answered Catherine.

Mr. Fanshawe demurred, however, thinking it some foolish whim, and at last Catherine said:

“I must tell you why I wish it done, then: I am sure we shall discover something underneath.”

At this we all looked at one another in extreme bewilderment.

“Discover something underneath? No doubt we should — cobwebs, probably, and dust and spiders,” answered Mr. Fanshawe, much amused.

But Catherine was not to be laughed down.

“Only do as I wish,” said she beseechingly, “and you will see. If you find nothing underneath the daïs but cobwebs and dust, then you may laugh at me as much as you like.” And I saw that she was serious, for tears were actually gathering in her eyes. Of course we were all very anxious to know what Catherine expected to find, and how she came to suspect that there was anything to be found; but she would not say, and begged us all not to question her.

And now George took upon himself to interfere.

“Let us do as Catherine wishes, father,” said he; “the daïs spoils the laundry, and would be much better away.”

“Well, well,” said Mr. Fanshawe, “do as you like, only I shall expect my share of the treasure that is found. — And now,” added he, “you must have a glass of wine to warm you, Catherine, for you look sadly pale, child.”

Here the conversation changed, though we often alluded to the subject again during the evening.

The next morning the first thing in all our thoughts was Catherine’s singular request.

I think Mr. Fanshawe had hoped she would have forgotten it, but such was not the case; on the contrary, she enlisted George’s services the first thing after breakfast to carry out her design, and they left the room together, accompanied by Ella.

It was a snowy morning, and Mr. Fanshawe was obliged to be away from home all day on business, so I was quite at a loss how to entertain my numerous guests successfully. Happily for me, however, the mystery attendant on the removal of the daïs in the laundry charmed them all; and I have to thank Catherine for contributing to their amusement much better than I could possibly have done.

Not long after the disappearance of Catherine, Ella, and George, a message was sent to us in the drawingroom requesting our presence in the laundry; and on all flocking there with more or less eagerness, we found a fire burning on the oldfashioned hearth and chairs arranged round it.

It appeared that with the help of Sam, our factotum, who was a kind of Jack-of-all-trades, George had succeeded in loosening the planks of the daïs, which, although strongly put together, were rotten and worm-eaten, and that we were now summoned to be witnesses of its removal. We found Catherine trembling with a strange eagerness, and her face quite pale with excitement. This was shared by Ella and George; and, judging by the important expression on their faces, I fancied they were let further into the secret than any one else.

We all sat down in the chairs placed for our accommodation, and the wild whistling of the wind in the huge chimney, together with the sheets of snow which darkened the window-panes, enhanced the mystery of the whole affair, while George and his coadjutor worked lustily on.

At length, after a great deal of panting and puffing, George was heard to exclaim, “Now for the tug of war!” and there followed a minute’s pause, and then a crash as the loosened planks were torn asunder, and a cloud of dust enveloped both workmen and spectators.

Involuntarily we all started forward, and a moment of the direst confusion ensued, during which the boys of our party greatly endangered their limbs among the broken boards.

“By George!” exclaimed my son at last — in his eagerness invoking his patron saint — as he stumbled upon something, “there is something here and no mistake;” and, hastily clearing away the rubbish and clinging cobwebs, he disclosed to view what proved on examination to be an immense oaken chest, about four feet in height, heavily carved, and ornamented with brass mouldings corroded with age and damp.

Here was a piece of excitement indeed; never in my most imaginative moments had I thought of anything so mysterious as this. The most sceptical among us grew interested.

“Oh, do open it!” cried Ella, when the first exclamations of surprise were over.

“Easier to say than to do, miss,” replied Sam, exerting his Herculean strength in vain. With the aid of a hammer and the kitchen-poker, however, he at last succeeded in forcing it open. We all pressed forward eagerly to peer inside. There was something in it certainly, but we none of us could determine what, until Sam, who was the boldest of us all, thrust in his hand and brought forth — something which caused the bravest to start with horror, while poor Catherine sank down, white and trembling, upon the littered floor. It was a bone, to which adhered fragments of decaying silk.

The consternation and conjectures which followed can be better imagined than described. Seeing the effects of the discovery upon Catherine, and indeed upon all, I bade Sam replace it in the chest, which George closed again, to be left until Mr. Fanshawe came home and could investigate the matter.

The rest of the day I passed in attending to Catherine, who seemed much shocked and overcome by what she had seen, and in trying to divert my guests’ thoughts from the subject, and dispel the gloom which had gathered over all. In this I succeeded only partially, and never did I welcome my husband’s return more gladly than on that evening.

On his arrival I would not let him be disturbed by the relation of what had happened until he had finished his dinner, and it was not till we were gathered as usual round the fire that George related the whole story to him.

When he ended the two gentlemen left the room together, in order that Mr. Fanshawe might verify by his own eyes what he would hardly believe.

They were some time gone, and on their return I noticed that my husband held in his hand an old piece of soiled parchment, with mouldy seals affixed to it.

“We certainly have discovered much more than I thought for, Catherine,” said he, “and possibly more than you thought for either.” Here he paused for her to reply, but she did not.

“The bones are most probably those of some animal,” added he — I fancied I could detect a certain anxiety in his tone that belied what he said;

“but in order to quell the active imaginations which I can see are running away with some of you” — here he looked round with a smile— “I will send for Dr. Driscoll to come and examine them tomorrow. I have also found a piece of parchment in the chest,” he added; “but I have not yet looked at its contents.”

“Before you do that, Mr. Fanshawe, and before you send for the surgeon,” interrupted Catherine suddenly in a clear voice, “I think I can tell you all about the bones found in the chest, and how I guessed them to be there.”

“I should certainly be very glad to be told,” my husband admitted, much surprised; “though how you can possibly know, I cannot surmise.”

“Listen, and I will tell you,” answered Catherine; and feeling very glad that our curiosity was at last to be gratified, we all “pricked up our ears,” as George would say, to listen.

I here transcribe Catherine’s story word for word, as my son George subsequently wrote it down from her dictation.

“You all remember,” she began, “my alarming you on New Year’s eve at midnight, and that I told you I was disturbed by a dreadful dream.

“I said so because I thought you would make fun of me if I called it a vision; and yet it was much more like a vision, for I seemed to see it waking, and it was more vivid and consecutive than any dream I ever had.

“Before I try to describe it, I want you all to understand that I seemed intuitively to comprehend what I saw, and to recognize all the figures which appeared before me, and their relation to one another, though I am sure I never beheld them before in my life.

“When Ella left me that night, I lay propped up with pillows, staring idly at the strange shadows thrown by the hidden lamp across the laundry ceiling and over the floor. As I looked it seemed to me that a change came over the room — a most unaccountable change.

“Instead of the blocked-up window, the rusty mangle, and the daïs at the farther end, I saw the window clear and distinct from top to bottom, and in front of a deep window-seat at its base stood an oaken chest, exactly corresponding to the one discovered this morning. The room seemed brilliantly lighted, and everything was clearly and distinctly visible; and not only was it changed, but also peopled.

“Many figures passed up and down; brocaded silks swept the floor, and old-world forms of men in strange costumes bowed in courtly style to the dames by their side. Among all these figures I noticed only one couple particularly, and I knew them to be bride and bridegroom. The man was tall and broad, with dark hair and eyes, and a sensual and cruel face. He seemed, however, to be quite enslaved by the woman by his side, whom I hardly even now like to think of, there was something to me so repellent in her presence.

“She was tall and of middle age, and would have been handsome were it not for a sinister expression in her dark flashing eyes, which was enhanced by the black eyebrows which met over them.

“She reminded me irresistibly of the effigy on the stone monument in Craymoor church, which Ella and I named “the wicked woman.”

“As I gazed on the strange scene before me I presently became aware of three other figures which I had not noticed before. They were standing in a small arched doorway in one corner of the room (where the servants’ bedroom now is) furtively watching the gay company. One was a pale, careworn woman, apparently of about five-and-thirty, still beautiful, though haggard and mournful-looking, with blue eyes and a fair complexion.

“Her hands rested on the shoulders of two children, one a boy and the other a girl, of about ten and eleven years of age respectively. They much resembled their mother, and, like her, they were meanly dressed, though no poverty of attire could hide the nobility of their aspect. I noticed that the mother’s eyes rested chiefly on the face of the tall stately man before mentioned, who seemed unaware or careless of her presence; and instinctively I knew him to be the father of her children and the blighter of her life.

“As I looked and beheld all this, the lights vanished, the company disappeared, and the room became dark and deserted. No, not quite deserted, for I presently distinguished, seated on the window-seat by the old oaken chest, the fair woman and her children again.

“The moonlight now streamed through the window upon the woman’s face, making it appear more ghastly and haggard than before. In her long thin fingers she was holding up to the light a necklace of large pearls, curiously interwoven in a diamond pattern, and on this the children’s eyes were fixed.

"She then hung it on the girl's fair neck, who hid it in her bosom. Both children then twined their arms round their mother and kissed her repeatedly, while her head sank lower and lower, and the paleness of death overspread her features.

"This scene faded away as the other had done, and I saw the fair woman no more.

"Then it seemed to me that many figures passed and repassed before the window — the wicked woman (as I shall call her to distinguish her), accompanied by a boy the image of herself, whom I knew to be her son. He was apparently older than the fair-haired children, who also passed to and fro, attired as servants, and generally employed in some menial work.

"At last the wicked woman's son, with haughty gestures, ordered the other boy to pick up something that lay on the ground, and when he refused, he raised his cane as though to strike him. Before he could do so, however, the boy flew at him, and they engaged in a fierce struggle.

"In the midst of this the wicked woman, whom I had learned to dread, came forward and separated them; after which she pointed imperiously to the door, and signed to the younger boy to go out.

"He obeyed her mandate, but first threw his arms round his sister in a last embrace, and she detached the pearl necklace from off her neck and gave it to him. He then went out, waving a last adieu to her, and I saw him no more.

"Confused images seemed to crowd before me after this, and I remember nothing clearly until I beheld an infirm and tottering figure led away through the arched doorway, in whom I recognized the tall and stately man I had first seen in company with the wicked woman, but who was now an old man, apparently being supported to his bed to die. As he passed out he laid one trembling hand upon the head of the fair girl, now a blooming woman, and a softer shade came over his face. This the wicked woman noted, and she marked her disapproval by a vindictive frown.

"She also was older-looking, but age had in no degree softened her features; on the contrary, they appeared to me to wear a harsher expression than before.

"In the next scene which came before me, the wicked woman's son was evidently making love to the girl. Both were standing by the old window-seat, but her face was resolutely turned away from him, and when she at last looked at him it was with an expression of uncontrollable horror and dislike.

“Again this scene changed as those before it had done; the young man was gone, and only the light of a grated lantern illumined the room, or rather made darkness visible. The wicked woman was the only occupant of the laundry; she was kneeling by the oaken chest, trying to raise the heavy lid. In her left hand she held a piece of parchment, with large red seals pendent from it. I knew it to be the old man’s will which she was hiding, thus defrauding the just claimants of their rights.

“Her hands trembled, and her whole appearance denoted guilty trepidation. At length, however, the lid was raised, but just as she was about to replace the parchment in the chest, a figure glided silently from a dark corner of the window-seat and confronted her. It was the fair girl, pale, resolute, and extending her hand to claim the will.

“After the first guilty start, which caused her to drop the parchment into the chest, the wicked woman hurriedly tried to close the lid. Her efforts were frustrated, however, by the girl, who leaned with all her force upon it, keeping it back, and still held out her hand as before.

“There followed a pause, which seemed to me very long, but which could in reality have only lasted a minute.

“It was broken by the wicked woman, who, hastily casting a glance behind her into the gloom of the darkened chamber, then seized the girl by the arm and dragged her with all her force into the chest. It was but the work of a moment, for the woman was much the more powerful of the two, and the poor victim was too much taken by surprise to make much resistance. I saw one despairing look in her face as her murderess flashed the lantern before it with a hideous gleam of triumph.

“Then the lid was pressed down upon her, and I saw no more, only I felt an unutterable terror, and tried in vain to scream.

“This was not all the vision, however, for before I had mastered my terror the scene was superseded by another.

“This time it was twilight, and the wicked woman and her son were together. The son seemed to be talking eagerly, and grew more and more excited, while the mother stood still and erect, with a malicious smile upon her lips. Presently she moved toward the chest with a fell purpose in her eyes, unlocked it with a key which hung from her girdle, raised the lid and disclosed the contents.

"I understood it all now: the son was asking for the girl whom he had loved, and whom on his return home he missed, and the wicked woman, enraged at hearing for the first time that he had loved her, was determined to have her revenge.

"He should see her again.

"On beholding the dread contents of the chest, the man staggered back horrified; then, doubtless comprehending the case, he turned suddenly upon the murderess, and threw his arm around her, and there ensued a struggle terrible to witness.

"Her proud triumphant glance of malice was now succeeded by one of abject fear, and, as his strength began to gain the mastery, of despair.

"His iron frame heaved for a moment with the violence of his efforts, the next he had forced her down into the chest upon the mouldering body of her victim. I saw her eyes light up with the terror of death for one second, and then her screams were stifled forever beneath the massive lid.

"The horror of this scene was too much for me; I found voice to scream at last, and I suppose it was my cry which alarmed you all."

When Catherine ceased speaking there was a profound silence for a minute, which Mr. Fanshawe was the first to break as he said with a peculiar intonation in his voice, "It is very strange, very unaccountable," reëchoing all our thoughts.

Now it happened that Mr. Fleet, our family lawyer, was among our guests that Christmas-time, and since the discovery of the chest and bones had taken a great interest in the whole affair. He now questioned and cross-questioned Catherine, and seemed quite satisfied with the result.

"This would have made a fine case," said he, "if only it had been a question of the right of succession, for any lawyer to make out; but unfortunately the events are too long past to have any bearing upon the present." (There Mr. Fleet was wrong, though we none of us knew it at the time.)

We now all launched forth into conjectures and opinions, during which Catherine lay still and weary upon the sofa. I saw this, and thought it quite time to put an end to the day's adventures by suggesting a retirement for the night, and we were soon all dispersed to dream of the mysterious vision and discovery.

I think we were none of us sorry when morning dawned without any further tragedy (by *us*, I mean the female part of the establishment).

When I came down to breakfast I found Mr. Fleet very active on the subject of the night before.

“A surgeon ought to be immediately sent for to pronounce an opinion on the contents of the chest,” he said; and Dr. Driscoll presently came, and after examining the bones minutely, decided that they were, as we thought, those of two females, who might have been from one to two hundred years dead.

Mr. Fleet next offered to decipher the will, for such he imagined the parchment to be, and he and Mr. Fanshawe were closeted together for some time.

When they at last appeared again, they looked much interested and excited, and led me away to inform me of the result of their examination.

They told me that the document had proved to be a will, but that there was a circumstance connected with it which greatly added to the mystery of the whole business. This was the mention of the name of L’Estrange. I was, of course, as much surprised as they, and heard the will read with great interest.

I cannot remember the technical terms in which it was expressed. Mr. Fleet read me the translation he had made, for the original was in old English; but it was to this effect:

It purported to be the will of Reginald, Viscount St. Aubyn, in which he bequeathed all his inheritance to his lawful son Francis St. Aubyn — commonly known by the name of Francis l’Estrange — and to his heirs forever. It was signed Reginald, Viscount St. Aubyn, and the witnesses were John Murray and Phœbe Brett, who in the old copy had each affixed their mark.

Mr. Fleet affirmed that it was a perfectly legal document, but this was not all it contained.

There was an appendix which our lawyer translated as follows:

“In order to avoid all disputes and doubts which might otherwise arise, I do hereby declare that my lawful wife was Editha, youngest daughter of

Francis l’Estrange, Baronet, and that the register of our marriage may be seen in the church of St. Andrew, Haslet. By this marriage we had two children, a son Francis, and a daughter Catherine, commonly called Francis and Catherine l’Estrange. And I hereby declare that Agatha Thornhaugh was not legally married to me as she imagined, my lawful wife being alive at the time; neither do I leave to her son by her first husband, Ralph Thornhaugh, any part or share in my inheritance.”

Both the will and the writing at the foot of it were dated the 14th of May, 1668.

This accumulation of mysteries caused me for a time to feel quite bewildered and unable to think, but Mr. Fleet was in his element.

“Here is a case worth entering into,” said he, and he further went on to state that he had no doubt that the L’Estranges mentioned in the will were our Catherine’s ancestors, the Christian names being similar rendering it more than probable. She was most likely a direct descendant of Francis l’Estrange, the heir mentioned in the will, who was no doubt also the fair-haired boy Catherine had seen in her vision.

The bones were those of his sister, the murdered Catherine l’Estrange, and of her murderess Agatha Thornhaugh, herself immured by her own son; but the matter ought not to rest on mere surmise, and the first place to go to for corroborating evidence was Craymoor church.

The rapidity with which Mr. Fleet came to his conclusions increased my bewilderment, and I was at a loss to know what evidence he expected to gain from Craymoor church. He reminded me, however, of Catherine’s statement that “the wicked woman” of her vision resembled the effigy on the monument there.

Thither, then, the lawyer repaired, accompanied by Mr. Fanshawe and George. It was thought best to keep the sequel of the story from Catherine and the others until it was explained more fully, as Mr. Fleet boldly affirmed it should be. I awaited anxiously the result of their researches, and they exceeded I think even our good investigator’s hopes.

Not only had they deciphered the inscription round the old monument, but with leave from the clergyman and the assistance of the sexton they had disinterred the coffin and found it to be filled with stones.

I am aware that this was rather an illegal proceeding, but as Mr. Fleet was only acting *en amateur* and not professionally, he did not stick at trifles.

The inscription was in Latin, and stated that the tomb was erected in memory of Agatha, wife of Reginald, Viscount St. Aubyn, who was buried beneath, and who died on the 31st day of December, 1649 — exactly two hundred years before the day on which Catherine had seen the vision.

I could not help thinking it shocking that the villagers had for two centuries been worshipping in the presence of a perpetual lie, but Mr. Fleet thought only of the grand corroboration of his "case." He applied to Mr. Fanshawe to take the next step, namely, to write to Catherine's aunt and only living relative, to tell her the whole story, and beg her to assist in elucidating matters by giving all the information she could respecting the L'Estrange family.

This was done, and we anxiously awaited the answer. Meantime, all my guests were clamorous to hear the contents of the will, and I had to appease them as best I could, by promising that they should know all soon.

In a few days, old Miss l'Estrange's answer came. She said her brother, father, and grandfather had all served in India, and that she believed her great-grandfather, who was a Francis l'Estrange, to have passed most of his life abroad, there having been a cloud over his early youth. What this was, however, she could not say. She affirmed that the L'Estranges had in old times resided in —— shire; and she further stated that her father's family had consisted of herself and her brother, whose only child Catherine was.

This was certainly not much information, but it was enough for our purpose. We no longer remained in doubt as to the truth of Mr. Fleet's version of the story, and when he himself told it to all our family-party one evening, every one agreed that he had certainly succeeded in making out a very clever case.

As for Catherine, on being told that the figures she had beheld in the vision were thought to be those of her ancestors, she was not so much surprised as I expected, but said that she had had a presentiment all along that the tragedies she had witnessed were in some way connected with her own family.

I must not forget to say that on ascertaining that the parish church of Haslet was still standing, we searched the register, and another link of evidence was made clear by the finding of the looked-for entry.

There remains little more to be told. The charge of the old will was committed to Mr. Fleet, and Catherine's story has been carefully laid up among the archives of our family. I say advisedly of *our* family, for the line of the L’Estranges, alias St. Aubyns, has been united to ours by the marriage of Catherine to my son George, which took place in 1850.

I who write this am an old woman now, but I still live with my son and daughter-in-law.

George has bought Craymoor Grange, thus rendering justice after the lapse of two centuries, and restoring the inheritance of her fathers to the rightful owner.

I have but one more incident to relate, and I have done. A short time ago, old Miss l’Estrange died, bequeathing all her worldly possessions to Catherine. Among these were some old family relics. Catherine was looking over them as George unpacked them, and she presently came to a miniature of a young and beautiful girl with fair hair and blue eyes, and a wistful expression, and with it a necklace of pearls strung in a diamond pattern. On seeing these she became suddenly grave, and handing them to me, said: “They are the same; the young girl, and the pearl necklace I told you of.” No more was said at the time, for the children were present, and we had always avoided alluding to the horrible family tragedy before them; but if we had still retained any doubt about its truth — which we had not — this would have set it at rest.

If you were to visit Craymoor Grange now, you would find no old laundry. The part of the house containing it has been pulled down, and children play and chickens peckett on the ground where it once stood.

The oaken chest has also long since been destroyed.

HAUNTED.

SOME few years ago one of those great national conventions which draw together all ages and conditions of the sovereign people of America was held in Charleston, South Carolina.

Colonel Demarion, one of the State Representatives, had attended that great national convention; and, after an exciting week, was returning home, having a long and difficult journey before him.

A pair of magnificent horses, attached to a light buggy, flew merrily enough over a rough-country for a while; but toward evening stormy weather reduced the roads to a dangerous condition, and compelled the Colonel to relinquish his purpose of reaching home that night, and to stop at a small wayside tavern, whose interior, illuminated by blazing wood-fires, spread a glowing halo among the dripping trees as he approached it, and gave promise of warmth and shelter at least.

Drawing up to this modest dwelling, Colonel Demarion saw through its uncurtained windows that there was no lack of company within. Beneath the trees, too, an entanglement of rustic vehicles, giving forth red gleams from every dripping angle, told him that beasts as well as men were cared for. At the open door appeared the form of a man, who, at the sound of wheels, but not seeing in the outside darkness whom he addressed, called out, "'Tain't no earthly use a-stoppin' here."

Caring more for his chattels than for himself, the Colonel paid no further regard to this address than to call loudly for the landlord.

At the tone of authority, the man in outline more civilly announced himself to be the host; yet so far from inviting the traveller to alight, insisted that the house was "as full as it could pack;" but that there was a place a little farther down the road where the gentleman would be certain to find excellent accommodation.

"What stables have you here?" demanded the traveller, giving no more heed to this than to the former announcement; but bidding his servant to alight, and preparing to do so himself.

"Stables!" repeated the baffled host, shading his eyes so as to scrutinize the newcomer, "*stables*, Cap'n?"

“Yes, *stables*. I want you to take care of my horses; *I* can take care of myself. Some shelter for cattle you must have by the look of these traps,” pointing to the wagons. “I don’t want my horses to be kept standing out in this storm, you know.”

“No, Major. Why no, cert’n’y; Marion’s ain’t over a mile, and — — “

“Conf — !” muttered the Colonel; “but it’s over the *river*, which I don’t intend to ford tonight under any consideration.”

So saying, the Colonel leaped to the ground, directing his servant to cover the horses and then get out his valise; while the host, thus defeated, assumed the best grace he could to say that he would see what could be done “for the *horses*.”

“I am a soldier, my man,” added the Colonel in a milder tone, as he stamped his cold feet on the porch and shook off the rain from his travelling-gear; “I am used to rough fare and a hard couch: all we want is shelter. A corner of the floor will suffice for me and my rug; a private room I can dispense with at such times as these.”

The landlord seemed no less relieved at this assurance than mollified by the explanation of a traveller whom he now saw was of a very different stamp from those who usually frequented the tavern. “For the matter of *stables*, his were newly put up, and first-rate,” he said; and “cert’n’y the Gen’ral was welcome to a seat by the fire while ’twas a-storming so fierce.”

Colonel Demarion gave orders to his servant regarding the horses, while the landlord, kicking at what seemed to be a bundle of sacking down behind the door, shouted— “Jo! Ho, Jo! Wake up, you sleepy-headed nigger! Be alive, boy, and show this gentleman’s horses to the stables.” Upon a repetition of which charges a tall, gaunt, dusky figure lifted itself from out of the dark corner, and grew taller and more gaunt as it stretched itself into waking with a grin which was the most visible part of it, by reason of two long rows of ivory gleaming in the red glare. The hard words had fallen as harmless on Jo’s ear-drum as the kicks upon his impassive frame. To do Jo’s master justice, the kicks were not vicious kicks, and the rough language was but an intimation that dispatch was needed. Very much of the spaniel’s nature had Jo; and as he rolled along the passage to fetch a lantern, his mouth expanded into a still broader grin at the honor of attending so stately a gentleman. Quick, like his master, too, was Jo to discriminate between “real gentlefolks” and the “white trash” whose rough-coated, rope-harnessed mules were the general occupants of his stables.

“Splendid pair, sir,” said the now conciliating landlord. “Shove some o’ them mules out into the shed, Jo (which your horses ‘ll feel more to hum in my new stalls, Gen’ral).”

Again cautioning his man Plato not to leave them one moment, Colonel Demarion turned to enter the house.

“You’ll find a rough crowd in here, sir,” said the host, as he paused on the threshold; “but a good fire, anyhow. ‘Tain’t many of these loafers as understand this convention business — I *pre*sume, Gen’ral, you’ve attended the convention — they all on ‘em *thinks* they does, tho’. Fact most on ‘em thinks they’d orter be on the committee theirselves. Good many on ‘em is from Char’ston to-day, but is in the same fix as yerself, Gen’ral — can’t get across the river tonight.”

“I see, I see,” cried the statesman, with a gesture toward the sitting-room. “Now what have you got in your larder, Mr. Landlord? and send some supper out to my servant; he must make a bed of the carriage-mats tonight.”

The landlord introduced his guest into a room filled chiefly with that shiftless and noxious element of Southern society known as “mean whites.” Pipes and drinks, and excited arguments, engaged these people as they stood or sat in groups. The host addressed those who were gathered round the log-fire, and they opened a way for the newcomer, some few, with republican freedom, inviting him to be seated, the rest giving one furtive glance, and then, in antipathy born of envy, skulking away.

The furniture of this comfortless apartment consisted of sloppy, much-jagged deal tables, dirty whittled benches, and a few uncouth chairs. The walls were dirty with accumulated tobacco stains, and so moist and filthy was the floor, that the sound only of scraping seats and heavy footsteps told that it was of boards and not bare earth.

Seated with his back toward the majority of the crowd, and shielded by his newspaper, Colonel Demarion sat awhile unobserved; but was presently recognized by a man from his own immediate neighborhood, when the information was quickly whispered about that no less a person than their distinguished Congressman was among them.

This piece of news speedily found its way to the ears of the landlord, to whom Colonel Demarion was known by name only, and forthwith he reappeared to overwhelm the representative of his State with apologies for the uncourteous reception which had been given him, and to express his now very sincere regrets that the house offered no suitable accommodation for the gentleman. Satisfied as to the safety of his chattels, the Colonel generously dismissed the idea of having anything either to resent or to forgive; and assured the worthy host that he would accept of no exclusive indulgences.

In spite of which the landlord bustled about to bring in a separate table, on which he spread a clean coarse cloth, and a savory supper of broiled ham, hot corncakes, and coffee; every few minutes stopping to renew his apologies, and even appearing to grow confidentially communicative regarding his domestic economies; until the hungry traveller cut him short with "Don't say another word about it, my friend; you have not a spare sleeping-room, and that is enough. Find me a corner — a clean corner" — looking round upon the most unclean corners of that room— "perhaps upstairs somewhere, and — — "

"Ah! *upsta'rs*, Gen'ral. Now, that's jest what I had in my mind to ax you. Fact is ther' *is* a spar' room upsta'rs, as comfortable a room as the best of folks can wish; but — — "

"But it's crammed with sleeping folks, so there's an end of it," cried the senator, thoroughly bored.

"No, sir, ain't no person in it; and ther' ain't no person likely to be in it 'cept 'tis *yerself*, Colonel Demarion. Leastways — — "

After a good deal of hesitation and embarrassment, the host, in mysterious whispers, imparted the startling fact that this most desirable sleeping room was *haunted*; that the injury he had sustained in consequence had compelled him to fasten it up altogether; that he had come to be very suspicious of admitting strangers, and had limited his custom of late to what the bar could supply, keeping the matter hushed up in the hope that it might be the sooner forgotten by the neighbors; but that in the case of Colonel Demarion he had now made bold to mention it; "as I can't but think, sir," he urged, "you'd find it prefer'ble to sleepin' on the floor or sittin' up all night along ov these loafers. Fer if 'tis any deceivin' trick got up in the house, maybe they won't try it on, sir, to a gentleman of your reputation."

Colonel Demarion became interested in the landlord's confidences, but could only gather in further explanation that for some time past all travellers who had occupied that room had “made off in the middle of the night, never showin’ their faces at the inn again;” that on endeavoring to arrest one or more in their nocturnal flight, they — all more or less terrified — had insisted on escaping without a moment’s delay, assigning no other reason than that they had seen a ghost. “Not that folks seem to get much harm by it, Colonel — not by the way they makes off without paying a cent of money!”

Great indeed was the satisfaction evinced by the victim of unpaid bills on the Colonel’s declaring that the haunted chamber was the very room for him. “If to be turned out of my bed at midnight is all I have to fear, we will see who comes off master in my case. So, Mr. Landlord, let the chamber be got ready directly, and have a good fire built there at once.”

The exultant host hurried away to confide the great news to Jo, and with him to make the necessary preparations. “Come what will, Jo, Colonel Demarion ain’t the man to make off without paying down good money for his accommodations.”

In reasonable time, Colonel Demarion was beckoned out of the public room, and conducted upstairs by the landlord, who, after receiving a cheerful “goodnight,” paused on the landing to hear his guest bolt and bar the door within, and then push a piece of furniture against it. “Ah,” murmured the host, as a sort of misgiving came over him, “if a apparishum has a mind to come thar, ‘tain’t all the bolts and bars in South Carolina as ‘ll kip’en away.”

But the Colonel’s precaution of securing his door, as also that of placing his revolvers in readiness, had not the slightest reference to the reputed ghost. Spiritual disturbances of such kind he feared not. Spirits *tangible* were already producing ominous demonstrations in the rooms below, nor was it possible to conjecture what troubles these might evolve. Glad enough to escape from the noisy company, he took a survey of his evil-reputed chamber. The only light was that of the roaring, crackling, blazing wood-fire, and no other was needed. And what storm-benighted traveller, when fierce winds and rains are lashing around his lodging, can withstand the cheering influences of a glorious log-fire? especially if, as in that wooden tenement, that fire be of abundant pine-knots. It rivals the glare of gas and the glow of a furnace; it charms away the mustiness and fustiness of years, and causes all that is dull and dead around to laugh and dance in its bright light.

By the illumination of just such a fire, Colonel Demarion observed that the apartment offered nothing worthier of remark than that the furniture was superior to anything that might be expected in a small wayside tavern. In truth, the landlord had expended a considerable sum in fitting up this, his finest chamber, and had therefore sufficient reason to bemoan its unprofitableness.

Having satisfied himself as to his apparent security, the senator thought no more of spirits palpable or impalpable; but to the far graver issues of the convention his thoughts reverted. It was yet early; he lighted a cigar, and in full appreciation of his retirement, took out his notebook and plunged into the affairs of state. Now and then he was recalled to the circumstances of his situation by the swaggering tread of unsteady feet about the house, or when the boisterous shouts below raged above the outside storm; but even then he only glanced up from his papers to congratulate himself upon his agreeable seclusion.

Thus he sat for above an hour, then he heaped fresh logs upon the hearth, looked again to his revolvers, and retired to rest.

The house-clock was striking twelve as the Colonel awoke. He awoke suddenly from a sound sleep, flashing, as it were, into full consciousness, his mind and memory clear, all his faculties invigorated, his ideas undisturbed, but with a perfect conviction that he was not alone.

He lifted his head. A man was standing a few feet from the bed, and between it and the fire, which was still burning, and burning brightly enough to display every object in the room, and to define the outline of the intruder clearly. His dress also and his features were plainly distinguishable: the dress was a travelling-costume, in fashion somewhat out of date; the features wore a mournful and distressed expression — the eyes were fixed upon the Colonel. The right arm hung down, and the hand, partially concealed, might, for aught the Colonel knew, be grasping one of his own revolvers; the left arm was folded against the waist. The man seemed about to advance still closer to the bed, and returned the occupant's gaze with a fixed stare.

“Stand, or I'll fire!” cried the Colonel, taking in all this at a glance, and starting up in his bed, revolver in hand.

The man remained still.

“What is your business here?” demanded the statesman, thinking he was addressing one of the roughs from below.

The man was silent.

“Leave this room, if you value your life,” shouted the indignant soldier, pointing his revolver.

The man was motionless.

“Retire! or by heaven I’ll send a bullet through you!”

But the man moved not an inch.

The Colonel fired. The bullet lodged in the breast of the stranger, but he started not. The soldier leaped to the floor and fired again. The shot entered the heart, pierced the body, and lodged in the wall beyond; and the Colonel beheld the hole where the bullet had entered, and the firelight glimmering through it. And yet the intruder stirred not. Astounded, the Colonel dropped his revolver, and stood face to face before the unmoved man.

“Colonel Demarion,” spake the deep solemn voice of the perforated stranger, “in vain you shoot me — I am dead already.”

The soldier, with all his bravery, gasped, spellbound. The firelight gleamed through the hole in the body, and the eyes of the shooter were riveted there.

“Fear nothing,” spake the mournful presence; “I seek but to divulge my wrongs. Until my death shall be avenged my unquiet spirit lingers here. Listen.”

Speechless, motionless was the statesman; and the mournful apparition thus slowly and distinctly continued:

“Four years ago I travelled with one I trusted. We lodged here. That night my comrade murdered me. He plunged a dagger into my heart while I slept. He covered the wound with a plaster. He feigned to mourn my death. He told the people here I had died of heart complaint; that I had long been ailing. I had gold and treasures. With my treasure secreted beneath his garments he paraded mock grief at my grave. Then he departed. In distant parts he sought to forget his crime; but his stolen gold brought him only the curse of an evil conscience. Rest and peace are not for him. He now prepares to leave his native land forever. Under an assumed name that man is this night in Charleston. In a few hours he will sail for Europe. Colonel Demarion, you must prevent it. Justice and humanity demand that a murderer roam not at large, nor squander more of the wealth that is by right my children's."

The spirit paused. To the extraordinary revelation the Colonel had listened in rapt astonishment. He gazed at the presence, at the firelight glimmering through it — through the very place where a human heart would be — and he felt that he was indeed in the presence of a supernatural being. He thought of the landlord's story; but while earnestly desiring to sift the truth of the mystery, words refused to come to his aid.

"Do you hesitate?" said the mournful spirit. "Will *you* also flee, when my orphan children cry for retribution?" Seeming to anticipate the will of the Colonel, "I await your promise, senator," he said. "There is no time to lose."

With a mighty effort, the South Carolinian said, "I promise. What would you have me do?"

In the same terse, solemn manner, the ghostly visitor gave the real and assumed names of the murderer, described his person and dress at the present time, described a certain curious ring he was then wearing, together with other distinguishing characteristics: all being carefully noted down by Colonel Demarion, who, by degrees, recovered his self-possession, and pledged himself to use every endeavor to bring the murderer to justice.

Then, with a portentous wave of the hand, "It is well," said the apparition. "Not until the spirit of my murderer shall be separated from the mortal clay can *my* spirit rest in peace." And vanished.

Halfpast six in the morning was the appointed time for the steamer to leave Charleston; and the Colonel lost not a moment in preparing to depart. As he hurried down the stairs he encountered the landlord, who — his eyes rolling in terror — made an attempt to speak. Unheeding, except to demand his carriage, the Colonel pushed past him, and effected a quick escape toward the back premises, shouting lustily for "Jo" and "Plato," and for his carriage to be got ready immediately. A few minutes more, and the bewildered host was recalled to the terrible truth by the noise of the carriage dashing through the yard and away down the road; and it was some miles nearer Charleston before the unfortunate man ceased to peer after it in the darkness — as if by so doing he could recover damages — and bemoan to Jo the utter ruin of his house and hopes.

Thirty miles of hard driving had to be accomplished in little more than five hours. No great achievement under favorable circumstances; but the horses were only half refreshed from their yesterday's journey, and though the storm was over, the roads were in a worse condition than ever.

Colonel Demarion resolved to be true to his promise; and fired by a curiosity to investigate the extraordinary communication which had been revealed to him, urged on his horses, and reached the wharf at Charleston just as the steamer was being loosed from her moorings.

He hailed her. "Stop her! Business with the captain! Stop her!"

Her machinery was already in motion; her iron lungs were puffing forth dense clouds of smoke and steam; and as the Colonel shouted — the crowd around, from sheer delight in shouting, echoing his "Stop her! stop her!" — the voices on land were confounded with the voices of the sailors, the rattling of chains, and the haulings of ropes.

Among the passengers standing to wave farewells to their friends on the wharf were some who recognised Colonel Demarion, and drew the captain's attention toward him; and as he continued vehemently to gesticulate, that officer, from his post of observation, demanded the nature of the business which should require the ship's detention. Already the steamer was clear of the wharf. In another minute she might be beyond reach of the voice; therefore, failing by gestures and entreaties to convince the captain of the importance of his errand, Colonel Demarion, in desperation, cried at the top of his voice, "A murderer on board! For God's sake, stop!" He wished to have made this startling declaration in private, but not a moment was to be lost; and the excitement around him was intense.

In the midst of the confusion another cry of "Man overboard!" might have been heard in a distant part of the ship, had not the attention of the crowd been fastened on the Colonel. Such a cry was, however, uttered, offering a still more urgent motive for stopping; and the steamer being again made fast, Colonel Demarion was received on board.

"Let not a soul leave the vessel!" was his first and prompt suggestion; and the order being issued he drew the captain aside, and concisely explained his grave commission. The captain thereupon conducted him to his private room, and summoned the steward, before whom the details were given, and the description of the murderer was read over. The steward, after considering attentively, seemed inclined to associate the description with that of a passenger whose remarkably dejected appearance had already attracted his observation. In such a grave business it was, however, necessary to proceed with the utmost caution, and the “passenger-book” was produced. Upon reference to its pages, the three gentlemen were totally dismayed by the discovery that the name of this same dejected individual was that under which, according to the apparition, the murderer had engaged his passage.

“I am here to charge that man with murder,” said Colonel Demarion. “He must be arrested.”

Horrified as the captain was at this astounding declaration, yet, on account of the singular and unusual mode by which the Colonel had become possessed of the facts, and the impossibility of proving the charge, he hesitated in consenting to the arrest of a passenger. The steward proposed that they should repair to the saloons and deck, and while conversing with one or another of the passengers, mention — as it were casually — in the hearing of the suspected party his own proper name, and observe the effect produced on him. To this they agreed, and without loss of time joined the passengers, assigning some feasible cause for a short delay of the ship.

The saloon was nearly empty, and while the steward went below, the other two repaired to the deck, where they observed a crowd gathered seaward, apparently watching something over the ship’s side.

During the few minutes which had detained the captain in this necessarily hurried business, a boat had been lowered, and some sailors had put off in her to rescue the person who was supposed to have fallen overboard; and it was only now, on joining the crowd, that the captain learned the particulars of the accident. “Who was it?” “What was he like?” they exclaimed simultaneously. That a man had fallen overboard was all that could be ascertained. Some one had seen him run across the deck, looking wildly about him. A splash in the water had soon afterward attracted attention to the spot, and a body had since been seen struggling on the surface. The waves were rough after the storm, and thick with seaweed, and the sailors had as yet missed the body. The two gentlemen took their post among the watchers, and kept their eyes intently upon the waves, and upon the sailors battling against them. Ere long they see the body rise again to the surface.

Floated on a powerful wave, they can for the few moments breathlessly scrutinize it. The color of the dress is observed. A face of agony upturned displays a peculiar contour of forehead; the hair, the beard; and now he struggles — an arm is thrown up, and a remarkable ring catches the Colonel's eye. "Great heavens! The whole description tallies!" The sailors pull hard for the spot, the next stroke and they will rescue ——

A monster shark is quicker than they. The sea is tinged with blood. The man is no more!

Shocked and silent, Colonel Demarion and the captain quitted the deck and resummoned the steward, who had, but without success, visited the berths and various parts of the ship for the individual in question. Every hole and corner was now, by the captain's order carefully searched, but in vain; and as no further information concerning the missing party could be obtained, and the steward persisted in his statement regarding his general appearance, they proceeded to examine his effects. In these he was identified beyond a doubt. Papers and relics proved not only his guilt but his remorse; remorse which, as the apparition had said, permitted him no peace in his wanderings.

Those startling words, "A murderer on board!" had doubtless struck fresh terror to his heart and, unable to face the accusation, he had thus terminated his wretched existence.

Colonel Demarion revisited the little tavern, and on several occasions occupied the haunted chamber; but never again had he the honor of receiving a midnight commission from a ghostly visitor, and never again had the landlord to bemoan the flight of a non-paying customer.

PICHON & SONS, OF THE CROIX ROUSSE.

GIRAUDIER, *pharmacien, première classe*, is the legend, recorded in huge, ill-proportioned letters, which directs the attention of the stranger to the most prosperous-looking shop in the grand *place* of La Croix Rousse, a well-known suburb of the beautiful city of Lyons, which has its share of the shabby gentility and poor pretence common to the suburban commerce of great towns.

Giraudier is not only *pharmacien* but *propriétaire*, though not by inheritance; his possession of one of the prettiest and most prolific of the small vineyards in the beautiful suburb, and a charming inconvenient house, with low ceilings, liliputian bedrooms, and a profusion of *persiennes*, *jalousies*, and *contrevents*, comes by purchase. This enviable little *terre* was sold by the Nation, when that terrible abstraction transacted the public business of France; and it was bought very cheaply by the strong-minded father of the Giraudier of the present, who was not disturbed by the evil reputation which the place had gained, at a time the peasants of France, having been bullied into a renunciation of religion, eagerly cherished superstition. The Giraudier of the present cherishes the particular superstition in question affectionately; it reminds him of an uncommonly good bargain made in his favor, which is always a pleasant association of ideas, especially to a Frenchman, still more especially to a Lyonnais; and it attracts strangers to his *pharmacie*, and leads to transactions in *Grand Chartreuse* and *Créme de Roses*, ensuing naturally on the narration of the history of Pichon & Sons. Giraudier is not of aristocratic principles and sympathies; on the contrary, he has decided republican leanings, and considers *Le Progrès* a masterpiece of journalistic literature; but, as he says simply and strongly, “it is not because a man is a marquis that one is not to keep faith with him; a bad action is not good because it harms a good-for-nothing of a noble; the more when that good-for-nothing is no longer a noble, but *pour rire*.” At the easy price of acquiescence in these sentiments, the stranger hears one of the most authentic, best-remembered, most popular of the many traditions of the bad old times “before General Bonaparte,” as Giraudier, who has no sympathy with any later designation of *le grand homme*, calls the Emperor, whose statue one can perceive — a speck in the distance — from the threshold of the *pharmacie*.

The Marquis de Sénanges, in the days of the triumph of the great Revolution, was fortunate enough to be out of France, and wise enough to remain away from that country, though he persisted, long after the old *régime* was as dead as the Ptolemies, in believing it merely suspended, and the Revolution a lamentable accident of vulgar complexion, but happily temporary duration. The Marquis de Sénanges, who affected the *style régence*, and was the politest of infidels and the most refined of voluptuaries, got on indifferently in inappreciative foreign parts; but the members of his family — his brother and sisters, two of whom were guillotined, while the third escaped to Savoy and found refuge there in a convent of her order — got on exceedingly ill in France. If the *ci-devant* Marquis had had plenty of money to expend in such feeble imitations of his accustomed pleasures as were to be had out of Paris, he would not have been much affected by the fate of his relatives. But money became exceedingly scarce; the Marquis had actually beheld many of his peers reduced to the necessity of earning the despicable but indispensable article after many ludicrous fashions. And the duration of this absurd upsetting of law, order, privilege, and property began to assume unexpected and very unpleasant proportions.

The Château de Sénanges, with its surrounding lands, was confiscated to the Nation, during the third year of the "emigration" of the Marquis de Sénanges; and the greater part of the estate was purchased by a thrifty, industrious, and rich *avocat*, named Prosper Alix, a widower with an only daughter. Prosper Alix enjoyed the esteem of the entire neighborhood. First, he was rich; secondly, he was of a taciturn disposition, and of a neutral tint in politics. He had done well under the old *régime* and, he was doing well under the new — thank God, or the Supreme Being, or the First Cause, or the goddess Reason herself, for all; — he would have invoked Dagon, Moloch, or Kali, quite as readily as the Saints and the Madonna, who has gone so utterly out of fashion of late. Nobody was afraid to speak out before Prosper Alix; he was not a spy; and though a cold-hearted man, except in the instance of his only daughter, he never harmed anybody.

Very likely it was because he was the last person in the vicinity whom anybody would have suspected of being applied to by the dispossessed family, that the son of the Marquis' brother, a young man of promise, of courage, of intellect, and of morals of decidedly a higher calibre than those actually and traditionally imputed to the family, sought the aid of the new possessor of the Château de Sénanges, which had changed its old title for that of the Maison Alix. The father of M. Paul de Sénanges had perished in the September massacres; his mother had been guillotined at Lyons; and he — who had been saved by the interposition of a young comrade, whose father had, in the wonderful rotations of the wheel of Fate, acquired authority in the place where he had once esteemed the notice of the nephew of the Marquis a crowning honor for his son — had passed through the common vicissitudes of that dreadful time, which would take a volume for their recital in each individual instance.

Paul de Sénanges was a handsome young fellow, frank, high-spirited, and of a brisk and happy temperament; which, however, modified by the many misfortunes he had undergone, was not permanently changed. He had plenty of capacity for enjoyment in him still; and as his position was very isolated, and his mind had become enlightened on social and political matters to an extent in which the men of his family would have discovered utter degradation and the women diabolical possession, he would not have been very unhappy if, under the new condition of things, he could have lived in his native country and gained an honest livelihood. But he could not do that, he was too thoroughly "suspect;" the antecedents of his family were too powerful against him: his only chance would have been to have gone into the popular camp as an extreme, violent partisan, to have out-Heroded the revolutionary Herods; and that Paul de Sénanges was too honest to do. So he was reduced to being thankful that he had escaped with his life, and to watching for an opportunity of leaving France and gaining some country where the reign of liberty, fraternity, and equality was not quite so oppressive.

The long-looked-for opportunity at length offered itself, and Paul de Sénanges was instructed by his uncle the Marquis that he must contrive to reach Marseilles, whence he should be transported to Spain — in which country the illustrious emigrant was then residing — by a certain named date. His uncle's communication arrived safely, and the plan proposed seemed a secure and eligible one. Only in two respects was it calculated to make Paul de Sénanges thoughtful. The first was, that his uncle should take any interest in the matter of his safety; the second, what could be the nature of a certain deposit which the Marquis's letter directed him to procure, if possible, from the Château de Sénanges. The fact of this injunction explained, in some measure, the first of the two difficulties. It was plain that whatever were the contents of this packet which he was to seek for, according to the indications marked on a ground-plan drawn by his uncle and enclosed in the letter, the Marquis wanted them, and could not procure them except by the agency of his nephew. That the Marquis should venture to direct Paul de Sénanges to put himself in communication with Prosper Alix, would have been surprising to any one acquainted only with the external and generally understood features of the character of the new proprietor of the Château de Sénanges. But a few people knew Prosper Alix thoroughly, and the Marquis was one of the number; he was keen enough to know in theory that, in the case of a man with only one weakness, that is likely to be a very weak weakness indeed, and to apply the theory to the *avocat*. The beautiful, pious, and aristocratic mother of Paul de Sénanges — a lady to whose superiority the Marquis had rendered the distinguished testimony of his dislike, not hesitating to avow that she was "much too good for *his* taste" — had been very fond of, and very kind to, the motherless daughter of Prosper Alix, and he held her memory in reverence which he accorded to nothing beside, human or divine, and taught his daughter the matchless worth of the friend she had lost. The Marquis knew this, and though he had little sympathy with the sentiment, he believed he might use it in the present instance to his own profit, with safety. The event proved that he was right. Private negotiations, with the manner of whose transaction we are not concerned, passed between the *avocat* and the *ci-devant* Marquis; and the young man, then leading a life in which skulking had a large share, in the vicinity of Dijon, was instructed to present himself at the Maison Alix, under the designation of Henri Glaire, and in the character of an artist in house-decoration. The circumstances of his life in childhood and boyhood had led to his being almost safe from recognition as a man at Lyons; and, indeed, all the people on the *ci-devant* visiting-list of the château had been pretty nearly killed off, in the noble and patriotic ardor of the revolutionary times.

The ancient Château de Sénanges was proudly placed near the summit of the "Holy Hill," and had suffered terrible depredations when the church at

Fourvières was sacked, and the shrine desecrated with that ingenious impiety which is characteristic of the French; but it still retained somewhat of its former heavy grandeur. The château was much too large for the needs, tastes, or ambition of its present owner, who was too wise, if even he had been of an ostentatious disposition, not to have sedulously resisted its promptings. The jealousy of the nation of brothers was easily excited, and departure from simplicity and frugality was apt to be commented upon by domiciliary visits, and the eager imposition of fanciful fines. That portion of the vast building occupied by Prosper Alix and the *citoyenne* Berthe, his daughter, presented an appearance of well-to-do comfort and modest ease, which contrasted with the grandiose proportions and the elaborate decorations of the wide corridors, huge flat staircases, and lofty panelled apartments. The *avocat* and his daughter lived quietly in the old place, hoping, after a general fashion, for better times, but not finding the present very bad; the father becoming day by day more pleasant with his bargain, the daughter growing fonder of the great house, and the noble *bocages*, of the scrappy little vineyards, struggling for existence on the sunny hillside, and the place where the famous shrine had been. They had done it much damage; they had parted its riches among them; the once ever-open doors were shut, and the worn flags were untrodden; but nothing could degrade it, nothing could destroy what had been, in the mind of Berthe Alix, who was as devout as her father was unconcernedly unbelieving. Berthe was wonderfully well educated for a Frenchwoman of that period, and surprisingly handsome for a Frenchwoman of any. Not too tall to offend the taste of her compatriots, and not too short to be dignified and graceful, she had a symmetrical figure, and a small, well-poised head, whose profuse, shining, silken dark-brown hair she wore as nature intended, in a shower of curls, never touched by the hand of the coiffeur, — curls which clustered over her brow, and fell far down on her shapely neck. Her features were fine; the eyes very dark, and the mouth very red; the complexion clear and rather pale, and the style of the face and its expression lofty. When Berthe Alix was a child, people were accustomed to say she was pretty and refined enough to belong to the aristocracy; nobody would have dared to say so now, prettiness and refinement, together with all the other virtues admitted to a place on the patriotic roll, having become national property.

Berthe loved her father dearly. She was deeply impressed with the sense of her supreme importance to him, and fully comprehended that he would be influenced by and through her when all other persuasion or argument would be unavailing. When Prosper Alix wished and intended to do anything rather mean or selfish, he did it without letting Berthe know; and when he wished to leave undone something which he knew his daughter would decide ought to be done, he carefully concealed from her the existence of the dilemma. Nevertheless, this system did not prevent the father and daughter being very good and even confidential friends. Prosper Alix loved his daughter immeasurably, and respected her more than he respected any one in the world. With regard to her persevering religiousness, when such things were not only out of fashion and date, but illegal as well, he was very tolerant. Of course it was weak, and an absurdity; but every woman, even his beautiful, incomparable Berthe, was weak and absurd on some point or other; and, after all, he had come to the conclusion that the safest weakness with which a woman can be afflicted is that romantic and ridiculous *faiblesse* called piety. So these two lived a happy life together, Berthe's share of it being very secluded, and were wonderfully little troubled by the turbulence with which society was making its tumultuous way to the virtuous serenity of republican perfection.

The communication announcing the project of the *ci-devant* Marquis for the secure exportation of his nephew, and containing the skilful appeal before mentioned, grievously disturbed the tranquillity of Prosper, and was precisely one of those incidents which he would especially have liked to conceal from his daughter. But he could not do so; the appeal was too cleverly made; and utter indifference to it, utter neglect of the letter, which naturally suggested itself as the easiest means of getting rid of a difficulty, would have involved an act of direct and uncompromising dishonesty to which Prosper, though of sufficiently elastic conscience within the limit of professional gains, could not contemplate. The Château de Sénanges was indeed his own lawful property; his without prejudice to the former owners, dispossessed by no act of his. But the *ci-devant* Marquis — confiding in him to an extent which was quite astonishing, except on the *pis-aller* theory, which is so unflattering as to be seldom accepted — announced to him the existence of a certain packet, hidden in the château, acknowledging its value, and urging the need of its safe transmission. This was not his property. He heartily wished he had never learned its existence, but wishing that was clearly of no use; then he wished the nephew of the *ci-devant* might come soon, and take himself and the hidden wealth away with all possible speed. This latter was a more realizable desire, and Prosper settled his mind with it, communicated the interesting but decidedly dangerous secret to Berthe, received her warm sanction, and transmitted to the Marquis, by the appointed means, an assurance that his wishes should be punctually carried out. The absence of an interdiction of his visit before a certain date was to be the signal to M. Paul de Sénanges that he was to proceed to act upon his uncle's instructions; he waited the proper time, the reassuring silence was maintained unbroken, and he ultimately set forth on his journey, and accomplished it in safety.

Preparations had been made at the Maison Alix for the reception of M. Glaire, and his supposed occupation had been announced. The apartments were decorated in a heavy, gloomy style, and those of the *citoyenne* in particular (they had been occupied by a lady who had once been designated as *feue Madame la Marquise*, but who was referred to now as *la mère du ci-devant*) were much in need of renovation. The alcove, for instance, was all that was least gay and most far from simple. The *citoyenne* would have all that changed. On the morning of the day of the expected arrival, Berthe said to her father:

"It would seem as if the Marquis did not know the exact spot in which the packet is deposited. M. Paul's assumed character implies the necessity for a search."

M. Henri Glaire arrived at the Maison Alix, was fraternally received, and made acquainted with the sphere of his operations. The young man had a good deal of both ability and taste in the line he had assumed, and the part was not difficult to play. Some days were judiciously allowed to pass before the real object of the masquerade was pursued, and during that time cordial relations established themselves between the *avocat* and his guest. The young man was handsome, elegant, engaging, with all the external advantages, and devoid of the vices, errors, and hopeless infatuated unscrupulousness, of his class; he had naturally quick intelligence, and some real knowledge and comprehension of life had been knocked into him by the hard-hitting blows of Fate. His face was like his mother's, Prosper Alix thought, and his mind and tastes were of the very pattern which, in theory, Berthe approved. Berthe, a very unconventional French girl — who thought the new era of purity, love, virtue, and disinterestedness ought to do away with marriage by barter as one of its most notable reforms, and had been disenchanted by discovering that the abolition of marriage altogether suited the taste of the incorruptible Republic better — might like, might even love, this young man. She saw so few men, and had no fancy for patriots; she would certainly be obstinate about it if she did chance to love him. This would be a nice state of affairs. This would be a pleasant consequence of the confiding request of the *ci-devant*. Prosper wished with all his heart for the arrival of the concerted signal, which should tell Henri Glaire that he might fulfil the purpose of his sojourn at the Maison Alix, and set forth for Marseilles.

But the signal did not come, and the days — long, beautiful, sunny, soothing summer-days — went on. The painting of the panels of the *citoyenne's* apartment, which she vacated for that purpose, progressed slowly; and M. Paul de Sénanges, guided by the ground-plan, and aided by Berthe, had discovered the spot in which the jewels of price, almost the last remnants of the princely wealth of the Sénanges, had been hidden by the *femme-de-chambre* who had perished with her mistress, having confided a general statement of the fact to a priest, for transmission to the Marquis. This spot had been ingeniously chosen. The sleeping-apartment of the late Marquis was extensive, lofty, and provided with an alcove of sufficiently large dimensions to have formed in itself a handsome room. This space, containing a splendid but gloomy bed, on an estrade, and hung with rich faded brocade, was divided from the general extent of the apartment by a low railing of black oak, elaborately carved, opening in the centre, and with a flat wide bar along the top, covered with crimson velvet. The curtains were contrived to hang from the ceiling, and, when let down inside the screen of railing, they matched the draperies which closed before the great stone balcony at the opposite end of the room. Since the *avocat's* daughter had occupied this palatial chamber, the curtains of the alcove had never been drawn, and she had substituted for them a high folding screen of black-and-gold Japanese pattern, also a relic of the grand old times, which stood about six feet on the outside of the rails that shut in her bed. The floor was of shining oak, testifying to the conscientious and successful labors of successive generations of *frotteurs*; and on the spot where the railing of the alcove opened by a pretty quaint device sundering the intertwined arms of a pair of very chubby cherubs, a square space in the floor was also richly carved.

The seekers soon reached the end of their search. A little effort removed the square of carved oak, and underneath they found a casket, evidently of old workmanship, richly wrought in silver, much tarnished but quite intact. It was agreed that this precious deposit should be replaced, and the carved square laid down over it, until the signal for his departure should reach Paul. The little baggage which under any circumstances he could have ventured to allow himself in the dangerous journey he was to undertake, must be reduced, so as to admit of his carrying the casket without exciting suspicion.

The finding of the hidden treasure was not the first joint discovery made by the daughter of the *avocat* and the son of the *ci-devant*. The cogitations of Prosper Alix were very wise, very reasonable; but they were a little tardy. Before he had admitted the possibility of mischief, the mischief was done. Each had found out that the love of the other was indispensable to the happiness of life; and they had exchanged confidences, assurances, protestations, and promises, as freely, as fervently, and as hopefully, as if no such thing as a Republic, one and indivisible, with a keen scent and an unappeasable thirst for the blood of aristocrats, existed. They forgot all about “Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality” — these egotistical, narrow-minded young people; — they also forgot the characteristic alternative to those unparalleled blessings— “Death.” But Prosper Alix did not forget any of these things; and his consternation, his provision of suffering for his beloved daughter, were terrible, when she told him, with a simple noble frankness which the *grandes dames* of the dead-and-gone time of great ladies had rarely had a chance of exhibiting, that she loved M. Paul de Sénanges, and intended to marry him when the better times should come. Perhaps she meant when that alternative of *death* should be struck off the sacred formula; — of course she meant to marry him with the sanction of her father, which she made no doubt she should receive.

Prosper Alix was in pitiable perplexity. He could not bear to terrify his daughter by a full explanation of the danger she was incurring; he could not bear to delude her with false hope. If this young man could be got away at once safely, there was not much likelihood that he would ever be able to return to France. Would Berthe pine for him, or would she forget him, and make a rational, sensible, rich, republican marriage, which would not imperil either her reputation for pure patriotism or her father's? The latter would be the very best thing that could possibly happen, and therefore it was decidedly unwise to calculate upon it; but, after all, it was possible; and Prosper had not the courage, in such a strait, to resist the hopeful promptings of a possibility. How ardently he regretted that he had complied with the prayer of the *ci-devant*! When would the signal for Mr. Paul's departure come?

Prosper Alix had made many sacrifices, had exercised much self-control for his daughter's sake; but he had never sustained a more severe trial than this, never suffered more than he did now, under the strong necessity for hiding from her his absolute conviction of the impossibility of a happy result for this attachment, in that future to which the lovers looked so fearlessly. He could not even make his anxiety and apprehension known to Paul de Sénanges; for he did not believe the young man had sufficient strength of will to conceal anything so important from the keen and determined observation of Berthe.

The expected signal was not given, and the lovers were incautious. The seclusion of the Maison Alix had all the danger, as well as all the delight, of solitude, and Paul dropped his disguise too much and too often. The servants, few in number, were of the truest patriotic principles, and to some of them the denunciation of the *citoyen*, whom they condescended to serve because the sacred Revolution had not yet made them as rich as he, would have been a delightful duty, a sweet-smelling sacrifice to be laid on the altar of the country. They heard certain names and places mentioned; they perceived many things which led them to believe that Henri Glaire was not an industrial artist and pure patriot, worthy of respect, but a wretched *ci-devant*, resorting to the dignity of labor to make up for the righteous destruction of every other kind of dignity. One day a gardener, of less stoical virtue than his fellows, gave Prosper Alix a warning that the presence of a *ci-devant* upon his premises was suspected, and that he might be certain a domiciliary visit, attended with dangerous results to himself, would soon take place. Of course the *avocat* did not commit himself by any avowal to this lukewarm patriot; but he casually mentioned that Henri Glaire was about to take his leave. What was to be done? He must not leave the neighborhood without receiving the instructions he was awaiting; but he must leave the house, and be supposed to have gone quite away. Without any delay or hesitation, Prosper explained the facts to Berthe and her lover, and insisted on the necessity for an instant parting. Then the courage and the readiness of the girl told. There was no crying, and very little trembling; she was strong and helpful.

"He must go to Pichon's, father," she said, "and remain there until the signal is given. — Pichon is a master-mason, Paul," she continued, turning to her lover, "and his wife was my nurse. They are avaricious people; but they are fond of me in their way, and they will shelter you faithfully enough, when they know that my father will pay them handsomely. You must go at once, unseen by the servants; they are at supper. Fetch your valise, and bring it to my room. We will put the casket in it, and such of your things as you must take out to make room for it, we can hide under the plank. My father will go with you to Pichon's, and we will communicate with you there as soon as it is safe."

Paul followed her to the large gloomy room where the treasure lay, and they took the casket from its hiding-place. It was heavy, though not large, and an awkward thing to pack away among linen in a small valise. They managed it, however, and, the brief preparation completed, the moment of parting arrived. Firmly and eloquently, though in haste, Berthe assured Paul of her changeless love and faith, and promised him to wait for him for any length of time in France, if better days should be slow of coming, or to join him in some foreign land, if they were never to come. Her father was present, full of compassion and misgiving. At length he said:

"Come, Paul, you must leave her; every moment is of importance."

The young man and his betrothed were standing on the spot whence they had taken the casket; the carved rail with the heavy curtains might have been the outer sanctuary of an altar, and they bride and bridegroom before it, with earnest, loving faces, and clasped hands.

"Farewell, Paul," said Berthe; "promise me once more, in this the moment of our parting, that you will come to me again, if you are alive, when the danger is past."

"Whether I am living or dead, Berthe," said Paul de Sénanges, strongly moved by some sudden inexplicable instinct, "I will come to you again."

In a few more minutes, Prosper Alix and his guest, who carried, not without difficulty, the small but heavy leather valise, had disappeared in the distance, and Berthe was on her knees before the *prie-dieu* of the *ci-devant* Marquise, her face turned toward the "Holy Hill" of Fourvières.

Pichon, *mâitre*, and his sons, *garçons-maçons*, were well-to-do people, rather morose, exceedingly avaricious, and of taciturn dispositions; but they were not ill spoken of by their neighbors. They had amassed a good deal of money in their time, and were just then engaged on a very lucrative job. This was the construction of several of the steep descents, by means of stairs, straight and winding, cut in the face of the *côteaux*, by which pedestrians are enabled to descend into the town. Pichon *père* was a *propriétaire* as well; his property was that which is now in the possession of Giraudier, *pharmacien, première classe*, and which was destined to attain a sinister celebrity during his proprietorship. One of the straightest and steepest of the stairways had been cut close to the *terre* which the mason owned, and a massive wall, destined to bound the highroad at the foot of the declivity, was in course of construction.

When Prosper Alix and Paul de Sénanges reached the abode of Pichon, the master-mason, with his sons and workmen, had just completed their day's work, and were preparing to eat the supper served by the wife and mother, a tall, gaunt woman, who looked as if a more liberal scale of housekeeping would have done her good, but on whose features the stamp of that devouring and degrading avarice which is the commonest vice of the French peasantry, was set as plainly as on the hard faces of her husband and her sons. The *avocat* explained his business and introduced his companion briefly, and awaited the reply of Pichon *père* without any appearance of inquietude.

"You don't run any risk," he said; "at least, you don't run any risk which I cannot make it worth your while to incur. It is not the first time you have received a temporary guest on my recommendation. You know nothing about the citizen Glaire, except that he is recommended to you by me. I am responsible; you can, on occasion, make me so. The citizen may remain with you a short time; can hardly remain long. Say, citizen, is it agreed? I have no time to spare."

It was agreed, and Prosper Alix departed, leaving M. Paul de Sénanges, convinced that the right, indeed the only, thing had been done, and yet much troubled and depressed.

Pichon *père* was a short, squat, powerfully built man, verging on sixty, whose thick, dark grizzled hair, sturdy limbs, and hard hands, on which the muscles showed like cords, spoke of endurance and strength; he was, indeed, noted in the neighborhood for those qualities. His sons resembled him slightly, and each other closely, as was natural, for they were twins. They were heavy, lumpish fellows, and they made but an ungracious return to the attempted civilities of the stranger, to whom the offer of their mother to show him his room was a decided relief. As he rose to follow the woman, Paul de Sénanges lifted his small valise with difficulty from the floor, on which he had placed it on entering the house, and carried it out of the room in both his arms. The brothers followed these movements with curiosity, and, when the door closed behind their mother and the stranger, their eyes met.

* * *

Twenty-four hours had passed away, and nothing new had occurred at the Maison Alix. The servants had not expressed any curiosity respecting the departure of the citizen Glaire, no domiciliary visit had taken place, and Berthe and her father were discussing the propriety of Prosper's venturing, on the pretext of an excursion in another direction, a visit to the isolated and quiet dwelling of the master-mason. No signal had yet arrived. It was agreed that after the lapse of another day, if their tranquillity remained undisturbed, Prosper Alix should visit Paul de Sénanges. Berthe, who was silent and preoccupied, retired to her own room early, and her father, who was uneasy and apprehensive, desperately anxious for the promised communication from the Marquis, was relieved by her absence.

The moon was high in the dark sky, and her beams were flung across the polished oak floor of Berthe's bedroom, through the great window with the stone balcony, when the girl, who had gone to sleep with her lover's name upon her lips in prayer, awoke with a sudden start, and sat up in her bed. An unbearable dread was upon her; and yet she was unable to utter a cry, she was unable to make another movement. Had she heard a voice? No, no one had spoken, nor did she fancy that she heard any sound. But within her, somewhere inside her heaving bosom, something said, "Berthe!"

And she listened, and knew what it was. And it spoke, and said:

“I promised you that, living or dead, I would come to you again. And I have come to you; but not living.”

She was quite awake. Even in the agony of her fear she looked around, and tried to move her hands, to feel her dress and the bedclothes, and to fix her eyes on some familiar object, that she might satisfy herself, before this racing and beating, this whirling and yet icy chilliness of her blood should kill her outright, that she was really awake.

“I have come to you; but not living.”

What an awful thing that voice speaking within her was! She tried to raise her head and to look toward the place where the moonbeams marked bright lines upon the polished floor, which lost themselves at the foot of the Japanese screen. She forced herself to this effort, and lifted her eyes, wild and haggard with fear, and there, the moonbeams at his feet, the tall black screen behind him, she saw Paul de Sénanges. She saw him; she looked at him quite steadily; she rose, slowly, with a mechanical movement, and stood upright beside her bed, clasping her forehead with her hands, and gazing at him. He stood motionless, in the dress he had worn when he took leave of her, the light-colored riding-coat of the period, with a short cape, and a large white cravat tucked into the double breast. The white muslin was flecked, and the front of the riding-coat was deeply stained, with blood. He looked at her, and she took a step forward — another — then, with a desperate effort, she dashed open the railing and flung herself on her knees before him, with her arms stretched out as if to clasp him. But he was no longer there; the moonbeams fell clear and cold upon the polished floor, and lost themselves where Berthe lay, at the foot of the screen, her head upon the ground, and every sign of life gone from her.

“Where is the citizen Glaire?” asked Prosper Alix of the *citoyenne* Pichon, entering the house of the master-mason abruptly, and with a stern and threatening countenance. “I have a message for him; I must see him.”

“I know nothing about him,” replied the *citoyenne*, without turning in his direction, or relaxing her culinary labors. “He went away from here the next morning, and I did not trouble myself to ask where; that is his affair.”

“He went away? Without letting me know! Be careful, *citoyenne*; this is a serious matter.”

“So they tell me,” said the woman with a grin, which was not altogether free from pain and fear; “for you! A serious thing to have a *suspect* in your house, and palm him off on honest people. However, he went away peaceably enough when he knew we had found him out, and that we had no desire to go to prison, or worse, on his account, or yours.”

She was strangely insolent, this woman, and the listener felt his helplessness; he had brought the young man there with such secrecy, he had so carefully provided for the success of concealment.

“Who carried his valise?” Prosper Alix asked her suddenly.

“How should I know?” she replied; but her hands lost their steadiness, and she upset a stew-pan; “he carried it here, didn’t he? and I suppose he carried it away again.”

Prosper Alix looked at her steadily — she shunned his gaze, but she showed no other sign of confusion; then horror and disgust of the woman came over him.

“I must see Pichon,” he said; “where is he?”

“Where should he be but at the wall? he and the boys are working there, as always. The citizen can see them; but he will remember not to detain them; in a little quarter of an hour the soup will be ready.”

The citizen did see the master-mason and his sons, and after an interview of some duration he left the place in a state of violent agitation and complete discomfiture. The master-mason had addressed to him these words at parting:

“I assert that the man went away at his own free will; but if you do not keep very quiet, I shall deny that he came here at all — you cannot prove he did — and I will denounce you for harboring a *suspect* and *ci-devant* under a false name. I know a De Sénanges when I see him as well as you, citizen Alix; and, wishing M. Paul a good journey, I hope you will consider about this matter, for truly, my friend, I think you will sneeze in the sack before I shall.”

* * *

“We must bear it, Berthe, my child,” said Prosper Alix to his daughter many weeks later, when the fever had left her, and she was able to talk with her father of the mysterious and frightful events which had occurred. “We are utterly helpless. There is no proof, only the word of these wretches against mine, and certain destruction to me if I speak. We will go to Spain, and tell the Marquis all the truth, and never return, if you would rather not. But, for the rest, we must bear it."

"Yes, my father," said Berthe submissively, "I know we must; but God need not, and I don't believe He will."

The father and the daughter left France unmolested, and Berthe "bore it" as well as she could. When better times come they returned, Prosper Alix an old man, and Berthe a stern, silent, handsome woman, with whom no one associated any notions of love or marriage. But long before their return the traditions of the Croix Rousse were enriched by circumstances which led to that before-mentioned capital bargain made by the father of the Giraudier of the present. These circumstances were the violent death of Pichon and his two sons, who were killed by the fall of a portion of the great boundary-wall on the very day of its completion, and the discovery, close to its foundation, at the extremity of Pichon's *terre*, of the corpse of a young man attired in a light-colored riding-coat, who had been stabbed through the heart.

Berthe Alix lived alone in the Château de Sénanges, under its restored name, until she was a very old woman. She lived long enough to see the golden figure on the summit of the "Holy Hill," long enough to forget the bad old times, but not long enough to forget or cease to mourn the lover who had kept his promise, and come back to her; the lover who rested in the earth which once covered the bones of the martyrs, and who kept a place for her by his side. She has filled that place for many years. You may see it, when you look down from the second gallery of the bell-tower at Fourvières, following the bend of the outstretched golden arm of Notre Dame.

The château was pulled down some years ago, and there is no trace of its former existence among the vines.

Good times, and bad times, and again good times have come for the Croix Rousse, for Lyons, and for France, since then; but the remembrance of the treachery of Pichon & Sons, and of the retribution which at once exposed and punished their crime, outlives all changes. And once, every year, on a certain summer night, three ghostly figures are seen, by any who have courage and patience to watch for them, gliding along by the foot of the boundary-wall, two of them carrying a dangling corpse, and the other, implements for mason's work and a small leather valise. Giraudier, *pharmacien*, has never seen these ghostly figures, but he describes them with much minuteness; and only the *esprits forts* of the Croix Rousse deny that the ghosts of Pichon & Sons are not yet laid.

THE PHANTOM FOURTH.

THEY were three.

It was in the cheap night-service train from Paris to Calais that I first met them.

Railways, as a rule, are among the many things which they do *not* order better in France, and the French Northern line is one of the worst managed in the world, barring none, not even the Italian *vie ferrate*. I make it a rule, therefore, to punish the directors of, and the shareholders in, that undertaking to the utmost within my limited ability, by spending as little money on their line as I can help.

It was, then, in a third-class compartment of the train that I met the three.

Three as hearty, jolly-looking Saxon faces, with stalwart frames to match, as one would be likely to meet in an hour's walk from the Regent's Park to the Mansion House.

One of the three was dark, the other two were fair. The dark one was the senior of the party. He wore an incipient full beard, evidently in process of training, with a considerable amount of grizzle in it.

The face of one of his companions was graced with a magnificent flowing beard. The third of the party, a fair-haired youth of some twenty-three or four summers, showed a scrupulously smooth-shaven face.

They looked all three much flushed and slightly excited, and, I must say, they turned out the most boisterous set of fellows I ever met.

They were clearly gentlemen, however, and men of education, with considerable linguistic acquirements; for they chatted and sang, and declaimed and "did orations" all the way from Paris to Calais, in a slightly bewildering variety of tongues.

Their jollity had, perhaps, just a little over-tinge of the slap-bang jolly-dog style in it; but there was so much heartiness and goodnature in all they said and in all they did, that it was quite impossible for any of the other occupants of the carriage to vote them a nuisance; and even the sourest of the officials, whom they chaffed most unmercifully and unremittingly at every station on the line, took their punishment with a shrug and a grin. The only person, indeed, who rose against them in indignant protestation was the head-waiter at the Calais station refreshment-room, to whom they would persist in propounding puzzling problems, such as, for instance, “If you charge two shillings for one-and-a-half-ounce slice of breast of veal, how many fools will it take to buy the joint off you?” — and what *he* got by the attempt to stop their chaff was a caution to any other sinner who might have felt similarly inclined.

As for me, I could only give half my sense of hearing to their utterings, the other half being put under strict sequester at the time by my friend O’Kweene, the great Irish philosopher, who was delivering to me, for my own special behoof and benefit, a brilliant, albeit somewhat abstruse, dissertation on the “visible and palpable outward manifestations of the inner consciousness of the soul in a trance;” which occupied all the time from Paris to Calais, full eight hours, and which, to judge from my feelings at the time, would certainly afford matter for three heavy volumes of reading in bed, in cases of inveterate sleeplessness — a hint to enterprising publishers.

My friend O’Kweene, who intended to stay a few days at Calais, took leave of me on the pier, and I went on board the steamer that was to carry us and the mail over to Dover.

Here I found our trio of the railway-car, snugly ensconced under an extemporized awning, artfully constructed with railway-rugs and greatcoats, supported partly against the luggage, and partly upon several oars, purloined from the boats, and turned into tent-poles for the nonce — which made the skipper swear wofully when he found it out some time after.

The three were even more cheery and boisterous on board than they had been on shore. From what I could make out in the dark, they were discussing the contents of divers bottles of liquor; I counted four dead men dropped quietly overboard by them in the course of the hour and a half we had to wait for the arrival of the mailtrain, which was late, as usual on this line.

At last we were off, about halfpast two o’clock in the morning. It was a beautiful, clear, moonlit night, so clear, indeed, that we could see the Dover lights almost from Calais harbor. But we had considerably more than a capful of wind, and there was a turgent ground-swell on, which made our boat — double-engined, and as trim and tidy a craft as ever sped across the span from shore to shore — behave rather lively, with sportive indulgence in a brisk game of pitch-and-toss that proved anything but comfortable to most of the passengers.

When we were steaming out of Calais harbor, our three friends, emerging from beneath their tent, struck up in chorus Campbell's noble song, "Ye Mariners of England," finishing up with a stave from "Rule, Britannia!"

But, alas for them! however loudly their throats were shouting forth the sway proverbially held by Albion and her sons over the waves, on this occasion at least the said waves seemed determined upon ruling these particular three Britons with a rod of antimony; for barely a few seconds after the last vibrating echoes of the "Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!" had died away upon the wind, I beheld the three leaning lovingly together, in fast friendship linked, over the rail, conversing in deep ventriguttural accents with the denizens of Neptune's watery realm.

We had one of the quickest passages on record — ninety-three minutes' steaming carried us across from shore to shore. When we were just on the point of landing, I heard the dark senior of the party mutter to his companions, in a hollow whisper and mysterious manner, "He is gone again;" to which the others, the bearded and the smooth-shaven, responded in the same way, with deep sighs of evident relief, "Ay, marry! so he is at last."

This mysterious communication roused my curiosity. Who was the party that was said to be gone at last? Where had he come from? where had he been hiding, that *I* had not seen him? and where was he gone to now? I determined to know; if but the opportunity would offer, to screw, by cunning questioning, the secret out of either of the three.

Fate favored my design.

For some inscrutable reason, known only to the company's officials, we cheap-trainers were not permitted to proceed on our journey to London along with the mail, but were left to kick our heels for some two hours at the Dover station.

I went into the refreshment-room to look for my party; I had a notion I should find them where the Briton's unswerving and unerring instinct would be most likely to lead them. It turned out that I was right in my conjecture. There they were, seated round a table with huge bowls of steaming tea and monster piles of buttered toast and muffins spread on the festive board before them. Ay, indeed, there they were; but *quantum mutati ab illis*! how strangely changed from the noisy, rollicking set I had known them in the railway-car and on board the steamer, ere yet the demon of sea-sickness had claimed them for his own! How ghastly sober they looked now, to be sure! And how sternly and silently bent upon devoting themselves to the swilling of the Chinese shrub infusion and to the gorging of indigestible muffins. It was quite clear to me that it would have been worse than folly to venture upon addressing them while thus absorbed in absorbing. So I resolved to await a more favorable opening, and went out meanwhile to walk on the platform.

A short time I was left in solitary possession of the promenade; then I became suddenly aware that another traveller was treading the same ground with me — it was the dark elderly leader of the three. I glanced at him as he passed me under one of the lamps. He looked pale and sad. The furrowed lines on his brow bespoke deliberation deep and pondering profound. All the infinite mirth of the preceding few hours had departed from him, leaving him but a wretched wreck of his former reckless self.

“A fine night, sir,” I said to break the ice— “for the season of the year,” I added by way of a saving clause, to tone down the absoluteness of the assertion.

He looked at me abstractedly, merely reëchoing my own words, “A fine night, sir, for the season of the year.”

“Why look ye so sad now, who were erst so jolly?” I bluntly asked, determined to force him into conversation.

“Ay, indeed, why so sad now?” he replied, looking me full in the face; then, suddenly clasping my arm with a spasmodic grip, he continued hurriedly, “I think I had best confide our secret to you. You seem a man of thought. I witnessed and admired the patient attention with which you listened to your friend’s abstruse talk in the railway-car. Maybe you can find the solution of a mystery which defies the ponderings of our poor brains — mine and my two friends.”

Then he proceeded to pour into my attentive ear this gruesome tale of mystery:

“We three — that is, myself, yon tall bearded Briton,” pointing to the glass door of the refreshment-room, “whose name is Jack Hobson, and young Emmanuel Topp, junior partner in a great beer firm, whom you may behold now at his fifth bowl of tea and his seventh muffin — are teetotallers — — “

“Teetotallers!” I could not help exclaiming. “Lord bless me! that is certainly about the last thing I should have taken you for, either of you.”

“Well,” he replied with some slight confusion, “at least, we *were total* teetotallers, though I admit we can now only claim the character of partial abstainers. The fact is, when, about a fortnight ago, we were discussing the plan of our projected visit to the great Paris Exhibition, Topp suggested that while in France we should do as the French do, to which Jack Hobson assented, remarking that the French knew nothing about tea, and that a Frenchman’s tea would be sure to prove an Englishman’s poison. So we resolved to suspend the pledge during our visit to France.

“It was on the second day after our arrival in Paris. We were dining in a private cabinet at Désiré Beaurain’s, one of the leading restaurants on the fashionable side of the Montmartre — Italiens Boulevard. Our dinner was what an Irishman might call a most ‘illigant’ affair. We had sipped several bottles of Sauterne, and tasted a few of Tavel, and we were just topping the entertainment with a solitary bottle of champagne, when I became suddenly aware of the presence of another party in the room — a *fourth man* — who sat him down at our table, and helped himself liberally to our liquor. From what I ascertained afterward from Jack Hobson and Emmanuel Topp, the intruder’s presence became revealed to them also, either about the same time or a little later. What was he like? I cannot tell. His figure and face remained indistinct throughout — phantom-like. His features seemed endowed with a stronge weird mobility that would defyingly elude the fixing grasp of our eager eyes. Now, and to my two companions, he would look marvellously like me; then, to me, he would stalk and rave about in the likeness of Jack Hobson; again, he would seem the counterfeit of Emmanuel Topp; then he would look like all the three of us put together; then like neither of us, nor like anybody else. Oh, sir, it was a woful thing to be haunted by this phantom apparition. Yet the strangest part of the affair was that neither of us seemed to feel a whit surprised at the dread presence; that we quietly and uncomplainingly let him drink our wine, and actually give orders for more; that we never objected, in fact, to any of his sayings and doings. What seemed also strange was that the waiter, while yet receiving and executing his orders, was evidently pretending to ignore his presence. But then, as I dare say you know as well as I do, French waiters are *such* actors!

“Well, to resume, there he was, this fourth man, seated at our table and feasting at our expense. And the pranks that he would play us — they were truly stupendous. He began his little game by ordering in half-a-dozen of champagne. And when the waiter seemed slightly doubtful and hesitating about executing the order, Topp, forsooth, must put in his oar, and indorse the command, actually pretending that *I*, who am now speaking to you, and who am the very last man in the world likely to dream of such a preposterous thing, had given the order, and that I was a jolly old brick, and the best of boon companions. Surprise at this barefaced assertion kept me mute, and so, of course, the champagne was brought in, and I thought the best thing to do under the circumstances was to have my share of it at least; and so I had — my fair share; but, bless you, it was nothing to what that fourth man drank of it. In fact, the amount of liquor *he* would swill on this and on the many subsequent occasions he intruded his presence upon us, was a caution.

“We paid our little bill without grumbling, though the presence of the fourth man at our table had added rather heavily to the *addition*, as they call bills at French restaurants.

“We sallied forth into the street to get a whiff of fresh air. *He*, the demon, pertinaciously stuck to us; he familiarly linked his arm through mine, and, suggesting coffee as rather a good thing to take after dinner, took us over to the Café du Cardinal, where he, however, took none of the Arabian beverage himself (there being only three cups placed for us, as I distinctly saw), but drank an interminable succession of *chasse-café*, utterly regardless of the divisional lines of the cognac *carafon*. Part of these he would take neat, another portion he would burn over sugar, gloating glaringly over the bluish flame, while gleams of demoniac delight would flit across his ever-changing features. Jack Hobson and Topp, I am sorry to say, joined him with a will in this double-distilled debauch; and when I attempted to remonstrate with them, they brazenly asserted that *I*, who am now speaking to you, who have always, publicly and privately, declared brandy to be the worst of evil spirits, had taken more of it, to my own cheek, as they slangily expressed it, than the two of them together; and the waiter, who had evidently been bribed by them, boldly maintained that *le vieux monsieur*, as he had the impudence to call me, had swallowed *plus de trois carafons de fine*; whereupon the fourth man, stepping up to him, punched his head, which served him right. Now you will hardly believe me when I tell you that at that very instant Topp forced me back into my chair, while Jack Hobson pinioned my arms from behind, and the waiter had the unblushing effrontery to stamp and rave at me like a maniac, demanding satisfaction or compensation at my hands for the unprovoked assault committed upon him by *me, coram populo*! — by *me*, who, I beg to assure you, am the most peaceable man living, and am actually famed for the mildness of my disposition and the sweetness and suavity of my temper. And, would you believe it? everybody present, waiters and guests, and my own two bosom-friends, joined in the conspiracy against me, and I actually had to give the wretch of a waiter ten francs as a plaster for his broken pate, and a salve for his wounded honor! Where was the real culprit all this time, you ask me — the fourth man? Why, he quietly stood by grinning, and they all and every one of them pretended not to see him, though Topp and Jack Hobson next morning confessed to me that they certainly had an indistinct consciousness of the presence throughout of this miserable intruder.

"How we finished that night I remember not; nor could Jack Hobson or Emmanuel Topp. All we could conscientiously stand by, if we were questioned, is that we awoke next morning — the three of us — with some slight swimming in our heads, and a hazy recollection of a gorgeous dream of brilliant lights and sounds of music and revelry, and bright visions of groves and grottoes, and dancing houris (or hussies, as moral Jack Hobson calls the poor things), and a hot supper at a certain place in the Passage des Princes, of which I think the name is Peter's.

"I will not tire your courteous patience by a detailed narrative of our experiences day after day, during our fortnight's stay in Paris. Suffice it to tell you that from that time forward to yesterday, when we left, the *fourth man*, as we, by mutual consent, agreed to call the phantom apparition, came in regularly to our dinner; with the dessert or a little after; that he would constantly suggest a fresh supply of Côte St. Jacques, Moulin-à-Vent, Beaune, Chambertin, Roederer Carte Blanche, and a variety of other, generally rather more than less expensive, wines — and that he somehow would manage to make us have them, too.

"Then he would sally forth with us to the café, where he would indulge in irritating chaff of the waiters, and in slighting comments upon the great

French nation in general, and the Parisians in particular, and upon their institutions and manners and customs.

"He would insist upon singing the Marseillaise; he would speak disparagingly of the Emperor, whom he would irreverently call Lambert; he would pass cutting and unsavory remarks upon the glorious system of the night-carts; he would call down the judgment of Heaven upon the devoted head of poor Mr. Haussmann; he would go up to some unhappy sergent-de-ville, who might, however unwittingly, excite his ire, and tell him a bit of his mind in English, with sarcastic allusions to his cocket-hat and his toasting-fork, and polite inquiries after the health of *ce cher* Monsieur Lambert, or the whereabouts of *cet excellent* Monsieur Godinot. The worst of the matter was that I suppose for the reason that man is an imitative animal, a sort of *À¹¸·º¿Â ¼ÅÉÁ¿Â*, or Monboddian monkey minus the tail — my two companions were, somehow, always sure to join the wretch in his evil behavior, and to go on just as bad as he did. No wonder, then, that we got into no end of rows, and it is a marvel to me now, how ever we have managed to get off with a whole skin to our bodies.

"He would insist upon taking us to Mabille, the Closerie des Lilas, and the Châteaurouge, where he would indulge in the maddest pranks and antics, and somehow lead us to join in the wildest dances, and make us lift our legs as high as the highest lifter among the *habitués*, male or female.

"One night, at about halfpast two in the morning (*Hibernicè*), he had the cool assurance to drag us along with him to the then closed entrance to the Passage des Princes, where he frantically shook the gate, and insisted to the frightened concierge, who came running up in his nightshirt, that Peter's must and ought to be open still, as *we* had not had our supper yet; and Topp and Jack Hobson, forsooth, must join in the row. I have no distinct recollection of whether it was our phantom guest or either of my companions that madly strove to detain the hastily retreating form of the concierge by a desperate clutch at the tail of his shirt; I only remember that the garment gave way in the struggle, and that the unhappy functionary was reduced nearly altogether to the primitive buff costume of the father of man in Paradise ere he had put his teeth into that unlucky apple of which, the pips keep so inconveniently sticking in poor humanity's gizzard to the present day. And what I remember also to my cost is, that the sergent-de-ville, whom the bereaved man's shouts of distress brought to the scene, fastened upon *me*, the most inoffensive of mortals, for a compensation fine of twenty francs, as if *I* had been the culprit. And deuced glad we were, I assure you, to get off without more serious damage to our pocket and reputation than this, and a copious volley of *sacrés ivrognes Anglais*, fired at us by the wretched concierge and his friend of the police, who, I am quite sure, went halves with him in the compensation. Ah! they are a lawless set, these French.

"On another occasion we three went to the Exhibition, where we visited one of our colonial departments, in company with several English friends, and some French gentlemen appointed on the wine jury. We went to taste a few samples of colonial wines. *He* was not with us *then*. Barely, however, had we uncorked a poor dozen bottles, which turned out rather good for colonial, though a little raw and slightly uneducated, when *who* should stalk in but our fourth man, as jaunty and unconcerned as ever. Well, *he* fell to tasting, and he soon grew eloquent in praise of the colonial juice, which he declared would, in another twenty years' time, be fit to compete successfully with the best French vintages. Of course, the French gentlemen with us could not stand *this*; they spoke slightingly of the British colonial, and one of them even went so far as to call it rotgut. I cannot say whether it was the spirit of the uncompromising opinion thus pronounced, or the coarsely indelicate way in which the judgment of our French friend was expressed, that riled our phantom guest — enough, it brought him down in full force upon the offender and his countrymen, with most fluent French vituperation and an unconscionable amount of bad jokes and worse puns, finishing up with a general address to them as members of the *disgusting* jury, instead of jury of *dégustation*. Now, this I should not have minded so much; for, I must confess, I felt rather nettled at the national conceit and prejudice of these French. But the wretch, in the impetuous utterance of his invective, must somehow — though I was not aware of it at the time — have mimicked my gestures and imitated the very tones and accent of my voice so closely as to deceive even some of my English companions: or how else to account for the fact of their calling me a noisy brawler and a pestilent nuisance? *me*, the gentlest and mildest-spoken of mortals!

"Before our departure from London we had calculated our probable expenses on a most liberal scale, and we had made comfortable provision accordingly for a few weeks' stay in Paris. But with the additional heavy burden of the franking of so copious an imbiber as our fourth man thus unexpectedly thrown on our shoulders, it was no great wonder that we should find our resources go much faster than we had anticipated; so we had already been forcedly led to bethink ourselves of shortening our intended stay in the French capital when a fresh exploit of the phantom fourth, climaxing all his past misdeeds, brought matters to a crisis.

"It was the day before yesterday, the 4th of September. We had been dining at Marigny, and dancing at Mabille. Our eccentric guest had come in, as usual, with the champagne, and had of course, after dinner, taken us over to the enchanted gardens. We were all very jolly. *He* suggested supper at the Cascades, in the Bois de Boulogne. We chartered a *fiacre* to take us there and back. We supped rather copiously. *He* somehow made our coachman drunk, and took upon himself to drive us home. Need I tell you that he upset us in the Avenue de l'Impératrice, and that we had to walk it, and pretty fast too? It was a mercy there were no bones broken.

"Well, as we were walking along, just barely recovering from the shock of the accident, he suddenly took some new whim into his confounded noddle. Nothing would do for him but he must drag us along with him to the great entrance of the Elysée Napoléon (which erst was, and maybe is soon likely to be once more, the Elysée Bourbon), where he had the brazen impudence to claim admittance, as the Emperor, he pretended, had been graciously pleased to offer us the splendid hospitality of that renowned mansion. What further happened here, neither I nor either of my friends can tell. Our recollections from this period till next morning are doubtful and indistinct. All we can state for certain is, that yesterday morning we awoke, the three of us, in a most wretched state, in a strange, nasty place. We learn soon after from a gentleman in a cocked hat, who came to visit us on business, that the imperial hospitality which we had claimed last night had indeed been extended to us — only in the *violon*, instead of the Elysée. Our phantom guest was gone: he would alway, somehow sneak away in the morning, when there was nothing left for him to drink — the guzzling villain!

"The gentleman in the cocked-hat pressingly invited us to pay a visit to the Commissaire du Quartier. That formidable functionary received us with the customary French-polished veneer of urbanity which, as a rule, constitutes the *suaviter in modo* of the higher class of Gallic officials. He read us a severe lecture, however, upon the alleged impropriety of our conduct; and when I ventured to protest that it was not to us the blame ought to be imputed, but to the *quatrième*, he mistook my meaning, and, ere I could explain myself, he cut me short with a polite remark that the French used the cardinal instead of the ordinal numbers in stating the days of the month, with the exception of the first, and that he had had too much trouble with our countrymen (he took us for Yankees!) on the 4th of July, to be disposed to look with an over-lenient eye upon the vagaries we had chosen to commit on the 4th of September, which he supposed was another great national day with us. He would, however, let us off this time with a simple reprimand, upon payment of one hundred francs, compensation for damage done to the coach — drunken cabby having turned up, of course, to testify against us. Well, we paid the money, and handed the worthy magistrate twenty francs besides, for the benefit of the poor, by way of acknowledgment for the imperial hospitality we had enjoyed. We were then allowed to depart in peace.

“Now, you’ll hardly believe it, I dare say, but it is the truth notwithstanding, that we three, who have been fast friends for years, actually began to quarrel among ourselves now, mutually imputing to one another the blame of all our misadventures and misfortunes since our arrival in Paris, while yet we clearly knew and felt, each and every of us, that it was all the doings of that phantom fourth.

“One thing, however, we all agreed to do — to leave Paris by the first train.

“To fortify ourselves for the coming journey, we went to indulge in the luxury of a farewell breakfast at Désiré Beaurain’s. Of course we emptied a few bottles to our reconciliation. I do not exactly remember how many, but this I *do* remember, that our irrepressible incubus walked in again, and took his place in the midst of us rather sooner even than he had been wont to do; and he never left us from that time to the moment of our landing at Dover harbor, when he took his, I hope and trust final, departure with a ghastly grin.

“I dare say you must have thought us a most noisy and obstreperous lot: well, with my hand on my heart, I can assure you, on my conscience, that a quieter and milder set of fellows than us three you are not likely to find on this or the other side the Channel. But for that mysterious phantom fourth — — "

Here the whistle sounded, and the guard came up to us with a hurried, "Now then, gents, take your seats, please; train is off in half a minnit!"

"What can have become of Topp and Jack Hobson?" muttered my new friend, looking around him with eager scrutiny. "I should not wonder if they were still refreshing." And he started off in the direction of the refreshment-room.

I took my seat. Immediately after the train whirled off. I cannot say whether the three were left behind; all I know is that I did not see them get out at London Bridge.

Remembering, however, that the appalling secret of the supernatural visitation which had thus harassed my three fellow-travellers had been confided to me under the impression that I might be likely to find a solution of the mystery, I have ever since deeply pondered thereon.

Shallow thinkers, and sneerers uncharitably given, may, from a consideration of the times, places, and circumstances at and under which the abnormal phenomena here recited were stated to have been observed, be led to attribute them simply to the promptings and imaginings of brains overheated by excessive indulgence in spirituous liquors. But I, striving to be mindful always of the great scriptural injunction to judge not, lest we be judged, and opportunely remembering my friend O'Kweene's learned dissertation above alluded to, feel disposed to pronounce the apparition of the phantom of the fourth man, and all the sayings, doings, and demeanings of the same, to have been simply so many visible and palpable outward manifestations of the inner consciousness of the souls of the three, and more notably of that of the elderly senior of the party, in a succession of vino-alcoholic trances.

My friend O'Kweene is, of course, welcome to such credit as may attach to this attempted solution of mine.

THE SPIRIT’S WHISPER.

YES, I have been haunted! — haunted so fearfully that for some little time I thought myself insane. I was no raving maniac; I mixed in society as heretofore, although perhaps a trifle more grave and taciturn than usual; I pursued my daily avocations; I employed myself even on literary work. To all appearance I was one of the sanest of the sane; and yet all the while I considered myself the victim of such strange delusions that, in my own mind, I fancied my senses — and one sense in particular — so far erratic and beyond my own control that I was, in real truth, a madman. How far I was then insane it must be for others, who hear my story, to decide. My hallucinations have long since left me, and, at all events, I am now as sane as I suppose most men are.

My first attack came on one afternoon when, being in a listless and an idle mood, I had risen from my work and was amusing myself with speculating at my window on the different personages who were passing before me. At that time I occupied apartments in the Brompton Road. Perhaps, there is no thoroughfare in London where the ordinary passengers are of so varied a description or high life and low life mingle in so perpetual a medley. South-Kensington carriages there jostle costermongers’ carts; the clerk in the public office, returning to his suburban dwelling, brushes the laborer coming from his work on the never-ending modern constructions in the new district; and the ladies of some of the surrounding squares flaunt the most gigantic of *chignons*, and the most exuberant of motley dresses, before the envying eyes of the ragged girls with their vegetable-baskets.

There was, as usual, plenty of material for observation and conjecture in the passengers, and their characters or destinations, from my window on that day. Yet I was not in the right cue for the thorough enjoyment of my favorite amusement. I was in a rather melancholy mood. Somehow or other, I don’t know why, my memory had reverted to a pretty woman whom I had not seen for many years. She had been my first love, and I had loved her with a boyish passion as genuine as it was intense. I thought my heart would have broken, and I certainly talked seriously of dying, when she formed an attachment to an ill-conditioned, handsome young adventurer, and, on her family objecting to such an alliance, eloped with him. I had never seen the fellow, against whom, however, I cherished a hatred almost as intense as my passion for the infatuated girl who had flown from her home for his sake. We had heard of her being on the Continent with her husband, and learned that the man's shifty life had eventually taken him to the East. For some years nothing more had been heard of the poor girl. It was a melancholy history, and its memory ill-disposed me for amusement.

A sigh was probably just escaping my lips with the half-articulated words, “Poor Julia!” when my eyes fell on a man passing before my window. There was nothing particularly striking about him. He was tall, with fine features, and a long, fair beard, contrasting somewhat with his bronzed complexion. I had seen many of our officers on their return from the Crimea look much the same. Still, the man's aspect gave me a shuddering feeling, I didn't know why. At the same moment, a whispering, low voice uttered aloud in my ear the words, “It is he!” I turned, startled; there was no one near me, no one in the room. There was no fancy in the sound; I had heard the words with painful distinctness. I ran to the door, opened it — not a sound on the staircase, not a sound in the whole house — nothing but the hum from the street. I came back and sat down. It was no use reasoning with myself; I had the ineffaceable conviction that I had heard the voice. Then first the idea crossed my mind that I might be the victim of hallucinations. Yes, it must have been so, for now I recalled to mind that the voice had been that of my poor lost Julia; and at the moment I heard it I had been dreaming of her. I questioned my own state of health. I was well; at least I had been so, I felt fully assured, up to that moment. Now a feeling of chilliness and numbness and faintness had crept over me, a cold sweat was on my forehead. I tried to shake off this feeling by bringing back my thoughts to some other subject. But, involuntarily as it were, I again uttered the words, “Poor Julia!” aloud. At the same time a deep and heavy sigh, almost a groan, was distinctly audible close by me. I sprang up; I was alone — quite alone. It was, once more, an hallucination.

By degrees the first painful impression wore away. Some days had passed, and I had begun to forget my singular delusion. When my thoughts aid revert to it, the recollection was dismissed as that of a ridiculous fancy. One afternoon I was in the Strand, coming from Charing Cross, when I was once more overcome by that peculiar feeling of cold and numbness which I had before experienced. The day was warm and bright and genial, and yet I positively shivered. I had scarce time to interrogate my own strange sensations when a man went by me rapidly. How was it that I recognized him at once as the individual who had only passed my window so casually on that morning of the hallucination? I don’t know, and yet I was aware that this man was the tall, fair passer-by of the Brompton Road. At the same moment the voice I had previously heard whispered distinctly in my ear the words, “Follow him!” I stood stupefied. The usual throngs of indifferent persons were hurrying past me in that crowded thoroughfare, but I felt convinced that not one of these had spoken to me. I remained transfixed for a moment. I was bent on a matter of business in the contrary direction to the individual I had remarked, and so, although with unsteady step, I endeavored to proceed on my way. Again that voice said, still more emphatically, in my ear, “Follow him!” I stopped involuntarily. And a third time, “Follow him!” I told myself that the sound was a delusion, a cheat of my senses, and yet I could not resist the spell. I turned to follow. Quickening my pace, I soon came up with the tall, fair man, and, unremarked by him, I followed him. Whither was this foolish pursuit to lead me? It was useless to ask myself the question — I was impelled to follow.

I was not destined to go very far, however. Before long the object of my absurd chase entered a well-known insurance-office. I stopped at the door of the establishment. I had no business within, why should I continue to follow? Had I not already been making a sad fool of myself by my ridiculous conduct? These were my thoughts as I stood heated by my quick walk. Yes, heated; and yet, once more, came the sudden chill. Once more that same low but now awful voice spoke in my ear: “Go in!” it said. I endeavored to resist the spell, and yet I felt that resistance was in vain. Fortunately, as it seemed to me, the thought crossed my mind that an old acquaintance was a clerk in that same insurance-office. I had not seen the fellow for a great length of time, and I never had been very intimate with him. But here was a pretext; and so I went in and inquired for Clement Stanley. My acquaintance came forward. He was very busy, he said. I invented, on the spur of the moment, some excuse of the most frivolous and absurd nature, as far as I can recollect, for my intrusion.

“By the way,” I said, as I turned to take my leave, although my question was “by the way” of nothing at all, “who was that tall, fair man who just now entered the office?”

"Oh, that fellow?" was the indifferent reply; "a Captain Campbell, or Canton, or some such name; I forget what. He is gone in before the board — insured his wife's life — and she is dead; comes for a settlement, I suppose."

There was nothing more to be gained, and so I left the office. As soon as I came without into the scorching sunlight, again the same feeling of cold, again the same voice— "Wait!" Was I going mad? More and more the conviction forced itself upon me that I was decidedly a monomaniac already. I felt my pulse. It was agitated and yet not feverish. I was determined not to give way to this absurd hallucination; and yet, so far was I out of my senses, that my will was no longer my own. Resolved as I was to go, I listened to the dictates of that voice and waited. What was it to me that this Campbell or Canton had insured his wife's life, that she was dead, and that he wanted a settlement of his claim? Obviously nothing; and I yet waited.

So strong was the spell on me that I had no longer any count of time. I had no consciousness whether the period was long or short that I stood there near the door, heedless of all the throng that passed, gazing on vacancy. The fiercest of policemen might have told me to "move on," and I should not have stirred, spite of all the terrors of the "station." The individual came forth. He paid no heed to me. Why should he? What was I to him? This time I needed no warning voice to bid me follow. I was a madman, and I could not resist the impulses of my madness. It was thus, at least I reasoned with myself. I followed into Regent Street. The object of my insensate observation lingered, and looked around as if in expectation. Presently a fine-looking woman, somewhat extravagantly dressed, and obviously not a lady, advanced toward him on the pavement. At the sight of her he quickened his step, and joined her rapidly. I shuddered again, but this time a sort of dread was mingled with that strange shivering. I knew what was coming, and it came. Again that voice in my ear. "Look and remember!" it said. I passed the man and woman as they stopped at their first meeting!

"Is all right, George?" said the female.

"All right, my girl," was the reply.

I looked. An evil smile, as if of wicked triumph, was on the man's face, I thought. And on the woman's? I looked at her, and I remembered. I could not be mistaken. Spite of her change in manner, dress, and appearance, it was Mary Simms. This woman some years before, when she was still very young, had been a sort of humble companion to my mother. A simple-minded, honest girl, we thought her. Sometimes I had fancied that she had paid me, in a sly way, a marked attention. I had been foolish enough to be flattered by her stealthy glances and her sighs. But I had treated these little demonstrations of partiality as due only to a silly girlish fancy. Mary Simms, however, had come to grief in our household. She had been detected in the abstraction of sundry jewels and petty ornaments. The morning after discovery she had left the house, and we had heard of her no more. As these recollections passed rapidly through my mind I looked behind me. The couple had turned back. I turned to follow again; and spite of carriages and cabs, and shouts and oaths of drivers, I took the middle of the street in order to pass the man and woman at a little distance unobserved. No; I was not mistaken. The woman was Mary Simms, though without any trace of all her former simple-minded airs; Mary Simms, no longer in her humble attire, but flaunting in all the finery of overdone fashion. She wore an air of reckless joyousness in her face; and yet, spite of that, I pitied her. It was clear she had fallen on the evil ways of bettered fortune — bettered, alas! for the worse.

I had an excuse now, in my own mind, for my continued pursuit, without deeming myself an utter madman — the excuse of curiosity to know the destiny of one with whom I had been formerly familiar, and in whom I had taken an interest. Presently the game I was hunting down stopped at the door of the Grand Café. After a little discussion they entered. It was a public place of entertainment; there was no reason why I should not enter also. I found my way to the first floor. They were already seated at a table, Mary holding the *carte* in her hand. They were about to dine. Why should not I dine there too? There was but one little objection, — I had an engagement to dinner. But the strange impulse which overpowered me, and seemed leading me on step by step, spite of myself, quickly overruled all the dictates of propriety toward my intended hosts. Could I not send a prettily devised apology? I glided past the couple, with my head averted, seeking a table, and I was unobserved by my old acquaintance. I was too agitated to eat, but I made a semblance, and little heeded the air of surprise and almost disgust on the bewildered face of the waiter as he bore away the barely touched dishes. I was in a very fever of impatience and doubt what next to do. They still sat on, in evident enjoyment of their meal and their constant draughts of sparkling wine. My impatience was becoming almost unbearable when the man at last rose. The woman seemed to have uttered some expostulation, for he turned at the door and said somewhat harshly aloud, “Nonsense; only one game and I shall be back. The waiter will give you a paper — a magazine — something to while away the time.” And he left the room for the billiard-table, as I surmised.

Now was my opportunity. After a little hesitation, I rose, and planted myself abruptly on the vacant seat before the woman.

“Mary,” I said.

She started, with a little exclamation of alarm, and dropped the paper she had held. She knew me at once.

“Master John!” she exclaimed, using the familiar term still given me when I was long past boyhood; and then, after a lengthened gaze, she turned away her head. I was embarrassed at first how to address her.

“Mary,” I said at last, “I am grieved to see you thus.”

“Why should you be grieved for me?” she retorted, looking at me sharply, and speaking in a tone of impatient anger. “I am happy as I am.”

“I don’t believe you,” I replied.

She again turned away her head.

“Mary,” I pursued, “can you doubt, that, spite of all, I have still a strong interest in the companion of my youth?”

She looked at me almost mournfully, but did not speak. At that moment I probably grew pale; for suddenly that chilly fit seized me again, and my forehead became clammy. That voice sounded again in my ear: “Speak of him!” were the words it uttered. Mary gazed on me with surprise, and yet I was assured that *she* had not heard that voice, so plain to me. She evidently mistook the nature of my visible emotion.

“O Master John!” she stammered, with tears gathering in her eyes, reverting again to that name of bygone times, “if you had loved me then — if you had consoled my true affection with one word of hope, one look of loving-kindness — if you had not spurned and crushed me, I should not have been what I am now.”

I was about to make some answer to this burst of unforgotten passion, when the voice came again: “Speak of him!”

“You have loved others since,” I remarked, with a coldness which seemed cruel to myself. “You love *him* now.” And I nodded my head toward the door by which the man had disappeared.

“Do I?” she said, with a bitter smile. “Perhaps; who knows?”

“And yet no good can come to you from a connection with that man,” I pursued.

“Why not? He adores me, and he is free,” was her answer, given with a little triumphant air.

“Yes,” I said, “I know he is free: he has lately lost his wife. He has made good his claim to the sum for which he insured her life.”

Mary grew deadly pale. “How did you learn this? what do you know of him?” she stammered.

I had no reply to give. She scanned my face anxiously for some time; then in a low voice she added, “What do you suspect?”

I was still silent, and only looked at her fixedly.

“You do not speak,” she pursued nervously. “Why do you not speak? Ah, you know more than you would say! Master John, Master John, you might set my tortured mind at rest, and clear or confirm those doubts which *will* come into my poor head, spite of myself. Speak out — O, do speak out!”

“Not here; it is impossible,” I replied, looking around. The room as the hour advanced, was becoming more thronged with guests, and the full tables gave a pretext for my reticence, when in truth I had nothing to say.

“Will you come and see me — will you?” she asked with earnest entreaty.

I nodded my head.

“Have you a pocketbook? I will write you my address; and you will come — yes, I am sure you will come!” she said in an agitated way.

I handed her my pocketbook and pencil; she wrote rapidly.

“Between the hours of three and five,” she whispered, looking uneasily at the door; “*he* is sure not to be at home.”

I rose; Mary held out her hand to me, then withdrew it hastily with an air of shame, and the tears sprang into her eyes again. I left the room hurriedly, and met her companion on the stairs.

That same evening, in the solitude of my own room, I pondered over the little event of the day. I had calmed down from my state of excitement. The living apparition of Mary Simms occupied my mind almost to the exclusion of the terrors of the ghostly voice which had haunted me, and my own fears of coming insanity. In truth, what was that man to me? Nothing. What did his doings matter to such a perfect stranger as myself? Nothing. His connection with Mary Simms was our only link; and in what should that affect me? Nothing again. I debated with myself whether it were not foolish of me to comply with my youthful companion's request to visit her; whether it were not imprudent in me to take any further interest in the lost woman; whether there were not even danger in seeking to penetrate mysteries which were no concern of mine. The resolution to which I came pleased me, and I said aloud, "No, I will not go!"

At the same moment came again the voice like an awful echo to my words— "Go!" It came so suddenly and so imperatively, almost without any previous warning of the usual shudder, that the shock was more than I could bear. I believe I fainted; I know I found myself, when I came to consciousness, in my armchair, cold and numb, and my candles had almost burned down into their sockets.

The next morning I was really ill. A sort of low fever seemed to have prostrated me, and I would have willingly seized so valid a reason for disobeying, at least for that day — for some days, perhaps — the injunction of that ghostly voice. But all that morning it never left me. My fearful chilly fit was of constant recurrence, and the words "Go! go! go!" were murmured so perpetually in my ears — the sound was one of such urgent entreaty — that all force of will gave way completely. Had I remained in that lone room, I should have gone wholly mad. As yet, to my own feelings, I was but partially out of my senses.

I dressed hastily; and, I scarce know how — by no effort of my own will, it seemed to me — I was in the open air. The address of Mary Simms was in a street not far from my own suburb. Without any power of reasoning, I found myself before the door of the house. I knocked, and asked a slipshod girl who opened the door to me for "Miss Simms." She knew no such person, held a brief shrill colloquy with some female in the back-parlor, and, on coming back, was about to shut the door in my face, when a voice from above — the voice of her I sought — called down the stairs, "Let the gentleman come up!"

I was allowed to pass. In the front drawingroom I found Mary Simms.

“They do not know me under that name,” she said with a mournful smile, and again extended, then withdrew, her hand.

“Sit down,” she went on to say, after a nervous pause. “I am alone now; told I adjure you, if you have still one latent feeling of old kindness for me, explain your words of yesterday to me.”

I muttered something to the effect that I had no explanation to give. No words could be truer; I had not the slightest conception what to say.

“Yes, I am sure you have; you must, you will,” pursued Mary excitedly; “you have some knowledge of that matter.”

“What matter?” I asked.

“Why, the insurance,” she replied impatiently. “You know well what I mean. My mind has been distracted about it. Spite of myself, terrible suspicions have forced themselves on me. No; I don’t mean that,” she cried, suddenly checking herself and changing her tone; “don’t heed what I said; it was madness in me to say what I did. But do, do, do tell me all you know.”

The request was a difficult one to comply with, for I knew nothing. It is impossible to say what might have been the end of this strange interview, in which I began to feel myself an unwilling impostor; but suddenly Mary started.

“The noise of the latchkey in the lock!” she cried, alarmed; “He has returned; he must not see you; you must come another time. Here, here, be quick! I’ll manage him.”

And before I could utter another word she had pushed me into the back drawingroom and closed the door. A man’s step on the stairs; then voices. The man was begging Mary to come out with him, as the day was so fine. She excused herself; he would hear no refusal. At last she appeared to consent, on condition that the man would assist at her toilet. There was a little laughter, almost hysterical on the part of Mary, whose voice evidently quivered with trepidation.

Presently both mounted the upper stairs. Then the thought stuck me that I had left my hat in the front room — a sufficient cause for the woman’s alarm. I opened the door cautiously, seized my hat, and was about to steal down the stairs, when I was again spellbound by that numb cold.

“Stay!” said the voice. I staggered back to the other room with my hat, and closed the door.

Presently the couple came down. Mary was probably relieved by discovering that my hat was no longer there, and surmised that I had departed; for I heard her laughing as they went down the lower flight. Then I heard them leave the house.

I was alone in that back drawingroom. Why? what did I want there? I was soon to learn. I felt the chill invisible presence near me; and the voice said, "Search!"

The room belonged to the common representative class of back drawingrooms in "apartments" of the better kind. The only one unfamiliar piece of furniture was an old Indian cabinet; and my eye naturally fell on that. As I stood and looked at it with a strange unaccountable feeling of fascination, again came the voice— "Search!"

I shuddered and obeyed. The cabinet was firmly locked; there was no power of opening it except by burglarious infraction; but still the voice said, "Search!"

A thought suddenly struck me, and I turned the cabinet from its position against the wall. Behind, the woodwork had rotted, and in many portions fallen away, so that the inner drawers were visible. What could my ghostly monitor mean — that I should open those drawers? I would not do such a deed of petty treachery. I turned defiantly, and addressing myself to the invisible as if it were a living creature by my side, I cried, "I must not, will not, do such an act of baseness."

The voice replied, "Search!"

I might have known that, in my state of what I deemed insanity, resistance was in vain. I grasped the most accessible drawer from behind, and pulled it toward me. Uppermost within it lay letters: they were addressed to "Captain Cameron,"— "Captain George Cameron." That name! — the name of Julia's husband, the man with whom she had eloped; for it was he who was the object of my pursuit.

My shuddering fit became so strong that I could scarce hold the papers; and "Search!" was repeated in my ear.

Below the letters lay a small book in a limp black cover. I opened this book with trembling hand; it was filled with manuscript — Julia's well-known handwriting.

"Read!" muttered the voice. I read. There were long entries by poor Julia of her daily life; complaints of her husband's unkindness, neglect, then cruelty. I turned to the last pages: her hand had grown very feeble now, and she was very ill. “George seems kinder now,” she wrote; “he brings me all my medicines with his own hand.” Later on: “I am dying; I know I am dying: he has poisoned me. I saw him last night through the curtains pour something in my cup; I saw it in his evil eye. I would not drink; I will drink no more; but I feel that I must die.”

These were the last words. Below were written, in a man’s bold hand, the words “Poor fool!”

This sudden revelation of poor Julia’s death and dying thoughts unnerved me quite. I grew colder in my whole frame than ever.

“Take it!” said her voice. I took the book, pushed back the cabinet into its place against the wall, and, leaving that fearful room, stole down the stairs with trembling limbs, and left the house with all the feelings of a guilty thief.

For some days I perused my poor lost Julia’s diary again and again. The whole revelation of her sad life and sudden death led but to one conclusion, — she had died of poison by the hands of her unworthy husband. He had insured her life, and then ——

It seemed evident to me that Mary Simms had vaguely shared suspicions of the same foul deed. On my own mind came conviction. But what could I do next? how bring this evil man to justice? what proof would be deemed to exist in those writings? I was bewildered, weak, irresolute. Like Hamlet, I shrank back and temporized. But I was not feigning madness; my madness seemed but all too real for me. During all this period the wailing of that wretched voice in my ear was almost incessant. O, I must have been mad!

I wandered about restlessly, like the haunted thing I had become. One day I had come unconsciously and without purpose into Oxford Street. My troubled thoughts were suddenly broken in upon by the solicitations of a beggar. With a heart hardened against begging impostors, and under the influence of the shock rudely given to my absorbing dreams, I answered more hardly than was my wont. The man heaved a heavy sigh, and sobbed forth, “Then Heaven help me!” I caught sight of him before he turned away. He was a ghastly object, with fever in his hollow eyes and sunken cheeks, and fever on his dry, chapped lips. But I knew, or fancied I knew, the tricks of the trade, and I was obdurate. Why, I asked myself, should the cold shudder come over me at such a moment? But it was so strong on me as to make me shake all over. It came — that maddening voice. “Succor!” it said now. I had become so accustomed already to address the ghostly voice that I cried aloud, “Why, Julia, why?” I saw people laughing in my face at this strange cry, and I turned in the direction in which the beggar had gone. I just caught sight of him as he was tottering down a street toward Soho. I determined to have pity for this once, and followed the poor man. He led me on through I know not what streets. His steps was hurried now. In one street I lost sight of him; but I felt convinced he must have turned into a dingy court. I made inquiries, but for a time received only rude jeering answers from the rough men and women whom I questioned. At last a little girl informed me that I must mean the strange man who lodged in the garret of a house she pointed out to me. It was an old dilapidated building, and I had much repugnance on entering it. But again I was no master of my will. I mounted some creaking stairs to the top of the house, until I could go no further. A shattered door was open; I entered a wretched garret; the object of my search lay now on a bundle of rags on the bare floor. He opened his wild eyes as I approached.

“I have come to succor,” I said, using unconsciously the word of the voice; “what ails you?”

“Ails me?” gasped the man; “hunger, starvation, fever.”

I was horrified. Hurrying to the top of the stairs, I shouted till I had roused the attention of an old woman. I gave her money to bring me food and brandy, promising her a recompense for her trouble.

“Have you no friends?” I asked the wretched man as I returned.

“None,” he said feebly. Then as the fever rose in his eyes and even flushed his pallid face, he said excitedly, “I had a master once — one I perilled my soul for. He knows I am dying; but, spite of all my letters, he will not come. He wants me dead, he wants me dead — and his wish is coming to pass now.”

“Cannot I find him — bring him here?” I asked.

The man stared at me, shook his head, and at last, as if collecting his faculties with much exertion, muttered, “Yes; it is a last hope; perhaps you may, and I can be revenged on him at least. Yes revenged. I have threatened him already.” And the fellow laughed a wild laugh.

“Control yourself,” I urged, kneeling by his side; “give me his name — his address.”

"Captain George Cameron," he gasped, and then fell back.

"Captain George Cameron!" I cried. "Speak! what of him?"

But the man's senses seemed gone; he only muttered incoherently. The old woman returned with the food and spirits. I had found one honest creature in that foul region. I gave her money — provide her more if she would bring a doctor. She departed on her new errand. I raised the man's head, moistened his lips with the brandy, and then poured some of the spirit down his throat. He gulped at it eagerly, and opened his eyes; but he still raved incoherently, "I did not do it, it was he. He made me buy the poison; he dared not risk the danger himself, the coward! I knew what he meant to do with it, and yet I did not speak; I was her murderer too. Poor Mrs. Cameron! poor Mrs. Cameron! do you forgive? — can you forgive?" And the man screamed aloud and stretched out his arms as if to fright away a phantom.

I had drunk in every word, and knew the meaning of those broken accents well. Could I have found at last the means of bringing justice on the murderer's head? But the man was raving in a delirium, and I was obliged to hold him with all my strength. A step on the stairs. Could it be the medical man I had sent for? That would be indeed a blessing. A man entered — it was Cameron!

He came in jauntily, with the words, "How now, Saunders, you rascal! What more do you want to get out of me?"

He started at the sight of a stranger.

I rose from my kneeling posture like an accusing spirit. I struggled for calm; but passion beyond my control mastered me, and was I not a madman? I seized him by the throat, with the words, "Murderer! poisoner! where is Julia?" He shook me off violently.

"And who the devil are you, sir?" he cried.

"That murdered woman's cousin!" I rushed at him again.

"Lying hound!" he shouted, and grappled me. His strength was far beyond mine. He had his hand on my throat; a crimson darkness was in my eyes; I could not see, I could not hear; there was a torrent of sound pouring in my ears. Suddenly his grasp relaxed. When I recovered my sight, I saw the murderer struggling with the fever-stricken man, who had risen from the floor, and seized him from behind. This unexpected diversion saved my life; but the ex-groom was soon thrown back on the ground.

“Captain George Cameron,” I cried, “kill me, but you will only heap another murder on your head!”

He advanced on me with something glittering in his hand. Without a word he came and stabbed at me; but at the same moment I darted at him a heavy blow. What followed was too confused for clear remembrance. I saw — no, I will say I fancied that I saw — the dim form of Julia Staunton standing between me and her vile husband. Did he see the vision too? I cannot say. He reeled back, and fell heavily to the floor. Maybe it was only my blow that felled him. Then came confusion — a dream of a crowd of people — policemen — muttered accusations. I had fainted from the wound in my arm.

Captain George Cameron was arrested. Saunders recovered, and lived long enough to be the principal witness on his trial. The murderer was found guilty. Poor Julia’s diary, too, which I had abstracted, told fearfully against him. But he contrived to escape the gallows; he had managed to conceal poison on his person, and he was found dead in his cell. Mary Simms I never saw again. I once received a little scrawl, “I am at peace now, Master John. God bless you!”

I have had no more hallucinations since that time; the voice has never come again. I found out poor Julia’s grave, and, as I stood and wept by its side, the cold shudder came over me for the last time. Who shall tell me whether I was once really mad, or whether I was not?

DOCTOR FEVERSHAM’S STORY.

“I HAVE made a point all my life,” said the doctor, “of believing nothing of the kind.”

Much ghost-talk by firelight had been going on in the library at Fordwick Chase, when Doctor Feversham made this remark.

“As much as to say,” observed Amy Fordwick, “that you are afraid to tackle the subject, because you pique yourself on being strong-minded, and are afraid of being convinced against your will.”

“Not precisely, young lady. A man convinced against his will is in a different state of mind from mine in matters like these. But it is true that cases in which the supernatural element appears at first sight to enter are so numerous in my profession, that I prefer accepting only the solutions of science, so far as they go, to entering on any wild speculations which it would require more time than I should care to devote to them to trace to their origin.”

“But without entering fully into the why and wherefore, how can you be sure that the proper treatment is observed in the numerous cases of mental hallucination which must come under your notice?” inquired Latimer Fordwick, who was studying for the Bar.

“I content myself, my young friend, with following the rules laid down for such cases, and I generally find them successful,” answered the old Doctor.

“Then you admit that cases have occurred within your knowledge of which the easiest apparent solution could be one which involved a belief in supernatural agencies?” persisted Latimer, who was rather prolix and pedantic in his talk.

“I did not say so,” said the Doctor.

“But of course he meant us to infer it,” said Amy. “Now, my dear old Doctor, do lay aside professional dignity, and give us one good ghost-story out of your personal experience. I believe you have been dying to tell one for the last hour, if you would only confess it.”

“I would rather not help to fill that pretty little head with idle fancies, dear child,” answered the old man, looking fondly at Amy, who was his especial pet and darling.

“Nonsense! You know I am even painfully unimaginative and matter-of-fact; and as for idle fancies, is it an idle fancy to think you like to please me?” said Amy coaxingly.

“Well, after all, you have been frightening each other with so many thrilling tales for the last hour or two, that I don’t suppose I should do much harm by telling you a circumstance which happened to me when I was a young man, and has always rather puzzled me.”

A murmur of approval ran round the party. All disposed themselves to listen; and Doctor Feversham, after a prefatory pinch of snuff, began.

“In my youth I resided for some time with a family in the north of England, in the double capacity of secretary and physician. While I was going through the hospitals of Paris I became acquainted with my employer, whom I will call Sir James Collingham, under rather peculiar circumstances, which have nothing to do with my story. He had an only daughter, who was about sixteen when I first entered the family, and it was on her account that Sir James wished to have some person with a competent knowledge of medicine and physiology as one of his household. Miss Collingham was subject to fits of a very peculiar kind, which threw her into a sort of trance, lasting from half an hour to three or even four days, according to the severity of the visitation. During these attacks she occasionally displayed that extraordinary phenomenon which goes by the name of clairvoyance. She saw scenes and persons who were far distant, and described them with wonderful accuracy. Though quite unconscious of all outward things, and apparently in a state of the deepest insensibility, she would address remarks to those present which bore reference to the thoughts then occupying their minds, though they had given them no outward expression; and her remarks showed an insight into matters which had perhaps been carefully kept secret, which might truly be termed preternatural. Under these circumstances, Sir James was very unwilling to bring her into contact with strangers when it could possibly be avoided; and the events which first brought us together, having also led to my treating Miss Collingham rather successfully in a severe attack of her malady, induced her father to offer me a position in his household which, as a young, friendless man, I was very willing to accept.

“Collingham-Westmore was a very ancient house of great extent, and but indifferently kept in repair. The country surrounding it is of great natural beauty, thinly inhabited, and, especially at the time I speak of, before railways had penetrated so far north, somewhat lonely and inaccessible. A group of small houses clustered round the village church of Westmorton, distant about three miles from the mansion of the Collingham family; and a solitary posting-house, on what was then the great north road, could be reached by a horseman in about an hour, though the only practicable road for carriages was at least fifteen miles from the highway to Collingham-Westmore. Wild and lovely in the eyes of an admirer of nature were the hills and ‘cloughs’ among which I pursued my botanical studies for many a long, silent summer day. My occupations at the mansion — everybody called it the mansion, and I must do so from force of habit, though it sounds rather like a house-agent’s advertisement — were few and light; the society was not particularly to my taste, and the fine old library only attracted me on rainy days, of which, truth to say, we had our full share.

“The Collingham family circle comprised a maiden aunt of Sir James, Miss Patricia, a stern and awful specimen of the female sex in its fossil state; her ward, Miss Henderson, who, having long passed her pupilage, remained at Collingham-Westmore in the capacity of gouvernante and companion to the young heiress; the heiress aforesaid, and myself. A priest — did I say that the Collinghams still professed the old religion? — came on Sundays and holydays to celebrate mass in the gloomy old chapel; but neighbors there were none, and only about half-a-dozen times during the four years I was an inmate of the mansion were strangers introduced into the family party.”

“How dreadfully dull it must have been!” exclaimed Amy sympathetically.

“It *was* dull,” answered the Doctor. “Even with my naturally cheerful disposition, and the course of study with which I methodically filled up all my leisure hours except those devoted to out-of-door exercise, the gloom of the old mansion weighed upon me till I sometimes felt that I must give up my situation at all risks, and return to the world, though it were to struggle with poverty and friendlessness.

“There was no lack of dismal legends and superstitions connected with the mansion, and every trifling circumstance that occurred was twisted into an omen or presage, whether of good or evil, by the highly wrought fancy of Miss Patricia. These absurdities, together with the past grandeur of their house, and the former glories of their religion, formed the staple subjects of conversation when the family was assembled; and as I became more intimately acquainted with the state of my patient, I felt convinced that the atmosphere of gloomy superstition in which she had been reared had fostered, even if it had not altogether been the cause of, her morbid mental and bodily condition.

"Among the many legends connected with the mansion, one seemed to have a peculiar fascination for Miss Collingham, perhaps because it was the most ghastly and repulsive. One wing of the house was held to be haunted by the spirit of an ancestress of the family, who appeared in the shape of a tall woman, with one hand folded in her white robe and the other pointing upward. It was said, that in a room at the end of the haunted wing this lady had been foully murdered by her jealous husband. The window of the apartment overhung the wild wooded side of one of the 'cloughs' common in the country; and tradition averred that the victim was thrown from this window by her murderer. As she caught hold of the sill in a last frantic struggle for life, he severed her hand at the wrist, and the mutilated body fell, with one fearful shriek, into the depth below. Since then, a white shadowy form has forever been sitting at the fatal window, or wandering along the deserted passages of the haunted wing with the bleeding stump folded in her robe; and in moments of danger or approaching death to any member of the Collingham family, the same long, wild shriek rises slowly from the wooded cliff and peals through the mansion; while to different individuals of the house, a pale hand has now and then been visible, laid on themselves or some other of the family, a never-failing omen of danger or death.

"I need not tell you how false and foolish all this dreary superstition appeared to me; and I exerted all my powers of persuasion to induce Miss Patricia to dwell less on these and similar themes in the presence of Miss Collingham. But there seemed to be something in the very air of the gloomy old mansion which fostered such delusions; for when I spoke to Father O'Connor the priest, and urged on him the pernicious effect which was thus produced on my patient's mind, I found him as fully imbued with the spirit of credulity as the most hysterical housemaid of them all. He solemnly declared to me that he had himself repeatedly seen the pale lady sitting at the fatal window, when on his way to and from his home beyond the hills;

and moreover, that on the death of Lady Collingham, which occurred at her daughter's birth, he had heard the long, shrill death-scream echo through the mansion while engaged in the last offices of the Church by the bedside of the dying lady.

"So I found it impossible to fight single-handed against these adverse influences, and could only endeavor to divert the mind of my patient into more healthy channels of thought. In this I succeeded perfectly. She became an enthusiastic botanist, and our rambles in search of the rare and lovely specimens which were to be found among the woods and moors surrounding her dwelling did more for her health, both of body and mind, than all the medical skill I could bring to bear on her melancholy case.

"Four years had elapsed since I first took up my abode at Collingham-Westmore. Miss Collingham had grown from a sickly child into a singularly graceful young woman, full of bright intelligence, eager for information, and with scarcely an outward trace remaining of her former fragile health. Still those mysterious swoons occasionally visited her, forming an insurmountable obstacle to her mingling in general society, which she was in all other respects so well fitted to adorn. They occurred without any warning or apparent cause; one moment she would be engaged in animated conversation, and the next, white and rigid as a statue, she would fall back in her chair insensible to all outward objects, but rapt and carried away into a world of her own, whose visions she would sometimes describe in glowing language, although she retained no recollection whatever of them when she returned, as suddenly and at as uncertain a period, to her normal condition. On one of these occasions we were sitting, after dinner, in a large apartment called the summer dining-room. Fruit and wine were on the table, and the last red beams of the setting sun lighted up the distant woods, which were in the first flush of their autumn glory. I turned to remark on the beautiful effect of light to Miss Collingham, and at the very moment I did so she fell back in one of her strange swoons. But instead of the deathlike air which her features usually assumed, a lovely smile lighted them up, and an expression of ecstasy made her beauty appear for the moment almost superhuman. Slowly she raised her right hand, and pointed in the direction of the setting sun. 'He is coming,' she said in soft, clear tones; 'life and light are coming with him, — life and light and liberty!'

“Her hand fell gently by her side; the rapt expression faded from her countenance, and the usual deathlike blank overspread it. This trance passed away like others, and by midnight the house was profoundly still. Soon after that hour a vociferous peal at the great hall-bell roused most of the inmates from sleep. My rooms were in a distant quarter of the house, and a door opposite to that of my bedroom led to the haunted wing, but was always kept locked. I started up on hearing a second ring, and looked out, in hopes of seeing a servant pass, and ascertaining the cause of this unusual disturbance. I saw no one, and after listening for a while to the opening of the hall-door, and the sound of distant voices, I made up my mind that I should be sent for if wanted, and reentered my room. As I was closing the door, I was rather startled to see a tall object, of grayish-white color and indistinct form, issue from the gallery whose door, as I said before, had always been locked in my recollection. For a moment I felt as though rooted to the spot, and a strange sensation crept over me. The next, all trace of the appearance had vanished, and I persuaded myself that what I had seen must have been some effect of light from the open door of my room.

“The cause of the nightly disturbance appeared at breakfast on the following morning in the shape of a remarkably handsome young man, who was introduced by Sir James as his nephew, Don Luis de Cabral, the son of an only sister long dead, who had married a Spaniard of high rank. Don Luis showed but little trace of his southern parentage. If I may so express it, all the depth and warmth of coloring in that portion of his blood which he inherited from his Spanish ancestors came out in the raven-black hair and large lustrous dark eyes, which impressed you at once with their uncommon beauty. For the rest, he was a fine well-grown young man, no darker in complexion than an Englishman might well be, and with a careless, happy boyishness of manner, which won immediately on the regard of strangers, and rendered his presence in the house like that of a perpetual sunbeam. We all wondered, after a little while, what we had done before Luis came among us. He was as a son to Sir James; Miss Patricia softened to this new and pleasing interest in her colorless existence as I could not have believed it was in her fossilized nature to do; Miss Henderson became animated, almost young, under the reviving influence of the youth and joyousness of our new inmate; and I own that I speedily attached myself with a warm and affectionate regard to the happy, unselfish nature that seemed to brighten all who came near it.

"But the most remarkable effect of the presence of Don Luis de Cabral among us was visible in Miss Collingham. 'Love at first sight,' often considered as a mere phrase, was, in the case of these two young creatures, an unmistakable reality. From the moment of their first meeting, the cousins were mutually drawn toward each other; and seeing the bright and wonderful change wrought by the presence of Don Luis in Blanche Collingham, I could not but remember, with the interest that attaches to a curious psychological phenomenon, the words she uttered in her trance on the eve of his arrival. 'Life, light, and liberty,' indeed, appeared given to all that was best and brightest in her nature. Her health improved visibly, and her beauty, always touching, became radiant in its full development. My duties toward her were now merely nominal; and when, about two months later, Sir James announced to me her approaching marriage, and confessed that it was with this object he had invited Don Luis to come and make the acquaintance of his English relations, the strong opinions I entertained against the marriage of first cousins, and also on the especial inadvisability of any project of marriage in the case of Miss Collingham, could not prevent my hearty rejoicing in the fair prospect of happiness in which two persons who deeply interested me were indulging.

"Winter set in early and severely that year among our northern hills, and with a view to Blanche's removal from its withering influence, which I always considered prejudicial to her, the preparations for the marriage were hurried on, and the ceremony was fixed to take place about the middle of December. The travelling-carriage which was to convey the young couple on their way southward was to arrive at the nearest railway-station — then more than thirty miles distant — a week before the marriage; and as some important portions of the trousseau, together with a valuable package of jewels intended by Don Luis as presents for his bride, were expected at the same time, the young man announced his intention of riding across the hills to —— , in order to superintend the conveyance of the carriage and its contents along the rough mountain roads that it must traverse.

"We were all sitting around the great fireplace in the winter parlor on the evening before his departure. Miss Collingham had been languid and depressed throughout the day, and often adverted to the long wintry ride he was to undertake in a strain of apprehension at which Don Luis laughed gayly. To divert her mind, he recounted various adventures which had befallen him in foreign lands, with a vigorous simplicity of description which enchained her attention and interested us all.

“Suddenly, so sitting, Miss Collingham leaned forward, and in a changed, eager voice exclaimed, ‘Luis, take away your hand from your throat!’

“We looked. Luis’ hands were lying one over the other on his knee in a careless attitude that was habitual to him.

“‘Take it away, I say! Oh, take it away!’

“Miss Collingham started to her feet as she uttered these words almost in a shriek, and then fell back rigid and senseless, her outstretched hand still pointing to her betrothed.

“The fit was a severe one, but by morning it had yielded to remedies, and Luis set off early on his ride, to make the most of the short daylight, and intending to return with the carriage on the morrow. All that day Miss Collingham remained in a half-conscious state. It was a dreary day of gloom, with a piercing north wind, and toward evening the snow began to fall in those close, compact flakes which forebode a heavy storm. We were glad to think that Luis must have reached his destination before it began; but when the next morning dawned on a wide expanse of snow, and the air was still thick with fast-falling flakes, it was feared that the state of the roads would preclude all hope of the arrival of the carriage on that day.

“My patient took no heed of the untoward state of the weather. She was still in a drowsy condition, very unlike that which usually succeeded her attacks, and Miss Henderson, who had watched by her through the night, told me she spoke more than once in a strange, excited manner, as though carrying on a conversation with some one whom she appeared to see by her bedside. As the good lady, however, could give but a very imperfect and incoherent account of what had passed, I was left in some doubt as to whether Miss Collingham had seen more or Miss Henderson less than there really was to be seen, as I had before had reason to believe that she was not a very vigilant nurse.

“So the hours went on, and night closed in. Sir James began to feel some uneasiness at the non-appearance, not only of Don Luis, but also of the priest, who was to have arrived at Collingham-Westmore on that day.

"On questioning some of the servants who had been out of the house, the absence of Father O'Connor at least was satisfactorily accounted for: they all declared that it would be quite impossible for those best acquainted with the hills to find their way across them in the blinding drifts which had never ceased throughout the day. We concluded that Father O'Connor and Don Luis were alike storm-stayed, and had no remedy but patience.

"Late in the evening — it must have been near midnight — I was in Miss Collingham's dressing-room with Miss Patricia, who intended to watch by her through the night. We were talking by the fire, of the snow-storm which still continued, and of the hindrance it might prove to the marriage — the day fixed for which was now less than a week distant — when we heard a voice in the adjoining room, where we imagined the object of our care to be sleeping. We went in. Miss Collingham was sitting up in bed, her eyes wide open, in one of her rigid fits. She was speaking rapidly in a low tone, unlike her usual voice.

"'You cannot get through all that snow,' she said. 'Get help; there are men not far off with spades. Oh, be careful! You are off the road! Stop, stop! that is the way to Armstrong's Clough. Does not the postboy know the road? He is bewildered. I tell you it is madness to go on. See, one of the horses has fallen; he kicks — he will hit you! Oh, how dark it is! And the snow covers your lantern, and you cannot see the edge. Now the horse is up again, but he cannot go on. Do not beat him, Luis; it is not his fault, poor beast; the snow is too thick, and you are on rough ground. Now he rears — he backs — the other one backs also — the wheel of the carriage is over the edge — ah!'

"The scream with which these wild, hurried words ended seemed to be taken up and echoed from a distance. Miss Patricia stared at me with a ghastly white face of horror, and I felt my blood curdle as that long, shrill, unearthly shriek pealed through the silent passages. It grew louder and nearer, and seemed to sweep through the room, dying away in the opposite direction. Miss Patricia fell forward without a word in a dead faint.

"I looked at Miss Collingham; she had not moved, or shown any sign of hearing or heeding that awful sound. In a few seconds the room was filled with terrified women, roused from their sleep by the weird cry which rang through the house. Miss Patricia was conveyed by some of them to her own room, where, after much difficulty, we restored her to consciousness. Her first act was to grasp me by the arm.

"'Mr. Feversham, for the love of the Holy Virgin do not leave me! I have seen that which I cannot look upon and live.'

"I soothed her as best I might, and at last persuaded her to allow me to leave her with her own maid in order to visit my other patient, promising to return shortly.

"I found no change whatever in Miss Collingham. Sir James was in the room trying to establish some degree of calmness and order among the terrified women. We succeeded in persuading most of them to take a restorative and return to bed, and leaving two of the most self-possessed to watch beside Miss Collingham, who was still completely insensible, we went together to Miss Patricia's room.

"'Brother, I have seen her!' she exclaimed on Sir James' entrance.

"'Seen who, my dear Patricia?'

"'The pale lady — the spectre of our house,' she replied, shuddering from head to foot. 'She passed through the room, her hand upraised, and the blood-spots on her garment. Oh, James! my time is come, and Father O'Connor is not here.'

"Sir James did not attempt to combat his sister's superstitious terrors, but appeared, on the contrary, almost as deeply impressed as herself, and questioned her closely about the apparition. Her answers led to some mention of the strange vision which Miss Collingham was describing in her trance just before the scream was heard. At Sir James' request I put down in writing, as nearly as I could remember, all she had said, and so great was the impression it made on my mind that I believe I recalled her very words. Knowing all we did of her abnormal condition while in a state of trance, it was impossible not to fear that she might have been describing a scene that was actually occurring at the time; and Sir James determined to send out a party, as soon as daylight came, on the road by which Don Luis must arrive.

"The morning dawned brightly, with a keen frost, and several men were sent off along the road to —— with the first rays of light.

"Some hours afterward Father O'Connor arrived, having made his way with considerable difficulty across the hill. Miss Patricia claimed his first attention, for my unhappy charge remained senseless and motionless as ever.

"After a long conference, he came to me with grave looks.

"'She is at the window this day,' he said, shaking his head sorrowfully, when I had told him my share of the last night's singular experiences. 'The pale lady is there; I saw her as I came by the bridge as plainly as now I see you. We shall have evil tidings of that poor lad before nightfall, or I am strangely mistaken.'

"Evil tidings indeed they were that reached us on the return of some of the exploring-party. They were first attracted from following as nearly as they could the line of road, blocked as it was with drifts of snow by hearing the howling of a dog at some little distance, in the direction of the precipitous ravine which went by the name of 'Armstrong's Clough.' Following the sound, they came upon traces of wheels in the hillside, where no carriage could have gone had it not been for the deep snow which concealed and smoothed away the inequalities of the ground. These marks were traced here and there till they led to the verge of the precipice, where a struggle had evidently taken place, and masses of snow had been dislodged and fallen into the ravine.

"Looking below, the only thing they could see in the waste of snow was a little dog, who was known to be in the habit of running with the posthorses from —— , which was scraping wildly in the snow and filling the air with its dismal howlings. A considerable circuit had to be made before the bottom of the clough could be reached, and then the whole tragedy was revealed. There lay the broken carriage, the dead horses, and two stiffened corpses under the snow, that had drifted over and around them.

"I need not pursue the melancholy story; I was an old fool for telling it to you," said the Doctor.

"But Miss Collingham — what became of her?" asked an eager listener.

"Well, she did not recover," answered the Doctor with a slight trembling in his voice. "It was a sad matter altogether; and within a short time she lay beside her betrothed in the family vault below the chapel. Sir James broke up his establishment and went abroad, and I never saw any of the family again."

"And what did you do, Doctor?"

"I went to London, to seek my fortune as best I might; and I hope you may all prosper as well, my young friends."

“And is it all really true?” asked Amy, who had listened with breathless attention.

“That is the worst of it; it really is,” said the Doctor.

THE SECRET OF THE TWO PLASTER CASTS.

YEARS before the accession of her Majesty Queen Victoria, and yet at not so remote a date as to be utterly beyond the period to which the reminiscences of our middle-aged readers extend, it happened that two English gentlemen sat at table on a summer's evening, after dinner, quietly sipping their wine and engaged in desultory conversation. They were both men known to fame. One of them was a sculptor whose statues adorned the palaces of princes, and whose chiselled busts were the pride of half the nobility of his nation; the other was no less renowned as an anatomist and surgeon. The age of the anatomist might have been guessed at fifty, but the guess would have erred on the side of youth by at least ten years. That of the sculptor could scarcely be more than five-and-thirty. A bust of the anatomist, so admirably executed as to present, although in stone, the perfect similitude of life and flesh, stood upon a pedestal opposite to the table at which sat the pair, and at once explained at least one connecting-link of companionship between them. The anatomist was exhibiting for the criticism of his friend a rare gem which he had just drawn from his cabinet: it was a crucifix magnificently carved in ivory, and incased in a setting of pure gold.

"The carving, my dear sir," observed Mr. Fiddyes, the sculptor, "is indeed, as you say, exquisite. The muscles are admirably made out, the flesh well modelled, wonderfully so for the size and material; and yet — by the bye, on this point you must know more than I — the more I think upon the matter, the more I regard the artistic conception as utterly false and wrong."

"You speak in a riddle," replied Dr. Carnell; "but pray go on, and explain."

"It is a fancy I first had in my student-days," replied Fiddyes. "Conventionality, not to say a most proper and becoming reverence, prevents people by no means ignorant from considering the point. But once think upon it, and you at least, of all men, must at once perceive how utterly impossible it would be for a victim nailed upon a cross by hands and feet to preserve the position invariably displayed in figures of the Crucifixion. Those who so portray it fail in what should be their most awful and agonizing effect. Think for one moment, and imagine, if you can, what would be the attitude of a man, living or dead, under this frightful torture."

"You startle me," returned the great surgeon, "not only by the truth of your remarks, but by their obviousness. It is strange indeed that such a matter should have so long been overlooked. The more I think upon it the more the bare idea of actual crucifixion seems to horrify me, though heaven knows I am accustomed enough to scenes of suffering. How would you represent such a terrible agony?"

"Indeed I cannot tell," replied the sculptor; "to guess would be almost vain. The fearful strain upon the muscles, their utter helplessness and inactivity, the frightful swellings, the effect of weight upon the racked and tortured sinews, appal me too much even for speculation."

"But this," replied the surgeon, "one might think a matter of importance, not only to art, but, higher still, to religion itself."

"Maybe so," returned the sculptor. "But perhaps the appeal to the senses through a true representation might be too horrible for either the one or the other."

"Still," persisted the surgeon, "I should like — say for curiosity — though I am weak enough to believe even in my own motive as a higher one — to ascertain the effect from actual observation."

"So should I, could it be done, and of course without pain to the object, which, as a condition, seems to present at the outset an impossibility."

"Perhaps not," mused the anatomist; "I think I have a notion. Stay — we may contrive this matter. I will tell you my plan, and it will be strange indeed if we two cannot manage to carry it out."

The discourse here, owing to the rapt attention of both speakers, assumed a low and earnest tone, but had perhaps better be narrated by a relation of the events to which it gave rise. Suffice it to say that the Sovereign was more than once mentioned during its progress, and in a manner which plainly told that the two speakers each possessed sufficient influence to obtain the assistance of royalty, and that such assistance would be required in their scheme.

The shades of evening deepened while the two were still conversing. And leaving this scene, let us cast one hurried glimpse at another taking place contemporaneously.

Between Pimlico and Chelsea, and across a canal of which the bed has since been used for the railway terminating at Victoria Station, there was at the time of which we speak a rude timber footway, long since replaced by a more substantial and convenient erection, but then known as the Wooden Bridge. It was named shortly afterward Cutthroat Bridge, and for this reason.

While Mr. Fiddyes and Dr. Carnell were discoursing over their wine, as we have already seen, one Peter Starke, a drunken Chelsea pensioner, was murdering his wife upon the spot we have last indicated. The coincidence was curious.

* * *

In those days the punishment of criminals followed closely upon their conviction. The Chelsea pensioner whom we have mentioned was found guilty one Friday and sentenced to die on the following Monday. He was a sad scoundrel, impenitent to the last, glorying in the deeds of slaughter which he had witnessed and acted during the series of campaigns which had ended just previously at Waterloo. He was a tall, well-built fellow enough, of middle age, for his class was not then, as now, composed chiefly of veterans, but comprised many young men, just sufficiently disabled to be unfit for service. Peter Starke, although but slightly wounded, had nearly completed his term of service, and had obtained his pension and presentment to Chelsea Hospital. With his life we have but little to do, save as regards its close, which we shall shortly endeavor to describe far more veraciously, and at some greater length than set forth in the brief account which satisfied the public of his own day, and which, as embodied in the columns of the few journals then appearing, ran thus:

“On Monday last Peter Starke was executed at Newgate for the murder at the Wooden Bridge, Chelsea, with four others for various offences. After he had been hanging only for a few minutes a respite arrived, but although he was promptly cut down, life was pronounced to be extinct. His body was buried within the prison walls.”

Thus far history. But the conciseness of history far more frequently embodies falsehood than truth. Perhaps the following narration may approach more nearly to the facts.

A room within the prison had been, upon that special occasion and by high authority, allotted to the use of Dr. Carnell and Mr. Fiddyes, the famous sculptor, for the purpose of certain investigations connected with art and science. In that room Mr. Fiddyes, while wretched Peter Starke was yet swinging between heaven and earth, was busily engaged in arranging a variety of implements and materials, consisting of a large quantity of plaster-of-Paris, two large pails of water, some tubs, and other necessaries of the moulder’s art. The room contained a large deal table, and a wooden cross, not neatly planed and squared at the angles, but of thick, narrow, rudely-sawn oaken plank, fixed by strong, heavy nails. And while Mr. Fiddyes was thus occupied, the executioner entered, bearing upon his shoulders the body of the wretched Peter, which he flung heavily upon the table.

“You are sure he is dead?” asked Mr. Fiddyes.

“Dead as a herring,” replied the other. “And yet just as warm and limp as if he had only fainted.”

“Then go to work at once,” replied the sculptor, as turning his back upon the hangman, he resumed his occupation.

The “work” was soon done. Peter was stripped and nailed upon the timber, which was instantly propped against the wall.

“As fine a one as ever I see,” exclaimed the executioner, as he regarded the defunct murderer with an expression of admiration, as if at his own handiwork, in having abruptly demolished such a magnificent animal. “Drops a good bit for’ard, though. Shall I tie him up round the waist, sir?”

“Certainly not,” returned the sculptor. “Just rub him well over with this oil, especially his head, and then you can go. Dr. Carnell will settle with you.”

“All right, sir.”

The fellow did as ordered, and retired without another word; leaving this strange couple, the living and the dead, in that dismal chamber.

Mr. Fiddyes was a man of strong nerve in such matters. He had been too much accustomed to taking posthumous casts to trouble himself with any sentiment of repugnance at his approaching task of taking what is called a “piece-mould” from a body. He emptied a number of bags of the white powdery plaster-of-Paris into one of the larger vessels, poured into it a pail of water, and was carefully stirring up the mass, when a sound of dropping arrested his ear.

Drip, drip.

"There's something leaking," he muttered, as he took a second pail, and emptying it, again stirred the composition.

Drip, drip, drip.

"It's strange," he soliloquized, half aloud. "There is no more water, and yet — — "

The sound was heard again.

He gazed at the ceiling; there was no sign of damp. He turned his eyes to the body, and something suddenly caused him a violent start. The murderer was bleeding.

The sculptor, spite of his command over himself, turned pale. At that moment the head of Starke moved — clearly moved. It raised itself convulsively for a single moment; its eyes rolled, and it gave vent to a subdued moan of intense agony. Mr. Fiddyes fell fainting on the floor as Dr. Carnell entered. It needed but a glance to tell the doctor what had happened, even had not Peter just then given vent to another low cry. The surgeon's measures were soon taken. Locking the door, he bore a chair to the wall which supported the body of the malefactor. He drew from his pocket a case of glittering instruments, and with one of these, so small and delicate that it scarcely seemed larger than a needle, he rapidly, but dexterously and firmly, touched Peter just at the back of the neck. There was no wound larger than the head of a small pin, and yet the head fell instantly as though the heart had been pierced. The doctor had divided the spinal cord, and Peter Starke was dead indeed.

A few minutes sufficed to recall the sculptor to his senses. He at first gazed wildly upon the still suspended body, so painfully recalled to life by the rough venesection of the hangman and the subsequent friction of anointing his body to prevent the adhesion of the plaster.

"You need not fear now," said Dr. Carnell; "I assure you he is dead."

"But he *was* alive, surely!"

"Only for a moment, and even that scarcely to be called life — mere muscular contraction, my dear sir, mere muscular contraction."

The sculptor resumed his labor. The body was girt at various circumferences with fine twine, to be afterward withdrawn through a thick coating of plaster, so as to separate the various pieces of the mould, which was at last completed; and after this Dr. Carnell skilfully flayed the body, to enable a second mould to be taken of the entire figure, showing every muscle of the outer layer.

The two moulds were thus taken. It is difficult to conceive more ghastly appearances than they presented. For sculptor's work they were utterly useless; for no artist except the most daring of realists would have ventured to indicate the horrors which they presented. Fiddyes refused to receive them. Dr. Carnell, hard and cruel as he was, for kindness' sake, in his profession, was a gentle, genial father of a family of daughters. He received the casts, and at once consigned them to a garret, to which he forbade access. His youngest daughter, one unfortunate day, during her father's absence, was impelled by feminine curiosity — perhaps a little increased by the prohibition — to enter the mysterious chamber.

Whether she imagined in the pallid figure upon the cross a celestial rebuke for her disobedience, or whether she was overcome by the mere mortal horror of one or both of those dreadful casts, can now never be known. But this is true: she became a maniac.

The writer of this has more than once seen (as, no doubt, have many others) the plaster effigies of Peter Starke, after their removal from Dr. Carnell's to a famous studio near the Regent's Park. It was there that he heard whispered the strange story of their origin. Sculptor and surgeon are now both long since dead, and it is no longer necessary to keep *the secret of the two plaster casts*.

WHAT WAS IT?

IT is, I confess, with considerable diffidence that I approached the strange narrative which I am about to relate. The events which I purpose detailing are of so extraordinary a character that I am quite prepared to meet with an unusual amount of incredulity and scorn. I accept all such beforehand. I have, I trust, the literary courage to face unbelief. I have, after mature consideration, resolved to narrate, in as simple and straightforward a manner as I can compass, some facts that passed under my observation, in the month of July last, and which, in the annals of the mysteries of physical science, are wholly unparalleled.

I live at No. — Twenty-sixth Street, in New York. The house is in some respects a curious one. It has enjoyed for the last two years the reputation of being haunted. The house is very spacious. A hall of noble size leads to a large spiral staircase winding through its centre, while the various apartments are of imposing dimensions. It was built some fifteen or twenty years since by Mr. A —— , the well-known New York merchant, who five years ago threw the commercial world into convulsions by a stupendous bank fraud. Mr. A —— , as every one knows, escaped to Europe, and died not long after, of a broken heart. Almost immediately after the news of his decease reached this country and was verified, the report spread in Twenty-sixth Street that No. — was haunted. Legal measures had dispossessed the widow of its former owner, and it was inhabited merely by a care-taker and his wife, placed there by the house-agent into whose hands it had passed for purposes of renting or sale. These people declared that they were troubled with unnatural noises. Doors were opened without any visible agency. The remnants of furniture scattered through the various rooms were, during the night, piled one upon the other by unknown hands. Invisible feet passed up and down the stairs in broad daylight, accompanied by the rustle of unseen silk dresses, and the gliding of viewless hands along the massive balusters. The care-taker and his wife declared they would live there no longer. The house-agent laughed, dismissed them, and put others in their place. The noises and supernatural manifestations continued. The neighborhood caught up the story, and the house remained untenanted for three years. Several persons negotiated for it; but, somehow, always before the bargain was closed they heard the unpleasant rumors and declined to treat any further.

It was in this state of things that my landlady, who at that time kept a boarding-house in Bleecker Street, and who wished to move farther up town, conceived the bold idea of renting No. — Twenty-sixth Street. Happening to have in her house rather a plucky and philosophical set of boarders, she laid her scheme before us, stating candidly everything she had heard respecting the ghostly qualities of the establishment to which she wished to remove us. With the exception of two timid persons — a sea-captain and a returned Californian, who immediately gave notice that they would leave — all of Mrs. Moffat's guests declared that they would accompany her in her incursion into the abode of spirits.

Our removal was effected in the month of May, and we were charmed with our new residence.

Of course we had no sooner established ourselves at No. — than we began to expect the ghosts. We absolutely awaited their advent with eagerness. Our dinner conversation was supernatural. I found myself a person of immense importance, it having leaked out that I was tolerably well versed in the history of supernaturalism, and had once written a story the foundation of which was a ghost. If a table or wainscot panel happened to warp when we were assembled in the large drawingroom, there was an instant silence, and every one was prepared for an immediate clanking of chains and a spectral form.

After a month of psychological excitement, it was with the utmost dissatisfaction that we were forced to acknowledge that nothing in the remotest degree approaching the supernatural had manifested itself.

Things were in this state when an incident took place so awful and inexplicable in its character that my reason fairly reels at the bare memory of the occurrence. It was the tenth of July. After dinner was over I repaired, with my friend Dr. Hammond, to the garden to smoke my evening pipe. Independent of certain mental sympathies which existed between the doctor and myself, we were linked together by a vice. We both smoked opium. We knew each other's secret and respected it. We enjoyed together that wonderful expansion of thought, that marvellous intensifying of the perceptive faculties, that boundless feeling of existence when we seem to have points of contact with the whole universe — in short, that unimaginable spiritual bliss, which I would not surrender for a throne, and which I hope you, reader, will never — never taste.

On the evening in question, the tenth of July, the doctor and myself drifted into an unusually metaphysical mood. We lit our large meerschaums, filled with fine Turkish tobacco, in the core of which burned a little black nut of opium, that, like the nut in the fairy tale, held within its narrow limits wonders beyond the reach of kings; we paced to and fro, conversing. A strange perversity dominated the currents of our thoughts. They would not flow through the sun-lit channels into which we strove to divert them. For some unaccountable reason, they constantly diverged into dark and lonesome beds, where a continual gloom brooded. It was in vain that, after our old fashion, we flung ourselves on the shores of the East, and talked of its gay bazaars, of the splendors of the time of Haroun, of harems and golden palaces. Black afreets continually arose from the depths of our talk, and expanded, like the one the fisherman released from the copper vessel, until they blotted everything bright from our vision. Insensibly, we yielded to the occult force that swayed us, and indulged in gloomy speculation. We had talked some time upon the proneness of the human mind to mysticism, and the almost universal love of the terrible, when Hammond suddenly said to me, “What do you consider to be the greatest element of terror?”

The question puzzled me. That many things were terrible, I knew. But it now struck me, for the first time, that there must be one great and ruling embodiment of fear — a King of Terrors, to which all others must succumb. What might it be? To what train of circumstances would it owe its existence?

“I confess, Hammond,” I replied to my friend, “I never considered the subject before. That there must be one Something more terrible than any other thing, I feel. I cannot attempt, however, even the most vague definition.”

“I am somewhat like you, Harry,” he answered. “I feel my capacity to experience a terror greater than anything yet conceived by the human mind — something combining in fearful and unnatural amalgamation hitherto supposed incompatible elements. The calling of the voices in Brockden Brown’s novel of ‘Wieland’ is awful; so is the picture of the Dweller on the Threshold, in Bulwer’s ‘Zanoni;’ but,” he added, shaking his head gloomily, “there is something more horrible still than these.”

"Look here, Hammond," I rejoined, "let us drop this kind of talk, for Heaven's sake! We shall suffer for it, depend on it."

"I don't know what's the matter with me tonight," he replied, "but my brain is running upon all sorts of weird and awful thoughts. I feel as if I could write a story like Hoffman, tonight, if I were only master of a literary style."

"Well, if we are going to be Hoffmanesque in our talk, I'm off to bed. Opium and nightmares should never be brought together. How sultry it is! Goodnight, Hammond."

"Goodnight, Harry. Pleasant dreams to you."

"To you, gloomy wretch, afreets, ghouls, and enchanters."

We parted, and each sought his respective chamber. I undressed quickly and got into bed, taking with me, according to my usual custom, a book over which I generally read myself to sleep. I opened the volume as soon as I had laid my head upon the pillow, and instantly flung it to the other side of the room. It was Goudon's "History of Monsters," — a curious French work, which I had lately imported from Paris, but which, in the state of mind I had then reached, was anything but an agreeable companion. I resolved to go to sleep at once; so, turning down my gas until nothing but a little blue point of light glimmered on the top of the tube, I composed myself to rest.

The room was in total darkness. The atom of gas that still remained alight did not illuminate a distance of three inches round the burner. I desperately drew my arm across my eyes, as if to shut out even the darkness and tried to think of nothing. It was in vain. The confounded themes touched on by Hammond in the garden kept obtruding themselves on my brain. I battled against them. I erected ramparts of would-be blankness of intellect to keep them out. They still crowded upon me. While I was lying still as a corpse, hoping that by a perfect physical inaction I should hasten mental repose, an awful incident occurred. A Something dropped, as it seemed, from the ceiling, plumb upon my chest, and the next instant I felt two bony hands encircling my throat, endeavoring to choke me.

I am no coward, and am possessed of considerable physical strength. The suddenness of the attack, instead of stunning me, strung every nerve to its highest tension. My body acted from instinct, before my brain had time to realize the terrors of my position. In an instant I wound two muscular arms around the creature, and squeezed it, with all the strength of despair, against my chest. In a few seconds the bony hands that had fastened on my throat loosened their hold, and I was free to breathe once more. Then commenced a struggle of awful intensity. Immersed in the most profound darkness, totally ignorant of the nature of the Thing by which I was so suddenly attacked, finding my grasp slipping every moment, by reason, it seemed to me, of the entire nakedness of my assailant, bitten with sharp teeth in the shoulder, neck, and chest, having every moment to protect my throat against a pair of sinewy, agile hands, which my utmost efforts could not confine — these were a combination of circumstances to combat which required all the strength, skill, and courage that I possessed.

At last, after a silent, deadly, exhausting struggle, I got my assailant under by a series of incredible efforts of strength. Once pinned, with my knee on what I made out to be its chest, I knew that I was victor. I rested for a moment to breathe. I heard the creature beneath me panting in the darkness, and felt the violent throbbing of a heart. It was apparently as exhausted as I was; that was one comfort. At this moment I remembered that I usually placed under my pillow, before going to bed, a large yellow silk pockethandkerchief. I felt for it instantly; it was there. In a few seconds more I had, after a fashion, pinioned the creature's arms.

I now felt tolerably secure. There was nothing more to be done but to turn on the gas, and, having first seen what my midnight assailant was like, arouse the household. I will confess to being actuated by a certain pride in not giving the alarm before; I wished to make the capture alone and unaided.

Never losing my hold for an instant, I slipped from the bed to the floor, dragging my captive with me. I had but a few steps to make to reach the gas-burner; these I made with the greatest caution, holding the creature in a grip like a vice. At last I got within arm's length of the tiny speck of blue light which told me where the gas-burner lay. Quick as lightning I released my grasp with one hand and let on the full flood of light. Then I turned to look at my captive.

I cannot even attempt to give any definition of my sensations the instant after I turned on the gas. I suppose I must have shrieked with terror, for in less than a minute afterward my room was crowded with the inmates of the house. I shudder now as I think of that awful moment. *I saw nothing!* Yes; I had one arm firmly clasped round a breathing, panting, corporeal shape, my other hand gripped with all its strength a throat as warm, and apparently fleshly, as my own; and yet, with this living substance in my grasp, with its body pressed against my own, and all in the bright glare of a large jet of gas, I absolutely beheld nothing! Not even an outline — a vapor!

I do not, even at this hour, realize the situation in which I found myself. I cannot recall the astounding incident thoroughly. Imagination in vain tries to compass the awful paradox.

It breathed. I felt its warm breath upon my cheek. It struggled fiercely. It had hands. They clutched me. Its skin was smooth, like my own. There it lay, pressed close up against me, solid as stone — and yet utterly invisible!

I wonder that I did not faint or go mad on the instant. Some wonderful instinct must have sustained me; for absolutely, in place of loosening my hold on the terrible Enigma, I seemed to gain an additional strength in my moment of horror, and tightened my grasp with such wonderful force that I felt the creature shivering with agony.

Just then Hammond entered my room at the head of the household. As soon as he beheld my face — which, I suppose, must have been an awful sight to look at — he hastened forward, crying, “Great Heaven, what has happened?”

“Hammond! Hammond!” I cried, “come here. Oh, this is awful! I have been attacked in bed by something or other, which I have hold of; but I can’t see it — I can’t see it!”

Hammond, doubtless struck by the unfeigned horror expressed in my countenance, made one or two steps forward with an anxious yet puzzled expression. A very audible titter burst from the remainder of my visitors. This suppressed laughter made me furious. To laugh at a human being in my position! It was the worst species of cruelty. *Now*, I can understand why the appearance of a man struggling violently, as it would seem, with an airy nothing, and calling for assistance against a vision, should have appeared ludicrous. *Then*, so great was my rage against the mocking crowd that had I the power I would have stricken them dead where they stood.

“Hammond! Hammond!” I cried again, despairingly, “for God’s sake come to me. I can hold the — the thing but a short while longer. It is overpowering me. Help me! Help me!”

“Harry,” whispered Hammond, approaching me, “you have been smoking too much opium.”

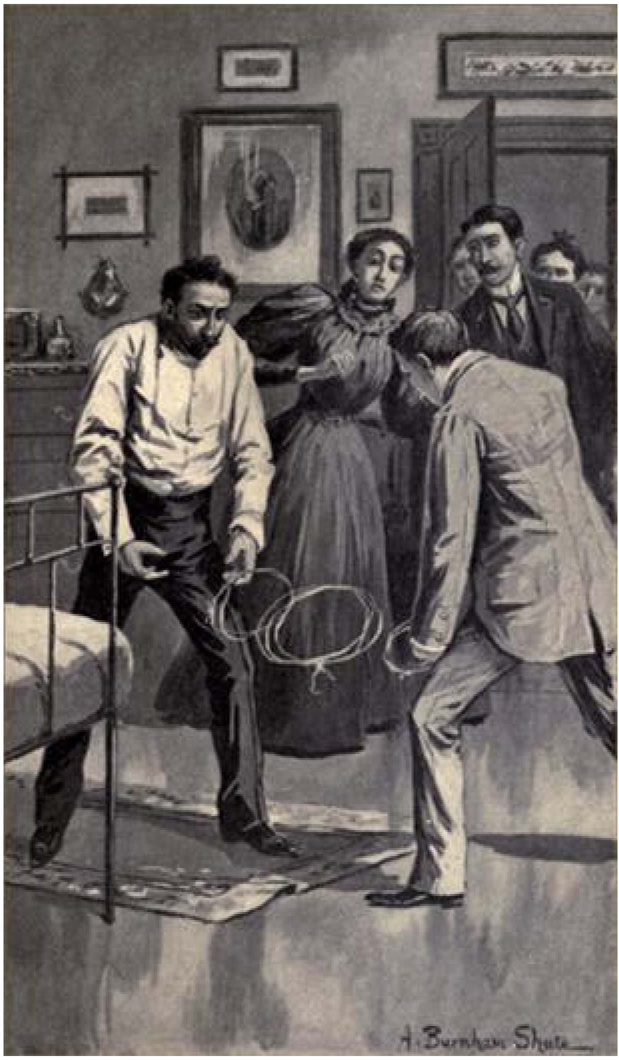
“I swear to you, Hammond, that this is no vision,” I answered, in the same low tone. “Don’t you see how it shakes my whole frame with its struggles? If you don’t believe me convince yourself. Feel it — touch it.”

Hammond advanced and laid his hand in the spot I indicated. A wild cry of horror burst from him. He had felt it!

In a moment he had discovered somewhere in my room a long piece of cord, and was the next instant winding it and knotting it about the body of the unseen being that I clasped in my arms.

“Harry,” he said, in a hoarse, agitated voice, for, though he preserved his presence of mind, he was deeply moved, “Harry, it’s all safe now. You may let go, old fellow, if you’re tired. The Thing can’t move.”

I was utterly exhausted, and I gladly loosed my hold.



"BOTH OF US — CONQUERING OUR FEARFUL REPUGNANCE TO TOUCH THE INVISIBLE CREATURE — LIFTED IT FROM THE GROUND, MANACLED AS IT WAS, AND TOOK IT TO MY BED."

Hammond stood holding the ends of the cord, that bound the Invisible, twisted round his hand, while before him, self-supporting as it were, he beheld a rope laced and interlaced, and stretching tightly around a vacant space. I never saw a man look so thoroughly stricken with awe. Nevertheless his face expressed all the courage and determination which I knew him to possess. His lips, although white, were set firmly, and one could perceive at a glance that, although stricken with fear, he was not daunted.

The confusion that ensued among the guests of the house who were witnesses of this extraordinary scene between Hammond and myself —

who beheld the pantomime of binding this struggling Something — who beheld me almost sinking from physical exhaustion when my task of jailer was over — the confusion and terror that took possession of the bystanders, when they saw all this, was beyond description. The weaker ones fled from the apartment. The few who remained clustered near the door and could not be induced to approach Hammond and his Charge. Still incredulity broke out through their terror. They had not the courage to satisfy themselves, and yet they doubted. It was in vain that I begged of some of the men to come near and convince themselves by touch of the existence in that room of a living being which was invisible. They were incredulous, but did not dare to undeceive themselves. How could a solid, living, breathing body be invisible, they asked. My reply was this. I gave a sign to Hammond, and both of us — conquering our fearful repugnance to touch the invisible creature — lifted it from the ground, manacled as it was, and took it to my bed. Its weight was about that of a boy of fourteen.

"Now, my friends," I said, as Hammond and myself held the creature suspended over the bed, "I can give you self-evident proof that here is a solid, ponderable body, which, nevertheless, you cannot see. Be good enough to watch the surface of the bed attentively."

I was astonished at my own courage in treating this strange event so calmly; but I had recovered from my first terror, and felt a sort of scientific pride in the affair, which dominated every other feeling.

The eyes of the bystanders were immediately fixed on my bed. At a given signal Hammond and I let the creature fall. There was the dull sound of a heavy body alighting on a soft mass. The timbers of the bed creaked. A deep impression marked itself distinctly on the pillow, and on the bed itself. The crowd who witnessed this gave a low cry, and rushed from the room. Hammond and I were left alone with our Mystery.

We remained silent for some time, listening to the low irregular breathing of the creature on the bed and watching the rustle of the bedclothes as it impotently struggled to free itself from confinement. Then Hammond spoke.

"Harry, this is awful."

"Ay, awful."

"But not unaccountable."

"Not unaccountable! What do you mean? Such a thing has never occurred since the birth of the world. I know not what to think, Hammond. God grant that I am not mad and that this is not an insane fantasy!"

"Let us reason a little, Harry. Here is a solid body which we touch but which we cannot see. The fact is so unusual that it strikes us with terror. Is there no parallel, though, for such a phenomenon? Take a piece of pure glass. It is tangible and transparent. A certain chemical coarseness is all that prevents its being so entirely transparent as to be totally invisible. It is not *theoretically impossible*, mind you, to make a glass which shall not reflect a single ray of light — a glass so pure and homogeneous in its atoms that the rays from the sun will pass through it as they do through the air, refracted but not reflected. We do not see the air, and yet we feel it."

"That's all very well, Hammond, but these are inanimate substances. Glass does not breathe, air does not breathe. This thing has a heart that palpitates — a will that moves it — lungs that play, and inspire and respire."

"You forget the phenomena of which we have so often heard of late," answered the doctor gravely. "At the meetings called 'spirit circles,' invisible hands have been thrust into the hands of those persons round the table — warm, fleshly hands that seemed to pulsate with mortal life."

"What? Do you think, then, that this thing is — — "

"I don't know what it is," was the solemn reply; "but please the gods I will, with your assistance, thoroughly investigate it."

We watched together, smoking many pipes, all night long, by the bedside of the unearthly being that tossed and panted until it was apparently wearied out. Then we learned by the low, regular breathing that it slept.

The next morning the house was all astir. The boarders congregated on the landing outside my room, and Hammond and myself were lions. We had to answer a thousand questions as to the state of our extraordinary prisoner, for as yet not one person in the house except ourselves could be induced to set foot in the apartment.

The creature was awake. This was evidenced by the convulsive manner in which the bedclothes were moved in its efforts to escape. There was something truly terrible in beholding, as it were, those second-hand indications of the terrible writhings and agonized struggles for liberty which themselves were invisible.

Hammond and myself had racked our brains during the long night to discover some means by which we might realize the shape and general appearance of the Enigma. As well as we could make out by passing our hands over the creature's form, its outlines and lineaments were human. There was a mouth; a round, smooth head without hair; a nose, which, however, was little elevated above the cheeks; and its hands and feet felt like those of a boy. At first we thought of placing the being on a smooth surface and tracing its outlines with chalk, as shoemakers trace the outline of the foot. This plan was given up as being of no value. Such an outline would give not the slightest idea of its conformation.

A happy thought struck me. We would take a cast of it in plaster-of-Paris. This would give us the solid figure, and satisfy all our wishes. But how to do it. The movements of the creature would disturb the setting of the plastic covering, and distort the mould. Another thought. Why not give it chloroform? It had respiratory organs — that was evident by its breathing. Once reduced to a state of insensibility, we could do with it what we would. Doctor X —— was sent for; and after the worthy physician had recovered from the first shock of amazement, he proceeded to administer the chloroform. In three minutes afterward we were enabled to remove the fetters from the creature's body, and a modeller was busily engaged in covering the invisible form with the moist clay. In five minutes more we had a mould, and before evening a rough facsimile of the Mystery. It was shaped like a man — distorted, uncouth, and horrible, but still a man. It was small, not over four feet and some inches in height, and its limbs revealed a muscular development that was unparalleled. Its face surpassed in hideousness anything I had ever seen. Gustave Doré, or Callot, or Tony Johannot, never conceived anything so horrible. There is a face in one of the latter's illustrations to *Un Voyage où il vous plaira*, which somewhat approaches the countenance of this creature, but does not equal it. It was the physiognomy of what I should fancy a ghoul might be. It looked as if it was capable of feeding on human flesh.

Having satisfied our curiosity, and bound every one in the house to secrecy, it became a question what was to be done with our Enigma? It was impossible that we should keep such a horror in our house; it was equally impossible that such an awful being should be let loose upon the world. I confess that I would have gladly voted for the creature's destruction. But who would shoulder the responsibility? Who would undertake the execution of this horrible semblance to a human being? Day after day this question was deliberated gravely. The boarders all left the house. Mrs. Moffat was in despair, and threatened Hammond and myself with all sorts of legal penalties if we did not remove the Horror. Our answer was, “We will go if you like, but we decline taking this creature with us. Remove it yourself if you please. It appeared in your house. On you the responsibility rests.” To this there was, of course, no answer. Mrs. Moffat could not obtain for love or money a person who would even approach the Mystery.

At last it died. Hammond and I found it cold and stiff one morning in the bed. The heart had ceased to beat, the lungs to inspire. We hastened to bury it in the garden. It was a strange funeral, the dropping of that viewless corpse into the damp hole. The cast of its form I gave to Doctor X —— , who keeps it in his museum in Tenth Street.

As I am on the eve of a long journey from which I may not return, I have drawn up this narrative of an event the most singular that has ever come to my knowledge.

UNCOLLECTED TALES

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SOME ACCOUNT OF THE LATTER DAYS OF THE HON. RICHARD MARSTON

The original Dublin University Magazine version of ‘The Evil Guest’

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PART I.

"When Lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth Sin: and Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth Death."

ABOUT sixty years ago, and somewhat more than twenty miles from the capital of Ireland, in a southward direction, there stood a large, and, even then, an oldfashioned mansion-house. It lay in the midst of a demesne of considerable extent, and richly wooded with venerable timber; but, apart from the sombre majesty of these giant groups, and the varieties of the undulating ground on which they stood, there was little that could be deemed attractive in the place. A certain air of neglect and decay, and an indescribable gloom and melancholy, hung over it. In darkness, it seemed darker than any tract beside; when the moonlight fell upon its glades and hollows, they looked spectral and awful, with a sort of churchyard loneliness; and even when the blush of morning kissed its broad woodlands, there was a melancholy in the salute which saddened rather than cheered the heart of the beholder.

This antique, melancholy, and neglected place, we shall call, for distinctness sake, Dunoran. It was then the property of the younger son of a nobleman, once celebrated for his ability and his daring, but who had long since passed to that land where human wisdom and courage avail nought. The representative of this noble house resided at the family mansion in England, and the cadet, whose fortunes we mean to sketch in these pages, lived upon the narrow surplus of an encumbered income, in a reserved and unsocial discontent, deep among the solemn shadows of the old woods of Dunoran.

The Hon. Richard Marston was now somewhere between forty and fifty years of age — perhaps nearer the latter; he still, however, preserved, in an eminent degree, the traits of manly beauty, not the less remarkable for its unquestionably haughty and passionate character. He had married a beautiful girl, of good family, but without much money, somewhere about sixteen years before; two children, a son and a daughter, had been the fruit of this union. The boy, Harry Marston, was at this time at Cambridge; and his sister, scarcely fifteen, was at home with her parents, and under the training of an accomplished governess, who had been recommended to them by a noble relative of Mrs. Marston. She was a native of France, but thoroughly mistress of the English language, and, except for a foreign accent, which gave a certain prettiness to all she said, she spoke it as perfectly as any native Englishwoman. This young Frenchwoman was eminently handsome and attractive. Expressive, dark eyes, a clear olive complexion, small even teeth, and a beautifully-dimpling smile, more perhaps than a strictly classic regularity of features, were the secrets of her unquestionable influence, at first sight, upon the fancy of every man of taste who beheld her.

Mr. Marston's fortune, never very large, had been shattered by early dissipation. Naturally of a proud and somewhat exacting temper, he acutely felt the mortifying consequences of his poverty. The want of what he felt ought to have been his position and influence in the county in which he resided, fretted and galled him; and he cherished a resentful and bitter sense of every slight, imaginary or real, to which the same fruitful source of annoyance and humiliation had exposed him. He held, therefore, but little intercourse with the surrounding gentry, and that little not of the pleasantest possible kind; for, not being himself in a condition to entertain, in that style which his own ideas of his station had led him to conceive to be but suitable, he declined, as far as was compatible with good breeding, all the proffered hospitalities of the neighbourhood; and, from his wild and neglected park, looked out upon the surrounding world in a spirit of moroseness and defiance, very unlike, indeed, to that of neighbourly goodwill.

In the midst, however, of many of the annoyances attendant upon crippled means, he enjoyed a few of those shadowy indications of hereditary importance, which are more dearly prized, in proportion as the substantial accessories of wealth have disappeared. The mansion in which he dwelt was, though oldfashioned, imposing in its aspect, and upon a scale unequivocally aristocratic; its walls were hung with ancestral portraits, and he managed to maintain about him a large and tolerably respectable staff of servants. In addition to these, he had his extensive demesne, his deer-park, and his unrivalled timber, wherewith to console himself; and, in the consciousness of these possessions, he found some imperfect assuagement of those bitter feelings of suppressed scorn and resentment, which a sense of lost station and slighted importance engendered.

Mr. Marston’s early habits had, unhappily, been of a kind to aggravate, rather than alleviate, the annoyances incidental to reduced means. He had been a gay roan, a voluptuary, and a gambler. His vicious tastes had survived the means of their gratification. His love for his wife had been nothing more than one of those vehement and headstrong fancies, which, in self-indulgent men, sometimes result in marriage, and which seldom outlive the first few months of that life-long connexion. Mrs. Marston was a gentle, noble-minded woman. After agonies of disappointment, which none ever suspected, she had at length learned to submit, in sad and gentle acquiescence, to her fate. Those feelings, which had been the charm of her young days, were gone, and, as she bitterly felt, for ever. For them there was no recall — they could not return; and, without complaint or reproach, she yielded to what she felt was inevitable. It was impossible to look at Mrs. Marston, and not to discern, at a glance, the ruin of a surpassingly beautiful woman — a good deal wasted, pale, and chastened with a deep, untold sorrow — but still possessing the outlines, both in face and form, of that noble beauty and matchless grace, which had made her, in happier days, the admired of all observers. But equally impossible was it to converse with her, for even a minute, without hearing, in the gentle and melancholy music of her voice, the sad echoes of those griefs to which her early beauty had been sacrificed — an undying sense of lost love, and happiness departed, never to come again.

One rooming, Mr. Marston had walked, as was his custom when he expected the messenger who brought from the neighbouring postoffice the Dublin letters, some way down the broad, straight avenue, with its double rows of lofty trees at each side, when he encountered the nimble emissary on his return. He took the letter-bag in silence. It contained but two letters — one addressed to “Mademoiselle de Barras, chez M. Marston,” and the other to himself. He took them both, dismissed the messenger, and opening that addressed to himself, read as follows, ‘while he slowly retraced his steps towards the house: —

“DEAR RICHARD — I am a whimsical fellow, as you doubtless remember, and have lately grown, they tell me, rather hippish besides. I do not know to which infirmity I am to attribute a sudden fancy which urges me to pay you a visit, if you will admit me. To say truth, my dear Dick, I wish to see a little of Ireland, and, I will confess it, *en passant*, to see a little of *you* too. I really wish to make acquaintance with your family; and though they tell me my health is very much shaken, I must say, in self-defence, I am not a troublesome inmate. I can perfectly take care of myself, and need no nursing or caudling whatever. Will you present this, ray petition, to Mrs. Marston, and report her decision thereon to roe. Seriously, I know that your house may be full, or some other *contretemps* may make it impracticable for me just now to invade you. If it be so, tell me, my dear Richard, frankly, as my movements are perfectly free, and my time all my own, so that I can arrange my visit to suit your convenience.

“Yours, &c.,

“Wynston E. Berkley.

“P. S. — Direct to me at — Hotel, in Dublin, as I shall probably be there by the time this reaches you.”

“Illbred and pushing as ever,” quoth Mr. Marston, angrily, as he thrust the unwelcome letter into his pocket.

“This fellow, wallowing in wealth, without one nearer relative on earth than I, and associated more nearly still with me by the — psha! not affection — the *recollections* of early and intimate companionship, leaves me unaided, for years of desertion and suffering, to the buffetings of the world, and the troubles of all but overwhelming pecuniary difficulties, and now, with the cool confidence of one entitled to respect and welcome, invites himself to my house. Coming here,” he continued, after a gloomy pause, and still pacing slowly toward the house, “to collect amusing materials for next season’s gossip — stories about the married Benedict — the bankrupt beau — the outcast tenant of an Irish wilderness and, as he said this, he looked at the neglected prospect before him with an eye almost of hatred. “Ay, ay, to see the nakedness of the land is he coming, but he shall be disappointed. His money may buy him a cordial welcome at an inn, but curse me if it shall purchase him a reception here.”

He again opened and glanced through the letter.

“Ay, purposely put in such a way that I can’t decline it without affronting him,” he continued doggedly. “Well, then, he has no one to blame but himself — affronted he shall be; I shall effectually put an end to this humorous excursion. Egad, it is rather hard if a man cannot keep his poverty to himself.”

Sir Wynston Berkley was a baronet of large fortune — a selfish, fashionable man, and an inveterate bachelor. He and Marston had been schoolfellows, and the violent and implacable temper of the former had as little impressed his companion with feelings of regard, as the frivolity and selfishness of the baronet had won the esteem of his relative. As boys, they had little in common upon which to rest the basis of a friendship, or even a mutual liking. Berkley was gay, cold, and satirical; his cousin — for cousins they were — was jealous, haughty, and relentless. Their negative disinclination to one another’s society, not unnaturally engendered by uncongenial and unamiable dispositions, had for a time given place to actual hostility, while the two young men were at Oxford, In some intrigue, Marston discovered in his cousin a too-successful rival; the consequence was, a bitter and furious quarrel, which, but for the prompt and peremptory interference of friends, Marston would undoubtedly have pushed to a bloody issue. Time had, however, healed this rupture, and the young men came to regard one another with the same feelings, and eventually to reestablish the same sort of cold and indifferent intimacy which had subsisted between them before their angry collision.

Under these circumstances, whatever suspicion Marston might have felt on the receipt of the unexpected, and indeed unaccountable proposal, which had just reached him, he certainly had little reason to complain of any violation of early friendship in the neglect with which Sir Wynston had hitherto treated him. In deciding to decline his proposed visit, however, Marston had not consulted the impulses of spite or anger. He knew the baronet well; he knew that he cherished no goodwill towards him, and that in the project which he had thus unexpectedly broached, whatever indirect or selfish motives might possibly be at the bottom of it, no friendly feeling had ever mingled. He was therefore resolved to avoid the trouble and the expense of a visit in all respects distasteful to him, and in a gentlemanlike way, but, at the same time, as the reader may suppose, with very little anxiety as to whether or not his gay correspondent should take offence at his reply, to decline, once for all, the proposed distinction.

With this resolution, he entered the spacious and somewhat dilapidated mansion which called him master; and entering a sitting-room, appropriated to his daughter’s use, he found her there, in company with her beautiful French governess. He kissed his child, and saluted her young preceptress with formal courtesy.

“Mademoiselle,” said he, “I have got a letter for you; and, Rhoda,” he continued, addressing his pretty daughter, “bring this to your mother, and say, I request her to read it.”

He gave her the letter he himself had just received, and the girl tripped lightly away upon her mission.

Had he narrowly scrutinized the countenance of the fair Frenchwoman, as she glanced at the direction of that which he had just placed in *her* hand, he might have seen certain transient, but very unmistakeable evidences of excitement and agitation. She quickly concealed the letter, however, and with a sigh, the momentary flush which it had called to her cheek subsided, and she was tranquil as usual.

Mr. Marston remained for some minutes — five, eight, or ten, we cannot say precisely — pretty much where he had stood on first entering the chamber, doubtless awaiting the return of his messenger, or the appearance of his wife. At length, however, he left the room himself to seek her; but, during his brief stay, his previous resolution had been removed. By what influence we cannot say; but removed completely it unquestionably was, and a final determination that Sir Wynston Berkley should become his guest had fixedly taken its place.

As Marston walked along the passages which led from this room, he encountered Mrs. Marston and his daughter.

“Well,” said he, “you have read Wynston’s letter?”

“Yes,” she replied, returning it to him; “and what answer, Richard, do you purpose giving him?”

She was about to hazard a conjecture, but checked herself, remembering that even so faint an evidence of a disposition to advise might possibly be resented by her cold and imperious lord.

“I have considered it, and decided to receive him,” he replied.

“Ah! I am afraid — that is, I hope — he may find our housekeeping such as he can enjoy,” she said, with an involuntary expression of surprise; for she had scarcely had a doubt that her husband would have preferred evading the visit of his fine friend, under his gloomy circumstances.

“If our modest fare does not suit him,” said Marston, with sullen bitterness, “he can depart as easily as he came. We, poor gentlemen, can but do our best. I have thought it over, and made up my mind.”

“And how soon, my dear Richard, do you intend fixing his arrival?” she inquired, with the natural uneasiness of one upon whom, in an establishment whose pretensions considerably exceeded its resources, the perplexing cares of housekeeping devolved.

“Why, as soon as he pleases,” replied he. “I suppose you can easily have his room prepared by tomorrow or next day. I shall write by this mail, and tell him to come down at once.”

Having said this in a cold, decisive way, he turned and left her, as it seemed, not caring to be teased with further questions. He took his solitary way to a distant part of his wild park, where, far from the likelihood of disturbance or intrusion, he was often wont to amuse himself for the livelong day, in the sedentary sport of shooting rabbits. And there we leave him for the present, signifying to the distant inmates of his house the industrious pursuit of his unsocial occupation, by the dropping fire which sullenly, from hour to hour, echoed from the remote woods.

Mrs. Marston issued her orders; and having set on foot all the necessary preparations for so unwonted an event as a visit of some duration to Dunoran, she betook herself to her little boudoir — the scene of many an hour of patient but bitter suffering, unseen by human eye, and unknown, except to the just Searcher of hearts, to whom belongs mercy and VENGEANCE.

Mrs. Marston had but two friends to whom she had ever spoken upon the subject nearest her heart — the estrangement of her husband, a sorrow to which even time had failed to reconcile her. From her children this grief was carefully concealed. To them she never uttered the semblance of a complaint. Anything that could by possibility have reflected blame or dishonour upon their father, she would have perished rather than have allowed them so much as to suspect. The two friends who did understand her feelings, though in different degrees, were, one, a good and venerable clergyman, the Rev. Doctor Danvers, a frequent visitor and occasional guest at Dunoran, where his simple manners and unaffected benignity and tenderness of heart, had won the love of all, with the exception of its master, and commanded even his respect. The second was no other than the young French governess, Mademoiselle de Barras, in whose ready sympathy and consolatory counsels she found no small happiness. The society of this young lady had indeed become, next to that of her daughter, her greatest comfort and pleasure.

Mademoiselle de Barras was of a noble though ruined French family, and a certain nameless elegance and dignity attested, spite of her fallen condition, the purity of her descent. She was accomplished — possessed of that fine perception and sensitiveness, and that ready power of self-adaptation to the peculiarities and moods of others, which we term tact — and was, moreover, gifted with a certain natural grace, and manners the most winning imaginable. In short, she was a fascinating companion; and when the melancholy circumstances of her own situation, and the sad history of her once rich and noble family, were taken into account, with her striking attractions of person and air, the combination of all these associations and impressions rendered her one of the most interesting persons that could well be imagined. The circumstances of Mademoiselle de Barras's history and descent seemed to warrant, on Mrs. Marston's part, a closer intimacy and confidence than usually subsists between parties mutually occupying such a relation.

Mrs. Marston had hardly established herself in this little apartment, when a light foot approached, a gentle tap was given at the door, and Mademoiselle de Barras entered.

"Ah, mademoiselle, so kind — such pretty flowers. Pray sit down," said the lady, with a sweet and grateful smile, as she took from the taper Angers of the foreigner the little bouquet which she had been at the pains to gather.

Mademoiselle sat down, and gently took the lady's hand and kissed it. A small matter will overflow a heart charged with sorrow — a chance word, a look, some little office of kindness — and so it was with mademoiselle's bouquet and gentle kiss. Mrs. Marston's heart was touched; her eyes filled with bright tears; she smiled gratefully upon her fair and humble companion, and as she smiled, her tears overflowed, and she wept in silence for some minutes.

"My poor mademoiselle," she said, at last, "you are so very, very kind."

Mademoiselle said nothing; she lowered her eyes, and pressed the poor lady's hand.

Apparently to interrupt an embarrassing silence, and to give a more cheerful tone to their little interview, the governess, in a gay tone, on a sudden said —

"And so, madame, we are to have a visitor, Miss Rhoda tells me — a baronet, is he not?"

"Yes, indeed, mademoiselle — Sir Wynston Berkley, a gay London gentleman, and a cousin of Mr. Marston's," she replied.

"Ha — a cousin I" exclaimed the young lady, with a little more surprise in her tone than seemed altogether called for— "a cousin — oh, then, that is the reason of his visit. Do, pray, madame, tell me all about him — I am so much afraid of strangers, and what you call men of the world. Oh, dear Mrs. Marston, I am not worthy to be here, and he will see all that in a moment — indeed, indeed, I am afraid. Pray tell me all about him."

She said this with a simplicity which made the elder lady smile, and while mademoiselle readjusted the tiny flowers which formed the bouquet she had just presented to her, Mrs. Marston goodnaturedly recounted to her all she knew of Sir Wynston Berkley, which, in substance, amounted to no more than we have already stated. When she concluded, the young Frenchwoman continued for some time silent, still busy with her flowers. But, suddenly, she heaved a deep sigh, and shook her head.

"You seem disquieted, mademoiselle," said Mrs. Marston, in a tone of kindness.

"I am thinking, madame," she said, still looking upon the flowers which she was adjusting, and again sighing profoundly— "I am thinking of what you said to me a week ago — alas!"

"I do not remember what it was, my good mademoiselle — nothing, I am sure, that ought to grieve you — at least nothing that was intended to have that effect," replied the lady, in a tone of gentle encouragement.

"No, not intended, madame," said the young Frenchwoman, sorrowfully.

"Well, what was it? Perhaps you misunderstood; perhaps I can explain what I said," replied Mrs. Marston, affectionately.

"Ah, madame, you think — you think I am *unlucky*," answered the young lady, slowly and faintly.

"Unlucky! Dear mademoiselle, you surprise me," rejoined her companion.

"I mean — what I mean is this, madame — you date unhappiness — if not its beginning, at least its great aggravation and increase," she answered dejectedly, "from the time of my coming here, madame; and though I know you are too good to dislike me on that account, yet I must, in your eyes, be ever connected with calamity, and look like some ominous thing."

"Dear mademoiselle, allow no such thought to enter your mind. You do me great wrong, indeed you do," said Mrs. Marston, laying her hand upon the young lady's, kindly.

There was silence for a little time, and the elder lady resumed —

"I remember now what you allude to, dear mademoiselle — the increased estrangement, the widening separation which severs me from one unutterably dear to me — the first and bitter disappointment of my life, which seems to grow more hopelessly incurable day by day.

Mrs. Marston paused, and, after a brief silence, the governess said —

"I am very superstitious myself, dear madame, and I thought I must have seemed to you an inauspicious inmate — in short, *unlucky* — as I have said; and the thought made me very unhappy — so unhappy, that I was go fag to leave you, madame — I may now tell you frankly — going away; but you have set my doubts at rest, and I am quite happy again."

"Dear mademoiselle!" cried the lady tenderly, and rising, as she spake, to kiss the cheek of her humble friend; "never — never speak of this again. God knows I have too few friends on earth, to spare the kindest and tenderest among them all. No, no. You little think what comfort I have found in your warm-hearted and ready sympathy, and how dearly I prize your affection, my poor mademoiselle."

The young Frenchwoman rose, with downcast eyes, and a dimpling, happy smile; and, as Mrs. Marston drew her affectionately toward her, and kissed her, she timidly returned the embrace of her kind patroness. For a moment her graceful arms encircled her, and she whispered, "Dear madame, how happy — how very happy you make me."

Had Ithuriel touched with his spear the beautiful young woman, thus for a moment, as it seemed, lost in a trance of gratitude and love, would that angelic form have stood the test unscathed? A spectator, marking the scene, might have observed a strange gleam in her eyes — a strange expression in her face — an influence for a moment *not* angelic, like a shadow of some passing spirit, cross her visibly, as she leaned over the gentle lady's neck, and murmured, "Dear madame, how happy — how very happy you make me." Such a spectator, as he looked at that gentle lady, might have seen, for one dreamy moment, a lithe and painted serpent, coiled round and round, and hissing in her ear.

A few minutes more, and mademoiselle was in the solitude of her own apartment. She shut and bolted the door, and taking from her desk the letter which she had that morning received, threw herself into an armchair, and studied the document profoundly. Her actual revision and scrutiny of the letter itself was interrupted by long intervals of profound abstraction; and, after a full hour thus spent, she locked it carefully up again, and with a clear brow, and a gay smile, rejoined her pretty pupil for a walk.

We must now pass over an interval of a few days, and come at once to the arrival of Sir Wynston Berkley, which duly occurred upon the evening of the day appointed. The baronet descended from his chaise but a little time before the hour at which the little party which formed the family at Dunoran were wont to assemble for the social meal of supper. A few minutes devoted to the mysteries of the toilet, with the aid of an accomplished valet, enabled him to appear, as he conceived, without disadvantage at this domestic reunion.

Sir Wynston Berkley was a particularly gentlemanlike person. He was rather tall, and elegantly made, with gay, easy manners, and something indefinably aristocratic in his face, which, however, was a little more worn than his years would have strictly accounted for. But Sir Wynston had been a *rou*è*,* and, spite of the cleverest possible making up, the ravages of excess were very traceable in the lively beau of fifty. Perfectly well dressed, and with a manner that was ease and gaiety itself, he was at home from the moment he entered the room. Of course, anything like genuine cordiality was out of the question; but Mr. Marston embraced his relative with perfect good breeding, and the baronet appeared determined to like everybody, and be pleased with everything.

He had not been five minutes in the parlour, chatting gaily with Mr and Mrs. Marston and their pretty daughter, when Mademoiselle de Barras entered the room. As she moved towards Mrs. Marston, Sir Wynston rose, and, observing her with evident admiration, said in an undertone, inquiringly, to Marston, who was beside him —

"And *this?"*

"That is Mademoiselle de Barras, my daughter's governess, and Mrs. Marston's companion," said Marston, drily.

"Ha!" said Sir Wynston— "I *thought* you were but three at home just now, and I was right. Your son is at Cambridge; I heard so from an old friend, Jack Manbury. Jack has his boy, there, too. D — n me, Dick, it seems but last week that you and I were there together."

"Yes," said Marston, looking gloomily into the fire, as if he saw, in its smoke and flicker, the phantoms of murdered time and opportunity; "but I hate looking back, Wynston. The past is to me but a medley of ill-luck and worse management."

"Why what an ungrateful dog you are!" returned Sir Wynston, gaily, turning his back upon the Are, and glancing round the spacious and handsome, though somewhat faded apartment. "I was on the point of congratulating you on the possession of the finest park and noblest demesne in Ireland, when you begin t*o grumble.* Egad, Dick, all I can say to your complaint is, that *I* don't pity you, and there are dozens who may honestly *envy* you — that is all."

In spite of this cheering assurance, Marston remained sullenly silent. Supper, however, had now been served, and the little party assumed their places at the table.

"I am sorry, Wynston, I have no sport of any kind to offer you here," said Marston, except, indeed, some good trout-fishing, if you like it. I have three miles of excellent fishing at your command."

"My dear fellow, I am a mere cockney," rejoined Sir Wynston; "I am not a sportsman; I never tried it, and should not like to begin now. No, Dick — what I much prefer is, abundance of your fresh air, and the enjoyment of your scenery. When I was at Rouen three years ago."

"Ha! — Rouen? Mademoiselle will feel an interest in that — it is her birthplace," interrupted Marston, glancing at the Frenchwoman.

"Yes — Rouen — ah — yes!" said mademoiselle, with very evident embarrassment.

Sir Wynston appeared for a moment a little disconcerted, too, but rallied speedily, and pursued his detail of his doings at that fair town of Normandy.

Marston knew Sir Wynston well; and he rightly calculated that whatever effect his experience of the world might have had in intensifying his selfishness or hardening his heart, it certainly could have had none in improving a character originally worthless and unfeeling. He knew, moreover, that his wealthy cousin was gifted with a great deal of that small cunning which is available for masking the little scheming of frivolous and worldly men; and that Sir Wynston never took trouble of any kind without a sufficient purpose, having its centre in his own personal gratification.

This visit greatly puzzled Marston; it gave him even a vague sense of uneasiness. Could there exist any flaw in his own title to the estate of Dunoran? He had an unpleasant, doubtful sort of remembrance of some apprehensions of this kind, when he was but a child, having been whispered in the family. Could this really be so, and could the baronet have been led to make this unexpected visit merely for the purpose of personally examining into the condition of a property of which he was about to become the legal invader? The nature of this suspicion affords, at all events, a fair gauge of Marston's estimate of his cousin's character. And as he revolved these doubts from time to time, and as the thought of Mademoiselle de Barras's transient, but unaccountable, embarrassment at the mention of Rouen by Sir Wynston — an embarrassment which the baronet himself appeared for a moment to reciprocate — flashed occasionally upon his remembrance, undefined, glimmering suspicions of another kind flickered through the darkness of his mind. He was effectually puzzled — his surmises and conjectures baffled; and he more than half repented that he had acceded to his cousin's proposal, and admitted him as an inmate in his house.

Although Sir Wynston comported himself as if he were conscious of being the very most-welcome visitor who could possibly have established himself at Dunoran, he was, doubtless, fully aware of the real feelings with which he was regarded by his host. If he had in reality an object in prolonging his stay, and wished to make the postponement of his departure the direct interest of his entertainer, he unquestionably took effectual measures for that purpose.

The little party broke up every evening at about ten o'clock, and Sir Wynston retired to his chamber at the same hour. He found little difficulty in inducing Marston to amuse him there with a quiet game of picquet. In his own room, therefore, in the luxurious ease of dressing-gown and slippers he sate at cards with his host, often until an hour or two past midnight. Sir Wynston was exorbitantly wealthy, and very reckless in expenditure. The stakes for which they played, although they gradually became in reality pretty heavy, were in his eyes a very unimportant consideration. Marston, on the other hand, was poor, and played with the eye of a lynx and the appetite of a shark. The ease and perfect goodhumour with which Sir Wynston lost were not unimproved by his entertainer, who, as may readily be supposed, was not sorry to reap this golden harvest, provided without the slightest sacrifice, on his part, of pride or independence. If, indeed, he sometimes suspected that his guest was a little more anxious to lose than to win, he was also quite resolved not to perceive it, but calmly persisted in, night after night, giving Sir Wynston, as he termed it, his revenge; or, in other words, treating him to a repetition of his losses. All this was very agreeable to Marston, who began to treat his visitor with, at all events, more external cordiality and distinction than at first.

An incident, however, occurred, which disturbed these amicable relations in an unexpected way. It becomes necessary here to mention that Mademoiselle de Barras's sleeping apartment opened from a long corridor. It was *en suite* with two dressing-rooms, each opening also upon the corridor, but wholly unused and unfurnished. Some five or six other apartments also opened at either side, upon the same passage. These little local details being premised, it so happened that one day Marston, who had gone out with the intention of angling in the trout-stream which flowed through his park, though at a considerable distance from the house, having unexpectedly returned to procure some tackle which he had forgotten, was walking briskly through the corridor in question to his own apartment, when, to his surprise, the door of one of the deserted dressing-rooms, of which we have spoken, was cautiously pushed open, and Sir Wynston Berkley issued from it. Marston was almost beside him as he did so, and Sir Wynston made a motion as if about instinctively to draw back again, and at the same time the keen ear of his host distinctly caught the sound of rustling silks and a tip-toe tread hastily withdrawing from the deserted chamber. Sir Wynston looked nearly as much confused as a man of the world can look.

Marston stopped short, and scanned his visitor for a moment with a very peculiar expression.

"You have caught me peeping, Dick. I am an inveterate explorer," said the baronet, with an ineffectual effort to shake off his embarrassment. "An open door in a fine old house is a temptation which— "

"That door is usually closed, and ought to be kept so," interrupted Marston, drily; "there is nothing whatever to be seen in the room but dust and cobwebs."

"Pardon me," said Sir Wynston, more easily, "you forget the view from the window."

"Ay, the view, to be sure; there *is* a good view from it," said Marston, with as much of his usual manner as he could resume so soon; and, at the same time, carelessly opening the door again, he walked in, accompanied by Sir Wynston, and both stood at the window together, looking out in silence upon a prospect which neither of them saw.

"Yes, I do think it is a good view," said Marston; and as he turned carelessly away, he darted a swift glance round the chamber. The door opening toward the French lady's apartment was closed, but not actually shut. This was enough; and as they left the room, Marston repeated his invitation to his guest to accompany him; but in a tone which showed that he scarcely followed the meaning of what he himself was saying.

He walked undecidedly toward his own room, then turned and went down stairs. In the hall he met his pretty child —

"Ha! Rhoda," said he, "you have not been out to-day?"

"No, papa; but it is so very fine, I think I shall go now."

"Yes; go, and mademoiselle can accompany you. Do you hear, Rhoda, mademoiselle goes with you, and you had better go at once."

A few minutes more, and Marston, from the parlour-window, beheld Rhoda and the elegant French girl walking together towards the woodlands. He watched them gloomily, himself unseen, until the crowding underwood concealed their receding figures. Then, with a sigh, he turned and reascended the great staircase.

"I shall sift this mystery to the bottom," thought he. "I shall foil the conspirators, if so they be, with their own weapons — art with art — chicane with chicane — duplicity with duplicity."

He was now in the long passage which we have just spoken of, and glancing back and before him, to ascertain that no chance eye discerned him, he boldly entered mademoiselle's chamber. Her writing-desk lay upon the table. It was locked; and coolly taking it in his hands, Marston carried it into his own room, bolted his chamber-door, and taking two or three bunches of keys, he carefully tried nearly a dozen in succession, and when almost despairing of success, at last found one which fitted the lock, turned it, and opened the desk.

Sustained throughout his dishonourable task by some strong and angry passion, the sight of the open escrutoire checked and startled him for a moment. Violated privilege, invaded secrecy, base, perfidious espionage, upbraided and stigmatized him, as the intricacies of the outraged sanctuary opened upon his intrusive gaze. He felt for a moment shocked and humbled. He was impelled to lock and replace the desk where he had originally found it, without having effected his meditated treason; but this hesitation was transient; the fiery and reckless impulse which had urged him to the act, returned to enforce its consummation. With a guilty eye and eager hands, he searched the contents of this tiny repository of the fair Norman's written secrets.

"Ha! the very thing," he muttered, as he detected the identical letter which he himself had handed to Mademoiselle de Barras but a few days before. "The handwriting struck me — ill-disguised — I thought I knew it; we shall see.

He had opened the letter; it contained but a few lines: he held his breath while he read it. First he grew pale, then a shadow came over his face, and then another, and another — darker and darker — shade upon shade — as if an exhalation from the pit was momentarily blackening the air about him. He said nothing; there was but one long, gentle sigh, and in his face a mortal sternness, as he folded the letter again, replaced it, and locked the desk.

Of course, when Mademoiselle de Barras returned from her accustomed walk, she found everything in her room, to all appearance, undisturbed, and just as when she left it. While this young lady was making her toilet for the evening, and while Sir Wynston Berkley was worrying himself with conjectures as to whether Marston's evil looks, when he encountered him that morning in the passage, existed only in his own fancy, or were, in good truth, very grim and significant realities, Marston himself was striding alone through the wildest and darkest solitudes of his park, haunted by his own unholy thoughts, and, it may be, by those other evil and unearthly influences which wander, as we know, "in desert places." Darkness overtook him, and the chill of night, in these lonely tracts. In his *solitary* walk, what fearful *company* had he been keeping! As the shades of night deepened round him, the sense of the neighbourhood of ill — the consciousness of the foul thoughts of which, where he was now treading, he had been for hours the sport — oppressed him with a vague and unknown terror; a certain horror of the thoughts which had been his comrades through the day, which he could not now shake off, and which clung to him with a ghastly and defiant tenacity, scared, while they halfenraged him. He stalked swiftly homewards, like a guilty man pursued.

Marston was not perfectly satisfied, though very nearly, with the evidence now in his possession. The letter, the stolen perusal of which had so agitated him that day, bore no signature; but, independently of the handwriting, which seemed to be, spite of the constraint of an attempted disguise, to be familiar to his eye, there existed in the matter of the letter, short as it was, certain internal evidences, which, although not actually conclusive, raised certainly, in conjunction with all the other circumstances, a powerful presumption in aid of his suspicions. He resolved, however, to sift the matter further, and to bide his time. Meanwhile, his manner must indicate no trace of his dark surmises and bitter thoughts. Deception, in its two great branches, simulation and simulation, was easy to him. His habitual reserve and gloom would divest any accidental and momentary disclosures of his inward trouble, showing itself in dark looks or sullen silence, of everything suspicious or unaccountable, which would have characterized such displays and eccentricities in another man.

His rapid and reckless ramble — a kind of physical vent for the paroxysm which had so agitated him throughout the greater part of the day — had soiled and disordered his dress, and thus had helped to give to his whole appearance a certain air of haggard wildness, which, in the privacy of his chamber, he hastened carefully and entirely to remove.

At supper, Marston was apparently in unusually good spirits. Sir Wynston and he chatted gaily and fluently upon many subjects, grave and gay.

Among them the inexhaustible topic of popular superstition happened to turn up, and especially the subject of strange prophecies of the fates and fortunes of individuals, singularly fulfilled in the events of their afterlife.

“By-the-bye, Dick, this is rather a nervous topic for me to discuss,” said Sir Wynston.

“How so?” asked his host.

“Why, don’t you remember?” urged the baronet.

“No, I don’t recollect what you allude to,” replied Marston, in all sincerity.

“Why, don’t you remember Eton?” pursued Sir Wynston.

“Yes — to be sure,” said Marston.

“*Well*?” continued his visitor.

“Well, I really don’t recollect the prophecy,” replied Marston.

“What! do you forget the gipsy who predicted that you were to murder *me,* Dick — eh?”

“Ah — ha, ha!” laughed Marston, with a start.

“Don’t you remember it now?” urged his companion.

“Ah — why — yes — I believe I do,” said Marston; “but another prophecy was running in my mind — a gipsy prediction, too. At Ascot, do you recollect the girl told me I was to be lord chancellor of England, and a duke besides.”

“Well, Dick,” rejoined Sir Wynston, merrily, “if both are to be fulfilled, or neither, I trust you may never sit upon the woolsack of England.”

The party soon after broke up — Sir Wynston and his host, as usual, to pass some hours at picquet — and Mrs. Marston, as was her wont, to spend some time in her own boudoir, over notes and accounts, and the worrying details of housekeeping.

While thus engaged, she was disturbed by a respectful tap at her door, and an elderly servant, an Englishman, who had been for many years in the employment of Mr. Marston, presented himself.

“Well, Merton, do you want anything?” asked the lady.

“Yes, ma’am, please, I want to give warning — I wish to leave the service, ma’am;” replied he, respectfully, but doggedly.

“To leave us, Merton!” echoed his mistress, both surprised and sorry, for the man had been long her servant, and had been much liked and trusted.

“Yes, ma’am,” he repeated.

"And why do you wish to do so; Merton; has anything occurred to make the place unpleasant to you?" urged the lady.

"No, ma'am — no, indeed," said he, earnestly, "I have nothing to complain of — nothing, indeed, ma'am."

"Perhaps, you think you can do better, if you leave us?" suggested his mistress.

"No, indeed, ma'am, I have no such thought," he said, and seemed on the point of bursting into tears "but — but, somehow — ma'am, there is something come over me, lately, and I can't help, but think, if I stay here, ma'am — some — some *misfortune* will happen us all — and that is the truth, ma'am."

"This is very foolish, Merton — a mere childish fancy," replied Mrs. Marston; " you like your place, and have no better prospect before you — and now, for a mere superstitious fancy, you propose giving it up, and leaving us. No, no, Merton, you had better think the matter over — and if you still, upon reflection, prefer going away, you can then speak to your master."

"Thank you, ma'am — God bless you," said the man, withdrawing.

Mrs. Marston rang the bell for her maid, and retired to her room.

"Has anything occurred lately," she asked, " to annoy Merton?"

"No, ma'am — I don't know of anything — but, he is very changed, indeed, of late," replied the maid.

"He has not been quarrelling?" inquired she.

"Ah, no, ma'am, he never quarrels — he is very quiet, and keeps to himself always — he thinks a wonderful deal of himself," replied the servant.

"But, you said that he is much changed — did you not?" continued the lady. For there was something strangely excited and unpleasant, at times, in the roan's manner, which struck Mrs. Marston, and alarmed her curiosity. He had seemed like one charged with some horrible secret — intolerable, and yet, which he dared not reveal.

"What," proceeded Mrs. Marston, "is the nature of the change of which you speak?"

"Why, ' ma'am, he is like one frightened; and in sorrow," she replied; "he will sit silent, and now and then shaking his head, as if he wanted to get rid of something that is teazing him, for an hour together."

"Poor man!" said she.

"And, then, when we are at meals, he will, all on a sudden, get up, and leave the table — and Jem Carney, that sleeps in the next room to him, says, that, almost as often as he looks through the little window between the two rooms, no matter what hour in the night, he sees Mr. Merton on his knees by the bedside, praying or crying, he don't know which — but, any way, he is not happy — poor man! — , and that is plain enough."

"It is very strange," said the lady, after a pause; " but, I do think, and hope, after all, it will prove to have been no more than a transient, nervous depression."

"Well, ma'am, I do hope it is not his conscience that is coming against him, now," said the maid; "We have no reason to suspect anything of the kind," said Mrs. Marston, gravely; "quite the reverse — he has been always a particularly proper man."

"Oh; indeed," responded the attendant, "goodness forbid I should say or think anything against him; but I could not help telling you my mind, ma'am, meaning no harm."

"And, how long is it since you observed this sad change in poor Merton?" persisted the lady.

"Not, indeed, to say very long, ma'am," replied 'the girl; "somewhere about a week, or very little more — at least as we remarked, ma'am."

Mrs. Marston pursued her inquiries no further that night. But, although she affected to treat the matter thus lightly, it had, somehow, taken a painful hold upon her imagination, and left in her mind those undefinable and ominous sensations, which, in certain mental dispositions, seem to foreshadow the approach of unknown misfortune.

For two or three days, everything went on smoothly, and pretty much as usual.. At the end of this brief interval, however, the attention of Mrs. Marston was recalled to the subject of her servant's mysterious anxiety to leave, and give up his situation. Merton again stood before her, and repeated the intimation he had already given.

"Really, Merton, this is very odd," said the lady. "You like your situation, and yet you persist in desiring to leave it. What am I to think?"

"Oh, ma'am," said he, "I am unhappy; I am tormented, ma'am. I can't tell you, ma'am — I can't, indeed, ma'am!"

“If anything weighs upon your mind, Merton, I would advise your consulting our good clergyman, Dr. Danvers,” urged the lady.

The servant hung his head, and mused for a time gloomily; and then said, decisively —

“No, ma’am — no use.”

“And pray, Merton, how long is it since you first entertained this desire?” asked Mrs. Marston.

“Since Sir Wynston Berkley came, ma’am,” answered he, “Has Sir Wynston annoyed you in any way?” continued she.

“Far from it, ma’am,” he replied; “he is a very kind gentleman.”

“Well, his *man,* then — is *he* a respectable, inoffensive person?” she inquired.

“I never met a more so,” said the man, promptly, and raising his head.

“What I wish to know is, whether your desire to go is connected with Sir Wynston and his servant?” said Mrs. Marston.

The man hesitated, and shifted his position uneasily.

“You need not answer, Merton, if you don’t wish it,” she said, kindly.

“Why, ma’am, yes, it *has* something to say to them both,” he replied, with some agitation.

“I really cannot understand this,” said she.

Merton hesitated for some time, and appeared much troubled.

“It was something, ma’am — something that Sir Wynston’s man said to me; and there it is out,” he said at last, with an effort.

“Well, Merton” said she, “I won’t press you further; but I must say, that as this communication, whatever it may be, has caused *you,* unquestionably, very great uneasiness, it seems to me but probable that it affects the safety or the interests of some person — I cannot say of whom; and, if so, there can be no doubt that it is your duty to acquaint the person or persons so involved in the disclosure, with its purport.”

“Ah, ma’am, there is nothing in what I heard that could touch anybody but myself. It was nothing but what others heard, without remarking it, or thinking about it. I can’t tell you any more, ma’am — but I am very unhappy, and uneasy in my mind.”

As the man said this, he began to weep bitterly.

The idea that his mind was affected, now seriously occurred to Mrs. Marston, and she resolved to convey her suspicions to her husband, and to leave him to deal with the case as to him should seem good.

"Don't agitate yourself so, Merton; I shall speak to your master upon what you have said; and you may rely upon it, that no surmise to the prejudice of your character has entered my mind," said Mrs. Marston, very kindly.

"Ah, ma'am, you are too good," sobbed the poor man vehemently. "You don't know me, ma'am; I never knew myself till lately. I am a miserable man. I am frightened at myself, ma'am — frightened terribly. Christ knows, it would be well for me I was dead this minute.

"I am very sorry for your unhappiness, Merton," said Mrs. Marston; "and, especially, that I can do nothing to alleviate it; I can but speak, as I have said, to your master, and he will give you your discharge, and manage whatever else remains to be done."

"God bless you, ma'am," said the servant, still much agitated, and left her.

Mr. Marston usually passed the early part of the day in active exercise, and she, supposing that he was, in all probability, at that moment far from the house, went to "mademoiselle's" chamber, which was at the other end of the spacious house, to confer with her in the interval upon the strange application just urged by poor Merton.

Just as she reached the door of Mademoiselle de Barras's chamber, she heard voices within exerted in evident excitement. She stopped in amazement. They were those of her husband and mademoiselle. Startled, confounded, and amazed, she pushed open the door, and entered. Her husband was sitting — one hand clutched upon the arm of the chair he occupied, and the other extended, and clenched, as it seemed, with the emphasis of rage, upon the desk which stood upon the table. His face was darkened with the stormiest passions, and his gaze was fixed upon the Frenchwoman, who was standing with a look half-guilty, half-imploring, at a little distance.

There was something, to Mrs. Marston, so utterly unexpected, and even so shocking, in this *tableau*, that she stood for some seconds pale and breathless, and gazing with a vacant stare of fear and horror from her husband to the French girl, and from her to her husband again. The three figures in this strange group remained fixed, silent, and aghast, for several seconds. Mrs. Marston endeavoured to speak; but, though her lips moved, no sound escaped her; and, from very weakness, she sank half-fainting into a chair.

Marston rose, throwing, as he did so, a guilty and a furious glance at the young Frenchwoman, and walked a step or two toward the door; he hesitated, however, and turned, just as mademoiselle, bursting into tears, threw her arms round Mrs. Marston's neck, and passionately exclaimed —

"Protect me, madame, I implore, from the insults and suspicions of your husband."

Marston stood a little behind his wife, and he and the governess exchanged a glance of keen significance, as the latter sank, sobbing, like an injured child into its mother's embrace, upon the poor lady's tortured bosom.

"Madame, madame — he says — Mr. Marston says, I have presumed to give you advice, and to meddle, and to interfere — that I am endeavouring to make you despise his authority. Madame, speak for me. Say, madame, have I ever done so — say, madame, am I the cause of bitterness and contumacy? Ah, mon dieu! c'est trop — it is too much, madame — I shall go — I must go, madame. Why, ah, why, did I stay for this?"

As she thus spoke, mademoiselle again burst into a paroxysm of weeping, and again the same significant glance was interchanged.

"Go — yes, you shall go," said Marston, striding toward the window. "I will have no whispering or conspiring in my house; I have heard of your confidences and consultations. Mrs. Marston, I meant to have done this quietly," he continued, addressing his wife; "I meant to have given Mademoiselle de Barras my opinion and her dismissal without your assistance; but it seems you wish to interpose. You are sworn friends, and never fail one another, of course, at a pinch. I take it for granted that I owe your presence at an interview which I am resolved shall be, as respects mademoiselle, a final one, to a message from that intriguing young lady — eh?"

"I have had no message, Richard," said Mrs. Marston; "I don't know — do tell me, for God's sake, what is all this about?" and as the poor lady thus spoke, her overwrought feelings found a vent in a violent flood of tears.

"Yes, madam, that is the question. I have asked him frequently what is all this anger, all these reproaches about — what have I done," interposed mademoiselle, with indignant vehemence, standing erect, and viewing

Marston with a flashing eye and a flushed cheek. "Yes, I am called conspirator, meddler, *intriguante* — ah, madame, it is intolerable."

"But what have I done, Richard?" urged the poor lady, stunned and bewildered— "how have I offended you?"

"Yes, yes," continued the Frenchwoman, with angry volubility— "what has she done, that you call contumacy and disrespect? Yes, dear madame, *there* is the question; and if he cannot answer, is it not most cruel to call me conspirator, and spy, and *intriguante*, because I talk to my dear madame, who is my only friend in this place?"

"Mademoiselle de Barras, I need no declamation from you; and pardon me, Mrs. Marston, nor from you either," retorted he; "I have my information from one on whom I can rely — let that suffice. Of course you are both agreed in a story. I dare say you are ready to swear you never so much as canvassed my conduct, and my *coldness* and *estrangement* — eh? these are the words, are not they?"

"I have done you no wrong, sir — madame can tell you. *Je ne le jamais faite* — I am no mischief-maker; no, I never was such a thing — was I, mar dame?" persisted the governess— "bear witness for me."

"I have told you my mind, Mademoiselle de Barras," interrupted Marston; "I will have no altercation, if you please. I think, Mrs. Marston, we have had enough of this; may I accompany you hence?"

So saying, he took the poor lady's passive hand, and led her from the room. Mademoiselle stood in the centre of the apartment, alone, erect, with heaving breast and burning cheek — beautiful, thoughtful, guilty — the very type of the fallen angelic. We must leave her there for a time, her heart all confusion, her mind darkness; various courses before her, and as yet without resolution to choose among them — a lost spirit, borne on the eddies of the storm — fearless and self-reliant, but with no star to guide her on her dark, malign, and forlorn way.

Mrs. Marston, in her own room, reviewed the agitating scene through which she had just been so unexpectedly carried. The tremendous suspicion which, at the first disclosure of the *tableau* we have described, smote the heart and brain of the poor lady with the stun of a thunderbolt, had been, indeed, subsequently disturbed, and afterwards contradicted; but the shock of her first impression remained still upon her mind and heart. She felt still through every nerve the vibrations of that maddening terror and despair which had overcome her senses for a moment. The surprise, the shock, the horror, outlived the obliterating influence of what followed. She was in this agitation when Mademoiselle de Barras entered her chamber, resolved with all her art to second and support the success of her prompt measures in the recent critical emergency. She had come, she said, to bid her dear madame farewell, for she was resolved to go. Her own room had been invaded, that insult and reproach might be heaped upon her — how utterly unmerited, Mrs. Marston knew. She had been called by every foul name which applied to the spy and the maligner; she could not bear it. Some one had evidently been endeavouring to procure her removal, and bad but too effectually succeeded. Mademoiselle was determined to go early the next morning; nothing should prevent or retard her departure; her resolution was taken. In this strain did mademoiselle run on, but in a subdued and melancholy tone, and weeping profusely.

The wild and ghastly suspicions which had for a moment flashed terribly upon the mind of Mrs. Marston, had faded away under the influences of reason and reflection, although, indeed, much painful excitement still remained, before Mademoiselle de Barras had visited her room. Marston's temper she knew but too well; it was violent, bitter, and impetuous; and though he cared little, if at all, for her, she had ever perceived that he was angrily jealous of the slightest intimacy or confidence by which any other than himself might establish an influence over her mind. That he had learned the subject of some of her most interesting conversations with mademoiselle, she could not doubt; for he had violently upbraided that young lady in her presence with having discussed it, and here now was mademoiselle herself taking refuge with her from galling affront and unjust reproach, incensed, wounded, and weeping. The whole thing was consistent; all the circumstances bore plainly in the same direction; the evidence was conclusive; and Mrs. Marston's thoughts and feelings respecting her fair young confidante, quickly found their old level, and flowed on tranquilly and sadly in their accustomed channel.

While Mademoiselle de Barras was thus, with the persevering industry of the spider, repairing the meshes which a chance breath had shattered, she would, perhaps, have been in her turn shocked and startled, could she have glanced into Marston's mind, and seen, in what was passing there, the real extent of her danger.

Marston was walking, as usual, alone, and in the most solitary region of his lonely park. One hand grasped his walking-stick, not to lean upon it, but as if it were the handle of a battle-axe; the other was buried in his bosom; his dark face looked upon the ground, and he strode onward with a slow but energetic step, which had the air of deep resolution. He found himself at last in a little churchyard, lying far among the wild forest of his demesne, and in the midst of which, covered with ivy and tufted plants, now ruddy with autumnal tints, stood the ruined walls of a little chapel. In the dilapidated vault close by, lay buried many of his ancestors, and under the little wavy hillocks of fern and nettles, slept many an humble villager. He sat down upon a worn tombstone in this lowly ruin, and with his eyes fixed upon the ground, he surrendered his spirit to the stormy and evil thoughts which he had invited. Long and motionless he sat there, while his foul fancies and schemes began to assume shape and order. The wind rushing through the ivy roused him for a moment, and as he raised his gloomy eye, it alighted accidentally upon a skull, which some wanton hand had fixed in a crevice of the wall; he averted his glance quickly, but almost as quickly refixed his gaze upon the impassive symbol of death, with an expression lowering and contemptuous, and with an angry gesture struck it down among the weeds with his stick. He left the place, and wandered on through the woods.

“Men can’t control the thoughts that flit across their minds,” he muttered, as he went along, “any more than they can direct the shadows of the clouds that sail above them. They come and pass, and leave no stain behind. What, then, of omens, and that wretched effigy of death? Stuff — psha! *Murder,* indeed! I’m incapable of murder. I have drawn my sword upon a man in fair duel; but *murder!* Out upon the thought — out, out upon it.”

He stamped upon the ground with a pang at once of fury and horror. He walked on a little, stopped again, and folding his arms, leaned against an ancient tree.

“Mademoiselle de Barras, vous etes une traîtresse, and you shall go. Yes, go you shall; you have deceived me, and we must part.”

He said this with melancholy bitterness; and, after a pause, continued —

“I will have no other revenge. No; though, I dare say, she will care but little for this — very little, if at all.”

“And then, as to the other person,” he resumed, after a pause. “It is not the first time he has acted like a trickster. He has crossed me before, and I will choose an opportunity to tell him my mind. I won't mince matters with him either, and will not spare him one insulting syllable that he deserves. He wears a sword, and so do I; if he pleases, he may draw it; he shall have the opportunity; but, at all events, I will make it impossible for him to prolong his disgraceful visit at my house."

On reaching home and his own study, the servant, Merton, presented himself, and his master, too deeply excited to hear him then, appointed the next day for the purpose. There was no contending against Marston's peremptory will, and the man reluctantly withdrew. Here was apparently a matter of no imaginable moment — whether this menial should be discharged on that day, or on the morrow and yet mighty things were involved in the alternative.

There was a deeper gloom than usual over the house. The servants seemed to know that something had gone wrong, and looked grave and mysterious. Marston was more than ever dark and moody. Mrs. Marston's dimmed and swollen eyes showed that she had been weeping. Mademoiselle absented herself from supper, on the plea of a bad headache. Rhoda saw that something, she knew not what, had occurred to agitate her elders, and was depressed and anxious. The old clergyman whom we have already mentioned, bad called, and stayed to supper. Dr. Danvers was a man of considerable learning, strong sense, and remarkable simplicity of character. His thoughtful blue eye, and well-marked countenance, were full of gentleness and benevolence, and elevated by a certain natural dignity, of which purity and goodness, without one debasing shade of self-esteem and arrogance, were the animating spirit. Mrs. Marston loved and respected this good minister of God, and many a time had sought and found, in his gentle and earnest counsels, and in the overflowing tenderness of his sympathy, much comfort and support in the progress of her sore and protracted earthly trial. Most especially at one critical period in her history had he endeared himself to her, by interposing, and successfully, to prevent a formal separation, which (as ending for ever the one hope that cheered her on, even in the front of despair) she would probably not long have survived.

With Mr. Marston, however, he was far from being a favourite. There was that in his lofty and simple purity which abashed and silently reproached the sensual, bitter, disappointed man of the world. The angry pride of the scornful man felt its own meanness in the grand presence of a simple and humble Christian minister. And the very fact that all his habits had led him to hold such a character in contempt, made him but the more unreasonably resent the involuntary homage which its exhibition in Dr. Danvers' person invariably extorted from him. He felt in this good man's presence under a kind of imitating restraint — not, indeed, under any necessity whatever of modifying his ordinary conduct or language — but still he felt that he was in the presence of one with whom he had and could have no sympathy whatever, and yet one whom he could not help both admiring and respecting; and in these conflicting feelings were involved certain gloomy and humbling inferences about himself, which he hated, and almost feared to contemplate.

It was well, however, for the indulgence of Sir Wynston's conversational propensities, that Dr. Danvers had happened to drop in, for Marston was doggedly silent and sullen, and Mrs. Marston was herself scarcely more disposed than he to maintain her part in a conversation, so that, had it not been for the opportune arrival of the good clergyman, the supper must have been commenced with a very awkward and unsocial taciturnity.

Marston thought, and perhaps not erroneously, that Sir Wynston suspected something of the real state of affairs, and he was therefore incensed to perceive, as he thought, in his manner, very evident indications of his being in unusually good spirits. Thus disposed, the party sat down to supper.

"One of our number is missing," said Sir Wynston, affecting a slight surprise, which, perhaps, he did not feel.

"Mademoiselle de Barras — I trust she is well?" said Doctor Danvers, looking towards Marston.

"I suppose she is — I don't know," said Marston, drily, and with some embarrassment.

"Why, how should *he* know," said the baronet, gaily, but with something almost imperceptibly sarcastic in his tone. "Our friend, Marston, is privileged to be as ungallant as be pleases, except where he has the happy privilege to owe allegiance; but I, a gay young bachelor of fifty, am naturally curious. I really do trust that our charming French friend is not unwell." He addressed his inquiry to Mrs. Marston, who, with some slight confusion, replied —

"No — nothing, at least, serious; merely a slight headache. I am sure she will be well enough to come down to breakfast."

"She is indeed a very charming and interesting young person," said Doctor Danvers. "There is a certain simplicity and goodnature about her, which argue a good and kind heart, and an open nature."

"Very true, indeed, doctor," observed Berkley, with the same faint, but, to Marston, exquisitely provoking approximation to sarcasm. " There is, as you say, a very charming simplicity. Don't you think so, Marston?"

Marston looked at him for a moment, but continued silent.

"Poor mademoiselle! — she is indeed a most affectionate creature," said Mrs. Marston, who felt called upon to say something.

"Come, Marston, will you contribute nothing to the general approbation?" said Sir Wynston, who was gifted by nature with an amiable talent for teasing, which he was fond of exercising in a quiet way. "We have all, but you, said something handsome of our absent young friend."

"I never praise anybody, Wynston — not even you," said Marston, with an obvious sneer.

"Well, well, I must comfort myself with the belief that your silence covers a great deal of goodwill, and, perhaps, a little admiration, too," answered his cousin, significantly.

"Comfort yourself in any *honest* way you will, my dear Sir Wynston," retorted Marston, with a degree of asperity, which, to all but the baronet himself, was unaccountable. "You may be right — you may be wrong; on a subject so unimportant, it matters very little which; you are at perfect liberty to practise delusions, if you will, upon *yourself."*

"By-the-bye, Mr. Marston, is not your son about to come to this country?" asked Doctor Danvers, who perceived that the altercation was becoming, on Marston's part, somewhat testy, if not positively rude.

"Yes; I expect him in a few days," replied he, with a sudden gloom.

"You have not seen him, Sir Wynston?" asked the clergyman.

"I have that pleasure yet to come," said the baronet.

"A pleasure it is, I do assure you," said Doctor Danvers, heartily. " He is a handsome lad, with the heart of a hero; a fine, frank, generous lad, and as merry as a lark."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Marston; he is well enough, and has done pretty well at Cambridge. Doctor Danvers, take some wine."

It was strange, but yet mournfully true, that the praises which the good Doctor Danvers thus bestowed upon his son, were bitter to the soul of the unhappy Marston; they jarred upon his ear, and stung his heart, for his conscience converted them into so many latent insults and humiliations to himself.

"Your wine is very good, Marston. I think your clarets here are many degrees better than we can get in England," said Sir Wynston, sipping a glass of his favourite wine. "You Irish gentlemen are sad, selfish dogs; and, with all your grumbling, manage to collect the best of whatever is worth having about you."

"We sometimes succeed in collecting a pleasant party," retorted Marston, with ironical courtesy, "though we do not always command the means of entertaining them quite as we would wish."

It was the habit of Doctor Danvers, without respect of persons or places, to propose, before taking his departure from whatever domestic party he chanced to be thrown among for the evening, to read some verses from that holy book, on which his own hopes and peace were founded, and to offer up a prayer for all to the throne of grace. Marston, although he usually absented himself from such exercises, did not otherwise discourage them; but upon the present occasion, starting from a gloomy reverie, he himself was first to remind the clergyman of his customary observance. Evil thoughts loomed upon the mind of Marston, like measureless black mists upon a cold, smooth sea. They rested, grew, and darkened there; and no heavensent breath came silently to steal them away. Under this dread shadow, his mind lay waiting, like the DEEP, before the Spirit of God moved upon its waters — passive and awful. Why, for the first time now did religion interest him? The unseen, intangible, was even now at work within him. A dreadful power shook his very heart and soul. There was some strange, ghastly wrestling going on in his own immortal spirit — a struggle which made him faint — which he had no power to determine. He looked upon the holy influence of the good man's prayer — a prayer in which he could not join — with a dull, superstitious hope that the words, inviting better influence, though uttered by another, and with other objects, would like a spell, chase away the foul fiend that was busy with his thoughts. Marston sate, looking into the fire, with a countenance of stern gloom, upon which the wayward lights of the flickering hearth sported fitfully; while, at a distant table, Doctor Danvers sate down, and taking his well-worn Bible from his pocket, turned over its leaves, and began, in gentle but impressive tones, to read.

Sir Wynston was much too well-bred, to evince the slightest disposition to aught but the most proper and profound attention. The faintest imaginative gleam of ridicule might, perhaps, have been discerned in his features, as he leaned back in his chair, and, closing his eyes, composed himself to at least an attitude of attention. No man could submit with more patience to an inevitable bore.

In these things, then, thou hast no concern — the judgment troubles thee not — thou hast no fear of *death*, Sir Wynston Berkley; yet there is a heart beating near thee, the mysteries of which, could they glide out, and stand before thy face, would, perchance, appall thee — cold, easy man of the world. Ay, couldst thou but see with those cunning eyes of thine, but twelve brief hours into futurity, each syllable that falls from that good man's lips unheeded, would peal through thy heart and brain like maddening thunder. Hearken, hearken, Sir Wynston Berkley, perchance these are the farewell words of thy better angel — the last pleadings of despised mercy.

The party broke up. Dr. Danvers took his leave, and rode homeward, down the broad avenue, between the gigantic ranks of elm that closed it in. The full moon was rising above the distant hills — the mists lay like sleeping lakes in the laps of the hollows — and the broad demesne looked tranquil and sad under this chastened and silvery glory. The good old clergyman thought, as he pursued his way, that here at least, in a spot so beautiful and sequestered, the stormy passions and fell contentions of the outer world could scarcely penetrate. Yet, in that calm, secluded spot, and under the cold, pure light which fell so holily, what a hell was weltering and glowing! what a spectacle was that moon to go down upon!

As Sir Wynston was leaving the parlour for his own room, Marston accompanied him to the hall, and said, "I shan't play tonight, Sir Wynston."

"Ah, ha! — very particularly engaged?" suggested the baronet, with a faint, mocking smile; "well, my dear fellow, we must endeavour to make up for it tomorrow — eh?"

"I don't know *that"* said Marston, "and — In a word, there is no use, sir, in our masquerading with one another — each knows the other — each *understands* the other — I wish to have a word or two with you in your room tonight, where we shan't be interrupted."

Marston spoke in a fierce and grating whisper, and his countenance, more even than his accents, betrayed the intensity of his bridled fury. Sir Wynston, however, smiled upon his cousin, as if his voice had been melody, and his looks all sunshine.

"Very good, Marston, just as you please," he said, "only don't be later than one, as I shall be getting into bed about that hour."

"Perhaps, upon second thoughts, it is as well to defer what I have to say," said Marston, musingly. "Tomorrow will do as well; so*, perhaps,* Sir Wynston, I may not trouble you tonight."

"Just as suits you best, my dear Marston," replied the baronet, with a tranquil smile; "only don't come after the hour I have stipulated."

So saying, the baronet mounted the stairs, and made his way to his chamber. He was in excellent spirits, and in high goodhumour with himself; the object of his visit to Dunoran had been, as he now flattered himself, attained. He had conducted an affair requiring the profoundest mystery in its prosecution, and the wisest tactique in its management, almost to a triumphant issue — he had perfectly masked his design, and completely outwitted Marston; and to a person who piqued himself upon his clever diplomacy, and vaunted that he had never yet sustained a defeat in any object which he had seriously proposed to himself, such a combination of successes was for the moment quite intoxicating.

Sir Wynston not only enjoyed his own superiority with all the vanity of a selfish nature, but he no less enjoyed with a keen and malicious relish the intense mortification which, he was well assured, Marston must experience, and all the more acutely, because of the utter impossibility, circumstanced as he was, of his taking any steps to manifest his vexation, without compromising himself in a most unpleasant way.

Animated by those amiable feelings, Sir Wynston Berkley sate down, and wrote the following short letter, addressed to Mrs. Gray, Wynston Hall:

"Mrs. GRAY, — On receipt of this, have the sitting-rooms, and several bedrooms put in order, and thoroughly aired. Prepare for my use the suite of three rooms over the library and drawing room; and have the two great wardrobes, and the cabinet in the *state* bedroom, removed into the large dressing-room which opens upon the bedroom I have named. Make everything as comfortable as possible. If anything is wanted in the way of furniture, drapery, ornament, &c., you need only write to John Skelton, Esq., Spring-garden, London, stating what is required, and he will order and send them down. You must be expeditious, as I shall probably go down to Wynston, with two or three friends, at the beginning of next month.

"WYNSTON BERKLEY.

"P.S. — I have written to direct Arkins and two or three of the other servants to go down at once. Set them all to work immediately."

He then applied himself to another letter of considerably greater length, and from which, therefore, we shall only offer a few extracts. It was addressed to John Skelton, Esq., and began as follows: —

"My DEAR SKELTON, — You are, doubtless, surprised at my long silence, but I have had nothing very particular to say — my visit to this dull and uncomfortable place was (as you rightly surmise) not without its object — a little bit of wicked romance; the pretty demoiselle of Rouen, whom I mentioned to you more than once — la belle de Barras — was, in troth, the attraction that drew me hither; and, I *think* (for, as yet, she affects hesitation) I shall have no further trouble with her. She is a fine creature, and you will admit, when you have seen her, well worth taking some trouble about. She is, however, a very knowing little minx, and evidently suspects me of being a sad, fickle dog — and, as I surmise, has some plans, moreover, respecting my morose cousin, Marston — a kind of wicked Penruddock — who has carried all his London tastes into his Irish retreat, a paradise of bogs and bushes. There is, I am very confident, a *liason* in that quarter. The young lady is evidently a good deal afraid of him, and insists upon such precautions in our interviews, that they have been very few, and far between, indeed. To-day, there has been a *fracas* of some kind. I have no doubt that Marston, poor devil, is jealous. His situation is really pitiably comic — with an intriguing mistress, a saintly wife, and a devil of a jealous temper of his own. I shall meet Mary on reaching town. Has Clavering (shabby dog!) paid his I. O. U. yet? Tell the little opera woman she had better be quiet. She ought to know me by this time — I shall do what is right — but won't submit to be bullied. If she is troublesome, snap your fingers at her, on my behalf, and leave her to her remedy. I have written to Gray, to get things at Wynston in order. She will draw upon you for what money she requires. Send down two or three of the servants, if they have not already gone. The place is very dusty and dingy, and needs a f eat deal of brushing and scouring, shall see you in town very soon — by the way, their claret here is particularly good — so I ordered a prodigious supply from a Dublin house; it is consigned to you, and goes by the ' Lizard;' pay the freightage, and get Edwards to pack it; ten dozen or so may as well go down to Wynston, and send other wines in proportion. I leave details to you."

Some further directions upon other subjects followed; and having subscribed the dispatch, and addressed it to the gentlemanlike scoundrel who filled the onerous office of factotum to this profligate and exacting man of the world, Sir Wynston Berkley rang his bell, and gave the two letters into the hand of his man, with special directions to carry them *himself* in person, to the postoffice in the neighbouring village, early next morning. These little matters completed, Sir Wynston stirred his fire, leaned back in his easy chair, and smiled blandly over the sunny prospect of his imaginary triumphs.

It here becomes necessary to describe, in a few words, some of the local relations of Sir Wynston's apartments. The bedchamber which he occupied opened from the long passage of which we have already spoken — and there were two other smaller apartments opening from it in train. In the further of these, which was entered from a lobby, communicating by a back stairs with the kitchen and servants' apartments, lay Sir Wynston's valet — and the intermediate chamber was fitted up as a dressing-room for the baronet himself. These circumstances it is necessary to mention, that what follows may be clearly intelligible.

While the baronet was penning these records of vicious schemes — dire waste of wealth and time — irrevocable time! — Marston paced his study in a very different frame of mind. There was a gloom and disorder in the room accordant with those of his own mind. Shelves of ancient tomes, darkened by time, and upon which the dust of years lay sleeping — dark oaken cabinets, filled with piles of deeds and papers, among which the nimble spiders were crawling — and, from the dusky walls, several stark, pale ancestors, looking down fearfully from their tarnished frames. An hour, and another hour passed — and still Marston paced this melancholy chamber, a prey to his own fell passions and dark thoughts. He was not a superstitious man, but, in the visions which haunted him, perhaps, was something which made him unusually excitable — for, he experienced a chill of absolute horror, as, standing at the farther end of the room, with his face turned towards the entrance, he beheld the door noiselessly and slowly pushed open, by a pale, thin hand, and a figure, dressed in a loose white robe, glide softly in. He stood for some seconds gazing upon this apparition, as it moved hesitatingly towards him from the dusky extremity of the large apartment, before he perceived that the form was that of Mrs. Marston.

"Hey, ha! — Mrs. Marston — what on earth has called you hither?" he asked, sternly. "You ought to have been at rest an hour ago — get to your chamber, and leave me — I have business to attend to."

"Now, dear Richard, you must forgive me," she said, drawing near, and looking up into his haggard face with a sweet and touching look of timidity and love, "I could not rest until I saw you again — your looks have been all this night so unlike yourself — so strange and terrible — that I am afraid some great misfortune threatens you, which you fear to tell me of."

"My looks! why, curse it, must I give an account of my looks?" replied Marston, at once disconcerted and wrathful. "Misfortune! what misfortune can befall us more? No, there is nothing — nothing, I say, but your own foolish fancy — go to your room — go to sleep — my looks, indeed; psha!"

"I came to tell you, Richard, dear, that I will do, in all respects, just as you desire. If you continue to wish it, I will part with poor mademoiselle; though, indeed, Richard, I shall miss her more than you can imagine; and all your suspicions have wronged her deeply," said Mrs. Marston.

Her husband darted a sudden flashing glance of suspicious scrutiny upon her face; but its expression was frank, earnest, and noble. He was disarmed — he hung his head gloomily upon his breast, and was silent for a time. She came nearer, and laid her band upon his arm. He looked darkly into her upturned eyes, and a feeling which had not touched his heart for many a day — an emotion of pity — transient, indeed, but vivid — revisited him. He took her hand in his, and said, in gentler terms than she had heard him use for a long time —

"No, indeed, Gertrude, you have deceived yourself; no misfortune has happened, and if I *am* gloomy, the source of all my troubles is *within.* Leave me, Gertrude, for the present. As to the other matter — the departure of Mademoiselle de Barras — we can talk of that tomorrow — *now* I cannot; so let us part. Go to your room — good night."

She was withdrawing, and he added, in a subdued tone —

"Gertrude, I am very glad you came — *very* glad. Pray for me tonight."

He had followed her a few steps toward the door, and now stopped short — turned about, and walked dejectedly back again.

"I *am* right glad she came," he muttered, as soon as he was once more alone. "Wynston is provoking and fiery, too. Were I in my present mood, to seek a *tête-à-tête* with him, who knows what might come of it? Blood; my own heart whispers — *blood!* I'll not trust myself."

He strode to the study door, locked it, and taking out the key, shut it in the drawer of one of the cabinets.

"Now it will need more than accident or impulse to lead me to him. I cannot go, at least, without reflection — without premeditation. Avaunt, fiend! I have baffled you."

He stood in the centre of the room, crouching and scowling as he said this, and looked round with a glance half-defiant, half-fearful, as if he expected to see some dreadful form in the dusky recesses of the desolate chamber. He sate himself by the smouldering fire, in sombre and agitated ruminations. He was restless — he rose again, unbuckled his sword, which he had not loosed since evening, and threw it hastily into a corner. He looked at his watch, it was halfpast twelve — he glanced at the door, and thence at the cabinet in which he had placed the key; then he turned hastily, and sate down again. He leaned his elbows on his knees, and his chin upon his clenched hand; still he was restless and excited. Once more he arose, and paced up and down. He consulted his watch again; it was now but a quarter to one.

Sir Wynston's man having received the letters, and his master's permission to retire to rest, got into his bed, and was soon beginning to dose. We have already mentioned that his and Sir Wynston's apartments were separated by a small dressing-room, so that any ordinary noise or conversation could be heard but imperfectly from one to the other. The servant, however, was startled by a sound of something falling on the floor of his master's apartment, and broken to pieces by the violence of the shock. He sate up in his bed, listened, and heard some sentences spoken vehemently, and gabbled very fast. He thought he distinguished the words "wretch" and " God;" and there was something so strange in the tone in which they were spoken, that the man got up and stole noiselessly through the dressing-room, and listened at the door.

He heard him, as he thought, walking in his slippers through the room, and making his customary arrangements previously to getting into bed. He knew that his master had a habit of speaking when alone, and concluded that the accidental breakage of some glass or chimney-ornament had elicited the volley of words he had heard. Well knowing that, except at the usual hours, or in obedience to Sir Wynston's bell, nothing more displeased his master than his presuming to enter his sleeping-apartment while he was there, the servant quietly retreated, and, perfectly satisfied that all was right, composed himself to slumber, and was soon beginning to dose again.

The fretting adventures of the night, however, were not yet over. Waking, as men sometimes do, without any ascertainable cause — without a start or an uneasy sensation — without even a disturbance of the attitude of repose, he opened his eyes, and beheld Merton, the servant of whom we have spoken, standing at a little distance from his bed. The moonlight fell in a clear flood upon this figure: the man was ghastly pale; there was a blotch of blood on his face; his hands were clasped upon something which they nearly concealed; and his eyes, fixed on the servant who had just awakened, shone in the cold light, with a wild and deathlike glitter. This spectre drew close to the side of the bed, and stood for a few moments there with a look of agony and menace, which startled the newly-awakened man, who rose up aright, and said —

“Mr. Merton, Mr. Merton — in God’s name, what is the matter?” Merton recoiled at the sound of the voice; and, as he did so, dropped something on the floor, which rolled away to a distance; and he stood gazing silently and horribly upon his interrogator.

“Mr. Merton, I say, what *is* it?” urged the man. “Are you hurt? — your face is bloody.”

Merton raised his hand to his face mechanically, and Sir Wynston’s man observed that it, too, was covered with blood.

“Why, man,” he said, vehemently, and actually freezing with horror, “you are *all* bloody — hands and face; all over blood.”

“My hand is cut to the bone,” said Merton, in a harsh whisper; and speaking to himself, rather than addressing the servant— “I wish it was my neck — I wish to God I bled to death.”

“You have hurt your hand, Mr. Merton,” repeated the man, scarce knowing what he said.

“Ay,” whispered Merton, wildly drawing toward the bedside again; “ who told you I hurt my hand? It is cut to the bone, sure enough.”

He stooped for a moment over the bed, and then cowered down toward the floor, to search for what he had dropped.

“Why, Mr. Merton, what brings you here at this hour?” urged the man, after a pause of a few seconds. “ It is drawing toward morning.”

“Ay, ay,” said Merton, doubtfully, and starting upright again, while he concealed in his bosom what he had been in search of. “ Near morning, is it? Night and morning, it is all one to me. I believe I am going mad, by— “

“But, what do you want? — what did you come here for at this hour?” persisted the man.

“*What!* ay, *that* is it — why, his boots and spurs, to be sure. I forgot them. His — his — Sir Wynston’s boots and spurs — I forgot to take them, I say,” said Merton, looking toward the dressing-room; as if about to enter it.

“Don’t mind them tonight, I say; don’t go in there,” said the man, peremptorily, and getting out upon the floor. “I say, Mr. Merton, this is no hour to be going about, searching in the dark for boots and spurs. You’ll waken the master. I can’t have it, I say; go down, and let it be for tonight.”

Thus speaking, in a resolute and somewhat angry under-key, the valet stood between Merton and the entrance of the dressing-room; and, signing with his hand toward the other door of the apartment, continued —

“Go down, I say, Mr. Merton — go down; you may as well quietly, for, I tell you plainly, you shall neither go a step further, nor stay here a moment longer.”

The man drew his shoulders up, and made a sort of shivering moan, and clasping his hands together, shook them, as it seemed, in great agony. He then turned abruptly, and hurried from the room by the door leading to the kitchen.

“By my faith,” said the servant, “I am glad he is gone. The poor chap is turning crazy, as sure as I am a living man. I’ll not have him prowling about here any more, however — that I am resolved on.”

In pursuance of this determination, by no means an imprudent one as it seemed, he fastened the door communicating with the lower apartments upon the inside. He had hardly done this, when he heard a step traversing the stableyard, which lay under the window of his apartment. He looked out, and saw Merton walking hurriedly across, and into a stable at the farther end.

Feeling no very particular curiosity about his movements, the man hurried back to his bed. Merton’s eccentric conduct of late had become so generally remarked and discussed among the servants, that Sir Wynston’s man was by no means surprised at the oddity of the visit he had just had; nor, after the first few moments of suspense, before the appearance of blood had been accounted for, had he entertained any suspicions whatever connected with the man’s unexpected presence in the room. Merton was in the habit of coming up every night to take down Sir Wynston’s boots, whenever the baronet had ridden in the course of the day; and this attention had been civilly undertaken as a proof of goodwill toward the valet, whose duty this somewhat soiling and ungentlemanlike process would otherwise have been. So far, the nature of the visit was explained; and the remembrance of the friendly feeling and good offices which had been mutually interchanged, as well as of the inoffensive habits for which Merton had earned a character for himself, speedily calmed the uneasiness, for a moment amounting to actual alarm, with which the servant had regarded his appearance.

We must now pass on to the morrow, and ask the reader’s attention for a few moments to a different scene.

In contact with Dunoran, upon the northern side, and divided by a common boundary, lay a demesne, in many respects presenting a very striking contrast to its grander neighbour. It was a comparatively modern place. It could not boast the towering timber which enriched and overshadowed the vast and varied expanse of its aristocratic rival; but, if it was inferior in the advantages of antiquity, and, perhaps, also in some of those of nature, its superiority in other respects was striking and important. Dunoran was not more remarkable for its wild and neglected condition, than was Newton Park for the care and elegance with which it was kept. No one could observe the contrast, without, at the same time, divining its cause. The proprietor of the one was a man of wealth, fully commensurate with the extent and pretensions of the residence he had chosen — the owner of the other was a man of broken fortunes.

Under a green shade, which nearly met above them, a very young man, scarcely one-and-twenty, of a frank and sensible, rather than a strictly handsome countenance, was walking, side by side, with a light-haired, laughing, graceful girl, of some sixteen years. This girl, without being classically beautiful, had such an elegance and perfect symmetry of form, and such an unutterable prettiness of feature, that it would have been difficult to conceive a being more attractive.

These two *friends* (for they were, in truth, no more) were taking a morning ramble together; and the gay laugh of the girl, and the more sober tones of her companion, sounded pleasantly among the arches of the greenwood. The young man was George Mervyn, the only son of the present proprietor of the place; and the girl was his orphan niece, Emily Howard. The mutual feelings of the two cousins were, as we have said, those of mere friendship, untinctured by the faintest admixture of any more romantic ingredient; and, indeed, a close observer might easily have detected this in the perfectly disengaged and honestly familiar way in which each accosted the other. As they walked on, chatting, to the great gate, which was to be the boundary of their ramble, the clank of a horse's hoofs in quick motion upon the sequestered road which ran outside it, reached them; and hardly had they heard these sounds, when a young gentleman rode briskly by, directing his look into the demesne as he passed. He had no sooner seen them, than wheeling his horse about, he rode up to the iron gate, and dismounting, threw it open, and let his horse in.

“Ha! Charles Marston, I protest!” said the young man, quickening his pace to meet his friend. “Marston, ray dear fellow,” he called aloud, “how glad I am to see you.”

Miss Howard, on the contrary, walked rather slower than before, and blushed deeply; but as the handsome young man, with an air in which delight, tenderness, and admiration, were undisguisedly mingled, saluted her after his long absence, through her smiles and blushes, there was in her pretty face a look of such blended gratification and modesty, as made her quite beautiful.

There was another entrance into Newton Park, opening also from the same road, about half a mile further on; and Charles Marston, but too intent on prolonging the happiness of this chance meeting, made his way to lie through this. Thus the young people walked on, talking of a hundred things as they proceeded, in the fulness and joy of their hearts.

Between the fathers of the two young men, who thus walked so affectionately together, there subsisted unhappily no friendly feelings. There had been several slight disagreements between them, touching their proprietary rights, and one of these had ripened into a formal and somewhat expensive litigation, respecting a certain right of fishing claimed by each. This legal encounter had terminated in the defeat of Marston. Mervyn, however, promptly wrote to his opponent, offering him the free use of the waters for which they had thus sharply contested, and received a curt and scarcely civil reply, declining the proposed courtesy. This exhibition of resentment on Marston’s part, had been followed by some rather angry collisions, where chance or duty happened to throw them together. It is but justice to say that, upon all such occasions, Marston was the aggressor. But Mervyn was a somewhat testy old gentleman, and had a certain pride of his own, which was not to be trifled with. Thus, though near neighbours, the parents of the young friends were more than strangers to each other. On Mervyn’s side, however, this estrangement was unalloyed with bitterness, and simply of that kind which the great moralist would have referred to “defensive pride.” It did not include any member of Marston’s family, and Charles, as often as he desired it, which was, in truth, as often as his visits could escape the special notice of his father, was a welcome guest at Newton Park.

These details, respecting the mutual relation in which the two families stood, it was necessary to state, for the purpose of making what follows perfectly clear. The young people had now reached the further gate, at which they were to part. Charles Marston, with a heart beating happily in the anticipation of many a pleasant meeting, bid them farewell for the present, and in a few minutes more was riding up the broad, straight avenue, towards the gloomy mansion which closed in the hazy and sombre perspective. As he moved onward, he passed a labourer, with whose face from his childhood he had been familiar.

"How do you do, Mick?" he cried.

"At your sarvice, sir," replied the man, uncovering, "and welcome home, sir."

There was something dark and anxious in the man's looks, which ill accorded with the welcome he spoke, and which suggested some undefined alarm.

"The master, and mistress, and Miss Rhoda — are all well?" he asked, eagerly.

"All well, sir, thank God," replied the roan.

Young Marston spurred on, filled with vague apprehensions, and observing the man still leaning upon his spade, and watching his progress with the same gloomy and curious eye.

At the hall-door he met with one of the servants, booted and spurred.

"Well, Daly," he said, as he dismounted, "how are all at home?" This man, like the former, met his smile with a troubled countenance, and stammered —

"All, sir — that is, the master, and mistress, and Miss Rhoda — quite well, sir; but— "

"Well, well," said Charles, earnestly, " speak on — what is it?"

"Bad work, sir," replied the man, lowering his voice. "I am going off this minute for— "

"For what?" urged the young gentleman.

"Why, sir, for the coroner," replied he.

"The coroner — the coroner! Why, good God, what has happened?" cried Charles, aghast with horror.

"Sir Wynston," commenced the man, and hesitated.

"Well?" pursued Charles, pale and breathless.

"Sir Wynston — he — it is *he,"* said the man.

"He? Sir Wynston? Is he dead, or *who* is? — who is dead?" demanded the young man, fearfully.

"Sir Wynston, sir — it is he that is dead. There is bad work, sir — very bad, I'm afeard," replied the man.

Charles did not wait to inquire further, but with a feeling of mingled horror and curiosity, entered the house.

He hurried up the stairs, and entered his mother's sitting-room. She was there, perfectly alone, and so deadly pale, that she scarcely looked like a human being. In an instant they were locked in one another's arms.

"Mother — my dear mother, you are ill," said the young man anxiously.

"Oh, no, no, Charles, dear, but frightened — horrified and as she said this the poor lady burst into tears.

"What *is* all this horrible affair? — something about Sir Wynston. He is dead, I know, but is it — is it suicide?" he asked.

"Oh, no, *not* suicide," said Mrs. Marston, greatly agitated.

"Good God! — then he is murdered," whispered the young man, growing very pale.

"Yes, Charles — horrible — dreadful I can scarcely believe it," replied she, shuddering while she wept.

"Where is my father," inquired the young man, after a pause.

"Why, why, Charles, darling — why do you ask for him?" she said, wildly, grasping him by the arm, as she looked into his face with a terrified expression.

"Why — why, *he* could tell me the particulars of this horrible tragedy," answered he, meeting her agonized look with one of alarm and surprise, "as far as they have been as yet collected. How is he, mother — is he well."

"Oh, yes, quite well, thank God," she answered, more collectedly— "quite well, but, of course, greatly, dreadfully shocked."

"I will go to him, mother — I will see him," said he, turning towards the door.

"He has been wretchedly depressed and excited for some days," said Mrs. Marston, dejectedly, "and this dreadful occurrence will, I fear, affect him most deplorably."

The young man kissed her tenderly and affectionately, and hurried down to the library, where his father usually sat when he desired to be alone, or was engaged in business. He opened the door softly. His father was standing at one of the windows, his face haggard as from a night's watching, unkempt and unshorn, and with his hands thrust into his pockets. At the sound of the revolving door, he started, and seeing his son, first recoiled a little, with a strange, doubtful expression, and then rallying, walked quickly towards him with a smile, which had in it something still more painful.

Charles, I am glad to see you," he said, shaking him with an agitated pressure by both hands— "Charles, this is a great calamity, and what makes it still worse, is, that the murderer has escaped; it looks badly, you know."

He fixed his gaze for a few moments upon his son, turned abruptly, and walked a little way into the room — then, in a disconcerted manner, he added, hastily turning back —

"Not, that it signifies to *us, of* course — but I would fain have justice satisfied."

"And who is the wretch — the murderer?" inquired Charles.

"Who? Why, every one knows! — that scoundrel, Merton," answered Marston, in an irritated tone— "Merton murdered him in his bed, and fled last night; he is gone — escaped — and I — suspect Sir Wynston's man of being an accessory."

"Which was Sir Wynston's bedroom?" asked the young man.

"The room that old Lady — had — the room with the portrait of Grace Hamilton in it."

"I know — I know said the young man, much excited— "I should wish to see it."

"Stay," said Marston; "the door from the passage is bolted on the inside, and I have locked the other — here is the key, if you choose to go — but you must bring Hughes with you, and do not disturb anything — leave all as it is — the jury ought to see, and examine for themselves."

Charles took the key, and, accompanied by the awestruck servant, he made his way by the back stairs to the door opening from the dressing-room, which, as we have said, intervened between the valet's chamber and Sir Wynston's. After a momentary hesitation, Charles turned the key in the door, and stood "In the dark chamber of white death."

The shutters lay partly open, as the valet had left them some hours before, on making the astounding discovery, which the partially-admitted light revealed. The corpse lay in the silk-embroidered dressing-gown, and other habiliments, which Sir Wynston had worn, while taking his ease in his chamber, on the preceding night. The coverlet was partially dragged over it. The mouth was gaping, and filled with clotted blood; a wide gash was also visible in the neck, under the ear — and there was a thickening pool of blood at the bedside, and quantities of blood, doubtless from other wounds, had saturated the bedclothes under the body. There lay Sir Wynston, stiffened in the attitude in which the struggle of death had left him, with his stern, stony face, and dim, terrible gaze turned up.

Charles looked breathlessly for more than a minute upon this mute and unchanging spectacle, and then silently suffered the curtain to fall back again — and stepped, with the light tread of awe, again to the door. There he turned back, and pausing for a minute, said, in a whisper, to the attendant —

"And Merton did this?"

"Troth, I'm afeard he did, sir," answered the man, gloomily.

"And has made his escape?" continued Charles.

"Yes, sir; he stole away in the night-time," replied the servant, "after the murder was done" (and he glanced fearfully toward the bed)— "God knows where he's gone."

"The villain!" muttered Charles; "but what was his motive? why did he do all this — what does it mean?"

"I don't know exactly, sir, but he was very queer for a week and more before it," replied the man; « there was something bad over him for a long time."

"It is a terrible thing," said Charles, with a profound sigh— "a terrible and shocking occurrence."

He hesitated again at the door, but his feelings had sustained a terrible revulsion at sight of the corpse, and he was no longer disposed to prosecute his purposed examination of the chamber and its contents, with a view to conjecturing the probable circumstances of the murder.

"Observe, Hughes, that I have moved nothing in the chamber from the place it occupied when we entered," he said to the servant, as they withdrew.

He locked the door, and as he passed through the hall, on his return, he encountered his father, and, restoring the key, said —

“I could not stay there — I am almost sorry I have seen it — I am overpowered — what a determined, ferocious murder it was — the place is all in a pool of gore — he must have received many wounds.”

“I can’t say — the particulars will be elicited soon enough — those details are for the inquest — as for me, I hate such spectacles,” said Marston, gloomily; “go, now, and see your sister; you will find her there.”

He pointed to the small room where we have first seen her and her fair governess, and Charles obeyed the direction, and Marston proceeded himself to his wife’s sitting-room.

PART II.

“When Lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth Sin: and Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth Death.”

Charles Marston and his father parted, after the brief interview recorded in our last number, in the hall of Dunoran, upon the gloomy morning succeeding the murder of Sir Wynston. The young man, dispirited and horrified by the awful spectacle he had just contemplated, hurried to the little study occupied by his sister. Marston himself ascended, as we have said, the great staircase leading to his wife’s private sitting-room.

“Mrs. Marston,” he said, entering, “this is a hateful occurrence, a dreadful thing to hare taken place here; I don’t mean to affect *grief* which I don’t feel — but, the thing is very shocking, and particularly so, as haring occurred under my roof — but that cannot now be helped. I hare resolved to spare no exertions, and no influence, to bring the assassin to justice — and a coroner’s jury will, within a few hours, sift the evidence which we hare succeeded in collecting — but, my purpose in seeking you now is, to recur to the conversation we yesterday had, respecting a member of this establishment.”

“Mademoiselle de Barras?” suggested the lady.

“Yes, Mademoiselle de Barras,” echoed Marston; “ I wish to say, that, haring reconsidered the circumstances affecting her, I am absolutely resolved that she shall not continue to be an inmate of this house.”

He paused — and Mrs. Marston said —

“Well, Richard, I am sorry, very sorry for it; but your decision shall never be disputed by me.”

“Of course,” said Marston, drily; “ and, therefore, the sooner you acquaint her with it, and let her know that die must go, the better.”

Haring said this, he left her, and went to his own chamber, where he proceeded to make his toilet with elaborate propriety, in preparation for the scene which was about to take place under his roof.

Mrs. Marston, meanwhile, suffered from a horrible uncertainty. She never harboured, it is true, one doubt as to her husband’s perfect innocence of the ghastly crime which filled their house with fear and gloom; but, at the same time that she thoroughly and indignantly scouted the possibility of his, under any circumstances, being accessory to such a crime, she experienced a nervous and agonising anxiety lest any one else should possibly suspect him, however obliquely and faintly, of any participation whatever in the foul deed. This vague fear tortured her — it had taken possession of her mind; and it was the more acutely painful, because it was of a kind which precluded the possibility of her dispelling it, as morbid fears so often are dispelled, by taking counsel upon its suggestions with a friend.

The day wore on, and strange faces began to fill the great parlour. The coroner, accompanied by a physician, had arrived. Several of the gentry in the immediate vicinity had been summoned as jurors, and now began to arrive in succession. Marston, in a handsome and sober suit, received these visitors with a stately and melancholy courtesy, befitting the occasion. Mervyn and his son had both been summoned, and, of course, were in attendance. There being now a sufficient number to form a jury, they were sworn, and immediately proceeded to the chamber where the body of the murdered man was lying.

Marston accompanied them, and with a pale and stern countenance, and in a clear and subdued tone, called their attention successively to every particular detail which he conceived important to be noted. Haring thus employed some minutes, the jury again returned to the parlour, and the examination of the witnesses commenced.

Marston, at his own request, was first sworn and examined. He deposed merely to the circumstance of his parting, on the night previous, with Sir Wynston, and to the state in which he had seen the room and the body in the morning. He mentioned also the fact, that on hearing the alarm in the morning, he had hastened from his own chamber to Sir Wynston's, and found, on trying to enter, that the door opening upon the passage was secured on we inside. This circumstance shewed that the murderer must have made his egress at least through the valet's chamber, and by the backstairs. Marston's evidence went no further.

The next witness sworn was Edward Smith, the servant of the late Sir Wynston Berkley. His evidence was a narrative of the occurrences we have already stated. He described the sounds which he had overheard from his master's room, the subsequent appearance of Merton; and the conversation which had passed between them. He then proceeded to mention, that it was his master's custom to have himself called at seven o'clock, at which hour he usually took some medicine, which it was the valet's duty to bring to him; after which he either settled again to rest, or rose in a short time, if unable to sleep. Having measured and prepared this dose in the dressing-room, the servant went on to say, he had knocked at his master's door, and receiving no answer, had entered the room, and partly unclosed the shutters. He perceived the blood on the carpet, and on opening the curtains, saw his master lying with his mouth and eyes open, perfectly dead, and weltering in gore. He had stretched out his hand, and seized that of the dead man, which was quite stiff and cold; then, losing heart, he had run to the door communicating with the passage, but found it locked, and turned to the other entrance, and ran down the backstairs, crying "murder." Mr. Hughes, the butler, and James Carney, another servant, came immediately, and they all three went back into the room. The key was in the outer door, upon the inside, but they did not unlock it until they had viewed the body. There was a great pool of blood in the bed, and in it was lying a red-handled case-knife, which was produced, and identified by the witness. Just then they heard Mr. Marston calling for admission, and they opened the door with some difficulty, for the lock was rusty.

Mr. Marston had then ordered them to leave the things as they were, and had used very stern language to the witness. They had then left the room, securing both doors.

This witness underwent a severe and searching examination, but his evidence was clear and consistent.

In conclusion, Marston produced a dagger, which was stained with blood, and asked the man whether he recognised it.

Smith at once stated this to have been the property of his late master, who, when travelling, carried it, together with his pistols, along with him. Since his arrival at Dunoran, it had lain upon the chimneypiece in his bedroom, where he believed it to have been upon the previous night.

James Carney, one of Marston's servants, was next sworn and examined. He had, he said, observed a strange and unaccountable agitation and depression in Merton's manner for some days past; be had also been several times disturbed at night by his talking aloud to himself, and walking to and fro in his room. Their bedrooms were separated by a thin partition, in which was a window, through which Carney had, on the night of the murder, observed a light in Merton's room, and, on looking in, had seen him dressing hastily. He also saw him twice take up, and again lay down, the red-hafted knife which had been found in the bed of the murdered man. He knew it by the handle being broken near the end. He had no suspicion of Merton having any mischievous intentions, and lay down again to rest. He afterwards heard him pass out of his room, and go slowly up the backstairs leading to the upper story. Shortly after this he had fallen asleep, and did not hear or see him return. He then described, as Smith had already done, the scene which presented itself in the morning, on his accompanying him into Sir Wynston's bedchamber.

The next witness examined was a little boy, who described himself as "a poor scholar." His testimony was somewhat singular. He deposed that he bad come to the house on the preceding evening, and had been given some supper, and was afterwards permitted to sleep among the hay in one of the lofts. He had, however, discovered what he considered a snugger berth.

This was an unused stable, in the further end of which lay a quantity of hay. Among this he had lain down, and gone to sleep. He was, however, awakened in the course of the night, by the entrance of a man, whom he saw with perfect distinctness in the moonlight, and his description of his dress and appearance tallied exactly with those of Merton. This man occupied himself for some time in washing his hands and face in a stable bucket, which happened to stand by the door; and, during the whole of this process, he continued to moan and mutter like one in woful perturbation. He said, distinctly, twice or thrice, "by — , I am done for and every now and then he muttered, "and nothing for it, after all." When he had done washing his hands, he took something from his coatpocket, and looked at it, shaking his head; at this time he was standing with his back turned toward the hay, so that he could not see what this object might be. The man, however, put it into his breast, and then began to search hurriedly, as it seemed, for some hiding-place for it. After looking at the pavement, and poking at the chinks of the wall, he suddenly went to the window, and forced up the stone which formed the sill; under this 'he threw the object which the boy had seen him examine with so much perplexity, and then he readjusted the stone, and removed the evidences of its having been recently stirred. The boy was a little frightened, but very curious at all that he saw;

and when the man left the stable in which he lay, he got up, and following to the door, peeped after him. He saw him putting on an outside-coat and hat, near the yard gate; and then, with great caution, unbolt the wicket, constantly looking back towards the house; and so, let himself out. The boy was uneasy, and sat in the hay, wide awake, until morning. He then told the servants what he had seen, and one of the men having raised the stone, which *he* had not strength to lift, they found the dagger which Smith had identified as belonging to his master. This weapon was stained with blood; and some hair, which was found to correspond in colour with Sir Wynston's, was sticking in the crevice between the blade and the handle.

"It appears very strange that *one* man should have employed two distinct instruments of this kind," observed Mervyn, after a pause. A silence followed.

"Yes, strange; it *does* seem strange," said Marston, clearing his voice.

"Yet, it is clear," said another of the jury, "that the same hand *did* employ them — it is proved that the knife was in Merton's possession just as he left his chamber, and proved also that the dagger was secreted by him, after he quitted the house.

"Yes," said Marston, with a grizly sort of smile, and glancing sarcastically at Mervyn, while he addressed the last speaker— "I thank you for recalling my attention to the facts — it certainly is not a very pleasant suggestion, that there still remains within my household an undetected murderer."

Mervyn ruminated for a time, and said he should wish to put a few more questions to Smith and Carney. They were accordingly recalled, and examined in great detail, with a view to ascertain whether any indication of the presence of a second person having visited the chamber with Merton was discoverable. Nothing, however, appeared, except that the valet mentioned the noise and the exclamations which he had indistinctly heard.

"You did not mention that before, sir," said Marston, sharply.

"I did not think of it, sir," replied the man, "the gentlemen were asking me so many questions; but I told you, sir, about it in the morning."

"Oh, ah — yes, yes — I believe you did," said Marston; "but you then said that Sir Wynston often talked when he was alone — eh, sir?"

"Yes, sir, and so he used, which was the reason I did not go into the room when I heard it," replied the man.

“How long afterwards was it when you saw Merton in your own room?” asked Mervyn.

“I could not say, sir,” answered Smith; “I was soon asleep, wad can’t say how long I slept before he came.”

“Was it an hour?” pursued Mervyn.

“I can’t say,” said the man, doubtfully.

“Was it five hours?” asked Marston.

“No, sir; I am sure it was not five.”

“Could you swear it was more than half-an-hour?” persisted Marston.

No, I could not swear that,” answered he.

“I am afraid, Mr. Mervyn, you have found a mare’s nest,” said Marston, contemptuously.

“I have done my duty, sir,” retorted Mervyn, cynically; “ which plainly requires that I shall leave no doubt which the evidence of the witnesses can clear up, unsifted and unsatisfied. I happened to think it of some moment to ascertain, if possible, whether more persons than one were engaged in this atrocious murder — you don’t seem to think the question so important a one — different men, sir, take different views.”

“Views, sir, in matters of this sort, especially where they tend to multiply suspicions, and to implicate others, ought to be supported by somethin? more substantial than mere fancies,” retorted Marston.

“I don’t know what you call fancies,” replied Mervyn, testily, “ but, here are *two* deadly weapons, a knife And a dagger — each, it would seem, employed in doing this murder — if you see nothing odd in that, I can’t enable you to do so.”

“Well, sir,” said Marston, grimly, “the *whole* thing is, as you term it, *odd,* and I can see no object in your picking out this particular singularity for long-winded criticism, except to cast scandal upon my household, by leaving a hideous and vague imputation floating among the members of it. Sir — sir — this is a foul way,” he cried sternly, “to gratify a paltry spite.”

“Mr. Marston,” said Mervyn, rising and thrusting his hands into his pockets, while he confronted him to the foil as sternly, “the country knows in which of our hearts the spite, if any there is between us, is harboured. I owe you no friendship — but, sir, I cherish no malice either; and against the worst enemy I have on earth I am incapable of perverting an opportunity like this, and inflicting pain, under the pretence of discharging a duty.”

Marston was on the point of interrupting, but the coroner interposed, and besought them to confine their attention strictly to the solemn inquiry which they were summoned together to prosecute. Meanwhile George Mervyn and Charles Marston were deeply pained and embarrassed at this fiery renewal of mutual hostilities between their parents; at a moment, too, when each had cherished the hope that they would, at least upon this occasion, have met without the exhibition of angry feelings.

There remained still to he examined the surgeon who had accompanied the coroner, for the purpose of reporting upon the extent and nature of the injuries discoverable upon the person of the deceased. He accordingly deposed, that having examined the body, he found no less than five deep wounds, inflicted with some sharp instrument; two of them had actually penetrated the heart, and had, of course, caused instant death. Besides these, there were two contusions, one upon the back of the head, the other upon the forehead, with a slight abrasion of the eyebrow. There was a large lock of hair torn out by the roots at the front of the head, and the palm and fingers of the right hand were cut. This evidence having been taken, the jury once more repaired to the chamber where the body lay, and proceeded with much minuteness to examine the room, with a view to ascertain, if possible, more particularly, the exact circumstances of the murder.

The result of this elaborate scrutiny was as follows: The deceased, they conjectured, had fallen asleep in his easy chair, and, while he was unconscious, the murderer had stolen into the room, and, before attacking his victim, had secured the bedroom door upon the inside — this was argued from the non-discovery of blood upon the handle, or any other part of the door. It was supposed that he had then approached Sir Wynston, with the view either of robbing, or of murdering him while he slept, and that the deceased had awakened just after he had reached him — that a brief and desperate struggle had ensued, in which the assailant had struck his victim with his fist upon the forehead, and having stunned him, had hurriedly clutched him by the hair, and stabbed him with the dagger which lay close by upon the chimneypiece, forcing his head violently against the hack of the chair. This part of the conjecture was supported by the circumstance of there being discovered a lock of hair upon the ground, at the spot, and a good deal of blood. The carpet, too, was tossed, and a water-croft which had stood upon the table close by, was lying in fragments upon the floor. It was supposed that the murderer had then dragged the half-lifeless body to the bed, where, having substituted the knife, which he had probably brought to the room in the same pocket from which the boy afterwards saw him take the dagger, he dispatched him; and either hearing some alarm — perhaps the movement of the valet in the adjoining room, or from some other cause — he dropped the knife in the bed, and was not able to find it again. The wounds upon the hand of the dead man indicated his having caught and struggled to hold the blade of the weapon with which he was assailed. The impression of a bloody hand thrust under the bolster, where it was Sir Wynston's habit to place his purse and watch, when making his arrangements for the night, supplied the motive of this otherwise unaccountable atrocity.

After some brief consultation, the jury agreed upon a verdict of wilful murder against John Merton, a finding of which the coroner expressed his entire approbation.

As the two young friends, George Mervyn and Charles, passed through the hall, they saw Rhoda gliding into her little study. Mervyn hesitated, as if about to follow her; but sighed, and said, after a moment's pause —

"Charles, I think she is more beautiful than ever."

Charles looked gratified, and replied —

"She is greatly improved since I saw her last — she is certainly *very* pretty."

They walked on in silence, and after a few seconds, Mervyn said, with a sigh —

"You can't think how my father's unhappy disagreement with yours afflicts me. I could have died with vexation to-day."

"It is, indeed, a deplorable thing — such near neighbours, too," replied Charles.

It was quite plain in what direction the thoughts of the two young men were travelling.

Marston, as a justice of the peace, had informations, embodying the principal part of the evidence given before the coroner, sworn against Merton, and transmitted a copy of them to the castle. A reward for the apprehension of the culprit was forthwith offered in the *Gazette,* but for some months without effect.

Marston had, in the interval, written to several of Sir Wynston’s many relations announcing the catastrophe, and requesting that steps might immediately be taken to have the body removed. Meanwhile, undertakers were busy in the chamber of death. The corpse was inclosed in lead, and that again in cedar, and a great oak shell, covered with crimson cloth and goldheaded nails, and with a gilt plate recording the age, title, &c. &c., was screwed down firmly over all.

Nearly three weeks elapsed before any reply to Marston’s letters were received. A short epistle at last arrived from Lord — , the late Sir Wynston’s uncle, deeply regretting “the sad and inexplicable occurrence;” and adding, that the will which, on receipt of the “distressing intelligence,” was immediately opened and read, contained no direction whatever respecting the sepulture of the deceased, which had therefore better be completed as modestly and expeditiously as possible, in the neighbourhood of Dunoran; and, in conclusion, he directed that the accounts of the undertakers, flee., employed upon the melancholy occasion, might be sent in to Mr. Skelton, who had kindly undertaken to leave London for Ireland without any delay, for the purpose of completing these last arrangements, and who would, in any matter of business connected with the deceased, represent him, Lord H — , as executor of the late baronet.

This letter was followed, in a day or two, by the arrival of Skelton — a well-dressed, languid, impertinent London tuft-hunter — a good deal faded — with a somewhat sallow and puffy face, charged with a pleasant combination at once of meanness, insolence, and sensuality — just such a person as Sir Wynston’s parasite might have been expected to prove.

However well disposed to impress the natives of Dunoran with high notions of his extraordinary refinement and importance, he very soon discovered, that, in Marston, he had stumbled upon a man of the world, and one thoroughly versed in the ways and characters of London life. After some ineffectual attempts, therefore, to overawe and astonish his host, Mr. Skelton became aware of the fruitlessness of the effort, and condescended to abate somewhat of his pretensions.

Marston could not avoid inviting this person to pass the night at Dunoran, an invitation which was accepted, of course; and next morning, after a late breakfast, Mr. Skelton observed, with a yawn —

"And now, about this body — poor Berkley! — what do you propose to do with him?"

"I have no proposition to make," said Marston, drily; "it is no affair of mine, except that the body may be removed without more delay. I have no suggestion to offer."

"H— 's notion was to have him buried as near the spot as may be," said Skelton.

Marston nodded.

"There is a kind of vault — is there not — in the demesne, a family burial place?" inquired his visitor.

"Yes, sir," replied Marston, curtly.

"Well?" drawled Skelton.

"Well, sir; what then?" responded Marston.

"Why, as the wish of the parties is to have him buried — poor fellow! — as quietly as possible, I think he might just as well be laid *there* as anywhere else."

"Had I desired it, Mr. Skelton, I should myself have made the offer," said Marston, abruptly.

"Then you don't wish it?" said Skelton.

"No, sir; certainly not — most peremptorily not," answered Marston, with more sharpness than, in his early days, he would have thought quite consistent with politeness.

"Perhaps," replied Skelton, for want of something better to say, and with a callous sort of levity— "perhaps you hold the idea — some people *do* — that murdered men can't rest in their graves until their murderers have expiated their guilt?"

Marston made no reply, but shot two or three livid glances from under his brow, at the speaker.

"Well, then, at all events," continued Skelton, indolently resuming his theme, "if you decline your assistance, may I, at least, hope for your advice. Knowing nothing of this country, I would ask you whither you would recommend me to have the body conveyed?"

"I don't care to advise in the matter," said Marston, "but if I were directing, I should have the remains buried in the city of Dublin. It is not more than twenty miles from this; and if at any future time his family should desire to remove the body to England, it could be effected more easily from thence. But you can decide."

"Egad! I believe you are right," said Skelton, glad to be relieved of the trouble or thinking about the matter; "and I shall take your advice."

In accordance with this declaration, the body was, within four-and-twenty hours, removed to Dublin, and buried there in St. Peter's churchyard, Mr. Skelton attending on behalf of Sir Wynston's numerous and afflicted friends and relatives.

There are certain heartaches for which time brings no healing; nay, which grow but the sorer and fiercer as days and years roll on. Of this kind, perhaps, was the stern and bitter feeling which now darkened the face of Marston, with an almost perpetual gloom. His habits became even more unsocial than before. The society of his son he no longer seemed to enjoy. Long and solitary rambles in his wild and extensive demesne consumed the listless hours of his waking existence; and when the weather prevented this, he shut himself up, upon pretence of business, in his study.

He had not, since the occasion we have already mentioned, referred to the intended departure of Mademoiselle de Barras. Truth to say, his feelings with respect to that young lady were of a conflicting and mysterious kind; and as often as his dark thoughts wandered to her (which indeed was frequently enough), his muttered exclamations seemed to imply some painful and horrible suspicions respecting her.

"Yes," he would mutter, "I thought I heard your light foot upon the lobby, on that *accursed* night. *Fancy* / well it *may* have been, but assuredly a *strange* fancy. I cannot comprehend that woman. She baffles my scrutiny. I have looked into her face with an eye she might well understand, were it indeed as I sometimes suspect, and she has been calm and unmoved. I have watched and studied her, still doubt — doubt — hideous doubt — is she what she seems, or — a TIGRESS?"

Mrs. Marston, on the other hand, procrastinated from day to day the painful task of announcing to Mademoiselle de Barras the stern message with which she had been charged by her husband. And thus several weeks had passed, and she began to think that his silence upon the subject, notwithstanding his seeing the young French lady at breakfast every morning, amounted to a kind of tacit intimation that the sentence of banishment was not to be carried into immediate execution, but to be kept suspended over the unconscious offender.

It was now six or eight weeks since the hearse carrying away the remains of the illfated Sir Wynston Berkley, had driven down the dusky avenue; the autumn was deepening into winter, and as Marston gloomily trod the lonely woods of Dunoran, the withered leaves whirled drearily along his pathway, and the gusts that swayed the mighty branches above him were rude and ungenial. It was a bleak and sombre day, and as he broke into a long and picturesque vista, deep among the most sequestered woods, be suddenly saw before him, and scarcely twenty paces from the spot on which he stood, an apparition, which for some moments absolutely froze him to the earth.

Travelsoiled, tattered, pale, and wasted, John Merton, the murderer, stood before him. He did not exhibit the smallest disposition to turn about and make his escape. On the contrary, he remained perfectly motionless, looking upon ‘his former master with a wild and sorrowful gaze. Marston twice or thrice essayed to speak; his face was white as death, and had he beheld the spectre of the murdered baronet himself, he could not have met the sight with a countenance of ghastlier horror.

“Take me, sir,” said Merton, doggedly.

Still Marston did not stir.

“Arrest me, sir, in God’s name — here I am,” he repeated, dropping his arras by his side. “I’ll go with you, wherever you tell me.”

“Murderer!” cried Marston, with a sudden burst of furious horror— “murderer — assassin — miscreant! — take *that.”*

And, as he spoke, he discharged one of the pistols he always carried about him full at the wretched man. The shot did not take effect, and Merton made no other gesture but to clasp his hands together, with an agonized pressure, while his bead sunk upon his breast. w Shoot me — shoot me,” he said, hoarsely; “kill me like a dog: better for me to be dead than what I am.” The report of Marston’s pistol had, however, reached another ear; and its ringing echoes had hardly ceased to vibrate among the trees, when a stern shout was heard not fifty yards away, and, breathless and amazed, Charles Marston sprang to the place. His father looked from Merton to him, and from him again to Merton, with a guilty and stupined scowl, still holding the smoking pistol in his hand.

“What — now! Good God — Merton!” ejaculated Charles.

"Ay, sir, Merton — ready to go to gaol, or wherever you will," said the man, recklessly.

"A murderer — a madman — don't believe him," muttered Marston, scarce audibly, with lips as white as wax.

"Do you surrender yourself, Merton?" demanded the young man, sternly, advancing toward him.

"Yes, sir; I desire nothing more — God knows I wish to die," responded he, despairingly, and advancing slowly to meet Charles.

"Come, then," said young Marston, seizing him by the collar— "come quietly to the house. Guilty and unhappy man, you are now my prisoner, and, depend upon it, I shall not let you go.'

"I don't want to go, I tell you, sir. I have travelled fifteen miles to-day, to come here and give myself up to the master."

"Accursed madman!" said Marston, unconsciously gazing at the prisoner, and then suddenly rousing himself, he said, "Well, miscreant, you wish to die, and, by — , you are in a fair way to *have* your wish."

"So best," said the man, doggedly. " I don't want to live — I wish I was in my grave — I wish I was dead a year ago."

Some fifteen minutes afterwards, Merton, accompanied by Marston and his son Charles, entered the hall of the mansion which, not ten weeks before, he had quitted under circumstances so guilty and terrible. When they reached the house, Merton seemed much agitated, and wept bitterly on seeing two or three of his former fellow-servants, who looked on him in silence as they passed, with a gloomy and fearful curiosity. These, too, were succeeded by others, peeping and whispering, and upon one pretence or another, crossing and recrossing the hall, and stealing hurried glances at the criminal. Merton sate with his face buried in his hands, sobbing, and taking no note of the humiliating scrutiny of which he was the subject. Meanwhile, Marston, pale and agitated, made out his committal, and having sworn in several of his labourers and servants as special constables, dispatched the prisoner in their charge to the county gaol, where, under lock and key, we leave him in safe custody for the present.

After this event, Marston became excited and restless. He scarcely eat or slept, and his health seemed now as much shattered as his spirits had been before. One day he glided into the room in which, as we have said, it was Mrs. Marston's habit frequently to sit alone. His wife was there, and, as he entered, she uttered an exclamation of doubtful joy and surprise. He sate down near her in silence, and for some time looked gloomily on the ground. She did not care to question him, and anxiously waited until he should open the conversation. At length he raised his eyes, and, looking full at her, asked abruptly —

"Well, what about mademoiselle?" Mrs. Marston was embarrassed, and hesitated.

"I told you what I wished with respect to that young lady some time ago, and commissioned you to acquaint her with my pleasure; and yet I find her still here, and apparently as much established as ever.

Again Mrs. Marston hesitated. She scarcely knew how to confess to him that she had not conveyed his message.

"Don't suppose, Gertrude, that I wish to find fault. I merely wanted to know whether you had told Mademoiselle de Barras, that we were agreed as to the necessity, or expediency, or what you please, of dispensing henceforward with her services. I perceive by your manner that you have not done so. I have no doubt your motive was a kind one, but my decision remains unaltered; and I now assure you again that I wish you to speak to her — I wish you explicitly to let her know my wishes and yours."

"Not mine, Richard," she answered, faintly.

,l Well, *mine,* then," he replied, roughly. "We shan't quarrel about that."

"And when — how soon — do you wish me to speak to her on this, to both of us, most painful subject?" asked she, with a sigh.

"To-day — this hour — this minute, if you can; in short, the sooner the better," he replied, rising. "I see no reason for holding the thing back any longer. I am sorry my wishes were not complied with immediately. Pray, let there be no further hesitation or delay. I shall expect to learn this evening that all is arranged."

Marston having thus spoken, left her abruptly — went down to his study with a swift step — shut himself in, and throwing himself into a great chair, gave a loose to his agitation, which was extreme.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Marston had sent for Mademoiselle de Barras, anxious to get through her painful task as speedily as possible. The fair French girl speedily presented herself.

"Sit down, mademoiselle," said Mrs. Marston, taking her hand kindly, and drawing her to the priediéu chair beside herself.

Mademoiselle de Barras sate down, and, as she did so, read the countenance of her patroness with one rapid glance of her flashing eyes. These eyes, however, when Mrs. Marston looked at her the next moment, were sunk softly and sadly upon the floor. There was a heightened colour, however, in her cheek, and a quicker heaving of the bosom, which indicated the excitement of an anticipated and painful disclosure. The outward contrast of the two women, whose hands were so lovingly locked together, was almost as striking as the moral contrast of their hearts. The one, so chastened, sad, and gentle; the other, so capable of pride and passion — so darkly excitable, and yet, so mysteriously beautiful. The one, like a Niobe, seen in the softest moonshine; the other, a Venus, lighted in the glare of distant fires.

"Mademoiselle, dear mademoiselle, I am so much grieved at what I have to say, that I hardly know how to speak to you," said poor Mrs. Marston, pressing her hand; "but Mr. Marston has twice desired me to tell you, what you will hear with far less pain than it costs me to say it."

Mademoiselle de Barras stole another flashing glance at her companion, but did not speak.

"Mr. Marston still persists, mademoiselle, in desiring that we shall part."

"Est il possible?" cried the Frenchwoman, with a genuine start.

"Indeed, mademoiselle, you may well be surprised," said Mrs. Marston, encountering her full and dilated gaze, which, however, dropped again in a moment to the ground. "You may, indeed, naturally be surprised and shocked at this, to me, most severe decision."

"When did he speak last of it?" asked she, rapidly.

"But a few moments since," answered Mrs. Marston.

"Ha!" said mademoiselle, and remained silent and motionless for more than a minute.

"Madame," she cried at last, mournfully, "I suppose, then, I must go; but it tears my heart to leave *you* and dear Miss Rhoda. I would be very happy if, before departing, you would permit me, dear madame, once more to assure Mr. Marston of my innocence, and, in his presence, to call heaven to witness how unjust are all his suspicions."

"Do so, mademoiselle, and I will add my earnest assurances again; though, heaven knows," she said despondingly, "I anticipate little success; but it is well to leave no chance untried."

Marston was sitting, as we have said, in his library. His agitation had given place to a listless gloom, and he leaned back in his chair, his head supported by his hand, and undisturbed except by the occasional fall of the embers upon the hearth. There was a knock at the chamber door. His back was toward it, and, without turning or moving, he called to the applicant to enter. The door opened — closed again — a light tread was audible — a tall shadow darkened the wall — Marston looked round, and Mademoiselle de Barras was standing before him. Without knowing how or why, he rose, and stood gazing upon her in silence.

“Mademoiselle de Barras,” he said at last, in a tone of cold surprise.

“Yes, poor Mademoiselle de Barras,” replied the sweet voice of the young Frenchwoman, while her Ups hardly moved as the melancholy tones passed them.

“Well, Mademoiselle, what do you desire?” he asked, in the same cold accents, and averting his eyes.

“Ah, Monsieur, do you ask — can you pretend to be ignorant? Have you not sent roe a message — a cruel, cruel message?”

She spoke so low and gently, that a person at the other end of the room could hardly have heard her words.

“Yes, Mademoiselle de Barras, I *did* send you a message,” he replied, doggedly— “a cruel one you will scarcely presume to call it, when you reflect upon your own conduct, and the circumstances which have provoked the measures I have taken.”

“What have I done, Monsieur? — what circumstances do you mean?” asked she, plaintively.

“What nave you done! A pretty question truly — ha, ha!” he repeated, bitterly, and then added with suppressed vehemence— “ask your own heart, Mademoiselle.” ft I have asked — I do ask, and my heart answers — *nothing*,” she replied, raising her fine melancholy eyes for a moment to his face.”

“It lies, then,” ho retorted, with a fierce scoff.

“Monsieur, before heaven I swear, you wrong me foully,” she said earnestly, clasping her hands together.

“Did ever woman say she was accused *rightly*, Mademoiselle?” retorted Marston, with a sneer.

"I don't know — I don't care; I only know that *I* am innocent," continued she, piteously. "I call heaven to witness you have wronged me."

"Wronged you! — why, after all. with what have I charged you?" said he, scoffingly; "but let that pass. I have formed my opinions — arrived at my conclusions; if I have not named them broadly, you at least seem to understand their nature thoroughly. I know the world; I am no novice in the arts of women, Mademoiselle. Reserve your vows and attestations for schoolboys and simpletons; they are sadly thrown away upon me."

Marston paced to and fro, with his hands thrust into his pockets, as he thus spoke.

"Then you don't, or rather you will not believe what I tell you?" said she, imploringly.

"No," he answered, drily and slowly, as he passed her; "I don't, and I won't (as you say) believe one word of it, so, pray spare yourself any further trouble about the matter."

She raised her head, and darted after him a glance that seemed absolutely to blaze, and at the same time smote her little hand fast clenched upon her breast; the words, however, that trembled on her pale lips were not uttered; her eyes were again cast down, and her fingers played with the little locket that hung round her neck.

"I must make, before I go," she said, with a deep sigh and a melancholy voice, "one confidence — one last confidence; judge me by it. You cannot choose, but believe me now; it is a secret, and it must even here be *whispered, whispered, whispered!*"

As she spoke, the colour fled from her face, and her tones became so strange and resolute, that Marston turned short upon his heel and stopped before her. She looked in his face; he frowned, but lowered his eyes. She drew nearer, laid her hand upon his shoulder, and whispered for a few moments in his ear. He raised his face suddenly; its features were sharp and fixed; its hue was changed; it was livid and moveless, like a face cut in gray stone. He staggered back a little, and a little more, and then a little more, and fell backward. Fortunately the chair in which he had been sitting received him, and he lay there insensible as a corpse. When at last his eyes opened, there was no gleam of triumph — no shade of anger, nothing perceptible of guilt or menace in the young woman's countenance; the flush had returned to her cheeks; her dimpled chin had sunk upon her full, white throat; sorrow, shame, and pride seemed struggling in her handsome face; and she stood before him like a beautiful penitent, who has just made a strange and humbling shrift to her father confessor.

Next day, Marston was mounting his horse for a solitary ride through his park, when Doctor Danvers rode abruptly into the courtyard from the back entrance. Marston touched his hat, and said —

"I don't stand onforms with you, doctor, and you, I know, will waive ceremony with me. You will find Mrs. Marston at home."

"Nay, my dear sir," interrupted the clergyman, sitting firm in his saddle, "my business lies with *you* to-day."

"The devil it does!" said Marston, with discontented surprise.

"Truly it does, sir," repeated he, with a look of gentle reproof, for the profanity of Marston's ejaculation, far more than the rudeness of his manner, offended him, "and I grieve that your surprise should have somewhat carried you away— "

"Well, then, Doctor Danvers," interrupted Marston, drily, and without heeding his concluding remark, " if you really *have* business with me, it is, at all events, of no very pressing kind, and may be as well told after supper as now; so, pray, go into the house and rest yourself — we can talk together in the evening."

"My horse is not tired," said the clergyman, patting his steed's neck; "and if you do not object, I will ride by your side for a short time, and as we go, I can say out what I have to tell."

"Well, well, be it so," said Marston, with suppressed impatience, and without more ceremony, he rode slowly along the avenue, and turned off upon the soft sward in the direction of the wildest portion of his wooded demesne, the clergyman keeping close beside him. They proceeded some little way at a walk before Doctor Danvers spoke.

"I have been twice or thrice with that unhappy man," at length he said.

"*What* unhappy man? — unhappiness is no distinguishing singularity — is it?" said Marston, sharply.

"No, truly, you have well said," replied Dr. Danvers; "true it is that man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward. I speak, however, of your servant, Merton — a *most* unhappy wretch."

"Ha! you have been with *him*, you say?" replied Marston, with evident interest and anxiety.

"Yes, several times, and conversed with him long and gravely," continued the clergyman.

"Humph! I thought that had been the chaplain's business, not yours, my good friend," observed Marston.

"He has been unwell," replied Dr. Danvers; "and thus, for a day or two, I took his duty, and this poor man, Merton, having known something of me, preferred seeing me rather than a stranger — and so, at the chaplain's desire and his, I continued my visits."

"Well, and you have taught him to pray and sing psalms, I suppose; and what has come of it all?" demanded Marston, testily.

"He does pray, indeed — poor man! and I trust his prayers are heard with mercy at the throne of grace," said his companion, in his earnestness disregarding the scoffing tone of his companion. "He is full of compunction, and admits his guilt."

"Ho! that is well — well for *himself* — well for his *soul,* at least — you are sure of it — he confesses — confesses his guilt?"

Marston put his question so rapidly and excitedly, that the clergy mail looked at him with a slight expression of surprise — and recovering himself, he added, in an unconcerned tone —

"Well, well — it was just as well he did so; the evidence is too clear for doubt or mystification; he knew he had no chance, and has taken the seemliest course — and, doubtless, the best for his hopes hereafter."

"I did not question him upon the subject," said Doctor Danvers; "I even declined to hear him speak upon it at first — but he told me he was resolved to offer no defence, and that he saw the finger of God in the fate which had overtaken him."

"He will plead guilty, then, I suppose?" suggested Marston, watching the countenance of his companion with an anxious and somewhat sinister eye.

"His words seem to imply so much," answered he; "and having thus frankly owned his guilt, and avowed his resolution to let the law take its due course in his case, without obstruction or evasion, I urged him to complete the grand work he had begun, and to confess to you, or to some other magistrate fully, and in detail, every circumstance connected with the perpetration of the dreadful deed."

Marston knit his brows, and rode on for some minutes in silence. At length, he said abruptly —

"In *this*, it seems to me, sir, you a little exceeded your commission."

"How so, my dear sir?" asked the clergyman.

"Why, sir," answered Marston, "the man may possibly change his mind before the day of trial, and it is the hangman's office, not yours, my good sir, to fasten the halter about his neck. You will pardon my freedom; but, were this deposition made as you suggest, it would undoubtedly hang him."

"God forbid, Mr. Marston," rejoined Danvers, "that *I* should induce the unhappy man to forfeit his last chances of escape, and to shut the door of human mercy against himself, but on this he seems already resolved; he says so; he has solemnly declared his resolution to me — and even against my warning, again and again reiterated the same declaration."

"*That* I should have thought quite enough, were I in your place, without inviting a detailed description of the whole process by which this detestable butchery was consummated. What more than the simple knowledge of the man's guilt does any mortal desire, guilty, or not guilty, is the plain question which the law asks, and no more; take my advice, sir, as a poor Protestant layman, and leave the arts of the confessional and inquisition to popish priests."

"Nay, Mr. Marston, you greatly misconceive me; as matters stand, there exists among the coroner's jury, and thus among the public, some faint and unfounded suspicion of the possibility of Merton's having had an accessory or accomplice in the perpetration of this foul murder.

"It is a lie, sir — a malignant, d — d lie — the jury believe no such thing, nor the public neither," said Marston, starting in his saddle, and speaking in a voice of thunder; "you have been crammed with lies, sir; malicious, unmeaning, vindictive lies; lies invented to asperse my family, and torture my feelings — suggested in my presence by that scoundrel Mervyn, and scouted by the common sense of the jury."

"I do assure you," replied Doctor Danvers, in a voice which seemed scarcely audible, after the stunning and passionate explosion of Marston's wrath, " I did not imagine that you could feel thus sorely upon the point, nay, I thought that you yourself were not without such painful doubts."

"Again, I tell you, sir," said Marston, in a tone somewhat calmer, but no less stern, "such doubts as you describe have *no* existence; your unsuspecting ear has been alarmed by a vindictive wretch, an old scoundrel who has scarce a passion left but spite towards me — few such there are, thank God — few such villains as would, from a man's very calamities distil poison to kill the peace and character of his family."

"I am sorry, Mr. Marston," said the clergyman, "you have formed so ill an opinion of a neighbour, and I am very sure that Mr. Mervyn meant *you* no ill in frankly expressing whatever doubts still rested on his mind, after the evidence was taken."

"He did — the scoundrel!" said Marston, furiously striking his hand, in which his whip was clutched, upon his thigh— "he *did* mean to wound and torture me; and with the same object he persists in circulating what he calls his doubts. Meant me no ill! forsooth I why, my good God, sir, could any man be so stupid as not to perceive that the suggestion of such suspicions — absurd, contradictory, incredible as they were — was precisely the thing to exasperate feelings, God knows, sufficiently troubled already; and not content with raising the question, where it was scouted, as I said, as soon as named, the vindictive slanderer proceeds to propagate and publish his pretended surmises — d — n "Mr. Marston, you will pardon me when I say that, as a Christian minister, I cannot suffer a spirit so ill as that you manifest, and language so unseemly as that you have just uttered, to pass unreproved," said Danvers, solemnly. "If you will cherish those bitter and unchristian feelings, at least for the brief space that I am with you, command your fierce, unbecoming words."

Marston was about to make a sneering retort, but restrained himself, and turned his head away.

"The wretched man himself appears now very anxious to make some further disclosures," resumed Doctor Danvers, after a pause, "and I recommended him to make them to *you,* Mr. Marston, as the most natural depository of such a statement."

"Well, Mr. Danvers, to cut the matter short, as it appears that a confession of some sort is to be made, be it so. I will attend and receive it. The judges will not be here for eight or ten weeks to come, so there is no great hurry about it. I shall ride down to the town, and see him in the jail some time within the next week."

With this assurance, Marston parted from the old clergyman, and rode on alone through the furze and fern of his wild and sombre park.

After supper that evening, Marston found himself alone in the parlour with his wife. Mrs. Marston availed herself of the opportunity to redeem her pledge to Mademoiselle de Barras. She was not aware of the strange interview which had taken place between him and the lady for whom she pleaded. The result of her renewed entreaties perhaps the reader has anticipated. Marston listened, doubted — listened, hesitated again — put questions, pondered the answers — debated the matter inwardly, and at last gruffly consented to give the young lady another trial, and permit her to remain for some time longer. Poor Mrs. Marston, little suspecting the dreadful truth, overwhelmed her husband with gratitude for granting to her entreaties (as he had predetermined to do) this fatal boon. Not caring to protract this scene — either from a disinclination to listen to expressions of affection, which had long lost their charm for him, and had become even positively distasteful, or perhaps from some instinctive recoil from the warm expression of gratitude from lips which, were the truth revealed, might justly have trembled with execration and reproach, he abruptly left the room, and Mrs. Marston, full of her good news, hastened, in the kindness of her heart, to communicate the fancied result of her advocacy to Mademoiselle de Barras.

It was about a week after this, that Marston was one evening surprised in his study by the receipt of the following letter from Dr. Danvers: —

"My DEAR SIR, — You will be shocked to hear that Merton is most dangerously ill, and at this moment in imminent peril. He is thoroughly conscious of his situation, and himself regards it as a merciful interposition of Providence to spare him the disgrace and terror of the dreadful fate which he anticipated. The unhappy man has twice repeated his anxious desire, this day, to state some facts connected with the murder of the late Sir Wynston Berkley, which, he says, it is of the utmost moment that you should hear. He says that he could not leave the world in peace without having made this disclosure, which he especially desires to make to yourself, and entreats that you will come to receive his communication as early as you can in the morning. This is indeed needful, as the physician says that he is fast sinking. I offer no apology for adding my earnest solicitations to those of the dying man; and am, dear sir, your very obedient servant, —

"J. DANVERS."

"He regards it as a merciful interposition of Providence!" muttered Marston, as he closed the letter, with a sneer. "Well, some men have odd notions of mercy and providence, to be sure; but if it pleases *him,* certainly *I* shall not complain, for one."

Marston was all this evening in better spirits than he had enjoyed for months, or even years. A mountain seemed to have been lifted from his heart. He joined in the conversation during and after supper, listened with apparent interest, talked with animation, and even laughed and jested. It is needless to say all this flowed not from the healthy cheer of a heart at ease, but from the excited and almost feverish sense of sudden relief.

Next morning, Marston rode into the oldfashioned assize town, at the further end of which the dingy and grated front of the jail looked warningly out upon the rustic passengers. He passed the sentries, and made his inquiries of the official at the hatch.

He was relieved from the necessity of pushing these into detail, however, by the appearance of the physician, who at that moment passed from the interior of the prison.

"Doctor Danvers told me he expected to see you here this morning," said the medical man, after the customary salutation had been interchanged. "Your call, I believe, is connected with the prisoner John Merton?"

"Yes, sir, so it is," said Marston. "Is he in a condition, pray, to make a statement of considerable length?"

"Far from it, Mr. Marston; he has but a few hours to live," answered the physician, "and is now insensible; but I believe he last night saw Doctor Danvers, and told him whatever was weighing upon his mind."

"Ha! — and can you say where Dr. Danvers now is?" inquired Marston, anxiously and hurriedly. Not *here,* is he?"

"No; but I saw him, as I came here, not ten minutes since, ride into the town. It is market-day, and you will probably find him somewhere in the high street for an hour or two to come," answered he.

Marston thanked him, and, lost in abstraction, rode down to the little inn, entered a sitting-room, and wrote a hurried line to Dr. Danvers, entreating his attendance *there*, as a place where they might converse less interruptedly than in the street; and committing this note to the waiter, with the injunction to deliver it at once, and the information where Dr. Danvers was probably to be found, he awaited, with intense and agitating anxiety, the arrival of the clergyman.

It was not for nearly ten minutes, however, which his impatience magnified into an eternity, that the well-known voice of Dr. Danvers reached him from the little hall. It was in vain that Marston strove to curb his violent agitation: his heart swelled as if it would smother him; he felt, as it were, the chill of death pervade his frame, and he could scarcely see the door through which be momentarily expected the entrance of the clergyman.

A few minutes more, and Dr. Danvers entered the little apartment.

“My dear sir,” said he, gravely and earnestly, as he grasped the cold hand of Marston, “I am rejoiced to see you. I have matters of great moment and the strangest mystery to lay before you.”

“I dare say — I was sure — that is, I suspected so much,” answered Marston, breathing fast, and looking very pale. “I heard at the prison that the murderer, Merton, was fast dying, and now is in an unconscious state; and from the physician, that you had seen him, at his urgent entreaty, last night. My mind misgives me, sir. I fear I know not what. I long, yet dread, to hear the wretched man’s confession. For God’s sake tell me, does it implicate anybody else in his guilt?”

“No; no one specifically; but it has thrown a hideous additional mystery over the occurrence. Listen to me, my dear sir, and the whole narrative, as he stated it to me, shall be related now to you,” said Dr. Danvers.

Marston had closed the door carefully, and they sate down together at the further end of the apartment. Marston, breathless and ghastly pale; his lips compressed — his brows knit — and his dark, dilated gaze, fixed immovably upon the speaker. Mr. Danvers, on the other hand, tranquil and solemn, and with, perhaps, some shade of awe overcasting the habitual sweetness of his countenance.

“His confession was a strange one,” renewed Dr. Danvers, shaking his head gravely. He said that the first idea of the crime was suggested by Sir Wynston’s man accidentally mentioning, a few days after their arrival, that his master slept with his banknotes, to the amount of some hundreds of pounds, in a pocketbook under his pillow. He declared that as the man mentioned this circumstance, something muttered the infernal suggestion in his ear, and from that moment he was the slave of that one idea; it was ever present with him. He contended against it in vain — he dreaded and abhorred it; but still it possessed him; he felt his power of resistance yielding. This horrible stranger which had stolen into his heart, waxed in power and importunity, and tormented him day and night. He resolved to fly from the house. He gave notice to you and Mrs. Marston of his intended departure; but accident protracted his stay until that fatal night which sealed his doom. The influence which had mastered him, forced him to rise from his bed, and take the knife — the discovery of which afterwards helped to convict him — and led him to Sir Wynston's chamber; he entered — it was a moonlight night."

Here the clergyman, glancing round the room, lowered his voice, and advanced his lips so near to Marston that their heads nearly touched. In this tone and attitude he continued his narrative for a few minutes. At the end of this brief space, Marston rose up slowly, and with a movement backward, every feature stung with horror, and saying, in a long whisper, the one word, "yes," which seemed like the hiss of a snake before he makes his last deadly spring. Both were silent for a, time. At last Marston broke out with hoarse vehemence —

"Dreadful — horrible — oh, God! God! — my God! how frightful!"

And throwing himself into a chair, he clasped his hands across his eyes and forehead, while the sweat of agony literally poured down his pale face.

"Truly it is so," said the clergyman, scarcely above his breath; and, after a long interval— "horrible, indeed!"

"Well," said Marston, rising suddenly to his feet, wiping the dews of horror from his face, and looking wildly round, like one newly waked from a nightmare, "I must make the most of this momentous and startling disclosure. I shall spare no pains to come at the truth," said he, energetically. "Meanwhile, my dear sir, for the sake of justice and of mercy, observe secrecy. Leave me to sift this matter; give no note anywhere that we *suspect*. Observe this reserve and security, and with it, detection will follow. Breathe but one word, and you arm the guilty with double caution, and turn licentious gossip loose upon the fame of an innocent and troubled family. Once more I intreat — I expect — I implore silence — silence, at least, for the present — silence!"

“I quite agree with you, my dear Mr. Marston,” answered Dr. Danvers. “I have not divulged one syllable of that poor wretch’s confession, save to yourself alone. You, as a magistrate, a relative of the murdered gentleman, and the head of that establishment among whom the guilt rests, are invested with an interest in detecting, and powers of sifting the truth in this matter, such as none other possesses. I clearly see with you, too, the inexpediency and folly of talking, for talking’s sake, of this affair. I mean to keep my counsel, and shall most assuredly, irrespectively even of your request — which should, however, of course, have weight with me — maintain a strict and cautious silence upon this subject.”

Some little time longer they remained together, and Marston, buried in strange thoughts, took his leave, and rode slowly back to Dunoran.

Months passed away — a year, and more — and though no new character appeared upon the stage, the relations which had subsisted among the old ones became, in some respects, very materially altered. A gradual and disagreeable change came over Mademoiselle de Barras’ manner; her affectionate attentions to Mrs. Marston became less and less frequent; nor was the change merely confined to this growing coldness; there was something of a positive and still more unpleasant kind in the alteration which we have noted. There was a certain independence and *insouciance,* conveyed in a hundred intangible but significant little incidents and looks — a something which, without being open to formal rebuke or remonstrance, yet bordered, in effect, upon impertinence, and even insolence. This indescribable and provoking self-assertion, implied in glances, tones, emphasis, and general bearing, surprised Mrs. Marston far more than it irritated her. As often as she experienced one of these studied slights or insinuated impertinences, she revolved in her own mind all the incidents of their past intercourse, in the vain endeavour to recollect some one among them which could possibly account for the offensive change so manifest in the conduct of the young Frenchwoman.

Mrs. Marston, although she sometimes rebuked these artful affronts by a grave look, a cold tone, or a distant manner, yet had too much dignity to engage in a petty warfare of annoyance, and had, in reality, no substantial and well-defined ground of complaint against her, such as would have warranted her either in taking the young lady herself to task, or in bringing her conduct under the censure of Marston.

One evening it happened that Mrs. Marston and Mademoiselle de Barras had been left alone together after the supper-party had dispersed. They had been for a long time ‘silent, and Mrs. Marston resolved to improve the *tête-à-tête,* for the purpose of eliciting from mademoiselle an explanation of her strange behaviour.

“Mademoiselle,” said she, “I have lately observed a very marked change in your conduct to me.”

“*Indeed!”* said the Frenchwoman.

“Yes, mademoiselle; you must be yourself perfectly aware of that change; it is a studied and intentional alteration,” continued Mrs. Marston, in a gentle but dignified tone; “and although I have felt some doubt as to whether it were advisable, so long as you observe toward me the forms of external respect, and punctually discharge the duties you have undertaken, to open any discussion whatever upon the subject; yet I have thought it better to give you a fair opportunity of explaining frankly, should you desire to do so, the feelings and impressions under which you are acting.”

“Ah, you are very obliging, madame,” said she, coolly.

“It is quite clear, mademoiselle, that you have either misunderstood me, or that you are dissatisfied with your situation among us: your conduct cannot otherwise be accounted for,” said Mrs. Marston, gravely.

“My conduct — *ma foi!* what conduct?” retorted the handsome Frenchwoman, confidently, and with a disdainful glance.

“If you question the fact, mademoiselle,” said the elder lady, “it is enough. Your ungracious manner and ungentle looks, I presume, arise from some apparently sufficient and well-defined cause, of which, however, I know nothing.”

I really was not aware,” said Mademoiselle de Barras-, with a supercilious smile, “that my looks and my manner were subjected to so rigid a criticism, or that it was my duty to regulate both according to so nice and difficult a standard.”

“Well, mademoiselle,” continued Mrs. Marston, “it is plain that whatever may be the cause of your dissatisfaction, you are resolved against confiding it to me. I only wish to know frankly from your own lips, whether you have formed a wish to leave this situation: if so, I entreat of you to declare it freely.”

"You are very obliging, indeed, madame," said the pretty foreigner, drily, "but I have no such wish, at least at present."

"Very well, mademoiselle," replied Mrs. Marston, with gentle dignity; "I regret your want of candour, on your own account. You would, I am sure, be much happier, were you to deal frankly with me."

"May I now have your permission, madame, to retire to my room?" asked the French girl, rising, and making a low courtesy— "that is, if madame has nothing further to censure."

"Certainly, mademoiselle; I have nothing further to say," replied the elder lady.

The Frenchwoman made another and a deeper courtesy, and withdrew. Mrs. Marston, however, heard, as she was designed to do, the young lady tittering and whispering to herself, as she lighted her candle in the hall. This scene mortified and grieved poor Mrs. Marston inexpressibly. She was little, if at all, accessible to emotions of anger, and certainly none such mingled in the feelings with which she regarded Mademoiselle de Barras. But she had found in this girl a companion, and even a confidante in her melancholy solitude; she had believed her affectionate, sympathetic, tender, and the disappointment was as bitter as unimagined.

The annoyances which she was fated to receive from Mademoiselle de Barras, were destined, however, to grow in number and in magnitude. The Frenchwoman sometimes took a fancy, for some unrevealed purpose, to talk a good deal to Mrs. Marston, and on such occasions would persist, notwithstanding that lady's marked reserve and discouragement, in chatting away, as if she were conscious that her conversation was the most welcome entertainment possible to her really unwilling auditor. No one of their interviews did she ever suffer to close without in some way or other suggesting or insinuating something mysterious and untold to the prejudice of Mr. Marston. Those vague and intangible hints, whose meaning, for an instant legible and terrific, seemed in another moment to dissolve and disappear, tortured Mrs. Marston like the intrusions of some spectre, vanishing as soon as revealed; and this, along with the portentous change, rather *felt* than visible, in mademoiselle's conduct toward her, invested the beautiful Frenchwoman, in the eyes of her former friend and patroness, with an indefinable character that was not only repulsive but formidable.

Mrs. Marston’s feelings with respect to this person were still further disturbed by the half-conveyed hints and innuendoes of her own maid, who never lost an opportunity of insinuating her intense dislike of the Frenchwoman, and appeared perpetually to be upon the very verge of making some explicit charges, or some shocking revelations, respecting her, which, however, she as invariably evaded; and even when Mrs. Marston once or twice insisted upon her explaining her meaning distinctly, she eluded her mistress’s desire, and left her still in the same uneasy uncertainty.

Marston, on his part, however much his conduct might tend to confirm suspicion, certainly did nothing to dissipate the painful and undefined apprehensions respecting himself, which Mademoiselle de Barras, with such malign and mysterious industry, laboured to raise. His spirits and temper were liable to strange fluctuations, n the midst of that excited gaiety, to which, until lately, he had been so long a stranger, would sometimes intervene paroxysms of the blackest despair, all the ghastlier for the contrast, and with a suddenness so abrupt and overwhelming that one might have fancied him crossed by the shadow of some terrific apparition, unseen by all but his own fascinated gaze. Sometimes, for a whole day, or even more, ho would withdraw himself from the society of his family, and, in morose and moody solitude, take his meals alone in his library, and steal out unattended to wander among the thickets and glades of his park. Sometimes, again, he would sit for hours in the room which had been Sir Wynston’s, and, with a kind of horrible resolution, often loiter there till after nightfall. In such hours, the servants would listen with curious awe, as they heard his step, pacing to and fro, in that deserted and inauspicious chamber, while his voice, in broken sentences, was also imperfectly audible, as if maintaining a muttered dialogue. These eccentric practices gradually invested him, in the eyes of his domestics, with a certain preternatural mystery, which enhanced the fear with which they habitually regarded him, and was subsequently confirmed by his giving orders to have the furniture taken out of the ominous suite of rooms, and the doors nailed up and secured. He gave no reason for this odd and abrupt measure, and gossip of course reported that the direction had originated in his having encountered the spectre of the murdered baronet, in one of these strange and unseasonable visits to the scene of the fearful catastrophe.

In addition to all this, Marston's conduct towards his wife became strangely capricious. He avoided her society more than ever, and when he did happen to exchange a few words with her, they were sometimes harsh and violent, and, at others, remorsefully gentle and sad, and this without any changes of conduct upon her part to warrant the wayward uncertainty of his treatment. Under all these circumstances, Mrs. Marston's unhappiness and uneasiness greatly increased. Mademoiselle de Barras, too, upon several late occasions, had begun to assume a tone of authority and dictation which justly offended the mistress of the establishment. Meanwhile Charles Marston had returned to Oxford, and Rhoda, no longer enjoying those happy walks with her brother, which had been made still more happy by their often leading her into the society of her young neighbours of Newton Park, pursued her light and easy studies with Mademoiselle de Barras, and devoted her leisure hours to the loved society of her mother.

One day Mrs. Marston, sitting in her own room with Rhoda, had happened to call in her own maid, to take down and carefully dust some richly-bound volumes which filled a bookcase in the little chamber.

"You have been crying, Willett," said Mrs. Marston, observing that the young woman's eyes were red and swollen.

"Indeed and I was, ma'am," she replied, reluctantly, " and I could not help it, so I could not."

" — Why, what has happened to vex you — has any one ill-treated you?" said Mrs. Marston, who had an esteem for the poor girl. " Come — come — you must not fret about it; only tell me what has vexed you. Come, come, you really must not be foolish."

"Oh! ma'am, no one has illused *me,* ma'am; but I can't but be vexed sometimes, ma'am, and fretted to see how things is going on. I have one wish — just one wish, ma'am — and if I got *that,* I'd ask no more," said the girl.

"And what *is* it?" asked Mrs. Marston; " what do you wish for? — speak plainly, Willett, what is it?"

"An! ma'am, if I said it maybe you might not be pleased. Don't ask me, ma'am," said the girl, dusting the books very hard, and tossing them down again with angry emphasis. " I don't desire anybody's harm, God knows, but for all that I wish what I wish, and that is the truth."

"Why, Willett, I really cannot account for your strange habit of lately hinting, and insinuating, and always speaking riddles, and refusing to explain your meaning. What *do* you mean? — speak plainly; if there are any dishonest practices going on, it is your duty to say so distinctly."

"Oh! ma'am, it is just a wish I have. I wish — ; but it's no matter.

If I could once see the house clear of that Frenchwoman— "

"If you mean Mademoiselle de Barras, she is a *lady,"* interrupted Mrs. Marston.

"Well, ma'am, I beg pardon," continued the woman; "lady or no lady, it is all one to me; for I am very sure, ma'am, she'll never leave the house till there is something bad comes about; and — and — . I can't bring myself to talk to you about her, ma'am. I can't say what I want to tell you; but — but —— Oh, ma'am, for God's sake, try and get her out, any way, no matter now — try and get rid of her." As she said this, the poor girl burst into a passionate agony of tears, and Mrs. Marston and Rhoda looked on in silent amazement, while she for some minutes continued to sob and weep.

The party were suddenly recalled from their various reveries by a knock at the chamber-door — it opened, and the subject of the girl's deprecatory entreaty entered. There was something unusually excited and assured in Mademoiselle de Barras' air and countenance; perhaps she had a suspicion that she had been the topic of their conversation. At all events, she looked round upon them with a smile, in which there was something supercilious, and even defiant; and, without waiting to be invited, sate herself down with a haughty air.

"I was about to ask you to sit down, mademoiselle, but you have anticipated me," said Mrs. Marston, gravely. "You have something to say to me, I suppose; I am quite at leisure, so pray let me hear it now."

"Thank you — thank you, madame," replied she, with a sharp, and even scornful glance; "I ought to have asked your permission to sit; I forgot to do so; but you have condescended to give it without my doing so; that was very kind — very kind, indeed."

"But I wish to know, mademoiselle, whether you have anything very particular to say to me?" said Mrs. Marston.

"You wish to know! — and why, pray, madame?" asked Mademoiselle de Barras, sharply.

"Because, unless it is something very urgent, I should prefer your talking to me some other time; as, at present, I desire to be alone with my daughter."

"Oh, ho! I ought to ask pardon again," said mademoiselle, with the same glance, and the same smile. "I find I am *de trop* — quite in the way. Helas! I am very unfortunate to-day." Mademoiselle de Barras made not the slightest movement, and it was evident that she was resolved to prolong her stay, in sheer defiance of Mrs. Marston's wishes.

"Mademoiselle, I conclude from your silence that you have nothing very pressing to say, and therefore must request that you will have the goodness to leave me for the present," said Mrs. Marston, who felt that the spirit of the French girl's conduct was too apparent not to have been understood by Rhoda and the servant, and that it was of a kind, for example sake, impossible to be submitted to, or tolerated.

Mademoiselle de Barras darted a fiery and insolent glance at Mrs. Marston, and was, doubtless, upon the point of precipitating the open quarrel which was impending, by setting her authority at defiance; but she checked herself, and changed her line of operations.

"We are *not* alone, madame," she said, with a heightened colour, and a slight toss of the head. "I was about to speak of Mr. Marston. I had something — not much, I confess — to say; but before servants I shan't speak — nor, indeed, *now* at all. So, madame, as you desire it, I shall not further interrupt you. Come, Miss Rhoda, come to the music-room, if you please, and finish your practice for to-day."

"You forget, mademoiselle, that I wish to have my daughter with me at present," said Mrs. Marston.

"I am very sorry, madame," said the French lady, with the same heightened colour and unpleasant smile, and her finely-pencilled brows just discernibly knit, so as to give a novel and menacing expression to her beautiful face— "I am very sorry, madame, but she must, so long as I remain accountable for her education, complete her allotted exercises at the appointed hours; and nothing shall, I assure you, with my consent, interfere with these duties. Come, Miss Rhoda, precede me, if you please, to the music-room. Come, come."

"Stay where you are, Rhoda," said Mrs. Marston, firmly and gently, and betraying no symptom of excitement, except in a slight tremor of her voice, and a faint flush upon her cheek.— "Stay where you are, my dear child. I am your *mother*, and, next to your father, have the first claim upon your obedience. Mademoiselle," she continued, addressing the Frenchwoman, calmly but firmly, "my daughter will remain here for some time longer, and you will have the goodness to withdraw. I insist upon it, Mademoiselle de Barras."

"I will not leave the room, I assure you, madame, without my pupil," retorted mademoiselle, with resolute insolence. "Your husband, madame, has invested me with this authority over my pupil, and she *shall* obey me. Miss Rhoda, I say again, go down to the music-room."

"Remain where you are, Rhoda," said Mrs. Marston again. "Mademoiselle, you have long been acting as if your object were to provoke me to part with you. I find it impossible any longer to overlook this grossly disrespectful conduct — conduct of which I had, indeed, believed you absolutely incapable. Willett," she continued, addressing the maid, who was evidently bursting with rage at the scene she had just witnessed— "your master is, I believe, in the library — go down, and tell him that I entreat him to come here immediately."

The maid started on her mission with angry alacrity, darting a venomous glance at the handsome Frenchwoman as she passed.

Mademoiselle de Barras, meanwhile, sate, listless and defiant, in her chair, and tapping her little foot with angry excitement upon the floor. Rhoda sate close by her mother, holding her hand fast, and looking frightened, perplexed, and as if she were on the point of weeping. Mrs. Marston, though flushed and excited, yet maintained her dignified and grave demeanour. And thus, in silence, did they all three await the arrival of the arbiter to whom Mrs. Marston had so promptly appealed.

A few minutes more, and Marston entered the room. Mademoiselle's expression changed as he did so to one of dejected and sorrowful submission; and, as Marston's eye lighted upon her, his brow darkened, and his face grew pale.

"Well, well — what is it? — what is all this?" he said, glancing with a troubled eye from one to the other. "Speak, some one. Mrs. Marston, *you* sent for me — what is it?"

"I want to know, Mr. Marston, from your own lips," said the lady, in reply, "whether Rhoda is to obey me or Mademoiselle de Barras?"

“Bah! — a question of women’s prerogative,” said Marston, with muttered vehemence.

“Of a *wife’s* and a *mother’s* prerogative, Richard,” said Mrs. Marston, with gentle emphasis; “a very simple question, and one I should have thought needing no deliberation to decide it.”

“Well, child,” said he, turning to Rhoda, with angry irony, “pray what Is all this fuss about? You are a very illused young lady, I dare aver. Pray what cruelties does Mademoiselle de Barras propose inflicting upon you, that you need to appeal thus to your mother for protection?”

“You quite mistake me, Richard,” interposed Mrs. Marston; “Rhoda is perfectly passive in this matter. I simply wish to learn from you, in mademoiselle’s presence, whether I or she is to command my daughter?”

“*Command*!” said Marston, evading the direct appeal; “and pray what is all this *commanding* about? — what do you want the girl to do?”

“*I* wish her to remain here with me for a little time, and mademoiselle, knowing this, desires her instantly to go to the music-room, and leave me. That is all,! said Mrs. Marston.

“And pray, is there nothing to make her going to the music-room advisable or necessary’ Has she no music to learn, or studies to pursue? Psha! Mrs. Marston, what needs all this noise about nothing? Go, miss,” he added, sharply and peremptorily, addressing Rhoda— “go this moment to the music-room.”

The girl glided from the room, and mademoiselle, as she followed, shot a glance at Mrs. Marston, which wounded and humbled her in the dust.

“Oh! Richard, Richard, if you knew all, you would not have subjected me to this indignity,” she said; and throwing her arms about his neck, she wept, for the first time for many a long year, upon his breast.

Marston was embarrassed and agitated. He disengaged her arms from his neck, and placed her gently in a chair. She sobbed on for some time in silence — a silence which Marston himself did not essay to break. He walked to the door, apparently with the intention of leaving her. He hesitated, however, and returned; took a hurried turn through the room; hesitated again j sat down; then returned to the door, not to depart, but to close it carefully, and walked gloomily to the window, whence ho looked forth, buried in agitating and absorbing thoughts.

“Richard, to you this seems a trifling thing; but indeed it is not so,” said Mrs. Marston, sadly.

“You are very right, Gertrude,” he said, quickly, and almost with a start; “it is very far from a trifling thing; it is very important.”

“You don’t blame me, Richard?” said she.

“I blame nobody,” said he.

“Indeed I never meant to offend you, Richard,” she urged.

“Of course not; no, no; I never said so,” he interrupted, sarcastically; “what could you gain by that?”

“Oh! Richard, better feelings have governed me,” she said, in a melancholy and reproachful tone.

“Well, well, I suppose so,” he said; and after an interval, he added, abstractedly, “This cannot, however, go on; no, no — it *cannot.* Sooner or later, it must have come; better at once — better *now.”*

“What do you mean, Richard?” she said, greatly alarmed, she knew not why. “What are you resolving upon? Dear Richard, in mercy tell me. I implore of you, tell me.”

“Why, Gertrude, you seem to me to fancy that, because I don’t talk about what is passing, that I don’t *see* it either. Now this is quite a mistake,” said Marston, calmly and resolutely. “I have long observed your growing dislike of Mademoiselle de Barras. I have thought it over; this *fracas* of to-day has determined me — it is decisive. I suppose you now wish her to *go,* as earnestly as you once wished her to stay. You need not answer. I know it. I neither ask nor care to whose fault I am to attribute these changed feelings — female caprice accounts sufficiently for it; but whatever the cause, the effect is undeniable; and the only way to deal satisfactorily with *it,* is to dismiss mademoiselle peremptorily and at once. You need take no part in the matter; I take it all upon myself. Tomorrow morning she shall have left this house. I have said it, and am perfectly resolved.”

As he thus spoke, as if to avoid the possibility of any further discussion, he turned abruptly from her, and left the room.

The extreme agitation which she had just undergone, combined with her physical delicacy to bring on an hysterical attack; and poor Mrs. Marston, with an aching head and a heavy heart, lay down upon her bed. She had swallowed an opiate, and before ten o’clock upon that night, an eventful one as it proved, she had sank into a profound slumber.

Some hours after this, she became in a confused way conscious of her husband's presence in the room. He was walking, with an agitated mien, up and down the chamber, and casting from time to time looks of great trouble toward the bed where she lay. Though the presence of her husband was a strange and long unwonted occurrence there, and at such an hour, and though she felt the strangeness of the visit, the power of the opiate overwhelmed her so, that she could only see this apparition gliding back and forward before her with the passive wonder and curiosity with which one awaits the issue of an interesting dream.

For a time she lay once more in an uneasy sleep; but still, throughout even this, she was conscious of hit presence; and when, a little while after, she again saw him, be was not walking to and fro before the foot of the bed, but sitting beside her, with one band laid upon the pillow on which her head was resting, the other supporting his chin. He was looking steadfastly upon her, with a changed face, an expression of bitter sorrow, compunction, and tenderness. There was not one trace of sternness; all was softened. The look was what She fancied he might have turned upon her had she lain there dead, ere yet the love of their early and illfated union had grown cold in his heart. There was something in it which reminded her of days and feelings, gone never to return. And while she looked in his face with a sweet and mournful fascination, tears unconsciously wet the pillow on which her poor head was resting. Unable to speak, unable to move, she heard him say —

It was not your fault, Gertrude — it was not yours, nor mine. There is a destiny in these things too strong for us. Past is past — what is done, is done for ever; and even were it all to do over again, what power have I to mend it! No, no; how could I contend against the combined power of passions, circumstances, influences — in a word, of pate? You have been good and patient, while *I* — but no matter. Your lot, Gertrude, is a happier one than mine."

Mrs. Marston heard him and saw him, but she had not the power, nor even the will, herself to speak or move. He appeared before her passive sense like the phantasm of a dream. He stood up at the bedside, and looked on her steadfastly, with the same melancholy expression. For a moment he stooped over her, as if about to kiss her face, but checked himself, stood erect again at the bedside, then suddenly turned — the curtain fell back into its place, and she saw him no more.

With a strange mixture of sweet and bitter feelings, this vision rested upon the memory of Mrs. Marston, until, gradually, deep slumber again overcame her senses, and the incident and all its attendant circumstances faded into oblivion.

It was past eight o’clock when Mrs. Marston awoke next morning. The sun was shining richly and cheerily in at the windows; and as the remembrance of Marston’s visit to her chamber, and the unwonted manifestations of tenderness and compunction which accompanied it, returned, she felt something like hope and happiness, to which she had long been a stranger, flutter her heart. The pleasing reverie, to which she was yielding, was, however interrupted. The sound of stifled sobbing in the room reached her ear, and, pushing back the bed-curtains, and leaning forward to look, she saw her maid, Willett, sitting with her back to the wall, crying bitterly, and striving, as it seemed, to stifle her sobs with her apron, which was wrapped about her face. *u* Willett — Willett, is it *you* who are sobbing? What is the matter with you, child?” said Mrs. Marston, anxiously.

The girl checked herself, dried her eyes hastily, and walking briskly to a little distance, as if engaged in arranging the chamber, she said, with an affectation of carelessness —

“Oh, ma’am, it is nothing — nothing at all, indeed, ma’am.”

Mrs. Marston remained silent for a time, while all her vague and agonizing apprehensions returned. Meantime the girl continued to shove the chairs hither and thither, and to arrange and disarrange everything in the room, with a fidgety industry, intended to cover her agitation. A few minutes, however, served to weary her of this; for she abruptly stopped, stood by the bedside, and, looking at her mistress, burst into tears.

“Good God! what is it?” said Mrs. Marston, shocked and even terrified, while new alarms displaced the old ones. “Is Miss Rhoda — can it be — is she — is my darling well?”

“Oh yes, ma’am,” answered the maid— “very well, ma’am; she is up, and out walking, and knows nothing of all this.”

“All *what* f “ urged Mrs. Marston. *“*Tell me — tell me, Willett, what has happened. What is it? Speak, child — say what it is.”

“Oh, ma’am — oh, my poor, dear mistress!” continued the girl, and stopped, almost stifled with sobs.

“Willett, you must speak — you must say what is the matter. I implore of you — I desire you!” urged the distracted lady. Still the girl, having made one or two ineffectual efforts to speak, continued to sob.

“Willett, you will drive me mad. For mercy’s sake — for God’s sake, speak — tell me what it is!” cried the unhappy lady.

“Oh, ma’am, it is — it is about the master,” sobbed the girl.

“Why he can’t — he has not — Oh, merciful God I he has not hurt himself I” she almost screamed.

“No, ma’am — no — not *himself* — no — no — but— “ and again she hesitated.

“But *what?* Speak out, Willett — dear Willett, have mercy on me, and speak out,” cried her wretched mistress.

“Oh, ma’am, don’t be fretted — don’t take it to heart, ma’am,” said the maid, clasping her hands together in anguish.

“Anything — anything, Willett — only speak at once,” she answered.

“Well, ma’am, it is soon said — it is easy told. The master, ma’am — the master is gone with the Frenchwoman; they went in the travelling coach last night, ma’am — he is gone away with her, ma’am — that is all.”

Mrs. Marston looked at the girl with a gaze of stupefied, stony terror — not a muscle of her face moved — not one heaving respiration showed that she was living. Motionless, with this fearful look fixed upon the girl, and her thin hands stretched towards her, she remained, second after second; at last her outstretched bands began to tremble more and more violently — and as if, for the first time the knowledge of his calamity had reached her — with a cry, unearthly, as though body and soul were parting, she fell back motionless in her bed.

Several hours had passed before Mrs. Marston was restored to consciousness; to this state of utter insensibility, one of silent, terrified stupor succeeded — and it was not until she saw her daughter Rhoda standing at her bedside, weeping, that she found voice and recollection to speak.

“My child — my darling — ray poor child,” she cried, sobbing piteously, as she drew her to her heart, and looked in her face alternately— “my darling — my darling child.”

Rhoda could only weep, and return her poor mother’s caresses in silence. Too young and inexperienced to understand the full extent and nature of this direful calamity — the strange occurrence — the general and apparent consternation of the whole household, and the spectacle of her mother’s agony, bad filled her with fear, perplexity, and anguish. Scared and stunned with a vague sense of danger, like a young bird, that, for the first time, cowers under a thunderstorm, she nestled in her mother’s bosom — there, with a sense of protection, and with a feeling of boundless love and tenderness, she lay, frightened, wondering, and weeping.

Two or three days passed, and Dr. Danvers came and sate for several hours with poor Mrs. Marston. To comfort and console, were, of course, out of his power. The nature of the bereavement — far more terrible than death — its recent occurrence — the distracting consciousness of all its complicated consequences — rendered this a hopeless task. She bowed herself under the blow, with the submission of a broken heart. The hope to which she had clung for years had vanished — the worst that ever her imagination feared, had come in earnest.

One idea was now constantly present in her mind. She felt a sad, but immovable assurance, that she should not live long, and the thought— “What will become of my darling, when I am gone — who will guard and love my child when I am in my grave — whom is she to look to for tenderness and protection then?” perpetually haunted her, and superadded the pangs of a still wilder despair to the desolation of a broken heart.

It was not for more than a week after this event, that, one day, Willett, with a certain air of anxious mystery, entered the silent and darkened chamber where Mrs. Marston lay — she had a letter in her hand — the seal and handwriting were Mr. Marston’s. It was long before the injured wife was able to open it — when she did so, the following sentences met her eye: —

“GERTRUDE — Yon can be ignorant neither of the nature, nor of the consequences of the decisive step I have taken — I do not seek to excuse it. For the censure of the world — its meddling and mouthing hypocrisy — I care absolutely nothing — I have long set *it* at defiance — and you yourself, Gertrude, when you deliberately reconsider the circumstances of estrangement and coldness under which, though beneath the same roof, we have lived for years — without either sympathy or confidence, can scarcely

— if at all regret the rupture of a tie which had long ceased to be anything better than an irksome and galling formality — I do not desire to attribute to you the smallest blame. There was an incompatibility, not of temper, but of feelings, which made us *strangers,* though calling one another man and wife — upon this fact I rest my own justification; our living together under these circumstances was, I dare say, equally undesired by us both. It was, in fact, but a deference to the formal hypocrisy of the world. At all events, the irrevocable act which separates us for ever is done — and I have now merely to state so much of my intentions as may relate in anywise to your future arrangements. I have written to your cousin, and former guardian, Mr. Roe, telling him how matters stand between us. You, I told him, shall have, without opposition from me, the whole of your own fortune to your own separate use, together with whatever shall be mutually agreed upon as reasonable, from my income, for your support, and that of my daughter. It will be necessary to complete your arrangements with expedition, as I purpose returning to Dunoran in about three weeks — and as, of course, a meeting between you and those by whom I shall be accompanied is wholly out of the question, you will see the expediency of losing no time in adjusting everything for your's, and my daughter's departure. In the details, of course, I shall not interfere. I think I have made myself clearly intelligible, and would recommend your communicating at once with Mr. Roe, with a view to completing temporary arrangements, until your final plans shall have been decided upon.

"RICHARD MARSTON."

The reader can easily conceive the feelings with which this letter was perused. We shall not attempt to describe them; nor shall we weary his patience by a detail of all the circumstances attending Mrs. Marston's departure. Suffice it to mention, that, in less than a fortnight after the receipt of the letter which we have just copied, she had for ever left the mansion of Dunoran.

In a small house, in a sequestered part of the beautiful county of Wicklow, the residence of Mrs. Marston and her daughter was for the present fixed. And there, for a time, the heartbroken and desolate lady enjoyed, at least, the privilege of an immunity from the intrusions of all external troubles. But the blow, under which the feeble remains of her health and strength were gradually to sink, had struck too surely home — and, from month to month — almost from week to week — the progress of decay was perceptible.

Meanwhile, though grieved and humbled, and longing to return to Ireland, to comfort his unhappy mother, Charles Marston, for the present absolutely dependant upon his father, had no choice but to remain at Oxford, and to pursue his studies there.

At Dunoran, Marston and the partner of his guilt continued to live. The old servants were all gradually dismissed, and new ones hired by Mademoiselle de Barras. There they dwelt, shunned by everybody, in a stricter and more desolate seclusion than ever. The novelty of the unrestraint and licence of their new mode of life speedily passed away, and with it the excited and guilty sense of relief, which had for a time produced a false and hollow gaiety. The sense of security prompted in mademoiselle a hundred indulgences, which, in her former precarious position, she would not have dreamed of. Outbreaks of temper, sharp, and sometimes violent, began to manifest themselves on her part — and renewed disappointment, and blacker remorse, to darken the mind of Marston himself. Often, in the dead of night, the servants would overhear their bitter and fierce altercations ringing through the melancholy mansion — and often the reckless use of terrible and mysterious epithets of crime. Their quarrels increased in violence and in frequency — and, before two years had passed, feelings of bitterness, hatred, and dread, alone seemed to subsist between them. Yet, upon Marston she continued to exercise a powerful and mysterious influence. There was a dogged, apathetic submission upon his part, and a growing insolence upon her's, constantly more and more strikingly visible. Neglect, disorder, and decay, too, were more than ever apparent in the dreary air of the place.

THE END

MY AUNT MARGARET’S ADVENTURE

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CHAPTER I.

AUNT MARGARET AT HOME.

MY Aunt Margaret was what is termed a clever woman — that is to say, she was keen and resolute, prompt and active, and difficult to overreach in matters of money or business. Of the former she was, people said, a little too fond. At all events she hated waste, and lived frugally on a dietary which leaned much upon tea and eggs, and sometimes omitted dinner altogether. But though light, her housekeeping was neither beggarly nor altogether uncomfortable.

Aunt Margaret, as I remember her — dear me, how many years ago! — was rather tall, if anything, and decidedly slim and erect, with a countenance which, though shrewd and energetic, had yet something kindly in it Her features were small and nicely turned, and one could quite suppose that she might have been a pretty girl once on a time.

She held herself well, and stepped with a good, firm tred, and lightly withal. Hers was a rustic life, somewhat lonely, in a three-storied house, with three rooms on a floor, and a gable at front — steep-roofed and tiled, and with a great growth of jessamine and woodbine about the porch and the windows. Half a dozen tall, dark elms made a comfortable shadow about the house; and a white paling in front enclosed, by the roadside, the little flower garden, with an old mulberry tree in the centre.

In the rear was a lock-up yard with coachhouse and stable, and a comfortable room in which old Tom Clinton slept with a blunderbuss and back-sword in case of robbers. On week-days Aunt Margaret dressed very plainly — stuff in winter, cotton in summer; but on Sundays she went to church in thick old satins or ancient brocades, so stiff that the squire’s lady across the aisle used to talk of them covetously for days after, and wonder why such things were not to be had now-a-days.

Aunt Margaret was always particularly neat She used to carry her keys in an oldfashioned way, man a ribbon by her side, a neat little pincushion, her scissors, and I forget what else. It was the tradition of that chatelaine which I saw revived lung after poor Aunt Margaret had gone to her rest She had long and very pretty hands — her years considered; and, in fact, the only thing I remember decidedly against her was her enamelled box of rappee, and the habit to which it ministered.

Her prime-minister was Winnifred Dobbs — fattish, rosy, ancient Time *had* thinned her flowing hair, and bleached it somewhat; but she smiled largely, and was goodhumoured; although not very quick, was steady and sure, and chatted volubly, though not always much to the purpose; and Aunt Margaret gave her her tea in the drawingroom, which was an excuse for keeping her there for the rest of the evening; and so Aunt Margret was not quite so lonely as she might have been.

There was a young and stumpy girl beside, who washed, and did nearly everything, and must have found these young days rather dull. To her the view of the road from the kitchen window was a resource, and the occasional calls of the baker, butcher, and dairyman were precious. She talked and laughed with herself; she sang a great deal in the scullery, and joked with the cat in the kitchen.

Among Aunt Margaret's sources of revenue was her moiety of what she called the Winderbrooke property. Everybody, of course, knows the old town of Winderbrooke. Three houses in the main street belonged to her and her sister. Of these, for convenience, they made a division, the best they could. Aunt Margaret had for her share a tobacconist and half a tailor. The latter was punctual; but the tobacconist owed a whole year's rent, and was already some way in his third half-year. His letters were highly unsatisfactory. The tailor's answers to her inquiries about his defaulting neighbour were reserved and evasive. But that Be had a wise terror of law and lawyers my Aunt would have retained an attorney forthwith.

"I'm not surprised, Winnie," said my Aunt, snuffing her candle, as she and her confidential handmaid sat by the fire, in her diminutive drawing room, at their tea; "not the least. Did you ever know one man tell of another when a woman was concerned Î John Pendle has been my tenant eleven years and knows all about that roguish snuff-man; but he won't tell me one iota about him. Not that Browning is anything on earth to him. I suppose he doesn't care if Browning was hanged; but simply Browning is a man, and *I* a *woman.* That's it, Winnie — that's *all* — *I'm* to be robbed and no one to prevent it A conspiracy I call it. I tell you, Winnie, I never knew one man prevent another's robbing a woman, except when he hoped to rob her himself.

Honest Dobbs's fat face and round eyes looked distressed over her teacup at her mistress, while she discoursed; and she made answer only by that expressive but unspellable tick-tick-ticking made by the tip of the tongue at the back of the teeth.

"And rob me they would, Winnie, if I were half such a fool as you, for instance. But I'll show them there *are* women who do know something of business."

And she nodded mysteriously, but briskly, on her maid with a side-glance of her dark eye.

"I mean to start tomorrow morning, after breakfast, at eight o'clock. You come with me, Winnie, and we'll sleep tomorrow night at Winderbrooke, and *that,* I think, will surprise

CHAPTER II.

MY AUNT MARGARET ON THE ROAD.

OLD Tom Teukesbury, from the “Bull,” was not at the little wicket of Aunt Margaret’s habitation until sixteen minutes past nine.

As Tom drew up, driving a one-horse covered vehicle, the name and fashion of which have long passed away, my Aunt, fully equipped was standing on the step of her open door, with her watch in her right hand, the dial of which she presented grimly at Tom, perched in the distance on the box.

Tom’s lean, mulberry-coloured face, sharp nose, and cold gray eyes winced not at the taunt “It’s easy a showin’ a watch. I’d like to know where the ‘oss is to come from, if maister sends the grey to Huntley, and Jack can’t go in harness noways; and here’s the bay can’t go neither without a brushing boot; and I’m to go down to Hoxton to borrow one of Squire; there’s a raw there as big as my’ hand — you don’t want her to founder ‘twixt this and Muckleston, I’m sure; and you wouldn’t be so hard on the brute, to drive her without one — and that’s why, ma’am.”

Tom’s way with women when he was late, was to complicate the case, with an issue on farriery, which soon shuts them up.

So Winnifred got in with a basket of edibles, and the carpet-bag on the seat beside my Aunt, who entered the vehicle severely.

It was a journey of nearly forty miles, by cross-roads, to Winderbrooke. All geographers well know the range of bills that lie between Hoxton and that town. The landscape is charming — the air invigorating. But the pull up the steep road that scales the side of the hill, is severe. The bay-mare showed signs of her soft feeding. She was hirsute, clumsy, and sudorous. She had a paunch, and now and then a cavernous cough.

The progress was, therefore, slow; and the ladies, every here and there, up particulars stiff bits, were obliged to get out and walk, which, although my Aunt might not mind it much, distressed good Winnifred Dobbs, who was in no condition for executing an excelsior movement on foot.

Near the summit of the hill the ladies waxed hungry; so, it was presumed, did the mare. The party halted; the nosebag was applied; the basket was opened: Tom had a couple of clumsy sandwiches; the ladies partook; and the bay mare enjoyed her repast with that pleasant crisp crunching, which agreeably suggests good grinders and a good grist There was still a little pull before reaching the crown of the hill Winnifred could walk no more; but my Aunt trod nimbly up the ascent, and on reaching the summit, made a halt, and, like an invading general, viewed with an eye at once curious and commanding, the country that lay beneath.

She was looking for Winderbrooke close by the foot of the hill.

“Where’s the town?” demanded my Aunt.

“Wat toon, ma’am?” inquired Tom. “Winderbrooke, to be sure.”

“Well, Winderbrooke will be there.” Tom was pistoling Winderbrooke with his whip.

“Where?”

“You see the steeple there?”

“Ay.”

“Well, that isn’t it.”

“No?”

“Now, ye’ll see a bit of a rock or a hillock atop o’ that hill.”

“That hill — well?”

“Now, follow that line on past that whitish thing ye see.”

“You don’t mean on that remote plain? Why, man, that’s the horizon.”

“Well, it’s beyond that a little bit, over the rising ground that will be jest there; and folks say, on a clear day, you may see the smoke o’ the toon over it, though I never did.

There was a pause, and my Aunt looked stem and black toward the remote objects which he indicated and neither could see, and then she looked back over her shoulder in the direction of home. I can’t say what was passing in her mind; but she looked forward again, and with an angry side-glance at Tom, she said — Why, it’s a *perfect journey!*” There was another pause, and she said with a dry abruptness, “Let me in, please;” and in the same defiant tone, “Go *on!”*

And she drew up the window with a sharp clang in Tom’s face.

She sat stiff and silent, and sniffed as she looked sternly through the window, and answered Winnifred Dobbs, who was under the same comfortable delusion about the vicinity of Winderbrooke, sharply and suddenly, when she asked how far they still had to go, before reaching that resting place.

“Fifty miles, and another range of mountains.”

CHAPTER III.

THE MOON RISES.

DOWN hill was pleasanter, and the bay mare did wonders, and my Aunt, who was not more unjust than the rest of her sex, soon forgave her companion, and talked affably enough with fat old Winnie Dobbs.

About two miles beyond the foot of the hill, in a pretty hollow, lies the pleasant little town of Dramworth, with old red brick gables and many tall poplars, where at the small inn, the party changed horses.

It was not far from three o'clock in the afternoon when they arrived there. One horse they found in the inn stable, but nothing less than a postchaise, and no driver on the premises, men and vehicles being away on other travels.

Tom being well known there, and fortunately being well esteemed, there was no great hesitation in trusting the horse in his hands. So the bay mare took her place in the stable, and the Dramworth steed was put to in her place. It was a long drive — three-and-twenty miles — still to Winderbrooke, and the horse and the roads indifferent The season was pretty well on in the autumn, and the evenings were not so long as they had been at midsummer, and as it was some time past three when they started, Tom could not undertake to reach their destination before nightfall.

From Dram worth to Winderbrooke was by no means so familiar a route to Tom Teukesbury as the road they had travelled hitherto. He conferred, however, with mine host under the porch, and gathered in brief hints and notes, the landmarks of his journey, and resumed the whip and reins with a serious but tolerably confident countenance.

Tom being under promise to spare the horse, drove drowsily. It is a very pretty country, though but thinly inhabited. The sun was by this time at the verge of those low hills that lie to the westward. They had just crossed a narrow old bridge over a little stream, and there was an ascent at the other side, which their horse refused to mount until the ladies had descended. In fact he was an unsatisfactory brute and, Tom feared, had been out that morning.

My Aunt and Winnifred got down and trudged on, this time in front of the vehicle, which came tinkling up the slope, in the slanting light, with Tom at the horse's head. In this lonely region a solitary little boy came over a stile by the roadside, and looking back, Aunt Margaret saw Tom at a standstill, conversing with the urchin, and pointing in various directions in illustration of his discourse, or his questioning.

"Well, Tom, what does he say? How far is it to Winderbrooke?"

"He is a stoopid, that boy, and knows nout — no more than that post, ma'am — he doan't."

I think Tom was uneasy by this time, for he did not know the country. He was gaping about him vainly for a sight of a human being, and standing up in the "dickey" and beckoning with his whip whenever he fancied he saw one. But each in succession turned out to be a horse or a goat, or a post Sometimes he got up a brisk trot, and sometimes subsided almost to a walk, as his doubts or his hopes prevailed. But though he affected in replying to my Aunt's queries through the front window, a confidence as to their whereabouts, and promised the early appearance of certain landmarks which he named, yet I think by this time honest Tom was strongly of opinion that he had lost his way.

By the time the sun went down they had got upon a wild moorland with patches of stunted old wood, and heathy undulations, and distant boundaries of low hills, crowned irregularly with trees.

"Get on a little faster, please; I don't like being out in the dark," urged my Aunt who, as a spinster, and in charge beside of Winnie Dobbs, felt her responsibilities duly.

Tom muttered to himself, and got into a trot which, however, soon abated. Twilight was deepening and a round harvest moon soon began to shine solemnly over the broad and solitary landscape.

"How many miles now, Tom?" asked my Aunt sharply from the window.

"It'll be about five from Winderbrooke, ma'am."

"And what's this place?"

"Well, it's the moor, I suppose."

"I'd like a glass of water. Is there a house near?"

"We'll be soon at the cross-mills — round that bit of a clump o' trees there."

But when they passed the dump there was neither river nor mills, and Tom stood up uneasily in the dickey, and made a dreary survey.

“Are we at the mills, Tom?”

“Not yet a bit, ma’am — I’m a looking if there’s a house near.”

But there was no friendly red twinkle from cottage window, and Tom, with his two maidens in charge, was growing very uncomfortable.

CHAPTER IV.

PERTURBATION.

They drove very slowly. Tom was groping in a geographical chaos, and paused every now and then. My Aunt inquired angrily, demanding the production of the cross-mills. Tom asked ten minutes, and half a mile more, and promised the *profert;* but after half an hour's driving, with no result, my Aunt grew extremely frightened and exasperated, and Tom sulkily admitted that he had his doubts as to their topographical position.

Tom halted, and stood up in the dickey, as before. My Aunt Margaret descended, and looking at the moonlit prospect from the bank by the roadside, harangued the troubled driver in strong and shrill language; and Winnie, whose grief was more sedentary, sat in the vehicle, and spoke not but stared through the window, with a fat and fatigued sadness, in vague apprehension.

There were plenty of old stories of highwaymen afloat through their scared fancies; and here was a lonely heath — two helpless maidens also, with a trunk, a basket of "prog," and four pounds seven and sixpence in a purse, and a driver without small or back-sword, and no pistols!

"We'll, sure get on the London road in two miles more or less, and then we're all right," said Tom.

"London, fiddle! It's my belief, Thomas Teukesbury, you nave not the faintest idea where we are; you haven't, sir, no more than myself."

"There isn't a light nor a house.

D — n the place!" retorted Tom, bitterly.

"Don't curse — we're bad enough. No impiety, please. *You* should command yourself, I think, if I do, while we are in this helpless and utterly unprotected situation."

"There's a man coming," said Tom, hopefully.

Good gracious!" cried my Aunt "No, there ain't," said Tom, dejectedly.

"Heaven be praised!" said my Aunt, with a gasp. "I look on it sir, we're in danger here on this dreadful moor, to which *you,* sir, have brought us.

What a shame, Thomas, to pretend you knew the way! Winnie, Winnie Dobbs, we're *lost* — lost on a heath! Tom has lost us!"

Winnie's fat, forlorn face filled the back window of the vehicle.

"Lost on a heath, Winnie, in the middle of the night!"

"What'll we best do ma'am?" imploringly asked Winnie, who was accustomed to derive her stock of wisdom in all emergencies from my Aunt Margaret's inspiration.

"Ask Thomas Teukesbury up there — he's our guide. He brought us here, though he does not seem to know a way out Ask him. I don't know, no more than the man in the moon there."

"I dessay we're all right enough, after all," said Tom, "only I don't know it by this light Will you get in, ma'am, and well git on a bit, and we'll, sure, light on a hinn or a public afore long."

Well, she did get in. The horse was unmistakably fatigued, with a disposition to draw up every now and then, by an old tree, or under a steep bank, or sometimes without any special landmark to invite.

Tom got down, and walked by the brute's adjected head; and my Aunt, who had given up the sarcastic and ironical mood as her alarms deepened, scolded him occasionally from the front window. As the back of his head and shoulders were presented, Tom walked on, not caring to turn about to reply, but, I am afraid, making some disrespectful remarks in the dark.

In fact, the poor horse, who, if he had but understood and spoken our language, could, probably, have saved them and himself a world of trouble, was so evidently done up that Tom insisted he must have his oats, and accordingly, he partook of that refreshment in a nosebag. Here was another delay. My Aunt's watch had been frequently consulted, by the moonlight, during that anxious journey. It was now out again. The night was a little sharp, too; and the whole party, who had made no provision for such a climate and such hours, were rather cold. You may be sure my Aunt's temper was not growing more agreeable.

There was just the alternative of a bivouac where they stood, or following, on chance, the road they had been pursuing. My Aunt adopted the latter. Affairs had grown so serious that she now never removed her face from the little front window, through which she looked ahead, with hope deferred, and a sick heart.

She had been so often deceived by marly banks and thickets, that it was not until they had almost reached it, to her inexpressible relief, she plainly saw the whitewashed front of a low, two-storied public, standing back from the road a few yards, and snugly sheltered among some thick and stunted trees.

My Aunt held the reins through the window, and Tom got down and summoned mine host A red streak of candlelight shot out through the door of the pot-house, and there was a parley which she could not hear.

CHAPTER V.

"THE GOOD WOMAN."

Tom returned slowly. My Aunt's heart sank.

"Well?"

"Only two rooms, ma'am, and lofts above, and the house full o' tipsy colliers, dancing. But there's an inn, called "The Good Woman," only half a mile on, and lots o' room."

My Aunt breathed a sigh of relief, and was silently thankful. Then she repeated the news to Winnie, who joined in the jubilation.

About ten minutes more brought them, after a slight ascent, on a sudden, to a hollow, expanding to an amphitheatrical plain, encompassed by wooded, rising grounds, and near the centre of which rose two abrupt and oddly-shaped hillocks, like islands from a lake, and a very large pond from under a thick screen of trees, and the clustered gables and chimneys of "The Good Woman" shone mistily in the moonlight They drew up before the door of the inn. Oldfashioned and weather-stained it looked in the faint beams. The door was closed — it was past ten o'clock — but a glimmer of candle or firelight shone through the shutter chink at the right My Aunt did not wait. There was no need to hold the reins of the timid horse, who coughed, snorted, and shook himself, with his nose near the ground.

My Aunt Margaret ran up the three broad steps, the dingy "Good Woman," without a head, sarcastically swinging between the sign-posts at her left With the carpet-bag in one hand, she hammered lustily at the knocker with the other. Tom, a little in the rear, with one foot on the steps, rested the trunk on his knee; and Winnie, with the basket of "prog" on her arm, stood dejectedly beside him.

There was some delay about opening the door, and when it was done, it was with a chain across, and a woman, with a coarse voice, and strong Irish accent, asked, not pleasantly, who was there.

"Travellers," said my Aunt, "who have been led astray by the driver."

"Where are yez from?"

"From Dramworth to Winderbrooke."

"From Dhramworth to Windherbrooke! an' he dhruv yez here! How many iv yez is in it?"

"Two ladies, a horse, a vehicle, and the driver." Tom, the culprit, was degraded, and my Aunt placed him after the vehicle.

The maid of the inn, with high-cheek bones, and a determined countenance, was looking over the chain.

"Did yez come through the village, or over the moor?"

"Over the moor, I suppose; from that direction," answered my Aunt "And why didn't yez stop at "The Cat and Fiddle?"

"You mean the small ale-house near this. It was full of inebriated men," answered Aunt Margaret, with dignity.

Well, *you* may come in, ma'am, and the leedy that's widge ye; but we can't *Accommodate* yer man, and he must only take the horse an' carriage back to 'The Cat an' Fiddle,' an' if that'll answer, yez may come in; if not, yez must all go on, for we won't let a man in after ten o'clock."

My Aunt expostulated, but the portress was inexorable.

"We won't let a *man* in after ten o'clock for Saint Payther, and that's the holy all iv it," she answered, firmly.

So, my Aunt submitted, and softening at the parting, gave Tom some shillings on account, and wished him goodnight; and when he had got upon the box, and started afresh for "The Cat and Fiddle," and had made some way in his return, the door was shut in the faces of the spinsters, who stood, with their modest luggage, upon the steps, in the moonlight. The chain was withdrawn, and the hall of "The Good Woman" stood open to receive them.

I don't know whether my Aunt had read "Ferdinand Count Fathom," or ever seen the "Bleeding Nun" performed on any stage; bat if she had I venture to say she was reminded of both before morning.

The woman with high-cheek bones, and somewhat forbidding face, stood before them on their entrance, with a brass candlestick raised in her hand, so that the light fell from above her head on the faces of the guests. She had allowed them without a helping hand to pull in their luggage, and was now maxing a steady and somewhat scowling scrutiny of my Aunt and Winnie.

"And yez come from Windberbrooke?" she said, after an interval, with a jealous glance still upon them.

My Aunt nodded.

"Yer mighty tall, the two o' yez, I'm thinkin (another pause.) "Will I help yez off widge yer cloaks?"

My Aunt would nave probably been tart enough upon this uncivil damsel, had it not been that her attention was a little called of! by the sound of female lamentation indistinctly audible from a chamber near the hall.

She proceeded to remove their mantles., eyeing them, at the same time, with a surly sort of curiosity.

"We are cold, my good woman; we can sit for a while by the kitchen fire," said my Aunt, recollecting herself.

"The kitchen's all through other wid the sutt that's tumbled down the chimbley; bud I'll light yez a bit o' fire in a brace o' shakes in your bedroom. Is it dinner yez'ill be wanting?"

"Tea, please," said my Aunt, "and Lend a hand i' ye plase, Missess, wid them things," said she to Winnie, whom, with the quick instinct of her kind, she discovered to be the subordinate.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WHITE CHAMBER.

A FAT slatternly woman, by no means young, with a face swollen and red with weeping, pushed open a side door, and standing behind the portress, gaped on them, and asked— "Is it them, Nell?"

"Arra, ma'am, can't ye keep quite. No it isn't no one, but here's two leedies ye see, that wants a bed an' a fire, and a cup o' tay in the white room. Come along i' ye plase, my leedy."

And in an' aside, as she passed, my Aunt heard her say, close in the blubbered face of the fat woman— "Arrah, ma'am, dear, will ye get in out o' that, an' shut the doore.

The stout woman complied; and as they mounted the broad stairs, they again heard the sounds of crying.

This certainly savoured in no wise of the warm welcome for which inns are famous. The mansion, too, old wainscoted, and palpably altogether too large for its business. They met Boots coming down the stairs with a dingy kitchen candle and a hammer in his hand; a pallid fellow, with the sort of inquiring hang-dog look that seemed to belong to the staff of "The Good Woman." He stood close by the wall in the corner of the lobby as they passed by, and did not offer to carry up the trunk.

"Bring a guvvaul o' wudd, will ye. Barney, jewel, to the white room?" said the handmaid over her shoulder.

My Aunt and Winnie followed her to the head of the stairs, where she placed the trunk, and this slight circumstance I mention, because it was immediately connected with my Aunt's adventure, and she took a coalscuttle instead, and conducting by two turns into a long wainscoted gallery, she opened a door on the right, and they entered a large square room, with a recess near one angle, two tall narrow windows, with white curtains rather yellow, and one very capacious bed, with curtains of the same. There was a skimpy bit of carpet near the hearth, and very scant and plain furniture.

The wood having arrived, Nell made a good fire, placed the deal table and two chairs near it, lighted a large mould of four to the pound, such as Molly Dumpling sported on the night of her dreadful adventure with William Gardner, and altogether the room began to put on its cheeriest looks. And when the teathings, eggs, and battered toast arrived, my Aunt and Winnie being well warmed by this time, sat down with their feet on the fender, the one mollified and the other consoled.

After tea, my Aunt, who was a fidgety person, made a tour of the room, and a scrutiny of the open cupboard and drawers, but she found nothing, except an old black glove for the left hand, in one of the drawers.

When this was over she sat by the fire again, and speculated for Winnie's instruction upon their geographical probabilities. But Winnie was growing sleepy.

"A double-bedded room would have been more *comme il faut;* but it is plainly a poor place, and after all the bed is unusually large," thought my Aunt.

And so, indeed, it was, extraordinarily large, and of an oldfashioned construction.

My Aunt, who was of an active inquiring genius, opened a bit of one of the shutters and peeped out It showed a view of the inn yard. The side next her had been formed by a wing of the house; but that now stood up a gaunt roofless wall, with the broad moon shining through its sashless windows. On the left was a row of tall and dingy stables and offices, and opposite, another ruined building, a shed, and a tall arched gate. The pavement was grass-grown and rutty, and the whole thing looked awfully seedy, and not the less gloomy for some great trees that darkly overhung the buildings from the outside.

Having made her survey, my Aunt would have closed the shutter, but that she saw a man walk lazily from the side beneath her, his hands in his pockets, across the yard, casting an undulating and misshapen shadow over the uneven pavement.

When he reached the gate at the other side, he took a key from his pocket, and unlocked a wicket in it, and setting his foot on the plank beneath, leaned his elbow on the side, and lazily looked out, as if on the watch for somebody. A huge dog came pattering out of a kennel in the shadow, and placing his great head by the man's leg, sniffed gloomily into the darkness.

“Are ye expectin’ any friends, ma’am?” asked Nell’s coarse voice over my Aunt’s shoulder, so sharply and suddenly that the start brought the blood to her thin cheeks.

“Not very likely to see friends here,” replied my Aunt, Very tartly. “What do you mean, woman, by talking that way over my shoulder?”

The grim chambermaid by this time had seen the man, and was eyeing him under her projecting and somewhat shrewish brows.

“An’ ye come from Hoxton?” she said rather slowly and sharply.

“I told you so, woman.”

“It wasn’t from Westerton, ye’re sure?”

“I’ve told you where we came from, though it is no business of yours. I never heard of Westerton.”

My Aunt added this a little emphatically, owing to an undefined feeling that a suspicion of having come from Westerton was likely in some mysterious way to prejudice her.

The maid replied nothing, but said a little gruffly, “By your lave, ma’am and pushing by her, she closed the shutters, and drew a great wooden sliding bolt across with a jerk.

My Aunt was so taken by surprise that she lost her time for retorting with effect, as she would have done, but she was so incensed, that from the fireplace she could not forbear saying, “I think you a most impertinent woman.”

To which the maid made no reply, but turned down the bedclothes, and arranged the curtains; and gathering together the tea equipage, carried the tray away, shutting the door.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ACCIDENT BEFALLS THE CANDLE.

MY Aunt Margaret stood for a while with her back to the fire, very erect, and her nose in air, sniffing defiantly toward the door through which that “most impertinent woman” had disappeared. Winnie was nodding profoundly in her chair by the fire. My Aunt with a toss of her head walked off again to the window, jerked back the bolt, and looked once more into the stableyard.

She saw Nell at the wicket-door, the man who had taken his stand there with the dog. Nell seemed to prevail with him, for he whistled back the dog, who had gone out, and locking the door again, he returned across the yard with Nell, who continued talking volubly as they walked side by side, and pointed up at my Aunt’s window. On seeing the shutter again open and my Aunt’s head and shoulders revealed against the light, both maid and man stopped in amaze, and silently gazed at her for some moments. I dare say, as my Aunt observed the evident impression produced upon those mysterious persons, she regretted inwardly the act of defiance which had removed the bolt and replaced her at the window. The woman walked into the house without speaking; the man called the dog, and strolled away towards the stable.

My Aunt closed the shutter, drew the bolt, and coming again to the fire, shook Winnie up from her sleep, and ordered her to say her prayers and get to bed.

These orders were soon complied with, and honest Winnie slept the sleep of a good conscience and a good digestion, sweetened by fatigue, while her mistress, who was cursed with an active mind, sat by the fire, with a well-snuffed candle, and conned over her correspondence and her figures, and prepared for the critical interview with the defaulting tobacconist next day. Then she fell into a reverie with her foot on the fender. I don’t think she dozed; but the fire grew low, and the snuff of the candle waxed long and heavy at top like a fungus, and the room was tenebrose and silent, as indeed was the house, for by this time it was very late.

After a while, my Aunt fancied she heard some one approaching her chamber door very softly. It was the stealthy creaking of the boards that warned her; she could not hear the tread of the foot. She held her breath, sitting straight upon her chair, and gazing at the door with such faint light as her unsnuffed taper afforded her; and I dare say she looked extremely frightened.

She heard some one breathing close outside the door, then a hand softly laid on the door-handle; the door gently opened, and the face of the woman of the high cheek bones, pale and lowering, looked in. Her ill-omened stare encountered my Aunt's gaze, and each was perhaps unpleasantly surprised.

Both looked on, pale enough, for some time without speaking. At last my Aunt stood up and said sharply— "What's your business here, pray?"

"'Tis late to be burnin' candle and fire, missess — halfpast twelve, no less," said the maid with cool asperity. "We're an airly house, ma'am, here, and keeps dacent hours. Mebbe it's what ye'd like supper — there's cowld corn-beef and bacon," she added after a pause.

"Not any, thanks; had I wished rapper, I would have rung for it," said Aunt Margaret, loftily.

"Thrue for you, missess, only there's no bell," answered the woman, coolly.

"More shame for you," retorted my Aunt, with a little flush, glancing along the walls innocent of bell-rope, for this "most impertinent woman" made her feel a little small.

"I seen you lookin' out again, ma'am, through the windy, I don't know after who."

The *aplomb* of this woman's attacks deprived my Aunt of breath and presence of mind, and she was amazed afterwards at the perplexed sort of patience with which she submitted to her impertinence.

"Yes: I looked out of the window."

"We would not like people stoppin' here that had friends outside," said the woman, with a searching glance and a sulky wag of her head.

"I don't know what you mean, woman."

"Oh, ho! thankee — I know very well what I mane — an' raebbe you're not quite sich a fool yourself but what you can make a guess. At any rate it is not a lady's part to be fur retin' about the room, an pimpin' an' spyin', ma'am."

“Leave the room, please,” exclaimed my Aunt.

“An’ mebbe signin’ and beckonin’ out o’ the windies be night. Oh, ho! thankee — I know well enough what belongs to a lady.”

“I repeat, woman, you had better leave the room.”

“*Woman,* yourself! — I’m not goin’ to be woman’d be you — an’ the big lump iv a woman ye brought widge ye. Who’s that? eh?”

“My housekeeper,” replied my Aunt, with a fierce dignity.

“An’ a strappin’ ould one she is,” retorted the woman, with a hoarse sneer. She was turning over Winnie’s clothes, which lay on a chair.

“Your conduct is intolerable. I shall see the proprietor in the morning.”

“An’ welcome!” said the woman, coolly. “You closed the shutters again, I suppose?” and she walked round the bed to the window, from which my Aunt had made her observations.

I do believe that, if she was enraged, Aunt Margaret was also the least bit in the world cowed by this woman. But observing a little trembling in the bed-curtains, to the far side of which her ugly visitor had passed, my Aunt made a quick step to the side of the bed next her, and drawing the curtain, saw this unpleasant woman at the opposite side with the bedclothes raised in her hand from Winnie’s feet and ankles, which she was inspecting.

“Big feet!” Where’s her boots, ma’am?” said the maid across the bed, eyeing my Aunt aslant, and replacing the bedclothes.

“Boots or shoes, on the floor by the fire, and I wish you’d begone.”

“I’ll take your own, too, ma’am,” answered she.

“Well, yes; that is, I’ll leave them outside the door.”

“As ye plaze: only get to yer bed, at wonst — it s all hours;” and without more preparation, she chucked my Aunt’s mould candle from its socket into the fire, where, lying on its side it blazed up merrily.

“What do you mean? How dare you, huzzy! Fetch a candle this moment.”

“Arra go to yer bed, woman, while ye have light, will ye?” and with these words the attendant withdrew, shutting the door with a clap.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF A FIGURE SEEN BY MY AUNT.

MY Aunt opened the door, very angry. She was about to walk down stairs to insist on trying the delinquent by court-martial before the "Proprietor;" but she recollected that he was probably in his bed and asleep by this time. She contented herself, therefore, by calling after her.

"Rely on it, I'll complain in the morning — so sure as I live."

And so she shut the door, and the candle making a glorious blaze in the grate my Aunt thought the chambermaid's advice worth following, and did get into her bed while there was light I dare say her collision with the chambermaid cost her more than twenty minutes' sleep. When her anger subsided there remained a different sort of uneasiness, for there was something ill-omened and menacing in the unintelligible ways of this inn and its people. My Aunt Margaret, however, was really tired, and eventually fell into a slumber, deep and dreamless, from which she awakened with a start.

She fancied that she had been disturbed by a sound as of some heavy weight pulled along the floor close to the room in which she slept The sound had ceased before she was fully awake; but it left her with a most disagreeable sensation of fear and uncertainty, for, undefinably, it was connected in her mind with the idea of mischief designed to herself.

All of a sudden she remembered her trunk, left at the head of the staircase, and the idea rushed upon her, "They are stealing my trunk!" The sound resembled the rumble of it along the floor.

My Aunt had a keen sense of property, and was not wanting in pluck. She jumped out of bed, opened her door softly, and listened. But everything was perfectly quiet "It was in order to confine me to my room that that odious woman deprived me of my candle," thought my Aunt, although even if she had had it at her bedside she could not have lighted it, for the fire had gone quite out She listened, but there was nothing stirring; and, in extreme *déshabille*, as she was, my Aunt, full of anxieties, crept out on the lobby, and made her way through the passages to the stairhead.

There stood the old hair trunk on its end, with its rows of dim brass nails, plain enough in the faint light from the lobby window. My Aunt was relieved. She would have been very glad to pull it into her room; but the distance was considerable, and the noise would have brought the people about her, and she was in no state to receive company.

Having stood affectionately and anxiously by the friendly trunk for a minute or two, irresolute, she began to find it too cold to stay longer; so, with an easier mind, she groped her way back again.

It was easier to find the lobby than to discover in the dark her own bedroom door. She groped along the passages; she had counted the steps, but now was not quite sure whether it was thirty-five, or *forty*-five; she stopped now and then to listen in her groping return, and began to grow rather confused; and wished, as active-minded persons not unfrequently do, that she had remained quietly as she was.

In fact, she was precisely in the situation to lose her way, and step into a wrong bedroom, and was extremely uncomfortable in mind and cold in body; and very nervous beside, lest any one should chance to come that way with a candle, and discover the nakedness of the land.

In this state my Aunt's deliberations were of the very fussiest sort, and her exertions great; but I doubt if she could hare recovered her room, at least at the first venture, without light. Light, however, did come, and this was the manner of its arrival On a sudden a door opened below stairs — near the foot of the staircase it must have been, she heard so clearly; and voices, before inaudible, now reached her ear.

A female was weeping loudly, and uttering broken sentences through her sobs.

"They've killed him — he's murdered — they've murdered him!" and similar ejaculations came rapidly tumbling one over the other in her ululation.

"Arra, ma'am, go back again, and stay where ye wor. We'll be even wid them yet, for it is murdher, the villians! said a voice, which my Aunt had no difficulty in recognising as that of the Irish chambermaid. "Bud don't be rousin' the people — it must be done quiet."

There was more sobbing, and more talk, and the weeping female gave way, and was again shut into her room, and a gleam of an approaching candle sent an angular shadow on the ceiling at the end of the passage in which my Aunt stood Extremely frightened, she crouched down close to the ground, and the forbidding-looking woman, with the high cheek bones, walked stealthily in from the stairhead passage, and stood, as pale as death, with her shoes off, and a candle in her hand, listening, as it seemed, at the far end of the gallery. She looked over her shoulder, and said, in a hard whisper —

“Stop there, wid their heavy shoes.” She had a hammer in her hand, and looked unspeakably repulsive in her pallor. She lifted the candle above her head and listened. My Aunt was staring full at her from her place of semi-concealment, in a recess of one of the doors, with her face close to the ground.

If the woman saw her, she had presence of mind to make no sign; but with the hand in which the hammer was, she drew her dress up a little to enable her to step more freely, and, with a light, soft tread, passed across the entrance of the gallery.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FUNERAL VISITATION.

MY Aunt was impressed with the most dismal and terrific ideas of what was going forward. She was quite unnerved. She saw, sometimes the shadow of this woman, and sometimes the full light of the candle, still thrown upon the floor and walls at the end of the lobby, and dared not move.

Quickly the woman returned. She had now the hammer under the arm which bore the candlestick, and whispered —

“Barney!”

Then she raised in her other hand a long, rather slender, steel blade, as it appeared to my aunt, quite straight, and whispered —

“That’s the thing — betther nor the hammer; there’s no one awake but herself — for the life o’ ye, make no noise.”

She was crossing the far end of the passage as she said this, and she and the light of her candle quickly disappeared.

The last gleam threw the shadow of a pair of shoes from outside a bedroom door, along the floor, towards my Aunt The door was next that in which she was crouched, and was a little open. She was now sure that she had discovered her room.

The moment the light had quite disappeared, she entered, and shut the door softly, and groped her way to the bed, and got in at her own side; and, being very cold, lay close to her companion for warmth. My Aunt envied Winnie her sound sleep. She vainly tried to compose herself, wildly conjecturing about unknown horrors, and longing for morning, and an escape from this suspected and mysterious house.

She was miserably cold, too. The night was sharp, and the fire long out. The bedclothes were insufficient, and Winnie also as cold as stone.

My Aunt had been in this state-freezing and listening, and awfully frightened for some ten minutes, perhaps, when she distinctly heard breathing near her door, and the muffled tread of shoeless feet, and then a whispering.

The door opened, and two men came in, carrying a coffin, on the lid of which a kitchen candle was burning dimly; and the ugly woman, Nell, between whom and my Aunt there had grown up, so fast, an unaccountable antipathy, followed, carrying in her hand the steel instrument which Aunt Margaret had observed before with so unpleasant a suspicion, and which was, in fact, a turnscrew.

The whole of this funereal pageant of a dream. The men paused for a moment, while the woman placed the candle on a chest of drawers, and slid the coffin-lid off, leaning it against the wall. They drew near; and as they laid their awful burthen lengthways on the bed by her side, one of the two men said —

"I'll go to the feet, and do you go to the head."

Upon this my Aunt, almost beside herself with terror, bounced up in the bed; and, instead of despatching her as she had expected, with a horrid roar and a screech, the men and woman fled from the room, and along the passage, leaving the coffin on the bed beside her.

"Winnie, Winnie — what is it?" cried my Aunt But no Winnie was there. In her stead lay a dead man, with a white-fringed cap on, and a black, stubbed beard, the growth of some three or four days, and a little line of the white of one eye shining between its half-closed lids.

It was now; my Aunt's turn, and with a loud yell, and overturning the coffin, she jumped out of the bed, and ran screaming along the gallery, where she fell, and fainted on the floor.

When she came to herself, she was in her own room and bed once more, with Winnie beside her: and she exclaimed, so soon as recollection quite returned —

"Oh, save me, Winnie, save me."

"You're quite safe, ma'am, dear."

"Where are we?"

"In the inn, ma'am."

"Bolt the door, Winnie; bolt the door, and lock it — they're all murderers."

"Drink some water, ma'am."

"Lock the door, you fool! We shall be murdered."

"The maid was here, ma'am, very sorry you were so frightened; but you went into the wrong room, and they could not help it."

CHAPTER X.

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED.

GRADUALLY the facts came to light, though not fully for a long time afterward.

"The Good Woman" was one of those inns pleasantly known to our great-grandfathers. The old London road had run by its steps; and the wheels of old stagecoaches, postchaises, and waggons, had dustied its windows once. But unluckily for "The Good Woman, she stood upon the apex of a curve of that great channel of traffic which modern reform and a county presentment cut off; and the London road, henceforward running in a straight line from Dwiddleston to Huxbridge — fifteen miles — leaves "The Good Woman" full three miles on one side.

With the opening of the new line, and the "Crottworthy Arms," the halcyon days of the old inn ended. Its gabled frontage, steep roofs, and capacious premises — a world too wide for its shrunk business — fell gradually to decay. The old proprietor retired to his farm in Cheshire; and his nephew succeeded, got desperately into debt, was sued in all directions, and judgments wielded by exasperated creditors glimmered terribly through the storm, threatening to dash him to pieces. At this crisis, the ill-starred innkeeper, having ventured by night to Maryston — all his excursions of late had been in the dark — took cold, and died of a catarrh in three days.

The inn, nearly reduced to a state of siege; the innkeeper himself having Ions been an invisible and intangible substance, hid away from warrants, arrests, and other personal dangers, among the dilapidated lumber rooms and garrets of the old house; the people thinking more of a moonlit flitting than of improving the traffic of the forlorn "Good Woman when the proprietor died, that procedure upon his part was kept as secret as every other of late had been, and not altogether without cause, for there were those among his incensed creditors who were by no means incapable of the legal barbarity of arresting his corpse.

Thus came the mystery and suspicion with which my Aunt and Winnie were received — the coffin being expected hourly, and a grave opened, in the dark, in the neighbouring churchyard. The Irish maid, whose head was full of the disguises and stratagems of which she had heard so much in her own ingenious and turbulent country, was for a while, disposed to think that the unseasonable visitors were myrmidons of the law in disguise. The fat, dowdy woman, who emerged, with blubbered cheeks, when they entered, and whose lamentations subsequently my Aunt heard when she visited her trunk on the stairhead, was the widow of the departed proprietor.

The rest, I think, explains itself; and the reader will be, no doubt glad to learn that my Aunt's visit to Winderbrooke was, on the whole, satisfactory, and that she lived for many years to recount, by the fireside, to hushed listeners, this "winter's tale" of her adventures in "The Good Woman."

THE END

MADAM CROWL’S GHOST

Twenty years have passed since you last saw Mrs. Jolliffe’s tall slim figure. She is now past seventy, and can’t have many milestones more to count on the journey that will bring her to her long home. The hair has grown white as snow, that is parted under her cap, over her shrewd, but kindly face. But her figure is still straight, and her step light and active.

She has taken of late years to the care of adult invalids, having surrendered to younger hands the little people who inhabit cradles, and crawl on all-fours. Those who remember that goodnatured face among the earliest that emerge from the darkness of nonentity, and who owe to their first lessons in the accomplishment of walking, and a delighted appreciation of their first babblings and earliest teeth, have “spired up” into tall lads and lasses, now. Some of them shew streaks of white by this time, in brown locks, “the bonny gouden” hair, that she was so proud to brush and shew to admiring mothers, who are seen no more on the green of Golden Friars, and whose names are traced now on the flat grey stones in the churchyard.

So the time is ripening some, and searing others; and the saddening and tender sunset hour has come; and it is evening with the kind old north-country dame, who nursed pretty Laura Mildmay, who now stepping into the room, smiles so gladly, and throws her arms round the old woman’s neck, and kisses her twice.

“Now, this is so lucky!” said Mrs. Jenner, “you have just come in time to hear a story.”

“Really! That’s delightful.”

“Na, na, od wite it! no story, ouer true for that, I sid it a wi my aan eyen. But the barn here, would not like, at these hours, just goin’ to her bed, to hear tell of freets and boggarts.”

“Ghosts? The very thing of all others I should most likely to hear of.”

“Well, dear,” said Mrs. Jenner, “if you are not afraid, sit ye down here, with us.”

“She was just going to tell me all about her first engagement to attend a dying old woman,” says Mrs. Jenner, “and of the ghost she saw there. Now, Mrs. Jolliffe, make your tea first, and then begin.”

The good woman obeyed, and having prepared a cup of that companionable nectar, she sipped a little, drew her brows slightly together to collect her thoughts, and then looked up with a wondrous solemn face to begin.

Good Mrs. Jenner, and the pretty girl, each gazed with eyes of solemn expectation in the face of the old woman, who seemed to gather awe from the recollections she was summoning.

The old room was a good scene for such a narrative, with the oak-wainscoting, quaint, and clumsy furniture, the heavy beams that crossed its ceiling, and the tall four-post bed, with dark curtains, within which you might imagine what shadows you please.

Mrs. Jolliffe cleared her voice, rolled her eyes slowly round, and began her tale in these words: —

MADAM CROWL'S GHOST

"I'm an ald woman now, and I was but thirteen, my last birthday, the night I came to Applewale House. My aunt was the housekeeper there, and a sort o' one-horse carriage was down at Lexhoe waitin' to take me and my box up to Applewale.

"I was a bit frightened by the time I got to Lexhoe, and when I saw the carriage and horse, I wished myself back again with my mother at Hazelden. I was crying when I got into the 'shay' — that's what we used to call it — and old John Mulbery that drove it, and was a goodnatured fellow, bought me a handful of apples at the Golden Lion to cheer me up a bit; and he told me that there was a currant-cake, and tea, and pork-chops, waiting for me, all hot, in my aunt's room at the great house. It was a fine moonlight night, and I eat the apples, lookin' out o' the shay winda.

"It's a shame for gentlemen to frighten a poor foolish child like I was. I sometimes think it might be tricks. There was two on 'em on the tap o' the coach beside me. And they began to question me after nightfall, when the moon rose, where I was going to. Well, I told them it was to wait on Dame Arabella Crowl, of Applewale House, near by Lexhoe.

"'Ho, then,' says one of them, 'you'll not be long there!'

"And I looked at him as much as to say 'Why not?' for I had spoken out when I told them where I was goin', as if 'twas something clever I hed to say.

"'Because,' says he, 'and don't you for your life tell no one, only watch her and see — she's possessed by the devil, and more an half a ghost. Have you got a Bible?'

"'Yes, sir,' says I. For my mother put my little Bible in my box, and I knew it was there: and by the same token, though the print's too small for my ald eyes, I have it in my press to this hour.

"As I looked up at him saying 'Yes, sir,' I thought I saw him winkin' at his friend; but I could not be sure.

"'Well,' says he, 'be sure you put it under your bolster every night, it will keep the ald girl's claws aff ye.'

"And I got such a fright when he said that, you wouldn't fancy! And I'd a liked to ask him a lot about the ald lady, but I was too shy, and he and his friend began talkin' together about their own consarns, and dowly enough I got down, as I told ye, at Lexhoe. My heart sank as I drove into the dark avenue. The trees stand very thick and big, as ald as the ald house almost, and four people, with their arms out and fingertips touchin', barely girds round some of them.

"Well my neck was stretched out o' the winda, looking for the first view o' the great house; and all at once we pulled up in front of it.

"A great white-and-black house it is, wi' great black beams across and right up it, and gables lookin' out, as white as a sheet, to the moon, and the shadows o' the trees, two or three up and down in front, you could count the leaves on them, and all the little diamond-shaped winda-panes, glimmering on the great hall winda, and great shutters, in the old fashion, hinged on the wall outside, boulted across all the rest o' the windas in front, for there was but three or four servants, and the old lady in the house, and most o' t' rooms was locked up.

"My heart was in my mouth when I sid the journey was over, and this the great house afoore me, and I sa near my aunt that I never sid till noo, and Dame Crowl, that I was come to wait upon, and was afeard on already.

"My aunt kissed me in the hall, and brought me to her room. She was tall and thin, wi' a pale face and black eyes, and long thin hands wi' black mittins on. She was past fifty, and her word was short; but her word was law. I hev no complaints to make of her; but she was a hard woman, and I think she would hev bin kinder to me if I had bin her sister's child in place of her brother's. But all that's o' no consequence noo.

"The squire — his name was Mr. Chevenix Crowl, he was Dame Crowl's grandson — came down there, by way of seeing that the old lady was well treated, about twice or thrice in the year. I sid him but twice all the time I was at Applewale House.

"I can't say but she was well taken care of, notwithstanding; but that was because my aunt and Meg Wyvern, that was her maid, had a conscience, and did their duty by her.

"Mrs. Wyvern — Meg Wyvern my aunt called her to herself, and Mrs. Wyvern to me — was a fat, jolly lass of fifty, a good height and a good breadth, always goodhumoured and walked slow. She had fine wages, but she was a bit stingy, and kept all her fine clothes under lock and key, and wore, mostly, a twilled chocolate cotton, wi' red, and yellow, and green sprigs and balls on it, and it lasted wonderful.

"She never gave me nout, not the vally o' a brass thimble, all the time I was there; but she was goodhumoured, and always laughin', and she talked no end o' proas over her tea; and, seeing me sa sackless and dowly, she roused me up wi' her laughin' and stories; and I think I liked her better than my aunt — children is so taken wi' a bit o' fun or a story — though my aunt was very good to me, but a hard woman about some things, and silent always.

"My aunt took me into her bedchamber, that I might rest myself a bit while she was settin' the tea in her room. But first, she patted me on the shouther, and said I was a tall lass o' my years, and had spired up well, and asked me if I could do plain work and stitchin'; and she looked in my face, and said I was like my father, her brother, that was dead and gone, and she hoped I was a better Christian, and wad na du a' that lids (would not do anything of that sort).

"It was a hard sayin' the first time I set foot in her room, I thought.

"When I went into the next room, the housekeeper's room — very comfortable, yak (oak) all round — there was a fine fire blazin' away, wi' coal, and peat, and wood, all in a low together, and tea on the table, and hot cake, and smokin' meat; and there was Mrs. Wyvern, fat, jolly, and talkin' away, more in an hour than my aunt would in a year.

"While I was still at my tea my aunt went upstairs to see Madam Crowl.

"'She's agone up to see that old Judith Squailes is awake,' says Mrs. Wyvern. 'Judith sits with Madam Crowl when me and Mrs. Shutters' —

that was my aunt's name— 'is away. She's a troublesome old lady. Ye'll hev to be sharp wi' her, or she'll be into the fire, or out o' t' winda. She goes on wires, she does, old though she be.'

"'How old, ma'am?' says I.

"'Ninety-three her last birthday, and that's eight months gone,' says she; and she laughed. 'And don't be askin' questions about her before your aunt — mind, I tell ye; just take her as you find her, and that's all.'

"'And what's to be my business about her, please, ma'am?' says I.

"'About the old lady? Well,' says she, 'your aunt, Mrs. Shutters, will tell you that; but I suppose you'll hev to sit in the room with your work, and see she's at no mischief, and let her amuse herself with her things on the table, and get her her food or drink as she calls for it, and keep her out o' mischief, and ring the bell hard if she's troublesome.'

"'Is she deaf, ma'am?'

"'No, nor blind,' says she; 'as sharp as a needle, but she's gone quite aupy, and can't remember nout rightly; and Jack the Giant Killer, or Goody Twoshoes will please her as well as the king's court, or the affairs of the nation.'

"'And what did the little girl go away for, ma'am, that went on Friday last? My aunt wrote to my mother she was to go.'

"'Yes; she's gone.'

"'What for?' says I again.

"'She didn't answer Mrs. Shutters, I do suppose,' says she. 'I don't know. Don't be talkin'; your aunt can't abide a talkin' child.'

"'And please, ma'am, is the old lady well in health?' says I.

"'It ain't no harm to ask that,' says she. 'She's torflin a bit lately, but better this week past, and I dare say she'll last out her hundred years yet. Hish! Here's your aunt coming down the passage.'

"In comes my aunt, and begins talkin' to Mrs. Wyvern, and I, beginnin' to feel more comfortable and at home like, was walkin' about the room lookin' at this thing and at that. There was pretty old china things on the cupboard, and pictures again the wall; and there was a door open in the wainscot, and I sees a queer old leathern jacket, wi' straps and buckles to it, and sleeves as long as the bedpost hangin' up inside.

"'What's that you're at, child?' says my aunt, sharp enough, turning about when I thought she least minded. 'What's that in your hand?'

"'This, ma'am?' says I, turning about with the leathern jacket. 'I don't know what it is, ma'am.'

"Pale as she was, the red came up in her cheeks, and her eyes flashed wi' anger, and I think only she had half a dozen steps to take, between her and me, she'd a gev me a sizzup. But she did gie me a shake by the shouther, and she plucked the thing out o' my hand, and says she, 'While ever you stay here, don't ye meddle wi' nout that don't belong to ye', and she hung it up on the pin that was there, and shut the door wi' a bang and locked it fast.

"Mrs. Wyvern was liftin' up her hands and laughin' all this time, quietly, in her chair, rolling herself a bit in it, as she used when she was kinkin'.

"The tears was in my eyes, and she winked at my aunt, and says she, dryin' her own eyes that was wet wi' the laughin', 'Tut, the child meant no harm — come here to me, child. It's only a pair o' crutches for lame ducks, and ask us no questions mind, and we'll tell ye no lies; and come here and sit down, and drink a mug o' beer before ye go to your bed.'

"My room, mind ye, was upstairs, next to the old lady's, and Mrs. Wyvern's bed was near hers in her room, and I was to be ready at call, if need should be.

"The old lady was in one of her tantrums that night and part of the day before. She used to take fits o' the sulks. Sometimes she would not let them dress her, and at other times she would not let them take her clothes off. She was a great beauty, they said, in her day. But there was no one about Applewale that remembered her in her prime. And she was dreadful fond o' dress, and had thick silks, and stiff satins, and velvets, and laces, and all sorts, enough to set up seven shops at the least. All her dresses was oldfashioned and queer, but worth a fortune.

"Well, I went to my bed. I lay for a while awake; for a' things was new to me; and I think the tea was in my nerves, too, for I wasn't used to it, except now and then on a holiday, or the like. And I heard Mrs. Wyvern talkin', and I listened with my hand to my ear; but I could not hear Mrs. Crowl, and I don't think she said a word.

"There was great care took of her. The people at Applewale knew that when she died they would every one get the sack; and their situations was well paid and easy.

"The doctor came twice a week to see the old lady, and you may be sure they all did as he bid them. One thing was the same every time; they were never to cross or frump her, any way, but to humour and please her in everything.

"So she lay in her clothes all that night, and next day, not a word she said, and I was at my needlework all that day, in my own room, except when I went down to my dinner.

"I would a liked to see the ald lady, and even to hear her speak. But she might as well a' bin in Lunnon a' the time for me.

"When I had my dinner my aunt sent me out for a walk for an hour. I was glad when I came back, the trees was so big, and the place so dark and lonesome, and 'twas a cloudy day, and I cried a deal, thinkin' of home, while I was walkin' alone there. That evening, the candles bein' alight, I was sittin' in my room, and the door was open into Madam Crowl's chamber, where my aunt was. It was, then, for the first time I heard what I suppose was the ald lady talking.

"It was a queer noise like, I couldn't well say which, a bird, or a beast, only it had a bleatin' sound in it, and was very small.

"I pricked my ears to hear all I could. But I could not make out one word she said. And my aunt answered:

"'The evil one can't hurt no one, ma'am, bout the Lord permits.'

"Then the same queer voice from the bed says something more that I couldn't make head nor tail on.

"And my aunt med answer again: 'Let them pull faces, ma'am, and say what they will; if the Lord be for us, who can be against us?'

"I kept listenin' with my ear turned to the door, holdin' my breath, but not another word or sound came in from the room. In about twenty minutes, as I was sittin' by the table, lookin' at the pictures in the old Aesop's Fables, I was aware o' something moving at the door, and lookin' up I sid my aunt's face lookin' in at the door, and her hand raised.

"'Hish!' says she, very soft, and comes over to me on tiptoe, and she says in a whisper: 'Thank God, she's asleep at last, and don't ye make no noise till I come back, for I'm goin' down to take my cup o' tea, and I'll be back i' noo — me and Mrs. Wyvern, and she'll be sleepin' in the room, and you can run down when we come up, and Judith will gie ye yaur supper in my room.'

"And with that she goes.

“I kep’ looking at the picture-book, as before, listenin’ every noo and then, but there was no sound, not a breath, that I could hear; an’ I began whisperin’ to the pictures and talkin’ to myself to keep my heart up, for I was growin’ feared in that big room.

“And at last up I got, and began walkin’ about the room, lookin’ at this and peepin’ at that, to amuse my mind, ye’ll understand. And at last what sud I do but peeps into Madam Crowl’s bedchamber.

“A grand chamber it was, wi’ a great four-poster, wi’ flowered silk curtains as tall as the ceilin’, and foldin’ down on the floor, and drawn close all round. There was a lookin’-glass, the biggest I ever sid before, and the room was a blaze o’ light. I counted twenty-two wax candles, all alight. Such was her fancy, and no one dared say her nay.

“I listened at the door, and gaped and wondered all round. When I heard there was not a breath, and did not see so much as a stir in the curtains, I took heart, and walked into the room on tiptoe, and looked round again. Then I takes a keek at myself in the big glass; and at last it came in my head, ‘Why couldn’t I ha’ a keek at the ald lady herself in the bed?

“Ye’d think me a fule if ye knew half how I longed to see Dame Crowl, and I thought to myself if I didn’t peep now I might wait many a day before I got so gude a chance again.

“Well, my dear, I came to the side o’ the bed, the curtains bein’ close, and my heart a’most failed me. But I took courage, and I slips my finger in between the thick curtains, and then my hand. So I waits a bit, but all was still as death. So, softly, softly I draws the curtain, and there, sure enough, I sid before me, stretched out like the painted lady on the tomb-stean in Lexhoe Church, the famous Dame Crowl, of Applewale House. There she was, dressed out. You never sid the like in they days. Satin and silk, and scarlet and green, and gold and pint lace; by Jen! ’twas a sight! A big powdered wig, half as high as herself, was a-top o’ her head, and, wow! — was ever such wrinkles? — and her old baggy throat all powdered white, and her cheeks rouged, and mouse-skin eyebrows, that Mrs. Wyvern used to stick on, and there she lay proud and stark, wi’ a pair o’ clocked silk hose on, and heels to her shoon as tall as ninepins. Lawk! But her nose was crooked and thin, and half the whites o’ her eyes was open. She used to stand, dressed as she was, gigglin’ and dribblin’ before the lookin’-glass, wi’ a fan in her hand and a big nosegay in her bodice. Her wrinkled little hands was stretched down by her sides, and such long nails, all cut into points, I never sid in my days. Could it even a bin the fashion for grit fowk to wear their fingernails so?

"Well, I think ye'd a-bin frightened yourself if ye'd a sid such a sight. I couldn't let go the curtain, nor move an inch, nor take my eyes off her; my very heart stood still. And in an instant she opens her eyes and up she sits, and spins herself round, and down wi' her, wi' a clack on her two tall heels on the floor, facin' me, ogglin' in my face wi' her two great glassy eyes, and a wicked simper wi' her wrinkled lips, and lang fause teeth.

"Well, a corpse is a natural thing; but this was the dreadfullest sight I ever sid. She had her fingers straight out pointin' at me, and her back was crooked, round again wi' age. Says she:

"'Ye little limb! what for did ye say I killed the boy? I'll tickle ye till ye're stiff!'

"If I'd a thought an instant, I'd a turned about and run. But I couldn't take my eyes off her, and I backed from her as soon as I could; and she came clatterin' after like a thing on wires, with her fingers pointing to my throat, and she makin' all the time a sound with her tongue like zizz-zizz-zizz.

"I kept backin' and backin' as quick as I could, and her fingers was only a few inches away from my throat, and I felt I'd lose my wits if she touched me.

"I went back this way, right into the corner, and I gev a yellock, ye'd think saul and body was partin', and that minute my aunt, from the door, calls out wi' a blare, and the ald lady turns round on her, and I turns about, and ran through my room, and down the stairs, as hard as my legs could carry me.

"I cried hearty, I can tell you, when I got down to the housekeeper's room. Mrs. Wyvern laughed a deal when I told her what happened. But she changed her key when she heard the ald lady's words.

"'Say them again,' says she.

"So I told her.

"'Ye little limb! What for did ye say I killed the boy? I'll tickle ye till ye're stiff.'

"'And did ye say she killed a boy?' says she.

"'Not I, ma'am,' says I.

“Judith was always up with me, after that, when the two elder women was away from her. I would a jumped out at winda, rather than stay alone in the same room wi’ her.

“It was about a week after, as well as I can remember, Mrs. Wyvern, one day when me and her was alone, told me a thing about Madam Crowl that I did not know before.

“She being young and a great beauty, full seventy year before, had married Squire Crowl, of Applewale. But he was a widower, and had a son about nine years old.

“There never was tale or tidings of this boy after one mornin’. No one could say where he went to. He was allowed too much liberty, and used to be off in the morning, one day, to the keeper’s cottage and breakfast wi’ him, and away to the warren, and not home, mayhap, till evening; and another time down to the lake, and bathe there, and spend the day fishin’ there, or paddlin’ about in the boat. Well, no one could say what was gone wi’ him; only this, that his hat was found by the lake, under a haathorn that grows thar to this day, and ’twas thought he was drowned bathin’. And the squire’s son, by his second marriage, with this Madam Crowl that lived sa dreadful lang, came in far the estates. It was his son, the ald lady’s grandson, Squire Chevenix Crowl, that owned the estates at the time I came to Applewale.

“There was a deal o’ talk lang before my aunt’s time about it; and ’twas said the stepmother knew more than she was like to let out. And she managed her husband, the ald squire, wi’ her whiteheft and flatteries. And as the boy was never seen more, in course of time the thing died out of fowks’ minds.

“I’m goin’ to tell ye noo about what I sid wi’ my own een.

“I was not there six months, and it was winter time, when the ald lady took her last sickness.

“The doctor was afeard she might a took a fit o’ madness, as she did fifteen years befoore, and was buckled up, many a time, in a strait-waistcoat, which was the very leathern jerkin I sid in the closet, off my aunt’s room.

“Well, she didn’t. She pined, and windered, and went off, torflin’, torflin’, quiet enough, till a day or two before her flittin’, and then she took to rabblin’, and sometimes skirlin’ in the bed, ye’d think a robber had a knife to her throat, and she used to work out o’ the bed, and not being strong enough, then, to walk or stand, she’d fall on the flure, wi’ her ald wizened hands stretched before her face, and skirlin’ still for mercy.

“Ye may guess I didn’t go into the room, and I used to be shiverin’ in my bed wi’ fear, at her skirlin’ and scrafflin’ on the flure, and blarin’ out words that id make your skin turn blue.

“My aunt, and Mrs. Wyvern, and Judith Squailes, and a woman from Lexhoe, was always about her. At last she took fits, and they wore her out.

“T’ sir was there, and prayed for her; but she was past praying with. I suppose it was right, but none could think there was much good in it, and sa at lang last she made her flittin’, and a’ was over, and old Dame Crowl was shrouded and coffined, and Squire Chevenix was wrote for. But he was away in France, and the delay was sa lang, that t’ sir and doctor both agreed it would not du to keep her langer out o’ her place, and no one cared but just them two, and my aunt and the rest o’ us, from Applewale, to go to the buryin’. So the old lady of Applewale was laid in the vault under Lexhoe Church; and we lived up at the great house till such time as the squire should come to tell his will about us, and pay off such as he chose to discharge.

“I was put into another room, two doors away from what was Dame Crowl’s chamber, after her death, and this thing happened the night before Squire Chevenix came to Applewale.

“The room I was in now was a large square chamber, covered wi’ yak pannels, but unfurnished except for my bed, which had no curtains to it, and a chair and a table, or so, that looked nothing at all in such a big room. And the big looking-glass, that the old lady used to keek into and admire herself from head to heel, now that there was na mair o’ that wark, was put out of the way, and stood against the wall in my room, for there was shiftin’ o’ many things in her chamber ye may suppose, when she came to be coffined.

“The news had come that day that the squire was to be down next morning at Applewale; and not sorry was I, for I thought I was sure to be sent home again to my mother. And right glad was I, and I was thinkin’ of a’ at hame, and my sister Janet, and the kitten and the pymag, and Trimmer the tike, and all the rest, and I got sa fidgetty, I couldn’t sleep, and the clock struck twelve, and me wide awake, and the room as dark as pick. My back was turned to the door, and my eyes toward the wall opposite.

“Well, it could na be a full quarter past twelve, when I sees a lightin’ on the wall befoore me, as if something took fire behind, and the shadas o’ the bed, and the chair, and my gown, that was hangin’ from the wall, was dancin’ up and down on the ceilin’ beams and the yak pannels; and I turns my head ower my shouther quick, thinkin’ something must a gone a’ fire.

“And what sud I see, by Jen! but the likeness o’ the ald beldame, bedizened out in her satins and velvets, on her dead body, simperin’, wi’ her eyes as wide as saucers, and her face like the fiend himself. ’Twas a red light that rose about her in a fuffin low, as if her dress round her feet was blazin’. She was drivin’ on right for me, wi’ her ald shrivelled hands crooked as if she was goin’ to claw me. I could not stir, but she passed me straight by, wi’ a blast o’ cald air, and I sid her, at the wall, in the alcove as my aunt used to call it, which was a recess where the state bed used to stand in ald times wi’ a door open wide, and her hands gropin’ in at somethin’ was there. I never sid that door befoore. And she turned round to me, like a thing on a pivot, flyrin’, and all at once the room was dark, and I standin’ at the far side o’ the bed; I don’t know how I got there, and I found my tongue at last, and if I did na blare a yellock, rennin’ down the gallery and almost pulled Mrs. Wyvern’s door off t’ hooks, and frighted her half out o’ wits.

“Ye may guess I did na sleep that night; and wi’ the first light, down wi’ me to my aunt, as fast as my two legs cud carry me.

“Well my aunt did na frump or flite me, as I thought she would, but she held me by the hand, and looked hard in my face all the time. And she telt me not to be feared; and says she:

“‘Hed the appearance a key in its hand?’

“‘Yes,’ says I, bringin’ it to mind, ‘a big key in a queer brass handle.’

“‘Stop a bit,’ says she, lettin’ go ma hand, and openin’ the cupboard-door. ‘Was it like this?’ says she, takin’ one out in her fingers, and showing it to me, with a dark look in my face.

“‘That was it,’ says I, quick enough.

“‘Are ye sure?’ she says, turnin’ it round.

“‘Sart,’ says I, and I felt like I was gain’ to faint when I sid it.

“‘Well, that will do, child,’ says she, saftly thinkin’, and she locked it up again.

“‘The squire himself will be here today, before twelve o’clock, and ye must tell him all about it,’ says she, thinkin’, ‘and I suppose I’ll be leavin’ soon, and so the best thing for the present is, that ye should go home this afternoon, and I'll look out another place for you when I can.'

"Fain was I, ye may guess, at that word.

"My aunt packed up my things for me, and the three pounds that was due to me, to bring home, and Squire Crowl himself came down to Applewale that day, a handsome man, about thirty years ald. It was the second time I sid him. But this was the first time he spoke to me.

"My aunt talked wi' him in the housekeeper's room, and I don't know what they said. I was a bit feared on the squire, he bein' a great gentleman down in Lexhoe, and I darn't go near till I was called. And says he, smilin':

"'What's a' this ye a sen, child? it mun be a dream, for ye know there's na sic a thing as a bo or a freet in a' the world. But whatever it was, ma little maid, sit ye down and tell all about it from first to last.'

"Well, so soon as I made an end, he thought a bit, and says he to my aunt:

"'I mind the place well. In old Sir Olivur's time lame Wyndel told me there was a door in that recess, to the left, where the lassie dreamed she saw my grandmother open it. He was past eighty when he told me that, and I but a boy. It's twenty year sen. The plate and jewels used to be kept there, long ago, before the iron closet was made in the arras chamber, and he told me the key had a brass handle, and this ye say was found in the bottom o' the kist where she kept her old fans. Now, would not it be a queer thing if we found some spoons or diamonds forgot there? Ye mun come up wi' us, lassie, and point to the very spot.'

"Loth was I, and my heart in my mouth, and fast I held by my aunt's hand as I stept into that awsome room, and showed them both how she came and passed me by, and the spot where she stood, and where the door seemed to open.

"There was an ald empty press against the wall then, and shoving it aside, sure enough there was the tracing of a door in the wainscot, and a keyhole stopped with wood, and planed across as smooth as the rest, and the joining of the door all stopped wi' putty the colour o' yak, and, but for the hinges that showed a bit when the press was shoved aside, ye would not consayt there was a door there at all.

"'Ha!' says he, wi' a queer smile, 'this looks like it.'

"It took some minutes wi' a small chisel and hammer to pick the bit o' wood out o' the keyhole. The key fitted, sure enough, and, wi' a strang twist and a lang skreak, the boult went back and he pulled the door open.

"There was another door inside, stranger than the first, but the lacks was gone, and it opened easy. Inside was a narrow floor and walls and vault o' brick; we could not see what was in it, for 'twas dark as pick.

"When my aunt had lighted the candle, the squire held it up and stept in.

"My aunt stood on tiptoe tryin' to look over his shouther, and I did na see nout.

"'Ha! ha!' says the squire, steppin' backward. 'What's that? Gi' ma the poker — quick!' says he to my aunt. And as she went to the hearth I peeps beside his arm, and I sid squat down in the far corner a monkey or a flayin' on the chest, or else the maist shrivelled up, wizzened ald wife that ever was sen on yearth.

"'By Jen!' says my aunt, as puttin' the poker in his hand, she keeked by his shouther, and sid the ill-favoured thing, 'hae a care, sir, what ye're doin'. Back wi' ye, and shut to the door!'

"But in place o' that he steps in saftly, wi' the poker pointed like a swoord, and he gies it a poke, and down it a' tumbles together, head and a', in a heap o' bayans and dust, little meyar an' a hatful.

"'Twas the bayans o' a child; a' the rest went to dust at a touch. They said nout for a while, but he turns round the skull, as it lay on the floor.

"Young as I was, I consayted I knew well enough what they was thinkin' on.

"'A dead cat!' says he, pushin' back and blowin' out the can'le, and shuttin' to the door. 'We'll come back, you and me, Mrs. Shutters, and look on the shelves by-and-bye. I've other matters first to speak to ye about; and this little girl's goin' hame, ye say. She has her wages, and I mun mak' her a present,' says he, pattin' my shouther wi' his hand.

"And he did gimma a goud pound and I went aff to Lexhoe about an hour after, and sa hame by the stagecoach, and fain was I to be at hame again; and I never sid Dame Crowl o' Applewale, God be thanked, either in appearance or in dream, at-efter. But when I was grown to be a woman, my aunt spent a day and night wi' me at Littleham, and she telt me there was no doubt it was the poor little boy that was missing sa lang sen, that was shut up to die thar in the dark by that wicked beldame, whar his skirls, or his prayers, or his thumpin' cud na be heard, and his hat was left by the water's edge, whoever did it, to mak' belief he was drowned. The clothes, at the first touch, a’ ran into a snuff o’ dust in the cell whar the bayans was found. But there was a handful o’ jet buttons, and a knife with a green heft, together wi’ a couple o’ pennies the poor little fella had in his pocket, I suppose, when he was decoyed in thar, and sid his last o’ the light. And there was, amang the squire’s papers, a copy o’ the notice that was prented after he was lost, when the ald squire thought he might ‘a run away, or bin took by gipsies, and it said he had a green-hefted knife wi’ him, and that his buttons were o’ cut jet. Sa that is a’ I hev to say consarnin’ ald Dame Crowl, o’ Applewale House.”

THE DEAD SEXTON

The sunsets were red, the nights were long, and the weather pleasantly frosty; and Christmas, the glorious herald of the New Year, was at hand, when an event — still recounted by winter firesides, with a horror made delightful by the mellowing influence of years — occurred in the beautiful little town of Golden Friars, and signalized, as the scene of its catastrophe, the old inn known throughout a wide region of the Northumbrian counties as the George and Dragon.

Toby Crooke, the sexton, was lying dead in the old coachhouse in the inn yard. The body had been discovered, only half an hour before this story begins, under strange circumstances, and in a place where it might have lain the better part of a week undisturbed; and a dreadful suspicion astounded the village of Golden Friars.

A wintry sunset was glaring through a gorge of the western mountains, turning into fire the twigs of the leafless elms, and all the tiny blades of grass on the green by which the quaint little town is surrounded. It is built of light, grey stone, with steep gables and slender chimneys rising with airy lightness from the level sward by the margin of the beautiful lake, and backed by the grand amphitheatre of the fells at the other side, whose snowy peaks show faintly against the sky, tinged with the vaporous red of the western light. As you descend towards the margin of the lake, and see Golden Friars, its taper chimneys and slender gables, its curious old inn and gorgeous sign, and over all the graceful tower and spire of the ancient church, at this hour or by moonlight, in the solemn grandeur and stillness of the natural scenery that surrounds it, it stands before you like a fairy town.

Toby Crooke, the lank sexton, now fifty or upwards, had passed an hour or two with some village cronies, over a solemn pot of purl, in the kitchen of that cosy hostelry, the night before. He generally turned in there at about seven o'clock, and heard the news. This contented him: for he talked little, and looked always surly.

Many things are now raked up and talked over about him.

In early youth, he had been a bit of a scamp. He broke his indentures, and ran away from his master, the tanner of Bryemere; he had got into fifty bad scrapes and out again; and, just as the little world of Golden Friars had come to the conclusion that it would be well for all parties — except, perhaps, himself — and a happy riddance for his afflicted mother, if he were sunk, with a gross of quart pots about his neck, in the bottom of the lake in which the grey gables, the elms, and the towering fells of Golden Friars are mirrored, he suddenly returned, a reformed man at the ripe age of forty.

For twelve years he had disappeared, and no one knew what had become of him. Then, suddenly, as I say, he reappeared at Golden Friars — a very black and silent man, sedate and orderly. His mother was dead and buried; but the "prodigal son" was received goodnaturedly. The good vicar, Doctor Jenner, reported to his wife:

"His hard heart has been softened, dear Dolly. I saw him dry his eyes, poor fellow, at the sermon yesterday."

"I don't wonder, Hugh darling. I know the part— 'There is joy in Heaven.' I am sure it was — wasn't it? It was quite beautiful. I almost cried myself."

The Vicar laughed gently, and stooped over her chair and kissed her, and patted her cheek fondly.

"You think too well of your old man's sermons," he said. "I preach, you see, Dolly, very much to the *poor*. If *they* understand me, I am pretty sure everyone else must; and I think that my simple style goes more home to both feelings and conscience— "

"You ought to have told me of his crying before. You *are* so eloquent," exclaimed Dolly Jenner. "No one preaches like my man. I have never heard such sermons."

Not many, we may be sure; for the good lady had not heard more than six from any other divine for the last twenty years.

The personages of Golden Friars talked Toby Crooke over on his return. Doctor Lincote said:

"He must have led a hard life; he had *dried in* so, and got a good deal of hard muscle; and he rather fancied he had been soldiering — he stood like a soldier; and the mark over his right eye looked like a gunshot."

People might wonder how he could have survived a gunshot over the eye; but was not Lincote a doctor — and an army doctor to boot — when he was young; and who, in Golden Friars, could dispute with him on points of surgery? And I believe the truth is, that this mark had been really made by a pistol bullet.

Mr. Jarlcot, the attorney, would “go bail” he had picked up some sense in his travels; and honest Turnbull, the host of the George and Dragon, said heartily:

“We must look out something for him to put his hand to. *Now’s* the time to make a man of him.”

The end of it was that he became, among other things, the sexton of Golden Friars.

He was a punctual sexton. He meddled with no other person’s business; but he was a silent man, and by no means popular. He was reserved in company; and he used to walk alone by the shore of the lake, while other fellows played at fives or skittles; and when he visited the kitchen of the George, he had his liquor to himself, and in the midst of the general talk was a saturnine listener. There was something sinister in this man’s face; and when things went wrong with him, he could look dangerous enough.

There were whispered stories in Golden Friars about Toby Crooke. Nobody could say how they got there. Nothing is more mysterious than the spread of rumour. It is like a vial poured on the air. It travels, like an epidemic, on the sightless currents of the atmosphere, or by the laws of a telluric influence equally intangible. These stories treated, though darkly, of the long period of his absence from his native village; but they took no well-defined shape, and no one could refer them to any authentic source.

The Vicar’s charity was of the kind that thinketh no evil; and in such cases he always insisted on proof. Crooke was, of course, undisturbed in his office.

On the evening before the tragedy came to light — trifles are always remembered after the catastrophe — a boy, returning along the margin of the mere, passed him by seated on a prostrate trunk of a tree, under the “bield” of a rock, counting silver money. His lean body and limbs were bent together, his knees were up to his chin, and his long fingers were telling the coins over hurriedly in the hollow of his other hand. He glanced at the boy, as the old English saying is, like “the devil looking over Lincoln.” But a black and sour look from Mr. Crooke, who never had a smile for a child nor a greeting for a wayfarer, was nothing strange.

Toby Crooke lived in the grey stone house, cold and narrow, that stands near the church porch, with the window of its staircase looking out into the churchyard, where so much of his labour, for many a day, had been expended. The greater part of this house was untenanted.

The old woman who was in charge of it slept in a settlebed, among broken stools, old sacks, rotten chests and other rattletraps, in the small room at the rear of the house, floored with tiles.

At what time of the night she could not tell, she awoke, and saw a man, with his hat on, in her room. He had a candle in his hand, which he shaded with his coat from her eye; his back was towards her, and he was rummaging in the drawer in which she usually kept her money.

Having got her quarter's pension of two pounds that day, however, she had placed it, folded in a rag, in the corner of her tea caddy, and locked it up in the "eat-malison" or cupboard.

She was frightened when she saw the figure in her room, and she could not tell whether her visitor might not have made his entrance from the contiguous churchyard. So, sitting bolt upright in her bed, her grey hair almost lifting her kerchief off her head, and all over in "a fit o' t' creepins," as she expressed it, she demanded:

"In God's name, what want ye thar?"

"Whar's the peppermint ye used to hev by ye, woman? I'm bad wi' an inward pain."

"It's all gane a month sin'," she answered; and offered to make him a "het" drink if he'd get to his room.

But he said:

"Never mind, I'll try a mouthful o' gin."

And, turning on his heel, he left her.

In the morning the sexton was gone. Not only in his lodging was there no account of him, but, when inquiry began to be extended, nowhere in the village of Golden Friars could he be found.

Still he might have gone off, on business of his own, to some distant village, before the town was stirring; and the sexton had no near kindred to trouble their heads about him. People, therefore, were willing to wait, and take his return ultimately for granted.

At three o'clock the good Vicar, standing at his hall door, looking across the lake towards the noble fells that rise, steep and furrowed, from that beautiful mere, saw two men approaching across the green, in a straight line, from a boat that was moored at the water's edge. They were carrying between them something which, though not very large, seemed ponderous.

"Ye'll ken this, sir," said one of the boatmen as they set down, almost at his feet, a small church bell, such as in oldfashioned chimes yields the treble notes.

"This won't be less nor five stean. I ween it's fra' the church steeple yon."

"What! one of our church bells?" ejaculated the Vicar — for a moment lost in horrible amazement. "Oh, no! — *no*, that can't possibly be! Where did you find it?"

He had found the boat, in the morning, moored about fifty yards from her moorings where he had left it the night before, and could not think how that came to pass; and now, as he and his partner were about to take their oars, they discovered this bell in the bottom of the boat, under a bit of canvas, also the sexton's pick and spade— "tom-spey'ad," they termed that peculiar, broad-bladed implement.

"Very extraordinary! We must try whether there is a bell missing from the tower," said the Vicar, getting into a fuss. "Has Crooke come back yet? Does anyone know where he is?"

The sexton had not yet turned up.

"That's odd — that's provoking," said the Vicar. "However, my key will let us in. Place the bell in the hall while I get it; and then we can see what all this means."

To the church, accordingly, they went, the Vicar leading the way, with his own key in his hand. He turned it in the lock, and stood in the shadow of the ground porch, and shut the door.

A sack, half full, lay on the ground, with open mouth, a piece of cord lying beside it. Something clanked within it as one of the men shoved it aside with his clumsy shoe.

The Vicar opened the church door and peeped in. The dusky glow from the western sky, entering through a narrow window, illuminated the shafts and arches, the old oak carvings, and the discoloured monuments, with the melancholy glare of a dying fire.

The Vicar withdrew his head and closed the door. The gloom of the porch was deeper than ever as, stooping, he entered the narrow door that opened at the foot of the winding stair that leads to the first loft; from which a rude ladder-stair of wood, some five and twenty feet in height, mounts through a trap to the ringers' loft.

Up the narrow stairs the Vicar climbed, followed by his attendants, to the first loft. It was very dark: a narrow bow-slit in the thick wall admitted the only light they had to guide them. The ivy leaves, seen from the deep shadow, flashed and flickered redly, and the sparrows twittered among them.

"Will one of you be so good as to go up and count the bells, and see if they are all right?" said the Vicar. "There should be— "

"Agoy! what's that?" exclaimed one of the men, recoiling from the foot of the ladder.

"By Jen!" ejaculated the other, in equal surprise.

"Good gracious!" gasped the Vicar, who, seeing indistinctly a dark mass lying on the floor, had stooped to examine it, and placed his hand upon a cold, dead face.

The men drew the body into the streak of light that traversed the floor.

It was the corpse of Toby Crooke! There was a frightful scar across his forehead.

The alarm was given. Doctor Lincote, and Mr. Jarlcot, and Turnbull, of the George and Dragon, were on the spot immediately; and many curious and horrified spectators of minor importance.

The first thing ascertained was that the man must have been many hours dead. The next was that his skull was fractured, across the forehead, by an awful blow. The next was that his neck was broken.

His hat was found on the floor, where he had probably laid it, with his handkerchief in it.

The mystery now began to clear a little; for a bell — one of the chime hung in the tower — was found where it had rolled to, against the wall, with blood and hair on the rim of it, which corresponded with the grizzly fracture across the front of his head.

The sack that lay in the vestibule was examined, and found to contain all the church plate; a silver salver that had disappeared, about a month before, from Dr. Lincote's store of valuables; the Vicar's gold pencil-case, which he thought he had forgot in the vestry book; silver spoons, and various other contributions, levied from time to time off a dozen different households, the mysterious disappearance of which spoils had, of late years, begun to make the honest little community uncomfortable. Two bells had been taken down from the chime; and now the shrewd part of the assemblage, putting things together, began to comprehend the nefarious plans of the sexton, who lay mangled and dead on the floor of the tower, where only two days ago he had tolled the holy bell to call the good Christians of Golden Friars to worship.

The body was carried into the yard of the George and Dragon and laid in the old coachhouse; and the townsfolk came grouping in to have a peep at the corpse, and stood round, looking darkly, and talking as low as if they were in a church.

The Vicar, in gaiters and slightly shovel hat, stood erect, as one in a little circle of notables — the doctor, the attorney, Sir Geoffrey Mardykes, who happened to be in the town, and Turnbull, the host — in the centre of the paved yard, they having made an inspection of the body, at which troops of the village stragglers, to-ing and fro-ing, were gaping and frowning as they whispered their horrible conjectures.

“What d’ye think o’ that?” said Tom Scales, the old hostler of the George, looking pale, with a stern, faint smile on his lips, as he and Dick Linklin sauntered out of the coachhouse together.

“The deaul will hev his ain noo,” answered Dick, in his friend’s ear. “T’ sexton’s got a craigthraw like he gav’ the lass over the clints of Scarsdale; ye mind what the ald soger telt us when he hid his face in the kitchen of the George here? By Jen! I’ll ne’er forget that story.”

“I ween ’twas all true enough,” replied the hostler; “and the sizzup he gav’ the sleepin’ man wi’ t’ poker across the forehead. See whar the edge o’ t’ bell took him, and smashed his ain, the selfsame lids. By ma sang, I wonder the deaul did na carry awa’ his corpse i’ the night, as he did wi’ Tam Lunder’s at Mooltern Mill.”

“Hout, man, who ever sid t’ deaul inside o’ a church?”

“The corpse is ill-faur’d enew to scare Satan himsel’, for that matter; though it’s true what you say. Ay, ye’re reet tul a trippet, thar; for Beelzebub dar’n’t show his snout inside the church, not the length o’ the black o’ my nail.”

While this discussion was going on, the gentlefolk who were talking the matter over in the centre of the yard had dispatched a message for the coroner all the way to the town of Hextan.

The last tint of sunset was fading from the sky by this time; so, of course, there was no thought of an inquest earlier than next day.

In the meantime it was horribly clear that the sexton had intended to rob the church of its plate, and had lost his life in the attempt to carry the second bell, as we have seen, down the worn ladder of the tower. He had tumbled backwards and broken his neck upon the floor of the loft; and the heavy bell, in its fall, descended with its edge across his forehead.

Never was a man more completely killed by a double catastrophe, in a moment.

The bells and the contents of the sack, it was surmised, he meant to have conveyed across the lake that night, and with the help of his spade and pick to have buried them in Clousted Forest, and returned, after an absence of but a few hours — as he easily might — before morning, unmissed and unobserved. He would no doubt, having secured his booty, have made such arrangements as would have made it appear that the church had been broken into. He would, of course, have taken all measures to divert suspicion from himself, and have watched a suitable opportunity to repossess himself of the buried treasure and dispose of it in safety.

And now came out, into sharp relief, all the stories that had, one way or other, stolen after him into the town. Old Mrs. Pullen fainted when she saw him, and told Doctor Lincote, after, that she thought he was the highwayman who fired the shot that killed the coachman the night they were robbed on Hounslow Heath. There were the stories also told by the wayfaring old soldier with the wooden leg, and fifty others, up to this more than half disregarded, but which now seized on the popular belief with a startling grasp.

The fleeting light soon expired, and twilight was succeeded by the early night.

The inn yard gradually became quiet; and the dead sexton lay alone, in the dark, on his back, locked up in the old coachhouse, the key of which was safe in the pocket of Tom Scales, the trusty old hostler of the George.

It was about eight o’clock, and the hostler, standing alone on the road in the front of the open door of the George and Dragon, had just smoked his pipe out. A bright moon hung in the frosty sky. The fells rose from the opposite edge of the lake like phantom mountains. The air was stirless.

Through the boughs and sprays of the leafless elms no sigh or motion, however hushed, was audible. Not a ripple glimmered on the lake, which at one point only reflected the brilliant moon from its dark blue expanse like burnished steel. The road that runs by the inn door, along the margin of the lake, shone dazzlingly white.

White as ghosts, among the dark holly and juniper, stood the tall piers of the Vicar's gate, and their great stone balls, like heads, overlooking the same road, a few hundred yards up the lake, to the left. The early little town of Golden Friars was quiet by this time. Except for the townsfolk who were now collected in the kitchen of the inn itself, no inhabitant was now outside his own threshold.

Tom Scales was thinking of turning in. He was beginning to fell a little queer. He was thinking of the sexton, and could not get the fixed features of the dead man out of his head, when he heard the sharp though distant ring of a horse's hoof upon the frozen road. Tom's instinct apprized him of the approach of a guest to the George and Dragon. His experienced ear told him that the horseman was approaching by the Dardale road, which, after crossing that wide and dismal moss, passes the southern fells by Dunner Cleugh and finally enters the town of Golden Friars by joining the Mardykes road, at the edge of the lake, close to the gate of the Vicar's house.

A clump of tall trees stood at this point; but the moon shone full upon the road and cast their shadow backward.

The hoofs were plainly coming at a gallop, with a hollow rattle. The horseman was a long time in appearing. Tom wondered how he had heard the sound — so sharply frosty as the air was — so very far away.

He was right in his guess. The visitor was coming over the mountainous road from Dardale Moss; and he now saw a horseman, who must have turned the corner of the Vicar's house at the moment when his eye was wearied; for when he saw him for the first time he was advancing, in the hazy moonlight, like the shadow of a cavalier, at a gallop, upon the level strip of road that skirts the margin of the mere, between the George and the Vicar's piers.

The hostler had not long to wonder why the rider pushed his beast at so furious a pace, and how he came to have heard him, as he now calculated, at least three miles away. A very few moments sufficed to bring horse and rider to the inn door.

It was a powerful black horse, something like the great Irish hunter that figured a hundred years ago, and would carry sixteen stone with ease across country. It would have made a grand charger. Not a hair turned. It snorted, it pawed, it arched its neck; then threw back its ears and down its head, and looked ready to lash, and then to rear; and seemed impatient to be off again, and incapable of standing quiet for a moment.

The rider got down
As light as shadow falls.

But he was a tall, sinewy figure. He wore a cape or short mantle, a cocked hat, and a pair of jack-boots, such as held their ground in some primitive corners of England almost to the close of the last century.

"Take him, lad," said he to old Scales. "You need not walk or wisp him — he never sweats or tires. Give him his oats, and let him take his own time to eat them. House!" cried the stranger — in the oldfashioned form of summons which still lingered, at that time, in out-of-the-way places — in a deep and piercing voice.

As Tom Scales led the horse away to the stables it turned its head towards its master with a short, shill neigh.

"About *your* business, old gentleman — we must not go too fast," the stranger cried back again to his horse, with a laugh as harsh and piercing; and he strode into the house.

The hostler led this horse into the inn yard. In passing, it sidled up to the coachhouse gate, within which lay the dead sexton — snorted, pawed and lowered its head suddenly, with ear close to the plank, as if listening for a sound from within; then uttered again the same short, piercing neigh.

The hostler was chilled at this mysterious coquetry with the dead. He liked the brute less and less every minute.

In the meantime, its master had proceeded.

"I'll go to the inn kitchen," he said, in his startling bass, to the drawer who met him in the passage.

And on he went, as if he had known the place all his days: not seeming to hurry himself — stepping leisurely, the servant thought — but gliding on at such a rate, nevertheless, that he had passed his guide and was in the kitchen of the George before the drawer had got much more than halfway to it.

A roaring fire of dry wood, peat and coal lighted up this snug but spacious apartment — flashing on pots and pans, and dressers high-piled with pewter plates and dishes; and making the uncertain shadows of the long "hanks" of onions and many a flitch and ham, depending from the ceiling, dance on its glowing surface.

The doctor and the attorney, even Sir Geoffrey Mardykes, did not disdain on this occasion to take chairs and smoke their pipes by the kitchen fire, where they were in the thick of the gossip and discussion excited by the terrible event.

The tall stranger entered uninvited.

He looked like a gaunt, athletic Spaniard of forty, burned half black in the sun, with a bony, flattened nose. A pair of fierce black eyes were just visible under the edge of his hat; and his mouth seemed divided, beneath the moustache, by the deep scar of a hare-lip.

Sir Geoffrey Mardykes and the host of the George, aided by the doctor and the attorney, were discussing and arranging, for the third or fourth time, their theories about the death and the probable plans of Toby Crooke, when the stranger entered.

The newcomer lifted his hat, with a sort of smile, for a moment from his black head.

"What do you call this place, gentlemen?" asked the stranger.

"The town of Golden Friars, sir," answered the doctor politely.

"The George and Dragon, sir: Anthony Turnbull, at your service," answered mine host, with a solemn bow, at the same moment — so that the two voices went together, as if the doctor and the innkeeper were singing a catch.

"The George and the Dragon," repeated the horseman, expanding his long hands over the fire which he had approached. "Saint George, King George, the Dragon, the Devil: it is a very grand idol, that outside your door, sir. You catch all sorts of worshippers — courtiers, fanatics, scamps: all's fish, eh? Everybody welcome, provided he drinks like one. Suppose you brew a bowl or two of punch. I'll stand it. How many are we? *Here* — count, and let us have enough. Gentlemen, I mean to spend the night here, and my horse is in the stable. What holiday, fun, or fair has got so many pleasant faces together? When I last called here — for, now I bethink me, I have seen the place before — you all looked sad. It was on a Sunday, that dismalest of holidays; and it would have been positively melancholy only that your sexton — that saint upon earth — Mr. Crooke, was here." He was looking round, over his shoulder, and added: "Ha! don't I see him there?"

Frightened a good deal were some of the company. All gaped in the direction in which, with a nod, he turned his eyes.

"He's *not* thar — he *can't* be thar — we *see* he's not thar," said Turnbull, as dogmatically as old Joe Willet might have delivered himself — for he did not care that the George should earn the reputation of a haunted house. "He's met an accident, sir: he's dead — he's elsewhere — and therefore can't be here."

Upon this the company entertained the stranger with the narrative — which they made easy by a division of labour, two or three generally speaking at a time, and no one being permitted to finish a second sentence without finding himself corrected and supplanted.

"The man's in Heaven, so sure as you're not," said the traveller so soon as the story was ended. "What! he was fiddling with the church bell, was he, and d —— d for that — eh? Landlord, get us some drink. A sexton d —— d for pulling down a church bell he has been pulling at for ten years!"

"You came, sir, by the Dardale-road, I believe?" said the doctor (village folk are curious). "A dismal moss is Dardale Moss, sir; and a bleak clim' up the fells on t' other side."

"I say 'Yes' to all — from Dardale Moss, as black as pitch and as rotten as the grave, up that zigzag wall you call a road, that looks like chalk in the moonlight, through Dunner Cleugh, as dark as a coal-pit, and down here to the George and the Dragon, where you have a roaring fire, wise men, good punch — here it is — and a corpse in your coachhouse. Where the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together. Come, landlord, ladle out the nectar. Drink, gentlemen — drink, all. Brew another bowl at the bar. How divinely it stinks of alcohol! I hope you like it, gentlemen: it smells all over of spices, like a mummy. Drink, friends. Ladle, landlord. Drink, all. Serve it out."

The guest fumbled in his pocket, and produced three guineas, which he slipped into Turnbull's fat palm.

“Let punch flow till that’s out. I’m an old friend of the house. I call here, back and forward. I know you well, Turnbull, though you don’t recognize me.”

“You have the advantage of me, sir,” said Mr. Turnbull, looking hard on that dark and sinister countenance — which, or the like of which, he could have sworn he had never seen before in his life. But he liked the weight and colour of his guineas, as he dropped them into his pocket. “I hope you will find yourself comfortable while you stay.”

“You have given me a bedroom?”

“Yes, sir — the cedar chamber.”

“I know it — the very thing. No — no punch for me. By and by, perhaps.”

The talk went on, but the stranger had grown silent. He had seated himself on an oak bench by the fire, towards which he extended his feet and hands with seeming enjoyment; his cocked hat being, however, a little over his face.

Gradually the company began to thin. Sir Geoffrey Mardykes was the first to go; then some of the humbler townsfolk. The last bowl of punch was on its last legs. The stranger walked into the passage and said to the drawer:

“Fetch me a lantern. I must see my nag. Light it — hey! That will do. No — you need not come.”

The gaunt traveller took it from the man’s hand and strode along the passage to the door of the stableyard, which he opened and passed out.

Tom Scales, standing on the pavement, was looking through the stable window at the horses when the stranger plucked his shirtsleeve. With an inward shock the hostler found himself alone in presence of the very person he had been thinking of.

“I say — they tell me you have something to look at in there” — he pointed with his thumb at the old coachhouse door. “Let us have a peep.”

Tom Scales happened to be at that moment in a state of mind highly favourable to anyone in search of a submissive instrument. He was in great perplexity, and even perturbation. He suffered the stranger to lead him to the coachhouse gate.

“You must come in and hold the lantern,” said he. “I’ll pay you handsomely.”

The old hostler applied his key and removed the padlock.

“What are you afraid of? Step in and throw the light on his face,” said the stranger grimly. “Throw open the lantern: stand *there*. Stoop over him a little — he won’t bite you. Steady, or you may pass the night with him!”

* * *

In the meantime the company at the George had dispersed; and, shortly after, Anthony Turnbull — who, like a good landlord, was always last in bed, and first up, in his house — was taking, alone, his last look round the kitchen before making his final visit to the stableyard, when Tom Scales tottered into the kitchen, looking like death, his hair standing upright; and he sat down on an oak chair, all in a tremble, wiped his forehead with his hand, and, instead of speaking, heaved a great sigh or two.

It was not till after he had swallowed a dram of brandy that he found his voice, and said:

“We’ve the deaul himsel’ in t’ house! By Jen! ye’d best send fo t’ sir” (the clergyman). “Happen he’ll tak him in hand wi’ holy writ, and send him elsewhidder deftly. Lord atween us and harm! I’m a sinfu’ man. I tell ye, Mr. Turnbull, I dar’ n’t stop in t’ George tonight under the same roof wi’ him.”

“Ye mean the ra-beyoned, black-feyaced lad, wi’ the brocken neb? Why, that’s a gentleman wi’ a pocket ful o’ guineas, man, and a horse worth fifty pounds!”

“That horse is no better nor his rider. The nags that were in the stable wi’ him, they all tuk the creepins, and sweated like rain down a thack. I tuk them all out o’ that, away from him, into the hack-stable, and I thocht I cud never get them past him. But that’s not all. When I was keekin inta t’ winda at the nags, he comes behint me and claps his claw on ma shouther, and he gars me gang wi’ him, and open the aad coachhouse door, and haad the cannle for him, till he pearked into the deed man’t feyace; and, as God’s my judge, I sid the corpse open its eyes and wark its mouth, like a man smoorin’ and strivin’ to talk. I cudna move or say a word, though I felt my hair rising on my heed; but at lang-last I gev a yelloch, and say I, ‘La! what is that?’ And he himsel’ looked round on me, like the devil he is; and, wi’ a skirl o’ a laugh, he strikes the lantern out o’ my hand. When I cum to myself we were outside the coachhouse door. The moon was shinin’ in, ad I cud see the corpse stretched on the table whar we left it; and he kicked the door to wi’ a purr o’ his foot. ‘Lock it,’ says he; and so I did. And here’s the key for ye — tak it yoursel', sir. He offer'd me money: he said he'd mak me a rich man if I'd sell him the corpse, and help him awa' wi' it."

"Hout, man! What cud he want o' t' corpse? He's not doctor, to do a' that lids. He was takin' a rise out o' ye, lad," said Turnbull.

"Na, na — he wants the corpse. There's summat you a' me can't tell he wants to do wi' 't; and he'd liefer get it wi' sin and thievin', and the damage of my soul. He's one of them freytens a boo or a dobbies off Dardale Moss, that's always astir wi' the like after nightfall; unless — Lord save us! — he be the deaul himsel.'"

"Whar is he noo?" asked the landlord, who was growing uncomfortable.

"He spang'd up the back stair to his room. I wonder you didn't hear him trampin' like a wild horse; and he clapt his door that the house shook again — but Lord knows whar he is noo. Let us gang awa's up to the Vicar's, and gan *him* come down, and talk wi' him."

"Hoity toity, man — you're too easy scared," said the landlord, pale enough by this time. "'Twould be a fine thing, truly, to send abroad that the house was haunted by the deaul himsel'! Why, 'twould be the ruin o' the George. You're sure ye locked the door on the corpse?"

"Aye, sir — sartain."

"Come wi' me, Tom — we'll gi' a last look round the yard."

So, side by side, with many a jealous look right and left, and over their shoulders, they went in silence. On entering the oldfashioned quadrangle, surrounded by stables and other offices — built in the antique cagework fashion — they stopped for a while under the shadow of the inn gable, and looked round the yard, and listened. All was silent — nothing stirring.

The stable lantern was lighted; and with it in his hand Tony Turnbull, holding Tom Scales by the shoulder, advanced. He hauled Tom after him for a step or two; then stood still and shoved him before him for a step or two more; and thus cautiously — as a pair of skirmishers under fire — they approached the coachhouse door.

"There, ye see — all safe," whispered Tom, pointing to the lock, which hung — distinct in the moonlight — in its place. "Cum back, I say!"

"Cum on, say I!" retorted the landlord valorously. "It would never do to allow any tricks to be played with the chap in there" — he pointed to the coachhouse door.

"The coroner here in the morning, and never a corpse to sit on!" He unlocked the padlock with these words, having handed the lantern to Tom. "Here, keck in, Tom," he continued; "ye hev the lantern — and see if all's as ye left it."

"Not me — na, not for the George and a' that's in it!" said Tom, with a shudder, sternly, as he took a step backward.

"What the — what are ye afraid on? Gi' me the lantern — it is all one: *I* will."

And cautiously, little by little, he opened the door; and, holding the lantern over his head in the narrow slit, he peeped in — frowning and pale — with one eye, as if he expected something to fly in his face. He closed the door without speaking, and locked it again.

"As safe as a thief in a mill," he whispered with a nod to his companion. And at that moment a harsh laugh overhead broke the silence startlingly, and set all the poultry in the yard gabbling.

"Thar he be!" said Tom, clutching the landlord's arm— "in the winda — see!"

The window of the cedar-room, up two pair of stairs, was open; and in the shadow a darker outline was visible of a man, with his elbows on the window-stone, looking down upon them.

"Look at his eyes — like two live coals!" gasped Tom.

The landlord could not see all this so sharply, being confused, and not so long-sighted as Tom.

"Time, sir," called Tony Turnbull, turning cold as he thought he saw a pair of eyes shining down redly at him— "time for honest folk to be in their beds, and asleep!"

"As sound as your sexton!" said the jeering voice from above.

"Come out of this," whispered the landlord fiercely to his hostler, plucking him hard by the sleeve.

They got into the house, and shut the door.

"I wish we were shot of him," said the landlord, with something like a groan, as he leaned against the wall of the passage. "I'll sit up, anyhow — and, Tom, you'll sit wi' me. Cum into the gunroom. No one shall steal the dead man out of my yard while I can draw a trigger."

The gunroom in the George is about twelve feet square. It projects into the stableyard and commands a full view of the old coachhouse; and, through a narrow side window, a flanking view of the back door of the inn, through which the yard is reached.

Tony Turnbull took down the blunderbuss — which was the great ordnance of the house — and loaded it with a stiff charge of pistol bullets.

He put on a greatcoat which hung there, and was his covering when he went out at night, to shoot wild ducks. Tom made himself comfortable likewise. They then sat down at the window, which was open, looking into the yard, the opposite side of which was white in the brilliant moonlight.

The landlord laid the blunderbuss across his knees, and stared into the yard. His comrade stared also. The door of the gunroom was locked; so they felt tolerably secure.

An hour passed; nothing had occurred. Another. The clock struck one. The shadows had shifted a little; but still the moon shone full on the old coachhouse, and the stable where the guest’s horse stood.

Turnbull thought he heard a step on the backstair. Tom was watching the back-door through the side window, with eyes glazing with the intensity of his stare. Anthony Turnbull, holding his breath, listened at the room door. It was a false alarm.

When he came back to the window looking into the yard:

“Hish! Look thar!” said he in a vehement whisper.

From the shadow at the left they saw the figure of the gaunt horseman, in short cloak and jack-boots, emerge. He pushed open the stable door, and led out his powerful black horse. He walked it across the front of the building till he reached the old coachhouse door; and there, with its bridle on its neck, he left it standing, while he stalked to the yard gate; and, dealing it a kick with his heel, it sprang back with the rebound, shaking from top to bottom, and stood open. The stranger returned to the side of his horse; and the door which secured the corpse of the dead sexton seemed to swing slowly open of itself as he entered, and returned with the corpse in his arms, and swung it across the shoulders of the horse, and instantly sprang into the saddle.

“Fire!” shouted Tom, and bang went the blunderbuss with a stunning crack. A thousand sparrows’ wings winnowed through the air from the thick ivy. The watchdog yelled a furious bark. There was a strange ring and whistle in the air. The blunderbuss had burst to shivers right down to the very breech. The recoil rolled the innkeeper upon his back on the floor, and

Tom Scales was flung against the side of the recess of the window, which had saved him from a tumble as violent. In this position they heard the searing laugh of the departing horseman, and saw him ride out of the gate with his ghastly burden.

Perhaps some of my readers, like myself, have heard this story told by Roger Turnbull, now host of the George and Dragon, the grandson of the very Tony who then swayed the spigot and keys of that inn, in the identical kitchen of which the fiend treated so many of the neighbours to punch.

What infernal object was subserved by the possession of the dead villain’s body, I have not learned. But a very curious story, in which a vampire resuscitation of Crooke the sexton figures, may throw a light upon this part of the tale.

The result of Turnbull’s shot at the disappearing fiend certainly justifies old Andrew Moreton’s dictum, which is thus expressed in his curious “History of Apparitions”: “I warn rash brands who, pretending not to fear the devil, are for using the ordinary violences with him, which affect one man from another — or with an apparition, in which they may be sure to receive some mischief. I knew one fired a gun at an apparition and the gun burst in a hundred pieces in his hand; another struck at an apparition with a sword, and broke his sword in pieces and wounded his hand grievously; and ’tis next to madness for anyone to go that way to work with any spirit, be it angel or be it devil.”

THE DREAM

Dreams! What age, or what country of the world, has not felt and acknowledged the mystery of their origin and end? I have thought not a little upon the subject, seeing it is one which has been often forced upon my attention, and sometimes strangely enough; and yet I have never arrived at anything which at all appeared a satisfactory conclusion. It does appear that a mental phenomenon so extraordinary cannot be wholly without its use. We know, indeed, that in the olden times it has been made the organ of communication between the Deity and His creatures; and when a dream produces upon a mind, to all appearance hopelessly reprobate and depraved, an effect so powerful and so lasting as to break down the inveterate habits, and to reform the life of an abandoned sinner, we see in the result, in the reformation of morals which appeared incorrigible, in the reclamation of a human soul which seemed to be irretrievably lost, something more than could be produced by a mere chimera of the slumbering fancy, something more than could arise from the capricious images of a terrified imagination. And while Reason rejects as absurd the superstition which will read a prophecy in every dream, she may, without violence to herself, recognize, even in the wildest and most incongruous of the wanderings of a slumbering intellect, the evidences and the fragments of a language which may be spoken, which *has* been spoken, to terrify, to warn and to command. We have reason to believe too, by the promptness of action which in the age of the prophets followed all intimations of this kind, and by the strength of conviction and strange permanence of the effects resulting from certain dreams in latter times — which effects we ourselves may have witnessed — that when this medium of communication has been employed by the Deity, the evidences of His presence have been unequivocal. My thoughts were directed to this subject in a manner to leave a lasting impression upon my mind, by the events which I shall now relate, the statement of which, however extraordinary, is nevertheless accurate.

About the year 17 — , having been appointed to the living of C —— h, I rented a small house in the town which bears the same name: one morning in the month of November, I was awakened before my usual time by my servant, who bustled into my bedroom for the purpose of announcing a sick call. As the Catholic Church holds her last rites to be totally indispensable to the safety of the departing sinner, no conscientious clergyman can afford a moment's unnecessary delay, and in little more than five minutes I stood ready, cloaked and booted for the road, in the small front parlour in which the messenger, who was to act as my guide, awaited my coming. I found a poor little girl crying piteously near the door, and after some slight difficulty I ascertained that her father was either dead or just dying.

"And what may be your father's name, my poor child?" said I. She held down her head as if ashamed. I repeated the question, and the wretched little creature burst into floods of tears still more bitter than she had shed before. At length, almost angered by conduct which appeared to me so unreasonable, I began to lose patience, and I said rather harshly, —

"If you will not tell me the name of the person to whom you would lead me, your silence can arise from no good motive, and I might be justified in refusing to go with you at all."

"Oh, don't say that — don't say that!" cried she. "Oh, sir, it was that I was afeard of when I would not tell you — I was afeard, when you heard his name, you would not come with me; but it is no use hidin' it now — it's Pat Connell, the carpenter, your honour."

She looked in my face with the most earnest anxiety, as if her very existence depended upon what she should read there. I relieved the child at once. The name, indeed, was most unpleasantly familiar to me; but, however fruitless my visits and advice might have been at another time, the present was too fearful an occasion to suffer my doubts of their utility, or my reluctance to re-attempting what appeared a hopeless task, to weigh even against the lightest chance that a consciousness of his imminent danger might produce in him a more docile and tractable disposition. Accordingly I told the child to lead the way, and followed her in silence. She hurried rapidly through the long narrow street which forms the great thoroughfare of the town. The darkness of the hour, rendered still deeper by the close approach of the oldfashioned houses, which lowered in tall obscurity on either side of the way; the damp, dreary chill which renders the advance of morning peculiarly cheerless, combined with the object of my walk — to visit the deathbed of a presumptuous sinner, to endeavour, almost against my own conviction, to infuse a hope into the heart of a dying reprobate — a drunkard but too probably perishing under the consequences of some mad fit of intoxication; all these circumstances served to enhance the gloom and solemnity of my feelings, as I silently followed my little guide, who with quick steps traversed the uneven pavement of the Main Street. After a walk of about five minutes, she turned off into a narrow lane, of that obscure and comfortless class which is to be found in almost all small oldfashioned towns, chill, without ventilation, reeking with all manner of offensive effluviæ, and lined by dingy, smoky, sickly and pent-up buildings, frequently not only in a wretched but in a dangerous condition.

"Your father has changed his abode since I last visited him, and, I am afraid, much for the worse," said I.

"Indeed he has, sir; but we must not complain," replied she. "We have to thank God that we have lodging and food, though it's poor enough, it is, your honour."

Poor child! thought I. How many an older head might learn wisdom from thee — how many a luxurious philosopher, who is skilled to preach but not to suffer, might not thy patient words put to the blush! The manner and language of my companion were alike above her years and station; and, indeed, in all cases in which the cares and sorrows of life have anticipated their usual date, and have fallen, as they sometimes do, with melancholy prematurity to the lot of childhood, I have observed the result to have proved uniformly the same. A young mind, to which joy and indulgence have been strangers, and to which suffering and self-denial have been familiarized from the first, acquires a solidity and an elevation which no other discipline could have bestowed, and which, in the present case, communicated a striking but mournful peculiarity to the manners, even to the voice, of the child. We paused before a narrow, crazy door, which she opened by means of a latch, and we forthwith began to ascend the steep and broken stairs which led to the sick man's room.

As we mounted flight after flight towards the garret-floor, I heard more and more distinctly the hurried talking of many voices. I could also distinguish the low sobbing of a female. On arriving upon the uppermost lobby, these sounds became fully audible.

"This way, your honour," said my little conductress; at the same time, pushing open a door of patched and half-rotten plank, she admitted me into the squalid chamber of death and misery. But one candle, held in the fingers of a scared and haggard-looking child, was burning in the room, and that so dim that all was twilight or darkness except within its immediate influence. The general obscurity, however, served to throw into prominent and startling relief the deathbed and its occupant. The light fell with horrible clearness upon the blue and swollen features of the drunkard. I did not think it possible that a human countenance could look so terrific. The lips were black and drawn apart; the teeth were firmly set; the eyes a little unclosed, and nothing but the whites appearing. Every feature was fixed and livid, and the whole face wore a ghastly and rigid expression of despairing terror such as I never saw equalled. His hands were crossed upon his breast, and firmly clenched; while, as if to add to the corpse-like effect of the whole, some white cloths, dipped in water, were wound about the forehead and temples.

As soon as I could remove my eyes from this horrible spectacle, I observed my friend Dr. D —— , one of the most humane of a humane profession, standing by the bedside. He had been attempting, but unsuccessfully, to bleed the patient, and had now applied his finger to the pulse.

“Is there any hope?” I inquired in a whisper.

A shake of the head was the reply. There was a pause, while he continued to hold the wrist; but he waited in vain for the throb of life — it was not there: and when he let go the hand, it fell stiffly back into its former position upon the other.

“The man is dead,” said the physician, as he turned from the bed where the terrible figure lay.

Dead! thought I, scarcely venturing to look upon the tremendous and revolting spectacle. Dead! without an hour for repentance, even a moment for reflection. Dead! without the rites which even the best should have. Was there a hope for him? The glaring eyeball, the grinning mouth, the distorted brow — that unutterable look in which a painter would have sought to embody the fixed despair of the nethermost hell — These were my answer.

The poor wife sat at a little distance, crying as if her heart would break — the younger children clustered round the bed, looking with wondering curiosity upon the form of death, never seen before.

When the first tumult of uncontrollable sorrow had passed away, availing myself of the solemnity and impressiveness of the scene, I desired the heart-stricken family to accompany me in prayer, and all knelt down while I solemnly and fervently repeated some of those prayers which appeared most applicable to the occasion. I employed myself thus in a manner which I trusted was not unprofitable, at least to the living, for about ten minutes; and having accomplished my task, I was the first to arise.

I looked upon the poor, sobbing, helpless creatures who knelt so humbly around me, and my heart bled for them. With a natural transition I turned my eyes from them to the bed in which the body lay; and, great God! what was the revulsion, the horror which I experienced on seeing the corpse-like, terrific thing seated half upright before me. The white cloths which had been wound about the head had now partly slipped from their position, and were hanging in grotesque festoons about the face and shoulders, while the distorted eyes leered from amid them —

"A sight to dream of, not to tell."

I stood actually riveted to the spot. The figure nodded its head and lifted its arm, I thought, with a menacing gesture. A thousand confused and horrible thoughts at once rushed upon my mind. I had often read that the body of a presumptuous sinner, who, during life, had been the willing creature of every satanic impulse, had been known, after the human tenant had deserted it, to become the horrible sport of demoniac possession.

I was roused by the piercing scream of the mother, who now, for the first time, perceived the change which had taken place. She rushed towards the bed, but, stunned by the shock and overcome by the conflict of violent emotions, before she reached it she fell prostrate upon the floor.

I am perfectly convinced that had I not been startled from the torpidity of horror in which I was bound by some powerful and arousing stimulant, I should have gazed upon this unearthly apparition until I had fairly lost my senses. As it was, however, the spell was broken — superstition gave way to reason: the man whom all believed to have been actually dead was living!

Dr. D —— was instantly standing by the bedside, and upon examination he found that a sudden and copious flow of blood had taken place from the wound which the lancet had left; and this, no doubt, had effected his sudden and almost preternatural restoration to an existence from which all thought he had been for ever removed. The man was still speechless, but he seemed to understand the physician when he forbade his repeating the painful and fruitless attempts which he made to articulate, and he at once resigned himself quietly into his hands.

I left the patient with leeches upon his temples, and bleeding freely, apparently with little of the drowsiness which accompanies apoplexy. Indeed, Dr. D —— told me that he had never before witnessed a seizure which seemed to combine the symptoms of so many kinds, and yet which belonged to none of the recognized classes; it certainly was not apoplexy, catalepsy, nor *delirium tremens*, and yet it seemed, in some degree, to partake of the properties of all. It was strange, but stranger things are coming.

During two or three days Dr. D —— would not allow his patient to converse in a manner which could excite or exhaust him, with anyone; he suffered him merely as briefly as possible to express his immediate wants. And it was not until the fourth day after my early visit, the particulars of which I have just detailed, that it was thought expedient that I should see him, and then only because it appeared that his extreme importunity and impatience to meet me were likely to retard his recovery more than the mere exhaustion attendant upon a short conversation could possibly do. Perhaps, too, my friend entertained some hope that if by holy confession his patient's bosom were eased of the perilous stuff which no doubt oppressed it, his recovery would be more assured and rapid. It was then, as I have said, upon the fourth day after my first professional call, that I found myself once more in the dreary chamber of want and sickness.

The man was in bed, and appeared low and restless. On my entering the room he raised himself in the bed, and muttered, twice or thrice, —

"Thank God! thank God!"

I signed to those of his family who stood by to leave the room, and took a chair beside the bed. So soon as we were alone, he said, rather doggedly, —

"There's no use in telling me of the sinfulness of bad ways — I know it all. I know where they lead to — I have seen everything about it with my own eyesight, as plain as I see you." He rolled himself in the bed, as if to hide his face in the clothes; and then suddenly raising himself, he exclaimed with startling vehemence, "Look, sir! there is no use in mincing the matter: I'm blasted with the fires of hell; I have been in hell. What do you think of that? In hell — I'm lost for ever — I have not a chance. I am damned already — damned — damned!"

The end of this sentence he actually shouted. His vehemence was perfectly terrific; he threw himself back, and laughed, and sobbed hysterically. I poured some water into a tea-cup, and gave it to him. After he had swallowed it, I told him if he had anything to communicate, to do so as briefly as he could, and in a manner as little agitating to himself as possible; threatening at the same time, though I had no intention of doing so, to leave him at once in case he again gave way to such passionate excitement.

"It's only foolishness," he continued, "for me to try to thank you for coming to such a villain as myself at all. It's no use for me to wish good to you, or to bless you; for such as me has no blessings to give."

I told him that I had but done my duty, and urged him to proceed to the matter which weighed upon his mind. He then spoke nearly as follows: —

"I came in drunk on Friday night last, and got to my bed here; I don't remember how. Sometime in the night it seemed to me I wakened, and feeling unasy in myself, I got up out of the bed. I wanted the fresh air; but I would not make a noise to open the window, for fear I'd waken the crathurs. It was very dark and throublesome to find the door; but at last I did get it, and I groped my way out, and went down as asy as I could. I felt quite sober, and I counted the steps one after another, as I was going down, that I might not stumble at the bottom.

"When I came to the first landing-place — God be about us always! — the floor of it sunk under me, and I went down — down — down, till the senses almost left me. I do not know how long I was falling, but it seemed to me a great while. When I came rightly to myself at last, I was sitting near the top of a great table; and I could not see the end of it, if it had any, it was so far off. And there was men beyond reckoning sitting down all along by it, at each side, as far as I could see at all. I did not know at first was it in the open air; but there was a close smothering feel in it that was not natural. And there was a kind of light that my eyesight never saw before, red and unsteady; and I did not see for a long time where it was coming from, until I looked straight up, and then I seen that it came from great balls of blood-coloured fire that were rolling high overhead with a sort of rushing, trembling sound, and I perceived that they shone on the ribs of a great roof of rock that was arched overhead instead of the sky. When I seen this, scarce knowing what I did, I got up, and I said, 'I have no right to be here; I must go.' And the man that was sitting at my left hand only smiled, and said, ‘Sit down again; you can *never* leave this place.’ And his voice was weaker than any child’s voice I ever heerd; and when he was done speaking he smiled again.

“Then I spoke out very loud and bold, and I said, ‘In the name of God, let me out of this bad place.’ And there was a great man that I did not see before, sitting at the end of the table that I was near; and he was taller than twelve men, and his face was very proud and terrible to look at. And he stood up and stretched out his hand before him; and when he stood up, all that was there, great and small, bowed down with a sighing sound; and a dread came on my heart, and he looked at me, and I could not speak. I felt I was his own, to do what he liked with, for I knew at once who he was; and he said, ‘If you promise to return, you may depart for a season;’ and the voice he spoke with was terrible and mournful, and the echoes of it went rolling and swelling down the endless cave, and mixing with the trembling of the fire overhead; so that when he sat down there was a sound after him, all through the place, like the roaring of a furnace. And I said, with all the strength I had, ‘I promise to come back — in God’s name let me go!’

“And with that I lost the sight and the hearing of all that was there, and when my senses came to me again, I was sitting in the bed with the blood all over me, and you and the rest praying around the room.”

Here he paused, and wiped away the chill drops which hung upon his forehead.

I remained silent for some moments. The vision which he had just described struck my imagination not a little, for this was long before Vathek and the “Hall of Eblis” had delighted the world; and the description which he gave had, as I received it, all the attractions of novelty beside the impressiveness which always belongs to the narration of an *eye-witness*, whether in the body or in the spirit, of the scenes which he describes. There was something, too, in the stern horror with which the man related these things, and in the incongruity of his description with the vulgarly received notions of the great place of punishment, and of its presiding spirit, which struck my mind with awe, almost with fear. At length he said, with an expression of horrible, imploring earnestness, which I shall never forget, —

“Well, sir, is there any hope; is there any chance at all? or is my soul pledged and promised away for ever? is it gone out of my power? must I go back to the place?”

In answering him, I had no easy task to perform; for however clear might be my internal conviction of the groundlessness of his fears, and however strong my scepticism respecting the reality of what he had described, I nevertheless felt that his impression to the contrary, and his humility and terror resulting from it, might be made available as no mean engines in the work of his conversion from profligacy, and of his restoration to decent habits and to religious feeling.

I therefore told him that he was to regard his dream rather in the light of a warning than in that of a prophecy; that our salvation depended not upon the word or deed of a moment, but upon the habits of a life; that, in fine, if he at once discarded his idle companions and evil habits, and firmly adhered to a sober, industrious, and religious course of life, the powers of darkness might claim his soul in vain, for that there were higher and firmer pledges than human tongue could utter, which promised salvation to him who should repent and lead a new life.

I left him much comforted, and with a promise to return upon the next day. I did so, and found him much more cheerful, and without any remains of the dogged sullenness which I suppose had arisen from his despair. His promises of amendment were given in that tone of deliberate earnestness which belongs to deep and solemn determination; and it was with no small delight that I observed, after repeated visits, that his good resolutions, so far from failing, did but gather strength by time; and when I saw that man shake off the idle and debauched companions whose society had for years formed alike his amusement and his ruin, and revive his long-discarded habits of industry and sobriety, I said within myself, There is something more in all this than the operation of an idle dream.

One day, some time after his perfect restoration to health, I was surprised, on ascending the stairs for the purpose of visiting this man, to find him busily employed in nailing down some planks upon the landing-place, through which, at the commencement of his mysterious vision, it seemed to him that he had sunk. I perceived at once that he was strengthening the floor with a view to securing himself against such a catastrophe, and could scarcely forbear a smile as I bid “God bless his work.”

He perceived my thoughts, I suppose, for he immediately said:

“I can never pass over that floor without trembling. I’d leave this house if I could, but I can’t find another lodging in the town so cheap, and I’ll not take a better till I've paid off all my debts, please God; but I could not be asy in my mind till I made it as safe as I could. You'll hardly believe me, your honour, that while I'm working, maybe a mile away, my heart is in a flutter the whole way back, with the bare thoughts of the two little steps I have to walk upon this bit of a floor. So it's no wonder, sir, I'd thry to make it sound and firm with any idle timber I have."

I applauded his resolution to pay off his debts, and the steadiness with which he perused his plans of conscientious economy, and passed on.

Many months elapsed, and still there appeared no alteration in his resolutions of amendment. He was a good workman, and with his better habits he recovered his former extensive and profitable employment. Everything seemed to promise comfort and respectability. I have little more to add, and that shall be told quickly. I had one evening met Pat Connell, as he returned from his work, and as usual, after a mutual, and on his side respectful salutation, I spoke a few words of encouragement and approval. I left him industrious, active, healthy — when next I saw him, not three days after, he was a corpse.

The circumstances which marked the event of his death were somewhat strange — I might say fearful. The unfortunate man had accidentally met an old friend just returned, after a long absence; and in a moment of excitement, forgetting everything in the warmth of his joy, he yielded to his urgent invitation to accompany him into a public house, which lay close by the spot where the encounter had taken place. Connell, however, previously to entering the room, had announced his determination to take nothing more than the strictest temperance would warrant.

But oh! who can describe the inveterate tenacity with which a drunkard's habits cling to him through life? He may repent, he may reform, he may look with actual abhorrence upon his past profligacy; but amid all this reformation and compunction, who can tell the moment in which the base and ruinous propensity may not recur, triumphing over resolution, remorse, shame, everything, and prostrating its victim once more in all that is destructive and revolting in that fatal vice?

The wretched man left the place in a state of utter intoxication. He was brought home nearly insensible, and placed in his bed. The younger part of the family retired to rest much after their usual hour; but the poor wife remained up sitting by the fire, too much grieved and shocked at the occurrence of what she had so little expected, to settle to rest. Fatigue, however, at length overcame her, and she sank gradually into an uneasy slumber. She could not tell how long she had remained in this state; but when she awakened, and immediately on opening her eyes, she perceived by the faint red light of the smouldering turf embers, two persons, one of whom she recognized as her husband, noiselessly gliding out of the room.

"Pat, darling, where are you going?" said she.

There was no answer — the door closed after them; but in a moment she was startled and terrified by a loud and heavy crash, as if some ponderous body had been hurled down the stair.

Much alarmed, she started up, and going to the head of the staircase, she called repeatedly upon her husband, but in vain.

She returned to the room, and with the assistance of her daughter, whom I had occasion to mention before, she succeeded in finding and lighting a candle, with which she hurried again to the head of the staircase.

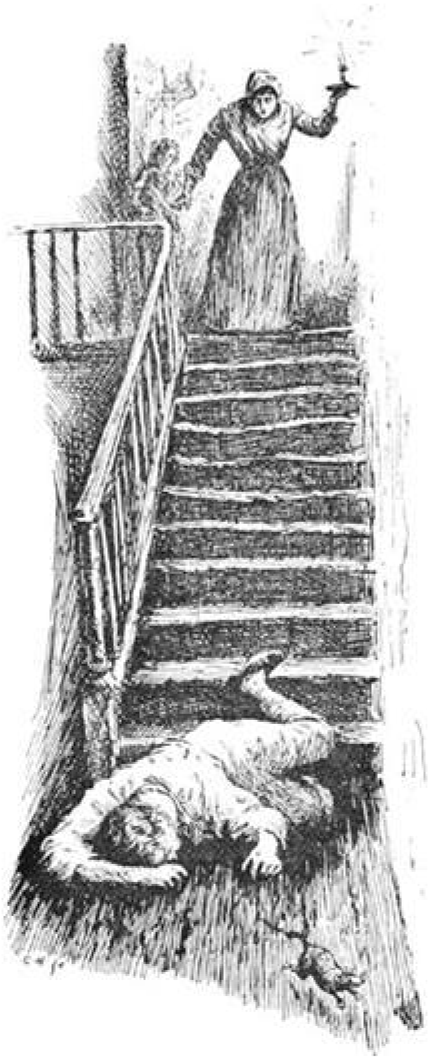
At the bottom lay what seemed to be a bundle of clothes, heaped together, motionless, lifeless — it was her husband. In going down the stairs, for what purpose can never now be known, he had fallen helplessly and violently to the bottom, and coming head foremost, the spine of the neck had been dislocated by the shock, and instant death must have ensued.

The body lay upon that landing-place to which his dream had referred.

It is scarcely worth endeavouring to clear up a single point in a narrative where all is mystery; yet I could not help suspecting that the second figure which had been seen in the room by Connell's wife on the night of his death might have been no other than his own shadow.

I suggested this solution of the difficulty; but she told me that the unknown person had been considerably in advance of her husband, and on reaching the door, had turned back as if to communicate something to his companion.

It was, then, a mystery.



AT THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS.

Was the dream verified? — whither had the disembodied spirit sped? who can say? We know not. But I left the house of death that day in a state of horror which I could not describe. It seemed to me that I was scarce awake. I heard and saw everything as if under the spell of a nightmare. The coincidence was terrible.

SQUIRE TOBY'S WILL

A GHOST STORY

Many persons accustomed to travel the old York and London road, in the days of stagecoaches, will remember passing, in the afternoon, say, of an autumn day, in their journey to the capital, about three miles south of the town of Applebury, and a mile and a half before you reach the old Angel Inn, a large black-and-white house, as those oldfashioned cagework habitations are termed, dilapidated and weather-stained, with broad lattice windows glimmering all over in the evening sun with little diamond panes, and thrown into relief by a dense background of ancient elms. A wide avenue, now overgrown like a churchyard with grass and weeds, and flanked by double rows of the same dark trees, old and gigantic, with here and there a gap in their solemn files, and sometimes a fallen tree lying across on the avenue, leads up to the hall-door.

Looking up its sombre and lifeless avenue from the top of the London coach, as I have often done, you are struck with so many signs of desertion and decay, — the tufted grass sprouting in the chinks of the steps and window-stones, the smokeless chimneys over which the jackdaws are wheeling, the absence of human life and all its evidence, that you conclude at once that the place is uninhabited and abandoned to decay. The name of this ancient house is Gylingden Hall. Tall hedges and old timber quickly shroud the old place from view, and about a quarter of a mile further on you pass, embowered in melancholy trees, a small and ruinous Saxon chapel, which, time out of mind, has been the burying-place of the family of Marston, and partakes of the neglect and desolation which brood over their ancient dwelling-place.

The grand melancholy of the secluded valley of Gylingden, lonely as an enchanted forest, in which the crows returning to their roosts among the trees, and the straggling deer who peep from beneath their branches, seem to hold a wild and undisturbed dominion, heightens the forlorn aspect of Gylingden Hall.

Of late years repairs have been neglected, and here and there the roof is stripped, and "the stitch in time" has been wanting. At the side of the house exposed to the gales that sweep through the valley like a torrent through its channel, there is not a perfect window left, and the shutters but imperfectly exclude the rain. The ceilings and walls are mildewed and green with damp stains. Here and there, where the drip falls from the ceiling, the floors are rotting. On stormy nights, as the guard described, you can hear the doors clapping in the old house, as far away as old Gryston bridge, and the howl and sobbing of the wind through its empty galleries.

About seventy years ago died the old Squire, Toby Marston, famous in that part of the world for his hounds, his hospitality, and his vices. He had done kind things, and he had fought duels: he had given away money and he had horse-whipped people. He carried with him some blessings and a good many curses, and left behind him an amount of debts and charges upon the estates which appalled his two sons, who had no taste for business or accounts, and had never suspected, till that wicked, open-handed, and swearing old gentleman died, how very nearly he had run the estates into insolvency.

They met at Gylingden Hall. They had the will before them, and lawyers to interpret, and information without stint, as to the encumbrances with which the deceased had saddled them. The will was so framed as to set the two brothers instantly at deadly feud.

These brothers differed in some points; but in one material characteristic they resembled one another, and also their departed father. They never went into a quarrel by halves, and once in, they did not stick at trifles.

The elder, Scroope Marston, the more dangerous man of the two, had never been a favourite of the old Squire. He had no taste for the sports of the field and the pleasures of a rustic life. He was no athlete, and he certainly was not handsome. All this the Squire resented. The young man, who had no respect for him, and outgrew his fear of his violence as he came to manhood, retorted. This aversion, therefore, in the ill-conditioned old man grew into positive hatred. He used to wish that d —— d pippin-squeezing, hump-backed rascal Scroope, out of the way of better men — meaning his younger son Charles; and in his cups would talk in a way which even the old and young fellows who followed his hounds, and drank his port, and could stand a reasonable amount of brutality, did not like.

Scroope Marston was slightly deformed, and he had the lean sallow face, piercing black eyes, and black lank hair, which sometimes accompany deformity.

"I'm no feyther o' that hog-backed creature. I'm no sire of hisn, d —— n him! I'd as soon call that tongs son o' mine," the old man used to bawl, in allusion to his son's long, lank limbs: "Charlie's a man, but that's a jack-an-ape. He has no goodnature; there's nothing handy, nor manly, nor no one turn of a Marston in him."

And when he was pretty drunk, the old Squire used to swear he should never "sit at the head o' that board; nor frighten away folk from Gylingden Hall wi' his d —— d hatchet-face — the black loon!"

"Handsome Charlie was the man for his money. He knew what a horse was, and could sit to his bottle; and the lasses were all clean *mad* about him. He was a Marston every inch of his six foot two."

Handsome Charlie and he, however, had also had a row or two. The old Squire was free with his horsewhip as with his tongue, and on occasion when neither weapon was quite practicable, had been known to give a fellow "a tap o' his knuckles." Handsome Charlie, however, thought there was a period at which personal chastisement should cease; and one night, when the port was flowing, there was some allusion to Marion Hayward, the miller's daughter, which for some reason the old gentleman did not like. Being "in liquor," and having clearer ideas about pugilism than self-government, he struck out, to the surprise of all present, at Handsome Charlie. The youth threw back his head scientifically, and nothing followed but the crash of a decanter on the floor. But the old Squire's blood was up, and he bounced from his chair. Up jumped Handsome Charlie, resolved to stand no nonsense. Drunken Squire Lilbourne, intending to mediate, fell flat on the floor, and cut his ear among the glasses. Handsome Charlie caught the thump which the old Squire discharged at him upon his open hand, and catching him by the cravat, swung him with his back to the wall. They said the old man never looked so purple, nor his eyes so goggle before; and then Handsome Charlie pinioned him tight to the wall by both arms.

"Well, I say — come, don't you talk no more nonsense o' that sort, and I won't lick you," croaked the old Squire. "You stopped that un clever, you did. Didn't he? Come, Charlie, man, gie us your hand, I say, and sit down again, lad." And so the battle ended; and I believe it was the last time the Squire raised his hand to Handsome Charlie.

But those days were over. Old Toby Marston lay cold and quiet enough now, under the drip of the mighty ash-tree within the Saxon ruin where so many of the old Marston race returned to dust, and were forgotten. The weather-stained topboots and leather-breeches, the three-cornered cocked hat to which old gentlemen of that day still clung, and the well-known red waistcoat that reached below his hips, and the fierce pug face of the old Squire, were now but a picture of memory. And the brothers between whom he had planted an irreconcilable quarrel, were now in their new mourning suits, with the gloss still on, debating furiously across the table in the great oak parlour, which had so often resounded to the banter and coarse songs, the oaths and laughter of the congenial neighbours whom the old Squire of Gylingden Hall loved to assemble there.

These young gentlemen, who had grown up in Gylingden Hall, were not accustomed to bridle their tongues, nor, if need be, to hesitate about a blow. Neither had been at the old man's funeral. His death had been sudden. Having been helped to his bed in that hilarious and quarrelsome state which was induced by port and punch, he was found dead in the morning, — his head hanging over the side of the bed, and his face very black and swollen.

Now the Squire's will despoiled his eldest son of Gylingden, which had descended to the heir time out of mind. Scroope Marston was furious. His deep stern voice was heard inveighing against his dead father and living brother, and the heavy thumps on the table with which he enforced his stormy recriminations resounded through the large chamber. Then broke in Charles's rougher voice, and then came a quick alternation of short sentences, and then both voices together in growing loudness and anger, and at last, swelling the tumult, the expostulations of pacific and frightened lawyers, and at last a sudden break up of the conference. Scroope broke out of the room, his pale furious face showing whiter against his long black hair, his dark fierce eyes blazing, his hands clenched, and looking more ungainly and deformed than ever in the convulsions of his fury.

Very violent words must have passed between them; for Charlie, though he was the winning man, was almost as angry as Scroope. The elder brother was for holding possession of the house, and putting his rival to legal process to oust him. But his legal advisers were clearly against it. So, with a heart boiling over with gall, up he went to London, and found the firm who had managed his father's business fair and communicative enough. They looked into the settlements, and found that Gylingden was excepted. It was very odd, but so it was, specially excepted; so that the right of the old Squire to deal with it by his will could not be questioned.

Notwithstanding all this, Scroope, breathing vengeance and aggression, and quite willing to wreck himself provided he could run his brother down, assailed Handsome Charlie, and battered old Squire Toby's will in the Prerogative Court and also at common law, and the feud between the brothers was knit, and every month their exasperation was heightened.

Scroope was beaten, and defeat did not soften him. Charles might have forgiven hard words; but he had been himself worsted during the long campaign in some of those skirmishes, special motions, and so forth, that constitute the episodes of a legal epic like that in which the Marston brothers figured as opposing combatants; and the blight of law costs had touched him, too, with the usual effect upon the temper of a man of embarrassed means.

Years flew, and brought no healing on their wings. On the contrary, the deep corrosion of this hatred bit deeper by time. Neither brother married. But an accident of a different kind befell the younger, Charles Marston, which abridged his enjoyments very materially.

This was a bad fall from his hunter. There were severe fractures, and there was concussion of the brain. For some time it was thought that he could not recover. He disappointed these evil auguries, however. He did recover, but changed in two essential particulars. He had received an injury in his hip, which doomed him never more to sit in the saddle. And the rollicking animal spirits which hitherto had never failed him, had now taken flight for ever.

He had been for five days in a state of coma — absolute insensibility — and when he recovered consciousness he was haunted by an indescribable anxiety.

Tom Cooper, who had been butler in the palmy days of Gylingden Hall, under old Squire Toby, still maintained his post with oldfashioned fidelity, in these days of faded splendour and frugal housekeeping. Twenty years had passed since the death of his old master. He had grown lean, and stooped, and his face, dark with the peculiar brown of age, furrowed and gnarled, and his temper, except with his master, had waxed surly.

His master had visited Bath and Buxton, and came back, as he went, lame, and halting gloomily about with the aid of a stick. When the hunter was sold, the last tradition of the old life at Gylingden disappeared. The young Squire, as he was still called, excluded by his mischance from the hunting-field, dropped into a solitary way of life, and halted slowly and solitarily about the old place, seldom raising his eyes, and with an appearance of indescribable gloom.

Old Cooper could talk freely on occasion with his master; and one day he said, as he handed him his hat and stick in the hall:

"You should rouse yourself up a bit, Master Charles!"

"It's past rousing with me, old Cooper."

"It's just this, I'm thinking: there's something on your mind, and you won't tell no one. There's no good keeping it on your stomach. You'll be a deal lighter if you tell it. Come, now, what is it, Master Charlie?"

The Squire looked with his round grey eyes straight into Cooper's eyes. He felt that there was a sort of spell broken. It was like the old rule of the ghost who can't speak till it is spoken to. He looked earnestly into old Cooper's face for some seconds, and sighed deeply.

"It ain't the first good guess you've made in your day, old Cooper, and I'm glad you've spoke. It's bin on my mind, sure enough, ever since I had that fall. Come in here after me, and shut the door."

The Squire pushed open the door of the oak parlour, and looked round on the pictures abstractedly. He had not been there for some time, and, seating himself on the table, he looked again for a while in Cooper's face before he spoke.

"It's not a great deal, Cooper, but it troubles me, and I would not tell it to the parson nor the doctor; for, God knows what they'd say, though there's nothing to signify in it. But you were always true to the family, and I don't mind if I tell you."

"'Tis as safe with Cooper, Master Charles, as if 'twas locked in a chest, and sunk in a well."

"It's only this," said Charles Marston, looking down on the end of his stick, with which he was tracing lines and circles, "all the time I was lying like dead, as you thought, after that fall, I was with the old master." He raised his eyes to Cooper's again as he spoke, and with an awful oath he repeated— "I was with him, Cooper!"

"He was a good man, sir, in his way," repeated old Cooper, returning his gaze with awe." He was a good master to me, and a good father to you, and

I hope he's happy. May God rest him!"

"Well," said Squire Charles, "it's only this: the whole of that time I was with him, or he was with me — I don't know which. The upshot is, we were together, and I thought I'd never get out of his hands again, and all the time he was bullying me about some one thing; and if it was to save my life, Tom Cooper, by —— from the time I waked I never could call to mind what it was; and I think I'd give that hand to know; and if you can think of anything it might be — for God's sake! don't be afraid, Tom Cooper, but speak it out, for he threatened me hard, and it was surely him."

Here ensued a silence.

"And what did you think it might be yourself, Master Charles?" said Cooper.

"I han't thought of aught that's likely. I'll never hit on't — *never*. I thought it might happen he knew something about that d —— hump-backed villain, Scroope, that swore before Lawyer Gingham I made away with a paper of settlements — me and father; and, as I hope to be saved, Tom Cooper, there never was a bigger lie! I'd a had the law of him for them identical words, and cast him for more than he's worth; only Lawyer Gingham never goes into nothing for me since money grew scarce in Gylingden; and I can't change my lawyer, I owe him such a hatful of money. But he did, he swore he'd hang me yet for it. He said it in them identical words — he'd never rest till he *hanged* me for it, and I think it was, like enough, something about *that*, the old master was troubled; but it's enough to drive a man mad. I can't bring it to mind — I can't remember a word he said, only he threatened awful, and looked — Lord a mercy on us! — frightful bad."

"There's no need he should. May the Lord a-mercy on him!" said the old butler.

"No, of course; and you're not to tell a soul, Cooper — not a living soul, mind, that I said he looked bad, nor nothing about it."

"God forbid!" said old Cooper, shaking his head. "But I was thinking, sir, it might ha' been about the slight that's bin so long put on him by having no stone over him, and never a scratch o' a chisel to say who he is."

"Ay! Well, I didn't think o' that. Put on your hat, old Cooper, and come down wi' me; for I'll look after that, at any rate."

There is a bye-path leading by a turnstile to the park, and thence to the picturesque old burying-place, which lies in a nook by the roadside, embowered in ancient trees. It was a fine autumnal sunset, and melancholy lights and long shadows spread their peculiar effects over the landscape as “Handsome Charlie” and the old butler made their way slowly toward the place where Handsome Charlie was himself to lie at last.

“Which of the dogs made that howling all last night?” asked the Squire, when they had got on a little way.

“’Twas a strange dog, Master Charlie, in front of the house; ours was all in the yard — a white dog wi’ a black head, he looked to be, and he was smelling round them mounting-steps the old master, God be wi’ him! set up, the time his knee was bad. When the tyke got up a’ top of them, howlin’ up at the windows, I’d a liked to shy something at him.”

“Hullo! Is that like him?” said the Squire, stopping short, and pointing with his stick at a dirty-white dog, with a large black head, which was scampering round them in a wide circle, half crouching with that air of uncertainty and deprecation which dogs so well know how to assume.

He whistled the dog up. He was a large, half-starved bulldog.

“That fellow has made a long journey — thin as a whipping-post, and stained all over, and his claws worn to the stumps,” said the Squire, musingly. “He isn’t a bad dog, Cooper. My poor father liked a good bulldog, and knew a cur from a good ‘un.”

The dog was looking up into the Squire’s face with the peculiar grim visage of his kind, and the Squire was thinking irreverently how strong a likeness it presented to the character of his father’s fierce pug features when he was clutching his horsewhip and swearing at a keeper.

“If I did right I’d shoot him. He’ll worry the cattle, and kill our dogs,” said the Squire. “Hey, Cooper? I’ll tell the keeper to look after him. That fellow could pull down a sheep, and he shan’t live on my mutton.”

But the dog was not to be shaken off. He looked wistfully after the Squire, and after they had got a little way on, he followed timidly.

It was vain trying to drive him off. The dog ran round them in wide circles, like the infernal dog in “Faust”; only he left no track of thin flame behind him. These man[oe]uvres were executed with a sort of beseeching air, which flattered and touched the object of this odd preference. So he called him up again, patted him, and then and there in a manner adopted him.

The dog now followed their steps dutifully, as if he had belonged to Handsome Charlie all his days. Cooper unlocked the little iron door, and the dog walked in close behind their heels, and followed them as they visited the roofless chapel.

The Marstons were lying under the floor of this little building in rows. There is not a vault. Each has his distinct grave enclosed in a lining of masonry. Each is surmounted by a stone kist, on the upper flag of which is enclosed his epitaph, except that of poor old Squire Toby. Over him was nothing but the grass and the line of masonry which indicate the site of the kist, whenever his family should afford him one like the rest.

“Well, it does look shabby. It’s the elder brother’s business; but if he won’t, I’ll see to it myself, and I’ll take care, old boy, to cut sharp and deep in it, that the elder son having refused to lend a hand the stone was put there by the younger.”

They strolled round this little burial-ground. The sun was now below the horizon, and the red metallic glow from the clouds, still illuminated by the departed sun, mingled luridly with the twilight. When Charlie peeped again into the little chapel, he saw the ugly dog stretched upon Squire Toby’s grave, looking at least twice his natural length, and performing such antics as made the young Squire stare. If you have ever seen a cat stretched on the floor, with a bunch of Valerian, straining, writhing, rubbing its jaws in long-drawn caresses, and in the absorption of a sensual ecstasy, you have seen a phenomenon resembling that which Handsome Charlie witnessed on looking in.

The head of the brute looked so large, its body so long and thin, and its joints so ungainly and dislocated, that the Squire, with old Cooper beside him, looked on with a feeling of disgust and astonishment, which, in a moment or two more, brought the Squire’s stick down upon him with a couple of heavy thumps. The beast awakened from his ecstasy, sprang to the head of the grave, and there on a sudden, thick and bandy as before, confronted the Squire, who stood at its foot, with a terrible grin, and eyes that glared with the peculiar green of canine fury.

The next moment the dog was crouching abjectly at the Squire’s feet.

“Well, he’s a rum ‘un!” said old Cooper, looking hard at him.

“I like him,” said the Squire.

“I don’t,” said Cooper.

“But he shan’t come in here again,” said the Squire.

“I shouldn’t wonder if he was a witch,” said old Cooper, who remembered more tales of witchcraft than are now current in that part of the world.

“He’s a good dog,” said the Squire, dreamily. “I remember the time I’d a given a handful for him — but I’ll never be good for nothing again. Come along.”

And he stooped down and patted him. So up jumped the dog and looked up in his face, as if watching for some sign, ever so slight, which he might obey.

Cooper did not like a bone in that dog’s skin. He could not imagine what his master saw to admire in him. He kept him all night in the gunroom, and the dog accompanied him in his halting rambles about the place. The fonder his master grew of him, the less did Cooper and the other servants like him.

“He hasn’t a point of a good dog about him,” Cooper would growl. “I think Master Charlie be blind. And old Captain (an old red parrot, who sat chained to a perch in the oak parlour, and conversed with himself, and nibbled at his claws and bit his perch all day), — old Captain, the only living thing, except one or two of us, and the Squire himself, that remembers the old master, the minute he saw the dog, screeched as if he was struck, shakin’ his feathers out quite wild, and drops down, poor old soul, a-hangin’ by his foot, in a fit.”

But there is no accounting for fancies, and the Squire was one of those dogged persons who persist more obstinately in their whims the more they are opposed. But Charles Marston’s health suffered by his lameness. The transition from habitual and violent exercise to such a life as his privation now consigned him to, was never made without a risk to health; and a host of dyspeptic annoyances, the existence of which he had never dreamed of before, now beset him in sad earnest. Among these was the now not unfrequent troubling of his sleep with dreams and nightmares. In these his canine favourite invariably had a part and was generally a central, and sometimes a solitary figure. In these visions the dog seemed to stretch himself up the side of the Squire’s bed, and in dilated proportions to sit at his feet, with a horrible likeness to the pug features of old Squire Toby, with his tricks of wagging his head and throwing up his chin; and then he would talk to him about Scroope, and tell him “all wasn’t straight,” and that he “must make it up wi’ Scroope,” that he, the old Squire, had “served him an ill turn,” that “time was nigh up,” and that “fair was fair,” and he was “troubled where he was, about Scroope.”

Then in his dream this semi-human brute would approach his face to his, crawling and crouching up his body, heavy as lead, till the face of the beast was laid on his, with the same odious caresses and stretchings and writhings which he had seen over the old Squire’s grave. Then Charlie would wake up with a gasp and a howl, and start upright in the bed, bathed in a cold moisture, and fancy he saw something white sliding off the foot of the bed. Sometimes he thought it might be the curtain with white lining that slipped down, or the coverlet disturbed by his uneasy turnings; but he always fancied, at such moments, that he saw something white sliding hastily off the bed; and always when he had been visited by such dreams the dog next morning was more than usually caressing and servile, as if to obliterate, by a more than ordinary welcome, the sentiment of disgust which the horror of the night had left behind it.

The doctor half-satisfied the Squire that there was nothing in these dreams, which, in one shape or another, invariably attended forms of indigestion such as he was suffering from.

For a while, as if to corroborate this theory, the dog ceased altogether to figure in them. But at last there came a vision in which, more unpleasantly than before, he did resume his old place.

In his nightmare the room seemed all but dark; he heard what he knew to be the dog walking from the door round his bed slowly, to the side from which he always had come upon it. A portion of the room was uncarpeted, and he said he distinctly heard the peculiar tread of a dog, in which the faint clatter of the claws is audible. It was a light stealthy step, but at every tread the whole room shook heavily; he felt something place itself at the foot of his bed, and saw a pair of green eyes staring at him in the dark, from which he could not remove his own. Then he heard, as he thought, the old Squire Toby say— “The eleventh hour be passed, Charlie, and ye’ve done nothing — you and I ‘a done Scroope a wrong!” and then came a good deal more, and then— “The time’s nigh up, it’s going to strike.” And with a long low growl, the thing began to creep up upon his feet; the growl continued, and he saw the reflection of the upturned green eyes upon the bedclothes, as it began slowly to stretch itself up his body towards his face. With a loud scream, he waked. The light, which of late the Squire was accustomed to have in his bedroom, had accidentally gone out. He was afraid to get up, or even to look about the room for some time; so sure did he feel of seeing the green eyes in the dark fixed on him from some corner. He had hardly recovered from the first agony which nightmare leaves behind it, and was beginning to collect his thoughts, when he heard the clock strike twelve. And he bethought him of the words "the eleventh hour be passed — time's nigh up — it's going to strike!" and he almost feared that he would hear the voice reopening the subject.

Next morning the Squire came down looking ill.

"Do you know a room, old Cooper," said he, "they used to call King Herod's Chamber?"

"Ay, sir; the story of King Herod was on the walls o't when I was a boy."

"There's a closet off it — is there?"

"I can't be sure o' that; but 'tisn't worth your looking at, now; the hangings was rotten, and took off the walls, before you was born; and there's nou't there but some old broken things and lumber. I seed them put there myself by poor Twinks; he was blind of an eye, and footman afterwards. You'll remember Twinks? He died here, about the time o' the great snow. There was a deal o' work to bury him, poor fellow!"

"Get the key, old Cooper; I'll look at the room," said the Squire.

"And what the devil can you want to look at it for?" said Cooper, with the old-world privilege of a rustic butler.

"And what the devil's that to you? But I don't mind if I tell you. I don't want that dog in the gunroom, and I'll put him somewhere else; and I don't care if I put him there."

"A bulldog in a bedroom! Oons, sir! the folks 'ill say you're clean mad!"

"Well, let them; get you the key, and let us look at the room."

"You'd shoot him if you did right, Master Charlie. You never heard what a noise he kept up all last night in the gunroom, walking to and fro growling like a tiger in a show; and, say what you like, the dog's not worth his feed; he hasn't a point of a dog; he's a bad dog."

"I know a dog better than you — and he's a good dog!" said the Squire, testily.

"If you was a judge of a dog you'd hang that 'un," said Cooper.

"I'm not a-going to hang him, so there's an end. Go you, and get the key; and don't be talking, mind, when you go down. I may change my mind."

Now this freak of visiting King Herod's room had, in truth, a totally different object from that pretended by the Squire. The voice in his nightmare had uttered a particular direction, which haunted him, and would give him no peace until he had tested it. So far from liking that dog to-day, he was beginning to regard it with a horrible suspicion; and if old Cooper had not stirred his obstinate temper by seeming to dictate, I dare say he would have got rid of that inmate effectually before evening.

Up to the third storey, long disused, he and old Cooper mounted. At the end of a dusty gallery, the room lay. The old tapestry, from which the spacious chamber had taken its name, had long given place to modern paper, and this was mildewed, and in some places hanging from the walls. A thick mantle of dust lay over the floor. Some broken chairs and boards, thick with dust, lay, along with other lumber, piled together at one end of the room.

They entered the closet, which was quite empty. The Squire looked round, and you could hardly have said whether he was relieved or disappointed.

"No furniture here," said the Squire, and looked through the dusty window. "Did you say anything to me lately — I don't mean this morning — about this room, or the closet — or anything — I forget— "

"Lor' bless you! Not I. I han't been thinkin' o' this room this forty year."

"Is there any sort of old furniture called a *buffet* — do you remember?" asked the Squire.

"A buffet? why, yes — to be sure — there was a buffet, sure enough, in this closet, now you bring it to my mind," said Cooper. "But it's papered over."

"And what is it?"

"A little cupboard in the wall," answered the old man.

"Ho — I see — and there's such a thing here, is there, under the paper? Show me whereabouts it was."

"Well — I think it was somewhere about here," answered he, rapping his knuckles along the wall opposite the window. "Ay, there it is," he added, as the hollow sound of a wooden door was returned to his knock.

The Squire pulled the loose paper from the wall, and disclosed the doors of a small press, about two feet square, fixed in the wall.

“The very thing for my buckles and pistols, and the rest of my gimcracks,” said the Squire. “Come away, we’ll leave the dog where he is. Have you the key of that little press?”

No, he had not. The old master had emptied and locked it up, and desired that it should be papered over, and that was the history of it.

Down came the Squire, and took a strong turnscrew from his gun-case; and quietly he reascended to King Herod’s room, and, with little trouble, forced the door of the small press in the closet wall. There were in it some letters and cancelled leases, and also a parchment deed which he took to the window and read with much agitation. It was a supplemental deed executed about a fortnight after the others, and previously to his father’s marriage, placing Gylingden under strict settlement to the elder son, in what is called “tail male.” Handsome Charlie, in his fraternal litigation, had acquired a smattering of technical knowledge, and he perfectly well knew that the effect of this would be not only to transfer the house and lands to his brother Scroope, but to leave him at the mercy of that exasperated brother, who might recover from him personally every guinea he had ever received by way of rent, from the date of his father’s death.

It was a dismal, clouded day, with something threatening in its aspect, and the darkness, where he stood, was made deeper by the top of one of the huge old trees overhanging the window.

In a state of awful confusion he attempted to think over his position. He placed the deed in his pocket, and nearly made up his mind to destroy it. A short time ago he would not have hesitated for a moment under such circumstances; but now his health and his nerves were shattered, and he was under a supernatural alarm which the strange discovery of this deed had powerfully confirmed.

In this state of profound agitation he heard a sniffing at the closet-door, and then an impatient scratch and a long low growl. He screwed his courage up, and, not knowing what to expect, threw the door open and saw the dog, not in his dream-shape, but wriggling with joy, and crouching and fawning with eager submission; and then wandering about the closet, the brute growled awfully into the corners of it, and seemed in an unappeasable agitation.

Then the dog returned and fawned and crouched again at his feet.

After the first moment was over, the sensations of abhorrence and fear began to subside, and he almost reproached himself for requiting the affection of this poor friendless brute with the antipathy which he had really done nothing to earn.

The dog pattered after him down the stairs. Oddly enough, the sight of this animal, after the first revulsion, reassured him; it was, in his eyes, so attached, so goodnatured, and palpably so mere a dog.

By the hour of evening the Squire had resolved on a middle course; he would not inform his brother of his discovery, nor yet would he destroy the deed. He would never marry. He was past that time. He would leave a letter, explaining the discovery of the deed, addressed to the only surviving trustee — who had probably forgotten everything about it — and having seen out his own tenure, he would provide that all should be set right after his death. Was not that fair? at all events it quite satisfied what he called his conscience, and he thought it a devilish good compromise for his brother; and he went out, towards sunset, to take his usual walk.

Returning in the darkening twilight, the dog, as usual attending him, began to grow frisky and wild, at first scampering round him in great circles, as before, nearly at the top of his speed, his great head between his paws as he raced. Gradually more excited grew the pace and narrower his circuit, louder and fiercer his continuous growl, and the Squire stopped and grasped his stick hard, for the lurid eyes and grin of the brute threatened an attack. Turning round and round as the excited brute encircled him, and striking vainly at him with his stick, he grew at last so tired that he almost despaired of keeping him longer at bay; when on a sudden the dog stopped short and crawled up to his feet wriggling and crouching submissively.

Nothing could be more apologetic and abject; and when the Squire dealt him two heavy thumps with his stick, the dog whimpered only, and writhed and licked his feet. The Squire sat down on a prostrate tree; and his dumb companion, recovering his wonted spirits immediately, began to sniff and nuzzle among the roots. The Squire felt in his breastpocket for the deed — it was safe; and again he pondered, in this loneliest of spots, on the question whether he should preserve it for restoration after his death to his brother, or destroy it forthwith. He began rather to lean toward the latter solution, when the long low growl of the dog not far off startled him.

He was sitting in a melancholy grove of old trees, that slants gently westward. Exactly the same odd effect of light I have before described — a faint red glow reflected downward from the upper sky, after the sun had set, now gave to the growing darkness a lurid uncertainty. This grove, which lies in a gentle hollow, owing to its circumscribed horizon on all but one side, has a peculiar character of loneliness.

He got up and peeped over a sort of barrier, accidentally formed of the trunks of felled trees laid one over the other, and saw the dog straining up the other side of it, and hideously stretched out, his ugly head looking in consequence twice the natural size. His dream was coming over him again. And now between the trunks the brute's ungainly head was thrust, and the long neck came straining through, and the body, twining after it like a huge white lizard; and as it came striving and twisting through, it growled and glared as if it would devour him.

As swiftly as his lameness would allow, the Squire hurried from this solitary spot towards the house. What thoughts exactly passed through his mind as he did so, I am sure he could not have told. But when the dog came up with him it seemed appeased, and even in high goodhumour, and no longer resembled the brute that haunted his dreams.

That night, near ten o'clock, the Squire, a good deal agitated, sent for the keeper, and told him that he believed the dog was mad, and that he must shoot him. He might shoot the dog in the gunroom, where he was — a grain of shot or two in the wainscot did not matter, and the dog must not have a chance of getting out.

The Squire gave the gamekeeper his double-barrelled gun, loaded with heavy shot. He did not go with him beyond the hall. He placed his hand on the keeper's arm; the keeper said his hand trembled, and that he looked "as white as curds."

"Listen a bit!" said the Squire under his breath.

They heard the dog in a state of high excitement in the room — growling ominously, jumping on the window-stool and down again, and running round the room.

"You'll need to be sharp, mind — don't give him a chance — slip in edgeways, d'ye see? and give him both barrels!"

"Not the first mad dog I've knocked over, sir," said the man, looking very serious as he cocked the gun.

As the keeper opened the door, the dog had sprung into the empty grate. He said he “never see sich a stark, staring devil.” The beast made a twist round, as if, he thought, to jump up the chimney— “but that wasn’t to be done at no price,” — and he made a yell — not like a dog — like a man caught in a mill-crank, and before he could spring at the keeper, he fired one barrel into him. The dog leaped towards him, and rolled over, receiving the second barrel in his head, as he lay snorting at the keeper’s feet!

“I never seed the like; I never heard a screech like that!” said the keeper, recoiling. “It makes a fellow feel queer.”

“Quite dead?” asked the Squire.

“Not a stir in him, sir,” said the man, pulling him along the floor by the neck.

“Throw him outside the hall-door now,” said the Squire;” and mind you pitch him outside the gate tonight — old Cooper says he’s a witch,” and the pale Squire smiled, “so he shan’t lie in Gylingden.”

Never was man more relieved than the Squire, and he slept better for a week after this than he had done for many weeks before.

It behoves us all to act promptly on our good resolutions. There is a determined gravitation towards evil, which, if left to itself, will bear down first intentions. If at one moment of superstitious fear, the Squire had made up his mind to a great sacrifice, and resolved in the matter of that deed so strangely recovered, to act honestly by his brother, that resolution very soon gave place to the compromise with fraud, which so conveniently postponed the restitution to the period when further enjoyment on his part was impossible. Then came more tidings of Scroope’s violent and minatory language, with always the same burthen — that he would leave no stone unturned to show that there had existed a deed which Charles had either secreted or destroyed, and that he would never rest till he had hanged him.

This of course was wild talk. At first it had only enraged him; but, with his recent guilty knowledge and suppression, had come fear. His danger was the existence of the deed, and little by little he brought himself to a resolution to destroy it. There were many falterings and recoils before he could bring himself to commit this crime. At length, however, he did it, and got rid of the custody of that which at any time might become the instrument of disgrace and ruin. There was relief in this, but also the new and terrible sense of actual guilt.

He had got pretty well rid of his supernatural qualms. It was a different kind of trouble that agitated him now.

But this night, he imagined, he was awakened by a violent shaking of his bed. He could see, in the very imperfect light, two figures at the foot of it, holding each a bedpost. One of these he half-fancied was his brother Scroope, but the other was the old Squire — of that he was sure — and he fancied that they had shaken him up from his sleep. Squire Toby was talking as Charlie wakened, and he heard him say:

"Put out of our own house by you! It won't hold for long. We'll come in together, friendly, and stay. Forewarned, wi' yer eyes open, ye did it; and now Scroope'll hang you! We'll hang you together! Look at me, you devil's limb."

And the old Squire tremblingly stretched his face, torn with shot and bloody, and growing every moment more and more into the likeness of the dog, and began to stretch himself out and climb the bed over the foot-board; and he saw the figure at the other side, little more than a black shadow, begin also to scale the bed; and there was instantly a dreadful confusion and uproar in the room, and such a gabbling and laughing; he could not catch the words; but, with a scream, he woke, and found himself standing on the floor. The phantoms and the clamour were gone, but a crash and ringing of fragments was in his ears. The great china bowl, from which for generations the Marstons of Gylingden had been baptized, had fallen from the mantelpiece, and was smashed on the hearthstone.

"I've bin dreamin' all night about Mr. Scroope, and I wouldn't wonder, old Cooper, if he was dead," said the Squire, when he came down in the morning.

"God forbid! I was adreamed about him, too, sir: I dreamed he was dammin' and sinkin' about a hole was burnt in his coat, and the old master, God be wi' him! said — quite plain — I'd 'a swore 'twas himself— 'Cooper, get up, ye d —— d land-loupin' thief, and lend a hand to hang him — for he's a daft cur, and no dog o' mine.' 'Twas the dog shot over night, I do suppose, as was runnin' in my old head. I thought old master gied me a punch wi' his knuckles, and says I, wakenin' up, 'At yer service, sir'; and for a while I couldn't get it out o' my head, master was in the room still."

Letters from town soon convinced the Squire that his brother Scroope, so far from being dead, was particularly active; and Charlie's attorney wrote to say, in serious alarm, that he had heard, accidentally, that he intended setting up a case, of a supplementary deed of settlement, of which he had secondary evidence, which would give him Gylingden. And at this menace Handsome Charlie snapped his fingers, and wrote courageously to his attorney; abiding what might follow with, however, a secret foreboding.

Scroope threatened loudly now, and swore after his bitter fashion, and reiterated his old promise of hanging that cheat at last. In the midst of these menaces and preparations, however, a sudden peace proclaimed itself: Scroope died, without time even to make provisions for a posthumous attack upon his brother. It was one of those cases of disease of the heart in which death is as sudden as by a bullet.

Charlie's exultation was undisguised. It was shocking. Not, of course, altogether malignant. For there was the expansion consequent on the removal of a secret fear. There was also the comic piece of luck, that only the day before Scroope had destroyed his old will, which left to a stranger every farthing he possessed, intending in a day or two to execute another to the same person, charged with the express condition of prosecuting the suit against Charlie.

The result was, that all his possessions went unconditionally to his brother Charles as his heir. Here were grounds for abundance of savage elation. But there was also the deep-seated hatred of half a life of mutual and persistent agression and revilings; and Handsome Charlie was capable of nursing a grudge, and enjoying a revenge with his whole heart.

He would gladly have prevented his brother's being buried in the old Gylingden chapel, where he wished to lie; but his lawyers doubted his power, and he was not quite proof against the scandal which would attend his turning back the funeral, which would, he knew, be attended by some of the country gentry and others, with an hereditary regard for the Marstons.

But he warned his servants that not one of them were to attend it; promising, with oaths and curses not to be disregarded, that any one of them who did so, should find the door shut in his face on his return.

I don't think, with the exception of old Cooper, that the servants cared for this prohibition, except as it baulked a curiosity always strong in the solitude of the country. Cooper was very much vexed that the eldest son of the old Squire should be buried in the old family chapel, and no sign of decent respect from Gylingden Hall. He asked his master, whether he would not, at least, have some wine and refreshments in the oak parlour, in case any of the country gentlemen who paid this respect to the old family should come up to the house? But the Squire only swore at him, told him to mind his own business, and ordered him to say, if such a thing happened, that he was out, and no preparations made, and, in fact, to send them away as they came. Cooper expostulated stoutly, and the Squire grew angrier; and after a tempestuous scene, took his hat and stick and walked out, just as the funeral descending the valley from the direction of the "Old Angel Inn" came in sight.

Old Cooper prowled about disconsolately, and counted the carriages as well as he could from the gate. When the funeral was over, and they began to drive away, he returned to the hall, the door of which lay open, and as usual deserted. Before he reached it quite, a mourning coach drove up, and two gentlemen in black cloaks, and with crapes to their hats, got out, and without looking to the right or the left, went up the steps into the house. Cooper followed them slowly. The carriage had, he supposed, gone round to the yard, for, when he reached the door, it was no longer there.

So he followed the two mourners into the house. In the hall he found a fellow-servant, who said he had seen two gentlemen, in black cloaks, pass through the hall, and go up the stairs without removing their hats, or asking leave of anyone. This was very odd, old Cooper thought, and a great liberty; so upstairs he went to make them out.

But he could not find them then, nor ever. And from that hour the house was troubled.

In a little time there was not one of the servants who had not something to tell. Steps and voices followed them sometimes in the passages, and tittering whispers, always minatory, scared them at corners of the galleries, or from dark recesses; so that they would return panic-stricken to be rebuked by thin Mrs. Beckett, who looked on such stories as worse than idle. But Mrs Beckett herself, a short time after, took a very different view of the matter.

She had herself begun to hear these voices, and with this formidable aggravation, that they came always when she was at her prayers, which she had been punctual in saying all her life, and utterly interrupted them. She was scared at such moments by dropping words and sentences, which grew, as she persisted, into threats and blasphemies.

These voices were not always in the room. They called, as she fancied, through the walls, very thick in that old house, from the neighbouring apartments, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other; sometimes they seemed to holloa from distant lobbies, and came muffled, but threateningly, through the long panelled passages. As they approached they grew furious, as if several voices were speaking together. Whenever, as I said, this worthy woman applied herself to her devotions, these horrible sentences came hurrying towards the door, and, in panic, she would start from her knees, and all then would subside except the thumping of her heart against her stays, and the dreadful tremors of her nerves.

What these voices said, Mrs. Beckett never could quite remember one minute after they had ceased speaking; one sentence chased another away; gibe and menace and impious denunciation, each hideously articulate, were lost as soon as heard. And this added to the effect of these terrifying mockeries and invectives, that she could not, by any effort, retain their exact import, although their horrible character remained vividly present to her mind.

For a long time the Squire seemed to be the only person in the house absolutely unconscious of these annoyances. Mrs. Beckett had twice made up her mind within the week to leave. A prudent woman, however, who has been comfortable for more than twenty years in a place, thinks oftener than twice before she leaves it. She and old Cooper were the only servants in the house who remembered the good old housekeeping in Squire Toby's day. The others were few, and such as could hardly be accounted regular servants. Meg Dobbs, who acted as housemaid, would not sleep in the house, but walked home, in trepidation, to her father's, at the gatehouse, under the escort of her little brother, every night. Old Mrs. Beckett, who was high and mighty with the make-shift servants of fallen Gylingden, let herself down all at once, and made Mrs. Kymes and the kitchenmaid move their beds into her large and faded room, and there, very frankly, shared her nightly terrors with them.

Old Cooper was testy and captious about these stories. He was already uncomfortable enough by reason of the entrance of the two muffled figures into the house, about which there could be no mistake. His own eyes had seen them. He refused to credit the stories of the women, and affected to think that the two mourners might have left the house and driven away, on finding no one to receive them.

Old Cooper was summoned at night to the oak parlour, where the Squire was smoking.

"I say, Cooper," said the Squire, looking pale and angry, "what for ha' you been frightenin' they crazy women wi' your plaguy stories? d —— me, if you see ghosts here it's no place for you, and it's time you should pack. I won't be left without servants. Here has been old Beckett, wi' the cook and the kitchenmaid, as white as pipeclay, all in a row, to tell me I must have a parson to sleep among them, and preach down the devil! Upon my soul, you're a wise old body, filling their heads wi' maggots! and Meg goes down to the lodge every night, afeared to lie in the house — all your doing, wi' your old wives' stories, — ye withered old Tom o' Bedlam!"

"I'm not to blame, Master Charles. 'Tisn't along o' no stories o' mine, for I'm never done tellin' 'em it's all vanity and vapours. Mrs. Beckett 'ill tell you that, and there's been many a wry word betwixt us on the head o't. Whate'er I may *think*," said old Cooper, significantly, and looking askance, with the sternness of fear in the Squire's face.

The Squire averted his eyes, and muttered angrily to himself, and turned away to knock the ashes out of his pipe on the hob, and then turning suddenly round upon Cooper again, he spoke, with a pale face, but not quite so angrily as before.

"I know you're no fool, old Cooper, when you like. Suppose there was such a thing as a ghost here, don't you see, it ain't to them snipe-headed women it 'id go to tell its story. What ails you, man, that you should think aught about it, but just what *I* think? You had a good headpiece o' yer own once, Cooper, don't be you clappin' a goosecap over it, as my poor father used to say; d —— it, old boy, you mustn't let 'em be fools, settin' one another wild wi' their blether, and makin' the folk talk what they shouldn't, about Gylingden and the family. I don't think ye'd like that, old Cooper, I'm sure ye wouldn't. The women has gone out o' the kitchen, make up a bit o' fire, and get your pipe. I'll go to you, when I finish this one, and we'll smoke a bit together, and a glass o' brandy and water."

Down went the old butler, not altogether unused to such condescensions in that disorderly and lonely household; and let not those who can choose their company, be too hard on the Squire who couldn't.

When he had got things tidy, as he said, he sat down in that big old kitchen, with his feet on the fender, the kitchen candle burning in a great brass candlestick, which stood on the deal table at his elbow, with the brandy bottle and tumblers beside it, and Cooper's pipe also in readiness. And these preparations completed, the old butler, who had remembered other generations and better times, fell into rumination, and so, gradually, into a deep sleep.

Old Cooper was half awakened by some one laughing low, near his head. He was dreaming of old times in the Hall, and fancied one of "the young gentlemen" going to play him a trick, and he mumbled something in his sleep, from which he was awakened by a stern deep voice, saying, "You wern't at the funeral; I might take your life, I'll take your ear." At the same moment, the side of his head received a violent push, and he started to his feet. The fire had gone down, and he was chilled. The candle was expiring in the socket, and threw on the white wall long shadows, that danced up and down from the ceiling to the ground, and their black outlines he fancied resembled the two men in cloaks, whom he remembered with a profound horror.

He took the candle, with all the haste he could, getting along the passage, on whose walls the same dance of black shadows was continued, very anxious to reach his room before the light should go out. He was startled half out of his wits by the sudden clang of his master's bell, close over his head, ringing furiously.

"Ha, ha! There it goes — yes, sure enough," said Cooper, reassuring himself with the sound of his own voice, as he hastened on, hearing more and more distinct every moment the same furious ringing. "He's fell asleep, like me; that's it, and his lights is out, I lay you fifty — — "

When he turned the handle of the door of the oak parlour, the Squire wildly called, "Who's *there*?" in the tone of a man who expects a robber.

"It's me, old Cooper, all right, Master Charlie, you didn't come to the kitchen after all, sir."

"I'm very bad, Cooper; I don't know how I've been. Did you meet anything?" asked the Squire.

"No," said Cooper.

They stared on one another.

“Come here — stay here! Don’t you leave me! Look round the room, and say is all right; and gie us your hand, old Cooper, for I must hold it.” The Squire’s was damp and cold, and trembled very much. It was not very far from daybreak now.

After a time he spoke again: “I’a done many a thing I shouldn’t; I’m not fit to go, and wi’ God’s blessin’ I’ll look to it — why shouldn’t I? I’m as lame as old Billy — I’ll never be able to do any good no more, and I’ll give over drinking, and marry, as I ought to ‘a done long ago — none o’ yer fine ladies, but a good homely wench; there’s Farmer Crump’s youngest daughter, a good lass, and discreet. What for shouldn’t I take her? She’d take care o’ me, and wouldn’t bring a head full o’ romances here, and mantua-makers’ trumpery, and I’ll talk with the parson, and I’ll do what’s fair wi’ everyone; and mind, I said I’m sorry for many a thing I ‘a done.”

A wild cold dawn had by this time broken. The Squire, Cooper said, looked “awful bad,” as he got his hat and stick, and sallied out for a walk, instead of going to his bed, as Cooper besought him, looking so wild and distracted, that it was plain his object was simply to escape from the house. It was twelve o’clock when the Squire walked into the kitchen, where he was sure of finding some of the servants, looking as if ten years had passed over him since yesterday. He pulled a stool by the fire, without speaking a word, and sat down. Cooper had sent to Applebury for the doctor, who had just arrived, but the Squire would not go to him. “If he wants to see me, he may come here,” he muttered as often as Cooper urged him. So the doctor did come, charily enough, and found the Squire very much worse than he had expected.

The Squire resisted the order to get to his bed. But the doctor insisted under a threat of death, at which his patient quailed.

“Well, I’ll do what you say — only this — you must let old Cooper and Dick Keeper stay wi’ me. I mustn’t be left alone, and they must keep awake o’ nights; and stay a while, do *you*. When I get round a bit, I’ll go and live in a town. It’s dull livin’ here, now that I can’t do nou’t, as I used, and I’ll live a better life, mind ye; ye heard me say that, and I don’t care who laughs, and I’ll talk wi’ the parson. I like ‘em to laugh, hang ‘em, it’s a sign I’m doin’ right, at last.”

The doctor sent a couple of nurses from the County Hospital, not choosing to trust his patient to the management he had selected, and he went down himself to Gylingden to meet them in the evening. Old Cooper was ordered to occupy the dressing-room, and sit up at night, which satisfied the Squire, who was in a strangely excited state, very low, and threatened, the doctor said, with fever.

The clergyman came, an old, gentle, "book-learned" man, and talked and prayed with him late that evening. After he had gone the Squire called the nurses to his bedside, and said:

"There's a fellow sometimes comes; you'll never mind him. He looks in at the door and beckons, — a thin, hump-backed chap in mourning, wi' black gloves on; ye'll know him by his lean face, as brown as the wainscot: don't ye mind his smilin'. You don't go out to him, nor ask him in; he won't say nout; and if he grows anger'd and looks awry at ye, don't ye be afeared, for he can't hurt ye, and he'll grow tired waitin', and go away; and for God's sake mind ye don't ask him in, nor go out after him!"

The nurses put their heads together when this was over, and held afterwards a whispering conference with old Cooper. "Law bless ye! — no, there's no madman in the house," he protested; "not a soul but what ye saw, — it's just a trifle o' the fever in his head — no more."

The Squire grew worse as the night wore on. He was heavy and delirious, talking of all sorts of things — of wine, and dogs, and lawyers; and then he began to talk, as it were, to his brother Scroope. As he did so, Mrs. Oliver, the nurse, who was sitting up alone with him, heard, as she thought, a hand softly laid on the door-handle outside, and a stealthy attempt to turn it. "Lord bless us! who's there?" she cried, and her heart jumped into her mouth, as she thought of the hump-backed man in black, who was to put in his head smiling and beckoning— "Mr. Cooper! sir! are you there?" she cried. "Come here, Mr. Cooper, please — do, sir, quick!"

Old Cooper, called up from his doze by the fire, stumbled in from the dressing-room, and Mrs. Oliver seized him tightly as he emerged.

"The man with the hump has been atryin' the door, Mr. Cooper, as sure as I am here." The Squire was moaning and mumbling in his fever, understanding nothing, as she spoke. "No, no! Mrs. Oliver, ma'am, it's impossible, for there's no sich man in the house: what is Master Charlie sayin'?"

"He's saying *Scroope* every minute, whatever he means by that, and — and — hisht! — listen — there's the handle again," and, with a loud scream, she added— “Look at his head and neck in at the door!” and in her tremour she strained old Cooper in an agonizing embrace.

The candle was flaring, and there was a wavering shadow at the door that looked like the head of a man with a long neck, and a longish sharp nose, peeping in and drawing back.

“Don’t be a d —— fool, ma’am!” cried Cooper, very white, and shaking her with all his might. “It’s only the candle, I tell you — nothing in life but that. Don’t you see?” and he raised the light; “and I’m sure there was no one at the door, and I’ll try, if you let me go.”

The other nurse was asleep on a sofa, and Mrs. Oliver called her up in a panic, for company, as old Cooper opened the door. There was no one near it, but at the angle of the gallery was a shadow resembling that which he had seen in the room. He raised the candle a little, and it seemed to beckon with a long hand as the head drew back. “Shadow from the candle!” exclaimed Cooper aloud, resolved not to yield to Mrs. Oliver’s panic; and, candle in hand, he walked to the corner. There was nothing. He could not forbear peeping down the long gallery from this point, and as he moved the light, he saw precisely the same sort of shadow, a little further down, and as he advanced the same withdrawal, and beckon. “Gammon!” said he; “it is nout but the candle.” And on he went, growing half angry and half frightened at the persistency with which this ugly shadow — a literal shadow he was sure it was — presented itself. As he drew near the point where it now appeared, it seemed to collect itself, and nearly dissolve in the central panel of an old carved cabinet which he was now approaching.

In the centre panel of this is a sort of boss carved into a wolf’s head. The light fell oddly upon this, and the fugitive shadow seemed to be breaking up, and rearranging itself as oddly. The eyeball gleamed with a point of reflected light, which glittered also upon the grinning mouth, and he saw the long, sharp nose of Scroope Marston, and his fierce eye looking at him, he thought, with a steadfast meaning.

Old Cooper stood gazing upon this sight, unable to move, till he saw the face, and the figure that belonged to it, begin gradually to emerge from the wood. At the same time he heard voices approaching rapidly up a side gallery, and Cooper, with a loud “Lord a-mercy on us!” turned and ran back again, pursued by a sound that seemed to shake the old house like a mighty gust of wind.

Into his master's room burst old Cooper, half wild with fear, and clapped the door and turned the key in a twinkling, looking as if he had been pursued by murderers.

"Did you hear it?" whispered Cooper, now standing near the dressing-room door. They all listened, but not a sound from without disturbed the utter stillness of night. "God bless us! I doubt it's my old head that's gone crazy!" exclaimed Cooper.

He would tell them nothing but that he was himself "an old fool," to be frightened by their talk, and that "the rattle of a window, or the dropping o' a pin" was enough to scare him now; and so he helped himself through that night with brandy, and sat up talking by his master's fire.

The Squire recovered slowly from his brain fever, but not perfectly. A very little thing, the doctor said, would suffice to upset him. He was not yet sufficiently strong to remove for change of scene and air, which were necessary for his complete restoration.

Cooper slept in the dressing-room, and was now his only nightly attendant. The ways of the invalid were odd: he liked, half sitting up in his bed, to smoke his churchwarden o' nights, and made old Cooper smoke, for company, at the fireside. As the Squire and his humble friend indulged in it, smoking is a taciturn pleasure, and it was not until the Master of Gylingden had finished his third pipe that he essayed conversation, and when he did, the subject was not such as Cooper would have chosen.

"I say, old Cooper, look in my face, and don't be afeared to speak out," said the Squire, looking at him with a steady, cunning smile; "you know all this time, as well as I do, who's in the house. You needn't deny — hey? — Scroope and my father?"

"Don't you be talking like that, Charlie," said old Cooper, rather sternly and frightened, after a long silence; still looking in his face, which did not change.

"What's the good o' shammin', Cooper? Scroope's took the hearin' o' yer right ear — you know he did. He's looking angry. He's nigh took my life wi' this fever. But he's not done wi' me yet, and he looks awful wicked. Ye saw him — ye know ye did."

Cooper was awfully frightened, and the odd smile on the Squire's lips frightened him still more. He dropped his pipe, and stood gazing in silence at his master, and feeling as if he were in a dream.

"If ye think so, ye should not be smiling like that," said Cooper, grimly.

"I'm tired, Cooper, and it's as well to smile as t'other thing; so I'll even smile while I can. You know what they mean to do wi' me. That's all I wanted to say. Now, lad, go on wi' yer pipe — I'm goin' asleep."

So the Squire turned over in his bed, and lay down serenely, with his head on the pillow. Old Cooper looked at him, and glanced at the door, and then halffilled his tumbler with brandy, and drank it off, and felt better, and got to his bed in the dressing-room.

In the dead of night he was suddenly awakened by the Squire, who was standing, in his dressing-gown and slippers, by his bed.

"I've brought you a bit o' a present. I got the rents o' Hazelden yesterday, and ye'll keep that for yourself — it's a fifty — and give t' other to Nelly Carwell, tomorrow; I'll sleep the sounder; and I saw Scroope since; he's not such a bad 'un after all, old fellow! He's got a crape over his face — for I told him I couldn't bear it; and I'd do many a thing for him now. I never could stand shilly-shally. Goodnight, old Cooper!"

And the Squire laid his trembling hand kindly on the old man's shoulder, and returned to his own room. "I don't half like how he is. Doctor don't come half often enough. I don't like that queer smile o' his, and his hand was as cold as death. I hope in God his brain's not aturnin'!"

With these reflections, he turned to the pleasanter subject of his present, and at last fell asleep.

In the morning, when he went into the Squire's room, the Squire had left his bed. "Never mind; he'll come back, like a bad shillin'," thought old Cooper, preparing the room as usual. But he did not return. Then began an uneasiness, succeeded by a panic, when it began to be plain that the Squire was not in the house. What had become of him? None of his clothes, but his dressing-gown and slippers, were missing. Had he left the house, in his present sickly state, in that garb? and, if so, could he be in his right senses; and was there a chance of his surviving a cold, damp night, so passed, in the open air?

Tom Edwards was up to the house, and told them, that, walking a mile or so that morning, at four o'clock — there being no moon — along with Farmer Nokes, who was driving his cart to market, in the dark, three men walked, in front of the horse, not twenty yards before them, all the way from near Gylingden Lodge to the burial-ground, the gate of which was opened for them from within, and the three men entered, and the gate was shut. Tom Edwards thought they were gone in to make preparation for a funeral of some member of the Marston family. But the occurrence seemed to Cooper, who knew there was no such thing, horribly ominous.

He now commenced a careful search, and at last bethought him of the lonely upper storey, and King Herod's chamber. He saw nothing changed there, but the closet door was shut, and, dark as was the morning, something, like a large white knot sticking out over the door, caught his eye.

The door resisted his efforts to open it for a time; some great weight forced it down against the floor; at length, however, it did yield a little, and a heavy crash, shaking the whole floor, and sending an echo flying through all the silent corridors, with a sound like receding laughter, half stunned him.

When he pushed open the door, his master was lying dead upon the floor. His cravat was drawn halter-wise tight round his throat, and had done its work well. The body was cold, and had been long dead.

In due course the coroner held his inquest, and the jury pronounced, "that the deceased, Charles Marston, had died by his own hand, in a state of temporary insanity." But old Cooper had his own opinion about the Squire's death, though his lips were sealed, and he never spoke about it. He went and lived for the residue of his days in York, where there are still people who remember him, a taciturn and surly old man, who attended church regularly, and also drank a little, and was known to have saved some money.

THE WHITE CAT OF DRUMGUNNIOL

Anonymous in *All the Year Round* (1869-70).

There is a famous story of a white cat, with which we all become acquainted in the nursery. I am going to tell a story of a white cat very different from the amiable and enchanted princess who took that disguise for a season. The white cat of which I speak was a more sinister animal.

The traveller from Limerick toward Dublin, after passing the hills of Killaloe upon the left, as Keeper Mountain rises high in view, finds himself gradually hemmed in, up the right, by a range of lower hills. An undulating plain that dips gradually to a lower level than that of the road interposes, and some scattered hedgerows relieve its somewhat wild and melancholy character.

One of the few human habitations that send up their films of turf-smoke from that lonely plain, is the loosely-thatched, earth-built dwelling of a “strong farmer,” as the more prosperous of the tenant-farming classes are termed in Munster. It stands in a clump of trees near the edge of a wandering stream, about halfway between the mountains and the Dublin road, and had been for generations tenanted by people named Donovan.

In a distant place, desirous of studying some Irish records which had fallen into my hands, and inquiring for a teacher capable of instructing me in the Irish language, a Mr. Donovan, dreamy, harmless, and learned, was recommended to me for the purpose.

I found that he had been educated as a Sizar in Trinity College, Dublin. He now supported himself by teaching, and the special direction of my studies, I suppose, flattered his national partialities, for he unbosomed himself of much of his long-reserved thoughts, and recollections about his country and his early days. It was he who told me this story, and I mean to repeat it, as nearly as I can, in his own words.

I have myself seen the old farmhouse, with its orchard of huge mossgrown apple trees. I have looked round on the peculiar landscape; the roofless, ivied tower, that two hundred years before had afforded a refuge from raid and rapparee, and which still occupies its old place in the angle of the haggard; the bush-grown “liss,” that scarcely a hundred and fifty steps away records the labours of a bygone race; the dark and towering outline of old Keeper in the background; and the lonely range of furze and heath-clad hills that form a nearer barrier, with many a line of grey rock and clump of dwarf oak or birch. The pervading sense of loneliness made it a scene not unsuited for a wild and unearthly story. And I could quite fancy how, seen in the grey of a wintry morning, shrouded far and wide in snow, or in the melancholy glory of an autumnal sunset, or in the chill splendour of a moonlight night, it might have helped to tone a dreamy mind like honest Dan Donovan's to superstition and a proneness to the illusions of fancy. It is certain, however, that I never anywhere met with a more simple-minded creature, or one on whose good faith I could more entirely rely.

When I was a boy, said he, living at home at Drumgunniol, I used to take my Goldsmith's *Roman History* in my hand and go down to my favourite seat, the flat stone, sheltered by a hawthorn tree beside the little lough, a large and deep pool, such as I have heard called a tarn in England. It lay in the gentle hollow of a field that is overhung toward the north by the old orchard, and being a deserted place was favourable to my studious quietude.

One day reading here, as usual, I wearied at last, and began to look about me, thinking of the heroic scenes I had just been reading of. I was as wide awake as I am at this moment, and I saw a woman appear at the corner of the orchard and walk down the slope. She wore a long, light grey dress, so long that it seemed to sweep the grass behind her, and so singular was her appearance in a part of the world where female attire is so inflexibly fixed by custom, that I could not take my eyes off her. Her course lay diagonally from corner to corner of the field, which was a large one, and she pursued it without swerving.

When she came near I could see that her feet were bare, and that she seemed to be looking steadfastly upon some remote object for guidance. Her route would have crossed me — had the tarn not interposed — about ten or twelve yards below the point at which I was sitting. But instead of arresting her course at the margin of the lough, as I had expected, she went on without seeming conscious of its existence, and I saw her, as plainly as I see you, sir, walk across the surface of the water, and pass, without seeming to see me, at about the distance I had calculated.

I was ready to faint from sheer terror. I was only thirteen years old then, and I remember every particular as if it had happened this hour.

The figure passed through the gap at the far corner of the field, and there I lost sight of it. I had hardly strength to walk home, and was so nervous, and ultimately so ill, that for three weeks I was confined to the house, and could not bear to be alone for a moment. I never entered that field again, such was the horror with which from that moment every object in it was clothed. Even at this distance of time I should not like to pass through it.

This apparition I connected with a mysterious event; and, also, with a singular liability, that has for nearly eight years distinguished, or rather afflicted, our family. It is no fancy. Everybody in that part of the country knows all about it. Everybody connected what I had seen with it.

I will tell it all to you as well as I can.

When I was about fourteen years old — that is about a year after the sight I had seen in the lough field — we were one night expecting my father home from the fair of Killaloe. My mother sat up to welcome him home, and I with her, for I liked nothing better than such a vigil. My brothers and sisters, and the farm servants, except the men who were driving home the cattle from the fair, were asleep in their beds. My mother and I were sitting in the chimney corner chatting together, and watching my father's supper, which was kept hot over the fire. We knew that he would return before the men who were driving home the cattle, for he was riding, and told us that he would only wait to see them fairly on the road, and then push homeward.

At length we heard his voice and the knocking of his loaded whip at the door, and my mother let him in. I don't think I ever saw my father drunk, which is more than most men of my age, from the same part of the country, could say of theirs. But he could drink his glass of whisky as well as another, and he usually came home from fair or market a little merry and mellow, and with a jolly flush in his cheeks.

Tonight he looked sunken, pale and sad. He entered with the saddle and bridle in his hand, and he dropped them against the wall, near the door, and put his arms round his wife's neck, and kissed her kindly.

"Welcome home, Meehal," said she, kissing him heartily.

"God bless you, mavourneen," he answered.

And hugging her again, he turned to me, who was plucking him by the hand, jealous of his notice. I was little, and light of my age, and he lifted me up in his arms, and kissed me, and my arms being about his neck, he said to my mother:

“Draw the bolt, acuishla.”

She did so, and setting me down very dejectedly, he walked to the fire and sat down on a stool, and stretched his feet toward the glowing turf, leaning with his hands on his knees.

“Rouse up, Mick, darlin’,” said my mother, who was growing anxious, “and tell me how did the cattle sell, and did everything go lucky at the fair, or is there anything wrong with the landlord, or what in the world is it that ails you, Mick, jewel?”

“Nothin’, Molly. The cows sould well, thank God, and there’s nothin’ fell out between me an’ the landlord, an’ everything’s the same way. There’s no fault to find anywhere.”

“Well, then, Mickey, since so it is, turn round to your hot supper, and ate it, and tell us is there anything new.”

“I got my supper, Molly, on the way, and I can’t ate a bit,” he answered.

“Got your supper on the way, an’ you knowin’ ’twas waiting for you at home, an’ your wife sittin’ up an’ all!” cried my mother, reproachfully.

“You’re takin’ a wrong meanin’ out of what I say,” said my father. “There’s something happened that leaves me that I can’t ate a mouthful, and I’ll not be dark with you, Molly, for, maybe, it ain’t very long I have to be here, an’ I’ll tell you what it was. It’s what I’ve seen, the white cat.”

“The Lord between us and harm!” exclaimed my mother, in a moment as pale and as chapfallen as my father; and then, trying to rally, with a laugh, she said: “Ha! ’tis only funnin’ me you are. Sure a white rabbit was snared a Sunday last, in Grady’s wood; an’ Teigue seen a big white rat in the haggard yesterday.”

“’Twas neither rat nor rabbit was in it. Don’t ye think but I’d know a rat or a rabbit from a big white cat, with green eyes as big as halfpennies, and its back riz up like a bridge, trottin’ on and across me, and ready, if I dar’ stop, to rub its sides against my shins, and maybe to make a jump and seize my throat, if that it’s a cat, at all, an’ not something worse?”

As he ended his description in a low tone, looking straight at the fire, my father drew his big hand across his forehead once or twice, his face being damp and shining with the moisture of fear, and he sighed, or rather groaned, heavily.

My mother had relapsed into panic, and was praying again in her fear. I, too, was terribly frightened, and on the point of crying, for I knew all about the white cat.

Clapping my father on the shoulder, by way of encouragement, my mother leaned over him, kissing him, and at last began to cry. He was wringing her hands in his, and seemed in great trouble.

"There was nothin' came into the house with me?" he asked, in a very low tone, turning to me.

"There was nothin', father," I said, "but the saddle and bridle that was in your hand."

"Nothin' white kem in at the doore wid me," he repeated.

"Nothin' at all," I answered.

"So best," said my father, and making the sign of the cross, he began mumbling to himself, and I knew he was saying his prayers.

Waiting for a while, to give him time for this exercise, my mother asked him where he first saw it.

"When I was riding up the bohereen," — the Irish term meaning a little road, such as leads up to a farmhouse— "I bethought myself that the men was on the road with the cattle, and no one to look to the horse barrin' myself, so I thought I might as well leave him in the crooked field below, an' I tuck him there, he bein' cool, and not a hair turned, for I rode him aisy all the way. It was when I turned, after lettin' him go — the saddle and bridle bein' in my hand — that I saw it, pushin' out o' the long grass at the side o' the path, an' it walked across it, in front of me, an' then back again, before me, the same way, an' sometimes at one side, an' then at the other, lookin' at me wid them shinin' eyes; and I consayted I heard it growlin' as it kep' beside me — as close as ever you see — till I kem up to the doore, here, an' knocked an' called, as ye heerd me."

Now, what was it, in so simple an incident, that agitated my father, my mother, myself, and finally, every member of this rustic household, with a terrible foreboding? It was this that we, one and all, believed that my father had received, in thus encountering the white cat, a warning of his approaching death.

The omen had never failed hitherto. It did not fail now. In a week after my father took the fever that was going, and before a month he was dead.

My honest friend, Dan Donovan, paused here; I could perceive that he was praying, for his lips were busy, and I concluded that it was for the repose of that departed soul.

In a little while he resumed.

It is eighty years now since that omen first attached to my family. Eighty years? Ay, is it. Ninety is nearer the mark. And I have spoken to many old people, in those earlier times, who had a distinct recollection of everything connected with it.

It happened in this way.

My granduncle, Connor Donovan, had the old farm of Drumgunniol in his day. He was richer than ever my father was, or my father's father either, for he took a short lease of Balraghan, and made money of it. But money won't soften a hard heart, and I'm afraid my granduncle was a cruel man — a profligate man he was, surely, and that is mostly a cruel man at heart. He drank his share, too, and cursed and swore, when he was vexed, more than was good for his soul, I'm afraid.

At that time there was a beautiful girl of the Colemans, up in the mountains, not far from Capper Cullen. I'm told that there are no Colemans there now at all, and that family has passed away. The famine years made great changes.

Ellen Coleman was her name. The Colemans were not rich. But, being such a beauty, she might have made a good match. Worse than she did for herself, poor thing, she could not.

Con Donovan — my granduncle, God forgive him! — sometimes in his rambles saw her at fairs or patterns, and he fell in love with her, as who might not?

He used her ill. He promised her marriage, and persuaded her to come away with him; and, after all, he broke his word. It was just the old story. He tired of her, and he wanted to push himself in the world; and he married a girl of the Collopys, that had a great fortune — twenty-four cows, seventy sheep, and a hundred and twenty goats.

He married this Mary Collopy, and grew richer than before; and Ellen Coleman died broken-hearted. But that did not trouble the strong farmer much.

He would have liked to have children, but he had none, and this was the only cross he had to bear, for everything else went much as he wished.

One night he was returning from the fair of Nenagh. A shallow stream at that time crossed the road — they have thrown a bridge over it, I am told, some time since — and its channel was often dry in summer weather. When it was so, as it passes close by the old farmhouse of Drumgunniol, without a great deal of winding, it makes a sort of road, which people then used as a short cut to reach the house by. Into this dry channel, as there was plenty of light from the moon, my granduncle turned his horse, and when he had reached the two ash-trees at the meering of the farm he turned his horse short into the river-field, intending to ride through the gap at the other end, under the oak-tree, and so he would have been within a few hundred yards of his door.

As he approached the "gap" he saw, or thought he saw, with a slow motion, gliding along the ground toward the same point, and now and then with a soft bound, a white object, which he described as being no bigger than his hat, but what it was he could not see, as it moved along the hedge and disappeared at the point to which he was himself tending.

When he reached the gap the horse stopped short. He urged and coaxed it in vain. He got down to lead it through, but it recoiled, snorted, and fell into a wild trembling fit. He mounted it again. But its terror continued, and it obstinately resisted his caresses and his whip. It was bright moonlight, and my granduncle was chafed by the horse's resistance, and, seeing nothing to account for it, and being so near home, what little patience he possessed forsook him, and, plying his whip and spur in earnest, he broke into oaths and curses.

All on a sudden the horse sprang through, and Con Donovan, as he passed under the broad branch of the oak, saw clearly a woman standing on the bank beside him, her arm extended, with the hand of which, as he flew by, she struck him a blow upon the shoulders. It threw him forward upon the neck of the horse, which, in wild terror, reached the door at a gallop, and stood there quivering and steaming all over.

Less alive than dead, my granduncle got in. He told his story, at least, so much as he chose. His wife did not quite know what to think. But that something very bad had happened she could not doubt. He was very faint and ill, and begged that the priest should be sent for forthwith. When they were getting him to his bed they saw distinctly the marks of five fingerpoints on the flesh of his shoulder, where the spectral blow had fallen. These singular marks — which they said resembled in tint the hue of a body struck by lightning — remained imprinted on his flesh, and were buried with him.

When he had recovered sufficiently to talk with the people about him — speaking, like a man at his last hour, from a burdened heart, and troubled conscience — he repeated his story, but said he did not see, or, at all events, know, the face of the figure that stood in the gap. No one believed him. He told more about it to the priest than to others. He certainly had a secret to tell. He might as well have divulged it frankly, for the neighbours all knew well enough that it was the face of dead Ellen Coleman that he had seen.

From that moment my granduncle never raised his head. He was a scared, silent, broken-spirited man. It was early summer then, and at the fall of the leaf in the same year he died.

Of course there was a wake, such as beseemed a strong farmer so rich as he. For some reason the arrangements of this ceremonial were a little different from the usual routine.

The usual practice is to place the body in the great room, or kitchen, as it is called, of the house. In this particular case there was, as I told you, for some reason, an unusual arrangement. The body was placed in a small room that opened upon the greater one. The door of this, during the wake, stood open. There were candles about the bed, and pipes and tobacco on the table, and stools for such guests as chose to enter, the door standing open for their reception.

The body, having been laid out, was left alone, in this smaller room, during the preparations for the wake. After nightfall one of the women, approaching the bed to get a chair which she had left near it, rushed from the room with a scream, and, having recovered her speech at the further end of the "kitchen," and surrounded by a gaping audience, she said, at last:

"*May* I never sin, if his face bain't riz up again the back o' the bed, and he starin' down to the doore, wid eyes as big as pewter plates, that id be shinin' in the moon!"

"Arra, woman! Is it cracked you are?" said one of the farm boys as they are termed, being men of any age you please.

"Agh, Molly, don't be talkin', woman! 'Tis what ye consayted it, goin' into the dark room, out o' the light. Why didn't ye take a candle in your fingers, ye aumadhaun?" said one of her female companions.

"Candle, or no candle; I seen it," insisted Molly. "An' what's more, I could a'most tak' my oath I seen his arum, too, stretchin' out o' the bed along the flure, three times as long as it should be, to take hould o’ me be the fut.”

“Nansinse, ye fool, what id he want o’ yer fut?” exclaimed one scornfully.

“Gi’ me the candle, some o’ yez — in the name o’ God,” said old Sal Doolan, that was straight and lean, and a woman that could pray like a priest almost.

“Give her a candle,” agreed all.

But whatever they might say, there wasn’t one among them that did not look pale and stern enough as they followed Mrs. Doolan, who was praying as fast as her lips could patter, and leading the van with a tallow candle, held like a taper, in her fingers.

The door was half open, as the panic-stricken girl had left it; and holding the candle on high the better to examine the room, she made a step or so into it.

If my granduncle’s hand had been stretched along the floor, in the unnatural way described, he had drawn it back again under the sheet that covered him. And tall Mrs. Doolan was in no danger of tripping over his arm as she entered. But she had not gone more than a step or two with her candle aloft, when, with a drowning face, she suddenly stopped short, staring at the bed which was now fully in view.

“Lord, bless us, Mrs. Doolan, ma’am, come back,” said the woman next her, who had fast hold of her dress, or her ‘coat,’ as they call it, and drawing her backwards with a frightened pluck, while a general recoil among her followers betokened the alarm which her hesitation had inspired.

“Whisht, will yez?” said the leader, peremptorily, “I can’t hear my own ears wid the noise ye’re makin’, an’ which iv yez let the cat in here, an’ whose cat is it?” she asked, peering suspiciously at a white cat that was sitting on the breast of the corpse.

“Put it away, will yez?” she resumed, with horror at the profanation. “Many a corpse as I sthretched and crossed in the bed, the likes o’ that I never seen yet. The man o’ the house, wid a brute baste like that mounted on him, like a phooka, Lord forgi’ me for namin’ the like in this room. Dhrive it away, some o’ yez! out o’ that, this minute, I tell ye.”

Each repeated the order, but no one seemed inclined to execute it. They were crossing themselves, and whispering their conjectures and misgivings as to the nature of the beast, which was no cat of that house, nor one that they had ever seen before. On a sudden, the white cat placed itself on the pillow over the head of the body, and having from that place glared for a time at them over the features of the corpse, it crept softly along the body towards them, growling low and fiercely as it drew near.

Out of the room they bounced, in dreadful confusion, shutting the door fast after them, and not for a good while did the hardiest venture to peep in again.

The white cat was sitting in its old place, on the dead man’s breast, but this time it crept quietly down the side of the bed, and disappeared under it, the sheet which was spread like a coverlet, and hung down nearly to the floor, concealing it from view.

Praying, crossing themselves, and not forgetting a sprinkling of holy water, they peeped, and finally searched, poking spades, “wattles,” pitchforks and such implements under the bed. But the cat was not to be found, and they concluded that it had made its escape among their feet as they stood near the threshold. So they secured the door carefully, with hasp and padlock. But when the door was opened next morning they found the white cat sitting, as if it had never been disturbed, upon the breast of the dead man.

Again occurred very nearly the same scene with a like result, only that some said they saw the cat afterwards lurking under a big box in a corner of the outer-room, where my granduncle kept his leases and papers, and his prayer-book and beads.

Mrs. Doolan heard it growling at her heels wherever she went; and although she could not see it, she could hear it spring on the back of her chair when she sat down, and growl in her ear, so that she would bounce up with a scream and a prayer, fancying that it was on the point of taking her by the throat.

And the priest’s boy, looking round the corner, under the branches of the old orchard, saw a white cat sitting under the little window of the room where my granduncle was laid out and looking up at the four small panes of glass as a cat will watch a bird.

The end of it was that the cat was found on the corpse again, when the room was visited, and do what they might, whenever the body was left alone, the cat was found again in the same ill-omened contiguity with the dead man. And this continued, to the scandal and fear of the neighbourhood, until the door was opened finally for the wake.

My granduncle being dead, and, with all due solemnities, buried, I have done with him. But not quite yet with the white cat. No banshee ever yet was more inalienably attached to a family than this ominous apparition is to mine. But there is this difference. The banshee seems to be animated with an affectionate sympathy with the bereaved family to whom it is hereditarily attached, whereas this thing has about it a suspicion of malice. It is the messenger simply of death. And its taking the shape of a cat — the coldest, and they say, the most vindictive of brutes — is indicative of the spirit of its visit.

When my grandfather's death was near, although he seemed quite well at the time, it appeared not exactly, but very nearly in the same way in which I told you it showed itself to my father.

The day before my Uncle Teigue was killed by the bursting of his gun, it appeared to him in the evening, at twilight, by the lough, in the field where I saw the woman who walked across the water, as I told you. My uncle was washing the barrel of his gun in the lough. The grass is short there, and there is no cover near it. He did not know how it approached; but the first he saw of it, the white cat was walking close round his feet, in the twilight, with an angry twist of its tail, and a green glare in its eyes, and do what he would, it continued walking round and round him, in larger or smaller circles, till he reached the orchard, and there he lost it.

My poor Aunt Peg — she married one of the O'Brians, near Oolah — came to Drumgunniol to go to the funeral of a cousin who died about a mile away. She died herself, poor woman, only a month after.

Coming from the wake, at two or three o'clock in the morning, as she got over the style into the farm of Drumgunniol, she saw the white cat at her side, and it kept close beside her, she ready to faint all the time, till she reached the door of the house, where it made a spring up into the whitethorn tree that grows close by, and so it parted from her. And my little brother Jim saw it also, just three weeks before he died. Every member of our family who dies, or takes his death-sickness, at Drumgunniol, is sure to see the white cat, and no one of us who sees it need hope for long life after.

SIR DOMINICK'S BARGAIN: A LEGEND OF DUNORAN

Anonymous in *All the Year Round* (1872)

In the early autumn of the year 1838, business called me to the south of Ireland. The weather was delightful, the scenery and people were new to me, and sending my luggage on by the mail-coach route in charge of a servant, I hired a serviceable nag at a posting-house, and, full of the curiosity of an explorer, I commenced a leisurely journey of five-and-twenty miles on horseback, by sequestered cross-roads, to my place of destination. By bog and hill, by plain and ruined castle, and many a winding stream, my picturesque road led me.

I had started late, and having made little more than half my journey, I was thinking of making a short halt at the next convenient place, and letting my horse have a rest and a feed, and making some provision also for the comforts of his rider.

It was about four o'clock when the road, ascending a gradual steep, found a passage through a rocky gorge between the abrupt termination of a range of mountain to my left and a rocky hill, that rose dark and sudden at my right. Below me lay a little thatched village, under a long line of gigantic beech-trees, through the boughs of which the lowly chimneys sent up their thin turf-smoke. To my left, stretched away for miles, ascending the mountain range I have mentioned, a wild park, through whose sward and ferns the rock broke, timeworn and lichen-stained. This park was studded with straggling wood, which thickened to something like a forest, behind and beyond the little village I was approaching, clothing the irregular ascent of the hillsides with beautiful, and in some places discoloured foliage.

As you descend, the road winds slightly, with the grey park-wall, built of loose stone, and mantled here and there with ivy, at its left, and crosses a shallow ford; and as I approached the village, through breaks in the woodlands, I caught glimpses of the long front of an old ruined house, placed among the trees, about halfway up the picturesque mountain-side.

The solitude and melancholy of this ruin piqued my curiosity, and when I had reached the rude thatched public-house, with the sign of St. Columbkill, with robes, mitre, and crozier displayed over its lintel, having seen to my horse and made a good meal myself on a rasher and eggs, I began to think again of the wooded park and the ruinous house, and resolved on a ramble of half an hour among its sylvan solitudes.

The name of the place, I found, was Dunoran; and beside the gate a stile admitted to the grounds, through which, with a pensive enjoyment, I began to saunter towards the dilapidated mansion.

A long grass-grown road, with many turns and windings, led up to the old house, under the shadow of the wood.

The road, as it approached the house skirted the edge of a precipitous glen, clothed with hazel, dwarf-oak, and thorn, and the silent house stood with its wide-open hall-door facing this dark ravine, the further edge of which was crowned with towering forest; and great trees stood about the house and its deserted courtyard and stables.

I walked in and looked about me, through passages overgrown with nettles and weeds; from room to room with ceilings rotted, and here and there a great beam dark and worn, with tendrils of ivy trailing over it. The tall walls with rotten plaster were stained and mouldy, and in some rooms the remains of decayed wainscoting crazily swung to and fro. The almost sashless windows were darkened also with ivy, and about the tall chimneys the jackdaws were wheeling, while from the huge trees that overhung the glen in sombre masses at the other side, the rooks kept up a ceaseless cawing.

As I walked through these melancholy passages — peeping only into some of the rooms, for the flooring was quite gone in the middle, and bowed down toward the centre, and the house was very nearly un-roofed, a state of things which made the exploration a little critical — I began to wonder why so grand a house, in the midst of scenery so picturesque, had been permitted to go to decay; I dreamed of the hospitalities of which it had long ago been the rallying place, and I thought what a scene of Redgauntlet revelries it might disclose at midnight.

The great staircase was of oak, which had stood the weather wonderfully, and I sat down upon its steps, musing vaguely on the transitoriness of all things under the sun.

Except for the hoarse and distant clamour of the rooks, hardly audible where I sat, no sound broke the profound stillness of the spot. Such a sense of solitude I have seldom experienced before. The air was stirless, there was not even the rustle of a withered leaf along the passage. It was oppressive. The tall trees that stood close about the building darkened it, and added something of awe to the melancholy of the scene.

In this mood I heard, with an unpleasant surprise, close to me, a voice that was drawling, and, I fancied, sneering, repeat the words: "Food for worms, dead and rotten; God over all."

There was a small window in the wall, here very thick, which had been built up, and in the dark recess of this, deep in the shadow, I now saw a sharp-featured man, sitting with his feet dangling. His keen eyes were fixed on me, and he was smiling cynically, and before I had well recovered my surprise, he repeated the distich:

/P "If death was a thing that money could buy, The rich they would live, and the poor they would die. P/

"It was a grand house in its day, sir," he continued, "Dunoran House, and the Sarsfields. Sir Dominick Sarsfield was the last of the old stock. He lost his life not six foot away from where you are sitting."

As he thus spoke he let himself down, with a little jump, on to the ground.

He was a dark-faced, sharp-featured, little hunchback, and had a walking-stick in his hand, with the end of which he pointed to a rusty stain in the plaster of the wall.

"Do you mind that mark, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, standing up, and looking at it, with a curious anticipation of something worth hearing.

"That's about seven or eight feet from the ground, sir, and you'll not guess what it is."

"I dare say not," said I, "unless it is a stain from the weather."

"'Tis nothing so lucky, sir," he answered, with the same cynical smile and a wag of his head, still pointing at the mark with his stick. "That's a splash of brains and blood. It's there this hundhred years; and it will never leave it while the wall stands."

"He was murdered, then?"

"Worse than that, sir," he answered.

"He killed himself, perhaps?"

"Worse than that, itself, this cross between us and harm! I'm oulder than I look, sir; you wouldn't guess my years."

He became silent, and looked at me, evidently inviting a guess.

"Well, I should guess you to be about five-and-fifty."

He laughed, and took a pinch of snuff, and said:

"I'm that, your honour, and something to the back of it. I was seventy last Candlemas. You would not a' thought that, to look at me."

"Upon my word I should not; I can hardly believe it even now. Still, you don't remember Sir Dominick Sarsfield's death?" I said, glancing up at the ominous stain on the wall.

"No, sir, that was a long while before I was born. But my grandfather was butler here long ago, and many a time I heard tell how Sir Dominick came by his death. There was no masther in the great house ever sinst that happened. But there was two sarvants in care of it, and my aunt was one o' them; and she kep' me here wid her till I was nine year old, and she was lavin' the place to go to Dublin; and from that time it was let to go down. The wind sthript the roof, and the rain rotted the timber, and little by little, in sixty years' time, it kem to what you see. But I have a likin' for it still, for the sake of ould times; and I never come this way but I take a look in. I don't think it's many more times I'll be turnin' to see the ould place, for I'll be undher the sod myself before long."

"You'll outlive younger people," I said.

And, quitting that trite subject, I ran on:

"I don't wonder that you like this old place; it is a beautiful spot, such noble trees."

"I wish ye seen the glin when the nuts is ripe; they're the sweetest nuts in all Ireland, I think," he rejoined, with a practical sense of the picturesque. "You'd fill your pockets while you'd be lookin' about you."

"These are very fine old woods," I remarked. "I have not seen any in Ireland I thought so beautiful."

"Eiah! your honour, the woods about here is nothing to what they wor. Al the mountains along here was wood when my father was a gossoon, and Murroa Wood was the grandest of them all. All oak mostly, and all cut down as bare as the road. Not one left here that's fit to compare with them. Which way did your honour come hither — from Limerick?"

"No. Killaloe."

“Well, then, you passed the ground where Murroa Wood was in former times. You kem undher Lisnavourra, the steep knob of a hill about a mile above the village here. ’Twas near that Murroa Wood was, and ’twas there Sir Dominick Sarsfield first met the devil, the Lord between us and harm, and a bad meeting it was for him and his.”

I had become interested in the adventure which had occurred in the very scenery which had so greatly attracted me, and my new acquaintance, the little hunchback, was easily entreated to tell me the story, and spoke thus, so soon as we had each resumed his seat:

“It was a fine estate when Sir Dominick came into it; and grand doings there was entirely, feasting and fiddling, free quarters for all the pipers in the counthry round, and a welcome for every one that liked to come. There was wine, by the hogshead, for the quality; and potteen enough to set a town a-fire, and beer and cidher enough to float a navy, for the boys and girls, and the likes o’ me. It was kep’ up the best part of a month, till the weather broke, and the rain spoilt the sod for the moneen jigs, and the fair of Allybally Killudeen comin’ on they wor obliged to give over their divarsion, and attind to the pigs.

But Sir Dominick was only beginnin’ when they wor lavin’ off. There was no way of gettin’ rid of his money and estates he did not try — what with drinkin’, dicin’, racin’, cards, and all soarts, it was not many years before the estates wor in debt, and Sir Dominick a distressed man. He showed a bold front to the world as long as he could; and then he sould off his dogs, and most of his horses, and gev out he was going to thravel in France, and the like; and so off with him for awhile; and no one in these parts heard tale or tidings of him for two or three years. Till at last quite unexpected, one night there comes a rapping at the big kitchen window. It was past ten o’clock, and old Connor Hanlon, the butler, my grandfather, was sittin’ by the fire alone, warming his shins over it. There was keen east wind blowing along the mountains that night, and whistling cowld enough, through the tops of the trees, and soundin’ lonesome through the long chimneys.

(And the story-teller glanced up at the nearest stack visible from his seat.)

So he wasn’t quite sure of the knockin’ at the window, and up he gets, and sees his master’s face.

My grandfather was glad to see him safe, for it was a long time since there was any news of him; but he was sorry, too, for it was a changed place and only himself and old Juggy Broadrick in charge of the house, and a man in the stables, and it was a poor thing to see him comin' back to his own like that.

He shook Con by the hand, and says he:

"I came here to say a word to you. I left my horse with Dick in the stable; I may want him again before morning, or I may never want him."

And with that he turns into the big kitchen, and draws a stool, and sits down to take an air of the fire.

"Sit down, Connor, opposite me, and listen to what I tell you, and don't be afeard to say what you think."

He spoke all the time lookin' into the fire, with his hands stretched over it, and a tired man he looked.

"An' why should I be afeard, Masther Dominick?" says my grandfather. "Yourself was a good masther to me, and so was your father, rest his sould, before you, and I'll say the truth, and dar' the devil, and more than that, for any Sarsfield of Dunoran, much less yourself, and a good right I'd have."

"It's all over with me, Con," says Sir Dominick.

"Heaven forbid!" says my grandfather.

"'Tis past praying for," says Sir Dominick. "The last guinea's gone; the ould place will follow it. It must be sold, and I'm come here, I don't know why, like a ghost to have a last look round me, and go off in the dark again."

And with that he tould him to be sure, in case he should hear of his death, to give the oak box, in the closet off his room, to his cousin, Pat Sarsfield, in Dublin, and the sword and pistols his grandfather carried in Aughrim, and two or three thrifling things of the kind.

And says he, "Con, they say if the divil gives you money overnight, you'll find nothing but a bagful of pebbles, and chips, and nutshells, in the morning. If I thought he played fair, I'm in the humour to make a bargain with him tonight."

"Lord forbid!" says my grandfather, standing up, with a start and crossing himself.

"They say the country's full of men, listin' sogers for the King o' France. If I light on one o' them, I'll not refuse his offer. How contrary things goes!

How long is it since me an Captain Waller fought the jewel at New Castle?"

"Six years, Masther Dominick, and ye broke his thigh with the bullet the first shot."

"I did, Con," says he, "and I wish, instead, he had shot me through the heart. Have you any whisky?"

My grandfather took it out of the buffet, and the masther pours out some into a bowl, and drank it off.

"I'll go out and have a look at my horse," says he, standing up. There was sort of a stare in his eyes, as he pulled his riding-cloak about him, as if there was something bad in his thoughts.

"Sure, I won't be a minute running out myself to the stable, and looking after the horse for you myself," says my grandfather.

"I'm not goin' to the stable," says Sir Dominick; "I may as well tell you, for I see you found it out already — I'm goin' across the deer-park; if I come back you'll see me in an hour's time. But, anyhow, you'd better not follow me, for if you do I'll shoot you, and that 'id be a bad ending to our friendship."

And with that he walks down this passage here, and turns the key in the side door at that end of it, and out wid him on the sod into the moonlight and the cowld wind; and my grandfather seen him walkin' hard towards the park-wall, and then he comes in and closes the door with a heavy heart.

Sir Dominick stopped to think when he got to the middle of the deer-park, for he had not made up his mind, when he left the house, and the whisky did not clear his head, only it gev him courage.

He did not feel the cowld wind now, nor fear death, nor think much of anything but the shame and fall of the old family.

And he made up his mind, if no better thought came to him between that and there, so soon as he came to Murroa Wood, he'd hang himself from one of the oak branches with his cravat.

It was a bright moonlight night, there was just a bit of a cloud driving across the moon now and then, but, only for that, as light a'most as day.

Down he goes, right for the wood of Murroa. It seemed to him every step he took was as long as three, and it was no time till he was among the big oak-trees with their roots spreading from one to another, and their branches stretching overhead like the timbers of a naked roof, and the moon shining down through them, and casting their shadows thick and twist abroad on the ground as black as my shoe.

He was sobering a bit by this time, and he slacked his pace, and he thought 'twould be better to list in the French king's army, and thry what that might do for him, for he knew a man might take his own life any time, but it would puzzle him to take it back again when he liked.

Just as he made up his mind not to make away with himself, what should he hear but a step clinkin' along the dry ground under the trees, and soon he sees a grand gentleman right before him comin' up to meet him.

He was a handsome young man like himself, and he wore a cocked-hat with gold-lace round it, such as officers wears on their coats, and he had on a dress the same as French officers wore in them times.

He stopped opposite Sir Dominick, and he cum to a standstill also.

The two gentlemen took off their hats to one another, and says the stranger:

"I am recruiting, sir," says he, "for my sovereign, and you'll find my money won't turn into pebbles, chips, and nutshells, by tomorrow."

At the same time he pulls out a big purse full of gold.

The minute he set eyes on that gentleman, Sir Dominick had his own opinion of him; and at those words he felt the very hair standing up on his head.

"Don't be afraid," says he, "the money won't burn you. If it proves honest gold, and if it prospers with you, I'm willing to make a bargain. This is the last day of February," says he; "I'll serve you seven years, and at the end of that time you shall serve me, and I'll come for you when the seven years is over, when the clock turns the minute between February and March; and the first of March ye'll come away with me, or never. You'll not find me a bad master, any more than a bad servant. I love my own; and I command all the pleasures and the glory of the world. The bargain dates from this day, and the lease is out at midnight on the last day I told you; and in the year" — he told him the year, it was easy reckoned, but I forget it— "and if you'd rather wait," he says, "for eight months and twenty eight days, before you sign the writin', you may, if you meet me here. But I can't do a great deal for you in the mean time; and if you don't sign then, all you get from me, up to that time, will vanish away, and you'll be just as you are tonight, and ready to hang yourself on the first tree you meet."

Well, the end of it was, Sir Dominick chose to wait, and he came back to the house with a big bag full of money, as round as your hat a’most.

My grandfather was glad enough, you may be sure, to see the master safe and sound again so soon. Into the kitchen he bangs again, and swings the bag o’ money on the table; and he stands up straight, and heaves up his shoulders like a man that has just got shut of a load; and he looks at the bag, and my grandfather looks at him, and from him to it, and back again. Sir Dominick looked as white as a sheet, and says he:

“I don’t know, Con, what’s in it; it’s the heaviest load I ever carried.”

He seemed shy of openin’ the bag; and he made my grandfather heap up a roaring fire of turf and wood, and then, at last, he opens it, and, sure enough, ’twas stuffed full o’ golden guineas, bright and new, as if they were only that minute out o’ the Mint.

Sir Dominick made my grandfather sit at his elbow while he counted every guinea in the bag.

When he was done countin’, and it wasn’t far from daylight when that time came, Sir Dominick made my grandfather swear not to tell a word about it. And a close secret it was for many a day after.

When the eight months and twenty-eight days were pretty near spent and ended, Sir Dominick returned to the house here with a troubled mind, in doubt what was best to be done, and no one alive but my grandfather knew anything about the matter, and he not half what had happened.

As the day drew near, towards the end of October, Sir Dominick grew only more and more troubled in mind.

One time he made up his mind to have no more to say to such things, nor to speak again with the like of them he met with in the wood of Murroa. Then, again, his heart failed him when he thought of his debts, and he not knowing where to turn. Then, only a week before the day, everything began to go wrong with him. One man wrote from London to say that Sir Dominick paid three thousand pounds to the wrong man, and must pay it over again; another demanded a debt he never heard of before; and another, in Dublin, denied the payment of a thundherin’ big bill, and Sir Dominick could nowhere find the receipt, and so on, wid fifty other things as bad.

Well, by the time the night of the 28th of October came round, he was a’most ready to lose his senses with all the demands that was risin’ up again him on all sides, and nothing to meet them but the help of the one dhreadful friend he had to depind on at night in the oak-wood down there below.

So there was nothing for it but to go through with the business that was begun already, and about the same hour as he went last, he takes off the little crucifix he wore round his neck, for he was a Catholic, and his gospel, and his bit o' the thrue cross that he had in a locket, for since he took the money from the Evil One he was growin' frightful in himself, and got all he could to guard him from the power of the devil. But tonight, for his life, he daren't take them with him. So he gives them into my grandfather's hands without a word, only he looked as white as a sheet o' paper; and he takes his hat and sword, and telling my grandfather to watch for him, away he goes, to try what would come of it.

It was a fine still night, and the moon — not so bright, though, now as the first time — was shinin' over heath and rock, and down on the lonesome oak-wood below him.

His heart beat thick as he drew near it. There was not a sound, not even the distant bark of a dog from the village behind him. There was not a lonesomer spot in the country round, and if it wasn't for his debts and losses that was drivin' him on half mad, in spite of his fears for his soul and his hopes of paradise, and all his good angel was whisperin' in his ear, he would a' turned back, and sent for his clargy, and made his confession and his penance, and changed his ways, and led a good life, for he was frightened enough to have done a great dale.

Softer and slower he stept as he got, once more, in undher the big branches of the oak-threes; and when he got in a bit, near where he met with the bad spirit before, he stopped and looked round him, and felt himself, every bit, turning as cowld as a dead man, and you may be sure he did not feel much betther when he seen the same man steppin' from behind the big tree that was touchin' his elbow a'most.

"You found the money good," says he, "but it was not enough. No matter, you shall have enough and to spare. I'll see after your luck, and I'll give you a hint whenever it can serve you; and any time you want to see me you have only to come down here, and call my face to mind, and wish me present. You shan't owe a shilling by the end of the year, and you shall never miss the right card, the best throw, and the winning horse. Are you willing?"

The young gentleman's voice almost stuck in his throat, and his hair was rising on his head, but he did get out a word or two to signify that he consented; and with that the Evil One handed him a needle, and bid him give him three drops of blood from his arm; and he took them in the cup of an acorn, and gave him a pen, and bid him write some words that he repeated, and that Sir Dominick did not understand, on two thin slips of parchment. He took one himself and the other he sunk in Sir Dominick's arm at the place where he drew the blood, and he closed the flesh over it. And that's as true as you're sittin' there!

Well, Sir Dominick went home. He was a frightened man, and well he might be. But in a little time he began to grow aisier in his mind. Anyhow, he got out of debt very quick, and money came tumbling in to make him richer, and everything he took in hand prospered, and he never made a wager, or played a game, but he won; and for all that, there was not a poor man on the estate that was not happier than Sir Dominick.

So he took again to his old ways; for, when the money came back, all came back, and there were hounds and horses, and wine galore, and no end of company, and grand doin's, and divarsion, up here at the great house. And some said Sir Dominick was thinkin' of gettin' married; and more said he wasn't. But, anyhow, there was somethin' troublin' him more than common, and so one night, unknownst to all, away he goes to the lonesome oak-wood. It was something, maybe, my grandfather thought was troublin' him about a beautiful young lady he was jealous of, and mad in love with her. But that was only guess.

Well, when Sir Dominick got into the wood this time, he grew more in dread than ever; and he was on the point of turnin' and lavin' the place, when who should he see, close beside him, but my gentleman, seated on a big stone undher one of the trees. In place of looking the fine young gentleman in goold lace and grand clothes he appeared before, he was now in rags, he looked twice the size he had been, and his face smutted with soot, and he had a murtherin' big steel hammer, as heavy as a halfhundred, with a handle a yard long, across his knees. It was so dark under the tree, he did not see him quite clear for some time.

He stood up, and he looked awful tall entirely. And what passed between them in that discourse my grandfather never heered. But Sir Dominick was as black as night afterwards, and hadn't a laugh for anything nor a word a’most for any one, and he only grew worse and worse, and darker and darker. And now this thing, whatever it was, used to come to him of its own accord, whether he wanted it or no; sometimes in one shape, and sometimes in another, in lonesome places, and sometimes at his side by night when he’d be ridin’ home alone, until at last he lost heart altogether and sent for the priest.

The priest was with him a long time, and when he heered the whole story, he rode off all the way for the bishop, and the bishop came here to the great house next day, and he gev Sir Dominick a good advice. He toult him he must give over dicin’, and swearin’, and drinkin’, and all bad company, and live a vartuous steady life until the seven years bargain was out, and if the divil didn’t come for him the minute afther the stroke of twelve the first morning of the month of March, he was safe out of the bargain. There was not more than eight or ten months to run now before the seven years wor out, and he lived all the time according to the bishop’s advice, as strict as if he was “in retreat.”

Well, you may guess he felt quare enough when the mornin’ of the 28th of February came.

The priest came up by appointment, and Sir Dominick and his raverence wor together in the room you see there, and kep’ up their prayers together till the clock struck twelve, and a good hour after, and not a sign of a disturbance, nor nothing came near them, and the priest slep’ that night in the house in the room next Sir Dominick’s, and all went over as comfortable as could be, and they shook hands and kissed like two comrades after winning a battle.

So, now, Sir Dominick thought he might as well have a pleasant evening, after all his fastin’ and praying; and he sent round to half a dozen of the neighbouring gentlemen to come and dine with him, and his raverence stayed and dined also, and a roarin’ bowl o’ punch they had, and no end o’ wine, and the swearin’ and dice, and cards and guineas changing hands, and songs and stories, that wouldn’t do any one good to hear, and the priest slipped away, when he seen the turn things was takin’, and it was not far from the stroke of twelve when Sir Dominick, sitting at the head of his table, swears, “this is the best first of March I ever sat down with my friends.”

"It ain't the first o' March," says Mr. Hiffernan of Ballyvoreen. He was a scholard, and always kep' an almanack.

"What is it, then?" says Sir Dominick, startin' up, and dhroppin' the ladle into the bowl, and starin' at him as if he had two heads.

"'Tis the twenty-ninth of February, leap year," says he. And just as they were talkin', the clock strikes twelve; and my grandfather, who was half asleep in a chair by the fire in the hall, openin' his eyes, sees a short square fellow with a cloak on, and long black hair bushin' out from under his hat, standin' just there where you see the bit o' light shinin' again' the wall.

(My hunchbacked friend pointed with his stick to a little patch of red sunset light that relieved the deepening shadow of the passage.)

"Tell your master," says he, in an awful voice, like the growl of a baist, "that I'm here by appointment, and expect him downstairs this minute."

Up goes my grandfather, by these very steps you are sittin' on.

"Tell him I can't come down yet," says Sir Dominick, and he turns to the company in the room, and says he with a cold sweat shinin' on his face, "for God's sake, gentlemen, will any of you jump from the window and bring the priest here?" One looked at another and no one knew what to make of it, and in the mean time, up comes my grandfather again, and says he, tremblin', "He says, sir, unless you go down to him, he'll come up to you."

"I don't understand this, gentlemen, I'll see what it means," says Sir Dominick, trying to put a face on it, and walkin' out o' the room like a man through the pressroom, with the hangman waitin' for him outside. Down the stairs he comes, and two or three of the gentlemen peeping over the banisters, to see. My grandfather was walking six or eight steps behind him, and he seen the stranger take a stride out to meet Sir Dominick, and catch him up in his arms, and whirl his head against the wall, and wi' that the hall-doore flies open, and out goes the candles, and the turf and wood-ashes flyin' with the wind out o' the hall-fire, ran in a drift o' sparks along the floore by his feet.

Down runs the gintlemen. Bang goes the hall-doore. Some comes runnin' up, and more runnin' down, with lights. It was all over with Sir Dominick. They lifted up the corpse, and put its shoulders again' the wall; but there was not a gasp left in him. He was cowld and stiffenin' already.

Pat Donovan was comin' up to the great house late that night and after he passed the little brook, that the carriage track up to the house crosses, and about fifty steps to this side of it, his dog, that was by his side, makes a sudden wheel, and springs over the wall, and sets up a yowlin' inside you'd hear a mile away; and that minute two men passed him by in silence, goin' down from the house, one of them short and square, and the other like Sir Dominick in shape, but there was little light under the trees where he was, and they looked only like shadows; and as they passed him by he could not hear the sound of their feet and he drew back to the wall frightened; and when he got up to the great house, he found all in confusion, and the master's body, with the head smashed to pieces, lying just on *that spot*.

The narrator stood up and indicated with the point of his stick the exact site of the body, and, as I looked, the shadow deepened, the red stain of sunlight vanished from the wall, and the sun had gone down behind the distant hill of New Castle, leaving the haunted scene in the deep grey of darkening twilight.

So I and the story-teller parted, not without good wishes on both sides, and a little "tip," which seemed not unwelcome, from me.

It was dusk and the moon up by the time I reached the village, remounted my nag, and looked my last on the scene of the terrible legend of Dunoran.

HYACINTH O’TOOLE

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IN the course of my life I have met with more accidents and assaults than twenty other men, and they never cost me any trouble to speak of — cats, prods, and gunshot, all came quite natural, and healed like enchantment. It was a murdering pity I was not a general. I could have stood any amount of hacking, and slashing, and riddling, and been never the worse man, nor a week on the sick-list. A shoemaker mistook me one day for a county Cork man that was paying attentions to his wife, and gave me a slice with his half-moon knife — bad luck to that ugly instrument — as I was walking down Petticoat Lane, no more thinking of his wife, I give you my solemn honour, than Saint Joseph of Arimathea was of Potiphar’s. The next thing was, Baron Dromdouski — a Polish refugee of distinction, and a perfect gentleman, I will day, and played the guitar like an angel, though liable occasionally to be carried away by his feelings — stuck me with an oyster-knife, while we were differing on politics, in the “Good Samaritan” in Exchange Street. I could count up fifty such unlucky catastrophes; but I think the worst was, what happened to me as I was whistling in the hall of my lodgings, where I was waiting to take Miss Doolan out for a walk.

I must tell you there’s nothing on earth I hate equal to a cat, and it is the only thing that walks on feet I was ever thoroughly affeard to look in the face. It’s a dread that was born with me, and it will never leave me; and I’d run into Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace away from one, and I think I’d have jumped after Quintus Curtins into the bottomless abyss if there was a cat behind me.

Well the cause of this accident I’m going to mention, was our cook, poor thing, that was flighty and out of her mind for love of a private grenadier in the Buffs, and she drove a three-pronged iron toasting-fork, between the kitchen banisters, up to the hilt in the calf of my leg. I thought it was the cat that I saw there, looking like mischief, only a minute before, and I gave a screech and a jump, and I went flying into the hall with the toasting-fork stuck in my leg.

"La! Mr. Toole, what's that stuck in your leg?" cries Miss Doolan, who was that minute coming down the stairs.

"It's the cat," I roared, almost out of my senses, and away with me out of the hall-door, that chanced to be open, and down the street I pegged like a madman, knocking my hat off on an old gentleman's face, that was looking out of his study-window, and never waiting to pick it up. I thought the beast would never let go, and my hair was standing up on my head, and I wish you saw the capers I cut, trying to shake it off.

"For the Lord's sake," I implored, dancing mad in the middle of the street, "will some of you pull it off my leg? I'll give yon a shilling, whoever does."

"I'll take it off," says a goodnatured scavenger, that thought I was mad — and bedad I wasn't far from it — and he strove to catch hold of the handle of the fork; and I was so wild with fright I made a cut at the animal with my stick behind, and struck the scavenger right across the knuckles, and on I ran feeling the cat's teeth and claws, as I thought, fast in me still.

"Bad luck to you, ye Turk!" says the scavenger, shying a stone at me, as big as a lemon, and knocking a carman out of his dicky with it, pipe, whip, caubeen, and all.

"Look what's stuck in his leg, boys!" called out the blackguard little children, running after me. "See there, look, look, look what's stuck in his leg!"

"Will some of you hit it, lick it, wallop it? It's *mad!*" I holloaed. By this time I was running up Grafton Street, and every one looking after me, some wondering, some laughing, and some frightened.

"It's fastened in my leg!" I roared. "Will none of you pull it off?"

"*I* will," says one.

"Shoot it," says I.

"*I* will," says another.

"It's *mad!*" said I.

"Stop your capers, man, and I'l*l* pull it out," says another.

"Give it a lick," said I*,"* break its back, stick a knife in it."

"Arra! Bother ye. How much ironmongery do you want?" says another. "Stop aisy, and I'll coax it out in a jiffy."

"Do," said I, "coax it; its name's Mufti."

"It was a little thief that snatched it out at last, as it trailed along the ground, and a devil of a hard pluck it took, and ran away with it and pawned it for a penny.

Well, I need go no further; I mentioned these, and might mention fifty other wounds, to show you that they were no trifles, and I can take my davy there was not one of the series that took a week to heal.

I'm happy to tell you that I was quite sufficiently well to avail myself of Mrs. Molloy's invitation to drink tea, go to the play, and return to supper with her agreeable party. I need not tell you that if I had had as many holes in my body as a colander, and was bleeding at every pore, I would have contrived, cost what it might, to drag myself to the side of the beautiful Theodora, although it was only to expire at her feet.

The hour named for assembling at the hospitable lodgings of the Molloys was halfpast five. I dressed myself with uncommon care. We sported wonderful high and voluminous white cravats in those days, which had a good deal the effect of modem poultices. We wore besides under-waistcoats of coloured satin, pantaloons and pumps, and blue coats with brass buttons gilt.

I was glad as I looked at myself in the glass, and brushed up my hair above my forehead into a "topping," as Mr. Bassegio called that conical triumph of the decorative art, to think that I looked a little pale.

Mundy had called on me the day after this extraction, not knowing a word of the matter, and wondering why I did not look in at the billiard-rooms. I made a rather painful effort, for I was lying on my face, to get into a more natural position, which I did with a slight groan. "Wounded!" says he.

"Slightly," said I, "that is, they say it won't be dangerous."

"Oh! oh!" says he, smiling faintly down at me as I lay on my bed, with a look at once stem and knowing. "Gunshot, eh?"

I had told him on purpose, for I knew that he was intimately acquainted with the Molloys, and I wished Theodora to hear that I was wounded; for a man hurt in an affair of honour (and what but that could she suppose?) is the most interesting patient that can come under the steel of the faculty or the cognisance of the fair.

"Gunshot," I acquiesced; for a carbine's as good a "gun" as a pistol any day; and about the "*shot*" at any rate, there could be no mistake.

"Shivering an' a daisy, as you say?" he inquired. "Looking into a barrel? Ten paces, eh?"

"I'll not deny the distance was about that," said I. "We were both slightly wounded, and — that's all. I won't talk about it; we are under terms not to tell on one another; and ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies. Are *you* asked to the Molloys' tea-party to go to the playhouse on — next, and back again to supper?"

"Yes," says Mundy, "and I mean to go; that's as fine a blackeyed, piquey-cheeked, bouncing grenadier of a— "

"*Stop!*" said I, making a bounce to sit up, for my blood was boiling; but I was not equal to that change of posture yet. "If you mean Miss Theodora Molloy— " I began.

"Oh! oh! So it is there the wind sits," says he, and he laughed, "I meant old Mother Molloy, of course; don't be uneasy, my dear fellow."

We parted, notwithstanding, very good friends, and I was glad to hear that he was just going to pay them a visit in their apartments on Ormond Quay, and I knew he could not keep my little secret long from that agreeable family.

The better part of the week had passed, as you are aware, since this visit of Mundy's, and I was now on the point of setting oat to enjoy the delightful evening I had been dreaming of for so long.

When my toilet was completed, I practised sitting down and standing up, which I did, perhaps, a little stiffly; still the movement was quite feasible, and I trusted to the inspiration of Theodora's presence to make it graceful.

When all was ready I took my opera-hat and got into the hackney-coach, with a great coat-of-arms, as big as a signboard, emblazoned on each door. Some judge or Lord Mayor, or other magnifico, seemed to have owned every one of them, fifty years before, and turned them adrift to batter about the town ever since. I sat down alone in my glory. It was a roomy place. Three could easily sit at a side. I wish you felt the jolting, and bobbing, and bumping. I was in no condition to enjoy it just then, and on second thought, I readjusted my pose. I kneeled down; such, for sufficient reasons, was the attitude I preferred, with my elbows on the cushion. There was room enough for changes of the sort: it was as big as a pew, a very uneasy one, you may suppose: the noise of it was enough to deafen a cannoneer for an hour after. If all the old iron and broken glass in Dublin was being tossed by madmen in frying-pans like pancakes, it could not exceed the ring and clatter and batter of that musical enclosure. They were all alike; there was no use in fretting; I wanted to be at Ormond Quay to the minute, not to lose one moment of Theodora's company, possibly to arrive first of the lot and have her all to myself before any one else should come in to bother us.

Unfortunately, my coachman was something the worse for liquor, and delayed me considerably by tumbling out of the box, which he did three times: once on his back, once on his face, and last on his knees and elbows. He had to be helped up on to the box every time, and his hat, whip, and other appurtenances collected and restored by some charitable blackguards of his acquaintance, while I, compelled to change my attitude of devotion, was stamping in my pumps and silk stockings, in my roomy prison, and swearing till I almost burst my cravat, with my "topping," my expressive face, and my fist out of the window. At length, after many hairbreadth escapes and a long and heartrending oscillation between the house ten doors above and the house ten doors below, the particular door I wanted to stop at, I was actually liberated, and ascended the narrow stairs, preceded by the maid, with my heart thumping, I verily believe, audibly. I heard people talking, and the voice of Theodora quite distinguishable from the rest. The woman did not announce my name, and I soon discovered that she was not aware that I had followed her upstairs, for she said:

"There's a little hop-o'-my-thumb of a man in the hall, if ye plase, ma'am, that says you asked him to tay; but I think it's what he's a bit of a shop-boy that's come with a bill, and, if you like, I'll put him out by the lug."

. I was so confused and embarrassed, and above all so anxious to put an end to the discussion, before anything past all endurance should be said, that I bolted into the room, putting on the best smile I could and stretching out my hand to Mrs. Molloy, who was next me. But the maid at the door, with arms as thick as Donnelly's, the boxer, caught me by the collar at the nape of my neck with such a sudden jerk that I fell sitting on the floor, smack, as if I was shot, and she never let go her grip, but held me half-choked, sitting bolt upright, with my legs out, pumps and pantaloons, like a pair of compasses.

"How dare ye!" says the powerful maid, giving me a shake that made my teeth chatter. "How dare ye, dare ye, dare ye!"

I think she'd have pulled me down the stairs backwards, sitting as I was, only that Mrs. Molloy recovered her speech, and with a stamp on the floor that made the tea-spoons jump in their saucers, she bawls out, "My curse on you, Juggy Hanlon, what are you doing to Mr. Dooley, my most sinsare friend? Up with ye, Mr. Dooley, and I hope you're nothing the worse, and down with yon, Juggy Hanlon, and my curse go along wid ye, to the kitchen. Take a chair and an air of the fire, Mr. Dooley, the evening's a trifle could, I think; and settle your cravat at the glass there between the windows, and we won't look at ye — bad luck to her impudence. Here's my daughter Theodora, waiting to shake hands wid ye; but she won't look at ye no more than myself till ye settle your waistcoat and cravat; it's a wonder of the world she didn't make smithereens of your watch. She's *cruel* strong, that same Juggy Hanlon!"

I did as I was bid; I was so confounded I could hardly see my own reflection in the dingy little pier-glass. I saw in the background the images of other people indistinctly, and I heard a sound of voices, but I could not say at the time whether they were laughing at me or what they were doing.

In another minute I was shaking hands with everyone that would shake hands with me, and with some of them, I dare say, twice over t at least. I was beginning to feel more like myself. It was not a very large party: Mundy was there, and Lieutenant Kramm — Sidebotham was on duty, but expected to get off in time to come to supper — there was an impudent little Galway chap, no bigger than myself, with a smirk on his red face, and a pair of calves, I give you my honour, AS round as a hat, paying attentions, if you please, to Miss Theodora Molloy. I don't think he was a day under forty! With half an eye I saw what he was at. If you caught a stranger driving your only horse and new gig to the Howth races, or walking down Dame Street in your best hat, with your umbrella in his hand, you might conceive, in a small way, the feelings with which I witnessed the usurpation in question. I had no idea until that moment how entirely I had come to regard Theodora as my own. I think I could have cut his ugly little head off his shoulders, and kicked it through the window into the Liffey.

"I must introjuice you to my sinsare friend— "

"The O'Kelly of Ballynamuck," whispered the gentleman from Galway, who knew his weakness.

"Mr. Dooley— "

“*Toole”* I whispered.

“Well, ain’t it all one? Mr. Toole, I beg leave to introjuice yon both. Mr. Toole, this is The O’Kelly of Ballynamuck. The O’Kelly of Ballynamuck, this is Mr. Toole.”

“Proud to make your acquaintance,” said The O’Kelly, with a fierce sort of curtsey, that made me think that he, also, instinctively smelt a rat.

“Your most obedient, sir,” said I, making him an awful low bow, and, raising my head higher than usual, I treated him at the end of it to a short, fierce stare; with another short bow at the end of that again.

“Fine weather, sir! uncommon fine, Mr. Toole. Everything promises amazing; though, of course, it don’t agree with everything alike. If this weather houlds a little longer I wouldn’t wonder if we had piteeties at three-halfpence!”

“*Indeed*, sir!” said I, expressing more wonder than I altogether felt, for I wasn’t quite sure whether the sum he named was wonderfully high or wonderfully low. “Do you play billiards, sir?”

“No, sir; cards and cock-fightin’ serves my turn. But what is cards and what is cock-fightin’ compared with the delightful societee of neeture’s noblest work, the objeck of our aspirations, our homage, and our life’s devotion — the fair sex?”

And with this he made a flourish with his hat, and a bow to Miss Theodora, the like of which I could hardly hope to execute in half a life, with such a smile of conceit and assurance, and, I may say; of defiance, as almost drove me out of my senses, and down he went, with a whisk, into the chair next hers, and began to talk love and nonsense into her ear, under my very nose! Every now and then, I could see from the comers of his eye he gave me a look as much as to say, “I have her, and I mean to keep her; and don’t you wish you may get her?”

“That fellow’s disposed to put a quarrel on me,” said I to myself; “*let* him; if he don’t, maybe I’ll put one upon *him.”*

I dare say I looked a little bit surly, for Mrs. Molloy plucked me by the coat, and said: “Sit down at the table, here, beside me and take a hot cup of tay, and a cut o’ that pittaytee-cake; and may I never! but ye look as if ye saw your tailor’s ghost with a bill in his fingers. Sit down now, I tell you,” and the imperious old lady pulled me down on the chair with a souse. “And here's for you; that's stingo; drink it, my child; and cream in it that will make you as fat as a pig."

I think in her youth Mrs. Molloy must have been very nearly as strong as Juggy Hanlon: I felt perfectly helpless in the hands of either. In deep dudgeon I swallowed lumps of potato-cake and gulped down tea, talking rather vaguely with old Mrs. Molloy, and watching Theodora and The O'Kelly of Ballynamuck with the corner of my eye.

"I see how it is, my poor little fellow," says Mrs. Molloy, with a kind wink at me, "but don't bother you head about him. "Mickey Kelly there," and she winked at me again, and jogged her elbow in the direction of The O'Kelly, "can't come to the playhouse tonight; he's going to Killcock to sell a mare, and he's the boy that can do it. So Theodora 'll have no one to look after her but yourself and them officers, and I leave her among you, and I think I know who'll be foremost. We leave that dear girl, me and Molloy there, just to do whatever she likes best herself. What time of day is it, Molloy?"

Old Molloy obediently grasped the seals of his huge silver watch, and hauled it, with several tugs, from the recesses of his fob.

"Why then, it's time the coaches was at the door," says Mrs. Molloy, in a tone of brisk alarm, having heard his report. "Bing the bell, some o' yez, like darlin's. Where's that Juggy Hanlon? Don't be affeard, Mr. Dooley," she interpolated to me, with a momentary playfulness, "she shan't lay a finger on you. Call two coaches, Juggy, and don't be while ye'd be lookin' about ye — mind. Bun in and get ready, Theo, my child." And she added more vehemently to her helpmate, "Shake them crumbs off your smallclothes, Mr. Molloy, and, for dacency's sake, will ye wipe that butter off your chin."

So issuing her orders in hot haste, Mrs. Molloy fussed, and wheezed, and bustled about. Mundy was arranging his curls, and smiling blandly at his handsome features in the looking-glass; and Lieutenant Kramm was entertaining old Molloy with terrific anecdotes of his sporting and military life; and The O'Kelly was taking his leave with all the fascination and gallantry that belonged to his courtly manners. From the window I saw him get into a battered gig, and drive off at a hideous pace, pretty much at the mercy of a mad-looking horse, in a westerly direction. That redfaced thief made me very uneasy; and you may be sure it wasn't altogether about his neck I was anxious.

Well, he was gone; that was one comfort. I shook myself up, and strutted from one window to another, and Mrs. Molloy's words and looks of encouragement came back, and I began to think if a little beast like that chooses to pin himself to a girl's apron-string, what is she to do? I dare say she hated the old whisky-faced rascal as much as I did; and didn't she give me a smile over her shoulder as she left the room!

My spirits rose. I was glad to observe that Mundy, who was six feet high and wore a red coat — decisive odds — was not in the running; and Kramm was directing his attentions chiefly to the old people. The opportunity would, after all, prove as fortunate as my wildest hopes had painted it.

In a few minutes more we were rolling and rattling away to the theatre. Mrs. Molloy distinguished Kramm and Mundy by placing herself under their escort, and starting first, with a tipsy coachman and a horse that had a morbid jerk in one of its legs, and seemed at every fifth step to be on the point of pitching, with a curtsey, on its head. Away they went in full fig, merrily, in this conveyance; Mrs. Molloy, as proud as a peacock to take her seat in the box next his Excellency, the Lord Lift'nant! I, old Molloy, and the lovely Theodora, whom I keep to the last, as children do their best bit, followed in our jingling, thundering, rolling coach, and in a few minutes down slammed the steps in front of the box-entrance, and I had the happiness of giving my arm to the beautiful girl I had never ceased thinking of since I saw her for the first time, in the barouche, outside the pickle-shop on Stephen's Green. Can I ever forget it!

Here we are now, all in our glory, under the blaze of the lamps. Mrs. Molloy's turban, or, as she persisted in calling that sort of coiffure, to her dying day, her "turbot," was the finest thing in green, yellow, and pink that night in the playhouse, with a big pin — I suppose they were precious stones — stuck in the front of it; her dress was of corresponding magnificence. At that time ladies wore next to no waists at all, and their clothes were made almost as tight as bolster-cases, if you just suppose a bit of string all round tied tight, and as close under the arm-pits as anatomy would permit. Whatever advantages this style of dress had, I think it was rather trying to persons of Mrs. Molloy's figure, and was calculated, with uncommon candour, to display every pound of flesh she boasted. She had three necklaces on, and a roll of fat for every one, and a pair of Roman-pearl pendants, that were as big as duck-eggs, and kept swinging and knocking on her inflamed shoulders whenever she turned her head. I will say this for Mrs. Molloy, that for her time of life she was as showy and plentiful a figure, and as roomy a woman as you could wish to fill a window with on a Lord Mayor's Day; and this night, in the front row of the box, next his Excellency, she was looking her very best, and, I dare say, a more striking figure than the Lord Lieutenant himself.

Mrs. Molloy was so anxious to get next the Lord Lieutenant, and her daughter to get as far as possible from Mrs. Molloy that Mundy and I were put side by side in the middle, Miss Theodora on my right, and the old lady on Mundy's left next the viceregal box. I remember the arrangement well, because we were hardly in our places, and I saying something engaging to Miss Theodora Molloy, sitting as I was side by side with my friend the lieutenant, when a fellow in the gallery calls out, "Three cheers for *Mundy* and his man *Friday*," and three cheers followed that made the lustres tremble.

This you may be sure made me feel rather fidgetty, more especially as who should I see but that blackguard young Figges, and all his malevolent family, grinning and sniggering away in a front row, only a box or two off. He was watching me, and laughing, you'd say, for a wager, and bursting with spite.

I was as sure as could be, of a thing I did not actually see, that the sneaking rascal had sent a lot of his shop-boys into the upper gallery to make fun of me before the people. Of course he saw my name down and who I was with when he went to take his places.

It was a terrible unlucky thing. It was putting me out. I could not hear half she said; and two or three times I was very near talking nonsense.

In a minute more another chap calls out from the gallery: "A cheer for the big soger with the little *hyacinth* in his buttonhole," and off goes another cheer.

Well, this blew over like the last, leaving me feeling rather small and blushing all over. But I did not pretend to think they meant me, and went on talking all the same, thinking the overture would never begin, and the curtain go up to put me out of pain.

Then there comes a thundering cheer for Mr. Toole, in the box next his Excellency, and I saw the Figgesses tittering.

No matter, I was determined to keep neverminding, and to talk on to that beautiful girl as if nothing in the world was going the least bit wrong.

“May I make bold,” says I, “to ask you, Miss Molloy, how long it is since you and Mr. O’Kelly were first acquainted?”

“And why should you care a brass farthing, Mr. Toole, to know? “ says she, looking as innocent and startled-like as a little frightened bird. “Sure there’s no harm in poor little Micky O’Kelly!”

“No harm, I dare say, and not much good,” said I; “but whatever he is I envy him, Miss Molloy, and lament all the precious time I have lost.”

I said this, you may be sure, as tenderly as I could.

“I hope you’re gettin’ on with her, Mr. Toole,” calls out a fellow affectionately from the gallery.

“Never mind,” says another, “he’s the boy that’ll *melt* her soon.” I felt my very cheeks tingling with shame. There was another cheer, and those accursed Figgesses grinning. Well, it could not last for ever, I thought. “Will those beastly fiddlers never begin?” I thought. “Is there no one else in the house to make fun of hut me? Will I ever be out o’ this, dead or alive?”

The house was now filling fast; the box-doors were opening and clapping; a human flood was oozing and tumbling into the pit from every entrance. The gallery was becoming more noisy every minute; the orchestra were assembling, were chatting together, turning over music, and tuning violins, double-basses, and all sorts of instruments. There was a cheer for “Nosey,” which was the nickname of the “leader” of those days. There was the usual “groan for the man in the white hat,” and call for “music,” and two or three fruits, small and hard, of that popular kind which were displayed by the vendors at the corner of Carlisle Bridge, in old japanned snuffer-dishes, and offered from 11 o’clock, A.M., to sunsetting, with inviting monotony, in the words, “Fourteen scarlet *craftons* for a halfpenny,” hit a hat or two in the pit, and one sounded the big drum with a spirit that made the accomplished drummer start, and drew upon him a glance of indignation from “Nosey,” now upon his throne. These “fine scarlet *craftons*,” as I knew from experience, were as cheap and convenient an ammunition as a man could take with him to the upper gallery, when he wished to take half-an-hour’s innocent diversion with bald heads in the pit.

Only two or three came down now; but they were “like the first of a thunder-shower,” as Lord Byron says, and I knew they were signs of the coming storm.

And now, on a sudden, every one in the house stood up, the orchestra struck up “God save the King.” The Lord Lieutenant was taking his place in state, in the box next ours, and such a storm of clapping, cheering, hooting, groaning, hissing, whacking of sticks on the front of the gallery, whistling, cat-calls, and other sounds rose all at once, as made the music totally inaudible, and deafened the entire audience for a time. During the whole of this period, while we could see by the elbows and fiddlesticks of the orchestra that the national anthem was still being played, much to my chagrin, I saw Mrs. Molloy, in whom I felt an interest, reflected from her lovely daughter, and a responsibility though not quite so near as Mundy’s, behaving herself in a manner that, I confess, scandalised me a good deal; for, with her side and shoulder on the cushion of our box, she contrived to get her face round the partition of his Excellency’s, and indeed, I may say, pretty well into it. One of her objects had been to get a good look at that dignified personage. I could soon perceive that she was engaged in a violent altercation with some one in the viceregal box, in which her face was, I may say, established.

I thought I could distinguish in her powerful voice an allusion to the well-known privilege that cats enjoy, of looking at kings; but, except the constant and vehement nodding of her turban, I could see nothing of what was going on in the state box.

Tom Barnacle was in the pit, a little way out, and told me next day all he saw; and from that and Mrs. Molloy’s narrative, I can relate that when her face presented itself considerable surprise and even consternation appeared in the countenances of those members of the household that were stationed in the rear of “his Excellency,” who looked straight before him, as if unconscious of the appearance of the disk that had risen so unexpectedly on his horizon.

Mrs. Molloy nodded repeatedly to “his Excellency,” and smiled affably, assuring him that she was proud to see him there, and that Molloy himself and her daughter being in the next box she did not think it would be manners if some one of the family did not wish his Excellency health, wealth, long life, and prosperity, which she did with a *cead mille failthe* from the heart of a Connaught woman, and the *boosom* of Ireland.

His Excellency, she complained afterwards, did not appear to hear what she was saying— "them ignorant blackguards were making such a noise" — but as the speech exhibited no symptoms of drawing towards its close, one of the gentlemen, in Castle uniform, stepped forward, and said with very marked distinctness: "Unless you withdraw your face, a constable shall take you from the next box, and convey you to the watch-house."

It was upon this that Mrs. Molloy, who had a "spent" befitting her ancient lineage, had retorted in high and scornful terms upon the "gentleman-at-large," who looked as if he would have liked to take by the throat that turbaned Turk; and it was not until she saw him, as she thought, make a sign to some one, in the rear of the box, that her prudence overcame her indignation, and, with a face of flame and many a sniff and snort, she resumed her original pose, and stared fiercely across at the side-scene opposite, and her gills palpitated for half an hour afterwards.

The frightful discord with which the representative of majesty was received, foreboded the political storm that was brewing.

'Macbeth' was the play, and my troubles, to return from great things to small, were not over yet, for when the witches came on, and the cauldron appeared, a chap calls out from the gallery: "The boiling-pot, Mr. Toole."

I felt it the more that there was a dead silence in the house at the moment. And when the smoke began to come up, and the witches said:

"Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire, burn; and, cauldron, bubble."

"Melting-day, Toole," says another. And when Macbeth said:

"Out, out, brief candle."

There was a roar of "Short sixes."

I give you my sacred honour, I felt as if I was melting myself. I'd have liked to stand up that minute and tell the whole world I was a chandler.

There’s nothing on earth so torturing as a mystery, with a lot of fellows, that know all about it, poking it under your nose every minute in the presence of a great assembly.

Between the acts, it was one succession of groans, and hisses, and political sentiments, and it was plain that the Lord Lieutenant and the government bigwigs were in ill odour with the gallery. It was just when Macbeth was on the point of murdering King Duncan, a chap among the gods called out, by way of a joke: “God save the King,” and with that another calls for “Patrick’s Day,” and then the whole gallery round set up one roar for “Patrick’s Day,” and nothing could you hear but “Patrick’s Day — Patrick’s Day,” in one thunder; you’d think the ceiling would come down. And out comes the manager, and stood bowing in front of the footlights, turning up his eyes to the gods, and Nosey waiting for a signal from him to strike up the tune they wanted. He made no sign; the clamour rose awfully; he smiled, he shrugged, he bowed very low, he expanded his white gloves imploringly, as he slowly looked from one side to the other of the gallery. All would not do; they would not give him a hearing. The manager went off, bowing and smiling regretfully, and he sent on Lady Macbeth to proceed, if she could; but the storm was rising steadily, and even that royal virago was forced to submit: Lady Macbeth curtseyed low, and in turn withdrew. Again the manager came forward. He gesticulated before the gentlemen in the gallery, conveying as well as he could that their demands were complied with; he stepped forward to the footlights, signed to Nosey, who rapped on his desk with his fiddlestick, and waved that wand of power over his musical familiars, and it was to be supposed the tune, so tumultuously demanded, was at last being executed by the full strength of Nosey’s band; but, of course, not a note could any one hear in the house. The magic of “Patrick’s Day” was powerless to abate the storm. That quarrel was but a pretext: there was something deeper in it. The manager bowed very low, and a sucked orange hit him on the head. At the same moment a whisky-bottle, from the upper gallery, hit the front of the Lord Lieutenant’s box, and a shower of glass splinters flew in all directions. Now there were gentlemen standing up in the boxes, and gesticulating fiercely at the gallery; box-doors were opened and peaceable people were drawing back and some getting out on the corridors; the same agitation was visible in the pit. Smash goes another bottle on the side of the viceregal box.

The Viceroy, being a plucky man, continued to sit serenely with his eyes on the stage. Old Molloy popped his bald head out to see what was going on, and instantly, not a scarlet "crafton," but one of those big, yellow apples that were called cannon-balls — never did they better deserve their name — burst with a thump on his shining bald head, a bit of it, as big as a walnut, hit me in the eye, exactly as I was saying, with a look of unutterable love in the unfortunate eye that I had fixed on her: "Dear Miss Theodora, fear nothing; am not I beside you?" Some pulp marked the spot where it had hit her papa, and a "noggin" of cider was streaming over his massive forehead and intelligent eyes, and I dare say old Molloy thought, for a minute, he was back again on the fair green of Ballynawhop.

If we had known that the Lord Lieutenant's box was likely to become the mark for all this artillery, I doubt if Mrs. Molloy would have been in such a hurry to secure the place of honour.

"Papa dear, are ye hurted?" Miss Theodora exclaimed with much trepidation; and "Oh, la! There's mamma!" And sure enough a cat had at that moment alighted with great directness on the head of Mrs. Molloy, whirling her tasteful turban and wig over her left cheek, and displaying instead a head as bald as her husband's. A live cat, bedad! If it had dropped into the box among us, Saint Peter would not have kept *me* in it an instant! Luckily it tumbled off Mrs. Molloy's turban, head over heels among the groundlings in the pit. Grasping her wig and turban with both hands she rose exclaiming, "Take me out of this hell upon earth some of ye."

At the same instant the Lord Lieutenant, having made up his mind to retire, rose with much dignity, and received a large lemon on his back; and I myself saw a mutton kidney in the eye of the Attorney-General, in the box opposite to ours.

It was indeed high time for all who had ladies to look after to beat a retreat, and we were soon in the corridor, and making our way down the stairs. Theodora was on my arm. I was afraid she might faint before we got her into the coach.

"Are you ill?" I whispered, squeezing her arm gently to the lapel of my coat with my elbow. "I hope you were not very much frightened?"

Upon this the channing girl treated me to a dazzling stare of her fine black eyes, and burst out laughing.

"Ah! Then, is it what you're jokin' me, you are, Mr. Toole?" says she. "Affeard, indeed! I wish you saw the stones and claealpins hoppin' on and off the boys' polls at the Fair of Killbattery. Ha, ha! Papa's nothing the worse, ye see; and, indeed, the smack of it took a start out of me, for I only saw it with the corner of my eye, and I could not tell but it was a paving-stone was in it, and the pulp flying out alarmed me for a moment for the dear man's brains. And mamma got it, too; that was a cat, or my name's not Theodora. Mamma! Who's she with? Oh, Mundy, I see. Mamma, dear, how's your head?"

"Bad enough, joole," rejoined Mrs. Molloy. My beautiful turbot's rooned and smathered on my head!"

The people who looked round to see who the speaker was who had suffered in so unusual a way, beheld Mrs. Molloy with old Molloy's red and yellow silk pockethandkerchief tied under her chin, holding her wig and turban down in their place, and looking, certainly, not unlike that class of ladies who used to carry flat-fish on their heads, and certainly I did feel a little bashful about her, for one side of her wig was dangling from under Molloy's handkerchief between her shoulders, and the Figgesses, who were coming down the stairs behind us, were laughing like hyænas. I don't think there was an unlucky thing happened to us that night but the eyes of that same beastly family were upon us.

I was thankful when Mrs. Molloy was shut up in her hack coach, and her daughter, her husband, and myself in ours.

We had all recovered our spirits by the time we had reached our destination on Ormond Quay. Up the stairs we stumbled, talking all together, and into the front drawingroom, where Juggy Hanlon *had* already lighted candles. Mrs. Molloy slipped quietly upstairs to restore her distracted head to order, while we talked on in the room where we had first mustered, and we could hear the servants tramping up and down the back drawingroom, clinking plates, and jingling spoons and knives and forks, and squabbling in loud and voluble accents over the arrangement of the supper.

"Mr. Lieutenant Kramm has just been telling me, Miss Theodora, that your music is all that I should have anticipated," said I, "would it be asking too great a favour from a nightingale to sing us a song from the perch of that music-stool, and to accompany itself with a few harmonious touches of that forte-piano?"

I give you this pretty speech in full, to show you how much pains I was taking to gain the beautiful creature's heart.

"Lieutenant Kramm says more than his prayers, I'm afraid," says she, sitting down carelessly before the instrument. "Not that I sing like a nightingale, for I know very well that I don't."

But she looked all the time as if she thought that she did.

"You don't sing like the nightingale in this one respect," said I, "that you excel it beyond all calculation."

"I don't mind a word you're saying, Mr. Toole; I think it's what you want to make a fool of me," said the young lady.

"Miss Molloy does not sing like the nightingale for *all* listeners," says Kramm, "only for her particular friends.

"That's it, I *hope,"* said I, "and I devoutly entreat that I may be included among the number."

"Sing that glorious thing you astonished me with the other morning," said Mundy, joining the chorus of supplication. "If you don't, I'll beg of Mr. Molloy to use his influence as a father."

"Well, then, I suppose I may as well," says she. I'll sing you one of Tommy Moore's melodies."

And, by the powers, so she did! She struck up on the piano, and I was delighted and, I do assure you, half-frightened by the power of her voice. Since I heard old "Whisky Tay" in the black-hole I had never listened to anything in the way of music half so loud! She had a way of throwing her voice into the words and swelling them out, that I never heard equalled; and when she came to the part:

"The mo-hoon hid her li-*hight,*
In the heavens that *ni-hi-hight,*
And wept behind a clou-*houd,*
O'er the maiden's shee-aim."

I was perfectly ravished.

"More power! My blessing! May I never, but that *teas* singing!" said I, in a state of extraordinary enthusiasm; and I do assure yon I hardly knew whether I was on my head or my heels. "Thank yon! *thank you!!* THANK YOU!!!" I cried with growing fervour. "God bless yon, my darling Miss Theodora, that was astonishing!"

Mundy was laughing all this time with a "Ha! ha! ha!" and no more disguise than he would at a clown in a circus.

"What are you laughing at, Mundy?" said J, turning on him as if I'd eat him up, with a stamp on the floor, for which I afterwards apologised to Miss Molloy, for it raised such a dust between me and Mundy I could scarcely see him, and I heard the young lady blowing and phewing, and slapping her hair with her pockethandkerchief; and old Molloy was taken with a fit of coughing.

"Laughing!" says Mundy. "Ha! ha! ha! phew! I say, where's the good of smothering us? Ha! ha! ha! why, man, I tell you it is — ha! ha! ha! — hys-sis-sis-sisterical — ha! ha! ha! I can't help it, I tell you, I — ha! ha! ha! — have a sort of trembling inside whenever I'm very much moved. Miss Molloy knows all about it. Don't be a fool; I told her long ago. I've had it on parade, and at funerals, and at divine service, by Jove, and I'll not be cross-questioned, nor bamboozled, nor made more nervous by any man living. *You* believe me, Miss Molloy, and that's all I care about."

"Ah! Be quiet, Toole, will ye?" It was the first time she called me by my surname, and I felt so happy I could have forgiven Mundy if he had pulled me by the nose. "It's true for him; he does really — he laughs whenever he's near cryin'. It happened to myself once, when I was getting well o' the swine-pock. Sure didn't I — see the way he was over the beautiful verses my poor Uncle Barney wrote, when he was leaving Ireland in a decline, and he called the pome a 'Farewell to Allyballycarick-o-dooley,' which was the name of his place, and there's hardly one in the world could read it without crying; and I give you my word, it was from one split of laughing with him into another! Not but what I think it would be better manners if he ran his head in a pittaytie-pot, and clapped it out o' the windy, sooner than offend people by his weakness, when he felt the fit cornin' on him," she concluded, with a little severity.

The discussion was ended at this point by the return of Mrs. Molloy, with her second best wig and "turbot" on her head; and just as we were going into supper in came Sidebotham. His eye was little more than sky-blue and yellow now, and a small slip of black plaister, instead of the bit of basilicon, as big as a turnpike-ticket, that was stuck across the bridge of his nose. He was not by any means so stand-off with me as when I last met him, and seemed disposed to be conciliatory, and indeed he went the length of borrowing five pounds from me as we went away.

I don't know how we bundled in to supper. I only know that I found myself beside Theodora. It was really an elegant supper. I remember it well, and I may as well tell you that old Molloy had a loin of roast pork before him; there was a big square of bacon, with greens, before Sidebotham — we were running, you see, a good deal on the pigs; before Mrs. Molloy, and as fat as herself, there was a grand roast goose, that came all the way from Connaught, and more fool it, considering all the good it got by the journey! And there was cow-heel and tripe, a dish that old Molloy fondly lost himself in, whenever he could get at it. There was enough cold-cannon to load a hod with; potatoes with and without the skins; there was a mountain of pancakes you might put a child to bed on; and such a good smell of stuffing, and onions, and gravy over all, that I declare to you I don't think the Prince Regent had a finer supper that night.

We were mortal hungry, and for a time conversation was a little dull; but I had the pleasure of hearing Theodora's beautiful voice every now and then, between the sounds of chumping, and munching, and gulping all round, calling on me for those little refined attentions that constitute, I may say, all the chivalry of the supper-table. Now it was:

"Mr. Toole, may I be troublesome to you for the gherkins?" And again —

"Another help o' the stuffin', ask mamma, Mr. Toole." Or —

"Show me the mustard, if you please?" Or —

"Will ye give me a dust of that pepper, Mr. Toole?

I do assure you it was one delightful round of similar requests and attentions all through the supper-time, and as the glorious girl had a fine appetite, she worked me, in that way, to my heart's content.

But this was only child's play compared with what followed, when the old lady called out " Come, Molloy, where's the punch? What are you foosthering about? We're all choking with the drooth, and lookin' at ye like so many dying fishes out o' water. There's Mr. Upside— "

"Sidebotham," said the lieutenant.

“Upsidedownbotham — well, whatever it is, the young captain there, that we knew in Athlone, is makin’ signs to me this half hour for drink. Come, man, stir. Juggy, good girl, bring the *kittle;* there’s two bottle of the right sort at your elbow, and half a dozen elegant lemons. *Putt* down the bowl before him, Juggy, that’s a darlint, and don’t be sousing the wather in as if you were drownding so many rats. Do you know what, Mr. Upside, Mr. Downbotham, that’s it; just look at that bowl — it houlds seven pints and about a wine-glass; that’s the very bowl Molloy was baptized in!” And she nodded impressively at Sidebotham, just as Molloy squeezed a lemon into the sacred vessel. “As sore as you sit there, Mr. Back — what your name? — no matter, I wish there was no such things as names, barrin’ Christian names, of course, for the sake of religion; but what was I saying? Yes; he was baptized in that very bowl!”

“Not *ducked* in it?” says Sidebotham.

“No; but sprinkled out of it by the Reverend Father Haddock.”

“He drank like a fish, I dare say, ma’am,” said Sidebotham, who didn’t care a fig what he said to any one.

“I don’t know, my dear, but he baptized like a Christian; and he met his death, most unfortunately, by being drownded in a bog-hole. He being a portly man, standing too near the edge, the bank gave way, and himself, and a child, and an ass and cart was all drownded together. I remember seeing him myself.”

“Not in the bog-hole?” said the lieutenant.

“No, honey! It was in the high street of Athlone, when I was only a little slip of a colleen.”

“We must drink to his memory, ma’am,” said Sidebotham.

“With all my heart, joole,” said Mrs. Molloy, who, barring a few political toasts, did not object to drink to anything.

By this time the punch, one of the few good things we unquestionably owe to England, was brewed; and infinite credit it did its “composer.”

Our Philomel was the only one of the party who partook of that wonderful elixir with extreme moderation. That nightingale only touched it lightly, as it were, with her musical beak, once or twice, and, content with this little sip, listened to our agreeable conversation, our toasts, and sentiments, and to a great deal of fiery and confidential nonsense from your humble servant.

After this, I can recall nothing distinctly, except the general consciousness that I never was so happy in the course of my life; only I once or twice observed that Kramm, who sat at Theodora's other side, and did not seem to hear a word I said, kept interrupting the girl with his long-winded stories; and then I remember Sidebotham seeing me home, and talking to him a great deal about Theodora, and something very touching was said that affected me, for I remember crying while he held my hand, and I held the railings, and I lent him some money, and how I got to my bed I don't know.

[This amusing story, by the gifted author of 'Uncle Silas' and 'In a Glass Darkly,' was left at the time of the author's death unfinished as it is here, but the Editor ventures nevertheless to give it in this state to the readers of 'TEMPLE Bar.' Humour is not a product of this furiously earnest age, and we cannot afford to lose any contribution to our mirth which comes in our way. — EDITOR.]

The Tales

In 1826, the Le Fanu family moved to Abington in County Limerick, where Le Fanu spent his youth.

LIST OF TALES IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Please note: uncollected tales will appear later in the list than tales appearing in collections.

THE GHOST AND THE BONE SETTER.
THE FORTUNES OF SIR ROBERT ARDAGH.
THE LAST HEIR OF CASTLE CONNOR.
THE DRUNKARD’S DREAM.
PASSAGE IN THE SECRET HISTORY OF AN IRISH COUNTESS.
THE BRIDAL OF CARRIGVARAH.
STRANGE EVENT IN THE LIFE OF SCHALKEN THE PAINTER.
SCRAPS OF HIBERNIAN BALLADS.
JIM SULIVAN’S ADVENTURES IN THE GREAT SNOW.
A CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF A TYRONE FAMILY
AN ADVENTURE OF HARDRESS FITZGERALD, A ROYALIST CAPTAIN.
THE QUARE GANDER.
BILLY MALOWNEY’S TASTE OF LOVE AND GLORY.
THE WATCHER
THE MURDERED COUSIN
SCHALKEN THE PAINTER
THE EVIL GUEST
AN ACCOUNT OF SOME STRANGE DISTURBANCES IN AUNGIER STREET
AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE OF A HAUNTED HOUSE
ULTOR DE LACY: A LEGEND OF CAPPERCULLEN
GHOST STORIES OF CHAPELIZOD
THE MYSTERIOUS LODGER
LAURA SILVER BELL
WICKED CAPTAIN WALSHAWE, OF WAULING
THE CHILD THAT WENT WITH THE FAIRIES
STORIES OF LOUGH GUIR
THE VISION OF TOM CHUFF
DICKON THE DEVIL
A STRANGE ADVENTURE IN THE LIFE OF MISS LAURA MILDMAY

THE HAUNTED BARONET
THE BIRD OF PASSAGE: A STORY OF A FIRST LOVE.
GREEN TEA.
THE FAMILIAR.
MR. JUSTICE HARBOTTLE.
THE ROOM IN THE DRAGON VOLANT.
CARMILLA.
SPALATRO
A DEBT OF HONOR.
DEVEREUX'S DREAM.
CATHERINE'S QUEST.
HAUNTED.
PICHON & SONS, OF THE CROIX ROUSSE.
THE PHANTOM FOURTH.
THE SPIRIT'S WHISPER.
DOCTOR FEVERSHAM'S STORY.
THE SECRET OF THE TWO PLASTER CASTS.
WHAT WAS IT?
SOME ACCOUNT OF THE LATTER DAYS OF THE HON. RICHARD MARSTON
MY AUNT MARGARET'S ADVENTURE
MADAM CROWL'S GHOST
THE DEAD SEXTON
THE DREAM
SQUIRE TOBY'S WILL
THE WHITE CAT OF DRUMGUNNIOL
SIR DOMINICK'S BARGAIN: A LEGEND OF DUNORAN
HYACINTH O'TOOLE

LIST OF TALES IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

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WICKED CAPTAIN WALSHAWE, OF WAULING

The Poems

Warrington Place, Dublin, where Le Fanu moved after his marriage to Susanna Bennett in 1844

THE POETRY OF SHERIDAN LE FANU

BEATRICE: A VERSE DRAMA IN TWO ACTS
DUAN NA CLAEV — THE LEGEND OF THE GLAIVE
THE HERO DEVOTES HIMSELF
THE SONG OF THE SPIRITS
THE CROMLECH
THORGIL AND HIS GLAIVE
TIR NA N-OGE — THE LAND OF THE YOUNG
FIONULA
SHAMUS O'BRIEN AND OTHER POEMS
PHAUDHRIG CROHOORE
MOLLY, MY DEAR
ABHAIN AU BHUIDEIL: ADDRESS OF A DRUNKARD TO A BOTTLE OF WHISKEY.
SONG: THE AUTUMN LEAF WAS FALLING
MEMORY
THE STREAM
A DOGGREL IN A DORMANT-WINDOW

BEATRICE: A VERSE DRAMA IN TWO ACTS

ACT I.

PROLOGUE.

IN Venice, in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, in the Ducal Palace, in the series of the Doges' portraits, occurs a blank space with this inscription:—"Hic est locus Marini Falieri, decapitati pro criminibus." His half-brother Andrea Faliero, suspected but not convicted of complicity in his treason, suffered the confiscation of all his lands and goods, and a sentence, under pain of death to remain within the liberties of Venice. His noble wife died soon after, in a convent; and he, with his infant daughter, repaired to the island of Torcello, where working in his boat as a fisherman, he maintained himself to his death. His daughter Beatrice having been, by a strange adventure, lost to him in her sixteenth year, he left none on earth of his name and lineage.

Palazzo on the Canale Grande.

CHORUS.
Sad night is o'er the city of the Isles,
And o'er a palace that amid her glooming
With a radiant halo smiles,
While music from its windows booming
Floats the voice of masque and measure
Through distant domes and marble piles,
And hymns the jubilee of youth and pleasure.

Between the ripple dimly plashing,
And the dark roof looming high,
Lost in the funereal sky,

Like many-coloured jewels flashing,
Small lamps in loops and rosaries of fire,
Verdant and blood-red, trembling, turning —
Yellow and blue — in the deep water burning,
From dark till dawning
Illumine all the wide concave,
And plash and stain the marble and the wave.
From balconies in air,

Th’ emblazoned silken awning
Flows like a lazy sail;
And gondoliers down there,
And masks upon the stair,
Hear music swelling o’er them like a gale.
Italian grace and gaiety,
And silver-bearded policy,
Princes and soldiers, sage and great,
The craft and splendour of the State,
Proud dames, and Adria’s fair daughters,
The sirens of Venetian waters,
Beautiful as summer dreams
Dreamed in haunted forest glade,
By silvery streams in leafy gleams,
Floating through the awful shade.

The noble palace peopled was right meetly,
And in its wide saloons the dance went featly,
And high above the hum
Swelled the thunder and the hoot
Of theorbo and viol, of the hautboy and the flute,
And the roaring of the drum.

SCENE.

A room in the same Palazzo, apart from the Masques and Dancers.

(Young Julio Contarini, leaning against a pillar, looks sadly through the window, his arms folded and his mask in his hand.)

FRANCESCO CORNARO. Old Andrea Aldini, dead at last!
Some pretty portraits and originals,
Ha, ha! have lost a master. Died this evening
About sunset.

JULIO. One old fool less in Venice.

FRANCESCO. Nay, he'll be missed, — missed at the Faro table.
Ha, ha, ha! Missed at other places too.
Made all he could of life — no fool, think I —
Eat his peach to the stone — ah, ha!

JULIO. Play out
The game! still, where the flowers and music were,
Linger, in deepening solitude and shadow,
And see the last lamp out?

FRANCESCO Per Bacco! yes.
Bravo! Amen, say I!

JULIO. The revel o'er,
Good bye! glide out, and home, and come no more —
Gape under fathoms of oblivion —
Turn up no more, save for a year or two,
In young men's jibing talk?

FRANCESCO. Each has his turn.

JULIO. The moon is low already. The sky, how
clear;
The stars blink strangely.

FRANCESCO. ‘Twill be sultry weather.

JULIO *(looking to the sky)*. Up there’s a mighty
allegory.

FRANCESCO. Ay, sir, for lovers and astrologers.
But wherefore here, signor? The dancers miss you.

JULIO. I miss not them.

FRANCESCO. Come, come, you are no cynic.
Music and tread of dancers in the ear — Come! this is life!

JULIO. And life’s a bitter pill.

FRANCESCO. Pish! affectation! come! It is enchanting.

JULIO. Hear — see — wonder — how beautiful it is!
The sneering laughter — whispered lust — pastiles —
And drilled musicians — waxlights — rustling silks —
Better the scent of wild flowers on the air,
The tune of nightingales and ring of waves,
And simple love under the kind, cold moon.
I’m tired.

FRANCESCO. And so am I.

JULIO. Of me? I’m going.

FRANCESCO. What! going?

JULIO. Ay, Francesco, cap and mantle,
Going. —

FRANCESCO. To moonlight and to simple love?

JULIO. I like to be alone — I choose to think.

FRANCESCO. I could say where — ha! But I must not tease.

JULIO. Ay, amen! To the devil if you please —
To Pluto, signor, so I go alone.
Farewell, Franceso.

FRANCESCO. Fare ye well. He’s gone.
(Exit JULIO.

SCENE.

The open sea near Venice. JULIO *is seen alone in his gondola rowing slowly*,

CHORUS.
Here we hover, here we trace
Contarini’s wondrous grace,
As across the mirror wide,
Like a phantom of the tide,
Boat and hero silent glide,

Sweeping slowly, far from shore,
Darkest sea with flashing oar —
In that shadow, in that beam,
Now behold him like a dream.

Dark locks, many a curling fold,
Such as young Antinous wore,
Touched with lights of misty gold,
Softly throw their shadow o'er
A broad low brow with pride o'erfraught —
Brow like ivory sculptor-wrought
Into beauteous curves of thought;
Oval face of Moorish tint,
Features wellnigh feminine,
Chiselled with a touch so fine,
So exquisite in every line;
Pencilled eyebrow, dreamy lash,
Carmine lip, with dark moustache,
And haughty smile of pearly glint.

Soft as night, those eyes of his,
Gloomed with shadows of the abyss;
Eyes of darkness, large and deep,
Where fires unfathomed play and sleep —
Sometimes drowsed in haughty dreams,
Sometimes flaming cold and wild,
They've with fatal purpose smiled,
Or darkly glowed with passion's gleams.

What their colour, what their light?
Canst thou fix the hues of night,
Or colour of the thunder cloud
Wherefrom the lightning leaps?
Or as the wave beneath the steeps
Where midnight blackness broods and sleeps,

Into hidden moonlight dashes,
Into Sudden splendour flashes —
And swallowed straight in blacker night
Blinds the gazer’s dazzled sight.

SCENE.

The Island of Torcello. Moonlight.

(The fisherman’s easement from the rocks and myrtles above, overlooking the water; the light of a lamp shines from it; a flight of stone steps leads down to the water from the door of the building.)
(Julio’s gondola; he ceases rowing and gazes.)

JULIO. How pretty this! the waters seek
So wooingly this bosky creek;
How lovingly the moonlight falls
On leafy cliff and cottage walls!
How all its peaks and edges glimmer,
And all its myrtles softly shimmer,
Rear’d of shadows and of light,
Sweet creation of the night!
From the rock’s projecting crest,
Venturous as a martlet’s nest,
The cot o’erhangs the water’s breast.
Nets are clinging on the wall,
Spars and tackle loosely lie,
And the patched boat high and dry,
Gaff and anchor rusted all;
O’er the waters softly swelling,
This thread of light, so pure and shy,
Seaward slanting from on high,
Glimmers from a fisher’s dwelling.

(The casement opens, and Beatrice, expecting her fathers return, sings a hymn.)

Hush! oh ye billows,
Hush! oh thou wind,
Watch o’er us, angels,
Mary, be kind!
Fishermen followed
The steps of the Lord;
Oft in their fishing boats
Preached He the Word.

Pray for us, Pietro,
Pray for us, John,
Pray for us, Giacomo,
Zebedee’s son.

If it be stormy,
Fear not the sea;
Jesus upon it
Is walking by thee.

Billows be gentle,
Soft blow the wind,
Watch o’er us, angels,
Mary, be kind!

(The voice ceases.)

JULIO. Sure never voice so wildly sweet
Did the ear of listener greet.
(Sings, answering her.)

Soft be the billows,
Gentle the wind,
Angels watch over thee,
Mary, be kind!

(BEATRICE comes to the casement, and looks out timidly in the light of the lamp.)

JULIO. By heaven! she is a pretty creature;
What a charm in every feature!

BEATRICE. That is not my father's boat,
Nor Leonardo's voice.

JULIO *(to himself)*. I vote
We try a stave, for Cupid's wings
Waft music as they fly. She sings!

BEATRICE *(singing)*. *If* thou be'st honest,
Stretch to thy oar,
Give thee good night, friend,
Come here no more.
(She closes the casement and goes back, the lamp still burning.)

JULIO. Angels and fairest saints of heaven!
Elysian dream!
Oh! could I deem
So beautiful a face,
So sweet and sad a grace
To mortal ever given!
If I be honest? — ay, amen!
I will be honest, so you come again.
I'll watch and listen for a glance,

Or song — and pray to Venus or to Chance.
I’d count the watches of the long night o’er
To hear or see thee, wondrous maid, once more.

(Folds his cloak about him; and, resting his cheek upon his hand, watches the casement from which issues the ray of the lamp, but in vain — she comes not again.)

(He sings).

A siren once her sea-girt home
With wild notes haunting,
Her spell upon the wingèd foam
And breezes chanting,
By moonlight, as he floated near,
With a sweet madness thralled the ear
Of a lonely gondolier.

While he listens, while he dreams,
On billows rocking,
Sweeter every moment seems
That siren’s mocking.
Other song will ne’er be dear,
Or singer to the heart or ear
Of that lonely gondolier.

Shadowed by that listening isle,
By her enchanted,
Her charm and music still beguile
His senses haunted.
And if that Spirit, strangely dear,
Will sing no more, no more appear,
Dies that lonely gondolier.

(Listening within, her finger to her lip.)

BEATRICE. Who can be the gondolier,
Whom I see not, only hear?
What can he want, the saucy youth?
“Appear” and “sing,” not I, in truth.
(A pause)
His voice was wondrous sweet and clear.

(As he in his boat slowly recedes, JULIO sings again.)

JULIO. A siren once her sea-girt home
With wild notes haunting,
Her spell upon the winged foam
And breezes chanting,
By moonlight, as he floated near,
With a sweet madness thralled the ear
Of a lonely gondolier.

(The notes die away in the increasing distance.
She listens for some time.)

BEATRICE. And so the foolish dream is done;
I’m glad the saucy fellow’s gone.
(A pause.)
Glad, too, he lighted here by night,
He’ll never find it in daylight.
Yes, glad — right glad — he’ll come no more.
(Listens for a longer time.)
And so, the foolish dream *is* o’er,
’Tis very well — it was not meet,
(Another pause as she listens vainly. She sighs.
And the song was wondrous sweet!
(Opens the casement and looks out. A pause.)

Quite gone — I'm glad — it was too bold.
(A pause.)
And yet the song was passing sweet!
Thou tuneful gondolier! whom sight
Of mine shall ne'er behold;
For thy sweet song — goodnight!
(She closes the casement.)

SCENE.

The Island of Torcello. Sunset. The fisherman's dwelling as before.

(BEATRICE in the casement, pensive, leaning on her hand.)

CHORUS.
There she sits with sea-gray eyes
Gazing o'er the sea,
In sunset dreams, beneath the skies
That dreamlike flash and flee.
And floats there in the fading light
A tender thought of yesternight?
Steals there the cold air along
A phantom echo of that song,
From the region ghostly high,
From the land of memory,
Where all things live that seem to die?

Slowly shifting into rest,
Like the vapours of the west,
In many a hue and fold,
Moves her saddened reverie,
Whose moods may thus be told.

THE REVERIE OF BEATRICE.

The sea-breeze wakens clear and cold
Over the azure wide;
Before his breath in threads of gold
The ruddy ripples glide,
And racing for the shingle
Their crystal chimes commingle,
As silver bells
In Paduan dells
From flying fleeces tingle.
O rising of the winds, O flow of the waves!
And the murmurous music of cliffs and caves,
And the billows that travel so far to die
In foam, on the loved shore where they lie.
I lean my cold cheek on my hand,
And as a child, with wide-set eyes,
Listens in a dim surprise
To some high story
Of grief and glory
It cannot surely understand;
Like that awed child,
To the Adriatic music wild
I listen, in a rapture lonely,
Not understanding, guessing only,
Its golden meaning not for me;
Letting my fancies come and go,
And fall and flow,
With the eternal singing sea.

(The gondola JULIO CONTARINI is seen approaching; it glides into the wooded creek. He is disguised as a minstrel, and, standing in the boat, lifts his cap.)

JULIO. Donna in that casement high,
Wilt thou brook my minstrelsy;
Shall I sing — or may I try?

BEATRICE. And what art thou?

JULIO. A gondolier,
Who can make music if thou'lt hear;
A wandering minstrel, who will sing
For a *baiôcco,* anything.

BEATRICE. *(Aside) 'Tis he.* It is that voice so clear.
(Aloud) If my father find thee here,
Stranger, it will cost thee dear.

JULIO. What guerdon can I pay too dear
For the chance of being here,
Such as thou art stealing near?

BEATRICE. *(Aside)* I'll hear him sing — I'm surely
right —
'Twas he who sang but yesternight!
(Aloud) There's a *baiocco* — so — let's hear
A song about a gondolier
And a sea-nymph singing near.
Have you none such?

(From the window she throws the coin, which he, receiving, pierces with a blow of his daggerpoint, and kissing it, attaches it to a golden chain that he draws from under his "tabârro," and replaces next his heart. Beatrice laughs.)

JULIO. Her laughter sweeter is than singing —
How cheerily it thrills!
Running music in its rills —
How sparkling and how ringing.
Laugh on, laugh on, thou lovely one.

BEATRICE. And how, sir, could I choose but smile
When I saw a coin so vile
Hung upon a golden chain,
Within a tabard to remain,
Like a relic or an order!
Could Paliaccio aught absurder?

(She laughs again.)

JULIO. *(Sings)* The gift the gondolier has gained,
Dropped by her so laughingly,
A talisman until he die,
Worshipped with a kiss and sigh,
By her is yet disdained.

The folly she disdained,
If yet a folly, is a sign
Of a madness half divine —
Thine the cause, the madness mine!
And yet it is disdained.

The folly she disdained!
Oh! like the heart he laid it to,
The homely coin is metal true,
And like his heart is wounded through,
And like his heart is chained.

BEATRICE. Signor, thou art no gondolier —
No golden chains such people wear.
Oh! why didst thou come here?

JULIO. As a spirit cannot sleep,
Cannot stay, but from the deep
Rises at a spell,
So, enchantress, here am I.

BEATRICE. Ay, here thou art, but why
And who?

JULIO. Who? it matters not to tell.
And why?— ’Tis loving thee so well

BEATRICE. In an old ballad I have read
What flatteries a gallant said,
And turned a maiden’s foolish head.

JULIO. If thou knewest in my strange wooing,
In this voyage of my love,
How near I sail to my undoing,
By my Guardian Saint above!
I swear thou wouldst believe my love.

BEATRICE. Art thou, then, that gondolier
Who last night was singing here;
Tell me ere we part?

JULIO. I am, indeed, that gondolier,
And thou that fatal siren art.

CHORUS.
And so the selfsame way,
From day to day;
Sometimes in blithesome morn,
Sometimes by twilight lorn,
Or when the red sun braves
Westward the blazing sea,
Floating on a sky of waves —
Or in night's lonely noon,
When wide in starlight quivers the lagoon —
He, like a vision, came and went,
Or as sweet music surges and is spent.
Visits made in mystery,
Suddenness and secrecy,
For he knew his fathers pride,
Ere Beatrice should be his bride,
Would lay her dead beneath the tide.

SCENE.

The same, on the next evening. JULIO AND BEATRICE *conversing as before.*

JULIO. And does thy father, all the year,
He and thy mother still live here?

BEATRICE. My mother's dead —

JULIO. Oh! is she dead?
What has my careless folly said
I would not stir one grief in thee
For all the treasures on the sea.

BEATRICE. Not grief, but joy for evermore
That she to death is wed.
We say they die who go before,
’Tis we who stay are dead.
The earth her mouldering image shrouds
But robed above the golden clouds,
She lifts adoring hands and eyes
To God, all glorious, good, and wise;
And with the angels white and high
She walks the flooring of the sky —
With crown of light,
In robe of white,
Where rolls the chant of victory.

CHORUS.
He *knew* what *she* knew not, the story
Of her lineage and its fall —
Of Faliero’s ancient glory —
Of the Treason and the fall.
Little dared he to her tell,
But she came to like him well;
And from her rocky city citadel,
Above the waters’ sway and swell,
To him she would the simple love
Of all her innocent life run o’er.

SCENE.

The same by moonlight, some nights later.

(Beatrice relating to Julio how with her father and Leonardo, she sailed in the fishing boat to visit the convent where her mother is buried.)

BEATRICE. They lifted me down from the giddy plank
Into the boat that rose and sank:
The eager sails that rattle and slap
With thundering flap,
At a turn of the tiller filled at last,
And stooped the mast
As the wet rope raced through the mooring ring.
On the mad waves their boat was free;
And like a wild-bird on the wing,
With sudden dive and soaring swing,
Still bending with the breeze away,
Away she swept on the laughing sea
'Mong waves and romping wind and spray.

Away the dancing island goes,
The sleeping headland dipt and rose,
The billows, that wild creatures be
Of the hearty and wondrous sea,
In sport and power
Welcome the boat with snort and plash
And riotous dash,
And hail of foamy shower.
High, spring high
Surge in your roaring glee
Fly, foam, fly!
And whirling mist of the sea!

The gusty wind be-stunned my ear
And drenched with pelting brine my hair;
Delightful were to me
The frown and the flash of the billows free
And the swell of the breezy sea!
Laughing with tremulous fear and delight
Salt on my cheek and salt on my lips;
With the joyful grips of my fingertips

I held the oozy gunwale tight.
When on the shore she furled her wing
How beautiful was everything!
Upon the mountain, sun and shade,
A splendour drowned in darkness made,
Purple and gold all blurred and barred;
And fluttering wild flowers' flashing sheen,
Blue, argent, crimson, round were starred,
Like fairy fires beneath the green;
Oh! sweet was all I saw to me,
And all I heard an ecstasy!

The winsome wind in all its moods,
The warble and the coo of woods,
The darkened sward and fragrant air,
The massy vault, the dripping well,
Whose darksome drops in music fell
Like gliding beads of murmured prayer.
Where cypresses and long grass wave,
A young nun took me by the hand,
And passing many a grave,
With a sweet sadness softly said,
"Here, little girl, thy mother's laid;
Oh, sister, pray that I
As well may live, as happy die."
She looked on the grave with a gentle sigh,
I often think she wished to die;
And for these words so kind and sweet
I could have knelt and kissed her feet.
She was so young, that though a child,
I felt she clung to me;
Sad was her face and never smiled,
Yet smiling seemed to be.
And oft when pale the evening skies,
And fading hues and outlines swim,

When stars are soft and waves grow dim,
That pretty lady's deep gray eyes
In twilight hours before me rise.
While homeward sailed our boat before
The sweet air blowing from the shore,
I silent gazed the gunwale o'er
On all that glided from my view,
The darkening trees and gables gray,
While our boat swept moaning through
The waters of the bay.

While like a voice of other years
Returning in a dream,
So far, so sweet, and sad it fell
And moving, why I could not tell,
With its mysterious harmonies,
And faint remembered memories,
The fountain of my tears;
From the gray belfry o'er the trees
Glided down the summer breeze
The grave note of the bell.

CHORUS.
And when the low farewell was spoken,
And when her light was gone,
And when the spell and dream were broken
And sea and sky were lone,
Looking 'twixt the sea and sky
With desert gaze and weary sigh,
She holds communion with her soul.
And thus, alone, debateth she, —
"A worker of mosaic, he;
Or a carver fine, maybe,
Of those charmèd heads and flowers,
Snakes and birds in marble bowers

I have pondered o’er for hours?
And does he love me as he says?
Or — are his ways like others’ ways?
And will my hero come tomorrow —
Will he come again?
Oh! why is love so like a sorrow —
Hope so nearly pain?”
All on her hand she laid her head;
And with these thoughts her young brain rife,
Light slumber o’er her little bed
Winged away her waking care;
But quiet days for her were fled;
Without him sea and sky were dead;
And before she was aware,
He grew the music of her life.

ACT II.

CHORUS.
A lovely Queen, her life laid down,
Lies here in splendid state;
Upon her temples cold, the crown
Shows strangely fair and great.
Her lieges come, her lieges go,
And early pass, and late,
To look upon her, fallen so
From her high estate.
Beneath the starry tapers greeted
By the frozen eyes,
Where darkly in the coffin sheeted
The glimmering pallor lies —
They see the lines of beauty rule,
Where all its glow is ended,
Corruption that is beautiful,
And sadness that is splendid.
In marble beauty night and day,
E’en thus was Venice seen;
Thus in the death of spirit lay
The Adriatic queen.

Man upon his journey hies —
A chequered course and variable,
Walking through life as he is shown
By gleams through yawning darkness thrown
By lights that fall from Paradise,
And hues that cross from hell.

Can we read his words or ways?
Whence he acts, or whereto thinks?
A vapour changing as we gaze,

An utterance of the sphinx.
Still the man our judgment baulks.
Good is he? or, is he evil?
At his right an Angel walks,
At his left a Devil.

Beside that beauty dead and cold,
With word of power and vengeful hand,
I smite the coffin with my wand;
As Death and Sin thou workest there.
Rise up, thou living monster old,
Reveal thy presence in the air!

SCENE.

A gorgeous chamber in the Palazzo of NEROEA *overlooking the Canal.* NEROEA *alone.*

CHORUS.
An icy fear and rapture dread
Ravish the heart and warn the head!
This Wonder is no mortal Leman,
Spirit of the starry host —
Lais — Cleopatra’s ghost —
Saddest angel — fairest Demon!
Lo! all human beauties, paling
In her lovely splendour, wane.
’Tis some antique dream exhaling
From the dead Apelles’ brain!
Fell beauty! — Love akin to hate,
Indolent and coy she sate:
Loose her girdle o’er her hips —
Luxury in every wile —
A mystic pain — a loving guile,

The scarlet scorn of cruel lips,
The pearly danger of her smile —
Her downward smile and glance oblique
Evil — yet Madonna-like!
Her girlish bosom's waving swell,
Her cheek's shy dimple, like the play
Of waters darkling in a well,
Lure not a lover but a prey.
In all her lithe limbs' modulations,
In the proud fulness of her throat,
In all her throbbing undulations,
The sorceries of beauty float.

Light at every stir up-throwing,
At every stir new marvels showing,
With enamelled pictures glowing,
Diamond-set and golden-chased,
Heroes of Venetian story,
In loose chains of linked medallions,
Loop the lithe round of her waist —
Riches floated here in galleons,
China silk and webs of gold
Round her throw an orient glory.
Green and crimson jewels burning
Glare and vanish at each turning,
Flash and vanish in each fold;
As the fiery eyes of snakes
Glide through nooks of flowery brakes,
Glare and vanish in each fold.

She was a deep thought of the Muse,
Whom canvas, marble, words refuse:
Striving what she was to tell
Is but a yearning and farewell —
And so — mute as first it rose,

The vision brief and broken,
With me to darkness goes
Unspoken —
But softly as an Orient Saint
Shadowed on a holy floor,
On memory that thrill and taint
Will smile and burn for evermore.

Who enters? Lo!
Passing phantom-like the door
A silent Monk stands on the floor.
Is he anchorite or devil?
High and gaunt this form of evil
Gliding noiselessly has sought her,
As a shadow on the water.
Marble-like beneath his cowl
Gleams the curve of his anguine scowl,
The broad cold eyes — that greenly stare,
And ever seem to search and smile,
And find in all things something vile —
Like insult and pollution scare.
She did not mean to greet him here —
She rose as people rise in fear.
He stood there in his garment sooty,
She stood gleaming in her glory,
Face to face, like Death and Beauty,
In a painted allegory.
(A pause, during which she gases on him.)

NEROEA. How earnest thou here?

SPALATRO. Your signoria’s order.

NEROEA. I know thee not.

SPALATRO. Lady, thou know'st me not.
And yet,
Lady, thou know'st me well.

NEROEA. Who called thee hither?

SPALATRO. Giacopo.

NEROEA. — Then thou art —

SPALATRO. Fra Spalatro.

NEROEA. Hast thou a sign?

SPALATRO. Thy ring, signora! Take it.

NEROEA. Ha! yes, I've heard. Be frank with
me — fear nothing.

SPALATRO. I fear nothing.

NEROEA. Nor I. Listen. My lover —
My noble lover — by a base girl cozened

SPALATRO. Alas! Alas!

NEROEA. By a base hussy in
A fisher's cot —

SPALATRO. Insufferably queer!

NEROEA. My own — mine always — for a year and
more —
Mine passionately — till — of late — and now —

(She pauses.)

SPALATRO. And now is cooling? Thine — and — some one else's?
What can I do?

NEROEA. What canst thou do? Well, sir?

SPALATRO. A philtre?

NEROEA. No.

SPALATRO. Find out who is the rival?

NEROEA. I know it.

SPALATRO. By my art inform thee how
'Twill end?

NEROEA. Come, come. Can thine art do no more?

SPALATRO. Many things.

NEROEA. Name them.

SPALATRO. I would first know, lady
What thou requir'st.

NEROEA. Why fear'st thou to say all,
If thou mean'st all?

SPALATRO. We all are cowards, lady.

NEROEA. Cowards? Thou sayest thou fearest nothing.

SPALATRO. Nothing — nothing! never! so long as I am safe.

NEROEA. Safe — and thy trade?

SPALATRO. Safe — because, being wise,
I am coward; being coward — safe.

NEROEA. Go on.

SPALATRO. Oh! not before your ladyship.

NEROEA. Thy life is in my hand.
(Spalatro smiles, and bows very low.)
Is poison sure
As witchcraft, villain? Ay, I've said it — speak!

SPALATRO. Some people think it surer — that is all.

NEROEA. Go on.

SPALATRO. I follow — rather — step by step.

NEROEA. Go on.

SPALATRO. Nay, not before your ladyship.

NEROEA. What? By St. Mark, wilt hold thy peace! Shall I
Play tempter to the Fiend, and drop again
Into his hollow ear his damned suggestion,
And wring my heart in syllables of terror,
That thou may'st smile? Gaunt blasphemy, away!
And elsewhere, saint-like, cowl thy murderous head,
And look like hell, and smile, and smell of death.
Oh God! Why did I call thee here?

(NEROEA passes through the curtain to the balcony.)

SPALATRO. Brava!
Ever the same. They'd murder prettily.
For *us,* the danger and the mire of murder;
For them its profit and romance. Is't so?
Yea, by my soul! Thou'lt put thy dainty hand to't,
Beautiful Cannibal! I know thy kind.
None of thine airs with me! I seat me here.
She'll come back presently in her right mind;
And at my feet, a penitent — henceforth
Sit gentle, and as she ought to be, afraid.

SCENE.

The balcony; NEROEA *alone*, *leaning over it. Moonlight.*

NEROEA. Ah! ha, ha ha! Thank God! The air, the moonlight.
Oh! cooling floods, pour drowning o’er the fire
Of my hot temples, and my wild heart’s bounds
Against this close-ribbed cage. Away, away!
To die is better. Stars! — cold eyes of heaven
That wake and look and wake and never feel,
Is there no pity? Spirits! angels! — nothing,
No pity? Is there duty, truth, or peace?
Cares the great God for me or what I do?
Is there peace anywhere? tremendous God!
Is time, from birth to death an agony?
Were I a god, I could not deal in riddles;
And with unreal lights and voices scare
Poor creatures, starless, on a waste benighted.
The boatman’s daughter? — the boatman’s innocent daughter? —
That drowned herself for love. I’ve thought of her
For many a day. How beautiful she looked!
And God is truth they say. She could not be
Unhappy, sure, and look so like an Angel!
And to my aunt I said, “Preach as they may,
’Tis well — that girl did right — the girl’s in heaven!”
My poor aunt at her prayers — good, narrow soul,
So cold, and I — God makes us differently —
So reptile-cold some — some of fire — all fire!
The fire — the worm — the worm that dieth not —
The fire — the fire. And I who said she was
In heaven; that she did right — lo! here am I,
All lost for him! and he all lost to me —
And here am I, and there the dark sea sleeps.
’Twas in the night she did it. What am I?
She dared it, all alone, poor soul! From night

To darker night, so easy — and I dare not.
How black it looks, that blind, remorseless mirror.
Oh, death! Oh, death! Oh anodyne appalling!
Once quaffed, then cold for ever! I'm no more
The brave girl I once was — a coward grown.
I that was once so brave; yet if I live,
She cannot — no, she cannot. Fool! she cannot.

SCENE.

The same gorgeous chamber in the Palazzo of NEROEA, *overlooking the canal.*

(An hour later. SPALATRO, smiling, his hand on the door at which he stands. NEROEA, pale and seated near a lamp, looking sternly at him)

SPALATRO. *Now*, madam, all is clear. No oracles.
Each understands the other. It shall be —
Ay it shall come to pass, not by my hand,
But by a sure one, lady.

NEROEA. There, there, there — go!

SPALATRO. Thou know'st young Giacopo?

NEROEA. For God's sake, go.

SPALATRO. Your Excellenza's most devoted friend,
And grateful slave, I do obey thee, lady;
So — fare thee well, and Fortune grant thee — all things. — (*Exit* SPALATRO.

(An interval of silence, during which she gazes wildly at the door through which he departed.)

NEROEA.— ’Tis gone — and I am of the dead — alone.
I’ve talked with horror. They have murdered
me.
I fear myself and walk the world a ghost.
Hark! There he goes, a message on the wave,
And leaves me here this hour’s eternal slave.

SCENE.

The Island of Torcello. Moonlight. (The fisherman’s cottage; a small lamp in the casement. The door is open. BEATRICE leans upon the doorpost, her hand from within upon the hatch; JULIO on the rude steps, without, his hand on hers.)

CHORUS.
As on that night they talked alone,
Changed, on a sudden, Julio’s tone;
.Paled his cheek, and thrilled his tone
As if a changeless dark or light —
Deathless summer — mortal blight —
The chance or fear of all his life
With that hour began or ended,
On a girlish word depended.
“Oh! Beatrice, be thou my wife!”
Well had the tiny shaft been shot,
And Cytherea’s graceful son,
Laughing saw his work was done;
And in a true love knot
Tied up all his arrows now,
Fancy-tipt and fiery-shafted,
Smiling too, unstrung his bow.

Through her heart the sweet voice wafted
O’er the frowning hills of life —
Down the shadowy steeps of life — A call of unseen Fate resembled.
Then upleapt a sudden fear,
Love for a moment chilled and trembled.
She heard the voice so sweetly rise,
Like a bugle in the skies,
And she looked in Julio’s eyes
Now so awful, yet so dear.

Days of childhood glad and kind
Away with all their treasures fleet,
Like early bloom on autumn wind,
Whirled before her pausing feet.
Vanishes the cottage wall,
The homely stair, the roses — all —
And the old lamp’s friendly spark —
The sameness and the safety o’er her —
And the great wide world before her
Flashes through the weltering dark!

Long although the journey — colder,
Darker than these fears of mine —
With my hand upon thy shoulder
And the other locked in thine;
And my head upon thy breast,
All is light and all is rest!
So she thought, and both were still,
Then she, trembling, sighed, “I will.”

SCENE.

The Island of Torcello. The night following.

(BEATRICE is seen approaching the window of a ruinous building.)

CHORUS.
In red and golden billows
Across the waning skies
The sunset glory wafted
In eastern darkness dies:
Soft floats the gray of twilight
Against the rosy tide,
And now the hosts of heaven
The welkin radiant ride.
From Lido and Murano
The bells have ceased their ringing,
In groves of island gardens
The nightingales are singing;
The cheer of distant mariners,
The ripple of the sea,
The song upon the waters
Sound sweet and lonelily.
The Moon reginal sailing
Down Adria’s mighty lake
A silver largess showers,
That sparkles in her wake.

Cowering from the silvery beams,
The shadowed evergreens among,
Mid leafy crags and dewy bowers,
And ruin-haunting flowers,
Grimly couchant, dreams
A building of another age
Bowed and furrowed as a sage,
And as a monster strong;
And through their shattered sockets deep,
Flashed by a hellish furnace,
Its wicked windows wince and peep

From under their beetling cornice.
Here in these glimmering dungeons sunk,
Dwells Spalatro, mysterious monk.
Holy, perchance, or darkly wise,
Some hinted he projected gold,
Some whispered that he poisons sold,
And up and down the gamut told
Of Magic's impious mysteries.
About this Friar
All fain had known — or more or less.
But the web of thought for all was ravelled,
They could not tell,
They dared not guess
For his knowledge where he travelled,
Than the door of Heaven higher,
Or lower than the gates of Hell.
With Spalatro there dwelt another
Slave — or brother,
An ugly, loathsome wight,
All as Gehazi white
With mildew of a leprosy.
Him Spalatro, with cynic joy,
Called his Beauty and his Boy.
He looked the child of Death and Sin;
Bald were his leprous head and chin,
Impish the bestial peak of his ear,
His hanging mouth and goggle leer.
O'er his warped shape this hideous knave
Wore the red frock of a galley slave.
He ever busy, ever by,
Hung like his parted shadow nigh,
That could not quit him quite.
Glooming, hovering hither and forth,
Now stretched a still stain on the earth,
Watching him as he walked or stood,
Watching as he pondered — or passed,

With the glare of a Fiend in servitude,
Who in his master eyes a prey,
Will be commanded, will obey,
But will suffer him never to win away,
Knowing well that his labour o'er,
His hour of lordship will come at last;
Will come, and change no more.
In those lone, cavernous rooms,
Like the foul spirits in the tombs,
By that furnace throbbing redly,
Among the phials sealed with clay,
Glasses crooked and ashes gray,
Pottering o'er their business deadly,
The two thus smouldered life away.

The glow this night
Of furnace light,
While around the moonlight reigns,
Trembles through the deep-barred panes
That stare, like the eyes of a sullen beast,
Blood red upon the holy east.
(BEATRICE taps at the window.)

SPALATRO. What makest thou, tapping at my window, hey?

BEATRICE. Pardon, good father, I know not
where else
In all the world to look for help.

SPALATRO. Ay, help!
Ay, always help. The same cry, ever help!

BEATRICE. My soul is troubled, and thy holy
counsel —

SPALATRO. Bah! Holy Policinello! Penance —
shrift!
How know'st thou I'm in orders? If I be,
'Tis all one; for I'm here by the Abbot's order,
Preparing medicines, not to hear confessions.
Trouble! ha, ha! We've all our troubles, Baby.
Go to the Carmelites.
(Shutting the window.)

BEATRICE. One moment, Father!

SPALATRO. Moment! I crave my meat like any
other;
I must work for it. Life's made up of moments.

BEATRICE. Here, Father, are two *sequins* — I've
no more.
Oh! sir, for Jesus' love, do not refuse me.
(He takes the money.)
Oh! thanks, good Signor!

SPALATRO. But I can't confess thee.

BEATRICE.— 'Tis no confession— 'tis an omen, sir.
I'm frighted by an omen, and implore —

SPALATRO. Omen! what omen! Come, come,
in a word.

BEATRICE. A dream, good sir.

SPALATRO. Ho! dreams! and what’s thy name?

BEATRICE.— ’Tis Beatrice, Signor.

SPALATRO. SO, Beatrice,
Whose daughter art thou, girl, hey?

BEATRICE. Leonardo’s,
The fisherman’s, who dwells hard by.

SPALATRO. I know,
I’ve heard — *(aside — By heaven, ’tis she)* — an
honest man.
His cottage hangs above the water, eh?
A worthy fisherman as there’s in Venice;
And a steep flight of steps down to the water;
I’ve seen his cottage in the creek hard by.
Is it not so?

BEATRICE. Just so — *(Aside — How friendly grows
he!)*

SPALATRO. *(Aside — Ha! by St. Mark, I knew it!)* Aye, I know
Thy mother’s dead? I know — and now, good child,
Pray what’s the matter?

BEATRICE. In my sleep a dream there came,
Voices talking first I heard,
Talking of a wedding coming,
Of my wedding, as I think.
“With a Doge’s ring he’ll wed me,”
Said a voice I thought was mine!

’Twas not I who spoke, and yet
I thought within myself ’twas mine.

SPALATRO. Oh! ho!
By Lido many a Doge’s ring
Under the surges’ boom and swing,
Mid the dip and wheel of the sea-bird’s wing,
Full fathom five,
Deeper than maiden cares to dive,
Lies low.

BEATRICE. And my mother was beside me,
White and cold, and smiling sweetly,
Like an angel, smiling sweetly.
Blessed mother, white and cold,
In a nun-like robe of white —
White and cold as if cold moonlight,
Warp and woof, were spun and shuttled,
Cold the hand she stirred my hand with.
Up got I, and went forth with her.
Smiling, white and cold, she led me
Down the steps and into the ripple.
Nothing felt I of the water;
Though deeper into the water,
Side by side, we trod together —
Deeper and deeper — beneath the water.
And when I waked, I felt the water
From my face receding cold,
From my face and feet receding.
Water over my bosom gliding,
Coldly from my limbs subsiding,
Gliding like my sleep from me,
And while from death I was emerging
From the wide and lonely sea,
Gentlest winds and waves were dirgeing

With a far, faint melody —
A far, faint, fearful minstrelsy,
O'er the dead men in the sea.

SPALATRO. A broken dream, and fancies wild
Away with them, thou silly child!

BEATRICE. I cannot, Father— 'tis in vain,
The fancies of my dream remain
Wheeling wildly in my brain,
Till my eyes are drowsed with pain.

SPALATRO. Into the sea, and down the stairs?
Folly, child! Go — say thy prayers.

BEATRICE. Stay, Father! When I try to
pray,
'Tis lips and beads, and only they,
Thought and spirit are far away!

SPALATRO. Try it again; the saints will soften;
A good thing can't be tried too often;
Ave and pater — every tittle;
Try *all* the saints, the big and little.

BEATRICE. The mighty mill-wheel over-shot
With solemn feet and bearded spray
That spins and spins for aye and aye,
Ever changing, changes not,
But with circling foam and feet
Will the selfsame measure beat —
Ever coming, ever going,
Parting now, now backward flowing

So these fancies in my brain
Rise and sink, and rise again.

SPALATRO *(calling)*. Boy! how is the crucible?

BOY *(within)*. Candescent only, not yet candent.

SPALATRO. Let it burn a little stronger,
Now! — I cannot stay much longer.
What's the matter?

BEATRICE. I saw the dream 'twixt night and
morning.
Father! think you 'tis a warning?

SPALATRO. Tell me — no one hears within —
Have you harboured thought of sin?

BEATRICE. No.

SPALATRO. Come, speak truth, there's no one by!
(Aside). Pretty parrots, how they lie!

BEATRICE. No, I tell thee, Father, truly.

SPALATRO. Little rogue! why so unruly?
Think you not, I know full well
Many a thing I never tell;
How beneath a windowsill,
Myrtle-shadowed, o'er the water,
Music, on the air of night,
Rises like a sudden light;

And the Noble, pretty daughter,
Ha! the Noble whose disguise
Cheats, perchance, all other eyes,
Is seen as clear, I tell you true,
By me, as he is seen by you.

(Looking upwards.)

BEATRICE. No, Father! Mary! Mother! No!

SPALATRO. Her eyes are innocent. A good dream so,
If it means that you must die.
There, don't tremble, do not cry,
When the good hour, clothed in fear,
Of endless rapture draweth near,
Be the bless'd one old or young,
A welcome clear
The angels hear
Thro' all the bells of heaven rung —
'Twas your mother, come to tell
The tidings of that silverous bell.
Why sobbing, child?

BEATRICE. I used to see her always near,
Till the sable veil of care,
Fold by fold bedraping me,
Hid her as the cloud the star.
'Tis some evil— 'tis not she.
Hell's near us always — heaven so far!

SPALATRO. Ay, heaven so far, yet very near —
The blinking stars that now you see,
How far,
Measured by miles, each star

‘Twixt number and immensity,
Twixt thought and madness — hung they be
So many miles in space tremendous,
The living brain
Contends in vain
To seize the sum stupendous.
Yet those stars
Whose distance Time cannot repeat,
With friendly motion,
Nightly on the breast of ocean
Rock and glimmer at our feet.
(Calling) — Boy! how is it?

BOY *(within).* Well, but not ripe as yet, so please you, Father.

SPALATRO *(to BEATRICE again)*.
Not all God, nor yet all devil;
Good commanding useth evil.
Thy open casement courts communion
With the great soul of the night;
And thy spirit, held in union,
Gave sight;
As each flower, its breath exhaling,
Feeds the incense of the night;
So each soul its thought retailing
Tints and streaks its spirit-light.
With each holy aspiration,
Crossing shapes of pain and sin,
Sprung of midnight’s inspiration,
On the outer air steal in.
Thence our dreams their meanings borrow
From the sounds that not in vain,
O’er the shoreless wastes of sorrow,

O’er the furnace of all pain,
Quiver on the sleeping brain.

CHORUS.
For with the mist pale dreams looked in,
Their feet were up and down upon the stair;
Her sleep, as in the grave the sleep of sin,
Without a turning, yet with gasp and scare —
Broke never; for the spirits busy there,
Weighed on her will and made the awful air
Her prison — till she saw the long night out,
And had her warning and her doubt.

SPALATRO. I fain would help thee — only be thou frank;
Under the sacred seal — behold the tonsure.
(He withdraws his cowl.)
Thou may’st tell all; and in my ear ’tis locked
As in a kist of adamant. Besides,
My art hath told me much concerning thee.
Thou hast a lover — rogue! ah, ah! — who comes
Rowing his gondola, alone — by night,
By day — whene’er he knows old Leonardo
Is out o’ the way. He loves thee well; and thou
Lov’st him. See, I know all, or next to all.
Come, daughter, hath he talked of marriage? Say.

BEATRICE. He hath.

SPALATRO. And thou’st consented?

BEATRICE. Yes.

SPALATRO. ’Tis well —
’Tis very well! But say the day and hour,
If he hath named them, and I’ll tell thee straight
If the stars favour thee. Nay, pretty child,
Dost fear to tell me?

BEATRICE. NO, good Father, no —
Heaven knows I trust thee. He will come tonight
At twelve o’clock, and in his gondola
Convey me where a priest shall wed us.

SPALATRO. Good!
I’m glad — I’m very glad. At twelve o’clock,
No sooner, thou art sure? — ha, well! Alone, too
’Tis good. Then let me see thy hand. It is
A good hand, wench! and fortunate; the thumb
Is Venus, and these lines converging, good —
And this cross line quite excellent, beside
To-day I made, for Julio Contarini,
A youth who hath a venture for tonight,
A scheme that shows the planets all conjoin
To avour enterprise and love this night.
There, there— ’tis all most fortunate! Thy dream
Was but a cheat of envious spirits grudging
Thy coming bliss; who’d dash the interval
Although th’ event they cannot mar. Most like
The youth’s impatient — champs the iron time,
And frets and spurns against the tedious hours.
Thou’lt hear of him before the noon of night
Unless my art beguiles me. Hi thee home —
Who knows how suddenly his hasty love
May bid him to thy door? Away! The stars
Befriend thee — the good spirits greet thee — go,
In fortune’s name, be happy.
(He closes the window.)

BEATRICE. Thou good man!
Thou good Samaritan! thou comforter!
If ever blessing followed mercy’s steps,
May mine pursue thee. Now all’s bright and clear,
Joy above joy! and I am safe as though
A radiant angel took me by the hand.
Exit Beatrice.

SCENE.

The interior of Spalatro’s Laboratory. The same night and hour.

SPALATRO *(closing the window)*. —
She’s gone — damned little fool! I cannot help it.
Ho, there! Apollo! A *baiocco* — quick —
From the bag there. On with thy blue *tabarro* —
Thy cap — and get thee down — unmoor the boat —
I join thee in a moment — and we pull
Swift for the city. ’Tis just eight o’clock;
Give me yon nail and hammer; get thee gone.
(Exit ATTENDANT.

SPALATRO *pierces the coin with the nail, changes his cassock and cowl for a tunic and a cap and feather, buckles on a sword, and puts on a pair of shoes with roses, then with a short cloak and gloves on, and quite disguised, he follows to the boat.)*

SCENE.

The Piazetta. About nine o’clock. (Saunterers, music, and laughter. Enter SPALATRO from the quay alone; he pauses between the pillars and draws his cloak about him.)

SPALATRO *(aside).* About this time walks Giacopo beneath
The cloister of the Doge's palace, here.
Disguised, he said, as an old Spanish merchant.
He must break tryst, and come away with me.
Lo, ha! there goes a stooped and weak-kneed sage —
In ruff, Toledan hat and cloak — and — ay —
How well he does it— 'slife. 'Tis exquisite —
So stiff and feeble, and so lightly jolted
Out of his way by gay-voiced youths, ha, ha!
Thou comic Death! I have a job for thee.
(He crosses the arcade beneath the Doge's palace.)
Good evening, Don Gonzales.

GIACOPO. Who? why? so!
Your reverence — in such a trim! Zooks, sir,

You make one laugh — you make an old man
laugh
Until he shakes to pieces; ha, ha, ha!

SPALATRO. Come round the corner.
(They walk to the quay.)
Never mind this business,
Beppo can wait. Put off this masquerade,
And go upon an errand will enrich thee.

GIACOPO. What fee?

SPALATRO. Three hundred crowns.

GIACOPO. What service?

SPALATRO. Thou knowst Leonardo’s cottage?

GIACOPO. Ay, the place
I’ve tracked young Julio Contarini to —
About that pretty wench, his daughter, eh?
(Spalatro nods.)
And the same lady?

SPALATRO. Ay.

GIACOPO. Oh! come bella!

SPALATRO. Ay, handsome as a devil! and her purse
So long. Come this way.
(The clock of St. Mark’s tolls the hour.)
Tempus fugit! Here,
Take this *(gives him the baiocco),* come this way —
nearer the water’s edge. —
(They talk low for a few minutes.)
GIACOPO. And who pays?

SPALATRO. I — who else?

GIACOPO. We’ve had some dealings.

SPALATRO. Many.

GIACOPO. None quite so large as this. Suppose
You should forget.

SPALATRO. Why, then you knock my brains out.

GIACOPO. Ha, ha! I trust thee; there's my hand.

SPALATRO. Enough.
Eleven o'clock. May fortune smile.

GIACOPO. 'Tis nothing.

(GIACOPO runs down the stone steps and springs into his gondola, rowing swiftly round to the opposite side oj the city.)

SCENE.

The Island of Torcello. Eleven o'clock. The moon has set. The fisherman's cottage.

(The lamp burning. BEATRICE leaning from the window watching; she stretches her hands towards the sea.)

BEATRICE. From the dark come forth, oh! dearest,
Fold my heart unto thy breast.
Oh! poor heart, what is't thou fearest?
Why this sadness and unrest?
'Tis a change from death to life,
From a recluse to a wife;
With my love my life is spent,
And marriage is a sacrament.

GIACOPO *(rowing at a distance unseen, sings.)*
Lo Merlo non a testa

Col tal-la-ral-lal-la-ral-tal-la-ral-la,
La testa non a lo Merlo
Povero Merlo! come fara pensar?

BEATRICE. What’s that?
Every little foolish thing
Startles and dismays me now.
Idle fellows always sing,
As by night they homewards row,
Rowing cheer’ly home by night,
Home to kindred and to light,
Home to kindred. Where art thou?
Mother, would I had thee nigh me,
Just to bless me as I go;
Hold the lamp, and smiling by me,
Kiss and bless me as I go.

Giacopo *(nearer — he sings.)*
For jolly weddings in the town
Laughing bells ring up and down!
With partridges and Cyprus wine,
And honey-cates, a feast divine;
Every fellow fills his skin,
Till the comely bride looks in.
Ring on finger, merry girl!
In each ear a Roman pearl;
Then to loving groom and lass
Carol we and fill the glass.

(Beatrice removes the lamp hastily from the window, and looks out in alarm. GIACOPO’s gondola enters the creek. He runs it on the shingle, and steps on the stairs.)

GIACOPO *(beckoning, cap in hand, towards the window, softly)*. Signora.

BEATRICE. Lo! who’s there?

GIACOPO. A messenger.

BEATRICE. From whom? Oh! speak thy news.

GIACOPO. From Signor Julio.

BEATRICE. In Heaven’s name, man, speak out.
What hath befallen?

GIACOPO. Why, nought but good, Signora. He awaits
Thee in the chapel yonder, with a priest.

BEATRICE. Thank God! ’tis well.

GIACOPO. ’Tis very well, Signora.
Here’s a note.

(She runs to the door, and he gives it to her.)

BEATRICE *(aside).* How wickedly he looked!
Methought — but for a moment! What is it?
A dream! oh, Heaven! yet all too good, and still
It seems unreal, and I’m frightened.

GIACOPO.*(calling).* Come!

BEATRICE *(answering).* I come, sir, I but take my
beads and mantle.

(Lower) Oh, happy, happy hour! God send us safe!
So near, and yet as far as Paradise,
Until thou hold'st me, Julio.

GIACOPO *(without).* Come, lady.

BEATRICE *(answering)*. I come, I come, sir. Only this —
(She places on the table, beside the lamp, a note
with these words:)
"Father, dearest, tomorrow I return a bride.
Forgive, and still love Beatrice."

GIACOPO. Come down,
Young woman! by the mass; or else you come
The day after the fair!

BEATRICE. Good sir, a moment.

GIACOPO *(watching her through the window)*. —
She stands and prays before the crucifix —
So let her. Quiet all.
(He listens seaward.)
Even so shall I:
We all will make our peace— 'tis right — some day.
All sinners. I'd a left this trade long since
If the vile skinflints had but paid fair wages.
But how's a proper man to live and save?
There ever is a right and wrong — and *this*
Is wrong, quite wrong; though it must come some way,
Fever or plague, to all of us, some day.
She's coming.

BEATRICE *(descending the steps with a small bundle in her hand, and her mantle about her in a low tone)* —

Ho! Signor Gondolier.

GIACOPO. Here — by the boat.

BEATRICE — How dark it is!

GIACOPO. Ay, lady, very dark!
Beatrice *(looking up at the window, says softly)* —
Farewell!

GIACOPO *(assisting her into the boat)* —
There, sit where thou art.

BEATRICE. Thanks, sir.

GIACOPO. No; facing t'other way.
Beatrice. Thanks, sir; I will *(changes).*
(He pushes off the boat and rows swiftly.)
How far is it, sir?

GIACOPO. Hold thy tongue.
(A pause.)
How know we, girl,
Who's near. 'Tis Julio's order —
Beatrice *(whispering to herself).* Yes; so dark.
He's right — he's always right. Beloved!

(Silence, during which Giacopo rows the boat swiftly for some time.)

GIACOPO. What mean'st thou
Over thy shoulder looking still at me?
Wilt look ahead or no? We may run foul

O’something. Lookahead. Lookout. *(Aside)* I wish
She’d pray. *(Aloud)* Hast ne’er a hymn? Come now, thou may’st
Be heard.

BEATRICE. What’s that — an island?

GIACOPO. Ay, the Lido.

BEATRICE. Voiceless and huge. How black in the black air —
Down, like a ship forsaken, drifting on us.
Dream-haunting Lido, pass away, oh! quickly.
Father! mother! shall I the roses see
Of sweet Torcello more? Tomorrow; yes,
Tomorrow. So, goodnight, and bless me, father!
Oh! bless your little Beatrice.

GIACOPO. Wilt sing?
Wilt sing a hymn or no?

BEATRICE. I will. ’Tis meet, sir,
On such a night — so happy and so fearful.
May God forgive us all. Oh! Julio, soon;
Oh! soon.
(She sings.)
As in a boat, the Lord of life —
Was ever king so lorn?
Among the roaring billows’ strife
Slumbered, travel-worn.

The twelve Apostles did despair
Amid the storm prevailing;
And standing round Him, filled the air
With fearful words and wailing.

His face so sweet, and kinglike form
Upraising at their cry,
With sign and word He stilled the storm,
And laid the billows by.

And thus He is for ever nigh,
E'en when He seems to sleep,
When seas are white, and black the sky,
The Lord my soul will keep.
(She shrieks) Jesu!
(A swift blow descending with the edge of the oar, despatches her, and Giacopo knots a heavy stone in her dress, and throws her over the gunwale.)

CHORUS.
In a line both straight and long,
Shadowy boat and boatman dart,
With strokes as quivering, swift and strong
As ever shook a maniac's heart.
Ghostly boatman, fleetly soaring
Over Adria's inky swell,
Like the Stygian spectre oaring
Fiercely through the mirk of hell;
Sudden stopped he in the dark,
Stood to watch and stooped to hark.
Thro' the black and soundless hollow,
Listened to a fear that spoke not,
Scanned pursuit that did not follow.
On his deed the lightning broke not,
To her shrieks the thunder woke not;
Shadowy sea and shadowy sky
But her shroud and canopy.
Nought he saw and nothing heard,

Not a sound and not a word,
Not the skimming of a bird;
Breathless still, with crouching stride,
Scowled he, searching far and wide.
Black and still, above and under,
Nature seemed to gather thought,
All things giving pause to ponder
On the deed that he had wrought.

Till headlong through the midnight flying,
He sees a pallor flash before him,
Like a halo in the air;
Two eyes, not dead, but ever dying,
Back in piteous wonder stare.
He headlong through the darkness flying,
With sparry pinion smites the wave.
“Bah! I saw her in the flood
Sinking to her crystal grave,
Like a sculptured maiden lying,
Like a marble splashed with blood,
Stretched and walled beneath the flood.”
Yet haunting look and haunting cry!
Tho’ a moment sped you by,
In his tortured ear and eye
Ye shall live eternally.

Gliding onward, now he neared
The voiceless buildings of the town,
Rising shadows that appeared
Like a black navy bearing down,
By demons darkly steered.
Swart against a sky of lead
The outline of the houses gloom,
Like damned ones in the day of doom,
When sun and moon are dead.

As the sea doth grope its way
Thro’ the windings of a cave,
Black as ink the lazy wave
Up that street so dark and sly
Lapped its way with crook and croon;
While the breeze through carvings high
Went humming like a faint bassoon —
Till he has backed his weary oar
And stepped beneath his stooping door.

SCENE.

A rich chamber in the Palazzo of NEROEA.

(Late on the evening following, one small lamp burning; JULIO *having, by means of a bribe, learned from* GIACOPO, *whom he knew to be one of the Society of Venetian bravos, and who craftily undertook, by means of his opportunities, to unravel the mystery of her fate, what had befallen* BEATRICE, *and who had procured her death, resolving to avenge it, visits* NEROEA. NEROEA *discovered alone. Enter* , JULIO.)

NEROEA. Oh! Julio *(rising with extended arms).*

JULIO. There — good e’en — stop there! sit down.

NEROEA. Oh! thou art pale; thou’rt tired?

JULIO. Ay, very tired.

NEROEA. Oh! dearest, art thou ill?

JULIO. Ill? Sick to death!

NEROEA. Nay, noble Julio, thou *art* pale!

JULIO. What! pale?
I am not pale. There’s another very pale.
No, ’tis the crimson that thine eye hath dazzled.

NEROEA. What crimson?

JULIO *(waving his arms towards the draperies)* —
This, and this — hast eyes? and all.
Thou art a Catholic, and wouldst not have
A poor girl buried without bell or dirge.
There is no dirge like that the wind doth pipe;
The hoarse waves wake an honest lamentation.
A captain in my galley, when a slave
Was drown’d— ’twas near the Lido, where the Doge
Sinks his ring deep; they’re never found again —
Told me the ears of drowning men are filled
With peals of sweet bells till they hear no more.
’Tis thou art pale.

NEROEA. Pale, Julio! I?

JULIO Ay, pale
As funeral flames in sunshine. I am sick.
Were I a girl, I’d choose a time —

NEROEA. For what?

JULIO. To die in.

NEROEA. Die!

JULIO. Ay, die. I’d have you drop
In your first summer, blooming, fragrant — all;
For with what measure thou dost mete withal,
To thee again it shall be measured. When
The first small wrinkle, like the worm of death,
Creeps on thy beauty — then all’s blasted.
Faugh! Thou shalt not slay for that. I am a beast.
Neroea. A beast! Ah, Julio *(she laughs)*.

JULIO. Ay — viribus editior —
By strength I took thee; thou cam’st not to me.
Dost love me?

NEROEA. Love? Oh, Julio! love and fear,
So near, and yet so strange; so loved, so awful!
Thy smile means even more than I can read,
And on thy laughter waits an echo faint
From a far place of pain and scorn. Alas!

JULIO. Dost love me?

NEROEA. Julio, to death!

JULIO. Love whom?

NEROEA. Oh, whom but Julio — thee — my Emperor!

JULIO. My Caesar's image, wench, and superscription —
Gold, gold!

NEROEA. My Julio, him alone I love.

JULIO. Thou liest! Why dost thou stare? Thou liest!
What is to stare at? Yet I do believe
Thou lov'st thy Julio, ev'n as he loves thee. Ha!

NEROEA. What's the matter?

JULIO. Lies.

NEROEA. Oh! cruel, cruel!

JULIO. Cruel — as cats that toy with mice; and yet
I'll do the kindest deed tonight that e'er
The stars wept over.

NEROEA. Thou wert always kind.

JULIO. And I'll be kinder. What is life? What's good in't?
Love bleeding lies; fair truth sunk, never more
So silver clear to speak, how many fathoms
Canst tell, beneath the grass-green sea?

NEROEA. Thou'rt ill,
Oh, Julio, very ill.

JULIO. No, only kind.
There, sit you still. What's life?

NEROEA. Julio, don’t talk of life.

JULIO. Of t’other thing
Mayhap. If I cried Death, and stamped my foot,
‘Twould bring up — what? Ha! seest thou nothing?

NEROEA. No.
Why wilt thou talk so wildly, Julio?

JULIO Ha!
Thou’rt frightened, silly bird, because ’tis dark.
It will be darker.

NEROEA. Let me call for lights.

JULIO. Not now; I’ll have them by-and-by; not now.
We hear, methinks, the clearer for the dark.
There was an old man cried —

NEROEA. When?

JULIO. In the night —
Last night, they say — and plucked his silver locks out,
And beat his wrinkled numbskull with his fists,
And howled as shrill and hollow as the caves
Of Æolus above the cold, wild sea.

NEROEA. Would they brought lights!

JULIO — What’s that? Ay, time enough —
Ay, lights and hands — I’ll warrant them by-and-by
There’s something in this room to carry out.
I’m sick.

NEROEA. I told thee thou wert ill, my Julio

JULIO. And by a serpent wounded. I've been mad.
Held to my lips an adder's tongue, and woo'd
The coils of slimy death. Thou pretty witch,
I am no longer mad, but know thee, cold,
And dead, and damned. Thou serpent, lift thy neck,
And hiss thy last at me. Dust shalt thou eat.
Thy sides are painted with the blood of her
Thou'st crushed and swallowed. Murderous
cannibal!
(NEROEA cries wildly, and rushes towards him.)
Off, Beldame! Judgment — ho!

NEROEA. Mercy! Oh God. —

CHORUS.
Lo where the guileless blood she planned to shed;
Her own is gliding on the polished floor;
The ambition and the zealous hate are dead,
The story of the humbler true love o'er.

The last oak of a noble forest towers —
The old Faliero, silent and alone,
Disdaining, through his brief and darkening hours,
Like feebler miseries, to bend or moan.

Now by a stranger hand the lamp is placed,
And little Beatrice no longer lights
The star he steered by on the moonless nights;
And when, like spirits lost, the sea-bird shrieks,
And when close-reefed across the roaring waste,
O'er breakers thundering in the shrilly winds;

His starless boat his wild home darkly seeks,
His eye at last the soulless beacon finds,
Thrills to his heart the ray of other years
Starred dimly in the dark by gathering tears.

In summer evenings, when the isles grow dim,
And seas float silvery round the darkened shore,
Never again awakes the distant hymn,
The laughing, sweet-voiced welcome in the door,
The loving prattle and the glad surprise,
When down the rocky stair the true step flies
To meet him at the gunwale by the shore.
That laughing, loving welcome as of yore,
That dancing step will wake again no more.

The cold sea breaks along the pebbles there,
The door is dark — the stair is but a stair —
And through the straggling roses, weeds wave high,
And summer breezes wildering rock and sigh.

DUAN NA CLAEV — THE LEGEND OF THE GLAIVE

GAESA — THE EXPLOIT IMPOSED.

Fair-shoulder, Fionula fair,
The wondrous child of Lir’s old race,
Answered the hero of the raven hair,
Of the strong hand and princely grace,
The great Cathair.

“Five leagues hence doth the Norseman lie
Beneath his cromlech gray;
Three miles round no soul draws nigh
From eve till dawn of day.
Nor friend of man, nor horse, nor hound,
Nought that hath life must cross that ground;
And in that cromlech, side by side,
The dead man and his sword abide.
And if thou lovest me as thou swarest,
And for my love thou greatly darest,
Alone tonight thou’lt seize for me
The giant glaive of the King of the Sea.
And so, for aye, his fame and thine,
And, with thy fame more humbly mine —
Like three harps sounding in the hall
To the same high story,
Of hero glory,
Shall ring for ever in the ears of all.”

Oh! who’d have dreamed that beneath the grace
Of that rich and wondrous form and face,
In the midnight blue of her dewy eye,

As she dropt her gaze with a blush and sigh,
Alas! could lie
Such cruelty?
Or who could deem
That beauty’s talisman should gleam —
A spell to blast him, not to bless —
From the white brow of the sorceress?

THE HERO DEVOTES HIMSELF

Her little sandalled foot before,
Flushed with the wildering light of beauty,
He kneeled and swore —
, Lady, this moment overpays,
The long eclipse of future days —
’Tis my joy to dare, to die my duty,
If only from my endless night
One lingering star ascends of light
Worthy of thine auroral crown,
And of true love’s forlorn renown.
The story of my adoration,
Like a jewel from the sea
Where I am lost, returned shall be,
A relic and a decoration;
And minstrels mingle, in the Feats of Fame,
My requiem with thy living beauty’s flame.”

With those words Cathair is gone,
And Fionula is alone.

The hero’s hair blew back and showed
His gleaming eyes and forehead broad;
His marble face and haughty head,
In resolve already dead.

On to the altar and the knife.
Like one renunciant of his life,
Who nears the sacrificial goal
Holding in his hand his soul —
On, on he paces, mute, alone,
By mossgrown cairn and druid stone,

Broad fields of corn and sloping meadow,
And level light and lengthening shadow,
By purpling hills and yellow woods,
And blazonry of western clouds
That o’er pale green and amber sky,
Weltering in cold and crimson, lie.
Bathed in the evening’s spirit tender,
A brown bird sitting on a spray
Whistles its happy soul away,
And thrills with life the silent splendour.
The glorious moment wanes and dies,
And Night rides up the Eastern skies —
Line behind line, and hand in hand,
In sable cloaked, the aerial band,
From pole to pole, ascending far,
In every helm a blinking star;
While their voiceless march before
Like dust the white mist rises hoar.

So darkness and the dew and hush
Of night came down on slope and bush,
And every glen and blue ravine
Was filmed with smoky haze
And autumn’s glow and russet green
Grew blurred and waste before the gaze
Of Cathair as he went by,
And beetling mountain, stark and high,
And fringe of hedgerow ‘gainst the sky,
And wild flowers ‘neath his foot that lay,
Together melted into gray,
Together in gloom were lost.

As through the Lisses three he crossed,
He knows that unseen shapes are near,
And tittered words are in his ear,

Now here and now there,
Faint harping and singing
And fairy spurs ringing,
And the whirr of their coursers’ shrill tremble in air,
And hovering glee and hovering pain
Their fearful burthen o’er his brain,
Their dreadful fancies shedding;
As swiftly o’er the throbbing sward,
Through haunted vapours treading,
He sees loom black before his tranced regard
Morrua’s forest, nobly wild,
Afar in billowy verdure piled.

THE SONG OF THE SPIRITS

Far behind him crept blackness and flickering glimmer,
To the northward, slow mounting, the tempest was rising,
While luridly glaring all earth lay expecting,
Voiceless and breathless, the yell of the tyrant.

Thus he entered the high, vacant halls of the forest:
No bird in its branches, no antler beneath them,
Nor boom of the beetle, nor bay of the wild dog.
Only, Priestess of Mystery, glides a White Shadow,
On he'r lip her forefinger — and faithful he followed,
Well knowing his fate led him on to the combat,
Well knowing a mandate of silence upon him.
The trunks of the great trees like time-furrowed castles, —
Gray glimmered through darkness impassive and awful,
Broad at base and at battlement broader the oak boles.
And a canopy dusky, snake-twisted, of branches,
Like crypts of cathedrals, low-groined and broadpillared,
Stretched mazily this way and that in perspective.

As sweet the evening glories faded
O'er Fionula's bower,
A lone sad voice the maid upbraided,
Charming the twilight hour.
With parted lips and hand to ear
She hearkened to the melody
So wildly and so faintly clear,
At the open casement dreamily.
The lonely splendour of a star
Lay trembling in her virgin tear;
And with the music, nigh or far,
There fell upon her heart a fear;

Swift round her ivory throat she drew
The cloak that doth in crimson fold her —
Swift round her shoulder, veined with blue,
And polished as a statue’s shoulder;
Then snapped the jewel in her cloak,
Still through the casement wildly gazing,
Like one whom spirit-songs have woke
From earthly sleep to sights amazing.
The Princess to the postern hied,
Upon her throat the jewel’s spark;
Her hand her pearly ear beside,
Her great eyes gleaming through the dark.

“From close of flower, till song of lark,
By mist or moonshine, *hill and hollow* —
To follow still and still to hark —
To hearken still and still to follow.”

Strange music of an ecstasy —
’Twas hardly sound, and came unsought;
She smiled, and listened to the lay
As listening to a sad, sweet thought.
Glares in the west a stain of blood,
The Wizard North its black storm raises —
And eastward o’er Morrua’s wood,
One great white star portentous gazes.

Sitting, spinning in the hall,
With lamps alight, the sunset after,
The whirring task her maids speed all
With silvery song and girlish laughter.
But, like an apparition, she
Is lost — and lost — and lost for ever,
And O their loving eyes shall see
The splendrous Fionula — never.

Lost; but her love she'll never find —
Sooner the foam wreath in its wake,
O'er ocean's waste, in ocean's wind,
The flying ship shall overtake.
Through the woods of Morrua and over its rootknotted flooring,
The hero speeds onward, alone, on his terrible message;
When faint and far-off, like the gathering gallop of battle,
The hoofs of the hurricane louder and louder come leaping,
There's a gasp and a silence around him a swooning of nature,
And the forest trees moan, and complain with a presage of evil.
And nearer, like great organ's wailing, high-piping through thunder,
Subsiding, then lifted again to a thousand-tongued tumult,
And crashing, and deafening and yelling in clangorous uproar
Soaring onward, down-riding, and rending the wreck of its conquest,
The tempest swoops on: all the branches before it bend, singing
Like cordage in shipwreck; before it sear leaves fly like vapour;
Before it bow down like wide armies, plumed heads of the forest,
In frenzy dark-rolling, up-tossing their scathed arms like Maenads.
Dizzy lightnings split this way and that in the blind void above him;
For a moment long passages reeling and wild with the tempest,
In the blue map and dazzle of lightning, throb vivid and vanish;
And white glare the wrinkles and knots of the oak trees beside him,
While close overhead clap the quick mocking palms of the Storm-Fiend.
Now southward drift the din and glare,
Like navies battling in the air;
On boom the thunder and the wind,
And wreck and silence lie behind,
While whirlwind roars and lightning burns,
The hero neither tires nor turns.
'Mid the wild wail of shrilly boughs,
And pealing thunder's claps and soughs;
And by the lightning's livid tapers,
And the black pall of eddying vapours,
He follows the White Shadow's call,
That never swerved for flash or wind,

And never stops nor looks behind,
But leads him to his funeral.

The forest opens as he goes,
And smitten trees in groups and rows
Beneath the tempest’s tune,
Stand in the mists of midnight drooping,
By mossgrown rocks fantastic stooping,
In the blue shadows of the yellow moon.

THE CROMLECH

And in the moonlight, bleached as bones,
Uprose the monumental stones,
Meeting the hero suddenly
With a blind stare
Dull as despair.
The formless boulder that blocked the door
Like a robed monster broad and hoar
He twice essayed to earth to throw
With quivering sinew, bursting vein,
With grinding teeth and scowling brow.
From his dark forehead with the strain,
Beads start and drop like thunder-rain;
And in the breathless tug and reek,
All his lithe body seems to creak.
The mighty stone to earth is hurled,
Black gapes the violated door,
Through which he rushes to rise no more
Into this fair, sad world.

THORGIL AND HIS GLAIVE

Where high the vaults of midnight gape
In the black waste, a blacker shape —
And near against a distant dark,
He could the giant Norseman mark
A black tarn’s waters sitting by;
Beneath a brazen, stormy sky,
That never moves but dead doth lie, —
And on the rock could darkly see
The mighty glaive beside his knee.
The hero’s front and upreared form,
Loomed dim as headlands in a storm.
No more will flicker passion’s meteors
O’er the dead shadow of his features,
Fixed in the apathy eternal
That lulls him in repose infernal.
The cornice of his knotted brows
A direful shadow downward throws
Upon his eyeballs dull and stark,
Like white stones glimmering in the dark;
And, carved in their forlorn despair,
His glooming features changeless wear
Gigantic sorrow and disdain,
The iron sneer of endless pain.
From the lips of the awful phantom woke
A voice, and thus, by the tarn, it spoke: —

“Son of Malmorra, what canst thou gather here?”
The spell was broke that struck him dumb,
And held his soul aghast and numb,
With a wild throb,
A laugh, and sob,
The frenzied courage came again

Of Cathair, the Prince of men.
With planted foot, with arm extended,
And his ferine gaze distended,
Back flowed the cataract of his hair
From the gleaming face of the great Cathair;
And he shouted lion-voiced,
Like one defying who rejoiced: —
“Thorgil, king of the wintry sea,
Of the nine-gapped sword and minstrel glee,
Of mountains dark and craggy valleys,
Of the golden cup and the hundred galleys,
Malmorra’s son, myself, have sworn
To take thy sword or ne’er return!”
The Norseman’s phantom, black and dread,
Turned not, lifted not his head.
Mute, without anger or alarm,
As shadow stretches, stretched his arm;
Upon the hilt his hand he laid,
The metal dull one bell-note made —
One cold flash from the awakened blade
Flecked the waste sky with flying glare,
Like northern lights
That sport o’ nights,
Shuddering across the empty air.
High overhead, where died the light
Through the wide caverns of the night,
The imprisoned echoes, whispering first,
Afar in moaning thunders burst.
Mortal armour nought avails —
Shearing the air, the enchanted blade
Of Thorgil a strange music made;
The brazen concave of the sky
Returns its shrilly sigh,
Above — around — along —
With the roaring shiver of a gong.
Black night around him floating, and booming of the sea

Have borne away the hero on the spirit-maelstrom free;
The shadows round him deepen in his soft and dreamless flight —
The pause of a new birth,
A forgetting of the earth,
, Its action and its thinking,
A mighty whirl and sinking,
A lapsing into Lethe, and the ocean caves of night.

TIR NA N-OGE — THE LAND OF THE YOUNG

A silvery song is in his ears,
A melody all sad and lone,
The voice that Fionula hears,
And follows still by brake and stone.
It is the voice of early years,
The early love long dead and gone.
His wounded head is on her knee,
Her hand his sable locks among;
And still the song enchantingly
By that remembered voice is sung
And dreamily he opes his eyes.
Beneath in rosy lustre lies,
With many a shivered line of gold,
A misty lake in many a fold
Of wood, and slope, and rock, and hill,
And riven peak, and winding rill.
Long golden reeds and floating lilies tell
Their secrets and rejoicings to the breeze,
And every flowery star and bloomy bell
That glow like oriel windows ‘neath the trees,
In gules and azure mottling the soft sward,
In fragrance and dim music sigh,
And sleep, and wake, but never die.
Such is the blessèd mystery
That of their weakness is the ward.
Here memory doth the hour beguile
And never too much pains or cheers,
Here all things sad are with a smile,
And all rejoicing is with tears.
Through everything there thrills a gladness,
Through everything there throbs a sadness;

And memory, love, and gratitude
A glory shed on every mood.

FIONULA

How to this hour she is sometimes seen by night in Munster.

By the foot of old Keeper, beside the *bohreen*,
In the deep blue of night the thatched cabin is seen;
‘Neath the furze-covered ledge, by the wild mountain brook,
Where the birch and the ash dimly shelter the nook,
And many’s the clear star that trembles on high
O’er the thatch and the wild ash that melt in the sky.
“Shamus Oge” and old Teig are come home from the fair,
And the car stands up black with its shafts in the air,
A warbling of laughter hums over the floor,
And fragrant’s the flush of the turf through the door.
Round the glow the old folk, and the colleens, and boys
Wile the hour with their stories, jokes, laughter, and noise;
Dogs stretched on the hearth with their chins on their feet lie,
To her own purring music the cat dozes sweetly;
Pretty smiles answer, coyly, while soft spins the wheel,
The bold lover’s glances or whispered appeal.

Stealing in, like the leather-wings under the thatch,
A hand through the dark softly leans on the latch,
An oval face peeps through the clear deep of night,
From her jewels faint tremble blue splinters of light.
There’s a stranger among us, a chill in the air,
And an awful face silently framed over there;
The green light of horror glares cold from each eye,
And laughter breaks shivering into a cry.
A flush from the fire hovers soft to the door,
In the dull void the pale lady glimmers no more.
The cow’ring dogs howl, slowly growls the white cat,
And the whisper outshivers, “God bless us! what’s that?”

The sweet summer moon over Aherloe dreams,
And the Galtees, gigantic, loom cold in her beams;
From the wide flood of purple the pale peaks up rise,
Slowly gliding like sails ‘gainst the stars of the skies;
Soft moonlight is drifted on mountain and wood,
Airy voices sing faint to the drone of the flood,
As the traveller benighted flies onward in fear,
And the clink of his footsteps falls shrill on his ear.
There’s a hush in the bushes, a chill in the air,
While a breath steals beside him and whispers, “Beware!”
While aslant by the oak, down the hollow ravine,
Like a flying bird’s shadow smooth-gliding, is seen
Fionula the Cruel, the brightest, the worst,
With a terrible beauty the vision accurst,
Gold-filleted, sandalled, of times dead and gone —
Far-looking, and harking, pursuing, goes on;
Her white hand from her ear lifts her shadowy hair,
From the lamp of her eye floats the sheen of despair;
Her cold lips are apart, and her teeth in her smile
Glimmer death on her face with a horrible wile.
Three throbs at his heart — not a breath at his lip,
As the figure skims by like the swoop of a ship;
The breeze dies and drops like a bird on the wing,
And the pulse of the rivulet ceases to ring;
And the stars and the moon dilate o’er his head,
As they smile out an icy salute to the dead.

The traveller — alone — signs the cross on his breast,
Gasps a prayer to the saints for her weary soul’s rest;
His “gospel” close pressed to the beat of his heart,
And fears still to linger, yet dreads to depart.
By the village fire crouched, his the story that night,
While his listeners around him draw pale with affright;
Till it’s over the country— “God bless us, again!”
How he met Fionula in Aherloe glen.

SHAMUS O’BRIEN AND OTHER POEMS

Jist afther the war, in the year’98,
As soon as the boys wor all scattered and bate,
’Twas the custom, whenever a pisant was got,
To hang him by thrial — barrin’ sich as was shot.
There was trial by jury goin’ on by daylight,
And the martial-law hangin’ the lavins by night.

It’s them was hard times for an honest gossoon:
If he missed in the judges — he’d meet a dragoon;
An’ whether the sogers or judges gev sentence,
The divil a much time they allowed for repentance.
An’ it’s many’s the fine boy was then in his keepin’,
Wid small share iv restin’, or atin’, or sleepin’;
An’ because they loved Erin, an’ scorned to sell it,
A prey for the bloodhound, a mark for the bullet —
Unsheltered by night, and unrested by day,
They’d the heath for their barrack, revenge for their pay.
An’ the bravest an’ hardiest boy iv them all
Was Shamus O’Brien, from the town iv Glingall.

His limbs were well set, an’ his body was light,
An’ the keen-fangèd hound had not teeth half so white.
But his face was as pale as the face of the dead,
And his cheek never warmed with the blush of the red;
An’ for all that he wasn’t an ugly young bye,
For the divil himself couldn’t blaze with his eye,
So droll an’ so wicked, so dark and so bright,
Like a fire-flash that crosses the depth of the night;
An’ he was the best mower that ever has been,
An’ the illigantest hurler that ever was seen.
In fincin’ he gev Patrick Mooney a cut,

An’ in jumpin’ he bate Tim Malowney a fut;
For lightness iv fut there was never his peer,
For, by gorra, he’d almost outrun the red deer;
An’ his dancin’ was sich that the men used to stare,
An’ the women turn crazy, he done it so quare;
An’, by gorra, the whole world gev it in to him there.

An’ it’s he was the boy that was hard to be caught,
An’ it’s often he run, an’ it’s often he fought,
An’ it’s many’s the one can remimber right well
The quare things he done; an’ it’s oft I heerd tell
How he freckened the magisthrates in Cahirbally,
An’ escaped through the sodgers in Aherloe Valley;
An’leathered the yeomen, himself agin’ four,
An’ stretched the two strongest on ould Galtimore.

But the fox must sleep sometimes, the wild deer must rest,
An’ treachery preys on the blood iv the best.
Afther many a brave action of power and pride,
An’ many a hard night on the mountain’s bleak side,
An’ a thousand great dangers and toils overpast,
In the darkness of night he was taken at last.
Now, Shamus, look back on the beautiful moon,
For the door of the prison must close on you soon,
An’ take your last look at her dim lovely light,
That falls on the mountain and valley this night —
One look at the village, one look at the flood,
An’ one at the sheltering, far-distant wood.
Farewell to the forest, farewell to the hill,
An’ farewell to the friends that will think of you still;
Farewell to the patthern, the hurlin’, an’ wake,
And farewell to the girl that would die for your sake.

An’ twelve sodgers brought him to Maryborough gaol,
An’ the turnkey resaved him, refusin’ all bail.

The fleet limbs wor chained, an’ the sthrong hands wor bound,
An’ he laid down his length on the could prison ground.
An’ the dreams of his childhood kem over him there,
As gentle an’ soft as the sweet summer air;
An’ happy remembrances crowding on ever,
As fast as the foam-flakes dhrift down on the river,
Bringing fresh to his heart merry days long gone by,
Till the tears gathered heavy and thick in his eye.
But the!tears didn’t fall, for the pride of his heart
Would not suffer one drop down his pale cheek to start;
An3 he sprang to his feet in the dark prison cave,
An’ he swore with the fierceness that misery gave,
By the hopes of the good, an’ the cause of the brave,
That when he was mouldering in the cold grave
His enemies never should have it to boast
His scorn of their vengeance one moment was lost;
His bosom might bleed, but his cheek should be dhry,
For undaunted he lived, and undaunted he’d die.

Well, as soon as a few weeks was over and gone,
The terrible day iv the thrial kem on;
There was sich a crowd there was scarce room to stand,
An’ sogers on guard, an’ dhragoons sword-in-hand;
An’ the court-house so full that the people wor bothered,
An’ attorneys an’ criers on the pint iv bein’ smothered;
An! counsellors almost gev over for dead,
An’ the jury sittin’ up in their box overhead;
An’ the judge settled out so detarmined an’ big,
With his gown on his back, and an illigant new wig;
An’ silence was called, an’ the minute ’twas said
The court was as still as the heart of the dead.
An’ they heard but the openin’ of one prison lock,
An’ Shamus O’Brien kem into the dock.

For one minute he turned his eye round on the throng,
An' he looked at the bars, so firm and so strong,
An' he saw that he had not a hope, nor a friend,
A chance to escape, nor a word to defend:
An' he folded his arms as he stood there alone,
As calm and as cold as a statue of stone;
And they read a big writin', a yard long at laste,
An' Jim didn't undherstand it, nor mind it a taste.
An' the judge took a big pinch iv snuff, an' he says,
"Are you guilty or not, Jim O'Brien, av you plase?"

An' all held their breath in the silence of dhread,
An' Shamus O'Brien made answer, and said,
"My lord, if you ask me, if in my life time
I thought any treason, or did any crime
That should call to my cheek, as I stand alone here,
The hot blush of shame, or the coldness of fear,
Though I stood by the grave to receive my death blow,
Before God and the world I would answer you, no;
But if you would ask me, as I think it like,
If in The Rebellion I carried a pike,
An' fought for ould Ireland from the first to the close,
An' shed the heart's blood of her bitterest foes,
I answer you, yes, an' I tell you again,
Though I stand here to perish, it's my glory that-, then
In her cause I was willing my veins should run dhry, — .
An' that now for her sake I am ready to die."

Then the silence was great, an' the jury smiled bright,
An' the judge wasn't sorry the job was made light;
By my sowl, it's himself was the crabbed ould chap,
In a twinklin' he pulled on his ugly black cap.
Then Shamus' mother in the crowd standing by,
Called out to the judge with a pitiful cry,
"Oh, judge, darlin', don't, oh, don't say the word,

The crathur is young, have mercy, my lord;
He was foolish, he didn't know what he was doin' —
You don't know him, my lord, oh, don't give him to ruin —
He's the kindliest crathur, the tendherest-hearted —
Don't part us for ever, we that's so long parted.
Judge, mavourneen, forgive him, forgive him, my lord,
An' God will forgive you, oh, don't say the word!"

That was the first minute that O'Brien was shaken,
When he saw he was not quite forgot or forsaken;
An' down his pale cheeks at the words of his mother, —
The big tears wor runnin' fast, one after th'other.
An' two or three times he endeavoured to spake,
But the sthrong manly voice used to falther and break;
But at last by the strength of his high-mounting pride,
He conquered and masthered his grief's swelling tide,
"An'," says he, "mother, darlin', don't break your poor heart,
For sooner or later the dearest must part;
And God knows it's betther than wandering in fear
On the bleak, trackless mountains among the wild deer,
To lie in the grave where the head, heart, and breast
From thought, labour, and sorrow for ever shall rest.
Then, mother, my darlin', don't cry any more,
Don't make me seem broken in this my last hour,
For I wish when my head's lyin' undher the raven,
No thrue man can say that I died like a craven!"
Then towards the judge Shamus bent down his head,
An' that minute the solemn death-sintence was said.

The mornin' was bright, an' the mists rose on high,
An' the lark whistled merrily in the clear sky —
But why are the men standin' idle so late?
An' why do the crowds gother fast in the street?
What come they to talk of? what come they to see?
An' why does the long rope hang from the crosstree?

Oh! Shamus O'Brien pray fervent and fast,
May the saints take your soul, for this day is your last;
Pray fast an' pray strong, for the moment is nigh,
When sthrong, proud, an' great as you are, you must die.

An' fasther an' fasther the crowd gathered there,
Boys, horses and gingerbread, just like a fair;
An' whiskey was selling, an' cussamuck too,
And ould men and young women enjoying the view.
An' ould Tim Mulvany, he med the remark,
There wasn't sich a sight since the time of the Ark;
An-' be gorra 'twas thrue for him, divil such a ' scruge,
Sich divarshin and crowds was known since the deluge.
For thousands was gothered there, if there was one,
Waitin' till such time as the hangin' id come on.

At last they threw open the big prison gate,
An' out came the sheriffs and sodgers in state,
An' a cart in the middle, an' Shamus was in it;
Not paler, but prouder than ever, that minute.
An' as soon as the people saw Shamus O'Brien,
Wid prayin' and blessin', and all the girls cryin';
A wild wailin' sound kem on by degrees,
Like the sound of the lonesome wind blowin' thro' trees.
On, on to the gallows, the sheriffs are gone,
An' the cart an' the sodgers go steadily on;
An' at every side swellin' around of the cart,
A wild sorrowful sound that 'id open your heart.

Now under the gallows the cart takes its stand,
An' the hangman gets up wid the rope in his hand;
An' the priest having blest him, goes down on the ground,
An' Shamus O'Brien throws one last look around.
Then the hangman dhrew near, and the people grew still,
Young faces turned sickly, and warm hearts went chill;

An’ the rope bein’ ready, his neck was made bare,
For the gripe iv the life-stranglin’ cord to prepare:
An’ the good priest has left him, havin’ said his last prayer.
But the good priest done more, for his hands he unbound,
And with one daring spring Jim has leaped to the ground;
Bang, bang! go the carbines, and clash go the sabres,
He’s not down! he’s alive still! now stand to him neighbours.
Through the smoke and the horses he’s into the crowd,
By the heavens he’s free! than thunder more loud
By one shout from the people the heavens were shaken —
One shout that the dead of the world might awaken.

Your swords they may glitter, your carbines go bang,
But if you want hangin’, it’s yourselves you must hang;
To night he’ll be sleepin’ in Aherloe Glin,
An’ the divil’s in the dice if you catch him again.
The sodgers ran this way, the sheriffs ran that,
An’ father Malone lost his new Sunday hat;
An’ the sheriffs wor both of them punished severely,
An’ fined like the divil, because Jim done them fairly.

PHAUDHRIG CROHOORE

Oh, Phaudhrig Crohoore was the broth of a boy,
And he stood six foot eight,
And his arm was as round as another man’s thigh,
’Tis Phaudhrig was great, —
And his hair was as black as the shadows of night,
And hung over the scars left by many a fight;
And his voice, like the thunder, was deep, strong, and loud,
And his eye like the lightnin’ from under the cloud.
And all the girls liked him, for he could spake civil,
And sweet when he chose it, for he was the divil.
An’ there wasn’t a girl from thirty-five undher,
Divil a matter how crass, but he could come round her.
But of all the sweet girls that smiled on him, one
Was the girl of his heart, an’ he loved her alone.
An’ warm as the sun, as the rock firm an’ sure,
Was the love of the heart of Phaudhrig Crohoore;
An’ he’d die for one smile from his Kathleen O’Brien,
For his love, like his hatred, was sthrong as the lion.

But Michael O’Hanlon loved Kathleen as well
As he hated Crohoore — an’ that same was like hell.
But O’Brien liked *hint,* for they were the same parties,
The O’Briens, O’Hanlons, an’ Murphys, and Cartys —
An’ they all went together an’ hated Crohoore,
For it’s many the batin’ he gave them before;
An’ O’Hanlon made up to O’Brien, an’ says he:
“I’ll marry your daughter, if you’ll give her tome.”
And the match was made up, an’ when Shrovetide came on,
The company assimbled three hundred if one:
There was all the O’Hanlons, an’ Murphys, an’ Cartys,
An’ the young boys an’ girls av all o’ them parties;
An’ the O’Briens, av coorse, gathered strong on that day,

An’ the pipers an’ fiddlers were tearin’ away;
There was roarin’, an’ jumpin’, an’ jiggin’, an’ flingin’,
‘An’ jokin’, an’ blessin’, and kissin’, and singin’,
An’ they wor all laughin’ — why not, to be sure? —
‘How O’Hanlon came inside of Phaudhrig Crohoore.
An’ they all talked an’ laughed the length of the table,
Atin’ an’ dhrinkin’ all while they wor able,
And with pipin’ an’ fiddlin’ an’ roarin’ like tundher,
Your head you’d think fairly was splittin asundher;
And the priest called out, “Silence, ye blackguards, agin!”
An’ he took up his prayer-book, just goin’ to begin,
An’ they all held their tongues from their funnin’ and bawlin’,
So silent you’d notice the smallest pin failin’;
An’ the priest was just beg’nin’ to read, whin the door
Sprung back to the wall, and in walked Crohoore —
Oh! Phaudhrig Crohoore was the broth of a boy,
An’ he stood six foot eight,
An’ his arm was as round as another man’s thigh,
’Tis Phaudhrig was great —
An’ he walked slowly up, watched by many a bright eye,
As a black cloud moves on through the stars of the sky,
An’ none sthrove to stop him, for Phaudhrig was great,
Till he stood all alone, just apposit the sate
Where O’Hanlon and Kathleen, his beautiful bride,
Were sitting so illigant out side by side;
An’ he gave her one look that her heart almost broke,
An’ he turned to O’Brien, her father, and spoke,
An’ his voice, like the thunder, was deep, sthrong, and loud,
An’ his eye shone like lightnin’ from under the cloud:
“I didn’t come here like a tame, crawlin’ mouse,
But I stand like a man in my inimy’s house;
In the field, on the road, Phaudhrig never knew fear
Of his foemen, an’ God knows he scorns it here;
So lave me at aise, for three minutes or four,
To spake to the girl I’ll never see more.”
An’ to Kathleen he turned, and his voice changed its tone,

For he thought of the days when he called her his own,
Though his eye blazed like lightnin’ from under the cloud
On his false-hearted girl, reproachful and proud,
An’ says he: “Kathleen bawn, is it thrue what I hear,
That you marry of your own free choice, without fear?
If so, spake the word, an’ I’ll turn and depart,
Chated once, and once only, by woman’s false heart.”
Oh! sorrow and love made the poor girl dumb,
An’ she thried hard to spake, but the words wouldn’t come,
For the sound of his voice, as he stood there fornint her,
Wint could on her heart as the night wind in winther.
An’ the tears in her blue eyes stood tremblin’ to flow,
O’er her cheek pale as marble, like moonshine on snow;
Then the heart of bould Phaudhrig swelled high in its place,
For he knew, by one look in that beautiful face,
That though sthrangers an’ foemen their pledged hands might sever,
Her true heart was his, and his only, for ever.
An’ he lifted his voice, like the agle’s hoarse call,
An’ says Phaudhrig, “She’s mine still, in spite of yez all!”
Then up jumped O’Hanlon, an’ a tall boy was he,
An’ he looked on bould Phaudhrig as fierce as could be,
An’ says he, “By the hokey! before you go out,
Bould Phaudhrig Crohoore, you must fight for a bout.”
With that then, said Phaudhrig, “I’ll do my endeavour,”
An’ with one blow he stretched proud O’Hanlon for ever.
In his arms he took Kathleen, an’ stepped to the door;
And he leaped on his horse, and flung her before;
An’ they all were so bother’d, that not a man stirred
Till the galloping hoofs on the pavement were heard.
Then up they all started, like bees in a swarm,
An’ they riz a great shout, like the burst of a storm,
An’ they ran, and they raced, and they shouted galore;
But Kathleen and Phaudhrig they never saw more.

But them days are gone by, himself is no more;
An’ the green grass is growin’ o’er Phaudhrig Crohoore,
For he couldn’t be aisy or quiet at all;
As he lived a brave boy, he resolved so to fall.
And he took a good pike — for Phaudhrig was great —
And he fought, and he fell in the year ninetyeight.
An’ the day that Crohoore in the green field was killed,
A sthrong boy was sthretched, and a sthrong heart was stilled.

MOLLY, MY DEAR

Since last I held your hand, dear Molly, ’tis many’s the year,
But altho’ you have wed with another, I still was true,
For I never could fancy a girl, dearest Molly, but you,
And the love of my heart was still with you, Molly, my dear.

When last I held your hand, you were goin’ to be married, my dear,
But I knew by the paleness no cold words of yours could disguise,
And I knew by the tears that were dimming your beautiful eyes,
That in spite of them all, dear Molly, you loved me alone.
Since last I held your hand? I am changed from what I was then,
In battle, in danger, in storm, in strife I have stood,
Won honour arid glory and riches as much as I would;
But in this world, dear Molly I’ll never be happy again.

ABHAIN AU BHUIDEIL: ADDRESS OF A DRUNKARD TO A BOTTLE OF WHISKEY.

From what dripping cell, through what fairy glen,
Where ‘mid old rocks and ruins the fox makes his den;
Over what lonesome mountain,
Acuishla machree!
Where gauger never has trod,
Sweet as the flowery sod,
Wild as the breath
Of the breeze on the heath,
And sparkling all o’er like the moonlighted fountain,
Are you come to me —
Sorrowful me?

Dancing — inspiring —
My wild blood firin.’;
Oh! terrible glory —
Oh! beautiful siren —
Come, tell the old story —
Come, light up my fancy, and open my heart.
Oh, beautiful ruin —
My life — my undoin’ —
Soft and fierce as a pantheress,
Dream of my longing, and wreck of my soul,
I never knew love till I loved you, enchanthress!

At first, when I knew you, ’twas only flirtation,
The touch of a lip and the flash of an eye;
But ’tis different now— ’tis desperation!
I worship before you,
I curse and adore you,
And without you I’d die.

Wirrasthrue!
I wish ’twas again
The happy time when
I cared little about you,
Could do well without you,
But would just laugh and view you;
’Tis little I knew you!

Oh! terrible darling,
How have you sought me,
Enchanted, and caught me?
See, now, where you’ve brought me —
To sleep by the roadside, and dress out in rags.
Think how you found me;
Dreams come around me —
The dew of my childhood, and life’s morning beam;
Now I sleep by the roadside, a wretch all in rags.
My heart that sang merrily when I was young,
Swells up like a billow and bursts in despair;
And the wreck of my hopes on sweet memory flung,
And cries on the air,
Are all that is left of the dream.

Wirrasthrue!
My father and mother,
The priest, and my brother —
Not a one has a good word for you.
But I can’t part you, darling, their preaching’s all vain;
You’ll burn in my heart till these thin pulses stop;
And the wild cup of life in your fragrance I’ll drain
To the last brilliant drop.
Then oblivion will cover
The shame that is over,
The brain that was mad, and the heart that was sore;

Then, beautiful witch,
I’ll be found — in a ditch,
With your kiss on my cold lips, and never rise more.

SONG: THE AUTUMN LEAF WAS FALLING

The autumn leaf was falling
At midnight from the tree,
When at her casement calling,
“I’m here, my love,” cried he.
‘Come down and mount behind me,
And rest your little head,
And in your white arms wind me,
Before that I be dead.

“You’ve stolen my heart by magic,
I’ve kissed your lips in dreams;
Our wooing, wild and tragic,
Has been in ghostly gleams.
The wondrous love I bear you
Has made one life of twain,
And it will bless or scare you,
In deathless peace or pain.
“Our dreamland shall be glowing,
If you my bride will be
To darkness both are going,
Unless you ride with me.
Come now, and mount behind me,
And rest your little head,
And in your white arms wind me,
Before that I be dead.”

MEMORY

One wild and simple bugle sound,
Breathed o'er Killarney's magic shore,
Awakes sweet floating echoes round
When that which made them is no more.

So slumber in the human breast
Wild echoes that will sweetly thrill
Through memory's vistas when the voice
That waked them first for aye is still.

Oh! memory, though thy records tell
Full many a tale of grief and folly,
Of mad excess, of hope decayed,
Of dark and cheerless melancholy.

Yet, memory, to me thou art
The dearest of the gifts of mind,
For all the joys that touch my heart
Are joys that I have left behind.

THE STREAM

When moonlight falls on wave and wimple,
And silvers every circling dimple,
That onward, onward sails:
When fragrant hawthorns wild and simple
Lend perfume to the gales,
When the pale moon in heaven abiding,
O’er midnight mists and mountains riding,
Shines on the river smoothly gliding
Through quiet dales —

I wander on in solitude,
Charmed by the chiming music rude
Of streams that fret and flow,
For by that eddying stream she stood,
On such a night I trow:
For her the thorn its breath was lending,
On this same tide her eye was bending,
And with its voice her voice was blending
Long, long ago.
Wild stream! I walk by thee once more,
I see thy hawthorns dim and hoar,
I hear thy waters moan,
And night winds sigh from shore to shore
With hushed and hollow tone;
But breezes on their light way winging,
And all thy waters’ heedless singing,
No more to me are gladness bringing —
I am alone.

Years after years, their swift way keeping,
Like sere leaves down thy current sweeping,

Are lost for aye, and sped —
And Death the wintry soil is heaping
As fast as flowers are shed.
And she who wandered by my side,
And breathed enchantment o’er thy tide,
That makes thee still my friend and guide —
And she is dead.

A DOGGREL IN A DORMANT-WINDOW

Among the gray roofs nooked,
As Chronos in the skies,
Red chimneys, old and crook'd,
Like headstones round me rise.

The chimneys, crook'd and old,
My neighbours in the air,
Like gods of dingy gold,
Bend sadly here and there.

The crows to roost returning
In their misty woods below —
The hill-tops dimly burning
In the sun's refracted glow —

Like purple shadows sailing
Across the sea-green sky,
Like far waves hoarsely wailing
Call dimly as they fly.
My senses, sadly dreaming,
Just hear and see them fly,
Like bygone shadows streaming
Along pale memory's sky.

From the gray tower with its corbels,
And its belfry arching fair,
The mellow curfew warbles
Its old tune on the air;

It sails above me welling
Like long soft summer waves,
Still quivering on and swelling
Across the village graves.

My lattice open flies,
The dewy evening air,
Fresh from the starry skies,
Just stirs my silvered hair.

Come forth, my graceful pipe,
My halfpenny pipe of clay,
With Latachia ripe
We'll wile the hour away.
Then musical by space,
Up from the gloaming street
Float sounds and songs apace,
And random prattle sweet —

Bold fellows laughing boldly
With soft-tongued maidens near,
Old people prating oldly,
And children's voices clear.

And in their faint gradations,
While changeless stars gleam o'er us,
I hear three generations
All chiming in one chorus.

The twilight deepens fast,
My pipe grows like a star,
Or a distant smithy's blast,
Or a lighthouse flash from afar.

A lonely man am I,
In my dormant-window thinking,
So lowly, and so high,
The dreamy vapour drinking.
The vapour hangs and dozes,
And the stars no more I see;
The opening film discloses
A loved pale face to me.

The sad face smiling there,
The young face as of yore,
Inexorably fair,
To speak or change no more.

The brown hair now is gray,
Of him you loved, but to
Your lovely shadow years away
His lonely heart beats true.

And now my pipe is out,
I drop it in the weeds,
It served its little bout,
And quietude succeeds.

And when my glow is o’er,
In ashes quenched my fire,
When its fragrance is no more
And spark and smoke expire;
O’er me may some one say,
As I, of you to-day,
Beneath the nettles and the flowers
Where lies my worn-out clay;.

He did in his allotted hours —
What fellows sometimes shirk —
In this enormous world of ours,
His halfpenny-worth of work.

The Criticism

A FORGOTTEN CREATOR OF GHOSTS: JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU by Edna Kenton

"He foresaw that the proprietors of Stayes would do him very well. In his bedroom at a country house he always looked first at the books on the shelf and the prints on the walls; he considered that these things gave a sort of measure of the culture and even of the character of his hosts. Though he had but little time to devote to them on this occasion a cursory inspection assured him that if the literature, as usual, was mainly American and humorous, the art consisted neither of the water-color studies of the children nor of "goody" engravings.... There was the customary novel of Mr. Le Fanu for the bedside; the ideal reading in a country house for the hours after midnight. Oliver Lyon could scarcely forbear beginning it while he buttoned his shirt." From "The Liar," *by* Henry James.

To a searcher in the barren field of Le Fanuana, who had run through innumerable indexes of literary "Histories" and "Studies" on the steadily diminishing chance of finding anywhere even bare mention of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, it was almost a shock to come upon a sturdy little row of figures following his name in one of the volumes of *The Cambridge History of English Literature.* Was it that in this dignified compendium of criticism he was at last recognized, "revived"? But no! Only in the light of the ever-projected Brontës did he shine on a few of their particular pages.

Straight into Charlotte Bronte's centenary year — 1916, when this thirteenth volume of *The Cambridge History* was issued — Professor A. A. Jack, of the University of Aberdeen, who wrote the Brontë chapter, shot a little shell which somehow failed to explode. With a theory of his own regarding the "sources" of *Jane Eyre,* he suggested that "the tale of actual and intended bigamy which Sheridan Le Fanu contributed to the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1839" might have been at once' the source of the famous "plot" and the source of Thackeray's vague disturbance over *Jane Eyre's* reminiscent quality.

It is Le Fanu's odd fate that his name should pass. Suggestions wilder than this have sufficed to rally the Brontëans for annihilation of the unfortunate suggestor; witness that naïve victim of Irish amiability, The Rev. William Wright, who looked up *The Brontës in Ireland,* or that unlucky prey of the deadly parallel who "proved", that Branwell Brontë wrote *Wuthering Heights.* But Professor Jack's stimulating chapter on Le Fanu's possible influence has passed unchallenged. Today *Wuthering Heights* is more sacrosanct than *Jane Eyre.* Yet, if he had gone further, as he might have, and had suggested probable origins in *The Purcell Papers* for Emily Bronte's "greatest villain in fiction", Le Fanu's predestined obscurity would doubtless have worked to hush even that profane pronouncement into silence. However, a book might be written (let us hope it will not be) on the correspondences between *The Purcell Papers* of Le Fanu and the Brontë novels.

Surely the unmitigated famelessness of Sheridan Le Fanu can be ranked among the outstanding curiosities of literature. One of the literal "best sellers" of the 1860-188o's, he has disappeared even from cursory addenda to Victorian literary history. Author of some of the really remarkable ghost stories of our literature, he is remembered today only by the "occultists" — the people, by the way, who really recognize a really ghostly tale. You will find his "Green Tea", his "Carmilla" and his "The Room in the Dragon Volonté" referred to still in occult literature. But if you should glance through Miss Dorothy Scarborough's exhaustive work, *The Supernatural in Fiction,* you will search in vain for even passing mention of Sheridan Le Fanu as a craftsman of parts in the delicate art of transferring shadows to the printed page; and this omission from her extensive survey is high evidence of how completely he has passed away from the literary earth. Curious are the fates of little books and little writers — most curious of all sometimes when they are called great. Le Fanu was not a great writer, but he wrote a few great ghost stories. And even as the "sensation" author of *Uncle Silas, The House by the Churchyard, Checkmate* and *Wylder's Hand,* to mention no others of a list so famous fifty years ago, his unqualified passing within a half-century's short span is hardly comprehensible.

Only one biographer — and he a personal friend — has tried to keep his name alive. Alfred Perceval Graves wrote Le Fanu's obituary in 1873 for the *Dublin University Magazine* which Le Fanu had owned. He wrote the preface for *The Purcell Papers,* the legends of the "wonderful priest of Drumcoolagh," collected from the old *Dublin University Magazine* files of

1838-1839 and published in 1880. In 1886 he prefaced the posthumous *Poems,* and in the 'nineties assisted Le Fanu's son, Richard Brinsley Sheridan Le Fanu, in editing a short-lived series of reprints of the father's work with illustrations by the son. In 1904 Mr. Graves published another edition of the *Poems* with another preface and, as recently as 1913, in his *Irish Literary and Musical Studies,* he gave many pages to what is probably his final tribute to his friend — a study pathetically reminiscent of all his others. He had so early said it all. Only a brother, William Le Fanu, in his autobiography, has contributed further to the picture of this charming Irish gentleman, littérateur, raconteur and occultist of old Dublin.

In the *Lives* of the multitudinous Sheridans we find him now and then. Contemporary of all the great Victorians (he lived from 1814 to 1873) his blood was that of some of the greatest English lights, social and otherwise,' of his age. Through his grandmother, Alicia, daughter of "Tom" and Frances Sheridan and sister of Richard Brinsley and Elizabeth, he was direct descendant of a family whose members have kept unbroken claim to fame for two hundred years. The Sheridan connection was double, for the two Sheridan sisters married two Le Fanu brothers. In Le Fanu's Merrion Square home in Dublin hung a dozen Sheridan portraits, all his by inheritance; "Tom" Sheridan, actor, father of the brood; Frances Sheridan, author of the Eighteenth Century *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Biddulph,* with their children and their children's children. Richard Brinsley Sheridan's granddaughters, the famous "Sheridan-Sisters" of London when Victoria was its girl-queen, were cousins of the Dublin Sheridan-Le Fanus — Caroline, the Hon. Mrs. Norton, Georgiana, loveliest of all the Duchesses of Somerset, and Helen, Lady Dufferin. The family ramifications stretched back and forth across the Irish Sea, and the whole family, all sides of it, wrote, from the old mother lioness down.

No wonder, then, that Sheridan Le Fanu scribbled from his earliest years. His *métier* was the mysterious, when it wais not the ghostly and the lurid, and for a score of years, from the 1860's on, he was read enormously on both sides of the Atlantic, for he was issued in America as fast as he was published in England. But, famous contemporary of other famous "mystery" writers — Collins, Braddon *et al.* — their names remain on any roll call of the Victorians while his is literally obliterated. His one-time vogue is noted by a no less meticulous recorder of his time than Henry

James. In “The Liar”, one of three tales published in 1889 under the title of *A London Life,* Mr. James remarks that, upon his hero’s arrival at Stayes to paint Sir David’s portrait, he looked, for omens and signs, at the pictures and the books, and they promised well: “There was the customary novel of Mr. Le Fanu for the bedside; the ideal reading in a country house for the hours after midnight.”

For Le Fanu, better than most of his lurid school, could “write”; more than others of his school, with the exception of Bulwer-Lytton, he was “occult”; his backgrounds were distinguished, they were thick with medieval lore and his pages were whimsical as well as lurid.

He had, however, a special gift for dealing with luridities. He was a real forerunner of the “psychic horror school” which Arthur Machen later on was to proceed to make his own and, after Machen, Blackwood. Why Le Fanu’s “Dr. Hesselius,” whose “case histories” furnish the material for the ghostly tales of *In a Glass Darkly,* does not lead the long modern list of “psychic doctors” in fiction is another mysterious mischance. His “Notes” on maladies of the mind were pioneer excursions into a field much over-cultivated today; he is the true father of Machen’s Dr. Raymond, of Blackwood’s Dr. Silence, even of that great degreeless, lay scientist, Mr. Sherlock Holmes himself.’

In his *Victorian Novelists* (1906), Louis Benjamin includes Sheridan Le Fanu, but all mistakenly devotes his rather shallow, critical attention to the “sensation” novels. This irritating study, the later Graves essays and the disregarded niche Professor Jack hollowed for him beside the Brontë sisters in *The Cambridge History of English Literature* are the only Twentieth-Century recognitions of Le Fanu’s life and works that a tolerably comprehensive search has salvaged from the modern flood of printed matter. Others may have been missed, but his exclusion from Miss Scarborough’s exhaustive research into supernatural fiction, Le Fanu’s veritable field, is fair evidence that Sheridan Le Fanu, for all modern cognizance, might never have lived at all.

II

If, in that pathetic list of Charlotte Bronte’s ‘ reading sources for 1829, set down in Mrs. Gaskell’s extraordinary *Life,* the old *Dublin University*

Magazine had been listed with *Blackwood's,* or if it had figured in a later catalogue of the Haworth parsonage library, this at least can be asserted fairly — Professor Jack would not have been the first to suggest, in 1916, *The Purcell Papers* as a plot source for *fane Eyre.* Long before her centenary year the extent of Charlotte Brontë's indebtedness to Sheridan Le Fanu would have been the subject of more than one profound *opus.* It is inexplicable, however, that Professor Jack's theory of sources stops short with one of *The Purcell Papers* and one of the Brontë novels; for, the further the comparison is carried, the stronger his case becomes. But, midway in his chapter on the Brontës, he springs, with disconcerting suddenness, a merely partial "case". He quotes a letter of Charlotte's to Mr. Williams in the autumn of 1847, that one which refers to Thackeray's well-known remark on the "reminiscent quality" of the *Jane Eyre* plot and carries her own asseveration of her belief that it was original. Then he comments as follows:

Charlotte Brontë's possible forgetfulness, if she had seen the story, and Thackeray's dim recollection are equally explicable. The tale of actual and intended bigamy which Sheridan Le Fanu contributed to the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1839 was just one of those stories eminently adapted to floating in the back of the mind. In the strange fictions of Le Fanu the reader's feelings are deeply moved without his either seeing the actual occurrences face to face or believing them to be real.... While nothing could be more probable than that the author of *The Irish Sketch Book* and *Barry Lyndon* had read this story, it is clear that Charlotte could have had access to it.... Charlotte Brontë herself, in requesting Messrs. Aylett & Jones to send out review copies of the *Poems,* mentions alone among Irish papers the *Dublin University Magazine*. A favorable notice appeared and in writing the editor to thank him for it, 6th October, 1846, she signs herself "Your grateful and constant reader." Later, 9th October, 1847, she makes a special request that Messrs. Elder & Smith should send *Jane Eyre* to the same review. It is not improbable that a forgotten remembrance of Le Fanu's story, read years before, supplied what was never a fertile inventiveness with the machinery it wanted.

Le Fanu's story of "actual and intended bigamy", *A Chapter in the History of a Tyrone Family,* the tenth of *The Purcell Papers,* is the story of Fanny Richardson, told by herself and set down by Father Purcell. Lord

Glenfallen pretends to marry her and takes her to Cahergillagh Court which boasted legends in plenty, with an old housekeeper, Martha, for teller of tales. Martha's first recital concerned the ominous fate of Lady Jane. There is a mysterious part of the castle which Fanny is forbidden to visit, but its mysterious dweller visits her, announcing herself as the true Lady Glenfallen and demanding that Fanny depart. This and succeeding visits Lord Glenfallen explains by saying that the lady is mad. She is blind, not mad; but at the end there is a murderous attack upon Fanny in her bedroom which is more than a little reminiscent of many things. The blind woman is hanged; Lord Glenfallen cuts his throat in mania and Fanny retreats to a convent. So much — and so very little — for one of *The Purcell Papers* in a Brontëan light. Professor Jack does much more with it; but nothing, of course, can convey the same delightfully piquant analogy as the Le Fanu story itself, to which, if he can obtain it today, the reader is cheerfully referred.

III

Now there are many reasons why the anonymous *Purcell Papers,* all of them, should have keenly interested the Brontë sisters in their fanciful girlhood. The tales were "Irish", they were "ghostly", above all, they were filled to running over with "coincidences", "correspondences", "identifications". Bronte family names abounded — Patricks and Emilys and Janes and Marys and Hughs. If Lady Glenfallen had for servant an "old Martha", so had the Haworth parsonage. If Father Purcell, "the wonderful priest of Drumcoolagh", lived in a mythical parish, Patrick Brontë, priest of Haworth, had served his tutor apprenticeship in the literal Irish parish of Drumgooland.

Professor Jack's suggested sources for plots end with *A Tyrone Family* and *Jane Eyre*. But speculation can go further and fare more abundantly with others of *The Purcell Papers* and their correspondences with Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. For the Second, Fifth and Sixth of the *Papers* bear the oddest resemblances to that novel with its "greatest villain", and they too are tales "eminently adapted to floating in the back of the mind". In each of them there is a Lady Emily, and in each of them there is an arch villain. In each of them there is a superlatively lonely house, and in two of them the revengeful inferior becomes the brutal master. In the first, *The Fortunes of Sir Robert Ardagh,* there are three sisters, the second of whom, Lady Emily, lives with her husband at Castle Ardagh. Sir Robert has a mysterious valet, whose malignant will dominates his master's fortunes and who at last destroys him. The second tale, *A Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess,* has the forced-marriage plot, wickedly manoeuvred by Sir Arthur T — n, father of an Emily and an Edward, and uncle of a Margaret, sincerely intent upon acquiring his niece's fortune either through her marriage with his son or by her murder. Murder it is, but all mistakenly not of the heroine — Emily is slain, and Margaret ends her story in the very mood of the end of *Wuthering Heights,* the wish that Emily "had been spared and that in her stead *I* were mouldering in the grave, forgotten and at rest".

But *The Bridal of Carrigvarah* yields the most of reminiscent likenesses, of suggestions for Heathcliffe's villainy, revenge and love, of "correspondences'! and "identifications". Here also is a Lady Emily', sadly figuring as a minor deserted character.

It will be recalled that the old servant, Ellen Dean, tells the tangled tale of *Wuthering Heights,* most of it, of Heathcliffe's servitude and later mastership. In *The Bridal of Carrigvarah,* Ellen Heathcote, daughter of a stern father, has at the outset two lovers, Richard O'Mara and Edward Dwyer, the latter a servant of the O'Maras, malignant, revengeful, plotting, their downfall. Having forced his young master into insincere assertion of his indifference to Ellen, Dwyer dickers for Heathcote's farm lease and his daughter. Refused both, he muses thus:

> Insolent young spawn of ingratitude and guilt, how long must I submit to be trod upon thus; and yet why should I murmur — his day is even now declining.... But I must wait — I am but a pauper now.... Were I independent once, I'd make them feel my power, and feel it *so,* that I should die the richest or the best avenged servant, of a great man that has ever been heard of.

Through Dwyer's devices, O'Mara, though betrothed to Lady Emily, marries Ellen Heathcote secretly, "madly, fervently, irrevocably in love", and hides her in the lonely Lodge, set in bleak and heathy hills. Again, through Dwyer's villainy, O'Mara is challenged by Lady Emily's brother and slain. While believing herself deserted, Ellen gives birth to a child and at its death sends for "the wonderful priest of Drumcoolagh", who finds the Lodge as dreary as ever Ellen Dean found Heathcliffe's *Wuthering Heights.* Ellen Heathcote dies, glad to know she was widowed, not deserted, and Dwyer completes the overthrow of the hated O'Maras.

"Correspondences" are, of course, a most delicate matter of shades, even shades of shades; things to be felt, not seen. Professor Jack's launching of his little boat of surmise, on so cool an ocean of documents as make up *The Cambridge History of English Literature,* argues strongly for the strength of his feeling. Taking his tip and playing it farther, his "measure of correspondence," as he calls it, between *The Purcell Papers* and the Brontë novels is largely increased. There is also, for the added amusement of "connections", Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas,* published nine years after Charlotte Brontë's death, but of interest notwithstanding. This is no more than a three-volume extension of *The Secret History of an Irish Countess,* with many names changed and with a governess, Madame de la Rougierre, added to brim the cup of villainy. On *Uncle Silas* Sheridan Le Fanu won his first wide fame. It is a queer old book, yet queerer books have survived, by their titles at least, to keep the memories of their authors green. But *Uncle Silas* too has passed — until the other day when it was included in an "old novels" series. And, once again, Le Fanu's fate of frustration has been operative. Since he was to be reprinted, why *Uncle Silas,* instead of those "occult" old tales by which alone, and by the smallest of small groups, the author has been remembered!

IV

It was some years ago, during an evening of talk on "horror" tales (the cataleptic, the vampiric, the "buried alive", the tangible ghostly and the intangible obsessionistic) that a title, "Green Tea," floated suddenly to the surface. Just the title, nothing more. I recalled it (no one else had ever heard of it) as a tale, vaguely, of a physician, a clergyman and an obsession — a little black monkey visible always by a halo of reddish light. "Nothing of the story remained — only the impression of its effect, which is indeed all any old forgotten tale can ask. Most of us who like to read can recall "the look of the page," but this too had vanished.

A few days later the arm of coincidence reached across an old bookstall and laid a finger on *Ignorant Essays,* by Richard Dowling (1888). Both book and author were unknown, but a note of "authority" rang out on the contents page: "The Only Real Ghost in Fiction", and the book fell open at the. fifteenth page and at this paragraph:

I am very bad at dates, but I think Le Fanu wrote "Green Tea" before a whole community of Canadian nuns were thrown into the most horrible state of nervous misery by excessive indulgence in that drug. Of all the horrible tales that are revolting, "Green Tea" is I think, the most horrible. The bare statement that an estimable and pious man is haunted by the ghost of a monkey is at first blush funny. But if you have not read this story read it and see how little of fun there is in it. The horror of the tale lies in the fact that this apparition of a monkey is the only *probable* ghost in fiction....

Sheridan Le Fanu, of course, and *In a Glass Darkly!* I saw again the little volume of ghostly tales of which "Green Tea" was one. I read on, and, in face of Mr. Richard Dowling's naïve summary of it, interest lapsed. It seemed too sufficiently obvious; I explained its enduring impression by the surmise that a youthful faith in the goodness of all clergymen must have been extreme; better never go back to the story itself.

But later I was to go back to its author for other reasons, and I reread "Green Tea" and the other case histories of Dr. Hesselius. Le Fanu's Father Purcell of Drumcoolagh may or may not lie back of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights,* but his Dr. Hesselius was John the Baptist for the little gods of later fiction — the psychic doctors. (Balzac's Dr. Desplein is the great father of them all!)

"In Dr. Martin Hesselius," writes his "Watson," a young surgeon frustrated of a great career by the loss of two fingers, "I found my master.... His knowledge was immense, his grasp of a case was an intuition.... For nearly 20 years I acted as his medical secretary. His immense collection of papers he has left in my care to be arranged, indexed, and bound. His treatment of some of these cases is curious. He writes in two distinct characters. He describes what he saw and heard, as an intelligent layman might, and when in this style of narrative he has seen the patient either through his own hall door to the light of day or through the gates of darkness to the caverns of the dead, he returns upon the narrative, and in the terms of his art and with all the force and originality of genius proceeds to the work of analysis, diagnosis, and illustration."

On these lines precisely "Green Tea" is done, in letters to a friend, Professor Van Loo of Leyden. These letters trace the strange case of the Rev. Mr. Jennings, a wealthy bachelor clergyman, beginning with Dr. Hesselius's first observations of him at an evening party.

"Mr. Jennings," writes the good doctor, "has a way of looking sidelong upon the carpet as if his eye followed the movements of something there. This, of course, is not always. It occurs only now and then. But often enough to give a certain oddity to his manner, and in this glance travelling along the floor there is something both shy and anxious."

Mr. Jennings drinks too much green tea, but his troubles are not born of that. Later he brings his hallucination to the doctor, who traces its developments, observing, after some time, "He has not yet given me his full and unreserved confidence". He never does, and goes down to a bitter death. And, after Dr. Hesselius has seen him "through the gates of darkness to the caverns of the dead," he "returns upon the narrative" and sums up.

No bad pattern, this, by which to cut one's dark psychologic cloth, in 1872. Dr. Hesselius was a gold mine for any novelist interested in the psychologic and the occult. In this German physician and metaphysician of the mind and soul, Le Fanu had hit upon more than a cunning device in the way of a reservoir for learning, intuition, magic or psychology to be tapped at will; he had hit upon a character as well, one that, had he lived to work with it, might have towered high in the heavens of ghostly fiction. But he had come upon it too late; he died the following year. The rest is silence, complete mysterious silence. He was famous; he was read; he "sold"; he' was of the Sheridan blood; he was filially reprinted no more than a quarter century after his death, and that death is only half a century back. But his very name is lost to present-day historians of his age. His novels, so multitudinously printed and reprinted, have simply disappeared. They areas rare on old bookstalls as black swans on old lakes.

Sheridan Le Fanu himself was "rare," after his wife's death, which occurred in 1858. He had been wit and scholar of old Dublin society; but, says Graves:

> From this society he vanished so entirely, that Dublin, always ready with a nickname, dubbed him "The Invisible Prince", and, indeed, he was for a long time almost invisible, except to his family and most familiar friends, unless at odd hours of the evening, when he might occasionally be seen stealing, like the ghost of his former self, between his newspaper office and his home in Merrion Square. Sometimes, too, he was to be encountered in an old, out-of-the-way book shop, pouring, over some rare Astrology or Demonology....

If it is ever discovered that the *Dublin University Magazine* of 1838 and 1839 was in the parsonage at Haworth — was even in the little circulating library at Keighley where the Brontë sisters walked for books to read — was even in the libraries of those purgartorial homes where the sisters were sad governesses, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Purcell Papers* may easily become the generating cause of a little literary thunderclap.

Meantime, Dr. Hesselius of "Green Tea" of *In a Glass Darkly* stands as the forerunner of the "soul doctors" so liberally employed by later writers in the supernatural field. On "Green Tea" alone (let pass the rest of his occult tales) Le Fanu, particularly charming descendant of the famous Sheridans, earned his right of way into any studies of the supernatural in fiction. That he has disappeared so completely from lists and records, even from the footnotes, of the Victorians, is so inexplicable as to be of itself almost "supernatural."

SHERIDAN LE FANU by E. F. Benson

from The Spectator, Vol. 146, 1931

THE writer of ghost stories and of tales which are designed to make the flesh creep embarks on hazardous voyages. If he does not scare his readers or inspire in them those precious uncomfortable impulses that cause them to glance hastily round in order to make sure that the creaking board or the wail of the wind did not betoken some dreadful presence even now making itself manifest to their horrified eyes, he has failed more ruinously than can any other class of narrator. The writer of humorous stories, though he may not amuse, may still interest his readers, the writer of serious psychological stuff may, though unwittingly, amuse; but no such adventitious good fortune can befall the author whose sole aim is to terrify. If he does not do that, he is naught, he falls completely flat, and no interest in side issues, whether intentional or not, will put him on his feet again. He must be all artist of no common sort, for the fearful lies but a hairbreadth away from the grotesque and the ludicrous, and his phantoms will terrify none unless they are surrounded by the phantasmal atmosphere in which alone they can live and breathe. Of all atmospheres, that is the most difficult to produce: it is easier to amuse, it is even easier to edify than, by suggestion, to alarm.

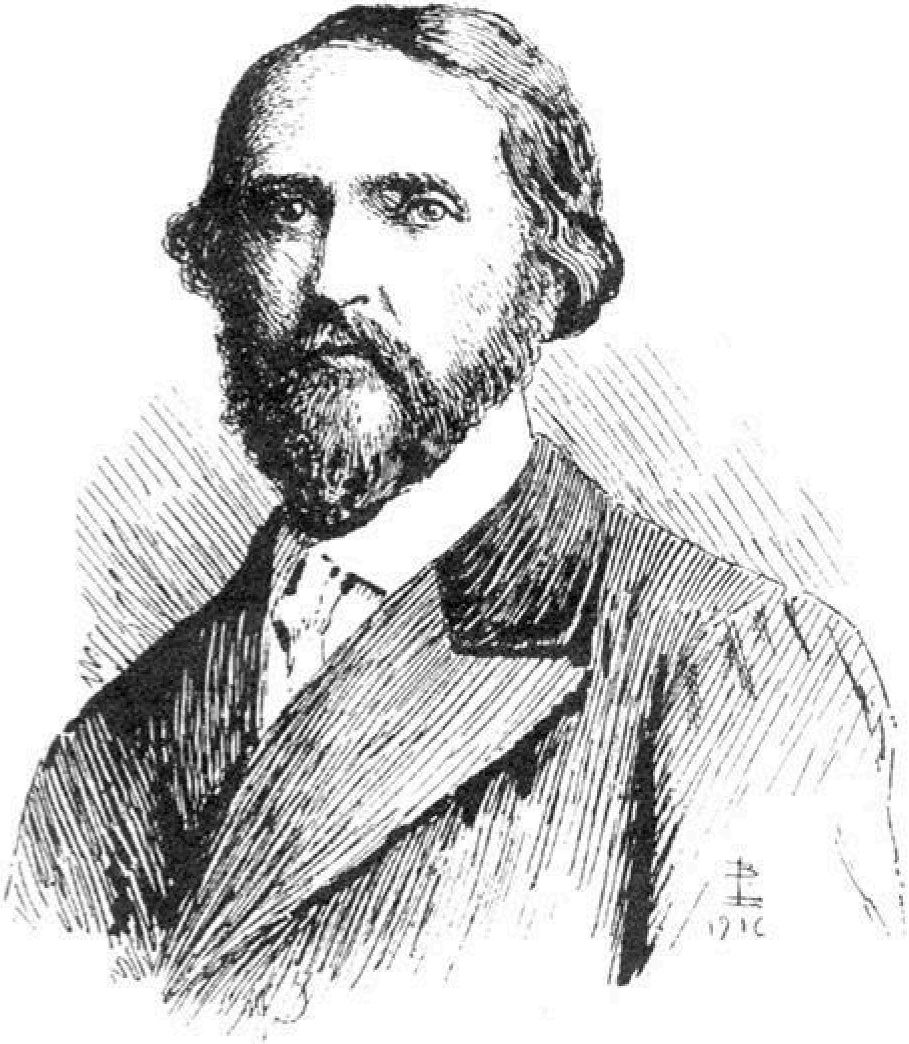
Sometimes a novelist whose *métier* and methods are purely psychological brings off a tremendous hit in the creepy line. The classical instance of such a happening was when Henry James wrote *The Turn of the Screw*. Not one of his most fervent admirers ever imagined that he could frighten them, but that appalling tale has probably alarmed more readers than the collected ghost stories of most other authors who make a speciality of creepiness. He tried it again, but with less success, in *The Sense of the Past*. Perhaps he would have been wiser to rest on one unfading laurel.

But there is one author, far too little known by those in search of creepy lore, who seldom fails in his high mission: his name is Sheridan Le Fanu. He produces, page for page, a far higher percentage of terror than the more widely read Edgar Allan Poe, and whether he deals in ghosts direct or in more material horrors, his success in making his readers very uneasy is amazing. Though we may already know the story we select to give us some insupportable moments on a lonely evening, there is a quality about most of his tales which seldom fails to alarm: familiarity with them does not breed comfort. Many ghost stories are efficacious for a first reading, but few, when we already know the worst that the author has to tell us, preserve untainted the atmosphere of horror as do the tales in *In a Glass Darkly*. The best of these, “Green Tea,” “The Familiar,” and “Mr. Justice Hartbottle,” are instinct with air awfulness which custom cannot stale, and this quality is due, as in *The Turn of the Screw*, to Le Fanu’s admirably artistic methods in setting and narration. They begin quietly enough, the tentacles of terror are applied so softly that the reader hardly notices them till they are sucking tile courage from his blood. A darkness gathers, like dusk gently falling, and then something obscurely stirs in it . . . . Dickens, in his *Christmas Carol*, which is one of the most famous ghost stories in literature, goes the other way about it, and the wrong way. He leads off with the appearance of Marley’s ghost, and then he has done his worst. The darkness brightens and we end on a grievous anti-climax of roast goose, Tiny Tim and a regenerated Scrooge. The moral is excellent, but who wants a moral in a ghost story? We can unbend our minds over morals afterwards.

This quiet, cumulative method leading up to intolerable terror is characteristic of all Le Fanu’s best work, and it is that which makes him so wholesale a fear-monger. He employs this technique not only in his short stories, but when he is engaged on a full-length, novel. Far the best of these, to my mind, is *Uncle Silas*, which in skill of narration, of gradual crescendo towards that most hideous chapter called “The Hour of Death,” is a sheer masterpiece in alarm. The book is a long one: it is not till we come to the four hundred and fiftieth page or thereabouts that the climax arrives, but from the first page onwards there is no pause in the relentless drip, drip, drip of ominous and menacing incident. Without the aid of the supernatural (though we are once or twice, rather unfairly, threatened with a ghost that does not mature), Le Fanu piles up, in the growing dusk, chapter by chapter, the horror of great darkness. Out of this dusk, intermittently at first, peer the grim faces of the French governess, of Dudley Ruthyn, of Uncle Silas, creatures of flesh and blood, but more ghastly than any ghost. Occasionally, as when Madame de la Rougierre is sent about her business, or when Dudley has apparently sailed for Australia, or when Uncle Silas seems like to die, we try to persuade ourselves that the darkness is lifting, but we are aware in our quaking consciousness that we are but buoying ourselves up with idle hopes. We do not see them for the moment because night is gathering, but we are sure that they are awfully whispering together in that shroud of blackness from which they will presently emerge for some murderous business. We cannot close the book, we cannot skip a word, we are altogether in the author's grip, and these compulsions are due to the consummate art with which he handles and develops his hideous theme . . . . Already, after a dreary period of fiction in which so many of our eminent writers have seemed to aim at producing flat and interminable chronicles, there are signs that the public craves for stories again, and, if such signs portend a change, we may be sure that among the authors of the mid-nineteenth century Le Fanu will come into his own, for technically, as a story-teller, his best work is of the first rank, while as a flesh-creeper he is unrivalled. No one else has so sure a touch in mixing the mysterious atmosphere in which horror darkly breeds.

The Memoir

18 Merrion Square, Dublin. Le Fanu moved here with his wife Susanna in 1856 and lived here until his death in 1873 (his wife died in 1858).



Le Fanu in later years

MEMOIR OF JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU

A noble Huguenot family, owning considerable property in Normandy, the Le Fanus of Caen, were, upon the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, deprived of their ancestral estates of Mandeville, Sequeville, and Cresseron; but, owing to their possessing influential relatives at the court of Louis the Fourteenth, were allowed to quit their country for England, unmolested, with their personal property. We meet with John Le Fanu de Sequeville and Charles Le Fanu de Cresseron, as cavalry officers in William the Third's army; Charles being so distinguished a member of the King's staff that he was presented with William's portrait from his master's own hand. He afterwards served as a major of dragoons under Marlborough.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, William Le Fanu was the sole survivor of his family. He married Henrietta Raboteau de Puggibaut, the last of another great and noble Huguenot family, whose escape from France, as a child, by the aid of a Roman Catholic uncle in high position at the French court, was effected after adventures of the most romantic danger.

Joseph Le Fanu, the eldest of the sons of this marriage who left issue, held the office of Clerk of the Coast in Ireland. He married for the second time Alicia, daughter of Thomas Sheridan and sister of Richard Brinsley Sheridan; his brother, Captain Henry Le Fanu, of Leamington, being united to the only other sister of the great wit and orator.

Dean Thomas Philip Le Fanu, the eldest son of Joseph Le Fanu, became by his wife Emma, daughter of Dr. Dobbin, F.T.C.D., the father of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, the subject of this memoir, whose name is so familiar to English and American readers as one of the greatest masters of the weird and the terrible amongst our modern novelists.

Born in Dublin on the 28th of August, 1814, he did not begin to speak until he was more than two years of age; but when he had once started, the boy showed an unusual aptitude in acquiring fresh words, and using them correctly.

The first evidence of literary taste which he gave was in his sixth year, when he made several little sketches with explanatory remarks written beneath them, after the manner of Du Maurier's, or Charles Keene's humorous illustrations in 'Punch.'

One of these, preserved long afterwards by his mother, represented a balloon in mid-air, and two aeronauts, who had occupied it, falling headlong to earth, the disaster being explained by these words: ‘See the effects of trying to go to Heaven.’

As a mere child, he was a remarkably good actor, both in tragic and comic pieces, and was hardly twelve years old when he began to write verses of singular spirit for one so young. At fourteen, he produced a long Irish poem, which he never permitted anyone but his mother and brother to read. To that brother, Mr. William Le Fanu, Commissioner of Public Works, Ireland, to whom, as the suggester of Sheridan Le Fanu’s ‘Phaudrig Croohore’ and ‘Shamus O’Brien,’ Irish ballad literature owes a delightful debt, and whose richly humorous and passionately pathetic powers as a raconteur of these poems have only doubled that obligation in the hearts of those who have been happy enough to be his hearers — to Mr. William Le Fanu we are indebted for the following extracts from the first of his works, which the boy-author seems to have set any store by:

‘Muse of Green Erin, break thine icy slumbers!
Strike once again thy wreathed lyre!
Burst forth once more and wake thy tuneful numbers!
Kindle again thy long-extinguished fire!

‘Why should I bid thee, Muse of Erin, waken?
Why should I bid thee strike thy harp once more?
Better to leave thee silent and forsaken
Than wake thee but thy glories to deplore.

‘How could I bid thee tell of Tara’s Towers,
Where once thy sceptred Princes sate in state —
Where rose thy music, at the festive hours,
Through the proud halls where listening thousands sate?

‘Fallen are thy fair palaces, thy country’s glory,

Thy tuneful bards were banished or were slain,
Some rest in glory on their deathbeds gory,
And some have lived to feel a foeman's chain.

'Yet for the sake of thy unhappy nation,
Yet for the sake of Freedom's spirit fled,
Let thy wild harpstrings, thrilled with indignation,
Peal a deep requiem o'er thy sons that bled.

'O yes! like the last breath of evening sighing,
Sweep thy cold hand the silent strings along,
Flash like the lamp beside the hero dying,
Then hushed for ever be thy plaintive song.'

To Mr. William Le Fanu we are further indebted for the accompanying specimens of his brother's serious and humorous powers in verse, written when he was quite a lad, as valentines to a Miss G. K.:

'Life were too long for me to bear
If banished from thy view;
Life were too short, a thousand year,
If life were passed with you.

'Wise men have said "Man's lot on earth
Is grief and melancholy,"
But where thou art, there joyous mirth
Proves all their wisdom folly.

'If fate withhold thy love from me,
All else in vain were given;
Heaven were imperfect wanting thee,
And with thee earth were heaven.'

A few days after, he sent the following sequel:

‘My dear good Madam, You can’t think how very sad I’m. I sent you, or I mistake myself foully, A very excellent imitation of the poet Cowley, Containing three very fair stanzas, Which number Longinus, a very critical man, says, And Aristotle, who was a critic ten times more caustic, To a nicety fits a valentine or an acrostic. And yet for all my pains to this moving epistle, I have got no answer, so I suppose I may go whistle. Perhaps you’d have preferred that like an old monk I had pattered on In the style and after the manner of the unfortunate Chatterton; Or that, unlike my reverend daddy’s son, I had attempted the classicalities of the dull, though immortal Addison.

I can’t endure this silence another week;
What shall I do in order to make you speak?
Shall I give you a trope
In the manner of Pope,
Or hammer my brains like an old smith
To get out something like Goldsmith?
Or shall I aspire on
To tune my poetic lyre on
The same key touched by Byron,
And laying my hand its wire on,
With its music your soul set fire on
By themes you ne’er could tire on?
Or say,
I pray,
Would a lay
Like Gay
Be more in your way?
I leave it to you,
Which am I to do?
It plain on the surface is
That any metamorphosis,
To affect your study

You may work on my soul or body.
Your frown or your smile makes me Savage or Gay
In action, as well as in song;
And if ’tis decreed I at length become Gray,
Express but the word and I’m Young;
And if in the Church I should ever aspire
With friars and abbots to cope,
By a nod, if you please, you can make me a Prior —
By a word you render me Pope.
If you’d eat, I’m a Crab; if you’d cut, I’m your Steel,
As sharp as you’d get from the cutler;
I’m your Cotton whene’er you’re in want of a reel,
And your livery carry, as Butler.
I’ll ever rest your debtor
If you’ll answer my first letter;
Or must, alas, eternity
Witness your taciturnity?
Speak — and oh! speak quickly
Or else I shall grow sickly,
And pine,
And whine,
And grow yellow and brown
As e’er was mahogany,
And lie me down
And die in agony.

P.S. — You’ll allow I have the gift
To write like the immortal Swift.’

But besides the poetical powers with which he was endowed, in common with the great Brinsley, Lady Dufferin, and the Hon. Mrs. Norton, young Sheridan Le Fanu also possessed an irresistible humour and oratorical gift that, as a student of Old Trinity, made him a formidable rival of the best of the young debaters of his time at the ‘College Historical,’ not a few of whom have since reached the highest eminence at the Irish Bar, after having long enlivened and charmed St. Stephen's by their wit and oratory.

Amongst his compeers he was remarkable for his sudden fiery eloquence of attack, and ready and rapid powers of repartee when on his defence. But Le Fanu, whose understanding was elevated by a deep love of the classics, in which he took university honours, and further heightened by an admirable knowledge of our own great authors, was not to be tempted away by oratory from literature, his first and, as it proved, his last love.

Very soon after leaving college, and just when he was called to the Bar, about the year 1838, he bought the 'Warder,' a Dublin newspaper, of which he was editor, and took what many of his best friends and admirers, looking to his high prospects as a barrister, regarded at the time as a fatal step in his career to fame.

Just before this period, Le Fanu had taken to writing humorous Irish stories, afterwards published in the 'Dublin University Magazine,' such as the 'Quare Gander,' 'Jim Sulivan's Adventure,' 'The Ghost and the Bone-setter,' *etc.*

These stories his brother William Le Fanu was in the habit of repeating for his friends' amusement, and about the year 1837, when he was about twenty-three years of age, Joseph Le Fanu said to him that he thought an Irish story in verse would tell well, and that if he would choose him a subject suitable for recitation, he would write him one. 'Write me an Irish "Young Lochinvar,"' said his brother; and in a few days he handed him 'Phaudrig Croohore' — Anglice, 'Patrick Crohore.'

Of course this poem has the disadvantage not only of being written after 'Young Lochinvar,' but also that of having been directly inspired by it; and yet, although wanting in the rare and graceful finish of the original, the Irish copy has, we feel, so much fire and feeling that it at least tempts us to regret that Scott's poem was not written in that heart-stirring Northern dialect without which the noblest of our British ballads would lose half their spirit. Indeed, we may safely say that some of Le Fanu's lines are finer than any in 'Young Lochinvar,' simply because they seem to speak straight from a people's heart, not to be the mere echoes of medieval romance.

'Phaudrig Croohore' did not appear in print in the 'Dublin University Magazine' till 1844, twelve years after its composition, when it was included amongst the Purcell Papers.

To return to the year 1837. Mr. William Le Fanu, the suggester of this ballad, who was from home at the time, now received daily instalments of the second and more remarkable of his brother's Irish poems— 'Shamus O'Brien' (James O'Brien) — learning them by heart as they reached him, and, fortunately, never forgetting them, for his brother Joseph kept no copy of the ballad, and he had himself to write it out from memory ten years after, when the poem appeared in the 'University Magazine.'

Few will deny that this poem contains passages most faithfully, if fearfully, picturesque, and that it is characterised throughout by a profound pathos, and an abundant though at times a too grotesquely incongruous humour. Can we wonder, then, at the immense popularity with which Samuel Lover recited it in the United States? For to Lover's admiration of the poem, and his addition of it to his entertainment, 'Shamus O'Brien' owes its introduction into America, where it is now so popular. Lover added some lines of his own to the poem, made Shamus emigrate to the States, and set up a public-house. These added lines appeared in most of the published versions of the poem. But they are indifferent as verse, and certainly injure the dramatic effect of the poem.

'Shamus O'Brien' is so generally attributed to Lover (indeed we remember seeing it advertised for recitation on the occasion of a benefit at a leading London theatre as 'by Samuel Lover') that it is a satisfaction to be able to reproduce the following letter upon the subject from Lover to William le Fanu:

'Astor House,
'New York, U.S. America.
'Sept. 30, 1846.

'My dear Le Fanu,

'In reading over your brother's poem while I crossed the Atlantic, I became more and more impressed with its great beauty and dramatic effect — so much so that I determined to test its effect in public, and have done so here, on my first appearance, with the greatest success. Now I have no doubt there will be great praises of the poem, and people will suppose, most likely, that the composition is mine, and as you know (I take for granted) that I would not wish to wear a borrowed feather, I should be glad to give your brother's name as the author, should he not object to have it known; but as his writings are often of so different a tone, I would not speak without permission to do so. It is true that in my programme my name is attached to other pieces, and no name appended to the recitation; so far, you will see, I have done all I could to avoid "appropriating," the spirit of which I might have caught here, with Irish aptitude; but I would like to have the means of telling all whom it may concern the name of the author, to whose head and heart it does so much honour. Pray, my dear Le Fanu, inquire, and answer me here by next packet, or as soon as convenient. My success here has been quite triumphant.

'Yours very truly,
'SAMUEL LOVER.'

We have heard it said (though without having inquired into the truth of the tradition) that 'Shamus O'Brien' was the result of a match at pseudonational ballad writing made between Le Fanu and several of the most brilliant of his young literary confreres at T. C. D. But however this may be, Le Fanu undoubtedly was no young Irelander; indeed he did the stoutest service as a press writer in the Conservative interest, and was no doubt provoked as well as amused at the unexpected popularity to which his poem attained amongst the Irish Nationalists. And here it should be remembered that the ballad was written some eleven years before the outbreak of '48, and at a time when a '98 subject might fairly have been regarded as legitimate literary property amongst the most loyal.

We left Le Fanu as editor of the 'Warder.' He afterwards purchased the 'Dublin Evening Packet,' and much later the half-proprietorship of the 'Dublin Evening Mail.' Eleven or twelve years ago he also became the owner and editor of the 'Dublin University Magazine,' in which his later as well as earlier Irish Stories appeared. He sold it about a year before his death in 1873, having previously parted with the 'Warder' and his share in the 'Evening Mail.'

He had previously published in the 'Dublin University Magazine' a number of charming lyrics, generally anonymously, and it is to be feared that all clue to the identification of most of these is lost, except that of internal evidence.

The following poem, undoubtedly his, should make general our regret at being unable to fix with certainty upon its fellows:

‘One wild and distant bugle sound
Breathed o’er Killarney’s magic shore
Will shed sweet floating echoes round
When that which made them is no more.

‘So slumber in the human heart
Wild echoes, that will sweetly thrill
The words of kindness when the voice
That uttered them for aye is still.

‘Oh! memory, though thy records tell
Full many a tale of grief and sorrow,
Of mad excess, of hope decayed,
Of dark and cheerless melancholy;

‘Still, memory, to me thou art
The dearest of the gifts of mind,
For all the joys that touch my heart
Are joys that I have left behind.

Le Fanu’s literary life may be divided into three distinct periods. During the first of these, and till his thirtieth year, he was an Irish ballad, song, and story writer, his first published story being the ‘Adventures of Sir Robert Ardagh,’ which appeared in the ‘Dublin University Magazine’ of 1838.

In 1844 he was united to Miss Susan Bennett, the beautiful daughter of the late George Bennett, Q.C. From this time until her decease, in 1858, he devoted his energies almost entirely to press work, making, however, his first essays in novel writing during that period. The ‘Cock and Anchor,’ a chronicle of old Dublin city, his first and, in the opinion of competent critics, one of the best of his novels, seeing the light about the year 1850.

This work, it is to be feared, is out of print, though there is now a cheap edition of ‘Torlogh O’Brien,’ its immediate successor. The comparative want of success of these novels seems to have deterred Le Fanu from using his pen, except as a press writer, until 1863, when the ‘House by the Churchyard’ was published, and was soon followed by ‘Uncle Silas’ and his five other well-known novels.

We have considered Le Fanu as a ballad writer and poet. As a press writer he is still most honourably remembered for his learning and brilliancy, and the power and point of his sarcasm, which long made the ‘Dublin Evening Mail’ one of the most formidable of Irish press critics; but let us now pass to the consideration of him in the capacity of a novelist, and in particular as the author of ‘Uncle Silas.’

There are evidences in ‘Shamus O’Brien,’ and even in ‘Phaudrig Croohore,’ of a power over the mysterious, the grotesque, and the horrible, which so singularly distinguish him as a writer of prose fiction.

‘Uncle Silas,’ the fairest as well as most familiar instance of this enthralling spell over his readers, is too well known a story to tell in detail. But how intensely and painfully distinct is the opening description of the silent, inflexible Austin Ruthyn of Knowl, and his shy, sweet daughter Maude, the one so resolutely confident in his brother’s honour, the other so romantically and yet anxiously interested in her uncle — the sudden arrival of Dr. Bryerly, the strange Swedenborgian, followed by the equally unexpected apparition of Madame de la Rougiere, Austin Ruthyn’s painful death, and the reading of his strange will consigning poor Maude to the protection of her unknown Uncle Silas — her cousin, good, bright devoted Monica Knollys, and her dreadful distrust of Silas — Bartram Haugh and its uncanny occupants, and foremost amongst them Uncle Silas.

This is his portrait:

‘A face like marble, with a fearful monumental look, and for an old man, singularly vivid, strange eyes, the singularity of which rather grew upon me as I looked; for his eyebrows were still black, though his hair descended from his temples in long locks of the purest silver and fine as silk, nearly to his shoulders.

‘He rose, tall and slight, a little stooped, all in black, with an ample black velvet tunic, which was rather a gown than a coat....

‘I know I can’t convey in words an idea of this apparition, drawn, as it seemed, in black and white, venerable, bloodless, fiery-eyed, with its singular look of power, and an expression so bewildering — was it derision, or anguish, or cruelty, or patience?

‘The wild eyes of this strange old man were fixed on me as he rose; an habitual contraction, which in certain lights took the character of a scowl, did not relax as he advanced towards me with a thin-lipped smile.’

Old Dicken and his daughter Beauty, old L’Amour and Dudley Ruthyn, now enter upon the scene, each a fresh shadow to deepen its already sombre hue, while the gloom gathers in spite of the glimpse of sunshine shot through it by the visit to Elverston. Dudley’s brutal encounter with Captain Oakley, and vile persecution of poor Maude till his love marriage comes to light, lead us on to the ghastly catastrophe, the hideous conspiracy of Silas and his son against the life of the innocent girl.

It is interesting to know that the germ of Uncle Silas first appeared in the ‘Dublin University Magazine’ of 1837 or 1838, as the short tale, entitled, ‘A Passage from the Secret History of an Irish Countess,’ which is printed in this collection of Stories. It next was published as ‘The Murdered Cousin’ in a collection of Christmas stories, and finally developed into the three-volume novel we have just noticed.

There are about Le Fanu’s narratives touches of nature which reconcile us to their always remarkable and often supernatural incidents. His characters are well conceived and distinctly drawn, and strong soliloquy and easy dialogue spring unaffectedly from their lips. He is a close observer of Nature, and reproduces her wilder effects of storm and gloom with singular vividness; while he is equally at home in his descriptions of still life, some of which remind us of the faithfully minute detail of old Dutch pictures.

Mr. Wilkie Collins, amongst our living novelists, best compares with Le Fanu. Both of these writers are remarkable for the ingenious mystery with which they develop their plots, and for the absorbing, if often over-sensational, nature of their incidents; but whilst Mr. Collins excites and fascinates our attention by an intense power of realism which carries us with unreasoning haste from cover to cover of his works, Le Fanu is an idealist, full of high imagination, and an artist who devotes deep attention to the most delicate detail in his portraiture of men and women, and his descriptions of the outdoor and indoor worlds — a writer, therefore, through whose pages it would be often an indignity to hasten. And this more leisurely, and certainly more classical, conduct of his stories makes us remember them more fully and faithfully than those of the author of the 'Woman in White.' Mr. Collins is generally dramatic, and sometimes stagy, in his effects. Le Fanu, while less careful to arrange his plots, so as to admit of their being readily adapted for the stage, often surprises us by scenes of so much greater tragic intensity that we cannot but lament that he did not, as Mr. Collins has done, attempt the drama, and so furnish another ground of comparison with his fellow-countryman, Maturin (also, if we mistake not, of French origin), whom, in his writings, Le Fanu far more closely resembles than Mr. Collins, as a master of the darker and stronger emotions of human character. But, to institute a broader ground of comparison between Le Fanu and Mr. Collins, whilst the idiosyncrasies of the former's characters, however immaterial those characters may be, seem always to suggest the minutest detail of his story, the latter would appear to consider plot as the prime, character as a subsidiary element in the art of novel writing.

Those who possessed the rare privilege of Le Fanu's friendship, and only they, can form any idea of the true character of the man; for after the death of his wife, to whom he was most deeply devoted, he quite forsook general society, in which his fine features, distinguished bearing, and charm of conversation marked him out as the beau-ideal of an Irish wit and scholar of the old school.

From this society he vanished so entirely that Dublin, always ready with a nickname, dubbed him 'The Invisible Prince;' and indeed he was for long almost invisible, except to his family and most familiar friends, unless at odd hours of the evening, when he might occasionally be seen stealing, like the ghost of his former self, between his newspaper office and his home in Merrion Square; sometimes, too, he was to be encountered in an old out-of-the-way bookshop poring over some rare black letter Astrology or Demonology.

To one of these old bookshops he was at one time a pretty frequent visitor, and the bookseller relates how he used to come in and ask with his peculiarly pleasant voice and smile, 'Any more ghost stories for me, Mr. —— ?' and how, on a fresh one being handed to him, he would seldom leave the shop until he had looked it through. This taste for the supernatural seems to have grown upon him after his wife's death, and influenced him so deeply that, had he not been possessed of a deal of shrewd common sense, there might have been danger of his embracing some of the visionary doctrines in which he was so learned. But no! even Spiritualism, to which not a few of his brother novelists succumbed, whilst affording congenial material for our artist of the superhuman to work upon, did not escape his severest satire.

Shortly after completing his last novel, strange to say, bearing the title 'Willing to Die,' Le Fanu breathed his last at his home No. 18, Merrion Square South, at the age of fifty-nine.

'He was a man,' writes the author of a brief memoir of him in the 'Dublin University Magazine,' 'who thought deeply, especially on religious subjects. To those who knew him he was very dear; they admired him for his learning, his sparkling wit, and pleasant conversation, and loved him for his manly virtues, for his noble and generous qualities, his gentleness, and his loving, affectionate nature.' And all who knew the man must feel how deeply deserved are these simple words of sincere regard for Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu.

Le Fanu's novels are accessible to all; but his Purcell Papers are now for the first time collected and published, by the permission of his eldest son (the late Mr. Philip Le Fanu), and very much owing to the friendly and active assistance of his brother, Mr. William Le Fanu.

Mount Jerome Cemetery, Dublin – Le Fanu's final resting place

Le Fanu’s grave